

Notes

THE EGG RINGS: A DEFENDED ENCLOSURE IN SALCEY FOREST (FIG 1)

The existence of a defended enclosure at SP802502 in Prentice Copse, a southern limb of Salcey Forest in the parish of Hartwell, Northants, was first referred to by Whetton in 1849¹, and has from time to time been visited by fieldworkers², notably Miss J N Morris and W B Hatherley in 1948, but the lack of a proper survey has prevented it from becoming better known³. The earthwork, which is remarkably upstanding, has apparently been saved from levelling by being contained within the forest which was established at least as early as the 13th century and has been little disturbed since. Today the whole of the earthwork is planted with larch and administered by the Forestry Commission, and no more than a dozen yards can be seen in any direction at any one time.

The earthwork occupies gravel subsoiled land gently dipping to the east, at approximately 390 ft above sea level. It comprises a single bank and ditch enclosing a roughly kidney shaped area of 1.185 ha (2.45 acres), the total aggregate width of bank and ditch being some 20m (66 ft). At its maximum the crest of the bank is approximately 1.2m above the silted ditch bottom. The circuit is interrupted at two points on its eastern, downhill, side, the more northerly gap being considered in this survey as being an original entrance on the basis that the bank steepens and inturns at this point, and the external ditch is, for a short stretch, wholly absent, providing continuity of level between the interior and exterior of the enclosure. Some 54m to the south of this entrance there is a further break in the defences, narrower than the other and retaining some slight indication of a ditch, thus rather less convincing as an original feature. However the fact that the bank inturns distinctly at this point also makes it difficult to explain this feature in terms other than that it

represents a secondary entrance, the external depression probably being formed by natural drainage.

Elsewhere on the circuit the defence line is continuous except where breached by modern forestry ditches attempting to drain, with only partial success, the surface water impounded by the earthwork. Despite an intensive search no other significant features could be discerned either internally or externally. The only find recorded from the area is, significantly, a Hunsbury type rotary quern from Organ's Hill, a neighbouring section of the forest.

Without further evidence, the date of construction of the Egg Rings cannot be confirmed, but its size and location on an eminent ridge suggest that it is a monument from the earthwork enclosed smaller hill fort type, attributable to the 3rd to 1st centuries AD.⁴

Only four hillforts are at present acknowledged in Northamptonshire all being confined to the uplands of the west of the county. There is, however, considerable accumulated evidence that the whole county was settled in the Iron Age⁵. Assuming there was no marked cultural difference between Iron Age peoples living in hilly country of the midlands, and those of less hilly parts, the question of what equivalent provision was made in the absence of suitable hills remains unanswered, and it is quite possible that the earthworks of the Prentice Copse type, which could quite easily be obliterated by medieval and later arable practice, were more widespread than has hitherto been accepted. In the south Northamptonshire area, a similar earthwork, for instance, seems to have existed also protected by forestry until recently but now cleared and ploughed out, at Old Tun Copse, Paulerspury (SP720434)⁶, another at Foscoate in the Ouse Valley in neighbouring Buckinghamshire (SP725347)⁷, and the ringwork at Alderton may well have Iron Age precedent⁸. These smaller fortified enclosures,

