



The Study Group for Roman Pottery

NEWSLETTER
AUTUMN
2020

S.G.R.P. Website - www.romanpotterystudy.org.

Remember to use our website for information and queries. If you would like to add an item, or suggest how the website may be developed, please contact

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LOCKDOWN EDITION II



News from the Committee

✓ **Introduction**

Welcome to the Newsletter as Autumn has truly set in with darker evenings, wetter and colder days... and a world that continues to shift and change unpredictably around us in the era of Covid-19. Many of us continue to be deeply affected, both personally and professionally, so first of all I would like to offer a tremendous thank you to the wonderful response to requests for contributions to this is newsletter – it is heartening to me, and I hope it brings some sense of shared experience and community amongst Roman pottery for you all.

Sadly, this must be tempered by the recent news that Val Rigby passed away; a stalwart of the SGRP and once its president, but maybe most importantly both a beacon amongst how research into pottery could be pursued and constantly updated, and even more so, somebody that was always willing to hear from others, talk pottery, and answer their enquires.

More positively, the SGRP committee was recently able to meet virtually via Zoom and consider how we are able to look to the future. Most importantly, in the 50th year of the group, we were able to confirm that the annual conference is going to be held virtually in June, and will be co-ordinated by Eniko Hudak and James Gerrard, with the precise date to be confirmed in the very near future. As well as sessions on current research, there will also be sessions looking back into the history and development of Roman pottery studies and another looking to the future, including how we can build resilience into our sector.

Part of the resilience of the SGRP has always been our membership and their willingness to engage within the group, not just be passive receivers of information, which brings me to my next rallying cry. The members of the committee have been stable for some time, with several by necessity having to extend their terms of office until new incumbents could be found. We would very much like to find new officers for the principal posts of Secretary and Treasurer, and potentially for President and Newsletter Editor. If you are unsure of what these posts entail, please contact the post holder or secretary and ask. You will be equally welcome as somebody who is completely new to the committee (young or old), or as somebody who has previously held office (we'd welcome you to take a turn again). I think it is important to say that holding a virtual committee meeting has proved very successful, and hopefully this will reduce the burden of travel on those that have previously felt distance a barrier. Nomination papers will be circulated closer to the conference (AGM).

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✓ *Subscriptions and Gift Aid*

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If you have changed your e-mail or address, please contact Diana to ensure that you receive a copy of the journal and/or newsletter.

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✓ The Journal for Roman Pottery Studies

Steve Willis

Volume 18 of JRPS is complete, with the copy-editing and proofing stages concluding imminently to allow the journal to go to press with Oxbow books and hopefully be delivered early in the New Year.

The formation of Volume 19 is already significantly progressed, including four contributions to date with papers on pottery production in Lincoln, Suffolk, and most notably a very large contribution on the industry and kilns at Cantley in South Yorkshire. That said, there is always room for more contributions, and if you would like to submit a paper, please contact the editor.

Obituary

Val Rigby (1938-2020)

By Jane Timby

It is with regret and great sadness I am writing to notify you that Val Rigby passed away in hospital on Saturday as a result of complications following major heart surgery. She was a great colleague and certainly a unique individual and I for one will greatly miss her.

Her archaeological career started in 1965 when she was pottery researcher for the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, London. Between 1974-78 she was pottery researcher, for Cirencester Excavation Committee and that was in fact where I first met her. She then moved on to the British Museum as Curator in the Department of British and European Iron Age Antiquities until her retirement in 1999.

She joined what she called 'Stead's circus' for the first year of the Winterton excavations and remained part of Ian Stead's team working on several key sites including Rudston Villa, King Harry Lane, Baldock and the Iron Age cemeteries in Yorkshire. Her special interests lay in Gallo-Belgic imported fine wares on which she published numerous reports over the years and Celtic metalwork. She was one of the SGRP's past presidents and was continuing to work on various pottery related projects until quite recently.



Val Rigby (left) admiring a large beaker with Rachel Seager-Smith during a regional SGRP meeting at Winchester; 18th February 1995.

