

Manors, Markets, and Morphology:

An investigation into the distribution patterns of medieval pottery fabrics in Leicestershire between 1100 and 1400, and the factors that shaped them



Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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1 Introduction

As a newcomer to the world of medieval pottery assemblages, it can be challenging to get to grips with and understand the dynamics of an entire county's pottery, let alone that beyond its borders. A nice cheat sheet to reference, or a dossier of collected knowledge to refer to would be a godsend. For many parts of the country however these kinds of resources are often simply stored safely away in the heads of specialists, carrying with them decades of analysis and interpretation to be dispensed when called upon. The kind of knowledge that sometimes only ever finds its way into the literature as a 'pers. comm.' reference. An infinite well of knowledge, but in a fragile container. Which means sometimes that knowledge can be lost in an instant, and all you can do is piece together what you can from the scraps left behind.

This is the unfortunate scenario Leicestershire archaeology experienced in 2021 with the passing of Deborah 'Debbie' Sawday, the doyenne of medieval pottery in the county, leaving behind over 40 years of work on the subject (ULAS, 2022). This thesis is in part an opportunity to fast-track the acquisition of my own understanding of what was happening with pottery in Leicestershire during the medieval period. While at the same time, it is also an attempt to shine a little bit of a light on the some of that wealth of knowledge Debbie left behind which now languishes in the dark depths of the grey literature archives.

1.1 The thesis

Pottery survives well in the archaeological record, making it one of the most common finds on any excavation, and in the medieval period it was a ubiquitous presence in household assemblages. There may be differences in the ratios of materials found among the table and kitchen ware assemblages of the period, be that wood, glass, metal, or ceramic etc., but no matter the status of a household, pottery maintained a consistent presence (Mellor, 2006). These factors, along with ability to source and date its origins therefore make pottery an excellent resource for investigating patterns of distribution and trade (Jervis, 2026; Meyer et al., 2016).

For many other materials documentary records such as household accounts, or manorial records, despite often being inconsistent and incomplete, can offer insight into their movement and distribution (Dyer, 2000). However, pottery was a material of such minor value that even when present in considerable amounts it rarely makes its way into such documentation (Jervis, 2014a; Jervis et al., 2015; Schofield & Vince, 1998). By their nature these accounts also fail to platform the largest driver of the medieval economy, the peasant class (Stafford, 1985).

Despite it being noted how useful it could be for providing insights into the markets and trade environment of Leicestershire (Dyer, 2015), and its presence as a long-standing objective of the *East Midlands Research Framework* (Lewis, 2026) (see also: Lewis, 2006), there has yet to be an attempt at mapping and understanding the distribution of medieval pottery in Leicestershire, and the means through which that distribution may have occurred.

This work will look to rectify that by first distilling almost 30 years of data on Leicestershire's medieval pottery into a referenceable dataset. It will then investigate the potential paths of distribution for individual pottery fabrics of known and unknown origin. Attempting to determine the driving forces behind this movement, whether they be the market networks of the region or the people and institutions of influence within the area.

Pottery distributions may not be able to provide answers that correlate with other aspects of medieval society (Jervis, 2025; Jope 1963) but they can help us move from an 'accumulation of data', into a something that ensures that pottery is more than just sherd counts and weights, and that production centres are treated as living entities rather than simply 'kiln sites' (Brown, 1998, 2014; McCarthy & Brooks 1988).

The focus of this work will be on the period of expansion for markets and fairs that coincides with the production period of many of the medieval fabrics of the high medieval period, c.1100-1400 (Jervis, 2025). However, earlier medieval fabrics, some whose production began in the 9th century, will also be included and analysed. This is due to both the production of many of these fabrics continuing into this period, and the fact that these earlier fabrics can also offer comparison and insight into the changing nature of pottery distribution in the county as the market economy developed.

Although a 'dots on maps' approach may be seen as passé in some respects (Jervis, 2014a; McCarthy & Brooks 1988), in order to be able to explore matters from a more theoretical standpoint there is a

requirement for understanding the baseline dynamics at play within the data beforehand. Although limitations for the scope of such work exist in this format, it is hoped that what can be set out in this thesis will provide a solid grounding for future research in the area.

2 The Context

2.1 Leicestershire in the medieval period

Leicester has settlement history dating back to at least the Iron Age and was one of the earliest urbanised centres in the region following Viking fortification in the 9th century (Lewis, 2026). The other notable pre-conquest settlement in the county is Melton Mowbray in the north east of the county (Lewis, 2026). The post-conquest period saw the population of the county grow significantly, and by 1300 it was a densely populated region, occupying a pattern of nucleated villages, and with more than 80% of the population working in agricultural roles (Dyer, 2005; Lewis, 2026). This included the founding of new towns such as Market Harborough, with the specific intention that they become commercial centres, with this also being the impetus for other settlements in the county to develop into smaller towns (Lewis, 2026).

Documentary evidence shows that Leicester was a centre of cloth manufacture, along with wool production and leather working during this period, with the high-quality cloth made in the town being exported to the east coast ports of Boston and Lynn (Buckley et al. 2021; Lewis, 2026). A lot of the town's trade links were concentrated on the eastern side of the county up until the 13th century, with merchants making frequent visits to Stamford during this period (Buckley et al. 2021). By the middle of the 13th century nearby Coventry had grown into the 'trading capital' of the region and a key cloth manufacturer, while Leicester's main export was wool (Buckley et al. 2021). This led to close trade links between the two towns, with traders from Leicester even becoming members of the Coventry guilds (Buckley et al. 2021).

The county's only navigable waterway was a small portion of the River Trent running north towards Nottingham (Buckley et al. 2021; Stafford, 1985). However, the town was a central hub of a well-

developed road network, with key routes to Derby/Nottingham in the north, Lincoln in the north east, Northampton in the south, and Coventry in the south east (Buckley et al. 2021).

Although medieval Leicestershire is well studied it has been absent from the analysis of a number of medieval systems, including river routeways (e.g. Edwards and Hindle 1991; Jones 2000), Bridges (e.g. Harrison, 2004), and market distributions (e.g. Britnell, 1981), limiting a complete understanding of these aspects of the county.

Further information on the city is detailed in the 2021 volume *Life in Roman and Medieval Leicester* by Buckley et al., while recent research into the county as a whole was compiled in the *Medieval Leicestershire* (2015) volume, edited by Kathleen Elkin. The state of knowledge of the Midlands as a whole during this period is detailed as part of the *East Midlands Research Framework* (2026), and Stafford (1985) has also written an overview of the region. Crouch (1993) has examined the Earls and Bishops of Leicestershire during this period, while Howell (1974) has detailed the economic condition of south east Leicestershire's peasantry, and McLoughlin (2008) has looked into peasant freedoms at a village in the north of the county. Squires (2004) has examined the parks and woodland of the county during that period, and Hamilton Thompson (1949) was responsible for a detailed history of Leicester Abbey.

2.2 Medieval markets and the rural economy

Towards the end of the 9th century elements were set in place that would form the backbone of the rural economy in England, as new towns, villages, and manors were ensconced throughout the country (Dyer, 2002). Farming was the primary occupation in many of these rural communities, growing crops and raising livestock to feed an ever expanding population (Dyer, 2002). Little changed for the peasant class immediately post-conquest, with settlement growth and agricultural exploitation continuing apace (Dyer, 2007). Infrastructure such as roads were improved allowing easier movement between distant locales (Dyer, 2007). As markets were established in these places from the 13th century onwards, movement between them for trading began to shape a new economy. Interests shifted from subsistence livelihoods under a 'feudalist' regime to an economy with commercialism at its heart (Dyer, 2007). This swing towards commercialism eventually put strains on the economy around the 14th century as the industries which were heavily relied upon, such as cloth manufacture, were affected by

fluctuations in prices and the importing of goods and craftsmen from the continent (Schofield and Vince, 1998)

We know that between the early 13th century and mid 14th century the number of markets in England grew into the thousands (Britnell, 1981). Thanks to the work of Samantha Letters (2003), details on the founding of many of these have been collated in a gazetteer form that allows us to piece together the pattern of this increase in Leicestershire and the surrounding counties. The dates set forth in the gazetteer are not absolute dates for the founding of markets, details of which are often unknown. It is instead a gathering of records for when markets were granted official charters, with it being uncertain which markets already existed prior to receiving this charter and were just receiving official validation and which were brand new markets (Britnell, 1981; Lewis, 2026). Analysis of the scale of production evident at the Stamford pottery in the pre-conquest period indicates that systems of marketing and distribution must have been in place long before the process of formalising by charter (Sawday, 2021).

The weekly nature of most markets provided opportunities to acquire goods that were required regularly but not every day, such as pottery (Schofield and Vince 1998). As a result, this increase in markets was a boon for rural crafts and saw large parts of the rural population engaging in part-time craft activities, leading to the production of such goods growing to a considerable scale by the end of the 13th century (Dyer, 2000/2; 2018; Jervis, 2026). This increase in production also came with an increase in rural consumption, that was enabled by the expanding market network (Dyer, 2010).

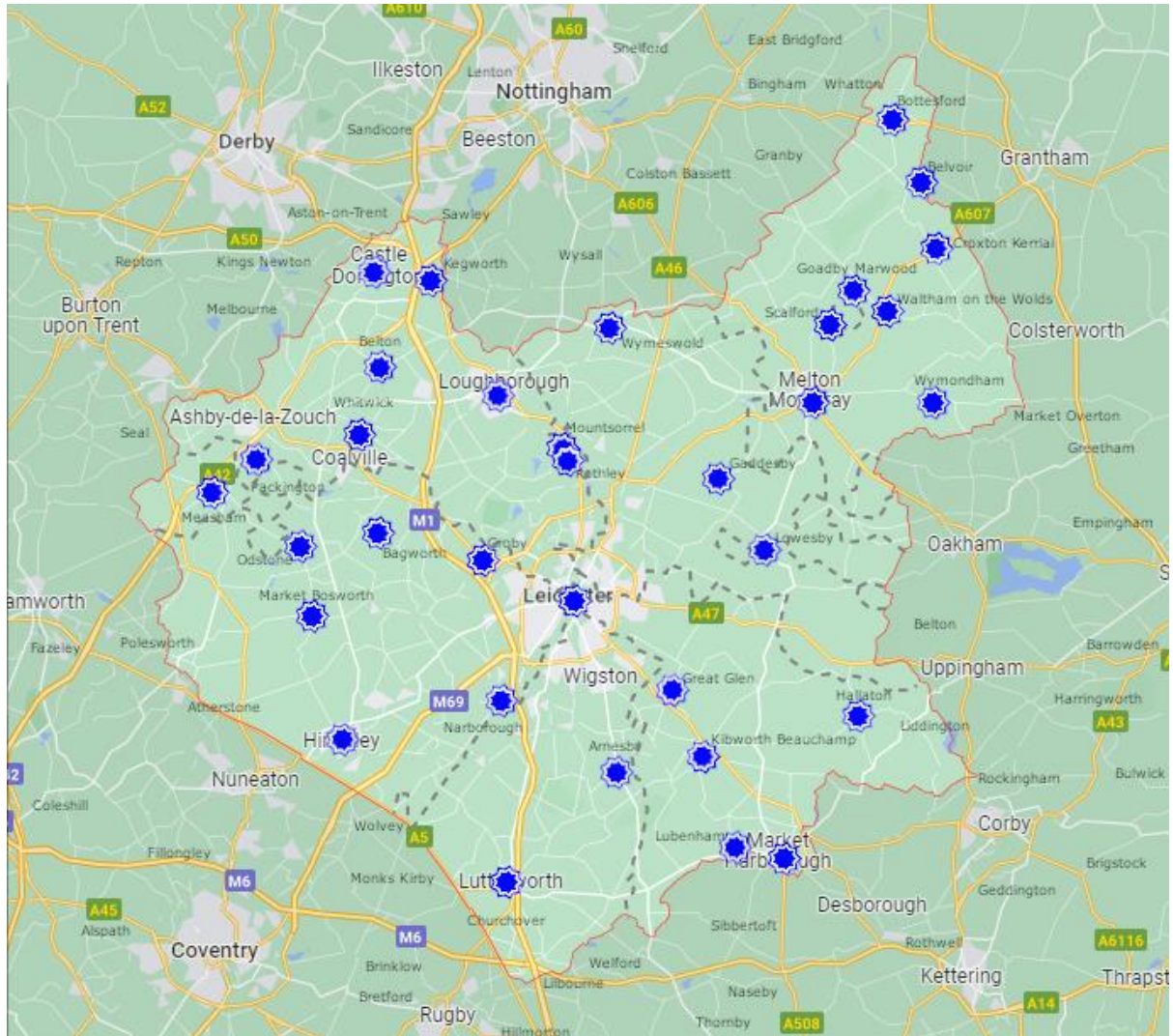


Figure 1. Locations that are granted charters for markets

We have records of a market existing in Leicestershire at Melton Mowbray by the time of the Domesday survey, and Leicester's market likely originated in the 12th century (Buckley et al. 2021; Stafford, 1985). Shifts in the economy of England during the 12th and 13th centuries saw landowners seek to take advantage of the commercialisation of the economy and burgeoning rural industries by creating new centres for exchange in the form of numerous additional markets and fairs (Jervis, 2025; 2026; Letters, 2003). This capitalisation on a changing economy resulted in 44 markets being granted charters in Leicestershire by the end of the 14th century (Letters, 2003; Lewis, 2026) (see Figure 1). Of these the dominant ones were Ashby de la Zouch, Hinckley, Leicester, Loughborough, Lutterworth, Market Harborough, Market Bosworth, Melton Mowbray, and Oakham (Dyer, 2015). Castle Donington, Hallaton, and Mountsorrel then make up the next tier down (Dyer, 2015)

For more in depth context on markets and the rural economy, Dyer has written extensively on the subject from the point of view of the standards of living in the medieval period (1989), everyday life within the economy (2000), making a living in medieval England (2002), and the economic and societal changes of the time (2007). Jervis (2021) has looked at living standards and material culture in rural medieval households. Masschaele (1997) examined the relationship between peasants and markets and how that transformed the economy. Davis (2012) has looked into the ways the legal and social frameworks shaped medieval markets, and Britnell (1981) analysed the motivations behind the period of medieval market expansion.

2.3 Medieval pottery in context

The medieval period saw pottery transition from being produced on a very localised basis, to its production becoming a commercialised industry where potters wholly or partially supplemented their income through potting (Jervis, 2025; Peacock, 1982). Initially in the early medieval period this industry was an urban one, based in early towns such as at Stamford in Lincolnshire in the 9th to 11th centuries, before potting became more of a rural activity that in turn provided ceramics to the burgeoning urban centres (Jervis, 2025; Mellor, 2006). These rural potteries could constitute anywhere from a single kiln to upwards of 40 (Mayes and Scott, 1984; Jervis, 2025).

Early medieval pottery forms tended to be limited to jars and cooking pots, along with spouted pitchers, and bowls (Sawday, 2021). Pots were often placed directly into the fire or into beds of ashes during the medieval period, as evidenced by sooting and burning seen on many of these types of vessels (Sawday, 2021). Table wares begin to come into use in the 11th century before they become a common household item in the 12th century, with these items often glazed and sometimes elaborately decorated (Sawday, 2021).

