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Neolithic Pottery from Woodbridge Farm, the Old Airfield, Milfield

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INTRODUCTION

During 1992 a series of seventeen evaluation trenches were excavated by the Department of Archaeology, University of Durham at Woodbridge Farm at the south and east end of the old airfield near Milfield village, Northumberland (fig. 1). Each trench measured 35m by 3.5m and was excavated by first stripping away the topsoil by machine and then cleaning back the exposed gravel surface with hoe and trowel. Six trenches contained archaeological features. These included trenches 3 and 13 which produced Neolithic pottery. In the provisional report the Neolithic pottery was thought to be native Iron Age material and the associated post-holes were consequently assigned to the same period (Loveluck *et al* 1992). Further work has now shown that the pottery is Neolithic and this must also be the date of the domestic-type pits in which they were found, and probably also the associated post-holes. The entire assemblage of domestic pottery, pit, gully and post holes suggests that this was an area of Neolithic settlement similar to those excavated at Thirlings and Bolam Lake (Miket 1987; Waddington and Davies 1998). The presence of early and later Neolithic ceramic types provides a further parallel with Thirlings where multi-phase Neolithic occupation was also evidenced (Miket 1987). This report was sponsored by Archaeological Services, University of Durham.

GRIMSTON WARE

An assemblage of 28 sherds of Early Neolithic Grimston Ware pottery was recovered from a pit [0303] in Trench 3 together with charcoal. The trench was located immediately east of the A697 trunk road at NT 943 325. The pottery was all retrieved from a pit which formed the west terminal of a gully feature located at the east end of the trench (fig. 2). Nearby sites which have produced comparable assemblages of Grimston Ware, of very similar form and fabric to those described here, include those from the the Yeavering palace site (Hope-Taylor 1977; Ferrell 1990), Yeavering henge site (Harding 1981; Ferrell 1990), Thirlings (Miket 1987), the Coupland Enclosure (Waddington 1996) and the Hirsel (Cramp 1980).

This is the earliest pottery tradition known in Britain and was in use for at least half a millennium (Gibson and Woods 1997, 175). Grimston Ware found at nearby sites has been recovered from contexts which have produced radiocarbon dates in the early fourth millennium, such as those from Coupland (3140 $\pm$60 bc OxA-6832; 3110 $\pm$60 bc OxA-6833; 3090 $\pm$70 bc Beta-96129; 3000 $\pm$70 bc Beta-96130). The sherds from Woodbridge Farm show typical characteristics of the Grimston Ware tradition (fig. 3) including rolled over rims, open rounded vessel shape, carinations, sinuous profile and absence of decoration, corky fabric and burnished surface.

The Woodbridge Farm material has a consistent fabric, being hard, and containing crushed stone angular grits which indicates that it was made using added opening materials. The sherds have a corky fabric on account of the burning out of organic inclusions during the firing process and/or the dissolution of calcareous inclusions. All the sherds have been burnished and show the use of grass wiping.

