

Cowlam 2003 ceramic assemblage (COW03)

Tony Austin & Elizabeth Jelley

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The following report looks at the ceramic assemblage recovered from the evaluation undertaken at Cowlam in 2003 (see above). A total of 93 objects were examined. Most had been assigned Small Find Numbers during excavation. A small group without numbers were assigned arbitrary ones prefixed with the letter 'E' to distinguish them. These have been catalogued in a database (COW03.accdb) which is to be deposited as part of the digital archive with the Archaeology Data Service (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/>).

Pottery

35 objects within the assemblage were identified as sherds of pottery of which 30 were assigned to archaeological periods. Some of the identifications are tentative as the only means of analysis available was visual inspection and many of the sherds are small and badly abraded.

Iron Age

Two sherds were assigned to this period but both are clearly residual within later contexts. One from topsoil clearance (1000) was from a thick walled vessel containing large mineral grits which is characteristic of the earlier Iron Age (and possibly earlier) in the North East of England (for example, see Buckland et al, 1990: Sumpter, 1990). The other is from a thick walled vessel with a soft fired, oxidised, calcite gritted fabric. These characteristics place this shard early with the long tradition of Calcite Gritted wares in this region which spans the Iron Age through to the post Roman period (for example see Austin & Jelley 2009: Jelley & Austin 2007). This shard comes from a context (1005) which also contains Roman and Medieval pottery.

Roman

The eight sherds assigned to this period were all within a reduced or grey ware tradition except for a single shard of Samian (*ibid*). They are generally fragmentary, small and abraded. This small Roman assemblage is demonstrably in contexts dated to later periods and is therefore residual. One shard (SF 458) from an Anglian context (1023) which appears to be the spout or narrow neck of a flagon shows clear signs of reuse as a weight or spindle whorl.

Anglian

A group of five sherds, Fabric A, were identified as having an organic tempered fabric and assigned to the post Roman; probably Anglian, period. These fabrics are also

known as Grass or Chaff Tempered Ware. Originally thought to have been tempered with grass but today dung or cereal waste is often seen as the source for the temper (Hamerow *et al* 1994, p.13).

Organic tempered wares are known before the Roman period but seem to disappear and then reappear in the Anglo Saxon period (*ibid*). The sherds at Cowlam are in demonstrably post Roman contexts.

Hamerow *et al* (p. 15 -16) further suggest that in the post Roman period 'the technique of chaff tempering was adopted first in the S. or SE. England in the 5th century, spread further to the W. and N. during the later 6th and 7th centuries and survived there long after it had been replaced in its place of origin', even as late as the early 10th century. The lack of 9 – 10th pottery such as Torksey Ware, known from other sites on the Yorkshire Wolds (Austin 1999, Vince & Steane 2008), in the assemblage might suggest an earlier date here.

Spatially, Organic Tempered wares are represented in the surrounding area identified, for example, at West Heslerton (Vince 1998) and Sancton (Vince 2004). Further afield it has also been recognised in Anglian York (Mainman 1993) where activity is dated to the late 7th – mid 9th centuries.

The fabric is similar to organic tempered sherds recently identified in the pottery assemblage from the 2006 excavation at Burdale also located on the Wolds (Austin & Jelley 2009).

Fabric A: Organic Tempered Ware

- Empty linear voids up to 4 mm long as visible
- Occasional quartz inclusions up to 1mm
- Dusting of minute, shiny (mica?) particles
- Hand thrown
- Oxidized (reddish) exterior and interior surfaces where visible
- Light, comparatively soft fabric (clamp fired?)
- Often soot covered exterior with burnt residues on interior
- Burning to fabric core in some cases
- Thick walled c. 10+ mm
- Sherds of sufficient size exhibit a curved profile suggestive of globular cooking pots

All five sherds came from the fills of feature 2 (see main text); contexts 1014 (1 shard), 1019 (3) and 1023 (1)

Medieval

15 sherds were assigned to this period. They are generally fragmentary, small and abraded and were all apart from a single shard recovered from layers described above as spreads of silt clay (1000, 1001, 1002) representing the accumulation of topsoil. The sherds are likely to relate to activity emanating from the nearby DMV; the spreading of midden as manure perhaps. This small assemblage is dominated by a reddish sandy ware totalling 8 sherds

Fabric B: a red sandy ware

Fine sand including quartz

Occasional white limestone(?) up to 1mm

Occasional dark brown (ferrous?) inclusions up to 1mm

Hard fired, oxidised

Appears wheel thrown

Pale green glaze (interior). Also brown glaze on some sherds

This has not yet been related to a fabric identified from the Brewster excavation at the DMV (Brewster & Hayfield 1988 93-7) but other sherds from the 2003 evaluation include Humber and Staxton Ware noted therein. The latter was recovered from context 1005 and may be intrusive. Alternatively this layer represents Medieval activity.

Table 1: Summary; pottery by period

Period	Shard Count
Iron Age	2
Roman	8
Anglian	5
Medieval	15
unassigned	5
total	35

Other ceramics

The other 57 objects were primarily daub with a small amount of other material

Type	Count
Daub	46
Fired clay	8
Tile	3
Drain pipe	1

Table 2: Other ceramics

Most of this material comes from topsoil clearance (1000 – 1002). Material in demonstrably pre-medieval contexts consists of daub and fired clay with the latter probably badly abraded pottery

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