

Section 52 Pottery descriptions part 1 Prehistoric, Roman, and Anglo-Saxon pottery

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Cross-references to Digital Supplement in red
Cross-references to Printed Synthesis in brown

Prehistoric and Roman pottery

Evidence for activity predating Period 3 was found in the form of pottery of early prehistoric, early and late Iron Age, and Roman dates. As this evidence is not regarded as part of the principal aims and objectives of the project, only a brief summary is included here; it is taken from the report by David Tomalin which can be seen in the archive.

Prehistoric pottery

A number of early prehistoric vessels were recovered, among them a Neolithic carinated bowl; simple rimmed and roll rimmed bowls of earlier Neolithic style, and a rusticated beaker. Their contexts had been somewhat disturbed in the medieval period, but the deposition of these single vessels in isolated pits suggests ritual deposition. The beaker may have originated in a grave. Sherds of later prehistoric date have also been recovered, principally as residual fragments in later contexts, but one substantial fingertip-decorated jar of early Iron Age date, comprising over 200 small sherds, was found in a pit disturbed by medieval courtyard cobbling. Late Iron Age pottery was also found, but only as small residual sherds of heavily-abraded, grog-tempered ware.

Roman pottery

Eleven Romano-British pottery types were identified, described in the archive. The majority of sherds found were residual in post-Roman contexts. They are all abraded and in a poor condition. Ditch 8/510 [CF28](#), however, produced two shelly ware jars, of a type manufactured at Harrold, north Bedfordshire (Brown 1994), and comprising over 100 sherds between them. They are dated to the 4th or possibly early 5th centuries. No other pottery was found in the ditch, and it is suggested that they were deposited when the ditch went out of use, in the very latest Roman period. The allocation of the use and disuse of this feature to Period 3 has therefore to be regarded as tentative despite its position in the vicinity of the Saxon *grubenhause*, [S1](#).

Anglo-Saxon pottery descriptions

A M Slowikowski

A01 Organic-tempered ware

52.03/14-17

Fabric

Fairly hard, dark grey fabric with occasional buff to brown patches on the surface. Texture is smooth with a soapy feel. Abundant long voids where organic material has burnt out. Organic material may include straw, grass, or chaff. Occasional inclusions of quartz may be present, 0.1-0.3mm, but these do not occur in every sherd. Organic tempering is predominant and quartz may not be a deliberate inclusion.

Forms

Mainly undiagnostic fragments were found although some rim sherds suggest small jars, which are plain and undecorated.

Date and parallels

This type has been published under different names, among them 'grass-tempered' and 'chaff-tempered' ware. Recent research backed by ethnographic parallels has determined that the likely source of this tempering was dung (Gaimster 1986). The term 'organic-tempered' pottery has been used here as a broad descriptive term covering all possible tempering types. A recent survey of this type of pottery has shown that, in the south and midlands, it reached its peak of popularity in the 7th century and had almost gone out of use by the mid-8th century (Hamerow *et al* 1994, 15). No stamps.

Distribution on site

The organic-tempered fabric A01 makes up a small percentage, 0.5%, of the total assemblage at La Grava, and its distribution is discussed with the total Saxon assemblage below.

A16 Mixed quartz-tempered type

52.02/1-8; 52.03/18-37B

Fabric

Hard-fired, fairly rough fabric, usually dark grey or black throughout, although surfaces may be light brown. Abundant ill-sorted sub-rounded to rounded quartz inclusions, 0.3–0.6mm, probably derived from the Greensand. Some sherds have sparse organic impressions particularly on the surface, but this may indicate that the pottery rested on grass or straw for drying rather than the deliberate inclusion of organic matter in the fabric.

Forms

Mainly single undiagnostic sherds were found, but there is some suggestion that forms may have been small, all-purpose jars. Some rims have been found, all in a fragmentary state, and a selection is illustrated in [52.03], but they are all unevenly hand-made and their true shape and angle can be difficult to distinguish. Decoration is rare but stamps do occur [52.02/1-8].

