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for 1987

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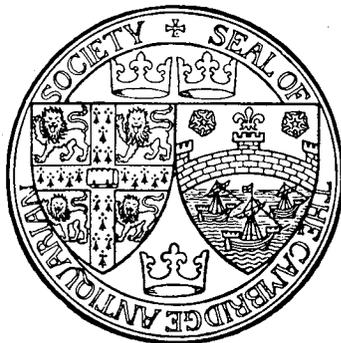
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CONTENTS

Quakerism in Cambridge before the Act of Toleration (1653–1689) LAUREL PHILLIPSON	1
Nomads in ‘Waterland’? Prehistoric Transhumance and Fenland Archaeology CHRISTOPHER EVANS	27
Ernest Greenfield’s Excavations at Exning Roman Villa C. J. WEBSTER	41
Denny Abbey: The Nuns’ Refectory JEM POSTER and DAVID SHERLOCK	67
Excavation at Riverside, Thompsons Lane, Cambridge PAUL FIRMAN and JOYCE PULLINGER	83
Music at Jesus College, Cambridge, c. 1557–1679 IAN PAYNE	97
Royal Mandates for Degrees in the Reign of Charles II (1660–85): An Aspect of the Crown’s Influence in the University of Cambridge JOHN TWIGG	105
The First Cottage of Clay Bats? JOHN MCCANN	113
<i>Index</i>	122

EXCAVATION AT RIVERSIDE, THOMPSONS LANE, CAMBRIDGE

PAUL FIRMAN and JOYCE PULLINGER

During the summer of 1982 an area on the south-eastern bank of the River Cam, some 100m downstream from the Great Bridge, became available for archaeological investigation (TL 44805906). The site was being re-developed by the Master and Fellows of St John's College, to whom thanks are due for permission to excavate and for financial help.

It was hoped to throw light on three problems: the location of the footings of the Roman bridge; the existence of a Saxo-Danish settlement; and the line of the medieval waterfront.

Test trenches were made by mechanical digger in various parts of the site, which is bounded by Thompsons Lane, the river, and the two outfalls of the King's Ditch (filled in many years ago), shown on Hammond's map of 1592. It is now apparent that this area was either under water or wet and marshy until the end of the medieval period, and that the earliest signs of activity relate to the first half of the seventeenth century.

An electrical power station and Neville House occupied the site prior to their demolition for redevelopment. An area where there appeared to have been less modern disturbance was chosen for more detailed excavation; this was divided into two portions, (Areas A and B (Fig. 1B)). A layer, half a metre at the south-east end to one metre at the north-west, was removed mechanically, before continuing the excavation by hand.

AREA A (Figs. 2 & 3)

For the location of the Roman river crossing and the later Saxo-Danish settlement no evidence was found. Some Roman pottery was present, but the sherds were distributed throughout many layers and features, and should therefore be considered residual, if not extraneous.

Up to the sixteenth century, the whole area seems to have been covered by alluvial mud-flats, much disturbed by later activities (layers 2 & 20 feature F.I). Frequent flooding could be demonstrated by the recovery of some fitting medieval potsherds, found close together in the upper levels, but abraded at their break surfaces. The make-up of these layers also suggested a water-borne deposit from the very even distribution of individual grains of sand throughout its dark clay structure and the presence of considerable quantities of small snail-shell, again evenly distributed though with very slight signs of horizontal layering.

From the eleventh to the fifteenth/early sixteenth centuries, the only evidence of human activity was a well-defined layer of Saxon-Norman and medieval potsherds (Fig. 6), animal bones and some building materials within the top 10cm of layer 2, apparently the result of rubbish-dumping on the mud-flats. Beneath this it was artefactually sterile, although it could not be pursued to any great depth. A continuation of the same deposit (layer 20) further from the river was trenched down another 0.75m with the same sterile result.

A thin layer of coarse gravel exposed within layer 2 (sec. E-F) about the same level as the present river-bed, extending some 3.5m further into the modern bank, could be interpreted as the remains of the river-bed at some considerably earlier period. It seems that some degree of control of the river had been established by the late sixteenth century, as Hammond's 1592 map shows the river bank lined with trees, though there are no buildings.

The eastern end of Area A provided evidence for the earliest occupation. It consisted of a length of foundation trench 0.5m wide on an east-west axis with gravel and chalk floors butting up against both sides but at slightly

