

Limpsfield Medieval Coarseware: a Descriptive Analysis

by M. D. PRENDERGAST

ABSTRACT

This paper describes Limpsfield ware in detail. Previous descriptive treatments are discussed and the writer's own approach is explained. The nature of the evidence and its variable comprehensiveness is specified. A description of the ware from each site forms the main body. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of salient points arising, and recommendations for further work.

PRELIMINARIES

The medieval coarseware potteries of Limpsfield in east Surrey have been known for a very long time. Their importance in the economic life of the region to the south of the Thames has been noted (Dunning, 1958; Prendergast, 1973). Yet information regarding the kilns and waster sites and the ware in consumer contexts is scarce and widely diffused. Recently, the available information was collected and organised into monograph form (Prendergast, 1973). Since archaeological interest in the specifically typological and diagnostic characteristics of the ware for dating and marketing studies encouraged the writing up of such descriptive analysis as a separate paper, this was deliberately omitted from that work. This present paper is concerned purely with a factual statement of the characteristics of Limpsfield ware as it is found in production contexts, with a view towards assisting and stimulating such studies. Together with the writer's work already cited, it therefore fulfils the expectations voiced in 1969 by others in the same field (Turner, 1969).

In time to come, it is probable that physical determinative methods will form the most logical basis for defining Limpsfield, as indeed other wares as well, but these are expensive, beyond normal availability and tell little of possible stylistic evolution.

PREVIOUS DESCRIPTIVE TREATMENTS

Colonel R. Cunnington, who knew the five main sites at Limpsfield, recognised two types of pot. One was a bowl with a sagging base and the other was a large pitcher with wide, flat and slashed handles. Some of the ware

was slightly glazed green while some was decorated with parallel wavy lines (Cunnington, 1932).

G. C. Dunning described the ware as sandy and grey with a harsh grey surface. The handles are broad and strap-like, decorated down the middle with deep slash marks in herring-bone patterns, or narrow and oblong with rows of fine incised lines across the upper end, or slash marks. There are also often combed lines and thumb-impressions down the side (Dunning, 1958).

The pottery from Vicars Haw and Moorhouse was later treated separately by Dunning and Hope-Taylor (1964). The jug handles from the Vicars Haw site have lines of deep thumb-impressions each with a stab-mark or with a line of stab-marks. Some handles have transverse rows of deep knife-cuts. The cooking-pot rim-flanges are squared and undercut. The bowls have broad flanged rims.

PRESENT APPROACH

The pottery industry of medieval Limpsfield was composed of a number of different sites, the evidence for which is set out and discussed elsewhere (Prendergast, 1973). These sites seem to have been grouped into three zones according to the availability of either water or clay resources, or both. Each zone is separated by a distance of about one kilometre from its nearest neighbour. The problem of defining Limpsfield ware is partly dependent on the uniformity of characteristics amongst these zone-groups and amongst the sites of each zone-group. The present paper examines the evidence from each site and sets this out in a suitable form for easy comparison. Thus it is hoped to provide a definitive description of the products of each site, and from there, to attempt a definition of Limpsfield ware as a whole.

DESCRIPTIVE METHOD

It is inaccurate to characterise a ware from a consideration of the colour of kiln rejects from waster heaps (usually the only extant evidence), as has commonly been done, since their rejection resulted from their having fallen below the 'normal standard', or that minimum standard acceptable for sale. The fabric texture and form of rejects are probably identical to that of successfully produced pots ('normal standard'), but the colour of rejects will be very variable, as this is dependant on kiln technology, faulty control of which results in failure.

It is not unlikely that even 'normal standard' Limpsfield pots varied in colour, either because they were produced from different clays at different sites, or because of a differential in kiln technology from site to site or as the years passed (Prendergast, 1973).

For these two reasons caution is necessary before classifying Limpfield according to a colour model. In the description that follows emphasis is therefore placed on those characteristics that are least likely to be sensitive to variables in firing, and which are most obvious and easily recognisable. These are Fabric, Pot types, Rim forms and Decoration.

THE EVIDENCE

All the readily available evidence is considered in this paper. Sources are summarized as follows:

<i>Zone-Group</i>	<i>Site</i>	<i>Information/Pottery described</i>
1	Moorhouse	Turner—Personal Collection Dunning and Hope-Taylor, 1964
2	Lakestreet Green Watts Hill I Watts Hill II Loampit Field	Leveson Gower, 1895 Prendergast—Personal Collection
3	Vicars Haw Scearn Bank	Dunning and Hope-Taylor, 1964 Prendergast—Personal Collection

This evidence is very uneven. It is felt that only at Watts Hill I and Scearn Bank have enough sherds been collected to show the probable full range of characteristics at each of those sites. At Moorhouse, Watts Hill II and Loampit Field the evidence can show only that there is no apparent deviation from Watts Hill I and Scearn Bank. The writer has had no access to Vicars Haw material and relies here entirely on the published information and personal communications.

The pottery from each of these sites except Vicars Haw is now described separately. A short note is also included on Leveson Gower's Lakestreet Green finds.

Watts Hill I (TQ 42305260)

The waster heap originally found here (Leveson Gower, 1869, 1870 and 1895) was almost completely removed and analysed by the writer in 1969. There was no stratification on the site, which was much disturbed. The bulk of the sherds occurred in a 30cm thick patch about 3.5m by 3.5m. Rolled sherds are located up to 7m away.

Fabric

The pottery is generally hard and well-gritted with quartz grains which

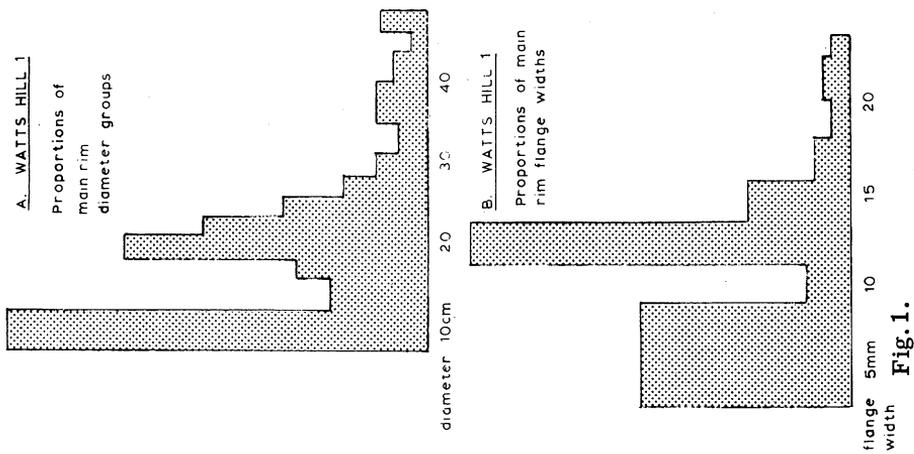


Fig. 1.

