Assessment of Anglo-Saxon Pottery from Fen Road, Ruskington, Lincolnshire (RFR04)

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Archaeological excavations by APS Ltd at Fen Road, Ruskington (NGR TF 08789 50851) revealed evidence of occupation of Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon date. In a few cases features produced contemporary assemblages of Anglo-Saxon or Iron Age date but in areas where occupation of both periods was present it has proved to be difficult to reliably separate each and every sherd. Nevertheless, a number of sherds of Anglo-Saxon date have been positively identified, having the same fabrics as other Anglo-Saxon vessels in the locality or having forms or surface treatment or decoration which do not occur on Iron Age pottery in central Lincolnshire. In total, 146 sherds were identified as being of Anglo-Saxon date, representing 128 vessels and weighing in total 2.273 Kg.

The Anglo-Saxon pottery certainly dates between the mid 5th and the 7th centuries. The lack of distinctive 5th/6th-century traits suggests that the occupation is mainly of 6th to 7th-century date.

Description

Fabric

The Anglo-Saxon pottery was all examined at x20 magnification using a binocular microscope. All of the sherds could be assigned to fabric groups which are known from other sites in this part of Lincolnshire (Table 1).

Table 1

Cname	Sum of Nosh	Sum of NoV	Sum of Weight
CHARN	11	8	72
CLSST	106	95	1818
ECHAFF	1	1	2
ESAXIMP?	2	1	29
ESGS	1	1	8
FE	2	2	9
LIM	11	9	252
LIM+RQ	1	1	5
RQ	8	7	37
RQ+CHAFF+LIM	1	1	1
SSTMG	2	2	40
Grand Total	148	128	2273

Charnwood ware (CHARN)

This fabric contains angular fragments of a biotite-rich acid igneous rock. Similar inclusion suites occur in boulder clays in the upper Vale of York and probably in parts of the North Yorkshire Moors but in the east midlands clays or sands containing such inclusions tend to have a much wider range of inclusions present, most of which are derived from more local sources and the most likely source is the Mountsorrel granodiorite, which outcrops in northeast Leicestershire and is found in boulder clay and fluvioglacial deposits to the south and east of that outcrop (Williams and Vince 1997).

Central Lincolnshire Sandstone-tempered (CLSST)

This fabric is characterised by the presence of a fine-grained sandstone, mostly with some iron-rich cement together with a variable quantity of limestone and other inclusions. Such sandstones outcrop in the middle and upper Jurassic and in decalcified sands and clays would tend to dominate the inclusion suite. The other inclusions are oolitic and shelly limestones, rounded quartz grains, angular igneous rock fragments, Millstone Grit sandstone and other sandstones. These indicate that the parent gravel is of fluvio-glacial origin, not simply derived from the local underlying bedrock. The Ruskington sherds could be subdivided into fabric groups depending on the relative proportions of sandstone, limestone and rounded quartz and these subdivisions might well indicate that different clay or temper sources were being exploited. However, all contain mainly rocks and minerals of middle/upper Jurassic origin and are therefore likely to have been made within, say, 10 miles of Ruskington.

Chaff-tempered ware (ECHAF)

This fabric contains few large inclusions (i.e. over 0.1mm across) except for the voids where organic temper has burnt out.

Possible import (ESAXIMP?)

Two sherds from a single wheelthrown whiteware jar with a rounded quartz sand were recovered. The vessel was not recognised as a common Romano-British type and it is therefore identified here as a possible import.

Early Anglo-Saxon Greensand-tempered (ESGS)

This fabric contains water-polished rounded quartz grains of the type which occur in the lower Cretaceous rocks which outcrop along the western edge of the Lincolnshire wolds (but which also occur in the Red Chalk, which outcrops at the base of the chalk in the southern tip of the Yorkshire Wolds). Where such grains form the majority of the quartz sand present is it assumed that the fabric is of Lincolnshire Wolds origin rather than fluvioglacial-derived sand being carried southwards from Yorkshire. Boulder clays containing abundant grains of

this quartz occur to the south of the Lincolnshire Wolds, and outcrop as islands surrounded by peat fen in the fens (for example, at Stickney).

