

Assessment of finds from Ripon (OSA03 WB20)

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A collection of finds from an archaeological watching brief carried out in Ripon by *On Site Archaeology* was submitted to the author for identification and assessment (Site Code OSA02 WB20).

Although some of the finds are of types which first occur in the later 12th century most of the assemblages contain material of late 13th to 14th or late 14th-century and later date and it is quite likely that none of the material is earlier than the mid 13th century. Alongside the finds of pottery, ceramic building material and ironwork, all of which indicate typical occupation and structural debris, there is a small group of mould fragments which are waste from the casting of copper alloy vessels such as bells or cauldrons. The production of such vessels was limited in the medieval period both because of the skill required to make them and the cost of the raw materials and transport of the finished items.

Description

Ceramic Building Material

Four fragments of flat roof tile, two fragments of pantile and one fragment of brick were recovered. The flat roof tiles were tempered with a coarse sand or gravel consisting of a mixture of calcareous and sandstone fragments up to 2.0mm across. They occurred in association with medieval and later finds and are probably of medieval date (late 12th to 15th century). The brick has a distinctive fabric, consisting of lenses of inclusionless clay interleaved with lenses containing abundant fine quartz sand. It is probably of post-medieval date and was found in association with the two pantile fragments, which also have a silty groundmass but with a moulding sand containing a mixture of quartz and calcareous inclusions. Pantiles are a post-medieval introduction into England and are likely to date to the later 17th century or later.

Fired clay

Two small fragments of burnt clay were recovered from context 5043. Neither fragment had any form and both were traversed with numerous fine circular holes, probably from roots. The fabric has a smooth soapy feel, containing no quartz inclusions over 0.1mm, as is mainly black from unburnt carbon. In one area, however, the carbon has been burnt out indicating an off-white colour.

Fine off-white, inclusionless clays in the Ripon area are likely to be Coal Measure Seatearths. The only outcrop of this type close to the site is to the west of the city. However, the fragments appear to be simply burnt subsoil rather than daub or clay flooring, since they lack any sign of working. Larger samples would be required to interpret these pieces more fully.

Iron

Two nails were recovered from the watching brief, from contexts 5043 and 5066. Both are associated only with medieval finds and it is likely that they are both of medieval date.

Metallurgical Waste

Five fragments of mould were found, in contexts 5015, 5054 and 5057. These moulds are debris from the manufacture of copper alloy vessels, such as bells, ewers, mortars, skillets and cauldrons.

Unfortunately, none of the pieces has any distinctive diagnostic traits. The clay is heavily tempered with organic material, which medieval references indicate are likely to be horse or donkey dung {Hawthorne & Smith 1979 #27543} and in addition contains quartz and calcareous silt. The calcareous nature of the fabric suggests that it contains material derived from Permian strata, such as the Magnesian Limestone which underlies the city.

Pottery

Medieval

Twenty five sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the watching brief. A number of these are of types which are not known to the author (coded here as MEDLOC). These include several quite distinct fabrics. These include vessels with a coarse sand temper derived from the Millstone Grit, which outcrops to the west of the city as well as forming the majority of the clasts in fluvio-glacial sands in the vale of York, vessels with a fabric containing only a fine micaceous silt and vessels with a sand temper consisting of sparse matt-surfaced quartz (from the Yellow Sands at the base of the Permian strata) and a fine-grained white sandstone. The visual examination of these fabrics suggests that with further work it would be possible to identify their sources.

Six sherds of Brandsby-type ware were found. This ware, which has an offwhite colour when oxidised and contains abundant fine quartz sand grains and variably amounts of muscovite, was produced in the Hambleton and Howardian hills areas to the east of the city from the later 13th to the 15th centuries.

Four sherds of Humber ware were found. However, two of these have an off-white silty fabric which suggests that they may also have been made from the Jurassic clays which outcrop around the fringes of the Howardian and Hambleton hills.

