

PREHISTORIC POTTERY FOUND AT IVER,  
BUCKS

BY

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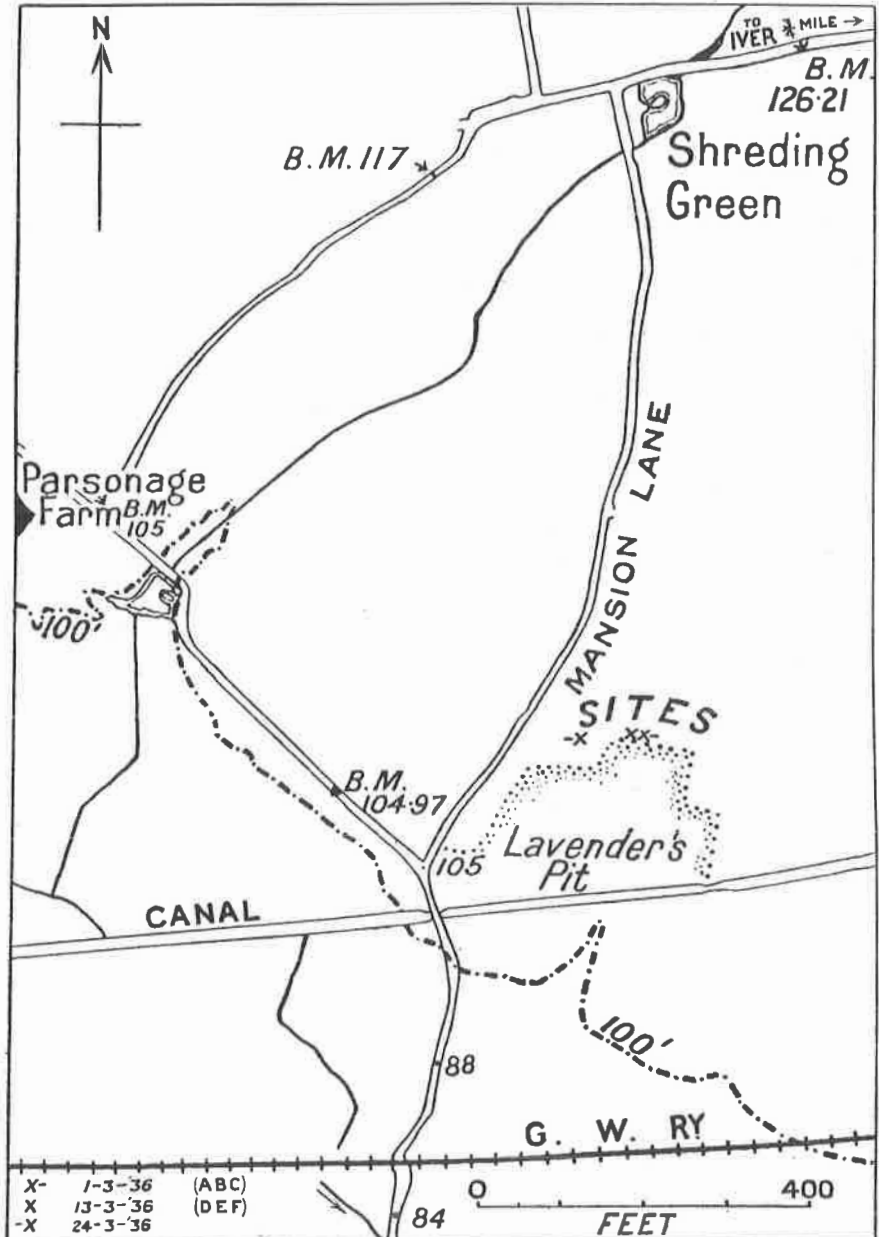
The gravel-pit, worked until June, 1936, by Messrs. W. J. and E. C. Lavender in a terrace intermediate between the Boyn Hill and Taplow stages, is situated east of Mansion Lane half-a-mile south of Shreding Green, 50 yards north of the Grand Junction Canal, and one mile south-west of Iver village. For several years this excavation, whose surface level stands at 105 ft. O.D., about 200 yards north of the drop to the Taplow Terrace, was constantly visited with the object of studying the Pleistocene deposits and the artifacts contained therein. While the purpose of the investigation was to establish the sequence of the Palæolithic industries represented in the layers,<sup>1</sup> the surface and topsoil were not neglected and a number of flint implements rewarded scrutiny.

