ART. III. – *King's Stables – An Early Shieling on Black Lyne Common, Bewcastle.* By G. G. S. RICHARDSON, B.Sc.

IN CW2 XLIII 42 Miss K. S. Hodgson noted that she had observed a group of stony mounds close to the ruined house of Broadside, above the left bank of the R. Black Lyne, about a mile north of the farm of Hole of Lyne. The farmer had reported finding a stone trough in one of them, which she suspected might have been a burial cist. In 1971 it was learned that the area in which these mounds lay was included in a scheme for afforestation by the Economic Forestry Group; the Field Study Section of our Society therefore carried out a survey of the mounds, and made arrangements with the Economic Forestry Group that a small part of the area would be left unploughed, so that at least one of the mounds could be excavated. Excavation during 1972, supported by close examination of the furrows of the forestry ploughing, showed that the mounds were the remains of a group of about 20 stone stack stands, surrounded by a stone wall.

During this work traces of burnt material, and sherds of medieval pottery, were observed in the plough furrows a short distance from the group of stack stands. By cleaning and deepening the furrows it was possible in 1973 to establish the outline of a small thatched clay building within a walled enclosure. Pottery associated with the building dated the site to the early fourteenth century.

Topography (Fig. 1.) The site lies on rough moorland on drift deposits of glacial boulder clay, red-brown when unaltered but leached to a pale grey in the upper horizons. Peat had developed over it to a depth of 30 to 40 cm. There are occasional deposits of sand and gravel overlying the clay, and it is on one of these, sloping south-westwards towards the river at about 700 ft. O.D. that the group of stone heaps is situated. The hut stands on a second gravel deposit 220 metres north-west, the two being separated by an old stream channel. Immediately to the north there is a glacial overflow channel which extends between the valleys of the Black and White Lyne rivers. (*Geology of the Country around Bewcastle* - Geological Survey Memoir 1970 H.M.S.O. p. 254.) Both sites are thus on relatively well drained rises in an otherwise flat and damp region, and would be attractive places for occupation and possibly even small scale cultivation.

History. H. G. Ramm (*Shielings and Bastles* – RCHM [England] 1970) records four farmstead sites in the Black Lyne valley, Nos 193 to 196, and another apparent farmstead site was observed on the left bank of the Black Lyne below the sites discussed in this paper (NY543800). Commenting on the absence of shieling sites on Black Lyne Common, in contrast to the other three commons of the Bewcastle Lordship (Greyfell, White Lyne and Bailey Hope) Ramm suggests that this "may be due to the drove road and later Smuggler's Way into Scotland facilitating the development of a number of small permanent dwellings on shieling sites". These farmsteads are stone built and no stack stands were found associated with them, but they are characterized by walled enclosures

