

A deserted Medieval farmstead in Woodlands Field, Earlswood

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with a report on the pottery by D J TURNER

Summary

Soilmarks in a field at Earlswood are suggested as being the remains of a deserted medieval farmstead consisting of a domestic complex, with a possible longhouse, separated from ancillary structures. Its identity may be ascribed to the lost farm of Sharps which may have been deserted as a result of the Black Death. There are hints, however, that abandonment could have occurred a little earlier.

DISCOVERY

In September, 1977, Woodlands Field (Horley tithe map, 1848: plot no 638), Earlswood, was ploughed in preparation for seeding with hay grass. Fieldwalking by the writer resulted in the discovery of two adjacent soilmarks centred on TQ 284 474. The marks, grey (Site 1) and brown (Site 2) stood out in sharp contrast to the surrounding soil, especially where the plough had exposed the raw, buff coloured clay of the subsoil. Although the field had been under pasture for many years the tithe apportionment revealed that it was arable in the 1840s; however the straight clear edges of parts of the soilmarks confirmed that the recent ploughing had penetrated to the present depth for the first time.

Site 1 (fig 2)

This soilmark covered an area of approximately 250m² and contained quantities of tile and pottery fragments tentatively dated from the first half of the 13th century to the second quarter of the 14th century. Associated with this material were charcoal, patches of scattered slag or cinder and blocks of stone from the Wealden beds and from the Upper and Lower Greensands. Some blocks of Reigate stone were much blackened by fire. Rarer were pieces of daub, scraps of metal and poorly preserved animal bone. The bulk of the pottery and tile was derived from the eastern side of the soilmark, the pottery showing a marked concentration in the north-east corner.

Site 2 (fig 2)

This soilmark, just east of Site 1, was well defined where the plough had exposed the subsoil but a thick scatter of tile fragments and gravel to the north and north-east suggested an original L-shaped occupation area of similar size to Site 1. The soilmark itself was similarly covered with a mass of gravel and broken tile. The near absence of domestic material, and particularly of charcoal, perhaps explains the difference in colour between this soilmark and Site 1.

Approximately 30m north of the soilmarks were two roughly circular dark patches one of which contained two sherds of 13/14th century pottery. These patches possibly represent pits, bonfires or charcoal burning areas. Unfortunately there was insufficient time for these features to be planned.

Discussion

Although it may be deemed hazardous to attempt the reconstruction of a settlement from a soilmark the finds suggest that Site 1 was of a domestic nature while Site 2 was not. The obvious

