

# STUDY GROUP FOR ROMAN POTTERY

## NEWSLETTER 39

May 2005



**S.G.R.P. Website** ([www.sgrp.org](http://www.sgrp.org))

Remember to use our website for information and queries. If you would like to add an item, or suggest how the website may be developed, please contact Ted Connell 01474 872763, [ted.connell@btinternet.com](mailto:ted.connell@btinternet.com)

### Brian Hartley

We have been deeply saddened by the news that Brian Hartley died on Tuesday, April 26th after a short illness. Kay has kindly shared some of the messages of sympathy that she has received from his many colleagues and friends. He is remembered as 'a friend and an inspiration', a 'really impressive man' who was 'always so friendly and helpful, as well as being so tremendously knowledgeable.' A man with 'extraordinary analytical intelligence,' 'one of the last of the true scholars.' 'With Brian Hartley not only Romano-British but the whole Provincial-Roman World lost one of its greatest Pastmasters.' Geoff Dannell has written the following tribute to him, on behalf of the Group:

*'Brian will be remembered both as a founder member of our Group, a remarkable contributor to pottery studies in Britain, and above all to samian studies throughout the Roman Empire.'*

*Most of you will have used the data assiduously collected by Brian and his team over some 50 years, in the form of site reports on samian. Many have come from his long-time research assistant Brenda Dickinson. Unfortunately Brian did not live to complete his revision of Oswald's Index of Potters' Stamps, but some 5000 pages of Mss exist, and his friends and colleagues will do their utmost to see that it is published.*

*A great family man, Brian's chief interest was in teaching, passing on the knowledge he accumulated and continuing the thread of Haverfield, Collingwood and Richmond. Following Philip Corder, he, together with Graham Webster and John Gillam did much to generate interest in Romano-British coarse pottery and to show the opportunities it offered to explain the history of both Roman Britain and its place in the Empire, rather than as a study in ceramology. He read Natural Sciences at Cambridge, and was always interested in the technology of pottery, taking part in a number of kiln experiments.*

*His dry humour, immense knowledge and kindness in sharing it, will be missed by many. We have lost a great Romanist, and we offer our condolences to his family and closest friends.'*

A Memorial Service is to be held, probably in late September.

## Committee news

Jane Evans reports: The committee had a very productive meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> March (finishing in time for some members to retire to a local hostelry to watch Wales win the Grand Slam!). With two further volumes of JRPS (12 and 13) fairly imminent, thoughts are now turning to future volumes. If you have suggestions for themes that could be covered, or offers of papers, please contact Jude Plouviez. The Graham Webster memorial grants for attending the Annual Conference were formally established, with specific aspects being decided upon. More details about this, and the deadline for applications, can be found below. The criteria for awarding the John Gillam prize will be presented to the membership at the AGM. Arrangements for the conference in July are now well under way. Provisional details of the programme and application forms are included with this mailing. Chris Lydamore has been busy developing his on-line Guide for Museum Officers. He would be interested to hear from anyone who has a good collection of images that could be included.

## The Membership

The Study Group currently has 132 members. A small number have left by default, having not paid subscriptions for some years. On a more positive note, we would like to welcome four new members who have recently joined: Pat Chapman, Pauline Skippins, Liz Johnson and Maria Duggan. Pat Chapman has worked for Northamptonshire Archaeology since 1998, having returned to archaeology after an eight year break home-educating her children. Pat edits reports, writes finds reports, and has responsibility for finds processing. Having handled a range of Roman assemblages from around the country over the last year Pat's interest 'was not just kindled, but fired', and she is keen to learn more. Pauline Skippins is a member of Colchester Archaeological Group, and has been involved in fieldwork and post excavation with them. She is interested in all aspects of Roman pottery, particularly local fabrics and kiln sites. Liz Johnson is Nick Cooper's assistant at ULAS, where she has worked since July 2004. She is currently completing an MA in Landscape Studies, and has been working on Roman pottery from developer funded, urban excavations in Leicester.

Roy Turland has been in England recently, and sent his best wishes to those members of the group who remember him. Though in his early 70s and meant to be retired, he is still travelling a lot through work. He has happy memories of the group.

And finally, congratulations to Laura Griffin who gave birth to Anna Elise on 19th February. For those who record weight as well as count, Anna weighed 8lb 3oz!

