

# NEWSLETTER 33 - November 2002

Welcome to the Winter Newsletter.

## Committee News

The committee presently looks like this:

President: Rob Perrin                      Hon. Treasurer/Membership: Ted Connell    Hon. Secretary: Alice Lyons  
Hon. Editor: Jude Plouviez              Production Manager: Pam Irving              Reviews Manager: Vivien Swan  
Ordinary Members: Bernard Barr, Kayt Brown, Maggi Darling, Geoff Dannell, Jane Evans, Laura Griffin  
Co-opted Member: Fiona Seeley

One committee meeting has been held, since the last Newsletter was distributed, on October 19th at the Museum of London. The meeting was well attended and a full agenda discussed. Work on future Journals of Roman Pottery Studies is going well with Volumes 10 and 11 nearing completion. The committee is now ready to receive any new pieces of work from study group members, for which a relatively quick publication time may be expected.

The SGRP annual conference timetable is now in place, with the next conference located at **Wallsend Museum** (with accommodation at the University of Northumbria) to be held between the **Fri 4th-Sun 6th July 2003**. In an attempt to make SGRP conferences more focused the committee has decided that each event should have a theme, in this case 'Form and Function'. For more details please see below.

Other subjects on the agenda covered the continuing SGRP projects including 'The Students Guide', development of the SGRP web pages and the possibility of providing samian training with funding from English Heritage (details to follow when available).

## The Membership

At the present time the membership totals 140. No membership list is attached to this Newsletter, if you require an updated list of members please apply to the secretary.

## Sad News

It is my sad duty to inform you that John Pullinger contacted the group with the news that his wife, Joyce, died suddenly on 25th September 2002. Joyce joined our Group in 1987 and was a regular attendee at our annual conferences and will be much missed.

## New Members:

Mrs Sue Beasley, who field walks and has a particular interest in Dalesware.  
Richard Jarret, undergraduate dissertation on North Kent Marshes BB2 Industry.

## Conference News

*The Roman Archaeology Conference 3-6th April 2003.*

A morning session entitled 'Roman Pottery Studies present and future- a session in memory of Graham Webster' has been allocated to the SGRP. Colin Wallace is convening the session and has asked Maggi Darling, Jerry Evans, Steve Willis, Vivien Swan, Paul Bidwell, Nick Cooper and Rob Perrin to contribute. Further details from the Website <http://www.le.ac.uk/ar/rac/>

*Debating Late Antiquity in Britain AD300-700 14-15th June 2003*

A conference hosted by the Archaeology Department at the University of York. This conference seeks to bring together researchers of the period AD300-700 in a lively debate. For more details please email James Gerrard (jfg101@york.ac.uk) or visit the conference website: <http://www-users.york.ac.uk/~rc132/>

### **SGRP Annual Conference, 'Form and Function' 4-6th July 2003.**

The Claude Gibb Hall, University of Northumbria is booked for the weekend, although lectures and pottery handling sessions will take place at Wallsend Museum and a trip to South Shields has also been organised. If you would like to give a paper at this conference please contact Vivien Swan on Tel/fax (01904) 468335.

### **SGRP Annual Conference, 'Romano-British Pottery and Trade' 2-4th July 2004.**

It is likely that accommodation will be at the University of North London with lectures and pottery handling sessions at Eagle Wharf. Contact Fiona Seeley Tel (0171) 5669324, fax (0171) 4903855 or email: fseeley@museumoflondon.org.uk

*SGRP Annual Conference 2005.* Top of the list at the moment is Cardiff.

### **Notice Board**

Sue Beasley (one of our new members) is interested in establishing a type series for Dalesware and asks that any members with a specialist interest in this fabric, with knowledge of the published material, would be kind enough to contact her. Contact: Tel: (01652) 618123 or email: suebeasley@aol.com.

Bill Crumbleholme, a potter from near Dorchester, has been asked by the diggers at Bestwalls, near Wareham, to reconstruct one of the Black Burnished Ware kilns that they have been excavating this summer. Bill would appreciate any advice! Contact [bill@upweypotters.com](mailto:bill@upweypotters.com) Look at <http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/crumbleholme/bbw.htm> for some of Bill's images and words.

