

AN EARLY IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AT HARBOROUGH ROCKS, BRASSINGTON

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INTRODUCTION

'Harborough Rocks' is the name given to an impressive outcrop of carboniferous limestone, altered to dunstone or dolomitised limestone, in the neighbourhood of Harborough Rocks Farm (SK242551; Fig. 1). The Rocks rise, in a series of angular scars or terraces, to a height of 379 metres O.D. above the surrounding plateau area of Carsington Pastures. Recent field investigations have revealed further evidence of the "Iron Age settlement" first reported here by Ward (1890) on the basis of pottery finds. Ward described the site of his finds as being: "on a steep slope or talus of soil forming the floor of a gap in one of the belts of rock on the south-west side of the hill near the [sc. farm-] house . . . pot sherds were everywhere of the same character . . . and confined to the south-west parts of the hill." Employment of this description and on-site investigation during 1986-89 led to the location of an area where similar pottery, bones and the occasional flint could still be found, mostly on or below the middle terrace, either in erosion patches or in molehills. It should be noted that archaeological evidence, from the neolithic through to the Roman periods, has been found elsewhere in the region of Harborough Rocks (Ward, 1890; Armstrong, 1923).

THE SETTLEMENT

Though a rubble stone wall and a possible clearance area have been located on the highest terrace, near the Beacon Barrow, the main occupation-area of the early-Iron Age settlement was, as far as can be ascertained, confined to an area to the south-west end of the middle terrace, north-east of the path by Harborough Cave (Fig. 1). In this area can be seen shallow depressions which may indicate domestic habitation sites. It is also possible that other components of the settlement spread onto terraces above and below the middle terrace: a small cave, with a boulder threshold part-way inside, in which have been found a few pottery sherds, is located below the middle terrace.

THE FINDS

This report describes the pottery and bones found in 1987-89, all of which are now deposited in Sheffield City Museum (accession nos 1986.53).

The pottery (Figs 2, 3)

Most vessels seem to have been made from local clays, though some appear to have been imported to the site. The local pottery contains calcite-silica inclusions and is finished in a variety of surfaces. Most examples have a thin skin, or slip-like surface, smoothed to a fine or, in some cases, leathery finish. This finish has a light creamy appearance. Some of the sherds have a waxy or soapy feel to the fabric. The 'imported' wares consist of finer fabrics, either sandy or black burnished.

