

EXCAVATIONS AT NO. 43 HIGH STREET, GRAVESEND

By ERNEST W. TILLEY

THROUGH the courtesy and co-operation of Mr. W. Winmill, the site foreman of the contractors, Yates (Bow) Ltd., I was able to watch the excavations throughout the whole of the work, from March until August 1963. He and his workmen were very helpful and without their kind co-operation the Gravesend Museum would have been the poorer by a lot of very interesting pottery. Fortunately, owing to the greatly restricted conditions of the site, the whole of it was excavated by hand, without the aid of modern mechanical equipment; otherwise, these finds might have been lost.

The site itself had been partly excavated many years ago to make a basement for a shoemaker's shop which existed here for about 150 years. The red-bricked walls were pierced with eight small pointed-topped niches, two to each wall, all of which were smoke-stained at the tops, and had undoubtedly been used to house the candles for heating the cobbler's wax and heel-ball. In the south-east corner of the site were the footings of a thick flint wall upon which the later shop had been built, but it was not possible to ascertain in which direction this wall ran. In the walls of the two adjoining buildings could be seen the heads of bricked-up arches which formed part of a tunnel of some sort running almost parallel with the High Street, and which had been broken into when the basement had been dug. This is very significant in view of the persistent rumours in the town of 'secret tunnels' running from the lower end of the street to the top. A fire-hearth in the basement, to the right of a recess in the rear wall, yielded a number of clay-pipes but these had been discarded, and it was not possible to date them.

The area behind the cobbler's shop was mainly undisturbed ground overlying the natural chalk, but this was only a thin layer and did not exceed two feet in depth. This part of the site is designated 'Surrounding area' in the catalogue of finds. Cut through the soil and into the chalk were five pits of varying depths. These were wells and rubbish-pits, and it is felt that none of them was intended as soak-aways; three of them were steined at the tops, two with bricks, and the other with chalk blocks. These pits are numbered from 1 to 5 in the catalogue which is the sequence in which they were excavated. No. 1 was at the rear in the south-west corner, No. 2 slightly right of the centre at the rear, No. 3 at the north-west rear corner and partly under the alley

which runs alongside the site, No. 4 forward and to the right of centre, and No. 5 forward and to left of centre. Four of these pits yielded pottery in varying amounts and this, coupled with other material, has enabled these pits to be dated and an idea obtained as to when they were finally disused.

Pit No. 1 was probably a rubbish-pit as it was only six feet deep and had no walling at the top. It was completely cleared of its filling and a wide variety of pottery forms was collected. Many vessels when pieced together were almost complete and will be described in this report.

Most of this pottery was of a rough, red ware, which could conveniently be called 'flower-pot ware'. The glazing was generally of poor quality, with one or two notable exceptions, and was mostly in various shades of brown. The scarcity of metal-work was noticeable, the only pieces being a brass, spherical cattle-bell, a bronze buckle, a few brass pins, a badly broken and corroded shallow, two-handled dish in copper, a lead token and a Dutch coin dated 1768. Glass was also very scarce from this pit, the base of a straight-sided beaker of brownish glass with a beaded cord running round the edge of the base, being the only important piece.

The following vessels from this pit are of the above-mentioned red ware, and the most complete.

A tripod pipkin with a single up-curving solid handle, several grooves around the shoulder, and the rim recessed to take a lid. The inside and the top of the outside poorly glazed in treacly-brown. Seventeenth century (Fig. 1.1).

A fine, but slightly distorted, brown-glazed chafing dish with an unglazed pedestal base which is roughly trimmed inside. The wide, out-curved, moulded rim has three vertical lugs set equidistant around it. Two horizontal handles are securely thumbed on half-way down the body, and there is a girth-ring on a level with the handles. Seventeenth century (Fig. 1.4).