**Recruit a friend or colleague to the Group: there's never been a better time to be a member as the Group moves forward with a flurry of journals and an exciting Conference Programme. The cost of membership is great value for money!**

## SGRP Annual Conference 2005 (8-10th July)

### Call for Papers

This year's conference is being hosted by Laura Griffin, on behalf of Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service and is based at University College Worcester. The conference theme is '**Regional approaches to Roman pottery studies**'. Papers offered so far include: an overview of the West Midlands Region in the Roman period (*Roger White*) and Roman Worcester (*James Dinn*); two papers on recent research on sites in Herefordshire, with *Colin Wallace* speaking on the Lyonshall project and *Steve Willis* on the pottery from the Iron Age and Roman industrial site of *Ariconium*, now written up for publication; pottery from the midlands/north-west border (*Ruth Leary*); an update on the gallo-belgic wares project (*Jane Timby*); an XRF analysis of Severn Valley ware pottery and tile (*Nigel Cassidy and Jane Evans*); The Worcestershire on-line fabric series (*Victoria Bryant*); and an overview of regional mortaria (*Kay Hartley*). A session is being dedicated to new and younger members, so that they can present their work; so far *Jonathon Dicks* has offered a paper on his work at Rowlands Castle and other speakers in this session include *Martin Pitts* and *Edward Biddulph*. The committee have decided that it would be useful for the

membership if a slot was allocated for discussion of the Group's website and its potential future role; accordingly members are encouraged to consider constructive ways forward for this valuable resource, so that these may be included in discussion during this session. The full programme, when decided, will be published on the SGRP website.

For our conference outing, *Richard Reece* will be taking us on a tour of Cirencester and we shall also be visiting the museum there. There will also be an opportunity to visit the offices of Cotswold Archaeology in order to view some of their recently excavated assemblages.

Building on the success of previous years, the *Annual Conference meal* is being held at a local Italian restaurant, following the drinks reception on Saturday evening. This event is always popular, so please ensure that you book your place in advance so that numbers can be finalised with the venue.

**VENUE:** The conference will be held on campus at University College Worcester, with accommodation in the University Halls. Booking forms are attached – accommodation is limited due to a number of other events being hosted by the College, so prompt booking is essential. Details, maps and final programmes will be sent when booking forms and payment are received. If there are assemblages from the region that you would particularly like to see, or you have material that you would like to display, please let us know.

Offers of papers should be sent to Laura Griffin, 28 East Street, Worcester. WR1 1NF  
Or by email to: [lauragriffin@karnak2002.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:lauragriffin@karnak2002.fsnet.co.uk)

### **The Graham Webster Memorial Grants, for attending the Annual Conference**

At the 2004 AGM of the Group it was unanimously agreed that the Group offer two grants in order to facilitate, through subsidy, attendance at the annual conference by those with limited means. It had been noted in the survey of the membership, previously organized by the hon. secretary, that the cost of attending the conference was prohibitive for some members, especially given travel costs. It had also been suggested by the membership that Graham Webster's contribution within the field of pottery studies and learning be recognized by the Group; Graham was of course instrumental in establishing our Group in the early 1970s. Accordingly we have agreed to name these grants in his memory.

Hence the Committee invite those of limited means to apply for a grant to cover **50% of the conference fee and half of the travel costs**. The refund will be made at the conference in Worcester. Applications may be submitted by members and non-members of the Group. Preference may be given to applicants wishing to attend most or all of the conference. A sub-committee of the Group will consider the applications with discretion. Applications should be made via a brief statement verifying the limited means of the applicant and their wish to attend the conference. **Applications for a grant should be submitted by email or letter to the hon. secretary of the Group (Jane Evans)**, who will pass the applications on to the sub-committee of the Group for consideration. **The closing date for receipt of applications is 10th June**. Applicants will be informed of the decision of the sub-committee within a week of that date.

### **The Bibliography**

A reminder that all contributors need to be sending up-to-date information to Colin. Grey literature should be included.

### **Mentoring**

SGRP member Ruth Leary has emailed the committee to suggest a system of mentoring. Ruth's idea was that the Group could compile a list of member's areas of expertise, which could be made available on the website. Members could then be approached for informal mentoring, or could be costed in to projects in an advisory capacity. This list could be publicised to contracting units, and might be particularly useful to smaller units who do not

employ a Roman pottery specialist, or larger units working outside their usual area. If you would be interested in being involved in this, please contact Jane Evans.

