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Contents

Evaluation Survey and Excavation at Wandlebury Ringwork, Cambridgeshire, 1994-97: Part II, The Iron Age Pottery

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A significant assemblage of Iron Age pottery was recovered from the 1994–97 excavations at Wandlebury (TL 4940 5343) by the Department of Archaeology and the Cambridge Archaeological Unit of the University of Cambridge (French 2004). The report on these excavations includes a detailed reassessment by JD Hill of the pottery from the earlier 1955–56 excavations on the site (Hartley 1957). The present report is intended to be read in conjunction with this earlier paper in PCAS 93.

Some 1821 sherds (15,173g) of Iron Age pottery were recovered in 1994–97. The bulk of the assemblage dates to the Early Iron Age, with smaller amounts of Late Bronze Age, Middle Iron Age and Late Iron Age material also occurring. The assemblage has been fully recorded on a spreadsheet held by the CAU, in line with the recommendations of the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group (PCRG 1992). Around half of the material was recorded by JD Hill during the late 1990s, and the remainder by the present author in 2004; every effort has been made to maintain consistency. As undiagnostic body sherds appear to have been discarded from the 1955–57 assemblage, creating a very unrepresentative sample (Hill in French 2004, 37), no attempt has been made to incorporate this earlier material into the database.

Methods of Recovery and Condition of the Material

As discussed by French (2004), the field investigations involved a programme of test pit trial excavation (Fig. 1). A total of 222 sherds were recovered from the dry sieving, 1498 from hand excavation of features, and 101 from wet sieving. The overall mean sherd weight for the assemblage is 8.4g, although this obscures significant differences relating to method of recovery. The mean weight from hand excavation of features is 9.9g, that from dry sieving of test pit samples is 5.2g, and that from wet sieving is only 3.1g. The hand-excavated material is generally in fair to good condition, although it provides fewer reconstructable vessel profiles or rim diameters than the 1955–56 assemblage. Only a single complete vessel profile is present, a cup/small bowl from F. 126.

Fabric

Twenty fabrics have been distinguished (Table 1). If these are grouped according to the main inclusion present, the majority can be classified as flint-tempered (56.9% by weight), the flint typically having been burnt prior to its addition to the clay. Other fabrics are characterised by quartz sand (19.2%), chalk (13.7%), shell/fossil shell (8.5%), or chaff/chopped vegetable matter (0.9%). A single grog-and-sand-tempered sherd (0.2%) represents the only wheel-made Late Iron Age pottery in the assemblage.

It has generally been assumed that most pottery in Iron Age East Anglia was produced and distributed on a local level. The fabrics in this assemblage are largely consistent with this, although the shelly wares may derive from non-local Jurassic clay sources. The relatively high proportion of chalk-containing wares compared to other contemporary local sites is notable and suggests use of local potting materials.

Forms, surface treatment and decoration

The forms largely confirm the evidence of the fabrics in indicating an earlier to mid first millennium BC date for most of the material. A few sherds probably date to the Late Bronze Age, for example an everted, internally bevelled rim from Test Pit 12 (Fig. 2.1). However, the majority of the assemblage is likely to date to the latter part of the Early Iron Age, *c.*500–400/300 BC, and is comparable to the material from the 1955–56 excavations. Once again, the assemblage can be divided into two main vessel classes: *burnished* fine tempered bowls and some jars with occasional body decoration of incised lines, and *unburnished* more coarsely tempered jars which can be decorated with fingertip or fingernail impressions on the rim or body (cf. Hill in French 2004).

