

**THE
JOURNAL
OF THE
WILKINSON
SOCIETY**

No. **6**

1978

PRICE 30p

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THE WILKINSON SOCIETY

The Society was formed in 1972 to meet the demand for an organisation to preserve the material and documentary evidence of Broseley's industrial past. Since an important part in this industrial past was played by John Wilkinson, who lived for a time at "The Lawns", it was decided that the organisation should be known as The Wilkinson Society.

The aims of the Society are :-

- (i) to act as custodian of any relevant material and information and to make such material and information available to interested individuals and organisations ;
- (ii) to promote any relevant preservation activity and to assist individuals or organisations in such activity where deemed appropriate ;
- (iii) to provide a link with the community of Broseley for individuals or organisations undertaking local historical research.

Any available material will be added to the existing collection of Broseley and Wilkinson relics at "The Lawns", Church Street, Broseley. This collection is open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays between Easter and September, from 2 p.m. until 6 p.m., or at other times by appointment.

Administration of the Society is by an annually elected committee. Membership is open to anyone interested in the Society's aims and activities. These activities include illustrated lectures, social evenings, researching and exhibiting the collection, field trips and coach tours. Members are kept informed by newsletters, and this annual Journal presents articles on the history of the Broseley area, John Wilkinson, and industrial archaeology in general.

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NOTES AND NEWS

The Year's Activities

The first meeting of the 1977 - 78 season was held at "The Lawns" on 14th October, 1977. Mr. Dennis Roberts spoke on "The Ceramic Industry in the Severn Gorge, 1750 - 1820", concentrating on little-known aspects of Jackfield and Caughley products, and the personalities of Messrs. Turner, Gallimore and Rose.

The fifth Annual General Meeting was held at "The Lawns" on 11th November. The Chairman reported that the museum debts had been cleared and that the Society had been very active during the period leading up to the auction sale of the New Willey buildings.

Officers and Committee for the year 1977 - 78 were then elected as follows :-

Chairman	-	N. J. Clarke
Secretary	-	M. Hawes
Treasurer	-	C. Whall
Curator	-	R. Pee
Assistant Curator	-	A. Mugridge
Committee	-	C. Pointon, J. Cragg, Mrs. S. Perfect, Mrs. A. Morton

Unanimous votes of thanks were given to the Chairman, Mr. M. Silvester, and the retiring Treasurer, Mr. D. Mason, for their past efforts. Both had been on the Committee since the foundation of the Society in 1972.

At the conclusion of the business Mr. H. Griffiths showed slides of the two summer outings in 1977, to Coalport and Worcester. After coffee, Mr. Neil Clarke presented a short but very interesting talk on "The Severn Navigation".

The annual joint meeting with the Friends of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum took place, for the first time, at the Severn Warehouse in Ironbridge, on 9th December. It was well attended by members of both organisations, who were treated to a series of photographic and tape-slide items of high quality, on Ironbridge, an iron-framed building in Shrewsbury, and on exports from the Severn Gorge.

The usual Social Meeting took place at "The Lawns" on 24th February, 1978. Members brought along a splendid selection of photographs, maps, postcards and paintings relating to the Broseley area, and the gathering of 50 enjoyed these with their sherry.

On 31st March, Sir Paul Benthall gave an expertly researched talk on "George Maw, Botanist, Gardener and Plant Hunter". The beautiful slides for his talk were photographed by Mr. Graham Saxby of Wolverhampton Polytechnic, from Sir Paul's copy of George Maw's book "The Genus Crocus".

The summer outing to the Avoncroft Museum of Buildings on 20th May was greatly enjoyed by the 39 participants; the weather did us proud, and the event was a success in all respects.

The fourth Annual Celebrity Lecture was held at "The Lawns" on Friday 1st September. Mr. Henry Sandon, Curator of the Dyson Perrins Museum of Worcester Porcelain, gave a most engaging and informative talk on the early history of the Worcester Porcelain Factory, and its connections with Caughley.

Finally, on September 7th, 8th and 9th at "The Lawns", several members of the Society took part in the Broseley Pageant. Written by Ralph Pee, directed by Mike Kaiser and with splendid costumes organised by Mrs. Freda Spickernell, this effort attracted large audiences and was so successful that it may be repeated in the near future.

In addition to the above, Committee Meetings were held at "The Lawns" on 27th January, 13th July and 6th October, 1978.

Mrs. Dora Pee

It is with great regret that we record the death of Mrs. Dora Pee, on August 12th, 1978 at Broseley.

Her kindness and hospitality to the Society from its earliest days will not be forgotten. Apart from her keen interest in all the Society's activities, she created the welcoming and friendly atmosphere at "The Lawns" which has contributed in no small measure to the success of our meetings there.

We extend our sincere condolences to Ralph Pee and the family.

Programme of Events for 1978 - 1979

- 27th October : Sixth A.G.M., followed by a talk - "The Broseley Association for the Prosecution of Felons" - by Mr. J. Cragg.
- 10th November : Illustrated talk - "The Bradley Ironworks of John Wilkinson" - by Mr. W. Smith.
- 8th December : Joint meeting with the Friends of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum at the Severn Warehouse, Ironbridge : illustrated talk - "The Uncommon Genius - Thomas Telford", by Alistair Penfold.
- 26th January : Members' evening at "The Lawns".
- 16th March : Illustrated talk - "Memories of Old Broseley", by Mr. E. Harris.
- May/June : It is hoped to arrange a summer outing in association with the F.I.G.M.
- August : Fifth Annual Celebrity Lecture (details to be announced).

The Journal

After holding the price of the Journal at the same level for three years, we are forced by production costs to increase the price (to non-members) to 30 pence. We are grateful to Mrs. B. Bale of Wellington for the typing and duplicating of this issue. Further copies and back numbers 3 - 5 can be obtained from the Secretary at 18, Salop Street, Bridgnorth, price 37p each (including postage). Contributions to future issues of the Journal would be welcome, and should be sent to the Editor at "Cranleigh", Little Wenlock, Telford.

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THE SEVERN IN SOUTH SHROPSHIRE

Part 2 : Navigation

The navigational properties of the river, which amount to volume of water/ maximum depth of channel at low levels, must have started to deteriorate at a very early date. Deepening of brooks by erosion and clearance of forests would lead to faster drainage with higher floods and lower low water. Telford noticed a deterioration in his time and put it down to the draining of water meadows (5), but this would be only one factor. In fact, concern had been shown as early as the 15th century: in 1425 a commission was appointed to view the banks of the Severn, repair defects, and see that mills and weirs did not obstruct traffic (these were probably fish weirs); and in 1472 another commission was appointed. It appears that there were difficulties even in those days (6). In 1575 another factor appeared: the dumping of industrial rubbish. James Clifford, Lord of the Manor of Broseley, was accused of obstructing the river with his pit waste (7).

For how long the river could naturally dispose of all the rubbish dumped into it is a matter for conjecture, but it certainly could not in later years. It was noticeable that when the new gas main was laid across the river north of Bridgnorth, material from a deep trench in a deep part of the river contained a large proportion of ceramic waste from the Broseley area, which means that industrial rubbish was filling up the deeps, making the current faster. There are numerous examples of alteration to the shape of the river bank by dumping, such as that near Maws and the Coalport Works and near the Bridge Clock at Bridgnorth, where purposeful dumping has practically closed the first arch and may be partly responsible for the filling of the Bylet channel.

The narrowing of the channel by building out the banks would not of course in itself affect navigation, the real limiting factor being the depth of water in the deep channels of the fords. At the fords the bed of the river is rock, and here the level of the bed can only alter very slowly and only downwards. This level can be taken as a datum for purposes of comparison. Taking a known example, fifty years ago the depth of water in the deep channel of the ford at Bridgnorth at summer levels was of the order of 2 ft: just too much for a young boy to paddle through even with his trousers round his buttocks. At this level, the level at the bridge was much the same as that shown in the numerous 18th and 19th century pictures of the town. Even given a 6 ins. error in observation, this only gives us 2 ft. 6 ins. of water over the ford at summer levels in the 17th century, and the pictures usually show some traffic. The conclusion is that until fairly recently the summer levels of the river were not very much different from those of the late 18th and 19th centuries.

Navigation by barges was always difficult, if not impossible, during the summer months. This low water hindrance to navigation normally lasted 2 or 3 months, sometimes 4 or 5, and on one occasion 10 months (8). One might have done better in the 1920s. In more recent years, 'export' of water from the catchment area and the control of water flowing into the river has made it impossible to assess what the natural deterioration is. Certainly in summer months, sufficient water for commercial navigation or even regattas would be by courtesy of the Water Board.

