



The Study Group for Roman Pottery

NEWSLETTER
SPRING
2022

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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Spring EDITION



✓ **An Introduction Of Great Sadness**

It was with great sadness that we learnt on May 1st 2022, Roberta Tomber passed away following a long and brave fight against cancer. Roberta served as the president of the Study Group for Roman Pottery between 2006-2009, was a bright and generous figure within our discipline(s) who was always willing to share and inspire with her knowledge. In the brief time we have had to digest this news, many have shared their own happy stories of being mentored by Roberta, of various encounters and travels in London and around the world, often colourful.



Since 2002 Roberta had been an Honorary Visiting Researcher in the Department of Conservation and Scientific Research at the British Museum, continuing to specialise in ceramic studies, which she had pursued previously at the Museum of London, where she had worked since completing her dissertation in 1988. She had developed areas of research that included her published book on Indo-Roman trade ('from pots to pepper')

which also highlighted her fascination with function over simple classification, but no consideration of her research can overlook her championing of microscopic and geological applications in the study of Roman pottery, in particular being one of the two co-authors of the seminal National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (Tomber & Dore 1998) that remains a foundation stone (vessel?) for so many of us today. These brief words can do no true justice to Roberta, and a full obituary will appear in a future volume of the Journal for Roman Pottery Studies, but as we approach conference season please remember her in your thoughts, even as I can hear her distinctive tones beckoning me over and telling me to get on with it. Her strength and character will continue to be an inspiration to us all.

If you would like to further participate in celebrating Roberta's life, her funeral will be taking place at Honor Oak Crematorium, Brockley Way, London SE4 2LJ on June 1st 2022, at 1.45pm. There will be a live webcast of the funeral at www.obitus.com (Username: fuse4734 ; Password: 053032)

After the service we will be gathering for food and drink at 95b Herne Hill, SE249LY. If you are planning to join us after the ceremony at Herne Hill, please let us know at gatheringforroberta@gmail.com by May 25th. You may also send messages of condolence to this email address.

In lieu of any flowers please donate to St Christophers Hospice in thanks for their kindness and care www.stchristophers.org.uk/donate



Study Group for Roman Pottery annual conference 18th June 2022 Leicester



The annual SGRP conference in 2022 is a hybrid in person/on-line one day-event which will be hosted by the University of Leicester.

The provisional programme of the conference is:

9.00 Registration

9.30 Welcome from president Rob Perrin

9.35 Recent Work in Roman Leicester(shire) Nick Cooper

10.00 Recent work on Leicester Forest kilns and supply to Leicester Liz Johnson/Nick Cooper

10.25 How Nene was my Valley? Excavations of a late Roman colour-coated ware kiln site beside the River Witham at Lincoln in 2009 Ian Rowlandson and Hugh Fiske

10.50 Tea/Coffee Break

11.10 A Long Wave Goodbye: Pottery big data and economic cycles Jerry Evans and Phil Mills

11.35 Structured deposition in an early Roman well at Ewell, Surrey Eniko Hudak

12.00 AGM

13.00 Lunch break

14.00 Pottery Viewing; Cadeby kiln group, Early Roman Leicester Groups etc (Roving reports with phone camera for on-line)

14.30 An update on Romano-British infant feeding cups: the military connection Kayt Hawkins

14.50 Kaleidoscope: getting to grips with the late Iron Age/Roman transition in Britain Isobel Thompson

15.10 Wine coolers and other RB ceramic strainer types: a functional analysis Scott Martin

15.30 Tea/Coffee Break

15.50 The Arch-I-Scan Project Pim Alison (video lecture)

16.10 Exploring vessel morphologies in Late Iron Age and Early Roman funerary contexts using shape data from digital scans Alasdair Gilmour

16.30 Conference Ends



Pottery from the Castle Street 'delicatessen' cesspit (c) Nick Cooper

In person attendance must be booked using the application form below, while online attendance can be booked via this link:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/study-group-for-roman-pottery-conference-leicester-2022-tickets-326625845697> To attend on-line via Zoom, the charge to members will be £10. The non-member rate is £15 and the student rate is £5.

The deadline for booking your place is **May 31st**, and we'd very much like to see you, in person or on-line.

