

Ailsa Mainman and Anne Jenner

Medieval pottery from York

Illustrations by Lesley Collett

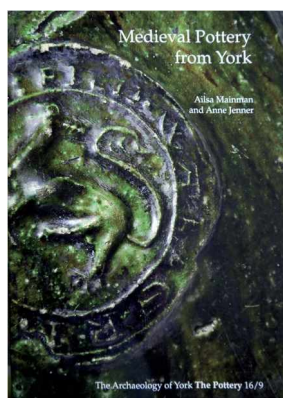
with Michael Andrews, Charlotte Bentley, Kate Leach and Trevor Pearson

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This volume presents a chronological guide to the medieval pottery of York from *c* 1050 to *c* 1500, drawing on both the historical context of York city and archaeology from recent excavations by the York Archaeological Trust (YAT). The date of *c* 1050 has been deliberately chosen as the first ceramic phase

in this publication representing the Anglo-Norman/medieval city and continues the sequence of pottery volumes (AY 16) following work on the Anglo-Scandinavian pottery (Mainman 1990, AY 16/5). The transition to post-medieval pottery from the 16th century onwards is seen as 'beyond the scope of this publication' but will be addressed by a forthcoming publication of YAT's 2008–11 excavations at Hungate. This publication is therefore very much presented as part of the fascicule series by which YAT present a collective overview of the city.

As part of the fascicule series this volume makes brief reference to the location of the medieval sites referred to in the text (Fig.436). For further information on particular sites the reader must go to the relevant publication, for example AY 10/6 for 16–22 Coppergate. Once you understand this concept it is not difficult to appreciate that this is a volume dedicated to summarising the pottery evidence only. Pottery fabrics, for example, were described in previous work (for example Brooks 1987 AY 16/3) are not duplicated here, making this a continuation and appreciation of previous pottery research in York. The Scope of this Volume states clearly that this volume draws on the large assemblages of 16–22 Coppergate (AY 10/6) and the College of the Vicars Choral at Bedern (AY 10/5) and that other sites referred to have been used to address particular questions or to provide illustrations. Dating and phasing draws on the evidence from four medieval tenements at 16–22 Coppergate which provided broadly-dated sequences supported by independent dating such as radiocarbon, dendrochronological, coin and archaeometric dates.

The book is divided into three sections; the first an Introduction and Overview setting the context for the assemblages studied, the second part is set out as four Ceramic Phases (CP9–12) and the last section draws the Conclusions together. The Catalogue of the illustrated vessels gives further detail of individual vessels including fabric description, colour, glaze type, rim diameter, site location and context number. Though the assemblages from 16–22 Coppergate supply the largest and most broadly-dated sequences of pottery it has been pointed out (page 1169) that the vessels at Coppergate were particularly fragmentary and so vessels from other sites in the city have been used to supplement the illustrations for this volume.

The first part of this volume includes a very brief introduction explaining the framework for this particular publication. The scope of this volume summarises the basis on which assemblages have been chosen; an overview provides a chronological narrative to the wares discussed; a definition of all the ceramic phases (CP0–CP13) used in York, with a short summary given for Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian phases (CP5–CP8); and finally a methodology with an explanation of the dating and phasing, quantification and terminology used.

The second part of this publication is concerned with the four Ceramic Phases (CP9–12) which cover the mid/late 11th to late 15th centuries in York. Each ceramic phase is a 'Chapter' which starts with a brief overview of the dominant ware types and continues then to discuss the major wares in more detail. Each 'chapter' follows a similar format; a short resume summarises previous research as a background, presenting a re-evaluation of the ware types in the light of recent thin section and ICPS work carried out by the late Alan Vince. Clarification of a sometimes varied Nomenclature is a natural part of this summary. Vessel forms, rim size and decorative motifs are discussed and illustrated for each ware type, presenting supplementary examples to those already published. Distribution and dating include recent find spots of a particular ware in other parts of Yorkshire and further afield. To reassess the dating of each ware the archaeological sequences from 16–22 Coppergate (AY 10/6) and the College of the Vicars Choral at Bedern (AY 10/5) have been used. Pie charts for each site phase and seriation graphs help to demonstrate these chronological changes.

