

## EXCAVATIONS AT MELBOURNE, DERBYSHIRE, 1973

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The excavation of a site on the street front at Melbourne, Derbyshire, was carried out by the Department of the Environment in February 1973 in advance of factory development. The site — a former allotment — lay on the east side of Castle Street, between the abattoir of C. Blunt and Son and the County Fire Station (SK 388254). The early nucleus of Melbourne had been centred on the Castle Street area, and the site lay within 50 m. of the castle itself. Excavation was undertaken to ascertain whether the site had seen any medieval or earlier occupation.

The solid geology of the site was Namurian sandstone or 'Millstone Grit'. The overlying soil profile comprised a soft black sandy topsoil (layer 1) and a soft gingery-brown sandy subsoil (layer 2), the latter resting upon the bedrock, with an intervening 10–20 cm. gradation of rotted sandstone. This profile extended over the whole of the excavated area.

Excavation was concentrated on the street frontage tract (cuttings I, II, III, IV, V, VI, X, XI), but three trenches (cuttings VII, VIII, IX) were opened farther east, down the slope of the hill upon which Melbourne stands, and at the eastern end of the present allotments. The 11 cuttings, Fig. 1, were all exploratory trenches in a previously unexcavated plot of land. The following groups of features were found:

- (a) Two pits containing Neolithic pottery, F 34 and F 36 in cutting XI.
- (b) A V-shaped ditch, F 11, running in a north-west to south-east direction in cuttings I, II, IV, VI. Its date was uncertain, but the feature may have been a drainage channel for a medieval fishpond.
- (c) A foundation trench for a wall, F 10, running from north to south below the present street wall of Castle Street, in cuttings I, II, IV. The feature was possibly of medieval date.
- (d) Intrusions of uncertain function: F 33 and F 35 in cutting XI, post-medieval; F 37, a stone spread in cutting XI of uncertain date; a deep rectangular pit, F 22, in cutting VII, also of uncertain date.

### NEOLITHIC PITS (Figs. 2 and 3)

The south-west corner of the site was investigated in cutting XI. The removal of layers 1 and 2 exposed two shallow pits, sealed by layer 2, at a depth of 1 m. below ground level. Both pits were sub-rectangular, but differed slightly in their profiles.

*Pit F 34* was the more circular of the two pits, with a diameter of 0·90 to 1·00 m., and had a maximum depth of 0·40 m. below the surface of the bedrock. It was filled with light brown sandy soil, with concentrations of charcoal towards the bottom. The pit contained five sherds of a late Neolithic vessel with cord-impressed decorations in lozenge shapes, one sherd of very coarse heavily gritted ware, three fragments of quartzite, apparently from an axehead, and one fragment of daub. Dr. W. A. Cummins (University of Nottingham, Department of Geology) identified the axehead fragments as quartzite, probably from the English Midlands, either from an outcrop (for example Nuneaton) or from pebbles in the Bunter Pebble Beds or more recent gravels. A specialist report on the Neolithic sherds appears below.

