

A few thoughts on Hadham wares at Elms Farm, Heybridge

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This forms the basis of a paper given to the Midlands and South-East Roman Pottery Research Group, at Hertford, 20th March 1999)

1. The site of Elms Farm in Heybridge was excavated between 1993 and 1995, revealing a large settlement dating through the late Iron Age and Roman period. A large village, rather than a small town, the site was absent of defence, administrative or bath buildings, or inscriptions. Six tons of Roman pottery was recovered from the site, which my colleague Joyce Compton, and I, with Scott's guidance, are currently recording. As work is still in progress, my thoughts on Hadham wares are provisional.

2. This 6 tons includes a varied range of Hadham products. We've isolated five specific wares: red-slipped or burnished oxidised wares; white-slipped oxidised ware; white-slipped grey ware; black-surfaced ware; and grey wares. These wares constitute two basic fabrics: oxidised and reduced, and both of these are variations of the classic Hadham fabric.

3. Taking the description from the MOLSS fabric handbook, the Hadham fabric is micaceous with abundant white quartz with dark iron-ore grains. This produces a distinctive 'salt and pepper' appearance. There is variation. Sometimes you'll get less salt and more pepper – good for those on low sodium diets. This classic fabric is worth emphasis. Under microscopic examination, the classic fabric is present in both reduced and oxidised wares. This allows us to reject or approve potential Hadham pieces with greater ease and satisfaction. I'm sure everyone's had difficulty in separating abraded reduced Hadham wares, for example, from other black or grey surfaced wares. I think microscopic examination is important considering that the typical characteristics of Hadham wares – glossy burnish or slip, or powdery feel when absent – are not always reliable indicators.

4. Using the microscope, our levels of confidence increase when assigning pottery to a Hadham source. Therefore, we are quite sure that there are few early Hadham products at Elms Farm. This is supported by the fact that we have only a relatively small amount of pottery coming in from what I call the 'London channel'. In 6 tons, there isn't much from Verulamium or London. Most of the pottery that is not imported, if not local, seems to come from Kent and Colchester. However, a possible early Hadham candidate is this London-Essex stamped bowl. It's a fine oxidised fabric, of which Rodwell states,

'comparisons....between oxidised London-Essex stamped ware and undoubted Hadham wares have demonstrated that the two groups are visually indistinguishable, even under the hand lens.'

But not under the microscope. I'd say it's a good candidate, but would have to err on the side of caution. If it is from Hadham, it's the earliest product at Elms Farm. Rodwell gives it a Flavian date.

5. This date, extending into the 2nd century perhaps may be applied to a small quantity of Hadham white-slipped grey wares. Its forms are limited to this globular

beaker and ring-necked flagons – forms which do not extend beyond the mid 2nd century.

6. After this fleeting early appearance, there is something of a hiatus in Hadham supply, until the 3rd century when a range of reduced products are made. I wouldn't call it a flood, but a steady stream, certainly. There is, however, a strong case suggesting that reduced wares reach Elms Farm from the late 2nd century – forms such as bead-rimmed dishes (ubiquitous in 2nd century contexts and widely produced in other fabrics). It is clear, though, that much of the supply occurs in the 3rd century, with the emphasis perhaps on the second half.

7. Supply continues to the end of the Roman period. From the later 3rd, bead-rimmed dishes are replaced by bead-and-flanged dishes – though perhaps not entirely, as bead-rimmed dishes seem to hold on into the 4th century. Whether they are still produced at this time, or they last a long time is a question that I can't answer.

8. Similarly, there is a strong case for suggesting that the oxidised fabric and its white-slipped variant reach Elms Farm in the late 3rd century or first half of the 4th. The case strengthens where we have a number of contexts with oxidised Hadham wares, but no other typically late fabrics, such as Oxford and late shell-tempered wares. If Hadham wares are removed from such contexts, late 3rd to early 4th century dates may be offered. Conversely, in late 4th century contexts, Hadham ware is poorly represented, as compared to these other late fabrics. If Hadham ware is principally a late Roman fabric, then its appearance is fleeting. More plausible, perhaps, is the suggestion that Hadham ware arrives at Elms Farm during the second half of the 3rd century, continuing into the later 4th, but not much beyond. It is perhaps worth suggesting that supply of Hadham ware never reached the same level as Nene valley or Oxford wares. I know that from sites such as Chelmsford and Caister, oxidised Hadham wares make a later 4th century appearance. But here we risk a circular argument. The dating of a context is, after all, an interaction between the pottery present, not a battle of dates set in stone.

9. Other interesting forms in oxidised fabrics include face pots. Another Hadham candidate is this 'peanut bowl'. Its shape resembles samian form Drag. 39, but is perhaps directly copying a metal prototype, rather than the samian imitation. Its surface appearance isn't typical Hadham. It has darker surface colour and coarser feel. But, and here I return to my original point, under the microscope, its classic Hadham fabric is revealed.