

Assessment of the pottery from West Lear's Farm, Chard Junction Quarry, Dorset, 2004 (WLF 03/55)

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Four hundred and four sherds of pottery, representing no more than 345 vessels and weighing 2.249 Kg from an excavation at West Lear's Farm, Chard Junction Quarry, Thorncombe, Dorset, were submitted for identification and assessment (Site Code WLF 03/55). The pottery is all of 11th to 12th-century date and indicates the existence of a small, possibly short-lived, settlement.

Description

Pottery

Medieval

Fabrics

The pottery could be divided into three fabric groups (Table 1).

SEW is South East Wiltshire ware, a distinctive ware with a light-bodied, inclusionless groundmass and a rounded quartz sand temper, c.0.5 to 1.0mm across.

SNX is a Non-Local Saxo-Norman ware. This example has a rounded calcareous gravel temper with no visible quartz inclusions.

SWCHT is South-Western Chert-tempered ware. It contains abundant rounded, polished quartz grains and angular white chert, in which microfossils are sometimes visible at x20 magnification. The groundmass is slightly micaceous and contains some fine quartz sand. The vessels are usually thoroughly fired, removing any carbon from the body, but have a grey core and oxidized brown surfaces. At x20 magnification some unidentified black inclusions are visible which might be tourmaline.

Table 1

Cname	Data	Total
SEW	Weight	12
	Nosh	1
	NoV	1
SNX	Weight	5
	Nosh	1
	NoV	1
SWCHT	Weight	2231

Nosh	401
NoV	342

Forms

Most of the vessels present were jars with a squat globular profile, sagging base and everted rim. A few of these vessels were decorated with combing, either in the form of wavy lines on the shoulder of the pot or wavy lines on the exterior, top or interior of the rim. The vessels vary considerably in size although at this stage no diameters were measured.

A few sherds came from one or more large storage jars (SJ) or spouted pitchers (SPP). A complete vessel of this form was excavated at Winchester and has a free-standing spout on the shoulder and three short handles running from the rim top to the shoulder. The vessels are decorated with complex combed patterns. However, the identification of these vessels simply by the diameter of the vessel or thickness of the wall is difficult since some of the jars, identified by the presence of soot on the exterior, are equally thick and large. It may be that further work on the collection could establish whether there are really both storage jars and spouted pitchers present or whether these large sherds all come from one vessel.

Table 2

Form	Data	Total
JAR	Weight	1848
	Nosh	380
	NoV	337
SJ	Weight	238
	Nosh	17
	NoV	1
SJ?	Weight	57
	Nosh	4
	NoV	4
SPP	Weight	93
	Nosh	1
	NoV	1
TP	Weight	12
	Nosh	1
	NoV	1

Finally, a single sherd from a Tripod Pitcher (TP). These vessels were handmade, glazed externally with a plain lead glaze and decorated with applied strips and roller-stamping. This particular sherd has an applied strip.

Use

Soot was noted on a large number of sherds. The SNX sherd had a charred deposit on the interior, suggesting that it was used for cooking stew or a similar liquid whereas on internal deposits were noted on any of the SWCHT sherds, 121 of which had sooting on the exterior. This suggests either that the SWCHT vessels were used for boiling water or that meat and/or vegetables were boiled rather than stewed since it would be a tribute to their cooking skills if no stews ever boiled dry.

Condition

Most of the pottery has lost its surface through chemical weathering (Coded ABR). In some cases the abrasion was sufficient to leave the inclusions standing proud of the surface (coded VABR). The calcareous inclusions on the surfaces and edges of the SNX vessel had been leached.

Table 3

Cname	Form	Data	ABR	LEACHED	VABR	Grand Total	
SEW	TP	Weight	12			12	
		Nosh	1			1	
		NoV	1			1	
SNX	JAR	Weight			5	5	
		Nosh			1	1	
		NoV			1	1	
SWCHT	JAR	Weight	618.5	1042	182.5	1843	
		Nosh	114	232	33	379	
		NoV	93	224	19	336	
	SJ	Weight	238			238	
		Nosh	17			17	
		NoV	1			1	
	SJ?	Weight		41		16	57
		Nosh		3		1	4
		NoV		3		1	4
	SPP	Weight				93	93
		Nosh				1	1
		NoV				1	1

Discussion

Dating

Chert-tempered pottery of a very similar nature to that from West Lear's Farm (SWCHT) was in use to the west, in Devon and Somerset, from the early 11th century onwards, predating the Norman Conquest. It is known, for example, from the short-lived early 11th-century *burh* re-occupation of South Cadbury and continued to be the main fabric in use in a large part of Devon and southern Somerset into the 13th century.

