

The Anglo-Saxon Pottery from Lanton Quarry (LAN 06)

Alan Vince and Kate Steane

The excavations at Lanton Quarry, Northumberland, carried out by Archaeological Research Services Ltd, revealed an Anglo-Saxon settlement consisting of ground-level post-built structures, sunken-featured buildings, and other features. A small quantity of pottery was associated with this settlement (63 sherds, representing no more than 40 vessels and weighing in total 791 gm) and all of this material could be paralleled in the Anglo-Saxon period in Yorkshire or eastern England south of the Humber.

This pottery is remarkable for two main reasons. Firstly, pottery of this period is mainly extremely rare in the north-east of England and southeast Scotland and, secondly, where it has been found, as at Arbeia fort (Tipper forthcoming) or Ratho, just to the south of Edinburgh (Smith 1995) it is found as single sherds, implying that pottery was not in everyday use and that these vessels are unusual imports from further south. Thin section and chemical analysis of the Arbeia and Ratho sherds is consistent with their being made in the Vale of York (although it does not discount a local source). The only exception to this rule has been Yeavinger, the site of a late 6th to 7th-century royal palace (Hope-Taylor 1977). At Yeavinger, however, pottery of Anglo-Saxon character is rare and most of the finds consist of rock-tempered vessels whose shape and method of manufacture suggest that they were made in a continuation of the pre-Roman Iron Age pottery tradition of northern England, although their dating to the late 6th and 7th centuries seems absolutely secure. This difference in ceramics between Lanton Quarry and Yeavinger is all the more remarkable considering that the Lanton Quarry settlement seems to have been occupied whilst Yeavinger was occupied (although the latter site was probably longer-lived, starting earlier and continuing later) and that it is possible to see one site from the other.

Archaeological Context

Most of the pottery comes from the fills of sunken-featured buildings, with similar quantities coming from each fill (Table 1). In addition, one sherd comes from post-built building 1 (no context number, SF <104>) and one from a pit (context 051, <175>).

Table 1

context group	Contexts	Sherds	Vessels	Weight (gm)
Pit 51	(051)	1	1	6
Post-Built Building 1	None	1	1	3
Sunken Featured building 1	(015)	6	5	96
Sunken Featured building 2	(017)	5	3	27
Sunken Featured building 3	(019), (1021)	24	5	438
Sunken Featured building 4	(063)	9	8	82
Sunken Featured building 5	(167)	4	4	54

The Alan Vince Archaeology Consultancy, 25 West Parade, Lincoln, LN1 1NW
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Sunken Featured building 6	(281)	13	13	85
Grand Total		63	40	791

Fabric

The pottery in the main is soft fired and has therefore not been heavily cleaned. However, from fresh breaks and from two thin sections and chemical analyses, it is clear that most has a very similar fabric to that of one of the two loomweight fabrics, with moderate angular sand up to 0.2mm across and a few larger angular rock fragments. Thin section analysis of two samples, however, indicates that they come from different sources. One fabric contains sparse altered volcanic rock fragments, consistent with a local origin (Fig 2), whilst the other is black throughout, with some obvious organic inclusions, and sparse to moderate angular rock fragments (Fig 1). The rock fragments in that thin section were shown to be coarse-grained quartz sandstone with overgrown grains. This fabric is typical of the pottery used and produced in the Vale of York, from the 5th to the 9th centuries and of the samples from Ratho and Arbeia. Thus, at least two quite different fabrics are present but without destructive analysis it is not possible to assign the sherds to either fabric group, nor to tell whether there are further fabrics present.

