

Imported medieval pottery from Pevensey Castle

Alan Vince

Introduction

One hundred and fifty eight sherds of possible medieval imports were selected for detailed study. They comprise one hundred separate vessels. The sherds were recorded by context, so that there are one hundred and eleven individual records. Twelve distinct wares were identified, accounting for all but 27 sherds.

Rhenish wares

Eighteen sherds, representing no more than nine vessels, are tentatively identified as Pingsdorf ware (PING). This ware was produced at a number of sites in the middle Rhine, to the south of Brühl and probably exported via Cologne. Earlier wares from this region, known as Badorf ware, were produced from the middle of the 8th century, through the 9th century and into the 10th century. Pingsdorf ware is first found in the later 10th century although English finds tend to be 11th century and later.

Hartwig Lüdtke, working on the late 11th-century and later pottery from Schleswig, suggested that there was a progression in the colour of Pingsdorf ware, as a result of an increase in firing temperature, from off-white, to olive to dark (Lüdtke 1985, 60-2, Taf 34-5). At St Magnus Wharf in the City of London, however, all three types were present in dendro-dated deposits of the early 11th century, earlier than the start of the Schleswig sequence (Vince & Jenner 1991, 100-102). Nevertheless, there was indeed a tendency for material from 12th-century deposits in London to be high-fired. The Pevensey examples are split evenly between dark and off-white fired sherds.

The most distinctive aspect of Pingsdorf ware is its red paint. Two standard patterns were cross-hatched lines on the upper half of the body and groups of three or four 'commas' applied with the finger tips in a circular motion. One example of the latter pattern was present at Pevensey (ID27).

A range of vessels were produced in Pingsdorf ware but none of the Pevensey sherds could be assigned to a specific form.

Northern French wares

Imports from Northern France are the most numerous class found at Pevensey. In virtually no case can these wares be assigned with certainty to a production centre although it is strongly suspected that Rouen itself is the main source. All these northern French wares were produced from off-white firing silty clays to which fine sand or sparse coarser sand might be added. Examination under the binocular microscope shows that there are variations in the texture and nature of the inclusions found in northern French wares. In the absence of distinctive typological features and comparative data on the petrological composition of published wares from France it is impossible to interpret these variations.

Early Glazed ware

Vessels of yellow-glazed whiteware decorated with applied, stamped strips are known from a number of English sites and are thought to date to the 10th and 11th centuries. Recent excavations in Rouen have revealed a number of these vessels and chemical analysis suggests that they are locally made (Dufournier *et al* 1998). Stratified examples are known from York (Mainman 1990, 444-462) and London (Vince and Jenner 1991, 106). One possible sherd of this type was found in this Pevensey Castle excavation (ID53), a thick undecorated body sherd (NFRY).

Unglazed vessels

Six sherds (four vessels) of unglazed whiteware are probably northern French cooking pots or jars (NFRE). Two of these have sooted exteriors. A third is a small sherd that might be a base fragment from a glazed vessel (ID74, see below).

Pre-conquest deposits in Southampton have produced sherds of Beauvais ware jars, exported via the Ouise valley. Under the binocular microscope these vessels can be seen to have a rounded quartz sand with some probable glauconite. The Pevensey sherds, however, have a finer textured sand temper, with less evidence for rounding of the grains. The precise fabrics vary, however, with one vessel containing large muscovite flakes in a silty matrix and another containing sparse rounded quartz grains up to 3.0mm across, also in a silty matrix. Two of the sherds have 'ribbed' surfaces, a feature of Norman pottery in the 11th and 12th centuries (discussed by Davison 1972 and more recently by Cotter 1997).

Rouen ware

Two distinct groups of vessels are known in the archaeological literature. The first of these is typified by a group of vessels from Rouen museum published by Barton (1966, Nos 1-3) and the two vessels from Quilter's Vault, Southampton (Platt and Coleman-Smith 1975, Pl.150). They have an off-white colour and a fine quartz sand temper and are decorated with applied, roller-stamped strips of white clay over a thin red wash. This type of jug was the model for the Rouen-style jugs made in London-type ware from the beginning of the 13th century until c.1250. Vessels of this type were not common in the Pevensey Castle assemblage. Only seven sherds were found, representing no more than three vessels (ROUE). In no case could the decorative scheme be ascertained.

