

The Pottery from Fishergate House and Blue Bridge Lane, Fishergate, York: Period 4

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Fifteen features excavated by Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd at Fishergate House and Blue Bridge Lane, Fishergate, York, were assigned by the excavators to Period 4. Of these, six were on the Fishergate House site and nine on the Blue Bridge Lane site.

In total, 98 sherds, representing no more than 81 vessels and weighing 0.722 Kg were recovered. Of these, 15 were of Roman date, four were of Anglian date, one was of post-medieval date and the remainder, 78 sherds, representing no more than 62 vessels and weighing in total 0.595 Kg, were of Anglo-Scandinavian to early Norman date (i.e. late 9th to early 12th centuries). In fact, the majority of these sherds, 70, were of Torksey ware and likely to date to the later 10th to mid 11th centuries.

Catalogue

Roman pottery

Fifteen sherds of Roman pottery were present in Period 4 feature fills. Most of these are small sherds of later 1st to early 3rd-century types, mainly Eboracum wares.

Anglian pottery

Four sherds of Coarse sand-tempered ware were recovered from Period 4 deposits. They all come from the fill of YFH F125.

Stamford ware

One Stamford ware glazed pitcher handle and two unglazed jar body sherds were recovered from Period 4 deposits. Stamford wares occur in York from the late 9th/early 10th century onwards but are most common in later Anglo-Scandinavian period deposits. At Coppergate, it seems likely that for a brief period Stamford supplied the majority of the pottery used in the town, filling a gap between a period when Torksey was the main supplier and the period when York Gritty ware was dominant (1990). There are 119 sherds of Stamford ware from later deposits. Such a high quantity suggests that this Stamford-dominated phase is represented at these Fishergate sites, but that it post-dates Period 4.

Torksey ware

Seventy sherds of Torksey-type ware were recovered from Period 4 deposits. Recent studies of Torksey ware from York undertaken by one of the authors (Alan Vince) as part of a survey of Anglo-Saxon pottery in Northern Britain suggests that, contrary to the conclusion

of Brooks and Mainman (Brooks and Mainman 1984), the Torksey ware found in York was all produced at Torksey itself. Several kilns have been excavated at Torksey, and these, together with a study of material stratified in late 9th to 11th-century deposits in Lincoln, show that there are several recognisable phases in the Torksey production. The earliest of these, represented at Coppergate, is characterised by the use of roller-stamped decoration on the rim and shoulder of vessels. The firing of these vessels also distinguishes them from later types. By the early to mid 10th century the use of roller-stamping on vessel rims had ceased, but rollerstamping on the shoulder of jars continued. No sherds of either group occur either in Period 4 deposits or elsewhere on the two sites. The next phase is marked by the distinctive “sandwich” firing of the vessels, which were clearly fired in an oxidizing atmosphere until late in the firing process when oxygen was excluded from the kiln. All of the Fishergate sherds have this firing (with one exception, from the fill of F177).

Most of the Fishergate sherds come from medium-sized jars, the most common form produced. Bowls were also present. These vessels often have added wheelthrown spouts, which might have been used for pouring out the contents but were more probably used as handles. One example of these spouts was present in a later deposit. The only other vessel forms represented were a single sherd from a large container with thumbled strips on the body (probably a storage jar) and a lamp.

York Gritty ware

Two sherds of York Gritty ware were present in Period 4 deposits. This ware, produced using a light-firing clay with large grits derived from Carboniferous sandstones, was already in widespread use in York by 1080, as demonstrated by excavations at York Minster (Holdsworth 1995). Thin-section and chemical analysis suggests that the source of this ware was in West Yorkshire, on the Coal Measures (as proposed by Le Patourel in her study of the Wharram Percy pottery). Both sherds come from wheelthrown jugs.

Anglo-Scandinavian York ware (York A ware)

Two sherds of York A ware were present in Period 4 deposits. This ware varies considerably in fabric but chemical analysis (and in particular a high Barium content) confirms that it probably comes from a single source. Recent characterisation studies, carried out as part of the post-excavation study of medieval pottery from sites on the A1 near Wetherby for Oxford Archaeology North, indicates that a likely source for this ware is Thorney (Cumberpatch and Roberts 1998-1999) and that Thorney Ware is actually identical to York A ware. York A ware was present in the earliest Anglo-Scandinavian contexts at Coppergate and before the end of the 10th century it had declined in frequency in York, or more probably had ceased to be produced.

