

Prehistoric pottery – Chalgrove CHEA18

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Introduction

A total of 179 sherds of prehistoric pottery weighing 1534g was discovered during excavations at Chalgrove (CHEA18). This comprised nine sherds of middle or late Bronze Age pottery weighing 40g, and 170 sherds of middle Iron Age pottery weighing 1494g. Material dating to the late Iron Age was included with the Roman pottery in a separate report. The prehistoric pottery is summarised in Table X.

Method statement

The pottery was recorded following the guidelines of the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group (PCRG 2010). Individual vessels were separated out from each context, weighed, with body, rim and base sherds counted. The major inclusion and up to two different minor inclusions in the fabric were noted, recording the grade (1-5; from very fine to very coarse), frequency (1-5; from rare to abundant), how well-sorted the inclusions are (1-4; from very well-sorted to poorly sorted), and the level of abrasion (1-3; from fresh to highly abraded). Each vessel was assigned a working fabric number, and this was rationalised into a final site fabric code. The code starts with a single letter indicating the major inclusion type, and subsequent letters indicating the minor inclusions. This is followed by a number, indicating different fabrics that share the same inclusions types. Each fabric is then described in further detail in Table X.

Forms were assigned to vessels where possible, and this follows a coded regional typological scheme developed by the author. Rim types, decoration and any other additional features were noted, following a basic coded system. Details of this are available in the archive. Rim diameters were also measured.

Middle/late Bronze Age pottery

A small assemblage of middle or late Bronze Age pottery was discovered in coarse flint fabric F3. The group was in poor condition with a very low Average Sherd Weight (ASW) of 4.4g. Some 75% of the material highly abraded, with the remainder moderately abraded. The sherds were dated by their fabric as they were all from the body or base and there was no decoration or other features that could be help to refine this phasing. The assemblage derived from three contexts. Single sherds were found in 1040 and 2006, respectively fills of middle Roman ditch 1133 in Area B, and early Roman ditch 2192 in Area C. The majority of the small group was found in 2236, fill of pit 2238, and this appears to be the only Bronze Age feature at the site.

	<i>Sherds</i>	<i>Weight (g)</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Forms, features and decoration</i>
<i>Middle/Late Bronze Age</i>				
F3	9 100%	40 100%	Coarse-grade moderately sorted abundant calcinated flint	Body and base sherds
<i>Middle Iron Age</i>				
Q1	147 69%	1077 64%	Moderate quantities of fine quartz sand	Three ovoid bowls with simple or slight bead rims (Fig. 6.1-2), one with short neck. One slack-shouldered or straight-sided vessel (Fig. 6.4). Seven burnished vessels, one with a perforation. Large handle.
Q11	35 17%	147 9%	Moderate quantities of fine quartz sand with occasional pieces of medium-sized iron oxides	Body sherds
Q2	3 1%	40 2%	Very common medium-sized quartz sand	Body sherds
Q3	9 4%	233 14%	Moderate quantities of fine glauconitic sand, and quartz sand	Two ovoid bowls with simple rims
F1	11 5%	74 4%	Medium-grade moderately sorted sparse calcinated flint, with sparse quantities of quartz sand	Body sherds
F2	4 2%	89 5%	Coarse-grade poorly sorted moderate to common calcinated flint, with sparse quantities of quartz sand	One ovoid bowl with a slightly everted slight bead rim (Fig. 6.3)
V1	3 1%	17 1%	Sparse medium-sized voids probably from shell. One piece of shell remaining	Body sherds
	194 91%	1497 89%	<i>Total of sand predominant (MIA)</i>	
	15 7%	163 10%	<i>Total of flint predominant (MIA)</i>	
	212	1677	<i>Total middle Iron Age pottery</i>	
	221	1717	<i>Total prehistoric pottery</i>	

Table X: Summary of the prehistoric pottery

Middle Iron Age pottery

Condition of the assemblage

The assemblage was in a moderate condition with a fairly low ASW of 7.9g. Some 86% of the assemblage by weight and sherd count was moderately abraded, with the remainder recorded as highly abraded. None of the sherds appeared to have been freshly broken prior to deposition.

