



Jigsaw Cambridgeshire Best Practice Users' Guide

An Introduction to Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Prehistoric Pottery of Cambridgeshire

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December 2013

LATE BRONZE AGE POTTERY

Plainware ceramics of the Post Deverel-Rimbury ceramic tradition (c. 1100-800 BC)

The beginning of the Late Bronze Age is marked by a major change in the ceramic record. The limited repertoire of bucket-shaped jars or urns which characterised the region's Middle Bronze Age **Deverel-Rimbury tradition** came to end, and was superseded by a new and far more diverse range of vessel forms. These included an array of subtly different shaped shouldered jars, bowls and cups, further sub-divided into coarsewares and finewares based on the character of their fabrics and methods of surface treatment. Although a few elements evolved from Deverel-Rimbury roots, the emergence of these visual, tactile and functional distinctions between vessel categories was a genuine innovation of the **Post-Deverel Rimbury (PDR)** ceramic tradition, which flourished throughout the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. The pots of the Late Bronze Age are known as **Plainware** ceramics, as decoration is rare. Where found, it is normally confined to a single row of fingertip impressions on the rim-top, or more rarely the shoulder, of coarseware jars.

Forms

- Shouldered jars, bowls, and cups. The shoulders are normally slack, rounded, or quite pronounced in profile, but rarely angular. Necks are upright, or hollowed.
- Bowls and cups can be thin-walled, and display delicately moulded rims. These often have everted, tapered lips. Bowls can also have dimpled bases known as *omphalos* bases.



Late Bronze Age fineware bowl (Must Farm)

Fabrics

- Commonly **flint-tempered** in most parts of Cambridgeshire.
 - **Coarseware** fabrics typically have moderate to common poorly-sorted coarse burnt flint inclusions (2-4mm in size), which penetrate the surface and give the vessel a very rough texture.
 - **Finewares** typically have finely crushed flint inclusions (<2mm in size), which are often well-sorted. The surfaces of the finewares are normally carefully smoothed, burnished, or sometime highly polished.
- **Shelly ware** fabrics, however, are more common around the Peterborough region in this period, with coarse shell characterising the coarsewares, and finely crushed shell the finewares.



Late Bronze Age coarseware jar (Must Farm)

- **Sandy wares** may also be present in some assemblages, but these always form a minor component, and are normally burnished finewares.

Decoration

- Rare on all types of vessel. Where present, it normally comprises a single row of fingertip impressions on the rim-top, or less commonly the shoulder, of coarseware jars. Some large jars also have plain or fingertip decorated cordons positioned on the neck or shoulder.
- Fineware bowls and cups are rarely ornamented, but the odd pot can display grooved or incised horizontal lines around the neck and/or shoulder, and very rarely, geometric or curvilinear motifs.

Context

- Mainly recovered from pits, waterholes, postholes and structures which form the tangible traces of settlement.

EARLY IRON AGE POTTERY

Decorated ware ceramics of the Post Deverel-Rimbury ceramic tradition (c. 800-350 BC)

The basic divisions between coarsewares and finewares, jars, bowls and cups, continues throughout the Early Iron Age, and serves to define the Post Deverel-Rimbury ceramic tradition. However, from c. 800 BC vessel forms become more angular, and decoration much more prolific. This pottery is therefore referred to as **Decorated ware** ceramics of the PDR tradition. The period itself is broken up into an **Earliest Iron Age**, dated c. 800-600 BC, and, to confuse matters somewhat, an **Early Iron Age**, c. 600-350 BC.

Forms

Earliest Iron Age, c. 800-600/550 BC

- Angular and round shouldered jars, bowls, and cups. Necks are upright, hollowed or out-turned, and can be flared on some angular vessels. Bowls and cups are can still be thin-walled and have *omphalos* bases.

Early Iron Age, c. 600-350 BC

- The repertoire of vessels is broadly similar to the Earliest Iron Age, though angular jars become less prolific at the end of the period.
- Jar rims are often internally thickened, and some are T-shaped or have pronounced internal flanges. S-shaped bowls are also more common, as are angular bowls with flared necks.
- New base types include foot-ring bases and pedestal bases. These were modelled on Continental proto-types of the sixth century BC and later.



Earliest Iron Age coarseware jar with decorated shoulder (Clay Farm)

Fabrics

- **Flint-tempering** remains common throughout most of the Early Iron Age in Cambridgeshire, with the grade and density of flint in the coarsewares and finewares being broadly similar to those in the Late Bronze Age. However, fabrics tend to be a little harder and sand is quite common in the clay matrix. The range of fabrics also becomes more variable in this period, particularly toward its close.
- **Shelly wares** are relatively frequent after c. 600 BC in southern Cambridgeshire, as are **sandy wares**; the latter dominating by the close of the Early Iron Age. Around Peterborough shelly wares remain the principal fabric throughout the period, as they did in the Late Bronze Age.