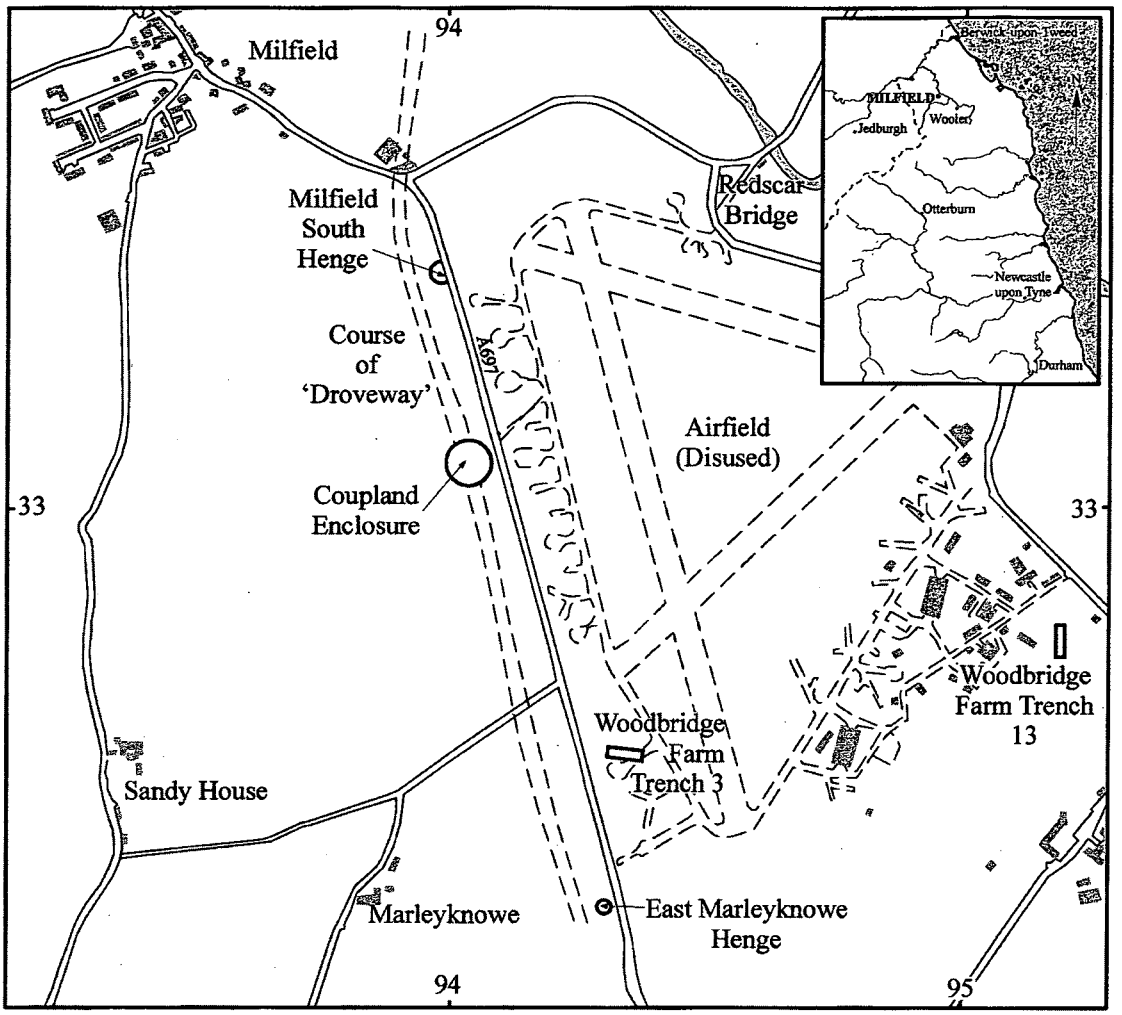


Fig 1. Location of the Woodbridge Farm trenches.

The uneven firing evident by the different colours of outer surface, core and inner surface indicates that the pots were fired by an open firing method. The assemblage includes 3 rim sherds and 25 body sherds; a minimum of 7 vessels are represented.

MELDON BRIDGE WARE

An assemblage of Late Neolithic Meldon Bridge Ware was recovered from a pit [1303] in trench 13 (fig. 2) together with charcoal. The trench was located at NT 951 327. A total of 9 sherds were found together with a further 43 tiny and heavily abraded sherds. The latter sherds, due to their small size and eroded condition, are not described further in this report. Sometimes referred to generically as Peterborough Ware this northern variety of impressed ware has a distribution which extends from the type site in Peebleshire (Burgess 1976) into the counties of north-eastern England. Sites close to Woodbridge

Farm which have produced this type of ceramic material include Yeavering (Ferrell 1990), Thirlings (Miket 1987), Whitton Hill (Miket 1985) and those from the vicinity of Ford-Crookham (Longworth 1969; Ferrell 1990).

The sherds from Woodbridge Farm show certain characteristics typical of the Meldon Bridge tradition including a rim sherd with a flat rim and twisted cord decoration together with a shallow concave neck and fingernail impressions on the outer surface. The other body sherds also show typical Meldon Bridge characteristics as they come from round bodied vessels, some with evidence of carinations, and have fingernail impressions over their entire outer surface (fig. 4).

The sherds from the Woodbridge Farm site show remarkable consistency in terms of their fabric being hard, thick walled and containing large crushed stone angular grits which indicates they were made using added opening materials. They have a corky fabric on account of the burning out of organic inclusions during the firing process and/or the dissolution of calcareous inclusions; in addition they have all been burnished and some show the use of grass wiping. The uneven firing evident by the different colours of outer surface, core and inner surface indicates that the pots were fired by an open firing method. The assemblage includes 1 rim sherd and 8 body sherds; a minimum of 4 vessels are represented.

