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# Journal of Roman Pottery Studies

# Journal of Roman Pottery Studies

Volume 15

*edited by*  
*Steven Willis*

ISBN: 978-1-84217-500-2

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*for*

The Study Group for Roman Pottery

### **Dedication**

The Study Group Committee dedicate this volume to Ted Connell who has given so much to the Group over many years. Ted joined the Group over 25 years ago; he has served as Group Treasurer (1994–2003) and developed the Group's Website from 2001.

Thank you Ted!

# Contents

Contributors to this Journal	ix
Editorial	x
Obituaries	
Gillian Braithwaite <i>by Richard Reece</i>	xi
John Dore <i>by David Mattingly</i>	xii
Vivien Swan <i>by Steven Willis</i>	xiv
1 Beyond the confines of empire: a reassessment of the Roman coarse wares from Traprain Law <i>Louisa Campbell</i>	1
2 Romano-British kiln building and firing experiments: two recent kilns <i>Beryl Hines</i>	26
3 New data concerning pottery production in the south-western part of <i>Gallia Belgica</i> , in light of the A29 motorway excavations <i>Cyrille Chaidron</i>	39
4 A characterisation of coastal pottery in the north of France (Nord/Pas-de-Calais) <i>Raphaël Clotuche and Sonja Willems</i>	61
5 Raetian mortaria in Britain <i>Katharine F. Hartley</i>	76
6 Two Flavian to early Antonine Romano-British pottery kilns at 7a Fisher Street, Carlisle <i>Melanie Johnson, Alex Croom, Katharine F. Hartley and Ray McBride, with contributions by Sue Anderson, Mike Cressey, Andrew Heald, Fraser Hunter, Adam Jackson and Jennifer Thoms</i>	96
7 Exports from Iberia: understanding the production of Lusitanian amphorae and their significance in Roman commerce between the first and fifth centuries AD <i>Andrew Philip Souter</i>	140
8 A brief history of the ceramic mortarium in antiquity <i>Robin P. Symonds</i>	169

## Contents

9	Rare and exotic amphorae in North-West Europe: finds from the Roman fort on the Kops Plateau, Nijmegen <i>Joost van den Berg</i>	215
10	The samian ware from Cardean and the Flavian occupation of Scotland <i>Felicity C. Wild</i>	236
11	Research Framework for samian ware, 2012 <i>Gwladys Monteil, Naomi Sykes, Steven Willis and Edward Biddulph</i>	248
12	Reviews	256
	<i>Faces from the Past: A study of Roman Face Pots from Italy and the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire</i> , Gillian Braithwaite†, 2007 <i>Reviewed by Robin P. Symonds</i>	256
	<i>La Graufesenque (Millau, Aveyron), Vol I: Condatomagus, une Agglomération de Confluent en Territoire Rutène II<sup>e</sup> s. a. C. – III<sup>e</sup> s. p. C.</i> , D. Schaad ed. 2007, and <i>La Graufesenque (Millau, Aveyron), Vol II: Sigillées Lisses et Autres Productions</i> , M. Genin ed. 2007 <i>Reviewed by Joanna Bird</i>	257
	<i>Salaisons et Sauces de poissons en Italie du Sud et en Sicile durant l'Antiquité</i> , E. Botte, 2009 <i>Reviewed by Robin P. Symonds</i>	262
	<i>Amphores vinaires de Narbonnaise, Production et grand commerce. Création d'une base de données géochimiques des ateliers</i> , F. Laubenheimer and A. Schmitt, 2009 <i>Reviewed by Robin P. Symonds</i>	264
	<i>Échanges et vie économique dans le Nord-Ouest des Gaules. Le témoignage des amphores du II<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C. au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.-C.</i> , F. Laubenheimer and E. Marlière, 2010 <i>Reviewed by Robin P. Symonds</i>	266
	<i>La céramique romaine en Gaule du Nord. Dictionnaire des céramiques: La vaisselle à large diffusion</i> , R. Brulet, F. Vilvorder and R. Delage, with the collaboration of D. Laduron, 2010 <i>Reviewed by Robin P. Symonds</i>	268

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# Beyond the confines of empire: a reassessment of the Roman coarse wares from Traprain Law

*Louisa Campbell*

“The hillfort of Traprain Law is crucial to any study of interactions between Rome and the indigenous population in southern Scotland... although extensively excavated and argued over, many features of its history and significance remain obscure, and it has attracted many, often contentious theories” (Hunter 2009a)

## *1. Introduction*

There has been a long history of interest in Roman and indigenous interaction in Northern Britain (eg Curle 1932; Richmond 1958; Robertson 1970; the term Northern Britain, as used here, refers to the area now covered by Scotland while the term North Britain refers to the area of Scotland and northern England); however, these enquiries have been generally unidirectional from a Roman stance. More recent theoretically informed debate has stimulated the reassessment of many long-held traditional readings of this period (eg Slofstra 1983; Woolf 1998; Mattingly 2004; Hingley 2005; Hunter 2007a). These new approaches have forced a re-appraisal of material culture and seek alternative perspectives (*cf* Said 1993) to understand how communities in situations of contact adopted, adapted and used foreign material culture in a culturally specific and relevant manner (Kopytoff 1986; Thomas 1991; 1992). Previous tendencies to ‘fit’ evidence into the framework of biased historical accounts are recognised as inadequate (Owen 2005, 7) and the focus is currently upon variability in the archaeological record before, during and after contact to consider longer-term social changes which may have occurred in any site under scrutiny.

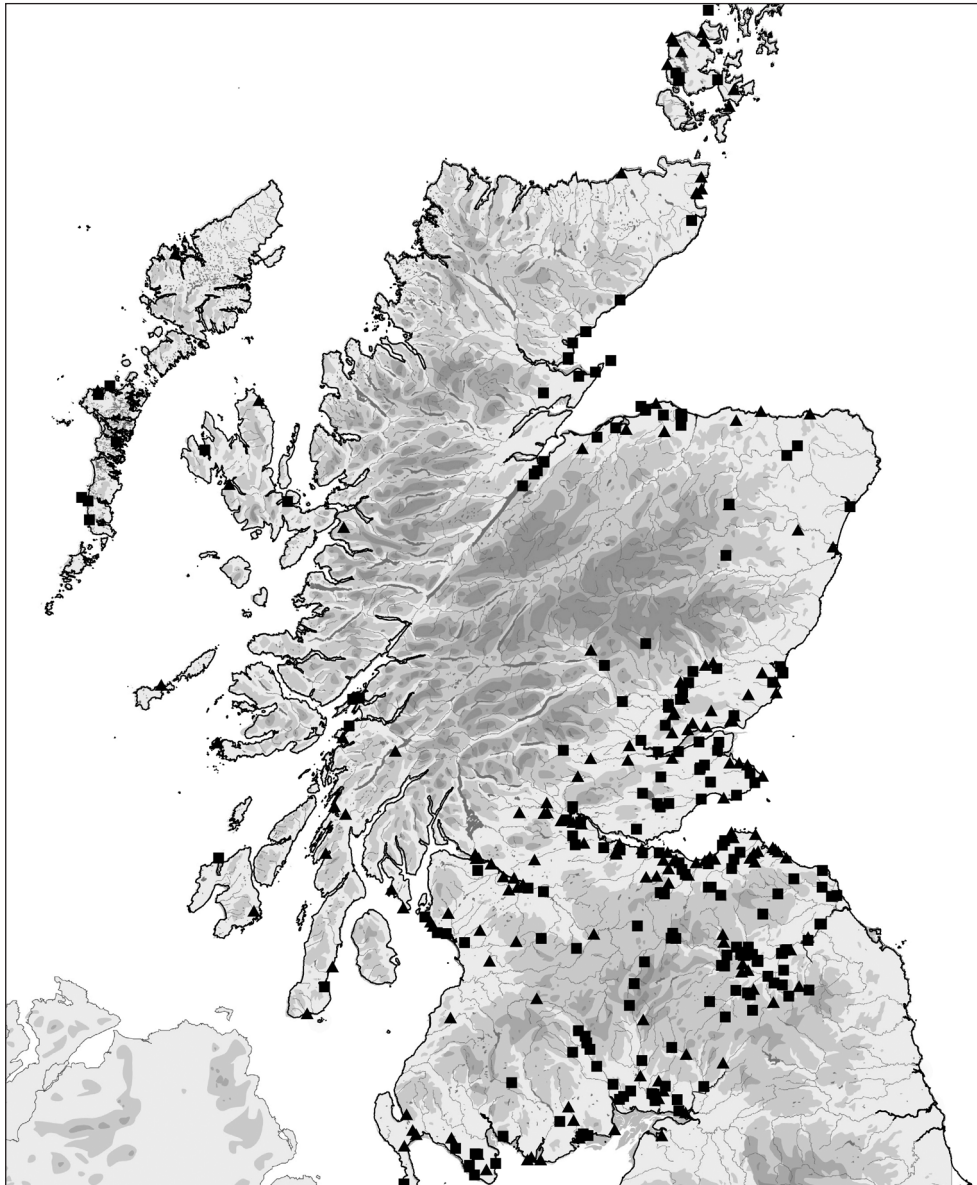
This paper stems from a much wider study of Roman pottery recovered from non-Roman contexts across Northern Britain (Campbell 2010) to consider the issue of interaction, or interfacing (Collins 2008), between

Rome and provincial societies and to determine how these objects functioned in new social settings (Kopytoff 1986). Having never been subject to holistic reassessment to modern standards of illustration, categorisation, publication or archiving (Darling 2004), the Roman ceramics recovered from the foremost known Northern civil centre at Traprain Law, East Lothian will provide the foundations for ongoing analyses of difference across the region, taking account of local and regional (Terrenato 1997, 24) as well as intra-regional (van Dommelen 1997) variation.

Hunter (2009a, 237) recently posed the question: “how unique is Traprain?” This is a particularly relevant enquiry as Traprain Law has always held a pivotal role as the principal elite site in the North. This status is largely due to the diversity and quality of recovered material, particularly Roman objects, as well as the hillfort’s commanding position in the landscape. However, its perceived uniqueness sits against a background of being the most extensively excavated Iron Age site in the North, a situation which has created and perpetuated a not insubstantial bias on both the research agendas of past academics and the evidence available to those who may wish to pose alternative questions of the data. Such imbalance cannot be redressed in this short paper and the current offering is therefore intended to present a holistic account of the coarse wares recovered from the site in order to ensure that the data are hereafter available for others to interrogate.

## *2. Traprain Law – Setting the Scene*

Roman objects reached a large number of sites across the North (Fig 1) and the material is unsurprisingly concentrated in the buffer zone between the two mural barriers and the eastern lowlands beyond the Antonine Wall. Thought to have been a Votadinian centre, Traprain



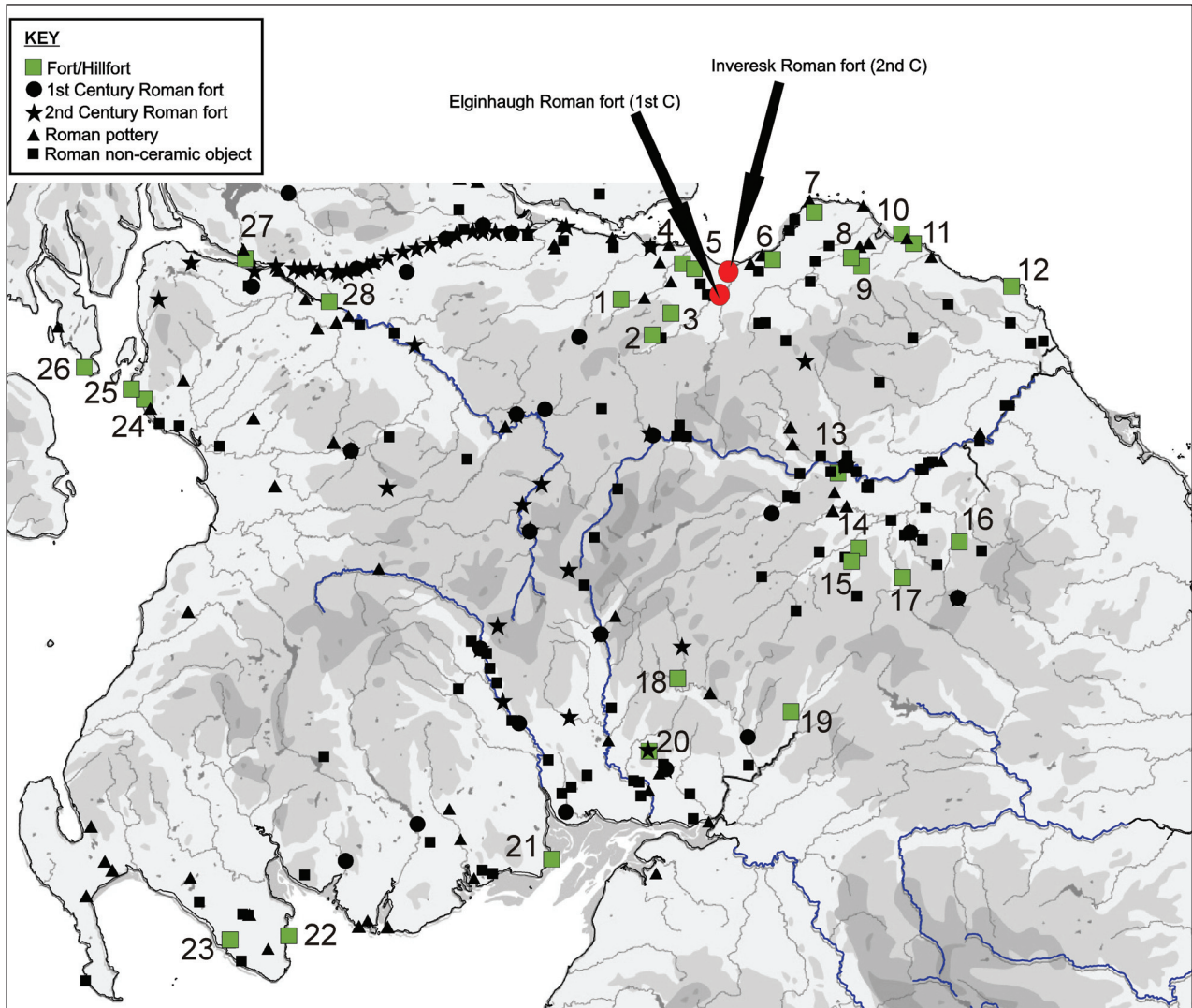
*Fig 1: The location of Roman objects from non-Roman contexts in Northern Britain*

Law is one of twenty eight lowland forts known to have received Roman goods (Fig 2). Situated on a massive volcanic outcrop amidst a plateau in East Lothian (Fig 3), Traprain's location has traditionally been thought to have been chosen for its defensive capabilities. However, the material evidence suggests that the site has seen human occupation from the Neolithic to the medieval period which may, in fact, imply a place of great cultural significance stretching over millennia.

