

Church Way, Doncaster: Anglo-Saxon Pottery

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Two early to mid Anglo-Saxon vessels were recognised in the Church Way pottery. Both were examined in thin section and through chemical analysis and this confirms that they are of fabrics known elsewhere in the East Midlands and Yorkshire in the later 5th to 7th centuries.

A handful of other vessels dating to this period have been identified in Doncaster of which the most significant is a sherd from a stamped urn of 6th-century type published by Hayfield and Buckland (Buckland and Hayfield 1989, 00). Thin section and chemical analysis of this sherd indicate that it contains rock and mineral inclusions which do not occur in South Yorkshire and that the nearest conceivable source would be the area immediately south of the chalk scarp in the Humber Gap but, since this fabric is not common in the 6th-century at Sancton the most likely source is in the Lincolnshire Wolds, immediately to the west or south of the chalk scarp. Similar fabrics have been noted at St Peter's church, Barton upon Humber (REF) amongst early to mid Anglo-Saxon pottery associated with pre-church activity.

These two sherds, therefore, provide further evidence that the Fort at Doncaster was occupied in the later 5th to 7th centuries. Whether this re-occupation consisted of a short-lived settlement within an abandoned Roman structure or whether the fort passed into Anglo-Saxon hands as a functioning military structure is debatable, but the presence of the stamped sherd suggests that if it was the latter then the fort continued to be occupied for over a century after the collapse of Roman authority.

In Lincolnshire, from the late 7th century onwards, a distinctive handmade shell-tempered ware was in use, Northern Maxey ware. Examples of this ware have been found in Yorkshire, at Fishergate on the outskirts of York for example (Mainman 1993) and thin section and chemical analysis have demonstrated that these York finds are of Lincolnshire origin (Vince and Steane 2005). No similar finds have been made anywhere in South Yorkshire and no pottery of this date, neither of Northern Maxey ware nor of any other type, was present at Church Way.

Similarly, there is a small amount of pottery of later 9th to 10th-century date from sites in South Yorkshire (Sprotbrough and Doncaster) and this suggests that the fort was occupied during this period. However, the number of sherds involved is very low (two wheelthrown shell-tempered jars, both of types found in Lincoln but not thought to be made there). This either implies that the fort inhabitants were not using pottery or that only a casual use was being made of it. No examples of any ware datable to this period were present at Church Way unless three sand-tempered sherds, which are more likely to be Trent valley products of the Roman period, are actually of later 9th or 10th century date. Thin section and chemical

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analysis suggest that the pots are from the Trent valley but not from Torksey, which is consistent with a Roman date (Vince 2007).

The first post-Roman period to be substantially represented at Church Way is the late 10th to mid 11th centuries. A number of sherds of Torksey-type ware were present at Church Way and their condition suggests that the occupation which gave rise to them was located nearby, presumably within the walls of the fort.

Torksey ware was produced at Torksey, on the east bank of the Trent, where several kilns were excavated by Prof M Barley (Barley Torksey). Further kilns have been found in more recent times and the area was clearly one of the major suppliers of pottery to the East Midlands and south and east Yorkshire.

The pottery was probably distributed in the main by river. Despite the presence of late 9th and early 10th-century kiln waste in Torksey, for example, the ware is rare in Lincoln until the later 10th century and this, presumably, is a consequence of the cutting or re-cutting of the Foss Dyke (Young and Vince 2005).

Twenty seven sherds of Torksey ware were present in the Church Way collection, representing no more than 24 vessels and with an average weight of 11gm. Given the small size of the assemblage and of the sherds it is not surprising that most of the sherds are featureless body sherds or bases. Although there are four rims none is of a closely dateable form. The majority of the sherds have a "sandwich" firing, which is lacking on much of the earliest Torksey-type ware and it is most likely that the material is mainly of later 10th to mid 11th century date. In Lincoln, it seems that the industry collapsed soon after the Norman Conquest and therefore the Church Way finds ought to be of pre-conquest date. Three examples were analysed and one of these matches samples from Kiln 2 at Torksey and if so this would date to the late 9th to early 10th centuries. The other two samples were more similar in chemical composition to Torksey ware than to any other comparanda but did not match any of the excavated kilns closely (Vince 2007).

- DR Jar rim from context 118. Sample No. V4184.
- Jar from context 437. Possibly from Kiln 2 at Torksey. Sample No. V4193.
- Jar base from context 299. The sagging base is very thin, apparently a feature of some Torksey ware (pers comm Jane Young). Sample No. V4191.

Two wares of probable immediately post-Conquest date were present at Church Way. These consist of Early Medieval Handmade Ware (Young and Vince 2005, EMHM, 00) and Grimston Thetford-type ware (Young & Vince 2005, THETG, 00).

The early medieval handmade ware typically has a similar quartz sand to that found in Torksey ware and even at x20 magnification it can be difficult to distinguish the two. However a series of samples of EMHM from Church Way were thin-sectioned and analysed using ICPS. The results indicate that the ware was probably not produced in the Trent valley but in

east Anglia, where round-bottomed jars typical of EMHM have been found, for example on the production site at Woodbastwick (Vince doncaster). Sixty-seven sherds of EMHM were recovered from Church Way and these represent no more than 34 vessels, with an average sherd weight of 6gm. However, these figures are skewed in part by the present of a smashed jar in context 503 comprising 30 sherds. If East Anglia is indeed the source of these vessels, then they were probably distributed around the coast (which is indeed the pattern found in Lincolnshire, where they are much more common on the coast than elsewhere, pers comm Jane Young).

- Jar from context 503. Sample No. V4195.
- Jar from context 361. Sample No. V4181.
- Jar from context 302. Sample No. V4175.
- Jar from context 416. Sample No. V4177.

There are 12 sherds of Grimston Thetford-type ware from Church Way. These come from no more than 11 vessels and have an average sherd weight of 51gm. This high weight reflects the fact that most of the sherds seem to come from large storage jars with applied, thumbed strips around the neck and down the body. These are typical of Grimston Thetford-type ware (Jennings and Rogerson 1994) and a source in Northwest Norfolk is therefore fairly certain. Thin-section analysis of four samples from Church Way reveals a suite of mineral inclusions which is consistent with a Lower Cretaceous origin, with a high rounded clay/iron grain component. There is therefore little doubt that these are Norfolk products. However, ICPS analysis revealed that the Church Way samples are slightly different from two from Pott Row, Grimston and to one from Barton-upon-Humber, but match one from Selby (Vince 2007). These differences may indicate that several centres in northwest Norfolk were producing Grimston Thetford-type ware or that chemical differences exist in the clays used at the Pott Row site.

- DR Storage jar (sherds from contexts 108 and 502). Sample number V4183
- DR Storage jar from context 110. Strap handle applied at rim with thumbing on the rim top. Sample V4176.
- DR Storage jar with strap handle joined at rim. Sample V4178.
- DR Jar from context 401. Sample V4182.

Conclusions

A small quantity of pottery from Church Way dates between the end of the Roman period and the mid 12th century, when the market square and associated streets were laid out. Until the later 10th century, or later, this pottery is very scarce and may not reflect activity nearby. However, from then on the evidence suggests activity close by. None of this pottery was local

and this implies that there was little, if any, locally-made pottery in South Yorkshire. All of the types found are likely to have arrived by boat. This suggests that from the late 11th century Doncaster had an active port with contact with east coast ports such as Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn. In addition, the Torksey wares, which are the only relatively common ware from Church Way which is certainly pre-conquest, might have arrived as the result of river trade, down the Trent and up the Don, but it is more likely that they were carried overland from the Littleborough ferry crossing, which is immediately north of Torksey.

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