

NEWSLETTER 29 - January 2001

Welcome to the Winter Newsletter.

Committee News:

A new committee was elected during the AGM at Chelmsford so the line-up now looks like this:

President: Rob Perrin Hon. Secretary: Alice Lyons Hon. Editor: Jude Plouviez

Membership: Louise Rayner Hon. Treasurer: Ted Connell
Ordinary Members Fiona Seeley, Annette Hancock, Maggi Darling and
Vivien Swan

A well-attended committee meeting was held at The Museum of London on the 20th January 2001. The forthcoming **conference at Liverpool University, to be held between the Fri 15th-Sun 17th June**, was on the agenda. Anyone who would consider speaking on their recent work, or has pottery to display or books to sell should contact **Vivien Swan** on (01904) 468335 as soon as possible. The need for two new committee members, when the term of office for Fiona Seeley and Annette Hancock runs out was also raised. A nomination paper for these positions is attached to this Newsletter and I would be grateful if they could be returned to me (with the permission of those nominated) as soon as is convenient.

Notice Board

- Congratulations to Vivien Swan, who has won this year's RBK Stevenson Award from the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, for her paper 'Legio XX and the History of the Antonine Wall Reconsidered', which stems from her work on pottery in Scotland.
- The annual Roman Pottery Bibliography. Colin Wallace reports that his two sides of A4 were discussed at the Writtle (Chelmsford) meeting. The Bibliography's contents, coverage, function and scope remain as set out in the August notes. Most of the gaps have been sorted out with contributors and regular production will begin again, with the completion of two tranches of Bibliography for the Journal (as described in point 5) and a deadline of December each year for new material. Thanks go to all the existing contributors.
- Miniature Pots. Members may have seen David Graham's recent posting on **Britarch** about Romano-British miniature pots. Details of diminutive vessels (cf. the ones from Coleshill, Uley, Verulamium Triangular Temple, Ivy Chimneys Witham, Elms Farm and Binsted) in useful contexts would be gratefully received by Mr Graham (david-graham@email.msn.com).
- During the recent meeting of the SGRP at Writtle a visit to the Harlow Museum was arranged. The Museum Officer, Chris Lydamore, felt that it was an opportunity to build and fire a pottery kiln to coincide with the visit and also for the general public to

see a replica ancient kiln fired. A working potter, Andrew Macdonald, (01552-528994), who has a deep interest in reproducing Roman pottery, was also invited to demonstrate throwing and decorating pots during the visit. A full description of this event can be found in the electronic ceramic discussion group at: arch-pot@egroups.com. Attempts to repair the kiln and carry out a reduction firing (to produce grey wares) are now planned for the spring 2001. SGRP members may keep in touch with the progress of repairing and firing the kiln by contacting Harlow Museum (01279 454959), visitors during these events are welcome.

- **DO YOU HAVE AN EMAIL ADDRESS?**

If so, we would like to know it. There are often times throughout the year that an item of news occurs that would be of interest to members. The cost of postage means that it would have to be **very** important to circulate it. However the cost of sending one or one hundred emails is exactly the same. So please email Ted Connell at ted.connell@btinternet.com with your email address if you have one.

- **DO YOU USE THE WWW AS A RESEARCH TOOL?**

The World Wide Web is reputed to be the place where you can find out any and everything. But to the novice surfer the chance of finding useful web sites that give information about roman pottery is like looking for a needle in a haystack. There must be somewhere, wonderful pictures and drawings of samian pottery, but I cannot find them (perhaps they are all in French).

Do you know of any web sites where you can look at pictures and drawings of pottery to help you identify that unusual or even mundane piece of pottery in your collection? If so please email Ted Connell at ted.connell@btinternet.com with its' address code. Equally if you are interested in knowing of **such** web sites that members might email me, then email me and I will pass them on.

- Good News, the Study Group Now has it's very own web site. So log on now at: www.sgrp.org

Conference News

A very enjoyable and successful SGRP conference was hosted by Scott Martin at Writtle College, Chelmsford between the 1st-3rd of September 2000.

Synopsis of papers given. Thanks to all the contributors.

