

Saxon Features at Abingdon

By MICHAEL AVERY and DAVID BROWN

This report describes Saxon period pits excavated incidentally during work on the Neolithic Causewayed Camp in 1963. The small group of pottery found in situ as well as pottery found nearby by E. T. Leeds in 1928 are described together with other finds. A photograph taken by Dr. J. K. St. Joseph in 1959 shows what is probably an extension of this site in the fields to the south-east.

THE STRUCTURAL REMAINS*

By MICHAEL AVERY

THIS excavation was undertaken as a salvage project in advance of house building which has now taken place. It was primarily aimed at recovering information about the Neolithic Causewayed Camp and the account of these Neolithic features will be published elsewhere.¹

In addition to the Saxon features which we describe, there are records of earlier Saxon finds from the same area: in 1928 Saxon pottery was collected by E. T. Leeds from gravel pits to the east of our site, and this find is recorded on the 25-inch Ordnance Survey map (Berks Sheet X.3), and in 1905 a skeleton which is possibly Saxon was found near our Area A.² This evidence suggests that we have here the remains, partly destroyed by gravel working, of a Saxon village similar to that at Sutton Courtenay, and the remarkable air photograph (PL. VII, A) of fields to the south-east, taken by Dr. J. K. St. Joseph in 1959,³ holds out the hope that a large part of this village is still available for excavation. It is probable that the dark rectangular crop marks which form a rash across the prehistoric features are caused by the remains of sunken huts as has recently been shown to be the case at Mucking in Essex, though some may, of course, be comparatively recent gravel pits.

The site lies at SU (41)511983, just south of the Radley road and a little over a mile north-east of the centre of the town. The trenches in Area B (plan, FIG. 1) were dug by machinery to search for the ditch of the Neolithic Causewayed

* I am grateful to the Ministry of Public Building and Works, and to the Ashmolean Museum, for financial help. Mr. Derek Keene and Miss Helen Sutermeister supervised part of the work in the area reported here, and to them and many volunteers I offer my thanks. I am grateful to the owner of the land, Mr. Dockar-Drysdale, for permission to dig and for presenting all finds to the Ashmolean Museum, where are also deposited notebooks, field drawings and photographs from the excavation. Mr. D. A. M. Sturdy, Dr. H. W. Catling and Mr. H. J. Case were most helpful during the excavation, and Mr. Case helped me draw some sections.

¹ Previous accounts are E. T. Leeds, *Antiq. J.*, VII (1927); VIII (1928), 461-73; IX (1929), 37; H. J. Case, *Antiq. J.*, XXXVI (1956), 11-30.

² See fig. 1 of E. T. Leeds and D. B. Harden, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Abingdon* (1936); E. T. Leeds, *Antiq. J.*, VIII (1928), 476, and IX (1929), 37.

³ J. K. St. Joseph, *Antiquity*, XXXIX (1965), 60-4.

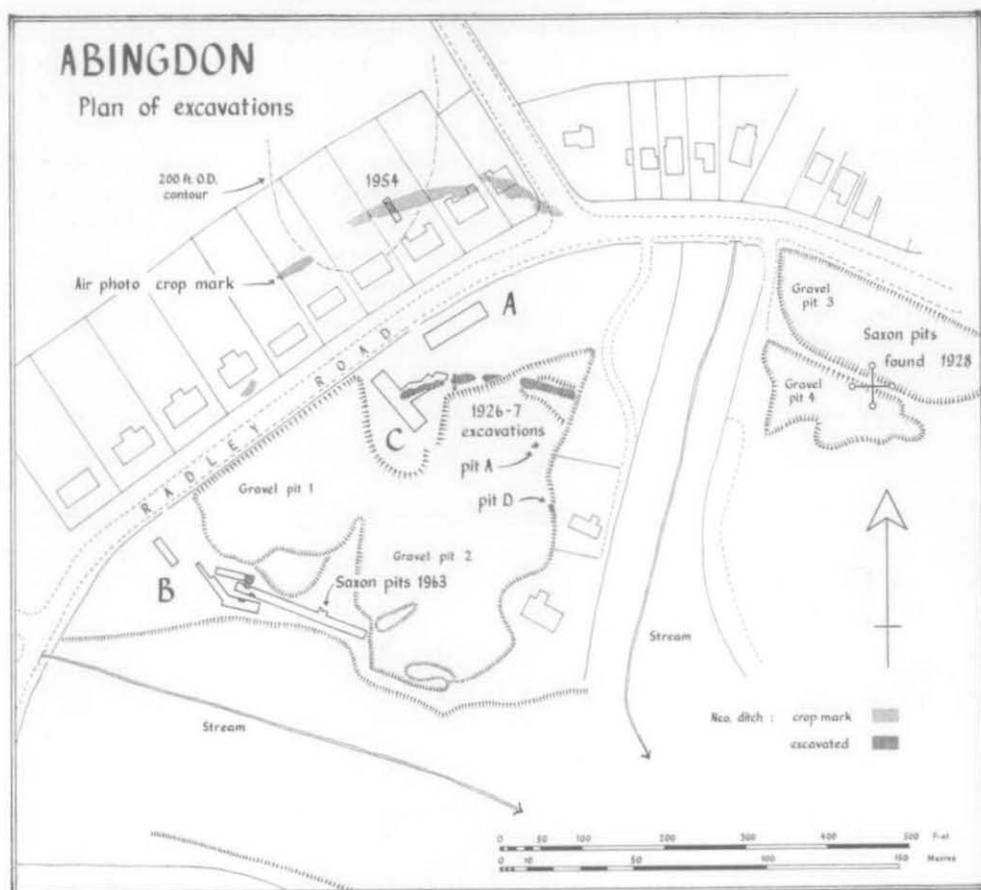


FIG. 1

Abingdon : Plan of excavations of Neolithic causewayed camp and Saxon pits.

Camp. At the western end of these trenches, near Radley Road, the stratigraphy was : turf, 9 in. deep ; gravelly loam, 12 in. deep ; solid gravel bedrock. Some Saxon pottery was found scattered in this area in the gravelly loam. Near the south-west end of the Neolithic ditch the natural gravel bedrock sloped down to the stream bed south-west of the site with a shallower slope than the modern ground surface which drops away steeply along the line marked with hachures on the plan. In the various layers of reddish gravelly loam which had relatively recently been dumped upon the gravel bedrock here to form a build up of up to four feet, there were also scattered Saxon sherds. In this area two shallow gullies which could not be dated by finds or stratigraphy were cut into the bedrock ; they may be either Saxon or Neolithic.