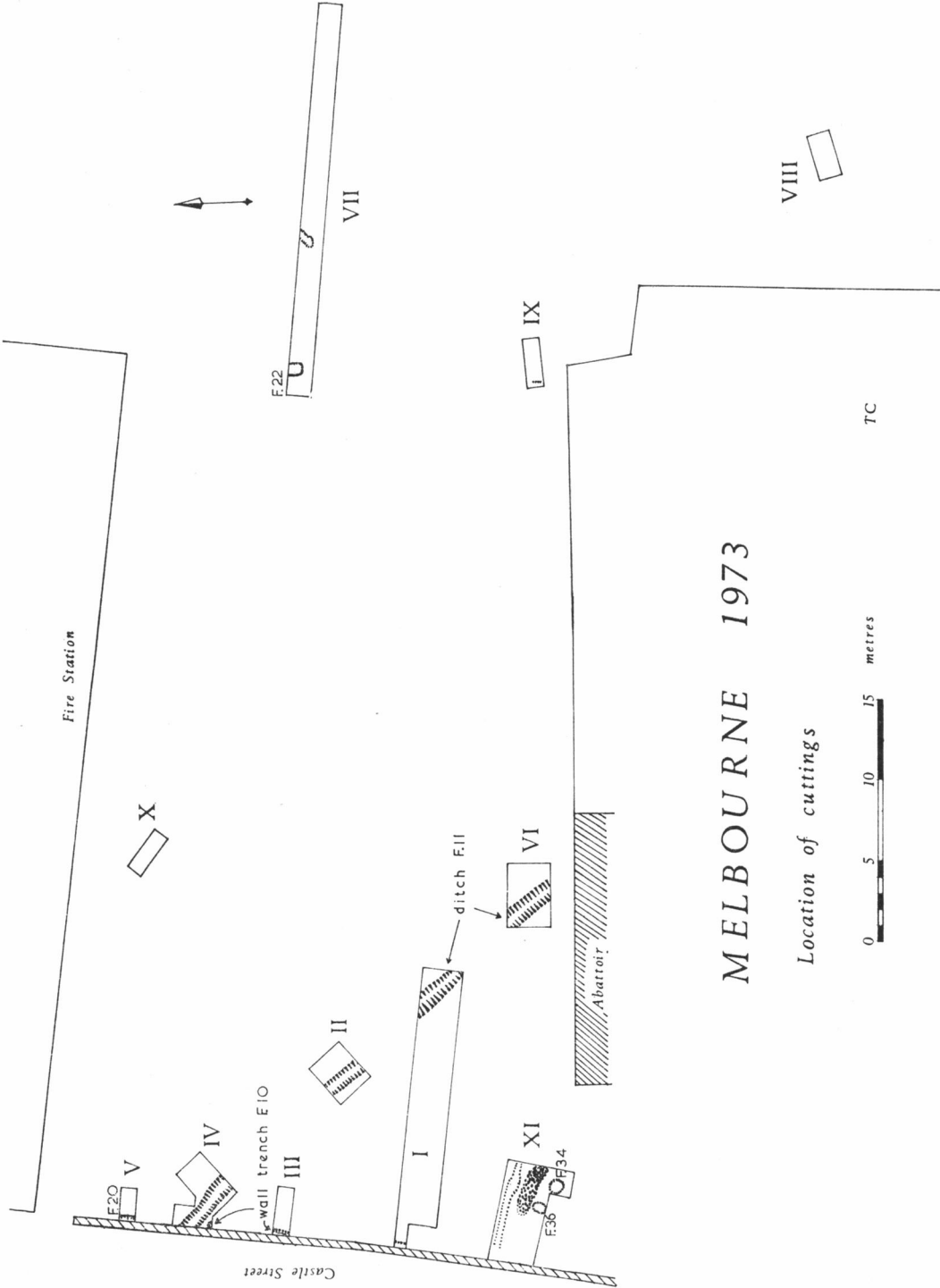
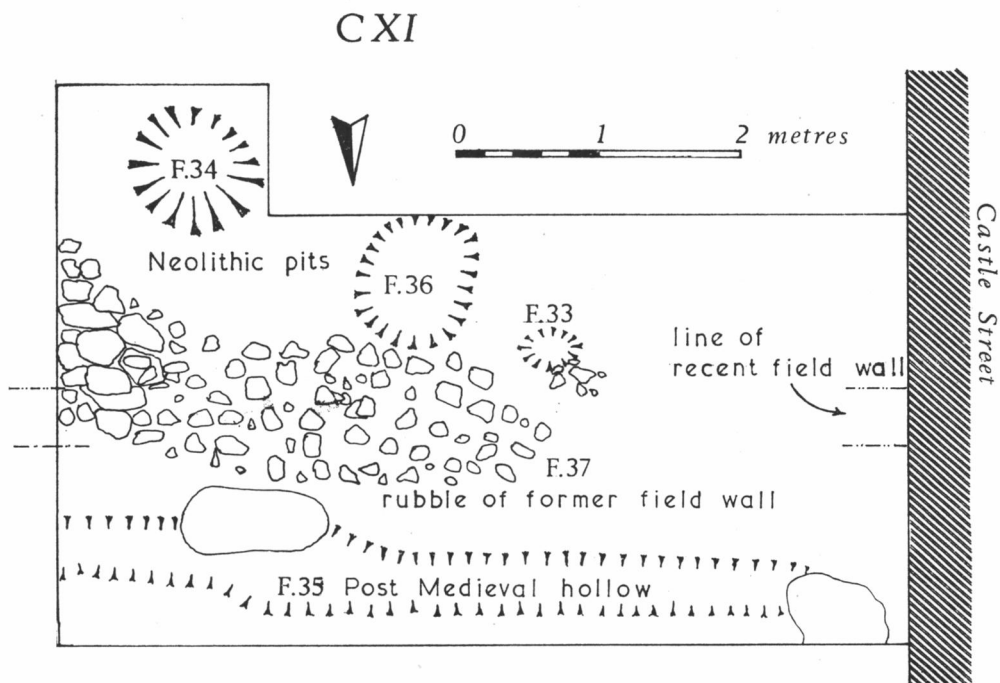