It is also apparent that traffic moved when the river was something above low summer levels when the current in places, if not everywhere, would be

fairly swift. A barge going downstream would not only be travelling pretty fast, but would not be under very positive control. Shooting a ford with a heavy load must have been a matter of knowing the river, choosing the channel and saying prayers. The idea of putting up sails to gain steerage-way by going even faster is hardly conceivable. It is not surprising that the last barge down the river crashed into the bridge at Bridgnorth. Incidentally, it is believed that the wreck of this barge was hauled ashore at the bottom of Doctors Lane and finally disappeared during the coal strike in 1912 (9). A thought comes to mind that the sailing conditions must have called for a recognised 'highway code' and a strong river discipline, but no code of signals or rule of the road appears to have been recorded.

In spite of the many pictures and statements by reputable historians, I find it difficult to believe that barges on this part of the river ever used sails. In the first place, the wind in a deep inland valley is far too erratic to make it worthwhile and sailing downstream on a 'running tide' would be nothing short of suicidal. Upstream, on very rare occasions, sails could have been of some help but only to the benefit of the bow haulers, who could not be dispensed with in case the wind dropped or changed and who would have to be paid anyway.

The barges certainly had masts which were necessary because the deep river banks made it impossible to tow with a rope attached directly to the vessel. These masts would, no doubt, also carry derricks for loading, which seem to have been taken by the artist as spars for sails, so that when he went home to London after making a sketch, he gave the vessel the rig of a London barge. Furthermore, to sail a wide flat bottomed barge, would be very like trying to sail a coracle. The Dutch sailed barges on their inland canals, but not only are the winds more regular in a flat country, they used barge boards lowered from the sides of the vessels to act as keels. I know of no record of barge boards being used on the Severn, but it is on record that in 1797 Severn trows were redesigned and fitted with keels for use under sail on the Severn Estuary (10).

Bow hauling by men seems to have been an unfortunate practice which grew up from expediency, and, having become established, proved difficult to eradicate. The provision of a towpath can only have been a small, albeit essential part of the problem, as the only difference between a horse path and a foot path is that a horse cannot negotiate stiles and such-like obstacles. It seems to have been an extreme form of Ludditism. Dr. Watkins Pitchford sees in it some truth in the old saying 'people born and bred in Shropshire are strong in the arm and weak in the head'. On the other hand, £5,000 to make a towpath is a lot of money to replace stiles and other obstacles with gates (11), but it may have been necessary to bridge small streams where they entered the river, as over Contree Brook.

In the 1920s there were two barges in use at Bridgnorth, both commercial barges adapted for passengers. They were not so wide as the original Severn barges, but certainly not narrow boats. One owned by Corfields on the right bank had a punt end, while the other owned by Darleys on the left bank had the normal rounded bows. They were both flat bottomed and drew only little water, possibly a foot when full of passengers. Although I never saw it used, Darleys barge had an upper deck, with seats for a band. Filled with 'trippers' of that age, these barges plied between their landing stages near the carpet factory and the Town Mills (a round trip of about 2 miles), negotiating the ford at the Water Works. They were normally drawn by a single horse, with the tow rope attached to the top of the mast. At that time, horses for this sort of thing were normally supplied by 'Pop' Jones of soda water fame, who delivered his pop in horse-drawn waggons. When horses were not available (if they were Pop Jones's they might have been

pulling the hearse or the fire engine), the barges were pulled by any handy volunteers. On occasions, one or other of these barges took Sunday School or such like parties as far as Apley for picnics, which meant negotiating several fords, including the difficult Gadstone. Possibly the last commercial voyage on this part of the river was made by Mr. Tomkins of Waterloo House, who in the '20s took curtains and the like to Apley Hall by rowing boat.

Low Town, Bridgnorth, has or had a large amount of stabling concentrated near the river. Some of this in corrugated iron is obviously connected with the horse sales held at the Falcon Hotel early this century. Some in brick and earlier is probably connected with the port traffic and distribution of goods by road. Some, still earlier and in sandstone, is more intimately connected with the river traffic. The sandstone stabling at No. 2 Bridge Street, originally the first house over the bridge, was once directly connected with the quay on the left bank, via a wide doorway which can still be seen in the wall between Nos. 1 and 2 and on 18th century prints. There is also a small sandstone building now part of No. 1 which can be seen on these prints and which may have been some kind of port building. Most of these 18th and 19th century prints show this quay as being silted up much as to-day. The stables are behind No. 3 Bridge Street, an Elizabethan cottage, and have very poor access to the street. As a boy, I was always told that they had been used for barge horses. The stable building itself is of some interest in that the beams of the main roof truss are angled to meet the beams supporting the left floor, providing a clear dormer loft uninterrupted by any cross ties (12). It has not been possible to date No. 2 Bridge Street. Part is Elizabethan, while a unique oak staircase speaks of a later period of some affluence. At the rear it had direct access to the quay and the riverside, and there are traces of a large cobbled yard.

The quay itself is not as high as that on the right bank; but it is quite high above summer river levels and, according to the 18th and 19th century prints, is practically unaltered. Whenever it was built, and it may have been quite early, by 1800 it had become, or was becoming, quite unusable owing to silting up. The quay on the right bank is higher, but steps go down to low water level. Some way down the first flight there is a manhole to a sewer far down below quay level, indicating that the quay has been built up over it. It seems strange that although the quay is so high, there are no records of a crane or derrick to lift the cargoes out of the barges.

The house of the 'River Steward', now demolished, was 'William and Mary (1689 - 1702)' (13), but before this there was a row of cottages between the road and the river with steps passing underneath like a water gate (14).

Having all the port facilities on one side of the river and most of the stabling on the other could not have been very convenient, especially as the bridge was subject to toll. It would, however, have been quite simple to dodge the toll by taking the horses across the ford. I remember a Mrs. Oakes wade across the river 'to save going all round by the bridge'. The toll house was on the bridge over the buttress of the now first arch, not as appears at first sight over that of the second. It was quite a large toll house with a lantern tower. Sometime between 1797 and 1824 it was rebuilt on a much smaller scale and the lantern used to decorate the outbuildings of Parlors Hall (15).

There are a number of warehouses on the right bank of the river of various ages, some possibly Victorian, but very little stabling. One gets the impression that river traffic originally concentrated on the left bank, but

that the silting up caused it to move to the right bank, where the port facilities are in general of a later date. This narrowing of the river, from the left, seems to have continued over the ages from the time when there were channels. It is still going on and, in spite of some dredging, the Bylet is unlikely to be an island for very much longer.

The rings in the bridge, often quoted as a relic of the barge traffic, were never intended for mooring barges; they are too big and too high from the water and are purely ornamental. Barge traffic is pretty flexible. A barge can stop and unload anywhere it can get near the bank. In the early days recognised loading places were known as loades, and the name persists in Hampton Loade, Fosters Loade, Skinners Loade and Friars Loade. The monks of Buildwas Abbey would have had a loade, but the name and whereabouts is lost. Later, industrialists built themselves wharfs like Willey Wharf. There was one at the Knowle for loading bricks and there would be one at the Wrens Nest. There must have been many others. Goods from the Upper Forge at Astbury were shipped from a wharf at Erdington via a miniature canal between the valley of the Mor brook and the Severn. This canal ran in a tunnel through the intervening sandstone, ending with a miniature quay out in the sandstone high above river level - a small scale Shropshire canal but without the incline. Clifford shipped his coals from the C. lcutts and there was a Benthall quay (16), but there are no physical traces of this early barge traffic in the Ironbridge area, and it was never a major distribution centre. The great build-up of river traffic in the 18th century, giving rise to Coalport and the quays near the Gothic Warehouse, was almost entirely concerned with the export of coal and manufactured goods from the area, which may have been a factor in the establishment of the practice of bow hauling. It would be easy for a team of bow haulers to ride downstream on a loaded barge in order to pull it back empty or lightly loaded. A horse would have to be led downstream. Many of the bow haulers came from Jackfield (17).

There is now a very difficult stretch of river between Coalport and Ironbridge. Continuing landslips due to the geological immaturity of this part of the river makes it difficult to visualise what it was like in the 18th century, but it could never have been very good.

It was originally intended to bring the Shropshire canal via an incline to somewhere near the bottom of Coalbrookdale (18) where there was to have been a short service canal as at Coalport. One might think this project was very wisely abandoned and the traffic directed to the Hay incline and Coalport, thus avoiding a bad stretch of river. There was a railway down to the river, but the Gothic Warehouse and the adjoining wharf does not appear to have been meant for handling heavy goods in bulk. In fact it gives the impression of a glorified parcels office. In contrast with the quays at Bridgnorth, the quay here is very little above water level and it seems strange for a quay to have been built which is flooded every time the river rises a foot or so. It may be that it was not always so and that changes in the level of the river bed, due to earth movements or silting, have given it its present characteristics.

