

ART. I.—*Pottery from prehistoric sites, North End, Walney Island.* By F. BARNES, B.A., F.L.A.

Read at Kendal, March 26th, 1955.

FOLLOWING on Miss Cross's investigations at the Walney North End flint chipping site,¹ much time has been spent there looking for artefacts; at the same time a sharp look-out was kept for any clues to the dating of the site.

Pottery had been found in the general area of sites V, VI and VII (fig. 1), and in 1950 the writer began to recover pieces of Beaker B from site III. These beaker sherds were very numerous, but almost all very tiny and eroded; a few eroded pieces of a larger pot, girted with large fragments of stone, and decorated with maggot-pattern, were found at the same place (CW2 1 16). In association were a typical tanged and barbed arrowhead, and 15 finely worked scrapers, ranging from a pygmy $\frac{1}{2}$ in. x $\frac{3}{8}$ in. to one of $1\frac{7}{8}$ in. x $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. A tentative reconstruction suggests that the beaker was $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. high.

A few fragments of crude, yellowish-brown, stone-girted pot were next exposed by sand movement at site II. Digging only produced a few more crumbs of pot, two human teeth (an upper left incisor, and a fragmentary molar with the grinding surface worn down to expose the dentine), two ordinary scrapers, a little bone and shell debris, and two small hand-anvils.

Meanwhile, the retreat of a large dune had exposed a mound of iron slag at site IV. The bronze pin (CW2 xlvii 76) was recovered from the surface of the mound, and further examination showed that there was a certain amount of pottery mixed with the slag. The site was dug as far as possible (fig. 2), and numerous sherds of

¹ Cf. CW2 xxxviii 160; xxxix 262; xlii 112; xlvi 67; xlvii 68; xlix 1; l 15.

hand-thrown bucket-shaped pots, gritted with large fragments of stone and perforated beneath the rim, were found. This pottery had been thrown away along with the slag, and seemed to have been subjected to intense heat after being broken: adjoining pieces were found which, though fitting together, showed marked differences in the degree of burning. About 3 in. beneath the layer of slag was a thin layer of blackened sand, in which were a few pieces of a large, thick pot of a vesicular, soapy

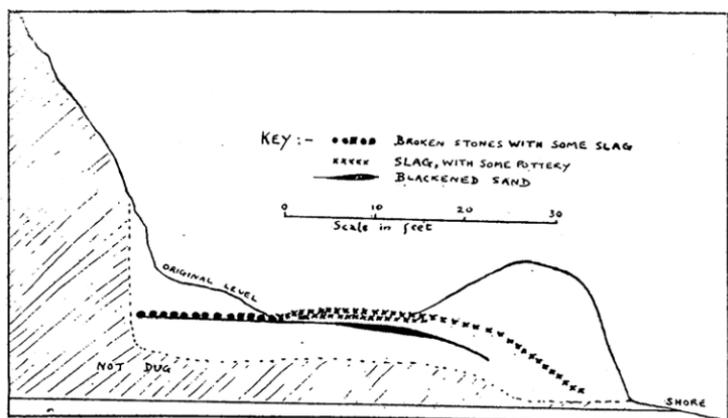


FIG. 2.—Section of slag-heap at Site IV.

texture and of a greyish colour (probably it was originally gritted with stone, now dissolved); its base is flat (fig. 4, 1). There were no flint artefacts, a few shells but none of the usual midden refuse. Fragments of brick of prehistoric type (fig. 6, 25) and an iron rivet (fig. 7, 33) were the only other finds. The iron slag was analysed through the courtesy of Dr. J. R. Schubert of the Iron and Steel Institute, and he reported:

“It is refuse of primitive iron-smelting, effected in the direct or bloomery-process, which was the only one applied in this country before 1490. For this reason it might be either medieval or prehistoric.”

The hearth itself was not found, being probably still beneath the 30 ft. dune. Bearing in mind the iron arrow-head (CW2 xlii 153) and the medieval potsherds (CW2 xlvi 74) found near by, it seems possible that a medieval bloomery has here disturbed an earlier habitation site.

