

IV.—NEOLITHIC "A" POTTERY FROM FORD, NORTHUMBERLAND.

BY MISS NANCY NEWBIGIN.

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The neolithic period has hitherto been almost a blank page in the record of Northumbrian prehistory. Apart from a number of polished stone celts of fairly wide distribution, many of which may well be early bronze age, the only authentic remains of the period are the two long cairns at the head of Redesdale (which probably represent an influence from over the border, and have little to do with contemporary developments in Northumberland); the decorated rim fragments of "Peterborough" pottery from Ford castle; and a poor little specimen of Neolithic A or "Windmill Hill" type, found "under a stone" near Old Bewick.¹ It is a bowl of the simplest form, round bottomed, with upright rim, without lugs or ornament, and of a rather rough, dark paste comparable to that of many sherds from Yorkshire. With its vague provenance, its lack of distinctive features, and its isolation from the rest of the Neolithic A culture (whose eastward distribution had not been traced farther north than Yorkshire), one could not place much emphasis on the Old Bewick bowl as evidence for the culture in our district;² but the discovery to be described here of a large batch of fragments from

¹ See Stuart Piggott, *Neolithic Pottery of the British Isles* (*Archæological Journal*, 1931), for the Old Bewick bowl, and throughout for parallels and typological analysis.

² A fragment of black burnished "domestic pottery" (P⁴ III, 74) from Harlow Hill probably belongs to the Windmill Hill class of pottery.

Ford, with a good range of the typical forms and pastes, and in typical associations, places the matter beyond any doubt.

The Neolithic A culture, ultimately derived from the common stock of west European neolithic, is in the south of England associated with causewayed camps and with primary burials in chambered cairns, where it is always pre-Beaker, and usually earlier than the Neolithic B or Peterborough culture, which arrived at a later stage of the neolithic from the shores of the Baltic. By the time it reached Yorkshire the Beaker people were already established, and there is abundant evidence that the two cultures were contemporary and to some extent fused. The neolithic folk took to burying their dead under round barrows as well as long; the older rite of communal burial was replaced by communal cremation (occasionally found even in Wiltshire); the funeral rites often included the scattering of broken sherds of pottery on the pyre—sherds which cannot be reassembled as complete pots, and which must have been broken before the funeral.

In his *British Barrows* Greenwell has an account of just such a communal cremation under a round barrow. It is his no. CLXXXVIII, at Broomhill, near Ford (the place now usually called Broom Ridge, a sandstone escarpment north of Rowtin Lynn Farm). He describes the bed of the barrow as a layer of burnt earth and bones "containing an extraordinary quantity of pot sherds" belonging to "a very large number of different vessels. They were of plain hard baked pottery, quite unlike that of which the sepulchral vases are made, and had the appearance of domestic vessels." (He also gives this name to the Yorkshire neolithic pottery.) "The bones of a number of persons were indistinguishably mixed up in a way that was certainly very peculiar, nor do I remember, he says, in the course of my experience to have seen anything like it. The whole of them, however, had certainly been deposited at one time, for there was no appearance of any

disturbance of the mound having ever taken place." With this typically neolithic assemblage was found a leaf-shaped flint, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by $1\frac{5}{8}$ inches wide, beautifully worked over with faces, with a fine retouch. It is illustrated in *Greenwell* and exhibited in the British Museum.

With a certain amount of dusty exploration, and the kind assistance of the British Museum authorities, the contents of the barrow were unearthed from the reserve of the *Greenwell* collection and proved to consist of three boxfuls of sherds, along with flints, charcoal, burnt bones (including a fragment of a child's skull), burnt clay, and a lump of red ochre.

The pottery consists of 204 sherds, of which few are over two inches in any dimension. Nearly all are fragments of fairly large bowls, probably about ten inches in diameter; but most of the rim fragments are so small and so irregular that one cannot make more than a rough estimate of the size of the bowls. In the typological sequence of Neolithic A pottery, the simple bowl shapes are earlier than the carinated forms, and it is to the latter (as we should expect) that most of these pots belong. This is best seen from an analysis of the sherds. Of the 204, 112 are plain fragments of the ordinary convex shape, which might come from any part of the body of a round-bottomed bowl; 45 are too small for their shape to be determined; 16 are concave and have been part of the neck of a shouldered pot, and five show the actual angle or S-curve of the shoulder itself. Of the twenty-three rim fragments, only five belong to the simple bowl shape. One sherd shows a thickening which may be part of a shoulder, while two have a raised rib pressed out from inside at the widest part of the pot, a feature without parallel in pottery of this class. Two of the plain convex sherds have a rough line scratched across them; otherwise there is no decoration or ornament of any sort, no lugs or handles, and no fragments of flat bases. This makes it plain that the bowls must have been of the usual round-

bottomed shape. The proportion of plain sherds to shouldered sherds and rims suggests that most of the bowls must have been carinated, as even they would yield plenty of plain convex sherds for one concave rim fragment.

