

NOTICE OF AN

Ancient Potter's Kiln

DISCOVERED IN THE

PARISH OF WEYBOURNE, IN THE HUNDRED OF HOLT,

COMMUNICATED BY

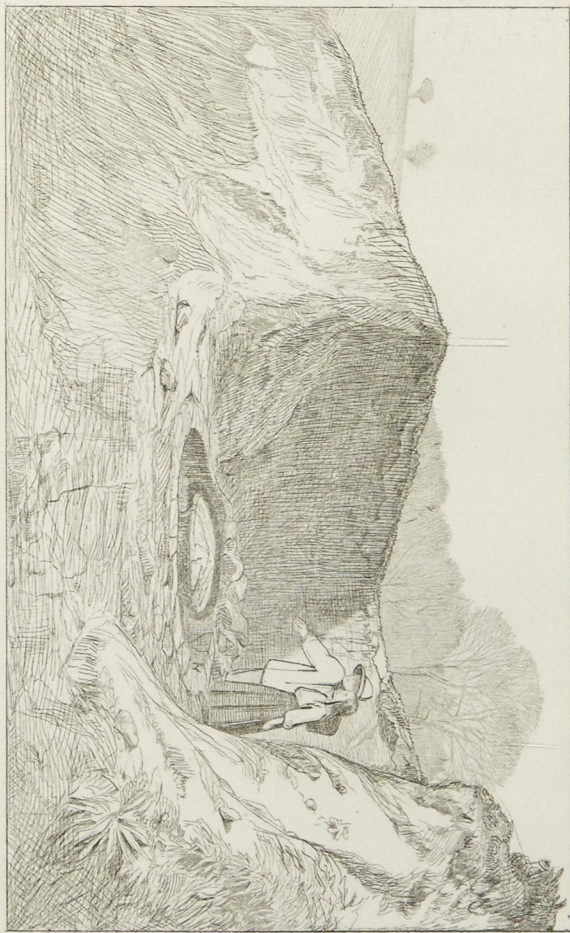
WILLIAM J. J. BOLDING, ESQ.

BETWEEN two fields, not far from the east boundary of the parish of Weybourne, in the hundred of Holt, there is a chalk-pit which appears to have been occasionally used for agricultural purposes. The soil resting on the chalk showed no marks of difference from the rest of the field; but on walking past the face of the steep bank I fancied some of the chalk was darker, and had been disturbed. On examination I found some pieces of Roman pottery, and determined on a farther investigation. The following are notes of the result.

The outline of the disturbed soil represented a bowl-shaped pit (No. 1) about four feet in depth and twenty feet in diameter if formed into a complete circle, and nearly flat at the bottom. Of this bowl the chalk-pit formed a section, nearly in the middle.

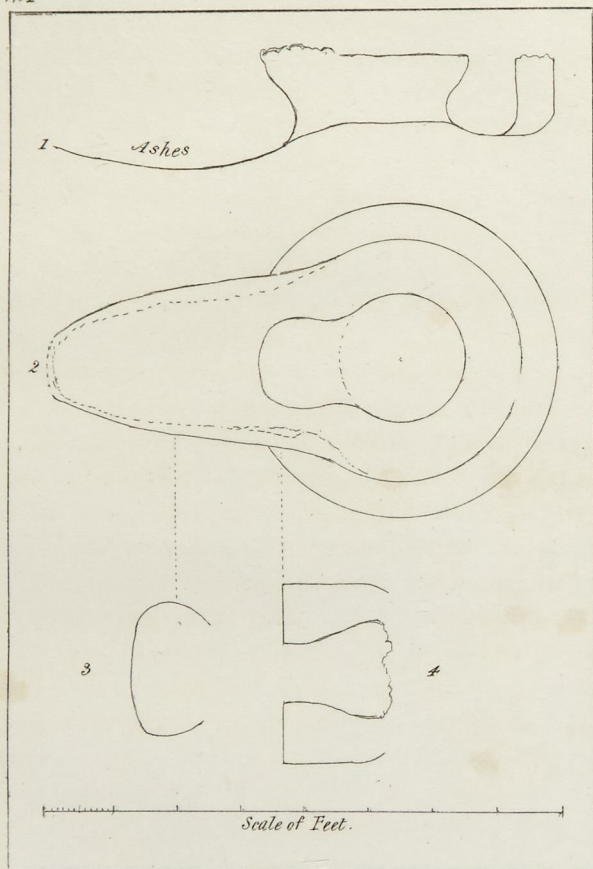
I commenced by digging in a slanting direction from the surface to the centre, and soon came upon what appeared to be a circle of broken Roman pottery, cemented with brick-earth, which had evidently been subjected to the action of fire. Gradually a circular table, surrounded by a flue and a fire-place, was laid bare, as represented in the plan (No. 2),