Search for other traces of this postulated earlier habitation-layer was continued, and eventually sand movement revealed a layer of shell, bone and charcoal refuse, mixed with pot-boilers, at site VII; a few crumbs of crude pottery were found on the surface, and as there was a reasonably flat area among the dunes, the site was dug as far as possible. A clay hearth occupied its centre, surrounded by a thick layer of occupation debris; near the hearth this layer was 6 in. thick, but at the periphery it was about 1 ft. thick, being divided into three sections by two intervening bands of sand: the lowest midden layer was 4 in., the middle one about 2 in. and the top one less than 1 in. thick. Trampled pottery fragments were found in such profusion, immediately around the hearth, that at first I thought I had found a kiln; complete excavation, however, showed that it was an ordinary hearth, at which masses of shellfish had been boiled in crude, bucket-shaped pots, with perforations below the rim, similar to those from site IV. A fragment of a flat disc of pottery, likewise perforated, can only be a lid; other perforated objects of baked clay and brick were present also (figs. 6 and 7). Implements of bone and antler, a piece of lead in the form of a link, and a fragment of a shale bangle, were also found. Underneath the hearth was a sharpening-stone, 4 in. long, which had been used on both sides; a deposit on one side suggests that bone has been stropped on it, while the other side is streaked with red raddle.

A scatter of midden refuse, about fifteen yards away at site VII (a), contained the badly weathered pieces of another perforated pot. This layer of refuse had no depth, but it seems to be a continuation of site VII. There was no flint at either VII or VII (a).



FIG. 3.—Pot no. 9, Site VII, reconstructed: height, 10 ins.

Photograph by courtesy of the North Western Evening Mail.

Investigations had reached this stage when the storms of January 1954 sliced the seaward edge from the dunes between V and VI, exposing a typical black band of midden refuse; the "winkle-pins" (CW2 1 18) were found in 1950 on a weathered exposure of this layer. At VI it consisted of a thick black band, about 5 in. thick and 8 in. above the shingle of the beach; 6 in. above the black band was a lighter layer of debris, barely 1 in. thick, composed chiefly of coarse grit, shells and broken stones. Superficially, the layers together seemed merely a continuation of VII, barely 25 yards away through the intervening dunes, being similarly composed of compact masses of shells, carbon, antler and bone refuse, mixed with shattered pot-boilers and unbroken cobbles. But closer examination showed that flint artefacts and flakes were common in the thick black layer, and the pottery recovered was quite different, being gritted with shell and elaborately decorated with incised lines. The upper faint layer contained a few small fragments of pottery, similar in fabric to that from VII. At a point between the two layers (apparently disturbed by a burrowing animal) was a small sherd of typical beaker ware. Embedded in the thick black layer were some shaped pieces of lignite.

DETAILS OF FINDS.

The sand at Walney North End is underlaid with numerous springs, and as a result, all finds are recovered in a thoroughly damp condition; in addition, the roots of the marram grass and other dune growths seek the moisture retained by the midden layer, so that the bulk of the pottery is interpenetrated by rootlets; this renders preservation and reconstruction difficult.² Further, the numerous rabbit-burrows render attempts at interpreting stratification very difficult.

² It was owing to the tangle of vegetation growing directly out of it that it was impossible to preserve the hearth.

