

ROMAN POTTERY PRODUCTION IN LINCOLNSHIRE:

Ian Rowlandson

After a brief introduction to the geology and geography of Lincolnshire Ian focussed on the area around Market Rasen. He told us how the first evidence of pottery production had been revealed following a plane crash in 1964, and much of the early excavation had been carried out (well) by local schools. Later developer-funded study took place at the site of what is now Tesco, which is how Ian became involved.

Ian showed how the location of a clay pit had been chosen because it was near an area of wind-blown sand, which would not have been suitable for crop growing but was convenient for the potters as 'temper material'. As well as pits and kilns, these sites needed a water source (used in cleaning the clay as well as creating the pots), and would have had workshops as well as wheels. Near each kiln there was a rake-out area, the layers in which are a good source of information on the history of the site and what it produced. The process would have taken two days: one for the kiln and one for the pots. The kiln and potstands were made of typically orange clay, but to create the authentic grey pottery oxygen had to be excluded from the kiln. Wood was used as fuel, though coal, peat and turves would have been options. The potters would have aimed for 95% success, though fragments and 'wasters' were found on site. Ian showed a 1970's video of a reproduction kiln being built, loaded and used. This was a very helpful illustration, as well as a reminder of some terrible hairstyles!

The surrounding landscape was wood pasture, as evidenced by pollen and animal bones. There had been a ditch around the clay pit, thought to be to prevent stock falling in. This had been recut several times, as shown by lines representing outward migration. People living there also made charcoal, and carried out metalworking.

Most of the pottery produced at Market Rasen was everyday fare. The fine pottery was confusingly called Parisian ware, after a local tribe which was not in fact in that area anyway. The Parisi were mainly from north of the Humber. (Pottery tends to be named after the place it was first discovered, rather than where it was made.) The potters could work anywhere, probably on sites protected by a landowner, who traded the pots to raise money. When resources were exhausted they moved on. In medieval times a potter lived and worked in his own (small) space.

The pots would most likely have been moved to market using local rivers. The kilns at Market Rasen were in an area comparatively sparsely populated by other kilns, so there would have been a relatively wide trading zone. Decline would have followed the departure of the Romans, when people reverted to using home-made pots, or metal or wooden containers.

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