Five sherds of Walmgate-type ware were found. The fabric of this ware contains moderate quantities of coarsegrained Millstone Grit sandstone and wasters have been found at Walmgate, York. However, in Ripon, it is possible that a more local source might have been responsible for their manufacture. All five sherds appear to come from the same vessel.

A single fragment of Midlands Purple ware was found. As its name suggests, this ware was probably manufactured in the midlands (it is particularly common in Nottinghamshire). The vessel is unglazed and appears to have been a jar with a flattened body. This might be accidental but could also indicate that the vessel was a standing costrel, used for carrying liquids about the person when travelling.

Post-medieval

Two sherds of Ryedale ware were recovered in the watching brief, Neither was stratified. Ryedale ware was produced in the same area as Brandsby-type ware in the early post-medieval period

Stone

Two fragments of stone were recovered. Neither shows any sign of human working and they are probably natural components of the subsoil. One is a calcareous micrite nodule and the other is a fine-grained, micaceous sandstone, probably of Permian age.

Assessment

Finds were recovered from 12 contexts and these can be assigned *terminus post quem* dates on the basis of the starting date of the latest type present. Given the uncertainty of the dating of the MEDLOC sherds and the long period of use of Brandsby-type ware it is possible that most of these contexts were actually deposited in the late medieval period (Table 1). However, contexts 5033, 5043 and 5066 are potentially the earliest investigated since they contain neither Brandsby-type ware nor definite late medieval types such as Midlands Purple, Humber ware or Walmgate ware.

The copper alloy mould fragments were all associated with late medieval pottery, which suggests that this activity was of late medieval date. A late date such as this makes it more likely that the vessels being produced were domestic utensils, such as cauldrons, rather than bells, since the use of these metal vessels was much more common in the late 14th and 15th centuries than earlier.

Table 1

Context	TPQ
5003	Late medieval
5015	Late medieval
5030	Late medieval
5033	medieval
5043	medieval
5050	post-medieval
5051	medieval
5054	Late medieval
5057	Late medieval
5060	medieval
5062	medieval
5066	medieval
US	post-medieval
Grand Total	

These finds indicate that the medieval material of culture of Ripon has great potential for a variety of studies, amongst them the study of pottery and ceramic building material supply and the production of cast copper alloy vessels. On their own, the finds from this watching brief do not warrant further work but they do indicate the potential of Ripon, and of this site in particular.

