



Roman period pottery

(excerpts from the National Roman Fabric Collection website, <http://potsherd.net/atlas/concordance/nrfrc>)

1. Some basic terms and descriptions

■ Amphoras

Amphoras were the **transport containers** of the Graeco-Roman world, are usually large pottery vessels, with handles, for the **storage and transportation of liquids**, especially wine, olive oil and other foodstuffs. The study of the production, distribution and dating of amphoras (and indirectly the products they originally contained) is one of the most important sources for the analysis of the Roman economy. Amphoras are commonly found in shipwrecks of the Roman period, particularly in the western Mediterranean.

■ Coarse wares

Coarse wares, for cooking or food preparation or storage, are the most common wares on most sites. In most cases they will be from local sources but some coarse wares are transported over long distances.

■ Fine wares

In addition to terra sigillata, other traditions of fine pottery were current during the Roman period. Many of these vessels can be classed as table wares, and were used as drinking vessels (cups and beakers) or for the service of food (plates and dishes). Common decorative techniques include slipped (or more rarely glazed) surfaces.

■ Mortaria

Mortaria are **hemispherical or conical bowls** commonly with **heavy flanges and coarse grits embedded into the internal surface**. They were used for pounding or mixing foods and are an important indicator of the spread of romanised food preparation methods. Stamps on some early Roman mortaria record the name of the potter, from which it is possible to trace their movement between workshops. Some vessels produced in Italy and Gaul are transported long distances but local factories dominate at most periods.

■ Terra Sigillata

A tradition of **red-gloss table wares** current in Western Europe from the first century BC until the third century AD. Probably the most widely distributed and intensively studied class of Roman ceramics. The products of the largest sigillata industries, such as those based at Arezzo (Italy) or near Millau (France) are found throughout the Mediterranean basin and across the northern Roman provinces and are an important source of dating evidence on many archaeological sites.

2. British Pottery

The tables overleaf list the various types of Roman-period pottery found in Britain. The website from which the tables were taken, at <http://potsherd.net/atlas/concordance/nrfrc>, also gives images for typical examples of each type of pottery.



Ware	Abstract	Class	From	To
Black-burnished 2	Wheel-thrown grey or black sand-tempered wares, typically everted-rim jars with burnished lattice decoration, bead-rim and plain dishes. Produced at sites around the Thames estuary (Kent/GB and Essex/GB) and distributed in south-east England and in northern Britain during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.	Coarse wares	120	250
Colchester colour-coated wares	Colour-coated beakers and other forms produced at Colchester (Essex/GB) and distributed across south and east Britain during the 2nd to 4th centuries AD.	Fine wares	120	250
Colchester mortaria	Mortaria manufactured at Colchester (Essex/GB) during 1st and 2nd centuries AD; wide distribution in eastern and northern England and southern Scotland during mid-late 2nd century AD.	Mortaria	40	200
Colchester terra sigillata	Terra sigillata manufactured at Colchester (Essex/GB) during mid-late 2nd century AD, with limited distribution in eastern England. Some of the potters working at Colchester had earlier operated at East Gaulish factories such as Sinzig and Trier (DE).	Terra Sigillata	155	180
Corbridge mortaria	Mortaria manufactured at or near Corbridge (Northumberland/GB) during the 2nd century AD; distributed across northern England and southern Scotland.	Mortaria	100	190
Crambeck wares	Grey wares, white wares and red-slipped produced near Crambeck (Yorkshire/GB) and distributed across northern Britain during the 4th century AD.	Coarse wares	300	410
Dales ware and Dales-type ware	Jars in coarse shell-tempered wares produced in the Lincolnshire and widely distributed across northern Britain during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.	Coarse wares	200	375
Derbyshire ware	Moulded-rim jars in hard grey wares produced in Derbyshire and distributed across central and northern Britain during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.	Coarse wares	140	350
Hadham red-slipped wares	Red wares produced in the area of Hadham (Herts/GB) and distributed across south and east England during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.	Fine wares	200	410
Late Roman grog-tempered wares	Coarse textured hand-formed grog-tempered jars, bowls and dishes produced in south-east England during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.	Coarse wares	270	410
Lincolnshire mortaria	Mortaria manufactured at several sites in and around Lincoln (Lincs/GB) during 2nd century AD; wide distribution across northern England and southern Scotland;	Mortaria	100	200
London-Essex stamped wares	Fine textured grey or orange wares with roller stamped decoration produced in the south-east England during the 2nd century AD.	Fine wares	70	125
Mancetter-Hartshill mortaria	Mortaria manufactured at Mancetter and Hartshill (Warks/GB) from the 2nd to 4th centuries AD; extensive distribution in midlands and northern England.	Mortaria	100	350
Nene Valley colour-coated wares	Fine table wares in a pale fabric with darker colour coat, often decorated with barbotine or painted decoration, produced in the Nene valley (Northants/GB) and widely distributed across Britain during the 2nd to 4th centuries AD.	Fine wares	150	410
Nene Valley mortaria	Mortaria manufactured in the Nene Valley potteries (Northants) from 2nd to 4th centuries AD; wide distribution in eastern England.	Mortaria	110	400
New Forest mortaria	Mortaria manufactured in New Forset potteries (Hants/GB) during 3rd and 4th centuries AD; distributed across southern Britain.	Mortaria	260	370
New Forest slipped wares	A wide range of fine tables wares produced in the New Forest (Hants/GB) and distributed across southern Britain during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.	Fine wares	260	370



