

Note on a lead fragment from site CH/84/CS Chichester, Sussex

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The object appeared to be a rim fragment from a large bowl with a very irregular non-rim edge. There was some red material showing at the bottom of the piece which careful examination under a low power microscope showed to be Samian ware.

It is suggested that the object is a lead patch from a broken Samian bowl, the irregular edge following the outline of the fracture. To give this sort of exact fit the lead must have been cast on to the bowl; presumably a temporary mould was fastened to the bowl and the molten lead poured in. When it had solidified the mould would have been broken away and the surface of the metal trimmed and smoothed. The lead is slightly thicker than the pottery, overlapping its edge to provide a positive key between metal and ceramic. When the bowl was finally discarded the lead patch became separated from the rest of it, with the exception of the small fragments still held in the metal.

Lead plugs to fill small gaps or perforations in pottery are relatively well known but this is the first time I have seen evidence for such an ambitious repair. Presumably the large size of the Samian bowl (its rim diameter must have been of the order of 30 cm) meant it was too precious to discard when all it lacked was a not insubstantial chip from the rim. The lead might originally have been painted (though no evidence of this survives) and would then have been a not too obvious repair.