

A later 17th-century assemblage of Ashton Keynes ware from Somerford Keynes, Gloucestershire

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SUMMARY

Archaeological work ahead of housing development at Somerford Keynes, Gloucestershire found a pit containing an assemblage of late 17th-century pottery, almost exclusively products of the Ashton Keynes kilns. The site lies in the adjoining parish to Ashton Keynes, Wiltshire, well-known as a producer of glazed earthenware pottery, and particularly important in the supply of utilitarian vessels to Cirencester and Gloucester between the 16th and 18th centuries. The composition of the group mirrors closely that of the urban markets and, with the addition of a 'chicken feeder' form is a likely representative of the kiln repertoire from/in this period. The dominance of Ashton Keynes products in this group, which includes a number of seconds, suggests that local domestic requirements for ceramic could be met almost entirely by the nearby kilns.

INTRODUCTION

In 2001 Cotswold Archaeology was commissioned by Conservation Builders Ltd. to undertake a small archaeological excavation in advance of a housing development at Lower Mill Estate, Somerford Keynes, Gloucestershire (SU 4025 1940; Fig. 1). The site lies 0.5 km south-east of the village of Somerford Keynes adjacent to the Lower Mill. This grade II listed building is largely of late 19th-century date, but mill buildings are first recorded on the 1807 Somerford Keynes Inclosure Map. The excavations revealed a small number of Romano-British, medieval and post-medieval features. The largest features on site were a number of 17th and 18th-century boundary ditches, one of which was cut by a large amorphous quarry pit [2290]. This pit contained at least two fills, representing different episodes of deliberate backfilling, the earliest of which [2292] contained domestic waste dating from c. 1660. Alongside 197 sherds of pottery it contained animal bone, fragments of 17th-century glazed ceramic roof tile, a small number of fragments from a probable Venetian glass beaker; an iron knife and two iron single loop buckles. The later fill [2291] produced 40 sherds of pottery, animal bone, roof tile, fragments of plaster, vessel glass similar to that from context [2292], and clay pipe stems. All of this material is likely to date to the Period c. 1670-1700, though some medieval material may also be present in the later fill. The date range of c. 1670-1700 for group [2290] is based on the associated glass beaker fragments of this date and a sherd of Frechen stoneware found in the primary deposit [2292] and clay pipes of 1690-1710 and Westerwald stoneware of 1675-1750 found in the uppermost fill [2291]. The absence of kiln furniture or other production-related debris and the abundance of animal bone and other rubbish in this deposit suggests it relates to domestic activity at Lower Mill Farm.

THE POTTERY

The pottery was examined by context and sorted into fabric types based on visible inclusions. Fabric types have, where possible, been matched to the Cirencester fabric type series (Ireland 1998, 98-140). Quantification recorded sherd count and weight, minimum vessel count and estimated vessel equivalent (EVEs). Classification of forms is adapted from Vince (1983, 132). Form codes utilised for Table 2 are in parenthesis.

Of the 237 sherds (12.4 kg) found in quarry pit [2290] the majority (197 sherds, 10.9 kg) are from the primary deposit [2292]. The dominance of Ashton Keynes ware in this group (Table 1), even allowing for its proximity to the kilns, is striking.

