

A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY POTTERY AT POTTER ROW, GREAT MISSENDEN, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY MUSEUM
ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP

Surface finds demonstrate the existence of a pottery at Potter Row, Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire in the first half of the seventeenth century. Its range of products is illustrated, the most distinctive being a group of stamped wares. The finds represent an unexpectedly late stage of pottery manufacture since the place name is recorded as early as AD 1311.

Introduction

Although the relevance of the place name has been previously noted (Renn, 1964), no ceramic finds were recorded from the site until August, 1975, when Mrs. J. Taylor and Mrs. D. Waterton deliberately sought evidence for production in the area. Their attention was drawn to a front garden (Fig. 1) which produced the pottery illustrated here. The pottery found was clearly produced in the immediate vicinity since it included wasters as well as kiln furniture and pieces of fired clay. The late date of the pottery was a surprise as the name *Le Pottererewe* is recorded in AD 1311 (E.P.N.S., 1925). Furthermore a *Peter Pottarius* appears in the Missenden Abbey cartulary at a slightly earlier date, in AD 1234–52 (B.R.S., 1938), and although there is no direct link between this name and the place name, it is obviously a reasonable deduction.

Much of the area in the immediate vicinity of the find lies beneath gardens and permanent pasture, however, further fieldwork in the areas by Mrs. M. Hall has succeeded in locating some evidence for the preceding mediaeval industry and it is intended to publish this separately after further work on both the site and material. However the limited nature of the evidence will scarcely allow a case to be made for any kind of real continuity between the two periods. No documentary reference to the post-mediaeval phase of the industry has yet been found.

This report is the combined work of many members of the County Museum Archaeological Group in conjunction with the signatory below. Those involved in the discovery have already been acknowledged, but particular thanks are due also to Mr. and Mrs. S. Cauvain who drew the pottery and Mrs. B. Hurman who was much involved in processing the material. Mr. R. Cowell, an in-service trainee, kindly drew the maps and also worked on the finds.

Michael Farley

The Types of Pottery Produced

The principal forms represented are pipkins, small bowls with bifid rims, plates/dishes/bowls (a group it was often not possible to separate from rims alone) bowls with rolled rims, flat rim bowls, and jars. There was a single example of a bleeding bowl

