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Excavations at Chanctonbury Ring, Wiston, West Sussex 1977

By OWEN BEDWIN

(With specialist reports by David Rudling, Sue Hamilton, Peter Drewett and
Karen Petzoldt.)

INTRODUCTION

CHANCTONBURY Ring (NGR TQ 139 121) is one of the best known landmarks in Sussex. It consists of a clump of trees, mostly beech, but with occasional sycamore, situated on the very northern edge of the South Downs, about 8 km (5 miles) from the coast (FIG. 1). The height above sea-level is 234 m (780 ft.), and the subsoil is Upper Chalk, though several local patches of Clay-with-flints were encountered during the excavation.

Beneath the trees, around the edge of the clump, is an oval earthwork consisting of a single ditch and bank (FIG. 2), enclosing about 1½ hectares (3 acres). There are two gaps in this earthwork; one to the south-west, the other to the east. The gap facing east seems to be the only genuine entrance; to the south-west, although the bank is interrupted, the ditch is not. This earthwork represents a small, univallate hill fort; the defences are well-defined, and are most conspicuous on each side of the eastern entrance.

Iron Age occupation of the South Downs around Chanctonbury is known from several sites, notably the enormous hill fort of Cissbury, 3 km away (FIG. 1), dominating the view to the south. Limited excavation at Cissbury dated the occupation of the hill fort there from the fourth to the first centuries B.C.¹ The site was used also during the Roman period; e.g. lynchet formation within the hill fort clearly derived from ploughing at this time.

Between Cissbury and Chanctonbury lie three Iron Age settlements; Park Brow, Findon Park, and Muntham Court (FIG. 1). At Park Brow, a field-system and trackway were found on a south-facing chalk spur; three separate settlements have been shown to exist on this spur, each one presumably exploiting the surrounding fields.² The earliest settlement is dated to the Middle Bronze Age, the second to the early Iron Age, and the third to the later Iron Age and Roman period. At Findon Park, several pits and a few post holes were found.³ The pottery indicated occupation throughout most of the Iron Age, though the earliest Iron Age was poorly represented, and the site appeared to have been abandoned about a century before the Roman invasion. Finally, at Muntham Court, evidence of an extensive early Iron Age settlement was uncovered, including several rectangular six-post structures and 20 m of palisade with a single gap.⁴ Also found was a circular Romano-British structure, 11 m in diameter, with a considerable number of bronze objects, which has led to the generally accepted association of this structure with ritual.

¹ E. C. Curwen and R. P. Ross Williamson, *Antiq. Journ.* xi (1931), 14–36.

² W. Hawley, *Archaeologia* lxxvi (1927), 30–40.

³ C. Fox and G. R. Wolseley, *Antiq. Journ.* viii (1928), 449–60.

⁴ G. P. Burstow and G. A. Holleyman, *Archaeological Newsletter* 6, no. 4 (1957), 101.

THE IRON AGE POTTERY (Sue Hamilton)

Introduction

The assemblage is ascribed to the early Iron Age. It is much fragmented and few joins can be established. Out of 1,360 sherds, 162 are diagnostic. Sherds were therefore grouped by fabric.

⁴⁶ J. G. D. Clark *et al.*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ I. F. Smith, *Windmill Hill and Avebury* (1963).

⁴⁸ P. L. Drewett, *The Archaeology of Bullock Down, Eastbourne* (forthcoming).

⁴⁹ I. H. Longworth, *PPS* xxvii (1961), 263–306.

⁵⁰ I. H. Longworth, in *Actes du VIII^e Congrès International des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques*, ed. J. Filip, (1966).

⁵¹ R. C. Musson, *Sx. Arch. Colls.* xcii (1954), 106–15.

⁵² P. L. Drewett, *op. cit.*

⁵³ E. C. Curwen, *Sx. Arch. Colls.* lxxi (1930), 237–45.

⁵⁴ P. L. Drewett, *PPS* xliii (1977), 201–42.

Undiagnostic sherds could thus be ascribed to the vessels indicated by diagnostic sherds within each fabric category. Tables and pie charts eliminated the necessity to catalogue sherds.

Fabric Analysis

Fabric categories were isolated in terms of characteristic groups of inclusions in broadly consistent quantities with typical size parameters. This method has been employed and discussed elsewhere.⁵⁵ It is simple and facilitates much-needed inter-site comparison. Some discussion of source is possible.