### **Professional Training and Current Issues Day School, Oxford, 13th April**

A day school in the professional training series sponsored by English Heritage at Rewley House (the Oxford University Department of Continuing Education) was held in mid April with the theme: *Current Issues in Roman Pottery Studies*. The meeting was in association with the Archaeology Training Forum. The day was designed for those working with Roman pottery on a regular basis, those with an interest in the subject, those new to pottery study and those who use pottery specialists in their own work (e.g. unit professionals). The meeting was well attended with a round-table of over twenty delegates from various backgrounds. The day was organized and chaired by Dr Alan Vince. Alan gave the first paper considering 'The life of a pottery specialist (from project design to archiving reports and data)'; he noted resources available to those of us in Roman pottery studies and covered procedures and issues, setting-up the day and areas for discussion. Roberta Tomber gave a paper on the analysis and interpretation of pottery fabrics looking at recent progress and new initiatives in examining fabrics. Fiona Seeley's paper examined the matter of dealing with the pottery from a kiln site. She gave details of the recent discovery of a mass of waster and other pottery from a site near Moorgate (London) representing 560kg of pottery (310 boxes) and dating to c. AD110-160; the nature of the assemblage raises questions relating to the Verulamium industry as the fabrics of a proportion of wasters at this site were in evidently standard Verulamium region varieties. The inference therefore is that the clay was travelling to London as a raw material for potting. Stamps on mortaria from the site occur elsewhere along the Thames estuary and particularly Kent indicating a trade in these vessels, at least, out of London. The report on the site is soon to be published.

After lunch Steven Willis spoke about aspects of specialist wares, including samian and other fine wares, amphorae and mortaria. He emphasized that amongst many potential variables site type is key in determining the nature of pottery assemblages in Roman Britain. He noted that his e-monograph on the distribution of samian ware was to appear shortly in *Internet Archaeology* vol. 17. Paul Tyers then gave an interesting presentation of On-line resources available for those working with pottery. Clearly his 'potsherd' site is a major help to many working in the field. Alan then led a discussion of the issues brought forward by the day. Subsequent feedback from delegates was fully positive and the day seemed a great success, in raising awareness in many areas. The attendance cost was perhaps high, especially for those not supported by an institution, but this may be weighed against the first rate facilities, care and environment at Rewley House which make events there such a pleasure to attend. Alan Vince is to be congratulated in bringing about such a worthwhile day.

*(Jane Evans notes: Roman pottery also featured strongly in The Roman Archaeology Conference/TRAC, and I was assured by one delegate that 'The future is ceramic'!)*

### **Pottery for Sale by Geoff Dannell F.S.A.**

*An updated version of a paper read to the Group on July 4<sup>th</sup>. 2004 at the London Meeting, taking to account some of the information given there by others*

It is 50 years this summer since I first washed pottery from "The Car Park" site in the sinks of the changing rooms behind the Verulamium Museum, and met samian ware. That set me out on a journey of exploration, which I am still happy to follow as it meanders its way through my life. What I want to talk about today is not in any way a valedictory, but rather an examination of some paths travelled, experience accumulated, and most importantly, work still to be done.

To paraphrase Sherlock Holmes, it is impossible to reach valid conclusions without data. When I started to try to find out about samian, there was data aplenty: The French savants Déchelette and Hermet had published volumes dedicated to both the history of the manufacture of samian ware in Gaul, and to the minutiae of its decoration. Oswald & Pryce had published a standard description and typology, based largely on that of the German,

Dragendorff. Oswald alone, had later produced by Herculean personal effort a corpus of Potters' Stamps and a comprehensive catalogue of animate motifs, incorporating the work of others such as Hermet for la Graufesenque, and of Ludowici, who worked on East Gaulish material. The two corpora of Robert Knorr were standard handbooks for the identification of South Gaulish wares, and to my delight, these books, rapidly become old friends, and were joined by Stanfield & Simpson's *Central Gaulish Potters*, almost as soon as my interest developed. One also could not ignore the works of Fölzer, Forrer, Delort, Chenet & Gaudron and Lutz, who filled in information concerning many of the smaller officinae of East Gaul, nor that of George Rogers on the inanimate details on Central Gaulish ware.

