Prehistoric Pottery

By Elaine L Morris

A total of 78 sherds (530 grammes) of handmade, prehistoric pottery has been identified from the Radford excavations conducted during the 1950s and 60s. The pottery includes one undecorated sherd from a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age beaker, but the majority of fabrics and forms date from the first millennium BC. The collection is assumed to be redeposited material as no indication of stratified features containing solely prehistoric material has been indicated. The pottery is in moderate condition and usually both surfaces are present, but many sherds are quite abraded with well-rounded edges. The mean sherd weight of the collection as a whole is typical of redeposited pottery of this date.

The collection was examined using a binocular microscope at x10 power to identify the types of inclusions in the fabric of each sherd. Characteristics of the pottery were recorded using the guidelines for analysis and reporting of later prehistoric pottery recommended by the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group (PCRG 2010) and comparative charts provided in this publication were used for reference. The dataset is presented here as a separate file. For each sherd or group of sherds from an identifiable vessel, the year of excavation, P number and bag information, weight of sherd(s), fabric code, part of vessel and form code if appropriate, diameter and percentage of rim or base present, thickness code, decoration code and location on vessel, surface treatment and location on vessel, firing condition, evidence of use, and date of the vessel was recorded. The codes for fabrics and forms are described below. Thickness codes are: ***1***, <5mm; ***2***, 5-<7mm; ***3***, 7-<9mm; and ***4***, 9-<11mm. Three decorative types were identified: ***FT***, finger-tip impressions; ***IC***, incised or slashed; and ***TO***, tooled rather than incised. One surface treatment, ***BU*** for burnished, was observed. Firing condition codes include: ***IR***, irregularly fired with evidence for both oxidisation and lack of oxidisation; ***OX***, oxidised; and ***UN***, unoxidised. Evidence of use visible on these sherds comprise: ***AB***, abrasion on the interior only due to scraping during use; ***PT***, pitted on the interior only due to contact with acidic foodstuffs; ***RS***, burnt residue; and ***SO***, soot. The position codes used for decoration, surface treatment and firing condition are: ***1***, throughout; ***2***, exterior; ***3***, interior, and ***10***, top of rim or lip edge. The presence of an ***X*** in any data field indicates that the surface of the sherd is not present and therefore information could not be recovered had it been present. Parentheses around any code indicate that there may be some doubt about the presence of evidence, a low confidence rating of data which can occur with abraded sherds.

Twelve rim and decorated body sherds were selected for illustration (Fig. 8.2 in Monograph) and are listed in the Catalogue of Illustrated Pottery.

Fabrics

Fifteen fabric types, belonging to five principal fabric groups, have been defined within this small collection. All of the descriptions are provided as tentative identifications in the absence scientific examination using petrological analysis of thin section. The number and weight of sherds assigned to each fabric type is presented with the descriptions.

The most common group is the possible igneous and sedimentary rock fabrics (RK1; SS1) which represent 40% of the collection by number of sherds and 42% by weight. If the identification of these inclusions is confirmed, then the popularity of these fabrics is similar to the frequency identified amongst the prehistoric pottery recovered during the Shapwick project fieldwork (Morris 2007, 566). The range of inclusions which appear to be present are similar to those identified by Peacock (1969) and Williams (1989) as most likely to have derive from the Beacon Hill area near Shepton Mallet, about 20km northeast of the Abbey. The distance of the source area from Glastonbury Abbey demonstrates that the people who left sherds of their pottery at this location had participated in the well-known ceramic trading networks in this area during the second and first millennia BC. Fabric RK1 in particular had been a resource used to make Early/Middle Bronze Age pottery found at Brean Down (Woodward 1990), Late Bronze/Early Iron Age pottery and Middle Iron Age Glastonbury Ware from Norton Fitzwarren (Williams 1989), and Early and Middle Iron Age vessels from Ham Hill (Morris 1987; 2000).

The second most common group is the calcite-bearing fabrics which represent 27% of the collection by number of sherds and 30% by weight. This group includes fabrics (CA1; CA3) which appear to have naturally-occurring, less frequent calcite and one (CA2) which has more frequent pieces of calcite which is distinctively crisp and angular in texture suggesting it may have been deliberately added as temper. The latter is typical of Middle-Late Iron Age pottery while the former have been identified as Late Bronze Age (Woodward 1990, fabric 481) and Early Iron Age (Morris 1987, 33) in date. The most likely source for this range of calcite-bearing fabrics would be in the Mendip Hills (cf. Peacock 1969, 48).

