The medieval pottery from the East London gravels: thematic text(s)

Site code: R-126, UP-HH89, UP-MF83, UP-WW82

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The East London landscape: settlement and economy: medieval pottery contribution

Medieval sites (*c* 1050–1500)

The fabric codes used in this report are listed in Table 1, while the quantification of the pottery from the various sites is summarised in Table 2. Illustrated sherds are listed in Table 3.

Table 1 Key to the fabric codes used in this report

Table 2 Broad quantification of the medieval pottery on sites in the study area

Prefix	Site	Sherds	ENV	Weight in gm
A	UP-HH medieval	896	313	5292
C	R-126 Late Saxon/medieval	582	Up to 190	8551
D	UP-WW medieval	52	21	329
F	UP-MF Medieval	1 sherd	1	8

Table 3 Catalogue of the illustrated pottery from Hunt's Hill and Great Arnold's Field

*see file potcat.doc

Site A: Hunt's Hill

In all 896 sherds of medieval pottery (313 ENV, 5.292 kg) were recovered from this site. Fourteen different fabric types were identified, with a number of sub-types, most of which are represented in the 695 sherds are from the areas of the site selected for detailed analysis (246 ENV, 4.222 kg). The assemblage mainly ranges in date from the late Saxon period to the 13th/14th century. The earliest fabrics comprise late Saxon shell-tempered ware (fabric LSSX: 99 sherds, up to 18 vessels, including A<P5>), and early medieval sand-tempered ware (EMS, EMSX: 46 sherds, up to 38 vessels); the latter include part of a large lid (A<P6>). The assemblage is dominated by two shell-tempered wares. The first, which can be handmade or wheel-finished, contains abundant fossil shell and virtually no sand (EMSHX, EMSHXS: 188 sherds from up to 79 vessels, including A<P3>, A<P7>). The second fabric, which is wheel-thrown or wheel-finished, contains abundant fine sand (SSWX: 334 sherds, 79 vessels including A<P4>); it was probably introduced later than EMSHX, but the two were certainly in use concurrently during the 12th century, and SSWX probably continued into the 13th century. A few other Essex fabrics are of a similar date (EXCS, A<P8>; EXFS; HARM; SOWX, A<P9>). One sherd may be of Mill Green coarse ware dating to the mid/later 13th century, but could also be an atypical Roman fabric. Most sherds are from jars and cooking pots, but three dishes and three jugs are also represented.

Site C: Great Arnold's Field

The extant pottery from this site amounts to 582 sherds (up to 190 vessels, 8.551kg). In the draft pottery report it was suggested that the dating centred on the early 12th

century but extended into the 14th century, with residual finds dating from the mid-11th century (Blake and Moorhouse 1970). Re-examination of the pottery confirms this, although the end date may be in the late 13th century.

In all 17 fabric types were identified, with a number of sub-types, and the composition of the assemblage is very similar to that at Hunt's Hill. The earliest fabrics comprise late Saxon shell-tempered ware (LSSX: 37 sherds from a dish and five jars, notably C<P1>) and early medieval sand-tempered (EMS: 15 sherds from a dish and 13 jars/cooking pots, including C<P5>), although some of the latter could date to the 12th century). Other early fabrics comprise a sherd of possible Thetford-type ware (THET) and possibly also the red-painted wares (REDP, C<P2>). The two sand-and-shell-tempered wares (EMSSX and SSWX) dominate the remainder of the assemblage, with 210 sherds (up to 26 vessels) and 96 sherds (up to 54 vessels) respectively. Fabric EMSSX includes C<P3>, C<P4>, while SSWX includes C<P7>, C<P8> and C<P11>–C<P15>). These, and a few other 12th-century coarsewares (EMFLX; EMGRX; ESUR; EXFS, C<P9>) and glazed wares (LCALC, LCOAR, LOND, HEDI; see Table 1, fabric codes) should be associated with the use of the building. The latest extant finds comprise London-type ware jugs that may have been decorated in the north French style and date to after 1170/1180 (OA303) and an unglazed sherd of possible Mill Green ware from S303. As some of the glazed wares are missing it is not clear when the structure was modified or abandoned, but it would seem to have gone out of use by *c* 1300, if not earlier.