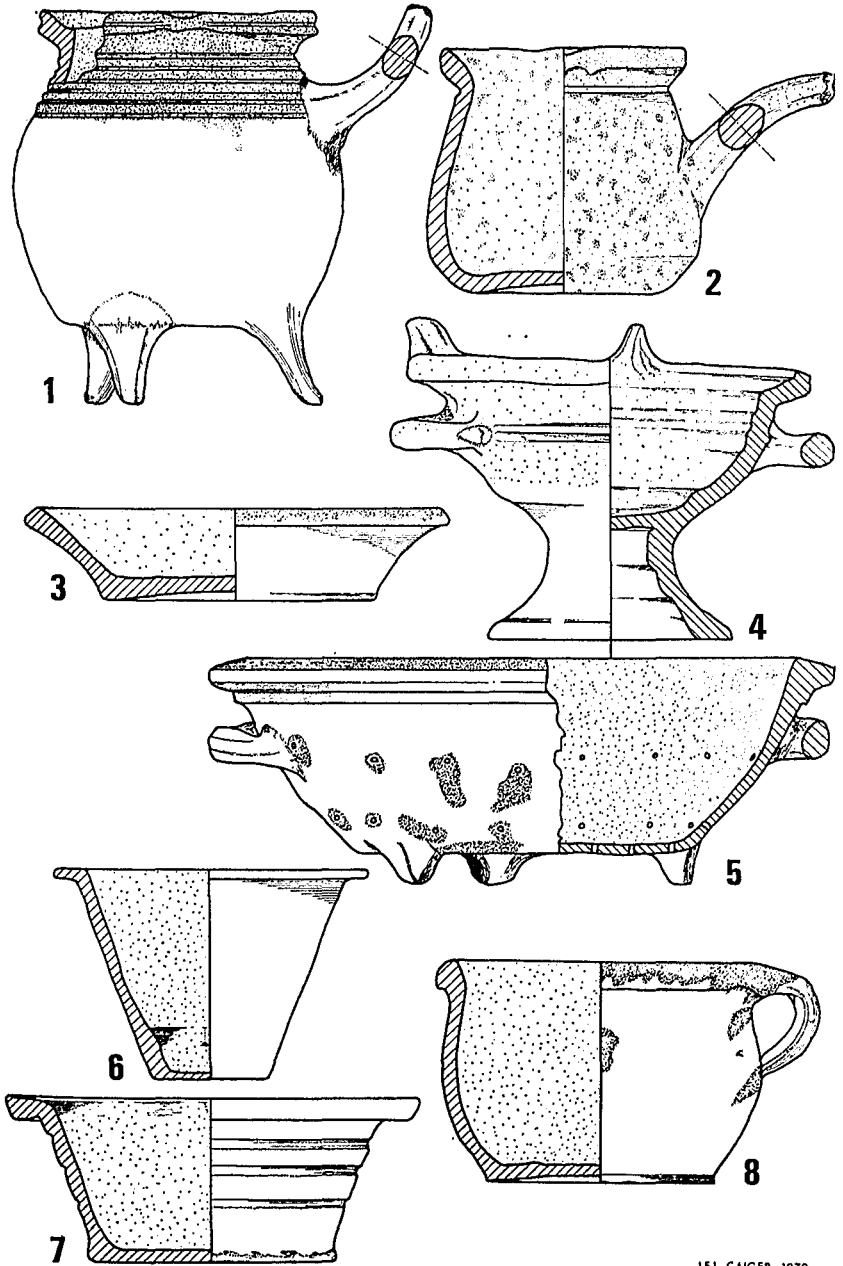
A straight-sided bowl with a flat out-curved, moulded rim, sloping sides and three girth-grooves. The angle of side to base is left rather rough, the brown internal glazing is even and good. Seventeenth century (Fig. 1.7).

Large two-handled straight-sided flower-pot type vessel in unglazed red ware. Out-curved rim, slightly recessed to take a lid, decorated with thumbing round the edge of the rim. Height, 12 in. Seventeenth century.

A large storage-vessel, internal brown glaze, slightly convex curving side. Rim not found but surviving side to a height of 10 in.

Several large pieces of posset-cup shaped vessels with handles and rolled rims. Glazing generally internal only. Seventeenth century.

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J.E.L. CAIGER, 1970.

FIG. 1.

A large dish with a wide moulded rim, recessed to take a lid. The inside of the base only, glazed in brown. Diameter c. 16 in.

A small lid or cover with a reddish-brown glaze. Diameter $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. A seventeenth century local product.

The base of a jug in brownish-grey ware with an internal and external glaze of brownish-purple. Three ribs around lower body. A local product of the seventeenth century.

Fragments of local red ware with internal purple glaze. Seventeenth century.

