

A Medieval Pottery Kiln at Ashampstead, Berkshire

LORRAINE MEPHAM and MICHAEL J. HEATON*

with a contribution by PAUL LINFORD†

SUMMARY

Landscaping work in October 1992 to the rear of domestic properties bordering Ashampstead Common, near Newbury in Berkshire, uncovered large quantities of medieval pottery. Limited examination of the landscaped area in January 1993 demonstrated that at least two phases of medieval kiln were present on the site, beneath a very thin cover of ploughsoil, within archaeological contexts yielding large quantities of medieval pottery of late 12th- to 13th-century date.

INTRODUCTION

In October 1992, during landscaping works at 'Uncommon', a bungalow on the edge of the dispersed village of Ashampstead, near Newbury in Berkshire, quantities of medieval pottery were observed and recovered by the landowner. After a brief initial examination of the material, English Heritage were approached to fund a limited assessment of the pottery and its immediate context.

In January of the following year, limited hand excavations were carried out to the rear of the house and stratified pottery was recovered from within and around a single circular kiln structure. This, and the material already collected by the landowner and neighbours, were rapidly examined and the results presented to English Heritage with a proposal for full analysis of the pottery, geophysical survey and publication of the site (Wessex Archaeology 1993). The geophysical survey was carried out by the Ancient Monuments Laboratory in two stages in August and November 1993.

This report summarises the archaeological work carried out on the site during 1993, and presents an analysis of the medieval pottery recovered in 1992 and 1993, together with a discussion of the regional significance of the kiln and its associated ceramic assemblage.

SITE LOCATION

Ashampstead occupies a dissected outcrop of Upper Chalk capped with clay-with-flints, between the valleys of the rivers Pang and Thames, 14 km north-east of Newbury, in Berkshire (Fig. 1). Ashampstead Common covers the southern periphery of the

village, bisected by the Yattendon-Upper Basildon road which lies in a deep cutting. The bungalow lies on the floor of a broad SW-facing terrace cut into the natural sloping contours above the level of the road. The site is located on the eastern edge of the garden, immediately overlooking the north side of the road (NGR SU 5757 7486).

The surrounding landscape is a patchwork of deciduous woodland and small fields with intervening houses and farms. The field immediately to the rear of the bungalow, presently under 'set-aside', slopes gently from north to south, originally having terminated at a steep hedge bank overlooking the road. A broad level terrace in the natural slope of the field is still visible, extending some 30 m east of the site. The landscaping has reduced the level in the immediate vicinity of the site by about 1m, leaving total soil cover of less than 0.10 m. The natural soil is a very silty clay loam with many flint fragments, yellowish-brown in colour except for the vicinity of the site where it is markedly darker brown.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Ashampstead, first mentioned specifically as *Essamested* in a document dated 1155-8 (Gelling 1973), is considered to have been part of the Saxon parish of Basildon (Peake 1931), although little is known with any certainty. Most of the adjacent houses are late medieval or post-medieval in date, and the construction of 'Uncommon' itself was preceded by the demolition of a timber-framed cottage of unrecorded date. With the exception of a quantity of pottery uncovered during construction of the existing bungalow and now held by Reading

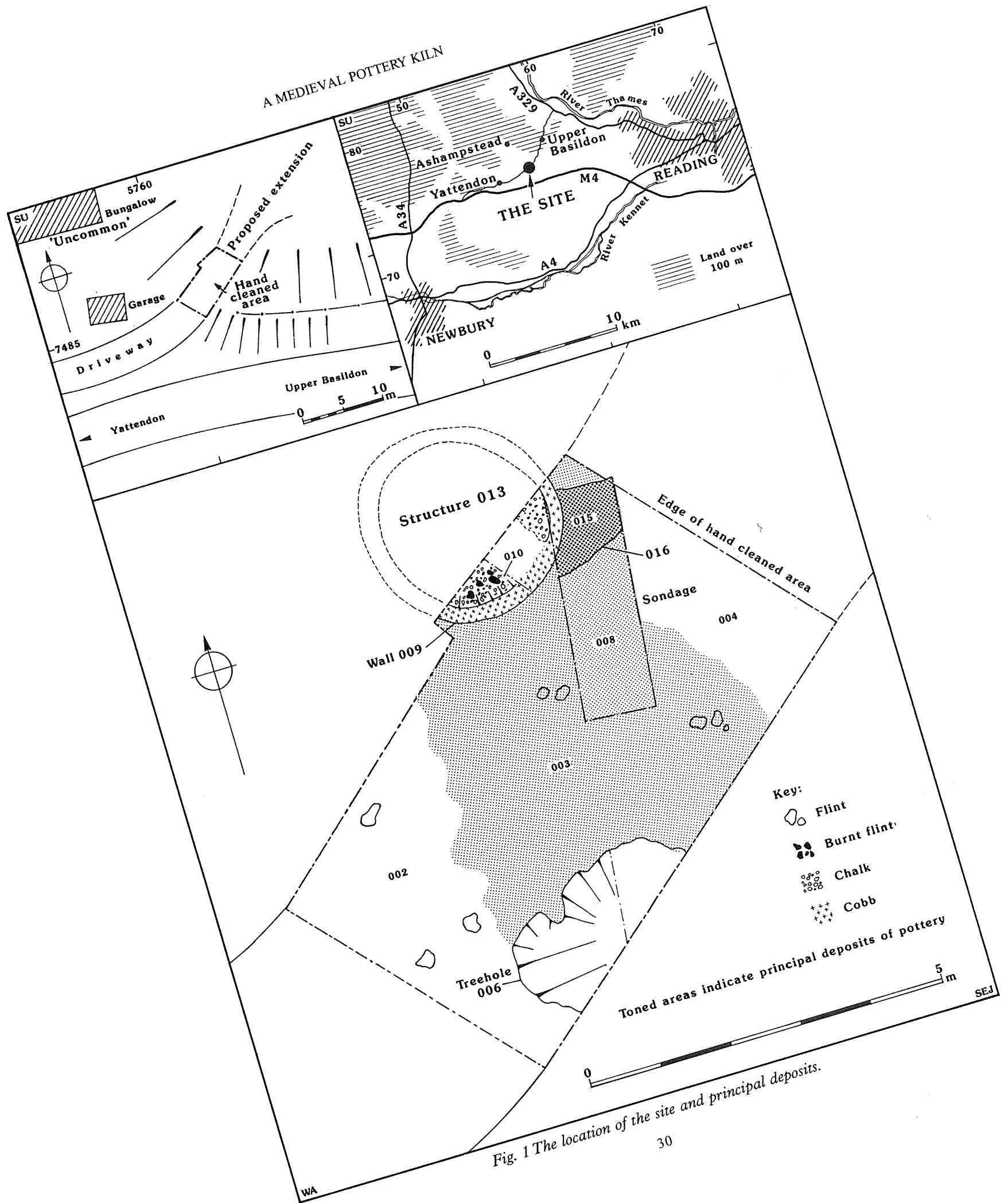


Fig. 1 The location of the site and principal deposits.

