

A Romano-British rural site at Eaton Socon, Cambridgeshire

Specialist Report

Pottery



by Rachael Seager Smith

THE POTTERY

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With the exception of a single Saxon sherd and small quantities of post-medieval material, all the pottery is of Romano-British date, spanning the period from the 1st to 4th centuries AD. A total of 1562 sherds, weighing 22856g, were recovered from stratified contexts.

In general, the condition of the assemblage is relatively good. Overall, the mean sherd weight is 14.6g but nearly 50% (748 pieces, 7619g) of the sherds are plain bodies with a mean weight of only 10g. Some surface abrasion, probably caused by post-depositional chemical erosion, is apparent but edge definition generally survives well.

The pottery was analysed according to the Wessex Archaeology guidelines for the analysis of pottery (Morris 1994). The assemblage was quantified using the number and weight of sherds by fabric type for each context. Pottery from unstratified and cleaning contexts was not examined in detail and, with the exception of the samian, no quantification of this material was undertaken. A site-specific fabric and vessel form series was compiled, where appropriate cross-referenced to those of other sites in the locality. In addition to a group of 'established wares' (distinctive fabric types of known provenance), the fabrics were identified by predominant inclusion type, and subdivided according to the range and coarseness of the inclusions present using a binocular microscope (x20 power).

Fabric totals for each Phase are shown in Appendix 2 of the published report (Gibson 2005). An estimate of the maximum number of vessels present was made for each fabric using rim forms alone (Table 2, see end). Single rim sherds or a group of joining sherds were counted as one example of that form while, for example, five rim sherds of the same form in the same fabric without direct evidence for joining were counted as five examples of the form. The Figure references below refer to Figs 8-10 in the published report (*ibid.*), where there is a full list of the illustrated sherds.

Romano-British

Together, the Continental finewares represent almost 3% of sherds. Samian predominates, and approximately 24 vessels belonging to a fairly restricted range of forms (Table 1), mostly plain ware bowls and dishes although two cups and a single piece from a rouletted beaker (form 72) were recognised. The low proportion of samian from Les Martres-de-Veyre is only to be expected (Marsh 1981), but the small amount from Southern Gaul is indicative of limited usage or availability of samian during the 1st century AD. One vessel, a form 18 dish, carries a stamp of CASTVS who worked at La Graufesenque. The majority were from Lezoux and include Hadrianic and early Antonine forms such as the form 18/31 and 18/31R bowls, as well as later 31, 31R and 79 forms. The form 46 vessel (cf. Oswald and Price 1920, pl.LV, 13) stamped BONOXVS, can be dated to c. AD 125-150 (Brenda Dickinson pers. com.) and belongs to the earlier group. A third stamp, apparently long but now very abraded although clearly ending in an M, occurs on a sherd from an uncertain bowl form made in the very pale Lezoux fabric which is probably of Antonine date. Broadly similar patterns of samian consumption have been noted at other sites in the region (Mills 1998; 2001; Dickinson 1999).

The other imports are also mostly from Central Gaul (fabrics E122 and E128; Tomber and Dore, 1998, 50, CNG BS and 52, CGN CC 1 respectively). Central Gaulish colour coated wares are Flavian to Trajanic in date and were made in the Lezoux/Les Martres area, probably travelling alongside samian. All three sherds were from one beaker (Fig. 9, 26). The Central Gaulish black slipped wares date from c. AD 150 into the 3rd century AD; both sherds were from indented beakers. Two other colour-coated sherds remain unprovenanced. These occur in a very fine brick red fabric with few visible inclusions and a matt, dark brown colour coat (fabric Q110). One is from a small cup form (Fig. 9, 27).

