SKNB DRAFT PUBLICATION REPORT: THE POTTERY

By Kayt Brown

Introduction

The assemblage comprises 10182 sherds (100187g) of predominately Roman pottery, with a small quantity of prehistoric material, largely residual in Roman features. The main assemblage can be dated from the mid-late 1st century AD to the late 2nd century AD. A small number of late Roman shell tempered sherds suggest limited activity in the 4th century AD date, although no features were assigned to this date.

Condition

As with a number of the Cotswold Water Park sites, adverse soil conditions had a major impact on the condition of the assemblage; surface preservation was poor and many sherds displayed discolouring of surfaces hindering fabric identification. The average sherd size for the assemblage as whole was relatively low at 9.9g, although there was variation in sherd size between the phases. Evidence of use was represented by sooting on the exterior of vessels, post-firing holes in a number of vessels, sherds with rivet holes and a number of lead rivets (see Cool small finds, this volume).

A total of 236 contexts produced pottery, although a number of large cleaning layers and unstratified material accounts for 37% of the assemblage by sherd count (36% by sherd weight). Ditches, layers and pits were the principal feature types to produce pottery although material was also recovered from gullies, postholes a well and a corndrier.

Methodology

The assemblage was recorded following the standard Oxford Archaeology recording system (Booth, OA unpublished). Sherds were examined by context and assigned to ware (or generalised ware group) and vessel type, where appropriate. Unstratified material and material from cleaning layers was recorded to generalised ware group as this material still provides an insight into the character of the assemblage. Where possible reference is made to existing typologies, for example Oxfordshire products (Young 1977), and fabrics are cross-references to the National Roman Fabric Collection (Tomber & Dore 1998). Sherds from each context were then quantified by sherd count, weight, rim count and rim equivalents. Also recorded were decoration, condition, evidence of use/reuse and repair.
Fabrics

A quantification of fabrics by sherd count, weight and estimated vessel equivalents (EVEs) is presented in table 1. Full fabric descriptions are included in the archive.

Fine and specialist wares

Imported fine and specialist wares were represented by amphorae, samian ware and a single sherd of Lyon ware. British material comprised fine wares, mortaria and white wares. Amphorae were predominately body sherds of South Spanish Dr 20 olive oil containers, with a single handle sherd and a complete, if fragmentary rim. In Britain such material dates from the late Iron Age - 3rd century AD. Other amphorae were represented by a single body sherd of another south Spanish type, Cam 186, used for fish-based products and dated from the Flavian period to the early 2nd century AD. Samian ware products of the south Gaulish and central Gaulish industries (Les Martres-de-Veyre and Lezoux) were represented, but there was an absence of later east Gaulish material (see samian report below). Examples of British fine wares were restricted to two sherds of colour-coat wares, possibly North Wiltshire products but in poor condition, and a single north Wiltshire glazed ware sherd. North Wiltshire colour-coat material has been dated to AD 125-140/50 (Anderson 1978, 380-3), and the distribution of this ware is largely based on Wanborough and Cirencester, with isolated finds on sites across Wiltshire (Seager-Smith 2001, 240). The distribution of known sherds of North Wiltshire glazed wares is again centred on Wanborough and dated to the first-second century AD (Seager Smith, 2001, 253). Regional mortaria can be sourced to Cirencester and Oxfordshire (both white ware and white-slipped), with a small number of un-sourced oxidised sherds.

Samian Ware

The samian assemblage comprised 152 sherds (1299 g), representing a minimum of 45 vessels. Over half of this material was unphased (53% by weight, 50% by sherd count). Of the phased material, the context groups were very small, often only 1 or 2 sherds. The dating of contexts, and even features by the samian present, is therefore, in many cases likely to be unreliable given the likelihood of re-deposition and intrusion of sherds.

