

BRONZE AGE POTTERY FROM WOOD LANE, OSTERLEY

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A number of sherds of Middle Bronze Age pottery were discovered by George Chambers of the West London Archaeological Field Group in August 1979, during the burial of a dog in the back garden of 'The Cottage', 160 Wood Lane North, Osterley (TQ 1545 7745).¹ The sherds were found at a depth of 790mm below the present ground surface, and at a point 430mm into the natural brickearth. No fragments of calcined bone or charcoal were associated with them, although several pieces of worked flint were found in the topsoil of the same garden by Mr. Chambers, and are considered separately below.²

LOCATION

Wood lane, which formerly ran to meet the London Road a kilometre to the south of of the findspot, is now divided into two—Wood Lane North and Wood Lane South—by the Great West Road (A4) which links London with Bath. Wood Lane North strikes just west of north to join Jersey Road, which skirts the south-eastern corner of Osterley Park. 'The Cottage' is one of a row of detached houses fronting the west side of Wood Lane, and is situated 200 metres to the north of the brow of a low ridge which runs SW-NE a few metres to the north of the Great West Road. The site of the former Wyke House and its grounds, now occupied by a sports ground and a nursery, lies across the road to the east, while further open ground lies at the rear of the garden to the south-west.

The findspot is situated above the 25 metre contour on the Taplow terrace of the Thames gravels,³ which is here overlain by an undulating sheet of silty, reddish-brown brickearth, lithologically similar to some of the loess soils of northern Europe.⁴ The junction between the Taplow and Flood Plain gravels lies 800 metres away to the south-east, with the Thames a further kilometre beyond. The ground slopes gently down to the river Brent a kilometre to the north-east, allowing a panoramic view of Ealing and the surrounding districts. Further views across the Thames flood plain may be obtained from the brow of the low ridge to the south.

Although topographically advantageous, much of the locality has been retained as public open space, which may help to explain the general paucity of known finds of relevant date in the immediate area. However, pottery described as 'Bronze Age' is recorded from Seward's Pit, Hanwell, a kilometre and a half to the north,⁵ an otherwise Middle Bronze Age metalwork hoard containing a Late Bronze Age bronze axe-mould is known from Southall,⁶ Middle Bronze Age palstaves are recorded from Southall⁷ and Hounslow,⁸ and quantities of Middle Bronze Age artefacts have been recovered from the

Thames between Isleworth and Kew.⁹ In addition, Late Bronze Age metalwork is known from Hanwell and Hounslow,¹⁰ while other undated, or dubiously dated, local sites include the much disturbed sub-circular enclosure with a single south-eastward facing entrance, lying 800 metres NNE,¹¹ and a circular earthwork in Osterley Park one kilometre to the NNW.¹²

CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DISCOVERY

Measuring 1×1.50 metres, the dog's grave is the latest in a series of six or seven such dug in the same area by Mr. Chambers since about 1950, and is sited in a flower border on the north side of the garden, against the wooden fence which separates the garden of No. 160 from that of No. 162. The sherds were recovered from the northern section of the grave, at a point more or less directly beneath the fence line. The fence itself is provided with substantial wooden supports spaced at *c.* 3 metre intervals, each set in pits dug through the topsoil and 100–150mm into the underlying brickearth. There were no indications to suggest that the sherds had been disturbed during the erection of the fence, although equally neither was there any sign of a contemporary feature such as a pit or ditch in which they might have been deposited either.¹³

THE POTTERY (*Fig. 1*)

Altogether, twenty-eight sherds were recovered, representing at least three, and possibly as many as five or six hand-made vessels belonging to the southern British Deverel-Rimbury tradition of Bronze Age pottery. The forms include bucket urns (Nos. 1, 2 and 4), a weakly-shouldered and possibly biconical urn (No. 3), and a globular urn (No. 5). None of the vessels bear any trace of applied or impressed decoration.

Visual examination suggested the presence of two distinct fabric groups, with twenty-two sherds belonging to one group, and the remaining six to another, separate, group. However, closer scrutiny under a binocular microscope of $\times 20$ magnification revealed merely two variations of the same basic fabric.

