

## The Role of Pottery in Funerary Practice

### Introduction

The evidence for late Iron Age and Roman-period funerary practice is limited, and comprises a diverse range of funerary practices, extending from burning on the pyre and the specific burial of pyre debris to formal burial of the deceased. While there are some clear differences between late Iron Age and Roman practices, a thread of continuity connects both periods; the dominance of cremation and subsequent burial of the cremated remains in ceramic vessels as a method of disposing of the dead. With just two cremation burials dated to the late Iron Age, study of the late Iron Age ceramic evidence inevitably focuses on the cremation process itself and the subsequent treatment of pyre material, found in more than thirty features. Equivalent evidence dating to the Roman period was not recovered, and the study of the pottery in this period is biased towards the formal burial of the cremated remains, usually in an urn with accompanying vessels, occasionally with a range of other artefacts. Differences extend to the selection of this pottery, typified by the inclusion of token fragments in late Iron Age pyre deposits, and the seemingly standard suites of complete, unburnt, vessels in Roman cremation deposits. This is in contrast to the apparently continuing trend of selecting token amounts of human remains throughout. Terminology used is that defined by McKinley (1997).

### The Late Iron Age

Thirty-three pyre features, either pyre sites or related pits, and two cremation burials of late Iron Age date were identified. Most of the activity was confined to the hinterland (Area W), although a single cremation burial was uncovered in Area E. Pottery was included in both burials, but recovered from only twenty-four of the pyre features. In addition, a pyre-related deposit comprising a large collection of burnt and heat-shattered pottery was recognised. Funerary activity in the late Iron Age at Heybridge, as instanced at Elms Farm, seems exclusively confined to cremation.

### Pyre features

These features fall into two groups; pyre sites, of which there are twenty, and pyre-related deposits (thirteen), although there appears to be nothing in the finds which would certainly distinguish either group from the other. In the features which contained pottery, only small quantities were found, consisting mainly of burnt sherds and representing a fraction of the vessels originally present on the pyre. The degree of burning varies, from sherds only reddened by heat to those which are cindery and burnt beyond recognition. Variation in burning occurs amongst sherds found in the same contexts, perhaps indicating the variable temperature at different locations within the pyre. Nonetheless, the remains selected all seem to have been on the pyre. There are six instances where the fragments are identified as unburnt. In four cases, the sherds are too small for comment, having an average sherd weight of 2g. The fifth is the footring base from a samian dish, although this is a later (2nd century) vessel and must be intrusive. The sixth example comprises the base and lower body from a Central Gaulish *Cam* 165 flagon found in pyre-related feature 2195, and perhaps truncated by ploughing. A small portion of the cremated bone (68g) [ref. human bone report] was apparently found inside the vessel, and a larger amount (239g) was

beneath the base. Since the cremation pit had been truncated in antiquity, it is unclear whether the bone was within the flagon when it was interred. The flagon is therefore not considered to be either a container or an ancillary vessel, rather it may represent an offering allied to the cremation rite itself. The cut which contained the flagon, along with a single burnt amphora sherd, had been inserted into one end of pyre site 2201, although the flagon was not resting on the floor of the cut. The amphora sherd, from an Italian Dressel 1 or 2-4 wine amphora in 'black sand' fabric, was from a different vessel from the amphora sherds found in the pyre site feature. This might suggest that the sherd had been deposited at the same time as the cremated bone and the flagon as part of a separate ritual.

The pottery found in the pyre sites is listed in Table 00 below, and Table 00 lists the pottery from pyre-related features. It can be seen that there are very few differences in the pottery from either feature type. There are marginally more imported wares from the pyre sites, although the reasons for this are unclear. More of the pyre-related features seem to contain unburnt pottery.

Feature	Pottery	Sherd count	Weight (g)	No. of Vessels	Comment
526	Fabrics GRS GROG	27	206	4	Burnt
2164	Fabrics GRS GROG	2	2	2	
2181	Fabric GROG	7	14	1	
2189	Flagon <i>Cam</i> 165 (CGFCS)	26	42	1	Burnt
	Fabric GROG	5	4	1	Burnt and cindery
2196	Fabric TN	2	4	1	Burnt
2201	Dressel 1 amphora (AITAL)	34	1510	1	Burnt
	Fabric GROG	25	500	1	Burnt
2254	Fabric GROG	28	106	1	Burnt
2332	Fabric GROG	96	126	1	Burnt and cindery
2443	Fabrics GROG ESH TN	14	17	3	Burnt and cindery
2455	Fabric GROG	26	228	1	Burnt
2490	Dressel 2-4 amphora (AITAL)	46	2207	1	Burnt
	Fabric GROG	3	4	1	Burnt
2906	Fabric GROG	74	476	2	Burnt and cindery
2908	Dressel 2-4 amphora (ARCAT)	50	391	1	Burnt and crazed
2934	Fabric GROG	20	53	1	Burnt and crazed

Table 00. Pottery in pyre sites

Feature	Pottery	Sherd count	Weight (g)	No. of Vessels	Comment
510	Fabric GROG	3	8	1	No surfaces
537	Fabric GROG	1	4	1	Burnt
561	Fabric GROG	27	240	1	Burnt and cindery
581	Fabrics GROG BSW	36	426	2	Burnt and crazed
2119	Fabric SGSW	1	2	1	Prob. not burnt
	Fabric BSW	7	10	1	Burnt
2129	Jar G16 (GROG)	15	168	1	Well burnt
2135	Fabrics GROG BSW GRS	21	68	3	Burnt
2195	Dressel 1 or 2-4 amphora (ABSAN)	1	51	1	Burnt and crazed
	Fabric CGFCS	102	364	1	Not burnt
2218	Fabric GROG	47	120	1	Well burnt
3585	Dish f31 (CGSW)	2	116	1	Not burnt
	Fabrics BSW GRS	122	582	6	Burnt

Table 00. Pottery in pyre-related features

The types of pottery in both pyre sites and pyre-related features form a pattern of sorts. Most of the pottery comprises fragmentary grog-tempered ware, with few definite forms identified and those present indicate no preference for vessel type. Imported pottery of late Iron Age date was recovered from the pyre sites, with the exception of pyre-related feature 2195. The burnt and fragmentary nature of most of the pottery clearly demonstrates that these sherds represent the residue from material burnt on the pyre which, for whatever reason, was not collected from it for incorporation in the burial or for secondary disposal away from the pyre. The few vessel classes identified display much variety; platters, bowls, beakers, flagons and jars are all represented, although too fragmentary for quantification. It is probable that many held food and drink as offerings on the pyre, and thus had served their ritual purpose. The vessel parts remaining after collapse of the pyre also demonstrate the disparate nature of these deposits. Body sherds form the bulk (48%) of the pottery assemblages, with rim and base sherds each forming just over 20% of the total. Complete profiles were recovered in only two cases, from pyre site 2254 and from pyre-related feature 581. The latter comprises joining rim, body and pedestal sherds from a heavily-burnt *Cam* 210 tazza-bowl [[archive 3108](#)], but less than a quarter of the original vessel survives.

