Neolithic and Bronze Age Activity in the Harringworth Area

by D A JACKSON

with contributions by
T G MANBY, A W R WHITTLE, ELIZABETH HEALEY
and MARY HARMAN

Extensive quarrying for ironstone has occurred in the Harringworth-Wakerley area of Northamptonshire in the 10 years up to 1978. The removal of topsoil prior to quarrying has enabled archaeological features that range in date from the Neolithic to the Anglo-Saxon periods, to be excavated in advance of destruction.[1]

Considerable post-Bronze Age activity has been recorded and this is described in forthcoming reports. The present paper only describes the pottery and finds from isolated Neolithic and Bronze Age pits, although it can reasonably be assumed that each pit is all that survived of former settlement sites. Other scattered pits have been located which can be assigned to these periods by the soil within them, and flints and pottery were found as residual material during the excavation of Iron Age and Roman sites.

The area under discussion is half a mile from the River Welland and some nine miles upstream (to the south west) from Stamford (general area SP 932974 to SP 942983). Topographically, the sites and features are situated on a broad expanse of Lincolnshire Limestone, which outcrops extensively on the high ground which runs parallel to, and overlooks the lower river valley, at heights between 275 and 350 feet OD.

From the observation of a large area of bedrock over a number of years it is clear that Neolithic and Bronze Age communities used the upper slopes of the Welland Valley, but apart from isolated pits, little trace of their settlements had survived in the area studied.

Thanks are due to the specialists who have contributed to this paper. The pottery from Pits 1 and 3 has been drawn by T G Manby and that from Pit 2 by Mike Rouilland. The flints were drawn by Elizabeth Healey.

PIT 1 (SP 934976)

In 1972 a small pit was revealed which contained pottery of early Neolithic type, in addition to some flint and animal bone. Pottery of early Neolithic date is rare in Northamptonshire.

The pit, which was only 450mm in diameter and 150mm deep, was bowl shaped, and filled with dark silty soil. No other Neolithic features were found in the vicinity of the pit.

[1] The work was carried out by the writer on behalf of the Department of the Environment.

THE POTTERY (FIG 1) *by* T G Manby

The assemblage consists of some 26 sherds and crumbs of varying sizes; the majority are shell gritted and some deeply pitted and weathered.

1. Bowl with out-bent and overhanging rim, over 300 mm internal diameter. Thick heavy, orange-buff to reddish fabric, smoothed exterior, buff to dark grey interior, grey core, laminated structure. Profuse fossil shell grit, particles up to 7 mm long, pieces erupt through the interior surface of the vessel (FIG 1, 1).
2. Rim sherds, flat-topped and externally thickened. In a porous laminated fabric, dark brown with an orange toned exterior. The fabric is deeply pitted by the solution of the tempering agent, probably a material softer than fossil shell (FIG 1, 2).
3. Two joining sherds of a small bowl, expanded and externally bevelled, internal diameter 100 mm. Dark brown laminated fabric with profuse fossil shell, pieces up to 7 mm long, erupting through both surfaces. The exterior of the rounded rim bevel is decorated with shallow radial strokes made by a round sectioned tool (FIG 1, 3).

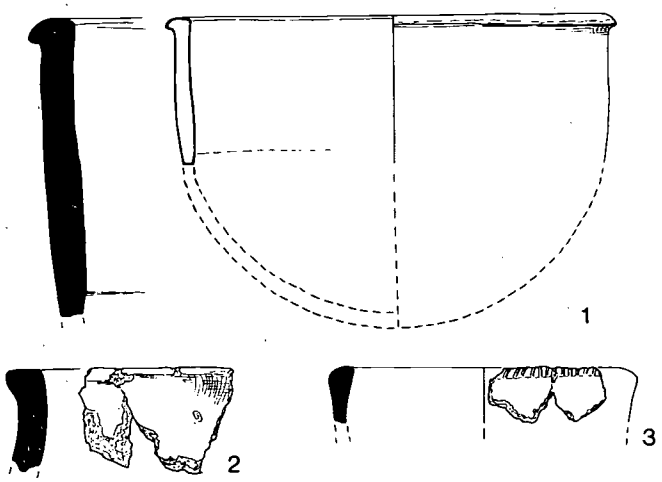

Fig 1 Harringworth: Neolithic pottery from Pit 1 (1/3; reconstruction of no 1 1/6)

The remainder of the sherds belong to three or four thin-walled vessels in shell gritted fabrics, orange to buff in colour with dark interiors and cores. There are also three sherds in a dark grey sandy fabric.