Some 248 sherds were burnished (3152g; 20.6% by weight), in some cases achieving a high gloss. Burnishing is most frequently seen on sherds with chalk or relatively fine flint temper (Table 1). The

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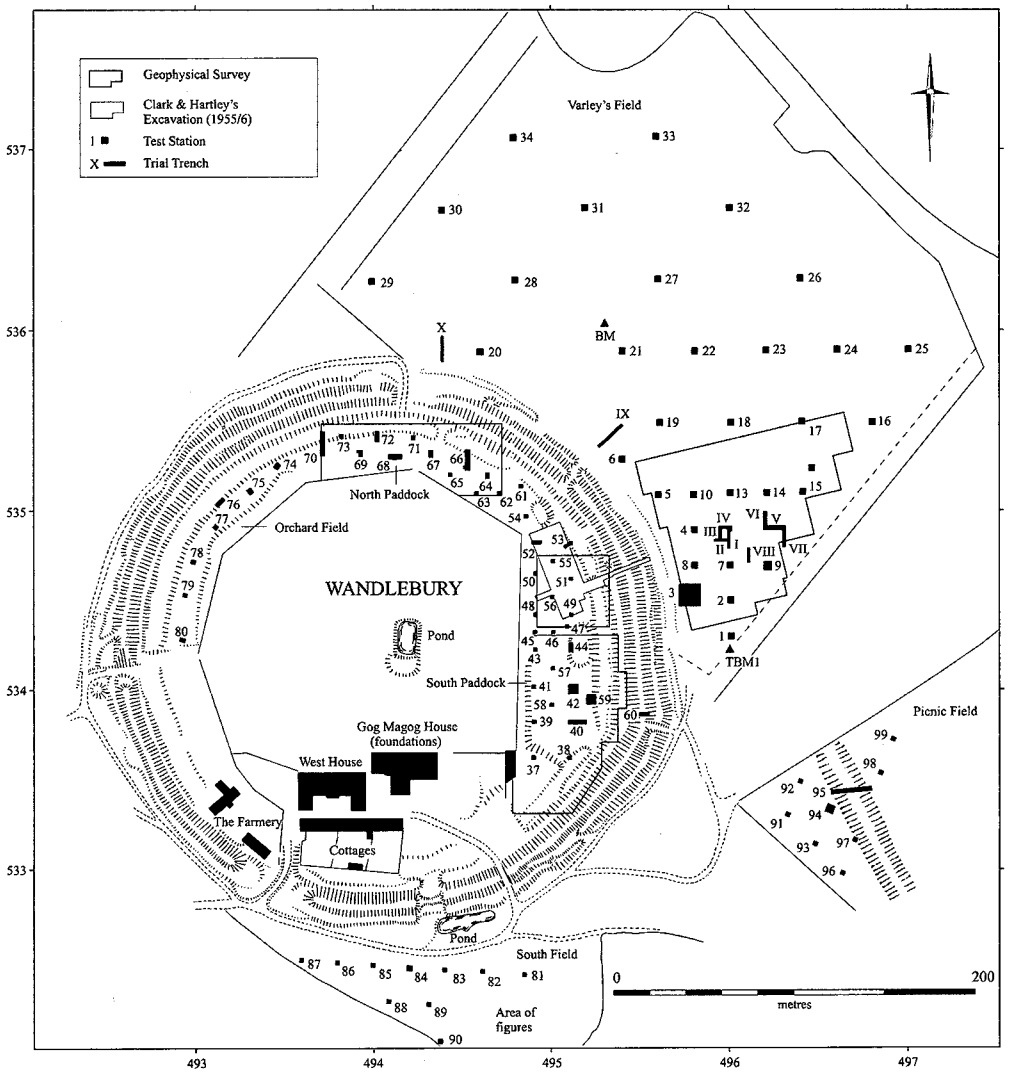

Figure 1. *Location plan of the survey and excavation work carried out in 1994-97 set against the RCHME earthwork plan of Wandlebury.*

number of burnished sherds recorded is likely to under-represent the original total, as burnished surfaces can be removed by abrasion. This was illustrated by two refitting sherds from different contexts of the same feature, one of which was highly burnished while the other no longer possessed a visible burnished surface, despite having only moderately abraded edges. No haematite-coated sherds were recovered.