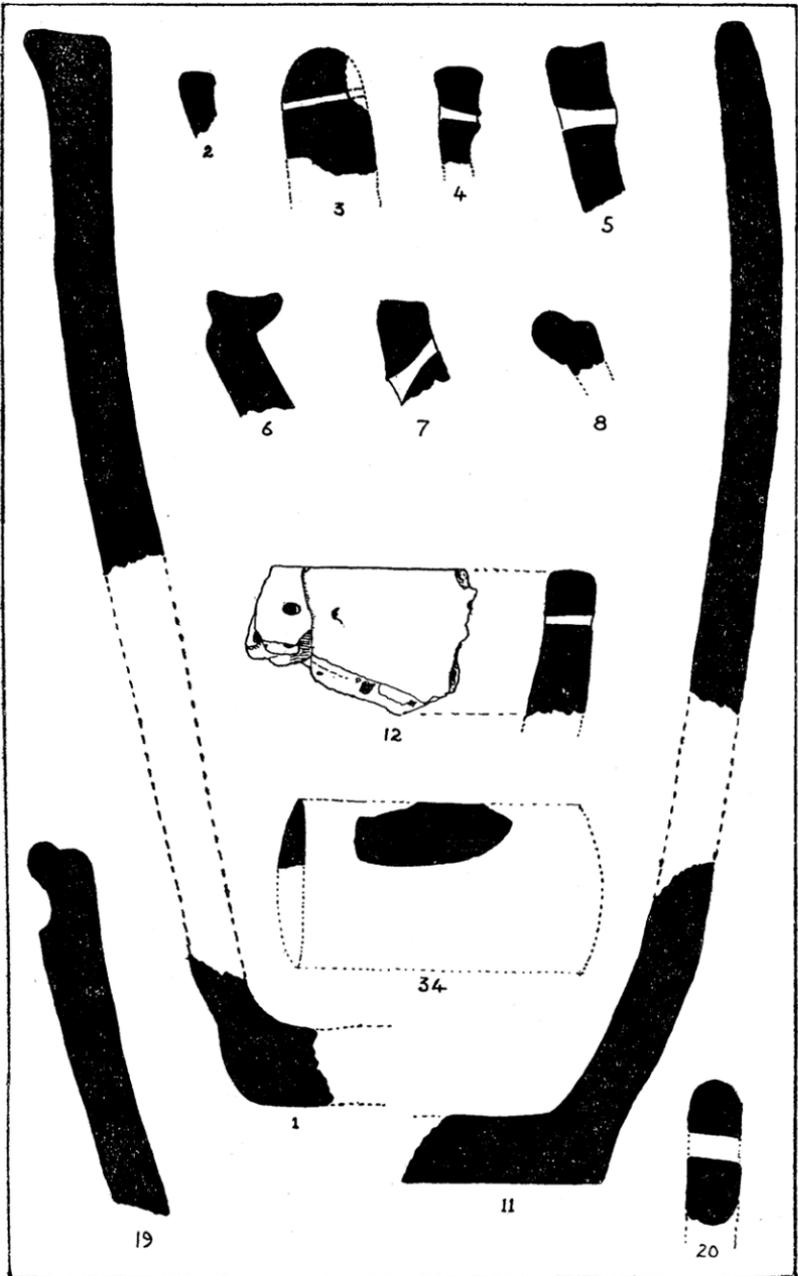


FIG. 4.—Nos. 1-5 and 20 from Site IV; nos. 6-8, 11, 12, 19 and 34 from Site VII (all $\frac{1}{2}$).

There are three main types of pottery:

Type A: Heavily gritted with shell, decorated with incised lines, hand-thrown but comparatively well baked. Some large sherds of this ware had no decoration; some were found crushed absolutely flat—by the pressure of heavy cobbles on pottery made pliable by dampness.

Type B: Gritted with large angular grits, which protrude sharply through both surfaces; this gives a hard pot which tends to break into flakes. When worn, either by weathering or (as at site IV) by burning, the clay is removed deeply from the surfaces, leaving the large grits standing in high relief.

Type C: With paste heavily loaded with fine stone grit and sand, resulting in a friable granulated texture, capable of much more elegant finish than Type B. In its present state it crumbles into a heap of grit at the least excuse.

Two other types are represented by single pots: the vesicular, soapy type from site IV, and a stray beaker sherd at site VII.

Site IV bloomery.

Fig. 4, 1. Straight-sided, flat rim slightly everted; ungritted, grey, flat base (burnt to a yellowish colour), unperforated. 10 in. diameter at mouth, 6 in. at base, about 11 in. high.

Fig. 4, 2. Type B, yellowish-brown on surface, slightly flattened rim, diameter 6 in.

Fig. 4, 3. Type B, very thick and crude; round rim, brown, diameter 12 in., perforation $\frac{1}{8}$ in.

Fig. 4, 4. Type B, rim very slightly flattened, dull brown surface, black inside, diameter 9 in., perforation $\frac{1}{8}$ in.

Fig. 4, 5. Type B, flat rim, light brown, diameter 11 in., perforation $\frac{1}{4}$ in. at $1\frac{3}{8}$ in. intervals.

Fig. 4, 20. Type B, round rim, brown, diameter 9 in., perforation $\frac{1}{4}$ in. at $1\frac{3}{8}$ in. intervals.

Fig. 6, 24. Type B, part of disc of reddish-brown pottery, apparent diameter 4 in., perforation $\frac{1}{4}$ in.

Fig. 6, 25. Portion of a cylindrical brick (?), broken through a perforation $\frac{3}{4}$ in. wide at surface, narrowing to $\frac{5}{8}$ in. inside.

Fig. 7, 33. Iron rivet from surface of mound (possibly modern).

Site VI.

