

Medieval Pottery

For a useful general reference: J. Haslam, 'Medieval Pottery' Shire Archaeology

Late Saxon c.850- c.1150AD

quartz tempered/sandy

1. **Stamford Ware c.850-1250AD**

Very fine bodied - the inclusions are barely visible to the naked eye. Thin walled and generally, but not always, wheel thrown. The body colour varies between black, white, grey, buff, orange or pink, with occasional pale yellow, orange, yellowish green or blue green lead glaze, the transparent glaze reflecting both the colour of the body and the firing conditions. More rarely, mottled green black or green copper glaze is found. Sometimes the external surface are knife trimmed and/or sooted. The ware is made in a wide range of forms - bowls, cooking pots/storage jars, spouted pitchers, jugs, pedestal dishes, bottles, lamps, crucibles etc.

The earlier forms include the cp/stjs, large storage jars and bowls - in quite a sandy fabric, often black, grey, buff or pink - but sometimes also white - in colour, occasionally decorated with roller stamping or rouletting on the rim or upperbody. A much finer fabric - often white or pale buff, appears from c.1050/1075 together with collared cp/stjs and spouted pitchers. The very finest fabric dates from c.1150, and occurs in table ware forms such as jugs and tubular spouted pitchers, bottles and dishes - from about the same time the copper is sometimes added to the transparent lead glaze. Decoration also becomes increasingly complex - often in the form of applied clay strips, stamps, thumbing, stabbing, incising and combing - from the mid to late 12th century.

This pottery can be quite easily confused with some Roman wares - such as the white flagon ware, but the presence of glaze and decoration, sooting and 'random' knife trimming will all point to a particular sherd being medieval rather than Roman, and the shape of the rim, or vessel form where known, should also help with the identification.

Stamford ware is the most commonly found late Saxon ware in Leicester and the county, the Stamford ware industry goes out of production during the first half of the 13th century.

(Kilmurry, K., 1980. 'The Pottery Industry of Stamford, Lincs. AD850-1250, British Archaeological Reports (British Series) 84.)

2. **Thetford Type Ware c.850-1200AD**

This is a hard fired, wheel thrown, smooth to sandy ware, grey in colour and unglazed, but occasionally roller stamped or rouletted. Made in a range of forms including cp/stjs, large jars with multiple handles and applied and thumbled clay strips, spouted pitchers, bowls, lamps and costrels.

The pottery can be confused with Roman grey wares save for the decoration and for the vessel forms, where identifiable.

Only very small quantities of this pottery are found in Leicestershire, and it is known as a 'type ware' because it was apparently not made at the Thetford kilns, but by itinerant potters working within the Thetford tradition.

This pottery probably lies within a 10th to early 12th century range.

(Rogerson, A., and Dallas. C., 1984. 'Excavations in Thetford, 1948-59 and 1973-80'. East Anglian Archaeology 22.)

3. **Torksey Type Ware c.850-1200AD**

Another 'type ware', this pottery is grittier than Thetford type ware and is grey or black on the surfaces, with a reddish brown core or margins, giving a sandwich effect. The wheel thrown pots occur most commonly as cp/stj, but bowls, cresset lamps, storage jars and spouted pitchers also occur - with rouletted or thumbled decoration.

Again this pottery is relatively rare in Leicester and the county. The pottery can be confused with Roman Black Burnished or Grey Wares. It probably dates between c.900-1150 AD when found in the city or county.

(Barley, M.W., 1964. 'Medieval Borough of Torksey Excavations 1960-2', Antiquaries Journal XLIV.)

(Barley, M.W., 1981. 'Medieval Borough of Torksey Excavations 1963', Antiquaries Journal LXI, part II.)

4. **Leicester Ware c.800-1100 AD**

Another grey, gritty and generally wheel thrown ware - the range of known forms is limited to cp/stj and storage jars, some knife trimmed around the exterior base, and with thumbled applied clay strip decoration or simple thumbing on the handles of the jars. A single shallow, hand made bowl or platter was also recovered from the kiln site. Rare, only a few sherds have been tentatively identified to date from excavations in Leicester. The pottery is dated to the 9th or 10th to the late 11th century.

