

Medieval Pottery Kiln at Bushfield Shaw, Earlswood: Interim Report

by D. J. TURNER

The Kiln

During the winter of 1973-74, a field survey carried out by the Holmesdale Archaeological Group, under the leadership of Mrs. Dawn Turrel, resulted in the discovery of a medieval pottery kiln in Bushfield Shaw on land scheduled for housing development as part of the 'Whitebushes Estate'. Sherds of medieval pottery were found by Mr. Roger Ellaby and a series of small pilot excavations located a spread of sherds, many of which appeared to be kiln wasters. A magnetometer survey by Mr. A. J. Clark, FSA, of the Department of the Environment, indicated the probable site of a kiln and the Reigate & Banstead Borough Council kindly gave permission for excavations by members of the Group and of the Surrey Archaeological Society directed by the writer for the Reigate Archaeological Co-ordination Committee.

The site (TQ 284 479) is immediately south of a stream running east-west which anciently formed the parish boundary between Reigate and Horley. The kiln thus lay just outside Horley parish. Immediately north of the stream is part of Earlswood Common, isolated from the mass of the common since 1838 by the London to Brighton railway. The soil is Wealden clay, dug until recently for brickmaking in nearby pits (see map, Fig. 1), but sand (Lower Greensand) is only two or three hundred yards away to the north or north-west. The pottery found was sand-filled.

Directly west of the kiln was a derelict north-south track which was found to have been surfaced as it crossed the stream by a layer of stone from the Wealden beds. The metalling was found to lie on top of one or two sherds of eighteenth-century pottery. The track is marked on Rocque's Map of Surrey and was, presumably, the forerunner of the lane which, until the development of the Whitebushes estate, ran north-south about a hundred yards to the west. Both track and lane are shown on the 1st edition of the one-inch O.S. map.

The remains of the kiln had been partly destroyed by ditching operations, possibly carried out in the 19th century. They had also been disturbed by tree roots, animal burrows, etc. Sufficient was recovered, however, to show that it had been an updraught kiln with a single fire or stoke-hole leading to three underfloor ducts (see plan, Fig. 2).

The kiln had been set directly on the land surface as the water table precluded the more normal practice of setting in a pit. The stoke-hole faced