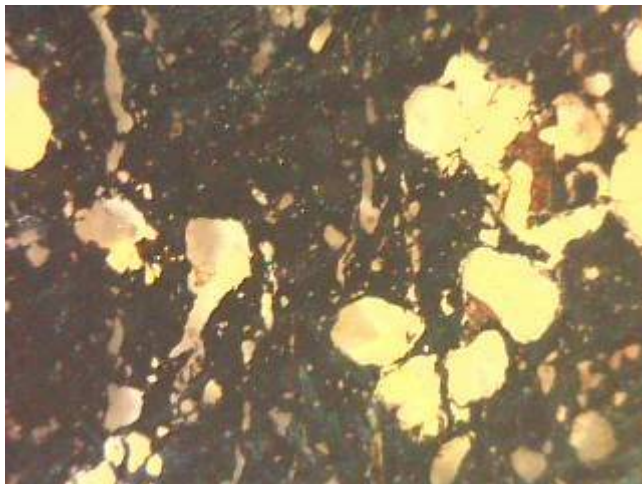


Figure 1 SBF4, (063) <10>

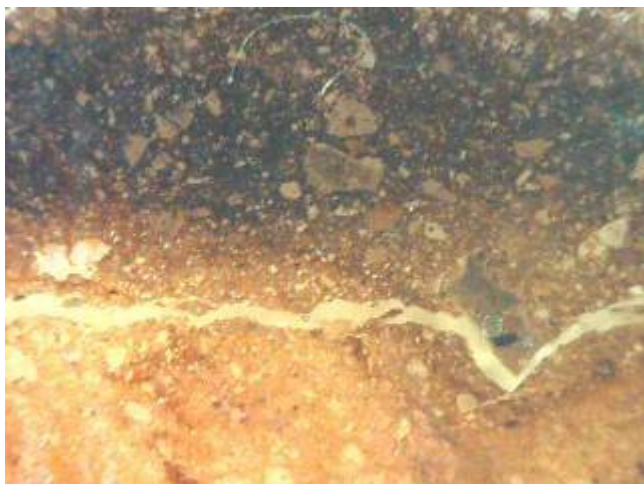


Figure 2 SFB3 (1021) <152B>

What can be said, with certainty, is that none of the sherds have the coarse rock-tempered fabric of the “Brittonic” sherds from Yeavinger, nor are there any with purely organic temper, a fabric apparently present at Yeavinger although those sherds cannot be identified in the surviving archive.

Form

Most of the sherds are too undiagnostic to be assigned to a specific form and could be from either jars or bowls (Table 2). However, at least nine different vessels were bowls, crude vessels with a hemispherical base, straight vertical walls and a rounded rim (Figs 3, 4, 5 and 6). These vessels vary considerably in size but probably all were used in food preparation. For example both the largest and smallest examples have external sooting (Figs 4 and 5). A similar number of vessels definitely had a rim and neck narrower than the girth and are classed as jars (Figs 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11). Two of these vessels have external sooting, and as with the bowls the examples span the range of sizes found (Figs 7 and 8). One example (not illustrated) comes from a vessel which is appreciably bigger than the remainder and is classed as a large jar. Examples from other sites appear to have been used for storage. A single decorated vessel, a jar was present, represented by two stamped sherds and one with horizontal grooves (Fig 11). The stamp, a cross on a circular stamp, is one of the commonest types and therefore impossible to match with others in the Archive of Anglo-Saxon Pottery Stamps maintained by D Briscoe. There is no sign of the use of this vessel, which may have been used for display and/or storage.

Table 2

Form	Sherds	Vessels	Weight (gm)
BOWL	28	9	480
JAR	13	9	115
JAR/BOWL	21	21	158
LARGE JAR	1	1	38
Grand Total	63	40	791



Figure 3 dn2

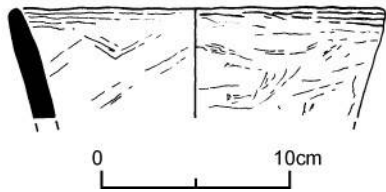


Figure 4 dn11

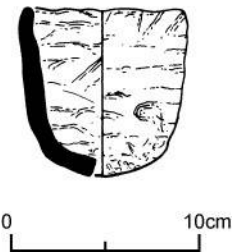


Figure 5 dn12

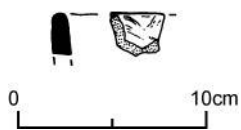


Figure 6 dn6



Figure 7 dn1

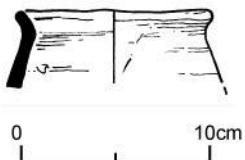


Figure 8 dn3 and 4

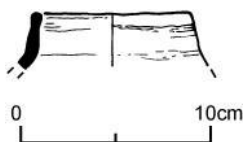


Figure 9 dn5

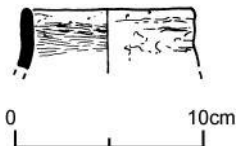


Figure 10 dn7

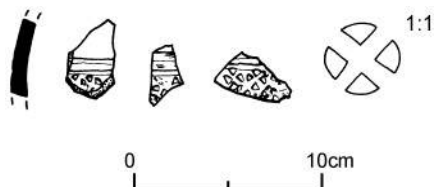


Figure 11 dn8, 9, and 10

Condition

Most of the sherds are in fresh condition, although encrusted with soil and, in some cases, soot. Despite an attempt to reconstruct vessels, few joining sherds were found, and those which did occur were between sherds in the same feature. Joining sherds were found in the fills of four different features (SFB1, SFB2, SFB4 and SFB6) but in only one case was the substantial part of the vessel present, indicating that some form of rubbish disposal was in operation, assuming that the vessels were used in the structures where they were found.

