

STAMFORD WARE FABRICS

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Summary

This paper reviews the Stamford ware fabric type series outlined by Kathy Kilmurry (1980) and discusses ways of approaching and interpreting Stamford ware products found outside the Stamford area.

Introduction

Attempts to classify the pottery produced at Stamford began when Dunning introduced the term 'Stamford ware' in 1956 (Dunning 1956) and continued with Hurst's work in 1957 (Hurst 1957). Subsequently Mahany carried out research on the fabrics and classified Stamford ware into three fabrics and three glazes. This was the background for Kathy Kilmurry's research on the pottery which further sub-divided fabrics, forms and glazes. Her thesis has become a major work of reference, but since its publication in 1980 her fabric classification has often produced difficulties for pottery researchers. Many of these problems are due to the comparatively limited quantity of Stamford material found on many sites, and the tendency to over-estimate the information potential of these few sherds.

This paper is designed to expand and to clarify some of the points discussed at an open meeting of the Lincolnshire Medieval Pottery Research Group held in Stamford on 23 February 1987. The intention is to demonstrate how recognition of the general trends in the development of Stamford fabrics can be a more realistic and useful objective for the researcher than the ability to identify individual fabrics strictly according to Kilmurry's classification.

Fabrics E and F

The published definitions of the late 9th century - early 10th century Castle kiln fabrics (Kilmurry 1980, 9, 34-9) are simply points within a spectrum covering the range of a single fabric type. Fabrics E and F are considered by Kilmurry to have been produced simultaneously, in similar quantities and in similar forms, so differentiation on the basis of subtle variations in fabric is, for the purposes of the pottery researcher, irrelevant.

The problem of differentiating the fabrics is highlighted by the fact that in Dr Kilmurry's Fig.8 (*ibid.*, 37), items 1 and 2 are published as two distinct red-painted ware vessels, in differing fabrics. These sherds were subsequently found to join.

Fabric H

Fabric H is likely to have been a Castle area product, closely related to, but dated slightly later than, fabrics E and F. The main differences are that H is generally 'dirtier', with a greater proportion of inclusions in a larger size range. It may be considered as falling at one extreme of the E/F range. It is, however, generally softer than the earlier fabrics and it is evident, from the vessels retrieved, that it is a part of a separate production process (*ibid.*, 9, 34, 42). Vessel forms and sub-forms in fabric H are basically the same as those in E/F, but some examples demonstrate the earliest known occurrence of rouletting on Stamford wares - a technique most common on subsequent A and D fabric vessels (*ibid.*, 132).

A sherd in fabric H is unlikely to be mistaken, when seen under a microscope, for one in fabric A. An isolated and undecorated bodysherd, however, could be confused with E/F, although, in terms of practical usage for dating, this is fairly inconsequential. The production of vessels in fabric H was probably short-lived and the pottery not widely distributed, so such problems are unlikely to arise.

Fabrics A and D

The nature of Stamford ware current in the 10th century poses a number of problems. For the period falling between the c. 900 AD Castle site fabric E/F kilns and the c. 1000 AD Wharf Road fabric A kilns, no production centre has been found in the town. It has been established, however, that following the relatively short-lived production of fabric H, fabric A vessels came to dominate the 10th century. These may be regarded as the first Stamford wares to have been widely traded in any significant quantity (*ibid.*, 131-133).

Because of the longevity of Saxo-Norman cooking pot/jar forms, spanning the 10th-11th century and possibly beyond, the dating of form 2 and 3 vessels and body-sherds manufactured in fabric A must at best be regarded as flexible, although rim forms may give a better measure of reliability (*ibid.*, 136-137). The similar but coarser fabric D, which is primarily a 10th century fabric, is more indicative of an early date. As a general rule vessels in the A/D range, where not obviously residual or found in association with the finer Stamford fabrics, may reflect 10th century or pre-Conquest deposition rather than that of the later 11th or 12th century.

