**Pottery from Cookham, Berks (Site COP21)**

*Paul Blinkhorn*

The pottery assemblage comprised 303 sherds with a total weight of 4258g. The estimated vessel equivalent (EVE), by summation of surviving rimsherd circumference was 2.90. It was mostly of early-middle Anglo Saxon date, although small quantities of prehistoric, Romano-British, late Anglo-Saxon, medieval, and post-medieval material were also noted.

The following fabrics occurred:

**F1: Organic-tempered Hand-built Ware**, 5th – mid 9th century. Moderate to dense chaff voids up to 5mm, with rare to sparse rounded calcareous material up to 2 mm, sparse fine quartz up to 0.5mm. 88 sherds, 1316g, EVE = 0.88.

**F2: Quartz tempered Hand-built** Ware, 5th – mid 9th century. Dense, sub-angular white quartz up to 0.5mm, sparse to moderate red or black iron of the same size. 75 sherds, 1107g. EVE = 0.48.

**F3: Calcareous gravel tempered**. 5th – mid 9th century. Moderate to dense clear and iron-coated quartz up to 1mm, rounded black ironstone up to 2 mm, calcareous material (including ?ooliths) up to 1 mm, rare flint. 2 sherds, 14g. EVE = 0.

**F95: Ipswich Ware**. Group 1 fabric, AD700-850 (Blinkhorn 2012). 1 sherd, 22g, EVE = 0.

**F102: Oxford-type Shelly ware**, late 8th – early 11th century (Mellor 1994). 86 sherds, 1238g, EVE = 1.31.

**F108: North French Oxidized Ware**, 7th – 9th century. 1 sherd, 3g, EVE = 0.

**F110: ?Frisian-type *Kugeltopf***, 8th – 9th century (Coutts, 1991). 1 sherd, 44g, EVE = 0.11.

**F200: Cotswold-type ware,** AD1000-1350 (Mellor 1994). 2 sherds, 7g, EVE = 0.

**F202: Newbury ‘A/B’ Ware**,late 11th – late 14th century (Mepham 1997, 51-2). 10 sherds, 93g, EVE = 0.03.

**F356: Surrey Whiteware**, mid 13th – mid 15th century (Pearce and Vince 1988). 1 sherd, 6g, EVE = 0.

**F405: Frechen Stoneware**, AD1550-1750 (Gaimster 1997). 1 sherd, 33g.

**F425: Glazed Red Earthenware**, 16th – 19th century (Brears 1969). 10 sherds, 138g.

**F451: Border Ware**, AD1550 - 1700. (Pearce 1988). 2 sherds, 7g.

**F999: Miscellaneous 19th and 20th century wares**. 7 sherds, 82g.

**F1001: All Romano-British**. 11 sherds, 53g.

**F1002: Iron Age**? Hard, grey sandy fabric with sparse fine calcareous material. 1 sherd, 27g.

**F1003: Iron Age**? Grogged. 3 sherds, 45g.

**F1004: Prehistoric**. Dense calcined flint temper. Bronze Age? 1 sherd, 23g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

The Anglo-Saxon hand-built wares are typical of the tradition in the Thames Valley region, with vessels in very similar fabrics occurring at early and middle Anglo-Saxon sites at places such as St Mary’s Butts, Reading (Blinkhorn in archive), *Lundenwic* (Blackmore 2003) and Maidenhead (Blinkhorn 2002), although it is not known if the wares have a common source. In London, the organic-tempered wares are given a date range of AD450-750, sand-tempered wares span the whole of the early/middle Saxon period (AD450-850), and Oolitic Wares are largely middle Saxon, c AD600-850 (Blackmore 2012, table 44). At St Mary’s Butts, which along with hand-built pottery, Ipswich Ware and imports, also produced a fairly large assemblage of Oxford Ware, the earliest features produced Ipswich Ware and hand-built pottery, so the whole assemblage must be regarded as being of 8th – mid 9th century date (Blinkhorn in archive). At Maidenhead, the hand-built wares could only be given a general early to middle Anglo-Saxon date, although evidence for pottery dating to the fifth century there was somewhat scant (Blinkhorn 2002).

All the hand-built sherds from here are undecorated. The dating of Anglo-Saxon hand-built pottery is mainly reliant on the presence of decoration, which is usually of 5th and/or 6th century date, with 7th century and later pottery being mostly plain (Myres 1977, 1). However, it cannot be said with certainty that an assemblage which produces only plain sherds is of 7th century or later date, as decorated hand-built pottery generally comprises just 5% or less of domestic assemblages (eg. Hamerow 1993, 51). Thus, small assemblages consisting of only undecorated hand-built sherds can only be given a broad early/middle Anglo-Saxon date.

