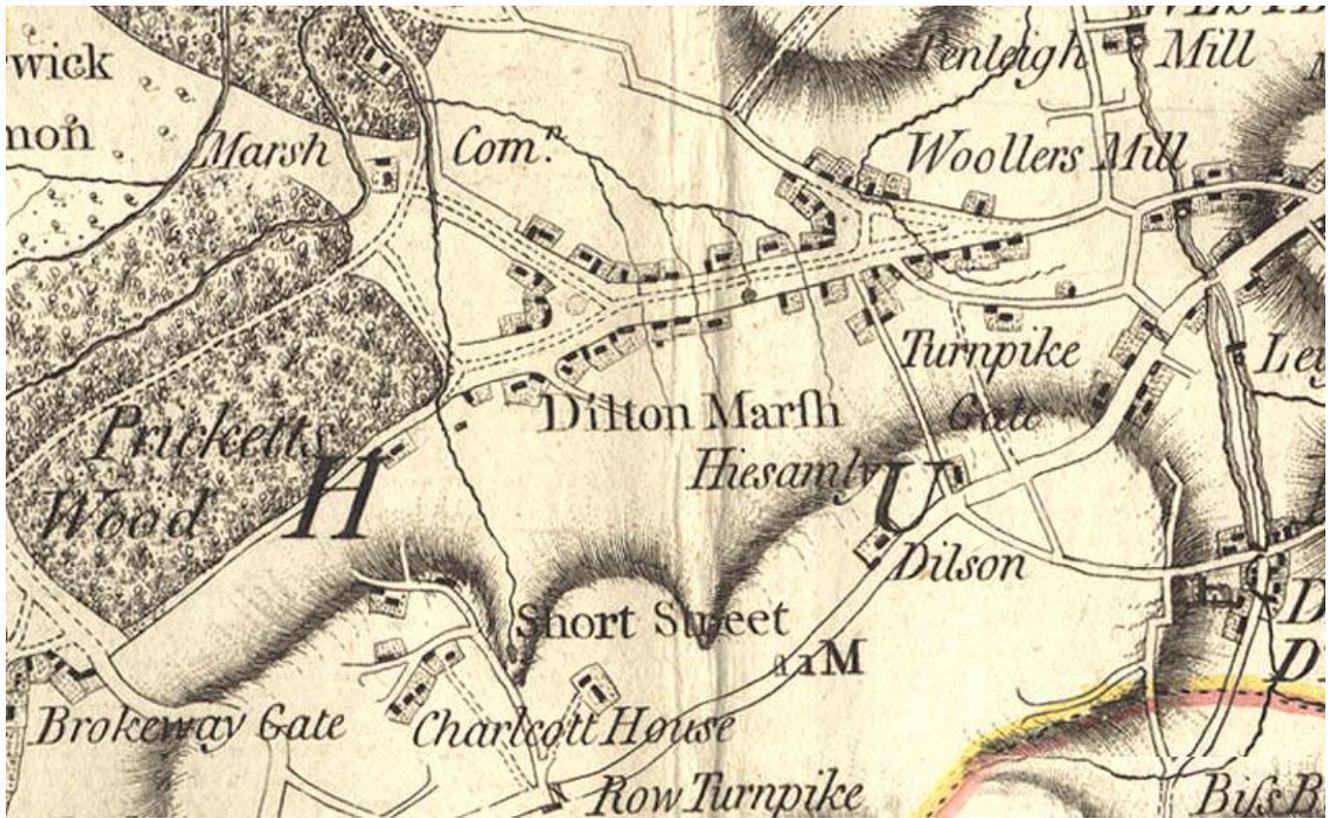


***A Romano-British Pottery Production Centre at Short Street,  
Westbury, Wiltshire***

**Mark Corney, Mathew Charlton and Nik Morris**



**2012**



Frontispiece. Extract from Andrews' and Dury's Map of Wiltshire, 1773 © Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre, Chippenham

## **Preface**

Pottery forms the single largest class of artefact recovered from the majority of excavations on Romano-British sites and the study of pottery production in the Roman Empire is key archaeological discipline. Production can range from single kilns to large industrial complexes engaged in mass production, marketing and export.

