

**Channel Tunnel Rail Link  
London and Continental Railways  
Oxford Wessex Archaeology Joint Venture**

**The Anglo-Saxon  
pottery from Saltwood Tunnel, Saltwood, Kent (ARC  
SLT 98)**

by Paul Blinkhorn

**CTRL Specialist Report Series**

**2006**

**©London and Continental Railways**

All rights including translation, reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of London and Continental Railways.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>ANALYTICAL METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>FABRICS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1	Early-Middle Saxon Hand-Built Wares .....	4
3.2	Imports .....	4
3.3	Late Saxon.....	4
<b>4</b>	<b>THE ASSEMBLAGE .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED VESSELS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
5.1	Accessory Vessels .....	7
<b>6</b>	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>8</b>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The pottery assemblage comprised 143 sherds with a total weight of 6,029 g. The estimated vessel equivalent (EVE), by summation of surviving rim sherd circumference was 6.45. The bulk of the assemblage (130 sherds, 5,923 g, 6.20 EVE) was of 5th–7th century date, with much of it consisting of accessory vessels from graves. In addition, seven sherds (91 g) of late Saxon material and six small and abraded sherds (15 g), probably of Romano-British date, were present. The latter were not examined further.

The Anglo-Saxon pottery is fairly typical of other finds in eastern and southern Kent, with the accessory vessels including a wheel-thrown imported bottle. The rest of the accessory vessels were undecorated, apart from a single example with bosses and incised lines, a decorative scheme with few parallels in Kent, but typical of the pottery found in the ‘Anglian’ areas of England. The dateable pottery suggests two phases of activity, one at the end of the 5th century, and another during the 7th century.

## 2 ANALYTICAL METHODOLOGY

The pottery was initially bulk-sorted and recorded on a computer using DBase IV software. The material from each context was recorded by number and weight of sherds per fabric type, with featureless body sherds of the same fabric counted, weighed and recorded as one database entry. Feature sherds such as rims, bases and lugs were individually recorded, with individual codes used for the various types. Decorated sherds were similarly treated. In the case of the rim sherds, the form, diameter in mm and the percentage remaining of the original complete circumference was all recorded. This figure was summed for each fabric type to obtain the estimated vessel equivalent (EVE).

The terminology used is that defined by the Medieval Pottery Research Group’s Guide to the Classification of Medieval Ceramic Forms (MPRG 1998) and to the minimum standards laid out in the Minimum Standards for the Processing, Recording, Analysis and Publication of post-Roman Ceramics (MPRG 2001). All the statistical analyses were carried out using a Dbase package written by the author, which interrogated the original or subsidiary databases, with some of the final calculations made with an electronic calculator. All statistical analyses were carried out to the minimum standards suggested by Orton (1998-9, 135-7).

### 3 FABRICS

The following were noted:

#### 3.1 Early-Middle Saxon Hand-Built Wares

F1. *Quartz*. Moderate to dense sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5 mm. 35 sherds, 1976 g, 2.95 EVEs.

F2. *?Chalk tempered*. Friable, corky fabric with moderate to dense voids up to 2 mm, leached out chalk? 32 sherds, 862 g, 0.78 EVEs.

F3. *Smooth*. Smooth and soft, few visible inclusions except for rare sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5 mm and sparse fine flecks of silver mica. 7 sherds, 503 g, 0.23 EVEs.

F4. *Chaff-tempered*. Sparse to dense voids up to 5 mm, rare to sparse sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5 mm. 11 sherds, 100 g, 0.18 EVEs.

F5. *Flint*. Sparse angular white flint up to 2 mm, rare mica, quartz and calcareous material up to 1 mm. Sparse organic voids. 2 sherds, 22 g.

F6. *Fine Quartz*. Moderate to dense sub-angular quartz *c* 0.2 mm. 11 sherds, 97 g, 0.23 EVEs.

F7. *Ironstone*. Sparse, sub-angular black and red iron ore up to 3 mm, rare to sparse sub-rounded quartz, flint and calcareous material up to 1 mm. EMS/F. 28 sherds, 675 g, 1.07 EVEs.

F8. *Chalk and Quartz*. Moderate to dense subrounded quartz <0.2 mm, sparse voids up to 2 mm. 3 sherds, 70 g.

#### 3.2 Imports

F10. *Merovingian wheel-thrown ware*. Fine sandy fabric with few visible inclusions. 1 sherd, 1614 g, 0.70 EVEs.

#### 3.3 Late Saxon

F12. *Sandy, wheel-finished*. Dense, fine sub-angular quartz <0.5 mm (MLS2). 7 sherds, 91 g, 0.25 EVEs.

### 4 THE ASSEMBLAGE

Two sherds apart, none the hand-built pottery was decorated except for a single accessory vessel from grave 117/2 (Fig. SL13), meaning that it is impossible to date most of the assemblage more closely than within the early to middle Saxon period. Generally, the Anglo-Saxons ceased decorating pottery in the early part of the 7th century (Myres 1977), but such wares were rare even when they were used. Usually, decorated wares only comprise around 3% of the pottery from settlement sites of the 5th and 6th century, such as Mucking in Essex (Hamerow 1994).