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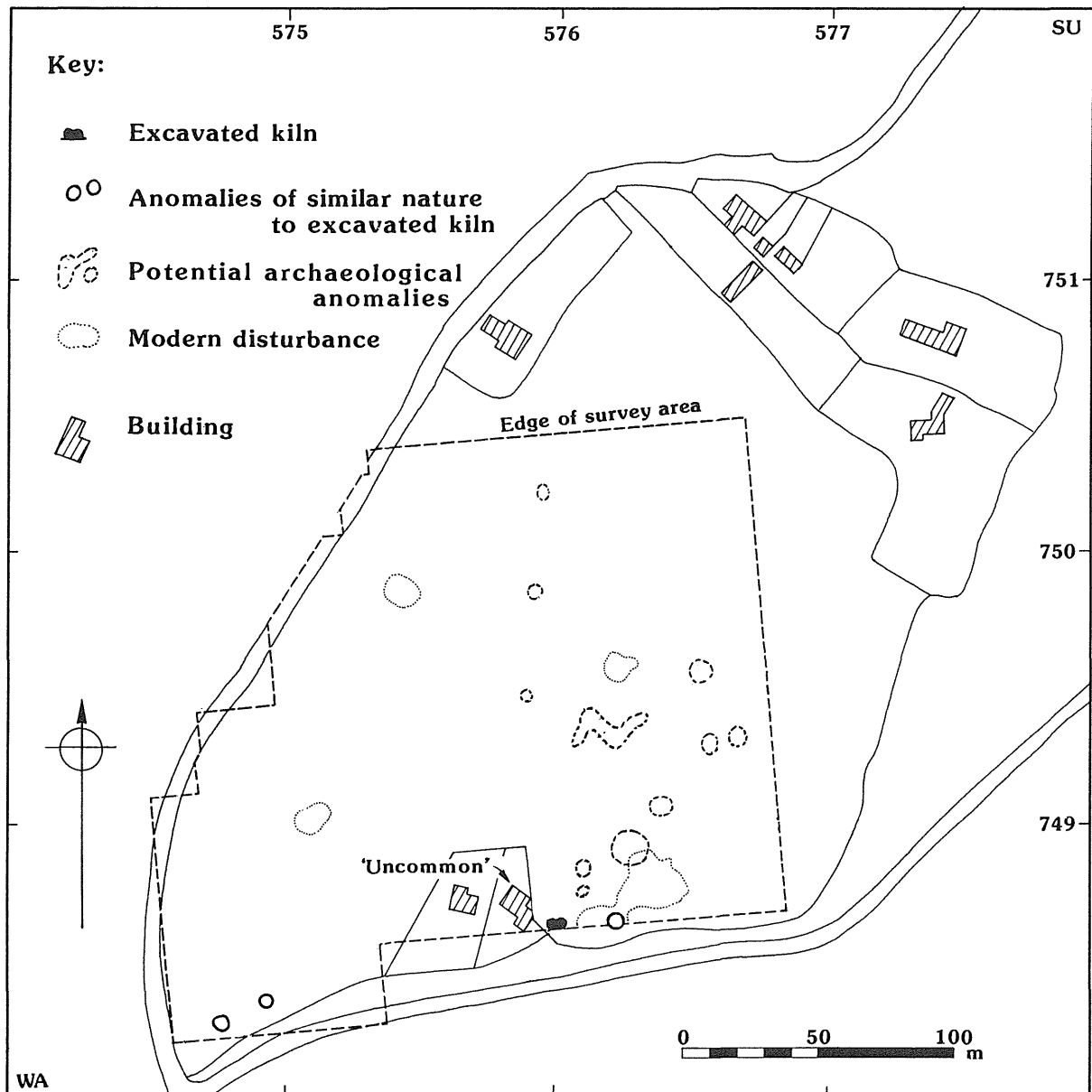


Fig.2 Results of the geophysical survey.

Museum, circumstantial place-name evidence for individual fields, by-ways and properties, and finds of pottery previously recorded by local inhabitants, Ashampstead and its Common had little previously recorded archaeological potential. Its landscape setting, however, is typical of that favoured — and created — by medieval craft industry: common woodland, on a clay source between established settlements and close to a thoroughfare. Place-names in the immediate vicinity, such as Burnt Hill, Burnt Hill Common and Kiln Pond (SU 5774) and Colliers Copse (SU 5873), indicate that charcoal burning has been a dominant industry here. In a wider perspective, this wooded upland landscape has been postulated as a possible source for at least some of the group of quartz-tempered wares recovered during excavations in the adjacent urban settlements

of Abingdon, Oxford, Newbury and Reading (Mellor 1980, 181; Mellor 1994; Vince forthcoming).

FIELD METHODOLOGY

The field investigations were limited specifically to the proposed driveway extension adjacent to the bungalow, where topsoil cover had been removed and 'features' and large quantities of pottery exposed, and set out specifically to record those deposits already exposed and establish whether medieval kilns were indeed present on the site. A 7 m length around the densest pottery concentration was cleaned and all exposed deposits recorded. A small sondage (3 m × 1 m) was opened to investigate a smaller feature, which proved to be a portion of a kiln-like structure.

Subsequently, a gradiometer survey was carried out in two stages by the Magnetometry Section of the Ancient Monuments Laboratory, covering first the immediate vicinity of the site, followed by the rest of the field.

The geophysical survey (by Paul Linford)

The field surrounding the site was surveyed using a Geoscan FM36 fluxgate gradiometer at 1m intervals on a 30m 'site-specific' grid. Forty grid squares were surveyed. Soil magnetic susceptibility was also surveyed, using a Bartington MSI magnetic susceptibility meter and field loop, on the same grid. Full details of the survey are available in the site archive (Ancient Monuments Laboratory Rep. No. 108/93), and are summarised here.

Three groups of anomalies were recorded: the excavated kiln, anomalies of a similar nature to the known kiln, and gross disturbances of probably modern date (Fig. 2). The excavated kiln displays a strong positive core surrounded by a strong negative circular boundary, but no comparable responses were found elsewhere in the survey area. Two anomalies of similar size and amplitude are present in the south-west corner of the survey, and perhaps represent pits or the remains of damaged kilns. However, magnetic susceptibility in this area was low, reducing the reliability of this interpretation. The most striking anomalies in the magnetometer survey are the amorphous areas of increased field strength distributed apparently at random over the survey area. These may well be pits related to the pottery production, but the lack of associated, recognisably archaeological anomalies allows no firm conclusion to be drawn. The two large negative anomalies along the western fringe of the field are caused by telegraph poles and the large area of mixed anomalies to the east of the houses is interpreted as the result of the landscaping that preceded these investigations.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The recorded deposits

Three groups of deposits were visible on the surface after hand-cleaning (Fig. 1). A thin covering of remnant silty clay-loam ploughsoil (004) covered the northern 1m or so of the examined area. Its maximum observed thickness at the north end of the sondage was less than 0.1m, its southern extent having been removed by machine during previous landscaping. The central 4.5m of the examined area was dominated by a dark grey, amorphous spread (003) of heterogenous silty clay and flint nodules and contained large quantities of pottery, burnt flint

and charcoal. This deposit also encompassed smaller isolated patches of weathered chalk, the largest of which (009) proved on examination to be the upper edge of a puddled chalk-and-clay wall. The down-slope — or south-western — edge of 003 was very irregular and disturbed by tree-root holes, such as feature 006, but was quite well defined against the underlying orange clay-with-flint natural subsoil (005).