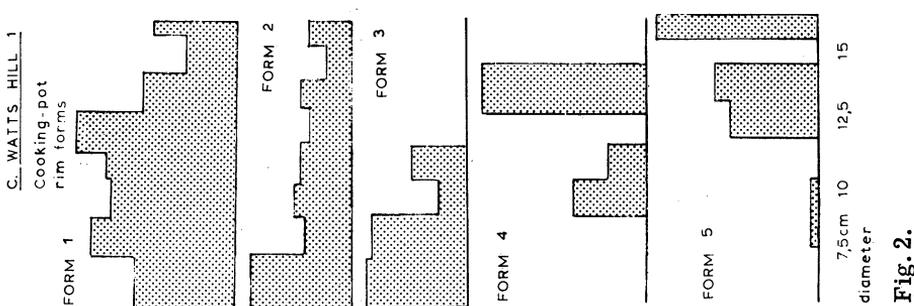


Fig. 2.

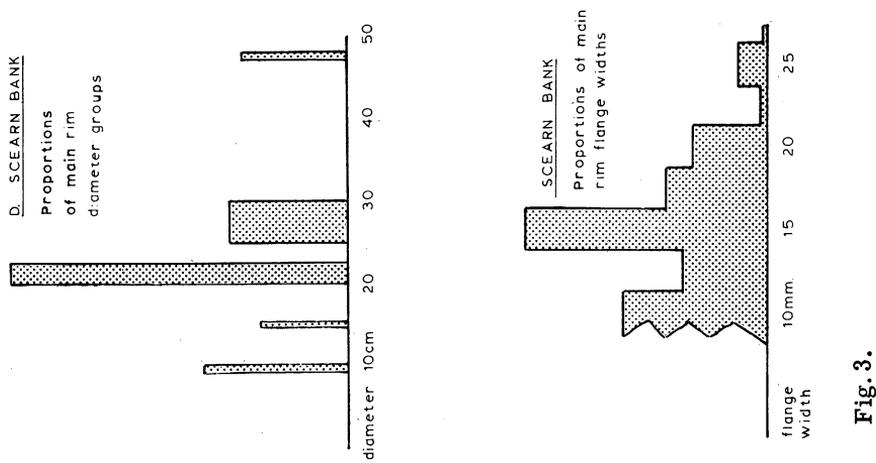


Fig. 3.

may reach 3mm. Colour is fairly uniform being mostly light grey to light brown, but the complete range is from dark grey to very light brown. The fracture is generally monochrome.

Pot Types and Rim Forms

Casual inspection at all Limpsfield sites indicates that the output was predominantly jugs, cooking-pots and dishes (Dunning's 'bowls').

At Watts Hill I the opportunity offered by the great bulk of available rim sherds was taken to test this indication statistically, and to see in what proportions these types were made. Statistical treatment of waster material must take into account difficulties created firstly, by the warping of the rims, and secondly, in the case of all the Limpsfield sites studied by the writer, by the small size of the rim sherds (at Limpsfield 6cm long average), both of which factors make measurement of pot diameter's occasionally uncertain. However, the writer has found little obvious evidence of serious warping at Watts Hill I or Scearn Bank, and feels that the criterion for rejection after firing must usually have been cracking.

Notwithstanding this, the following statistical analysis must be treated with caution. The conclusions drawn from it should not detract from the main descriptive purpose.

Bargraphs A and B (Fig. 1) show the proportional variation in dimensional characteristics in the sample of 400 measurable rims recovered. Bargraph A suggests that pots were produced in three main diameter groups:

<i>Group</i>	<i>Diameter Range (cms)</i>
1	7.5-12.75
2	17.5-30.5
3	35.5-42.25

Similarly, three main groups of flange widths are suggested in Bargraph B.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Flange Width Range (mms)</i>
1	2.5- 7.5
2	±12.5
3	17.5-22.5

Group 1 rims are very often associated with handles and lips, and must represent a jug group. Groups 2 and 3 are cooking-pots and dishes respectively, using currently favoured terminology. There has been little work

done by medieval archaeologists on the relation of pot types to functions, but the terms adopted here describe adequately the uses to which it is assumed each type was put.

Calculations based on the percentage frequency of rim diameters and the average length of each rim sherd demonstrate that these pot types were manufactured in the following rough proportions:

<i>Group</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1	Jugs	57.0
2	Cooking-pots	33.3
3	Dishes	10.0

The large sample of rims of the cooking-pot group (250) encouraged the extension of the analysis to an appreciation of the fairly wide spectrum of rim profiles evident. In this, the undershape of the rim flanges together with the inner flange angle were used as diagnostic variables to group the rims into Forms. Thus Form 1 (nos. 12-17) is characterised by undercut flanges and inner beading. Form 2 rims (18-22) have undercut flanges but no inner beading while Form 3 (23-26) flanges are not undercut. The remaining two forms are less homogeneous. Form 4 (27-29) is a nondescript mixture of Forms 1-3 features and Form 5 (30-31) represents a group with rims typical of the cooking-pot class but with diameters in the dish range. The results are shown in Bargraphs CI to C5 (Fig. 2). Forms 1 and 2 are the most coherent groups, Form 1 being roughly twice as common as Form 2. Form 3 was found in the smaller diameters only. Forms 4 and 5 lack coherence and are probably extreme variations of the other forms. It is possible that the different rim forms reflect individual preferences of the potters working at the site.

Bases are exclusively simple, with no thumbing. Only one profile of a pot from rim to base, that of a dish (no. 37) has been found from any Limpsfield site.

'Cisterns': one bung-hole was recovered from Watts Hill I.

Decoration

This term is here used to cover applied strips on the body and handle markings which have a wholly practical function (prevention of distortion and ease in handling), as well as more strictly decorative work.

The jug handles at Watts Hill I are both broad and narrow and have stabs in both regular and irregular pattern, the instrument used sometimes creating "pimples" on the underside. Slashes are rare and of small size. One handle in the sample is both stabbed and slashed. The lower ends of

the handles found are quite smooth. There is no evidence of thumbing. At the other sites the lower ends of handles are always thumbed.

