

ROMAN POTTERY FOUND AT 37, SOUTHWOOD LAWN ROAD, HIGHGATE VILLAGE

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CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE FINDS

Two vessels were found during the digging of an extension for the back of the house by Mr. Holt (a local builder) on 9th December 1971. Vessel 1 lay on its side about 3 ft. 9 ins. below the current ground surface. (The sherds belonging to the other vessels were some 18 ins. below the current ground surface.) According to the finder sand lay all around the flagon, even sealing the mouth. It contained the equivalent of a handful of "black soil-like material". The vessels are described below.

THE POTTERY

VESSEL 1:

Ring neck flagon with three rings at the top of the neck. One handle, no decoration. Wheel made.¹ Fig. 3, 1).

Core: Soft pink sandy fabric. Oxidised, possibly underfired.

Surface: Buff white, sandy feel, sand visible.

VESSEL 2:

Base of a similar vessel, but probably larger. No decoration. Wheel made. (Fig. 3, 2).

Core: Pink, but greyer and harder near to the internal surface.

Surface: Pink (oxidised), very "eaten" externally.

Examination of the excavation sections showed, below the modern surface, a layer of brown sandy soil. This was a fairly clean band, usually two or three inches thick, but dipping in one part, as though filling a pit. Mr. Holt noted that it was in similar coloured soil that the remains of Vessel 2 had been found. A check on the brown sandy soil produced a few very small sherds of red pottery and a few pieces of burnt clay, and possibly tile. The pottery was similar to that from Vessels 1 and 2. It is not possible to say much about the layer except that it could have formed the top of the subsoil in the Roman period. As a modern ground surface lay directly on it, it is possible that any Roman levels—had they been there—could have been removed in landscaping.

EXCAVATION

It was decided to investigate the area of garden in the immediate vicinity of the finds. This was a flowerbed, south of the findspot, some 80 sq. ft. in area, due for landscaping and, therefore, extensive disturbance. Some disturbance had already taken place with the removal of soil cutting down towards the north of the area (see section). Layer 1 was composed of flowerbed soil and this was removed and the underlying surface cleaned. Layer 2 was a light brown sandy soil in which it had been hoped to trace features which could be connected with the original finds but, however, none were located.

However, in the south-west corner a feature was located (see plan). It was found to be a small depression, probably a pit, with a fill of soil, slightly darker than Layer 2 but of very similar texture; in places the edge was difficult to locate. The pit contained nine tile fragments, all seemingly Roman, and a fragment of sandstone. Some other disturbance had also taken place on top of Layer 2 and although no further features were located, two small fragments of porcelain and a sherd of green glazed ware were recovered from the top of

the layer. It would seem probable that the top of this layer had been cut away prior to the laying out of the garden as this upper surface sloped at a slightly greater angle than the natural slope indicated by the junction of Layer 2 and the underlying natural sand (see section). If this is the case then only the bottom of the pit was recovered.