Observations of the topsoil had in no small measure been prompted by the fact that, six years ago, when first inspecting the gravel-workings at Mansion Lane, I was told by Mr. E. C. Lavender that shortly before my visit the men removing turf had exposed a number of circular areas of small diameter, distinguishable from their surroundings, containing charcoal and some small sherds of rude pottery. Potsherds, it seemed, also lay scattered about. I asked to be advised if any finds of a similar nature were made, but in spite of careful watch on the part of the men and myself it was not until Sunday, 1st March, 1936, that evidence forthcame to uphold the report received in 1931.

On the occasion of this visit to Mansion Lane gravel-pit, I ascertained that the mechanical excavator had bared at a depth of some 15 inches from grass three shallow circular patches, 12 inches in diameter, of a

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<sup>1</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, October, 1936, Vol. XVI., pp. 420-43.



MAP OF SITE NEAR IVER.

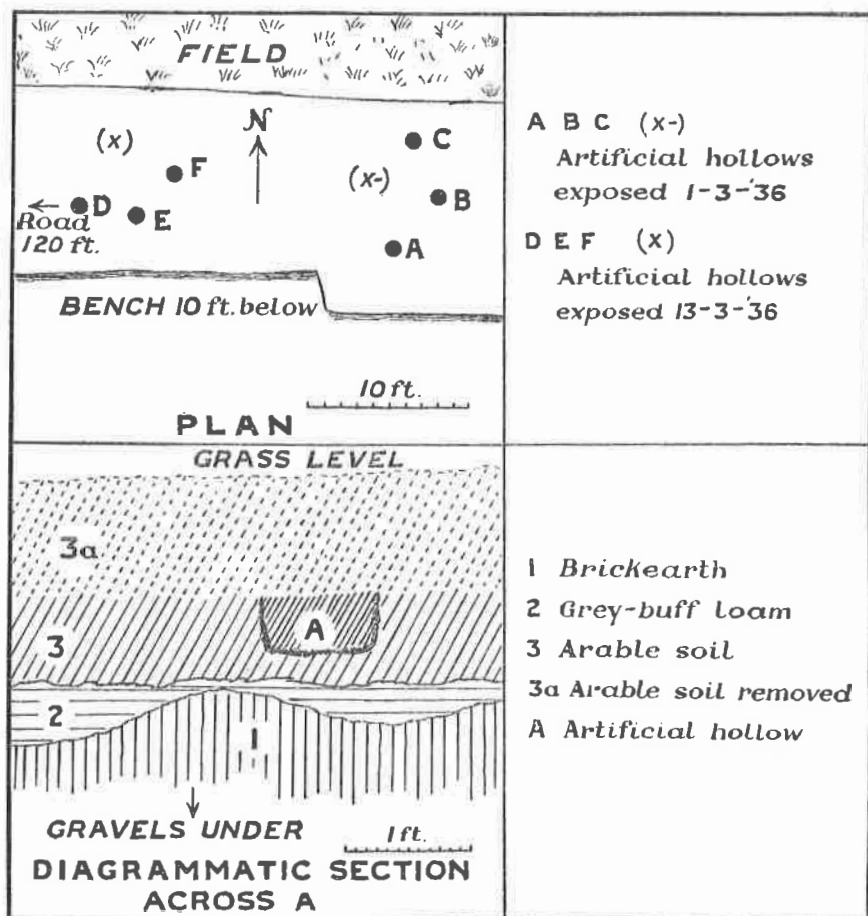
(Based on the Ordnance Survey with the sanction of H.M. Stationery Office).

shade markedly different from the arable soil, and exactly 7 feet apart, apparently disposed as an arc of large radius. (Site X— and A.B.C. on detailed plan and section). One contained fragments of ornamented pottery and a fine end-scraper on a delicately trimmed but broken flake, triangular in section, of dark grey flint. Sherds of the same decorated ware and many pieces of plain and more simply ornamented pottery were picked up within the space confined by a circumference described in continuation of the arc suggested by the arrangement of the three patches. Although the potsherds were in crumbling and saturated condition when collected, it appeared that several vessels were represented.

Surmising that here was a domestic site and that other discoveries would be made, I requested the foreman, Robt. Dowling, to advise me if anything similar turned up. On Friday, 13th March, Mr. Dowling telephoned to say that the grabs had again exposed some pottery a few yards west of the place inspected on 1st March. Repairing immediately to Iver, I saw that three small circular areas about 7 feet apart had been revealed at the same depth as before. (Site X and D.E.F. on detailed plan and section).