The group with the most variation in fabric types is the sandy fabrics group. There are very few sherds in each fabric and the range is likely to include material dating to any ceramic phase within the first millennium BC. The sources for these fabrics could be anywhere in the area, with the

exception of fabric Q5 which is either Durotrigian Late Iron Age or Black Burnished Ware of the Romano-British period made in the Wareham-Poole Harbour area of Dorset.

Two different shell-bearing fabrics were identified, one with an abundant amount of fossil shell (SH1) and the other with only a moderate amount of shell and oolitic limestone (SH2). These fabrics could not derive from locally available clay resources in the Abbey area. The former belongs to the range of later Iron Age Glastonbury Ware/South-western fabrics first identified by Peacock (1969, 48-50, group 4) for which the closest source would be a Jurassic Limestone. The Combe Hay area could be the source area for the shell and oolitic limestone fabric (Price and Watts 1980, 25).

One grog-tempered fabric (G1) is typical of many Beaker fabrics which have pieces of grog added to a sandy clay matrix (cf. Cleal 1995, fig. 16.2) while the other handmade, grog-tempered fabric (G2) is typical of late Iron Age/early Roman wares.

Calcite Fabrics

CA1 - richly calcite-gritted fabric (5 sherds; 32g)

Very common to abundant (30-40%), subrounded, moderately sorted calcite, ≤3mm, naturally-occurring in the clay matrix

CA2 – calcite-tempered fabric (14 sherds; 116g)

Common to very common (20-30%), angular to subangular, well-sorted, calcite temper, ≤2mm, in the clay matrix

CA3 – calcite-gritted fabric (2 sherds; 9g)

Sparse to moderate (7-10%), subrounded, well-sorted, weathered, calcite, ≤2mm, naturally-occurring in the clay matrix

Grog-tempered Fabrics

G1 – coarse, grog-tempered, sandy fabric (1 sherd; 3g)

Common to very common (25-30%), poorly-sorted, angular grog temper, ≤4mm, in a sandy clay matrix with moderate (15%), subangular to subrounded quartz, ≤0.5mm, and rare (1%), rounded iron oxide fragments, ≤1mm

G2 – richly grog-tempered, slightly sandy fabric (1 sherds; 3g)

Abundant (40%), moderately sorted, angular grog temper, ≤2mm, in a slightly sandy clay matrix with moderate (10%), well-sorted, subrounded quartz, ≤0.8mm

?Igneous and Sedimentary Rock Fabrics

RK1 – possible felspathic tuff and infrequent sandstone fabric (29 sherds; 207g)

Common to abundant (25-40%), subangular to subrounded, poorly-sorted, possible felspathic tuff and disaggregated felspars, U5mm, and rare (1%), sandstone fragments, ≤3mm, in a medium to coarse-grained, sandy clay matrix containing sparse (3-7%), rounded to subrounded quartz, ≤1mm

SS1 – Possible sandstone fabric (2 sherds; 17g)

Moderate to common (15-20%), well-rounded to rounded, moderately sorted, possible fine sandstone fragments, ≤3mm across, naturally-occurring in the clay matrix

Sandy Fabrics

Q1 – medium to coarse sand fabric (8 sherds; 41g)

Abundant (40-50%), subangular to rounded, moderately sorted quartz, ≤1mm with the majority ≤0.6mm, with very rare iron oxides, ≤1mm, naturally-occurring in the clay matrix

Q2 –micaceous, fine sand fabric (6 sherds; 20g)

Moderate to common (15-20%), subrounded to rounded, well-sorted, fine quartz, ≤0.3mm, with rare quartz up to 1.5mm, naturally-occurring in a micaceous clay matrix; one sherd in this fabric contained rare (1%), subangular to angular, possible felspathic tuff, measuring less than 2mm

Q3 – very fine sand fabric (4 sherds; 25g)

Very common to abundant (30-40%), subangular, well-sorted, fine sand to silt-grade quartz, ≤0.2mm, and rare (1%) subrounded, iron oxides, up to 2mm, naturally-occurring in a possibly micaceous clay matrix

Q4 – fine sand fabric (1 sherd; 4g)

Abundant (40-50%), subrounded to subangular, very well-sorted, fine quartz, ≤0.3mm, naturally-occurring in the clay matrix

Q5 – coarse, sand fabric with shale (Durotrigian/Black Burnished Ware) (2 sherds; 13g)

Very common (30%), subrounded to subangular, poorly-sorted, coarse-grade quartz, ≤1mm, and rare, rounded shale, ≤1.5mm, naturally-occurring in the clay matrix

QC1 – Vesicular, medium to coarse gravelly sand fabric (1 sherd; 6g)

