

INTRODUCTION

The region of interest is centred on the Thames estuary and the lower reaches of the River Medway (fig 1. and fig. 2). Emphasis is placed on northern Kent to the east of the River Cray and to the west of Sittingbourne. The southern limit is marked by a line drawn from Maidstone to the Swale. For reasons that will later become clear, a narrow strip of southern Essex will be considered in passing.

The industries under investigation have been known by various titles to various agencies, including 'North Kent Marshes', 'Upchurch', 'Thameside', 'Hoo Ware' and 'BB2*'. Several synthetic works have covered aspects of the industries or have incorporated them in broader studies. The conventional view of the industries is encapsulated in part III of the Southwark report (1978) and in much of Gillams work on BB2 (Gillam 1970, 1976). Thompson (1982) has drawn together much of the Iron age pottery of the region to provide an ancestry for local native styles. Pollard (1982a and forthcoming) has set out important ideas relating to the production and use of Roman pottery in Kent and carried out an extensive although essentially inward-looking distribution study.

The two industries have not thus far been the focus of a major research programme. I. Noel Hume (1954) made the best of antiquarian accounts of the Upchurch industry and his work was brought up to date by Monaghan (1982b). Pollard also summarised the history of investigations in the region as a whole (1982a, 307). Williams' (1977a) analyses of northern frontier black burnished wares was, by definition, consumer-orientated and of limited value to studying the industries at source. A modest amount of analytical work was performed by Monaghan (1982a): this provided an initial separation of Upchurch and Thamesides pottery. Examining the results of both these 'scientific' projects showed that further work of this nature was clearly out of the question until more basic archaeological research had been carried out.

This work is primarily concerned with defining and describing the industries. Those whose interests lie in the field of economics may therefore be somewhat disappointed. At the time of writing, little could be achieved by attempting to incorporate these industries into regional or national economic models. Too many fundamental questions required answers before any meaningful investigation of that nature could be carried out. Emphasis is therefore placed on constructing a typology, characterising the fabrics and establishing a framework for dating the pottery. Dating is the most difficult problem, as much of the dating of Kentish sites relies on parallels drawn from outside the county (i.e. Gillam 1970) or very old works such as the Richborough volumes (Bushe Fox 1926 etc). The dates proposed in this work therefore contain much scope for refinement. Effort has also been made to examine the industries against their environmental and historic background. A gazetteer of kiln sites is not included as that published by Swan (1984, 387-421) incorporates all but four sites known at the time of writing. All of these are very close to other suspected kilns recorded by Swan.

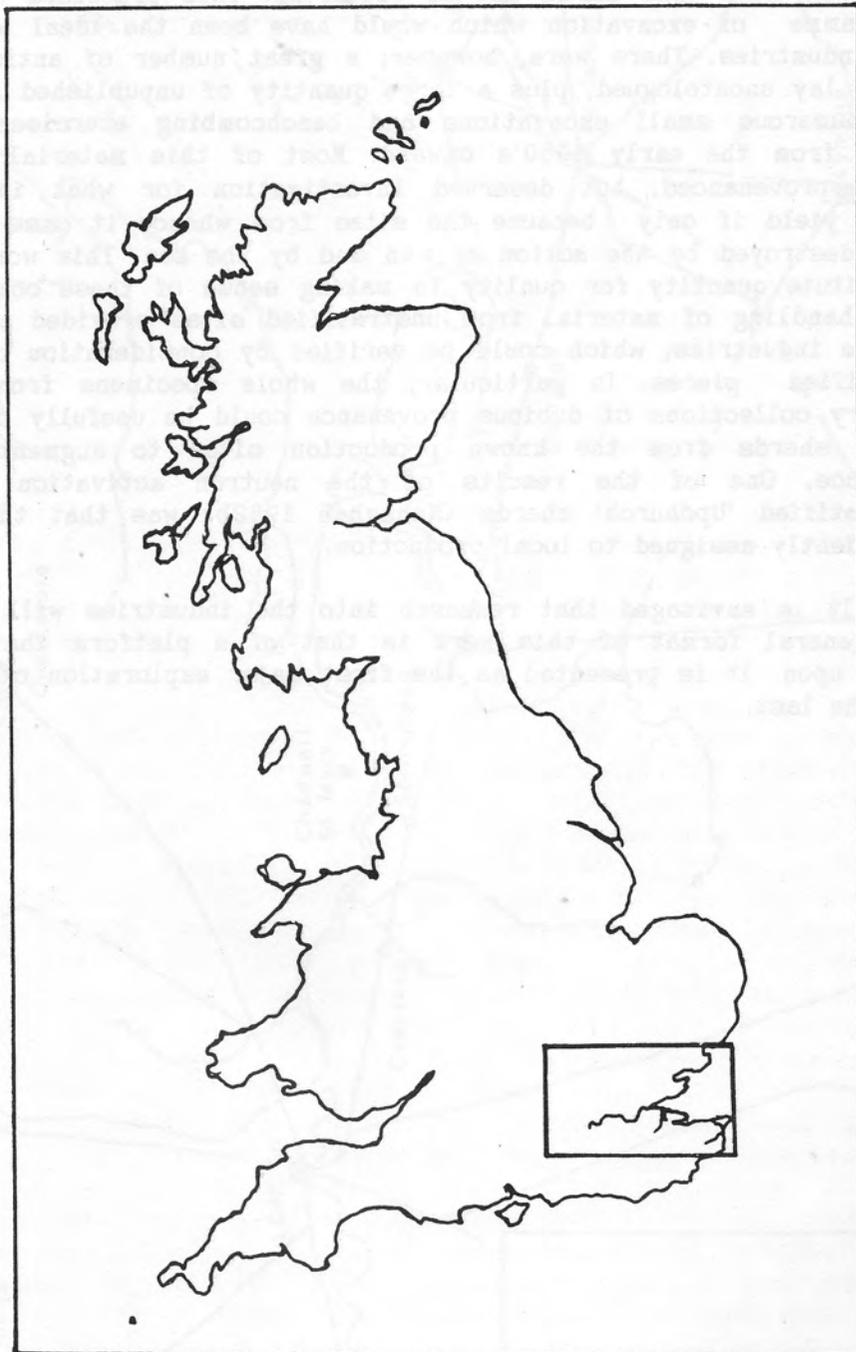


Fig.1

The production sites lie either on marshland, below the water table or below high tide marks in the estuaries. This precluded any ambitious programme of excavation which would have been the ideal way to tackle the industries. There were, however, a great number of antiquarian finds which lay uncatologued, plus a large quantity of unpublished material from the numerous small excavations and beachcombing exercises which took place from the early 1950's onward. Most of this material is stray or badly provenanced, but deserved investigation for what information it could yield if only because the sites from whence it came have largely been destroyed by the action of man and by the sea. This work set out to substitute quantity for quality in making sense of these collections. The bulk handling of material from unstratified sites provided a rough guide to the industries, which could be verified by consideration of the scarce stratified pieces. In particular, the whole specimens from nineteenth century collections of dubious provenance could be usefully compared with small sherds from the known production sites to augment the meagre evidence. One of the results of the neutron activation analysis of unstratified 'Upchurch' sherds (Monaghan 1982b) was that these could be confidently assigned to local production.

It is envisaged that research into the industries will continue, so the general format of this work is that of a platform that others may build upon. It is presented as the first major exploration of the subject, not the last.

