

(Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments), Joshua Pollard (University of Wales, Newport), Jenny Mitchum (Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust), Mark Noel (GeoQuest Associates) for their help, and to Dwr Cymru, Noel Fitzpatrick, Walters Civil Engineering and National Museums and Galleries of Wales for their practical support.

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

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The intertidal zone at Magor Pill, on the exposed coast of the Caldicot Level (Grid Ref. ST 43 84), affords important assemblages of pottery and other artefacts of Iron Age (Whittle *et al.* 1989; Allen 1998a), Romano-British (Allen 1998b), medieval and early post-medieval dates (Allen 1999). These materials, released from lost activity/occupation sites through prolonged coastal erosion, are largely found as weathered and abraded 'archaeological pebbles' in association with semi-mobile gravels, but a few similar artefacts, some clearly restratified, also occur sealed in the fill of a large late Holocene palaeochannel at the locality (Allen and Rippon 1997; Nayling 1998).

The Romano-British pottery assemblage (2513 sherds) is more diverse than might be expected of a wetland site (Allen 1998b). It includes elements suggesting connections, probably by water, with the military town of Caerleon on the Usk to the west.

The harsh environment at Magor Pill makes work on the pottery of all ages difficult. Typically, sherds are small, weathered, abraded and commonly stained, delicate surface coatings and decoration, and some glazes, having been damaged or completely destroyed. Consequently, some fabric groups, especially if small, are difficult if not impossible to diagnose. One of these is now identified as Roman, following the chance find of a distinctive rim sherd after the main report was completed. The recognition of this fabric strengthens the Magor Pill-Caerleon connection.

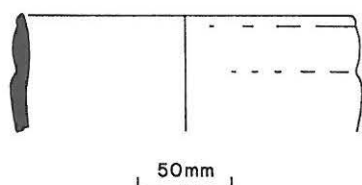
Represented by a small group of eight body sherds (bowls, a beaker) and one rim sherd, the fabric is identified as Caerleon ('Legionary') Ware (AD 90/100-180). It is soft to moderately soft and orange in colour, in some instances with a slightly darker core, no surface coatings having survived. The feel is distinctly silty and there is common to abundant

ill-sorted mica. Scattered throughout are red to brown clay micro-concretions (<3 mm) and very occasional, colourless to slightly milky, well-rounded quartz grains (c. 1 mm). The fabric is distinct from two similar ones also represented at Magor Pill. It differs from Severn Valley Ware (Webster 1976; Rawes 1982) in being brighter in colour and lacking a grey core, and from oxidised Oxfordshire products (Young 1977) in being less red and less sandy, and in showing no chalky or black grains. In fabric it is also distinct from Timby's (1990) early Severn Valley wares.

The critical rim sherd (Figure 1) is from an undecorated, hemi-spherical bowl imitating samian Dr. 37 (Webster 1996). It is almost identical with a Caerleon Ware bowl from the Caerleon legionary fortress baths (Zienkiewicz 1986, fig. 36 no.14) and close to another undecorated bowl in the ware from the *scamnum tribunorum* (Zienkiewicz 1993, fig. 32 no. 8). Similar Caerleon Ware bowls, but decorated *en barbotine*, are common at Caerleon (Nash-Williams 1932, nos. 185-194; Zienkiewicz 1993) and known at Usk (Webster in Manning 1993, fig. 119, no. 9.1). An undecorated bowl very like the Magor vessel, in an "orange fabric" with cream slip and red paint, came from a mid third-century context at Loughor (Marvell and Owen-John 1997, fig. 124 no. 110). Many Oxfordshire products were modelled on samian wares, including Dr. 37 bowls, but Young (1977) figures nothing at all close to the Magor Pill vessel. Similarly, this bowl has no recorded parallels in Severn Valley Ware, which also includes items, albeit few, styled on samian forms (Webster 1976; Rawes 1982).

On pottery evidence, the Romano-British settlement at Magor Pill flourished in the later part of the period (Allen 1998b), although there was a significant presence from the late Iron Age onward (Allen 1998a). Links with Gloucester, Caerleon and the southern shores of the Bristol Channel in the early Roman period were suggested by the presence in the assemblage of, respectively, oxidised limestone-tempered vessels closely resembling some early Severn Valley Ware (Timby 1990), Caerleon Ware mortaria, and Southwest BB1. The identification as

Figure 1: Pottery from Magor Pill. Caerleon ('Legionary') Ware bowl imitating Dr 37.



described of a wider range of Caerleon Ware vessels strengthens the case for contact at this early date, most probably by sea, between Magor Pill and the military town.

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