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MEDIEVAL POTTERY FROM CORBRIDGE: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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DURING NORMAL gardening operations at Lane End, Main Street, Corbridge, Northumberland (National Grid Reference 99016424) medieval pottery was noted in the kitchen garden. The site is a south facing strip running down from the top of the northern river bank to the river Tyne; the slope is one in four (25%) and it is therefore unlikely that there was ever a habitation site on it. It would seem reasonable to suppose that the pottery was deposited with household refuse as a fertilizer.

During the summer of 1984 a trench was excavated down the slope, but nothing of note was recovered from this work, nor were any man-made features found. Under the topsoil the subsoil was undisturbed, as were the river gravels that underlie the whole site. There was no concentration of the pottery, its distribution is best described as a general scatter over the whole area. Most of the edges of the sherds have been abraded through constant gardening activities.

In all two hundred and forty five sherds of medieval pottery and only a very few post medieval and industrial wares were recovered. One sherd of a handle of a grey German salt glazed Raeren mug was recovered, dating to between 1500–1550, and it is of a type that flooded the markets of Europe at this time. Platt and Coleman-Smith 1975 Vol. 2 pp. 159–161, fig. 197. Amongst the later wares were clay tobacco pipe stems, one bearing the stamp of G. Hamilton of Hexham, a 19th century clay pipe maker, the bowl of another pipe was also recovered which is decorated with a wheat sheaf on it, and was probably made by the Hamilton works for the public house of that name in the village of Corbridge. It is never easy to date precisely medieval pottery without associated finds and the Corbridge medieval pottery is no exception. The sherds are mostly small, and the forms they represent were in use for a long period. However the date range of between the late 14th Century to early 15th Century is suggested, because of their similarity to those forms found in the publications cited below. Sherd sizes ranged from 10 cm to 1 cm in length and no sherds could be joined up, therefore no profiles of vessels can be drawn from them.

The percentage of sherds from the group representing each form is interesting (see chart) with jugs 49.8% and cooking pots 48.9%. This ratio for these forms is what one has come to expect from the percentages of forms found in assemblages of pottery from both habitation and kiln sites of the medieval period. Bowls are much less common generally and are represented in this group by only 0.8%. Curfews are generally quite unusual, only being found in ones and twos on any

Fabrics

The colours of the fabrics have been matched with the two most easily available colour charts. The Pottery Colour Chart prepared by the study group for Romano-British Coarse Pottery, and the Munsell Soil Colour Chart, henceforth referred to as R. B. and M. The colour of the glazes has also been assessed by the use of the above charts.

Fabric One	Colour R.B. Brown/Yellow A5.M. Hue 7.5	Value 5/2
Fabric Two	Colour R.B. Brown/Yellow A7.M. Hue 5	Value 7/6
Fabric Three	Colour R.B. Brown/Yellow A6.M. Hue 10	Value 7/3
Fabric Four	Colour R.B. Brown/Yellow A4.M. Hue 5Y	Value 5/3

Fabric texture, unfortunately there is no satisfactory chart available for grading texture and the colour of inclusions. J. M. Hodgson's Soil Survey Field Handbook, 1976 is designed specifically for soils and is not adaptable for pottery texture or grain classification; this description has therefore been accomplished by eye.

The texture of the fabrics are described below:

Fabric One, fine grained with a few evenly dispersed white inclusions and sparse fine shiny silica sand.

Fabric Two, rough granular texture all over the fabric.

Fabric Three, very rough granular texture with many coarse dull sand inclusions.

Fabric Four, smooth even texture with a very few dispersed sand grains.

Glaze Colour

The three categories of glaze colours vary considerably inside each category; this is because of the varying thickness of the glaze itself as well as the temperature and atmospheric variations inside the kilns. This colour variation is common to all medieval kiln groups.

Glaze One R.B. Brown/Green A5.M. Hue 5Y Value 5/6 the most uniform of the three glazes recorded, variations range to rust brown or yellow at the edge of the glazed areas, or may be flecked with brown picking up iron from the fabric: rather dull surfaces.

Glaze Two R.B. Brown/Red B.4.M. Hue 5YR great variation is found in this category, ranging from a greenish variation to a brownish even in one instance, to a reddish, reduced flecking. Glossy.

Glaze Three R.B. Green A.3. ranging to Green/Brown A.2.M.—the green colouring is derived from the addition of copper oxide into the lead glaze. A dark glossy to light green slightly flecked dull glaze covers the range of this category.

The effects on glazes and fabric of uneven temperatures and oxidization and reduction can be seen in R. Coleman-Smith in Haigh, D. and Savage, M. 1984 pp. 132-3.

The significance of the four fabrics and glazes is not apparent, although it can be stated that this indicates that they are from different kilns and workshops, therefore

indicating trade contacts. The true significance of this trade will not become apparent until the kilns or areas of manufacture have been identified.

The significance of this pottery is not in the individual sherds, which are too small and insignificant to warrant illustration. The significance is that very little medieval pottery has been recovered from the Tyne Valley villages and towns and this group demonstrates that it is there to be found if its value is appreciated. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate investigations and observations of this sort in such places as Hexham and the Tyne Valley generally.

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- All the pottery from Corbridge has been given to the Museum of Antiquities, The University, Newcastle upon Tyne.