



Fig. 1: Excavation in progress.

(Photo: Gordon King)

# A Medieval Pottery Kiln at Pinner, Middlesex

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IN JUNE 1975, Mr. Jeffkins, a member of the Ruislip Natural History Society, was carrying out a survey of flora in the Pinner area. Amongst the sites he had to visit was a plot of land off Potters Street Hill (TQ107912) which was about to be developed for housing. When he arrived at the site he found that a new access road had already been cut through the western side of the site and that spilling from the bank of this road was a large amount of grey unglazed pottery. This was reported to the Museum of London where Alison Laws, the Field Officer, recognised the pottery as 13th century and

similar to that found on many medieval occupation sites in Middlesex and Hertfordshire. The developers agreed to an emergency excavation and this was carried out by the Museum of London and the West London Archaeological Field Group.

## **The Kiln**

The excavation revealed two features separated by the new road. On the south side of the road there was an irregular shaped shallow pit filled with a mass of hard grey gritty pottery much of which were wasters. This feature had been badly disturbed by tree roots and it was not possible to completely

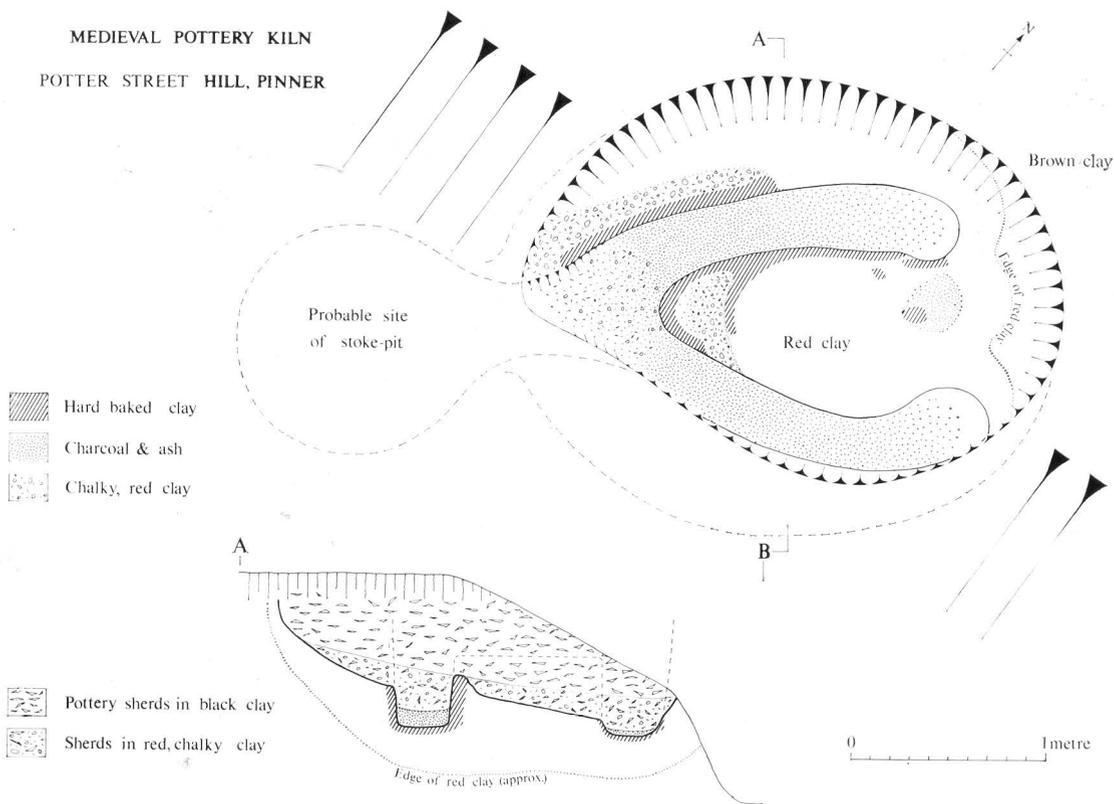


Fig. 2.

excavate this feature.

The north side of the road also had a pit full of pottery but as the excavation proceeded ridges of hard baked clay forming an oval shape were uncovered. When the excavation of this feature was complete it was clear that we had a single flue kiln with two vents and a raised central platform (see plan and section, figure 2). The firebox area had been destroyed by the new road but the flue from the firebox to the oven survived pointing in a south-westerly direction. Using Musty's classification<sup>1</sup> this kiln would be classified as type 1b. When the vents were cleared of pottery a layer of charcoal was found overlying greenish-grey crumbly clay. In the flue leading to the firebox there was a layer of chalk beneath the charcoal. Traces of baked clay lined the walls of the vent and on the central platform two overlying layers of burnt clay could indicate two possible building phases. There was no evidence of kiln furniture or of a roof.