South Gaulish material (La Graufesenque) accounts for just under a quarter (24% by sherd count) of all the samian recovered. Within this the earliest forms are rims from the bowl types Ritterling 12 and Curle 11. Production of Rit. 12 had ceased by AD 80, while Curle 11 developed through the Flavian period, and given the absence of earlier forms, it seems likely that samian started arriving at the site during the early Flavian period. This is similar to the situation at Claydon Pike (Webster FCP samian, this vol). Central Gaulish products form the bulk of the samian assemblage, dominated by Lezoux (post AD120), with only 25 sherds of Les Matres-de-Veyre (AD 100-125). The small quantity of Les Martres is interesting in that it shows that the acquisition of samian to the site did not decline at the end of the 1st century, alongside the decline of the south Gaulish industries. The proportion of forms Dr 18/31 to Dr31 within the assemblage is roughly equal, with marginally more Dr 18/31 present. This would indicate that the 2nd century assemblage is more likely to date to the first half of that century. Although form Dr 33 is the dominant cup form, there are a small number of
Dr27, and the absence of any late 2nd century forms such as the samian mortaria form Dr 45, or forms Walters 72 and 79/80 would support this theory.

Decoration occurs predominately on Dr 37 bowls (figure 00), and there are both south and central Gaulish examples. Decorated sherds comprise 15% of the assemblage, giving a ratio of decorated to plain ware of 1:10. This ratio is similar to that at Area A Asthall (Booth 1997, 110), and significantly higher than at the nearby site of Claydon Pike where decorated material accounts for only 4% of the samian assemblage (Webster FCP samian, this vol). There were three stamps, all on base sherds. Evidence of curation of samian vessels is visible on a number of sherds, in the form of rivet holes with in one instance a rivet still intact.

**Coarse wares**

*Prehistoric*

A small quantity of Iron Age sherds was present within the assemblage, all residual in later contexts. Fabrics were in the main calcaeous, being either coarse shell or limestone tempered. These fabrics are comparable to those at Claydon Pike (Booth FCP pot, this vol) and Thornhill farm (Timby 2001, 24) and may indicate some degree of middle - late Iron Age activity either at, or near to the excavated area. A further four sand tempered, possibly middle Iron Age, sherds were also recovered. A small number of coarse flint-tempered sherds, and two quartzite-tempered sherds are likely to date to the Bronze Age or earlier, although these again occur alongside later material.

*Late Iron Age/early Roman*

The ‘belgic’ type wares, characteristic of the 1st century AD in this region, accounted for 17% of the assemblage (by sherd count, 19% by weight). The grog-tempered wares (E80) were the dominant fabric types, occasionally with varying amounts burnt/leached out organic material and shell, which may have resulted in some overlap between the E80, E10 and E40 ware groups. A small number of sherds in a flint-gritted fabric and a range of sandy wares were also recorded. A similar range of ‘belgic’ type fabrics were identified at Ashton Keynes (Wessex Archaeology 1989), Thornhill Farm (Timby 2001, 28) and Claydon Pike (Booth FCP pot, this vol).

*Roman*

The coarse wares were dominated by the reduced wares (43.3% of the total assemblage by sherd count). The condition of the assemblage precluded the identification of many sherds to a specific source or even industry, hence the majority of reduced wares were recorded in the general R30 category (62% by sherd count). Sourced material included products of the North Wiltshire industry (Anderson 1979, 9) which were being produced from the early 2nd century at known sites such as Purton Toothill Farm and Whitehill Farm. This material accounted for almost 4% of reduced coarsewares (1.7% of the assemblage by sherd count) although it is likely that many more sherds were recorded within the R30 category. Savernake and a possible variant fabric R38 (sand and grog-tempered) were marginally better represented. A similar pattern was observed with the oxidised coarsewares; North Wiltshire products accounted for 21% (by sherd count) of this group and less well represented but still significant were Severn Valley products and the coarse oxidised ware group O80. The unsourced categories again accounted for the majority of oxidised coarsewares, but
included in this material are likely to be further products from the North Wiltshire and possibly Oxfordshire industries. As at Whelford Bowmoor, the reduced fabric R37 is again notable by its absence. A major fabric at Asthall (Booth 1997, 114), it does not appear to figure significantly at Whelford Bowmoor or Somerford Keynes, is poorly represented at Kempsford and no mention is made of similar fabric at Ashton Keynes (although to date no quantified data is available for this site). Again, this apparent paucity of R37 could be a result of the poor condition of much of this material, or be a genuine reflection of the distribution of this fabric. However, sherd condition is the more likely explanation, given that R38 is thought to be a variant of R37 from the same source.

