

II.—NOTES ON PREHISTORIC POTTERY AND A BRONZE PIN FROM ROSS LINKS, NORTHUMBERLAND.

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Ross Links is a sandy waste, forming a promontory on the north of Budle Bay. During the summer of 1924 Mr. Francis Buckley carefully examined the links for evidence of early occupation, more especially for examples of microlithic industry. An account of the flints found was published in *Archæologia Aeliana*, 4th series, Volume I, pp. 42-47.

In addition to these flints he also found a number of prehistoric objects, which it is the purpose of this paper to describe. The most important of these finds consists of a considerable number of fragments of Bronze Age pottery found rather less than a quarter of a mile from the edge of Budle Bay.

The writers have found about two hundred fragments of pottery, mostly of the beaker class of vessel, but also a few of the food-vessel type. The number of vessels represented by the fragments is uncertain, but it is at least ten beakers and three food-vessels.

The beakers may be classified according to their decoration into two main divisions: A, those showing a cord technique; B, those decorated with a series of rectangular dots formed by a cog wheel or notched stick.

Of Class A the rims alone show:

1. Line topped with undecorated interior.
2. Line topped outwardly beaked.
3. Line topped with two internal lines.
4. Line topped with three internal lines.
5. Line topped with five internal lines.

Some of this cord pottery is shown on plate I, p. 24. Similar pottery has been found farther north on this coast in the kitchen middens at North Berwick and Gullen Bay.¹ The lines are made with a twisted cord showing the relationship between this pottery and the continental cord-beakers.

Of Class B there are also at least five beakers :

1. With dents about one-sixteenth of an inch long and a thirty-second of an inch wide.
2. A different rim of this type.
3. Dents nearly one-sixteenth of an inch square.
4. Dents each one-sixteenth of an inch wide by three thirty-seconds of an inch long.
5. Having zones of lines and chevrons and a slight external rib. Some pieces of this pottery are shown on plate II, p. 24.

The food-vessels are shown on plate III, p. 24, and may be classified by their rims as follows :

1. Plain moulded rim with finger-nail decoration below.
2. Plain moulded rim with cord decoration below.
3. Decorated rim.

The beaker pottery is about three-sixteenths of an inch in thickness and the food-vessels about five-sixteenths of an inch. The fragments of the two classes were found mixed together. - If they are all of approximately the same date, that must be the time of the close of the beaker and the beginning of the food-vessel phase.

Dr. Cyril Fox, F.S.A., Keeper of the National museum of Wales, has examined the shards. He regards

¹ *Pro. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, Vol. LXII, pp. 253-294 and 308-319.

the whole as of one period, dating approximately 1600 B.C. He bases his opinion on the existence of internal rim decoration on some of the beaker fragments, and an external rib on others, and on the presence of early food-vessel forms. In 1925, he published a map² recording the distribution of beaker pottery in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and the Isle of Man, bringing the known examples in that area up to four hundred and three.

The shards from Ross Links represent fragments of a further ten or more examples, and form a considerable addition to this important group of pottery, which has hitherto, usually, been found associated with interment of human remains, but at Ross Links there were no indications of associated burials. It used to be thought that the beakers were exclusively funereal pottery,³ but that they were also used for domestic purposes is proved by the finds in the prehistoric pits at Peterborough.⁴

The predominating colour is red or buff tending to red, though sometimes varying considerably in tone over the surface of a single vessel. The red colour is due to the fact that most clays contain a small portion of iron salts in their composition, and if fired in an open hearth, the result is a red coloured pot. If, however, the air is kept away the resulting colour is then grey or black.

Clay, if used alone for pottery, may fail to keep its shape when burnt; it distorts in the firing. It was soon found that clay should be tempered by mixing with it something to render it slightly porous, so that the steam formed in the baking might escape. The material usually used for this purpose was sand for the finer, and broken stone for the coarser pottery. This tempering is now termed "grog." Other ingredients were sometimes added for other purposes, such as burnt bone. This produced

² *Archæologia Cambrensis*, 1925.

