

Introduction to Verulamium Region Ware mortaria and the London, Northgate VRW industry

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Verulamium region ware (VRW) fabric (Tomber and Dore 1998, 154-155).

Tomber and Dore described the normal, usually light-coloured fabrics produced in the Watling Street potteries for making stamped mortaria within the period cAD55-130/140. They did not include the iron-rich fabric of many, usually later, unstamped mortaria made in the same area. This clay is discussed by Vince and Tomber, p174-178 in Seeley and Drummond-Murray 2005, and p.84-85 and elsewhere in the volume, by Fiona Seeley and Alan Vince.

London, Northgate VRW industry

The major difference between normal, light-coloured fabric, usually termed 'VRW WH' fabric and the fabric used in the Northgate potteries in London to make stamped mortaria in the period cAD110-140, lies in how far potters working in the Northgate pottery were prepared to go from the accepted 'VRW WH' norm for Flavian-Trajanic products made at Brockley Hill, in clay, the composition and amount of inclusions and in the composition of the trituration grit.

In addition to transporting the light-firing clay from the Reading Beds, they may have also taken some of the iron-rich clay which was available in the area, but in London they had easy access to iron-rich London Clay.

The Watling Street Production fabrics

'**Verulamium region ware**' or '**VRW**' has traditionally been regarded as an umbrella term covering pottery productions strung out along Watling Street, at, and south of Verulamium (Map 14 in Swan 1984), as far south as Brockley Hill, Middlesex, which is situated about half way to Londinium. Mortaria are known to have been made in workshops at Verulamium (Insula V, Pit 6, Corder 1941; and Verulam Hills Field, St Albans, Anthony 1968), at Little Munden Farm, Bricket Wood (Saunders & Havercroft 1977), at Radlett (Page 1898; Page 1900; Castle 1972a); and at Brockley Hill (Applebaum 1951; Castle 1972a; 1972b; 1972c; 1973; 1974; 1974-6; 1976; 1978; Castle and Warbis 1973; Richardson 1951; Smith et al 2008; Suggett 1953; 1954a; 1954b; 1955; 1958). Only the site at Brockley Hill has been extensively investigated, but despite all the work done, the full extent of the pottery production area there is still unknown. The details known for Little Munden and Radlett and, indeed, at Verulamium merely provide keyhole knowledge of the productions in these areas. It is highly likely that other productions along Watling St, south of Verulamium, and probably south of Brockley Hill are still unknown.

All of these potteries are linked by using generally similar clays from the Reading Beds; by working in the same tradition and having techniques in common. For example, as far as we know, potters working in these areas in the Flavian period, used the same method to add the clay used for forming the spout (exceptions to this rule may be potters like G. Attius Marinus, Doccas, SEX·VA· IV[S?], and others who came from the Colchester workshops in the mid to late Flavian period). The practice may have been used in the VRW production areas from the very beginning and probably continued into the Trajanic period, ceasing to be used when simpler spouts

began to be made, which needed little, if any extra clay to be added. This technique is so limited to these potteries that it is possible to recognize a potter who learnt his craft in these potteries when he has moved or been transferred to a different part of the country and is using a completely different clay. Using a wire, they cut out a suitable area of rim to allow for a well-shaped spout and added a suitable piece of clay to form the spout. This was a normal practice in the first century, what was special about their technique was the method they used for keying on the extra clay. Instead of making criss-cross slashes etc. they pressed about three fingers, held close together onto the clay, at right-angles across the spout; these impressions are easily recognizable. It must have worked, but it was a practice limited to these potteries. Of course, it is only on occasions when the extra clay has come away that you can see the method used. Because of the addition of clay, the spout is always a weak point whatever the method used. It ceased to be a weak point during the first half of the second century as potters began to make simpler spouts and added a minimum, if any, extra clay.

This is not to suggest that all of these potteries were owned by one person or were part of one Company of some kind, which demanded uniformity. There is just not sufficient information available to understand the organization of workshops or potteries in detail, what we do know is that the potters in these workshops were mostly, if not all, working in the same tradition.

We also know that several potters (or managers) were involved in workshops in different areas within the Verulamium region, either simultaneously or consecutively during their careers, like Driccius at Brockley Hill and Radlett and so on. More surprisingly many were active in totally different areas, like Doccas, TMH, Aprilis, and others, at first in Colchester and then in the Verulamium region; Camulacus at the Verulamium region and Wroxeter and so on.

