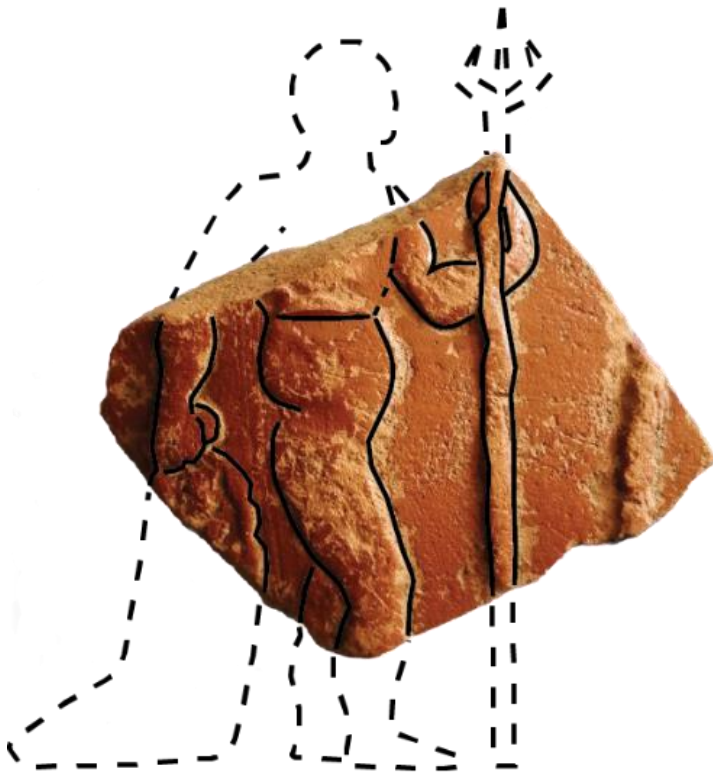


## A gladiator from the past?

While we were recently making some improvements in our stores, we came across some old boxes of archaeological pottery that were originally excavated in the 1960s and 70s. Although the majority of the boxes will need to wait until the autumn for us to investigate them properly, we thought it would be nice to put a small selection of finds from a couple of them on display as part of our Roman Summer.



The sherd with probable original complete outline shown by a dotted line.

Although all the finds are of interest, one particular pot-sherd stood out as being worth mentioning a little sooner. It was excavated in 1976 by Wally Wright at Elliott's Yard (now Legions Way) where just under 2000 years ago, there was a Romano-British occupation site.

The sherd, which is 34mm high, is samian ware, a glossy red earthen ware pottery that was imported into Britain from Gaul in the first and second centuries AD. Although most samian ware had a smooth surface some of the more ornate vessel forms were made in special moulds and could, as this one is, be highly decorated.

After washing, inspection of the sherd showed that it bears the partial impression of a human figure. You can see the left arm and hand (which is holding a spear or similar), torso and legs down to just below the knees. You can also see the lower right arm and hand which is holding something.

Unfortunately, the sherd is too damaged for us to be sure but there is a good chance that the object

being held is a net and that the figure is either a spear fisherman or, perhaps more likely given the usual subject matter of decorated bowls, a gladiator called a retiarius.

The retiarius, or fisherman, was often pitted against a much more heavily armed gladiator called a secutor, whose helmet with its large round eye-holes, broadly resembled a fish head.

This sherd, along with a selection of others from Wally's excavations at Elliotts Yard, Stansted Road, Canons Close and Grange paddocks will be on display as part of our Roman summer.