

A MEDIEVAL POTTERY KILN AT BENTLEY, HANTS.

By K. J. BARTON and P. C. D. BREARS

INTRODUCTION

IN the late nineteen thirties Major Wade of Bentley discovered the remains of a medieval pottery kiln near Bentley Railway Station. Following his excavation Major Wade wrote an account of the kiln, this being published in *Country Life* for April 7, 1944. This article contains only the scantiest detail, and it has been considered worthwhile to publish the present paper, including all the information currently available on the site and its wares. The kiln was built on a narrow strip of Gault Clay bounded by river gravels and alluvium, its site (SU 788431) being in a narrow field lying between Station Road to the south and the River Wey to the north, half a mile south of Bentley village. Since Major Wade's excavation, deep ploughing has taken place, making it unlikely that any structures now remain in situ. The surviving notes on the excavation give little detail as to the size or construction of the kiln, for they only mention that it had two firemouths and stokepits, one at either end, and that it was made from 'sawn blocks' of local stone.

POTTERY FROM THE KILN

Pottery from the excavation (Fig. 1)

All pottery recovered from the kiln itself by Major Wade has been deposited in the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities at the British Museum.

1-7. Grey-pink body with fine sharp grit. No internal reduced areas. Exceptions: Pink-orange body, gritted as in 1. Pink-grey body, fine shell gritting. No internal reduction.

8. Pink shell-gritted ware, with grey patches on surface.

9-10. Body as in 1-7 above.

11-17. Grey-white lightly gritted body, with glaze, rich green with occasional brown to red stained areas, these sometimes appearing almost lustrous. No internal glazes.

Pottery from local sites

The following sherds, identical to those from the kiln site, were discovered within a few miles of the kiln, and are therefore attributed to it. Except where stated otherwise, sherds in this section were formerly in the Curtis Museum, Alton, but are now housed with the Hampshire County Museum Service at Winchester.

Hampshire

- Alton, Barclay's Bank (SU 717394) 1956: Skillet handle, with triangular stabbing.
- High Street (SU 717394) 1935-6: Jug sherds found in a sewer trench.
- Holybourne, 143 London Road (SU 735408) 1943: Sherds of cooking pots found during drain-digging.
- Powntley Copse (SU 710420) 1937: Cooking pots with applied strips.
- Liss, Berry Grove Farm (SU 775280) 1953: Sherds of cooking pots and jugs.
- Dennis Way (SU 775280) 1960: Sherds of cooking pots, jugs and skillet sherds.
- Selbourne, 'Wellhead', Fountain Road (SU 739338) 1956: Skillet handle.

Soberton, Russell's Farm (SU 601107) 1937:
Jug sherds.

West Tisted (SU 653291) 1940: Cooking pot.

West Worldham, Manor Farm (SU 741370)
1937: Cooking pots.

Surrey

Farnham, Badshot Lea (SU 864486). Sherds of cooking pots were excavated from this moated site by I. Dormor and the Farnham Museum Society in 1965-8, and are now in the Wilmer House Museum, Farnham.

—Farnham Castle (SU 837473): Jug sherds, now in Wilmer House Museum, Farnham.

DISCUSSION

The material illustrated falls readily into two distinct groups: coarse wares and glazed jugs, which show individual sources of influence although they are the products of the same kiln.

The coarse wares comprise cooking pots, a pan, a skillet and a curfew. It is worth noting that no roof, hearth or floor furniture is present in this group although this gives no indication of the kiln's actual production. The forms of these wares, with the notable exception of the handle of the skillet No. 7, parallel exactly the forms of similar vessels common to west Sussex as illustrated in the Hangleton report (Holden 1963, figs. 18, 20). Similar forms occur at Bramber (Barton and Holden forthcoming), at Steyning and Durrington (Worthing Museum), Tarring (Barton 1964a, 21-2), at the Binstead kiln site (Worthing Museum, information C. Ainsworth) and at Chichester (Chichester Museum). In Hampshire they are known from Oyster Street, Portsmouth (1968-70 excavations, City Museum), Bishops Waltham (1968 excavations, Portsmouth City Museum) and Winchester (Cunliffe 1964, fig. 38, 5 and 6). They did not occur at Milton in south-west Hampshire (Hurst 1967). Material in Southampton,

Guildford and Salisbury Museums is not discussed here. To judge from the finds mentioned here these forms are found over much of east Hampshire, south Surrey and west Sussex, more widely than the later, west-Sussex ware jugs.