The amphoras found in the pyre features have fractured in a very distinctive way, due to the extreme temperatures involved and the thickness of the vessel walls. These sherds have formed into elongated cubes, where they have split along heat-induced stress-fractures, resulting in a lower average sherd weight than normal (32g compared with 69g for the whole amphora assemblage, and 100g for all amphoras other than those in pyre-related assemblages). Other sherds from pyre features represent much smaller vessel parts, in most cases little more than single, though sometimes large, fragments. This is especially true of lower wall and base sherds, where a larger piece is more likely to survive due to the thicker nature of this part of the vessel. These larger pieces are the exception rather than the rule, and, even so, represent only a small fraction of the original vessel.

Similarities can be inferred from the pottery found in pyre features discovered on the route of the A27 bypass at Westhampnett, West Sussex (Mephram 1997, 137), although no imported pottery was recovered from this site. Sherds found both in pyre sites and in pyre-related features were indistinguishable from each other, and Mephram suggests that some pottery was left at the pyre sites while other sherds were redeposited in pyre-related features. Vessels deposited in the main cemetery were whole and unburnt, though there was correlation between the pottery types, both in the cemetery and at the pyre sites. The main difference is in the condition of the two types; that from the pyre features being burnt and fragmentary, suggesting that the rites associated with burial in graves and those associated with the cremation itself were distinct and separate (Mephram 1997, 137). This would also appear to be the case at Heybridge.

#### *Dating*

Four features contained imported fine ware, including pyre-related feature 2195 which held the flagon base, described above. Sherds from a similar Central Gaulish flagon, this time very burnt, came from pyre site 2189. Two pyre sites, 2196 and 2443, produced tiny sherds of *terra nigra*, probably from platters. Burnt amphora sherds

were recovered from three pyre sites, representing three different vessels; two are Italian, forms Dressel 1 and Dressel 2-4, and the third is a Catalan form Dressel 2-4. These imports provide dating evidence for the pyre features; the amphoras, *Cam* 165 flagons and *terra nigra* all probably first arrived at Heybridge during the last quarter of the 1st century BC. All three pottery types can also be found in contexts of early 1st century AD date, although Dressel 1 amphoras would normally be considered to be residual by this time. Central Gaulish flagons ceased to be imported *c.* AD20 (Rigby 1989, 120), but *terra nigra* continued into the mid 1st century AD. Supporting dating evidence is provided by brooch fragments [ref. brooches], recovered from five features, three of which also contained amphora sherds. Most of the activity represented by the pyre features can probably be dated to the first half of the 1st century AD, with a start date perhaps late in the previous century. The presence of Roman pottery, including samian, in at least three deposits indicates that activity continued into the mid to late 1st century.

### Cremation burials

In contrast to the number of pyre features, there are few formal burials of late Iron Age date, perhaps indicating that the main cemetery lay some distance from the pyre sites, and probably outside the development area. The main cemetery might be located some way from the settlement, indicating that the rite of cremation was, perhaps, public and that of formal burial a more private affair. The most likely explanation, however, is that cremation was a restricted rite and the formal burial of cremated remains was the exception rather than the rule. Although not located in close proximity to one another, the two burials have similarities; Table 00 summarises the pottery types. Both can probably be dated to the last quarter of the 1st century BC, although there are few intrinsic dating factors (see below).

Feature	Area	Cinerary vessel	Ancillary vessels
2379	W	Jar EF170 (GROG)	Jars EF171, EF172 (GROG), lid EF202 (GROG)
8177	E	Jar EF160 (GROG)	Jar EF159 x 2 (GROG), bowl EF44 (GROG)

Table 00. The pottery in the late Iron Age cremation burials (the prefix EF denotes the Typology form number, pp.00)

#### *Assemblage composition and character*

Each cremation burial contained a jar, used as the cinerary urn, and three ancillary vessels. None of the vessels can be closely paralleled in the *Camulodunum* type series. The cinerary urn in burial 8177 (EF160, ref.) equates to Thompson's B2-4 (1982, 133). A similar jar with rippled shoulders came from the New Cemetery at Heybridge in 1912 (Thompson 1982, vol.3, fig.44.1100). This vessel contained cremated bone and was found with a cut-down Arretine platter which had been used as a cover for the urn. The platter is included in the gazetteer provided by Wickenden (1986, 53), where the late Iron Age cremation cemetery is dated late 1st century BC to early 1st century AD. The platter has been dated by Kenrick (1986, 53, fig.26.9) to *c.* 20BC, but, of course, was unlikely to have been a new vessel when deposited.

Three ancillary vessels lay to the east of cinerary urn EF160. These comprise two jars (EF159) with rippled shoulders and a carinated bowl (EF44). One jar, as recovered, is rimless and friable, probably under-fired originally, and is similar in form to the urn (either Thompson's B2-4 or B2-3). The third jar equates to Thompson's B3-6, but has decoration on the lower body comparable to another jar from Heybridge

(Thompson 1982, vol.3, fig.44.1091). The fourth vessel, a carinated bowl, is unparalleled, but falls into Thompson's Class E1-4, with the addition of a cordon beneath the carination. The E1-4 form was common in the first half of the 1st century AD, but was infrequent at *Camulodunum*, where the type was conflated with *Cam* 214 (Thompson 1982, 369).

The cinerary urn from burial 2379 (EF170) is a plain jar with an everted rim and a neck cordon. The form matches Thompson's B1-2, which was long-lived. Three ancillary vessels lay to the west of the urn and comprise two plain jars (EF171, EF172) and a lid (EF202). Jar EF171 equates to Thompson's form B5-2, with the closest parallel at Brickwall Hill, Hertfordshire (Thompson 1982, 647, no.17). The form is similar to *Cam* 118, an example of which occurred in the Lexden cemetery, Colchester (Hawkes and Crummy 1995, fig.7.2). Jar EF172 is a Thompson B4-2 with red surfaces, probably imitating *terra rubra*. The closest parallel is from Holborough in Kent (Thompson 1982, vol.3, fig.48.1031), where a continental influence is suggested. The fourth ancillary vessel is a plain lid, slightly domed with a shallow groove along the edge of the rim and a short, solid knob. Lids are difficult to categorise and were not always made to fit the vessels they accompany, and this example could have covered any of the jars with which it was deposited.