Work on Roman pottery from Chelmsford post Going - C. Wallace

Chris Going's 1987 *The Mansio and other sites in the south-eastern sector of Caesaromagus: the Roman Pottery* was the only book Graham Webster ever told me to buy, rather than just read. Its impact was huge, with proper considerations of pottery as dating evidence and discussions of pottery supply and use following on from good clear fabric descriptions and a properly worked out form series. Guided by Going, work on the pottery from the 1980s excavations has not sought to repeat his work, but instead analysis has focused on new contributions. For example, the 1970s site-sequence becomes patchy after lateC2/earlyC3, so there is added interest in C3 groups from the later excavations (baths and the defences' backfilling). The so-called 'Antonine Fire' horizon in Essex has been given a doing-over as well. Much more speculative are ideas based on contrastive site histories by the Late Roman

period, where location has conditioned access to the pottery rather than its position in any hierarchy of sites. This idea taken to the extreme could mean that quantified data could be almost as good as a map reference for locating sites in the late C4AD (see Scott's paper for the real stuff).

Early Gaulish Pottery Imports (c. 20 BC to AD 75) at Elms Farm, Heybridge and the Occurrence of these Wares in Essex and Beyond. - Steven Willis

This paper conveyed the preliminary results of the study of the early Gaulish pottery recovered at Elms Farm, focusing upon its sources, typology, chronology and quantities. Much of the data presented drew on the collective work of the Elms Farm pottery team (and in particular by Joyce Compton). It is now clear that Elms Farm has produced the most numerous and important collection of Central Gaulish wares so far excavated in Britain, this assemblage being of Augustan character. (Only at Silchester, perhaps, has a comparable range and amount of such imports been unearthed). In contrast the quantities of genuine Gallo-Belgic/North Gaulish pottery (Terra Rubra, Terra Nigra and White Wares, etc), which in Britain essentially succeed the Central Gaulish imports, are modest. The spatial incidence of these various types across the Elms Farm site was briefly examined. The paper discussed these imports and considered the pattern seen at Elms Farm as against that of Essex sites generally. Elsewhere in Essex, Central Gaulish imports do occur though very rarely, being, at best, only sporadically recorded. Gallo-Belgic/North Gaulish pottery types are more widespread, but, as elsewhere in Britain tend in Essex either to occur in small amounts (representing solitary vessels or a handful of items), or to appear in strong concentrations (as at Camulodunum and Fingringhoe). The paper looked also at trends in the phenomenon of 'local' copying of these imported forms. The contribution of the Elms Farm pottery assemblage for engaging the character of the site in the Late Iron Age and conquest period, and for wider regional studies, was emphasised.

Heybridge Essex: new light on the wine trade. - P.Sealey

Excavations at Elms Farm produced the largest assemblage of Dressel 1 amphorae found in Britain since 1945. Imports of wine to the site peaked in the late 1st century BC when Dressel 1 was still in production. After the end of Dressel 1 c.10 BC, imports of wine declined significantly and remained depressed for the next fifty years. The same trend has been noted in Gaul, and is also reflected in the number of shipwrecks with Dressel 1 and Dressel 2-4 amphorae. In Britain the difficulty of obtaining imported wine in the first four or five decades AD explains why high-status graves and cemeteries are so poorly endowed with wine then. The root cause of this decline seems to have been increased consumption of wine in Italy.

Elms Farm: Aspects of pottery supply from the later 1st to 4th century - E.Biddulph

Five pottery kilns were excavated at Elms Farm, providing evidence for intermittent pottery production from the late 2nd to early 4th century. The most interesting example comprised two kiln structures sharing a single stoke hole, and dates to the late 2nd and/or early 3rd century AD. Both kilns were built with a single flue and central pedestal – so-called 'Wattisfield'-type. The pedestal and flue of this kiln was built partially with mortaria and some grey ware sherds. The mortaria was set in an apparently radial fashion with some rims facing the edge. While the use of a single stoke hole suggests that both kilns were at one stage contemporary, it is not clear if they were built at the same time. The difference in construction technique could well suggest that the kilns were built at different times. But it is also possible that the re-use of pottery represents repair, which would give very little indication as regards to precedence. Products fired in them include grey ware jars and beakers, and probably the mortaria, also. Some of these mortaria were stamped. These are virtually unique.