Examination in hand-excavated sondages revealed the following stratigraphic sequence. Layer 003 was the southern edge of a more extensive layer which extended northwards as layer 008 beneath the ploughsoil 004, beyond the edges of the area examined. Although less than 0.05m thick, it contained large quantities of pottery, with most of the sherds packed flat and tightly together. Layer 003/008 sealed the eastern edge of puddled chalk feature 009, and the fill (014) of a narrow linear feature (016) which appeared to run east-west across the narrow sondage, from underneath 009.

Examination of 009 revealed it to be the puddled chalk-and-clay lining of a circular structure 0.6m deep and approximately 3m in diameter. The lining itself was 0.2m thick and displayed clear vertical finger-smearing on the inside face. Although not fire-blackened, the inside face was hard and well cemented. It was sealed by a thick deposit of degraded lining (012) sealing a thin layer (014) of black ash and charcoal — both contained within the structure — which rested on a base of burnt flint nodules and puddled chalk. No further investigation of the structure or its manner of construction was feasible within the narrow confines of the trench. The whole is referred to hereafter as Structure 013.

The linear feature 016, filled with material almost identical to layer 003, but containing a higher density of pottery sherds and charcoal, extended from the outer north-eastern edge of Structure 013 across the sondage. Two edges were defined clearly in plan, but the feature was not examined in section. Although not investigated, the clear superimposition of Structure 013 over feature 016 indicated that the construction of 013 had cut through the fill of 016. Examination of 016 would not therefore have been possible without first destroying 013, which was impracticable given the restrictions of the archaeological specifications.

Summary

Structure 013, of which only a small part was examined, is almost certainly a pottery kiln, although the small extent of the investigation precludes any typological conclusion. Structural details of its construction technique do survive and the large quantities of featured daub contained loose within it probably derive from the roof of the last firing.

Feature 016 is probably a stoke-pit for another, adjacent, kiln.

At least two phases are indicated by the superimposition of Structure 013 over feature 016; layer 003, from which most of the 'unstratified' pottery is probably derived, seals both, but may itself be derived from the fill of feature 016. At least two kilns are likely to be present on the site, and the spread of darker coloured soils and surface pottery extending north and east from the site suggest more. The fabric of the kiln wall 009 is similar to the surrounding clay-with-flint, although with more chalk inclusions; it is possible therefore that the large surface depression noted some metres to the north-east of the site may indicate quarrying contemporaneous with the kilns' use. A flint-lined pit noted by the landowner to the north-west of the site may have been a slaking pit used in the construction of the kiln(s), and possibly in the preparation of the potting clay itself.

THE POTTERY

The pottery assemblage collected from Ashampstead consists of three elements:

- unstratified material collected by the landowner from the landscaped area and, specifically, from the vicinity of a dark patch of soil 003/008 (later revealed as covering the kiln Structure 013)
- unstratified material collected by the landowner and neighbours from a wider area of the field around the landscaped area
- material recovered from stratified contexts during archaeological investigations by Wessex Archaeology.

The total assemblage amounts to 8310 sherds (98.5 kg). It must be stressed that only a very small proportion of the total pottery assemblage was found in direct association with the excavated kiln structure; evidence that much of the rest of the assemblage also derives from pottery production on the site is discussed below.

Methodology

For the purposes of this report, only the stratified material recovered during the archaeological investigations by Wessex Archaeology has been examined in detail. This comprises 990 sherds (16,090 g) from contexts 002, 003, 004, 007, 008, 010, 011, 012 and 014. The remainder of the assemblage, comprising the unstratified material collected from the site and its vicinity, and including sherds collected during hand-cleaning after topsoil stripping (context 001), has been scanned with the intention of picking out any elements which are not represented amongst the stratified assemblage.

The detailed analysis of the stratified assemblage has followed standard Wessex Archaeology procedures as set out in *The Analysis of Pottery* (WA Guidelines No. 4). Macroscopic examination indicates that with the exception of a handful of sherds, the assemblage may be described as representing a single fabric type, albeit with some variation in the coarseness of inclusions, and in colouring. For this reason, a detailed fabric analysis has not been carried out, although examples that differ widely from the perceived 'norm', as described below, have been noted, and some attempt has been made to correlate minor variations within the fabric with particular vessel forms. Type series have been created for rims, bases and handles. The pottery has been recorded by context, including details of vessel form, vessel size, surface treatment, decoration and manufacturing technique. Particular attention has been paid to evidence of 'wasters' in the form of distorted or otherwise damaged sherds.

Fabrics

The dominant fabric type can be described as follows:

1. A hard, moderately coarse clay matrix containing a moderate amount (10–20%) of fairly well-sorted, rounded quartz grains mainly within the range 0.5–1.0 mm; rare to sparse (1–5%) iron oxides; and rare mica flakes. The fabric is generally oxidised orange-red, although there are paler orange-buff examples, and it frequently has an unoxidised core; a small proportion of examples are completely unoxidised.

The homogeneity of the pottery fabric throughout the assemblage would suggest that the bulk of the material represents the products of a single source, if not a single kiln. The variety in colouring reflects a number of different firing techniques or firing 'events', but it is noticeable that within discrete groups, such as that from the kiln structure, and that from the overlying dark soil, the colouring is markedly consistent. Only a few identifiable 'wasters' were observed, although a small proportion of sherds are completely unoxidised, possibly as a result of overfiring.

Similar medium-grained sandy wares are found over a wide area of east Wiltshire, Berkshire, and south Oxfordshire, and are notably long-lived, occurring from the late 11th century to the 15th century. Fabric 1 can be paralleled, for example, within the medieval assemblages from Newbury, where it covers the range of medium-grained sandy wares identified (Vince forthcoming, fabric group C), from Reading, where there is a similar range of sandy fabrics, distinguished on the basis of surface

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Table 1. Vessel forms by context (all Fabric 1)

Quantification is presented by number of rims, and by estimated vessel equivalents (eves). Eves have been calculated only for the stratified assemblage.

1. Stratified assemblage

Rim types	Cooking Pot Rims			Bowl Rims		Tripod Pitchers		Slip-decorated Pitchers	
	1	2	3	1	2	Rim	Handle	Rim	Handle
Stratified over kiln	78	13	4	14		4	1	1	4
Kiln			1		2			1	2
TOTAL	78	13	5	14	2	4	1	2	6
Eve	6.2%	0.95%	0.30%	0.55%	0.19%	0.42%	-	0.13%	-

2. Unstratified assemblage

	Cooking Pots		Bowls	Jugs/Pitchers		
	Rim		Rim	Rim	Spout	Handle
Unstratified over kiln	124		30	3		9
General unstratified	537		131	125	5	72
TOTAL	661		161	128	5	81

treatment (Underwood forthcoming, fabrics S, SGg and Ssg) and Oxford (Haldon 1977, fabric AG). A source for some at least of these wares has previously been postulated in the area between Reading and Newbury (Mellor 1980, 181; Mellor 1994; Vince forthcoming). The fabric of products of the Camley Gardens kilns in Maidenhead is visually similar to Fabric 1, although there is some difference in texture and firing, and the Camley Gardens fabric is petrologically distinct (M. Mellor pers. comm.). The quantities of these sandy wares identified, and their wide area of distribution, would certainly suggest that they were being produced at a number of different sources.

