

# Assessment of the Anglo-Saxon Pottery from Lanton Quarry

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The section headings in the following assessment report refer to those in the *Management of Archaeological Projects* (HBMC 1991), Appendix 4.

## 1. Factual data

### 1.1. Statement on the material

#### 1.1.i. Quantity

Sixty three sherds of pottery were identified as being of Anglo-Saxon date. It is possible that some earlier, prehistoric, sherds are present but certainly all of the sherds large enough for the shape and size of the vessel to be determined were consistent with this identification.

The sherds come from no more than 40 vessels, perhaps considerably less. However, since none of the material was washed and was all unmarked it was not possible at this stage to compare sherds from different contexts to see if they joined.

The pottery weighed in total 791 gm, giving an average sherd weight of 12.55 gm, which is quite large for collections of this date.

#### 1.1.ii. provenance

Table 1 lists the context of the material. Almost all the sherds come from the backfill of sunken-featured buildings and range between one and 13 vessels represented in each context. The only other sherds are from the fill of a pit in the area of the Anglo-Saxon buildings, 51 and from the fill of a post hole in Post-Built Building 1. However, the sherd from pit 51 has lost its external surface and only weighs 6gm and so its identification must be taken as tentative and that from the posthole only weighs 3gm.

**Table 1**

context group	Context	Sum of Nosh	Sum of NoV	Sum of Weight
Pit 051	051	1	1	6
Post-Built Building 1	"POST BUILT BLDG 1"	1	1	3
Sunken Featured building 1	015	6	5	96
Sunken Featured	017	5	3	27

building 2				
Sunken Featured building 3	019	2	2	49
	1021	22	3	389
Sunken Featured building 4	063	9	8	82
Sunken Featured building 5	167	4	4	54
Sunken Featured building 6	281	13	13	85
Grand Total		63	40	791

### Dating

One vessel is represented by a complete profile, and rims from at most seven other vessels were found. In addition, three stamped body sherds were present. All of these featured sherds are consistent with an early Anglo-Saxon date.

The three stamped body sherds come from the same context, the fill of sunken featured building 6, and bear a cross in a circle stamp combined with burnished lines. Dr J N L Myres was of the opinion that stamps could occur on decorated vessels at any time between the mid 5<sup>th</sup> and the mid 7<sup>th</sup> centuries but that their peak of popularity was in the mid to late 6<sup>th</sup> century (Myres 1969, 45). The profile is of a crude bowl, of the type termed "accessory vessels" by Myres, which were clearly used for cooking. These vessels occur on domestic settlements throughout the early Anglo-Saxon period but closely-dated examples tend to be found in later 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>-century contexts. This is almost certainly due to the increase in inhumation burial at that time and the use of these vessels as grave goods, presumably symbolising food for the deceased. The rims are mainly simple rounded forms, sometimes with an external bead. This form is found throughout the early Anglo-Saxon period and was replaced by the everted rim, often with a thickened neck (reflecting where the rim has been added to the inside of the last coil of the body). These everted types occur late in the early Anglo-Saxon period and are current in the succeeding Mid-Saxon period. Sherds from the body indicate that most come either from simple bowls or from jars with a globular body where the neck profile flows from the shoulder to the rim without a sharp change of angle. This form is not closely dated and probably occurs throughout the early Anglo-Saxon period. Indeed, some of the earlier Mid Saxon vessels from Lundenwic have a similar profile, indicating that it continued in use into the 7<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Vince 1990, Figs 50-51).

In summary, the internal dating evidence is consistent with an occupation at any date between the later 5<sup>th</sup> and the early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries but is probably more in favour of a mid to late 6<sup>th</sup> century date.

### Contamination

The area of early Anglo-Saxon settlement is not disturbed by later features and there is no reason to suppose that there is any contamination by later material.

### Residuality

The area of early Anglo-Saxon settlement was also occupied in the prehistoric period and there is a strong possibility of odd sherds of prehistoric date being present within the fills of the sunken featured buildings. However, if so, these would only be featureless body sherds.

### 1.1.iii. range and variety

Table 2 lists the identifiable vessel forms present in the collection. Three vessel forms were identified: the bowl, with a rounded or flattened rounded base, straight sides and rounded rim; the jar, with a globular body, rounded neck and rounded rim and a large jar, represented by a single sherd from the fill of sunken featured building 3 whose large size is indicated by the curvature of the sherd and its thickness. One of the bowls was produced using the standard coiling technique but because of the thinness of the body extra clay was added both inside and outside. This indicates a fairly low level of competence or that the purpose for which the pot was made did not require attention to such details.

