

CO-OP, AMESBURY (60030/60031/60032)

## **SAXON AND MEDIEVAL POTTERY**

by **Lorraine Mephram**

### **Introduction**

The complete assemblage from all stages of fieldwork at the Site amounts to 514 sherds (7850g). Of this, 440 sherds (5442) are of Saxon or medieval date. Four Romano-British sherds were also recovered, all residual, and the remainder of the assemblage is of post-medieval date. Only the Saxon and medieval pottery will be discussed here; details of other wares are held in the project archive.

The overall condition of the assemblage is fair; it is fragmentary, with few conjoining sherds, but sherds are relatively unabraded. Mean sherd weight is 12.4g.

### **Methods of analysis**

The assemblage was analysed following the standard Wessex Archaeology recording system for pottery (Morris 1994), focusing on a detailed examination of fabric and form. Fabrics have been defined here either on the basis of the range of macroscopic inclusions, or by reference to known types. Sixteen fabric types have been identified, of which eight are known types which can be related at least to source area if not precise source; some others may be variants of these types. Fabric totals and brief fabric descriptions are given in **Table 1**. Vessel forms have been defined and described following nationally recommended nomenclature (MPRG 1998). All data resulting from the pottery analysis are stored in the project database (Access) and are held in archive

### **Early/Middle Saxon pottery**

Two sherds of organic-tempered ware (V400) are dated as early to middle Saxon (5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries). Both are small, abraded body sherds, and both occurred residually in later contexts (ditches 489 and 503).

### **Late Saxon and medieval pottery**

The late Saxon and medieval assemblage contains 14 different ware types, most of which are identifiable at least to source area, and which reveal a number of geographically distinct sources of supply to the town. Of these, six fabrics are considered to be of Late Saxon type, with a date range of 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Most common are calcareous (chalk-tempered) wares (C400), which appear here exclusively in jar forms, long-necked, with simple, everted rims (**suggested illust 1?**). These vessels are well finished and are possibly wheelthrown, or have wheel-finished rims on handmade bodies. No complete profiles are present, but body profile appears to be rounded, and bases are sagging.

Alongside the calcareous wares are sherds of wheelthrown, reduced sandy wares of Michelmersham-type (E404), in jar forms, comparable to products of a recently excavated late 10<sup>th</sup>/early 11<sup>th</sup> century kiln in that village (Mephram and Brown forthcoming), but also comparable to its probable precursor, Late Saxon Sandy ware, found in Winchester from the late 9<sup>th</sup> century (Biddle and Collis 1978). Two examples were observed with curvilinear tooling around the shoulder. Sherds of similar sandy

wares in the same contexts, but of a slightly different texture, with oxidised surfaces (QU400), may also be Michelmersh-type products; they include body sherds with applied, stamped strips (**suggested illust 3?** Briscoe 1981, stamp type A3a) in the same manner as some of the Michelmersh-type spouted pitchers (Addyman *et al.* 1972), although the only other diagnostic sherds in this fabric are two jar rims with expanded profiles.

Also present, but in smaller quantities, are a small number of sherds containing patinated flint inclusions (FL400); only one vessel form is present, a jar with short, everted, simple rim (**suggested illust 2?**). A single sherd in a second flint-tempered fabric, containing angular, white and grey flint inclusions (F401), appears to derive from a similar form.

One other known fabric type is represented amongst the Saxo-Norman group, by just two body sherds. This is a wheelthrown ware of Cheddar type, found in late 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> contexts at the Saxon palaces at Cheddar (Rahtz 1979, 309-18).

Other wares are probably or certainly of later, early medieval date. A single sherd of a glazed, decorated tripod pitcher in Laverstock-type coarseware, from pit 520, is likely to be of late 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century date. These pitchers have been previously recorded as 'South East Wiltshire pitchers' (e.g. Vince 1981), but the similarity of fabric type with the products of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Laverstock kilns suggests an earlier production centre in this area. Other sherds of Laverstock-type coarseware from the site, however, are not so easily dated, and could lie anywhere between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Other wares occur in much smaller quantities. Flint-tempered and calcareous-/flint-tempered wares potentially fall within two ceramic traditions, from the Kennet Valley and from west Wiltshire. Wares of 'Kennet Valley' type (E441, E442; Mepham 2000) have a wide distribution across west Berkshire and north-east Wiltshire, and have a lengthy currency, from at least the 11<sup>th</sup> century through to the 13<sup>th</sup> century; one possible source is in the Savernake Forest, where the place-name *Crockerstrove* is recorded (Vince 1997, 65). 'West Wiltshire' wares (E428) have a distribution centred on Warminster and were probably products of the medieval Crockerton industry; they have a similarly lengthy currency through the medieval period (Smith 1997, 21-2, fabric D).

