

MAGOR PILL MULTIPERIOD SITE: THE ROMANO-BRITISH POTTERY, AND STATUS AS A PORT

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Substantial human activity ranged almost continuously from the Iron Age into the early modern period at Magor Pill (Gwent) but, because of coastal erosion, the surviving evidence takes the form chiefly of transposed pottery assemblages. A collection of 2,513 Romano-British sherds is described, together with an assemblage of 179 prehistoric sherds chiefly of the late Iron Age (including 1st century AD). The Iron Age pottery is dominated by Calcite-tempered and Limestone-tempered Wares, and there are some sherds tempered with quartz sand. Dominating the Romano-British assemblage are vessels representing the local South Wales grey coarseware industry, but imported Southeast Dorset BB1 is also important. The minor imported coarsewares are chiefly Southwest BB1, from Southwest England, and Severn Valley Ware and Grey Micaceous Ware, from the Severn Vale to the northeast. Also reaching the site were finewares from the Nene Valley, the New Forest and, especially, Oxfordshire. The mortaria are dominated by Oxfordshire products, but Caerleon Legionary Ware is represented, and there are vessels possibly from other sources in the West and Southwest of England.

The pottery evidence suggests that the Magor Pill settlement flourished in the later Roman period but that occupation had been continuous from the late Iron Age. In comparison with another wetland site in the area (Rumney Great Wharf), together with a range of dryland sites in southeast Wales, the status of Magor Pill seems to have been that of a well-endowed rural settlement with significant connections by coastal waters with other parts of the Severn Estuary, including the town of Caerleon with its nearby quay on the Usk. There is, however, no evidence suggesting that Magor Pill was, in the Roman period, the first port of entry for goods crossing the Bristol Channel.

Introduction

Magor Pill and its associated palaeochannels lie on the shores of the Caldicot Level (northeastern Gwent Levels) on the Welsh side of the Severn Estuary. It is the tidal lower reach of the St. Bride's Brook, rising in the hills to the north of Magor village. Investigations over several decades cumulatively demonstrate that the pill was a focus for significant human activity at various dates from the late Iron Age to early modern

times (Nash-Williams 1951; Boon 1967; Courtney 1986-87; Whittle *et al.* 1989; Allen and Rippon 1997; Allen 1998; Nayling 1998). The evidence for that activity, however, presents many challenges to interpretation, since little of it is in any kind of stratified context (Allen and Rippon 1997) and little of that can be regarded as primary (Boon 1967; Whittle *et al.* 1989). This is because the coast of the Caldicot Level, in common with the neighbouring Wentlooge Level to the southwest (Allen and Fulford 1986; Allen 1987 1997), has experienced severe, episodic erosional retreat over the last two millennia (Allen and Rippon 1997). As a consequence, sites of settlement or economic activity have been destroyed, with only the more durable artefacts, such as pottery, surviving today in modified form as a dispersed, intertidal strew of archaeological pebbles. This material is chiefly Romano-British, but there are prehistoric and important medieval and early modern elements.

The aim of this paper is to give an account of the prehistoric and Romano-British pottery assemblages, especially in regard to the question of whether Magor Pill was a trading port at the time, as it appears was the case in the medieval and early modern periods (Allen and Rippon 1997). Nash-Williams (1951) was early to note Romano-British pottery at Magor Pill, but the first accounts in modern terms, all based on very small assemblages, are by Boon (1967), Allen and Rippon (1997) and Webster (in Nayling 1998). Allen (1998) has described examples of a distinctive late Iron Age earliest Romano-British product (Calcite-tempered Ware) from Magor Pill and related them to a wider distribution in the Severn Estuary and the hinterland served by its tributaries. That distribution implied trading by water.

Setting

A detailed account of the geological and geomorphological setting of Magor Pill is given by Allen and Rippon (1997), so that only salient points

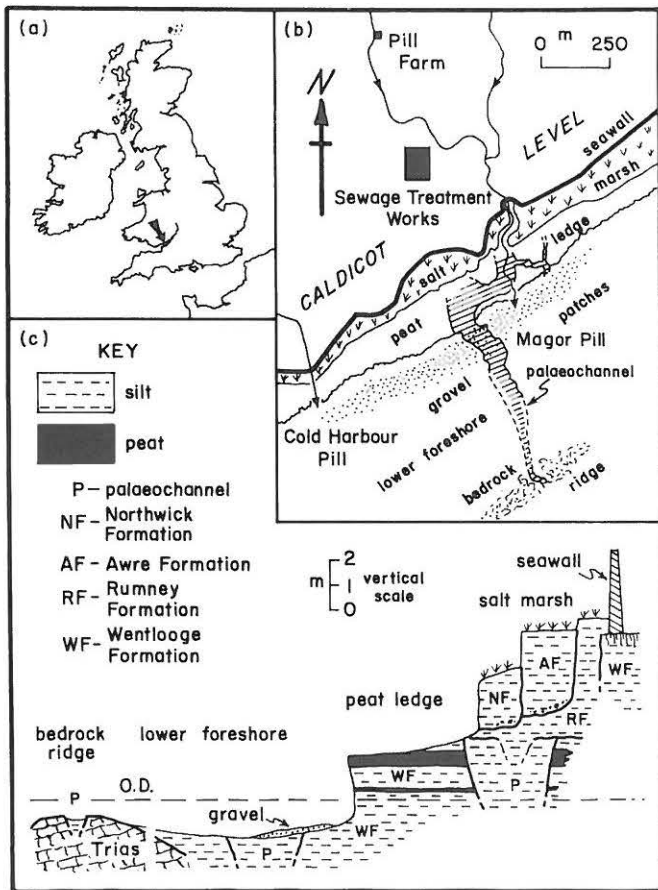


Figure 1: Magor Pill. (a) Setting (b) The features of the intertidal zone. (c) Partly schematic (but vertically accurate) cross-section illustrating the geomorphology and geology of the intertidal zone.

need be repeated here (Figure 1). The landscape as seen today is divided into two zones by a bold sea wall stabilized after set-back largely on a probable late medieval line.

Inland from the wall is a distinctive historic landscape which includes, to the southwest of the St. Bride's Brook canalized as Mill Reen, farmland (Lower Grange) that belonged to the Cistercian community at Tintern Abbey (Rippon 1996). It was from excavations at the Sewage Treatment Works near the wall that Boon (1967) described a small assemblage of Romano-British pottery. Recently, a very light scatter of the pottery was recovered from the field adjoining the northeast bank of the reen opposite the works.

The zone seaward of the wall is dominated by a complex outcrop of Holocene estuarine peats and silts (Wentlooge, Rumney, Awre and Northwick Formations) with a total thickness of the order of 10 m, also recorded from boreholes at the Sewage Treatment Works (Locke 1970-71). On a low ridge far from the shore the beds (lower Wentlooge

Formation) are seen to rest on Triassic mudrocks with probably late Pleistocene ice-wedge casts of periglacial origin. A conspicuous feature of the intertidal zone is a bold cliff and wide ledge displaying peats and silts of mid Holocene age (middle Wentlooge Formation). The former channel of Magor Pill cuts these beds and the lowermost few decimetres of the overlying upper Wentlooge Formation, and ranges across the intertidal zone as far as the bedrock ridge. Sedimentation was occurring in this palaeochannel around the end of the Roman period and, with an important break of early medieval date, continued into modern times. A little to the northeast lies another discordant palaeochannel and its tributaries, one of which was excavated by Whittle *et al* (1989). These were silting up in the late Iron Age. The sea wall is thought to conceal a cliff cut back in silts of the upper Wentlooge Formation.