The emphasis upon Traprain is perhaps understandable given its position as the most extensively studied Northern site combined with having the largest Roman pottery assemblage recovered from any non-Roman site. The lack of synthesis of the numerous publications and absence of a modern reassessment of the pottery has perhaps

perpetuated the notion of Traprain's unique character and this study will analyse the Roman coarse wares from the site to determine whether such a status still has merit. An analysis of the types of vessels present on Traprain will also provide the raw data to facilitate future inter and intra-regional comparisons of the pottery from across Northern Britain as the research progresses.

Cree and Curle's earliest excavations on Traprain Law focussed upon the western plateau just below the hill crest from 1914 to 1915, followed by a more extensive programme from 1919 to 1923 (Curle 1915; 1920; Curle and Cree 1916; 1921; Cree and Curle 1922; Cree 1923; 1924; see site plan, Fig 3b, gridded squares A-T). Despite these prolific seasons of excavation and later work by Cruden (1940), Bersu's trenching of the



Key to site names:

1	Kaimes Hill	8	Traprain Law	15	Ruberslaw	22	Cruggleton
2	Braidwood	9	Whittinghame	16	Hownam Rings	23	Fell of Barhullion
3	Castlelaw	10	Castle Park	17	Edgerston	24	Seamill
4	Edinburgh Castle	11	Broxmouth	18	Castle O'er	25	Auldhill
5	Arthur's Seat	12	Earnsheugh	19	Kirk Hill	26	Little Dunagoil
6	St. Germain's	13	Eildon Hill North	20	Burnswark	27	Dumbarton Rock
7	Craig's Quarry	14	Fast Castle	21	McCulloch's Castle	28	Yorkhill

Fig 2: Scottish Lowland forts with Roman objects

rectangular enclosure to the east of the summit cairn (Close-Brooks 1983, fig 5.1), combined with Feachem (1958) and Strong's (1984) rampart investigation and rescue excavations carried out on the summit after an extensive fire (Rees and Hunter 2000; Armit *et al* 2005; Armit *et al* in prep.), the chronological sequencing of Traprain Law has yet to be irrefutably determined. However, the evidence is suggestive of activities being undertaken on the site from the Neolithic through the

Bronze Age and Roman Iron Age, and then early to later medieval period (Rees and Hunter 2000, 435).

Interpretations of sites such as Traprain Law, which have been extensively studied and discussed as potential client states of Rome (eg Breeze 1982, 57), are, similarly, not without controversy. Much uncertainty surrounds whether the site was continually occupied from the later Bronze Age to the fifth century AD (Burley 1956; Hill 1987) or whether it functioned as a focus of ceremonial

activity or settlement (Hill 1987; Breeze 1996, 113–4; Armit 1997, 102–3; Armit and Ralston 2003, 180; Armit *et al* 2005). Hill (1987) considers Traprain to have been abandoned before the Roman presence and thereafter used in a ceremonial capacity until it was refortified after disruptions in the late or post-Roman period. However, reliance upon negative evidence for Roman material culture makes this stance questionable (Hill 1982a, 10; Burgess 1984, 171–2; Close-Brooks 1987).

The more recent assessment of the artefactual evidence by Erdrich and others (Erdrich *et al* 2000) appears to demonstrate the functional as opposed to ceremonial nature of the site throughout its occupational sequences, although neither activity need be mutually exclusive (Brück 1999). It is entirely possible that Traprain held ideological significance throughout its periods of use (Yeoman 1999, 16–28), although the current archaeological evidence cannot irrefutably support this hypothesis (Rees and Hunter 2000, 437).

The structural remains appear to confirm alterations in the later Roman period coinciding with a rise in Roman goods (Hunter 2009a, 235). Refortification around the late fourth–early fifth century AD followed by short-lived reoccupation until the end of the fifth century is potentially paralleled in North Wales (Arnold and Davies 2000) and radiocarbon dating evidence from the nearby enclosure at Whittingehame confirms a late phase of re-use in the fifth and sixth century (Haselgrove 2009, 203). Meanwhile, the nearby hillfort at Eildon Hill North (Owen 1992) has provided a close parallel to the structural sequencing at Traprain, although the very small ceramic collection from the former is not comparable to the Traprain collection (Campbell 2010, 31–2, 156, 194 and 212–3). Roman material from Edinburgh Castle (Driscoll and Yeoman 1997) and Dumbarton Rock (Alcock and Alcock 1990; Alcock *et al* 1992), may yet be confirmed as potentially residual (Hunter 2009a, 237); however, simplistic categorisation of objects recovered from unexpected later contexts as residual (eg Alcock and Alcock 1990; Wallace 2006) is deliberately avoided within this research in favour of more solid interpretive models.

Previously, much attention has been focussed upon the late Roman silver hoard and coinage recovered from Traprain (Curle 1923; Burley 1956; Sekulla 1982) which has been taken as evidence of the site's high status. However, Erdrich *et al* (2000) rightly consider that the full potential of artefactual remains has yet to be exhausted. Their distributional analysis has confirmed that hearths and domestic artefacts appear relatively evenly spread throughout the 4 levels defined by Curle and Cree's early work. Paradoxically, samian is clustered around the southern area, a pattern which mirrors jewellery, horse trappings, knives and weapons, particularly in levels 2 and 3. While glass, some of which was associated with crucibles and subjected to reheating (Cree and Curle

1922, 206), is concentrated almost exclusively in the north and west of the excavated area, especially in level 2. This suggests that some of the features defined as hearths may, in fact, have served an industrial as opposed to domestic function (Erdrich *et al* 2000, 447), whilst slag from the summit confirms that ironworking activities were performed there (Rees and Hunter 2000, 435).

The site appears to have been a centre of innovation for hybridised trumpet brooches which have been recovered from Roman and Iron Age sites; indeed Curle (1932, 76) notes that 65% of the brooches recovered from southern Scotland by 1932 were manufactured at Traprain. However, nuanced differences have now been identified between examples recovered from Roman and Iron Age site types (Hunter 2009a, 234). Hybridised artefacts are also present elsewhere in Lowland Scotland (eg Dungworth 1998). Reuse of Roman pottery is also evident and almost entirely restricted to samian vessel sherds at most sites, although the investigation of samian reuse at Traprain has, until now, been solely restricted to the deliberate re-cutting of sherds (Erdrich *et al* 2000).

Given that samian is so predominantly perceived as being a signifier of social status, the research (Campbell 2010) has necessarily incorporated the analysis of samian from across Northern Britain. As with the coarse wares, samian recovered from Traprain Law is the largest collection of its kind from any non-Roman context in Northern Britain and a wide range of vessel forms are present. All are fragmentary; many sherds derive from different vessels and a good number have been subject to reuse. Regrettably, there is not the space to discuss these wares in this short paper and the present discussion will therefore be restricted to the coarse wares recovered from Traprain over the last century.

### 3. Presenting the Dataset

Gillam (1958, 78–9) determined that, although specialised craft activities such as metal-working were being undertaken at Traprain Law, this did not transmit to the development and Romanization of pottery production which remained rather “rudimentary and functional” and may have been made by women at the household level. Roman letters etched into Roman pottery sherds noted by Curle (1932, 359) have been taken as evidence of the inhabitants' need to interpret Roman documents and inscriptions in order to conduct trade (Scott 1958, 119). However, this type of inscription is relatively common on Roman ceramics and is more likely to be graffiti, that is to say, ownership labels, inscribed onto the vessels by their original owners, probably Roman soldiers (Collingwood and Wright 1995).

Hunter (2009a, 230) proposes that coarse wares are most prevalent on sites deemed to be of high status, particularly Traprain, with samian being most commonly recovered from sites thought to be of lower status. This

pattern, he suggests, supports Macinnes' (1984) model of elites controlling access to high status goods, such as samian. This is taken as evidence that the commodities contained within the coarse ware pots are most likely to have drawn interest from the inhabitants of high status sites rather than the pots themselves (Hunter 2009a, 230). However, this may be a questionable approach to material which Hunter (2001, 291) has previously admitted can enlighten our understanding of such issues. At any rate, this current research can demonstrate that coarse wares are not, in fact, the prevalent Roman pottery types recovered from most sites considered to be of high status. Fig 4 confirms that samian is prevalent on these sites, but that need not imply elite access and control as the majority of sites contained less than a handful of sherds, and these mostly derive from different vessels.

Integral to the proposal for the emergence of elites is a move towards centralisation of social groups (Renfrew 1982; Jobey 1966; Cunliffe 1991), conspicuous consumption of prestige goods within hoards (Hunter 1997, 121) and certain individuals' access to and control over such prestige goods (eg Macinnes 1984). Given Sanmarti's (2004, 33) proposal that internal developments may have been major contributory factors towards social change for many communities, it is questionable that sufficient centralisation of social groups in Northern Britain had occurred for Rome to successfully rely upon well-tested mechanisms of control over local elites and administrative systems (Clarke 1958, 42; Cunliffe 1991, 115; Millett 1992, 99; Hanson 1993). We must therefore turn to the material remains for the provision of interpretive insights into the issue of contact in the North and Roman pottery provides an ideal vehicle to address these issues.

In order to determine the function and social meanings of Roman pottery consumed by the occupants of Traprain Law it is necessary to conduct a detailed analysis of the types of vessels being selected for adoption from Roman sources as well as the contexts of deposition and distributional spread of sherds across the site. The following graphs determine the types of vessels which have been recovered from first and second century Roman military contexts, the composition of the sherds present at Traprain and their condition. Fig 5 demonstrates that body sherds are by far the most common type recovered and confirms Hunter's (2009a, 230) premise that the Traprain assemblage is dominated by coarse wares. This is in contrast to the pattern existing on the majority of Northern indigenous sites where samian predominates. A similar pattern of coarse ware predominance exists on Roman military sites, further indicating local selectivity and a preference for samian. Similarities between the coarse ware and samian patterns at military sites and Traprain might suggest that the occupants were in closer contact with Romans and therefore more susceptible to what was available locally. To determine what types of

vessels were being adopted and whether there were any indications of selectivity present, data has also been gathered from the first century fort at Elginhaugh (Hanson 2007) and recent unpublished work at the western gate of the second century fort at Inveresk (Fig 6) for the purposes of comparison.

In common with Elginhaugh, a higher proportion of cooking pots are present on Traprain. Amphorae do not feature heavily in the military context, but are almost non-existent on Traprain, whilst mortaria constitute the second most popular vessel-type from Elginhaugh but are comparatively rare on Traprain. Dishes are similarly under-represented, whereas bowls are more common. However, perhaps the most striking feature of the assemblage is the high proportion of beakers on Traprain. Indeed, they are more numerous on the site than at the fort and flagons are similarly highly represented. This is a most interesting aspect and may speak to us on the subject of drinking practices prevalent amongst the inhabitants of Traprain, whilst from the lack of mortaria we might infer that the local community had no need of this type of vessel for the purposes of food preparation.

Comparison with Inveresk has thrown up yet more interesting patterns and, although jugs and cooking pots still feature most prominently at Inveresk, they are far less prevalent on that site than at Elginhaugh. Lids are comparatively non-existent at both Inveresk and Traprain and, contrary to the very high proportion present at Elginhaugh, Inveresk has far fewer mortaria. Beakers still feature on Traprain as the most significant vessels being adopted from types available for consumption and, in comparison to Inveresk, the pattern is more markedly increased, whilst flagons and jugs barely feature at the second century fort.

Turning to sherd condition, the majority of coarse ware sherds are fresh (Fig 7), closely followed in number by burnt sherds. Paradoxically, a proportionally higher number of samian sherds have been subjected to abrasion and very few are burnt. Samian has also been subject to reuse to a much higher degree than the coarse wares, providing conclusive evidence for the reconstitution of Roman objects into existing cultural conditions and their reuse in a culturally relevant manner (Kopytoff 1986; Thomas 1991; 1992; Thomas 2002). As regards distribution, although it should be noted that the early work of Curle and Cree is not stratigraphically secure, an analysis of distributional spreads confirms that the highest level contained a respectable number of coarse ware sherds from first-fourth century, particularly in the extreme south-west of the excavated area. This pattern is intensified for Level 2, with more from the south-eastern segments, and level three parallels this trend although sherds have decreased numerically, while very few sherds were recovered from the lowest level.

