

Putting Roman Tackley on the map

Tackley lies half a mile to the north of Akeman Street, the major road that connected the two important Roman towns of St Albans (Verulamium) and Cirencester (Corinium). Eight miles to the east along Akeman Street is the garrison town of Alchester, just outside Bicester, and two miles to the west, beyond Sturdy's Castle, are the remains of a village at Samsons Platt. To the north and west are the sites of several Roman villas.

During the last year, members of the Local History Group have been walking the fields around the village looking for evidence--pieces of pottery, flint tools, metalwork, coins, etc.--of the people who lived and worked here from prehistoric times to the Middle Ages. Using crop markings as a guide we have found several concentrated collections of Roman pottery which date from the 2nd to the 4th centuries AD. These include many pieces of everyday pots, most of them made locally—Oxford was an important centre of the pottery industry—but some come from further afield, Stowe and the Nene valley. Most of the pieces come from cooking pots and serving vessels, as well as flagons for drinking wine or beer. Among the more interesting of these everyday items are mortaria, shallow bowls with pieces of grit pressed into the surface, used for grinding food. We have also collected pieces of more valuable, fine quality pottery, including Samian ware, which was imported from Southern France—the equivalent of today's best dinner service. One of these is embossed with a scene showing a lion hunt. A few pieces of Roman glass and one small piece of decorated bronze, perhaps a writing instrument or for applying cosmetics, have turned up.

Olive oil from Southern Spain

One fragment of pottery has been identified as coming from a large jar, made in Southern Spain, that was used to import olive oil. People in Tackley were buying olive oil 1800 years before it was on sale in the Village Shop!

Altogether we have identified five Roman sites within a mile-and-a-half of Tackley Church. Only one of these might be a villa, i.e. a collection of buildings, both domestic and agricultural, at the heart of a large estate and occupied by the Romano-British aristocracy. The others are almost certainly farmsteads, where the less well-off lived. But even though they don't have the mosaics and under-floor central-heating that are familiar from such villas as North Leigh, they are just as interesting and can give insights into how the majority of the population, and not just the rich and powerful, lived and worked.

We are planning more walks and further investigations, including a geophysics survey (as on Time Team), and there is always the possibility, with the permission of the landowners, of small excavations.

If you would like to join the History Group please contact John Harding, 55 St John's Road, johnharding55@yahoo.co.uk If you have found objects yourself, either out walking or in your garden, and would like to know more about them or add them to our records, please contact John Perkins, 19 Nethercote Road, tel. 331147, jperkins@brookes.ac.uk.

John Perkins