Assessment of the finds from Syningthwaite Priory Farm, Bilton in Ainsty with Bickerton, North Yorkshire (OSA06 EV02)

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A small collection of finds, mostly consisting of pottery with small quantities of ceramic building material, glass, clay tobacco pipe, metals and stone, was submitted for identification and assessment.

The finds date from the medieval period onwards and are consistent with the documented history of the site, a nunnery founded in the early 12th century and continuously occupied from then on. The majority of the finds probably date to the later 12th/13th century or the late 18th to 20th centuries and there is no concentration of finds of dissolution date, such as one would expect from a monastic site which had been destroyed and rebuilt during the mid 16th century.

Description

One hundred and fifty-two items were assessed. They were recorded by fragment count (Nosh), number of objects represented (NoV) and weight (Table 1).

Table 1

	Sum of	Sum of	Sum of
class	Nosh	NoV	Weight
CBM	6	6	720
COPP	2	2	16
CTP	1	1	4
IRON	1	1	41
LEAD	2	1	131
PMGL	2	2	265
POTTERY	136	108	2601
STONE	2	2	1292
Grand			
Total	152	123	5070

Ceramic Building Material

Fragments of two bricks, three floor tiles and one unidentified object, probably a flat roof tile, were recovered.

Two fabric groups were present: the first includes the brick and floor tiles and the second consists solely of the unidentified object. The first is an oxidized sandy fabric containing abundant subangular quartz grains up to 0.2mm across and sparse larger, sometimes angular, fragments up to 0.5mm across. The general appearance of this fabric is similar to

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that of pottery produced in York, but is also similar to pottery and clay samples from Follifoot and is probably typical of numerous Quaternary clays in the Vale of York.

The three floor tiles are both plain and have seen considerable wear. They are undoubtedly of medieval date but the precise date is uncertain. Plain tiles were used alongside decorated ones from the 12th century onwards in the north of England ({Stopford 2005 #46223}) but became more common in the later medieval period. The similarity in fabric of the bricks suggests that the bricks too might be of medieval date, but one has traces of a coal-tempered mortar, which tends to be a post-medieval and later feature (perhaps as a result of the increasing use of coal as domestic fuel). One of the bricks is extremely thin for a brick and was moulded in a straw-lined mould and It might have been used as a hearth tile.

Chemical analysis of the brick and floor tile fragments would be able to determine how similar the bricks and tiles are to each other and would enable the fabric of the bricks and tiles to be compared with that of other groups of bricks, tiles and pottery produced in the Vale of York (e.g. Follifoot, York, Holme-upon-Spalding Moor) and thus might be able to determine whether they were produced close to the site or elsewhere.

The second fabric has a similar quartz sand temper to the first group, but has a calcareous groundmass. It is similar to the fabric of some of the flat roof tiles found in York and is visually similar to tile wasters from Cawood, a known source of tiles for York (OSA04 EV07). The calcareous groundmass, combined with a "salt-surfacing" (a lightening of the surface of the tile, due to the presence of salt and carbonate during firing) indicates the use of a marine clay which excludes a source either in the Syningthwaite or York areas.

Copper Alloy

Two copper alloy coins were recovered, both of 20th-century date. Neither shows much sign of corrosion and this suggests that they were buried in a dry environment, or have not spent long below ground. That from Trench 2 (unstratified) is a penny of Edward VII, minted in 1903 but showing moderate wear and possibly not lost until decimalisation (i.e. lost at any time between 1903 and 1971). That from Trench 9 (902) is a halfpenny of George VI, minted in 1943 and showing only slight wear.

Clay Tobacco Pipe

A single fragment of clay tobacco pipe was recovered from Trench 8, context 803. The fragment comes from a decorated, spurred pipe of late 18th or, more probably, early to mid 19th-century date.

Iron

A single iron nail was recovered, from Trench 12, context 1206. The nail has a large, domed rectangular head and was probably used decoratively, for example on a door or chest.

Lead

Two fragments of melted lead waste were recovered, from Trench 12, context 1206. The lead has run into the cracks of a fine-grained material, perhaps a clay floor or hearth but no traces of this material remain.

