Horningsea ware on Hadrian’s Wall

Figure 1. Pottery from 59 Denhill Park, Benwell. Scale 1:4

Plate 1. Horningsea reduced ware. (A) original internal surface; (B) damaged surface.
Location
The ware has now been found at all of the forts excavated on the eastern end of Hadrian’s Wall, with examples from South Shields, Wallsend, Newcastle and Benwell. So far it has not been identified further to the west, apart from one possible example from Vindolanda.

Dating
There are no well-stratified examples of the ware in Antonine contexts; it seems likely that it first appeared in the area during the early third century, when the army came to rely heavily on pottery from South-east England and East Anglia. The largest quantities of Horningsea ware appear in third century contexts.

Quantity
The ware, although present at these sites, is not found in large quantities. It makes up less than 1% of any site assemblage.

Types
The most common type found on the Wall is the large storage jar, although there is also at least one narrow-necked jar from South Shields. The most complete example of a storage jar found so far was recovered in late 2007 from just outside Benwell Roman Fort (approximately 40% of the vessel survives).

At the eastern end of the Wall, the typical storage jars found on sites (about 300mm across at the widest point of their body) were supplied by a range of different industries, including those in South-east England and the Severn Valley. The larger jars (500mm or more at their widest point) are less common, and come from only a few sources. While examples in North Kent Shelly ware were found at South Shields and one in pink grogged ware was found at Wallsend, Horningsea is the largest supplier of these larger storage jars. However, the small quantities of the larger jars involved suggest they were not regularly traded to the north as unused vessels, but may have been used as containers in some small-scale trade of an unknown commodity.