

# DERBYSHIRE WARE — A REAPPRAISAL

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IT is now almost thirty years since J. P. Gillam's important article on Romano-British Derbyshire ware appeared in this *Journal*.<sup>1</sup> Gillam's review of the site-datings suggested "the latter part of the third and the beginning of the fourth (century) for the production of Derbyshire ware".<sup>2</sup> In recent years, however, fresh evidence has emerged, not least from one of the actual production centres, to necessitate a reappraisal of Gillam's original dating. This article is designed to bring together the more important strands of the evidence drawn from both published and unpublished material.

## EVIDENCE FROM EXCAVATED SITES

### a. *The kilns*

Of the two production centres at Hazelwood and Holbrook known to have produced Derbyshire ware the latter site was believed by the excavators to be the earlier.<sup>3</sup> S. O. Kay in his report of the excavations referred briefly to this in his conclusions, although dating evidence from the site was inconclusive. A brief addendum gave the evidence of geochronological dating produced by Professor R. M. Cook from samples of the kiln furniture.<sup>4</sup> This suggested a "date in the 2nd century A.D. and not late in that century" for the kiln, although the possibility of error was not ruled out. Kay concluded that Derbyshire ware on the Antonine sites (see below) was most probably derived from the Holbrook kilns.

### b. *Sites listed by Gillam and Kay*<sup>5</sup>

#### i) *Little Chester* (Gillam site 1)

Dr. Graham Webster's excavation in 1960 produced a number of sherds of Derbyshire ware.<sup>6</sup> The most conclusive evidence for the first appearance of the ware was from a pit sealed by a sequence of clay floors.<sup>7</sup> The latter were in turn sealed by burnt daub containing coarse pottery and samian of the second half of the second century. Material from the pit

<sup>1</sup> *D.A.J.*, LXI (1940), 26-37. See also *Ant. J.*, XIX (1939), 429-37.

<sup>2</sup> *D.A.J.*, LXI (1940), 36.

<sup>3</sup> *D.A.J.*, LXXXII (1962), 21-42.

<sup>4</sup> *D.A.J.*, LXXXII (1962), 41.

<sup>5</sup> A complete list is given by Kay: *D.A.J.*, LXXXII (1962), 37-41.

<sup>6</sup> *D.A.J.*, LXXXI (1961), 85 ff.

<sup>7</sup> *D.A.J.*, LXXXI (1961), 104-5. Material from the pit is samian nos. 9 & 37 and coarse pottery nos. 1-4 of which nos. 3 and 4 are in Derbyshire ware.

including a black-burnished dish similar to examples from Antonine levels in Scotland leaves little doubt that the pit is approximately of the same date as the floors. Derbyshire ware in this pit must therefore be Antonine in origin, although closer dating is not possible.

ii) *Brough* (Gillam site 7)

The recent excavations on the Roman fort of Brough-on-Noe, Derbyshire,<sup>8</sup> by Manchester University have produced several groups of pottery of the 2nd century A.D. containing fragments of Derbyshire ware. These belong to the second phase of the fort's occupation, namely the period of occupation after c. A.D. 157/8 on the evidence of a dedication slab datable to the governorship of Iulius Verus found reused in the *principia* (RIB 283). The pottery groups from the period immediately following c. A.D. 157/8 closely resemble those found on other Pennine forts thought to have been abandoned in the mid-2nd century. The evidence from Brough together with that from Melandra Castle and perhaps Slack (q.v.) suggests that Derbyshire ware was already reaching the immediate locality of the kilns and those military sites close to the production area by the middle of the 2nd century.

iii) *Wall*

A fragment of Derbyshire ware occurs in Antonine levels from the site at Wall.<sup>9</sup> This is among a large group of pottery from a gully near to Watling Street. Black-burnished ware in the group suggests a date around the middle of the 2nd century A.D.<sup>10</sup> for the deposition of the group.

iv) *Rochester*

Excavations in 1961<sup>11</sup> produced Derbyshire ware in the civilian rampart with residual material mostly of 2nd-century date.

v) *Templeborough* (Gillam site 20)