Discussion: medieval settlement and status

Although medieval pottery was found on a number of sites in the study area, it is not possible to deduce much from the smaller assemblages. The pottery from both sites A and C suggests that they were contemporary. It supports the documentary evidence, limited though it is, for occupation of some kind by the time of Domesday, but the main period of occupation spanned the late 11th to late 13th/early 14th centuries. The fragmented condition of the finds from site A make it hard to comment on status, but it is clear that a large amount of pottery was used there. Although smaller in size, the collection from site C is (despite the fact that some sherds are now missing) of sufficient quality to suggest that this was more than an ordinary farmstead and that it was very probably the site of Launders Manor.

These finds are important as there are few assemblages of this date that can be related to manorial, or even domestic, sites in south-west Essex (the pottery assemblage from Low Hall, Walthamstow is much later in character, dating from the 14th century onwards). Together the two assemblages demonstrate the range of wares that might be expected in a 12th-century household. Jars/cooking pots, some of considerable size, are the most common form, with up to 100 examples from Great Arnold's Field and up to 285 at Hunts Hill (A<P3>–A<P5>, A<P7>, A<P8>; C<P1>, C<P3>– C<P10>, C<P13>, C<P14>). Other forms include bowls/dishes C<P11>) and curfews, placed over the fire to extinguish it or enclose the embers and keep a small fire burning safely at night (C<P12>); some of these are forms that also occur at Chipping Ongar (Walker 1999, fig 10, no.7, curfew/chimney pot; no.9, dish). The larger dishes may have been used in cheese making as much as for serving (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, 109–10). Table/serving wares are in the minority on both sites, but

London-type ware jugs in the Rouen and North French styles were found at site C, together with jugs that may be from the Mill Green area.

Discussion: medieval dating frameworks and typologies

In Essex the classification of fabric types has for long been based on a numerical system, (Cunningham 1982, 1985; Drury 1993), within which shell-tempered fall into fabric 12, with numerous sub-types (Table 1) and most sandy wares fall into fabric 13. For this report, however, a code system based on that used by the Museum of London was used (see Table 1). Dating the shell-tempered wares is problematic, partly because they continued longer in Essex than in London, and partly due to the lack of other diagnostic fabrics, but it is generally agreed that there is a trend from fully shell-tempered fabric to sandy wares with minimal shell (eg Huggins 1976, 103; 1988, 136; Blackmore in prep). The vessels represented in fabrics EMSX, EMSSX and EMSHX appear to be handmade, although possibly with rims finished on a turntable.

It would also appear that the different rim types can be broadly dated. The typology developed for Chelmsford (Cunningham 1985, 2; Drury 1993) has been applied to other sites (Cotter 2000, fig 27; Walker 1997b, 168; 1999a, 29; in prep). As can be expected, there is a progression in all fabric types from simple everted and upright rims (type A) to more developed forms. Where present, the forms in LSSX are very similar to those made in Oxfordshire and used in London (A<P5>, C<P1>, cf Vince and Jenner 1991, fig 2.23). Other early examples include A<P4> (a very early example of fabric type SSWX1) and the thickened everted rims (eg C<P10>), which date to the 11th century. Three EMSHX jars from site A have deep flaring rims with thumbed decoration around the edge (A<P3>, A<P7>), a form that does not occur in London but has close parallels at Rayleigh Castle (not specifically published; now stored at Southend Museum). The necked, beaded rims (type C1; eg C<P3>–C<P5>, C<P8>) are mainly dated to the late 11th/12th century, although they could be earlier in London. More developed everted forms such as A<P8>, C<P8>, C<P13>, C<P14> and the squared or flat-topped rims (types B2a, C3 and H; eg C<P7>, C<P15>) are generally dated to the late 12th/early 13th century (Williams 1977, 168–9; Cotter 2000, fig 27), although they could be earlier in London. The latter mainly occur in fabric SSWX and correspond most closely with those of London SSW. Almost all the shelly wares are plain, although a few have thumbing on the rim (A<P3>, A<P7>; C<P4>) or body (C<P8>, C<P11>). As a whole the sand- and shell-tempered wares from sites A and C and the forms made in them are broadly similar to those found at Barking, to the west (Vince 2002, figs 8, 9), and at Rayleigh Castle (Helliwell and McCleod 1981) and North Shoebury to the east (Walker 1995). The shell-tempered forms found at Hadleigh Castle, however, are quite different (Drewett 1975, fig 15, nos 1–6). Other contemporary sites include Waltham Abbey (Huggins 1973, 1976; 1988; 1995), Pleshey Castle (Williams 1977; Walker 1988) and Chipping Ongar (Walker 1999).

Discussion: medieval trade and economy

Pottery production/distribution?

