

**The prehistoric pottery
from Meriden, Solihull,
West Midlands**

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by
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Methodology

The material was recorded using the standard BUFAU pottery recording system and analysed on Access database. The assemblage was quantified in full: by sherd count, weight (g), and estimated vessel equivalent (EVE). Only rim equivalents (EVE's) are published, but percentages for bases are recorded in the archive. The level of abrasion was recorded for individual sherds.

The pottery assemblage described below is coded based on a system devised by David Knight (1998) and in conjunction with the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group (PCRG) guidelines for the analysis and publication of later Prehistoric pottery (1997). The fabrics are listed and described in **Appendix AH/1**.

Bronze Age

A total of 119 sherds, weighing 1959g was recovered. The overall average sherd weight, 16g, was remarkably high and almost all of the material (98% by sherd count) derived from stratified contexts. A very small proportion of the pottery (1%) was abraded. The majority of the Bronze Age pottery was of Early Bronze Age style and 85% of the total (by sherd count) was found in the fillings of four pits in the group that lay southwest of the double post ring. A further significant deposit of such pottery was found in a single isolated pit to the west (1641), while a few similar sherds from the fill of the Iron Age enclosure ditch and roundhouse RH1 were presumably residual. These latter sherds were much smaller in size, although not abraded. In addition to the Early Bronze Age assemblage, there was one large sherd of Late Bronze Age type, found in the fill of the Iron Age enclosure ditch (1081).

The nature of the assemblages from the four most important pit deposits is summarised in **Table AW/1**. These pits contained fragments from between one and seven vessels, although in most cases only a small proportion of each vessel was represented (on average 12% of the rim). The only larger vessel portion came from the isolated feature 1641: this contained 85% of a decorated urn base.

Table AW/1. Early Bronze Age pottery assemblages from four pit deposits

Context	No. sherds	Weight (g)	Average sherd weight(g)	Minimum no. of vessels	Illustration nos.
1162	71	1352	19	7	1-6
1164	3	12	4	2	7
1175/1176	25	268	11	probably 1	8-10
1641	10	133	13	1	11-12
TOTAL	109	1765	16	11	

Fabrics

Most of the pottery, including all the illustrated items, contained common quantities of coarse grog inclusions (fabric GRCC). Occasional sherds had finer grog inclusions (GRCF) or displayed a fine sandy fabric (QUCF). One large plain wall sherd

contained common medium-sized inclusions of limestone (LJCM). Full fabric descriptions may be found in **Appendix AH/1**.

The majority of vessel surfaces were smoothed (90% by sherd count), while the rest showed some evidence of scratching or a lightly scored surface.

Form

The vessels represented were mostly small to medium sized urns with straight or slightly ovoid profiles. Two vessels were particularly small and can be classed as cups. Most of the urn rims had an internal bevel. The two cups displayed simple rounded and flattened rims respectively, while one of the urns also had a flattened rim form. The two base angles found were both of simple flat form. All except one of the rim fragments were decorated; six with incised linear motifs and four with impressed designs formed with a round-toothed comb or a finger nail. One of the base angles was also decorated with fingertip impressions.

Catalogue

(All in fabric GRCC)

AW/1 Rim fragments totaling 20% of the rim from a large urn with internal rim bevel. Decoration: incised geometric design of large opposed filled triangles. External sooting. Context 1162.

AW/2 Rim, 10% surviving, from an urn with internal rim bevel. Decoration: incised large opposed filled triangles on the upper wall and a row of finger nail impressions on the rim bevel. Context 1162.

AW/3 Rim, 12% surviving, from a small urn with internal rim bevel. Decoration: incised horizontal line below rim above diagonal incised lines, the latter probably part of a chevron pattern. Context 1162.

AW/4 Rim, 10% surviving, from a small straight-sided urn with flattened rim. Decoration: round tooth-comb impressions forming two horizontal lines with verticals between; below these a row of finger nail impressions. Context 1162.

AW/5 Rim, 11% surviving, from a very small urn with ovoid profile and internal rim bevel. Decoration: horizontal rows of round tooth-comb impressions. Part of one repair hole surviving. Sooting on internal and external surfaces. Context 1162.

