

## ROMAN POTTERY

*By Jane Timby*

### **Introduction and methodology**

Amongst the finds from earlier archaeological interventions at Glastonbury Abbey is a small collection of unstratified Roman pottery amounting to some 256 sherds weighing *c* 2.9 kg. The pottery is generally of mixed condition with some small, quite abraded pieces but other larger better-preserved pieces. This is reflected in the overall average sherd weight of 11.3 g, indicative of material that has undergone some disturbance.

The sherds were sorted into fabric groups based on the type, size and frequency of inclusions in the paste based on macroscopic observation. Where appropriate the codes used in the National Roman reference series for named traded wares were used (Tomber and Dore 1998). The sorted material was quantified by sherd count and weight (see Table 1). Where sherds had evidently broken during or after retrieval these were counted as one. Rim sherds were coded according to vessel type and other features such as surface finish and decoration were noted. The quantified data was entered onto an Excel spreadsheet, a copy of which is deposited with the site archive. A small selection of the better preserved material has been illustrated.

### **Discussion of fabrics and associated forms**

The following section is divided later Iron Age-early Roman and Roman and Late Roman. Descriptions have been kept to a minimum as details for known wares can be found elsewhere or the codes used are generic where detailed sub-division has little meaningful value, for example unnamed grey wares. Although a moderately wide range of wares have been noted the assemblage is very much dominated by a small group of fabrics, most notably black burnished wares (DOR BB1 / SOW BB1) and local grey wares which account for 26.2% and 21.5% by sherd count respectively.

#### ***Later Pre-Roman Iron Age - early Roman***

*Calcite-tempered ware.* Ten sherds including three jar rims. Handmade forms in a reduced black ware containing a moderate scatter of calcite inclusions. The fabric is one typical of the later Iron Age and early Roman period in this area and probably derives from the Mendips (Timby 2007, 572; Allan 1998). It should be noted that one of the fabrics (fabric G) from Cheddar, dated by association to the 10<sup>th</sup> century or earlier, is calcite-tempered. The author noted the similarity of this fabric with the earlier pre-Roman one (Rahtz 1979, 310). Four of the nine sherds from Glastonbury Abbey were recovered from beneath the Saxon floor level.

#### ***Grog-tempered ware (GR)***

A single rim from a handmade jar. This ware is typical of the pre-Roman Iron Age but continued to be used and made up to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

### ***Roman: Continental imports***

*Samian.* In total 17 sherds of samian are present in the collection with examples from the South Gaulish (LGF SA) (La Graufesenque), Central Gaulish (LEZ SA) (Lezoux) and East Gaulish (TRI SA) (Trier) and (RHZ SA) (Rheinzabern) production sources. The three South Gaulish pieces include two sherds of decorated bowl (Dragendorff (Drag.) 37) (D1; D2) and a minute sherd from a grave fill in the nave (1957. P1245). The Lezoux pieces comprise a single sherd from a cup Drag. 27 dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century; a sherd from a decorated bowl (Drag. 37) (D3); a rim fragment from another bowl or dish; two sherds from dishes Drag. 36 and very small piece probably of a Drag 31R.

The four East Gaulish sherds, kindly identified by Joanna Bird, include three vessels from Trier all likely to date to the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and one from Rheinzabern . Forms from the former source include two variants (Lud Sb) of bowls Drag. 31 and one cup, Drag. 33, with a mid way groove on the outer wall. The Rheinzabern sherd is a bowl or dish dating to the later 2<sup>nd</sup> to first half 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

#### *Decorated sherds*

D1. Flaked bodysherd from a South Gaulish bowl. Probably Drag. 37. Thirteen petalled flowers set in notched circles set in panels with small seven-petalled rosettes at the corners. ?First century.

D2. A small decorated sherd from a Drag. 37 bowl showing a seated hare facing right. Flavian.

D3. Bodysherd from a Central Gaulish bowl Drag. 37 decorated with a simple large scrolled vine-leaf similar to that used by Iustus or Mercator II. *c* AD 160-190.

### ***Roman: Regional wares***

*Dorset black burnished ware* (DOR BB1) (Tomber and Dore 1998, 127). By count this is the second commonest fabric in the collection; first by weight accounting for 25.8%. Most of the forms present span the 2<sup>nd</sup> through to the later 3<sup>rd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> centuries. In particular these include a number of jars with flared or beaded rims, plain-rimmed dishes (Fig. 6), a grooved rim bowl (Fig. 7) and flanged-rim conical bowls (Fig. 11). The three jars with beaded rims (e.g. Fig. 1) could potentially date to the 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

*South-west black burnished ware* (SOW BB1) (*ibid*, 1998, 129). Represented by 13 sherds all of which are from jars, largely of 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century date (Fig. 9).