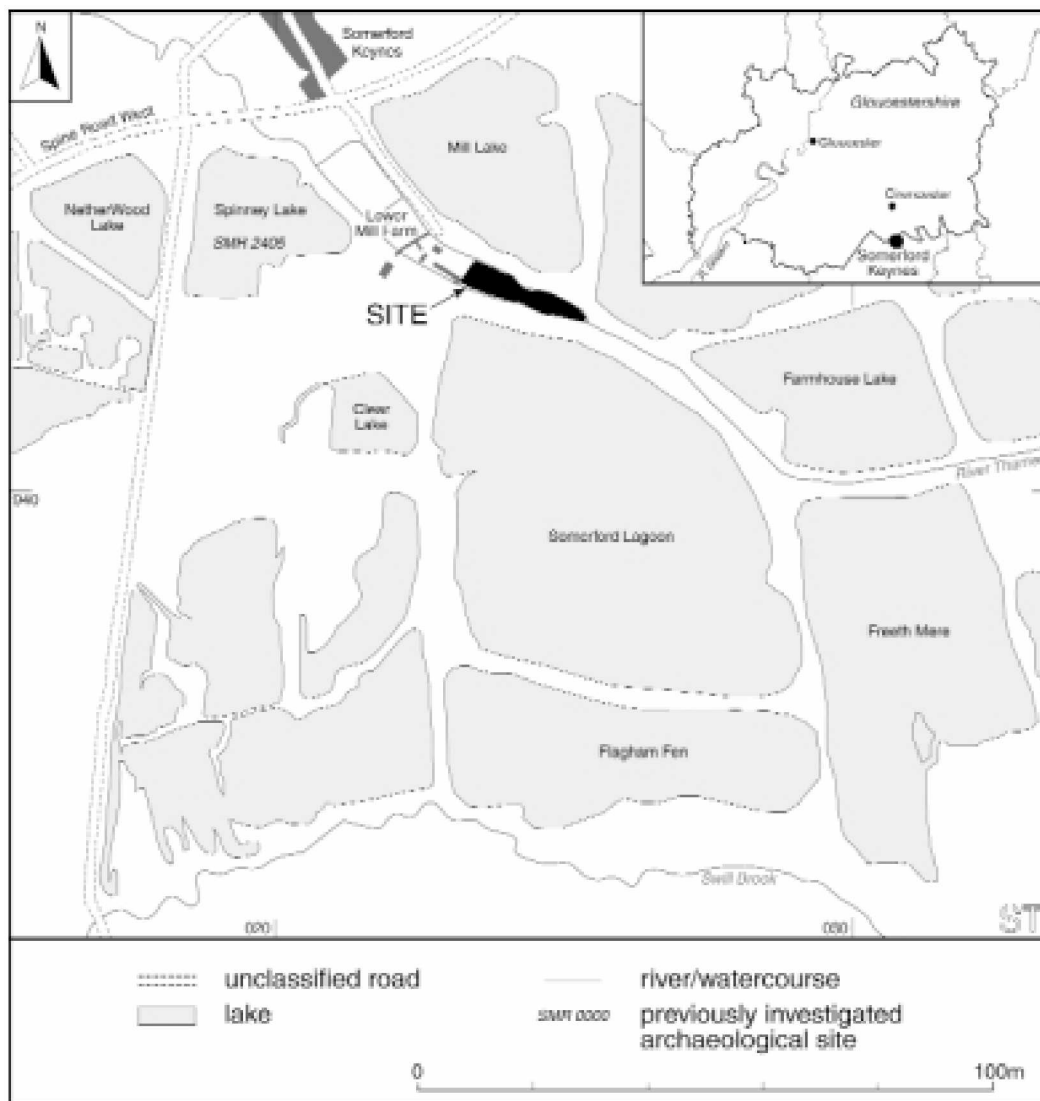


Fig. 1 Site Location

Table 1 Pottery quantification, Quarry Pit [2290]

Pottery Type	Cirencester fabric	Count	Weight	Min. ves. count	EVEs
Post-medieval/modern					
Ashton Keynes glazed earthenware	F201	233	12269g	187	6.26
Frechen stoneware	F216	3	85g	1	-
Westerwald stoneware	F217	1	10g	1	-
Total		237	12364g	189	6.26

Obvious wasters are not present in the assemblage, however imperfections noted on a number of vessels support the interpretation of these as seconds. The most common firing flaws consist of damage to the rims caused by adhesion during the firing process. Occasional instances of spalling, blistering (Fig. 2, no. 3) and warping (Fig. 3, no. 11) are also noted. Similar imperfections do not appear to be a feature of groups from Gloucester and Cirencester and circulation of such vessels must have been very localised.

Fabric

The Ashton Keynes fabric has been described previously (Vince 1984), with reference to petrographic analysis using samples from the production sites, Gloucester and Cirencester. The Lower Mill group matches the material as described, with slight variations in colour (some sherds have a grey core) likely the effect of firing and sherd thickness.

All represented sherds feature lead glaze which varies

from a light olive green, mottled olive green/brown, clear (appearing brown) to black green colour (Table 1). Firing characteristics and glaze colour may have been manipulated to an extent, with certain vessel forms exhibiting tendencies towards darker or lighter shades. Complex-rimmed jars/deep bowls which tend towards darker green hues, commonly exhibit a grey or purple-grey fabric. The use of reduction to produce this effect and a greater tendency to green-firing glazes was considered, on the basis of evidence from Cirencester (Ireland 1998, 108) to be a characteristic of production prior to late 17th century.