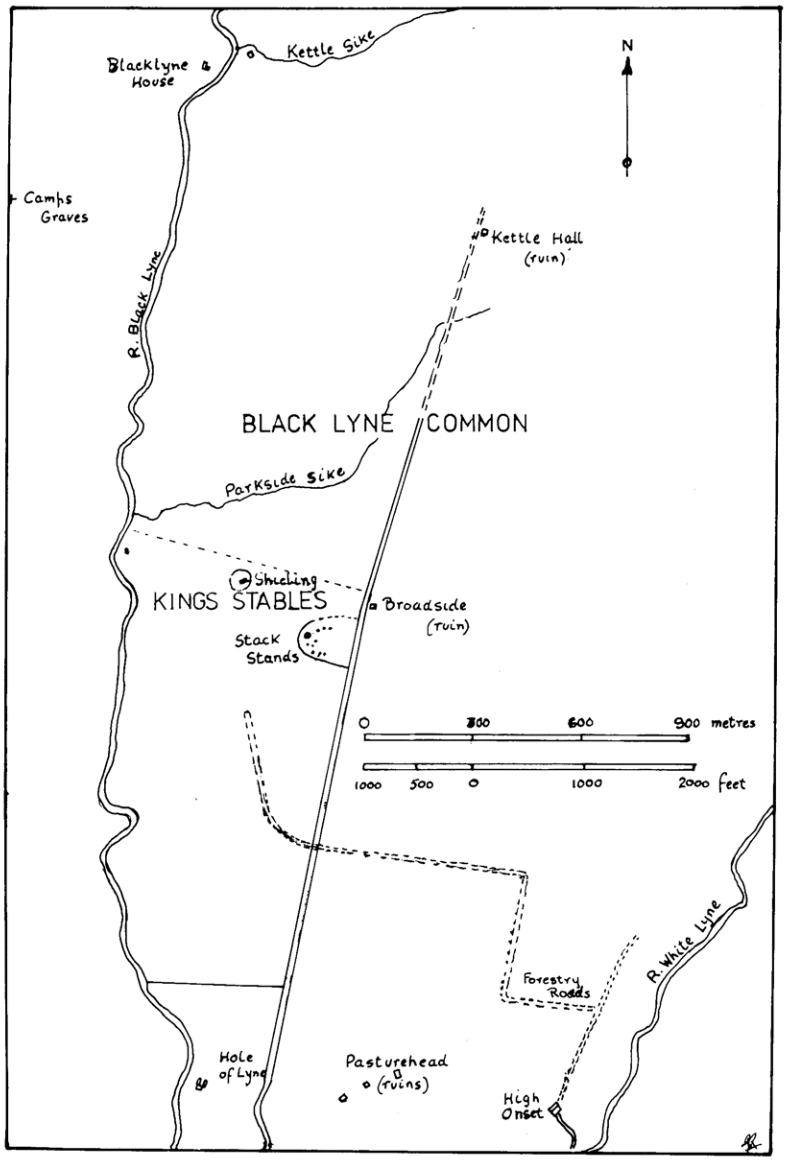

FIG. 1. – Sketch map of Kings Stables (NY 546800).

similar to those found near Broadside. They are not firmly dated, but Ramm considers that the earliest house at the Clints (No. 196) was medieval (*loc. cit.* p. 44).

Black Lyne Common was the subject of an Enclosure Act in 1816, when it was described as "waste . . . incapable of any considerable improvement". No buildings are shown on the maps accompanying the Enclosure Award; the houses, now ruinous, at Broadside and Kettle Hall, and the road to them, were evidently constructed between 1816 and the first Ordnance Survey of 1868. A Chancery Decree of 1630 (Heysham Mounsey MSS D2/DMH – Carlisle Record Office) lists the messuages and tenements in Bewcastle

Manor, nearly all of which can still be identified. The area of occupation seems to have been very much the same as it is now, with the farms at Hole of Lyne, Lynesteads, and High Onset fringing the Black Lyne Common. There is no reference to any tenement on the Common itself.

The group of visible mounds is locally known as King's Stables, and there are legends that it was the site of a royal hunting camp or an army encampment.

The Stone Mounds. The original survey showed upwards of 30 mounds of varying size, in many of which the stones barely showed through the turf and were difficult to locate when the grass was long. After the area (apart from the site reserved for excavation) had been ploughed for afforestation, the furrows were examined for additional evidence. It was then found that several of the apparent "mounds" were in fact parts of the stone bank which had already been identified on the western edge of the group. It became clear that there had been a continuous enclosure bank, which could be traced along the western and southern sides of the group, from the glacial channel, until it disappeared under the 1820 occupation road to Broadside and Kettle Hall.

A section cut through the enclosure bank showed it to be the foundations of a wall 1·10 m thick, faced on both sides with large stones, enclosing a core of smaller stones. The section trench proved to have been cut at a point where there had been a gap 0·9 m wide in the wall, presumably an entrance, although there was no clear evidence of a trodden surface below the tumble of fallen stones which had obscured it. The quantity of fallen stones beside the wall indicated an original height of about 0·75 m and it must be assumed either that there had been considerable stone robbing, or that the wall had been built partly of turf. The foundation stones and some of the fallen stones were larger than would be found in recent dry stone walling. Raistrick ("Pennine Walls" - *Dalesman*, 1966) suggests that the use of large stones is an indication of an early date of construction.

