

ROMAN POTTERY FROM HATFIELD FOREST

by Anna Doherty, February 2017

Introduction and methodology

A small assemblage of Roman pottery was recovered during ditch clearing in Hatfield Forest in the late 1990s. The majority of the sherds were in bags marked as coming from NGR TL5376 2023 and dated as being discovered on 07.05.97. An additional bag of 21 sherds contained a label marked with a later date, 01.08.99, and the following description: 'Roman feature by access track to Forest Lodge, from surface of dark upper fill'. This is the only information available and it therefore remains uncertain whether or not the sherds originate from sealed archaeological deposits; however, the fairly consistent late 1st to mid 2nd century dating of the material suggests that this is a possibility.

The pottery was examined using a x 20 binocular microscope and quantified by sherd count, weight, Estimated Vessel Equivalent (EVE) and Estimated Vessel Number (ENV) on *pro forma* records and in an Excel spreadsheet. Fabrics and forms were recording using the Essex regional type-series (Biddulph et al 2015, incorporating form codes from Going 1987).

Overview of fabrics and forms

As shown in Table 1, about 80% of the assemblage is made up by grey wares. More than half of these are typical of the Hadham industry, the remainder are unsourced. A few examples of oxidised or white-slipped wares were also recorded, again including both Hadham and unsourced vessels. There are notably low levels of typical early Roman fabrics. For example, there are only a few examples of grog-tempered or shell-tempered sherds; however, fairly well-fired storage jar fabrics are marginally better represented. Black surfaced wares are also relatively uncommon, accounting for about 8% of the assemblage and these are all micaceous sandy wares, probably also deriving from the Hadham area.

Code	Fabric description	Sherds	Weight (g)	ENV
BB2	Black-burnished ware 2	1	22	1
BSW	Black-surfaced wares	21	107	21
COLB	Colchester buff ware	7	39	5
ESH	Early shell-tempered wares	1	8	1
GROG	Grog-tempered wares	3	21	3
GRS	Sandy grey wares	91	590	91
HAR	Hadham grey wares	123	682	120
HAWO	Hadham white-slipped oxidised wares	1	5	1
HAX	Hadham oxidised wares	3	10	3
LRC	Lower Rhineland colour-coated ware	1	3	1
MWSRF	Miscellaneous fine white- or cream-slipped red-buff wares	1	13	1
MWSRS	Miscellaneous white- or cream-slipped sandy red wares	2	34	1
OXW	Oxfordshire white wares	1	7	1
RED	Miscellaneous oxidised wares	3	13	3
SGSW	South Gaulish samian (La Graufesenque)	1	2	1
STOR	Storage jar fabrics	8	122	8
<i>Total</i>		<i>268</i>	<i>1678</i>	<i>262</i>

Table 1: Quantification of Roman pottery fabrics

Few regionally-traded Romano-British wares were identified but these include examples of Colchester buff ware and a single sherd of BB2, also probably of Colchester origin. A single sherd in a white ware fabric is tentatively identified as Oxfordshire white ware, since it is a very small fragment which appears to have been slightly burnt and it would represent the only element in the assemblage which is necessarily of later 2nd or 3rd century date. Imported fine wares include a single bodysherd of 1st century south Gaulish samian ware and another from an indented beaker in 2nd century Lower Rhineland colour-coated ware.

The vast majority of vessels attributable to a general form class are jars; however, many of these are partial rim profiles which are difficult to attribute a specific form type (Table 2). Of the more diagnostic forms, there are two examples each of 1st/early 2nd century (G20) cordoned necked jars and 2nd century or later (G24) plain necked jars. There is also an example of a black-burnished style everted rim jar (G9) in Hadham grey ware and a BB2 rounded rim dish (B4.2) with acute lattice decoration, both post-dating AD120. A carinated bowl (C16.4) in an unsourced coarse white-slipped ware dates to c.AD100-160. A tiny fragment probably from a bead-and-flange mortarium was also recorded. This is the possible Oxfordshire white ware sherd and although very little of the profile is present the bead appears to be quite prominent, similar to those on late 2nd to 3rd century forms (e.g. D4-D5).

