

The Anglo-Saxon Pottery from Barnetby le Wold

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A watching brief carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology Lincoln Ltd produced a small quantity of black handmade pottery, identified by Jane Young as being of early to mid Anglo-Saxon date, from context 003.

These sherds were submitted to the author for an assessment of their potential for archaeological research (as recommended in *The Management of Archaeological Projects, Edn 2* (1991)).

Fabric

Fabric analysis using thin sections and chemical analysis of the clay body can establish within limits where the raw materials used to make pottery vessels were obtained.

In this case, all the vessels contained abundant rounded quartz sand grains, up to 0.02mm across and are therefore classed into fabric ESGS in the East Midlands Anglo-Saxon Pottery Project classification. Some of these have polished surfaces and are stained with iron, giving a distinctive appearance. Such grains come from lower Cretaceous sands and sandstones, such as those which outcrop along the western slopes of the Lincolnshire Wolds where Barnetby Le Wold is situated. However, in comparison with most of the sherds coded ESGS from the Lincolnshire Wolds, these rounded grains are much smaller, usually c.0.2-0.3mm across compared with c.1.0-2.0mm for the others.

Within this collection, there are differences in fabric which probably indicate the use of slightly differing materials and the deliberate addition of temper. In particular, one sherd contains abundant organic inclusions. Such material has been identified on other sites as being waste from crop processing and it has been suggested that it may have been fed to animals and subsequently the dung of those animals was used to temper pottery (as still happens today in parts of Africa). In two cases, sherds were observed to contain larger, angular grits, some of which could be identified as being biotite granite and Millstone Grit. The polished quartz sand is much less common in these two sherds than in the remainder, but is definitely present. Therefore, it is likely that grit from a fluvio-glacial sand has been added to a local sandy clay, or that a boulder clay was used to produce the vessels that these two sherds came from.

In addition to the rounded quartz sand, larger angular voids were present in most of the sherds, probably indicating the former presence of angular limestone inclusions (such as the Tealby limestone) whilst fragments of a fine-grained sandstone, with overgrown, loosely cemented grains, up to 2.0mm across were present in several sherds (J Young comments

that these would have been coded as SST in her records, with the fact that Lower Cretaceous polished quartz was present being noted as a comment).

One hundred and fifty sherds of early to mid Anglo-Saxon pottery have been recorded from sites in the Barnetby area, in an area bounded by Barton upon Humber in the north, on the east by the Wolds, and on the west and south by the Ancholme (Table 1). The sites form two groups, one of which is located along the springline on the western scarp of the Wolds (Barnetby, Bigby, New Somerby, Caistor and Normanby-le-Wold) and the other of which is situated in the Vale of Ancholme (South Kelsey, Thornton le Moor, Owersby and Osgodby).

Fifteen of these sherds were noted as containing biotite granite inclusions (CHARN) but the presence of these inclusions in definitely locally-made sherds at Barnetby suggests that a second examination of these sherds is required. Similarly, 70 sherds were noted as containing sandstone inclusions (SST), but at Barnetby these also occur with the local rounded quartz sand and are probably mainly local products. Twenty one sherds were not identified, except as being of early or early to mid Anglo-Saxon date (ESAX or EMSAX), or containing undescribed inclusions which suggest a local or a non-local origin (ESAXLOC and ESAXX). The remainder are of the same general type as those found at Barnetby (ESGS, 44 sherds).

Table 1

Location	LOCALITY	CHARN	EMSAX	ESAX	ESAXLOC	ESAXX	ESGS	SST	Grand Total
Wold edge	Bigby			1					1
Wold edge	Caistor	13	6	1			40	59	119
Wold edge	New Somerby	1							1
Wold Edge	Normanby-le-Wold		2						2
Vale of Ancholme	Osgodby	1		1			2	10	14
Vale of Ancholme	Owersby		1				1		2
Vale of Ancholme	South Kelsey		5					1	6
Vale of Ancholme	Thornton Le Moor				3	1	1		5
	Grand Total	15	14	3	3	1	44	70	150

