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'Time's wheel runs backwards or stops; potter and clay endure'

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Addresses in honour of Bernard Rawes, the late President of the Society, delivered at Clifton Cathedral, Bristol, 16 March 1996

‘Time’s wheel runs backwards or stops; potter and clay endure’: a tribute to Bernard Rawes’s contribution to Roman pottery studies

By JANE TIMBY

The name of Bernard Rawes is one which will always be associated with the Roman archaeology of Gloucestershire. Numerous publications to be found in the Society’s *Transactions*, as well as in national journals such as *Britannia*, are testament to his archaeological endeavours. Indeed it is easy to forget that Bernard was essentially a self-taught archaeologist, his work carried out on a purely voluntary basis stemming from personal interest. My own acquaintance with Bernard only dates from 1983 when I came to Gloucestershire to work on the Roman pottery from Henry Hurst’s excavations in Gloucester. Although my knowledge of Bernard as a person is limited — he was very much a private man — it is difficult to work on Roman sites or artefacts in Gloucestershire and not be familiar with his work. This has been particularly highlighted recently during a reappraisal of Roman nucleated settlement in the Cotswolds, a project funded by English Heritage,¹ where Bernard’s work at the small Roman town at Wycomb has proved very useful.² One recurrent feature of several of Bernard’s excavations is the often restricted or difficult nature of the sites he investigated. The work at Wycomb was in advance of the building of the Andoversford bypass and was carried out, in its later stages, alongside the actual road construction. Although many might disagree with some of his conclusions or interpretations, nobody could fault Bernard for the prompt and meticulous publication of his findings. Amongst other things he made a valuable contribution to Roman pottery studies for Gloucester.

The primary focus of Roman occupation in the Gloucester area was at Kingsholm, where Ermin Street met the Severn. A fort or fortress was established there *c.* A.D. 49. For reasons perhaps not yet completely understood a new legionary fortress was subsequently established on the site of the present city of Gloucester and was occupied after A.D. 66. As the army moved across the country, areas were handed over to the civilian authorities to be organised in such a way as to develop the economy, to maintain law and order, and to romanise the native population. The Roman answer to these problems was to create urban settlements. The highest ranking of these was the *colonia*, specifically established to accommodate retired army veterans, and such a settlement was built to replace the legionary fortress at Gloucester. It is generally agreed that Gloucester (*Glevum*) was established in the reign of the Emperor Nerva (A.D. 96–8).

Despite a long history of Roman occupation there is a general paucity of evidence for the pottery production which must have been common in the locality. Although this situation tantalizingly still prevails, the discovery of the remains of a pottery kiln in Gloucester in 1966 has proved extremely valuable in attempts to understand early pottery supply to the *colonia*.

In 1966 during building work on the site of the College of Art in Brunswick Road, opposite the

city library, workmen discovered some burials and then a potter's kiln. Mr. John Rhodes of Gloucester Museum immediately mounted a salvage campaign to rescue material that had been exposed, but he was unable to conduct further work. The discoveries came to Bernard's attention and, with the builder's permission, he undertook a rescue dig working with other volunteers in the evenings and at weekends between August 1966 and March 1967. This was one of Bernard's first sorties into field archaeology and, despite obviously limited access to the archaeology alongside the building works, it motivated his further interest in Roman sites and in pottery studies.

Further investigations at the College of Art site uncovered a second kiln and various other features. In terms of location the site falls just outside the south-east wall of the *colonia*. The kilns, both damaged by later digging, were updraught circular structures, each with a fixed integral pedestal.³ It was originally thought that the main period of production was Flavian, but this conclusion was drawn before any detailed study of pottery had been done in Gloucester and before the large sites of the 1960s and 1970s had been investigated by others. The kilns were important because they represented the first evidence of pottery production in Gloucester. One unusual and particularly interesting feature of the College of Art kilns was the recovery of a number of clay pipes, presumed to come from the superstructures. These are an uncommon find. Possibly the only real British parallel is a very unusual 2nd-century kiln at Colchester thought to be associated with samian production.⁴ The tubes were most likely used to create roof vents, but they could have formed some other part of the structure. Whatever their specific purpose, as Bernard himself pointed out, they suggest a fairly sophisticated kiln structure.