Table 3

vessel no	context group	REFNO	Total
1	Sunken Featured building 1	<40>	1
		<42>	1
		<49>	1
2	Sunken Featured building 2	<50>	1
		<51>	1
		<133>	1
		<134>	1
3	Sunken Featured building 6	<136>	1
		<139>	1
		<135>	1
4	Sunken Featured building 6	<137>	1
		<149>	1
		<47>	1
5	Sunken Featured building 4	<52>	1

Discussion

There is too little material present to make many inferences from the pottery but the following points can be made.

The two vessel types present are both found, together, in early Anglo-Saxon contexts further south, on both sides of the Humber. There is no evidence for a local "Brittonic" element in the pottery assemblage which therefore represents a foreign culture in north-eastern England. This unusual nature is also shown by the evidence for at least some local production. No such production can be demonstrated north of the Tees, although in no case is the evidence for non-local production cast iron, but is likely in several cases south of the Tees, where pottery is found in similar frequencies to that found at Lanton Quarry.

The bowl form seems not to have been subject to much chronological development from the 5th to the 7th centuries, and even later, since similar vessels have been found at Fishergate, York (Mainman 1993). The jar form too shows little development and the vertical neck with simple rounded rim seen on Figs 7, 9 and 10 is not only found in the 5th to 9th centuries but is also the basis for the Ipswich ware jars of the 8th centuries. However, the simple everted rim seen on Fig 8 is more common in 7th century contexts and later.

The stamped jar, Fig 11, probably consists of panels of stamping separated by incised lines. This tends to be a 6th-century feature although it extends into the early 7th century.

In summary, therefore, if the settlement had a short period of use then it was probably occupied in the early 7th century. However, on the evidence of this pottery it could have had a much longer period of occupation.

A further point worth making is that the Lanton Quarry sherds do not support the model for backfilling of Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured buildings promoted by Jess Tipper. Based on his work at West Stow in Suffolk and West Heslerton in the Vale of Pickering, North Yorkshire, Tipper suggests that most of the finds from sunken featured buildings were initially disposed of elsewhere, on an above-ground midden, and that only later, when these buildings were abandoned and their raised floors decayed or removed, were they backfilled. This hypothesis explains well how it can be that unweathered, joining fragments of the same vessel can occur in the fills of features which on other grounds appear to be different in date (Tipper 2004). That this model does not apply to the Lanton Quarry site is also suggested by the discovery of features interpreted as the clay supports for the uprights of a warp-weighted loom, with the loomweights present ranged between these supports, in SFB4.

Bibliography

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Tipper, J. (2004) The Grubenhous in Anglo-Saxon England: An analysis and interpretation of
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Yedingham

Appendix 1

context group	phase	drawing no	REFNO	TSNO	Form	subfabric	Action	Drawing ID	vessel no	Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use
Pit 51	ND	0	<175>		JAR						BS	1	1	6	6.00	LOST EXT SURFACE	BLACK DEP INT
Post-Built Building 1	ESAX	0	<104>		JAR						BS	1	1	3	3.00	LOST EXT SURFACE	BLACK DEP INT
Sunken Featured building 1	ESAX	1	<42>		JAR		DR	01	1		R	1	1	18	18.00		SOOTED EXT
Sunken Featured building 1	ESAX	1	<40>		JAR		DR	01	1		BS	1	0	17	17.00		
Sunken Featured building 1	ESAX	2	<39>		BOWL		DR	02			R	1	1	26	26.00		
Sunken Featured building 1	ESAX	0	<37>		JAR						BS	1	1	9	9.00		
Sunken Featured building 1	ESAX	0	<38>		BOWL						BS	1	1	25	25.00		
Sunken Featured building 1	ESAX	0	<41>		JAR/BOWL						BS	1	1	1	1.00		
Sunken Featured building 2	ESAX	0	<9>		JAR/BOWL					CLAY ADDED INT/EXT	BS	1	1	7	7.00	FRESH BREAK	
Sunken Featured building 2	ESAX	0	<48>		JAR/BOWL						BS	1	1	6	6.00		
Sunken Featured	ESAX	0	<49>		JAR				2		BS	1	1	4	4.00	FRESH BREAK	SOOTED EXT

