UNCORRECTED ARCHIVE REPORT

APPENDIX 7 – ANGLO-SAXON POTTERY

by Paul Booth

Introduction

Some 221 sherds (3540 g) of Anglo-Saxon pottery were recovered from features 39, 43, 82, 283, 324 and 664. All the pottery from these features was scanned very rapidly (in 2005) to check that the already-recorded Iron Age and Roman material did not include Anglo-Saxon sherds. In the event, all the pottery (18 sherds, 312 g) from feature 324 was assigned to the Anglo-Saxon period, having originally been recorded using the Iron Age pottery recording system when it was realised that some or most of the pottery was Saxon. A single tiny fragment from context 82/A/3, originally recorded as Roman, was similarly reassigned. As so often, confident separation of body sherds of Iron Age and early Anglo-Saxon date on fabric criteria alone was problematic and not all of the sherds listed below are certainly of the latter period. This problem was exacerbated by severe limitations on resources which precluded comprehensive recording of the material, including detailed examination of fabrics. The pottery was mostly in quite good condition. The assemblage had an average sherd weight of 16 g and included a number of large, fresh sherds. Surfaces were usually well-preserved. Fabric groups were recorded by context group in terms of sherd count and weight and vessels were quantified by rim count and REs (rim equivalents). Aspects of surface treatment and vessel use were noted where clearly present.

Fabrics

A number of sherds were examined at x20 magnification to define the range of fabric types. Most sherds were then assigned to these groups on the basis of macroscopic examination. Seven fabric groupings were defined, usually on the basis of their two most common inclusion types. The latter were identified by alphabetic codes, as follows:

A quartz sand

M mica

N none evident

R rock (sandstone in this assemblage)

V 'vegetable/grass' organic

The firing of all the fabrics was fairly consistent. Unoxidised (dark grey to black) or irregularly fired surfaces were characteristic (the latter particularly on the exterior) and only a few sherds were partly oxidised. Inclusion sizes were generally not above 1 mm

except for organic (V) temper. Exterior burnishing was common, interior burnishing less so.

Summary fabric descriptions:

AN. Only sparse to moderate sand grains visible. This type of fabric is common in the middle Iron Age, and it is possible that some of the sherds assigned to it here were not of Anglo-Saxon date.

AR. Sand-tempered with the addition of sparse to moderate inclusions of sandstone up to *c* 2 mm, the concreted grains of which are clearly visible at x20 magnification. All the sherds in this fabric were notably well-finished, being burnished overall both externally and internally. Mica is fairly prominent in the surfaces of some sherds.

A(V). Sand-tempered with sparse organic inclusions. This type of fabric is also relatively common in an Iron Age context and an Iron Age date is possible for some of the sherds recorded in it.

AV. Sand- and organic-tempered. In some cases the organic inclusions, or the characteristic voids indicative of them, appear more prominent than the sand grains, but examination at x20 magnification showed that the quartz sand inclusions were generally more common.

VA. As fabric AV, but the relative proportions of organic and quartz sand inclusion are reversed.

VAM. As fabric VA, but with the addition of prominent mica inclusions. All the sherds in this fabric came from fills of feature 283.

V(A). As fabric VA, but the sand inclusions appear to be very sparse.

Quantification of the fabrics is given in Table A7:1.

Table A7:1: Anglo-Saxon pottery fabric totals

Fabric	No.sherds	% Sherds	Weight	% Weight	Vessels
AN	5	2.3	76	2.1	
AR	7	3.2	126	3.6	1
A(V)	11	5.0	654	18.5	1
AV	149	67.4	2107	59.5	8
VA	33	14.9	423	11.9	2
VAM	13	5.9	138	3.9	
V(A)	3	1.4	16	0.5	
TOTAL	**221**		**3540**		**12**

In effect, fabrics A(V) to V(A) are a continuum, with the two main inclusion types

present in varying proportions. It is uncertain how far the different stages along the continuum were considered significant by the potters producing these vessels, which is why fairly broad groupings have been adopted. The sample is insufficiently large for firm conclusions to be based on these variations, but the two most common groups (in terms of sherd count) are those closest together, fabrics AV and VA (together comprising 82.4% of all sherds and 78% of weight), rather suggesting that the distinctions were not particularly important. The addition of mica in fabric VAM may indicate a slightly different clay source from that of the majority of the material, but these sherds were otherwise very similar to those in fabric VA. There is no indication of the source(s) of most of the pottery, although these may be presumed to have been local. Fabric AR, with sandstone inclusions, was distinctive but may also have been of quite local origin. These inclusions are likely to have been of 'Malmstone', a local sandstone derived from the Upper Greensand Formation (Owen et al 1996, 74). It is sometimes used in Iron Age pottery in the area, for example being analogous with the 'conglomerate' noted by Hingley as the defining characteristic of Iron Age fabric 4 at Wittenham Clumps (Hingley 1980, 34) and some Iron Age fabrics on this site (see Iron Age pottery report, Appendix 5).

