LATE IRON AGE AND ROMANO-BRITISH BRIQUETAGE SITES AT QUARRYLANDS LANE, BADGWORTH

BY R. H. LEECH

INTRODUCTION

Two sites were investigated in 1974 after M. Aston, Field Archaeologist, Somerset County Council, had been informed of their discovery by Mr. H. E. Body of Heatherfield Farm, Chapel Allerton. Site 1 (Fig. 1), centred at ST 39285144, was discovered in the laying of field drains, the trenches for which had been backfilled before any observations could be made. Site 2, between ST 39215180 and ST 39185169, was found while the drainage ditch between these points was being widened; by the time the discovery was investigated the water level had risen above the strata of archaeological interest, and it was not possible to make a record until November 1974. By then the rapid growth of vegetation, the erosion of the sides of the drain, the need to draw from a ladder standing in the channel and inclement weather prevented more than a short section from being examined in detail. The writer wishes to thank Pamela Leech and Bob and Anne Everton for their help in the field and Warwick Rodwell for his advice in the preparation of this report.

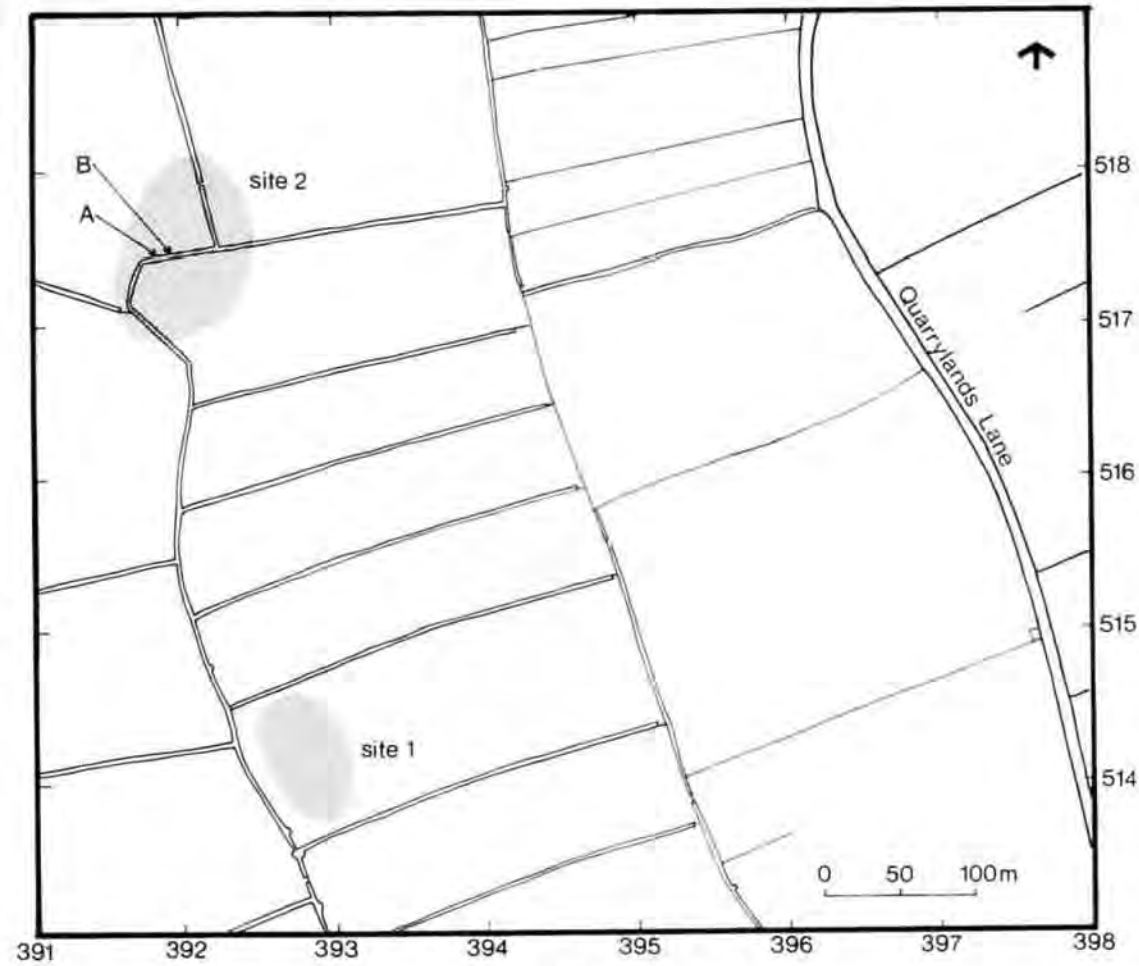

Fig. 1

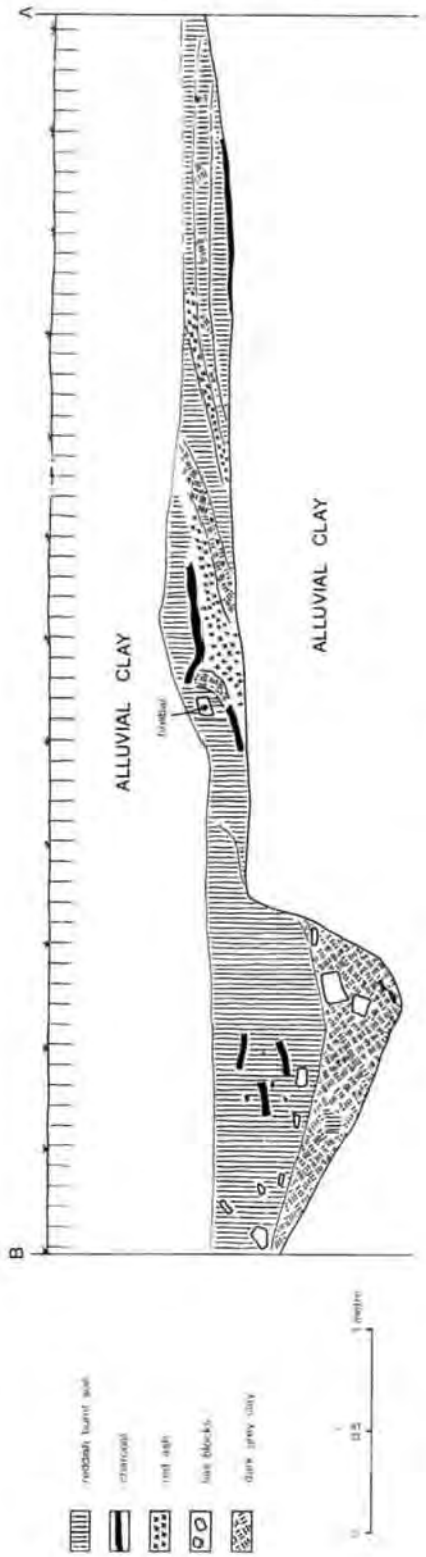
A
B
ALLUVIAL CLAY
ALLUVIAL CLAY
reddish burnt soil
charcoal
lime blocks
dark grey clay
1 metre

Fig 2

Site 2

The position of the drawn section 8.0 m long (Fig. 2) is shown as A–B on the location map (Fig. 1). The stratigraphy observed was as follows:
