

# A CELTIC FARM ON BLACKPATCH

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THE block of downland between the Arun Valley to the west and the Findon-Washington road to the east consists of a central plateau which slopes gently southwards from the northern escarpment to Wepham Down, Harrow Hill, and Blackpatch. This plateau was examined and partly surveyed by the Doctors Curwen (*S.A.C.* 1923, vol. LXIV), who demonstrated that it contained at least one Celtic field system, and was the seat of several small agricultural communities in the Roman and Medieval periods.

The easiest and most direct approach to the area from the coastal plain is through the valley which runs up to Cock Hill between Harrow Hill on the west and Blackpatch on the east.

The air photograph (Plate I) shows a small inclosure at the head of the valley on Cock Hill (1), and one on either side, namely on New Barn Down to the south of Harrow Hill (2), and on the south-west slope of Blackpatch (3). The two latter lie in the middle of and form part of Celtic field systems. All three inclosures were originally discovered by the Doctors Curwen.

The inclosure on New Barn Down (2) was excavated by the Worthing Archaeological Society (*S.A.C.* 1934, vol. LXXV), and found to be a small farm of the Late Bronze Age. That on Cock Hill (1) was surveyed by Doctor Curwen (*S.A.C.* 1922, vol. LXIII). Trial pits dug recently by the writers have produced Late Bronze Age pottery low down in the coarse silt of the ditch, which indicates that this inclosure may prove to be of similar date.

The third inclosure, on the south-west slope of Blackpatch (3) has not previously been described, though Doctor Curwen had made a note of it on his copy of the 6-inch O.S. map. When it was noted by the writers, the bulldozers were already obliterating all traces of the flint