Table A7:2: Quantification of Anglo-Saxon pottery fabrics by context

Context	Fabric	No	Wt	Vessels	Comments
39/A/1	AV	21	241	C/122	
	VA	4	49		
39/A/2	A(V)	1	134		
	AV	44	881	C/730	
	VA	2	27	C/710	
39/A/3	AN	1	19		
	AV	3	59		
	VA	1	10		
39/A/4	VA	12	108		
39/A/5	AV	3	56		
39/A/6	AV	1	43	C/731	same vessel in /5
	VA	5	86		
Sub Total		*98*	*1713*		
43/A	AN	1	6		possibly not A-S
43/A/1	AV	4	84	C/731	
43/A/3	A(V)	6	421		possibly not A-S
Sub Total		*11*	*511*		
82/A/3	AV	1	2		
Sub Total		*1*	*2*		
283/A/1	AN	1	18		possibly not A-S

Context	Fabric	No	Wt	Vessels	Comments
	A(V)	1	54	base	possibly not A-S
	AV	1	11		possibly not A-S
	AV	2	73	C/731	
	VA	3	8		
	VAM	10	90		
283/A/2	AV	26	283	C/735	
	VA	2	52		
283/A/4	VAM	1	6		
283/B/5	AV	1	8		
283/C/1	AV	2	16		
	VA	1	47		
	VAM	2	42		
283/C/3	AR	1	24		
	AV	25	127	C/110 C/112	
283/C/4	A(V)	1	20	C/735	
283/C/5	VA	2	8		
283/C/6	AN	1	2		possibly not A-S
Sub Total		*83*	*889*		
324/A/1	AR	3	66	C/122	
	AV	9	161		
324/A/2	AR	3	36		
	AV	3	49		
Sub Total		*18*	*312*		
664/A/1	AN?	1	31		
	A(V)	2	25		
	AV	3	13		
	VA	1	28	C/735	
	V(A)?	3	16		
Sub Total		*10*	*113*		
TOTAL		**221**	**3540**	**12**	

Vessel forms, decoration and use

Twelve vessels, probably all different, were represented by rim sherds, the majority in fabric AV. All the vessels were defined as jars, although in a few cases the sherds were quite small and the identification can be considered uncertain. There was considerable minor variation in rim form, but no clear patterning in this variation. Only one of the pots was of reasonably substantial size. For the nine vessels whose rim diameters could be estimated one was 100 mm, one 120 mm, three from 130-140 mm and four from 150-160 mm. One of the latter (vessel No. 1) was probably significantly larger than the

other vessels, despite its similar rim diameter. Apart from burnishing no other decoration, such as stamping or tooling, was present. Burnishing was usually overall or in zones, such as on the shoulder and upper surfaces of the rim. Linear burnish was present on one vessel (No. 3). The sherd was not sufficiently large for certainty, but it is possible that the undulations in the wavy burnished line and some irregularity in the profile of the shoulder reflected the position of bosses beneath. Quality of finishing of vessels was variable. Sherds in fabric AR were particularly well-burnished both internally and externally. Burnish was used on sherds of all the other main fabrics as well (it was absent only on sherds in fabric V(A)), but there does appear to have been some variation in its occurrence (allowing for the fact that hasty recording may not have been totally consistent). Burnish was only recorded on *c* 25 sherds (16.8%) in fabric AV but was generally more common in other fabrics. Apart from fabric AR, burnish occurred on more than 50% of sherds in fabric A(V) and VAM and on 42% of sherds in fabric VA. There does seem, therefore, to have been a genuine difference in the frequency of surface treatment between the most common fabric and the others.

This distinction was not apparently reflected in vessel forms or in evidence for use. Although inevitably most common on sherds of fabric AV, evidence for vessel use in the form of external sooting and internal charred residues (and sometimes both on the same sherd) was noted on sherds in fabrics AR, VA and VAM as well. Some at least of the vessels in all the main fabric groups therefore seem to have been used as cooking pots. This may well have been the function of almost all of the vessels in the assemblage, although it is not directly demonstrable. No such evidence is associated with the pedestal base and lug fragments - the form and function of the vessels with which they were associated are uncertain.

Discussion

This small assemblage can be paralleled by published material from a number of sites in the near vicinity, including Dorchester (Frere 1962; May 1977; Rowley and Brown 1981; Wilson 1984), the cemetery at Wally Corner, Berinsfield (Booth 1995a) and Benson (Timby 2003), as well as from the older excavations at Sutton Courtenay, slightly further afield. Other relevant sites in the Oxford region include Barton Court Farm (Miles et al 1986, fiche 7:F1-G6), Abingdon (Avery and Brown 1972; Underwood-Keevill 1992) and Oxford Science Park (Blinkhorn 2001). The largest Anglo-Saxon pottery assemblage from the area, from Barrow Hills, Radley, remains unpublished (Blinkhorn forthcoming).