Wares were mechanically disaggregated and sieved to extract the inclusions. Two to five gram samples were disaggregated and a representative one gram from each was sieved (0.2 mm mesh). The results for ten vessels are published as pie charts (FIGS. 12 and 13). The figure in the centre of each pie chart is the number of inclusions counted in each one gram sample. Higher counts generally indicate smaller as well as more numerous inclusions. Where necessary, further samples were disaggregated to check fabric grouping. Others again were saw-sectioned for study. A $\times 50$ binocular microscope was used for detailed analysis and a $\times 20$ for routine work.

Fabric categories

This section should be read in conjunction with TABLES 1 and 2, and the pie charts (FIGS. 12 and 13). The assemblage was dominated by flint-gritted wares. Variations in size and numerical presence of these grits was continuous rather than discrete. Analysis of joining pieces indicated considerable variation within single vessels and to subdivide the flint-gritted wares would have been unrealistic.

Flint-gritted wares

Fabrics Ib and Ic (below) represent extremes within a single variable fabric, Ia. In the case of vessels 30/31 and 42 in Feature 110, Ib and Ic respectively constitute single pots. Fabric 2, however, is clearly a finer ware. Flint-gritted wares account for 90 per cent of the assemblage. The flint is calcined and comprises at least 60 per cent and often 80 per cent of the inclusions within these wares.

Fabric Ia (69 per cent)

Sections can be thick (8 mm). Cores and often surfaces are reduced. The flint is disaggregated in size but notably includes medium⁵⁶ (1.2 mm), coarse (2–4 mm), and very coarse (4–6 mm) grits. Subsidiary inclusions are irregularly shaped iron oxides and opaque quartz together with fragments of mudstone.

Fabric Ib (17 per cent)

Sections are thinner (6 mm) and exterior surfaces are smoothed. The coarsest grades of calcined flint are rare. Surfaces show signs of oxidation, as on vessel 31 (FIG. 13).

Fabric Ic (1 per cent)

Sherds are thin-walled (4 mm). Surfaces are black or buff, and smoothed. Flint grits are infrequent and of medium and fine grades.

Fabric 2 (2 per cent)

Sherds are thin-walled (5 mm) and dominated by fine (0.5–1.0 mm) and very fine (0.2–0.5 mm) flint. Vessel 18 (FIG. 12) is oxidized, while vessel 46 (FIG. 13) is reduced.

⁵⁵ S. Hamilton, *A Fabric Study of the Iron Age Pottery from Bishopstone, Sussex* (1976), B.A. Dissertation, Institute of Archaeology, London.

⁵⁶ Inclusions were measured along their longest axis. The size parameters given for each grade of inclusion apply throughout the analysis.