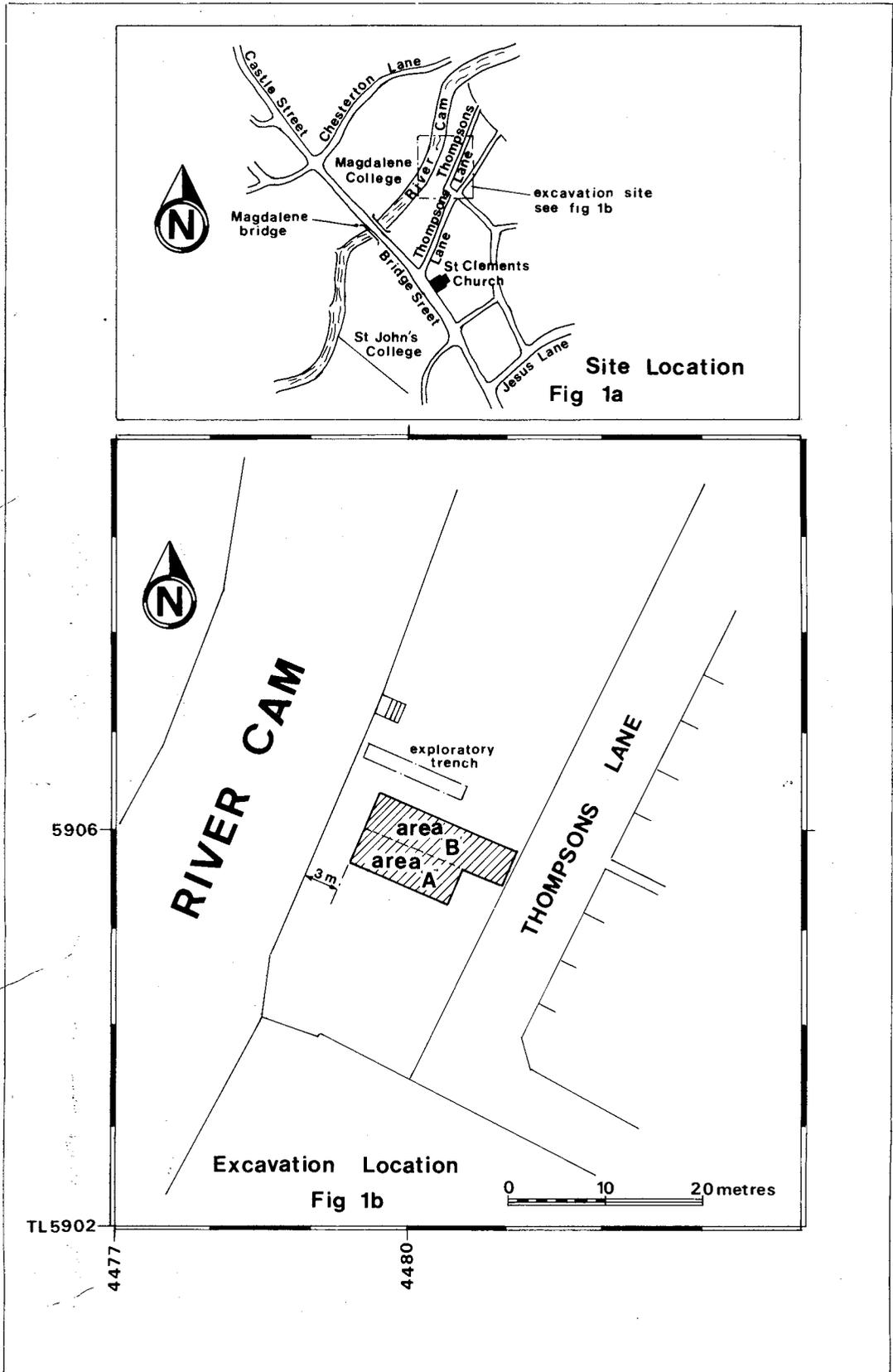


Figure 1. Thompsons Lane, Cambridge, 1982

different levels, continuing beyond the eastern boundary of the excavation (F.II). The limited area available prevented any real interpretation but, assuming that the trench had not been too much enlarged by robbing, its size suggested a fairly substantial wall. In the absence of any associated artefacts, any dating could only be assessed stratigraphically: it was earlier than the floors above it, which were in turn cut by pits (F.IVb & F.IIc) of mid-seventeenth-century date.

Probably of similar date as this trench was the end of a deep trench near the river (F.IIa); here again dating was difficult as only three potsherds were recovered, from the upper levels of its fill (layer 5a), the most recent being late medieval/early post-medieval. Only the lower levels of this feature remained, for it had been re-cut at a later date and filled with layer 5. It had been dug into the alluvial layer and continued beyond the excavation towards the river; whether it was connected to the river could obviously not be proved, but this would seem likely. Its north bank was markedly under-cut, but how far this continued or what was the profile of its bottom was impossible to determine, because of the water table here.

After the structure associated with the foundation trench (F.II) had gone out of use, it was robbed out and filled in, and a new floor laid over it and its butting floors. This was part of a complex of floors (layers 4a, 15–17) of which an estimated 20 square metres could have existed within Area A alone, for they continued into both the eastern and southern boundaries and a recent brick and tile-lined cellar (F.XI) had destroyed part of them. Much had also been destroyed by other later features; however, sufficient remained to show that two separate steps down, in a different part of Area A (layers 16 & 17, section J–K), were on a similar alignment and of almost identical construction, compact chalk lumps in a soft mortar, except for layer 17 which was of small rounded pebbles. This strongly suggested a direct relationship, even though they were all at slightly different levels. A protective structure may have existed over these floors for it was noticeable that, while these floors were exposed during excavation, quite considerable surface weathering occurred. Again, in the absence of associated artefacts, any positive dating was impossible but they must have been later than

this foundation trench (F.II) and earlier than the mid-seventeenth-century pit (F.IIc).

Some time after the above floors had been constructed, a rectangular pit (F.IIc layer 20a) was cut through into the alluvial layer (20) beneath. It was 1.6m wide by 0.7m deep with vertical sides, continuing beyond the southern excavation boundary, lined all over with a layer of burnt wood, filled with a sandy soil containing building rubble and animal bone together with Roman, medieval and sixteenth-century potsherds. This pit was cut and sealed by a later larger one (F.IVb layers 4 & 14), which was used for the storage of grey clay (layer 14), cleaned by puddling in a clay-lined hollow (F.IV) near the river, considered to be contemporary with this pit. The final fill (layer 4) contained many well-preserved clay smoking pipes of late-seventeenth-century date; these were possibly being manufactured on site. Considerable quantities of cattle horn-cores were also present, probably waste from a horn-using industry near by. This last feature continued into Area B.

The latest features were a brick and tile-lined cellar (F.XI) 2.5m square, in the centre of Area A, and a gravel floor at the eastern end (layer 6) of nineteenth-century date.

P.E.F. (Cambridge Archaeology Field Group)

AREA B (Figs. 2 & 4)

The riverine silts contained Roman and medieval pottery, as well as china and stoneware from more recent times. These silts were cut by five features. The earliest in Area B was a rectangular pit 1m by 2m, containing refined off-white clay, probably used for making pipes. A number of broken clay pipes *c.* 1670 were found in Areas A and B. This pit was sealed by the kiln (see below).