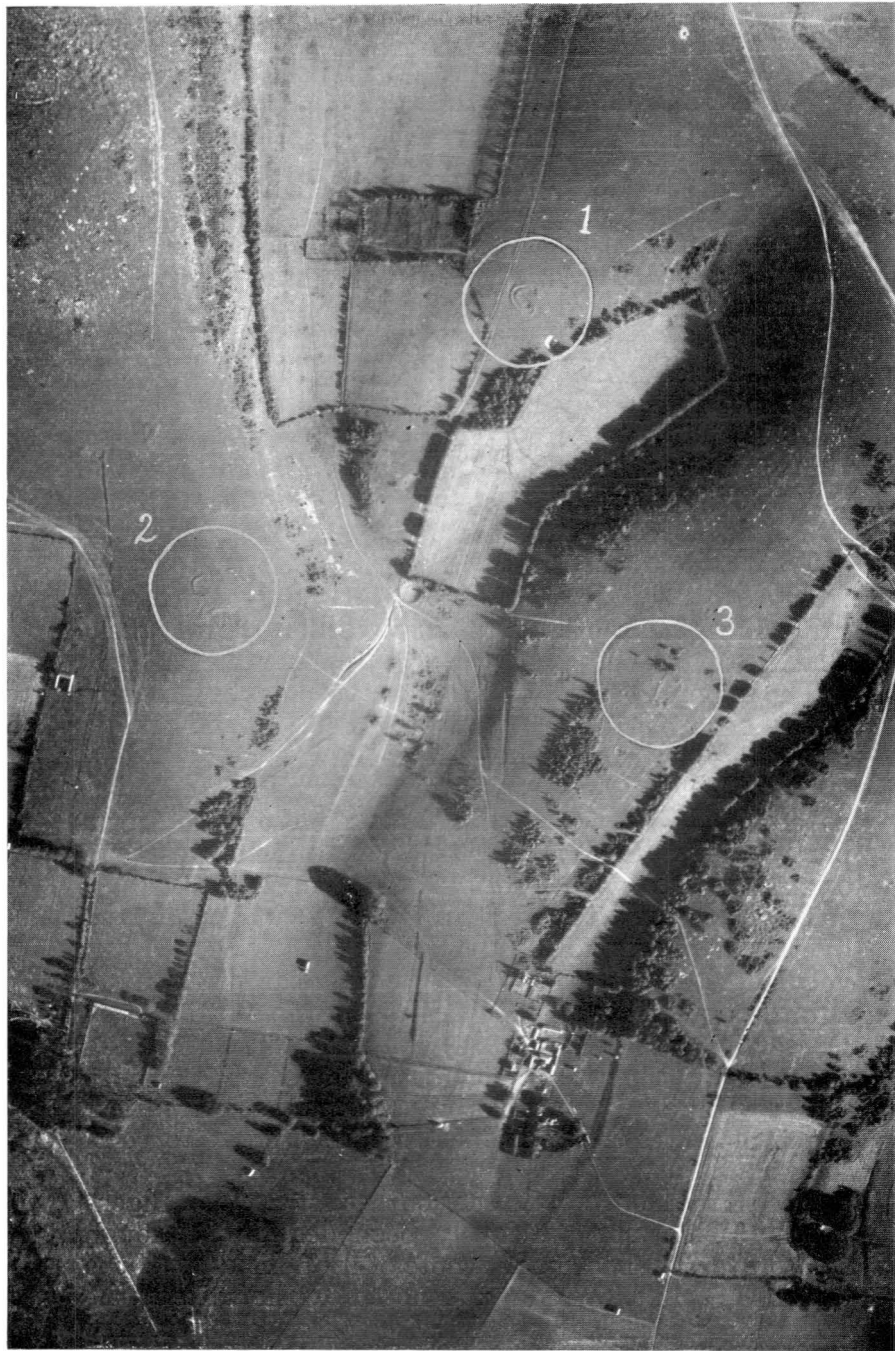


PLATE I. BLACKPATCH FROM THE AIR

mines on the adjacent slope of Blackpatch, and the whole area was scheduled for immediate deep ploughing, so that it was decided to survey it and to excavate as much of it as time allowed. The farmers, Messrs. Jenkins, readily gave permission and instructed the ploughmen not to destroy the excavations.

