

## A MEDIÆVAL POTTERY AT ASHTEAD.

BY  
SHEPPARD FRERE.

ASHTEAD in Roman times was the centre of an extensive tile-making industry, and more recent times have witnessed the manufacture of bricks near by.

A link between these two periods was made when, in the summer of 1939, the writer discovered a mediæval site at which pottery and tiles were manufactured.

The site lies beside the main Southern Railway line almost half a mile east of Ashtead Station, and is situated on a bungalow building estate,<sup>1</sup> whose rapid development was responsible at once for its discovery and destruction. The spot is marked on the accompanying sketch map and plan (Figs. 1 and 2), which could have been more accurately drawn but for the regrettably unhelpful attitude adopted by the builder, who at the last moment refused a tracing of the estate plans.

The subsoil is a heavy clay, and in a natural state would bear a dense woodland vegetation; and these two circumstances must be responsible for the situation of the kiln at a spot otherwise so dank and uninviting. In addition, I am informed by Mr. A. W. G. Lowther, F.S.A., and Mr. A. R. Cotton, F.S.A., that Craddocks Lane<sup>2</sup> (see Fig. 1) was the old highway before the construction of the present turnpike road in the eighteenth century.

At the time of discovery the site had already been ruined by building. Soil from the foundation trenches had been removed and thrown into an old field ditch. This heavy soil was much blackened by charcoal, and contained very large quantities of pottery. Information from workmen and indications in the trenches showed that the centre of the dark area was beneath the houses Nos. 14 and 15 Newton Wood Road

<sup>1</sup> The Loraine estate.

<sup>2</sup> Now Craddock's Avenue.

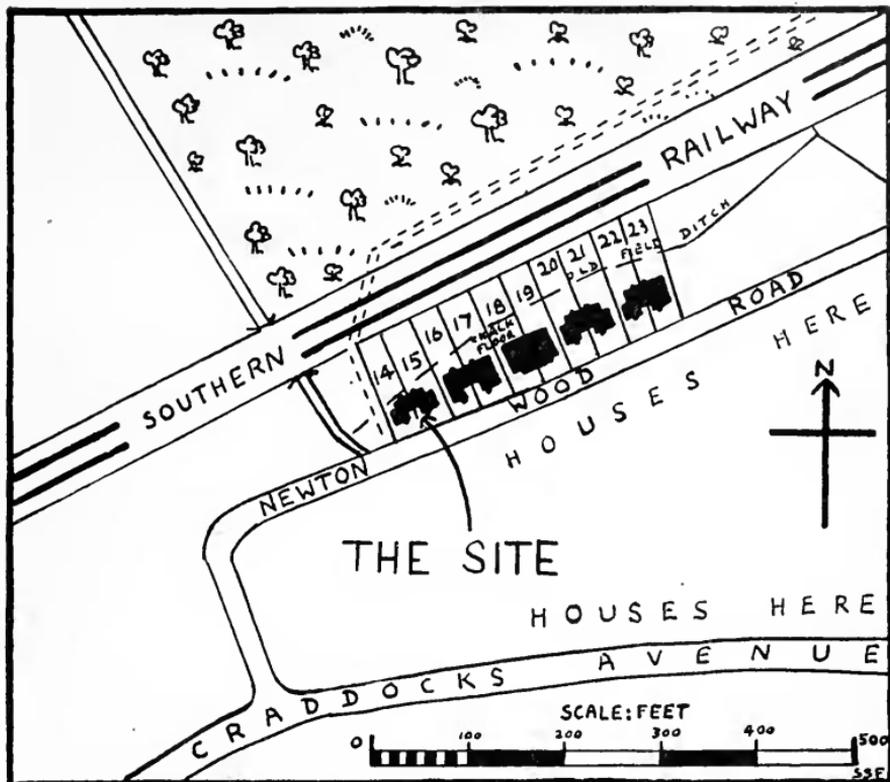


FIG. 1.—SKETCH MAP OF ASHTEAD POTTERY SITE.