Two large vertical-sided rectangular pits cut into the riverine silts contained blue-grey clay. These pits were over 7m long to the point where they were cut by the foundation trench of an eighteenth-century clunch wall, but there was no sign of them beyond it. One was 80cm deep; the other 6.54m wide, underlay part of the kiln. But its depth could not be established because most of the area was under water, (when the water level rose following storms). This one was used as a

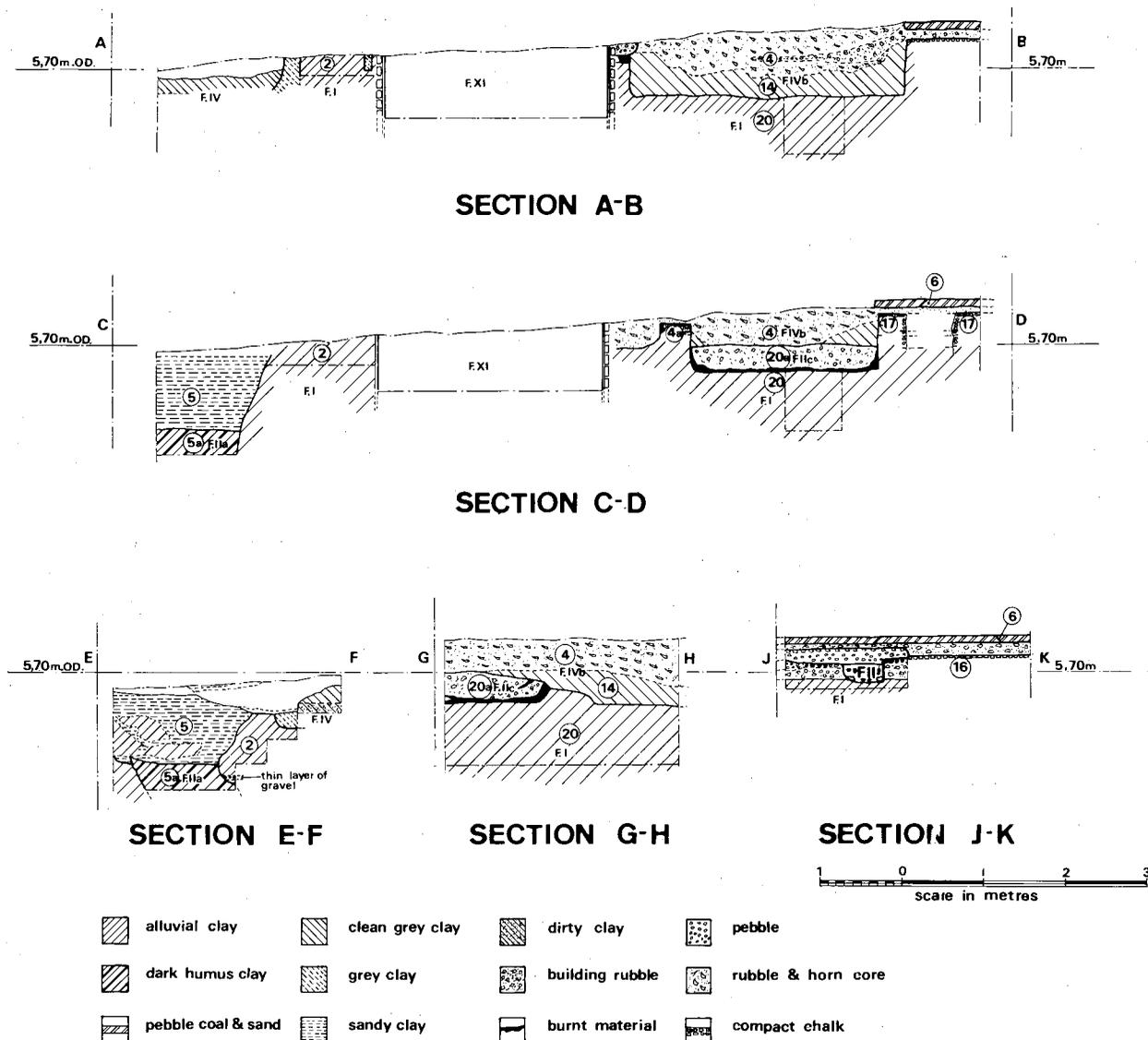


Figure 3. Sections, Area A.

dump for cattle horn-cores and rubble after these pits ceased to be used as clay-pits. A layer of ash, sand and charcoal cut the pit vertically, level with the kiln opening; in places it was fibrous, suggesting burnt vegetation. Below it was a black layer of ash and charcoal, dipping eastwards under the pit.

In the north-east corner of Area B, a segment of a curving feature cut through the pit and the riverine silts. It had a timber lining; tops of three posts were found, linked by traces of timber boarding. Round the edge was a chalk marl packing 10 cm wide and inside the feature the space outside the

timbers was filled with blue-grey clay with some stones. The fill within the timbers was very dark silty clay with humus and some brick fragments; an early-eighteenth-century glazed sherd and a fragment of a shale vessel were found in it. Full excavation of this feature was impossible as it lay below the present river level and storm water flooded this part of the trench for the remainder of the excavation.

Both the clay pit and the timber-lined feature were cut by the rubble make-up packed inside the river-front boarding.