In conclusion, it can be said that the exploited, possibly abused, and now neglected Severn has served the country well in spite of its shortcomings. Without locks above Stourport, it is not surprising that river traffic vanished with the coming of the railways. That the river was used to such a large extent illustrates the need for transport brought about by the Industrial Revolution. The possibility of a weir at Bridgnorth is raised from time to time, but it is never likely to be built. It would, after all, only provide some local scenic effects and a pool for small boats. It would

need a virtual staircase of weirs and locks to make it navigable for any great distance (the Thames, a much simpler river, has 44), and it is likely to remain the resort of canoeists and anglers.

References (continued from Part 1.)

5. J. Plymley, 'A General View of the Agriculture of Shropshire' (1803), p. 286.
6. W. Watkins-Pitchford, 'Bygone Traffic on the Severn', p.26.
7. B. Trinder, 'The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire' (1973), p. 10.
8. Watkins-Pitchford, op.cit., p.25.
9. Ex.inf.E.H.Pee.
10. J.E. Andrews, Shropshire Magazine, April 1972.
11. Watkins-Pitchford, op.cit., p.24.
12. Ex.inf. former Apley Estate Agent, who remembered oaks on the estate having their branches weighted with stones to provide such beams.
13. Watkins-Pitchford, op.cit., p.5.
14. Ex. inf. E.H. Pee.
15. There are many prints of the bridge at Bridgnorth, a number of which can be seen in the Northgate Museum. The lantern can now be seen on Clark's motor showrooms in Wolverhampton.
16. Trinder, op.cit., p. 122.
17. ibid., p. 109.
18. ibid., p. 130.

Ralph Pee

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THE OLD VICARAGE, BENTHALL, BROSELEY, SALOP.

Report of an archaeological investigation of the site, January 1978.

The Old Vicarage, Benthall, is situated just outside Broseley in Shropshire. The site is owned by Mr. & Mrs. Cragg and occupies two acres with a large brick house dating from about 1660 with later additions. North of the house is a slope leading down to a filled-in disused coal mine ventilation shaft of the early 20th century. To the south is a brick stable, probably the same age as the house, a lean-to shed attached to the stable, and a brick-built pigsty now used as a shed. These buildings form a division between the main back garden and a flat circular area bounded on the south side by a mixed hedge raised about 2 metres above a cow field belonging to a neighbouring property (see fig. 1).

The house was mentioned in the 1851 census as Coppice House, Benthall and was occupied by Mr. Jones, a "Potter" employing several hands. It was used as a Vicarage in the late 19th century and hence received its present name.

About 100 yards south of the forementioned hedge during the 18th century were open-cast coalworkings known as the Deerleap. A Wooden railway is recorded as having extended from the Deerleap to the main road through the Vicarage grounds.

Mr. Cragg recalls that up until about 15 years ago the flat area by the stable, known as the Drying Patch, was mounded up with an old bath, other bulky refuse, and material associated with early ceramics. These comprised a large quantity of saggars from a saltglaze kiln of c.1720, mostly imperfect, and pieces of saltglazed brickwork which were originally part of a kiln. However, all except a few complete saggars and one section of saltglazed bricks were dumped during the early 1960s to fill in the disused mine-shaft which had become unsafe. Other similar saggars had been used on part of the site just outside of the kitchen to support an earth bank which had been damaging a 19th century lean-to shed.

Considerable alteration to the site during recent years has resulted in many slopes and dips being repositioned. This makes it very difficult to determine the position of any demolished buildings. However, Mr. Cragg kept any pieces of ceramics uncovered during work on various parts of the site. It is impossible to say accurately the location each piece came from, except that all were from the site. These fragments, to be detailed later, give further evidence of salt-glaze and leadglaze manufacture, during the early 18th century, of types not normally associated with potteries in Shropshire, but typical of Staffordshire.

There is still much to be learnt about pottery making during this period, and so an archaeological excavation on the site was planned for early in 1978, in the hope of locating a kiln.

Henry and John Sandon, assisted by David Sandon, arrived at the Old Vicarage on December 31st, 1977 and after extensive examination of the locations decided the flat area known as the Drying Patch (fig. 1) would be the most likely place for a kiln to have stood, besides the fact that the saggars had been found there. If the circular area represented a kiln base it was felt a box would be best situated on the outer part of the Drying Patch just inside the south hedge, 200 cm. north/south by 150 cm. east/west. This we referred to as Box 1.

The topsoil was 10 cm. and contained very mixed dumps of recent ash and rubble, but also a few salt-glazed shards from the early 18th century, including wasters. This was termed level 1.

Below this was a wide deposit of dark soil representing general household refuse and deposits of Victorian and later dates. In the upper part of this level 2 were found a section of a salt-glaze saggar and other 18th century shards. Along with these were Victorian and 20th century pottery and glass bottles plus metal fragments, in considerable quantity. At about 50 cm. the Victorian remains died out and only 18th century fragments were found. All pieces were fragments and showed no signs of kiln imperfections.

At 64 cm. a fragment of flat unglazed high-fired earthenware was found with an incised name ? Clowlon and date 1 Octob.. . It is very similar in paste and colour to lead-glazed mugs found on other parts of the site. It is probably a potter's tool. At a similar depth was also found several unglazed shards possibly wasters, intended for glazing. One was clearly an unglazed fragment of a mug with turned banding exactly matching the mugs with brown lead glaze found throughout the site.

At 70 cm. a change of level was discovered; a compact earth floor of a lighter colour. On cleaning, a pit was found to be dug through the floor in the north east corner of the box. The pit contained a large quantity of clay roof tiles and a meat-paste container. The finds dated the pit to mid Victorian. At its deepest the pit reached 104 cm. from the surface.

The earth floor was a very compact layer of clayey soil containing rubble, cinders and pieces of early 18th century pottery. However, the floor was only a thin top shell lying on natural clay which was undisturbed. The clay was found at a depth of about 74 cm. and was white pipeclay stained brown with iron, containing varied sizes of pebbles. Box 1 showed no further prospects and after measuring was backfilled. A section is drawn as fig. 9.

The following day a further examination of the entire site was made with the help of Malcolm Nixon who is experienced on kiln excavation and structure. Again it was felt that the Drying Patch was the most likely site for a kiln.

Simeon Shaw in his "History of the Staffordshire Potteries" (1829), when debating the possibility of the Elers brothers making salt-glaze described the kiln said to have been used by the Elers at Bradwell in Staffordshire as being about 5 feet inside diameter, while salt-glaze kilns in Burslem were ten to twelve feet. He wrote ... "salt-glazed pottery of that time was comparatively cheap; and the oven, being fired only once a week, required to be large, to hold a quantity sufficient to cover contingent expenses. Hence we find the ovens were large, and high, and had holes in the domes, to receive the salt cast in to effect the glazing".

Box 1 had already ruled out a large kiln on the Drying Patch but a small kiln of say 6 or 8 feet in diameter could still have stood there. It was decided a trench nearer to the stable buildings might locate the foundations of a small kiln.

On Monday January 2nd, 1978 John Sandon, Malcolm Nixon and David Sandon marked out a trench running NE/SW, 420 cm. long and 50 cm. wide. The thin turf lay directly on a dark ash and soil similar to the upper levels of Box 1. This represented a Victorian and early 20th century refuse dump probably associated with the house. It contained various glass bottles, metal tins and broken pottery, including several pieces of "Salopian Art Pottery" made nearby in Benthall c. 1900, and Coalport china from just over the river.

The dark rubbish level reached a depth of about 80 cm. before giving out to a pure ash level composed of grey ash and cinders with pieces of potter's tools and kiln furniture. They were of a type associated with the later 19th century. At between 95 and 100 cm. the natural undisturbed clay was once more discovered ruling out the Drying Patch as the location for a kiln. The trench was back filled. A section is drawn as fig. 10. The kiln furniture probably represented the period when the house was used by Mr. Jones, c. 1850s.

The failure to find any brickwork or traces of kiln structure indicated that the Drying Patch could never have been the location of a kiln. Therefore a further examination of the area was made to try and find a stratified undisturbed deposit of early 18th century material to help determine what ceramic use the site had been put to.

Just outside of the kitchen window above the lean-to previously mentioned is a mound bearing an oak tree and seeming to have been built up artificially. The tree appears to be at least 200 years old. A gentle probe under the surface produced a quantity of early salt-glaze wasters and so a small box was prepared.

The top 15 cm. was a very dark ash soil containing fragments of the salt-glazed saggars, pieces of "white-dipped" salt-glazed mugs and salt-glazed wasters, all c. 1700 - 1720. But this was only a surface dumping and lay on a thin level of brown soil containing household deposits of pottery and bones of the later 18th century. At only 25 cm. natural clay was again encountered. The salt-glazed level must represent a surface deposit of soil from another part of the site. Once more, after measuring, the box (Box 2) was filled in.