The base (Fig. 1 No. 5) can only be from a tripod pitcher. It is paralleled by bases produced at the Orchard Street kilns, Chichester (Down 1971). Also similar is the base from Pit M.35 in Winchester (Cunliffe 1964, fig. 39; Barton 1972). The Orchard Street kiln showed that such tripod pitchers were produced side by side with strap handled jugs in seemingly equal quantities. The discovery of a complete tripod pitcher at Magdalene Hospital, Steyning (Lewis 1964, fig. 3) and a base at Tarring, both remarkably similar in form (Barton 1964a), suggests an extended geographical range for these types.

The fragment of curfew handle, No. 8, is similar to one found at Laverstock (Holden 1963) and to others, notably one from Hangleton (Holden 1963) and two from Winchester (Cunliffe 1964, fig. 45).

The jugs, unlike the coarse wares, do not have wide regional connections. Their strap handles with ridged centre section and their thumb external flanges are common to vessels from west Sussex and south-east Hampshire. The applied strip motif on No. 13 occurs in this style on some west-Sussex types. Similar handle form and styles of decoration occur on a vessel from Kingdon's Workshop, Winchester (Cunliffe 1964, fig. 38). The scale motif is also occasionally discovered on fragments in neighbouring areas, but the large grid stamps seen on Nos. 15 and 16 are a hitherto unknown decorative motif on glazed jugs in this area (Dunning and Wilson 1953). Although known in the Saxo-Norman period, their use does not continue into the early Middle Ages. The 'stick-end' decoration and the faces are of a quite individual and purely 'Hampshire Basin' style (Barton 1969) found on a group of vessels limited to this small area. Two vessels, one in Chichester (City