This patterning broadly parallels the samian which Erdreich *et al* (2000) took as evidence of Roman material



Fig 3a: Traprain Law: a view of Traprain Law from the north side (© Bill Hanson)

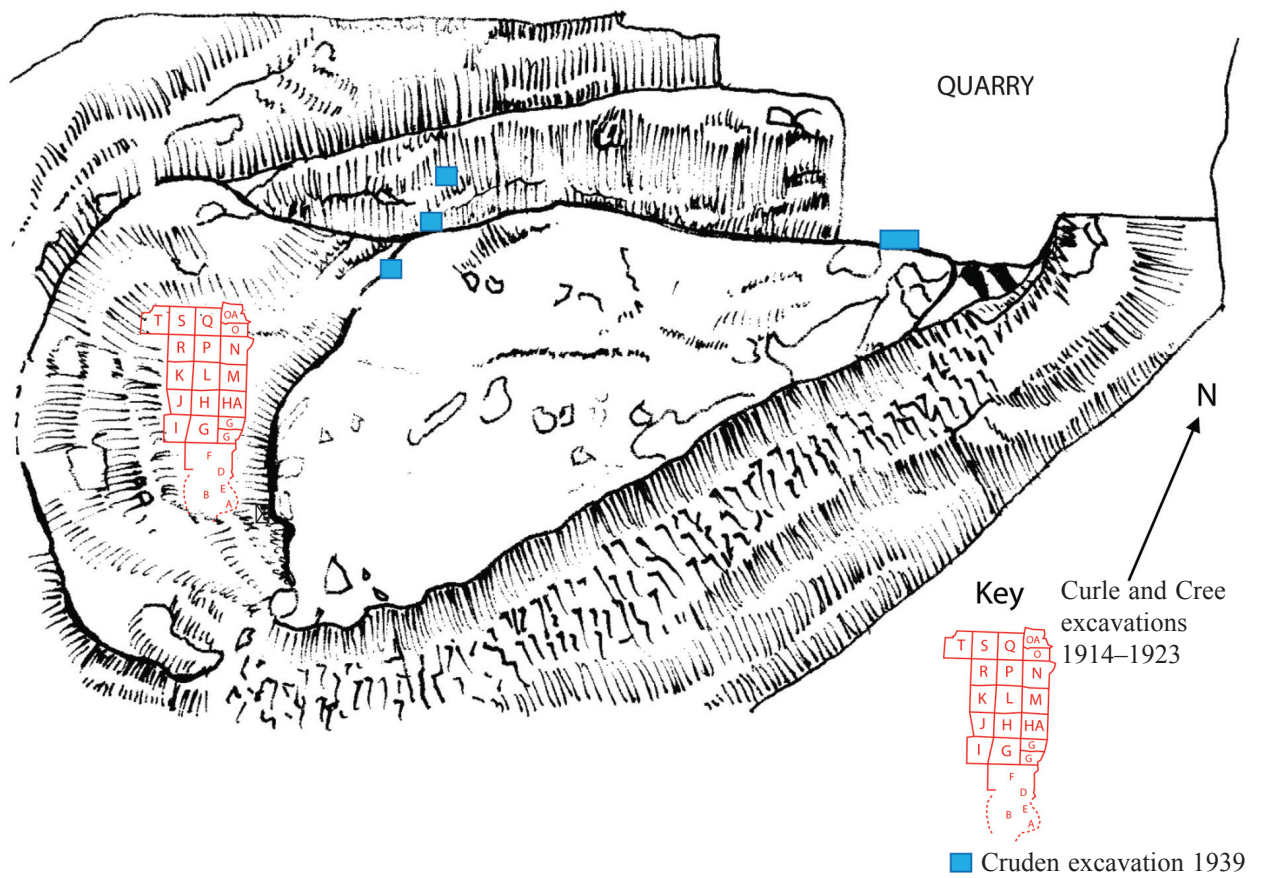


Fig 3b: Traprain Law: site plan (based on information in Close-Brooks 1983)

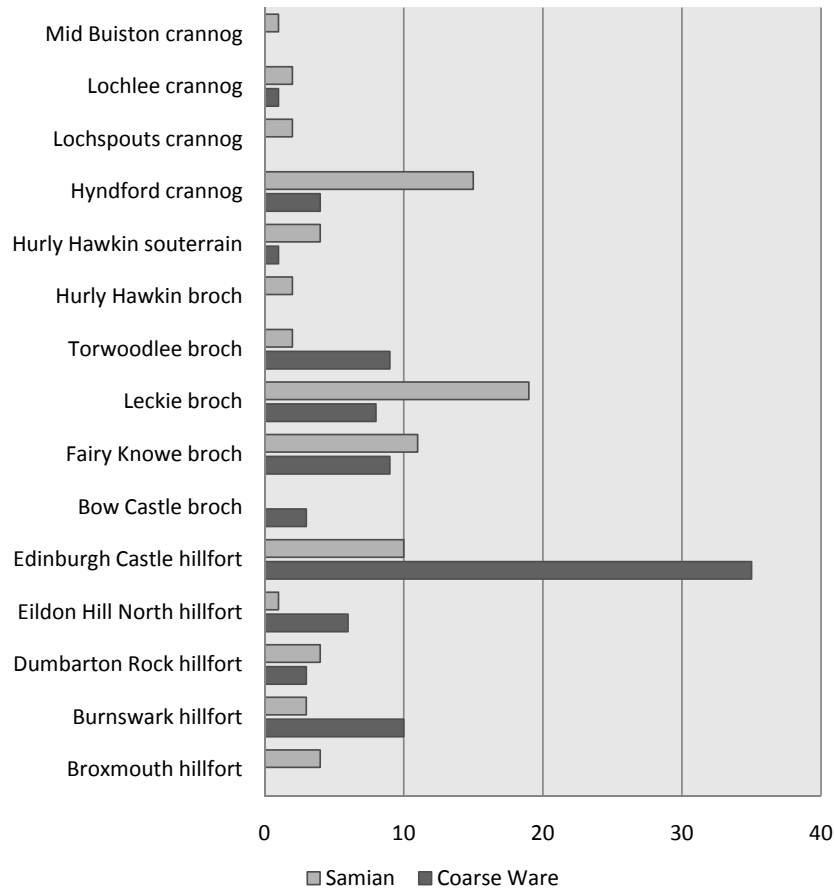


Fig 4: Minimum Vessel Numbers recorded from proposed 'elite' sites

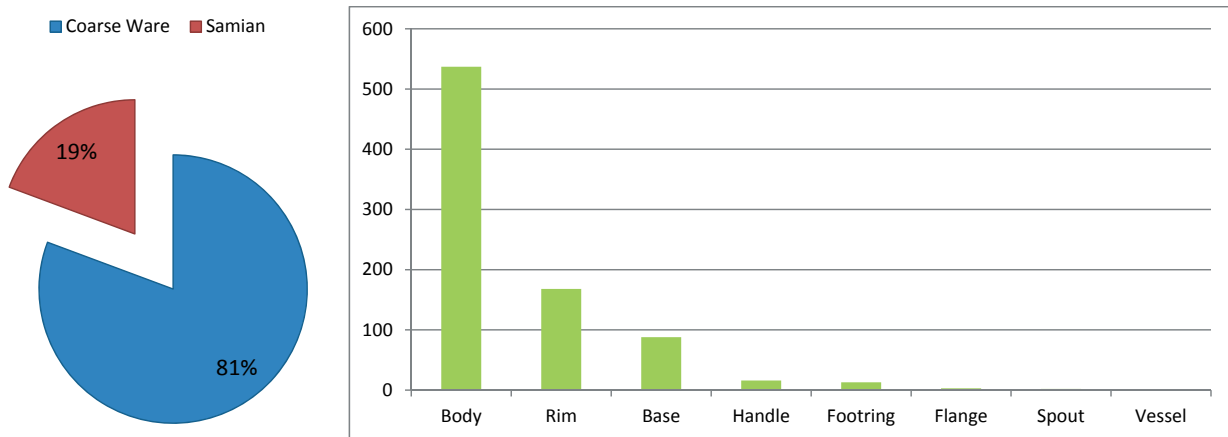


Fig 5: Traprain Law – Composition of the assemblage (by sherd count)

being available mainly during the periods when there was a Roman military presence in Scotland. That paper concluded that the mechanism of distribution to the inhabitants of Traprain was most likely in the form of diplomatic gifts. However, this hypothesis, understandably, takes no account of the later coarse wares, nor does it explain their presence two centuries after

Roman withdrawal from the North. The picture is further complicated by the evidence of vessels from across four centuries throughout all occupational levels.

The integrity of the collections from Traprain and elsewhere needs consideration in a study of this kind, as the question arises as to whether the pottery recovered in these older excavations was all retained or whether body

sherds, for example, were selectively discarded. The fact that mortaria are represented by rim and spout sherds only and the amphora is represented by featured sherds (rim and handle) is noteworthy but may arise from chance factors or may indicate something of ancient practice and process. Whilst it is possible to envisage that only sherds considered diagnostic, or potentially so (including body sherds), were retained by either excavators or curators, for the most part it is firmly suspected that excavators of these non-Roman sites tended to carefully preserve all finds, since finds of all types on such sites are infrequent, while sherds of Roman pottery are likely to have been especially well curated for their value as evidence of date and ‘contact’. This attentiveness is borne out in the publications of such sites. Moreover, the data below showing the proportion of body sherds present in the Traprain assemblage seems consistent with the range and frequency of sherd types that would be envisaged from integral collections, and so implies careful collection and retention. Single body sherds are clearly the norm rather than the exception across the assemblages from Northern Britain. Indeed this is a very important aspect of the interpretation of Roman sherds in non-Roman contexts (see below and Campbell 2010).

#### 4. Roman Coarse Wares

In order to discuss the potential cultural significance of Roman pottery to its indigenous recipients, it is necessary to present a comprehensive account of the material and this section therefore illustrates and discusses the coarse ware sherds recovered from all of the excavations conducted upon Traprain Law over the last century

##### 4.1 Amphora

Only two amphora sherds have been recovered from across all of Traprain’s many excavations, weighing 303g. One rim (Fig 8) and part of a handle sherd are present, both of which originate from the same vessel, a second century Dressel 20 (Peacock and Williams 1986). These amphorae were commonly used for the storage and transportation of Spanish olive-oil, a subject which has recently been used to discuss the processes of Romanization (Funari 1996, 83). Given Hunter’s (2009a, 230) proposal of commodities contained within coarse pots being of more interest to the inhabitants of high status sites than the pots themselves, the presence of only two fragments of what is perhaps the best known Roman vessel type for storage and transportation of commodities is most pertinent. Explanations include the obvious possibility of excavation strategies excluding areas of their potential deposition; that the inhabitants of Traprain had no wish to adopt these vessel types (neither for their form or contents); or there was limited availability of amphorae from the source of supply, that is, Roman forts. The second option conflates two issues: interest in the

amphora as a vessel to re-use for alternative purposes and interest in its contents. The latter would be particularly surprising as it would imply a desire for olive oil. More interesting is the absence of wine amphorae. Given the stress traditionally placed upon the social role of drinking (Hunter 2005, 235) and evidence of ‘Celtic tribes’ in southern Gaul and southern England being receptive to wine imports (eg Pitts 2004), the lack of these vessel types may be taken to suggest that Northern elites were not receptive to such imports or practices.

Fig 6 confirms that amphorae do not feature heavily within either military context and this would imply that the most likely explanation for the marked lack of these vessel types on Traprain is the very limited amounts available for consumption from the forts. However, this does not preclude the possibility that the vessels were regarded as having no intrinsic value to Traprain’s occupants and therefore may not have held any attraction for them (eg Thomas 1992). Whilst their presence might infer the adoption of Romanized habits of eating or storing foodstuffs, their absence might similarly imply that interaction with Romans had limited impact on their storage or consumption practices.

##### 4.2 Mortaria

The presence or absence of mortaria might similarly have impacted on tastes or cuisine. As with amphorae, mortaria (Fig 9) barely feature in the Traprain assemblage, with 37 sherds present in the collection, weighing 794g. Only four vessel rims are represented, three of which are buff and were probably manufactured in the second century AD, and one fourth century red-slipped mortarium from Oxfordshire (Fig 9d). The buff ware sherds originate from Mancetter/Hartshill (Fig 9a), Colchester (Fig 9b) and possibly a Holt white slipped ware vessel (Fig 9c).

Unlike amphorae, the availability of mortaria differs markedly between the first and second centuries. Fig 6 confirms these vessels as constituting the second most common type recovered from Elginhaugh in the first century. Significantly, although the vessels appear to have been most commonly available to military personnel during the first century, none of these appear to have reached the inhabitants of Traprain, who instead received only three (amongst the recovered assemblage) in the second century. More striking still is the presence of the fourth century Oxfordshire red-slipped flanged mortarium which emulates a Drag. 38 samian form and was recovered from level 2 of areas G or F in the south of Curle and Cree’s excavations on the western plateau (Curle and Cree 1916, 91). This vessel was produced a full two centuries after the Roman withdrawal from Northern Britain and its presence in the second occupational level is most enigmatic, implying potential secondary deposition.

The presence of the mortaria sherds then appear to raise rather more questions than they provide answers for.