Box 3 was dug five metres south of Box 2, on a slightly sloping bank raised by a brick wall outside the back door of the house. Below the turf was a dark brown soil which gave on directly to the undisturbed natural clay, at a depth of 20 cm. Both Boxes 2 and 3 were 150 cm. by 100 cm.

No other parts of the site indicated from the surface that they might hide undisturbed levels of 18th century occupation, and so no further trial boxes were attempted. The only method which might be used to locate the kiln is a resistivity test of the ground using electrical equipment, and plans will be made for such a test to be carried out, perhaps later in the year.

The only material which can be used to indicate what sort of pottery was made on the site are the saggars and the shards found by Mr. Cragg on unrecorded parts of the site.

There are three main types of ceramics found in quantity on the site, buff-coloured earthenware covered with a brown glaze, slipware fragments with

various designs below clear glazes, and salt-glazed stoneware. Each will be dealt with in turn.

Most abundant are the brown-glazed wares of which over 400 fragments have been found. Mostly they are pieces of mugs, cylindrical at the bases and flared at the rims, particularly on the larger examples. The mugs occur in five different sizes and have slightly fluted curved handles roughly central on the side of the vessels. Just below the upper join of the handle are turned ridges arranged in two rows of four or five, running round the bodies, and each mug has turned ledges at the bases. From the base sections found it is possible to account for at least 25 different examples of the mugs. A typical example is drawn in section as fig. 2.

One unusual shape of which a nearly complete specimen and several shards were found, is an onion shaped bottle with a short foot and loop handle applied to the shoulder. The bottle's intended use is uncertain. Like the mugs, the small bottles are brown-glazed with the thick glaze dribbling to just above the foot (fig. 3.)

Other notable shapes in brown-glazed ware are a two-handled porringer with widely flaring rim and three deeply turned grooves level with the upper handle (fig.4.), the base of a very large bottle or cooking pot (fig. 6.) and a base of a flat or shallow dish of square shape with rounded sides curved both vertically and horizontally. It is not possible to predict what form it originally took (fig. 5.).

There is very little evidence of kiln wastage among the brown-glazed shards found except for one mug base which has pieces of another pot adhering to the inside, but it is not definitely a waster. The only certain waster is the fragment found in pit 1, level 2, part of an unglazed mug with the turned bands. From the style of shape the mugs can be dated to c. 1700 - 1710.

The slipwares themselves fall into two main types; variously coloured trailed and feathered designs in so called Staffordshire style, and a distinctive type of wares in fairly high-fired buff earthenware body, simply trailed in chocolate-brown with narrow bands and streaks, below a pale yellow-tinted transparent lead glaze. The first type occurs in very small quantity and in scattered pieces not nearly complete enough to re-construct. These are probably imported dishes, maybe from Staffordshire, which were used and broken in the house.

Pieces of the other slipware type are much more numerous and some pieces are surprisingly complete. These include the base of a mug very similar in shape, and in a not unlike body, to the brown-glazed mugs already mentioned. Also a two-handled porringer related in shape to the brown-glazed one was found with brown streaks below a yellow glaze. The most impressive of this type was a complete but broken shallow dish of small size with a "piecrust" rim and parallel streaks of brown slip. Tests will be carried out on shards of both the brown-glazed and slipware pieces to see if, as suspected, they originated from the same clay.

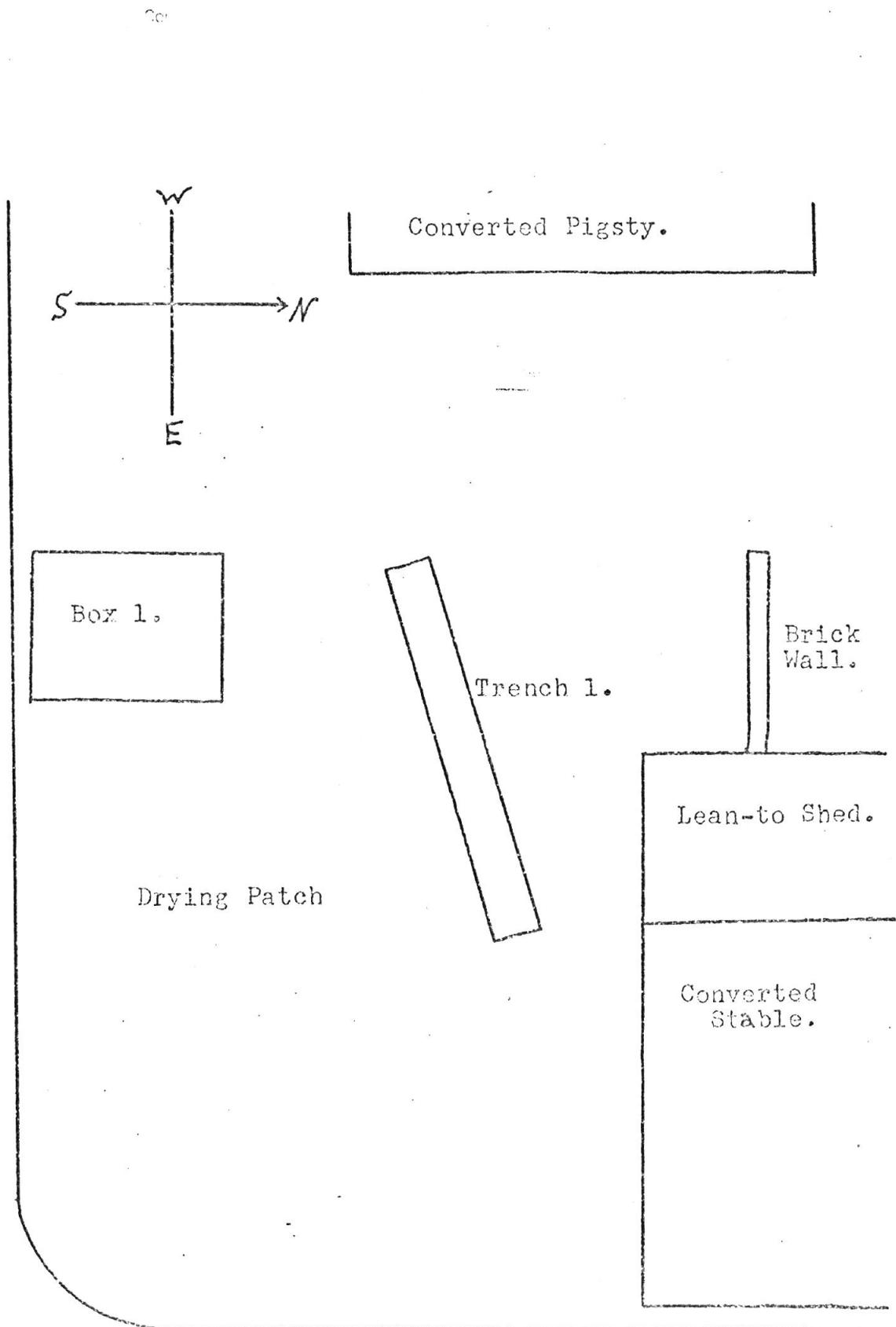
The most important of the ceramic finds relate to salt-glazed stoneware production and from the finds a clear picture can be obtained.

Salt-glazed wares developed in Staffordshire in a particular way. The earliest wares were brown using a clay rich in iron. Various experiments were made to try and introduce white salt-glaze but the white clay of Burslem

Fig. 1.

The Old Vicarage, Benthall, January 1978.