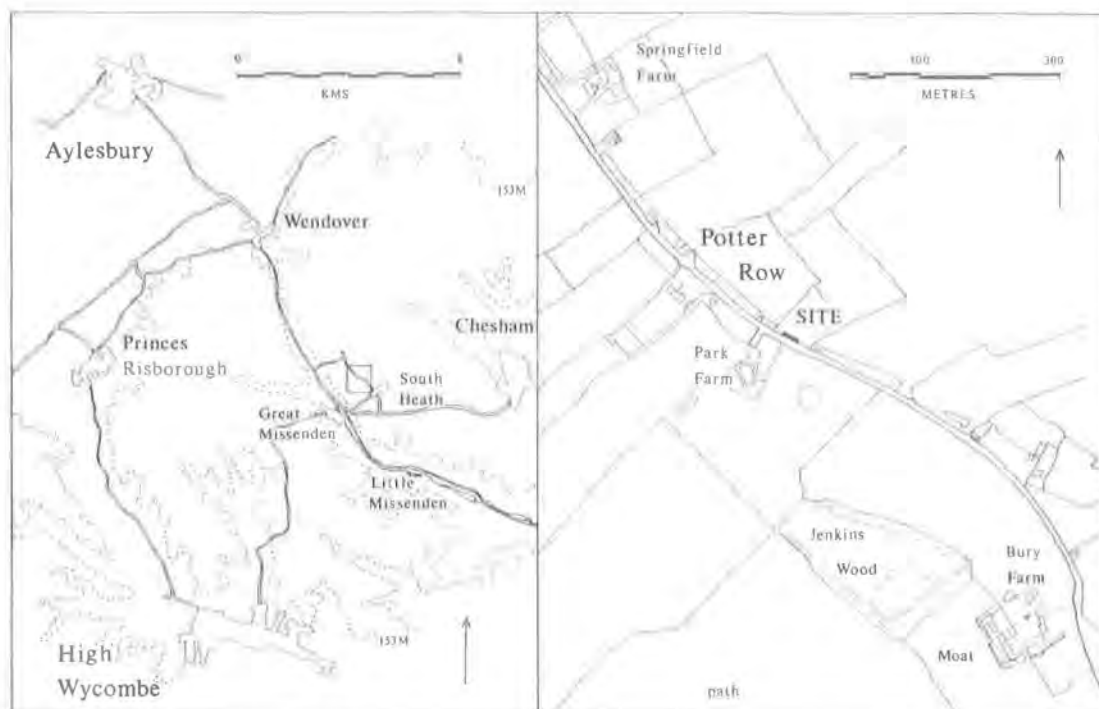


Fig. 1 Location of Potter Row site.

and two fragments of chafing dish. Not illustrated are a further thirteen small bowl rims, a single jug spout and three handles – probably from jugs, also two straight pulled handles, perhaps from skillets.

The most distinctive feature of the assemblage are the stamped wares (Fig. 3). This style of decoration at present seems to be unique to Potter Row. Four stamp types can be identified which have been christened respectively the beetle, rosette, stippled crescent, and paired crescent; and parts of further stamps are visible but not complete enough to classify.

Pottery Fabric

The fabric of the Potter Row material is homogeneous, being normally of a smooth even texture, with very slight sandiness. The colour is often off-white but ranges through light red (2.5 YR 6/6) to reddish-yellow (5 YR 7/6). The sherds are normally quite hard, evenly oxidised and show no core. Rarely, small red flecks are visible in the fabric. Dr. D. F. Williams, of the University of Southampton, kindly examined a prepared thin section from a pipkin and found the matrix to be 'anisotropic containing numerous subangular quartz grains, average size 0.10 – 0.30 mm.'. The glaze colour is mainly greenish, a few pieces being classic 'Tudor green', but honey coloured glazes are also present particularly on the pipkins.

The source for the light firing clay utilised by the potters is not obvious. The drift map shows Potter Row on clay with flints; the more recent soil survey (sheet 238, 1961) maps the soil as being of the Batcombe Series, described as a 'plateau drift of loamy clay with flint and pebbles,' not an obvious source of light clay. However, it is unlikely that potters at this period strayed far from their clay source, and so it is probable that small deposits of suitable clay do exist locally.

Kiln Material

There was little direct evidence of the nature of the kiln or kilns themselves, but a few pieces of roughly made glazed brick from the site suggest that brick formed a substantial part of the structure as in the Brill post-mediaeval kilns. Several fragments of ring stilt (Fig. 4, 22 and 23) which are used for supporting smaller glazed wares during firing, were also found, and a piece of partially glazed peg-hole tile which was probably used as an internal spacer.

Dating and Discussion

There is no doubt that pottery manufacture in Buckinghamshire in the post-mediaeval period was much more extensive than has been previously realised. The considerable industry at Brill is well attested by finds, backed by a range of documentary sources (Farley, 1979), and some of the Chiltern potteries were noted in discussion of that industry. Since the latter study, the slightly later pottery from the Emmanuel Church site at Chesham, which includes wasters, has been prepared for publication, and further work on wills and deeds, particularly by Mr. J. Chenevix Trench, has confirmed the Coleshill industry to have been well established in the eighteenth century. Potters are now known to have worked in the eighteenth century also at Hedgerley and Hedgerley Dean and in the seventeenth century at West Wycombe. There is nothing to suggest at present that these Chiltern potters supplied anything but a fairly local market. They were of course dependent on locally occurring clays and small timber, and transport of their wares must always have been time-consuming. Increasingly during the eighteenth century, they had to compete with more attractive tablewares from outside, and must have found themselves restricted more and more to the heavier and less sophisticated products which it was profitable to sell on a local basis.

