

Cheviot Quarry Pottery Assessment (Pottery from all interventions at the quarry)

By: Clive Waddington

Background

The Cheviot Quarry has produced large assemblages of pottery from interventions by the University of Durham, MAP, Tyne and Wear Museums Service and by the most recent work by ARS Ltd. The assemblage of Neolithic pottery resulting from the work by Durham University included 37 sherds and a further 43 tiny fragments, and consisted of a group of Carinated Bowl sherds and a group of Impressed Ware sherds of the Meldon Bridge sub-style, and these have been fully published elsewhere (Waddington 2000). The MAP excavations produced 167 sherds of Neolithic pottery that included fragments of Carinated Bowls, Impressed Ware, Early Beaker and Later Beaker (MAP 2000). The TWMS watching brief and excavation produced 180 sherds of pottery and included fragments of Carinated Bowl, including about 100 fragments from what looks to be a near enough complete Carinated vessel, and a piece of Grooved Ware. The ARS Ltd excavation produced 322 sherds that included fragments of Carinated Bowls, Neolithic Plain Ware and Grooved Ware.

The pottery recovered from Cheviot Quarry forms one of the largest assemblages of Neolithic pottery so far discovered in Northern England. However, what makes the assemblage of particular significance is that:

1. An entire sequence of Neolithic stylistic forms is present which will allow for typo-chronological analysis and inferences about related uses, behaviour and patterns of discard
2. Most of the material comes from datable contexts which will allow the sequence to be dated
3. The pottery all comes from features with good contextual and archaeological associations (e.g. from pits within buildings)
4. Many of the sherds have adhesions on the internal and external surfaces making many suitable for residue analysis (see the residue assessment) which will assist in understanding function, diet and other behavioural patterns through the Neolithic

The diversity of types and associations with different types of features (e.g. pits, hearths, buildings) will allow for consideration of linkages between certain pottery forms and particular uses and depositional practices. Furthermore, comparisons will be able to be made between the directly analogous pottery recovered from the adjacent Thirlings site and the similar features identified there (including rectangular buildings, pits and hearths).

Sherd Count & No. vessels estimate

A total of 706 sherds of pottery have been recovered from Cheviot Quarry of which all are Neolithic except for three that are probably Iron Age in date. The initial assessment

suggests that there are at least 11 from the University of Durham evaluation (Waddington 2000), at least 60 vessels present in the material recovered from the ARS Ltd excavations, at least 12 from the MAP excavations (MAP 2000) and, based on an initial inspection, 10 from the Tyne and Wear excavations. An additional 100 or more crumbs of pottery have been collected with these samples. Although some of the sherds are small body sherds there are large amounts of rims and substantial-sized sherds including the sherds of what is almost a complete beaker and two Carinated Bowls. All three of these should be able to be reconstructed.

Fabrics and Technology

A mixture of fabrics are present, though the Carinated Bowls are generally all very well made and highly burnished, whereas the plain bowls are not quite as well-finished though they are still, in most cases, well-made substantial vessels. This accords with the observations made by Herne in his review of Early Neolithic bowls (Herne 1988). The fabrics all contain opening agents in the form of crushed sandstone or quartz, coil made and have undergone open firings. The Impressed Ware is thick-walled and well made and also has a calky fabric. The Grooved Ware is also well-made, though often more crumbly than the earlier pottery. It had crushed stone inclusions and is also usually thick-walled. The beakers tend to be a thinner fabric and well-made, again with small crushed stone inclusions, and includes both cord and comb decorated vessels. All these fabrics and styles can be related to the existing corpus of pottery known from North East England, and the Milfield Basin in particular. This will allow for direct comparisons between existing material and that which has been found previously.

Dating

The dating of prehistoric pottery in Northern England is poorly understood with only a handful of dated pieces. To date there are no dates for Impressed Ware in the north, only one dated beaker in the North East (Topping 2004), and virtually no dates for Grooved Ware other than the single pit from Milfield North (Waddington unpub.). As the entire Neolithic sequence is present on this site, and all with the potential to be dated, there is a unique opportunity to understand the typo-chronology of Neolithic ceramics in the north and to relate this to patterns of past human behaviour, methods of construction and decoration as well as information relating to cooking practices, storage, diet, daily routines and depositional customs and perhaps ritual connotations.

Discussion

The assemblage from Cheviot Quarry can be compared to the assemblage from the adjacent site at Thirlings which produced Carinated Bowls, Plain Ware, Impressed Ware and Grooved Ware (Miket 1987). This site is being written up concurrently with Cheviot Quarry and so the opportunity exists to look at these assemblages together. Furthermore, these assemblages can be compared with those from Yeavering, Milfield North, the henge sites, Ford and the Ewart Pit alignment (all in the Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle) and those from Broomridge (British Museum) to allow for synthesis of this

data and enhance understanding of the role of pottery in Neolithic communities, identify patterns in depositional and functional practices as well as explore the varying stylistic and potential symbolic connotations by relating them to contemporary forms of art and expression at the time (e.g. rock art, lithic forms).

Conservation Statement

The ceramics have all been placed in acid free paper subsequent to excavation and then placed in sealed plastic bags. The pottery has then been individually unwrapped and left to be air dried over several days. The pottery has been placed back in its acid free paper and placed in its plastic bag with the bags then placed in stout cardboard storage boxes. Advice on the best way to store these pieces will be sought from the Museum of Antiquities of Newcastle prior to deposition.

Further Work

A full analysis, based on standards set out by the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group is required for the entire assemblage, together with a report that places the pottery in its typo-chronological context, and relates the pottery to the existing corpus known from the region. A dedicated dating programme should be targeted at this pottery to take advantage of the opportunity to obtain a full sequence of dates for Neolithic pottery in the north. At least 60 of the sherds merit illustrating for publication, a number of which are decorated. Furthermore, it is recommended that reconstruction drawings showing vessels in 3D are undertaken for: 1) the Carinated Bowls and Plain Wares, 2) the Impressed Ware, 3) the Grooved Ware and 4) the Beakers. Three vessels could be attempted to be reconstructed, although only one of these appears to have the majority of sherds present. A complimentary programme of residue analysis should be undertaken to assist with understanding function and associations of the vessels.

References

- Herne, A. 1988. A time and place for the Grimston Bowl. In J. C. Barrett and I. A. Kinnes (eds.) *The Archaeology of Context in the neolithic and Bronze Age: Recent Trends*. Sheffield, Department of Archaeology and Prehistory: 9-29.
- MAP. 2000. Cheviot Quarry, Milfield Near Wooler Northumberland. Phase 1 and Phase 2 South. Unpublished archive report. Pottery Assessment Appendix 6.
- Miket, R. 1987. *The Milfield Basin, Northumberland 4000 BC - AD 800*, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, Unpub. MLitt Thesis.
- Topping, P. 2004. Hillforts, farms and fields. Excavations on Wether Hill, Ingram 1993-2002. In P. Frodsham (ed.) *Archaeology in Northumberland National Park*. York, Council for British Archaeology. CBA Research Report 136: 190-201.

Waddington, C. 2000. Neolithic pottery from Woodbridge Farm, The Old Airfield, Milfield. *Archaeologia Aeliana* 5th series 28: 1-9.