

## SAXON AND NORMAN POTTERY FROM COLCHESTER CASTLE PARK

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THE pottery is divided into four groups according to the stratigraphical evidence, which is given in detail in the descriptions of the pottery on pp. 66–67. With one exception (group 1, no. 1), which is a stray of earlier date, all the pottery may be regarded as contemporary, since even the latest, group 4 from pit C1, was sealed by the old turf-line over the Norman Bank. There is no historical evidence for the construction of this Bank, but since it is not in alignment with the Castle Keep, built c. 1076–86, it is believed to be slightly later in date. It may be said at once that no appreciable difference in date can be detected between the pottery of groups 2, 3, and 4. Comparison with dated material found elsewhere in England suggests that the pottery is not later than the early part of the twelfth century, but closer dating is provided by comparison with material from Colchester Castle itself. This consists of four sherds, including the angle of a sagging base, obtained from the foundation trench of the Castle Keep in 1931–2, which Mr. Hull kindly sent to me for examination. Although so few in number, the ware of these sherds is consistent and agrees precisely with that of groups 2, 3, and 4 as described below. The date of these groups, and therefore of the Norman Bank, is thus as close to the date of the Keep as the sequence of construction will allow. On balance, the available evidence points to a date within the period c. 1080–1100 for the Norman Bank.

The only sherd certainly pre-Norman in date is part of a small hand-made pot of coarse ware with pitted surface (fig. 2, 1). The wide-mouthed shape and the ware are characteristic of the pagan Anglo-Saxon period, and parallels may be quoted from cemeteries and hut-sites in East Anglia and in Essex.<sup>1</sup> The Castle Park pot may therefore be referred to the sixth or seventh century; possibly it was originally associated with inhumations on the site, which were disturbed by the Normans (p. 57).

The rest of the pottery, representing twelve vessels, provides a cross-section of the ceramics of East Anglia in the late Saxon and Norman periods. The dominant group in East Anglia in the late Saxon period is the wheel-turned pottery of Saxo-Norman type.<sup>2</sup> As yet the earliest date for this group is in the first half of the ninth century, and it lasted with slight development until about the middle of the twelfth century.<sup>3</sup> In East Anglia there is a well-marked regional difference in the fabrics comprising the coarse pottery of the group. At the type-site of Thetford, at Norwich, and other places in Norfolk and Suffolk, the pottery is hard and sandy,

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Little Wilbraham, Cambs., T. C. Lethbridge, *Recent Excavations in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk* (1931), pl. vi. Hut on the Car Dyke at Waterbeach, *Antiq. Journ.* vii, 143, fig. 3. Hut-site at Bulmer Tye, Essex,

*Medieval Archaeology*, iii (1959), 282, fig. 99.

<sup>2</sup> J. G. Hurst, 'Saxo-Norman Pottery in East Anglia', *Proc. Cambridge Antiq. Soc.* xlix (1956), 43 ff., 1 (1957), 29 ff., and li (1958), 37 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. Cambridge Antiq. Soc.* li (1958), 62–63.

with a harsh grey surface. On the other hand, at St. Neots and numerous other sites along the rivers Ouse and Cam, notably at Bedford and in the Cambridge region, the ware is softer, grey or black in the core with a brown or purple-toned surface, soapy to the touch, and it is white-flecked by shell.<sup>1</sup>

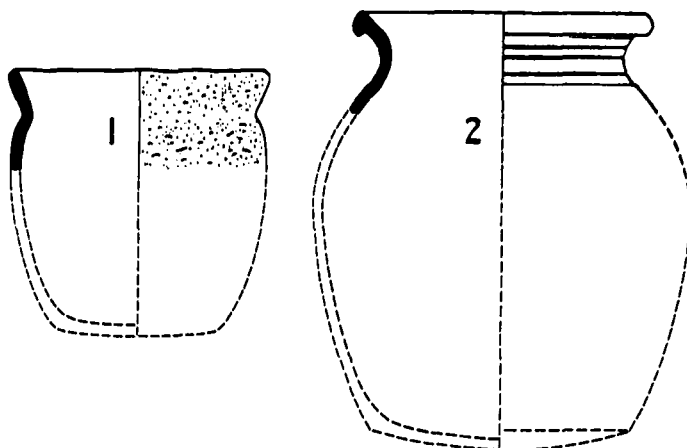


FIG. 2. Pottery. 1-2, group 1. (4)