Pottery in the 13th century is considered by some to have been a highwater mark in England's ceramic history (Barton, 1975). This period sees significant development in pottery production methods including the introduction of a number of new kiln types, including the double-flue, multi-flue, and parallel flue types (Barton 1975). This development continues into the 14th century with kilns capable of firing larger quantities of pots at higher temperatures. From the 14th century the number of production centres declines, and established traditions are disrupted, with similar forms and fabrics being produced at multiple centres across a region (Barton, 1975; Lewis, 2026).

Potters in the medieval period were low status and pots they produced were low value items, to such an extent that it was common for them to not be subject to taxes (Dyer, 1982; Jervis, 2014a; 2025; McCarthy & Brooks, 1988). This is large part why no potter's guild existed alongside other craft guilds in many urban centres (McCarthy & Brooks 1988). Their relationship with landowners varied by pottery with some paying for the extraction of materials, others for rent of the kilns (Jervis, 2025; Mellor, 2006).

An overview of medieval pottery including the technological aspects, distribution, uses and symbolism, and common regional fabrics was written by McCarthy and Brooks (1988). While the Medieval and Later Pottery Research group have published 45 journal editions on various aspects of the country's medieval pottery. Le Patourel (1968) has written on the difficulties of finding contemporary documentary evidence of the medieval pottery industry. Mellor (2006) has written on the comparisons between town and country pottery usage. Jervis (2014a) meanwhile takes a more theoretical approach to examining the relationship between pots and people in the period, along with how pots gain meaning (2014b). He has also looked at medieval potters as small-scale entrepreneurs (2025).

2.4 Previous pot distribution analyses

Analysis of pot distributions has been undertaken in numerous areas of the country and through a variety of methods over the years.

Bellamy and Le Patourel (1970) looked at the distribution patterns of different decorative patterns from a kiln site in Yorkshire. While Vince (1977) examined into the pottery industry of the Malvern region and distribution of these wares. Moorhouse (1981, 1983) has written on the manner of pot distribution and the ways documentary evidence can be used to understand how pottery is being moved around a region. Streeten (1985) has studied the production and distribution of medieval pottery in south east England. Mellor (1994) produced an extensive synthesis of the medieval fabrics of Oxfordshire and their distributions, covering a period from the middle Saxon era through to the early modern period.

More recently Signer (2025) has examined pottery production and consumption in the Vale of Pickering with the help of documentary evidence. While Jervis (2026) has used network analysis to examine ceramic networks and the process of urbanisation.

3 Methodology

3.1 Data overview

A total of 635 written reports and excel datasets were examined for their suitability in providing the data needed for this project. The datasets created by Deborah Sawday were sourced from a digital repository on the ULAS internal computer system, used for the safe storage of the work of staff members who are no longer with the unit. These datasets represent a contained grouping of data produced between 1998 and 2019, covering the period from when ULAS transitioned to fully digital reporting, until Debbie's passing. Following her death, assessment of medieval pottery assemblages for ULAS associated projects initially passed to Paul Blinkhorn and Dr Alice Forward, before later being taken on by the author. Data from these later assemblages was obtained from a separate area of the ULAS internal computer system. In total 258 datasets were deemed appropriate for use in this work. Of these 233 were recorded by Deborah Sawday, 15 by Paul Blinkhorn, 4 by Dr Alice Forward, and 6 by the author.

It was decided to restrict the examination of datasets to those prepared by the above specialists in order to maintain as consistent a recording baseline as possible. The fabric series currently in use, and which has been in that form with minor amendments since 1999, was developed in large part by Deborah Sawday, meaning these datasets could be assured of being extremely consistent and of the highest accuracy. Of the other specialists' datasets included in this work, Paul Blinkhorn has extensive experience with East Midlands pottery assemblages, including experience and familiarity with the Leicestershire Fabric Series. Dr Alice Forward and the author were both trained in house at ULAS where the reference collection for the Leicestershire Fabric Series is stored. Dr Alice Forward has over 10 years' experience as a pottery specialist and is currently the Post-excavation Manager at ULAS, and while the author has only been working with Leicestershire medieval pottery for a short time, the level of oversight and verification provided during that time by Dr Forward means that this work can also be relied upon as rigorous enough for this study.

Once this examination of the datasets was complete the entire project assemblage measured 80,917 sherds, weighing 1,327,540g. These figures were heavily weighted towards the assemblages from the city of Leicester simply by nature of this being where the most extensive excavations have been carried out in the county, with these city assemblages containing a total of 65,180 sherds weighing 1,131,796g. The remaining 90 locations combined contained 15,737 sherds weighing 195,744g.

It was determined that the analysis of the assemblages should be focused only on the number of sherds present within an assemblage and not their weight, however. This decision was made largely due to the skewing of the data caused by distinct differences in the nature of the pottery fabrics and the vessels produced in them, along with changes in pottery production methods over the period examined. The strongest evidence for the need for this approach came in the comparison of sherd counts and weights between Stamford ware and the later medieval Midland Purple ware that was part of the initial rounds of analysis. Stamford ware is an early medieval ware that contains a significant percentage of fine walled, relatively small vessel types produced in wood fired kilns reaching a maximum of 900°C (Kilmurry, 1980), whereas Midland Purple ware leans more towards thicker-walled utilitarian cooking vessels made in coal-fired kilns at temperatures of up to 1000°C. This results in Midland Purple sherds not only being far heavier at comparable sizes to Stamford ware but also the advanced firing methods used made the sherds less destructible which means surviving sherds tend to be larger overall. This resulted in Stamford ware making up 11% of the assemblage sherd count overall but only 6% of the weight of it, while Midland Purple made up just 5% but accounted for 10% of the weight.

This approach still has flaws however, particularly related to the post-depositional effects experienced by certain pottery fabrics. As already alluded to, earlier medieval fabrics were often fired at lower temperatures meaning they are 'softer' and so more prone to breakage, particularly on sites that have seen a degree of disturbance. Pottery fabrics with organic or fossiliferous inclusions such the shell-tempered wares from Lincoln are also at greater risk of post-depositional fragmentation in acidic soils where the leaching out of these inclusions weakens the fabric causing it to fragment more easily. Initial assessments however indicated that there was greater variability in the weight ratios among localised groups than there were within sherd counts.

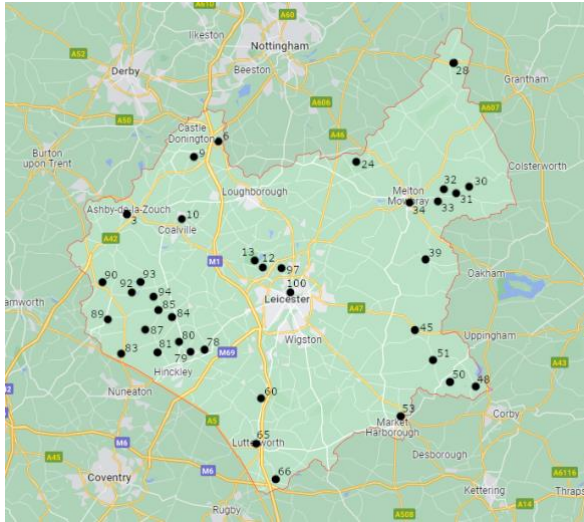


Figure 2. Sites with over one hundred sherds in their assemblage

Further decisions were necessary when deciding on a lower threshold for the size of the assemblages that would be included in the analysis. This proved to be a tricky proposition, involving balancing the need for adequate coverage of the county with trying to avoid the statistical anomalies that small datasets can produce. A threshold of 100 sherds which would normally be considered a reliable dataset; however, such a threshold would have left just 37 sites with a very uneven distribution across the county (Figure 2).

The distribution also had a strong bias towards the south west of the county. After experimenting with data from all available datasets the distribution pattern of locationally similar assemblages was assessed to determine the point at which the distribution pattern of individual sites began to differ significantly from the grouping as a whole. From this it became clear that any assemblage fewer than ten sherds could not be used as a reliable indicator of fabric ratios and so this was set as the absolute baseline for analysis. In order to minimise the variability present in any of the remaining smaller assemblages it was decided that any assemblages with 25 sherds or fewer would be plotted at a reduced size so as to be observable but not distortive.

For the purposes of this project the movement of pottery between settlements was the main focus and so the 258 datasets were condensed down by combining the data from all excavations carried out in a settlement area into a single assemblage for that location. Doing this reduced the number of assemblages being analysed to an initial 102 locations (Figure 3), before refinement of the methodology to exclude the later medieval fabrics lowered this figure to a final total of 91 locations (Figure 4).

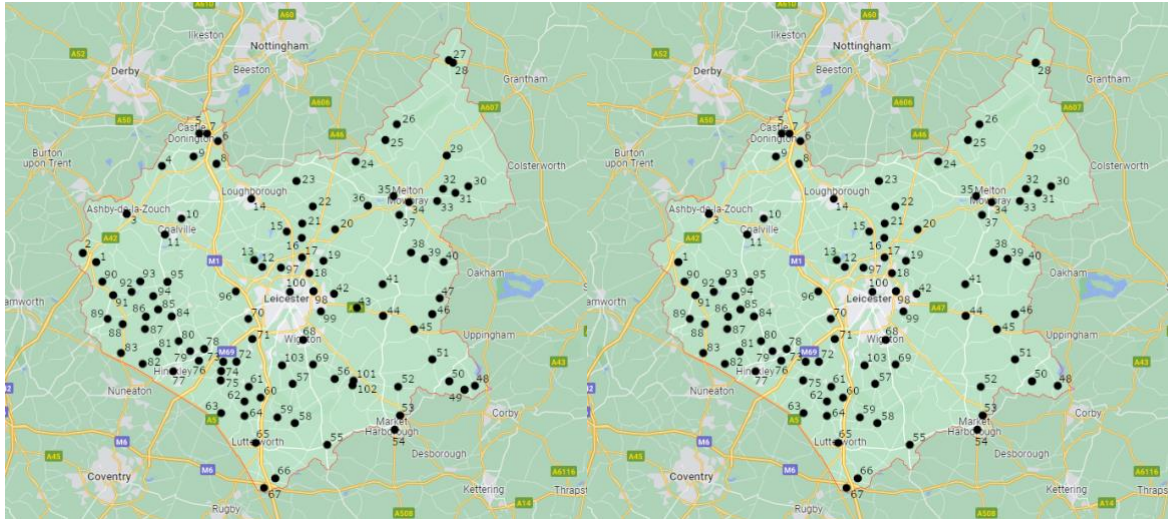


Figure 3. Initial site selection



When it came to mapping out the results of the analysis a further threshold of significance was settled on for fabrics within an assemblage. A figure of 10% was decided on for this, and was done primarily to legislate for secondary and tertiary movement of pottery through the likes of low-level interpersonal trading, gift giving, and potential individual outlier households within assemblages (REF). This 10% figure also helps account for some of the variability in phasing of the sites surveyed, such that wares in production at either only the start or end of the period of occupation do not muddy the waters of distributions too much.

For each fabric the distribution was marked on a map with colour coded thresholds of 50%, 40%, 30%, 20% and 10% of the assemblage. Each site's distribution was individually examined for significant discrepancies between the sherd count and sherd weight, to ensure the validity of these thresholds.

3.2 The City of Leicester dilemma

The assemblage of sherds for the city of Leicester dataset accounts for 81% of the total assemblage. Upon examination of this data though, there appeared to be some issues with its suitability for use in certain aspects of this project. Discussions were had with some members of ULAS staff involved in these projects (Forward, 2026; Morris, 2026) about the distribution pattern for some of the later fabrics as these distributions were unusual when mapped out over the city. What became apparent from these discussions is that northern region of the city had seen numerous large-scale excavations

that had produced extensive assemblages, and owing to the restrictive nature of commercial archaeological budgets not all of the pottery from these assemblages has been analysed.

Selection strategies employed as part of the budgeting process appear to have affected the assessment of the later medieval material in such a way that although arguments (Morris, 2026) could be made that the distributions did reflect some of the changes to the city in the later medieval period, they still limit the reliability of these city assemblages in such a way that detailed mapping of this area cannot be trusted at this time. Should further work be done to analyse the entirety of these assemblages, mapping of city-wide distributions of these fabrics would then become a viable task. For the purposes of this project though it means that the city assemblage will be approached as a single large assemblage, and assessments made about the ratios of fabrics found within treated with appropriate caution.

This selection strategy issue did not affect any of the other county sites. All sherds within these assemblages were recorded and so these can be treated as complete and reliable representation of these locations.

3.3 Fabrics within the dataset

Following extraction of the data from the site datasets, twenty-nine individual pottery fabrics were recorded from the period of study. There are subdivisions within a number of these fabrics, but as the purpose of this work is to investigate the general movement of pottery across the county all analysis has been conducted on the basis of the broad fabric types alone. I will now provide a brief overview of the main fabrics encountered that will be discussed later.

Of the early medieval fabrics Stamford ware stands as the most widely distributed of all wares in this period, even making its way as far north as Scotland and across the North Sea to Sweden (McCarthy & Brooks 1988). It was produced in Stamford in Lincolnshire between c. 850 and 1250 (Davies and Sawday 1999; Sawday 2009) and was notable for both the quality of the manufacture and the variety of forms produced. In fact, the jug form developed there would become the archetype for water carriers in England for the next 250 years (Barton, 1975).

In the city of Leicester, we know of two small pottery production industries, but we have only located the kiln site for one of them. Firstly, we have the early medieval 'Leicester ware' which is a wheel-

thrown coarse grey fabric mainly used for storage jars, thought to date from 870-1100, with kilns dating to the 10th to 11th century excavated in the 1960s (Hebditch, 1967). This fabric can easily be confused with Roman grey ware at a glance, though it possesses enough distinguishing features to limit confusion at analysis. This is then followed by Leicester Splashed ware, a coarse sandy coil-built fabric with a 'splashed' lead glaze that dates to 1100-1250. This fabric is predominantly used for jugs, storage jars, and bowls.

Other early medieval fabrics that formed part of county assemblages include Torksey ware, produced in Lincolnshire between 800 and 1200; St Neots ware, produced in Cambridgeshire between 850 and 1100, along with a later 'developed' form continuing until 1350, and the unglazed Lincoln shelly wares produced between 870 and 1200. There are also more minor fabrics such as Northampton ware dating from 850 to 1100 century, Thetford ware from Norfolk dating from 850 to 1200, along with some of the generic Reduced Sandy wares of unknown origin thought to have been produced from the 850 century all the way through to until 1400.

In the post-conquest period up until the 14th century there are two dominant fabrics among the county assemblage. Firstly, there is the only known rural pottery within Leicestershire during this period, located at Potters Martson in the south west of the county on the road to Coventry. A village in which the production of pottery was so intrinsically linked that it led to a change of name in the thirteenth century, from the original Meristone to Le Potteres Mersitone, later Potters Marston (Dyer, 2002; Mellor, 2006). Pottery production took place here between c. 1100 and 1300 (Sawday, 1991). The primary vessel types produced by the Potters Marston kilns were jars and cooking pots, with a smaller selection of spouted pitchers, jugs, bowls, and lamps (Sawday, 1991).