After the initial stages of the conquest, the use of pottery increased on civilian sites as a result of the army importing quantities of pottery to supply its own garrisons as well as encouraging native craftsmen to produce similar items. As Roman influence spread across Britain, so did the manufacture of regional and localised ceramics which imitated Roman forms and shapes, subsequently supplying both the Roman army and civil markets. The demand for imported pottery saw a subsequent rise in economic exploitation by overseas traders in the wake of the invasion, evidence of which can be seen at sites such as the Roman fort at Kingsholm in Gloucestershire in which 47% of the ceramic assemblages were imported from overseas, some as far away as Palestine (Millett 2005: 77).

The manufacturing of pottery originally developed near to forts and the larger towns, but the emergence of smaller towns with their own production centres stimulated local centres with a distribution radius of some 15km or 9 miles (Millett 2005 :82-83). This continued until the fifth century, when production declined with the collapse of the centralised marketing system (Salway 1997: 338).

In Wiltshire, Romano-British small towns often developed as secondary settlements along pre-existing Roman roads, with the size of these sites being largely due to the economic stimulus provided by the Roman road system (Hanley 2000:49). This included settlements such as Verlucio, which is situated along the road from Bath to Mildenhall, near Bell Farm, and is approximately 1.25 kilometres south east of the modern village of Sandy Lane. Numerous finds of iron slag and kiln debris have been found in the fields to the north of Hayfields Copse, and it seems likely that the Romans were exploiting iron as a resource in this area; a similar situation to that which is attested at The Ham, Westbury (see below).

Another similar settlement is 'White Walls' in Easton Grey, Wiltshire which lies along the halfway mark between Bath and Cirencester (Draper 2001:9). Both settlements no doubt grew up as staging posts for travellers and it is possible that *Verlucio* also possessed a *mansio* (Corney 2001, 29).

Some of these settlements provided services such as Nettleton Shrub where the Broadmead Brook crosses the Fosse Way. Excavations here discovered over 50 buildings were uncovered, together with a multitude of finds. The buildings included a shrine to Apollo the sun god, a guest house, a mill, and a gift shop providing votive offerings for the pilgrims at the temple, industries such as the manufacture of pewter are attested.

Some of the villa sites in Wiltshire have also been linked with industrial activities, with evidence of metal working, stone quarrying and pottery production, at villas such as Tottenham and Dogridge. Here both pottery and tile kilns were located In addition the villa at Westlecott in Swindon lies within an area closely associated with pottery production (Anderson 1977: 6). It is plausible that villas may have been the residences of the individual who acquired status and wealth as a result of these industrial practises.

Pottery production sites known in Wiltshire include Savernake (SMR SU26SW304), Minety (ST99SE301), Lydiard Millicent (SU18NW314), Purton (SU08NE300), Bishopstone (SU28SW341), Swindon (SU18SW324, SU18SW361, SU18SW307, SU18SW306, SU18SW312), Lydiard Tregoze (SU18SW345, SU18NW320), Covingham (SU18NE349), Calne Without (ST96NE311), Milton Lilbourne (SU16SE302) and Great Bedwyn (SU26SW303). The discovery of a further production centre at Short Street is an important addition to the record for Roman Wiltshire.

## ***A Romano-British Pottery Production Centre at Short Street, Westbury, Wiltshire***

Mark Corney, Mathew Charlton and Nik Morris

### *Introduction*

In 1999 three possible pottery kilns were discovered during the construction of a tennis court at the hamlet of Short Street near Westbury in Wiltshire (ST83704875, Figure1).