Appendix

Context	class	Cname	Form	Description	date	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Subfabric	Part	Use	Condition
5003	POTTERY	MEDLOC	JAR	GLAZE SPOT EXT;WT	12.2	1	1	7	A SSTMG >1.0MM;RED BODY	BS		
5003	POTTERY	WALMGATEJUG		PLAIN GL;COMBED EXT	14.2	4	1	64		BS	WHITE DEPO INT	
5015	CBM	MTIL	FLAT		12.2	1	1	3	CALC AND SST SAND	BS		
5015	METALLURGICALFCLAY		MOULD		med	1	1	13	ORGANIC TEMPER;SILTY;CALCAREOUS	BS		
5015	NONE	STONE	GEOL		NONE1	1	1	11	POSSIBLE CONCRETION WITH BROWN CORE AND PINK EXTERIOR	BS		
5015	POTTERY	MEDLOC	JUG	PLAIN EXT GL;KT EXT	12.2	1	1	13	SILTY MICACEOUS FINE	BS		
5015	POTTERY	MP	JAR	UNGLAZED;GROOVES ON SHOULDER;FLATTENED BODY (ACCIDENTAL? DELIBERATE?)	14.2	1	1	17		BS		
5030	POTTERY	HUM	JUG	REDUCED CORE AND INT;EXT PLAIN GL	14.2	1	1	153	OFFWHITE FINE SANDY	B		
5033	POTTERY	MEDLOC	JUG	PLAIN EXT GL;SAGGING BASE	12.2	1	1	21	SILTY MICACEOUS	BS		VABR
5043	fclay	FCLAY	?	DIFFERENT FABRIC AND APPEARANCE FROM MOULDS	nd	2	1	3	SOFT;OFFWHITE WHERE NOT DK GREY/BLACK;ORGANIC TEMPER - ROOTS?	BS		
5043	IRON	IRON	NAIL		nd	1	1	1		BS		
5043	POTTERY	MEDLOC	JAR	HM?	12.2	1	1	11	SSTMG>2.0MM	B	SOOTED EXT	
5050	CBM	MTIL	FLAT		12.2	1	1	6	CALC AND SST SAND	BS		
5050	CBM	PMTIL	BRICK		16.2	2	1	35	SILT/FINE SAND;VARIEGATED WITH UNTEMPERED LENSES	BS		
5050	CBM	PMTIL	PANT		17.2	1	1	69	SILTY;CALC/QUARTZ SANDED BASE	BS		
5050	CBM	PMTIL	PANT?		17.2	1	1	7	SOFT;MICACEOUS SILTY	BS		
5050	POTTERY	MEDLOC	JUG	EXT GROOVED DEC;EXT PLAIN GL	12.2	3	1	7	SPARSE MATT Q >1.0MM;SPARSE FINE WHITE SST >3.0MM	BS		
5051	POTTERY	BRANDSBYJUG		EXT CUGL	13.2	2	1	16		BS		
5054	CBM	MTIL	FLAT		12.2	2	2	7	CALC AND SST SAND	BS		

Context	class	Cname	Form	Description	date	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Subfabric	Part	Use	Condition
5054	METALLURGICALFCLAY		MOULD		med	3	3	68	ORGANIC TEMPER;SILTY;CALCAREOUS	BS		
									LOOSELY-CEMENTED WELL-SORTED SST;Q GRAINS >0.3MM;MUSC >1.0MM;PERMO-TRIASSIC?			
5054	NONE	STONE	GEOL		NONE1	1		93		BS		
5054	POTTERY	BRANDSBY	JUG		13.2	1	1	3		BS		
5054	POTTERY	HUM	JUG	REDUCED CORE AND INT	14.2	2	2	35	ORGANIC TEMPER;SILTY	BS		
5054	POTTERY	MEDLOC	JUG	PLAIN EXT GL	12.2	1	1	1	SST SAND	BS		
5057	METALLURGICALFCLAY		MOULD		med	1	1	1	ORGANIC TEMPER;SILTY;CALCAREOUS	BS		
5057	POTTERY	BRANDSBY	JAR		13.2	1	1	7		BS	SOOTED EXT	
5057	POTTERY	HUM	JUG		14.2	1	1	1	OFFWHITE FINE SANDY	BS		
5060	POTTERY	BRANDSBY	JUG	ID?;PLAIN GL	13.2	1	1	22		BS		IRON PAN COATED
5062	POTTERY	BRANDSBY	JUG	GROOVED DEC;PLAIN GL	13.2	1	1	7		BS		
5066	CBM	MTIL	FLAT		12.2	1	1	1	CALC AND SST SAND	BS		
5066	IRON	IRON	NAIL		nd	1	1	15		BS		
5066	POTTERY	MEDLOC	JAR	HM?	12.2	1	1	5		BS	SOOTED EXT	
				BH JOIN WITH GLAZE OVER CRACK ACROSS HANDLE AND HALFWAY ACROSS BODY WALL;EXT CUGL;THREE								
US	POTTERY	RYEDALE	JUG/CISTTHUMB	IMPRESSIONS	16.1	1	1	147		BS		
US	POTTERY	RYEDALE	JUG/JAR	PLAIN EXT GL	16.1	1	1	3		BS		
US	POTTERY	WALMGATEJUG		PLAIN GL;COMBED EXT	14.2	1	1	15		BS	WHITE DEPO INT	