The sherd of Ipswich Ware and the two possible imported sherds are particularly of note. The former is quite a rare find at sites in the Thames Valley and its hinterland, and usually only occurs at sites of higher than normal status (see below). Of the latter, which are even less common than Ipswich Ware, one of them appears likely to be a fragment of a lightly-burnished North French or Eastern Belgian Redware vessel, a type dated in London to c AD650-850 (Blackmore 2012, table 44), while the other is a fragment of a *kugeltopf*, the common domestic pottery of many areas of the Low Countries and the Rhineland in the 8th and 9th centuries (eg. Coutts 1991, 67). This example has a somewhat nondescript sandy fabric. Such pots were hand-built and wheel-finished, with the only technologically-comparable middle Saxon material from English sites being Ipswich Ware and some of the pottery from the monastic sites of north-east England such as Whitby and Jarrow (Hurst 1976, 306). Like Ipswich Ware, middle Saxon imports only occur at higher status sites.

**Site Status**

There is little doubt from the pottery that there was activity at the site in the middle Anglo-Saxon period, with the large quantity of Oxford Ware showing that it was occupied during the late 8th – 9th century. The key to the understanding of the site status however, while not completely conclusive, lies with the imported sherds and the fragment of Ipswich Ware.

*Kugeltofpen* are very unusual find at sites at English sites, partly perhaps because the nondescript bodysherds would be difficult to distinguish from local hand-built sandy wares but also because it was probably not normally a type of pottery which was traded, and was more likely personal possessions of Frisian traders, perhaps as cooking pottery, whereas the wheel-thrown North French and Badorf Wares appear to have been a by-product of the wine trade (Coutts 1991, 148). If so, then it suggests very strongly that Frisians were active here. The role of Frisians in international trade in the middle Anglo-Saxon period is well-attested by both history and archaeology; Bede recorded the presence of a Frisian slave-trader in London in AD 679, Alcuin referred to Frisians in York, and they were also mentioned in Altfrid’s ninth-century *Life of St. Liudge*. In addition, the monastic community of St Maximin at Trier had a Frisian employed as a commercial agent (Hodges 1982, 88-9).

Continental pottery such as Badorf-type Ware, North French Wares and Tating Ware is known from other contempory sites in the Thames Valley. The first two of these are very common in London (Blackmore 2012, table 44), and occur at smaller sites such a Lake End Road Maidenhead (Blinkhorn 2002), Old Windsor (Hurst 1976) and St Mary’s Butts, Reading (Blinkhorn in archive). *Kugeltopfen* do not. The vessel has no obvious parallels at the major sites in the *wic* of London such as the Royal Opera House (Blackmore 2003), Jubilee Hall and Maiden Lane (Blackmore 1988) or the Peabody and National Gallery sites (Blackmore 1989). Similarly, it has no parallels at Hamwic (Hodges 1981) or Flixborough (Vince 2009). At the wic of Ipswich, fragments of around thirty *Kugeltopfen* of probable 8th – 9th century date are known from the excavations in the town in the later 20th century (Coutts 1991, 39), with the rim-form of the vessel from here being very similar to one from the Suffolk emporium (Wade 1988, Fig 55.8). None were noted amongst the pottery from the more recent excavations at Stoke Quay in the town (Sudds 2020).

Ipswich Ware has a very similar distribution to the commoner imports in the Thames Valley, and occurs at all the sites noted above, particularly at the *wic* of London, where many thousands of sherds of it are known (eg. Blackmore 2003). One feature of sites in the Thames Valley where both Ipswich Ware and continental imports occur is all for them are of higher than normal status. Aside from the trading port at London, Old Windsor is the site of a palace of Offa, St Mary’s Butts is thought to be the site of the nunnery of Elfrida, although the pottery pre-dates its foundation, but there is also a tradition that St Birinus founded St Mary’s Church there in the 7th century and the site is thought to be the ‘royal vill’ described in Asser’s *Life of Alfred* (Astill 1978, 77). Further to the west, excavations in Wantage near the reputed site of the royal manor where Alfred was born produced two sherds of North French Ware and a fragment of Ipswich Ware (Blinkhorn 2016), two sherds of North French Ware also occurred at another site of a minster church at Bampton in Oxfordshire (Blinkhorn 2000, 282), and Ipswich Ware and Frankish pottery are also known from various sites near St Frideswide’s minster in Oxford (Blinkhorn 2001; Mellor 2003, Table 6.7). Two sherds of Ipswich Ware but no imports occurred at a small excavation at Thatcham in Berkshire near the site of a Saxon minster church (Blinkhorn 2005). Lake End Road, Maidenhead is somewhat enigmatic. As well as the pottery, it produced glass and metalwork which are indicative of the presence of wealthy individuals but, curiously, no coins or buildings. It is thought to have been a meeting-place due to its location (Hiller et al. 2002, 72).

