

## **INVESTIGATION OF SAXON AND LATEST ROMAN POTTERY TRENDS**

### **Introduction, Methodology and Background**

This work was undertaken following receipt of the Elms Farm Saxon pottery report. Essentially, the Saxon assemblage (6.83kg) is dated to the later 5th and early 6th centuries. This is somewhat at variance with the report for the 1972 Crescent Road, Heybridge, excavations (Drury and Wickenden 1982), where the Saxon pottery assemblage (8.3kg) was dated to the first half of the 5th century (1982, 31). Also, the implication in the Crescent Road report is that there is continuity of occupation and, thus, use made of Roman pottery, the late fine wares in particular, by the Saxon inhabitants, alongside handmade Saxon pottery (1982, 20). The tentative conclusion for the Elms Farm assemblages is that there is no evidence for continuity, and the late Roman pottery is residual in Saxon features. This appears to be reinforced by the dating of the Saxon pottery.

In order to investigate the so-called late Roman/Saxon interface, comparison has been made using a variety of assemblages and measures. Firstly, tables were constructed to demonstrate the average sherd weights (brokenness) for Elms Farm features which have both Saxon and Roman pottery (Table 1A); features which are late but have no Saxon pottery (Table 1B); late groups from other sites (Table 1C); Saxon pottery from Elms Farm and Crescent Road, Heybridge (Table 1D). Next, tables were constructed for late groups from various sites using other measures; percentage EVE (Table 2A); percentage weights (Tables 2B, C and D); minimum vessel counts for the Roman and Saxon Crescent Road pottery (Table 2E); fabric comparisons for the late Roman pottery found in sunken-featured buildings at West Stow, Suffolk (Table 2F).

It was noted in the Crescent Road Roman pottery report (Going in Wickenden 1986, 43) that Nene Valley colour-coated ware (NVC) forms a high percentage of assemblages in late Roman Essex. NVC replaced Colchester colour-coated ware (COLC) when this industry collapsed during the 3rd century. It has also been postulated that, in Essex, an increase in Oxford products is matched by a decrease in sandy grey wares during the 4th century as the latter gradually fell out of production. Whether this combination of fabrics can be used to determine firm dating during the

4th century is difficult to establish. Table 2D details percentage weights for these fabrics.

Few firm conclusions have been drawn from these tables and comparisons, although this may be a conclusion in itself. It would appear that the Elms Farm assemblages and those from Crescent Road are somewhat different, perhaps reflecting the more concentrated nature of Saxon occupation further to the north of the Elms Farm site. Evidence for late Roman and Saxon interaction, as then understood, has been set out by Tyler (1996, 108-10), although no firm conclusions were drawn at that time either. The evidence put forward for coexistence at Rivenhall (Rodwell and Rodwell 1985, 68-77) had already been discounted (Esmonde Cleary 1989, 196, following Millett 1987).

The conclusion reached at West Stow (Plouviez 1985, 85) was that the pottery in Saxon contexts was already broken before incorporation, and so Roman vessels were not used by the Saxon populace. Instead, Plouviez suggests that the sherds themselves may have been used, for instance as weights or as spindle whorls, since there seemed to be a preponderance of rims and bases, some of which had been shaped and/or drilled. Evidence for utilisation of Roman sherds by Saxon inhabitants at Elms Farm (and Crescent Road), however, did not seem to be forthcoming.

Full investigation of the late Roman/Saxon interface is hampered by two things: First, very small quantities of Early Saxon pottery are normally recovered from occupation sites. Amounts used for this study are as low as 1.6kg (at Downhouse Farm, West Hanningfield) and, even for Heybridge, which produced large amounts of pottery of all dates, there is only 6.8kg from Elms Farm and 8.3kg from Crescent Road.

Second, the deposition of either late Roman or Early Saxon pottery assemblages cannot be dated with precision, as yet. Theoretically, at any site, either or both could have been deposited at any time during the 5th century.

