

Area R - LPRIA & Roman pottery summary

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Introduction - Area R contained 107 contexts yielding pottery. A total of 56516g was recovered, dating from the 1st to 4th centuries. Chronological division is evident within area R, with 2nd century cremations to the NW, 4th century activity E of the burials, and to the S, separated by river deposits, are features mainly representing 3rd century activity. The pottery itself is domestic and utilitarian, with grey wares dominating, though, compared with area Q, there is greater incidence of imported and Romano-British finewares.

First century activity: A handful of features to the S share an early date. The hearth 12288 is the earliest datable feature, containing LIA pottery. No feature can be clearly associated with it, though it is surrounded by undated post-holes. Other post-holes 12272 and 12241 share a mid to late 1st century date. They, along with undated post-holes 12243 and 12270, could still be associated with well 12245, which was in-filled during the 2nd century, though the absence of packing makes it difficult to assign the pottery to the construction or demolition phases. More plausible is their association with a mid 1st century post-hole 12267, which is cut by the well. Gullies 12238 and 12291 cannot be dated more closely than early Roman, though there is a high level of residuality within the former. The fact that the earliest features are concentrated within the southernmost part of area R suggests contemporaneous activity beyond the excavated area.

Second century activity: This is represented mainly by cremation burials within the NW part of the site, of which all but one contained between one and four vessels. By themselves, they are not closely datable, though are not out of place within this period. The burials appear to be chronologically homogenous and can be given a mid to late 2nd century date, with the exception of 12219, which can be dated within the early to mid 2nd century, by virtue of the inclusion of a G29 jar. The disturbance of some burials (such as 12105 and 12120 which contained broken vessels) or, more simply, the presence of bone not being noted means that vessel status cannot be established in all cases. In burials 12003, 12203 and 12219, however, the calcined bone was placed in large narrow necked jars. A lid-seated jar G5 was placed within cremation pits 12105 and 12120, though no lid was evident, suggesting either secondary use of the vessels (if the lid had broken) or that these jars did not always come with lids. All vessels (excluding samian) appear to have been made locally, mainly in grey or black-surfaced wares, and share similarity of form. Liquid containers (for serving) are represented by G40 flask/bottles in 12003, 12203 (which also contained a flagon) and 12219, while liquid containers (?for drinking out of) are represented by beakers within 12005, 12203 and 12208. Otherwise, most ancillary vessels can be classified as non function specific utilitarian vessels (i.e. standard jars). There are no food vessels, such as dishes.

No other feature can be placed with certainty within the 2nd century. Pit 12025, for example, has a late 2nd to early 3rd century date

Third century activity: Features of this date are located in the S and NW parts of area R and comprises pits, ditches and post-holes. The E-W ditch 12236 has an early 3rd century date and might represent part of a boundary. N-S ditch 12027, E of the burials, contained a number of complete or near-complete vessels. These have a late 3rd century date, and so are unlikely to represent disturbed burials. However, the presence of such pottery within the end of the ditch suggests a termination rite. If the ditch function was originally related to the cremations (e.g. boundary), commemorating the closure of this function by an elaborate ritual seems apposite, though the gap in date casts doubt on the idea. In any case, the area contains other 3rd century features, such as pits 12075, 12020 and 12034, which may more likely relate to the ditch 12027.

Fourth century activity: All 4th century activity is concentrated within the NE part of the area. The wood-lined ditch 12046, for example, has a late 4th century disuse date. Segment 12182 may be part of the same ditch, but dates to the late 3rd to 4th century. However, its eight sherds of pottery do not make for an accurate date, and so contemporaneity between the two segments is probable. To the W of this ditch are two possible structures. 'Foundation pit' 12228 dates from the early 4th century. The interpretation of the bottom fill 12113 as a floor is aided by the presence of small and abraded pottery sherds, as if 'kicked about'. Its possibly associated features are undated. 12062 contains a highly mixed assemblage. The presence of Saxon pottery suggests that this is residual.

The pottery: A wide range of forms and fabrics were represented. Locally made grey and black-surfaced wares dominate, as they do in area Q, though there is a far greater incidence of mortaria, indicating fully Romanised food preparation. These were also locally produced, though some were manufactured in the Nene Valley. Other non-locally made pottery was used in the area. Some grey and oxidised wares came from the Hadham kilns. In addition, Nene Valley colour-coats are well represented (probably more so than colour-coated vessels from Colchester). Red-slipped ware from Oxford is present, but occasionally, since its presence in Essex commences from the mid 4th century. Late shell-tempered pottery and flint-tempered Rettendon ware were also present. There is a moderate incidence of imported varieties, principally from east and central Gaul. One example comes from the lower Rhineland. The range of forms present is expected from a mid to late Roman horizon. Dishes, for example, develop from the bead rimmed B2 to the bead and flanged B6. There are few flagons, which are mainly 1st to mid 2nd century. Wide-mouthed bowl-jars are present, though G5 lid-seated jars remain in use up to the late 3rd century.

Residuality: A number of features contain residual pottery. The small amount of grog-tempered pottery within the 4th century ditch 12046 is clearly residual, though its source is not immediately obvious. Residuality within well 12245 is high, with the presence of 1st century fabrics such as grog and Pompeian red ware. Their source is perhaps more apparent, in that the well cuts some features which have a 1st century date. In all cases, residuality has been attested using the parameters of date and abrasion. The latter, by itself, is not always a reliable indicator. The pottery from ditch segments 12046 and

12182 was abraded, though of homogeneous date. This was probably due to the contexts remaining open for a time before being sealed.

Quantified groups: The absence of groups of a reasonable size and quality meant that just five contexts were selected for quantification by eves. Out of these, one (secondary fill 12026 from ditch 12027) is worthy of publication. From it, information such as form/fabric chronology can be gleaned, in addition to the interesting nature of its deposition.