Post-Medieval Glass

Two glass objects were recorded. The first is the base of a tall bottle of dark green glass. The handblowing and weathering of the glass suggest a mid 18th to early 19th century date. The second is a small bottle, moulded into the shape of a thatched cottage. This bottle, in a clear glass, is likely to be of 20th-century date and was probably used for perfume.

Pottery

12th to 13th Century

Sixty sherds of pottery dating between the mid 11th and the 13th centuries were recorded (Table 2). They are of three ware groups: Yorkshire Gritty ware (YG), which was produced in West Yorkshire, including Potterton, from the mid 11th to the mid 13th centuries; York glazed ware, which was produced in the later 12th and earlier part of the 13th centuries, probably in the Hambleton Hills area (i.e. the predecessor of Brandsby-type ware); and Northern Gritty ware (NGR). The latter was has a wide variety of colours and textures but is always tempered with a sandstone sand, containing overgrown quartz grains up to 1.0mm across and no rounded grains at all. The groundmass is often micaceous and fine-textured. Analysis of a large number of samples from sites to the north of Wetherby suggests that the ware is all produced from similar clays and sands, probably at a site or sites between Wetherby and Harrogate. Typology of the vessels made suggest that the pottery was in operation from the later 12th to the mid 14th centuries but is superceded by Humberware in the second half of the 14th century. Some of the Syningthwaite sherds may therefore be of later date that the other two wares.

Table 2

Cname	Form	Sum of Nosh	Sum of NoV	Sum of Weight
NGR	JAR	2	2	7
	JAR/JUG	4	4	11
	JUG	18	15	349
	JUG/JAR	1	1	7
YG	JAR	25	23	163
	JUG	1	1	13
YORK	JUG	9	9	130
Grand Total		60	55	680

All of the sherds in these early fabrics come from jugs and jars and there is a general split between jar fabrics (YG) and jug fabrics (YORK and NGR). However, one of the unglazed YG sherds comes from the neck of a jug, although it is completely unglazed, whilst two of the NGR sherds come from jars.

Later 13th to early 16th Century

Twenty-three sherds of later 13th to early 16th-century pottery were recorded (Table 3). They are of four wares: Brandsby-type ware (BRAN); Humberware (HUM), Tees Valley Ware (TVW) and Martincamp ware (MART).

Table 3

Form	BRAN	HUM	MART	TVW	(Grand Total
DJ		1				1
FLASK			1			1
JUG	10	9				19
JUG/JAR					2	2
Grand Total	10	10	1		2	23

Brandsby-type ware was produced at a number of centres in the Hambleton Hills, including Brandsby. It was first produced in the later 13th century but continued to be produced throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, eventually being superceded by Ryedale ware in the later 15th or 16th centuries. Only two featured sherds were found. The first was a squared rim from a jug with an oval or rod handle which had thumb impressions on each side of the rim/handle join and probably a series of narrow grooves down the back of the handle. Typologically, this vessel is probably early in the Brandsby-type ware production. Similarly, the second vessel is a baluster jug base with interval thumbing around the base and a thick dribble of glossy green glaze. A late 13th to mid 14th-century date is likely for this vessel.

Humberware was produced at several centres around the Humber basin, including York, Holme upon Spalding Moor and West Cowick. Visually, there is little difference between these wares although they can be distinguished through chemical analysis of the fabric. Other Humberware production sites in east Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire have fabrics which can be distinguished from the Vale of York centres and none of these types is present. The Humberware sherds include no featured sherds and the only chronologically distinctive type is a body sherd from an unglazed, oxidized drinking jug. This type is typical of the later 14th century.

Tees Valley ware has a fine red-firing body with sparse quartz sand temper and usually a thick white slip. It is present in large quantities at sites in the Tees valley and as far west as Richmond, but is scarce further south in the Vale of York. Tees Valley ware is found in association with later medieval types.

The Martincamp flask is an import, probably from northern France. The type was first recognised by John Hurst at Kirkstead Abbey who recognised three types of imported flask: Type I is a white earthenware and has a flattened globular body with an added tapering neck. Type II is a grey stoneware with a spherical body and Type III is a red earthenware, with a similar form to Type 3. The attribution to Martincamp, between Dieppe and Beauvais, is questionable but it seems likely that they are a northern French product ({Hurst, Neal, et al.