Black-burnished ware and imitation, possibly local, fabrics were, in common with a number of sites in the area, well represented comprising 14% (by sherd count). The poor condition, however, of much of this material is reflected in the proportion by weight (g) of only 11%.

Forms

Vessel form classes comprised Amphora (A), flagons and jugs (B), jars (C), jars/bowls (D), beakers (E), cups (F), bowls (H), bowls/dishes (I), dishes (J), mortaria (K), lids (L), and miscellaneous (M), with each of these classes sub-divided into specific form types. Table 2 shows the correlation between these vessel classes and the ware groups.

Jar forms dominated the assemblage, accounting for 61% by eves. Within this class early forms include bead-rim jars (CH) (figure 2.6), dating to the 1st century AD, occurring in the Belgic type fabrics and reduced coarseware in roughly equal proportions. High-shouldered or ‘necked’ jars (CE) (figure 1.4) are similar in date, and again occur principally in the E ware fabrics, but are relatively poorly represented. The everted-rim cooking jar form (CK) (figure 2.00) occurs almost exclusively in Black-burnished ware and imitation fabrics and is the most prolific jar form within the assemblage. The only other jar form to be significantly represented is the medium mouthed jar (CD). A number of vessels were assigned to the intermediate jar/bowl category, when insufficient profile survived to enable a more precise definition. These comprised just over 11% by eves, as did bowl forms. Again black-burnished ware types would appear to be the main supplier of this form, mainly straight-sided bowls (HB) with either plain, slightly beaded or triangular beaded rims. There were a small number of plain top rims, dating from the early 2nd century AD and early flanged bowls, late 2nd to mid 3rd century in date. Fineware bowls occur as a single colour-coat sherd, a sherd of a Lyon hemispherical bowl (Greene 1979) (figure 1.5), and the samian forms Dr30 (HA), the curving sided (HC) bowl forms Dr31, 37, 38 and curle 11. Cup forms occur exclusively in samian forms Dr 27 (FB), 33 (FC), and 35 (FA). Alongside unsourced oxidised and reduced beakers are single examples of a poppyhead beaker and a decorated sherd of a north Wiltshire glazed ware (figure 2.15), comparable to a conical beaker, part of the Wanborough group (Arthur 1978, 323, fig 8.8, no 5.5; Seager Smith 2001, 295, fig 102). Only two tankards were present, both Severn valley products (figure 2.10). Flagons are poorly represented, as are lids, mortaria and amphorae, with one complete, if fragmentary, rim of the latter.
There is also a single example of an oxidised triple vase base (figure 2.00) and a small fragment of a tazza in a reduced fabric.

**Decoration**

The main forms of decoration comprised grooves and cordons on examples of most fabric types. Burnished decoration was present as either zones of burnish, lines or lattice. Lattice decoration was restricted to black-burnished ware types with only a few examples on reduced coarsewares. In all but one instance lattice decoration was narrow (acute), in keeping with the early date of the assemblage, and occurred on both jar and bowl/dish forms. Two vessels had burnished decoration on the underside of the base. Barbotine decoration and rouletting were the only other forms of decoration to occur on a number of reduced body sherds. Possibly the latest sherd in the assemblage was a rilled late Roman shell-tempered sherd, 4th century in date (unstratified).

**Site discussion**

A large proportion of the assemblage was unphased (37% by sherd count). The bulk of the assemblage was recovered from trench 5, which is also the only area to produce any reliable phasing information. A brief discussion of the material from each trench is presented followed by comments on the overall assemblage. The pottery totals by phase are shown in Table 3 and by trench in Table 4.

Although 3 broad phases were identified through the stratigraphy, in ceramic terms the distinction is not always clear. There is significant overlap in the wares represented in all phases, due partly to the narrow time span of activity at the site and longevity of some fabrics during this period, but re-deposition of sherds, and in some cases curation of vessels are also likely factors. The inter-cutting nature of many of the features to produce pottery, particularly in trench 5 has resulted in many features from different phases producing a quite homogenous range of wares, with dating, particularly between phases 2 and 3 based largely on a small number of diagnostic forms.