### **Tables and data**

Tables 1A-C: Brokenness of late Roman pottery in selected Elms Farm features

Table 1D: Brokenness of Saxon pottery from Crescent Road and Elms Farm SFBs

Tables 2A-D: Comparison of various late pottery groups by %EVE and %weight

Table 2E: Minimum vessel data for pottery in Crescent Road SFBs

Table 2F: Fabric comparisons for Roman pottery in SFBs at West Stow, Suffolk

Table 3: Numbers of coins in selected Elms Farm features

Essex 'late groups' examined comprise;

Elms Farm KPGs 37-40 (Biddulph, Compton and Martin 2015)

Crescent Road, Heybridge; Ditch 122 (Going, in Wickenden 1986)

Chigborough Farm; Pit 1705 (Horsley and Wallace 1998)

Great Dunmow; 'late shrine' 273 (Going and Ford 1988)

Shillingstone Field, Great Sampford; Ditch 21 (Martin 1998)

Downhouse Farm, West Hanningfield; Pit 520, Ditch 712 (Martin and Tester unpub.)

Great Holts Farm, Boreham; Ditches 177, 816, 302 (Martin 2003)

Buildings Farm Great Dunmow; Pit 421 (Wallace 1997)

Few features on any site contain Saxon pottery with which to compare Elms Farm KPG40; only body sherds were recorded in two groups at Downhouse Farm. It is unfortunate, too, that the published assemblages from the 1972 Crescent Road excavations do not include full quantification. The Roman pottery found alongside the Saxon pottery in SFBs 1-5 would have provided a very useful comparison. Minimum vessel information, which is all that can be gleaned, is given in Table 2E.

**Tables 1A-D: Brokenness of late Roman and Saxon pottery in selected features**

Table 1A: Average sherd weight of late Roman pottery in same features as Saxon

<b>Fabric</b>	<b>BSW</b>	<b>GRS</b>	<b>GRF</b>	<b>HAX</b>	<b>LSH</b>	<b>NVC</b>	<b>OXRC</b>	<b>RET</b>	<b>SAXON</b>
<b>Building 65</b>	13	7	12	13	-	16	10	-	-
<b>Building 67</b>	8	19	-	-	-	14	-	-	21
<b>Building 68</b>	16	12	6	-	-	12	12	-	17
<b>Building 69</b>	11	9	3	2	28	2	-	48	7
<b>Pit 8142</b>	6	15	3	2	-	3	-	4	21
<b>Pit 10782</b>	14	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	43
<b>Ditch 25271</b>	9	8	8	6	8	8	10	13	12
<b>Pit 15354</b>	9	9	8	-	16	3	6	-	65
<b>Pit 24456</b>	11	13	6	-	-	(140)	-	-	19
<b>Pit 10062</b>	11	13	20	21	10	14	12	20	33
<b>Ave</b>	11	12	7	4	6	7	5	9	24

The NVC in Pit 24456 is a single sherd from a thick-walled vessel and has been excluded from the dataset

NB. The Elms Farm 'site norm' ASW = 19

Table 1B: Average sherd weight of late Roman pottery in late Roman features

<b>Fabric</b>	<b>BSW</b>	<b>GRS</b>	<b>GRF</b>	<b>HAX</b>	<b>LSH</b>	<b>NVC</b>	<b>OXRC</b>	<b>RET</b>
<b>Pit 8155</b>	6	7	1	-	-	3	-	14
<b>Pit 5209</b>	17	12	16	8	11	19	8	15
<b>Well 5806</b>	9	17	12	6	7	6	8	-
<b>Ditch 15055</b>	6	10	11	4	9	5	13	23
<b>Pit 4129</b>	11	16	14	11	22	8	-	17
<b>Ditch 10380</b>	18	19	23	66	-	54	19	25
<b>Ditch 10657</b>	11	16	27	41	11	19	65	24
<b>Pit 15232</b>	13	4	29	16	13	1	6	34
<b>Ditch 16338</b>	16	17	14	14	4	13	22	45
<b>Pit 4153</b>	11	11	13	6	10	8	10	15
<b>Ave</b>	11	13	16	17	7	14	15	21