AW/6 Rim, 11% surviving, from a cup with open profile and flattened rim. Decoration: incised transverse lines on the top of the rim and one horizontal incised line below the rim. Context 1162.

AW/7 Rim, 10% surviving, from a cup with ovoid profile and simple rounded rim. Decoration: one row of finger nail impressions immediately below the rim. Context 1164.

AW/8 Rim of indeterminate diameter from a large urn with a concave internal rim bevel. Decoration: incised diagonal lines, probably part of a larger design. Interior sooting. Context 1176.

AW/9 Wall sherd decorated with vertical incised lines. From the same vessel as no. 8 above. Interior sooting. Context 1175.

AW/10 Plain flat base angle, 10% surviving, from an urn with an almost vertical lower wall. Same vessel as nos. 8 and 9 above. Context 1175.

AW/11 Rim of indeterminate diameter from a small urn with internal rim bevel. No decoration on surviving portion. Context 1641.

AW/12 Base angle, 85% surviving, from a small urn with outward flaring lower wall. Decoration: one row of fingertip impressions round the base. Same vessel as no. 11 above. Context 1641.

Discussion

The groups of urns and small accessory vessels from the pits adjacent to the double post ring are Early Bronze Age in date: c. 1800-1600 cal BC. Pottery of this period is relatively rare in the west Midlands and the assemblage from Meriden has provided a very important addition to the existing corpus for Warwickshire. These are the first examples of this particular style from the county, and only six examples of the more commonly occurring Collared Urns were recorded by Longworth (1984, 274-5). The Meriden vessels are related stylistically to the Cordoned Urn series of northern Britain on the one hand, and to the Biconical Urn tradition of southern England on the other.

Midland urns of this style are known especially from barrows along the Derwent valley in the Peak District, and also from the Trent river gravels in Derbyshire and Leicestershire. The horizontal and diagonal incised lines, arranged in geometric designs, figure numbers **AW/1-3, 8 and 9**, can be matched on a Cordoned Urn from Stanton Moor and a small urn with biconical profile from Matlock Bridge, both Derbyshire (Vine 1982, nos. 513 and 524 respectively). The filled triangle motif found on numbers **AW/1 and 2** occurs on Cordoned Urns from Darley Dale, Derbyshire and from Cocklow, Leek and the Leek area, Staffordshire, although all these designs were executed in twisted cord technique (*ibid* nos. 508-510). Filled triangles occur on two of the five Cordoned Urns with incised decoration from a gravel site at Eye Kettleby, Leicestershire (Marsden and Woodward forthcoming), and incised cross hatching is present on a Cordoned Urn from Hill Farm, Willington, Derbyshire (Hancocks and Woodward forthcoming). This Willington vessel was found in a pit near to a ring of postholes (Hughes and Jones forthcoming). Another Cordoned Urn, from a different site at Willington, was decorated with cord-impressed panel motifs (Manby 1979, no.108, fig. 64). At Eye Kettleby, a series of radiocarbon dates has demonstrated that Cordoned Urns with internally bevelled rims and incised decoration occurred earlier than those with rows of fingertip decoration, with the former belonging in the Early Bronze Age. However, one Cordoned vessel, like number **2** at Meriden, was decorated with both incised and fingernail techniques. The Middle Bronze Age vessels from a ring ditch at Barton-under-Needwood, Staffordshire are quite different from the Meriden urns (Martin and Allen, 2001). They are more similar to the straight-sided urns with simple or flattened rims from Eye Kettleby, which were associated with Middle Bronze Age radiocarbon dates.

The main difference between the Meriden urns and the Pennine/Trent valley examples is the absence of raised cordons on the Meriden vessels. Also point toothed comb impressions are not commonly found on Cordoned Urns, although they are a recurring feature on Collared Urns e.g. vessels from Stanton Moor 26 and Willington (Vine 1982, nos. 465 and 506), and also were employed on the lower part of a Food Vessel or Collared Urn from Oldbury Barrow, Warwickshire (*ibid* no. 604). The Meriden vessels, with their rounded slack biconical profiles and internally bevelled rims, can also be compared with some of the urns from Bromfield in Shropshire. These are related to the later Early Bronze Age Biconical Urn tradition of Wessex and southern England. In particular, multiple incised chevron designs occurred on vessels P11 and P39 (Stanford 1982, fig.16).

