



## Compendiario

*An Assemblage of Notes and News*



### A MEDIEVAL POTTERY KILN FROM STEAD LANE, THORNER, LEEDS

#### Introduction

In 1997 Archaeological Services (WYAS) were commissioned by Portford Homes to carry out an archaeological watching brief during groundwork associated with a residential development on land in the centre of the village of Thorner in West Yorkshire (see Fig. 1 for a location plan).

#### Location and geology

The development area lay in the centre of the village of Thorner, on the north-eastern outskirts of Leeds, West Yorkshire (NGR SE 379 403), on fairly level ground at an altitude of *c.* 90 m aOD. The underlying geology was predominantly millstone grit, underlain by sandstone together with a band of mudstone and shale across the eastern part of the site.

#### Archaeological background and fieldwork methodology

The village of Thorner has been known as the location of medieval pottery kilns since the mid 1960s when P. Mayes published a brief note on the recovery of pottery, including wasters, disturbed by building work (Wilson and Hurst 1967). This confirmed documentary evidence published by Le Patourel (1965: figure 40, 1968:109, 118, 119) which indicated that pottery was manufactured in the village until at least 1358.

The development area was believed to coincide with the site of the medieval manorial complex of Thorner. Apart from some damage caused by service trenches, the construction of cottages to the north and a small group of flats to the west, the supposed manorial complex appeared to have largely survived as open grassland since its abandonment in the eighteenth century. Pottery and building remains were reputedly found during the removal of a railway embankment to the west of the site and the construction of the flats. In 1966 a medieval pottery kiln and pottery wasters were discovered during development work approximately 250 m to the north-west of the development area, close to Manor Farm Cottage and Thorner Beck (Wilson and Hurst 1967). Archaeological investigation during the current development was regrettably limited to a watching brief, with scope for limited feature clarification and salvage recording.

#### Results

The sections exposed during the excavations showed a

general inclination of deposits down towards the south and into an apparent basin. The clean, pale yellow and cream, natural sands clearly visible in the northern trenches were seen to dip down under various silty deposits, predominantly a reddish-brown silty loam. All these deposits became wetter towards the centre and south of the site, the lower deposits showing signs of gleying taking place at a depth of *c.* 1.30 m below the ground surface (after topsoil stripping). A number of archaeological features were identified including evidence for a possible moat or water course at the southern end of the site, smaller ditches and a medieval pottery kiln in the north-eastern part of the development area.

#### *The kiln*

The site of the medieval kiln (context 31) was initially visible as a patch of red daub/fired clay within the subsoil that also contained an abundance of medieval pottery. Further pottery fragments were scattered over an area to the east of the kiln. A concentration of daub/fired clay, possibly representing a second kiln, was observed 15 m to the east of the kiln at the northern limit of the site. Cleaning and partial excavation of kiln 31 revealed it to be approximately oval in plan, measuring about 2 m by 1 m and orientated east-west. A projecting lobe of reddened clay on the eastern side was probably indicative of a flue position. Immediately to the west of the kiln was a circular shallow depression (not fully excavated) about 1.5 m in diameter. The upper fills of this depression were ashy in character and yielded a quantity of medieval pottery. The kiln appeared to have been constructed of yellow clay, which had become reddened on firing. A number of non-diagnostic blocks of burnt Magnesian limestone embedded randomly within the clay suggested that components of the kiln structure might well have been of stone. No vitrified parts of the kiln walls or floor were recovered from the site suggesting that the kiln remains had been dismantled or truncated in antiquity. The kiln would appear to have been quite small with internal dimensions of probably no more than 1 m by 0.5 m. What little evidence there is suggests it may have possessed two opposing flues, with the western depression being the principal flue and access point.

#### *The moat or channel*

The investigation encountered what appears to have been a network of linear channels, the largest of which was waterlogged. A full plan of these features could not be made. Nevertheless, their locations and orientations are not consistent with the conventional plan of a moated manorial complex. The pottery recovered from their fills would suggest that they were open in the medieval period, possibly for the purpose of draining an area that has historically been renowned for being boggy.

