

Area N – LPRIA & Roman pottery summary

By Edward Biddulph

Introduction – Pottery was recovered from 392 contexts, weighing 326,015g. The area's chronological trends may be summarised as follows:

- ❑ Its main period of activity took place in the late Iron Age, certainly commencing, and perhaps reaching its *floruit*, during the later 1st century BC.
- ❑ Activity continues into the Roman period, though many features fall out of use by the second half of the 1st century AD.
- ❑ This decline continues into the middle Roman period. Few new features are built or cut during the 2nd and 3rd centuries.
- ❑ A slight revival is evident by the late 3rd century, with features remaining in use into the 4th, but not surviving much into the later part of the century.

Boundaries & enclosures – The most substantial linear features in area N are the boundary ditches N3 and N14. Nothing later than mid 1st century AD was recovered from the latter, which, almost certainly, passed out of use by then. The initial periods of in-filling commenced during the earlier part of the century. The parallel ditch N14 is not demonstrably earlier than N3, and might be contemporary with it. However, there were no imported finewares amongst its pottery assemblages, which might hint at a pre-importation (and therefore earlier) date. The small amount of pottery from the remaining linear features adds little to their chronology or phasing. Only one segment from parallel ditches N13 contained pottery, which was late Iron Age in date. Similarly, the Roman gullies N34 yielded largely undiagnostic pottery. It is worth noting, however, that small amounts of pottery, if any, are usually recovered from structural features, such as beamslots or foundation trenches. The pottery from groups N13 and N34 are consistent, in terms of condition and quantity, with such structural elements.

Structures – While structures certainly exist, judging by the profusion of post-holes, the absence of diagnostic pottery makes it difficult to make sense of post-hole groups. For the record, I'd make the 'roundhouse' (N4) an integral structure, contemporary with the boundary N3.

Pits & wells – The earliest pits are dated to the late 1st century BC – their initial use possibly commencing even earlier. These include 11745 and 11774, which, incidentally, contain a significant number of joining sherds, and could be part of the same deposition episode. In addition, the condition of the pottery, especially within the lower fills, is good. It is possible that the feature, which was not bottomed, is a well. Other early pits, whose infilling extends into or takes place during the early 1st century AD, include 11477, 11463, 11342, 23128 and 23158. Also represented are transitional pits (N6 and N24), with periods of infilling occurring before and after the conquest. The greatest volume of pottery from pits is dated, then, from the early to mid 1st century AD. But this is also a period when a high proportion of features fall out of use, with fewer replacements being cut. A number of pits are dated to the early Roman period (extending to the end of the 2nd century), except 11344, placed in group N8. Its date is late 1st century BC to early 1st century AD, so perhaps its placement in, say, N6 is more appropriate. Clearly a decline in activity is well under way, since few features seem to have been cut during the 2nd century. This decline was arrested somewhat towards the later 3rd century, when new pits were in use. Pits such as 10953 and 11713 remained active into the 4th century. As no feature was dated exclusively to the 4th century, one may assume that the inhabitants during this time made use of 3rd century features.

Kilns & hearths – Grouped as N11 are hearths 10894, 10895, 10929 and 11045. These have a uniform, but largely undiagnostic late Iron Age date. Whilst association with nearby pits, such as 11050 or 11228 (which contained metalworking debris) is possible, domestic use might also be suggested (though obvious structural associations are absent). Southern hearths N32 are also of early date. Hearth 23018 is late Iron Age, whilst 23157 is early Roman. Among the latest features in area N are two kilns 10906 and 11423. The former commenced production from the early 3rd century, but seems to have had a short life, ceasing by the mid 3rd. However, deposits continued to accumulate up to the mid 4th century. Kiln 11423 was constructed probably in the 2nd century, and remained in use until the late 3rd century. For some of the time, then, the features were in use simultaneously.

The pottery – The bulk of the pottery was, as expected, locally produced, domestic and utilitarian. The majority of imported pottery was found in late Iron Age contexts. Fabrics include a micaceous ware from Central Gaul. This is restricted, at present, to two forms - *Cam* 102 beaker and *Cam* 262 jar (flagons, also produced, are usually white-slipped). So far, most examples of the former have been from this area, and show variation in size and surface treatment (probably due to firing conditions, rather than different production sites). Only one (probable) example of the *Cam* 262 jar, from context 11720, is present. This is a coarser fabric, with large and frequent granite inclusions. It is also uncommon, present at only a handful of sites, including Colchester. The fabrics *terra rubra*, *terra nigra*, and ‘Pompeiiian’ red ware (one or two pieces from Central Gaul) are well represented. In a TR fabric, from context 11452, was a bossed beaker. This is uncommon, though a similar example was found at Sandford Quarry. Of particular interest is a sherd, from context 11329, decorated with applied ridges. This is from a ‘thorn’ beaker, and dates from the Late Republican to Augustan periods. Implicit, then, is the fact that pottery (or, more accurately, its contents) was imported from an early date, and in apparently large quantities. Trade connections, or even informal contacts, were well established by the late 1st century BC. It is worth noting that there is proportionately less samian in area N than in comparable areas, such as D. In broad terms, a high ratio of early imports to a low ratio of (early) samian is also suggestive of a generally early date for the main phases of activity in area N.

A colour-coated mortarium made in the Nene Valley was found in pit 11713. A copy of the late 2nd to mid 3rd century samian form 45, it had a functional lion-head spout. The copy itself dates from the late 3rd century, when the samian industries collapsed. I would have presumed, incidentally, that copies were produced concurrently with their prototypes, when a market existed and demand was greatest.

Potential – Area N provides a wealth of material to enable research particularly into pottery supply, and the late Iron Age-Roman transition (though the inhabitants clearly embraced Roman(ised) culture long before the Claudian conquest). The presence of a number of well-dated groups, mainly from pits, will facilitate the study of changes in trade, use of and movement around the site. The early imported wares will be particularly useful in enhancing the chronology of the late Iron Age.