Three other fabrics are present in very small quantities:

2. A hard, moderately coarse clay matrix containing a sparse to moderate amount of poorly-sorted, rounded quartz grains <1 mm; sparse to moderate subrounded calcareous inclusions <2 mm; and rare subangular flint <2 mm. Unoxidised with patchily oxidised surfaces.
3. A hard, fine silty clay matrix containing a sparse amount of subrounded, fairly well-sorted, quartz grains; rare red iron compounds and rare fine mica. Oxidised, very pale-firing.
4. A hard, moderately coarse clay matrix containing a moderate amount of poorly-sorted, rounded quartz grains <1 mm; sparse subangular flint fragments <5 mm. Both oxidised and unoxidised.

Two of these fabrics can be paralleled at New-

bury. Fabric 4 (three sherds) falls within the range of flint-tempered wares found in 11th- and 12th-century contexts, and Fabric 2 (four sherds) is comparable to calcareous fabrics identified in 13th- and 14th-century contexts (Vince forthcoming, fabric groups A and B respectively). Both fabric groups have a putative source in the Savernake Forest. Fabric 3 (one sherd) can be identified as a Surrey whiteware, of uncertain source. All three fabrics occur only in plain body sherds; the discussion of vessel forms below refers, therefore, only to Fabric 1.

Vessel forms (all Fabric 1)

Vessel forms have been defined mainly on the basis of rim types, although other elements, such as handles, spouts, bases, and decorated sherds have also been used to infer the presence of certain forms. Four main forms have been identified: cooking pots, bowls, spouted tripod pitchers, and slip-decorated pitchers. Rim diameters have been calculated only for sherds within the stratified assemblage. A breakdown of the vessel forms by context is presented in Table 1, which gives numbers of rim sherds, and estimated vessel equivalents (eves). The percentages given below have been calculated on the basis of the eves.

Cooking pots

Cooking pots have been sub-divided into three types on the basis of rim forms.

Type 1 (71.4%) (Fig. 3, Nos. 1-8): These vessels are handmade, with wheelthrown or wheel-finished rims, and sagging bases; complete profiles are absent.

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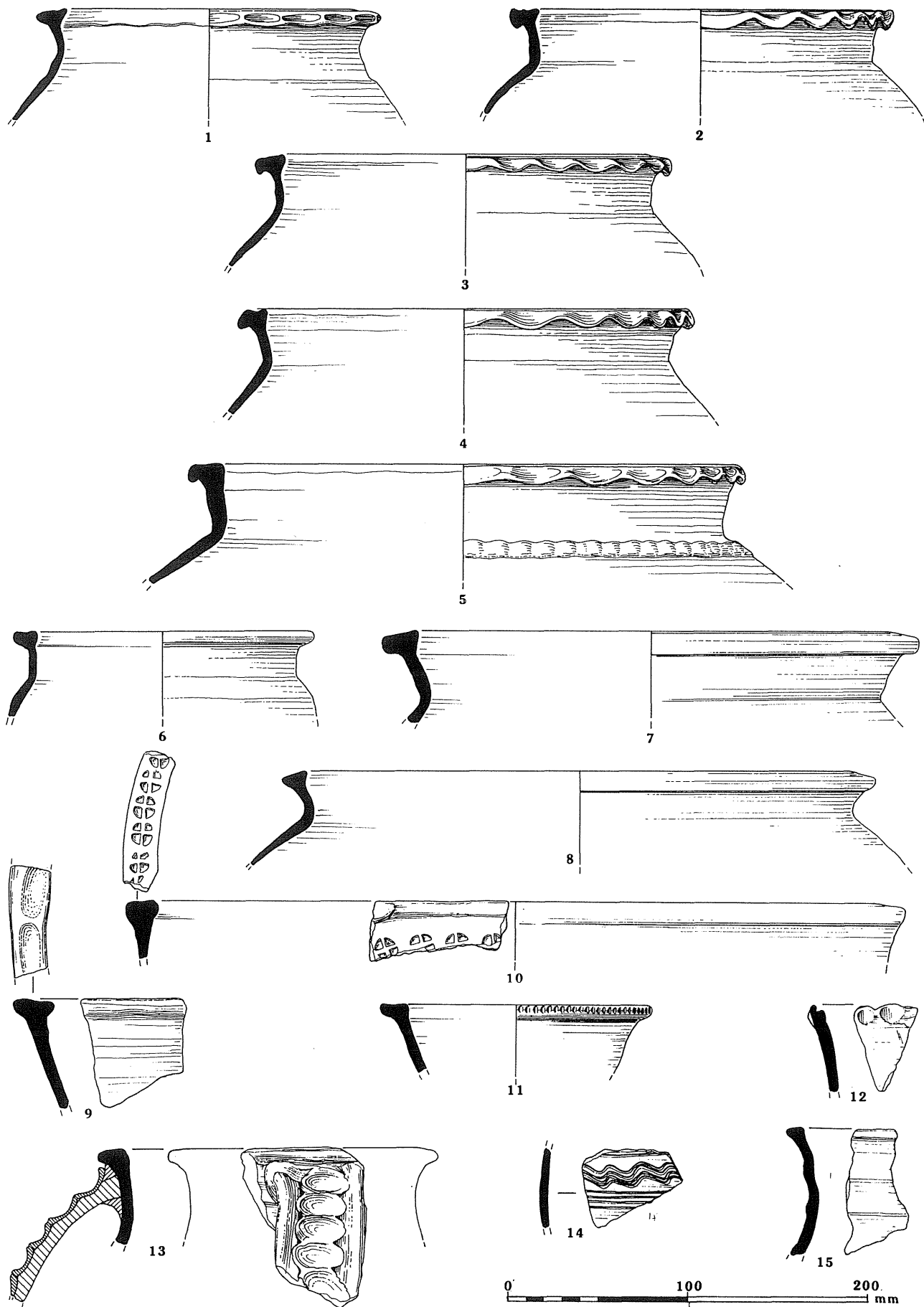


Fig. 3. Nos. 1-15: pottery from the excavated area. Scale 1:4.