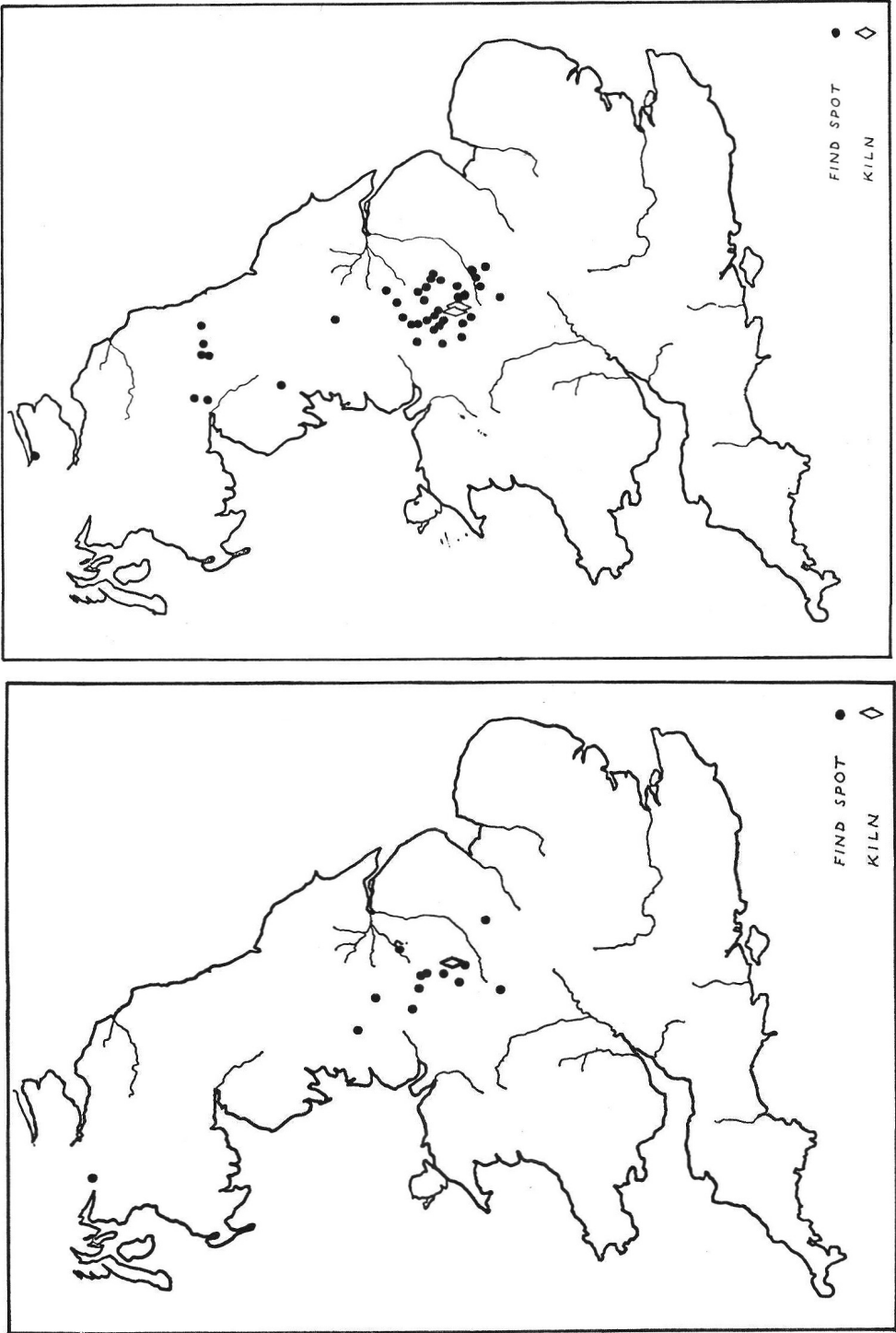
A vessel of Derbyshire ware is illustrated by May (*The Roman forts at Templeborough*, 1922, pl. XXXIIIa, no. 212). This is from the well beneath the headquarters building. Mr. J. P. Gillam kindly informs us that Dr. Grace Simpson has suggested to him that the well belongs to the 2nd-century headquarters building and that the Derbyshire ware fragment is therefore of that date. May is far from clear on the point but there is certainly nothing in the fill of the well, as listed, which need necessarily contradict this suggestion.