The larger group, represented here by Nos. 1–4, consists of a coarse, heavily flint-tempered sandy fabric, with surface colours ranging from red-brown to grey-black. The second, to which the six sherds represented by No. 5 belong, is similar, but generally finer. The flint temper is crushed smaller and more evenly sorted, the vessel walls are thinner, and the external surfaces have been coated with a thin slip which has been burnished.

Although now conventionally dated to the Middle Bronze Age,¹⁴ recent work has suggested that the origins of Deverel-Rimbury pottery should be sought within the indigenous late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age ceramic sequence.¹⁵ A development of this line of enquiry has allowed Barrett and Bradley to argue for contemporaneity between the Deverel-Rimbury cremation cemeteries and the classic Wessex II burials,¹⁶ whose largely complementary distributions have been noted by several earlier writers. This has led, in turn, to the suggestion that the cremation cemeteries represent a lower, and perhaps more egalitarian, stratum of society living in the areas surrounding

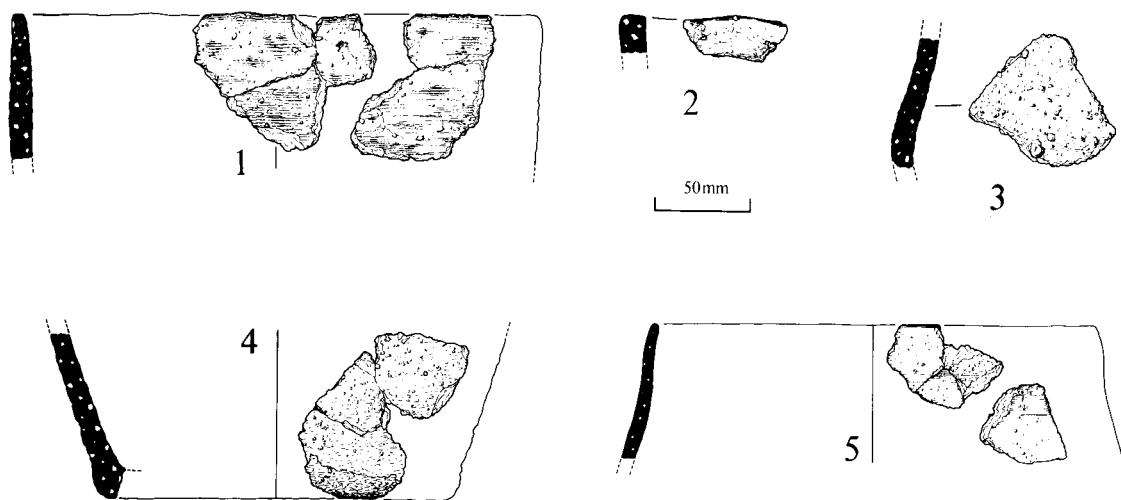


Fig. 1. Osterley: Bronze Age pottery.

1. Five sherds of a large bucket urn with a simple, upright rim, of minimum diameter 280mm. Both exterior and interior surfaces bear traces of wipe-marks, and the interior surface in particular is covered with a network of fine contraction cracks. Coarse, sandy fabric with an abundant crushed calcined flint temper, the largest inclusion of which measures 8mm across. The core is dark grey-black in colour, with a brown margin. Surface colours range from brown to black.
2. Single sherd of a large bucket urn with a simple, upright, flattened rim. The size of the sherd makes any exact determination of the rim diameter impossible, although it is at least as great as, if not greater than, No. 1. All surfaces bear traces of wipe-marks, and there are contraction cracks on the exterior. Coarse, sandy fabric similar to No. 1, although the calcined flint temper is sparser, and has been crushed finer. The core is dark grey-black, with a dark brown margin.
3. Single sherd from a large, weakly-shouldered and possibly biconical urn, with badly eroded surfaces. Although the coarse, sandy fabric is similar to that of Nos. 1 and 2, the calcined flint temper is less evenly sorted, with individual inclusions as large as 10mm across, and this, together with the abraded condition of the sherd, makes the vessel appear even coarser than it probably was. The core is dark grey-black with a brown margin.
4. Three conjoining sherds of a large, straight-walled vessel with a minimum basal diameter of 180mm. Both interior and exterior surfaces are somewhat eroded, and the interior surface has a number of contraction cracks, which are densest at the junction of base and wall. Coarse, sandy fabric with an abundant calcined flint temper. The core is dark grey-black with a dark brown margin. Surface colours range from red to brown on the exterior and from brown to black on the interior. It is possible that this is the same vessel as No. 1.
5. Four sherds, three conjoining, of a large globular urn with a simple rounded rim, of minimum diameter 230mm. The interior surface is somewhat eroded, while the exterior has been treated with a fine slip, fired red-brown, which bears traces of burnishing. There are no contraction cracks visible. Sandy, grey-black fabric with a well-sorted crushed calcined flint temper.

