BRONZE FOUNDER'S MOULDS FROM ROMSEY.

IN 1939 Sir Richard Luce kindly allowed me to examine about seventeen pieces of coarse baked clay which had recently been found beneath the foundations of some demolished cottages adjoining the east wall of King John's House. He has also put into my hands his typescript account of the exploratory excavations carried out on this site, which were briefly published by Mr. T. D. Atkinson in the H.F.C. *Proceedings*, XIV, Pt. 2, 273, and also a plan of the area.

Most of the fragments were recognisable as discarded moulds for casting bronze skillets and cauldrons, and the fact that the cottages were thought to have been built about 1700 indicated that they were at least of 17th century date. Their friable condition and their having been used as ballast to fill an earlier pit on the site of the cottages suggest a date probably not much earlier than 1650, a suggestion which is borne out by the form of moulding on the legs. They were found under a large lump of chalk, which was itself at a depth of 2ft. from ground level. A second pit on the site contained a mass of broken bricks which may well have come from the same source as the moulds, and the source can hardly have been far away. There is a complete record of the owners of the site from the time of the Dissolution, but no hint of a bronze foundry there, so that this was probably not on the actual spot. Bell Street, to the south of the Market Place, strongly suggests the former site of a foundry.

Although church bells in many parishes are the existing records of bronze founders back to an early period, and although some information may be gleaned from mediaeval cauldrons and other vessels, few written records of their foundries before the 18th century seem to have survived, so that the forms of these moulds may be the means of attributing certain skillets and cauldrons to the Romsey founder. The better preserved pieces have therefore been illustrated and diameters of the different vessels have been given at the points marked with arrows. The most characteristic features are the pattern on the skillet handle (fig. 1), the fluted legs on the skillets (figs. 2 and 3) and the angular neck of the cauldron (fig. 4). Part of a skillet handle with a design very similar to that on the Romsey mould was found in the Salisbury drainage excavations of 1852, and is now in the Salisbury Museum (fig. 10).

The products of the 17th century provincial bronze founder may be summarized as follows :—Church bells and smaller bells of this form, known as Aaron bells ; rumbler bells ranging from about 1 to 4 inches in diameter ; pestles and mortars ; skillets

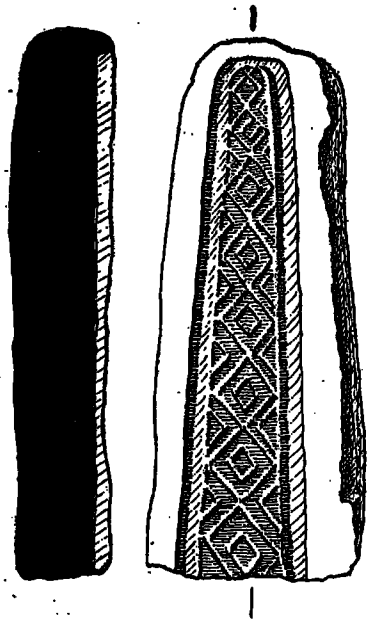


Fig. 1.

2 INCHES.

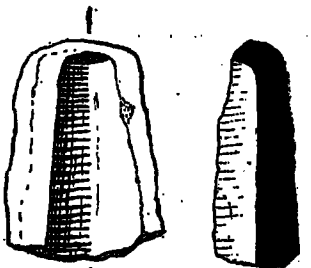
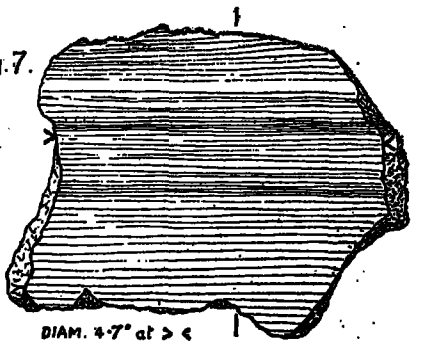


Fig. 6.

Fig. 7.



