

## Assessment of pottery, ceramic building material and other finds from Moor Lane, Staines

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### Summary

Four hundred and fifty six fragments of pottery, ceramic building material and some other materials (wrongly identified at TVAS) from an excavation at Moor Lane, Staines (MLS00/31), were submitted for identification and assessment. This is the second collection of finds submitted from this site, the first consisting of 21 fragments from the evaluation (Vince 2000).

The material ranges in date from the prehistoric period to the 19<sup>th</sup> century but mainly consists of a mid Saxon assemblage and a Saxo-Norman assemblage. From the character of the finds it would seem that the site was occupied during these two periods and that finds of prehistoric, Roman and post-medieval date are present as a 'background scatter'. There is also a small collection of unabraded 19<sup>th</sup>-century pottery indicating activity on site at this period as well.

### Methodology

The finds were examined visually and, where required, using a x20 binocular microscope. Wherever possible the finds were assigned to a category and, for the pottery and some of the ceramic building material, were then classified by fabric and form. The material was quantified by fragment count and, where it was self-evident, by the number of vessels represented. In several cases finds from a single context were bagged separately. No attempt was made to look for sherd families between bags. In several cases fragments of ceramic building material were present in pottery bags and in one or two cases sherds of pottery were present in bags of ceramic building material. No attempt to re-bag these finds, nor to separate material by date or fabric, was made since this would appreciably have added to the cost of the assessment. Given the small size of the assemblages, however, it should be possible for these finds to be re-assigned and re-bagged at a later date using the catalogue created here.

### Pottery

#### Prehistoric

Five small abraded fragments of prehistoric pottery were recorded. Most of these came from soil samples. All were tempered with abundant angular fragments of white flint (which might be calcined and crushed rather than naturally angular) up to 4.0mm across.

Context:	REFNO:	Description:	Trench:	Cname:	Form:	Nosh:	NoV:
213	TOP		81E 67N	PREH	JAR	2	1
149	252			PREH	-	1	1
148	251	SCRAP	SAMPLE19	PREH	-	1	1

111	158	VERY ABRADED	SAMPLE09	PREH	-	1	1
101	177	TINY SCRAP	SAMP 14	PREH	-	1	1

### Romano-British

Four fragments of Romano-British pottery were recorded, to add to the one fragment found in the evaluation. Most were undatable sandy greyware sherds, probably from jars, but they include the base of a Nene Valley colour-coated beaker of 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>-century date.

Contex t:	REFNO :	Description:	Trenc h:	Cnam e:	Form:	Nosh:	NoV:	SUBFABRIC:
[3] (52)		FETTLED INT	11	RPOT	JAR	1	1	BB1
216	272	BURNISHED LINES EXT		RPOT	JAR	1	1	SANDY GREYWARE
133	184	VERY ABRADED		RPOT		1	1	SANDY GREYWARE
101	SURFA CE	NENE VALLEY CC		RPOT	-	1	1	
101	SURFA CE	WHITE-SLIPPED		RPOT	JAR	1	1	SANDY GREYWARE
146	197	VERY ABRADED		RPOT	JAR	1	1	SANDY GREYWARE

### Mid Saxon

Two hundred and twenty-six sherds of pottery were found, representing at most one hundred and eighty-six vessels. All of the vessels are tempered with abundant organic inclusions, probably chaff. A small number of large rounded calcareous nodules are present, but it is not clear from visual examination whether these are septarian nodules derived from the London Clay or calcareous algae. The groundmass is finer in texture than the local brickearth (to judge by the character of the burnt clay artefacts from the site) but contains abundant quartz silt. In a few instances muscovite was also identified but in the main the fabric is not micaceous, unlike the 'chaff-tempered' wares found in mid Saxon *Lundenwic* and Barking.