Fig. 6, 21. Type A, reddish brown outside, black inside; narrow, rounded rim, diameter 7 in. Deeply incised decoration,

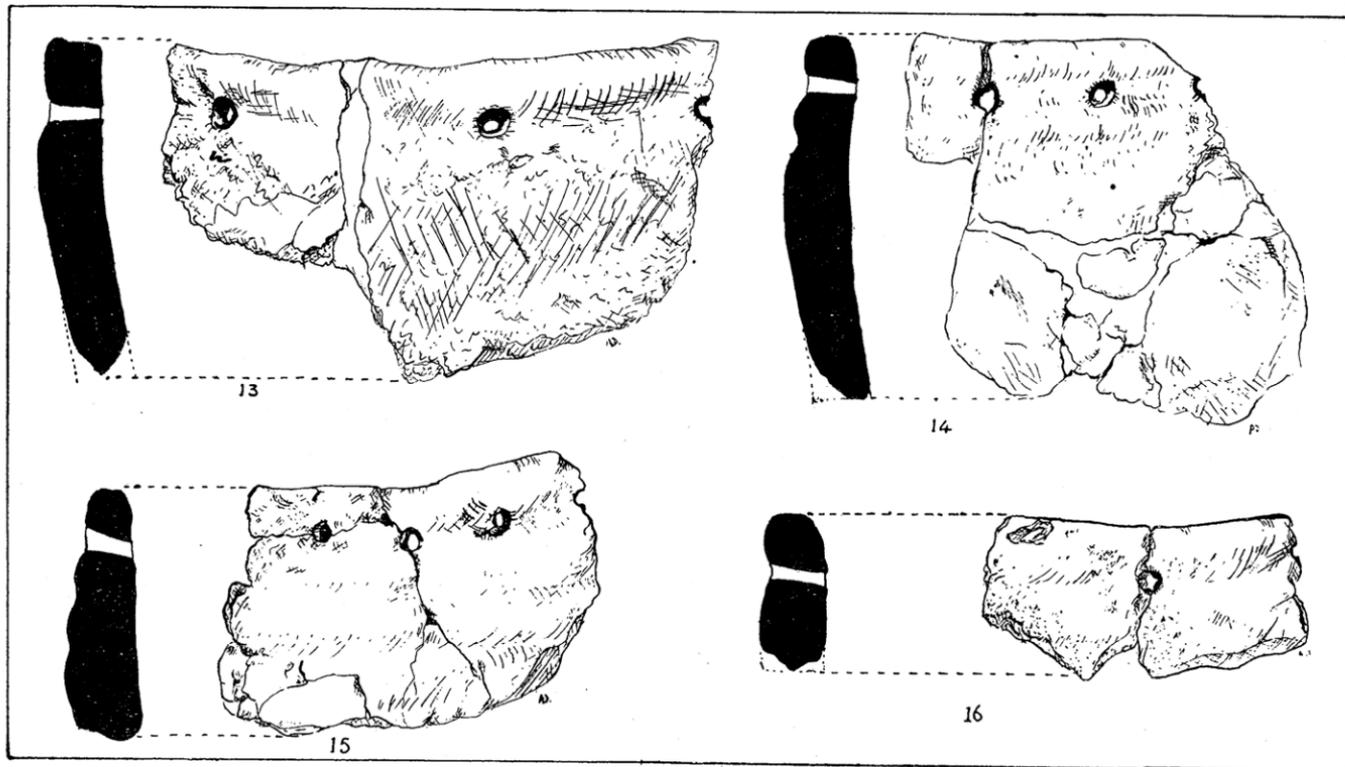


FIG. 5.—Nos. 13-16, from Site VII (♯).

vertical stabs immediately below the rim, three horizontal lines beneath, with regularly spaced sloping lines below.

Fig. 6, 22. Type A, yellowish-brown; an internal bevel gives the pot an acute but rounded rim of 8 in. diameter. Decoration consists of a band of deeply incised, obtuse-angled chevrons, enclosed by a horizontal line. Associated undecorated sherds suggest that the body of the pot was plain.

Fig. 6, 22a. Type A, small section of a flat base, diameter 7 in.; possibly the base of 22, but if so, this pot must have been a basin 4 in. deep.

Fig. 7, 23. Type A, two large contiguous pieces of a large, though thin-walled pot, about 11 in. diameter at the mouth; lightish brown, rounded rim with two internal mouldings; apparent height 12 in. Decorated with an over-all pattern of shallowly incised chevrons.

