

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LIII

JANUARY 1959 TO DECEMBER 1959

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NOTES ON POTTERY FROM SOME ROMANO-BRITISH KILNS IN THE CAMBRIDGE AREA

B. R. HARTLEY

As Dr Philip Corder has recently observed, one of the most urgent needs in Romano-British studies is the publication of kiln-groups from local potteries.¹ The use of the proton magnetometer for locating kilns is already bringing a spate of new discoveries,² but this does not mean that older finds are of less importance. Indeed, constant reappraisal of them in the light of new evidence is a vital necessity, and so is publication of old finds that have previously escaped publication. It is for these reasons that notes on the pottery from two kiln-sites, namely War Ditches, Cherryhinton and Jesus Lane, Cambridge, are offered here. Further work on kilns at the important pottery at Horningsea is badly needed, especially as its products are potentially valuable for dating the occupation of Fenland sites. Until this is done, little can be added to the original report on Horningsea, though a few comments on some outstanding points are added below.

WAR DITCHES, CHERRYHINTON

In 1939 Mr T. C. Lethbridge excavated a pottery kiln overlying the Iron Age ditch. Although the kiln was illustrated in the report, it was not possible to publish the pottery, because of the need for economy at the time.³ The writer is grateful to Mr Lethbridge, and to the Curator of the University Museum, where the finds are, for permission to publish the pottery here.

The kiln itself was of up-draught type, entirely clay-built, and roughly circular in plan. It had an elongated central pedestal, though no evidence of the nature of the pottery-chamber floor seems to have survived. The flue was very short, and the kiln a small one, probably about 3 ft. in diameter.

All the pottery was in oxidized fabric, usually orange-brown or buff, though the colour of many sherds had been changed by accidental refiring, or by contact with hot ashes in the stoke-hole. The clay was micaceous and took a good burnish, some of the sherds having the slightly soapy feeling that is often found with Belgic pottery. Surface decoration was limited to rilling and scoring, sometimes in horizontal zones,

¹ *Arch. J.* vol. CXIV, p. 11.

² *Antiquity*, vol. XXXIII, pp. 205-7; *Archaeometry*, vol. II, pp. 32-6.

³ *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. XLII, pl. XII, with pp. 120-1 and 124.

more frequently arranged haphazardly with oblique and vertical combing overlapping. The range of forms was limited, but all seem to be of Belgic ancestry:

Type 1

Large narrow-mouthed jars. There are three closely similar examples, all in orange-brown fabric with unburnished surfaces. Each has a prominent cordon at the junction of the neck and shoulder (Fig. 1, no. 1).

Type 2

Medium-mouthed jars. Two main groups may be distinguished, between them accounting for over half the kiln's products. Orange-brown or buff fabric, frequently with a grey core, is normal, though one example is in greenish grey ware.

Type 2 A

Small jars, about $4\frac{1}{2}$ –6 in. in diameter. No cordons, but decoration of horizontal rilling on the shoulder and irregular combing below (Fig. 1, nos. 2–3).

Type 2 B

Large jars, 10–14 in. in diameter, usually with cordons, occasionally with surface decoration like that of type 2 A (Fig. 1, nos. 4–8).

Type 3

Wide-mouthed jars. All are in red-brown or orange-brown fabric with burnished surfaces. A cordon is normal at the shoulder, and so is a slight constriction about half-way down the profile, though it is sometimes reduced to a slight groove. One example has rilling on the edge of its rim (Fig. 1, nos. 9–10).

Type 4

Imitations of Gallo-Belgic platters. There are at least six examples, all differing in precise form. All were originally red-brown with internal and external burnish, but several have been baked to black or brown after fracture. The only base preserved has three deeply incised concentric grooves, derived from the foot-ring of the proto-type (Fig. 1, nos. 11–14).

