

Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Pottery at Huckhoe, Northumberland

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Excavations at Huckhoe, Northumberland, were carried out by George Jobey and published by him in *Archaeological Aeliana* in 1959 (Jobey 1959). The site consisted of an oval enclosure, initially of timber but replaced by earth, within which were a series of houses and yards. Finds indicate occupation in the Roman period, apparently continuing into the late 4th century (Gillam 1959) with the possibility that the handmade "Native" wares include pre-conquest examples.

Three sherds of a light-bodied wheelthrown ware were examined by Charles Thomas and identified by him as being probably of post-Roman date. A further sherd was examined by Gerald Dunning and identified as being an inturned rim bowl, dated by Dunning to the 13th century.

Re-examination of the collection in 2007 by the author found that the collection, now in the Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, appears to be complete and the three "Brittonic" sherds can be identified. They each have ground edges which Thomas's report makes clear were where pH analyses were carried out. The inturned rim bowl is also readily identifiable.

In addition, two other groups are thought possibly to be of post-Roman date: a jar rim and a group of 11 sherds, probably from one vessel, which are likely to be from the base of a medieval jar.

The Pottery

Roman and Coarse Pottery

The Roman pottery was not examined but is published by Gillam. It includes both Samian ware and late 4th century types, indicating a long period of occupation.

The coarseware all has a similar appearance and has a coarse silt/fine sandy texture with sparse angular fragments of igneous rock, mostly fine-grained and dark in colour. The ware is therefore very similar to the Erratic Tempered ware found in East Yorkshire and the Vale of Pickering (). The vessels are, however, considerably thicker and cruder than those found in definite Iron Age contexts in Yorkshire and are more similar to the "native" wares from Piercebridge, some of which are clearly of mid Roman date. Most of the sherds come from vessels which were oxidized, sometimes with a darker brown or grey core. The vessels were coil-built and the luting between the coils is extremely poor in quality, so that many sherds have broken along the original coil boundaries. . This difference in vessel size and

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technology certainly suggests that these vessels are different from the Yorkshire Iron Age to early Roman vessels but whether they are contemporary but differ in cultural affinities or are later is not clear.

None of the sherds had a similar appearance to the 6th-century handmade vessel from Binchester, which is clearly made in an Iron Age tradition more akin to that of East Yorkshire.

Possible Imported Vessel

The three sherds published by Thomas as possible 5th to 7th-century imports probably all come from the same vessel. The vessel is wheelthrown with a very smooth external surface, probably as a result of turning. The sherds probably come from the lower part of the vessel, which is conical and has a diameter in the order of 100mm. These features suggest a date in the earlier part of the Roman period. Thomas reported that at least one sherd had what might be traces of a black slip, which would also be consistent with a Roman date, although to this author this appears more likely to be sooting, which has taken place after the spalling of the vessel surface, but before the sherd's broken edges were created.

Arguing against a Roman date, however, are two points: firstly, that John Gillam examined and published the other Roman pottery from the site and would presumably have rejected these sherds as Roman. Secondly, that Thomas was able to point to comparative samples from northern Ireland and from Dunadd.

The fabric is pink (5YR 7/4) and contains few inclusions over 0.1mm across apart from moderate rounded yellowish red (5YR 4/6) clay pellets, finer in texture than the groundmass. The groundmass contains abundant quartz and muscovite silt.

Similar fine off-white micaceous clays occur (but are not common) in the Coal Measures; the Middle Jurassic in North Yorkshire and the East Midlands and in the Tertiary in south-east England and northern and western France and it is likely that ICPS analysis would narrow down the potential source area (although, depending on what area is indicated, it might still not determine the date of the vessel).



Figure 1 Fabric of possible Dark Age imported sherd (scraped by C Thomas for pH analysis).



Figure 2 External surfaces of possible Dark Age imported sherds



Figure 3 Internal Surfaces of possible Dark Age imported sherds

Possible Early to Mid Anglo-Saxon Vessel

A single sherd of possible early to mid Anglo-Saxon date was identified (marked H/3/115, Figs 4-6). The sherd is the rim of a jar with a short almost vertical neck, rounded rim, broken off at the neck. Similar rims occur on both Iron Age necked and shouldered jars (e.g. Rigby) and Anglo-Saxon jars but the sherd is clearly from a very different type of vessel than the "Native" vessels from the site.

The fabric is dark brown to black with dark brown surfaces. Moderate angular fragments of feldspar and biotite are visible, indicating that the temper consists, at least in part, of biotite granite.