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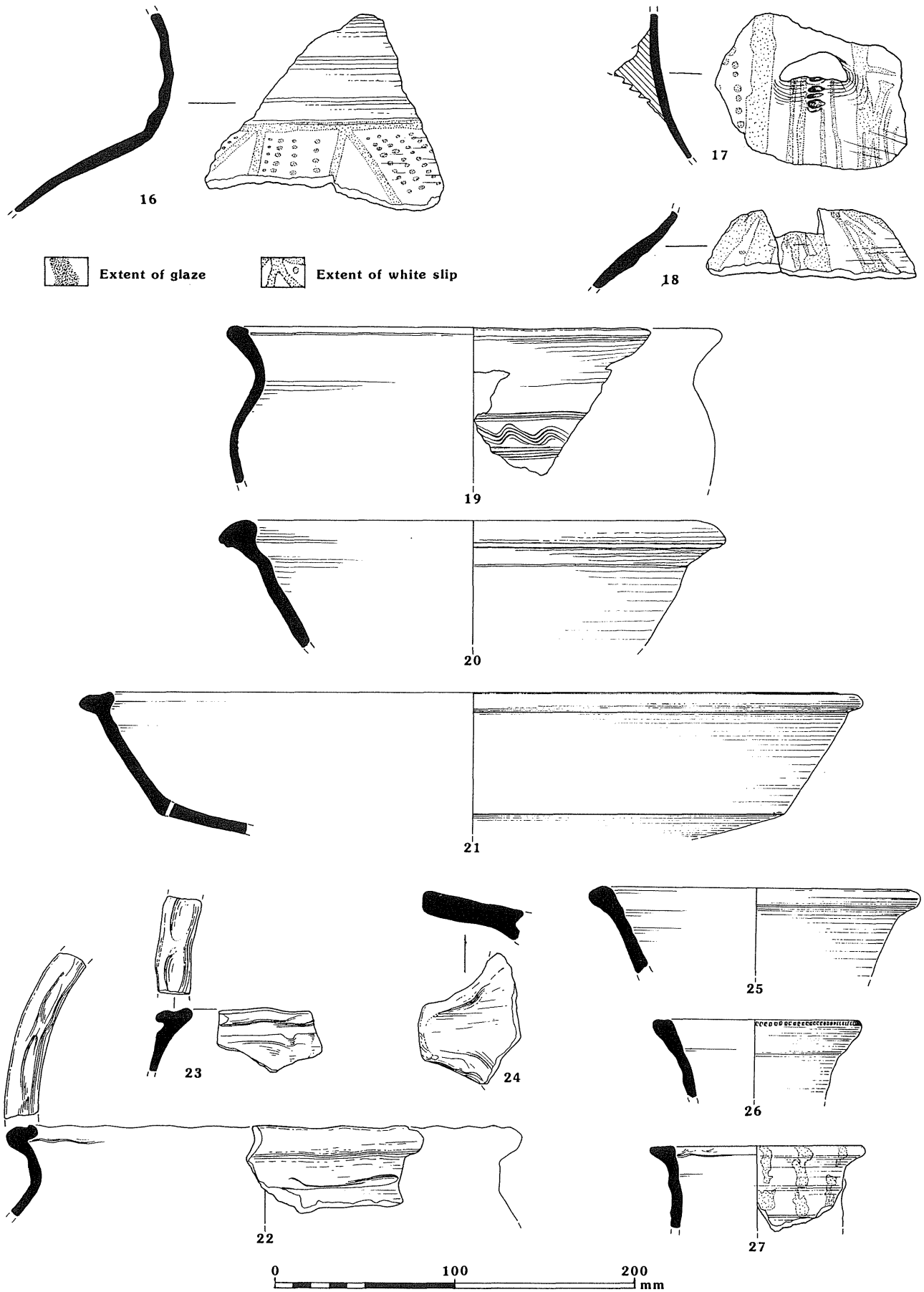


Fig. 4. Nos. 16–21: pottery from the excavated area; Nos. 22–27: pottery from the unstratified collection. Scale 1:4.

Rim forms are noticeably consistent: everted and flattened, with a roughly triangular section, sometimes with a central groove along the top of the rim to create an almost bifid form. Rims are frequently decorated with finger-impressions, either along the top of the rim or, more frequently, around the outside edge. Rim diameters within the stratified assemblage range from 140mm to 300mm, with the majority falling within the range 180–280mm. A few vessels have applied strips, either horizontally around the shoulder, or vertically on the body. Unglazed body sherds with linear and curvilinear combed decoration in horizontal bands (Fig. 3, No. 14; Fig. 5, No. 42) may also derive from these vessels; alternatively, they may come from jug or pitcher forms (see below).

Type 2 (10.7%) (Fig. 4, No. 22): Less common are vessels with heavier, more rounded 'clubbed' rims, which are less frequently finger-impressed. Vessels again are handmade, with wheel-thrown or wheel-finished rims.

Type 3 (3.3%) (Fig. 4, No. 19): A small number of vessels have more flaring rims, slightly thickened and roughly squared. Vessels are completely wheel-thrown. One example has shallow linear and curvilinear combing around the point of maximum girth.

None of these vessels are glazed, but occasional examples of Types 1 and 3 have random glaze spots or splashes, probably indicating that they were fired with glazed vessels. Unglazed body sherds with linear and curvilinear combed decoration may derive from cooking pots, but the only definite example is one Type 3 cooking pot (see above).

It is difficult to infer any chronological sequence involving the three types, but it may be noted that cooking pots with clubbed rims are common within assemblages from Newbury, Reading and Oxford from at least the early 12th century. More developed rims, comparable to those of Types 1 and 3, appear to start slightly later, by the later 12th century, but all three cooking pot types are found together in 12th- and 13th-century contexts throughout this area.

Bowls

Two types of bowl have been defined on the basis of rim forms.

Type 1 (7.8%) (Fig. 3, Nos. 9–10; Fig. 4, No. 23): These vessels are generally more crudely made than the cooking pots. They are handmade and knife-trimmed, although some examples appear to have been finished off on a wheel. Rim forms are hammer-headed or T-headed and are frequently decorated with finger-impressions around the top. Stamped

decoration, consisting of a repeated quartered circle, was observed on three rim sherds, around the top of the rim and on either the internal or the external surface. The small size of the rim sherds present has precluded an estimate of rim diameter for all but one sherd, which has an estimated diameter of 400 mm. Bases are sagging. A few internally-glazed examples were noted.

Type 2 (0.6%) (Fig. 4, Nos. 20–21): These are deeper bowls or pans, with hammer-headed or T-headed rims, often 'flanged'. Only a few examples are present. These vessels show a slightly higher degree of finishing than the Type 1 bowls, and are generally wheelthrown.

The shallow, convex-sided Type 1 bowls are characteristic of 12th-century assemblages in the area, while the deeper bowls or pans of Type 2 are rarely found before the 13th century.

Tripod pitchers (4.8%) (Fig. 3, Nos. 11–13; Fig. 4, Nos. 25–6; Fig. 5, No. 30–1, 39)

No complete profiles of tripod pitchers are present, but various elements of the classic tripod pitcher type have been identified. These are externally splash-glazed, handmade vessels with spouts, strap handles and tripod bases. They have plain conical necks with simple thickened or externally thickened rims which may be decorated with notching, roller-stamping, or finger-tip impressions. The tubular spout is attached by being pushed through the body of the pitcher, and supported by a wrapover strut below the rim. The strap handles have plaited insets, and roller-stamped decoration along the edges. Handle attachment is by luting, and the junction of the handle and body below the rim is strengthened by the addition of extra clay. Glazed body sherds with linear and curvilinear combed decoration in horizontal bands probably derive from these vessels. The glaze is thick, olive green, and apparently extends all over the outside of the vessel, including the underside of the base, and inside the neck.

Tripod pitchers are generally considered to be a 12th-century form in this area, but have also been found with slip-decorated pitchers (see below) in early 13th-century contexts at Reading (Moorhouse 1973, 97) and Oxford (Haldon 1977, figs. 20–21; Mellor 1980, fig. 10).

