

III.

NOTICE OF A SUBMARINE DEPOSIT OF SAMIAN WARE OFF THE
COAST OF KENT. BY JOHN T. BEER, F.S.A. Scot.

It is perhaps not possible now to ascertain when the extraordinary deposit of Samian ware upon this bank, locally known as The Pan Rock, was first discovered. Probably it would not be anterior to the establishment of oyster culture by the Whitstable Company of Dredgers, whose charter of incorporation was obtained by special Act of Parliament in 1793, but whose operations extend back to a much earlier period, they having had the exclusive right of dredging and fishing over the marine portions of the manor for ages. The site of the deposit is not, however, within the limits of their rights, but some three or four miles to the eastward, and nearly opposite to Herne Bay. But the *spat* or young spawn of the oysters, which for a few days floats on the surface, is often carried away from over the beds by unfavourable winds and tides, and then settling down attaches itself to any hard substance on the adjacent bottom. This part of the sea, which is called the *Flats*, is free ground, and is dredged alike by the Whitstable freemen for the recovery of the young brood, which is then laid down on their proper beds, and by others both for it and that which has attained maturity. It has been by this continual scraping of the ocean bed with the dredges through successive generations that the hoard was reached and gradually brought to light.

Being a native of the town, and related to several of the dredgers, I have, during some summer holidays there, been able to acquire a few good specimens of this valuable deposit. Fifty years ago it was much more easily obtainable than of late ; in fact, it is difficult now to get, even on the spot, a good and fairly perfect piece. And when obtainable, so eager is the demand, from the spread of antiquarian knowledge and multiplication of collectors, that the prices demanded are greatly in excess of those formerly thought most liberal.

As to the quantity which has been recovered, it would be difficult to conjecture, although it must be large, seeing that the period over which

the find ranges is long ; the number of the boats (always three persons to each) occasionally working the ground from 50 to 70 ; and the channels into which it has flowed numerous and far-reaching ; besides which, during the earlier years of its recovery, many fine pieces were destroyed as of little value, being used for ordinary domestic purposes in the homes of the finders.

The site, I have said, is nearly opposite to Herne Bay ; it is also about three miles out from the coast, and as the land thereabout has suffered considerably during many generations from inroads of the water, this has given rise to the supposition, up to the present generally entertained in the locality, that a Roman station for its manufacture originally stood upon the bank ; but of this there is no certain proof. A positive answer can, however, be given in the fact that all the pieces obtained are whole, except such as are broken by the dredges, whereas, in the case supposed, the mass would be but shards, with few or no perfect pieces. Besides, although the coast has yielded much to the ocean, yet there is not the least probability of the land having extended thus far out, at least since the time of the Roman occupation of our island.

Having thus disposed of the conjecture that the site may have been that of a Roman pottery, another must be advanced, which I venture to think has in it a much greater probability of truth.

It is well known that a large quantity of pottery was made by, or under the direction of the Romans, at Upchurch, Castor, and many other places south and west of York, yet Jewitt says :—“The well-known Samian ware, the finest and most beautiful of the pottery of the Romans which is found in this country, was not manufactured here.” And Birch, quoting from Brongniart, in his *Ancient Pottery*, says :—“It was apparently an importation, being exactly identical wherever discovered, and is readily distinguishable from the local pottery.” Italy, Gaul, and Germany were the chief seats of its production, and probably it was from the Gauls that Britain obtained its principal supply.

Now, the Pan Rock is a shoal or bank lying directly in the course of navigation from the English Channel to the Thames—the Reculvert formerly being the point where all vessels from the Continent entered

the North Sea for the metropolitan river. This being so, it becomes almost certain that a vessel laden with this particular ware was sometime, during the first four centuries of our era, *en voyage* from the Continent to the Thames, and by storm or otherwise, became a wreck on this bank. During the centuries following all pertaining to the ship, except its imperishable cargo, would decay. An interesting peculiarity of the deposit worthy of note is, that the very way in which it was packed in the hold of the ship is indicated by the state of the pieces recovered—the whole apparently being in a position face downwards. The proof of this will be given when we consider the character and condition of the portions recovered.