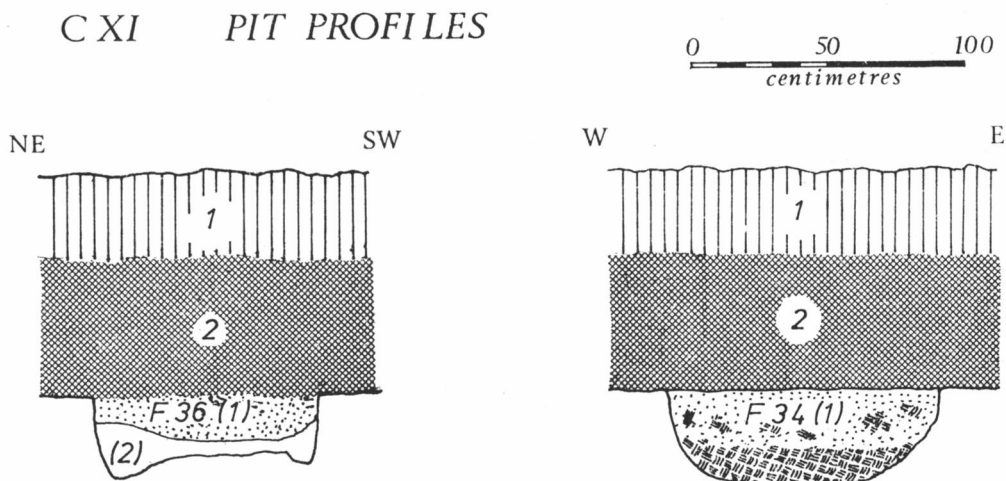


