

Roman pottery

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Introduction

Some 294 sherds of Roman pottery, weighing *c* 5.6 kg, were recovered from the excavation. The assemblage was recorded following guidelines set out in *A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology* (PCRG, SGRP, MPRG 2016).

Each context group was sorted into wares, which were assigned codes taken from Oxford Archaeology's guidelines for recording Roman pottery (Booth 2016). Forms were identified by rim and similarly assigned standard OA form codes (expressed as a two-letter code, such as CK for 'cooking pot' type jar, sometimes followed by a three-digit rim code, for example JB 110, a plain-rimmed curving-sided dish). Each vessel was quantified by sherd count, weight, number of vessels (MV) based on rim, and sherd count estimated vessel equivalent (EVE), which measures the surviving percentage of the circumference of a rim. Thus, a complete rim was recorded as 100%, while half a rim was recorded as 50%. In this report, percentages have been converted to fractions of a whole, 100% becoming 1 EVE and 50% becoming 0.5 EVE. Ware codes pertaining to regionally significant fabrics were cross-referenced with the National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (Tomber and Dore 1998). A date for deposition, or spot-date, was provided for each context group on the basis of the pottery it contained.

INSERT TABLE 1

Assemblage composition and supply

Reduced wares and Oxidised wares

Context groups were assigned to a broad single Roman phase (mid to late Roman) and this, along with the small size of the assemblage means the pottery has been analysed as a single group.

The assemblage is dominated by reduced wares (R30, R20, R211, R10) making up 29.6% of the assemblage by weight and 28.78% by EVE. Oxidised wares were rare, and constituted only 1.25% of the assemblage by weight, and 1.3% by EVE. The reduced wares were available as mainly jars including up to five wide mouthed jars (CM) which were the most commonly identified vessels where enough of the rim and shoulder were present to determine form. In contrast, only one vessel was identified as a narrow mouthed jar (CC) and one as a medium mouthed jar (CD). A single small globular jar or beaker with everted rim in a fine reduced fabric with rouletted decoration was recorded.

These reduced wares are likely to have been made locally or traded within the region. Reduced ware production has been identified at Shenstone on the M6 toll (9.3km to the west) (Powell et al, 2008), Sherifoot Lane (9.4km to the south-west) (Evans et al 2014) and Mansetter Hartshill (12-13km to the south-east) where the large industry here produced reduced wares as part of its output. Although the reduced wares at Tamworth may have originated from unknown local kilns, all of these sites are within a distance (15-20km) that might be travelled to market (Peacock 1982, 85, 107, 112). No attempt has been made to match individual fabrics found at Tamworth to any of these individual sources, but very similar wide mouthed jars were produced at Shenstone in the mid to late 2nd century and in

the Severn Valley kilns to the west (albeit with a more wedge shaped rim) and it is therefore a common form produced in the region, with local variations in form filling a common need (Leary 2008).

A single small sherd of a reduced ware bowl or dish (2058) had a plain rim but too little was present to tell its full form. However, this is likely to have derived from a black-burnished ware style form and dates to the mid-2nd century into the 4th century (Gillam 1976).

The paucity of oxidised wares is a phenomenon identified elsewhere in the region including on sites along the M6 Toll (Leary 2008). Although this is a small assemblage it appears to have also been a site where oxidised wares were not favoured. A single oxidised rim form was identified as a curving sided bowl with a bead rim in Severn Valley ware (O40). The site lies at the eastern limit of the distribution of the Severn Valley products.

Black-burnished wares

Black burnished ware vessels manufactured in the Dorset kilns formed a significant part of the assemblage, comprising 22.1% by weight and 20.6% by EVE. The vessels identified by rims included six cooking pots and two straight sided bowls. Several jars from context 2408 had a moderately splayed neck with everted and slightly beaded rim tips consistent with a mid to late second century date (Leary 2008) and one had a wavy burnished line on the neck, which was rare beyond the second century (Gillam 1976). This, combined with the presence of one chronologically significant right angled lattice and one with a slightly wider obtuse burnished lattice, suggests a date in the latter half of the 2nd century, possibly into the 3rd for this context.

Two straight sided bowls in black burnished ware were recovered from contexts 53 and 2057, their flat rims are consistent with a later second century date (Gillam 1976).

Mortaria

At least three mortaria were present on the site, making up 18.8% of the assemblage by weight and 13.8% by EVE. The form is represented by two large rims from the Mancetter-Hartshill kilns (M23) and an oxidised white slipped body sherd most likely from Wroxeter or an unidentified local source.