Sparse (5-7%), irregularly-shaped vesicles, less than 2mm across, with rounded to subangular, coarse quartz and other unidentified rocks and minerals, <1mm, naturally-occurring in the clay matrix

Shelly Fabrics

SH1 – shell fabric (1 sherd; 11g)

Abundant (40-50%), angular to subrounded, poorly-sorted shell, ≤5mm, in the clay matrix

SH2 – fossil shell and oolitic limestone fabric (1 sherd; 24g)

Moderate (10%), angular to subrounded, moderately sorted, fossil shell and oolitic limestone, ≤3mm, in a fine, dense clay with rare (1%), subrounded to subangular quartz, ≤0.1mm, and rare (1%), rounded iron oxides measuring from 1-5mm across

Vessel Form Types, Decoration, and Surface Treatment

Five distinctive rim types have been identified in the collection (R1-R5). One derives from an ovoid or convex-profile jar (R2; Fig. 8.2, 3) and has a lip shape which is nearly hooked in profile. It is similar to type J7 from Ham Hill (Morris 1987, fig. 3, 36-39) and type PA1 from South Cadbury (Woodward 2000, fig. 12, E 3B C - 20), which suggests that it might belong to the first half of the first millennium BC. This vessel, which had been made from a sandy fabric with infrequent calcite or calcareous inclusions (Q3), could be contemporary with that represented by a fragment of lug handle (H; Fig. 8.2, 2) made from a different sandy fabric (Q2). The latter had also been used to make an obtuse-angle, shouldered jar (A; Fig. 8.2, 1), a vessel similar to type J2B at Ham Hill (Morris 1987, fig. 3, 14-19) and many shouldered jars from South Cadbury (Woodward 2000, fig. 12, ceramic assemblages 5 and 6). These three forms represent activity in the Abbey area dated to the *Late Bronze/Early Iron Age* period due to their forms and quartz sand fabrics. They may or may not be contemporary with two other rim types which can be dated to the *Early Iron Age* more specifically. These include examples of short, slightly flared rims from three necked jars of uncertain lower profile (R1; Fig. 8.2, 5-7), which can be paralleled to Early Iron Age examples from Ham Hill (Morris 1987, types J1A-J1B, fig. 3, 1-7), South Cadbury (Woodward 2000, fig. 12, E 3B C – 4), and Danebury (Brown 2000, type JB1.2, JB2.1-2, figs. 3.15-3.16), and a single sherd from a tripartite carinated jar (R3; Fig. 8.2, 4), not dissimilar to larger examples of Early All Cannings Cross style jars and bowls found at Potterne (bowl type 3.3, jar type 32; Lawson 2000, figs. 48, 30 & 54,, 60) and coarseware bowls from Danebury which date to the fifth to fourth century BC (BA2; Brown 2000, fig. 3.29). This vessel is represented by the only sherd in the Abbey collection made from fine sandy fabric Q4 and is black and highly burnished. The flared rim, necked jars are usually softly-shouldered or round-shouldered forms typical of the seventh to fourth century BC. What may be most significant is that the type R1 jars were made in non-sandy fabrics, indicating very different sources which cannot be local. In this case, they derive from the Shepton Mallet (RK1) and the Mendip Hills (CA1).

In contrast, the final two rim types derive from vessels from the *Middle to Late Iron Age* period. Type R4 (Fig. 8.2, 11) is one of the most common shapes of this era with a simple, slack-profile reminiscent of a barrel, while type R5 (Fig. 8.2, 12) is much more distinctive with its straight-sided profile and can be referred to as a proto-saucepan pot form as it is similar to examples from Danebury dated to the fourth to third century (Brown 2000, type PA2.1, 90, fig. 3.36).

Decoration occurs on five sherds. One of the Early Iron Age type R1 jars has a row of small, finger-tip impressions along the top of the rim. Two body sherds from different vessels are decorated with tooled lattice designs typical of Middle-Late Glastonbury Ware/South-western style pottery found so commonly in Somerset and a third simply displays horizontal tooled lines. The proto-saucepan pot (Fig. 8.2, 12) appears to straddle the dating of ceramics with a change in technique in decoration and its placement on vessels. While the decoration was applied to the top of the rim as if belonging to the Early Iron Age era, the use of an incising tool rather than the more traditional fingernail slashing effect to make the decoration suggests the Middle Iron Age period as appropriate for a Middle Iron Age-shape vessel; this was a vessel in transition.