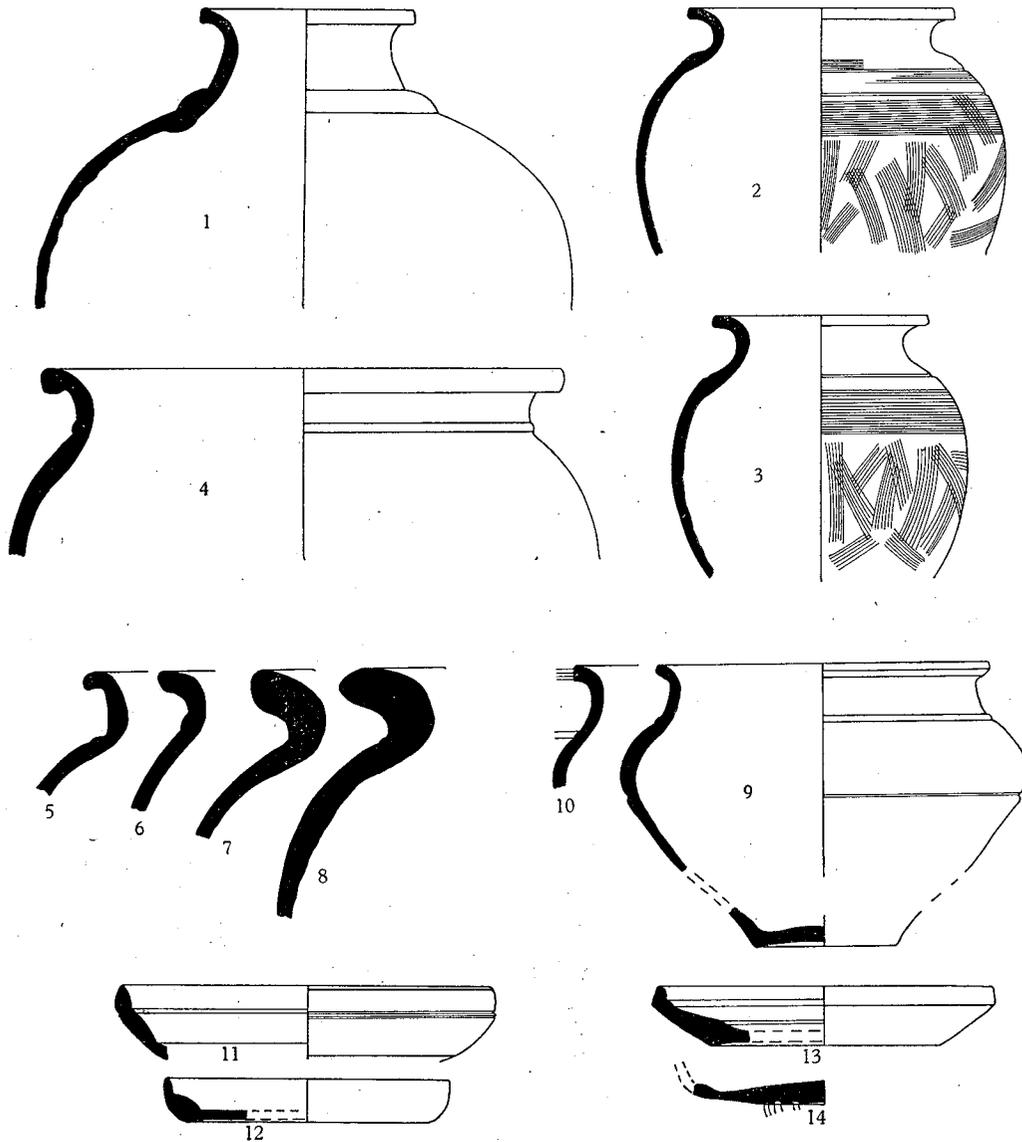
Although the total number of rims is only forty, it is worth recording the percentages for each type, as they should give a rough indication of the proportions of the forms produced: type 1, 7.5%; type 2 A, 12.5%; type 2 B, 40%; type 3, 25% and type 4, 15%.

The close similarity of all the forms to ones in use at Camulodunum in the pre-Flavian period leaves no doubt that the pottery is in the Belgic tradition.¹ But what of its date? It has long been appreciated that native forms tended to be produced in northern East Anglia long after they had passed out of fashion elsewhere.² However, none of the War Ditches types has been recorded from Fenland sites or at the

¹ C. F. C. Hawkes and M. R. Hull, *Camulodunum*, pls. LXXVIII ff.