Table 1: Samian vessel forms present (maximum number of examples)

Vessel form	SG	CG (Les M)	CG (Lezoux)	Total
18	2	1	-	3
18/31	-	1	2	3
18/31R	-	-	2	2
18/31R or 31R	-	-	2	2
31	-	-	1	1
31R	-	-	2	2
33	-	-	3	3
36	-	-	1	1
38	-	-	1	1
46	-	-	1	1
72	-	-	1	1
79	-	-	1	1
Open	-	-	3	3
Totals	2	2	20	24

Mortaria from three different sources were recognised, together representing approximately 2% of the Romano-British sherds. The earliest were supplied by the industry based in the Verulamium region. Although the vessel from pit 112 (Fig. 9, 21) does not appear to be a typical product of this region (cf Wilson 1984, figs. 111 and 112), its fabric suggests that it was made here. Another vessel from gully 91 (segment 594) has the low, inturned bead characteristic of this region although the rest of the flange is missing. The only identifiable Oxfordshire ware form dates from c. AD 240-300 (Young 2000, 76, type M21). However, Nene Valley white ware mortaria were numerically the most common although only one form (Fig. 8, 7), typologically of later 3rd to 4th century AD date (Howe et al 1980, fig. 8, 102; Hartley and Perrin 1999, 132, fig. 78, M37, M40-44) was identified.

In this area, it is apparent that the traditional differentiation between the British-made 'coarse-' and 'fine-' wares is not based so much on fabric type as on individual vessel forms, the local industries making the entire range of utilitarian kitchen vessels as well as finer tablewares. The rest of the assemblage can be divided into two main groups consisting of oxidised and grey ware fabrics.

In general, the oxidised wares, here including the Nene Valley colour coated wares, provided the intermediate quality wares between the imported tablewares and the utilitarian kitchen vessels. Three fabric types were identified, Nene Valley colour coated ware, Verulamium region white ware and a white sandy ware with fumed surfaces, in addition to a 'catch-all' group (fabric Q103) encompassing all other white/pink/buff/orange/red fabrics.

The earliest white wares derive from the Verulamium region (Tyers 1996, 199-201). Most are from flagon forms; the ring-necked example (Fig. 9, 22) being of a type dated to c. AD 60-120 (Davies et. al. 1994, fig. 34, 148 and 149).

Twelve other white sandy ware sherds with dark grey/brown, 'smoked' surfaces, especially around the rim, may also be from this region. Forms include jars with grooved rims (Fig. 8, 16), dated to c. AD 125-180 at Verulamium (Wilson 1984, fig. 93, 2244-2246, 2249-2251 and 2254). This is a relatively common form in the east Midlands, made in a variety of fabrics including Nene Valley cream wares (Perrin 1999, 109, fig. 66, 317). Sherds from three lids (Fig. 9, 31) were also present, one of which can be paralleled in Verulamium region white ware in London (Davies et. al. 1994, 51, fig. 40, 223).

The Nene Valley colour-coats included a range of straight-sided bowl/dish forms, (types R101 and Fig. 8, 9 and Fig. 9, 30), which could have been used either at table or in the kitchen as casseroles. Other forms, such as an imitation samian form 38 (Fig. 9, 28) bowl and the Castor box fragments (not illustrated), which probably functioned like a modern tureen (Perrin 1999, 98), are likely to have been used at table. Numerous beaker sherds were also noted, most from fairly small, rather bag-shaped forms, often rouletted although at least one had underslip barbotine scroll decoration (cf. Perrin 1999, fig. 60, 143-9). All these forms represent typical products of the Nene Valley industry (cf Perrin 1999, 87-106) and probably date from the mid 2nd to mid 3rd century AD. Two forms however, the imitation samian bowl (Fig. 9, 28; (Perrin 1999, 102, fig. 63, 245-7)) and a tall, hollow pedestal base paralleled in 4th AD century contexts at Billingbrook, near Water Newton (ibid, fig. 9, 114) and Cambridge (Pullinger et. al. pl.CXXVI, 895), indicate that Eaton Socon continued to receive vessels from this industry into the 4th century.

The miscellaneous oxidised wares, mainly containing variable quantities of sand, represent the products of more than one source and probably span a wide date range. Rims include examples of 1st to 2nd century necked and cordoned jar forms (similar to Fig. 8, 4 and 5) as well as 2nd to 3rd century AD examples (Fig. 8, 6). A few of the orange-firing sherds may be products of the Hadham industry. These vessels were only widely distributed during the 4th century AD although evidence from Milton Keynes indicates at least a small volume of trade in the mid to late 2nd century AD (Marney 1989, 124). The upright rim jar (Fig. 9, 20) can be paralleled at Milton Keynes (ibid. fig. 47, 7); other examples come from Coggeshall and London. Other vessels such as the double bead rimmed bowl (Fig. 9, 32) in a slightly sandy pale red slipped fabric, may be products of the 4th century AD Obelisk kiln at Harston (Young 1982, fig. 14, 24 and 39). The majority of sherds in this group were, however, plain bodies probably from flagon forms. Only one white-slipped sherd was present but decorated sherds from two vessels in fine buff coloured fabrics (Fig. 10, 37 and 38) indicate the availability of British finewares to the inhabitants of this settlement.