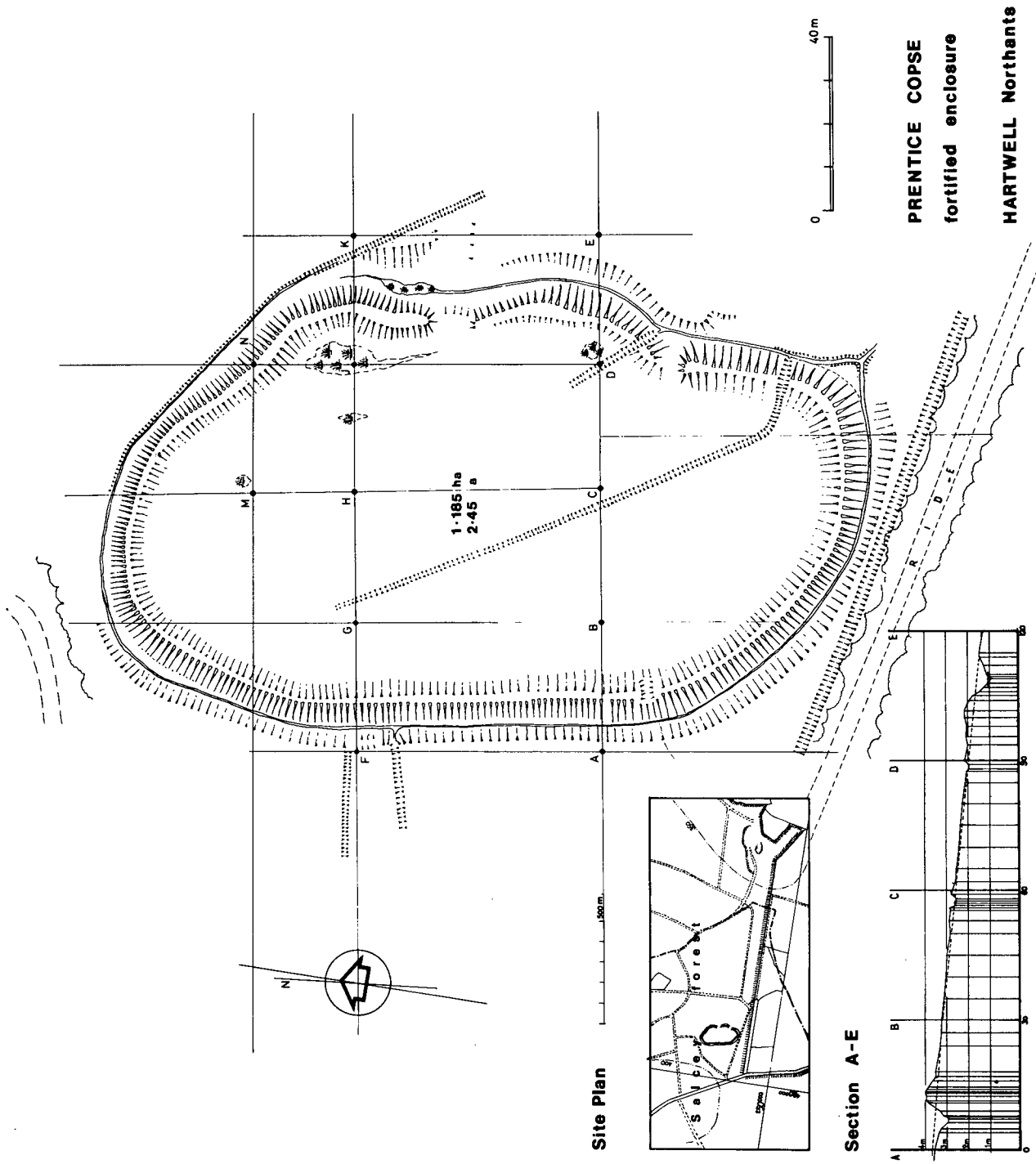


Fig. 1 The Egg Rings, Salcey Forest, Northamptonshire

like Draughton in mid Northants⁹, but which are better represented in Wessex, should perhaps be distinguished from, on one hand, the hill forts of 4-7 enclosed acres, which includes all the Northamptonshire examples (omitting the extension to Borough Hill) and which must represent the efforts for security of an organised community, and on the other hand, the ditched enclosures of up to ¾ acre in extent, such as Aldwincle¹⁰, Twywell¹¹, Wakerley¹², and Briar Hill¹³, which, arguably, need not contain more than an extended family group.

The survey of the Egg Rings was carried out in the winter of 1978-9 by C and P Woodfield and R and D Friendship-Taylor as part of a research programme on earthworks. Information on past records was kindly provided by Mr Robert Moore.