On the body sherds, line decoration is about twice as common as applied strips. No sherd was found with both. Of the line decoration, multiple incised waves (or combed waves) are predominant, appearing in banks around the pots. Single line incised waves and multiple incised straight lines also occur, sometimes together.

Some of the dishes have stabs on the flanges, while small slashes appear on a very few cooking-pot rims. On the dish rims, multiple incised waves are common.

Four glazed sherds were found amongst the total of collected sherds. The colour of the glaze varies from light brown to green and off-white. In view of the extreme rarity of glaze at Limpsfield, it is interesting that at least one of these is demonstrably a waster, as there is glaze adhering to the fracture. None of these four is atypical of Limpsfield in colour, texture or form.

When applied strips and line decoration occur at other Limpsfield sites these do not differ from Watts Hill I examples and are not separately illustrated.

Scearn Bank (TQ 43065138)

Three distinct heaps of wasters were originally found here (Leveson Gower, 1869). How large these heaps were is unknown, but the likelihood is that they were not all exactly contemporary. Today these seem to be much dispersed and mixed and are now mutually indistinguishable. Leveson Gower mentioned no differences among these heaps.

The sample for description and analysis was collected from the surface at all points of the site. Thus it must certainly contain pottery from each of the three heaps.

Fabric

The ware is very well quartz-gritted. The grits are ill-sorted and vary from quite fine to 3mm. Some sherds are hard but generally rejects at Scearn Bank seem to be softer than at Watts Hill I. Again the colour is very variable. The commonest is light brown to grey but there is a large proportion of dark grey and dark brown to red.

Pot Types and Rim Forms

The sample of 200 rim sherds was treated in the same way as at Watts Hill I. Bargraphs D and E (Fig. 3) show that, within the limits set by the small sample, the tendencies in pot diameters and flange widths closely parallel those at Watts Hill I. Together with the shapes of pots indicated by the largest fragments, this evidence suggests a Watts Hill I range of pot types.

No detailed analysis of rim profiles was carried out. The rim forms identified at Scaern Bank fall within the Watts Hill I spectrum, but there is no evidence for the predominance of any one rim form.

Decoration

Both slashing and stabbing appear on the handles, the slashing being very irregular. The lower ends of the handles are thumb-pressed. One Scaern Bank jug handle is circular in cross-section, a type not seen elsewhere in Limpsfield to the writer's knowledge.

Multiple incised waves are found on some dish rims. On a few others there is a row of small slashes. The writer has not identified multiple incised waves on Scaern Bank body sherds, but single incised line waves and multiple incised straight lines round the body, sometimes together, are common. In all, there seems to be less line decoration at Scaern Bank than at Watts Hill I. Applied strips are common.

No glazed sherds have been found at Scaern Bank. However, two features appear here that have not been met with elsewhere in Limpsfield. One sherd of dark grey Limpsfield-like ware was partially covered on its outer surface with a white slip. One base sherd, thumb-pressed on its external edge, has also been found. Both these may be imports.

Loam pit field (TQ 42445265)

A small surface collection was made at this site, about 100m from Watts Hill I. Leveson Gower's bank, "20 to 30 yards" long and made up almost entirely of sherds, has been much reduced (Leveson Gower, 1869 and 1870).

Fabric

Quartz-grit is about as common as at Watts Hill I. The ware is fairly uniform in colour being mostly light brown to grey. Only a small proportion of brown to orange appears. Loam Pit Field sherds are the hardest in texture of all the Limpsfield wasters investigated by the writer.

Pot Types and Rim Forms

The common Limpsfield range is recognised here, but the proportions are undetermined. The rims of jug diameter often have a flange width in the Watts Hill I cooking-pot range. In every other respect Loam Pit Field rim characteristics are the same as those at other sites.

Decoration

The handles are either stabbed or slashed. The slashing is very regular. The ridges of one thumb-pressed handle are slashed.

Multiple incised waves on dish flanges again occur. This feature appears

also on body sherds, occasionally together with multiple incised straight lines.

Applied strips are common. There is no evidence of glaze.

Moorhouse (TQ 42705385)

This site has now been completely destroyed. The writer has not seen the pottery *in situ*. The following description is based on twelve sherds in private hands.

Fabric

The amount of quartz-gritting is variable, but individual grits are generally less than 1mm. Colour varies from light grey to light brown with some bright pink.

Pot Types and Rim Forms

Sherds of cooking-pots, and of a jug and a dish are represented in the sample. Hope-Taylor reported a large sagging base with applied strips round the edge and claimed these were from 'storage-jars' (Dunning and Hope-Taylor, 1964). Rim forms are similar to those at previously described sites.

Decoration

There is no evidence of decoration in this sample but stabs on 'bowl' flanges are recorded by Hope-Taylor (Dunning and Hope-Taylor, 1964).

The characteristics of Moorhouse ware described conform with some of Watts Hill I. However, the sample contained one very unusual sherd, a base with thumbing underneath. This probably equals Hurst's Group I (firm thumbing underneath without thumbing on the side), hitherto unrecorded outside Cambridge and Carmarthenshire (Hurst, 1963).

Watts Hill II (TQ 42255270).

A very small sample of worn sherds was collected here. Colour varies from red through brown to grey. The fabric is well gritted. From the illustrations, it can be seen there is no divergence from Watts Hill I.

One rim sherd has a slight green-brown glaze on its flange and in the fracture. This is probably a waster.

Lakestreet Green (TQ 419528)

A kiln was found here by Leveson Gower (1895). The kiln structure is treated more fully elsewhere (Prendergast, 1973).

Leveson Gower reported the finding of three, apparently whole, pots at a depth of 3ft 6ins (using his figures). One of these had the following dimensions: circumference: 3ft 2ins; height: 5ins; diameter (presumably rim

diameter): 10½ ins. There are no further details. The writer has been unable to locate these pots in Leveson Gower's deposition in Guildford Museum.

The presumed form of this one pot is characteristic of the Watts Hill I dish class, but the diameter suggests a smaller variant.

CONCLUSION

It is not intended to provide an exhaustive discussion of the evidence set out above. However, a number of points merit comment.

