

NEOLITHIC POTTERY AND THE HORNCORE OF AN AUROCHS (*BOS PRIMIGENIUS*) FROM CORHAMPTON, HAMPSHIRE

By CAROLINE GRIGSON AND ISOBEL SMITH

INTRODUCTION by G T Denford

In 1951 the excavation of a septic tank in the grounds of Corhampton House, Corhampton (SU 609202), led to the discovery of a vertebra, fragments of antler, a horncore and part of a scapula together with sherds of Neolithic pottery. The site was visited by Frank Cottrill, then Curator of Winchester City Museums, on 25th April 1951 and he produced a rough, annotated sketch plan of the excavation. The trench was 14'6" (4.4m) long and 6'6" (2.0m) wide, the total depth was unrecorded but was at least 8' (2.45m). It revealed a layer of chalky soil going down to a depth varying from 4'6" (1.4m) to 8' (2.45m) from the ground surface, and overlying the solid chalk. The pottery and the skeletal remains came from the chalky soil. A note on the sketch plan records that there were no adjacent surface features to suggest that a long barrow or causewayed camp had been discovered.

The finds, being on County Council property, were reported to the Castle Committee of the Hampshire County Council on 23rd April, 1951. It was resolved that the material should be placed on loan to Winchester City Museum and that the County Council should pay for the restoration of the bowl represented by some of the sherds. The restored bowl and other sherds, along with the horncore and fragments of skeletal material, remain on loan to Winchester City Museums (Accession No 46) where they are presently housed.

THE HORNCORE by C Grigson

The late Dr F C Fraser of the British Museum (Natural History) identified the bones in 1954 as a broken skull of *Bos primigenius*, scapula fragments of an ox, a thoracic vertebra (prob-

ably of a red deer), and red deer antler fragments. All that now remains of the scapula, vertebra and antler are three small fragments that are probably referable to the antler so these cannot be discussed further; however the right horncore, with the adjacent parts of the frontal and occipital regions, represents a fine specimen of an adult bull aurochs (*Bos primigenius*), Fig 1.

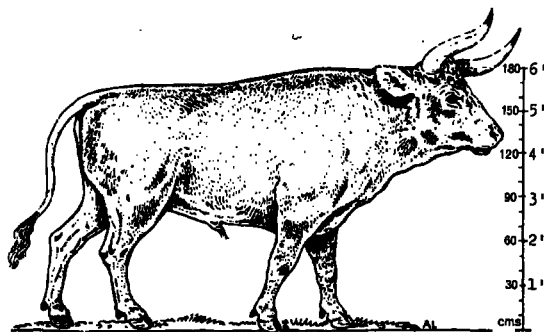


Fig 1. Reconstruction of an aurochs bull of the Holocene period (after J Boessneck, in Haushofer 1961).

The horncore is strongly curved (Fig 2). At its base is a ring of flat excrescences of bone; these 'perlen' rings reach this extent in *Bos* at an age of about 5 - 10 years (Grigson 1976). The sutures between the frontal and parietal bones, both in the temporal fossa and below the horncore, are fused, showing that the animal was over 5 - 7 years old (Ussow 1901).

The table shows that the Corhampton *Bos* horncore is well within the size range of Holocene aurochs in Northern Europe.

Dating

If the *Bos primigenius* skull were contemporary with the Hembury style bowl with which it was