#### *Vessel treatment*

The pottery from each of the late Iron Age cremation burials differed in the treatment received before or upon deposition. Both burials contained jars, all of which probably had highly-burnished surfaces originally. Three of the vessels in burial 8177 had been subjected to partial but severe heating, possibly just prior to deposition. The cinerary urn had been patchily burnt internally and externally, and the exterior of the base was completely reddened indicating that the jar may have been placed on a very hot surface prior to (or upon) burial. Along with the cremated bone, the urn contained fragments of an iron brooch-and-ring ensemble [ref. brooches]. A large piece of one of the brooches had fused to the inside of the base, probably as a result of the high temperature, but this could equally have occurred after deposition, perhaps due to the percolation of rainwater. Two of the ancillary vessels had also been affected by heat, but the third was probably under-fired and is now in very many fragments, such that any comment is difficult. The carinated bowl had been scorched, mostly on the interior of the rim but also in patches externally, and the cordoned jar is partially burnt on the base and very patchily on the exterior. The vessels all seem to have been placed upright in the grave, although damage was sustained during machining prior to excavation.

The vessels in burial 2379 also seem to have been placed upright, although the lid had probably been displaced and was recovered, in two pieces, from the floor of the grave. Whether this occurred upon, or following, deposition, perhaps when the grave was backfilled, is difficult to ascertain. The urn had tilted to the east, perhaps during backfilling, but the lid was to the west, with the ancillary jars between it and the urn. It might be suggested, therefore, that the lid had been deliberately broken and placed before burial. The urn and the red-surfaced jar appear to have been intact when buried, but the third jar (EF171), highly burnished, has had a series of chips removed from the rim [Photo?]. There is some evidence that the edge of the rim has been sawn in places as if to facilitate removal of the chips. A section of the rim opposite the row of chips has also been removed. None of this damage appears to be recent. Evidence

for minor damage to vessels in late Iron Age cemeteries is scant, but at King Harry Lane, Verulamium, about 10% of vessels have had one or two chips taken out of the rim (Rigby 1989, 203). None had a series of chips removed in a similar fashion to those from the rim of jar EF171. The pottery from the Lexden cemetery is not fully published (Hawkes and Crummy 1995, 169), and most of the burials previously recorded from Heybridge are finds of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Details of possible damage occurring on vessels from Lexden, or the earlier finds from Heybridge, are not noted and thus unavailable for comparison. Interestingly, one of the ancillary vessels, pedestal urn 39, from the burial at Maldon Hall Farm, 2km from Heybridge (Lavender 1991, 208) had a section of the rim missing, although there are no further details in the description. This damage may well be ancient.

### *Dating*

Comparative site-dating details have been provided above. Very little intrinsic dating evidence is inherent. Both burials contained grog-tempered pottery only; closely-datable imported fine ware is absent. Of the two burials, the pottery from 8177 is perhaps the easiest to date. The jars have rippled shoulders, a feature of Birchall's (1965) 'early' pottery from the Aylesford-Swarling burials [ref. typology], dated late 1st century BC to early 1st century AD. The brooch ensemble contained in the urn is similarly dated [ref. brooches], providing supporting dating evidence for burial 8177. In contrast, the pottery from 2379 is plain, and there is no supporting evidence in the form of metalwork. Stratigraphically, the burial is placed early in the series of pyre-related features, and indeed it is cut by pyre site 2934. These pyre features are broadly dated to the first half of the 1st century AD, indicating a possible earlier date for the burial. It has been noted that one of the jars resembles *Cam* 118, only four of which were recorded by Hawkes and Hull (1947, tables pp. 277-81). The form is accorded a date of *c.* 50-10BC by its appearance in the Lexden cemetery (Hawkes and Crummy 1995, 164), which might explain the low occurrence at later *Camulodunum*.

A comparison can perhaps be made to Cremation Number 3 from Maldon Hall Farm (Lavender 1991, 205-8). This burial contained, amongst other finds, eight grog-tempered vessels and a silver *knotenfibel*. The brooch dated the grave to the second half of the 1st century BC. Five of the vessels had a quoit-shaped pedestal, which may be an antecedent for the bead-rimmed foot of the *Cam* 118 jar. The two burials at Elms Farm are likely to be later than those at Maldon Hall Farm and a date which bridges the end of the 1st century BC and beginning of the 1st century AD is probably best for both burials.

### **Pyre-debris deposit 15416**

A single feature, pit 15417, although at some distance away from the pyre features described above, has been interpreted as a large deposit of pyre debris. The importance of the deposit was recognised at an early stage and the pit was fully excavated. The pottery is described in full elsewhere [ref. Pot Sequence (KPG5) and Supply]. There are sufficient similarities in the probable treatment, and in the pottery types, with the material in the pyre sites and pyre-related features to support the interpretation as pyre debris. Most of the sherds (92%) are burnt, some to a very high degree, and the average sherd weight is low, indicating that a similar process to that in the pyre features had taken place, although no cremated bone was present. The major difference is in the quantity of pottery in the deposit (58.5kg), in contrast to the low quantities recovered from the pyre features. There are large parts of three Dressel 1

amphoras, again fragmented into cube-shaped sherds, although the average sherd weight for these is higher at 52g. This is probably accounted for in part by the presence of the base and spike from one of the vessels. Also present are large sections from *terra rubra* platters, Central Gaulish wares and a number of grog-tempered vessels, including jars, beakers and a bowl. The pottery types, and the date of the deposit, are compatible with the pyre features. Despite the degree of burning, large numbers of sherds conjoined, allowing many of the vessels to be reconstructed sufficiently for illustration (Fig.00, KPG5). A minimum figure of twenty-five has been calculated, although a small number of sherds (7.3%) could not be assigned and at least some of these might represent single occurrences from other unidentified vessels. Examination of the surviving vessel proportions indicates that, on average, only a third of each vessel represented had been deposited (Fig.00).

