

# PREHISTORIC, ROMANO-BRITISH AND FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ACTIVITY AT ASHWELLS, TYLERS GREEN, BUCKS

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*Systematic fieldwalking has revealed evidence for areas of prehistoric and Romano-British occupation. The presence of substantial tile and pottery production in the fourteenth century AD was also recorded.*

## *Introduction*

The presence of a concentrated ceramic scatter in a field to the south-east of Ashwells, Tylers Green was first mentioned to Miles Green by Mrs Eileen Schneider, whose father had ploughed the field during the last war and had often commented on the concentration. Historical research by Miles Green suggested that the field was called Tigele furlong in about AD 1200. Systematic field walking of the immediate area (Farley 1981) was undertaken to determine the nature of the scatter and the results of that work are described in this paper.

## *Site Location*

The field lies about 500m to the south-east of Ashwells Manor, Tylers Green (see Fig. 1). The area surrounding Ashwells has been developed for housing. Immediately to the north are two fields under rough pasture, but further south the fields are cultivated and accessible for walking. Material in the northern half of the selected field was collected in 30m squares while in the southern half, where finds were sparse, 30m strips were walked.

The northern end of the field is a plateau about 60m wide but it falls steeply away to the Wye valley to the south. In the north-western corner of the field there is a substantial pit, about 10×3m in area and about 2m deep, which may be a former clay pit. The underlying geology of the plateau is mapped as clay with flints, and that underlying the southern part of

the fields as soft white chalk with many flints (Geological Survey 1974).

## *The Finds*

### *Prehistoric*

A total of 34 struck flint flakes were collected from all parts of the field, about half of them from the north-western corner, including two small scrapers and a core (Fig. 2). The flints probably date to the Neolithic period. Seventeen prehistoric body sherds were collected from the north-western corner of the field. Most of the sherds were made in coarse fabric with many small pieces of calcined flint which stood proud of the sherd surface. A few sherds were in a finer fabric with fewer flint inclusions. A large number of broken calcined flints were noted on the field surface which could be consistent with prehistoric land use.

Prehistoric pottery from this part of the Chilterns is not common so there is little material for comparison. A few very abraded sherds in the same heavily calcined flint fabric were recovered from within the ard grooves underneath the Romano-British farmstead site at nearby Micklefield (Cauvain and Cauvain 1978). A middle to late Iron Age date is most likely for the sherds from both Tylers Green and Micklefield.