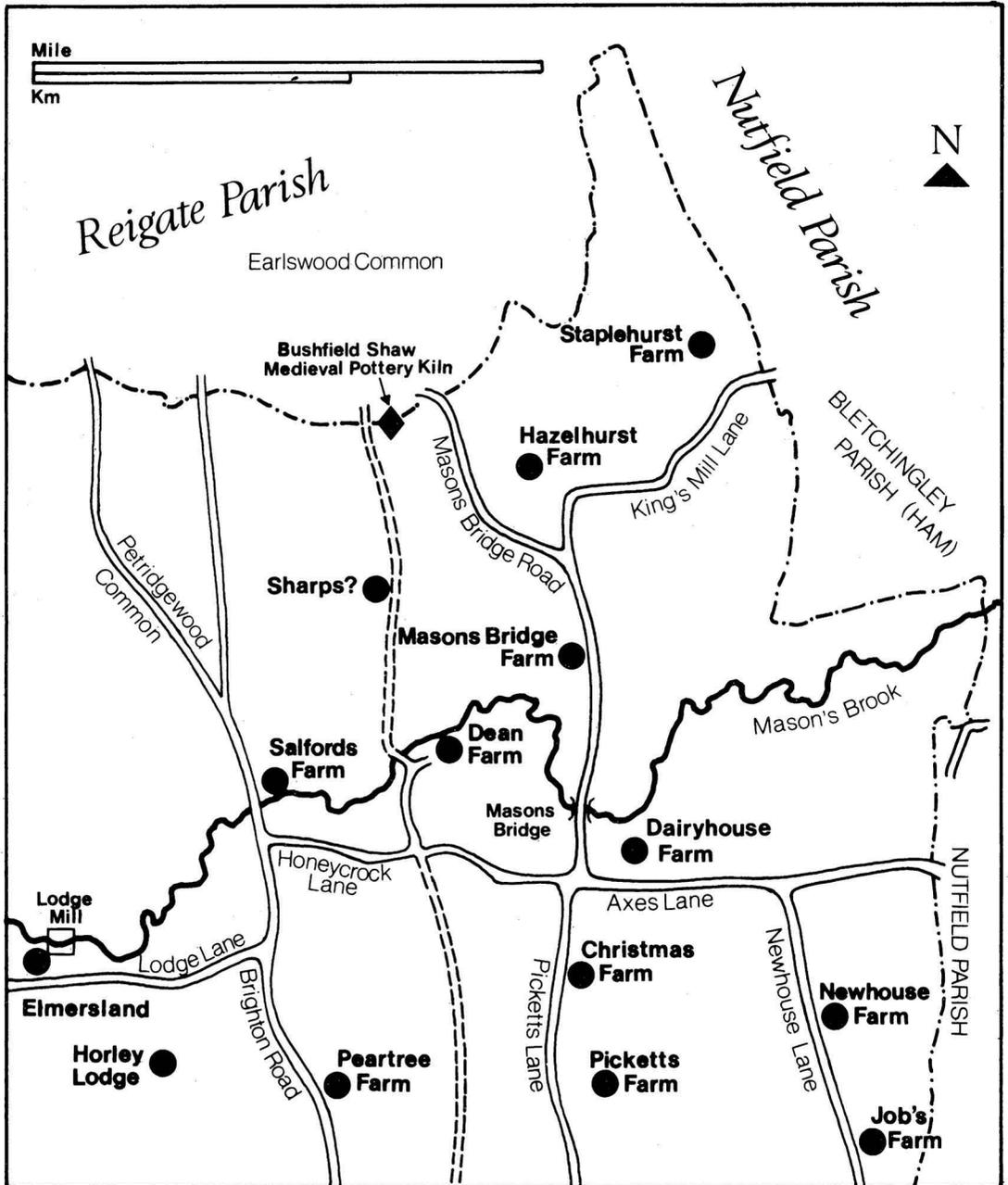


Fig 1. Location map. The north-east portion of ancient Horley parish showing existing and recent farms of probable medieval origin. For details see Ellaby (1982). Woodlands Field (Sharps?) is left of centre.

interpretation would be that here we have a medieval farmstead with a house and yard or garden on Site 1 and ancillary buildings such as animal pens, barns etc on Site 2. The location of such deserted sites, unmarked by a moat or other earthworks, remains a very rare occurrence.

The eastern side of Site 1, where most of the pottery and tile was found, would appear to be the site of the house. With soilmark dimensions of approximately 17m by 6.5m it may be suggested that this was of the longhouse type with the living quarters in the upper or northern



Plate 1. Soilmarks in Woodlands Field, Earlswood: oblique aerial view looking south-west. (Photo: D W Williams, by courtesy of Bristow Helicopters Ltd)

end where the bulk of the pottery was collected, while the lower or southern end was used for housing cattle or other livestock. This suggestion is reinforced by the fact that the proposed house is aligned downslope towards the stream which would allow drainage away from the byre end (Beresford & Hurst 1971, 124). If this interpretation is correct then the proposed farm buildings on Site 2 would probably have been erected at a later date when it became customary for the more prosperous peasants to separate the living and farm accommodation (Beresford & Hurst 1971, 102). It may be of significance then that the few sherds on Site 2 were all of off-white wares whereas those on Site 1 included potentially earlier fabrics.

The presence of blocks of stone on Site 1 implies that the house was timber framed and erected on a sill beam resting on stone footings. The roof was evidently tiled, while daub indicates a wattle construction for the walls.