The long trench B₃, 170 feet long by 10 feet wide, was stripped of turf and topsoil down to gravel bedrock by machinery. The machine removed wholesale that part of Saxon pit 1 which lies in trench B₃, and many finds that must

come from this pit 1 were recovered by carefully searching the spoil heap. Small extensions to the trench B₃ were then dug to examine this area more carefully (plan, FIG. 2). These extensions revealed Saxon pit 2, and also showed that much of the area had been severely damaged by small pits which were not visible on the surface of the ground but which are presumably gravel pits of relatively recent date, though earlier than those which are marked on the general plan and were being worked in the 1920s. The filling of these gravel pits was a homogeneous very gravelly brown loam with no layering visible in it. A search was made for postholes in this area. Two probably Saxon postholes were found inside the area of pit 1, and both were filled with the same ashy material as layer 6, at the bottom of the pit. A third posthole with a very gravelly fill and cut by the filling of pit 1 is probably Neolithic.

Whatever the original purpose in digging these two Saxon pits, it is clear from their filling that they were later used as deposits for refuse, consisting

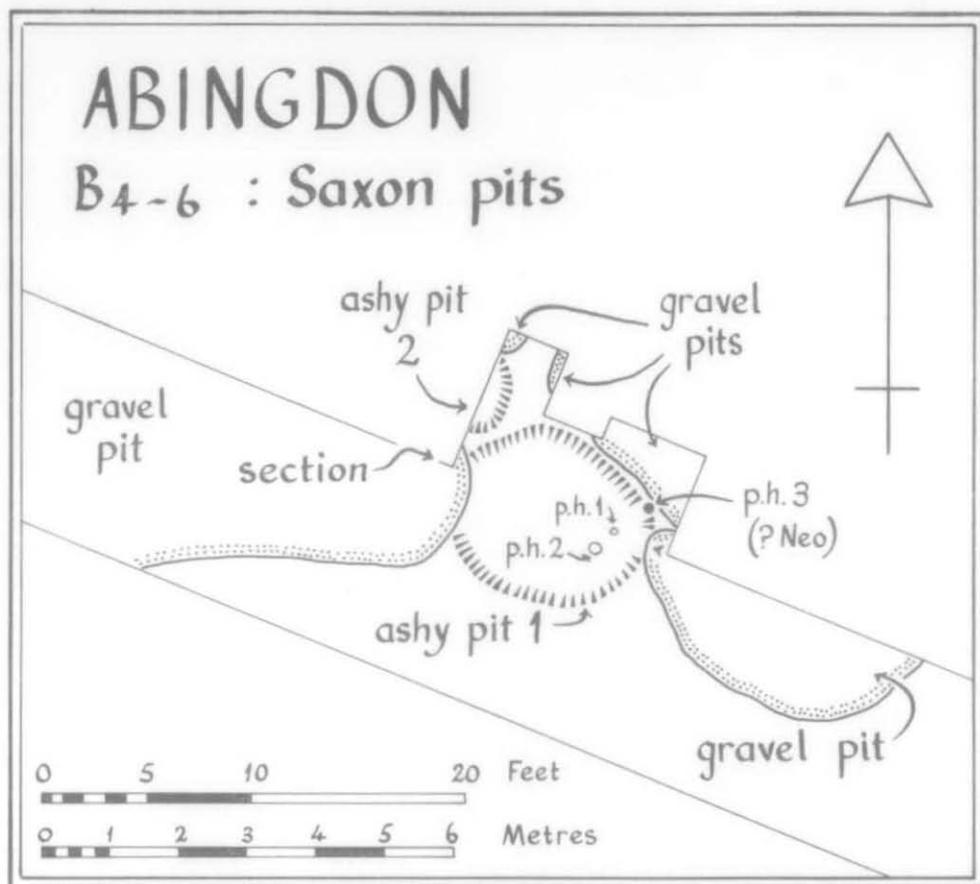


FIG. 2

ABINGDON 1963 : Plan of the ashy Saxon pits found in trench B₃ and B₄₋₆.

apparently at least in part of the burnt remains of a structure, possibly of wattle and daub. Layer 7 of pit 1 appeared on excavation to be fire-reddened clay and to resemble broken-up baked daub, although no solid wattle-marked lumps were noted. Frequent tiny pieces of charcoal were found in both layers 6 and 7 of pit 1. Layer 7 of pit 1 and layer 4 of pit 2 were identical in composition, and presumably come from the same refuse spread simultaneously over both pits. This suggests that the whole of the fillings of both pits (layers 6 and 7 of pit 1, and layers 4, 5 and 6 of pit 2) are of contemporary refuse removed from elsewhere to fill them.

In Area A, in 1963, an unaccompanied crouched skeleton of an adult male was found in a shallow scoop in bedrock. Arguing from the extremely fragile state of the bones, and the mode of burial, this is perhaps more likely to be a Neolithic or Beaker period burial. But, of the two skeletons found in 1905 near Area A, the extended male skeleton could be of Saxon date while the crouched female skeleton found 'in a small square hole' is more likely to be contemporary with the 1963 skeleton.

THE POTTERY, AND OTHER FINDS

By DAVID BROWN

All sherds from the stratified deposits are mentioned; elsewhere I have made a selection, though all decorated sherds are included. The descriptions emphasize the presence or absence of the grass-tempering technique (abbreviated g.t.). Individual sherds are too dissimilar to permit grouping by fabrics save for occasional small groups of 3 or 4 sherds. Marginal figures refer to the drawings on Figs. 5-9; letters to pl. VII, B.

ANGLO SAXON PIT 1 (Section, Fig. 3)

Layer 7, soft bright red sandy material

- One fragment of handmade pottery, buff surfaces, contains some shell tempering, probably refired; not Saxon, perhaps Roman or Iron Age.

Layer 6, gravelly light grey loam of ashy texture.

- 5 Roman bronze coin, pierced for stringing on a necklace (Gratian, *Gloria Novi Saeculi* type, mint of Arles, *R.I.C.*, ix, 66, no. 15); from layer 6 overlying layer 7.
- 2 Two-edged bone comb; the flat plates on both sides are decorated with incised lines and ring and dot ornament; kidney-shaped cut-outs in the endplates; partly from layer 6, partly from the bulldozer's spoil heap.
- 8 Shoulder and rim of a large jar; thick, dark, grass-tempered fabric; layer 6 below layer 7.
- F Decorated fragment with cruciform stamp and incised line; hard, black fabric, apparently not grass-tempered.
- Six weathered grass-tempered sherds and one not grass-tempered, with dark burnished surfaces; layer 6 beneath layer 7.
- 9 Concave shoulder and rim of carinated jar; brown surfaces, smoothed inside and out; a little grass-tempered; layer 6 overlying layer 7.
- 10 Side wall and rim of small hemispherical bowl; dark brown, well smoothed, without g.t.; layer 6 overlying layer 7.

