

Discovery of Neolithic Pottery on Meare Heath, Somerset

BY H. ST. GEORGE GRAY, F.S.A.

THE turf-moors of Meare and Shapwick are revealing their secrets one by one. The discovery here recorded carries the archæology of this interesting area back very definitely to Neolithic times.

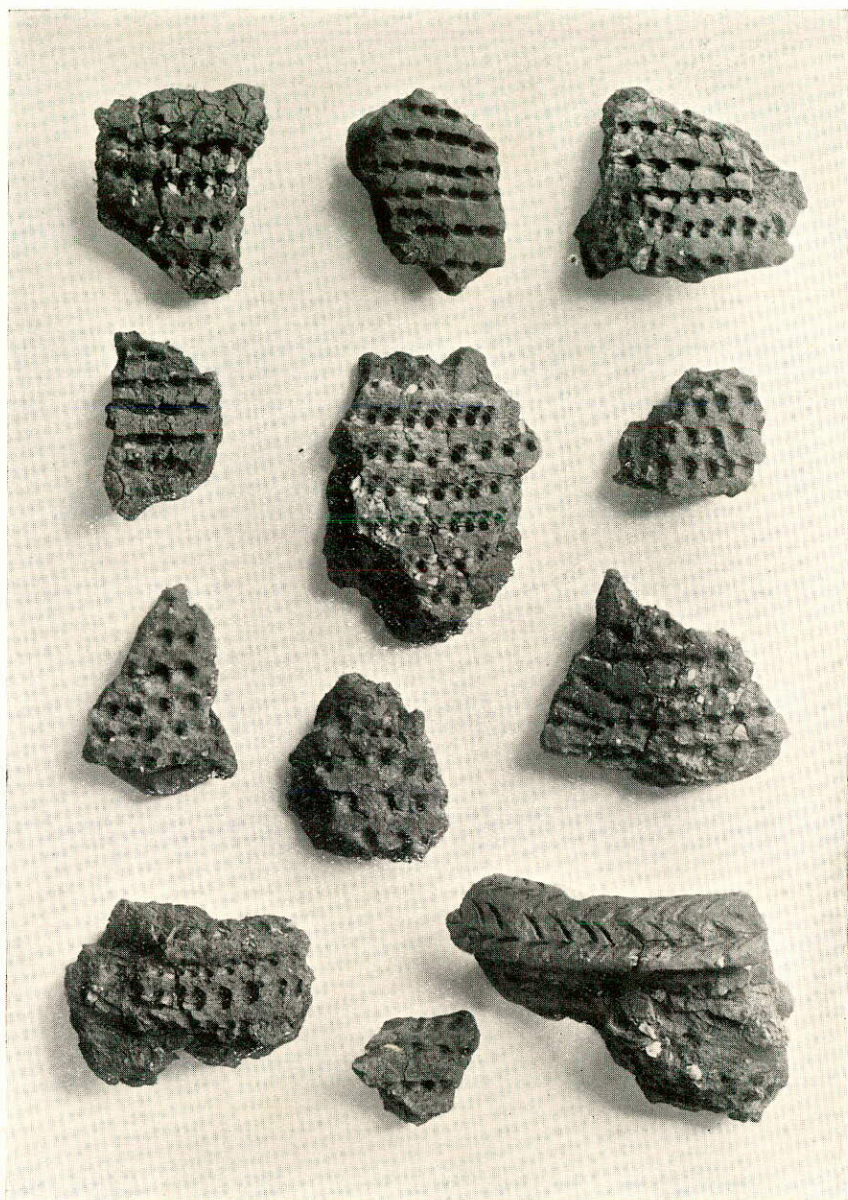
During the season's excavations at the Meare Lake Village in the summer of 1936 it came to the writer's knowledge that a man, at one time employed in those excavations, had found some rude pottery when turf-cutting in July on Meare Heath. A call was made without delay at the cottage of Charles Gooding, when from an outhouse a small basket was produced which contained what had been recovered of a Neolithic 'B' pot (Peterborough ware), presumably round-bottomed.

The writer made an appointment to go to the place of finding on the following evening, where a considerable amount of turf-cutting had taken place during the season. Gooding had not marked the exact spot by a stake but he knew the place within a foot or two. Knowing the depth to be of primary importance, it was clearly ascertained that the pottery had been found at an approximate depth of 4.75 ft. The fragments had been brought to the surface on a spade through from 4 to 6 inches of water.¹

The discovery was made about 135 yds. south of 'Heath Rhyme' (6 in. Ord. Sheet LII, N.W.), and 500 yds. east of the road connecting Ashcott and Meare Railway Station with the village of Meare.² The position is 765 yds. south-west of

¹ Had the area been dry, Gooding would probably have been able to get out all the fragments of the broken pot—broken up perhaps by his spade.

