

DISCOVERY OF A ROMANO-BRITISH POTTERY KILN SITE NEAR FULMER

A Romano-British Pottery Kiln has been located in the parish of Fulmer, almost exactly $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles due south-east of the kiln-site at Wapsey's Wood, Hedgerley, described in *Records XIII*, pp. 252-280. The site is just below the crest of the hill on the South-south-west edge of Duke's Wood and overlooks Fulmer and the Alderbourne Valley. It is quite near a new house named "Duke's Kiln" which itself preserves the name of a brick kiln established by the Duke of Portland when rebuilding the mansion and park wall at Bulstrode about a century or more ago. The continuity of the tradition of good, workable clay in this area is thus interestingly borne out.

The ground, which had been under the plough a very great many years ago, is now being worked as allotments, leased by Mr. J. G. Hetherington. Sherds of pottery and burnt material began to turn up at very shallow depth, 6 inches to 1 foot, on the piece of ground being worked by Mr. A. Cock, who very kindly at once informed me. As it was clearly impracticable to embark on a proper excavation at the present time, the ground was dug a little more deeply in one or two areas to determine the nature of the site, and elsewhere it was dug as lightly as possible so as not to disturb the underlying material. A vast quantity of pottery has already come from these superficial operations—more than enough to indicate the nature of the site. An investigation of the field below the present finds, now under the plough, revealed a number of sherds, much rolled, indicating a thin spread probably from the source above, now disclosed.

It is clear that the site is the same in almost every way as that at Hedgerley. Only a most careful analysis of the pottery types can determine positively which, of the two is the earlier, if, indeed, they are not contemporary. The sherds exhibit the same technique

and so many of the same forms that there can be very little difference in date. (The Hedgerley kilns were in operation from circa 120 to 170 A.D., according to Mr. Cottrill's statement on the Hedgerley wares). It would be tempting to suggest that the Fulmer site was the first, being lower down the valley, and that as the suitable clay became exhausted, or the markets in the district saturated, the potters penetrated further into the Chiltern area up the valley to Hedgerley. This may well be so, as many of the types appear coarser than some at Hedgerley and are more limited in range. An almost complete strainer of shallow, everted rim type has emerged, and many of the large jars and pots (such as Nos. 1 and 2 in the Hedgerley Report) are present. No precise parallel to the "pie-dish" that was the most frequent and characteristic product of the Hedgerley kilns has so far appeared at Fulmer; but a fairly shallow vessel with a flat, moulded rim seems connected with it. Ornament is sparing, and is confined to the incised wave-crest and trellis type, and to burnished lines, sometimes evenly spaced in a cordon, sometimes diagonally grouped in threes or in trellis. White slip appears on four or five specimens. There is perhaps a trace of roughcast-ware on only two examples, and at present there appear to be no mortaria, though some of the moulded rims (always from quite small vessels) may be derived types. Only one beaker is identifiable, and one rim-fragment apparently from a cup of similar form to No. 13 in the Hedgerley report, a Samian form imitation of circa 80-120 A.D. The base of a small pot has a cross roughly painted or burnished upon it; and Dr. Oakley points out that this was a charm to prevent milk in the vessel from going sour. A very high proportion of wasters is present, both overfired (hard, metallic grey) and underfired (almost reverted to clay). Much of the ware is very sandy with large particles of flint grit. Clay packing with grass marks appears again, as well as evidence of kiln debris in the shape of chunks of vitrified clay. There is not the same appearance of the very large stoking-pits filled with

ash and debris as at Hedgerley, but a narrow chamber seemed to run South-east from where the first finds were made. A second source of pottery, perhaps another kiln or filled up rubbish pit occurs a few yards South of the first area.

Dr. K. P. Oakley has seen the site, and confirms that it is in the clay of the Reading Beds, which here appears just below the Glacial Gravel spread of the upper part of Duke's Wood. The Hedgerley site was actually in the gravel, with outliers of the Reading Beds a short distance away. Grey wares, sandy-buff, red, and black on red, all wheel-made, are present, as well as some very coarse, heavy wares which have more the appearance of being hand made. Mr. J. G. Hetherington, the owner of the site, has very kindly surveyed it and placed it on a tracing of the 25 inch Ordnance Map: and he and Mr. Cock have most willingly placed all the material at my disposal. It is therefore hoped to return to the site and excavate it properly after the war, when information as to the structure of the kilns may be forthcoming.

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