

Medieval pottery from excavations at Mellor, 2005

C.G. Cumberpatch BA PhD
Freelance Archaeologist

With a contribution by Jane Young

Illustrations (To be completed)

- Figure 1 Rim of a Buff Gritty ware jar (OVM05 Trench 33, unstratified)
Figure 2 Rim of a Shell Tempered ware jar (OVM05 TR33, feature 007, context 020)
Figure 3 Base of an unidentified vessel (OVM05 Trench 36 Feature 283, Context 285)

Introduction

The medieval pottery from Mellor was examined by the author on 7th November 2005. The greater part of the assemblage consisted of twenty-six sherds representing a maximum of twenty-four vessels. The details are summarised in Table 1. It should be noted that the total weight of the sherds is incomplete as that of the Shell Tempered ware sherd is not known at the time of writing. Given the small size of the assemblage and the lack of opportunity that this offers for comparisons and contrasts within the assemblage and between features, this is not a serious problem, although the correct weight will be added to the archive table as soon as it is determined. Two sherds are the subject of individual comments. The first of these is a sherd of Shell Tempered ware, discussed below by Jane Young. The second is a sherd of ambiguous date and character which is described in detail below.

Type series

Very few of the medieval sherds from the 2005 season were identifiable to a recognised ware type, in part due the relative lack of medieval sites excavated in the area and the absence of a regional type series for the Greater Manchester area. For this reason the wares represented have been assigned generic names based upon the characteristics of the sherds. The sandy and finer gritty wares are distinguished by the texture and density of quartz inclusions but have in common a bright orange colour either throughout the sherd or internally and externally. In this they resemble other examples of medieval pottery from Derbyshire, as discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Cumberpatch 2004a, 2004b). The character of the individual sherds is summarised in Table 1.

Of the identifiable sherds, the rim sherd in *Buff Gritty ware* was the most distinctive. The form of the vessel resembled examples from West Yorkshire where the flat topped, clubbed rim is typical of cooking pots dating to the later 11th to early 13th century (Cumberpatch 2002). The sherd is shown in Figure 1.

The sherd of *Shell Tempered ware* was the subject of a report by Ms J. Young. Her description of the sherd is as follows:

OVM05 TR33, Feature 007, Context 020

The sherd submitted for examination is a slightly overhanging everted rim sherd is from a large jar (Figure 2). Most of the larger shell fragments have been leached away leaving medium (0.3mm to 0.6mm) to large sized voids (0.6 to 2mm). A background of finer shell fragments is still visible, although all typological features of the shell temper have been lost. Sparse medium-sized round to sub-round quartz and moderate finer iron-rich grains are also present in the fabric. It is likely that this sherd belongs to the Derbyshire group rather than the Lincolnshire group but precise identification is impossible due to the poor condition of the sherd. The alignment of the shell voids within the sherd and the undercutting of the rim strongly suggest

that the vessel was wheel thrown. Typologically outside of Derbyshire the rim belongs to the period between the late 12th and mid 13th centuries, although a date as early as the late 11th century is possible.

OVM05 Trench 36 Feature 283, Context 285

The base of a jar or other closed vessel in a sandy textured oxidised fabric weighing 39 grams. The vessel appears to be hand made (as opposed to wheel thrown) and has thick walls and an uneven base. The external surface appears to have a pale grey surface although whether this is an applied slip or a form of 'self-slip' is unclear. The fabric is densely tempered with fine rounded to sub-rounded quartz grains varying between 0.2mm and 1.5mm in diameter, with the finer grains being commoner than the coarse ones. It is these that give the sherd its sandy texture. The sherd is shown in Figure 3.

There is nothing in the character of the sherd to indicate its date range or origin. The fact that it is hand made is insufficient to establish either a pre-Roman or post-Roman date. Although hand-made medieval pottery is not uncommon in the wider region (Cumberpatch *et al.* 1998-1999, Cumberpatch 2004a, 2004b, Cumberpatch in press) this sherd does not belong to a ware type previously defined. Local Saxon wares are very poorly known but reduced fabrics are more generally more characteristic of this period than are oxidised ones.

The pre-Roman pottery so far recovered from Mellor is characterised by a wide range of very different fabrics (Cumberpatch *et al.* 2005), none of which match the characteristics of the sherd in question. This diversity in fabric type would appear to imply that pottery was reaching the site either from a number of different sources or over a long period of time during which pottery making practices had changed resulting a range of types. This is hardly evidence for a pre-Roman date for this sherd, but provides a possible explanation for its difference from the other sherds from the site.

In general, while a pre-Roman date cannot be ruled out, the general character of the sherd appears to be medieval rather than pre-Roman and unless there is good contextual or other evidence for an earlier date (with all the implications that this will carry for the identification of prehistoric pottery in the area), a medieval date is preferred.

Discussion

The medieval assemblage from Mellor, although small in size and abraded in nature, is sufficient to establish the presence of medieval activity on the site. Further work in future years is likely to involve the recovery of more medieval material and this will provide the basis for a clearer understanding of the range of wares in use in the area in the post-Roman and post-Conquest periods.

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