The decorated vessel from grave 117/2 is very similar to an example from the Dover Buckland cemetery, dated to the late 5th century (Evison 1987, 92). Evison (ibid.) also notes

that two sherds from similar vessels were found in non-cemetery contexts in Dover itself. The Buckland vessel was found in association with a spear of Swanton's F1 type, a form which was used throughout the pagan period, but the grave belongs to the first phase of burials at the site (ibid. 29), and so a 5th-century date appears valid. Myres (1987, fig. 3) saw vessels such as these, with bosses and vertical lines, as typical of the 'Anglian' areas of England, and his corpus (1977, figs 218–226) recorded a large number of similar vessels, nearly all of which occurred in East Anglia, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and the north Midlands. However, another vessel of this general type is noted from the Bifrons cemetery in Kent, and another from East Shefford in Berkshire.

Anglo-Saxon hand-built pots are very rare as grave goods in eastern Kent, with imported wheel-thrown bottles (or ?local copies) usually more common. The Dover Buckland vessel was the only one from 165 graves, whereas seven wheel-thrown vessels were present in other graves. Very few other hand-built vessels are known from cemeteries in the area. Two were noted in the cemetery at Lyminge (Warhurst 1955), from a total of 42 graves. The two pots in question appear typical of this part of the county; one was plain, the other had line decoration in the so-called 'Jutish' style. It is perhaps relevant that both the pots at Lyminge were in the graves of children, for this seems to be where hand-built vessels most often occur. The pot from Dover Buckland was in the grave of an adult, but at Saltwood, where sufficient bone remained to allow an estimation of the age at death, most of the pots were from graves of children or young adults (for the skeletal ageing, see McKinley, this volume). The pots from graves 22, 38 and 169 were not associated with skeletal remains which could be aged, but the vessels from graves 29 and 117 were both with infants, and the vessel from 39 was with a juvenile of 9–14 years. That in grave 81 was with an individual of between 7 and 30 years of age, and those from 37 and 133 with adults under 35.

The two decorated sherds (Figs SL8 and SL9) do offer secure dating within the early Saxon period. The sherd with the incised boss (Fig. SL8) is slightly unusual, as early Anglo-Saxon vessels with bosses and incised decoration tend to have lines around the boss and defining it, rather than running across it. Pots with incised bosses are known, but these tend to be the highly-decorated *Buckelurnen* (eg Myres 1977, figs 194–200), and the decoration tends to be diagonal rather than vertical. It is possible therefore that the fragment from this site is from a *Buckelurne*, and, like the decorated accessory vessel, is of late 5th century date, but the sherd is too small to allow reconstruction of the original decorative scheme of the pot. The sherd with the incised lines (Fig. SL9) could also be relatively early, but the same comments apply here. Horizontal lines were used on many different types of decoration throughout the early Saxon period.

The hand-built pottery is otherwise fairly difficult to date other than with the broad early-middle Saxon period (AD 450–850). None of the forms of the more complete vessels are particularly distinctive.

The Merovingian bottle from context 4721, grave 169. (Fig. SL12) is likely to be of 7th-century date. Imported bottles such as these, with multiple rows of roller-stamping, are likely to have been made in northern France (Evison 1987, 94), are well-attested from Anglo-Saxon sites in Kent, where they occur mainly, but not exclusively, as accessory vessels in graves, and have been the subject of an extensive study by Evison (1979). They are rare finds at English sites outside Kent, and tend to occur singly, such as at the barrow burial at Asthall in Oxfordshire (Evison 1974). They are invariably of 7th-century date.

The late Saxon pottery is mostly fairly typical of material known from Canterbury. The bowl rim (Fig. SL11) is somewhat unusual, but such forms are very common in more northerly late Saxon pottery traditions, such as the Thetford ware industries of East Anglia (eg Rogerson and Dallas 1985).

Overall, the range of pottery types would suggest three phases of activity at the site. The first, at the end of the 5th century, the second during the 7th century, and the last during the late Saxon period. However, this picture may be somewhat skewed due to the nature of pottery consumption in Kent in the early Anglo-Saxon period. The 6th century in the areas of England which produce pottery in quantity usually sees a shift in decorative technique from linear to stamped decoration, and such pots are common in East Anglia and the north and east Midlands. However, in Kent, stamped pottery is rare. Certainly, examination of the Myres corpus shows that by far the majority of the decorated pottery from Kentish cemeteries is either plain or purely line-decorated. A stamped vessel is known from Faversham (*ibid.*, fig. 303), and four others from Northfleet (*ibid.*, figs 135, 140, 206 and 235). Orpington produced two (*ibid.*, fig 148, 191), Otford one (*ibid.*, fig. 300) and Riseley two (*ibid.*, fig. 240 and 304). All the sites are in the north or west of Kent, whereas the sites from the east and south of the country which Myres included in the corpus have not produced any stamped accessory vessels. It may be therefore that in eastern Kent in the 6th century stamping was not used on pottery, or there may even have been an hiatus in the use of hand-built pottery. Certainly, there are other areas of England, such as Oxfordshire (Blinkhorn 2003) where, although pottery was generally used, there were periods in which it was not, despite small quantities of material being imported from elsewhere. The chronology of the associated grave-goods at this site will hopefully resolve the issue.