The second of these fabrics is Chilvers Coton ware, produced just to the south of Nuneaton in Warwickshire. Producing pottery at a large scale from 1200 possibly until as late as 1475, more than 42 kilns were excavated at the site in the 1960s and 1970s (Mayes and Scott, 1984). Typically, vessels are fine-bodied and wheel-thrown in a wide range of forms including jugs, cooking pots, storage jars, dripping dishes, and bowls, to later forms such as pipkins, skillets, and cisterns. Often employing highly decorative designs and glazing, these vessels were fired at higher temperatures as improvements to fuels and kilns developed from the 13th century onwards.

Outside of those two main fabrics some of the other key pottery types in the county are Lyveden ware produced over the border to the south east in Northamptonshire between 1150 and 1500 (Spoerry, 2016). A coarse shelly/oolithic fabric, hand-built and sometimes wheel-finished used to make jugs,

jars, cooking pots, and bowls, often with a green glaze from the 13th century onwards (Spoerry, 2016). Nottingham ware, and Nottingham splashed ware emanate from over the border to the north in Nottinghamshire, though the exact source for Nottingham Splashed ware is unknown (Lewis, 2026). The two Nottingham fabrics exist sequentially in the archaeological record with Nottingham splashed ware existing in parallel with Leicester Splashed ware and also bearing many similarities in form and glazing. Nottingham ware follows between 1250 and 1350, and like many 13th century fabrics in the region is primarily represented by jugs, with the occasional aquamanile, all frequently with a dark green glaze applied to them. The final fabric of this group is the Medieval Sandy wares. These are somewhat of a catch-all group of wares of varying dates and potential origins, likely dating between 1200 and 1500. The fabrics within this group have been suggested to originate in potteries in Warwickshire, Derbyshire, and Nottinghamshire, though there are no confirmed sources for any of them. Often confused with Chilvers Coton and Nottingham ware fabrics they inhabit the same range of forms and feature similar green glazes.

Of the remaining regional fabrics that appear in smaller number in Leicestershire assemblages we have Coventry ware, a coarseware coming from the south west, dating from 1100 to 1400, and the slightly later Bourne ware coming from the east, dating from 1250 to 1650. We then have a small group that once again constitute almost catch-all groups. The Coarse Shelly wares are believed to come from Northamptonshire, between 1100 and 1400, the Oxidised Sandy wares are largely of unknown origin and are thought to date to from 1100 to 1250, and the Calcite Gritted wares, again of unknown origin date from 1100 to 1400. And finally, there are the non-local fabrics and the continental imports, which begin to arrive in the 14th and 15th centuries, but these are very rare in Leicestershire, with each making up less than 0.25% of the county assemblages examined.

4 Results

4.1 The early medieval fabrics

4.1.1 Stamford ware

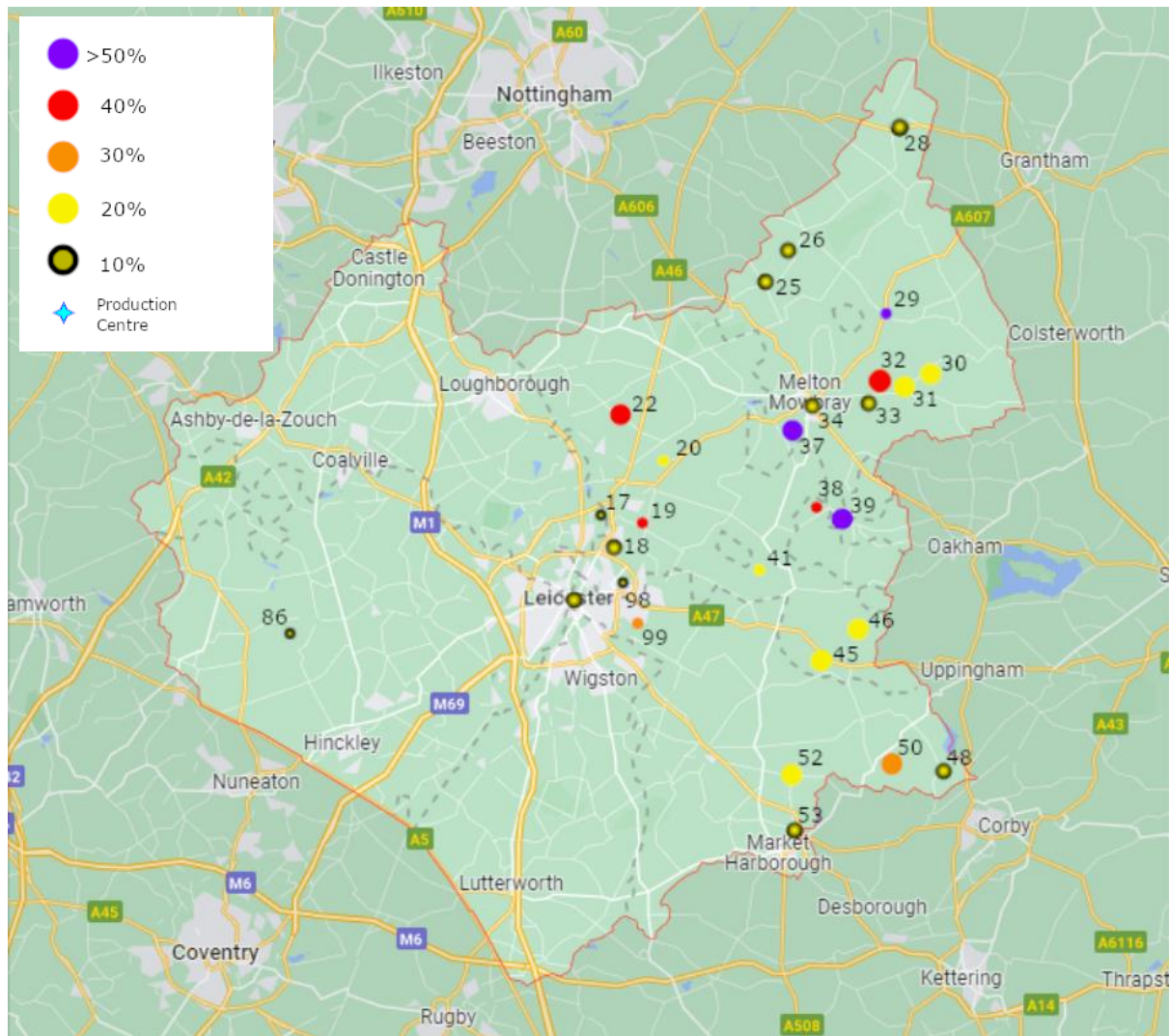


Figure 5. Distribution of Stamford wares

Of the 16 sites examined in which Stamford ware made up over 20% of the assemblage, 12 of these are situated within a 20-mile radius of the production centre of Stamford, with only one location west of Leicester having any notable percentage within its assemblage. The highest proportions are found in the strip between Oakham and Melton Mowbray. Waltham on the Walds [29], Eye Kettleby [37], and Somerby [39] all have assemblages in which Stamford ware makes up over 65% of the sherds found (67%, 75%, and 66%). Freeby [32] and Burrough on the Hill [38] follow after with 44 and 41%, and Garthorpe [30] and Saxby [31] stand at 29% and 26% respectively. Wyforby [33], Melton Mowbray [34], and Cold Newton [41] complete this strip with between 10 and 20% of their assemblages being Stamford ware. The results of Cold Newton need to be approached with some caution as not only is it an assemblage of less than 25 sherds but there is a significant difference between its sherd percentage and weight percentage, at 26% and 8% respectively.

Of the grouping in the south east Nevill Holt [50] has the highest proportion at 34%. Tugby [45], Loddington [46], and Thorpe Langton [52] all have over 20% at 26%, 26%, and 28% respectively. With this grouping completed by Great Easton [48] and Great Bowden [53] who both sit at between 10% and 15% Stamford ware.

A loose cluster of significance exists on the north eastern edge of the city of Leicester. Many of these are small 'questionable' assemblage sites but there is enough consistency among their assemblages to suggest these are valid indicators. Barkby [19], Rearsby [20], and Evington [99] all have notable amounts of Stamford ware at 46%, 22%, and 36% respectively. Wanlip [17], Thurmaston [18], and Tower's Hospital [98] are all in the 10% to 20% range, with Tower's Hospital at the lower end of this. The City of Leicester itself is also within this range, sitting at just 13%, but with the point of note that Stamford ware was actually the second most numerous fabric within the city assemblages as a whole.

In addition to these main groupings there is a small lower percentage grouping in the north east corner north of Melton Mowbray, made up of Long Clawson [25], Hose [26], and Easthorpe [28], all with between 10% and 20% Stamford ware.

The one site west of Leicester with any notable amount of Stamford ware is Coton [86], situated on the western side of the county, and standing as a significant anomaly among the distribution. However, when examined closely Coton only had 3 sherds of Stamford ware and crossed the threshold of significance as a result of being a small assemblage in the 'questionable' zone with 21 sherds. To put that into greater context the highest number of sherds of Stamford ware west of Leicester is the 7 sherds found at Sheepy Magna, where they make up less than 1% of the medieval assemblage. With no more than 4 sherds found at any other site in the west of the county, the Coton assemblage is very much in keeping with the surrounding area, with its proportions likely being affected by the small sample size of the assemblage.

4.1.2 Early medieval wares from Leicester

Neither of the two Leicester fabrics from this earlier period, Leicester ware and Leicester Splashed ware, have much presence outside of the city. Leicester ware is represented by just 256 sherds within the dataset, all from within the city, making up 0.4% of the city centre assemblage. In fact, 98.5% of

the Leicester ware sherds were recovered from within a 250m radius in the north east corner of the city.

It is a similar story with Leicester splashed ware, with 97.7% of these sherds found within the city centre, though there are some small groupings at locations on the northeastern perimeter of the city, Thurmaston [18] and Rearsby [20]. It does not make it above 10% at either location, however. There is also the outlier site of Lockington in the far north west of the county where it makes up 8% of that assemblage.

4.1.3 The remaining early medieval fabrics

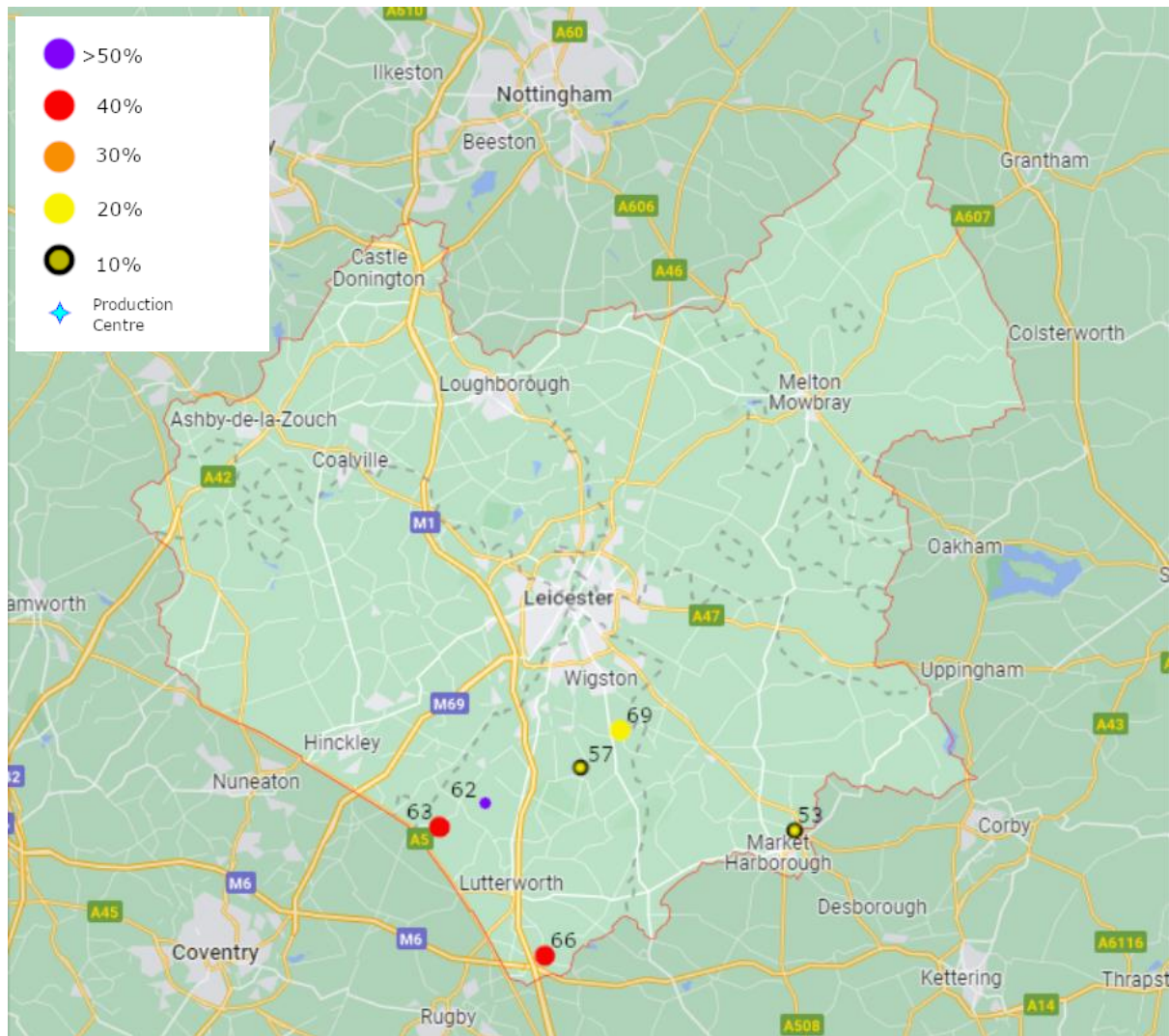


Figure 6. Distribution of St. Neots wares

St Neots ware is the only other early medieval fabric outside of Stamford ware to appear in notable quantities among county assemblages. All of these instances of significance are situated in the central southern part of the county. The main St Neots grouping was in the western portion of this area, with the fabric making up 62% of the assemblage at Leire [62], 47% at Claybrooke, and 43% at Swinford. The eastern portion of the area had a slightly lower presence at 22% in Kilby [69], 17% at Peatling Magna. It did not exceed 5% of the assemblage anywhere else in the county. There were however 194 sherds present in the city centre assemblages, though it made up less than 0.5% of that assemblage.

Only four locations have notable amounts of Lincoln Shelly wares in their assemblages. These are all located in the north east of the county. These wares make up over 25% of the assemblage at Rearsby [20] and Waltham on the Wolds [29], with Sysonby [35] having 19% and Burrough on the Hill 14%.

Beyond these Lincoln Shelly wares only make up minor proportions in rest of the county assemblages, though where it does appear it is entirely confined to the east of the county.

Torksey and Thetford wares had very little presence in the county as whole, with 94% of each being found in the city centre, where they individually make up less the 1% of the city assemblage. Outside of this, only the assemblage at Rearsby [20] where it made up 11% of the assemblage had any significant quantity of Torksey ware. Other minor sites for Torksey ware were in the north west of the county, at Kegworth [6] and Long Whatton [8] where it makes up 8% and 6% respectively. Thetford ware however does not exist in more than a single sherd outside of the city assemblage.

Northampton ware has similarly small presence in the county, with little presence in the city centre as well. Only 7 sherds were found in the city assemblage, and the only other location with any notable amount was Great Bowden [53] with 4%, in the south east, on the border with Northamptonshire.