² Cf. *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* vol. VII, pp. 236–7.

Arbury Road settlement, first occupied in the early second century. Furthermore, imitation Gallo-Belgic platters have yet to be attested from a certain second-century context, though it is perhaps worth noting that they have recently been found in the



Pottery from the War Ditches kiln.

Fig. 1 (Scale: $\frac{1}{4}$)

Nene Valley in association with Flavian-Trajanic occupation. These facts, together with the similarity to the Belgic prototypes in form and fabric, suggest that the kiln was first-century; it is, however, impossible to decide on present evidence whether it was pre-Flavian or Flavian.

While discussing the site, it is worth recalling the earlier discovery of many examples of distinctive jars in buff fabric with brown barbotine decoration of circles and dots.¹ McKenny Hughes noted that fragments occurred everywhere at the War Ditches, but that they were much more common at one particular point.² This suggests that another kiln, producing this finer ware, may have existed nearby. Certainly it is not common elsewhere in the Cambridge area, though Mr Lethbridge has recorded a complete pot from the cemetery at Guilden Morden.³

JESUS LANE, CAMBRIDGE

In 1901, somewhere on the north side of Jesus Lane, very considerable quantities of Roman pottery were found.⁴ A little of it reached the Museum, where there are seven or eight more or less intact vessels, most of them distorted or with waster cracking. As McKenny Hughes pointed out, there can be no doubt that they came from a dump associated with potters' kilns. Most of the pots are in grey fabric with a light grey silvery slip; one has a black, bituminous wash. It is not impossible that colour-coated ware was made as well (see type 4). The surviving vessels are unlikely to represent the full range of the products and it is, of course, impossible to deduce anything about their relative frequency in the output of the kilns.

Type 1

Narrow-necked vessels with pedestals. These are of flagon shape but they quite certainly had no handle. The two examples have different forms of pedestal. Both have a silver-grey slip on the upper two thirds of the outside only, and they must, therefore, have been inverted and only partly dipped in the slip (Fig. 2, nos. 1 and 1a).

Type 2

Narrow-necked vessels of flagon shape. Once more there is no question of handles having been present, but this time the bases are of normal flagon type. Three examples, two with wavy lines in an unburnished band on the shoulder. The slip is similar to that of type 1 and again only covers the upper part of the vessels (Fig. 2, nos. 2-3).

Type 3

Wide-mouthed jars. Two examples, one in similar fabric to the previous types (Fig. 2, no. 4), the other with a black, bituminous slip on the upper part of the outside (Fig. 2, no. 5). Although the fabric of the second one is so different from the other examples, the similar technique of partial immersion in the slip suggests a common origin, as this method is most unusual. These jars are reminiscent of products of the Nene Valley kilns.⁵

¹ *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. x, pl. xx. ² *Ibid.* p. 464.

³ *Ibid.* vol. XLII, p. 124.