A further interesting aspect of the vessels from Meriden is the occurrence of two accessory cups, numbers **AW/6 and 7**, from contexts 1162 and 1164 respectively. Accessory cups do occasionally occur with Cordoned Urns found in funerary contexts, as at Eaglestone Flat, Derbyshire (Barnatt 1994, fig. 13, vessel 5A), although no close parallels for the Meriden examples have been found. In general terms, they belong to Longworth's form 9c: bowl-shaped cups with contracted mouth, convex sides and flat base (Longworth 1984, 52-3). One cup-sized vessel was found at Bromfield (Stanford 1982, fig.18, P10). This was decorated with a row of thumbnail impressions just below the rim and these can be compared with the row of fingernail impressions found on Meriden vessel number 7.

There is no evidence that the urn fragments from Meriden were associated with human remains. Also the small proportions of each vessel deposited, and the occurrence of sooting in four instances, may be indicative of non-funerary activity. This activity appears to have involved the deliberate deposition of small portions selected from the upper portions of decorated urns, many of which were rather small vessels. The locations of most of the deposits within pits southwest of the double post ring is reminiscent of the positioning of the fragments of a decorated Cordoned Urn in a pit located southwest of a post ring at Hill Farm, Willington on the gravels of Derbyshire (Hughes and Jones forthcoming).

Iron Age pottery

A total of 32 sherds (411g) of pottery with an average weight of 13g were recovered. The group comprises all the available pottery recovered from an evaluation carried out by Worcestershire County Archaeological Service (Griffin et al 2000) and from excavations undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology (2001.) This report details the study and analysis of mid-late Iron Age pottery deriving from well-stratified and secure contexts only, representing 21% of the overall total. The quantification of this material is detailed in **Table AH/1**. The research aims were to characterise the site chronology and settlement economy through analysis of the ceramics and to compliment the published material existing for small rural settlements in Warwickshire.

For ease of reference much of the pottery information is tabulated and for the purposes of this report the mid-late Iron Age material has been treated as a single entity. The mid-late Iron Age occupation was analysed and dated c.400-100BC. This assemblage derived from the polygonal enclosure ditch and from curvilinear ditches/gullies, postholes and pits within the enclosure. The assemblage was represented by good closed groups of pottery characterised by mid-late Iron Age globular, ovoid and rounded shouldered jars with brushed and scored decoration.

Fabrics

Eight handmade Iron Age fabrics have been identified: five with quartz, two briquetage fabrics and one with grog temper. Of the Iron Age pottery, the most common fabrics within the overall assemblage are the QUCM fabric (38%) and QUCF fabrics (34%.) The other fabrics occur in smaller quantities (**Table AH/1**.)

Nothing of particular note was observed about the Iron Age fabrics, although the presence of three sherds of Briquetage is of note. The majority had inclusions of

common quantity with the modal size of inclusions ranging from fine, medium, coarse to very coarse.

Table AH/1: Pottery: fabric and quantities in assemblage

Fabric Name	Common Name	Qty	% Qty	Wt (g)	% Wt (g)	AVSW	Rim EVE	% Rim EVE
GRCM	Grog tempered (Medium)	3	9	66	16	-	-	-
QUCC	Quartz tempered (Coarse)	1	3	20	5	-	-	-
QUCF	Quartz tempered (Fine)	11	34	138	34	-	0.06	40
QUCF/IRRC	Quartz tempered (Fine) Ironstone (Coarse)	1	3	1	<0.5	-	-	-
QUCF/QTRV /IRRV	Quartz tempered (Fine) Quartzite tempered (Very Coarse) Ironstone (Very Coarse)	1	3	8	2	-	0.03	20
QUCM	Quartz tempered (Medium)	12	38	102	25	-	0.06	40
QUCM/VOCM	Sandy/Organic Briquetage Droitwich	1	3	42	10	-	-	-
QUVV/ROVV	Cheshire Plain Briquetage	2	6	34	8	-	-	-
Total		32	100	411	100	13g	0.15	

Surface finishes

The range and variety of surface finishes were restricted to external surfaces on two fabrics (QUCF and QUCM.) The finishes principally comprised finely scratched lines (SCRA) representing scoring and burnishing (BURN.) The percentage occurrence of surface finish by sherd count is detailed in **Table AH/2** below.

