
TRAC Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference

www.trac.org.uk

Paper Information:

Title: Roman Finds Assemblages, Towards an
Integrated Approach?

Author: Jeremy Evans

Pages: 33–58

DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC1992_33_58

Publication Date: 31 March 1995



Volume Information:

Rush, P. (ed.) 1995. *Theoretical Roman Archaeology: Second Conference Proceedings*. Worldwide Archaeology Series, vol. 14. Aldershot: Avebury/Ashgate.

Copyright and Hardcopy Editions:

The following paper was originally published in print format by Avebury Press (an imprint of Ashgate). This volume is no longer in print, but hard copy editions may still be available from book dealers.

TRAC has now made this paper available as Open Access, after consulting the original publisher's rights office. Copyright remains with TRAC and the individual author(s), and all use or quotation of this paper and/or its contents must be acknowledged. This paper was released in digital Open Access format in April 2013.

ROMAN FINDS ASSEMBLAGES, TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED APPROACH?

Jeremy Evans

Since this paper was to be given to a Theoretical Roman Archaeology conference an attempt has been made here to examine a little the relationship between theoretical approaches and the generally pragmatic work of field archaeology in the context of Roman finds assemblages. It is assumed for the purposes of this paper that our basic task as archaeologists is to examine and analyse Romano-British society by means of reasoning about its material remains.

It does seem to this author, from his own basically pragmatic viewpoint, that there is a rather over-wide gulf between the development and propounding of theories on Romano-British archaeology and the day to day business of its recording and reporting, which in part reflects a division between those employed in Universities and those working in field archaeology. These might perhaps be crassly described as the 'two cultures' of Romano-British archaeology. This is not to denigrate theoretical approaches to Romano-British archaeology, they seem desperately needed as we acquire more and more data, but seem to get bogged-down in recording it, without the commensurate expansion of our understanding of the general processes taking place in Roman Britain.

Rather it seems to this author that theoretical approaches are generally too divorced from the material evidence and that, in turn, is often presented in manners which do not aid its synthetic analysis. It seems far too rarely that theories are tested against the evidence, which they usually can

be either directly, or by deduction of their material consequences were they to be true and then seeking these. It is recognised that the testing of theories will be a Bayesian process, where they may not be completely refuted, but they can at least be considerably weakened by failing to be consistent with the evidence.

This author's concern here is not to set about doing this, but to look at the other side of the equation, that mass of data that we spend much of our professional lives accumulating, and to suggest some lines of enquiry we might consider developing and a general approach which might facilitate the examination of theoretical approaches.

THE SAMPLE

Turning to our data, the first point to be made is that we select a very odd collection of sites from which to study the diocese. Most authorities estimate that around 90% of the population lived on rural sites, in villages or isolated settlements, but these seem to have evoked little interest and stimulated disproportionately few excavations and fieldwork projects compared with forts, towns and villas. Table 3.1 shows the numbers of rural sites excavated as a proportion of all excavations recorded in Britannia since 1970. Only excavations have been counted and those have been counted by the year, so that sites with several seasons of excavation will have multiple records. Most of the site classes are self-explanatory; 'other' principally comprises pottery kilns and temples. Excavations of field systems have not been counted, nor have the too frequent trenches across Roman roads.

Table 3.1. The incidence of excavations on Roman sites by site type and Britannia region (see Fig. 3.1).

Region	1969-1973								
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Site type									
Fort	60%	81%	62%	30%	12%	6%	0	6%	10%
Vicus	0	9%	15%	10%	0	0	0	0	0
Hillfort	7%	6%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1%
Town	5%	0	0	23%	27%	41%	60%	29%	30%
Villa	5%	0	0	15%	22%	10%	4%	23%	28%
Rural	14%	3%	21%	11%	21%	19%	8%	34%	17%
Other	10%	0	3%	11%	17%	25%	28%	9%	15%
n	42	32	39	133	180	69	25	101	178

1974-78

Region	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Site type									
Fort	49%	70%	55%	36%	8%	0	2%	14%	8%
Vicus	12%	15%	0	7%	1%	2%	0	1%	2%
Hillfort	2%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1%	0
Town	14%	0	21%	25%	41%	45%	76%	33%	30%
Villa	2%	0	0	9%	15%	5%	7%	22%	21%
Rural	14%	15%	18%	15%	25%	28%	2%	10%	18%
Other	7%	0	5%	7%	11%	22%	13%	15%	20%
n	43	47	38	151	165	65	46	72	142

1979-1983

Region	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Site type									
Fort	37%	85%	76%	32%	12%	3%	0	15%	4%
Vicus	2%	3%	0	15%	1%	0	0	3%	2%
Hillfort	7%	9%	0	1%	1%	0	0	3%	2%
Town	29%	0	21%	21%	30%	46%	84%	20%	22%
Villa	7%	0	0	12%	15%	5%	4%	18%	26%
Rural	19%	3%	0	14%	27%	26%	2%	21%	21%
Other	0	0	3%	5%	15%	21%	10%	20%	22%
n	59	33	33	108	122	39	49	80	134

1984-1988

Region	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Site type									
Fort	45%	93%	89%	37%	12%	9%	1%	8%	3%
Vicus	21%	3%	7%	11%	1%	2%	0	1%	1%
Hillfort	3%	0	0	4%	1%	2%	0	0	0
Town	18%	0	0	23%	30%	42%	73%	41%	42%
Villa	3%	0	0	2%	19%	5%	5%	25%	26%
Rural	7%	3%	4%	19%	19%	22%	0	14%	15%
Other	3%	0	0	12%	19%	20%	20%	11%	14%
n	62	29	28	91	108	65	79	92	122

1969-89

Region	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	All
Site type										
Fort	47%	82%	71%	33%	11%	4%	1%	10%	6%	21%
Vicus	9%	8%	4%	11%	1%	1%	0	1%	1%	4%
Hillfort	5%	3%	0	1%	0%	0%	0	1%	1%	1%
Town	18%	0	11%	23%	32%	42%	75%	53%	31%	31%
Villa	4%	0	0	10%	18%	7%	5%	22%	25%	14%
Rural	13%	7%	11%	13%	24%	24%	3%	20%	18%	17%
Other	4%	0	3%	8%	15%	22%	16%	13%	18%	13%
n	210	146	140	511	589	247	210	356	607	3016

