

ROMANO-BRITISH POTTERY FROM PERRY OAKS

by Kayt Brown

Introduction

The excavations at WPR98 and POK96 produced a total of 2287 sherds of Romano-British pottery, weighing 26,784 g. This material spans the entire Roman period. The vast majority of the assemblage was recovered from WPR98, with only 60 sherds (449g) of late Roman pottery recovered from POK96. No Romano-British pottery was recovered from Northern Taxiway (GAI 99) or from Grass Area 21 (GAA 00).

Nature of assemblage

The assemblage was on the whole in a poor condition and surface treatments were not well preserved. The average sherd weight (8.6g) reflects the poor condition of much of these sherds (see Table 1 below). A total of 59% of the sherds were recorded as being in poor or very poor condition, comprising only 32% of the total weight. Most context groups are small in size, comprising badly abraded sherds: 150 contexts produced only 5 or less sherds and only 25 contexts produced more than 30 sherds. The larger, better preserved material includes the material from the sequence of wells, which represents in one instance a complete, if fragmentary, late Roman flask. A relatively limited range of fabrics and forms were represented, with local products dominating the assemblage.

Table 1: Pottery condition

Condition	No Sherds	% Sherds	Weight (g)	% Weight
Good	118	5	4775	17
Moderate	824	31	13566	46
Poor	1031	46	7407	33
Very Poor	313	18	1036	4
Total	2287	100	26784	100

Evidence of use was restricted to sooting and burnt residue of a number of sherds, principally body sherds and some jar rims. One vessel, a samian bowl, had been repaired with a rivet which was still attached to the sherd.

Methodology

The material from each context was initially spot dated and quantified by sherd count and weight during the excavation. Further detailed analysis comprised characterisation of the fabrics (by use of x10 microscope) and forms present, and refinement of the spot dating. The recording system was largely based on that employed by Oxford Archaeology for the recording of assemblages within the Thames Valley. Within this system fabrics are grouped by common major characteristics which are defined by letter (for example M = mortaria, S = samian

etc). These major ware groups can then be divided numerically into sub-groups and individual wares (for example 'R' denotes all sandy reduced wares, 'R30' all medium/fine reduced sandy wares, and 'R39' refers to the Alice Holt industry). A hierarchical alphabetical sequence system is used for the definition of vessel types (Oxford Archaeology unpub.). Vessel numbers were calculated using Estimated Vessel Equivalents (EVEs). Decoration, evidence of use, repair and sherd condition were also recorded. The information was recorded directly onto the Framework Access Database. The research themes addressed in the Project Update note could then be addressed. A full breakdown of ware and vessel codes, along with a correlation table with the Museum of London and National Roman Fabric Collection codes is presented in the archive.

Fabrics

A total of 44 fabric types were identified, although many of these are general ware categories, such as Romanised sandy greywares (R30), with in many cases, only a small number of sherds assigned to the more precise fabric code (some 29 fabrics comprised less than 10 sherds). The fabrics are listed in Table 2 by sherd count, weight and estimated vessel equivalents (EVEs) by ware type, with a summary of ware groups in Table 3.

Table 2: Quantification of individual fabric types by sherd count, weight and EVEs

Fabric Type	Fabric Type Description	No Sherds	Weight (g)	EVEs
A11	South Spanish (Dressel 20 etc)	2	527	0.05
B10	hand made black-burnished ware 1	8	97	0.21
B11	standard Dorset black-burnished fabric	8	96	0.46
B30	other black-burnished type/imitation fabrics (possible overlap with some R30 & R50 fabrics)	34	410	0.32
C10	shell tempered fabrics	41	383	0.69
C11	incl . late Roman shell tempered fabrics (Harrold?)	4	10	0.07
F50	colour-coated fabrics (major British)	1	14	0.12
F51	Oxfordshire colour-coat	16	125	0.24
F52	Nene Valley colour-coat	20	123	0.05
M21	Verulamium region mortaria	4	326	0.19
M22	Oxfordshire white ware mortaria	3	120	0.05
M30	oxidised mortaria with white slip	8	116	0.11
M31	Oxfordshire white-slipped mortaria	7	105	
M41	Oxfordshire red colour-coat mortaria	8	44	0.07
O10	fine oxidised sandy fabrics	26	137	0.04
O11	fine Oxfordshire oxidised	3	18	
O20	'standard' sandy fabrics	331	4247	1.91
O21	sandy Oxfordshire oxidised	6	23	0.11
O24	sandy oxidised 'Portchester D type' Overwey white ware	33	202	0.59
O25	sandy with clay pellets	8	340	0.07
O27	coarse sandy	1	56	