What the men on this occasion took to be the base of an inverted vessel, prudently left untouched pending my arrival, on extraction seemed a compact and well-kneaded lump of potter's clay containing flint particles. Pl. II, No. 2. Nearby were collected numerous potsherds, all devoid of ornamentation, a few blades and a pounder of grey flint.

A further discovery was made towards the end of March when the excavator, clearing farther west and nearer the road over a restricted area, exposed one single hollow like those previously noted. (Site —X, detailed plan and section). In this reposed a small, almost complete, shallow and plain vessel like a saucer (Pl. II, No. 1) of the same dull earthy-brown ware as the thick ornamented pottery brought to light at the beginning of the month. Radicles protruding from the body of the thin wall and other signs testified to an



DETAILED PLAN AND SECTION.

ancient break. No piece matching or fitting the vessel resulted from inspection of the surroundings, but the search did not prove futile, as a large piece of reddish ware was found embedded in the ground within a foot or so of the spot where the vessel lay. This fragment broke in the hand, but the pieces have been united.

The map shows the disposition of all three sites. The discoveries of 1st and 13th March are also indicated on a larger scale, with a section across one of the hollows exposed in the detailed plan. Cross-references applicable to these groups are borne on the two, but the position of the solitary find of 24th March appears on the map only.

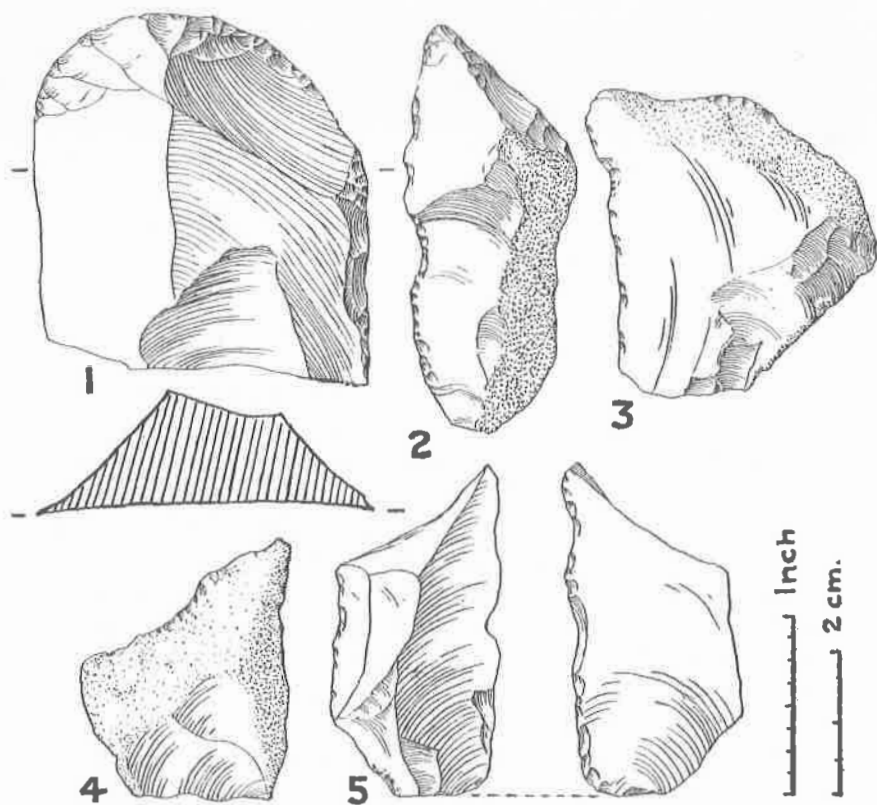
The gravel-pit closed down about the beginning of June, and, as no antiquities came to light between the date of the last find and the cessation of work, I may now record the remains from Iver. Before considering the relics in detail, however, a brief reference may be made to the situation of the habitations disclosed by excavation in land now open and under cultivation. The sites marked on the map of the site show that the community established here was not far from water. Moreover, it is probable that to the south of the settlement lay marshy ground, later reclaimed by drainage and canalisation of streams for that intensive agriculture, which for centuries has made famous this part of Buckinghamshire. In prehistoric times, no doubt, the natural conditions were such as to support an abundant fauna providing the inhabitants with an ample food supply.