It appears therefore that this site is very likely to be of a similar high status to the others in the region which have produced pottery assemblages containing imports and/or Ipswich Ware. The presence of a fragment of a *Kugeltopf* is extremely tantalising, and suggests that foreign merchants, probably Frisians, were visiting the site to trade with the inhabitants, perhaps exchanging luxury goods such as wine for some of the items that ecclesiastical houses of the period were known to have produced, such as carved stone, glass and metalwork, or perhaps even timber or agricultural produce (Blinkhorn 2012, 93-5). Some of the nunneries of the period, such as that at Castor near Peterborough, have produced evidence of large-scale cloth manufacture, a product that Anglo-Saxon England was particularly famed for (*ibid*.).

Obviously, these conclusions should be regarded as tentative at this stage, based as they are on a relatively small amount of evidence, but what there is so far is entirely in keeping with the idea that the site was a nunnery or similar in the 8th – 9th centuries, and further work at the site can only clarify the picture.

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*Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | PHIST | RB | F1 | F2 | F3 | F95 | F102 | F108 | F110 | F200 | F202 | F356 | PMED | F999 |  |
| Cntxt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | No | Wt | Date |
| 100 |  |  |  |  | 2 | 11 | 1 | 12 |  |  |  |  | 2 | 36 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 6 | 4 | 24 | 3 | 64 | MOD |
| 101 |  |  | 1 | 4 | 7 | 88 | 4 | 40 |  |  |  |  | 8 | 152 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 7 | 1 | 1 | MOD |
| 102 |  |  |  |  | 9 | 145 | 1 | 37 |  |  | 1 | 22 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 8thC |
| 103 |  |  | 1 | 16 | 8 | 79 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 6 | 32 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 107 |  |  |  |  | 5 | 36 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 2 | 28 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 110 |  |  |  |  | 2 | 62 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 113 |  |  |  |  | 3 | 32 | 2 | 10 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 115 |  |  | 3 | 10 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 19 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 6 |  |  |  |  |  |  | L11thC |
| 118 |  |  | 1 | 6 | 1 | 26 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 119 |  |  |  |  | 5 | 137 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 120 |  |  |  |  | 1 | 9 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 200 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 30 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 11 |  |  |  |  | 1 | 4 | MOD |
| 201 |  |  |  |  | 3 | 17 | 4 | 45 |  |  |  |  | 3 | 30 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 2 | 7 |  |  | M16thC |
| 202 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 3 | 193 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 204 |  |  | 1 | 2 | 2 | 13 | 17 | 146 |  |  |  |  | 12 | 87 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 207 |  |  |  |  | 1 | 4 | 5 | 37 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 3 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 7thC? |
| 209 | 1 | 27 | 2 | 9 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 9 | 278 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 211 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 27 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 216 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 3 | 24 |  |  |  |  | 10 | 93 |  |  | 1 | 44 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 219 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 7 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 223 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 13 | 1 | 8 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 225 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 6 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 232 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 8 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 301 |  |  |  |  | 2 | 26 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 13 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 5 | 118 | 1 | 7 | MOD |
| 302 |  |  |  |  | 5 | 57 | 4 | 19 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 6 | MOD |
| 303 | 2 | 35 |  |  | 4 | 20 | 4 | 53 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 333 |  |  | 1 | 4 | 2 | 14 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 335 | 2 | 33 |  |  |  |  | 2 | 41 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 350 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 22 |  |  | M16thC |
| 402 |  |  | 1 | 2 | 9 | 75 | 9 | 107 |  |  |  |  | 4 | 32 |  |  |  |  | 2 | 7 | 8 | 76 |  |  |  |  |  |  | L11thC |
| 503 |  |  |  |  | 4 | 47 | 3 | 116 |  |  |  |  | 11 | 139 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 504 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 10 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 505 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 7 | 36 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 506 |  |  |  |  | 1 | 5 | 3 | 80 |  |  |  |  | 3 | 42 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 507 |  |  |  |  | 2 | 30 | 1 | 61 |  |  |  |  | 1 | 5 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 508 |  |  |  |  | 2 | 83 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 509 |  |  |  |  | 1 | 242 | 1 | 113 |  |  |  |  | 3 | 32 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | L8thC |
| 510 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 2 | 27 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 512 |  |  |  |  | 1 | 4 | 1 | 35 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| 603 |  |  |  |  | 5 | 49 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | E/MSAX |
| Total | 5 | 95 | 11 | 53 | 88 | 1316 | 75 | 1107 | 2 | 14 | 1 | 22 | 86 | 1238 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 44 | 2 | 7 | 10 | 93 | 1 | 6 | 13 | 178 | 7 | 82 |  |