C T P WOODFIELD

NOTES

1. Whetton: *Guide Book to Northampton and Environs* (1849) 203-4. Whetton was accurate in his measurement of the enclosed area.
2. In his field survey of Hartwell parish, *CBA 9 Bulletin*, 5, 8, David Hall noted an adjacent earthwork which was first reported by Paul Scrimshaw of the Forestry Commission in 1960. The existence of two defended enclosures within some 500m of each other is a fact of some significance, and may relate to other groups of ditched Iron Age enclosures. See note 11.
3. The Egg Rings have been surveyed by the RCHM for inclusion in their forthcoming inventory, for southern Northamptonshire (Vol4, Hartwell 1). C C Taylor, who prepared the Inventory notes only accepts one entrance as original, and likens the earthwork to one at Tarrant Gunville, Dorset. This seems too great a distance from which to draw meaningful parallels.
4. Cunliffe, B, *Iron Age Communities in Britain*, 1975, 156-7.
5. Evidence reported in *BNFAS* and *Northamptonshire Archaeol*, Vols1-14.
6. *Newsletter of the Wolverton Archaeological Society*, 6, 1-5. There are verbal reports of upstanding banks forming an enclosure of similar size, but little can now be discerned on the ground. The writer thanks Dennis Mynard for this information.
7. Earthworks were visible about 1973 but recent mechanised agriculture has reduced the banks to almost nothing.
8. The enclosed area at Alderton is approximately 2 acres. The Castle was owned by Thomas le Sauvage in the mid-13th century. The scale and shape of the earthworks could well be those of an Iron Age fort remodelled in the early medieval period. Grimes, W F, in *Problems of the Iron Age in Southern Britain* (ed S S Frere), Fig 5 and note.
10. *Northamptonshire Archaeol*, 12, 1978, 13
11. *Northamptonshire Archaeol*, 10, 1975, 75
12. *Northamptonshire Archaeol*, 9, 1974, 85
13. *Northamptonshire Archaeol*, 14, 1979, 102

AN EARTHWORK AT HARRINGWORTH, NORTHANTS (SP94147; FIG2)

In September 1978 a trench was excavated across the bank and ditch of an undated enclosure 100m in diameter at Harringworth, Northants. Topographically, the enclosure spanned a shallow valley, with a small stream or dyke, and the parish boundary running through the enclosed area. The surface geology was Boulder Clay.

The bank and ditch on the south side of the enclosure has been largely levelled by ploughing, although clearly visible as a soil mark. To the north, however, the bank was still standing up to 1m high, but was being rapidly levelled by modern ploughing.

Pre-medieval enclosures still surviving as earthworks are rare in Northamptonshire and it was therefore decided to section the bank and ditch before they became completely levelled. In addition, it was hoped to find evidence to date the enclosure, during the excavation. A 2m wide trench was excavated across the bank and ditch, partly by machine and partly by hand, just south of the entrance to the enclosure. The ditch was found to have been about 2m deep originally, but had silted up for most of its depth. The bank, where excavated, was standing to a height of 600mm and sealed a buried soil of gingerish silty loam (layer 9).

In addition to sectioning the bank and ditch a 2m wide strip of topsoil was removed mechanically right across the enclosure from west to east. No traces of occupation were found apart from a few patches of charcoal embedded in the Boulder Clay.

No dating evidence was found during the excavation, but a charcoal sample from layer 4 in the ditch, has produced a single radiocarbon determination of 980 AD ± 60 (Harwell 2959), thus indicating an Anglo-Saxon/Danish date for the enclosure. Although the charcoal sample came from a level approximately 400mm above the bottom of the ditch it is unlikely to have taken a long period of time for this amount of silt to accumulate in the bottom of a ditch dug into Boulder Clay.

Some 300m to the north-west another circular earthwork 230m in diameter was visible on aerial photographs taken in 1947. The modern road seems to deviate round this enclosure (RCHM 1975).