The assemblage comprises seven jars, six beakers, five platters, three amphoras, two flagons, one mortarium and one large bowl. The vessels originated from a wide geographical area. The Dressel 1 amphoras are probably Campanian, as is a bead-rimmed Pompeian-red ware platter. This platter form appears to be unparalleled in Britain, although a single example with half-round external beading from *Camulodunum* is cited in the type series (Hawkes and Hull 1947, 221). Central Gaulish imports are represented by a *Cam* 165 flagon and a *Cam* 1 platter. Three platters are Gallo-Belgic, probably *terra rubra* from the Vesle valley near Rheims (S. Willis pers. comm.), although severe burning has made precise fabric identification difficult. Also severely burnt, was a *terra rubra* *Cam* 112 beaker. A second beaker, a large *Cam* 113, is the only vessel from northern Gaul. This is a long-lived type, although this example is barrel-shaped which is an early characteristic (Rigby 1989, 138).

The remaining thirteen vessels are likely to have been locally made and are, in the main, grog-tempered. A single shell-tempered *Cam* 255 jar probably originated in the Thameside area of south Essex or north Kent. All of the vessels are wheel-thrown, except for a small *Cam* 259 jar, which is roughly finished and may be hand made. The large bowl is part of a lid-and-bowl set in the style of *Cam* 253, although no lid was found in the deposit. The rim is certainly recessed to take a lid, which in *Cam* 253 is high-domed with a hollow knob. This form of lid-and-bowl set is a common find in burials in south-east Britain, with Augusto-Tiberian antecedents found in the Rhineland (Hawkes and Hull 1947, 267). A cremation burial at North Shoebury, Essex, contained a similar bowl, with inturned rim but also without the lid, accompanied by a cordoned *Cam* 252 lid-and-bowl set (Thompson 1995, fig.70). This burial is dated late 1st century BC to early 1st century AD. Three of the beakers in the pyre-debris deposit bear zones of combed decoration between cordons, in imitation of rouletted Gaulish beakers; the fourth is plain, except for a cordon under the rim. The jars are also plain, except for one very large example which has incised chevron decoration on the shoulder cordon. The last vessel is a grog-tempered flagon and is probably a local copy of the Central Gaulish *Cam* 165.

Almost all of the grog-tempered pottery is burnt to a red/orange colour with various cracks, spalls and cindery grey patches, the degree of which perhaps depending on the proximity of the pot to the heat-source. Only one beaker retains its original, reduced finish, although there are several more unburnt sherds which appear to be from further vessels. Much of the imported pottery is also burnt, heat-discoloured, cracked and

distorted, and the illustrations (Fig.00) have been produced to reflect the condition of the pottery. The Pompeian-red ware platter is particularly distorted and discoloured, although the distinctive black sand fabric is still recognisable. The breakage was originally thought to have been deliberate, and to have taken place before vessels had been subjected to burning. However, reconstruction of the larger grog-tempered vessels has demonstrated that much of the pottery seems to have split along the fissures produced during the height of the burning process. There is no direct evidence to suggest that the grog-tempered vessels were deliberately broken. As noted above, the amphoras also seem to have split into small sherds along heat-fractures, rather than to have suffered deliberate breakage.

The temperature required to produce these effects must have been intense. Sherds of burnt and distorted pottery were recovered from a late Iron Age ditch at nearby Slough House Farm and are discussed by Horsley and Wallace (1998, 146). The possibility that this deposit may represent pyre waste was not considered but, in describing the temperature necessary to reduce pottery to a cindery state, they suggested that a sustained temperature in excess of 1000°C would be required (following Rye 1981). Horsley and Wallace considered that maintaining such a temperature under open firing conditions would be unusual, but work by McKinley (1997) suggests otherwise. Experimental pyre cremations were conducted at Guiting Power, Gloucestershire, where recorded temperatures of over 1000°C were maintained for up to three hours (McKinley 1997, 134). The evidence suggests a pyre-related cause for the condition of the pottery from pyre-debris pit 15417, rather than deliberate manual breakage, followed by burning, as originally posited.

Whereas the majority of the pyre-debris pottery has been burnt, as already noted, a small quantity of sherds in the deposit are unburnt. There are unburnt fragments from a grog-tempered butt beaker [archive 2174], on which the scheme of combed decoration matches that on a severely burnt vessel [archive 2169]. Although these decorative schemes are not individually distinctive, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the burnt and unburnt fragments are from the same butt beaker. Two other burnt vessels certainly have conjoining unburnt sherds; the *Cam* 165 flagon [archive 2155] and the *Cam* 113 butt beaker [archive 2151]. The presence and quantity of unburnt sherds might depend on how the vessels were stacked on the pyre. Once the cremation process was fully under way, collapse of the pyre might have resulted in the breakage of vessels, with some sherds perhaps falling away from the heat.

The deposit appears to be a connection between the rituals of cremation and the rituals of burial. Most of the cremated bone had perhaps been collected from the pyre site and interred within whole vessels. Paralleling this, it appears that most of the pyre-debris pottery was given its own 'burial' in a separate ceremony and location. Hence the small quantity and size of the sherds remaining at pyre sites; larger pieces may well have been selected for just such a ceremony. Or the possible re-use of pyre sites might require clearance of pyre debris, still treated with a degree of respect even though not accorded full burial rites along with the cremated remains. The absence of other goods might indicate that only the pottery was accorded this degree of respect. That the pyre-debris deposit was located some distance from the pyre sites may also have been a deliberate act. At Westhampnett, the quantities of pottery found in pyre features were also small, and Mephram suggests (1997, 137) that the rest of each



vessel might have been disposed of in ways which were not recovered during excavation. The possibility seems to be that pyre debris was buried away from pyre sites, making the link between deposits of burnt pottery and funerary activity difficult to establish, particularly in the absence of cremated bone, as in this deposit. The study of pottery treatment may be one of the ways to do so, especially if sherd links can be established. Hints at differences in customs and rituals associated with the cremation rite are also provided by the burial in the Lexden Tumulus (Foster 1986) and the complex ceremony which seems to have taken place at Folly Lane, Verulamium (Niblett 1999). Further significance of the assemblage from pyre-debris pit 15417 for our understanding of pyre technology, cremation and funerary practices is discussed in the Burials section (ref.).

### *Dating*

The dating of the assemblage is not straightforward. Dressel 1 amphoras have an accepted terminal date for importation of 10BC [ref. amphora report]. Many of the other imported wares have dates for their initial production which range from 25BC to 15BC, although most continued to be imported until at least AD25. Campanian Pompeian-red ware occurred on continental sites in the Augustan period (Peacock 1977, 158). These include Oberaden (occupied *c.* 12-8BC) and Haltern (occupied *c.* 9BC-AD9), and bead-rimmed Pompeian-red ware platters were found at both, although never common (Loeschcke 1909, 271; taf. xiv, no.75B). In describing the Pompeian-red ware from Usk, south Wales, Greene (1979, 130) noted that the loss of an external bead on the rim occurred early in the 1st century AD.

