HAM HILL 1975: A WATCHING BRIEF

BY ANN ELLISON AND TERRY PEARSON

During the winter of 1975/6, 40,000 tons of quarry waste were removed from the stone quarries on Ham Hill for use as hard-core on the Ilchester By-Pass Construction scheme. Archaeological surveillance of this scheme was currently being carried out by Terry Pearson for the Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset and the Department of the Environment and this work was extended to include a watching brief of the quarrying on Ham Hill.

The 210-acre hillfort on Ham Hill is one of the largest in the country. Although conventional archaeological investigation has been limited (Gray, 1924) the extensive quarrying of Ham stone since at least Roman times has led to the discovery of

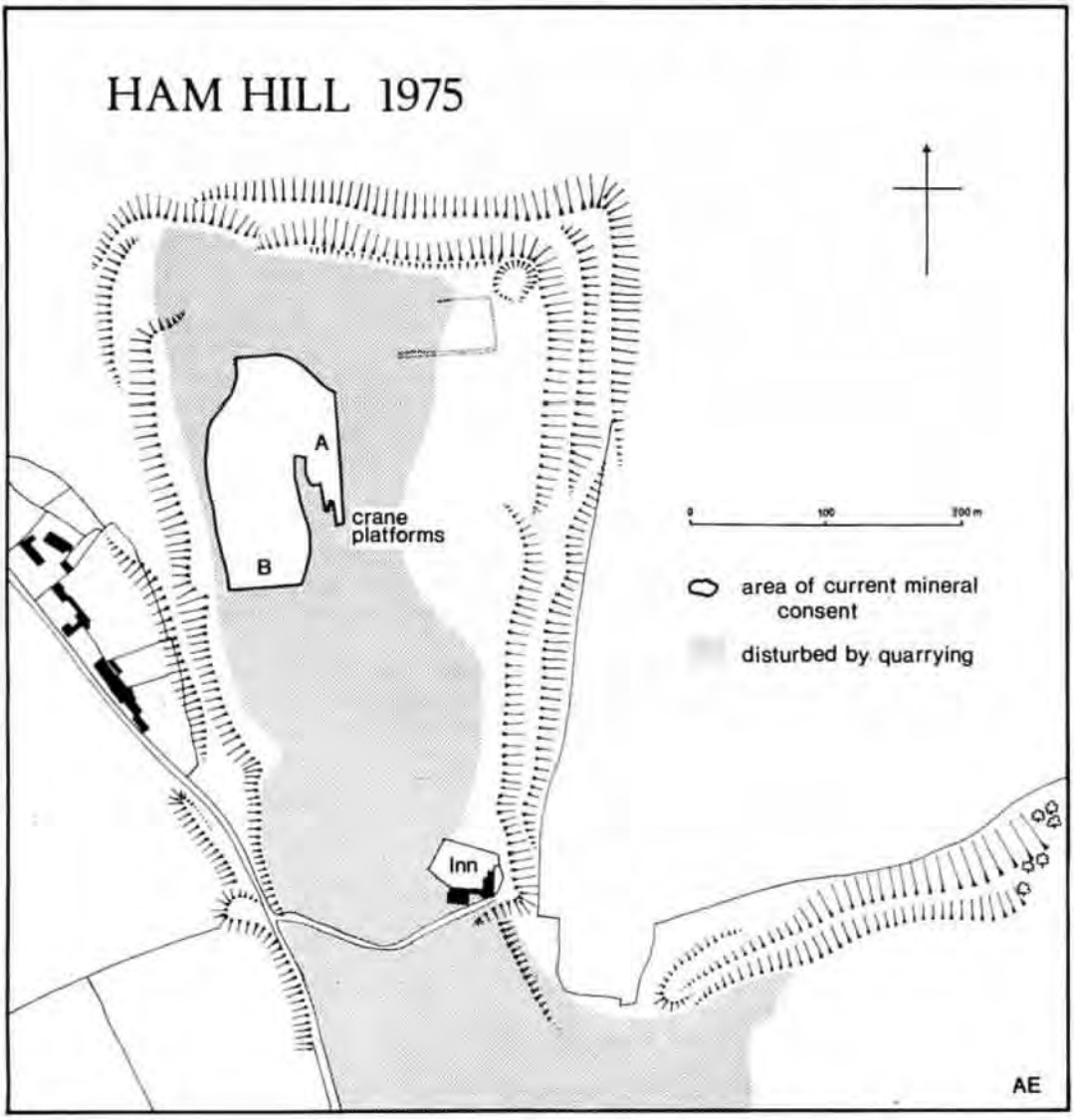

Fig. 1

numerous finds which indicate occupation of the hilltop from the Neolithic period onwards, with the most intensive use in the 1st century B.C. and the first part of the 1st century A.D. (Seaby, 1950 and references there cited; Frere, 1967, p. 74). The western part of the hillfort interior has been extensively damaged by quarrying. The history of these activities has recently been summarised in the Victoria County History, *Somerset*, Vol. III (1974), p. 244, while a detailed description of the techniques and equipment used during the 19th century is supplied by Trask (1898, ch. IX).

