

# LATE SAXON AND EARLY MEDIEVAL POTTERY FROM THE DESERTED VILLAGE OF BARROW(?) IN ODCOMBE PARISH ST 508173

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY MICK ASTON

## INTRODUCTION

This site was first noted by Roger Leech on a vertical air photograph in the Planning Department of Somerset County Council (Huntings Air Surveys, Somerset County Council 1971 Run 51 8502). The site was visited in April 1976 by Mr. H. Prudden and the writer. At that time the earthworks were very clear, although areas of ridge and furrow to the north had been destroyed and hedges grubbed out. A wide deep holloway crossed the site with well defined house platforms along each side. No house sites were visible. A ruined barn lay at the east end of the site (about six acres in extent) and along the north side was a prominent boundary bank under a hedge.

A cursory examination of records for the area did not reveal the likely name for the site but on the 1839 Tithe Map for Odcombe (SRO D/D/Rt. 139) the field containing the deserted village is called Barrow's Orchard. For convenience the site is being called Barrow(?). It is still in Odcombe parish although frequently it is erroneously referred to as Lufton.

In October 1976, before the site could be scheduled as an Ancient Monument (it was one of the better examples of a deserted medieval village in the county) the earthworks were bulldozed with consequent removal of the house platforms and crofts and infilling of the holloways. A contour and hachure plan of the earthworks, at the time they were being removed, was made by Mr. J. Dowson of the County Surveyor's Department and pottery was collected from the site by Mr. W. Chapman, who carried out a watching brief, and by Miss S. Rees. It is intended to publish air photographs taken of the site by the writer in May 1976 in a forthcoming report on the deserted settlements of Somerset in these *Proceedings*.

## THE POTTERY

Groups of pottery revealed as field scatters through agricultural or construction work, such as the levelling of the Barrow(?) earthworks, the ploughing of the earthworks at Shepton Montague (Keynes and Whitfeld, 1976, p. 111) and the construction of the sewer pipe at Wearne (Leech, 1976, p. 45), provide a source of information which is often neglected. The limitations of such information, however, must be clearly borne in mind. The nature of the evidence to be gained from field scatters is limited in several ways. Whether the finds scatter can be considered to have been derived from a site in the vicinity or whether it has been dumped through the agencies of either topsoil displacement or agricultural processes such as the spreading of 'midden', the material will not be a complete assemblage. It will neither be representative of all the artifact types present on the site nor their relative proportions.

The value of studying finds scatters lies in the identification of distinct artifact types which can on the one hand help in the chronological assessment of activities on the site and on the other give positive information on the distribution of particular classes of objects. But it should be emphasized that where this analysis is limited to typological comparison it is bound by the inherent faults of the system (Hurst, 1962-3, pp. 147-148). Pottery from deserted village sites can often be of the utmost importance especially where it is the sole evidence of the cultural and possibly chronological affinities of the settlement.

The pottery from Barrow(?) was collected at the time the earthworks were being destroyed. Sixty-one sherds were recovered which can be ascribed to a period from before the Conquest to the 14th century. The chronological implications are, however, strictly limited as the residual 'midden' elements cannot be isolated. A full report of the Pottery Types is deposited with the pottery in Somerset County Museum.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE POTTERY AND ILLUSTRATED SHERDS (Fig. 1)

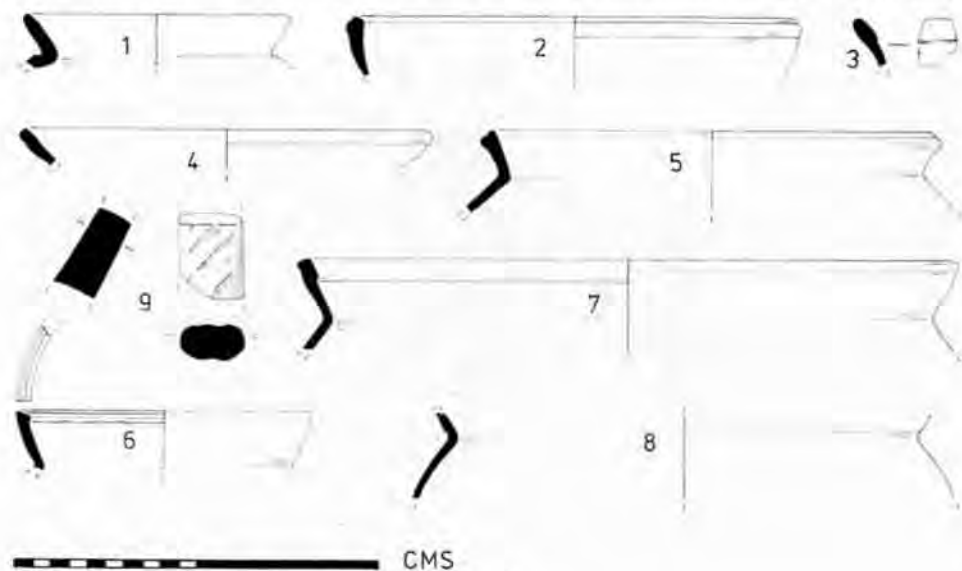


Fig. 1.