South East Wiltshire (SEW) tripod pitchers, however, appear to have been introduced soon after the Norman conquest, perhaps contemporary with the re-occupation of Old Sarum and the transfer of administration from Wilton. These vessels, too, had a long life being replaced in the early 13th century by sandy jugs and then by wheelthrown Laverstock ware vessels.

The unidentified limestone-tempered vessel (SNX) is thick-walled and reminiscent of late Saxon rather than Saxo-Norman wares.

The outside limits for the occupation at West Lear's Farm are therefore early 11th to early 13th century. However, the presence of only a single glazed sherd is suggestive of an end date for the settlement before 1150, after which date one might have expected more tripod pitchers and, perhaps, a wider range of fabrics.

The range of forms present is consistent with an early to mid 11th through to mid 12th-century date.

Source

The similarity in fabric between the SWCHT vessels present on the site suggests that they are all from a single centre (in this regard, there is less variation than is found in Bath Fabric A, which was used contemporaneously in north Somerset and west Wiltshire and is probably the product of several different centres, including Potterne). The inclusions are all present in Lower Cretaceous strata, which outcrop extensively in south Somerset, west Dorset and south and east Devon but the SWCHT vessels are tempered with a detrital sand, rather than crushed rock, and gravels consisting of chert and polished quartz probably have a slightly wider distribution, although the absence of Jurassic or Devonian rock fragments in the pottery fabric limits the potential source area. There is, however, possibly some fine sand of Permo-Triassic origin in the fabric which would suggest a source to the west of the Lower Cretaceous outcrop. This would require confirmation by thin-section analysis. If so, it would distinguish the West Lear's Farm vessels from those used in Devon and east Cornwall, which have recently been the subject of a study by David Williams (Williams 2004). There is no doubt, however, that the SEW tripod pitcher originated in the Salisbury area, over 60 miles to the east. The SNX vessel cannot be provenanced without further work.

Status

To a certain extent, the interpretation of the status of the settlement depends on the date of the settlement. The lack of glazed wares could be interpreted either as indicating an early date (pre-1150), predating the start-up of local glazed ware production centres, or it could indicate a low status in which the occupants were unable to acquire glazed wares through a lack of surplus goods to trade. It is likely, however, that the presence of the single sherd of SEW tripod pitcher clinches the case for an early date, since presumably to acquire a vessel carried overland for over 60 miles indicates surplus funds.

Assessment

There is no doubt that the pottery from West Lear's Farm comes from settlement on the site, probably short-lived and limited to the early/mid 11th to mid 12th centuries. It might even be limited within this date range.

There are very few sites in southwest England which have produced good collections of late 11th/early 12th-century pottery. In most rural settlements, the pottery of this date is mixed with later material. This is the case, for example, at Shapwick in Somerset. Assemblages from Exeter are small although well-dated and contain French as well as English wares. One has to look to Castle Neroche, in Somerset, and Launceston Castle, in east Cornwall, for contemporary large stratified assemblages. And these two sites, of course, cannot be taken as typical of pottery use in the southwest since they are both castle sites occupied by a Anglo-Norman garrison. It is therefore suggested that if the postulated date can be confirmed by C14 dating then the small settlement at West Lear's Farm and its pottery assemblage is worthy of analysis and publication since it indicates the range of pottery used by such a community at an important point in history.

Publication

It is recommended, therefore, that the pottery is published, using as a basis, this assessment report but with the addition of illustrations of selected pieces and a catalogue and with a short discussion, placing the West Lear's Farm collection in its regional context.

Illustration

There are 19 rim sherds which could be illustrated (the rest being too small), together with two decorated body sherds. However, the quantity of illustrations could probably be reduced by omitting sherds with very similar profiles. However, there are at least 10 different rim forms, so as a minimum one would want 12 illustrations.

Scientific analysis of the pottery fabrics

It is recommended that a sample of the chert-tempered wares and the SNX vessel are examined in thin section and by chemical analysis (a) to confirm the visual impression that the SWCHT vessels were made in a single centre and (b) to see if scientific analysis can localise the potential production centres of the two wares. It may be possible, for example, to compare analyses of the West Lear's Farm pottery with those carried out in the 1980s by Dr P Spoerry (Spoerry 1990).

