

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-00327-8 - Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain  
H. E. M. Cool  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## EATING AND DRINKING IN ROMAN BRITAIN

What were the eating and drinking habits of the inhabitants of Britain during the Roman period? Drawing on evidence from a large number of archaeological excavations, this fascinating new study shows how varied these habits were in different regions and amongst different communities and challenges the idea that there was any one single way of being Roman or native. Integrating a range of archaeological sources, including pottery, metalwork and environmental evidence such as animal bone and seeds, this book illuminates eating and drinking choices, providing invaluable insights into how those communities regarded their world. The book contains sections on the nature of the different types of evidence used and how they can be analysed. It will be a useful guide to all archaeologists, and those who wish to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of these materials and how best to use them.

HILARY COOL is a professional archaeologist who, for the past ten years, has run her own business providing post-excavation services to the professional sector. She is also a director of Barbican Research Associates, a company specialising in writing up backlog sites. Her publications include *The Roman Cemetery at Brougham, Cumbria* (2004) and (with J. Price) *Roman Vessel Glass from Excavations at Colchester 1971–1985* (1995).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-00327-8 - Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain

H. E. M. Cool

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

# EATING AND DRINKING IN ROMAN BRITAIN

H. E. M. COOL



Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-00327-8 - Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain  
H. E. M. Cool  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo  
Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521003278](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521003278)

© Cambridge University Press 2006

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2006

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN-13 978-0-521-80276-5 hardback  
ISBN-10 0-521-80276-8 hardback  
ISBN-13 978-0-521-00327-8 paperback  
ISBN-10 0-521-00327-X paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this book, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-00327-8 - Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain  
H. E. M. Cool  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

***For Mike***

*who has patiently lived with me and the Romans for a very long time*

## *Contents*

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>List of tables</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
1 Apéritif	I
2 The food itself	8
3 The packaging	15
4 The human remains	21
5 Written evidence	30
6 Kitchen and dining basics: techniques and utensils	37
7 The store cupboard	56
8 Staples	69
9 Meat	80
10 Dairy products	93
11 Poultry and eggs	98
12 Fish and shellfish	104
13 Game	111
14 Greengrocery	119
15 Drink	129
16 The end of independence	152
17 A brand-new province	172

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-00327-8 - Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain  
H. E. M. Cool  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
18	Coming of age	200
19	A different world	221
20	Digestif	243
	<i>Appendix: Data sources for tables</i>	246
	<i>References</i>	253
	<i>Index</i>	275

## *Figures*

1.1 Map showing the principal sites mentioned in the text.	<i>page</i> 4
1.2 Detailed insets 2 and 3 for fig. 1.1.	5
1.3 Detailed inset 4 for fig. 1.1.	6
3.1 Amphora forms and their main contents.	17
6.1 Early third-century ‘north African’ casseroles and cooking jars from York.	40
6.2 Tripod cooking bowls.	41
6.3 A selection of mortaria showing size ranges.	42
6.4 Boxplot showing the internal diameters of pottery mortaria and stone mortars by date.	44
6.5 Metal vessels used in sacrifice and bathing, with altar.	48
8.1 Beehive and lava querns.	72
9.1 Cattle scapula from Castleford.	90
10.1 Military cheese presses and strainers from Longthorpe and Holt.	96
15.1 Detail of the Simpelfeld sarcophagus showing the wine service.	137
15.2 Metal vessels used for hand washing and the wine service.	139
15.3 Strainers used for infused drinks.	145
15.4 Pottery beakers with drinking mottos from Verulamium and York.	148
15.5 Plot of the size of late second- to third-century pottery beakers.	149
15.6 Comparison of the sizes of first-, third- and fourth-century pottery beakers.	150
16.1 Pottery tablewares found in the King Harry Lane cemetery showing the range of sizes.	156
16.2 Sizes of beakers used as accessory vessels at the King Harry Lane cemetery compared to the size of motto beakers.	165