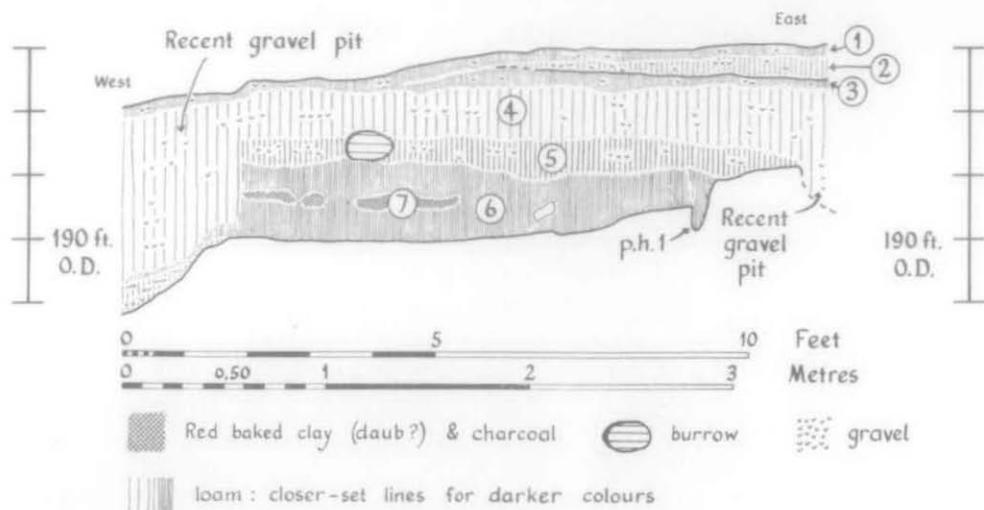


FIG. 3
Section of Saxon pit 1.

Details of layers are:

1. Dark brown gravelly humus.
2. Very gravelly red-brown loam: dumped from nearby gravel workings.
3. Dark brown gravelly humus: buried turf
4. Very gravelly red-brown loam.
5. Dark brown gravelly loam; possibly a buried turf.
6. Gravelly light grey loam of ashy texture.
7. Soft bright red sandy material, containing some patches of charcoal; perhaps partly-baked daub?

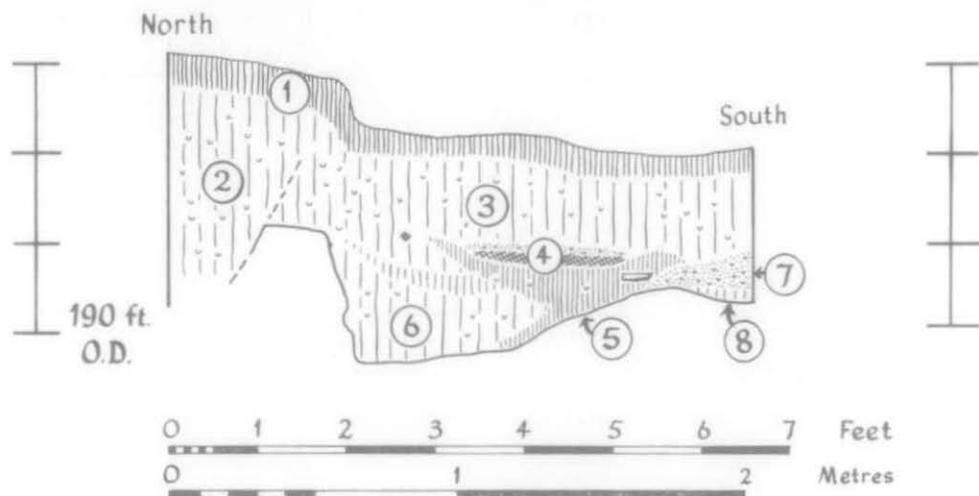


FIG. 4
Section of Saxon pit 2.

Details of layers are:

1. Dark brown gravelly humus.
2. Reddish-brown gravelly loam—recent gravel pit back-filled.
3. Dark brown gravelly loam.
4. Red loamy clay, overlain by sandy gravel band (as Saxon pit 1, layer 7).
5. Blackish loam with a little gravel (as Saxon pit 1, layer 6).
6. Reddish-brown gravelly loam.
7. Yellowish gravelly sand.
8. Brown loam.

- 11 Fragments of base and wall of a jar with upstanding rim, the top edge pared flat ; orange brown outside, dark brown inside, well smoothed surfaces ; densely g.t. throughout ; from layer 6 overlying layer 7, as well as fragments from layer 5.
- Four small sherds, only one g.t. ; from 6 above 7.
- 12 Thin rim fragment ; reddish brown smoothed surface ; not apparently g.t. ; layer 6.
- 13 Base of small bowl ; dark grey, densely g.t. throughout ; layer 6.
- 14, C Fragments from the shoulder of a small vase decorated with a band of diagonal grooves above a pattern of stamps and undulating lines ; worn, dark brown fabric containing tiny white, ? limestone, particles ; laminar fracture, but probably not due to g.t. ; grooves caked with soot ; the pot may have had a rounded base, or a pedestal ; 3 fragments, one each from layer 6, layer 5 and the bulldozer's spoil heap.
- 15 Numerous non-joining fragments of a single vessel, a jar of some sort ; mauve-brown core with dark brown to black smoothed surfaces ; g.t., black speckling in core ; a white lime deposit covers much of the inner surface suggesting that the pot had been used as a kettle ; fragments from layer 6 in all positions, layer 5 and the bulldozer's spoil heap.
- Of six other fragments from layer 6, one is g.t.

Layer 5, dark brown gravelly loam

- Parts of pots 11, 14, 15 described above.
- 16 Fragment of a small pedestal base, not apparently g.t.
- 17 Fragment of the side of a small bowl ; thin, hard, dark brown fabric ; the fold-over of the clay in the making shows clearly in the fracture.
- 18 Sherd with shallow burnished grooves ; smoothed surfaces, soot coated black inside, black outside ; laminar fracture with traces of g.t. ; angle of sherd uncertain.
- Of the remaining nineteen sherds, nine are definitely g.t., and six are definitely not.

Layers 1-4, red-brown gravelly loam, gravelly humus

- 19 Fragment in thin, hard black fabric, well smoothed surfaces ; incised triangle, possibly part of a frieze of triangles.
- H Scrap with cruciform stamps ; hard, dark, porous fabric, possibly g.t.
- G Curving wall sherd with incised decoration ; smoothed, light brown, small quartz grits, not g.t.
- Dark brown sherd with quartz sand in fabric, not g.t. ; the edge of a string hole at one edge shows that this is part of a pot with pierced lugs.
- There remain thirty-two sherds from these layers, all are small and abraded and it is not easy to decide which are g.t. and which are not—at least, both techniques are used. One sherd is burnished with three parallel lines.

ANGLO SAXON PIT 2 (Section, FIG. 4)

Very little of this pit was excavated, and there is only one scrap of pottery to accompany the section : a dark brown sherd with quartz sand and traces of g.t.

FINDS FROM THE BULLDOZER'S SPOIL HEAP

Some of this material joins that from Anglo-Saxon pit 1, especially layer 6, as already mentioned ; and all these finds are probably derived from that layer.

- 6 Shale spindle whorl.
- 1 Double pointed bone thread picker.