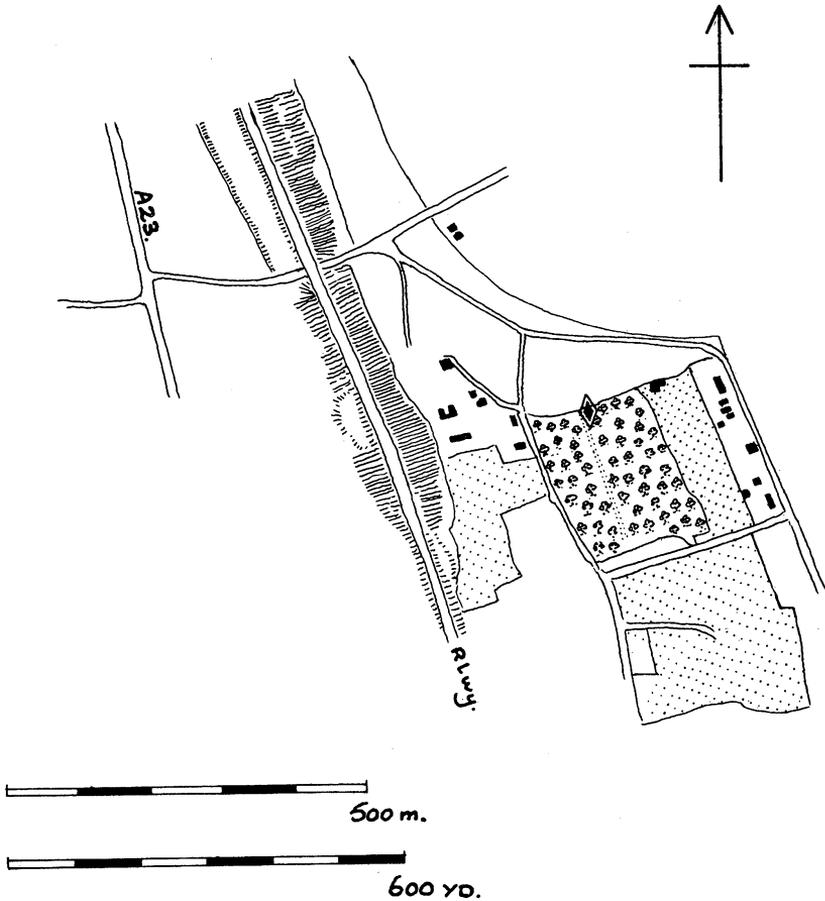


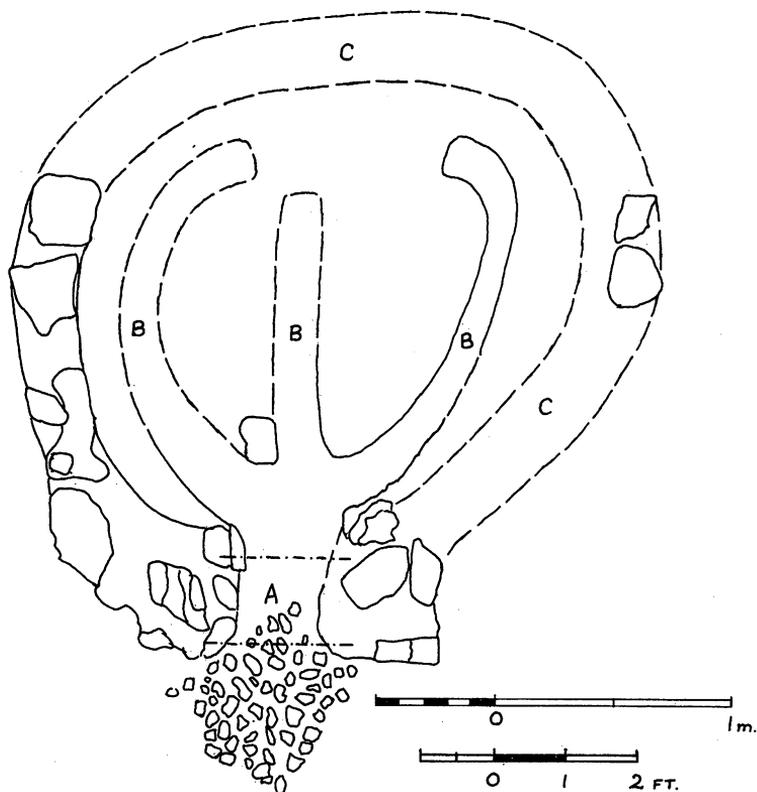
Fig. 1. Position of Kiln. (Old brickfields stippled)

east and outside it was a small apron of pebbles set on the natural clay. Beyond this was a spread of wasters in a black carboniferous soil.

The waster dump contained very little kiln wall material and, over the kiln itself, kiln wall material was confined to a thick layer of crushed burnt clay lying almost wholly within the bounds set by the lines of the kiln walls. Beneath the crushed kiln wall deposit there was little remaining of the kiln floor, but fragments of broken floor and roof tile were found. The sides and bottom of the better preserved northern duct were made of roof tiles.

This can be interpreted as follows:

1. The kiln, once built, was not dismantled between firings.



Key: A - Stokehole with arch over
 B - Underfloor ducts
 C - Kiln wall

Fig. 2. Plan of the 14th Century Pottery Kiln at Bushfield Shaw

2. When the kiln was finally abandoned, the floor—probably made of floor and roof tiles—was removed and the kiln walls were deliberately beaten into the kiln and crushed into a heap.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the potter himself carefully slighted his own kiln. Possibly the kiln design was a 'trade secret' not to be allowed to fall into the hands of rivals interested in technical details. This could suggest that the kiln may only have been in use for one potting season.

The Pottery

Earlswood has long been suspected of having been a medieval potting centre. A well known waster jug, found many years ago on the site of the Earlswood Golf Club House, is exhibited at Guildford Museum (Hooper,

1945, pl. VI). A second jug from Earlswood, now in the British Museum (Rackham, 1948, pl. 61), has been claimed as a waster but may in fact be a usable 'second' and may not be a product of a local kiln. Certainly nothing was recovered from the Bushfield Shaw kiln that provided any parallel to the British Museum jug, although there was much that paralleled the Guildford Museum vessel.

One point is of particular interest. That is the source of the clay used for the white slip found on many jugs. The nearest suitable clay is probably to be found in the Reading Beds in the vicinity of Cheam. It is perhaps not idle to note that a route from Cheam to Earlswood could have included the pre-Turnpike lane, known from at least the 16th century as Potters Lane (Lambert, 1912, 294), running north-south to the west of Banstead. This lane formed the boundary between Banstead and Burgh and linked directly northwards across Banstead Downs to Cheam and southwards via Wray Lane and Linkfield Street to Earlswood Common.