With Journal for Roman Pottery Studies Volumes 10 and 11 both near completion, the contents of future volumes are under consideration. If any member would like to publish their research in a future JRPS please contact Jude Plouviez on (01284) 352448 or email [jude.plouviez@et.suffolkcc.gov.uk](mailto:jude.plouviez@et.suffolkcc.gov.uk)

Please remember to keep your contact details up to date, including any new e-mail addresses. The secretaries contact details are at the beginning of this Newsletter.

### **Winchester SGRP Annual Conference 2002**

Paper Synopsis

#### **HOW TO SUCK EGGS**

Edward Biddulph

Excavations of a Roman farmstead at Strood Hall, near Great Dunmow, Essex (one of over 30 sites investigated by Oxford Wessex Archaeology ahead of construction of the A120 Stansted-Braintree trunk road) yielded some 13,500 sherds (c 124 kg) of Roman pottery. Analysis has yet to take place, but I intend to quantify the entire assemblage by sherd count, weight and EVEs.

The rationale behind this is as follows. The mean sherd weight of 9g for the entire assemblage reflects its fragmentary nature. Rims were invariably broken at the neck. In contrast, surface preservation was generally good. One reason for this difference may lie in the heavy boulder clay from which the pottery was recovered. Sherd extraction was difficult and pieces that were reasonably intact when exposed tended to break along existing hairline fractures upon excavation and removal. I know that this happened because I spent some time assisting in the excavations. The fragmented state of the pottery complicates the study of context formation using the conventional measures of sherd count and weight, as the effects on pottery of multiple episodes of disturbance on the one hand and soil conditions on the other are virtually indistinguishable. Mean sherd weights alone cannot satisfactorily separate the two. By comprehensively recording EVEs, 'completeness' (EVE/number of vessels represented) can be calculated. Removing sherd count from the equation removes *in situ* breakage as a factor affecting the pottery and results should relate solely to context formation.

Deciding on how to approach pottery analysis in this case has benefited from first hand experience of the site. A greater appreciation of the site leads to a more appropriate selection and use of recording methods. Obviously, it

would be rarely possible for pottery researchers to excavate the sites from which their assemblages derive, but we can start to frame our thinking on individual sites by taking a close interest in conditions of excavation, soil type, weather etc. Just ask the excavator for details. These phenomena are the things that affect the recovery of pottery, but whose appearance on the pottery cannot be separated easily.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF SOME RECENT WORK ON POTTERY FROM RUTLAND AND LEICESTERSHIRE**

*Annette Hancocks*

Three sites were recently excavated from these counties. The first, Stamford Road, Oakham revealed a series of Late Iron Age/Romano-British enclosures and associated features situated along the southern bank of the stream that formed the northern extent of the site.

The Roman assemblage, which derived largely from ditch fills, was characterised by early Roman pottery forms such as beakers, platters, and globular and lid-seated jars. The range of material is restricted to necked jar forms, carinated bowls and beakers. The assemblage is recognisably post-Conquest in date and characterised by beakers, platters, and globular, necked and lid-seated jars. Grey wares seem to dominate the period assemblage, occurring in platter, beaker and carinated bowl forms. The use of decoration is restricted to cordons on the girth of the beaker forms, white slip, horizontal incised lines and rustication. No absolute dating evidence was recovered for this period.

All of the vessel forms were produced in fabrics considered to be of local origin. There is no evidence for regionally traded coarseware such as Black-Burnished ware, although small quantities of Verulamium Region White-ware and Nene Valley White-ware were observed. Samian and Dressel 20 amphorae were recovered. This was the only evidence for imported wares. Overall the assemblage was unabraded, but a high level of fragmentation was recognised. This is reflected in the low average sherd weight of 7g for the whole assemblage.

Viewed as a whole, the pottery assemblage is indicative of low-level rural occupation throughout all periods, with abandonment of the settlement some time in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century. The lack of diversity, in terms of forms and fabrics, amongst the pottery assemblage is further evidence for the low status and domestic character and nature of occupation.