The Mancetter-Hartshill vessels span the period of production, with body sherds being characteristic of the 'early type' (c.AD 100-130 possibly continuing a little later) with a sandy fabric and pale trituration grits and two large rims portions of 'later type' with smoother fabric and dark grey/ black grits produced from c AD 130/140 onwards. One of these (from context 2394) is a form representative of the evolution between the earlier bead and flange forms and the later (post AD160) hammerhead rims and is paralleled in Catterick (form M75, AD 160-210, Hartley 2002). The rim from context 52 is from an even later form, with a more pronounced hammerhead rim and traces of red paint from a probable geometric pattern on the rim, also paralleled at Catterick (form M84) and dating to AD 200-260.

A white slipped mortaria body sherd was similar to Gloucester mortaria in appearance with a soft very sandy fabric, moderate well sorted quartz and fine mica inclusions but is likely to have a more local source. Similar sherds were identified on the M6 toll (fabric MWS1) and a possible source in Wroxeter was postulated (Leary 2008) which seems more likely, especially given the anomalous early date Gloucester mortaria would provide.

Other fabrics

A small number of body sherds in the distinctive Derbyshire coarseware fabric (included in the reduced ware quantifications above) date to AD 150-350. No rims conclusively in Derbyshire ware were present but this does demonstrate supply from another regional industry. A rim sherd in a very similar pimply coarse ware fabric appeared to be from a cup rimmed jar, which is a form common to Derbyshire ware, and if this is not actually a product of the kilns it is likely to be a local or regional imitation.

Shelly wares were present and have not been identified to source, and although similar in appearance to South Midlands shell tempered wares from Bedfordshire the late date of that fabric would mean this would be the only material of 4th century date from the assemblage. Given the chronology of the rest of the assemblage, a local source is more likely.

Two small sherds of white ware were recovered, one of which is most similar to products from the Mancetter-Hartshill kilns and one is most likely Nene Valley ware.

Imported wares

The only imported wares were Central Gaulish samian which constituted 17.6% of the assemblage by weight and 26.6% of the assemblage by EVE. Forms included several plan vessels; a Drag 18/31R dish/platter, a Drag 31R dish/platter and a Drag 31R bowl. A complete, although fragmented rim and a significant portion of the body of a decorated Drag.37 bowl was also found (context 2223). It was highly decorated, with most strikingly, an erotic scene within a roundell, repeated around the body of the bowl, interspersed with vine leaves, birds, and running dogs around the base. There was no name stamp, but the design can be attributed to one of three potters using a mould of this type in Lezoux; Criciro (AD 135-170), Cinnamus (AD 135-180) or Divixtus (AD145-175) (Oswald 1936, Stanfield and Simpson 1958).

Although the assemblage is rather too small to draw any conclusions about the supply to the area, the form of the wide mouth reduced ware jars (very similar to those produced at Sherstone) and the paucity of oxidised products does fit the pattern observed on sites in the local area and is examined in more detail by Leary (2008) in relation to the M6 toll sites.

Chronology

The majority of the assemblage dated to the late second century with some activity continuing into the early part of the third. The earliest pottery was a sherd of earlier Mancetter-Hartshill mortarium (AD 100-130) with its coarser fabric and pale trituration grits distinguishing it from the later fabric, which was a more frequent occurrence on the site and is identifiable by its finer fabric and darker grey and black grits.

The frequency of the black burnished ware suggests a date after the wider distribution of the fabric (after AD120) and this combined with the presence of the earlier Mancetter_Hartshill mortarium means that the second quarter of the second century would be a reasonable assumption for the earliest activity on the site. The flourish of activity appears to be from the mid second century, with the appearance of well dated Central Gaulish samian ware forms, including the Drag.37 decorated bowl, more closely dated by the decoration to AD 135-180, and a Drag 31R bowl dated to AD 160-200 (Webster 1996). Despite samian table wares being more likely to be 'curated' and in use longer than coarsewares, this dating is supported

by the likely date of the frequent occurrence of wide mouthed jars (mid to late second century) and the appearance of Derbyshire ware from around AD150.

This dating is further supported by the presence of a straight sided flat rimmed bowl in black-burnished ware and a similar vessel in reduced ware found in the same context as Central Gaulish samian ware, supporting a late 2nd century date for these. The angles of the burnished lattice decoration and the splayed rims on several black burnished ware cooking pots suggest a date of at least the very late 2nd century and probably into the early 3rd. (Gillam 1976).

The later Mancetter-Hartshill mortaria fabrics make up the majority of the mortarium sherds, and date to AD130 at the earliest. The earlier of the two rims dated to AD 160-210 and the later in the smoother fabric with a painted hammerhead rim to AD 200-260 further suggesting the period of main activity took place in the late 2nd to early 3rd century.