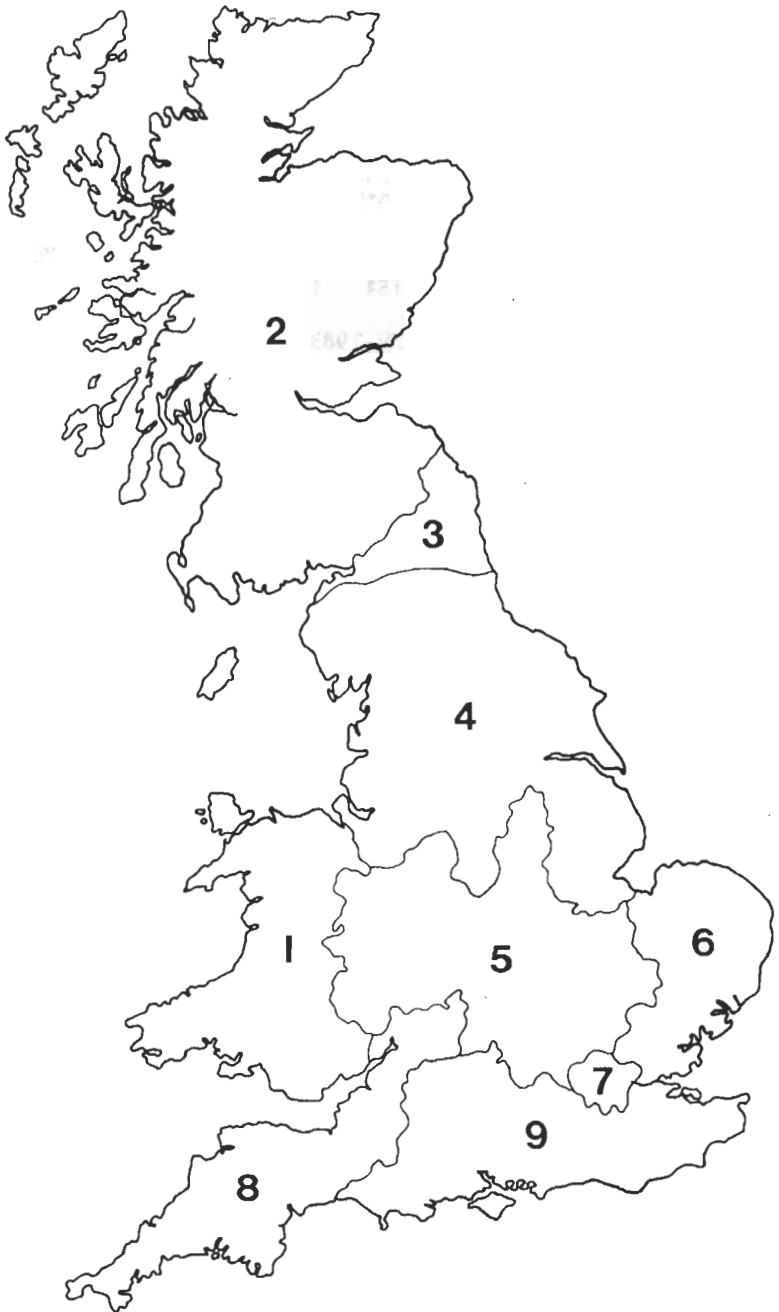


Figure 3.1. Map of the regions by which Britannia reports excavations.

Table 3.1 shows the data split into four blocks of five years and together as a twenty one year block. There are marked regional variations, and some shifts of emphasis with time, but the first point to emerge is that rural sites are grossly under-represented, overall comprising only 16.7% of the sites listed. This global figure hides some fairly consistent regional variations. Regions I-IV, ie Wales, Scotland, Hadrian's Wall and northern England are the regions in which rural sites are the most poorly represented, apart from London (for which the reasons are fairly obvious). The home counties, region IX, also has a fairly poor representation of rural sites, whilst the best regions are V, VI, and VII, the Midlands, East Anglia and the south-west. Worryingly the chronological trend seems to be against the excavation of rural sites; in 1969-73, 1974-78 and 1979-83 they formed 18% of all excavations reported, but in the following quinquennium, 1984-88, they fall to a mere 13% of excavations.

The totals of excavated sites shown in Table 3.1 reflect subjective perceptions of the impact of public expenditure policies since the later 1970s, falling from 799 in 1969-73 to 769 in 1974-78 and to 657 in 1979-83 with a slight rise to 676 in 1984-88 reflecting the rise of developer funding. It is clear from the figures, too, that the benefits of developer funding have been confined almost entirely to the Midlands and the south, adding further regional bias to our national sample. The Welsh Office (region I) seems to manage things better with a rise in the number of excavations from 1969-1988, whilst the number of Scots sites excavated in 1984-88 was only slightly fewer than in 1969-73.

Fulford (pers. comm.) rightly points out that these data on excavation numbers do not necessarily reflect the expenditure on excavations on different site types and evidence of this would be interesting (although difficult to obtain including developer funded excavations).

The reluctance to excavate rural sites must reflect the attitudes of funding bodies and the planning processes which tend to assess the importance of sites as individual units, without full regard to the development of research strategies which might elucidate more of the economy, social relations and identity of the rural population, and of its relationships to 'urban' and 'villa' centres. As an example of this tendency the number of fort excavations, 21% of all sites, compared with excavations of *vici*, 4% of all sites, suggests that Roman military archaeology still lacks interest in the civilian communities associated with forts.

QUESTIONS AND APPROACHES —————

Despite the devotion of a series of volumes to the *civitates* of Roman Britain we still know little of what are the material cultures of the diocese. The *civitas* volumes seem to have paid more attention to piecemeal chunks of the history and pseudo-history of the diocese than to examining material (culture) patterning within and across cantonal and regional boundaries. Interesting patterns would seem to exist in the evidence, take, for example, the division of the Dobunni into three groups on the basis of their coinage (Selwood 1989: fig 13.11), and the inclusion of the southern of these in the core distribution of BB1 types (which rarely, if ever, travel to the Midlands, Wales or the north), and the concentration of most hall villas within the Dobunnic territory as defined by Selwood (Millett 1990: fig. 87; note the *civitas* boundaries on this do not correspond with Selwood's). There are also enormous differences in the finds assemblages between highland and lowland zone sites (see below).

THE RECORD —————

Turning to the published archaeological record, much is said of archaeological reporting as preservation by record, but the record, as compared with the material and stratigraphic archive, is frequently incomplete and often delphic. As with pottery reports 25 years ago, many finds reports consist of detailed descriptions and parallels of individual objects of 'intrinsic interest', but with no indication of whether some, all, or a 'representative selection' of the particular type has been made (or of how much the editor has removed).

Pottery reports have slowly become quantified, or rather pottery fabrics are fairly often quantified relative to each other in publications, following Young's (1980) guidelines. This has been a fairly slow process, however, Griffiths (1989: 67) commented 'Exhaustive enquiries revealed that nowhere on the continent or in Britain could all these criteria be satisfied [of holding the data in consistent format required for her study]. Of the five most likely areas in Britain, only two local units could supply a consolidated form/fabric series for their local coarsewares, only one of which was available for immediate use in 1982 when these enquiries were made. The publication record for recent excavations was overall fairly good, but the almost total lack of quantification, even on sites published since 1980, was surprising.' Even when quantification has been done, and has included the

samian ware and mortaria, it is frequently impossible to discover how many vessels of which form occur in which phase. Sometimes pottery reports may be fully quantified, but very rarely is it then possible to establish how many, of which finds types, occur with the pottery. An excellent example of this is the good series of published pottery groups from a number of different rural and villa sites in the environs of Milton Keynes (Marney 1989). It would be of interest in the light of these and their use by Griffiths (1989) to quantify the glassware assemblages from the same groups against the proportion of fineware and to examine other aspects of the finds assemblages. However, the full glass report by Price (1987) has been edited: 'owing to limitations of space only the more interesting pieces have been described below' (Mynard 1987). Further analysis from the published record is therefore impossible, despite the use of microfiche in the volume, which one might expect to obviate such limitations. It is unclear which other finds categories have been dealt a similar fate.

Fulford (1975: 134) has suggested that the absolute quantity of pottery on Roman sites, especially in the south-east, may have been declining in the later fourth century. This is, in principle, a testable hypothesis, with interesting implications for assertions made about the later Roman economy. Unfortunately the test would require a record, or reasonably accurate estimate, of the volume of earth relative to the quantity of excavated pottery from an acceptable sample of sites, but to this author's knowledge, this information has been recorded on only two Romano-British excavations, Lynch Farm (Jones 1977) and Shipton Thorpe, even though this was done on the former in 1977! No doubt, *inter alia*, excavators are deterred from doing this by the knowledge that it is a tool of comparative method, and that without any other sites with which to compare their data they can do little with it apart from publishing and hoping that someone else will benefit. An analogous situation seems to have existed with pottery assemblages, where, following Hull's (1932) quantified report on the Yorkshire signal stations further quantified reports followed on late Roman assemblages (Gillam 1957; Corder 1961) but not on any earlier material.

What seems to be lacking in many published reports is any coherent philosophy of preservation by record. Instead the finds assemblage is fragmented into large numbers of individual specialist reports, but the finds officer/excavator responsible for collecting these makes little attempt to put them together again and examine trends in the assemblage as a whole. Thus the basic aim of the reconstructability of the assemblage from the record is often lost, despite the advent of microfiche which should

allow reconstructability at reasonable cost. (Even if microfiche is an outdated technology that would be better replaced by read-only ASCII computer discs and printed drawings (cf. Hen Domen: Barker and Higham 1982).

It now seems that it is not only reports published some time ago to which Pitt-Rivers (1887: xvii) comments are applicable:

Excavators, as a rule, record only those things which appear to them important at the time, but fresh problems in Archaeology and Anthropology are constantly arising, and it can hardly fail to escape the notice of anthropologists . . . that on turning back to old accounts in search of evidence, the points which would have been most valuable have been passed over from being thought uninteresting at the time. Every detail should, therefore be recorded in the manner most conducive to facility of reference.