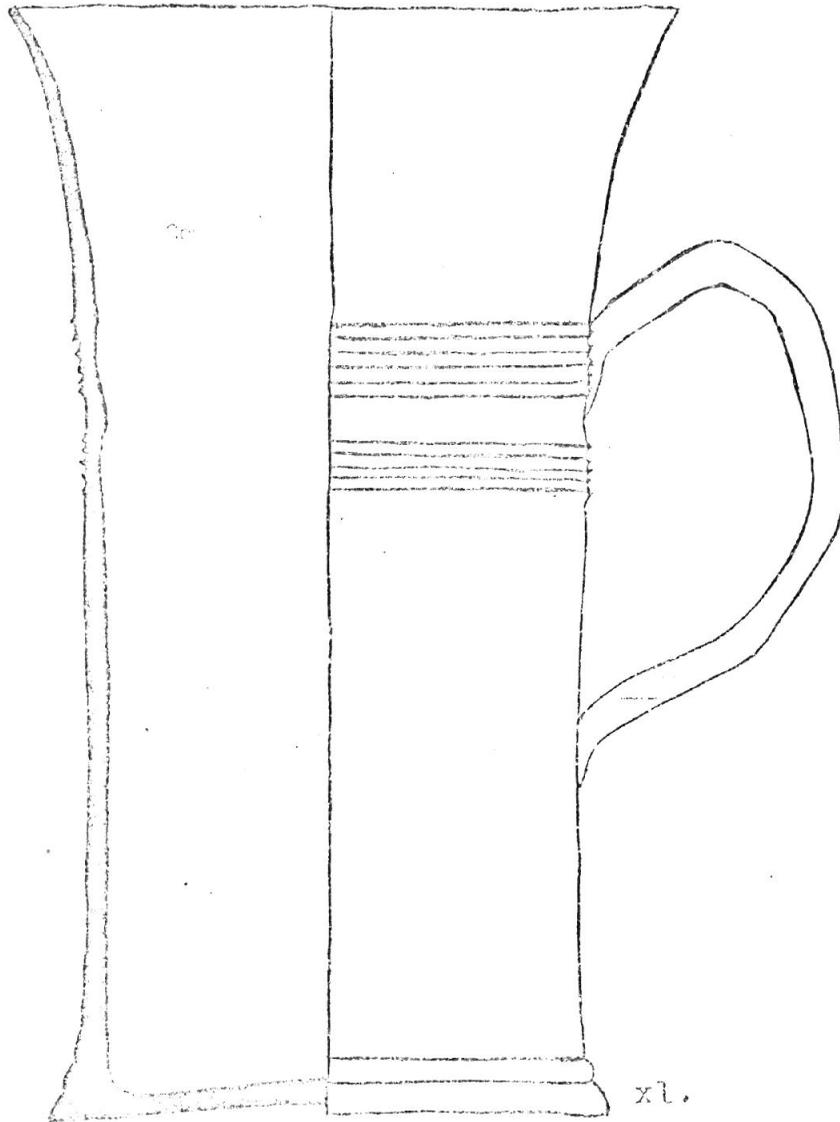
Excavations in the "Drying Patch".



Cowfield.

Scale. 1.5cm.=1 metre
1:66.6.

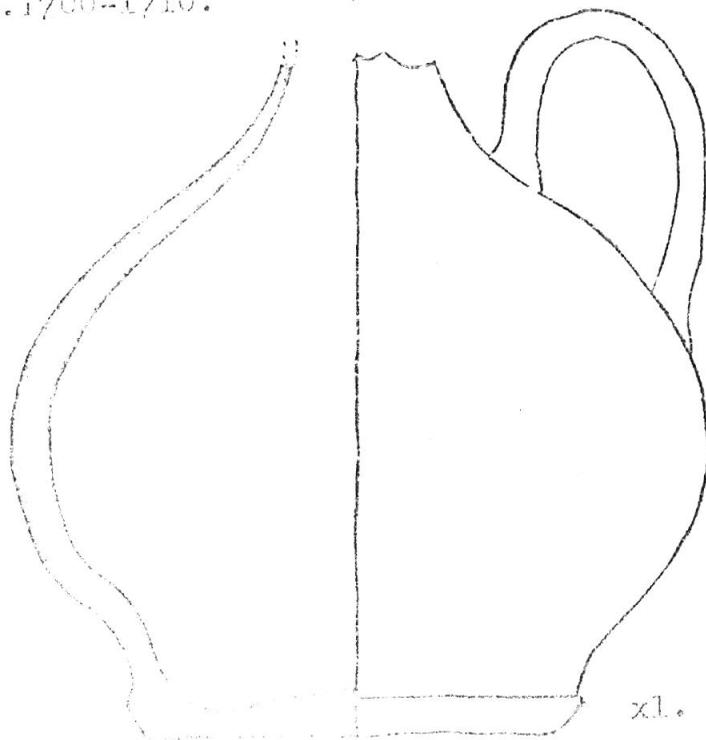
Fig. 2.



x1.

Section of mug with running brown glaze stopping just above the foot. c. 1700-1710.

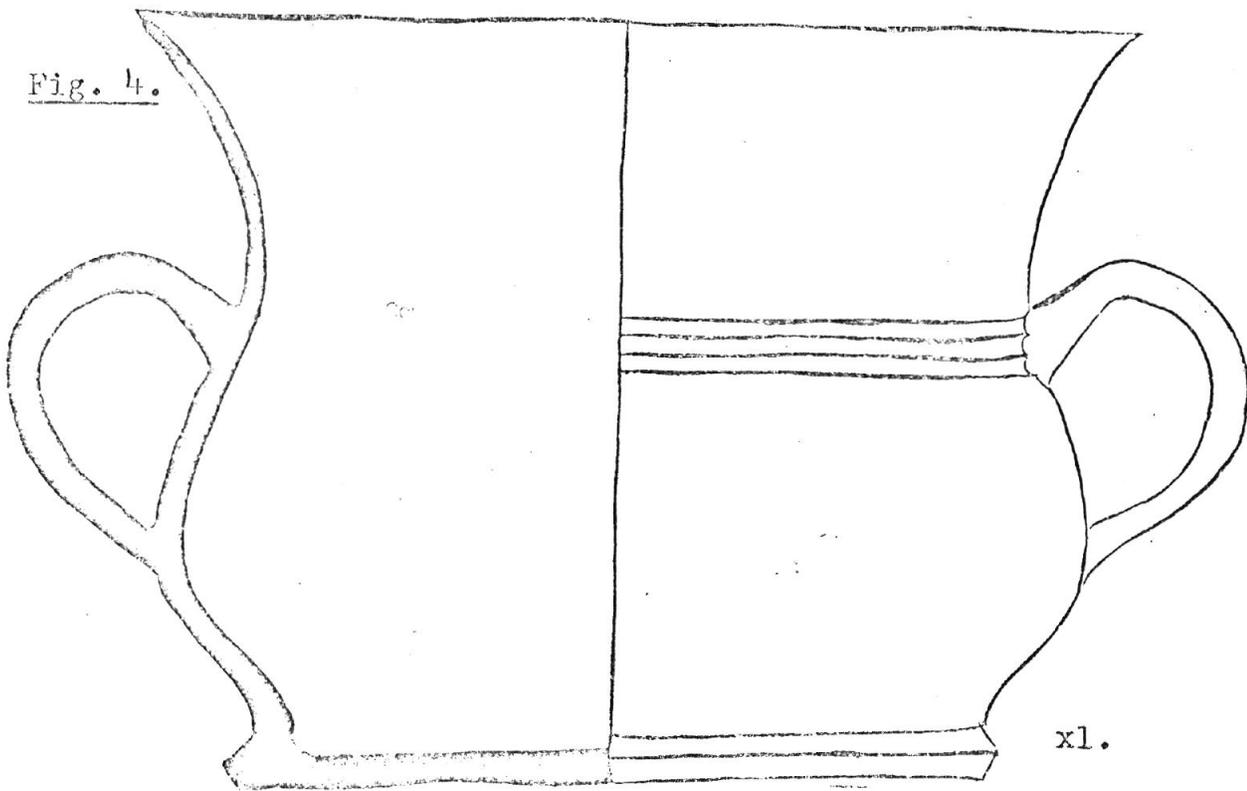
Fig. 3.



x1.

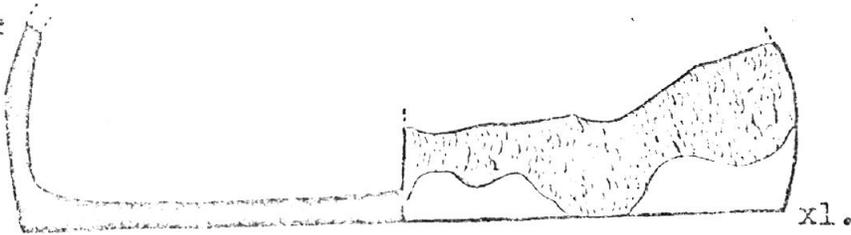
Small brown-glazed onion-shaped bottle also with the thick glaze running to the foot, c. 1700-1710.

Fig. 4.

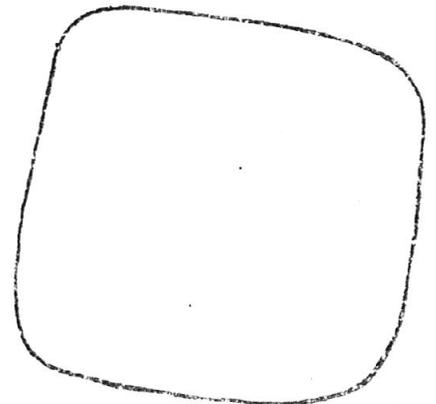


Two handled porringer covered with a running brown lead glaze, c.1700

Fig. 5.