Surface finish	Quantity (%)
BURN	9
SCRA	16

Table AH/2: Percentage occurrence of surface finishes within Iron Age assemblage

Forms

A minimum number of six vessels were observed from the Iron Age assemblage. The forms include two globular jars, a rounded shouldered jar, an ovoid jar, and an open bowl form. In addition, a single Cheshire Plain Briquetage folded over rim form was recognised (**Fig. AH/14**) These are listed in **Appendix AH/3** and in the catalogue of illustrated forms below. Decoration was observed on only two rim forms. This comprised of finger-tipping on the rim of the rounded shouldered jar (**Fig. AH/13**) and finely incised linear motif on the body of the open bowl (**Fig. AH/15**.)

Catalogue

Middle Iron Age type forms

13 RS/U/FPE (DWG 001)

Rounded shouldered jar with upright neck and flattened lip, pinched out externally. Finger-tipping on rim surface. Smoothed surfaces. Context E205, Polygonal enclosure

complex, Diam. 120mm (7%), fabric QUCF/QTRV/IRRV, cf. Park Farm, Barford (Ford and Woodward, 1994, Fig. 8.12, 14) and Ryton (Bateman, 1977, Fig 18.21, 39).

14 Cheshire Plain Briquetage (DWG 007)

Rim, folded over type, Context 1218, RH1, Diam. Indet, fabric QUVV/ROVV, cf. Fisherwick, Smith, 1979, Fig 14. 1 3 5, 53 and Whitemoor Haye Woodward forthcoming 2002, Fig. 38.1-2, 52.

15 OPEN/N/RD (DWG 009)

Open, neckless form with rounded direct rim. Smooth internal surface with finely incised linear 'scoring' on external surface. Context 1299, RH2, Diam. 100mm, (6%), fabric QUCF, cf. Ryton (Bateman, 1977, Fig 18.4 and 18.24, 39.) This example has a more tapered rim. This form also occurs at Wasperton in the MIA phases.

Late Iron Age type forms

16 Decorated body sherd (DWG 008)

Incised linear decoration. Context 1297, RH2, fabric QUCF, cf. Ryton (Bateman, 1977, Fig. 18.29, 39) and Park Farm, Barford (Ford and Woodward, 1994, Fig. 8.27, 14; Wasperton Settlement I; Whitemoor Haye Woodward forthcoming 2002.

17 Decorated La Tène type style pottery (DWGS 003 and 004)

Finely incised fringes, either side of an incised horizontal line. Context E309, Polygonal enclosure complex, fabric QUCM, cf. Covert Farm Crick (Hancocks and Woodward forthcoming) incised fringe motif between two continuous lines.

18 OV/N/SIC (DWG 002)

Ovoid, neckless jar with single internal channel. Smooth surfaces, with external sooting on outer surface. Context E303, Enclosure complex, Diam. 170mm, (6%), fabric QUCF, common final Iron Age rim type. No exact parallels found.

19 GLOB/N/RD (DWG 005)

Globular, neckless jar with rounded direct rim. Smooth surfaces, with external sooting on outer surface. Context 1034, Enclosure complex, Diam. 120mm (6%), fabric QUCM, cf. Ryton (Bateman, 1977, Fig. 18.14, 39.)

20 GLOB/C/EVR (DWG 006)

Globular jar with concave neck and everted rim. Smooth surfaces. Context 1034, Enclosure complex, Diam. Indeterminate, fabric GRM, cf. Wixford (Woodward, 1999, Fig. 23.1b, 58.)

Decoration

Eight sherds (25%) of the Iron Age assemblage have decorative motifs. The decoration primarily consisted of incised linear motif on the external body or girth of a vessel (Fig. AH/15.) The one exception to this being the La Tène Style decorated pottery from E309 (Fig. AH/17.) Material of similar style has been recovered from Moulton Park, Northants (Williams, 1974, Fig 14, 33-40) and Covert Farm, Crick, Northants (A. Woodward pers. Comm), where an incised fringe motif between two continuous lines was observed.