The presence of buildings in the suggested yard on the west of Site 1 cannot be verified, neither can the existence of industrial activities such as ironworking. The patches of slag could equally represent areas of hardstanding to offset the poorly drained Weald clay. Evidence for surface improvement within the house was not immediately apparent but in contrast with many medieval houses, where domestic refuse was removed and deposited in pits or spread on agricultural plots, pottery sherds were found in abundance and it may be suggested that these were trodden into the floor which under high water table conditions must have been quite soft. Similarly on Site 2 there was evidence that floors were metalled as gravel was clearly concentrated on the soilmark whereas in the field generally it was only thinly scattered.

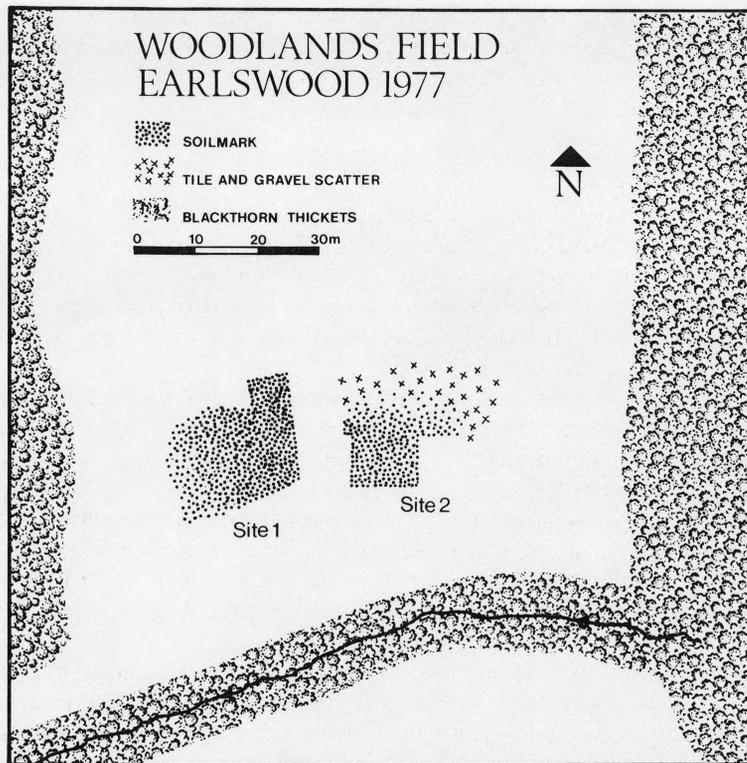


Fig 2. Plan of the Woodlands Field site.

GEOLOGY

The farmstead site is positioned at the head of a small intermittent stream which drains, via a shallow valley, the southern flank of a flat topped spur of the Higher or 230 foot Terrace of the river Mole (Green et al 1934, 43). The surface soil contains, among other stones, ochreous, frost fractured and pitted flint fragments and nodules typical of an eroded gravel spread (Green et al 1934, 52). The subsoil is Weald Clay weathered to a buff colour and in places contains seams of hard laminated claystones (Dines et al 1933, 39, and personal observation). The weathered clay overlies the parent soil, a blue-grey shaley clay some two metres or more below the surface.

LANDSCAPE

A study of the tithe map and existing fields suggests that prior to modern development the immediate vicinity consisted of patches of woodland and relatively small rectangular fields with bank and ditch, presumably of Elizabethan or later origin (Turner 1977, 85). These fields are bounded on the north by Earlswood Common and on the west by Petridgewood Common. The field banks, fenced and surmounted by scrub oak, elm and hawthorn of no great age, appear not to have been hedged in the past. This may indicate that they were coppice banks. Indeed John Rocque's map of *c* 1770 shows a tract of woodland which appears to lie adjacent to or possibly includes Woodlands Field, thus providing a likely explanation for its name. Woodlands Field may have been converted to arable around this time. Conversion to pasture in more recent years has resulted in dense thickets of blackthorn encroaching into the fields, probably due to selective grazing. This profusion of blackthorn has, presumably, provided the name for the locality, White Bushes

Until recently this landscape was pitted and scarred by quarries which were worked in the

upper weathered portion of the clay principally for brickmaking. To the west of Woodlands Field is the London to Brighton railway opened in 1838 while immediately to the east is a trackway running north-south with possible Saxon origins (Ellaby 1982b).