But it is G. Attius Marinus who was truly exceptional in being involved at Radlett (and probably Brockley Hill), Colchester, Mancetter-Hartshill, Warks, probably at Little Chester and at, at least one other, uncertain site, possibly in Lincolnshire. This evidence of activity in more than one area is far from being limited to potters working in the Verulamium region. See Introduction to mortaria at Mancetter-Hartshill, and elsewhere, for further discussion of these and other relevant points.

Fabrics at the workshops at Verulamium, Brockley Hill, Little Munden and Radlett

The mortaria made in the above areas during the prime period of production when the mortaria were stamped (*cAD55-cAD145*), seem usually to have been intended to be off-white to pale buff in colour, but the colour can vary a lot. They may be greyish-cream throughout or have a pinkish core or more rarely a blackish core; these variants may well be due to varying firing conditions in the kiln. While some variations in colour relate to firing conditions, some variations in the clay available could also be involved. They often appear to have a self-coloured and unobtrusive slip.

Although the colour can vary, what is always consistent is the granular texture of the fabric. The fabric is packed with inclusions, mostly of moderately well-sorted, rounded quartz with few red-brown and rare black inclusions. These make the fabric

granular to the touch. There are, however, mortaria which are otherwise identical, but which are somewhat smoother to the touch because the inclusions, while being the same otherwise, are slightly smaller in size and are possibly more rounded.

The trituration grit always consists of a mixture of quartz and flint with rare red-brown and rarer black material. If the inclusions were indigenous to the clay, this difference will just be the result of slight variations in the clay beds.

Oxidized fabrics

A proportion of these stamped mortaria are brownish, or reddish-brown, again with no slip or with a self-coloured unobtrusive slip and otherwise exactly similar to the above. A small number of Matugenus mortaria have been noticed in a distinctly orange to red-brown fabric and even the odd one at the Brockley Hill kilns is this colour.

Oxidized fabrics with white slip Oxidized fabrics with a white slip could be described as rare in the VRW mortaria:— Potter INC 31, NSRO retrograde, who worked at the Verulam Hills Site (Anthony 1968) could be an example of this. He used this fabric, but although the slip is usually obvious, its colour is often indeterminate and most of the examples known are overfired and most are from the kiln-site.

A good example of the unstamped mortaria in this fabric is a rare one, from the Antonine occupation of Scotland: a mortarium found at Bearsden (Breeze 2016, 146, Illustration 7.18, no. 1): ‘Hard, granular brownish-orange fabric with thick cream slip. Inclusions: frequent, mostly tiny, fairly well-sorted, sub-rounded and angular quartz, possibly occasional flint and rare black slag and orange-brown material. Trituration grit mainly flint with occasional quartz and rare red-brown material.’

The use of a white slip was more commonly used with unstamped mortaria produced from the Antonine period onwards, but normal VRW WH fabric did continued in use at least for some time.

History of the industry

The earliest mortaria made at Verulamium were not stamped, but the practice probably began cAD50-55. The earliest context with a stamped VRW WH mortarium of which I am aware is in Richardson 1944, (p123, (c), ‘Stamps on mortaria’, no. 4). If this is correctly transcribed this should be part of an F LVGVDV counterstamp of Albinus 1, from Die 6A, from the ‘red daub and ash layer’ Phase 2, dated AD55-61. Albinus 1 with Oastrius (Saunders and Havercroft 1977), and some others would be among the earliest of the potters stamping their mortaria in the Verulamium region. Although this estimate for the beginning of stamping in this area is generally acceptable, it might be possible to get more decisive dating by studying contexts in London, Colchester and of course Verulamium where all finds are from contexts which are indisputably earlier than the Boudiccan destruction.

Once the practice of stamping had started in the area, it appears to have been the norm to stamp all the mortaria made there until some point in the mid-second century when

the practice ceased. The practice of stamping mortaria coincided largely with the period of greatest productivity for the VRW industries and the widest distribution of their products. The practice of stamping may have gone on slightly longer at the Northgate pottery, where they were stamping some mortaria with profiles which are definitely later than mortaria stamped in the Verulamium region (Seeley and Drummond-Murray 2005, p112, fig 145 (cont) <P189> to <P199>).