This small assemblage from Harringworth comes from an area, the Northamptonshire Uplands and flanking river-valleys, where Neolithic pottery finds have been few. Parallels must be sought in the Fenland Basin to the east and both northwards and southwards along the Jurassic Ridge.

Three elements at once distinguish the Harringworth pottery from the Grimston style material at Fengate, Peterborough (Pryor 1974). These are the use of crushed fossil shell as a tempering agent; the heavy over-hanging rim form of bowl (FIG 1, 1) and the radial stroke decoration on top of the rim (FIG 1, 3). Fossil shell grit had been employed in some of the plain earlier Neolithic pottery found at the Aldwincle site (Jackson 1976) in the Nene Valley some ten miles south of Harringworth. It was also used for a small carinated bowl found at Great Ponton, near Grantham, some 21 miles to the north on the continuation of the Jurassic Ridge in south eastern Lincolnshire. Fossil shell grit was a favoured tempering agent employed for pottery of the Neolithic Abingdon, Mildenhall and Whitehawk styles in south eastern England.

DETAILED FEATURE COMPARISONS OF THE HARRINGWORTH ASSEMBLAGE

1. Closed bowls with heavy over-hanging rims (FIG 1, 1): Maiden Bower causewayed camp, Bedfordshire. Piggott, *Archaeol J* 88 (1931), 90 and 134, FIG 6, 9. A bowl with radial stroke decoration on the rim. Abingdon style assemblage.

Abingdon causewayed camp, Berkshire. Leeds, *Antiq J* 7 (1927), 451, FIG 2, 10 and 12; 8, b; the latter belongs to a very tall type of vessel unlike the majority of bowls which are hemispherical. Leeds, *Antiq J* 8 (1928), 473, FIG 4. Case, *Antiq J* 36 (1956), 20-22, FIG 3, 10; 4,28. Bowls in both shell and stone gritted fabrics.

Windmill Hill causewayed camp, Wiltshire. Smith, *Windmill Hill and Avebury* (1965), 48-50, FIG 11. Heavy over-hanging rims are grouped in Class C as 'externally enlarged'. This class is numerically the largest of the six rim classes distinguished at this site, but not all belong to vessels of simple bowl shape like the Harringworth vessel. The form does occur in both stone and shell gritted fabrics; some vessels have lugs on the body and others have shallow incised decoration: Smith 1965, FIG 17, P 61, P 62; FIG 18, P 71, P 74; FIG 22, P 106, P 107; FIG 24, P 146.

Mildenhall Fen, Cambridgeshire. Clark *et al, Proc Prehist Soc* 26 (1960), 230, FIG 21, P 1-9. The overhanging rims vary in character and are on bag-shaped vessels. Various stone grits were used at this site and any shell grit would have been dissolved by the acid soil producing the 'corky' fabric at this site.

Whiteleaf Hill, Buckinghamshire. Childe and Smith, *Proc Prehist Soc* 20 (1954), 224, FIG 6, 23. Overhanging rims of various forms are usually at this site on shouldered or S-profiled vessels.

2. *Thick rim with flat top, externally expanded.* Mildenhall Fen. Clark *et al* (1960). FIG 26, P 57 on a shouldered bowl, the rim is also slightly expanded internally. Bowls of this form in stone gritted fabrics are also present at: Ty Isaf, Brecknockshire, Grimes, *Proc Prehist Soc* 5 (1939), 133, FIG 6, 3. Towthorpe Barrow 18 and Rudston Barrow 61, Yorkshire, Newbiggin, *Proc Prehist Soc* 3 (1937), 211-212, FIG 2, 7-8.

3. *Small bowl with radial stroke decoration on the rim.* Abingdon causewayed camp. Leeds 1928, 455, PL 72, FIG 2. N. Mildenhall Fen, Clarke *et al* (1960), 239, FIG 25-27. Tom Tivey's Hole, near Leighton, Somerset, Barrett, *Proc Univ Bristol Speleol Soc* 11 (1966), 18, FIG 5, 1. This shell gritted bowl is the same diameter as the Harringworth vessel and is its best parallel.