MEDIEVAL RESOURCES

Although medieval farming to *c* 1350 was based on agriculture, the siting of a farmstead was probably crucial for the exploitation of other resources, especially in areas of newly colonised marginal land such as the Weald Clay. Exploitation of the local stone appears to be confirmed by the finding of many slabs of hard claystone on the Woodlands Field site. These are only obtainable at some depth (see note above on geology) and could be seen recently, in great quantity, littering the ploughsoil within a shallow, undateable quarry just west of Woodlands Field and truncated by the railway line.

Quarrying of the clay itself was certainly carried out locally in medieval times for tile making (Hooper 1945, 107) and pottery manufacture. Much pottery on the Woodlands Field site evidently came from the Bushfield Shaw kiln (Turner 1974) 500m to the north and possibly from others which may have existed nearby.

A pottery and tile industry suggests retention of woodland in the vicinity and this is likely to have been coppiced for a continuous supply of material for charcoal burning, building and tools.

The intermittent stream adjacent to the site would have provided water in wet seasons but a more permanent supply could have been obtained from ponds or the perennial stream some 500m to the south.

Regarding the farming aspects of the site, the general absence of pottery and other midden material outside the soilmarks might indicate that the main activity was based on stock raising rather than arable, a suggestion made more plausible when considering the nature of the soil on this plateau site. Waterlogged in the winter months and drying to a brick hard consistency in the summer, this extremely tenacious Weald Clay would have hard pressed the medieval ploughman to produce consistently successful crops.

IDENTITY

While the greater part of the Wealden parish of Horley was settled from established manors north of the Downs, the area under discussion appears to have been linked to Reigate as part of a large tract of woodland and waste known as Earlswood and Petridgewood. In 1623, when the manor of Reigate was surveyed (SRO 371/2/5/1) the relics of this woodland were listed under the heading Commons and Waste and as such belonged to the lords of the manor. The original extent of this demesne woodland remains unknown but encroachment for farming purposes has clearly taken place in the past (Hooper 1945, 38). This process was probably initiated in the colonisation of the clay lands before the 12th century but greatly expanded during the 12th and 13th centuries when the increasing population provided the established manors with the opportunity to profit from previously unexploited land.

Among the holders of land in this area was Reigate Priory, believed to have been founded in the reign of Henry III (1216–72) but before 1233 (Meekings 1960, 82). In 1538 (Manning & Bray *i* 298) the Priory held three local farms called Dayhouse, Salford and Sharps which were probably granted to that House by its founder William de Warenne, 6th Earl of Surrey (Hooper 1945, 68). The farmsteads working the two former holdings may be readily identified as Dairyhouse farm and Salfords farm (fig 1) but Sharps is lost. In the 1623 Survey, however, the 'Demesnes of the Priory called Sharps' are described as 'adjoining the Common or Waste called Petherich Wood on the east part'. Significantly the tithe map of Horley (1848) depicts two small pieces of woodland (fig 3) called Sharps Lane Shaw and Sharps Copse east of Petridgewood Common and close to Woodlands field. It would seem probable therefore that the farmstead, abandoned around the middle of the 14th century (see pottery report below), was on a Priory