So there it was: a well-documented subject with ample resources on which to depend for identification, dating and provenance. It proved an ideal field for me, as a part-time archaeologist. Parcels of pottery arrived, reports were solemnly written, references quoted, and from time to time obliging friends actually published (and some told me that they had, but many didn't) the results.

However, there was a worm in this idyllic apple. It had to do with my education, first as an economic-historian at school, and later as a student of economics at the L.S.E, and second of course, my seminal meeting with Brian Hartley through Sheppard Frere's Verulamium excavations. The former led me to question the whole basis upon which samian studies were predicated (this soon extended to other pottery), in that identification and typology together with dating appeared to have become ends in themselves, terminal objectives, like the buffers at Kings Cross station. Brian prompted me to question the data, which hitherto, as a neophyte, I had rather too easily accepted as being tidy parcels of knowledge, safely pigeon-holed and not requiring re-examination.

At that period, research in pottery studies was concentrated on the pots themselves with hardly any attention to their production or as articles of commerce. It might be argued with hindsight, that the first imperative was to provide the data, and interpretation could not have proceeded such a vital phase of study. However, that is entirely to neglect the fact that questions of economic exploitation were rarely raised. Modern economics had started its investigations in the eighteenth century, and could hardly be regarded as a new discipline. Nor could the skills-base of many of the specialists be criticized as being overly narrow, or removed from reality. They ranged through clergy to civil servants, technical draughtsmen to computer experts. Only a few were archaeologists or classicists, who might be accused of living in "ivory towers". The problem was, and remains, far more one of focus. It was to a certain extent easier and perhaps more comfortable to classify, and to establish dating, both of which depended upon 'rational' decisions based on fact, rather than to enter into the whirlpool argy-bargy of "whys" and "wherefores", more akin to the problematic social sciences.

The huge, and ever expanding quantity of data led to monumental oversimplifications in identification, which are only now becoming apparent, and which may in the fullness of time shake parts of our dating tree – that is still to be examined. Talking of samian, I am persuaded that we have only come very lately to the social and economic implications of its manufacture, consumption and distribution. Certainly, I can recognize a whiff of philately among the classifiers of samian! I suspect that this is also true of other classes of ceramics.

So where does this take us. First it is important to realize that ceramic production exists in a three dimensional world, of time, space and function. Next, that the exploitation of ceramics had a largely commercial purpose, whether the Added Value of the application of labour and capital to the essential raw materials was for private profit or public gain as tax revenue. Pottery was made for two purposes: for immediate local use, but also as an item of trade, and despite the length and complexity of the supply-chain in the ancient world, pottery production and consumption seem to conform to the basic economic laws which we understand today.

However, this is based upon a hypothesis of a totally "free market" in the Roman economy. We should not ignore the fact that in a society dominated by the concept of *patrones* and *clientes*, supply might be manipulated. Where landowners were powerful, and had multiple estates, they might easily move skilled personnel from one place to another, perhaps

explaining those puzzling events where particular types of ceramic appear to have multiple points of origin. Samian ware would certainly fit in this category. Moreover, contracts for provisioning the army, let out to private individuals, might have a similar effect, in directing and limiting sources of supply. Similar patrician influence might account for the availability of merchandise in civilian markets.

Samian ware, which is my specific area of interest did not emerge from a vacuum. Its predecessors were widespread in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Hellenistic world, particularly those of the painted and slipped ceramics, which is equally true of other classes of pottery. Classical authors pointed out to Italian estate owners, that they had raw materials at hand, which together with skilled labour, could add profit to their agricultural enterprises. This was in the context both of substitution for bought-in necessities, like amphorae in which to pack wine, oil or fruits, or dolia for storing grain, or for articles of consumption for the family and personnel of the estate.