Date and parallels

The dating of this type is probably within the early-middle Saxon period, probably earlier rather than later. Associated pottery in S4, the *grubenhause* in Area 8, T 30 [52.03/38] has been dated to the 6th century (Martin Howe, pers comm) and pottery of the same type found at Furnells, Raunds, Northamptonshire, has been dated to c 600 AD (Paul Blinkhorn, pers comm). On other sites in the county, for example the deserted settlement at Stratton, quartz-tempered fabrics appear to continue well into the middle Saxon period; further work on the pottery from that site should clarify this situation (Wells in prep). The presence of rounded Greensand quartz suggests very local manufacture.

Distribution on site

This type is the most common of the Saxon fabrics, making up 69% of the Saxon, if only 4.8% of the total, assemblage. Its distribution is discussed with the total Saxon assemblage, below.

A18 Fine quartz-tempered type

52.02/9-13; 52.03/38-41

Fabric

Hard, fairly smooth but occasionally sandy in feel. Reduced dark grey to black throughout but with occasional brown exterior surfaces. Abundant, well-sorted, fine sub-rounded to sub-angular quartz, 0.1–0.2mm. The range within this fabric type is wide, but all are characterised by inclusions of very fine quartz.

Forms

Mainly jars; decoration is either in the form of stamps [52.02/9-13] or other incised motifs [52.03/38 /40]. Being in a finer fabric, vessels of this type are more likely to take a clear stamp and are therefore more likely to be decorated than the other coarser fabrics occurring on the site. Decoration is rare but stamps do occur.

Date and parallels

This type appears to be contemporary with A16, within a date range of 6th–7th centuries.

Distribution on site

Type A18 makes up 15% of the Saxon, and 1.04% of the total assemblage. Its distribution is discussed with the total Saxon assemblage, below.

A19 Quartz and organic-tempered type

52.03/42-44

Fabric

Very hard, fairly smooth fabric, reduced dark grey to black throughout. Abundant rounded quartz, deriving from the Greensand, 0.3–0.6mm. Frequent long voids, black in colour, where organic inclusions have burnt out. The same voids are seen on the surfaces. The inclusion of quartz gives this fabric a sandy rather than a soapy feel which would have been the result of the inclusion of organic matter alone. The Greensand quartz suggests that this type is related to mixed quartz A16.

Forms

All sherds are undiagnostic body sherds. No stamps

Date and parallels

A contemporary date with mixed quartz A16 and fine quartz A18 in the 6th–7th century is suggested.

Distribution on site

Only small quantities were found, 8% of the Saxon, and 0.57% of the total assemblage. Its distribution is discussed with the total Saxon assemblage, below.

A23 Sandstone-tempered type

52.03/45-47

Fabric

A hard fabric with texture like very fine sandpaper, although the surfaces have been smoothed over. Colour is dark grey to black throughout. Sandstone inclusions are in the form of distinctive clusters of quartz crystals, resembling sugar. Inclusions are moderately frequent, sub-rounded, 0.6–1.2mm in size. Abundant, sub-rounded to rounded quartz inclusions, 0.3–1.0mm. Occasional, sparse red iron ore can be seen.

Forms

Small hand-made jars with narrow upright rims. No stamps.

Date and parallels

Although a firm date is uncertain, a date in the 6th–7th centuries is suggested for this type, possibly contemporary with the mixed quartz A16 and fine quartz A18 types but with a source further afield. Only very small quantities were recovered and it is unlikely to be local. Small quantities have been recovered from other Saxon sites in the county, for example Village Farm, Bedford Southern Bypass (Albion Archaeology in prep), but never a major part of the total assemblage, and it has to be assumed that the source is outside the county.

Distribution on site

Few examples have been found, making up less than 0.1% of both the Saxon and the total assemblage. Its distribution is discussed with the total Saxon assemblage, below.

Distribution of the total Anglo-Saxon assemblage

Most of the Saxon pottery was found as residual material in later contexts. Its distribution, however, suggests that sherds were not dispersed a long distance from where they had originally been deposited and there are clear concentrations [2.03]. Large numbers of sherds, over 100 within each concentration, come from outer areas where evidence of contemporary structures in the form of *grubenhauser*, survive. The largest assemblage, 364 sherds, over one quarter of the total, comes from the area of S4. S4, a *grubehaus* in the area of the southern court, also produced pottery which may have been associated with the use of this structure, although as it was discarded in the fills it cannot be certain that the pottery may not have been used elsewhere. Concentrations of Saxon pottery were also found in other areas: the core area of the site produced 299 sherds of Saxon pottery; the area around S14 and S23 produced 188 sherds of Saxon pottery; the area around S42, S43, S56, and S59 in the southern court produced 154 sherds of Saxon pottery; and the area of S16, S22, S54, and S65 produced 130 sherds of Saxon pottery. Any evidence of contemporary structures within these areas of concentration did not survive the later building construction. All other sherds were distributed randomly over the rest of the site [2.03, 2.04].