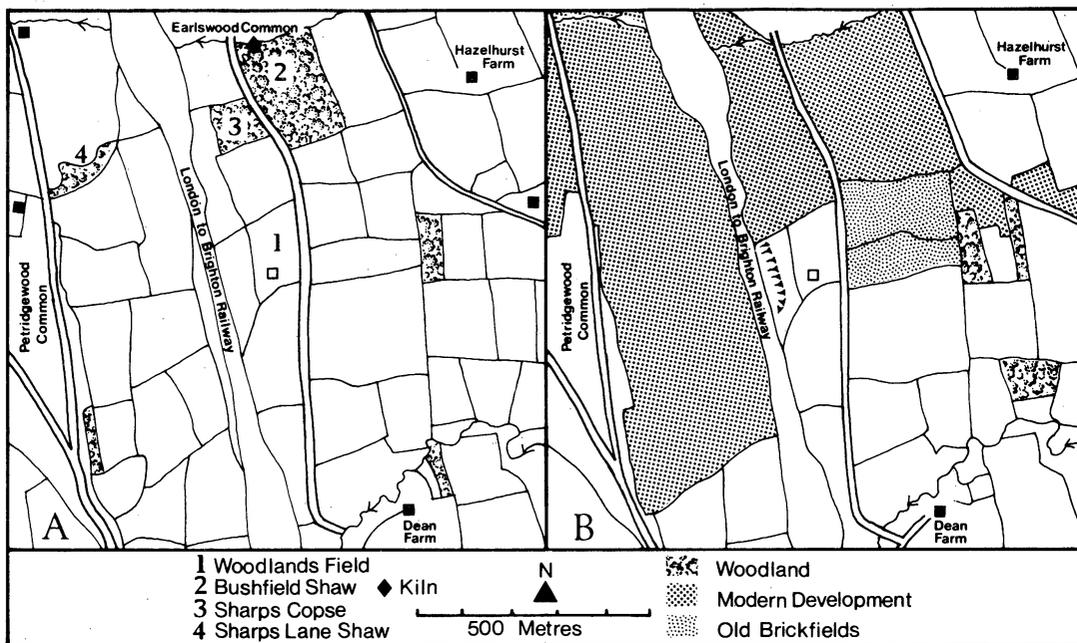


Fig 3. The Woodlands Field vicinity: A, in 1848 (based on the Horley tithe map, Surrey Record Office) and B, in 1880.

holding at some time called Sharps. Interestingly the origin of the farmstead apparently coincides with the supposed foundation of the Priory, ie the first half of the 13th century.

The first known record of Sharps occurs in 1535 (*Valor* 2, 67) when, significantly, 'Sallforde & Sharps' was valued as a single unit of ecclesiastical property. This would suggest that Sharps was part of the Salfords holding at that time and probably had been so since its desertion. Although it would be easy to cite the Black Death of 1349 as the cause of desertion it is equally tempting to suggest that the property had become part of Salfords at least 17 years earlier. In the 1332 Lay Subsidy Returns under Reigate, Filippo and Ricardo de Saleford were assessed at 3s 2½d and 2s 8d respectively, which could imply that both these men, probably father and son dwelling at the same farm, were tenants of relatively large portions of land. Had the Woodlands Field farmstead been abandoned before 1332 and the land taken over by one of these men? If this suggestion is correct then desertion may have occurred on the death or migration of the previous tenant.

Sharp was presumably a one-time tenant but efforts to trace him have so far been in vain. Although missing, perhaps significantly, from the Horley and Reigate lists for 1332 the name occurs in a few other Surrey parishes at that time including adjacent Nutfield.

Pottery from Woodlands Field, Earlswood

D J TURNER

The detailed catalogue of the pottery is on Microfiche 2-12

The pottery from Woodlands Field, although not stratified, provides an interesting check on the group published from Hookwood (Turner 1977, 70-83). The same wares predominate although the range is extended slightly. The date range is similar but the Woodlands Field series appears to start earlier as shell-tempered and red/brown surfaced grey wares are present. The same terminal date of mid-14th century appears to apply to both sites.