DIAM. 4·7" at >-<

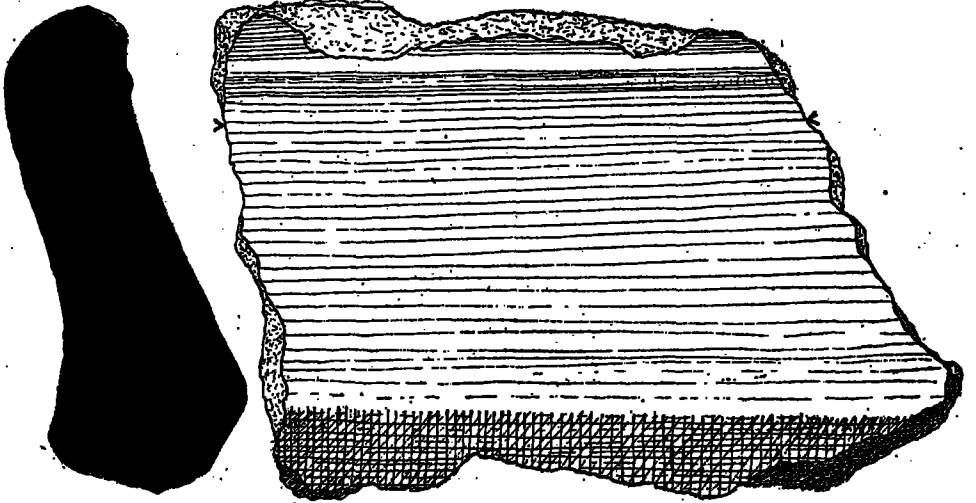
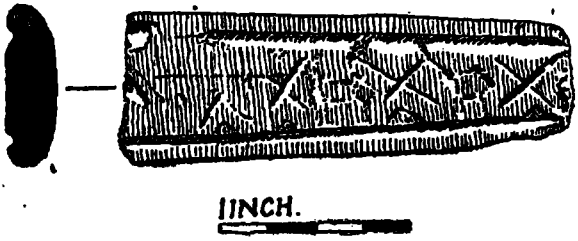


Fig. 4.

DIAM. 9" at >-<

Fig. 10.



and cauldrons. H. B. Walters (*The Church Bells of Wiltshire* (1929), 279-280) mentions a bell of the 17th century at Winchester College, bearing the initials I.H. and which the College Accounts state definitely was cast at Romsey. But the identification of I.H. with John Higden, who was the servant of Joseph Carter, a bell-founder of Reading, is only conjecture, and it is of course the merest suggestion, in default of other evidence, that he could have made these moulds. Several bells probably cast in Hampshire (*ibid.* 279) by I.H. fall between 1619 and 1652.

To turn to the moulds themselves, seven, including the handle mould, seemed to represent skillets, varying in diameter, at the points marked on the figures with arrows, from 4·2 to 6·2 inches (see figs. 1-3, and 7. The last figure may possibly represent a mortar), while five others were probably for cauldrons, including the leg shewn in fig. 6. These varied in diameter at the arrow marks from 8·6 to 13·4 inches (see figs. 4 and 5). These diameters do not give the full width at the lip. The pieces being very fragmentary, it was necessary to take the widest surviving part to obtain

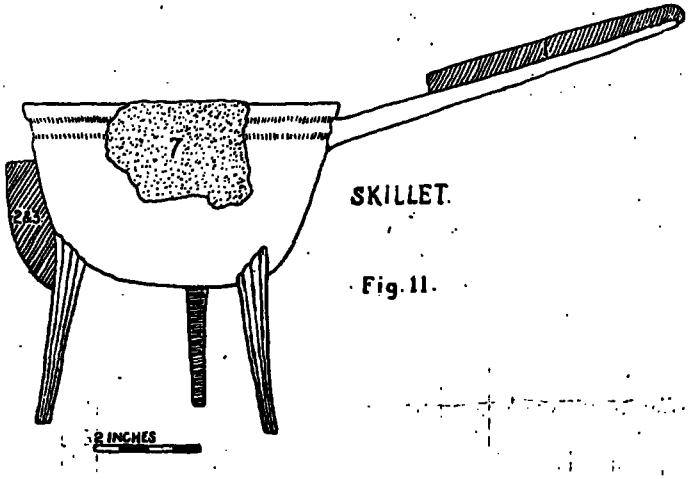


Fig. 11.

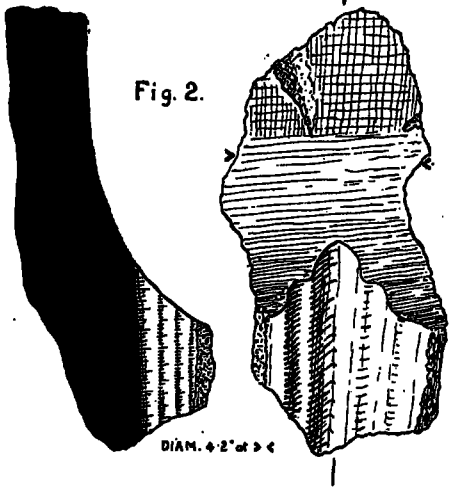


Fig. 2.