The mound selected for excavation appeared superficially to be roughly circular, and work was begun on a quadrant system. It was found that the ground sloped to the south-west and the lower edge had been terraced with stones to give a roughly level platform about 3·50 m wide with a slightly rounded south-west end. About 1·5 m from the edge of the platform there was a group of large stones whose tops, projecting through the turf, had provided the surface indication of the mound. These stones surrounded a hollow 0·50 m across, bottomed with small stones. Extending north-eastwards from this group there was a spread of small stones (*c.* 10 cm) forming a roughly cobbled rectangular platform 6 m by 3·7 m, which was surrounded by a scatter of smaller stones. Over most of the area the spread was only one stone deep, resting on an iron-pan layer above the natural sandy sub-soil; but close to the group of large stones there was an upper layer of cobbling separated from the lower one by a peaty deposit 15 cm thick. Along the south and west edges of the cobbled platform there were traces of a channel 40 cm wide and 10 cm deep filled with grey silt; this was presumably a drainage trench round the platform. (Figs 2 & 3).

Examination of the remains of the mounds which had been cut into by the forestry ploughs suggested that they were all of very similar construction, with a group of large stones set in a spread of much smaller ones. No artifacts were found in any of the mounds.

Stone platforms, with groups of large stones or timber posts to provide a ventilation opening, have been in use as stack bases on local farms within recent years, and on present evidence this seems to provide the most likely interpretation of the purpose of the mounds.

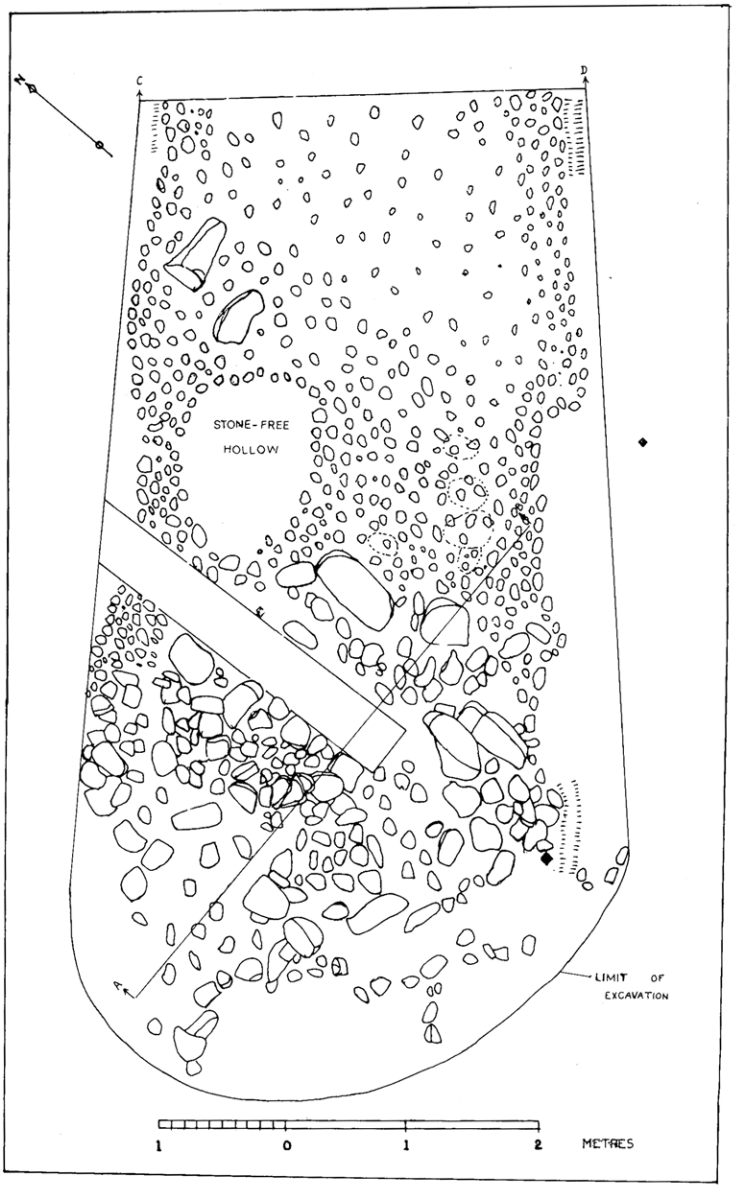

FIG. 2. – Plan of Stack Stand.

