

EARLY MEDIEVAL POTTERY FROM WESTBURY, EAST MEON, HAMPSHIRE

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INTRODUCTION

A GROUP of early medieval pottery was found at St. Nicholas Chapel, Westbury, East Meon, Hampshire, by Mr. G. Walker during excavations in 1960. Westbury lies on the extreme western limits of East Meon parish, six miles west of Petersfield in south-eastern Hampshire (Nat. Grid Ref. SU 657239). The structure of the chapel, known as St. Nicholas' Chapel, was described by Nisbett (1866), with plan, elevations and a brief manorial history. The history was more fully outlined by Page (1909, 68-9). In the early sixties Mr. G. Walker carried out excavations on the site of the chapel. The excavation took the form of a trench 3 ft. wide across the mid point of the existing structure. It located a black silty deposit some 2 ft. thick sealed below the floor of the chapel, though the limits of the deposit were not found. It may have been a large pit or alternatively the silted-up bed of one of the old courses of the River Meon, which now flows immediately to the north of the site. The pottery was found in the deposit though none of the sherds in the group show any signs of being immersed in water for any length of time. The widespread occurrence throughout England of groups of late Saxon material sealed below post-Conquest churches has recently been discussed by J. G. Hurst (Beresford and Hurst, 1971, 129). Most of the pottery found is basically late Saxon in character, but the presence of some possibly later pieces and one sherd with thirteenth century parallels and the fact that the surviving remains of the overlying church were thought to date only from the late thirteenth century (Nisbett, 1866; Peers, C. R., in Page, 1909, 74-5), suggest that this cannot be safely treated as a closed group of eleventh century date. It is likely that it falls within the period *c.* 1000-1150.

DESCRIPTION OF POTTERY (Fig. 20)

Four basic fabrics are recognised, classified on the basis of inclusions in the clay.

<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>	<i>Number of sherds</i>	<i>%</i>
A	Chalk and flint with soapy surfaces	12	21
B	Chalk, flint and sand	33	58
C	Sandy	8	14
D	Gritty - uneven irregular surfaces	4	7
		—	—
		57	100
		—	—

Fabric A

1. Small rim sherd, crudely made, fine smooth fabric with dull pinkish brown smooth surfaces, blackened externally, dark grey core; tempered with fine crushed flint and a few irregular lumps up to 2 mm. across.