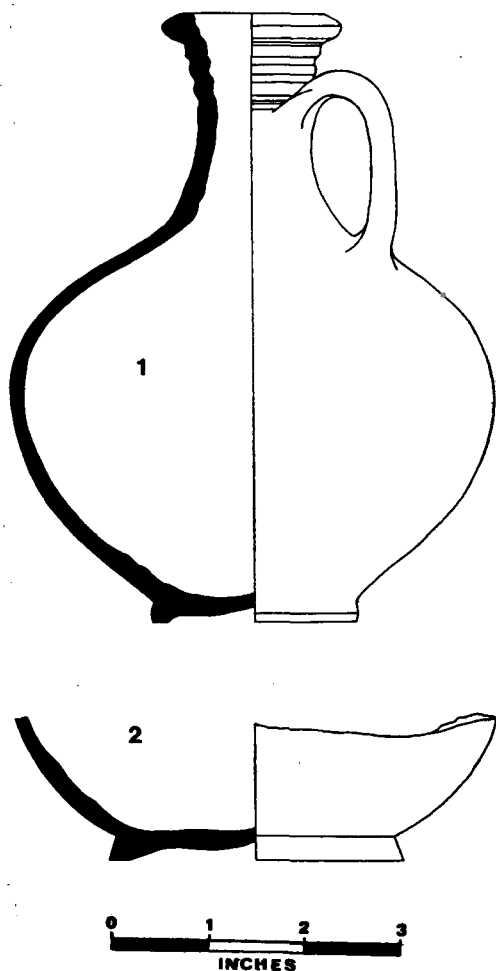


Fig. 3
Pottery found at 37 Southwood Lawn Road

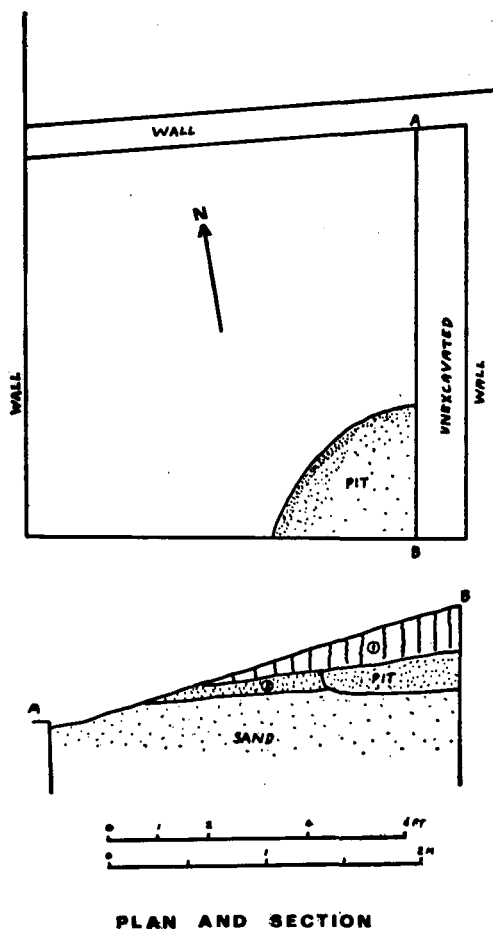


Fig. 4
37 Southwood Lawn Road

FINDS

Layer 1: This layer contained the expected garden detritus and a few sherds of indistinguishable pottery. It also produced two tile fragments.

1. Tile with "keying" for plaster, possible a box flue tile fragment.
2. Tile fragment with curved section, possibly an "imbrex" tile.

Layer 2: Two small fragments of porcelain.

1. Sherd, green glazed with dark filler but pink hard fine fabric.
2. Tile fragment. On one surface is a slight patch of glazing, brown green in colour, the fabric is comparable to the other tile from this layer and the pit.
- 3-6. Plain tile fragment.
- 7-9. Three sherds of pottery, fine pink fabric.
10. Tile fragment, one side carries "keying" for plaster and from the fracture this would seem to be a fragment of a box tile.
11. Sherd of pottery, fine, soft, brown fabric.
12. Sherd of pottery, fine, soft, grey fabric.
13. Sherd of pottery, fine, soft, dark grey fabric.

Pit:

- 1-6. Six plain tile fragments.
7. Fragment of box tile with "keying" for plaster.
- 8-9. Two fragments of tile with "keying" for plaster, both possibly fragments of box flue tiles.
10. Fragment of sandstone, worn on one surface.

If Layer 2, No. 2, is an example of "flash glazing" rather than a piece of deliberately glazed tile (this glazing is very slight and localised), then it would indicate repeated firings at high temperatures, indicative *perhaps* of a kiln structure.

INTERPRETATION

Two possibilities are suggested for consideration:

1. The flagons found by Mr. Holt could be part of a burial group. In favour of this would be the complete nature of Vessel 1 and its occurrence within a pit.
2. These, and the pieces of tile, could be residue from kiln production. The soft, possibly underfired, nature of the pottery, and the possible "flash glazing" on the piece of tile from Layer 2 (No. 2) would support this idea. In terms of known "local activity" we have evidence of Roman pottery production from a site at the northern end of Highgate Wood, only about three-quarters of a mile away. A probable second site in the Wood, as yet unexcavated, is evidenced by surface pottery and tile scatter. This lies less than half a mile to the north of Southwood Lawn Road.

NOTES

- 1 Flagons, similar in appearance, are dated to the period A.D. 60-75 at Verulamium (Verulamium Excavations, vol. 1. Research Report of the Soc. of Antiquaries of London, v.28, p.273).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Mr. Holt for informing us of the find. This, and the support of the house-owners, Mr. and Mrs. G. C. Farmer, enabled us to do the work described above. It is hoped that all the pottery and tile will be deposited in Haringey Museum.