Forms (Figs 2 to 4)

The range of forms represented corresponds largely with assemblages from Gloucester (Vince 1983, 132) and Cirencester (Ireland 1998, 108), with the exception of a chicken feeder (Fig. 4, no. 20).

Wide-mouthed, open vessel forms are typical of glazed earthenware throughout the post-medieval period and most classes, including deep bowls/pancheons, curved-walled bowls and jars, can be readily paralleled among the repertoire of potteries operating in the wider region (Good 1987, 34-100). A utilitarian, kitchen-related function can be assumed for most of the recorded pottery. The presence of a groove or ledge to the inner part of the rim on most forms of all types may be significant, suggesting provision for a lid. For deep bowl or jar-like (complex-rim) vessels, this feature is particularly pronounced, perhaps suggesting use as storage vessels.

Large Deep Bowls/Pancheons (BCONF/BD/PAN). Fig. 2, nos 1-3

Large deep bowls with straight or slightly curving walls range from between 360-480 mm in rim diameter. The rim typology varies in detail but most examples are curving and

broad, presumably to facilitate safe handling. Two vessels (not illustrated) feature pouring lips.

Flat-rim Shallow Bowl/Plate (PLSBF). Fig. 2, no. 4

None of the examples of this form are sufficiently complete for full reconstruction, although the shallowness of these vessels is indicated by the surviving portions. The size of these vessels, ranging from 360-400 mm rim diameter, is probably too large for them to have functioned as tablewares. The flat, double-grooved rim is characteristic and matched by examples from post 16th to 17th-century and later dated contexts at Cirencester Abbey (Ireland 1998, 101).

Curving-walled Bowls (BCW). Fig. 2, no. 5 and Fig. 3, nos 6-7

All recorded examples are smaller than the straight-sided bowls (Fig 2, nos 1-3) described above. The rim diameters range between 180-280 mm. All feature the wheel-applied lines noted by Vince as common for the class (Vince 1983, 132). Vessels of identical form are produced by East Somerset potters from the late 16th century (Good 1987, 38, fig. 21).

Large, Complex-rim Bowls (CRVB). Fig. 3, nos 8-9

Only two such vessels occur which appear to represent hybrid versions of the two main bowl forms, with rim typology borrowed from the complex-rimmed vessel types. Rim diameter is mid-way between the two main bowl classes (320-340 mm).

Complex-rim Deep Bowls/Jars (CRV). Fig. 3, nos 10-11 and Fig. 4, nos 12-15

Vessels of this type appear significantly smaller than complex-rim bowls (Fig 3, nos 8-9) described above, with rim diameters

Table 2 Quarry Pit [2290] forms. Minimum vessel count and EVEs

Fabric	Form	Fill 2291		Fill 2292		Total	
		Min vess	EVEs	Min vess	EVEs	Min vess	EVEs
F201	BCONF	2	0.12	13	0.80	15	0.92
	BCW	1	0.07	7	0.92	8	0.99
	CHKF	-	-	1	0.34	1	0.34
	CRV	2	0.16	10	2.08	12	2.24
	CRVB	-	-	3	0.35	3	0.35
	JEV	-	-	3	0.53	3	0.53
	JUG	-	-	1	0.06	1	0.06
	P	1	0.06	-	-	1	0.06
	PLSB	1	0.04	6	0.37	7	0.41
	TANK	1	0.10	1	0.20	2	0.30
F216	DJ	1	-	-	-	1	-
F217	DJ	1	-	-	-	1	-
Totals		10	0.55	45	5.65	55	6.2