Comparatively little pottery of the late Saxon period has yet been found in Essex, but both classes of ware are represented, and in date these cover nearly the same range as in East Anglia. At Witham a hut-site excavated by Mr. F. Cottrill in 1934 produced the upper part of a spouted pitcher of Thetford ware and the flanged rim of a bowl of St. Neots ware, dated *c.* 900 by a memorial coin of St. Edmund. The only finds known from Colchester are late in the period; on the site of 31-32 High Street were found a spouted pitcher and a cooking-pot, both of Thetford ware, which may be dated not earlier than the tenth or eleventh century.<sup>2</sup> The other class of fabric is now represented at Colchester by the cooking-pot of shelly ware from Castle Park (fig. 2, 2). This has the thickened and everted rim frequent on cooking-pots of this ware at Bedford,<sup>3</sup> Cambridge, and Paxton and St. Neots, Hunts.<sup>4</sup> The narrow grooves on the neck are exactly matched by grooving in this position on cooking-pots at Bedford, but apparently unknown elsewhere. The features of this pot thus demonstrate the extension of the upper Ouse sub-group of St. Neots ware south-east to the Essex coast in the late eleventh century.

The bulk of the pottery from the Castle Park excavation, namely groups 2, 3, and 4, comprises nine rims and a restored pot (fig. 3, 3-12 and pl. xvii). All belong to the same type, a wide-mouthed cooking-pot of globular shape, with bulging shoulder and deep sagging base in diameter only slightly less than the bulge. The

<sup>1</sup> Two sources have been suggested for the shell, either fresh-water mussels from streams or the shell-marls of the districts. See remarks by Mr. E. M. Jope in *Oxoniensia*, xxiii (1958), 49, and *Antiq. Journ.* xxxix, 245.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. Cambridge Antiq. Soc.* 1 (1957), 46, fig. 6, 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Medieval Archaeology*, iii (1959), 39, fig. 15, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Proc. Cambridge Antiq. Soc.* xlix (1956), 58 ff., figs. 4, 7, and 8.

rimms have the sections characteristic of cooking-pots dated about the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and show only a slight variation or development. Group 2, nos. 3 and 4, are simple everted rims with an outward slope on top, but no. 5 of this group has the slope prolonged downwards to form a slight flange. This developed rim-section is well represented in group 3 by nos. 7, 8, 9, and 10. On the other hand the simpler rim, only slightly thickened, is represented in group 3 by no. 11, and by the restored cooking-pot of group 4, no. 12, which on the stratigraphical evidence is the latest of the series. This interlocking of the rim-types excludes any appreciable difference in date between the three groups, which are therefore regarded as contemporary.

All the rims are plain, and lack even the simple motif of finger-tip marks along the outer slope sometimes present on rims of cooking-pots of this date. Linear decoration does, however, occur on the neck and body of two pots, group 2, no. 5, and group 3, no. 6, and for these different explanations may be offered. The first pot (fig. 3, 5) has bands of incised wavy lines inside the neck and also outside on the neck and upper part of the body. Decoration of this kind is unusual on cooking-pots of the Norman period, and it will be discussed below (p. 66). The other pot (fig. 3, 6) has two sharply incised girth-grooves below the angle of the neck, and the rim has a wide bevel internally. Both features are derived from the pottery of the preceding period. The girth-grooves have already been mentioned in connexion with the cooking-pots of St. Neots ware from Colchester and Bedford (p. 63). The internal bevel of the rim occurs on cooking-pots of both the St. Neots and Thetford classes, though it is more frequent on the latter. This pot is thus a Norman version of the late Saxon cooking-pot, with the characteristics of the internal bevel, neck angle, and girth-grooves more sharply defined.

The ware of the cooking-pots is very consistent and this, taken in conjunction with the uniformity in character of the pots, suggests that the majority in groups 2, 3, and 4 were made in the same locality and possibly at the same pottery. The fabric is grey in the core and the outside surface is low-toned, light red grading into brown, or sometimes red and grey in patches. The clay is free from grit, and the backing is always fine sand; only one pot (group 3, no. 2) has in addition a few small white specks in the clay. The surface is smoothed but slightly harsh to the touch, like fine-grained sandpaper.

Recent work has shown that the globular cooking-pot, as exemplified by fig. 3, 12, which is usually regarded as typical of the twelfth century, was in fact developed earlier over a considerable part of southern and eastern England. In southern England, broadly between the English Channel and the river Thames, the evidence is abundant for the continuity of hand-made pottery throughout the late Saxon period. The later phase is best demonstrated by the scratch-marked cooking-pots of Wessex,<sup>1</sup> by pottery from eleventh-century occupation beneath Oxford Castle mound,<sup>2</sup> and by the widespread use of individual stamps to decorate the pitchers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>3</sup> In East Anglia the evidence is obscured by the dominance of wheel-turned pottery of the Thetford, St. Neots, and Stamford

<sup>1</sup> *Antiq. Journ.* xv, 174.