Ironstone-tempered (FE)

A few sherds contain large angular ironstone inclusions, together with mudstone or shale pellets and have a fine-textured, silt-free groundmass. These characteristics suggest the use of a clay from the Middle Jurassic exposures on the scarp slope of the Jurassic ridge, but similar rocks might be present on the dip slope, much closer to Ruskington.

Oolitic Limestone-tempered (LIM)

This fabric is characterised by abundant ooliths, and occasional fragments of oolitic limestone, with a variable quantity of rounded quartz sand. The inclusions suggest that the clay was tempered with a weathered oolitic limestone with either no cement or one that was softer than the ooliths. This is not the case for any local exposures but is true of the Ketton rock which outcrops in the Stamford area.

Oolitic Limestone and rounded quartz sand tempered (LIM+RQ)

A single sherd contained approximately equal quantities of ooliths (as in LIM) and rounded quartz grains.

Trent valley sand-tempered (RQ)

This fabric contains a rounded quartz sand, mean size 0.5mm, with some rounded calcareous inclusions up to 1.5mm across. Similar quartz sand occurs in the Witham terraces at Lincoln but is widespread in the Trent valley.

Rounded quartz, chaff and oolitic limestone tempered (RQ+CHAFF+LIM)

A single sherd contained a mixture of rounded quartz, the voids from organic tempering and ooliths. It is likely to be related to (or the same as) LIM+RQ.

Millstone Grit sandstone-tempered ware (SSTMG)

This fabric contains angular fragments of Millstone Grit sandstone and its component quartz sand grains, recognisable at x20 magnification through the overgrowth of the quartz sand grains and by the presence of an off-white kaolinitic cement .

Form

Table 2

Form	TRENCH	Sum of Nosh	Sum of NoV	Sum of Weight

JAR	1	37	29	1074
	2	2	2	17
	3	3	3	35
	5	4	4	73
	6	1	1	2
	7	1	1	4
	8	26	21	196
	9	19	16	199
	10	5	5	18
	11	3	3	18
	12	7	7	34
	13	20	17	170
	14	18	17	150
	15	1	1	3
	16	3	3	20
JAR Total		150	130	2013
LARGE JAR	1	1	1	167
	2	1	1	33
	9	1	1	54
	12	1	1	13
	13	1	1	30
LARGE JAR Total		5	5	297

Most of the sherds come from globular jars with a short vertical neck and rounded rim (Table 2). They vary somewhat in size, although few rim diameters could be measured. Several base sherds were present indicating that bases were rounded but with a carination at the base/body join.

Only one decorated vessel was represented, a single sherd from a stamped jar. The vessel is probably a large globular jar in which there is no sharp neck angle. The sherd comes from the neck/shoulder of the jar and includes a single vertical burnished line, indicating that the stamps were separated into vertical panels

Several of the vessels were roughly burnished, either just on the exterior or on both interior and exterior. Examination of more complete material suggests that where they were burnished, this treatment often extended over the rim to at least the inside of the shoulder. In most cases, however, it is not possible to say where the sherd was positioned on the parent vessel.

A few vessels have thick walls and very low curvature and these must come from much larger vessels, whose form cannot be determined, except to say that they too were probably roughly globular in shape (Table 2, Large Jar).

