

# A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON A LATE SAXON WARE FROM NOTTINGHAM

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## Summary

Material from a recent excavation in Nottingham included a group of late Saxon pottery from possibly the stoke-pit of a pottery kiln. Some of the features normally associated with wasters are present. The most common form is the cooking pot/jar, with a small number of wide-mouthed bowls and one or two storage vessels. The provisional date range for this ware is c.920-1020 on ceramic grounds, with argument for a date c.1000. It is proposed to call this pottery 'Nottingham ware'.

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## Introduction

From June 1978 to March 1980 excavations were conducted on a site between St Mary's Gate and Halifax Place in the Lace Market, Nottingham (SK 575396). Material was recovered from a possible stoke-pit of a pottery kiln and included roughly shaped fired clay, which had probably been part of the kiln structure, and a group of pottery with some of the features normally associated with wasters. No dating evidence was found other than the pottery, for which a date in the range c.920-1020 can be suggested on ceramic grounds. From site phasing, a date late in the 10th or early in the 11th century can be argued.

## The pottery

A total of 405 sherds, weighing 6.4 kilograms, with an estimated minimum number of 20 vessels, maximum 38 vessels, was recovered from the possible stoke-pit. With few exceptions, the majority of this material is consistent with a single source of production, and is therefore regarded as the product of the kiln. It is proposed to call this pottery 'Nottingham ware'.

## Fabric

The main inclusions in the fabric of the kiln product are moderately sorted, common, rounded/sub-rounded quartz grains (0.1 mm - 0.8 mm, most 0.2 - 0.4 mm); moderately sorted, sparse to moderate iron (haematite, 0.1 mm - 2.0 mm); and moderately sorted, sparse white or cream anhydrite (0.1 mm - 2.0 mm, most 0.2 - 0.5 mm). The anhydrite was identified by Dr W. Cummins at Nottingham University by X-ray diffraction. There is a wide variation in the degree of hardness of the fabric ranging from soft to very hard. The fabric is smooth to the touch with a finely irregular fracture. Both oxidised and reduced sherds are represented: oxidised sherds range from pale brown, reddish-yellow, or pink to reddish-brown (Munsell: 10YR 7/3 - 6/3, 7.5 YR 7/4 - 8/4, 10YR 6/6 - 6/8, 5YR 6/4 - 6/6), while reduced sherds range from grey or grey-brown to dark grey (Munsell: 7.5Y N7/0, 10YR 6/1 - 5/1, 7.5YR N4/0). With the exception of the bowls the majority of the

sherds are reduced with predominantly orange-pink or red-brown margins and a grey core.

### Forms

The forms represented in the group are cooking pots, bowls and probably storage vessels. Of these the most common form is the cooking pot.

From the vessels recovered the form of the cooking pot would appear to be extremely standardised (Fig. 1, 1). The standard form has a globular shape, with an everted, thickened, internally hollowed rim, and with an externally trimmed convex base. Decoration is either notched lozenge roller stamping or incised horizontal lines, which do not occur in combination (Fig. 1, 2-3). Roller stamping is confined to the shoulder or external edge of the rim. Incised lines occur on the shoulder and main body.

The bowl form is wide-mouthed with a thickened triangular rim (Fig. 1, 4-5). The most common rim is triangular in section with a single example having a longer, undercut flange (Fig. 1, 6). One or two examples of a more rounded flange also occur (Fig. 1, 7). Decoration, a common feature on the bowls, is confined to roller stamping on top of the flange (Fig. 1, 5, 7).

A small number of storage vessels is also present (Fig. 1, 8-9). Of these, one example is decorated on the body with vertical applied strips which have been thumbbed.

The cooking pot form was probably wheel thrown, whereas the storage vessels were obviously coil-built. From the small number of bowls represented in the group it is possible only to suggest that they may have been coil-built and wheel finished.

No glaze was present on any of the vessels.

### The fired clay

Perhaps the best evidence for the presence of a pottery kiln are the fragments of a fired clay 'fire arch' or 'fire bar' found with the pottery. These fragments would suggest a kiln with similarities to the Torksey kiln 1 or kiln 4 (Barley, 1981, 270-1, fig. 8) or to the Thetford kilns (Davison, 1967, 193, fig. 54).

### Chronology and discussion

The forms present in this assemblage are known throughout eastern England from York in the north (Holdsworth 1976, Brooks and Mainman 1983) to Ipswich in the south (Hurst 1976). It comes as no surprise, therefore, to discover traces of a production site in Nottingham.