Most features within phase 1, including the enclosure ditches can be dated to the late 1st - early 2nd century. The 'belgic' type wares and early reduced coarsewares (such as Savernake) form the bulk of the material recovered in this phase. There is very little mortaria or samian and no British fine wares. Residual Iron age material amounts to 60 sherds. There are a few features which may indicate earlier activity at the site, although the individual assemblages recovered from these features are small. Posthole 310 contained grog-tempered sherds and limestone sherds, a combination that is indicative of the early to mid 1st century AD at the nearby site of Thornhill Farm (Timby 2001, 24). Ditches 117, 314, and gullies 315 and 316 also contained mid-late 1st century AD pottery.

The ceramics from this phase 1 are comparable in both range of fabrics and forms, to Thornhill Farm periods E-F (c. AD75 - 120), which also appears to be a phase of intensive occupation. At Thornhill Farm, however, the quantity of ceramics
diminishes during the 2nd century (phase 2, Thornhill Farm period G). At Somerford Keynes there is an increase in the amount of samian and black-burnished wares, including in the latter instance straight-sided bowls/dishes with flat top rims, dated from the early- mid 2nd century (phase 2). In trench 5 it was possible to further subdivide this phase into phase 2a and 2b, on stratigraphic grounds, although again this is not reflected in the ceramics from these features. Included within phase 2 is the pottery recovered from the postholes of the aisled building (B1), which is consistently 2nd century in date (see below), with a small quantity of grog-tempered wares. Grog-tempered wares continue to appear alongside later fabrics into phase 3 and although some may be due to re-deposition, the average sherd sizes of this material remain high.

**Trench 1**
Single sherd of O20 (4g) and post medieval sherd (16g) from Ditch LB3. Phase 2/3.

**Trench 2**
A single black-burnished type sherd (7g) from gully 8, unphased.

**Trench 4**
Five sherds, comprising two R30 sherds (23g), two central Gaulish sherds (9g) dated to the early-mid 2nd century, and a single sherd of R95 (10g).

**Trench 5**
Trench 5 produced 7027 sherds (70070g), the largest assemblage of pottery recovered from a sequence of inter-cutting ditches, gullies, pits and post-holes. Good stratigraphic groups were, however, rare and many features produced small quantities of material. This, combined with the poor condition of much of the material, enabled only a broad phasing sequence to be applied within the trench (see above).

**Phase 1 (Table 5)**
Pottery from the enclosure ditches was predominantly late 1st to early 2nd century in date and all enclosures displayed a similar range of wares. Groups of material from individual features were small ranging from 7 sherds in enclosure 3 to 304 sherds in enclosure 4. Enclosure 4 is stratigraphically the earliest of the enclosures and was the only enclosure to produce a quantity of middle Iron Age sherds, re-deposited alongside later wares. Central gully 147, located within enclosure 2, also produced late 1st - early 2nd century pottery and could well be contemporary with this enclosure. A number of linear ditches were the other principal feature type to produce pottery (see Table 5), although again groups tended to be small and broadly dated to the late 1st - 2nd century. The only possible exception to this is posthole 311 (310), which contained grog-tempered and limestone sherds, which may indicate an earlier, mid 1st century AD date. The calcareous and e-ware fabrics are the two dominant groups within the phase 1 material from ditches, with e-wares remaining a consistent presence in all phases. Black-burnished ware and imitation types also feature significantly (see Table 5).
Phase 2 (Table 6)

The ditches assigned on stratigraphic grounds to phase 2 show an increase in the proportion of oxidised and reduced coarsewares and black-burnished ware compared to earlier fabrics. Fine and specialist wares in the form of samian and mortaria also increase. However, material from ditch fills, given the nature of the feature type, should always be approached with caution, especially when dating is based on such relatively small samples. Also within phase 2 are a series of postholes from a substantial aisled building (B1), which produced 171 sherds of pottery within the limestone packing of the postholes. This material included 3 middle Iron Age sherds, a single calcareous sherd and a small quantity of grog-tempered wares, with the bulk of the material comprising roman reduced and oxidised coarsewares. Two sherds of Les Martres-de-Veyre samian, (a decorated Dr 37 bowl and part of a DR 35 cup) would indicate a terminus post quem of 100 - 125AD for the construction of this building.

