



Compendiario

An Assemblage of Notes and News



THE HISTORY OF THE ARCHIVE OF ANGLO-SAXON POTTERY STAMPS

Introduction

The Archive of Anglo-Saxon Pottery Stamps covers the period usually referred to as 'Pagan Saxon', but in fact stamps continue to be found in contexts as late as the early 8th century, although the peak period is the late 5th to early 7th centuries. Following the merger of the Early Anglo-Saxon Pottery Group with the Medieval Pottery Research Group in 1992, it was suggested that many members of the M.P.R.G. would not be aware of the existence and scope of the Archive, and for that reason this note has been written.

The history of the Archive

The present Archive was started in 1980, as a result of suggestions by Tom and Margaret Jones, who had discovered an easy, cheap and reliable way of recording stamps on the Anglo-Saxon pots at Mucking. The possibility that the same stamps could be associated with a number of pots was, however, first recognised by the late J. N. L. Myres and published in 1937.

The impetus for developing this field of research came with the excavation of the Lackford cemetery. As the discoverer of this site in 1945, I took part in the initial excavations, and became interested in the shape and form of the stamps on the pots being recovered. It was at the suggestion of the late Tom Lethbridge that I started to re-draw and study the stamps, first from Lackford and then from subsequent reports. As a result I accumulated an illustrated Card Index, started in 1951 and taken from excavation reports.

The Lackford report, published by Lethbridge in 1951, was the first ever stamp-orientated excavation report for an Anglo-Saxon Cemetery. This site formed a watershed in the study of Anglo-Saxon pottery, as up to this time pots were poorly illustrated or ignored unless whole, decorated or considered unusual. This was also probably the first 'rescue' excavation to be carried out, after a second deep ploughing of the site, and under what today would be considered insuperable difficulties. At this time petrol and funds were unavailable, as was paper for publication. To add to these problems, the site was two kilometres from any road — all equipment and the recovered pots had to be carried to where the cars could be parked each evening, and then taken back to Cambridge (about 25 miles/40 kilometres away). Because of the attitude to Anglo-Saxon pottery which had been the norm until this time, vast numbers of sherds from the site, which would now be kept and drawn, were ignored, so that this site represents the meeting of the old and the new techniques.

In order to be able to use the Card Index, it was necessary to work out a classification system so as to be able to retrieve stamps without difficulty. When the Jones' approached the British Museum with the idea of an Archive, I was asked, because of my previous work, to expand my operations to include the new casts. Initially they all came from Mucking.

The structure of the Archive

Since its inception, the Archive has accumulated some 18,000 casts of individual pot stamps from all over England. All the

major museums have now been covered and many smaller ones. Of the two big South Humberside cemeteries, Cleatham has been cast and processed for the Archive and the second is being done this year. Although the casts in the Archive are almost exclusively from the Pagan Anglo-Saxon period, information on, and some casts of, Celtic, Romano-Saxon, Late Saxon and Early Medieval stamped pottery are included when these are sent to us, but are labelled for the different periods. The classification system devised for the stamps is published elsewhere (Briscoe 1981), and is not described here.

In addition to this, there is the illustrated Card Index, showing stamps copied from reports (*i.e.* where casts are not available due to various circumstances, including loss of the pot or sherd). Secondly there is Dr. Noel Myres' illustrated card index and *Corpus* of the stamped pots, with 1556 records; thirdly there is a collection of impressions taken in Europe by Dafydd Kidd, numbering 468 items, plus impressions from various other sources.

This information, which includes over 20,000 stamps, is stored on computer [Amstrad PCW8512] and can be accessed on 3 in. or 5.25 in. floppy disks. Computer programs used are LocoScript, LocoMail, LocoFile and Sage Retrieve. Material from the LocoMotive programs can also be accessed on IBM-compatible computers. The information is organised as follows:

1. *Site Lists*: *i.e.* stamps found at a specific site.
2. *Retrieve databases* for the following areas:
 - a) Northern area
 - b) Midlands area
 - c) Southern area
 - d) East Anglia excluding Norfolk
 - e) Norfolk
 - f) Spong Hill
 - g) Loveden Hill

Information can be extracted on a variety of parameters from all these databases: *e.g.* a specific Pot type, a specific Stamp Group, a specific Site, Pots with bosses, Museum, Myres *Corpus* reference, etc. None of the databases (a–e), above, overlap.

3. *Retrieve databases* for uncast stamps:
 - a) Card Index (see above)
 - b) Myres *Corpus*: stamped pots
 - c) Continental stamps

4. *Locofile databases*. These combine material from 2a–e (above), organised by Stamp group, so that it is possible to get an overall picture for the whole country for a specific group (*e.g.* A5fv). In conjunction with LocoMail, information can be extracted on a variety of parameters. We can also produce LocoMail lists for Sites or areas, organised by Stamp type.

Furthermore, research into old publications of sites has been carried out, and we have acquired photocopies of the relevant material. This, with the large library of books on the period which we have accumulated, offers a reference library in addition to the casts for consultation.