Most of the burnished vessel forms are broadly comparable to those from the 1955–56 excavations, and primarily consist of round-shouldered tripartite jars (eg Figs. 2.4 & 3.16), round-shouldered, flared-mouth bowls (eg Figs. 2.2–.3, 2.9 & 3.19), and simple open cups/bowls (eg Fig. 3.17). Specific forms without direct parallel in the 1950s assemblage include a complete cup or small bowl (rim diameter 10cm) with straight flaring walls and a deeply indented omphalos base (Fig. 3.14), and an unusual rim with an internal lip or 'lid-seat' (Fig. 3.18), probably from a tripartite jar. Vessel rims can be rounded, flattened or tapered. Rim diameters range from *c.*10–22cm with a mean around 18cm, a similar pattern to the 1955–56 data. Most bases are simple and flat, although there are two omphalos bases (including the aforementioned cup), and one base with a protruding foot-ring (cf. Hartley 1957, Fig 7.24). All rims from burnished vessels are unornamented. Three burnished body sherd are decorated, all from the same context (F. 29 [234]). Two of these sherds are from a bowl with a finely incised double horizontal line of chevrons across the shoulder and at least one further line of chevrons around the neck (Fig. 2.9). The third (tiny) decorated sherd comes from a different vessel and bears more deeply incised intersecting straight lines (Fig. 2.8). Only a single burnished sherd has burnt food residues, indicating that burnished vessels were not normally used for cooking.

The unburnished pottery forms are again mostly analogous to those from the 1950s assemblage.

Table 1. *Pottery fabric groups, 1994-97 excavations. Percentages are by weight.*

Fabric		n	Weight (g)	% of assemblage	% burnished
C1	Sparse-moderate medium-very coarse CHALK, sparse fine-medium QUARTZ	74	1212	7.9	69.6
C2	Sparse-moderate fine-very coarse CHALK, sparse fine-medium QUARTZ, rare medium-coarse IRON OXIDE	59	693	4.5	49.5
C3	Sparse-moderate medium-very coarse CHALK, sparse coarse FLINT, sparse fine QUARTZ	18	205	1.3	100.0
F1	Sparse-moderate fine-medium FLINT, sparse-moderate fine QUARTZ	376	2180	14.3	31.7
F2	Sparse-moderate medium-coarse FLINT, sparse-moderate fine QUARTZ	404	4260	27.9	14.3
F3	Sparse-moderate medium-very coarse FLINT, sparse-moderate fine-medium QUARTZ. Poorly sorted.	94	1101	7.2	-
F4	Sparse-moderate medium-extremely coarse (>5mm) FLINT, sparse-moderate fine-medium QUARTZ. Very poorly sorted.	38	440	2.9	-
F5	Common medium-coarse FLINT, sparse fine QUARTZ	19	138	0.9	23.2
F6	Moderate fine-medium FLINT, moderate fine QUARTZ, rare medium IRON OXIDE	3	23	0.2	87.0
G1	Moderate medium-coarse GROG, moderate fine QUARTZ.	1	32	0.2	100.0
Q1	Common fine QUARTZ	257	1583	10.4	11.0
Q2	Common fine-medium QUARTZ, rare medium-coarse FLINT	181	991	6.5	9.8
Q3	Common fine QUARTZ, rare coarse IRON OXIDE	7	91	0.6	50.5
Q4	Common fine-medium QUARTZ, rare coarse-very coarse IRON OXIDE	28	259	1.7	-
QF1	Common medium-coarse QUARTZ, moderate medium FLINT	106	535	3.5	6.2
S1	Sparse medium-very coarse SHELL, sparse fine QUARTZ	60	591	3.9	2.9
S2	Moderate-common medium-very coarse SHELL, sparse fine QUARTZ	59	585	3.8	0.7
S3	Moderate medium-coarse SHELL, sparse medium-very coarse IRON OXIDE, sparse fine QUARTZ	11	78	0.5	-
S4	Moderate coarse SHELL, rare coarse FLINT, rare coarse IRON OXIDE, sparse fine QUARTZ	2	45	0.3	-
V1	Moderate VOIDS from plant material, sparse fine QUARTZ. Pale oxidised fabric.	8	133	0.9	-
	Other/Unknown	19	116	0.8	2.6
	Total	**1824**	**15,291**	**100.0**	**20.6**