Among the rims form G predominates, a shallow bowl with widely splayed lip, which Mr. Stuart Piggott associates specially with eastern Britain. Next in order come shouldered bowls with inturned rims—forms F and FJ, characteristic of a late stage of the south-western neolithic. Of the simple bowls, nos. 9, 20, and 23 belong to a shallow saucer of very coarse paste and uneven profile, while 18 and 19, by contrast, are of fine hard paste, very thin and well burnished, belonging to deeper bowls with upright sides. No. 22 is exceptional; its very thick rim is unusual, and the hollow immediately below the lip on the *inside* of the pot is without parallel. Pittings under the rim are common enough on Neolithic A bowls, but usually farther down the pot, and always on the outside.

The treatment of the lip is typical, recalling the archetypal bag-shaped leather vessels which Schuchhardt postulates as the ancestor of our type. It is either thickened (nos. 3 and 7), or pinched out between finger and thumb (nos. 4, 10, 26, 27), or rolled over (e.g. no. 2, where the section shows the actual fold where the clay has been doubled over. Cf. also 1, 15, 17, 21).

The paste is on the whole good, but varies both in character and quality. It ranges from a reddish plant-pot shade to a dark brown that is almost black. The variations in thickness will be seen from the accompanying sections. The surface is usually well smoothed, sometimes to a high polish (the burnishing being done with both vertical and horizontal strokes). In many pieces the large grits bulge out the surface without actually breaking it, so that though hard and burnished, it appears rough and uneven. In other cases the grits weather out, leaving a surface at once pitted and highly burnished. Some frag-

ments (e.g. 9, 20, 23) are thick and coarse, badly baked in the centre, and rough on the surface.

Many of the sherds show marks of burning on their broken surfaces, which suggests that the pottery must have been already broken when it was scattered on the funeral pyre. It cannot have been broken by subsequent interments (as is sometimes suggested to explain this feature elsewhere), for it is clear from Greenwell's account that all the cremations must have been deposited at one time.

It is of interest in confirming the local origin of the pottery that the grit used to back the paste is made of particles of quartz, such as weather out of the local sandstone.

The presence of flint implements and flakes does, however, bespeak a trade with the chalk countries farther south. The Farnham factory, and (nearer home) the chipping floor at Budle Bay, suggest that at various periods flint was imported as raw material, and worked into implements locally. Two traditions seem to be represented here, for while the leaf-shaped implement is of beautiful and finished workmanship, in the best neolithic style, the others are all tiny chips and flakes, none over an inch and a half long, nearly all showing signs of use, but only three with secondary working. The whole group has a distinctly microlithic appearance. Flint no. 19 has been made from a chip of a polished flint celt,³ important both as an example of the overlap of microlithic tradition into neolithic times, and as providing another link between the Neolithic A culture and the polished stone axes. No. 2, tiny though it is, has been used as a cutting implement on something rough. Its bright black surface has one edge dulled and striated for about an eighth of an inch on either face.

³ At Windmill Hill occurred large numbers of implements made of re-chipped fragments of polished flint celts. Dr. Graham Clark has published (*Man*, 1932, 223) an example of the reverse process, where a broken flint knife of Scandinavian type had been made into a double faceted bec-de-flute burin, and certain roughnesses in the burin facets subsequently polished.

Flint was scarce and precious—every fragment utilized; one has only to look at the freakish flakes that have been used. No. 13 has hinge fracture along half its working edge, but the remainder shows signs of use; no. 4 is diseased all over; no. 9 has been worked quite carefully into a little thumb scraper, although the flake is so twisted that it is difficult to get any purchase on it in use.

