

**Channel Tunnel Rail Link
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**The post-Roman pottery from Mersham, Mersham,
Kent (ARC MSH 98)**

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1 INTRODUCTION

A total of 267 sherds (3016 g) of post-Roman pottery was recovered from Mersham (CAT excavation: ARC MSH 98). The assemblage ranges in date from middle Saxon to post-medieval, and provides valuable evidence for the possible precursors to the medieval Ashford ware industry.

2 METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The pottery was recorded using a project-specific Access database. Fabric types were defined, using a x20 binocular microscope, following the Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT) type series for post-Roman pottery. A scheme-wide type series was created for rim, base and handle forms, and this was linked where possible to vessel forms whose definition followed nationally recommended nomenclature (MPRG 1998). Details of decoration, surface treatment, manufacture, use-wear and condition were also recorded. Quantification in all cases is by both number and weight of sherds; EVEs have not been considered appropriate for use with post-Roman assemblages.

This report draws on recorded data and a report prepared by John Cotter (Canterbury Archaeological Trust) as part of the assessment phase (URS 2001).

3 DESCRIPTION OF ASSEMBLAGE

Twenty-five fabric types were identified: two middle/late Saxon (MLS), five late Saxon (LS), six early medieval (EM), three medieval (M), four late medieval (LM), four post-medieval (PM), and one modern (LPM). Totals by fabric type are given in Table 1*. All of the Saxon and medieval wares are local or regional types with known or likely sources in Kent or East Sussex, and much of this material is likely to have been locally produced in the Ashford area.

Table 1: Fabric totals

Fabric Code	Fabric Name	No. sherds	Weight (g)	Date range
MLS2	Canterbury-type Sandy Ware	3	27	775 – 875
MLS100	Miscellaneous Middle Saxon wares	1	4	
LS1	Late Saxon Sandy Ware	26	271	850 – 1050
LS2	Late Saxon Shelly Ware	12	249	850 – 1050
LS3	Late Saxon Shelly-Sandy Ware	6	87	850 – 1050
LS19	Late Saxon Non-Local Chalk-Filled Ware	1	11	850 – 1050
LS100	Miscellaneous Late Saxon wares	1	2	850 – 1050
EM.M5	Ashford-type (Potter's Corner) Shelly-Sandy Ware	3	18	1125 – 1250
EM1	Canterbury Sandy Ware	74	849	1050 – 1225
EM2	Early Medieval Shelly Ware	91	689	1075 – 1225
EM3A	Miscellaneous Shelly-Sandy Ware	7	81	850 – 1225
EM4	West Kent Fine Sandy Ware	2	19	1125 – 1250
EM28	Kentish Sandy Ware with Shell and Sparse Flint	1	22	1175 – 1225

Fabric Code	Fabric Name	No. sherds	Weight (g)	Date range
EM100	Miscellaneous early medieval wares	1	13	1050 – 1225
M10	Wealden-Type Pink-Buff Sandy Ware	1	7	1350 – 1550
M40B	Ashford/Wealden Sandy with very rare shell	5	30	1175 – 1400
LM2	Canterbury-type earthenware	6	79	1475 – 1550
LM4	Wealden Buff Sandy Ware	5	103	1450 – 1550
LM32	Wealden Orange-Buff Sandy with reduced streaks	6	173	1475 – 1550
LM100	Miscellaneous Late Medieval wares	1	4	1350 – 1550
PM1	Local Post-Medieval Redware	7	227	1550 – 1700
PM2.5	Wealden Fine Earthenware	2	9	1550 – 1675
PM2.6	Wealden Buff Earthenware	1	32	1550 – 1675
PM25	London Stoneware	1	5	1675 – 1825
LPM12C	Pearlware	3	5	1780 - 1825
	TOTAL	267	3016	

Only four sherds have been identified as of middle/late Saxon date – three sherds of Canterbury-type sandy ware and one miscellaneous shelly sherd (MLS100). None are diagnostic, and all occurred with later material.

