ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

REPORT

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TITLE Saxon pottery from Harrold Pit, Odell, Bedfordshire

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INTRODUCTION

A number of samples of Saxon pottery from dated contexts (see below) were submitted for examination. All the sherds were initially viewed with the aid of a binocular microscope (x 20), and a selection were then studied in thin section under the petrological microscope. The object of the analysis was to see if there was any appreciable difference in the fabric of the pottery from the site over a period of some 150 years.

PETROLOGY AND FABRIC

Pottery was examined from the following features:

1) F283 (in use after A.D. 524).
2) F86I (in use after A.D. 573).
3) FI23 (constructed after A.D. 607).
4) Saxon well (? c. A.D. 685).
5) F46 (Saxon pit, no dating available).
6) F325 (Saxon pit, no dating available).

When viewed in the hand-specimen and under the binocular microscope, the fabric of the majority of sherds appears to be very similar. This is a hard, fairly rough sandy fabric in various shades of dark grey. Numerous quartz grains are scattered throughout the clay, often protruding through the surfaces and giving the material a 'pimply' look, though some samples have received a light burnishing to the outer surface, making it reasonably smooth. Small pieces of sandstone and limestone can usually be seen in most of the sherds. There is, however, some visual variety in the material, i.e. Saxon well sherd (8) contains a more than average amount of sandstone, and FI23(3) is somewhat vesicular in appearance.

Thin sectioning of selective samples confirms the visual fabric identification. The clay body of the sherds analyzed contains numerous grains of quartz, and a scatter of fragments of quartz sandstone and limestone, with the odd piece of fossiliferous shell present in some of the samples. There is thus no indication of any dramatic change in the fabric, and by implication the source(s), of the Odell pottery during the period of occupation of the site. Odell is situated on Boulder Clay, with deposits of Great Oolite limestone, Cornbrash, Oxford Clay and Upper Esturine limestone situated closeby, and Northamptonshire Ironstone 3 miles to the north. All the materials present in the Odell pottery could have been obtained within a reasonable distance of the find-site, and there seems no reason to suspect anything other than a fairly local origin.