Ware	Abstract	Class	From	To
North Kent shell-tempered storage jars	Large storage jars in coarse shell-tempered fabrics produced in northern Kent (GB) and distributed in south-east England and along the east coast during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.	Coarse wares	60	150
Oxfordshire red/brown-slipped wares	A wide range of red-slipped tables wares, often decorated with rouletting, stamps or white slip, produced in the Oxfordshire potteries (Oxon/GB) and widely distributed across Britain during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.	Fine wares	240	410
Oxfordshire white-ware mortaria	Mortaria manufactured in Oxfordshire potteries (Oxon/GB) from 2nd to 4th centuries AD; wide distribution across midlands and southern England.	Mortaria	100	410
Portchester fabric D ware	Jars, bowls and dishes in a coarse cream or yellow fabric, produced in the Surrey-Hampshire border region (GB) and distributed in southern England during the 4th century AD.	Coarse wares	300	410
Rossington Bridge Black-burnished ware	Jars and dishes in a hard grey sandy fabric produced at Rossington Bridge (nr Doncaster, Yorkshire/GB) with limited distribution in northern Britain during the 2nd century AD.	Coarse wares	140	180
Rossington Bridge mortaria	Mortaria manufactured at Rossington Bridge (nr Doncaster, Yorks/GB) during 2nd centuries AD; distributed in northern England and southern Scotland;	Mortaria	135	190
Savernake-type grey wares	Jars, bowls and dishes in a coarse grey ware produced at several sites in Wiltshire (GB) during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.	Coarse wares	40	300
Severn Valley wares	A range of orange or red-brown wares produced along the middle Severn valley and distributed across western Britain (and sparsely in northern Britain) from 2nd to 4th centuries AD.	Coarse wares	40	410
South Devon burnished ware	Jars and bowls in a hard grey or black ware produced in south Devon (GB) and distributed in south-west England during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.	Coarse wares	60	410
South Midlands shell-tempered wares	Jars, bowls and dishes in coarse shell-tempered wares produced in eastern England and distributed widely in Britain during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.	Coarse wares	300	410
South-east Dorset black-burnished 1	Coarse-textured hand-formed black sandy wares with burnished surfaces, typically everted-rim jars with burnished lattice decoration , flat-rimmed bowls and plain dishes. Produced in the Poole Harbour region (Dorset/GB) and distributed throughout Britain from the mid-2nd to 4th centuries AD.	Coarse wares	40	410
South-east England glazed ware	Flasks, beakers and bowls in a green-glazed grey ware, decorated with white barbotine, distributed in southern England during the 2nd century AD.	Fine wares	70	120
The 'London ware' style	A range of fine-textured grey or black wares with incised or compass drawn decoration produced at a number of sites in south and east England during the 2nd century AD.	Fine wares	70	150
Verulamium-region mortaria	Mortaria manufactured at Brockley Hill (Middx/GB) and St Albans (Verulamium, Herts/GB) and surrounding region during 1st and 2nd centuries AD; wide distribution in southern Britain and (more rarely) northern England and southern Scotland.	Mortaria	50	200
Verulamium-region white ware	Flagons, bowls and jars in a pale granular wares produced at Brockley Hill (Middx/GB) and the St Albans (Verulamium, Herts/GB) region and distributed in south-east England during the the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.	Coarse wares	50	200
Wilderspool mortaria	Mortaria manufactured at Warrington (Ches/GB) with distribution in north-west England, north Wales and southern Scotland during 2nd century AD.	Mortaria	110	190



3. Local pottery - Lower Nene Valley fabrics

Products of the Lower Nene Valley represented in the collection all belong to a single fabric, with three different surface treatments defined here as White, Parchment and Colour-coated ware. While there is variety in clay colour, from white to iron-rich tones, they form a continuum and therefore have been combined. The mortaria included here all date to the 3rd and 4th centuries.