1986 #11313, 102-104}). Type I, which is the type found at this site, is dated c.1475-1550. Examples are considerably less common that the later types, II and III, and tend to be found on port sites or inland at "high status" settlements. Despite this, the later type seems to have been imported empty, and used as a portable water or wine flask and is therefore likely to have been used by people travelling on foot (such as pilgrims, foot soldiers or agricultural labourers).

Post-medieval

Ten sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered from various trenches (Table 4) together with an assemblage of 17th-century date from Trench 16 (Table 5). They are mostly of earthenwares (Blackware – BL; Glazed Red Earthenware – GRE; and Late Humberware – LHUM) but include one sherd of Staffordshire Slipware – STSL, from a posset pot with white slip jewelling on a dark brown slip background, and one sherd of Frechen stoneware – FREC, from the Rhineland. The earthenwares have a long period of use and cannot be closely dated whilst the STSL vessel is of late 17th to mid 18th century date and the FREC vessel is of mid 16th to late 17th-century date. The assemblage from Trench 16 in addition contains brown-glazed earthenware (BERTH), Midlands Yellow ware (MY), Ryedale ware, Staffordshire redware (STRE) and tin-glazed ware (TGW). The latest type in this assemblage is the Staffordshire redware, a bowl with marbled slip decoration on the interior. The assemblage also includes sherds from a Ryedale ware chafing dish which appears to have stood on tripod feet, a very unusual form. Three vessels are worthy of illustration: the Rydale chafing dish, the Midlands Yellow ware bowl and the tin-glazed bowl.

Table 4

Form	Description	BL	FREC	GRE	LHUM	STSL	Grand Total	
BOWL	CUGL INT			1				1
	INT GL			2				2
DJ			1					1
JAR		3			1			4
PANC	CUGL?			1				1
POSS	WHITE DOTS ON DKBR SLIP BACKGROUND EXT					1		1
Grand Total		3	1	4	1	1		10

Table 5

Form	Description	BERTH	LHUM	MY	RYEDALE	STRE	TGW	Grand Total
BOWL	FLANGED BOWL WITH LEAD BACK; LTBR AND LTBL PAINTED INT						4	4
	INT AND EXT LTBR SLIP WITH WHITE SLTR AROUND FLANGED RIM			7				7
	INT CUGL				1			1
	INT PLAIN REDUCED GL				1			1

	LOOP HANDLE;INT AND EXT PLAIN OXIDIZED GL	1						1
	MARBLED WHITE/BROWN (SELF- COLOURED) SLIPS;KT EXT BASE					1		1
CHAF	ORNATE LOOP HANDLE; PIERCED BASE AND TRACE OF TRIPOD FOOT? INT CUGL				5			5
JAR			1					1
	INT PLAIN GL;EXT BROWN GL	4						4
JAR/JUG	FOOTRING BASE;EXT PLAIN SPLASH GL				1			1
PANC	BEADED RIM;INT BROWN GL	1						1
Grand Total		6	1	7	8	1	4	27

Late 18th-century and later

Fifteen sherds of later 18th-century or later date were recorded (Table 5). These are all factory-made wares produced at numerous centres (Creamware – CREA; English Stoneware – ENGS; 19th-century Buff ware – NCBW; Nottingham Stoneware – NOTS; Pearlware – PEAR; Transfer-printed ware – TPW and Whitewares – WHITE) apart from a site sherd of flowerpot which was probably made somewhere in the Vale of York (LPMLOC).

