

RECENT ARCHAEOLOGY

IRON AGE POTTERY FROM TWO PITS AT FINCHAM, NORFOLK.

by Sarah Percival.

Introduction

In September and October 1992, staff from the Norfolk Archaeological Unit maintained a watching brief on the digging of a pipeline from Marham to Fincham, for Anglian Water Services. On a north-facing hill-slope near Fincham (NGR TF696078), two adjacent pits were observed (County Site 29260, Context 1). Pottery and a small group of animal bones were recovered from these pits and further pottery was found during backfilling of the trench; the animal bones were from cattle and sheep or goats.

The Pottery

Fifty-nine sherds weighing 2.825kg were collected when the pipe-trench cut through two pits. At least three vessels are probably represented. The sherds are large and there was a high proportion of rim and base sherds; All are undecorated. Although some admixture of the fragments had occurred during subsoil stripping and trenching for the pipe, there is little doubt that these sherds represent a contemporary deposit. Undisturbed collections such as this one, although small, can be useful for comparative purposes in the study of other Iron Age assemblages from excavation and surface collection.

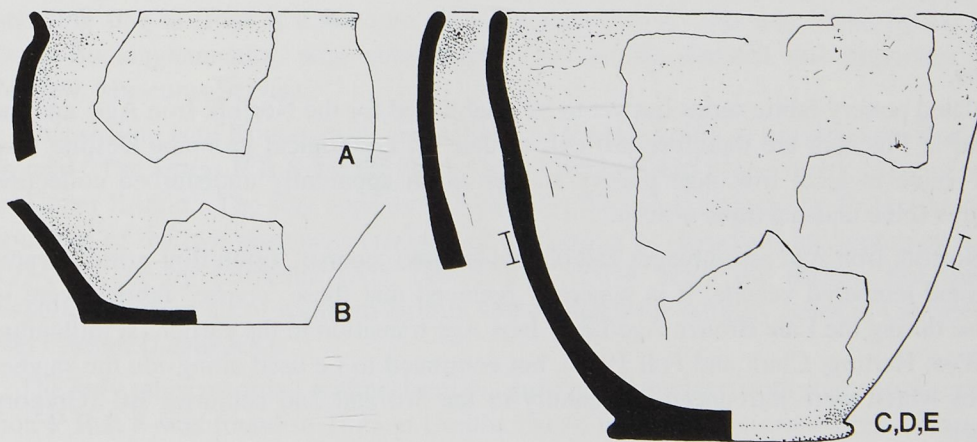


Fig. 1

Catalogue of illustrated sherds (Fig.1)

A – Fabric hard, well-fired. Inclusions: rounded quartz sand (fine-medium) common; angular quartzite (medium size) moderately common. Occasional vacuoles in the surface probably caused by the burning-out of accidental inclusions of organic material.

Rim sherd from a slightly shouldered jar. The rim is plain and slightly flared with an external diameter of 16cm. The profile is slightly irregular, suggesting that the vessel was handmade. The external surfaces have been smoothed and the internal surfaces have been finished by wiping.

B – Fabric hard, well-fired. Inclusions: rounded quartz (fine-medium), common; angular chalk (medium) occasional. Slightly micaceous. Surfaces of the sherd display occasional vacuoles, perhaps caused by the leaching-out of chalk inclusions.

Two joining sherds from a slightly sagging base. The profile is slightly irregular, but regular striations on the interior of the vessel suggest that it was hand-built but wheel-finished. External surfaces have been smoothed. The diameter of the base is 11cm.

C, D, E – Fabric hard, well-fired. Inclusions: rounded quartz (fine), common; angular flint (coarse) occasional.

Rim, body and base sherds from a large jar with a rim diameter of *c.* 24cm. Slightly sagging base with irregular, applied foot ring. Rim upright and rounded, slightly thickened on the interior. The vessel is probably hand-built and has been smoothed internally and externally.

Discussion.