At present only a broad date range can be given to the Potter Row products. All of the forms have a fairly long life, generally commencing in the Tudor period and continuing into the early eighteenth century. Moreover, it is not certain that the finds necessarily belong to one phase of activity – they could represent the accumulated debris of a generation or so of potters whose kilns are as yet undiscovered. In general terms, however, the group does seem to be internally consistent and it will be argued below that a date in the first half of the seventeenth century seems to fit the assemblage best. It is unfortunate that no contemporary reference to the potters themselves has yet been traced. Failing this kind of evidence, however, it is to be hoped that one day their particularly distinctive stamped wares may be recognised in a datable context on an excavation.

One general pointer to a date for the pottery is the clay itself. It is predominantly light in colour – light red rather than pure white, but somewhat removed from the brickier fabrics often associated with later seventeenth and eighteenth century pro-

ducts. The predominantly greeny glaze also reflects a widespread Tudor tradition which becomes less pronounced as the seventeenth century progresses. This general impression has been given substance by Holling (1971), in his study of different phases of the Surrey/Hampshire industry. The lack of slip decoration, which becomes fairly common in the mid – late seventeenth century, may also be significant.

A few types enable the date range to be narrowed. The rounded knob (Fig. 4, 21), which is from a chafing dish – a vessel used to contain burning charcoal during a meal on which to keep food warm – is particularly distinctive. Metal chafing dishes, of which pottery examples are the poor relation, have been classified and broadly dated by Lewis (1973). The Potter Row type belongs to his class E which was certainly in use in 1628 and probably throughout the first few decades of the seventeenth century.

The pipkins with external lid seating and hollow handles, have a family resemblance to those from Ash, Surrey (Holling, 1969, Fig. 5), where there is documentary evidence for potters in the seventeenth century, particularly the first half; and also to those from a potters' dump at Cove, Hants., for which a date in the second quarter of the seventeenth century is argued (Haslam, 1975). The latter site also has three examples of stamped ware, although the stamps used are very simple. The use of stamps at Potter Row is most unusual and may reflect the growing interest during the seventeenth century in enhancing plain wares, which, through the use of decorative slipwares, eventually became widespread in the later seventeenth century. The Potter Row stamps are quite sophisticated. Simple slipware motifs are conveniently illustrated by Cooper (1968, particularly pp. 15–26).

Pottery Catalogue

Pipkins (Fig. 2):

Including those illustrated the total number of pipkin fragments identified were: rims 29, feet 19, handles 5, lids 3, knobs 1.

1. Dull green glaze int., also in lid seating. Fabric light red.
2. Green glaze int. and down to lid seating. Light red ext. and white core.
3. Dull green glaze int. and also in lid seating. Light red fabric.
4. Honey glaze int., also in lid seating. Light red ext. and white core.
5. Brownish-green glaze int. and down to lid seating. Light red ext., white-grey core. Glazed on fracture.
6. Brownish-green glaze int., traces of glaze in lid seating. Light red ext., white core, 12 cm. diam.
7. Honey glaze int., traces of glaze in lid seating. Light red ext., white core, 12 cm. diam.
8. Badly decayed glaze, int. only. Light red ext., red core, 12 cm. diam.
9. Light brown glaze int. and down to lid seating. Light red ext. and core, 14 cm. diam.
10. Honey glaze int., also in lid seating. White fabric with sparse red flecks, 14 cm. diam.
11. Green glaze int. and brown ext. down to lid seating. White fabric, 16 cm. diam.
12. Honey glaze int. and green ext. down to lid seating. Grey-white core, sparse red fleck, 18 cm. diam.
13. Honey glaze int. and also in lid seating. White core, 18 cm. diam.
14. Foot applied and pulled. Green glaze int. of vessel. Light red core.
15. Foot applied and pulled. Olive green glaze int. of vessel. Light red, grey core. Glazed on fracture.
16. Lid. Honey glazed int. and thinly ext. White fabric.
17. Lid. Honey glazed int. and thinly ext. White fabric.
18. Lid knob. Brown glazed ext. but eroded. Fabric light red to white.
19. Handle. Unglazed. Hollow, thrown. White fabric.
20. Handle. Splash of green glaze. Hollow, thrown. White fabric.
21. Handle. Unglazed. Hollow, thrown. Light red fabric.