1. The apparent absence of glaze at Limpsfield is controversial (Prendergast, 1973). It can be seen that glaze was not entirely absent; at least two glazed wasters have been found. Cunnington's reference to light green glaze was to Vicars Haw pottery (F. W. Holling, Guildford Museum, personal communication, 1969), yet Dunning emphasises that there was no glaze found there. The matter must remain uncertain.
2. Consideration of the evidence and of the illustrations shows that the products of the kiln sites discussed differ in no very noticeable respect from each other. The overall impression is of a uniformity in style. Going further, if we assume that the sites are not all of the same date, and that the industry extended over roughly 150 years on documentary evidence (Percy, 1969), then this uniformity argues a lack of stylistic development. The problems for the archaeologist attendant on this stagnation are very great (Prendergast, 1973).
3. A satisfactory definition of Limpsfield must ignore colour and concentrate on texture, rim form, handles and decorative characters as set out above. The texture is coarse, but more work needs to be done before the quartz grits can be recognised as natural inclusions from the source clay or as deliberate artificial tempering, a difference which must be determined to avoid possible confusion with other very similar coarsewares. The efficacy of using the other characteristics in defining Limpsfield must be assessed by an exhaustive comparison with material from other south-eastern medieval coarseware production sites. In particular, it would be useful to undertake a full analysis of the source clays of Limpsfield and of fired clays from each production site using physical determinative methods, as outlined elsewhere (Prendergast, 1973). It is such techniques that offer the best hope of solving the problems caused by the uniformity amongst the sites themselves and also by the great similarity to other coarsewares of the south-east.

THE POTTERY (Figs. 4-12)

Watts Hill I

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Hard dark grey, light grit. | 4. Light red-brown, heavy grit. |
| 2. Dark grey, heavy grit. | 5. Dark grey, light grit. |
| 3. Light grey, light grit. | 6. Grey-brown, heavy grit. |

7. Grey-brown, well-fired, gritted.
8. Brown, gritted.
9. Grey-brown, with red core, gritted.
10. Grey-brown, light grit.
11. Grey-brown, gritted.
12. Dark grey, gritted.
13. Light brown, heavy grit.
14. Dark grey, gritted.
15. Brown, heavy grit.
16. Dark grey, heavy grit.
17. Brown-grey, heavy grit.
18. Light brown, gritted.
19. Brown, gritted.
20. Light grey, heavy grit.
21. Light grey, heavy grit.
22. Brown-grey, gritted.
23. Light grey, heavy grit.
24. Dark grey, gritted.
25. Light brown, light gritted.
26. Light brown, light gritted.
27. Red-brown, heavy grit.
28. Dark brown, heavy grit.
29. Light brown, heavy grit.
30. Light brown with red core, gritted.
31. Dark grey, heavy grit.
32. Dark grey, gritted.
33. Brown, gritted.
34. Light brown, gritted.
35. Grey-brown, gritted.
36. Brown, gritted.
37. Brown, gritted.
38. Grey, gritted.
39. Grey, gritted.
40. Grey, gritted.
41. Grey, gritted.
42. Grey, gritted.
43. Very light grey, gritted.
44. Black to dark grey, gritted.
45. Brown, gritted.
46. Hard, well-fired, dark grey, very light grit.
47. Dark brown, heavy grit.
48. Dark brown with red core, gritted.
49. Dark grey, gritted.

50. Light grey, light grit.
51. Red-brown, heavy grit.
52. Brown, heavy grit.

Scearn Bank

53. Hard, grey, gritted.
54. Red-brown, gritted.
55. Light brown, gritted.
56. Light brown, gritted.
57. Light grey, gritted.
58. Light brown, gritted.
59. Hard, brittle, dark-brown, gritted.
60. Soft, light brown, gritted.
61. Brown, gritted.
62. Light grey, gritted.
63. Soft, light brown, gritted.
64. Light grey, gritted.
65. Light brown, gritted.
66. Light grey, diameter undetermined.
67. Light red with red core, gritted.
68. Light grey.
69. Hard, grey, light grit.
70. Soft, light brown, gritted.
71. Light grey.
72. Base-angle sherd, red-brown, gritted, diameter undetermined.

Loam Pit Field

73. Grey, gritted.
74. Light brown, gritted.
75. Light grey, light gritted.
76. Light grey, light gritted.
77. Light grey, light gritted.
78. Light grey, light gritted.
79. Light grey, light gritted.
80. Well-fired, grey, gritted.
Three parallel vertical slashes
2cm long on internal attachment area.
81. Light grey, gritted.
82. Light brown, gritted.
83. Grey-brown, gritted.

Moorhouse

84. Light brown, light grit.
85. Pink surface, grey core, gritted.
86. Light brown, light grit.
87. Pink, some large grits.
88. Light brown, gritted.
89. Light brown, gritted.
90. Light brown, gritted.
91. Light brown, grey internal surface.
92. Light brown, gritted.
93. Grey, brown external surface, gritted.

94. Grey, gritted.

95. Heavy base-angle sherd, grey, gritted. Heavy thumbing underneath.

Watts Hill II

96. Light grey, light grit.

97. Off-white to light brown, light grit.

98. Light red, heavy grit.

99. Light grey core, red surface, thin green-brown glaze internally and on flange.

100. Light grey, light grit.

101. Light grey, light grit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to Mr D. J. Turner of the Society and Mr F. W. Holling of the Guildford Museum for much practical help and advice. To Mr R. H. G. Leveson Gower, of Titsey, I am grateful for permission to excavate at Watts Hill.

REFERENCES

- Cunnington, R. H., 1932. *In* Fry, L. G. Oxted, Limpsfield and neighbourhood.
- Dunning, G. C., 1958. Report on medieval pottery from Joyden's Wood, near Bexley. *In* Tester, P. J., and Gaiger, J. E. L. 'Medieval buildings in the Joyden's Wood square earthwork.' *Arch. Cant.*, 72, pp. 18-40.
- Dunning, G. C., and Hope-Taylor, B., 1964. Limpsfield, Surrey. *In* Council for British Archaeology, Medieval Research Committee, Exhibition of medieval pottery. [Catalogue.] pp. 5-6.
- Hurst, J. C., 1964. 'Jugs with bases thumbbed underneath.' *Med. Arch.*, 6-7 (1962-3), pp. 295-8.
- Leveson Gower, G., 1869. 'On a Roman villa discovered at Titsey.' *Sy. A. C.*, 4, pp. 214-37.
- , 1870. Report of paper read to the Society of Antiquaries of London on 17th June, 1869. *PSAL*, 2nd Ser., 4, pp. 358-60.
- , 1891. Report of paper read to the Society on 12th February, 1891. *PSAL*, 2nd ser., 13, pp. 247-51.
- , 1895. Report of paper read to the Society on 18th January, 1894. *PSAL*, 2nd ser., 15, pp. 50-52
- Percy, K., 1969. 'Limpsfield: documentary evidence for medieval potters.' *Sy. A. S. Bull.*, 58.
- Prendergast, M. D., 1973. The coarseware potteries of medieval Limpsfield in Surrey. *Privately printed and circulated.*
- Turner, D. J., 1969. Note appended to Percy, K., 1969, above.