<sup>2</sup> *Oxoniensia*, xvii-xviii (1952-3), 77 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Medieval Archaeology*, iii (1959), 34, fig. 11.

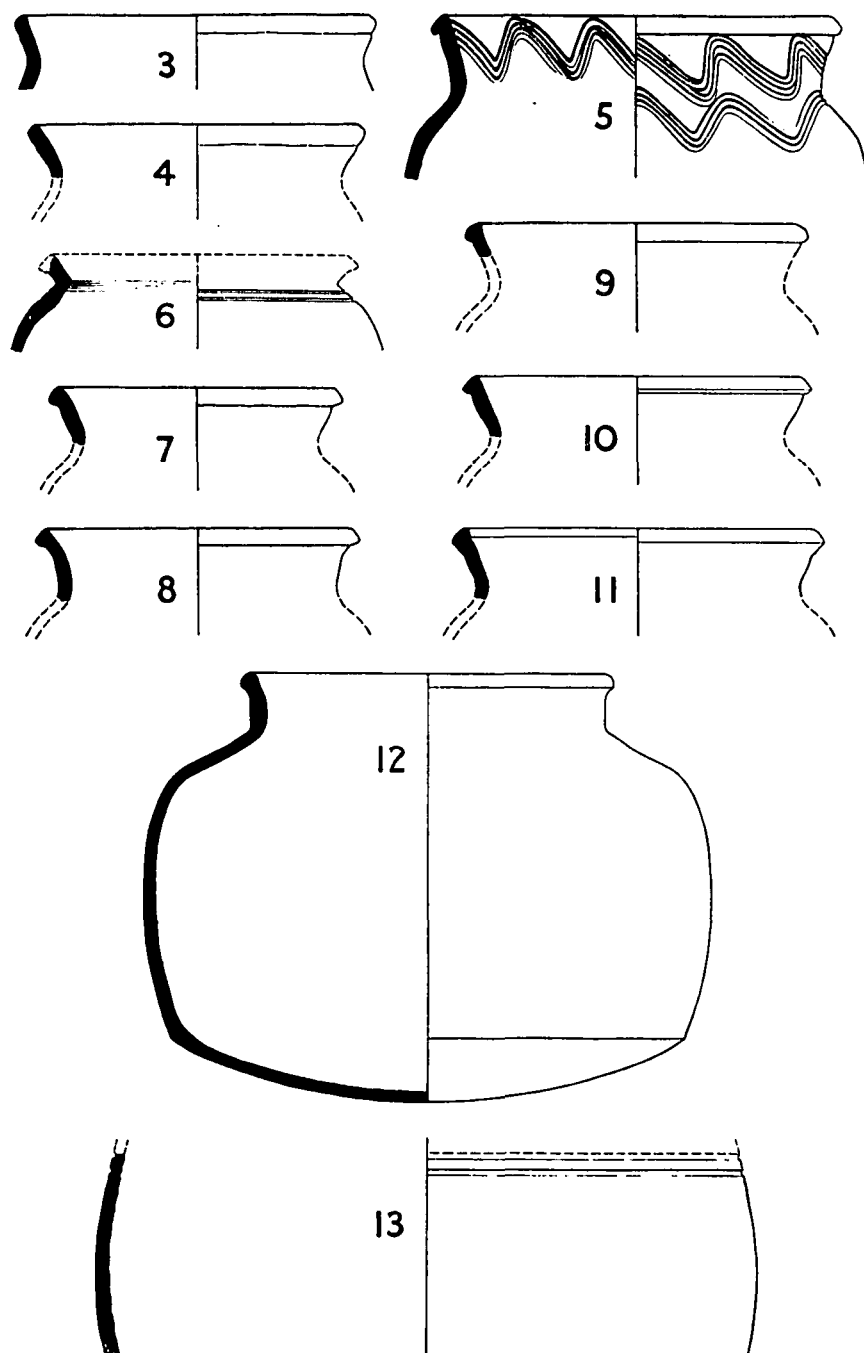


FIG. 3. Pottery. 3-5, group 2; 6-11, group 3; 12-13, group 4. ( $\frac{1}{4}$ )