Taphonomy

Generally the whole Iron Age assemblage was well preserved as is reflected in the fact that all of the pottery was unabraded (<5% wear of original surfaces). This figure implies that features were rapidly weathered and silted up very quickly, allowing little abrasion and weathering of the ceramics, where present.

Within the Iron Age phase the overall average sherd weight is 13g (**Table AH/1.**) The pottery can be characterised by medium-sized, unabraded sherds. Some allowance must be made for the density and coarseness of the fabrics in the production of these handmade vessels. This will have affected the degree of preservation in situ and survival. Pottery derived from three main feature types in this phase: ditches, postholes and pits.

The fill of the enclosure ditch was fairly homogenous throughout (Northants Archaeology 2001.) 47% of the Iron Age assemblage was recovered from this polygonal complex. Pottery was recovered from two of the three roundhouses. This consisted of 12% from RH1 and 25% from RH2. The remainder of the assemblage (16%) derived from pits and postholes.

Vessel size and function

Within the Iron Age group the average diameter of the surviving vessels was 128mm. It is probable that vessels of this size were associated with food preparation and cooking. Some confirmation of this came from the fact that two vessels have traces of external sooting upon them. External sooting was recognised on a further three sherds.

Discussion

Only a limited number of pottery assemblages of this date have been published for Warwickshire (Hingley, 1994, 20.) Within this in mind comparative data sets have been somewhat restricted. However, clear and distinct patterns of trade and exchange have emerged from this small assemblage, which have further enhanced our understanding about the character, range and variety of ceramics reaching the site.

It seems probable that the prehistoric pottery, based on fabric and form is of mid-late Iron Age date (400-100BC). The presence of diagnostic indicators, such as incised scoring, finger - tipping on rim tops, as well as the occurrence of globular and ovoid jars would appear to justify this date range. The majority of the Iron Age pottery assemblage is quartz tempered.

These characteristics can be well matched at similar dated sites within Warwickshire. Pottery from the late Iron Age site at Wixford (Woodward in Palmer 1999, 58-59) has few affinities with the Meriden assemblage with the exception of the paralleled globular jar (**Fig. AH/20.**) Other material recovered from the sites of Ryton-on-Dunsmore (Bateman 1978) and Park Farm, Barford (Cracknell and Hingley (1994) compares favourably with the confines of the Meriden assemblage.

Perhaps the most exciting observation is the occurrence of three sherds of briquetage. These consist of two fragments of Droitwich and one of Cheshire Plain material. Elaine Morris has noted that generally Droitwich and Cheshire Plain briquetage appear very rarely in Warwickshire (Hingley, 1994, 20.) The Meriden fragments would appear to be contemporary in date with the other ceramics recovered from the

polygonal enclosure. The Cheshire Plain folded over rim form was recovered from Roundhouse 1 and was found in association with a granodiorite quern identified as deriving from the Mount Sorrel area of Leicestershire (Sutherland this report.) This is important evidence of the fundamental trade and exchange networks that were operating along well-established routes. The presence of regionally traded briquetage, although not uncommon on sites of this date, is increasingly adding to the known distribution of this pottery type within the West and East Midlands.

A similar polygonal enclosure to that noted at Meriden was recorded at Preston, Gloucestershire (Mudd et al 1999, 42-48) and dated to middle Iron Age period. A larger volume of pottery, 454 sherds, of early –middle Iron Age date was recovered, with an average sherd weight of 10g. The majority of this material derived from the enclosure ditch fills, as opposed to internal features. A similar pattern of pottery dispersal was noted at Meriden, although in much smaller quantities.

Other elements of the Meriden settlement are shared on later prehistoric sites from Warwickshire. These include pits and roundhouses within an enclosed settlement area. These traits seem to be closely paralleled to settlement sites in the Cotswolds, where the typology of hillforts from that region compares favourable with those from Warwickshire (Hingley, 1996, 18.)