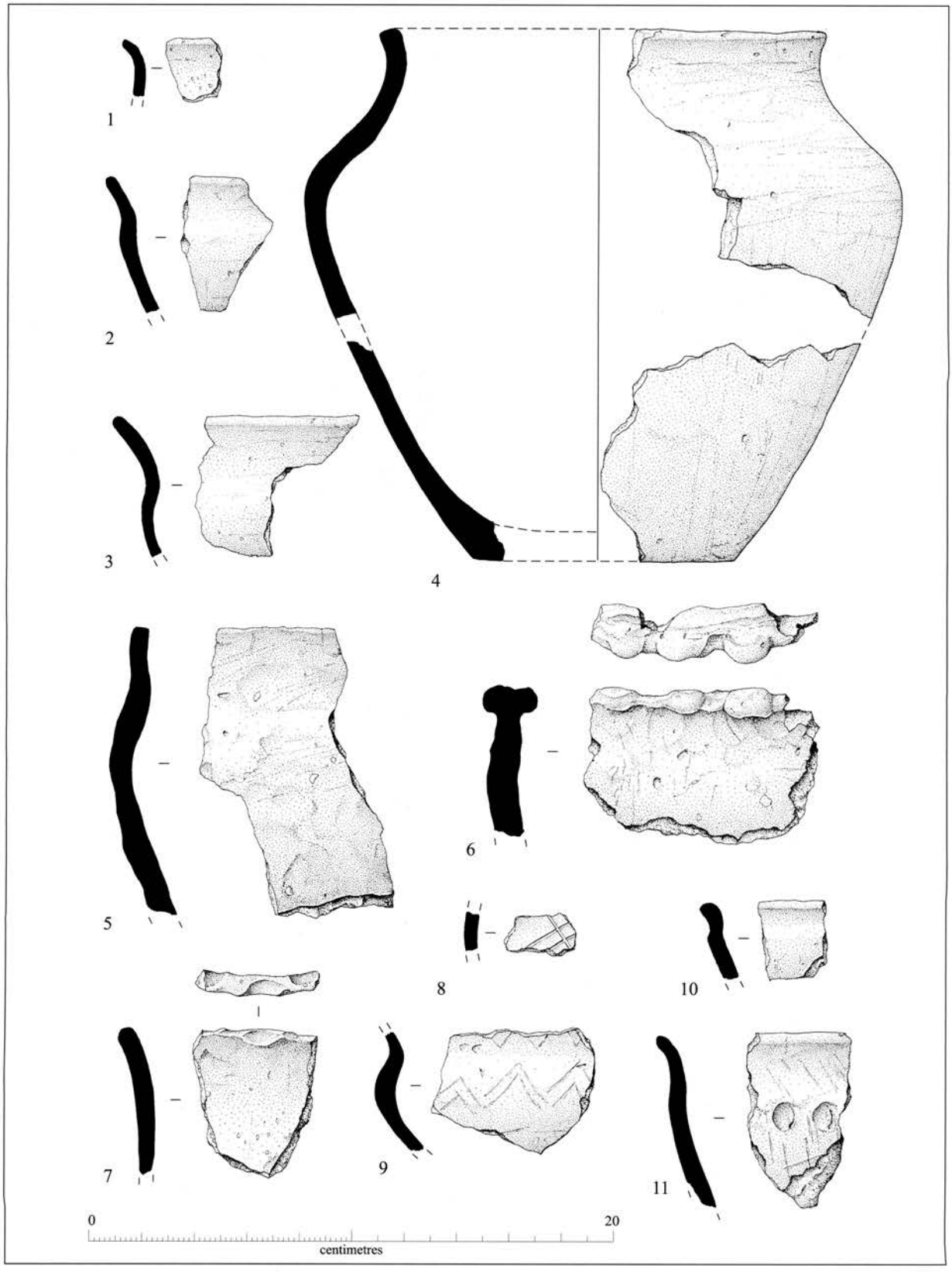

Figure 2. *Pottery from the 1994-97 excavations. 1: Test Station 12, topsoil (fabric F5, unburnished); 2-3: Trench 68, F. 220 [632] (F1, burnished); 4: Trench 68, F. 220 [632] & F. 235 [670] (C1, burnished); 5: Trench 68, F. 220 [633] (F2, unburnished); 6: Trench 68, F. 220 [632] (F3, unburnished); 7: Trench 68, F. 220 [632] (F2, unburnished); 8-9: Trench 68, F. 129 [234] (Q1, burnished); 10: Trench 68, F. 15 [005] (Q1, burnished); 11: Test Station 9, F. 15 [091] (S1, unburnished). Scale: 1:2.*