The omens are still not too good as it appears that the basic ceramic evidence from urban sequences is supposed to be replaced by ceramic (only) syntheses (Fulford and Huddleston 1991). It also appeared that assessments of the post-excavation treatment of finds groups were likely to be made on a material by material basis (Wainwright 1990), or, if not, then only the more exceptional (and therefore atypical) groups were liable to be funded, although this emphasis seems now to have been modified (Wainwright 1991a: appendix 4, section 4.2.1.ii). However, nowhere in *The Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (Wainwright 1991a) is any commitment made to the reconstructability of the assemblage and the general system still appears to be designed to avoid publishing 'uninteresting' finds and the danger of this has been emphasised by the recent Society of Antiquaries discussion paper on archives and publication.

One of the reasons that the data are treated as they are may be that there is still little of an archaeology of Roman Britain in the sense of an interpretation of it based primarily on the material record rather than inspired by history or 'pseudo-history'. Millett (1990) noted that 'during the work on this book I have become intensely aware that some established opinions about the subject are based not on evidence, but on what have been called 'factoids'. These are pieces of information which have been so commonly repeated that they are almost indistinguishable from facts.' Interpretation in Romano-British archaeology is rarely 'firmly based in material and in the demonstrated relationships between different parts of that material' (Reece 1988). Lacking the basic data we tend to assert its nature on the basis of im-

pressions and then go on to interpret these.

Collingwood (1946: 149) commented:

'History' said Bury 'is a science, no less and no more.' There is a slang usage . . . according to which 'science' means natural science. Whether history is a science in that sense of the word, however, need not be asked; for in the tradition of European speech going back to the time when Latin speakers translated the Greek *episteme* by their own word *scientia*, and continuing unbroken down to the present day, the word 'science' means any organized body of knowledge. If that is what the word means Bury is so far incontestably right, that history is a science, nothing less.

He went on to say (1946: 251):

History then, is a science, but a science of a special kind. It is a science whose business is to study events not accessible to our observation, and to study these events inferentially, arguing to them from something else which is accessible to our observation, and which the historian calls 'evidence' for the events in which he is interested.

In both of these quotations archaeology could, with little modification, be substituted for history, but in large part a 'scientific archaeology' of Roman Britain has yet to develop and the phrase is generally employed for the piecemeal use of techniques borrowed from the natural sciences. The study of data to observe trends for which interpretations might be advanced and tested against further data is hampered enormously by the lack of fully and consistently published data.

INTEGRATED APPROACHES —————

This section is drawn principally from data easily at hand and does not purport to be a review. Its aim is to illustrate some types of approach and to sketch one or two possible trends in data which might repay further study.

Volume of excavated earth figures do exist for a Norman to post-medieval sequence from the Orange Grove excavations in Bath (O'Leary 1981; Evans and Millett 1992). Figure 3.2 shows the number of roughly contemporary and Roman residual sherds per cubic metre in the medieval sequence from these excavations and the numbers of roughly contempor-

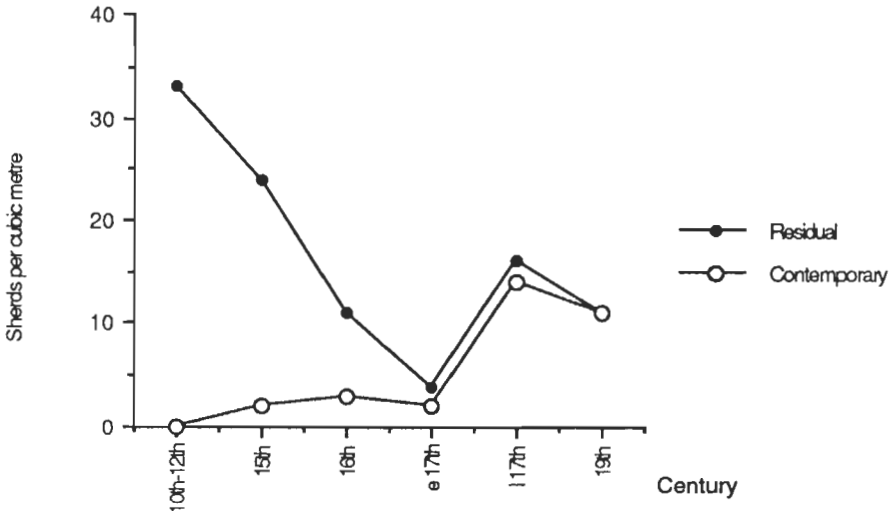


Figure 3.2. Bath Orange Grove pottery supply by volume of earth excavated (after Evans and Millett 1992).

ary and Roman and medieval residual sherds in the post-medieval part of the sequence. The sequence does offer some interesting possibilities with the absolute quantity of Roman material being much greater than medieval. Even in the late seventeenth century in this sequence Roman residual material is commoner than medieval residual sherds. This could merely be a product of the nature of this specific sequence where the Roman occupation was probably an intensively used area as it is less than 150m from the spring, whilst the medieval site consisted of the Abbey foundations and a cemetery and the post-medieval one was a public park.

One reason why the Bath sequence might reflect a more general trend comes from a functional analysis of the material from all periods (Evans 1985: tables 5.14 and 5.15) following the definitions used on Roman material by Millett (1979) and Evans (1985). There is clearly much less functional diversity in the medieval assemblage than amongst the Roman one and this diversity is only restored in the post-medieval period. A similar pattern can be seen in the similar analyses of a sequence from Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham (Evans 1991) and the medieval to post-medieval sequence from the Newcastle Castle ditch (Ellison 1981). The lack of functional diversity in medieval assemblages emphasises the point, more easily accepted for aceramic periods, that pottery is employed for a different range of activities in different periods, and if the range is comparatively

restricted the absolute quantity in use may well be less.

A further point emerges from these three medieval to post-medieval sequences from the function figures (and from the sequences of basic technology (handmade/wheelmade/moulded) and surface treatment (glaze type)). Developments seem to take place earliest in the Newcastle sequence, followed by the Bath one, with Chester-le-Street trailing behind, this would seem to reflect the social and economic status of the sites, a castle in a major 'port of trade', a prosperous southern town, and a back street site in a minor market town (cf. Weatherill 1988).

An interesting attempt to integrate interpretation of the finds assemblage from a site was made by Halstead, Hodder and Jones (1979), who utilised both variations in the levels of ceramic finewares and the classes of bone waste, examining these in relation to the types of features excavated and their spatial distribution. The authors concluded that 'though in the Iron Age there is little remaining evidence of spatial separation of activities on the site, past separation of activities in space and/or time resulted in segregation of different types of refuse. This is less the case in the larger more complex Roman site where there is more mixture of different types of rubbish' (Halstead et al. 1979: 130).

A similar study, regrettably unpublished, was made of the well and pit groups at Portchester utilising data on the principal pottery fabrics, fine-ware levels, functional groupings of the small finds and a rather more sophisticated division of the animal bone assemblage than that employed at Wendens Ambo (Creighton 1985). Consistent differences were demonstrated between the pit groups, characterised by a more industrial use, and the isolated pits and wells receiving domestic debris. This, together clearly defined discrete pit complexes, suggested a high degree of zoned activity on the site, consistent with a well-organised, presumably military, occupation (Creighton 1985: section 6). Interestingly, this is the second re-examination of these features, the first being by Millett (1979), which seems to reflect not weaknesses in the original report but rather its usefulness in providing the full data necessary for subsequent re-evaluation.