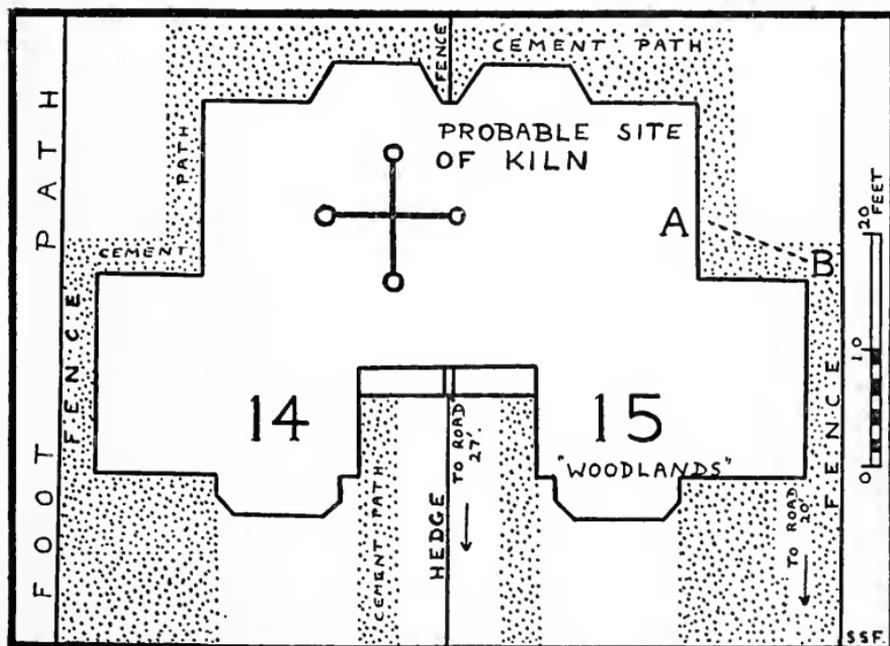


FIG. 2.—PLAN OF NOS. 14-15 NEWTON WOOD ROAD, ASHTEAD.

where a layer of cement, already spread, precluded any archaeological investigation. The workmen, however, though vague, said that there had been some kind of hard floor encountered there, and it seems certain that this was a kiln; for only thus can the large quantity of wasters and burnt debris be explained.

Investigations, carried out with the help of the Epsom College Archaeological Society, especially Messrs. A. C. and R. G. Swan and A. J. Hucker, were therefore confined to the rescue of pottery already exposed, the examination of the drain trenches, and the supervision of other building excava-

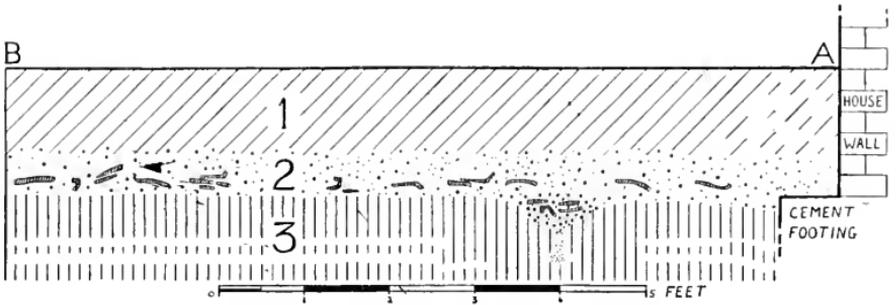


FIG. 3.—SECTION OF DRAIN TRENCH BY HOUSE IN NEWTON WOOD LANE, CRADDOCK AVENUE, ASHTEAD, SHOWING MEDIEVAL POTTERY LAYER.