### *Romano-British*

Material from the Romano-British period in-

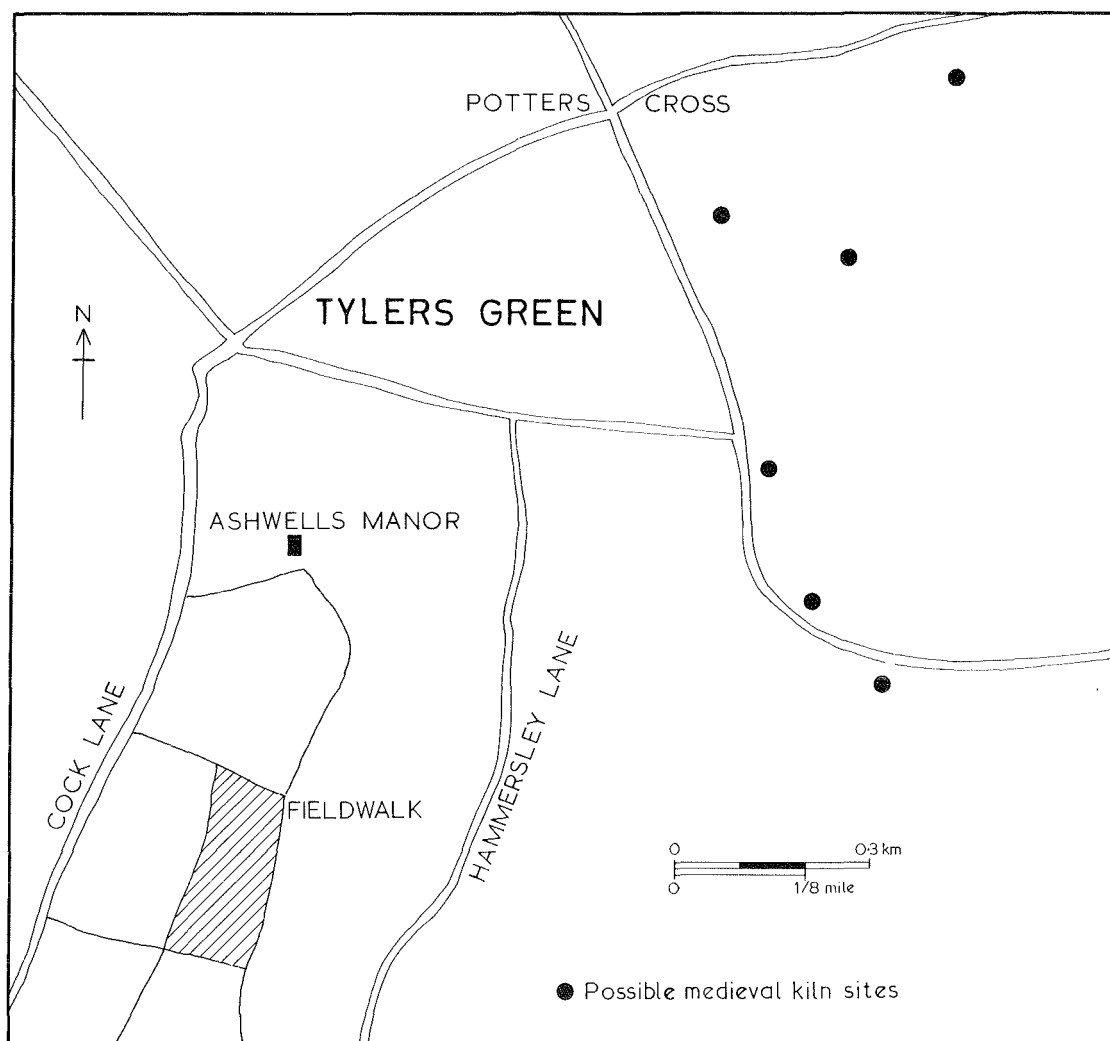


Fig. 1. Fieldwalk location.

cluded two pieces of tegula and two fragments of two querns, both of which were made from coarse sandstone (Fig. 2.4–5). There were a total of 79 Romano-British pottery sherds, including 12 rims and two pieces of mortaria, collected from the northern half of the field. Many were in soft fabrics similar to those from nearby Micklefield and none are likely to be later than second-century AD in date. A selection is illustrated in Fig. 3. Colour descriptions are according to the Munsell notation.

1. Dark-brown colour-coat bowl. Light brown (10YR 8/6), soft fabric.
2. Small bowl. Pinky/red colour (2.5YR 7/10) with grey core. Soft fabric.
3. Small bowl. Light brown colour (5YR 7/6) with dark grey core. Soft, soapy fabric with a few calcined flint pieces.
4. Brown colour coat bowl (7.5YR 6/6) with mica dusting. Light brown colour with grey core. Soft fabric.
5. Small jar. Dark grey exterior, brown interior (7.5YR 6/4). Soft soapy fabric.
6. Brown exterior (2.5YR 7/2), grey/brown interior. Soft soapy fabric.