4.2 The High Medieval fabrics

4.2.1 Potters Marston

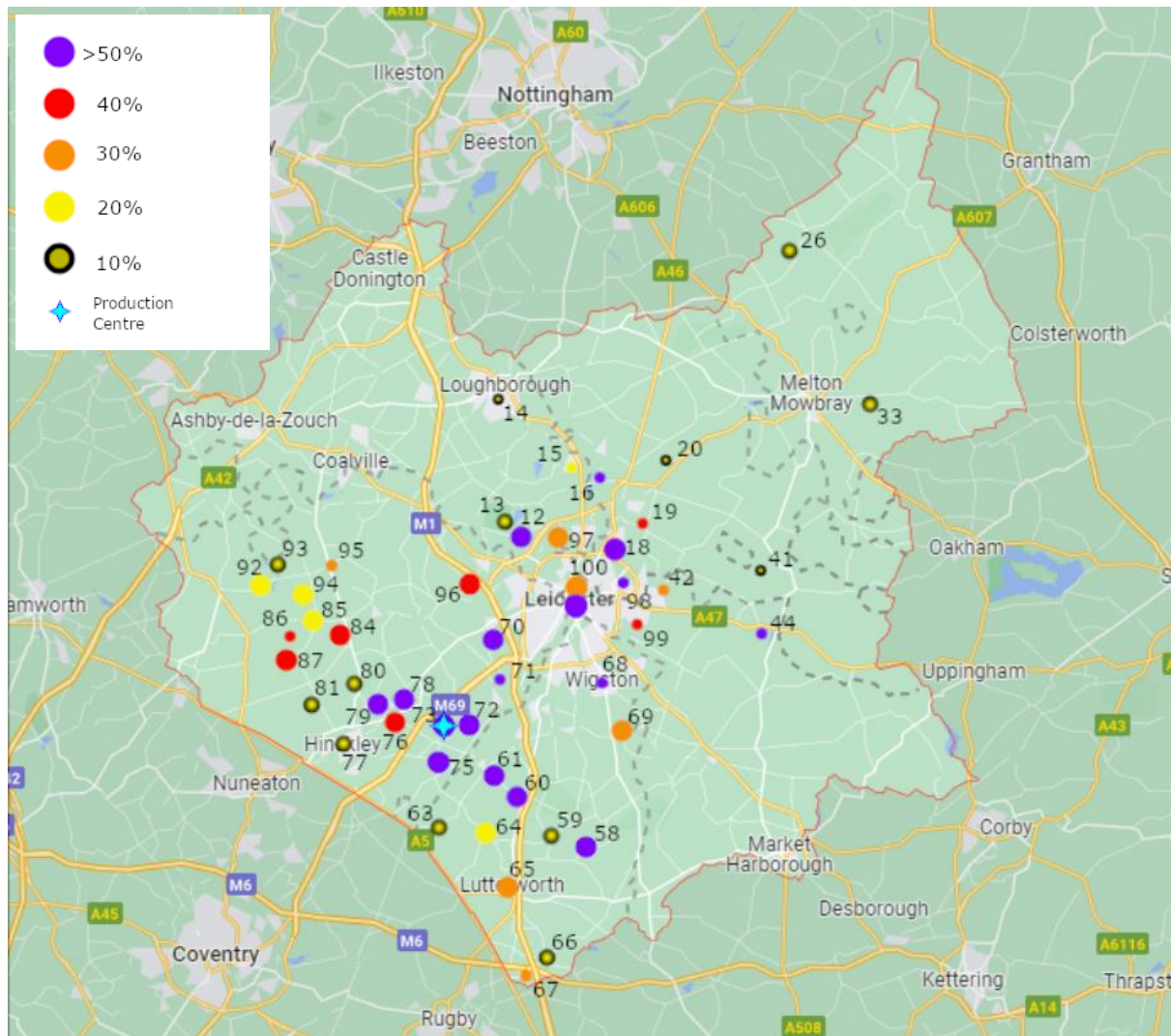


Figure 7. Distribution of Potters Marston wares

Potters Marston is by far the most numerous medieval fabric type in the Leicestershire assemblage as a whole, making up 48% of it. This percentage, however, is heavily skewed by its presence within the large City of Leicester assemblages where it accounts for 56% of the medieval pottery and measures almost four times the quantity of sherds of the next nearest fabric. Of the 32 individual sites in the city centre Potters Marston make up more than 50% of the assemblage at 20 of them, and over 60% at 11 of them.

In the wider county though this figure drops to 25% and places it as the second most numerous fabric present, behind Chilvers Coton. As Figure 7 illustrates, the distribution of Potters Marston in the county is much more restricted than its overall numbers might suggest. What we see is that Potters

Marston is in fact largely confined to the south west of the county, along with sites within close proximity to the City of Leicester. The strongest cluster of sites, all but one with assemblages of over 50% Potters Marston, exists within a 5-mile radius of the production centre [73] (whose own assemblage the fabric accounts for 97% of). This cluster includes Broughton Astley [61] at 76%, Huncote [72] at 86%, Sapcote [75] at 75%, Earl Shilton [78] at 59%, Barwell [79] at 72% and Elmsthorpe [76] at 44%.

Beyond this local cluster there is a further small grouping to the north west of the production site centred around Market Bosworth [85]. The southeastern portion of this group has the highest Potter Marston proportions in Cadeby [84] at 49%, Coton [86] at 48%, and Shenton [87] at 42%. The rest of the grouping have similar quantities of the fabric, with Market Bosworth at 26%, Congerstone [92] at 25%, Carlton [94] at 27%, and Nailstone [95] at 30%. Shackerstone [93] on the northern edge of the group drops down notably to 14%. This drop-off is much like the southern margin of the cluster that sits between it and the production centre grouping, in which we have Hinckley [77] at 16%, Stapleton [80] at 19%, and Stoke Golding [81] at 10%.

Another grouping appears to centre around Lutterworth [65] to the south east of the production site. Within this we have Walton [58] where Potters Marston makes up 93% of its assemblage, Dunton Bassett [60] at 63%, Catthorpe [67] at 36%, and Lutterworth at 32%. A few lower percentage locations also sit among this cluster, with Ashby Parva [64] at 22%, Gilmorton [59] at 16%, Claybrooke [63] at 19%, and Swinford [66] at 13%.

As previously mentioned, the city of Leicester assemblages are dominated by Potters Marston and there is further clustering apparent around the city's perimeter. A total of sixteen locales with significant Potters Martson assemblages sit within a 6-mile radius around the city, of which 14 contain assemblages with greater than 35% Potters Marston. There is not an apparent pattern to the Potters Martson proportions within this cluster, with even the seven sites of over 50% being evenly spread around the city's edge.

Aside from the small 'questionable' assemblage at Billesdon [44] Potters Marston has very limited presence in the rest of the county. In the north west and south east it does not account for more than 5% of the assemblage at any of the sites in these regions, and it is a similar story in the north east, though there are a couple of outlier sites in Hose [26] and Wyfordby [33] where it makes up 18% and 11% respectively.

4.2.2 Chilvers Coton

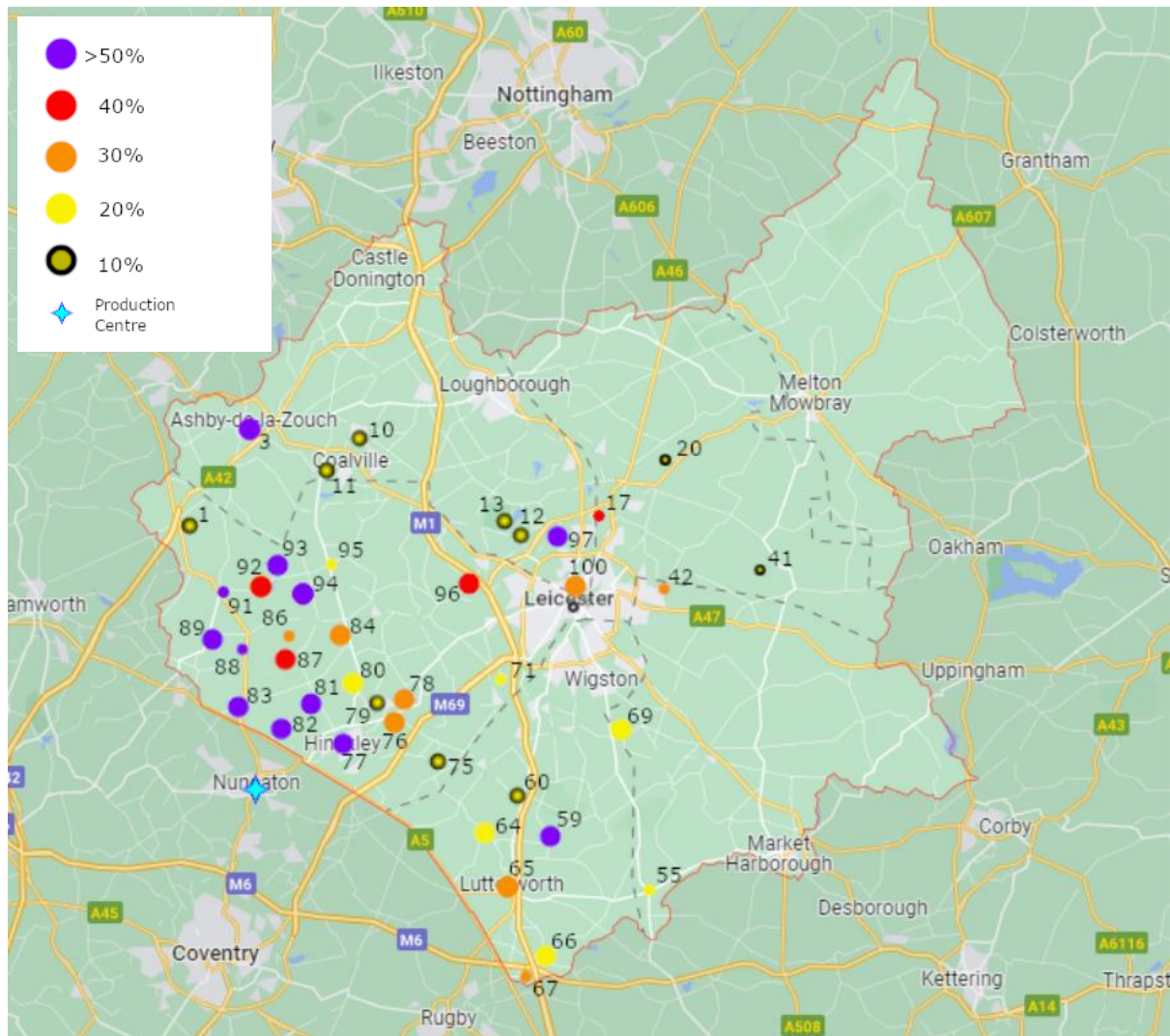


Figure 8. Distribution of Chilvers Coton wares

As previously mentioned, outside of Leicester Chilvers Coton is the most numerous medieval fabric in the county. There is considerable overlap between the distribution of Chilvers Coton and that of Potters Martson, perhaps unsurprising consider the Chilvers Coton production site is less than 10 miles from Potters Marston.

In the immediate vicinity of the Potters Marston production site there is little intrusion from Chilvers Coton with no more than 6% of the assemblage at the sites of Huncote [72], Potters Marston [73], Sapcote [75], and Broughton Astley [61]. Chilvers Coton does start to overlap more as we move to

north east, away from Potters Marston, with Elvesthorpe [76] and Earl Shilton [78] seeing 30% and 32% of their assemblages composed of Chilvers Coton. Around Market Bosworth [85] where a cluster existed for Potters Marston there was similar cluster for Chilvers Coton, although the balance of dominance is towards the north west side for Chilvers Coton. Interestingly there is very little Chilvers Coton present in Market Bosworth itself (8%). On the southeastern side Cadeby [84] at 39%, Coton [86] at 38%, and Shenton [87] at 49% are not dissimilar to the Potters Marston numbers, with Shenton in fact being higher. On the north west side though Chilvers Coton has significantly more presence than Potters Marston at a number of those locations. Congerstone [92] sits at 41%, Shackerstone [93] at 73%, and Carlton [94] at 62%, with only Nailstone [95] at a lower proportion of 20%.

Chilvers Coton is most dominant along the southwestern edge of the county. Indeed, it makes up more than 70% of the assemblage at six locations in this strip: Hinckley [77] with 72%, Stoke Golding [81] with 86%, Higham on the Hill [82] with 97%, Fenny Drayton [83] with 80%, Sibson [88] with 100%, and Twycross [91] with 73%. Sheepy Magna [89] sits slightly lower at a presence of 59%. By comparison, Potters Martson has almost no presence in this strip, making up less than 5% of the assemblage at 4 of those locations.

Further up the western edge of the county Chilvers Coton is again found in high proportions at Ashby de la Zouch [3] with 96% of the assemblage. Though the sites in close proximity to Ashby de la Zouch, Appleby Magna [1], Whitwick [10], and Ravenstone [11] only just crack the significance threshold at 11%, 12%, and 11% respectively, meaning it is possible that it represents an outlier rather than a continuation of the trend.

In the south of the county Chilvers Coton again has a similar cluster to Potters Marston around Lutterworth, and also at comparable proportions, with Ashby Parva [64] at 24%, Lutterworth [65] at 38%, Swinford [66] at 26%, and Catthorpe [67] at 36%. Interestingly, the two sites on the northern edge of this cluster, Gilmorton [59] and Dunton Bassett [60] have opposing proportions of the two fabrics with Gilmorton being 70% Chilvers Coton, whereas Dunton Bassett has 63% Potters Marston.

Chilvers Coton lacks the presence of Potters Martson in the city centre, and despite being the third most common fabric there, it represents only 7% of the city assemblage. This is mirrored in a much smaller presence in the areas on the periphery of the city. It still has a strong presence at Wanlip [17] (47%), Scraptoft [42] (36%), Ratby [96] (42%), and Leicester Abbey [100] (30%). The most notable of

these peripheral sites though is Castle Hill [97] where the proportions of Chilvers Coton are far higher than anywhere else in surrounding area at 59%.

Much like Potters Marston, Chilvers Coton has almost no presence on the north and east of the county with no location in these regions having higher than 5% of the assemblage, beyond the small 'questionable' assemblages of Rearsby [20] (17%) and Cold Newton [41] (11%).