Table 6

Form	Description	CREA	ENGS	LPMLOC	NCBW	NOTS	PEAR	TPW	WHITE	Grand Total
-		1								1
BOT						2				2
BOWL	INDUSTRIAL SLIP				2					2
	LARGE VESSEL;JARDINIERE?							2		2
CUP	INDUSTRIAL SLIP EXT						1			1
FLP				1						1
JAR	MARMALADE JAR		2							2
OVAL DISH	MARKED "STONE CHINA ROYAL [] TRIPE"							1		1
PLATE	=							2	1	3
Grand Total		1	2	1	2	2	1	5	1	15

A wide range of forms is present, one of which is a sherd from an oval transfer-printed dish which is marked "Stone China. Royal [S]tripe". A close parallel for this vessel was recently put up for auction (Fig 1). The 156 sherds include a few of late 18th/early 19th-century character (CREA and PEAR) but are mainly of mid 19th to early 20th-century types, including fragments of marmalade jar with vertical ribbing.



Figure 1 Bottom: parallel for vessel from context 802 (http://www.pfkauctions.co.uk/Catalogues/as290605/lot0318.jpg)

Stone

Two fragments of stone were submitted. Both are probably Permian limestones and neither show any signs of working or use. They are probably Magnesian Limestone brought to the site as building stone.

Assessment

Trench 2

Table 7

Context Nosh TPQ

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202	3	late 12th+
204	1	Late 18th+
210	1	late 12th+
216	6	Late 17th+
219	3	Late 12th+
221	4	Late 16th+
222	1	Late 16th+
224	2	Late 15th+
226	1	Mid 11th+
US	1	late 12th+

Trench 4

A single fragment of probable medieval flat roof tile was recovered from context 406.

Trench 5

Pottery of late 19th-century or later date was recovered from contexts 502 and 503.

Trench 7

Pottery of late 19th-century or later date was recovered from context 701.

Trench 8

Context 800 produced a fragment of 20th-century glassware. Context 802 produced sherds of late 19th-century or later pottery and context 803 produced a sherd of transfer-printed ware plate, of late 18th-century or later date.

Trench 9

Context 902 produced a coin minted in 1943.

Trench 10

Table 8

Context	Nosh	TPQ
1001	27	Late 14th+
1005	10	Late 12th+
1007	6	Late 14th+
1009	9	Late 13th+

Trench 11

A sherd of later 12th-century or later date was recovered from context 1101.

Trench 12

Table 9

Context Nosh TPQ 1206 12 Late 12th+ 1210 2 Late 13th+

Trench 13

A sherd of later 12th-century or later date was recovered from context 1301.

Trench 14

Two sherds of later 14th-century or later pottery and a fragment of mid 18th-century or later glassware were recovered from context 1401.

Trench 16

Two contexts in Trench 16 produced finds, 1607 and 1617. Both are the backfills of a robber trench. The lower fill, 1617, contains the more closely-datable types, which indicate a mid 17th-century date. The upper fill, 1607, on its own can only be dated to the later 16th-century or later, but the types present were probably all still current in the mid 17th century.

Chronology

The nunnery at Syningthwaite was founded in the 1120s and much of the pottery found is likely to date to the first century of occupation of the complex. Because of the lack of change in the YG industry, however, it is impossible to prove that the nunnery was built on previously unoccupied ground.

Further Work

The medieval pottery from this site is interesting in that it comes from an area whose pottery sequence is poorly known. It seems to show that the priory was supplied partly through York (YORK, BRAN, TVW, MART, HUM) and partly from the west (YG, NGR) and that the bias between west and east shifted during the medieval period. Chemical analysis of some of the wares could be used to test this model. Three of the vessels from Trench 16 should be illustrated.

