

The Brenig Hafod : a study of pottery use,
dispersal and survival on an upland site.

J. Patrick Greene
Runcorn Development Corporation

In 1973 and 1974 an intensive programme of rescue excavation took place in the upland valley of the Brenig River, a tributary of the Dee. A large part of the valley was due to be flooded by the construction of a reservoir, which has now, in 1977, been completed.

David Allen of the Rescue Archaeology Group directed one of the sites, known as Brenig 48. On both sides of a small stream, the Nant Criafolen, rectangular stone building foundations were discovered, centred on SH 988575. A total of seven buildings were excavated, as well as boundary banks and middens (see plan in Current Archaeology 55, 1977, 239). The site appears to be a 'hafod', or summer pasture habitation attached to a lowland farming settlement. I was asked by Mr. Allen to examine the pottery from the excavation, and he has kindly allowed me to publish this account of it in advance of his full report.

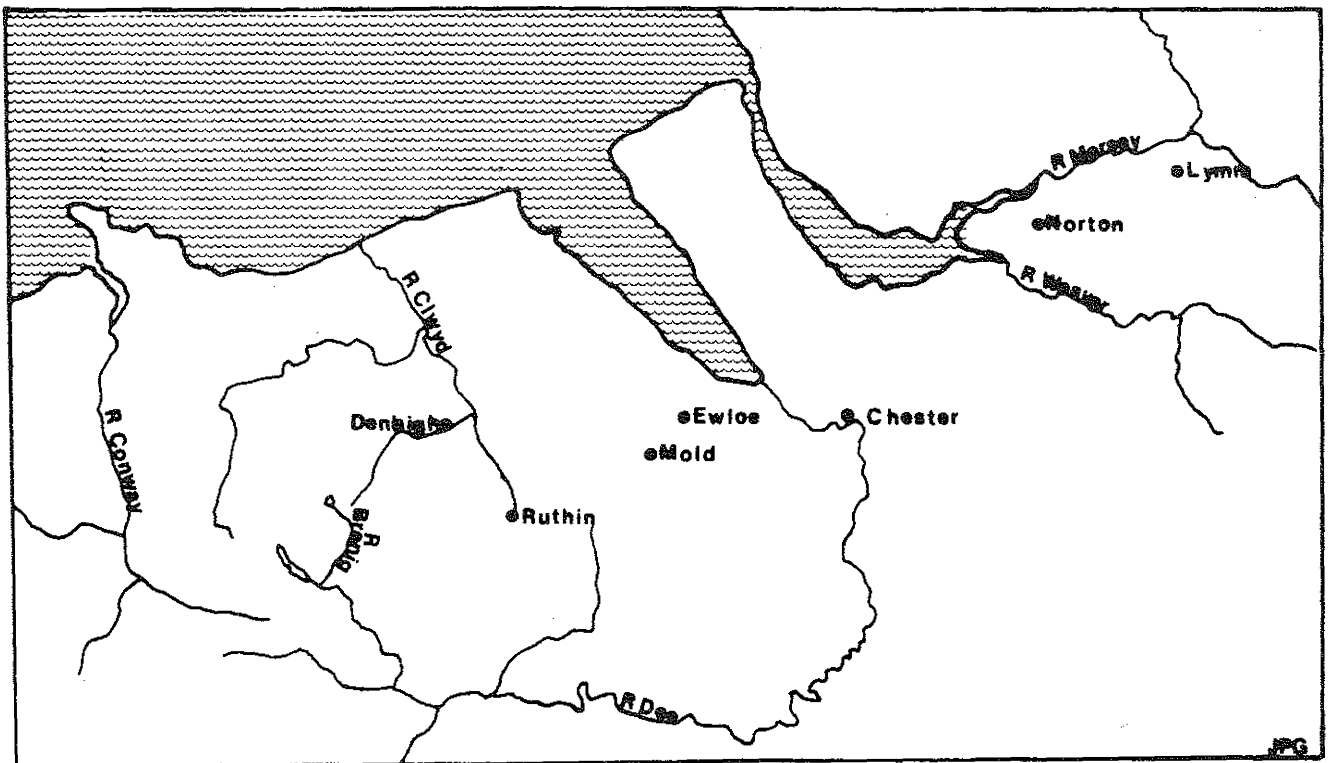


fig.7

Every sherd recovered from the site was given an individual number, and these are the ones used throughout this report. The pottery was clearly associated with occupation of the hafod, most of it being recovered from middens. There is no appreciable difference between the groups of pottery found in separate features - indeed, sherds common to individual vessels

were found scattered throughout different features, as cross reference between Table 1 and 2 will make clear. This report will, therefore, consider all the pottery together; date and span of deposition is discussed below (page 40).