Also easily confused with Roman grey wares, save for the thumbing, knife trimming and the vessel forms. (Hebditch, M., 1967-8. 'A Saxo Norman Pottery Kiln Discovered in Southgate Street, Leicester 1964', Transactions Leics. Archaeological and Historical Society, XLIII, 4-9)

calcite gritted/shelly ware

5. Lincoln/Lincs Shelly Wares c.850-1100AD

This pottery is tempered with rough shell, is generally wheel thrown and fired in a clamp or bonfire kiln, leading to a wide variation in surface colouration which ranges from brown to red or purple/black. usually with a dark grey or black core. Vessel forms include cp/stjs, bowls - often with inturned rims, lamps and storage jars, sometimes decorated with roller stamping or rouletting, incised wavy lines, thumbled applied clay strips and thumbing. Liquid containers such as spouted pitchers or jugs do not occur in this ware because it could not be fired at a high enough temperature to become water tight - the shell would burn out.

Small quantities of this and the virtually indistinguishable St Neots type ware (although the latter is, apparently, never rouletted) are found in Leicester - and the county. Once again, easily confused with Roman shelly wares - though the latter have flat bases and often show wheel marks, or evidence of surface 'rilling' on the exterior. (McCarthy M., 1979. 'The Pottery' in J.H. Williams 1979, St Peter's Street, Northampton: Excavations 1973-76, Northampton Development Corporation Archaeol. Mon. 2, 151-229)

Other wares dating from this period include Reduced and Oxidised Sandy wares and Calcite Gritted wares - which serve as a 'catch all' for pottery which cannot be more closely identified.

Early Medieval c.1100/1150 - c.1250 AD

Stamford ware continued in production and was the most common glazed pottery in Leicester and the county during the 12th and early to mid 13th centuries. However, this period also saw the emergence of new, often rurally based, pottery industries - and a general decline in the standards of pottery manufacture.

rock tempered

1. Potters Marston Ware c.1100-c.1300 AD

The major inclusions in this pottery was originally thought to be limestone, but has subsequently been identified as an igneous rock - syenite - an outcrop of which is known near the site of the kilns at Potters Marston, 12 km south west of Leicester. The pottery appears to have been the most common ware in Leicester and in the south west of the county by the mid to late 12th century, apparently gradually taking over from Stamford ware in importance.

Potters Marston is generally hand or coil built, buff coloured with a grey core. However marked colour variations - including black and reddish patches on the surface - suggests that the earlier pottery was fired in clamp or bonfire kilns. The 12th century pots are often narrow bodied and sloping shouldered, and often highly decorated. The later pottery tends to be more rounded and squat in form. The initially relatively restricted range of vessel forms - cp/stjs, storage jars, bowls, lamps and jugs, was extended during the 13th century to include wide mouthed bowls, dripping dishes, fire covers and ridge tiles - when single flued kilns were also introduced, which made the surface colour of the pottery much less variable. At their best, the potters produced fine walled, often highly decorated vessels - comparable to Stamford ware in terms of the sheer variety and range of decoration - especially during the early period of production, in spite of the constraints imposed by the potters having to work with such a coarse bodied clay.

The industry was finally superseded, probably towards the end of the 13th century by the finer, wheel thrown and glazed products of industries based at Chilvers Coton in Warwickshire, Nottingham and elsewhere. (Davies, S., and Sawday, D., 1991. 'The Post Roman Pottery' in A. Connor and R. Buckley 'Roman and Medieval Occupation in Causeway Lane, Leicester' Leicester Archaeology Mon 5.)