Figure 3.3 (Evans forthcoming b) shows the ratio of various common finds types relative to the quantity of pottery from the Roman fort at Segontium: the numbers of nails, tile fragments and bone fragments divided by the number of sherds of pottery. Figure 3.4 shows a similar diagram, calculated on the same basis, for three third century sequences from Gas House Lane, Alcester (Evans forthcoming c) and one of the later fourth century. Ideally the figures would be best standardised by the

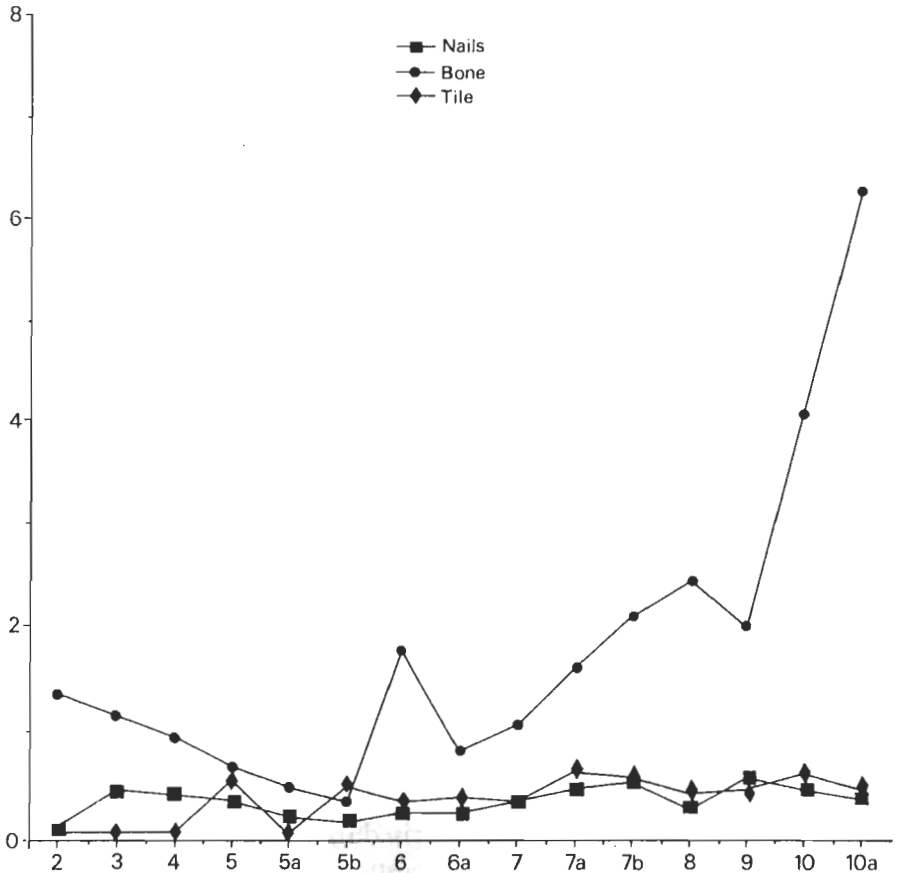


Figure 3.3. Ratio of common finds types by period at Segontium relative to the quantity of pottery.

volume of deposits excavated, but, this information was not available. Standardisation by the quantity of pottery does assume that, overall, the amount of pottery and the way it was discarded was similar in all parts of the Roman period, not an entirely reliable assumption. However, if the quantity of pottery is the main factor changing between phases then all three of the ratios being examined should change together. In fact in the Segontium sequence the data all change together only in period 7A, for which a fall in the quantity of pottery could be suggested.

Various interesting details appear in the Segontium sequence (Evans forthcoming b) such as in the apparent demolition debris (period 5A) of

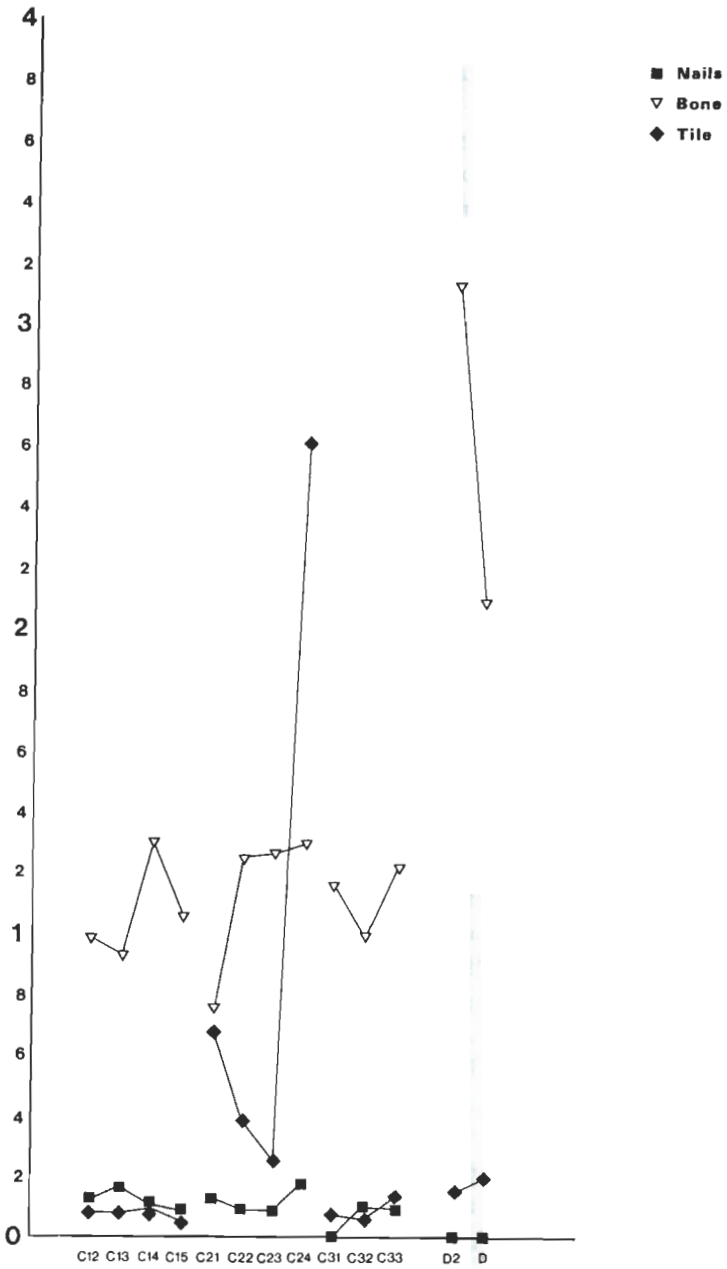


Figure 3.4. Ratio of common finds types by period at Alcester, Gas House Land, relative to the quantity of pottery.

the period 5 structures, which appears to represent a dump of outdated material, especially samian (King and Millett forthcoming) also contains fairly few nails, and very little tile. This seems to suggest that nails, and perhaps tile, were deliberately stripped from the building on demolition. But there is a fairly consistent change in the sequence from period 6, with the amount of animal bone rising sharply. The greater quantities of bone may reflect a change in waste disposal practices, which would not have needed to be as strict as previously since the population density of the area had fallen very considerably. Periods 6A and 7 are fairly similar to 6, but period 7A saw an increase in both bone, tile and nails. This could reflect a fall in the quantity of pottery in period 7A, but given structural evidence suggesting that the period 7 courtyard building was rather run down in this period a real increase in the quantity of refuse left around would seem likely.

The amount of bone further increases in period 7B, which is satisfactorily similar to period 8 with which it is at least partly contemporary. The quantity of bone continued to increase in period 10, no doubt from the back-filling of the pits with domestic waste, and there is a further rise in period 10A with domestic waste being dumped in the large disused drain across the site.

The Gas House Lane sequence (Fig. 3.4) shows similar basic trends to the Segontium one for the 3rd and 4th centuries. As in the former sequence all three third century sequences show a bone fragment to pottery ratio fluctuating around 1:1, this seems to be quite a general phenomenon (compare the 'Romanised' sites on Fig. 3.7). The quantity of tile in the sequences tends to suggest its use on the site from its inception and the proportion of nails seems to remain fairly constant. The only really notable deviations in the tile figures are in phases C21 and especially in phase C23. This latter was the only point in the third century sequences where *pilae* occur and it appears that a hypocaust has been demolished or refurbished somewhere in the vicinity of the site. The late fourth century groups from area A, phase D2, and phase D, dating to after c. AD 370 show an interesting change. The lack of nails no doubt reflects the lack of buildings in the areas with phase D deposits (whether in this phase or earlier) although there are quantities of tile, perhaps dumped along with quantities of domestic waste. The quantity of bone has risen markedly, as in the Segontium sequence, if not as greatly. In both these cases it is suggested that this phenomenon reflects a breakdown in previous waste disposal practices at this period. Similar changes can also be seen elsewhere: the tip of late Roman domestic

waste on the berm outside the city wall in Lincoln (Darling 1977) or the large spread of late fourth century material around the buildings and yard of the villa at Beadlam, North Yorks. (Stead 1971); and the large deposit including several pole-axed cattle skulls from the partially demolished *prae-furnium* of the later fourth century hypocaust of the 'Commandant's House' of the fort at Binchester, Co. Durham.