Ceramic Phase 9 (*c* 1050/70–1150) discusses Stamford-type wares, Gritty Wares, Splashed wares and imported wares. Each section encompasses a discussion of the latest thoughts on these wares, for example the recent discovery of a kiln at Simpson Malt Factory in Pontefract (Roberts and Cumberpatch 2009) produced a new provenance for some of the 'so-called Stamford-ware products' found in York.

Re-evaluation of five Gritty ware fabrics – previously published as fabrics which vary considerably (Brooks AY 16/3, 150) are reassessed here (pages 1178 and

1179) from five samples, which Vince proved to have different petrological and chemical characteristics suggesting a variety of possible production sites similar to samples of clays from Pontefract, north or west of the Vale of Pickering and the Vale of York. As the main cooking vessel fabric in post-conquest levels (Period 6 at Coppergate) and the next two centuries discussion continues on how this ware type might be part of a broader northern Gritty ware tradition with a distribution throughout Yorkshire, Northumberland and southern Scotland (Jennings 1992, 14).

Splashed Wares in all their variety are presented by fabric type-characterised 'as a broad spectrum of similar, overlapping fabrics and forms and a great deal of variability' but grouped here as three main types; oxidised, reduced and white-firing clays which reached the York market as pitchers or jugs and occasionally jars and pipkins.

The late 11th- to early 13th-century tenants of the Coppergate properties are seen as purchasing their wares from a number of contemporary production sites. The period is one of entrepreneurship and enterprise in 12th-century Anglo-Norman York which has become a thriving and expanding commercial centre trading with the region.

Ceramic Phase 10 (*c* 1150–1250) is noted for the highly decorated 'York Glazed wares' which dominate this period. A short introduction tells us that Gritty wares continue to supply cooking vessels, some of the Splashed wares continue in production in the early part of CP10 whilst French imported vessels from Rouen and Saintonge, Scarborough ware and Developed Stamford ware also occur in small quantities.

York Glazed wares are one of the earliest mainstream medieval ceramic industries which supply York throughout the Anglo-Norman period. These occur from mid/late 12th century through to the mid/late 13th century. Clarification is offered for the previous use of the term 'York White ware'. This volume reinforces that both the early and mainstream York Glazed wares encompass a variety of fabrics and that the Early York Glazed ware is characterised by pink quartz giving it a grittier appearance. In the Discussion of York Glazed wares (page 1224) the evidence from 16–22 Coppergate concludes that there is no chronological difference between these fabric types and that the once thought of earlier type is merely a variation of the main ware.

The Coppergate evidence is therefore able to support that both pink and mainstream whiteware fabrics occur in the 12th century; Early York Glazed ware possibly by the mid 12th century and York Glazed ware in the second half of the 12th century.

A discussion of the York Glazed ware jug forms is comprehensive in describing styles and forms. As the collection of complete and near complete vessels in the Yorkshire Museum has been published by Sarah Jennings (1992 39–44) the supplementary examples here are from Hungate and 16–22 Coppergate. Types

of decoration, 'drenched in religion and myth', are discussed in detail and previous interpretations re-viewed. The conclusion summarises that these highly decorated vessels are clearly devices linked to social, cultural and political significance and may reflect status as in the case of the de Quincy seal and prosperous families such as the FitzWalters.

CP10 is summarised as an innovative period of pottery production between the mid 12th and mid 13th centuries when York was in a boom period with many established ecclesiastical institutions expanding and new ones coming into existence. Gritty wares continue to provide the cooking wares whilst local tastes prefer table jugs, condiment dishes, aquamaniles, lamps and sprinklers made in light-coloured fabrics. Whilst elements of decoration may be influenced by French vessels the York seal jugs are unique and remain a distinct feature of York Glazed ware.

Ceramic Period 11 (*c* 1250–1350) is dominated by Brandsby-type ware, once thought to be quite a distinct production from the village of Brandsby 14m north of York, but now considered to be a successor to York Glazed ware. A second dominant fabric type in CP11 is Sandy Red wares now believed to evolve from the oxidized Splashed wares of CP9.

Brandsby-type ware is considered the gradual replacement of York Glazed ware occurring from the early/mid 13th century and continuing through to the second half of the 14th century.

Mainman and Jenner conclude that Vince's thin section and chemical analysis points to sources to the north of York with a tradition of potting extending from the 12th to 15th centuries; a similar conclusion to documentary work carried out by Le Patourel in 1968 and Hayes in 1988.