the Wessex heartlands, and that it was in these areas that the earliest, and fullest, development of Deverel-Rimbury material occurred.¹⁷

Following Calkin's pioneering work in the Bournemouth area,¹⁸ a number of regional ceramic groups have been defined within the Deverel-Rimbury complex. The pottery from Osterley belongs to the lower Thames group, which is characterised by the presence of large bucket urns and a scarcity of the finer globulars.¹⁹ The occurrence of one of these latter vessels within the small collection under consideration is thus of some interest. Further, the lack of any sharp division in fabric between this 'fine' globular and the 'coarse' bucket urns, mentioned above, serves to link the Osterley material with that from Sussex studied by Ellison.²⁰

The lower Thames valley is particularly notable for its Middle Bronze Age cremation cemeteries—a number of which have been discovered in the west London region—with those situated on the Taplow terrace gravels at Acton and Yiewsley lying only 4.7 kilometres to the north-east and 8.5 kilometres to the north-west respectively.²¹ Domestic sites are scarcer, although one, and perhaps two palisaded enclosures are known from Thorpe in Surrey,²² while early settlement debris has been recovered from Petters Sports Field, Egham,²³ Sipson,²⁴ Staines²⁵ and possibly Kempton Park.²⁶ Further sites may be suspected, however, as a number of excavations in the London area have produced scatters of abraded, flint-tempered pottery which could be relevant here. One such, at Busch Corner, Syon Park, lies only one and a half kilometres to the south-east of the present finds.²⁷

THE FLINTWORK (*Fig. 2*)

by Margaret Wooldridge

Three pieces of struck flint were found in the topsoil of the back garden of 'The Cottage' by Mr. Chambers, but they cannot be strictly associated with the pottery described above. It is impossible to date them precisely, although parallels for the denticulated pieces Nos. 1 and 2 exist in the late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age flint assemblages from Durrington Walls²⁸ and Fengate,²⁹ and in the probably Middle Bronze Age flintwork from the Itford Hill cemetery-barrow.³⁰

DISCUSSION

Taken together, the pottery and flint are indicative of further prehistoric activity on the Thames gravel terraces to the west of London, a point which should by now occasion little surprise. The nature of the activity they attest is, however, difficult to determine from the limited evidence available here. The flintwork is typical of the generally undiagnostic material regularly recovered during fieldwork in the area,³¹ and is thus not particularly helpful. The pottery is of potentially greater significance in this respect, although its true status remains doubtful. The absence of calcined bone, together with the number of vessels apparently deposited in a restricted area would certainly seem to indicate a *domestic* rather than a funerary context, although the circumstances surround-