Fabric Types

All the pottery, with the exception of two sherds discussed on page 41, can be divided into five fabric types, lettered A to E.

- A. Very hard fine grained fabric, high fired, with a smooth fracture, occasional quartz inclusions (up to 0.5mm diameter); dark grey-purple colour range. Identical to Norton Priory fabric type 28.
- B. Hard fabric with a smooth fracture, unidentified white rounded inclusions (0.5 - 2.0mm diameter range), some quartz (up to 0.5mm diameter); orange-brown colour range. Identical to Norton Priory fabric type 29.
- C. Very hard fine grained fabric, high fired with a smooth fracture, fairly frequent quartz inclusions (up to 0.5mm), some iron oxide inclusions (up to 0.5mm), occasional gross inclusions (unidentified stone up to 5mm maximum dimension) - the same clay as A but less well prepared. Grey-purple colour range. (Similar to Norton Priory fabric type 27).
- D. Very hard fine grained fabric, high fired, with a smooth fracture occasional quartz inclusions (up to 0.5mm), occasional buff clay inclusions (1-3mm); occasional unidentified dark inclusions. Similar clay to A and C but lighter in colour where reduced (buff-grey) and when oxidised where glaze is absent (pale orange).
- E. Hard fine grained fabric, with a rather laminar fracture, frequent round quartz inclusions (0.5mm diameter) some slightly pink in colour, infrequent grains of iron oxide; buff.

Table 1

Area 01

Provenance	Fabric Type	Find Number
Humus	A	3, 6.
	B	1, 8.
Midden: BG 4801: 70 Layer a	A	14, 18, 27, 31, 36, 38, 39, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47, 51, 53, 54, 55, 66, 67, 88, 90, 94, 138, 143, 144.
	B	62, 63, 73, 97, 98, 140, 142.
	D	15, 35, 48, 64, 68, 86.
	Glass	28.
Outer Collapse: BG 4801:97	A	16, 21.

Table 1

Area 01

Provenance	Fabric Type	Find Number
Ditch	A	17, 19, 20.
BG: 4801:73	B	122.
	C	112.
Midden	A	105, 107, 145, 146, 150, 151, 153, 155,
BG: 70 Layer B		158, 159, 160, 164.
	B	106.
	D	152, 154, 157.
	tin glaze	149.
Inner Collapse	A	109.
BG: 4801:98	D	111.
? Outer South	A	129.
	B	120.
	C	119.
Unstratified	A	130.

Area 03

Provenance	Fabric Type	Find Number
Midden material	A	300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 308, 309.
BG 4803:88		
Terrace make-up	E	314.
to west of		
Building g-g		
Sealed by Hafod	E	316.
wall: BG 4803:99		
g-g		
Drainage Gully:	B	317, 318.
BG 4803:93		

Area 05

Provenance	Fabric Type	Find Number
Inner Collapse:	A	500.
BG 4805:98		

Area 05

Provenance	Fabric Type	Find Number
Outer Collapse: BG 4805:97	A	501, 505, 506.
Outer Collapse: BG 4805:89	A	502, 508, 510.
	C	509.
	D	503.
House Floor: BG 4805:95	A	504.
Drainage Gully: BG 4805:92	A	511.
Midden: BG 4805:77	A	515, 517.
	g-g E	514, 516, 518.
Midden BG 4805:77a	A	521, 522, 525, 529, 532, 534, 538.
	B	523, 527.
	g-g E	524, 526, 530, 531, 533, 536.
Midden BG 4805:77c	g-g E	539, 540, 541.
Midden BG 4805:77d	A	544, 548.
	g-g E	543, 546, 547.
	Buff unglazed ware	551.
Midden BG 4805:77f	A	555.
	B	558, 560, 561.
	E	559, 562.
	g-g E	552, 553.
Unstratified	A	519.

