

Anglo-Saxon Pottery in Yorkshire: A Review of Pottery Use in the 5th to 11th Centuries

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Introduction

The academic study and publication of pottery of 5th to 7th century date in Yorkshire extends back to at least the beginning of the 20th century (Smith 1912) whilst one of the first serious studies of 9th to 11th century pottery in the county is that of John Hurst, whose contribution to the study of Anglo-Saxon and later pottery in Yorkshire was vast, starting with his series of papers on Late Saxon pottery in East Anglia, which included Yorkshire sites in their gazetteers (Hurst 1955; Hurst 1956; Hurst 1957). These studies all emphasised the similarities of Yorkshire finds to those found south of the Humber but later finds suggested that the county might not have slavishly mirrored developments elsewhere and, for example, it was suggested by Hurst that at Whitby Abbey, wares were in use which had no precise parallels elsewhere of a similar date (unfortunately, no final statement was ever published on these finds, although the terms “Whitby ware” and “Fine Whitby ware” were introduced into the literature), together with “Otley ware”. The most accessible description of these wares is in Hurst’s chapter in David Wilson’s *The Anglo-Saxons*, (Hurst 1976).

Over the following years, mirroring the growth of the study from, essentially, a single expert to one with numerous practitioners, some using the same terminology, some using variants and some probably using the same terms but with different definition, the clarity of the mid 20th century picture has been obscured. At the same time, however, the quantity of material available to study has risen dramatically, mainly through excavations at the urban sites of York (1978; Mainman 1990; Mainman 1990) and Beverley (Watkins 1991; Didsbury and Watkins 1992) and the excavations at West Heslerton (where the pottery, excluding that from the cremation cemetery, is still in the process of publication).

The NASP survey

In 2000 I presented the results of a study of the fabrics of the early (to mid?) Anglo-Saxon pottery from West Heslerton (based on a microscopic study of the entire collection by Christine Haughton, a classification of these into fabric and subfabric groups by Jane Young and thin section and chemical analysis of a small sample of this material by myself). Several distinct fabrics were recognised, many of which could not have been produced in the immediate vicinity of the site. However, at that time there was absolutely no comparative material and therefore no means of putting the West Heslerton results into context. English Heritage was therefore approached to see if they would be willing to fund a survey of Anglo-Saxon pottery from Yorkshire. The outcome of this was that in 2002 a three year project was The Alan Vince Archaeology Consultancy, 25 West Parade, Lincoln, LN1 1NW
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started, to establish where collections of Anglo-Saxon pottery were to be found, and to undertake some thin section and chemical analysis. In 2006 a second phase of the project was approved, to publish the results of the 2002-5 project, preceded by a few additional analyses to complete the survey.

Results

The Late Roman/Early Anglo-Saxon Transition

Sites have been excavated at two localities where a stratigraphic relationship should exist between 4th-century Roman strata and subsequent Anglo-Saxon activity. These are York and West Heslerton. At York, there is no clear evidence for early Anglo-Saxon settlement within the walls of the Roman fortress or *colonia* and, by contrast, considerable evidence for activity in the surrounding countryside, with cremation cemeteries containing 5th century and later burials at Heworth and The Mount (Stead 1956), both located on major Roman approach roads, and a settlement at Heslington Hill, recently revealed through excavations by Field Archaeology Services (Spall 2008). The settlement was certainly occupied in the 6th century.

A small quantity of pottery from very late Roman levels in excavations in the fortress and *colonia* have been published by Monaghan (Monaghan 1997). This pottery is potentially "sub-Roman", dating to a period when York was still occupied by descendants of its 4th century garrison and citizens, perhaps with Anglo-Saxon settlement under "British" political control in the surrounding countryside. The excavations on the site of the *principia* of the Roman fort, revealed during works necessitated by the strengthening of the foundations of York Minster in the 1970s under the direction of Derek Phillips might well also support this model, in which the walled city continued to be occupied in the 5th and 6th centuries but with little use of pottery (or, apparently, datable metalwork). However, a detailed analysis of the stratigraphic evidence by Prof Carver suggested, plausibly, that the long life posited for the *principia* building was not supported by the evidence, which suggested that in fact the structure might have collapsed during the 5th century and that all later artefacts stratified below the destruction levels were suspect and likely to be intrusive (Carver 1995).