LEICESTER 2022 SGRP CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM (IN-PERSON ONLY)

Saturday June 18th

Name:	
Address:	
Email	
Phone	
In person Conference fee (please indicate) Member £35 Non-Member £45 Student £5 Membership subscription £15	
Total Payment:	
Special requirements (diet/access)	
Receipt required	

Please email your completed booking form to Conference organiser Nick Cooper njc9@le.ac.uk and SGRP Treasurer Diana Briscoe archive@asps.org.uk and pay by bank transfer to Barclays Bank Littlehampton Branch, Account Name: SGRP (Study Group for Roman Pottery), Account Number: 0045 7272, Sort Code: 20-20-62. Using ref 'PotConf22'

If paying by cheque please make payable to SGRP and post with your booking form to Diana C. Briscoe (SGRP Treasurer), 117 Cholmley Gardens, London NW6 1UP.

For those wishing to stay over at the conference centre on the Friday and/or Saturday night the preferential (association) rates for B&B per person per night are Standard room £45.00 + VAT and for an Executive room £60.00 + VAT. If you would like to book accommodation, then please contact the conference centre directly conferences@leicester.ac.uk quoting the event number 73344. If you are having trouble booking accommodation, please contact Nick Cooper (njc9@leicester.ac.uk) directly, copying in the university's conference co-ordinator, Lisa Kirby (lk57@le.ac.uk).

✓ The SGRP Committee

You may have noted the presence of the AGM within the programme of the conference, and highlighted by the former role of Roberta Tomber, a former president, and the work of countless other individuals, I'm sure you will be in no doubt that it these contributions that enable the Study Group for Roman Pottery to continue its valuable work, projects and influence, as well as produce outputs for its members.

Therefore, we must highlight that several committee members will soon be coming to the end of their current terms, and we would therefore like to advertise for nominations for these posts.

- *President* (incumbent Rob Perrin)
- *Treasurer* (incumbent Diana Briscoe)
- *Newsletter Editor* (incumbent Andrew Peachey)

If you would like to nominate yourself or anyone else for one of the following posts, please contact Adam Sutton at secretary.sgrp@gmail.com , or if you would like to discuss further one of the posts, please enquire through Adam and he can put you in touch with one of the incumbents to discuss the role.

✓ The Journal for Roman Pottery Studies

Steve Willis

I am very happy to confirm that **Volume 19** of **JRPS** is finished, and once again is looking like a well-packed edition of a variety of articles and sites

As JRPS editor, I have signed it off for publication so it is on its way and depending now on the printing schedule of Oxbow Books we may hopefully see copies by mid or late June, if not imminently thereafter.

Member News

✓ Further Enquiries on Roman 'Baby Bottles'

Kayt Hawkins and Julie Dunne have been awarded a research grant by the Society of Antiquaries to undertake Organic Residue Analysis (ORA) on the so-called Romano-British 'infant feeding' vessels that Kayt spoke about at the last SGRP conference. I have a list of around 150 such vessels and will be working my way around various organisations/institutions to ask if they may be interested in participating by allowing us access to the vessels in their archives.

We can sample individual sherds and for complete vessels Julie has devised a way of sampling the interior (dependant on the shape of the rim/neck). If anyone is super keen to let us sample their vessels do please drop Kayt an email (kayt.hawkins@ucl.ac.uk) and likewise if anyone has recently come across any more of these vessels, please let me know so I can add them to my database.

✓ Archaeological Illustration: How to Draw Pottery

David Rudling

Many SGRP members will enjoy sketching sherds they record and may be interested in this course of the technical drawing of pottery; or otherwise may have colleagues or volunteers that they work alongside who may find this both appealing and applicable.

A Joint Rottingdean Whiteway Centre and Sussex School of Archaeology Special Event.

This day school is suitable for beginners, and those who wish to refresh their drawing skills. The day will begin with a power-point introduction on how to draw pottery using modern drawing conventions, demonstrating good and bad illustration practices. Students will then draw various pieces of pottery throughout the day, including whole pots and sherds, ancient and modern ceramics, decorated and plain pottery, whilst the tutor circulates advising them on their drawing techniques. As pottery is often the most common artefact generally found on sites, the need to draw it well is very important/useful.

The course will mainly cover pencil drawings of pottery. Today most publication illustration is completed by using various computer drawing programmes, which are not available at this course. Students, if they wish and have the right pens, can attempt to ink up their pencil drawings if there is time. Whatever methods of producing illustrations for publication are used, the drawing conventions are the same, and will be taught to the standard of any archaeological drawing office.

Course date: Saturday 18th June, 10am-4pm.

Venue: The Whiteway Centre, Whiteway Lane, Rottingdean, Sussex, BN2 7HB

Tutor: Jane Russell, MA (former Senior Illustrator at the UCL Archaeology South-East Unit)

Course fee: £30. For more information and to book: www.rwc.org.uk/special_events

Further links to this course and other courses on archaeological illustration, as well as other specialisms can be found at <http://www.bajr.org/Employment/UKTraining.asp>

✓ **An Experimental Pottery Kiln**

Isobel Thompson

In 1975, Ian Jackson excavated the Slayhills 4 pottery kiln on the Medway marshes in north Kent, close to the confluence of the River Medway with the River Thames. He has lent the original pottery and kiln bars to Archaeology South-East for a project to not only study the original pottery and kiln furniture, but also construct an experimental pottery kiln at Butser Ancient Farm based on that recorded in north Kent.