Rim sherd *A* is of a form which is fairly common in later Iron Age assemblages such as Spong Hill, North Elmham (Gregory forthcoming). The apparent wheel-finishing of base sherd *B* is more unusual, and probably indicates that the vessel dates to the late Iron Age.

Sherds *C* and *D* resemble sherds 1 and 2 from Holmebrink Farm, Methwold (Silvester and Northover 1991), both of which feature upright, rounded rims and sandy fabrics. Comparable upright jars have also been found at Spong Hill, North Elmham (Gregory, forthcoming fig.105) and Feltwell Villa (Gurney 1986, fig.20).

The coarsely applied foot-ring of base sherd *E* is most unusual, and no similar bases are known from Norfolk.

Conclusions

A reliably-dated pottery fabric series has yet to be established for the Norfolk Iron Age, and the sherds found at Fincham are therefore difficult to date on typological grounds. Despite this, they are of value to local Iron Age pottery studies as an apparently undisturbed collection which features some unusual traits of form.

Typical Norfolk Iron Age assemblages can be divided into 'coarse', often flint-gritted, wares and 'fine' sand-tempered vessels. It is generally believed that these 'coarse' fabrics were in extensive use during the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age transition in the earlier 1st millennium BC (as at West Harling: Clark and Fell 1953), but continued to be used alongside the sandier 'fine' fabrics which were introduced in quantity in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC (Gregory forthcoming).

On the basis of our present knowledge the sandy fabric and lack of decoration on sherds *A-E* both probably indicate a Middle or Late Iron Age date. The material already mentioned from Holmebrink Farm Methwold was tentatively dated to the 3rd-2nd century BC, and the comparable material from Spong Hill and Feltwell Villa has also been attributed to this period. Perhaps the Fincham assemblage, although broadly similar to that from nearby Methwold, is of slightly later date on account of the presence of wheel-finished base sherd *B*.

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A ROMAN PROVINCIAL LEAD SEALING FROM BURGH CASTLE

by David Gurney

In April 1993, a metal-detector rally was held on the fields around the Roman fort of the Saxon Shore at Burgh Castle, adjacent to but excluding the Scheduled Ancient Monument. This resulted in the recovery and on-site recording of more than five hundred Roman coins, and a wide range of Roman, Saxon and medieval and post-medieval artefacts, found by more than five hundred metal-detectorists who attended this event.¹

Among the finds recovered and retained for further study was a circular lead seal depicting a standing stag in front of a tree and the inscription P B S. This was found by Mr Rod Halsey from Buckinghamshire, who subsequently has kindly donated this important find to the Norfolk Museums Service.²

This sealing is of Roman date, and belongs to a small group of inscribed provincial examples in lead.³ The letters P B S are for *P(rovinciae) B(ritanniae) S(uperioris)*, 'Seal of the province of Upper Britain'. The stag appears to have been the badge adopted by *Britannia Superior*, the southern of the two provinces established (according to Herodian) by Septimius Severus (AD 193-211), or by Caracalla (AD 196-217) in whose reign the earliest inscriptions occur. *Superior* covered all of southern Britain and included the military bases at Caerleon (*Legio II*) and Chester (*Legio XX*).

The only other recorded sealing from the province (now lost) with stag *couchant* and inscription P B R S was found in 1875 at Combe Down (Avon). This came from a Roman building believed to be a headquarters for procuratorial officials.

Slightly more common are the seals of the northern province, *Britannia Inferioris*, inscribed P B I. Examples are recorded from York, Binchester (Co. Durham) and Aldborough (N. Yorks). A fourth is said to have been 'picked up at Felixstowe' (Suffolk) before 1847, and this may therefore have come from the Saxon Shore fort of Walton Castle, lost in the 18th century though coastal erosion.

The two provinces from which these sealings derive ceased to exist by AD 314, by which time reorganisation had seen the creation of four new provinces with new names. The walled fort at Burgh Castle is generally taken to date to the latter part of the 3rd century, but earlier occupation, perhaps of a military nature, cannot be discounted.