*New Forest colour-coated ware* (NFO CC) (*ibid*, 1998, 141; Fulford 1975). Four sherds including an indented beaker, a barbotine scroll decorated beaker and a bowl, probably Fulford type 68.

?*New Forest grey ware* (NFO RE) (Fulford 1975). A rimsherd from a two-handled bowl (Fig. 13). The form is featured in the New Forest type series (*ibid*, type 17) although there is a slight question mark as to whether it is a New Forest product. Similar vessels feature at Portchester Castle which suggests a date in the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

*Oxfordshire colour-coated ware* (OXF RS) (*ibid*, 1998, 176). Seven sherds comprising two mortaria; one small beaker sherd and two bowls, probably Young (1977) forms C49 and C81. All these vessels are likely to have been imported into the area in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

*Severn Valley ware* (SVW OX) (*ibid*, 1998, 148-9). Five sherds were recorded including two identifiable as from tankards. Not closely datable other than probably 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century.

?*Wiltshire grey grogged ware* (WIL GR). A fine grey ware with a slightly lumpy texture from the presence of grog / clay pellets. A single, wheel made everted rim jar with a rolled rim (Fig. 10).

#### ***Roman wares: local/ unknown wares***

*Black sandy ware* (BW): Six sherds: one a squat, flanged-rim bowl in black, sandy, ware, probably a local imitation of BB1 and typologically datable to the later 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century; one everted rim jar and the others plain bodysherds.

*Black surfaced grey ware* (BSGY). A fine sandy grey ware with a black-slipped surface. Probably a late Roman vessel.

*Fine black micaceous ware* (BWFMIC): Two very small sherds from under the Saxon floor.

*Grey sandy ware* (GREY1) / *Grey micaceous ware* (GYMIC): A miscellaneous group of wares not necessarily from a single source but probably largely local. A range of forms are present, in which jars dominate (Fig. 5, 8) but there are also examples of a flask, plain-rimmed dishes, and bowls: grooved rim (Fig. 4); flat rim (Fig. 2) and flanged rim (Fig. 12). Typologically the group embraces material of mid 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>-century date. In addition to the sandy wares were 14 sherds with a distinctively micaceous fabric which includes flared-rim jars and a flat-rim dish or bowl. One jar sherd with a slightly sooted exterior surface has quite crudely executed burnished-line chevron decoration.

*Grey ware with glauconitic sand* (GREY2). A wheel made grey sandy ware with a sparse to moderate temper of fine, well-sorted black rounded grains of glauconitic sand. Three sherds including one simple everted jar rim.

*Grey sandy ware with limestone* (GREY3). A grey ware with a grey or sandwich red-brown/grey core with a sandy texture. The matrix also contains sparse inclusions of limestone. Ten body/base sherds including both handmade and wheel made vessels, probably mainly jars.

*Fine grey sandy ware (GYF) / Fine grey micaceous ware (GYFMIC)*: Eleven small bodysherds and one jar rim from the former and two rimsherds of the latter. The fine grey micaceous ware rims include a bowl and a large storage jar with incised decoration on the rim (Fig. 14). This latter vessel is typical of the Somerset area with other similar examples well documented from sites like Ilchester (Leach 1982, fig. 73) and Shapwick (Timby 2007, fig. 13.22.R65).

*North Somerset grey ware (NSOM RE)*. Three sherds with a harder fired darker grey, slightly pimply textured fabric are typical of the late Roman grey ware industry of North Somerset. The sherds include a flanged rim conical bowl copying a BB1 form.

*Oxidised sandy ware (OXID1)*): Twelve sherds of sandy, oxidised wares including at least two storage jars, one with slashed decoration on the inner rim edge (Fig. 15).

*Oxidised sand with limestone (OXID2)*. An oxidised version of GREY2. A single rim sherd from a vessel with a rolled rim probably Roman.

*Oxidised with grey burnished surface (OXID3)*. A single sherd from a wheel made vessel. Soft fine oxidised fabric with a grey slipped, burnished surface.

