Iron Age Pottery from Salmonby

S. M. Elsdon

In the 1950s and 1960s Mr Geoffrey Taylor and his brother, Mr D. B. Taylor, farmed land in the parishes of Salmonby and Tetford. They made many archaeological discoveries dating from the Palaeolithic onwards. Some of the important Neolithic and early Bronze Age finds are recorded by May (1976, 77-80) and details of other finds can be found in earlier volumes of this journal (1966-8).

The present study concerns the Iron Age pottery from a single field in Salmonby, at the southern end of the Lincolnshire Wolds near to Horncastle. A study of the Neolithic and Bronze Age flints and barrows from the same field as the pottery under discussion in this article was also published in this journal (Phillips et al. 1990). The site is located on the south bank of the River Lynn at National Grid Reference TF 318 748. It was called Field AB by Geoffrey Taylor, who assigned a unique letter code to all the fields he examined. The area was first investigated in 1969 by Geoffrey and Shirley Taylor when they walked over the field after ploughing, which had exposed many dark areas with pottery sherds on the surface. Assistance was given by Mr J. T. Hayes of Branston, Dr Anderson of Spilsby and Mrs Mayes of Horncastle.

In 1973, when the field was to be to be cultivated further, Mr Taylor obtained permission to excavate in order to recover as much as was possible in the limited time available; a few days in the late autumn and five days at Easter 1974. A sketch plan of the features was made at the time but never surveyed in to the field boundaries so that the exact position of the features cannot now be located. Fig. 2 is based on the sketch plan, prepared by Geoffrey Taylor.

Most of the Iron Age pottery came from two ditches which were adjacent to a small hut. The hut was oval in shape defined by a line of 9\(^\circ\) diameter postholes, some of which had packing stones, located along its internal western edge. The lower level of the hut floor, of which about one quarter was cleared, was 2-3\(^\circ\) thick and contained a few pottery sherds within its make-up. The hut was bounded by a deep ditch on the southern side and this was joined by a further ditch which cut it. Within the earlier ditch were several pot sherds including the greater part of a large storage jar (Fig. 4.23). The ditch also contained animal teeth, burnt clay and scraps of charcoal. It was apparently quickly filled as there were no distinct layers within its fill. The hut site was covered in plastic and the post holes were marked with stones as the intention was to return the following year but, in the event, was not further recorded.

This hut and associated ditches was part of a more extensive Iron Age complex and overlay a Neolithic/Bronze Age area of occupation evidenced by finds of this period. Ditch E was about 2\(^\circ\) deep with a rounded base. It contained small potsherds, burnt clay charcoal and worked flint. The ditch C complex was a single ditch in places and double in others. Depths of the ditches varied from 1\(^\circ\) to 2\(^\circ\).

THE POTTERY (Figs. 3-5)

This report is based on a single day's assessment of the complete pottery assemblage at Bradford where Mr Taylor now lives. The drawn sherds were extracted from the collection for more detailed study.

The total weight of the pottery recovered is 30.83 kg. Most of the material comes from ditches in proximity of the hut which were excavated in 1973 and 74. Two illustrated sherds (1 and 2) come from the hut and nine (Fig. 3, 5, 10, 14; 5, 23, 25, 26, 29) from the hut ditch.

Fabric

The pottery was examined under X10 and X30 microscopes. It is basically all the same dense sandy fabric with lumps of quartz sandstone filler and occasional grog. A vesicular fabric with a light 'corky' texture is a variation on the basic fabric. Many of the vesicular fabric sherds contain angular voids and a laminated structure shows at the breaks. There is now no indication of the original contents of the voids and dilute hydrochloric acid failed to react. It is possible, and indeed probable, that the voids contained shell which has entirely leached out. This hypothesis could only be established by thin section analysis which is not available at present but sherds of very similar appearance from Gamston (Notts.) did reveal traces of shell in thin sections (Knight 1992). Both fabrics occur in fine medium and coarse wares although there is a higher proportion of the vesicular fabric in fine wares.

One can only speculate as to the reason for the two fabrics. Perhaps the dense sandy material was more suited to cooking and storage use but a high proportion of the unclassifiable sherds are very thick and highly vesicular. It is possible that a detailed study of the fabrics could be more revealing but resources do not permit this at the moment.

