

## **Area H – LPRIA & Roman pottery summary**

By Edward Biddulph

**Introduction** – Pottery was recovered from 554 contexts, weighing 797,293g. The area's chronological trends may be summarised as follows:

- ❑ The earliest activity dates to the late Iron Age, probably commencing from the second half of the 1st century BC.
- ❑ An increased level of activity is evident in the 1st century AD, especially during the later part.
- ❑ With something of a hiatus during the first half of the 2nd century, activity resumes in the second half.
- ❑ This revival continues apace in the 3rd century, perhaps declining slightly in the later part.
- ❑ New features are cut or built during the 4th century, some possibly remaining open into the 5th.

**Ditches & boundaries** – Ditches are among the earliest features, including the N-S ditch 16018 (H50). A number of handmade forms were recovered from it, which, in the absence of imported finewares and wheel-thrown pottery, suggests a date commencing from the mid/late 1st century BC. Ditch groups H52 and H53 may share this date – handmade forms were recovered from layer 6910 (above 16053) and ditch 6923. Features in groups H16, H51, and 6427 in H53 contained undiagnostic late Iron Age pottery, and could date from the later 1st century BC to late 1st century AD. At least three ditches were in-filled during the second half of the 1st century AD – H24, broadly contemporary with some surfaces of road 4 (e.g. 6664); H45, a replacement, albeit short-lived, of H24; and the curvilinear ditch H56. No new ditches were cut during the first half of the 2nd century, and it also seems unlikely that ditches cut during the 1st century remained open into the second. Although strongly indicating a break in activity from the end of the 1st century to the middle of the 2nd, this may reflect ceramic invisibility. First century forms that continue into the 2nd century cannot be assigned the later date with confidence without associated 2nd century forms. However, given the general dearth of early to mid 2nd century pottery from area H, a genuine reduction of activity is probably most likely. The second half of the 2nd century is a period of revival. New ditches include 6313 and 6358 (H58) and 6769 (H57). These are likely to have remained in use in the 3rd century. It is also likely that ditches dug in the 4th century remained open into the 5th, including 6577 (H113). Ditch 16338 (H60) contained a large and abraded late Roman assemblage, with little obvious residuality. It is possible that this material was redeposited into a feature that is among the latest in the area, perhaps also remaining open into the 5th century. It is interesting, then, that the pottery from a wall line (16197, H61) is of similar date, quality and composition. Also, this feature joins at right angles to the ditch. If both features are not related in function, then they are perhaps in terms of their disuse. The pottery suggests deliberate dumping, which possibly reflects a policy of closing certain parts of the site during the late 4th/early 5th century.

**Pits & wells** – There are relatively few pits from area H. Most of them date to the Roman period, peaking in the 3rd century. None of the pits that date to the late Iron Age contained significant amounts of pottery, perhaps suggesting that rubbish was disposed of in other ways, or that there was a low level of domestic activity. Pottery was recovered from one possible and one actual well. The latter (H76) was out of use by the late 2nd century. Considering that its lining timbers were felled in the mid 2nd century, the well is likely to have been in use for short time, probably no more than fifty years. The former (H75) was in use up to the second

half of the 4th century. Although its bottom fill (6640) contained five pewter vessels and a lot of bone, suggesting a structured deposit, the pottery is unremarkable and should perhaps be considered a separate event.

**Roads** – Area H was bounded by three roads. Road 1 to the west originated in the late Iron Age. Phase 1 can be dated thus with some certainty, since relatively large amounts of late Iron Age pottery were also recovered from phase 2 deposits. Road 4 to the south was constructed possibly by the later 1st century, and was certainly in use during the 2nd, perhaps continuing into the 3rd century. Road 5 to the north is less well dated, containing an assortment of largely undiagnostic pottery. However, it was probably constructed in the Roman period and possibly remained in use up to the late 3rd century. With road 1, phase 3 deposits containing pottery dating from the late 2nd century, it is probable that all three roads were in contemporaneous use, perhaps during the 2nd and/or 3rd centuries.

**Structures & hearths** – As with area N, little sense can be made out of the profusion of post-holes, slots and other structural elements. Two of the most convincing buildings includes groups H23 and H48. The former is likely to date to the late Iron Age. The latter probably dates from the second half of the 2nd century. Taking the dates of the pottery from the area's structural elements as a broad indicator, most construction activity seems to have taken place in the Roman period. The period between the later 2nd and first half of the 3rd centuries is something of a high point – mirroring the pattern suggested by the pit evidence. Most of the storage jar hearths could not be dated closely, though the (intrusive) pottery within some of them suggests that they form part of an early Roman practice.

**The pottery** – Generally, the quality of the pottery was poor. In many of the large groups much of the pottery was broken and abraded, although, on the whole, fairly well-dated. However, the level of residuality, particularly from layers, was high. This may be due, in part, to poor feature definition, and perhaps, in the later Roman period, to changing rubbish disposal habits. Most of the pottery was domestic and utilitarian, the bulk of it being locally produced (cooking) jars and dishes. Imported finewares are poorly represented. The small number of Gallo-Belgic imports is mainly residual. East Gaulish Rhenish ware is possibly more common than the earlier Central Gaulish Rhenish ware, perhaps reflecting the greater level of activity in the late 2nd and first half of the 3rd centuries. Romano-British finewares – Colchester, Oxford and Nene Valley colour-coated wares – are relatively abundant, as are fabrics such as Hadham wares, BB1 and BB2. Fabrics that are found infrequently at Elms Farm include silty ware, which was possibly made at Verulamium and dates to the mid 1st century; and South-East English glazed ware, a late 1st to early 2nd century fabric.

**Quantified groups** – The pottery from nineteen contexts was selected for quantification by EVE's, and reflects the chronological trends – over half of the groups date to the late 2nd and 3rd centuries. The groups are: **6001, 6002, 6152, 6178, 6203, 6268, 6314, 6533, 6647, 6693, 6874, 6875, 6907, 6957, 16054, 16073, 16083, 16182 and 16333**. Ten are worthy of publication.