These various observations and excavation results support a model in which the Roman settlement at York continued to be occupied by Britons who used little or no pottery and who co-existed with Anglo-Saxons living outside the city limits, perhaps on land granted in return for military duty. Support for this traditional model also comes from a few military sites in Yorkshire and surrounding counties where substantial evidence for early Anglo-Saxon occupation has been found (for example, at Newton Kyme, near Tadcaster (Evans ***)).

The limited role which pottery might have played in the lives of these Britons can be seen from the fact that there is no pottery of 5th to 7th century date from any site in Elmet (in so far as we can define the boundaries of that British kingdom).

However, a re-working of the stratigraphic and ceramic evidence from perhaps the largest and least disturbed late Roman (and later) site so far excavated in York, at Wellington Row (Monaghan 1997, 1108-23) suggested to Mark Whyman that the occupation sequence extended well into the "sub-Roman" period. Whyman's conclusions were based partly on a re-consideration of the nature of some of the material considered by the excavators to be demolition rubble, suggesting that the main stone structure on the site, a temple built close to the southern end of the bridge across the Ouse, and partly on the fact that there are differences in the frequency of "late Roman" pottery types (Monaghan's Ceramic Period 4c) in these late deposits which are difficult to interpret if the pottery is simply all residual, redeposited material.

However, it is now clear, as it was not when Whyman did his research, that the ware which shows these differences in frequency, Calcite-Tempered Ware (Monaghan's Group K) was produced in the Vale of Pickering, using glauconitic clays from the Speeton Beds. These do not outcrop on the western scarp of the wolds, where the Upper Cretaceous chalk sits immediately on top of Jurassic deposits (Kent 1980). Therefore, if Calcite-tempered ware was being used in York in the later 5th or 6th centuries then it was being produced in a region where there is now clear evidence for a complete replacement of Roman by Anglo-Saxon culture in the mid 5th century. At West Heslerton, for example, there is evidence for the supplanting of a late Roman religious sanctuary by an Anglo-Saxon village, without any break in occupation (which would have undoubtedly have been marked by the accumulation of silt). Radiocarbon dates from this site, taken from articulated bone which can never have moved since deposition, confirm that this transformation/transition took place in the 5th century (Powlesland, pers comm).

Finally, we must consider the possibility of the existence, throughout the Roman period in Yorkshire, of a native tradition, continuing that found in the Pre-Roman Iron Age. To the north, at sites such as Faverdale East, near Darlington, there is clear evidence for the production of pottery in the Roman period (including distinctively Roman forms) but made by hand using clay tempered with large, angular rock fragments. A similar fabric was used in the 6th century at Binchester, where a jar, which would be unremarkable amongst a collection of pre-Roman Iron Age vessels, was found accompanying a female inhumation. However, no such vessels are known from sites just slightly further south, such as Catterick, nor from sites around York or in East Yorkshire or the Vale of Pickering. Further west and south, there is no evidence for the common use of pottery in the pre-Roman Iron Age and certainly no evidence for the use of such handmade wares in the Roman period, at sites such as Doncaster (Buckland and Magilton 1986) or Castleford (Rush et al. 2000). In Yorkshire, therefore, there does not appear to have been a surviving tradition of hand production of pottery in the Roman period.

The Early Anglo-Saxon Period

Domestic or burial sites dating between the mid 5th and the 7th centuries have been found throughout the Vale of York, the Vale of Pickering, the Yorkshire Wolds and the East Yorkshire claylands (Fig 1). It is difficult to date un-associated pottery of this period closely but, broadly speaking, vessels with bossed decoration could be of 5th or 6th-century date whilst stamped vessels could be of 6th or early 7th century date. Undecorated forms show no obvious typological progression within the period (and indeed in most cases it is impossible to distinguish body sherds of handmade vessels of this period from those of the succeeding two and a half centuries).