### The Pottery

A vast amount of pottery was excavated from

<sup>1</sup> J. Musty, "Medieval Pottery Kilns," in V. Evison (ed.) *Medieval Pottery from Excavations*. (1974).

both the kiln and the shallow pit. The fabric of all the pottery is very simple, being a hard grey reduced ware tempered with quartz sand. A very small amount of pottery is oxidised and red in colour but is very soft so it would seem likely that this is an accident of firing and not intentional. All the materials for making the pottery were close at hand: the site lies on the edge of the glacial deposits and consists mainly of clay but there are patches of quartz sand scattered around the locality. The area was probably wooded and so supplied the fuel and a small stream still exists running along the northern edge of the site.

The main type of decoration consists of applied thumbed strips. These only occur on the larger cooking pots and it seems likely that their purpose was for strengthening as much as decoration. The only other type of decoration found is the stabbing and slashing of jug handles and bowls. None of the pottery was glazed.

The pottery filling the upper layers of the kiln and the pit was in a blackish clay. The pottery from the vents of the kiln was in reddish clay. Full analysis of all the pottery will take some time and it is

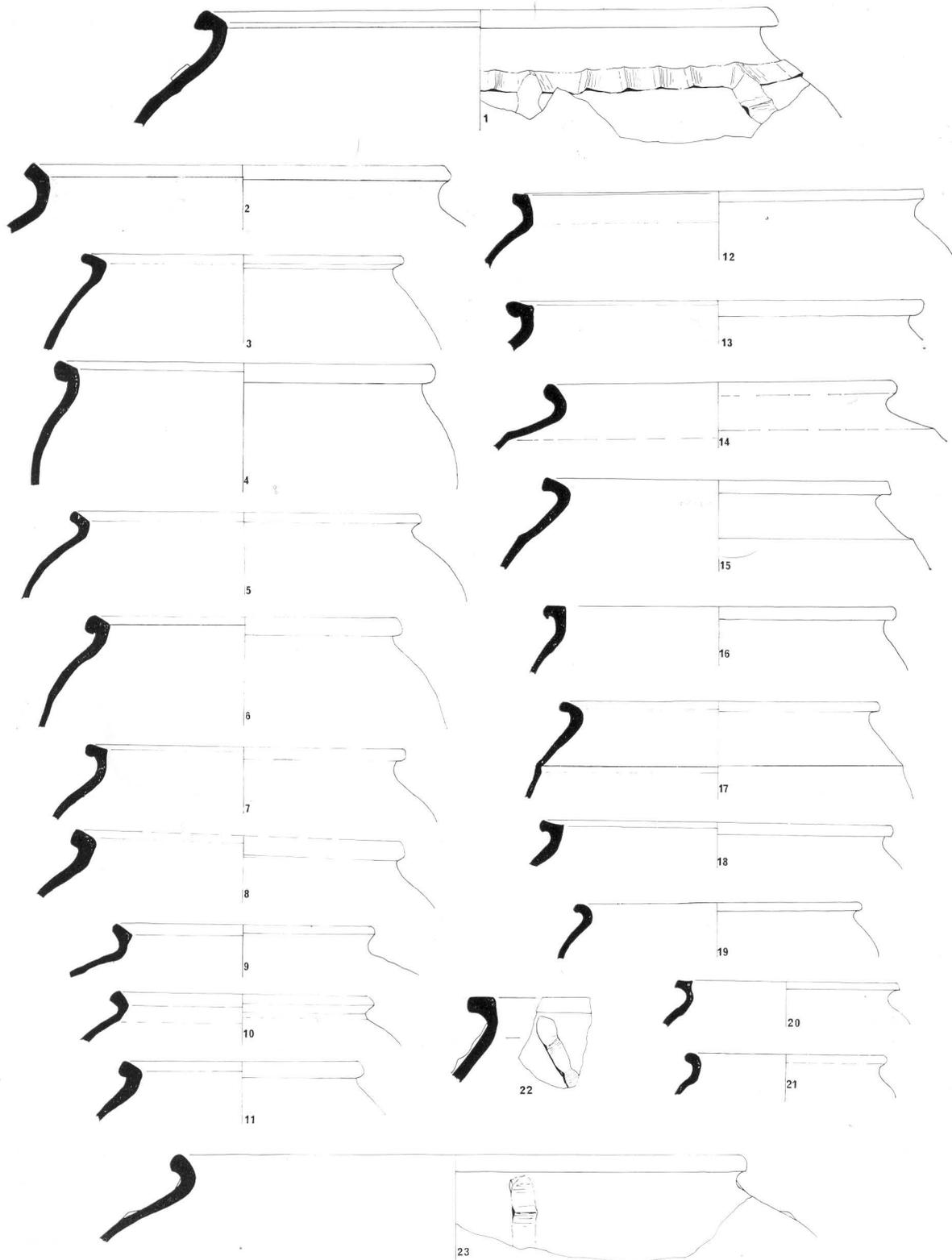


Fig. 3: Cooking pots (1/4).