In the late 1960s a second pottery production site came to light during excavations by Henry Hurst in Berkeley Street. Interestingly the site fell within the walls of the *colonia*, an unusual location for an industrial activity which was normally restricted to areas outside the defences. The College of Art and Berkeley Street kilns produced vessels in an identical range of fabrics. The vessels include white-slipped flagons, hemispherical bowls, jars, beakers, lids and mortaria in both orange and grey fabrics. A small proportion of mica-slipped fineware was also found. At Berkeley Street, reinterpretation of the site, combined with a study of the waster material associated with the kiln, had indicated that the potter or potters were working in the later Flavian period.⁵ The layers below the kiln horizon contained identical fabrics indicating an earlier phase of production dating to the Neronian–Flavian period. The technology associated with the production of the vessels and the range of forms, which are distinctly Roman and thus foreign to most native Britons at that time, strongly suggest that the potting was undertaken by immigrants, either potters following in the wake of the army or military personnel. The vessel types have a distinctive Flavian aura, many still reflecting characteristic continental features which generally tend to become devolved by the 2nd century.

The College of Art kilns were probably slightly later than the Berkeley Street example. Subsequent pottery work and keyhole observations by people like Patrick Garrod in every hole or service trench opened up within the city have allowed a slight refinement of the dating. It is likely that the area occupied by the College of Art was metalled during the Flavian period of military occupation and again after the *colonia* had been established *c.* A.D. 120–5. This leaves a period of some 20–35 years between the metallings which was probably the time when the potters established themselves. The production thus probably dates to the late Flavian or early Trajanic periods and undoubtedly supplied the newly founded *colonia*. As the Berkeley Street kiln appears to be slightly earlier it is interesting to speculate whether the Berkeley Street potters, presumably using land temporarily undeveloped in the interval between the demolition of the military barracks and subsequent *colonia* development, were evicted by the developers. They may well have moved to the College of Art site outside the wall.

Subsequent work by Patrick Garrod on the site of the rugby ground at Kingsholm in the

1980s has revealed another pottery production site, also dating to the early Roman period. Undoubtedly many more such sites remain to be discovered.

Before Bernard's work the only study of pottery made for Gloucester was by Charles Green, who in 1943⁶ coined the term Glevum ware for an orange ware typical of the area. Some of the vessels selected by Green are clearly produced by the Gloucester kilns but others came from another local industry somewhere in the lower Severn valley and are known colloquially as Severn Valley ware. Green conflated two industries with different chronological ranges and Bernard recognised this confusion. Severn Valley ware is ubiquitous in the area, where it is to be found on every Roman site dating from the 1st to the 4th century. Unlike Gloucester kiln ware, which seems to occur outside the city rarely, Severn Valley ware was marketed over a large area extending from Somerset northwards to the Antonine Wall and broadly following the line of the M5 and M6 motorways along the course of a little recognised Roman trade route. For such an extensive industry it is a mystery why more production centres have not been found. In Gloucestershire the only known kiln is at Alkington, alongside the M5 motorway.⁷ Outside the county kiln sites have been found in the Malvern area and near Birmingham.⁸ There are obviously many more sites to be found and the Gloucester hinterland is probably a key area.

Severn Valley ware became one of Bernard's preoccupations. In 1982⁹ he published a synthetic paper attempting to produce a dated typology for the region. Much of the material was drawn from the numerous sites he himself had investigated, e.g. the Portway in Upton St. Leonards, Brockworth, Wells' Bridge in Barnwood, Haymes in Southam, Vineyards Farm in Charlton Kings and Tredington Rise in Stoke Orchard.¹⁰

The present picture emerging for Gloucester is that the two separate military installations at Kingsholm and Gloucester city were basically self-sufficient in terms of pottery.¹¹ While it may be anticipated that a certain amount of pottery came as luggage, it was clearly more practical to establish a local supply. It is thus likely that potters were part of the military entourage; most native potters would be unversed in Roman forms and technology. Different cuisine and eating habits required a different repertoire of vessels such as flagons, table wares, and mortaria. The range of vessels from Kingsholm strongly indicates that kilns were established in the Neronian period to produce flagons, lamps, mortaria and the like. With the construction of the second fort a new local supply was established to produce a slightly different range of wares in fabrics quite different to those found at Kingsholm. The potter, or potters, attached to the new legions may well have come from elsewhere, thus introducing new forms and techniques. It would appear that these potters, or their successors, remained in Gloucester for at least two or three generations after the establishment of the *colonia* and supplied pottery to local people. The lack of recognisable Gloucester products outside the city suggests a small market but one which initially faced little competition. A temporary decline in the availability of samian in the early Trajanic period may have encouraged the College of Art potters to experiment with fine mica-slipped wares for a short period.