1. Humus. 2. Clayey soil with charcoal and sherds. 3. Clay Subsoil.

tions in the neighbourhood in case of fresh discoveries. Pottery did occur, though sparsely, up the slight rise eastwards, and between the second and third houses (Nos. 17 and 18) was a chalk floor, perhaps of a barn. Near by were recovered one or two fragments of Roman brick and of Reigate stone—a hint that somewhere near ran the Roman road from the villa on the Common.

Only one drain trench (*see* Fig. 2, A–B) showed any feature. This section A–B (Fig. 3) showed a distinct black layer very full of sherds, six inches thick, separating the humus from the subsoil. At its base was a slight channel.

## THE POTTERY.

Large quantities of sherds were recovered, more than 99 per cent of them being of a very coarse gritty pink or greyish ware, evidently made on the spot. Several definitely warped and overfired pieces occur, and it is probable that much of

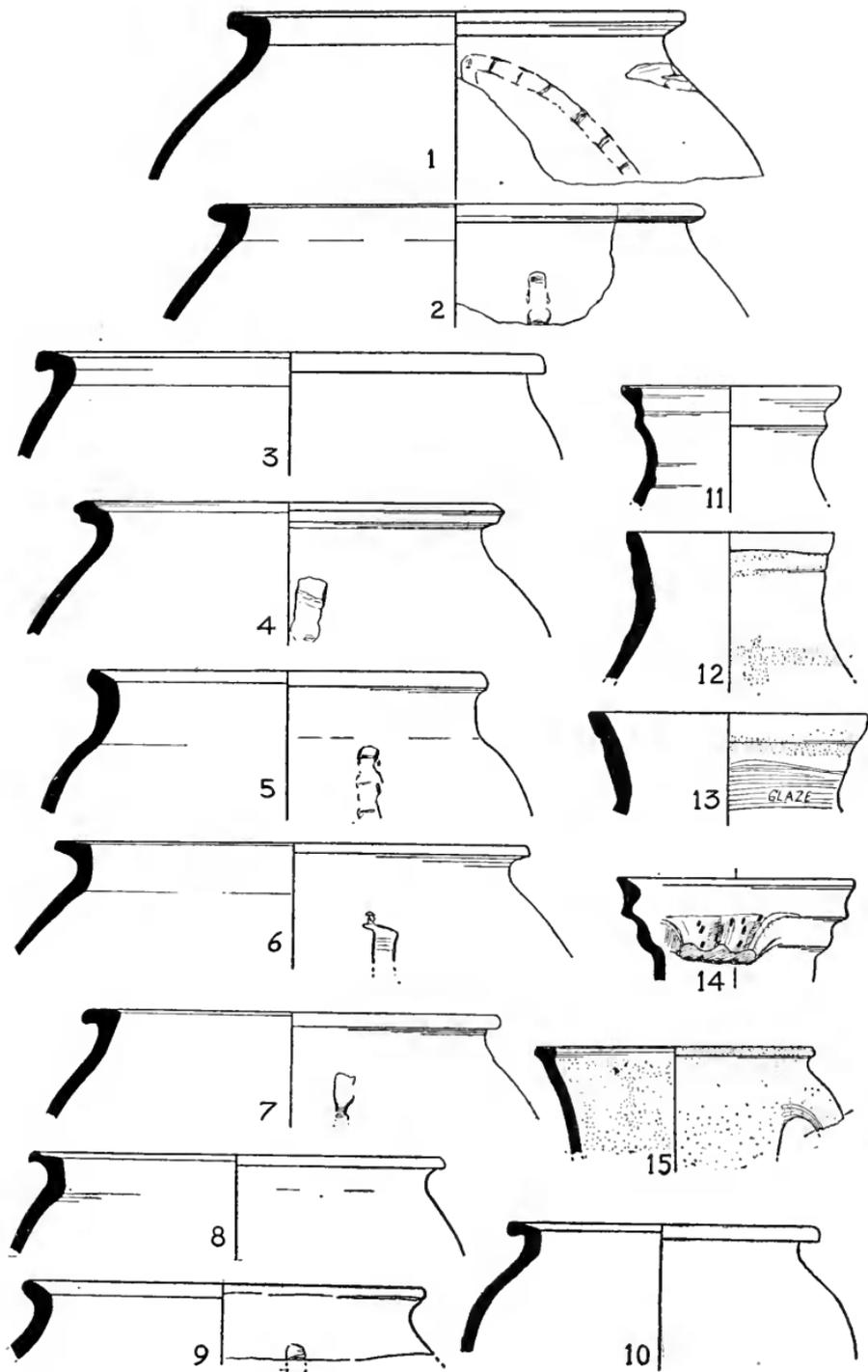


FIG. 4.—MEDIÆVAL COOKING POTS AND JUGS FROM ASHTEAD. ( $\frac{1}{4}$ )

the remaining pottery consists of broken wasters. It is difficult to account otherwise for the presence of more than 450 rims of closely similar vessels recovered, these being but a small proportion of the total still remaining unexcavated.

The remaining 1 per cent belongs to a higher class of ware, and exhibits the characteristic thirteenth- and fourteenth-century green glaze. These vessels were no doubt imported from elsewhere for the use of the potters. They are too fragmentary for illustration.