Small Bowls (Fig. 3, 1-6):

The illustrated examples, with one exception, have bifid rims. They are of smaller diameter and thinner than the group following, although these two groups have a family resemblance. Thirty examples were identified.

1. Green glazed int. White fabric.

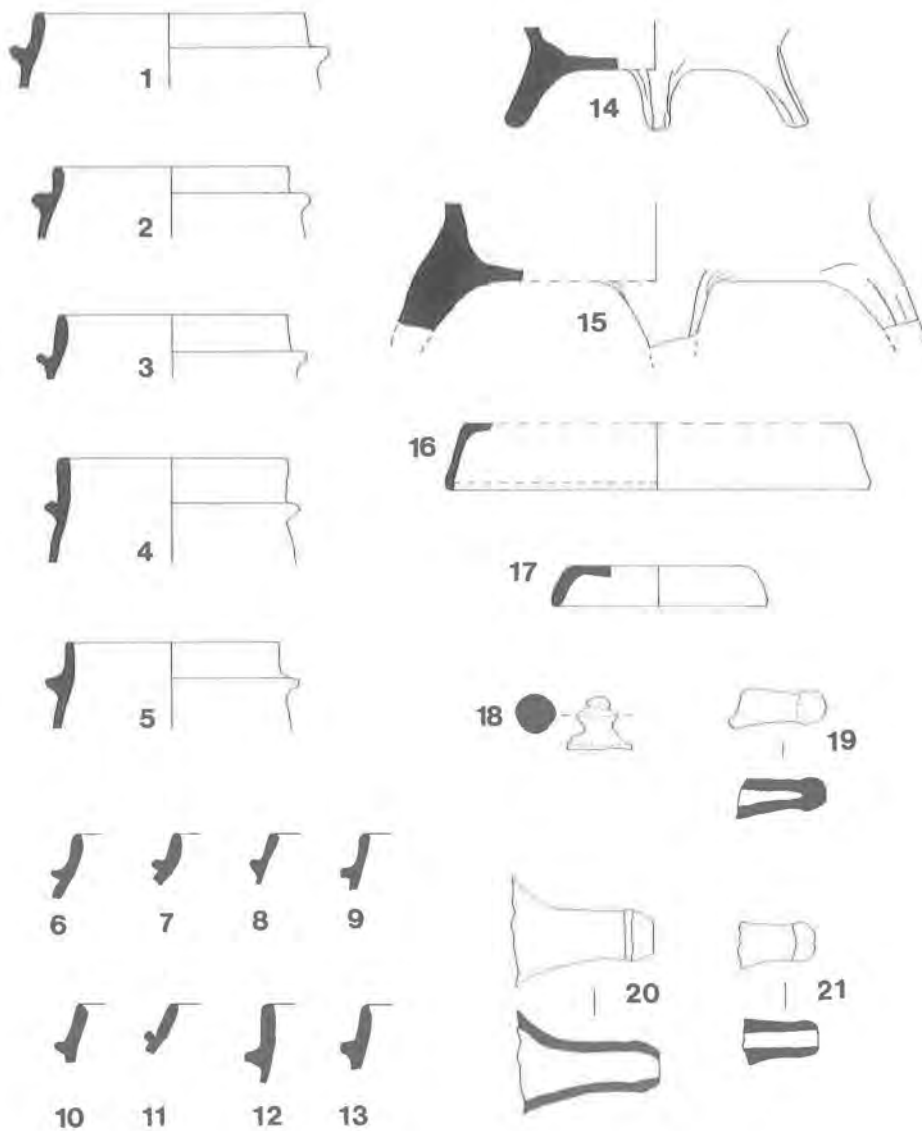


Fig. 2. Potter Row, pipkins ($\frac{1}{4}$).

2. Honey glazed int. Light red fabric, occasional red flecks.
3. Green int. rim, brown int. body. Traces of clear glaze also. White fabric.
4. Green int. Traces of clear glaze on ext. Light red fabric.
5. Green glazed int. Light red, slightly sandy fabric.
6. Brown glazed int. Traces of stamp on rim (not illustrated).