The similarity between what are termed 'York Glazed wares' and the early forms of Brandsby-type wares has long been recognised (by Holdsworth 1978, Brooks AY 13/1, 13 and AY 16/3, 151–4, and Jennings 1992, 24) and is acknowledged here. This volume contributes further evidence from Brooks and then Jennings work on the assemblages from the College of the Vicars Choral at Bedern (AY 10/5) that both of these wares use similar decorative motifs and the suggestion is made by Mainman and Jenner that these are overlapping industries in the early to mid 13th century rather than viewing Brandsby-type ware as a new type (page 1233).

Sandy red ware vessels are discussed and illustrated in Figures 510–11 and a speculative production source suggested to the north or north-east of York where there are other known production centres in Beverley, Scarborough and Staxton/Potter Brompton or closer to the Humber basin.

Ceramic Phase 12 (*c* 1350–1450/1500) sees the final decades of Brandsby-type ware, the rise of Humber wares and Walmgate ware produced at Walmgate and Fishergate in York. European imports include three examples of Saintonge pegau, Low Countries red ware, Sieberg, Langerwehe and Raeren.

Stratigraphically (at 118–126 Walmgate) the Walmgate ware wasters could date from the late 13th to late 15th century but typologically look like unglazed late 14th to early 15th-century baluster-shaped drinking jugs. Vince's work on the pottery from Blue Bridge Lane in Fishergate suggests strong similarities with Brandsby-type ware made from the boulder clays of the Hambleton and Howardian Hills.

A large section of Ceramic Phase 12 discusses the significant assemblage of industrial Red Sandy wares found at the College of the Vicars Choral at Bedern (AY 10/5), first identified by Brooks and then Jennings (1992, 44–5). Vessels used in the distilling process; bases, cucurbits, bowls, jugs, cauldrons/bowls with tripod feet and crucibles are found along with domestic vessels such as jugs, jars, curfews, dripping dishes and some roof furniture.

Humber wares gradually take a larger share of the pottery market in York from the later 14th century and peak in the 15th. At the same time Brandsby-type wares decrease in popularity in the late 14th century. In this the York assemblages resemble those from Beverley (Watkins 1991, 99) and Hull (Watkins 1987).

Hambleton-type ware is a fine white ware with thick green glaze found in late 14th to 15th century deposits. One of the more common forms is the cistern and the more unusual lobed bowl with fluted rim which on emptying reveal a human figure or stag.

The summary for CP12 discusses the change from white to red-firing clays which continues through to the 19th century. Pottery mostly from the Humber Basin begins to take over the market and a more utilitarian product, for example the basic small drinking jug is less carefully finished and sometimes partially glazed. The Walmgate wares produced in York are considered an inferior product, almost disposable, being poorly shaped, poorly finished and usually unglazed, though in their defense they are mostly industrial vessels produced for a specific market.

Conclusions for this volume surmise that medieval York was supplied by rural potteries for most of its history, though the pattern of supply changed over time. Vince's analytical work has helped to characterise these local products as well as indicating the possible locations of some of these potteries. The conclusions are presented by centuries (late 11th to 15th). The established trading networks of the Anglo-Scandinavian period changed in the Anglo-Norman period to small new potteries established in villages around the town, stimulated by the presence of a large and reliable market. Analysis of the late 11th-/12th-century Gritty wares suggests a source to the south-west of the city in the region around Potterton, West Yorkshire. In the course of the 12th century the 'exuberant style' and highly decorated York Glazed ware appealed to a higher social class or those aspiring to it and are likely to be from a source to the north of York, overlapping with the emergence of Brandsby-type wares from the same potting villages to the north of

the city. These coincide with York undergoing a boom period with many secular and ecclesiastical institutions expanding.

Towards the end of the 13th century documentary and archaeological evidence shows that a shift is starting to take place to the use of red-firing clays from villages to the south of York which leads to the dominance of the Humber ware potters taking a large share of the market by the end of the 14th century. Consideration of the impact of the Black Death on the potting villages to the north is given as a speculative reason for the change in style and forms of pottery at the end of the 14th century. Throughout the 14th and 15th centuries white-firing clays continue in production from the villages to the north on a limited scale. Brandsby-type wares evolve into Hambleton-type wares which specialise in the production of table wares, such as the lobed bowl. In the 15th-century Humber wares dominate the York market and evolve into Purple Glazed wares of the 16th century.