The general character of the Red or Samian ware is so well known that there is no need to enlarge upon it. It is of a deep red hue, natural to the clay, or obtained by oxide of iron or other colouring substance. The clay is fine and hard, almost metallic, and capable of a fine polish, breaking when baked, as smooth and sharp as china, although about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in thickness. This feature of the ware became anciently an illustration of anything fragile; thus Plautus in his *Bacchides* says:—

“Take care, prythee, lest any heedless touch that;
Thou knowest how soon a Samian vase will break.”

It is a question with some experts whether the fine, rich, smooth surface is the result of polishing on the wheel, or of the application of a thin siliceous glaze. So far as the plain ware is concerned, I have no doubt the former was the process, as there is little or no indication on the newly-fractured edges of a separate film; neither can it be detected where the surface has suffered abrasion by friction or otherwise.

A special feature of the Whitstable find is the almost total absence of decorated pieces; in fact, among the large quantity coming under my own observation, there has been none with any other ornament than a simple leaf with stem, laid on the top rim. This is usually called the lotus leaf decoration. I have heard of an ivy leaf similarly used, and have one or two spurious imitations bought at Canterbury, but have not seen an original piece. In either case they are exceptional. This is

significant, as in the magnificent collection at York almost the whole is ornamented; and seeing it has been found mostly in and about the city, is worthy of note. A fragment of this moulded Samian from Wrexham is in my own small museum. It seems to represent a slave or captive pleading for mercy, and has the symbols of brief life (a green branch), and of eternity (a coiled serpent), stars around the bottom, and the tongue and bead fringe border, which is common to almost the whole of the ornamented ware. Fortunately this fragment has the name of the maker ISVDVI upon it. Most of these fancy specimens are thus stamped in the design, and not on the bottom, as in the plain examples.

The Pan Rock deposit is also limited to a narrow range in the variety of its forms, indicating, I think strongly, that if not all from one manufactory, they are from one district where this special class of pottery was made.

The most important of these wares are large bowls (Fig. 1, No. 1), those in my own collection having a diameter of 10 inches and a depth of $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, a side view of which is also given in the plate group. They are of the usual thickness, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch to about half-way down, where they are thickened $\frac{1}{16}$ inch by a raised rim, while midway between this and the centre is a ring of wavy style marks at right angles with the direction of the circle. The centre is slightly elevated, and has the name of the maker AMATORIS in relief Roman capitals on a depressed ribbon stamp. The top rim is rounded to a moulding at the back, and the raised foot has a diameter of 4 inches by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep. These supporting rims are almost invariably broken; lying exposed to the surface of the soil while the body is still embedded in the mud, the heavy iron frame of the dredge coming into violent contact with them, breaks them off wholly or in part, but at the same time wrests the piece from its long undisturbed abode, so that another dredge passing over the same spot catches and brings it up. One of these bowls in the Liverpool Museum is $11\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter, and has a rose centre without name.

That this is the position in which the whole cargo was originally packed in the ship's hold is further shown by the fact that while the inside of the pieces are in nearly all cases almost as bright and perfect as when new (except for small marine attachments), the backs are always

much abraded by the surface action of gravel and water, and have also a coating of soil, barnacles, serpulæ, ostreæ, animalculæ, and weeds.