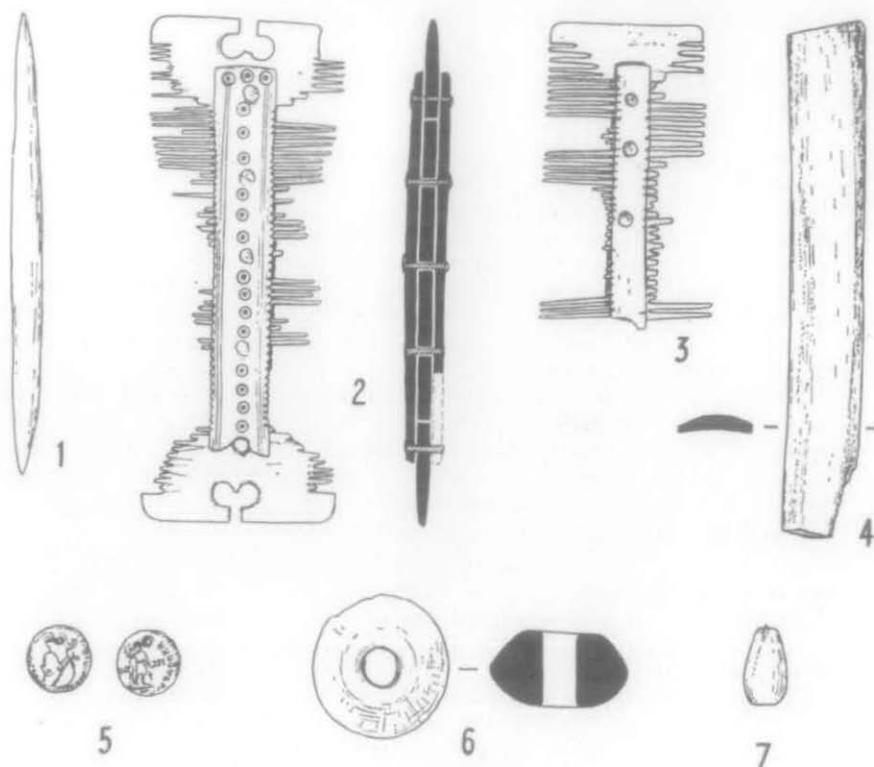


FIG. 5

Small finds : bone, bronze, shale, amethyst. Scale $\frac{1}{2}$

- 20 Bowl with out-turned rim, low footstand and three pierced lugs around the belly ; dark brown smoothed surfaces being either mauve or red just below the surface ; sparsely g.t.
- 21 Neck and rim of a vase ; dark brown fabric containing a little quartz sand ; inside smoothed, outside burnished to a high gloss—a finish better than any other piece from the site.
- 22 Neck and rim of a jar ; hard, rough black fabric, smooth outside ; not g.t.
- 23 Hard, dark well smoothed surfaces ; not g.t.
- 24 As 23.
- 25 Thin, smoothed, friable material ; g.t.
- 26 Hard, smooth but uneven surfaces, angular rim ; not g.t.
- 27 As 26.
- 28 Smoothed, friable material ; g.t.
- 29 Upright rim ; well smoothed, not g.t.
- 30 Hard, smooth but uneven ; as 26, 27.
- 31 Lumpy fabric with quartz sand ; flattened and smoothed rim edge ; not g.t.
- 32 As 31.
- 33 Two fragments ; probably a lid ; badly smoothed, stick scraping marks on surface.

