

Assessment of the pottery and ceramic building material from 47-53 High Street, Potterspur, Northamptonshire

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829 sherds of pottery and ceramic building material from 47-53 High Street, Potterspur, Northamptonshire, excavated by Network Archaeology Ltd were submitted for identification and assessment. The collection consists mainly of production waste of later medieval Potterspur ware, including ridge tiles, with a small quantity of 19th-century pottery and ceramic building material.

Description

The finds were identified and recorded in an Access database using the classification of the Northamptonshire Pottery Type Series as a guide to ware classification (REF). Pottery forms were classified using the terminology proposed by the Medieval Pottery Research Group (1998). The material was quantified by sherd count, maximum number of vessels and weight in grams (Table 1). At the request of the excavators, Modern ceramic building material was counted and weighed but not further recorded.

Table 1

Class	Data	103	104	106	107	109	110	111	Grand Total
ASBESTOS	Sum of Nosh			1					1
	Sum of NoV			1					1
	Sum of Weight			3					3
CBM	Sum of Nosh	15	26	2	5	1			49
	Sum of NoV	15	26	2	5	1			49
	Sum of Weight	666	342	10	119	77			1214
PPOT	Sum of Nosh		2		4			1	7
	Sum of NoV		2		2			1	5
	Sum of Weight		5		15			0.5	20.5
MPOT	Sum of Nosh	1	409	1	13	132	215	1	772
	Sum of NoV	1	409	1	13	128	214	1	767
	Sum of Weight	4	4578	15	161	546	945	11	6260
Total Sum of Nosh		16	437	4	22	133	216	1	829
Total Sum of NoV		16	437	4	20	129	215	1	822
Total Sum of Weight		670	4925	28	295	623	945.5	11	7497.5

Key: Nosh = number of sherds, NoV = number of vessels, CBM = Ceramic Building Material, PPOT = post-medieval/modern pottery, MPOT = medieval pottery

From Table 1 it can be seen that there is a small quantity of post-medieval/modern pottery from contexts 104, 107 and 110. Furthermore, modern ceramic building material was recovered from contexts 103, 106, 107 and 109. Nevertheless, the small proportion of modern material in contexts 104, 109 and 110 suggests that these assemblages are actually of medieval date and are contaminated with small quantities of more recent material.

Ceramic and Other Building Material

Medieval

Two small groups of fired clay were recovered, from contexts 104 and 110. Both have the same fabric, which has a calcareous groundmass and abundant large fragments of oolitic limestone and nacreous bivalve shells, several mm across, together with straw impressions. The fabric is soft and the surfaces, where present are coated with a white layer assumed to be a lime wash. One of these surfaces is convex and the remainder are roughly flat. There are no wattle impressions and one possible angular stone impression.

The low firing and the lack of temperature gradient from the surface to the interior of the fragment argue against these fragments being kiln lining or part of a kiln superstructure. They might, however, be part of a daub and lime wash coating on the outside of a kiln superstructure. Alternatively, they may be from the walls of a domestic structure.

The limestone inclusions are mixed which indicates that they have been transported from the outcrop rather than representing a brash developed on the outcrop *in situ*. The soil survey description of the site suggests that the origin of this clay may have been a limestone-rich colluvium which may have been quarried on site. However, this clay is quite different from that used for the pottery production.

Fragments of five lead-glazed ridge tiles in Potterspurly ware were found. Some of these had evidence of being wasters. Ridge tiles may therefore have been produced alongside pottery on the site, or they may have been reused to form a cover for the kiln if its superstructure consisted of a cylindrical or ovoid tube with an open top.

A small fragment of a brick or tile over 25mm thick in a fabric similar to Potterspurly ware was found. The fabric contained abundant angular fragments of clay and sparse bivalve shell. It is likely that the fragment is from a hearth tile rather than a brick. Such tiles were used as the bases for hearths during the later medieval and early post-medieval periods.

Modern

Twenty-three fragments of modern building material were recovered from the site, from contexts 103, 107 and 109. They have not been recorded in detail but include cement from the bonding of a frogged brick structure and as such as of late 19th or 20th-century date. A fragment of pantile and a whiteware wall tile (of the type used to tile the walls of washhouses) were found in the pottery collection.