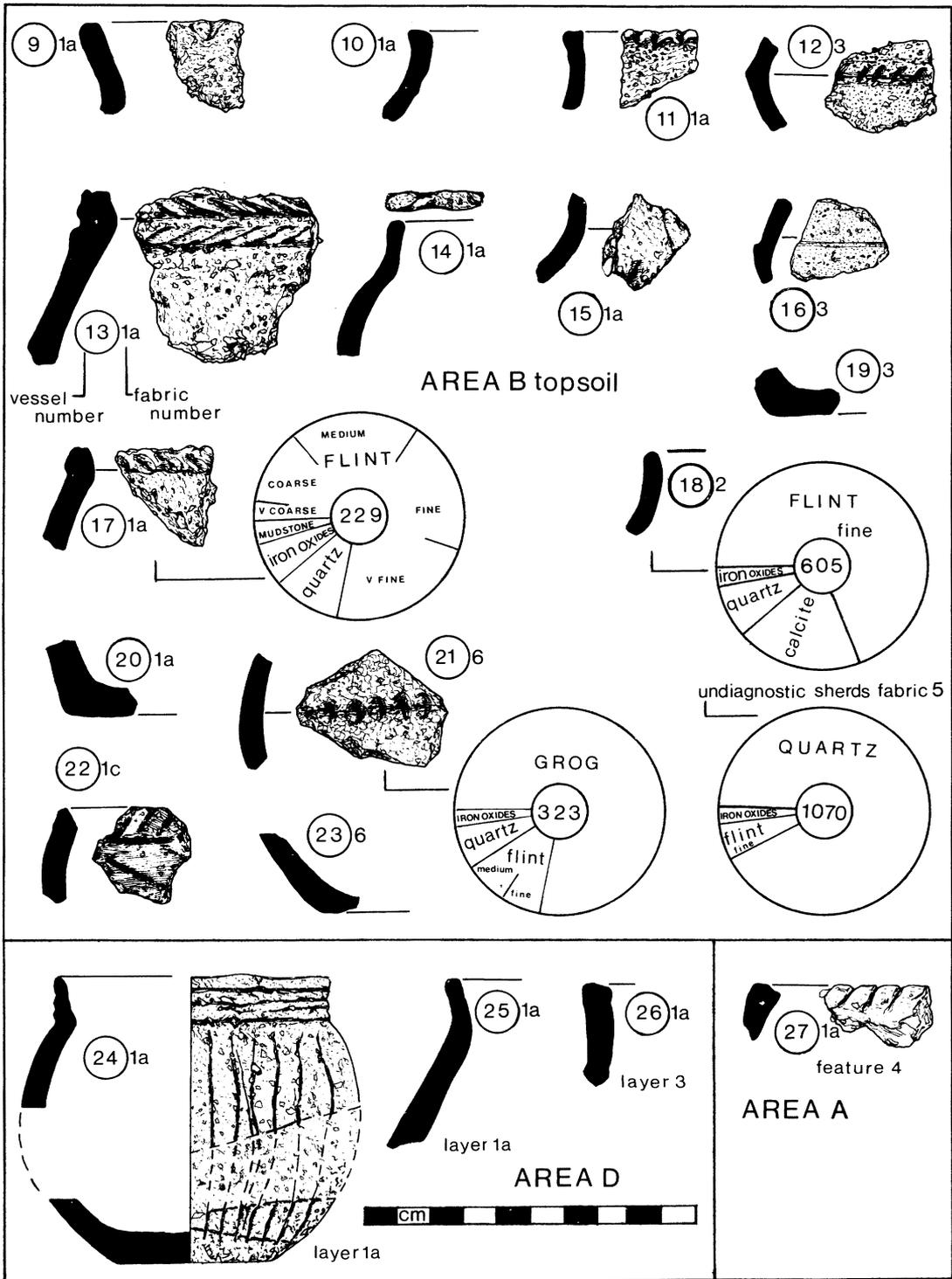


FIG. 12. Chanctonbury Ring 1977. Iron Age pottery. Scale $\frac{1}{2}$.