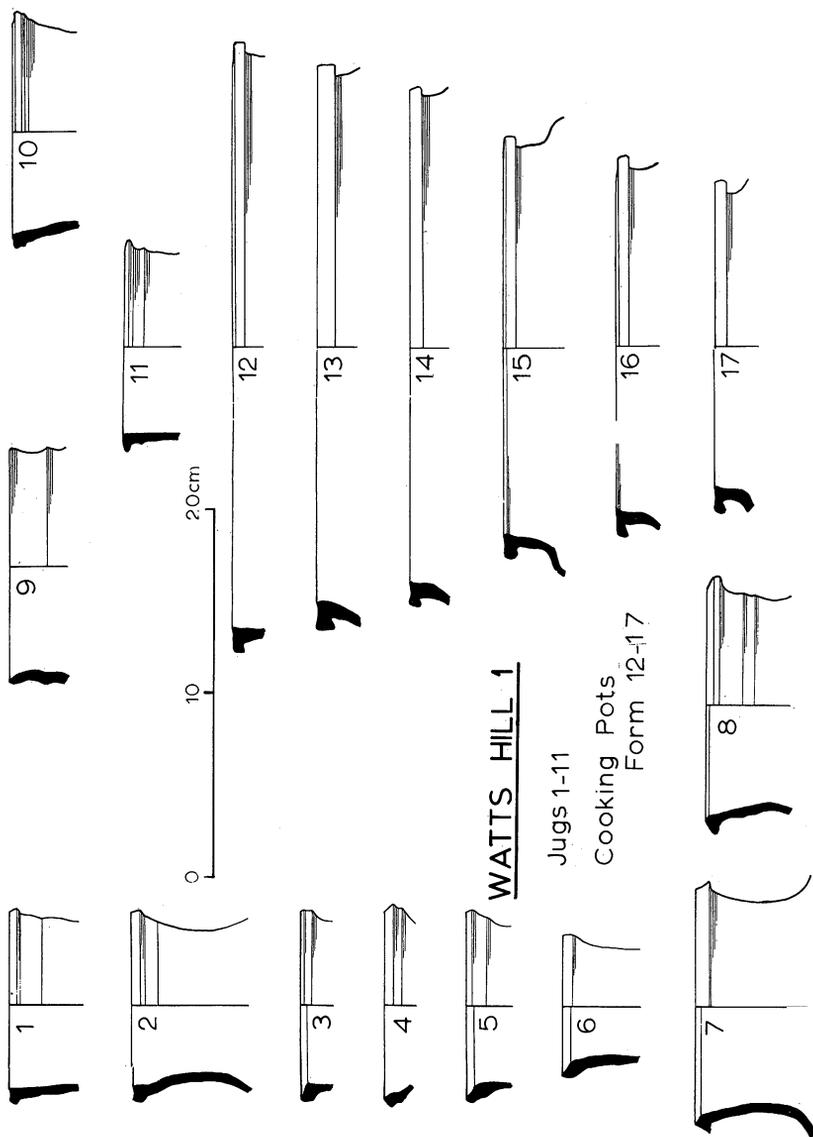


Fig. 4.

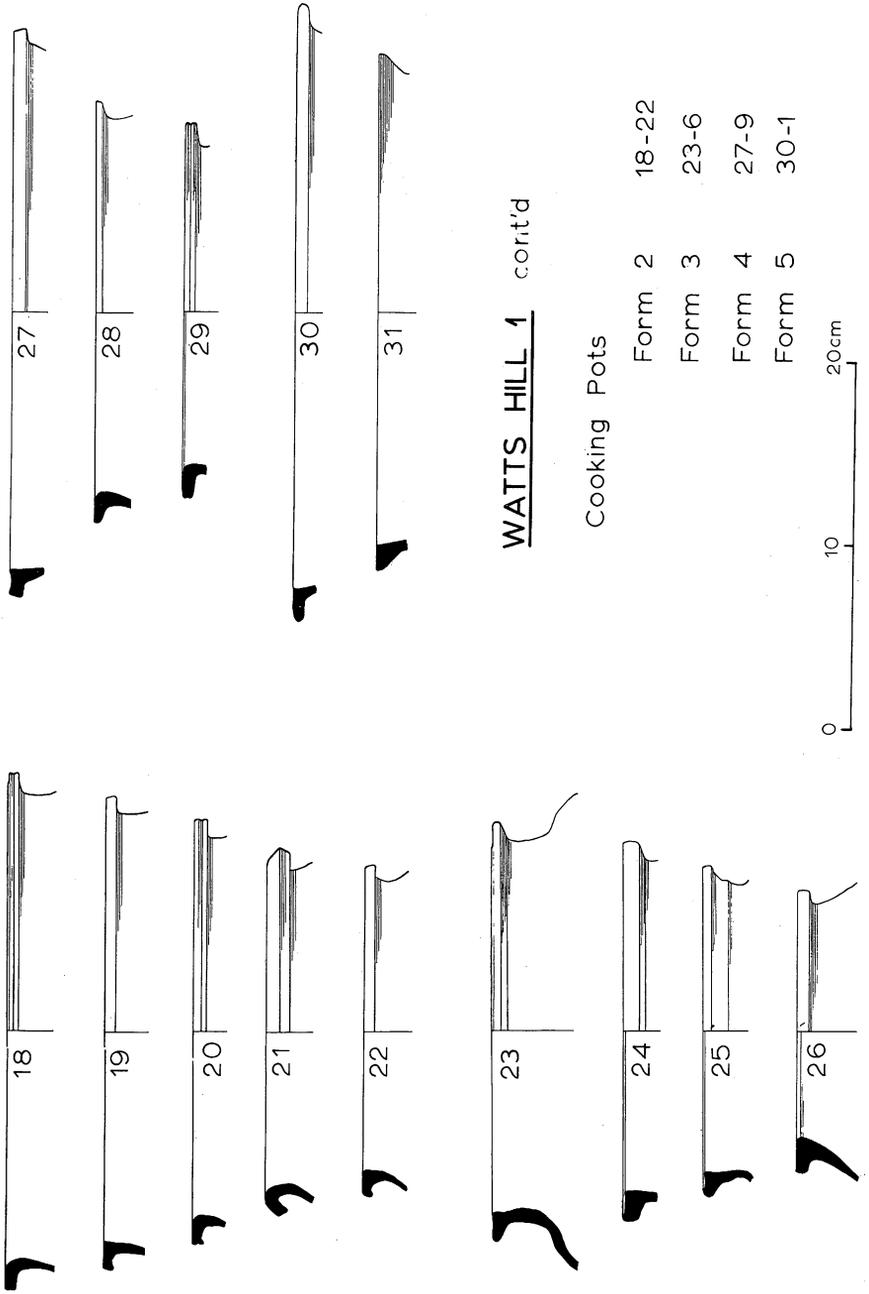


Fig. 5.