A slightly larger group (46 sherds) is of late Saxon date, within which five fabric types have been identified, including one miscellaneous ware (LS100: chalk and shell temper). Apart from one sherd of a non-local ware (LS19), all these are shelly, sandy or shelly-sandy wares which are likely to be of local manufacture. The shelly and shelly-sandy wares (LS2 and LS3), on the basis of similarity of fabric, are clearly closely related to the early medieval Ashford-type wares. The sandy ware (LS1) is, likewise, often difficult to distinguish from the early medieval Canterbury wares (EM1). Similar sandy and shelly wares are known from the mid-late Saxon settlement at Sandtun, near Hythe, where the similarity of one of the sandy wares with wares from Mersham has already been noted (Gardiner *et al* 2001, 208-10; Hodges 1981, 11). Vessel forms from Mersham, in both sandy and shelly or shelly-sandy wares, are almost exclusively rounded jars with everted necks and slightly beaded rims (e.g. Fig. 1, No. 1), although one dish in fabric LS3 is also present (Fig. 1, No. 2). None of these vessels are decorated in any way.

Positively identified early medieval Ashford-type wares (EM.M5) are rare, but other early medieval wares (EM2 and EM3A) are likely to belong to the same tradition, possibly representing an earlier (although chronologically overlapping) phase of the industry. These two wares combined make up approximately 45% by weight of the total early medieval assemblage. Vessel forms – flared neck jars with beaded rims – are very similar to those of the late Saxon wares (Fig. 1, Nos 3, 4).

However, it is apparent that the local Ashford industry was still facing heavy competition from Canterbury during the early medieval period – fabric EM1 makes up approximately 50% of the total by weight. Vessel forms present here are jars with flared

necks and externally thickened rims (Fig. 1, No. 5). Similar forms occur within the early medieval assemblage from Westenhanger (ARC WGC98; ARC WSG99).

Other early medieval wares (EM4, EM28, EM100) are represented by a handful of sherds, with no diagnostic pieces. The shelly/flint-tempered fabric EM28 is a type characteristic of the south Kent and Sussex coast. The single sherd of EM100 (miscellaneous early medieval ware, as yet unattributed to source area) is decorated with rouletting in Pound Lane kiln style (Cotter 1997), and could be an import.

There is a sharp decline in the quantities of later pottery recorded from the site. Later wares include medieval Ashford/Wealden wares, and later medieval Canterbury-type and Wealden wares, and post-medieval local and Wealden-type earthenwares. All these are present in very small quantities. Non-Kentish wares are not represented until the post-medieval period, and then only by a single sherd of London stoneware.

4 DISTRIBUTION AND CHRONOLOGY

Pottery was recovered from 61 features, with a small quantity (17 sherds) found unstratified. A breakdown of the pottery by feature type reveals that sherds came from pits (148 sherds), ditches and gullies (87 sherds), postholes (8 sherds), and miscellaneous features and layers (7 sherds). Only three features produced more than 20 sherds - pit 1023 (38 sherds), ditch 1065 (23 sherds) and ditch 1070 (21 sherds) – and most features yielded less than 10 sherds. This sparse distribution, combined with the largely undiagnostic nature of the assemblage, and the difficulties encountered in distinguishing Late Saxon from early medieval wares, means that any refinement to the existing site phasing is likely to be extremely limited.

Only eight sherds came from Phase 2 contexts (late Anglo-Saxon, *c* 850-1050). These comprised two sherds in fabric LS3 from pit 1160 (Group 2), including a jar with simple everted rim; six sherds in fabrics MLS2, LS1 and LS3 from pits 1075, 1115 and 1147 (Group 3), including two jar rims (one simple and one thickened) and one dish rim (Fig. 1, No. 2); and one sherd in LS3 from pit 1101 (Group 4). The occurrence of all other late Saxon sherds in later contexts indicates extensive reworking of deposits and thus a fairly intensively occupied site.