Plates/Dishes/Bowls (Fig. 3, 7–16):

From the surviving rims it was rarely possible to determine whether plates, dishes or bowls were represented so this group are treated together. Bifid rims are again fairly common and stamps seem to occur on all types. It was the general impression that bowls are less common than plates or dishes. Sixty-two rims were present, of which twenty-two were stamped. In addition, thirty-four individual stamped sherds were present.

7. Deep brown glazed int., greeny-brown glazed ext. Light red fabric.
8. Green glazed int., brown glazed ext. Beetle stamp on rim (not illustrated). Light red fabric, edge glazed.
9. Deep brown glaze on int. only. Beetle stamp on rim int. Light red fabric.
10. Green glazed int., brown glazed ext. Light red fabric, edge glazed.
11. Green glazed int. Beetle stamp on rim int. Light red fabric, edge glazed.
12. Brown glazed int. and ext. Beetle, and paired crescent stamps int. Light red fabric, edge glazed.
13. Honey glazed int., olive green glazed ext. White fabric.
14. Brown glazed int. and ext. Brick red fabric. 24 cm. diam.
15. Green-brown glazed int. and ext. White fabric. 26 cm. diam.
16. Brown glazed int., light brown glazed ext. White fabric. Part of beetle stamp. 34 cm. diam.

Decorated Sherds (Fig. 3, 17–25):

17. Brown glazed int. and ext. Beetle, paired crescent and other stamps int. Light red fabric, edge glazed.
18. Brown glazed sherd with paired crescent and stippled crescent stamps. Hard, light grey fabric.
19. Brown glazed sherd with stippled crescent and unclassified stamp. Light red fabric.
20. Brown glazed int., green glazed ext. Beetle stamp. Light red fabric.
21. Brown glazed body sherd with paired crescent stamp and fragment of stippled crescent. Edge glazed. Light red fabric.
22. Dark brown glazed int., ?stamp form. Dark red fabric.
23. Brown glazed body sherd, edge glazed. Paired crescent stamp. Light red fabric.
24. Brown glazed int., green glazed ext. Light red fabric. Rosette stamp.
25. Brown glazed int. Rosette and double paired stamps. Light red fabric.