³ *British Barrows*, p. 103, and *Ancient Britain*, by Rice Holmes, p. 467.

⁴ Reginald Smith in *Archæologia*, Vol. 62, p. 350, and B.M. *Stone Age Guide*, 3rd ed., 1926, pp. 98, 99.

a pot which, when fired, could be burnished. On many of the beakers a somewhat similar surface was obtained by another method. Canon Greenwell observes "some of the pottery seems to have been made by overlaying a coarse and ill-worked clay with a coating of finer paste."⁵ This produced a smooth surface upon which to execute the ornamentation.

There was, however, a third method of producing a similar result, viz., that before baking the pot, its surface was rubbed round with a smooth instrument, such as a piece of shale or bone.⁶ This had the effect of pushing the grog into the interior, and producing a coating of fine clay at the surface, which, when baked, appeared as a semi-glaze. After examining the fragments from Ross Links, a practical potter pronounced them to have been made by this latter process.

None of the fragments from Ross Links exceed two inches by one and a half inches; in no case has it been possible to reconstruct from them the complete profile of either a beaker or a food-vessel. It may therefore be desirable to describe these two types of vessels, and to illustrate them by examples in the Society's museum. The origin of the beaker is supposed to have been a calabash to which was added a high basket-work neck made water-tight with clay.⁷ Thus the vessel originally consisted of two parts, viz., a globular body out of which arose a long, conical neck, only the latter being decorated. A distinctive feature of the continental cord-beakers is the restriction of the decoration to the upper part of the vessel (plate iv) and its termination at the lower edge in a zone of pendant triangles,⁸ but in course of time the

⁵ *British Barrows*, p. 64.

⁶ Or a water-worn pebble, see *Pro. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, 1906, p. 374.

⁷ *A Study of Bronze Age Pottery in Britain*, by the Hon. John Abercromby, 1912, p. 11; O. G. S. Crawford, *Geographical Journal*, 1912, p. 201; Cantor Lectures, 1926, C. R. Peers, *Ornament in Britain*, p. 5.

⁸ *Notes on Early British Pottery*, by E. T. Leeds, *Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. II, p. 333.



body and neck became merged, the decoration spreading over the whole vessel. The beaker had arrived at this stage of evolution prior to its introduction into Britain, and with few exceptions British beakers are decorated over both upper and lower portions; yet the line of junction between the body and neck is usually marked by a distinct contraction or waist. The level of this waist line varies considerably. In the south of England the beakers usually have long necks and low waist lines. Abercromby made this his first class; whereas in the north of England and south of Scotland the beaker⁹ is characterized by a short neck merging into an oval paunch, having a high but not very distinct waist line as on plate v, figs. 1 and 2. Abercromby made this type his third class of British beakers and regarded them as a later and degenerate form of his first class. It is possible, however, that the height of the waist may be mainly a matter of tradition with potters of different districts and that the two types may represent parallel streams of contemporary development.

There is considerable difference of opinion as to where the beaker originated. It certainly was not in Britain. British beakers are believed to be a cross between the Iberian bell-beaker and the central European cord-beaker and to have been introduced by round headed people who came from the continental coast bordering on the North sea, settling in Britain about 2000 B.C.¹⁰

Many believe that the beaker folk introduced metallurgy into Britain;¹¹ certainly soon after their landing here bronze came into use in these islands.

These beaker immigrants may have brought with them a few domestic pots, such as is shown on plate IV, but pottery was not then a commercial import, being too

⁹ *Pro. Soc. Antiq. Newcastle upon Tyne*, 3rd series, Vol. IV, pp. 198 and 286; see also *Arch. Ael.*, 2nd series, Vol. XV, pp. 49, 51, fig. 2; *Arch. Ael.*, 3rd series, Vol. II, pp. 126-149, figs. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5; *Arch. Ael.*, 3rd series, Vol. XI, pp. 119-176, figs. 5 and 6.

¹⁰ *When did the Beaker Folk Arrive?* by Gordon Child, *Archæologia*, Vol. 74, p. 159.