Many identifiable fragments of vessels were recovered from this pit, some of them being thirteenth-century imports. These would appear to be strays from the surrounding area. The most interesting pieces were submitted to Mr. Stephen Moorhouse of the then Ministry of Works who has kindly supplied the following report on seven of them.

Residual pieces

1. Sherd from the body of a polychrome jug in fine smooth off-white fabric, with external decoration in dark purple/brown (shown black in the drawing) and pale lime green (stippled in the drawing). The sherd comes from the body of a tall fine baluster shaped jug of the type shown by G. C. Dunning¹ to have originated in the Saintonge area of south-western France and dating to the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (Fig. 2.1).

2. Rim from a Westerwald tankard in hard fine grey stoneware with external moulded and incised design below the rim cordon and covered all over in a light grey glaze slightly darker externally. The form has straight sides as suggested by the present piece varying in height with a rounded strap handle; dated generally to the late seventeenth-early eighteenth centuries (Fig. 2.2).

Associated pottery from the pit

3. Two non-conjoining sherds forming a third of the circumference of a shallow dish in fine sandy buff fabric with a pinkish tinge to the surfaces; covered internally with a bright yellow ochre glaze with a clear lead external sheen in places. Locally made white ware fabrics are unknown in Kent,² so it is likely that the present vessel comes from

¹ G. C. Dunning, 'Inventory of Medieval Polychrome Jugs found in England and Scotland', in Cyril Fox and C. A. Raleigh Radford, 'Kidwelly Castle, Carmarthenshire', *Archaeologia*, lxxxiii (1933), 114-18 and 124-34 and for more recent evidence G. C. Dunning, 'A Group of English and Imported Medieval Pottery from Lesnes Abbey, Kent; and the trade in early Hispano-Moresque pottery in England', *Antiq. Journ.*, xli (1961), 4-5.

² D. C. Mynard, 'A Group of Post-Medieval Pottery from Dover Castle', *Post-Med. Arch.*, iii (1969), 40.

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one of the kilns in the extensive post-medieval pottery production centre in north-western Surrey and eastern Hampshire some of the sites of which are being excavated by Mr. F. W. Holling.³ Vessels from this group of kilns are known from Dover,⁴ so it is reasonable to assume that the present piece has a similar origin. The dating is difficult for it does not readily associate itself with any known form on the Surrey kilns and yellow wares are known from the start of the post-Medieval industry in the sixteenth century (Fig. 2.3).

4. Two non-conjoining sherds from the rim of a platter or shallow bowl in a very hard buff sandy fabric with a broad pink margin towards the upper surface which is covered in a dark shiny olive-green glaze with purple iron specks; the underside of the larger piece is fire-blackened. This vessel is not a local product, its hardness and colouring of glaze has not been noticed on the kilns excavated by Mr. Holling, but the products of those excavated suggest that this angular form of rim, as opposed to the rounded clubbed rim, is characteristic of the late sixteenth-early seventeenth century and suggests a date for the present piece (Fig. 2.4).

5. Large fragment from a plate in a fine pinky fabric, with internal decoration of brown, blue and yellow, covered all over in a dull white tin-glaze thick on the underside where light purple splashing is evident. The edges have been affected by the acid soil for the glaze has been leached a light purple; this would appear to be a common factor among tin-glazed earthenwares deposited in acid soils. The origin of the plate is difficult to pinpoint with precision but a factory near Florence in northern Italy is likely, most probably from the Tuscan group of factories.⁵ It should date to the early sixteenth century from art historical evidence although few pieces have been found in securely stratified archaeological contexts. The plate can therefore be regarded as of some antiquity when it was eventually discarded (Fig. 2.5).

6. Projecting lobe from a Saintonge chafing dish, in very smooth off-white fabric, with all-over external shiny green glaze which extends over the upper edges of the lobe and light-grey inner surface due to burning when the dish was in use. The front of the lobe had a moulded face, characteristic of this type of chafing dish, which has obviously either broken or blown off during firing as the glaze has completely covered the area of the scar left by the mask and penetrated the two holes, pierced through the body from the inside to relieve vaporization during firing. More complete examples of the type show that the lobes

³ The evidence is summarized in F. W. Holling, 'Seventeenth-century Pottery from Ash, Surrey', *Post-Med. Arch.*, iii (1969), 18-30.