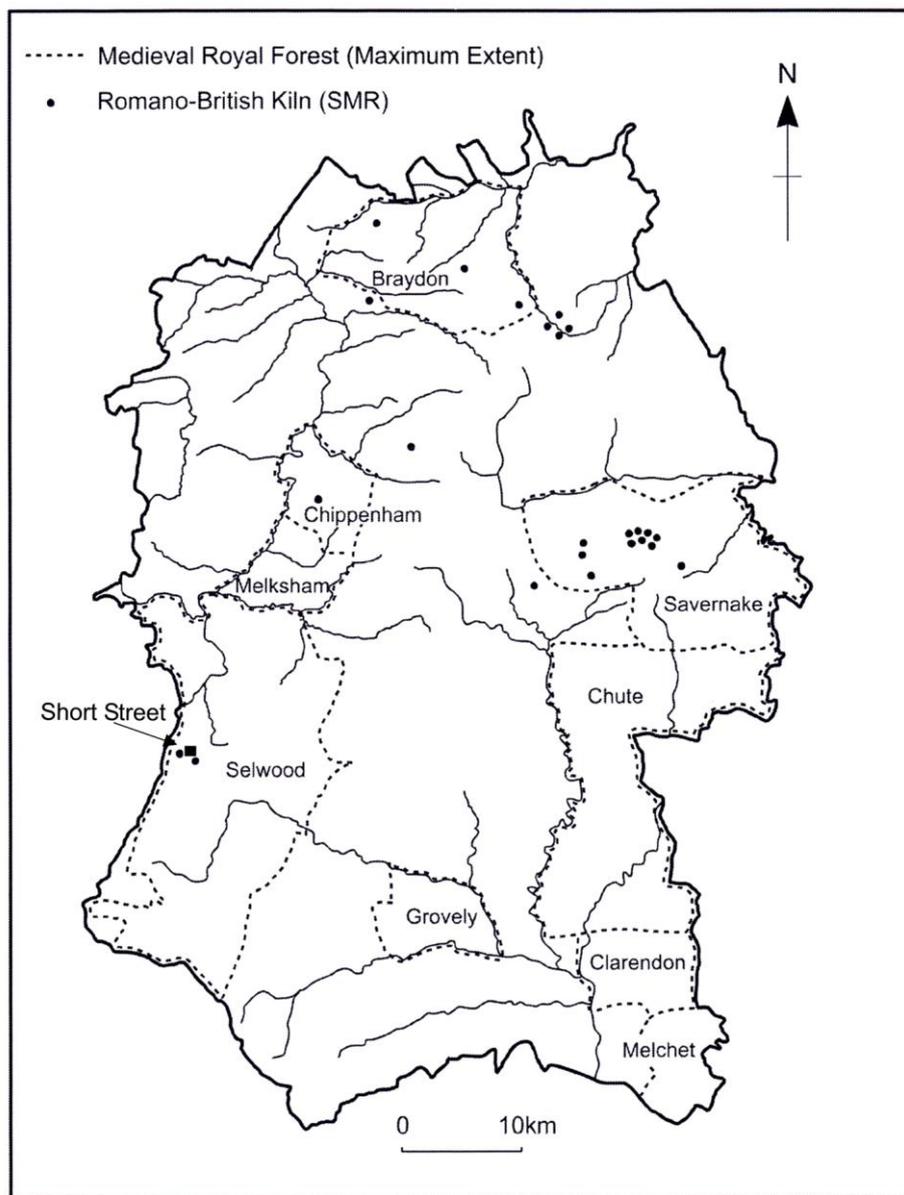


Figure 1. Short Street location and distribution map of known Romano-British pottery and tile kilns in Wiltshire shown in relation to rivers and medieval Royal forests. After Draper, 2006 with additions.

The owner of the property was approached by a group of local enthusiasts, who wanted to investigate the possibility of Romano-British pottery production on the site. They were given permission to excavate a fourth structure located on the northwest corner of the tennis court, where charcoal rich deposits had been seen during groundworks, but no kiln was found. In 2004/5 a further

trench located a well preserved pottery kiln (Plate 1, Figure 2). Unfortunately no records were made apart from a series of photographs and although a large quantity of Romano-British pottery, CBM and pennant sandstone tiles was recovered none was assigned to any particular context and therefore the entire assemblage must be regarded as unstratified.

The Bath & Camerton Archaeological Society were subsequently asked by the landowner to record the extent of the archaeology as well as undertaking a geophysical survey of the paddock northeast of the tennis court with the purpose of locating further evidence of pottery production and a context for the excavated kiln.

### *Topography and Geology*

Short Street is located 3.3km to the south west of Westbury in the district of West Wiltshire. The geology and topography of the Westbury area changes from the chalk uplands in the south-east to low-lying ground in the north-west, passing through Lower Chalk, Upper Greensand, Head Deposits, Gault and Kimmeridge Clay, with the great chalk escarpment of Salisbury Plain to the east dividing the chalk upland from the clay country. Numerous springs and wells rise at the foot of the chalk escarpment, the two largest of which are the Wellhead spring to the south-east of Westbury feeding the River Biss; to the east of Westbury an unnamed spring feeds the Bitham Brook, which passes through the town to join the Biss (Crittall 1965).