Why, for instance, did no mortaria reach Traprain during the first century when they were potentially more readily available from Elginhaugh? Why did the inhabitants of the site decide to acquire them in the second century when they were potentially *less* readily available? Why did they receive such comparatively small quantities in the second century and why was there such a gap between the periods in which they were consumed (ie second–fourth century)? What were the mechanisms by which the fourth century item reached the site two centuries after Roman withdrawal? How can we explain the presence of this sherd on the same occupational level as the other, earlier, mortarium sherds on the western plateau? Given that only rims and part of a spout are present in very small numbers, how did mortaria function within this society? Only a deeper interrogation of the other types of vessels present on Traprain can potentially answer these questions.

### 4.3 Cooking pots and lid handle

Storage jars and cooking pots could be similarly associated with food storage and preparation. The vessels represented in Fig 10 are defined as cooking pots principally because of the evidence of burning or singeing present on the vast majority of sherds; however, they could equally have been used as storage jars (Gillam 1976, 61). There are, in total, 54 sherds of potential cooking pots present in the Traprain assemblage, weighing 1.137kg, 14 of which are diagnostic and all date from the second century, with the exception of Fig 9m, a calcite-gritted pot which could date to the fourth. The diagnostic vessels comprise of four Black Burnished Ware 1 (Fig 10a–d), six Black Burnished Ware 2 (e–j), two grey wares (k–l), one calcite-gritted ware (m), and a base of extremely gritty fabric which is red at the core with a dark grey exterior (n). The round object (o), which is of dark grey ware and rather unusual, could be the handle from a cooking pot lid and represents the only potentially lid-related object recovered from the site. Most of the cooking pot sherds were recovered by Curle and Cree's work and are mainly concentrated between levels 2 and 3 in the south-west of the excavated area. The small number of these vessels showing burning or sooting is in marked contrast to the locally made pot which suggests Roman pottery may have been used differently to typologically traditional examples.

### 4.4 Storage jars

Storage jars constitute the highest proportion of vessels and sherds from the assemblage, amounting to 194 sherds in total from a minimum of 42 vessels, weighing 4.092kg. The majority of the jars are grey and black-burnished wares (Fig 11), including BB1 (Fig 11a and b), BB2 (c–e), calcite-gritted wares (f–g), grey wares (h–l), a fine grey ware (m), and fourth century Crambeck reduced wares (n–w). These latter vessels appear to correspond with the fabrics, and particularly the decorations (e and n),

of Crambeck wares; however, Gillam has disputed the presence of these vessels in Scotland, stating that they were not present “even at Traprain Law” (1973, 62). Therefore, although it is unclear whether John Gillam himself viewed the Roman ceramics from the site, it should be noted that these vessels could potentially derive from a source producing very similar types to those manufactured at Crambeck, North Yorkshire.

The white, buff and colour coated jars (Fig 12) include fourth century Oxfordshire white slipped (Fig 12a and b); Holt white slipped (c), Verulamium (d), Mancetter/Hartshill (e) dated to the second century and a Lower Nene Valley colour-coated jar (f) possibly manufactured in the third century. Oxidised jars (Fig 13) all date to the second century and include one complete unguent jar, possibly from Holt (Fig 13a), and several Severn Valley Ware items (b–h).

### 4.5 Bowls

In common with Roman forts, bowls are relatively well represented at Traprain (Fig 14); a total of 64 sherds have been recovered from a minimum of 19 vessels, weighing 989.7g. The diagnostic sherds include imitation BB1 (Fig 14a), BB2 (b–d), grey ware (e), Wilderspool oxidised ware (f), Wiggonholt white ware (g), Severn Valley Ware (h), Mancetter/Hartshill ware (i) dated to the second century, as well as fourth century Crambeck (j–m) and Oxfordshire red-slipped wares (n–q). In the absence of any locally-made ceramic bowls, it is also likely that alternative, more ephemeral materials, such as wood, were used to manufacture such objects.

### 4.6 Dishes

Unlike Roman forts, very small numbers of dishes have been recovered from Traprain (Fig 15), amounting to 14 sherds, weighing 275.8g. One sherd from a flat-based calcite-gritted vessel has not been illustrated and the five diagnostic dishes include four of BB2 (a–d) and one possible Upper Nene Valley white ware (e). These vessel-types may have served dual-purposes and could have been utilised as bread-baking dishes or as lids for flanged bowls to seal heat into casseroles or stews in the communal hearths of military forts (Vivien Swan, pers. comm.). It is not clear how these vessels functioned within Iron Age contexts as they are almost non-existent elsewhere on Scottish sites. The scarcity of dishes might suggest that oven-baking of casseroles or flat breads were not common methods of food preparation for the occupants of Traprain or the wider communities across the region.

### 4.7 Flagons

Flagons are well represented on Traprain (Fig 16), particularly in comparison to Inveresk where locally produced flagons and other ceramic wares have been recovered from the *vicus* (Swan 1988), with 93 sherds deriving from a minimum of 22 vessels, weighing 871g.

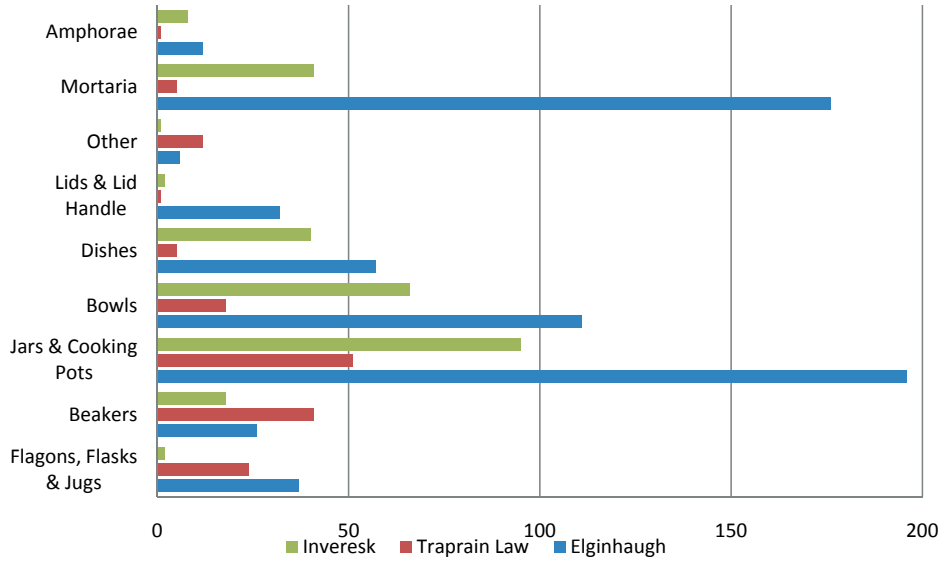


Fig 6: Traprain Law, Elginhaugh and Inveresk comparison (by Minimum Vessel Nos.)

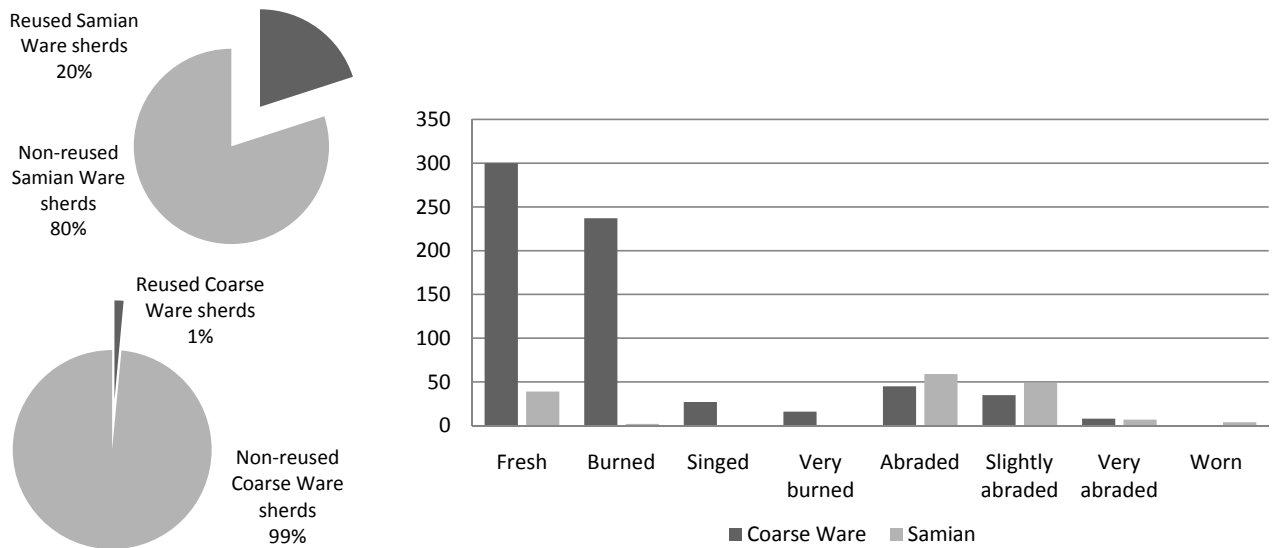


Fig 7: Traprain Law – Condition of the sherds

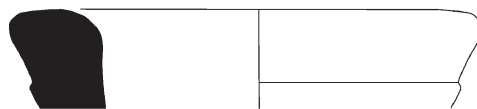


Fig 8: Traprain Law – Roman Amphora (1:2)

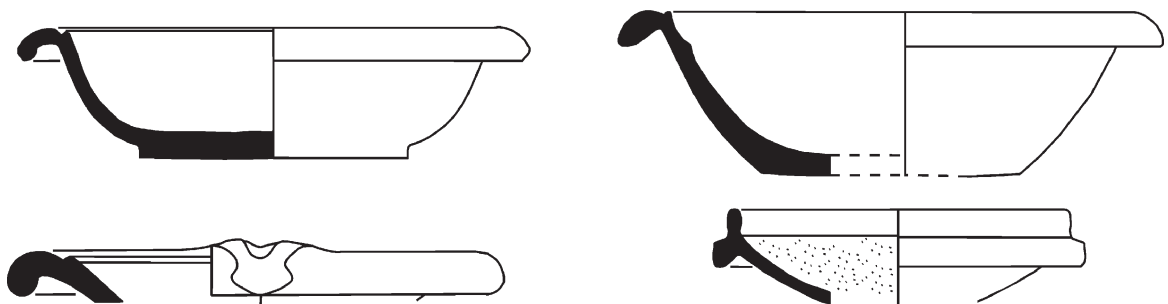
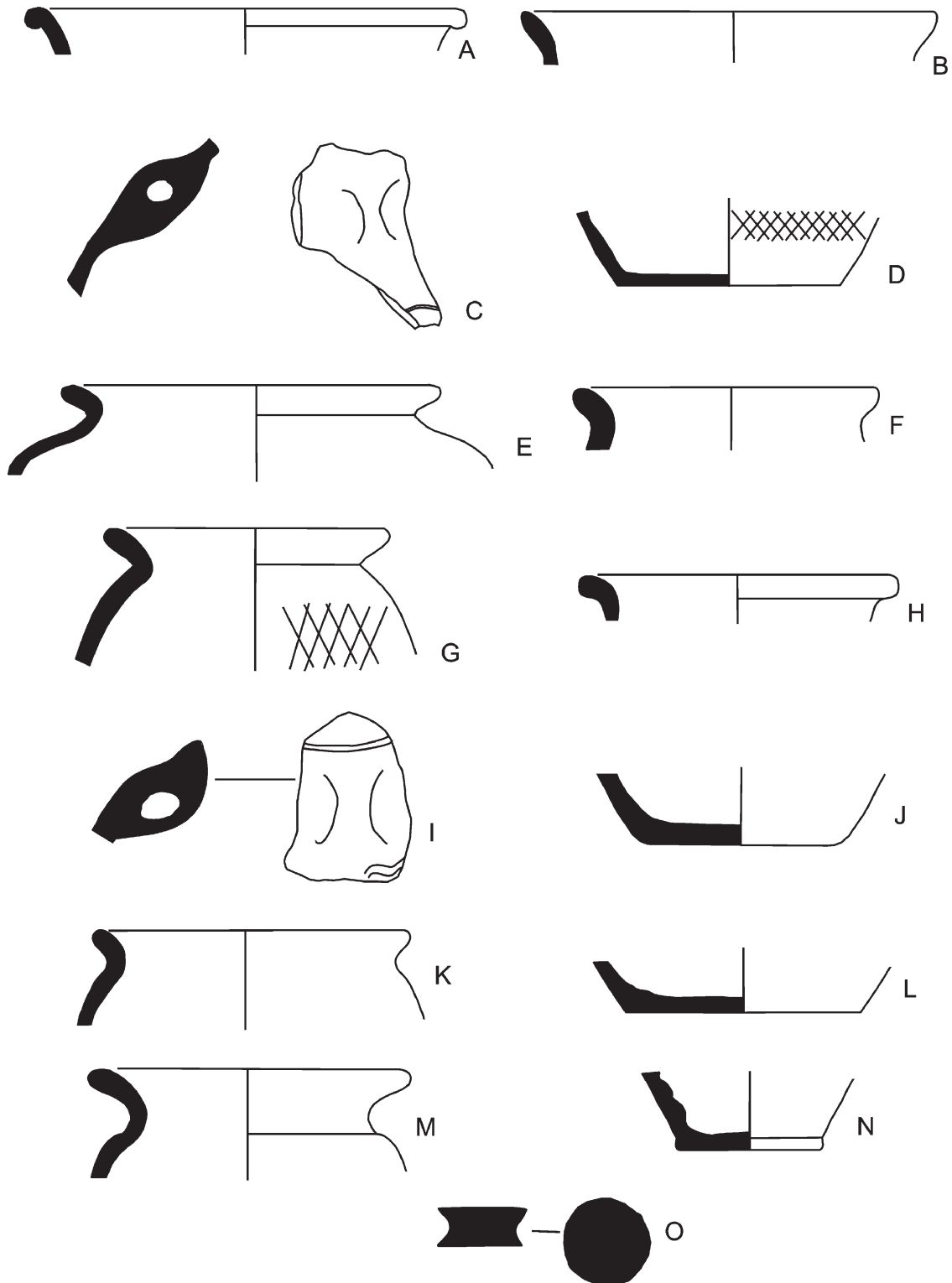