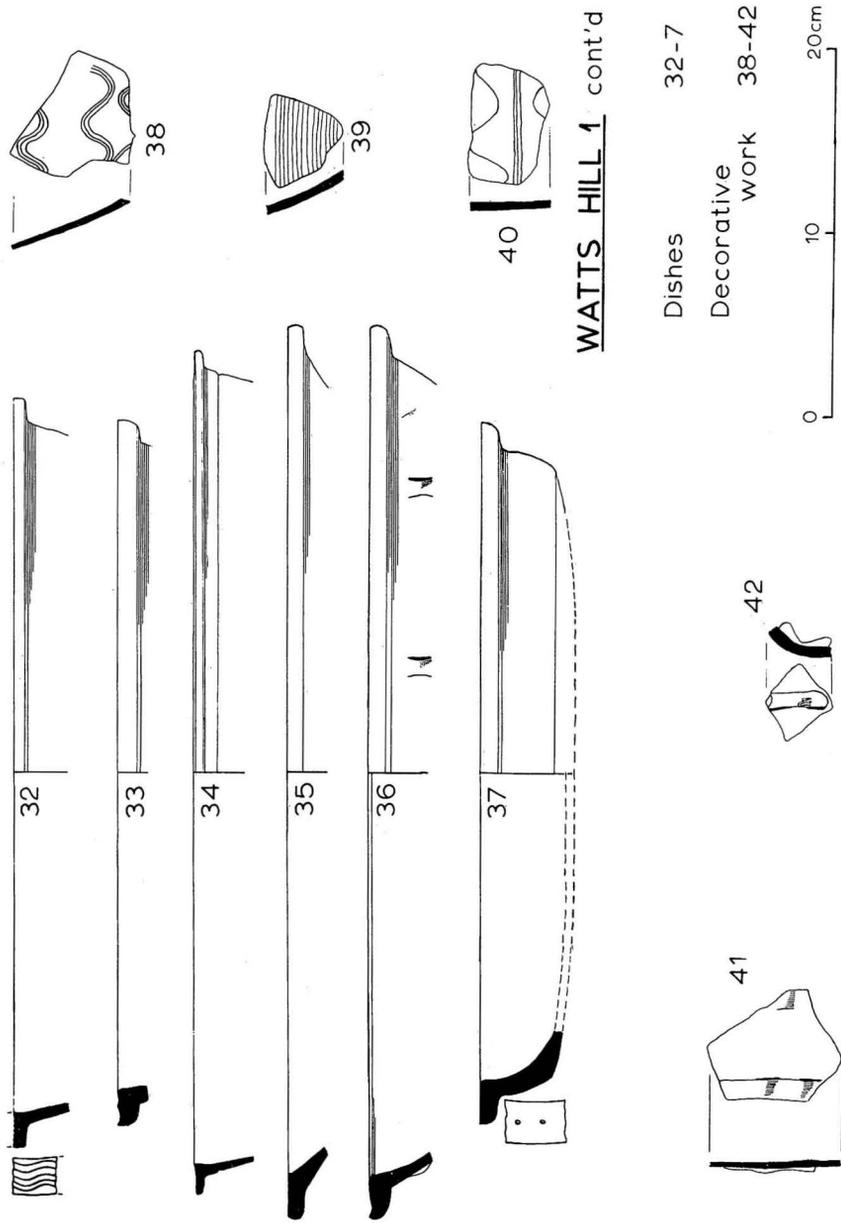
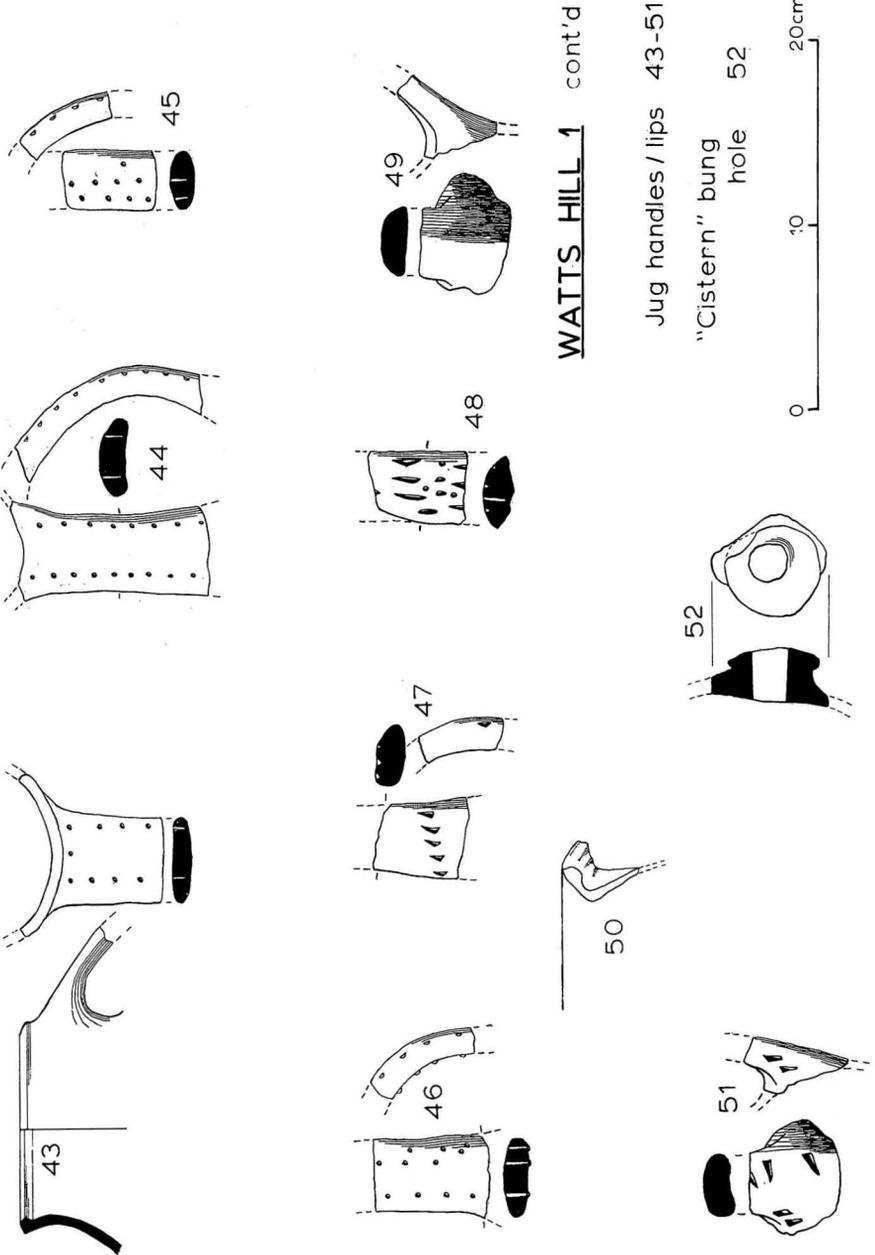