The area from which rubble was extracted in 1975-6 lay almost entirely within the zone previously disturbed by quarrying (Fig. 1). Owing to the rapid removal of the material, direct and continuous observation of the process was difficult and the watching brief therefore took the form of regular inspection of exposed faces for any signs of undisturbed archaeological deposits. It was apparent that the Iron Age and Roman ground levels and features in this area had long since been removed by quarrying and when Iron Age and Roman sherds were recovered from any one location they were found to derive from an inverted sequence of tip lines: i.e. the Iron Age pottery lay above the Roman. Prehistoric material was mainly recovered from Area B (Fig. 1) while most of the Roman sherds came from Area A. The zinc templates, which are known to have been in use during the 19th century, were found at the very bottom of the existing waste tips, stratified below redeposited prehistoric and Roman material.

Two types of structural feature were observed during the watching brief. First, during the cutting back of the west face of the present quarry area, several archaeological layers and the cross-section of a large V-shaped ditch were observed in the section well above the quarry floor. These features were probably connected with the rampart system of the Iron Age hillfort and further quarrying in this direction was therefore diverted. Secondly, in the south-east corner of the present quarry, two sets of massive stone foundations were exposed but not removed. These were platforms erected to support some of the steam cranes which were used to lift stone blocks in the 19th century.

PREHISTORIC FINDS

Bronze Age pottery (Fig. 2, 1). Rim sherd with square profile, two horizontal incised lines on rim, traces of lightly tooled chevron decoration on body; grey core, oxidised outer surface, hard fabric, shell inclusions up to 2 mm diameter, some dissolved out. Trevisker Style.

Flints (not illustrated). A selection of cores, flakes and simple blades.

Daub (not illustrated). Fragments of daub containing grog and limestone inclusions.

Iron Age pottery. The sherds have been classified according to fabric as follows:

Hardness	*Inclusions*	*No. of Sherds*	*Illustrated Examples*
medium	dense shell fragments and crushed shell	85	Fig. 2, 2–13
medium	sparse quartz up to 5 mm diameter	15	none
medium	plate shell and quartz	21	Fig. 2, 18
hard	quartz up to 2 mm diameter and mica specks	36	Fig. 2, 14–17, 19
soft, 'soapy'	mica specks	13	Fig. 2, 20–22
soft	grass/straw	2	none
medium	red iron ore up to 6 mm diameter	1	none

The finger-tip decorated shell-tempered sherds (Fig. 2, 10–11) date from the early phases of the pre-Roman Iron Age (6th–5th centuries B.C.) with the rest of the assemblage—which is characteristed by shelly and sandy fabrics, simple rounded, squared and rolled rims and incised geometric decorations—falling after 400 B.C.