(Haynes, J., 1952. 'A 13th century kiln site at Potters Marston', Trans Leics Archaeological and Historical Society, XXVIII.)
(Sawday, D., 1991. 'Potters Marston Ware', Trans Leics Archaeol Hist Soc LXV.)

calcite gritted/shelly

2. Stanion/Lyveden Type Ware c.1100-c.1400 AD

The Saxo Norman Lincoln/Lincs shelly ware and St Neots type ware gradually gave way to the rurally based medieval Lincolnshire and Stanion Lyveden type shelly wares, the latter industry being based in north Northamptonshire. The Stanion Lyveden type wares - hand made and buff coloured - only occur in small quantities in the city, but becomes increasingly common to the south and east of the county. The earlier forms include sloping shouldered jugs with flared rims, often decorated with rouletting or incised lines, later cp/stjs become more rounded with thumbing at the rim. During the 13th century, the industry developed a wider range of forms and a distinctive style of decoration - including the use of white slip under a green glaze, and grid stamped applied white clay pads.

(McCarthy, M., 1979. 'The Pottery' in J.H. Williams 1979.)

quartz tempered/sandy

3. Splashed Ware c.1100-1250 AD

This ware gets its name from the effect of the powdered lead glaze on the body of the pot after firing, when it acquired a pitted appearance. It was probably made in Leicester, as well as at Nottingham and Derby and elsewhere in the midlands. The surfaces are generally buff coloured with a grey core, the glaze firing to an orange or orange/green. Leicester Splashed ware is generally hand or coil built, at Nottingham the finer Splashed wares are often wheel thrown. The range of forms appears to be fairly limited - cp/stjs, bowls and jugs are common, but lamps, fire covers, tripod pitchers and ridge tiles are also known in this ware in Leicester, where the pottery was probably fired in simple single flued kilns.

Both local and Nottingham Splashed wares are found in small quantities in Leicester, the former becoming more common to the north of the county. The Leicester Splashed wares have a distinctive range of decoration including jugs with rod handles (round in section) decorated with incised chevron patterns, and cordons round the body. Applied clay zoomorphic decoration (depicting animals) - though very rare - is also found on this ware.

(Sawday, D., 1998. 'Post Roman Pottery' in L. Cooper 1998, New Evidence for the Northern Defences of Roman Leicester: An archaeological excavation at Cumberland Street, Trans Leics Archaeol Hist Soc, LXXII: 92-109.)

Small quantities of hand made or wheel thrown pottery in Oxidised and Reduced Sandy wares also occur during this period.

Medieval c.1200/1250 - c.1450 AD

A period of economic expansion - reflected in the rise of new large scale pottery industries such as that at Chilvers Coton in Warwickshire, where over 68 kilns have been excavated.

quartz tempered/sandy

1. Chilvers Coton ware c.1200/1250 - 1450/1475 AD

The most common pottery in Leicester and frequently found to the west of the county during this period, these generally fine bodied white, buff or pink, wheel thrown wares dominate in the early period - the mixed lead and copper glazes firing mottled yellow and green. Early forms include cp/stjs, bowls, dripping dishes and jugs - later forms - pipkins, skillets, urinals and cisterns. The 13th century jugs in particular can be highly decorated with an overall glaze, applied iron rich clay strips or pads, with stamps, notching and rouletting etc. The often elegant early forms give way during the later 14th century to more pedestrian plain shapes, with a general decline in the use of glaze and decoration and the increasing use of red firing clays. The latter were more able to withstand the higher firing temperatures achieved by the gradual transition, from the 13th to the 15th centuries, from single flued to multi flued kilns. The later vessels often had only a token splash of brown or brownish black glaze around the upper portion of many of the pots as decoration, whilst the glaze on jugs was often limited to a 'bib' around the pouring lip and down to the shoulder of the vessel.

A coarser version of this ware, generally buff bodied and crudely made, also exists, but its distribution tends to be restricted to a limited area around the kiln source.

(Mayes, P., and Scott, K., 1984. 'Pottery Kilns at Chilvers Coton, Nuneaton', Society for Medieval Archaeology, Mon. 10.)