Another major kiln, comprising a single-flue with central pedestal type was located to the south away from the centre of the site. This example was later than the previous kilns, dating to the late 3rd or early 4th century. Products, made in grey wares and black-surfaced ware, were predominantly dishes and jars.

The final two kilns were again located in the southern area. The pottery recovered from them was of very poor quality and no forms could be definitely assigned to them. But it seems likely that grey ware products were fired in both, probably dating to the first half of the 3rd century.

Together, the evidence suggests intermittent production. There are too few signs of repair to suggest that the kilns had anything but short life spans, perhaps even less than a year. The Elms Farm potters seem to have had fairly limited repertoires – again a symptom of short periods of production. Taking this as read, the absence of more kilns, even any which might fill in the gaps between known production dates, suggests that pottery production did not take place throughout the Roman period. But assuming continuous production, what sort of evidence might we expect? A single potter using a single, but constantly maintained, kiln could probably supply most, if not all, of the site's pottery needs. So, we'd only need to find evidence for, say, one potter per generation. On that basis, we can quickly estimate, assuming that, with a life expectancy of around 40 years, there was a working life of around 25 years. There should then be a minimum of 16 potters working within a 400-year period. Each kiln provides evidence for a minimum of one potter. So we've found at least five already. Also, if potters set up business near to fuel sources, i.e. woodland, we are hardly likely to find many kilns within a settlement, or even on the edges of it.

Elms Farm was not dependent on the big production centres, like Colchester, to supply its pottery, certainly not during times of production. More crucially, Elms Farm provides evidence that specialised forms, like mortaria, were sometimes 'home made'.

Late Roman Essex - T.S.Martin

The aim of this paper was to provide a synthesis of recent work (much of it unpublished) in the county that has provided important insights into pottery supply and use in the period after c. AD 350. This corresponds to ceramic phase 8 in the Chelmsford time-sequence. In this period 'new' fabrics arrive in Essex in the shape of Oxfordshire red colour-coat and Late shell-tempered ware. The evidence for the late dating of these fabrics was briefly reviewed, although only Oxfordshire red colour-coat was examined in depth. Important data from Braintree was cited as evidence for this fabric not being available until the 380's at the earliest. Evidence for what happened in the 5th century was also discussed. Data from Elms Farm, Heybridge suggests that locally made pottery may have declined considerably in this period, while a tantalising group from Aveley may be mid 5th century. This group (albeit small) was comprised entirely of Oxfordshire red colour-coat, Late shell-tempered ware, Portchester D, and Alice Holt grey ware. It is suggested that this group was deposited at a time when no locally made pottery was available.

Pottery from Cremation burials - E.Biddulph

History books will tell you that vessels deposited into cremation burials contained food and drink for the soul's journey to the underworld. I would like to challenge this very firmly established interpretation or, at least, explain why it cannot fit all of the evidence all of the time. Many burials contained a standard suite of vessel types. A typical burial might contain a liquid-serving vessel (flagon or flask), a drinking vessel (cup or beaker), and a food vessel

(dish or bowl). This conforms to a 'dinner table setting'. Some combinations of vessels are more difficult to reconcile with it. Burials may contain, say, two flagons and a beaker. Well, the soul is all right for drink, but what about food? Sometimes, vessel function changed with the way that the vessel was deposited into the burial. One of the more common practices was to turn vessels upside-down. It is obvious to say that such vessels cannot physically have held food. In other burials, vessels may be placed on their sides, resting against urns, or placed below urns. Vessels that served as lids or other unknowable purposes that required their inversion cannot have been used for eating and drinking. Occasionally, there is evidence for deliberate breakage or mutilation. Presumably, vessels were 'killed' in order to pass from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead. Oddly, a single burial may contain a mixture of killed and non-killed vessels. The breaking of a vessel destroys its earthly function. A flagon cannot hold liquid if it's got a hole in its base. Since the interpretation that vessels carried food and drink offerings depends on the vessels retaining both form and function, it seems reasonable to suggest that if a vessel could not function as a food/drink vessel in life, it could not function as a food/drink vessel in death.