The sandy greywares dominate the assemblage, alone representing 60% of the sherds and 51% of the weight of the total assemblage. All are likely to be locally made but the problems of defining slight differences between sandy greyware fabrics are well-known and here they are considered as a single group although for archive purposes they were divided into three, based on the frequency and size of the quartz sand inclusions. Sparsely tempered, gritty fabrics, often grey-brown in colour (fabric Q105) were most common; the other groups contained moderate to abundant 'coarse' (fabric Q100) and 'fine' (fabric Q101) quartz.

Potential sources include the Nene Valley and various kilns around Cambridge (Hull and Pullinger 1999, 141, fig. VII.1), Bedford and Milton Keynes (Marney 1989),

including Caldecote (Slowikowski and Dawson 1993). Products from smaller centres at West Stow and Watisfield present in Cambridge (Hull and Pullinger 1999, 141, fig. VII.1) may occur here. Lower Nene Valley (colour-coated) grey wares (Perrin 1999, 78) never formed more than a very minor component of the assemblage. The forms are largely utilitarian. First to early 2nd century AD types are confined to a few Belgic style jars with everted or lid-seated rims, frequently cordoned (Fig. 8, 4 and 5). Bead rimmed forms are scarce and, as in the Cambourne development area (Wessex Archaeology in prep.) it appears that the sandy greywares formed a relatively minor component of the assemblage at this time. A much-expanded range of forms is apparent from the middle of the 2nd century AD onwards, comprising wide and narrow-necked jars and bowls with upright and everted rims, plain rimmed dishes, flat, triangular and rounded rimmed bowls/dishes with straight and carinated sides as well as numerous less common types. A few characteristically late vessels (dropped flange bowls and rilled jars with triangular or hooked rims – Fig. 8, 11 and 29) indicate that the greywares remained an important component of the assemblage into the 4th century AD.

The calcareous wares, containing fossil shell from the Jurassic beds in the South Midlands, follow in the native, pre-conquest ceramic tradition of the area. These wares are probably from various sources but the largest centre known to have used fossiliferous clays was at Harrold, Bedfordshire (Brown 1994) while other may be from the Nene Valley (Perrin 1999, 118). They were most common during the 1st and early 2nd centuries AD but, as in Cambridge (Hull and Pullinger 1999, 142), suffered a severe numerical decline in the mid to late 2nd century AD, probably replaced by the sandy grey wares. A few forms such as the everted rim jars (R115) and round bodied bowls (R111), may belong within the later 2nd to early 3rd century AD, and it is likely that these wares were present, at least in small quantities throughout the Roman period. Their popularity again increased during the later 3rd and 4th centuries AD and Late Roman forms, although not well-represented in this assemblage, include the characteristic rilled jars with undercut rims, a plain rimmed dish and a dropped flange bowl (Fig. 8, 10).

The grog-tempered wares are also of 1st to early 2nd century AD date and were probably made locally. The majority are from one vessel (Fig. 9, 19) found on the southern edge of the site. No examples of the distinctive pink grogged fabric, made in the Towcester/Milton Keynes area, were identified although it is relatively common on sites in Northamptonshire, especially during the 2nd century AD (Perrin 1999, 124).

Only one Black Burnished ware vessel (a plain rimmed dish dating from the later 2nd century AD onwards), from the Wareham/Poole Harbour region of Dorset was recognised. This low level of BB1 supply is paralleled at other rural sites in the region (Hancocks *et. al.* 1998, 45) and it is possibly that this vessel may have arrived with the personal belongings of an individual or travelling piggy-back with some other commodity.

