

Roman Period

Notes taken from a talk given by Dr. Stephen Upex, Covington, October 2014 and workshop November 2014

Area surrounded by known Roman sites, e.g. Stibbington, Stanground, Stilton, Godmanchester, Duston, Irchester (no pottery kilns), large Roman site north of Thrapston. Local road links include Ermine Street, road between Bedford and St. Neots, road linking Durobrivae, Thrapston and Irchester. By the middle-end 44AD troops from the 43 Claudian invasion were overwintering in our area in forts at Longthorpe, Godmanchester and others.

In Peterborough, North Cambridgeshire and the East Midlands, wheel thrown pottery first appeared in the Iron Age. The military brought Roman pottery to this area – between 45AD and 60AD 2,500 soldiers were stationed at Longthorpe. Kilns were spoon-shaped and a yard from end to end. Produced platters, bowls and dishes. Production stopped by 65AD. By 2-4th centuries there was a spectacular Roman landscape at Durobrivae – the bridge where Ermine Street crossed the River Nene. There were planned industrial suburbs in the modern Normangate Field, between Caster and Durobrivae. There were hundreds of kilns in the Peterborough area. They were dumbbell shaped and block built. Neighbouring woodland was coppiced to feed the fires. Stibbington has the most complete pottery production workshop so far found in the Northern Provinces, with emplacements for potters wheels including flywheels. Kilns were also found along the A1 in the 1950s. There are four main groups of kilns: Stanground, Holme (Fen Edge) – producing sandy clay coarsewares; Fengate; Chesterton, Sibson, Castor, Nailsworth, Wansford – the main production centre with hundreds of kilns; west of Wansford – very early kilns. Nene Valley pottery has been found in Fenland and was transported up the Nene to Northampton. It has also been found in London, Leicester, Lincoln and York. Small amounts also went to Hadrian's Wall. Specialist wares travel long distances by pack animals, trains of several hundred pack horses each. Sawtry has more horse bones than any other site in Cambridgeshire which suggests it was connected with the pack animals. Colour coated ware has even been found in the Rhineland, having been transported across from The Fens.

Main types:

Iron Age: Tacitus, commenting on what the Romans found when they arrived in Britain, said that the 'population is very dense' and that there were cattle and farming. Society was run from the paramount chief down. There were hillforts, e.g. at Stonea Camp on the edge of the Fen. Round houses continue into the 4th century and become Saxon. The local tribe, the Catavelauni, imported a wide variety of goods such as wine pottery and metal jewellery. Nene mussels and oyster shell was used as temper as well as limestone sometimes. Pots were clamp fired but in the last 100 years of the Iron Age pottery was wheel turned and fired in small kilns. These were in the banks of ditches, using the ditch as a stoke hole.

Burnished ware – quite fine – on the cusp of BC/AD.

Imports from Iberia and North Africa from late Iron Age onwards.

Samian was produced mainly in the Massif Central in France and in Germany. Produced up until the end of the 1st century AD. It is considered ancestral tableware so was repaired when broken. Could have been bought at Durobrivae but very expensive so only for a wealthy villa. Cottestock was possibly the biggest villa in Roman Britain. There are 12 big villas around Durobrivae and villas

spaced at regular intervals along the Nene Valley, e.g. Fotheringhay. There were large villas also at Stanwick, and Great Staughton to the East.

Roman shellyware was produced e.g. at Longthorpe from 1st -4th centuries. Used for general storage and cooking. Can use the rims for dating. Lid seating rims. Most lids were made of wood. Waterproofing with milk.

Greyware: reduced wares produced from 1st to 3rd centuries. Made in the Nene Valley by Flavian potters in mid 1st century. When leatherhard, the pots were placed upside-down in the kiln and fired very gradually up to 900 degrees. When up to temperature, the flue was bunged up with plant material such as straw to produce a carbon-rich atmosphere resulting in greyware. Often have lattice decoration.

The Nene Valley is also famous for its colour coated ware. After pots were leatherhard, they were dipped into slip (runny clay with different minerals added to it), then dried and fired. The kiln wasn't bunged up but the flue was left open, producing an oxidising atmosphere. This ware can be decorated and rims changed with the fashion (plain, beaded, corniced – early to late period).

Decoration:

Rouletting – like a pastry wheel

Barbotine – swirls, swags, dots of slip – 2-3rd centuries

Applique – moulded pieces stuck on with slip – ditto 2-3 centuries

Sand stuck onto the outside

Stamped ware – e.g. London ware but in 2nd century also made in this area.

Creamwares: Cooled more quickly in the kiln. 2-4th centuries. Fashionable rims and handles.

Black burnished reduced ware produced again at the end of the Roman period – 4th-5th centuries. **Also red material imported from Oxfordshire.**

Going into the **Saxon period** at about 600AD, pottery was very similar to that produced in the Iron Age. More soups and stews at the end of 4th century whereas in the 1st century there were more platters. End of the Hadrianic to beginning of the Antonine period was a very prosperous time – lots of beakers produced. By end of 4th century, beer becomes dominant drink.