17.1	Colchester. Sites in the vicinity and location of the excavated sites within the fortress.	173
17.2	Leadenhall Court, London. Location of the site at the north-west of the later <i>forum basilica</i> and main excavation area.	181
17.3	Cremation Burial 25 at Stansted.	196
17.4	Burial 2 at Grange Road, Winchester.	197
18.1	The Uley temple complex.	212
18.2	The <i>mithraeum</i> at Carrawburgh.	214
19.1	Correspondence analysis plot showing the change of glass-vessel assemblage compositions with time.	225
19.2	Correspondence analysis plot showing the changes in pottery vessels available at York with time.	229
19.3	Correspondence analysis plot showing the changes in pottery-vessel assemblages at Wroxeter with time.	233
19.4	Fourth-century silver spoons used in both pagan and Christian worship.	241



## *Tables*

3.1 Amphorae as a proportion of total pottery assemblages.	<i>page</i> 18
3.2 Size and capacities of some of the commoner amphora forms found on British sites.	19
4.1 Mean stature of adults in eight late Roman cemeteries.	25
4.2 Incidence of dental caries, enamel hypoplasia and cribra orbitalia.	26
4.3 The incidence of DISH in sexed individuals over the age of 45 at Poundbury.	28
6.1 Incidence of sooting, burning and limescale on different categories of pottery vessels.	38
6.2 A comparison of the functional categories in selected late second- to third-century samian assemblages.	46
7.1 A comparison of dated amphora assemblages.	60
7.2 The presence/absence of amphora types in dated assemblages.	61
7.3 The presence/absence of various spices in waterlogged deposits.	65
9.1 A comparison of later first- to mid-second-century animal bone assemblages.	81
9.2 The relationship between deadweight and meat yield.	81
11.1 A comparison of the recovery of different types of poultry at selected urban sites.	99
11.2 A comparison of sheep/pig and poultry bone fragments from Culver Street, Colchester and Fishbourne.	100
13.1 A comparison of sheep/pig and deer bones at selected sites.	112
14.1 The incidence of fruit remains in selected cesspits.	120
15.1 Wine sources at first-century forts.	133
15.2 Wine sources in London during the first century.	134
15.3 Incidence of metal vessels on different types of site.	140
16.1 Pottery forms from Braughing.	161

16.2	Pottery forms from Gorhambury.	161
16.3	Tableware forms in formal burials at the King Harry Lane cemetery.	162
16.4	Incidence of cups in the graves at King Harry Lane.	163
16.5	Associations of the principal types of tablewares at the King Harry Lane Cemetery.	167
17.1	Proportions of the principal domesticates at Colchester in contexts dated to AD 49–60/1.	174
17.2	Amphorae-borne commodities in Colchester AD 44–60/1.	175
17.3	Pottery-vessel forms from Colchester AD 44–60/1.	176
17.4	Glass-vessel forms from Colchester AD 44–60/1.	178
17.5	Pottery and glass vessels associated with Phase 3 contexts at Leadenhall Court, London.	182
17.6	Animal bone from the principal domesticates from selected Fort I contexts at Castleford.	186
17.7	Pottery vessels from Fort I contexts at Castleford.	188
17.8	Glass vessels from Fort I and the Phase 1 <i>vicus</i> area at Castleford.	188
17.9	Animal bone from the principal domesticates from Period 2 contexts at Claydon Pike and Period 1 contexts at Orton Hall Farm.	190
17.10	Pottery vessels from Period 2 contexts at Claydon Pike and Period 1 contexts at Orton Hall Farm.	192
17.11	The grave goods from the Bartlow burials.	194
18.1	Principal pottery and glass-vessel types from contexts of Phases 2, 3 and 5 at Causeway Lane, Leicester.	203
18.2	Principal pottery and glass-vessel types from Claydon Pike (Phase 3) and Parlington Hollins.	204
18.3	Animal bone from the principal domesticates from Period 3 contexts at Claydon Pike and Roman contexts at Parlington Hollins.	205
18.4	Animal bones from Phase 4 contexts at Uley.	213
18.5	The pyre good-meat-bone associations for burials at Brougham.	218
19.1	Glass-vessel assemblages of various dates quantified according to form.	224
19.2	The principal pottery vessel forms in use in Roman York.	228
19.3	Pottery from late Roman and sub-Roman contexts at the Baths Basilica, Wroxeter.	233