Local informants say that it was a common practice only a generation or two ago to cut and stack some of the moorland grass and use it as feed to extend the period during which cattle could be kept on the high pastures.

The Shieling. During the excavation of the mound and bank members of the team noticed that fire-reddened clay had been thrown up by the forestry plough in an area some 250 metres north-west of the excavation. Examination of the furrows showed that they had cut into stratified layers of burnt clay and charcoal, and some small sherds of

tcwaas_002_1979_vol79_0005

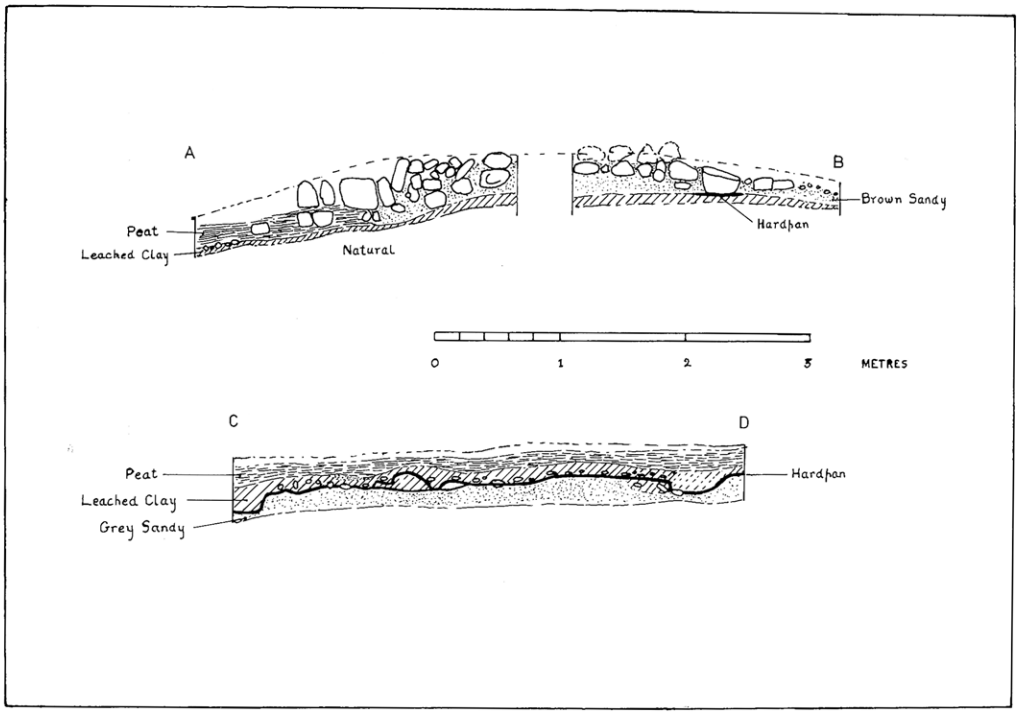

FIG. 3. – Sections of Stack Stand.

medieval pottery were found in the upcast. The seedling trees had already been planted and a proper area excavation was consequently impracticable, but it was decided, with the co-operation of the Economic Forestry Group, to carry out as full an examination as possible by cleaning up and where necessary deepening the furrows.