The coarse ware embraces three chief types of pot, the most numerous (80 per cent) being a jar with flattened rim with square profile, and often an upright neck. The second type (15 per cent) is a shallow dish with oblique, or occasionally upright, side and flattened rim. Far less frequent is a finer jug (4 per cent).

Decoration is of two main kinds, vestigial raised pinched ribs vertical or arched, and streaks of barbotine white slip. The former appears restricted to the jars, the latter perhaps to the jugs. A small percentage of the bases are fingered in the manner characteristic of the period, and the handles are stabbed, a device as much auxiliary to proper firing as ornamental.

In the illustrations the rarer forms loom necessarily as large as the common, but taking the bulk of the pottery together one cannot suppress the reflection that, alike in artistic repertoire and general competence, the Ashtead potters were far below the most degenerate of even Romano-British potters.

A selection of sherds has been examined by Mr. G. C. Dunning, F.S.A., and his notes have been incorporated herein. The writer would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. Bernard Rackham, F.S.A.

*Note:* The pieces here illustrated and a selection of sherds have been given to the Guildford Museum. A second selection is preserved at Epsom College.

**1-10.** Cooking pots. Nos. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 10 are varying shades of brick red, the others dirty grey. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 9 are decorated with poorly executed raised bands. The others perhaps had this decoration too; but the total quantity of fragments bearing raised bands is not great enough to allow of all the jars having had them. Certain distinctions of form