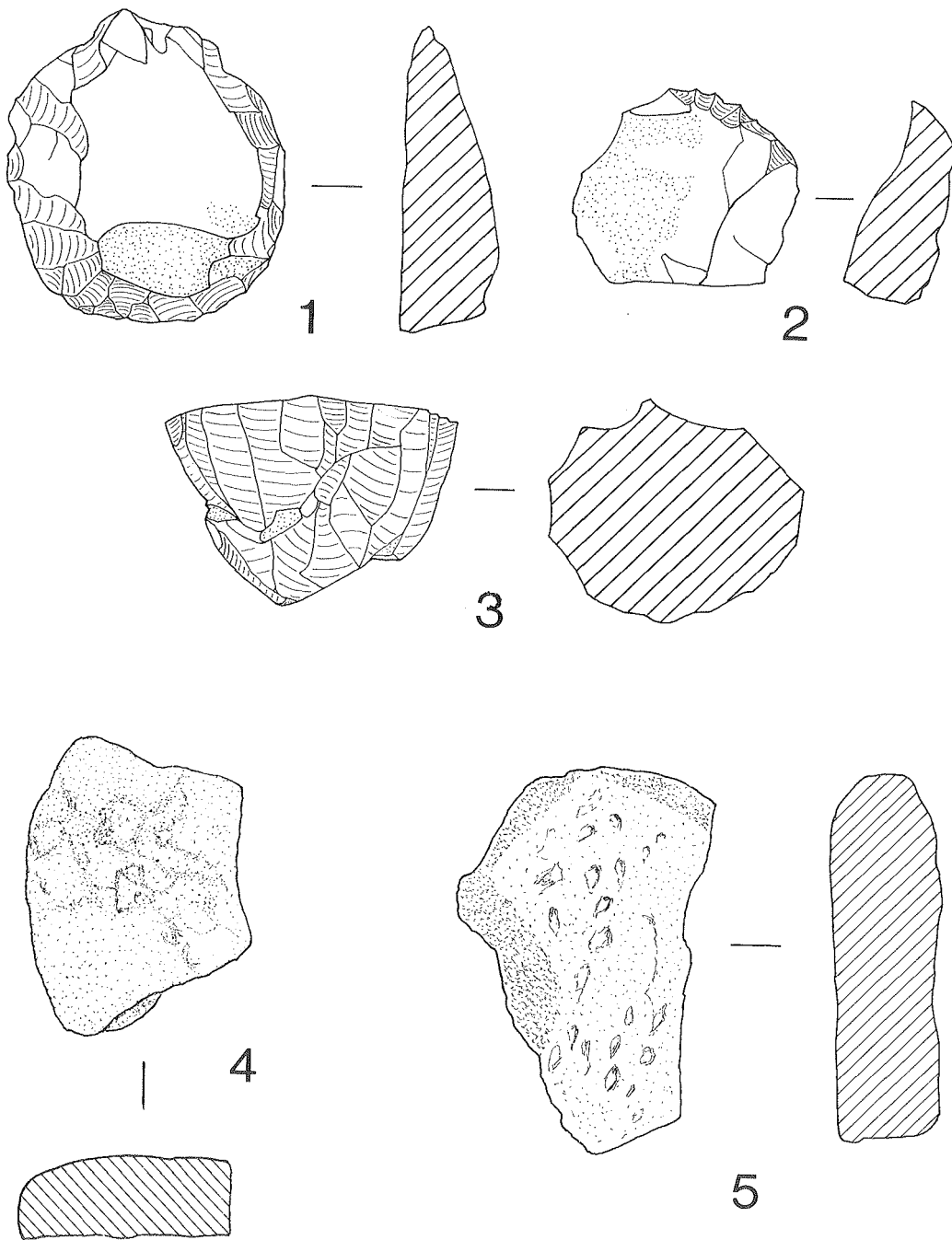


Fig. 2. Flints (1:1) and Romano-British quern fragments (1.2).