Excavation along the route of the Ashby bypass revealed a curvilinear ditch of late Iron Age date, forming part of an enclosure. Two curvilinear ditches of similar date showed evidence of later recutting and may be part of a more extensive enclosure complex. Traces of linear, curvi-linear and semi-circular ditches and gullies, and shallow pits may relate to settlement activity and subdivision within these late Iron Age enclosures. To the east of the Iron Age settlement was a later phase of activity comprising several linear gullies, pits and a stone surface, all dating to the late Romano-British period. Dividing the areas of Romano-British activity and Iron Age settlement was a wide linear ditch, which was dated to the late Romano-British period and extended beyond the edge of excavations. The fill of this ditch sealed three undated pits.

A total of 1184 sherds (c.12.5kg) of pottery with an average weight of 11g was recovered from the site. Dated to the mid-later Iron Age period and the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. 58% of the pottery derived from well-stratified and secure contexts. This latter assemblage derived primarily from ditch fills and surfaces and probably dated to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The pottery associated with Phase 2 was characterised by Roman pottery forms such as necked, globular and storage jars, bead and flanged bowls and dishes in locally and regionally traded fabrics.

14 Romano-British pottery fabrics were defined. The most common Roman fabric within the phased assemblage is the locally produced grey ware (GW, 15% by count), followed by the regionally traded Derbyshire coarseware (DERCO, 4% by count.) 19% of the overall assemblage comprised locally traded Roman fabrics, with a further 8% consisting of regionally traded Roman wares, such as Lower Nene Valley wares, Derbyshire coarseware and Mancetter-Hartshill white ware.

Of the pottery recorded, decoration was only recorded on two sherds. These were a Derbyshire coarseware globular jar, which has a wavy, grooved, decorative motif on the internal surface of the cup of the rim. A single decorative grey ware sherd had incised horizontal lines upon its exterior surface.

There are a total of 74 vessels represented in the total Roman ceramic assemblage. Of these, 18 derive from the stratified phase 2 while the remainder are unstratified. The most common form present in the phase 2 assemblage is

the flanged bowl, followed by the globular jar and the hooked rim bead and flange mortaria. These forms are primarily associated with a 2nd - 4th century AD date range. Some of these forms occur in fabrics that are regionally traded, such as Derbyshire coarseware, Mancetter-Hartshill white ware and Lower Nene Valley Colour-coated wares, fabric groups that have their flourish of production during the 2nd - 4th century AD.

The pottery recovered from the phase 2 group comprised locally and regionally traded wares that could be dated on the basis of both form and fabric to the 2nd - 4th century AD. It seems likely, from further analysis of the pottery, that the dating can be refined to the mid - late 3rd - early 4th century AD. This is based on the presence of BB1 copies of straight-sided dog dish and other forms and the distinctive Derbyshire coarseware fabric. These fabrics and forms are comparable to other material recovered from sites in the area, such as Ravenstone and Normanton-Le-Heath. A single sherd of unstratified Dressel 20 amphorae was noted in the assemblage. This fabric is characteristically dated to the late 1st - early 3rd century AD, and the sherd represented the only imported pottery recovered from the site. The lack of imported samian appears to confirm the later date range for the site.

The ceramic assemblage appears to be wholly utilitarian and domestic in function, comprising jars, bowls and dishes. These forms are primarily associated with storage, processing and the preparation/production of food. On these grounds the site can perhaps be interpreted as a low status, rural occupation site.

The sources of the various fabric groups reaching the site varies considerably. The most dominant regionally traded fabric within the Roman assemblage is Derbyshire coarseware. There is no Black-burnished ware within the group. A small percentage of Lower Nene Valley Colour-coated ware was recognised along with other regionally traded wares. It seems highly likely that the locally produced grey wares may well derive from the nearby kilns at Ravenstone. Combined with the presence of granodiorite pottery within the prehistoric pottery assemblage, the principal source of pottery supply would appear to be from the south-east (Ravenstone, Normanton-le-Heath and Mountsorrel areas.) There is some influence from the south with the presence of Mancetter-Hartshill mortaria and from the north with the observation of Derbyshire coarseware (3% by weight).