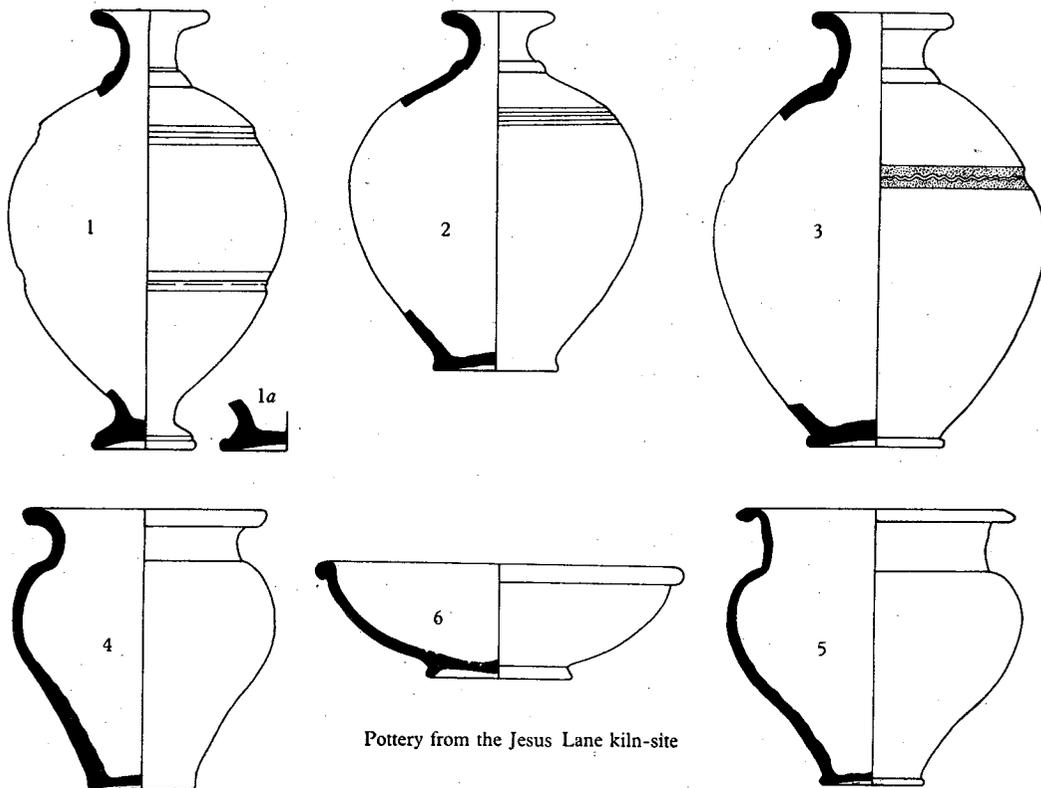
⁴ *Ibid.* vol. x, pp. 194-6; C. Fox, *Archaeology of the Cambridge Region* (1923), p. 211 with pl. XXIV, 3.

⁵ *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. LII, p. 22, nos. 3-5.

Type 4 (?)

Imitation of Samian form 31. This complete dish is not certainly a waster, though it may well have come from the kilns. If it did, the range of fabric must be extended, for it is orange-brown with a red colour-coat (Fig. 2, no. 6).

Major J. G. S. Brinson, F.S.A., tells me that he has found examples of type 1 in late third- and early fourth-century contexts at Great Chesterford. Such a dating fits the general character of the other forms very well, and certainly type 4, if it is to be admitted, could scarcely be earlier than the late third century. The distribution of



Pottery from the Jesus Lane kiln-site

Fig. 2 (Scale: $\frac{1}{4}$)

the products was no doubt largely a local one. Apart from the Chesterford examples, similar types have been noted from Arbury Road,¹ and from Fenland sites immediately north of Cambridge.

HORNINGSEA

The large pottery at Horningsea was clearly of major importance and its products, notably large storage jars of distinctive type, in grey ware,² have been found on many sites in the Cambridge area, particularly in the Fens. By the standards of the time,

¹ *Ibid.* vol. XLVIII, p. 39, no. 90.² *Ibid.* vol. XVII, p. 60.

the kilns were extraordinarily well published, but it is certain that some of the dates proposed for the pottery need modifying. This applies particularly to the pedestal-jars that were assigned to the first century. They were found in a 'trench' (pit?) near kiln 5 which also contained samian stamps now known to be of late second-century date,¹ while another has recently been found in a late second- or third-century context at Exning.² These Horningsea pedestal-jars are, therefore, yet another reminder of the conservative tradition of East Anglian potters, like Jesus Lane type 1, above. None of the published pottery from the site is certainly fourth-century, and it now seems likely that the kilns were predominantly Antonine and third-century.

Finally, attention may be drawn to the recorded occurrence of wasters from indented beakers in colour-coated ware.³ They are not illustrated in the report. Their manufacture at Horningsea would not be surprising, particularly as it is now becoming increasingly clear that colour-coated ware was made at many more sites than has often been supposed.

¹ Namely, AVCELLA F and DOVIHCCVS (a variant form of the stamp of DOECCVS of Lezoux).

² *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. LII, pp. 19 f., nos. 16 and 36.

³ *Ibid.* vol. XVII, p. 63.

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