² The nearest point on the road is 16.0 ft. above sea-level.



NEOLITHIC "B" POTTERY, MEARE HEATH, SOM.

From a Photograph by Mr. H. St. George Gray, F.S.A.

Stileway Farm and 1160 yds. (over half-a-mile) north-east of the Railway Station.

The ancient trackway, described by Dr. A. Bulleid, F.S.A.,³ is nearly three-quarters-of-a-mile to the west. The La Tène II scabbard of bronze⁴ and a bronze socketed celt⁵ were found in 1928 at the same distance in a w.s.w. direction. From the Shapwick Roman hoard (pp. 163–170 of this volume) this Neolithic pottery was found at a distance of $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles E.N.E.

What remains of the vessel is now in some three dozen fragments, including one fairly large piece of rim. The pieces are very friable and liable to flake. The paste is black, fairly soft, with large grits, roughly mixed, badly fired, outer surfaces having a rather smooth if not soapy appearance.

From the remaining piece of rim it is seen that the vessel had a heavy bevelled mouth which slopes outwards over the slightly hollowed neck, and in the other direction extends inwards beyond the line of the inner contour of the vessel. This bevel (width 17.5 mm.) is decorated with a double herring-bone design (fairly well seen in the photograph, Plate IV).

It is estimated that the pot had an external diameter at the rim of about 8 in. Presumably the vessel had an hemispherical base, but no fragment preserved definitely indicates this probability.

The zonal decoration might be described as profuse and it probably covered the whole of the body. The variety of lines of impressions is best understood by reference to Plate IV, including oblong punchings (some of which considerably overlap), diamond-shaped marks and round depressions.

The most westerly place in Somerset, indeed, we believe, in the s.w. of Britain at which pottery of Neolithic 'B' type has been found was in the writer's excavations in Barrow I, Battle-gore, Williton, West Somerset, in 1931.⁶

We know of only one other discovery of this class of ware in Somerset, namely, the fragment of the upper part of a bowl of Peterborough ware, found in Rowberrow Cavern on Mendip;

³ *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, lxxix, 19–29.

⁴ *Antiq. Journ.*, x, 154–5.

⁵ *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, lxxv, p. lxxviii.

⁶ *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, lxxvii, Plate X, P8, and pp. 28, 35.

it has an everted rim, slight shoulder and hollow neck, and is decorated with maggot chevrons.⁷ It is preserved in the Museum of the Spelæological Society, University of Bristol.

Neolithic 'B' pottery has not been found in Devon or Cornwall, so far as we are aware, but this kind of ware was revealed in the Maiden Castle excavations in 1936.

PRELIMINARY NOTES ON BOG-STRATIGRAPHY, MEARE HEATH,
ON SITE OF DISCOVERY OF NEOLITHIC 'B' POT

BY H. GODWIN, PH.D.

The Botany School, Cambridge

Like the Shapwick site, this heath is part of a large raised bog, and it shows a similar stratigraphy, though former peat cutting or drainage has removed all the fresh upper sphagnum peat, except in local patches which still suffice to show the original structure. The site lies within about 100 yds. of the bog margin, though extensive cutting has made the exact position of the latter indeterminable.

The following boring is certain to have been within a few feet laterally of the site, and the pot is estimated to have been at a depth of 4 ft. 9 in. (142 cms.). An error of perhaps 6 or 9 in. (15-22 cms.) is possible either way.

D	cms. 0-40	Crumbly peat soil.
C	40-170	Dark, highly humified <i>Calluna</i> , <i>Eriophorum</i> peat.
B	170-300	Black <i>Phragmites</i> peat with seeds of <i>Menyanthes</i> .
A	300 »→	Blue clay.

It will be seen at once that the pot was certainly found in the lower part of the dark *Calluna-Eriophorum* peat, and even if it were a buried vessel, the Neolithic 'B' bog-surface almost certainly still lay in this deposit.

The reference of this discovery and of the hoard of Roman coins (see pp. 163-170) to specific horizons in a raised bog is a result of great scientific interest, and it is much to be hoped that future finds in the bog will have the surface position and depth accurately recorded, notified and investigated.

⁷ *Proc. Bristol Spelæol. Soc.*, ii, 205; *Arch. Journ.*, lxxxviii, 152.