2. Medieval Sandy Ware c.1200/1250 - 1450/1475 AD

This white or pale buff pottery is similar to the Chilvers Coton wares, but the inclusions are larger, ranging up to 2.5mm as opposed to a maximum size of approximately 1mm, for the comparable Chilvers Coton wares - and the pottery feels and looks coarser. However the Medieval Sandy wares share the same general overall characteristics and patterns of development as the Chilvers Coton wares and are apparently fairly local in origin. Some are thought to be products of the Burley Hill kilns at Duffield north of Derby, and others may in fact be coarser products of the Chilvers Coton kilns. The later, more hard fired pottery possibly originates from the Ticknall kilns on the border of Derbyshire and Leicestershire.

Other green glazed wheel thrown sandy wares are also found in smaller quantities in Leicester, becoming more common in the county nearer the kiln source, such as the Nottingham green glazed wares. The mid 13th century and later Nottingham jugs in particular being characterised by a particularly good quality dark green glaze. To the east and in Rutland the wheel thrown Bourne wares dominate.

calcite gritted/shelly

3. Stanion Lyveden Type Ware c.1100 - 1400+ AD

This pottery continues to appear in Leicester, albeit in lesser quantity than the Chilvers Coton and medieval sandy wares. Cooking pots/storage jars, bowls and glazed jugs with applied grid stamped pads and slip decoration occur during the 13th and 14th centuries, the pottery becoming plainer and more functional by the later 14th century.

(Bellamy, B., 1983. 'Medieval Pottery Kilns at Stanion', Northamptonshire Archaeol 18.)

(McCarthy, M.R., 1979. 'The Pottery' in J.H. Williams 1979.)

Late Medieval c.1400 - c.1550 AD

Technological change had been gathering momentum at Chilvers Coton during the 14th century with the increasing use of coal instead of wood to fire the kilns, whilst the 15th century saw the introduction of first four, and then five flued kilns - meaning that the pottery could be much more highly fired - sometimes almost to the point of vitrification. These changes both at Chilvers Coton and elsewhere led to the development of the so called Midland Purple wares. The Nottingham and Lydden Stanion industries had ceased production by the mid 15th century.

quartz tempered/sandy

1. Midland Purple Ware c.1375 - c.1550 AD

An exceptionally hard, almost vitrified, wheel thrown ware with a dark reddish purple, grey or brown body. Vessel forms are utilitarian and include - jars, cisterns, pipkins, bowls, skillets, urinals and jugs, generally with minimal decoration save for a dark brown or purple and sometimes metallic looking glaze, usually on the upper part of the vessel. The interior of the cisterns and of flat ware forms such as bowls and skillets are also frequently glazed. Pottery cooking pots are much more unusual as most people could afford metal vessels by this time. Midland Purple is common throughout the midlands during this period.

Individual sherds may be confused with the 'pimply' Roman Derbyshire ware - but the latter is more usually pale grey or brown in colour, sometimes with a reddish core, and is never glazed. Local sources include Chilvers Coton and Ticknall in Derbyshire.

(Woodland, R.R., 1981. 'The Pottery' in J.E. Mellor and T. Pearce, The Austin Friars, Leicester, CBA Res. Rep. 35, 81-129.)

2. Cistercian Ware c.1475-1550

This pottery has a very fine sandy dark red or brown body, is thin walled, wheel thrown and lead glazed. The glaze fires a dark brown or purple/black over the body. However the vessels are often highly decorated with trailed white slip or applied white clay pads, and stamps. The transparent lead glaze fires to a pale yellow over this applied clay decoration. Cistercian was made in a wide range of table ware forms - most notably cups - (during most of the medieval period wood, metal or horn was most commonly used for drinking vessels). Chafing dishes, posset pots, jugs, table salts, costrels and candlesticks are also found in this ware. Stacking evidence on some of the Midland Purple cistern bases suggests that they were initially used as saggars to protect the more delicate Cistercian ware vessels, which were stood on the inverted base of a cistern with another cistern stacked upside down on top of the fine ware vessel before the kiln firing took place.