The mortarium may also be Italian in origin, and a likely arrival with the amphoras (P. Tyers and K. Hartley, pers. comm.). A similar type of mortarium was found in features dated *c.* 10BC-AD20 at Skeleton Green (Partridge 1981, 32), and can also be paralleled at Haltern (Loeschcke 1909, 242; abb.33). The Italian imports may be the earliest in the assemblage, possibly first arriving at Heybridge at the beginning of the last quarter of the 1st century BC. Importation of Central Gaulish micaceous wares into Britain probably first occurred *c.* 25BC (Rigby 1986, 270), and had ceased by *c.* AD20/5 (Rigby 1989, 120). Manufacture of Central Gaulish pottery occurred slightly before that of Gallo-Belgic wares. Production of the Gallo-Belgic platter types found in the deposit had probably commenced by *c.* 15BC (Rigby 1989, 121) and had ceased by *c.* AD25.

In contrast, the coarse pottery vessels were very unlikely, on typological grounds, to have been in production as early as 15BC, and were more probably introduced during the early 1st century AD. The jars, especially, are 1st century AD types, and their shoulders are plain or cordoned, rather than rippled. Therefore, a date for the deposit at the very end of the 1st century BC, or, more probably, the beginning of the 1st century AD, is proposed, implying that the amphoras, along with the other Italian vessels, are likely to have been old when deposited.

### **Conclusion**

The recovery of pottery from a significant number of pyre features has led to better understanding of the processes involved in some constituents of the funerary rites undertaken during the late Iron Age. That we see only a small part of those rites is evidenced by the small number of cremation burials of this date uncovered at Elms Farm. Cremation, debris disposal and formal burial all seem to have taken place in

separate locations, unlike those at Folly Lane, Verulamium. The evidence suggests that different suites of pottery goods were used during cremation and formal burial, although similar pottery types were used. Less obvious, though, are the procedures involved, although perhaps a glimpse is provided by the scorched vessels in burial 8177. Cremated bone may not have always been allowed to cool before selection and interment. The procedures and ceremonies involved in both cremation and burial, indeed any of the means of disposal of the dead, seem to have been dependent on the status of the deceased, and, just as likely, on the attitudes and beliefs of the mourners. Continuation of these differing ceremonies can perhaps be seen in the more standardized formal burials of the Roman period.

### The Roman-period burials

A total of twenty Roman cremation burials were uncovered. Although no pyre sites, pyre debris or related features were excavated, the Roman-period cremation burials nevertheless supply sufficient data for meaningful consideration. Albeit thinly distributed, the burials span the early Roman period. The group of four burials from Area D is among the earliest, dating to the second half of the 1st century AD. Unfortunately, the small groups from Areas M and W cannot be dated more closely than early Roman. The largest group, from Area R, dates to the second half of the 2nd century, possibly extending into the 3rd century. All but one burial yielded ceramic vessels that served either as containers for the cremated bone or as ancillary grave goods. Few grave assemblages were large, with most offering just one or two vessels in addition to the cinerary container. The Area W group of burials, bar one, are perhaps notable for including no ancillary ceramic vessels. The latest formal burial, late or sub-Roman inhumation 10776 (ref.), included no pottery other than extraneous mid-3rd century sherds. The Area R burial group provides the best information in terms of composition and treatment and largely forms the basis of this study. A summary of the Roman-period burial evidence is presented in Table 00.

Date range	Feature	Area	Cinerary vessel	Ancillary vessels
Early Roman	15017	M	Jar (GRS)	Flagon J (BUF), lid K (BSW)
	15040	M	Jar G36 (BSW)	Dish B1 (BSW), miniature jar G (BSW)
Early Roman	43	W	Jar G (GRS)	-
	554	W	Jar G (GRS)	-
	557	W	Jar G (GRS)	-
	564	W	-	Flask G40 (GRF)
	572	W	Jar G (BSW)	-
Mid-late 1st century AD	9329	D	-	Fabrics GROGC, BSW, GRS
	9665	D	Jar G (GRS)	Jar G (GRS), beaker H1 (BSW)
	9927	D	Jar G (GRS)	-
	9928	D	Jar G (GRS)	Beaker H (BSW)
Mid to late 2nd century AD	12003	R	Jar G36 (GRS)	Dish f31 (CGSW), flask G40 (GRS)
	12006	R	Jar G (BSW)	Cup f33 (CGSW), beaker H35 (RED)
	12038	R	-	Flask G40 (BSW)
	12105	R	-	Jars G5 (BSW) G9 (BSW)
	12120	R	-	Jar G5 (GRS)
	12203	R	Jar G45 (GRS)	Dish f18/31 (CGSW), cup f33 (CGSW), flask G40 (GRF), beaker H20 (COLC), flagon J3 (COLB)
	12208	R	-	Jar G22 (BSW), miniature R3 (BSW)

	12219	R	Jar G45 (GRS)	Dish f18/31 (CGSW), jar G29 (BSW), flask G40 (GRF)
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Table 00. Pottery in Roman-period cremation burials

*Assemblage composition*

Ceramic vessels contained cremated bone in thirteen of the nineteen burials. Most vessels were locally made in sandy grey ware (GRS); two were produced in black-surfaced ware (BSW). Most jar types cannot be identified; they either did not survive intact or are generally undiagnostic. Diagnostic jar forms tend to be large storage or cooking jars. One such vessel is the narrow-necked G36 type. This appears in burial 12003, which is dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD (and also in burial 15040). The two remaining well-preserved vessels are both G45 storage jar types, interred within mid to late 2nd century burials 12203 and 12219. All three jars are typical cinerary vessels; cooking or storage jars are by far the most common container for cremated bone in Roman Britain (Philpott 1991, 30). Other vessel types are by no means unknown, however. Flagon and bowls occasionally contained cremated remains at King Harry Lane (Stead and Rigby 1989, table 43). Closer to home, it has been suggested that a flagon interred within Cremation 4 at Langford Road, Heybridge, served as the cinerary vessel, although no bone was found (Langton and Holbrook 1997, 26).