¹¹ *The Dawn of European Civilization*, by Gordon Child, p. 294.

fragile to transport far from its factory. Each community made its own pottery; the women were the principal potters of the period, and there was a continual local output to meet the loss, caused by breakages. Hence the pottery reflects the fluctuation of local art better than any other surviving relic of the period.

The beaker folk, on their arrival here, made pottery of local clay, but according to their own traditional shapes and decoration. These beaker folk intermarried with the earlier inhabitants of Britain, who so outnumbered them that they were gradually absorbed. During this process their pottery shows the influence of British characteristics. For example, when beakers were first introduced here they had no interior decoration, but some of the later beakers have this feature, which is common to the British neolithic bowl. As the beaker folk lost their individuality, so did their pottery. The late beaker (plate VI, fig. 1), from Huntlaw, Northumberland,¹² is far removed from early beaker form. It has no constriction at the junction of base and neck, and the decoration is of a nondescript thumb-nail kind. When the beaker folk were absorbed, the native element in art re-asserted itself, and the beaker was supplanted by a new form, the food-vessel (plate VI, fig. 2); moreover the food-vessel is not a modified beaker, but a modified neolithic bowl.

Plate VII, fig. 1, is a typical neolithic bowl found at Peterborough. It has a rounded base, but the most striking feature is the deep hollow moulding under the lip. This deep groove round the neck persists in the type and must have had a use. These bowls are cooking-vessels, and their rounded bases were placed in the hot embers. As they have no handles by which they could be removed when heated, it is suggested that a pliable green sapling could be looped round the groove in the bowl and be used as a handle for lifting from the fire. In course of time the bowl underwent several changes,

¹² *Pro. Soc. Ant. Newcastle upon Tyne*, 4th series, Vol. III, p. 19.

acquiring a flat base, an angular outline and a modified rim, often consisting of two shallow grooves instead of one deep one. (Plate VII, fig. 2 d.) This form is termed a food-vessel. The lower groove is often, and the upper one occasionally, intercepted at three or more points by pierced lugs, apparently intended for the suspension of the vessel. (Plate VIII, fig. 1.) The evidence of the finds is that the late beakers were contemporary with early food-vessels and that both fulfilled the same purpose. They have frequently been found in adjacent graves of approximately the same date. The Society's museum contains examples of this, as fig. 2 on plate V, a beaker from Jesmond, and fig. 2 on plate VI, a food-vessel found close by. This food-vessel is almost like a neolithic bowl, having the rounded form and the deep groove under the brim. Fig. 2 c on plate VII shows a beaker¹³ and three food-vessels—a, b and d—from adjacent burials at Amble. Two of these food-vessels have single grooved brims, the third has double grooves, the lower intercepted in three places by pierced lugs. In some later examples the lugs remain, but are not pierced. They appear as so many perpendicular bridges over the groove, as in fig. 2 on plate VIII. They were applied to the vessel after the clay had been partly dried; in consequence many of them have come off, leaving marks where they were attached to the vessel, as may be seen in fig. 2, plate IX, where four of the five lugs are now missing. The disuse of the lugs as a mode of suspension, their survival as unpierced knobs, and subsequent retention as ornaments are examples of phenomena frequently observed. Dr. Cyril Fox¹⁴ has lately attributed the origin of our "encrusted ware" to this survival of atrophoid lugs, believing that such examples as fig. 1, plate IX, and the Humbledon Hill example¹⁵ were evolved in the north of Britain. Certainly

¹³ See *Pro. Soc. Antiq. Newcastle upon Tyne*, 4th series, Vol. I, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. VII, pp. 115 to 133.

