

Section 53 Pottery descriptions part 2 Medieval shelly wares B01–B09

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

Unrecognised B wares 53.01/48–52

Five forms in unrecognised medieval shelly wares are illustrated in [53.01]. Three are jars [53.01/48–50], one is a possible ladle [53.01/51], and the last is a bowl [53.01/52].

B01 St Neots type 53.02/53–57

Fabric

Described by Hurst (1956) and fully discussed by Hunter (1979, 230–40). At Northampton, Denham (1985, 54) defined a chronological sequence for St Neots fabrics according to, among other things, colour and texture. This sequence seems to be borne out on sites in Bedfordshire, both urban, such as Bedford (Baker and Hassall 1979c, 165), and rural, such as Stratton, near Biggleswade (Wells in prep). The La Grava vessels are consistently dark red-brown in colour, coarse in texture with poorly-sorted inclusions, predominantly shell, with sparse quantities of quartz. The fabric is comparable to B04 at Bedford and may equate to Denham's fabric T1(3), which she dates to 900–1150 (Denham 1985, 54). However, it also has some of the characteristics, particularly of form, of fabric B01A at Stratton and T1(2) at Northampton, where it has been dated to the 11th–12th centuries.

Forms

Few fragments are diagnostic of form. From a total of 66 vessels, there are four bowls, two jugs, and a single jar. The rest are small body sherds or base fragments. Bowls are large and shallow with a diameter of 40–50mm. None of the classic pre-Conquest rim forms, those that are T-shaped or inturned, occur. All vessels are competently thrown on a wheel. The deepest of the bowls [53.02/53], has a knife-trimmed base. The distinctive 'soapy' texture of the classic Saxo-Norman St Neots-type pottery has been frequently commented upon (Hurst 1956, 44; Baker and Hassall 1979c, 165). It has been suggested (McCarthy 1979, 226) that this was caused by careful wiping of the surfaces to hide the speckled white of the inclusions, something that does not seem to have been done by the potters who produced the La Grava vessels.

Date and parallels

The broadest date range for St Neots-type ware has been published as mid-9th century to 12th century, with a peak in the 10th to 11th centuries. By the 12th century, this type developed into the medieval shelly wares and at the end of the date range, it can be difficult to distinguish between them. Vessel size increased with time, so the diameters of the bowls put them into the later date range for St Neots. Jugs, only two of which were found, are a post-Conquest introduction, becoming common in the 12th century (Pearson 1996, 84). The

forms, diameters, and rim types of the few vessels present all point to a date at the end of the St Neots tradition, in the late 11th or 12th centuries.

The type occurs in small quantities at La Grava, 0.28% of the total throughout the whole life of the site. It might be that in this area, close to the Greensand Ridge, other pottery types predominated in this period, possibly the sandy types C59A and C59B, outnumbering the St Neots-type wares. This was suggested as one of the possible reasons for the paucity of St Neots-type wares at Chalgrave, six miles away from La Grava (Brine 1988, 46). A number of bowls with in-turned rims were, however, found at Chalgrave. The distribution of St Neots-type wares is very wide, and Mellor (1994a, 60) has suggested that this industry's aggressive marketing policy made this the dominant ceramic type over a wide area in the 10th and 11th centuries. It spread as far east as Essex (Helen Walker, pers comm), and south as far as London (Lynn Blackmore, pers comm).

It is found in north Hertfordshire, in quantity, at Pirton, a motte and bailey, but in St Albans it is only found in small quantities and is mainly residual in later contexts (Alison Turner-Rugg, pers comm). In Buckinghamshire it is the dominant type as far south as Bletchley, and to the north, in Northamptonshire, it dominates north of Brackley. Bearing in mind the possibility that there was a difference in fabric emphasis between north and south Bedfordshire, as there was in Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire, it is nevertheless notable that there is so little sign of St Neots-type pottery.

No kiln sites are known but the core of production of this type is thought to be the north Bedfordshire/Northamptonshire area. The geology of this area is suitable; shelly pottery was made here from the Iron Age, throughout the Roman period and into the 13th and 14th centuries. A late Roman kiln site producing both pottery and tiles was excavated at Harrold (Brown 1994) and medieval kiln sites are known at Harrold and Olney Hyde (Hall 1972; Mynard 1984).