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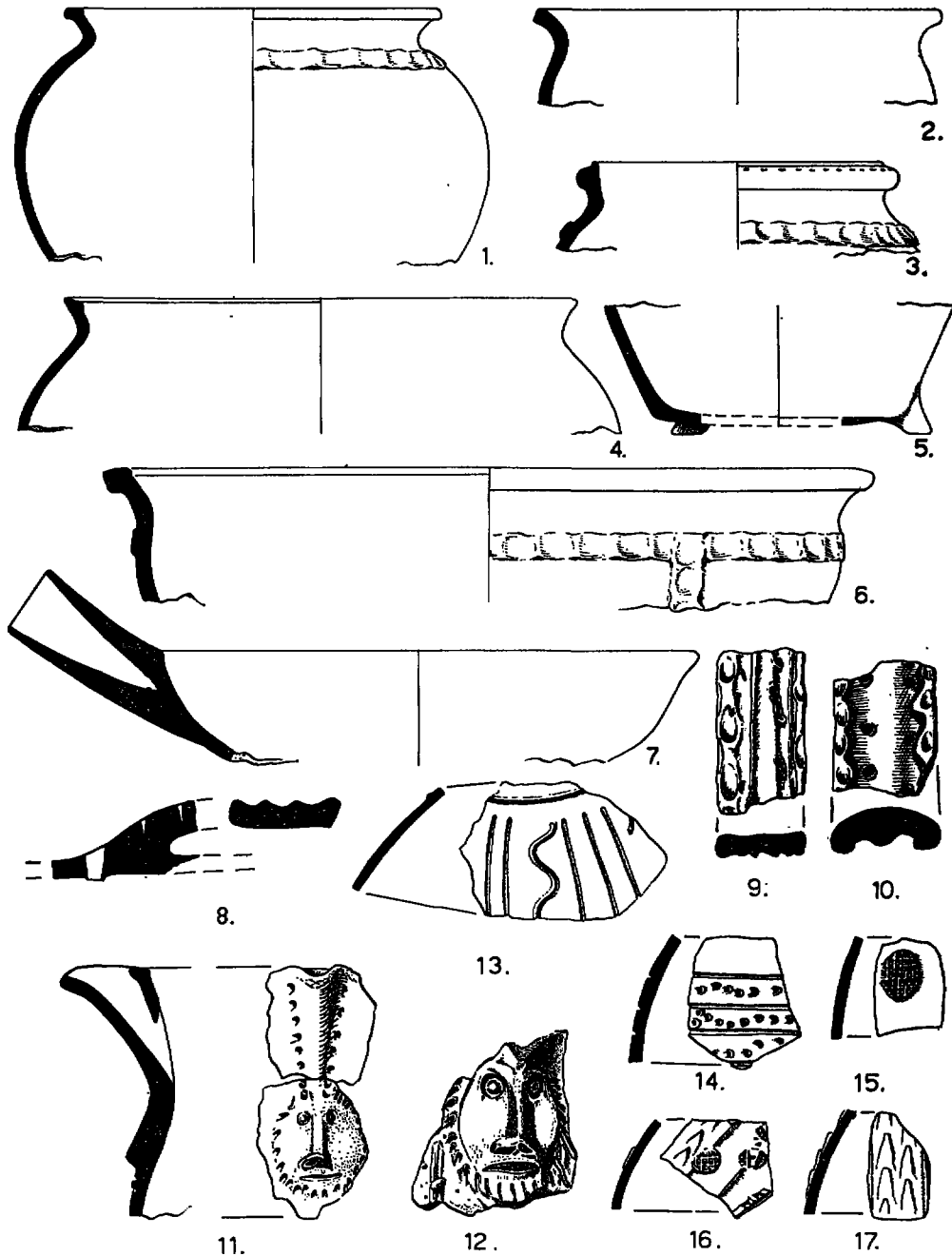


Fig 1. (Scale $\frac{1}{4}$).

Museum) and the other in Southampton (Gods House Tower Museum) clearly come from the same kiln. These two vessels are in a fine quality glaze and fabric, and have applied strips which are impressed with 'small stick-end' decoration. The Southampton one has a face on the body set apparently just below the spout, as in the case of Nos. 11 and 12 here. The Southampton face is elongated, oval in plan and of a noble countenance. The Winchester example (Cottrill 1946) is a highly decorated jug which bears three faces on the body. The quality of this vessel and the obviously female character of the faces, sets it apart from the Bentley jugs, whose crude and hairy faces have a character all of their own, more reminiscent of other facial forms seen on 'West Country' medieval jugs where the use of beard slashing and stick-end decoration around the spout is common (Barton 1964). These characteristics were emphasised in discussion of the products of the Orchard Street kiln and other wares from Chichester (Down 1971). It is becoming apparent that during this period there were sources of influence that came from the west rather than from the east of this region, although the character of the faces appears very localised.

DATING

In dating this group, note must be taken of those forms which can be readily paralleled elsewhere and in this case it is regrettable that insufficient material is available to show the form of the jugs. The cooking pot forms are dated at Hangleton, Sussex, to the first half of the thirteenth century and at Winchester to the second half of the thirteenth century. The tripod foot which appears to be from a pitcher, is similar to those dated to the thirteenth century at Magdalene Hospital, Steyning, and at Tarring, Sussex. A similar date is given for the curfew handle from Hangleton, Sussex. The parallels with the products of the Orchard Street kiln, Chichester, would suggest a similar date, as a similar range of wares occurs in this area before the spread of the west-Sussex wares for which a fourteenth century date has now been confirmed. The weight of evidence thus suggests that the pottery from the Bentley kiln can be dated firmly in the thirteenth century and probably within its second half.

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