■ General appearance

Typically the fabric is hard with a smooth or irregular fracture and smooth surfaces; under adverse soil conditions abrasion creates a powdery surface. In colour the ware is generally white, pink-buff, pale yellow, but occasionally orange or grey may occur, as may oxidised cores or margins in the same range of colours. Beakers and mortaria, particularly reed-rim and hammerhead varieties, are the most widely exported products.

■ Hand specimen

This fabric is characterised by well-sorted silt- to fine sand-sized quartz, red iron-rich inclusions, and red and white pellets, with the white more readily identifiable in iron-rich fabrics. Although not visible in our samples, fine black inclusions may also be present (L.Rollo, pers comm). The clay may contain fine sparse silver mica, but this is not a distinguishing feature. Quartz, the only common inclusion, is normally <0.1mm, although certain sherds, particularly the beakers amongst our samples, have sparse but regular larger grains to c 0.3mm. Colour-coated mortaria are usually in a finer textured fabric than the reed-rim ones (K Hartley, pers comm). Iron-rich inclusions and especially clay pellets, sometimes seen as streaks of poorly mixed clay, are known up to 2.0mm, although only the clay pellets/streaks tend to exceed 0.5mm. Trituration grits comprise abundant black slag, of varying average sizes, ranging between 1.5–3.5mm and 0.2–1.0mm on our two samples.

■ Thin section

Five samples were viewed in thin section and are united by having a groundmass of common well-sorted silt-sized inclusions, generally quartz but rarely feldspar, opaques or flint. Larger inclusions vary in frequency between samples, but generally measure up to c 0.5mm. In some samples fragments to 1.5mm of sandstones with ill-sorted constituents can be identified. The finer fraction of these sandstones are present in additional samples and some may correspond with inclusions defined as white clay pellets in the hand specimen. Additionally, matrix-coloured and iron-rich clay pellets, quartz-rich opaques and polycrystalline quartz are present. Only one section, with higher birefringence than the others, exhibits muscovite mica. Finally, slag trituration grits are visible.

■ Source

Lower Nene Valley products are associated with a number of kilns found throughout the area at Warsford, Stibbington, Sibson-cum-Stibbington, Chesterton, Water Newton, Yaxley, Normangate Field (Castor) and Stanground.

3.1 Nene Valley colour-coated wares

Fine table wares in a pale fabric with darker colour coat, often decorated with barbotine or painted decoration, produced in the Nene valley and widely distributed across Britain during the 2nd to 4th centuries AD.

■ Fabric and technology

Hard, smooth-textured fabric with finely irregular fracture; white to off-white (e.g. 7.5YR 7/6-8) orange-yellow (7.5YR 5/6) or darker grey or brown core with variable slip colour, dark brown to black, mottled lighter orange or orange-brown where thinner; abundant very fine quartz sand (visible at x20) and occasional larger quartz grains, red or orange and black flecks and occasional pale clay pellets (some streaking of these, and orange/black flecks, in the



matrix); decoration includes barbotine (both under and over the slip), rouletting, grooving, folding and some use of moulds – roughcasting almost unknown.

- **Forms**

Wide range of tablewares, including jugs, flagons and bottles, imitation samian forms, Castor boxes, cups and beakers. The latter are decorated in barbotine with hunting scenes ('Hunt cups') or human figures during 2nd and 3rd cent., barbotine scale work (3rd cent.) or white slip scroll and berry motifs (3rd-4th cent.). Some vessels (particularly in the earlier barbotine technique) are very ornate and depict religious scenes (Webster 1989). Limited production of stamp decorated samian-derived forms during early-mid 3rd cent. (Dannell 1973) and plainer vessels from later 3rd (e.g. Drag. 31, 36, 37, 45). During 4th cent. some coarse ware forms produced in colour coated fabrics (e.g. jars, dishes and flanged bowls).