Vessel destruction and inversion reminds us that functions and meanings change with the burial act. A vessel found in a burial pit might have a completely different meaning, or function, to the same type of vessel found in a rubbish pit. But also, two burials may contain a beaker each, but the only thing that the vessels share is form. Meaning (the reasons why the vessels were chosen) may substantially differ.

But, why is the range of vessels chosen narrow and standard? I would argue that a standard range is an inevitable result of classification, whereby pots are placed in pre-existing and pre-defined categories.

Ultimately, we cannot prove any interpretation. We should, though, acknowledge that the evidence doesn't always fit a single interpretation, and that other explanations are required.

Aspects of pottery supply to Alcester and the Arrow Valley - J.Evans

There appear to be three patterns of pottery deposition in the early-mid 1st century represented in the Alcester area. That at Tiddington, Wasperton and Salford Priors which ties in to sites to the south and east in Oxfordshire and Northants, with the large scale use of grog-tempered 'Belgic' wares. A different pattern seems to be represented in the Bidford Grange material, which ties in with the rest of the Severn Valley, a region that shows a remarkable homogeneity in its pottery use. Where 'Belgic' forms appear in early Severn Valley wares, and storage jars and cooking pots in organically tempered and Malvernian fabrics. The Alcester assemblage is rather different and rather more 'Roman' which may perhaps represent its putative role as a fort and vicus at this date.

The differences between the Tiddington and Salford Priors type assemblages and those, generally, to the west are sharp and would seem to suggest a fairly 'hard' boundary. This might represent a boundary that might separate the territory of the northern Dobunni in some form from the Corieltauvi. This putative boundary, with minor changes, would seem to be followed by Severn Valley wares. It is worth remarking that the Severn Valley region is unique in Roman Britain in having an oxidising tradition dominant for its coarsewares, and for maintaining this throughout the Roman period. As Timby has suggested the tradition would seem to originate in the later Iron Age. It was largely used for prestigious Gallo-Belgic types. Indeed perhaps the association of oxidised wares and high-status pottery types helped to ensure the success of the tradition. The survival of this unique tradition in the area, and the

production of a fairly restricted repertoire of types at a number of independent kiln sites within the region, argues in itself that the ceramic pattern reflects some wider social unit. Fulford and Allen have demonstrated that Severn Valley wares have a plateau-like distribution, with a large part of the region having over 40% of Severn Valley wares in assemblages and a very sharp fall-off at the boundaries. Supposing the Severn Valley ware distribution is in some way significant, to what does it relate? Not to the extent of the Dobunni region as a whole, certainly.

A high proportion of ceramic drinking vessels in assemblages seems to be typical of groups from the Severn Valley region. It might be that the differences between assemblages in this region and elsewhere are to be chiefly accounted for by the production of tankards in ceramic form here and purely in organic materials elsewhere. However, tankard handles are far from common small finds on Roman sites and it does seem quite likely that the frequency of drinking vessels in this region reflects a genuine difference in the functional composition of vessels in all material in use in the Roman period. Speculatively one might suggest a society where the consumption of drink, presumably alcoholic (? cider/? beer) was deeply embedded in social relations and that the conversion of agricultural surplus into such and the provision of hospitality with this was a means of acquiring and/or maintaining social standing. Either way this unique regional feature in the composition of pottery assemblages would appear here to go back to the Iron Age and not to have been a result of 'Romanization' in ceramic use.

Pottery and Romanization (Creolization) - Nick Cooper, University of Leicester Archaeological Services

The paper aimed to make pottery researchers realise that their data are now (or should be) considered desirable property by the wider academic community. Material Culture studies are now considered 'sexy' and along with other items of portable material culture such as glass, small finds and coins, pottery has an important contribution to make as probably the best index of economic and social change in Roman Britain. The quantified analysis of site assemblages in terms of relative amounts of imports, regional and local wares was shown to produce distinct urban and rural patterns in a similar way to Jerry Evans' work on vessel forms. Comparison was drawn with the situation in America where material culture studies are held in high regard. In particular, parallels were drawn between the process of Romanization and that of Creolization (the unique hybrid of African and English culture found in the Southern States) and the impact of the 'Georgian world view' in order to highlight potential avenues of research.