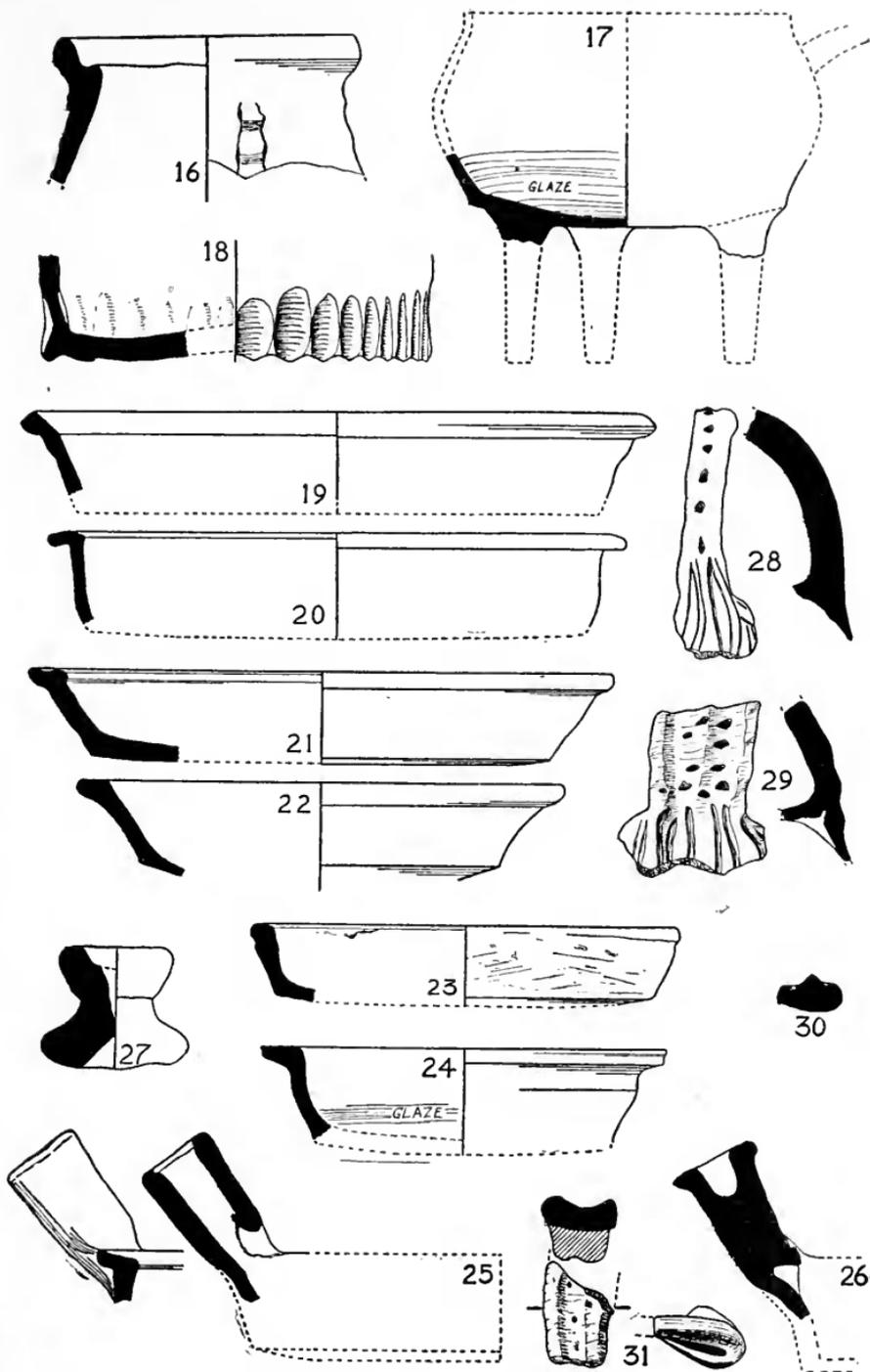


FIG. 5.—MEDIÆVAL POTTERY FROM ASHTEAD. (1)

may be made. 5 and 6 have upright necks, 2, 3, and 7 are noticeably lacking in necks, the shoulders curving straight in to the angle. 9 is recurved, betraying itself only in the bevelled interior. 1 has a warped shoulder.

Sometimes the lip is ridged, as on 1, 4, 8 (and 3 slightly) as though to receive a lid. A noticeable feature is that the inside of the neck is flattened in almost every case, and in 3 is actually faceted.

It has been unfortunately impossible to recover the complete profile of any jar, but they appear to have been of a short baggy form. A very similar vessel, with complete profile, was found in the Rye Kilns (*Sussex A.C.*, LXXIV, p. 63, no. 5).

**11-15.** Jugs of varying form, paste, and decoration.

**11.** Hard-baked, well moulded, brick coloured, undecorated.

**12.** Dark brown, containing the normal substantial grit; decorated with horizontal bands of white slip (indicated by stippling).

**13.** Dark core, brick to grey surface, decorated with horizontal band of white slip partially filling up a moulded hollow, below which is dark green glaze.

**14.** Moulded rim and part of stabbed handle, in white gritty paste, undecorated.

**15.** Brown paste, coated inside and out with a patchy white slip.

The only common feature here is the flattened rim, in two cases (11 and 15) slightly concave.