Form	Description
26-57	Beakers
63-68	Flagons or jugs
75-77	Wide-mouthed jars or bowls
79	Flanged bowl
80-84	Imitation samian
87	Dish
89	Castor box (with lid)

Table1. Classification of Nene Valley colour-coated ware (after Howe, Perrin and Mackreth)

- **Chronology**

Production of colour-coated wares from mid-2nd cent., probably in the hands of immigrant (Lower Rhineland?) craftsmen. Some influence from East Gaulish sigillata industries during early 3rd cent. Production continues until end of 4th cent.

- **Source**

The Lower Nene Valley, centered on Water Newton.

- **Distribution**

Extent of mapped distribution incomplete due to confusion with other wares (e.g. Lower Rhineland imports and Colchester colour-coated wares) in older literature. Has been identified in Antonine groups from Verulamium and northern frontier. Probably most extensive during 3rd cent. prior to rise of Oxfordshire industry, but continues to hold large proportion of total market in eastern England into later 4th cent. partly due to production of 'coarse ware' forms.

3.2 Lower Nene Valley Parchment ware (LNV PA)

General appearance

Mortaria, bowls and face flagons were commonly produced in this fabric. As expected, parchment ware belongs to the iron-free end of the spectrum with break and surfaces varying between white, buff, cream or pale yellow (10YR 8/1–8/2, 10YR 8/4–7/4, 10YR 8/3–7/3). Occasionally oxidised cores are seen, in this case to pale orange (2.5YR 7/6), as are mottled surfaces in a variety of the oxidised shades. Painted decoration varies from orange-brown (5YR 5/6) to brown (5YR 3/1) or red-brown (2.5YR 4/3–3/3, 2.5YR 7/6–6/6), depending on how thickly it has been applied.



3.3 Mancetter-Hartshill mortaria

Mortaria manufactured at Mancetter and Hartshill (Warks/GB) from the 2nd to 4th centuries AD; extensive distribution in the Midlands and northern England.

■ Fabric and technology

Fine-textured fabric, often very hard; creamy-white, perhaps with pink or grey core, occasionally with a pale-brown wash; inclusions of fine quartz and occasional red-brown and white particles; gritted with either quartz and red-brown sandstone (on earlier specimens), or abundant red-brown or black angular grits (including ironstone or slag). Wheel-thrown.

■ Forms

Mortaria, the earliest resemble contemporary products of the Verulamium-region industry with a hooked flange, later a smaller flanged and higher bead. From c. AD 160 a new hammerhead style developed. Some painted with simple geometric patterns during 3rd cent. *Gillam 242, 253, 254, 257, 259, 261.*

Stamps

The chronological distribution of the principal named potters is shown below.

Potter	Date	
BONOXUS	120-160	
BRUSCIUS	140-170	
CANDIDUS ii	100-140	
CEVANOS	100-130	
CICRO CICRUS	130-160	
COERTUTINUS	100-140	
DOBALLUS	140-180	<-> NVMO?
DOCCAS	100-125	<- VRMO
ERUCANUS	100-130	
G. ATTIUS MARINUS	100-130	<- VRMO <- COMO
GRATINUS	130-165	
ICOTAGUS	130-160	
IUNIUS ii	150-185	
IUNIUS LOCCIUS	135-165	
LOCCIUS PRO.	130-165	
LOCCIUS VIBIUS	135-165	
MAURIUS	150-185	
MINOMELUS	135-165	
MOCO MOCUS	100-135	
MOSSIUS	145-185	
NANIECO	135-165	> WPMO
NIDUS	120-140	<- VRMO
RUICCO RUTICO	150-185	
SARRIUS	135-170	> RBMO
SENNIUS	160-185	
SEPTUMINUS	100-130	<- Little Chester
SIMILIS	135-170	> NVMO
SURUS	100-130	
VICTOR	100-130	<-> Little Chester?
VITALIS iv	115-145	

**■ Chronology**

From c. AD 100; some potters migrated from the Verulamium region industry (G. Attius Marinus, Doccas, Nidus) at this time. In some cases the same die occurs on both VRMO and MHMO products. From the mid-2nd cent. some MHMO potters moved north to workshops in Yorkshire (e.g. Sarrius). Stamping ceased at end of 2nd cent. but production continues into 4th cent.

■ Source

Around Mancetter and Hartshill, on the Warwickshire/Leicestershire border, where many kilns have been recorded and excavated. Painted wares, grey wares and other cooking wares produced alongside mortaria.

■ Distribution

Extensive in the Midlands and north between mid-2nd and early-4th cent (Bidwell 1985, 183). The distribution of stamps of the principal 2nd cent. AD potters is shown on