*Table 2*

Form	context group	Sum of Nosh	Sum of NoV	Sum of Weight
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BOWL	Sunken Featured building 1	2	2	51
	Sunken Featured building 3	22	3	389
	Sunken Featured building 4	1	1	7
	Sunken Featured building 5	1	1	3
	Sunken Featured building 6	2	2	30
JAR		1	1	6
	Post-Built Building 1	1	1	3
	Sunken Featured building 1	3	2	44
	Sunken Featured building 2	3	1	14
	Sunken Featured building 4	4	3	39
	Sunken Featured building 5	1	1	9
JAR/BOWL	Sunken Featured building 1	1	1	1
	Sunken Featured building 2	2	2	13
	Sunken Featured building 3	1	1	11
	Sunken Featured building 4	4	4	36
	Sunken Featured building 5	2	2	42
	Sunken Featured building 6	11	11	55
LARGE JAR	Sunken Featured building 3	1	1	38
Grand Total		63	40	791

#### 1.1.iv. Condition

Two of the bowl sherds and one jar showed fresh breaks and this indicates the friable nature of the pottery. One bowl sherd and two jars had lost their external surfaces, either through spalling during use or through weathering (frost damage). None was washed, so that it might be possible to carry out organic chemical analysis of the vessels and perhaps C14 dating of the organic deposits on the interior and exterior of the pot. However, this does limit any attempt to determine the frequency of traces of use, such as sooting and burnt food. Such traces can be used to determine the details of use, such as whether vessels were sat in embers or at the edge of a fire and whether they were burnt dry or whether food stuck to the base through not being stirred.

Despite this, black deposits were noted on the interior of three vessels, all identified as jars, and sooting was noted on the exterior of six vessels, two of which were bowls and the others jars.

#### 1.1.v. Primary sources & documentation

There are no primary sources or documentation which might enhance the study of this collection.

### **1.2. Means of collecting the data**

This assessment is made from a study of all of the sherds, recording the sherd count, number of vessels, weight, use and condition. Any decoration was noted.

## 2. Statement of potential

### **2.1. The value of the data**

The Lanton Quarry material is the first sizeable collection of early Anglo-Saxon pottery from any site north of the Tees. It is therefore important to document the material and make that data available to others. The site is also likely to have been contemporary to the central place of Yeavinger which is situated within sight of the quarry. The relative abundance of pottery from the quarry site contrasts with the very low quantity of pottery found by Hope-Taylor at Yeavinger (Hope-Taylor 1977) and therefore helps us to understand that site better. It indicates that Yeavinger's relative lack of pottery is not due to the inability or unwillingness of the local population to use pottery but rather a function of the differences in activity being carried out at the two sites and probably also to differences in taphonomy. It is possible, for example, that refuse disposal zones await discovery at Yeavinger.

#### 2.1.i. Aims of research

Given the low quantity of other material of this date from the north-east of England the pottery should be documented thoroughly by production of an illustrated catalogue. Three aspects of the pottery would then be worthy of further study:

- a) Dating and cultural associations. The pottery, together with the structural details of the post-built and sunken-featured building and the loom weights, provides evidence for the date and cultural contexts of the early Anglo-Saxon settlement at Lanton Quarry. The date of the pottery can partly be determined by the sort of typological arguments given above, but based on a more detailed examination of each vessel. It might also be possible to establish the date of the vessels through AMS dating of the carbonised food and soot deposits found on the vessels, since these are intimately associated with the pottery vessels, unlike charcoal which might be affected by residuality or intrusion. Thermoluminescent dating of the vessels would also be possible, but would be a destructive process and might be better carried out on the loom weights.

The stamped sherds should be entered into the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Pottery Stamps. However, the stamp design is too common for any hope of being able to establish die duplicates.