Phase 3 (Table 7)

There is very little in the assemblage which can be dated later than the late 2nd - early 3rd century AD. With the exception of some later forms (for example groove and bead rim black-burnished ware bowls) and some mortarium forms, the main wares represented do not significantly alter during the 2nd century. Consequently the material from the phase 3 features does not appear to differ greatly from the preceding phase. For example ditch 114 is stratigraphically the latest feature within this trench yet in terms of the pottery recovered can not be distinguished from phase 2. The corndrier (167) produced a range of re-deposited late 1st and 2nd century fabrics with no diagnostic forms. Ceramics usually indicative of the 3rd century in this region are absent, for example east Gaulish samian, (and no late samian forms), and no material from the large late Roman industries such as Oxfordshire colour-coat products are present within the assemblage.

Trench 7

Eleven sherds comprising 10 E80 sherds (54g) and a single limestone tempered sherd (1g) from gullies 313 - 317, phase 1.

Trench 8

Single sherds of Black-burnished ware sherd (1g), flint-tempered E60 (7g), E80 (27g), two sherds of R30 (36g) and 3 R35 sherds (113g). Ditches 65 and 64, phase 2/3.

Trench 9

Single sherd of R38 from gully 62, phase 2a.

Trench 12

Single sherd of E80 (32g) and R30 (8g) from ditch group 36, phase 2/3.
Trench 13

A total of 137 sherds (1085g) was recovered from trench 13 (Table 8). Over 30 sherds were retrieved from cleaning layers and topsoil. Ditches 314 and 317 produced 8 grog-tempered sherds (75g), including part of a high shouldered or ‘necked jar, typically 1\textsuperscript{st} century AD in date. Possible phase 1 /2 sherds comprise 4 E80 sherds (72g) and 4 R30 sherds (11g) from Gully fill (313). The remaining 91 sherds were from features phased to the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century and include a number of sherds from the ditch which also produced the sculptural fragment.

Trench 17

Trench 17 produced the second largest assemblage of 2478 sherds (23076g; Table 9). Little reliable phasing information was available from this trench, although in ceramic terms it is similar to trench 5. Unphased material accounted for 261 sherds. Only 4 sherds (88g) were recovered from features dated to phase 1, with a further 84 (723g) from phase 1 /2. By for the bulk of the assemblage was recovered from later features, including pit 405 and gully CG419, which, although stratigraphically late, contained a small quantity of 2\textsuperscript{nd} century pottery. Layer 34, phase 2/3, produced over 580 sherds mostly 2\textsuperscript{nd} century in date, with an average sherd weight of 9g. Included in this material are some large sherds of grog-tempered and reduced bead rim jars (average sherd weight of 35g), which would imply a date early in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century date, rather than later, as sherds of such sizes are unlikely to have undergone much post-depositional disturbance. Pit 400 produced an exceptionally large number of sherds (1299 sherds, 10596g). Black-burnished wares were well represented within this at over 100 sherds, including everted-rim jars, bowls and dishes. Once again the grog-tempered and other ‘belgic’ type wares are surprisingly well represented along with a coarseware bead-rim jar with particularly large individual sherd size (3 sherds 325g). The good survival of these 1\textsuperscript{st} century fabrics and forms could well be due to an element of curation as a number of lead rivets, some with coarseware fabrics adhering were also recovered from the site, although mainly from unstratified layers. Well (402) produced a small quantity of 2nd century AD coarsewares and a single sherd of Les Martres-de-Veyre samian.