DISCUSSION

The Neolithic pottery from the Woodbridge Farm site was recovered from what appear to be domestic pit features associated with charcoal. In the case of the Grimston Ware material the pit from which the assemblage came was situated at the terminal of a shallow gully which could suggest that it was associated with a structure. As the pits were found in narrow archaeological trenches just 3.5m wide it is highly likely that further pits exist in this area. The pits containing the pottery fall into the ill-defined category of 'domestic pit', and in conjunction with the gullies and post holes, can reasonably be thought to represent evidence for a settlement site.

The physical remains (pits, gullies and post-holes), artefactual residues (pottery and charcoal) and multiple occupations during the early and later Neolithic recall the evidence from Thirlings, a multi-period Neolithic settlement site just over a kilometre away. Like Woodbridge Farm the Thirlings site was also located on the free-draining, raised fluvio-glacial gravel terrace and this is also the case for the Neolithic settlements at Yeavering and the Coupland Enclosure. The Woodbridge Farm site thus offers further evidence for a pattern of relatively dense Neolithic settlement concentrated on the gravel terraces of the Milfield Plain, with repeated occupations of those same places (persistent places) throughout a period which included the transition from the use of Grimston Ware to the use of impressed wares. Work by Gibson (1986a) has indicated that Neolithic pottery production was conducted locally using local clays. The use of the locally occurring agates and quartz as opening materials (temper) added to Neolithic pots noted by Miket (1987) gives further support to this conclusion.

The botanical macro-fossils recovered from domestic pits containing Grimston Ware at the Coupland Enclosure site indicated that wheat and barley were being grown in the centuries around 3900 BC (cal.) on the gravel terraces (Waddington 1999). This conjures up an image of many small-scale settlements distributed over the raised terraces of the plain in close proximity to the rich resources of the river Till and the adjacent wetland fringes (e.g. wildfowl, fish, rushes, watering animals, edible green leaf plants) over what is now the modern alluvial flood plain.

On the basis of the archaeological evidence for relatively flimsy structures it has been argued that these settlements may have been semi-permanent, occupied for several months of the year or for just a few years at a time (Waddington 1999). The continued use of a lightweight mobile stone tool kit during the Early Neolithic also suggests that a considerable degree of mobility was included in the pattern of Neolithic settlement in this region