Ancillary vessels were deposited in thirteen burials. (This includes vessels that may have served as cinerary containers, but from whose burial no bone was recovered.) Table 00 shows the range of ancillary vessels; on average, each of these burials yielded two. There appears to be no pattern of difference in the numbers of vessels per grave over time, although the relatively few burials involved means that such differences are not easily detected. Child burial 12203 in Area R stands out by virtue of containing five ancillary vessels. Even with such a small sample size, burial 12203 is unusual. All but one of the remaining eighteen burials yielded two vessels or fewer, including five that contained none at all. At Langford Road small burial groups were recovered. Two of the three largely intact burials contained just one ancillary vessel; the third had four vessels (Langton and Holbrook 1997, 25-6). Groups of fewer than four vessels are reasonably typical of the region. At Kelvedon (Rodwell 1988, table 4) and Great Dunmow (Wickenden 1988, 12-21), undisturbed burials yielded on average two and three vessels respectively, although, compared to Heybridge, proportionately more burials at Great Dunmow contained large groups of four or more vessels.

The choice of ancillary vessels emphasises liquids. Seven of the twelve burials that contained ancillary vessels included some form of liquid-holding vessel, either flask, flagon or beaker. This is a lower proportion than at Great Dunmow or Skeleton Green. Provision was made for drinking in 73% and 85% of these burials, respectively (Going 1988, 22). Two Elms Farm burials, 12006 and 12203, each contained more than one drinking vessel. The remaining burials yielded single drinking vessels. Storage or preparation vessels (jars and lids) were next in popularity, followed by vessels serving 'dinner table' functions (dishes and bowls). Table 00 summarises the range of ancillary vessels present.

Form	Jars	Flasks	Dishes	Beakers	Cups	Flagons	Miniatures	Lids	Total
Number	7	5	4	3	2	2	2	1	26

Table 00. Ancillary vessels from the Roman-period cremations

The limited number of burials reveals no pattern of vessel combination, beyond that drinking vessels were deposited in most burials which contained ancillary vessels. Four of the five ancillary vessels deposited in 12203 were drink-related, comprising a cup, a beaker, a flask and a flagon. Going (1988, 22) links the provision of drinking vessels to wealth. The higher the incidence, the wealthier the deceased or mourning community. This equation can surely be applied to any vessel class, although 12203 was the most varied in terms of grave goods, containing, among other objects, a glass vessel, an iron hanging lamp, a glass bead and a set of bone gaming counters. This burial assemblage had been interred in a wooden casket or shuttered grave. The exceptional nature of this burial perhaps suggests that children were accorded differential treatment or, at least, had requirements for the afterlife that set them apart from adults.

The burial assemblage overall, with its high proportion of drinking vessels, differs from mundane ‘domestic’ assemblages that contain no obvious ritual elements. This is clear when the Area R burial assemblage, a chronologically cohesive group, is compared with six quantified non-burial pottery groups assigned to Ceramic Phase 7 (AD170-210). These are more or less contemporary with the burial assemblage. The proportion of storage/preparation vessels is also lower in the burial assemblage, but the proportion of eating vessels is roughly equal.

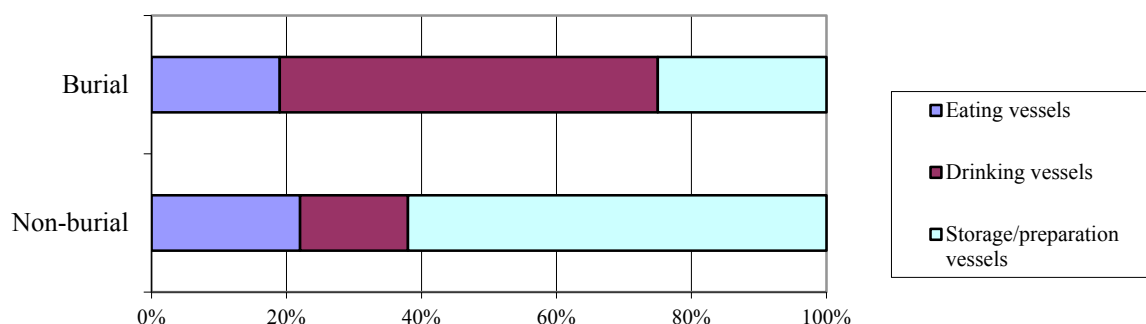


Fig.00. Assemblage composition: a comparison between Area R burials and Ceramic Phase 7 pottery groups, excluding KPG27. The non-burial proportions are based on EVE; the burial proportions on number of vessels

Schucany (2000, 123) suggests that the jar is characteristic of a household assemblage. The greater proportion of jars that a burial assemblage has, the closer it is to a household assemblage. One clear conclusion to draw from these results is that the burial assemblage does not represent a set of household items. Schucany suggests, of similar results from Biberist-Spitalhof, that its assemblage represents ‘equipment for a new life’ (2000, 123). If so, the requirements of this new life must be different from those of the old, ‘earthly’ one, since there is no strict transference of household functions. We should otherwise expect greater variety of vessels, including mortaria. The bias towards drinking vessels might better represent the pursuit of leisure. The vessels allow the spirit to enjoy its ‘retirement’ in the afterlife, rather than to carry out household chores. That burial vessels are unlikely to represent all household uses of pottery is amplified by the differences between the two assemblages in fabric composition. As Fig.00 shows, the burial assemblage comprises less locally-produced

pottery and more imported pottery (exclusively Central Gaulish samian) than the non-burial groups. This reflects fabric choice elsewhere, although proportions vary. At Great Dunmow, 72% of ancillary vessels were locally made, with 17% and 11% being from continental and regional sources respectively (cf. Wickenden 1988, 12-21). In a non-burial group, admittedly dated slightly later than the burials, continental pottery accounted for just 2% of the total by EVE (Going 1988, table 1).

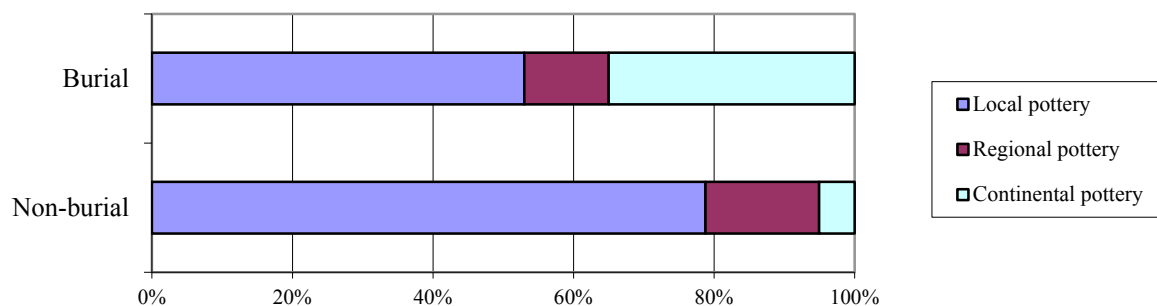


Fig.00. Assemblage composition (fabrics): a comparison between Area R burials and Ceramic Phase 7 pottery groups, excluding KPG27. Quantification as Fig.00