R1 – short, slightly flared rim on necked jar (Fig. 8.2, 5-7)

R2 – nearly hooked rim on ovoid or convex-profile jar (Fig. 8.2, 3)

R3 – upright rim on tripartite, acute-angle, carinated-profile jar (Fig. 8.2, 4)

R4 – upright, rounded-lip rim with slight indication of neck on slack-profile, barrel-shaped jar (Fig. 8.2, 11)

R5 – slightly incurved, flattened rim on straight-sided vessel with no neck, similar to proto-saucepan pots (Fig. 8.2, 12)

A – angled, shoulder sherd (Fig. 8.2, 1)

B – flat base

D – decorated body sherd (Fig. 8.2, 8-10)

H – lug-type handle (Fig. 8.2, 2)

N – neck zone of vessel (not illustrated)

P – plain body sherd (not illustrated)

Vessel Size and Evidence of Use

Despite the small size of the sherds in the collection, a few provide clues to the size and function of the pots they represent. One example each of types R3, R4 and R5 measure between 100 and 160mm in diameter and belong to the generally small size (100-<200mm) of later Iron Age pots. These would have been vessels easily picked up by individuals for their personal use, rather than medium-size vessels (200-<300mm) or large vessels (300-<400mm) which can be interpreted as more suitable for family and group food consumption and storage. Small pots are the commonest vessels recovered on later Iron Age sites in southern Britain (e.g. Woodward and Blinkhorn 1997; Hancocks 2003, fig. 17.1; Morris and Crosby 2007, 57-8, tables 4-6). Equally significant is the evidence of use still visible on some sherds. Pitting-out of calcareous inclusions on the interiors of vessels used to hold acidic foods occurred on three sherds (fabrics CA2 and QC1) while the presence of soot or burnt residue occurred on two other sherds from cookpots in fabrics SS1 and SH1. Interior abrasion from scraping of contents was observed on the Beaker sherd, and the barrel-shaped jar (Fig. 8.2, 11), and a body sherd from a vessel made from fabric SH1.

Discussion

The variety of fabrics identified and their wide distribution of sources is typical of so many assemblages from Somerset, particularly in the Glastonbury area. The nature of ceramic procurement during the first millennium BC is well-attested by published assemblages and does not need reiterating here. The significance of this collection lies in its principal focus on the middle centuries of the period, from the Early Iron Age through the Middle Iron Age period, and on its representation of typical settlement life. Cookpots and acidic storage vessels, along with a number of identifiable personal pots for daily consumption of food and access to a variety of vessels from around the region, makes this small and highly fragmented collection another contribution to the growing identification of settlement locations in the county.

Catalogue of Illustrated Prehistoric Pottery (see figure in Monograph; PRN, Pottery Record Number)

Late Bronze/Early Iron Age

1. Obtuse-angle sherd from shouldered jar; fabric Q2; oxidised exterior and interior, unoxidised core; year 1955; bag information: P1041; PRN1021.

2. Lug-type handle; fabric Q2; oxidised exterior, unoxidised core; year 1955; bag information: EWC 6, P1043; PRN 1022.

3. Ovoid jar; fabric Q3; form type R2, less than 5% of rim present; oxidised throughout; year 1955; bag information: EWC 6, P1043; PRN1023.

Early Iron Age

4. Small, tripartite, shiny, black jar or bowl; fabric Q4; form type R3, 5% of 100mm rim diameter present; burnished exterior; unoxidised firing throughout; year 1956; bag information: CLA 1, P1128; PRN1033.

5. Short-necked, decorated jar; fabric RK1; form type R1, less than 5% of rim present; row of small, finger-tip impressions on top of rim; irregularly fired surfaces; year uncertain; bag information: P268.1, P321; PRN1003.

6. Short-necked jar; fabric RK1; form type R1, less than 5% of rim present; unoxidised exterior and core, oxidised interior; year 1956; bag information: CLA 1, P1128; PRN1034.

7. Short-necked jar; fabric CA1; form type R1, less than 5% of rim present; unoxidised throughout; year 1956; bag information: CL 1, Ex 2, P1172.1-2; PRN1044.

Middle/Late Iron Age

8. Decorated body sherd from shiny, black bowl; fabric CA2; burnished on both surfaces; tooled lattice motif; unoxidised firing throughout; abraded surfaces; year 1955; bag information: 1998/3/59, P1018; PRN1014.

9. Decorated body sherd from uncertain type of vessel; fabric SS1; traces of tooled lattice decoration; oxidised exterior, unoxidised core and interior; very abraded surfaces; year 1955; bag information: 1998/3/74, P1033; PRN1015.

10. Decorated body sherd from shiny, black bowl; fabric RK1; burnished on both surfaces; tooled horizontal, parallel lines around vessel girth; unoxidised firing throughout; year 1955; bag information: 1998/3/85, P1042; PRN1028.