- b) Characterisation. Petrological and geochemical analysis has been carried out on a small number of vessels of early to mid Anglo-Saxon date from sites north of the Tees. These consist of: Ratho, to the south of Edinburgh, which produced a sunken-featured building whose fill included pottery and loom weights. C14 dating of the fill indicated a late 6<sup>th</sup> or early 7th century date for the primary fill; Jarrow, where the pottery is probably contemporary with the Mid Saxon monastery and Arbeia (South Shields) where a single sherd from a stamp-decorated vessel was present. At all three sites, the vessels were made from a clay in which Millstone Grit sandstone was the probable source of quartz grains whilst at Ratho the fired clay contained volcanic rock inclusions which are consistent with a local source. Examination of chipped edges of the Lanton quarry sherds suggests that they have a different fabric containing sub-rounded fragments of igneous rocks, quite possibly of local origin. Therefore, both the quantity of pottery and its source are at odds with previously-known evidence. A sample of the Lanton Quarry pottery should therefore be analysed to establish its petrological and geochemical characteristics. Ideally, if a single source is present at least six samples would be taken in order establish the mean and range values for inclusion types and elements present. There is no evidence from the sherds examined that there is more than one fabric, but given the lack of possibilities for stereomicroscope study (because of the soil coating) it would be prudent to budget on more samples. Assuming that only vessels with sherds more than 10gm were sampled, there are only 14 vessels which could be studied: 3 from SFB 1; 5 from SFB 3; 3 from SFB 4; 2 from SFB 5; and 1 from SFB 6.
- c) Function. There are two potential methods of establishing the function of pottery vessels. The first is to study the shape and size of the vessels and the presence and position of use traces on their surfaces and the second is to use organic chemical analysis. Experience has shown that organic chemicals associated with the use of vessels can occur in samples where there is no visual sign of use, since they are preserved within the pores of the pot itself or bound to clay minerals within the fabric of the vessel. However, since the sherds have been left unwashed to enable organic chemical analysis, it is not present to carry out both analyses at the same time. It is suggested that one way through this impasse would be to select samples from each recognised vessel and to remove these from the collection and then to carefully wash, dry and mark the remaining sherds, which could then be studied in the traditional manner.

#### 2.1.ii. Integration of studies with other materials

There is a possibility of enhancing the study of the pottery through analysis of the fired (and unfired) clay. Samples of the fired and unfired clay loom weights should be taken for petrological and geochemical analysis to provide a local reference point with which to compare samples of the pottery.

### 2.1.iii. Costing

Table 3 lists the various tasks which have been identified here and provides costs for those which could be carried out by AVAC.

*Table 3*

Task	Description	Rate	Cost	VAT
1	Select sherds for potential organic chemical and AMS C14 dating analyses	£25.00 per hour	£50.00	£8.75
2	Wash, dry and mark remaining sherds	£10.00 per hour	£40.00	£7.00
3	Search for cross-joins and group sherds by vessel	£25.00 per hour	£400.00	£70.00
4	Select for illustration, reconstruction, photography and document decisions	£25.00 per hour	£50.00	£8.75
5	Illustration of 12 vessels	£20.00 per vessel	£240.00	£42.00
6	Photography	£25.00 per hour	£50.00	£8.75
6	Reconstruction of vessels	Not included in costing		£0.00
7	Organic chemical analysis	Not included in costing		£0.00
8	C14 dating of soot/burnt food	Not included in costing		£0.00
9	Thin section analysis	£25.00 per section	£225.00	£39.38
10	Chemical analysis (ICP-AES carried out at Royal Holloway College, London)	£25.00 per sample	£225.00	£39.38
11	Production of Report	£25.00 per hour	£400.00	£70.00

12	Adding stamps to the Anglo-Saxon Pottery stamp corpus and commissioning report	£200.00 fee	£200.00	£35.00
13	Packaging of material for return to Newcastle	£25.00 per hour	£100.00	£17.50
14	Courier	Not included in costings		£0.00
	Total		£1,980.00	£346.50

### 3. Archive Requirements

#### 3.1. Storage and curation

##### 3.1.i. storage requirements

The pottery is at present wrapped in tissue paper but present in plastic bags, with the potential for damage during transport. It would be better for the sherds to be packed in plastic Stewart boxes, within their plastic bags, with bubble wrap or similar material used to separate the bags. Given the lack of pottery of this period locally, those vessels which could be reconstructed and displayed should be restored after an assessment by a professional conservator.

##### 3.1.ii. Retention and discard policy

It is recommended that all of this collection is kept for future study.

#### Bibliography

HBMC (1991) Management of Archaeological Reports. English Heritage

Hope-Taylor, B (1977) Yeaving. An Anglo-British centre of early Northumbria.

Myres, J N L (1969) Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England. Oxford, Oxford University Press

Vince, A G (1990) Saxon London: an archaeological investigation. B A Seaby



*Appendix 1*

DN	context group	Context	REFNO	Action	cname	Form	.Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use
1	SFB 1	015	42	DR	ESAX	JAR	SHL= 015 40	R	1	1	18	18.00		SOOTED EXT
1	SFB 1	015	40	DR	ESAX	JAR	SHL= 015 42	BS	1	0	17	17.00		
2	SFB 1	015	39	DR	ESAX	BOWL		R	1	1	26	26.00		
0	SFB 1	015	37		ESAX	JAR		BS	1	1	9	9.00		
0	SFB 1	015	38		ESAX	BOWL		BS	1	1	25	25.00		
0	SFB 1	015	41		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	1	1.00		
0	SFB 2	017	9		ESAX	JAR/BOWL	CLAY ADDED INT/EXT	BS	1	1	7	7.00	FRESH BREAK	
0	SFB 2	017	48		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	6	6.00		
0	SFB 2	017	49		ESAX	JAR	SHL=017 50 =017 51	BS	1	1	4	4.00	FRESH BREAK	SOOTED EXT
0	SFB 2	017	50		ESAX	JAR	SHL=017 49 =017 51	BS	1	0	6	6.00	FRESH BREAK	
0	SFB 2	017	51		ESAX	JAR	SHL=017 49	BS	1	0	4		FRESH	

