

A FOURTH-CENTURY COLOUR-COATED FABRIC AND ITS TYPES IN SOUTH-EAST ENGLAND

By MICHAEL FULFORD

Recent work on the pottery excavated at Pevensey by Salzman¹ and Cottrill² has brought to light a colour-coated fabric which has not yet been recognised.³ It is characterised by its hardness, which is almost that of a stone-ware, and its dark orange-red colour. Inclusions of haematite or limonite occur regularly throughout and can sometimes be seen on the surface. The colour-coat is either a deep red or an orange-red and the surface is uneven and bumpy to the touch. It is immediately possible to distinguish this fabric visually from other red colour-coated wares, such as those from the New Forest or Oxfordshire kilns. All illustrated sherds are from the Roman fort at Pevensey except No. 5, which is from Thundersbarrow.⁴

The forms of the bowls (Fig. 1, Nos. 1-13) are closely matched by those from the Oxfordshire region, but the walls are thicker and the general finish is not nearly so fine. The white painted decoration, common on the Oxfordshire bowls, appears carelessly applied, and running scroll patterns are often so badly executed that they are difficult to recognise. There seem to be five basic sorts of bowl, of which Types 1 and 2 are akin to Drag. 36 (No. 7) and 38 (not illustrated), while the other three are variations on a simple bowl with a slight convex profile. Type 3 has a simple rim and is probably carinated (Nos. 1, 4, 5, 6, 12 and 13), while Type 4 has a rounded

¹ L. F. Salzman, 'Excavations on the Site of the Roman fortress at Pevensey, 1906-7,' *Sussex Arch. Colls.*, vol. 51 (1908), pp. 99-114; *Sussex Arch. Colls.*, vol. 52 (1909), pp. 83-95.

² Unpublished excavations of 1936-9.

³ Since the bulk of the material so far discovered comes from Pevensey itself, it may be appropriate to call the group Pevensey ware until the exact location of manufacture is known.

⁴ K. P. Oakley, 'The pottery from the Romano-British site at Thundersbarrow Hill,' *Antiquaries Journal*, vol. 13 (1933), p. 137, fig. 3.