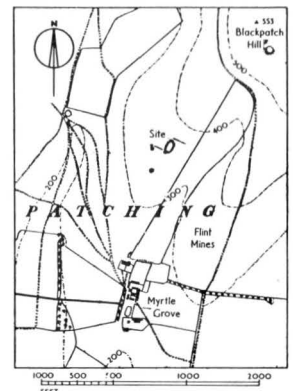
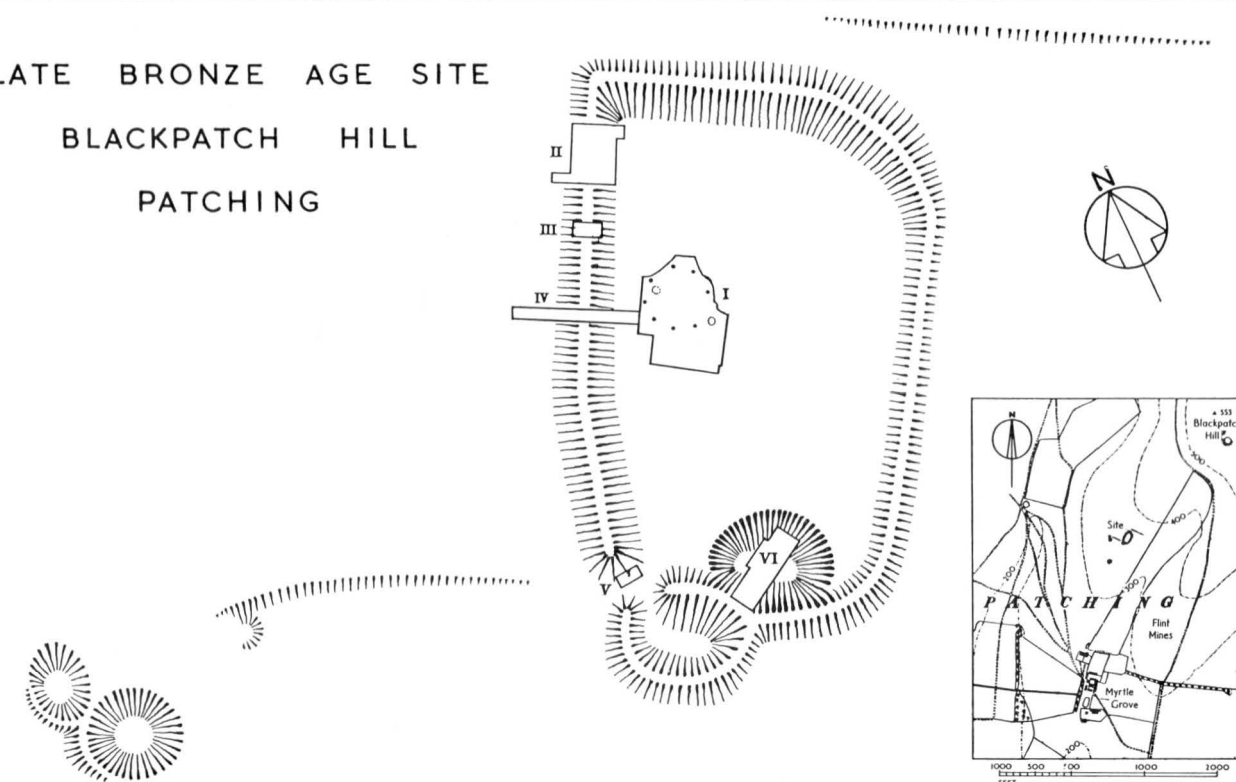
The inclosure (Fig. 1) with its associated lynchet system was situated near the middle of the slope: Lat. 50 52' 16" N., Long. 0 26' 50" W., 6-inch O.S. sheet L (S.E.). It consisted of a roughly rectangular area, 140 ft.  $\times$  90 ft., with its long axis 27° true. It was bounded by a low bank with an entrance at the south-west corner. An oval depression (A), 40 ft.  $\times$  30 ft., lay against the inside of the south bank, and a similar oval depression (B) of almost identical size lay against the outside of the south bank just south of the entrance.

The north bank of the inclosure continued at each end as a lynchet, running across the slope of the hill, and was itself a double lynchet about 2 ft. 6 in. high. The east and west banks were about 10 in. high and 27 ft. in width. The west bank turned at a right angle at its lower end, where it formed the north side of the entrance, and ran down the slope in a westerly direction as a lynchet. Thus it is clear that the inclosure formed part of the lynchet system.

### CUTTING I (FIG. 2)

This was made near the centre of the west side of the inclosure, where the ground appeared to have been slightly levelled, and there were scattered surface sherds of Bronze Age pottery and pot-boilers. It revealed a circular hut site (Plate II), approximately 20 ft. in diameter, which consisted of eight circular post holes, a storage pit, and a cooking pit. The post holes were roughly 7 ft. apart, except nos. 1 and 8 in the south-east sector, which were 11 ft. apart and, presumably, formed the entrance to the hut. The post holes varied in depth from 12½ to 20 in. and in diameter from 12 to 14 in. They each contained from eight to twenty large tabular