<sup>8</sup> See *D.A.J.*, LXXXVI (1966), 100. The pottery is at present stored at the University of Manchester.

<sup>9</sup> *Lichfield and S. Staffs. Arch. Soc. Trans.*, vol. 5 (1963-4), 38-9 & fig. 16-17. Nos. 196-7 are in Derbyshire ware.

<sup>10</sup> Black-burnished ware present includes Gillam types 118 (A.D. 125-160); 221 (A.D. 140-180); 116 (A.D. 125-150). There is also a mortarium dated by Mrs. Hartley to A.D. 110-150. There seems little to date the deposition of this group later than c. 150.

<sup>11</sup> *D.A.J.*, LXXXII (1962), 41; *N. Staffs. Journal of Field Studies*, vol. 2 (1962): "Excavations at the Roman site of Rochester, Staffs.", by Graham Webster. The Derbyshire ware fragment is no. 25.



b. 3rd and 4th centuries A.D.

FIG. 1. Distribution maps of Derbyshire ware.

a. 2nd century A.D.

c. *Other sites*i) *Melandra Castle*

The excavation of the *fort* at Melandra Castle, Derbyshire,<sup>12</sup> yielded no Derbyshire ware. Recent excavation on the site of part of the *vicus*, however, has produced small quantities of the ware. A few fragments were discovered unstratified in the area excavated, but more notable were fragments associated with the destruction deposit of the supposed *mansio* situated to the east of the fort.<sup>13</sup> Plentiful pottery evidence associated with these fragments points to a very early Antonine date for the destruction of the building.<sup>14</sup>

ii) *Jewry Wall, Leicester*

Among the material from the Jewry Wall site at present housed in the Institute of Archaeology, London, as part of a teaching collection, there are two fragments of Derbyshire ware. One of these fragments is to be found among material belonging to level III. Other material from this level suggests a date late in the 2nd century, or possibly a little later,<sup>15</sup> for the deposition of this group. The other fragment in the collection is to be found among pottery from level I of the "forum". Unfortunately it is unmarked and its association with the group can only be assumed. Provided this is so, however, it marks another appearance of the ware in small quantities near to the area of production at a point in time close to (and possibly earlier than) the mid-2nd century A.D.

iii) *Balmuildy*

In view of the absence of Derbyshire ware from Antonine levels on Hadrian's Wall it is surprising to find even a single example on the Antonine Wall. One does occur, however, at Balmuildy,<sup>16</sup> although the precise context is not certain.

iv) *Ribchester*

Excavations in 1969<sup>17</sup> on a site in the civil settlement, associated with the Roman fort at Ribchester, produced one small fragment of Derbyshire ware. Although too much reliance cannot be placed on such a small fragment (only *c.* 1 cm. square) the overall context of the find, sealed well below a heavy layer of cobbling thought to have been laid down as a

<sup>12</sup> R. S. Conway, ed., *Melandra Castle*, Manchester, 1906. Pottery excavated prior to 1948 is published in *D.A.J.* (1949), 1-39.

<sup>13</sup> *J.R.S.*, LVII (1967), 180-1; *D.A.J.*, LXXXVII (1967), 161-2.

<sup>14</sup> The pottery from the site is shortly to be housed in the Derby Museum. We are most grateful to Mrs. Felicity Wild for reporting on the samian from the supposed *mansio*.

<sup>15</sup> K. M. Kenyon, *Jewry Wall*, Leicester (Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries, no. XV), fig. 46. Fig. 46. 11 seems to be a later type than anything else in the group and is perhaps intrusive.

<sup>16</sup> S. N. Miller, *Balmuildy* (Glasgow, 1922), plate XLV, 29, described as hardy gritty red. We are most grateful for information concerning this fragment to Mrs. Felicity Wild who has seen and handled it.

<sup>17</sup> By the authors and Mr. B. J. N. Edwards. Report pending.

parade ground (?) in the later 2nd century, strongly suggests that the piece belongs with the late 1st and 2nd century material with which it was found. With no pottery later than the 2nd century from this area of the excavations, the Ribchester fragment can presumably be placed with our other examples of Derbyshire ware of 2nd-century date.

#### v) *Carpow*

Excavations on the site of the legionary fortress at Carpow, Perthshire,<sup>18</sup> produced a small fragment of Derbyshire ware. The fortress is reliably dated to the period A.D. 208-12, although there is also later material from the site.