⁴ Mynard, *op. cit.*, in note 2 above, p. 39, fig. 12, nos. 19-28 and p. 38.

⁵ I am grateful to Mr. John Mallet of the Victoria and Albert Museum and Mr. J. G. Hurst, F.S.A., for their comments on this piece.

and body are alternately glazed green and yellow on the outside, but the sherd is not large enough to indicate this. Saintonge chafing dishes are dated throughout the sixteenth century⁶ the earlier ones having ornate lobes and decorated low drooping handles while later examples are not as complicated in their design having simple cut-outs in the rim top to form suspension lobes. The present example can therefore be dated to the second half and probably towards the end of the sixteenth century (Fig. 2.6).

7. Sherd in fine grey stoneware with internal lighter surface and external light bronze glaze. A horizontal unintelligible legend between raised cordons surrounds the maximum girth of the pot and the lower part of the sherd deploys the top from a circular medallion. The sherd is from a well-known type of jug made in the Frechen factories, with a shape as reconstructed for the present piece, a horizontal legend around the middle of the pot, alternate circular medallion and leaf foliage designs above and below the legend and a large broad, realistic head on the front of the jug, unlike the debased stylized faces of the later bellarmines of which the present jugs were predecessors. The evolution of this form of stoneware jug from the early sixteenth-century Cologne jugs⁷ through the sixteenth century is fairly well established with the present type being characteristic of the second half of the century. Jugs with readable legends and clear-cut faces and medallions belong to the middle of the century while the more debased and poorly executed medallions, narrower, less well defined faces and unintelligible legends can be dated towards the end of the century. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of this later type is the legends which are often cut the wrong way round and the spelling jumbled so that when the mould is applied the result becomes hopelessly confused as in the present case. A date towards the end of the sixteenth century would therefore not be out of place for the present piece (Fig. 2.7).

DATING

The external dating evidence suggested for the individual pieces above is diverse, but as they were all found in the same group, they can be regarded as having been deposited at the same time although it is possible that nos. 6 and 7 could have been in circulation for some time before being discarded; certainly the edges of no. 6 are not clean cut as if freshly broken. The polychrome sherd is obviously an earlier piece while the Westerwald tankard rim no. 2 could have been in the

⁶ The evidence is summarized in J. G. Hurst 'Post-Medieval French Imports and English Copies at Lincoln', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, no. 1 (1966), 54-8.

⁷ The types of Cologne jug and their dating are discussed in J. G. Hurst, 'A Sixteenth-Century Cologne Jug from Newcastle', *AA*⁴, xlvii (1969).

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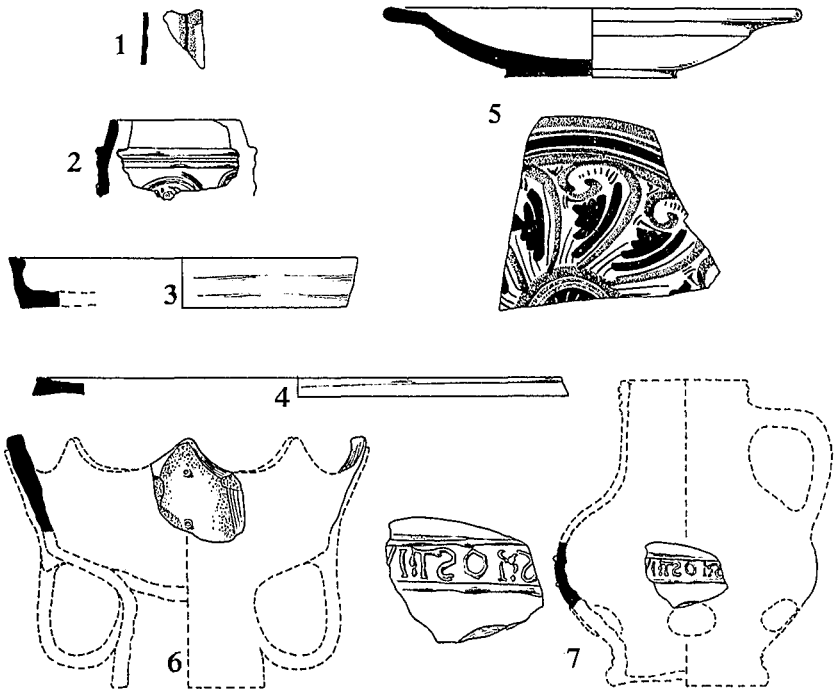


FIG. 2.

top of the pit for it is clearly not contemporary with the rest of the group, which otherwise appears to form a useful collection dating towards the end of the sixteenth century, but would possibly be as late as *c.* 1600.