Distribution on the site

The contexts where this type occurs are mainly situated in the core area of the priory, between S30 and the area of the ditch CF29. Odd fragments occur in outer agricultural Areas 4 and 5 [14.03], probably through manuring. Fifty contexts contain St Neots-type pottery. The earliest context is 13/1177, a sealing layer in the bridge area (S7/20), Period 4–5.2. It does, however, contain much mixed material ranging in date from the Anglo-Saxon period to the 13th century. Other contexts in which this type occurs produced a mixture of pottery types, with coarse sandy C59A, fine sandy C59B and Hertfordshire-type greyware C60 predominating, as elsewhere on the site. Other types occurring with B01 are medieval shelly B07, Nuneaton ware C21, coarse sandy C53, London ware C57, and flint and quartz ware C63. These associated pottery types agree well with the suggested dating for St Neots-type ware B01 at La Grava, above. All St Neots-type pottery from contexts phased later than 5.2 (58% of the type) may be regarded as residual. Contexts dated to the 12th century, phases 5.1 to 5.2, may be regarded as providing the latest date for the type.

B05 Harrold/Olney Hyde type

53.02/58–61

Fabric

A category for pottery with calcareous inclusions which is part of the medieval shelly tradition, and can be said, in all probability, to have originated in the Harrold/Olney Hyde group of kilns. This type has been described by Mynard (1984, 65–84) and Hall (1972, 26–30). A light orange colour when oxidised, it is a

light blue-grey when reduced. This type can be very soapy to the touch. It is often difficult to distinguish sherds belonging to these kilns on fabric alone, and diagnostic elements of form or decoration have to be present before sherds can be allocated to this type.

Forms

Mainly jugs, although some shallow bowls and jars are also present. The majority of vessels, 82%, are undiagnostic body sherds.

Date and parallels

The pottery from Olney Hyde, Buckinghamshire, has been dated to the mid-12th to late 13th centuries on typological grounds (Mynard 1984, 76). A date in the first half of the 13th century has been given to products of the Harrold kilns which were found in stratified contexts at Strixton and Irchester, Northamptonshire (Hall 1972, 2, 28). There is certainly documentary evidence for the presence of potters at Harrold in 1275 (Le Patourel 1968).

Distribution on site

At La Grava, the majority of vessels of this type occurs in phases 5.2 and 5.3, late 12th to mid-13th centuries, agreeing with the known dating from the Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire sites. Like the St Neots-type **B01**, most of the vessels of this type occur in the earliest core of the priory, associated with **S20** and **S21**.

B07 Medieval shelly ware

53.02/62-68; 53.03

Fabric

Described by Baker and Hassall (1979c, 167-170) under the name 'developed St Neots ware', this is a general term describing the broad calcareous-tempered pottery tradition that developed from the Saxo-Norman St Neots-type wares. The fabric is generally oxidised throughout to a light orange colour although patchy reduction to a light grey colour may occur.

Forms

Those occurring at La Grava are as for type **B05** Harrold/Olney Hyde-type, but with bowls predominating, and jugs and jars in roughly equal proportions. A single lamp was found.

Date and parallels

The sherds allocated to this type are those shelly sherds whose source cannot be certain, but which have been dated to the 12th or 13th centuries. At La Grava 62% are residual or intrusive.

Distribution on site

This type shows a random distribution across the core of the site. There are, however, small concentrations associated with a number of structures which have been interpreted as services or kitchens [**53.03**]. Jars, jugs, and bowls are all associated with the function of these structures. The predominance of bowls in this type suggests that other wares were being used as cooking and storage vessels, probably Hertfordshire-type greyware **C60**. The single lamp was found associated with **S27**, which functioned as a latrine block.

Form	Structure				
	21	23	27	43	59
jar	1	6	2		1
jug		4	2	1	2
bowl	3	3	3	4	11
lamp			1		

53.03 Table of forms in Type B07 found in service buildings

B09 Lyveden/Stanion type
55.02/292-294

Fabric

A calcareous-tempered pottery type, developed from Saxo-Norman St Neots type (B01), described by Webster (1975, 60-77) and Bellamy (1983).

Forms

Eleven examples of this type were found at La Grava, predominantly undiagnostic body sherds. Of the four forms which can be positively distinguished, two are jugs in Type A fabric, decorated with applied white slip with grid stamps (Webster 1975, 63). The single condiment [55.02/293] which occurred on the site was in this fabric type. One plain jar was also found.

Date and parallels

This type has been dated within a range from the early 13th to the mid-14th centuries.

Distribution on site

Five sherds are residual, and one intrusive. Of the remaining five vessels, four were found associated with S43 and S59, the domestic and agricultural buildings in the southern court, and one, the condiment, in association with S29, the guest house.