Table 1C: Average sherd weight for various late groups from other sites

<b>Fabric</b>	<b>BSW</b>	<b>GRS</b>	<b>GRF</b>	<b>HAX</b>	<b>LSH</b>	<b>NVC</b>	<b>OXRC</b>	<b>RET</b>	<b>SAXON</b>
<b>Buildings Farm Pit 421</b>	7	9	9	6	8	10	3	-	-
<b>Downhouse Farm Pit 520</b>	5	7	8	5	9	4	9	14	4
<b>Downhouse Farm Ditch 712</b>	7	9	9	6	6	6	7	10	3
<b>Great Holts Ditch 177</b>	14	9	10	10	7	38	18	18	-
<b>Great Holts Ditch 816</b>	28	18	16	9	8	3	6	15	-
<b>Great Holts Ditch 302 Bottom fill</b>	19	16	32	15	16	22	22	22	-
<b>Great Holts Ditch 302 Top fill</b>	15	14	10	10	35	6	23	20	-

N.B. Comparisons cannot be made for the following late groups as sherd counts are not given in the relevant reports: Chigborough Farm, Pit 1705; Shillingstone Field, Ditch 21; Heybridge, Ditch 122; Great Dunmow, 'late shrine' 273

Table 1D: Average sherd weights for various Heybridge Saxon pottery assemblages

Crescent Road assemblage	SFB 1	SFB 2	SFB 3	SFB 4	SFB 5	All Saxon
ASW	12	12	11	18	16	11.5

Elms Farm assemblage	Building 67	Building 68	Building 69	All Saxon
ASW	21	17	7	18.7

N.B. The Elms Farm Saxon 'site norm' ASW = 19 (same as the Roman ASW)

Crescent Road Saxon pottery quantities	SFB 1	SFB 2	SFB 3	SFB 4	SFB 5
Sherds/weight	123/1435g	28/340g	230/2430g	40/710g	46/720g

Quantities are from Drury and Wickenden 1982, Table 2

Elms Farm Saxon pottery quantities	Building 67	Building 68	Building 69
Sherds/weight	4/83g	13/215g	22/161g

**Tables 2A-D: Comparison of various late groups by %EVE and %weight**

Table 2A: Comparison of late groups from various sites using %EVE

<b>Fabric</b>	<b>BSW</b>	<b>GRS</b>	<b>GRF</b>	<b>HAX</b>	<b>LSH</b>	<b>NVC</b>	<b>OXRC</b>	<b>RET</b>	<b>SAXON</b>
<b>Elms Farm KPG 37/8</b>	19	20	21	1.3	6.6	11	3	2.6	-
<b>Elms Farm KPG 39</b>	2	2	11	3	27	11	35	-	-
<b>Elms Farm KPG 40</b>	12	24	7	1	3	6	18	2	17
<b>Cres Road Ditch 122</b>	0.5	62	-	1	11	11.6	-	12	-
<b>Late shrine 273</b>	1.4	18	-	24	21	16	8.6	3	-
<b>Shill. Field Ditch 21</b>	14	50	11	1	3	3	-	-	-
<b>Downhouse Pit 520</b>	28	28	19	3	2	1	1	-	b/s
<b>Downhouse Ditch 712</b>	13	25	21	9	19	4	3	1.5	b/s
<b>Great Holts Ditch 177</b>	10	21	2	14	3	9	5	16	-
<b>Great Holts Ditch 816</b>	11	27	9	17	3	1	2	20	-
<b>Great Holts Ditch 302 Bottom fill</b>	11	42	7	9	2	2	-	26	-
<b>Great Holts Ditch 302 Top fill</b>	8	32	6	6	4	-	2	35	-
<b>Chig. Farm Pit 1705</b>	16	36	6	10	2	5	-	2	-
<b>Buildings Farm Pit 421</b>	1	27	31	31	-	-	-	-	-

