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# **The early prehistoric pottery from Northumberland Bottom, Southfleet, Kent**

by Emily Edwards

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

A total of 213 sherds (2,452 g) of early prehistoric pottery were recovered from features at Northumberland Bottom. Apart from a single flint-tempered sherd of middle Bronze Age date, these sherds represented three vessels (Table 1); two Beakers recovered from a double (possible triple) burial at Wrotham Dry Valley, and a Collared Urn (associated with cremated human bone) at Hazells Farm. Despite the contexts in which these pots were deposited, two were fragmentary and were only 25-30% complete. The condition of the material, however, was generally good.

*Table 1: Summary of Neolithic and early Bronze Age pottery*

Feature	Context	Sherd count	Weight (g)	Ware	Number of vessels	Illustrated vessels	Comments
1071	1205	1	674	BKR	1	P1	Complete
1071	1204	50	282	BKR	1	P2	30% represented
106	106	161	1469	CU	1	P3	25% represented
Total		212	2425		3		

## 2 FABRICS

### 2.1 Descriptions

Each vessel was of a different fabric and possibly manufactured from a different clay, each of which contained little additional material (Table 2). The sources utilised were local but not immediately available on the site, with the likely exception of the one flint-tempered middle Bronze Age sherd. The two Beakers were well-fired and finished, although the clays were not prepared; some naturally occurring inclusions within P1 were as thick as the wall of the vessel. The Collared Urn was thicker walled and the clay laminated, suggesting very little preparation. The grog was often large, angular and fired to a different colour from the surrounding matrix.

*Table 2: Description of fabrics*

Fabric Name	Period	Fabric description
APfeR1	LNEBA (P1)	10% very fine yellow sand. 1% rounded ferruginous pellets. 1% rounded rock.
SA2	LNEBA (P3)	2% shell, thin walled and finely crushed. 5% fine sand. 1% argillaceous pellets. 5-10% voids - possibly both organic and leached shell.
GA1	EBA (P2)	Very hackly and laminated, crumbly fabric manufactured from argillaceous clay containing 30% grog (up to 3 mm) and 5% sand.
F1	MBA	20-30% flint.

## 2.2 Sources

The vessel fabrics suggest two or three sources of clay: a sandy (yellow sand), slightly ferruginous clay containing some river gravel, a slightly sandy clay containing fine thin walled shell, and a very argillaceous clay containing some sand.

The geology at Wrotham Dry Valley is Upper chalk overlain by the Thanet Beds. At Hazells Farm, Thanet Sands are predominant. Any clays used for the manufacture of pot will have been obtained away from the site, although the sand in the clay may have been Thanet Bed sands. It is possible to identify the most likely sources through detailed description, but a thorough petrological study and clay sampling strategy would have to be undertaken in order for a source to be established.

The Thanet Sands in north Kent consist of fine, well sorted yellow sands, Glauconite and pebbles. The nearest clay sources are the Woolwich and London Clays (2.5 km to Swanscombe and 5.5 km to Shorn Wood). The Woolwich Beds consists of coarsely shelly and heavily organic black clay (Cooper 1984, 42) with sandy facies; the shell is large, thick walled and common and the sand less well sorted than the Thanet Sands. The London Beds consists of marine mudstone (dominantly argillaceous) with marine facies and sand beds (BGS 1996, 103; Anderton *et al.* 1979, 253-4). This clay is well studied and is rich in fauna, including shell. The Holocene alluvial deposits of East Tilbury, consisting of peat, alluvial silt and clay and gravel, are about a mile away and should also be considered, as they were laid down by this period (BGS 1996, 125-6). These deposits are considered as marine deposits and also contain shell. As these alluvial clays are 'reworked', they will vary considerably from outcrop to outcrop (Hamerow 1993, 31) although as they are marine deposits they do contain shell (BGS 1996, 126).

It is likely that the alluvial clays and the London Clays at Shorn Wood near Cobham and/or at Swanscombe are the sources of these materials. According to Arnold's (1985, 54-5) model for the procurement of raw materials for pottery manufacture, these distances are common, especially given the lack of potting clays at Northumberland Bottom.

## 3 FORMS/MANUFACTURE

Both Beaker vessels are typologically early. The complete vessel (P1), associated with the female skeleton and therefore deposited in a lower context, was found upright. It is not symmetrical, having been fired whilst too wet, and has an oval rim diameter and bulging belly. There are indication that it originally had a red-brown burnished exterior and it also has three 'fire clouds' around the circumference of the vessel. The most likely suggestion is that these are the result of other vessels having been placed both around and against the Beaker during firing, thus cutting off the air supply.