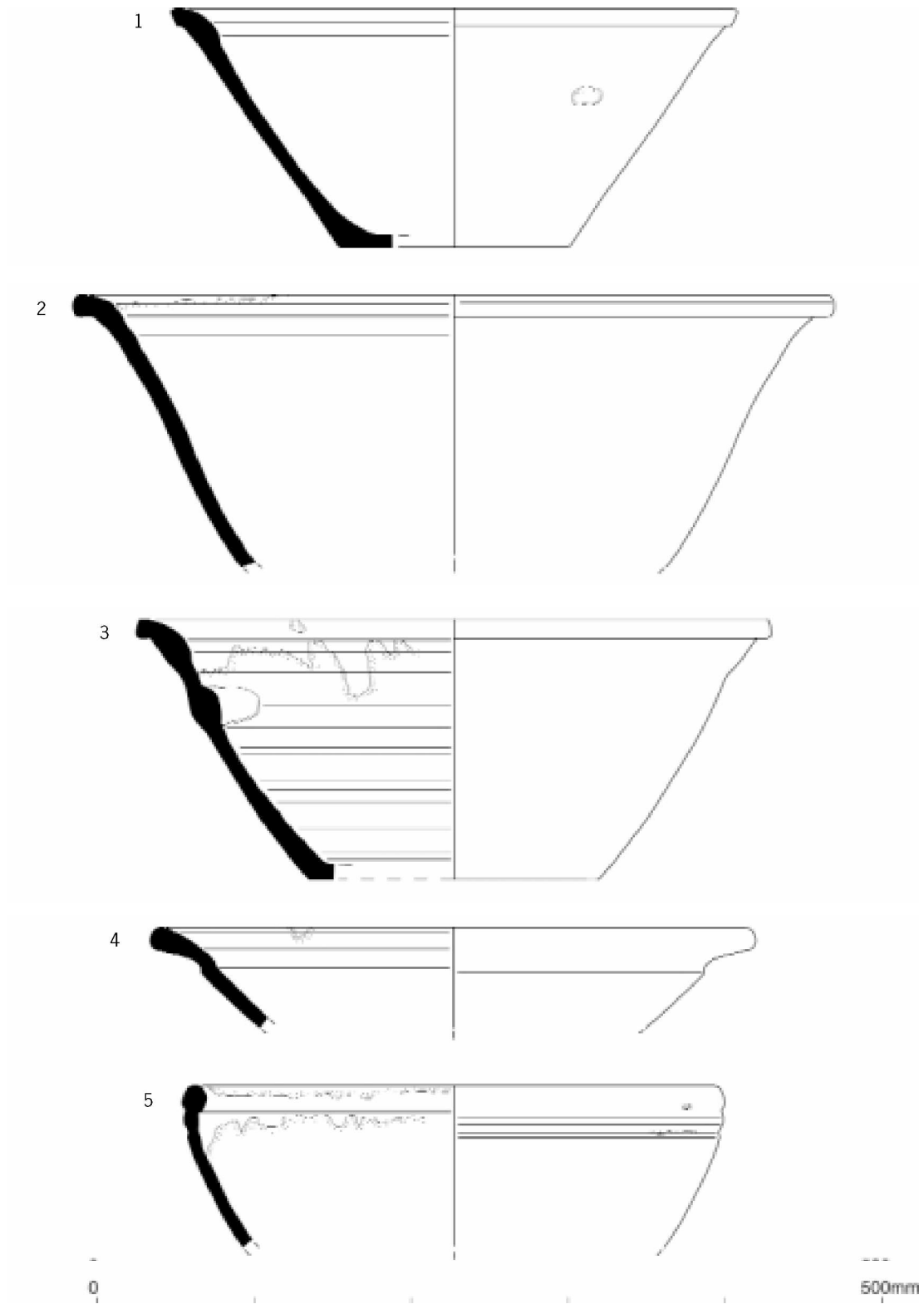


Fig. 2 Ashton Keynes Ware, Quarry Pit [2290], nos 1-5 (scale 1:4)

ranging from 160 mm to 300 mm. No complete vessel profiles could be reconstructed though surviving shoulder profiles and the lower portions of vessels almost certainly of this type, support Vince's interpretation of them as jar-like vessels. Bases belonging to such vessels are generally plain, although a splayed base sherd (Fig. 4, no. 14) may relate to this class. The wheel-applied lines on Fig. 4, no 15 are matched

on examples from Gloucester (Vince 1983, 157, no. 394).

Jars (JEV). Fig. 4, nos 16-17

Jars with simple, everted rims are rare in this assemblage (Table 2). Vessel no. 16 may represent a handled jar or cauldron-type vessel.