Lying against the wall is a descending flight of three active salt marshes, each underlain by silts deposited on an erosional, wave-cut platform backed by a largely concealed cliff. The oldest of these deposits, beneath the high marsh, is the Rumney Formation of possibly 17th century inception. The marsh associated with the Awre Formation is of late 19th century origin. The lowest marsh conceals the Northwick Formation, which began to form in the middle years of the present century. This flight of marshes shows that short-term coastal instability accompanies the long-term tendency for retreat in the area.

Taphonomy

The pottery described here was collected from three contexts. Most of the material was assembled over a period of years by systematically line-walking patches of semi-mobile gravel (Allen and Rippon 1997) that range along the exposed lower foreshore at Magor Pill for about a kilometre to the northeast from Cold Harbour Pill (Figure 1b, c). Vigorous tidal currents sweep this part of the intertidal zone at all seasons and during gales the gravels are stirred by waves which can be up to 2 m high. The transposed sherds scattered among the gravels now lie at a much lower altitude than the primary contexts from which they may be presumed to have been derived. Associated with them are a few prehistoric flakes and tools in flint and dark grey-black tuff. As well there is a little primitive iron-making tap slag, other iron-making slags, and furnace lining, all likely to be Roman by

comparison with other sites in the Severn Estuary (e.g. Allen and Fulford 1990; Fulford and Allen 1992). The large, angular lumps of iron ore very thinly scattered equally widely among the gravels are identical in character to the iron ores which formed the cargo of the medieval boat-wreck in the pill (Allen 1996a; Allen and Rippon 1997; Young and Thomas in Nayling 1998), could have been intermittently scoured during storms from the degrading vessel after it reached its final resting place.

A little pottery was from time to time recovered from stratified contexts in the main palaeochannel, although exclusively in silts of medieval and later dates in which it had been reburied (Allen and Rippon 1997). Webster and Redknap (in Nayling 1998) have also described small collections of Romano-British and medieval wares, in their case from around the medieval boat-wreck recovered from the palaeochannel. These various findspots are associated with the peat ledge and the inner part of the lower foreshore.

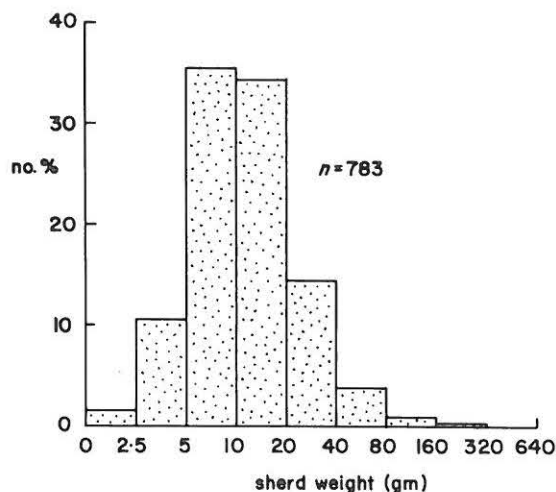
A few sherds of prehistoric pottery were collected at the level of the peat ledge from silts filling the eastern palaeochannel (Allen and Rippon 1997; Allen 1998), reinforcing the results of the excavation by Whittle *et al* (1989) in one of its tributaries. This context may be assumed to be primary, as it yielded thermally-fractured pebbles, bones and a wooden item, several large sherds and an almost entire pot. It is the only primary context attested in the modern intertidal zone. Nash-Williams' (1951) sherds were found near Cold Harbour Pill. His field records, as

recounted by Locke (1970-71), suggest that the pottery occurred partly on the peat ledge and, transposed in a secondary stratified context, at the base of the retreating Rumney and/or Awre Formations (N.B. the Northwick Formation had not yet appeared). A total of 2,692 sherds (47,083 g) was recovered during the present study (Table 1), of which about 6.7 no.% was prehistoric.

The pottery is very variable in quality of preservation. Sherds range in size from substantial portions of jars and bowls down to fragments from these same vessels no bigger than a postage stamp, as illustrated by the Southeast Dorset BB1, the best-represented, well-defined ware in the assemblage with an average weight per sherd of 14.4 g (Figure 2). All degrees of wear are represented by the various fabrics, from sherds that are almost pristine, with well-preserved surface treatments and decoration, to those with fully rounded edges and corners and no surviving trace of original surfaces (Figure 3). Generally speaking, the convex surfaces of sherds are the most damaged - sherds tend to be transported by currents over a bed in a convex-up orientation - and surface treatments are generally best preserved on recessed parts of sherds, such as under rims, in the recesses of mouldings, and on the bottoms of grooves. Some variably worn sherds, commonly associated with medieval or early modern wares, were recovered from secondary stratified contexts in the fill of the main palaeochannel. Again using Southeast Dorset BB1 for illustration, body sherds outnumber rim sherds which in turn exceed base sherds (Table 2). Body sherds defined by four fractures outnumber five-sided ones (Figure 4), but a small proportion are triangular and there are even a few hexagonal and septagonal examples. Ten well-rounded body sherds (*c.* 1.3% of Southeast Dorset BB1) had clearly been broken again after having been significantly rounded and one of these had experienced further breakage (Figure 3). Probably a higher proportion had experienced secondary fracture intertidally, but this is difficult to prove conclusively at low degrees of sherd rounding.

The features just described, combined with the known geological evolution of the site (Allen and Rippon 1997), suggest that the sherds have a complex taphonomy and reached their points of collection by a variety of paths (Figure 5). Some could have been released from a primary context on to the retreating foreshore and subsequently retained there until collected. These are likely to be the smaller and most worn sherds. On the foreshore further breakage as well as rounding was experienced. Other sherds after their release from a primary context could have been

Figure 2: Pottery from Magor Pill. Distribution of weight among sherds from Southeast Dorset BB1 vessels.



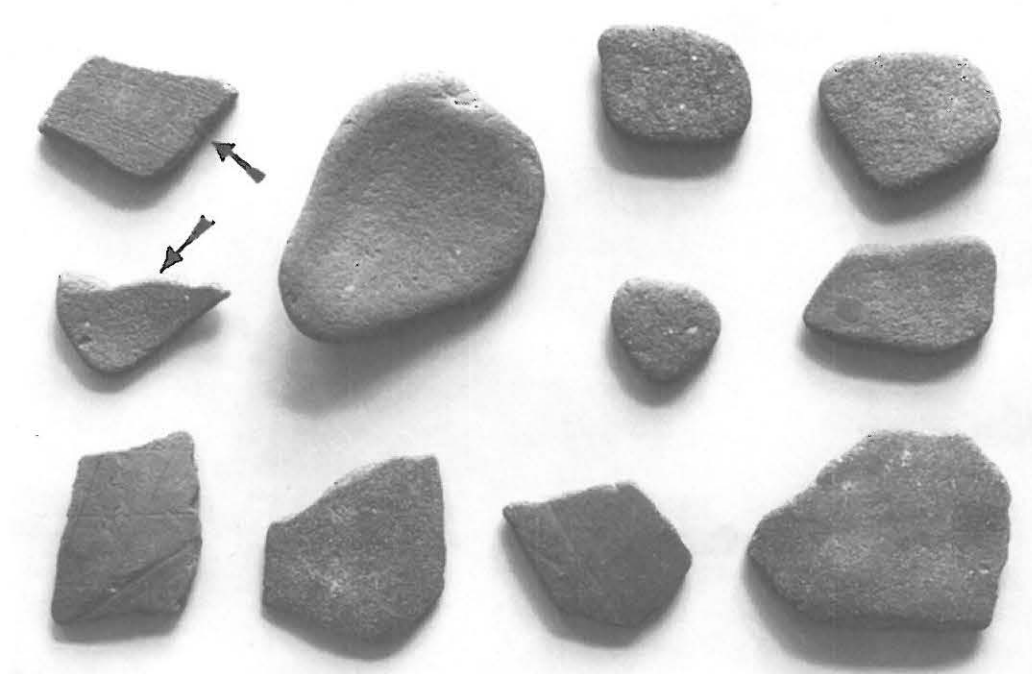


Figure 3: Selected sherds of Southeast Dorset BBI illustrating the range of wear. Arrowed sherds were broken again after a degree of rounding. The largest is about 80 mm long.