The pottery found at Mansion Lane is noteworthy, as the sherds recovered on 1st March seemed at first sight to consist of products assignable to two periods, but with little disparity of age. In the case of the decorated fragments the nature of the ornamentation and the pottery itself pointed unmistakably to late Neolithic ("Peterborough") ware. Ascription to the early Bronze Age appeared a closer dating of the plain and even of some of the ornamented potsherds. Further difficulty respecting the age of the deposit

arose from the discovery of the small saucer-like vessel and the plain coarse reddish sherd near it. The former is of a type rare enough abroad in early contexts, and, so far as I know, in these islands it has not been connected with Neolithic B ("Peterborough") ware of which it is fashioned. As all the pottery was found in precisely similar conditions it seems we are confronted with relics of a transitional or overlap site. Mr. Stuart Piggott, who has examined the whole and kindly comments on some of the potsherds, regards all the pottery as belonging to a kindred group.

The worked flints, which have from time to time been picked up on the surface, are not dating factors. It is feared also that those occasionally recovered above the grey-buff loam under the topsoil, sometimes overlying the red brickearth, do not present helpful, determining features of workmanship despite the fact that they occurred at approximately the same level as the pottery fragments. On the other hand, the artifacts of flint found with the pottery may with reason be associated in point of age with the accompanying sherds. Only these figure in this communication. The specimens which accompany the end-scraper, (No. 1 in the sketch), call for little comment. They consist principally of flakes struck from nodules, the corticed surface indicating that they were among the first flakes detached (Nos. 2, 3 and 4, in the sketch). No. 5 was removed from a prepared core.

The spherical nodule of dark grey flint, included in the discovery of the 13th March, is much injured by use. Pitted and bruised all over its surface, this elementary tool may be regarded as a pounder of the type sometimes found in numbers at prehistoric and even later domestic sites yielding pottery. This specimen must have served to triturate material on a stone anvil for backing potter's clay. The nature of the abrasions is such as to distinguish them from those characteristic sunken areas produced on hammerstones by long employment in flaking. (Pl. II, No. 3).



Sketch of worked flints found with pottery at Mansion Lane, Iver.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE POTTERY

## A. Ornamented ware:—(Pl. I).

No. I. This ware is dull brown externally, but sooty black inside. It is not well backed, and, as it contains unusually large grits of crushed flint scarcely injured by fire, it seems that the complete vessel could not have been subjected to great heat. The sherds figured, 1.a., 1.b., and 2, represent what remains of a vessel with a thickened broad everted rim projecting downward and moulded inside at the top, which bears six sharply defined lines made apparently by the impression of a very fine cord of plaited hair or fibre. For  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch downward the inside of the wall, I. 1.b, bears a criss-cross design, probably produced by the sharp edge of a flint. The exterior of the wall under the brim is left plain for  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch. Below are five or six zones of "maggot" ornament, each zone being separated from the next by an interspace left untreated, I. 2.

No. II. Sherd of fairly hard ware, reddish externally and internally, the core dark and well backed with small flint grits; ornamented by stabbing the clay with a twisted cord wound on a core. The impressions are disposed in ascending concentric arcs  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch apart. This scheme of decoration is bounded in its upper part by three horizontal rows of twisted cord impressions, the lowest confusing with those below. The suggestion of a beading in the interspaces above and below is occasioned by the central line, which is much deeper than its neighbours.

No. III. A rim and wall fragment of a vessel of muddy-brown soft ware containing particles of flint. Although much injured the sherd still shows a rounded top and patterns outside 1.a. and inside 1.b., the central, one external within a moulding. The external and internal designs appear to have been produced by bird-bone impressions. All can be paralleled in the figs. illustrating Miss Dorothy Liddell's article in *Antiquity*, 1929, p. 283 ff.

No. IV. Many fragments identify another vessel, but only two ornamented pieces, which fit, can usefully be





illustrated. Probably the pot was elaborately ornamented, but it can only be asserted from what now remains that the scheme of decoration of the body consisted of not less than three rows of stamped ornament produced by pressing forward a sharp-edged toothed instrument into the unfired clay and drawing it back to form more or less oblong vertical depressions, the process being repeated all round, but somewhat irregularly. Under this, where the wall bulges outward and then incurves to give the characteristic neck and shoulder, is a chevron pattern made by pressing a twisted cord into the soft clay, but so deeply that in places the impressions almost penetrate. One of the sherds (now united to its companion) so decorated is holed conically in two places, the centres of the holes  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch apart. They impair the lower part of the chevrons, and the clay has been pushed far beyond the inner face of the wall. Under the chevrons there is a zone of ornament consisting of short vertical deeply impressed lines, but their condition is now such that it cannot be said how they were produced.