The site (Fig. 4) was on another gravel mound similar to that on which the stack bases lay, the two being separated by a shallow gully. We were able to establish the outline of a rectangular building measuring about 6·3 by 3 metres with its long axis east-west. The southern end may have been slightly rounded. It lay on the most nearly level part of the mound, but sloped appreciably towards the west; there was no evidence of any attempt to level the site. The walls were about 0·6 m thick; the foundations of brown puddled clay were slightly cut into the natural sandy clay and appeared to have been reinforced with boulders at each end. Outside the walls there was an irregular series of small boulders, separated from the walls themselves, possibly anchorages for ropes securing the thatch, such as can still be seen on old thatched buildings in Ireland and the Western Highlands of Scotland.

The floor inside the building was of greasy yellowish clay, clearly distinguishable from the wall material and the natural clay. Sections of the debris overlying the floor showed a layer of fine fibrous charcoal 3 cm thick, presumably the remains of collapsed thatch. Above this, near the walls, there was a 10 cm layer of burnt clay, and a further layer of coarser charcoal 4 cm thick, suggestive of wattle reinforcement of the wall material. The remains were sealed under 8-10 cm of peat (Fig. 5). Two 10 cm post sockets were found at the east end of the building, and the fragmentary remains of a post lay at the west end, but there was no clear evidence to show how the roof had been supported.

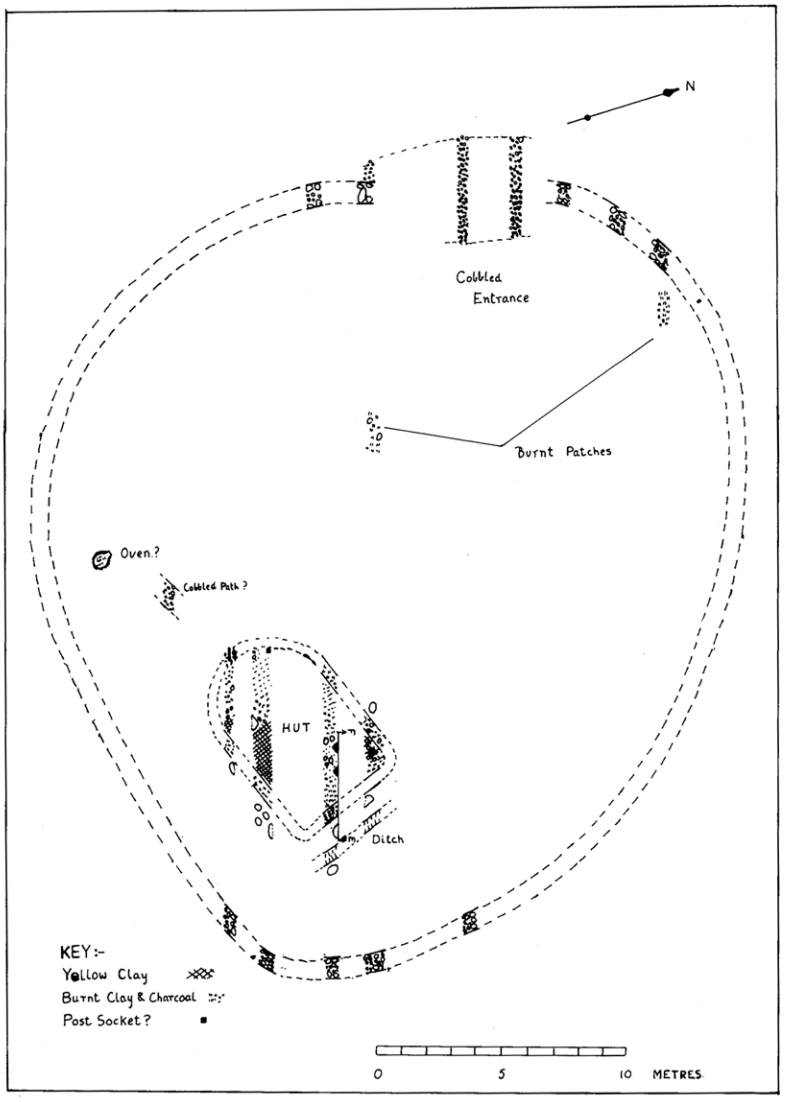

FIG. 4. – Plan of Shieling and Enclosure.

