Channel Tunnel Rail Link

London and Continental Railways

Oxford Wessex Archaeology Joint Venture

The post-Roman pottery from Northumberland Bottom, Southfleet, Kent (WNB 98)

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CTRL Specialist Report Series

2006

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1 INTRODUCTION

A total of 511 sherds (6003 g) of post-Roman pottery was recovered from Northumberland Bottom (MoLAS excavation: ARC WNB98; MoLAS watching brief: ARC HRD99). The assemblage ranges in date from Early/Middle Saxon to post-medieval, with the bulk falling within a fairly restricted date range of early 12th to late 13th century.

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 Lyn Blackmore (MoLSS) as part of the assessment phase (URS 2001).

3 DESCRIPTION OF ASSEMBLAGE

Fourteen fabric types were identified: one Early/Middle Saxon (EMS), eight early medieval (EM), three medieval (M), one late medieval (LM), and one post-medieval (PM); totals by fabric type are given in Table 1. Most of the Saxon and medieval wares are local or regional types with known or likely sources in Kent; two sherds of London-types wares have also been identified amongst the early medieval/medieval assemblage.

Table 1: Fabric totals

Fabric Code	Fabric Name	No. sherds	Weight (g)	Date range
EMS4	Early Saxon organic-tempered ware	1	10	550-725
EM1	Canterbury sandy ware	1	22	1050-1225
EM3	Miscellaneous shelly ware	35	443	1050-1250
EM22	NW Kent fine sandy ware with sparse shell and grits	25	166	1125-1250
EM26	Coarse London-type ware	1	5	1125-1225
EM31	?Kentish coarse sandy ware with moderate shell	5	42	1100-1200
EM35	NW Kent shell-tempered ware	287	3669	1050-1225
EM36	NW Kent sandy and shell-tempered ware	113	1133	1100-1250
EM48	?NW Kent shell-filled fine sandy ware	5	51	1050-1250
M5	Fine London-type ware	1	9	1080-1350
M38B	NW Kent fine sandy ware (reduced)	32	316	1175-1400
M100	Miscellaneous unidentified medieval wares	3	57	1200-1400
LM30	?Wealden orange-buff white-slipped ware	1	44	1475-1625

Fabric Code	Fabric Name	No. sherds	Weight (g)	Date range
PM1	Local post-medieval redware	1	36	1550-1700
	TOTAL	511	6003	

A single Early/Middle Saxon organic-tempered body sherd was recovered, occurring residually in an early medieval context.

Amongst the early medieval assemblage the shelly and sandy/shelly wares of local type (respectively, EM35 and EM36) are overwhelmingly predominant, together accounting for 86.8% of the total early medieval assemblage by weight. Fabric EM35 contains fossil shell which derives from the Woolwich Beds clay. Fabric EM36 contains a higher proportion of sand and is less easy to source; its strong presence within this assemblage, however, suggests that like EM35 it is of local manufacture, and probably from the same general source area. Vessel forms in both fabrics are very similar – in both cases only jar forms have been identified, with rim profiles thickened or externally expanded (Fig. 1, Nos 3-4). There are two reconstructable profiles, both in fabric EM35; both are from rounded jars (MPRG 1998, form 4.1.7) with flaring necks, one from pit 740 (Fig. 1, No. 1) and one from post hole 752 (Fig. 1, No. 2). The presence of external sooting on many sherds confirms that these vessels were probably used primarily as cooking pots, although other uses (eg food storage) cannot be ruled out. Nine measurable rims range in diameter from 200 mm to 280 mm. Decoration is restricted to one body sherd with an applied, thumbed strip, and one finger-impressed rim.

The remainder of the early medieval assemblage is made up largely of other shelly and sandy/shelly wares which are again likely to originate from the local area of north-west Kent (fabric EM48 contains fossil shell from the Woolwich Beds clay, as fabric EM35 but with more sand, and may well be related to the latter ware). These fabrics, as EM35 and EM36, appear to have been used exclusively for jar forms, but rim profiles (seen only in fabrics EM2, EM22 and EM31) are generally the more developed triangular or squared forms (eg Fig. 1, Nos 5, 7).