### DISCUSSION

The contexts in which the above material was found demonstrate that Derbyshire ware was in production by the latter half of the 2nd century A.D. Furthermore, the evidence from Melandra Castle, Jewry Wall and Brough-on-Noe strongly suggests that the ware was already in circulation by the mid-2nd century. A similar conclusion may perhaps be drawn from the results of recent excavation at Slack (Gillam site 17).<sup>19</sup> This has shown that occupation terminated in the *vicus*, as well as the fort, by c. A.D. 140. It seems likely, therefore, that the fragment of Derbyshire ware from the *vicus* recorded by Gillam was deposited before this date. Early production was, however, fairly localized, with the puzzling exception of the Balmuilty fragment. Otherwise it was not until the 3rd century that Derbyshire ware began to travel far afield.<sup>20</sup> This revised dating entails some refinement of the evidence first offered by Gillam.<sup>21</sup> His dating was based on the only stratified evidence available at the time, that of the Hadrian's Wall area. It suggested that Derbyshire ware was in circulation there during the later 3rd and early 4th century. Evidence from Derbyshire itself also pointed to this period as the time of intensive production. Cautiously Gillam did not rule out the possibility of an earlier date for the introduction of the ware but could find no definite evidence to support this view.<sup>22</sup> The above catalogue shows that evidence is now forthcoming; as a result it appears that, although the ware did not reach Hadrian's Wall until the later 3rd century, it was already in production by the mid-2nd century. As one might expect, production remained on a small scale and comparatively localized until the 3rd century, the period of expanded production recognized by Gillam both for the local market and export to the northern frontier zone.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, XCVI (1962-3), 184-207. The fragment P. 205, no. 6 is from the demolition deposit in and around the Legate's Palace and thus reliably dated A.D. 208-12. The report is hesitant in describing the piece but Mr. J. P. Gillam kindly informs us that it is indeed Derbyshire ware.

<sup>19</sup> We are most grateful to Mr. B. R. Hartley for information concerning the Slack excavations.

<sup>20</sup> *Ant. J.*, XIX (1939), 430 (list of sites) & 435 (site evidence).

<sup>21</sup> *Ant. J.*, XIX (1939), 429-37.

<sup>22</sup> *Ant. J.*, XIX (1939), 437.

<sup>23</sup> We are most grateful to Mr. J. P. Gillam for confirming that evidence from the Hadrian's Wall area still points to the occurrence of Derbyshire ware there only in the later 3rd and 4th centuries.