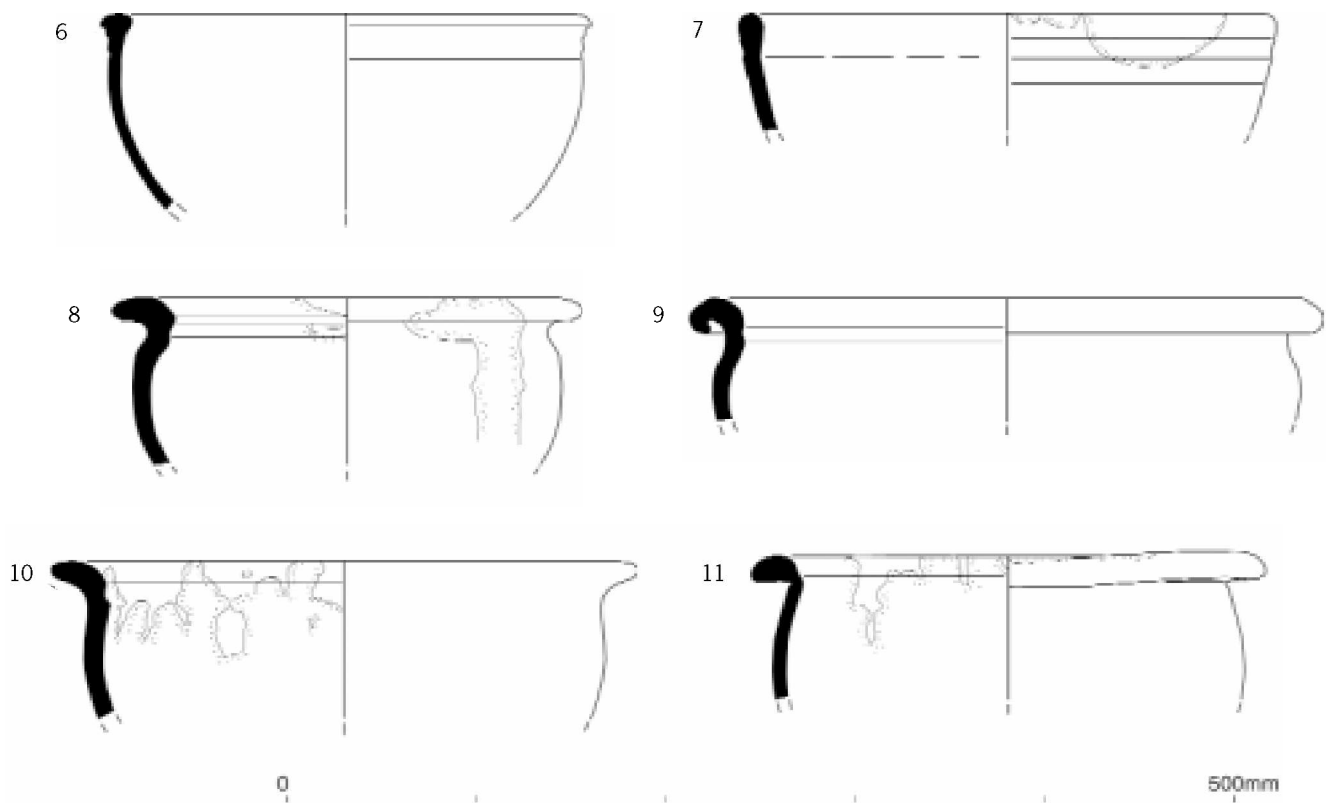


Fig. 3 Ashton Keynes Ware, Quarry Pit [2290], nos 6-11 (scale 1:4)