Shell-tempered wares

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At both Hunts Hill and Great Arnold's Farm, and on 12th-century sites across the county (Essex fabric group 12), shell-tempered wares are the dominant group. Regional variations in fabric and form show that they were produced at a number of centres, but so far no definite kiln sites have been found. The source of the Late Saxon-style wares remains to be determined, but is almost certainly local, as very little was identified at Barking (Vince 2002, 172). Fabric EMSHX is probably made of Woolwich Beds clay, of which there are limited outcrops in the Romford area; the Woolwich Formation extends through Orsett to Hadleigh and Shoeburyness (Sumbler 1996, 100–2, fig 26). Little scientific work has been done on these fabrics, but some comparative data for LSSX-, EMSH- and SSWX-type fabrics exists for Barking Abbey (Vince 2002), and for SSWX-type fabrics for Pleshey Castle, Rayleigh, North Shoebury and Chelmsford (Vince 2001a, b; Blackmore in prep). For this reason six samples from site C were selected with a view to comparing the SSWX group. Three were studied in thin section, and all were analysed chemically (Vince 2005; http://www.postex.demon.co.uk; see specialist report). Both methods identified three fabric types, and showed that four of the samples belonged to the same group. The chemical data was compared with that for other wares from Essex (both shell-tempered and non-shell-tempered), and it was found that the main group (SSWX1) is chemically quite different from all the other shell-tempered wares that have been analysed. It is probably from a fairly local source, at, or near to, the later pottery production site of Mill Green, which is only some six miles to the north. As the fabrics from site A are very similar, the same probably applies to that site too. Fabric SSWX2 could be from East Essex (between Rayleigh and Bradwell on Sea), or north Kent, while fabric SSWX3 is of unknown origin but chemically like other samples from Barking, Pleshey Castle, Rayleigh, North Shoebury and Chelmsford.

Other coarsewares

Most other fabrics are of 11th- to 13th-century date. The jars in fabric EMSX are extremely similar to the London fabric early medieval sandy ware, and if not imported, they are close local copies of the London forms. Most of the other fabrics, notably the grog-tempered ware (EMGRX) and the various sand-tempered wares (EXFS, EXCS, SOWX and HARM) have a similar clay matrix. They were probably made fairly locally made, perhaps in the area of Mill Green and Harlow (Walker in prep, Horndon).

Wider trade

The medieval fabrics from the sites discussed here are, on the whole, quite different in character to those from sites in central London. Given the general proximity of some sites to London one might expect more London and Surrey fabrics than has been

found, but these wares do not seem to be widely distributed within Essex. In addition to Great Arnold's Field and Hunt's Hill, however, London-type ware and early Surrey ware have been found at Chipping Ongar, in the Roding Valley, which was on the route from London to north Essex and Suffolk, and Horndon, which may have received imported pottery via the Thames (Walker 1999, 173; Walker in prep).. Thetford ware, of which one possible sherd was found at Great Arnold's Field, has also been identified at Horndon, , where a wide range of fabric types was found, including Surrey whitewares, Scarborough ware and continental imports (Walker in prep and pers comm).

Post-medieval (*c* 1500–1900)

Post-medieval activity was evidenced at Hunts Hill, Uphall Camp and Whitehall Wood, the largest group being from Hunts Hill (Table 4). From the amount, location and condition of the pottery, which mainly comprises small sherds, it would seem that activity on most sites was limited and in some cases the finds may indicate manuring of the fields rather than occupation. The bulk of the material dates to the 18th and 19th centuries. The fabrics are noted in the individual assessment reports. Redwares and factory made wares from Staffordshire are the most common types; other regional wares are few and imports are even less common. Most of the pottery comprises standard domestic wares (kitchen wares and table wares), but there are also numerous with sherds from flower pots.

Table 4 The distribution of the post-medieval pottery

Site	Sherds	ENV	Weight in gm
R-MHF77 Post-medieval	37	37	304
UP-HH Post-medieval	57	50	410
UP-MF Post-medieval	38	35	341
UP-WW post-medieval (not recorded)	??	??	??
UP-GS Post-Roman	10	10	67

Research agenda for the East London Gravels (Saxon and medieval)

Some thoughts:

Closer collaboration between excavating bodies would lead to better correlation between recording systems; shared scientific analyses

How can we reliably distinguish between Iron Age and Saxon fabrics?

Important thin section work has been carried out on the early Saxon material, but the questions raised by the results can only be answered by chemical analysis of the fabrics, ideally with a larger number of samples.

More work is needed on the characterisation of the Essex shell-tempered wares.