LATE BRONZE AGE SITE  
BLACKPATCH HILL  
PATCHING



# CUTTING I

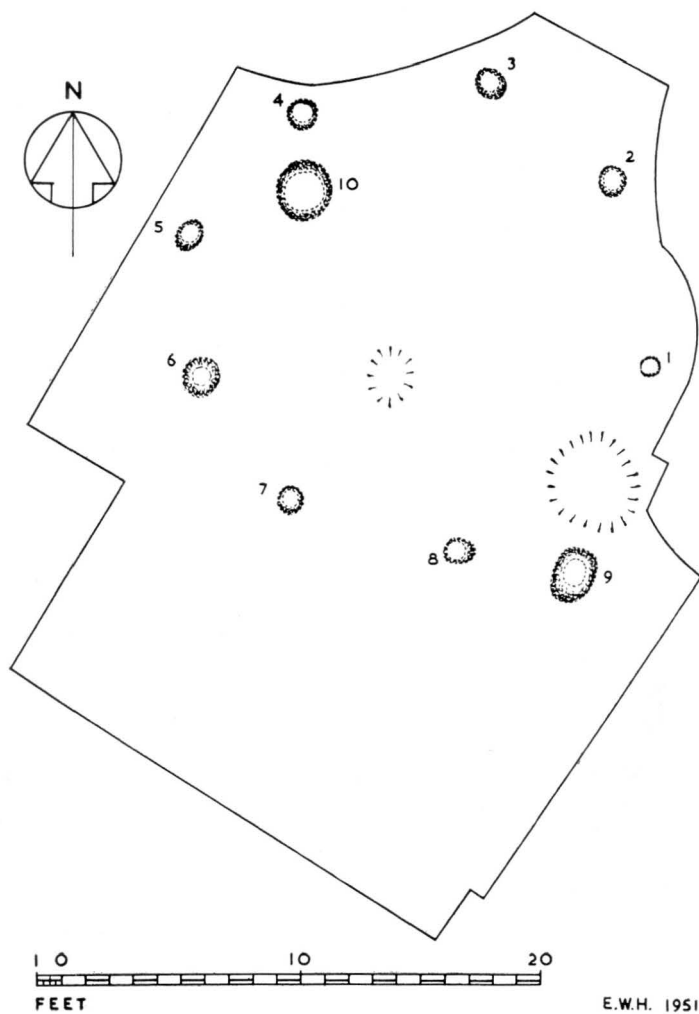


FIG. 2. BLACKPATCH: CUTTING I

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packing flints, and up to more than a hundred pot-boilers. Small fragments of carbonized oak were found near the bottom of holes 3, 4, and 6. Sherds of Late



PLATE II. BLACKPATCH: HUT SITE

Bronze Age pottery were found near the top of holes 2, 6, and 7.

The storage pit (hole 10, Fig. 2; and Plate III) was situated in the north-west part of the hut, as far from the entrance as possible. It was roughly circular (diameter 29 in. and depth 16 in.). It contained fragments of a saddle quern, parts of a large Deverel-Rimbury

urn (Fig. 3, A), carbonized oak, and large flints in a matrix of brown earth, with small chalk rubble at the sides.



PLATE III. BLACKPATCH: STORAGE PIT

The cooking pit (hole 9) lay just outside the entrance to the south-east, and was oval in shape (3 ft.  $\times$  20 in. diameter by 1 ft. deep). It was full of pot-boilers, and contained two sherds of Bronze Age pottery.

The floor of the hut was covered with pot-boilers and sherds of Bronze Age pottery, mainly Deverel-Rimbury urns, also a flint scraper and knife. The intact skeleton

of a lamb or kid was buried between post holes 6 and 7, and may have been sacrificial in purpose. Practically no pottery or pot-boilers were found outside the hut except near the entrance.

Cuttings II, III, and IV were made through the west bank, and revealed the following features. The bank was made of rammed chalk, with a sort of revetment of