This is surely the context within which much of the production of specialised and fine wares began. The next stage was the development of external demand warranting the production and marketing of surplus capacity as part of a money (or perhaps barter) economy. So, we see Campanian fine wares spreading out to the early Roman provinces, and the first Arretine products getting to such strange places as Britain and India. What are the drivers for this proliferation? Clearly there has to be demand, and in the case of this class of pottery, it cannot be merely utilitarian. Late Iron-Age Britain had got on quite well without samian pottery. In Italy it had to meet competition. First, in metal vessels, particularly silver ware, and also in glass, but seems to found itself a niche market on two fronts; first, as a standardized impermeable table ware, particularly suited to provisioning the army, and second, as an appealing lower priced alternative to silver and glass in the provinces. Its ubiquity can be seen in the number of production sites, and its appearance on military sites from the late first century B.C., as well as at prestige habitations like the Villa Livia on the Palatine in Rome. A late-Augustan group of production sites were developed, the largest of which was Arezzo. They soon acquired sufficient critical mass to make commercial exploitation of their products through merchants attractive, not only within Italy and the near provinces, but widely throughout the Mediterranean and to far away destinations.

Romanisation of most of western Europe brought complex social emulation into play, as tribes, and particularly their leading families, made political relationships with the dominant power. The desire to live a Roman life-style in a manner, which might distinguish ruling classes from their underlings, and to emphasise superiority, seems to have played a major part in the proliferation of samian production centres across southern Gaul ( and I don't know why I have previously ignored the possibility that British chieftains imported, or were given as prestige donations, chefs trained in the Roman eating rite. The nineteenth century saw the leading families of the British aristocracy using French chefs like that of the Fitzwilliam family, who was their highest paid domestic servant) and perhaps there was an earlier parallel. After all the hardware of the Roman table is not really useful unless the cuisine matches it.

The Italian production sites were to be followed rapidly, in fact almost contemporaneously by production centres for TR and TN. The history of Roman military campaigns gives us a fairly exact record of these developments.

This answers to two of our dimensions, time and place. The third, functionality, needs much further investigation, and it is this subject, which it seems to me, with notable exceptions like the studies of Vivien Swan, has been most ignored. By this I mean not merely what the vessel was designed for, or what it was used for, but also its relationship to others of similar type. It is relevant to ask a simple question in modern terms. Why buy a Gucci, or a Lacoste, when BHS and M&S can provide articles of the same utility? Aha, you say, but they can't! There is the material, the cut, that *je'ne sais quoi*, which leads us to pay extortionate prices for articles *de luxe*, or for novelties. There may also be utilitarian or technical reasons for choosing a Dyson over a Hoover, or practical reasons of accessibility for choosing a local product over an import, or mere price in the case of commodities. At the same time one must remember that many of the criteria of these choices were exaggerated by the conditions of distance and transportation in the ancient world. But when the poet Martial extolled the virtues of the

beakers either made at, or shipped from, Saguntum in Spain, to Italy he was talking directly to us across 1900 years in words which have a peculiarly modern relevance.

The fact is, consumers have reasons for choosing between one product and another, and it is fundamental to our studies that we continue to delve into the social and economic drivers for those choices. The data that we so carefully quantify today at enormous cost are entirely useless unless we use them to explain the real cultural environment of their period, and to map the changes over time. I pointed out last year that the names of vessels inscribed on the so-called *graffiti* at La Graufesenque held some indicators of usage. What can the adoption of non-native pottery forms tell us about the degree of Romanisation in particular areas or differences of diet or food preparation? This question of course can now also be answered with more confidence by residue analysis.

There are notable exceptions in this cause. I have mentioned Vivian Swan, who has shown beyond doubt that a particular group of soldiers, finding that the ceramics necessary to their culture were not available in Britain, promptly made their own. Paul Tyers has long been mapping distributions of certain classes of vessel; Steven Willis has attempted to relate form and function on type-sites using statistical methodology, Jane Timby has attempted the same for Terra Nigra. Gwladys Monteil has shown that there seem to be significant vessel choices in Roman London. As a point of fact, we know that small vessels (typically, the *trentales* mentioned on the *graffiti* or kiln-load memoranda at la Graufesenque), appear to have gone mainly to southern and Mediterranean destinations. Some forms like Drag. 24/5 had longer lives in the south; marbled vessels have a disproportionately high representation in the Mediterranean basin.

Many recent site reports are now structured to reflect form and fabric, and therefore source. What is missing, by and large, is study beyond the site. This is in part a serious fault in our funding structure. Research in archaeology is out. Post-excavation study is severely limited, and the universities cannot take up the challenge. Yet without regional and sometimes national and international studies, we cannot hope to identify the ebb and flow of the economy of ceramic production and consumption, and add flesh to the rather dry bones of archaeological investigation.