This range of shelly and sandy/shelly wares can be paralleled on several other sites in north-west Kent, and similar fabrics are also common in London. A very similar (although smaller) range has been recorded at the nearby site at Tollgate (ARC TLG 98: Mepham 2006). 'Shell-gritted wares' were, for example, predominant at Eynsford Castle from the late 11th century through the 12th century, declining in the 13th century (Rigold 1971; Rigold and Fleming 1973). Shelly wares were also present at Rochester from around the middle of the 11th century (Tester 1972). At Northumberland Bottom the jar rim forms seen in fabrics EM35 and EM36 appear to equate to the Eynsford shelly wares of phase Y (Rigold 1971, fig. 13), while later phases at Eynsford, and a 13th/14th century ditch in Dartford (Mynard 1973, fig. 2), produced shelly and sandy/shelly wares in jar forms closer to those seen at

Northumberland Bottom in fabrics EM3 and EM22. A site recently excavated at Northfleet yielded a small assemblage dominated by 'shelly limestone ware', probably equivalent to EM35 (Blinkhorn 2001). In London comparable fabrics to EM35 and EM36 are Early Medieval Shelly ware (EMSH), appearing in the early to mid 11th century but most common from the late 11th to mid 12th century (Vince and Jenner 1995, 63-4), and Early Medieval Sand and Shell-Tempered ware (EMSS), with a similar date range (ibid., 59-63). Early Medieval Shelly ware is noted as being less common in London than in north-west Kent (and pointing therefore to a primary source in the latter area), although still containing the fossil shell from the Woolwich Beds.

The only regional wares present - coarse London-type ware (EM26, equivalent to LCOAR: Pearce *et al.* 1985, 3), and Canterbury-type sandy ware (EM1) - are each represented by single body sherds. The coarse London-type sherd is from a glazed jug, while the Canterbury-type sandy ware sherd is from a spouted pitcher (Fig. 1, No. 9).

Quantities of pottery decline steeply after the early medieval period, and there are only 38 sherds assigned to medieval and later fabrics. Of the 36 sherds in medieval fabrics 32 are in the sandy grey ware fabric M38B. It was previously thought that sandy grey wares found on sites in north-west Kent originated from the Limpsfield kilns in Surrey, but fabric and form differences were noted in the Eynsford Castle assemblage (Rigold 1971, 158), and later textural analysis confirmed the distinction between the two areas, and suggested that the west Kent grey wares were probably made at several different kilns (Streeten 1982, 93, fig. 38). A waster found in Rochester, for example, hints at the possibility of pottery manufacture there (Harrison 1972, 144), although other sherds from the city are similar in thin section to Canterbury-type wares (Streeten 1982, 92). Only two rims are present in fabric M38B – a jar with expanded rim (Fig. 1, No. 8) and a jug. One grey ware sherd, however, which contains coarse, iron-stained quartz, is more closely comparable to the Surrey Limpsfield-type ware (M44A).

Also amongst the medieval wares is a single sherd of London-type ware (M5, equivalent to LOND: Pearce *et al.* 1985, 3), from a jug, probably with Rouen-style decoration.

4 DISTRIBUTION

Most of the pottery from the site came from the enclosures near the former Northumberland Bottom army camp (ARC WNB98, but pottery was also recovered from the Hazells Road diversion (ARC HRD99), from the Iron Age/early Roman settlement site at Downs Road (ARC WNB98) and from the area of the Late Iron Age/early Roman enclosed settlement on the west-facing hillside (ARC WNB98).

Two main phases were identified within the Northumberland Bottom medieval enclosures. From the Phase 1 enclosure, most pottery seems to have come from internal ditch 208 (107 sherds), with only two sherds from the actual enclosure ditch 205/240. Internal ditch 903 produced a further three sherds. As for the overall assemblage, fabrics EM35 and EM46 are predominant here, in jar forms as described above, but ditch 240 contained the single sherd of Limpsfield-type grey ware (mid 12th to late 13th century), while the single sherd of London-type ware came from ditch 208. If the latter sherd is from a Rouen-style jug, this would date this deposit no earlier than the beginning of the 13th century.

As for Phase 1, little pottery (14 sherds) was recovered from the enclosure ditch of Phase 2 (214/2102). Small quantities came from internal pits 320 (51 sherds), 890 (5 sherds), 891 (18 sherds) and 909 (7 sherds), and from various contexts within building 896 (38 sherds, with a further 14 from a sealing layer). Fabrics EM35 and EM36 (and other shelly and sandy/shelly wares) are still present within Phase 2 features in similar forms to Phase 1 (eg Fig. 1, Nos 4-6, 7), but augmented by sherds from jugs in grey ware fabric M38B. The presence of M38B is consistent with the archaeomagnetic date from building 896 of 1295-1325, although other sherds could be earlier, perhaps residual in Phase 2 contexts.

At the Hazells Road diversion site, 98 sherds were recovered from features of both Roman and medieval date. Most of this assemblage derived from contexts associated with the use and subsequent demolition of two ovens or kilns (170 and 202). Only three body sherds (EM36, EM48) could be related to the use of the kilns (trample layer 166). A further 77 sherds came from demolition layers – these include sherds of EM35, EM36 and EM48 in jar forms as described above (eg Fig. 1, No. 3), with the addition of two sherds of the grey ware fabric M38B and part of a spouted pitcher in Canterbury-type sandy ware (Fig. 1, No. 9). Most of this group could be residual, given that the second (and later) kiln 202 provided an archaeomagnetic date of 1200-1250.