Class	Code	ENV	EVE
Platters	A2.2	1	
	A2.5	1	0.05
Dishes	B4.2	1	0.05
Bowls	C	1	
	C12?	1	
	C16.4	1	0.15
Mortaria	D	1	
Jars	G	12	0.38
	G20	2	0.18
	G24	2	0.19
	G9	1	0.08
Beakers	H	1	
<i>Total</i>		25	1.08

Table 2: Quantification of Roman pottery forms

Amongst the fine or table wares there are two examples of later 1st century (A2) platters, one in Hadham grey ware and another in Colchester buff ware. Two partial profiles in fine black-surfaced fabrics possibly come from bowls loosely imitating samian forms. One, which also features fine comb-stabbed decoration, is similar to Going's C12 form; another is a small fragment from a fine flange. Finally the single bodysherd of Lower Rhineland colour-coated ware has an indented profile, demonstrating that it comes from a beaker.

Discussion and conclusions

Overall the pottery is typical of earlier/mid Roman lower-status rural assemblages. It is dominated by local coarse wares, especially from the Hadham industry, and by jars and coarse bowls, with relatively few examples of fine table wares or imported fabrics. Although the current assemblage is fairly fragmented and abraded, the apparent concentration of a few hundred sherds in a single area provides a good indication that Roman settlement

activity was occurring nearby, almost certainly within Hatfield Forest itself. This suggests that there may have been clearings in the forest or that some or all of the area was completely unforested during the Roman period.

Although several sherds are clearly of 1st century date, there is a notable lack of tempered and black-surfaced wares especially when contrasted with the largely pre-Flavian assemblage from recent excavations at Takeley (Doherty 2015). There, grog- and shell-tempered wares together accounted for about 10% of the assemblage and black-surfaced wares for over half of fabrics. This suggests that the current assemblage largely post-dates c. AD70. Most other fabrics and forms are consistent with a c. late 1st-mid 2nd century date; however, a single sherd of possible Oxfordshire white-slipped ware is probably later in date (c. late 2nd-3rd century). It should also be noted that the small group of pottery labelled as having been recovered in 1999 does not contain many feature sherds, and is therefore less closely datable, though it appears to contain a similar range of fabrics to the main group collected in 1997.

Interestingly then, the assemblage appears to belong to a period which is relatively poorly represented in other major excavations in the area. Some high status late 1st-mid 2nd century cremation burials were recorded, alongside a single group of pottery from a ditch at Stansted DCS (Wallace 2004, 301-302) and a several hundred sherds of mid Roman were also noted at Stansted LBR (Stansbie & Biddulph 2008, 18.9). However the vast majority of local sites including Takeley and Stansted ACS, LCTP and MCTP had little to no pottery of late 1st or 2nd century date (Doherty 2015; Going 2004, 139; Stansbie & Biddulph 2008, 18.3-6).

References

- Biddulph, E., Compton, J., and Martin, T.S. 2015, 'The Late Iron Age and Roman Pottery', in Atkinson, M. and Preston, S.J., *Heybridge: A Late Iron Age and Roman Settlement, Excavations at Elms Farm 1993-5*, Internet Archaeology 40. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11141/ia.40.1.biddulph1>
- Doherty, A. 2015, 'Prehistoric and Roman pottery', in Germany, M., *Archaeological excavation at Brewer's End, Dunmow Road, Takeley, Harlow, Essex: post-excavation assessment and updated project design*, Archaeology South-East Unpublished Report 2015137
- Going, C.J. 1987, *The Mansio and other sites in the south-eastern sector of Caesaromagus: the Roman pottery*. CBA Res. Rep. 62, London
- Going, C.J. 2004, 'Pottery', in Havis, R. and Brooks, H. *Excavations at Stansted Airport, 1986-91 Volume 1: Prehistoric and Romano-British*, East Anglian Archaeology 107, 139-165
- Stansbie, D. and Biddulph, E. 2008, 'Iron Age and Roman pottery', in Cooke, N., Brown, F., and Phillpotts, C., *From Hunter gathers to huntsmen: a history of the Stansted landscape*, Framework Archaeology Monograph 2, CD-Rom chapter 18
- Wallace, C. 2004, 'Pottery from DFS and DCS cremations', in Havis, R. and Brooks, H., *Excavations at Stansted Airport, 1986-91 Volume 1: Prehistoric and Romano-British*, East Anglian Archaeology 107, 238-245