

The Iron Age and Roman pottery from Woodlands Park, Leatherhead

Introduction

An Iron Age/Romano-British (IA/RB) site at Woodlands Park, Leatherhead, centred on TQ 151 587, was first revealed in 1960 when a prominent hill was cleared of trees by explosives and ploughing. A local resident, Mr J Mead, collected numerous sherds of IA and RB pottery, an enamelled bronze roundel with Celtic running ornament (dated to the 1st century AD), Roman roofing tile and fragments of relief-stamped tile. An early report by A W G Lowther suggested, on the basis of the presence of the roundel and the hilltop location, that this may have been the site of a ‘Romano-Celtic Temple’. A photograph and description of the roundel was published (Lowther 1963, 202).

Further ploughing in March 1966 revealed a heavy scatter of sherds on the southern slope of the hill and it was reported that over 200 sherds were recovered (Anon 1966, 279: report of F G Aldsworth).

In September 1966, excavations by Fred Hastings revealed a large area roughly paved with flints, which had been extensively robbed in places (Anon 1966: report of F A Hastings). Adjacent to the paving was a feature that was interpreted as a drainage ditch filled with dark soil containing some bone, charcoal and pottery including samian ware. Trial trenching over a large area of the summit of the hill was completely negative. It was hoped to obtain aerial photographs of the site under crop in the summer but there is no evidence that they were ever taken or obtained.

At the time it was planned to carry out a resistivity survey, but, as with the proposed aerial photography, it is not thought that this was done. Conversations with Frank Pemberton and David Taylor – who were present at the 1966 excavations – have not led the present authors to any written excavation archive. Frank Pemberton recalls that a large proportion of the excavated area was laid with broken roofing tile, the pieces of which were set on edge at an angle. This hints strongly at demolition debris being re-used in a paved yard. Only a very limited sample of tile was retained in the site archive.

Given the level of damage to the site reported above, the extensive investigations made in the 1960s, the construction of the M25 motorway through the western edge of the site and the return of the latter to ‘forestry’ plantation, there must now be serious doubts as to the survival of any intact archaeology. However, a substantial pottery archive still exists which has not been examined to modern standards nor published: this note seeks to remedy this.

Methodology

The archives in Leatherhead and Guildford Museums were examined and each sherd recorded on a bag-by-bag basis onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The original identifications by K S Painter of the British Museum were included. Robin Symonds examined fresh sections of appropriate sherds to identify their provenance in the light of modern knowledge. This resulted in a major revision to the original categorisation.

The revised pottery catalogue has been analysed by major form, fabric and date groups (table 1), which it is hoped casts more light on the history of the site. Table 2 lists the identifiable tile from a total of seventeen examples retained in the archive. Ian Betts provided an informal identification of the flue tile die types.

The authors would have liked to contact Fred Hastings or his son to enquire about the possible existence of a written site archive, but have been unsuccessful in tracing an address (Hastings 2004).

Analysis

The assemblage mainly consists of small sherds, often much abraded and not susceptible to reconstruction except in a handful of cases. Analysis depends to a large extent on sherd count rather than estimated vessel equivalents. There are, unfortunately, no securely stratified contexts and the whole assemblage must be regarded as unstratified. The finds from the only identifiable context (Ditch A) included pottery of all the dates found on site and must therefore be considered residual and of no use in dating the ditch. In many cases an interpretation of forms can be made and where this has been done the appropriate parallels have been drawn.

At the time of the original classifications, the Portchester D fabric – the source of which had been located at Overwey, Tilford (Clark 1950) – was relatively unknown and it is now recognised that the Woodlands Park pottery archive contains numerous sherds of this ware. Furthermore, Lyne & Jefferies (1979) discuss a ‘Late Surrey Buffware’ industry, stating that ‘the few sites which have produced large amounts are in mid-Surrey, particularly Leatherhead (Woodlands Park) which may have been near the source’ (*ibid.*, 61). They appeared to be unaware at the time of previous discussions of the Portchester D fabric (Fulford 1975; Orton 1977, 35) which have informed the present analysis. No more than three or four sherds of buff-surfaced pottery within the corpus exhibit any characteristics that cannot be said to fall squarely within the reported range of fabrics from the Overwey kilns (Clark 1950). This small group of exceptions contains fabrics that are slightly softer with less frequent and much less uniform quartz sand and some iron ore.