Function

Table 3

Use	TRENCH	Sum of Nosh	Sum of NoV	Sum of Weight
LEACHED INT; WHITE DEP INT	1	3	1	151
LEACHED INT; WHITE DEP INT Total		3	1	151
SOME INT LEACHING	2	1	1	13
“	13	3	1	34
SOOTED EXT	1	5	2	197
SOOTED EXT; SOME INT LEACHING	13	1	1	9
SOOTED EXT; WHITE DEP INT	9	2	1	29
SOOTED INT	1	7	7	260
“	3	1	1	8
“	5	3	3	68
“	7	1	1	4
“	8	6	5	41
“	9	2	2	15
“	13	2	2	41
“	14	5	5	72
“	16	3	3	20
SOOTED INT/EXT	1	2	2	36
“	13	1	1	7
“	14	1	1	17
SOOTED INT/LEACHED INT	8	1	1	44
WHITE DEP INT	1	2	2	43
Grand Total		155	135	2310

A few of the sherds, as noted above, have very little curvature and a thick wall and are probably from large vessels used for storage.

Most of the sherds present have fabrics which contain calcareous inclusions. Where the vessel was used to contain acidic liquid these inclusions have leached from the inner surface (Table 3, leached int).

In some cases the vessels were used to boil water and have a light brown “kettle fur” deposit on the interior (Table 3, white dep int).

In others, the contents had an organic content and when burnt dry have lead to a black carbonaceous deposit on the inner surface (Table 3, sooted int). It is remarkable that there are more sherds with these deposits than with external sooting.

In both cases, there may also be sooting on the exterior of the vessel, and this sooting may be present on the upper part of the vessel, where there are no internal deposits (Table 3, Sooted ext).

From these traces (Table 3), it is possible to say that most of the Ruskington Anglo-Saxon pottery was used mainly for domestic purposes – boiling water and cooking.

Condition

Table 4

Condition	TRENCH	Sum of Nosh	Sum of NoV	Sum of Weight
ABRA	1	1	1	3
“	2	1	1	33
“	3	1	1	24
“	5	1	1	5
“	6	1	1	2
“	8	3	3	18
“	10	1	1	7
“	12	6	6	43
“	13	6	5	20
“	14	7	7	37
“	15	1	1	3
SOME LEACHING INT/EXT	2	1	1	4

Two measures of the sherd condition were recorded. The first is the sherd weight, which will obviously vary with the size and wall thickness of the parent vessel, and the second is abrasion (Table 4). There is a wide range in the collection, from small, abraded sherds, which are presumably from ploughsoil and exposed to mechanical and chemical weathering, to large, unabraded sherds, which have probably been buried in a feature deep enough to protect them from weathering, either by the plough, frost, or the action of groundwater.

Assessment

Date

Recent work on Anglo-Saxon pottery recovered from a settlement at Brough, in the Trent valley, suggest that this site was occupied in the 5th century but that a similar range of fabrics occur in the parts of the site occupied at that time and in the slightly later, late 5th to 6th-century, settlement. These wares include several found at Ruskington: CHARN, CLSST, FE, RQ and SSTMG. At the other end of the period, various wares of early Anglo-Saxon character have been found associated with Maxey-type wares of mid Saxon date. These include: CHARN, ESGS, LIM and SSTMG. Thus, at least two of the fabrics found at Ruskington occur throughout the Early Anglo-Saxon period and are thus impossible to date closely.

The single stamped sherd is likely to be of 6th-century date, although one would really need to see the overall decorative scheme to be sure. The globular form of the jars, with a simple rounded rim, is more characteristic of the 5th to 6th centuries than later, when everted rims and pronounced shoulders on bag-shaped jars are more common.

Taking all of these clues together, it is likely that the early Anglo-Saxon Ruskington pottery dates to the 6th/7th centuries.

Location of settlement

In some cases, a trench produced only a few sherds of early Anglo-Saxon pottery, from unstratified or post-Saxon deposits such as the fills of medieval plough furrows (Table 2). The size of these sherds varies from trench to trench and in most cases they were less than 10gm mean weight. Four trenches, however, produced larger sherds: Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 8. Thus, in evaluating the significance of the spread of Anglo-Saxon pottery finds the relative size of the sherds ought to be considered. In general, however, these finds seem to indicate a similar scatter across the trenches.