By the mid 2nd century pottery production in Gloucester seems to have given way to market pressure from the rapidly expanding Severn Valley ware industry. That seems to have developed from a small localized rural industry to one of the major providers of pottery in the west of England. Indeed it seems that the Gloucester potters latterly focused on production of grey kitchen wares, perhaps having already lost the market for the orange wares in which the Severn Valley potters excelled, and that any table-ware requirements were met by imported samian wares.

Although one forgets sometimes that he was not a trained archaeologist but essentially an amateur, Bernard's professional style of recording puts many professionals to shame. It is clear that without his work, coupled with that of his wife Barbara, much archaeological

information providing a useful springboard for future research and interpretation would have been lost.

Notes

1. Timby, J.R. (forthcoming). *Kingscote: a Roman Estate Centre in the Cotswolds with a review of other nucleated settlements in the region* (Cotswold Archaeol. Trust Monograph).
2. Rawes, B., 1980. 'The Romano-British site at Wycomb, Andoversford', *TBGAS* 98, 11–55.
3. Rawes, B., 1972. 'Roman pottery kilns at Gloucester', *TBGAS* 91, 18–59; 1978. 'Roman pottery kilns at Gloucester: a supplementary note', *ibid.* 96, 77–8.
4. Hull, M.R., 1963. *The Roman Potters' Kilns of Colchester* (Soc. Antiq. Res. Rep. 21, London), 20–34.
5. Timby, J.R., 1991. 'The Berkeley Street pottery kiln, Gloucester', *Jnl. Roman Pottery Studies* 4, 19–31.
6. Green, C., 1943. 'Glevum and the Second Legion', *Jnl. Roman Studies* 33, 25–37.
7. Fowler, P.J., and Bennett, J., 1973. 'Archaeology and the M5 Motorway: second report', *TBGAS* 92, 21–81.
8. Cf. Webster, P.V., 1976. 'Severn Valley Ware: a preliminary study', *ibid.* 94, 18–46.
9. Rawes, B., 1982. 'Gloucester Severn Valley Ware', *ibid.* 100, 33–46.
10. Portway (1984): *ibid.* 102, 23–72; Brockworth (1981): *Britannia* 12, 45–78; Wells' Bridge (1977): *TBGAS* 95, 24–39; Vineyards Farm (1982): *Glevensis* 16, 17–19; (1983): *Glevensis* 17, 40; Tredington Rise (1971): *TBGAS* 90, 26–34.
11. Cf. Timby, J.R., 1990. 'Severn Valley Wares: a reassessment', *Britannia* 21, 243–51.

Roman Samian Ware: a study in detection

By PETER WEBSTER

Bernard Rawes was one of the few people not earning their living by archaeology who have, in recent years, ventured into samian studies. He can thus be placed in the tradition of 'amateur' samian study which goes right back to Felix Oswald and T. Davies Pryce in the earlier years of this century — distinguished company indeed. It seems entirely appropriate, therefore, that part of this substitute for a Presidential Address should include a discussion on Roman samian ware.

The object here is not to talk about a specific piece of samian but rather to look generally at how samian was made and couple this with a review of our changing ideas about the organisation of the samian industry. This will lead to a consideration of how ideas about the identification of those making decorated vessels is changing.

The study of decorated samian hinges on attempts to find out who made the individual sherds which are generally what is recovered from excavations. This is where the 'detection' of the title of this piece comes in. However, to understand the detective work required to identify an individual maker, we first of all need to look at the way in which samian was made.

Manufacturing processes appear to have been remarkably similar at all the many centres of Gaulish samian production. This may be the result of an industry dictated to by its middlemen who were seeking a standardised product made by a set method (cf. Picon 1993). However, it does allow us to look at just one centre, La Graufesenque, and use it to illustrate the methods of all major producers.