

A MEDIEVAL POTTERY PRODUCTION SITE AT JACK IRONCAP'S LANE, GREAT BRICKHILL

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The products of a probable kiln site at Jack Ironcap's Lane, Great Brickhill are described. The site was probably in operation in the fourteenth to early fifteenth century.

Introduction

The village of Great Brickhill lies on a NE-SW ridge of Woburn Sands, some 1600m south of Little Brickhill and Watling Street, overlooking the alluvial deposits of the Ouzel Valley to the west and boulder clays to the east (Fig. 1).

Jack Ironcap's Lane runs east-west on the north side of the village, between the Little Brickhill-Great Brickhill road and a track to the west. About 150m of its 300m length, at its eastern end, forms a substantial hollow way with a depth of between 5 and 7m.

Pottery has been collected from the sides and bottom of the hollow way since at least 1957 (County Antiquity Survey No. 0536), some of it being deposited at Buckinghamshire County Museum (BCM Acc. Nos. 46.64, 67.62, 69.62, 70.64, 71.64, 84.25, 138.74, 223.73, 228.1986, 454.67, 455.67, 43.1989). The pottery appears to have been displaced by burrowing animals and rainwater from the top of the south side, then washed some distance down-slope to the west by water action. Close examination of the area showed pottery to be present in an indistinct layer approximately 40cm below the present ground level. This layer can be traced for about 10m, 30m from the eastern end of the lane (SP 9059 3086). As a potential production area, Jack Ironcap's Lane has been discussed by D. C. Mynard, particularly with reference to finds from Stantonbury (Mynard 1974, 17-41) and Great Linford (Mynard, forthcoming).

The only historical evidence for the existence of a pottery production area is the 1772 Enclosure map, which gives the name 'Potters' Lane' to what is now Jack Ironcap's Lane. (Bucks County Record Office catalogue No. IR/28(ii) R). The only known ceramic industry close by is that of the fifteenth-century tile kilns at Little Brickhill (Mynard 1975, 55-80). The name 'Brickhill' is not indicative of a ceramic tradition in the area; the first element is thought to be from a Celtic word related to Welsh *brig*, meaning 'top or summit' (Mawer and Stenton 1925, 31).

The Enclosure map includes an area known as Green End, which may survive as a small grassed plot opposite Home Farm Lane, south of the building today called Green End cottage. Court rolls of 1594 describe the Green End 'manor' as consisting of a farm and land held by William Sheperd; this is likely to have included most of the south side of Jack Ironcap's Lane. (VCH 4, 1925, 293-8).

The Pottery

In the Buckinghamshire County Museum are 439 sherds which form the collection from Jack Ironcap's Lane. The object of the analysis described in this report was to determine, if possible, fabric, forms and groups of Great Brickhill ware. The pottery was initially divided macroscopically into three groups: the first being pottery thought to be Great Brickhill ware; the second being sherds less certainly so, and the third a group comprising all obviously