Pit no. 2 was, without doubt, dug as a rubbish-pit, and it was from here that the principal amount of pottery came. It was about 5 ft. in diameter at the top, reducing to 3 ft. at the bottom, and was about 9 ft. deep. The filling was very fine and powdery and light in colour, similar to soil waste broken down with lime. The acid content of this could have been the cause of the very poor condition of the coins and other metal from this pit. Small finds, other than pottery, included a carpenter's folding rule, a silver tea-spoon, two bone knife-handles, early nineteenth-century clay-pipes and about twenty corroded half-pennies of George II and George III dated between 1775 and 1799. This is the only pit from which any tiles were obtained, these being the usual red type with both round and square peg-holes. The amount of pottery from this pit was astounding, and it is not possible to mention it all. By far the greater amount was common table-ware and consisted of many hundreds of pieces of white porcelain bowls, cups, saucers,

plates and jugs. Much of this was decorated with transfer-printed patterns in the style of the 'Willow pattern', floral designs and rural scenes in imitation Chinese styles. These are late eighteenth-early nineteenth century delft and is probably mainly Lambeth. Glass was represented by a long octagonal bottle in clear glass, measured off into four equal sections, and parts of several short, free-blown, cylindrical wine-bottles in green glass. One piece bore a circular glass seal with EAST TILBURY HALL on it. Square bottles of similar glass were fewer in number. A large amount of kitchen waste such as meat and fowl bones and a few shells were mixed throughout the filling.

Ignoring the delft ware until a detailed examination can be made of it, the most interesting pieces are all of the eighteenth century.

A complete, heavy, two-handled, triple-legged colander in coarse red ware with a brown internal glaze. The holes have been roughly stabbed from outside with a round tool (Fig. 1.5).

A fine, large, straight-sided, reddish-brown teapot with an excellent high glaze. The body covered with combed striations.

A shallow dish of red local ware glazed internally only (Fig. 1.3).

Two red ware flower-pot shaped vessels with wide flat rims. Glazed internally in treacly brown (Fig. 1.6).

Small chamber-pot in local coarse red ware, glazed internally with a poor brown glaze (Fig. 1.8).

A small apothecary's pot in buff ware with a light blue glaze, 'WARREN PERFUMER' in black capitals. An identical pot was later found by Mr. Winmill on a site at Shoreditch. A bottle bearing the lettering, 'WARREN PERFUMER MARYBONN STREET LONDON' is in the collection of the London Museum dated to c. 1790.

Two yellow bowls of mid-eighteenth century Whieldon ware, with mottled brown decoration.

A straight-sided jar in red ware with a grey unglazed exterior and a rolled-over rim. Two lines of stabbing around the edge of the rim and a similar band below the rim.

A small, salt-glazed bellarmine-type bottle with no decoration.

Two large bowls with cream interior glaze.

Two large bowls with very dark brown glaze.

Two chamber pots in a fine white salt-glazed stoneware. Heavily decorated with blue floral pattern and a central rosette on which is an oval medallion, one with G.R. and crown, the other with a crowned bust of George III and G.R. either side of it.

Pit no. 3 was apparently a well which was partly in the site area and partly under Chase Alley and seems to have been used by the tavern next door when it was known as 'The Three Tuns'. According to local directories the name was changed to 'The Chase' about the year 1859. The bottom of the well had not been reached when, at a depth

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of about 14 ft. from ground level, a stop had to be made to the excavating as sufficient material had been removed to satisfy building regulations. The filling mainly consisted of soft earth and builder's rubble. The earliest pottery from the lowest depth reached was of late seventeenth-century date and consisted for the main part of Staffordshire 'combed ware'. Metal work was represented by two silver teaspoons which bore the mint-mark for the year 1830 and a small Catholic medallion also dated 1830. Glass consisted of wine-bottles, medicine- and ink-bottles and fragments of wine glasses. A salt-glazed bellarmine type vessel of about a gallon capacity, the markings of which are missing, and a red ware pipkin with mottled ginger-brown glaze and a solid lug handle can be dated to the early nineteenth century (Fig. 1.2).