There is a strong similarity in fabric between vessels found throughout the northern and eastern parts of the county (ie. Excluding West Yorkshire, much of which formed the British kingdom of Elmet during this period, and South Yorkshire where pottery is very scarce and probably acquired from outside the area). Samples have been taken of vessels from domestic and funerary contexts throughout the "core" pottery using area. In some cases, the pottery was probably made using weathered clay or subsoil in which sand was naturally present. In others, it is possible that temper was prepared, by fire-cracking. Very few of these samples have been shown to have been made at any great distance from the findspot although, for example, it is very difficult to determine the amount of movement of pottery up and down the Vale of York, since the underlying Quaternary geology of the valley does not vary much from end to end. However, there is clear evidence that at West Heslerton the majority of the pottery was produced in the Vale of Pickering (entailing in some cases transport over distances of a few tens of miles but including several fabrics which could have been produced close to the site) whilst most of that sampled at Easington, near the North Sea coast on the Holderness peninsula, were very similar in composition to samples of the natural boulder clay from the site.

Two particularly telling assemblages come from Sancton, situated near the western scarp of the Wolds about 2.5 miles southeast of Market Weighton, and a group of sites close to Catterick.

The Sancton samples were selected to represent the main visual fabric groups seen in the pottery vessels from Sancton I, the cremation cemetery (Timby 1993). Sancton is the largest cremation cemetery known north of the Humber and many of the vessels present have close parallels with vessels from sites in Lincolnshire (some of these vessels were grouped together by Myres as the work of the "Sancton-Baston potter" Myres 1977, Figs 347-8). The 40 sampled vessels were thin-sectioned and samples taken for chemical analysis (using Inductively-Coupled Plasma Spectroscopy - ICPS). These studies suggest that most of the pottery used on the site (at least 30 out of 39 samples) was made from outcrops of Jurassic clay which occur in a triangular region, with one tip close to Market Weighton and the other

two on the Humber. In much of the lower-lying parts of this area the clay is obscured by Quaternary gravels and other deposits, together with deposits of wind-blown sand and the actual outcrop available to early Anglo-Saxon potters was probably much more limited.

Within this group of 30 samples, at least nine distinctive temper groups were recognised (a mixed limestone/sandstone sand; sandstone; coarse rounded quartzose sand; limestone (represented entirely by rounded voids); acid igneous rock; coarse sandstone of Millstone Grit type; organic temper; erratics and a sand including polished rounded quartz grains. There was no clear correlation of chemical composition with temper type and it seems likely that the pots were actually made from a single clay outcrop (i.e. even narrower than the potential area defined above) and that the choice of temper was a cultural matter rather than being forced by geological circumstances. In many cases, rare examples of inclusions which defined one of the groups visually were identified in sections of another group, which also suggests that the vessels could have been produced in a small area.

This result is consistent with others from the county but because of the distinctive nature of the clay used it is more precise. It also contrasts with the results from the analysis of samples from a settlement at Melton, also located close to the chalk scarp but on the south side of the Wolds, about 10 miles to the southeast of Sancton. There, admittedly from a much smaller collection, only one major fabric was identifiable and ICPS analysis of a sample of vessels from the site indicates that the vessels can be distinguished from the Sancton ones.

Two important points can be made from these studies. Firstly, the connection between Sancton and Lincolnshire did not involve the transport of pottery and must therefore have been due to a movement of potters. Secondly, the idea that these larger cremation cemeteries served a correspondingly larger area than the smaller ones finds no support from a study of the pottery fabrics. This also appears to be true of the York-area cemeteries at The Mount and Heworth. Detailed visual examination of vessels from these sites in the Yorkshire Museum Three main fabrics, two containing varying quantities of sandstone and quartz (and in one fabric muscovite) derived from that sandstone and the other containing large angular fragments of acid igneous rock account for almost all the pottery known from the cemeteries. All three fabrics could have been produced locally although without more detailed scientific analysis this cannot be proved.