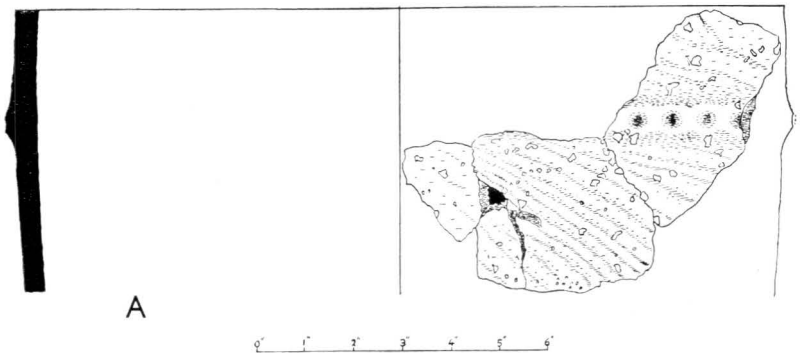


FIG. 3. POTTERY FROM BLACKPATCH EXCAVATION  
A. From Storage Pit

large tabular flints on either side. There was a slight depression on either side into which many of the flints had slid, but there was no true ditch. There were no post holes, but all over the bank were irregular, tapering holes which contained earth varying in colour from brown to black, and which were obviously made by the root systems of shrubs and trees. The root system of a large tree was found in the outer side of the bank in the north part of cutting II, and that of another tree, which contained a sherd of Bronze Age pottery, in cutting III. Similar root holes were found in the south bank where it appeared in cutting VI. It is thus clear that the south and west banks, at any rate, were not crowned by a stockade but by a thick hedge which contained trees of considerable size.

Cutting V, which was actually extended farther in all directions than is shown in Fig. 1, was made across the north side of the entrance to the inclosure. It revealed



that there were no post holes, but that bushes had reached right down to the entrance.

All the Late Bronze Age farms on the Sussex Downs which have so far been investigated contain large depressions near the entrance to their inclosures whose significance has not been determined with any certainty. It has been suggested that they may have been connected in some way with the unsolved problem of the water supply to the settlements. The great difficulty of this explanation is the porous nature of the upper chalk. Both the depressions in the present site sloped gradually up to the entrance—pit A to the inside, and pit B to the outside of the south bank.

### THE DEPRESSIONS

Cutting VI, Fig. 1, was made right across the south bank where it separated pits A and B, and was continued in a direction  $65^\circ$  (true) right across depression A for a distance of 25 ft. It revealed the following facts.

The depression was bowl-shaped and sloped gradually down to its centre, which was 4 ft. 4 in. below a line joining its north edge to the top of the south bank. It had been cut into the virgin chalk. Broken patinated flints filled the bottom up to a level floor, which extended over an area 15 ft. in diameter. Thus the depth of flints was about 20 in. in the centre and decreased until virgin chalk was reached 7 ft. 6 in. from it. The flints lay very loosely, and could easily be picked out by hand. Fine black earth filled the crevices between them, and formed the base of the overlying turf. Thus there was practically no chalk at all in the filling of the depression: it had apparently all been used for the south and east banks. The chalk floor of the depression was not puddled. Water poured into it at any stage of the excavation disappeared almost immediately.

The following objects were scattered among the flints down to the underlying chalk without any stratification:

1. Most of the base of a thick, globular Late Bronze Age pot with a flat base. Moderately worn.

2. A large number of sherds of very coarse Bronze Age pottery. Much worn.
3. Several sherds of a small Hallstatt pot with a rather sharp shoulder and a smooth rust-coloured surface.
4. A few sherds of later Iron Age pots with black, burnished surfaces and much finer paste, containing a little fine flint grit. One sherd is wheel-turned.
5. Many sherds of much-worn Roman grey ware and a few sherds of buff ware.
6. A sherd of *Terra Sigillata* (Dragendorf form 37) with leaf decoration. Flavian. Probably south Gaulish.
7. A Roman nail and a small piece of sheet bronze.
8. Part of a much-worn human mandible, probably that of an old woman.
9. Several fragments of long bones, split for marrow extraction. These include a fragment of human femur and one of pig.
10. Numerous animal teeth.
11. Several oyster shells.
12. One oval and two long flint scrapers.
13. Ten flint knives of various shapes.
14. Many flint flakes all very deeply patinated white.
15. A small amount of oak charcoal.
16. Some hundreds of 'pot-boilers' and several rounded beach pebbles.

In addition there were two very unusual items, namely, a coin from central Gaul which had been cast in a mould, and three hand-worked disks of tabular flint.