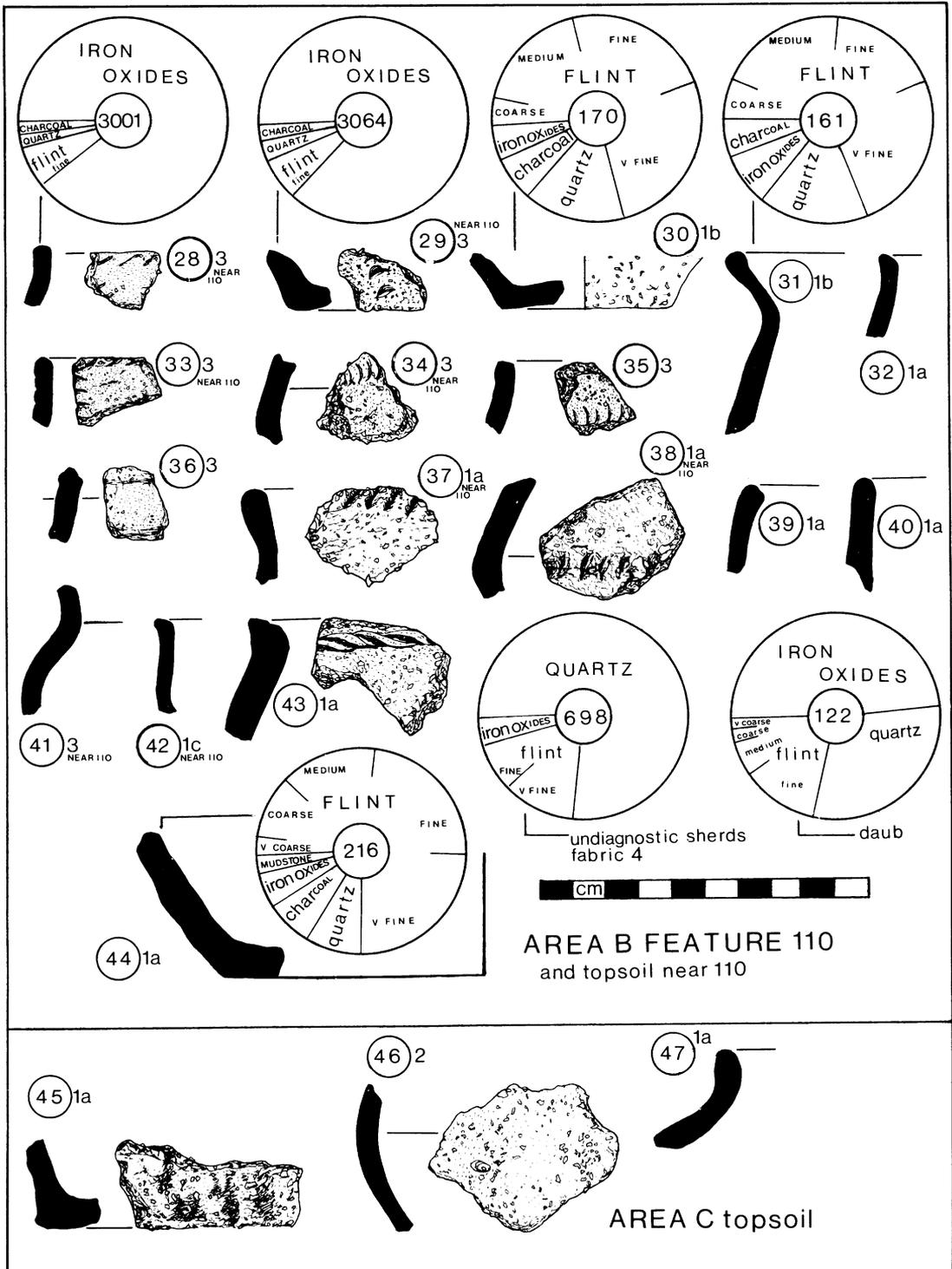


FIG. 13. Chanctonbury Ring 1977. Iron Age pottery. Scale $\frac{1}{2}$.

Other wares

These include iron oxide, sand and grog wares.

Fabric 3 (5.8 per cent)

This is a distinct fabric which has been isolated at a number of sites. Its distribution and source are discussed below. Sherds are of silty texture and bespeckled with pisolith (mineral grain) iron oxides (80 per cent). Surfaces have been burnished at the leather-hard stage, and are brown or black. Cores are reduced.

TABLE I: Sherd weight and counts according to feature and fabric

| Area | Feature | Fabrics | | | | | | | | Total |
|--------------------|------------------|---------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| | | 1a | 1b | 1c | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | |
| A | Topsoil | 15 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | — | — | — | 22 |
| A | 3 | 3 | — | — | 4 | 1 | — | — | — | 8 |
| A | 4 | 8 | 4 | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | 15 |
| B | Topsoil | 307 | 108 | 2 | 15 | 33 | — | 3 | 8 | 476 |
| B | 107 | 4 | — | — | 1 | 2 | — | — | — | 7 |
| B | Topsoil near 110 | 127 | 28 | 5 | — | 15 | 2 | 1 | — | 178 |
| B | 110 | 303 | 57 | 16 | — | 23 | 36 | — | — | 435 |
| B | 111 | 5 | 18 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 23 |
| C | Topsoil | 79 | 4 | 2 | 3 | — | — | 5 | 1 | 94 |
| C | 305 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| D | Layer 1 | 20 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 21 |
| D | Layer 1A | 60 | 9 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 70 |
| D | Layer 3 | 4 | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 6 |
| F | Topsoil | 4 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 4 |
| Total no. | | 939 | 232 | 28 | 25 | 79 | 38 | 9 | 10 | 1,360 |
| Total weight (gm.) | | 6,767 | 1,887 | 98 | 137 | 435 | 97 | 65 | 89 | 9,575 |
| % no. | | 69.0 | 17.1 | 2.1 | 1.8 | 5.8 | 2.8 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 100 |
| % weight | | 70.7 | 19.7 | 1.0 | 1.5 | 4.5 | 1.0 | 0.7 | 0.9 | 100 |

Fabric 4 (2.8 per cent)

This buff-coloured ware relates to one undefined vessel in Feature 110. It is a sandy ware (78 per cent quartz sand) containing some fine flint (18 per cent).

Fabric 5 (0.7 per cent)

Large quantities of quartz sand are present (95 per cent). The ware is harder-fired, thin-walled, and grey- or buff-coloured. All sherds are undiagnostic but are unlike the rest of the Iron Age material. They may be Romano-British.