Retention

All of the finds except for the unworked stone should be retained

Appendix 1

Context	class	cname	subfabric	Form	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Description	TSNO	Action	Use	Condition
202	POTTERY	YG		JAR	1	1	2					
202	POTTERY	YG		JAR	1	1	26					
202	POTTERY	YORK		JUG	1	1	2	EXT CUGL;				
204	POTTERY	PEAR		CUP	1	1	1	INDUSTRIAL SLIP EXT				
210	POTTERY	NGR		JUG/JAR	1	1	7	EXT PLAIN GL;OBTUSE BASE ANGLE			SOOTED EXT;BLACK DEPO INT	
216	POTTERY	TVW		JAR	2	1	6					
216	POTTERY	YG		JAR	3	3	32					
216	POTTERY	STSL		POSS	1	1	3	WHITE DOTS ON DKBR SLIP BACKGROUND EXT				
219	POTTERY	YORK		JUG	1	1	24	CUGL;SPARSE THUMBING				
219	POTTERY	YG		JAR	2	1	8				BLACK DEPO INT;SPALLED EXT	
221	POTTERY	GRE		PANC	1	1	11	CUGL?				
221	POTTERY	GRE	SILTY MICACEOUS REDWARE	BOWL	1	1	18	CUGL INT			SOOTED EXT	
221	POTTERY	GRE	SILTY MICACEOUS REDWARE	BOWL	2	1	22	INT GL				
222	POTTERY	FREC		DJ	1	1	9					
224	POTTERY	YORK		JUG	1	1	1	CUGL				
224	POTTERY	MART	WHITE EARTHENWARE	FLASK	1	1	18	FLATTENED GLOBE SHAPE				
226	CBM	MTIL	A FINE SAND	BRICK	1	1	191				COAL- TEMPERED MORTAR	

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Context	class	cname	subfabric	Form	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Description	TSNO	Action	Use	Condition
226	CBM	MTIL	A FINE SAND	BRICK	1	1	96				PLAIN MORTAR	
226	POTTERY	YG		JAR	1	1	2					
406	СВМ	MTIL	CALC BODY;FINE SA Q	-	1	1	1					
502	POTTERY	NCBW		BOWL	1	1	7	INDUSTRIAL SLIP				
502	POTTERY	LPMLOC		FLP	1	1	3					
502	POTTERY	LHUM		JAR	1	1	32					
503	POTTERY	BL		JAR	1	1	13					
503	POTTERY	NCBW		BOWL	1	1	3	INDUSTRIAL SLIP				
503	POTTERY	CREA		-	1	1	1					
701	POTTERY	NOTS		BOT	2	1	34					
701	POTTERY	WHITE		PLATE	1	1	34					
701	POTTERY	TPW		PLATE	1	1	77					
800	PMGL	PMGL	CLEAR	ВОТ	1	1	42	MOULDED BOTTLE IN SHAPE OF THATCHED COTTAGE				
802	POTTERY	TPW		BOWL	2	1	109	LARGE VESSEL; JARDINIERE?				
802	POTTERY	TPW		OVAL DISH	1	1	23	MARKED "STONE CHINA ROYAL [] TRIPE"				
803	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	1	1	4	19TH-C DEC;SPURRED				
803	POTTERY	BL		JAR	2	1	18					
803	POTTERY	TPW		PLATE	1	1	2					
902	COPP	COPP		COIN	1	1	7	GRVI 1/2 PENNY 1943			SLIGHT WEAR	
902	POTTERY	ENGS		JAR	2	2	15	MARMALADE JAR				
1001	POTTERY	YORK		JUG	1	1	11					
1001	STONE	STONE	PERMIAN LST?	GEO	1	1	23					

Context	class	cname	subfabric	Form	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Description	TSNO	Action	Use	Condition
1001	POTTERY	YG		JAR	2	2	8					
1001	POTTERY	YORK		JUG	1	1	3	PLAIN GL				
1001	POTTERY	BRAN		JUG	1	1	61	SQUARED RIM;ROD HANDLE;THUMB IMPRESSIONS TO EITHER SIDE;GROOVES DOWN HANDLE;CUGL				
1001	POTTERY	BRAN		JUG	3	3	49	PLAIN GL				
1001	POTTERY	NGR		JUG	1	1	33	SQUAT JUG;THUMBED BASE				
1001	POTTERY	HUM		JUG	5	5	146					
1001	POTTERY	YG		JAR	3	3	15					
1001	POTTERY	NGR		JUG	1	1	11					
1001	POTTERY	YORK		JUG	1	1	13					
1001	POTTERY	BRAN		JUG	3	2	88					
1001	POTTERY	HUM		JUG	4	4	220					
1005	POTTERY	YG		JAR	1	1	2					
1005	POTTERY	NGR		JUG	9	6	170					
1007	POTTERY	NGR		JUG	4	4	115					
1007	POTTERY	NGR		JUG	1	1	3	STAMPED BOSS -WHEATEAR;CUGL				
1007	POTTERY	HUM		DJ	1	1	11	UNGLAZED OXID				
1009	POTTERY	BRAN		JUG	2	1	3					
1009	POTTERY	NGR		JAR/JUG	4	4	11					
1009	POTTERY	NGR		JAR	2	2	7				OOTED XT	
1009	POTTERY	YG		JAR	1	1	13					
1101	POTTERY	NGR		JUG	1	1	11	PLAIN EXT GL				
1206	STONE	STONE	PERMIAN LST?	GEO	1	1	1269	UNWORKED BLOCK				
1206	LEAD	LEAD		WASTE	2	1	131			M	IELTED	
1206	IRON	IRON		NAIL	1	1	41	RECT DOMED HEAD				

