

## A Late Romano-British Pottery Kiln in the Parish of Compton, Berkshire.

By W. E. HARRIS.

A NUMBER of small fragments of Romano-British pottery having been brought to the Newbury Museum by Mr. K. Chapman, of Woodrows Farm, Aldworth, and which had been brought to the surface by a tractor on one of his fields, a visit was made in July 1934 by Brig.-Gen. W. K. Hardy, Mr. P. Williams and myself to the site.

The field—O.S. Sheet Berks. xxvii N.E. 1913—forms the southern boundary of the Farm.

The pottery fragments, although mostly very small, were so abundant that it was considered desirable to explore the area, and towards the end of September a trench was cut across it from west to east by Brig.-Gen. Hardy, finding what further excavation at subsequent times, proved to be a pottery kiln.

The site promised to be of such interest as work proceeded that Brig.-Gen. Hardy invited the staff of the Reading Museum to take part in the excavation, and later they were joined by several boys, members of the Archæological Society at Leighton Park School, Reading, who also assisted with the digging.

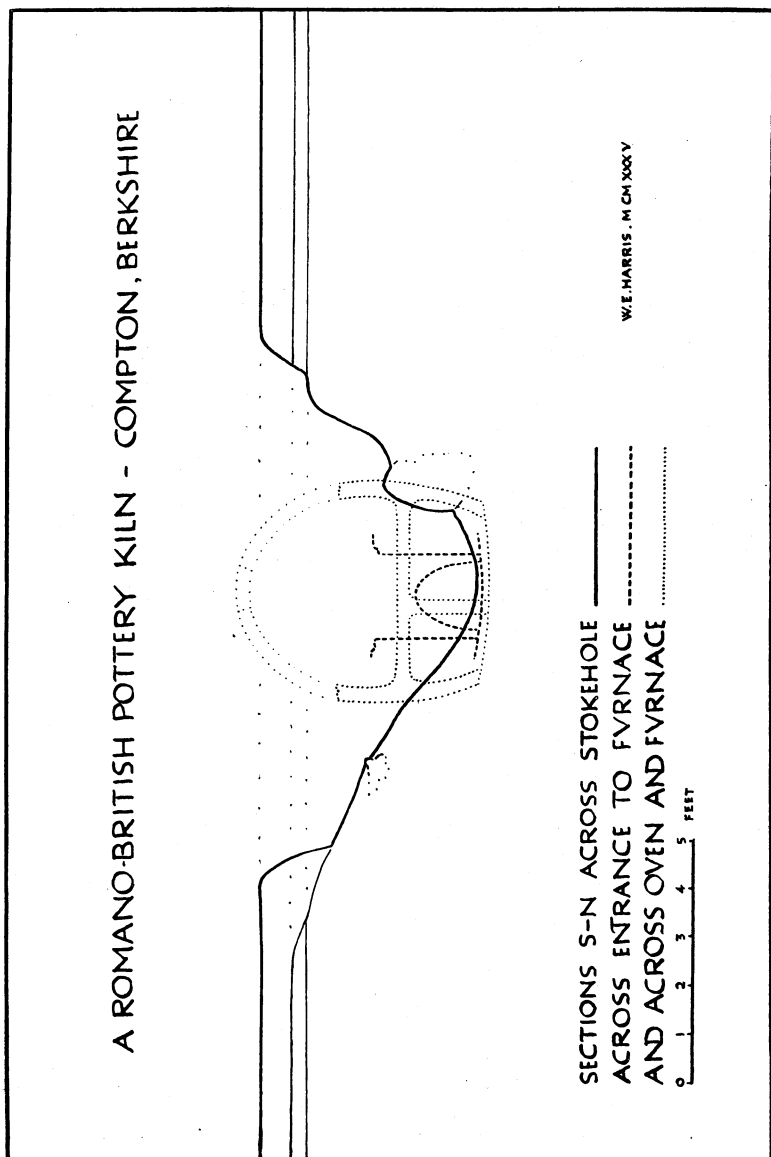
The kiln consists of a pit cut out of the natural chalk—upper formation—measuring about ten feet across at the chalk surface from north to south, and about eleven feet from east to west, with a maximum depth of three feet ten inches.