Fig. 7, 31. Much of the bone and antler found here showed signs of cutting and polishing, but only this beautifully polished bone pin is definitely recognisable.

Fig. 8, 35 and 36. Perhaps the most intriguing finds yet made at the North End site consist of a group of carved objects in lignite. They were found together in the bottom-most occupation layer. There is firstly an oval tablet, across the face of which five roughly parallel lines have been scribed; these lines are at intervals of about $\frac{3}{4}$ in., and have been carried partly round the edges, across old scars where the lignite had flaked. Then there is a triangular block of lignite with two sides straight and the other rounded; the rounded end has been deeply, if crudely, carved. Unfortunately one edge of this carved end has broken away, so it is impossible to say with any certainty what it represents: but it is easy to imagine that it is a grotesque face. This block sits easily on or between the lines on the oval tablet, like a chessman on its board. There were also a few fragments of what appeared to have been thin plaques of lignite, one with rounded ends 2 in. wide and $\frac{3}{8}$ in. thick, another square-ended but of similar dimensions. One can only guess at the use of the objects; perhaps they were an *aide memoire* for counting in fives (cf. the old sheep-scoring numerals, CW1 iii 381 ff.).

Site VII (a).

Fig. 6, 18. Type B, brown, stained black inside; roughly everted rim, with a double thong impression $\frac{1}{2}$ in. below it; diameter at rim 7 in., $\frac{1}{4}$ in. perforations at $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. intervals. This pot was a surface find, the numerous fragments being in general too eroded to allow reconstruction.