Slip-decorated pitchers (1.4%) (Fig. 3, No. 15; Fig. 4, Nos. 16–18, 27; Fig. 5, Nos. 28–9, 32–38, 40–1, 43–5)

These vessels are similar in form to the tripod pitchers, but have been defined on the basis of decoration. They are handmade and have a conical, corrugated neck, globular body, and rod or, more frequently, strap handle with a variety of stabbed,

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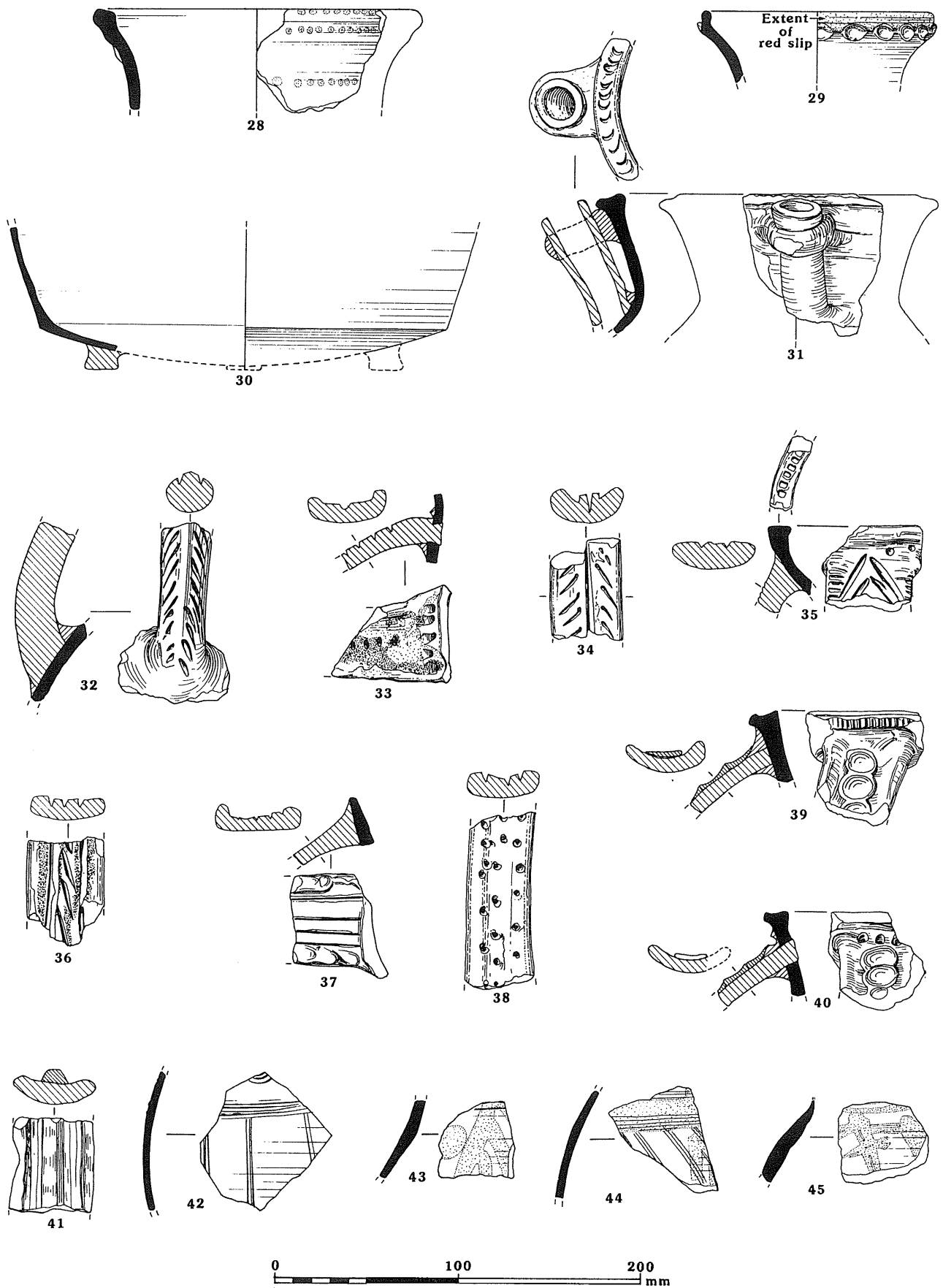


Fig. 5. Nos. 28-45: pottery from the unstratified collection. Scale 1:4.

slashed and incised decoration. Handles are plugged into the body of the vessel below the rim, and luted or plugged at the base. Base forms are uncertain, but they could have been tripod-footed, although non-tripod bases are known (Mellor 1994, fig. 27, no. 3). No spouts were found definitely associated with these vessels, although they are likely to have had a spout similar to those of the tripod pitchers (see above). Decoration on the rim, neck and body of the pitchers consists of slipped bands and more complex motifs; combinations of slipped bands and dots are common. Handles may also be slipped. Vessels are glazed externally with a patchy light olive green splash glaze, although the absence of complete profiles means that the extent of glazing cannot be fully determined.

Comparable vessels are known from Newbury (Vince forthcoming), but are particularly common in Reading (Moorhouse 1973, fig. 12; Underwood forthcoming), in both instances in early 13th-century contexts.

Distribution on site

The pottery recovered from the site may be considered in three groups:

- Pottery directly associated with the excavated kiln structure
- Pottery from a spread of dark soil overlying the kiln structure, recovered during the archaeological investigations
- All other pottery

Pottery directly associated with the kiln structure (Fig. 3, No. 15; Fig. 4, Nos. 16–21)

Although pottery was recovered in large quantities from a layer of dark soil (003/008) which sealed part of the kiln structure, this pottery cannot be linked directly to the kiln structure itself (013). The only material which can be directly associated with the structure of the kiln comprises sherds from the degraded kiln lining (012), and from the underlying layer of ash and charcoal (014).

This material comprises 31 sherds. Three vessel forms are represented: a Type 3 cooking pot, Type 2 bowls, and rim/neck, body and handle sherds from a small number (a maximum of eight) of slip-decorated pitchers. In addition, there are two body sherds of Fabric 2. On the basis of the vessel forms, a date in the first half of the 13th century can be suggested for this group of material. Slip-decorated pitchers do not occur at Newbury before the early 13th century, and are superseded by all-over white-slipped vessels in the second half of the 13th century (Vince forthcoming). This pattern is echoed in south Oxfordshire (Mellor 1994, 80). At Reading they could appear as early as the late 12th century, but

are not so well dated here (Underwood forthcoming).

Several of the sherds show signs of spalling, due to uneven water content in the clay fabric, and several are completely unoxidised. Oxidised examples are of consistent orange/red colouring. One pitcher rim sherd is not only completely unoxidised but also slightly distorted (Fig. 3, No. 15), and the glaze on all the slip-decorated pitchers shows signs of degeneration, probably as a result of misfiring. It is reasonable to infer from the presence of these flawed examples that this small group of vessels represents wasters, most probably from the final (or only) firing of the kiln.

Pottery from a spread of dark soil overlying the kiln structure (Fig. 3, Nos. 1–14)

Large quantities of pottery were recovered during the archaeological investigation, from a spread of dark soil (003/008), which was observed to seal partially the kiln structure 013. Since joining sherds have been noted between this layer and the remnant ploughsoil layer (004/010), pottery from the latter context is also included here. The total amount of pottery from these contexts is 788 sherds.

Pottery from the dark soil can be seen to form a very homogeneous group. All sherds are in Fabric 1, and a very restricted range of vessel forms is represented. The bulk of the identifiable vessel forms comprises cooking pots of Type 1. Cooking pots of Type 2 are present in much smaller quantities, as are Type 1 bowls. One of the bowls (Fig. 3, No. 10) is stamped with a repeated quartered circle motif on top of the rim and on the internal surface. Three pitcher rims, one with notched decoration around the rim, one with a finger-impressed rim, and one with a strap handle decorated with a thumb-impressed strip, probably derive from tripod pitchers (Fig. 3, Nos. 11–13). The presence of pitcher forms, and the dominance of the more developed cooking pot rims of Type 1, combined with the absence of slip-decorated vessels, would indicate a date range probably in the second half of the 12th century.