Fig 9: Traprain Law – Mortaria; top left (a) Mancetter/Hartshill; top right (b) Colchester; bottom left (c) perhaps Holt white slipped; bottom right (d) Oxfordshire (1:4)



*Fig 10: Traprain Law – Cooking Pots (1:2)*

The collection includes second century vessels probably from Inveresk (Swan 1988) (a–f), Central Gaul colour coated (g, m and p), Inveresk locally produced ware (h and i), Verulamium white (j), Mancetter/Hartshill white

(k), Severn Valley white slipped (l), Lower Nene Valley colour coated ware dated to the third century (n) and a second–third century base of greyish-white fabric (o), as well as fourth century vessels from Crambeck (q–r),

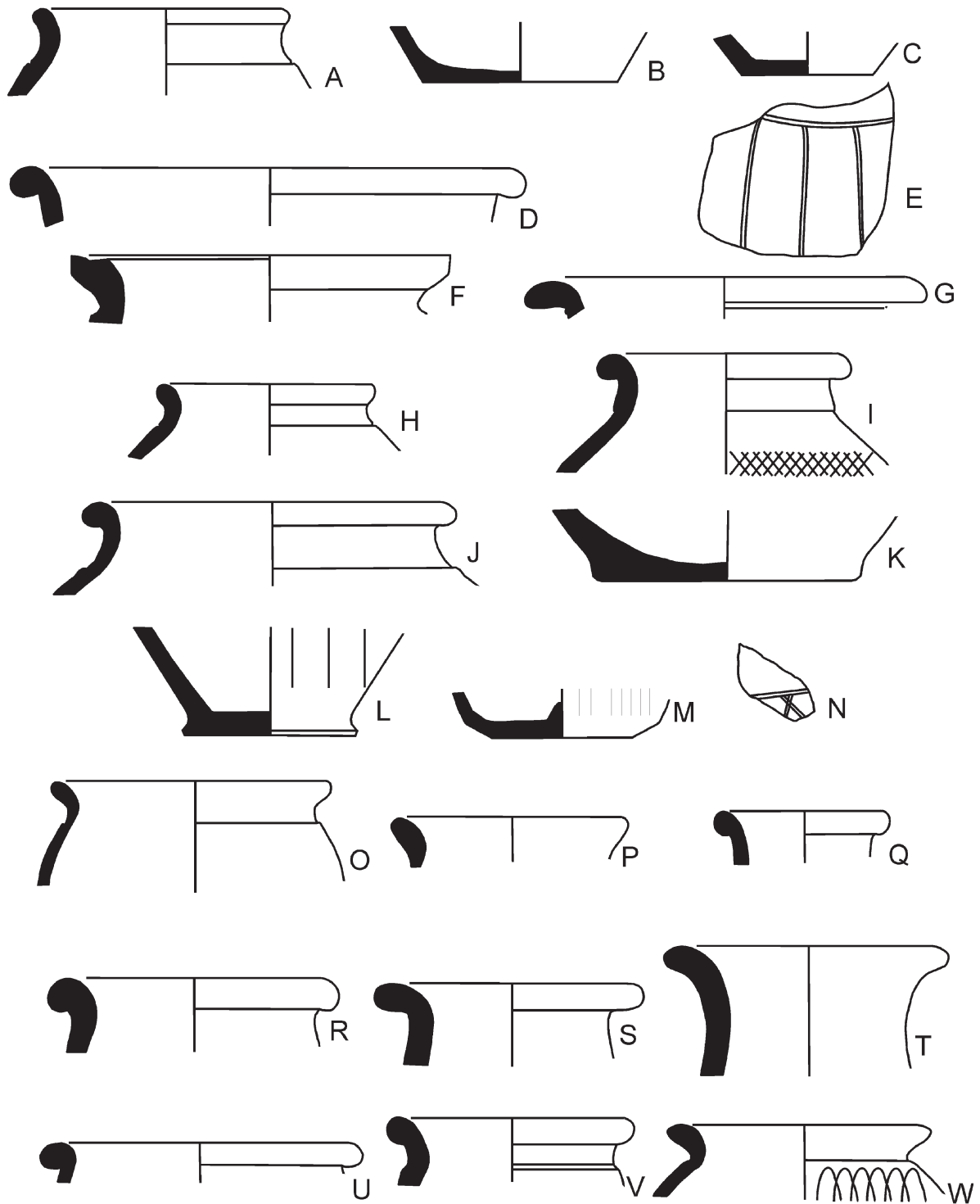


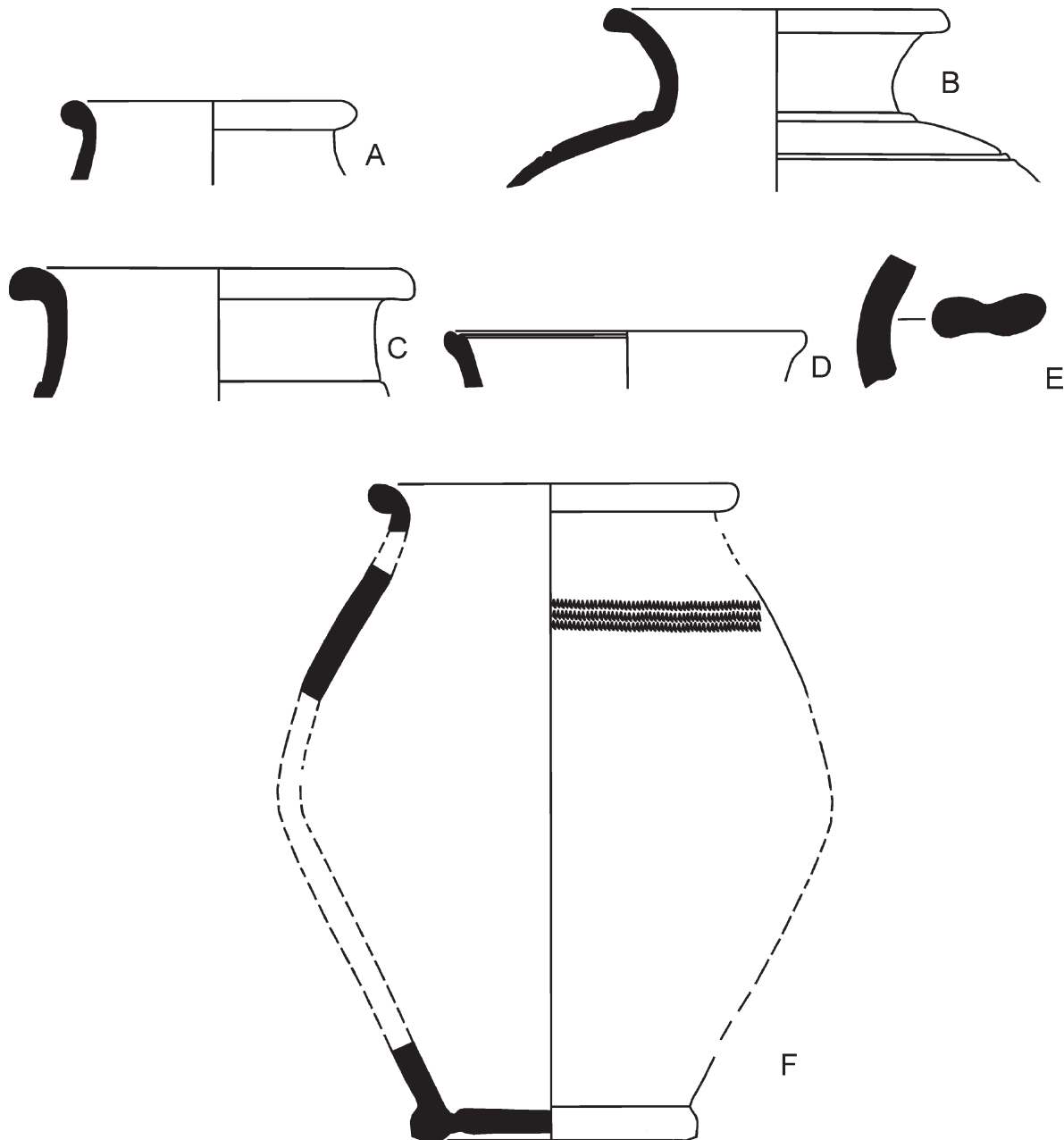
Fig 11: Traprain Law – Black Burnished and Grey Ware Jars (1:2)

New Forest painted sherds (s), which could alternatively have derived from a bowl as the sherds are too small to determine with confidence, and a small base of Oxfordshire red slipped ware (t).

#### 4.8 Beakers

Beakers constitute the highest number of coarse ware

sherds represented at Traprain, totalling 225 sherds from at least 44 vessels, weighing 1.439kg. No complete vessels have been recovered and only diagnostic rim or base sherds have been illustrated (Fig 17) as well as decorated sherds (Fig 18). Rims and bases (Fig 17) include second century BB1 (a), BB2 (b and c), Grey ware (d), fine grey (e), Central Gaulish colour coated ware



*Fig 12: Traprain Law – Buff, White Slipped and Colour Coated Jars (1:2)*

(f–h) and a possible Caerleon colour coated ware (i). A white painted Rhenish beaker probably of third century date (j) is present, as well as colour coated beakers from Cologne (k–m) dating from the second–third century, while Lower Nene Valley colour coated ware present dates from the third century (n–p); fourth century vessels include Crambeck reduced wares (q and r), as well as Oxfordshire white slipped ware (s) and possibly Market Rasen fine reduced ware (t).

#### *4.8.1 Decorated beaker sherds*

Several decorated beaker sherds are present (Fig 18). The

second century vessels include two conjoining rouletted sherds from a fine grey ware beaker (a), a single sherd from another fine grey rouletted vessel (b), a coarser grey barbotine beaker (c), and a Central Gaulish colour-coated rouletted sherd (d). A single sherd from a Cologne colour-coated beaker with lined barbotine decoration (e) is of second-third century date, whilst one rouletted item (f), several white-painted Rhenish beaker sherds and Lower Nene Valley colour-coated sherds date to the third century (g–m).

Thirteen of the beaker sherds were recovered from the recent summit excavation, with the rest mainly from

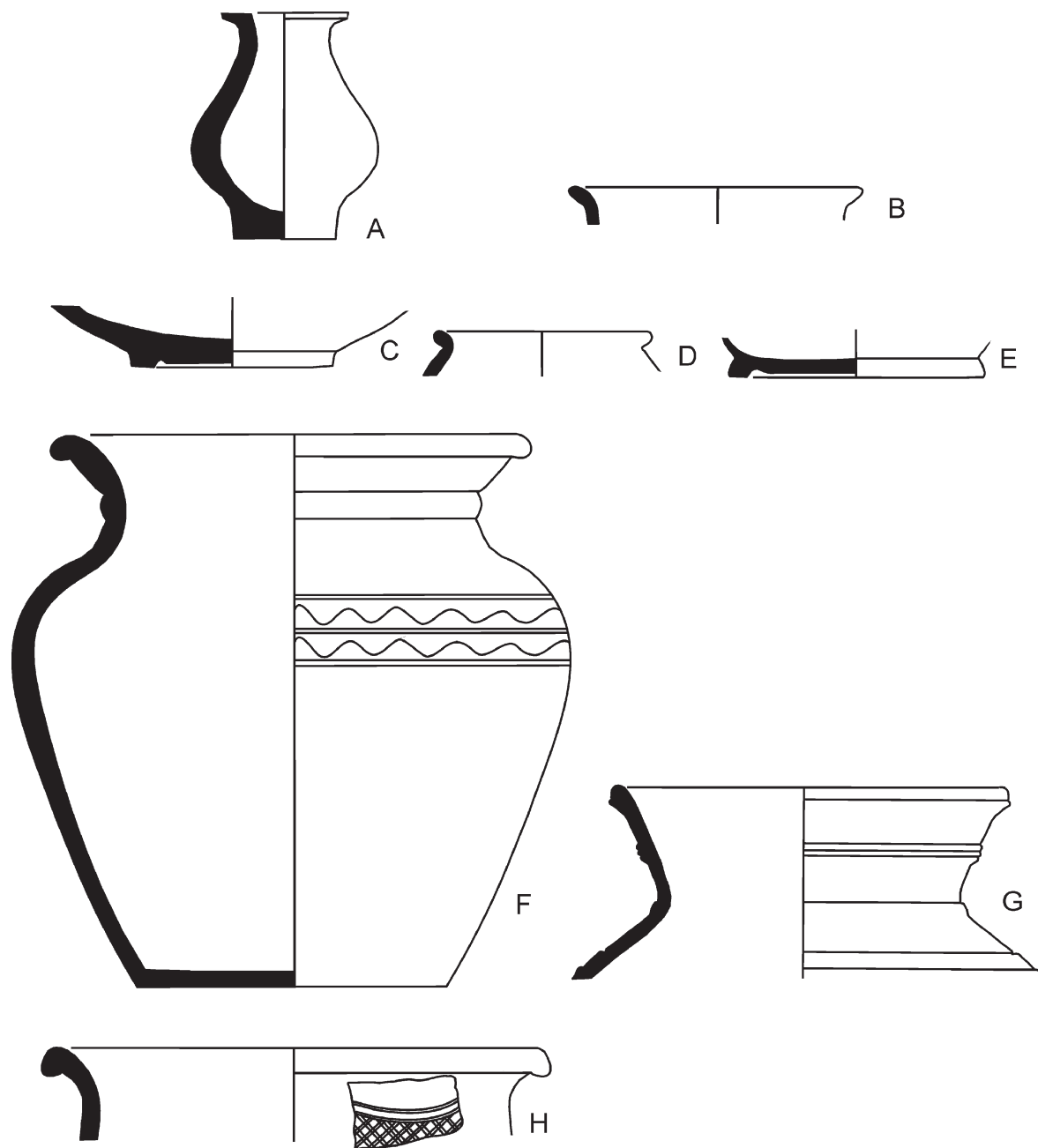


Fig 13: Traprain Law – Oxidised Jars (1:2)

the western plateau and spread across areas B, D, F and H in the south and south-east and small numbers from areas N, S and R in the north of the excavated area. They mostly come from level 2 then 3 with a few deriving from levels 1 or 4.