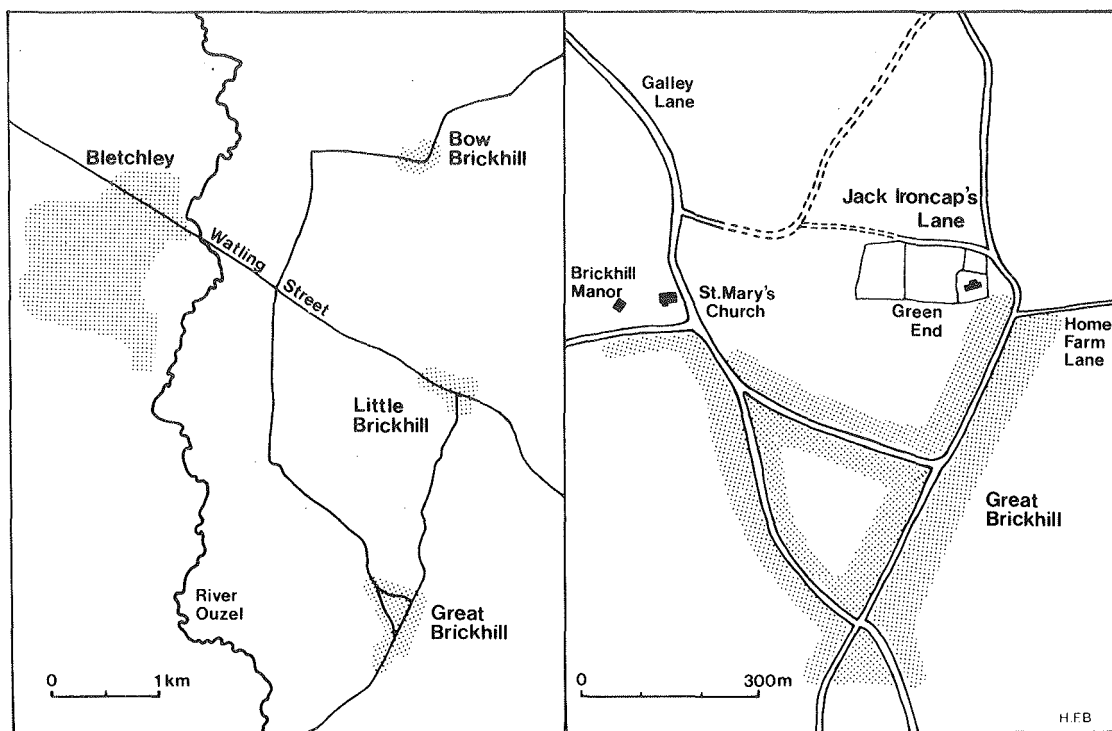


Fig. 1. Location of Jack Ironcap's Lane, Great Brickhill, Bucks.

post-medieval ceramics, which were not further studied. The second group was then examined for fabric type (using a $\times 20$ binocular microscope), and the pottery tested with a 5% dilute solution of hydrochloric acid. Those reacting with the acid (indicating shell-tempering or limestone inclusions) were then excluded since this inclusion is an unlikely component of the sand-tempered Brickhill ware. The remainder of the group could with some confidence be considered local products; it comprised 399 sherds, and weighed 7.85kg.

The surface colour of the sherds is rather uneven. The majority are medium grey-brown to dark grey in colour (2.5 Y 0/4), although a substantial portion are paler shades of red-brown, as light as pale red (2.5 YR 8/6). Clearly kiln control was somewhat erratic; some 'sandwich' sherds showed multi-coloured signs of both reduced and oxidized kiln conditions. The surface texture is fairly coarse and sandy, with dark grey overfired sherds having an extremely

coarse texture. No glaze was evident on any sherd.

The characteristic feature of the fabric is the high proportion of quartz grains, well sorted and both rounded and sub-angular. The quartz is in the range of 0.2–0.8mm, the majority being 0.3–0.5mm. The colour and transparency of the quartz appears to depend on the firing conditions: most are opaque and red-brown in oxidized sherds, whilst reduced sherds include mostly clear, colourless grains. This variation is visible even in a single sherd. Occasional red or black rounded particles of iron ore are apparent in the range of 0.1–0.4mm. There are also rare inclusions of sub-angular flint, between 2.0–5.0mm.

All the sherds were individually catalogued using a variant of the system devised by Maureen Mellor of the Oxford Archaeological Unit. Sherds were recorded according to their form, decoration and any outstanding features,

across a total of 14 fields. Approximately 2.1% of sherds were firmly identified as wasters. These included sherds that were obviously warped, cracked or suffering 'bubble' deformations. A few handles had apparently become detached from the vessel during the firing process. The pottery included 114 rim sherds and was sorted into 32 different rim forms. With the exception of the jug-forms, any rim form represented by fewer than 5 examples (i.e. approx. 4.5% of the total) were not examined further. This left a total of 78 sherds, divided into 7 groups, according to vessel type and size. Although only 4 jug rim sherds were identified, they were included as a significant group, being composed of particularly diagnostic sherds.

Pottery Catalogue (Fig. 2)

The classification of forms and types follows, the illustrations showing the range within each type.

Bowls

Bowls dominated the collection, 31% of all rim sherds were of this vessel type. Three main rim forms were noted (1, 7, 9 below), each form having minor variations within the basic range, which are illustrated as profiles only. In the following list 'd' indicates the diameter of the vessel, followed by a figure denoting the surviving rim, expressed as a percentage.