Table 5

TRENCH	Sum of Nosh	Sum of NoV	Sum of Weight
1	4	4	164
2	2	2	46
3	2	2	32
5	2	2	18
6	1	1	2
7	1	1	4
8	5	5	101
9	2	2	7

10	1	1	4
12	2	2	13
13	15	13	96
14	7	7	42
15	1	1	3
16	3	3	20

Stratified material, however, is more restricted in its distribution (Table 3). It also tends to be better preserved, with mean sherd weights of over 10gm in five trenches (1, 5, 9, 13 and 14). The sherds from features in Trenches 8, 10 and 12 also include a higher proportion of abraded sherds and it is therefore possible that the pottery from features in these trenches is actually residual and that the features are of post-Anglo-Saxon date.

Table 6

TRENCH	Sum of Nosh	Sum of NoV	Sum of Weight
1	34	26	1077
5	2	2	55
8	21	16	95
9	18	15	246
10	4	4	14
11	1	1	5
12	5	5	33
13	4	4	94
14	9	9	102
Grand Total	98	82	1721

Regional importance

The Sleaford area is emerging as an importance focus of early Anglo-Saxon activity, at a time when there is little evidence at all for occupation in or around Lincoln. This site is one of a number which indicate a high density of settlement and, presumably, agricultural exploitation of the light soils on the dip slope of the Jurassic ridge, situated between upland grazing land to the west and the fen edge to the east. In itself, the site is probably of no great significance, but in comparison to several previously-discovered sites it does have one unusual feature: much of the pottery has not undergone obvious alteration after burial and this would allow analysis of the fabrics to be carried out with a good chance of a successful outcome.

Potential for characterisation studies

Most of the Anglo-Saxon pottery from the site is of local manufacture, as determined by binocular microscope study. It would be possible to subdivide the local wares into different

fabric groups and, with luck and a programme of sampling and analysis of local clay and sand sources, it might be possible to pinpoint the production sites for this local pottery and to demonstrate which sites were sharing the same resources. This is, however, a large project in which this Ruskington material could play an important part. However, there are a few vessels in the collection for which a local source is less likely and by taking a small number of samples for thin section and chemical analysis it would be possible to determine whether or not they were unusual local products or, as suspected, made outside of the area and traded in. These wares include CHARN, RQ, and SSTMG.

Potential for typological studies

Several of the sherds are of sufficient size to reconstruct the size and shape of the parent vessel. However, all but one are undecorated vessels and the total number of vessels represented is quite low, so that even further detailed study will not establish the full range of vessel forms used at the site. However, there are a number of rim sherds present, several of which are sufficiently large to reveal the orientation and general profile of the vessels from which they came.

Recommendations

Retention

All of the pottery should be retained for future study.

Fabric analysis

Samples of CHARN, FE, LIM, RQ and SSTMG should be thin sectioned and chemical analyses of their compositions obtained. This would enable the visual identifications to be tested and the fabrics compared with those from other sites in Lincolnshire and the neighbouring counties. A minimum of seven samples is recommended.

Costing

Five thin sections at £22.50 each plus VAT = £132.18 inc VAT

Five ICPS analyses at £23.50 each plus VAT = £138.06 inc VAT

Stamp recording

The stamped sherd should be illustrated (line drawing and photography) and then sent to Diana Briscoe, of the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon pottery stamps, for entry into her database. This would result in a list of sites from which similar stamps have been recovered.

Costing

Postage (special delivery) and Packing = £15 inc VAT

Specialist fee = £29.37 inc VAT

Illustration

The stamped sherd, the rim sherds (where their orientation can be discerned) and one of the base sherds should be illustrated.

In total, 14 sherds are recommended for illustration (see Appendix 1, Action).

Costing

Fourteen line drawings at £14.00 each plus VAT = £230.30 inc VAT

Checking at pencil stage and producing catalogue = £29.37 inc VAT

Publication

A note on the Ruskington assemblage, comparing it with those from other recently-studied Anglo-Saxon pottery assemblages in the area, should be prepared, and submitted to *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology* for publication.