The construction of the early 2nd century AD kiln has been co-ordinated by Alice Dowsett, Paul Wordsworth and Bill Sillar as part of an Archaeo-Tech session for students at the Institute for Archaeology (UCL). The kiln is now drying out, and will be fired during the weekend 29th September to 2nd October this year during another Archaeo-Tech session. This was financed by a grant from the SHS Dean's Strategic fund which allowed Archaeology South-East staff, Louise Rayner and Anna Doherty, to study the pottery assemblage and kiln furniture from the original excavation and also to work with a potter, Alison Sandeman, using a Roman style kick wheel to begin to make some pottery to fill the kiln.

We look forward to hearing the results of the analysis and the kiln firing.



✓ **Some Intriguing 'Industrial' Sherds From A Late Roman Site in Gloucestershire**

Jane Timby

Following the location of a coin hoard found by metal detectors and reported to the local Finds Liaison officer (and on a recent TV programme), a small dig was commissioned to try and establish the context of the find with the discovery of a further hoard.

At the request of the excavator I did a site visit with Paul Tyers to look at the pot. The material we saw was extremely sooty and very broken up and appeared to be largely 4th century AD although with other earlier bits mixed in. Amongst it were the items photographed here.

These are circular tubes with holes in the walls in a coarse grey ware fabric. They flare out at one and have a hole the other. They have



variable wall thicknesses and diameters. Initially it was thought they were connected with a kiln. Although we only saw a sample of the pot it did not initially seem to be kiln waste and there was little fired clay from any structures in the deposit we looked at. The site also featured a small furnace and there was a small quantity of iron slag present. The implication is that this was a small late Roman industrial complex of some nature although for what exactly is not clear at present. The area excavated could of course be peripheral to the centre of activity.



Lorraine Mephem very kindly found a slight parallel with broadly similar items identified as kiln props in post-medieval Somerset/Devon. So one suggestion is that these may have acted as kiln props for pottery production and Graham Taylor is going to experiment. Alternatively the different sizes and the form could suggest they fitted into one another to create some sort of vaulting for the transmission of hot air / gases becoming smaller towards the top of a domed structure.

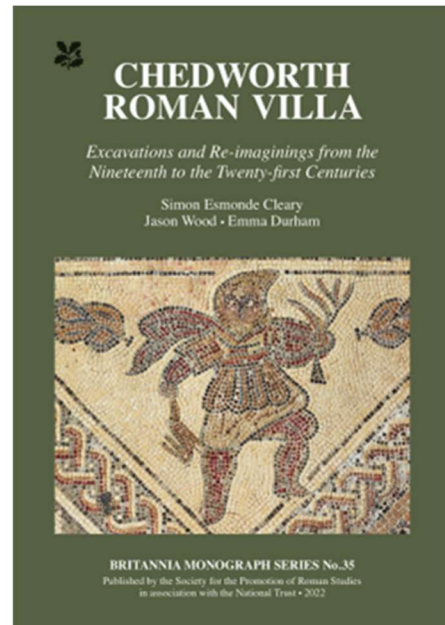
If they are connected with pottery production and, it may become a bit clearer when the pottery is washed and the fabrics are visible, does anyone know of any parallels in a Roman context?

If members could please send any thoughts to Jane directly at janertimby@gmail.com, that would be appreciated.

✓ **Publication on Chedworth Roman Villa**

It is rare that Roman monuments in the United Kingdom can be subject to extensive new reporting, but following over 10 years of archaeological research the latest Britannia monograph is able to present a comprehensive record of Chedworth Roman villa, now under the custodial care of the National Trust (and well-worth a visit if you are in the Cotswolds <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/chedworth-roman-villa>)

The volume brings together a large body of new, contextualised information about the villa including: a history of work at Chedworth from the 1860s to the present; a detailed fabric survey of the extant remains; description and analysis of the Roman structural remains; description and analysis of the decorative elements (e.g. mosaics, sculpture) and finds, notably chapters on the Pottery (by Rachel Seager Smith), and an Overview of the Pottery (by Jane Timby with Joanna Bird).