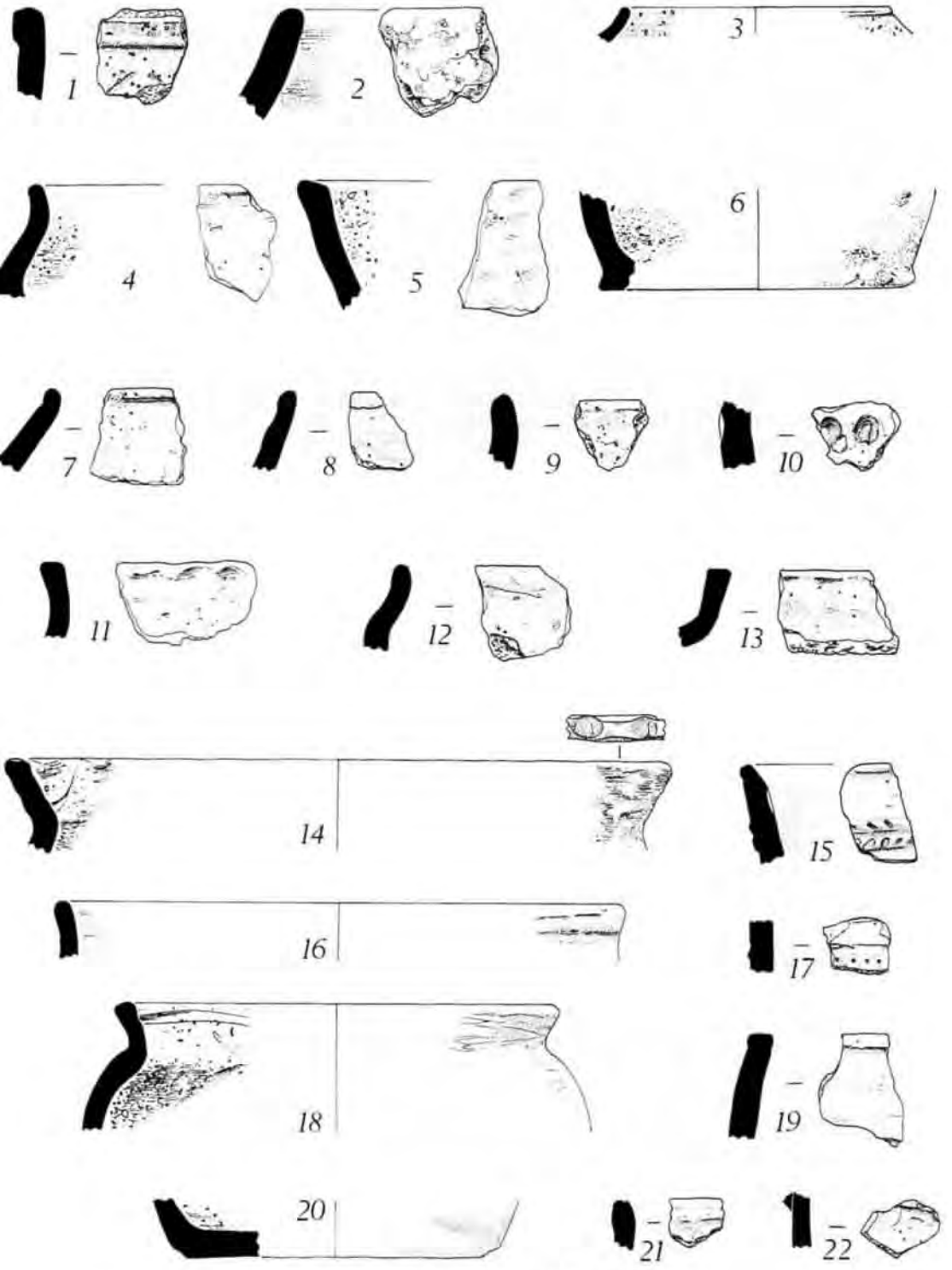

Fig. 2. Ham Hill 1975: Prehistoric Pottery (½)

DUROTRIGIAN AND ROMAN POTTERY

Coarse Wares. 42 sherds of black-burnished ware (CRAAGS Ilchester Type Fabric Series: BB) including an abraded sherd from a round-shouldered grooved bowl, a footring base (Fig. 3, 3) and two rim sherds (Fig. 3, 1–2). These indicate an assemblage of the 1st century A.D. 3 sherds from thick-walled grey ware storage jars (CRAAGS Ilchester Type Fabric Series: Giii) are of the 1st or 2nd century A.D.

Samian. 3 sherds of South Gaulish manufacture, probably all from La Graufesenque and all certainly of pre-Flavian date.

(a) rim Drag. form 24/25
(b) wall sherd Drag. form 27, probably Neronian.
(c) chip of rim, possibly Ritterling form 9.

It is likely that the samian is all associated with the Roman military activity on Ham Hill.

Amphorae. Abraded body sherd of an amphora of south Spanish manufacture: the commonest form is Dressel 20. Probably 1st century A.D.

LATER FINDS

Post-Medieval. Body sherd of jar, Donyatt kilns, 18th century (not illustrated). Four zinc templates (Fig. 3, 4–7) and off-cuts from other zinc sheets are evidence of quarrying in the 19th century. The templates were used for the accurate cutting of Ham stone mouldings and bear the compass marks and setting-out lines employed during their manufacture.

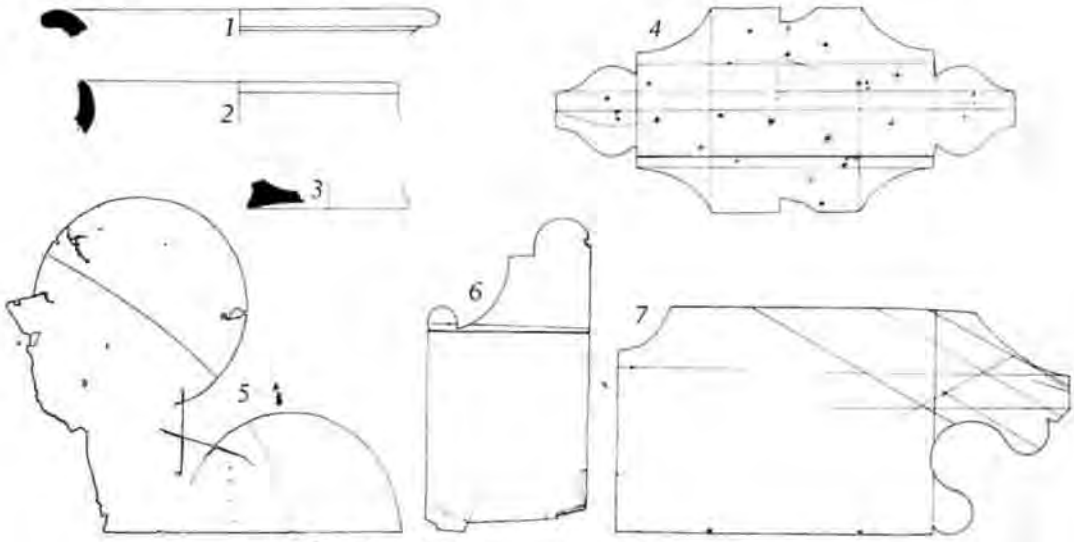

Fig. 3. Ham Hill 1975: Roman pottery and zinc templates (¼)

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The finds will be deposited at Taunton Museum.

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