W.



A POTTERS KILN WEYBOURNE.

N^o 2



1 Section of the Kiln.

3 Section of the fire place.

2 Plan of the Do.

4 Do. of the flue & table.

and which I think could have been nothing else than a Romano-British potter's kiln.

This kiln differs in many respects from those described by Mr. Artis and others,* and as this is the only instance of remains of the kind being found in the County, a further minute description of them may be interesting.

The ware was all of that dull blue kind which is usually found, except the fragments built into the kiln itself, and from them the colour had been driven off by the intense heat. The bottoms of the vessels must have varied very much in size—from one inch and a half to ten or twelve inches, perhaps more. There was very little attempt at ornament on any of them; and out of about fifty pieces which I collected, two or three only had foliated patterns upon them, which ran round the bowl below the rim. One or two other pieces, which formed the side of a bowl, were indented by marks such as would be represented by the finger nail in soft clay; these marks were very similar to those visible on the Saxon pottery, which has been found in plenty on the neighbouring Salthouse marshes, and which is of an inferior kind, bearing no marks of the lathe. There were no fragments of bricks. The kiln itself was coloured a deep blue-black, so were the pieces of wrappers or outer coverings. It had evidently been used more than once before the inside circle of fragments with brick-earth had been added, and it had been used after the addition, as both brick-earth and pottery were stained with the colouring matter.† Although the heat had been strong enough to destroy the colour of the pieces of pottery used, it had not penetrated to the outer circle.

* See the work entitled "The Celt, the Roman, and the Saxon," by Thomas Wright, Esq. Chap. VII., pages 212, 213, and 214.

† This colouring matter seems to have been pyrogallie acid, for I find that the fumes from tannin or gallic acid colours brick-earth heated to a red heat with tints from a pale blue to a dark blue-black. If oak branches and leaves were used for the fire the process is explained.

The construction of the kiln appeared to me to be this: an excavation was formed, flat at the bottom, on which was marked the outer circle, five feet in diameter; from the same centre a circle, two feet in diameter, formed the table; by removing the earth from the intermediate space to the depth of ten inches a flue was thus constructed; the outer circle was broken into, and gradually inclined a few inches for the fire-place; the whole was then washed with a thin coating of slip; the pottery packed in the shape of a dome, covered with wrappers, a vent being left at the top of the dome; fired and coloured. The flue when opened by me had been reduced in width six inches by the juxtaposition of broken fragments, and an addition had been made to the table close to the fire-place, evidently after the kiln had been used once, by placing broken fragments of pottery and brick-earth by the side of it; for what purpose it is not easy to say, but most probably for the purpose of forming a second table on which to pile smaller ware, which could not readily be packed over so wide a space as the first and larger flue.

There is little clay and not much brick-earth in the parish of Weybourne; what there is is of an inferior description. There are, however, some fissures, or pockets in the chalk filled with a better kind of earth, and apparently one of these places had been taken advantage of in which to make the ware.

Weybourne,
March, 1857.