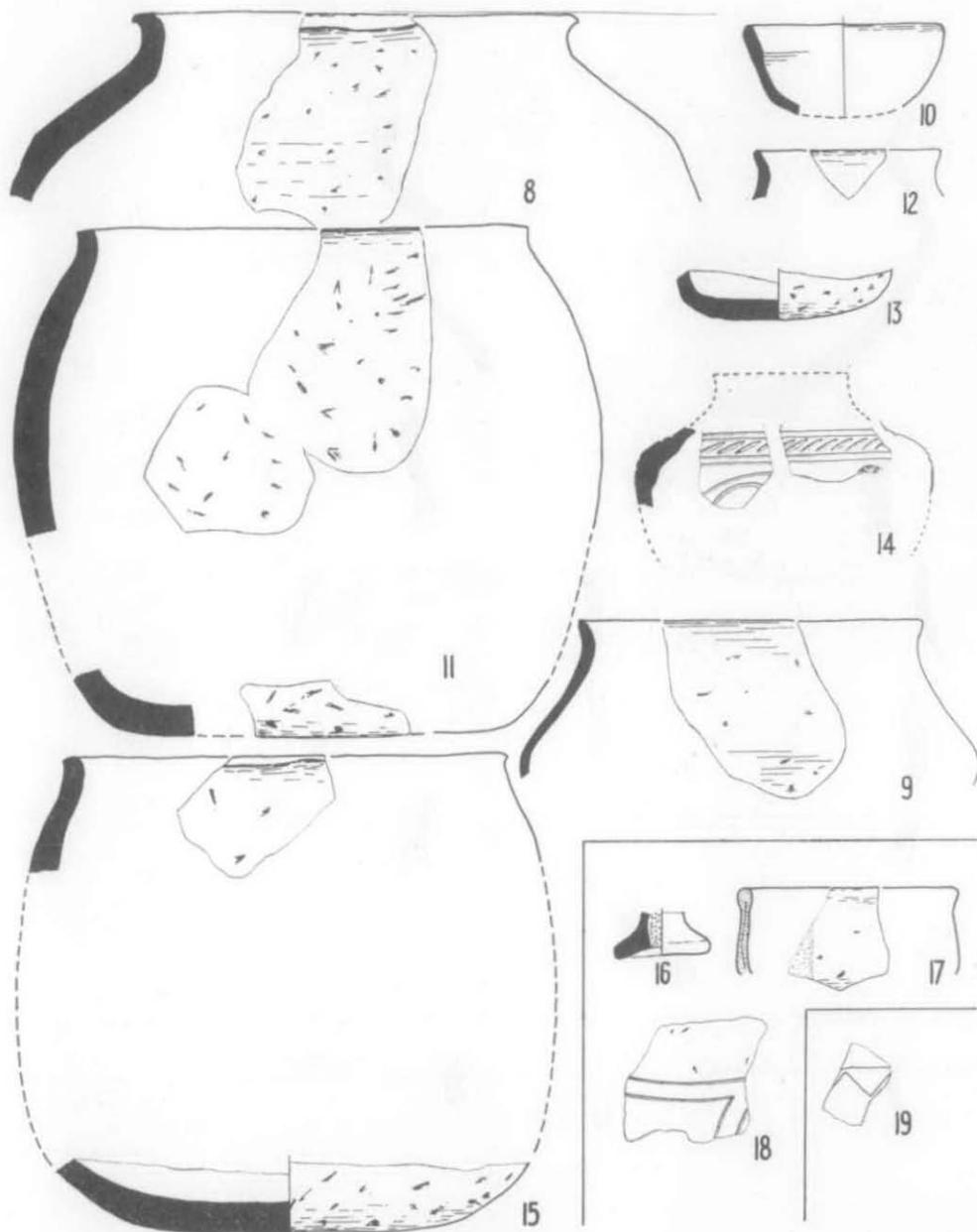


FIG 6.
Scale $\frac{1}{4}$

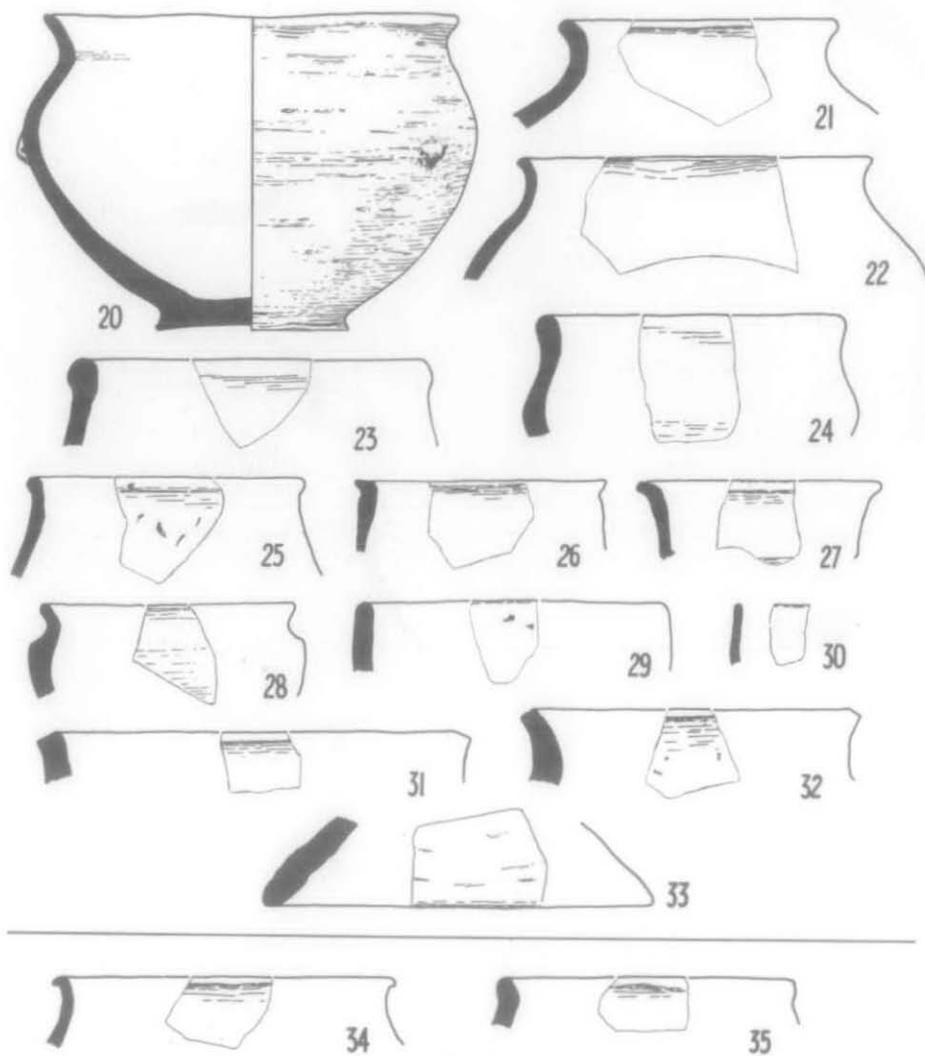


FIG. 7
Scale $\frac{1}{2}$

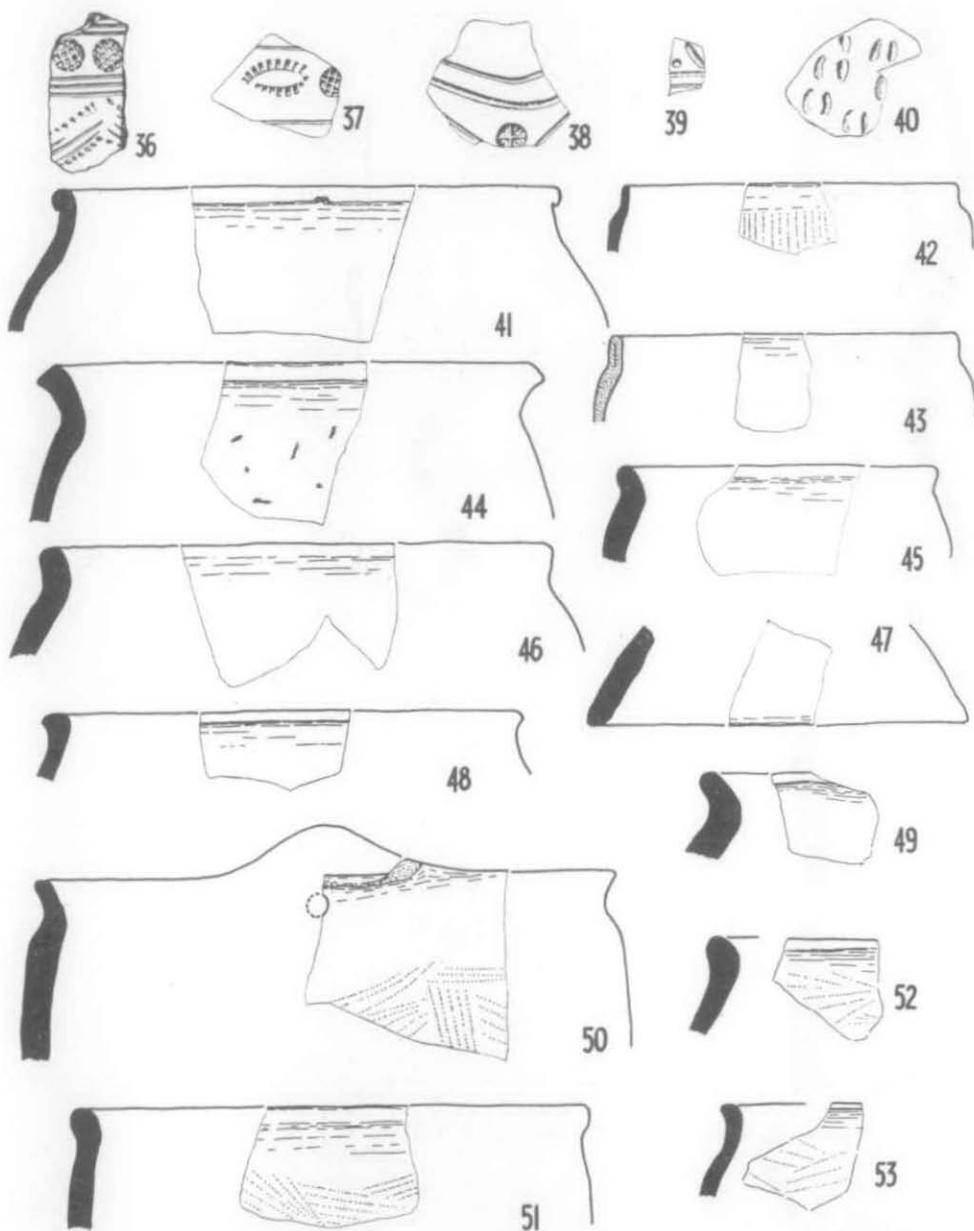


FIG. 8
Scale $\frac{1}{2}$

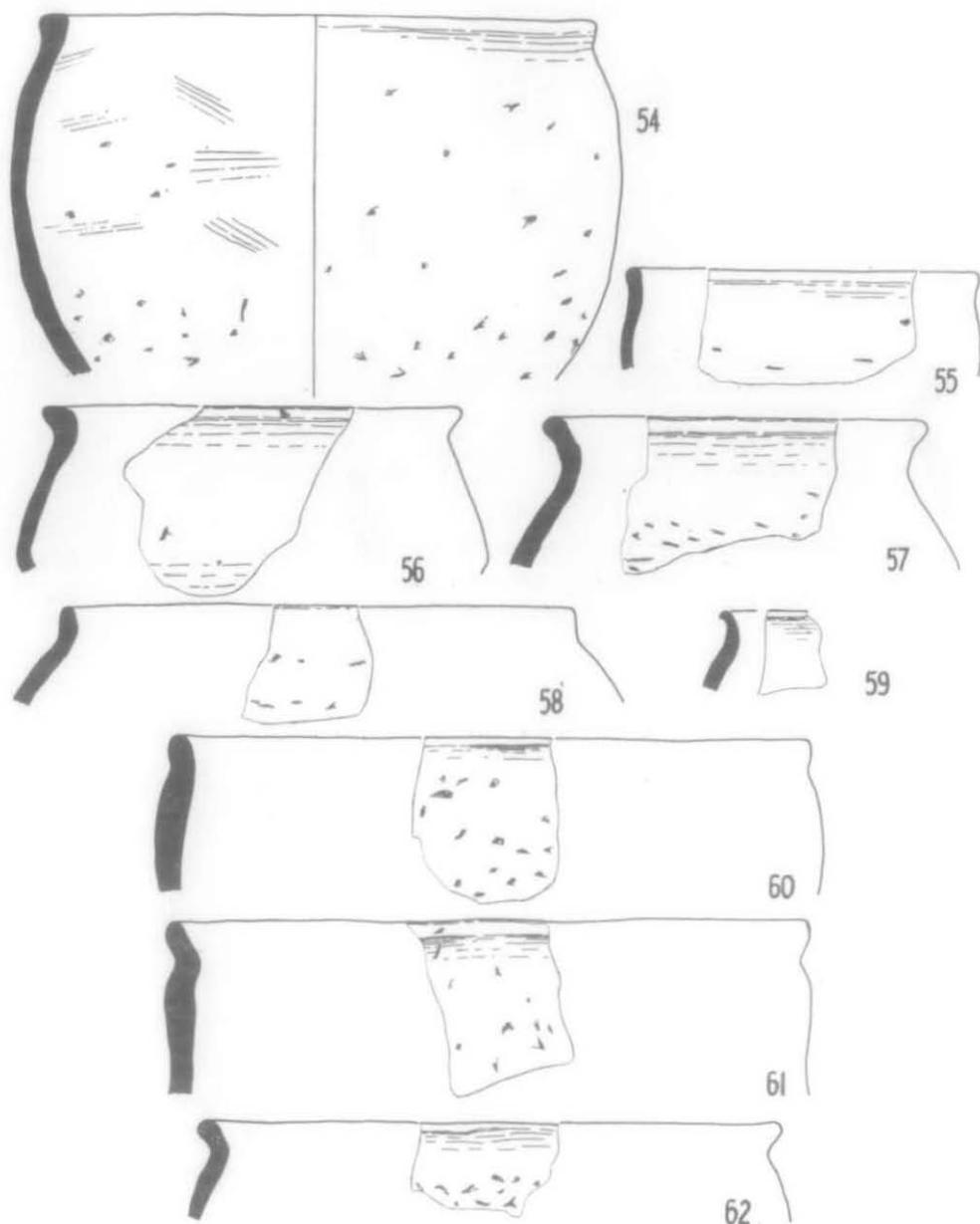


FIG. 9
Scale $\frac{1}{2}$

OTHER FINDS FROM 1963

Outside the Saxon pits, the only other feature below the topsoil to produce Saxon pottery was a buried turf line above the Neolithic ditch (layer 5 of section B4, not illustrated).

- 34 Weathered jar rim ; dark brown, badly smoothed ; not g.t.
- 35 Smoothed but uneven rim ; weathered ; probably not g.t.
- Of twenty other sherds from this deposit, six are definitely g.t., and nine are definitely not.

Elsewhere on the site Saxon sherds came from the topsoil in the following areas:

- Area A* : A few abraded sherds.
- Area B2* : A large quantity of very small fragments ; three with burnished grooves ; one with a pierced suspension hole ; one with rusticated decoration ; none of these decorated sherds is g.t. though as a whole the group is about equally divided.
- E Two sherds with the same maltese cross stamp.
- Area B7* : A few abraded sherds, predominantly g.t.
- Area B8* : One abraded sherd.
- 7 An amethyst pear-drop bead with remains of an iron wire loop sticking out of the top ; the bottom is cracked away at one side, probably because of the corroding iron. The iron must be the remains of a suspension hook and shows that the bead was being worn, as intended, as a pendant rather than strung on a necklace.
- Area C2* : One sherd.

FINDS FROM 1928