Pottery

Medieval

Almost all the medieval pottery from the site consists of sherds of Potterspurry ware (772 sherds). Much of this pottery shows definite signs of being waste. These include overfiring of the fabric to a hard, light grey semi-stoneware, glaze running over the edges of sherds, oxidation of broken sherd edges where the remainder of the core is reduced, immature glaze, pieces of pot and clay stuck in the glaze and underfiring. Of these, the most common defects are overfiring and oxidation of broken edges. Both of these defects suggest that the most common problem encountered in firing was for the temperature to rise too high (overfiring) and too fast (cracking). There are, however, very few examples of warped wasters and none of completely melted pieces, both of which are not uncommon in medieval pottery waste assemblages. The pottery mainly came from three distinct areas, contexts 104, 109 and 110. There is, however, little difference in the character of the pottery between the three groups which are consequently assessed here as a single assemblage.

There are several distinct fabrics within the collection. Without further work it is not known if these represent the use of different clays, or can all be explained in terms of differences in firing. For this assessment the sub-fabrics were not recorded on a sherd-by-sherd basis.

Sub-fabric 1: soft, brown with fine sand up to 0.2mm across and rare larger rounded quartz grains, some of which are coated in haematite, and angular fragments of ironstone up to 1.0mm across. Muscovite is common in the groundmass.

Sub-fabric 2: hard, light brown but otherwise similar to sub-fabric 1 except that muscovite is not visible in the fabric

Sub-fabric 3: hard, off-white with burnt-out calcareous inclusions up to 0.5mm across, some containing a white powdery deposit. The remaining inclusions are similar to those in sub-fabric 2.

Sub-fabric 4: Very hard, light grey, or light grey surfaces with a light brown core. Inclusions as in sub-fabric 2

It is possible that sub-fabric 3 is simply a higher-fired version of sub-fabric 2 but no calcareous inclusions were noted at x20 magnification. They may, however, be visible in thin section. Similarly, the presence of muscovite and the redder colour of sub-fabric 1 may be due to a lower firing temperature and the lack of reaction between calcareous inclusions and clay minerals in the body. These interpretations can be tested by the use of petrological analysis and chemical analysis (using Inductively-Coupled Plasma Spectroscopy). The source of the potting clay is not known. Clay was present on the site, forming a layer above limestone. This is likely to be the colluvium noted by the Soil Survey as overlying limestone bedrock in the village. However, to the excavator the clay seemed very similar to that used in the pottery. Samples of the clay were taken but have unfortunately been discarded.

Most of the pottery consisted of featureless body sherds. With some effort many of these could have been assigned to a form but for this assessment they have been counted, weighed and then ignored. Attention was, instead, concentrated on the 109 featured sherds (Table 2). These could be assigned to four forms: bowls, jars, jugs and a possible storage jar.

Table 2

Form	Data	104	107	109	110	Grand Total
-	Sum of Nosh	361	7	95	197	660
	Sum of NoV	361	7	95	196	659
	Sum of Weight	3335	67	0	763	4165
BOWL	Sum of Nosh	5	1		1	7
	Sum of NoV	5	1		1	7
	Sum of Weight	158	13		41	212
JAR	Sum of Nosh	1	1	1		3
	Sum of NoV	1	1	1		3
	Sum of Weight	18	21	11		50
JUG	Sum of Nosh	41	4	36	17	98
	Sum of NoV	41	4	32	17	94
	Sum of Weight	991	60	535	141	1727
SJ	Sum of Nosh	1				1
	Sum of NoV	1				1
	Sum of Weight	76				76
Total Sum of Nosh		409	13	132	215	769
Total Sum of NoV		409	13	128	214	764
Total Sum of Weight		4578	161	546	945	6230

Bowls

Only 7 featured sherds could be identified as bowls. All were flanged rims from large conical vessels, of the type often known as pancheons. Such vessels often have a wide pulled spout and it has been suggested that they were used in separating cream from milk. However, it is likely that this form, without the spout, would have had numerous uses in food preparation. All 7 examples belong to Mynard's Bowl Type b class (Mynard 1970). Some of these rims have glaze on the interior whilst others are completely unglazed. It is likely, however, that glaze was present in the base of all the vessels.

Jars

Only three featured sherds could be identified as jars, again all were rims. In Mynard's typology two of these belong to his Cooking Pot Type b class and one to his Cooking Pot Type d.