An eighteenth-century clunch wall formed

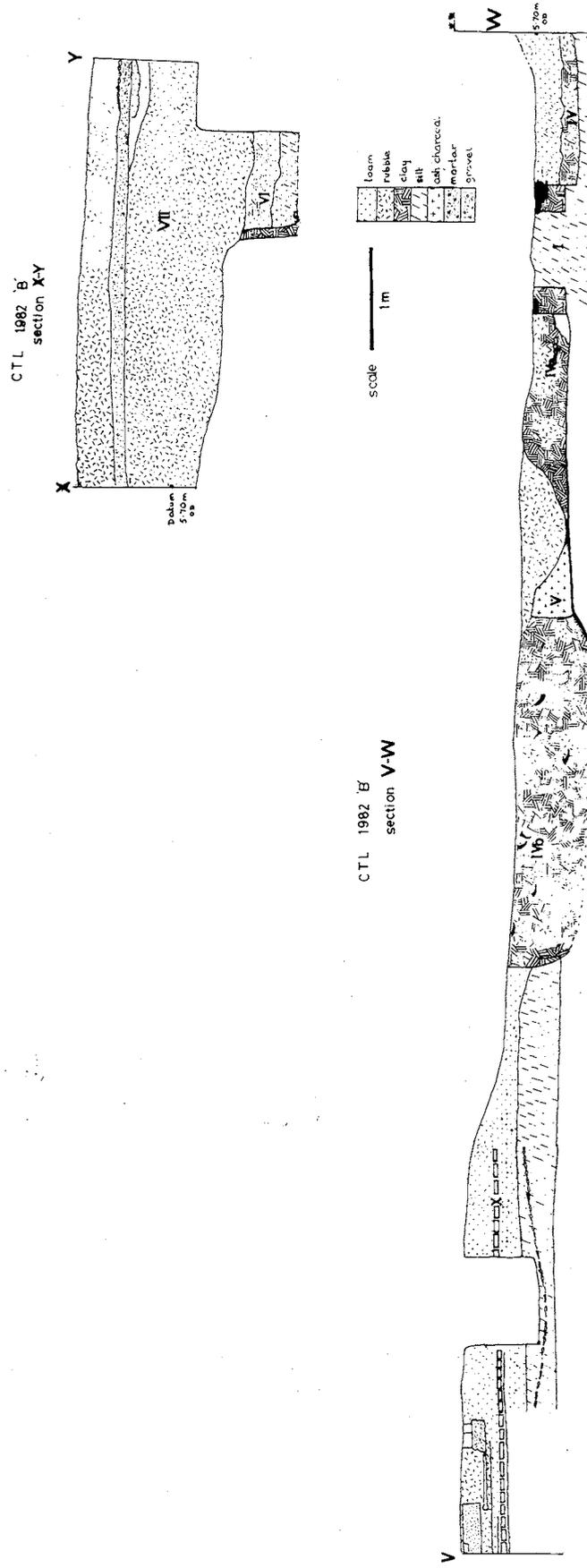


Figure 4. Sections, Area B.

the north-east side of Area B. This wall and its foundation trench cut through the side of the kiln and all three earlier pits, and was laid directly on the silts. The maximum remaining height of the wall was 47 cm; the side away from the excavation was vertical, but that in Area B was offset, being 60cm wide for the lower two courses of clunch blocks and only 50cm above.

A single layer of deep red bricks was seen in the south-east section towards Thompsons Lane – a yard or possibly the edge of a wall foundation. It overlay loam with charcoal flecks, containing fragments of fourteenth/fifteenth-century pottery, and was covered by a layer of loam with fragments of kiln bricks and decayed bricks from the collapsed kiln chimney-stack.

In the extension of Area B next to Thompsons Lane were wall-footings of yellow Cambridge brick and floor-tiles from a nineteenth-century building.

THE KILN (Fig. 5)

An early eighteenth-century kiln was constructed over the pits and riverine silts. It was used for firing pinkish yellow peg-tiles and flower-pots of the same fabric. The flower-pots were made in a variety of shapes and sizes.

The kiln was 5m overall in length, 4.5m internally, and was pear-shaped. The probable overall width was 3.65m (part of one side wall was cut by a later clunch wall footing) and the internal width was 2.7m. Although the floor of the kiln had collapsed, the whole of the pedestal down the centre, the complete furnace floor, and most of the sides remained intact.

The kiln was constructed of red bricks from Suffolk, although a very few yellow Cambridge ones were incorporated, possibly in repair work. A soft mortar bonded the bricks together. The bricks used differed in size as follows:

19	× 10.5	× 5.5cm	21	× 10	× 5cm
22	× 11	× 6cm	22	× 10.5	× 6.25cm
22.5	× 10.5	× 6cm	22.5	× 11	× 7cm
23	× 11	× 5cm	23	× 10.5	× 5.5cm
23	× 12	× 4cm	23.5	× 10.5	× 4.5cm
20	× 10	× 6cm (chimney stack)			
21.5	× 10	× 7cm (pedestal)			

There were many broken tiles in the kiln, some of which were wasters – distorted or with holes punched awry. Flower-pots, fired in the kiln, were made of the same fabric as the tiles, and varied in size and shape (Fig. 9). They appear to have been hand thrown. Peat may have been used for firing the kiln. One of the earliest patents in this country was in 1630 and was granted to the person who ‘found out how to reduce “peate and turffe” into “coale” for burning among other things “brick, tyle and lyme”’.

The furnace floor, blackened in places, consisted of square yellow tiles 24 × 24 × 4cm, cut at the edges to fit the shape of the kiln. This floor was laid directly on a 2–4cm layer of sand which had been put over the riverine silts and the earlier pits. One or two broken peg-tiles from an earlier kiln were under the floor.

The entrance to the kiln furnace was still plugged with unmortared bricks packed end on and sealed by a bank of sand. At the opposite end of the kiln a heap of bricks, which were blackened and burnt on one end, indicated roughly the position of the chimney. A tall chimney would have been needed for sufficient draught to produce the high temperatures necessary for firing a kiln of this size.

It appeared that the kiln draught was unsatisfactory, and the bulbous shape was modified internally by the addition of extra bricks at the sides to form a straighter edge, thus reducing the area of the furnace floor. At the same time the floor tiles were trimmed back to fit the new sides.

Many bricks forming the pedestal were vitrified, an indication of the high temperatures reached during firing. A few pieces of charcoal and some ash were found.

Some fragments of the clay tile floor were found. These floor tiles were more than 34 cm long (total length unknown) and were 5.5cm thick. The underside of these fragments were smoke blackened.

The furnace area was filled with broken peg-tiles and wasters, flower-pot fragments and wasters, and broken kiln floor tiles. Whole peg-tiles measured 26.75 × 16.5 × 1.25 cm (10½ × 6½ × ½in.).

