

and an Italian source for the deposit on the vessel seems most probable. Thus the authors have concluded that the vessel is a relatively modern import during the last century and not as the label on the pot implies dug up in Cheshire.

## Roman False Teeth

The first example of an ancient false tooth has been found in the jaw of a 30 year-old man buried in a Gallo-Roman necropolis at Chantambre, France, and is described by Eric Crubezy of the University of Toulouse in *Nature* (391,1998,29). It is perhaps not surprising that more examples are lacking as the process of fitting the false tooth must have been extremely painful. It involved fashioning the tooth out of iron and then hammering it into the empty socket in the jaw!

## A Small Roman Dog

Ian Baxter tells me that he has recently examined the skeleton of a dwarf hound found in a human-



sized grave at York Road, Leicester. It is of 4th century date. The dog's grave was one of four graves, the others contained human burials orientated east-west. The dog, too, seemed to be deliberately orientated, in its case northeast-southwest with the head to the northeast.

Despite the large size of its grave, Baxter reports that the dog was a dwarf hound and, in life, would have resembled a dachshund. Remains of others of this size have been located, but complete skeletons are comparatively rare: small dogs such as this are not known before the Roman period. The York Road dog had a head length

of 15 cm. Its overall length from nose to root of tail was approximately 60 cm and its height at shoulder was 27 cm. He estimates that in life it would probably have weighed slightly under 28 lbs (10 kg). Both the radius and the tibia are bowed and very robust with thick walls. Three cut marks in the skull caused by a knife point are seen as stab marks and thus Baxter thinks that the burial of the dog was a sacrificial act. However, although dogs may be buried with humans there was no human burial with the York Road dog and it may be a substitute for a dead person's body or intended to summon a missing person to his grave.

Baxter's examination of the York Road dog is part of a larger study of small Roman dogs. These he classifies into three discrete groups in terms of cranial and post-cranial morphological traits. The animals in two of the groups are probably lap-dogs, whereas the York Road animal belongs to Group 3 which he thinks are specialised hunting dogs, possibly used to hunt boar and other game in dense undergrowth.

## Medbourne Donkey Update

In CA 144, Ian Baxter reported the finding of a medieval donkey at Medbourne, Leics., but he now says all is not what it seemed. Thus a recent AMS date has been obtained and comes out at  $180 \pm 35$  BP making the donkey of late 18th/early 19th century date and not medieval. Consequently earlier dated donkeys are still restricted to a Roman specimen from Newsteads and a pre-early 17th century example from Caldicote (Herts).

## Ancient Frankincense

Spoon shaped incense burners with long handles are known from the Old Kingdom in Ancient Egypt. Now ancient samples of incense have been chemically characterised. These were from the cellar of a house at Qasr Ibrim dating to around AD400-500 and the work was undertaken by

R.P. Evershed and co-workers (*Nature*, 390,1997,667). They used mass-spectrometry in conjunction with gas chromatography and typical constituents of frankincense were identified including pentacyclic triterpenoid and boswellic acids. There was also evidence for the presence of a pinaceous resin.

One is faced with the immediate problem as to where the frankincense originally came from, as it is obtained from trees of the genus *Boswellia* and these did not grow near Qasr Ibrim but are found in Arabia and Somaliland and would need to be imported from there as would the pinaceous resin. The finding of the two resins together may imply that both were used together when incense was burnt.

## Bullets or Blades

In CA 149 I reviewed a Royal Armouries monograph by Alan Williams and Anthony de Reuck on the Greenwich Royal Armoury. In particular one of their conclusions was that during the period 1545-1567 there was an extended period of experimentation to increase the hardness of the steel employed. One of the authors (de Reuck) has now come up with an alternative explanation for the experimenting (*J.Arms and Armour Soc.*, XV (No7), 1998).

His argument is that the increasing use of firearms required an armour that was tough rather than hard so as to resist penetration. Those still favouring protection against the cut and thrust of the sword required hardness in their steel but this embrittled it. Consequently, experiments were needed to achieve the impossible, a steel which was both hard and tough. That is, a compromise between embrittled hardness and softer toughness.

Tony de Reuck concludes that the efforts of the Almain armourers at Greenwich were fruitless and they were "attempting to reach the unattainable summit of their profession". He says that this was not to catch up with their continental opposite numbers, but with the aim of