Area 06

Provenance	Fabric Type	Find Number
Inner Collapse BG 4806:98	B	600.
Drainage Gully: BG 4806:93	A	605.
	B	603.
Unstratified	B	608.

Area 07

Provenance	Fabric Type	Find Number
Outer Collapse: BG 4807:97	A g-g C g-g E	704, 720, 726. 727. 701, 714, 715, 718, 719.
Outer Collapse: BG 4807:82	A B	705, 709, 711, 713. 708, 710.
Drainage Gully: BG 4807:88	g-g E	728.
Humus Outer south	B	732.
Midden: BG 4807:70a	A B C	736, 746, 747, 748, 750, 753, 757, 760, 762, 767. 742, 768. 765.

Vessels

All the sherds within each fabric type were examined to identify the different vessels of which they once formed part. The complete list of vessels and the number of sherds that comprise them, is as follows (Table 2). An attempt has been made to estimate the proportion of the vessel that the surviving sherds represent and is expressed in terms of 1.0 representing the complete vessel. No estimate is given where the surviving proportion was less than 0.2 of the complete vessel.

Table 2

Fabric Type A

Nineteen vessels represented

Vessel No.	Sherd Numbers	Surviving Proportion	Drawing Number
i	3, 6, 88, 129, 143, 144, 146, 150, 158, 159, 164, 711, 713.	0.5	1
ii	300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 308, 309.	0.4	2
iii	14, 16, 20, 27, 31, 49, 53, 66, 90, 94, 109, 130, 145, 151.	0.3	3

Table 2

Fabric Type A

Vessel No.	Sherd Numbers	Surviving Proportion	Drawing Number
iv	506, 511.	0.2	4
v	501, 504, 519, 522, 538, 544, 548, 555.	0.2	5
vi	709, 726, 747, 748, 757, 760.	0.2	6
vii	38, 51, 55, 75, 105, 107, 138, 155, 500, 521, 525, 605, 704, 720.	0.2	-
viii	73, 505, 736, 753.	0.8	7
ix	746, 750.	-	-
x	42.	-	-
xi	153.	-	-
xii	705.	-	-
xiii	45, 47, 505.	0.2	8
xiv	502, 534.	-	-
xv	517.	-	-
xvi	510.	-	-
xvii	19, 21, 515.	0.2	9
xviii	17, 18, 38, 39, 41, 44, 48, 54, 160, 532.	0.2	10
xix	529.	-	-

Fabric Type B

Four vessels represented

Vessel No.	Sherd Numbers	Surviving Proportion	Drawing Number
xx	1, 8, 62, 97, 120, 142, 317, 318, 558, 600, 603, 708.	0.2	11
xxi	63, 106, 122, 560, 710, 732, 742, 761.	-	12
xxii	98, 140, 526, 527, 561.	-	-
xxiii	608.	-	-

Fabric Type C

Three vessels represented

Vessel No.	Sherd Numbers	Surviving Proportion	Drawing Number
xxiv	509.	-	-
xxv	112, 119.	-	-
xxvi	727, 765.	-	-

Fabric Type D

Two vessels represented

Vessel No.	Sherd Numbers	Surviving Proportion	Drawing Number
xxvii	15, 48, 68, 86, 111, 152, 154, 157, 503.	0.2	13
xxviii	35, 64.	-	14

Fabric Type E

Four vessels represented

Vessel No.	Sherd Numbers	Surviving Proportion	Drawing Number
xxix	514, 516, 518, 524, 526, 530, 531, 533, 536, 539, 540, 541, 543, 546, 547, 552, 553, 559, 562, 701, 714, 715, 718.	0.3	15
xxx	728.	-	-
xxxi	314, 316.	-	-
xxxii	719.	-	-

In addition to the vessels listed above, two other vessels were represented by one body sherd each.

Sherd Number 551 was unglazed, with a hard, fine grained fabric, smooth fracture with iron oxide inclusions (occasionally as large as 1.0mm diameter but more frequently 0.1mm diameter) and occasional quartz grains (up to 0.2mm diameter) pale buff. Outer surface smoothed; fine throwing lines visible on inner surface. Vessel number xxxiii.

