

Assessment of an Anglo-Saxon potsherd from Brickyard Lane, Melton, East Yorkshire (MBL04)

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A single sherd of pottery of putative Iron Age or Anglo-Saxon date was found during an excavation at Brickyard Lane, Melton, East Yorkshire. The sherd was submitted to the author and identified as being of early Anglo-Saxon date and of a fabric which suggests local manufacture, to the west of the findspot.

Description

The sherd was found in context 2002 and comes from the body of a globular handmade vessel, c. 8mm thick, with burnished external and internal surfaces. The inner surface is coated with a black deposit, probably the remains of burnt food.

The fabric consists of fragments of a coarse-grained sandstone up to 3.0mm across and bivalve shell fragments of similar size in a fine matrix. The sandstone is composed of overgrown quartz grains up to 1.0mm across with no sign of any cement and is almost certainly lower Carboniferous Millstone Grit. The shell fragments are about 0.5mm to 1.0mm thick and are composed of prisms of calcite at right angles to the shell surface. Such shells are characteristic of the *inoceramids*, a bivalve family which evolved in the Permian and became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous period. Thus, they are not contemporary with the Millstone Grit. The fine texture of the clay matrix suggests that the clay may be of Jurassic age. Upper Jurassic Oxford Clay outcrops along the western edge of the Yorkshire Wolds, from Market Weighton to the Humber.

From these characteristics it is likely that the vessel was produced along the western side of the Yorkshire Wolds, from Market Weighton to the Humber and was tempered with a fluvio-glacial sand composed mainly of Millstone Grit fragments. Such sands occur throughout the Vale of York but are not found to the south of the Wolds (i.e. at Melton itself) nor to the east of the Wolds, where the fluvio-glacial sands do not contain Millstone Grit as a major component.

Vessels with a similar appearance and petrological composition are known from the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Sancton (Sancton I) but at that site almost all the calcareous inclusions were leached, making it impossible to identify the *inoceramid* shell.

Pottery of broadly similar character is known from Fishergate, York, in the 8th century but there is also evidence suggesting that pottery became scarce in East Yorkshire during the mid Saxon period (e.g. at Elloughton, where a mid/late Anglo-Saxon phase of occupation

was only recognised through C14-dating of a hearth, and at Beverley, where mid Saxon occupation was accompanied by a single vessel, an Ipswich ware jar).

Assessment

There is remarkably little evidence for domestic settlement in the early to mid Anglo-Saxon period in this part of Yorkshire, despite the existence of several cemeteries, of which Sancton is by far the largest.

The sherd itself would repay further analysis by thin section and Inductively coupled plasma spectroscopy, which could test the identification made by eye here and enable a comparison with the Sancton pottery to be carried out.

Costing

Thin section analysis: £22.50 plus VAT. This includes the manufacture of the thin section at the University of Manchester, which would be added to the AVAC reference collection, and the production of a report.

Inductively-coupled plasma spectroscopy: £23.50 plus VAT. The sherd sample would be prepared in Lincoln and analysed at the Department of Geology, Royal Holloway College, London, and an interpretative report produced by the author.