All the sherds appear to come from jars with a globular body, high shoulder and rolled-out rim with a rounded profile. The vessel bases are flat with a distinct base angle. This is an unusual feature in mid Saxon handmade pottery from southern England where it is much more common to find rounded or flattened bases without a sharp base angle. Two of the base sherds had deep u-sectioned grooves impressed into the surface during manufacture. This feature has not been noted elsewhere and it is uncertain whether it was a functional modification, to ensure that flames could circulate around the vessel, or a decorative one. The vessels have walls with a wildly varying thickness. The inner surfaces often show signs that clay has been scooped away using a coarse tool (unlikely to be the potter's fingernails, since there are no clear nail impressions, and the tool is probably rougher and more jagged than one would expect fingernails to be). The exterior surface, and the interior of the rim and

sometimes just underneath the neck are usually roughly burnished, but there is no clear direction to the burnishing, except around the rim where the strokes are roughly horizontal.

A distinctive feature of the fabric is that the groundmass is often oxidized, and a dull brown colour, except for blackened haloes surrounding the organic inclusions. However, the surfaces are almost invariably black. This implies that the vessels were fired in oxidizing conditions, but for such a short time that the organic inclusions have not burnt out, in most cases charred matter remains in the voids left by the organic inclusions but in some cases this has been turned into a white powdery ash.

A few of the sherds show signs that they come from vessels used for cooking food (sooted surfaces and charred food remains on the interior of the vessel, two sherds) or for boiling water (sooted surfaces and a light brown 'kettle fur' deposit on the interior, two sherds). A further four sherds have sooted exteriors but no deposits on the inside. It is possible that this evidence of use has been overlooked because of the black surfaces of the vessels and the difficulty of distinguishing soot derived from use from charcoal derived from charring of the organic inclusions. However, the surfaces of the sherds are well-preserved and it is likely that this low incidence is a true reflection of the function of the vessels.

In central London, chaff-tempered wares of this sort occur in the later part of the early Anglo-Saxon period (replacing more varied tempering material during the 7<sup>th</sup> century) and were themselves replaced by Ipswich ware during the 8<sup>th</sup> century. By the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century assemblages in *Lundenwic* contain mostly Ipswich ware sherds and continental imports with very few chaff-tempered sherds indeed. However, it is clear that inland from the Thames estuary chaff-tempered wares are likely to have survived in use longer, although Ipswich wares were present at the causewayed enclosure at Staines (Jones & Moorhouse 1981, 120). Thus, either the Moor Lane site is of the same date as the causewayed enclosure but of lower status (or otherwise differing in function) or it is earlier, dating between the later 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries.

It would be possible, using AMS C14 dating, to date the 'chaff' temper in these sherds directly.

## **Saxo-Norman**

One hundred and thirty sherd of pottery dating to the Saxo-Norman period were recorded, in addition to the fourteen sherds found in the evaluation trenches.

Almost all of the wares found are of types found in the City of London (Vince & Jenner 1991). There is in addition one possible example of a Newbury Group B vessel, produced in the Kennet Valley (NEWBURYB) and one unidentified handmade sandy ware. There are no examples of London's LSS or EMSS wares, both of which are of pre-conquest date, and only a handful of EMS sherds, a type which had a long period of use, extending into the post-conquest period. Taken as a single assemblage, if this material was found in the City of London it would have been assigned an early to mid 12<sup>th</sup> century date. This is consistent with the presence of a few sherds of South Hertfordshire Greyware (SHER) and Local Greyware (LOGR) which are solely post-conquest types in the city.

It is possible that the location of Staines, 20 miles to the west of the city, had some bearing on the supply of pottery, for example by decreasing the quantity of shell-tempered wares, which are thought to have originated to the southeast of the city, and increasing the quantity of early Surrey wares (ESUR). However, it is possible to match the assemblage quite closely in the city, which suggests that distance from London is not a major factor in the character of the pottery. The major difference between this assemblage and those from the city is the lack of continental imports or locally-produced glazed wares. These differences are readily explained by the wealth and trading connections of the city.