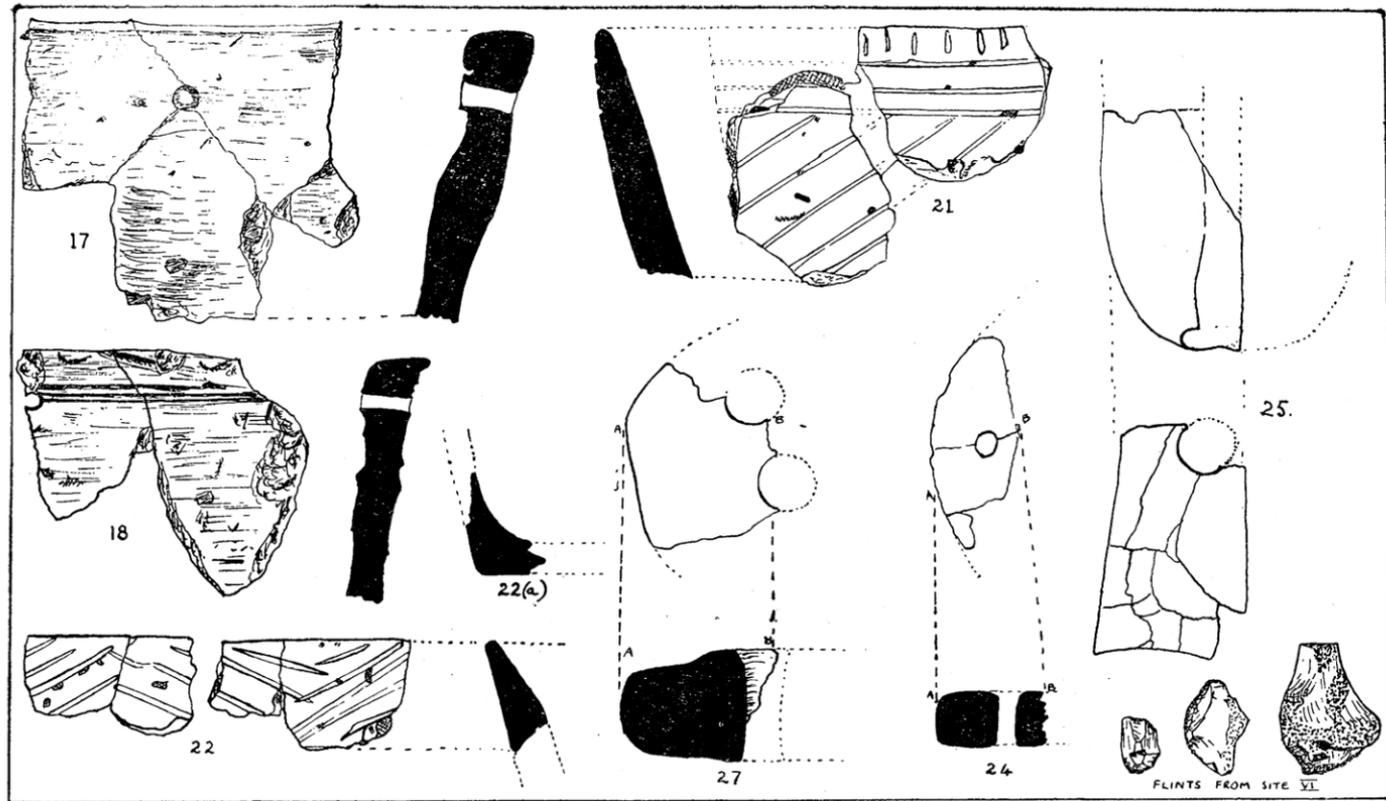


FIG. 6.—Nos. 24 and 25 from Site IV; flints and nos. 21, 22 and 22 (a) from Site VI; nos. 17 and 27 from Site VII; no. 18 from Site VII (a). (½).

Site VII.

Fig. 4, 6. Type C, light buff on surface, black inside; the flattened rim projects inwards to form a rounded internal lip; the body of the pot slopes sharply inwards. Diameter 10 in.

Fig. 4, 7. Type C, deep buff (perhaps stained with iron); flat rim, diameter 11 in., $\frac{1}{4}$ in. perforation.

Fig. 4, 8. Type C, light buff; carefully moulded rim, flat inside, with a deep rounded moulding. Diameter about 8 in.

Fig. 3, 9. Type B, reddish-brown pot with rounded rim. Height 10 in., diameter at rim $9\frac{1}{2}$ in. and at base 6 in.; $\frac{1}{4}$ in. perforations at $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. intervals.

Fig. 7, 10. Type C, buff coloured, base of a thick pot, external diameter $7\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Fig. 4, 11. Type C, majority of the body and part of the base of a large unperforated pot, reddish-brown, with rounded rim. Height about 12 in., diameter at rim 11 in., at base 8 in.

Fig. 4, 12. Type C, buff colour, slightly flattened rim; diameter 11 in., $\frac{1}{8}$ in. perforations at $1\frac{7}{8}$ in. intervals.

Fig. 5, 13. Type C, buff colour, flat rim; diameter 11 in., $\frac{1}{4}$ in. perforations at $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. intervals in a shallow groove beneath the rim.

Fig. 5, 14. Type C, greyish-buff, rounded rim; diameter 10 in., $\frac{1}{4}$ in. perforations at $1\frac{1}{8}$ in. intervals in the top of two shallow grooves beneath the rim. There is a thick incrustation inside the pot, apparently of soot covered by a white, limy crust; traces of a similar deposit remain on many of the other pots.

Fig. 5, 15. Type C, greyish-buff, rounded rim; diameter 10 in., $\frac{1}{4}$ in. perforations at 1 in. intervals in the first of three shallow grooves.

Fig. 5, 16. Type C, greyish-buff, rounded rim; diameter 11 in., $\frac{1}{4}$ in. perforations at $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. intervals.

Fig. 6, 17. Type B, light brown, very crude paste, flattened rim; diameter 10 in., $\frac{1}{4}$ in. perforation.

Fig. 4, 19. Type C, greyish-buff, flat rim with a deep groove beneath it; diameter 11 in.

Fig. 7, 26. Two pieces of a reddish-brown brick cylinder or drum, with a central perforation $\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide at the surface.

Fig. 6, 27. Parts of a disc of baked clay, containing large rounded pebbles; the largest portion contains parts of two perforations approximately $\frac{3}{8}$ in. across.

Fig. 7, 28. Knife-haft (?), of antler, each end showing numerous axe-cuts.

Fig. 7, 29. Sliver of bone, worked to a polished point

Fig. 7, 30. Piece of a highly polished bone pin.