One of the most obvious characteristic of the present assemblage in comparison with the more recently published groups is its lack of sherds with calcareous tempering, whether of limestone or shell. Such fabrics tend to be a consistent minority component of most of these groups. Their absence here may be a consequence of the small size of the assemblage, but it is also possible that such sherds were not identified amongst Iron Age material in very similar fabrics. Although Anglo-Saxon pottery was concentrated

(and was therefore identified) in a limited number of features, it is possible that there was a more general (thin) scatter of material of this date that was effectively invisible against the background of the much larger Iron Age assemblage. This could have included calcareous sherds, but their absence from the larger Anglo-Saxon groups (such as features 39 and 283) does seem to have been real.

Whatever its minority components, the assemblage was dominated by sand and organic ('grass') tempered fabrics. The two inclusion types usually occurred in combination, although there was a clear distinction between vessels at the extremes of the range. There is no clear distinction between the fabrics dominated by one or the other inclusion type in terms of associated vessel forms (but the numbers of rims are so small that this is probably not meaningful), nor in their occurrence in the main feature groups. This is likely to mean that the sand and organic tempered traditions, clearly closely linked, were contemporary, at least in the context of the present assemblage.

The chronological range of the pottery cannot be defined closely. A radiocarbon date (HAR 4799) from waterhole 82 has a two sigma range of AD 440-767. Unfortunately this feature only produced a single tiny Saxon sherd, so the extent to which it can be considered representative of the chronology of the Saxon phase as a whole, and therefore of the pottery, is unclear. It is certain that the pottery would fall within this overall date range. The preferred chronological model for the region (eg Avery and Brown 1972 79-81; Booth 1995b, 231; Timby 2001, 157) sees 5th-century assemblages dominated by sand-tempered fabrics, which are then supplemented, perhaps from the later 5th century but certainly in the 6th, by organic-tempered fabrics. Whether the latter ever came to totally dominate assemblages in the 7th century is less clear, however. Alternatively, Blinkhorn (eg forthcoming) prefers a cultural rather than a chronological explanation of the differential appearance of organic-tempered pottery, but this interpretation is not followed here. On this basis, the present assemblage can be assigned broadly to the late 5th-7th century, and in view of the relative scarcity of fabrics VA, VAM and V(A), a late 5th-6th century date may (subjectively) be preferred. Occupation could have extended throughout this period at a low level, or might have been of short duration for a brief time within this date range. The pottery cannot be used to support either interpretation at the expense of the other. With the exception of No. 1, all the vessels recovered seem to have been of small to medium size and the evidence of surface deposits indicates the use of many as cooking vessels which, on the basis of size, suggest that they were associated only with small (?family) groups.

Catalogue of illustrated vessels (see main report Fig 73)

1. 39/A/1. Fabric AV. Jar with upright slightly expanded rim. Irregularly fired exterior, otherwise unoxidised. Smoothed internal and external surfaces.

2. 39/A/5 and 39/A/6. Fabric AV. Jar with curving everted rim. Irregularly fired exterior, unburnished. External sooting and internal charred residue in places.

3. 43/A/1. Fabric AV. Jar with curving everted rim. Unoxidised firing throughout. Burnish on top of rim and shoulder and wavy burnished line on shoulder.

4. 283/A/1. Fabric AV. Jar with curving slightly everted rim. Unoxidised firing throughout, burnished internally and externally. Some external sooting.

5. 283/A/1. Fabric A(V). Base with slight, roughly formed footring. Irregularly fired throughout.

6. 283/A/2. Fabric AV. Jar with tapered curving everted rim. Exterior irregularly fired in places, but mostly unoxidised. Burnished on top of rim and shoulder. External sooting.

7. 283/C/3. Fabric AV. Jar with simple upright rim. Irregularly fired exterior, unburnished.

8. 283/C/4. Fabric A(V). Jar with tapered curving everted rim. Unoxidised firing throughout. Unburnished. Extrenal sooting.

9. 324/A/1. Fabric AR. Jar with slightly expanded upright rim. Unoxidised firing throughout, burnished overall on interior and exterior. Burnt internal residue.

10. 324/A/2. Fabric AV. Irregular ?vertical lug with small perforation. Irregularly fired exterior surface. Burnt internal residue.

11. 664/A/1. Fabric VA. Jar with tapered curving everted rim. Firing mostly unoxidised throughout. Overall interior and exterior burnish.

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