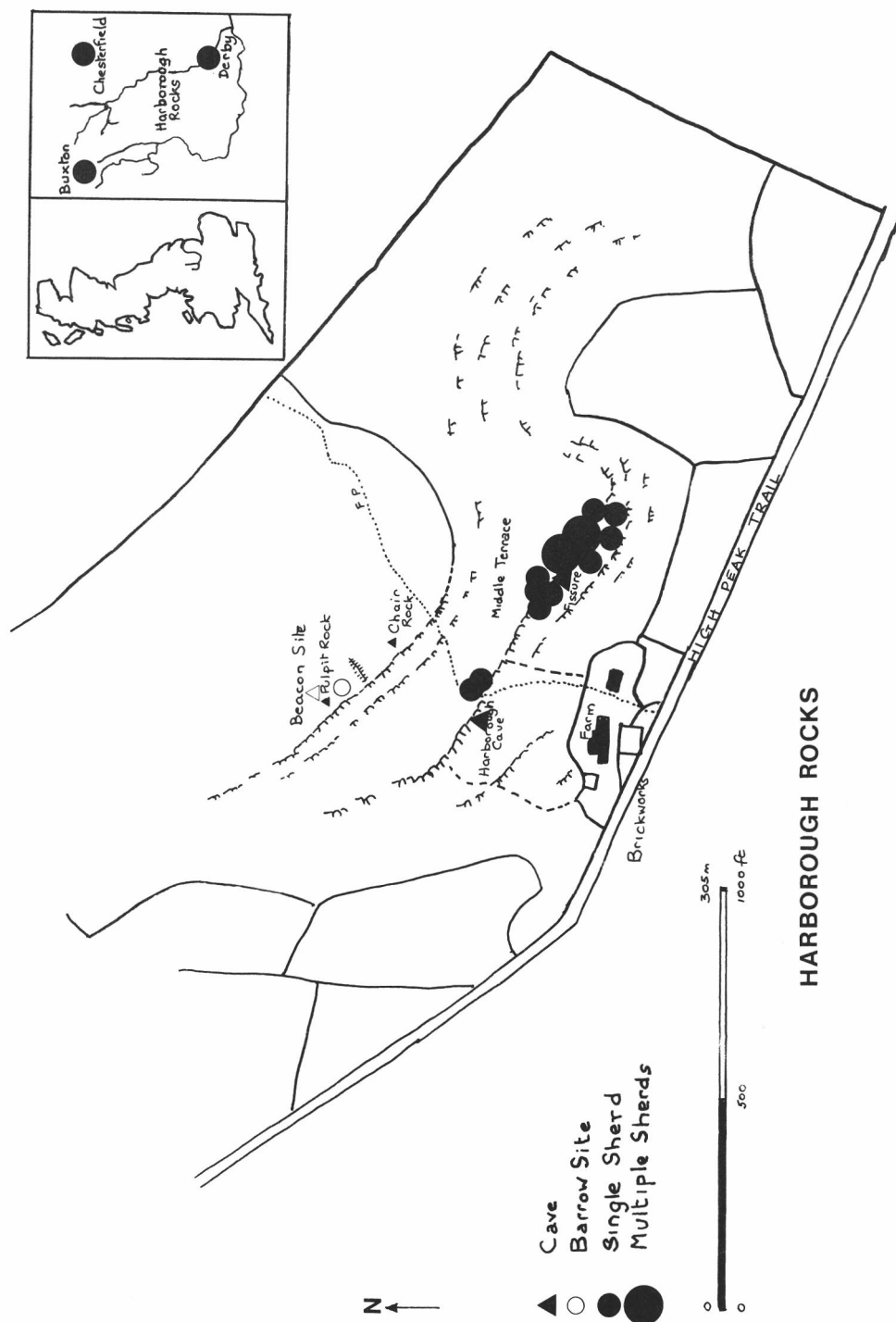


Fig. 1 Harborough Rocks: Site location and distribution of finds.