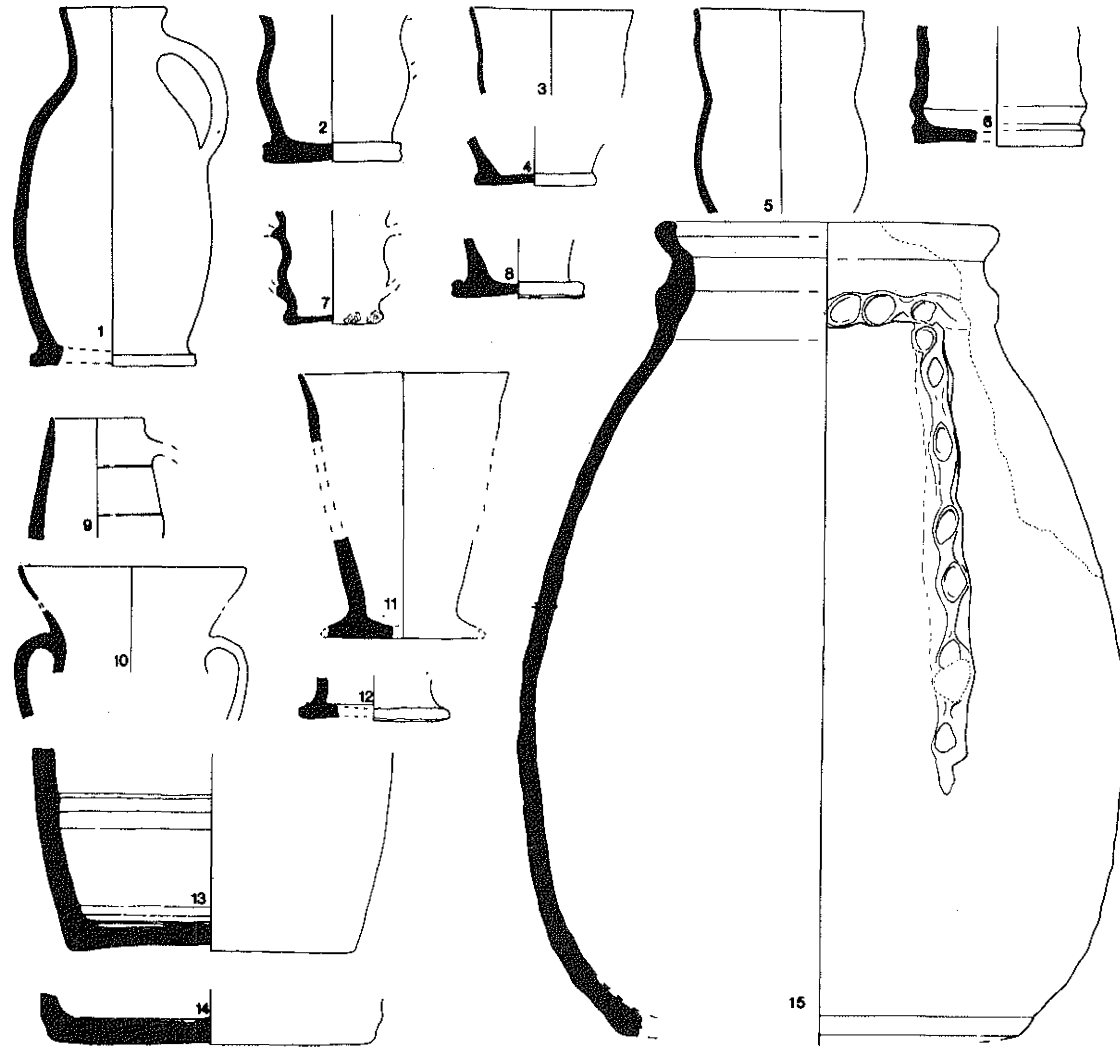
Sherd Number 149 had a lead glaze, to which about 7% of tin oxide had been added as an opacifier, over a soft light brown to buff smooth fabric. Vessel number xxxiv.