Costing

Task	Time/individual cost	Cost
Production of publication text	8 hours	£180 plus VAT
Selection of illustrated sherds	2 hours	£45 plus VAT
Illustration of 12-19 sherds	To be drawn at TVAS	TVAS
Thin section analysis	7 samples at £22.50 each, production by S Caldwell, University of Manchester, analysis and report by Dr A Vince	£157.50 plus VAT
Chemical analysis	7 samples at £22.50, analysis by Dr J N Walsh, Royal Holloway College, London, and statistical analysis and report by Dr A Vince	£157.50 plus VAT
Total		£540 plus VAT

Bibliography

Spoerry, P. (1990) "Ceramic Production in Dorset and the Surrounding Region." *Medieval Ceramics*, 14, 3-18.

Williams, D. (2004) "Thin Section Analysis." in A. Saunders, ed., *Launceston Castle*, SMA Monograph Series Society for Medieval Archaeology, Leeds.

Appendix: List of finds

Context	Feature	Description	Cname	Form	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Part	Use	Condition	Action
152	49		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	26	BS	SOOTED EXT		
158	105		SWCHT	JAR	68	68	173	BS		ABR	
158	105		SWCHT	JAR	38	38	154	BS	SOOTED EXT	ABR	
158	105	WAVY COMBING EXT	SWCHT	JAR	4	4	19	BS		ABR	
158	105		SWCHT	JAR	3	3	13	B		ABR	
158	105	EVERTED RIM;WAVY COMBED INT	SWCHT	JAR	2	1	30	R		ABR	DR;TS;ICPS
158	105	LARGE VESSEL;EXT COMBING	SWCHT	SJ?	1	1	16	BS		VABR	
158	105	EVERTED FLAT-TOPPED/BEVELLED RIM	SWCHT	JAR	6	6	52	R		ABR	DR
158	105	APPLIED STRIP	SEW	TP	1	1	12	BS		ABR	
158	105	EVERTED RIM;FLAT-TOPPED RIM;WAVY COMBING INT AND EXT	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	13	R		VABR	DR
158	105	EVERTED RIM;FLAT-TOPPED RIM;BEAD EXT	SWCHT	JAR	4	4	30	R		ABR	DR
158	105	EVERTED FLAT-TOPPED/BEVELLED RIM;POSS WAVY COMBING INT RIM	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	7	R		ABR	
158	105	EVERTED RIM	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	7	R		ABR	
159	105		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	3	BS			
159	105		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	0.5	BS	SOOTED EXT		
161	107		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	6	BS	SOOTED EXT		
161	107		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	7	BS			
161	107	EVERTED FLAT-TOPPED	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	7	R		ABR	
161	107	EVERTED INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BEADING	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	7	R			
162	108		SWCHT	JAR	2	1	4	BS		ABR	
165	111		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	0.5	BS		VABR	
169	115	SF29;EVERTED RIM;OXIDIZED ALONG CRACK	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	10	R			DR
171	117		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	1	BS		ABR	

Context	Feature	Description	Cname	Form	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Part	Use	Condition	Action
172	118		SWCHT	JAR	4	4	15	BS	SOOTED EXT		
172	118		SWCHT	JAR	4	4	22	BS			
172	118		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	13	B	SOOTED EXT		
173	119	EVERTED RIM;WAVY COMBING ON INT;SV174?	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	8	R			
173	119		SWCHT	JAR	3	1	7	BS			
174	120	SF32	SWCHT	JAR	5	5	15	BS		ABR	
174	120	EVERTED RIM;WAVY COMBING ON INT SV173?	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	26	R			DR
174	120		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	4	BS	SOOTED EXT		
174	120	SF32;EVERTED FLAT-TOPPED RIM	SWCHT	SJ?	1	1	4	R		ABR	
174	120	SF32	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	2	BS	SOOTED EXT	ABR	
175			SWCHT	JAR	4	4	15	BS	SOOTED EXT		
175			SWCHT	JAR	4	4	26	BS			
175		EVERTED RIM;BEADED EXT	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	46	R		ABR	DR;TS;ICPS
175			SWCHT	JAR	2	2	15	B	SOOTED EXT	ABR	
175		SIMPLE EVERTED RIM;THIN-WALLED	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	3	R		ABR	DR
176	121		SWCHT	JAR	3	3	19	BS			
176	121		SWCHT	JAR	3	3	30	BS	SOOTED EXT		
176	121	WAVY COMBING	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	7	BS			
178	123		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	6	BS	SOOTED EXT		
183	128		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	7	BS		ABR	
183	128		FCLAY	DAUB?	1	1	1	BS			
51	1		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	5	BS	SOOTED EXT		
53	3		SWCHT	JAR	38	38	156	BS		ABR	
53	3		SWCHT	JAR	21	21	123	BS	SOOTED EXT	ABR	
53	3		SWCHT	JAR	10	8	18	BS			
53	3		SWCHT	JAR	9	9	22	BS	SOOTED EXT		