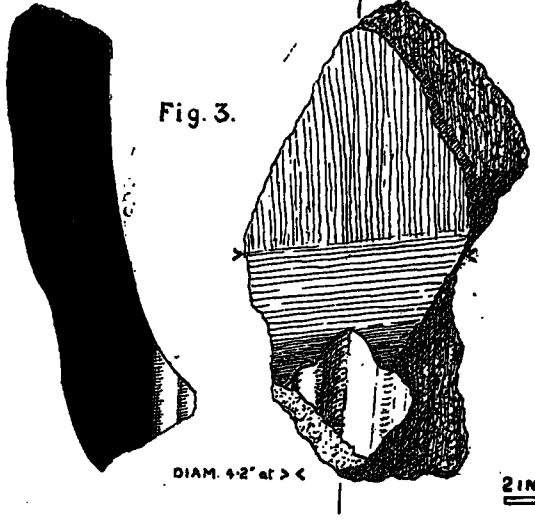


Fig. 3.

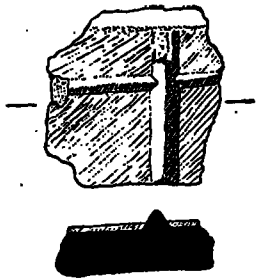


Fig. 9.

2 INCHES

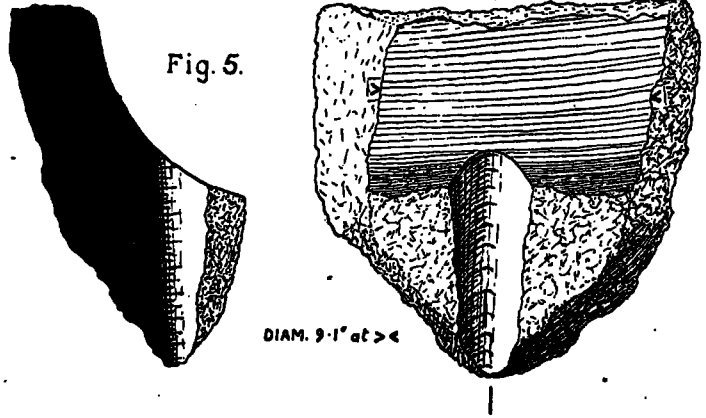


Fig. 5.

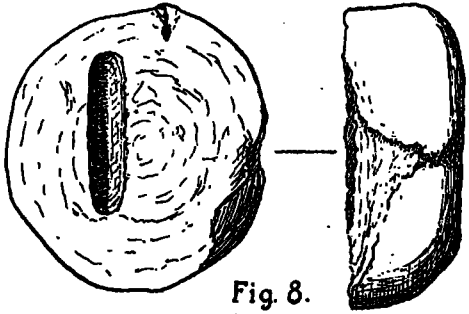


Fig. 8.

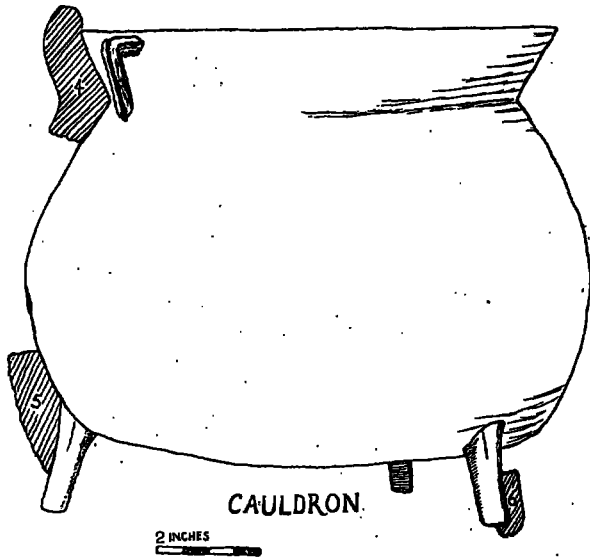


Fig. 12

even an approximate diameter at that point. Only the pieces shewn in figs. 4 and 7 gave an indication of the lips of the vessels. The piece shewn in figure 8 appears to be from the end of a leg or a skillet handle, and the deep slot to the left of the centre indicates the latter, but if so it must have been a very large skillet. For the piece shewn in fig. 9 I can offer no solution. It is almost flat, except for two transecting ridges, one considerably higher than the other, which would, of course, appear as deep grooves in a piece of bronze cast on them. For the sake of clarity, I have drawn typical examples of a cauldron and a skillet, shewing where the pieces of mould in figs. 1-7 must have belonged.

Where the original surface of the moulds presented itself, it appeared like smooth, lightly baked clay with a buff tint on the exterior, but the surfaces exposed to the molten bronze, though striated by the founder, were glazed and in places coloured green by the chemical action of the hot metal, while the clay had been blackened up to about half its thickness in some cases. Not a single piece of metallic bronze was found. The pit containing the moulds was immediately inside the south wall of the cottage and about 4ft. from the west wall.

H. DE S. SHORTT.