Fig. 6.



WATTS HILL 1 cont'd

Jug handles / lips 43-51

"Cistern" bung hole 52



Fig. 7.

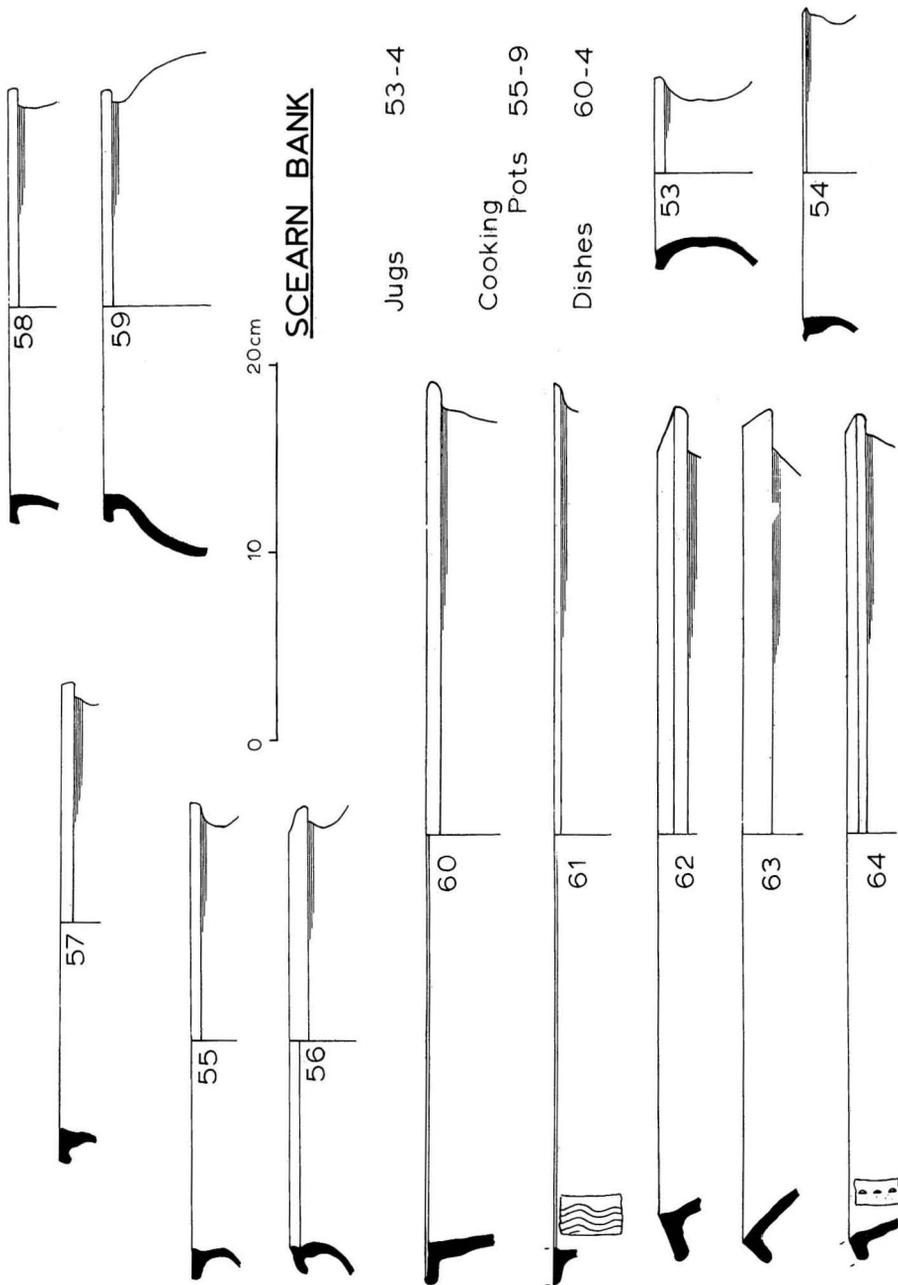
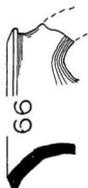
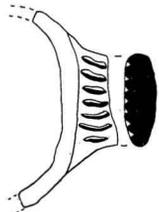


Fig. 8.



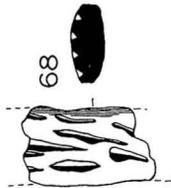
66



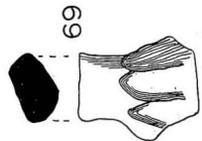
65



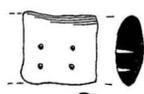
67



68



69



70



71

SCEARN BANK

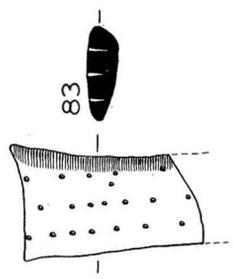
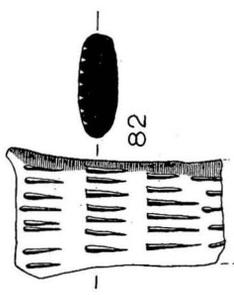
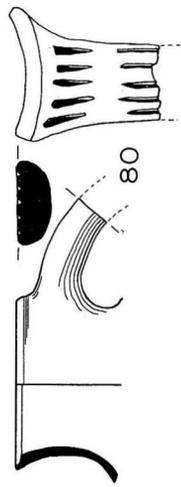
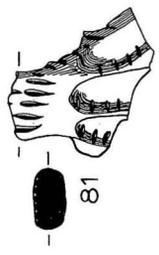
Jug handles/lips 65-71

Atypical base 72



72

Fig. 9.