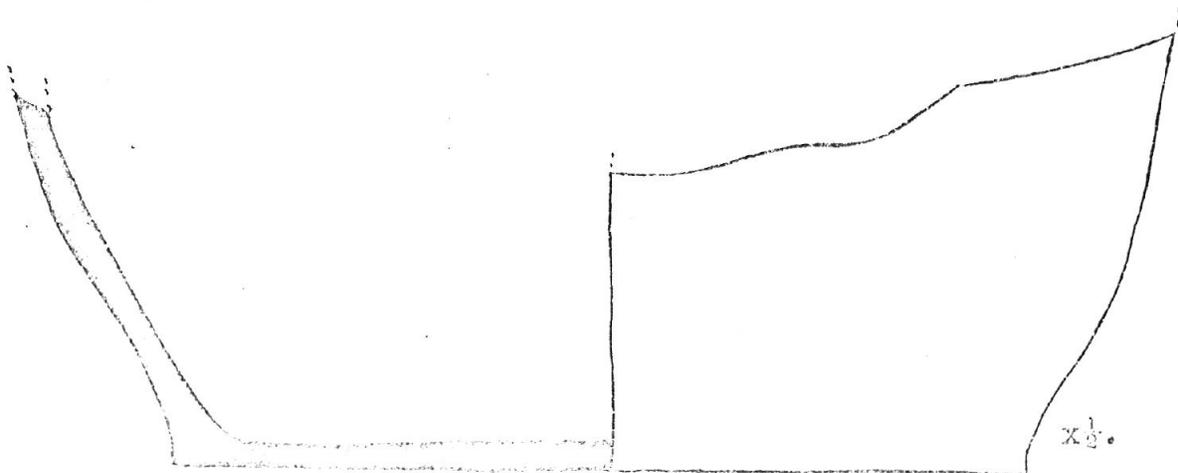


Brown glazed vessel of uncertain use, c.1700-1710.



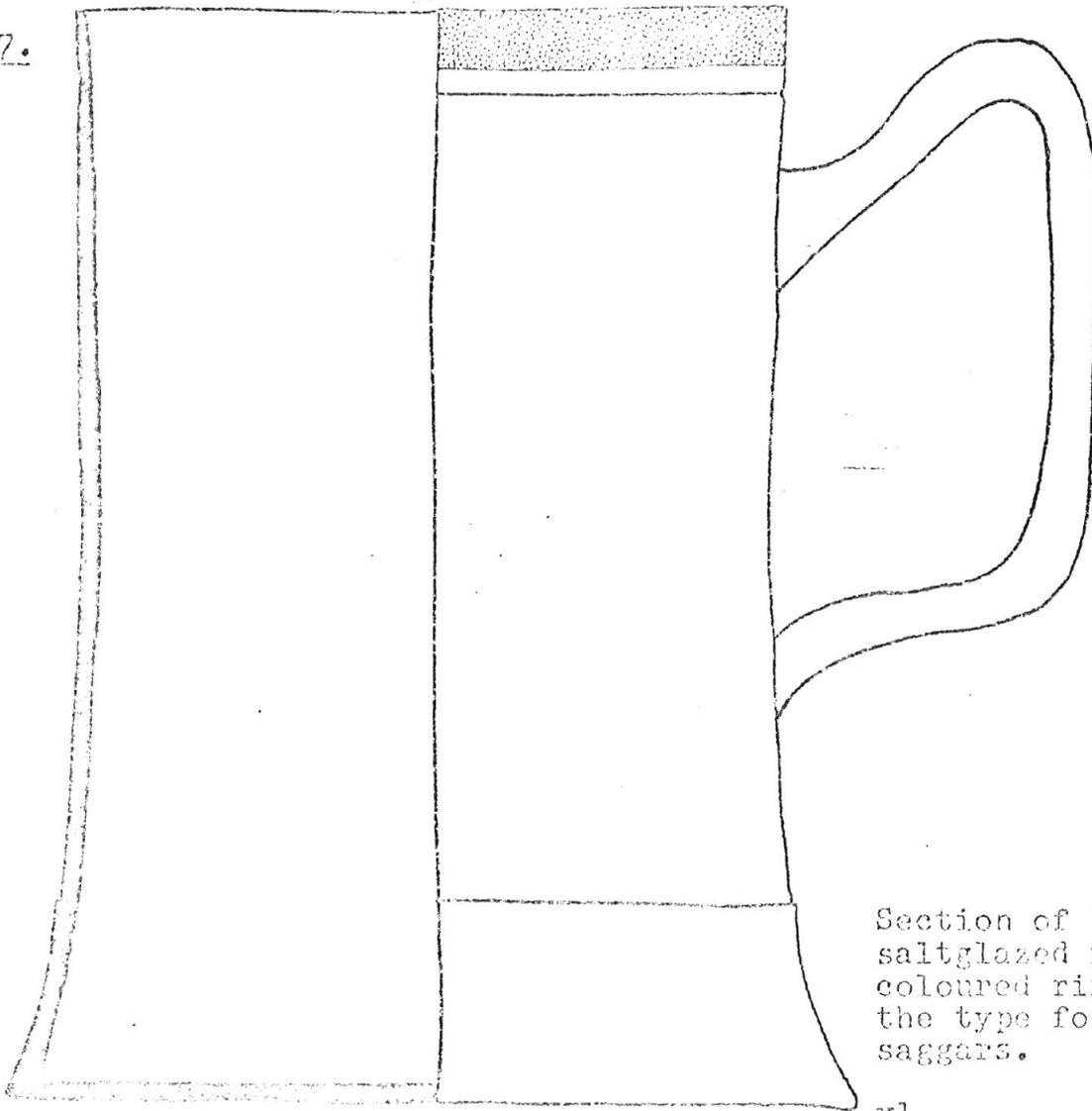
Base section x 1/2.

Fig. 6.



Base of a large vessel, the interior glazed deep brown, the outside with similar smears, c.1700-1720

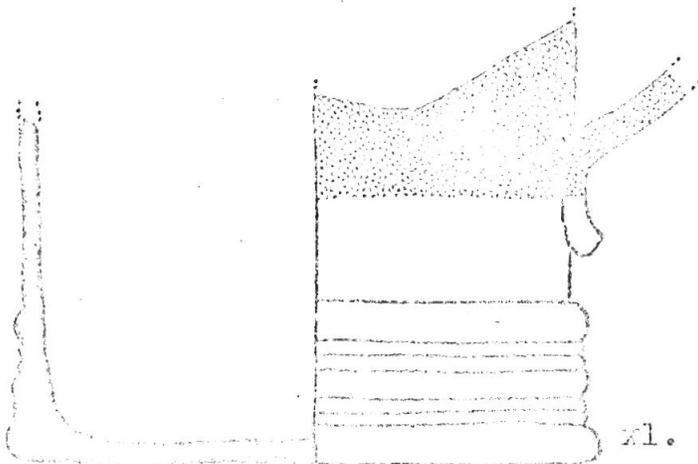
Fig. 7.



Section of "white-dipped" saltglazed mug with iron coloured rim, c.1720, of the type found inside the saggars.

xl.

Fig. 8.



Section of the base of a "white-dipped" saltglazed mug, the upper part covered with a ferruginous wash, c.1710.

xl.

Fig.9.