Pottery collected by E. T. Leeds and others from gravel pits *c.* 1928 ; these pits are marked as gravel pits 3 and 4 on the east side of Fig. 1. From the fragments now preserved in the Ashmolean Museum, this selection includes all decorated sherds, and the majority of the pottery with rim sherds as well as the two bone objects preserved with the material.

- 3 Part of a two-edged-bone comb ; the midribs have a plano-convex section.
- 4 Piece of worked bone, cut flat on one side and with chamfered edges on the other. This piece seems to be the roughcut for the midrib of a comb.
- 36A : Decorated fragment with stamps, grooves and dots ; hard, dark brown fabric, smoothed, not g.t.
- 37I Decorated fragment with stamp, and oval pattern made perhaps with a cogged roulette ; smooth surface, hard, with some g.t.
- 38D Decorated fragment with stamp and grooves ; smooth surfaced black ware with some g.t.
- 39B Dark granular fragment with burnished black surface and part of a band of chevron and dot ornaments.
- 40 Fragments with pinched-up rusticated decoration ; black with sandy brown surfaces ; not g.t.
- 41 Shoulder and rim of jar, the edge turned over ; hard, smooth but uneven, not g.t.
- 42 Bowl rim ; hard brown fabric, well smoothed with vertical burnishing below rim ; not g.t.
- 43 Bowl rim ; fold-over of clay visible in section ; reddish brown, quartz sand, no g.t.

Three sherds in similar fabric

- 44 Jar rim ; well smoothed outside, flattened and smoothed rim ; quartz sand in fabric, not g.t.
- 45 Rough uneven surface, fabric as 44.