It is possible to see these figures as reflecting Fulford's (1975) suggestion that the absolute quantities of Roman pottery was in decline in the late fourth century. However, given that the quantity of pottery from period 10A at Segontium was very large, as it was from the Lincoln and Binchester deposits cited above this seems unlikely, as such, although only volume figures will show this. It might be possible, however, that there is a dichotomy between deposits in northern and western England and those in the south-east, given other suggestions (see below) of there being two different ceramic cultures in these areas by the late fourth century.

Figures 3.5 and 3.6 show the proportions of finewares from assemblages from various sites of early-mid and late fourth century date from northern and southern England. The figures, in fact, are not quite comparable as the northern ones (Evans 1985) include painted parchment wares, one of the principal late fourth century finewares in the region, whilst the southern ones are restricted to colour-coated wares, thus the northern figures are slightly higher than they might be. It is, however, clear that whilst there is a slight rise in the proportion of finewares in the north in the later fourth century, this does not generally amount to a level greater than 15% and the maximum value is below 25%.

In the south in the early fourth century the fineware level seems to be on average more like 10–20% and on, many, but not all, sites the fineware level rises markedly in the late fourth century. The average level is probably in the order of 25%, but quite a number of sites produce levels over 40%. A similar effect may be observed by comparing Hodder's map of the proportions of samian ware (Millett 1990: fig. 54) from assemblages in the south-west with his maps of the proportions of 3rd and 4th century finewares from the same area (Hodder 1974: fig. 8). (As Fulford (pers. comm.) has rightly commented there are some sub-regional trends within the broad brush approach being taken here, and these may prove of interest when regional studies of finewares and site status are made.)

A similar dichotomy can be seen developing between north and south in the functional use of pottery. In the third century the level of jars on sites in the north (Evans 1985: table 5.2) seems to be similar to those in the

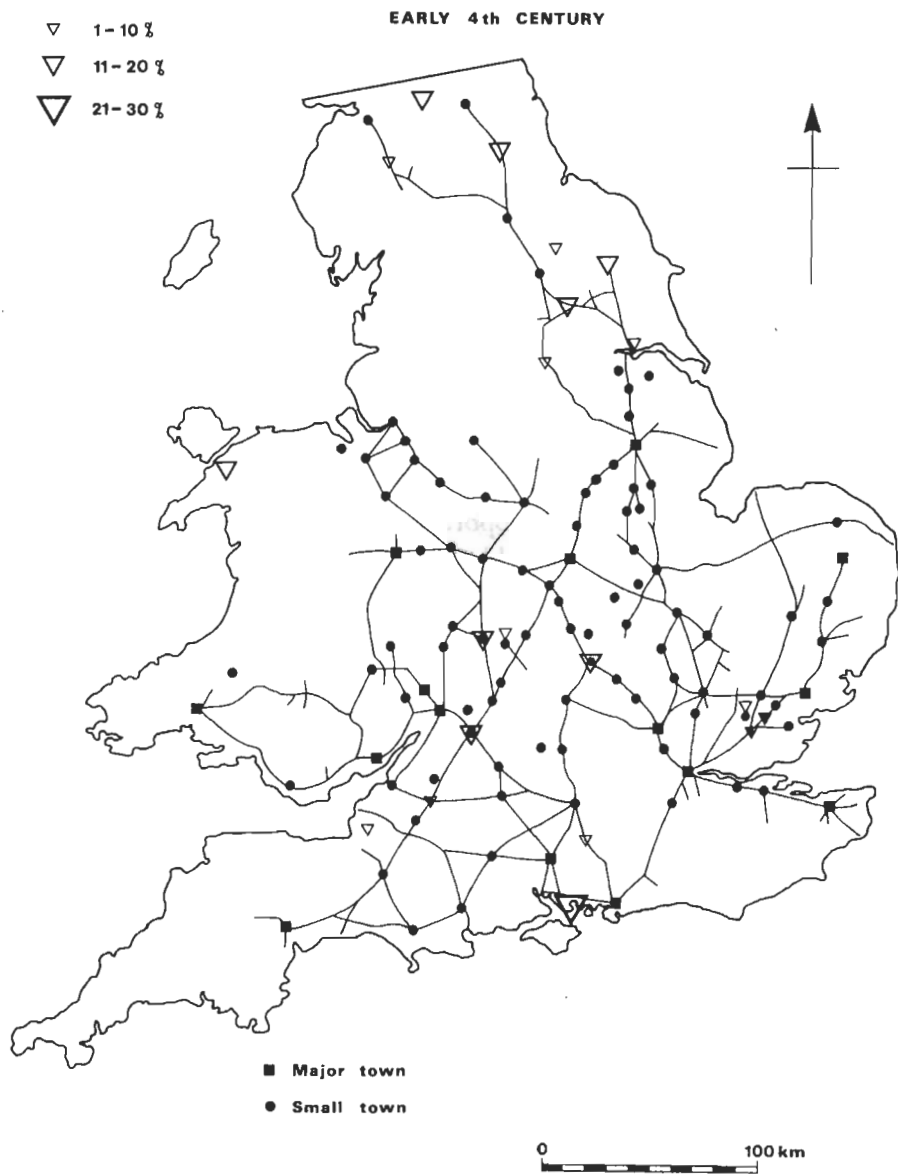


Figure 3.5. The proportions of finewares from various sites in the early fourth century.

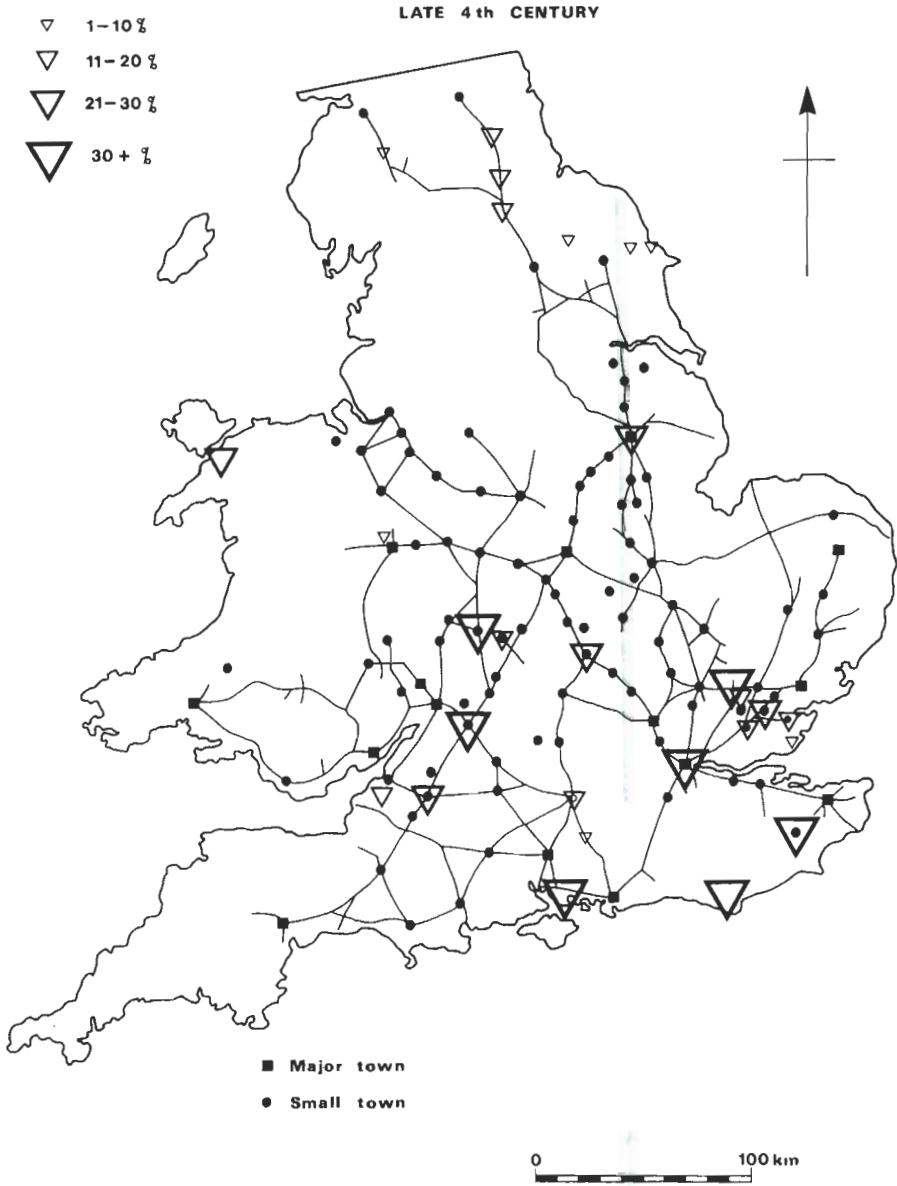


Figure 3.6. The proportions of finewares from various sites in the late fourth century.

south (Going 1987; Millett 1979; Millett 1983; Evans forthcoming c), but in the early fourth century this rises slightly in the north to a general range of 40–50% and in the late fourth century there is a further rise to levels generally above 50% and often markedly so. Meanwhile in the south the proportion of jars often falls to its lowest level in the late fourth century as the proportion of tablewares increases with the proportion of finewares. (Again some sub-regional trends may also be present such as the high levels of drinking vessels on some Severn Valley region sites) (Evans forthcoming a).