11. Upright rim, small jar; fabric CA2; form type R4, 7% of 140mm rim diameter present; evidence of abrasion from use on interior; year 1956; bag information: CLA 4, P1155.1-5; PRN1039.

12. Proto-saucepan pot-style jar; fabric SH2; form type R5; decorated with row of short, parallel, incised lines or slashed with fingernail along top of rim; oxidised exterior and interior surfaces, unoxidised core; soot on exterior; year 1957; bag information: 2007/31/25, CL 1, Ext 1, P1396; PRN1052.

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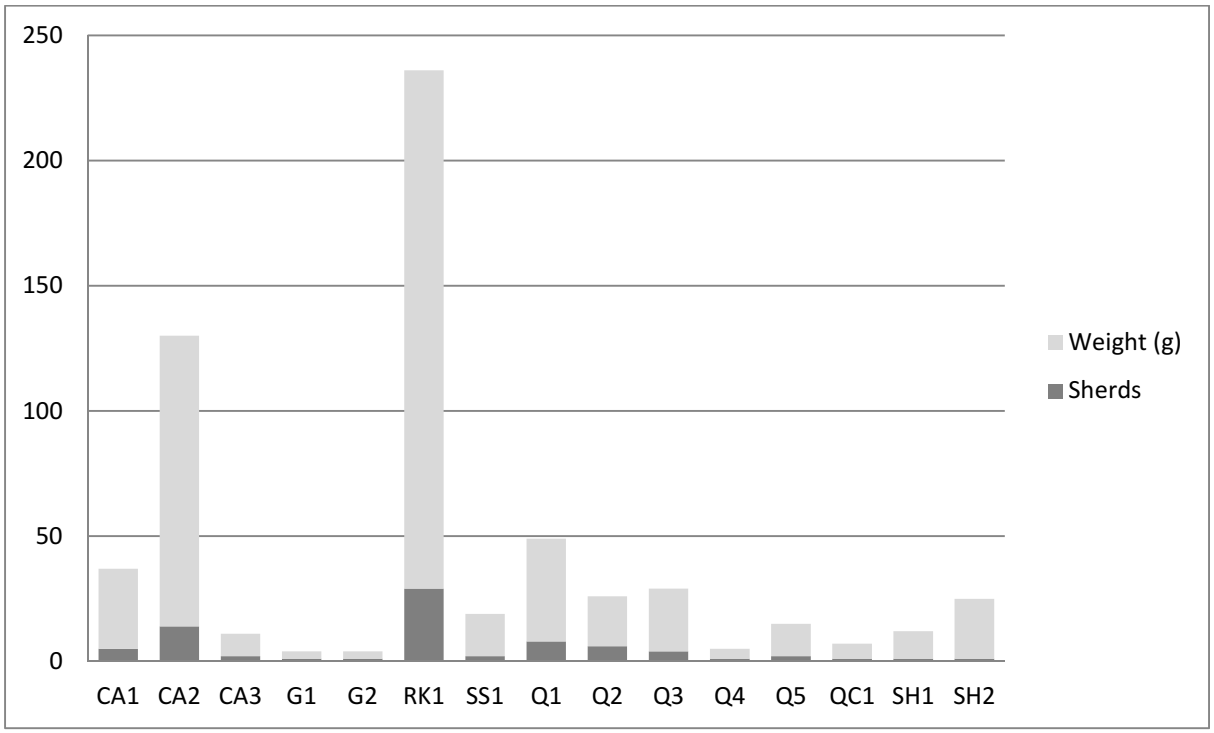
Appendix 1. Histogram of prehistoric pottery at Glastonbury Abbey



Appendix 2. Key of prehistoric pottery fabric types

Calcite Fabrics

CA1 - richly calcite-gritted fabric

CA2 – calcite-tempered fabric

CA3 – calcite-gritted fabric

Grog-tempered Fabrics

G1 – coarse, grog-tempered, sandy fabric

G2 – richly grog-tempered, slightly sandy fabric

?Igneous and Sedimentary Rock Fabrics

RK1 – possible felspathic tuff and infrequent sandstone fabric

SS1 – Possible sandstone fabric

Sandy Fabrics

Q1 – medium to coarse sand fabric

Q2 –micaceous, fine sand fabric

Q3 – very fine sand fabric

Q4 – fine sand fabric

Q5 – coarse, sand fabric with shale (Durotrigian/Black Burnished Ware)

QC1 – Vesicular, medium to coarse gravelly sand fabric

Shelly Fabrics

SH1 – shell fabric

SH2 – fossil shell and oolitic limestone fabric