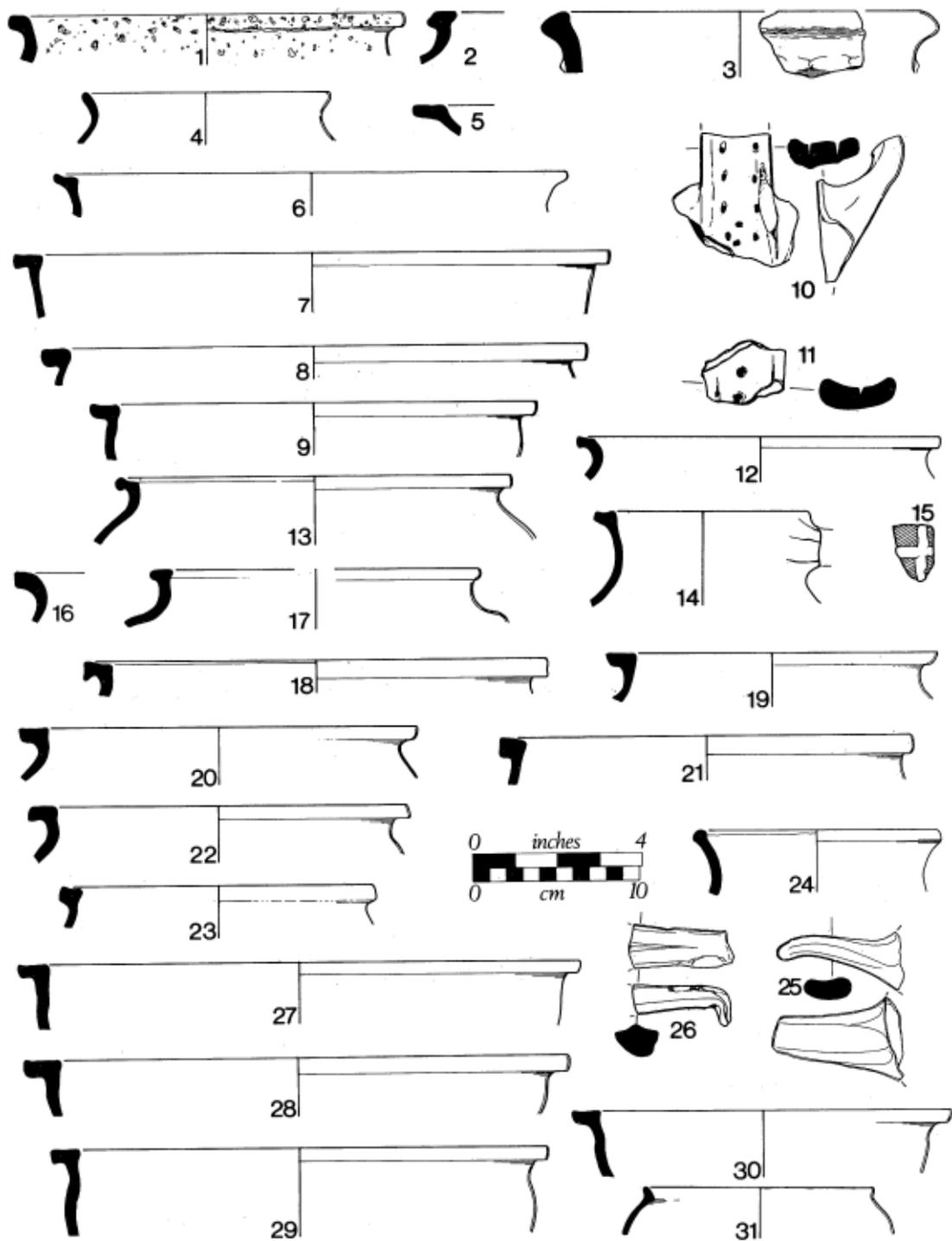


Fig 4. Selected pottery from Woodlands Field. 1, shell-tempered ware; 2-11, red-brown surfaced grey ware; 12-15, grey reduced ware; 16-31, pink oxidized ware. (4)