DISCUSSION

The post-Roman silts, deposited on the gravel which formed the river bed, show that the

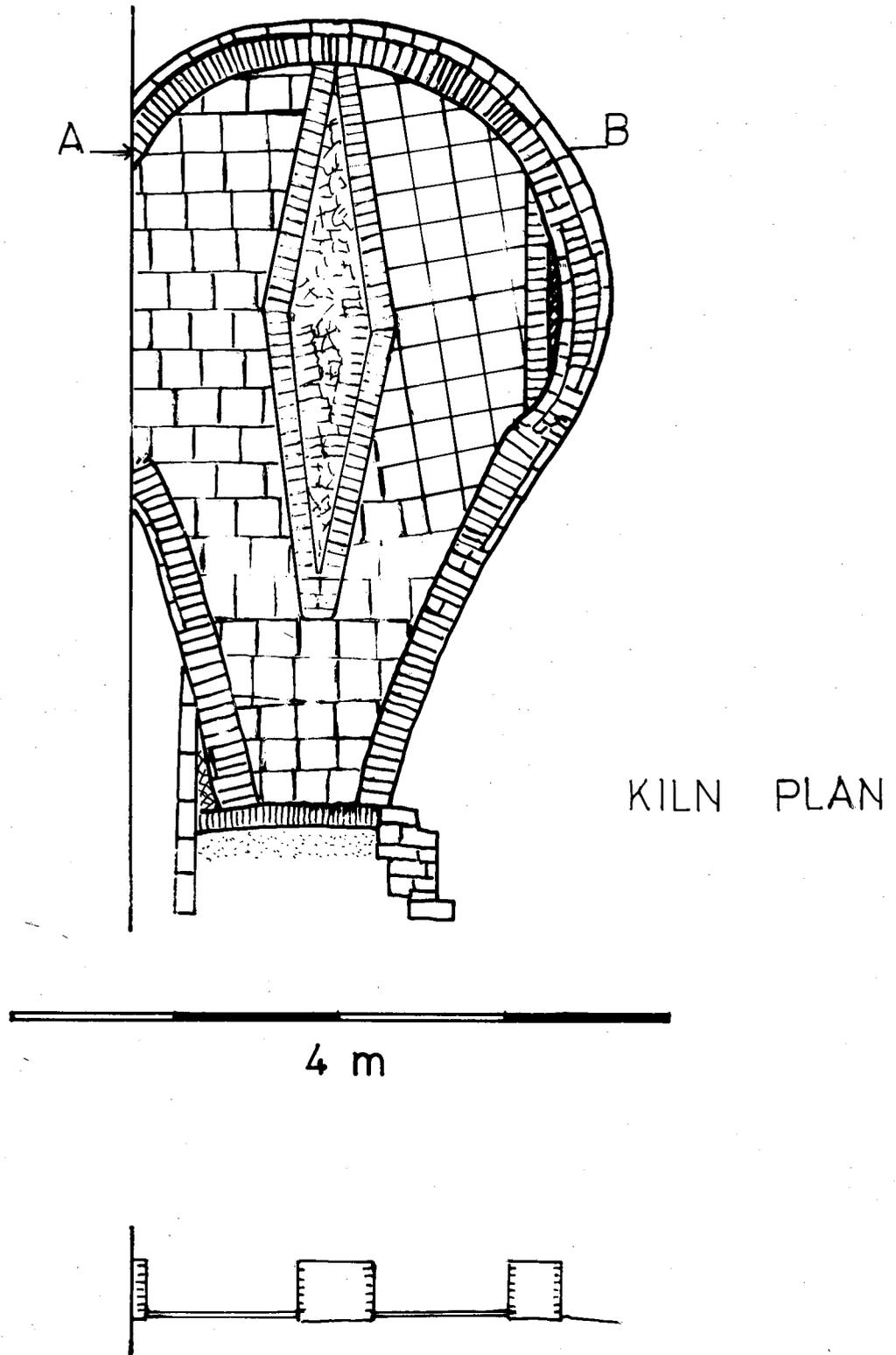


Figure 5. The eighteenth-century kiln: plan.

river must have been very much wider than it is at present, until the end of the medieval period. It is probable that the first dry land in medieval times was the top of the gravel terrace under the houses on the east side of Thompsons Lane. St Clement's church, built in the early part of the thirteenth century, was perhaps the nearest building to the river. Excavations in 1973 at Skeel's bicycle shop, Bridge Street, also showed a considerable depth of riverine silts containing medieval sherds. The consulting engineers for the Thompsons Lane site found in one of their boreholes (No. 3), to the ENE of Area B, old decaying timber ('possibly piles'). Could this timber be the remnant of the river front in the medieval period? Lying on the silts around the SE end of the kiln, and partly below it, was a layer of thirteenth/fourteenth-century pottery. It looked as if it had been tipped into water as one load, and settled in and around a slight hollow in the silt (Fig. 4).

Line's 1574 map of Cambridge shows this site as pasture – possibly flood meadows. Hammond's map of 1592 only shows pasture. The 1798 map by Custance shows the site divided into large plots but without buildings, as does the 1830 map by Baker. The OS map of 1886 shows the site divided into more plots with a few buildings.

A pit (F.III) containing white refined clay was possibly connected with the making of clay pipes c. 1670. A number of pipes of this date were found in both Areas A and B and very few appear to have been used. The black layer of ash and charcoal below the later pits (F.IVa and V) might be rake-out from kilns used for firing clay pipes. The two large blue-grey clay pits may have been contemporary with the pipe clay pit; it is evident that peg-tiles were made on this site prior to the kiln found. In 1619 a Privy Council Order was made stating that there should be no thatching on buildings in the town, and those already thatched be changed as quickly as possible (Cooper's *Annals of Cambridge*). A small piece of coal found just outside the kiln was Newcastle coal. This could easily have been brought from King's Lynn by barge.

Three early-eighteenth-century buildings may have been supplied with tiles from the kiln: one at Peterhouse, one at Emmanuel College and the house 'Little Trinity' in Jesus Lane. The latter has tiles on the roof similar to those from the kiln. St Clement's vicarage was

re-roofed at this time, and the back appears to have tiles from the kiln.

The owner of the kiln must have been a man of some substance to import bricks overland from Suffolk (nearest known source Horseheath), or else he must have had a certain market to recoup his outlay. It is probable that there were several kilns on the site but later developments have demolished them. The engineers' trial pit 1, some metres to the south of the kiln, showed a layer of black ash, 15cm thick at a depth of 65 cm from the surface of cement screed which was at approximate street level. This ash lay on the riverine silt.

Although St John's College has owned the land since the mid sixteenth century (it is part of their Dovecot estate), there are no records as to how the land was used in the early eighteenth century.

