

REAPPRAISAL OF A COLLARED URN AND OTHER POTTERY FROM BARROW 8, ASHEY DOWN, ISLE OF WIGHT

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INTRODUCTION

In 1969, excavations on Ashey Down revealed some 240 potsherds lying on the buried land surface beneath Barrow 8 and scattered in and beyond the surrounding ditch. Forty-six sherds are of similar fabric and 9 bear impressed decoration which has been described as 'short, wide, whipped, cord, maggots'. At first sight these sherds resemble some Late Neolithic pottery from beneath two other Island round barrows at Niton and Arreton Down (Dunning 1932, 198-210; Alexander and Ozanne 1960, 276-281). In the Ashey Down excavation report in these *Proceedings* (Drewett 1972) the assemblage is reported as Neolithic and described as probably representing simple bag-shaped bowls.

In 1973 the writer examined the Ashey Down material while preparing a catalogue at Carisbrooke Castle Museum. This article seeks to record new information showing that at present there is little evidence for Neolithic occupation on Ashey Down.

THE BRONZE AGE POTTERY (FIG. 1)

In the excavation report 12 sherds illustrate the pre-barrow material from the site and are conveniently numbered 1-12 (Drewett, Fig. 25). In this article they are prefixed D. Most important are sherds D 1-9 which are here recognised as a single vessel, Fig. 1, no. 1, comprising some 46 fragments. The critical sherds are D5 (upside-down) and D 7, both of which form the overhanging portion of a collar. Breaks in the sherds had occurred flush with the overhang and these details seem to have been misinterpreted in the original study, apparently for a rather unusual reason.

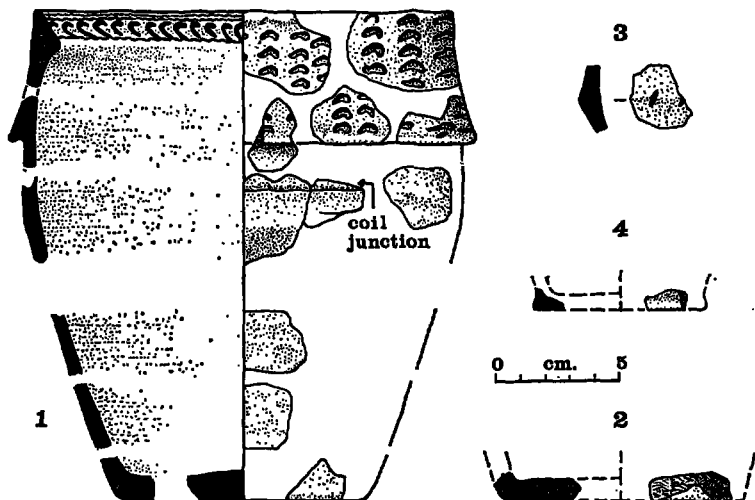


Fig. 1. Bronze Age pottery from Barrow 8, Ashey Down, Isle of Wight. (Scale $\frac{1}{2}$).

The cross-section of sherd D 8 shows that the pot was coil made. Inadequate smoothing and sealing of the surface had caused oxidization in the coil junctions during firing. Six fragments came from the lower part of the collar and in four of these the coil junction coincided with the position of the overhang. The sherds had subsequently separated along the line of the junction and the oxidized surface had neatly disguised the break. Fragments like sherd D 5 therefore appeared to be part of a rim.

When the presence of coil junctions was recognised, all the sherds were washed in acetone to remove earth consolidated with polyvinyl acetate. Cleaning revealed 2 overhanging sherds with conventional breaks and after an exhaustive search one sherd was finally reassembled to form a complete profile from collar to body. Once the shape of the collar had been established, careful measurement of the curvature of the body sherds enabled an overall reconstruction to be made, as shown in Fig. 1, no. 1.

A Bronze Age date for the impressed sherds from the ditch filling puts in question the remainder of the 'Neolithic' material from the excavation. In addition to our new collared urn, fragments of at least 5 other Bronze Age vessels had been dragged from the barrow by the plough. These are:

2. Urn with a base diameter of approximately 10 cm. Black gritless ware with grey/buff inner surface and pink/orange oxidized exterior with a little grog. Base is 1 cm thick with the body sherds narrowing to 0.5 cm. Three sherds from the Iron Age/Romano-British plough soil in barrow ditch.
3. Carinated or shouldered vessel, perhaps as little as 10 cm in diameter. The fabric is black with a yellow/pink oxidized exterior and occasional tiny inclusions of calcined flint. The shoulder is decorated with oblique indentations. The vessel is represented by a single sherd from the ditch filling. Insufficient survives to be sure of the correct inclination in the illustration.
4. Vessel with base diameter of about 7 cm. The fabric resembles sherd 3 but it is harder and contains occasional fragments of dark brown chert. This sherd could represent a beaker.
5. Large urn, at least 20 cm in diameter. Pink gritless ware with buff inner and outer surfaces. Two body sherds come from the base of the ploughed material in the ditch fill. A third lying amongst a substantial group of base and rim fragments from the collared urn suggests that the two vessels may have been associated.
6. Large urn, of blue-grey fabric with buff oxidized inner and outer surfaces. It is 12 mm thick and tempered with calcined flint and shell. Two sherds come from the plough soil over the ditch and a third was recovered beyond the barrow area.

Vessels 2, 3 and 4 are illustrated in Fig. 1.

Nine additional body sherds found in and beyond the barrow ditch are also of Bronze Age character. Their condition is poor and it is likely that most of them belong to the vessels listed.

DISCUSSION

The reconstruction shows a secondary series collared urn with short line cord impressions on the collar. After careful cleaning the impressions were examined under a $\times 20$ stereo-microscope but no evidence of whipping was observed and the term 'maggot' is

therefore best omitted from their description. On the expanded rim bevel are cord-impressed crescents set within horizontal lines of twisted cord. This motif also appears on the unexpanded rim bevel of a large secondary series collared urn from Rancombe, Isle of Wight (Crawford 1922, 211, Pl. I). Unfortunately this portion of the urn has not been illustrated.

The collar decoration is reminiscent of the Late Neolithic ancestors of the collared urn series (Longworth 1961, 267). Mortlake ware 'maggots' occur at Arretton Down and Niton, but none are arranged in the peculiar vertical columns found at Ashey Down.

Similar cord impressions are equally rare on the collared urns of the region. Some 20 further urns have been unearthed in the island but only that from Totland bears short line cord impressions and these are chained in vertical and horizontal zones (Carisbrooke Castle Museum, Acc. No. S.35). From neighbouring Dorset come five urns illustrated by Abercromby (1912, 2, Cinerary Urns nos. 9, 20, 35) and Calkin (1964, 8, Fig. 2, M3, M4), but, here too, little close resemblance can be found. On the primary series urn from Sturminster Marshall rows of short line cord impressions alternate in a herring-bone pattern and similar arrangements appear on the secondary series urns from Handley Down, Charminster and Wick. On the Bere Regis urn diagonal impressions are repeated on the collar in four horizontal bands. Two collared urns from Hengistbury Head may provide further examples of short line cord decoration but a precise description of the impressions has not been published. (Bush-Fox, 1915, 18-19, V, VI.)

These urns remind us that Late Neolithic short line cord impressions may appear in a variety of collared urn motifs and are apparently the result of local preference. Ashey Down provides a further example of this diversity and the vertical column arrangement might be compared with the grouping of oval impressions on a fragmentary collared urn from Codicote Heath, Hertfordshire (Greenfield 1961, Fig. 5, 17). In the multifarious collared urn series however, it would be unwise to lay emphasis on individual motifs, and we must await Dr. Longworth's forthcoming corpus for a balanced assessment.

THE LATE PRE-ROMAN IRON AGE POTTERY

While the contents of Barrow 8 were being scattered by the plough new pottery was also introduced. The intrusive sherds belong to the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age and were probably deposited during manuring in the 1st century BC. Rim sherd D 10, flat-based fragments, and a large quantity of flint tempered body sherds previously described as Neolithic, all correspond to local jars and saucepan pots loosely associated with Dressel I amphorae at the neighbouring site at Knighton. This site lies three-quarters of a mile SSW of Ashey Down and is the likely source of the foreign Lower Greensand stones found scattered on the ancient fields. The wares usually display a smooth or burnished surface but through tilling and weathering in the Iron Age plough soil most have acquired a coarse 'Neolithic' appearance. A few sherds represent soapy textured, shell tempered jars which are found at Knighton and also Mount Joy, Carisbrooke (report forthcoming). Most important, however, are three body sherds of Belgic wheel-thrown vessels found in the buried subsoil beneath the barrow (Excavation small-find nos. Ashey Down I, 228, 228, 241). These sherds demonstrate that the depth of disturbance by ploughing or

perhaps rodent activity is far greater than previously supposed. As a corollary we should view with caution the present evidence for a sealed land surface and associated Neolithic occupation on Ashey Down.

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