Fabric 6 (0.9 per cent)

The fabric is distinguished by its grog content (80 per cent). Surfaces are smooth and sometimes burnished. The grog is generally oxidized while the matrix remains reduced. In composition it is similar to later Iron Age grog wares. Its decoration (FIG. 12.21) is appropriate to the rest of the early Iron Age assemblage.

Three featureless sherds containing multi-coloured sand inclusions were also collected from the topsoil. The inclusions are of non-local origin and in texture the fabric appeared medieval.

Daub

Daub from Feature 110 was analysed and included fragments (4 mm) of iron oxide (43 per cent), quartz sand (32 per cent) and flint (12 per cent).

Forms and decoration

TABLES 1 and 2 summarize the association of fabrics and types within individual strata/features. They can provide an estimate of the minimum number of vessels and give a typological reconstruction of the assemblage. Only a small proportion of the pottery was well stratified. Much came from the topsoil, or was residual and associated with Romano-British deposits or second world war disturbances. Feature 110, a shallow Iron Age pit, was the most useful for studying relationships between fabric and type. Sherds found in the topsoil near this feature were definitely associated with its contents. Vessel 24 (FIG. 12) was the only virtually complete vessel to be found, and came from Area D, layer 1A (FIG. 7), a sticky layer at the base of the topsoil immediately inside the rampart. Further pieces of Iron Age pottery were stratified in this layer.

The assemblage includes a variety of forms, although the number of vessels represented may not be unduly large (perhaps under 25). Forms and decoration are listed below. The range of coarse wares is primarily summarized under fabric Ia. The other fabrics indicate the range of finer wares. The pottery can be broadly assigned to the early Iron Age. It is stylistically related to Cunliffe's 'Kimmeridge-Caburn' group (sixth–fifth centuries B.C.⁵⁷), and includes bipartite bowls, cordoned and furrowed bowls, open carinated bowls, tripartite jars and shouldered jars. Typical decorative techniques include finger-tip and finger-nail impressions and cordons. The pottery can be compared with the early pottery from the Caburn,⁵⁸ Hollingbury,⁵⁹ Harting Beacon⁶⁰ and Slonk Hill.⁶¹

The pottery can be divided into the following classes:

Fabric Ia

Bipartite bowl with slightly flaring rim. Oblique finger-nail impressions and stick incisions decorate rims and shoulders (FIG. 12.10, 11 and 26). Rim 47 (FIG. 13) is slightly outcurved and thickened, and may alternatively belong to a jar.

Globular jar represented by vessel 24 (FIG. 12); a unique jar with vertical and horizontal incised decorative lines which attain a lattice effect near the base.

Shouldered jar with upstanding rim. The rim top is often 'pie-crust' or decorated with oblique incisions (FIG. 12.14 and FIG. 13.37). The shoulder may be decorated with finger-tip impressions.

Large (e.g. base FIG. 13.44) tripartite jar with cordoned shoulder, decorated with oblique finger-nail impressions and slashed incisions (FIG. 12.13 and 17; FIG. 13.37).

Bag-shaped vessel with plain rim (FIG. 13.39 and 40).

Fabric Ib

Tripartite jar (FIG. 13.27).

Fabric Ic

Open bowl (FIG. 13.42).

Obliquely incised shoulder (FIG. 12.22).

Fabric 2

? Bipartite bowl (FIG. 12.18).

⁵⁷ B. W. Cunliffe, *Iron Age Communities in Britain* (1974), first edition.

⁵⁸ E. Curwen and E. C. Curwen, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ B. W. Cunliffe, (1966), *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ S. Morris, in O. Bedwin, *Sx. Arch. Colls. cxvi* (1978), forthcoming.

⁶¹ S. Morris, in R. Hartridge, *Sx. Arch. Colls. cxvi* (1978), forthcoming.