Our Members and their Lockdown Labours

✓ Alice Lyons...and the wonders of new laying out space

I imagine my year has had many of the same challenges as the wider population. My 87 year old mother was very ill with Covid but amazingly has made a full recovery, while I lost a dear (much younger) friend to other health issues but there was no funeral which was very difficult. Happily my son is well and has returned to university in Sussex but with all other young people he is studying on-line. My own work life continues to be busy, as a free-lancer now I enjoy working for a range of clients, the limitations this year has brought means training and consultancy work has reduced but pottery work has increased with everybody trying to keep projects moving and people employed. While some of my hobbies such as dancing have been a no-no in 2020, others such as potting and walking have been able to continue, even if a slightly adapted way. In other news I have just opened a new office in central Norwich - which has the laying out space and light which we pottery people really need!! [see photo below]. So wishing a happy and healthy 2021 for all and SGRP members in particular!



Alice's new office, christened with Roman pottery (we're not jealous at all of that space!)

✓ Jo Mills...and frivolity with samian ware

I has no idea if a serious or frivolous contribution would be better for the newsletter while we are locked down, but other than making my silly poster about identifying samian stamps, lockdown has allowed me to do a few things that have been pending for a very long time - like cutting up my fallen-to-bits copy of Central Gaulish Potters and rearrange it in potter alphabetical order! A bit of an old-fashioned cut and paste job really, but I can now find Drusus II or Laxtucissa so much more quickly! I do wonder if it'll actually make potter-finding an easier process, but there is at least one thing off the jobs list!

At some point in the near-ish future I may have a couple of stamped Drag 29's – the only examples of this potters' work in UK, to write a short note on – depends on where my investigations lead – but would the journal be a good place for them?

✓ Isobel Thompson

Since lockdown began I have had regular Zoom sessions with Stewart Bryant and Mark Landon on a Braughing Project, involving a baseline research agenda, GIS mapping, and plans for targeted fieldwork. For now, this has evolved into the art of the possible. Hertford Museum houses much material from the Braughing-Puckeridge area, and should soon be accessible. Here is a note from Mark Landon, who (as well as researching late Iron Age coin pellet mould) runs the Braughing Archaeology Group:

Bernard Barr looms large in the story of the archaeology of East Hertfordshire. From the early 1960s through to the 1990s he carried out excavations on some of the most important sites in this part of the world, including the nationally significant potteries at Bromley Hall, the typesite for Hadham Ware. Although he never published his results, he left a voluminous paper archive and more than 400 kg of finds at Hertford Museum.

This material is long overdue for evaluation, and needs to be placed in context with more recent work on the site and its satellites in the area. Braughing Archaeology Group is proposing to begin with a catalogue of Bernard's paper archive, and then to proceed with a full catalogue of the finds. Publications will be issued during the course of the work, with a view to producing a full overview at the end of the project.

Hertford Museum also has the Henderson Collection, of material salvaged in the 1930s by a local landowner setting up a poultry farm. When I looked at this in the 1970s there were 53 boxes of unwashed pottery, three of which I chose at random for scrubbing up and recording the contents. A small percentage of the pottery has been published, by myself and by Clive Partridge, but the Collection has never been fully examined to find out what's in there. It appears to have a chronological range from the earlier 1st century BC until at least the late 1st century AD, including Roman finewares. The importance of Braughing as a major late Iron Age oppidum is undoubted but its origins are unclear, and surprisingly little is known about the subsequent Roman settlement. The Henderson Collection, although unstratified, has potential to shed some light, if we only knew what it contains. So this is also on BAG's agenda.

✓ The Surrey Roman Pottery Guide

Kayt Marter-Brown

The Surrey Roman pottery guide is now in print - it was talked about at the study day we had in Woking. Copies can be ordered by contacting info@surreyarchaeology.org.uk and it costs £5 plus £2 p&p. The preference in Surrey is that people use the MOLA codes or at least provide a concordance. The guide also includes examples of some local fabrics, such as those from Ashted.