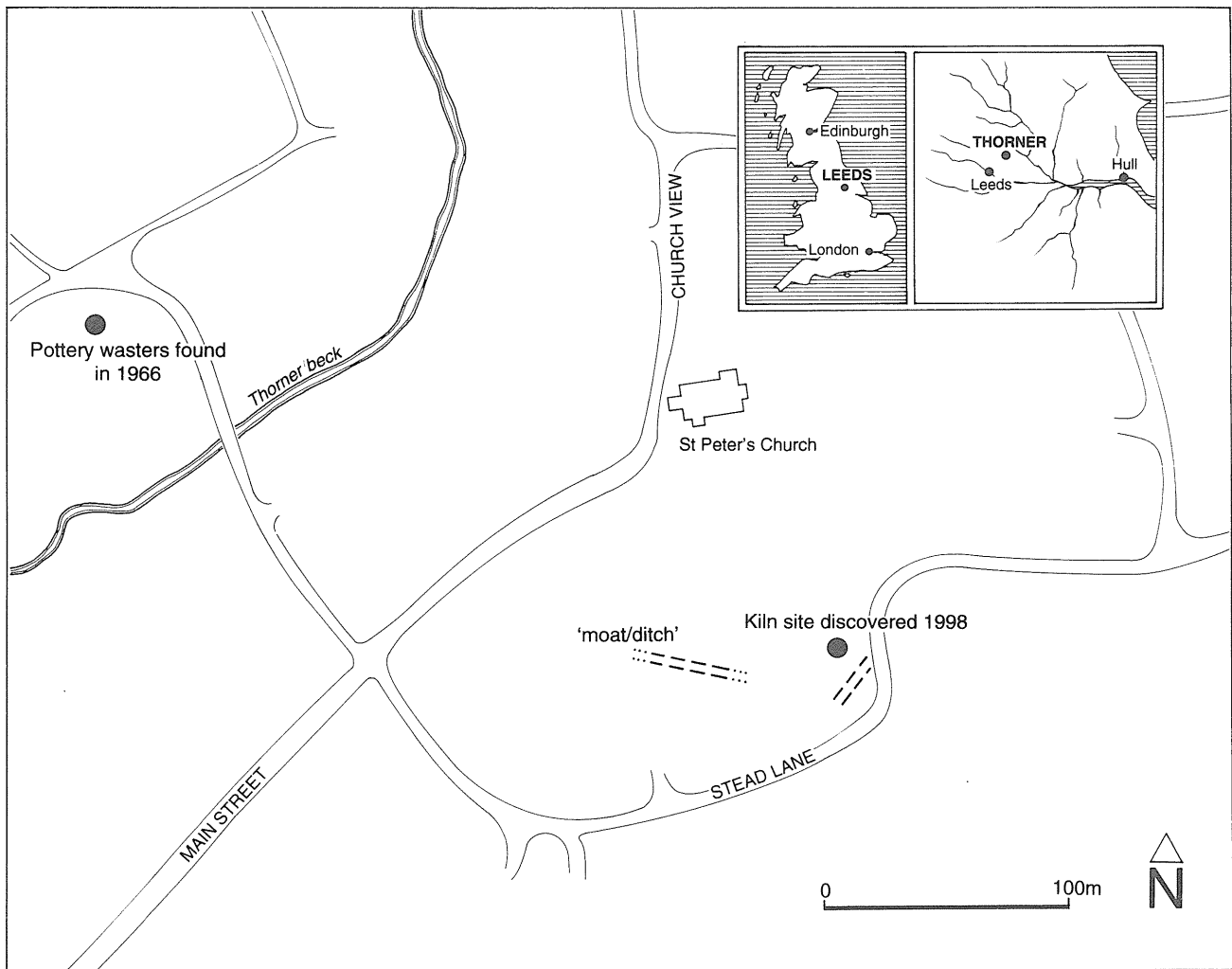


Fig. 1. Location map for the site of the medieval pottery kiln at Stead Lane, Thorner, Leeds.

**The pottery**

The assemblage consisted of 683 sherds of pottery weighing 8859 grams. The group was remarkably homogeneous in composition both in terms of the fabrics present and the vessel shapes. Owing to financial restrictions the following description of the assemblage is based on an assessment-type examination rather than full sherd-by-sherd recording.

*Fabric*

The group was dominated by an orange oxidised fabric, but included a substantial proportion of two reduced versions, reduced either throughout or internally with oxidised internal and external margins. The pottery was very hard and all of the sherds were in good condition showing no evidence of abrasion or reworking. Macroscopically the pottery was a quartz-sand tempered gritty ware with an uneven 'pimplly' surface. The closest affinities would appear to be with 11th- and 12th-century types such as Hillam and Pimplly wares (Cumberpatch, in prep.). It should be distinguished from later medieval soft or friable gritty wares such as those described by Moorhouse and Slowikowski (1987) from Kirkstall Abbey. Under a binocular microscope ( $\times 20$  magnification) the fabric is somewhat vesicular and

contains moderate to abundant quantities of transparent angular to sub-angular quartz. The inclusions measure between 0.6 mm and 2mm, although the larger grains were somewhat rarer than those of 1mm and below. In reduced sherds the quartz is even more prominent, appearing white or transparent against the dark grey matrix.