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DN	context group	Context	REFNO	Action	cname	Form	.Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use
							=017 50					4.00	BREAK	
0	SFB 3	019	58		ESAX	LARGE JAR		BS	1	1	38	38.00		
0	SFB 3	019	59		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	11	11.00		
0		051	175		ESAX	JAR		BS	1	1	6	6.00	LOST EXT SURFACE	BLACK DEP INT
0	Post-Built Building 1	POST BUILT BLDG 1	104		ESAX	JAR		BS	1	1	3	3.00	LOST EXT SURFACE	BLACK DEP INT
0	SFB 4	063	10		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	13	13.00	LOST SURFACE INT	
3	SFB 4	063	47	DR;TS;ICPS	ESAX	JAR	ROUNDED, BEADED RIM TO SHOULDER	R	1	1	22	22.00		SOOTED EXT; BLACK DEP INT
4	SFB 4	063	52	DR	ESAX	JAR	ROUNDED RIM	R	1	1	3	3.00		
0	SFB 4	063	84		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	16	16.00		SOOTED EXT
5	SFB 4	063	60	DR	ESAX	JAR		R	1	1	6	6.00		

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DN	context group	Context	REFNO	Action	cname	Form	.Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use
0	SFB 4	063	61		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	1	1.00		
7	SFB 4	063	88	DR	ESAX	JAR		R	1	0	8	8.00		
6	SFB 4	063	91	DR	ESAX	BOWL		R	1	1	7	7.00		
0	SFB 4	063	90		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	6	6.00		
0	SFB 5	167	89		ESAX	JAR		BS	1	1	9	9.00		SOOTED EXT
0	SFB 5	167	120		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	30	30.00	LOST A SURFACE	
0	SFB 5	167	126		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	12	12.00	FRESH BREAKS	
8	SFB 6	281	135	DR	ESAX	JAR/BOWL	HOT CROSS BUN STAMP; 2 HORIZ GROOVES	BS	1	1	5	5.00		
0	SFB 6	281	140		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	3	3.00		
0	SFB 6	281	141		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	3	3.00		

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DN	context group	Context	REFNO	Action	cname	Form	.Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use
0	SFB 6	281	143		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	5	5.00		
9	SFB 6	281	149	DR	ESAX	JAR/BOWL	HOT CROSS BUN STAMP; 1 HORIZ GROOVE	BS	1	1	8	8.00	FRESH BREAK	
0	SFB 6	281	151		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	6	6.00	FRESH BREAK	
0	SFB 6	281	133		ESAX	BOWL	SHL=281 134	BS	1	1	25	25.00	FRESH BREAK	
0	SFB 6	281	136		ESAX	JAR/BOWL	SHL=281 139	BS	1	1	4	4.00	FRESH BREAK	
10	SFB 6	281	137	DR	ESAX	JAR/BOWL	HOT CROSS BUN STAMP; 1 HORIZ GROOVE	BS	1	1	7	7.00	FRESH BREAK	
0	SFB 6	281	134		ESAX	BOWL	SHL=281 133	BS	1	1	5	5.00	FRESH BREAK	
0	SFB 6	281	138		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	7	7.00		
0	SFB 6	281	139		ESAX	JAR/BOWL	SHL=281 136	BS	1	1	2	2.00	FRESH BREAK	
0	SFB 6	281	150		ESAX	JAR/BOWL		BS	1	1	5		FRESH	

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DN	context group	Context	REFNO	Action	cname	Form	.Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use
												5.00	BREAK	
11	SFB 3	1021	152/A	DR	ESAX	BOWL		R;BS	3	1	56	18.67	FRESH BREAKS	SOOTED EXT
12	SFB 3	1021	152/B	DR;TS;ICPS	ESAX	BOWL	CLAY ADDED INT/EXT	PROF	18	1	323	17.94	SOIL RETAINED WITHIN LARGE FRAG	SOOTED EXT
0	SFB 3	1021	152/C		ESAX	BOWL		BS	1	1	10	10.00	LOST EXT SURFACE	
0	SFB 5	167	77/1		ESAX	BOWL		BS	1	1	3	3.00		