Undoubtedly the two phenomena sketched out above (Evans in prep.) deserve further study, but it seems that generally two different 'material cultures' of ceramic use were developing in 'Roman' Britain in the late fourth century.

Figures 3.7, 3.8 and 3.9 show the finds assemblages divided by basic material types standardised to finds per square metre (in default of volume figures this is believed to be a reasonable measure for sites without deep stratigraphy) from Roman and early post-Roman sites. Figure 3.7 shows the assemblages from six Roman rural sites, three, Elsted in West Sussex (Redknap and Millett 1980), Ower in Dorset (Sunter and Woodward 1987) and Bradley Hill in Somerset (Leech 1982), from the lowland zone, Roman Britain *proprie dictu*, and three, Milking Gap in Northumberland (Kilbride-Jones 1938), Graeanog in Gwynedd (Kelly forthcoming) and Staden in Derbyshire (Makepeace 1983) from the highland zone. Figure 3.8 in comparison shows the same data from three post-Roman sites, all with claims of rather higher status than the above Roman sites: Cadbury-Congresbury, Somerset, which has been suggested to be a monastic site (Fowler et al. 1970), Bantham, Devon, is interpreted as a port site (Silvester 1981) and phase 3C at Cowdrey's Down, Hampshire (Millett 1983). (For the latter site the area figures have been adjusted and only the roofed area of the settlement in this phase has been used.) Figure 3.9, for comparison, shows finds from area 7 for four succeeding third century phases at the small town of Alcester, Warwickshire. The deposits here are not deep, nor do they necessarily extend over the whole area of the trench in each phase and plotted by phase they are felt to be reasonably comparable with the other data.

These figures, from which the rest of this paper arises, were constructed to attempt to examine and illustrate differences in the finds assemblages between Roman and post-Roman sites. The selection of the sites is reasonably random, the main constraints being the difficulty of finding out the quantities of pottery and animal bone from sites and small finds reports which appear to be complete, and sites which appear to have been reason-

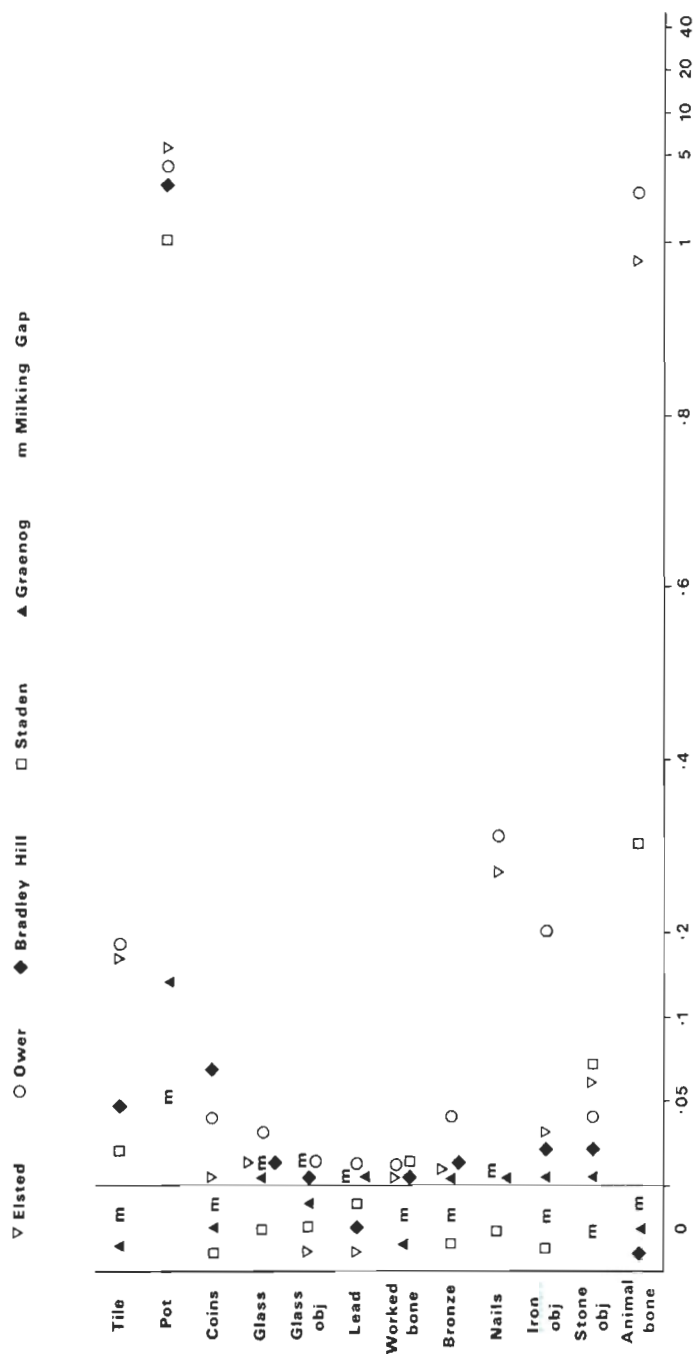


Figure 3.7. The frequency of finds occurrence standardised by site area from six Roman rural sites.

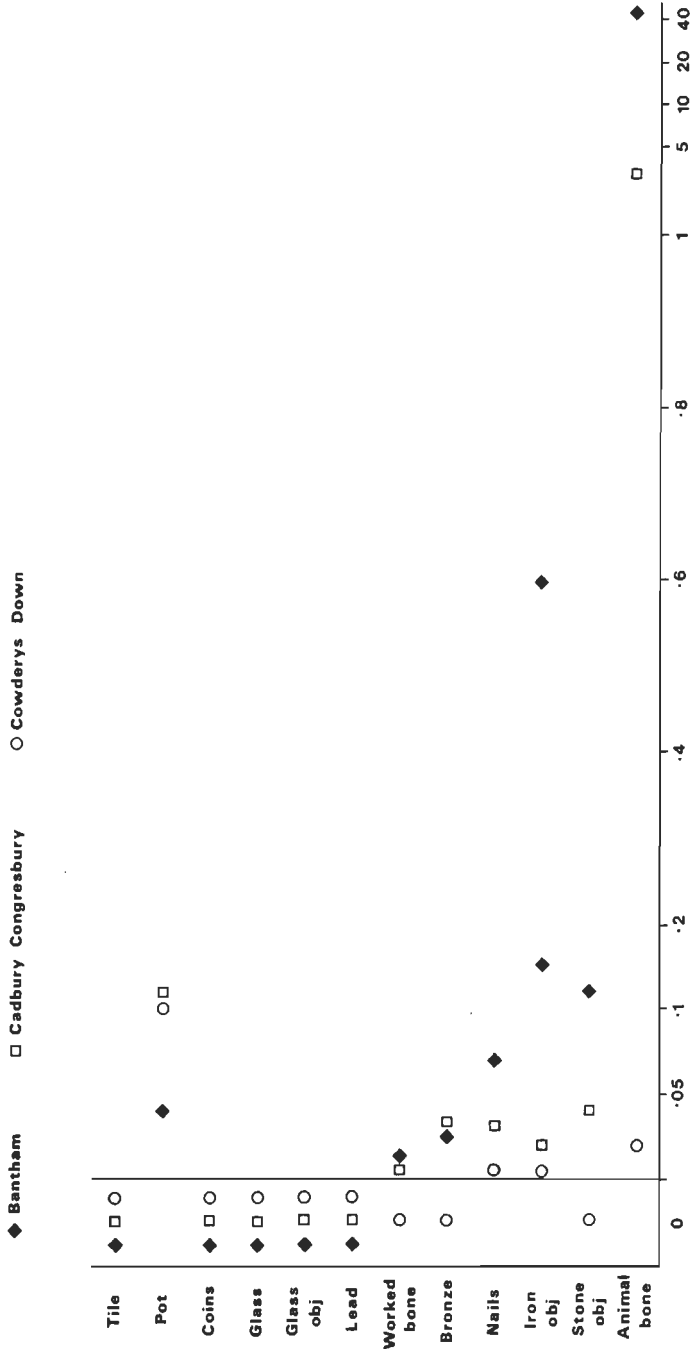


Figure 3.8. The frequency of finds occurrence standardised by site area from three post-Roman rural sites.