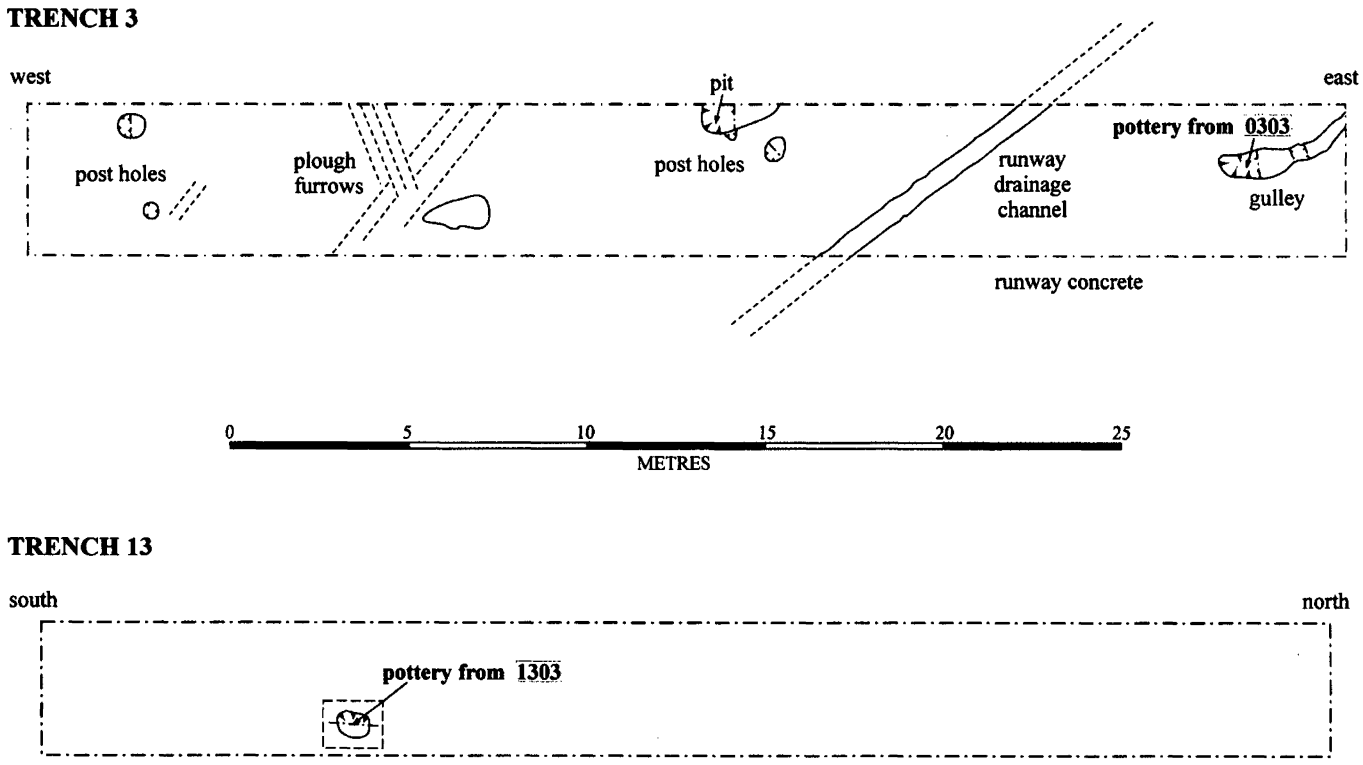


Fig 2. Plan of trenches 3 and 13.

(*ibid*). However, the macro-fossil and pollen evidence is quite clear that cultivation of cereals was also taking place at this time (*ibid*; Jacqui Huntley pers com.). Therefore, the key questions which this further evidence for Neolithic settlement pose are: what type of settlement pattern obtained in this area during the Neolithic, how did it develop over time, and how did patterns of lowland and upland settlement relate?

APPENDIX 1: CATALOGUE OF POTTERY

The pottery sequence in this catalogue has been determined by the small find number assigned to each sherd after excavation. As a result sherds belonging to the same vessel do not necessarily occur together although they are cross-referenced in the entries.

GRIMSTON WARE (28 SHERDS FROM CONTEXT [0303])

1. Body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular or round-based vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 11mm maximum thickness. This sherd is probably from the same vessel as sherds 4, 8, 9, 13, 15, 17, 19, 23 and 28. Undecorated. (fig. 3).
2. Body sherd with thin wall, hard fabric and crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular or round-based vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with area of fire cloud, dark grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 7mm maximum thickness. Probably from the same vessel as sherds 3, 5, 7, 10, 14, 21, 22, 24, 25 and 27. Undecorated. (fig. 3).
3. Body sherd with thin wall, hard fabric and crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular or round-based vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 6mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 2).
4. Body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular or round-based vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 10mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 1). (fig. 3).
5. Rim sherd with thin wall, hard fabric and rolled over rim. Part of an open bowl but too small to permit accurate estimation of the diameter of the vessel. Crushed stone angular grits. Light buff brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 7mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 2) (fig. 3).
6. Body sherd of hard fabric with angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular or round-based vessel. Red brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and inner surface. The vessel has been burnished. The sherd measures 6mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. A different fabric from all the other sherds from this context.
7. Body sherd with thin wall, hard fabric and crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular or round-based vessel. Light brown colour on external surface with dark brown core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 5mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 2).
8. Body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular or round-based vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with grey core and grey brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 10mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 1).
9. Body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular or round-based vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with grey core and grey brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd

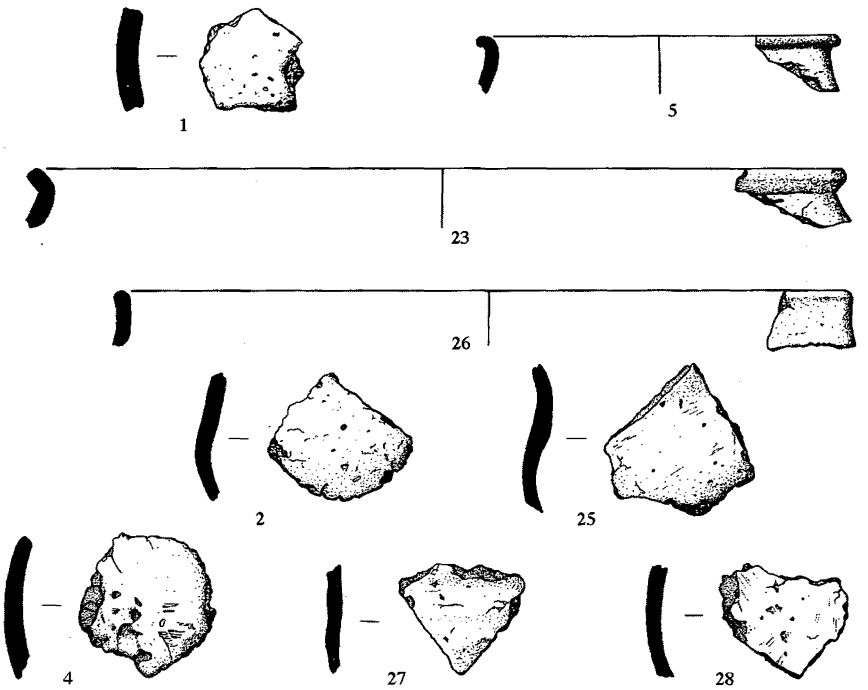


Fig 3. Selected Grimston Ware sherds 1, 2, 4, 5, 23, 25, 26, 27 and 28 (scale 1:4).

measures 10mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 1).

10. Abraded body sherd with no external face remaining. Dark brown core and inner face with crushed stone angular grits. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. (See also sherd number 2).
11. Body sherd of hard fabric with highly smoothed surface and angular grits different from the other sherds in the assemblage (except 12). Curving profile suggesting part of a globular or round-based vessel. Dark brown coloured external surface and inner surface with light buff brown core. The vessel has been heavily burnished and grass wiped giving it a shiny surface. The sherd measures 8mm maximum thickness. Probably from the same vessel as 12. Undecorated.
12. Body sherd of hard fabric with highly smoothed surface and angular grits different from the other sherds in the assemblage (except 11). Dark brown coloured external surface and inner surface with light buff brown core. The vessel has been heavily burnished and grass wiped giving it a shiny surface. The sherd measures 8mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 11).
13. Body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular or round-based vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with grey core and grey brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 9mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 1).
14. Body sherd with thin wall, hard fabric and crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular or round-based vessel. Light brown colour on external surface with dark brown core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 6mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 2).
15. Body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Slightly curving profile suggesting part of a globular or round-based vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and

wiped with grass. The sherd measures 9mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 1).

16. Body sherd of hard fabric with large crushed stone angular grits. Slightly curving profile with carination suggesting part of a globular vessel. Light orange-brown colour on external surface with same coloured core and a slightly lighter inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 10mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. A different fabric from all the other sherds from this context although it could possibly be from the same vessel as sherd number 20.
17. Body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular vessel. Buff to medium brown colour on external surface with grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 9mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 1).
18. Body sherd of hard fabric with large crushed stone angular grits. Light brown-grey external surface and dark grey core, no inner surface remaining due to abrasion. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd is of unknown thickness as the inner side has been eroded away. Undecorated. A different colour from all the other sherds from this context.
19. Body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Light buff brown colour on external surface with grey core. The colour of the inner face remains unknown as this surface has been abraded. The vessel has been burnished. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 1).
20. Body sherd of hard fabric with large crushed stone angular grits. Slightly curving profile suggesting part of a globular vessel. Light yellow-brown colour on external surface with same coloured core and inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 6mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 16).
21. Body sherd with thin wall, hard fabric and crushed stone angular grits. Light buff brown colour on external surface with area of fire cloud, dark grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 5mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 2).
22. Body sherd with thin wall, hard fabric and crushed stone angular grits. A possible carination evident although the sherd is too small for this to be definite. Light brown colour on external surface with dark brown core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 6mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 2).
23. Rim sherd of hard fabric with rolled over rim. Part of a large thick-walled open bowl but too small an angle evident to permit accurate estimation of the diameter of the vessel. Crushed stone angular grits. Light buff brown colour on external surface with grey core and grey brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 9mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 1). (fig. 3).
24. Body sherd with thin wall, hard fabric and crushed stone angular grits. Light buff brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 5mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 2).
25. Body sherd with thin wall, hard fabric and crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile and carination indicating part of a thin-walled globular or round-based vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with area of fire cloud, dark grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 6mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 2). (fig. 3).
26. Simple rim sherd of hard fabric with blackening on the inside. Part of an open carinated bowl but too small to permit accurate estimation of the diameter of the vessel. Angular grits. Very light buff brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 6mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (fig. 3).
27. Body sherd with thin wall, hard fabric and crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile and carination indicating part of a thin-walled globular vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and dark brown inner surface. The vessel has been

burnished and wiped with grass. The sherd measures 6mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 2). (fig. 3).