1. Square, flanged rim. Minimum d. 32cm, maximum 44cm, average 36.5cm. d. 32.5% of rim. Variant profiles: 2. d. 38.5% of rim; 3. d. 32.6%; 4. d. 36.3%; 5. d. 38.3%; 6. d. 36.4%.
7. Flanged rim, concave top, lip at base of flange. Minimum d. 38cm, maximum 42cm, average 40.6cm. d. 38.5%. Variant profiles; 8. d. 42.7%.
9. Rounded underside, concave top. Minimum d. 10cm, maximum 16cm, average 11.5cm. d. 16.12%. Variant profiles: 10. d. 10.15%; 11. d. 10.15%; 12. d. 10.13%.

Jars/Cooking Pots

These rim forms comprised 22% of rim sherds. Three distinct rim forms (13, 17, 23) were noted.

13. Pointed top, thickened internally with slight internal hollow. Minimum d. 16cm, maximum 20cm, average 18cm. d. 20.7%. Variant profiles: 14. d. 18.8%; 15. d. 18.3%; 16. d. 16.9%.
17. Everted rims. Minimum d. 18cm, maximum 24cm, average 22cm. d. 22.9%. Variant profiles: 18. d. 22.7%; 19. d. 18.6%; 20. d. 26.6%; 21. d. 24.5%; 22. d. 20.5%.

23. Simple everted rims. Small size of sherds make diameters only approximate. Average d. 32cm. d. 32.3%. Variant profiles: 24. d. 32.5%; 25. d. 32.2%.

Jugs

Only one form of jug rim was found, accounting for 4.4% of the total of the rims.

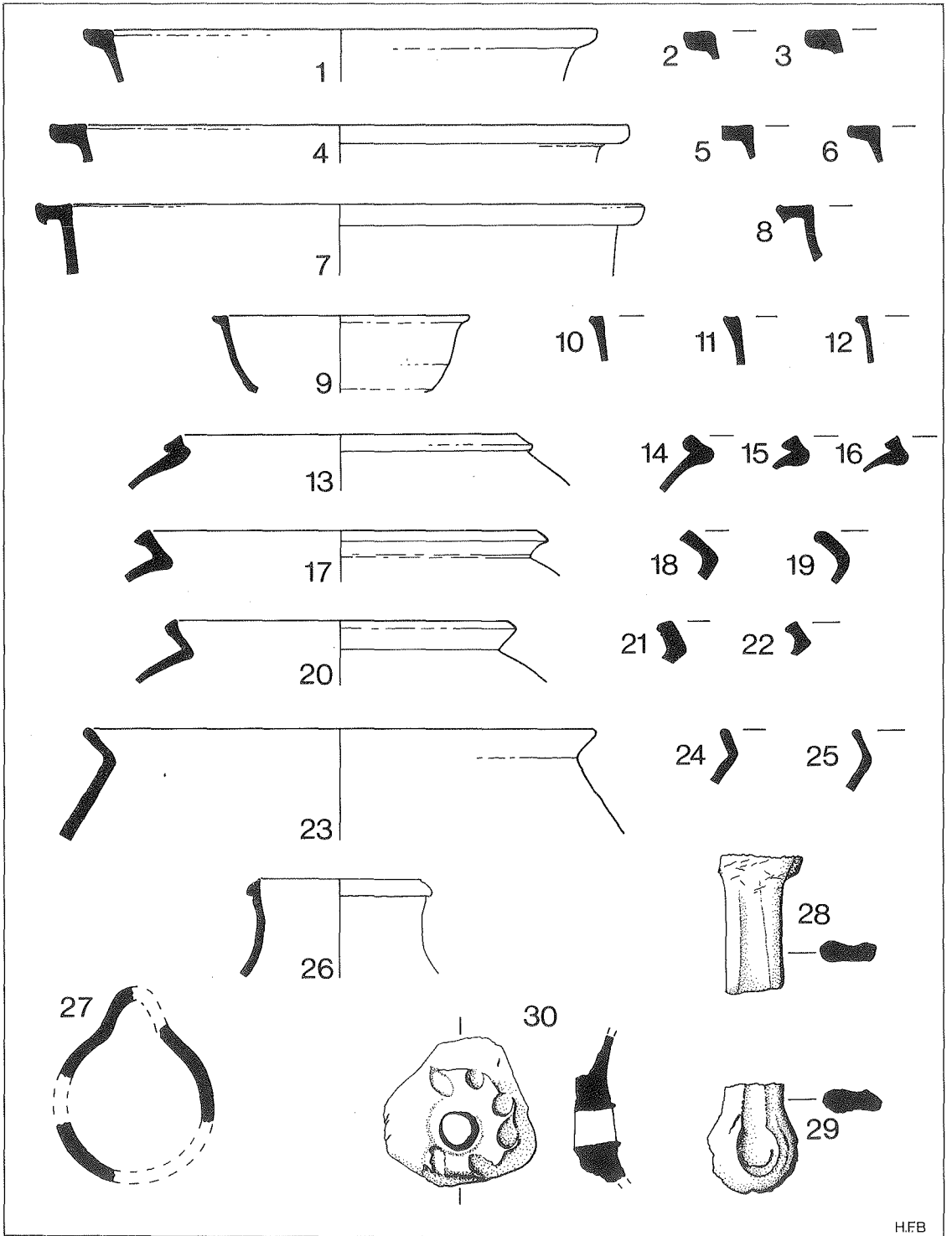
26. Hooked rim, with distinctive sharp ridge on top. Minimum diameter 10cm, maximum 14cm, average 12cm.
27. Reconstructed plan view of jug rim. Spout formed by finger depressions on either side of 'pulled' rim. Similar to bridge spout.
28. Top of strap handle. All handles were of this form. It is uncertain to what point on the vessel the handle was attached, as no diagnostic sherds were available. Upper part of surface wiped.
29. Base of strap handle. Waster. Appears to have split away from body of vessel during firing. Overfired and cracked.
30. Finger-decorated bung-hole, implies the production of pitchers/cisterns but no other sherds were recognized as belonging to this vessel type, apart from 3 other bung-hole sherds.