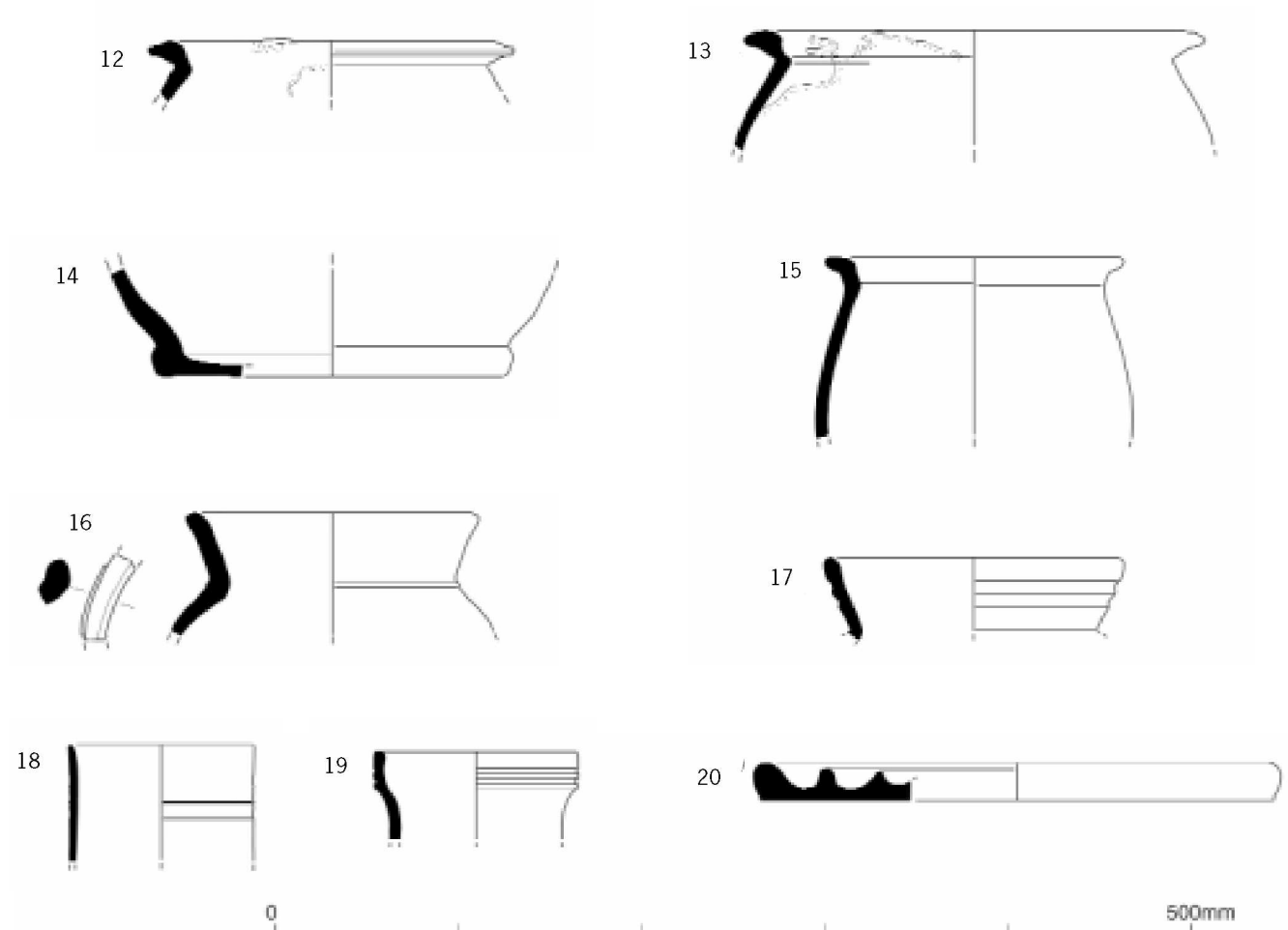


Fig. 4 Ashton Keynes Ware, Quarry Pit [2290], nos 12-20 (scale 1:4)

Mug/Tankard (TANK). Fig. 4, no. 18

A single vessel is illustrated, although further thin-walled sherds with similar internal and external black-green glazing may represent further examples. Similar cylindrical vessels appear to be rare among the Gloucester (*ibid.*, 132) and Cirencester groups (Ireland 1998, 132, fig. 92, nos 101-3).

Jug (JUG). Fig. 4, no. 19

A single jug is recorded in a form identical to an example from a 17th to 18th-century context from Cirencester (*ibid.*, 134, no. 100). Further sherds from a globular-bodied vessel (not illustrated) which is similarly glazed internally and externally, features wheel-applied girth grooves and probably comes from a second jug.

Chicken Feeder (CHKF). Fig. 4, no. 20

The mode of use for such vessels, which consists of a shallow dish with concentric internal divisions, is attributed on the basis of resemblance to modern vessels utilised for this purpose. The form is best known in Surrey/Hampshire border wares dateable to *c.* 1550-1700 (MoL 2005), but would seem to be previously unknown in Ashton Keynes ware.