Jugs

Jugs were by far the most common form within the assemblage, accounting for 101 of the 112 featured sherds. Only one shape appears to have been produced, a rounded jug with a sagging base, wide base angle (23 sherds) with no decoration and a roughly cylindrical neck without a sharp neck/body angle. The vessels had a low cordon on the shoulder (17 sherds) but otherwise have little decoration. Nine sherds with grooved decoration were found, however, and these include one sherd from the lower body suggesting that the marks may have included maker's marks as well as decoration. The remainder are mainly from horizontal wavy bands, probably from the upper half of the body. The jugs, therefore, are similar to the complete jug from Gold Street, Northampton published by Mynard (1970, Fig 1 No. 1). Nineteen rim sherds were found, all of them with a squared rim similar to Mynard's Fig 1 No. 6. These have a concave profile below the overhanging rim with a sharp line separating the rim from the neck. Experiment shows that it would be possible to achieve this shape using a finger or thumb to support the rim whilst another finger is used to force the rim down and out. The sharp groove, therefore, is likely to be made by the potter's fingernail.

Twenty fragments of handle were found. All are wide strap handles, luted to the rim and girth. The rim joins were secured by a row of deep knife-cut slashes which pierce the handle and body clay whilst the body/handle join was secured and decorated by either one (as in Mynard, 1970, Fig 1 No. 2) or two thumb impressions. The body of the handle was also decorated with slashed lines. In most cases these form a single column of diagonal slashes (Mynard's Handle Type c) but three examples with vertical slashed lines on either side of the central column (as in Mynard, 1970, Fig 1 No.17) also occur.

It is clear from these fragments that glaze was only used sparingly on these jugs. The glaze was often limited to a 'bib' or circular patch of glaze below the spout and most of the handles and base sherds are unglazed or have what could have been accidental splashes of glaze. The glaze is of two kinds: a plain lead glaze, appearing brown through the colour of the body, and a mottled green glaze, coloured by copper.

Four base sherds are probably from jugs but are extremely unusual. The base is completely flat, instead of the slightly sagging base normally found and the profile has a slight pedestal, similar to that found on late medieval cups. The sherds are unglazed and much too large and thick-walled to be cups however.

Storage Jar

A single unglazed body sherd from a thick-walled globular bodied vessel was found. The curvature of the sherd and the wall thickness suggest that it comes from a much larger vessel than either the jugs or jars from the site and it is suggested that this might have been a storage jar.

Date

Although each of the characteristics found in this collection can be matched in other collections of Potterspury ware the collection is unusual. The main point of difference is that jars, one of the most common forms on settlement sites, are so rare. Furthermore, the detailed typology of the jugs and

bowls is limited and Mynard describes and illustrates a number of forms which are absent from the collection. Whilst this may, to some extent, be due to the relatively small size of the collection, it is also likely that the production was limited to jugs with a few examples of other forms.

Mynard notes that the potting industry must have begun at Potterspur by the late 13th century since the prefix “Potters-” was already in use by 1287 (Mynard 1970, 49). This collection, however, seems to be somewhat later and the low number of jars is consistent with a 14th-century or later date. The uniformity of the products and the use of a bib of glaze is in fact typical of late medieval pottery (i.e. late 14th to 15th centuries). The pottery, therefore, is likely to be contemporary with the kiln discovered on the site by *Northamptonshire Archaeology* in 1998.

Modern

Eight sherds of modern pottery were recovered (Table 3). There were no large concentrations and it is likely that all the sherds represent contamination from overlying modern deposits. In total, the sherds only amount to 30gm in weight. The types present are in the main typical of the later 19th and early 20th centuries. A single sherd from context 110 is a sliver from the interior of a bowl made from a calcareous, fine-textured red body with a white internal slip and colourless lead glaze. Whilst this is most likely to be a coarseware bowl from the country potteries of northeast England it might possibly be a late medieval Italian import, although this is unlikely.

Table 3

Context	Data	ITALS/SUND	NCBW	PMLOC	TPW	WHITE	Grand Total
104	Sum of Nosh		1	1			2
	Sum of NoV		1	1			2
	Sum of Weight		1	4			5
106	Sum of Nosh					1	1
	Sum of NoV					1	1
	Sum of Weight					3	10
107	Sum of Nosh				3	1	4
	Sum of NoV				1	1	2
	Sum of Weight				12	3	15
110	Sum of Nosh	1					1
	Sum of NoV	1					1
	Sum of Weight	0.5					0.5
Total Sum of Nosh			1	1	1	3	2
			8				

Total Sum of NoV	1	1	1	1	2	6
Total Sum of Weight	0.5	1	4	12	6	30.5

Assessment

The limited range of pottery forms and decoration found in the Potterspury production waste suggests that it may represent the waste from a short period of potting by a limited number of potters rather than being derived from a waster dump used over a long period of time by the whole community. Study of this material, therefore, may provide us with a guide as to what vessel types were produced together. If the same range of features is found on Potterspury ware from a settlement site where the pottery was used it may allow us to identify a particular phase in the development of this long-lived and important pottery industry.