We should be asking ourselves far more frequently than we do 'what is the penetration of a particular ceramic product into a geographical area?'. 'Why does a kiln site start, how does it start, what its place, development and demise?'. 'What competitive products exist at various times, what are their apparent competitive advantage, where are the boundaries of their penetration?'. Where are the Venn diagrams to show us what is going on in terms of the proportion of competitive products in use at particular times. Why are certain products like mortaria, so specialised that there always appear to be discrete centres of production, as with samian ware. Why do some of these proto-industries rise and fall?

These are questions for the younger students among us. I am concerned with re-fighting some old battles, with the huge advantage of modern technology. The data is being constantly refined. That is the boring bit; head-numbing distinctions of one potter's stamp from another, one decorative poinçon from another. With samian we are beginning to see some results of these studies in the organisation of production as I discussed at last year's meeting. However, our understanding of marketing is still fragmentary. We have some clues. We see preponderances of certain wares in certain regions, but the trails are as yet unexplored, the areas undefined. We lack multi-disciplined approaches. Samian in the Arretine tradition, TR and later samian and TN seem to have competed for similar markets. Is this in fact true? How many 'Arretine' sources existed for Britain? Do they show regional variation. Can some of these trading patterns be traced either to the result of political activity or result from it?

How, and why, does a production site like Les Martres-de-Veyre apparently erupt fully formed in the early second-century, and establish itself against the still flourishing industry of South Gaul, only to fade over twenty years to almost total nonentity; and more, why does so much of its product land up in Britain? Does this have any relevance to the date of the Holt military establishment, reflecting a supply problem of some sort. What caused the demises of La Graufesenque, and later Lezoux, the two largest Gaulish production centres? What were the economic limitations on the distribution pattern of Montans products, which come from an

area with which Britain had close and extensive links for wine. Can we plot the samian trade routes in combination with other ceramic fine-wares? Did the merchants pick up a range of goods along the way? If we could answer these questions we might then extend similar investigations to other domestic pottery production centres , like those of the New Forest, Haddon, Oxfordshire and the Nene Valley.

This raises some serious questions of data collection and treatment. It seems generally established that weight and EVES are two quantitative measurements thought to be valuable. However, it seems to me that while useful comparators, they are often followed slavishly, with little regard for minimum or threshold vessel populations. Statisticians please copy!

There is then the question of the sources of pottery assemblages. We have had a number of shots at creating both national and local fabric collections. But in a world where travel is becoming, and will become even more, expensive, both of resource and time, we need a better method of disseminating information, and the Web must be the answer.

Here I see a leading role for our group by putting a set of standard visual tools on-line, and I would suggest the following:

- An updated data base of Vivien Swan's kiln corpus, the primary work from which all else should flow
- Then for each identified kiln or kiln group:
- A pottery type catalogue
- Sample thin section photographs
- Sample break section photographs
- Sample surface photographs
- A description of any individual traits
- Links to other sites like 'Potsherd'

Proper use of these tools would enable us to isolate the 'rogue' pieces, the ubiquitous 'oxidised' or 'reduced' sherds, for which a new home must be sought. I would suggest that this is a proper target for our group and its web-site, and perhaps might attract funding.

Such an initiative would lead to greater precision in examining collections from sites, in an effort to see the human dynamics involved with these most utilitarian artefacts. Huge volumes of data already exist. There is a diminishing need for more, although we are obliged to examine new finds. We have an obsession with precise dating, when the social implications of changes in pottery collections over time are comparatively neglected. I greatly welcome the decision of some excavation directors to broaden the presentation of their pottery reports under the direction of a single administrator, who can synthesise the overall data to answer some of these questions, and, of course, in the case of wares traded over long distances, to ask what other artefacts may have travelled along the same routes. We need to turn our attention to these issues over the next decades, unless our subject is to become sterile and divorced from the societies in which ceramics were both made and used.

History is properly the study of the result of human activity, archaeology a hand-maiden in this endeavour. It is time for us to put the people back into pottery studies.

**Please remember to keep your contact details up to date, including any new e-mail addresses.**

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