The coin (Plate IV), which was in mint condition, was reported on by Mr. G. N. Jenkins of the British Museum as follows: 'I think this coin is Gallic. This type of bronze cast piece hails mostly from Central Gaul (Loire Valley, &c.), but I cannot trace anything exactly like it either in our collection or in Blanchet's *Traité des Monnaies Gauloises* or in La Tour's *Atlas des Monnaies Gauloises*. However, it must, I think, be this class of thing.'

Mr. Mattingly, in a postscript, wrote: 'This should be first century B.C. A Gaulish equivalent of our Belgic coins.'

The three disks were identical in appearance and size. Each had been chipped from a piece of tabular flint by about sixteen oblique blows into a circle with a bevelled edge, having a diameter of 1.1 in. on one face, of 0.9 in. on the other, and a thickness of 0.2 in. The larger faces

were all smooth, while the smaller ones were slightly roughened. They had a heavy, white patina. Presumably they were used for some game.

The cutting was extended most of the way along the top of the south bank in a very careful search for post holes, but none were found. The bank had been surmounted by a hedge, like the west one, and had been



PLATE IV. GAULISH COIN FROM BLACKPATCH

built up to the level of the lower end of the inclosure in such a way that the depression A resembled a pond with the inclosure as its catchment area.

The absolutely clean-cut, untrodden, and sloping nature of the chalk bottom of the depression, without much sign of burning, excludes its use as a fire pit or oven and, coupled with the absence of post holes, excludes its use as an underground dwelling. Nevertheless, the position of the contained objects indicates that it was probably in use for some purpose, without its present turf covering, from the Late Bronze Age to the Flavian period. In addition a sloping approach had been worn to it from the entrance to the inclosure, whence a track under its associated lynchet ran down the westward slope into the valley. In the opinion of the writers the most probable solution is that the depression was a pond which was lined with flints and a mixture of puddled

clay and straw, rushes, or similar organic material which would dry and carbonize into a black powdery substance, thus allowing the flints to slide into a loose heap at the bottom of the depression. Water coming in contact with the underlying chalk would soak through it and not puddle it unless it were churned up.

It was only possible to make rapid trial holes in depression B while ploughing was actually in progress. No artifacts were discovered, but it was ascertained that the filling consisted of flints with practically no chalk and, relatively, much more soil than in depression A, the soil being much less black and more clayey, which indicated a much smaller admixture of organic matter. The underlying chalk was scarcely puddled.

The writers were able to examine the corresponding depression at Itford Hill when it was being excavated by Mr. Holden. It was filled with flints and clay without any artifacts. It was smaller and shallower than depression A. Its chalk floor was not puddled.

Dr. E. C. Curwen found the chalk floor immediately under the turf in the two depressions on New Barn Down. In only one was the chalk floor puddled. The contained artifacts were very similar to those found in depression A (*S.A.C.* 1934, LXXV. 137).

The writers have been unable to ascertain the contents of the depressions marked as ponds in the inclosures on Plumpton Plain (*P.P.S.* 1935, I. 16).

The contemporary settlement at Winterbourne Gunner in Wiltshire apparently contained no depressions (*P.P.S.* 1941, II. 114).

Depressions of similar type exist on the surrounding Downs in connexion with the following settlements:

1. Park Brow (Hallstatt).
2. Findon Park (la Tène).
3. Thornwick Barn (Roman).
4. Middle Brow (Roman).
5. Tolmere Pond (Roman).
6. The north slope of Harrow Hill (Roman).
7. Peppering Bottom (probably Roman).
8. Chantry Bottom (Roman and Medieval).
9. Martin's Croft (Medieval).
10. Cobden Farm (Medieval).

The 'Circus' on Park Brow is the only one of these

depressions which has been excavated, so far as the writers are aware.

The depressions in the Iron Age Hill Forts have been discussed by Dr. E. C. Curwen in relation to their water supply in his *Archaeology of Sussex*, p. 250.