While there is nothing to link this group of pottery with on-site production, several points may be suggestive. The sherds from this context are nearly all of a noticeably consistent pale orange/pink colour. A restricted range of vessel forms is represented, the bulk comprising a single type of cooking pot. There are no obvious wasters, but it may be suggested that this group of material represents a single dumping episode of waste from another kiln, and possibly mostly from a single firing.

Unstratified pottery over and around the kiln area (Figs. 4–5, Nos. 22–45)

The range of pottery recovered from surface collection, both over the area of the kiln and in the

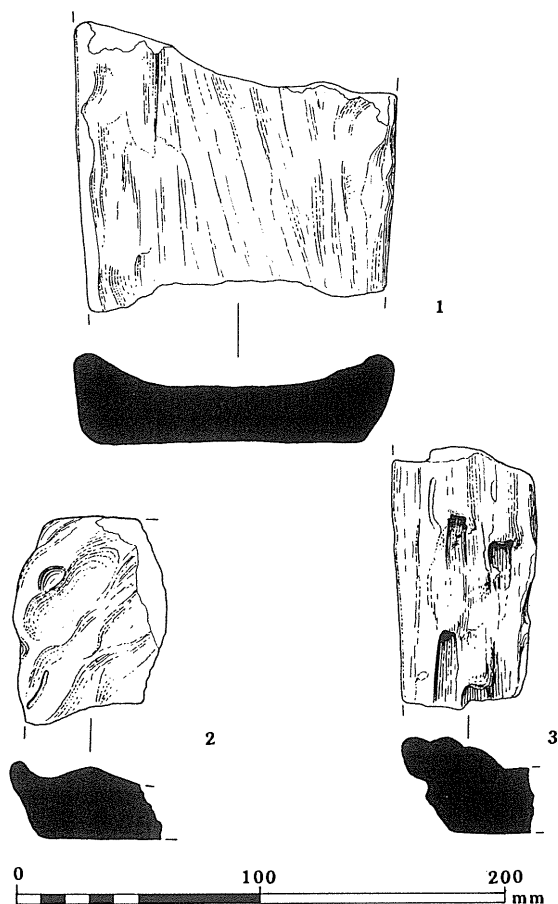


Fig. 6. Nos. 1-3: Kiln furniture. Scale 1:4.

near vicinity, complements that recovered from the stratified assemblage. Rim sherds derive mainly from cooking pots, with some slight variations on the range described above. Bowls are less frequent, although the proportion of bowls to cooking pots is higher than for the stratified assemblage. Pitcher rims and handles likewise form a higher proportion of the diagnostic sherds. Rim sherds and spouts can rarely be attributed to specific pitcher forms, but the preponderance of handles with a variety of slashed and stabbed decoration would suggest an emphasis on the slip-decorated pitchers, with other pitcher forms less frequently represented.

Other vessel forms are also represented: there is one tripod foot from a pipkin, and two skillet handles (Fig. 4, No. 24).

Discussion

The products of the excavated kiln have been identified as Type 2 bowls, Type 3 cooking pots and slip-decorated pitchers, with a date range in the first half of the 13th century. The spread of material over the kiln, containing a large proportion of cooking pots, while stratigraphically later than the kiln, is more likely to represent a dump of late 12th-century material, almost certainly products of another,

earlier kiln nearby. Other material within the unstratified assemblage comprises mainly vessels which fall within this mid 12th- to mid 13th-century time span, although the pipkin from the unstratified collection might extend the date range into the 14th century or even later. Nothing demonstrably earlier than the mid 12th century was observed.

While only a small proportion of the assemblage from Ashampstead can be identified as kiln products definitely originating on the site, there is sufficient evidence to make a few general points. Most importantly, it is apparent that Ashampstead can almost certainly be identified as the source of at least some of the sandy wares supplied to both Reading and Newbury, and that this production centre was in operation at least from the late 12th to the early 13th century. Products included cooking pots, bowls and slip-decorated pitchers, and spouted tripod pitchers were almost certainly also manufactured here. While the unstratified pottery assemblage recovered over and around the kiln cannot be definitely attributed to this production centre, it seems reasonable to infer, from the homogeneous nature of the assemblage, with its consistent fabric type and restricted, fairly standardised range of vessel forms, and the presence of probable kiln furniture (see below), that much, if not all of the assemblage is in fact of local manufacture.

FIRED CLAY

A total of 4285g of fired clay was collected from the site. This can be divided into two categories: clay with added chalk or limestone ('cob'), most of which derived from the lining of kiln 013; and fragments of a sandy clay, similar to the dominant pottery fabric from the site, which occur as fragments of possible kiln furniture.

With the exception of a few fragments with one flattish, roughly smoothed surface, the cob fragments retain no visible features to enable any further discussion of the construction of the excavated kiln. The clay objects, however, may provide some information on the internal arrangements of this structure or other, as yet undiscovered kilns on the site. None of these objects survives complete, but sufficient elements exist for a tentative reconstruction to be made. Most of the objects appear to have been flattish, 25-30mm thick, and subrectangular, with slightly bevelled edges, raised around the 'upper' edges, some with finger impressions (Fig. 6, Nos. 1-3). There is one complete width, of 125mm. Some of the pieces have deep, oblique, partial perforations. It can be suggested that these objects were firebars, forming part of the internal kiln furniture. One other small object, a 'squeeze' of clay retaining a fine thumb-print, could have been used as a spacer to separate vessels within the kiln.

CONCLUSIONS

Limited excavation on the site at Ashampstead has revealed part of a probable medieval kiln, which can be dated by its potential products to the first half of the 13th century. The extraction of further typological and technological data from the structure was precluded by the restrictions of the archaeological investigations. The excavated structure sealed a second feature, which has been interpreted as the stoke-pit for an earlier kiln, and a geophysical survey has identified further anomalies which may represent similar features, or other features connected with pottery manufacture. If these are further kilns, the concentration may be compared to other medieval village-based industries such as Boarstall in Buckinghamshire (Farley 1982). Certainly the quantity and range of pottery recovered during the excavation would suggest that the products of more than one kiln are represented.

The potential distribution of the Ashampstead-type ware is harder to define, as it falls within a widespread tradition of moderately coarse sandy wares which covers much of central southern England from the 12th century onwards. Such wares are commonly found in the urban centres of Abingdon, Oxford, Reading, Windsor and Newbury, for example. It is almost certain, however, that at least some of the sandy wares found in Reading and Newbury originated here. At a distance of *c.* 14km from Newbury and *c.* 15km from Reading, Ashampstead would have been well situated to supply both these centres. The supply of south Oxfordshire is less certain, since there are other possible sources, at least for the cooking pots and tripod pitchers, but it would seem that some at least of the sandy wares reaching Abingdon, Wallingford and Oxford, in particular the slip-decorated pitchers, did originate from this area (Mellor 1980, 181; 1994, 71-80; Weare 1977, 212).