Form and Decoration

The fine wares

1. Small rounded bowls which are decorated or burnished or both (Fig. 1, 2, 4, 6-9). These are hand made and, in some cases, the rim has been finished on a slow wheel. The fabric is either light, corky and vesicular or a dense sandy one, mostly the former.

Fig. 1. Salmonby, location map (F. N. Field)
The decorated sherds are also in the two types of fine fabric; the rouletted ones are 'corky' and those with 'plaited' or grooved decoration and dimple stamps are in the very fine dense sandy fabric. Decoration is incised, rouletted or 'plaited' and the patterns are interlocking arcs or, more commonly, chevrons.

2. The second type of fine ware bowls have everted rims and necks with cordons below (Fig. 3.3, 7, 10, 12). This is a common form and there are many unillustrated examples. In some cases there is vertical smoothing or burnishing on the lower part of the body (Fig. 3.3, 14). Necks sometimes have vertically burnished strips (not illustrated here). Bases are raised foot-rings or dishes (Fig. 3.14, 15). Two or three rims have an internal groove.

3. The hollow-cordoned beaker (Fig. 3.13) is typical of the site but a common enough late Iron Age form elsewhere, e.g. Saffron Gardens, near Bletchley, (Waugh et al. 1974, Fig. 4). It is in the dense sandy fabric and burnished externally. There is one nearer parallel from the Lawn, Lincoln (Darling and Jones, 1988 and Elsdon 1993, C.11).

4. The head-rim jar (Fig. 3.11) is likewise an acceptable late Iron Age form. The one example is in the 'corky' fabric.

5. Bowls are represented by two sherds only (Fig. 3.5, Fig. 5.28) in the dense sandy fabric. No. 28 has a small perforation near the rim and is burnished internally.

There is also one example of a fine, thin-walled jar with interlocking are decoration similar to Dragonby (Eldson and May 1987, Fig. 31, no.1294; May 1996, Fig. 19.54, no. 643).

The coarse wares

The illustrated medium-sized jars are less often in the vesicular fabric, but there are many vesicular sherds belonging to vessels of unidentified forms.

Forms are rounded and the rims are of embryonic head-rim type or everted (Fig. 5.24-27, 32). There are also stubby, upright rim jars with heavy external sooting. Decoration, where present, is light twig brushing but most jars are plain. Some have single horizontal grooves. One sherd (Fig. 5.29), has deep and apparently patterned scoring. Also present are bases which have been perforated subsequent to firing.

There is a high proportion of sherds from large jars, mostly in the 'corky' fabric and some of these have rolled rims (Fig. 5.30, 31). One very large jar was found almost complete in the ditch (Fig. 5.23). It is in the dense sandy fabric. The pottery evidence suggests that large jars were the method of grain storage here rather than pits.

Catalogue of Illustrated Pottery

The references given at the beginning of each description are those assigned by G. Taylor.

1. Hut. Dense sandy fabric with sparse quartz and vegetable filler; brown throughout; sooted internally at rim; hand made. Possible double chevron decoration.

2. Hut. Vesicular fabric, brown throughout; very thin and possibly wheel made; neatly executed pattern of tooled interlocking arcs.

3. Hut ditch P2. Vesicular fabric; brown throughout; probably hand made and rim finished on slow wheel; burnished externally and internally at rim; vertically burnished lines on lower part of body.

4. Hut ditch 2D. Brown vesicular fabric with iron ore fragments on surface; burnished externally andinternally at rim; handmade and wheel finished.

5. Hut ditch 78. Dense, dark brown, sandy fabric; externally burnished; hand made.


7. 474F. Brown 'corky' fabric; angular voids; exterior has darker brown slip; burnished externally and internally at rim; interior eroded; probably wheel made.

8. 5. Slightly vesicular fabric; brown surfaces and dark grey core; fine sandy ware with black iron ore and rounded golden quartz; burnished externally with a stone; hand made.

9. 69 J, lower fill, ditch B complex. Dense brown sandy fabric with minimal filler and only slightly vesicular; burnished externally and internally at rim; hand made and wheel finished.

10. Hut ditch. Brown, highly vesicular fabric with large voids; darker brown slip on both surfaces; possibly wheel made.

11. 69 F, ditch A complex. Light brown 'corky' and very vesicular.

12. Mid brown and only slightly vesicular; externally sooted.

13. 5D. Dense brown fabric and only slightly vesicular; profuse sand and quartz; burnished externally with a flat-ended tool; possible slip on exterior; interior eroded; hand made. Seven sherds.