The volume incorporates a discussion of the development of the villa and its place in the landscape; the consolidation and display of the villa from its discovery in 1864 to the present. The volume is well illustrated with drawings and photos ranging in date from the late 1800s to the present, and will appeal to all with an interest in Roman Britain, villas in particular, and in the antiquarians who first discovered and investigated them.

It may be purchased at <https://www.oxbowbooks.com/oxbow/chedworth-roman-villa.html>

✓ **Pots, concretions, parasites...and a thought on 'storage' jars.**

Archaeologists at the University of Cambridge analyzed crusty material formed on the inside surface of a ceramic pot dating to the 5th century from a Roman villa site in Sicily. Using microscopy to identify intestinal parasites, the team from the Ancient Parasites Laboratory identified the eggs of whipworm, confirming that the vessel had once contained human faeces. Conical pots of this type have been recognized quite widely in the Roman Empire and in the absence of other evidence they have often been called storage jars. The discovery of many in or near public latrines had led to a suggestion that they might have been used as chamber pots, but until now proof has been lacking," says Roger Wilson, a professor in UBC's department of classical, Near Eastern and religious studies who directs the Gerace archaeological project in Sicily where the pot was found.

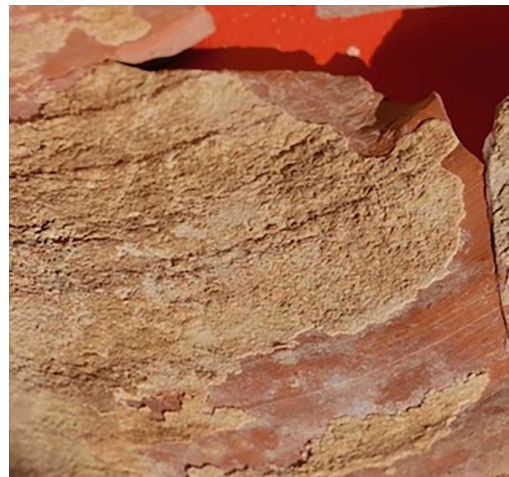
Sophie Rabinow (Downing College, Cambridge) said, "We found that the parasite eggs became entrapped within the layers of minerals that formed on the pot surface, so preserving them for centuries. This is the first time that parasite eggs have been identified from concretions inside a Roman ceramic vessel both confirming that the Gerace pot must have been used to contain human faeces and showing that parasite analysis can provide important clues for ceramic research." Whipworms are human parasites that are about five centimetres long and live on the lining of our intestines. The eggs they lay get mixed in with the human faeces, and so would be deposited in a chamber pot during use. Minerals from urine and faeces built up in layers on the inner surface of the pot as it was repeatedly used, creating concretions.



*Chamber pot of the 5th century CE from the Roman villa at Gerace, Sicily (Italy).
Credit: Roger Wilson*

The technique will only work if at least one of those people who used the chamber pot was infected by intestinal worms. Where such parasites are endemic in the developing world today, more than half of people are infected by at least one type of intestinal parasite. If Romans were infected as commonly, there is high probability that this approach will identify most such vessels as chamber pots if encrusted deposits are preserved.

Although the measurements of the Gerace chamber pot (31.8 cm high with a diameter of 34cm at the rim) indicate it could have been used for sitting on, it was more than likely used in conjunction with a wickerwork or timber chair under which the chamber pot was set. Piers Mitchell, the parasites expert who led the study in the laboratory, says: "This pot came from the baths complex of a Roman villa. It seems likely that those visiting the baths would have used this chamber pot when they wanted to go to the toilet, as the baths lacked a built latrine of its own. Clearly, convenience was important to them."



*Mineralised concretions that formed on the surface of the interior of the pot.
Image credit: Roger Wilson*

The research is published today in the *Journal of Archaeological Science*:

"Using parasite analysis to identify ancient chamber pots: an example of the fifth century CE from Gerace, Sicily, Italy" by Sophie Rabinow, Tianyi Wang, Roger J.A. Wilson and Piers D. Mitchell. *Journal of Archaeological Science*

✓ ...and finally...meanwhile, in Rome.

The presence of Roman pottery, even incredible Roman pottery...in Rome, is hardly unexpected, but nonetheless occasionally a ceramic object of exceptional, if not unique character is discovered (and also has cute aesthetic appeal). Utility workers laying pipes in the Via Luigi Tosti revealed part of a set of burial chambers, which would have been part of a larger complex located along the Via Latina (or “Latin Road”), one of the oldest of the city’s thoroughfares. These have been dated to the 1st century BC to 1st century AD, and within of the newly revealed funerary vessels was found a striking terracotta dog statue, which is now awaiting further analysis.



*Many thanks to all contributors, and
we hope to hear much more from you in
the coming year.*