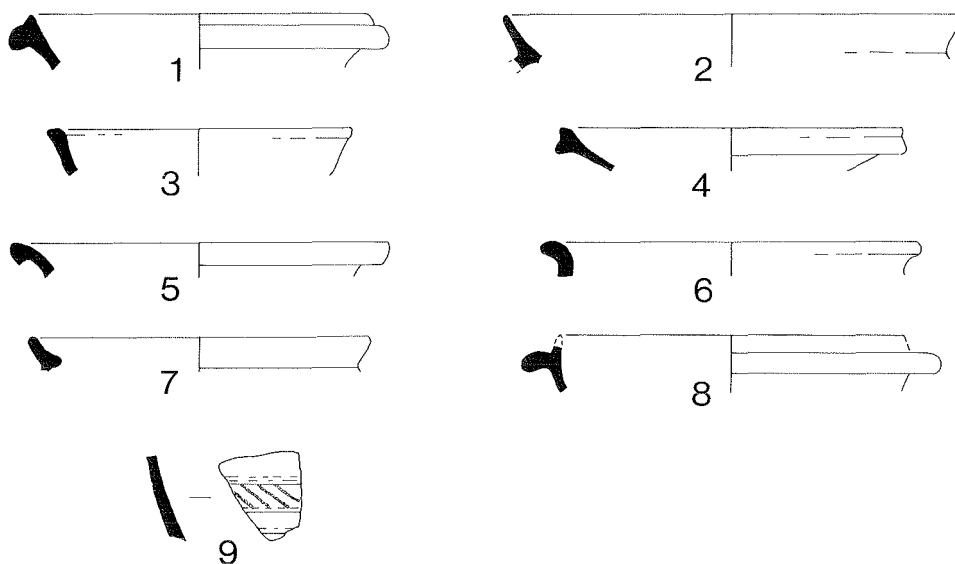


Fig. 3. Romano-British pottery (1:4).

7. Jar. Cream colour (2.5Y 8.5/6) with grey core. Hard fabric with many small quartz grains.
8. Mortarium with light brown and translucent grits. Pinky/red colour (2.5YR 7/10) with grey core. Soft fabric. Probably a product of the Oxfordshire kilns.
9. Grey colour (10Y 7/1). Soft fabric with large numbers of small quartz grains.

The nature of the Romano-British finds suggests limited occupation in the area in the first or second centuries AD. Like the nearby site at Micklefield the Romano-British activity at Ashwells was probably established slightly earlier than the villa at Holywell Mead, High Wycombe. It is unlikely that a substantial building stood in the area though the presence of tegulae is noteworthy.

#### *Medieval Tile*

By far the greatest proportion of archaeological material on the surface of the field was medieval tile. In an area 6040m<sup>2</sup> at the northern end of the field it was estimated that about 4000kg of broken tile was showing on the surface. This quantity of tile is greater than one would expect from a medieval building and could only be associated with a kiln. Flat peg-hole tile, curved ridge tile, and plain, glazed and unglazed floor tiles were present, as well as two pieces of decorated floor tile.

There were no complete tiles of any form so it is not possible to give typical dimensions for them. Average tile thicknesses for the various forms were: flat roof tile, 12mm; curved roof tile, 14mm; floor tile, 18mm (range 16–22mm). Some of the broken floor tiles had sides 11.5cm long, a dimension which occurs frequently with Penn tiles. They also had chamfered edges so that the area of the base of the tile was smaller than the top.

Among the plain, glazed floor tiles were some which had been made in a triangular shape. The method of making these tiles appears to have been by forming a normal square tile and then scoring it deeply on one diagonal before firing. After firing the tile was broken in half along the previously scored line. Most of the tile was red and made in a hard fabric containing large numbers of small quartz grains less than 2mm across. One surface of all of the tiles exhibited the typical heavily sanded surface that would have been acquired during the manufacturing process. Many tiles had been overfired to a dark grey colour and some had distorted during firing. Green or light brown glaze had been applied to some of the floor tiles. Some pieces had glaze on their broken edges, suggesting re-

use in a kiln as wedges or that they had been part of the kiln structure. Decorated tiles were absent, apart from two pieces of 'Penn type' tiles. One piece was too small for identification but the other was part of a Hohler type P22 (Hohler 1941). The almost complete absence of decorated tiles is interesting and contrasts with other finds from the Tylers Green/Penn area. This difference may indicate some degree of specialization within the Penn tile industry, or it may be that evidence for decorated tile production lies underneath the pasture of the field immediately north of the one under investigation. However, a search with a proton magnetometer failed to locate kilns here and there is no evidence for significant archaeological activity in adjacent cultivated fields to the west and south.

### *Medieval Pottery*

Over 1100 sherds of medieval pottery were collected during the fieldwalk, the greatest concentration being recovered from the same area as the tiles. The fabric of the pottery was similar to that of the tile, being hard and slightly sandy, with quartz grains up to 0.5mm in size.