Although the pottery was the only artefact type to be found in any quantity on this site, there are few large feature groups. Only 14 features contained more than 20 sherds and of these, only six (ditches 28, 76, 124 and 285 and watering hole 81 and refuse pit 845), contained more than 100 pieces. The overall distribution of material, especially these larger feature groups, in the central and southern part of the site suggests that the main focus of settlement activity was located to the south, beyond the limits of the present excavation.

However, the nature of the excavated features and the resulting problems of intrusion and residuality also limit the overall potential of the assemblage. One example of the

mixed nature of the assemblage from a single feature comes from pit 845. This feature, although belonging to Phase 1 (1st century – c. AD 120) contains significant quantities of pottery dating from mid 2nd century AD onwards (ie. samian from Lezoux, Central Gaulish black slipped ware and Nene Valley colour coated ware (Gibson 2005, Appendix 2), as well as various straight-sided bowl/dish and jar forms in coarseware fabrics). Pit 845 cut two earlier pits (848 and 850) and it is also possible that numbering errors occurred during excavation or the preliminary post-excavation processing of artefacts from these features. Similarly, material found in ditches is only rarely linked to the use of the ditch but rather represents material, possibly spanning a wide date range, present in an area once the feature has gone out of use and is filling up. The majority of sherds (58%) from this site were found in the ditches, with 25% being from the various pits.

In general, the all the fabrics and forms are encompassed by the range of products expected in this area. The material generally compares well with assemblages from Cambridge (Hull and Pullinger 1999), the Cambourne development area (Wessex Archaeology in prep.) and Eynesbury (Mephram forthcoming) as well as from sites slightly further afield (Perrin 1999; Hancocks et. al. 1998; Hancocks 2001). Although the assemblage is dominated by utilitarian wares, at least limited access to, or use for, fine tablewares is indicated by the presence of samian, imported and British finewares (ie. Fig. 10, 37 and 38).

Ignoring the problems of pit 845, ceramically, there are few discernable differences between the assemblages from stratigraphic Phases 1 and 2, which are probably fairly closely dated from the Flavian period to c. AD 120. The bulk of the assemblage dates from the early/mid to late 2nd century AD, relating to the reorganisation of the field system (Phase 3) and possibly implying an expansion of the settlement or at least increased rates of deposition in this area of its hinterland. The absence of East Gaulish samian clearly indicates an interruption of fineware supply during the early 3rd century AD. Indeed, few, if any, of the other fabrics and forms need belong within this period, say, the first 40 years of the 3rd century AD although a coin (SF 32) probably of Severan (AD 193-235) date has been identified (Wells, *The Coins*, internet paper). Although this period is a notoriously difficult to identify ceramically, it seems probable that the nature of activity changed at this time, perhaps becoming more agriculturally based. The presence of characteristically Late Roman material (rilled jars with hooked rims and dropped flanged bowls in calcareous and sandy coarseware fabrics, the Hadham and Harston Obelisk wares and 4th century Nene Valley forms), indicate resumption of settlement during the later 3rd and 4th centuries AD. The relatively small quantities of late material however, suggest that this is likely to have been relatively short-lived, small-scale and/or a fair distance away.

Notable omissions from this assemblage include samian mortaria although the coarseware forms, present from at least the 2nd century AD onwards, imply the adoption of Romanised methods of food preparation. Interestingly, the samian form 38 vessel is very worn and may have been used like a mortaria for grinding and other food preparation purposes. Amphorae and decorated samian vessels are also notable by their absence although this is likely to be a reflection of status. In general, the distribution, condition and nature of the assemblage are consistent with the deposition and redeposition of domestic debris from a rural farming community.

Saxon

A single plain body sherd in a very obvious quartz tempered fabric was found in the uppermost fill of ditch 128 (context 761, segment 758), associated with a few sandy greyware sherds of Romano-British date. Although intrinsically undatable, the fabric

of this sherd is comparable with early to middle Saxon (5th-7th centuries AD) material invariably found in small quantities in the upper fills of earlier features located within the Cambourne new town development area (Wessex Archaeology in prep.) and at Eynesbury (Mephram 2004).

Q400 Very hard, coarse-grained fabric containing common, poorly-sorted subrounded quartz up to 0.5mm across and rare crushed sandstone inclusions up to 3mm across. Dark grey brown in colour. Handmade.