No. V. A single wall-fragment of rather soft ware, coarse and brownish-red externally, but dark brown on the surface of the interior; the core black and containing comparatively large pieces of flint attesting considerable heat action. The sherd is ornamented with six ribs or almost complete beadings, the hollows between each bearing small obliquely set impressions of a twisted cord.

No. VI. Three ornamented wall-fragments were found, two of which have been united and so figured. The surfaces, external and internal, are brick-red. The pottery has been well fired, as is proved by the appearance of the protruding grits of flint. The core is bluish-black, and the ware is manifestly superior to the generality of the specimens from this site. Three parallel lines, each  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch apart and probably resulting from the impression of a reed, ornament the upper part. Below are several fairly distinct short imprints of a twisted cord suggesting elaboration of the scheme above. Underneath again are simple twisted-cord

designs disposed in concentric arcs lightly impressed.

No. VII. Rim fragment of coarse muddy-brown ware containing comparatively few but large flint grits; ornamented outside, 1.a., just under the rim with small horizontally disposed impressions probably made by stabbing the unfired clay with a bird-bone. A shallow and wide moulding separates this pattern from what are doubtless vestiges of a design of the same nature. The interior, 1.b. and the top 1.c., have been treated ornamentally with two narrow parallel grooves.

B. Plain ware:—

Little can be said of the unornamented pottery so many sherds of which have been picked up at Mansion Lane; still, remains of at least four vessels are identifiable. There are no rims, but some wall-fragments and a few pieces present features of interest. The ware is mostly of a dull brown shade, but some fragments are reddish with an occasional bluish tinge also noticeable in places on the lump of clay (Pl. II, No. 2).

(Drawing of potsherd and wall-sections).

No. VIII. A few small pieces of reddish-brown pottery, of fairly thin wall-section containing little backing, may be regarded as the remains of a vessel of shapely contour, 5 inches in diameter.

No. IX. One vessel is represented by a dozen thick blackish-brown sherds. So few fit, however, that conjecture cannot be made as to original dimensions. Some fragments pieced together show characteristic bulging of the wall. The ware contains a fair proportion of grits and is fairly well fired.

No. X. Two sherds of coarse thick ware dried to a bright red. The ware is so poor in grit content that the clay pulverises on handling. One fragment attests that the wall of the vessel had a pronounced external moulding.

No. XI. A few sherds of thin brown ware tinged greyish-blue, resembling that of which is composed VIII, show curving of the wall.

Mr. Stuart Piggott, to whom I am indebted for the following notes on the pottery from Iver, says:—