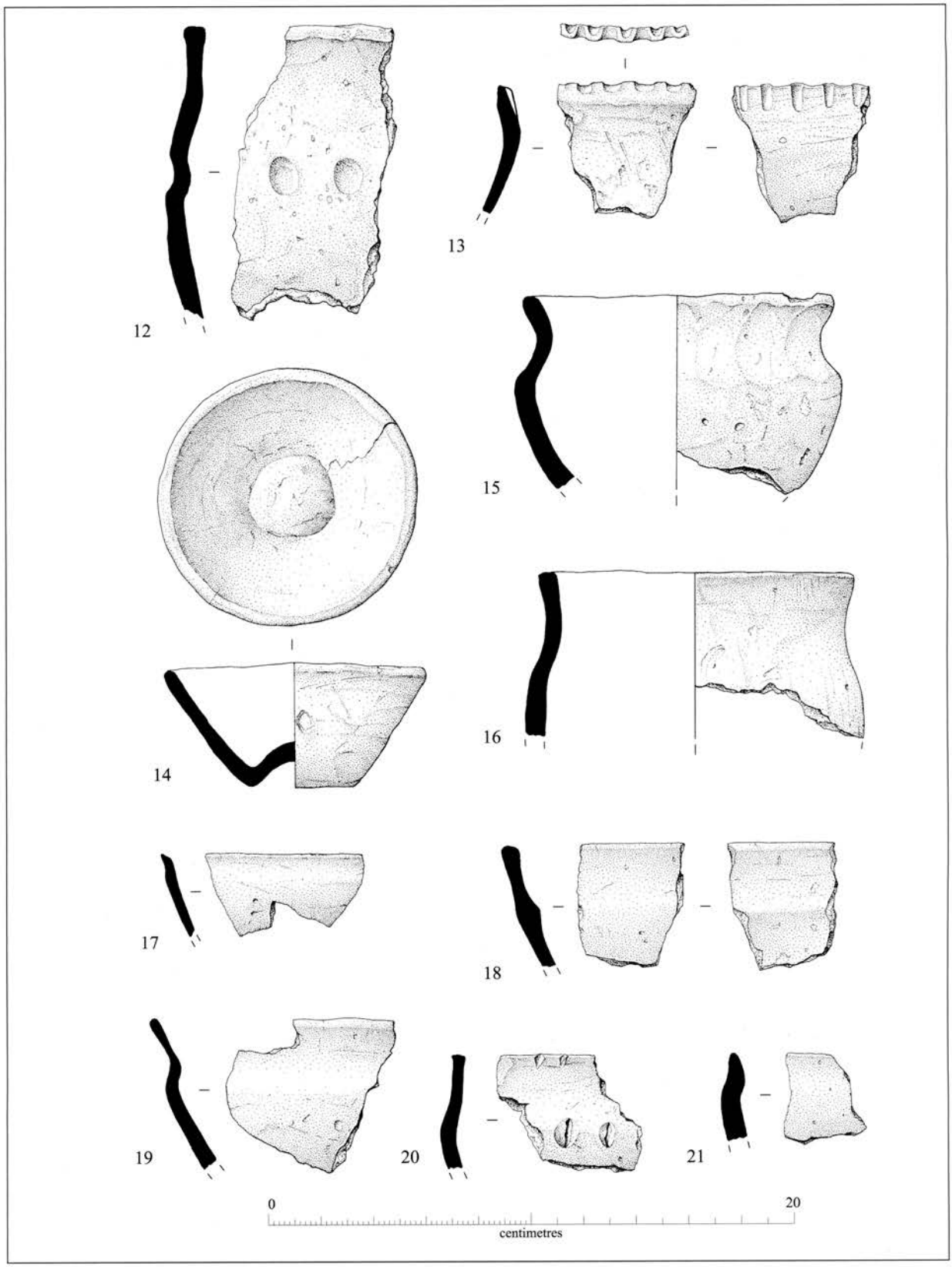

Figure 3. *Pottery from the 1994-97 excavations. 12: Trench 52, F. 177 [486] (S2, unburnished); 13: Trench 52, F. 177 [451] (C1, unburnished); 14: Test Station 35, F. 126 [333] (F2, burnished); 15: F. 69, F. 227 [643] (V1, unburnished); 16: Test Station 3, F. 65 [272] & [339] (F1, burnished); 17: Test Station 3, F. 65 [273] and [339] (F1, burnished); 18: Test Station 69, topsoil (Q1, burnished); 19: Trench I, F. 20 [047] (F1, burnished); 20: Trench III, F. 23 [041] (F1, unburnished); F. 127 [210] (Q2, unburnished).*

Tripartite jars and barrel-shaped or gently rounded jars (eg Figs. 2.5 & 3.12) are dominant, although some vessels can be characterised as shouldered bowls (eg Fig. 2.15 & 3.20). Surfaces range from fairly smooth to roughly wiped (and one Middle Iron Age vessel is scored; see below). Rims can be rounded, flat or T-shaped. The rim diameters have a wider range than for burnished vessels, *c.*8–32cm, although the mean is similar at *c.*18cm. Bases are normally flat, sometimes being slightly stepped or pinched out. Vessels can be decorated on either the rim or the body. A total of ten unburnished rim sherds (10.9%) from seven vessels are decorated, as follows: two vessels with fingernail impressions along the rim top perpendicular to the rim; one with fingertip impressions along the rim top (cf. Hartley 1957, Fig. 7, 21); one with fingertip impressions along the rim top, alternately placed at the inner and outer edge of the rim (Fig. 2.7); one with fingernail impressions around the front of the rim (and also around the shoulder: Fig. 3.20); one with 'stick' impressions along the inner edge of the rim (Fig. 3.13, and cf. Hartley 1957, Fig. 8.60 & 8.62; White 1963, Fig. 4.1); and one T-shaped rim 'crimped' along its front edge (Fig. 2.6). Meanwhile, eighteen sherds from nine vessels have a single row of fingertip or fingernail impressions around the shoulder (eg Figs. 2.11, 3.12 & 3.20). Some 2.1% of unburnished sherds have burnt food residues. While this figure is low, it does demonstrate that unburnished vessels were more often used in cooking than burnished vessels.

A few contexts contained pottery that had a slightly later appearance and is likely to date to the Middle Iron Age. A feature of pottery of this date in south Cambridgeshire is a trend away from flint-tempered to sandy fabrics. The clearest Middle Iron Age feature was pit F. 166 in Test Station 58, which contained exclusively sandy wares, including an ovoid jar with a flat-topped rim and random linear scoring on the body, another Middle Iron Age feature. A further diagnostic sherd is a rim from a small slack-shouldered vessel in a sandy fabric, from root hole F. 127 in Test Station 15 (Fig. 3.21). The limited material that can be placed in this period suggests a much reduced level of activity.

Only one sherd could be positively identified as Late Iron Age, a wheel-made beaded rim from a jar or bowl in fabric G1 from [562] (Trench 68). This context is believed to represent spread material from the inner rampart, thus supporting the Late Iron Age date ascribed to this rampart by Hartley (1957). The lack of diagnostic Late Iron Age pottery from contexts other than the inner ringwork indicates that there was no substantial contemporary settlement, within the investigated area at least.