The conditions of the examination, with the remains exposed in strips 0·8 m wide, separated by balks 1·5 m wide, already carrying young trees, made it impossible to establish the position of the doorway with certainty, but traces of a flagged path and a turf wall detached from the building suggest that it was probably towards the west end.

Outside the east wall of the building there was a ditch 0·4 m deep and 1·2 m wide extending for 4 to 5 metres; this would be necessary to protect the building from run-off water on the sloping ground.

The building stood within a stone-walled enclosure, very roughly circular and about 30 metres in diameter. The stone wall was similar in construction to the one round the stack

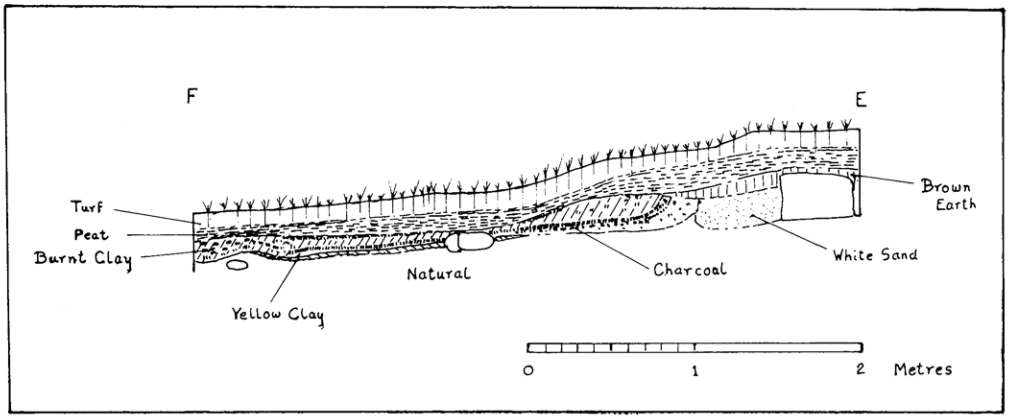

FIG. 5. – Section of Shieling.

bases. In its western side there was an entrance 3 metres wide which had a cobbled surface covered with greasy and odoriferous grey clay; it had clearly seen much passage of animals. Apart from the building, the only features noted inside the enclosure were areas of burning suggestive of camp fires, and a circular pit 0·65 m in diameter and 0·14 m deep, surrounded by an upcast bank of leached clay. The pit contained much charcoal and burnt clay, and was probably the remains of an oven.

Finds. A few of the 46 pottery sherds found were in the upcast from the plough furrows, but the majority were from the floor of the building, sealed by the destruction debris. The pottery is listed in Mr J. E. Parson's report (see Appendix).

The other identifiable finds from the area of the building were the iron rowel of a spur, part of an iron knife blade, and some iron fragments, possibly nails. There were no finds from the excavated stack stand: some objects suspected of being rusted nails were identified by Dr C. Owston as being accretions of iron-pan round small twigs or grass stems.

Discussion. The discovery of this shieling bears out H. G. Ramm's surmise that many shielings were built of turf and have not lasted as well as the stone ones (*loc. cit.* p. 6). There were no surface indications and only inspection whilst the plough upcast was still fairly fresh, so that the distinctive red coloration of the burned clay was clearly visible, enabled the site to be identified. Many more may well have been lost in earlier afforestation, and those that remain will be discovered only by chance disturbance. The pottery evidence dates the shieling to the first half – possibly the first quarter – of the fourteenth century, and makes this the oldest dated site of its kind in the Bewcastle area. The absence of any other buildings and the flimsy structure of the hut, suggest that it must be classed as a shieling, notwithstanding the associated enclosures and (possibly) stack stands, which Ramm (*op. cit.* p. 7) suggests would be evidence for a permanently occupied farmstead. The spindle whorl which was found gives some support, however, to the documentary evidence (*op. cit.* p. 5) that the herdsman was accompanied by his family during the period of "shielding".