Decoration

Earliest Iron Age

- Decoration is prolific on coarsewares jars, and is focused on the rim (rim-top, rim-exterior and rim-interior), neck, shoulder, and in rare cases, the body and base.
- This is often done across multiple zones of the vessel (e.g. on the rim and shoulder), with rows of finger impressions (finger-tip, finger-nail, and finger pinching) remaining the commonest form of treatment. However, tools were also used to impress, stab and nick the clay, or cordons added, providing a more varied means decoration than in the Late Bronze Age.
- Decoration on fineware bowls also becomes more frequent in this period. These vessels were sometimes adorned with incised or grooved linear, curvilinear and/or geometric lines, again around the neck and shoulder, but also occasionally on the belly.



Tool impressed Earliest Iron Age coarseware jar sherd (Clay Farm)

Early Iron Age

- The frequency of decoration on **coarsewares** seems to gradually fall in Early Iron Age, though many of the techniques remained the same.
- Decoration on the **finewares**, however, became slightly more common, and there emerged various regional styles associated with particular types of fineware bowl. These were classified by Barry Cunliffe as Chinnor-Wandlebury (mainly found in the Cam Valley); Darmsden-Linton (found in parts of southern Cambridgeshire and around the eastern Fen-edge), and Fengate-Cromer or West Harling-Fengate (mainly in the Peterborough region) – the latter having its origins in the Earliest Iron Age.

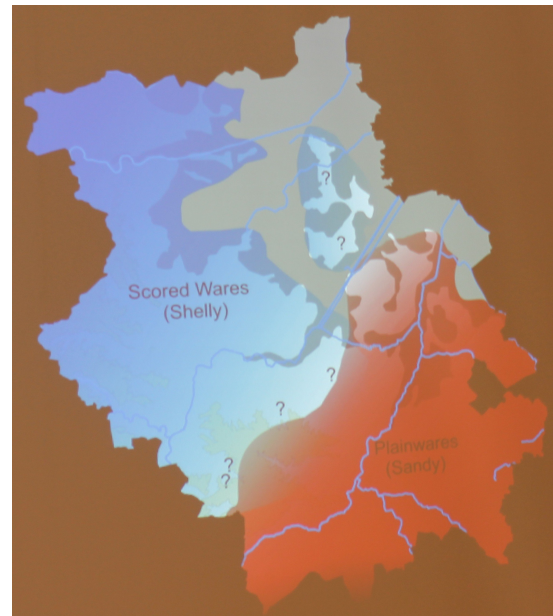
Context

Mainly recovered from pits, waterholes, postholes and structures which form the tangible traces of settlement.

MIDDLE IRON AGE-TYPE POTTERY

Plain wares and Scored wares (c. 350 BC - AD 43/50)

During the fourth century BC, the categorical distinctions between coarsewares and finewares and jars, bowls and cups which defined the PDR ceramic tradition began to break down. In their place, a more restricted range of **slack-shouldered jar forms** came to dominate the pottery service, with bowls and cups largely disappearing from the ceramic record. The new handmade forms of this period have long currencies which do not fit comfortably within the traditional divisions of a Middle Iron Age (c. 350-100 BC) and Late Iron Age (c. 100BC – AD 43). The terminology is confusing, and for this reason some prefer the label 'later' Iron Age ceramics. However, any label where date is defined in the name is always problematic, especially since nothing has changed more in the last 100 years than the chronologies give to periods in prehistory and their associated ceramics. Be that as it may, the term '**Middle Iron Age-type pottery**' will be used here.



In Cambridgeshire there are two main types of potting tradition in this period:

- The **Scored Ware tradition** is found mainly in the lower Ouse Valley and northwards to Peterborough, and is characterised by shelly wares with incised or scored external surfaces (labelled **Breedon-Ancaster Ware** by Barry Cunliffe).
- The **Plain Ware tradition**, found mainly to the east of the River Ouse and across southern Cambridgeshire. This is characterised by plain sandy ware pots. The vessel forms of these traditions are broadly similar, but the fabrics and surface treatments are distinct.

Forms

- Slack- or weakly-shouldered jars and barrel-shaped vessels with no shoulder or distinct rim-zone.
- Necks on most jars are short, upright or slightly out-tuned, with rims normally displaying simple flattened or rounded lips.
- Omphalos bases disappear, and foot-ring bases become extremely rare.
- Clear bowl forms are often hard to distinguish, except for globular 'fish-bowl' shaped pots, with slightly beaded rims. These are normally burnished, and



*Middle Iron Age Scored Ware jar rim
(Barleycroft)*

sometimes decorated with curvilinear motifs whose designs echoes patterns found on some metalwork. These are very distinctive, and do not seem to appear before the second century BC in the region.