In the notes accompanying the Northamptonshire Pottery Type Series, the discovery and study of groups of Potterspury ware waste was given a high priority, since in the author's view previous discoveries had been cursorily treated. If further disturbance of the ground is planned at the site then the opportunity should certainly be taken to increase the size of this sample. However, even if no further work takes place this collection is large enough to characterise the products.

At present, the collection cannot be closely dated, and could be of any date from the later 13th to early 16th centuries, although it is most likely to date to the middle of this period, the later 14th or 15th centuries.

Following the deposition of the potting waste, there is no evidence from these finds for any activity until the mid/late 19th century although the quantity of modern finds is too low to give an accurate start date for this phase. These late finds are quite small but not abraded and give the impression of being buried close to their place of use rather than been spread onto the fields with manure. A single fragment of land drain, however, may indicate a period of land drainage preceding Victorian or later occupation.

Retention

The majority of the sherds are featureless body sherds and probably contain little potential for further analysis, although they could be assigned to a vessel form. However, even if they were assigned to a form it is uncertain what extra information about the production this would produce. Similarly, they could be assigned to a sub-fabric, but this process would be more useful if applied to featured sherds. It is therefore recommended that the featureless body sherds, which have been rebagged separately, be discarded, ideally by being reburied on the site.

Further Work

The pottery production waste should be studied and the results published. Certain dimensions present on these vessels could be measured. These include the rim diameters of all rims large enough for reconstruction, the width of strap handles and the width of the squared rims. 4 hours @ £22 per hour

A series of sherds covering the main variations in vessel type and form have been selected for illustration. 20 sherds to be illustrated by Network Archaeology's in-house illustrators.

Samples of the fabric should be analysed, using thin section and chemical analysis. This should aid the identification of this specific group of Potterspurty ware if or when it is subsequently found on settlement sites. This analysis would also determine whether or not the observed differences in colour are due solely to conditions in the kiln or were affected by the composition of the potting clay. Ten samples would be required for chemical analysis, selected so as to cover the visual variations in fabric and colour. For thin section analysis four samples would be sufficient, one from each of the visually distinct fabric groups. 14 analyses at £22 each including analysis.

A short note should then be prepared on this material for inclusion in *Medieval Ceramics* or a local archaeological journal. 4 hours @ £22 per hour

The various tasks and their estimated costs are summarised in Table 2.

Table 4 Summary of Costing of Proposed Further Work, excluding pottery illustration

Task	Cost	Cost plus VAT
Measurement	£88	£103.40
scientific analysis	£308	£361.90
Report	£88	£103.40
Grand total	£484	£568.70

Appendix. Catalogue of finds

Contextclass	cname	Form	subfabric	Weight	Part	Nosh	NoV	Use	Description
110	CBM	FCLAY		BIVALVE SHELL;ROUNDED OOLITIC LST;SPARSE GSQ;CALC MATRIX	49	BS	3	3	ONE CONVEX SURFACE;WHITE
103	CBM	MOD			666	BS	15	15	
103	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			4	BS	1	1	CUGL
104	CBM	FCLAY		BIVALVE SHELL;ROUNDED OOLITIC LST;SPARSE GSQ;CALC MATRIX	132	BS	17	17	
104	CBM	MTIL	BRICK	BIVALVE SHELL;ANGULAR CLAY PELLETS;LIGHT-BODIED CF POTTERS PURY WARE	16	BS	1	1	
104	CBM	POTTERS PURY RIDGE			88	BS	2	2	
104	CBM	POTTERS PURY RIDGE			57	BS	3	3	WASTE
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			18	BS	2	2	WASTE CORDON ON SHO
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY-			837	BS	157	157	WASTE
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY-			2361	BS	200	200	WASTE
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			49	BS	4	4	WASTE CORDON ON SHOULDER;CUGL
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JAR			18	R	1	1	
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			17	BS	3	3	WASTE CORDON ON SHOULDER;PLAIN
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY BOWL			158	R	5	5	FLANGED RIM
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY-			137	B	4	4	FLAT PEDESTAL
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			190	R	8	8	FLAT-TOPPED SQ RIM
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			34	R	1	1	FLAT-TOPPED SQ RIM;PULLED SPO
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			10	BS	1	1	WASTE LUTED B/H JOIN
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			92	H	2	2	WASTE LUTED B/H JOIN;C THUMB
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			24	H	1	1	WASTE LUTED B/H JOIN;E SLASH DOWN ON OF HANDLE;CEN THUMB(S)