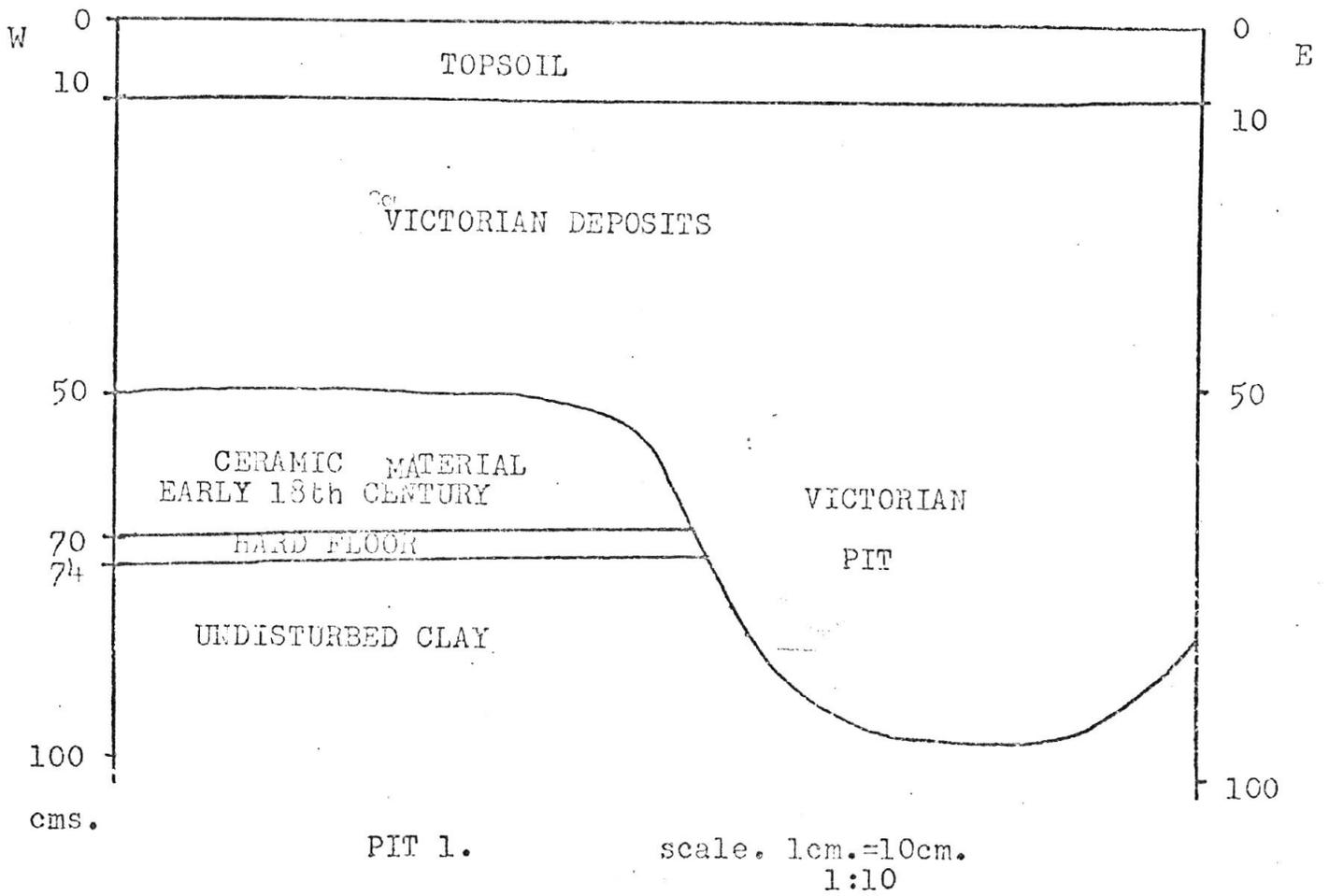


Fig.10.

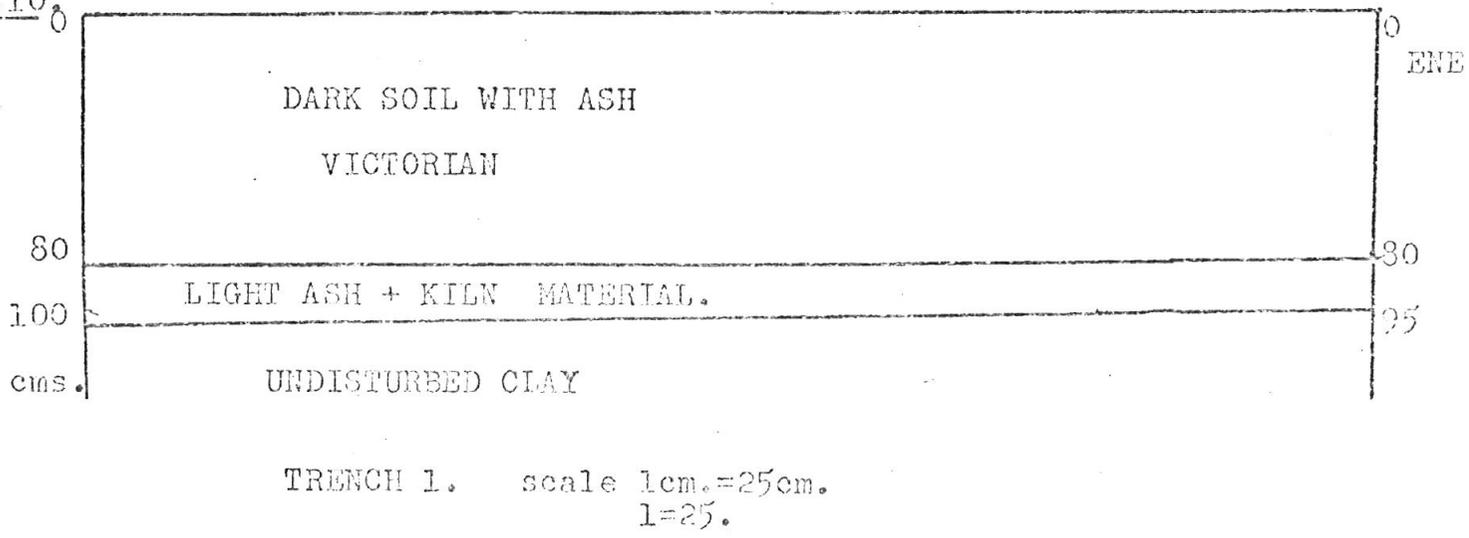


Fig.11.

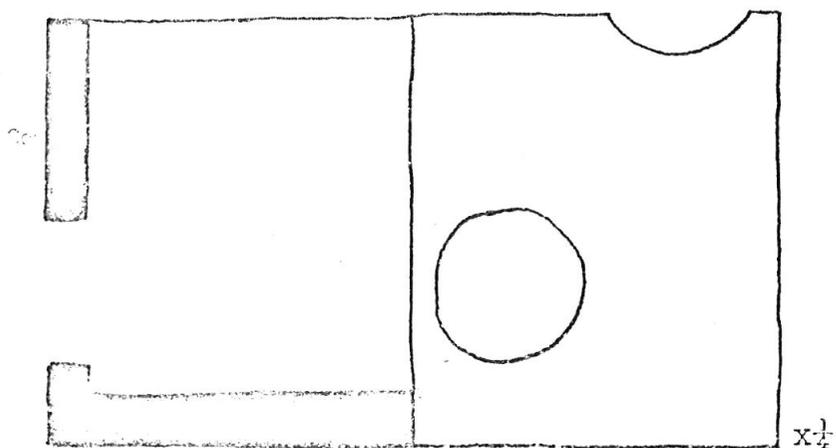
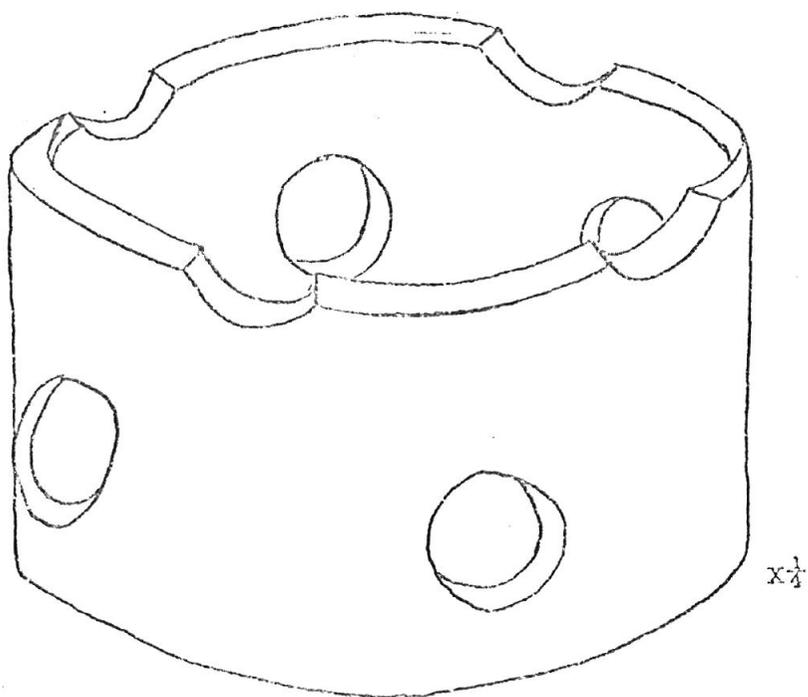


Fig.12.



Section of a saltglaze saggars, c.1720

was not suitable. It is said the Elers brother were first to overcome this by dipping their stoneware mugs into white ball clay imported from Dorset to produce "white-dipped" stonewares partly banded in brown. This process was introduced, whether by the Elers or by somebody else, about 1700. By about 1715 - 1720 a method was discovered by which the local clay could be whitened by adding crushed calcined flint. This gave the first true white salt-glaze and the process using calcined flints continued for many decades. Round about 1720 the rims of finely potted "white-dipped" vessels were dipped in iron which gave them a brown band around the rim. All pieces of these "white-dipped" salt-glazed wares are traditionally ascribed to Staffordshire, and so if the same sort of development can be found in Shropshire, traditional attributions will have to be re-thought.