The c. 1000 AD Wharf Road kiln produced vessels in a fabric designated A by Kilmurry and effectively falling to the finer end of the A/D spectrum. It should be noted, however, that neutron activation analysis of the Wharf Road A fabric shows that it forms a distinctive subgroup within Kilmurry's A classification, although it is visually consistent with other fabric A sherds (*ibid.*, 212. For further details on Wharf Road production: *ibid.*, 42-46; Mahany, Burchard and Simpson 1982, 95-104).

Form 1 straight-sided bowls were not found among the Wharf Road wasters, so it is assumed that such vessels were produced elsewhere in the town. Examination of some of the early types published by Kilmurry as being of fabrics A or D shows that they tend to be generally coarser than the Wharf Road material and may date from the late 10th century, superseding the more typically 10th century form 14 inturned-rim bowls. In comparison to the cooking pot/jar forms, neither form is particularly common outside Stamford.

Examination of published early form 1 bowls in both fabrics has shown that fabric D is similar to fabric A but sandier, with a greater proportion of inclusions in the upper size range. In both cases, the quartz grains are characteristically rounded and the background clay is generally clean. These features distinguish them from the earlier, more variable E/F/H fabrics, while the overall coarseness of fabric and appearance of A and D separate them from the later finewares of the 11th-12th century.

Although fabric A is said by Kilmurry to continue into the 12th century (1980, 133) it may be difficult to recognise. The manufacturing process for collared vessels, for example, tends to be superior to that of the Wharf Road products and, even microscopically, the fabric of published examples of A vessels in this form can look deceptively similar to the finer fabrics of the 11th-12th centuries (see discussion).

Again, it must be emphasised that sherds in fabrics of the A/D range (most commonly found outside Stamford in vessel forms 2 and 3, but also, to a lesser extent, in form 8, early form 5, and possibly form 1), are only potentially valuable as dating agents where there is a total absence of both finer Stamford wares and any independently datable local material. (For details of the development of vessel forms, see Kilmurry 1980, 134-140.)

Fabric G

Under Kilmurry's definition, fabric G is effectively a mixture of A and B type clays (*ibid.*, 9, 65, 207). The chances of a fresh break on a sherd revealing a 'marbled' section, as described by Kilmurry, however, are at best remote. On the whole, G is probably best used, if at all, as a generic term encompassing miscellaneous fabrics that fall somewhere between standard A and the later B types.

Precise definition of a sherd as being of fabric G is virtually irrelevant for dating purposes. Any sherd that is notably finer in fabric and other general attributes than the typical A/D or Wharf Road material would fall within Kilmurry's suggested date range of 11th-12th century, whether a true G or not.

The most widely distributed vessel form in which a G type fabric is likely to be identified is the collared vessel/spouted pitcher (forms 4 and 5), dating approximately from the mid-11th to mid-12th centuries. Stylistic changes in rim forms have been chronicled by Kilmurry, enabling a closer dating to be suggested for diagnostic sherds than can be realistically expected from the identification of fabric alone (*ibid.*, 133, 136-140).

The fabric is only rarely seen in jug forms, or with a copper glaze, although Kilmurry has published a few examples. Such vessels may, however, represent the coarser end of her B range of fabrics (see discussion).

Fabric B

Two production centres, found in close proximity, have been isolated for vessels in Kilmurry's fabric B. The first is the Pantiles site and the second is the 1963 Stamford School site nearby.

The Pantiles group of wasters has been dated to around the middle of the 12th century on the basis of typological aspects of the group. For instance, though the predominant vessel type was of the collared variety, it appeared that spouts were no longer being applied to pitchers as a matter of course. Instead, lips were being formed on the rims as a precursor to fully developed jug forms. Similarly, there is some evidence to show early experimentation with adding copper to the basic lead glaze (*ibid.*, 49-53).

The Stamford School kiln was itself dated archaeomagnetically to c. 1200 + 20 years and wasters show the Stamford pottery industry to have been in its fully 'developed' phase. This included the use of copper glazes, often in conjunction with elaborate decoration, on jugs, tubular spouted pitchers and other vessels (*ibid.*, 53-57).

The School kiln fabric appears, microscopically, to be marginally finer than that of the Pantiles and may be better termed a B/C type fabric. This is another case where a narrow definition of fabric type has little bearing on date range, as a sherd of this overall quality, with or without the copper glaze, would quite obviously belong to the later period of Stamford ware production.