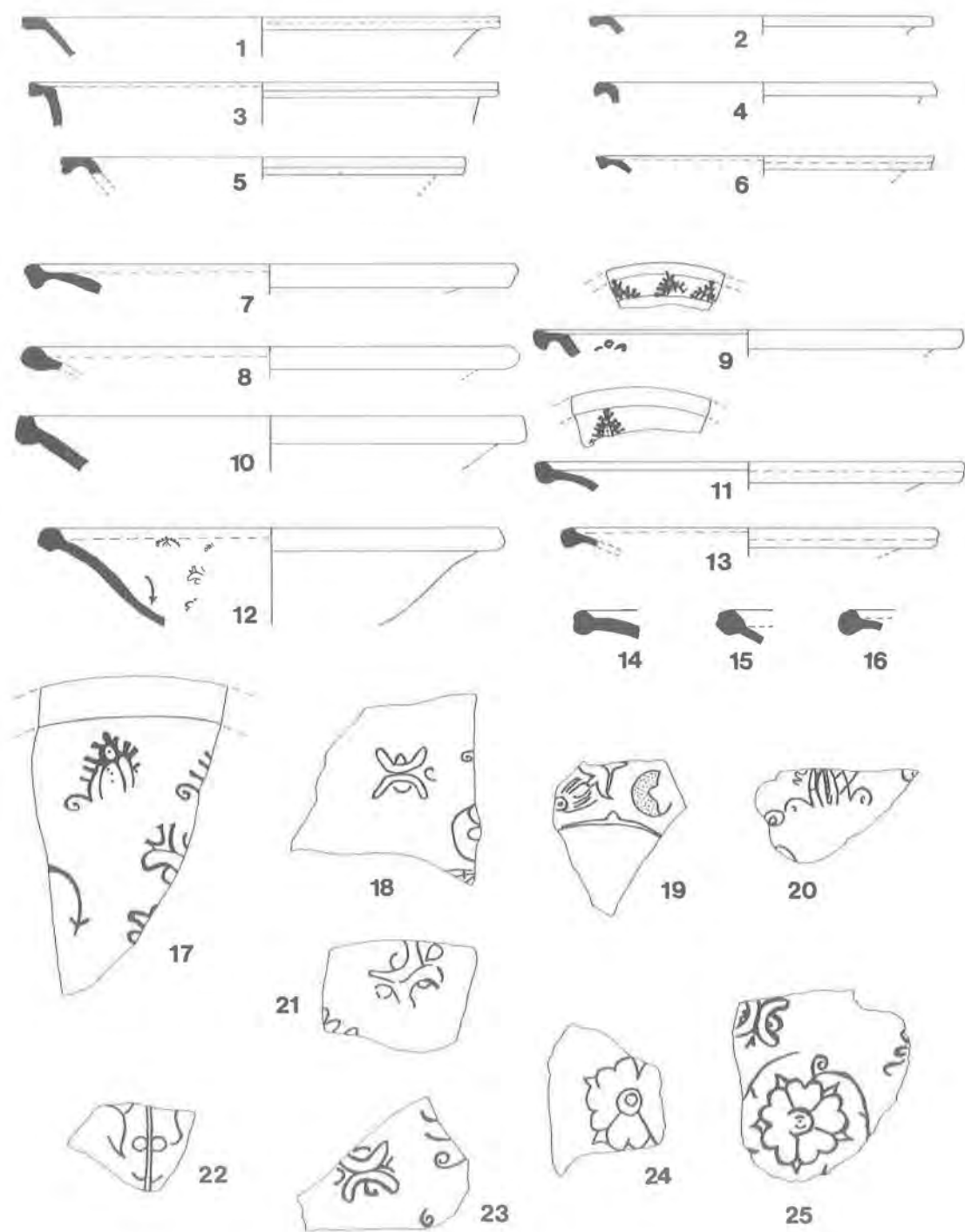


Fig. 3. Potter Row, bowls, plates and dishes (¼), decorated sherds (½).

Bowls with Rolled Rims (Fig. 4, 1–10):

Seventy-two of this type were identified.

1. Light green glaze int. White fabric.
2. Light green glaze int. Light red fabric.
3. Patchy light brown and light green glaze int. and ext. rim only. Light red fabric.
4. Green glaze int. with fragment of glaze on rim. Light red fabric.
5. Olive green glaze int. and ext. Light red fabric.
6. Green glaze int. Brown glaze ext. to just below rim. White fabric.
7. Orange/brown glaze int. Traces of dark brown glaze ext. under rim. Light red fabric with occasional white flecks.
8. Dark olive green glaze int. with traces on ext. Light red fabric with fine black flecks.
9. Honey glaze int. Brown glaze ext. Light red fabric.
10. Honey glaze ext. White fabric.

Flat Rim Bowls (Fig. 4, 11–13):

Five examples were recorded.

11. Uneven green glaze int. Green glaze on underside of rim ext. White fabric.
12. Green glaze int. and on broken edge. Light red fabric, white core.
13. Olive green glaze int. and rim top. Light red fabric, light grey core with fine black flecks.

Jars (Fig. 4, 14–19):

Eighteen examples were recorded.

14. Olive green glaze int. with traces on ext. Buff fabric.
15. Traces of olive green glaze int. and ext. Glaze and fabric overfired.
16. Dark brown glaze int. Red fabric.
17. Brown glaze int. Light red fabric.
18. Green/brown glaze int. with traces on ext. rim. Light red fabric.
19. Green glaze int. Light red fabric with white core.

Misc. (Fig. 4, 20 and 21):

Bleeding bowl, one example only.

20. Green glaze int. and ext. with glazed horizontal lobed handle. Light red fabric.

Chafing dish, two examples recorded.