Trench 19

Trench 19 produced a small assemblage of only 204 sherds (2662g) with a good average sherd weight of 13g (Table 10). Just under half of this assemblage (48% by sherd count) was unphased, resulting largely from topsoil and cleaning layers. Material which could be phased was from predominately late ditches (phase 2/3). Only 5 grog-tempered sherds were recovered, the remaining assemblage comprising 2\textsuperscript{nd} century material including central Gaulish samian, amphora and at least 2 mortaria, both Oxfordshire products (1 white-ware, 1 white-slipped). The pottery from this trench may represent activity from phase 2 onwards.
General discussion

The small number of possible Bronze age and Iron age sherds hint at limited early activity in the area, with stronger evidence for activity at the site possibly from the early- mid 1st century AD and certainly from the late 1st century AD. The assemblage from Somerford Keynes shows many similarities to a number of rural sites within the region. As at Thornhill Farm and to a lesser extent at Claydon Pike there is a late 1st century - early 2nd century component of the assemblage which still comprises a significant proportion of ‘local’ grog-tempered wares. At Thornhill Farm, grog-tempered material was still a dominant fabric, occurring alongside Severn Valley and Savernake wares in period E-F (AD75-120+) (Timby 2001, 31). Although no quantified data exists for the assemblage from Ashton Keynes, it would appear that there is a similar range of material present during the late Iron age/early Roman period. The occurrence of limestone tempered fabrics is also well recorded at these sites and at a number of other rural sites such as Watchfield, Oxfordshire (Laidlaw 2001, 255), Groundwell Farm, Wiltshire (Gingell 1982,61), Kempsford (Biddulph, forthcoming) and Faringdon, Gloucestershire (Brown in prep).

However, in contrast to Claydon Pike, Ashton Keynes, and to some extent Kempsford, activity at Somerford Keynes appears to cease in the late 2nd - 3rd century. Locally produced wares are the principal sources for the assemblage and in keeping with rural sites in the upper Thames Valley, the proportion of fine and specialist wares is low, at only 2.5% (by sherd count) and 5.5% (by weight - a higher percentage reflecting the presence of amphorae and mortaria sherds). Sites at Old Shifford farm, Standlake (Timby 1995, 129) and Gravelly Guy, Oxfordshire (OA in prep) both produced less than 1% fine and specialist wares, compared to the urban assemblage at Asthall where the figure is almost 7% during the same period (Booth 1997, 134). There is little evidence within the ceramic assemblage to indicate that it represents anything other than a rural, domestic assemblage, which would appear to be in contrast with the small find evidence (Cool small finds, this vol). However there are hints that the occupants at Somerford Keynes may have had access to more luxury items, for example the presence of a Lyon glazed bowl, although the occurrence of all fine wares is severely limited. Combined with this, characteristically Roman forms such as mortaria, amphorae and flagons are all poorly represented within the assemblage, and suggests that Roman culinary practises may have had little impact on the inhabitants of the site. Like many rural sites of this period jars and bowls form the dominant vessel types. The presence of sherds from a triple vase and a tazza are the only elements of the assemblage that may indicate any form of ritual activity, but given the number of sherds involved this is a rather tenuous link.
Bibliography

Anderson, A. S. 1979 The Roman Pottery Industry In North Wiltshire Swindon Archaeological Society Report No.2


Biddulph, E. [incomplete]

Booth, P. M. 1997 Asthall, Oxfordshire: Excavations in a Roman ‘Small Town’ Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph No.9, Oxford Archaeological Unit

Booth, P Oxford Archaeology Roman Pottery Recording System: An Introduction Oxford Archaeology unpublished

Brown, K. 2003 faringdon - [Incomplete]

Cool, H. this volume

Gingell, C. 1982 Excavation of an Iron Age enclosure at Groundwell Farm, Blunsdon St Andrew, 1976-7, Wiltshire Archaeol Mag 76, 34-75

Greene, K. 1979 The Pre-Flavian Fine Wares at usk? University of Wales, Cardiff


Seager-Smith, R. The Pottery In: Ashton Keynes, Wessex Archaeology post-exca-vation assessment, unpublished


Timby, J, 1995 Pottery, in Iron Age and Roman settlement at Old Shifford Farm, Standlake (G Hey), Oxoniensia 60, 1996, 124-136

Timby, J. 2001 The Pottery In: D. Jennings, J. Muir, S. Palmer and A. Smith Thornhill Farm, Fairford, Gloucestershire: an Iron Age and Roman Pastoral site in the Upper Thames Valley Oxford Archaeology Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph


Webster, P the samian this volume

Young, C J, 1977 Oxfordshire Roman pottery, BAR Brit Ser 43, Oxford