The figure for GRS in 'late shrine' 273 includes GRF, recorded together as Grey Wares  
The group from Buildings Farm is dated AD300/10-AD360/70 because both LSH and OXRC are present only as body sherds in small quantities (Wallace 1997, 78)

Table 2B: Percentage weights for Saxon and late Roman pottery in various features

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Saxon</b>	<b>Oxford</b>	<b>Late</b>	<b>Coarse Ware</b>	<b>Site Phase</b>
<b>Building 65</b>	-	<1	8	84	VI
<b>Building 67</b>	13	-	2	75	VI
<b>Building 68</b>	11	1	2	69	VI
<b>Building 69</b>	2	-	2	77	VI
<b>Pit 10782</b>	5	-	-	56	IV
<b>Pit 8142</b>	1	-	2	90	V
<b>Pit 8155</b>	-	3	2	75	V

<b>Ditch 25271</b>	6	<1	8	66	IV-VI
<b>Pit 15354</b>	18	2	7	71	VI
<b>Pit 24456</b>	7	-	2	83	VI

Table 2C: Percentage weights for Elms Farm CP11 KPGs and Wider Pool groups

<b>Context</b>	<b>Saxon</b>	<b>Oxford</b>	<b>Late</b>	<b>Coarse Ware</b>	<b>Site Phase</b>
<b>4128</b>	-	5	26	56	VI
<b>4386</b>	-	1	2	89	VI
<b>5210 (KPG37)</b>	-	7	18	71	V-VI
<b>5763 (KPG39)</b>	-	27	33	32	IV
<b>10062</b>	1	4	10	44	IV
<b>10378</b>	-	5	35	60	V-VI
<b>10657</b>	-	3	11	78	V-VI
<b>12044</b>	3	1	7	66	IV-VI
<b>13238</b>	-	2	13	65	IV
<b>15056 (KPG38)</b>	-	26	10	64	V-VI
<b>15224</b>	-	2	10	64	VI
<b>15233</b>	-	1	11	83	VI
<b>16333</b>	-	1	1	91	VI
<b>14529 (KPG40)</b>	26	10	13	43	VI

N.B. For Tables 2B and 2C, the percentage weights have been calculated in the same way for each group:

Late – calculated using late Roman fabrics Alice Holt, late shell-tempered ware, Hadham, Nene Valley colour-coated ware and Portchester D, where present.

C/W – encompasses all local coarse wares, whether residual or not, plus BB1 and BB2, but excluding buff wares, e.g. Colchester Buff.

Table 2D: Percentage weights for selected fabrics in CP11 KPGs and Wider Pool groups

<b>Context</b>	<b>Oxford</b>	<b>NVC</b>	<b>GRS</b>	<b>Saxon</b>
<b>4128</b>	5	1	22	-
<b>4386</b>	1	1	27	-
<b>5210 (KPG37)</b>	7	7	22	-
<b>5763 (KPG39)</b>	27	6	7	-

<b>10062</b>	4	5	26	1
<b>10378</b>	5	26	19	-
<b>10657</b>	3	7	18	-
<b>12044</b>	1	3	22	3
<b>13238</b>	2	2	15	-
<b>15056 (KPG38)</b>	26	4	21	-
<b>15224</b>	2	1	51	-
<b>15233</b>	1	-	19	-
<b>16333</b>	1	1	18	-
<b>14529 (KPG40)</b>	10	3	13	26

Table 2E: Minimum vessel counts for pottery in Crescent Road SFBs

	<b>Oxford</b>	<b>NVC</b>	<b>Hadham</b>	<b>LSH</b>	<b>RET</b>	<b>Saxon</b>
<b>SFB 1</b>	9 (24)	(5)	-	-	(2)	23
<b>SFB 2</b>	1	-	-	(2)	(4)	4
<b>SFB 3</b>	6 (6)	2 (2)	1	1 (1)	1 (4)	21
<b>SFB 4</b>	2	(1)	-	-	(4)	7
<b>SFB 5</b>	2	-	1	(4)	-	8