#### 4.9 Cheese press

The base of one cheese press is also present (Fig 19), comprising of two conjoining sherds weighing 62.4g. This is an unusual vessel which has been pierced through the base inside the footring and at least three piercings

are evident on the base of the vessel close to, but external to, the footring. Both sherds were recovered from area J of Curle and Cree's excavations. They are recorded as having come from levels 1 and 2, but this seems unlikely and they may instead derive from the same layer emphasising the need for caution in accepting the rather arbitrary stratified contexts defined by early excavators. Cheese presses are uncommon on military forts and much rarer on Iron Age sites, indeed, this is the only known example recovered from a non-Roman context in Lowland Scotland, and none has yet been recognised

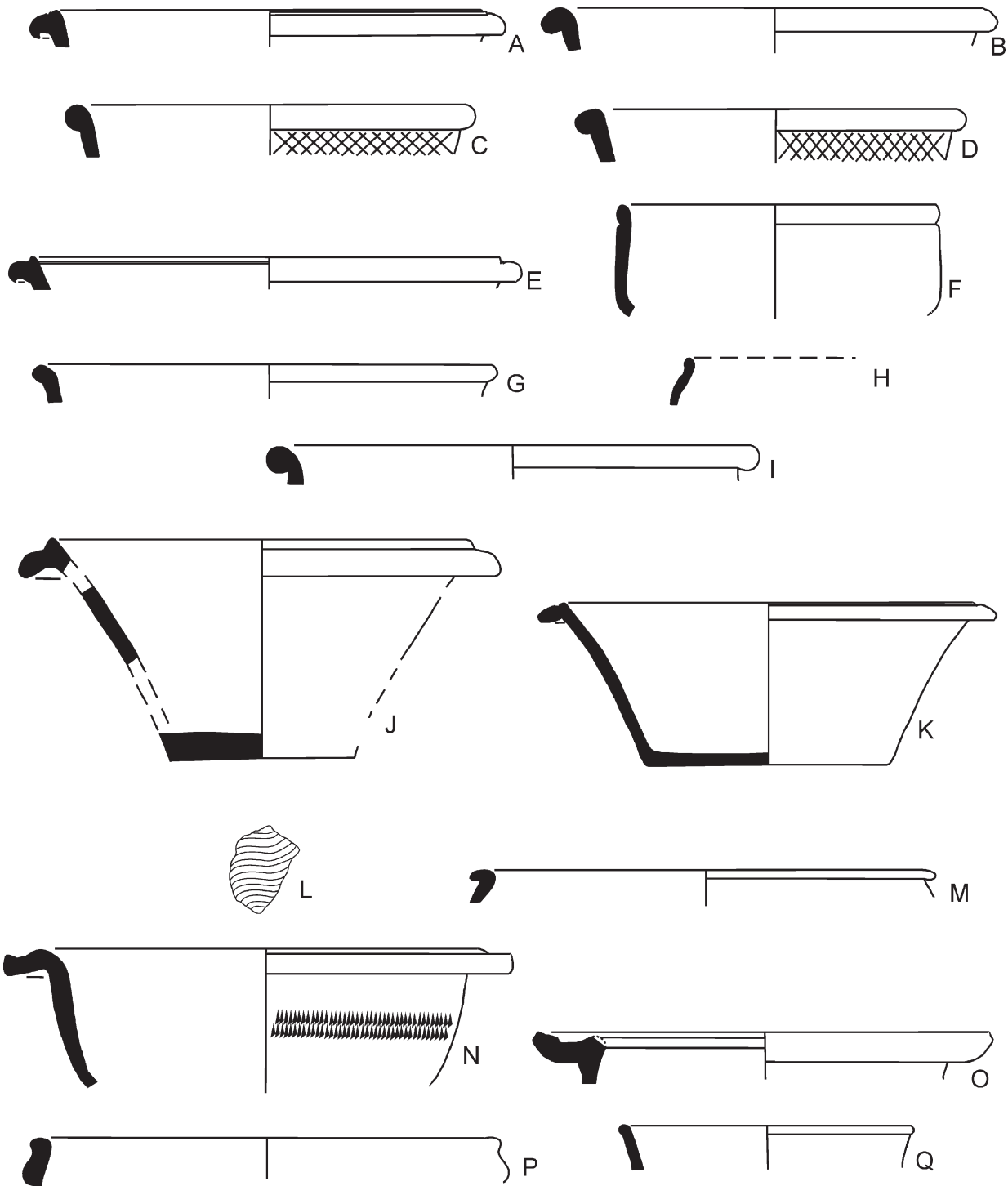


Fig 14: Traprain Law – Bowls (1:4)

from any account so far published for the Atlantic North. It has been suggested that mortaria may have sometimes functioned as alternatives to cheese presses in Roman Britain (Cool 2006, 95). This particular base has been rather poorly formed at the footing and may have been made locally at Inveresk fort as the fabric appears to broadly conform with Inveresk ware.

#### 4.10 Coarse ware summary

The research has confirmed that the ceramic assemblage from Traprain is rich and ripe for interpretation using modern recording, identification, illustration and interpretation methodologies within the framework of theoretical constructs recently applied to other parts of the Empire and other fields of study. This is a substantial

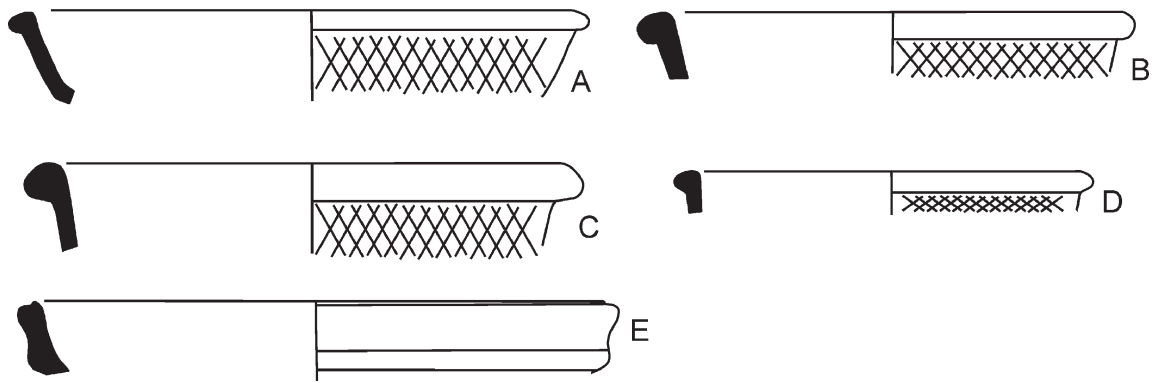


Fig 15: Traprain Law – Dishes (1:4)

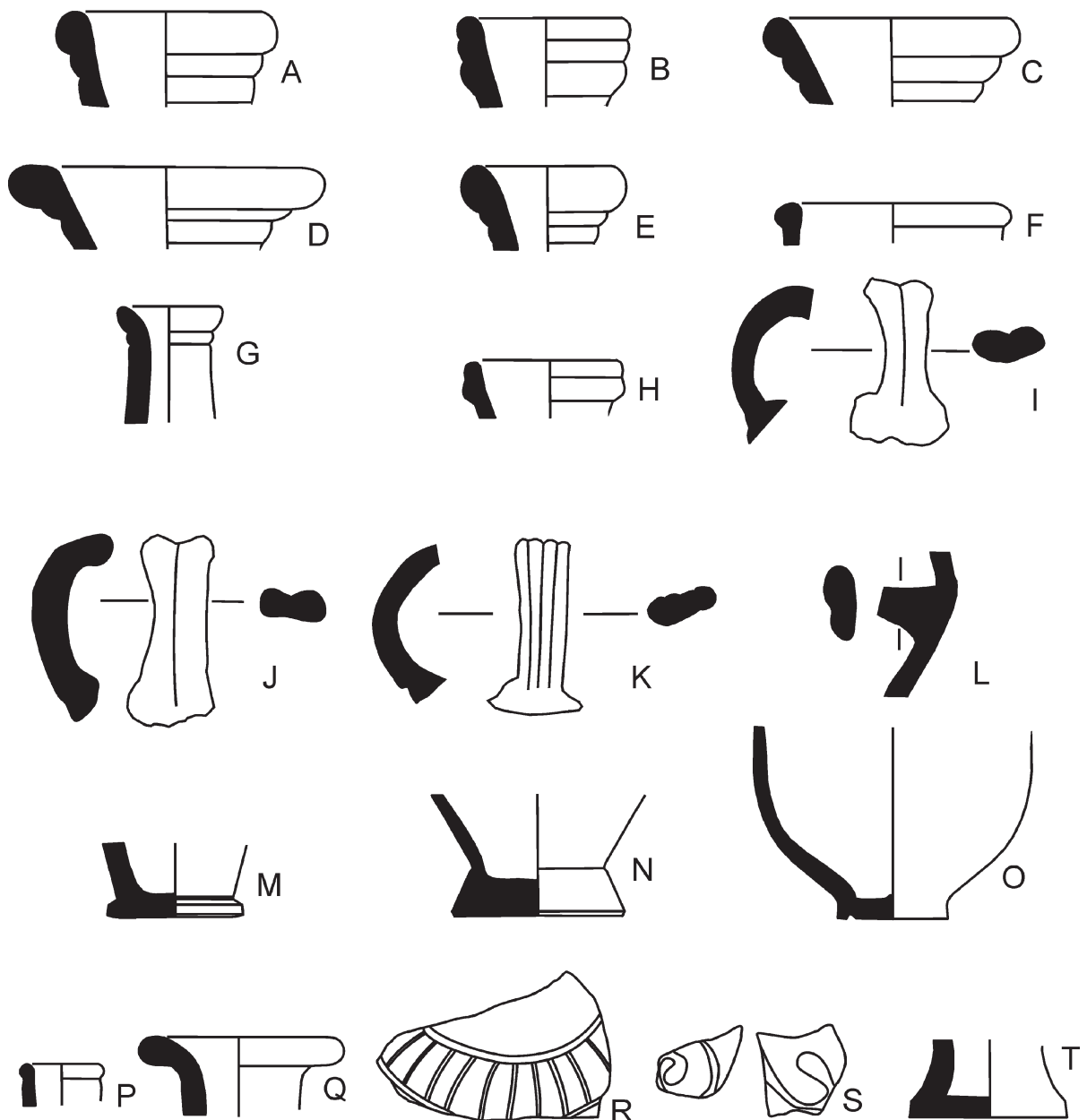


Fig 16: Traprain Law – Flagons (1:2)



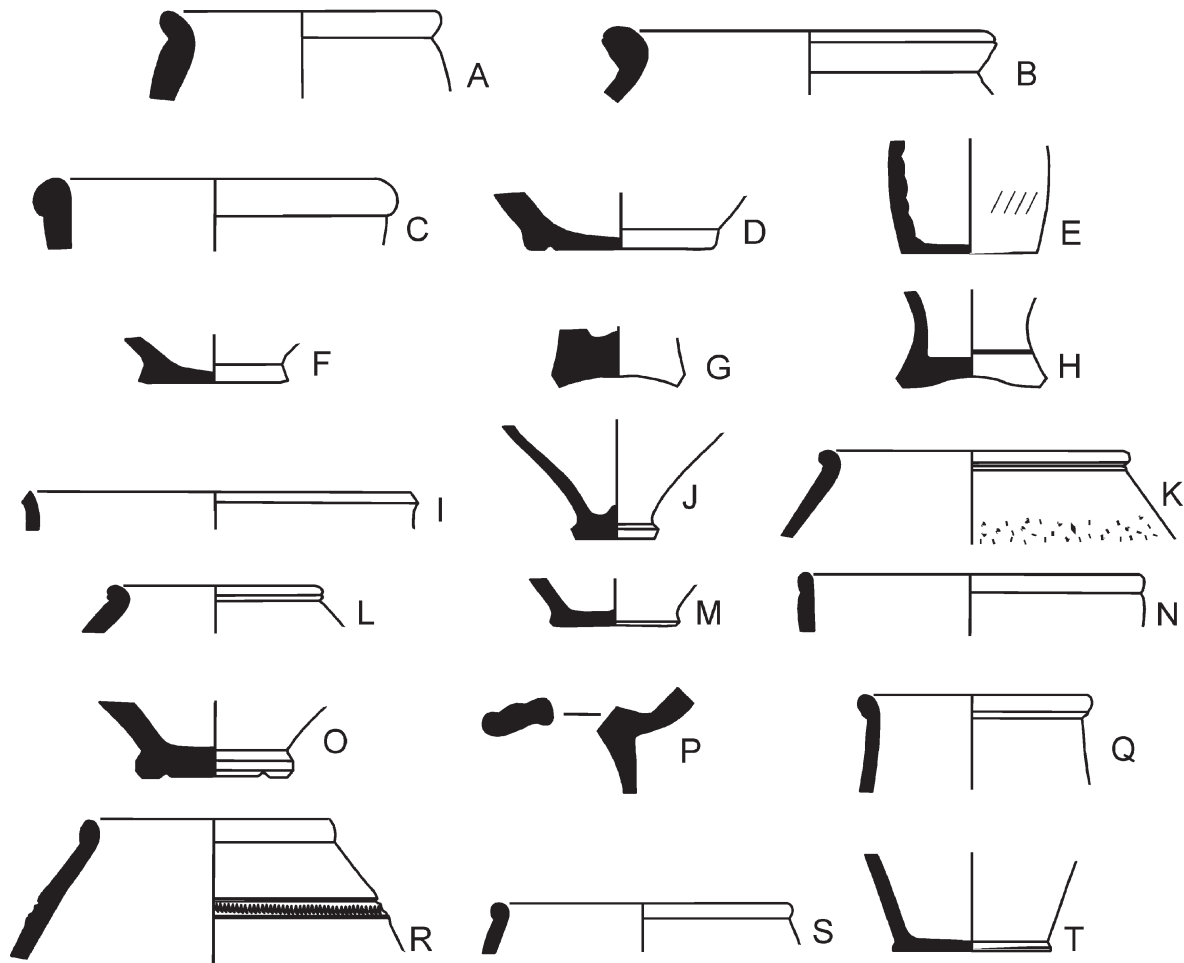


Fig 17: Traprain Law – Beakers (1:2)