21. Light brown glazed support knob for chafing dish. Traces of glaze on broken rim edge. Light red fabric.

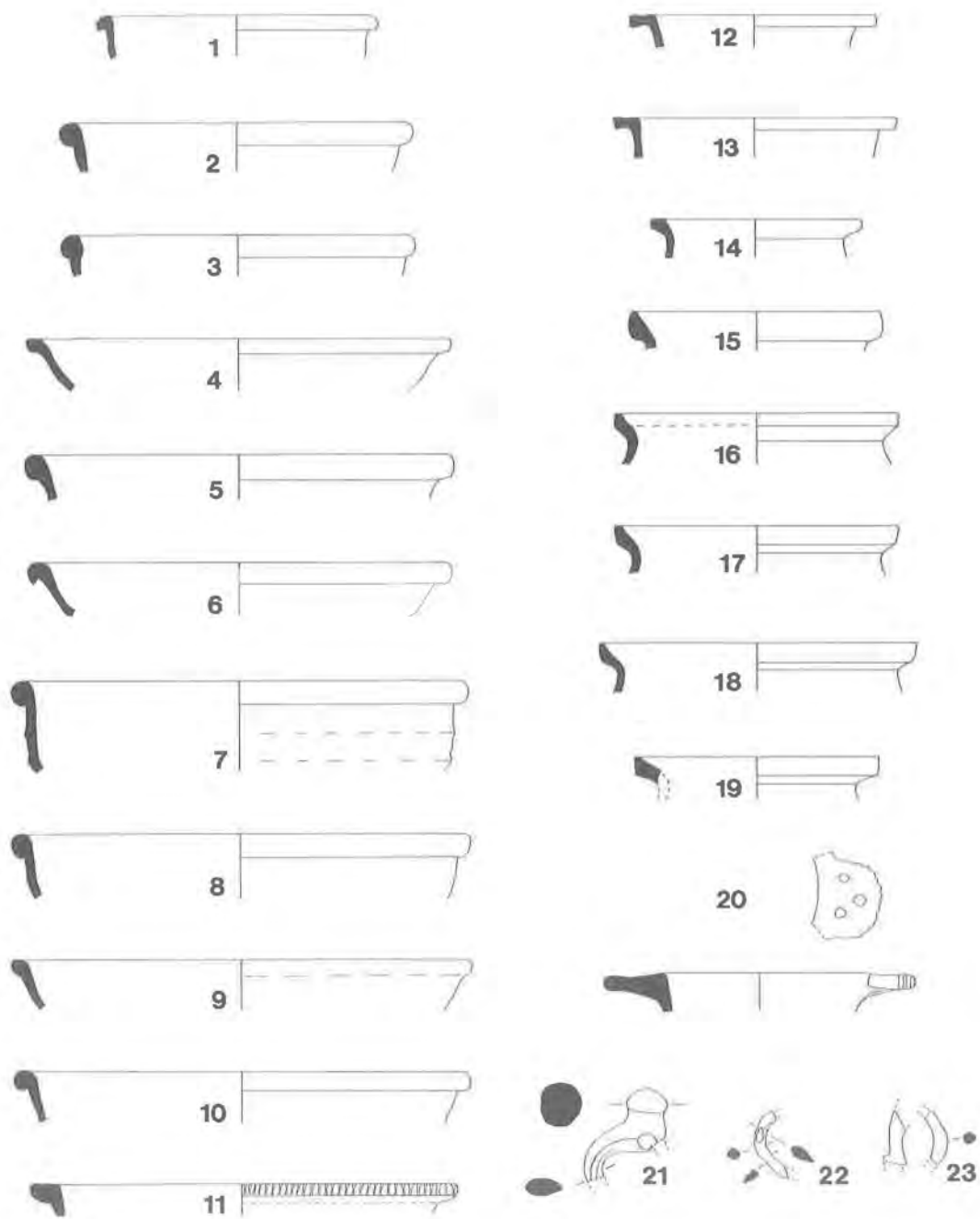


Fig. 4. Potter Row, bowls, jars, etc., and kiln furniture (1/4).

Kiln Furniture (Fig. 4, 22 and 23):

Apart from the two illustrated, sixteen other fragments of ring stilt were present. A piece of partially glazed peg-hole tile from the site was also probably used as kiln furniture.

22. Ring stilt with traces of brown glaze. White fabric.

23. Ring stilt, brown glaze. Light red fabric.

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