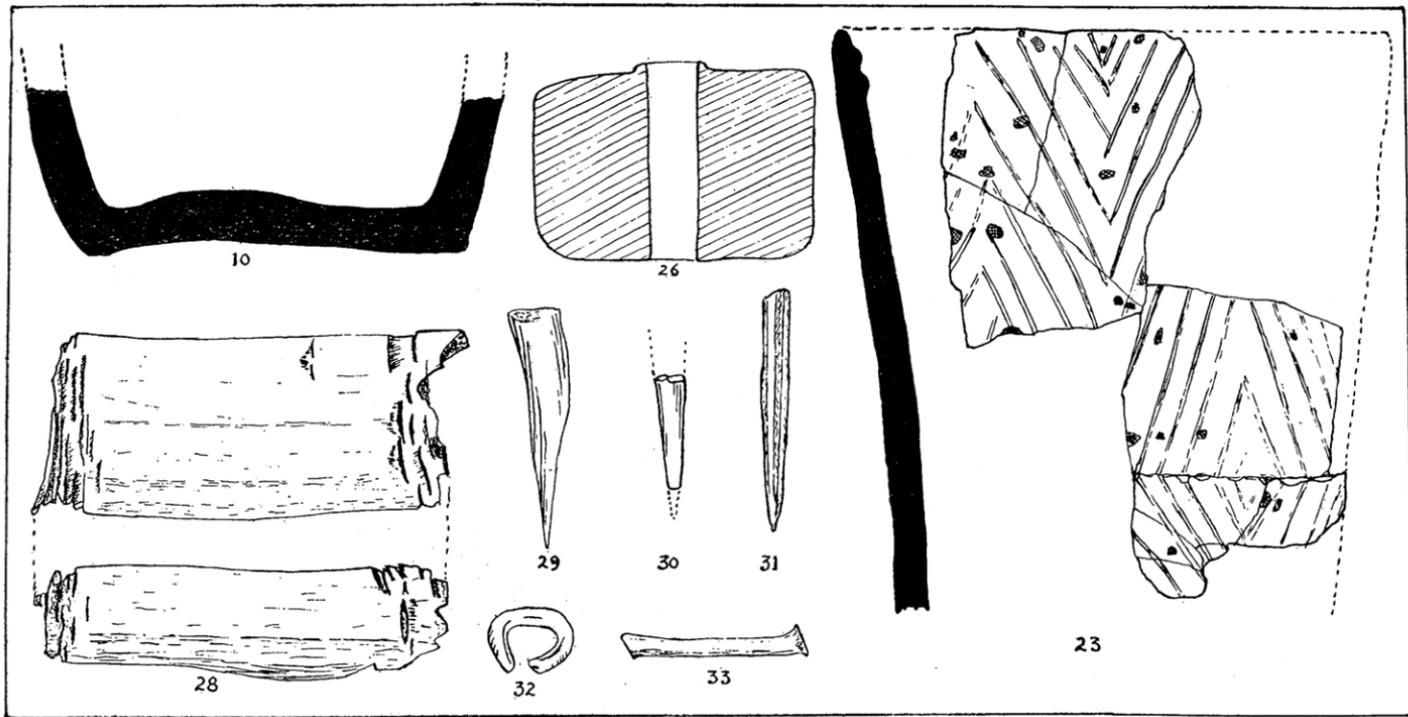


FIG. 7.—No. 33 from Site IV; nos. 23 and 31 from Site VI; nos. 10, 26, 28-30 and 32 from Site VII. ($\frac{1}{2}$, except nos. 10 and 23, which are $\frac{1}{4}$).

Fig. 7, 32. Link of lead, found embedded deeply in the lowest black layer, in close association with fig. 4, 11.

Fig. 4, 34. Fragment of a polished black bangle, in shale.

Much of the bone refuse showed signs of cutting and polishing, but the only other piece worthy of mention is a single tooth of a comb.

The masses of shell debris contained nothing exotic, being composed of the same types of mollusc that are still common in the vicinity; the most numerous in the midden deposits at both sites VI and VII were: *ostrea edulis*, *mytilus edulis*, *cardium echinatum*, *nucella lapillus* and *ocenebra erinacea*. The others were *patella vulgata*, *aporrhais pespelicani*, *turritella communis*, *littorina littorea*, *littorina saxatilis rudis* and *cyprina islandica*.

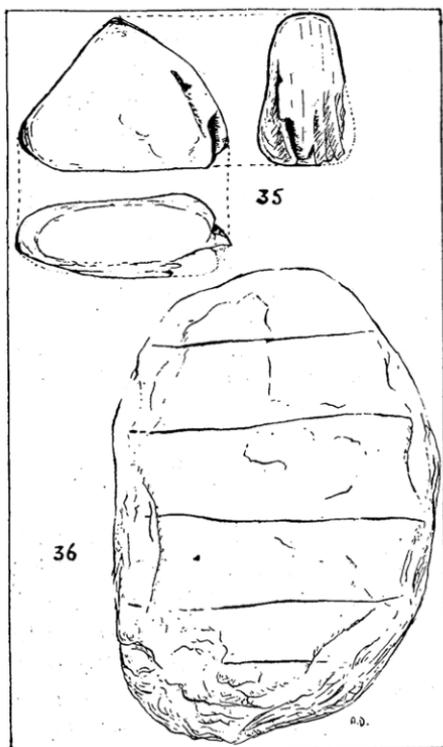


FIG. 8.—Lignite objects from Site VI ($\frac{1}{2}$).