¹⁵ *Arch. Ael.*, 3rd series, Vol. XI, p. 121.

these loops have given us one of the most curious and puzzling types of Bronze Age pottery, i.e., a food-vessel in the form of a bowl with four pierced lug-like feet (fig. 1, plate x), which was found near Corbridge and has been in the Society's possession for over a century.¹⁶ Similar vessels have been found in Yorkshire¹⁷ and Lincolnshire.¹⁸ Was the Corbridge type of food-vessel intended to be suspended in an inverted position? and, if so, why? There are many such points which need clearing up about the loops on our food-vessels, and these might be made the subject of a valuable study. For example, some of the loops are so small, in the Corbridge vessel less than one-tenth of an inch diameter, that they would scarcely allow of the passing of an efficient thong. Again, some of the food-vessels have a large number of loops, nine¹⁹ or even ten.²⁰ It seems unnecessary and inconvenient to use ten loops to support one small pot. If the original use of the loops was for suspension, may they not, at a later date, have been used for some other purpose?—such as that of tying on a cover to keep out flies and fingers? Some of the food-vessels had pottery lids,²¹ and later encrusted cinerary urns, which were evolved from food-vessels, are usually decorated with a pattern, (fig. 1, plate ix) which suggests the lashing on of a lid.²²

The food-vessel has an infinite variety of forms, many having no loops (fig. 2, plate x). It is the most attractive class of British Bronze Age pottery. It was evolved in Britain, probably north Britain, and is unrepresented outside the British Isles.

During the time that the food-vessel was in use, the burial customs of Britain underwent a great change.

¹⁶ *Arch. Ael.*, Vol. I, donations, p. 2, Plate VI G.

¹⁷ *British Barrows*, fig. 74.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, fig. 75.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, fig. 70, p. 142.

²⁰ *Archæologia*, Vol. 43, p. 380.

²¹ *British Barrows*, p. 89.

²² See *The Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. VII, pp. 115-133.

With the earlier food-vessel, it was mainly by inhumation, but with the later, cremation became common, and the food-vessel, after passing through many phases, emerged as the cinerary urn—an evolution beyond the scope of this paper.

BRONZE PIN.

Mr. Buckley also found a very fine bronze pin.²³ It is of exceptional size, viz., three and seven-eighths inches

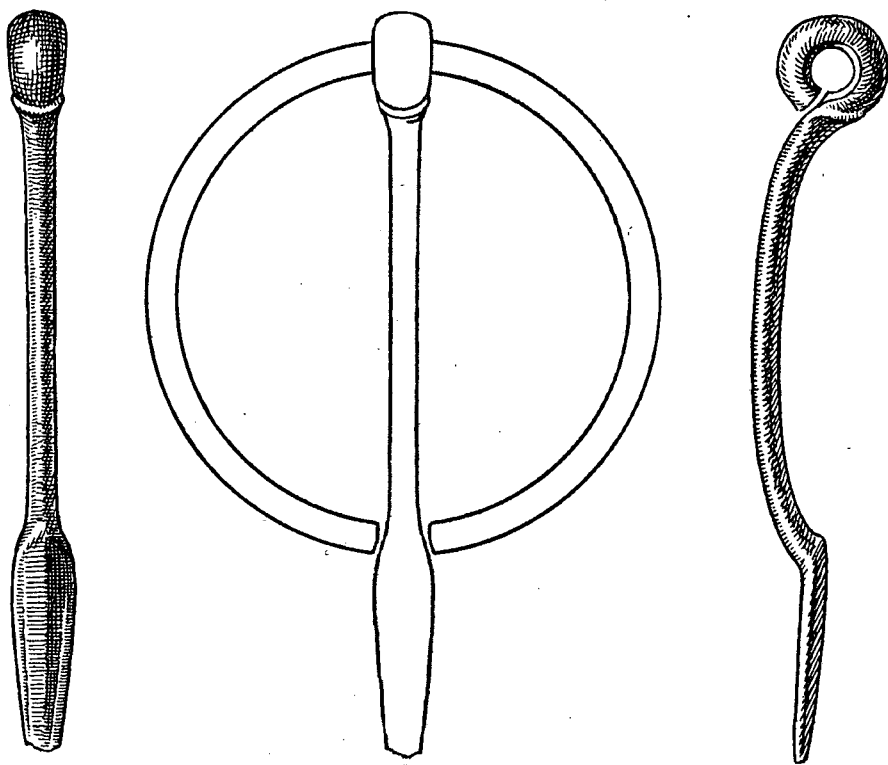


Fig. 1

long, and belonged to a penannular brooch of the early Iron Age. It is now in the British Museum, where it is

²³ For similar brooch from Camelon see *Pro. Soc. Antiq. Scotland* XXXV, p. 402, fig. 35.

exhibited upon a card with a drawing of such a brooch, as suggested in fig. 1.