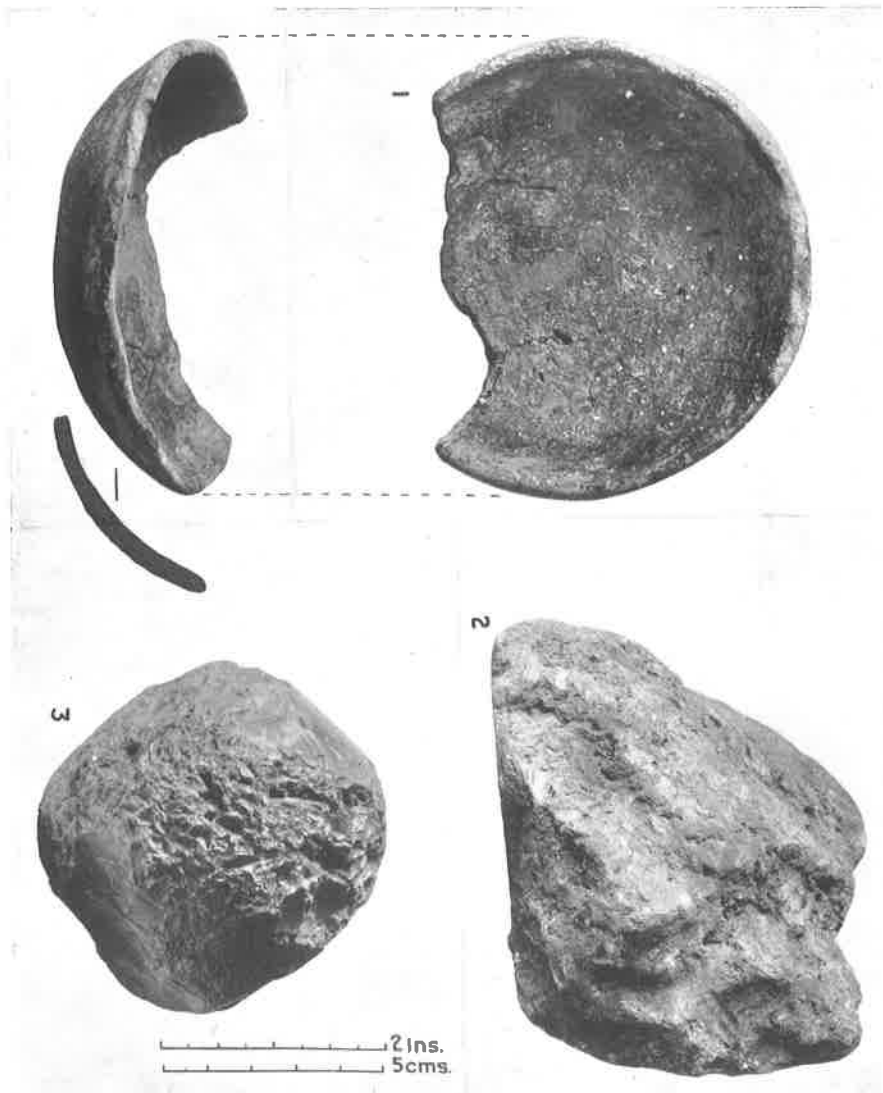
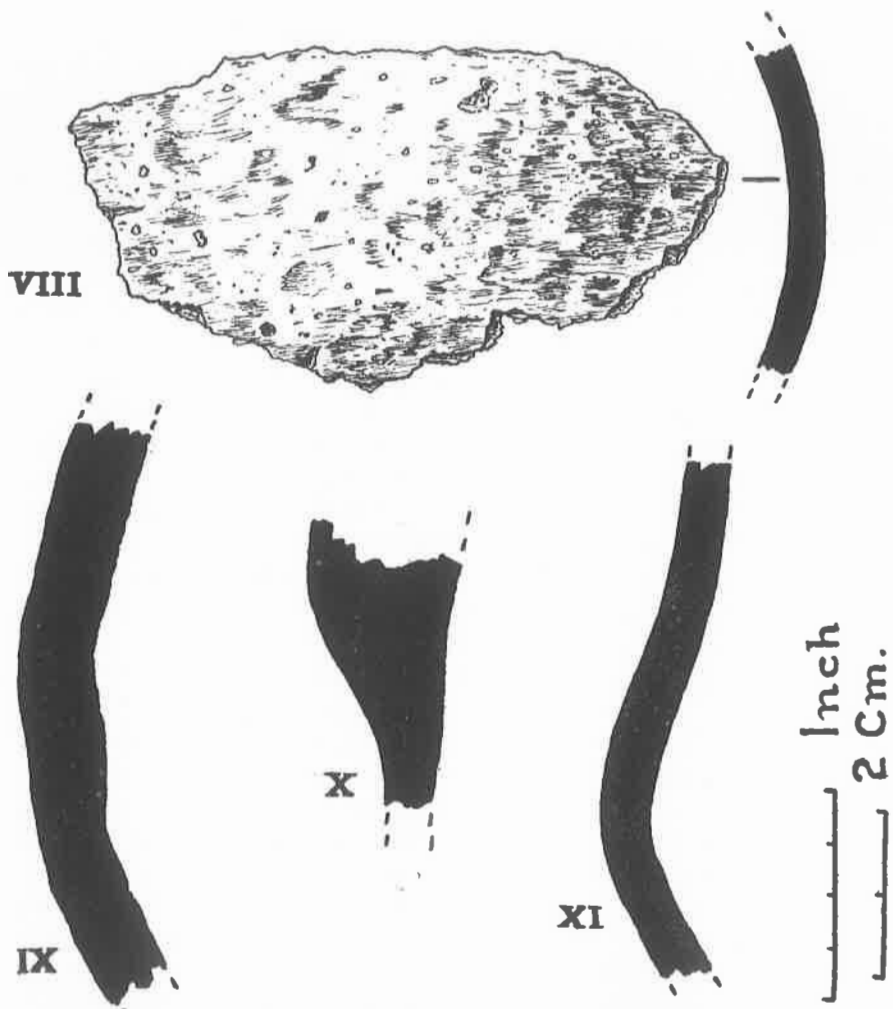


PLATE II.