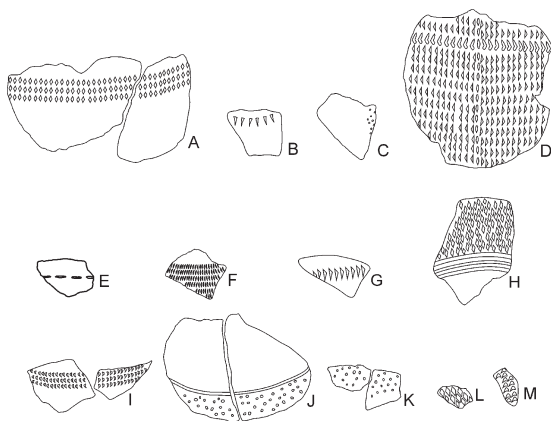


Fig 18: Traprain Law – Decorated beaker sherds (1:2)



Fig 19: Traprain Law – Cheese Press (1:1)

collection of Roman pottery which is currently unrivalled at any other non-Roman site across the whole of Scotland and provides an excellent dataset from which to conduct comparative analyses across the region.

Modern-day approaches to the study of Roman ceramics draw a very clear distinction between samian and coarse ware specialisms. However, given that samian appears prominent on Northern settlement sites (Willis 1997; 1998a; 1998b), it has been necessary to adopt a holistic approach to the pottery for this research, involving the assessment of both wares in order to fully consider any patterns of similarity or variation arising from across the entire collection. The benefits of this approach have become immediately apparent by confirming that practices of selective adoption appear to have been in place at Traprain in terms of the types of vessels that were being accepted into existing cultural conditions, and are also important for addressing the issue of reuse. These aspects will be covered in future publications.

Coarse wares predominate in the Traprain collection, a situation which is at odds with the commonly held

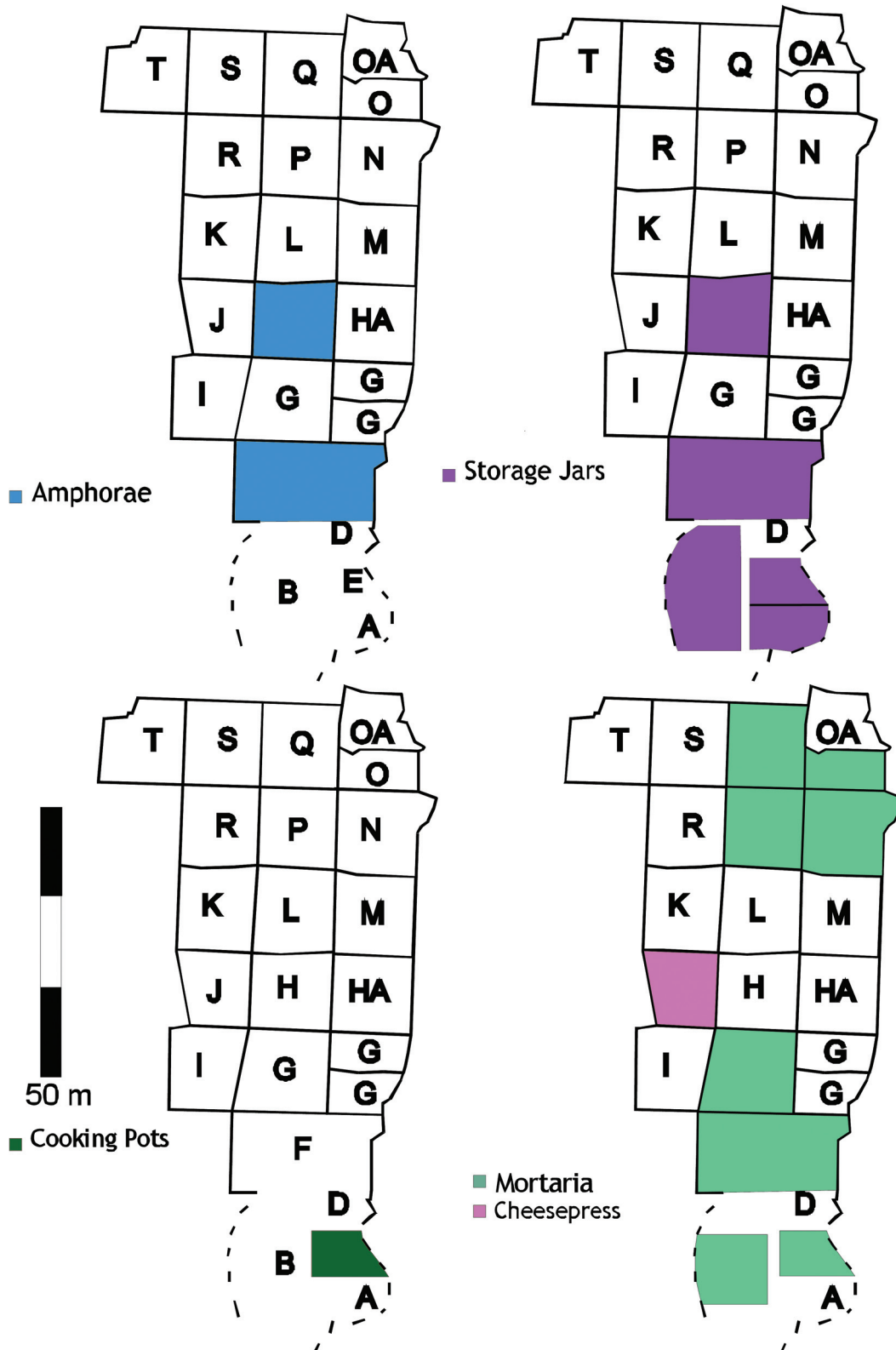


Fig 20: Traprain Law – Food storage and processing pot distributions

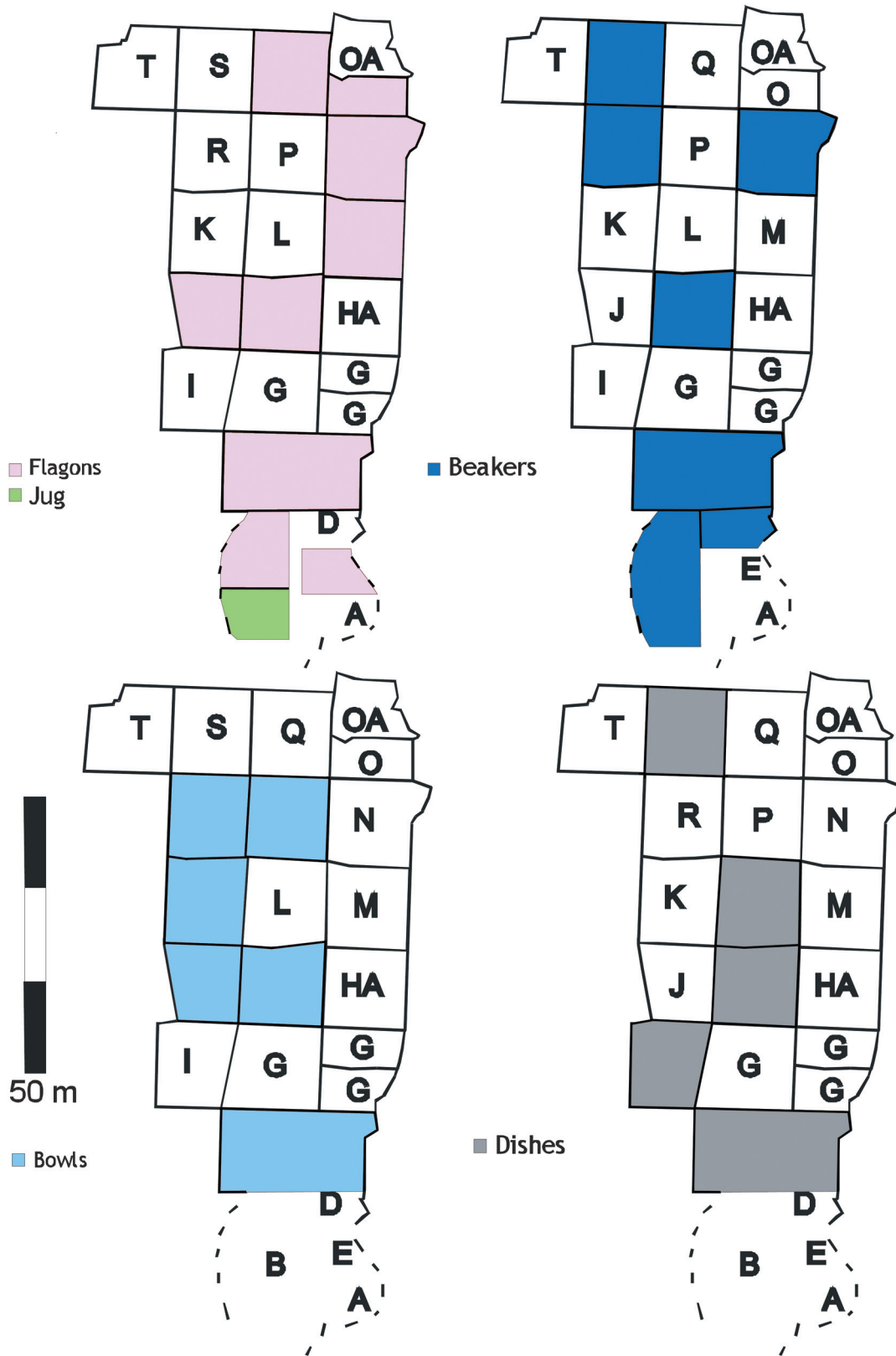


Fig 21: Traprain Law – Table ware pottery distribution

perception that samian is an indicator of high status. In part though this is likely to reflect the chronology of this particular assemblage over all, for it includes a proportion of later Roman types which will have arrived at the site after the normal period of samian production and circulation. Vessels associated with eating and drinking, particularly storage jars, beakers and flagons, predominate and may be associated with the maintenance of status through social feasting (Hunter 2005, 235). The dichotomy between the presence of beakers in military contexts and Traprain is most intriguing and could well confirm that these vessel-types formed an element of soldiers' military kit (Swan 2009). These were potentially treasured objects that confirm and display the ethnic origin of their owners, in the same way as some vessels from along the Antonine Wall which have been manufactured in accordance with clearly definable ethnic traditions (Swan 1992; 1999). Accordingly, they could well have been subject to very careful curation and therefore less liable to breakage. The diverse nature of individual fragments which cannot be matched with any other sherd is paralleled with the samian, particularly the decorated sherds, none of which derive from the same vessel, possibly signifying that many of the sherds were broken at the time of their arrival on the site (Warner 1976, 285), that they were treated differently to other material (Willis 1997) and potentially curated over lengthy timescales.

Unlike the military sites where mortaria constitute a substantial percentage of ceramic collections, only four of these vessel types occur on the hillfort, one is a fourth century product of Oxfordshire and, therefore, a late arrival on the site. Similarly, the lack of amphorae on Traprain suggests that traditional large-scale storage and food preparation practices remained largely unaffected by the Roman presence. While it has been suggested that the cheese press could imply an interest in gourmet products (Hunter 2009a, 230), it is impossible to draw any conclusions on the subject based on the presence of two joining fragments from the base of this vessel-type. Bowls and dishes are also represented in small quantities and these originate from various locations and a wide date-range.

In terms of their distributional spread, like samian, amphorae and storage jar sherds were recovered from the centre and south of the western plateau excavations, as were cooking pot and mortaria sherds, although the latter also came from the extreme north-east of the plateau (Fig 20). Flagon follows a similar pattern and beakers also came from the centre, south-west and north-west, while bowls and dishes also have a central and western distribution (Fig 21). Sherds from vessels spanning centuries were present in upper and lower levels which could imply secondary deposition; however, the insecure nature of the stratigraphic information from the early excavations makes it challenging to draw definitive conclusions on this subject.