Spatial patterning

The distribution of pottery indicates a swathe of Early Iron Age settlement extending across the interior of the ringwork and the southern part of Varley's Field. Within this settlement swathe, there are hints of spatial patterning. The relative proportions of burnished and decorated wares from different parts of the site are summarised by Table 2. (As pots were only ever decorated on a small part of their surface, the proportion of decorated sherds will under-represent the original frequency of decorated vessels.) The North Paddock/Orchard Field is distinguished by a higher mean sherd weight, a markedly greater frequency of burnished wares, and a slightly higher frequency of decorated sherds. It is true that the only decorated *and* burnished sherds were from Varley's Field, but they were adjacent to the North Paddock. These spatial variations could be related to subtle chronological differences. It is also possible that post-depositional factors could have led to differential survival of burnished surfaces. Alternatively, the observed patterns could relate, at least in part, to differences in the functional use or conceptual associations of different areas of the site.

Local affinities

As noted by Hill in relation to the material from the 1955–56 excavations, the pottery from Wandlebury can best be compared with assemblages from sites dating to the latter part of the Early Iron Age in southern East Anglia and the Chilterns (Hill in French 2004). Within south Cambridgeshire, perhaps the closest parallels are from Edix Hill, Barrington, which yielded a combination of tripartite and bipartite/barrel-shaped jars along with at least one tripartite bowl (Woudhuysen 1997, Fig. 19.2–.14). A similar range of vessels comes from Stansted Airport, Essex (SCS site). Of particular interest is the large group from F. 2187 at that site, which included a range of tripartite jars and bowls including some foot-ring or pedestalled bowls. This feature is dated by Brown (2004) to around the 5th century BC on typological grounds, and it has produced a radiocarbon date of 518–384 BC at 95% confidence level.

Locally, the material from Wandlebury can be

Table 2. Assemblage composition from different areas of the site (percentages by weight).

	Varley's Field	S. Paddock	N. Paddock/ Orchard Field
MSW, hand dug features (g)	7.7	11.8	13.0
Unburnished, undecorated (%)	84.3	78.4	54.7
Unburnished, decorated (%)	3.3	0.9	5.3
Burnished, undecorated (%)	11.9	20.7	40.0
Burnished, decorated (%)	0.5	0	0

contrasted with assemblage from the very early 1st millennium BC settlement at the Hutchison Site, New Addenbrooke's, 3.5km to the northwest (Evans *et al.* 2004). This assemblage almost exclusively consists of flint-tempered wares, entirely lacks burnished or geometrically incised pottery, and does not share any of the distinctive forms seen at Wandlebury such as tripartite bowls and jars. A Late Bronze Age date is demonstrated by a radiocarbon date of 1110–900 cal BC (2 sigma). Further work on the Hutchison Site pottery and comparison with the Wandlebury assemblage has significant potential to elucidate local ceramic development during the early 1st millennium BC.

As noted by French (2004, 61), Wandlebury's closest comparable site in terms of size and form is the Arbury ringwork on the northern edge of Cambridge. A series of investigations have been carried out at this enclosure, most of which have failed to recover any Iron Age pottery (Evans & Knight 2002). This mirrors the paucity of material from the 1950s excavation of the first phase rampart and ditch at Wandlebury, suggesting that these ringworks were not foci for contemporary settlement. However, the most recent excavation at Arbury has yielded a deposit of substantially complete vessels, very different to the fragmented and incomplete pottery typically associated with settlement activities (Evans & Knight forthcoming). The pottery largely consists of sandy, slack-shouldered Middle Iron Age-type vessels but also includes some burnt flint-tempered wares more similar to earlier types, and the group as a whole can probably be dated to the early Middle Iron Age (*c.*4th/3rd centuries BC). Similarities in form and fabric can be noted between the sandy wares from the Arbury ditch and some of the pottery dated to the Middle Iron Age from 'settlement' features at Wandlebury (eg Fig. 3.21). The implication is that if Arbury and Wandlebury are contemporary, then the latter was constructed at a time when settlement activity on the hilltop was much reduced.

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