The pigmy flints, the pottery and the pin all came from one site, that had apparently been a slight ridge in the old land surface and is now a desolate sandy waste. Yet for some unknown reason, this spot was chosen as an occupation site by early man from the time when he first came so far north, following the receding ice, down to the coming of the Romans, and therefore is of the highest importance, for it is seldom in Britain that such a site is found.

URN FACTORY.

Mr. Buckley also found on Ross Links, a little east of the aforementioned ridge, what is believed to be an urn factory.

At the point of excavation, thirteen and a half feet of sand covered a floor of rounded pebbles (probably drift), below which lay a coarser sand. At a depth of eight feet below the top of the sand hill was found a belt of hardened and fire-blackened sand four to six inches thick (fig. 2). This belt of sand contained a number of objects, which had all apparently been imported, or deposited during an occupation of the site. These objects included :

1. Over fifty fragments of urns, a few of which could be pieced together.
2. Three much used hammer stones of quartzite.
3. Fire-cracked stones, many in small fragments.
4. Lumps of clay, mostly yellow, but some brown and a few red.
5. Disc-like pebbles.

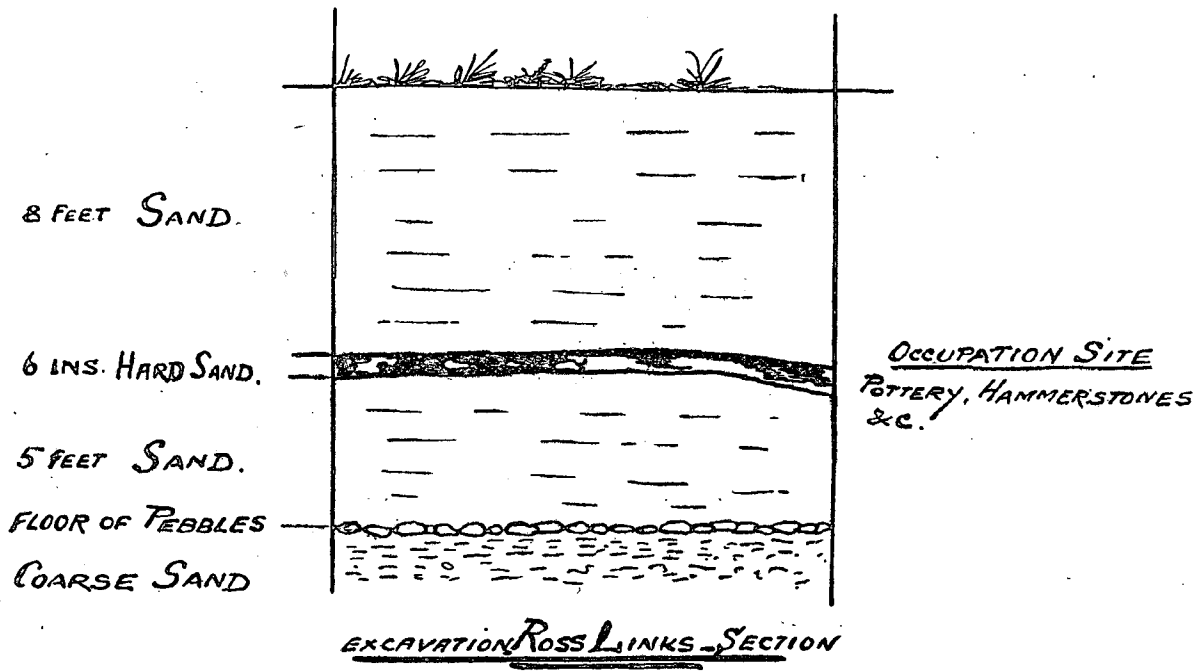


Fig. 2

6. Many pieces of cannel coal, or shale, worn smooth by water action and no doubt picked up on the adjacent shore.
7. Some large flat stones.