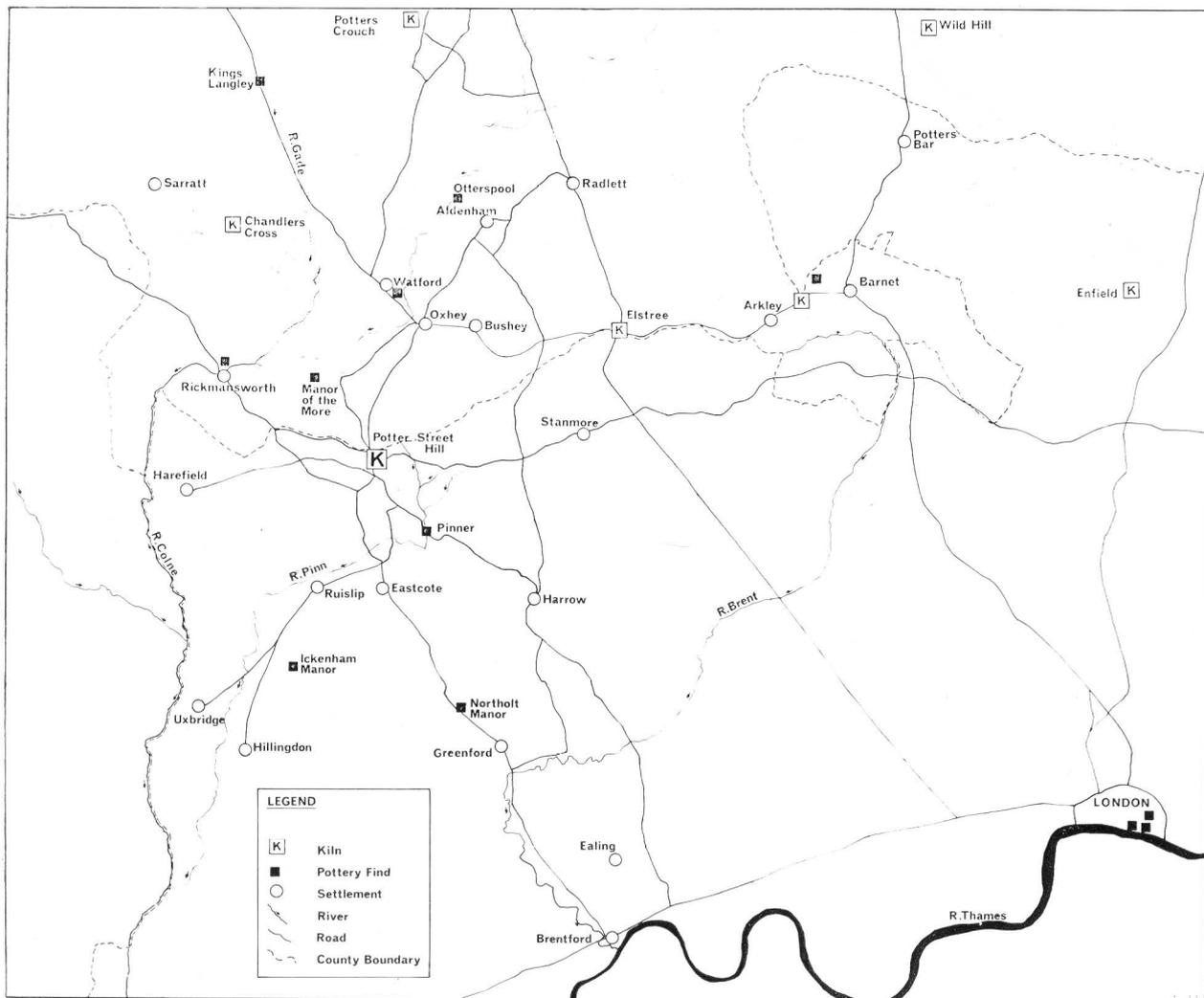


Fig. 4.

hoped to publish a final report covering all the pottery some time next year. The pottery illustrated in this article is only that from the lower red layer of the kiln and it is not possible to say at this time whether it is contemporary with the pottery from the upper grey layers which form the much larger proportion of the pottery recovered.