Jugs, bowls and jars were all present in the material. Rod and strap handles for jugs were both present. Deliberate glazing was only associated with the jugs and the rest of the forms were unglazed. Decoration appeared to a limited extent on all pottery forms, with occasional applied strips and wavy line patterns. Some of the pottery sherds were wasters, having glaze on their broken edges which, together with the quantity of sherds present, indicates that pottery as well as tile was being made in the vicinity. The production of pottery in the Penn/Tylers Green area at the same time as tiles has only been recently recognized.

### *Medieval Pottery Catalogue*

Colour descriptions in this catalogue are made according to the Munsell notation where possible. Where the profile only is illustrated the abbreviation d indicates the diameter of a sherd in cm. The following sherds are illustrated in Figs. 4 and 5.

#### *Jugs*

1. Light red (5YR 7/6) with grey core.
2. Yellow red (7.5YR 8/6) with grey core and traces of

pale green glaze on exterior.

3. Dark grey (10Y 6/1) with light red core.
4. Light red interior (5YR 7/6) with yellow-green (10Y 5/6) glaze on exterior.
5. Light red interior (7.5YR 7/6) with traces of light green glaze on exterior.
6. Light red-yellow (10YR 9/4) with trace of light green glaze on exterior.
7. Light grey fabric (5YR 4/1-2.5Y 8.5/2).
8. Light red-yellow (10YR 8/4), d=22.
9. Light brown (YR 4/2) with light red core.

#### *Bowls*

10. Light red (5YR 7/10).
11. Light red (5YR 7/10).
12. Light grey (5Y 8.5/1).
13. Light red-yellow (5YR 7/6) with grey core, d=22.
14. Light grey (5Y 8.5/1), d=26.
15. Light grey (5Y 8.5/1), d=17.
16. Yellow-grey (2.5Y 8.5/4) with grey core, d=16.
17. Light grey (5Y 4/1).
18. Light red (2.5YR 7/6) with grey core, d=28.
19. Light red-yellow (10YR 8/4), d=28.
20. Light red-yellow (10YR 8/4).
21. Light red (5Y 2.5/1) exterior, grey interior.
22. Light yellow-grey (2.5Y 8/2) with light red core, d=25.
23. Light red exterior (2.5Y 8/4), grey interior (5Y 8/1).
24. Light red (5YR 7/8), d=26.
25. Yellow-grey (2.5Y 8/4), d=27.
26. Light red (2.5YR 6/8) with grey core, d=28.
27. Dark grey (5Y 2.5/1).
28. Dark grey (5Y 4/1).
29. Dark grey exterior (5Y 4/1) with light red interior (7.5YR 7/6), d=34.
30. Light red (7.5YR 8/6) with grey core.
31. Light grey (5Y 8/1), d=30.
32. Dark grey (5Y 5/1), d=28.
33. Light grey (2.5Y 9/2).
34. Light red (5YR 7/10).
35. Light red (5YR 7/8).
36. Light red (5YR 6/8).

#### *Jars*

37. Light grey exterior (5Y 8/1) with dark grey interior (5Y 4/1).
38. Light red (5YR 8/6), d=27.
39. Light red (5YR 7/8), d=28.
40. Light red (5YR 7/8), d=26.
41. Light red (5YR 6/6) with grey core.
42. Light red (7.5YR 8/8) with grey core, d=39.
43. Light red exterior (5YR 8/4) with grey interior (5Y 8/1), d=16.
44. Light red (5YR 6/8).
45. Light red (5YR 7/10).
46. Dark grey (10YR 5/1) with light grey core. Applied strip with finger-tip impressions.
47. Light red (7.5YR 8/6), d=22.
48. Light red (7.5YR 8/6) with grey core, d=24.
49. Light red (5YR 8/8) with dark grey core.
50. Light red (7.5YR 7/6) with light grey core, d=27.
51. Light red (5YR 7/8) with grey core, d=26.
52. Light red (5YR 8/8) with grey core, d=30.