A similar range of fabrics was found on sites at the northern end of the valley, at Catterick (Wilson 2002) Catterick Bridge (Wilson 2002) and Scorton Quarry (Evans forthcoming). All the sites were probably used during the 6th century and given the historical importance of Catterick one might expect, if anywhere, to find evidence for the development professional potting at Catterick or York. However, analysis of vessels from the three localities shows firstly, that within the limits imposed by the geological location, there is a wide variety of

fabrics used, some of which were probably made from silty clay collected from the sites of lakes which occupied much of the lower-lying ground in the valley, both during the glaciation (as the ice retreated, lakes developed immediately in front of the glaciers) and in the Holocene. Others were either obtained from outcrops of Carboniferous mudstones or, more likely, boulder clays in which the clay component was mainly derived from this source. Despite differences in inclusion types (mainly Carboniferous chert, biotite granite; and Millstone Grit either used solely or in combinations) and in groundmasses (weathered mudstone versus lacustrine silt), there are no clear-cut divisions visible in the chemical compositions. Instead, there is a difference in the composition of the Scorton Quarry and Catterick samples but no clear difference between the two Catterick sites. This suggests that Scorton Quarry, although situated adjacent to Catterick, may have exposed different clay sources, implying again that potting took place on a very small scale. It may be significant that despite their proximity, Catterick and Scorton are separated by the river Swale.

The later Anglian (aka Mid Saxon) Period

The 7th century in Yorkshire saw the introduction of Christianity and, at about the same time, coinage. However, on both counts it was not until the very end of the century that these two institutions were securely established. The first archbishop of York, Paulinus, for example, had to leave Northumbria following the death of King Edwin in 633 and spent the rest of his life in Rochester. It is during this century that Yorkshire once more enters history, but archaeological evidence actually declines in frequency and our ability to date it. Even where it is clear that a site was occupied in this period it is often difficult to tell whether any pottery found was in contemporary use or residual from previous centuries. This is a problem especially where the total quantity of evidence is low and potentially conflicting. A sunken-featured building at Wharram Percy, for example, produced large, joining fragments of pottery of early Anglo-Saxon character alongside a fragment of carved stone which is certainly not earlier than the late 7th century and sherds of Tating ware and imported grey/black burnished wares of similar date (Hurst 1984).

Other sites have similarly complex archaeology to unravel and the current state of knowledge suggests that some areas where pottery had been used extensively in the preceding two and a half centuries ceased to use pottery, except for rare, imported vessels. This appears to have been the case at Beverley, for example, where excavations at Lurk Lane to the south of the standing medieval Minster, found extensive traces of the 7th to 9th century monastery but only one pottery vessel – an Ipswich ware spouted pitcher produced on the East Anglian coast (Watkins 1991). That site, together with the complete lack of 8th or 9th century pottery from a substantial swathe of rural landscape at Melton, between the Wolds and the Humber, suggests that this part of Eastern Yorkshire was aceramic. Further north, however, there is plentiful pottery from the Anglian monastery at Whitby Abbey which includes no stamped or otherwise decorated sherds and is very probably of late 7th to mid 9th century date. A little bit

further north, just outside the county, was the monastery of Hartlepool (Daniels 1988). Extensive excavations there produced no pottery of this date whatsoever, despite finding and excavating levels associated with monastery.

West Heslerton was certainly occupied in this period, and produced a sizable collection of *stycas* indicating occupation up to the middle of the 9th century. Pottery was found in the same deposits as these coins, but it could not be established for certain that it was in contemporary use, although this is certainly the belief of the excavator.

Other sites are even less easy to interpret. Sprotbrough, in South Yorkshire just to the south of Doncaster, for example, produced two Anglo-Saxon coins of 8th century date (), but no pottery of this period (Vince and Steane 2007). However, only a small area of potentially late 7th to mid 9th century stratigraphy was excavated and it might be that the site was not occupied intensively until the 9th or 10th centuries.