ALCESTER

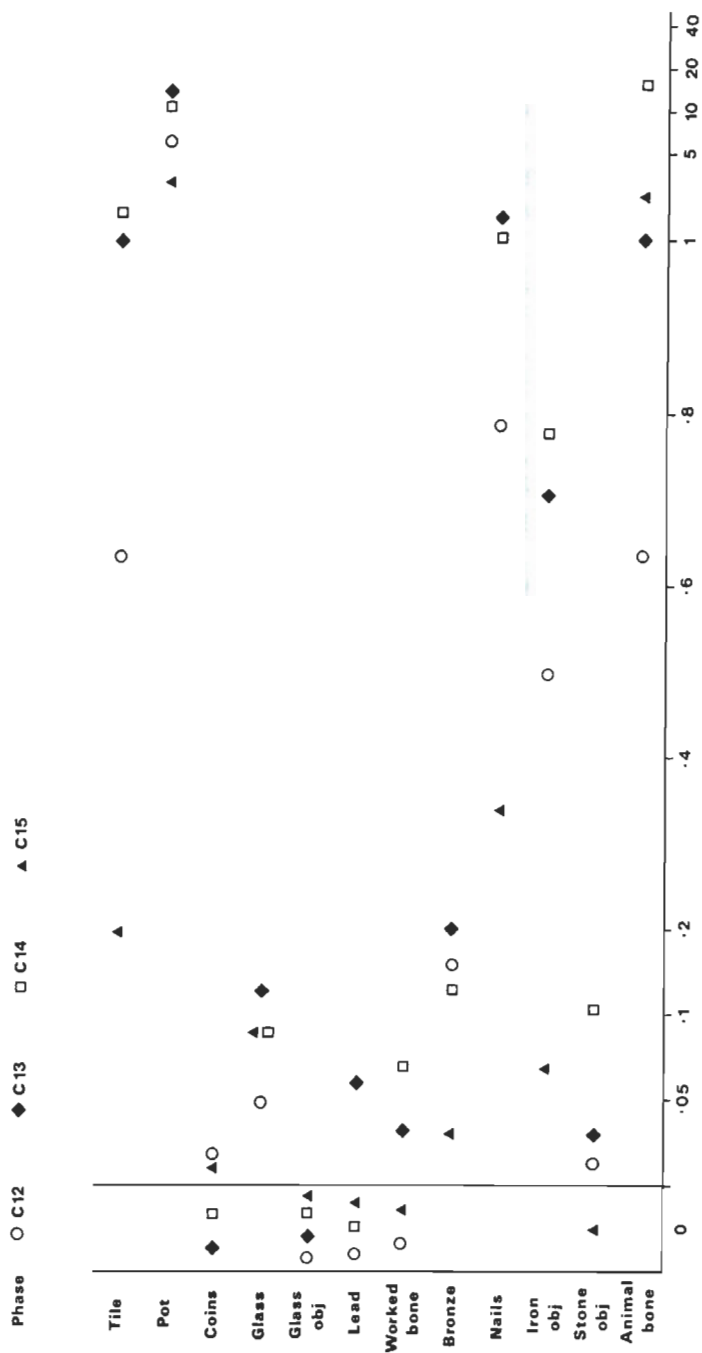


Figure 3.7. The frequency of finds occurrence standardised by site area from three phases at Gas House Lane, Alcester.

ably fully excavated within the limits of their trenches. Even so the number of nails from Bradley Hill is unreported as is the quantity of animal bone.

It is reasonably clear that the Roman lowland rural sites have much more pottery, as expected, but also more nails, sometimes more iron and definitely a wider range of material types than the post-Roman sites which were probably of a higher status. Figure 3.7 further emphasises the considerable material dichotomy between highland and lowland zone rural sites, the highland zone sites quite often having lower finds levels than on the post-Roman sites, although they do have a rather wider selection of finds classes and a little more pottery. Regional variations within highland zone sites in fact seem to be exhibited in the quantity of pottery, with Pennine and Cumbrian sites having very little, but those in North Wales, at least, having rather more (cf. Gidney 1986; Dore 1983; Going and Marsh forthcoming; Evans forthcoming d, e and f). Interestingly one of the four categories of finds types both highland and post-Roman sites tend to have more of than lowland Roman rural sites is stone artefacts, hones, whetstones, quernstones, etc., in part this is no doubt related to geological conditions, but also probably to the fact that this material type is available everywhere and does not necessarily rely on trade or exchange for its provision.

One interesting implication of this illustration of the highland/lowland division between 'Roman Britain' and the contemporary 'Celtic West', is in the role of the military *vici* in the 'Celtic West', especially in north-western England. These were clearly not centres providing goods and services for the surrounding countryside in the same way as such settlements, in Yorkshire for example. Leaving aside possible reasons for this, the simple lack of reasonable quantities of 'Romanised' goods on the rural sites demonstrates it. It is much more probable that the *vicani* formed an alien blot on the landscape, along with the forts (quite probably even speaking a different language from the surrounding rural population). The disappearance of these sites in the 4th century, compared with the continued occupation of such sites in Yorkshire until the end of the century is eloquent testimony to the differences of function between these sites in the two regions (Evans 1984).

The Alcester urban sequences, in contrast to those discussed above, might suggest that in the third century this small town may still have functioned as a central node for the distribution of goods, with much higher densities of finds and a wider range of finds types than on the rural sites examined. (This is not a consequence of residual material, the particular

site being occupied *de novo* at this time).

It would seem from this sketchy and very preliminary survey that many data remain to be studied in comparative examination of the finds assemblages from Roman sites, however, Honorius's letter of AD 410, to Bruttium or Britain (Rivet and Smith 1979), is only the end of the world for Romanists and such comparisons with both early and high medieval sites (and even post-medieval sites) might prove revealing in a *longue durée* approach. Indeed it would seem to be in the early post-medieval period that many Roman type features of assemblages reappear, perhaps one of the benefits of the unseen hand of money taxation and government expenditure, rather than providence? (cf. Evans 1990; Pearce 1942; Hill 1980).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has attempted to show that there is considerable scope for the development of the study of Roman finds assemblages and a Romano-British archaeology, but that one of the prerequisites for this is the capacity to express sites as a matrix of associated finds and that some method of absolute quantification such as the volume of earth excavated is needed. Volume figures are not a panacea, and will not necessarily provide the grounds for simple comparisons between groups: factors such as context type will also need to be taken into account. However, in the absence of data, the difficulties which may be encountered when they exist remain speculative. The ability to examine sites as a matrix of associated finds will not in itself solve any problems, but will provide a basis for the realistic comparison of, and the systematic examination of trends in, the archaeology. Hypotheses to explain patterning in the data might then be proposed and their material corollaries tested: a *sine qua non* for the development of a rigorous and mature archaeology, as opposed to a history or culture-history, of Roman Britain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Chris Scull, Martin Millett and Mike Fulford for comments on drafts of this paper which have improved it considerably (particularly the former for his sterling work on the English). The author, however, remains solely responsible for the opinions expressed and all remaining errors. The illustrations are the work of Nigel Dodds and Steve Rigby.