Context	class	cname	subfabric	Form	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Description	TSNO	Action	Use	Condition
1206	POTTERY	YG		JAR	3	3	12					
1206	POTTERY	YORK		JUG	1	1	1	EXT CUGL;INCISED LATTICE				
1206	POTTERY	YORK		JUG	1	1	5	EX CUGL;APPLIED THUMBED STRIPS/FLOWER				
1206	POTTERY	YG		JAR	7	6	43					
1210	POTTERY	YG		JUG	1	1	13	LOOKS LIKE AN UNGLAZED JUG NECK				
1210	POTTERY	BRAN		JUG	1	1	47	BALUSTER BASE WITH BROAD THUMBING AND GLOSSY CUGL RUNNEL CF SCAR				
1301	POTTERY	YORK		JUG	1	1	70	CUGL;ROD HANDLE				
1401	CBM	MTIL	A FINE SAND	FLOOR	1	1	151	WHITE SLIPPED			WORN	
1401	CBM	MTIL	A FINE SAND	FLOOR	1	1	236				WORN;PLAIN MORTAR	
1401	PMGL	PMGL	DKGR	TALL	1	1	223	M18/E19TH C				WEATHERED
1607	COMMENT	ZDATE			0	0	0	L16TH+				
1607	POTTERY	BERTH		JAR	4	1	74	INT PLAIN GL;EXT BROWN GL				
1607	POTTERY	BERTH		PANC	1	1	23	BEADED RIM;INT BROWN GL				
1607	POTTERY	RYEDALE		CHAF	5	1	253	ORNATE LOOP HANDLE; PIERCED BASE AND TRACE OF TRIPOD FOOT? INT CUGL		DR		
1607	CBM	MTIL	A SA Q <0.2MM;MATT SURFACED AND BROWN COATED	FLOOR	1	1	45	PAINTED WHITE SLIP AND PLAIN GL;BEVELED KT SIDE;SANDED, GLAZED BASE				
1617	COMMENT	ZDATE			0	0	0	M17TH				
1617	POTTERY	TGW		BOWL	4	1	54	FLANGED BOWL WITH LEAD BACK; LTBR AND LTBL PAINTED INT		DR		
1617	POTTERY	MY		BOWL	7	1	177	INT AND EXT LTBR SLIP WITH WHITE SLTR AROUND FLANGED RIM		DR		
1617	POTTERY	STRE		BOWL	1	1	18	MARBLED WHITE/BROWN (SELF-				

AVAC Report 2005/32

Context	class	cname	subfabric	Form	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Description COLOURED) SLIPS;KT EXT BASE	TSNO	Action	Use	Condition
1617	POTTERY	BERTH	SILTY BODY	BOWL	1	1	53	LOOP HANDLE;INT AND EXT PLAIN OXIDIZED GL				
1617	POTTERY	LHUM		JAR	1	1	26					
1617	POTTERY	RYEDALE		BOWL	1	1	8	INT CUGL				
1617	POTTERY	RYEDALE		BOWL	1	1	10	INT PLAIN REDUCED GL			SOOTED EXT	
1617	POTTERY	RYEDALE		JAR/JUG	1	1	141	FOOTRING BASE;EXT PLAIN SPLASH GL				
US	COPP	COPP		COIN	1	1	9	ERVII;PENNY;1903			MODERATE WEAR	
US	POTTERY	NGR		JUG	1	1	6					