There must be added to this the uncertain depth of soil above the chalk in Romano-British times—a few inches.

The accumulation of soil above this must not be considered.

At the west side of the pit or stokehole, is an opening, originally arched with clay and flint, forming the entrance to the furnace, and part of this arch appeared during the excavation, but collapsed when clearing away the rubble above it.

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The furnace is egg-shaped in plan, widening out from the entrance, and is divided unevenly by a vertical septum three and a half inches thick, supporting the platform or oven floor which is three inches thick and perforated by four holes remaining *in situ* about three inches by two and a half inches in diameter, with other holes about one and a half inches in diameter in the loose fragments removed.

The northern half of the furnace is divided by another supporting wall apparently added at a later time.

The enclosing wall of the furnace, made against the natural chalk is about three inches thick, and the whole structure consists of clay moulded by hand and hardened by firing, with everywhere the impression of grass or straw, and many finger prints, one complete impression of a human hand being found.

The wall of the oven remains to a height of about one foot above its floor, but the upper part or dome has collapsed, its existence attested by the large quantity of baked material found upon the floor.

On the north side of the pit, and just by the entrance to the furnace is a large block of sandstone two feet eight inches from west to east and eighteen inches high, set in the chalk bank, as if a seat for the worker, and from it, half encircling the pit and running slightly upwards towards the south is a line of flints.

Whether these flints are a natural layer in the chalk, cut through in making the pit, or an artificial structure connected with it, is not proved.

That other kilns exist nearby was suggested by the clearing of the pit, which was completely filled with ash.

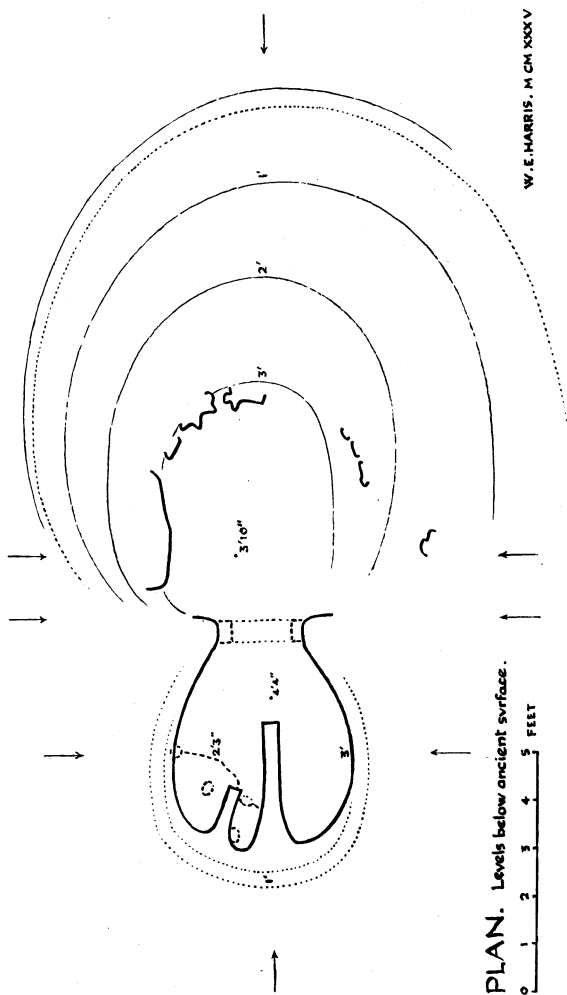
So much ash could not have been deposited before the kiln ceased working, and must have come from others nearby, active at a later time.

Much of the pottery found in the ash must have come with it.