The pottery included a wide range of oxidised coarse ware sherds, very few of which had been glazed, as well as a small number of reduced sherds. Types found include cooking pots and bowls (predominating), dishes, cauldrons, skillets, pipkins and a curfew. Many of the larger cooking pots were strengthened and decorated with applied strips.

Of prime importance, however, is a substantial number of decorated jug fragments. These are also mainly of oxidised fabrics, frequently with white slip and usually with green glaze, although a proportion have clear lead glaze. The latter are almost all decorated by bands of white slip laid either girthwise or in a diaper pattern. The principal decorative technique on the rest of the jugs is by scribing, often to produce sgraffito patterns on the slipped jugs. Wave, loop, concentric circle and combed patterns were found disposed in a variety of combinations and there had been some use of rouletting.

Several of the jugs had bridge spouts and some had face-on-front decoration. One notable bridge spout found (no. 7) is in the form of a fully modelled head.

A small selection of pottery is illustrated (Figs. 3-5). The selection does not attempt to reflect the proportions of different types of vessel or decoration in the assemblage. Full analysis of the material will take some time.

(Colour codes given in parenthesis refer to colours given in the Study Group for Romano-British Coarse Pottery's *Pottery colour chart* [1974]).

Figure 3

1. Large cooking pot of sandy fabric. Orange-pink colour (brown 6A to 6B).
2. Cooking pot with very coarse sand temper (up to 2 mm). Orange-pink colour (brown/yellow 7A).
3. Cooking pot. Orange-pink colour (brown/yellow 7A).

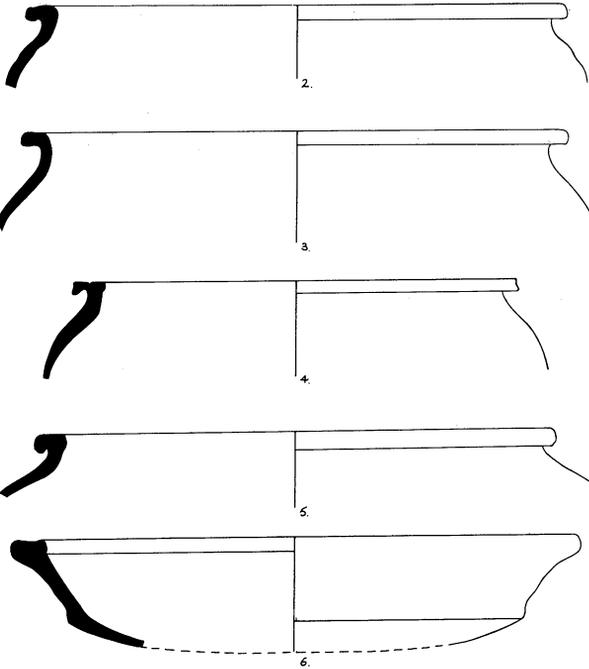
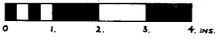
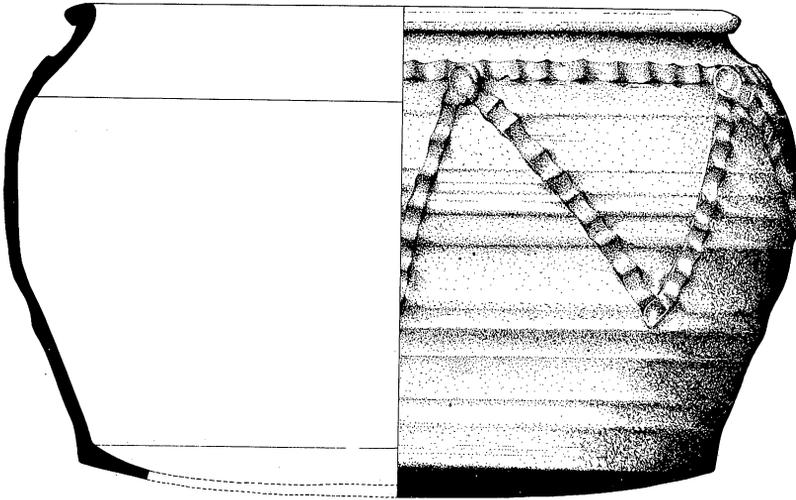


Fig. 3. Pottery from the Earlswood Kiln

4. Cooking pot. Orange-pink colour (brown/yellow 7A). Rim stabbed on top.
5. Cooking pot. Brown surface, partly glazed, (brown 3A to 4A unglazed; yellow/brown 2A to green/brown 2A glazed) over pink fabric (red/brown 5B).
6. Dish with straight sides and sagging base. Orange-pink colour (yellow/brown 6A) with pale slip (?) internally (brown 7B).