An Act was passed in 1703 'for improving the Cam from Queen's Mill by Magdalene Bridge (or Great Bridge) to Clayhithe for barges, boats, lighters etc. and dues listed therein include for deal boards, timber, bricks, tiles, sedge, stones or pebbles, clay or sand, iron or lead, pitch tar etc.' The present river-front boarding, now rendered with concrete, may well be that put in for improvement as the result of the 1703 Act.

J.P. (C.A.S. Archaeological Research Group)

The finds, full report and site paper-work will be placed in the keeping of the County Archaeologist.

POTTERY: AREA A

Fig. 6

1. Shell-tempered pot, dark grey with red-brown internal surface, copious shell inclusions, smooth surface texture; St Neots type ware; Saxo-Norman, layer 2.
2. Shell-tempered pot, fabric similar to 1 but of a rougher surface texture; early medieval, layer 2.
3. Dark grey pot, red-brown surfaces, fine quartz inclusions, sooting on rim, finger impressions around rim; Saxo-Norman, layer 2.
4. Dark grey pot, fabric similar to 3, finger impressions around rim; Saxo-Norman, layer 2.
5. Dark grey pot, light brown outer layers, fine quartz inclusions, surfaces dark grey, medieval, layer 2.

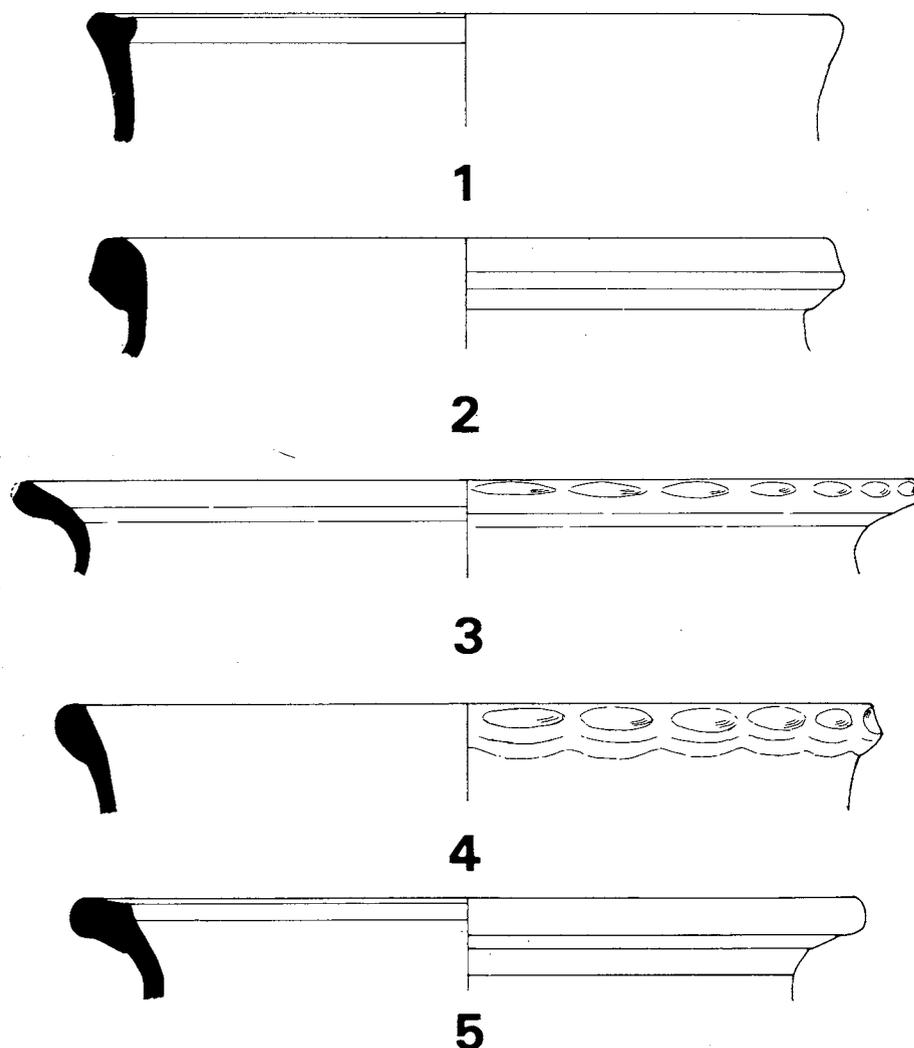


Figure 6. Early medieval cooking pots, Area A.
Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

Fig. 7

6. Buff jug, external greenish glaze, medieval, layer 2.
7. Buff bowl, yellow green glaze, c. 1600, F.IVb.
8. Buff bowl, pale orange glaze internally and rim only, internal trailing white pipe clay decoration showing yellow through glaze, early 17th century, F.IVb.
9. Buff jar, yellow-brown salt glaze lower half internally and round rim, 17th century or later, F.XI.
4. Buff jar, grey core.
5. Shell-tempered buff jar, everted rim.
6. Buff jar, grey core, gritty fabric.
7. Buff jug with spout, uneven partial glazing (orange).
8. Buff jar, grey core, gritty fabric.
9. Buff bowl, grey core, finger-tip impressions round rim; Saxo-Norman.
10. Buff jug, grey core, part of handle.
11. Grey mug with part of handle; 16th century.
12. Patterned green glazed (externally) fragment of Lyveden ware jug.
13. Buff handle of jug with partial green glazing, grey core.
14. Buff jar, grey core, incised decoration.
15. Grey jar.
16. Buff jar, grey core.
17. Buff jar.
18. Red-buff fragment, green glaze, combed pattern.