The position of the new find tallies with what we already know of the distribution of population in prehistoric Northumberland. It is on that belt of open sandstone country, always so densely settled, between the Till and the east coast, which forms a natural north and south highway. This, and the predominance of the eastern form G, link it with the Yorkshire group (in spite of the apparent blank in co. Durham) rather than with the Scottish or Cumberland examples. Perhaps the blank is more apparent than real; much may have perished unrecognized at the hands of early investigators, for in the nature of the case a communal cremation with scraps of broken, unornamented pottery is a confused and unspectacular find, not likely to attract the attention of the treasure hunter. Moreover, the Copt Hill barrow at Houghton-le-Spring⁴ contained an axial flue with communal cremation *in situ*, which links it definitely with the Yorkshire neolithic in spite of the absence of pottery.

In conclusion I should like to thank Mr. Stuart Piggott for going through the pottery with me, and giving me the benefit of his experience, and the authorities of the British Museum for giving me access to the pottery, and facilities for examining and photographing it.

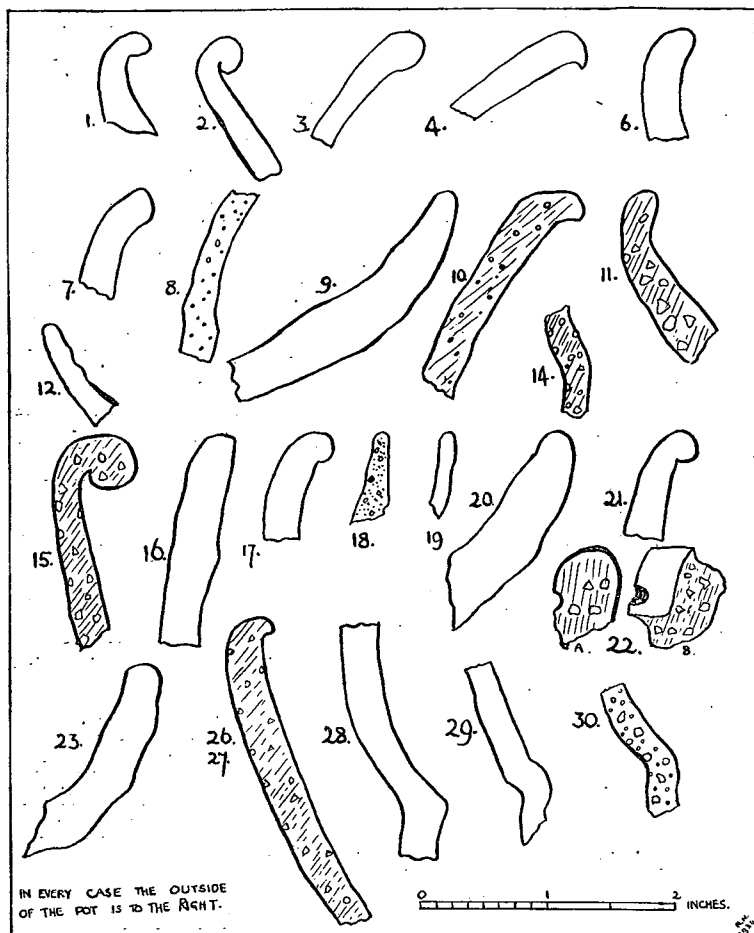
THE RIM AND SHOULDER FRAGMENTS.

(plate XIX, p. 156)

1. Reddish brown paste of fine clay with small grits, burnished to a smooth, hard surface. Form F, shouldered pot with inward sloping neck and rolled rim. c. 9 in. diameter. Mends with 21.

⁴ *Arch. Ael.*³ XI, pp. 123 ff.

2. Paste as above but a thinner walled pot. Form F, with rolled lip. The section shows the actual fold in the clay. Burnish cracked by heat. At least 8 in. diameter.



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3. Fine grained, hard paste of darkish brown, burnished with horizontal strokes. Form G, with thickened lip. 9 in. diameter.
4. Shallow, splayed bowl of similar paste and finish to 3, but with irregular pinched-out lip. Form G.