104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		44	H	1	1	LUTED B/H JOIN;E SLASH DOWN ON OF HANDLE;TWO
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		27	BS	1	1	LUTED R/H JOIN
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		30	R	1	1	WASTE ROW OF VERTICA SLASHES ROUND NECK;FLAT-TOPP SQUARED RIM;LU JOIN
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		57	H	1	1	STRAP;DIAG SLA BETWEEN TWO P SLASHES;UNGLA
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		114	H	1	1	STRAP;SLASHES AND DIAG SLASH HANDLE;SPLASH
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		25	BS	2	2	WAVY GROOVED
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		6	BS	1	1	WASTE WAVY GROOVED
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		201	B	7	7	WASTE WIDE ANGLE SAG BASE
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		53	B	4	4	WIDE ANGLE SAG BASE
104	MPOT	POTTERS PURY SJ		76	BS	1	1	
104	PPOT	NCBW	BOWL	1	BS	1	1	
104	PPOT	PMLOC	FLP	4	BS	1	1	
106	ASBESTOS	ASBESTOS	FLAT	3	BS	1	1	COATED WITH TA
106	CBM	PMTIL	PANT	7	BS	1	1	
106	CBM	WHITE	WALT	3	BS	1	1	WHITE GLAZE;PR MOULDED
106	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		15	H	1	1	STRAP;DIAG SLA
107	CBM	MOD		119	BS	5	5	
107	MPOT	POTTERS PURY-		67	BS	7	7	WASTE
107	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		20	BS	2	2	WASTE CORDON ON SHOULDER;CUGL
107	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JAR		21	R	1	1	WASTE
107	MPOT	POTTERS PURY BOWL		13	R	1	1	WASTE FLANGED RIM
107	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		22	B	1	1	WASTE WIDE ANGLED SA BASE
107	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		18	B	1	1	WIDE ANGLED SA BASE
107	PPOT	TPW	PLATE	12	R	3	1	WILLOW PATTERN
107	PPOT	WHITE	JAR	3	BS	1	1	HORIZ LT BLUE S
109	CBM	MOD	LAND DRAIN	77	BS	1	1	
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG		27	H	1	1	WASTE B/H LUTED STRAP
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY-		800	BS	95	95	WASTE

109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			33	BS	3	2		CORDON ON SHO
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			24	BS	2	1		CUGL; WAVY GRO
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			22	B	1	1		WASTE DIAG GROOVE ON BODY; WIDE ANGLE SAGGING BASE
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			43	R	3	1		WASTE FLANGED RIM; CUGL; LARGE
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			8	R	1	1		WASTE FLAT-TOPPED SQ RIM
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			42	R	1	1		WASTE FLAT-TOPPED SQ RIM
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			61	R	1	1		WASTE FLAT-TOPPED SQ RIM; STRAP R/H S WITH DIAGONAL LOWER DOWN
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JAR			11	R	1	1		GLAZE ON EXT R
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			18	BS	3	3		GROOVED
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			23	BS	3	3		WASTE PLAIN EXT GL; WA GROOVING
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			53	H	2	2		WASTE R/H SLASHED
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			119	H	12	12		WASTE STRAP; MAINLY W DIAGONAL SLASH WITH PARALLEL S ONE ONLY AT R/H
109	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			62	B	3	3		WIDE ANGLE; SAG BASE
110	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			38	BS	3	3		CORDON ON SHO
110	MPOT	POTTERS PURY-			744	BS	195	195		WASTE
110	MPOT	POTTERS PURY BOWL			41	R	1	1		FLANGED RIM
110	MPOT	POTTERS PURY-			19	B	2	1		FLAT BASE WITH PEDESTAL
110	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			17	R	3	3		FLAT TOPPED SQ RIM
110	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			7	BS	1	1		GROOVED DEC
110	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			11	H	3	3		STRAP; DIAG SLA
110	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			2	BS	1	1		WASTE WAVY GROOVED
110	MPOT	POTTERS PURY JUG			66	B	6	6		WASTE WIDE ANGLED SA BASE
110	PPOT	ITALS/SUND	BOWL		0.5	BS	1	1		INT WHITE SLIP A CLEAR GLAZE; CO ITALS OR SUND!
111	MPOT	MEDLOC	JUG	SILTY, BRICK EARTH FABRIC; STREAKS OF WHITE CLAY	11	BS	1	1		REDUCED CUGL (OXBLOOD)

Bibliography

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