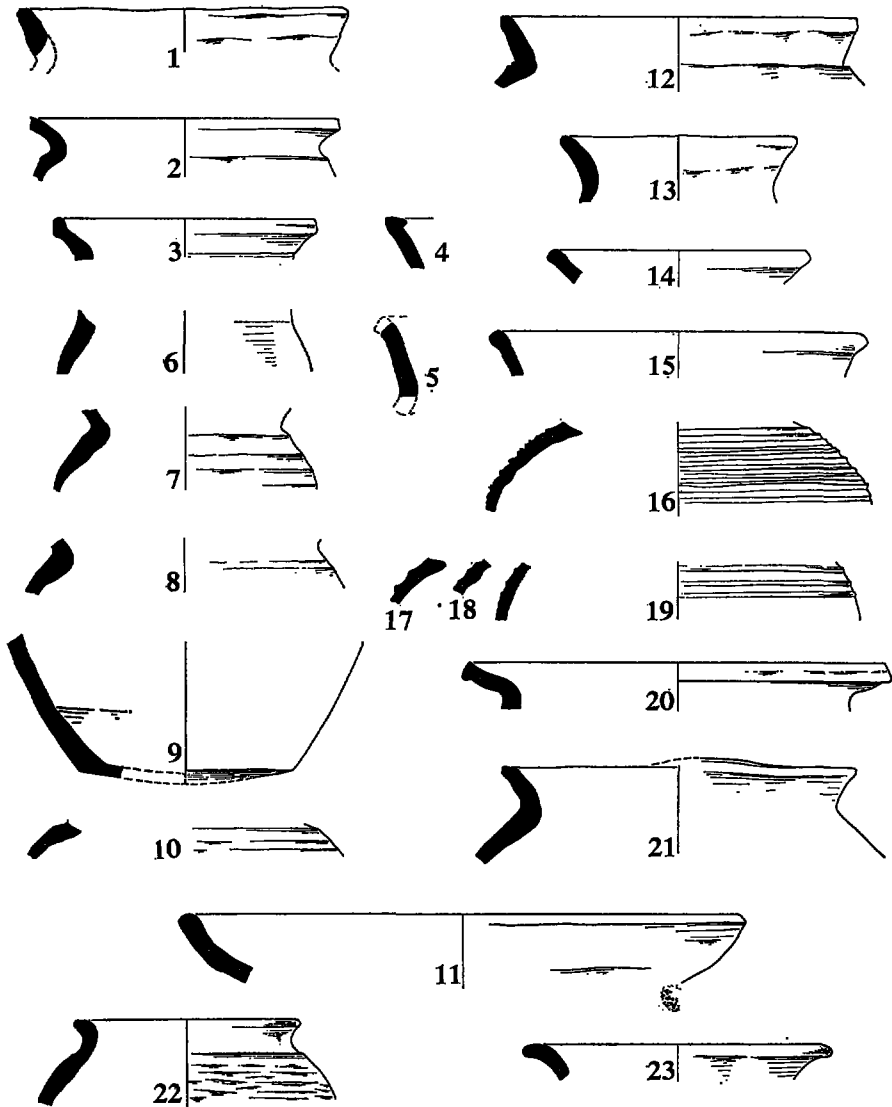


Fig. 20. Medieval pottery from Westbury, East Meon, Hampshire. (Scale $\frac{1}{4}$)

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2. Rim with soapy pimply pinkish surfaces, blackened externally on the shoulder and inside the rim, grey core; tempered with chalk and medium-sized flint grits. The surfaces have been wiped, giving them a smooth waxy appearance, but uneven where the flints protrude.

3. Rim sherd in fabric as no. 1, with blackened dull brown inner surface, reddish brown outer surface and dark grey core.

4. Rim from flared-mouthed cooking pot, hard-fired fabric with many small rolled inclusions, giving the surface a dull creamy-pink harsh texture; blackened internally, grey core.

5. Fragment from vessel with tall flared rim, fine smooth fabric with sparse fine flint and chalk inclusions; smooth surfaces, dull creamy pink on the exterior, otherwise completely reduced to a dark grey.

6. Shoulder from crudely made vessel, fabric as no. 2 but with addition of a few micaceous inclusions; completely oxidised to dull reddish brown, with lumpy surface slightly rougher internally.

7. Rim and shoulder from crudely made cooking pot, hard-fired fabric with irregular chalk and flint tempering; dull reddish brown surfaces, externally wiped smooth and internally rough and uneven, dark grey core.

8. Shoulder from crudely made cooking pot, hard-fired fabric, grey ware with irregular chalk and flint inclusions; externally wiped leaving the surface slightly coarse textured.

9. Three joining sherds forming the lower half of vessel, softish fabric completely reduced to dark brownish grey with fine chalk and flint inclusions, the chalk leached out on the inner surface giving a corky appearance, smooth internally, more so due to the leaching.

Fabric B

10. Shoulder from crudely made vessel, hard-fired sandy fabric with varying sized crushed flints protruding through the surfaces, inner surface completely reduced to light greyish brown.

11. Rim from large shallow pan, hard-fired irregular light reddish brown fabric, the irregular and uneven surfaces burnt light grey externally, dark grey core, large irregular flint and chalk inclusions, the latter having leached out in places.

12. Simple everted rim with grooved ridge on the shoulder, hard-fired fine sandy fabric, varying crushed flint inclusions; reddish brown margins slightly burnt externally, dark grey core.

13. Coarsely made rim, completely reduced to dark grey, small crushed flint and chalk inclusions, the latter having leached out in places; outer surface has been wiped leaving an almost burnished appearance, the inner surface is rough.

14. Small rim, hard completely reduced grey ware, blackened internally, irregular flint inclusions, internal surface smoother than exterior.

15. Rim, fabric and surface finish as no. 14. It is difficult to determine whether these two rims come from wheel or hand-made pots.

16. Large sherd from upper part of cooking pot, smooth clayey fabric, small sparse flint inclusions, smooth very dark bluish-grey surfaces burnt black externally near the

top, with deep coarse even grooves made by a comb with semi-square ends. From the large pond to the north-west of the chapel.

17. Sherd from body of cooking pot, hard-fired fine smooth fabric, angular flint inclusions, blackened inner surface, dull grey-brown fire-blackened exterior, light grey core. The exterior surface appears to have been rilled during the throwing process, but possibly finished-off with a broad comb.

18. Sherd from body of cooking pot, fabric as no. 17 except that inner surface is dull reddish-brown; decorative technique as no. 17.

19. Body sherd, hard-fired, completely reduced brownish-grey fabric, medium sized crushed flint inclusions; slightly soapy, lumpy surfaces. The rilling is not so pronounced on this sherd.

