

A sherd of Harrold Shelly ware from Carlisle

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The rim of a wheelthrown jar with a hooked rim from a site in Carlisle was submitted for identification.

The vessel, which has a light coloured body, once contained an abundant shell sand but the inclusions have been completely leached. Under x20 magnification, these inclusions can be identified as thin-walled bivalve shell, including punctate brachiopod, and echinoid shell. The size, shape and sorting of the inclusions suggests that they come from a shell sand, probably naturally present in the clay as dug rather than a shelly limestone. Bands of shelly marl occur in the Jurassic sequence in midland England and have also been noted in Gloucestershire. They have not been noted in Lincolnshire or Yorkshire, however. Within this potential source area, the most likely source is the Harrold industry in Bedfordshire (1998 and references therein).

Wheelthrown, hooked-rim jars of this type, usually with close-set rilling on the body, are a widely-distributed type in the late Roman period and there is some evidence that the Harrold industry (or kilns in the same general area) continued to operate later into the late 4th/early 5th centuries than other regional late Roman wares. This, for example, was the pattern in Gloucester where the frequency of late Roman shelly ware in assemblages increased steadily during the 4th century culminating in the very late 4th/early 5th-century deposit associated with a hoard of Theodosian coins at New Market Hall, Gloucester (Hassall and Rhodes 1974). The content of this Carlisle find, in a dark earth stratified between late Roman and medieval deposits, is exactly right therefore for this ware and suggests that Carlisle continued to be part of long-distance overland trade routes to the very end of the Roman period.

Bibliography

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