Acknowledgements

We should like to thank Elaine Morris for confirmation of the identification of the briquetage.

Appendix AH/1 Age Type Fabric Descriptions

The fabric descriptions listed comprise only of those from phased deposits. The coding system used is based on that defined by Knight (1998, 5). Four alphabetical characters are employed. The first two characters indicate the main inclusion type, employing two letter codes listed below. The third character designates the quantity of the main inclusion (e.g. SHMC: moderate coarse shell). Recommended conventions for the description of frequency classes and modal size classes are those summarised by Knight (1998, 21). If material being categorised lies between two codes, it should revert to the lower designation (rare to sparse fine quartz = QURF). If a fabric contains several main inclusions (e.g. shell and quartz) a combination of codes may be employed (e.g. SHMC/QUMC = moderate coarse shell and moderate coarse quartz). This series has been cross-referenced to the concordance of Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service (LMARS) (Pollard 1999).

GRCF – Common, fine, well sorted and angular grog temper (<0.25mm).

GRCM – Common, medium, well sorted, angular grog temper (<0.25-1mm).

GRCC – Common, coarse well sorted, sub-angular grog temper (>1-3mm).

LICM – Common, medium, well sorted, angular limestone temper (>0.25-1mm).

QUCF – Common, very fine/fine, well sorted and rounded quartz temper (<0.25mm).

QUCF/IRRC – Common, very fine/fine, well sorted and rounded quartz temper (>0.25-1mm) and rare, coarse, poorly sorted and angular ironstone temper (1-3mm).

QUCF/QTRV/IRRV – Common, very fine/fine, well sorted and rounded quartz temper (<0.25mm), with rare, very coarse, poorly sorted and angular quartzite temper (>1mm) and rare, very coarse, poorly sorted and angular ironstone temper (>3mm).

QUCM – Common, medium, well sorted and rounded quartz temper (>0.25-1mm).

QUCM/VOCM – Common, medium, well sorted and rounded quartz temper (>0.25-1mm) and common, medium, well sorted, elongated voids (organic) temper (>0.25-1mm). Droitwich sandy or organic tempered briquetage.

QUCC – Common, coarse, well sorted and rounded quartz temper (<1-3mm).

QUVV/ROVV – Very common, very coarse, well sorted, angular quartz temper (>3mm) and very common, very coarse, angular rhyolite temper (<3mm). Cheshire Plain Briquetage.

Appendix AH/3: Form Occurrence by phase

Phase	Fabric code	Form category
1: Bronze Age	GRCC	<p>Large urn with internal rim bevel and incised geometric design of large opposed filled triangles</p> <p>Urn with internal rim bevel and incised large opposed filled triangles on the upper wall and a row of finger nail impressions on the rim bevel</p> <p>Small urn with internal bevel rim and incised horizontal line below rim above diagonal incised lines, the latter probably part of a chevron pattern</p> <p>Small straight-sided urn with flattened rim. Decoration comprises of round tooth-comb impressions forming two horizontal lines with verticals between; below these a row of finger nail impressions</p> <p>Very small urn with ovoid profile and internal rim bevel. Decoration: horizontal rows of round tooth-comb impressions. Part of one repair hole surviving.</p> <p>Cup with open profile and flattened rim. Decoration: incised transverse lines on the top of the rim and one horizontal incised line below the rim.</p> <p>Cup with ovoid profile and simple rounded rim. Decoration: one row of finger nail impressions immediately below the rim.</p> <p>Large urn with a concave internal rim bevel. Decoration: incised diagonal lines, probably part of a larger design.</p> <p>Small urn with internal rim bevel</p>
2: Mid-Late Iron Age	<p>QUCF/QTRV/IRRV</p> <p>QUVV/ROVV</p> <p>QUCF</p> <p>QUCM</p> <p>GRCM</p>	<p>Rounded shouldered jar with upright neck and flattened lip, pinched out externally.</p> <p>Folded over rim type from Cheshire Plain Briquetage</p> <p>Open, neckless form with rounded direct rim</p> <p>Ovoid, neckless jar with single internal channel.</p> <p>Globular, neckless jar with rounded direct rim.</p> <p>Globular jar with concave neck and everted rim.</p>

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