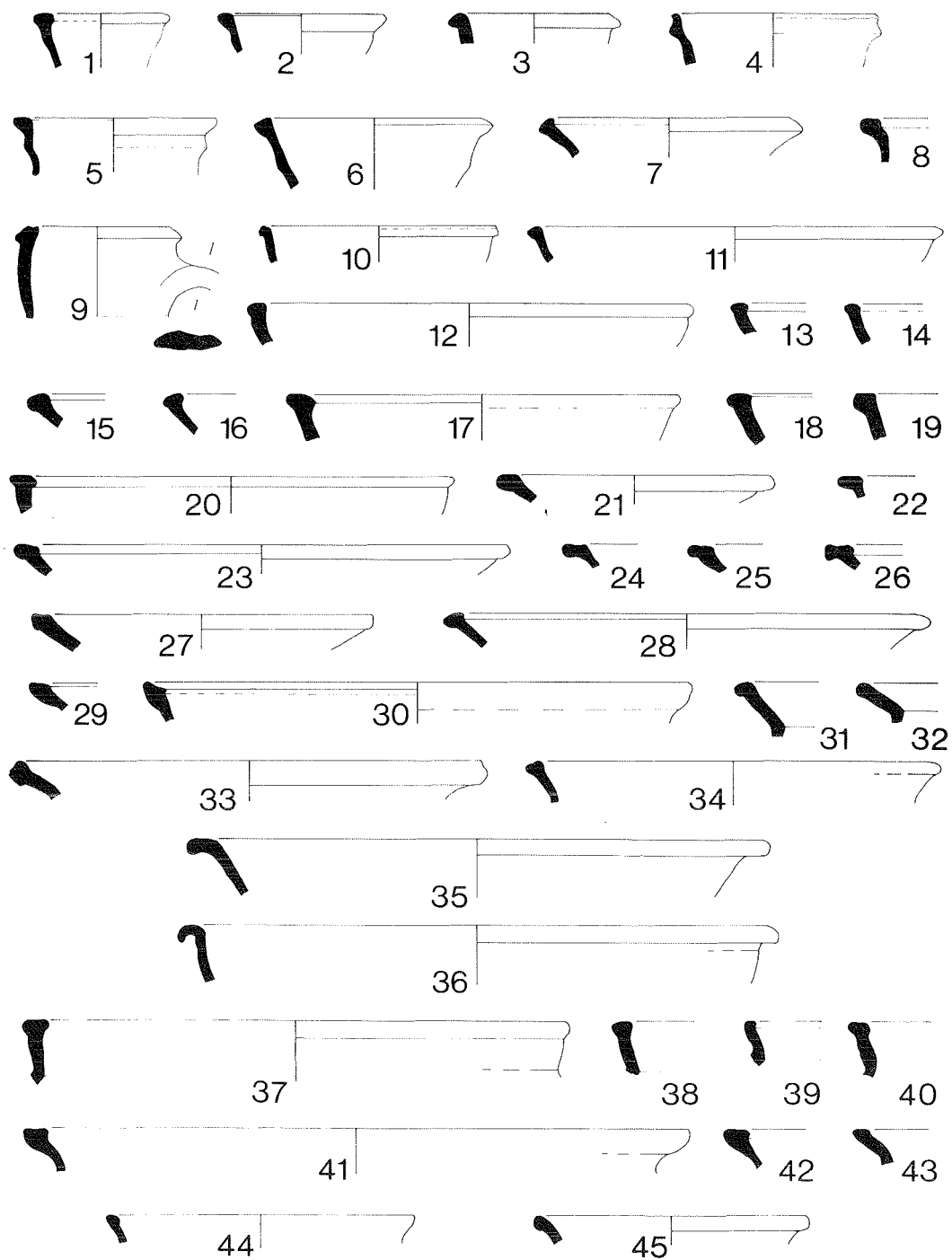


Fig. 4. Medieval pottery (1:4).