Similar fabrics were used in the pre-Roman Iron Age throughout Yorkshire and north-east England. The granitic inclusions are probably derived from fluvio-glacial gravel rather than being crushed or fire-cracked pebbles, as appears to have been the case in the pre-Roman Iron Age.

The sherd is, however, too small for both thin section and chemical analysis and in any case it is unlikely that fabric characterisation would allow us to decide on the date of this vessel.



Figure 4 Profile view



Figure 5 External view



Figure 6 Internal view

Medieval Bowl

A single sherd was identified by Jobey as medieval and was reported on by Dunning, who identified the form as an inturned-rim bowl. Such vessels are uncommon in northern England but Dunning's interpretation seems likely, given the curvature of the vessel and the probable orientation of the sherd (Figs 7-9). The vessel appears to have been wheelthrown, although from a rim sherd alone it is impossible to be certain.

Dunning summarises the history of this form and little has changed in the succeeding 50 years to change our views of this form. It appears during the 10th century (at Lincoln its appearance defines the start of the mid 10th century horizon, Young and Vince 2006) and is a minor part of assemblages throughout the later 10th and 11th centuries. It was made in several industries of Saxo-Norman wheelthrown type (such as Lincoln kiln type ware; Torksey ware; Stamford ware) and there is little evidence for its continued production into the later 11th or 12th centuries in the East Midlands. No examples are known to the author in post-conquest wares in northern England.

The fabric, however, points to a post-conquest and local origin. Inclusions of medium-grained sandstone and millet grain quartz with matt surfaces were noted. These suggest an origin somewhere on the east coast from Newcastle southwards (since the Permian Yellow Sand deposits which are the source of the millet grain quartz do not outcrop north of Newcastle). No similar examples were present at Saddler Street, Durham, nor is this a form found at the Castle in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (J Vaughan, pers comm). No examples were published from the post-conquest settlement of Thristlington (Addis 1989) nor is it present at Eshott, a mid to late 12th-century production site situated about 15 miles northeast of Huckhoe (2001).

This bowl, therefore raises some interesting problems. Either it is of pre-conquest date, in which case it is probably evidence for local pottery production in the Saxo-Norman wheelthrown tradition, or the form has been mis-identified although as Figs 7 and 9 make clear the orientation of sherd is quite clear. A third possibility, that it is a Saxo-Norman import from the East Midlands/East Anglia, is unlikely considering the fabric.



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

Possible Medieval Jar

Eleven sherds of what is probably a single vessel were identified by the author as being most likely to be a handmade sagging-based jar of medieval date. The sherds consist of one in an envelope marked H/3/104 and ten in an envelope marked H44.

The sherds come from a relatively thin-walled vessel (c.4.0mm thick) with an oxidized dark brown fabric. A single base angle sherd is present and from that it appears that the vessel had a globular body and sagging base. There is sooting on the exterior surfaces. At x20 magnification abundant subangular quartz grains are visible. They are well-sorted, c.0.5mm to 1.0mm across. The groundmass is free from visible inclusions.

The quartz sand includes no rounded grains of Permo-Triassic origin and both the clay and sand can be matched with Coal Measures mudstones and sandstones.

Handmade, globular-bodied, sagging-based jars, often with everted rims, are a distinct potting tradition in the 11th century and later and occur in northern England first at Beverley possibly in the pre-conquest 11th century (Reduced Chalky Ware) and at Durham, probably

immediately post-conquest (Durham ware, Carver 1979; forthcoming). However, the Huckhoe fabric appears to contain more sand than the Durham ware, although this could be tested by further analysis.

Discussion

The site at Huckhoe was clearly occupied in the Roman period, apparently into the late 4th century. However, the quantity of later finds is so low that it is difficult to interpret them.

If, as seems likely, the use of pottery declined drastically in the 5th century and did not start to revive until after the Norman conquest then the Huckhoe site might well have been in continuous occupation. Alternatively, the site could have been abandoned in the late 4th or early 5th centuries and the few post-Roman finds could be the result of casual use of the site. Probably, the only method of determining which of these options is more likely would be further excavation of the site, with a view to collecting materials which could be dated by C14 determinations and which could be related to the structural history of the site. However, the fact that the two latest vessels are both of types which could have been in use in the early post-conquest period but not much later might suggest that this site was finally abandoned in the late 11th century, at about the time when nucleated village sites such as West Whelpington and Thristlington were founded.

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