✓ Frankish Pottery from Alderney?

Jason Monaghan

One of the frustrations of excavating the Roman small fort at the Nunnery in Alderney has been how little Roman pottery we have found. A decade of summer excavations have yielded less than a full finds' tray worth, of which most is residual and all is scrappy. Our team moved out onto the adjacent Longis Common in 2018 where we discovered a Roman settlement that could extend over 4 hectares. Buried by sand, the walls of its buildings still stand up to a metre high, and at last we are finding stratified sherds. The buildings appear to be third or fourth century, overlying an earlier Roman phase, with an Iron Age burial ground deeper still. We had to suspend operations in 2020 but hope to restart in 2021 in a happier world.

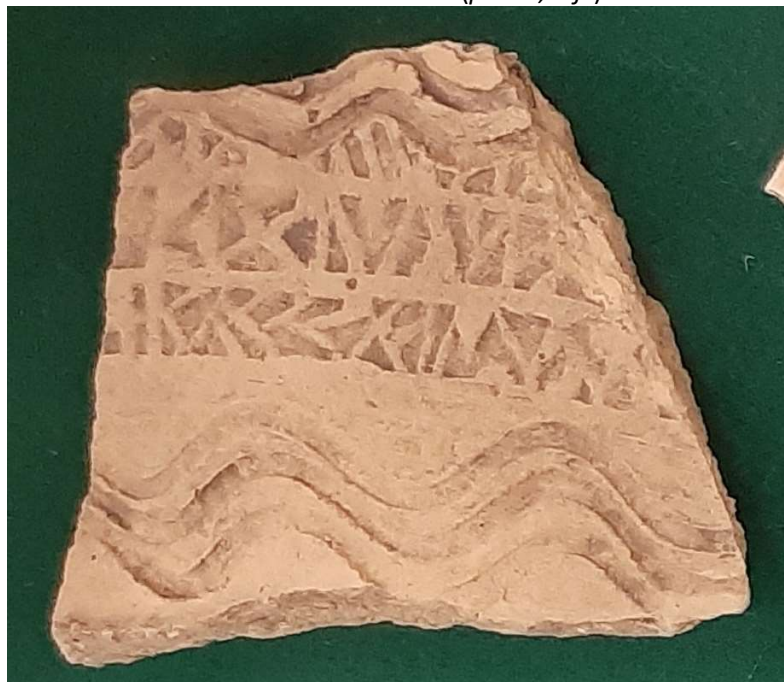


In 2019 I was working in the corner of one building which had the patchy remains of a cobble floor. In a dip within the Roman surface were a number of grey potsherds, and a metre away was a crushed oxidised jug associated with the base of a glass cup with Christian motif. I believe the glass to be Frankish, but I wonder if members have an opinion on the adjacent pot? (photo, left)

Checking Alderney Museum's finds boxes this autumn I also came across a buff sherd with roller-stamped designs from an earlier dig at the Nunnery (2). All thoughts gratefully received

monaghanfoss@gmail.com

Interim reports on the excavations can be found in the latest Bulletin of the Alderney Society. For more information on the site check out the Dig Alderney facebook page.



✓ **New Publication from the Upper Nene Archaeological Society**

Maureen A. Powell

∞
**ROMAN
PIDDINGTON:**

A comparative report on the pottery in three deposits from the 1989–92 'Courtyard' excavations at Piddington Roman villa

M.A. Powell

Fascicule 7



THE UPPER NENE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY 2019

Despite the cancellation of all archaeological meetings this summer, and with it the normal outlets for our publications, the Upper Nene Archaeological Society is delighted to make available our latest publication, with proceeds providing valuable support that ensure we can survive through the lock down period, and look forward to re-opening our excavations and analysis when we are permitted.

Fascicule 7 is now available by post and describes phases of the Piddington Villa occupation in Northamptonshire from the 1st to the 5th century, and gives some evidence for activities that have occurred in a grid area of the 'Courtyard'.