At Great Glen 504 sherds of pottery (6203g) were recovered from the evaluation and excavation. The assemblage has only been assessed. The pottery was rapidly scanned, assigned to a ceramic period and spot-dated to provide a terminus post quem. The percentage of pottery recovered for each ceramic phase is as follows: Late Iron Age (4%), Roman (77%), Medieval (14%), Post-medieval (4%) and indeterminate (1%).

387 sherds (5165g) of Romano-British pottery were recovered from 37 contexts. This comprised 77% of the total ceramic assemblage. Some 11% of this material were recovered from ploughsoil and cleaning layers. At least 61 diagnostic and dateable rim and base angles were recognised. This material principally dated to the late 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The range and variety of this material comprised typically grey ware and shell-tempered ware of local and regionally traded origin. Mortaria from Mancetter-Hartshill, Lower Nene Valley and Oxfordshire Colour-coats and well as a small amount of imported fine ware such as samian and coarseware like amphorae.

Of the locally produced grey wares, forms such as bead and flange bowls and everted rim jars were identified. Regionally-traded wares recognised amongst the assemblage include an Oxfordshire colour-coat hemispherical bowl of 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century date, an indented folded beaker and a dog dish copy both of 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> century date and both in a Lower Nene Valley colour-coat fabric. A small quantity of Black-burnished ware pottery was identified. One form observed was a dog dish bowl of 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> century date. Very little samian, amphorae or other imported wares were recognised during the initial scan of the material.

It is proposed that the site will be published in a volume of the British Archaeological Reports (British Series), Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit Monograph series entitled *Excavations on Iron Age and Romano-British Sites in Leicestershire and Rutland*.

## **THE FOURTH CENTURY: A DARK AGE?**

James Gerrard

This paper attempted to highlight the current lack of knowledge regarding Late Romano-British lighting furniture and especially pottery candlesticks. While examples are known, such as the terra sigillata candlestick from Bignor or the examples produced by the New Forest industry, they remain rare and unusual finds. Whether this is due to other materials being used to provide lighting furniture or a lack of identification remains a difficult point. However, given the rarity of pottery candlesticks in the Roman period it seems likely that these artefacts are worthy

of further study. If any reader knows of examples of Romano-British pottery candlesticks then he/she is welcome to contact me with details via email: [jfg101@york.ac.uk](mailto:jfg101@york.ac.uk) or c/o Archaeology Department, King's Manor, Exhibition Square, York, YO10 7EP

## **NEW RESEARCH ON INDO-ROMAN TRADE**

Roberta Tomber

This paper described the work I will be undertaking on Indo-Roman trade at Southampton University, over the next two years from a research grant awarded to David Peacock by the Arts and Humanities Research Board.

The subject of Indo-Roman trade has long fascinated the West, due to the distance involved and its exotics items, including pearls, silk and pepper. It was through the excavations of Sir Mortimer Wheeler at Arikamedu on the Coromandel coast of southern India that the subject first became popularised in Britain. It was at Arikamedu in 1945 that Wheeler uncovered the largest concentration of Roman finds in India, including Roman amphorae and fine wares, from which he postulated that Arikamedu was a Roman trading colony.

Egypt played a vital role in the trade between the Roman empire and India. It was from the Red Sea ports that goods from the East reached the Roman Empire, and then travelling via the Nile River arrived at Alexandria and eventually the wider Mediterranean. The last ten years has seen extensive excavation at two of these Egyptian ports, Berenike and Myos Hormos and has uncovered a wide range of artefacts, ranging from pottery and textiles to archaeobotanical remains from East Africa, the Gulf and India.

These finds provide the strongest evidence for Eastern and African activity in Egypt and in conjunction with new evidence from throughout the contact zone enable the trade between Rome and the East to be reassessed. This study will include a literature search of relevant finds from the entire contact zone, from which a database of this information will be compiled. In addition, pottery assemblages from Egypt and India, including Eastern and Roman wares (particularly amphorae), will be examined. From this review Wheeler's interpretation of Indo-Roman trade will be reconsidered, based on a broad spectrum of modern archaeological finds.