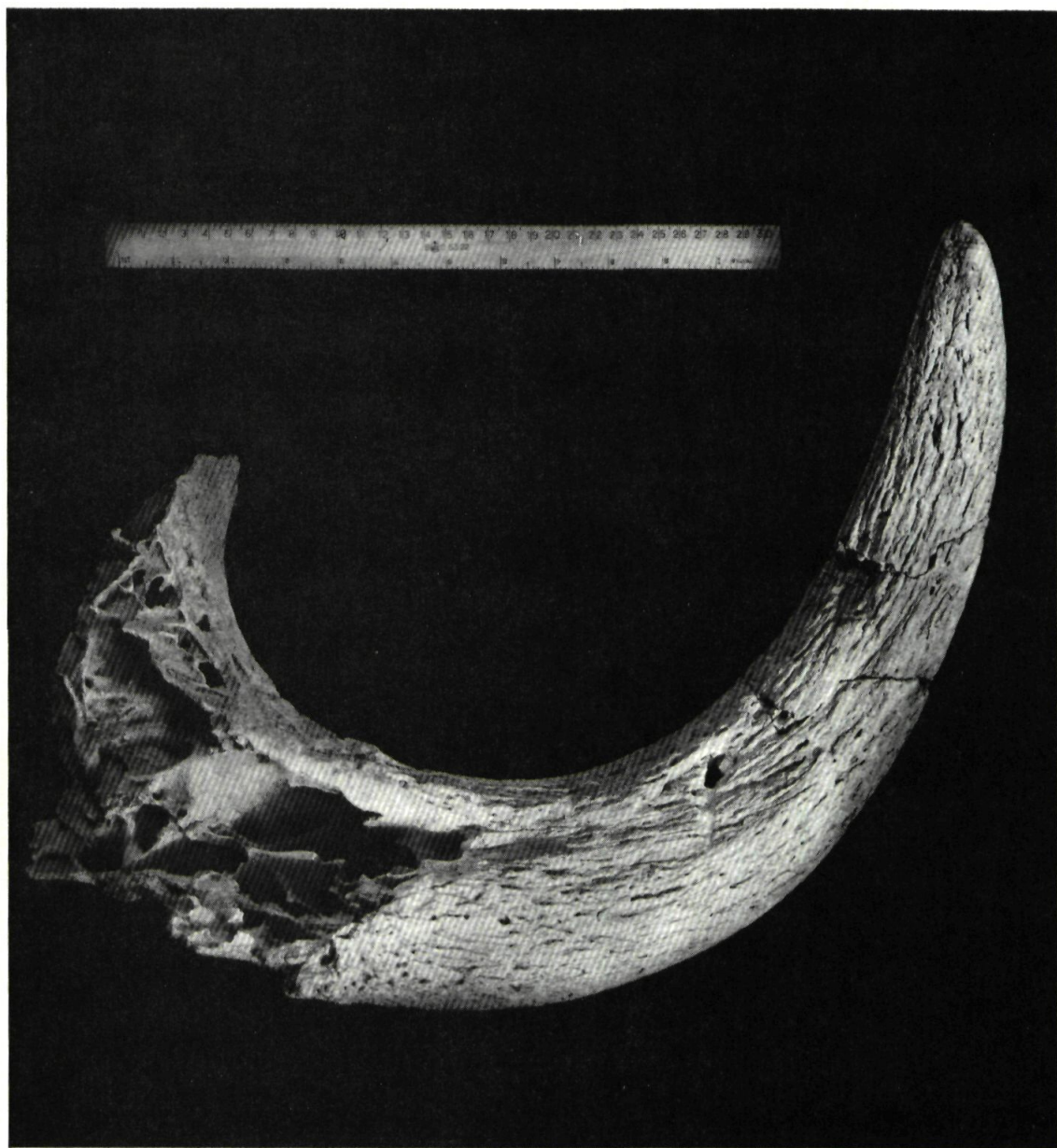


Fig 2. The horncore; photo courtesy of British Museum (Natural History).

found its date should be in the range 3,300 – 2,580 bc (Smith 1974). This has now been verified with a direct radiocarbon date on part of the occipital region of 2840 ± 70 bc (BM 1889).

Discussion

The aurochs was a common animal in Britain during Pleistocene and post-glacial times and its remains have been found in most parts of England, Wales and Scotland preserved in archaeological sites and in bogs and gravels.

The huge Pleistocene form retreated from the country during the last advance of the ice and was replaced early on in the postglacial period by a smaller (but still large) form, invading across the land bridge from the Continent. The earliest British post-glacial aurochs bones found so far are those from the famous Mesolithic site at Star Carr in Yorkshire at the chronozone IV/V interface (at about 7,500 bc). The Star Carr aurochs bones were of two sizes, and the authors of the report (Fraser and King 1954) were unable to decide whether these represented two species or two sexes, but comparisons with work done on the Continent by von Leithner (1927) and others show clearly that it is bulls and cows that are represented.