N.B. Figures are taken from Drury and Wickenden 1982, Tables 1 and 3A  
(The figures in brackets indicate the numbers of formless sherds)

Table 2F: Fabric comparisons for late Roman pottery at West Stow, Suffolk

	<b>Oxford</b>	<b>NVC</b>	<b>Red ware</b>	<b>Shelly</b>	<b>Grey ware</b>
<b>Sherds</b>	140	152	69	7	8
<b>%Sherds</b>	37	40	18	2	2

N.B. Information taken from Plouviez 1985, Table 8

Note: A total of 376 sherds of late Roman pottery was examined from excavations at West Stow, Suffolk (Plouviez 1985). Twenty-six SFBs contained Roman pottery, amounting to 155 sherds (less than half of the total). Plouviez (1985, 85) noted that the low number of sherds present in the SFBs makes comparisons between periods rather tentative.



Table 3: Numbers of coins in selected late features

<b>Feature</b>	<b>4th C (second half)</b>	<b>4th C (first half)</b>	<b>Earlier than 4th C</b>
<b>Pit 4128</b>	-	3	1
<b>Pit 5209</b>	7	10	3
<b>Well 5806</b>	1	-	-
<b>Pit 10062</b>	1	2	1
<b>Ditch 25027</b>	1	3	1
<b>Well 14529</b>	2	1	1
<b>Ditch 15055</b>	-	1	1
<b>Ditch 15223</b>	-	-	1
<b>Pit 15232</b>	-	-	1
<b>Pit 8142</b>	-	-	1
<b>Building 68</b>	-	-	1

## Discussion

### 1. %EVE

KPG39 is not consistent with latest Roman groups elsewhere and neither is KPG40, although we are now certain that the latter is a Saxon deposit. In some ways, both of these groups are not representative of late 4th century deposits. The %EVE of OXRC and LSH in these groups bucks the trend. In particular, OXRC sits happily elsewhere at 5% - only at the Great Dunmow 'late shrine' does it approach 10%. LSH is also odd in that Elms Farm seems to do quite well in this fabric compared to other places.

### 2. Average sherd weights

The ASW of Roman pottery in contexts with Saxon pottery is generally lower than that in latest Roman contexts. Interestingly, OXRC has among the lowest of the ASWs in Saxon contexts – so much for Saxons liking this nice shiny red pottery. The highest ASWs in Saxon contexts are coarse wares. Comparison of ASWs between sites is not worthwhile since these will be site-specific and determined to a large extent by waste management strategies. Having said that, the ASW of OXRC is no

different from other wares, suggesting that there is no prolonged gap between the discard of local coarse wares and regional fine wares. In other words, the use of local and regional pottery is concurrent.

### 3. %Weights

In Saxon features, the %weights of Oxford and late Roman wares are generally very low (1-2% mark) but reach the 10% mark or higher in latest Roman groups. Could it be that, in groups that have no Saxon pottery but have low %weight in Roman fine wares, we are potentially dealing with 5th-century contexts (e.g. 16333). This would, of course, fly in the face of conventional wisdom; it's not the large amount of late Roman fine wares that gives the context a 5th century date, but the very small amount! The %weight of coarse wares is usually high, which suggests that the proposed decline of the local industries is dated too early. These local industries may well have continued concurrently with late 4th century importation of regional wares, rather than these fine wares filling a void left by the collapse of the local industries.

In conclusion, groups should be dated to the late 4th century on the absence of any other indicators (e.g. 5th century coins) or, to be more correct, we cannot date any group closer than late 4th/early 5th century. Importantly, late fine wares are not so special – the Saxons certainly didn't think so, and there is no evidence that they used Roman pottery either. It appears that local industries did not cease production decades before the end of regional fine wares. The figures suggest diminished production, but not to an extent suggesting cessation of production soon after the mid-4th century.