POTTERY: AREA B

Fig. 8

1. Buff jar, grey core, flat rim.
2. Buff jar, grey core, everted rim.
3. Buff jar, grey core.

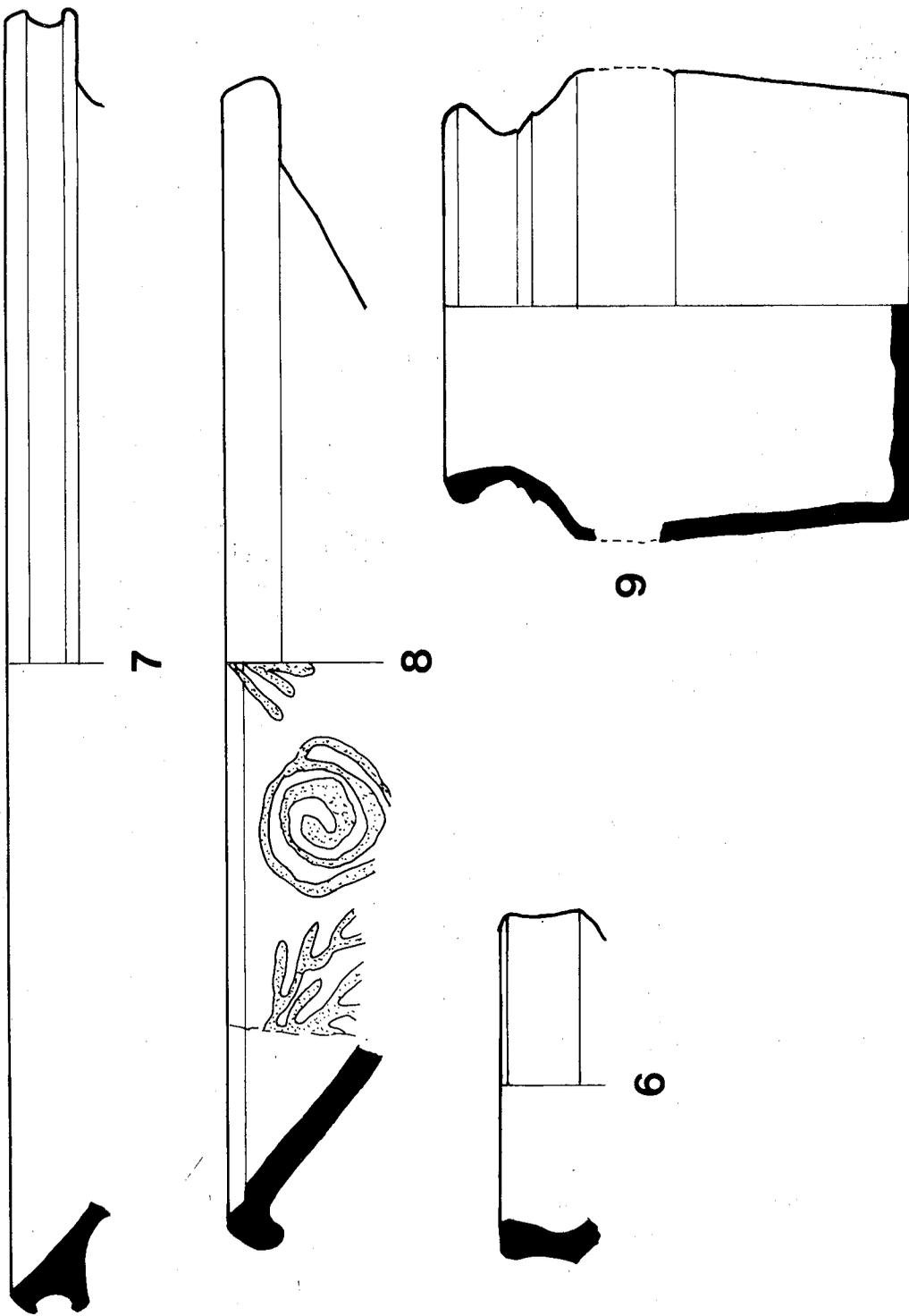


Figure 7. Medieval and later pottery, Area A. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