A small amount of pottery (23 sherds) came from other features on this part of the site, but included little diagnostic material beyond a jar rim in M38B (Fig. 1, No. 8).

To the east of Downs Road was a medieval farmstead or settlement represented by postholes, pits and a boundary ditch. Few features here produced pottery, but the most significant groups came from pit 740, which contained sherds of a single vessel, a rounded jar in fabric EM35 (Fig. 1, No. 1). The sherds are in poor condition, friable and badly abraded, but it appears that this vessel may have been placed in the pit deliberately (perhaps as a receptacle of some kind) rather than discarded. Pottery vessels are occasionally found set into the floors of medieval buildings, often close to a hearth (eg Moorhouse 1986, figs. 13 and 14). A second, similar jar in EM35, largely complete, came from posthole 752 (Fig. 1, No. 2), and the same posthole produced the single Saxon sherd from the site. In the absence of anything

more closely datable within the assemblage from Downs Road, a date range in the later 11th or 12th century might be suggested.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The assemblage from Northumberland Bottom, together with the smaller assemblage from Tollgate (ARC TLG98) gives a 'snapshot' of the early medieval ceramic sequence for north Kent, which has more in common with the London area than with the rest of Kent. Closely comparable evidence comes from the nearby site at Pepper Hill Lane, Northfleet (Blinkhorn 2001).

Shelly and sandy/shelly wares, probably of local manufacture, dominate both assemblages, as they do on other sites in north Kent, such as Rochester, Dartford and Eynsford Castle. Whereas in London these wares have a fairly restricted date range of 11th to later 12th century, in Kent their period of use seems to continue into the 13th century. At Northumberland Bottom the vessel forms present (jars/cooking pots with undeveloped rims) suggest an earlier date range (11th-12th century) for the dominant fabrics EM35 and EM36, with more developed rims confined to other fabric types (EM3 and EM22). Sandy grey wares (M38B), which appear slightly later, are also likely to be of local manufacture, and these grey wares obviously competed successfully against the Canterbury-type wares which are common across much of the rest of Kent. Only one Canterbury-type sherd was present at Northumberland Bottom, and this is in line with other sites in the area.

None of this helps greatly with the dating of various features across the site, since most feature groups of any size seem to include a chronological mixture of types. Where site stratigraphy has enabled a broad phasing, such as at the Northumberland Bottom enclosures, there seems to be little chronological separation between the phases. The Phase 1 enclosure included at least one developed rim, and a London-type ware jug with Rouen-style decoration, suggesting a date range in the early 13th century. Pottery from the Phase 2 enclosure and associated features included a small proportion of sandy grey wares (M38B) alongside the shelly and sandy/shelly wares, and a few developed jar rims, but is not entirely consistent with the late 13th/early 14th century archaeomagnetic dating from the oven/kiln in building 896. As for Tollgate, the focus of activity in each of the concentrations of features identified appears to lie between the late 11th and the late 12th century (Downs Road settlement) or early 13th century (Northumberland Bottom enclosures, Hazells Road diversion).

Quantities of pottery are too small to suggest any social or functional differences between the various concentrations. There are very few glazed sherds overall, although it may be noted that jug sherds (including the only fine London-type jug) are more numerous within the assemblage from the Northumberland Bottom enclosures. However, the single spouted

pitcher in a regionally traded ware (Canterbury-type sandy ware) from the Hazells Road diversion site is also noteworthy in this respect. The small collection from the Downs Road settlement, in contrast, has more in common with fairly low status rural dwellings with little in the way of material culture.

6 CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED VESSELS

Figure 1

1. Jar profile, fabric EM35. PRN AE-1524-6/1528, WNB contexts 739/819, posthole 740 (Downs Road settlement).
2. Jar profile, fabric EM35. PRN AE-1529, WNB context 751, posthole 752.
3. Jar rim, fabric EM36. PRN AE-1418, HRD99 context 153, demolition spread over kilns (Hazells Road diversion).
4. Jar rim, fabric EM36. PRN AE-1504, WNB98 context 292, tread within building 896 (Northumberland Bottom enclosures, phase 2).
5. Jar rim, fabric EM3. PRN AE-1447, HRD 99 context 211, collapse of oven 210 (Hazells Road diversion).
6. Jar rim, fabric EM31. PRN AE-1516, WNB 98 context 319, pit 320 (Northumberland Bottom enclosures, phase 2).
7. Jar rim, fabric EM3. PRN AE-1502, WNB 98 context 292, tread within building 896 (Northumberland Bottom enclosures, phase 2).
8. Jar rim, fabric M38B. PRN AE-1414, HRD 99 context 60, ditch 57 (Hazells Road diversion).
9. Tubular spout, fabric EM1. PRN AE-1434, HRD 99 context 159, layer over kiln 180 (Hazells Road diversion).

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