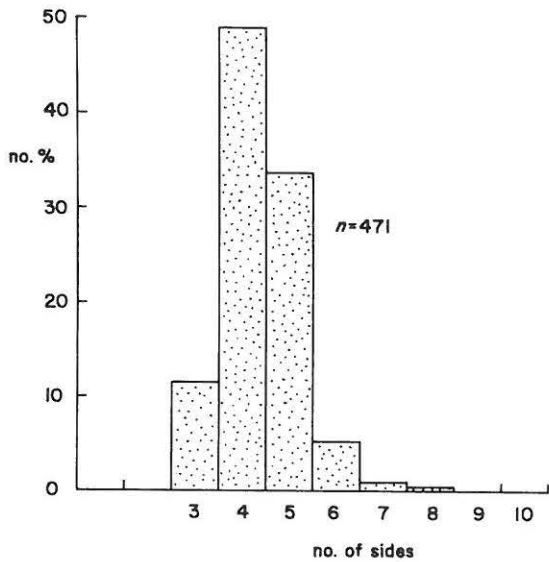


Figure 4: Pottery from Magor Pill. Distribution of number of broken sides among body sherds of Southeast Dorset BBI vessels.

sequestered for a long period in the palaeochannel fill or some mud deposit, now eroded away, before arriving on the foreshore. These fragments are likely to be the larger and the least worn of those found. The advance and retreat of the coast allow paths to the foreshore more complicated still to have been followed, with both primary and secondary stratified contexts being tapped more than once. However,

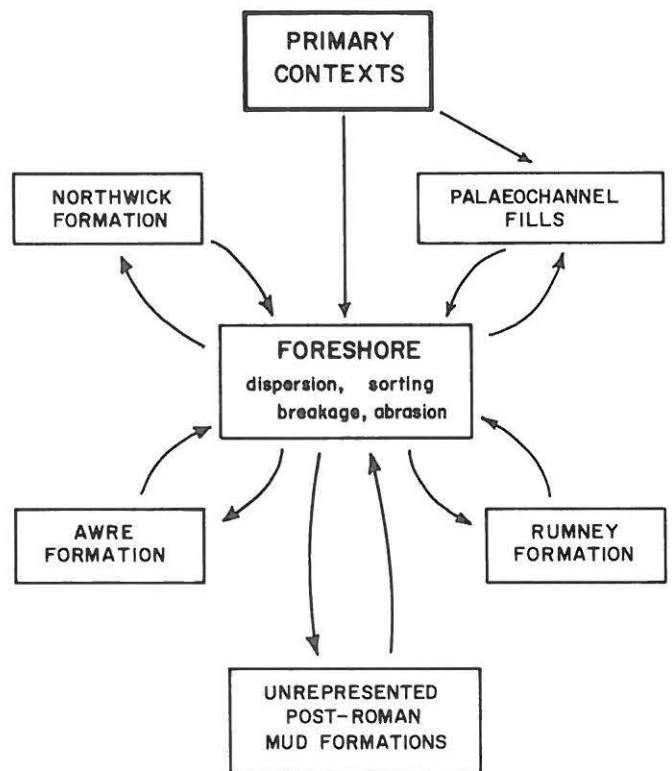


Figure 5: Preservational pathways of pottery and other durable artefacts at Magor Pill.

Table 1. Summary of pottery assemblage at Magor Pill

	no.(%)	wt g(%)
PREHISTORIC		
Calcite-tempered Ware	141 (78.8)	2,003 (77.7)
Limestone-tempered	20 (11.2)	331 (12.8)
Oolite-tempered	1 (0.6)	9 (0.4)
Shell-tempered	2 (1.1)	17 (0.7)
Quartz-tempered(1)	3 (1.7)	66 (2.6)
Quartz-tempered(2)	2 (1.1)	21 (0.8)
Clay pellet-tempered(1)	6 (3.4)	72 (2.8)
Clay pellet-tempered(2)	1 (0.6)	11 (0.4)
Clay pellet-tempered(3)	3 (1.7)	47 (1.8)
Total	179 (100.2)	2,577 (100.0)
ROMAN		
<i>Finewares</i>		
Samian: South Gaul (La Gaufesenque), 2; Central Gaul (Lezoux), 9; Central Gaul (Les Martres-de-Veyres), 32		
total samian	43 (1.7)	613 (1.4)
Oxfordshire (red/brown-slipped)	85 (3.4)	798 (1.8)
Nene Valley	1 (tr.)	4 (tr.)
New Forest	1 (tr.)	5 (tr.)
Micaceous colour-coated	8 (0.3)	87 (0.2)
Miscellaneous	4 (0.2)	48 (0.1)
<i>Oxidised coarsewares</i>		
Severn Valley Ware	75 (3.0)	887 (2.0)
Limestone-tempered	5 (0.2)	140 (0.3)
Quartz-tempered	4 (0.2)	278 (0.6)
Buff sandy	3 (0.1)	68 (0.2)
Miscellaneous sandy	19 (0.8)	253 (0.6)
<i>Reduced coarsewares</i>		
Shell-tempered	1 (tr.)	22 (tr.)
Southeast Dorset BB1	800 (31.8)	11,502 (25.8)
Southwest BB1	23 (0.9)	342 (0.8)
South Wales Greywares		
dark-grey sandy	349 (13.9)	6,592 (14.8)
light-grey sandy	138 (5.5)	3,535 (7.9)
mid to dark grey sandy	798 (31.8)	14,715 (33.1)
Micaceous Grey Ware		
(Gloucester TF5)	87 (3.5)	1,725 (3.9)
Other micaceous sandy (?TF5)	17 (0.7)	306 (0.7)
Miscellaneous	2 (0.1)	52 (0.1)
<i>Mortaria</i>		
Oxfordshire whiteware	12 (0.5)	
Oxfordshire white-slipped	4 (0.2)	
Oxfordshire red/brown-slipped	17(0.7)	
total by weight		502 (1.1)
Other Oxfordshire	3 (0.1)	496 (1.1)
Caerleon Legionary	5 (0.2)	1248 (0.3)
?Caerleon Legionary	6 (0.2)	44 3(1.0)
?Shepton Mallet	1 (tr.)	860 (1.9)
?Southwest England	1 (tr.)	40 (0.1)
Miscellaneous	1 (tr.)	45 (0.1)
Total	2,513 (100.0)	44,506 (100.0)

because of long-term coastal retreat, and the presently obscured bases of the Rumney, Awre and Northwick Formations, the various pathways shown in Figure 5 cannot be fully proven. Although in following these paths the pottery became significantly abraded, as well as dispersed along the coast over a distance of the order of one kilometre, the fact that body, rim and base sherds of a major ware decrease in number in that order suggests that water-sorting has not been excessive in the process.

The pottery assemblages

Table 1 lists the composition of the assemblages while the Appendix gives details of the various wares. Only the more significant features of the pottery are summarized below, together with the dating evidence.