### References

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LIA/Roman Pottery: Saxon Interface  
Archive Note

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## APPENDIX

### SHERDS WITH RSX DECORATION

Pottery with so-called Romano-Saxon decoration is generally thought to be a mid to late 4th century manifestation. The decorative styles can variously be represented by dimples, impressed lines and symbols, moulded animal figures and bosses. The styles recorded at Elms Farm can be paralleled in Roberts (1982). Only thirty-one examples (listed below) were noted in the entire assemblage, with just under three-quarters of these appearing in appropriately-dated contexts (cp25 is the notation for late 4th century+). Only two contexts, however, are key pottery groups but, interestingly, two features, 8736 and 15354, are Saxon.

As would be expected, more than half of the sherds are in fine fabrics, such as fine and Hadham grey wares (GRF, HAR) and Hadham oxidised ware (HAX), appearing to confirm a Hadham source for this style of decoration. The average sherd weight, at 8g, is low.

A gazetteer of Essex findspots was published some time ago (Rodwell 1970). These include Chelmsford, Wickford, Mucking, Stanford-le-Hope, Rawreth, Great Chesterford and Colchester. Rodwell has pointed out that not all of these findspots have firm Saxon connections and that most of the gazetteer is represented by unstratified material. Heybridge, which does have a firm Saxon connection, can now be added to the list of findspots.

Given that the number of occurrences at Elms Farm is so low, and context information so general, establishing connections between the presence of RSX sherds and any Saxon influence is an impossible task. If anything, the evidence seems to be contradictory.

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LIA/Roman Pottery: Saxon Interface  
Archive Note

List, by context, of pottery with RSX decoration

Context	Feature	Fabric	Description	cp	Phase
5159	Layer	BSW	Body sherd with embossed lion	25	V-VI
5227	Layer	HAX	Body sherd with embossed lion	25	V-VI
5275	Layer	GRF	Body sherd with RSX decoration	25	V-VI
5306	Layer	BSW	E3 rim with RSX dimples	25	V-VI
5453	Layer	BSW	Body sherd with RSX dimples	25	V-VI
5713	13707	GRF	Body sherd with RSX decoration	18-20	IIIB
6153	Layer	GRF	Body sherd with RSX dimple	21-25	V-VI
7470	Collapse	GRF	Body sherd with dimple	25	V
8636	8635	GRS	Body sherd with RSX decoration	25	VI
8737	8736	HAR	Body sherd with dimple	25	VI
8737	8736	BSW	Body sherds with RSX decoration	25	VI
8967	8966	HAR	Body sherd with ?boss	22-23	V
10017	10067	GRS	Body sherd with RSX decoration	24	V
10405	10538	BSW	Body sherd with possible RSX decoration	25	V-VI
10516	10518	GRF	Bowl rim with RSX decoration	25	IV
12206	Layer	HAX	Body sherd with RSX dimples	0	0
13721	13284	GRF	Body sherd with raised boss - RSX	17	IIIA
14244	14245	HAX	Body sherd with raised boss - RSX	20-25	0
14564	14655	BSW	Body sherds with impressed RSX	22-23	V
14635	14632	HAX	Body sherd with RSX line decoration	19-20	V-VI
15353	15354	GRF	Body sherds with bosses - RSX	25	VI
16230	16231	HAX	Body sherd with lion motif	25	VI
19048	19047	GRS	Body sherd with boss	25	VI
20034	14934	HAX	Body sherd with groove and boss	23-24	IV-V
20334	Layer	HAX	Body sherd with RSX decoration	0	0
20533	20532	GRS	Body sherd with bossed decoration	25	V
20533	20532	HAX	E3 rim and body sherds with RSX dec.	25	V
20815	20814	HAR	Body sherd with boss- RSX	25	VI
21500	Layer	BSW	Body sherd with possible RSX decoration	25	0
22386	Layer	HAX	Body sherd with RSX decoration	25	0
24001	Layer	GRF	Body sherd with RSX decoration	0	0

N.B. 10017 and 14564 are Key Pottery Groups; 8736 and 15354 are Saxon features