Fabric, form, decoration and surface treatment

Seven fabrics were identified, four dominated by sand, two by flint and one with voids probably from leached shell inclusions. The sand dominated fabrics included a fine fabric, Q1, that the majority of the sherds were made out of, and a similar coarser sand fabric, Q2. The other sand dominated fabrics included one with occasional pieces of iron oxides, Q11, and one with glauconitic sand, Q3. The flint-dominated fabrics were in two grades, F1 and F2, and both also had quartz sand

inclusions. Fabric V1 had voids probably from leached shell, with a piece of shell remaining in one of the three sherds. This was the only fabric not to contain quartz sand.

The form of seven vessels could be recognised. Six of these were very similar ovoid bowls with simple or slight bead rims, and one had a short neck. Three of these were in fabric Q1 (Fig. 6.1-2), two in Q3, and one in F2 (Fig. 6.3). The seventh vessel was slack-shouldered or straight-sided with a flattened rim, and was in fabric Q1 (Fig. 6.4). Nine rims were present, seven on the vessels described, as well as another slight bead and a simple rim. A large moulded handle from a substantial vessel in fabric Q1 was also present. Eight vessels were burnished, all but one in fabric Q1, with the other in Q3. One of the burnished vessels in fabric Q1 had a perforation made after firing. There was a single sherd in fabric Q1 that had been heated to a high temperature after firing, found in roundhouse 20, with one of its edges having a pumice-like appearance. The assemblage completely lacked decoration.

Provenance

The majority of the pottery was discovered Area A (80% sherds, 71% weight). Of this, c 87% was found in penannular gullies, with just one ditch (42), two pits (88 and 103) and a furrow (6) additionally producing pottery. Only very small amounts of pottery were found in these four features, except pit 88 that produced three sherds from different vessels weighing 118g. The vast majority of the flint-tempered sherds from Area A derived from penannular gully 166.

Three ditches in Area B produced pottery, and this included the largest assemblage of Iron Age pottery, comprising 22 sherds weighing 303g, including the large handle, from the terminal of ditch 1131. Roman ditch 1133 produced 17 residual middle Iron Age sherds. Two contexts in Area C produced middle Iron Age pottery, and this was all residual in Roman ditches. All of the material from Area C was flint-tempered and included the ovoid bowl that was in fabric F2.

Discussion

The majority of the assemblage conforms with other middle Iron Age assemblages in the region. The dominance of quartz sand is expected in this period, and the presence of glauconitic sand is also consistent with expectations. The forms are typical of middle Iron Age assemblages. These were all very similar bowls, and no clear jars were present. However, a slightly surprisingly large percentage of the assemblage was dominated by flint, some 7% by sherd count and 10% by weight. Flint became increasingly scarce as a tempering agent through the early Iron Age in the Thames Valley with sand dominating by the middle Iron Age. The relatively large amount flint at Chalgrove might be chronologically indicative, perhaps suggesting that this element of the assemblage is early within the middle Iron Age. It is perhaps relevant that almost all of the flint-tempered pottery came from Area C and penannular gully 166.

The presence of an ovoid bowl with a slight bead rim in coarse-tempered fabric F2 demonstrates the use of the fabric in the middle Iron Age, and suggests that all of the body sherds in fabrics F2 and the finer flint fabric F1 are broadly contemporary and not residue from the limited later Bronze Age activity on the site. Flint-tempered middle Iron Age pottery has been noted in reasonable quantities the locality of Chalgrove at Appleford (Lambrick 1980, 57), Castle Hill/Wittenham Clumps (Edwards 2010a, Table 3.4), North Stoke (Ford and Hazell 1989, 23), and Woodcote Road (Timby and Stansbie 2005, Table 8), and slightly further afield at Great Western Park, Didcot (Brown forthcoming). However, it is notably absent at other nearby large assemblages (e.g. DeRoche 1978, 54; Edwards 2010b, Table 6.2; Lambrick 2010, 6). At Warpsgrove, just 1.5km to the north-west, flint-tempered middle Iron Age pottery was discovered but in only very small quantities (Timby 2004, Table 2.9).

None of the forms or rims have any clear influence from the early Iron Age. The continuing use of flint may have been a local preference that continued well into the middle Iron Age, or it might indicate a slightly earlier focus at the two parts of the site where this occurred, but still within the middle Iron Age.

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