From this review the Harringworth assemblage has its best parallels in the Abingdon style of the earlier Neolithic, with elements that occur also at the regionally adjacent Mildenhall style sites.

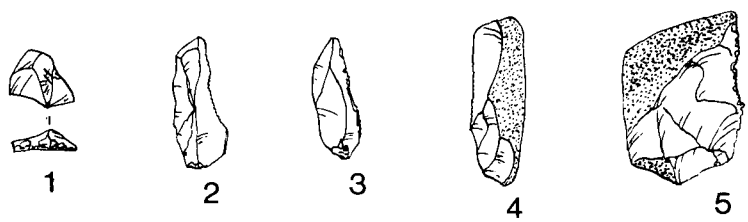

Fig 2 Harringworth: flints from Pit 1 (½)

THE FLINT *by* Elizabeth Healey (FIG 2)

A group of 18 struck flints was found in Pit 1 with the earlier Neolithic pottery. It includes 14 waste flakes and 4 serrated flakes. Seventeen of the flakes have a white patina (only on the tip of no 2), and one has been burnt). Cortex was present on four flakes. The dimensions of the unbroken flint are given below:

Breadth in mm \ Length in mm	0	10	20	30	40	50	Total
10	1	1	1	—	—		3
20	1	—	1	2**	2*		6
30	—	—	—	—	—		—
40	—	—	—	1*	—		1
50	—	—	1	—	—		1
Total	2	1	3	3	2		11

* Serrated.

The flakes then vary from small spalls to larger flakes; the broken flakes were also amongst the larger ones, several of which are blade-like. Although no flakes could be fitted together it is likely that several came from the same core. The cores have been systematically worked, but only two have scars of flakes struck from other platforms. Two small flakes include part of an earlier striking platform like no 1. This also has random striation marks on its back, but there is no indication of polishing and it is probably the result of accidental damage.

The serrated flakes (nos 2-5) have minute denticulations along one edge, formed by the removal of tiny spalls from the vertical face at regular intervals; there are between 11 and 13 teeth per cm. All have a narrow band of lustre on the ventral face along the toothed edge; (this is also present on the damaged centre part of no 3, the teeth of which were presumably broken in use). No modification to the blank is apparent, (Smith 1965, 91-2), but two flakes have cortex on the opposite edge and two have signs of utilization, possibly a type of backing. Three of the flakes are thin (5mm or under) and blade-like, but the fourth (no 5) is squat and over 10mm thick.

Serrated flakes are found in industries of Mesolithic and Neolithic traditions, and there is no reason to doubt their association with the pottery here.

THE ANIMAL BONES *by* Mary Harman

There is a very small quantity of bone, fairly well preserved but badly broken. The majority of the fragments are identifiable.

Two species are represented; cattle and pig. The cattle bones are: R. ulna fragment (sub adult), proximal end of R. metatarsal, parts two first phalanges, parts two third phalanges, all of domestic cattle size. The pig bones are: one skull frontal fragment, two nasal fragments, one molar tooth fragment and one third molar with the first cusps slightly worn, L. humerus shaft fragment, R. calcaneum (sub adult), tarsal, metapodial, one second phalanx (immature and calcined); none are of such size as to suggest wild pig.

One fragment may be part of the radius shaft, possibly from a sheep. There are also two fragments of large ribs, and four of small ribs (cattle and pig size).

A group of this sort is not uncommon on a lowland Neolithic site, but it is not large enough to draw any further conclusions.

PIT 2 (SP 934977).

A late Neolithic pit was found in 1975, some 100m south of Pit 1. The pit, which was irregular in shape, had a maximum diameter of 930mm and a minimum diameter of 500mm. It was 180mm deep. The filling consisted of gingery brown stony soil containing a few burnt stones. Approximately 190 sherds of pottery were found in the pit, along with one struck flake. No other features were found in the vicinity of the pit.

THE FINDS *by* A W R Whittle

Pottery (FIG 3)

Approximately 190 sherds (1.4kg) of Late Neolithic Beaker pottery were recovered from the pit described above by Mr Jackson, including 3 rims, 5 flat base sherds, and 47 decorated body sherds; the rest were plain body sherds.