## **APPROACHING OUR PREDECESSORS. WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE HISTORY OF ROMANO-BRITISH POTTERY STUDIES**

Colin Wallace

The Study Group ourselves have done quite well at discussing the development of our part of Romano-British archaeology: for example the papers by Birley and Webster in the 1977 Gillam festschrift, BAR S30. Good obituaries or other accounts are available for most of the major figures, from early ones like John Ward (1856-1922) and James Curle (1862-1944), to later names like RAH Farrar (1917-1993) and Graham Webster (1913-2001). What happens next, when an enquirer wishes to place R-B pottery studies first of all in the context of the larger discipline? Any careful review of the literature on the history of Romano-British archaeology will show that the somewhat caricatured views of the history of Roman archaeology as displayed in the 1987 paper by RFJ Jones (Bulletin University of London Institute of Archaeology 24) are disturbingly common. This is in contrast with the many, more serious treatments of prehistory and prehistorians. If Romano-British archaeologists do not explore the formation of their discipline, then prehistorians or classicists are certainly not going to do it for them.

Recently, there appeared a paper by Evert Baudou, where he discusses what he calls the 'problem-orientated scientific biography' (Norwegian Archaeological Review 31.2). By this is meant one which is written with the intention of elucidating a particular, important, still-active archaeological problem, situating the subject of the biography in society at large and allowing the writing of a biography to contribute to archaeological research generally. Given the continued discussion to the present day of the validity of one of the basic concepts introduced by an early Twentieth-century Romano-British archaeologist (i.e. Romanisation), the notion of the problem-oriented biography seems very relevant to any discussion of the ways of writing of the history of Romano-British archaeology. 'Problem-oriented' or 'critical histories' work (e.g. C Evans on Bersu, Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society 64, 1998) has not made much of an impact yet on Romano-British studies, yet the applications seem clear enough. As an example of what might be achieved - if one wants to think about the individual and the collective in a Romano-British context - Aileen Fox's recent autobiography (Aileen A Pioneering Archaeologist, Leominster, 2000) can serve as rather more than just a useful quarry for anyone wishing to discuss the life and times of the

practitioners of Twentieth century Roman archaeology in Britain. Given her career, a problem-orientated biography of Lady Fox might therefore take as its point of departure 'archaeological training'. 'Archaeological training' brings us neatly on to one of the predecessors of the Study Group – the Great Casterton Summer School of the 1950s. Graham Webster has written his reflections on the 1950-58 work at this small town (in *Archaeologist at Large*, 1991), but overall we have barely begun to think about the institutional – rather than the personal – aspects of the history of Romano-British archaeology. For those, not just in Romano-British archaeology, who rely on the particular theoretical stance to writing disciplinary history that promotes the use of personal details, personal papers, personal libraries and the atmosphere of places and times, there is a problem. Obtaining such material can be difficult; difficult enough even to promote an over-reliance on secondary works and one's own imagination. To avoid derivative work, one starting-point lies in Roman archaeology's tradition of corpus works. To provide vital information, do we not need a biographical dictionary: of people, organisations and projects? It would not be made as an end in itself of course. The intention is to provide material for thought, by leading the reader to published sources – autobiographies, biographies, obituaries and shorter reviews – and giving some appreciation of the archival sources that exist. I provided an example of an entry in such a biographical dictionary, offering a summary of an archaeologist's context and contacts, their publications and the publications about them. I offered a short review of one set of contexts and contacts from the early Twentieth century, informed by a conscious problem-orientated stance. The central figure, Donald Atkinson (1886-1963), was the subject a few years ago of an almost purely descriptive treatment (in *Transactions Bristol Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 112, 1995) that gathered basic details, but more can usefully be said.

It is often claimed that archaeology, especially prehistoric archaeology, has come of age, and that a sign of the maturity of the discipline is a willingness of scholars to engage with their predecessors. How true is this of Romano-British archaeology? Worryingly, not at all: more than one recent treatment (e.g. Hingley, R 2000 *Roman Officers and English Gentlemen*) has implied that it is riddled with problems and dogma to an unacceptable degree. Yet good reflexive practice is possible and a first step towards this is the assembly of past trends in scholarship, drawing on the 'critical histories' and 'problem-orientated' approaches used elsewhere in writing the history of archaeology.

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