Aims, objectives and use of the Archive

The primary aim of the Archive is to produce material for comparison between sites which may be far apart, in order to

discover any patterns in distribution that might lead to more information regarding the early Anglo-Saxon settlers, their movements, trade patterns and perhaps even their religious beliefs. In addition, reports are made on any material which is submitted to us. Reports are also written, on stamps which have been submitted, for inclusion in excavation reports. Information has also been sent by letter to inquirers from the Continent.

The Archive is housed at present at Little Acres, Stoke Poges, Bucks SL2 4JG, England. It is available to anyone who would like to visit it or who wishes to consult it, in order to compare material or for reference. Stoke Poges is easily reached by train from Paddington to Slough, or by car. The Archive is destined to be deposited in the British Museum, which supports our work.

A number of people visit the Archive each year, and in July 1991 it hosted a meeting of the Early Anglo-Saxon Pottery Group. This was well attended, and much interest shown in what was available.

Present findings and research

It has become evident, as a result the latest acquired material, that the distribution of pot stamps has a bearing on tribal and family groups. It is hoped to be able to trace this back, ultimately, to continental sources. The material is already showing a regional bias for some of the less common motifs, some of which can be linked to continental sites. Two further articles are planned, but the pressure of work on the Archive plus the research into the material and writing of reports makes this difficult.

The task of listing stamps, drawing them for the card index and putting the data on computer continues, and it will be some time before this is completed, but we expect our current workload to be processed by mid-1993, and welcome information on any new discoveries of stamped pottery.

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AN ANGLO-SAXON MAMMIFORM POTTERY VESSEL FROM BARTON-ON-HUMBER

Introduction

The pot which is the subject of this note was found in 1990, during the excavation by the Humberside County Council Archaeology Unit of an Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemetery at Castledyke South, Barton-on-Humber, South Humberside (TA 0317 2175). The vessel (Fig. 1), which is complete, was found in the grave (No. 133) of an infant of undetermined sex. The poor condition of the skeletal remains precluded a closer determination of age. The pot was supported by a fragment of lava quern and lay towards the centre of the grave. The only

other grave goods were an iron fragment and three glass beads, all of which were found in the grave fill above the pot. The beads may be of 6th- or 7th-century date, the period to which most of the Castledyke inhumations belong. The provision of a pottery accessory vessel was not a majority rite within the cemetery; deliberately deposited pots occur in only c. 15 of the 190 graves. These are predominantly the graves of children, and the pots in question are usually plain domestic vessels showing signs of previous use.

Description

The vessel (weight 212 gm) is mammiform, with a bulbous perforated 'teat' at the base. It has a neatly defined neck above an asymmetrical body, with a short, irregularly beaded, everted rim. The upper body has a well-rounded profile. The vessel height (with rim plane horizontal) is 111 mm; the rim diameter is 63–67 mm, while the diameter of the perforation of the teat is 4–6 mm.

The fabric is dark grey with red external core margin; the external surface is dark brownish-grey except for two areas of abrasion (see below) where the smoothed surface has worn away to reveal the colour of the core-margin. The fabric is tempered with abundant, angular, dark brown magnetic inclusions in the size range c. 0.5–3.0 mm. These are presently interpreted as iron slag. They are visible on the exterior surface only in the areas noted above. Occasional quartz grains and voids of burned-out organic material also occur. There are no other vessels in this fabric from the cemetery, and no Early Saxon slag-tempered vessels from South Humberside are known to the author. This need not, of course, imply a non-local or foreign origin for the vessel.

The upper half of the inner surface presents several roughly horizontal *striae*, the longest of which occupies approximately one-third of the circumference; the cross-section varies from 'V'-shaped to irregular. These appear to have been made before firing and may result from grits being dragged along the surface by the potter's fingers during manufacture.

Patchy light-coloured residues which react with dilute hydrochloric acid occur on several parts of the vessel. They are most extensive on the upper half of the interior, but there are also slight traces over much of the outer surface. It is hoped that specialist analysis of these residues (not yet carried out) will contribute to an understanding of the use to which this vessel was put, although they may prove to have been caused by the post-depositional environment.

The teat is very heavily abraded. Both the outer surface and core margin have been completely worn away, and the original shape of this part of the vessel is uncertain. The only other signs of wear are the two abraded areas noted above. One is directly below the rim, the other on the maximum girth on the opposite, more bulbous, side of the pot (see below).

Discussion

The most obvious interpretation of this vessel is that it was a child's feeding bottle, an assumption which tends to be reinforced by the fact that it was found in an infant's grave. Vessels with this function are recorded in a variety of materials, including ceramic, from both earlier and later periods, though no other mammiform nor Anglo-Saxon examples are at present known to the author. There is at least nothing inherently improbable in the provision of such a vessel for an infant who could not, for whatever reason, be fed naturally. If this is the case then one must suppose that the vessel was intended for an unweaned infant, perhaps to administer milk expressed by the mother or a wet-nurse. The basal perforation is rather large, but it could have been packed with a scrap of cloth or other material in order to help regulate the flow. The bulbous shape of this part