The cemetery seem to have fallen from use during the 7th century, as is usually the case with those sites which started in the pagan period. This may not be evidence of continuity but re-use of an ‘ancient’ burial ground, an example of the final flourish of ‘defiant paganism’ in the face of the spread of Christianity (Lucy 2000, 183).

## 5 CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED VESSELS

Illustrations can be found in the grave catalogue.

Fig. SL4: Context 4551, F1. Jar rim. Black fabric with orange-brown outer surface.

Fig. SL5: Context 805, F4. Jar rim. Uniform dark grey fabric, well-burnished outer surface.

Fig. SL6: Context 805, F6. Jar rim. Uniform grey fabric with black, well-burnished outer surface.

Fig. SL7: Context 284, F8. Jar rim. Uniform black fabric, well-burnished outer surface.

Fig. SL8: Context 3147, F4. Bossed and incised body sherd. Uniform black fabric with smoothed outer surface.

Fig. SL9: Context 3063, F6. Incised body sherd. Dark grey fabric with smoothed black outer surface.

Fig. SL10: Context 243, F12. Jar rim. Uniform dark grey fabric.

Fig. SL11: Context 608, F12. Bowl rim. Uniform dark grey fabric, patch of sooting on inner surface.

### 5.1 Accessory Vessels

Nine vessels were used as accessory vessels. Two of these were too crushed and fragmented to allow any sort of reconstruction, but the rest were either complete or could be rebuilt to a degree which allowed identification of fabric and form.

Fig. SL1: Context 3997, Grave 133. Fabric F2. Full profile of jar. Dark grey fabric with brown outer surface, calcareous inclusions entirely leached out, giving a 'corky' texture.

Fig. SL2: Context 2815, Grave 81. Fabric F1. Complete jar. Uniform black fabric.

Fig. SL3: Context 1211, Grave 22. Fabric F3. Highly fragmented jar. Grey-brown fabric with orange-brown and black surfaces. Vertical burnishing strokes on the upper body.

Fig. SL12. Context 4720, Grave 169. Fabric F10. Near-complete Merovingian bottle. Uniform grey fabric, burnished surfaces with lines of roller-stamping around the waist.

Fig. SL13. Context 3758, Grave 117/2. Fabric F1. Sharply carinated jar with vertical bosses and incised lines, double incised cordon at base of neck. Reddish-brown fabric with black surfaces. Outer surface smooth and burnished, rim worn in antiquity.

Fig. SL14: Context 1253, Grave 29. Fabric F7. Small globular jar. Black fabric, lower outer surface dark orange brown. Outer surface smooth with horizontal burnishing strokes.

Fig. SL15: Context 1351, Grave 39. Fabric F1. Small jar. Mottled dark reddish-brown and black, unburnished surfaces. Ring of sooting around base, but pad not sooted, suggesting vessel was set in a fire at some point.

The following were too crushed to allow even the most basic reconstruction:

Context 1416, Grave 37. Fabric F2. Light brown fabric with black patches. Vessel completely disintegrated, and calcareous inclusions leached out. Flat base, no rim survived. Possible applied circular boss. Overall form uncertain.

Context 1329, Grave 38. Fabric F1. Grey fabric. Completely disintegrated. No discernible survival of base. Single small rim sherd, with upright and everted form.

## 6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blinkhorn, P W, 2003 The pottery in Hardy, A, Dodd, A, and Keevill, G D, *Aelfric's Abbey. Excavations at Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire, 1989-92*, Oxford Archaeology Thames Valley Landscapes **16**, 159-206

Evison, V I, 1974 The Asthall type of bottle, in *Medieval Pottery From Excavations* (eds V I Evison, H Hodges and J G Hurst), John Baker, London, 77-94

Evison, V I, 1979 *A corpus of wheel-thrown pottery in Anglo-Saxon graves*, Royal Archaeol Inst Monog Ser, London

Evison, V I, 1987 *Dover: Buckland Anglo-Saxon cemetery*, Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England Archaeol Report **3**

Lucy, S, 2000 *The Anglo-Saxon way of death*, Sutton, Stroud

MPRG, 1998 *Guide to the classification of medieval ceramic forms*, Medieval Pottery Research Group Occ Paper **1**

MPRG, 2001 *Minimum standards for the processing, recording, analysis and publication of post-Roman ceramics*, Medieval Pottery Research Group Occ Paper **2**

Myres, J N L, 1977 *A corpus of Anglo-Saxon pottery of the pagan period* 2 vols, Cambridge

Myres, J N L, 1987 *The English settlements*, Oxford

Orton, C, 1998-99 Minimum standards in statistics and sampling, *Medieval Ceramics* **22-23**, 135-8

Rogerson, A, and Dallas, C, 1984 *Excavations in Thetford 1948-59 and 1973-80*, East Anglian Archaeol **22**

Warhurst, A, 1955 The Jutish cemetery at Lyminge, *Archaeol Cantiana* **69**, 1-40