

Anglo-Saxon Pottery from Site 12, Silk Willoughby to Staythorpe Pipeline (ssp252:00 Int 10, Field 56)

Alan Vince

Fragments of fourteen early to middle Anglo-Saxon vessels were recovered from site 12, although there is a possibility that this includes some vessels of prehistoric date.

The sherds vary in size and condition. They include some sherds which are heavily abraded (such as #110, from F123) as well as some which are unabraded. There is one sherd family, with links between sherds in F103, F105 and F143.

All but one sherd (the highly abraded #110) have evidence for use in cooking, either through external sooting (13 examples) or internal deposits of burnt food or kettle fur (1 example). There is little doubt that the sherds come from domestic vessels. The range of fabrics present, details of the typology and this high degree of sooting all suggest a date at the end of the early Anglo-Saxon or beginning of the middle Anglo-Saxon period.

Wares

The fourteen vessels include examples of six different fabrics (Table 1). The most common of these, with five examples, is tempered with abundant rounded quartz grains. The presence of sparse rounded Jurassic limestone inclusions suggests that the vessels have a local source, the quartz sand being obtained from the Trent valley or windblown sand deposits derived from Trent valley sands. The remaining fabrics include one other which may have a relatively local origin, LIM, which is tempered mainly with rounded fragments of oolitic limestone. Two vessels contained a mixed sandstone sand which contains some rounded Jurassic limestone together with two types of quartz sandstone, one with haematite cement and both containing overgrown quartz grains up to 0.3mm across (SSTCL). This fabric is particularly common on sites in the Sleaford area and it is presumed that it was produced there (although at present no match for the sandstones can be found within local gravels). The remaining vessels may be non-local. They include two with acid igneous rock inclusions (CHARN) and two tempered with quartzose sand derived mainly from Carboniferous sandstone (SSTMG). The former ware is likely to have been produced in Leicestershire, where it forms a high proportion of early to middle Anglo-Saxon pottery assemblages. The presence of moderate quantities of rounded quartz sand in one of these vessels is noteworthy since this variant had been noted mainly on domestic settlement sites which are likely to be of transitional early/middle Anglo-Saxon date. The latter fabric is particularly common on sites in the Vale of York and further north. Finally, one vessel contains a mixture of quartz sandstone and basic igneous rock fragments (ERRA). Both types of inclusion are angular and possibly deliberately added. However, fabrics with a similar appearance can be produced naturally using the boulder clay which outcrops in the Lindsey marshes. The variety and far-flung origins of the wares present is typical of the early Anglo-Saxon period and it is noteworthy that this site

is situated close to the major Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Loveden Hill, which was probably of more than local significance.

Table 1

Cname	JAR
CHARN	2
ERRA	1
LIM	2
RQCL	5
SSTCL	2
SSTMG	2
Grand Total	16

Two sherds of middle Anglo-Saxon Maxey ware (MAX) were also present. This ware has been subdivided into a northern and southern variety and both of these are of the Northern variety. A potential production site for this ware has recently been identified at Bottisford in North Lincolnshire and it would be possible to tell whether these sherds are from that source using chemical analysis. Furthermore, the two sherds are of different subfabrics, E - characterised by the sparse presence of echinoid spines alongside nacreous bivalve shell, and B - characterised by texture. The assignment of these sherds to those subfabrics could be confirmed by thin-section analysis.

Manufacturing techniques

All of the pottery was made by hand, using wide coils. There is evidence for the use of the fettling technique, wiping the surfaces with a coarse material to trim off excess clay, on some vessels. This technique was probably used on both surfaces of the vessels but in most cases the evidence for its use on the exterior of the vessel has been removed by subsequent treatment. In three cases here, however, the rough scratching survives on the vessel exterior (SSTCL from F143, SSTMG from F159 and F170).

Forms

All the sherds come from jars. In one case the vessel had a completely flat base (RQCL from F143). In two cases the form of the vessels can be established. Both are from roughly cylindrical bodied vessels with a slight constriction at the neck. A sherd from a more globular-shaped vessel with a pronounced shoulder and a vertical 'long boss' was found in F159.

The rims of four vessels survived. Three of these were rounded and the fourth had a flat top. Flat topped rims appear to be a late feature within early to middle Anglo-Saxon pottery.

Function

As noted above, all of the vessels, bar one, show signs of use in cooking. The incidence of sooting on the exterior suggests that vessels were suspended above the flames rather than sitting in the embers of a fire. It is possible that this is a change which took place within the early to middle Anglo-Saxon period.

Decoration

The long boss noted above is the only example of decoration.

Dating

The presence of sherds of Maxey ware on the site suggests that occupation extended to the late 7th century. None of the other types need be much earlier than this, however. Even the long boss is a decorative feature which appears to have survived to the end of the early Anglo-Saxon period. However, there are no known examples of this feature on vessels of definite middle Anglo-Saxon date, or on sites such as Flixborough, which appear to have been first occupied in the late 7th century.