- 46 Badly smoothed surface, fabric as 44.
 47 Fragment of a lid ; dark, rough fabric, not g.t.
 48 Hard dark fabric with quartz sand.
 49 Very hard rim of large jar ; grey fabric, rough in break ; well smoothed dark surface, quartz grits but no g.t.

Four sherds in a distinct sandy fabric

- 50 Bowl rim which originally had an applied ear pierced for suspension—save that the hole was made through the edge of the pot rather than through the added ear ; fine grained sandy fabric ; grey core, darker surfaces ; occasional inclusions of lumps of flint on stone ; smoothing strokes clearly visible on surface.
 51 As 50.
 52 As 50.
 53 As 50, but core orange rather than grey.

Three sherds in a distinct grass-tempered fabric

- 54 Side wall of a bowl with thickened rim ; hard dark fabric, thin, densely g.t. giving sponge-like section ; well-smoothed, but pock marked surfaces.
 55 As 54.
 56 Jar with thickened rim, as 54.
 57 Dark, smoothed fabric ; some quartz sand, g.t.
 58 Similar to 57.
 59 Fragment with thin out-turned rim, burnt red ; probably g.t.
 60 Thick, heavily g.t. ; rough, unsmoothed surfaces.
 61 Thick, hard, heavily g.t. ; smooth but uneven surfaces.
 62 Hard, smoothed, heavily g.t. ; buff surfaces, otherwise similar to 54.

ANIMAL REMAINS

All the animal bones from the site, from both Neolithic and Saxon contexts, have been examined by C. L. Cram, and his report will be published in full with the Neolithic features.

The main points are that most of the bones are from cattle ; pig bones are the next most numerous with sheep or goat bones a little fewer. There are no bones of wild animals. Most bones are broken. The ages of the animals at death range from six months to over three and a half years.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDS

By DAVID BROWN

The features do not have the characteristic post holes, nor do they seem to be large or regular enough to justify being called sunken huts ; though no doubt there are sunken huts nearby, as indicated by the air photograph. This spread to the south-east, over the modern parish boundary into Radley, shows that the present finds come from only a small part of an extensive site. Obviously they are not necessarily representative of the site as a whole.

The pottery from pit 1 is a typical Sutton Courtenay set of material.⁴ Both

⁴ Three reports, *Archaeologia* 73, 147-92 ; 76, 59-80 ; 92, 79-93.

types of large jar, 8 with the neck and out-turned rim, and 11 and 15 with near vertical sides have parallels there; so too, do the small cups 10, 13, 17, 30, the pedestal 16, and the smaller jars 9, 21, 22. The only complete vessel, 20 with its foot and pierced lugs is best matched by a vessel from Laverstock and Ford, Wilts, though the same techniques are widespread; 5 at Abingdon, grave B 51 contained a small cup with pierced lugs and a footring as well as blue glass beads and a pair of button brooches dating the group to the early 6th century.⁶ The fragments of vessel 14 are tantalizing. They look as though they come from a pedestal jar like the one from the cemetery at Harwell; 7 both have a combination of stamps and diagonally grooved band, though in this case there is no evidence of bosses as on the Harwell piece. A late 5th or early 6th century date seems appropriate. The group as a whole could be of any date in the 6th century, or later.

The finds from the rest of the site do not differ radically from those from pit 1. A variety of stamped pieces must be associated with the 6th century, particularly 36 and 37. Both have round stamps with cross hatching like Abingdon C 8 and C 81, and 36 repeats the pendant triangle scheme of decoration of Abingdon C 47, C 73 and C 79, all typical 6th century pots. Rusticated ware, like 40, occurs on several local sites though there is not yet any firm dating for it. Pierced lugs, like 50, are common at Sutton Courtenay and Shakenoak,⁸ and there was a piece of one in the fill of grave B 25 at Abingdon, probably a 6th century grave. The earliest sherd from the whole site is probably the fragment 39 with chevron and dot ornament. The piece is too small to show which is the correct way up, and is illustrated one way up in the drawing and the other way up in the photograph. The decoration and fine, well smoothed fabric are characteristically 5th century. At the other end of the scale, the latest datable object is the amethyst bead 7. Beads of this sort occur in graves in the Upper Thames valley at Longcot, Berks., and at Stanlake and Yelford, Oxon.⁹ All three are secondary Christian cemeteries indicating a date after A.D. 635. The pierced coin and shale spindle whorl can be matched by several examples from local pagan cemeteries, and the combs from both cemeteries and settlements. The date range for the group, and for this corner of the site seems to be late 5th to 7th century.

I have not been able to detect any signs of coil building in the sections of the sherds, though in two cases the clay can be seen to be doubled over at the rim. The fabrics are so varied that any attempt at a general classification is bound to fail and, in so small a sample, nothing can be deduced from the small groups of similar sherds. In describing the pottery I have concentrated on recording the presence or absence of grass-tempering. This technique involves the deliberate inclusion of chopped grass in the moist clay before making the pot. Some people did it, others didn't, and for this reason alone it is of some significance. We do

⁵ *Wilts Arch. Mag.*, LXIII (1968), 103-5; J. N. L. Myres, *Anglo-Saxon Pottery* (1969), fig. 12.

⁶ As note 2.

⁷ *Oxoniensia*, XXI (1956), 22-34.

⁸ C. Brodrigg *et al.*, *Excavations at Shakenoak*, III (1971).

⁹ All in Ashmolean Museum; Yelford published in *Archaeologia* 38, pl. III.

not really know why the technique was used. It is usually said that it made the clay easier to work, though it would seem to have been harder to fire satisfactorily and less suitable for holding liquids than the ordinary pottery. These are questions that can only be solved by experiment.

Another line of enquiry is the difference between the pots which are grass-tempered and those which are not. At first sight it appears as though the fine decorated pottery was not grass-tempered, but that the ordinary cooking pots—or some of them—were. This is an old explanation which seems to have been confirmed by the recent finds from 5th century deposits at Portchester, Hants,¹⁰ and Mucking, Essex,¹¹ where vessels which are diagnostically early and Saxon are not grass-tempered while some of the plain cooking pots are. This distinction holds good for the 5th century but, if it is valid, why doesn't it hold good for the 6th century as well? At Portchester the typical, decorated 6th century stamped pots are grass-tempered as often as not, and the same can be said for the fragments discussed above. In the cemetery at Abingdon the heavily stamped urn C 81, the unstamped (and unpublished) urn C 60 with incised pendant triangles, and the small cup from grave B 24 are all decorated vessels made with grass-tempered pottery; so, too, are the stamped urn from Brighthampton 29,¹² the large bossed cremation pot from Wallingford F and the small cup from Wallingford grave 11.¹³ These are more than just a few exceptions, and it seems probable that, during the 6th century, grass-tempering was not reserved just for the cooking pots, but was being used for all sorts of pots as and when convenient. This is certainly the impression given by the sherds described above, and it agrees with Professor Jope's notes on the pottery from the kiln at Cassington.¹⁴

Locally, the pots which can be dated earliest in the 5th century,¹⁵ the *stehende bogen* urns Abingdon C 64, C 67, C 74, C 76, the pedestal pot C 22, and the faceted cup from grave B 111 are all made without grass-tempering. This is to be expected, for these are all fine, decorated pots; there is no plain pottery to go with them. But the pottery from the hut site at nearby Dorchester includes very little decorated pottery,¹⁶ and there is no grass-tempered pottery among it; at least, almost none, for Professor Frere specifically notes and illustrates the only grass-tempered sherd from the site. Some of this Dorchester pottery is 5th century, and there is no reason why it should not all be. How is the absence of grass-tempering to be explained?