Edited by David Ingham of Albion Archaeology, the phase plans and drawings are by Roy Friendship Taylor, the 104 pages contain photographic plates of the most interesting potsherds; the report catalogues the ceramic fabrics and discusses the over 3000 sherds that were excavated from three layered contexts of the Piddington Villa in 1989-92.

Priced at £15, including postage and packing, anyone interested should contact – Diana Friendship Taylor at 'UNAS'. e-mail. dianaf-t@hotmail.com. Cheques payable to: 'UNAS', Toad Hall, 86 Newport Road, Hackleton, Northampton, NN7 2AD; or if a bank transfer is preferred the details are as follows: Yorkshire Bank, Sort code: 05-06-33, Account name: Upper Nene Archaeological Society, A/C No: 41158587.

✓ News from the Continent

Franziska Dovenar

From the continent (isolated by fog on the channel), we look with great worry and sorrow to Britain, at first because of the Brexit, and now for the pandemic with the high death toll in your part of the world. As for pottery research, nothing special from our side. My daily archaeological work is more general, like an excavation on Roman villa site in Luxembourg since May (*photo below*; will interim end this month). Work here (*Centre national de recherche archéologique* Luxembourg, <https://www.cnra.lu/fr>) runs almost normally, some colleagues work from home, completely or partially, depending on their situation.



Our current site at Contern: the rear of the main building of a Roman villa with axial courtyard

At work in Luxembourg, "almost normality": Some colleagues who work in the office rather than in the field (there has to be, alas, administration) are alternately in "home office" now, but mostly due to very small rooms where they already "suffered" from "cage housing" before the virus.

The field archaeologists (I belong to that 50-50 caste who do both) have been "locked down" from late March to late April but they returned to their sites in early May). Unfortunately, our site doesn't have many extant small finds (including pottery), obviously the former thrifty owners left the site broom-clean. My team of three workmen is nevertheless always optimistic. The preservation of the villa is quite good, many of the 24 rooms (so far) still have cement flooring, rising walls are sometimes 40-50 cm high, we've got a big hypocausted room and a cellar. One week before the end of this year's campaign (first days of November), one of my workmen caught the virus, so we all had to go into quarantine. Luckily, the testing was negative, and also the positive tested colleague got over it without any symptoms.

Conferences and meetings of all sorts are cancelled, I suppose it is similar in Britain. This week, I followed for the first time a four day international conference on polychromy via Zoom (cf. flyer attached). It was very well organised, had superb speakers and papers, and was a real highlight of the year. More that 290 people had registered for it (I was told this meeting has usually been a small "club" of about 40-50 specialists). The hunger for "archaeological input" is evidently very big.

At Trier (Germany), they started a new DFG research project about the pottery production in the Eifel region (*Ein antikes Industrieviertel in der Südeifel – Technik-, Wirtschafts- und Siedlungsarchäologie der römischen Töpfereien von Speicher*,

<https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/427122341?context=projekt&task=showDetail&id=427122341> & and <https://web.rgzm.de/ausstellungen-terminen/a/article/archaeologie-von-ungeahntem-ausmass-die-roemischen-toepfereien-von-speicher-und-herforst-suedeifel/>).

At Cologne university, they seem to do specified Roman pottery studies, too

(<https://archaeologie.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/en/recent-news/events/detail/digital-humanities-kolloquium-michael-remmy-koeln#news1200>).

The German yearly conference on Roman pottery (the *Keramiktag*, organised for 14 years by Constanze Höpken, Martin Grünwald and Susanne Biegert) has sadly been stopped completely in 2019, because of a too small number of specialists willing to present papers or to attend the meeting at all (cf. PDF).