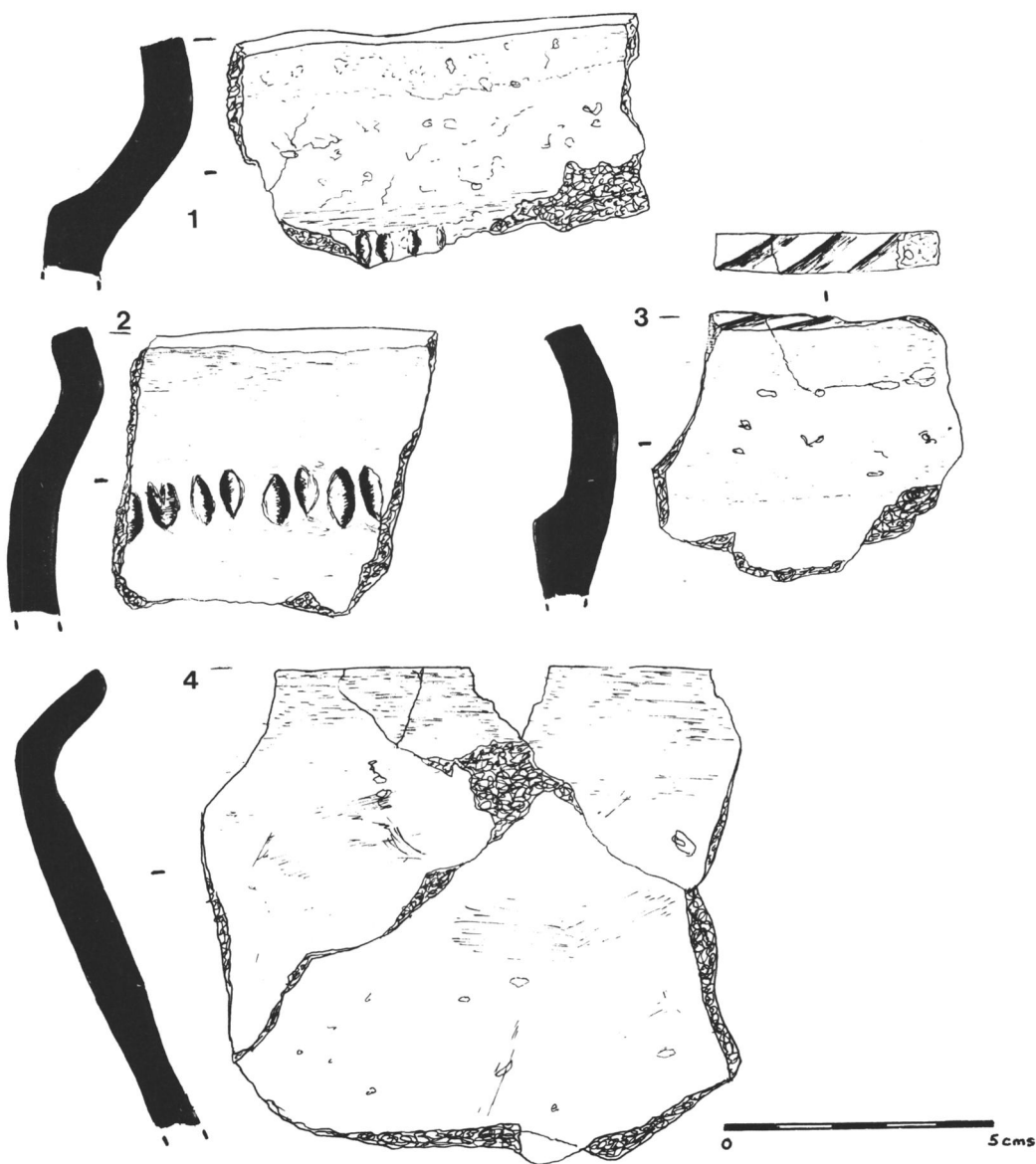


Fig. 2 Harborough Rocks: Iron Age pottery, catalogue nos 1-4.

Decoration, mainly confined to the rim or shoulder areas, consists of oblique cabling, finger-indentations and -pinching. Challis and Harding (1975: 48-9) suggest that finger-tipping on rims and shoulders is characteristic of transitional late bronze age and early pre-Roman iron age pottery in the north of England, particularly in the Hallstatt C period. Vessel forms found at Harborough Rocks include necked and bipartite situlas. A recently (1989) discovered rim of a bipartite vessel, possibly derived from a bronze situla, is almost identical to that found by Ward in

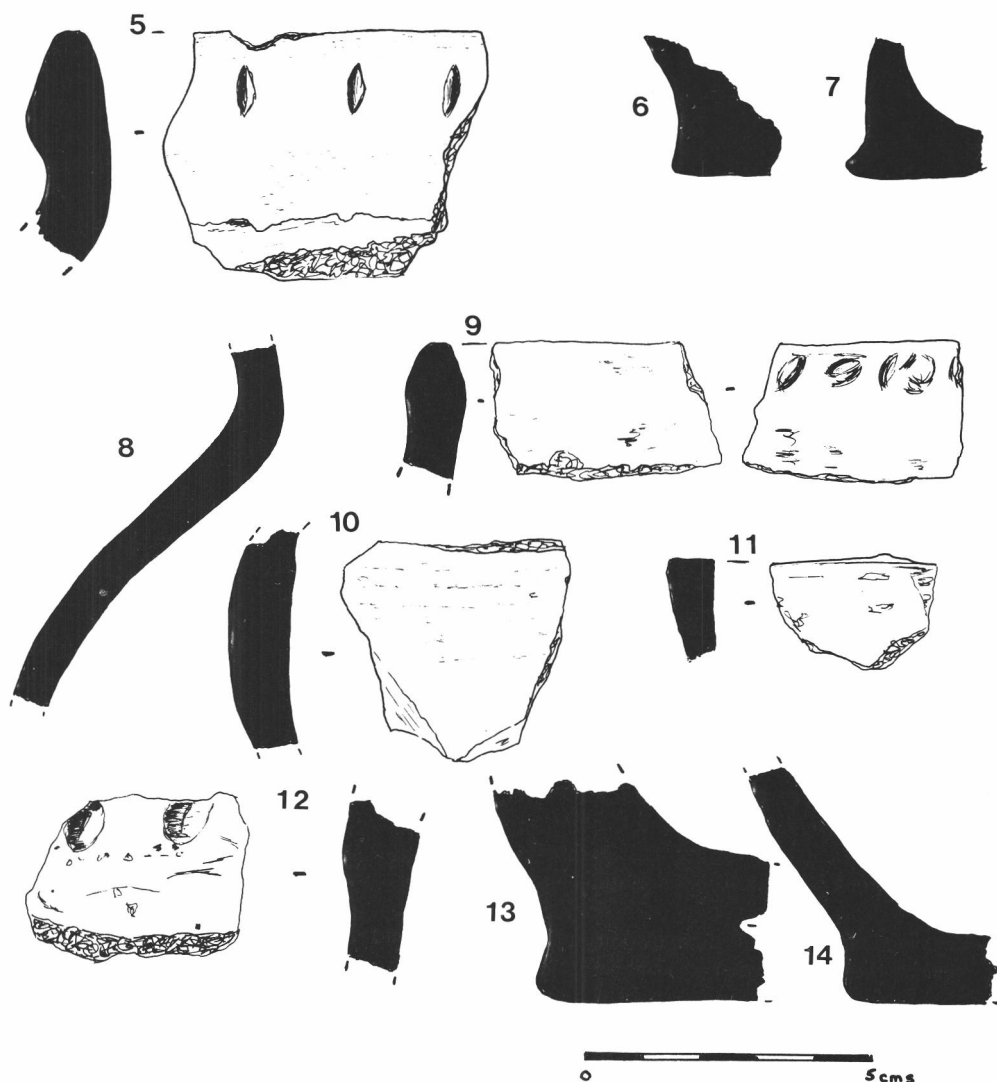


Fig. 3 Harborough Rocks: Iron Age pottery, catalogue nos 5- 14.