If it had occurred further north it would not have been noteworthy, but Dorchester is right in the middle of a whole group of sites producing grass-tempered pottery. The technique occurs all up and down the Thames valley, and, so it seems, sporadically over England south of the Thames. Further north it is unusual, or absent. The few cremation pots which I have examined from

¹⁰ B. Cunliffe, *Antiq. Journ.*, I (1970), 67-85.

¹¹ M. U. Jones, *Berichten R.O.B.*, XIX (1969), 145-56.

¹² *Archaeologia* 38, 97, fig. 5.

¹³ J. N. L. Myres, *op. cit.*, figs. 23, 39.

¹⁴ E. M. Jope, *Med. Arch.*, VI (1962), 1-14.

¹⁵ J. N. L. Myres, *Med. Arch.*, XII (1968), 35-41.

¹⁶ S. S. Frere, *Arch. Journ.*, CIX (1962), 147-9.

central and northern England show no sign of it, and it is rare on settlement sites ; at Upton, Northants.,¹⁷ there was none ; at Maxey¹⁸ it was ' notably the exception ' ; at West Stow, Suffolk,¹⁹ it amounts to no more than 2% of the total pottery. The technique seems to divide the country more or less on the line between the Anglian and Saxon culture zones.

The fact that there are large areas of England in which the technique does not occur at all shows that grass-tempering was not an established part of Anglo-Saxon pottery technology, but was a technique which was learnt after their arrival in England. It does not, so far as I am aware, occur at all on the continent. This allows the pottery at Dorchester to be explained quite simply as pre-dating the introduction of the technique in this area. The interesting question which remains is who invented the technique, and who taught it to the Saxons?

P. J. Fowler has drawn attention to sherds of grass-tempered pottery at a number of sites in the south-west : Ogbourne St. George, Downton and Westbury, Wilts., Glastonbury and Cadbury Congresbury, Somerset, Frocester and Barnsley, Glos.,²⁰ and there is a piece at Gloucester itself.²¹ These pieces are sufficiently far west to avoid being labelled Saxon, and although they are without precise dates, they occur in sub-Roman deposits following on from Roman layers or are found in association with imported pottery indicating a 5th century date for at least some of them. Notably these grass-tempered wares occur alone without the fine decorated wares which are so typically Saxon.

The obvious deduction from this is that the grass-tempered technique is sub-Roman. Presumably it was invented somewhere in southern England, and being found satisfactory, was widely used to produce hand-made domestic vessels following the failure in the supply of wheel-made ones. In the south-west, outside Saxon areas, it appears by itself, and is recognizable ; elsewhere it is invariably mixed with Saxon pottery. Throughout the 5th century, in the areas of overlap, the wares remained separate, and only a proportion of the plainer vessels were grass-tempered, but by the 6th century there had been an exchange and fusion of techniques so that many of the decorated Saxon vessels were by then being grass-tempered. The date at which this fusion took place no doubt varied from place to place ; the evidence from the cemetery and sites around Abingdon suggests that in this area it happens early in the 6th century.

¹⁷ *Antiq. Journ.*, II (1969), 202-21.

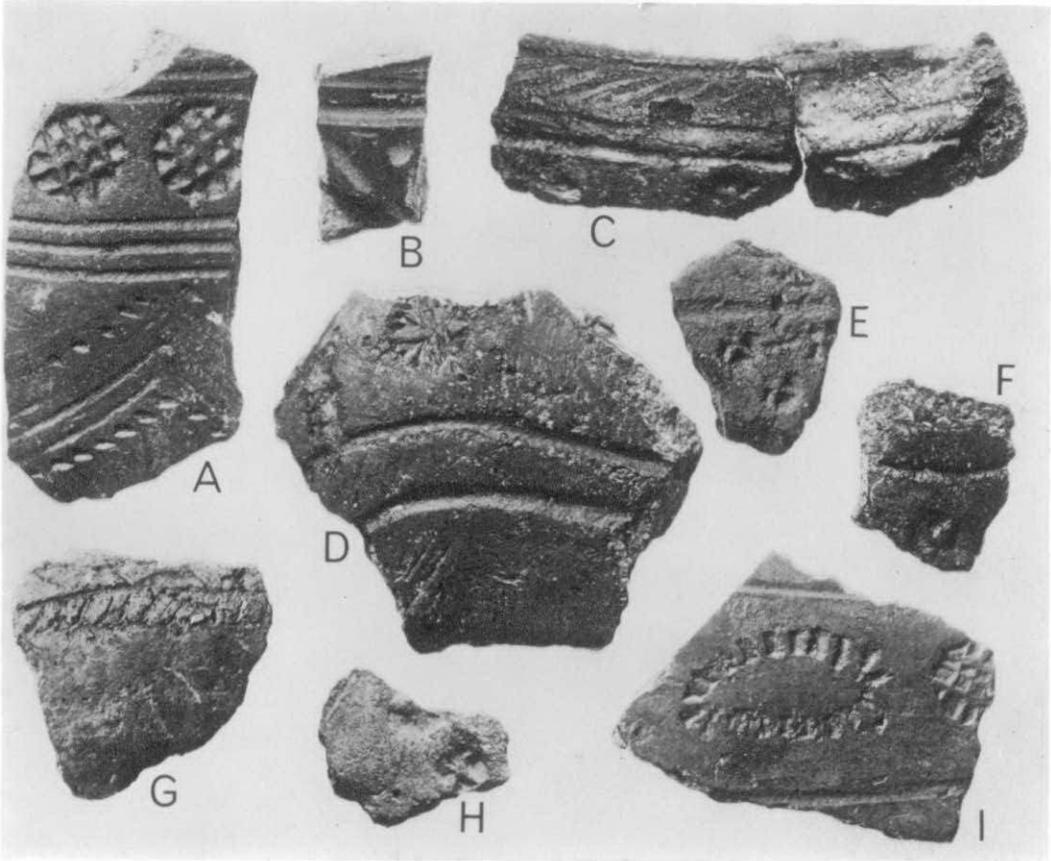
¹⁸ P. Addyman, *Med. Arch.*, VIII (1964), 20-73.

¹⁹ S. E. West, *Med. Arch.*, XIII (1969), 1-20.

²⁰ P. J. Fowler, *Trans. Bristol & Glos. Arch. Soc.*, LXXXIX (1971), 50-52.

²¹ In Gloucester City Museum.

PLATE VII



Decorated sherds, scale 1/1.

Ph: Ashmolean Museum