These jugs resemble some of similar date found at Guildford (*S.A.C.*, XLV, p. 144).

**16.** Rim of storage-jar with internal ledge for lid; decorated with vertical raised rib. Interior brick, exterior dirty brown. Very roughly moulded. The profile is sagging, and in this it resembles the large storage-jar from Fawkhams, Kent (*Ant. J.*, XIX, July, 1939, p. 309 and Fig. 6).

**17.** Base of a pipkin standing on three legs. Grey-brown gritty paste, internal green glaze.

**18.** Base of heavy jug in very coarse gritty dark grey ware, heavily thumbled so that there are slight internal bulges. The frilling of the base appears to reach the lowest level of the sagging base, a feature known as early as the mid-thirteenth century (vid. *S.A.C.*, XLV, p. 142 and references).

19–24. Shallow dishes, usually with sagging bases. The simple straight-walled dish (23) is present, but normally there is a flattened rim, usually everted. 21 (whose rim is slightly concave) represents the pattern, and the carelessness of the workmanship is nowhere better seen than in the attempts like 19 and 22, with their arched walls and feebly moulded lips, to attain the standard. The paste in each case is the normal gritty ware, the colour varying slightly. 24 and possibly 22 have remnants of green glaze towards the base. The clay soil of the site has in all cases proved corrosive of the local attempts at glazing (*e.g.* 13, 17, and 24). There is one example with profile like 20, with the normal brick gritty paste, but with a fine cream slip regularly applied both inside and out.



FIG. 6.—MÆDLÆVAL JUG-HANDLES FROM ASHTEAD. (4)

25, 26. Handles of skillets, hollowed to form a socket for a wooden handle. 25, brown and gritty, is completely perforated, while 26, redder and more sandy, is hollowed each end. A very similar vessel occurred in the Rye kilns (*Sussex A.C.*, LXXIV, p. 59, Pl. XI, 4).

27. Hour-glass shaped lump of brick, gritty, ware, which Mr. Dunning considers to be a saggar, or prop for supporting pots in the kiln.

28–33. Handles.

28. Jug handle in hard white sandy ware, with traces of green glaze: decorated with scored lines and conical stabs. This belongs to a high-class jug, and may not be locally made.

29. Jug handle in brick-red gritty ware: ribbed and decorated with scored lines and stabs.

30. Jug handle with single rib; decorated with shallow stabs and white slip each side of rib.

31. Pipkin handle in creamy gritty ware.

32, 33. Jug handles in dirty brown gritty ware, ribbed and slashed. The two flanking ribs are cabled (especially seen on 32). These two are so nearly identical that it was at first thought they were the same handle. But the wall of the vessel is in each case pieced at the top of the handle, showing that the lip of the jug is not far distant. It is possible that these handles belong to a two- or even three-handled flagon, but the writer has not been able to find a parallel.

Besides these pottery forms, the Ashtead potters, as did those of Rye, manufactured tiles, both for roof and floor. Unlike the Sussex site, however, no elaboration was here attempted. The floor tile fragments are plain slabs of brick,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick, while the roof tiles are thinner, (about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch), in one case certainly curved (probably semicylindrical, like the Roman imbrex), to sit along the ridge. They are in the ordinary brown gritty clay, undecorated and unglazed.

For the dating of this series the writer is greatly indebted to Mr. G. C. Dunning, F.S.A., who indicates that a date in the closing years of the thirteenth century suits all its features, though it could possibly be as late as the first half of the fourteenth century. In the absence, then, of written evidence in the records of Ashtead,<sup>1</sup> we may ascribe the kiln's activity to about the year A.D. 1300. It is greatly to be hoped that this series of associated, and approximately dated, types will prove useful when the mediæval antiquities of the district come to be investigated. Excavation in this field is long overdue.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. A. R. Cotton, F.S.A., has kindly undertaken to investigate this question.