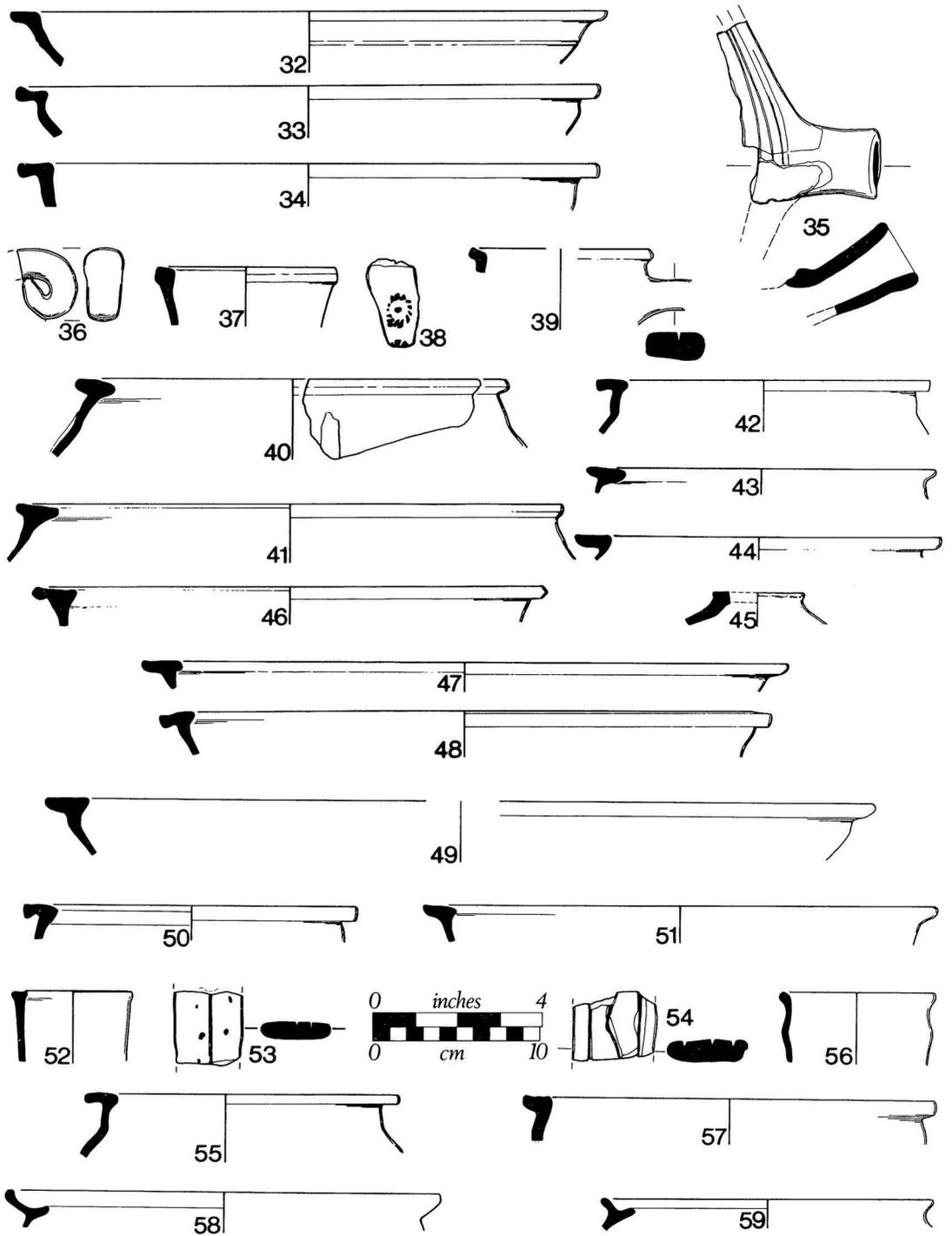


Fig 5. Selected pottery from Woodlands Field. 32-36, pink oxidized ware; 37-39, cream slipped jugs; 40-54, off-white ware; 55-56, pale brown ware; 57-59, buff surfaced sandy ware. (4)

The same five principal types of vessels are found:

- cooking pots – vessels whose mouths are clearly smaller than their girth
- jars – vessels with a rim diameter of 20 cm (8 in) or less and whose girth was little more
- dishes – vessels whose rims were the widest part
- bowls – vessels whose rim and girth were similar but which are shallower than jars
- jugs

(see further Turner 1977, 71). Other types identifiably present were cauldron(s), pipkins, a skillet, one possible lid and one possible aquamanile 'tail'.

The great predominance of the oxidized wares over the roughly contemporary 'white' wares may easily be explained by the proximity of the site to kilns producing oxidized pottery (Turner 1974).

(Dimensions: where a diameter is quoted, this is the internal rim diameter except where otherwise stated).