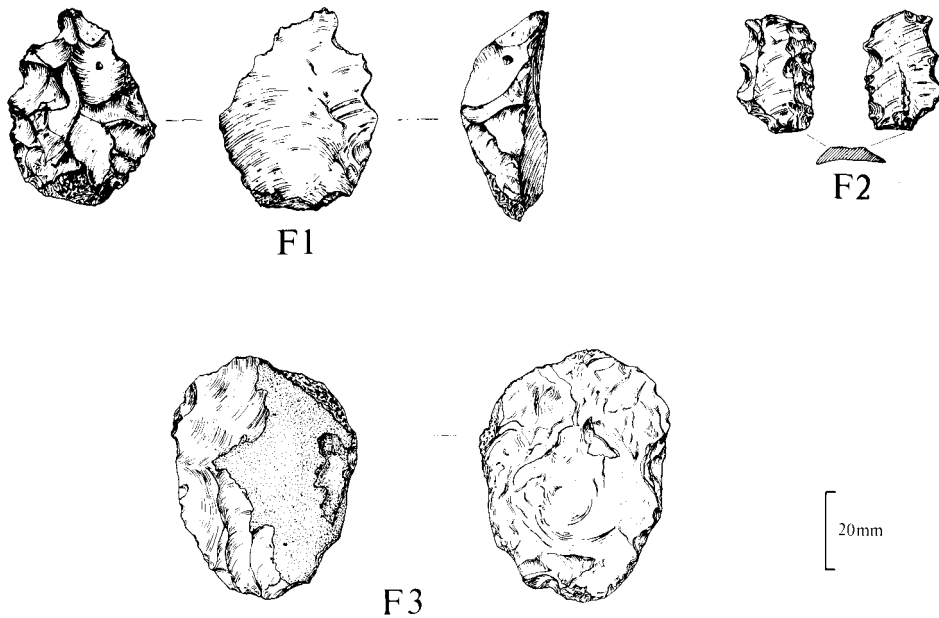


Fig. 2. Osterley: Flintwork.

- F1. Heavy, squat flake of coarse, mottled grey-blue (?)chalk flint. The dorsal face has been worked over with steep retouch giving a rough, markedly indented working edge. The ventral surface is unretouched.
- F2. Small blade fragment of translucent grey-brown (?)gravel flint. There is a hinge fracture at the distal end, while the proximal end has been snapped and retouched. One edge of the dorsal face has a coarse, blunting retouch, while the opposite edge has two steeply retouched notches.
- F3. Undistinguished and undiagnostic fragment of battered grey-brown (?)gravel flint with some cortex remaining on the dorsal surface. Probably waste material.

ing the discovery do not allow the idea to be pressed too far. Bearing in mind the general scarcity of Bronze Age settlement sites in the region, it must be hoped that future work in the vicinity of the findspot will clarify the situation further.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to the finder, George Chambers, and to the owners of the property, Mr. and Mrs. W. N. Robinson, for answering many queries relating to the circumstances of the discovery; to Bob Salanson of the Museum of London for undertaking the conservation of the pottery; to Margaret Wooldridge for illustrating and reporting on the flintwork; to Kevin Crouch and Alison Laws for kindly supplying unpublished information; to John Barrett and Stuart Needham for their help with the pottery, and to the latter for allowing me to consult the National Bronze Implements Index held in the British Museum. I am further indebted to George Chambers and Stuart Needham for reading and commenting on the text.