Although the closest comparison is with Hillam ware, a number of characteristics distinguish the Thorner material. Some of these are typological and are described below, but in terms of the fabric the material is characterised by a more restricted range of mineral inclusions, principally quartz. The non-crystalline red ferrous grains characteristic of Hillam ware are notable by their absence. The fabric has been given the provisional name of Thorner type ware.

*Manufacture*

All of the sherds examined were wheel thrown, in spite of the coarseness of the clay. There was no evidence of surface modification such as knife trimming or dry smoothing. None of the sherds showed any trace of glaze or slip and none was decorated. The quasi-decorative rilling on the body of the vessel, a characteristic of Hillam wares, was also absent. While the assemblage did not include any

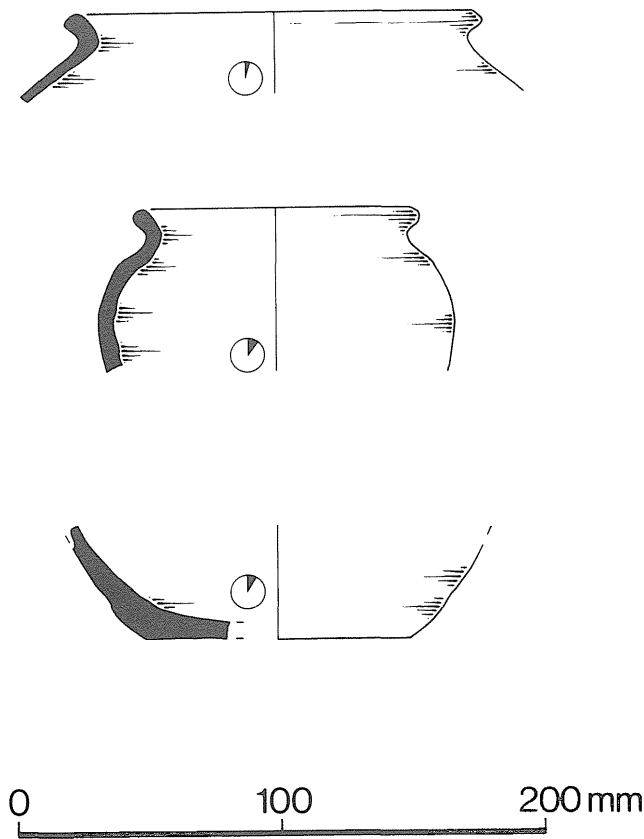


Fig. 2. Characteristic sherds from the kiln at Thorner, Leeds.

medieval domestic ceramic assemblages, although familiar from workshop groups (cf. Cumberpatch *et al.* 1998–9, this vol. p. 54.)

Neither of these observations proves that the pottery was from a workshop and the fired clay found associated with it (described below) could have been from a furnace serving some other purpose. On balance however, it seems reasonable to suggest that the assemblage was associated with a workshop, although only more detailed excavation and controlled recovery could have demonstrated this conclusively.

*Typological characteristics*

The vessels were homogeneous in typological terms, all appearing to be flat based, plain, globular jars or cooking pots (although none were sooted). There were no complete profiles and three characteristic sherds are shown in Figure 2. The rims were low, everted and rounded in shape, resembling those published by Manby from Upper Heaton (1964, Figure 11; 1–4, 7, 9). A minority showed a more angular profile and these tended to be in the reduced fabrics, although this distinction was probably a matter of chance as a considerable number of rounded rims were also in the reduced fabric. The vessels are typologically similar to Le Patourel’s 13th-century Northern Gritty type (1965, figure 31) with the earlier square profiled rims (typical of Hillam wares) notable by their absence. As Le Patourel has noted, however such characteristics have limited reliability in terms of dating (*ibid.*, 111).

*Dating*

As noted above, dating on typological grounds is less than reliable. The ‘rule of thumb’ that the square or rectangular profiled rims characteristic of Hillam and Pimply wares are earlier than the heavy rounded rims, characteristic of Northern Gritty and Orange Gritty wares, should not be transferred outside these types uncritically. There is no unequivocal evidence for the date of the assemblage from Thorner. All that can be suggested is that, on the basis of the technical quality of the pots and their typological characteristics, they seem more likely to date to the earlier part of the 13th century, rather than the preceding 11th and 12th centuries. There was no evidence to place them later than the mid-13th century. The evidence of other types

obvious kiln wasters it did not resemble a normal domestic assemblage. Two characteristics stood out which pointed to a non-domestic origin:

- The vessels showed no sign of having been used; wear was minimal and none of the sherds was sooted, most unusual with gritty ware (cf. Cumberpatch 1997)
- The assemblage was dominated by a single type of vessel and fabric. Although sherds from other vessels were present, the quantities were extremely small and the majority were not contemporary with the overwhelming bulk of the material. Such a composition profile is highly unusual in

Table 1. Statistics of sherd counts by pottery type from the excavation of the kiln at Thorner, Leeds.