An edited volume of related papers; S.Pearce (Ed) 'Researching Material Culture', Leicester Archaeology Monograph 7, is to be published before Christmas. For further information contact Alan McWhirr at the University (adm3@le.ac.uk). Also out before Christmas is Nick Cooper's 'Archaeology of Rutland Water' (Leicester Archaeology Monograph 6) which contains the only Roman pottery groups to be published from Rutland since Great Casterton in the 1960s! For further information contact Richard Buckley (rjb16@le.ac.uk) or myself (njc9@le.ac.uk).

The Pottery from Cambridge - J. Pullinger

A total of 252,200 sherds were examined 158,490 of which were stratified. The pottery included imported wares, samian, Lyon ware (rough coated), St.Remy, Rhenish and amphorae from Gaul, south Spain and North Africa. British sources for mica-dusted wares were West Stow, Wattisfield and London. Colour coated wares came from various sources

but mainly the Nene Valley, whilst red polished wares came mainly from Oxford with some from Much Hadham and the Harston Obelisk kilns. Coarse wares, buff, grey and black came from Cherry Hinton war ditch kilns, Horningsea, Milton, Jesus Lane, and the Roman town itself. The sources of BB1 and BB2 are unknown, but thought to be from kilns somewhere in East Anglia. Shell tempered ware tailed off in the middle of the 2nd century but increased greatly in the late 3rd and 4th centuries. Belgic forms of vessels continued until the end of the 1st century, gradually modifying.

Important features were the Claudian ditch, a late 1st century well, the fort ditch, a shrine and infant burial shafts. Also there were kilns in the north of the town, one small one attempting to make colour-coated wares in the early 4th century and a larger one producing mainly large coarse indented beakers was also found. Fabric types are listed, in the recently published volume.

It is particularly interesting to see the 1st century 'military' types and those vessels used for ritual purposes in the later centuries.

For more detail see: Alexander J and Pullinger J., 1999. Roman Cambridge. Excavations on Castle Hill 1956-1988. Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society. Volume LXXXVIII.

(We regret to announce that Joyce Pullinger died on 25th September 2002)

A pre-Flavian pit group from Stanwick, Northants - E. McSloy

This paper looked at pit group dating probably to the period c. 50-70AD and the wider issue of 'supply' of fine wares in the 1st century AD. The assemblage in question derived from a pit associated with an untypical regular rectangular ditched enclosure. The assemblage is unusual in many respects, particularly in the concentration of non-native tradition fine wares, including samian and 'silty-wares'. The treatment of this material is also unusual, with many vessels burnt and all seemingly highly fragmented. The occurrence of human bone in the pit adds to the impression that this is in some way a 'special deposit'.

Silty ware pottery is known from a number of sites in central south-east England in forms copying TR and TN beakers/platters as well as North Gaulish flagon types. The ware type would seem to represent the first native produced ware type to be 'traded' in the period after AD43. Only one production site has so far been discovered, that at Rushden, Northants. Despite the close proximity of this site to Stanwick, only one vessel from the 'special' pit deposit and few vessels from Stanwick in general can be attributed to Rushden. This would seem to support the assertion of the Rushden excavator that the kiln products were intended primarily for a specialist, probably military market. Stylistic differences to be seen in silty ware vessels known from Stanwick tend to suggest that a number of production centres are represented. Such evidence would seem to fit with the model (proposed elsewhere), for the LPRIA in the region, which sees Gallo Belgic and other exotic ceramics finding its way into the hands of the population by means of gift exchange.

Funnels and Strainer Bowls - C. Wallace

Round-bottomed strainer bowls (e.g. Gillam 348 & Young C118) are an uncommon form (one-per-site?). The bowl shapes of the R-B finds studied are varied, but arguably what is important is the general type and the perforations. They date to all periods, from LIA/ER to Late Roman. As to context associations, they do not occur in burial-groups, but otherwise no pattern has been observed. Without chemical analysis, the simple term 'strainer' would seem to be sufficient in itself to cover function (though not everyone at Writtle agreed with this!). As a class, they have been worth studying, not least because as they lie between everyday forms and highly-specialised ones (like planting pots), they are just about widespread enough

and just specialised enough to be illuminating – if looked at on a province-wide level, like all such ‘funnies’. It is interesting that flat-bottomed strainer-bowls (e.g. Colchester 298) would seem to be early Roman (Alice Holt excepted!), as if it became clear that a large area of perforations was going to be necessary, such that only round-bottomed vessels could provide. Most R-B finds have a medium-to-large area perforated and small ones tend to be early, again as if the form settled down after experimentation.