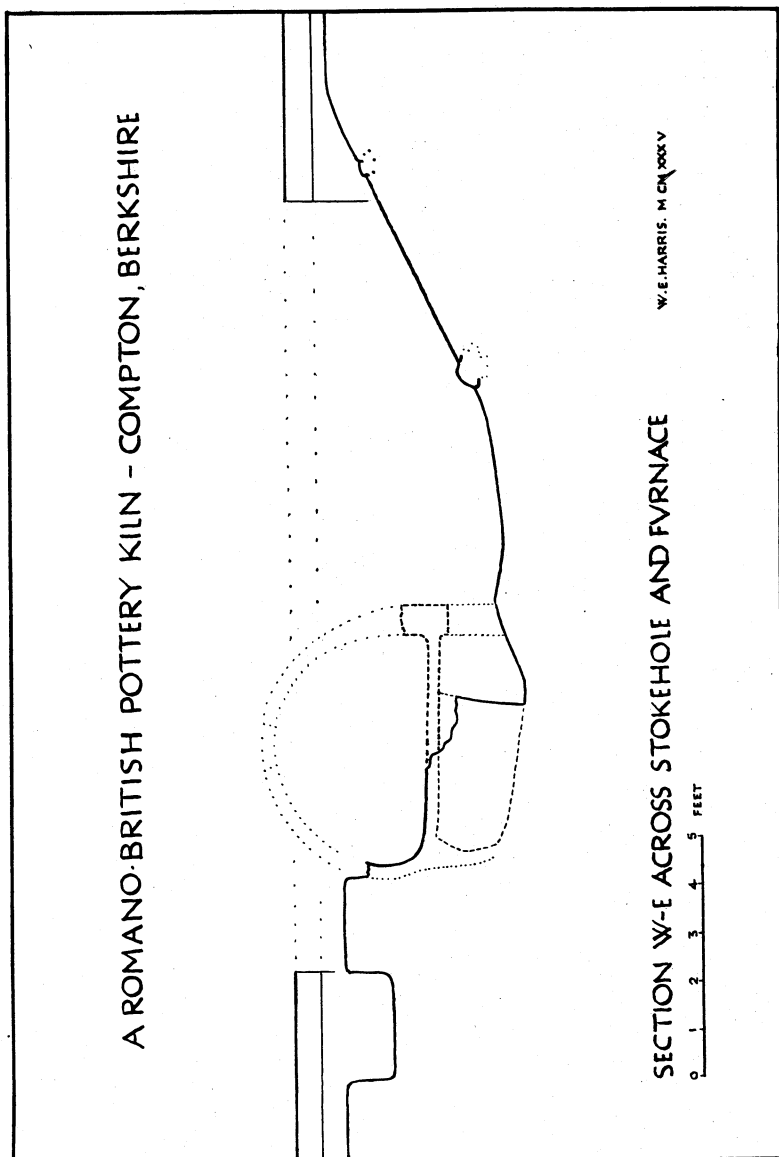
It is not my province to describe in detail the pottery from the kiln, which is being dealt with by Commander T. H. Pollen, but the predominant form is a small circular dish with simple inturned rim around the outer edge of which are usually several fine grooves.

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A typical example was found in the filling near the furnace entrance.

It was repaired at the Reading Museum and is now in the possession of Mr. Chapman.

Many handled vessels were produced, and I understand that some of the pottery is like that found on the Romano-British site on Lowbury Hill.\*

Some fragments of dark ware, the whole surfaces of which are covered with fine horizontal ribbing is exactly as some found by Brig.-Gen. Hardy and myself in a late fourth-fifth century ditch filling on the Romano-British site at Thatcham-Newtown in 1931.

To the south of the kiln now described were found the remains of a flint floor, and from this level came three small copper coins.

1. Theodora. Pietas type. 2nd Off : Trevirorum.

2. Constantius II Caesar. Virtus type. „ „

3. Gratianus. Securitas type. Mint mark illegible.

Assuming from the coin of Gratianus a late date for the activity of the kilns, it yet remains to be proved on the spot whether that activity extended into the fifth century A.D.

The coins, like the pottery, might have been deposited on the disused site from later working areas, and so the kiln might have been active as early as the third quarter of the fourth century A.D.

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\* D. Atkinson : *The Romano-British Site on Lowbury Hill* 1916, Fig. 16, Nos. 16, 17, Fig. 17, No. 44.