O80	coarse tempered fabrics. The temper is usually grog, but can be other materials.	5	249	
O83	very coarse sandy	9	219	0.06
Q10	White slipped, oxidised fine fabrics, ?early Roman	4	20	
Q11	fairly fine	1	1	
Q20	White-slipped oxidised fabrics	17	265	0.48
Q25	Verulamium sandy (cf W21) oxidised, white slip	1	4	0.02
R10	fine reduced fabrics (usually Oxfordshire) sand inclusions are very fine or not visible at all	27	133	0.91
R20	sandy fabrics	9	198	
R30	medium/fine fabrics	1255	10,809	10.43
R31	organic and sand inclusions	3	8	
R39	Alice Holt fine sandy	155	5191	1.12
R50	dark surfaced fabrics (Young reduced fabric 5)	5	16	
R70	Calcareous fabrics	17	150	
S	samian ware	5	21	
S20	South Gaulish (including La Graufesenque)	8	62	0.46
S30	Central Gaulish (including Lezoux)	31	293	0.61
S40	East Gaulish	1	62	0.10
S42	Chémery-Faulquemont	4	24	
W10	'standard' white fabrics	5	14	
W11	Oxfordshire parchment ware	2	2	
W12	Oxfordshire fine white ware	1	30	0.12
W20	sandy white fabrics	92	663	0.10
W21	Verulamium region	55	828	1.01
	TOTAL	2287	26784	20.47

Table 3: Summary of ware types by sherd count, weight and EVEs

Ware type	Ware type Description	No. Sherds	% Sherds	Weight (g)	% Weight (g)	EVEs
Fine and Specialist wares						
A	Amphora	2	<1	527	2	0.05
M	Mortaria	30	1	711	3	0.42
S	Samian	49	2	462	2	1.17
F	Fine wares	37	2	262	1	0.41
Q	White-slip wares	23	1	290	1	0.5
W	White wares	155	7	1537	6	1.23
Coarse wares						
B	Black-burnished ware types	50	2	603	2	0.99
C	Shell-tempered	45	2	393	2	0.76
O	Oxidised wares	422	19	5491	20	2.78
R	Reduced wares	1471	64	16505	61	12.16
U		3		3		
Total		2287	100	26784	100	20.47

The assemblage was divided into two principal categories, the fine and specialist wares and the coarsewares, a division employed by Booth when interpreting assemblages from the Upper Thames Valley (Booth 2004, 39).

Fine and specialist wares

Finewares are not well represented within the assemblage at 3.8% (by sherd count), although when combined with the specialist wares, such as mortaria, flagons and amphorae this figure increases to 13.0 % of the total assemblage (by sherd count). Samian is the only imported fine ware, predominantly central Gaulish products with small amounts from south and east Gaul. Only two sherds of amphora were recovered, both in a Baetican (southern Spanish) fabric.

In the early – mid Roman period there is a paucity of British finewares from the assemblage. It is interesting to note the absence of mica-dusted material, usually assigned to the 2nd century AD and which occurs in large quantities at Staines. Recent excavations at Northgate have confirmed that they were being produced in London, although a previous suggestion of production at Staines is now generally discredited (pers. comm P. Jones). Similar material occurs in small proportions at sites within the upper Thames valley, such as at Eton (Brown in prep). Given the poor surface condition at WPR98, if this material were present in a significant quantity it would inflate the proportion of the oxidised ware category. Later Romano-British finewares include colour-coat products of the Nene Valley and Oxfordshire industries.

White wares include products of Verulamium industry and unsourced wares in the late 1st and 2nd centuries, with later Roman wares represented by Oxfordshire parchment ware and Oxfordshire white wares, although none of this material occurs in any large quantity. It was not possible to source the white-slip material, which may again be relatively locally produced.

Coarsewares

Combined, the coarsewares account for 83% of the assemblage (by sherd count, 86 % by weight). Although diagnostic sherds within these fabrics enable some to be more closely dated, the majority can only be broadly assigned to the Romano-British period (1st – 4th centuries AD).

The assemblage is dominated by the unsourced, presumably locally produced, reduced (R10; R20; R30; R31; R50)) and oxidised (O10; O20; O25; O27; O80; O83) sandy wares. Material of this type is well recorded within the study area; although most of the Perry Oaks material is likely to be locally made, production centres have been identified in London at Highgate Wood (Davies *et al.* 1994, 74-88), and possible production along the Colne Valley has also been suggested (Crouch and Shanks 1984).

Regional Romano-British coarseware industries that could be identified comprised principally Alice Holt (R39) produced in the Hampshire/Surrey border area, operating throughout the Roman period. Other coarseware industries are represented by Dorset black-burnished ware (B10; B11) and Oxfordshire sandy wares (O11; O21).

Overwey-Tilford fabric (O24) forms some of the latest material within the assemblage, dating from the mid 4th century AD.