Fig. 1 Melbourne 1973: location of cuttings.



TC JD

Fig. 2 Melbourne 1973: plan of cutting xi.



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Fig. 3 Melbourne 1973: sections of Neolithic pits in cutting xi.

Key: 1 — dark topsoil; 2 — light brown sandy soil; Pit F. 36, 1 — ginger-brown sandy soil, 2 — brown soil with sand; Pit F. 34, 1 — light brown sandy soil with charcoal patches.

*Pit F 36* was slightly smaller, with a diameter of 0.70 to 0.85 m., and a depth of 0.25 m. below the bedrock surface. Its base was flatter than that of *F 34*. Its filling was a ginger-brown sandy soil, darker towards the bottom but without charcoal deposits. The pit contained no artefacts.

#### THE DITCH (Figs. 1 and 4)

A ditch of uncertain date was exposed in cuttings I, II, IV and VI, and some 31 m. of its length lay within the excavation site. It ran from north-west to south-east in a straight line, passing under Castle Street at the north-west end and the abattoir to the south-east. The ditch profile was V-shaped, with a flat bottom; it had an average depth of 1.35 m. below the topsoil surface and 0.60 to 0.80 m. below the bedrock surface. Its width at bedrock level varied between 0.90 m. in cutting IV and 1.50 m. in cutting I. The width of the flat bottom was 0.35 m. The slope of the ditch sides varied; in cuttings I and VI it sloped evenly at about 45 degrees, but in cuttings II and IV it had been cut with a distinct shelving along its eastern side. The ditch dropped towards the south-east 0.1214 over its length, a negligible gradient of 1 in 138.7.

The ditch was filled with an upper light brown fine sand, layer 3, and a lower fine grey 'silt', layer 4, in each of the four sections dug across it. The original uppermost profile of the ditch had been completely destroyed, and along its entire length the upper filling was sealed by the widespread post-medieval cultivation layer 2. The ditch contained no finds, and so cannot be dated.

The ditch profile resembled that of a Roman military marching camp, but no finds of this period were recovered from the site. Further, it was not possible to link the ditch with the prehistoric pits to the west. It is possible that the ditch was a medieval fishpond drainage channel. A plan of Melbourne Common in 1625 (Derbyshire Record Office 369 G/ZP4) shows what appear to be fishponds between Castle Street and Chapel Street. The line of the ditch in the excavated area suggests that it could have come from such ponds, and might have drained into the Carr Brook at some point east of the Castle. This assumes that the ditch was a periodic watercourse; the lower grey filling, indeed, seemed to exhibit the appearance of fine water-deposited silt.

## CII DITCH PROFILE

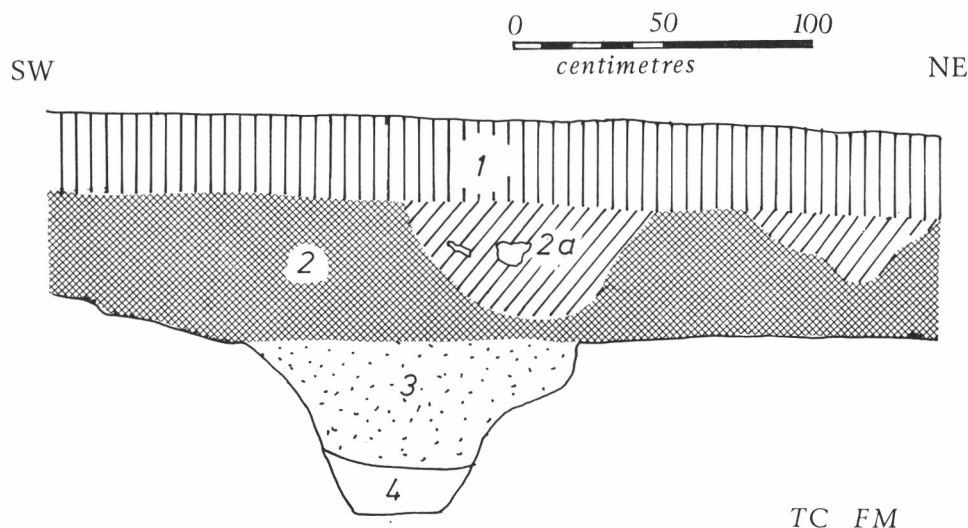


Fig. 4 Melbourne 1973: section of ditch in cutting II.

Key: 1 — dark topsoil; 2 — light brown sandy soil; 2a — dark brown soil present in some areas as intrusions; 3 — light brown sand, very fine grained; 4 — grey silt.

### FOUNDATION TRENCH F 10 (Fig. 1)

A probable wall-foundation trench was located in cuttings I, III and IV, following approximately the same line as that of the existing street wall. The sides of the trench were almost vertical, and its depth reached 0.40 m. below the bedrock surface. Its width could not be gauged, since its western side lay outside the excavation limits under the pavement of Castle Street. The trench extended for at least 12.5 m.; its northern end was exposed in cutting IV, but its southern terminal (or perhaps corner) must have lain within the unexcavated area between cuttings I and XI. Its line was not straight. The trench seemed to mark the line of a robbed wall, although no masonry, bricks or posts were contained in its filling. The latter consisted of a light brown sandy soil, layer 1, slightly paler than its sealing layer 2, the general site subsoil. At the bottom of the trench were patches of yellow sand, layer 3.