The clay was found in lumps, but in one place an unbroken mass covering several square feet. It seemed to be affected by fire, and even partly baked. Slight traces, of burnt bones, small in size, were found.

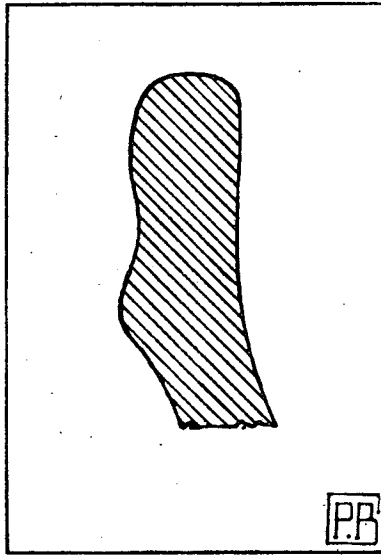
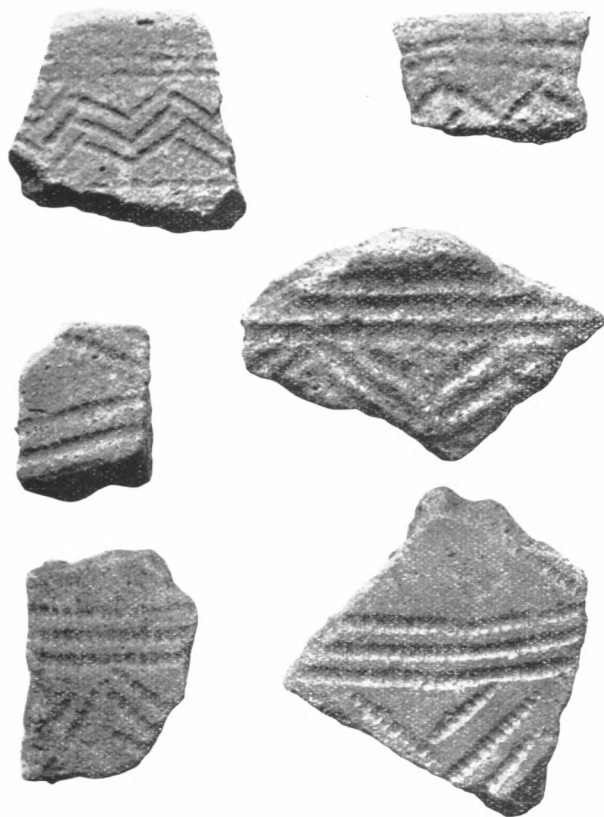


Fig. 3

It is thought that this collection of objects indicates the site of an urn factory. The hammer stones were no doubt used for crushing the burnt stones (basalt) into grit, to form grog, for they are of the same substance as the grit found in the pottery shards. Of the pieces of coal, one is an oblong block with either end frayed, as if used as a smoother; the rest are round, flat pieces, which may have been used for shaping the urns. One large block of clay was impressed with deep corrugations on top. Such clay could have been obtained about a