Cname:	DISH	JAR	Grand Total
EMCH	1	17	18
EMFL		1	1
EMS		3	3
EMSH		3	3
ESUR	3	96	99
NEWBURYB		1	1
SHER		2	2
LOGR		3	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>130</b>

The majority of the sherds found are clearly from jars used in cooking. As in the mid Saxon period, however, the majority of sherds have no evidence for use. However, the proportion with evidence for unspecified cooking (22%), boiling water (5%) or cooking food (8%) is much higher. However, it should be noted that without exception these Saxo-Norman wares had lighter-coloured bodies against which the traces of soot and other deposits contrast. Four sherds of shallow dishes were found. One of these has traces of use in cooking food and they may have been used like modern frying pans. One of the jars (LOGR) has a trace of a spout about 50mm up from the base. This might indicate that the vessel was a spouted bowl rather than a jar. The sherd is too fragmentary for positive identification however.

With the exception of a few rim sherds with thumbled decoration at the lip the vessels were undecorated.

### Post-medieval

A single sherd of yellow-glazed Border ware (BORDY) was present. Such vessels probably ceased production during the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### Early Modern

Eleven sherds of early modern pottery were present. Although five of these were Creamwares, which might be of late 18<sup>th</sup> century date, the group as a whole is likely to be of 19<sup>th</sup> century date.

Form:	BORDY	CREA	ENGS	MISC	RBOR	TPW	Grand Total
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BOWL		2			1	1	4
DISH					1		1
FLP			2				2
JAR	1						1
PLATE		3					3
TOILET			1				1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>

### Burnt clay

One hundred and eighteen fragments of burnt clay were recovered. They include two fragments which were too abraded and small to positively distinguish burnt clay from deliberately fired tile. Of the remainder, all were composed of a sandy friable fabric of the type produced from Thames valley brickearth and containing a range of detrital minerals from various sources (eg water-polished quartz grains, rounded quartz grains with a matt surface, iron-cemented sandstone fragments, angular and rounded flint fragments). Most of the fragments came from soil samples and retained no surfaces, or with surfaces too small to identify the object they came from. A minority were identifiable as loom weights or daub.

### Loom weights

Two definite fragments of loom weight were present. Both retained the central hole, from which it is clear that they belong to Wheeler's bun-shaped weights rather than the earlier doughnut-shaped weights. The larger fragment comes from [100] (170) and is part of a decorated weight with a groove worn where the warp has rubbed against the weight. This weight was covered with a smooth white deposit which might be a limewash but has not been positively identified.

### Daub

Several fragments had rough but flat surfaces and were clearly from mud walling of some kind. There was, however, no fragment which bore the impressions of wattling.

### Roman Tile

Twelve fragments of Roman tile were recorded, most of them small and abraded.

Context:	REFNO:	Description:	Trench:	No
101	SURFACE			1
142	193	VERY ABRADED		1
16	67		SAMPLE11	4
200	253/254			1
220	276			1
3	52		SAMPLE11	3
123	171	ABRADED		1

## Bitumen

Two fragments of a bitumen-based surface were recovered, both from [142] (193). Both were heavily tempered but the tempering material has not been identified. It is likely that this material is modern contamination.

## Iron

A single fragment of iron-rich material was submitted. It is probably slag rather than iron panning but does not contain either charcoal or glassy inclusions which would confirm this.

## Assessment

The excavation has confirmed the conclusions arrived at from the evaluation of the site. Namely, that there are two main periods of activity represented and that the mid Saxon activity has been disturbed by the Saxo-Norman activity. The much larger assemblage present from the current excavation allows this conclusion to be amplified: it now seems likely that the mid Saxon activity dates to the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century (although this does require confirmation through AMS dating) whilst the Saxo-Norman activity is likely to be early to mid 12<sup>th</sup> century. In both cases, the pottery seems to have been derived from normal domestic activities.

This assessment has been made without access to any stratigraphic information and it is possible that more detail could be extracted from the collection through a stratigraphic examination. Furthermore, the residuality of the mid Saxon pottery could be explored more fully if the collection were to be weighed, ware-by-ware, as there are clear visual differences in the sherd size of the mid Saxon and Saxo-Norman wares in some deposits but not in others.

## Bibliography

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