Portchester-type Ware

Four sherds (nos. 16-19), although similar to others in fabric B, are so alike in both fabric and decorative technique as to warrant separate mention. They represent a type which is now recognised as occurring on many early medieval sites in the south of England (Hurst, 1961, 263) ranging in date from the tenth to the late thirteenth century. The earlier variety is heavily grooved, usually carried out with a crude comb-like tool, as illustrated by sherds from Northolt, Middlesex (Hurst, 1961, 266, fig. 69, nos. 92 and 93), dated to the period 1050-1150 and similar to nos. 18 and 19 here. A closely combed sherd from Oxford is dated to the late eleventh to early twelfth century (Jope and Pantin, 1958, 42, fig. 14, no. 26). Recent excavations on the site of Reading Abbey have produced grooved sherds from a number of pits spanning the twelfth century (Moorhouse, 1973). The Abbey at Reading was founded in 1121 and the pits relate to the earlier phases on the site. At least three shoulder sherds display neatly executed close spaced continuous vertical combing. This distinct form of decoration persists into the thirteenth century in certain areas in the form of a raised cordon thrown with the body of the pot, as seen on examples from Northolt (unpublished; information from J. G. Hurst), where the type died out with the introduction of Surrey white wares in the late thirteenth century.

This grooving can be seen on a distinctive type of late Saxon pottery recently identified in the Portsmouth region. It has been found in quantity at Portchester Castle in a stratified sequence, demonstrating that the type belongs to the tenth and early eleventh century (Cunliffe, 1970, 75-80); the type has therefore been defined as Portchester ware.

Early medieval groups from further north display vessels of similar form but in strictly local fabrics. The commonest form is the characteristic high, round-shouldered cooking pot with heavy grooving on the body and a sagging base (Cunliffe, 1970, 76, fig. 7, 23, 24 and 78, fig. 9, 1-3). The fabric is hard-fired with fine rounded inclusions and soapy textured surfaces fired to varying shades of brown. A number of early medieval pits in the deserted medieval village of Brown Candover (material in Chilcomb House museum, Winchester, acc. no. W.O.C. 705 and 706), ten miles to the north-west of Westbury, contained sherds of Portchester-type wares; one vessel can be closely paralleled at Portchester itself (Cunliffe, 1970, 78, fig. 9, 2). A single rim sherd of characteristic Portchester ware form (Cunliffe, 1970, 78, fig. 9, 7) comes from a general

early medieval scatter at Turrill House, Overton (Chilcomb House, acc. no. W.OC 680). A few sherds have also come from a ringwork at Well, near Long Sutton, in northern Hampshire, whose occupation covers the eleventh to thirteenth century (Chilcomb House acc. no. 708 and writer's collection in the museum; *cf.* also *Med. Archaeol.*, 15 (1971), 147). The sherds from Odiham, referred to by Cunliffe (1970, 77) do not appear to be true Portchester ware, but more akin to this northerly variant; the find spot is some distance from the main centre of distribution for Portchester ware. More groups are required before its distribution can be shown and its relation to Portchester ware established. The available dating for the type is discussed below (p. 46) along with the dating evidence for the group as a whole.

Fabric C

20. Rim from cooking pot, very hard uniform completely reduced light grey fabric; competently potted with many small sand particles giving surfaces smooth but harsh texture.

Fabric D

21. Large rim sherd, very coarse hard-fired fabric, completely reduced to dark grey, large angular flint inclusions protrude through already lumpy surfaces, exterior slightly smoother than interior. A thickening and vertical projection on the otherwise uniform rim top suggests some form of lug. No provenance.

Vessels with pierced projecting lugs are known from Chichester and Steyning (*inf.* from K. J. Barton). Although no. 21 is not from the deposit under the chapel, two small body sherds in a very similar fabric were found there. It is included to illustrate one of the forms current in the fabric. Because the date range of this fabric is not yet clear, the sherd need not be contemporary with the group.

Iron Age

22. Large sherd from the rim and shoulder of jar, 'porridgy' fabric, lumpy internal surface, burnished internally and externally to just below the rim. The exterior has irregular very shallow horizontal rilling and is covered with a reddish-brown coating. The rilling suggests a date probably in the first century A.D.

Romano-British

23. Gently everted rolled over rim, hard-fired fine sandy fabric completely reduced to dark grey, highly burnished surfaces, slightly reddish under the rim. Probably second century A.D.

DISCUSSION

Dating

The dating evidence of the deposit is confusing but suggests a date within the period *c.* 1000 to *c.* 1150. Most of the vessels represented are the small cooking pots typical of late Saxon and early medieval groups in central southern England. They are hand made with simple rim forms. The lack of flat bases, with the exception of no. 9, suggests that they were round-bottomed; round bases are a feature of late Saxon domestic

vessels in the region and further afield. The range of associated fabrics agrees with similar assemblages from Winchester. However, it should also be noted that a version of fabric B continues well into the medieval period, being used for the commoner domestic cooking vessels over a wide area of central southern England. Nos. 4, 5 and 9 might be considered later on stylistic grounds and might therefore be regarded as intrusive in this group; they could have been deposited at any time up to and indeed during, the building of the chapel, which on stylistic evidence belongs to the later thirteenth century. Evidence is accumulating to suggest that certain basic everyday ceramic styles had a long life span in rural areas once they had been introduced in the earlier medieval period (Moorhouse, forthcoming) and altered little in the forms and fabrics in which they were made. The absence of jugs argues for a date before the early or mid-thirteenth century, though it is possible that only cooking pots happened to be included in the deposit and the lack of jugs might therefore not be significant. This suggestion seems unlikely for the majority of the pottery would fit happily into an eleventh to twelfth century context and the deposit does not contain wheel-made, sandier domestic vessels with moulded rims typical of the thirteenth century.