When the distribution of these various vessel forms within the postulated distribution area of the Ashampstead-type sandy ware is considered, some interesting patterns emerge. At Newbury, tripod pitchers are the most common (just under half of all identifiable vessels), and at Reading there is a markedly high proportion of slip-decorated pitchers, although sandy ware cooking pots are also important. This emphasis on the finer glazed vessels is in marked contrast to the Ashampstead assemblage, with its preponderance of cooking pots; identifiable pitchers and other glazed forms comprise a very small proportion of the total assemblage. The dominance of glazed wares over cooking pots has already been noted for the distribution of Newbury group C wares, with the exception of Reading, as has the lack of a 'core area' in which these wares are the most common (Vince forthcoming). It is sug-

gested that this indicates a difference in marketing between cooking pots and glazed wares, with a concentration on the latter. While the evidence from Ashampstead would suggest that cooking pots were being produced in greater numbers than glazed ware, it would seem that these cooking pots were intended mainly for the local market. The distribution of such vessels further afield would have been affected by competition from the calcareous cooking wares from the Savernake area of north-east Wiltshire, whereas the glazed ware had fewer competitors to contend with. This pattern of overlapping cooking-ware industries with more mutually exclusive glazed ware industries, is one which is common to most of southern England at this time (Vince 1981).

In conclusion, it must be stressed that this report is based on what must be only a very small sample of pottery from Ashampstead, and that any meaningful discussion of the pottery industry which was based here must await further investigations on the site.

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* Wessex Archaeology, Portway House, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury SP4 6EB

† Ancient Monuments Laboratory, Fortress House, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 1AB.

Catalogue of illustrated sherds (all Fabric 1)

Excavated material

1. Cooking pot (Type 1) with finger-impressed rim. Handmade body; wheel-finished rim. Context 008.
2. Cooking pot (Type 1) with finger-impressed rim. Handmade body; wheel-finished rim. Context 008.
3. Cooking pot (Type 1) with finger-impressed rim. Handmade body; wheel-finished rim. Context 008.
4. Cooking pot (Type 1) with finger-impressed rim. Handmade body; wheel-finished rim. Context 008.
5. Cooking pot (Type 1) with finger-impressed rim. Horizontal applied strip below neck. Handmade body; wheel-finished rim. Context 008.
6. Cooking pot rim (Type 1). Handmade body; wheel-finished rim. Context 008.
7. Cooking pot rim (Type 1). Wheel-finished. Context 008.
8. Cooking pot rim (Type 1). Handmade body; wheel-finished rim. Context 008.
9. Bowl rim (Type 1), finger-impressed. Handmade body; ?wheel-finished rim. Context 008.
10. Bowl rim (Type 1), stamped with quartered circle on top of rim and on internal surface below rim; one ?finger impression on inside edge of rim. Handmade; ?wheel-finished rim. Context 008.
11. Pitcher rim, with small vertical notches on outside edge of rim. ?Wheel-finished. Context 008.
12. Pitcher rim, finger-impressed. ?Wheel-finished. Context 008.
13. Pitcher rim with handle. ?Wheel-finished rim; handle luted on to vessel wall, with extra clay moulded round for support. Applied thumbed strip down centre of handle. Context 008.
14. Decorated body sherd, with horizontal linear and curvilinear combing. Handmade. Context 008.
15. Rim sherd of slip-decorated pitcher with corrugated neck; overfired and slightly distorted. Traces of patchy external glaze. Context 014.
16. Neck and shoulder of slip-decorated pitcher with corrugated neck. Decorated with horizontal slip bands around lower part of neck; below this, diagonal slip bands creating 'zones' filled with slip dots. ?Wheel-thrown; patchy external glaze. Context 014.
17. Body sherd of slip-decorated pitcher, with strap handle stump; handle luted to vessel wall. Body decorated with vertical slip bands and lines of dots; multiple slashes up centre of handle. Handmade; patchy external glaze. Context 014.
18. Body sherds of slip-decorated pitcher. White slip bands; external glaze. Context 012.
19. Cooking pot (Type 3); horizontal band of shallow linear and curvilinear tooling around point of maximum girth. Wheelthrown. Context 012.
20. Bowl (Type 2), wheelthrown. Context 012.
21. Bowl (Type 2); pre-firing perforation at edge of base. Wheelthrown. Context 014.

Unstratified material

22. Cooking pot (Type 2) with finger-impressed rim. Handmade; ?wheel-finished.
23. ?Bowl (Type 1), with finger-impressed rim. Handmade.
24. Skillet handle. Handmade.
25. Pitcher rim, slightly cracked; glazed externally and internally.
26. Pitcher rim, roller-stamped decoration around outside edge of rim. White slip externally; glazed externally and internally.
27. Slip-decorated pitcher rim, corrugated neck, vertical slip bands, glazed externally and internally.
28. Slip-decorated pitcher rim; horizontal slip bands and rows of slip dots.
29. Slip-decorated pitcher rim, finger-impressed; red slip band around top of rim.
30. Base of tripod pitcher with one tripod foot; sagging base. Handmade; glazed externally.
31. Rim of spouted pitcher; impressed decoration on top of rim. Glazed internally and externally.
32. Base of rod handle, riveted attachment to body; two opposed rows of diagonal slashes down centre of handle.
33. Top of strap handle; stabbed decoration across top of handle at junction with body and down centre. White slip and patchy external glaze.
34. Strap handle, cut nearly in half lengthways; two opposed vertical rows of diagonal slashes. Vertical white slip band down centre; glazed.
35. Pitcher rim and top of strap handle. Impressed decoration on top of rim, and down edges of handle; two opposed vertical rows of diagonal slashes on handle. Glazed internally and externally.
36. Base of strap handle, riveted attachment to vessel wall. Two vertical incised lines; row of diagonal slashes within these lines. Patchy glaze.
37. Top of strap handle; finger impressions along edges of handle, and multiple vertical incised lines. White slip and glaze internally and externally.
38. Strap handle, multiple stabbed holes.
39. Pitcher rim with strap handle luted on. Notched decoration around outside edge of rim; finger-impressed strip down centre of handle.
40. Slip-decorated pitcher rim with strap handle, riveted attachment. Stabbed decoration across top of handle at junction with body; finger-impressed applied strip down centre of handle. Glazed internally and externally.
41. Strap handle, applied strip down centre.
42. Decorated body sherd; two-directional linear, and curvilinear combed design. Handmade.
43. Body sherd from slip-decorated pitcher; white slip motifs. Handmade?
44. Body sherd from slip-decorated pitcher; white slip bands, and linear combing. Handmade; glazed externally.
45. Body sherd from slip-decorated pitcher; white slip bands. Handmade; glazed externally.

A MEDIEVAL POTTERY KILN

Résumé

Du jardinage paysagiste en Octobre 1992 derrière des propriétés privées donnant sur le 'Ashampstead Common', près de Newbury dans le Berkshire en Angleterre, a découvert de fortes quantités de céramique médiévale. Un examen limité du paysage en Janvier 1993 a démontré la présence d'au moins deux phases de fours médiévaux sur le site, sous une terre de labour très éparse, et parmi des niveaux archéologiques produisant de fortes quantités de céramique médiévale allant de la fin du 12ème jusqu'au 13ème siècles.

Zusammenfassung

Im Oktober 1992 brachten landschaftsgestaltende Arbeiten hinter Wohnhäusern, die an den Ashampstead Common grenzen, große Mengen mittelalterlichen Töpferguts zutage. Im Januar 1993 zeigten begrenzte Untersuchungen auf dem Areal, daß dort mindestens zwei Phasen eines mittelalterlichen Brennofens unter einer sehr dünnen Schicht gepflügten Ackerbodens lagen. Das archäologische Umfeld enthielt eine Fülle mittelalterlicher Tonwaren aus dem späten 12. bis 13. Jahrhundert.