P1 is decorated with incised horizontal bands of decoration which appear carelessly applied. These bands are discontinuous and the gaps are staggered down the length of the vessel, as is the decoration on vessels from Great Mongeham and Cottington Hill (Clarke 1970). The vessel could fall into more than one of Clark's groups, being tall and slender, with a high narrow waist, narrow base and a small difference between belly and rim diameter. The profile is indistinguishable from either the more slender of the East Anglian Group or the shorter necked of the W/MR type (Clarke 1970). Either style is a stage three Beaker according to Lanting and Der Vals (1972) and an early phase (Early, Style 2) according to Case (1977; 1993). This vessel form appears to be rare in Kent although vessel P2, an East Anglian style, is much more common.

The decoration on P2 is more zoned than that on many Kentish Beakers. The comb-impressed horizontal bands on this vessel are interspersed with plain zones and zones with a horizontal ladder motif (the joining short lines are diagonal). Combed zoned decoration is noted on vessels from Bromley (Clarke 1970, no. 406), Folkestone (*ibid.*, no. 633), Erith (*ibid.*, no. 403) and Capel-le-Ferne (*ibid.*, no. 629); these vessels are all either East Anglian or Northern Style vessels (*ibid.*).

The large Collared Urn (P3) is a Second Series South Eastern style, like much of the published Collared Urn material from Kent. The form of the upper body is very straight sided. The collar has been formed through the application and smoothing of a triangular sectioned cord on below the collar area and the rim is internally bevelled. Many of the broken sherds clearly showed the tongue and groove method of joining the coils; the section forming the rim constitutes two separate coils, as does the collar. The vessel is decorated around the collar and on the rim bevel with impressed twisted cord, forming filled triangles and horizontal lines. This motif is unusual amongst published vessels, which tend to be more simply decorated (Longworth 1984). There are, however, very few vessels with which to make such comparisons.

#### 4 GENERAL DISCUSSION

The two Beakers from the double inhumation were stylistically early, the more complete vessel (P1) having a slightly more sinuous W/MR/East Anglian profile than appears to be usual for Kent. The vessel from the higher contexts (P2) associated with the male skeleton was fragmented and only 30% complete. This vessel has a more typical profile for an East Anglian style vessel from Kent. Clarke (1970) recorded the incidences of Beaker position in relation to associated crouched skeletons in graves, against gender and age (adult/child) where available. The vessel associated with the lower female skeleton is placed behind the pelvis and feet and below the pelvis, which is a typical position for an East Anglian vessel. Unfortunately Clarke was only able to find three burials containing East Anglian vessels

which could be analysed in this way, none of which were male. The Collared Urn is a late style vessel (Second Series South Eastern) typical of published examples from Kent, on which 'tongue and groove' coil joins are clearly visible. A total of eleven Collared Urns were mentioned by Longworth (1984, 216-217), mostly from the north-east and the Isle of Thanet; no new vessels have been published since. The unusual feature of this Collared Urn appears to be the decoration; twisted cord filled triangles have not been noted in Kent before. Although Longworth states that they are a tradition not restricted to any particular part of Britain they do appear more frequently on vessels to the north and north-east.

The clays utilised in the manufacture of these vessels were not available on site. Several locations can be named as possible sources but an intensive programme of clay sampling would be necessary in order to establish which were used. The following suggestions may be made:

The potters living near the site travelled small distances from a fixed settlement to obtain materials (Arnold 1985, 54-5).

- The vessels were made at the clay source.
- The clay was collected and brought back to the site for the manufacture of pottery.

The area was inhabited by mobile groups of people simultaneously using various points in the landscape (Garwood 1999, 296). The vessels were made and used at source and deposited with the dead at the site.

The distance to source is possibly evidence of trade between two settled communities. The pots were made at source by other potters inhabiting the area and were traded/brought to the site.

## 5 CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED VESSELS

### *Figure 1*

P1. Context 1205. One complete Beaker vessel (674 g). Either W/MR or East Anglian style. Fabric: Apf1. Firing: ext; YBR, core; G-YBR, int; YBR. ST: ext; SM, BU?, int; SM. Th: 5 mm. Rim Diam: 106-120 mm. Patches of burnishing. Fire clouds and indentations show possible angle of rest during firing. Decoration: Incised, staggered horizontal bands, all over.

P2. Context 1204. Three refitted sherds from a fragmented East Anglian style Beaker (45 in total, 282 g). Fabric: SA2. Firing: ext; Br-RBR, core; BL, int; BR-RBR. ST: ext; SM, int; SM. Th: 7 mm. Rim Diameter: 110 mm. Base Diam: 50 mm. Decoration: A zoned vessel with plain zones alternating with zones of comb applied decoration, horizontal bands and ladder motif (diagonal short lines crossing the horizontal bands).

P3. Context 106. Five sherds of a Collared Urn are illustrated (161 in total, 469 g). A Secondary Series South Eastern style. Fabric: GA1. Firing: ext; BR, core; BL, int; BR. ST: ext; SM, int; SM. Th: 14 mm. Rim Diam: 500 mm. Decoration: Bevel; twisted cord, horizontal lines. Collar: twisted cord, horizontal lines and filled, nested triangles.

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