Illustrated Vessels

1. Fabric A, black glaze (dark purple where thin) with pale speckles inside and outside (vessel i).
2. Fabric A, thick black shiny glaze with silvery streaks inside and outside (vessel ii).
3. Fabric A, dark brown glaze with pale speckles inside and outside (vessel iii).
4. Fabric A, dark greenish brown shiny glaze with pale speckles inside and outside (vessel iv).
5. Fabric A, black shiny glaze with purple streaks, evenly applied inside and outside (vessel v).
6. Fabric A, brown-black glaze with silvery streaks, inside and outside (vessel vi).
7. Fabric A, dark brown shiny glaze with silvery streaks and pale speckles inside and outside (vessel viii).
8. Fabric A, dark brown glaze with silvery spots inside, thin brown and blistered outside (vessel xiii).
9. Fabric A, black glaze with silvery spots, inside and outside (vessel xvii).
10. Fabric A, dark brown glaze with pale speckles inside and outside (vessel xviii).
11. Fabric B, patches of yellowish-brown shiny glaze inside and outside; purple where glaze absent (vessel xx).
12. Fabric B, patches of dark brown shiny glaze inside and outside; brown where glaze absent (vessel xxi).
13. Fabric D, areas of brown glaze with black silvery spots and pale speckles inside and outside. Fired brown where glaze absent; circular patch on outside base due to proximity of small vessel during firing (vessel xxvii).
14. Fabric D, purple-black patchy glaze (brown where absent) inside and outside (vessel xxviii).
15. Fabric E, slightly blistered, rough surface with white specks due to quartz in the body, unevenly applied inside and outside. Green colourant (probably copper) giving dark green appearance where thickest and grey where thin (vessel xxix).

Discussion

Of the thirty-four vessels represented, twenty-three were composed of



fabrics A and B. With the exception of two illustrated vessels (drawing numbers 1 and 9) all A and B vessels were handled drinking vessels and fall into the two categories of shape described from Norton Priory (Greene and Noake forthcoming). One type narrows towards the base, which broadens out into a substantial foot; the other is approximately barrel shaped. The two types are illustrated here: the former by fig. 4, 10, 11 and 12, the latter by 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. There is a striking similarity between this collection of pottery from Brenig and the material from the cloister of Norton Priory in terms of fabric, type of vessel and its general appearance. In addition, the vessel (fig. 4, 9) which could perhaps be regarded as a handled bottle, while differing somewhat in size and shape from Greene and Noake's vessel 20, is remarkably similar in fabric, glaze and treatment (*ibid.*). The other handled bottle from Brenig (fig. 4, 1) has no close parallel at Norton. It is worthy of note that two thirds at least of all the vessels from the site are handled drinking vessels. This accords well with entries in the Welsh Port Books, which in the sixteenth century repeatedly refer to 'cups' as part of their cargoes (Talbot 1968, 129-131).

Fabrics C and D are little different from fabrics A and B; the differences could be adequately explained by less careful preparation of the clay rather than a different source. This observation is consistent with the type of vessel that C and D compose. In all cases the vessels are relatively large containers, casually finished and with no decoration. They are outnumbered by the smaller, finer vessels described above in similar proportions at Norton.

With such a close correlation between the vessels from Brenig and Norton Priory, it is possible to assign a date to the Brenig material on the basis of the evidence from Norton Priory. The dating of the Norton Priory pottery is discussed in Greene and Noake (*ibid.*). Briefly, the archaeologically recognisable horizon provided by the Dissolution of 1536 and the re-occupation of the site in 1545 by the new lay owners provides a useful chronological datum. There is no doubt that this dark glazed pottery was in use at Norton Priory from the early sixteenth century, and that it continued in use beyond the mid sixteenth century. By the early seventeenth century, however, the forms of vessels (though not their fabrics) had changed considerably.

There is some slight evidence that some of the fabric E sherds could have been associated with the earliest occupation of the site. An abraded sherd was seated beneath the wall foundation in area 03, a building robbed in antiquity, probably during the life span of the settlement. Sherds of this type were absent from the midden in areas 01 and 07. However, they did occur in midden 05 in conjunction with other fabrics.

How does the dating of fabric type (E) compare with the sixteenth century date range that can thus be assigned to the Brenig pottery so far considered? At first sight the sherds have a distinctly 'medieval' appearance, contrasting in form, glaze, fabric and finish with the dark glazed wares. A close parallel is provided by the material from the probable kiln site discovered in field walking by members of the Buckley Clay Industries Research Committee at Ewloe, Clwyd in 1975. The writer has been fortunate in being able to compare material from Ewloe with the Brenig examples. There is now doubt that fabric E is identical to that of the Ewloe vessels, and that the vessel type and rim form of the Brenig vessel xxix (fig. 4, 15) can be closely paralleled at Ewloe (see Davey and Harrison forthcoming).