Unsourced shell-tempered wares (C10) formed a small component of the assemblage and would appear to be early in date on the basis of vessel form, probably marking a continuation of the local native Late Iron Age ceramic tradition (see *Prehistoric Pottery Report*: fabric SH1).

Vessel Forms

Diagnostic sherds were assigned a vessel class and where possible to individual vessel type. A breakdown of the codes used is available in the archive, with quantification by EVEs. In a number of cases featured body sherds, rather than rims, were used as indicators of vessel type. Due to the fragmentary nature of the sherds individual forms have been grouped by vessel class in Table 4.

The fragmentary nature of the assemblage precluded, in many cases, more precise vessel form identification past that of general vessel class. In the case of jars, the largest vessel class with 12.40 vessels by EVEs, a large proportion of rims could not be assigned to a specific jar type. Where sufficient profile was present, early forms comprised bead rim jars and necked or high-shouldered jars, forms which (in 'Romanised' fabrics) both date from the mid 1st century AD, possibly extending into the 2nd century. Other 2nd century and later forms include medium-mouthed jars and angled everted rim jars in reduced sandy wares and black-burnished wares. Within the storage jars are examples of Alice Holt class 10 large cable-rimmed jars (AD180+) with the characteristic finger clawing on surfaces, while late jar forms include the 4th century Overwey-Tilford hook-rim rilled jars (Lyne and Jefferies 1979, class 3c).

There is only one example of an early Roman 'Surrey' or 'Atrebatian' bowl. From the early – mid 2nd century AD black-burnished ware straight and convex sided bowls with flat top or dropped flange rims, and plain rimmed bowls/dishes are present, although these forms do also occur in other reduced sandy fabrics. These bowls forms also occasionally display burnished lattice decoration, as in the case of an Alice Holt class 5D bowl (Lyne and Jeffries 1979) as well as black-burnished ware forms. Oxfordshire colour-coat bowls occur as forms C45 and C69. The former, although dated AD270+ by Young (1977), has been shown by recent work to date possibly from the mid 3rd century (pers. comm. P. Booth), whilst the latter is early 4th century in date.

Very few flagons were identified - a Verulamium white ware ring-necked flagon, datable to the early 2nd century, and neck sherds in a white-slipped fabric and in reduced sandy ware. Included within the flagon class is a large Alice Holt flask, the closest form being a class 1B (Lyne and Jefferies 1979, fig. 24), although this example is large even for this type (Fig. 1). It is complete except for the rim and displays alternate bands of burnished zones and burnished lattice decoration, with a finger impressed rilled flange on the neck. It is late in date (c.AD 330- 420) and was recovered from the base of waterhole 174069. Although it is most likely to be an Alice Holt product, it does show some similarity to the late Roman Overwey-Tilford fabric (pers. comm. M. Lyne).

Early mortaria are represented by a single Verulamium example. Three unsourced white-slipped mortaria are likely to date from the 2nd century AD, and a similar fabric has been identified at Staines (pers.comm R.Seager-Smith). One of these vessels has an oblique perforation from the top of the rim to the lower junction of rim and wall. Later mortaria comprise an East Gaulish samian Dr 45 and the Oxford industry imitation of this form, dated from AD 240 (Young 1977, type C97). Oxfordshire white-ware mortaria are represented by the rim of a type M17 vessel. There is also a single example of a 4th century Oxford mortarium (*ibid.*, type C100).

Other vessel forms are poorly represented. Cups and plates/dishes are predominantly samian forms, including Dr 33, Dr 18/31, Dr31, Dr31R and the decorated bowl form Dr 37. Beakers, where identifiable, are represented by poppyhead beakers and Nene Valley colour-coat body sherds. Only three lids were identified and there is a single body sherd from a strainer in a sandy reduced fabric.

Table 4: Vessel class as percentages of the assemblage (by EVEs)

Vessel Class	Vessel class description	EVEs	% of total assemblage
A Total	Amphora	0.05	<1
B Total	Flagons	0.22	1
C Total	Jars	12.40	61
D Total	Jar/Bowl	0.64	3
E Total	Beaker	0.05	<1
F Total	Cup	0.90	4
H Total	Bowl	2.99	14
I Total	Dish	0.57	3
J Total	Plate	0.24	1
K Total	Mortaria	0.61	3
L Total	Lids	0.17	1
Z Total	Unidentifiable	1.63	8
TOTAL		20.47	100

Dating

Five broad ceramic phases were defined within the Roman period. Given the nature of the assemblage outlined above, these phases are necessarily broad in date and are defined as follows:

RCP1 - Late Iron Age/early Roman transition (100BC – AD100); this is equivalent to Late Iron Age (see Prehistoric pottery report), and discussed in detail in Mephram and Every this vol.