The identification of the stone platforms as stack stands has been questioned on the grounds that they were (a) too numerous for the potential crop of grass on the moor, and (b) unnecessarily spread out. The older generation of farmers in the district recall, however, that in former times grass was cut and stacked in small heaps from which the

cattle fed directly when the grazing became inadequate in the autumn. For this usage a number of small stack bases spread over a considerable area, and enclosed by a wall, would be more practical than a closely set group of larger stacks. No acceptable alternative explanation has been put forward so far, and the total absence of artifacts, or of remains of fires, weighs heavily against there having been any actual habitation associated with the platforms. They were clearly not burial mounds.

The excavation produced no conclusive evidence that the stack stands were contemporary with the shieling, but their proximity, the similarity of the enclosure walls and the comparable degree of overgrowth of the structures make it reasonable to assume that they were associated.

Acknowledgements.

The officers of the Economic Forestry Group were most co-operative in arranging permissions to carry out the investigations, and to them and their principals I record grateful thanks. The actual survey and excavations were carried out by members of the Society and its Carlisle Regional Group; I cannot mention them all by name, but their work, sometimes under difficult conditions, was highly appreciated. The expenses of the excavation were met by a grant from the Society.

I am indebted also to Mr G. E. Parsons for reporting on the pottery finds; to Dr C. Owston and his colleagues at Cranfield Institute for examination of the iron finds; Mr R. Hogg, Mr Ritson Graham and Miss B. Harbottle for their helpful comments; and to Mrs Barbara Smith for much local information.

Appendix.

Pottery Report by G. E. Parsons

The medieval pottery from the excavation comprises some 46 sherds. Form and fabric suggest at least 10 vessels. Both reduced and oxidised fabrics are present amongst what are predominantly jug sherds. There would appear to be more than one kiln source for this group which, on present knowledge, would adequately fit into a first half of the fourteenth-century date bracket. Millimetre measurements in parentheses denote fabric thickness.

1. Four conjoined sherds from a shallow oval dish (10 mm) in hard slightly gritty fabric with dark grey core and oxidised surfaces except where carelessly applied medium green glaze covers a light green surface. The dish has a rod section side handle with ear-shaped profile and decorated with groups of slash marks at intervals on the upper surface.[1]

Height 5·1 cm

2. Rim of jug (4 mm) in hard sandy fabric, dirty grey on the inside and oxidised dark buff on the exterior with traces of galena glaze spots. The rim form is a well known northern type but not yet paralleled in published Cumberland material.

Rim dia. 11·4 cm

[1] Medieval Pottery from Finchale Priory. M. G. Jarrett & B. J. N. Edwards. AA4, xxxix (1961) p. 276, figs. 113-119. For discussion of this type of vessel see *ibid.* p. 259.

3. Rim of jug (2 mm) in thin hard smoothish dark grey fabric with traces of deteriorated sage green glaze on the partially oxidised exterior. The interior bears evidence of carbon from a post-break deposition.

Rim dia. 11·4 cm

4. Base sherd of jug (7 mm) in hard slightly gritty fabric, medium grey core, fired lighter grey on interior with outer skin oxidised to dark buff over pinkish buff margin. The basal angle has been 'interval' pinched and the base shows residual traces of mid green glaze derived from the pot above it in the kiln.

Base dia. 15·3 cm

5. Neck sherd of jug (4 mm) in soft smooth light buff fabric with overall internal light green glaze. The sherd suggests a fine thin jug internally glazed.

6. Flat base sherd of vessel (cooking pot?) (4 mm) in thin medium hard micaceous sandy fabric oxidised to light buff colour. Traces of carbon on the inside indicate a post-use deposition.

Base dia. 15·3 cm

7. Base sherd of small vessel (2·5 mm) in medium hard dark grey fabric with sparse green brown glaze spots on the exterior. The wall of the pot bears indication of limited knife trimming.

8. Foot of tripod vessel in hard sandy fabric discoloured to a dirty buff as 2. Sparse dirty green brown glaze spots appear on the exterior of the foot.

9. Pottery spindle whorl in softish orange buff fabric with very sparse small quartz grit. A darker skin is abraded on one of the surfaces.