Figure 4

7. Bridge spout of anthropomorphic jug. Spout modelled as a head with protruding (broken) nose, possibly phallic. Pierced applied pads for eyes. Headband. Protuberance from neck possibly represents decorated (left) shoulder. Second fragment, possibly of right forearm. Over-fired and re-fired (?) to various shades of grey and brown. Neck of jug decorated with incised waves.
8. Bridge spout of jug. Orange-pink (brown 6A) with brown surface (brown 3A) internally and cream slip (brown/red 7A). Mottled green glaze (green 5A to brown/green 4A) with red spots (blue/brown 2D). Decorated with vertical sgraffito combing showing brown (red/brown 2A).
9. Large jug of sandy fabric. Dirty orange-brown colour (yellow/brown 4A unglazed to yellow/brown 3B with patches of green/brown 3A glazed) externally and orange-pink colour (brown 5B) internally. Decorated with diaper pattern of cream slip (brown/red 7A unglazed, brown/red 6A glazed).
10. Boldly thumbled base of jug. Reduced ware with core partly oxidised. (Surface neutral 4 to 6; oxidised parts of core blue/brown 5C).

Figure 5

11. Sherd of jug decorated with inscribed wave between girth grooves and stamped (?) rosette patterns. Pink (red/brown 6B) body—buff (brown/red 6A) internally. Cream slip (lighter than brown/red 7A) on exterior through which decoration has been cut. Thick brown glaze (brown/red 4A over slip, darker than brown/red 3A in sgraffito).
12. Sherd of jug decorated with girth grooves between running loop sgraffito. Pink (red/brown 6B) body with cream slip (brown/red 7A); fired to brown (yellow/brown 3A) in sgraffito where unglazed. Thin mottled green glaze (brown/green 6A through brown/green 5A, pre-dominating, to green 4A).
13. Fragment of face-on-front jug of partly oxidised pink (red/brown 5B) ware with cream (brown/red 7A) slip and mottled green (yellow/green 5A and green 4A to green/brown 1A) glaze.
14. Sherds of sgraffito decorated jug with wave between girth grooves and rouletting between grooves scribed in chevrons. Pink-buff (yellow/brown 6A) ware with near white slip. Spots of green glaze (yellow/green 5A to green 4A).
15. Sherds of sgraffito decorated jug with wave between girth grooves and