At the Old Vicarage site many fragments of salt-glazed stonewares have been found, a great number showing signs of being wasters. There are two sorts occurring, brown stonewares made from clay containing iron, and "white-dipped" wares, both with large brown iron-coated areas (fig. 8.), and also with simple brown banded rims (fig. 7.). Some of the fragments have crazed on the surface, a feature common to Staffordshire wares.

Of the salt-glaze saggars eight complete examples survive. They are circular drums with straight sides pierced with four round or slightly oval holes to allow the salt vapour to contact the pots during the firing. They are each about 38 cm. diameter, 20 to 23 cm. tall and the sides are 2 to 3 cm. thick. The top rims are cut with four shallow curves to help separate saggars if they became stuck together in the kiln. Some of the saggars show signs of firecracks which have been patched with clay before being used again in another firing. Some have distorted and have had their rims reinforced to allow the next saggarr to sit level. All the surviving saggars are heavily glazed with thick brown salt-glaze (figs. 11 & 12.).

Three of the saggars contain wasters of mugs stuck to the inside, with five or six bases arranged round one central one, the centre mug being smaller in size. The mugs are all of the type drawn as fig. 7. and have brown rims. Identical saggars have been excavated in Stoke dating from c. 1700 - 1720. The white mugs found inside the Benthall saggars date these examples to c. 1720.

To sum up, the ceramic material found on the Old Vicarage site in Benthall indicates local production of brown lead-glazed wares, yellow slipwares with simple brown streaking, and salt-glazed stonewares of brown and "white-dipped" types, all of the period c. 1700 - 1720. The quantity of material on the site, especially the bulky saggars, is conclusive evidence that the two kilns needed to fire the lead-glazed and salt-glazed wares were on the site or at least very near. The excavations in early January 1978 were unable to locate any kiln foundations but a further visit with resistivity testing equipment is planned.

The wares made during the early 18th century are of types known traditionally as Staffordshire and probably represent a group of potters migrating to the area from Staffordshire, remaining in touch with changes in production methods in Stoke. The site had ample supplies of easily dug clay and coal and, like in Burslem, the clay found on the site is rich in iron and would have produced brown salt-glaze until dipping in white clay was introduced. Very little true white salt-glaze was found and no wasters, and so it is quite likely that the introduction of calcined flint in Stoke, c. 1720, was an innovation not used at Benthall, and probably brought an end to the Benthall works.

Arrangements will be made to research the Parish and other records to try and find mention of a pottery on the site, and perhaps further excavation will be carried out later in the year. A saggar and representative fragments from the site are at present on exhibition in the Wilkinson Society Museum in Broseley.

References in this report to salt-glaze production in Stoke have been adapted from "Staffordshire Salt-glazed Stoneware" by Arnold Mountford which illustrates many pieces similar to those found at Benthall. I am especially grateful to Mr. & Mrs. Cragg for their kind co-operation throughout the excavations and for giving us complete access to the site.

John Sandon

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Correspondence

Among the letters received by the Secretary over the past year were the following :

- (1) from R.D. Turnbull of Connah's Quay, a copy of the report by Clwyd County Planning Department "Archaeology at Bersham", based on excavations carried out in 1976 under the auspices of the Manpower Services Commission ;
- (2) from D.G. Thomas of the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society, who is working on a bibliography of "The History of the Ironbridge Gorge" for Encyclopaedia Britannica, a request for the back numbers of our Journal ;
- (3) from W.L. Goodman, who recently visited our Museum to see the collection of joiners' tools, a dust-jacket of his revised study "British Planemakers from 1700", published by Arnold and Walker in October at £7. 95p.

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The Ironbridge Bicentenary

Next year sees the 200th anniversary of the building of the Iron Bridge. A Bicentenary Committee, representing many public and private bodies, has been planning the form which the celebrations will take. Our Society was represented by the Chairman at a public meeting held on 24th October, 1978, at the Severn Warehouse, Ironbridge, where details of the next year's programme were given, ideas and suggestions sought from those present and participation invited. As our contribution to the occasion, we are planning to (1) produce a special publication on John Wilkinson, one of the main promoters of the bridge project (June); (2) take part in the special events of 2nd July, 200 years to the day since the spans of the bridge first met over the River Severn; and (3) devote our annual celebrity lecture to an appropriate theme (late August).

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BOAT-BUILDING AND THE CHEPSTOW SHIP REGISTERS

A few comments and additional material of local interest might be added to the article in Volume 4 of the Journal, which was based largely on Grahame Farr's "Chepstow Ships".

In the first place Farr's book was researched around thirty years ago, was orientated primarily to the lower Severn and Wye, and without the benefit of, for example, the photographs of barges now in the possession of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust. Secondly, a few of his conclusions are suspect.

Take, for example, the definition of tuck stern. The form described is indeed seen in illustrations of Wye boats, but would more normally be called a counter or lute stern. Tuck has two normal meanings in boat construction, and both relate to the sweep of planking along the length of the hull near the junction of sternpost and transom, not to the face of the transverse counter. More fundamentally Farr's conclusions ("Chepstow Ships", Page 26) about the occurrence of clench and carvel building on the Severn are in doubt, both on internal evidence and because there is no place in his scheme for the late nineteenth century clench-built barges of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust photographs (in fact there is no simple explanation for them).

These and other issues are clouded by the unreliable nature of the Register entries for this sort of purpose. Thus early entries at Gloucester include for "build" the term "British (clench)" - the Surveyors were obviously in doubt about what information was required. (Early iron boats apparently so bemused the Surveyors in this respect that they were termed "clench built of iron" which, though a rather nice term, could be misleading). The pro formas were not intended to fully describe the construction of vessels, and details are so sparse that the Surveyors' meaning is elusive. In similar vein there is to my knowledge no clear definition of the differences between barges, frigates and trows, even for a single period; size alone is not adequate, on that and the fact that barges never had two masts, at least, the Registers are clear.

The Register entries are also transient: particularly for up-river boats, for there was little need for owners to keep the entries up to date. A registration was only necessary for vessels trading beyond the Customs Port of Gloucester. Thus the Commissioners were unable to record full details of such information as masters, owners and rebuilding. Individuals could be noted as being the master of several different vessels at one time, changes of ownership are recorded many years after the event, and the fate of the vessel is often a matter of conjecture.

An extreme example of local interest is the "Three Brothers", built at Bridgnorth in 1849, registered in 1859 as the property of William Exley of Broseley, Brick and Tile Merchant; owned about 1866 by John Burroughs, of Ladywood Ropery and Firebrick Works, Jackfield, Ironbridge, when the vessel was described as "worn out" and was removed from the Annual List. The Register was not finally cancelled until 1971. In 1859 she was a barge of 20.94 tons, 66.6 feet x 14 feet x 2.8 feet depth in hold.

Because the Acts did not require vessels used for inland navigation to be registered, and only vessels over 15 tons at all, it is likely that the majority of up-river vessels escaped the records altogether. It is unfortunate that the Act (35 Geo 3 c58, 112) for special registration in 1795, requiring all vessels over 13 tons throughout the country to be recorded by Clerks of the Peace has apparently preserved no more than a few isolated records.

In no instance that I have seen was the name of a Severn vessel changed with ownership or rebuilding (mariners would have considered it unlucky, I believe). There are very distinctive patterns of names for barges on the upper Severn - even personal names not widely used for commercial craft elsewhere. William is the classic Severn name, but Brothers, Sisters, Friends are common and unusual. Eliza, Fanny, Mary, George, Betsy, Industry, Endeavour, Prudence, similarly. All bespeak a homely streak, and honest trade (the barge-masters were truly a different class from the bowhaulers !), and it is hardly coincidence that Quakers were prominent in the area.

The Chepstow register for the "Fanny", snow, of 125 tons, in 1791 - 2 reveals the shipowning interest of William Reynolds of Ketley (in partnership with William Horton, deal merchant of Coalbrookdale). It perhaps also reflects links between the ironmasters of the Gorge and Cumberland and the merchants and shipbuilders of Chepstow, touched on by Trinder in "Industrial Revolution in Shropshire" and by Farr in "Chepstow Ships".

R.A. Barker

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A graveyard of barges ?

Earlier this year a member of our Society, Mr. Ray Pringlescott, and fellow-members of the R.A.F. Cosford Sub-Aqua Club started a survey of the bed of the River Severn from Coalport to Apley. Just below the Coalport China Works Museum they discovered the wrecks of possibly nine boats. Some of these wrecks are visible at low water and have been known of locally for some time; but the significance of this 'barge graveyard' does not seem to have been previously recognised. A full report of the survey and a possible explanation for the wrecks will appear in the next issue of the Journal.

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