Context	Description	Thorner type	Hillam	Brown glazed	Green glazed	Coarse gritty	Orange gritty	Roman
1	U/S; 10 m S of kiln					3		
4	U/S; 10 m S of kiln		1				1	
5 <sup>1</sup>	U/S; 10 m S of kiln	1						
6 <sup>2</sup>	Fill of channel 10 m S of kiln	10	4					
			(1 base)					
23	Fill of channel 60 m E of kiln	13						
24 <sup>3</sup>	Subsoil above kiln	209	1	2				
25	Reddened clay above kiln	145	2		1			1

1. The flanged rim sherd differed from the usual Thorner fabric in containing an unidentified black grit.  
 2. Three joining base sherds in Hillam ware formed part of the base of a large jar/cooking pot.  
 3. Also found was a strap handle in an unidentified soft oxidised sandy ware.

of pottery associated with the group was of little help in resolving the question of the date. Two contexts (24 and 25, the subsoil above the kiln and the fill of the kiln respectively) both included sherds of Hillam ware, as did the collection of unstratified material. This alone cannot be taken as unequivocal evidence of a date however as context 25 also included a sherd of Roman greyware while context 24 produced two sherds of post-medieval (later 17th- or 18th-century) Brown Glazed Coarse ware. Amongst the unstratified material a sherd from a 15th-century spigot-hole cistern in a Purple Glazed Sandy ware further confused the issue.

#### *Parallels for Thorner type ware*

It is highly probable that Thorner type ware has hitherto been subsumed under the categories of Oxidised Hillam ware, Gritty ware, Orange Gritty ware and Northern Gritty ware, but the timely identification of the type has led to a review of material from Pontefract Castle (Cumberpatch, in prep.). Although the quantities present cannot yet be determined, it is clear that Thorner type ware does occur amongst the material from the Castle and that it forms a small but significant component of the assemblage. A summary description of the contexts and finds is given in Table 1. Contexts 24, 25, 26 and 27 produced 2589 grams of soft, untempered, oxidised fired clay. This appears to have formed part of a furnace or kiln, although no obviously structural elements were identified.

#### Conclusion

The evidence suggests that during the 13th century the site was part of, or close to, a medieval pottery production site. The small kiln could well be associated with the pottery industry, although the available evidence is inadequate to determine this conclusively.

The presence of a deep watercourse or ditch on the site and open during the medieval period might also be indicated by the results of the watching brief. The points at which the course of the feature can be plotted on the ground do not allow the reconstruction of a symmetrical moated enclosure.

#### Acknowledgements

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## AN EARLY MEDIEVAL POTTERY PRODUCTION SITE AT BURY HILL, MELTON, SUFFOLK

### INTRODUCTION

Small-scale excavations by Suffolk County Council Archaeological Unit at Bury Hill, Melton (SMR ref. MTN002) in 1982 produced a total of 19 kg of pottery. Melton is located 8 miles to the north-east of Ipswich, just outside Woodbridge in the Deben Valley (Fig. 1).

The excavation was prompted by the recovery of relatively large quantities of pottery from pipe trenches in the area by a local historian, Mrs W. Dalrymple-Hay, in the early 1980s. Prior to this, medieval pottery had been found in the general area in the early 1960s during drainage work. The excavation was funded by Suffolk County Council and was carried out before extensive residential development of the site. The site archive is held by the Archaeological Service, Suffolk County Council. For lack of funding, a report on the site and its artefacts was not completed until recently (Abbott and Anderson 1997).

Two trial trenches with a total area of 27 square metres were hand excavated at a point where drainage trenching had allowed a large number of medieval pottery sherds to be collected. The trial trenches were only one metre apart and both revealed two parallel ditches of broadly contemporary, early medieval (11th-12th century) date, with the later ditch almost certainly being a recut of the earlier one. Both ditches contained large quantities of medieval pottery sherds, and of the total exposed 11-metre length of the features within the two trial trenches, some 6 metres were excavated and hand sorted. The only other features in the trenches were a short length of ditch of probably late Neolithic date and an undated posthole. While no direct evidence was found for pottery production on the site, only a small area was examined and subsequent watching-brief work in the vicinity of the trial trenches was frustrated by poor communications with various developers, making the context of this relatively large pottery find uncertain. However further evidence for medieval activity in the area is indicated by the casual recovery of a King John (1199-1216) penny close to the site in the mid-1980s.