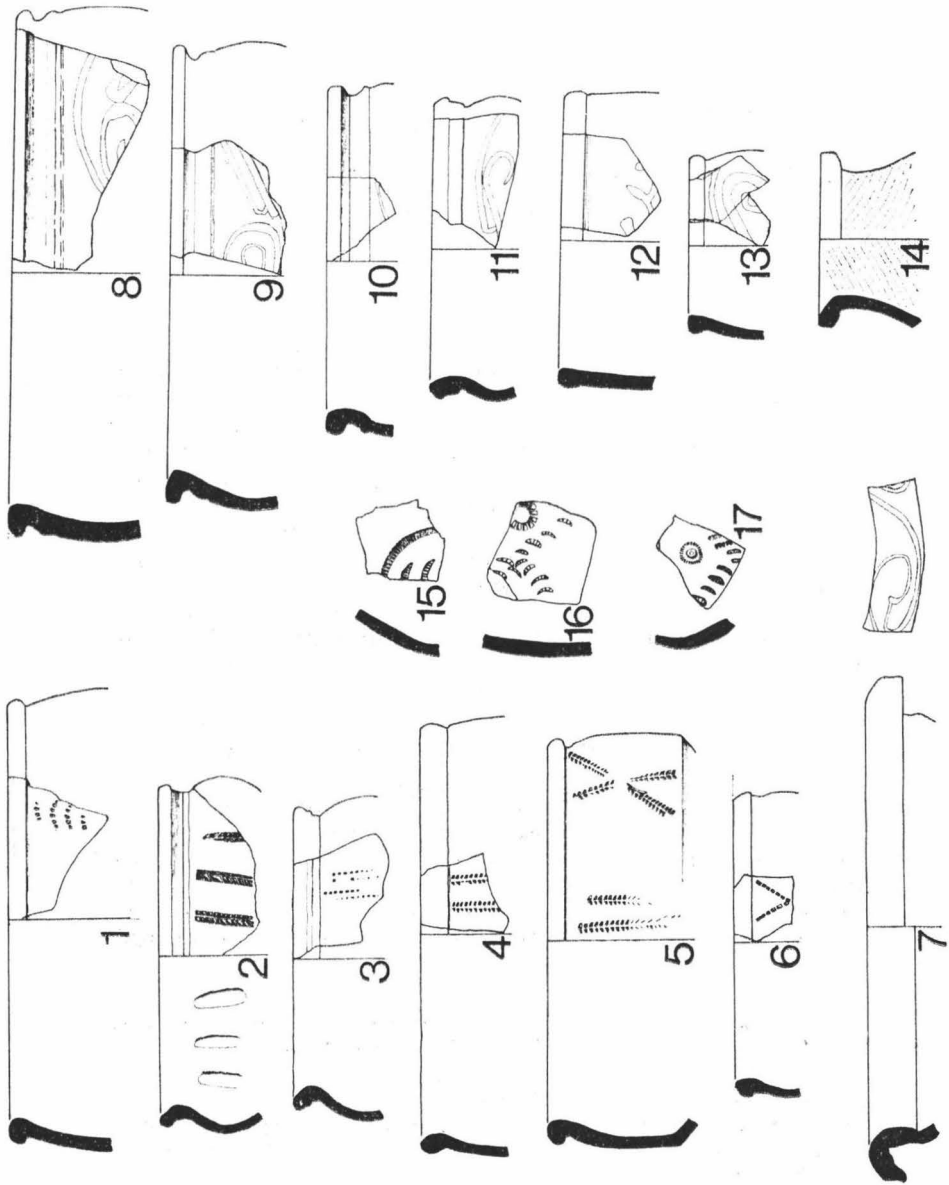


FIG. 1. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$ full size

profile, which is markedly drawn in at the rim (Nos. 2, 3 and 11). Type 5 is similar to Type 3, but it does not appear to be carinated and the rim is thick and bent out (Nos. 8, 9 and 10). Decoration can consist of either white paint (Nos. 8-13), or a variety of impressed motifs. Rosette and demi-rosette occur, as do meandering 'cog' motifs (Nos. 1, 15, 16 and 17), but more common than these are parallel or diagonally opposed lines of wedge-shaped stamps in a \wedge formation (Nos. 2-6). In many cases, especially the latter, these decorations appear to have been made using a single pointed instrument rather than a wheel or whole stamp. Besides the bowl forms, there is one example of a neck of a jar or beaker (No. 14).

The distribution of vessels in this fabric is restricted to the coastal area of Sussex and east Hampshire, while the largest amount comes from Pevensey itself. Less than a dozen sherds are known from Chichester,¹ and at Portchester,² out of a very large sample of fourth century pottery, representing some four to five hundred red colour-coated vessels only sherds belonging to perhaps seventeen vessels of this fabric type were recovered. This accounts for only about 2½% of the colour-coated bowls. Sherds have also been found at Chilgrove villa, near Chichester³ and at Thundersbarrow.⁴ A survey of sites in Kent produced no further material; in particular there appeared to be none at Richborough. Thin section and heavy mineral analysis⁵ failed to give any indication of a possible location for the kilns, but a source either in east Sussex or near Pevensey seems likely, on the grounds that the largest amount of material so far identified comes from there.

The limited distribution suggests that it is a reflection of competition from the Oxford and New Forest industries, though at the same time the survival of the Pevensey fabric implies that the other two groups were unable to compete adequately in this corner

¹ Information from Mr. A. Down, Chichester Excavations Committee.

² From current work on the pottery from Prof. B. W. Cunliffe's recent series of excavations.

³ Information from the excavator, Mr. A. Down.

⁴ K. P. Oakley, *op. cit.*

⁵ Thin section showed abundant rounded haematite grains and some quartz in an anisotropic matrix of baked clay. The diameter of the haematite grains averaged 0.168mm., while that of the quartz averaged 0.042mm. Heavy mineral analysis revealed a very few minerals whose characteristics had been distorted, apparently by the high temperature of the firing. Owing to the difficulty of characterising the fabric an experiment was carried out to see whether there was any possibility of Pevensey ware being a high fired version of an Oxfordshire fabric, since the resemblances in form were so close. A piece of the latter was re-fired up to 1200C., but did not show any effects similar to those present in Pevensey ware.

of the province, possibly because it was out of reach of the primary marketing area. The best route of access for the Oxfordshire products was via the Thames by sea, which, in the fourth century, was not perhaps very safe, while the New Forest products were best marketed by sea, or through a town like Chichester, which was remote to east Sussex.

Dating the group must at present be provisional, until much more evidence is available. At Chilgrove a late fourth or early fifth century date seems likely, while at Thundersbarrow No. 5 comes from a corn-drying oven and is associated with a coin of Constans, dated c. 348-50.¹ At Pevensey itself, as there are no well-dated groups, the dating must be vague and can only depend on general associations. Coin evidence points to the building of the fort wall after 335² and to intensive occupation in the middle of the fourth century.³ There are also associations with Oxfordshire ware, current throughout the century, and with Argonne ware which falls in to Hübener's Groups 1, 2, 3 and 7, dated broadly 325-425.⁴ At Portchester (c. 280-c. 370), of the thirteen stratified examples, five belong to contexts pre-340, while the rest are later.

The evidence points, then, to a date towards the middle of the fourth century for the floruit of this type, but the end can only be guessed at, perhaps in the fifth century. The tradition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle gives a date of 491 for the capture of Anderida (Pevensey) by Aelle and the Saxons, although this date is probably too old by twenty years,⁵ and it is just conceivable that this local Roman industry continued well in to the fifth century. Presumably a concern which was only serving a local market might continue longer, being less susceptible to the widespread disruptions of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, which would be more likely to have an immediate effect on the larger industries dependent on a wider market.

¹ E. C. Curwen, 'Excavations on Thundersbarrow Hill, Sussex,' *Antiquaries Journal*, vol. 13 (1933), p. 123.

² J. P. Bushe-Fox, 'Some notes on Roman Coast defences,' *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 32 (1932), p. 67.

³ Cf. the evidence of the coin histogram (fig. 36) and the argument for a foundation date for the fort in the mid-fourth century in B. W. Cunliffe (ed.), *Fifth Report on the Excavation of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent* (1968), pp. 265-7.

⁴ W. Hübener, 'Eine Studie zur spätrömische Rädchensigillata (Argonnen-sigillata),' *Bonner Jahrbuch*, vol. 168 (1968), pp. 241-98.

⁵ J. Morris, 'Dark Age Dates,' in M. G. Jarrett and B. Dobson (eds), *Britain and Rome* (1965), p. 157.