Most of the assemblage (207 sherds) derived from Phase 3 contexts (early medieval, *c* 1050-1200), from pits and ditches, many of which appear to be directly associated with ironworking. Diagnostic sherds, from a number of features, comprise the jar forms described above for the early medieval wares (Fig. 1, Nos 3-5), and a decorated sherd in an unsourced ware (EM100), possibly an import (pit 1107, Group 13). None of this is particularly closely datable, but the relative scarcity of the definitively identified Ashford-type (Potter's Corner) shelly-sandy ware (EM.M5) does, however, suggest that activity on the site had largely ceased by the later 12th century. There is nothing amongst the pottery from these features to

suggest anything other than a purely domestic origin, despite the industrial nature of the site. Fine wares are notable by their absence – there are no glazed wares and, apart from the single rouletted sherd, no decorated vessels.

The presence of some medieval, late medieval and post-medieval sherds within features attributed to this phase (eg pits 1039, 1102, 1131 and 1137 and ditches 1029, 1065, 1070 and 1120) suggests either some intrusion, or that some features need to be re-phased.

A further 20 sherds derived from the two ditches (1036, 1056) assigned to Phase 4 (late medieval, c 1450-1550). These ditches produced a mixture of early medieval, medieval and late medieval wares, with a single sherd of local redware (PM1) from ditch 1036. The single diagnostic sherd is a bunghole in Wealden fabric LM32 from ditch 1056 (Fig. 1, No. 6).

5 DISCUSSION

Very little is as yet known of the Saxon and early medieval pottery industry of the Ashford area and, in fact, assemblages of this date range are rare in the rural Weald of Kent as a whole. The assemblage from Mersham therefore contributes a useful body of data, albeit relatively small, towards an understanding of the ceramic sequence at this period, and supplements the evidence from the Middle Saxon assemblage from *Sandtun*, near Hythe, which suggests that the East Wealden pottery industry may have its origins in the 8th/9th centuries (Gardiner *et al.* 2001, 211).

Although only 50 sherds of middle and late Saxon pottery were recovered from Mersham, this nevertheless represents the largest such group from the CTRL route. The close similarity of these sandy, shelly and shelly-sandy wares to the early medieval wares provides evidence for the early precursors of the Ashford and Canterbury industries. Good independent dating evidence is still lacking for these wares, and dating here is based entirely on vessel form, which seems to show little development between the late Saxon and early medieval wares, both wares occurring in fairly crudely made, rounded jar forms with relatively simple rims. This would be consistent with the scarcity of Ashford-type (Potter's Corner) shelly-sandy ware (EM.M5), which suggests that the date range for these earlier wares does not extend beyond the later 12th century.

The local industry did not, however, gain a majority share of the market until later in the medieval period. In the ceramic sequence from Mersham, Ashford wares were supplemented from the start by Canterbury-type wares, which appear to have made up approximately half of the assemblage at any period, although supplying essentially the same range of forms. The flint-tempered and shelly/flint-tempered wares characteristic of the south Kent and Sussex coastal area, relatively common, for example, within the early medieval assemblages from other sites in the southern part of the CTRL route (eg Little Stock Farm and

Westenhanger), are almost entirely absent here. This may again be due to chronological factors.

The range of wares for the late Saxon and early medieval periods indicates a strictly utilitarian assemblage, in line with the industrial nature of the site; this is not a high status site.

6 CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED VESSELS

Figure 1

1. Jar rim, fabric LS2. PRN (Pottery Record Number) AE-199, context 403, pit 1129 (early medieval).
2. Dish rim, fabric LS3. PRN AE-241, context 618, pit 1115 (late Saxon).
3. Jar rim, fabric EM2. PRN AE-315, context 318, pit 1023 (early medieval).
4. Jar rim, fabric EM3A. PRN AE-242, context 562, pit 1109 (early medieval).
5. Jar rim, fabric EM1. PRN AE-319, context 318, pit 1023 (early medieval).
6. Bunghole spout, fabric LM32. PRN AE-323, context 508, ditch 1056 (late medieval).

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