4.2.3 Lyveden wares

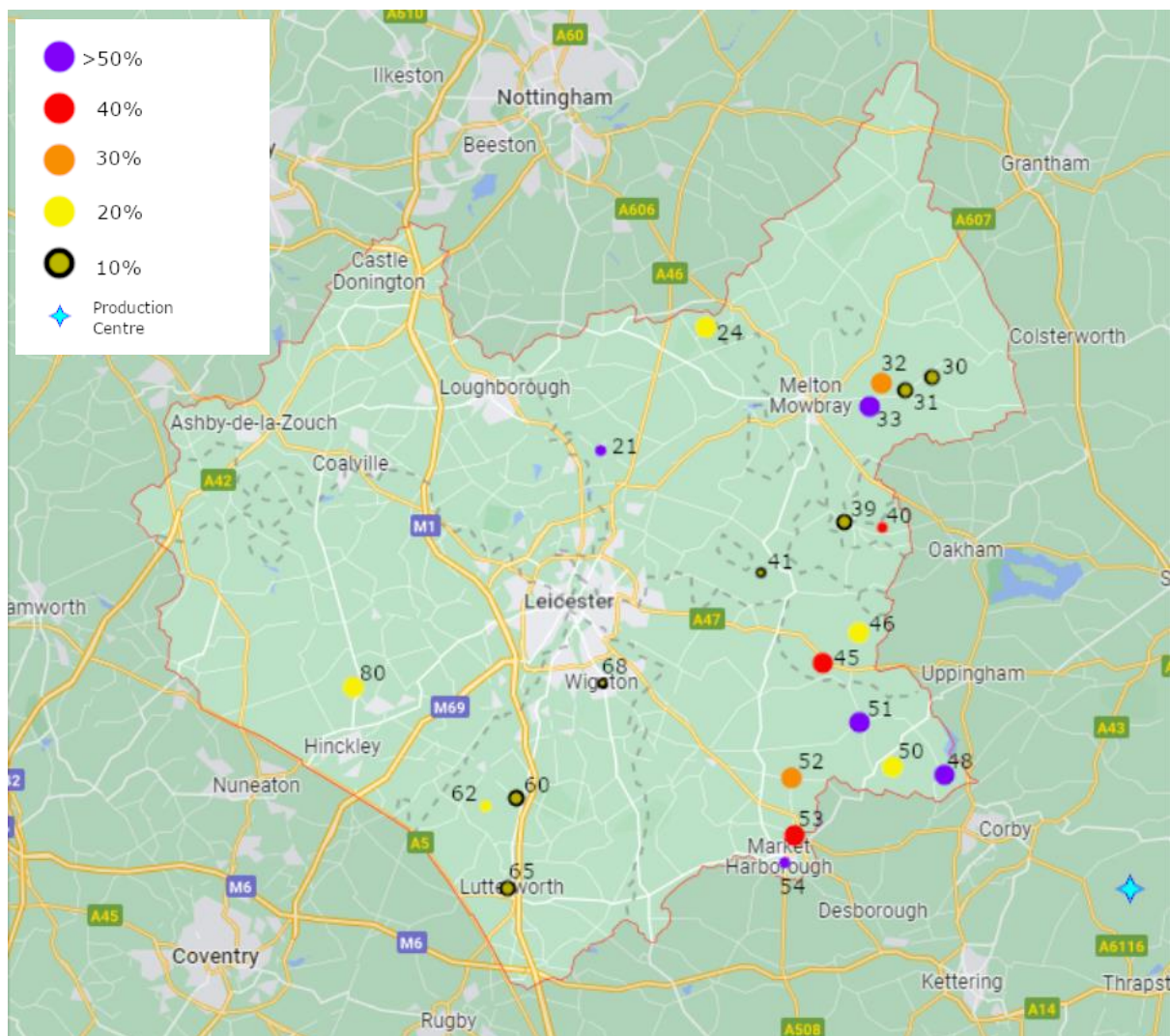


Figure 9. Distribution of Lyveden wares

Lyveden wares are the third most common fabric in the county, accounting for 10% of the assemblage outside of Leicester. Within the city it has much less of a presence, accounting for 1.5% of that assemblage, and is the seventh most common fabric seen there.

Lyveden wares are mostly restricted to the very eastern edge of the county, where it is the dominant fabric, and appear to have two main clusters. The southeastern cluster is made up of 8 locations that all sit within 15 miles of the fabric's production centre of Lyveden in Northamptonshire. Among these there is a small grouping around Market Harborough of Thorpe Langton [52] with 37% Lyveden fabrics, Great Bowden [53] with 43%, and Market Harborough [54] itself with 94%. Above this another grouping close to Uppingham in Rutland consists of Tugby [45] at 47%, Loddington [46] at 28%, Great Easton [48] at 73%, Nevill Holt [50] at 21%, and Hallaton [51] at 54%.

Sites in the second cluster in the north east of the county, close to Melton Mowbray, have slightly lower percentages of Lyveden fabrics but it is still the dominant fabric at four of these: Old Dalby [24] with 26%, Freeby [32] with 35%, Wyfordby [33] with 59%, and Cold Overton [40] with 48%. Lyveden fabrics have a lesser prominence at the remaining sites in this group, Garthorpe [30], Saxby [31], and Somerby [39] constituting between 10% and 15% of these assemblages.

There are two notable outliers to these clusters among the Lyveden distribution. Firstly, there is Sileby, located 6 miles north of Leicester, where Lyveden is the dominant fabric and accounts for 63% of the assemblage. This is a smaller 'questionable' assemblage, but its assemblage as a whole is distinct enough among those surrounding it to warrant closer consideration. The same goes for the group in the south west of the county which, although no site features more than 25% Lyveden fabrics, suggests a possible connecting grouping.

4.2.4 Nottingham wares

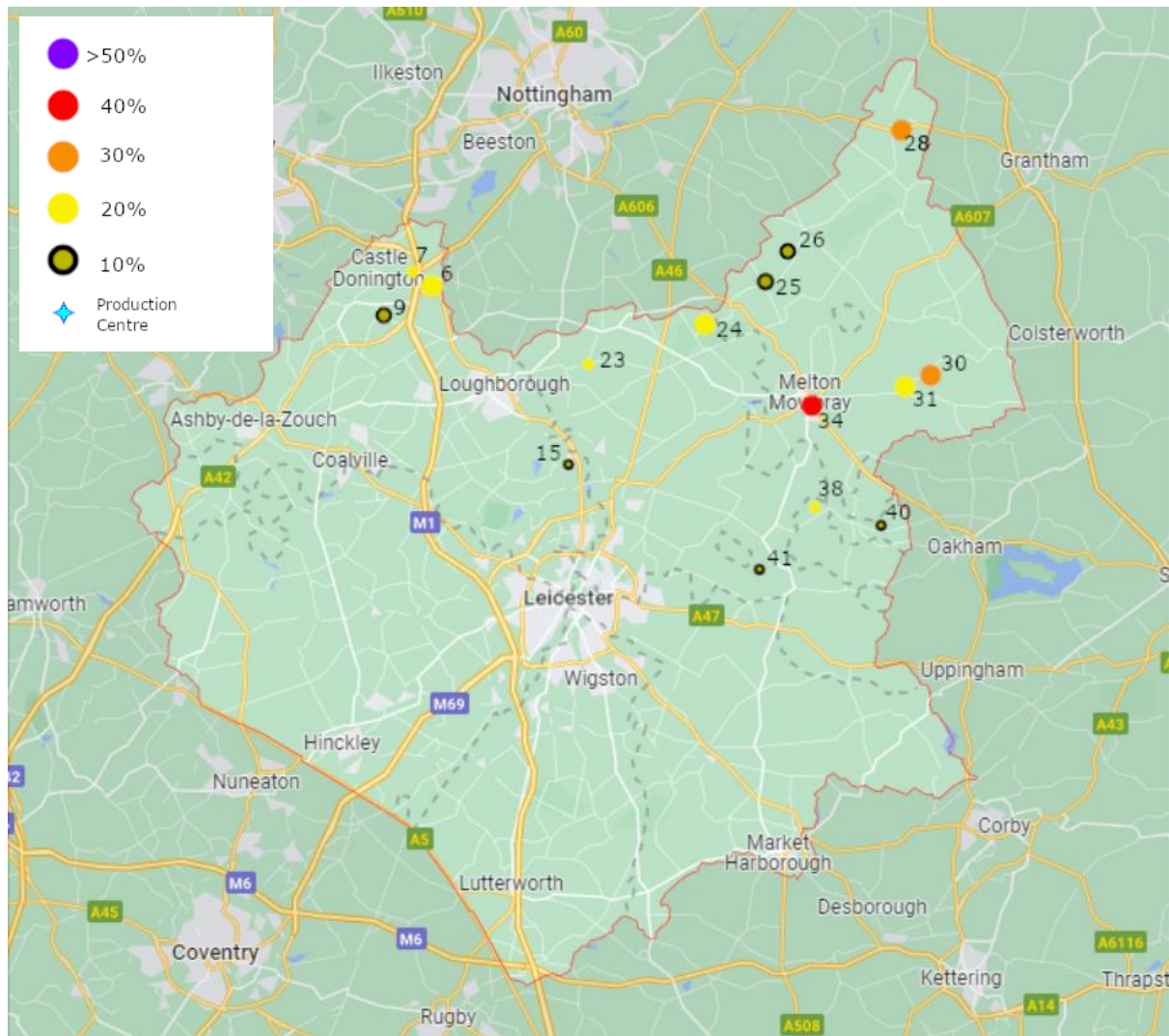


Figure 10. Distribution of Nottingham wares

Nottingham ware fabrics primarily occur in the north east and far north west of the county, with many of the sites sitting close to the Nottinghamshire border. In the north east Nottingham ware is the dominant fabric in Melton Mowbray [34] making up 44% of that assemblage. The assemblages at Easthorpe [28] and Garthorpe [30] both also have significant quantities of Nottingham ware with 32% each. After these the assemblages of Wymeswold [23], Old Dalby [24], Saxby [31], and Burrough on the Hill [38] all contain between 24% and 28% Nottingham ware.

The northwestern grouping contains slightly lower proportions than those sites with Nottingham ware making up 21% of the assemblage at Kegworth [6], 20% at Lockington [7], and 18% at Diseworth [9].

Nottingham wares have a similar presence in the city of Leicester to the Lyveden fabrics, being the sixth most common fabric there, constituting 1.8% of the assemblage.

4.2.5 Coarse Shelly wares

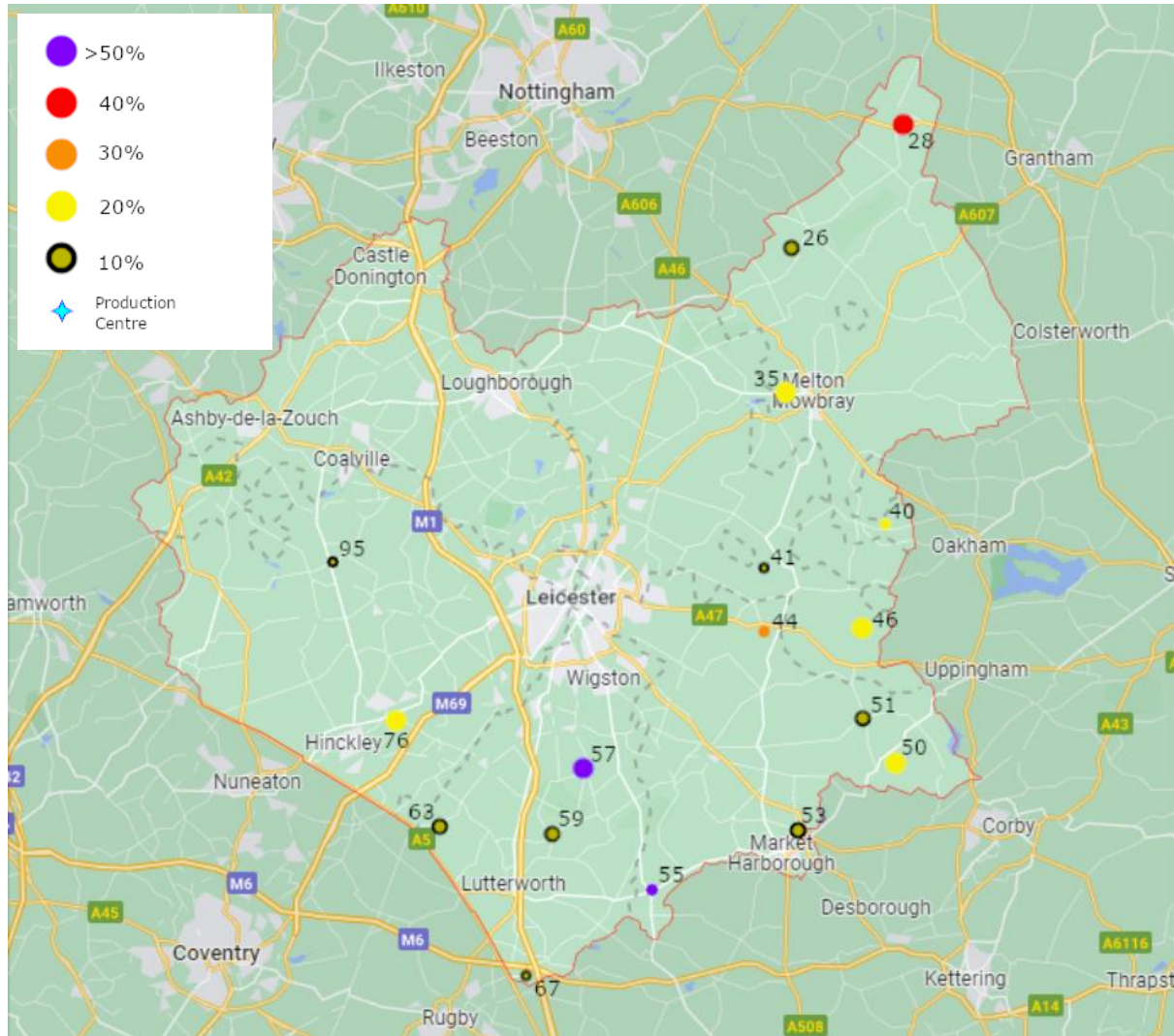


Figure 11. Distribution of Coarse Shelly wares

The broadly defined Coarse Shelly wares have a distribution representative of their somewhat catch-all nature. Although largely confined to the eastern part of the county there is not a significant pattern to many parts of the distribution with it mainly being a consistent low-level presence across that side of the county at between 10% and 25%. The sites at which the coarse shelly wares account for more significant proportions of the assemblage, Easthorpe [28] at 46%, Billesdon [44] at 35%, Husbands Bosworth [55] at 67%, and Peatling Magna at 61%, are all spaced out throughout the region. The proximity of the two highest proportion sites of Husbands Bosworth and Peatling Magna, at around 6 miles apart, stands as the strongest association among these sites.