NOTES

1. Museum of London Archaeological Finds Index D232
2. The finds have since been generously presented to the Museum of London by the owners of the property, Mr. and Mrs. W. N. Robinson, and may be examined there.
3. H. B. Woodward 'The Geology of the London District' *Mem. Geol. Surv.* (2nd edition 1922).
4. S. W. Wooldridge and D. L. Linton 'The Loam-Terrains of South-east England and their relation to its early history, *Antiquity* 7 (1933) 297-310; J. A. Catt 'The contribution of loess to soils in lowland Britain' in S. Limbrey and J. G. Evans (eds.) *The Effect of Man on the Landscape: the Lowland Zone* CBA Research Report 21 (1978) 12-20.
5. C. H. Compton 'Palaeolithic implements from Hanwell' *Journ. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.* 63 (1907) 123.
6. C. H. Read 'Hoard from Southall, Middlesex' *Proc. Soc. Antiq. London.* 16 (1896-97) 328-330.
7. Single example found in 1900 during the construction of the canal 'between S(outhall) and Slough'. Information in the National Bronze Implements Index, British Museum.
8. Two examples found 'with' other Bronze Age metalwork by labourers digging in a field in Hounslow (C. E. Vulliamy *The Archaeology of Middlesex and London* (London 1930) 110). The famous hoard of Iron Age animal figurines was found in the same field (*ibid.* 133-135).
9. E.g. G. F. Lawrence 'Antiquities from the Middle Thames' *Archaeol. J.* 86 (1929) 78-81.
10. National Bronze Implements Index, British Museum and also Museum of London Archaeological Finds Index.
11. *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Middlesex* 2 (London 1911) 4 and Museum of London Archaeological Finds Index I 62. It is described as a 'homestead moat' in *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Middlesex: Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England* (London 1937) 86.
12. Vulliamy *op. cit.* in note 8, 273, and Museum of London Archaeological Finds Index I 52. This too is described as a 'homestead moat' in *R.C.H.M. ibid.*, 86.
13. Points confirmed by the finder.
14. C. B. Burgess 'Chronology and Terminology in the British Bronze Age' *Antiq. J.* 49 (1979) 28.
15. J. C. Barrett 'Deverel-Rimbury: Problems of Chronology and Interpretation' in R. Miket and C. B. Burgess (eds.) *Settlement and Economy in the Third and Second Millennia BC* B.A.R. 33 (1976) 289-307. (However, in a more recent assessment of the ceramic problem, Barrett has suggested that in some areas (e.g. the Upper Thames basin and Wessex) Deverel-Rimbury material carries on into the ninth century BC (J. C. Barrett 'The Pottery of the Later Bronze Age in Lowland England' *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 46 (1980) 314)).
16. J. C. Barrett and R. Bradley 'Preface: the Ploughshare and the Sword' in J. C. Barrett and R. Bradley (eds.) *Settlement and Society in the British Later Bronze Age* B.A.R. 83 (1980) 10.
17. J. C. Barrett 'The Evolution of Later Bronze Age Settlement' in Barrett and Bradley *ibid.* 82ff.
18. J. B. Calkin 'The Bournemouth area in the Middle and Late Bronze Age with the 'Deverel-Rimbury' problem re-considered' *Archaeol. J.* 119 (1962) 1-65.
19. J. C. Barrett 'Four Bronze Age cremation cemeteries from Middlesex' *Trans. London Middx. Archaeol. Soc.* 24 (1973) 119ff.
20. A. Ellison 'The Bronze Age pottery in E. W. Holden 'A Bronze Age cemetery-barrow on Itford Hill, Beddingham, Sussex' *Sussex Archaeol. Collect.* 110 (1972) 112.
21. Barrett *op. cit.* in note 19, 116-119.
22. B. Johnson *Archaeology and the M25* (Surrey Archaeol. Soc 1975)
23. *Ibid.*, 12; M. O'Connell and S. Needham 'A Late Bronze Age hoard from a settlement at Petters Sports Field, Egham, Surrey' *London Archaeol.* 3 (1977) 123-130.
24. Salvage work conducted on behalf of the Museum of London by the present writer and the West London Archaeological Field Group during earth moving activities preceding gravel extraction in Sipson Lane, London Borough of Hillingdon, revealed several features containing *inter alia* a cylindrical loomweight and sherds of heavily flint-tempered pottery.
25. K. Crouch *The Friends Burial Ground, Staines, 1975-76* Joint London Middx. Archaeol. Soc. and Surrey Archaeol. Soc. Special Paper 2 (forthcoming).
26. R. F. Sheppard 'Two Bronze Age urns from Kempton Park' *Trans. London Middx. Archaeol. Soc.* 26 (1975) 281-2.
27. Information from Alison Laws.
28. G. J. Wainwright and I. M. Longworth *Durrington Walls: Excavations 1966-68* Rep. Res. Comm. Soc. Antiq. Lond. 29 (1971) 156ff.
29. F. Pryor *Excavation at Fengate, Peterborough, England: The Second Report* Royal Ontario Museum Monograph 5 (1978) 104ff; F. Pryor *Excavation at Fengate, Peterborough England: The Third Report* Northants. Archaeol. Soc. Monograph (1980) 106ff.
30. R. Bradley 'The flint industry' in Holden *op. cit.* in note 20, 93ff.
31. M. C. Wooldridge 'The flintwork' in R. Canham 'Excavations at Shepperton Green, 1967 and 1973' *Trans. London Middx. Archaeol. Soc.* 30 (1979) 122.