Post-medieval

The post-medieval material mostly consists of 19th-20th century industrial wares (white and blue and white 'china') although three red earthenware sherds and one piece of Staffordshire-type slip ware were also present. These probably derive from the practice of manuring the fields with domestic rubbish from the nearby settlements.

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Table 2: Vessel forms present by fabric (excluding samian – see Table 1)

Form code	Finewares			Mortaria			Oxidised wares			Grey wares						Total	
	E128	Q110	E207	E209	E213	E176	Q103	Q108	Q109	Q105	Q100	Q101	G100	C100	Q102		E101
Mortaria:																	
M21	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
R106	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
R117	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Bowls:																	
R111	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	2
R119	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	4
R124	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
R128	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
R129	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	3
R130	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
R132	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Straight-sided bowls/ dishes:																	
R101	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	3	9	7	-	-	2	-	22
R107	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	3	10	2	-	1	-	-	18
R108	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	-	-	1	-	1	5
R109	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
R126	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Jars:																	
R103	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	3
R104	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	8	2	2	-	1	-	-	14
R105	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	3	-	-	6
R110	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	5
R113	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
R114	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	8	-	-	9
R115	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	3	-	-	5
R116	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	3
R120	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
R121	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
R125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	3
R133	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1

Finewares		Mortaria			Oxidised wares				Grey wares									
Form code	E128	Q110	E207	E209	E213	E176	Q103	Q108	Q109	Q105	Q100	Q101	G100	C100	Q102	E101	Total	
<i>Misc forms:</i>																		
R112	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
R118	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
R122	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
R123	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
R127	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
R131	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Totals	1	1	1	1	1	7	4	5	1	36	32	13	1	27	2	1	134	

Key to forms:

Mortaria: M21 = Young 2000, 76, type M21, not illustrated; R106 = mortaria with inturned bead and a slightly down-turned reeded flange – Fig. 8, 7; R117 = mortaria with narrow, slightly inturned bead and heavy, downturned flange – Fig. 9, 21.

Bowls: R111 = round-bodied bowl with flat-topped rim – Fig. 8, 14; R119 = carinated bowl with a filled and hooked rim – Fig. 9, 23; R124 = copy of samian form 38 – Fig. 9, 28; R128 = carinated bowl with double bead rim – Fig. 9, 32; R129 = wide-mouthed bowl with upright neck and rounded body – Fig. 9, 33; R130 = bead rim bowl – Fig. 10, 34; R132 = shallow bowl with a sinuous profile – Fig. 10, 35.

Straight-sided bowls/dishes: R101 = triangular, rounded or flat rimmed dishes/bowls - Fig. 8, 1 and 2; R107 = shallow bowls/dishes with plain rims – Fig. 8, 8; R108 = dropped flange bowls/dishes – Fig. 80, 10 and 11; R109 = copies of samian form Curle 23 – Fig. 8, 12; R126 = 'incipient' flanged bowl/dish – Fig. 9, 30.

Jars: R103 = triangular, lid-seated bead rimmed jar – Fig. 8, 3; R104 = necked and cordoned jars – Fig. 8, 4 and 5; R105 = upright-necked jars with straight-ended rims – Fig. 8, 6; R110 = everted rim jar/bowls – Fig. 8, 13; R113 = necked jar with grooved rim – Fig. 8, 16; R114 = jar with a moulded lid-seated rim – Fig. 8, 17 and 18; R115 = high-shouldered necked jar with flared rim – Fig. 8, 19; R116 = jar with upright rim – Fig. 9, 20; R120 = narrow-necked jar with an out-turned rim, grooved and cordoned on shoulder – Fig. 9, 24; R121 = high-shouldered jar with lid-seated rim, grooves, cordons and decoration beneath shoulder – Fig. 9, 25; R125 = hooked rim jar – Fig. 9, 29; R133 = squat jar/bowl with an outturned, lid-seated rim – Fig. 10, 36.

Misc forms: R112 = storage jar with a tall, rolled rim – Fig. 8, 15; R118 = ring-necked flagon – Fig. 9, 22; R122 = beaker with a sharply everted rim – Fig. 9, 26; R123 = plain rim from small cup – Fig. 9, 27; R127 = lids – Fig. 9, 31; R131 = Castor box – not illustrated.



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