4.2.6 Medieval Sandy

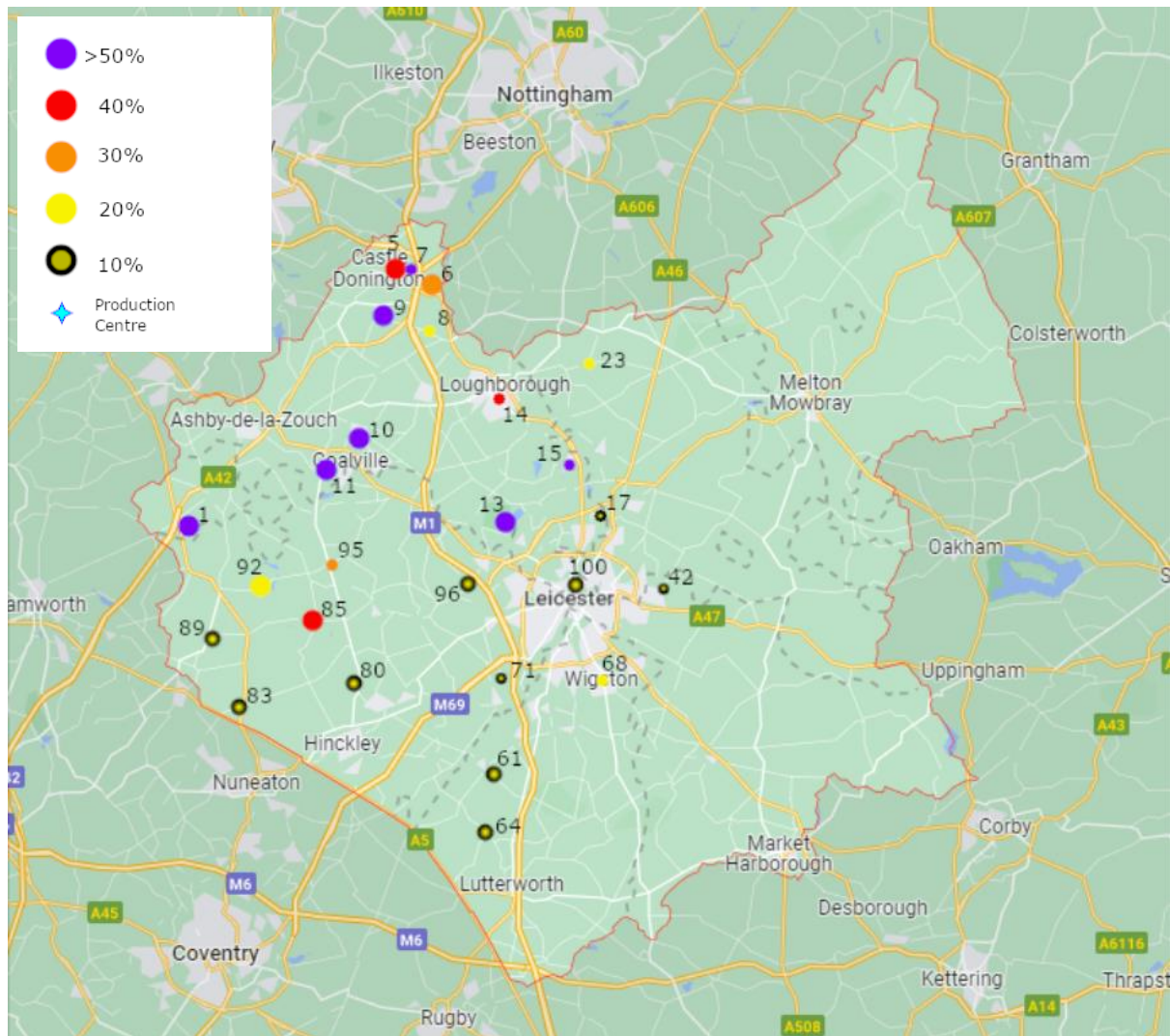


Figure 12. Distribution of Medieval Sandy wares

While the ‘Coarse Shelly’ wares may be somewhat of a broadly defined fabric that is indistinct in its distribution the similarly broad sounding ‘Medieval Sandy’ wares turned out to be a set of fabrics with a far more defined distribution. The medieval sandy fabrics are by far the most dominant fabric type in the north west of the county, being the most numerous fabrics at ten of the twelve sites in the region, making up over 50% of the assemblage at eight of them, and being a close second in the two locations it is not the dominant fabric.

As well as this dominance of the north west of the county, medieval sandy fabrics also have a consistent presence in the territory of Potters Marston and Chilvers Coton in the south west of the

county. Market Bosworth [85] represents the most notable of these southwestern sites as medieval sandy wares make up 47% of its assemblage. The sites surrounding it are dominated by Potters Marston and Chilvers Coton wares, and majority of these have less than 10% medieval sandy wares in their assemblages. Though the sites of Congerstone [92] and Nailstone [95] a couple of miles north of it also have notable percentages of medieval sandy in their assemblages (29% and 30% respectively), however these sites have a more of a balanced mix of fabrics compared to Market Bosworth.

Medieval sandy wares also have a notable presence in the city of Leicester assemblages, being the fourth most common fabric, and making up 5% of the city assemblage.

4.3 The Remaining Medieval Wares

4.3.1 Oxidised and Reduced Sandy wares

Neither of these fabrics have a known source but when mapped out both appear to have an origin north of the county. In fact, the closest association both of these fabrics types have is to the main 'Medieval Sandy' wares. A majority of the locations with significant proportions of either of these fabrics also have significant medieval sandy assemblages, or they have significant proportions of both oxidised and reduced sandy wares.

In fact, if the assemblages for the medieval sandy wares and oxidised and reduced sandy wares are combined, these sandy fabrics are then the dominant fabric at all twelve of the sites in the north west region. Not only that but they account for over 70% of the assemblage at six of them and only fail to top 50% at one of them.

4.3.2 Coventry ware

Coventry wares only have a significant presence in four assemblages, all located in the south west of the county, and within 15 miles of their source. Despite this minimal presence the assemblage of the site of Norton Juxta [90] on the western edge of the county consists of 93% Coventry wares in assemblage of 187 sherds, with the site of Twycross [91] a mile and a half to the south east having the next highest proportion at 27%.

4.3.3 Bourne wares

Bourne wares only make up 1% of the county assemblage and this is mostly confined to the very eastern edge of the county, between 20 and 25 miles from its source in Bourne. Only the sites of Saxby [31], Cold Overton [40], and Loddington [46] had greater than 10% Bourne wares in their assemblages, and these are all at the lower end of that distance range.

4.3.4 Calcite Gritted wares

Only three sites had significant amounts of Calcite Gritted wares in their assemblage, Seagrave [22] at 46%, Long Clawson [25] at 44%, and Thorpe Langton [52] at 28%. None of these sites bear relation to each other geographically, but they are all associated with sites with significant Stamford ware assemblages.

5 Patterns in the data

5.1 The Early Medieval Pottery

The Stamford ware distribution is in line with what might be expected given where Stamford is located. Melton Mowbray and Oakham were both prescribed boroughs (Letters, 2003) and we know that at least Melton Mowbray had a market of some kind at the time of the Domesday survey (Stafford, 1985). Without a survey of assemblages from Northamptonshire, Rutland, and Lincolnshire it is not possible to ascertain where the clusters originate, though logically both Oakham and Rutland would both be reasonable stop offs and points of disbursement. The clustering of points on the northeastern side of Leicester would also seem to indicate that Stamford ware in the city is making its way there via Melton Mowbray in a sort of 'market hopping' journey from Stamford to Oakham then Melton Mowbray and finally on to Leicester (Buckley et al. 2021).

In the early medieval period, we know that Leicester and Northampton were two of largest settlements in the region (Lewis, 2026), and the pattern of St Neots ware distribution fits these wares entering the county on the main roadway from Northampton to the south. With no production centre having been located for St Neots ware, the variation in the fabric has led to suggestions it is being

produced in multiple places, including around Northampton itself (Spoerry, 2016). This would mean that the extent of its distribution was similar to the 20-mile radius of Stamford ware. Unlike Stamford ware though it does not appear to have ‘market-hopped’ further than that into the Leicester as only around 200 sherds of it have been found in the city centre. Lutterworth would have been the obvious place to ‘hop’ from, but a market was not established there by charter until 1224 (Letters, 2003), which would have been too late to have served this purpose. Though we cannot be certain a market did not exist there prior to this. The city would however have already been well served for pottery owing to the quantity of Stamford ware that was flowing into it, along with the Leicester ware being produced in the city and providing the coarser utilitarian wares. Therefore demand for further wares may simply not have been there. During this period Leicester also had far stronger links established with Stamford thanks to the wool trade than it did with Northampton so there may not have been the impetus to export lower value bulky goods like pottery over such a distance.

The lack of early medieval fabrics in the west of the county raises questions as to what this might mean for the ceramic environment in this portion of the county during the period. The lack of pottery in circulation in Leicestershire in the 9th century has been remarked upon, with suggestion that the county as whole was aceramic during this time (Sawday 2021). This is believed to have changed by the 10th century, especially with the growth of the Stamford ware production centre (Sawday 2021). We are only seeing evidence of that in the eastern and southern parts of the county though. Stamford ware is making good inroads into the county from the east, and there are notable amounts of St Neots ware arriving into the county from the south.

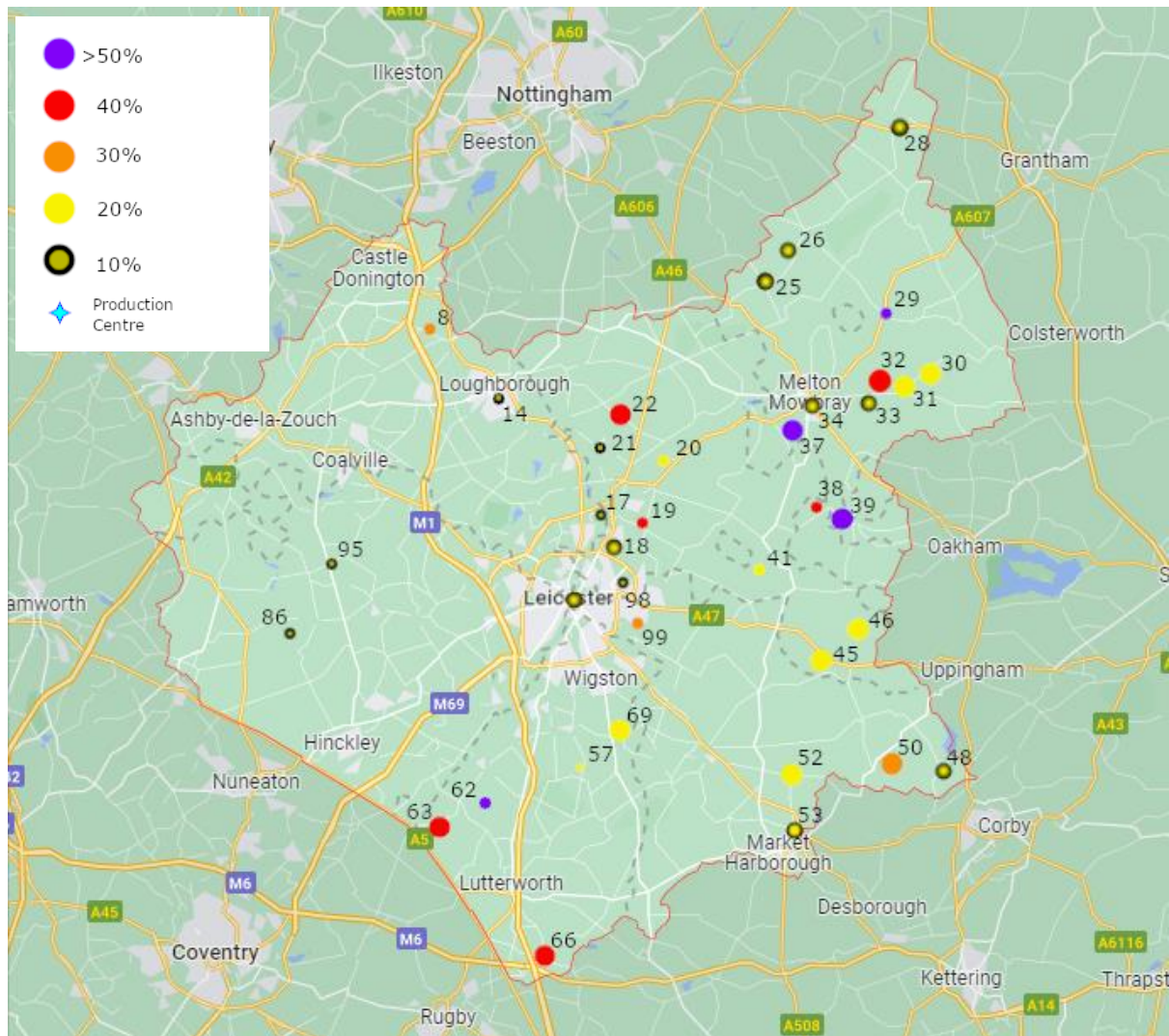


Figure 13. Overlain distribution of Stamford ware, St Neots ware, and Reduced Sandy ware

Dating of Reduced Sandy wares is thought to be contemporary with other similar fabrics, such as Thetford and Torksey wares, though its end date is possibly thought to be as late as 1400. If we regard it as wholly contemporary with Thetford and Torksey wares and call it an early medieval fabric, then that would increase coverage by a small amount in the very north of the county. Plotting all three of these fabrics together on a map, however, illustrates how large a void exists in early medieval in the west of the county (Figure 13).

The possibility that the start date of Potters Marston may be earlier than is currently assumed has been proposed in the past, though comparative dating at sites in the city centre has seemingly disproven this possibility (Forward, 2026). Should this not be the case then unless an early medieval fabric type in the region is being consistently misidentified and misdated, or the fabric was too soft to survive, though it must be concluded that based on the evidence of these distribution patterns the

west of the county likely remained largely aceramic right up until pottery production started at Potters Marston in the early 12th century.

5.2 The High Medieval Pottery

The clearest difference from the early medieval period is the change in the direction the pot is moving into the city from. Following a period where the west of the county was possibly aceramic and domination of Stamford ware came from the east, the 12th and 13th centuries see a shift towards dense pottery assemblages in the west and the three main post-Stamford ware fabrics all originating from that side of the county as well.

What this coincides with primarily is a change in Leicester's trading relationships. Where Stamford had previously been the town's primary trading partner when it came to wool and cloth, but now the growth of Coventry had seen it take on a more prominent role in this trade, eventually becoming Leicester's primary trading partner (British History Online, 2026).