Pottery Type A: pre-Conquest

- (1) Cooking pot or storage jar; rim sherd; angular limestone (leached out) and sparse rounded/angular quartzitic grit-tempered fabric. Slightly soapy feel; surfaces oxidized and core reduced; hand-made. Fire-blackened over the rim, suggesting that the vessel had been inverted over a fire.

Pottery Type B: 11th-13th centuries

- (2) Cooking pot or storage jar; rim sherd; hand-made and slow-wheel finished. Coarse quartzitic grit-tempered fabric with pimply surfaces. Oxidized surfaces and reduced core.

Pottery Type B/C: 11th-13th centuries

- (3) Cooking pot or storage jar; rim sherd; hand-made and slow-wheel finished. Quartzitic and flint/chert grit-tempered fabric (large flint grits up to 6 mm across). Reduced grey fabric.  
 (4) Cooking pot or storage jar; rim sherd; (description as No. 3). Reduced dark grey-dark brown fabric.

Pottery Type D: c.12th-14th centuries. (None illustrated)

Cooking pots or storage jars; fine micaceous fabric with occasional quartzitic grits. Wheel thrown. (Cf. Ilchester fabric E (Leach, forthcoming).)

Pottery Type E: c.13th-14th centuries

- (5) Cooking pot or storage jar; rim sherd; wheel-thrown. Coarse sand-tempered, micaceous fabric with isolated quartzitic grits. Oxidized dark orange/brown fabric.

Pottery Type F: c.13th-14th centuries

- (6) Cooking pot or storage jar; rim sherd; wheel-thrown. Fine micaceous fabric with occasional quartzitic grits and grog. Oxidized external surface and core light buff/orange, internally reduced brown/black.
- (7) Cooking pot or storage jar; rim and body sherds; (fabric as No. 6). Oxidized surfaces orange/buff and reduced grey/black core.
- (8) Cooking pot or storage jar; neck and body sherd; (fabric as No. 6). Oxidized surfaces buff with reduced grey core.

Pottery Type G: c.12th-14th centuries. (None illustrated)

Tripod pitcher or jug sherds; fine sand-tempered fabric roughly glazed with external patchy green lead glaze. Oxidized surfaces, orange buff and reduced light grey/blue core. Handle, body and base sherds.

Pottery Type H: c.12th-14th? centuries

- (9) Extruded bar, handle or large tripod foot; coarse quartzitic grit-tempered fabric. Oxidized orange buff throughout.

## DISCUSSION

### *Pre-Conquest*

Pottery Type A from Barrow(?) (Fig. 1, No. 1) is comparable in both form and fabric with sherds ascribed to the late 10th or early 11th centuries at Ilchester (Leach, forthcoming) and typologically comparable to examples from Cheddar (Rahtz, 1974, p. 116, Fig. 4, No. 41). The identification of pottery of this period has become possible through the analysis of these two stratified sequences, which suggests that the lack of knowledge of pre-Norman ceramics in the area (Ellison, 1976, p. 5) is largely due to the lack of excavated sequences of pottery.

### *11th to 13th Centuries*

The bulk of the pottery recovered from the Kingsham's site at Ilchester belongs to this period. The local pottery was all hand-made; wheel-thrown pottery was apparently not locally produced until the later 13th century. Pottery Types B (Fig. 1, No. 2) and B/C (Fig. 1, Nos 3 and 4) are comparable to Ilchester types (Pottery Type B/BB). Pottery Type B was probably the product of a local kiln which accounted for ninety per cent of a recent pottery group discovered by Mr. Peter Rood at West Mudford deserted village (Pearson, forthcoming (a)). Owing to the insecure nature of stratified pottery groups of this period, little can be done at present towards the analysis of form. The rim form of No. 4, however, probably belongs to the earlier part of this period, while No. 3 is commonly found in later groups at both Ilchester and Taunton (Pearson, forthcoming (b)).

The glazed wares from Barrow(?) (Pottery Type G) apparently belong to roughly glazed tripod pitchers or jugs. These are mainly attributed at present to the 12th and 13th centuries at Ilchester but could be late 11th-century in date (Rahtz and Hirst, 1974, p. 78).

### *Late 13th and 14th Centuries*

Pottery Types E, F and D (Fig. 1, Nos. 5-8) are all wheel-thrown and probably belong to this period. Unlike the Ilchester pottery, the late 13th-century kiln at Donyatt was still producing solely hand-made pottery (Site 1, Coleman-Smith and Pearson, forthcoming), although by the mid-14th century Donyatt kilns were producing good quality wheel-thrown wares.

## CONCLUSION

The pottery from Barrow(?) indicates a date range from the pre-Conquest period to the late 13th or early 14th centuries; however, the absence of good quality late 14th-century wares may indicate a period of desertion. The infiltration of material

through the dispersal of 'midden', thus implying a possibly earlier date of abandonment, cannot be dismissed; alternatively, later material may merely be absent from this small sample. These pottery types show affinities with those in use at Ilchester, which was a market town of some influence in the early medieval period.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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