By far the most important site of this period in Yorkshire is Fishergate. Two major excavations have taken place at Fishergate: Redfern's Glassworks, 46-54 Fishergate (Kemp 1996; Mainman 1993) and the Blue Bridge Lane/Fishergate House site (Spall and Toop 2004; Vince and Young 2004). Between them, they allow a coherent history of the settlement to be constructed, from its foundation in the late 7th or early 8th century and its incorporation into the extra-mural suburbs of York in the late 9th century.

The site was occupied by a cemetery in the Roman period and seems then to have been used for agriculture until the foundation of a large trading settlement (whose exact status within the Northumbrian kingdom is discussed by O'Connor, O'Connor 1991). The foundation seems to date from the late 7th or early 8th century, slightly later than equivalent sites south of the Humber (such as Ipswich, London and Southampton). The main period of activity on the site appears to have been in the 8th century but occupation continued into the 9th century and there is little evidence for a gap in occupation at the Blue Bridge Lane site from this late 7th to 9th century phase to the succeeding late 9th to 11th century phase, although the incidence of imported pottery shows a clear break before the mid 9th century, with very few definite late 9th to 11th century imports at all. The importance of the site for the present discussion is that there is not a sign of any earlier Anglo-Saxon activity and therefore all the handmade pottery of early Anglo-Saxon character from the site is undoubtedly of late 7th to mid 9th century date. Thin section and chemical compositional analyses of these wares indicated that there were several distinct groups present, although all contained sandstone and quartz inclusions derived from the Millstone Grit. In all likelihood, the pottery was made somewhere close to York, but whether the various subfabrics found (nine to date) represent different sources or are simply the result of variations in a single source of raw materials is not clear.

The imported vessels from Fishergate consist of Badorf ware from the Vorgebirge region between Bruhl and Bonn and grey/black burnished wares, which Mainman suggests come from a source or sources in eastern Belgium (Mainman 1993).

Imports from Lincolnshire (Northern Maxey-type ware) and East Anglia (Ipswich ware) complete the range of pottery types found. Northern Maxey ware has not been confirmed elsewhere north of the Humber (a sherd identified by Gareth Watkins at Lurk Lane has been re-identified as a medieval vessel) and Ipswich ware has a strange and limited distribution. It is present at Beverley (one vessel) and at Fishergate (several vessels) but is absent from Wharram Percy, West Heslerton and Whitby, the other large collections of this period. However, recently, a series of finds have been made in on sites in the East Yorkshire claylands, recognised by Peter Didsbury and confirmed by the author (albeit only visually). The situation in East Yorkshire is complicated by the loss of a substantial section of the coast to erosion, so that sites which are today on the coast would have been further inland in this period.

Outside of York, continental imports are very rare, and consist of a single vessel from Bolton Percy used as a container for a mid 9th century coin hoard (Hodges 1981), and a black/grey burnished ware vessel with tin-foil decoration from Wharram Percy (Hurst and Hodges 1976). The incidence of continental imports in this period is unusual in that they do not occur at all at Whitby Abbey, despite its coastal location and the later importance of Whitby as a fishing port.

The Anglo-Scandinavian (aka Late Saxon) Period

For the period from the late 9th century onwards we have a much clearer idea of the range of pottery used in Yorkshire, but this is based almost entirely on finds from York (by far the largest collection coming from Coppergate, Mainman 1990) and, to a much lesser extent, Beverley (Watkins 1991).

Handmade pottery was used in this period but only in small quantities (and only known from Coppergate). Thin section and chemical analysis of this type indicates that the samples certainly come from a single source and indicate a strong similarity between this fabric and the wheelthrown York D ware (Fig 1) rather than with Humberware wasters from Fishergate (made from local clay quarried on site) or with handmade early to mid Anglo-Saxon vessels from Fishergate or Heslington Hill. Taken alongside the typological evidence, which shows that the forms and rims of these vessels show little similarity with the earlier period, it seems that there is connection between this handmade ware and its early 9th century and earlier predecessors.