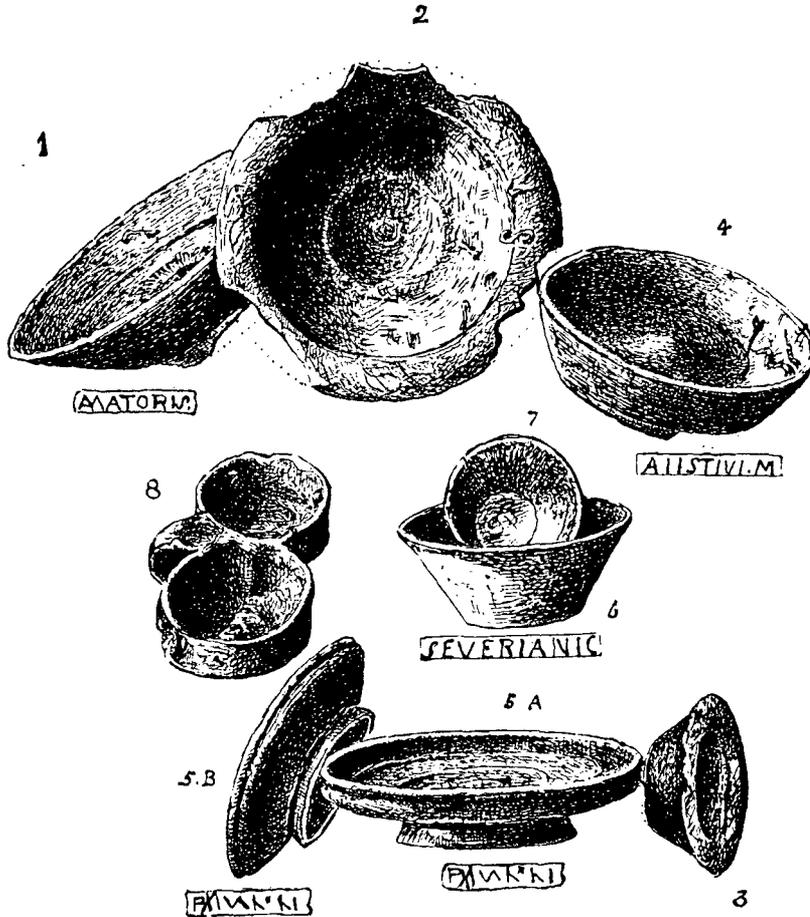


Fig. 1. Vessels of Samian Ware. (From a Drawing by John H. Day.)

Of course, when the piece, after being turned out of the soil, lies some considerable time unrecovered, these attachments are made

on the interior, yet rarely to the same extent. The large bowls when reversed bear no bad resemblance to a Mandarin's hat, wanting but a knot in the centre to perfect the likeness.

There is another form of bowl which is sometimes found, a damaged specimen of which (Fig. 1, No. 2) is in my own possession. It has two chief characteristics of departure from the form of that previously described, in its broad convex brim and shallower body. It is on the upper surface of the brim of these pieces that the leaf decoration usually occurs; and although it is scarcely apparent on this specimen, a close inspection shows a faint outline of their former presence ere being rasped down by many centuries of friction. The convex brim has a breadth of 1 inch on the upper surface, with a deep-incised line at its spring. From this ring the body curves down gradually without break to the centre, where there is a small impressed circle $\frac{5}{8}$ inch in diameter, but no maker's name; indeed, I do not know of any of this form being named.¹ The rims of these vessels are moulded over at the back, and thence continued with a flat surface to the round of the body. This piece has a diameter of $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and a depth of $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches without the foot, as that is quite broken away.

The smaller specimen (Fig. 1, No. 3) is in better condition, and shows the leaf pattern quite distinctly. The rim is not moulded at the back as the larger piece, but curved throughout to the shape of the upper surface. The foot of this also is entirely gone. Diameter, $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches; depth, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch.

A more prevalent occurrence is that of smaller bowls or shallow basins of a medium size, having rounded top edges, from whence the sides curve slightly down to the bottom, which springs gradually to a cone centre, across which the name of the maker [AESTIVI.M] is stamped as in No. 1, the double II being equal to E, so that the name would be Æstivi. The marine incrustation on the interior of this piece (Fig. 1, No. 4) has an opaline sheen which is very effective on the deep red body. Many of

¹ Since writing the above, I have had an opportunity of inspecting the large and beautiful collection of "Samian" in the Musée at Rouen, and found there, as I fully expected to do, that not a single specimen of this form had any inscription or any other decoration than the leaf referred to. This had not previously been noted by the courteous curator under whose guidance I made the observation.

the pieces have been much deteriorated by the efforts made to remove these acquisitions by those who knew not their antiquarian and artistic value.