Bibliography

- Barker, Philip and R. Higham 1982. *Hen Domen, Montgomery*, v. 1. London: R.A.I.
- Collingwood, Robin G. 1946. *The Idea of Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Corder, Philip C. 1961. *The Roman Town and Villa at Great Casterton, Rutland*, Third Report.
- Creighton, John 1985. Portchester Castle; an Investigation into the Analysis of Site Finds. Unpublished undergraduate dissertation, University of Durham.
- Cunliffe, Barry and David Miles (eds), 1984. *Aspects of the Iron Age in Central Southern Britain*, 191-204. Oxford.
- Darling, Maggi 1977. *A Group of Late Roman Pottery from Lincoln*. London: Council for British Archaeology (for Lincoln Archaeological Trust, 16.1).
- Dore, John 1983. The Pottery. In Nicholas Higham and G. Barri D. Jones (eds), *The Excavations of Two Romano-British Farm Sites in North Cumbria*. *Britannia* 14:67-70.
- Ellison, Anne 1981. The pottery. In Barbara Harbottle and Anne Ellison (eds), *An Excavation in the Castle Ditch, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1974-6*. *Archaeologia Aeliana* (ser. 5) 9:95-164.
- Evans, Jeremy 1984. Settlement and Society in North-Eastern England in the Fourth Century. In Peter Wilson, Richard F. J. Jones and David M. Evans (eds), *Settlement and Society in the Roman North*, 43-48. Bradford.
- Evans, Jeremy 1990. From the End of Roman Britain to the 'Celtic West'. *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 9.1:91-103.
- Evans, Jeremy 1991. The Chester-le-Street Pottery. In Jeremy Evans, Richard F. J. Jones and Percival T. Turnbull (eds), *Excavations at Chester-le-Street 1978-9*. *Durham Arch. Journal* 6: fiche 83-130.
- Evans, Jeremy forthcoming a. The Bidford Grange (BG91) Pottery. In Nicholas Palmer (ed.), *Report on excavations at Bidford Grange, Warks*. *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society*.
- Evans, Jeremy forthcoming b. The finds synthesis. In John Casey, John L. Davies and Jeremy Evans (eds), *Excavations at Segontium 1975-79*. London: Council for British Archaeology.
- Evans, Jeremy forthcoming c. The Gas House Lane Pottery. In Stephen Cracknell (ed.), *Excavations at Gas House Lane, Alcester*. In Stephen Cracknell *Roman Alcester*, 3, *the Defended Area*. London: Council for British Archaeology.
- Evans, Jeremy forthcoming d. The Graeanog Pottery. In Richard Kelly (ed.), *Report on Excavations at Graeanog, Gwynedd*. *Archaeologia Cambrensis*.
- Evans, Jeremy forthcoming e. The Pottery from Bryn Eryr, Anglesey. In David Longley (ed.), *Report on Excavations at Bryn Eryr*. *Archaeologia Cambrensis*.
- Evans, Jeremy forthcoming f. The Ewan Rigg Pottery. In Robert Bewley (ed.), *Report on Excavations at Ewan Rigg, Cumbria*.

- Evans, Jeremy in prep. Function and Finewares; Some Trends in Romano-British Ceramics. *Journal of Roman Pottery Studies*.
- Evans, Jeremy and Martin Millett 1992. Residuality Revisited. *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 11(2):225-240.
- Fowler, Peter J., R. S. Gardner and Philip Rahtz 1970. *Cadbury Congresbury, Somerset 1968: an Introductory Report*. Bristol.
- Fulford, Michael G. 1975. *New Forest Roman Pottery*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports (British Series 17).
- Fulford, Michael G. and Karen Huddleston 1991. *The Current State of Romano-British Pottery Studies: a Review for English Heritage*. London: English Heritage (occasional paper 1).
- Gaffney, Vince and Martin Tingle 1989. *The Maddie Farm Project: an Integrated Survey of Prehistoric and Roman Landscapes on the Berkshire Downs*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports (British Series 200).
- Gidney, Louisa J. 1986. The Pottery. In Ken Fairless and Dennis Coggins (eds), Excavations at the Early Settlement Site of Forcegarth Pasture South, 1974-5. *Durham Arch. Journal* 2:34.
- Gillam, John P. 1957. The Coarse Pottery. In E. J. W. Hilyard (ed.), *Cataractonium, Fort and Town*. *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 39:224-265.
- Going, Christopher 1987. *The Mansio and Other Sites in the South-Eastern Sector of Caesaromagus; the Roman pottery*. London: Council for Brit. Archaeol.
- Going, Christopher and Geoffrey Marsh forthcoming. The Pottery from Cefn Graeanog. In R. White (ed.), *Report on Excavations at Cefn Graeanog, Gwynedd*. *Archaeologia Cambrensis*.
- Griffiths, Karen 1989. Marketing Roman pottery in Second Century Northamptonshire and the Milton Keynes Area. *Journal of Roman Pottery Studies* 2:67-76.
- Hodder, Ian R. 1974. Some Marketing Models for Romano-British Coarse Pottery. *Britannia* 5:340-359.
- Halstead, Paul, Ian R. Hodder and Glenis Jones 1978. Behavioural Archaeology and Refuse Patterns: a Case Study. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 11:118-131.
- Hill, Christopher 1980. *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714*. 2nd ed. London.
- Hingley, Richard 1989. *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain*. London: Seaby.
- Kilbride-Jones, H. E. 1938. The Excavation of a Native Settlement at Milking Gap, High Shield, Northumberland. *Archaeologia Aeliana* (Ser. 4) 15: 303-350.
- King, Anthony and Martin Millett forthcoming. The Samian. In P. John Casey, John L. Davies, and Jeremy Evans, *Excavations at Segontium 1975-79*. London: Council for British Archaeology.
- Makepeace, G. A. 1983. A Romano-British Settlement at Staden near Buxton. *Derbyshire Arch. Journal* 103 (1984):75-86.
- Marney, Pauline T. 1989. *Roman and Belgic Pottery from Excavations in Milton Keynes 1972-82*. Aylesbury: Bucks. Arch. Society (monograph 2).

- Millett, Martin 1979. An Approach to the Functional Interpretation of Pottery. In Martin Millett (ed.), *Pottery and the Archaeologist*. London: London Institute of Archaeology (Occasional Publication No. 4).
- Millett, Martin 1983. Excavations at Cowdrey's Down, Basingstoke 1978-81. *Archaeological Journal* 140:151-279.
- Millett, Martin 1990. *The Romanization of Britain; an Essay in Archaeological Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Millett, Martin and David Graham 1986. *Excavations on the Romano-British Small Town at Neatham, Hampshire 1969-79*. Winchester.
- Mynard, Dennis (ed.) 1987. *Roman Milton Keynes: Excavations and Fieldwork 1971-82*. Aylesbury: Bucks. Arch. Society (monograph 1).
- O'Leary, Timothy 1981. Excavations at Upper Borough Walls, Bath, 1980. *Medieval Archaeology* 25:1-30.
- Pearce, B. 1942. Elizabethan Food Policy and the Armed Forces. *Economic History Review* (ser. 1) 12:39-46.
- Pitt-Rivers, A. H. L. F. 1887. *Excavations at Cranbourne Chase*, vol. I. London.
- Price, Jennifer 1989. Glass. In Mynard 1987, 147-157.
- Redknap, Mark and Martin Millett 1980. Excavations on a Romano-British Farmstead at Elsted, West Sussex. *Sussex Arch Collections* 118:197-229.
- Reece, Richard 1988. *My Roman Britain*. Cirencester.
- Rivet, A. L. F and Colin Smith 1979. *The Place Names of Roman Britain*. London.
- Selwood, Lynn 1984. Tribal Boundaries Viewed from the Perspective of the Numismatic Evidence. In Cunliffe and Miles 1984.
- Silvester, R. J. 1981. An Excavation on the Post-Roman Site at Bantham, South Devon. *Devon Arch. Society Proceedings* 39:89-118.
- Stead, Ian M. 1971. Beadlam Roman Villa: an Interim Report. *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 43:178-186.
- Sunter, J. and Peter Woodward 1987. *Romano-British Industries in Purbeck*. Dorset Natural Hist. and Arch. Society (monograph no 6).
- Thomas, Charles 1966. *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain*. London: Council for British Archaeology (Research Report 7).
- Wainwright, Geoffrey 1990. *The Management of Archaeology Projects*. London: Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England.
- Wainwright, Geoffrey 1991a. *The Management of Archaeology Projects* 2nd edn. London: Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England.
- Wainwright, Geoffrey 1991b. *Exploring Our Past: Strategies for the Archaeology of England*. London: Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England.
- Weatherill, Lorna 1988. *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760*. London.
- Young, Christopher J. 1980. *Guidelines for the Processing and Publication of Roman Pottery from Excavations*. London: D.A.M.H.B. (Occasional paper 4).