28. Body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a globular vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with grey core and grey brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 9mm maximum thickness. Undecorated. (See also sherd number 1). (fig. 3).

Meldon Bridge Ware (9 sherds and 43 degraded sherds)

29. Thick walled body sherd of hard fabric with large crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a rounded vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with dark brown core and blackened inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 19mm maximum thickness. The sherd is decorated with vertical impressions. The sherd is probably from the same vessel as sherd numbers 31, 32, 33 and 34. (fig. 4).
30. Thick walled rim sherd of hard fabric with a shallow neck, slight shoulder and twisted cord impressions on the flat top of the rim. Medium brown colour on external surface with blackened core and buff coloured inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 20mm maximum thickness. The sherd is decorated on its outside surface with oblique impressions. (fig. 4).
31. Thick walled body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a rounded vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with dark brown core and medium inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 16mm maximum thickness. The sherd is decorated on the outer surface with oblique impressions. (See also sherd number 29).
32. Thick walled body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a rounded vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and medium brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished. The sherd measures 19mm maximum thickness. (See also sherd number 29).

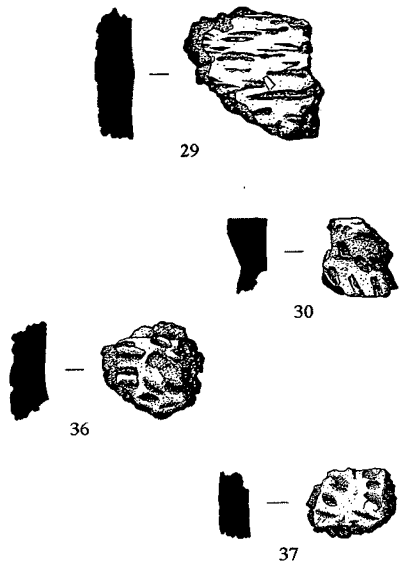


Fig 4. Selected Meldon Bridge Ware sherds 29, 30, 36 and 37 (scale 1:4).

33. Thick walled body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a rounded vessel. Light buff brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and medium brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished. The sherd measures 16mm maximum thickness. It probably belongs to the same vessel as 29 and 31.
34. Thick walled small body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Light buff brown colour on external surface with blackened core and inner surface. The vessel has been burnished. The sherd measures 13mm maximum thickness. The sherd is decorated on the outer surface with oblique impressions. (See also sherd number 29).
35. Thick walled abraded body sherd with the inner surface missing. Hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. The vessel has been burnished giving a smooth outer surface which has no decoration. Its curving profile implies it comes from a carinated vessel. It has no decoration or definitive shape to determine whether it is Meldon Bridge Ware but the fabric is essentially the same as the Meldon Bridge sherds and it has come from the same context so it is considered likely to have come from a vessel of that ceramic tradition. The sherd measures 19mm maximum thickness but

would have originally been thicker as the inner face has eroded away.

36. Thick walled body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a rounded vessel. Light buff brown merging to grey brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and medium brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 16mm maximum thickness. The sherd is decorated with fingernail impressions. It probably belongs to the same vessel as 37. (fig. 4).

37. Thick walled body sherd of hard fabric with crushed stone angular grits. Curving profile indicating part of a rounded vessel. Light buff brown merging to grey brown colour on external surface with dark grey core and medium brown inner surface. The vessel has been burnished and grass wiped. The sherd measures 15mm maximum thickness. The sherd is decorated with fingernail impressions. (See also sherd number 36). (fig. 4).