Fabrics

- Scored wares are commonly shell tempered, and usually have coarse and poorly-sorted inclusions (mainly 2-5mm in size, with some exceeding 8mm).
- The Plain wares from southern Cambridgeshire generally have dense sandy fabrics. Vessel walls tend to be fairly thick.

Decoration

- Finger tip decoration is found on some pots, but nearly always restricted to the rim, particularly the rim-top.
- Scoring, obviously, is quite prolific in Scored ware assemblages, but Scored wares can be found in Plain wares assemblages too, albeit in small numbers (some presumably acquired by exchange with Scored ware-using communities).
- Occasionally, a small number of burnished bowls or other vessels may display curvilinear decorative motifs (see above).



Middle Iron Age Plain Ware jar base (Barleycroft)

Context

Mainly recovered from pits, ditches, enclosures and roundhouse eaves-gullies.

LATE IRON AGE-TYPE POTTERY

'Belgic' related ceramics (c. 100 BC - AD 43/60)

Although ceramics of the Middle Iron Age-type tradition are found throughout the period conventionally known as the Late Iron Age in Cambridgeshire (c. 100 BC – AD 43), in the first century BC we see the arrival of a new ceramic tradition in which **grog-tempered** pottery forms a significant component, and **wheel-made** ceramics make their first appearance. The new forms, technologies and fabrics of this '**Belgic**' related potting tradition are found alongside 'traditional' handmade Middle Iron Age-type wares. In other words, there is no wholesale replacement: the two traditions coexisted throughout the period, and are found together on most sites. The rate at which Belgic-related ceramics were grafted



into pre-existing potting traditions varied across Cambridgeshire, with responses seeming to differ between adjacent sites and communities.

In general, Belgic pottery appears to have been adopted earlier in Southern Cambridgeshire, and is more prolific in the old heartland of communities which used Plain Ware Middle Iron Age-type ceramics. It first appears in cremations, some of which pre-date the mid first century BC. However, current dating evidence (although slim) suggests that it was not until the second half of the first century BC that it made a more regular appearance on settlement sites. Moreover, it only seems to become prolific in the first half of the first century AD, particularly in the period immediately before the Roman Conquest. Outside of this region (in the old Scored Ware heartland), adoption was more piecemeal and selective, and frequencies of Belgic pottery are noticeably lower before c. 40 AD. The picture is therefore complex, and to make matters more confusing, some of the wheel-thrown forms allied to the Late Iron Age 'Belgic' tradition have a currency which post-dates the Roman Conquest by at least a decade or more, and can still be found in Iron Age-type (or 'native') sandy fabrics alongside Romanizing wares.

Forms

- The adoption of the potter's wheel allowed for the production of a more varied ceramic repertoire, which went hand in hand with a return to a visual and function distinction between **coarseware** 'cooking' pots/kitchen wares, and **finewares/tablewares** used for serving, eating and drinking.
- Jars, bowls, cups and platters can be identified (though the latter are rare). Jars and bowls tend to have rounded shoulders and upright or out-turned necks, sometimes slightly off-set from the shoulder. Rims are normally everted and have rounded or beaded lips. However, some coarseware jar rims have a distinctive internally thickening, and late vessels can have internal lid-seats. The more elaborate pedestal jars of this tradition are mainly found in cremations.
- Tazza-type vessels - wheel-made carinated cups & bowls with constricted waists and foot-ring or pedestal bases - are more widespread on settlements, but are also common in burial contexts.

Fabrics

- The most distinctive fabric is **grog**. The coarseware fabrics have moderate to common poorly-sorted medium and coarse grog (mainly 1-3mm in size), which is normally dark grey, brown or buff in colour, whilst in the finewares the grog is finer (<1.5mm in size) and moderately well-sorted.
- However **sandy wares** tend to dominate, particularly in southern Cambridgeshire, and are commonly hard-fired.

Decoration

- Wheel-made pots and handmade vessels that imitate wheel-made pots are often cordoned, rippled or corrugated on, or immediately above, the shoulder. Some may also be decorated with grooved horizontal lines in this zone.
- Some fineware jars and bowls have burnished linear bands or lattice lines on the body

and belly.

- Combing is especially common on the body and shoulder of coarseware jars. The quality of the execution varies. On the body, vertical combing is most common, but on the shoulder, overlapping arcs are more frequent. The manner of combing can sometimes be confused with scoring on Scored Wares, but the fabrics are usually quite distinct (Scored Wares tend to have shelly fabrics, whereas combed Late Iron Age wares have grog or sandy fabrics).

Context

- Mainly recovered from pits, ditches, enclosures and roundhouse eaves-gullies. Earliest pots appear to come from cremations.