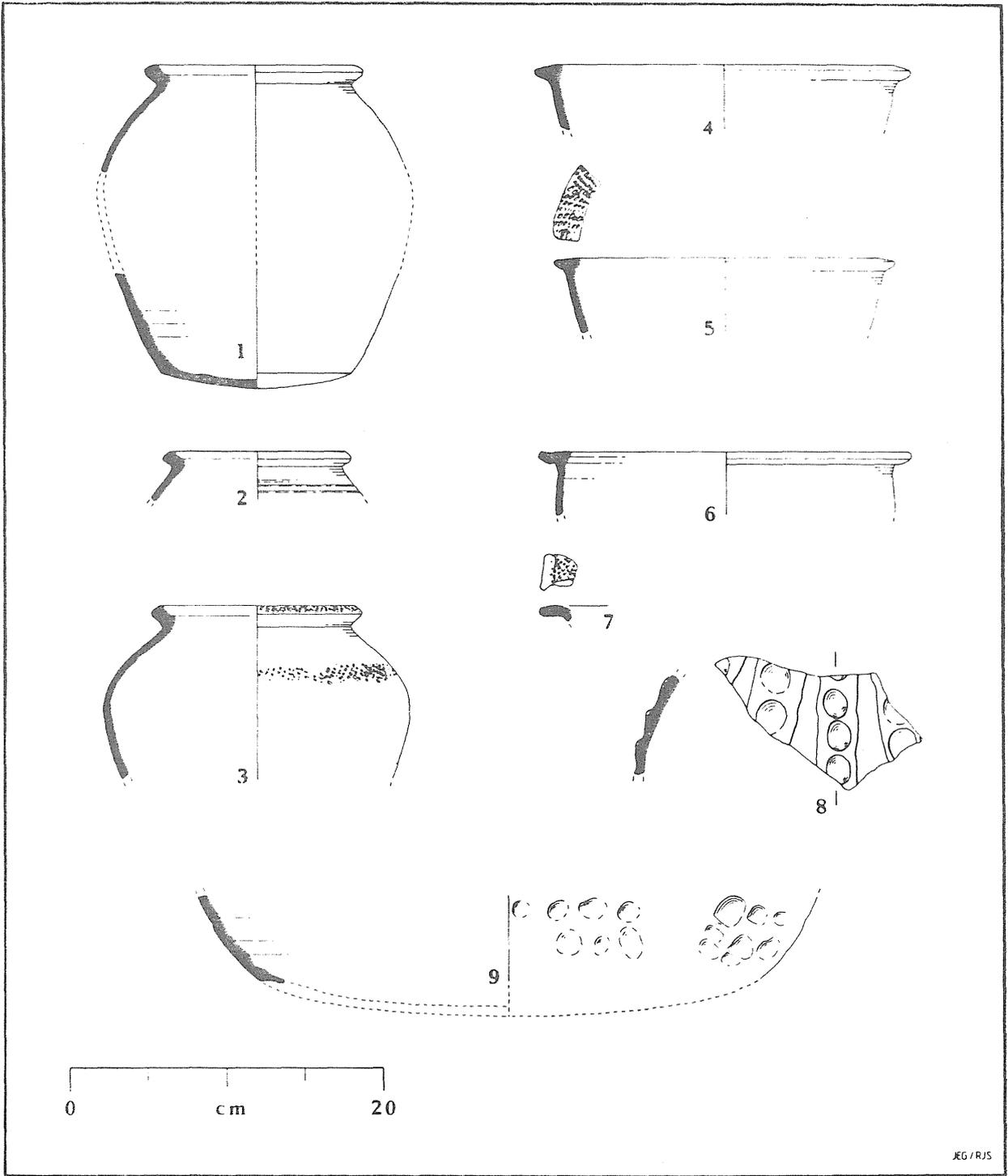


Fig. 1. Late Saxon Nottingham ware c. 920-1020. Scale 1:4

Comparison between the features of this group and other assemblages suggest that the Nottingham production was during the 10th and 11th century. The form of the cooking pots, with rectangular or slightly lid-seated rims, incised and rouletted decoration and sagging bases is closely comparable with material recovered from kilns producing Thetford-type (Hurst 1957; Atkin, Ayers and Jennings 1983; Rogerson and Dallas 1984) and Torksey-type wares (Barley 1964, 1981). These kilns have been dated to the 10th and 11th centuries with evidence of continued production at Norwich into the 12th century (Jennings 1983). The chronology has been confirmed from excavated occupation sites, for example at Coppergate in York (Mainman pers. comm.) and at Flaxengate in Lincoln (Gilmour pers. comm.). The same is true of the bowl form, both with and without rouletting on the flange. The sherd with thumbled applied strips is presumably part of a large pitcher or storage vessel which is a well-recognised form among the Thetford-type and Torksey-type wares. Many of the forms were also produced in the distinctive Stamford ware at a comparable period (Kilmurry 1980).

An attempt to place the Nottingham group in the context of a pottery type-series for the city would suggest a date in the first half of the 11th century. Material from early post-Conquest contexts indicates the production of pottery in a distinctly different tradition of hand-made, reduced sandy wares.

Although the group was from a secure context, being largely isolated to one feature, subsequent stripping precluded placing this feature in a dated stratigraphic sequence. A feature sequence can, however, be argued from the site phasing, which would suggest a date late in the 10th or early in the 11th century for the group.

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