Shell filled ware

(See Turner in Woods 1974, 90). Very rare at Woodlands Field, cf absence from Hookwood (Turner 1977). (Fig 4:1)

Pink or red-brown surfaced grey fabrics & related pottery

Generally well made and fired pottery with a distinctive margin and surface of red-brown to pink shades on a grey body. Fine to medium sand filler is present. This ware has been tentatively ascribed to 1150–1300 (Turner 1973, 216); the latter part of this period is presumably represented at this site. (Fig 4:2–11)

Grey reduced fabrics

In 1970 the present writer suggested that the local grey fabrics of East Surrey could be visually divided into three categories:

- Black surfaced grey
- Grey surfaced grey
- Limpsfield types

At Hookwood (Turner 1977) it was noted that the 'Limpsfield type' sherds had coarser sand filler than the pottery from the Limpsfield kilns themselves (Prendergast 1973; 1975). A number of sherds from Woodlands Field tend to emphasize this difference and a fourth category is therefore proposed, viz:

- Coarse tempered grey

This is not to be confused with the early reduced ware (Turner in Woods 1974, 88–90) found with earlier rim and vessel forms.

There can also now be seen to be some grey-ware jugs carrying glaze (and thereby distinguishable from Limpsfield type jugs). The ware of these jugs is hard and uniformly reduced to light or medium grey. Slip decoration occurs and glaze is usually clear, thin and patchy.

Grey surfaced grey fabric resembles the black-surfaced grey except in the colour of the 'skin' which is dark to medium grey, often not very clearly different in tone to the body of the sherds.

It is by no means certain whether the differences between the five categories are significant but it would seem reasonable to retain the distinction for the present, in the hope that future work will clarify the problem (Fig 4:12–15)

Pink oxidized sandy fabrics

As found at Moat Farm, Hookwood (Turner 1977, 72–6, 79–81), and produced at Bushfield Shaw kiln (Turner 1974). Few Woodlands Field rims can, however, be directly paralleled at Hookwood and some appear earlier (eg S.8, 23, 40). (Figs 4,5:16–36)

Most bases are plain but some are thumbled (both continuously and intermittently thumbled examples are present) or swagged. Examples of all these types were also found at Bushfield Shaw. Some jugs have bridge spouts, as at Bushfield Shaw.

Saaler (in Ketteringham 1976) divided the oxidized wares from Alsted into:

- Red-to-pink
- Pink sandy
- Buff-surfaced pink
- Greyish pink

but as this full range has been found on the same kiln site at Bushfield Shaw, there seems little justification in attempting to retain the distinction.

Cream slipped jugs

Cream slipped pottery was produced at the nearby Bushfield Shaw kiln (Turner 1974) along with unslipped oxidized vessels. Most of the cream slipped vessels from this site are in ware (b) (Turner 1967, 56–7) but vessel S.45 is in fabric (c). (Fig 5:37–39)

White or near-white, coarse sandy fabrics

As found at Moat Farm, Hookwood (Turner 1977, 76–8 & 81–2) and as at Hookwood, some sherds have been mis- or over fired to a grey colour. Bases are usually plain but some thumbled bases have been found. (Fig 5:40–54)

Pale brown ware

Grey or brown ware with smooth pale grey-brown surface. Also found at Reigate (Turner 1970, no 16; Woods 1974, no 15). No dating evidence for this ware exists as yet but the vessel forms, etc, point to an early 14th century date. (Fig 5:55–56).

Buff surfaced sandy ware

A few sherds of this ware were also found at Hookwood (Turner 1977, 82) and presumably they mark the last pottery brought onto the site in both cases. A date in the second quarter of the 14th century is thus indicated for the abandonment of the site. (Fig 5:57–59)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks are due to Mrs Denise James for typing, Mr W Maiklem for permission to examine Woodlands Field and Mr Jeremy Greenwood for assistance with documentary sources. The pottery was drawn by David Williams as also were the other illustrations from the author's working drawings. Mr Williams also went aloft for aerial photographs by courtesy of Bristow Helicopters Ltd.

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