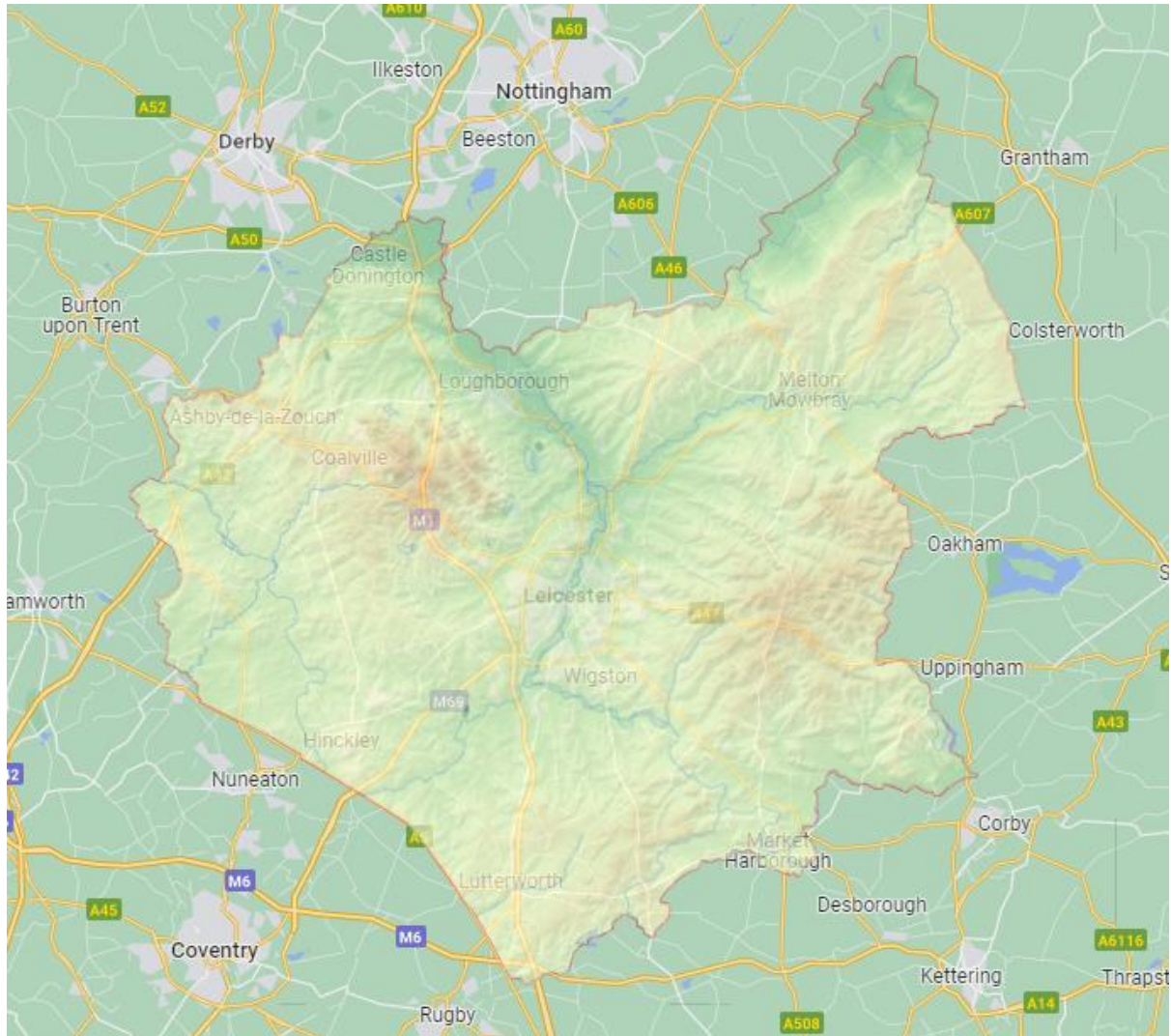


Figure 14. Topographic map of Leicestershire

The Leicester to Coventry route has the topographic advantage in being a straighter lowland route compared to the longer dog leg path required to get to and from Stamford (Figure 14). This route was also served by a more substantial road that was capable of taking heavy traffic, which with Coventry's rate of growth it would certainly have seen. It would have been ideal circumstances to capitalise on and that appears to have been exactly the potters at Potters Marston did.

5.2.1 Patterns of distribution for Potters Martson

A likely aid to the success of the Potters Marston production centre is the fact that the manor of Potters Martson was under the ownership of the Prior of Coventry, a man who became the most

powerful figure in Coventry during the 13th century (Burt, 2012; Stephens, 1969). With wool and cloth becoming Coventry's primary industry, employing more than a quarter of the town's workers (Stephens, 1969), the constant traffic up and down the road to Leicester would have provided prime opportunities for any number of crafts looking for reliable source of income. The beginning date of production of Potters Marston coincides nicely with the burgeoning status of Coventry's wool trade. Whether the establishment of the production centre came before the start of this boon or whether it came after is unknown. So is the knowledge of whose idea either the foundation or development of the workshop was. Was it a calculated move to take advantage of the movement of goods into Leicester from Coventry by the potters, or was it done at the behest of the Prior to increase the earnings from the land?

The distribution of the Potters Marston ware pots appears to have been quite market based, but clearly utilised other sources as well. The cluster to the north west is very indicative of a small group of settlements being serviced by a small rural market town. The lower proportions of the ware in this cluster may be a result of Market Bosworth not being given chartered status until 1224 (Letters, 2003) by which time production would have started on some of the early Chilvers Coton fabrics and therefore both fabrics would have been in use at the same time. It would have been a similar story with Lutterworth to the south east where the proportions of the two fabrics are reasonably even, though the market at Lutterworth was chartered a little earlier in 1214 (Letters, 2003). The strong cluster around the production centre would suggest the potters were freely selling their wares from the production site itself. Interestingly, based on the locations of the lower proportion sites of Stapleton [80] and Stoke Golding [81], sitting between the Market Bosworth cluster and the production centre one this suggests a possible catchment area of around 3 miles for each of them that these locations happen to fall between.

The proportions of Potters Marston at sites on the periphery of Leicester offer strong evidence that Potters Marston was being taken to Leicester for marketing purposes rather than being exchanged on a casual low-level basis. We would probably expect there to be some patterning in the Leicester cluster if anything unusual was involved in the town centre's outward distribution, but instead it is a remarkably even spread of proportions. As would be expected for a town the size of Leicester the catchment area for the market is double that of Market Bosworth, standing at around 6 miles.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the Potters Marston ware distribution barely shows up on the mapping. Which is that the trade in Potters Martson along the Coventry road was a one-way flow into Leicester. This limit to the southerly distribution of the ware was a source of intrigue. So, an examination of the twenty ULAS excavations that have taken place in Coventry during the same period

was performed, yielding the information that Potters Martson made up just 1% of the assemblage across those excavations. A further random sampling of ten recent reports on the Archaeology Data Service of excavations that had been undertaken by other units in Coventry, was done to verify this. This sampling found zero sherds of Potters Marston were recorded during any of these excavations. The likely cause of this is not the arrival of Chilvers Coton in the 13th century, but probably simply the result of Coventry producing its own coarse earthenwares, meaning it had no need to acquire these vessel types from external sources. A factor that is in part responsible for the Potters Martson void up the very western edge of the county.

A final curiosity regarding Potters Marston is that despite its domination of the city assemblage and being the second most numerous fabric in the wider county, it actually has the smallest distribution range of any of the major fabrics in the assemblage. With a majority of the fabric being distributed within 10 miles of the production site, Potters Marston differs significantly from the distribution radius of Stamford ware, St Neots, Chilvers Coton, Lyveden, and Nottingham ware, all of which have distribution radii of 20-25 miles. In large part this is simply a consequence of the production centre's location between two major towns, own of which already has an adequate supply of kitchen wares.

5.2.2 Patterns of distribution for Chilvers Coton

Of all the fabrics analysed Chilvers Coton is by far the most intriguing. At first glance it appears to a fairly standard radius of distribution from the production centre of Chilvers Coton over the border in Warwickshire. In the areas where there is overlap with Potters Marston's distribution the proportions are lower, while in those where there is not the proportions are significantly higher. It is upon examining the data more closely that things get interesting. To start off with, the void strip along the southwestern edge of the Potters Marston distribution does not simply represent a drop below the 10% threshold it represents an almost complete absence of Potter Marston. This includes the grouping of Higham of the Hill [82], Fenny Drayton [83], Sibson [88], and Twycross [91] where the respective Potters Martson proportions are 3%, 1%, 0%, and 0%.

What is key to understanding how strange this is, is that the production sites of Potters Martson and Chilvers Coton are able to exist and succeed alongside each despite being less than 10 miles apart because they serve different niches. Potters Marston predominantly make simple utilitarian coarse earthenware, of the sort utilised for cooking and storage in the 12th and 13th century. There are decorated versions of these pots, and glazing was occasionally applied, but in general they are kitchen

wares. Vessel forms from Chilvers Coton on the other hand lean more towards table wares, glazed jugs and spouted pitchers, XXXX, XXX etc. It is why they exist in quite even quantities in the areas where their distribution overlaps.

Kitchen wares exist in those assemblages located in this strip, but they are present in the forms of Coventry wares and the various sandy wares. If this strip simply sits at the edges of the ranges for a number of fabrics, we would expect a tapering off of proportions as it reached its limits, instead it drops off a cliff. So, what is going on in this strip?

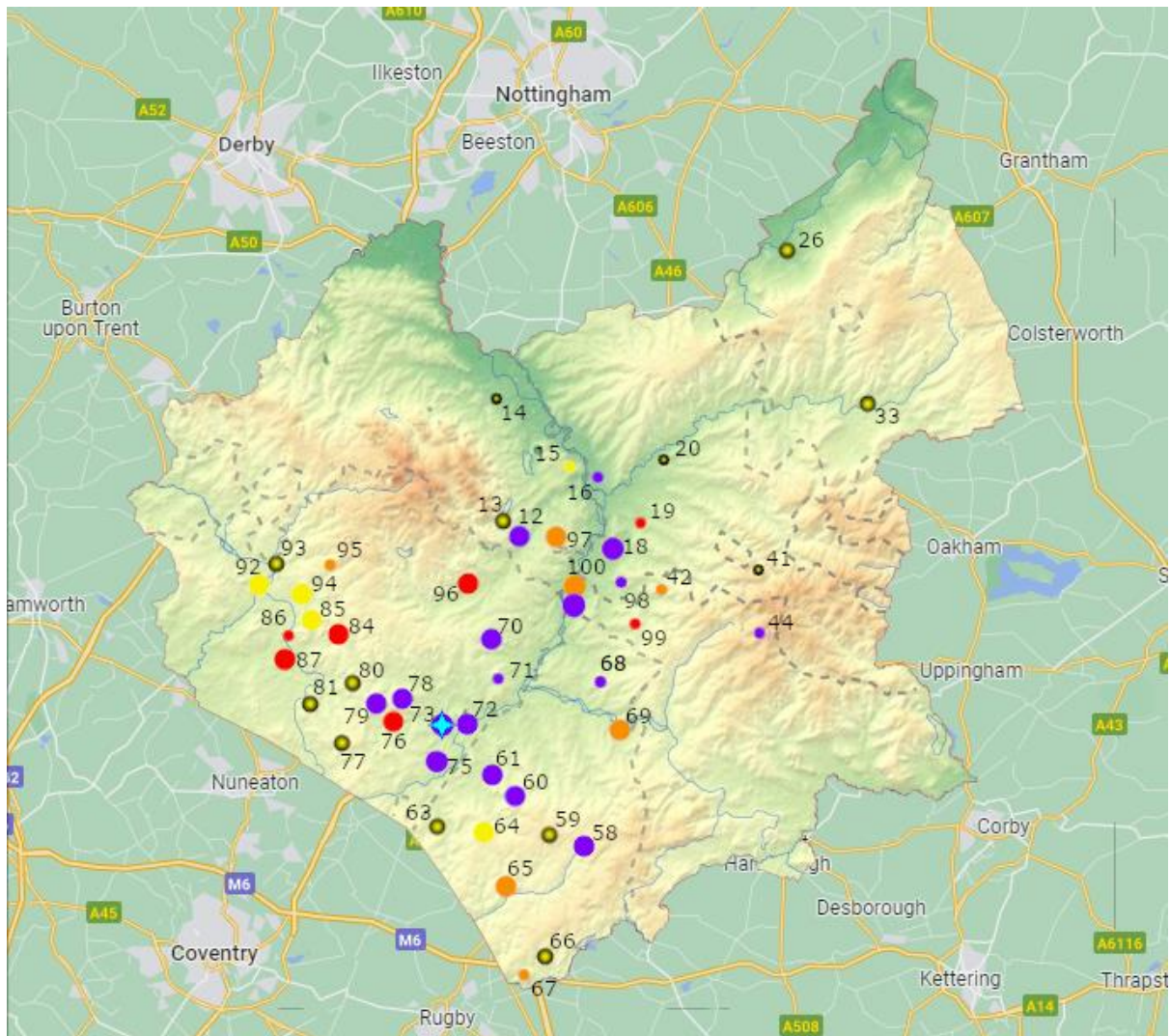


Figure 15. Distribution of Potters Marston overlying the topographic map

Topographic and environmental analysis of the area illustrates that this strip actually follows the topography of the landscape quite closely. The edge of the Potters Martson distribution follows along the edge of a hilly, forested range (Figure 15) (Squires, 2004). This seems to answer it, but if this line were an unconquerable barrier, it should theoretically also make things difficult to pass the other way

over it as well, but it does not. Chilvers Coton flows comfortably over it and is present on all of the sites on the Potters Marston side with the exception of the mile radius around the Potters Marston production site.

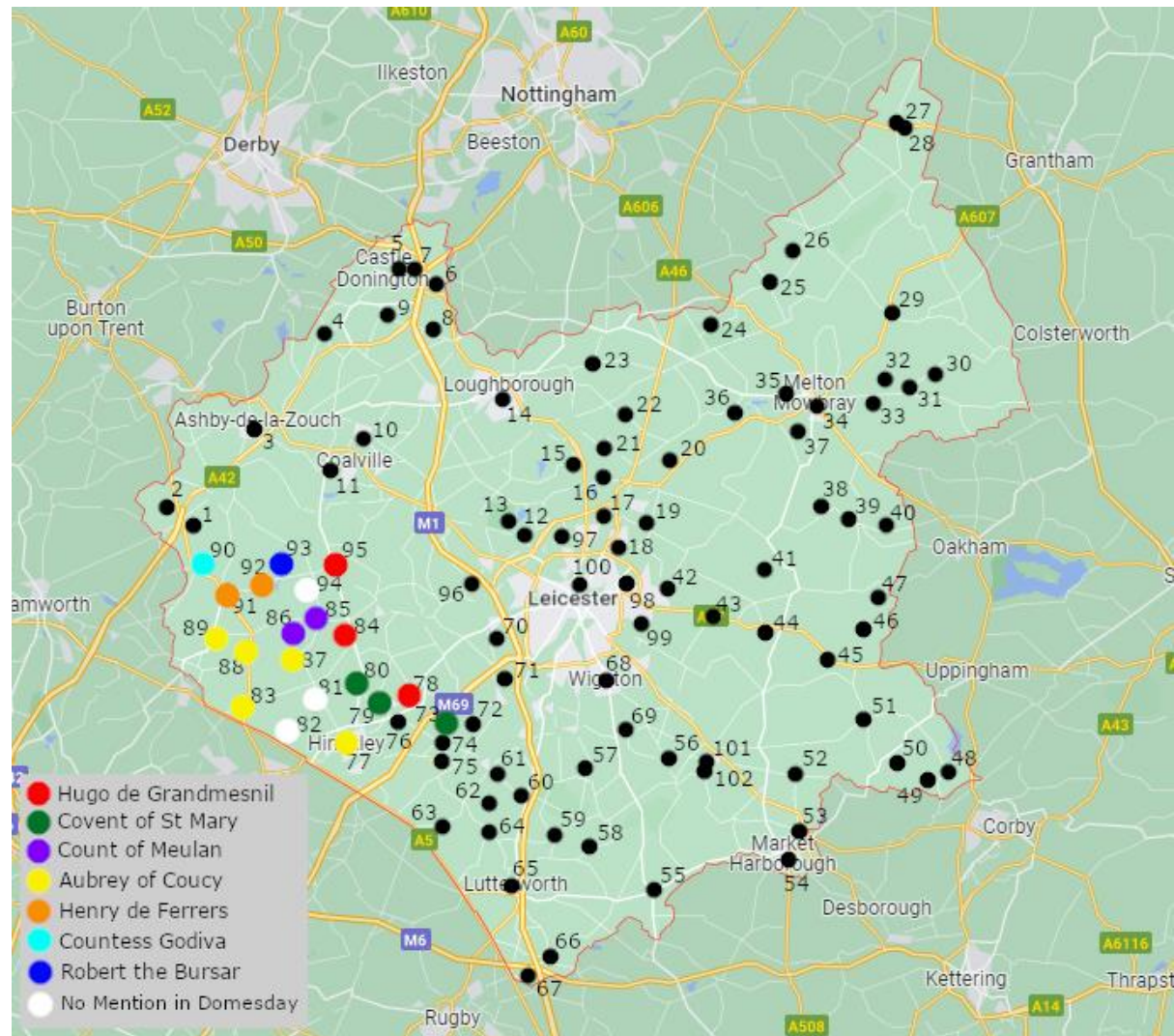


Figure 16. Manors at the time of Domesday

So, if it is not environmental it has to be human beings using a natural line to create a man-made one. If we start at the Domesday survey, we can see that this line already existed in the division of manors at the time of the Conquest (Figure 16). The sites in question that sit within this strip all fall under one of three categories, under the manor Aubrey, under the manor or Henry de Ferrers, or not mentioned in Domesday. We know that records suggest Aubrey abandoned England shortly after the Conquest and so never took up Lordship of these manors (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 2026). What becomes apparent from examining the historical records of these locations is that all the sites in the strip that were previously Aubrey's or 'not recorded' fall into the full or partial control of Henry de

Ferrers, the Earl of Derby, who initially only held two of the manors at the northern end of the strip (Nichols, 1811). The de Ferrers family though has a habit of picking the wrong side in a fight, first siding with King Stephen over Henry II, and then with Simon de Montfort over Henry III. As a result, they did lose these manors for short spells of time, but whether they were under Henry de Ferrers, the family's Honour of Winton, or the later Baron of Groby line of Henry and William de Ferrers, these locations spent an extended periods of time in the family de Ferrers ownership.