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context group	phase	drawing no	REFNO	TSNO	Form	subfabric	Action	Drawing ID	vessel no	Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use
Sunken building 2	ESAX	0	<50>		JAR				2		BS	1	0	6	6.00	FRESH BREAK	
Sunken building 2	ESAX	0	<51>		JAR				2		BS	1	0	4	4.00	FRESH BREAK	
Sunken building 2	ESAX	0	<58>		LARGE JAR						BS	1	1	38	38.00		
Sunken building 3	ESAX	0	<59>		JAR/BOWL						BS	1	1	11	11.00		
Sunken building 3	ESAX	11	<152A>		BOWL	M ORG;M ROCK	DR	11			R;BS	3	1	56	18.67	FRESH BREAKS	SOOTED EXT
Sunken building 3	ESAX	12	<152B>	V5104	BOWL	INT CLAY: OXID WITH DECAYED ROCK;EXT CLAY BLACK M ROCK	DR;TS;ICPS	12		CLAY ADDED INT/EXT	PROF	18	1	323	17.94	SOIL RETAINED WITHIN LARGE FRAG	SOOTED EXT
Sunken building 3	ESAX	0	<152C>		BOWL	M ORG;M ROCK					BS	1	1	10	10.00	LOST EXT SURFACE	
Sunken building 4	ESAX	0	<10>		JAR/BOWL	BLACK;M ORG;M ROCK					BS	1	1	13	13.00	LOST SURFACE INT	
Sunken building 4	ESAX	3	<47>	V5103	JAR	BLACK;M ORG;M ROCK	DR;TS;ICPS	03	5	ROUNDED, BEADED RIM TO SHOULDER	R	1	1	22	22.00		SOOTED EXT; BLACK DEP INT

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context group	phase	drawing no	REFNO	TSNO	Form	subfabric	Action	Drawing ID	vessel no	Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use
Sunken Featured building 4	ESAX	4	<52>		JAR	BLACK;M ORG;M ROCK	DR	04	5	ROUNDED RIM	R	1	1	3	3.00		
Sunken Featured building 4	ESAX	0	<84>		JAR/BOWL	BLACK;M ORG; S ROCK?					BS	1	1	16	16.00		SOOTED EXT
Sunken Featured building 4	ESAX	5	<60>		JAR		DR	05			R	1	1	6	6.00		
Sunken Featured building 4	ESAX	0	<61>		JAR/BOWL						BS	1	1	1	1.00		
Sunken Featured building 4	ESAX	7	<88>		JAR		DR	07			R	1	0	8	8.00		
Sunken Featured building 4	ESAX	6	<91>		BOWL		DR	06			R	1	1	7	7.00		
Sunken Featured building 4	ESAX	0	<90>		JAR/BOWL						BS	1	1	6	6.00		
Sunken Featured building 5	ESAX	0	<89>		JAR						BS	1	1	9	9.00		SOOTED EXT
Sunken Featured building 5	ESAX	0	<120>		JAR/BOWL						BS	1	1	30	30.00	LOST A SURFACE	
Sunken Featured building 5	ESAX	0	<126>		JAR/BOWL						BS	1	1	12	12.00	FRESH BREAKS	
Sunken Featured building	ESAX	0	<771>		BOWL						BS	1	1	3	3.00		

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context group	phase	drawing no	REFNO	TSNO	Form	subfabric	Action	Drawing ID	vessel no	Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use
5																	
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	8	<135>		JAR/BOWL		DR; PHOTO	08	4	HOT CROSS BUN STAMP; 2 HORIZ GROOVES	BS	1	1	5	5.00		
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	0	<140>		JAR/BOWL						BS	1	1	3	3.00		
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	0	<141>		JAR/BOWL						BS	1	1	3	3.00		
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	0	<143>		JAR/BOWL						BS	1	1	5	5.00		
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	9	<149>		JAR/BOWL		DR; PHOTO	09	4	HOT CROSS BUN STAMP; 1 HORIZ GROOVE	BS	1	1	8	8.00	FRESH BREAK	
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	0	<151>		JAR/BOWL						BS	1	1	6	6.00	FRESH BREAK	
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	0	<133>		BOWL	BLACK;M ORG;M ROCK			3		BS	1	1	25	25.00	FRESH BREAK	
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	0	<136>		JAR/BOWL	BLACK;M ORG;M ROCK			3		BS	1	1	4	4.00	FRESH BREAK	
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	10	<137>		JAR/BOWL	BLACK;M ORG;M ROCK	DR; PHOTO	10	4	HOT CROSS BUN STAMP; 1 HORIZ GROOVE	BS	1	1	7	7.00	FRESH BREAK	
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	0	<134>		BOWL	BLACK;M ORG;M ROCK			3		BS	1	1	5	5.00	FRESH BREAK	
Sunken	ESAX	0	<138>		JAR/BOWL	BLACK;M					BS	1	1	7	7.00		

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context group	phase	drawing no	REFNO	TSNO	Form	subfabric	Action	Drawing ID	vessel no	Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use
Featured building 6						ORG;M ROCK											
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	0	<139>		JAR/BOWL	BLACK;M ORG;M ROCK			3		BS	1	1	2	2.00	FRESH BREAK	
Sunken Featured building 6	ESAX	0	<150>		JAR/BOWL	BLACK;M ORG;M ROCK					BS	1	1	5	5.00	FRESH BREAK	