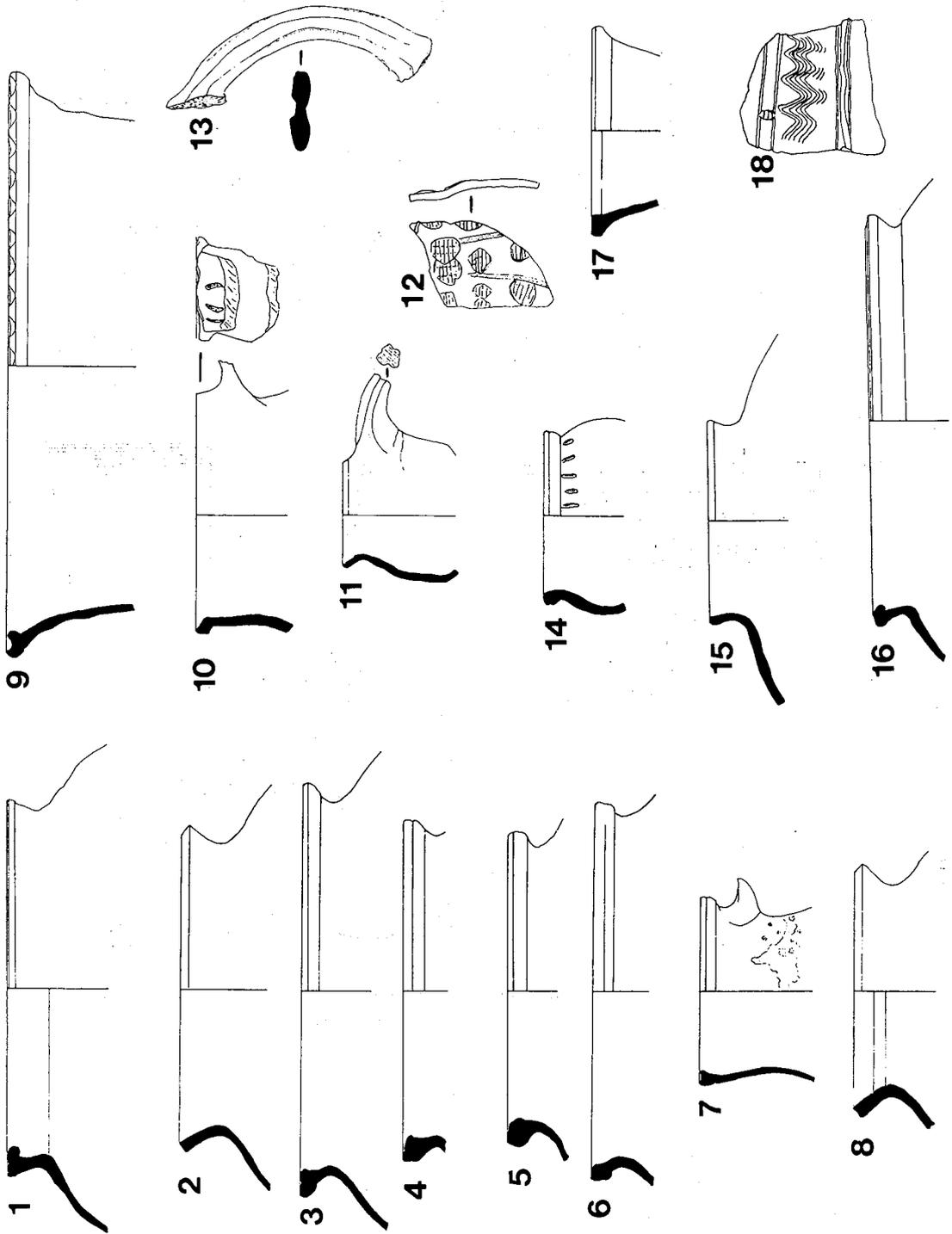


Figure 8. Pottery from Area B. Scale 1/4.

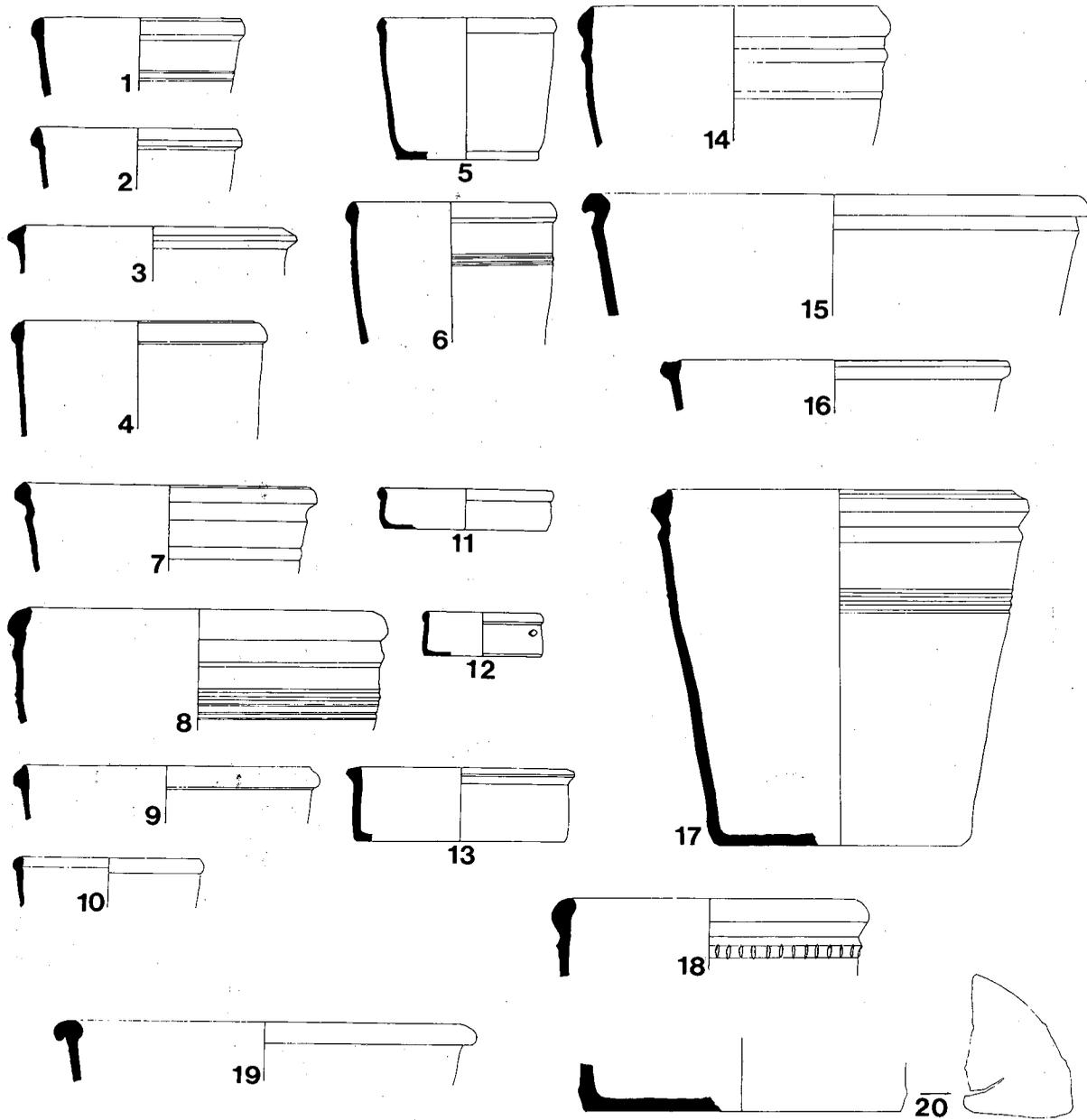


Figure 9. Eighteenth-century flower-pots from the kiln. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

CONTENTS

Quakerism in Cambridge before the Act of Toleration (1653–1689)	LAUREL PHILLIPSON	1
Nomads in 'Waterland'? Prehistoric Transhumance and Fenland Archaeology	CHRISTOPHER EVANS	27
Ernest Greenfield's Excavations at Exning Roman Villa	C.J. WEBSTER	41
Denny Abbey: The Nuns' Refectory	JEM POSTER and DAVID SHERLOCK	67
Excavation at Riverside, Thompsons Lane, Cambridge	PAUL FIRMAN and JOYCE PULLINGER	83
Music at Jesus College, Cambridge, c. 1557–1679	IAN PAYNE	97
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The First Cottage of Clay Bats?	JOHN MCCANN	113
<i>Index</i>		122