The bones have not received expert examination, but antlers, boar tusks and horn cores prove the presence of deer, pig and ox; other bones are readily recognisable as either sheep or goat, and a jaw is either dog or fox (cf. CW2 xxxix 277 for a description of similar midden material).

CONCLUSIONS.

Owing to the nature of the site, which limits investigation to hollows between high moving sand-dunes, it has not yet been possible to complete the basic enquiry as to the date of original occupation of the site, and its later history. A trench joining sites VI and VII would probably answer most of our questions, but it would involve moving hundreds of tons of sand. It seemed best, therefore, to publish this interim report, even though it can only give tentative conclusions (which future dune movements will perhaps allow to be checked).

Drawings and descriptions of pottery from sites VI and VII were sent to Mr R. J. C. Atkinson, F.S.A., for comparison with pottery from his excavations at Luce Sands, Wigtownshire, in 1952. He writes:

"The sherds decorated with incised patterns can be paralleled closely from among the Luce Sands pottery . . . This was contemporary with a corded Beaker of type B, and earlier than fragments of Food Vessel. Though it is, of course, impossible to be sure from drawings alone, I have little doubt that your decorated pottery is of the same type, and presumably of the same date (i.e., Secondary Neolithic)."

Examples of perforated pottery, however, were not present at Luce Sands.

This perforated pottery has been difficult to parallel. As flint was not found in association with this type of pot, though it is so abundant in the immediate vicinity, it seemed safe to assume that it belonged to the Iron Age; it did not seem to have any similarity to English Iron Age types, but appeared more likely to be a product of some Highland Zone culture. Search in the Iron Age section of the National Museum of Antiquities, in Edinburgh, revealed many pots similar in paste and shape,

but unperforated, from the brochs and hill-forts (e.g., Broch of Tappock, Torwood, and Coalhill fort, Dalry).

I am indebted to Mr R. B. K. Stevenson, F.S.A., for drawing my attention to a pot found at Garrocher, Cree-town, Kircudbrightshire,³ which is perforated and in every way similar to the North End ware; and also to perforated sherds from Culver Hole, Gower.⁴ Reports of the excavations at Kirkhead Cave, Cartmel,⁵ speak of finds of crude pottery, perforated below the rim, but unfortunately these finds no longer exist.

The pottery was obviously used in connection with the shellfish and, judging from the enormous amount of shell debris and charcoal, shell-collecting and cooking must have been a major industry. The pottery gives the impression that it is crude, not from any lack of technical skill in its makers, but because it was regarded as expendable: the rim fragments show considerable variations of profile—flat, round or even moulded. Perforations were made by pushing a rod through the paste from outside, before baking.

In conclusion, it would appear that the North End was used by Secondary Neolithic food-gatherers (B Beakers, incised pottery) who conducted extensive flint-chipping operations, using flint pebbles from the shingle beaches. Later, an Iron Age people (perforated pots, net-sinkers (?), bone comb, shale bangle, lead link, &c.) camped among the same dunes, and gathered and cooked large quantities of shellfish. Later still—perhaps at an early medieval date—a bloomery was sited on the side of Walney Channel, so as to take full advantage of the prevailing winds, and apparently utilizing the “iron pan”, which underlies much of the area, as a crude ore: ample wood was available at Sowerby Woods, just across the channel.

³ Cf. *D. & G. Trans.* xxiii (1940-44), 158.

⁴ Cf. Grimes, *Guide to the Prehistoric Collections in the National Museum of Wales*, 192.

⁵ Cf. Barber, *Furness and Cartmel Notes* (1894), 27.

In addition to the persons named above, I must record my indebtedness to Miss M. A. Douglas for her assistance in drawing the finds, and to my son, Mr A. Barnes, for his help on the sites. All the finds have been added to the collections of the Barrow-in-Furness Museum.