The only other vessels from this pit which are of interest are four flat stone-ware flasks, one bearing the inscription, 'J. MOORE. THREE TUNS. GRAVESEND'. Moore was the landlord in the 1840s. Another bore, 'EUROPEAN. MANSION HOUSE STREET'. The other two have no inscriptions.

A great number of clay-pipes came from this pit, many of them by the Gravesend makers Sloper and Bishop, and Pascall of Dartford, all of whom made in the mid to late nineteenth century.⁸

Pit no. 4 was walled at the top and was undoubtedly out of use and partly filled during the period of the cobbler's shop. The pit was excavated to a depth of 40 ft. but only three vessels were found, all of stone-ware. A brown, cylindrical, liquid blacking pot, a small ink-pot with a white glaze, and a brown jug with the inscription, 'LONDON DISTILLERY COMPY. OLD ST. LONDON. E.C.' These must be contemporary with the cobbler's shop for scattered through the filling were a number of old boots and shoes of the Victorian period. Unfortunately, it was not possible to have the pit fully excavated.

Pit no. 5 was well made with a steining of chalk blocks for six or seven feet down. It had been completely filled with clean chalk and was perfectly barren of all other material. The date could not be arrived at due to this lack of finds, and as the well was not fully cleared the total depth was not ascertained. Being in close proximity to the previous pit it is assumed by Mr. Winmill that this was of a similar depth. He also suggests that the chalk filling of this well could have been obtained from the excavation for the shoemaker's basement. Sixteen feet of filling were removed from this well, and it was then sealed over.

The pottery from the surrounding area included a lot of similar wares to those found in the pits but in addition there was an appreciable amount of black coarse wares. These are of the late thirteenth century.

⁸ E. W. Tilley, 'Gravesend: Seventeenth-Eighteenth Century Finds', *Arch. Cant.*, lxxvii (1962), 199.

Two pieces are worthy of note; a small fragment of brownish ware with a clear external glaze, decorated with wide vertical stripes in a cream slip. This is a piece of a late thirteenth-century decorated jug. The other piece is a thirteenth-century skillet handle in grey coarse ware, the underside of which has been stabbed with small holes. This is similar to other examples from Kent, Eynsford, etc. Other fragments of jugs in red and brown wares with mottled green glazes can be assigned to the same period.

CONCLUSIONS

From the evidence it would appear that the site had been in continuous occupation from the thirteenth century with a slight slackening off in the fourteenth/fifteenth centuries. Very extensive occupation began in the seventeenth century and continued without another break until the present day. The basement of the cobbler's shop had destroyed much of the evidence of the early periods but the flint footings in the south-east corner are possibly of this time. The western end of the site had been built on, possibly during the sixteenth century, as there were partly demolished walls through which Pit no. 3 had been dug. This pit contained late-seventeenth century pottery near the bottom, no eighteenth century material, but nineteenth century near the top. This would seem to indicate that the pit was filled with the builder's rubble during the eighteenth century; this settled leaving a depression which was later filled with waste from the 'Three Tuns'. Old cottages existed in Three Tuns Square, which was behind the site, until the 1930s.

The approximate dates of the pits, then, are:

Pit no. 1 c. 1590–c. 1770.

Pit no. 2 c. 1760–c. 1830.

Pit no. 3 c. 1790—and finally filled c. 1850.

Pit no. 4 ? –and filled c. 1860.

Pit no. 5 ? –filled when basement was dug c. 1845.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must express my thanks to Mr. W. Winmill; his co-operation, help in restoration and advice with this report are also very much appreciated. My thanks also go to the site owners, Messrs. Manfield of Northampton, for permission to retain the material found, to Mr. J. Benson for historical data, to Mr. D. Thompson for his help in reconstruction of some of the pottery and to Mr. J. E. L. Caiger for drawings of Fig. 1. Finally, I must thank Mr. Stephen Moorhouse of the Department of the Environment for examining and reporting on the more important pottery and for having done the drawings for Fig. 2.