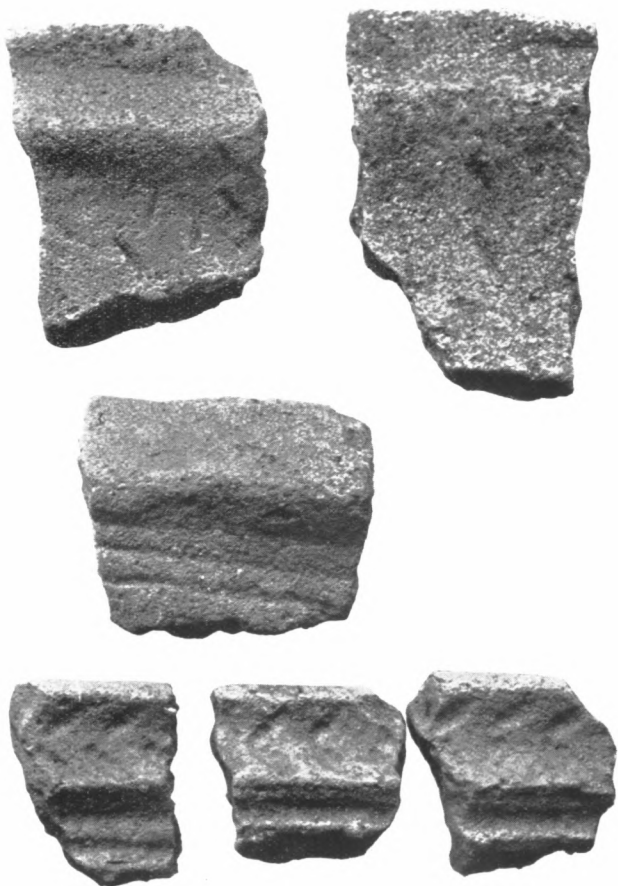


CORD BEAKER POTTERY FROM ROSS LINKS. FULL SIZE.
BLACK GATE MUSEUM.



BEAKER POTTERY FROM ROSS LINKS. FULL SIZE.

BLACK GATE MUSEUM.



POTTERY, ROSS LINKS. FULL SIZE.

BLACK GATE MUSEUM.



BEAKER, COLCHESTER MUSEUM.



FIG. 1.
BEAKER, ILDETON. HALF SIZE.



FIG. 2.
BEAKER, JESMOND. HALF SIZE.

BLACK GATE MUSEUM.



FIG. 1.
BEAKER, HUNTLAW.



FIG. 2.
FOOD VESSEL, JESMOND.
HALF SIZE.

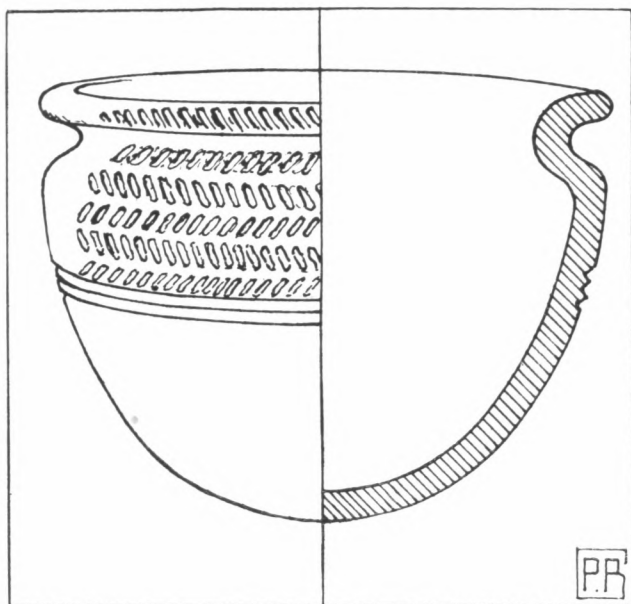


FIG. 1.
NEOLITHIC BOWL. HALF SIZE.



FIG. 2.
POTTERY FROM AMBLE, NORTHUMBERLAND.

BLACK GATE MUSEUM.



FIG. 1.
FOOD VESSEL. HALF SIZE.
BLACK GATE MUSEUM.



FIG. 2.
FOOD VESSEL. HALF SIZE.
BLACK GATE MUSEUM.



FIG. 1.



FIG. 2.

BROKEN FOOD VESSEL, CROGLN. HALF SIZE.

BLACK GATE MUSEUM.



FIG. 1.
FOOD VESSEL, CORBRIDGE. HALF SIZE.
BLACK GATE MUSEUM.



FIG. 2.
FOOD VESSEL, ELSWICK. HALF SIZE.
BLACK GATE MUSEUM.

FROM ROSS LINKS, NORTHUMBERLAND



quarter of a mile away, but it is not at present found on the links.

The pottery found at this site was all of the thick coarse kind, such as is usually associated with cinerary urns and a late date in the Bronze Age. On the other hand the only fragment of a rim found (fig. 3), now in the Black Gate museum, does not agree with any known cinerary urn form.