14. Hut ditch. Dense sandy fabric; brown; profuse rounded sandy filler, poory sorted; vertical smoothing marks. Surface at the top has been joined to another sherd and it would fit with no. 6.

15. 5D. Fine brown, sandy fabric; other sherds show vertically burnished lines on lower part of body.

16. 69 J-Sg, ditch A complex. Dense sandy fabric; dark brown surfaces and lighter core; external Slip; highly burnished with flat-ended tool; 'plaited' decoration bordered by tooled line; curvilinear pattern incorporating a dimple stamp.

17. 69A, ditch A complex. Dense sandy fabric, slightly vesicular; dark brown; burnished externally; large piece of quartz embedded on surface.

18. 69 G, ditch A complex. Dense, sandy, red/brown fabric; tooled line and dimple stamp; burnished.


20. 69 JTF, ditch A complex. Fabric and decoration as above; tooled line on one side of rouletted.


22. In ditch surrounding hut. Very large jar, whole profile present but not available at time of drawing; estimated size; coarse but dense sandy fabric; red surfaces and grey core; blacker towards rim.

23. PL Sandy fabric with small voids; small quantities of grog and small, black shiny particles / iron ore; mica flecks.

24. Hut ditch. Very dense, heavy sandy fabric; brown and sooted externally; small black rounded particles visible; iron ore; thick internal deposit; hand made.

25. Hut ditch. Hard, brown, sandy fabric with well rounded particles; diameter estimated; some external sooting; hand made.


27. 79, Hut ditch. Dark brown sandy fabric; burnished internally; hole bored for suspension.

28. 78, Hut ditch. Small sherd with very deep scored marks in a curved pattern; brown, sandy fabric with large voids.

29. 69 JG, ditch B complex. Large rolled-rim jar in brown vesicular fabric.

30. 3DB. Rolled rim in brown vesicular fabric.

31. 2D, AB 2D, AB 3 TF, AB 7D. A variety of rims in the brown, vesicular fabric.

Fig. 2. Salmonby. Sketch map location of features discovered by G. Taylor in field AB. Based on 1900 OS 1:2500 scale survey (D. Taylor)
Discussion

The decoration of the fine ware in the Salmonby assemblage is significantly different from that on sites in north and central Lincolnshire. Given the geographical circumstances this is perhaps not surprising. In north and mid Lincolnshire the bulk of the decorated pottery recovered has been rouletted. At Salmonby there are a few rouletted sherds with possible curvilinear patterns but the chief decoration is of the tooled chevron type. There is a tooled bowl from Ingoldmells which suggests that there might have been a third school of pottery decoration in the late Iron Age in mid-eastern Lincolnshire, in addition to the two already identified in the north and around the Ancaster Gap (Elsdon 1993). The most interesting facet of this possible new production centre is the 'plaited' line which replaces the double toothed square-notched roulette of northern and central Lincolnshire. This seems to be a new type of locally developed roulette wheel and we must now be on the lookout for further examples of this technique in eastern Lincolnshire.

The nearest known site which has pottery similar to that from Salmonby is from a saltern at Ingoldmells on the Lincolnshire coast (Baker 1960; May 1976, 143-55; Elsdon 1993). In addition to the decorated bowl already mentioned there are bowls similar to no. 3 and others with vertical burnished lines on the neck as at Salmonby. There is also marked similarity in the coarse ware jars.

The quality and quantity of pottery recovered in just five days from this small complex of ditched enclosures suggests a higher standard of living than was current at similar sites in neighbouring Nottinghamshire. At Gamston, for instance, an extensive excavation produced, in fine ware, only one jar very similar to no. 2 and one small sherd of rouletted pottery (Knight 1992). However, the Salmonby collection is not of uncommon richness in Lincolnshire when compared to sites like Draytonby (35 mls/56 km) in the north, Old Sleaford and Ancaster in central Lincolnshire (25 miles/40km south west).

Some, but not all of the pots are wheel made. Several are hand made and the rims are finished on a slow wheel. Both these sites are assumed to date to the latest period of the Iron Age in Lincolnshire, that is to say late first century BC to the Conquest and beyond.

Fig. 4. Salmonby. The decorated Iron Age pottery Scale 1:1 (S. M. Elsdon)
Fig. 5. Salmonby. The Iron Age pottery Scale 1:3 (S. M. Elsdon)

References
May, J., 1976, Prehistoric Lincolnshire.