Two main fabrics are represented:

1. (182 sherds). Light reddish brown to brown exteriors, dark interiors, surfaces uneven but smooth; sherds 5 to 8mm thick; very soapy compact fabric with very sparse sandy filler and occasional calcareous inclusions and larger stone grits up to 5mm; breaks weathered.

This includes the rim and base sherds and all but 7 of the decorated body sherds. One rim (FIG 3, 2) is everted, with an external pinched up cordon below it, above a concave neck. The other two rim sherds probably belong to a separate pot (FIG 3, 1), with a similar though slightly more open profile. The base sherds (FIG 3, 3) may all belong to one pot, some 90mm in diameter at the base, and with well out-turned lower walls. Six decorative techniques are represented by the decorated body sherds (numbers of sherds in brackets):

a. (6) Closely spaced horizontal parallel lines of fine stamp or comb (FIG 3, 4).

b. (2) Parallel horizontal lines of larger stamp or comb (FIG 3, 5).

c. (4) Fine, parallel, horizontal but discontinuous incised lines (FIG 3, 6).

d. (23) Parallel, horizontal grooved lines, both continuous and broken but overlapping (FIG 3, 7-10).

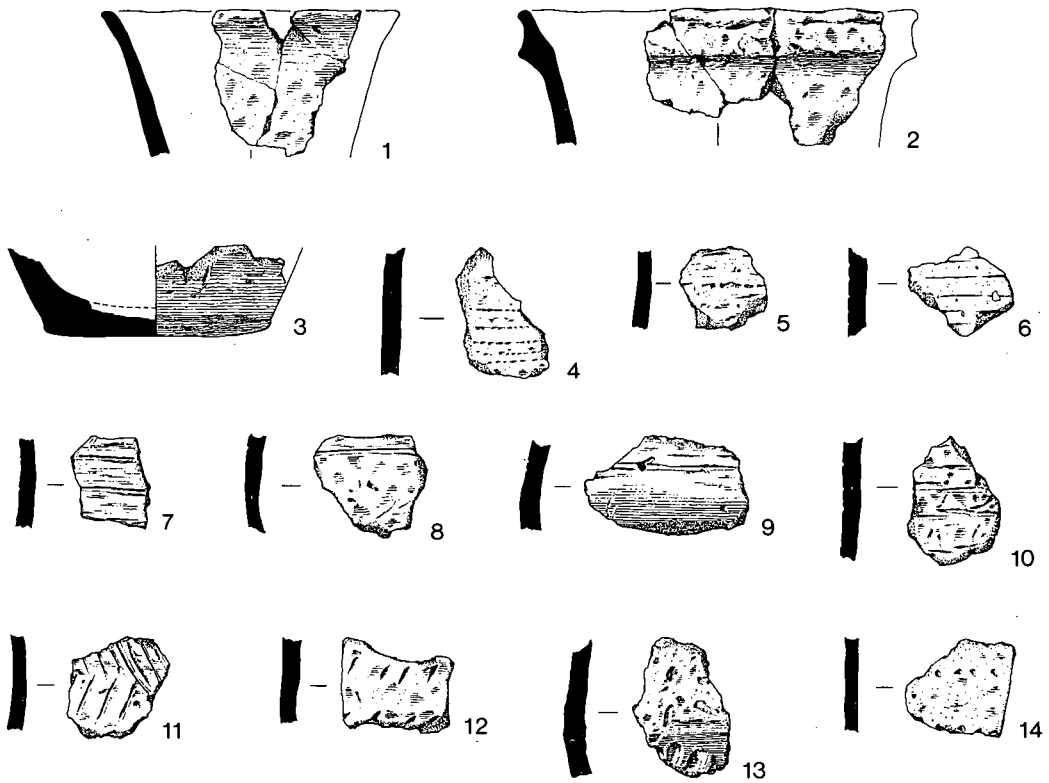

Fig 3 Harringworth: Beaker pottery from Pit 2 (1/3)

e. (3) Parallel grooved lines in chevron motif (FIG 3, 11).

f. Parallel lines of finger nail and tip impressions (FIG 3, 12-13).

2. (8 body sherds). Light reddish brown exteriors, dark interiors; surfaces smooth and even though weathered; sherds 4mm thick; soapy compact fabric with dense sandy filler; breaks weathered. Seven are decorated with parallel horizontal lines of small jabbed impressions (FIG 3, 14).