Fraser and King compared the Star Carr cranial material with three complete aurochs bulls' skulls from Athol, Kirkudbrightshire, and the Thames that are housed in the British Museum (Natural History), and which they assumed to be of Pleistocene date. One of the three (from a bog in Kirkudbrightshire) has been radiocarbon dated to $7,124 \pm 72$ bc (Burleigh *et al* 1976) and it is now suspected that all three skulls belong firmly in the post-glacial period.

Although Britain was separated from the Continent during the Mesolithic, the aurochs continued to thrive in Britain and its remains have been found in earlier Neolithic sites in southern England such as Windmill Hill (Jope and Grigson 1965).

The animal bones from Neolithic sites are dominated by those of domestic cattle, which were probably imported by the first farmers

along with sheep and goats from the Continent. Domesticated Neolithic cattle were very similar to the wild form, differing only in size. Although the shape of cows' and bulls' bones differs, the size of domestic bulls overlaps with that of wild cows, so when fragmentary bones are found in archaeological sites they can be very difficult to distinguish. However, a few aurochs bones can be identified with certainty.

	Corhampton	Holocene	
		Males range n	Females range n
Length of outer curvature	598	433–845 66	335–530 24
Circumference at base of horncore	e350	257–395 72	180–264 26

Table 1. The size of the Corhampton horncore compared with that of other Holocene aurochs in Britain and Northern Europe (Grigson 1978). Measurements in millimetres; e = estimated; n = number.

Jackson (1943) found some fairly complete ox skulls in the Neolithic levels of Maiden Castle which he assumed belonged to a special domestic Neolithic breed of long-horned ox, but subsequent work has shown that the skulls came from wild cows and bulls. It is possible that there was some local domestication of cattle in Britain and some crossing between wild and domestic populations, but there is as yet no evidence for this.

Aurochs remains are still found in Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age sites at around 2,000 bc, for example: Mount Pleasant (Harcourt 1979), Durrington Walls (Harcourt 1971a), Marden (Harcourt 1971b), Snail Down (Clutton-Brock and Jewell forthcoming), and Puddlehill (Grigson 1976), but so far there are no certain remains of aurochs later than this.

The most recent reliable dates done on aurochs bones include Hemp Knoll (BM 1585, 1810 ± 60 bc; Grigson 1980) and Charterhouse Warren Farm (BM 731, 1295 ± 37 bc; Burleigh and Clutton-Brock 1977), so it looks as though the aurochs became extinct in southern Britain in the Late Neolithic/Early

Bronze Age period or soon after. Following Ritchie (1920) it is often suggested that the aurochs may have survived later in Scotland, however very few Scottish finds have been dated, and those that have been are early, so this cannot now be substantiated.

THE POTTERY by I F Smith

The sherds appear to represent a minimum of four vessels and a possible maximum of seven. Inclusions in the fabric of vessels 1-4 have been identified from macroscopic inspection. The sherds numbered 5-7 have been impregnated with wax prior to the removal of thin sections for petrological analysis and can no longer be compared for colour or texture with the others.

1. Bowl (Fig 3) reconstructed from four large sherds representing about one-third of the rim circumference and showing nearly complete profile; one original lug is attached. As restored, the internal diameters are about 170mm at the rim, increasing to a maximum of 190mm at 40mm below the rim. The depth would have been about 148mm.

Wall thickness ranges from 7mm beneath the rim to 11mm towards the base. In section, the rim varies from rounded to slightly flattened. The flat-topped lug, set 10mm beneath the rim, is triangular in plan and in section. Colour and texture are slightly altered as a result of consolidating treatment. The exterior is light brown with reddish tints and with darker patches beneath the rim; the interior is light brown. The surfaces, especially the outer, are irregular, with many protruding grits; broad horizontal tooling-marks are present on the inner surface. The abundant inclusions appear to be finely comminuted, calcined flint, with a few larger fragments

2. Three fairly large body sherds; a localized thickening at the edge of one may represent the end of a lug. Thickness elsewhere is 10mm to 12mm. The exterior is red, superficially grey in patches; the interior is light brown. The fragile, loose-textured fabric contains abundant calcined flints, generally coarse (up to 9 mm) and occasionally protruding through the surfaces.