classes, but the emergence of a persistent Saxon tradition during the eleventh century is now recognizable in a group termed 'Early Medieval ware'. The group consists largely of cooking-pots with sagging bases, in shape and development closely comparable with those in the southern counties, and a few pitchers or jugs.<sup>1</sup> The fabric is characteristic; a thin and hard sandy ware, usually grey in the core with a red-toned surface. The Castle Park cooking-pots (fig. 3, 3-5 and 7-12) are the direct descendants of this group in the Norman period. This relationship is confirmed by the analogies for the incised wavy lines on the upper part of fig. 3, 5, among the late Saxon pottery of East Anglia. The most relevant material is from the Saxon town of Thetford,<sup>2</sup> where the motif is found on two classes of pottery. First, it occurs on Thetford ware as a simple wavy line on the inner slopes of rims of some of the cooking-pots, and also on the sides of these and of pitchers, either alone or alternating with bands of rouletting. Secondly, it occurs in the same way and in the same positions on cooking-pots of Early Medieval ware, but on these the taller necks gave scope for its duplication into bands of several lines together. The stratification at Thetford shows that the first group antedated the second and also continued to be made at the same time. Clearly the inference is that at Thetford this simple linear motif on Early Medieval ware was taken over from the other ceramic group in the eleventh century, and its usage continued directly into the Norman period, as on the Castle Park pot.

It remains to mention one pot of group 4 (fig. 3, 13), found in association with the cooking-pot (fig. 3, 12) in pit C1. The sherds are of buff sandy ware with grey surface, slightly finer in texture than the cooking-pots. The type to which the sherds belonged cannot be determined with certainty. The large size, 13½ inches in maximum diameter, would suit a storage-jar, though the ware is thinner and finer than usual, and storage-jars have elaborate applied-strip decoration,<sup>3</sup> not paired incised girth-grooves. The pot is more likely to have been a large pitcher; it is regrettable that more of it was not found.

## DESCRIPTION OF POTTERY

(Figs. 2 and 3)

### Group 1

Two rims found in the tumble of the Roman wall in its upper part, due perhaps to robbing in early Norman times for stones to build the Keep.

1. Fragment of hand-made cooking-pot of coarse laminated grey ware with pitted surface where chopped vegetable matter has burnt out. Anglo-Saxon, sixth or seventh century.

2. Wheel-turned cooking-pot with roll rim, undercut. Grey ware with crushed white shell, dark grey surface slightly purple-toned and soapy. On the neck are three narrow girth-grooves, and a slight offset marks the junction of neck and body. Restored with sagging base after similar cooking-pots found at Bedford.

<sup>1</sup> *Medieval Archaeology*, iii (1959), 44.

<sup>2</sup> Information from Group-Captain G. M.

Knocker.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. Cambridge Antiq. Soc.* 1 (1957), 53, fig. 8.



Restored cooking-pot of group 4. (1/4)

*Group 2*

Three rims found in the old turf-line on the wall-tumble. This level is interpreted as a pause between the robbing of the wall and the throwing up of the Norman Bank.

3. Cooking-pot rim. Simple rim sloping outwards, with slight constriction below outside. Brown sandy ware, light red beneath the surface, which is darker red and grey in patches.

4. Similar rim, but more everted. Grey sandy ware, light red surface.

5. Upper part of cooking-pot. Rim sloping outwards, flanged outside and undercut. Grey sandy ware, light red surface with grey tones. Decorated with incised wavy lines inside the neck, and outside in two bands on the neck and on the slightly flattened bulge.

*Group 3*

Six rims found in the material of the Norman Bank.

6. Cooking-pot rim. Fine light red sandy ware, grey-toned surface. The outer part of the rim is missing, but inside it has a long bevel. The rim meets the body at a sharp angle, and below are two sharply incised narrow girth-grooves. The features of the pot show that it is a Norman version of the late Saxon cooking-pot with girth-grooves on the neck, as present in group 1, no. 2, with the characteristics of internal bevel, neck angle, and girth-grooves more sharply defined.

7. Cooking-pot rim. Grey sandy ware, light red surface with grey tones. Rim sloping outwards, flanged outside.

8. Similar rim. Grey sandy ware with few small white specks, grey-brown surface.

9. Similar rim, outer margin rounded. Grey sandy ware, light red surface.

10. Similar rim, outer edge of flange sharply defined. Grey sandy ware, light red surface.

11. Similar rim, outer edge thin and well defined. Grey sandy ware, grey-brown surface.

*Group 4*

Two pots found in layer 5 of a seven-layer pit, C1, dug into the tail of the Norman Bank, but sealed by the old turf-line over the Bank. The pit is therefore contemporary with, or immediately post-dates, the construction of the Bank.

12 (pl. xvii). Restored cooking-pot. Close-textured grey sandy ware, light red surface grey-toned below shoulder and on underside of base. Squat globular shape with shoulder slightly flattened above the bulge, and deep sagging base. Rather narrow-mouthed, rim rounded on top with sharp outer edge, set on vertical neck.

13. Fragments of large pot of buff sandy ware with grey surface. The sherds are from the side of the pot, and have two sharply incised girth-grooves above the bulge.