

## **Anglo-Saxon pottery from Sewerby (OSA02 EX09)**

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A number of assemblages of pottery from On Site Archaeology excavations at Sewerby were examined at the request of Peter Didsbury. Most of these were probably of later prehistoric or early Romano-British date but a handful were identified as being of Anglo-Saxon date by comparison with the pottery found at the Sewerby Anglo-Saxon cemetery and elsewhere in northern England.

In total there are only four possible Anglo-Saxon coarsewares, of which one, from context 3799 is very dubious, and one, from context 3387, is either of later prehistoric or early Roman date or an extremely unusual find for this area, being paralleled only in the extreme northeast of England and Scotland.

There are two definite mid Saxon vessels, both Ipswich ware. The presence of these two vessels with little or no contemporary coarsewares requires some explanation and may suggest that mid Saxon activity on the site is on a larger scale than might be expected from a study of the material culture. Alternatively, the presence of two Ipswich ware vessels may indicate a link between the site and fishing or coastal trade.

### **Catalogue**

#### **Early to mid Anglo-Saxon coarsewares**

##### **Context 3031**

The rim of a globular jar with a rounded rim and slight neck. The fabric is tempered with mixed inclusions which include medium-grained sandstone fragments up to 1.0mm across, rounded quartz grains up to 1.0mm across, some of which have a noticeably matt surface, possible igneous rock fragments, muscovite laths and voids which probably contained limestone. The groundmass contains abundant ill-sorted quartz. These characteristics are typical of the boulder clays of the Yorkshire coast, from Whitby to the southern tip of Holderness. It is therefore possibly of local origin.

The vessel probably had a burnished exterior but the interior is more irregular, although it may be weathered. The exterior of the vessel is coated with soot.

The vessel is probably of early Anglo-Saxon date and both the globular form and rounded rim are paralleled in numerous early Anglo-Saxon assemblages, both domestic and cemetery contexts but are lacking in mid Saxon assemblages in Yorkshire, such as Fishergate in York, Whitby Abbey and West Heslerton.

### Context 3387

Fragments of two vessels. Vessel 1 is represented by five sherds from a flat-based jar with abundant chaff temper. The sherds have oxidized external surfaces and a dark grey core. The fabric contains numerous voids, some of which have the impressions of grass stems and leaves, sometimes with charred remains of the inclusions remaining. In addition to "chaff", the fabric contains abundant ill-sorted angular quartz up to c.0.2mm. The vessel is flat based with a sharp base angle. No evidence for surface treatment or use remains.

Chaff tempering is known, rarely, in the later prehistoric and early Roman periods but is particularly common in the early Anglo-Saxon and mid Saxon periods. The flat base and sharp base angle is typical of late Bronze Age to early Roman rock-tempered coarsewares in East Yorkshire and northeast Lincolnshire, but no examples of chaff-tempered fabrics are known to the author in this area in that period. Chaff-tempered wares have been found in several early Anglo-Saxon contexts in northern Britain, for example, at West Heslerton (where fabric does appear to be more common later in the settlement's history), Sancton, Easington and Hayton. They also occur in potentially mid Saxon contexts, as at Fishergate in York and possibly at Cottam. However, all these vessels have the globular or bag-shaped profile rather than a flat base. Flat-based jars with abundant chaff-temper are known from Dunbar, in Scotland, and Yeavinger, in north-east England, both in mid Saxon contexts. It is therefore uncertain whether this vessel is an unusual later prehistoric or early Roman vessel or mid Saxon vessel of a type only known to date from much further north.

Vessel 2 consists of two sherds from a globular jar. The fabric is similar to that of the vessel from context 3031 but with a higher quantity of fine-grained sandstones. The vessel is globular and one sherd comes from the shoulder, indicating the existence of a sharp neck. There is no evidence for burnishing on the interior. The vessel has soot encrusting on the exterior. This vessel is either a later prehistoric fineware or of early Anglo-Saxon date.

### Context 3799

Three sherds of a calcite-tempered jar. The vessel is extremely thick-walled, up to 14 mm. The fabric contains abundant angular voids, clearly from leached calcite inclusions, and rounded brown inclusions which are probably altered glauconite. The groundmass is fine-textured with no visible quartz silt or muscovite. This fabric was produced in the Vale of Pickering, from the Bronze Age through to the Anglo-Saxon period but is difficult to distinguish vessels of different date. Outside of the Vale of Pickering, the ware tends to be exclusively late Roman in date.

## **Ipswich ware**

### Context 3090

Two joining sherds from an Ipswich ware jar. The vessel is probably c.200mm in rim diameter and has a rolled-out rounded rim. Both exterior and interior are covered with horizontal burnishing. The fabric has few inclusions larger than 0.1mm across and has a reduced grey groundmass containing abundant quartz and muscovite silt. This fine fabric is one of the most common Ipswich ware fabrics and was almost certainly produced at Ipswich itself.

### Context 3953

The complete profile of a small Ipswich ware jar. The fabric is similar to that of the vessel from context 3090 and contains few large inclusions, apart from one angular white flint fragment and a few rounded quartz grains. The vessel is 91 mm tall with a rim diameter of 75 mm. The vessel has a smoothed external surface but no individual burnished lines are visible. There are no signs of use.

A recent survey of this ware suggests that it is not found outside of East Anglia until the early 8<sup>th</sup> century and was in use until the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century. North of the Humber, there are few findspots of Ipswich ware, of which the main one is Fishergate, in York, a possible Frisian trading post. Other finds have been made at Thwing and Beverley, both religious communities and at Bridlington, presumably associated with fishing or the landing of goods. Remarkably, no examples are known from Whitby Abbey, nor from the almost total excavation of the rural settlement at West Heslerton. It seems, therefore, that Sewerby, Bridlington and Thwing mark the northern limit of Ipswich ware distribution. The lack of contemporary local coarsewares may indicate that local pottery was not used in the mid Saxon period at Sewerby. This would be consistent with the results of the excavation at Lurk Lane, Beverley, where a single Ipswich ware vessel is the only mid Saxon pottery from a site with clear evidence for mid Saxon occupation, and from Elloughton, on the Transco West Hull pipeline, where C14 dating indicates occupation in the mid or late Saxon period but where, again, no pottery of this period was found.