Fabric C

Fabric C is extremely fine and smooth in appearance and should easily be recognised among other Stamford fabrics. It is primarily associated with the developed phase of Stamford ware production, but a plain sherd, if residual in context, may be overlooked as the fabric is virtually indistinguishable from some Midland yellow fabrics, even with X20 magnification.

Discussion

I have attempted above to describe the general trends in the development of Stamford fabrics, based on a simplified, though I hope not simplistic, interpretation of Dr Kilmurry's own highly detailed system of classification. Some of the practical problems experienced by pottery researchers using Kilmurry's fabric designations may possibly be resolved by viewing the system from a different angle, starting with Christine Mahany's original series consisting simply of fabrics A, B and C. This approach is particularly pertinent to problems associated with the longevity of Kilmurry's fabric A and to the definition of her fabric G.

Mahany's original fabric A, corresponding to 10th-11th century coarsewares, was sub-divided by Kilmurry to include fabrics A, D, E, F, G and H (Kilmurry 1980, 8). In an effort to rationalise these, one may view E/F and H as a single fabric grouping and A and D as a further group within the same general, if slowly evolving, tradition that dominated the Stamford industry until the mid 11th century. Any production of fabric A beyond this date may be associated primarily with the continued, but declining, manufacture of form 2 and 3 cooking pots and the earlier sub-forms of form 5 spouted pitchers. It is doubtful, however, whether fabric A proper should be linked with the rapidly developing fineware industry (corresponding to Mahany's fabric B), which was to the forefront of Stamford ceramic production by the late 11th century. Rather, the general appearance of fineware vessels published as fabric A by Kilmurry tends to suggest that they belong within Mahany's B tradition, and even microscopically, the fabric may appear to have more in common with Kilmurry's own fabric B than with her fabric A. Hence it has become almost standard practice for researchers to use such terms as A/B, A/G etc. to denote fabrics which are marginally coarser than the standard Kilmurry fabric B (i.e. the Pantiles waster fabric), but finer than her fabric A.

Fabric G is the most elusive of Kilmurry's series and has been the subject of apparent misunderstanding both in and out of print. Kilmurry proposed the fabric as being a further sub-division of Mahany's original fabric A tradition, writing that "Mahany ... defines Fabrics B and C macroscopically; her original Fabric A can now be divided into Fabrics A, D, E, F, G and H." (*ibid.*, 8). Mahany, on the other hand, in a footnote referring to the re-classification of her fabrics by Kilmurry, assigns fabric G to her own fineware tradition (B). She states: "The work of K. Kilmurry ... has further sub-divided, by microscopic examination, the sandy fabric A, into her fabrics A, D, E, F and H ... Mahany fabric B corresponds to Kilmurry B and G, and Mahany fabric C to Kilmurry C" (Mahany, Burchard and Simpson 1982, 119-120).

For the purposes of the pottery researcher, it is practical to regard fabric G as belonging with the fineware tradition and the 11th century innovations of vessel form. In Kilmurry's work, fabric G is predominantly associated with collared vessels and spouted pitchers from around the middle of the 11th century, with a negligible proportion of cooking pots in that fabric. The latter are quite probably better described as representing the finer end of the A tradition. Similarly, where finewares have been published as fabric A by Kilmurry, it would appear that this is more logically the coarser end of the Mahany B fabric tradition than the finer end of Mahany A.

For the general purposes of the pottery researcher, particularly in consideration of the complex period spanning the 11th century, it may be practical to revert to Mahany's original fabric classification. In terms of using Stamford ware as a dating indicator, it would be better to let ware sub-grouping, on the basis of vessel form and sub-form, override the finer details of fabric.

The table below summarises the apparent relationships between Mahany's and Kilmurry's respective systems as discussed above.

	c. 900-1050+ coarsewares	c. 1050-12th cent. finewares	c. 1150-13th cent. developed
Mahany	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>
Kilmurry	E/F, H, A/D	(A), G, B	B, C
Dominant vessel forms	2, 3, 8, 5	4, 5	6, 24

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