Fifteen pottery stamps, drawings, and casts, were submitted to the Archive of Anglo-Saxon Pottery Stamps (see <<http://aasps.org.uk>>), resulting in the report which follows.

Anglo-Saxon pottery stamps

Diana C Briscoe

In the following report, where a stamp is called 'rare', it means that there are twenty or fewer examples in the whole Archive of some 20,000 stamps, and therefore it is notable and of interest. Stamps described as 'uncommon' have between 21 and 40 examples in the Archive. 'Die' means the actual piece of carved bone, wood, (possibly) chalk, or metal used to make the impression [52.01, 52.02].

Briscoe Type	Archive no	Rarity	Cat nos 52.02 ¹	Fabric	Size in mm	Associated stamps
A 4ai	008	Common	2	A16	6 x 5	
A 5ai	006	Incomplete	4	A16	5 x 6	A 9civ
A 5avii	007	Common	6	A16	11 x 12	
A 5avii	010	Common	7	A16	14 x 14?	
A 5di	015	Common	1	A16	10 x 9	
A 5fvi	001	Rare	10	A18	6 x 7	
A 7civ ●	012	Rare	3	A16	13 x 14	C 1ai; R 1bi
A 9civ ★	005	Unique	4	A16	13 x 13	A 5ai
B 2cii	016	Common	13	A18	12 x 13	
C 1ai	013	Uncommon	3	A16	3 x 3	A 7civ; R 1bi
C 2ai	003	Uncommon	11	A18	5.5 x 4	
G 2aii ★	004	Common	5	A16	10 x 4	
O ●	002		8	A16	0.5 x 5	
R 1bi	014	Common; rouletting	3	A16	3 x 4	A 7civ; C 1ai
S 1aii ◆	009	Rustication	9	A18	8 x 5.5	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Might be part of H aii ★ Might be part of an A5 di – see Archive no 15 ★ Unique stamp – nearest parallel to centre stamp from Caistor by Norwich ◆ S covers types of rusticated pots ● A close match to a stamp from Bidford, Warks (BID-27-13) 						

52.01 Table of Anglo-Saxon pottery stamps according to the Briscoe typology

Stamp A 4ai

The A 4ai stamps form the largest section of the Archive and are so common and so un-distinctive as to be almost impossible to comment upon. The Archive has around 250 examples that fall within the 'tolerance band' of 5x5 to 6x6mm.

Stamp A 5ai/avii (three examples)

The A 5a stamps form another large section of the Archive. They are seldom distinctive enough to be diagnostic from site to site. I should note here that my mother made a major change to this category just before her death by separating the stamps previously categorised as A 5ai into different categories depending on the number of 'petals' present. So a stamp with five petals is now classified as A 5av; with seven as A 5avii; and so on up to A 5axii. Category A 5axiii comprises an 'oddities' section. Category A 5ai now exclusively describes incomplete stamps where it is impossible to count the number of 'petals'. This has obviously made it easier to establish parallels from site to site.

¹ Editor's note: the table omits catalogue no 12 which is shown on 52.02

Stamp A 5avii

In the case of the two A 5avii stamps, both are at the top end of the size range for this stamp. There are 90+ stamps in the Archive, ranging in size from 14x14mm to 4x4mm and coming from all over the east and south of England. The closest parallel to the 14x14mm stamp is one from Worthy Park in Hampshire, also 14x14mm. Ranging down in size, there are also A 5avii stamps from Spong Hill (13x13mm), Crossgates at Seamer in Yorkshire (13x13mm), Altenwade in Germany (13x13mm), Lackford (12x12mm), Mucking cemetery II (11x11mm), Loveden Hill (11x11mm), and St John's in Cambridge (11x10mm). None of these are sufficiently diagnostic to warrant a connection between the two sites, but the size connection is interesting.