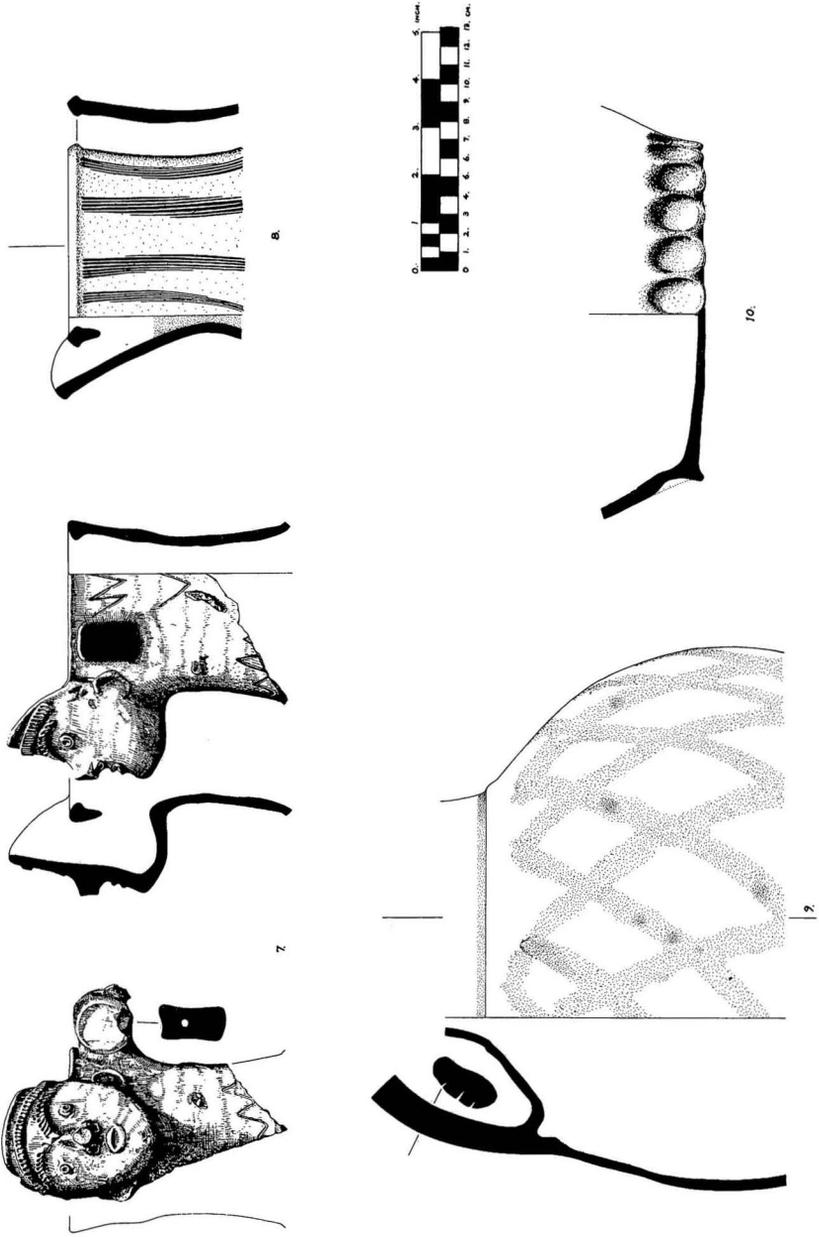


Fig. 4. Pottery from the Earlswood Kiln

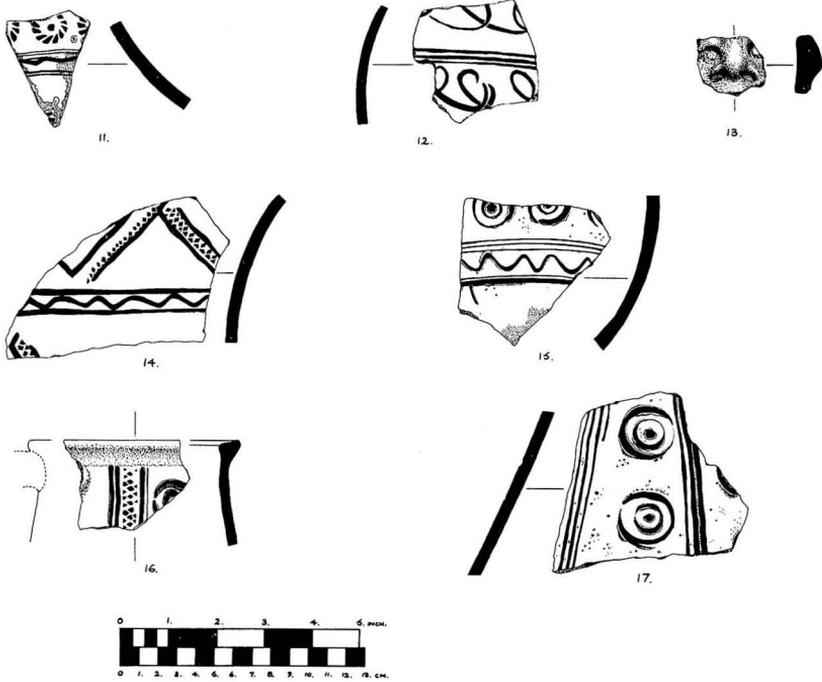


Fig. 5. Pottery from the Earlswood Kiln

- concentric circles above. Pink-buff ware (brown/yellow 7A) with near-white slip that does not extend to the base of the jug. Mottled green glaze (paler than yellow/green 7A to green 4A).
16. Rim of jug. Neck sgraffito decorated with rouletting between vertical grooves and concentric circles. Pink (red/brown 6B) fabric fired brown (brown 2A) in the sgraffito with cream (brown 6B) slip and thin mottled green glaze (paler than yellow/green 7A to green 4A).
17. Sherds of sgraffito decorated jug. Decorated with vertical grooves with concentric circles between. Pink ware (red/brown 5B), fired brown (brown 2A) in the sgraffito, pink-buff (brown/yellow 7A) internally.

Acknowledgements

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