Seventeen further sherds of this ware were present on the Fishergate sites: four of these are intrusive in Period 3 deposits and the remainder are in later contexts.

York D ware

A single sherd of York D ware was present in a Period 4 deposit. York D ware is a reduced wheelthrown greyware which differ in typology, decoration and fabric from York A ware (1990). The ware is less common in York than York A ware and it has been suggested that it might be slightly later in date, or that it continued to be produced after York A ware had ceased.

Ten further sherds of York D ware were found on the sites and one of these was thin-sectioned and analysed chemically.

Stratigraphy

Fishergate House(YFH00)

F104

A single sherd of post-medieval brown-glazed earthenware was recovered from this feature. If stratigraphic evidence places this feature in period 4 then the sherd must be intrusive.

F125

Four sherds of Roman pottery, three sherds of Anglian coarse sand-tempered ware and two sherds of Torksey ware were recovered from the fill of this feature. The Torksey ware dates the fill to the late 9th-century or later (most likely to the late 10th to mid 11th century).

F129

Two sherds of Roman pottery, a sherd from a York D ware jar and 29 sherds of Torksey ware were recovered from the fill of this feature. The high proportion of Torksey ware suggests a late 10th to mid 11th-century date.

F150

Two sherds of Roman pottery and one sherd from a Torksey ware jar were recovered from the fill of this feature. The Torksey ware dates the fill to the late 9th century or later.

F161

A sherd from a York A ware jar dates the fill of this feature to the late 9th century or later.

F177

Two sherds of Roman pottery, 18 sherds of Torksey ware, a sherd of Stamford ware pitcher, and a sherd from a York Gritty ware jar were recovered from the fill of this feature. The high proportion of Torksey ware indicates a late 10th-century date or later and the presence of the York Gritty ware jar may either indicate a date in the mid 11th century or be intrusive.

F183

A sherd from a Torksey ware jar dates the fill of this feature to the late 9th century or later.

F216

A sherd of Roman pottery was recovered from the fill of this feature.

F229

Two sherds of Roman pottery and a sherd of York A ware jar were recovered from the fill of this feature. The York A ware dates the fill of this feature to the late 9th century or later.

Blue Bridge Lane (YBB01)

F112

A single sherd of Stamford ware jar dates this feature fill to the late 9th-century or later (most likely later 10th to 11th century).

F256

A sherd of Roman pottery and a sherd of York Gritty ware were recovered from the fill of this feature.

F291

A sherd of Torksey ware was recovered from the fill of this feature, dating it to the late 9th century or later.

F336

A sherd of Torksey ware was recovered from the fill of this feature, dating it to the late 9th century or later.

F460

A sherd of Stamford ware jar recovered from the fill of this feature, dating it to the late 9th century or later.

F480

A sherd of Torksey ware was recovered from the fill of this feature, dating it to the late 9th century or later.

Discussion

Because the Period 5 assemblages are so small, the terminus post quem for any individual feature is early, often the late 9th century. However, in some cases the sherds which give this early date are of York A ware, which is thought likely to have fallen out of use by the late 10th century. Since there is a scatter of York A ware sherds in later contexts as well, it is clear that some activity took place on the site in the later 9th to mid 10th centuries. These York A ware sherds show no sign of being more abraded than the other Anglo-Scandinavian wares in Period 5 and therefore probably were originally buried in archaeological features rather than lying around in ploughsoil or topsoil.

There is no doubt, however, that the main activity in Period 5 dates to the later 10th to mid 11th centuries and in a few instances (F129 and F177, both at Fishergate House) the assemblages are large enough to support this dating.

The end date for this Period depends on the status of the two sherds of York Gritty ware, from F256 on YBB01 and F177 at YFH00). If these sherds are contemporary, then the period must continue into the mid/late 11th century, but if they are intrusive then it could end at any point in or after the late 10th century.

Bibliography

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