Finally, there are a few sherds of fine sandy ware, mostly of 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century Laverstock type (E420/E421), with one other glazed sherd of unknown source, probably of similar date (Q402), and four unglazed sherds of a non-distinctive, unglazed sandy ware (Q401).

### **Chronology and affinities**

This small assemblage from Amesbury is a useful addition to a growing body of evidence for Late Saxon ceramics within Wessex. The precise dating remains somewhat debatable, but the presence of Michelmersh-type and Cheddar-type wares indicate a date range of 10<sup>th</sup> to early 11<sup>th</sup> century for the bulk of the assemblage.

There are several comparable assemblages from sites in Wiltshire and Hampshire. Similar calcareous and flint-tempered wares, in similar jar forms, have been found at Trowbridge, Wilton and Market Lavington in Wiltshire, and at Romsey in Hampshire

(Mephram 1993; Andrews *et al.* 2000; Mephram 2006; Powell *et al.* in prep.). Michelmersh-type and Cheddar-type wares were also identified on all four sites. One sherd in an identical fabric to Amesbury fabric Q400, also with applied stamped strips, was found at Wilton (Andrews *et al.* 2000, fabric Q404), and both fabric and jar rim form are paralleled at Market Lavington (Mephram 2006, fabric E424, fig. 51, 9), although in both instances these wares were misidentified as medieval.

The evidence from all these sites tends to support the generally accepted pattern of Late Saxon pottery production and distribution, consisting of a small number of production centres in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, each with a relatively wide distribution, increasing in number and decreasing in distribution area in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Vince 1981). All five sites produced wares within the five groups of calcareous, flint-tempered, Michelmersh-type, Laverstock-type and Cheddar-type, although in varying proportions, showing that each site had access to a number of sources of ceramic supply. Sources for the calcareous and flint-tempered wares are unknown, but each may in fact form part of a 'ware tradition' produced in more than one location, but exploiting similar sources of clay and tempering agents, flint-tempered wares perhaps originating from the river valleys and calcareous wares from the chalk uplands..

A continuation of the ceramic sequence after the 11<sup>th</sup> century is difficult to demonstrate, apart from the presence of 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century glazed wares. Coarsewares of Laverstock, West Wiltshire and Kennet Valley type all have their origins in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, although continuing in use well into the medieval period. There is one definite tripod pitcher sherd of late 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century date, but nothing else closely datable. In any case, these wares are only sparsely represented on the site, and the emphasis does seem to be on the earlier period.

### **Distribution on site**

The largest groups of pottery came from ditch 523 (106 sherds), pit 518 (86 sherds) and its recut 511 (144 sherds). Sherds from ditch 523 are entirely of Late Saxon type – chalk-tempered and Michelmersh-type wares, the latter including the oxidised variant with applied stamped strips (**illust 3?**). A very similar range of fabrics and forms, with the addition of flint-tempered wares, came from pit 518 (which intersected with ditch 523) and its recut 511 (**illust 1, 2?**), although a single sherd of Kennet valley ware from the primary fill of 518, and further sherds of the same fabric from the lower fill of the recut, could indicate a slightly later date for this feature.

Apart from these three features, pottery distribution across the site was sparse, no feature yielding more than 20 sherds. This obviously renders the dating evidence provided by the pottery slightly unreliable, but what pottery there is suggests that ditches 503, 507, 519, 522 and 523 are all of Late Saxon date, but that the majority of the pits (e.g. 518/511, 520, 526, 624) and postholes (405, 426, 477, 487, 493) are slightly later.

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### **Suggested illustrations**

1. Jar rim, fabric C400. PRN (Pottery Record Number) 105, context 514, pit 518.
2. Jar rim, fabric F400. PRN 59, context 510, pit recut 511.
3. Body sherd with applied, stamped strips, fabric Q400. PRN 117, context 414, ditch 523.

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**Table 1: Saxon and medieval fabric totals**

<b>Fabric Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>No. sherds</b>	<b>Weight (g)</b>
	KNOWN WARE TYPES		
E400	Cheddar-type ware	2	22
E404	Michelmersh-type ware	80	992
E420/E421	Laverstock-type finewares	4	55
E422	Laverstock-type coarseware	17	107
E428	West Wilts type micaceous coarseware	6	32
E441	Kennet Valley flint-tempered ware	6	42
E442	Kennet Valley chalk-/flint-tempered ware	16	80
	OTHER WARES		
C400	Limestone-tempered fabric; probably wheelthrown, or with wheel-finished rims	246	3285
F400	Fabric containing sparse, patinated flint inclusions	23	314
F401	Fabric containing common, angular white/grey flint	1	43
Q400	?Michelmersh ware variant; generally with oxidised surfaces	32	404
Q401	Medium grained sandy fabric	4	11
Q402	Fine sandy glazed ware, rare flint inclusions	1	37
V400	Organic-tempered fabric (early-mid Saxon)	2	18
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>5442</b>