(1) Dark grey alluvial clay 0.65–0.85 m below the present ground surface, sealed by (3).
(2) A ditch or pit c. 0.20 m wide cut into (1).
(3) Successive layers of ash, reddish burnt clayey soil and charcoal, with lias blocks, briquetage and pottery, sealing (1), filling (2) and sealed by (4); the uppermost parts of (3), 0.45–0.65 m below the present ground surface, appeared to have been eroded and probably once reached a greater height, forming a mound.
(4) Dark grey alluvial clay 0.35–0.65 m; beyond the areas where (3) was observed it was impossible to distinguish between (1) and (4).
(5) Dark grey humic clayey soil, 0.10 m in depth.

THE FINDS

THE POTTERY (Fig. 3)

In a recent assessment of late Iron Age and Romano-British pottery from the Somerset Levels it has been suggested that a 'phase with decorated Glastonbury pottery was probably succeeded by one during which a developed style of this pottery was in use, some time around the date of the Roman Conquest. This in turn was succeeded by a Durotrigian and then a full Romano-British phase' (Miles and Miles, 1969, 24). At Quarrylands Lane there are no Glastonbury types, though several flat bead-rim jars (1-2, 15-18) may be devolved forms. Other bead-rim jars (2-6) and an incipient everted rim jar (8) are probably Durotrigan mid- to late 1st century. The profile of one everted rim jar (7) indicates a middle pre-Roman Iron Age date, but other everted rim jars (9-11, 22, 23 and 25), flat rim bowls (12, 13, 20, 21), Corfe Mullen (31) and Samian (32) ware are probably of the late 1st or 2nd centuries.