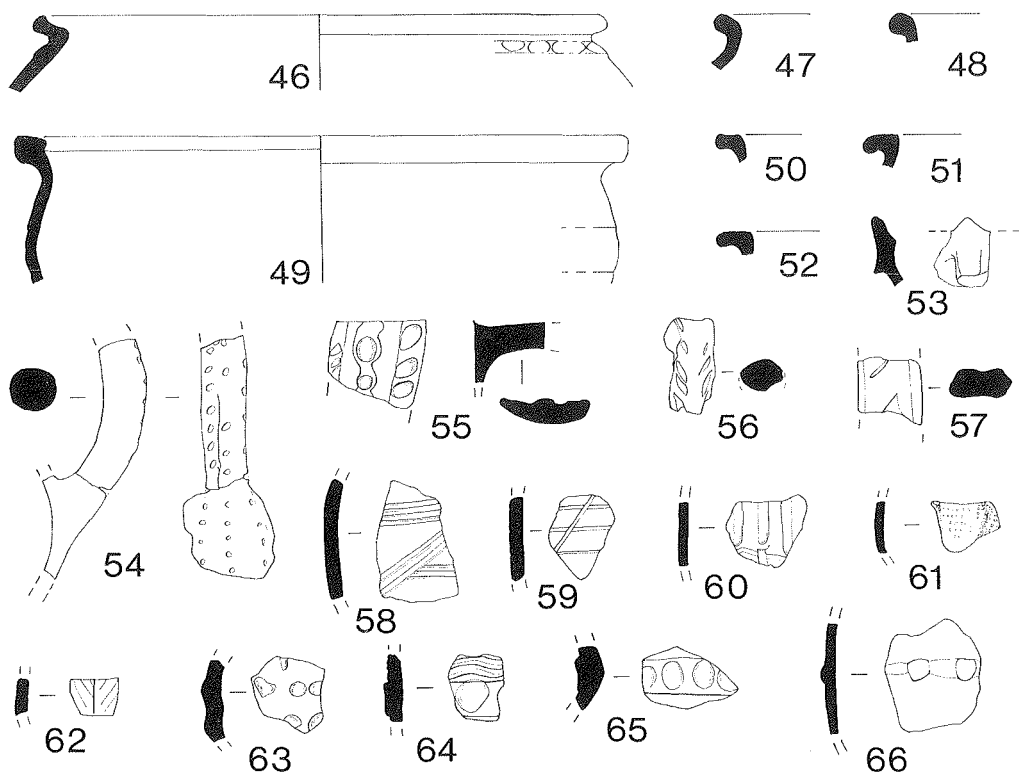


Fig. 5. Medieval pottery (1:4)

*Handles and decorated sherds*

- 53. Knob from chafing dish(?) Light red fabric (5YR 7/6) with light green glaze (2.5GY 5/6) on exterior.
- 54. Two pieces of rolled jug handle. Light grey fabric (2.5Y 8.5/2) with traces of light green glaze.
- 55. Strap handle. Light red fabric covered by yellow-green glaze, grey core.
- 56. Pulled handle with deep stabbing. Light red (5YR 7/8) with traces of light green glaze, grey core.
- 57. Strap handle. Light red fabric (7.5YR 8/6) with traces of light green glaze, grey core.
- 58. Yellow-grey exterior (10YR 7/4) with dark grey interior (10YR 3/1).
- 59. Light red (5YR 8/6) with grey core.
- 60. Part of decorated jug. Light red fabric (5YR 7/6) with traces of light yellow-green glaze on exterior, grey core.
- 61. Part of jug decorated with applied strips, including one in a very dark green. Light green glaze on exterior, grey core and cream coloured interior (10YR 9/4).
- 62. Sherd decorated with incised lines. Light red (2.5YR 6/10). Traces of light brown glaze on one broken edge.
- 63. Decorated sherd with exterior dark green glaze, including some on one broken edge. Interior colour grey (5Y 6/1) on light red and dark grey core.
- 64. Light grey (5Y 7/1) with applied thumbed strip.
- 65. Light red exterior (5YR 7/8) with applied thumbed strip, grey interior (10YR 6/1).

- 66. Light grey (5Y 6/1) with applied thumbed strip.