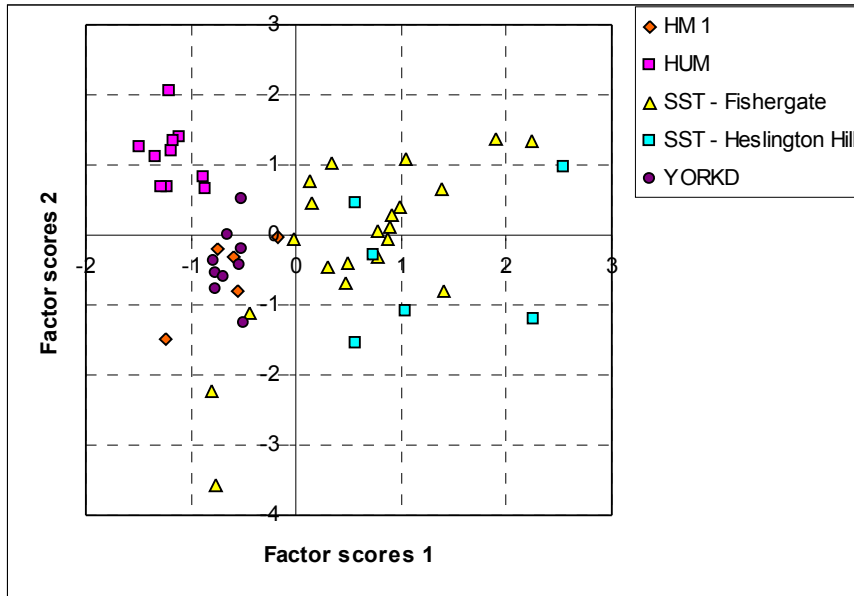


Figure 1

Perhaps the greatest surprise is that a source for the major ware supplying York has been found, and that this source is not, as supposed, somewhere in York or its suburbs but on the western fringes of the Vale of York, at Thorner. Thorner has previously been suggested as the source (or at least a source) for York Gritty ware (Jennings 1992, for which see below) but in 1998, excavations by West Yorkshire archaeological services uncovered a kiln and waste dated by the finders to the later medieval period (Cumberpatch and Roberts 1998-1999). Subsequent re-examination and sampling of the waste from this site established that it contained barium-rich inclusions, derived from veins cutting through the local Millstone Grit and these were sometimes present in thin section, and even when absent from thin section often lead to an elevated barium content. These features are matched in samples from York, Beverley and other sites, indicating that Thorner was a major supplier of pottery to late 9th century and later Yorkshire. Barium levels are elevated in several parts of the Vale of York as a result of erosion of these and similar veins but such high levels have not been noted by the author anywhere else in Yorkshire.

Le Patourel's comments on the source of York Gritty ware suggests that wasters found at Thorner in the 1960s might have been of that ware whilst the village lies immediately north of Potterton, whose name, recording in the Domesday Book, indicates pottery production there by the 1080s (Ekwall 1960, 372).

Other wares found at Coppergate are mostly either continental imports or produced south of the Humber in Lincolnshire (Lincoln shelly wares; Torksey ware and Stamford ware). Torksey ware is the most common of these and although examples of mid 10th century date are known from York, the ware is numerically unimportant until the late 10th century. From then until the middle of the 11th century it is the most common ware found in York. Chemical

analysis was carried out on samples of Torksey ware from well-dated deposits at Coppergate, and material from other consumer sites in Yorkshire (mainly Doncaster and Beverley). These analyses suggest that all of the Torksey ware sampled was produced in kilns at Torksey, on the Trent. This conclusion is at odds with that of a similar study carried out by students at Bradford University for Ailsa Mainman and Cathy Brooks (Brooks and Mainman 1984) but this discrepancy is probably due to the fact that Brooks and Mainman included medieval greywares which had no connection with Torksey ware in their study.