Dated Danish enclosures are rare, but Dyer

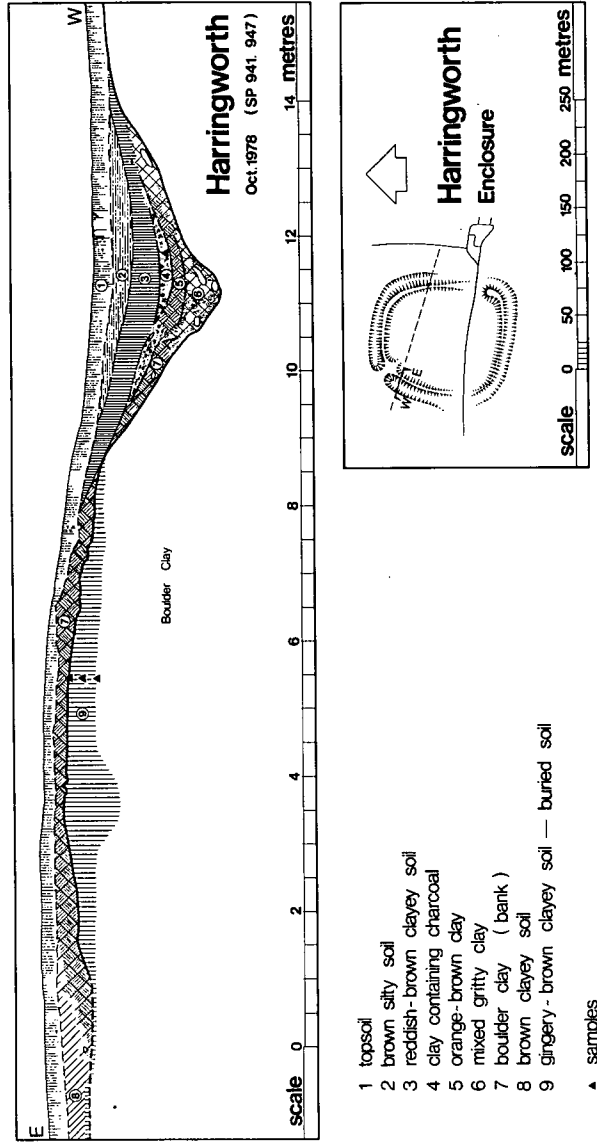


Fig. 2 Enclosure at Harringworth, Northamptonshire

(1972) has discussed a number of possible English sites and compared them with known continental examples. The roughly circular shape of some of these enclosures may be of particular relevance when looking for parallels for the Haringworth site.

It may be of interest that a man named Turkil of Haringworth, who was a Danish thegn of substance and a companion of Hereward 'the Wake', owned five hides of land at Haringworth (Hart 1974, 36-39). He also owned land at Fotheringhay and Lilford in the same county and at Leighton Bromswold in Huntingdonshire.

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D JACKSON
 Archaeology Unit
 Northamptonshire County Council

A TUDOR POTTERY KILN AT WOOD NEWTON, NORTHANTS.

The discovery of pottery sherds during the erection in 1973 of new houses in a new road called 'The Paddock' in Wood Newton was reported to Dennis Jackson, who visited the site with Robert Moore of the Guildhall Museum, Northampton. The approximate National Grid Reference of the site is TL 035945.

The site was recognised as that of a pottery production centre and subsequently a rescue excavation was arranged by John Hadman, the work being largely carried out by Miss Z Coult, a student at Prince William College, Oundle.

Sherds were to be found all over the site, but in particular were associated with burnt stone from the footings trenches of one house; accordingly, by arrangement with the builder, limited excavation took place within one room of this house.

The excavation, FIG3, revealed the main part of a pottery kiln of rectangular form with a free-standing central pedestal. The structure was built of limestone within a pit aligned north west to south east with the stoke hole to the south east. The kiln was approximately 2m in length and 1m wide; the pedestal was just over 1m in length and

300mm wide and was placed centrally within the kiln. The depth of the kiln was not recorded. After excavation the plan and finds were passed to the author for report.

THE KILN PRODUCTS

The ware produced was medium to fine sand-tempered with a grey core and either oxidised red-brown surfaces or reduced grey-brown surfaces.

In general, there was a marked preference towards the oxidised surface colour, of the sherds recovered 2800gms being red-brown and only 1210gms grey-brown. Glaze present on most vessels was a rich shiny olive-green lead glaze.

The type of vessels produced were bunghole pitchers, cooking pots, lids, bowls, chafing dishes, skillets or handled pans, costrels, tripod-footed vessels and narrow based jars. This range of form suggests a date in the 16th century.

The proportion of sherds of each type of vessel in the assemblage recovered is shown in the following table.

The number of vessels is based entirely on counting individual rims, or other essential features, e.g. skillet-handles, costrel lugs, etc.

Form	Weight	Est no of vessels
Bunghole pitchers	1410gms	9
Cooking pots	800gms	11
Cooking pot lids	10gms	1
Bowls	450gms	9
Chafing dishes	25gms	2
Skillets	250gms	4
Costrels	20gms	2
Tripod vessels	50gms	1
Cup	25gms	1

DESCRIPTION OF THE POTTERY

Bunghole Pitchers, FIG4, 1.