Drawing of Potsherd and wall-sections of Neolithic B. ware from  
Mansion Lane, Iver, Bucks,

“ The group is homogeneous, and the types are characteristic of Neolithic B wares, but attention may be drawn to a few points of special interest.

“ The incised lattice-work pattern inside the rim of No. I (1.b) is unusual, but is precisely paralleled both as to motif and position at Danbury, Essex. (*Ant. Journ.* XIII, 60 and fig. 1). The crescentic “ maggots ” on No. I (2) are in the fine Continental style, rare in Denmark and Sweden (though *cf.* the sherd from Gastrikland illustrated by Childe in *Arch. Journ.* LXXXVIII, 60, Pl. IX, B.), but common in South Russia (*e.g.* Aleschki-Kinburg-Rosenberg, *Kulturströmungen in Europa zur Steinzeit*, 46). This motif is not common in Britain executed in actual cord, though for examples from Scotland see Childe, *Prehistory of Scotland*, Pl. V, and is usually represented by crescentic impressions made with a bone or a finger-nail (*e.g.* Runcton Holme, Norfolk, in *Proc. Prehist. Soc. E. Anglia*, VII, 200, with references there given).

“ No. II has exceedingly fine whipped cord impressions, recalling those from Rowberrow Cavern in the Mendips (*Proc. Bristol Spelæo. Soc.*, II, 205 and Pl. XIII B).

“ The hollow neck and shoulder of IV are typical, as are the deep impressions, conical in section in the hollow. In some English examples these pits are made with the finger-tip (as at Danbury, quoted above), but those at Iver have been made with a pointed instrument.

“ The technique of cord ornament in deep-set zones on No. V resembles that of certain Early Bronze Age sherds from Fengate in Mr. Wyman Abbot's collection: similar technique is, however, seen on the rims of undoubtedly Neolithic B sherds from Handley Down, Dorset (Pitt-Rivers, *Excavations in Cranborne Chase*, IV, Pl. 294, 3 and 5).

“ Finally, No. VI has the peculiarity of vaguely curvilinear lines of impressed cord. It is

hardly necessary to invoke Bornholm (Rosenberg no. 315) on the one hand, nor Beacharra (*Arch. Journ.* LXXXVIII, 53 and 109) on the other—a better parallel is the bowl from the Thames at Wandsworth (*Arch.* LXIX, 10) with its regular curved cord-impressed lines over the lower part.”

The almost complete vessel, one inch high,  $4\frac{1}{8}$  inches in diameter, consists of a thin-walled shallow saucer-like dish with rounded rim. Pl. II, no. 1. The coarse muddy-brown ware, meagrely backed with minute sparsely disseminated particles of flint and poorly fired, in composition, appearance and quality is like that of most of the plain potsherds and the greater number of ornamented fragments found at Mansion Lane. The bottom and base are flattish, the latter approximately  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter. The thickness does not exceed  $\frac{5}{16}$  inch.

From the nature of the break one might suppose that originally the vessel was provided with a handle, but more probably it was inansate. The flat base, too, is unusual in pottery of this class, but a small Neolithic bowl from the Camp de Chasse (Saône-et-Loire), and preserved at Autun,<sup>2</sup> resembles this example from the Thames valley.

Mr. Christopher F. Hawkes, British Museum, whose interest and suggestions are gratefully acknowledged, agrees with me that a view which might be advanced that this shallow dish could be a lid of the type covering cinerary urns of the Early Iron Age in the Rhine and North-western German area is to be dismissed, not only because of the ware itself, but on account of the circumstances of the find and association with the other relics. It may, therefore, be concluded that this small vessel affords an important addition to the record of late Neolithic fictilia in the Thames valley. The plain sherds included in the discovery also indicate that English domestic pottery of the late Neolithic period comprises a greater variety of undecorated products than was thought to exist.

<sup>2</sup> Jos. Déchelette, *Manuel d'Archéologie Préhistorique*, vol. I., pp. 554-6; also Jacques de Morgan, *l'Humanité Préhistorique*, No. 8, fig. 134, p. 239.