The second group of Rouen ware vessels (ROUL) consists of smaller, thinner-walled vessels with a slightly browner fabric with more fine sand temper. A classic example is a vessel from High Street, Southampton (Platt & Coleman-Smith 1975 Fig. 189 No.1052), a vessel associated with Saintonge polychrome ware and datable to the late 13th or early 14th century. There are 13 sherds of this type from the Pevensey Castle excavations, representing no more than 10 vessels. Decorative schemes include large cone-shaped white pellets over a red wash, diagonal iron-rich strips, vertical applied white strips with small square roller-stamping and a flower modelled in white clay over a red wash with an iron-rich clay pellet at the centre.

Green-glazed ?Rouen ware

Jugs with a mottled green glaze, produced by the addition of copper to a lead glaze, are found alongside early Rouen ware vessels wherever the latter occur. Their fabric is very similar to those of the clear-glazed Rouen wares but there are differences in the type of decoration used. It is likely that they were produced alongside the early Rouen ware vessels but whether by a different group of potters or on the same kiln sites is unknown.

Forty-five sherds of these vessels were found at Pevensey (NFM), but representing only a maximum of 14 vessels (a single smashed vessel accounts for 28 sherds, ID48). One vessel has copper-stained glaze externally and clear glaze inside (ID109). One sherd had a pulled spout, a rare feature on these vessels, which normally have no spouts at all, and two vessels had vertical applied triangular self-coloured strips. One squared rim had an accidental smear of red clay under the glaze, perhaps an indication that it was made alongside Rouen ware vessels.

Green-glazed micaceous silty ware

A distinctive class of northern French import has been noted on many English and Irish sites but has yet to be given a standard name or attribution. An example from High Street A, Southampton (Platt & Coleman-Smith 1975 No.980) will serve as a type specimen. The fabric is browner than other French whitewares, although still a light-coloured clay. The texture is siltier than other imported French whitewares and muscovite is an abundant element in the silt.

Typologically, these vessels are closer to south-western French than Rouen ware vessels. They typically have the same tall baluster form, strap handles thrown on the wheel and large parrot-beak bridge spouts. Decoration, however, is different. They can be decorated with roller-stamping and horizontal grooves.

The distribution of this type on sites in England has a western bias: Exeter, Launceston Castle, Chepstow, Bristol and Dublin have all produced examples whereas London, Boston and Hull have not.

Direct dating is at present difficult but a case could be made for these vessels being the prototype for Ham Green B ware jugs in the later 12th and early 13th centuries, mirroring the situation with Rouen ware and London-type ware in the east.

Six sherds of this type were present in this Pevensey Castle assemblage (NFMS).

Normandy gritty ware

Two sherds of Normandy gritty ware were present (NORG). This ware is another French whiteware, distinguished mainly by the presence of coarse rounded quartz gravel, some of which is haematite-coated. One sherd is from a standard Normandy gritty ware vessel with a wide applied band decorated with pairs of fingertip impressions (ID64). The other sherd is a body sherd with splashes of yellow glaze.

Southwestern French wares

The southwest of France was a major producer of whitewares in the medieval period. Of these, the best known is Saintonge ware. Following recent advances in characterisation of these wares it is now clear that polychrome and all-over-green vessels have a tight chemical signature, suggesting that they had a restricted source and limited period of production. Mottled-green glazed vessels have a wider spread of chemical compositions and were produced over a longer period of time and, perhaps, a wider geographic area. Following the proposal of Deroeux and Dufournier (Deroeux *et al* 1994) the term Saintonge ware is here restricted to the polychrome and all-over-green glazed vessels and the remainder are classed as southwestern French wares. It should be noted, however, that the standard practice in the British Isles and Ireland is to class both groups as Saintonge ware.

Mottled-glazed wares

Twenty sherds of southwestern French whiteware with mottled green glaze were found in the excavations, representing no more than 18 vessels (SAIM). Four of these sherds had been burnt after firing, and two of these were certainly from the same vessel. Only one featured sherd was present, the body-handle join from a strap handle.