It is likely, therefore, that the site was occupied solely within the 7th century but a longer period of occupation cannot be discounted on the basis of such a small sample of pottery.

Interpretation

The collection from Site 4 appears to be a domestic assemblage. The presence of sherd links between sherds in different features is consistent with the current understanding of rubbish disposal during the early to middle Anglo-Saxon period. Rubbish was deposited first onto middens, situated at ground level and normally removed during antiquity. A fraction of this material is subsequently incorporated into the backfill of features, either through deliberate backfilling or erosion. The fresh condition of much of the pottery suggests that in this case the features were backfilled within a few years of the breakage of the vessels, although this would depend on the size and nature of the midden deposit.

Assessment

Site 4 may be a small part of a large settlement or an isolated farm. It is difficult to tell from the evidence here. The fact that much of the pottery appears to be roughly contemporary and of 7th century date is of interest, in that a similar interpretation has been made for the Anglo-Saxon activity at Site 10. There are few publications of domestic assemblages of Anglo-Saxon pottery from Lincolnshire, and none from sites which are likely to date solely to the 7th century. Site 4 therefore gives an opportunity to study pottery supply and typology in a previously-unknown period. The contrast in the range of sources and forms between the Site 4 and Site 10 assemblages is also of interest and may eventually allow differences in the date or function of the two sites to be elucidated.

Samples of each of the six fabric groups should be thin-sectioned, alongside the two Middle Anglo-Saxon shelly wares, both to confirm visual identifications and to allow detailed comparison between

the fabrics found here and at other sites to be made. Samples of the mid Anglo-Saxon shelly wares should be analysed using Inductively Coupled Plasma Spectroscopy in order to compare their composition with sherds from the possible production site at Bottisford.

Drawings of five of the vessels should be made.

A publishable report, based on this assessment, modified as a result of the thin-section analysis, should be prepared.

Costing

Task	Cost (excluding VAT)
Eight thin sections, analysis and report	£168
Three ICPS analyses and report	£63
Five drawings	£50
Preparation of publication report	£168
Grand total	£449 (plus £78.58 VAT) = £527.58

Appendix One: List of Catalogued Pottery

Feature	Context	Cname	Subfabric	Form	Nosh	NoV	Action	Description	Part	ID
F123	1163	CHARN	R Q >1.0MM;R SST >4.0MM;GRANITE AND BIOTITE >4.0MM	JAR	1	1	PTS	VABR;BLACK CORE AND INT;REDUCED EXT MARGIN	BS	110
F143	1189	CHARN	+ RQ	JAR	1	1		SOOTED EXT	BS	116
F159	1208	ERRA	M SUGARY SST;A BASALT; S MICRITE	JAR	16	1	DR;PTS	LONG BOSS;SOOTED EXT AT RIM;OXID EXT LOWER BODY;DEPO INT	R	126
F143	1189	LIM		JAR	1	1	DR;PTS	ROUNDED RIM;BURNISHED INT AND EXT;SOOTED EXT	R	116
F143	1189	LIM	+ RQ	JAR	1	1		DEPO INT	BS	116
F103	1143	MAX	E	JAR	1	1	PTS;ICSP	SOOTED EXT	BS	106
F105	1145	MAX	B	JAR	1	1	PTS;ICSP	SOOTED EXT	BS	107
F159	1208	RQCL	RQ >1.0MM;R LIMESTONE;S CHAFF	JAR	1	1	PTS	SOOTED EXT	BS	126
F143	1189	RQCL		JAR	1	1		SOOTED EXT	BS	116
F143	1189	RQCL		JAR	2	1		SOOTED EXT	BS	116
F143	1189	RQCL		JAR	1	1		FLAT BASE;SOOTED EXT	B	116
F184	1262	RQCL	RQ AND BLACK FE;MICACEOUS MATRIX	JAR	1	1			BS	143
F103	1143	SSTCL	OR PREH? (JY)	JAR	1	1	DR	SOOTED EXT;SHL #107	R	106
F143	1189	SSTCL		JAR	1	1	DR;PTS	SOOTED EXT;FETTLED EXT;FLAT TOPPED RIM;SHL #106 #107	R	116

F105	1145 SSTCL	OR PREH? (JY)	JAR	1	1 DR	SOOTED EXT	R	107
F105	1145 SSTCL	OR PREH? (JY)	JAR	1	1 DR	SOOTED EXT	R	107
F170	1238 SSTMG		JAR	1	1	SOOTED EXT;FETTLED EXT	BS	131
F159	1208 SSTMG		JAR	8	1 DR;PTS;ICPS	FETTLED INT;FETTLED EXT;SOOTED EXT;ROUNDED RIM;CYLINDRICAL BODY	BS	126