Lincoln shelly wares of early 10th to early 11th century date were common finds at Coppergate and in many cases they could be positively identified by eye (by Jane Young). Examples of earlier, late 9th century, examples, have not been noted, but this is quite likely to be due to the lack of late 9th century stratigraphy at Coppergate and elsewhere in York. Outside of York, the only finds of Lincoln shelly wares noted in Yorkshire are two examples from Melton (the only finds of 10th century date from the whole site) and a single example from Market Weighton (again, the only Anglo-Scandinavian vessel known from the town). Because of the scarcity of all pottery of this date from East Yorkshire, all three sherds were sampled for thin section and chemical composition analysis, confirming the visual identifications (Vince 2006b; Vince 2006a).

Although finds of Stamford ware are not unusual north of the Humber, almost all of these date to the mid 11th century or later. Definite pre-conquest sherds are rare, even in the huge Coppergate, collection. Most of these early finds are crucibles (and no analyses are available to the author). A large amount of analysis of Stamford ware, including finds from York, was undertaken by Dr K Kilmurry, but the raw data was not included in Kilmurry's thesis, nor published in her BAR monograph and is feared lost (Kilmurry 1980). Given that there is now evidence for a mid 12th century pottery industry known from Pontefract whose products are visually very similar indeed to those produced in Stamford, a good case can be made for a complete re-examination of the source of supply of "Stamford ware" from sites in Yorkshire.

The Anglo-Scandinavian/Norman Transition

That there was a sudden change in pottery supply to York in the mid 11th century is demonstrated by three independent strands of evidence. Firstly, the Coppergate excavation shows the appearance of York Gritty ware in Period 11 deposits, albeit alongside a high proportion of Anglo-Scandinavian types. The first introduction of the ware is therefore dated by its absence in what must be early to mid 11th century building levels and its appearance in mid-11th century or later dumps. It has been suggested that the need to raise the ground level was created by partial blocking of the River Foss, which is located at the far end of the Coppergate tenements. This pool, and its responsibility for the loss of income from two mills on the Foss, was recorded in the Domesday Book.

Secondly, excavations at York Minster identified the construction horizon associated with the Norman minster, constructed during the archbishopric of Thomas I (1070-1100, Phillips and Heywood 1995). Most of the pottery associated with that construction was of York Gritty ware, confirming that the replacement of Torksey ware and Stamford ware was complete by this time (Holdsworth 1995).

Thirdly, petrological analysis of York Gritty ware has established that it was produced from a white-firing, fine-textured Coal Measures clay. The closest outcrops of such a clay to York are on the western outskirts of Leeds, and Potterton, whose place-name suggests pottery production, is first recorded as a name in the Domesday Book in 1087.

In addition to this West Yorkshire white gritty ware, there is evidence for the use and local production of a gritty whiteware at Doncaster in South Yorkshire. There, however, the dating evidence is poor but it does seem that Doncaster Gritty ware is post-conquest. It has some typological features which are rare or absent in the West Yorkshire industry. These include the use of bands of diamond roller-stamping. Both thin section and chemical analyses can distinguish the West and South Yorkshire products, but in the hand they can look very similar.

It is possible that these new gritty wares were accompanied from their inception by glazed vessels but so far so well-dated "local" glazed wares have been recovered from 11th-century contexts and it is possible that they are a slightly later innovation, perhaps of the early 12th century.