5. Similar paste to 3 and 4. Too small to tell the profile angle, but probably form G.
6. Reddish brown clay, not baked right through. Poor burnish. Form G.
7. Hard baked dark brown paste with smooth burnish and large grits, which give an uneven surface both inside and out. Slightly thickened lip. Form G. At least 8 in. diameter.
8. Dark brown clay, light in weight, much battered. Highly burnished pitted surface. Thickening at shoulder (lip missing). Form G.
9. Thick, coarse, brick-red paste of dusty texture, not burnished. Form A. Cf. pot from Esh's Barrow, near Cowlam, E.R. Mortimer Collection. Piggott, fig. 9, no. 3. Cf. 20 and 23.
10. Dark, hard, well-fired clay, well burnished with horizontal strokes. Medium to large grits. Pinched-out lip with a rough line scratched round the outside at the base of the thickened portion. Form FJ. Same pot as 11 and 27.
11. Coarser dark brown clay, with large grits making the surface bulge. Fairly well burnished, horizontally. Form FJ.
12. Fine dark brown paste, well burnished. Small grits. Well and evenly made, with faint indications of two grooves round the outside. The form, with the inturned neck and upright lip thinning towards the edge, is not exactly paralleled, but appears related to F.
13. Fragment to show pitted texture and burnish.
14. Shoulder fragment. Fine dark brown burnished ware, red inside. Form doubtful.
15. Dark brown fairly fine well-baked paste, with large grits bulging out the surface, which is smooth and hard, but not burnished. Rolled lip. Form FJ. $9\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter. Same as 25.
16. Dark, hard, well-baked ware, smoothed diagonally. Rim pinched out to a very slight angle on the outside, with a slight hollow moulding below it. Probably form F. c. $10\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter. Faint chevron pattern in the burnish.
17. Hard ware of reddish brown clay, fairly well smoothed. Rolled rim. Burnt matter adhering inside. Form G. c. $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter.
18. Fine, hard, dark brown ware, thin and well smoothed. Medium grits. Form A. c. 10 in. diameter.
19. Lighter paste than 18; thinner; hard and fine, reddish on outside. Form A. c. 8 in. diameter.
20. Thick, coarse, red ware, badly baked. Irregular profile. Cf. nos. 9 and 23, which are from the same pot. Diameter probably c. $6\frac{1}{2}$ in.

21. Same pot as 1, with wide shoulder. Form FJ. c. 9 in. diameter at rim.
22. Small fragment of very thick rim of coarse dark ware; with large grits. Quite well smoothed. Half an oval hole remains just inside the rim, as though made by the impress of a very slender finger-tip.
23. Hard but coarse dark ware, badly fired. Irregular profile. No grits visible. Form A. A shallow bowl c. $6\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter. Decorated with thumb flutings below rim.
24. Clay, burnish, pitted texture and thickened shoulder as no. 8. Probably from the same pot.
25. Paste and form as 15; the same pot.
26. Form F, with chevron pattern. Same as 16.
27. Hard, well-fired, well-burnished pot; dark brown outside, black inside. Form F, with pinched-out lip. c. 9 in. diameter. Medium grits. Same as 10 and 11.
28. Shoulder fragment of rather coarse paste. Large grits. Well-smoothed, hard surface. Form G. Diameter 11 in. at shoulder.
29. Shoulder fragment with a raised rib pressed out from inside. Light brown, fairly hard, well-smoothed paste; very little grit. No known parallels.
30. Shoulder fragment. Dark brown, hard, smooth ware. Fairly large grits. Form doubtful.
31. Fragment showing thickening and angle at shoulder.
32. Convex fragment of coarse ware with large grits. Incised line scratched across it with a sharp implement.
33. Plain fragment to show marks of burning on the fractured surfaces. (i.e., it was already broken when the cremation took place.)

Analysis of the Forms.