The prehistoric element is miniscule but extremely varied and probably from more than one prehistoric horizon. It is dominated by Calcite-tempered Ware (Peacock 1969, Group 3) of the late Iron Age and later 1st century AD, all but five sherds of which are fully described elsewhere (Allen 1998). Undecorated jars and bowls with simple, beaded, flat or out-turned rims predominate, but a few jars have upright, moulded necks. The little decoration seen is either impressed 'eyebrows' or patterns in 'Glastonbury' styles. Much less abundant, and also attributable to the late Iron Age, is the Limestone-tempered Ware (Spencer 1983; Morris 1994). None of these sherds is diagnostic, but Whittle *et al.* (1989, fig. 11.7) figure from an excavation in a tributary of the eastern palaeochannel (Fig. 1b) a jar in this fabric with a swollen, slightly out-turned, bead-like rim. Although Whittle's small assemblage includes no quartz-tempered wares, these may also be of late Iron Age to earliest Roman date (see Webster fabric B in Manning 1993). Upright necked vessels (Figure 6.1, 2) and a jar/bowl with a slightly outturned rim are represented, and one small, hand-made sherd (Figure 6.3)

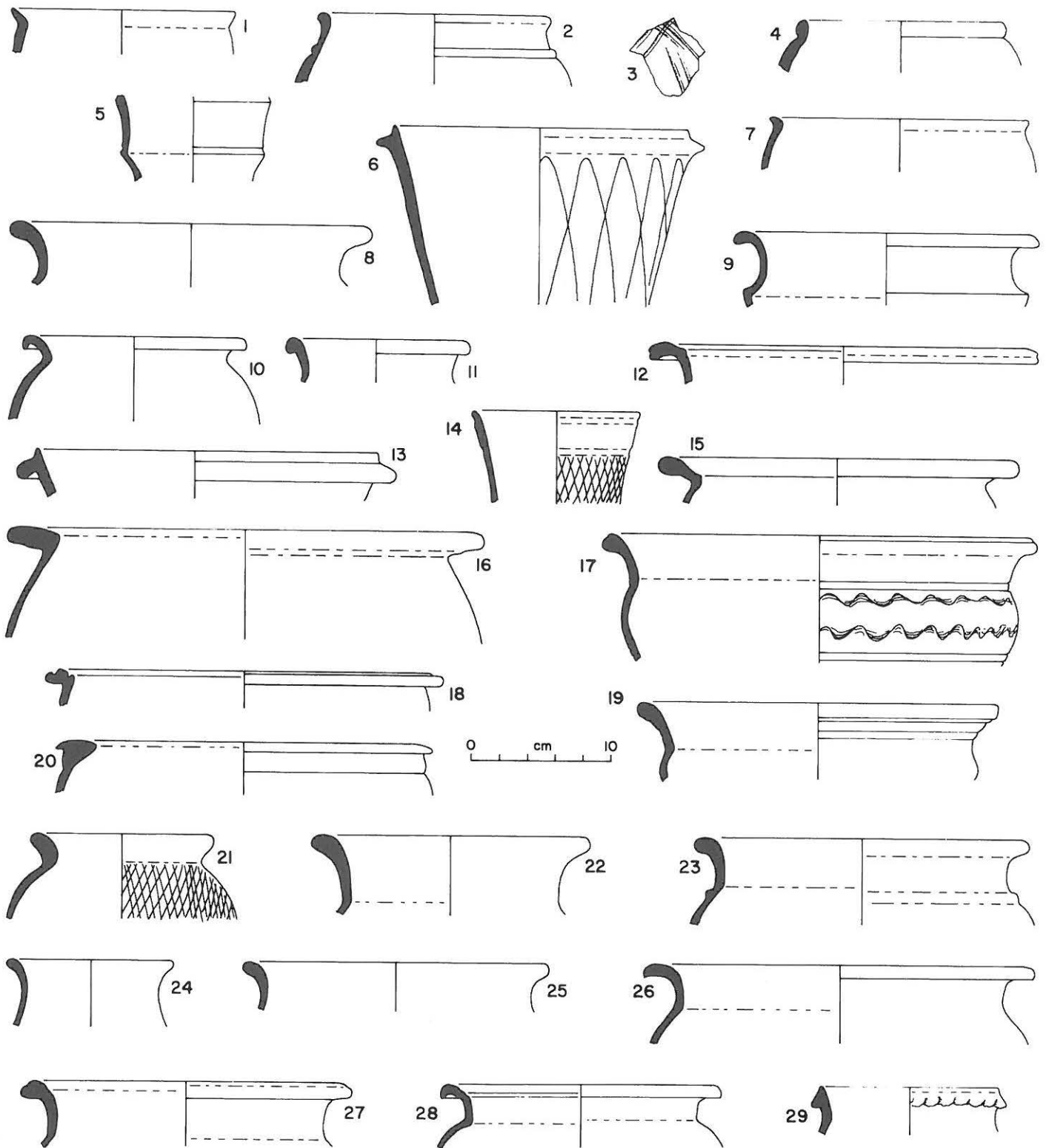
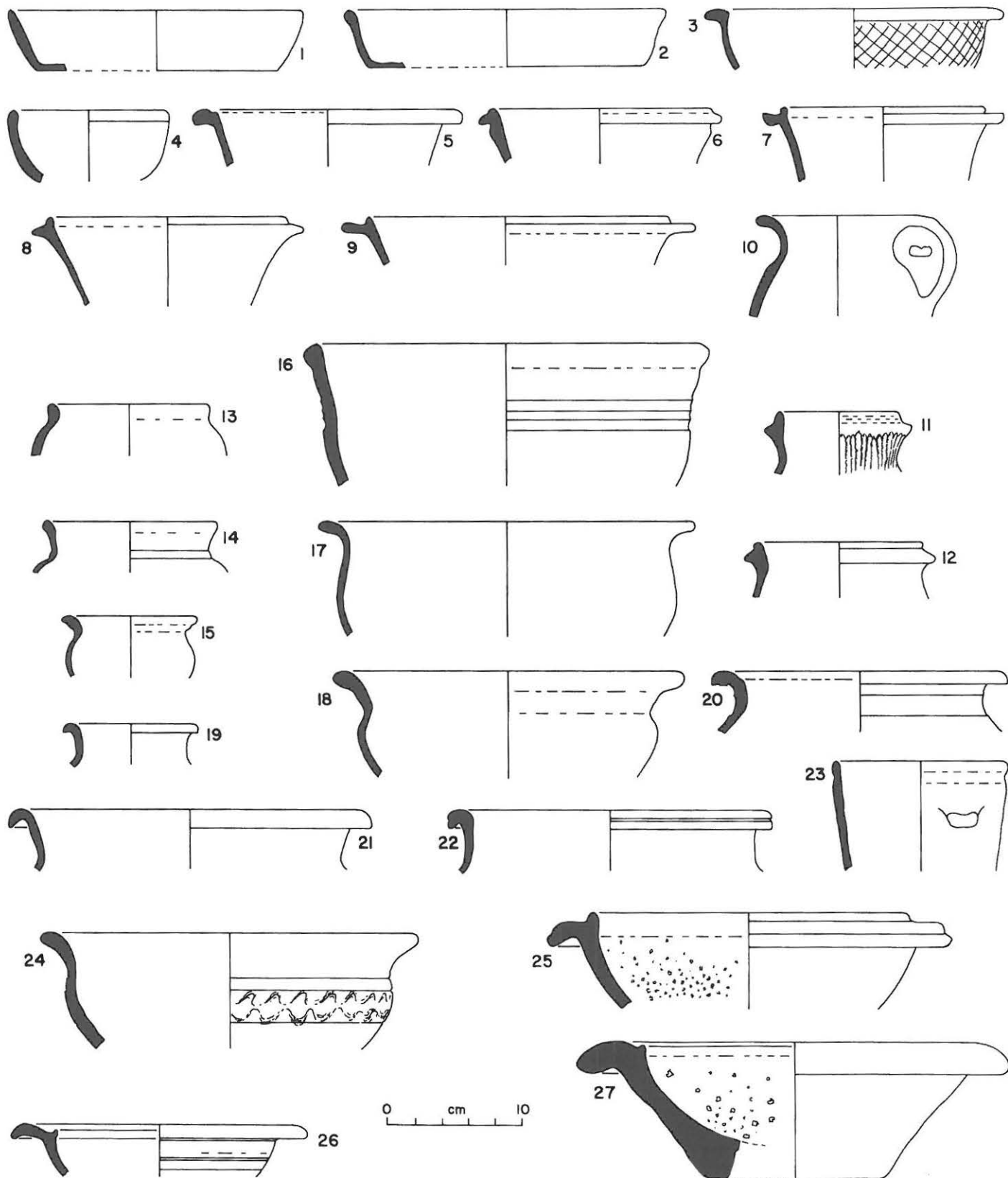