Perhaps the last-mentioned pieces and a kind of plate or *patera* (Fig. 1, No. 5 A) are most abundant in this horde. I have seen only one size of these latter articles, except a large one in the Liverpool Museum, which has a diameter of $11\frac{1}{4}$ inches; and although by different makers, they vary nothing in form, and but slightly in finish. They are $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter and $1\frac{5}{8}$ deep, and very correctly modelled. The sides spring about $\frac{5}{8}$ inch, and from a fine raised line are rounded over to a moulding at the back. The sides are deeply concave to another more boldly raised line, which marks the bottom of the plate. There is also another strongly indented line round the bottom about 1 inch nearer the centre, which is finished with the usual small circle, $\frac{5}{8}$ inch, having in this case the name PΛVΛ·K across it. The bottom is not flat, but very slightly hollow. The late eminent antiquary, Mr C. R. Smith, in a communication to myself, calls the above name Paulli; but as I have more than one distinctly marked piece, and the third letter is not a simple U or V, but apparently a compound of U and N, or possibly W; and as there is also a marked and dotted space between the two L's, I can scarcely read it so. The foot (Fig. 1, No. 5 B) is $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches across and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep, and in these pateræ is much less damaged than in the other shapes, probably because their shallow form did not offer so much resistance to the drag of the dredge as did the more deeply embedded pieces. Another common name on these forms is ATILIANLM, the final M standing for *manu* or maker.

Of basins proper there are a variety in size, though none in shape, if we exclude the shallow bowl-like vessels already mentioned under that head. In one respect they differ from the usual form—Grecian, Cyprian, or modern—in not being rounded inside at the bottom, the sides meeting it with an obtuse angle. In fact, I am led to believe, from a broken specimen I have, that the parts mentioned were made separately, and afterwards united previous to being put into the kiln. The largest in my collection (Fig. 1, No. 6) is $3\frac{3}{4}$ deep, $5\frac{1}{2}$ in diameter at top, and $2\frac{1}{4}$ at bottom, which is but very little elevated in the middle, where the

name SEVERIANIC appears. A smaller one (Fig. No. 7) is $1\frac{3}{4}$ deep, $3\frac{7}{8}$ in diameter at top, and $1\frac{3}{4}$ in diameter at the bottom. Their bases are without feet, as those are completely cut away. They have no other ornamentation than a single sunken ring about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the rim, which is not moulded on the outside. The name on this one is difficult to read, some oyster brood lying across it, but probably it is the same as on No. 6.

The cargo, if such it was, consisted also of some pottery wares not properly Samian, the clay not being so finely prepared nor so smoothly finished; indeed, the articles are very rough compared with the bulk of the cargo. One small piece (Fig. 1, No. 8) in excellent condition was given to me by a cousin, Mr Thomas Gilbert, who himself dredged it from the bank. It is a pair of shallow cups united with a finger ring on one side. They are each $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep. One is slightly sunk in the centre, the other is quite plain. The two together are 5 inches across; they are thickly glazed on the inside only, and were probably intended for salt or other table condiments.

Another uncommon piece in my possession is a large two-handled jar of still coarser clay and rougher make; the colour also is much lighter in tone than that of the Samian. The form is graceful in outline, although very unevenly built up, and partakes somewhat of the tulip shape. The handles, one of which only remains, are squat and small, admitting only the thumb and finger; the upper end is firmly attached to the rim at right angles, while the lower part is flattened and elongated to a blunt point, and laid on to the side of the jar in a gentle, graceful curve, giving the whole a crude, snake-like appearance. The bottom is quite flat, and the top rim seems, from the small part remaining, to have been about 1 inch high. The jar is $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches to the top of the body, and $9\frac{3}{8}$ inches to the top of the handles and rim. The mouth is 5 inches in diameter, the thickest part of body $7\frac{3}{8}$ inches, and the bottom $4\frac{3}{8}$ inches. It is covered on one side, which had probably lain uppermost, with barnacles, &c.; but the inside is coated with marine incrustations of the same kind as on the other pieces. There is no mark on any of these coarse specimens.

There are a few of these coarse jars, differing in shape, and just as recovered, in an exceedingly fine collection of this Whitstable haul in

the Liverpool Public Museum, the noble gift of the late Joseph Mayer of that city. It is strange to find such a collection so far from the spot, especially as the Canterbury Museum, only six miles away, cannot show anything to approach it.

I may add that all the pieces described from my own collection have come to me direct from the finders, and have never been in the hands of a dealer.