The differences between burial and domestic assemblages suggest that vessels were selected deliberately for burial. The vessels were not the random gifts of mourners, nor simple appropriation of household material. There is, of course, no reason to assume that similar vessel types served the same functions in death as they did in life. Vessel treatment, such as specific placement within the burial pit and deliberate mutilation (see below), suggests that these vessels were regarded in ways exclusive to the funerary context without reference to household practices (Biddulph 2002). Inevitably, comparisons between burial and domestic assemblages bring out these differences. It is possible that vessels contained items other than food and drink. Such items could include plant material deposited for symbolic reasons, for example poppy (the bringer of sleep), dates (symbols of reincarnation), and leaves from evergreens for eternal life (Kreuz 2000, 48-50). Even items that could be consumed were perhaps not intended for consumption, but instead constituted libations and offerings.

The Heybridge cremation burial assemblage is closest to Great Dunmow in functional character (Fig.00). In both, drinking vessels predominate, but vessels pertaining to other functions form a strong presence. The Colchester data, based on ninety burial groups from the Joslin Collection (May 1930), show an even greater preponderance of drinking forms at the expense of storage/preparation vessels, a trend repeated at Kelvedon and Skeleton Green. The proportion of eating vessels remains reasonably consistent at all sites, except at King Harry Lane, Verulamium.

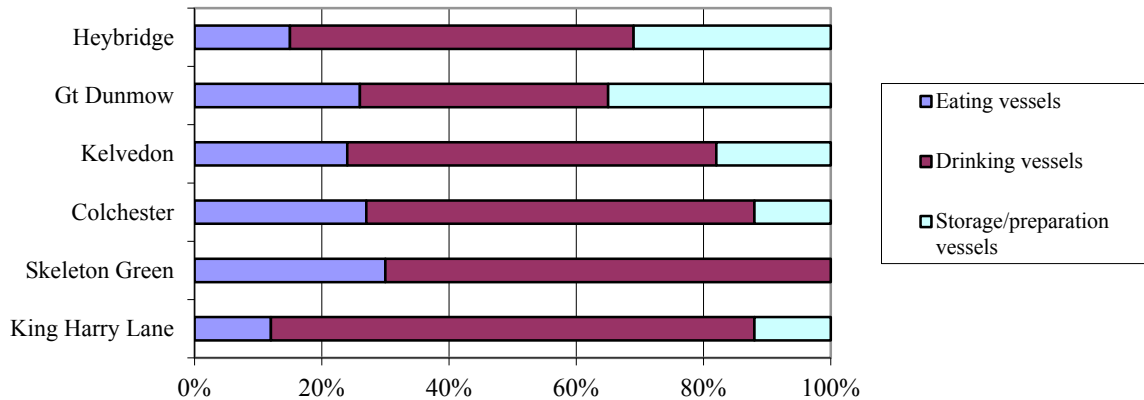


Fig.00. Functional composition of ancillary vessels, expressed as a proportion of number of vessels. Eating vessels are platters, dishes and bowls; drinking vessels are flasks, beakers and cups; storage/preparation vessels are jars and lids

Some caution must be noted, since assemblages vary chronologically and in size. Great Dunmow (Wickenden 1988), Skeleton Green (Partridge 1981) and Colchester yielded substantially larger assemblages than Heybridge, with 54, 105 and 260-plus vessels, respectively. King Harry Lane (Stead and Rigby 1989) provided seventeen vessels from sixteen Roman burials. The Kelvedon burials suffered from plough damage and robbing, and just ten cremation burials, yielding seventeen ancillary vessels, survived intact. Given assemblages of similar date and size, differences might become less pronounced. It should be noted, too, that Fig.00 shows differences in the types of vessels, not the *perceived function* of those vessels within the burials. Dishes used as lids, for example, have been placed in the eating vessel category, when actually they might have been more appropriately placed in the storage/preparation category. All cups have been placed in the drinking vessel category, but some, such as samian f27, were probably eating vessels (*ref. vessel function*). These objections notwithstanding, differences seem clear enough, although the reasons for such differences are less so. A wider and more cohesive dataset than is presented here is required before any strong connections between ceramic character, chronology, settlement status or geographic region can be made. It is worth suggesting, however, that local variations in funerary practice might well play some role. At Skeleton Green and King Harry Lane, in Hertfordshire, jars found in burial contexts serve almost exclusively as cinerary containers, while in the more easterly sites presented here, jars also appear as ancillary vessels.

Two samian vessels, an f33 cup from burial 12203 and an f18/31 dish from 12219, are probable ‘seconds’. Both have distorted rims and show no signs of wear. The deposition of unused ‘seconds’ in burials was a common practice in Roman Britain and beyond (cf. Lyne 1999, 301; Tuffreau-Libre 2000, 54). Seconds, accidental products of firing, should not be confused with deliberately ‘killed’ vessels. Their inclusion in burials may be viewed as a sign of low status or poverty on the part of the mourners or the deceased. More realistically, seconds suggest the existence of a funerary market to which potters could sell their sub-standard products, though probably not directly. This implies that seconds, at least, were not collected from the household of the deceased or mourners, but instead bought as and when required for funerary purposes. We may imagine the involvement of burial societies, which

ensured proper burial of its members (Lewis and Reinhold 1990, 185). Such societies may well have contributed grave-goods as well as financial grants, perhaps using their members' regular subscriptions to acquire stock.

#### *Vessel treatment*

Given the limited size of the burial assemblage overall, vessel treatment cannot be discerned in all burials. However, aspects of certain Area R burial groups are worth consideration. Vessels in three burial pits were specifically placed. In burial 12006, the cinerary vessel was placed on top of the samian f33 cup. The cinerary vessel in 12105 contained an inverted jar in addition to the bone. Burial 12203 was the most complex burial in terms of deliberate treatment. A beaker rested fully on top of a samian dish, while a samian cup partially rested on the same dish. No doubt, the vessels within this burial were also placed in relation to the non-ceramic grave goods, such as the hanging lamp. Placements similar to these are attested at other burial sites. At Great Dunmow, the cinerary vessel from Cremation 4 contained a flagon as well as the cremated bone. Additionally, a samian bowl was placed on its side, resting against the cremation vessel (Wickenden 1988, 15). Occasional vessels from the cemetery at Kelvedon were inverted (Rodwell 1988, 47). These were all deliberate acts, and the deceased and mourners were undoubtedly fully conversant with their symbolism. While we may remove the pots themselves from the ground, it is almost impossible to retrieve their meanings and the motives behind the rituals must stay within the realms of speculation. One aspect that may be worth stressing is the physical contact between vessels, which may have aided the spiritual consumption of the items within them. The deceased could not actually hold the cup placed in burial 12006, but the physical link between that vessel and the cinerary container enabled the spirit to take the contents. If the jar placed inside the cinerary vessel in 12105 contained food, then the physical relationship between the two vessels enabled to the spirit to eat. The physically-linked beaker, dish and cup in burial 12203 are harder to explain, since there is no contact with the cinerary vessel. We may suppose that vessel placement was not necessarily determined by a single motivation, or that the ancillary vessel contents (if any) were not limited to items directly related to the welfare of the soul.