Figure 6: Pottery from Magor Pill. Prehistoric: 1-3 - quartz-tempered ware; 4 - clay pellet-tempered ware. Romano-British: 5 limestone-tempered ware; 6 - quartz-tempered ware; 7-15 - dark-grey sandy ware; 16-29 - light-grey sandy ware.

also has decoration reminiscent of the cruder Glastonbury geometric type (Rouillard in Coles 1987). Late Bronze to Iron Age dates seem possible for the generally soft, clay pellet-tempered fabrics, which include a beaded rim (Figure 6.4) and a body sherd from a thick-walled, strongly carinated bowl.

Finewares contribute only 5.7 no.% of the Roman assemblage. The samian vessels are very



limited in range of form and chiefly undecorated, but point to dates from the late 1st century AD to at least the end of the 2nd, with the emphasis on the middle and late 2nd century. Oxfordshire Ware is twice as abundant and more varied than samian. The vessels represented are a variety of deep bowls, beakers, flanged bowls, flagons and a strainer. Most of the forms have long date ranges, from either the early-

Figure 7: Romano-British pottery from Magor Pill. 1-23 - mid to dark grey sandy wares; 24 - buff sandy ware. Mortaria: 25 Caerleon Legionary Ware; 26 - (?) Southwest England; (?) Shepton Mallet

Table 2. Summary of sherd types, Southeast Dorset BB1, Magor Pill

<i>type</i>	<i>no. (%)</i>
Rim sherds	207(25.9)
Base sherds	90(11.3)
Body sherds	490(61.3)
Full profiles (chiefly 'dogdishes')	13(1.6)
Total	800(100.1)

Table 3. Summary by sherd count of vessels forms, Southeast Dorset BB1, Magor Pill and Rumney Great Wharf

<i>form</i>	<i>Magor Pill</i>	<i>Rumney Great Wharf</i>
	<i>no. (%)</i>	<i>no. (%)</i>
Shallow dishes ('dogdishes')	70 (31.3)	76 (21.4)
Flat-rimmed dishes/bowls	2 (0.9)	1 (0.3)
Flanged bowls	35 (15.6)	49 (13.8)
Everted-rim jars	116 (51.8)	230 (64.6)
Flagons	1 (0.3)	-
Total	224 (100.0)	356 (100.1)

Table 4. Summary by rim count of vessel forms, South Wales Greywares, Magor Pill

<i>form</i>	<i>dark-grey sandy ware</i>	<i>light-grey sandy ware</i>	<i>mid to dark grey wares</i>
	<i>no. (%)</i>	<i>no. (%)</i>	<i>no. (%)</i>
Shallow dishes ('dogdishes')	6 (12.8)	-	27 (21.6)
Flat-rimmed dishes/bowls	6 (12.8)	4 (18.2)	8 (6.4)
Flanged bowls	2 (4.3)	1 (4.6)	12 (9.6)
Jars/bowls with thickened rims	20 (42.6)	15 (68.2)	30 (24.0)
Everted-rim jars	12 (25.5)	1 (4.6)	40 (30.2)
Flatgons/jugs	-	1 (4.6)	7 (5.6)
Tankards	1 (2.1)	-	1 (0.8)
Total	47 (100.1)	22 (100.2)	125 (100.0)

Table 5. Summary of pottery assemblage at Rumney Great Wharf

<i>Finewares</i>	<i>no. (%)</i>
Samian: South Gaul (La Graufesenque), 40; Central Gaul (Lezoux), 89; Central Gaul (Les Martres-de Veyres), 11	
total samian	140 (3.2)
Oxfordshire red/brown-slipped	253 (5.7)
<i>Oxidised wares</i>	
Severn Valley Ware	51 (1.2)
Miscellaneous sandy	128 (0.4)
<i>Reduced wares</i>	
Southeast Dorset BB1	1,460 (33.0)
South Wales Greywares	
dark-grey sandy	96 (2.2)
mid to dark grey sandy	2,308 (52.2)
Micaceous Grey Ware (Gloucester TF5)	12 (0.3)
<i>Mortaria</i>	
Oxfordshire whiteware	18
Oxfordshire white-slipped	1
Oxfordshire red/brown-slipped	66
total Oxfordshire	85 (1.9)
?Nene Valley	2 (0.1)
Total	4,425 (100.2)

mid 3rd century or late 3rd century to the end of the 4th, but a few are restricted to the 4th century. It is noteworthy that tiny fragments of delicate beakers in Nene Valley and New Forest Wares should also have survived in the harsh environment at Magor Pill.

Oxidized coarsewares are less abundant (4.2 no. %) than the finewares. Severn Valley Ware (Webster 1976; Rawes 1982) is dominant, represented by storage jars, cooking jars with everted rims, a pulley-rimmed jar and a campanulate bowl. The assemblage is mid to late Roman in aspect and includes none of Timby's (1990) early forms. One of these - a carinated beaker/bowl (see also Webster in Manning 1993, fig. 135) - is, however, found in the Limestone-tempered Ware (Figure 6.5), and a number of the body sherds in this fabric are decorated with horizontal grooves in a manner reminiscent of Severn Valley Ware generally. The distinctive Quartz-tempered Ware includes a large flanged bowl of the late 3rd-early 4th century (Figure 6.6). A jar/bowl of a mid-to-late 2nd century form is represented in the miscellaneous oxidised sandy wares.

About 90% of the Roman assemblage is formed of reduced coarsewares, of which the largest well-defined product is Southeast Dorset BB1. The grey coarsewares are present in some variety, and only a few of these fabrics have been satisfactorily resolved.

Southeast Dorset BB1 forms almost one-third of the Roman assemblage at Magor Pill. It is represented by a very limited range of familiar forms, among which everted-rim storage and cooking jars and shallow dishes ('dogdishes'), including Gillam's (1976, fig. 6.87) 3rd-century fish-dish, predominate (Table 3). Their date-range is from the beginning of the 2nd century to the middle of the 4th, with the emphasis heavily on the latter half of this interval. Vessels restricted to or ranging into the 4th century are twice as abundant as those attributable to the 2nd and 3rd centuries put together. A very small number of sherds compare closely in fabric, and the better preserved in surface treatment, with museum material at Exeter assigned to Southwest BB1 (Holbrook and Bidwell 1993), reminiscent in style to the Southeast Dorset products but manufactured elsewhere using different raw materials. The vessels represented hint at a wide date-range, from the late 1st to possibly the 4th century.

Micaceous Greyware (Heighway 1983, Gloucester TF5) is a not yet well-known but clearly late Roman product with a restricted distribution in the Severn Estuary area (Allen and Fulford 1996). The forms represented at Magor Pill, many imitating Southeast Dorset products, are shallow dishes, flanged and other bowls, everted-rim jars and flagons/jugs, with a date-range chiefly in the 3d and 4th centuries.