Wine Coolers - T. S. Martin

This unusual bowl form was defined and its morphological characteristics described in detail. The key characteristic is the lid, which was fixed to the sidewalls before firing and has a narrow central aperture. It is also pierced by a number of fine strainer-like holes, which are generally arranged in triangles although letters are known. Just over 30 of these vessels have been identified in Britain and are widely distributed, although none are known from Scotland or the south-west of England. Other than in Britain these vessels are concentrated on the Rhineland. In Britain they occur on a wide range of sites and are especially common on military sites and vici outside forts, but are not exclusive to them. They occur in a wide range of fabrics, although none are known to be the products of the major industries. Evidence from Germany suggests that these vessels may have had a very specialised function, perhaps involving the preparation of an alcoholic drink of some kind.

"Late Iron Age and early Roman Spouted Strainer Bowls" - P. Sealey

The pottery spouted strainer bowls found in Britain are copies of bronze versions. Although conventional wisdom sees them as wine strainers, this is misconceived. There are no prototypes for them in the Roman world and in Britain there is no consistent association of strainer bowls with wine amphorae. It is more likely they were used for straining vegetable additives out of the so-called Celtic beer.

The Scole Temple Miniature Ceramic Cauldron - Alice Lyons

The basic components of this vessel are:

1. The cauldron has a diameter of 135mm (which is half the normal size of a utilitarian metal cauldron of the same design).
2. It's slightly angled rim (not designed to place a lid on)
3. An upright collar
4. Swelling body
5. Rounded base
6. At the junction of the collar with the body is a band of what might be taken for rivets but are in fact stamped circular impressions
7. Originally two-but now only one surviving free running loop hangs from a 'D' section lug situated just below the rim. It is interesting that wear marks show quite clearly under the surviving loop in its rest position, but no wear marks show on the other side. This suggests that the vessel survived, and was used, long after it ceased to be – in the strictest sense- a suspended vessel. There are also wear marks on the vessel base that indicate that it was not suspended at all times (or not at all after the loss of one of its loops).

This is a wheel made vessel the fabric of which is a good quality micaceous grey ware; consistent with the pottery made at Wattisfield in north Suffolk. The Wattisfield kiln site lies approximately 15km to the south-west of Scole. This is a rare form that appears to be most commonly found in East Anglia, Norfolk and Suffolk particularly. It is a form that has

preserved a native (Iron Age) vessel type into the latter part of the Roman period. Most of the examples cited (where dating is possible) are confined to the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. It was a form that was valued, worth keeping in use after sustaining damage. It was used on temple sites or in graves or as hoard containers- all activities where a vessel had a particular status or value to be acceptable.

Face Pots in East Anglia - G. Braithwaite

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries two types of face pot predominate, a two or three-handled face jar in buff or white-slipped wares, and a grey face jar with no handles, but which often has a frilled rim and/or a notched cordon on the shoulder. The handled face pots begin in the later 1st century and continue through into the 4th, and are found mainly in the south-east, with a few scattered examples on military sites across the rest of Britain. The grey face pots seem to start in the 2nd century and continue into the early 4th; they occur mainly in East Anglia, but also in north Kent and in north-east England. The grey face pots are of very similar form to Romano-British smith pots which have applied smith's tools on the shoulder; they have a similar distribution to them, and in several cases these grey face pots also have smith's tools on them.

On the Continent face pots are found almost exclusively in the heavily militarised areas along and behind the defended river frontiers of the Rhine and the Danube, and in areas of military or former military activity. They appear to be closely associated with the Roman army and with its veterans and military families. In Britain however they are found as much if not more within the civilian zones, though always in areas of former military occupation. It is suggested that the grey face pots found in East Anglia could represent veteran settlement in this region, begun during the occupation of the East Anglian forts in the wake of the Boudiccan rebellion. Such occupation could have continued throughout the 2nd century in preference to the as yet very unsettled conditions in the northern military zone.

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