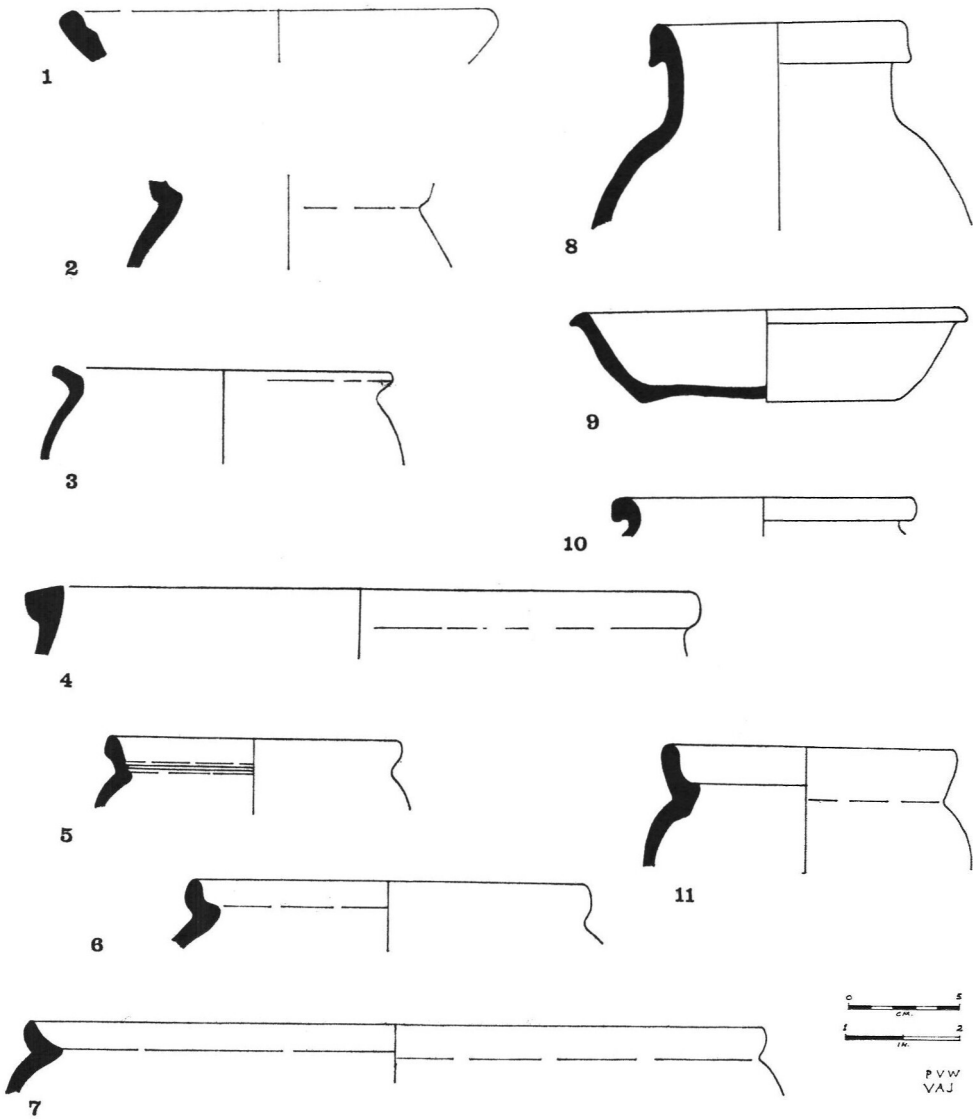


FIG. 2. Early examples of Derbyshire ware.

- 1-3 The Antonine fort at Brough-on-Noe (B66 A2. 10).
- 4 Little Chester (LP 37. 1-3).
- 5 Jewry Wall, Leicester, level III.
- 6-7 Melandra Castle *vicus*, destruction deposit associated with presumed *mansio* (F. II. 1).
- 8-11 Material from Derbyshire caves in the British Museum:
  - 8. Old Woman's House, Taddington Dale.
  - 9-10. ? Old Woman's House (acc. no. 1910. 6-28).
  - 11. ? Harborough.

The new evidence from the 2nd century prompts a re-examination of the date of some southern Pennine sites mentioned by Gillam. Harborough Rocks, Old Woman's House and Ravencliffe Cave, all Derbyshire cave sites,<sup>24</sup> contain material datable to the 2nd century as well as Derbyshire ware. In the absence of later material from these sites it now seems reasonable to suggest that the Derbyshire ware from these cave sites may also be 2nd century in date. Nor can Derbyshire ware found on certain other local sites continuously occupied from the 2nd until the late 3rd or 4th century now be indiscriminately ascribed to the latter part of that occupation.<sup>25</sup> Naturally, since production was at its highest in the 3rd and 4th centuries, the balance must still be towards these dates, but such dating can no longer be regarded as conclusive without other evidence.

The study of Derbyshire ware illustrates only too well the reliance of those wishing to study pottery on the skill of the excavator. Excavations in the early part of the century formed the bulk of the material available for study until fairly recent times. Only within the last decade have excavations in the area close to the production centres produced sufficient stratified Derbyshire ware to allow a re-assessment of the early growth of the Derbyshire pottery industry. While many of the details remain unclear, the picture as a whole can now be seen to follow a coherent pattern. We can suppose an industry beginning production in the mid-2nd century, but catering almost exclusively for a localized market, until expansion in the late 2nd or early 3rd century<sup>26</sup> and improved marketing sent its products across the northern military zone.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Gillam sites 8, 10 & 11 respectively. Some of the material from the excavations is in the British Museum.

<sup>25</sup> e.g., Deepdale Cave (Gillam site 2) and Silverlands (site 5).

<sup>26</sup> On the evidence of the Balmuldy and Carpow material.

<sup>27</sup> We are most grateful to Mr. J. P. Gillam for reading this article and making helpful suggestions.