The remaining grey wares, which dominate the assemblage, all fall within Spencer's (in Vyner and Allen 1988 fig. 51) mainly later Roman South Wales Greywares industry (Spencer in Vyner and Allen 1988, fig.51; Webster in Manning 1993). These products are found abundantly on both sides of the outer Severn Estuary and inner Bristol Channel and seem to have been made at numerous, scattered centres including, in southeast Wales, Llanedeyrn and Caldicot. Unfortunately, the industry is so far known only in a very general way. Known kiln sites are few and only a limited number of fabrics and stylistic traits can be clearly resolved within the considerable range of subtle variations.

One of these is dark-grey sandy ware, forming 13.9 no.% of the assemblage. The vessels (Table 4) include a wide variety of bowls/jars with thickened rims, including a few campanulate types (Figure 6.7-

13, 15), with a general similarity of form, but less of fabric, to many described by Vyner and Evans (1978) from Llanedeyrn near Cardiff, and by Spencer (in Vyner and Allen 1988) and Barnett *et al.* (1990) from Caldicot. All but one of the flat-rimmed vessels carry a slight groove or shelf on the inner side of the rim (Figure 6.12, 15), a trait reported at the Caldicot kilns (Barnett *et al.* 1990). The fabric is also represented by a beaker (Figure 6.14). That flagons/jugs are present is suggested by a handle-fitting on a body sherd and a handle fragment. The shallow dishes, flanged bowls and everted-rim jars are imitations in the Southeast Dorset style. Gillam's (1976) corresponding forms cover the period from the mid 2nd to the mid 4th century.

The light-grey sandy ware is also distinctive, but less abundant. Parallel forms are present in the Llanedeyrn and Caldicot assemblages (Vyner and Evans 1978; Spencer in Vyner and Allen 1988; Barnett *et al.* 1990). Shallow dishes are conspicuously absent among the vessels, which are dominated by jars/bowls (Figure 6.1628), many campanulate, with thickened rims (Table 4). One bowl has a double groove on the flat top of the rim (Figure 6.18). The single definite flagon/jug present has a flanged, lightly-thumbed rim (Fig. 6.29).

About two-thirds of the miscellaneous, mid to dark grey greyware vessels (Table 4) - shallow dishes, chiefly flanged bowls (Figure 7.1-9) and everted-rim jars - imitate Southeast Dorset BB1 forms which cover the period from the early 2nd to the late 4th century (Gillam 1976). The other forms lie in the general South Wales tradition. The flagons/jugs (Figure 7.10-12) have either a pulley or flanged rim (*cf.* Spencer in Vyner and Allen 1988, fig. 49.58, 61) or one that is thickened and out-turned. The jars/bowls (Figure 7.13-22) occur in some variety but include campanulate types, and one has a wavy line scored beneath the rim, as recorded by Vyner and Evans (1978, fig. 5.15) and Spencer (in Vyner and Allen 1988, fig. 48.10). Tankards are represented by a single example (Figure 7.23).

Although not a reduced product, and numerically unimportant, the buff sandy ware is also in the South Wales tradition. It includes a campanulate bowl decorated with grooves and combed wavy lines (Figure 7.24).

Various mortaria were recovered at Magor Pill. The great majority are Oxfordshire whiteware or colour-coated products covering the period from the mid 3d century to the end of the 4th. Also noteworthy is Caerleon Legionary Ware of the 2nd century (Figure

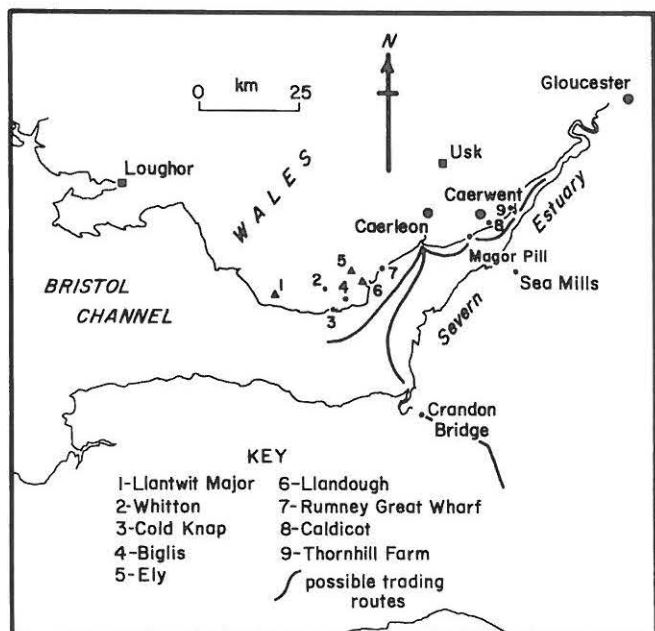


Figure 8: The Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary. Location of Magor Pill (Gwent Levels) and comparative sites in southeast Wales and the West of England.

7.25), a possible Southwest England vessel of perhaps around the end of the 1st century (Fig. 7.26), and one of about the same date possibly from Shepton Mallet (Fig. 7.27).

Regional comparisons

Only the pottery remains by which to judge the character of the now-destroyed late Iron Age to Romano-British settlement at Magor Pill. The Roman assemblage described, although arguably a mixture of material from many primary contexts, could be biased away from the more delicate finewares and toward the generally more robust coarseware vessels, given the long spread of the material over the foreshore (Figure 1) and its considerable degree of wear (Figure 3). With this caution in mind, how does Magor Pill compare on this restricted basis with other settlements of the period in the region? These occur in two contrasting settings, either in presumably embanked coastal wetlands or on dry ground in some cases close to rivers.

The only known wetland settlement of any size is that at Rumney Great Wharf on the southwestern part of the Gwent Levels (Figure 8), where small pottery assemblages are described from several unquestionably primary contexts (ditches, pits, a well) over a modern coastal frontage of about 100 m (Allen and Fulford 1986; Fulford *et al.* 1994). The pottery in these contexts is pristine and unabraded, the only

signs of decay being a loosening of some slipped coatings. Many of the sherds are large, some are conjoining, and a whole pot is recorded.

Episodic coastal erosion extending over at least the last several hundred years has considerably reduced the settlement at Rumney Great Wharf (Allen 1987; 1997). Unlike Magor Pill, it does not appear to have been associated with an active creek or tidal stream, or to have stood more or less directly on the Roman shore. Large quantities of transposed pottery are also now to be found at the site, as at Magor Pill, but in sandy pocket beaches associated with the mud cliff rather than gravel patches (Allen and Fulford 1986). The large collection assembled over a period of years, and presumably derived from many primary deposits, may be taken despite its limitations as a reliable indicator of the general character of the settlement.

There are important similarities as well as differences compared to Magor Pill (Tables 1, 5). There is no prehistoric element at Rumney Great Wharf, but the samian and Oxfordshire finewares are almost twice as abundant. Otherwise the two assemblage share many compositional similarities, but with a significantly greater diversity evident at Magor Pill. The date-ranges of the Roman material are also similar. The diverse Oxfordshire wares (bowls, beakers, a flagon, mortaria) include a single vessel of the early to mid 2nd century (Young 1977 M6), but the range is otherwise from the mid 3rd century to the late 4th, with these two centuries about equally emphasized. Although the Southeast Dorset BB1 (Gillam 1970 1976) includes a few vessels of the 2nd century, the great majority are divided about equally between the 3rd and 4th centuries. Roughly similar proportions of the same restricted range of vessel types as at Magor Pill are seen at Rumney Great Wharf (Table 3). Southwest BB1 is noticeably unrecorded. As already noted (Allen and Fulford 1986; Fulford *et al.* 1994), the dark grey and miscellaneous grey wares are in the South Wales Greywares tradition (Spencer in Vyner and Allen 1988) but include many Southeast Dorset imitations (Table 4). Many of the flat-rimmed bowls have a picrust rim (Allen and Fulford 1986, fig 7.15), a trait not recorded by Spencer (in Vyner and Allen 1988) from South Wales Greywares. The jars/bowls typically have smoothly flaring, thickened and in some cases overturned rims and find many parallels in greyware assemblages from the area (Vyner and Evans 1978; Spencer in Vyner and Allen 1988; Barnett *et al.* 1990). Some bowls are campanulate.