At present, no site has provided firm dating evidence for Ewloe type pottery, though excavated examples from Chester and Hen Blas (Clwyd) might indicate a fourteenth or fifteenth century date (Davey 1976, 27). Similar ware has been found at Lymm Hall, Cheshire (Johnson and Bearpark forthcoming) with no dark glazed wares present. At Norton Village, Runcorn, however, two contexts have produced both types of pottery in association (Greene and Hough, forthcoming). Metalling of the axial road through the Village produced sherds of both categories, together with a silver penny of Elizabeth I which is unlikely to have been minted later than about 1570. The nature of a road, probably in use over a substantial period, must make one cautious about claims to contemporaneity between the two categories, but the presence of both in the fill of a ditch defining a house platform at the Village does reinforce the possibility that both categories of ware were in use at the same time. The conclusion to be drawn is that there is a strong possibility that the categories did overlap in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a co-existence made easier to accept by the fact that the vessel forms, and therefore, functions are so clearly different in the Brenig examples. All four fabric E vessels at Brenig are likely to have been large storage vessels on a scale that none of the dark glazed vessels could possibly match.

Two sherds remain to be considered. The tiny white glazed sherd (vessel xxxiv) was examined by Mr. R. Coleman-Smith, to whom I am grateful for the following remarks. The glaze is white and usually described as Delft or tin glaze. There is no blue tinting in this glaze, as found in English Delfts, and its quality is rather unlike the typical Dutch Delfts or French Faience. There is no evidence of decoration, not even of lustre ghosting; however, from the appearance of the fabric and the glaze, although the sherd is only 5mm diameter, it is most probably Spanish in origin. Its possible date range is very wide. One example of thirteenth century date is recorded from Southampton (Platt and Coleman-Smith 1975, No. 1277, 173) but it occurs more widely plentifully at later dates, into the seventeenth century.

The pale buff unglazed sherd (vessel xxxiii) was submitted to Mr. J.G. Hurst, who kindly identified it as characteristic of a North French Type 1 flask - a class first described by Mr. Hurst in 1966 (Le Patourel 1966, 54-59) and which more recently has been found to have been made at Martincamp between Dieppe and Beauvais (Chapelot 1975, 160). He further commented that it fits in well with a sixteenth century context, dating from the first half of the century.

Taking all the evidence from the pottery together, there is no reason why any of it need be earlier than the late fifteenth century, or later than the late sixteenth century. Thus the maximum period during which pottery was in use at the hafod was about a century, but the span of occupation could have been very much shorter.

Source of the Pottery

Two sherds are derived from vessels brought from a considerable distance - one from North France, the other probably from Spain. Their presence on such an isolated site in the depths of North Wales is at first sight surprising. However, as the presence of imported wares on village sites is being increasingly recognised, the Brenig discoveries serve to emphasise just how widespread their distribution can be (cf Dunning in Butler 1975).

The source of vessels made from Fabric E is likely to be in the Ewloe area,

as explained above, though there remains the possibility that other kilns producing identical wares will be found elsewhere. The source of the remaining pottery, which constitutes the bulk of the material, is more problematical. No kilns have yet been found west of the Pennines that could be a source of sixteenth century dark glazed wares, which are however found at numerous sites throughout the area. Davey has rightly urged caution in ascribing dark glazed wares to Buckley because no kiln sites have yet demonstrated production there earlier than the seventeenth century (Davey 1976, 16-17). However, if it transpires that kilns in the Buckley area were in production in the sixteenth century, then the geographical position of Brenig would suggest strongly that the Buckley area would be well placed to supply pottery vessels, with Benbigh and Ruthin as the most likely markets. Alternatively, the two towns themselves may have had pottery kilns in the vicinity producing dark glazed wares.