Site 1 (Fig. 3)

1–2. Jars with flat bead rims; hard rough exterior, very rough interior, heavily gritted with angular quartz sand; dark grey to black.
3–5. Jars with bead rims; fabric as 1–2.
6. Jar with bead rim, probably black burnished category 1 (Farrar, 1973, 75–6).
7. Jar with pronounced shoulder and slightly everted rim; fabric as 1–2.
8. Jar with everted rim; fabric as 6.
9. Jar with cavetto rim; fabric as 1–2.
10. Jar with everted rim; hard smooth burnished exterior, fine, some sand temper; dark grey.
11. Jar with everted rim; hard rough, heavily gritted with angular quartz grains; light to medium grey.
12–13. Bowls with flat rims; fabric as 10.
14. Storage jar with plain rim; fabric as 11.

Site 2

15–18. Jars with flat bead rims; fabric as 1–2.
19–20. Jars with bead rims; fabric as 1–2.
21. Jar with everted rim; fabric as 6.
22–23. As 12–13.
24–26. Jars with everted rims; well burnished exteriors; fabric as 10. Two similar vessels not illustrated.
27. Bowl; fabric as 10.
28. Bowl or dish; fabric as 10.
29. Narrow necked jar or flagon; well burnished exterior; fabric as 10.
30. Jar with everted rim; hard, fine, many small voids, dark grey.
31. Jar with everted rim; medium hard, smooth, fine, a very few fine quartz grains; light to medium grey.