A number of vessels are decorated with a scored wavy line immediately beneath the rim (see also Fulford *et al.* 1994, fig. 8.10-13), as at Llanedeyrn (Vyner and Evans 1978, fig. 5.15), but none appeared to carry such decoration on the shoulder or body, a trait at the Caldicot kilnsite (Spencer in Vyner and Allen 1988, fig. 50.1; Barnett *et al.* 1990, fig. 10.101). Despite the considerably larger size of the assemblage, the range of mortaria is much narrower at Rumney Great Wharf than at Magor Pill and there are no confirmed Caerleon products, although one possible sherd has been noted (Fulford *et al.* 1994).

In the wider region (Figure 8), further comparison of the Roman material at Magor Pill may be made with a range of sites in dryland contexts on or near the coast and in several cases on or near rivers. These are grouped as (1) the long-ranging military establishment at Caerleon (Boon 1978; Vyner 1978; Zienkiewicz 1986; Evans and Metcalf 1992), the apparently well-resourced post-military settlements at Usk (Manning 1993) and Loughor (Marvell and Owen-John 1997), and the town of Caerwent (Casey 1983), (2) the villas at Ely (Wheeler 1922), Llandough (Owen-John 1988) and Llantwit Major (Nash-Williams 1953) in the Cardiff area, (3) the lower status rural settlements of Biglis (Parkhouse 1988), Caldicot (Vyner and Evans 1988), Thornwell (Hughes 1996) and Whitton (Jarrett and Wrathmell 1981), and (4) the presumed mansio at Cold Knapp, Barry (Evans *et al.* 1985). Modern pottery reports, although in few cases quantified, are available for most of these sites. Many of the sites had late Iron Age beginnings and yield a little pottery, some with Glastonbury-style decoration, of the period.

Although almost all the wares represented are also found at the high-status sites of the first group, it is obvious that the Magor Pill settlement was not of this kind. These sites present at least an equal and generally greater range of forms in the South Wales and Southeast Dorset coarsewares, a much wider range of finewares and mortaria (including ranges of continental imports) and, wherever the context is appropriate, diverse amphorae. Especially noteworthy are the high ratios of Southeast Dorset BB1 at Caerleon, particularly the baths and quay, and at Usk. The range of Southeast Dorset forms does not, however, rival that seen at Roman Dorchester (Woodward *et al.* 1993) in the immediate hinterland of the production area and on one of the chief land routes leading from it (Allen and Fulford 1996, fig. 1). Caerleon is one of a number of sites in South Wales (Abergavenny, Cowbridge, Loughor, Neath) at which the closely allied Southwest BB1 has been

recognized (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991).

The Magor Pill pottery assemblage is more like those from the villas, but nonetheless different from them, suggesting some difference in status for the settlement. Heavy reliance for coarsewares was placed at the villas on the (local) South Wales and (imported) Southeast Dorset industries, and there is an almost identical range of vessel forms to Magor Pill. The difference in this case lies in the wider range of mortaria and finewares, including continental imports, and the presence at Llantwit Major of amphorae. The latter are not recorded at Ely, where the pottery assemblage described is very small, but may be genuinely absent at Llandough.

Although in some respects the more diverse, Magor Pill seems closest in its Roman pottery assemblage to the group of rural settlements, especially Biglis and Whitton, and also the mansio. The ranges of coarseware vessels forms are almost identical, and samian and Oxfordshire products are the sole or predominant finewares. Other continental imports are lacking, and mortaria occur in comparatively limited ranges of fabrics. Amphorae - in each case a few sherds only - are restricted to Caldicot and Thornwell.

Discussion

Two points are of especial interest. Firstly, what are the implications at Magor Pill of the late Iron Age wares, amounting to about 6.7 no.% of the combined assemblages? Secondly, given the setting of the Magor Pill site on a substantial tidal channel, was an import-export trade a significant activity there during the Roman period?

Occupation by the late Iron Age at Magor Pill is suggested by the only primary context exposed intertidally, channel-fills which have yielded thermally fractured stones, bones, a wooden object and pottery assigned to the 1st century BC (Whittle *et al.* 1989; Allen and Rippon 1997; Allen 1998). In this the site differs from the aceramic cluster of Iron Age buildings at Goldcliff on the coast to the southwest (Bell and Neumann 1997). As in certain contexts at the long-ranging, dry-ground sites of Llanmelin (Nash-Williams 1933), Thornwell Farm (Hughes 1996) and Whitton (Jarrett and Wrathmell 1981), at Magor Pill there are no associated Roman wares. Activity could nonetheless have extended into the 1st century AD, given the character of the oxidised Limestone-tempered Ware, and the younger elements of the Calcite-tempered Ware, present in the transposed pottery assemblage. As at Biglis (Parkhouse 1988),

Caldicot (Vyner and Evans 1988), Llandough (Owen-John 1988) and Thornwell Farm (Hughes 1996), small amounts of pottery in both Iron Age and Roman styles may have been deposited together in the mid and late 1st century AD.

There is no direct evidence for the character of the late Iron Age occupation at Magor Pill but the wetland setting places distinct limits on speculation. The wetland sediments of this date in the locality are thick silts (Allen and Rippon 1997), suggesting a mineralogenic tidal marsh and a relative sea level that was rising comparatively rapidly. Occupation was, therefore, either seasonal and limited to herding or hunting during the late spring-summer months of weak tides and fair weather, or if permanent it took place in the shelter of a fully encircling seabank engineered in the immediate vicinity. The age and range of vessel forms deposited during and following the 2nd century AD (Tables 1, 3, 4) leave little doubt that settlement was then permanent and increasingly substantial. Hence any localized seabank was either continuously maintained to a standard sufficient to keep out all but the more extreme storm tides, or a more ambitious structure, rooted in the distant dry ground and embracing a large part of the Caldicot Level, was created. Judging from the Rumney Great Wharf pottery assemblage (Table 5), the 2nd century saw embanking and settlement on the neighbouring Wentlooge Level (Allen and Fulford 1986; Fulford *et al.* 1994), and it was during this century that the Biglis dry-ground site was reoccupied (Parkhouse 1988) and villas appeared at Ely (Wheeler 1922) and Llantwit Major (Nash-Williams 1953).