Stamp A 5di

This is another very large category of stamps, but there are sufficient differences between dies to make identification possible in some cases. The Archive has 57 stamps that fall within the 'tolerance band' of 9x9mm to 11x10mm. Of these, the ones that appear to have the closest resemblance to this stamp come from Cassington, Oxfordshire (9x9mm); Lackford (9x9mm); Loveden Hill (9x9mm); Kempston, Bedfordshire (10x10mm); and Mucking cemetery II (10x10mm).

Stamp A 5fvi

This is a rare category of stamps, with only ten examples in the Archive. Of these, the ones that appear to have the closest resemblance to this stamp come from Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire (6x6mm) though the site identification is not certain, Lackford (6x6mm), and Mundesley, Norfolk (7x7mm). The first is particularly significant in the light of the A 7civ stamp which follows.

Stamp A 7civ

This is a rare category of stamps, with only seven examples in the Archive. Of these, one appears to be a direct parallel to this stamp and comes from Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire (13x13mm); the stamps are probably made by the same die (Warwickshire Museum access ref A7304).

Stamp A 9civ

This is a unique stamp with no parallels in the Archive, and as such, extremely interesting. The centre motif would be classified as H 4ai, should it appear without the outer circle. H 4ai is another very rare category with only three stamps represented. None of them match the dimensions of this stamp (5x4mm). The three stamps come from West Stow (2x5mm), Caistor-by-Norwich (3x6mm) and Haslingfield, Cambridgeshire (6x12mm). However the category definitely has an East Anglian bent and this may be significant.

Stamp B 2cii

This is a fairly common stamp with 55 examples in the Archive. However, at 13x13mm, this stamp is at the absolute top end of the size range, being paralleled by only one stamp from Caistor-by-Norwich (13x13mm). There are other smaller parallels from Caistor-by-Norwich and one from West Stow at 11x9mm.

Stamp C 1ai

Surprisingly, this is an uncommon stamp with only 33 examples in the Archive. The motif is very easy to make and therefore should not be considered as diagnostic unless found in company with other paralleled stamps on the same pot or sherd. The stamp itself is at the bottom end of the size range and close

size parallels are found at Caistor-by-Norwich (3x3mm), Spong Hill (3x3mm) and Lackford (4x3.5mm). The first of these seems to reinforce apparent connections to central Norfolk.

Stamp C 2ai

This is an uncommon stamp with 38 examples in the Archive. Again the motif is so universal as to be of little use for diagnostic purposes. However, at 5.5x4mm, this stamp is at the bottom end of the size range, being paralleled by stamps from Lackford (5x5 and 5x6mm); Little Wilbraham, Cambridgeshire (5x5mm), Loveden Hill (5.5x6mm); and Mucking cemetery II (5x6mm). Again the paralleled sites appear to match the pattern of correspondence for other stamps from this site.

Stamp G 2aii

This may well be a fragment of an A 5di, but I will assume that its current classification is correct. G 2aii is a fairly common stamp with 59 examples in the Archive. The motif is so universal as to be of little use for diagnostic purposes. The closest parallels in size for this stamp all come from Spong Hill (10x4mm through 10x6mm).

Stamp R 1bi

The R types cover all forms of rouletting, but I am not satisfied with the way the classification of this type has been organised and may well revise it in the near future. Provisionally, however, I have allocated the above classification. There is no parallel to this stamp in the Archive. The impression may well have been made with a piece of metal.

Stamp S 1aii

The S types cover all forms of rustication, which is what I think we have on this sherd. There is a particular sort of rustication that produces precisely this impression when cast. I should note that several pots with this sort of rustication turned up when the Archive cast the pottery from cemeteries such as Lackford, Girton, St John's and the two Wilbrahams. It may be generic to the south Cambridgeshire/west Suffolk culture.

Despite the fact that only a little stamped pottery has been retrieved from this site, what has appeared has been extremely interesting and the stamps have frequently been rare, if not unique. There appears to be a very good chance of a direct correspondence between the pot from Bideford-on-Avon and one sherd. There is also quite a lot of evidence for contacts between La Grava and the Cambridge/West Stow axis and with Caistor-by-Norwich. These apparent long-range contacts may be explained by the position of the site, close to the junction of Ermine Street with the Icknield Way. Is it being over-imaginative to suggest that the site may have functioned as a latter-day *mansio* where traders from the north and east regularly stopped, and possibly traded? Looking at the stamped pottery, it does not seem impossible.