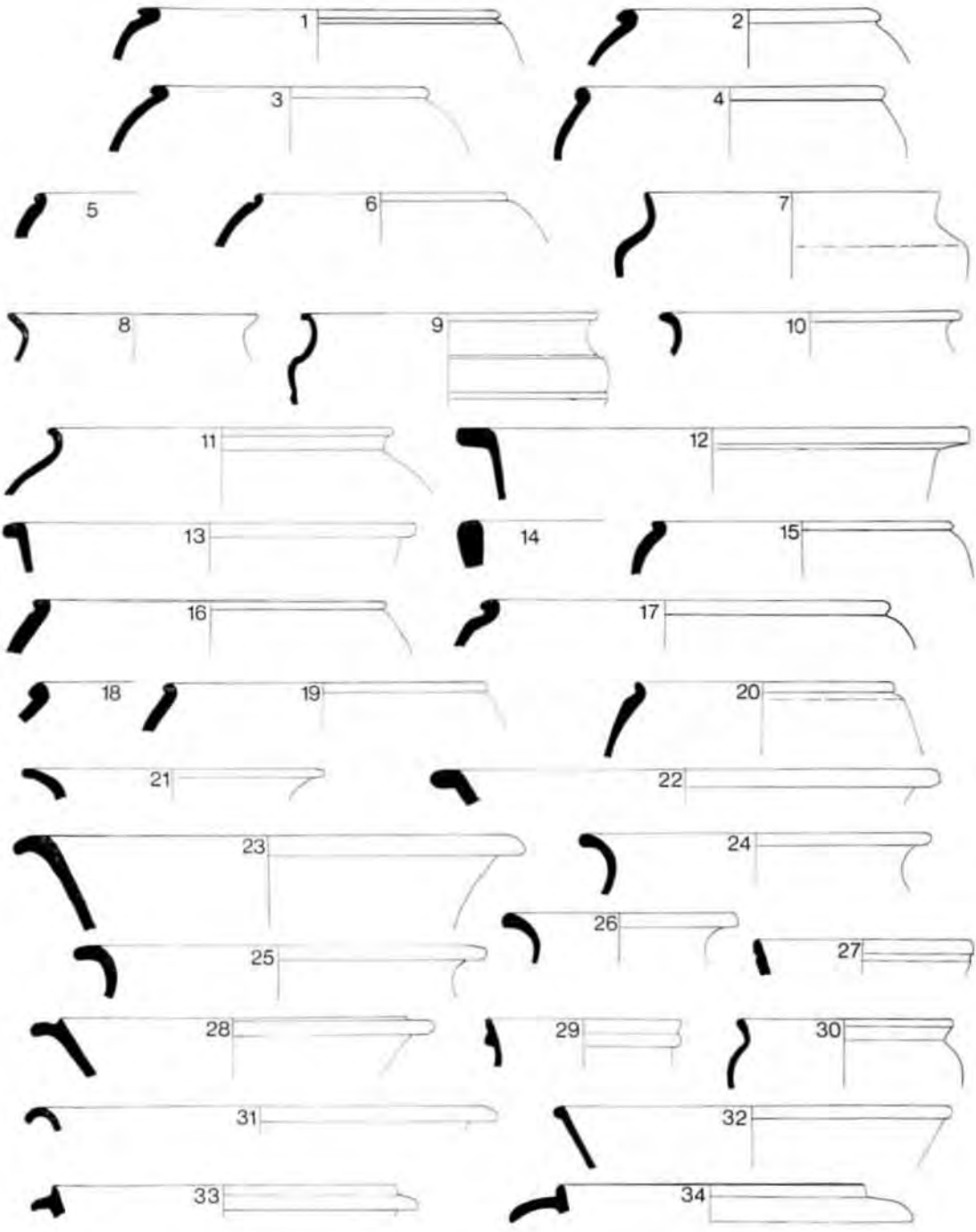

Fig. 3. Pottery from Quarrylands Lane (¼)

32. Bowl with rolled rim; hard, fine; buff.
33. Bowl with flanged rim; fabric as 6. 3rd or 4th century A.D.
34. Bowl with flanged rim; hard, fine, small inclusions; orange-red.

Not Illustrated (all Site 2)

35. 39 sherds of black burnished ware (see 6) including fragments of everted rim jars.
36. 30 sherds of grey fabrics, not examined in detail.
37. 7 sherds of heavily gritted ware, as 1–2.
38. 3 sherds of shell gritted ware.
39. 9 sherds of fine red wares, not examined in detail.
40. 2 sherds of Corfe Mullen ware (Calkin, 1935).
41. 5 body sherds of a handled mug.
42. 5 sherds of Samian, including one form 27, probably pre-Flavian.

BRIQUETAGE (not illustrated)

The briquetage was of a fine clay, presumably from the site, with a tempering of chopped vegetation including grass, straw and cereal grains, fired to an orange red colour. Several fragments were partly covered with a thin green glaze. The assemblage includes both hearth/kiln furniture and fragments of crudely made fired-clay vessels.

Site 1

1. Fragment of square end of bar, section 55 mm. sq.
2. Fragment of tile, section tapering to a thickness of 55 mm.

Site 2

3. Two large fragments of bar, section 50 mm sq., and many smaller fragments of bars.
4. Two fragments of round bar, section 50 mm and 70 mm diameter respectively.
5. Three fragments of straight sided or flat bottomed vessels, 10 mm thick.
6. Many smaller fragments of briquetage.

Location of finds

The pottery (with the exception of nos. 1–18, 21–25, 32, retained by Mr. Body) and briquetage is deposited in the Somerset County Museum, Taunton.

BRIQUETAGE SITES ELSEWHERE

It is impossible to discuss the evidence from Quarrylands Lane without examining first the nature and date of comparable sites, Mounds of pottery and briquetage c. 8km to the south in the area of the Huntspill Cut and around Gold Corner Bridge in the parishes of West Huntspill and Chilton Polden, first described by Stradling (Stradling, 1849), were re-examined by Bulleid 1914; by then at least 50 mounds were recognized, and several had been excavated (Fig. 4). Bulleid (Bulleid 1914) stated that 'the mounds consist of innumerable fragments of pottery mingled with large quantities of briquetage, and fire ash; looked at in section a mound appears stratified, but upon tracing any given series of layers they are found to be restricted to a small area and do not run continuously through the whole diameter of the mound' (Bulleid 1914, 139). He agreed with Stradling that they were probably rubbish dumps from pottery production, adding that the method of firing was probably a smother kiln. His photographs of the pottery and briquetage, including firebars, tiles and luting, are still the only published illustrated record of finds from the mounds. Clay moulds for the production of coin counterfeiting types of *c.* 180–*c.* 230 A.D. found 'almost adjoining one of the pottery kilns' and 'two small leather purses . . . found in a pottery mound' (Stradling, 1849, 58–9) suggested that the potteries dated from the late 2nd century to the end of the 4th.