The filling contained five sherds of late-medieval ware, quartz gritted, with a cream-buff fabric. These sherds in themselves were insufficient evidence for assigning a date to the foundation trench, but perhaps the absence of later pottery might allow us to suggest a 15th- or 16th-century date for its filling.

If the putative wall had once been part of a building, the structure would have extended westwards under Castle Street, and would imply a change in the line of the street after the demolition of the building. This seems unlikely; more probably, the trench might have held the foundations for a wall around the Castle grounds. It is worth noting that most of the medieval sherds from the excavation — particularly the earlier items — were recovered from the immediate vicinity of F 10, in the disturbed topsoil and subsoil.

In cutting V the shallow stone-packed foundation trench of the existing street wall, cut into layer 2, overlay a trench similar to F 10, although deeper — 0.70 m. below the bedrock surface. The lower trench, F 20, contained a surviving wall foundation of four courses. The gap of soil between the two walls indicated that F 20 was certainly earlier than the street wall, F 20 then, might have been a northerly continuation of F 10.

### POST-MEDIEVAL FEATURES AND STRATIGRAPHY (Figs. 1 and 2)

Post-medieval intrusions were removed from several cuttings, and the excavation of the widespread layers 1 and 2 was carried out in all 11 cuttings. Because the topsoil and subsoil exhibited no visible signs of stratigraphical subdivisions, both were excavated in arbitrary levels, in order to establish whether there existed any vertical period differentiation. No such chronological sequence was indicated by the finds, however, for medieval and modern pottery was recovered from both layers 1 and 2 in various parts of the site. Repeated and deep cultivation and other disturbances had clearly taken place over the whole site as a result of the recent allotment cultivation and the root disturbances caused by a former orchard.

Post-medieval intrusions of uncertain function were excavated in several cuttings. A shallow east-west linear hollow, F 35 in cutting XI, had probably served as a fence furrow. The nearby small hollow, F 33, may have held a post, and the stone spread, F 37, was doubtlessly left after the demolition of an east-west stone wall at the southern side of the site. The only other post-medieval intrusion of any significance was F 22, a deep rectangular trench at the northern end of cutting VII; there was, however, no evidence for its date or function.

### THE POTTERY

With the exception of the finds from F 10, F 34 and F 36, all of the finds were recovered from contexts of post-medieval disturbance. The bulk of this material was pottery, although there was a quantity of unstratified tile fragments. The only metalwork was modern, as was the glass. The particularly important prehistoric sherds are described in detail, but only a selection of the medieval pottery is described and illustrated, since most of it was unstratified. The finds and their catalogue are deposited in Derby Museum.

## NEOLITHIC POTTERY FROM F 34, by I. H. Longworth

- 1 (Fig. 5) Five sherds from a decorated bowl of well-fired paste tempered with a large quantity of grit, mainly quartz, grey to brown both faces with dark grey core. External surface well-smoothed where weathered. Diameter of rim c. 23.5 cm.; height c. 15.0 cm. On the rim, short transverse twisted cord lines; beneath the rim, pendant filled triangles outlined by and filled with diagonal twisted cord lines or concentric lozenges. At the greatest diameter, a single row of small jabbed impressions above twisted cord filled lozenges. One sherd carried a vertical twisted cord line.