Continuing to examine the distribution in this way only extends the pattern. The grouping of high proportion settlements to the north of Market Bosworth do not belong to the de Ferrers directly, but they own significant parcels of land either under the de Ferrers name or the family's Honour of Winton banner.

The outlier of the assemblage that set off this whole chain of investigation is the site of Castle Hill [97], three miles north of Leicester. The assemblage at Castle Hill was odd in that it was not in concert with either the Leicester assemblages to the south nor the settlements of modern-day Charnwood to the north. The key element of the assemblage was the abnormally high proportion of Chilvers Coton. Castle Hill was not part of the manor of the Ferrers. Instead, it belonged to the Knights Hospitallers. The same Knights Hospitallers who controlled part of the manor of Chilvers Coton.

There is debate over the extent of the Hospitaller control over the Chilvers Coton production centre. Some describe the production centre as a Hospitallers manor, others believe the Hospitallers sold a portion of their land to the owner of the neighbouring manor, and it was this land on which the kilns were discovered in the 1960s (Wilson, 2018). Though some of the later excavated kilns still sit within the Hospitaller manor (Wilson, 2018). Either way, the relationship between the Hospitallers, and the Templars who preceded them in controlling the manor, and the Chilvers Coton pottery was likely to have been a close one. There is certainly record of the Templars selling clay to the pottery (Mayes and Scott, 1984). The unusually high proportion of Chilvers Coton at Castle Hill stands as further evidence of that relationship.

So how does the extended Ferrers family fit in? Well, if there is one thing the Ferrers family was committed to above almost anything it was the Crusades (Evans, 2000). Numerous generations fought and died fighting in them, from the First Crusade in 1096 to Fifth in 1217 (Evans, 2000). The family not only supported them the cause bodily, they also did so financially. They donated a number of parcels of land, as well as churches, to the Templars and Hospitallers (Brown, 2003).

Other links with Chilvers Coton include the Ferrers family's Honour of Winton holding court in Nuneaton, in the adjacent parish to the Chilvers Coton manor (Nichols, 1811), and the use of

horseshoe decorations on Chilvers Coton pots, believed to be a possible reference to the Ferrers coat of arms (Ratkai, 2026).

As well as it being a way to potentially offer continuing financial support to the Hospitallers, the presence of so many Chilvers Coton vessels within their manors could have acting as tangible visual proof of that support as well. Or perhaps the connection with the Templars/Hospitallers reminded them of their more prosperous past and the Crusades. Whatever the reason, there is a clear favouring of the fabric in all manors associated with the family, suggesting there is some significance at the root of it.

One final curiosity of the Chilvers Coton distribution is the route that it appears to take into Leicester, entering from the north west. This would make sense in the respect of following the line of Ferrers manors and the road up the western side of the county to Ashby de la Zouch [3] and then taking the road from there past Whitwick [10] into Leicester. However, there may also be the question of how much control the Prior of Coventry had over the roadway between Coventry and Leicester. The prior held manors at a number of locations along the route of the road, and had a vested interest in maintaining the condition of the roadways, whose upkeep the church was a strong promoter of (De Luca, 2016), as well as its necessity for the wool trade. It may have been that the Chilvers Coton Peddlers were dissuaded from using that route into Leicester by tolls or some other form of intimidation as the Prior favoured his own goods transport along it.

5.2.4 Patterns of distribution for Medieval Sandy ware

The distribution of the Medieval Sandy wares represents one of the biggest surprises of the analysis conducted on the dataset.

Without a concrete source for the fabrics, the range of potentially places of origin meant that its presence within an assemblage could only offer tentative contributions to the larger picture of a site. At times Medieval Sandy wares have been identified personally on the basis that they are not Chilvers Coton or Nottingham wares so they must be a Medieval Sandy ware, as opposed to being a distinct fabric identified in their own right.

As a consequence, the distribution picture that emerged from the analysis was truly impactful in terms reframing an entire fabric's place in the county assemblage. In fact, the Medieval Sandy wares have such a stronger presence in the north west of the county that it has highlighted the need for cross-

border collaboration with Nottingham and Derbyshire medieval pottery specialists to ascertain which of the two counties the fabrics originate from, or if there is variation within the fabrics.

The excavated settlement distribution in the north west of the county is lacking in coverage which makes determinations about trade routes taken slightly more difficult. The route between Nottingham/Derby and Leicester via Kegworth and Loughborough would seem to be the most likely route for the ware to have taken for the Leicester assemblage. There is not strong evidence of market trade in it at Leicester but there is a grouping of evenly spaced peripheral sites with small notable assemblages that may suggest the ware is being marketed in Leicester in some way. There is certainly a consistent presence of the fabric along this roadway to Leicester to indicate intentional movement of the ware along this route. A southerly route from Kegworth or Castle Donington stopping at the markets of Whitwick [10] and Market Bosworth [85] would also fit the distribution, with greater proportions found at the start of the journey, gradually decreasing towards the end, either through diminishing supply or increased competition from the southwestern fabrics. There are enough sites in a radius around Market Bosworth with a small but significant Medieval Sandy ware assemblage that this would likely have been a regular route taken. Market Bosworth being the end point of such a journey could also explain the unusually high proportion of these wares in its own assemblage.

5.2.5 Lyveden and Nottingham wares

I am grouping the Lyveden and Nottingham ware together for this analysis despite them originating from completely opposite side of the county. This is being done due to the fact that if you overlay their distributions the resulting distribution map is a fairly good companion to the Stamford ware distribution map (Figure 17). The role that Stamford ware filled in the east of the county has effectively been 'rebuilt in the aggregate' by these two fabrics (with the additional assistance of Bourne wares).

5.2.7 Calcite Gritted wares

Although the dating on this fabric type is listed as 12th to 14th century as part of the Leicestershire Medieval Fabric Series its closely associated with Stamford ware heavy assemblages, which would imply that it is perhaps a contemporary fabric to Stamford ware rather than a later fabric. The wide spread of sites utilising this fabric would suggest pots tempered this way are being produced in the earlier Saxon 'local need' manner.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The utility of distribution maps

I feel this work has demonstrated how useful a basic 'dots on maps' approach can be at uncovering patterns within distribution networks. I appreciate the usefulness of the network analysis approach undertaken by Ben Jervis on the flow of pottery through market ecosystems (2025) but work on such a large scale has its limitations when it comes to seeing the intricacies of this movement on a smaller scale. There are a number of significant differences between the paths the network analysis sees pottery flowing along (Figure 17) and the reality of what it actually happening.

The main issue is that it works on a presence/absence basis, with any movement considered to be 'primary' movement. What this ends up doing is manufacturing connections between locations on account of single sherds of a pottery fabric ending up in that location, with the quantity and method of transportation not taken into account. What we can see from the figure above is that based on the methodology employed the production centres of Potters Marston and Chilvers Coton seemingly have

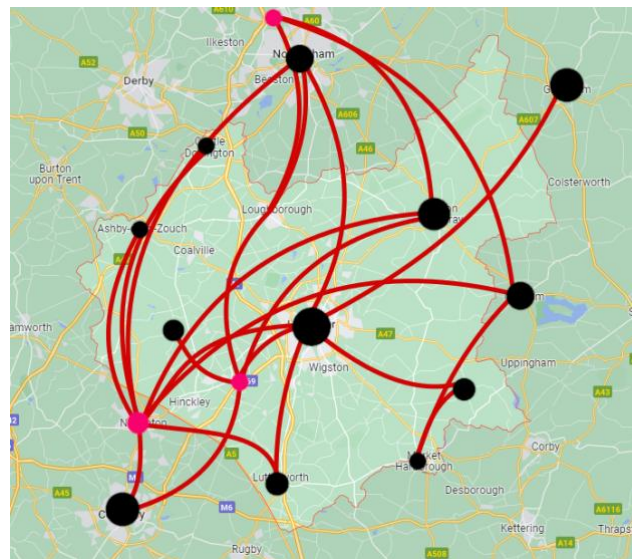


Figure 18. Recreation of figure illustrating flow of pottery in Jervis (2025) report

multiple connections to locations in the west and north west of the county. Whereas what the distribution maps show is that there is very little presence of either fabric in these areas. With Potters Marston for instance, we can see from the distribution map that it is moving into the centre of Leicester for both use and marketing, and from there it is then being spread around the suburbs and outlier areas on the city's perimeter. Now based on the network analysis this secondary movement from the market in the town centre to the outskirts would be obscured and instead be seen as direct engagement between the production centre and the consumer. Which is why such analysis works best on a large scale where those secondary or perhaps tertiary movements are incidental to the bigger picture. On the more micro scale analysis though there are far more opportunities to dig into the data and pull out the stories within, in a way that has a greater connection to the human beings within it.

6.2 How do markets fit into the Leicestershire pottery distribution networks?

Despite charters having been granted for 44 markets in the county, there is little evidence for pottery having been traded at most of them, though some low-level trade may have been taking place. In reality only 6 of these markets, Leicester, Melton Mowbray, Hallaton, Kegworth, Market Bosworth, and Market Harborough show clear evidence of pottery marketing having occurred at them. With the possibility that Whitwick and Wymondham may yet prove to be a part of this grouping with more data.

In areas with more than one market in close proximity to each other, only one of the markets seems to have been designated for pottery marketing. As is the case with Kegworth, where there is no evidence of association with the nearby market of Castle Donnington. There's a similar story at Market Bosworth with the Odstone and Bagworth markets. It would seem that along with taking place on different days, these markets, especially where pottery is concerned, served different purposes for the communities they served.

Perhaps the most notable finding where markets are concerned is the consistency in the catchment areas of both rural and urban markets. The extent of the clusters around Hallaton, Kegworth, Market Bosworth, and Market Harborough all stood at roughly 3 miles. This would seem a reasonable distance to travel to and from in a day, on minor roadways that may not have been particularly well maintained, whilst laden with goods. Leicester and Melton offer the comparative data on urban market catchment areas, and as previously mentioned these larger markets have catchment radii of around 6 miles each. The variation between the rural and urban market catchment areas is likely to be almost entirely down to the quality of the access road to these markets. The older urban markets will have had long established routeways into them with approaches from multiple angles which would have been easily passable by foot and cart. This easier travel experience obviously broadens the distance that can be

travelled in the course of a day and the quantity of goods that can be purchased at one time. These catchment areas – spheres of influence – dyer

6.3 Pottery production centres

As well as the catchment area radius for markets there also appears to be a fairly consistent radius of distribution from pottery production sites. With the exception of Potters Marston whose unique circumstances have already been addressed, all of the other major fabrics had distribution radius' of around 20-25 miles. Now we know Stamford ware was travelling further afield than that, but those longer distance distributions would have been for the finest of wares and been facilitated by good links by water that allowed more distance to be covered in less time. Leicester unfortunately lacked such navigable waterways (Stafford 1985) and as such pottery, as a heavy bulky item could not travel as far with ease. As a low value good, there would have been economic thresholds at which the earnings gained by taking goods on to a more distant market would have been negated by the profit margin hit associated with doing so.

6.4 The people moving the pottery

The lack of documentary records relating to pottery in the period make the role people and institutions played in its movement complicated to ascertain. For instance, we know the most powerful man in Coventry was in possession of the land on which Potters Martston was being produced, but we do not know to what extent he was involved in the running or decision making related to the pottery. It can be assumed the goings on there were a little less important than his other endeavours (Burt, 2012), but he would certainly have been profiting to some extent off of the success of it. It is possible that records exist somewhere that offer some scant detail of his influence, but current research has not brought this to light.

Pot-peddlers leave no trace on the record, and details of interpersonal trades and exchanges for pottery are rarely considered worthy of the time. Transactions were happening outside of markets and towns all the time, in areas hidden from any record (Dyer, 2000). So, the only option is to examine the archaeological record it the hopes that oddities with it can provide some insight on the human influence on the movement of pottery around the region. The link between the Ferrers family and

Chilvers Coton may seem like a tenuous one, but it was guided by the archaeology. The Castle Hill site offers the most direct correlation, and from there it is a matter of using the limited knowledge available to follow the patterns in the archaeology as far they can be instructive, and sometimes that will involve going out on a limb to make the case for the conclusions drawn. We know that the Ferrers family would do what they could to compete in the social milieu of the time so an attempt to continue a connection with the Templars/Hospitallers that had been so fruitful for them in the past would seem like an obvious route for them to take (Evans, 2000).

In order to continue to understand the effect individuals had on distribution patterns is going to require more data, likely of a more granular nature, including the examining not just fabrics but vessel forms. It also going to require further exploration of the documentary records to establish where the connections between people and places exist and what minor traces they left of their everyday activities in relation to those places.

6.5 Areas requiring further work

Anomalies still exist in the data that do not yet have adequate explanations and there still remains a wealth of additional pottery assemblage data in paper archives, along with the work other archaeological units have performing work within Leicestershire's borders. As previously mentioned, the more data we have the stronger conclusions can be drawn.

A collaborative effort to help standardise fabrics across county borders would also allow more nuanced patterns to be drawn out that are not apparent when working within arbitrary boundaries. It is likely that to another specialist a Medieval Sandy fabric goes by a different name in their world, and that alternate name has a source associated with it.

6.6 Closing thoughts

I believe this study has provided significant new understandings of the pottery distributions within the county of Leicestershire, and it has done so in an easily repeatable manner that could be replicated in neighbouring counties. This is also only the start of the exploration of the data gathered on the Leicestershire assemblage. Not only have features such as catchment areas for markets and production centres been clarified, and the effects of individuals of influence on the movement of

pottery been uncovered, but fitting the findings from the analysis of the dataset within such a work as this required being selective in the avenues followed. So, looking ahead I am excited by the prospects of what is still to be uncovered by following those other avenues in the futures, and finding out more about the dynamics of pottery and the market economy in the county.