TABLE 2: Incidence of diagnostic sherds for each feature

| Area | Feature | Rim, bipartite bowl | Rim, shouldered jar | Incised shoulder | Rim, tripartite jar | Rim, bag-shaped jar | Cordon, tripartite jar | Thumb-impressed base | Large flat base | Globular jar | Rim, tripartite jar | Small flat base | Rim, open bowl | Incised shoulder | Rim, bowl | Shoulder | Rim, bipartite bowl | Incised shoulder | Cordon/furrowed shoulder | Shoulder | Flat base | Finger-impressed | Flat base | | |
|----------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|-----------|----------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------------|----------|-----------|------------------|-----------|----|---|
| A | Topsoil | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | |
| A | 4 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | |
| B | Topsoil | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 2 | — | — | 7 | — | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | |
| B | Topsoil near 110 | — | 1 | 2 | 4 | 1 | — | — | 6 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | |
| B | 110 | — | 12 | — | 6 | 1 | — | — | 23 | — | 7 | 2 | — | — | — | — | 1 | 3 | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | |
| C | Topsoil | 2 | 2 | — | — | — | — | 1 | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | |
| D | Layer 1 | — | 3 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | |
| D | Layer 1A | — | 2 | — | 2 | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | |
| D | Layer 3 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | |
| F | Topsoil | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | |
| Fabric | Ia | Ia | Ia | Ia | Ia | Ia | Ia | Ia | Ia | Ia | Ib | Ib | Ic | Ic | Ic | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 6 |
| Illustrated examples | 10 | 47 | 14 | 15 | 9 | 39 | 13 | 45 | 20 | 24 | 31 | 30 | 42 | 22 | 18 | 46 | 28 | 12 | 16 | 41 | 19 | 21 | 21 | 23 | |
| | 11 | 32 | 27 | 25 | 40 | 17 | 17 | 44 | 44 | 24 | 42 | 42 | 42 | 22 | 18 | 46 | 33 | 34 | 36 | 41 | 29 | 21 | 23 | 23 | |
| | 26 | 37 | 38 | — | — | — | 43 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 33 | 34 | 36 | 35 | 29 | 6 | 6 | 6 | |

Fabric 3

Bipartite bowl with oblique finger-nail impressions on the rim, shoulder and base. In Feature 110 (FIG. 13), nos. 28, 29, 33, 34 and 35 are likely to come from the same vessel. Nos. 36 and 41 may represent another. No. 16 (FIG. 12) is a furrowed shoulder, while no. 36 (FIG. 13) is cordoned.

Fabric 4

A collection of undiagnostic sherds from Feature 110 belonging to a single vessel.

Fabric 5

Undiagnostic sherds, possibly Romano-British.

Fabric 6

Bowl with finger-tip impressions on the shoulder (FIG. 12.21 and 23).

Sources

The pottery contained common sedimentary minerals and this makes it difficult to specify clay sources. A few comments, however, can be made. Some Clay-with-flints exists on top of the Downs near Chanctonbury and a sample was examined. The composition of the clay does not exclude its use for the flint-gritted wares, but the deposits at Chanctonbury are not thick enough to be usable. The Gault and valley clay of the Adur (3 km distant) would have been usable.

The sand in Fabric 4 is opaque and variable in size and shape. It suggests a Wealden deposit containing derived sand.

Fabric 3 contains large quantities of iron oxides in pisolith form. It is a fabric which has been recognized on other sites; Bishopstone,⁶² the Caburn,⁶³ Glynde,⁶⁴ Itford Bottom,⁶⁵ Kiln Combe⁶⁶ and Ranscombe Hill.⁶⁷ This distribution is in the process of being plotted.⁶⁸ The ware suggests exploitation of a ferruginous deposit in the Wealden series. Straker's list⁶⁹ of Wealden iron-working sites gives good indications of major exposures of iron-bearing strata, the richest being Wadhurst Clay. The source is under investigation, but implies exploitation/trade extending several kilometres inland.

Conclusions

Much of the pottery was fragmentary and unstratified, but a varied range of early Iron Age forms could be distinguished.

The suggested sources for the pottery imply that in this respect the site was associated with the Weald rather than the Downs. Chanctonbury and other northerly sites on the South Downs are well positioned to exploit both Weald and Downland. The relatively small number of vessels estimated would favour a view that Chanctonbury was not permanently occupied/utilized. It would be better explained as a link site which straddled both Weald and Downland economies. Further investigation, including analysis of pottery and pottery fabrics from other similarly placed sites, is required to illuminate this hypothesis.

⁶² S. Hamilton, in M. G. Bell, *Sx. Arch. Colls. cxv* (1977), 83–118.

⁶³ E. Curwen and E. C. Curwen, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ Unpublished; material in Barbican House, Lewes, Sussex.

⁶⁵ M. G. Bell, *forthcoming.*

⁶⁶ M. G. Bell, *forthcoming.*

⁶⁷ C. M. Green, in O. Bedwin, *Sx. Arch. Colls. cxvi* (1978), *forthcoming.*

⁶⁸ The fabric has been noted at these listed sites, and further work is in progress.

⁶⁹ E. Straker, *Wealden Iron* (1969).