✓ A funded MA and student placement in Roman pottery with MOLA-Headland infrastructure and the University of Reading

Adam Sutton (asutton@mola.org.uk), Eniko Hudak (EHudak@pre-construct.com), and Lanah Hewson (L.Hewson@student.reading.ac.uk)

A three-year post-excavation project is now underway to deal with the archaeology uncovered through the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon Road Improvement Scheme, which includes numerous Iron Age and Roman rural settlements, part of a Roman villa complex, a Deserted Medieval Village, several prehistoric monuments, and large parts of an almost entirely new Roman pottery industry. Among the numerous research projects MOLA-Headland Infrastructure (MHI) have attached to this post-ex work is a funded MA, incorporating a dissertation on the topic of sampling Roman pottery assemblages, and a placement in which the student would start learning to work with Roman pottery and gain some experience in the commercial sector via working within MHI. This MA has been awarded to Lanah Hewson, who is now studying at the University of Reading following the first six weeks of her placement based at MOLA Northampton, where she worked closely with Adam Sutton (MHI) and Eniko Hudak (PCA) learning the basics of identifying, recording, and reporting upon Roman pottery assemblages.

Roman pottery training

Those of us working on the project always envisaged that specialist training and upskilling would be an important part of the A14 post-ex. Working with such a massive ceramic resource and within a large team of experts (eleven pottery specialists!), the opportunity for learning seemed clear, while the great significance of many parts of the assemblage meant that we had no problem exciting young researchers interested in the chance to develop within the specialism. Lanah had the following to say, following on from her first six weeks as a trainee pottery specialist:

“When the MA was advertised and offered an opportunity to develop a specialism in Roman Pottery by working with academic and professional units, it sounded like everything I could dream of! I applied because I knew this was an amazing opportunity and I’d kick myself if I didn’t. In the first week I was struggling to differentiate pot from pebbles and couldn’t get my computer monitor to switch on, let alone decipher the software for recording everything! But by the end, thanks to Adam’s very patient teaching, I was able to work confidently and independently. While Eniko was down I got to learn a lot about more specialised forms and learned some tricks and tips to help orientate and identify sherds. I genuinely looked forward to coming into the office everyday because I knew how much fun each day would be!”

The MA and placement is also an interesting opportunity for collaboration between specialists working at different units and with academic partners. Lanah has now worked closely with pottery specialists from multiple commercial units, and will continue her education in ceramics and Roman material culture under the tutorship of experts such as Profs. Mike Fulford and Hella Eckardt at the University of Reading. The hope is not to simply train Lanah to identify and report upon pottery assemblages, but also to work creatively using modern theoretical and data-driven approaches to finds.

The research: sampling Roman pottery assemblages

Archaeologists recovered over two metric tons of Iron Age and Roman pottery from the A14 sites. This material offers us an invaluable resource for the study of these periods in eastern England and along the Cambridgeshire fen-edge, and those of us working on the post-ex now have several research projects based directly around the pottery which we hope to share more about soon. Inevitably, these quantities of pottery also present significant challenges. Not only are specialists involved in one of the largest collaborative post-excavation programmes yet undertaken by commercial archaeology in this country; we also have to wrestle with thorny issues around sampling pottery assemblages in order to bring the quantities of ceramics subjected to full analysis down to manageable levels.

Pottery sampling is a relatively under-researched area, at least in British pottery studies. While many of us are familiar with the need to carefully allocate our resources of time, effort, and money to those parts of assemblages which are of the greatest archaeological potential, solutions to these problems have tended to be arrived at on a case-by-case basis, e.g. by focusing analysis on 'key groups' or similar. From the outset on the A14, work needed to be done to think about how assemblages could be rendered manageable given the constraints of commercial resourcing, but without compromising the research aims of the project or the intrinsic value of the finds.

With little established background to work from in the literature, it was decided that the best way to start thinking about sampling was to rigorously test the sampling strategy arrived at for the A14. This is where Lanah's work comes in. The aim of the MA dissertation is to record the 'unsampled' portions of one of the A14 pottery assemblages whilst Eniko and Adam produce the data and report for the 'sampled' assemblage. Lanah will then compare the resulting 'complete' dataset to that produced by Eniko and Adam in accordance with the project's sampling methodology. This would help identify biases introduced into the data as a result of selection decisions, and in turn inform how specialists interpret 'sampled' datasets across the scheme. It will also permit consideration of alternative sampling strategies which could be applied to future projects.