Costing

Eight hours at £22.50 per hour plus VAT = £211.50 inc VAT

Costing

The total cost of the recommended further work is £668.75 pus VAT, or £785.80 in total.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Context	TRENCH	REFNO	Action	Cname	Form	Part	Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Use	Condition
104	1			CLSST	JAR	BS	BURNISHING EXT	1	1	135		
104	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	3		
104	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	40	SOOTED INT	
112	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	10	SOOTED INT	
114 A+B	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	20		
114 A+B	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	85	SOOTED INT	
115	1		DR13	CLSST	JAR	R		1	1	38	SOOTED INT	
115	1			LIM	JAR	BS		1	1	21	SOOTED INT/EXT	
124	1		DR14	CLSST	JAR	R		1	1	15	SOOTED INT/EXT	
150	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	3		
150	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		2	1	36		
153	1		DR5	CLSST	JAR	R	INT SCRAPING	1	1	51		
153	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		2	1	13	SOOTED EXT	
159	1		DR6	CLSST	JAR	R	EXT BURNISHING	1	1	14		
162	1		DR4	CLSST	JAR	R	EXT BURNISHING	1	1	27		
162	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	29		
162	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		3	1	151	LEACHED INT; WHITE DEP INT	
162	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		2	2	20	SOOTED INT	
167	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		2	1	37		
167	1		DR2	CLSST	JAR	R;		2	1	25		

Context	TRENCH	REFNO	Action	Cname	Form	Part	Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Use	Condition
						BS						
167	1		DR1	CLSST	LARGE JAR	R		1	1	167		
167	1		DR3	CLSST	JAR	B	ROUNDED BASE	1	1	67	SOOTED INT	
167	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	28	WHITE DEP INT	
168	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	15	WHITE DEP INT	
168	1			LIM	JAR	BS		3	1	184	SOOTED EXT	
172	1	21		CHARN	JAR	BS		1	1	1		
172	1			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	3		ABRA
172	1	21		CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	1		
172	1	21		ECHAFF	JAR	BS		1	1	2		
200	2			CHARN	JAR	BS		1	1	13	SOME INT LEACHING	
200	2			CLSST	LARGE JAR	BS		1	1	33		ABRA
300	3			CLSST	JAR	B	VERY OBTUSE ANGLED BASE	1	1	8	SOOTED INT	
321	3			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	24		ABRA
500	5			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	13	SOOTED INT	
506	5			CLSST	JAR	BS	BURNISHED EXT	1	1	12	SOOTED INT	
506	5			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	43	SOOTED INT	
513	5			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	5		ABRA
600	6			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	2		ABRA
700	7			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	4	SOOTED INT	
800	8			CHARN	JAR	BS		1	1	3		
800	8			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	12		
800	8			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	5	SOOTED INT	
800	8			CLSST	JAR	BS	SCRAPED EXT	1	1	44	SOOTED INT/LEACHED INT	

Context	TRENCH	REFNO	Action	Cname	Form	Part	Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Use	Condition
800	8		DR12	SSTMG	JAR	R	SCRAPED INT	1	1	37		
801	8			CHARN	JAR	BS		3	1	8		
801	8	4		CHARN	JAR	BS		1	1	1		
801	8			CHARN	JAR	BS		3	2	11	SOOTED INT	
801	8			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	1		
801	8			CLSST	JAR	R		1	1	5		
801	8			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	10	SOOTED INT	
801	8			ESGS	JAR	BS		1	1	8		ABRA
801	8			LIM	JAR	BS		2	2	10		ABRA
801	8			RQ	JAR	BS		2	2	13		
801	8			RQ+CHAFF+LIM	JAR	BS		1	1	1		
804	8			CLSST	JAR	BS		3	1	8		
804	8			CLSST	JAR	BS	SCRAPED EXT	1	1	15	SOOTED INT	
806	8			CLSST	JAR	R		1	1	4		
900	9			CLSST	JAR	BS	EXT SCRAPING	1	1	3		
900	9			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	4		
903	9		DR8	CLSST	JAR	BS	INT BURNISHING; EXT STAMPED FOUR DOT DEC	1	1	12		
903	9			CLSST	LARGE JAR	BS		1	1	54		
903	9			CLSST	JAR	BS		6	6	99		
903	9	12		CLSST	JAR	R		1	1	3		
903	9			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	3	SOOTED INT	
903	9		DR9	ESAXIMP?	JAR	BS		2	1	29		
903	9			LIM	JAR	BS		1	1	12	SOOTED INT	
903	9			RQ	JAR	BS		1	1	3		