## *Preface*

I decided to write this book as it combined three of my great interests in life – food, drink and Roman Britain. Whilst few people would be surprised at the first two, a passion for the third would raise eyebrows in many archaeological circles. For much of my professional life just as real men didn't eat quiche, so real archaeologists didn't do Roman Britain. For Classical archaeologists, the province of *Britannia* was a distant excrescence, far from the 'proper' archaeology of the Mediterranean lands. Within British archaeology, it was seen as the preserve of arcane specialisms pursuing their own agendas far from where the theoretical action was. Whilst theory has now come to Roman Britain, it is still an uncomfortable place for many. Modern tastes wish to do away with anything that recalls colonialism, whilst rising nationalisms prefer not to engage with periods when Britain was self-evidently part of a wider world. Prehistory is still a safer, more comfortable and purer world for archaeologists to play in.

This is a great pity as Roman Britain is a very strange place, much stranger than the many popular books written about it would lead one to think. It is fully worthy of being studied in its own right, but that has to be done on its own terms. This involves knowing how to interpret all the data relating to it. The problem with Roman Britain is that there are just too many things. Too much pottery, too much metalwork, too many animal bones. People tend to be overwhelmed by the sheer volume. They deal with it by picking out the occasional morsel, and hoping the rest will go away. This book is offered as a kind of hitchhiker's guide to those who would like to explore this material, but who lose the will to live when faced with the reams of specialist reports that even a minor excavation can generate. It shows, I hope, how these reports can be used to explore different facets of the past. I have chosen to explore eating and drinking

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-00327-8 - Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain  
H. E. M. Cool  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

xiv

*Preface*

because not only does it interest me but, as the celebrated gourmet and bon viveur Brillat-Savarin said ‘Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are’. Where better to start exploring Roman Britain?  
*Bon appetit!*

## *Acknowledgements*

A book like this depends on the work of the specialists who have sorted, identified, analysed and published the multitude of items on which it is based. Their names are mentioned in the footnotes, but I would like to put on record my thanks here, and my apologies too if I have misrepresented them.

Over the years I have benefited from discussions with many people. Those who have kindly answered questions specifically to do with this book include Richard Brewer, Peter Davenport, Brenda Dickinson, Jerry Evans, Andrew (Bone) Jones, Ruth Leary, Scott Martin, Quita Mould, Stephanie Ratkái, Paul Sealey and Vivien Swan. Special thanks are due to Ruth and Scott, who made the results of currently unpublished work available to me; and to Bone for reading the sections pertaining to fish. Jerry has been particularly generous with unpublished work and useful discussion. I'm sure he won't agree with what I've made of it all, but I hope he'll enjoy the result. Alex Smith and Oxford Archaeology kindly allowed me to refer to the results of the Claydon Pike excavations in advance of full publication and provided additional details.

Jaye Pont is thanked for her invaluable guidance in matters pertaining to illustration software, and I am grateful to the West Yorkshire Archaeological Service (via Chris Philo) and the Winchester Excavation Committee (via Professor Martin Biddle) for providing figs. 9.1 and 17.4.

I would like to thank Cambridge University Press for publishing the book, and the two editors who have overseen it, Jessica Kuper and Simon Whitmore. Simon is owed special thanks for his forbearance over its much delayed appearance. I am most grateful also to Sarah Parker, Joanna Breeze and Gwynneth Drabble for their work in preparing the book for publication.

Mike Baxter provided fig. 15.1 and read the final draft which was much improved by his comments. He has also provided constant encouragement and support during the book's prolonged gestation, and indeed for much longer than that. So, as is only right, this book is for him.

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-00327-8 - Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain  
H. E. M. Cool  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

xvi

*Acknowledgements*

The final stages of preparing the manuscript have been enlivened by listening to the Test Match Special commentary of the thrilling 2005 England – Australia Ashes series. It has been most distracting – many thanks to the players of both teams and the commentators.