Little dating evidence is available for the Portchester type ware described above (pp. 44-45). The similarity in forms with the type series suggest it is at least contemporary and cannot be any earlier, and the groups from Brown Candover show that it is current in early medieval contexts. The survival of the grooved body at Northolt into the thirteenth century may not be relevant for Hampshire, considering the strict regionalisation of ceramic styles in the medieval period, and particularly within the general period under discussion. All that can be said at the moment is that grooving on the body of vessels has a wide distribution in southern Britain during the late Saxon-early medieval period, varying in date range from region to region. At present then, the grooved sherds with Portchester ware affinities, nos. 16-19, cannot help date the Westbury deposit with any precision. It is hoped that future work will produce evidence for the terminal dating of the type and suggest possible sources for its manufacture.

It could be suggested that a number of sherds from the deposit are later in character than the bulk of the material. These are nos. 4, 5 and 9. More developed rim forms begin to appear on domestic utilitarian vessels in the late Saxon period, in contrast to the simpler earlier types (*cf.* nos. 1, 12, 13 and 21 here). This is demonstrated locally by pit 111 from Portchester Castle (Cunliffe, 1970, 77, fig. 8, 4-15) where a series of moulded rims in Portchester ware were found in a tenth to early eleventh century context. It has been shown above that potters were copying Portchester ware forms in local fabrics, so it is possible that the rims are contemporary with the earlier elements of the group. The flat base, no. 9, would also seem out of context in a late Saxon group from the area. The dominant form is the round-bottomed cooking vessel. Hurst has pointed out (Hurst, 1964, 123) that during the late Saxon period in the Winchester region, this form of vessel was in use alongside flat-based vessels introduced via Winchester ware (and now Portchester ware) and derived ultimately from the continent. The only piece therefore that has no direct parallels in the Saxo-Norman period is no. 20.

Sherd no. 20 is problematical for vessels in identical form and fabric are known from Winchester (e.g. Cunliffe, 1964, 116, fig. 40, no. 3) in late thirteenth century contexts.

It was recorded as coming from the dark silt below the chapel, though its precise find spot is not known. It could conceivably be intrusive, as it is the only distinctively late sherd from the group, possibly being associated with the construction of the chapel which overlay the deposit. Until further groups from the area are examined it would be wise to regard this sherd as contemporary with the group, especially as seven body sherds in similar fabric were also found.

CONCLUSIONS

The conservatism of pottery styles in rural areas in the medieval period is now being recognised. A transition took place in pottery types and styles during the eleventh and twelfth century generally in England, more so in the south. The change over in styles probably took many years to complete and older styles remained in vogue along with their newer counterparts. The rate of transition obviously varied from region to region, depending on the readiness of local potters, and their customers, to adopt to new techniques and styles. Centres such as Winchester and Chichester probably were the first to adopt new types and to develop distinctive wares and it may well have been many years before these had any effect on the people of rural areas. These points have to be borne in mind when dating the deposit.

The bulk of the pottery is late Saxon in character. A number of sherds (nos. 16-19) have similarities with a type current over a wide area of southern Britain in the Saxo-Norman period; they have more local significance in that they are allied to Portchester ware (see above) which is dated to the tenth and eleventh century. The fabric and decoration of one of these, no. 16, can be paralleled exactly from the Catherington group, six miles south of Westbury, dated to the period *c.* 950-1100 (Pile and Barton, 1973). Present evidence would suggest that no. 20 and possibly the base no. 9 were intrusive, but the present state of our knowledge of domestic pottery covering the early medieval period is in such a state of flux, that it could well be that these are indeed contemporary. The internal evidence of the deposit is therefore confusing, but suggests a date within the period *c.* 1000 to *c.* 1150. Further groups of this crucial period are needed from the area before any firm comments can be made about the various fabric types and indeed the date range of the deposit.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Mr. G. Walker for permission to publish the group and for making facilities available to examine it; to Mr. K. J. Barton for discussing the Catherington group prior to his own publication in these *Proceedings* (see pp. 49-56 of this volume); to Mr. J. G. Hurst for commenting on the group as a whole and to Dr. G. J. Wainwright and Miss S. Butcher respectively for their comments on the Iron Age and Roman pieces.

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