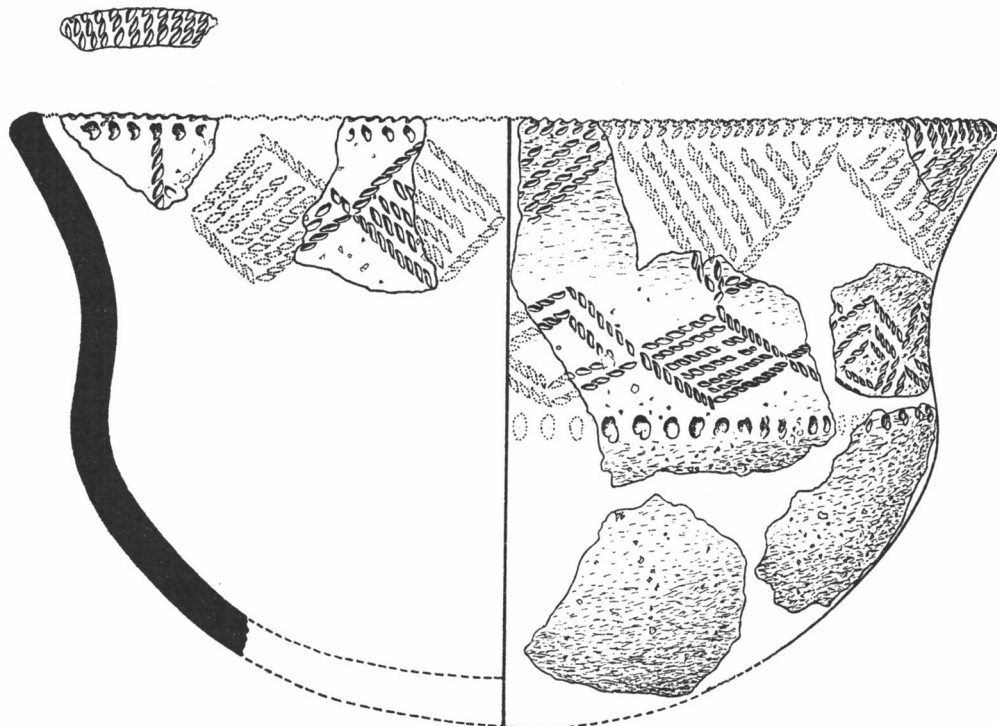


Fig. 5 Melbourne 1973: Neolithic bowl, scale 1 : 2.

The bowl, both in its slightly inturned rim and in its total form, suggests comparison with Ebbsfleet forms farther south. As in certain other late vessels in this style, strong Beaker influence can be detected in the decorative scheme. In this instance, the combining of filled triangles and lozenges suggests incorporation of ideas derived from Clarke's Southern British motif group 4 (Clarke 1970, 427). The use of a row of impressions at the greatest diameter of the vessel is of particular interest, for this becomes a trait typical of the north-western style of the collared urn tradition, incorporating vessels previously listed by W. J. Varley as 'Pennine Urns' (Varley 1938, 169-71). The use of this feature on a later Neolithic bowl suggests a possible source for its derivation.

- 2 (Not illustrated) An undecorated wall sherd of coarse paste tempered with a large quantity of coarse quartz grits, brown externally, dark grey internally. The fragment comes from a second Neolithic bowl.

## MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL POTTERY (Fig. 6)

A variety of unstratified medieval and post-medieval pottery was recovered, mostly from the street frontage cuttings. I am grateful to Mr. Glyn Coppack for discussing it with me. The following wares were represented:

- 1 Derby ware, 11th century.
- 2 Derby off-white sandy ware, 12th-13th centuries.

- 3 Derby splashed ware, 12th–13th centuries.
- 4 Nottingham ware, green glazed with whitish fabric, c. 14th–15th centuries.
- 5 Imported stoneware, Langerwehe, early 16th century.
- 6 Late-medieval gritty wares in buff-cream-orange fabric, 15th–16th centuries.