### DISCUSSION

This little farm resembles in its main features the three others of the same period which have so far been excavated in Sussex. The inclosures were all of similar shape, were surrounded by banks, and contained huts and depressions. This farm had simple banks without stockades or ditches but surmounted by hedges like that on Plumpton Plain 'A'. One hut only was excavated, though others might have been found if time had allowed. Each inclosure on Plumpton Plain contained only one hut. The size and shape of the huts and the size of and distances between the post holes were approximately the same in each of the four sites.

Each inclosure formed part of a lynchet system with a field-way ending at its entrance. On Blackpatch the lynchets were ploughed before they could be surveyed, and the air photograph is the only record of them. Each farm was situated near to the centre of a south slope of the Downs with a commanding view of the sea. In each case the querns were saddle-backed and the pottery was Deverel-Rimbury. Bronze was rare and flint tools fairly common. All the huts appear to have been made from oak posts.

There is no conclusive evidence that any of the sites were occupied after the Late Bronze Age, though all contained a few sherds of Iron Age and Roman pottery.

### POTTERY

The pottery found in the hut was of two kinds:

1. Large, barrel-shaped pots of coarse clay, badly baked to a dirty brown colour. The paste of these contained large amounts of very coarse flint grit. They were ornamented by fingertip impressions on raised bands and on the rims (Fig. 3).

2. Smaller, globular pots of much finer clay of a dirty brown colour. These were better baked, contained much finer grit in smaller quantities, and were devoid of orna-

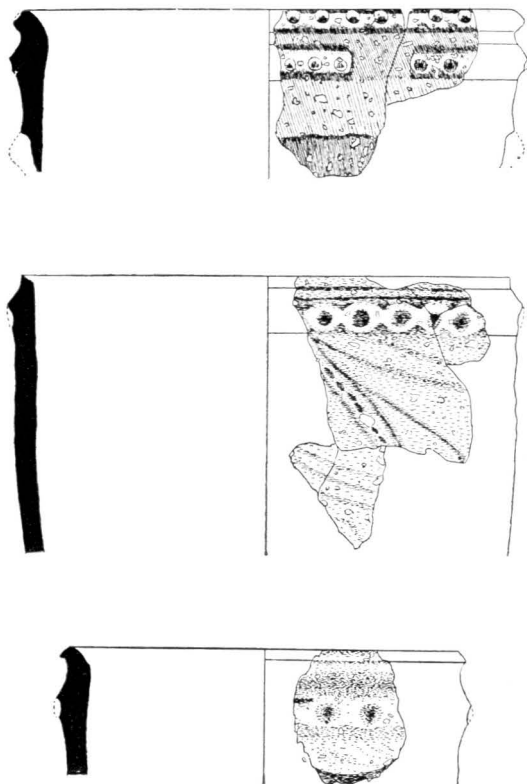


FIG. 4

ment except for an occasional incised line. A handle, probably one of four, belonging to one of these pots was found. No decorated, globular pots of French Middle Bronze Age type were found. In this, Blackpatch differed from New Barn Down and Plumpton Plain, and resembled Itford Hill.

#### SUMMARY

A small farm, coeval with and resembling the one on New Barn Down, has been found on Blackpatch on

the other side of the valley. It has been excavated and is now under crops.

The writers wish to thank the following gentlemen: Mr. E. W. Holden for preparing Fig. 1; Messrs. G. P. Burstow, F.S.A., and N. E. S. Norris, F.S.A., for help and advice in the excavation; Dr. E. C. Curwen, F.S.A., for obtaining Plate IV and for his advice; Mr. G. A. Holleyman, F.S.A., for his advice on the survey and on the excavation of the bank; Sir Edward Salisbury of the Royal Botanical Gardens for his report on the charcoal; Mr. Bruce Mitford of the British Museum for obtaining the report on the coin; Messrs. Jenkins of Myrtle Grove who farm the land and gave all possible help. Plate I is published by permission of the Air Ministry.