Mottled-glazed vessels of this sort have a wide date range, being first found in early to mid 13th-century deposits and continuing throughout the 13th and 14th centuries. The earlier vessels are usually tall baluster jugs whereas squatter forms, often with less glaze, become common later on.

Saintonge polychrome and all-over green wares

A single sherd from a jug coated with a homogenous copper green glaze was found in the excavation (SAIG, ID73) and one possible example of polychrome-decorated ware (SAIP, ID103).

These two decorative schemes - polychrome and all-over-green - sometimes occur together, with green glaze inside and polychrome outside and the two types have identical distributions and dates. Current thinking places the production of this ware in a very narrow band in the late 13th or early 14th century. Dendro-dated deposits in the City of London date the introduction to sometime later than 1270 and earlier than c.1330.

Flemish highly decorated wares?

Six sherds of white-slipped redware are tentatively identified as being Flemish imports, so-called Aardenburg ware (AARD). None of the Pevensey sherds is decorated, however, and the similarity of Flemish and English slipped wares in the 13th and 14th centuries makes this identification very tentative.

Other possible imports

Twenty-seven sherds were submitted for identification but cannot at present be assigned to any known source. They include both white-firing and red-firing vessels. Some might be of continental origin and others of non-local English origin. All are coded MISC in the archive database and are individually described there.

Post-medieval intrusions?

Sherds of a yellow-glazed whiteware which might have been Frechen whiteware were tentatively identified as Hampshire/Surrey Border products (BORDY).

Chronology

It seems likely that most of these imports arrived in the layers in which they were found as a result of complex site-formation processes rather than being dated by their contexts. Since many of the imports found themselves have known date-ranges it is possible to say something about the periods of activity represented by plotting these dates (Table 1). This shows that very little of the pottery found need date to before the late 12th century, even if the types themselves were being produced before that. It is clear, though that there is material spanning the 13th and early 14th centuries with roughly equal quantities likely to date to the early 13th and later 13th centuries and a much smaller quantity dating to the early 14th century.

Table 1

Cname	Sherds	Vessels	Weight	Earliest	Latest
MISC	27	24	188.5	ND	ND
NFRY	1	1	40	900	1150
PING	18	9	100	1050	1250
NFM	45	16	295.5	1150	1350
NFRE	6	5	21	1150	1350
NFSM	6	6	22.5	1150	1250
NORG	2	2	28	1150	1250
ROUE	7	7	16	1150	1250
AARD	6	6	21	1250	1450
SAIM	20	19	67.5	1250	1450
SAIN?	1	1	0.5	1250	1450
ROUL	13	10	33.5	1250	1350
SAIG	1	1	5	1300	1350
SAIP	1	1	1	1300	1350
BORDY	4	3	14	1550	1750

Bibliography

Barton, K 1965 Medieval Pottery at Rouen *Archaeological Journal* **122**, 73-85

Cotter, John 1997 *A Twelfth-century pottery kiln at Pound Lane, Canterbury: Evidence for an Immigrant Potter in the Late Norman Period* Canterbury Archaeological Trust Occasional Paper **1**

Davison, B K 1972 Castle Neroche: an abandoned Norman Fortress in South Somerset *Proc Somerset Archaeol Natural History Soc* **116**, 16-58

Dufournier, D, Lecler, E & Le Maho, Jacques 1998 Céramiques décorées et glaçurées des Xe et Xie siècles découvertes à Rouen (Seine-Maritime). *Proximus* **2**, 151-160

Lüdtke, Hartwig 1985 *Die mittelalterliche Keramik von Schleswig Ausgrabung Schild 1971-1975* Ausgrabungen in Schleswig Berichte und Studien **4**

Mainman, A J 1990 *Anglo-Scandinavian Pottery from Coppergate* The Archaeology of York **16/5**

Platt, Colin and Coleman-Smith, Richard 1975 *Excavations in Medieval Southampton 1953-1969 Vol 2: The finds* Leicester University Press

Vince, Alan & Jenner, Anne 1991 The Saxon and Early Medieval Pottery of London in Vince, Alan (ed) *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London: II. Finds and Environmental Evidence*. LAMAS Special Paper **12**, 19-119