Form



Figure 1 Bowl rim, external view

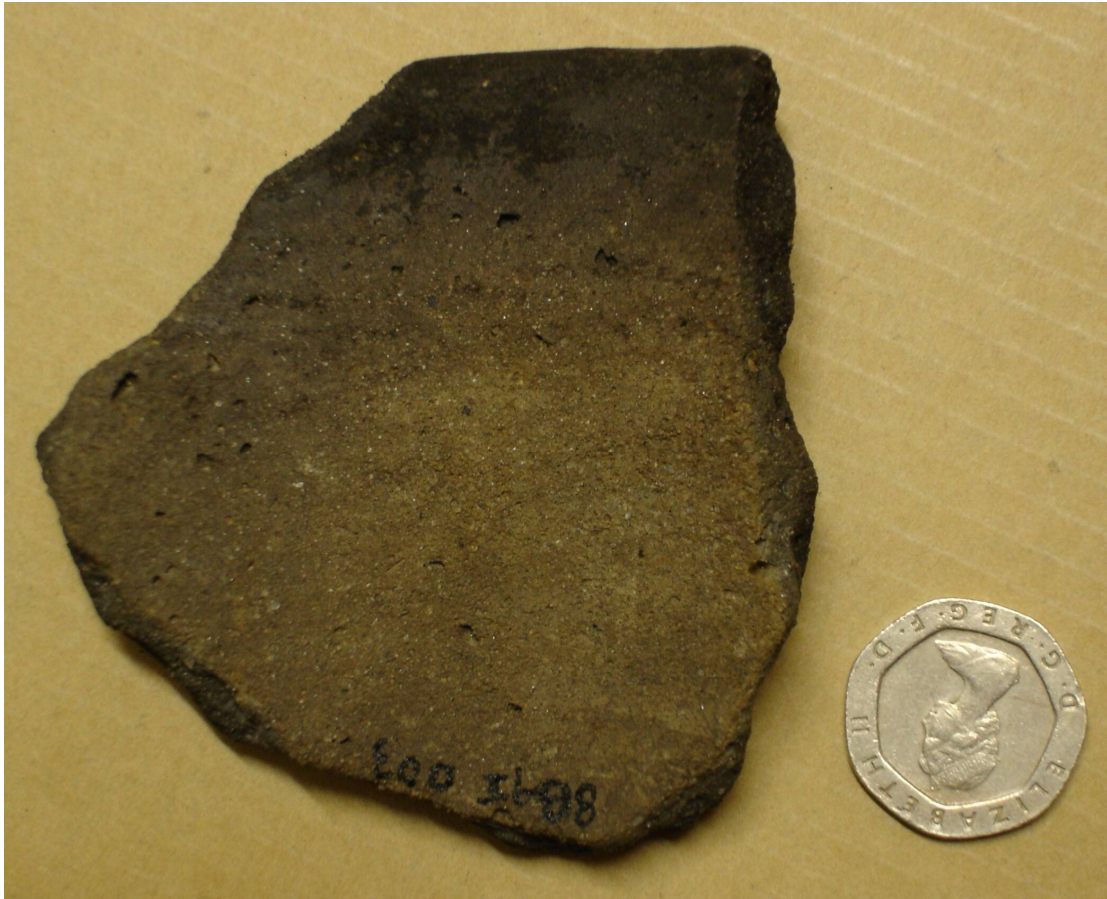


Figure 2 Bowl rim, internal view

Only one of the sherds came from a positively identifiable form, a hemispherical bowl with a flaring rim. This vessel had been used for cooking and had soot both on the exterior and on the interior of the rim. The sherd could, and should, be illustrated.

Chronology

Coarse, handmade vessels such as those found at Barnetby were used throughout the early Anglo-Saxon period and into the mid Saxon period (several of the sites listed above also produced Mid Saxon Northern Maxey ware). In fact, only three (Bigby, New Somerby and Owersby) did not and only one of these produced more than one sherd. Therefore, to find a group of early to mid Anglo-Saxon pottery in this area, without any mid Saxon sherds on the site is actually unusual and probably sufficient to say that the sherds are of early 7th-century or earlier date. No closer dating than mid 5th to early 7th century is possible without the use of AMS C14 dating of the carbon adhering to the bowl rim. However, the difference in grain size noted between these Barnetby sherds and the remainder might be significant and it may be that a solely early Anglo-Saxon fabric group could be defined, based on this collection.

The implications of this find for the settlement history of Barnetby depend on placing the find into context. It may be that the sherds came from a short-lived settlement which was abandoned, or re-located, before the mid Saxon period. If so, then the establishment of the medieval village of Barnetby on the same site might simply be due to the good location of the site, e.g. an elevated site with access to a spring. On the other hand, it might indicate that the village was occupied throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. The layout of the present village has a grid plan with the church being located slightly to the east of the village and directly to the east of the Manor Farm. Such a layout was shown at Goltho to be of late 9th/early 10th-century date and at Goltho there was no sign of any previous occupation on the site. This might be true of Barnetby too.

The Manor Farm finds could be placed into context by fieldwalking the fields surrounding the village and by collecting pottery and other finds from gardens within the village.

Conclusion

Although early Anglo-Saxon settlement sites are being discovered at the rate of one or two per year in Lincolnshire, they are still rare in comparison to Roman or medieval sites and every attempt should be made to maximise the amount of information that can be gleaned from them. The Barnetby le Wold collection suggests that it is about time that the early to mid Anglo-Saxon pottery of this area was re-examined, at which point it would be worthwhile including the Barnetby sherds in any program of scientific analysis that arose from this study.

At this stage, it is recommended that the bowl fragment is drawn and a sample of its fabric is taken for analysis.

Costing

Illustration of one potsherd = £15.00 plus VAT

Thin section analysis = £22.50 plus VAT

Chemical analysis = £23.50 plus VAT

Grand Total = £61.00 plus VAT

Bibliography

HBMC (1991) *Management of Archaeological Reports*. English Heritage.