The VRW industry owed its great success partly to the needs of London, but primarily to the needs of the northern military advance. In the Claudian-Neronian period, the lack of adequate and ready supplies had led to the setting up of small local depots to provide pottery for the local military, as at Longthorpe (Dannell and Wild 1987, fig.35) where the kilns have been found as well as examples of the mortaria and flagons etc made there. Imports from the Continent would certainly also have been in use, but once adequate potteries like those in the Verulamium region were available, those small, early, local productions attached to individual military Units ceased.

From cAD60/70, the Verulamium region productions together with a major production south-east of Amiens in the vicinity of Noyon (Oise), in Gallia Belgica supplied the army with mortaria (and perhaps flagons), as it progressed northwards setting up forts, *vici*, towns etc. as it progressed.

As the army moved northward and through Wales other potteries were set up which had regional importance at Caerleon, Wroxeter, Lincoln, Mancetter-Hartshill, Warks, Holt, Wilderspool, Walton-le-Dale, Carlisle, in the Catterick area, Corbridge etc and some local workshops too, provided mortaria and other vessels. Despite all this, the Verulamium region and Noyon producers retained their importance into the first half of the second century and some unstamped mortaria made in the VRW potteries were being used in Scotland during its Antonine occupation.

From cAD140 onwards, the Verulamium region potters were concentrating on their local markets. The practice of stamping mortaria had ceased, probably cAD140.

Apart from the excavation reports, this industry and the fabrics produced in the Verulamium region have been widely studied and discussed: Seeley and Thorogood 1994; Davies et al. 1994, 4.6, p.40-62; Devereux et al. 1982; Tyers 1983; Marsh & Tyers 1978; Hartley and Tomber 2006; Tomber and Dore 1998; Swan 1984; Tyers, 1996. Also, relating to the production below at Northgate House, Seeley and Drummond-Murray 2005, p84-85 and p137-145; and Vince and Tomber in Seeley and Drummond Murray 2005, p174-178.

VRW/ Northgate House, (20-28 Moorgate), London (Seeley and Drummond-Murray 2005).

In 2005 the excavation of pottery production in an industrial area of the Walbrook valley at Northgate House, 20-28 Moorgate, City of London was published. This clearly complicates the situation because analyses proved that the owner or manager of this Pottery was prepared to transport clay from the Reading Beds so that they could produce mortaria which could be identical in fabric with mortaria produced, for example at the Brockley Hill potteries (Vince and Tomber, p174- 178 in Seeley and Drummond-Murray 2005, and p.84-85). They were, however, also prepared to use

local (iron-rich) clays and to mix the clays in varying proportions so that while some of their mortaria are in fabric, which is identical to the eye with normal VRW WH products, others can vary so much from the norm that they are not recognisable as in VRW fabric.

It could be worth making a study of the full suites of trituration grit and inclusions used in case this could help to distinguish all of the London products from those used in the Watling Street workshops. The evidence suggests that the pottery production at Northgate House began cAD110 and that the practice of stamping continued until at least cAD140.

In this 'Introduction' I try to treat these two sets of productions separately, as far as possible, as VRW and VRW/Northgate House though for some potters who used VRW fabric I have insufficient evidence to show to which set the potters belonged. On occasions when all of a potter's stamps have been found only in London or at appropriate provenances there is obviously a distinct possibility of production in London rather than at Brockley Hill etc. and I have tended to give London the benefit of the doubt. Fortunately, it is possible to distinguish the workshops which many potters were active at, including Northgate House. It can also be reasonably assumed from present evidence that, at least one potter, Marinus 1, was active at both Brockley Hill and Northgate, though it is likely that the die used there (Die 10) was either a poor copy of the Die 1 which was certainly used at Brockley Hill or a die in a deteriorated condition which produced stamps which look like ghosts of normal Die 1 stamps, but we need to wait upon having reasonable proof of that. Some other potters may have been active in London as well as at one of the VRW sites. Present indications would suggest that their activity at Northgate would probably be towards the end of their production life.