*Oxidised sandy with clay pellets (OXID4)*. A sandy ware with a common frequency of well-sorted quartz and sparse rounded clay pellets. One of the two sherds is from a lid with a flat rim.

*Oxidised sandy with limestone and rock inclusions (OXID5)*. A single handmade bodysherd. Red-brown with a sandwich grey core. The paste contains fragments of decaying limestone, sandstone and rock fragments up to 1 mm.

*Fine oxidised ware (OXIDF)*. Two sherds of sandy, oxidised ware and six sherds of fine, oxidised ware were recorded. Some of the latter may have originally been colour-coated. One base (Fig. 16) shows the edge of a post-firing graffiti

*South-west oxidised ware (SOW OX)*. An unslipped oxidised version of Tomber and Dore 1998, 192, fabric SOW WS.

*White-slipped oxidised ware (WSOXID) / white-slipped micaceous oxidised ware (WSOXMIC)*: The former includes two sherds, one a rim sherd from a curved-wall dish; the latter is represented by a single sherd.

*Miscellaneous white ware (WW)*. Single fine white ware bodysherd. Source unknown.

## **Discussion**

The Roman pottery assemblage recovered from various excavations at the abbey suggests occupation dating from the later Iron Age-early Roman period through to the 4<sup>th</sup>-century. It is not possible from the assemblage to determine whether activity was intermittent or

continuous. The group is small from dispersed locations and there is also the likelihood that some selection may have taken place in terms of retention. Samian, for example, accounts for 6.6% of the group by sherd count which is slightly higher than would be expected, suggesting that pieces were kept because of their distinctive nature and usefulness for dating, whereas more local wares, unless particularly large or featured, may have been discarded. On average, rural settlements in the region usually produce between 1-2% samian although slightly higher percentages might be expected from higher status establishments. As might be expected BB1 forms a significant component of the Glastonbury Abbey assemblage but on the basis of other quantified assemblages in the region (cf. Timby 2007, 600), this figure is slightly on the low side. Similarly an absence of Roman amphorae might indicate that unfeatured sherds were not kept or were possibly mixed/ discarded with tile. Other regional imports such as the later Roman colour-coated wares from the Oxford and New Forest industries are quite typical finds in the area. The balance of 'local' oxidised / reduced wares is probably broadly that which might be expected but the low incidence of distinct featured pieces makes dating of individual sherds problematic.

Many of the other archaeological interventions around the abbey have produced odd Roman sherds (e.g. Farwell 1998; Hollingrake C & N 1992; Rahtz 1991; Carr 1985). The pottery from the Tor includes samian, DOR BB1 and probably Oxfordshire colour-coated ware. The coarse wares suggest a later Roman date; the samian includes sherds of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>-century currency (Hartley 1991; Rahtz 1991). A similar picture is shown with pottery from the mound with a single 1<sup>st</sup>-century sherd and others dating to between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries (Carr 1985). All this is indicative of a Roman presence in the area but the exact nature of this presence is elusive at present.

### *Catalogue of illustrated sherds*

1. Beaded rim jar. Fabric: DOR BB1. 1998/3/396. P1275. CL.S3.1959.
2. Flat rim bowl. Fabric: GREY. 1998/3/283. P1202. CLE 1957.
3. Flagon with a small bifid rim. Fine sandy brown ware. P723.
4. Grooved rim bowl. Fabric: GREY, 1988/1384. P1323.
5. Everted rim jar. Fabric: GREY. 1991/85/4. P240.
6. Plain-rimmed dish. Fabric: DOR BB1. 1991/79/4. P194.
7. Grooved rim bowl. Fabric: DOR BB1. 1988/3/279. P1198
8. Flared rim jar. Fabric: GREY. 2007/31/23. P1394. 1957. Kiln 3.
9. Flared rim jar. Fabric: SOW BB1. 1988/1384. P1323.12.
10. Everted rim jar. Fabric: WIL GR. P721-2
11. Flanged rim, conical bowl. Fabric: DOR BB1. Unstratified.
12. Flanged rim, conical bowl. Fabric: GREY/ NSOM RE. Unstratified.
13. Handled bowl, as Fulford type 17. Fabric: ?NFO RE. P723.
14. Storage jar. Fabric: GYFMIC. 1998/3/101, P1055. 1955 Q3.
15. Storage jar. Fabric: OXID1. Unstratified.
16. Base with the edge of a post-firing graffito scratched into the underside. Fabric: OXIDF. 1991/100/10. P309.

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