

INTERIM REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS AT HEDGERLEY, 1935

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The excavation of the Romano-British Pottery-kiln site near Wapsey's Wood, Hedgerley, discovered in 1934 by Mr. C. E. Vulliamy, has now been concluded, and it is hoped to publish a full report in a future part of the *Records*. Meanwhile the main results of the work may be briefly indicated.

In the time available for excavation—consisting of short spells during the summer of 1935—it was only possible to explore a selected area. The selection proved to be a fortunate one; the basements of two kilns and their respective stoking-pits, together with traces of at least one other kiln and an oven, were found within the small area chosen for excavation. The two main kilns (nos. 1 and 2) were of the oval, up-draught type, unusually small, but with relatively long fire-holes. They had been constructed in steep-sided pits dug in the natural gravel; their walls were of clay. The longer axes of the two kilns were almost parallel, and in each case the fire-hole was at the eastern end.

On their inside the kiln-walls had been vitrified through direct contact with the fire. This blue-black zone was succeeded outwards by clay burnt bright red. Where the walls were exceptionally thick, the red zone passed outwards into yellow unburnt clay. The kilns showed clear indications of having been reconstructed and re-lined from time to time. The walls of kiln no. 1 showed three successive vitrified linings; kiln no. 2 had been re-lined at least once.

The height to which the walls of the kilns originally stood above ground-level is a matter for conjecture, but it is fairly certain that they were roofed with domes built of alternating layers of clay and turf; these would have been partly demolished after each firing. In the initial stages of firing, vent-holes would have been

left in the dome to create an upward draught, but in the production of dark-grey wares it is thought probable that the kiln was muffled before the pottery was drawn. Slabs of the clay packing, used in the construction of the kiln-domes, were found in quantity amongst the debris filling the stoking-pits. These clay plates show the impressions of the turf or grass lacing.

Each kiln was connected with a large irregularly shaped stoking-pit which had shelving sides, and varied from one to four feet in depth. The stoking-pits narrowed towards the fire-holes, and their floors sloped down in that direction. The basement-floors of the kilns on the other hand sloped up from the fire-hole. This arrangement was probably conducive to a good draught, and would thus have tended to eliminate "baffling" of the gases.

Neither kiln showed any clear indication of having had a permanent raised floor such as is usual in kilns of this type. Squarish and obconical blocks of vitrified clay were however found in the fire-chambers, and it may be that these supported temporary floors on which the pottery was stacked.

Kiln no. 2 had been built against and partly on top of the debris of an earlier kiln, or oven, which had been demolished. The plan of this earlier structure was indeterminate, but it appears to have connected with the stoking-pit which served kiln no 1. At the back of the same stoking-pit, but on the other side, a definite oven was discovered. This had been built in a circular pit, $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet in diameter, and appears to have been constructed on the principle of the "bucket-grate." A number of fire-bars was found in association with this oven. Its precise purpose is uncertain.

Potsherds in prodigious quantity, including many wasters, occurred in the filling of the stoking-pits. Several almost complete pots were found in the stoke-hole of kiln no. 1, and in the debris at the back of kiln no. 2. The products of the Hedgerley kilns were mainly kitchen wares—the chief forms being variously sized jars, including roll-rim and 'poppy head' types,

and flanged bowls of the usual 'pie-dish' variety. Several fabrics were produced; a fine, hard, dark-grey ware and a coarser, deep buff-coloured ware, predominate. Many of the pots are ornamented with incised or burnished lines; "wave-crest" and lattice ornaments are specially common.

The majority of the sherds no doubt represent rejected pots. It is therefore not surprising to find that much of the material is either overbaked or underbaked. Sherds belonging to the former category are distinguished by their blue-grey colour, and by their hardness and metallic ring. The under-baked variety has undergone partial reversion to clay through the action of damp and aided perhaps by the acid character of the soil.

While some of the pottery types appear to be new and to represent purely local fashions of potting, most of the types are well-known and approximately datable. The pottery has yet to be studied in detail, so that the precise dating of the individual kilns must wait for the full report, but a general review of the material suggests that the industry arose at the end of the 1st century A.D. and continued until sometime in the latter half of the second century.

A few stray sherds of imported Samian ware turned up in the course of the excavations. These were kindly examined for us by Dr. Davies Pryce, who says that they are all second century. The only more closely datable fragment is a portion of a bowl of the form 18/31, which is referable to the period 130-150 A.D.

Brushwood collected from adjacent woods no doubt served as fuel for the Hedgerley kilns. Fragments of charcoal from the floors of the stoking-pits were submitted to Mr. C. Maby, who reports the presence of the following woods:—Oak, Beech, Hazel and Poplar. The presence of Beech is particularly noteworthy.

Detailed mention of all the kind help afforded by many people in the course of the excavations, would be out of place in an interim report; but mention must be made here of the generosity of Mr. Richmond

Watson, the owner of the site, for affording every facility for excavation, and for generous financial help towards the expenses; also to our member, Mr. R. H. Trench, whose contribution towards the excavation fund has enabled much of the pottery to be restored. Full acknowledgments will be made later.