DISCUSSION

Ashton Keynes ware (Cirencester Fabric F201)

The pottery kilns at Ashton Keynes are likely to have been in operation by the early 16th century, as demonstrated by the recovery of products from stratified contexts in Gloucester (Vince 1983, 131-61). Kilns operating at Ashton Keynes are noted in the later 17th century by Aubrey (Britton 1969, 35). The emergence of Ashton Keynes wares is coincident with the demise of the long-lived medieval Minety-type industry. Some form of continuity between the two industries may account for the significant market share won by Ashton Keynes products at Gloucester and Cirencester, both sites where Minety wares occur commonly into the late medieval period. Identification at Cirencester of a putative transitional ware combining elements of Minety-type in its oolitic limestone-tempered fabric and yet typically Ashton Keynes forms may further be indicative of a period of overlap (Ireland 1998, 107). The transitional fabric has not been identified in the Lower Mill Estate assemblage.

The conservative nature of the Ashton Keynes ware repertoire throughout its production period has been remarked on by Vince (1983, 132). The open forms which form the bulk of the vessels represented belong to types

common throughout the period of overall production in the 16th and 18th centuries. A date of before *c.* 1730-40 is indicated for this group by a lack of late forms, such as shallow, straight-sided bowls, flanged plates and flowerpots (*ibid.*, 132). Other elements within the assemblage, such as the standard of application and preference for green coloured glazes (see below) are suggestive of pre-18th-century dating. The absence of certain forms including chafing dishes, dripping pans and pipkins, which appear on the basis of material from Cirencester to have originated in the 16th to early 17th-century, is probably significant, and probably suggests a date after *c.* AD 1650. The absence, save for a single sherd, of knife trimming, a technique most often seen with earlier post-medieval pottery, also supports a date after the mid-17th century.

The group from quarry pit [2290] expands only slightly the known form repertoire for Ashton Keynes products and serves to highlight the conservative nature of the ware throughout much of the post-medieval period. The presence of seconds is notable and their (recorded) absence at Cirencester may indicate that circulation was extremely localised, perhaps even on a familial level.

Similarities in terms of composition between the Somerford Keynes group and those from the large consumption sites at Cirencester and Gloucester confirm a heavy bias to utilitarian forms, with only very few drinking/serving forms and no 'display' vessels represented. Interestingly, with the exception of a single chicken feeder vessel, the composition of the Somerford Keynes group, an assemblage which almost certainly relates to use by a rural household, compares closely to those from the urban centers and suggests little difference in mode of use between town and country.

Acknowledgements

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Resume

Des fouilles archéologiques en aval d'une zone d'habitation ont révélé une fosse contenant un assemblage de poterie de la fin du 17^{ème} siècle provenant presque exclusivement des fours d'Ashton Keynes. Ce site est situé dans la commune limitrophe d'Ashton Keynes dans le Wiltshire, village bien connu pour la production de faïence et particulièrement important dans

l'approvisionnement de céramiques utilitaires vers Cirencester et Gloucester entre le 16^{ème} et 17^{ème} siècle. La composition du groupe reflète celle des marchés urbains et, à l'exception d'une mangeoire à grain, représente probablement le répertoire de la période. La prédominance des produits d'Ashton Keynes (Wiltshire) dans ce groupe, y compris un certain nombre de ratés de cuisson, suggère que les besoins en céramique pouvaient presque entièrement être satisfaits par les fours locaux.

Zusammenfassung

Archäologische Arbeiten vor dem Bau einer neuen Siedlung in Somerford Keynes, Gloucestershire, brachten eine Grube zutage, die eine Gruppe von Töpferwaren aus dem späten 17. Jahrhundert und fast ausschließlich aus Ashton Keynes-Werkstätten stammend, enthielt. Die Grabungsstätte liegt in der benachbarten Gemeinde Ashton Keynes, Wiltshire, die für die Herstellung glasierter Steingutware und zwischen dem 16. und 18. Jahrhundert für ihre besondere Bedeutung bei der Versorgung Cirencesters und Gloucesters mit Gebrauchskeramik bekannt ist. Die Zusammensetzung der Fundgruppe spiegelt die enge Verbindung der städtischen Märkte wider und ist unter Einschluß einer Kükenfutterform wahrscheinlich repräsentativ für das Repertoire der Brennöfen dieser Zeit. Das Vorherrschen der Ashton Keynes-Produkte in dieser Gruppe, einschließlich einiger Stücke 2. Wahl, weisen darauf hin, daß die häuslichen Bedürfnisse für Keramik fast vollständig von den nahegelegenen Brennöfen befriedigt werden konnten.