No further research was carried out in the area until 1930 when two mounds were excavated by Dewar; the finds included pottery, briquetage, firebars and platforms of impacted clay. The area known to contain mounds was greatly extended when Dewar observed the cutting of the new Huntspill River in 1939–40 and showed that a number of mounds were sealed by the alluvial clay which overlies the peat to the west of the area examined by Bulleid and earlier workers (Dewar, 1941). Since then there have been excavations of mounds by the Clevedon and District Archaeological Society in 1960 and by the Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society whose work has also included the detailed observation and recording of further mounds exposed in the sides of the Huntspill River (Langdon, 1972, and Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society's unpublished MS in Somerset County Museum). Because of these discoveries it is probable that more mounds are to be found for some distance north and south of the Huntspill Cut.

Other sites in the levels (Fig. 4) which have produced briquetage include Newbridge, East Huntspill (Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society, ibid; Ordnance Survey ST 34 NW 11), Woolavington on the site of Romano-British buildings (Ordnance Survey ST 34 SE 3), at Worston Bridge (Ordnance Survey ST 34 NW 7) and the Sandyway Housing Estate (Nash 1973, 99) both in Highbridge and Burnham-on-Sea, at other sites in the area between West Huntspill and Brent Knoll (Nash Collection, Somerset County Museum) and at Combwich (material held by R. Pike of Combwich).

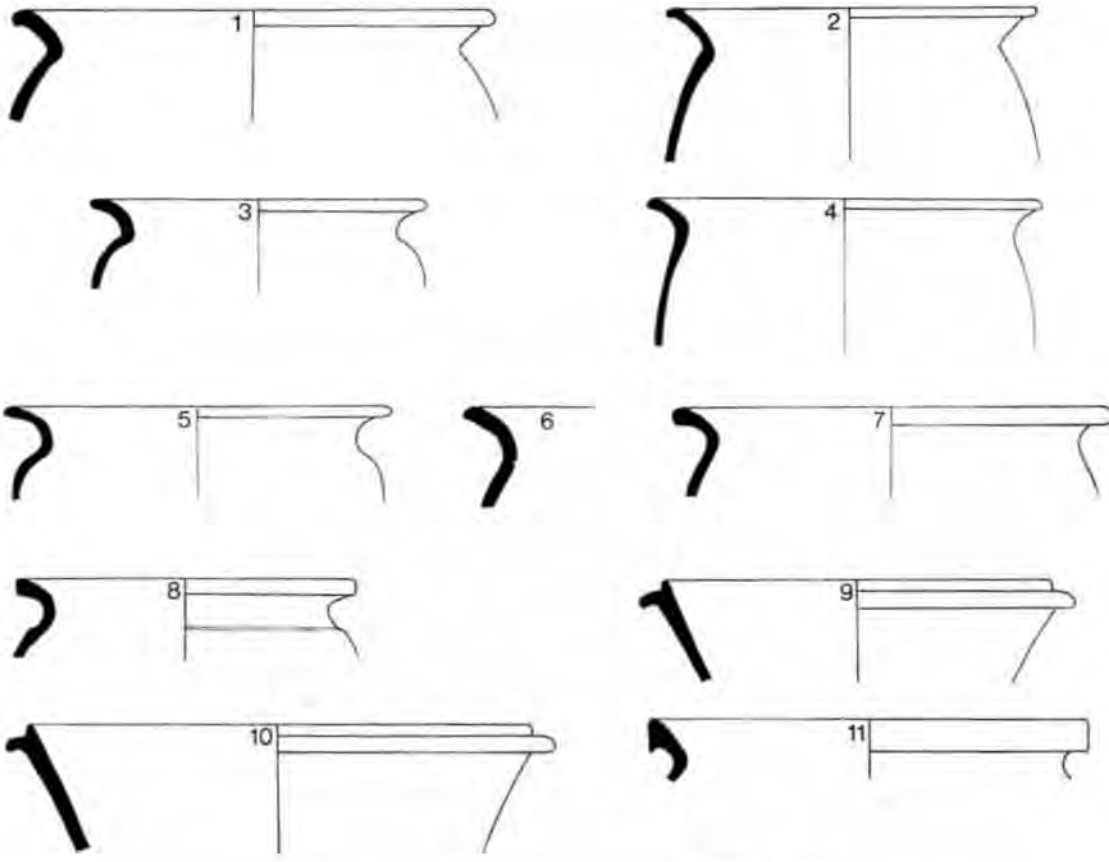

Fig. 4. Pottery from mounds cut by the Huntspill River (¼)