At a time when 'big infrastructure' projects seem to be becoming more and more common, researching sampling strategies associated with bulk finds is clearly useful in helping us to think critically not only about how resources such as money and time are managed as part of post-ex, but also what pottery can most effectively tell us about our sites and about life in the past. In the case of the A14, taking a sampled approach to full pottery recording has freed up resources which have been reallocated to other aspects of ceramic analysis, such as a substantial budget for archaeometry (mainly petrography, geochemistry and radiography) and time for detailed characterisation of the Lower Ouse Valley pottery industry. It is also hoped that Lanah's work will provide a springboard for further research into statistically rigorous pottery sampling strategies, which are all the more important in the age of 'big data'.

Outcomes and what's next

Until spring 2021 Lanah will be based at the University of Reading working on her dissertation and other taught modules. She will return to Northampton for a total of six weeks throughout the spring and summer of 2021, to continue learning about Roman pottery prior to submitting her dissertation. We hope that Lanah remains as energised about our specialism as she has been to date, and that she continues the strong start that she has made as a young pottery researcher!

The project has also already proved rewarding for those doing the training. The opportunity to spend extended periods of time training interested students does not often come up in commercial archaeology, and so the placement provided Adam and Eniko with the chance to hone their own skills as teachers and consider how best to impart specialist knowledge. Specialist training is necessarily in-depth, and creative solutions are sometimes needed! It is important that specialists can attract, enthuse, and educate new members of our community.

We also look forward to outcomes of Lanah's research and to seeing how the project develops. This MA and its placement are interesting chances to see how fruitful research can be done on the back of big infrastructure funding. It may well be worth other organisations considering how they can make use of similar opportunities that may arise in the future, for the purposes of both research and for specialist training.

✓ **Paul Booth**

So introducing my work on recording the Roman pottery from Dorchester in the last newsletter, I am still crawling through the sherd mountain - 70,000 down now - but they are not giving up their secrets easily. A notable characteristic of the assemblage is its overall state - the sherds are mostly in pretty good condition, but conversely are typically very small. The overall mean sherd weight is almost exactly 10 grammes, but that includes amphorae and large storage jar sherds. So the material is well broken up, but not kicked about to the extent that sherds become significantly abraded. Have any of our colleagues encountered similar large assemblages with this character?

Apart from that, I have just received an article hot off the digital press that is a synthesis and consideration of Roman pottery in the Oxford region based on data from over 100 sites; presumably about to appear in hard copy as well. While I cannot distribute this directly, I would like to draw SGRP members' attention to it – and if anyone is really keen they should contact me directly. The full bibliographic reference is:

Booth, P. 2020 'Status or What? Aspects of Broad Characterisation of Roman Pottery Assemblages in the Oxford Region.' *Oxoniensia* Vol. 85. 1-42

✓ **Pamela Irving**

Although I remain a very interested bystander, I am sadly no longer an active participant in Roman pottery studies, therefore I would like to take the opportunity to pass on some of my books to those who are still active. I have a list of books that I can e-mail to anyone that is interested, available on request (contact me at pamirving@outlook.com). I haven't checked what the going rate for them is, but would want to sell them for at least what I could get from a book dealer (ie less than the market price plus p&p). I also have a list of post-Roman ceramics and excavation publications which I would also like to rehome, which I could send on request to those who work across periods.

I am also wondering how people have managed professionally and financially in these strange times. Have the people who normally work from home had enough paid work to keep afloat mentally and financially. What about the people who don't have that option; has archaeological work continued, have short term contracts dried up; have people been able to work as 'normal' in 'covid-safe' work environments. Has anyone any tips to pass on about how they have managed to keep afloat financially (alternative and related crafts expanding beyond archaeology or into media). Following Val Rigby's sad death, and Jane's suggestion of a memorial donation to a charity of one's own choice, if the Study Group is now a charity, would members think it feasible to allow donations to the Group in her memory? These could either add to a 'welfare' fund if one already exists (since there are options for help with the cost of attending meetings and helping to provide professional standard publication material for the Journal), or to set one up, which could accept other donations in the future, as a separate ring-fenced source of funding to encourage new entrants to pottery studies. If you have any opinions on these suggestions, please send them to the secretary and they will be discussed at a future Committee meeting.