This book is no quick guide to the medieval pottery of York but a review, building on previous research and a re-evaluation of the major pottery industries found in York between 1050 and 1500. New consideration is given to the sources of these wares in the light of thin section and chemical analysis (ICPS) carried out by Alan Vince and is set into a chronological framework by reference to the well-stratified archaeological sequences of Coppergate and Bedern. The combination of these two sets of data was enough to warrant the research involved in this publication in a re-assessment of the medieval pottery sequence in York. In a city which has only one known production site Alan Vince's contribution has been an invaluable piece of research characterising the possible sources for local industries. Respectfully building on previous research and publication fabric descriptions have not been systematically reproduced here but discussed and referenced as the foundation for research in this volume. The fact that these publications (AY 16/1 from 1978 and AY 16/3 from 1987) are still valid is a tribute to their authors.

The range of vessels is well illustrated by line drawings and some colour photography. The colour photographs of the sherd fractures (detail of fabric) are a useful tool to accompany the photographs and show the variation in fabric types but though produced at x20 or 1:1 (not stated) would, for my liking, be more useful if a little larger or more expansive. As the illustrations are supplementary to previously published volumes this is not a stand alone guide to the medieval pottery of York but a continuation of previous work.

The use of pie charts and seriation graphs seem to be a favoured York method of presentation and in this respect follow a house style. In my opinion, the serigraphs are difficult to interpret in detail given that one axis is labelled with pit groups numbers for which the reader has no reference in this book. For example in Figure 439 one can only presume that pit 39102 is nearer

AD 1050 in date and pit 39107 nearer AD 1150, as the text says that Gritty ware rises in popularity in the second half of the 11th century. Perhaps a set of dates on the axis would have been more useful than the pit numbers for the Hungate site. As a simple diagram the message is conveyed but it requires further reading to be able to interpret the results and pit context/landuse numbers for which there is no explanation in the text.

The summaries for Ceramic Phase CP9 and CP10 relate the major ware types to likely production sources and interpret how the development of the Anglo-Norman town may have influenced these wares and trade, for example in CP 9 York is characterised as becoming a thriving and expanding commercial centre trading with the region. For CP11 and CP12, however, there is no such interpretation. It might have been helpful if these summaries discussed the types of housing and population inhabiting the city at this time. Perhaps we could have had plans of the city at each ceramic phase so as to interpret how the town changed, though this makes for a different type of publication.

These issues raise the question of what level of readership this publication is aimed at. This is not a simple guide to the medieval pottery of York but a more detailed summary and re-evaluation of the major pottery ware types, its restrictions as a stand alone guide to the medieval pottery of York lie in it being part of the York fascicule series. To make it more of a stand-alone reference book it would have needed an explanation of the archaeology from the sites within the city, a summary of the phases at Coppergate and Bedern used as the dating for this volume and a bit more in the Summary for each Ceramic Phase on what types of properties existed in each phase of the city, helping to interpret the its character. However, to have included this would have made the publication a much bigger volume, requiring more time in preparation and a more costly purchase price. This also falls outside of the fascicule structure by which York publishes its archaeology.

This book therefore works on two levels – to simply look up what types of pottery are found in York this is a good guide to the ware types and some vessel forms, though for a complete picture of all vessel forms and fabric details the reader will have to go to previous volumes and Jennings publication of the Yorkshire Museum collections (Jennings 1982). For the more serious pottery researcher a little more work is required to establish dates, influences and where in York these wares are found; but these are questions which no one volume can encompass. Nothing can beat the expertise and years of accumulated knowledge gained by a local pottery specialist from continuing research incorporating new archaeological evidence.

This was a big subject to accommodate in one volume and I can see that some compromise has had to be made in how far to discuss the medieval pottery of York, for example the luxury of reproducing all illustrations of a ware type in one publication. This volume serves to update the previous publications and gives a good guide to the main ware types, their vessel forms, is well illustrated and well researched drawing on other sites in York and beyond. Its main focus has been to address research into possible clay sources and combine this with two well-defined site sequences. Mainman and Jenner have succeeded in moving forward and defining a chronological sequence for some very similar looking pottery traditions found in the medieval pottery of York. Where it is limited is in some of the broader themes but this would be taking this book into a different publication and format.

Lucy Whittingham
7th July 2014

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