RCP2 - Early Romano-British AD 43-120

RCP3 - Middle Roman AD 120-240

RCP4 - Late Roman AD 240-410

RCP5 - Romano-British AD 43-410

There was a considerable degree of residuality and dating of many features on ceramic grounds is quite tenuous with many only assigned a broad Roman date of c. AD 43 – 410. Added to this was the division of the early Roman assemblage based on ceramic traditions with the inclusion of the native late Iron Age/early Roman 'Belgic' wares in the prehistoric pottery section. Although there is a substantial amount of these wares there is very little 'Romanised' material that could be dated earlier than the early-mid 2nd century AD.

Contexts that contained this early material with Roman wares such as Verulamium and some unsourced sandy wares defined the early Romano-British period. Early forms within these groups are restricted to bead-rim and high-shouldered/necked jars, with the single example of a 'Surrey' or 'Atrebatian' bowl. Early flagons and mortarium types are completely absent and there are virtually no amphorae. Not until the end of the first quarter of the 2nd century AD does Roman material really start to occur in quantity.

The middle Roman period (Roman phase 3) is characterised by a general increase in the amount of sandy wares, the occurrence of Black-burnished ware forms such as flat-topped bowls/dishes and a general increase in the amount of sandy wares.

Central Gaulish samian is present from the start of the 2nd century AD, and may well be a reflection of the proximity of Perry Oaks to Staines, although it is interesting that no other finewares, such as the mica-dusted wares that are so ubiquitous at Staines and that occur on some rural sites in the Upper Thames Valley, are present within the assemblage. The apparent lack of mica-dusted wares may in part be a result of the poor surface preservation of sherds or may represent a genuine absence. Also, within this middle Roman period, samian forms provide the only alternative forms to jar and bowls (such as cups and plates) within the assemblage. Good context groups of this material, however, are rare within the assemblage.

Late Roman material (Roman phase 4) is characterised by products of the Oxfordshire industry, the late Alice Holt Overwey-Tilford fabric and a small quantity of late Black-burnished ware. Although there appears to be substantially more late Roman material than in the earlier periods, a significant proportion could be residual as the majority consists of undiagnostic sandy wares dated here through association with characteristically late material.

Distribution

The nature of the assemblage precluded any detailed analysis of the distribution of pottery across the excavated area. Pottery was recovered from a range of feature types, principally ditches, pits and the wells/waterholes, and very little, if any was associated with definite domestic structures.

Although there is little evidence for domestic buildings in the Roman period, there is a concentration of material from the early Roman period into the 2nd century AD in the north-west corner of the main excavations. The distribution of samian is restricted to a small number of ditches and pits further to the west of the enclosure. The placing of the large flagon in well 174069 represents deliberate deposition. Gradual

accumulation through agricultural activity is the most likely explanation for material occurring within the ladder enclosure, given the poor condition of sherds and high level of residuality. The sequence of wells/waterholes within the main settlement area illustrates the range of material spanning the early to late Roman periods.

Discussion

In terms of supply of ceramics, the Perry Oaks assemblage is dominated by local producers in the early period. Coarsewares were probably being supplied by producers in the Colne and lower Thames Valleys, occurring alongside some early Alice Holt material. Calcareous fabrics are known within assemblages in London, and a similar range of sources may be represented at Perry Oaks. Regional industries were more significant from the early – mid 2nd century, such as the Black-burnished ware industry, although by the mid 3rd century the large industries of Alice Holt and Oxford were the principal suppliers, complemented by the 4th Century by a small quantity of Overwey-Tiford wares.

The assemblage at Perry Oaks would appear to complement that observed at nearby Imperial College Sports Ground (Wessex Archaeology 2000; pers. comm. L. Mephram). Within both assemblages there would appear to be a gradual changeover from the Late Iron Age/early Roman 'Belgic' types wares to more 'Romanised' material at some point within the late 1st or, more likely, early 2nd century AD. Similar trends in the supply of ceramics are apparent within the two assemblages, including the paucity of fine and specialist wares (amphora and mortaria) and the dominance of the late Roman industries of Alice Holt and Oxford. The poor representation of finewares is also shown at Mayfield Far, East Bedfont (Jefferson 2004) and at Binfield Park this low representation combined with a limited form repertoire, was taken to indicate low status rural settlements (Booth 1995, 114); a pattern also recognised in the Upper Thames Valley.

Other comparative assemblages are few within the West London area with some of the sites as yet un-published, such as Wall Garden Farm, Sipson, and Holloway Lane, Harmondsworth. Comparative assemblages from Roman field systems in the neighbouring upper Thames valley are likewise few in number, although assemblages from sites in the Lower Kennet Valley, such as Binfield Farm (Booth 1995), Lea Farm, Hurst (Manning and Moore 2000) and Pingewood (Johnston 1983-5) also exhibit some similar characteristics to those identified at Perry Oaks.

Illustrated vessel:

1. Alice Holt flask, (R39), late Roman. Context (174039), feature (174069).

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