The illustration is a reconstruction from sherds of several vessels. The average height was 340mm, rim diameter 100mm and base diameter 180-200mm. The vessels were wheel-turned and the bases were trimmed with a knife after removal from the wheel. The rims generally had a single groove around the top edge and were pulled out to form simple lips for pouring. All handles were of strap type and undecorated apart from three thumb or finger impressions at the lower connection with the body; they were fixed simply by being pushed onto the body and the junction smoothed over. The bungholes were applied in the same way and were also plain and undecorated. The body of the pitchers was decorated with a

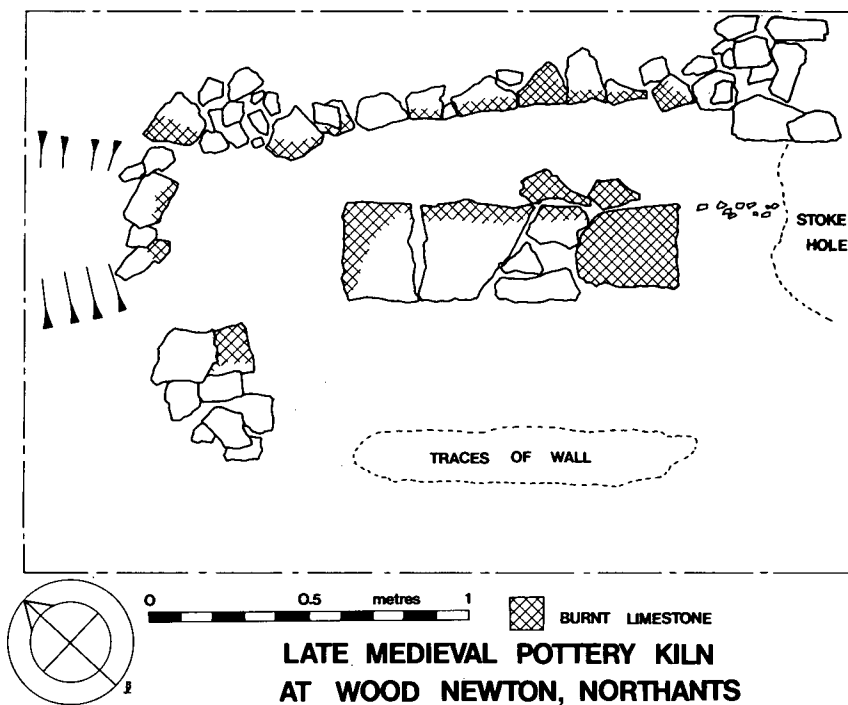


Fig. 3

single bead around the neck, and normally two incised grooves around the shoulder. One example, however, had five grooves consisting of a band of three with one above and another below. Glaze was applied mainly to the neck and shoulder.

The vessels were stacked on one another in the kiln, rim impressions being clearly visible on bases. One waster consisted of a rim and base fused together.

Cooking pots, FIG4, 2-4.

There were three forms:

- a) Plain bag shape, illus 2, with slightly everted rim concave on the inner edge; glaze was applied externally but did not cover the rim.
- b) Similar form but with rounder shoulder, illus 3, and slightly narrower neck created by the development of the rim which is more everted and has a pronounced hollow lid seat internally. Glaze again external with a few splashes on top of the rim.
- c) Illus 4, upright collar rim with groove on top edge and flattened bead around externally.

It was not possible to reconstruct a complete cooking pot form. However, the average rim

diameter was 175mm and the base 150mm.

Cooking pot lids, FIG4, 5.

Sherds of a lid, diameter 150mm, which fits the rim of cooking pot type b. Glazed both internally and externally.

Bowls, FIG4, 6 and 7.

The rims are out-turned flanges, concave on top and occasionally on the outer edge. There are two sizes, small (no7), diameter 280mm and larger (no8) diameter 350mm. All bowls were glazed internally.

Chafing dishes, FIG4, 8.

Several rim sherds, three knobs and one base fragment represent at least two vessels and are combined to form the illustration. The rim diameter was 225mm and that of the base 100mm. These vessels were glazed internally and had simple thickened rims against which the knobs, which are small triangular 'peaks' of clay, were pushed and secured. The internal glaze had run towards the rim, showing that the vessel was fired in an inverted position.