Surviving Proportion

Two features of the collection of pottery from the site are worthy of note, the surviving proportion and distribution of pottery sherds across the site. Of the thirty four vessels recognised, in only two instances was the surviving proportion as much as half the vessel. No less than twenty vessels were represented by less than 0.2 of the complete vessel. As it is very unlikely that broken pottery was ever discarded at any great distance from the hafod, one must assume that the remainder became scattered over the area surrounding the excavated portion of the site. The distribution of pottery vessels across the excavated site, with sherds from individual vessels being found in many different locations, suggests that broken vessels were left lying about rather than being methodically disposed of in rubbish dumps. The general conclusion to be drawn is that for a complete picture of the use of pottery on this site (which in many ways is an ideal site for the study of pottery use due to its small size and isolated position) a much larger area would have to be excavated, to the same meticulous standards that were applied to the excavation of the structures. The implications in terms of time and finance are daunting.

Acknowledgements

The writer is indebted to Richard Coleman-Smith, Peter Davey and John Hurst for their comments on various aspects of the Brenig pottery. Beryl Noake, (field researcher with the Archaeology Section, Funcorn Development Corporation) examined the fabrics of all the vessels and drew vessel xxix (fig. 7, 15); to her also my thanks are due.

Les fouilles de sauvetage à Brenig 48 (SH 988575), habitation située dans les pâturages estivaux dans la vallée à hauteur de la rivière de Brenig ont effectuée la trouvaille d'un ensemble de trente quatre vases représentés par cent soixante sept tessons de poterie.

Cinq catégories de pâte ont été identifiées: A,B,C,D,E. La distribution de tessons a travers le site a été étudiée, et la proportion survivante de tous les vases a été calculée et illustrée dans un tableau (Table 2.).

De couleur gris-pourpre (Types A,C,D), brun-orange (B). et beige (E), la pâte est assez homogène et dure, dégraissée par des fragments de quartz de dimensions et de quantités variables, selon la forme du vase.

Types A, B: Vingt trois sont représentées, dont vingt-et-une sont des coupes à anse, petites, bien formées, de pâte fine.

Types C, D: Cinq récipients sont représentées, moins bien faits, de pâte plus grossière.

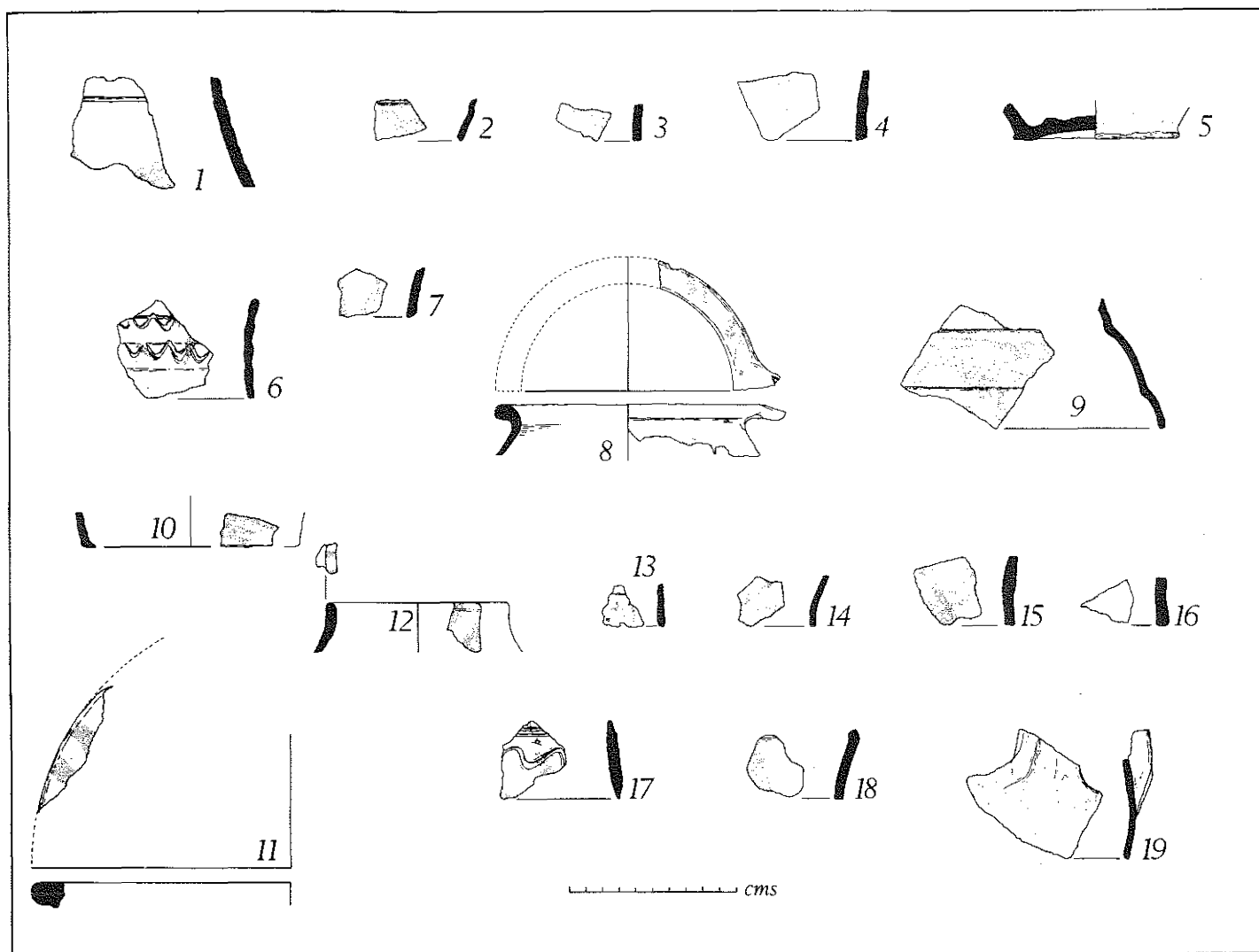
Type E: Quatre récipients sont représentées, notamment plus grands que C et D.