Allen and Fulford (1996) drew attention to the powerful evidence for a considerable northward carriage of Southeast Dorset BB1 pottery by water across the inner Bristol Channel-Severn Estuary during the Roman period. Could Magor Pill on the northern shore have been the landing place - or at least a significant point of entry - for these and other goods from Southwest England? Crandon Bridge on a loop of the River Parrett in Somerset is most appealing as the port of exit on the southern side of the Bristol Channel (Langdon and Fowler 1971), given its very high ratio of Southeast Dorset BB1, the presence of a considerable variety of finewares, including diverse continental imports, and the plentiful amphorae (Allen and Fulford 1996). Southwest BB1 is also reported (Holbrook and Bidwell 1993). On the other hand, the early Roman port of Sea Mills on the Avon below Bristol (Boon 1945 1949; Bennett 1985; Ellis 1987) seems to have played little role, given the low ratio of Southeast Dorset BB1, although

amphorae, mortaria and finewares, including a range of continental imports, are again present in considerable variety. Magor Pill (Table 1) does not display the richness of these coastal sites and, therefore, is unlikely to have been the main Roman port on the South Wales coast. Its geographical location also argues strongly against such a role, for Magor Pill is not strategically positioned. It is separated from the Roman town of Caerwent by 7 km of wetland and hilly country. The distance from Caerleon is 12 km across similar ground, including the bold ridge of Chepstow Hill-Kemeys Graig overlooking the Usk. Legionary and later Caerleon, with its nearby stone and timber quay, rich array of finewares, and high ratio of Southeast Dorset BB1 (Boon 1978; Vyner 1978; Zienkiewicz 1986; Evans and Metcalf 1992), is most plausibly the chief South Welsh port.

Magor Pill may nevertheless have played a role as one of a number of a minor ports handling essentially coastal boat traffic in and out of Caerleon and along the Severn Estuary. More varied than the collection from the contemporary but apparently landlocked and, therefore, probably land-serviced settlement at Rumney Great Wharf (Table 5), the pottery assemblage (Table 1) reveals a high ratio of Southeast Dorset BB1, as well as small quantities of Southwest BB1 and Caerleon legionary products. The sources of the Micaceous Greyware and Severn Valley Ware from their distributions lie further up the Severn Estuary (Allen and Fulford 1996). Oxfordshire products could have been dispersed by water from Gloucester after reaching there by road, to judge from their mapped distributions (Young 1977). As in earlier and later periods (Courtney 1986-87; Allen 1996a 1996b 1998; Allen and Rippon 1997; Nayling and Caseldine 1997; Nayling 1998), the inner Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary in Roman times provided at a number of levels a vital means of communication and trade by water. The Barland's Farm Romano-Celtic boat (Nayling *et al.* 1994), entombed in the fill of a substantial palaeochannel near the landward margin of the Caldicot Level, is a perfect example of the sort of craft, seaworthy in inshore waters but manoeuvrable in creeks at high tide, that could have been engaged in these activities.

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Appendix: The pottery assemblage (Magor Pill) (selected fabrics and dating; see Figures 6 and 7)

All of the *prehistoric fabrics* are fine-textured, highly reduced and dark grey to black throughout, but in some cases with surface patches coloured mid grey to buff. The vessels are, with few exceptions, hand made. Calcite-tempered Ware is described elsewhere (Allen 1998). The limestone-tempered ware carries abundant angular inclusions of fossiliferous limestone (<4 mm) with very subordinate calcite, occasional rounded quartz sand, and clay pellets. The oolite-tempered ware has abundant inclusions of oolitic limestone (<3 mm) and ooids with some clay pellets. Large fragments of fossil shell characterize the shell-tempered sherds. The quartz-tempered fabric 1 is characterized by abundant medium- to coarse-grained quartz sand; the second fabric is tempered with crushed vein-quartz (<5 mm), clay pellets, and a little calcite (<3 mm). Three fabrics are characterized by a temper dominantly of clay pellets. In the first,

angular vein-quartz is almost as abundant as the pellets, but in the second its place is taken by poorly rounded quartz sand (<1 mm). Angular quartz fragments are greatly subordinate to pellets in the third.

The *samian* (Webster 1996) has little variety and only two decorated sherds are present. The small component from South Gaul is formed by a footring from each of Dr. 18/31 and 18/31R dating to around the end of the 1st century AD. Several rim and body sherds from Dr. 31R and a rim-sherd from Dr. 31 are present in the larger element from Central Gaul (Lezoux). A mid 2nd century date may be suggested. Central Gaul (Les Martres-de-Veyres) provided many examples of the mid 2nd century form Dr. 31/31R (including a badly worn stamp CA...), Dr. 37 (late 1st century and later), Dr. 38 (late 2nd century) and the mortarium Dr. 43 (late 2nd century). No sherds which could have come from beakers or small bowls were recovered.

The *Oxfordshire* red/brown-slipped wares (Young 1977) embrace the whole of the main production-period of the industry (mid 3rd-late 4th century). Flagons (including C8.5) are represented by a few sherds, but the main products seen are bowls of the C44, C45, C46 and C48 groups, the flanged bowls C51, and a bowl attributable to C75 (mid-late 4th century). There are numerous small, comparatively thin-walled sherds which could have come from beakers, including indented types. The late Roman *Nene Valley* and *New Forest* sherds are also from indented beakers, the latter showing a white-painted spray motif (Fulford 1975, forms 42.1-3). The *Micaceous colour-coated fabric* is soft and reduced (light to mid grey), with a silty-sandy matrix supporting abundant white mica, occasional clay pellets, and a few grains of slag. The surfaces carry a fugitive red/brown slip.

Among the reduced wares, the *Southeast Dorset BBI* (Gillam 1970, 1976) is of major importance for dating at Magor Pill. It includes 2nd century forms like Gillam's (1976) shallow dishes of type 75 ('dogdish'), flat-rimmed dishes of types 61 and 66, and jars of types 2, 4 (especially abundant), 5 and 30. The 3rd century is strongly represented by shallow dishes of Gillam's (1976) type 79, flanged bowls of types 44 and 46, and very abundant everted-rim jars of types 6, 8, 10 and 11. Products attributable to the 4th century are also very plentiful and include Gillam's (1976) dishes of types 82-84, flanged bowls of types 46-49, and numerous jars of types 9, 12, 13 and 14 and, especially, type 11.

The *South Wales Greywares* vary subtly over a range from slightly to abundantly sandy and from light grey to dark grey and to grey-black over an oxidized core. At Magor Pill, specific categories are difficult to resolve within the general group because of these features, combined with the frequent partial or complete loss of evidence for surface treatments because of weathering and wear in the intertidal zone. The *dark-grey sandy ware* is characterized by a red-brown, oxidized core (in some cases two oxidized zones are present) which grades outward to dark grey. The fabric is hard, with abundant fine- to medium-grained quartz sand; a dark grey to black slip appears to have been applied to the surfaces. At Magor Pill this ware includes many vessels imitating Southeast Dorset BB1 forms of the 2nd century onwards, including a tankard (*cf.* Gillam 1970, type 184) and Gillam's (1976) dishes and bowls 47, 49, 60, 79, 82 and 83, and the jars of types 9, 10 and 13. The *light-grey sandy ware* has an off-white to pale grey fabric with abundant fine- to medium-grained quartz sand and occasional, rounded quartz grains 2-4 mm across. Imitations of Dorset products are few and restricted to a few jars and early flanged bowls. Forms inspired by the Dorset industry are common among the remaining, probably heterogeneous greywares. They include Gillam's (1976) shallow dishes of types 71, 73 and 77-84, his flat-rimmed bowls of types 54, 57, 59 and 60, flanged bowls like his types 43 and 44 together with bowls reminiscent of the 4th century forms, and jars of types 5, 8, 9, and 12. The earliest of these forms in Dorset are dated to the early-mid 2nd century and the latest to the mid 4th century.

The most numerous and significant *mortaria* are those from the Oxfordshire industry (Young 1977). There are whitewares of the mid-late 3rd century (M17.3, 17.4) and the mid 3rd-mid 4th century (M22.1, 22.11), whiteslipped wares of the mid-late 3rd century (WC4.1, 5.1) and the mid 3rd-late 4th (WC7.1), and numerous red/brown-slipped vessels covering the mid 3rd-late 4th century (C97.3, 100.2). At Magor Pill in southeast Wales these forms are close to the extremity of their known range as mapped by Young (1977).

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