*Dating the Medieval Ceramic*

There are some similarities in the pottery forms to recent fifteen to sixteenth-century finds from Tylers Green (Hutchings and Farley 1989) though some of the Ashwells glazed jug forms seem to reflect an earlier date. Also there are no examples of the bifid bowl rims that are common by the Tudor period. The relatively sandy fabric is similar to that from the early thirteenth-century kilns at Denham (Farley 1988) but there are few similarities in forms, though the finger impressed strip of no. 46 (Fig. 5) is reminiscent of some Denham forms. A fourteenth-century production date for decorated floor and roof tiles at Penn is historically attested. At Windsor Castle in the fourteenth century undecorated green glazed tiles, including triangular ones, were laid on the same floors as decorated Penn floor tiles in the Round Tower (Kerr pers. comm.). Visually the undecorated green glaze

tiles are similar to those described in this study, so we can reasonably assume that such tiles were being made at Penn in the fourteenth century.

We are now left with the question of whether the production of tiles and pottery was contemporary. The two ceramic fabrics are very similar in appearance but this similarity is undoubtedly a consequence of the local clay composition and cannot therefore be taken as positive evidence for a contemporary date. There is no reason to suppose that tile and pottery production could not take place on the same site at the same time. Indeed the same kiln structure could have been used for both tiles and pottery, though not at the same firing. It may have been the case that tile production had ceased on the site, perhaps after fulfilling a contract for Windor castle, and that the activity had changed to potting. The forms are the best indication for dating the pottery and since these suggest a fourteenth-century date it would appear that pottery and tile production on the site is of similar date, if not contemporary. There was a John le Pottere who in 1350 joined with William Tyler, the Vicar of Penn and others in poaching 100 rabbits from the Vicar of Wooburn (CP40/387/61).

The production site south of Ashwells Manor is at some distance from the other likely sites of Penn/Tylers Green kilns (Fig. 1). There is no clear link between the siting of kilns and the local geology. Although the majority of the probable kiln sites are on pebbly clay, some are located on a mottled clay and the site south of Ashwells is on clay with flints. Despite the varying geological locations the ceramic fabrics from the presumed kiln sites are visually similar. Detailed chemical analyses of the apparently similar fabrics currently being undertaken may eventually prove helpful in distinguishing fabric groups.

#### *Historical Note*

One of the Charters in the Missenden Abbey Cartulary (no. 710) (Jenkins 1945) deals with the grant to the Abbey in about AD 1200 of a mill and lands in Wycombe belonging to Elias Gynant. Ashford (1960, 8) concluded that

these lands were largely contained between the roads running northwards from Wycombe valley to Totteridge and to Tylers Green. They may in fact have run a little further to the east than he thought, since Gynant's 'East Grove' is described in the Charter as being 'below Reiner's Grove' and this was presumably somewhere near Rayner's farm.

Part of the charter runs 'and the half acre that is in Tigeleforlang and three acres in Rubeoforlang which run down to that half acre'. The next charter (711), of the same date, runs 'and the sixth acre lies in rubeo furlangio next to the acres of Walter Clerk of Penn'.

'Tigel' is Old English for tile and its appearance in the name Tigeleforlang must reflect an earlier tradition associating the field with tiles, pottery, or red clay for their production since the reference is about 200 years earlier than the material described in this article. We know there were earlier tilers in the area: Nicholas le Tyler was a freeholder in Penn in 1222 (Hughes 1940, 15); but it seems likely that it was Romano-British tile and pottery that gave the field its name. The area was probably uncultivated and undisturbed from the end of the Roman period until after the Conquest.

The other name in the quotation, 'rubeo furlangio', must be the scribe's translation into Latin – the language of the Cartulary – of 'red furlong', and we have seen that the Charter tells us it lay directly above 'tile furlong'. When we look at the 1848 Wycombe Tithe map we see that this upper field (rubeoforlang) was called 'Radmoor'. This may contain the word 'moor' in the sense of rough grazing, or it may be a scribal corruption of 'Radnor', from *radenora*, the red slope.

There is a supporting link between the two field names, in that the description 'red' (rad or rubeo) has sometimes been found to indicate the presence of pottery which was as red a colour as people of earlier times were likely to see.

A final caveat: although the historical evidence for the location of 'tigeleforlang' and



'rubeoforlang' places these ancient fields in the same general area as the modern field being studied, and although it seems likely that the modern field is part of the ancient ones, it is impossible to be entirely certain of this.

#### *Acknowledgements*

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