Context	Feature	Description	Cname	Form	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Part	Use	Condition	Action
53	3	FREE-STANOING SPOUT	SWCHT	SPP	1	1	93	SP		VABR	DR
53	3		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	49	B		ABR	
53	3	EVERTED RIM;WAVY COMBING INT	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	9	R		VABR	
53	3	EVERTED FLAT-TOPPED RIM	SWCHT	JAR	2	1	8	R			
53	3	WAVY COMBING EXT	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	8	BS		ABR	
53	3		SWCHT	JAR	3	1	7	BS			
53	3	EVERTED RIM WITH EXTERNAL BEAD	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	6	R			
54	4	SF4;11MM THICK	SNX	JAR	1	1	5	BS	CHARRED DEPO INT	LEACHED	TS
56	6		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	2	BS		VABR	
61	15		SWCHT	JAR	13	13	48	BS			
61	15		SWCHT	JAR	9	7	22	BS	SOOTED EXT	ABR	
61	15	EVERTED FLAT-TOPPED RIM	SWCHT	JAR	2	1	56	R	SOOTED EXT		DR;TS;ICPS
61	15	FAINT TRACES OF COMBING EXT	SWCHT	SJ?	1	1	15	BS		ABR	
61	15	WAVY COMBING	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	7	BS		ABR	
64	14		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	3	BS	SOOTED EXT	ABR	
66	17		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	3	BS		ABR	
67	18		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	15	BS		ABR	
72	24		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	1	BS		VABR	
72	24		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	11	BS	SOOTED EXT		
72	24		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	7	B	SOOTED EXT		
74	29		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	7	BS	SOOTED EXT		
74	29		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	5	BS			
76	22		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	3	BS			
82	32		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	4	BS	SOOTED EXT		
82	32		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	2	BS			

Context	Feature	Description	Cname	Form	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Part	Use	Condition	Action
83	33	COMPLEX CURVED COMBING	SWCHT	SJ	12	1	131	BS			TS;ICPS
83	33	COMPLEX CURVED COMBING	SWCHT	SJ	5	0	107	BS			
83	33	SF18	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	7	BS	SOOTED EXT		
85	35		SWCHT	JAR	3	1	11	BS	SOOTED EXT		
87	37	LARGE VESSEL;EVERTED FLAT-TOPPED RIM	SWCHT	JAR	15	1	129	R	SOOTED EXT	VABR	DR;TS;ICPS
87	37		SWCHT	JAR	7	7	11	BS		VABR	
87	37	EVERTED FLAT-TOPPED RIM	SWCHT	SJ?	1	1	22	R		ABR	DR
87	37		SWCHT	JAR	3	1	15	BS	SOOTED EXT	ABR	
87	37	GLOBULAR THIN-WALLED BODIES WITH SHARP NECK ANGLE	SWCHT	JAR	2	2	16	BS		VABR	
87	37		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	1	BS		VABR	
87	37	SF21	SWCHT	JAR	2	2	3	BS		ABR	
87	37	SF21;EVERTED OUTFOLDED RIM	SWCHT	JAR	2	1	8	R	SOOTED EXT	ABR	
87	37	EVERTED RIM;EXT BEAD	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	6	R		ABR	
87	37	CROSS-HATCHED COMBING	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	2	BS	SOOTED EXT	ABR	
88	38		SWCHT	JAR	3	1	11	BS	SOOTED EXT		
89E	76N		SWCHT	JAR	2	2	7	BS	SOOTED EXT		
89E	74N		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	3	R		ABR	
91	41	SF24	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	3	BS	SOOTED EXT		
92	42		SWCHT	JAR	10	1	105	BS			TS;ICPS
92	42		SWCHT	JAR	1	1	15	BS	SOOTED EXT	ABR	
92	42	EVERTED FLAT-TOPPED RIM	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	8	R	SOOTED EXT		
95	45		SWCHT	JAR	3	2	12	BS	SOOTED EXT	ABR	
SURFACE	120	EVERTED RIM	SWCHT	JAR	1	1	7	BS		ABR	