There are differences between the pottery from Quarrylands Lane and the much discussed mounds of the West Huntspill/Chilton Polden area. The pottery from the former is mainly of the 1st century B.C. and of the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. with a little later material; a variety of fabrics are represented, with black burnished and grey wares predominating. The pottery from the mounds probably dates from the mid-3rd century at the earliest (Farrar, 1973, 93–4), and two main fabrics are represented. Firstly there are hand-made jars and bowls in heavily quartz sand gritted black burnished ware (Fig. 4, 1–5) which scientific examination has indicated could come from a Dorset source (Dr. D. F. Williams *in lit*). Secondly there are jars both with everted and hooked rims, and bowls with flanged rims, wheel-thrown in a fine hard well-burnished grey fabric manufactured in the local clay (Dr. D. F. Williams *in lit*) (Fig. 4, 6–11). A characteristic feature of the everted rim jars is a noticeable thickening of the edge of the rim. The quantities of pottery found there in these two fabrics, together wih the almost complete absence of other types, indicates that the material is probably waste from pottery production. Certainly further work on local sand deposits is needed before the attribution of the black burnished wares to a Dorset source can be fully accepted.

The theory that the Somerset Levels were inundated by a rising sea level in the late 3rd century A. D. (Cunliffe, 1966) has recently been countered with an alternative more convincing hypothesis that the area was estuarine mud flats and salt marsh throughout the Romano-British period (Hawkins, 1973, 82). The absence of a buried soil horizon and the apparent longevity of the sites at Quarrylands Lane both support the latter view; the sites probably lay close to the edge of higher cultivable land marked by the limit of the present alluvium around the Isle of Wedmore. The briquetage sites at Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge were possibly similarly located, for recent work (Nash ,1973) has suggested that they are on the edge of slightly higher ground around Huntspill and Highbridge. In general, however, much more research is needed to identify former shorelines and river courses in the Somerset Levels.

Salt-making sites producing briquetage are now known to have been scattered widely around the estuaries of early Iron Age and Roman Britain, notably in Lincolnshire, Essex, Kent, Sussex, Dorset, Cornwall and Somerset. A recent conference on salt (ed. de Brisay and Evans, 1975) included papers on all the above areas except the last two; Somerset was alluded to only in passing references (Farrar, 1975, 19–20 and Bradley 1975, 21). Comparable sites to Quarrylands Lane are the Essex Red Hills, thought to have been estuarine mud flats in the Romano-British period and to have been used seasonally for saltmaking but not for pottery production (de Brisay, 1972 and 1973). The strata observed at the Red Hills are similar to those at Quarrylands Lane and to those exposed in the sides of the Huntspill Cut west of Gold Corner Bridge; and the excavator's conclusions are probably equally applicable: 'it would seem that there must have been a serried expanse of small mounds: each an individual working area which was used for a short time only. During the occupation of the site the action of the sea and the weather would have eroded these . . . After the abandonment of the site this same erosion would have smoothed the whole area leaving the gentle contours as we know them today' (de Brisay 1973, 35).

Where salt and pottery production probably occur together as in Dorset and Somerset it is difficult to distinguish between the waste of the two processes except by pointing to large quantities of a particular type of pottery like that from the West Huntspill/Chilton Polden mounds. It has been shown in Somerset and elsewhere that briquetage vessels are not found on inland pottery producing sites so their presence probably always indicates former salt production whether or not pottery manufacture was involved as well.

The hypothesis recently advanced for the place of salt production in the rural economy of coastal Hampshire and Sussex (Bradley, 1975) may probably be applied equally well to Somerset. Salt making was seen as a seasonal activity carried out by non-specialist agricultural communities living close to the shoreline. The most likely time for this was the summer months with low water levels, high air and water

temperatures and long spells of sunshine. The presence of grains from winter sown cereals was argued to be evidence for the production of briquetage in early August, with the absence of Spring-sown varieties indicating that salt making had ceased by early September when the latter crop would be harvested.

Further research into Iron Age and Romano-British salt manufacture in the Somerset Levels would be most rewarding. Although in recent years there has been work in the Huntspill Cut and Highbridge areas, elsewhere large parts have been scarcely studied. There is a need for detailed fieldwork over a wide area of former shoreline and estuarine mud flats. Former river courses and drainage systems of different periods show up on most existing air photograph coverage of the Levels but these too have never been plotted systematically and their publication could be a worthy target for research. There is also a need for more excavation but this should probably only be on a large scale where mounds and intervening areas can be studied in conjunction

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