A. 3 pots. Simple bowls.

F. }
FJ. } 6 pots. Carinated bowls with in-turned rim.

G. 7 pots. Carinated bowls with out-turned rim.

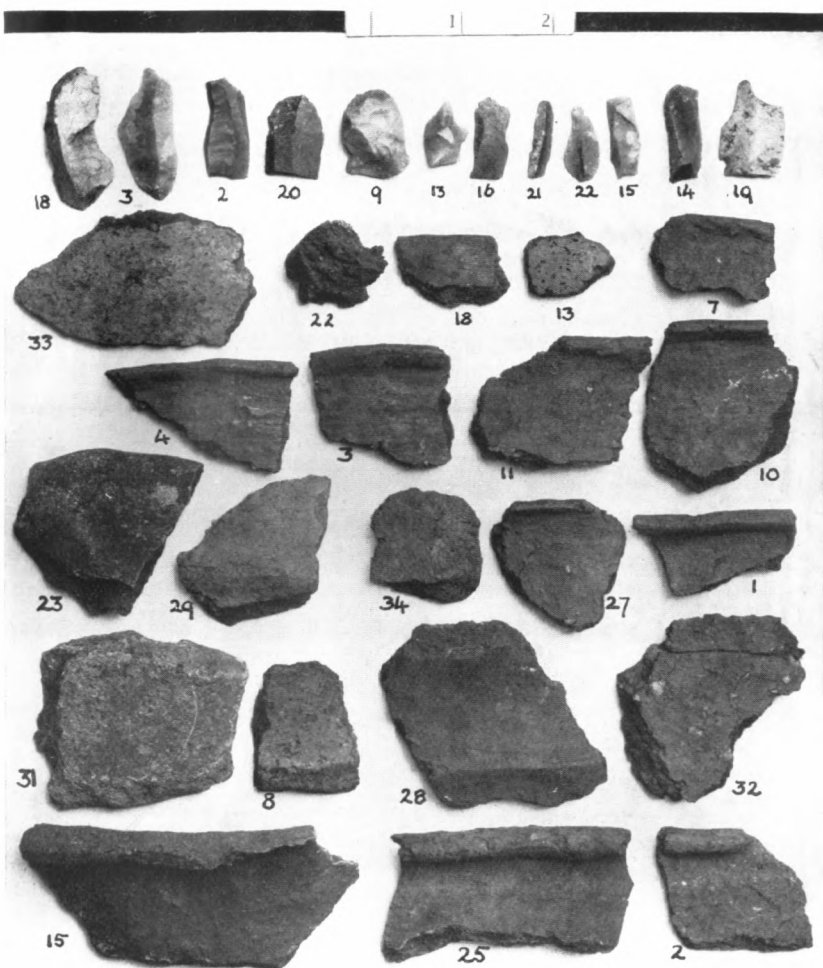
Uncertain, 4.

THE FLINTS.

(plate XIX, p. 156)

(For the leaf-shaped flint see Greenwell, *British Barrows*, p. 410.)

1. Twisted flake showing use on right side. No working. $1\frac{3}{8}$ in. long.
2. Bright black flake, $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. long. Right side dulled and striated by use for about $\frac{1}{8}$ in. from the edge on both surfaces.



British Museum Photo.

NEOLITHIC POTTERY AND FLINTS FROM FORD, NORTHUMBERLAND.

3. Flake of borer shape, $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. long. Used along right side and at point.
4. Flake of diseased flint, $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. long, used on left side.
5. Flake of poor flint $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. long by $\frac{7}{8}$ in. broad. Hinge fracture at end. Slight signs of use.
6. Flake 1 in. by $\frac{3}{4}$ in. Slight use at left side.
7. Flake $\frac{3}{4}$ in. by $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Slight use at right side.
8. Wedge-shaped chunk $\frac{5}{8}$ in. by $\frac{3}{8}$ in., showing slight signs of use.
9. Thumb-scraper on a flake of S-shaped section, very thick at bulbar end. 1 in. by $\frac{1}{16}$ in. Worked round nose and right side.
10. Flake 1 in. by $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Slight signs of use.
11. Pointed flake $\frac{1}{16}$ in. long, with crust left on. Left edge used.
12. Flake $\frac{1}{16}$ in. by $\frac{1}{16}$ in., with graver-like point. The arcs of percussion rings on the bulbar face show it to be part of a large flake.
13. Flake $\frac{5}{8}$ in. by $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Used along both sides of point.
14. Steep-sided nose-scraper with core left on one side. Nose steeply flaked. Sides also used, but not worked.
15. Flake $\frac{7}{8}$ in. long. Used but not worked.
16. Flake showing no signs of use or working.
17. Broken end of rounded flake, $\frac{1}{16}$ in. by $\frac{9}{16}$ in. Used but not worked.
18. Flake of diseased flint $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{7}{16}$ in. Used round both ends and down one side. No working.
19. Fragment of a polished flint celt, chipped to a graver-like point. The upper surface is a continuous curve, polished all over except for two chips at the right side 1 in. by $\frac{9}{16}$ in.
20. Flake of black flint with slight retouch at left side, and marks of use at end.
21. Narrow flake of triangular section with crust left on one side. No working or use. $\frac{7}{8}$ in. by $\frac{1}{8}$ in.
22. Flake $\frac{1}{16}$ in. by $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Sides used.
23. Triangular flake with crust remaining on left side. Right edge has hinge fracture for a third of its length, near the point, but the remaining two-thirds has been used.
24. Lumps of core crackled by fire.
25. Irregular lump of opaque flint of bright carnelian red.

Postscript. Since the block (p. 154) was made, the mending of some of the pottery has necessitated a few modifications in the profile angle of rims (10, 16, 21); and 9, 20 and 23 prove to be parts of one bowl, which has been restored. This is indicated in the text, but it has not been possible to show it in the drawings.