In some cases, the motive behind vessel placements seems clear. Samian dishes were placed over the mouth of the cinerary jars in burials 12003 and 12219 (the dish in 12003 was inverted). Cremation 2 at the Langford Road site included a samian dish that covered the mouth of the cinerary vessel (Langton and Holbrook 1997, 26). Similar practices are widely attested at other sites, for example Colchester and Skeleton Green. Typically, shallow vessels were chosen to cover the cinerary container, as is the case for the two examples at Heybridge. The choice and use of a vessel may have been for entirely practical reasons: a shallow vessel is wide enough to cover the mouth but limits the final height of the deposit. Indeed, mundane motives may have determined the practice in the first instance, with the covering vessel acting as a lid to prevent soil contamination of the human remains. If this was the reason, then it did not overly concern the inhabitants of Heybridge (or Roman Britain, for that matter), as evidence for ceramic lids is relatively rare. Although organic bungs and covers could have been used instead of ceramic lids, the occasional use of flagons or beakers instead of shallow vessels (*e.g.* May 1930, pl. xci, no.3) suggests that conceptual motivations would better fit the evidence. The need to protect the human remains may well have been a factor, but this protection may have been as much

spiritual as physical. Whatever the reasons behind this practice, it is suggested that the placement of vessels over the mouth of the cinerary vessel, and especially those that have been inverted, represents changes in original everyday function. An inverted dish is no longer able to bear food and so cannot be regarded as a food vessel, nor as a container for offerings (Biddulph 2002).

Two vessels, the dish that covered the cinerary vessel and a flask, both from burial 12219, were deliberately 'killed', with chips having been removed along the rim. Going (1988, 23) suggests that the type of vessel determined the type of mutilation. Thin-walled, narrow-mouthed vessels (*e.g.* flagons and jars) tended to be perforated, while rim segments were removed by saw from thicker-walled open forms, such as platters and dishes. As the 'killed' flask in 12219 demonstrates, this was not a hard and fast rule. Practically, knocking holes through the base or the sides risked smashing the pot, and drilling tended to be the favoured method for creating holes (*ref. vessel function*). The evidence for deliberately-mutilated pottery is relatively infrequent, but widespread. Some of the commoner types of mutilation were identified at Great Dunmow and include removed rim sections and holes through bases and vessel walls (Going 1988, 22). At Kelvedon, some flagons were perforated or were chipped at the rim; jars had been perforated through the base (Rodwell 1988, 117-121). Within the wider region, the practice is also attested at, among others, Colchester (May 1930, pl. lxxvii, no.16), Skeleton Green (Partridge 1981, fig.102) and Folly Lane, Verulamium (Lyne 1999, 301). The practice is poorly understood and no single explanation seems to cover the full range of evidence. Suggestions include the notion that the missing fragments were retained by the living as keepsakes (Going 1988, 22). Alternatively, a vessel was mutilated so that it could not have been used *against* the living (Lyne 2000, 301). A variation of this explanation requires that pots were damaged so that they could pass from the realm of the living to that of the dead (*cf.* Down and Rule 1971, 73). None is a fully satisfactory explanation. The infrequency of the practice would seem to rule them out. At least two of the above explanations would be stronger if the same treatment within the burial pit was applied consistently to every vessel. Even within a single burial, each vessel might have been accorded different treatment, so that just one of a number of vessels might be 'killed'.

By focusing on the burial pit itself, we inevitably reduce the significance of its contents in any *pre*-burial funerary rite. However, in such rites, certain vessels ultimately included in the burial pit may have served specific functions. Some of these functions may have left tale-tell signs on pots or required the vessels to be placed inside the pit in certain ways. What we recover, then, may be an end-product, rather than primary evidence of preparation for the journey from one world to the next. Effectively, the significance of those vessels may have ended with their final burial.

A *pre*-burial funerary rite that perhaps might best fit the phenomenon of 'killing' alludes to sacrifice. Creighton (2000, 204) suggests that the paraphernalia of sacrifice - bowls, *patera* and ladles, usually in metal - were represented in the aristocratic graves of the late Iron Age. So, the mutilated food vessels stood proxy for animals; indeed, they may have actually contained the meat of those animals. Alternatively, eating vessels contained food 'sacrificed' through the killing of the vessels, or salted flour (*mola salsa*), traditionally sprinkled over the victim. Mutilated liquid containers contained wine for pouring over the 'victim', or liquids for sacrificial libations.



Creighton (2000, 204) adds that sacrifice was the business of the aristocracy. The infrequent appearance of 'killed' vessels is consistent with a minority practice. But while the extent of the practice is unclear, it is certain that sacrifice could form part of the funerary process. Virgil's description of Aeneas conducting the funeral of his fallen comrade Misenus includes the burning of sacrificial food on the pyre (6, 235). Epigraphic evidence from other parts of the Empire suggests that sacrifices were undertaken at burial places on special days and anniversaries to commemorate the dead (cf. Lewis and Reinhold 1990, 524).

### **Conclusion**

Despite the limited dataset, this study has revealed a varied pattern of burial practices at Heybridge during the Roman period. The burial data are broadly typical of Roman burial practices across the region. However, this study has indicated differences between non-burial domestic assemblages and burial assemblages at Heybridge, suggesting that ceramic vessels placed inside the burial pit were selected. In addition, analysis of assemblage composition has proved a useful tool for comparing the Elms Farm burial data to a range of settlements, highlighting differences between them. Potentially, these differences could help to characterise settlement types, and more data from more sites are required. However, that Heybridge seems to be closer to 'lower-order' settlements, in terms of composition, than settlements with greater urban development accords well with the evidence of settlement morphology, economy and artefactual supply.