It is completely clear that certain potters worked only at Northgate House, notably Maximus, Lucius, Valentinus and Catullus as well as some with incomplete or uncertain names. The mortaria of all four named potters were sold in London, but beyond that, the products of Valentinus and Catullus were directed towards Kent where another of their potters, INC 15, has an enigmatic link to a kiln-site at Otford in Kent (Pearce 1930), which would be worth exploring. On the other hand, the mortaria of Maximus and Lucius, who sometimes, possibly often, actually stamped the same, identical mortaria (ie working together), reached sites in West Sussex, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire, Essex and Suffolk. These different distribution patterns suggest deliberate directives and they are distinctly different from the distribution patterns for potters we know worked in the Watling Street potteries.

The discovery of this production in London obviously raises the question of whether anyone had considered transporting clay from the Reading Beds in the first century because of the size of the London market. In the Flavian period it is believed that the workshops in the Verulamium region could have supplied 90% of the mortaria used in London. It is especially important to record the quantity and the distribution of each and all stamped mortaria with their fabrics and trituration grit and with the individual dies used because these could be able to provide crucial evidence through distribution about where products were being made (or dies used). It should not be taken for granted without evidence, that clay was being transported in the same way in the first century as it clearly was to the Northgate pottery by cAD110.

As I understand it, the present belief concerning the Northgate potteries is that the mortaria which can be attributed to Northgate can be dated to two periods cAD110-140 and cAD140-160/170. It is believed that the VER WH clay was used throughout the whole time-span of the kilns, but the London (iron-rich) clay was used much more as the industry progressed. I am only concerned here with stamped mortaria, which are the ones which date cAD110-140. Some of these, more especially those of Maximus and Lucius are virtually indistinguishable from mortaria made at Brockley Hill etc in the 'Verulamium region', but they are distinguishable by their distribution, which marked them out as different, long before the Northgate kilns were discovered. They are also distinguished by quite good 'quality control' about their products.

The mortaria of Catullus at Northgate and in London and in Thanet might pass muster with mortaria made at Brockley Hill, but his mortarium at Canterbury would not be recognized as the same fabric. His distribution fits Northgate exactly: London, excluding Northgate, (3 mortaria); Canterbury; Gravesend; Westgate Court, Thanet (2-3 mortaria).

Valentinus was a much more prolific potter, distribution: Northgate (up to 7 mortaria, some approximating to Brockley Hill fabric but tending to be very overfired); London (8 mortaria, five of which could be accepted as close to Brockley Hill fabric); Canterbury and Highstead (5, all acceptable as Northgate, but not closely comparable to Brockley Hill fabric); Caerleon (queried as VRW when seen); Corbridge (queried as VRW when seen); Dover (2 mortaria, granular but not quite VRW WH); Slayhill, Upchurch (not considered to be VRW WH when examined); Wroxeter (missing). The fabric obviously varies in these mortaria, from what appears to be VRW WH to a fabric which might, on occasion, be attributable on appearance to Kent – it sometimes was! Valentinus's distribution fits Northgate closely, despite two outliers at Corbridge and Wroxeter which were clearly carried by individual travellers.

This is a long-winded way of demonstrating that the mortaria made in the Northgate potteries AD110-140 were not always consistent VRW WH fabric. Their fabric could vary quite considerably on occasion, depending of the fabric and the inclusions.

The question of why the Northgate potteries were prepared to import clay from the Reading Beds is intriguing. And why, after doing that, were they so often willing to mix it with varying proportions of London Clay so that in some mortaria any relationship to VRW ware can be lost in macroscopic examination. Did they find the continuing transport of clay on what would be a very large scale, too onerous or too expensive to keep up the supply of light-firing clay? Or did the potters just vary in quality control?

It is undoubtedly true that there was more use of iron-rich clay for mortaria in the second half of the second century and this also happened in at least some Watling Street potteries, but perhaps not to the same extent as at Northgate.

Potters active in the Verulamium region or/and at the Northgate House pottery, London who were stamping mortaria

To date we know of about 60 potters with relatively literate stamps and more than 50 other potters whose known stamps are either too incomplete or too uncertain to include among the individual potters. In addition, we know of probably four herringbone dies and five trademark dies in use. We also have six dies of Procuratorial stamps (Hartley 1996), which could have been used at Brockley Hill, though some site in London is certainly possible.

Even as it stands, this number, 120-130, is likely to be higher than the numbers represented by names, trademarks etc. at any other of the major potteries in Britain, which were making and stamping mortaria in the first and second centuries in Britain. At least eight of this total worked only in the Northgate potteries, while Marinus 1 is known to have worked both there and in the Watling Street potteries.