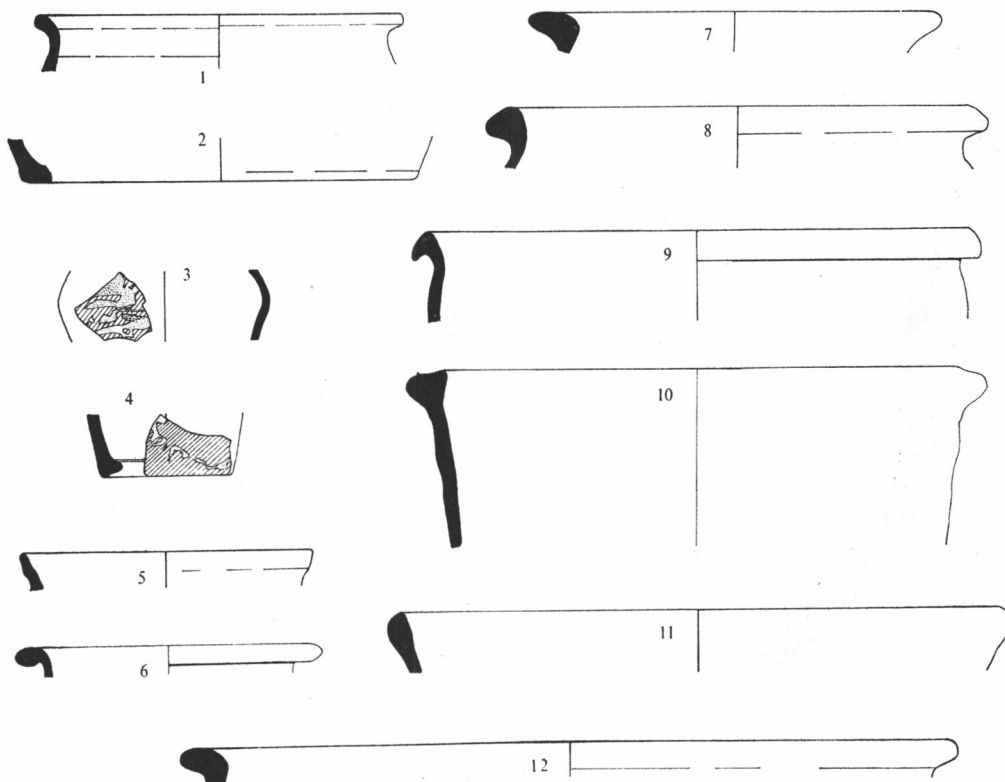


Fig. 6 Melbourne 1973: post-medieval pottery, scale 1 : 4. Drawn by Alison Graham.

All of the medieval sherds were found in later, much-disturbed contexts, and only type 6 was recovered in any quantity. Types 1, 5 and 6 are illustrated.

The post-medieval pottery included a wide range of types from coarse red earthenwares, black and yellow wares, to Staffordshire wares, later stonewares and transfer-printed wares. Most had been dumped as rubbish all over the site, and, in the absence of structural remains of this period, the pottery is of minimal archaeological significance. An unexpectedly small quantity of Ticknall wares was recovered.

#### *Derby ware*

- 1 Rim of cooking pot from cutting 1 (2); cf. Full Street, Derby, no. 1 (Hall and Coppack 1972).
- 2 Base from cutting 1 (2).

#### *Imported stoneware*

- 3 Body sherd from jug, matt finish, from cutting 1 (1); Langerwehe.
- 4 Base, matt finish, from cutting 1 (2); Langerwehe.

*Late-medieval gritty wares*

- 5 Rim of jar in red ware, thinly potted, rim collared, from cutting IV (1).
- 6 Rim, thickly flanged, from jar in thinly potted in orange-buff ware, from cutting IV (2).
- 7 Heavy rim from jar in cream ware with traces of external orange slip, from cutting I (2).
- 8 Heavy rim from cooking pot with rather thin wall, in orange-grey ware with splashes of external purple-brown glaze, from cutting IV (2).
- 9 Hooked flange rim from large cooking pot, from cutting IV (2).
- 10 Large, thickly potted storage vessel in orange-grey ware with internal splashes of brown glaze, from cutting IV (2).
- 11 Rim from large dish in cream ware, from cutting VI (2).

*16th-17th-century earthenware*

- 12 Rim from large storage or cooking vessel, in hard fired buff-orange fabric with dark brown external glaze; some grit. From cutting I (1).

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