3. Two smaller body sherds; exterior dark brown, interior reddish; thickness 8mm to 9mm; surfaces irregular. The fairly compact fabric contains sparse calcined flints, generally small (up to 3mm), and quartz grains.

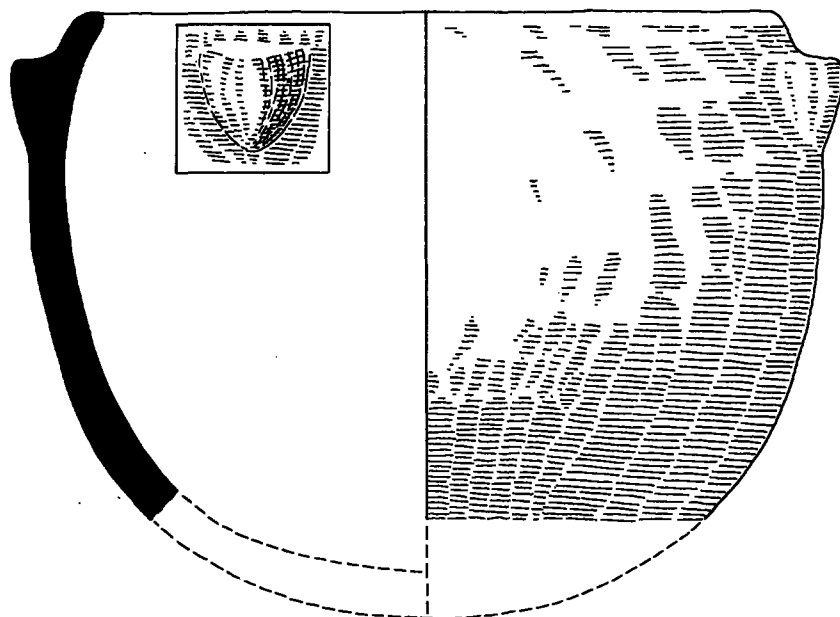


Fig 3. The Hembury ware bowl. Scale 1:2.

4. A small body sherd; pale reddish-buff throughout; thickness 7mm. The well-smoothed compact fabric is vesicular in section. Fine inclusions (up to 2mm) appear to comprise calcined flint, quartz grains, and possibly shell.

5-7. Four thin sections taken from these three body sherds are discussed in an unpublished thesis by Sofranoff (1976, 194, 198, 201); the slides are indexed in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Southampton as N111-114. It is not now possible to relate the thin sections to individuals sherds. There are some internal inconsistencies in references to these sections within the thesis and between the thesis and lists supplied to Winchester City Museum, and Mr T C Darvill, who has kindly re-examined the slides, points out that some of the identifications may be erroneous. In the circumstances it is worth noting here only that all the sherds appear to contain flint, quartz grains and shell in varying proportions and that one also contains a small quantity of quartzite. The only sherd that merits individual mention is one that seems to carry decoration in the form of irregularly-spaced parallel incised lines; the area involved measures 25mm by 12mm.

The plain round-bottomed bowl with a pair of lugs set on the upper part of the body represents a type of utilitarian container which, with variations in size and in details of shape, is a regular component of the earlier Neolithic ceramic assemblages distributed from Cornwall to Wiltshire and known as Hembury ware (Piggott 1954, 67) or as the South-western style (Whittle 1977, 77). Similar vessels occur less frequently in pottery from Sussex now grouped by Whittle (1977, 85) with the decorated style. The ill-defined and apparently irregular geographical boundary between these stylistic zones appears to lie in Hampshire and eastern Dorset. Both styles were current from the latter part of the fourth millennium bc until at least the middle of the third; some plain pottery with lugs may have remained in use even longer (*cf* Wainwright 1979, 90).

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