

Pottery of 'London Ware' Type from the Nene Valley

by Robert Perrin

Many of the distribution maps in Dr W. Rodwell's recent preliminary study (1978) of the various wares which have been termed, often erroneously, 'London Ware' show few examples from the Nene Valley. Examples have in fact occurred on most of the sites so far excavated, including Orton Hall Farm, Monument 97, Castor, Water Newton, Werrington (David's Lane) and Billing Brook. Moreover, Ashton, Chesterton and Normangate Field have produced quite large amounts, often in well dated archaeological deposits.

The Nene Valley vessels have a wide variety of fabric, form and decoration. The most common forms are imitations of samian forms 30, 31 and 37, but there are also other types of bowl and dish, together with one or two jar forms, and so far one narrow-mouthed jar (fig. 5A-E). The more usual fabric is hard, well-made, and only slightly sandy. The surfaces are usually smoothed or burnished. The fabric core varies in colour from red-brown through buff and grey to dark grey, with one or two having a brown and grey 'sandwich' core. The surfaces are usually a different colour, generally grey, greyish-brown or dark grey to black. One or two may have been slip-coated. Other fabrics are progressively more sandy with one or two examples being so coarse that the decoration is easily lost. These also range from brown to grey in colour. Decoration is even more varied. Pieces can have incised lines and grooves, compass-drawn circles or half-circles, and be rouletted, stabbed, dimpled or stamped. Designs incorporating one or more of these features are common.

It is not certain if any of the wares were locally produced, as no kilns making them have yet been located. There is a vessel in Peterborough Museum, marked 'Water Newton' which could well be a 'second' and is unlikely to have travelled far from its point of manufacture. The wide range of fabric, form and decoration is also perhaps indicative of some local production.

One or two of the motifs can be paralleled outside the Nene Valley, perhaps suggesting trade links, travelling potters, or areas of influence for local potters. The strongest link appears to be with West Stow, Wattisfield and the North Essex centres. Similar designs also occur on vessels from different sites

along the Nene Valley, such as Brixworth, Ashton, Kettering, Orton Hall Farm, Chesterton, Grandford, and Normangate Field.

It seems probable that the main period for production and use of these wares in the Nene Valley was in the first half of the second century. Some of the Normangate Field examples come from pit groups dated by samian ware to c. A.D. 130-150. Others from Chesterton and Monument 97 were also in layers of the second quarter of the second century. Pieces from Castor were associated with Trajanic-Hadrianic samian ware and mortaria. The Grandford sherd comes from a Period 2 layer dating to before c. A.D. 140. The site at Ashton should provide conclusive evidence for the date range; for it was occupied from the conquest period onwards.

A point of interest is that in the first half of the third century the potter INDIXIVIXUS, and perhaps others, working at Park Farm, Stanground (Dannell (1973)) produced stamped wares. It is uncertain exactly how this production relates to that of the earlier 'London Ware' type under discussion, which seems to have ceased around the middle of the second century. This and other aspects of the wares, such as the distribution, full range of fabrics and motifs, and possible links with other areas, are topics for future research.

Bibliography

- Dannell (1973) G. B. Dannell, 'The Potter Indixivixus' in *Current Research in Romano-British Coarse Pottery*, ed. A. P. Detsicas, 1973, 139-142.
- Rodwell (1978) W. Rodwell, 'Stamp-decorated pottery of the early Roman period in Eastern England' in *Early Fine Wares in Roman Britain*, ed. P. Arthur, G. Marsh, 1978, 225-292.

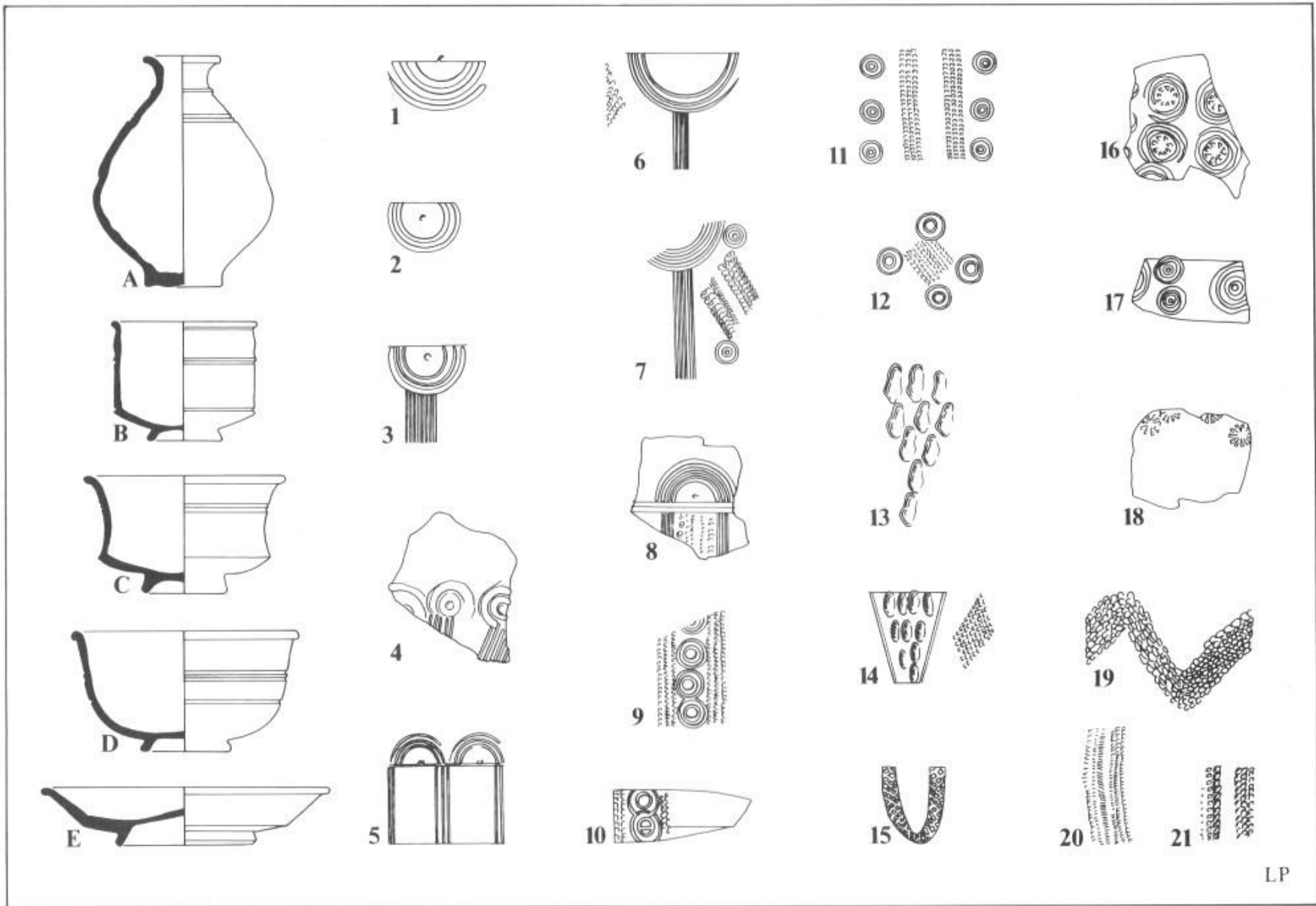


Fig 5 Decoration on some 'London Ware' in the Nene Valley