The pottery consists of three types of vessels: cooking pots, bowls, and jugs. The cooking pots form the largest group, accounting for about 90 per cent of the total. We have tried various schemes of classification of the cooking pot rims but none have been completely successful. As John Hurst points out<sup>2</sup> much of the variation of rim form is probably due to slightly different placing of the potter's fingers and is not significant in itself. However those shown in Figure 3 do show some distinct variations. A

small number have flat rims (nos. 16 and 22) but the majority are everted some with an internal beading (nos. 2, 4, 7 and 13). Numbers 14, 15 and 17 show a distinct shoulder. Classification of these cooking pots might have been easier if we had complete profiles but the other pottery sherds recovered indicates that they all have plain sagging bases.

The bowls (figure 5) all have flat rims, No. 4 being decorated with stabbing. Two types could be identified: those with straight sides (nos. 1, 3 and 4) and those with curving sides (nos. 2 and 5).

Only three jug rims were found in the lower layer and these are shown in figure 5, nos 6, 7 and 8.

2 J. G. Hurst, "The Kitchen Area of Northolt Manor, Middlesex," *Medieval Archaeol.* 5 (1961) 254-76.

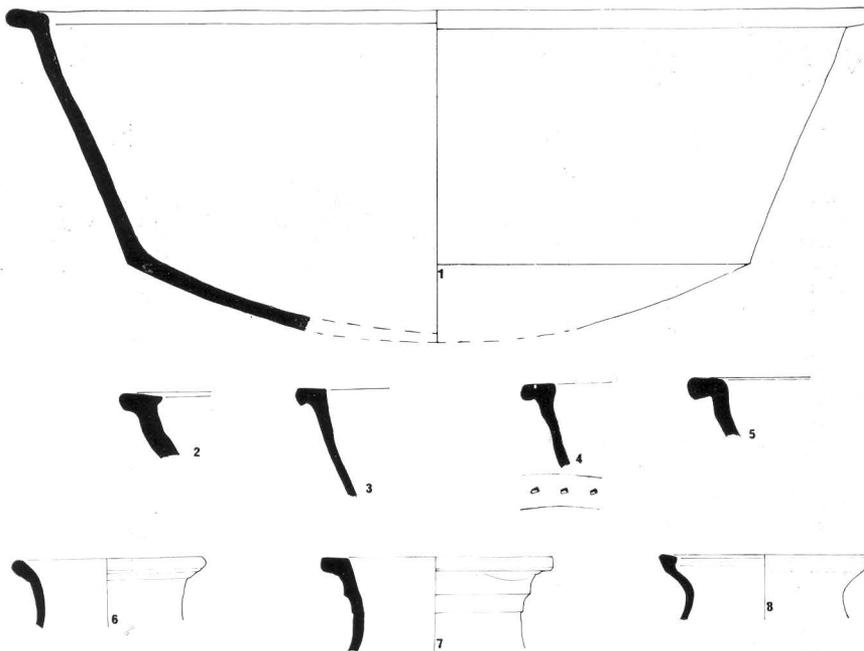


Fig. 5: Bowls and jars (4).

No handles were found associated with these rims but the upper layers produced a variety of rod and strap handles decorated with stabbing or slashing.

The type of pottery from this kiln has been found on many medieval occupation sites in Middlesex and Hertfordshire. The most important for dating is that of Northolt Manor where there is a sequence of pottery from Saxon to Tudor<sup>2</sup>. At this site the hard grey medieval ware, some of which is said to come from the Pinner Kiln<sup>3</sup>, is dated from 1225 to 1335. Hurst<sup>2</sup> suggests that the hard grey medieval ware coming from the 14th century features are probably strays from pre-1300 features.

Figure 4 shows the location of other pottery finds and also the location of other possible kiln sites producing similar pottery. Apart from Pinner, the only other kiln found is that at Chandlers Cross recently excavated by David Neal. The other possible sites at Arkley, Elstree, Enfield, Potters Crouch and Wild Hill have produced kiln furniture or wasters but no actual kiln structures. The dating of the sites where the hard grey medieval has been found all give dates in the 13th century.

Documentary research of the site has started but apart from tracing the name Potters Street back as far as 1509 little has been discovered.

#### Acknowledgements

The pottery drawings and location map were prepared by Tony Lewis and that of the plan and

<sup>3</sup> R. Lancaster. "Northolt Manor," *London Archaeol* 2 no. 13 (1975) 341.

section of the kiln by Gordon King. Mr. Phillip Snell provided the information on the documentary research.



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