Common in Leicester and the county, much of this pottery seems to share the same sources as the Midland Purple noted above, namely Chilvers Coton and Ticknall.

(Woodland, R.R., 1981. 'The Pottery' in J.E. Mellor and T. Pearce, The Austin Friars, Leicester, CBA Res. Rep. 35, 81-129.)

3. Surrey Whiteware c.1400 - c.1600+

This is a very fine, white or buff bodied and thin walled, ware with a shiny green or greenish yellow, lead and copper glaze - which may be confused with copper glazed Stamford ware. The pots were biscuit fired before glazing, and made in a variety of forms, most notably cups - including lobed and pedestal types - as well as jugs, bowls, ink pots etc. Some local copies of this ware occur at Chilvers Coton and elsewhere, but much of the pottery found in Leicester and the county seems to derive from Surrey or the Surrey Hampshire border. The bright green glaze originally earned this pottery the name 'Tudor Green'.

(Moorhouse, S., 1984. 'Late Medieval Fine Ware' in West Midlands Pottery Research Group Newsletter 3.)
(Pearce, J.E., Vince, A.G. *et al*, 1988. 'A Dated Type Series of London Medieval Pottery Part 4: Surrey Whitewares. Museum of London and Middlesex Archaeological Society.)

The post Roman Pottery from the forum evaluation A10 1999 - notes for the display

The excavations demonstrated that in spite of intensive activity on the site during the throughout the historic and modern periods there are areas where levels relating to the late Saxon and medieval town still survive relatively undisturbed.

context (440) two Lincoln/Lincs shelly ware cooking pot/jar rims, wheel thrown & sooted externally, one is also rouletted on the exterior rim. This pottery comes from a floor layer in a building fronting on to that part of the old High Street, now known as Applegate. The High St was the major thoroughfare of the medieval town. The pottery dates from the late 9th or 10th centuries.

(114) (112) (115) fragments of wheel thrown Stamford and hand made Potters Marston cooking pot/jar rims and a hand made Leicester Splashed ware body sherd dating from the later 11th and/or 12th centuries. From road deposits on the medieval Hotgate, now Thornton Lane.

(200) a wheel thrown cup or tyg, with a white body and a vertical double looped strip, decorated with applied iron rich clay pads and feathered iron rich trailed slip, the transparent lead glaze firing brown and yellow over the different coloured clays. The vessel would probably have had several handles and double looped strips. A rare find in Leicester. Probably dated to the mid 17th century.

(333) late medieval and post medieval pottery - all wheel thrown - from a layer north of the parish boundary wall, including (Tudor Green) a green glazed Surrey Whiteware pedestal cup, two Midland Purple cistern rims and a range of Cistercian ware cup fragments and misc decorated sherds probably also associated with cups or jugs, and a Midland Blackware pedestal cup fragment & a Midland Yellow chafing dish (prob all from Ticknall in Derbyshire - though the origins of the MB are slightly more uncertain than the rest of the pot), also a fragment of a slip ware bowl, and part of a stoneware jug - the wire cut base suggests that this vessel originates in Frechen in the Rhinelands where it dates from c.1550+ The large number of drinking vessel fragments recovered from this context suggests that there was a tavern, or perhaps even a merchant hall in the area - where entertaining was carried out on a large scale

(338) a fragment of a hand made/moulded medieval ridge tile in Potters Marston ware, found in a wall - dating from the late 13th century - the presence of ceramic roofing tiles on the excavation (which were quite heavy) suggests that there were buildings of some quality in the area - not a surprising find in the heart of the med town.

From the Jewry Wall collection

A Frechen stoneware mug

3 Cistercian/Midland Blackware cups

A Midland Yellow ware jar (the grey/green glaze is a result of the pot being fired in a reducing (oxygen deprived) atmosphere in the kiln - the yellow glazed vessels have been fired in an oxygen rich atmosphere.)