Decoration

Little decoration is evident. Some body and handle sherds appear to have been wiped, perhaps with grass or similar material. 13 of the 203 body sherds were decorated with incised horizontal grooves, usually in groups of three, or with a single incised groove at an acute angle to the body of the vessel, producing a sharp ridge. One sherd was stabbed with a comb or similar instrument. All basal sherds were slightly convex, but there is no obvious indication of knife-trimming.

Dating

The jug forms (Nos. 26–30) and the larger bowls (Nos. 1–8) are similar to products of the Olney Hyde kilns (Mynard 1984, 56–85) and can be assigned a fourteenth-century date. The smaller bowls (Nos. 9–12) are less easy to date but are likely also to be of the fourteenth century. Jar forms Nos. 17–22 are broadly similar to the fifteenth-century forms of Flitwick, Bedfordshire (Mynard, Petchey and Tilson 1983). The relatively smooth finish and developed rim forms of jars Nos. 13–16 perhaps indicate a later fourteenth or early fifteenth-century date. As a collection then, the pottery implies production from the beginning of the fourteenth century to perhaps the first half of the fifteenth century.



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Fig. 2. Medieval pottery from Jack Ironcap's Lane, Great Brickhill (1/4 scale).

Great Brickhill ware has only been certainly identified on two sites, both in the Ouse valley, and approximately 13km to the north-west, at Stantonbury and Great Linford. These are the only published references to finds from stratified contexts. In view of the problems of identifying and defining 'East Midlands late medieval reduced ware' (Moorhouse 1974), it is likely that other examples remain unrecognized and unpublished.

Discussion

Although only 2.1% of sherds were identified as wasters, it seems unlikely that such material would be transported for any distance. There is no indication of wear, staining or blackening as might be expected if these sherds represented a domestic refuse deposit. It is, therefore, likely that there was a kiln site on the south side of Jack Ironcap's Lane, very probably in what is now the garden of Green End Cottage from which the ceramic derives. The kiln site near Jack Ironcap's Lane would be in close proximity to supplies of fuel from the extensive woodlands to the north. In addition, the site lies on one of the highest points in the village, permitting the

ventilation of a kiln to be assisted by the prevailing southerly wind. The production site is approximately 60m west of extensive boulder clay deposits. Some 19 'ponds' are marked on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey 6in. map, within 1 mile of the village, some of which may have originated as medieval clay pits.

Closer location of the kiln site and any associated features would be best achieved by a proton-magnetometer survey. The land in this area is built up, gardened or given over to rough pasture, severely limiting any further fieldwork. Before a definitive analysis of Great Brickhill ware could be prepared, stratified groups would be needed in order to complete the type-series and define more closely the date of the production.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Michael Farley for much guidance and support and also to Denis Mynard and June Burbidge (Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit) for guiding me through their pottery collection.

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