## 5. Discussion

The high occurrence of Roman material on Traprain could suggest reasonable contact with Rome (Hunter 2009a, 232); however, this hypothesis does not explain how that relationship was maintained after Roman withdrawal from the region as evidenced by the presence of third and fourth century Roman pottery and other goods. Erdrich *et al* (2000, 453) further suggest that the absence of samian immediately before or after the Roman presence could refute the previously supposed existence of close long-term relationships with the Romans (eg Frere 1987, 286), but this hypothesis takes no account of later coarse wares. It is conceivable that a mass migration of elites moved into the region to fill a power vacuum (Mackie 1979; 1982) or Roman emissaries travelled northward to maintain political contact as potentially evidenced by the hoards of late second century *denarii* from Birnie in Moray (Hunter 2004; 2007b). However, a potentially more feasible explanation might be that this later material passed through existing or newly formed long-distance contacts with other groups further south or even through a chain of contacts across regions in the manner of the *kula* system of exchange existing in the Trobriander (Malinowski 1922) and other societies from Papua New Guinea (Leach and Leach 1983). Parallels have been found with the range of pottery present on Roman military sites, while brooches appear to reflect this pattern (Hunter 1996), although the low quantity of Roman weapons or military equipment appears to preclude this site from having been occupied by Roman auxiliary troops as has been confirmed for the watchtower on Eildon Hill North (Steer and Feachem 1952; Frere 1986).

Looting from Roman sites is also a possibility (Robertson 1970), but the evidence of selectivity from what was available is thought to confirm the army's role in exchange systems and Erdrich *et al* (2000, 454) conclude that the acquisition of Roman goods was most likely the result of diplomatic contacts between Romans and favoured groups. This, they consider, may confirm that the presence of samian could be taken as evidence of the high status of the site's inhabitants, in concurrence with Willis (1998a, 86–8) who has suggested that samian was highly prized and differently treated by recipient communities. However, the widespread nature of Roman goods on Iron Age sites should discourage assumptions that these were objects of status (Hunter 2001, 291). Indeed, Willis' wider discussion (1997, 39) also notes the possibility that the predominance of early samian, often to the exclusion of other Roman wares, on the majority of indigenous sites in southern Scotland, North Wales and Northumberland may, in fact, imply that no social restrictions were in place for access to these wares (*contra* Macinnes 1984).

Taphonomic processes could have impacted upon the condition, size and distribution of sherds. Campbell's (2007, 84) methodology for assessing these processes can

be helpfully applied here to determine whether broken vessel fragments have been discarded and continually degraded. In this model sherd size curves give indications of potential trampling as curvature decreases with sherd size until discarded fragments can no longer be broken underfoot, nor affected by re-deposition or plough action below a minimum of 1–2cm. Fig 22 confirms that coarse ware sherds predominantly lie within the 3–5cm range, suggesting that they were not subjected to continual trampling or other taphonomic processes.

They may well have been secondary as opposed to primary rubbish (Campbell 2007, 86); however, there are in fact only seven recorded instances of midden deposition of Roman ceramic sherds across the entirety of Northern Britain. One of these is from a sixth midden under the monastic site at Whithorn, Dumfries and Galloway (Dickinson 1997; Hill 1997, 292–7) another is, significantly, the nearby hillfort at Edinburgh Castle which produced a large Roman ceramic assemblage (Driscoll and Yeoman 1997). Alternatively then, the graph may represent sherds which were subject to retention and curation after initial breakage. This suggestion is strengthened by the comparatively similar average sizes of rim and base sherds as these break less easily due to relative thickness which leads to strengthening as well as redistribution of some stress (Campbell 2007, 85). This is a similar pattern to the sizes of sherds recovered from across Northern Britain (Fig 23); however, it differs markedly from samian sherds which predominantly measure 2cm in length (Fig 22). The fragmentary condition of sherds (Chapman 2000) is potentially highly significant and the wider research draws out possible patterns of proportionalising practices (Campbell 2010) whereby parts of deliberately broken objects are imbued with cultural significance and distributed out to individuals during ritualised activities.

To return to Hunter's (2009a) question, "how unique is Traprain?", in comparison to the other sites traditionally thought of as elite, Traprain Law does indeed continue to stand out as 'unique' in terms of access to Roman ceramic and non-ceramic material. No other site approaches the quantity or range of vessels recovered from Traprain. Biases in excavation strategies and methodologies have undoubtedly contributed to the situation. While it is tempting to compare the total excavation of Broxmouth hillfort (Hunter 2009b, 155), which produced only six samian sherds (Hill 1982b), all of which were subject to reuse (Campbell 2010), caution should be exercised in drawing comparison of such markedly different sites as the large hillfort at Traprain sitting atop the rocky outcrop on the East Lothian plains and Broxmouth resting upon a slight elevation in the landscape. Only Edinburgh Castle (Driscoll and Yeoman 1997) and the two Stirlingshire brochs at Leckie (Mackie 1979; 1982) and Fairy Knowe (Main 1998) have produced large Roman ceramic assemblages. Castlehill (Smith 1919) is their closest rival with a mere 22 sherds. However, some

definable similarities also emerge between some sites, particularly in the range of material culture recovered, associations with crafts and metal-working activities and site placement, all of which are likely to have been linked to ideological symbolism and cultural memory (Hingley 1997; 1999; Garcia Sanjuan *et al* 2007).

Regrettably, like many other sites in the North, the lack of secure stratigraphic evidence from the many early excavations restricts chronological interpretation of depositional contexts on Traprain Law. It is therefore impossible to determine whether the Roman material was being used and deposited contemporaneously with similar objects in Roman military contexts as is often presumed (eg Hill 1982b; Armit 1999), treated carefully and curated over lengthy timescales or if these objects, or parts thereof, were brought to the site at a later date. Indeed, radiocarbon sampling from Whittingehame enclosure 2.5km south-east of Traprain confirms the site's reuse during the fifth–sixth century, a situation which would not have been apparent from material remains including a worn second–third century samian platter sherd from one of the latest stratigraphic layers (Haselgrove 2009, 203). Ongoing research on the remaining Roman pottery recovered from Iron Age sites in the North should further clarify how these objects functioned within recipient societies. It is, however, possible that Roman objects may have been valued more for their form and functional qualities as opposed to their association with elitism or Romanization (Millett 1992).

It is also possible that these vessels may have originally been acquired by elite occupants of Traprain as a means of asserting and maintaining their social status (Millett 1992, 99–101) through social feasting and drinking (Hunter 2005, 235; Pitts 2004, 50). After the initial period of "first contact" (Owen 2005, 14), the vessels may have lost their original exotic or prestige value and become more readily available with a decrease in status. However, the fragmentary condition of the sherds, many of which derive from entirely different vessels, hints at more complex processes at play and it is to be hoped that a more nuanced picture will emerge as the research progresses. Many of the samian sherds have been adapted and reused by the hillfort inhabitants. Such changes in use can therefore aid our understanding of social changes and subsequent changes in the meanings of the objects (Barratt 1994, 88). While none of the sherds have been subjected to petrological, chemical or macroscopic analysis, future analysis of their wear patterns and any residual material (eg metal from polishing) would prove most beneficial in order to draw more definitive and legitimate conclusions.

#### Note

All figures in this paper are based on the work of the author and derive from her thesis, except for Fig 3 (where the sources are referenced in the captions).

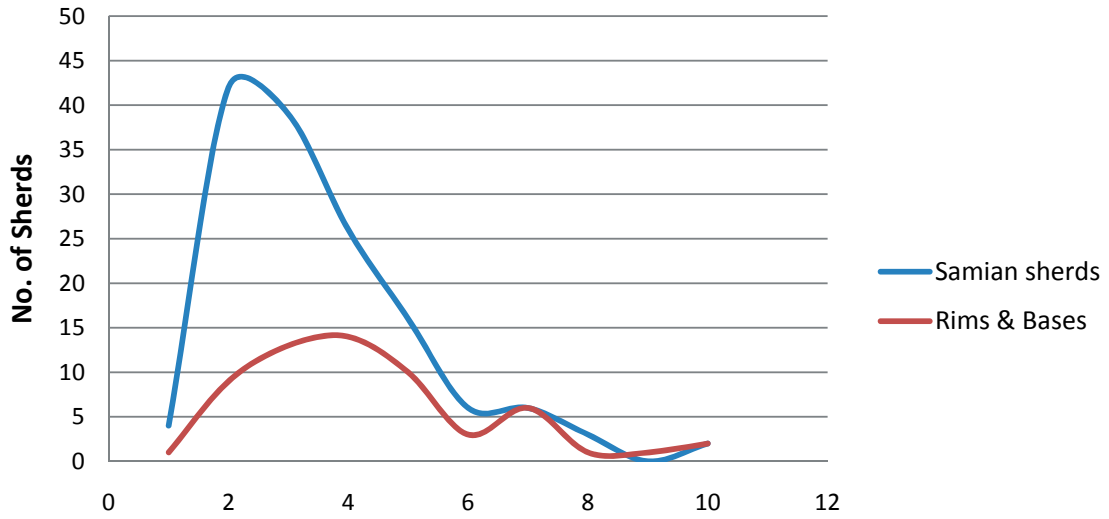
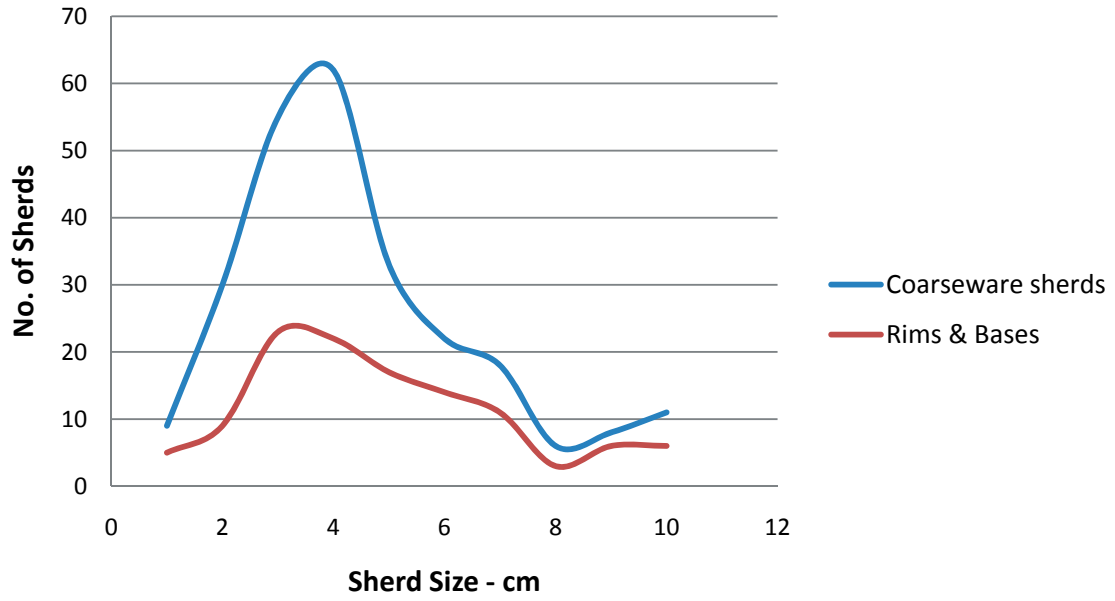


Fig 22: Traprain Law - sherd size measurements

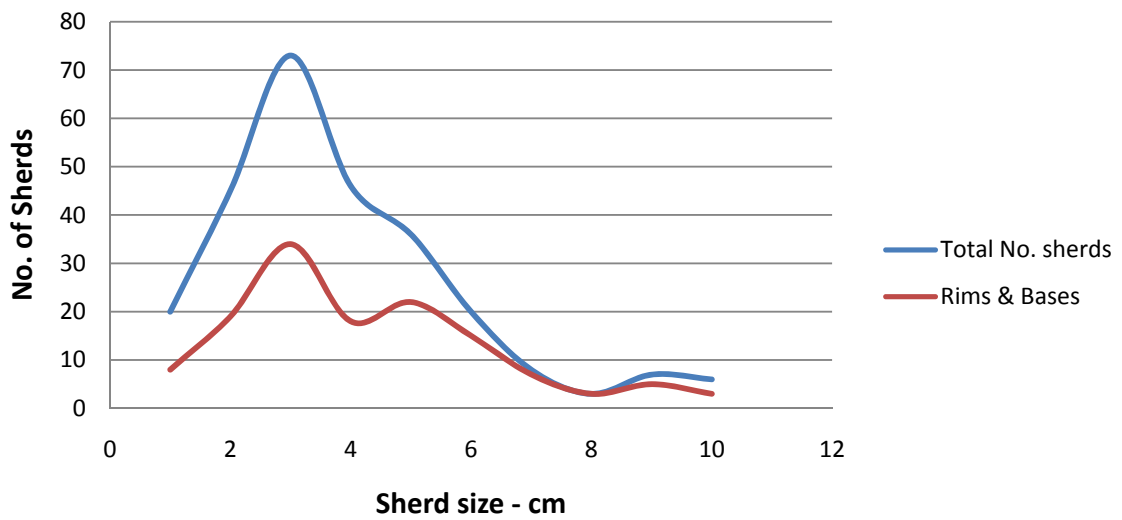


Fig 23: Taphonomic Processes – sherd sizes in Northern Britain (Data from the author's PhD thesis)

Lloyd Bosworth (University of Kent) kindly adapted the appearance and format of some of these illustrations for this publication under the direction of the editor.

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