Form, decoration and to some extent fabric indicate that the pots represented were Beakers. The pots were sparsely decorated and some may have been plain. Given its context, this might be considered a domestic assemblage. Several pots may be represented. The everted rims, bellied body sherds and flat bases are not however distinctive enough to allow more than a general comparison to either Middle or Late style Beaker forms (as defined by Case 1977). Pinched up cordons also occur right through the Beaker sequence (Clarke 1970, 37). The decorative techniques represented are also undiagnostic in themselves and are found in both the Middle and Late styles. The only specific motif, the chevron on FIG 3, 11, has a similar range of occurrence. The lack of diagnostic traits however, compared with the Beakers commonly found in graves, may be characteristic of so-called domestic assemblages which may allow slightly more precise dating. Plain vessels and finger nail-and-tipping decoration (characteristic of the FN group) were considered by Clarke (1970, 43) to be typical of earlier rather than later such domestic assemblages, especially of his AOC, E and W/MR groups, which fall into Case's Early and Middle phases and most probably in this case given the other decorative techniques used into the latter. The assemblage may then belong to the Middle Beaker phase, dating in conventional radiocarbon chronology from about 2000 to 1800 bc. The term 'domestic assemblage' however should be used cautiously, for it is noticeable that convincing settlement traces as such are much more common in the Late Beaker phase than before (eg Clarke 1970, Groups S1-4, N3-4, *passim*) and that Clarke's FN group, earlier rather than later in date, occurs mainly either in graves or in isolated pits such as here and is at least partly 'domestic' by virtue of its decoration.

Struck Flint

One short (30mm) partly cortical waste flake was also recovered.

PIT 3 (SP 939982).

A Bronze Age pit was found during the excavation of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery in 1970. Apart from a small amount of pottery the only finds were some burnt hazel nut shells. The pit, which was bowl shaped, was on average 1.1 m in diameter and 200 mm deep. It was filled with dark stony soil.

Some 27 m to the north of the pit a single deep post hole, filled with dark soil, was found. Fragments of Bronze Age pottery were found embedded in the subsoil around the post hole, possibly suggesting that this was a hut site.

THE POTTERY (FIG 4) *by* T G Manby

All the sherds are small and fragmentary (FIG 4).

1. Beaker. Reddish to orange, fine sand grit. Faint comb decoration of reserve lozenge type.
2. Collared Urn, three sherds of a collar including three of the lower edge. Orange buff exterior, dark grey interior and core. Thick coarse cord decoration.
3. Neck fragment of a collared urn of medium size, probably the same as no 2. Smooth buff exterior, brown interior, dark grey core. One row of incised herring-bone decoration and traces of a second row below. There are also two body fragments in this fabric (not illustrated).

4-7. There are five small sherds and 6 crumbs in a deeply weathered and pitted dark grey fabric with orange surfaces. Decorated with incised lines in a herring-bone pattern on the exterior (4-5) and a lattice arrangement on the interior (4-7). These fragments may have come from the neck of a small collared urn.

8. (Not illustrated). A small sherd in a collared urn fabric, orange exterior, dark grey core.

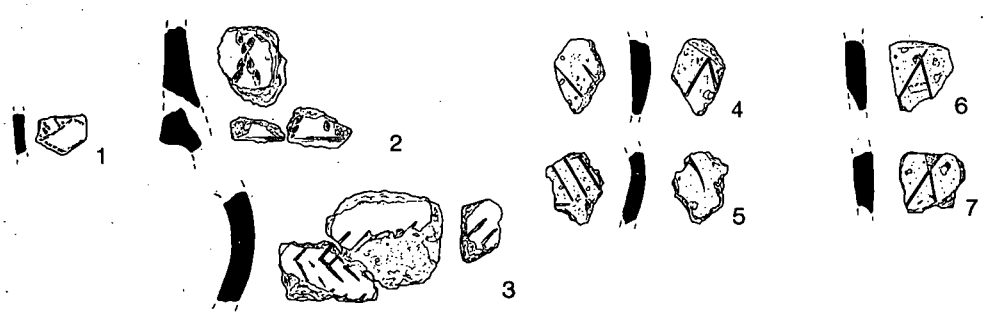

Fig 4 Harringworth: pottery from Pit 3 (1/3)

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