Discussion

Although the broad sequence and dating of Anglo-Saxon pottery in Yorkshire is similar to that found south of the Humber and east of the Trent there are some differences which are worth emphasising. The county has to be considered in four separate blocks in the early Anglo-Saxon period. The main block, running from The Humber to the Tees and from the North Sea to the western side of the Vale of York, has a very similar ceramic sequence to that found, say, in Lincolnshire or East Anglia. Pottery was produced locally but in several cases exploiting different tempering materials. Whether these reflect the existence of different groups of potters or were culturally significant is unknown. Within this block, pottery was in common use and a settlement site is likely to produce sherds from many vessels. To the west, this area borders on the Pennines with little evidence for pottery use. To the southwest, there is historical evidence for the survival of a British kingdom into the early 7th century and the conquest of Elmet and incorporation of its population into Northumbria does not seem to have led to their adoption of pottery, so that there is virtually no archaeological evidence for the kingdom, either during its independent existence or later in the 7th century.

South of the river Sheaf, in Sheffield, and the Humber, was a fourth block, now forming South Yorkshire. It is assumed that this area fell into Anglo-Saxon control early on but very little pottery was used and, again, there is very little archaeological evidence against which to test these assumptions. A few sherds have been found in excavations in Doncaster but, unlike the situation in North and East Yorkshire, it seems that pottery was always scarce and produced outside of the region (in this case, probably in north Lincolnshire).

The first three of these divergent regions were conquered during the 7th century and became part of Northumbria. The fourth, however, was clearly part of Mercia by the time of the Battle of Hatfield Chase, and was different in its use of pottery from the other areas, being neither completely aceramic nor fully pottery-using. It should be remembered, however, that this is mostly an argument based on the absence of evidence and it would only take a couple of lucky excavations to transform our knowledge of these areas.

For the later 7th (possibly) and 8th and 9th centuries (certainly) the evidence suggests that pottery use was very varied. Areas, such as East Yorkshire, where pottery was being used, and made, in the earlier period, seem to have given up the use of pottery whilst sites such as Wharram Percy and Whitby Abbey appear to have had a flourishing use of pottery. In the case of Whitby, the situation is also complicated by the apparent lack of continental imports and the fact that the community was founded by Abbess Hilda, who had spent the previous twenty years in the abbey at Hartlepool, which was aceramic. At least, it seems that we can say that those responsible for food preparation at Whitby were not also immigrants from the north. Taking the archaeological evidence alone, we should probably conclude that external contacts between Northumbria and the outside world were centralised through York.

The mid 9th century conquest of Northumbria saw the foundation of the Kingdom of York and the extension of Northern influence south of the Humber. This is reflected in the pottery sequence by the presence of York A ware jars on a few sites in south Yorkshire.

By contrast with all known 9th to 11th century wheelthrown pottery industries elsewhere in the British Isles, York A ware was produced in a rural pottery, suggesting that York was perhaps better integrated with its surrounding hinterland than midland or southern towns were with theirs. A change in pottery supply took place in the mid 10th century with the sharp decline (if not cessation) of use of Yorkshire wares (York A and York D wares) and the corresponding rise in Lincolnshire products, first Torksey then, briefly, Stamford unglazed ware, before their replacement, probably immediately after the Norman Conquest, by York Gritty ware. No corresponding events took place, either in the 10th century or the 11th, south of the Humber and it does seem likely that both events are related to political changes. In the mid 10th century the last Viking king of York was defeated at the battle of Stainmore, after which Northumbria was permanently part of England (albeit with a large degree of autonomy under the Anglo-Danish aristocracy). In 1069-70 the north suffered a considerable blow, the harrying of the

north. Nothing similar took place in the south and the replacement of Anglo-Danish by Norman lords took place much earlier and with more economic effect than the mid 12th century emergence of an Anglo-Norman aristocracy in the south. It may well be that these new, late 11th-century Norman lords brought over Norman potters to work on their estates. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that there are close parallels for the form and fabric and decoration of York Gritty ware (and Doncaster Gritty ware) in Normandy (Normandy Gritty ware). The immigration of continental potters to England in the post-conquest period has been documented by John Cotter, based on his study of the production site at Pound Lane, Canterbury (). Cotter lists several convincing examples of similar movement but those which can be dated are 12th century, consistent with the increasing commercialisation of crafts following return of settled conditions after the Civil War. These Yorkshire examples appear to be both earlier and a rural phenomenon.

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