LOAMPIT FIELD

- Jugs 73-5
- Cooking-Pots 76-9
- Jug handles 80-3

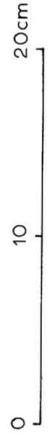


Fig. 10.

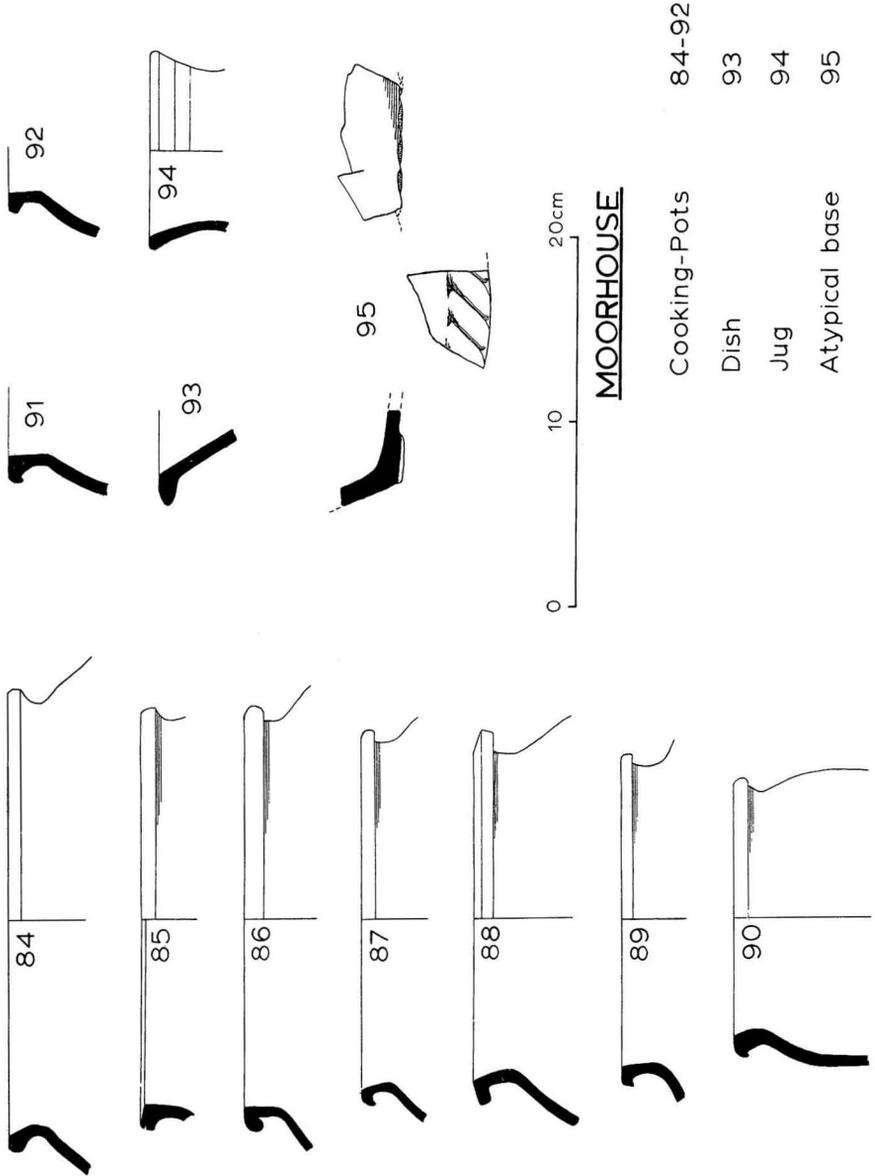


Fig. 11.

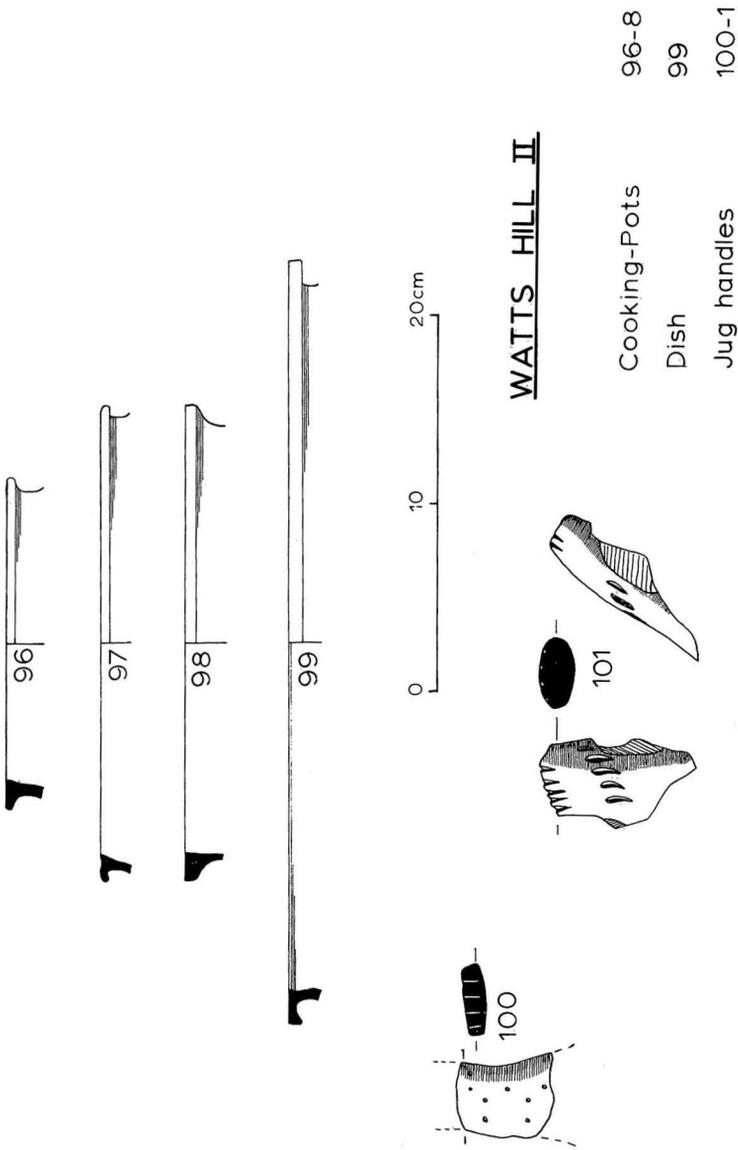


Fig. 12.