Although the absence of material in such a small assemblage should never be considered a conclusive dating tool there are some aspects of this assemblage that can be noted with caution. The absence of sherds in fabric group E (wares of late Iron Age tradition) may preclude a 1st century date although material of this type is fairly scarce in the area anyway (Leary 2008). However, there also were no typically early forms such as platters or flagons and no Malvernian wares which would have suggested activity in the 1st century. There were no regional fine wares from the Oxford or Nene Valley industries underlining the lack of significant occupation activity in the later Roman period where some of this material would be expected. No context groups were dated by pottery after *c* AD 260, suggesting that pottery deposition ceased, and the settlement had been abandoned before the late Roman period.

Pottery use and site status

One mortarium sherd (context 2058) in Mancetter-Hartshill fabric had a hole made after firing on the lower wall near the base. This may have been for a repair but no cleat remained. The black-burnished ware jars from context 2408 were all heavily concreted on the exterior with soot and this supports their use as cooking pots. The Drag.37 samian ware bowl showed wear on the interior at the base, probably as a mixing bowl. This highlights its function as a utilised vessel, not necessarily as the 'fine china' or a decorative piece.

The assemblage is fairly small, and in-depth analysis on status and inter-site comparison is not possible, but the character of the assemblage suggests food preparation, cooking and serving practices, supplemented by fine table wares and demonstrating some knowledge of dining in the Roman tradition. The site is located close to the north to south route of Watling Street and the north-east to south-west aligned Fosse Way, both of which would have provided good access to exotic and regionally traded goods. Amphorae were not present, but the assemblage is too small to suggest this meant that the settlement had no access to wine or olive oil. The decorated samian bowl is likely to have been a conversation piece although not necessarily a high status item, with erotic scenes being popular motifs along with hunting scenes, gladiatorial battles and mythical scenes on highly decorated samian vessels. Internal wear restricted to a concentrated and well defined area in the centre at the base, similar to wear patterns seen on mortaria shows that it was well used (probably for mixing), but also that it was presumably kept for a fairly long time. A thumb print was present on the base of the bowl which may have been accidentally made during manufacture, but its position, inside the footring may mean that it was deliberate, and a way of marking the pot in a similar way to a stamp.

Pottery condition and pattern of deposition

The mean sherd weight of 19.3g indicates a moderate to well preserved assemblage that is unlikely to have been deposited far from its point of use and it is unlikely that the sherds were redeposited many times prior to final deposition. Even without the larger and heavier mortarium sherds the mean sherd weight is 16.7g and this is still a moderately well preserved assemblage.

The pottery was overwhelmingly recovered from ditches with only one pit (2241) and one posthole (2255) producing pottery. This suggests that the primary pattern method of deposition was to dump domestic waste into the ditches surrounding the settlement.

The pattern of pottery deposition and condition suggests that while deposition was concentrated in ditches, there was no significant difference in the condition of the pottery across most feature types, suggesting that the pottery was subject to a similar process of waste management after household breakage and initial discard. The preservation of such a large portion of the decorated samian bowl suggests it was not deposited far from its point of use and may have originated from the building on the site.

Catalogue of illustrated pottery

1. Wide-mouthed necked reduced ware jar with everted rim c. AD 160–200. Context 2058, fill of ditch 50001.
2. Wide-mouthed necked reduced ware jar with everted rim. c. AD 160–200. Context 2223, fill of ditch 50015.
3. Fine reduced ware globular jar with everted rim and roulette decoration. c. AD 100–200. Context 2198, fill of ditch 50003.
4. Cooking pot, black-burnished ware with lattice decoration, everted rim with slightly beaded rim and heavily sooted exterior. c. AD 200–250. Context 2408, fill of ditch 50001.
5. Cooking pot, black-burnished ware with lattice decoration and heavily sooted exterior. c. AD 200–250. Context 2408, fill of ditch 50001.
6. Cooking pot, black-burnished ware with sooted exterior and everted rim. c. AD 200–250. Context 7.
7. Mortarium, Mancetter–Hartshill with bead and flange transitioning to hammerhead rim. c. AD 160–210. Context 2394, fill of ditch 50009.
8. Mortarium, Mancetter–Hartshill later type with hammerhead rim and trace of red paint. c. AD 200–260. Context 2052, fill of ditch 50006.
9. Bowl (Drag. 37), Central Gaulish (Lezoux) samian ware showing repeated erotic scene separated by vine leaves. The erotic motif was used by Criciro, Divixtus, and Cinnamus ii, with the style being most reminiscent of the work of Cinnamus ii (eg Stanfield and Simpson 1958, plate 162), c. AD 135–180. Context 2233, fill of ditch 50006. 2408, fill of ditch 50001.

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