1890 (Fig. 2:4). The pottery from Harborough has much in common with that from Staple Howe and Thornham Hill in east Yorkshire (Brewster, 1963) and Castle Hill in Scarborough, etc.

Catalogue

1. Rim sherd (Fig. 1:1). Sharp shoulder; flat/bevelled rim; finger nail (pinched) decorations on shoulder. Light-grey gritty exterior; light-grey gritty interior; coarse fabric; grey/black core; surface crazed.
2. Rim sherd (Fig. 1:2). Rim slightly flattened; finger impressions (pinched); nail marks. Smoothed grey/cream exterior; gritty cream/brown interior; coarse fabric; cream/brown core.

3. Rim sherd (Fig. 1:3). Thickening on shoulder; oblique cabling on rim. Grey/brown exterior; grey/dark-grey interior; calcitic grits protruding through a smoothed surface. (Three other fragments in the same style.)
4. Rim/body sherd (Fig. 1:4). Large vessel (bipartite situla); internal rim-constricted neck. Creamy-white exterior (black carbonised on rim top); grey/brown interior, darker on rim; coarse gritty dark-grey core; surface smoothed, with small striations.
5. Rim sherd (Fig. 2:5). Finger nail impressions. Light-grey exterior, gritty texture; light-grey interior, with slightly coarser grits; grey/brown core.
6. Base sherd (Fig. 2:6). Grey/white exterior; coarse fabric; gritty grey core.
7. Base sherd (Fig. 2:7). Heeled. Dark-brown interior; reddish exterior.
8. Body sherd (Fig. 2:8). Large globular-type bowl or jar. Fine dark-brown/grey exterior, sandy in texture and slightly pitted in places; grey/reddish-pink smooth interior; light-grey core.
9. Rim sherd (Fig. 2:9). Round rim; finger impressions on inside. Grey/black interior; light-brown interior.
10. Body sherd (Fig. 2:10). Black coated burnished exterior; grey core; hard fabric.
11. Rim sherd (Fig. 2:11). Flat rim; gritty fabric, smoothed surface. Brown interior.
12. Body sherd (Fig. 2:12). Finger impressions. Coarse gritty texture; brown/grey exterior and interior.
13. Base sherd (Fig. 2:13). Orange/brown exterior and interior; poorly fired; grey core; coarse, very thick fabric.
14. Base sherd (Fig. 2:14). Smooth surface; light-grey/cream exterior; black/dark-grey interior; coarse fabric, with calcite grit inclusions.

The bones (MC)

See Table 1.

	OX	SHEEP/GOAT	PIG
TEETH Upper	2	5	2 incisors
Lower	3	3	1 canine
MANDIBLE			1
VERTEBRA	1	1	
RIB	11		
SCAPULA		1	
HUMERUS	2	3	
RADIUS/ULNA	1	2	2
METACARPAL	1	2	1
PELVIS	1	2	
FEMUR		1	
TIBIA	4	3	
ASTRAGALUS	1	1	
CALCANEUM	1		
METATARSAL	1	1	
PHALANX			1
OTHER	1 horn core	1 horn core (goat)	
FRAGMENTS	c. 100 fragments, mainly sheep, goat, ox and pig		

Table 1: *Harborough Rocks: analysis of bone finds.*

DISCUSSION

As implied above, according to Challis and Harding (1975) finger-tipping directly on rims and shoulders had its origins in the finger-tipped cordon. During the seventh century finger-tipped ware became thinner and smoother, and its shapes more varied. Its evolution seems to have been influenced by movements of population from the Continent, and in certain areas appears to display chronological overlaps with late bronze age types: as noted, the Derbyshire examples have many similarities with pottery dating from the seventh century found at Scarborough and Staple Howe. Major changes, in the form of new shapes, appear from the sixth into the fifth century. These are represented at Harborough Rocks, and suggest an expansion of population inland. Radley and Radford (1969) found sherds similar to the Harborough Rocks material above Grange Mill; GAM has also found similar sherds at Castle Ring on Harthill Moor. A reappraisal of the early and late iron age material in Derbyshire is now needed to take into account the many fragmentary remains, as little new research has been carried out since Challis and Harding (1975).

REFERENCES

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