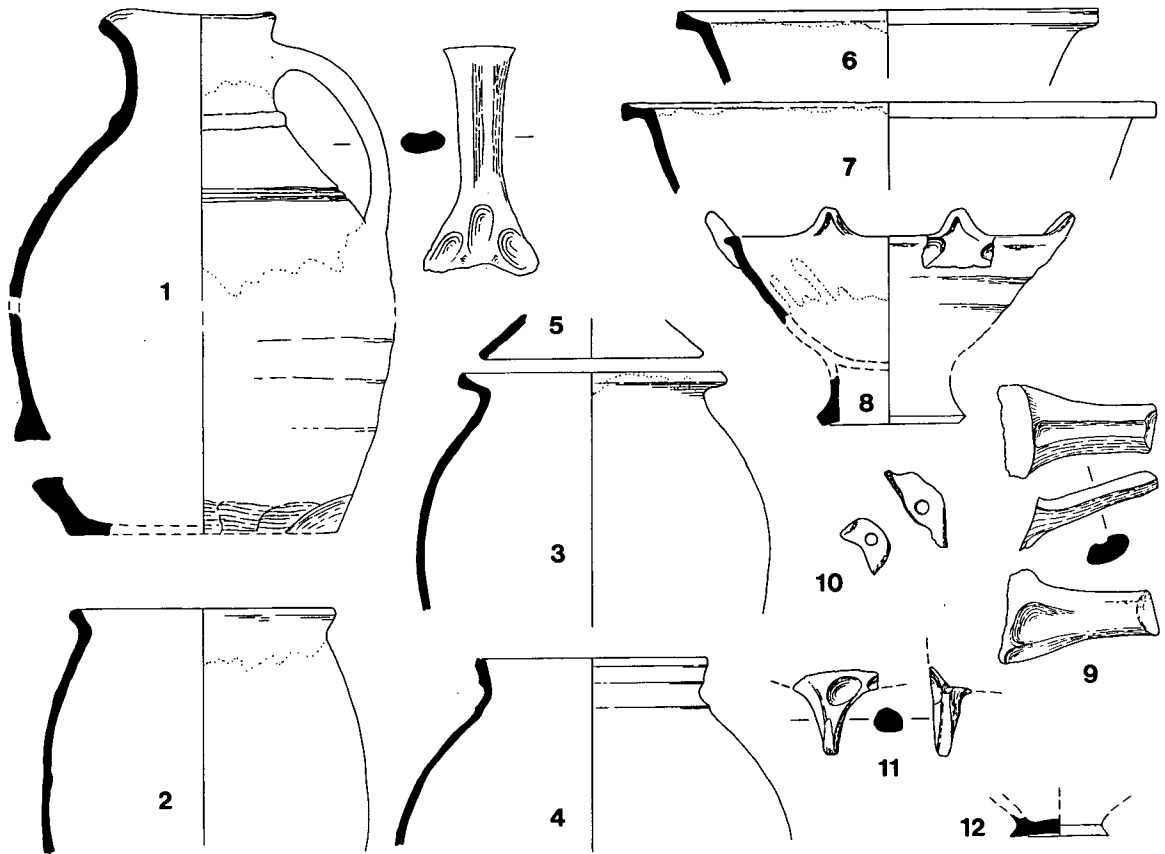


Fig 4. Wood Newton, pottery from kiln (¼)

Skillets, FIG4, 9.

Four handles are from skillets. They are rectangular in section with a groove along the upper surface. Dimensions of the illustrated example were: length 90mm, width 50mm at junction with body and 30mm at end: the other three were very similar in size, the smallest being 80mm, 40mm and 30mm.

Costrels, FIG4, 10.

Two small pierced lugs are from the shoulders of costrels. No body sherds were found.

Tripod vessels, FIG4, 11.

Two triangular legs are clearly from the base of a vessel of approximately 180mm diameter. They are similar to the knobs of the chafing dishes, but are longer, and bear the impression of a base rather than a rim.

Narrow based cup? FIG4, 12.

Narrow base, 650mm in diameter, which may come from a cup.

CONCLUSIONS

The pottery from this kiln consists of late medieval and early post-medieval forms. The absence of medieval jugs and the presence of bung-hole pitchers and the chafing dish suggests a date in the late 15th-16th century.

The fabric is not medieval, nor has it the 'mass produced' character or feel of full 17th century wares.

The date suggested for this group is therefore the first quarter of the 16th century.

Acknowledgements

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DENNIS C MYNARD

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A. E. BROWN