L'étude s'occupe ensuite des problèmes d'origine et de datation. De glaçure brun-foncé à noir, à l'intérieure ainsi qu'à l'extérieur, Types A, B, C, D offrent une grande similitude au matériel de Norton Priory (cloître). La source la plus probable de cette céramique serait à Buckley, mais à présent il n'y existe d'évidence que pour des fours du dix-septième siècle. Type E ressemble beaucoup aux tessons trouvés dans le voisinage d'Ewloe, mais ici aussi la source précise reste incertaine. La datation reste donc sur des comparaisons - se fiant à la documentation de Norton Priory, Types A, B, C, D dateront du seizième siècle, tandis que des fouilles à Norton Village, Runcorn, où les deux groupes ont été trouvés ensemble, suggéreront que Type E coexistait avec Types A, B, C, D à la fin de quinzième -au début du seizième siècle. Les deux imports, l'un de l'Espagne, l'autre de la France (Martincamp) concorderont avec cette datation générale.

Bibliography

- Chapelot, J., 1975. Les Trouvailles Céramique de la Rance and du port du St. Servan, in Langouet, L., Les Dossiers du Centre Regional Archaeologique Alet, 2, 143-174.
- Davey, P.J., 1976. 'Recent fieldwork in the Buckley Potteries', Buckley No. 4. (the journal of the Buckley Society), April, 16-29.
- Davey, P.J., Harrison, H.M., forthcoming. 'Ewloe', in Davey, P.J., ed. Medieval Pottery from Excavations in the North West.
- Greene, J.P., Hough, P.R., forthcoming. 'Excavations at Norton Village, Cheshire'.
- Greene, J.P., Noake, B., forthcoming. 'Norton Priory', in Davey, P.J., ed. Medieval Pottery from Excavations in the North West.
- Johnson, B., Bearpark, P.J., forthcoming. 'Lymm Hall', in Davey, P.J., ed. Medieval Pottery from Excavations in the North West.
- Le Patourel, H.E.J., 1966. 'Kirkstall Abbey Excavations', Pub. Thoresby Soc., 11, 54-59.
- Platt, C., Coleman-Smith, R., 1975. Excavations in Medieval Southampton 1953-1969, Leicester.
- Talbot, E.J., 1968. 'Welsh Ceramics: a Documentary and Archaeological Survey', P.N.A., 2, 119-139.

Red-Painted Pottery in North-Western Europe :
New light on an old controversy



Red-painted and red-burnished wares from Hamwih.

Red-painted : class 12 (Trier) nos. 1,2,3,4,6,13,16,17,18;

class 9 (Beauvaisis) nos. 7,8,14,15;

class 25 (Paris ?) no. 11;

class 35 (Bouxwiller) no. 12.

Red-burnished : nos. 5,9,10,19.