✓ **Robert Hopkins**

Hawking ceramics in the early 20th Century and analogies with the supply of Roman Pottery

Reading through a volume of the Dorset Nat. Hist and Arch. Soc, I came across a paper on the post-Medieval Verwood potteries, a ceramic cottage industry centred on Cranborne in east Dorset, which ceased production just after the Second World War. It gives an insight into how a long-lived ceramic industry distributed its wares. The system is one of the many possibilities in the distribution of Romano-British ceramics.

In the section relating to the late 19th - early 20th century, the distribution was mainly through independent hawkers purchasing stock directly from the potters; these then travelled the region with their horse drawn waggon, later by motorised vans. The merchants/waggoners would call on retail outlets and private properties offering their wares, and no doubt doubled up as market stall traders. One potter is also known to have his own waggon, directly selling his ceramics as far afield as Yeovil.

Pottery was not the only commodities bought and sold by the merchants. We are familiar with ceramics being 'piggy backed', and in a reversal, the hawkers also bulk purchased locally made brooms to sell on their 'rounds'. And not one to miss an opportunity, the aforementioned merchant potter was also a purchaser of farm produced cheeses, to sell on his visits to Bournemouth.

The author suggested the industry's decline was due to its conservative 'thinking' and unwillingness to adapt, especially during the inter-war years. While this is one possible reason, there was also competition from mass producers, also the economic problems in the 1920' and 30's. There was also a possible supply chain issue; the potters gave hawkers stock on credit, which is a risky strategy, for if a merchant defaults, the potter could be in financial jeopardy. However, this is only a problem for the industry if the entire pottery's distribution is done through a small number of enterprises, if these were to go bust, the industry would face possible collapse.

An example of this comes from the mid 19th Century in rural Carmarthenshire. The widespread abandonment of upland farms is thought to be due to a small number of cattle droving 'livestock dealers' going bankrupt and defaulting on credit, money, which in many cases was most of a farmer's annual income. Together with the annual tithe payments (a levy which led to major rural unrest in the 1880's and 90's), many farmers were left penniless, abandoned their farmsteads, and migrated to the industrial areas.

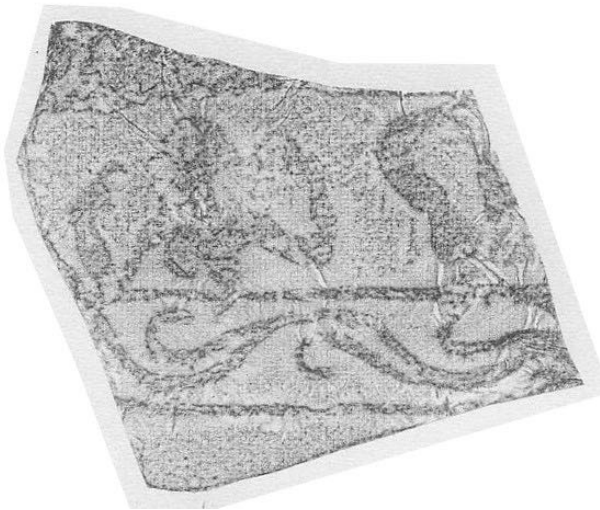
The Verwood pottery demonstrates a method of distributing ceramic products through small independent, itinerant traders travelling the countryside, and such a system in distributing Romano-British pottery cannot be dismissed

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And finally....A samian rubbing appropriate to lockdown

The period of lockdown and a hiatus in other work has allowed me to update and research my catalogue of samian ware motifs, and depending on how informative or amusing it may be, this rubbing may merit closer inspection. I can't decide whether it's a couple reclining in bed under a duvet with an entwined patterned border, or a pair of naturists exercising behind a wrought iron fence!



From all on the SGRP committee, we hope you and your families stay well, and look forward to seeing you again at future meetings.