In respect of the flue tile, it is interesting that die numbers 2 and 25 were not previously known from Surrey; indeed die 25 is currently paralleled only in Oxfordshire and the west. (Betts *et al* 1997)

Chronology

The assemblage contains 54 Late Iron Age sherds, indicating that the site was in use from that time. The wide date-range of the Romano-British sherds suggests that the site continued in use throughout that period, with clusters of Alice Holt industry sherds in the 1st and 2nd

Table 1 Identifiable forms, excluding undiagnostic body sherds

Ware	Date	Strainer	Bowl	Jar	Dish	Flagon	Lid	Storage jar	Beaker	Mor-tarium	Flask	Am-phora	Total
Late Iron Age	LIA	–	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2
BB1	43–160	–	2	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3
BB2	100–250	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2
BB style	120–400	–	2	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3
Alice Holt													
Surrey (Early)	50–160	1	5	51	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	57
Alice Holt													
Farnham (Late)	250–400	3	28	168	18	6	3	5	–	–	–	–	231
Highgate C	70–160	–	–	3	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	4
Nene Valley	160–300	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	2
New Forest	260–370	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
Oxford	270–400	–	16	21	–	–	–	–	3	13	–	–	53
Portchester D	350–400	–	67	68	3	1	–	–	–	–	1	–	140
Samian	120–250	–	6	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	6
Unknown	43–450	1	9	62	5	–	–	1	6	–	–	1	85
Total forms		5	137	377	28	7	3	6	11	13	1	1	589

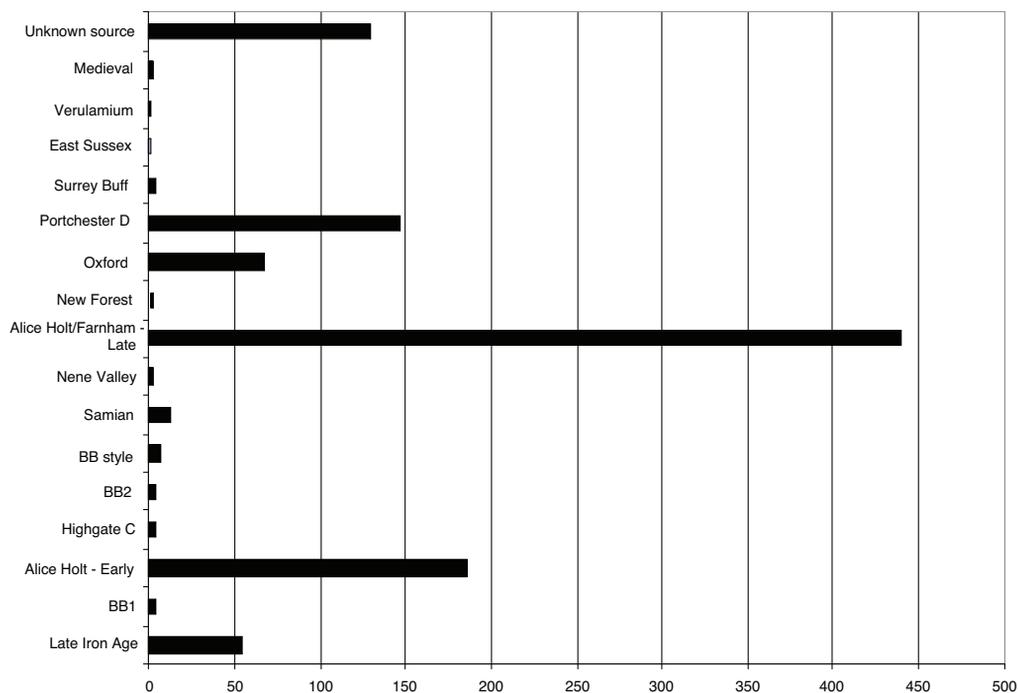


Fig 1 Woodlands Park, Leatherhead. Analysis of pottery by ware and sherd count

Table 2 Tile

Type	Pieces	Die (where identified)
Flue tile	1	25
	1	14
	1	2
	1	66
	3	4
	4 combed	
<i>Tegulae</i>	4	

centuries AD and the 3rd to early 5th centuries AD. The conventional ‘gap’ in the early 3rd century may relate either to economic downturn or, possibly, to imprecision in the dating. Overall there is a preponderance of mid-3rd to early 5th century material.

Character of the site

While the potteries of the Alice Holt and Farnham industry make up the greater part of the Romano-British finds, it is interesting to note the presence of other wares including Black Burnished 1, East Sussex, Highgate C, New Forest, Oxford and Nene Valley. Clearly, this variety of pottery indicates that the occupants of the site had wide-ranging access to markets. The variety of pottery fabrics and forms is typical of that encountered on Romano-British domestic sites in south-east England and the composition is also typical of the later period (to which 89% of sherds belong) with its preponderance of jars over bowls and other vessels.

Nothing in the finds assemblage would therefore lead one to characterise this site as a ‘temple’ (*pace* Lowther). The parallels he quoted for the enamelled roundel are not considered valid (F Pemberton, pers comm); the roundel is in fact a Hull Type 249A disc brooch

paralleled at Colchester (Hull 1958, 7, 118) and Silchester (Kilbride Jones 1980, 2, 4) and commonly found on a variety of sites and on the Continent. The roundels quoted from Hockwold-cum-Wilton, Norfolk (*JRS* 1963, pl 16) are not brooches, are significantly larger, and each portrays the image of a deity.

The original presence of so much tile, including the five varieties of box-flue tile and a few *tegulae* left in the archive, suggests the former presence of a domestic building of some size in the vicinity.

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