Context	TRENCH	REFNO	Action	Cname	Form	Part	Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Use	Condition
905	9			CLSST	JAR	BS		2	1	29	SOOTED EXT; WHITE DEP INT	
905	9			RQ	JAR	BS		2	1	2		
1027	10			CLSST	JAR	BS		3	3	7		
1027	10			CLSST	JAR	BS	BURNISHED EXT	1	1	4		
1033	10			FE	JAR	BS		1	1	7		ABRA
1103	11			LIM+RQ	JAR	BS		1	1	5		
1200	12			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	8		ABRA
1201	12			RQ	JAR	BS		1	1	5		ABRA
1209	12			CLSST	LARGE JAR	BS		1	1	13		ABRA
1209	12			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	3		
1209	12			FE	JAR	BS		1	1	2		ABRA
1209	12			RQ	JAR	R		1	1	7		ABRA
1213	12			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	8		ABRA
1300	13		DR10	CLSST	JAR	R	BURNISHED EXT	1	1	5		
1300	13			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	4		
1301	13			CHARN	JAR	B	ROUNDED BASE	1	1	35	SOOTED INT	
1301	13			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	23		
1301	13			CLSST	LARGE JAR	BS		1	1	30		
1301	13			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	6	SOOTED INT	
1305	13			CLSST	JAR	BS		3	3	9		ABRA
1307	13			CLSST	JAR	BS	SCRAPED EXT	1	1	14		
1307	13			CLSST	JAR	BS		2	2	10		
1307	13			CLSST	JAR	BS		3	1	34	SOME INT LEACHING	

Context	TRENCH	REFNO	Action	Cname	Form	Part	Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Use	Condition
1307	13			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	9	SOOTED EXT; SOME INT LEACHING	
1307	13		DR11	CLSST	JAR	R		1	1	7	SOOTED INT/EXT	
1312	13			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	1		ABRA
1312	13			SSTMG	JAR	BS		1	1	3		
1400	14			CLSST	JAR	BS		4	4	31		ABRA
1400	14			LIM	JAR	BS		1	1	9	SOOTED INT	
1410	14			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	1		ABRA
1410	14	11		LIM	JAR	BS		1	1	1		
1412	14			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	3		ABRA
1412	14		DR7	CLSST	JAR	R		1	1	37	SOOTED INT	
1412	14			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	10	SOOTED INT	
1412	14			LIM	JAR	BS		1	1	14	SOOTED INT	
1414	14			CLSST	JAR	BS	EXT BURNISHING; EXT SCRAPING	1	1	11		
1414	14			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	17	SOOTED INT/EXT	
1414	14			LIM	JAR	BS		1	1	1		
1414	14			RQ	JAR	BS		1	1	7		
1415	14			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	2	SOOTED INT	ABRA
1501	15			CLSST	JAR	BS		1	1	3		ABRA
1603	16			CLSST	JAR	BS		3	3	20	SOOTED INT	

Bibliography

Williams, D. and Vince, A. (1997) "The Characterization and Interpretation of Early to Middle Saxon Granitic Tempered Pottery in England ." *Medieval Archaeol*, XLI, 214-219.