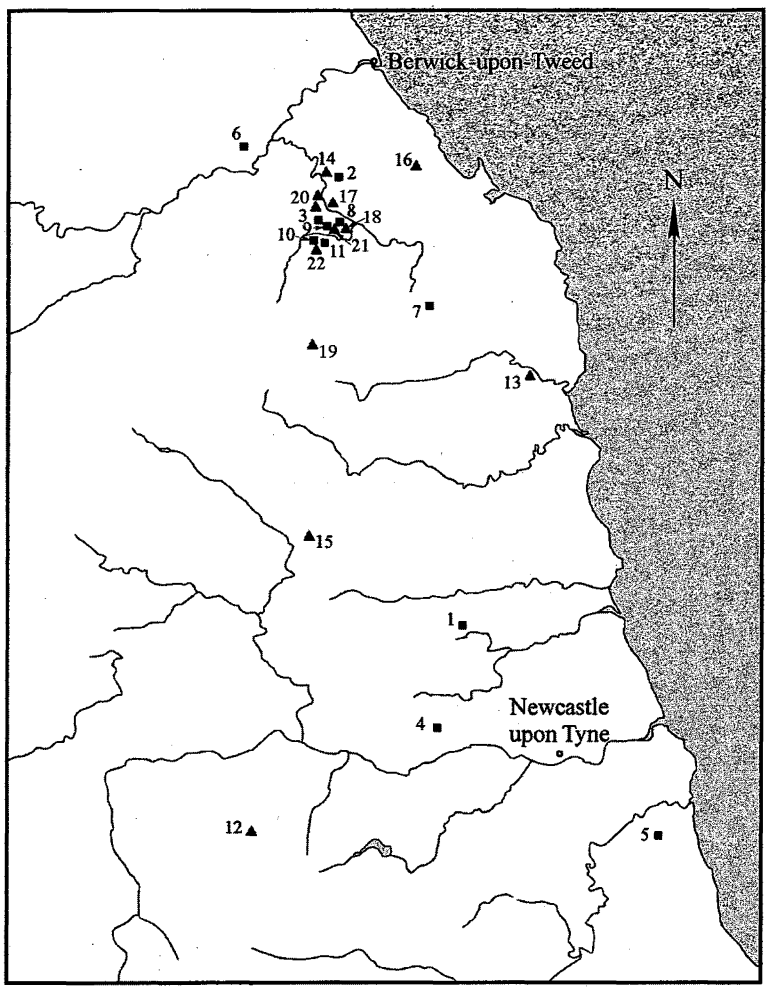
NEOLITHIC POTTERY SITES IN NORTHUMBERLAND

Grimston Ware Sites in Northumberland (See also fig. 5)

SITE	REFERENCES
Bolam Lake (Sandyford Field)	Waddington and Davies 1998
Broomridge (Ford Barrow)	Greenwell and Rolleston 1877; Newbiggin 1935
Coupland Enclosure	Waddington 1996
Harlow Hill	Newbiggin 1935; Tait 1968
Hasting Hill (Co. Durham)	Manby 1973
Hirsel (Coldstream)	Cramp 1980
Old Bewick	Piggott 1931
Thirlings	Miket 1976; 1987
Woodbridge Farm	This report
Yeavering Palace	Hope-Taylor 1977; Ferrell 1990
Yeavering Henge	Harding 1981, 127; Ferrell 1990

Meldon Bridge and Peterborough Ware Sites in Northumberland (See also fig. 5)

SITE	REFERENCES
Allendale (Old Town Farm)	Tait 1968
Alnwick	Leeds 1927, 457
Ford Castle (Crookham)	Leeds 1927, 457; Longworth 1969; Miket 1976
Heatherwick (Elsdon)	Tait 1968
Kyloe Crags	Tait 1968
Redscar Bridge	Leeds 1927, 457; Miket 1976
Thirlings	Miket 1976; 1987
Wether Hill	Topping 1997 (this single sherd is not certain)
Whitton Hill	Miket 1985; Ferrell 1990
Woodbridge Farm (Milfield)	This report
Yeavering Palace Site	Hope-Taylor 1977; Ferrell 1990



■ Grimston Ware Sites ▲ Meldon Bridge and Paterborough Ware Sites

1. Bolam Lake
2. Broomridge
3. Coupland Enclosure
4. Harlow Hill
5. Hasting Hill
6. Hirsel
7. Old Bewick
8. Thirlings
9. Woodbridge Farm
10. Yeavering Palace
11. Yeavering Henge
12. Allendale (Old Town Farm)
13. Alnwick
14. Ford castle (Crookham)
15. Heatherwick (Elsdon)
16. Kyloe Crags
17. Redscar Bridge
18. Thirlings
19. Wether Hill (possible Peterborough ware)
20. Witton Hill
21. Woodbridge Farm
22. Yeavering Palace Site

Fig 5. Map showing earlier Neolithic pottery sites on Northumberland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Archaeological Services, University of Durham for funding the study of this pottery and to Linda Bosveldt for drawing the pottery and Tony Liddell for drawing the maps.

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