Short Street occupies a ridge top at approximately 126 metres above sea level. The vales to the north form part of the Oxford Clay belt and the ridge is comprised of Upper Greensand with a mixture of silty sand and sandstone. The Upper Greensand gives way to chalk in the south and south-east and additionally there are seams of Kimmeridge and Corallian Shale. The geology of the landscape contributes ideal tempering material along with its wooded areas and natural springs, making the location ideal for the manufacture and production of pottery (Nuth:1999).

### *Archaeological Background*

The area around Short Street is rich with Romano-British remains and large quantities of pottery dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century have been recovered from surrounding fields. Field walking at Emmetts Piece, approximately 270m south of the Short Street kilns, (ST8392 4860) recovered 3954 sherds with a total weight of 29143gm (Appendix 1). In addition to the pottery quantities of Romano-British CBM and pennant sandstone roofing material was also recovered. The evidence suggests an extensive industrial complex on the edge of a greensand scarp overlooking Dilton Marsh, close to clay sources.

There is evidence of extensive Romano-British settlement and industrial activity to the north and south of Westbury, notably at The Ham and Wellhead. The finds recovered from the Ham during the 19th century indicate extensive activity and occupation throughout the Romano-British period and it is possible that the settlement was located to exploit local mineral resources. Much of the site was destroyed by open-cast iron mining in the 19th century. The site of the Ham is known from antiquarian reports and associated finds, which suggest that it developed as a road side industrial and market settlement (Corney 2001; Draper 2006: 10). At Wellhead, 2.5 km from the Ham, a settlement occupied from the late first century to the early fifth century AD produced evidence for weaving, tanning, and possibly iron smelting (Rogers and Roddham 1991:52). All finds of Roman material from the area of Short Street are presented in Appendix 2, using date derived from the Wiltshire HER.

### The Excavated Remains

The two small trenches were excavated on the north western edge of the tennis court (Figure 3).

#### Trench 1

Trench 1 was located over a kiln of single chambered single flue type (Swan 1984, 113). The kiln dimensions are not recorded but the surviving photographs (from which the approximate measurements are taken) show it to be partly sunken, ovoid in plan and measuring approximately 1.8m by 1.2m with an ash pit and flue over 1.2m long and 0.5m wide. The kiln wall appears to survive to a height of 0.15m high and 0.2m thick (Plates 1 and 2). Unfortunately the orientation of the kiln was not recorded and the surviving photographic archive provides no clues. The kiln chamber appears to have been well-preserved with a clay floor surviving *in situ* with a number of circular venting perforations. The floor appears to be approximately 0.2m thick and was probably supported on a pedestal.



Plate 1. View of the kiln as excavated.

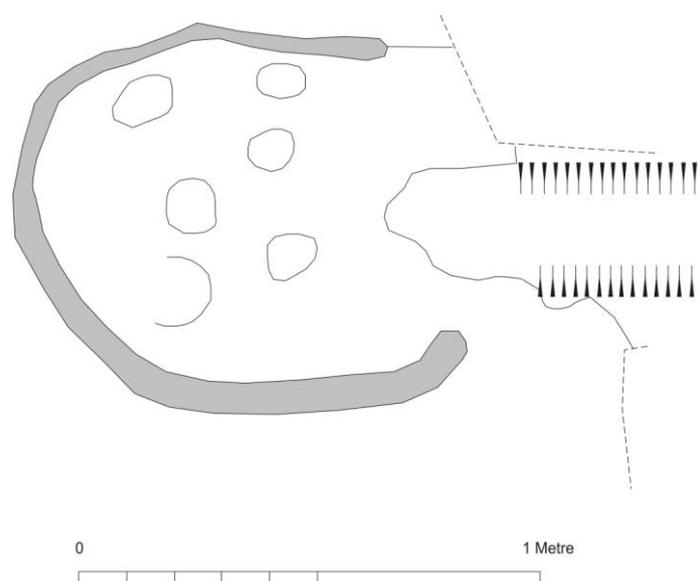


Figure 2. Sketch plan of the excavated kiln compiled from site photographs



Plate 2, View of the long axis of the kiln showing the ash pit and flue in the foreground

### *Trench 2*

Trench 2 appeared to show evidence of occupation including a possible floor but over excavation resulted in the feature being noted in section only. There were three possible postholes, two perhaps with stone packing, as well as a rough perforated stone possibly part of a base for a potter's wheel (Plates 3 and 4). No further details of the potential structure are available.



Plate 3. General view of Trench 2 showing three possible postholes

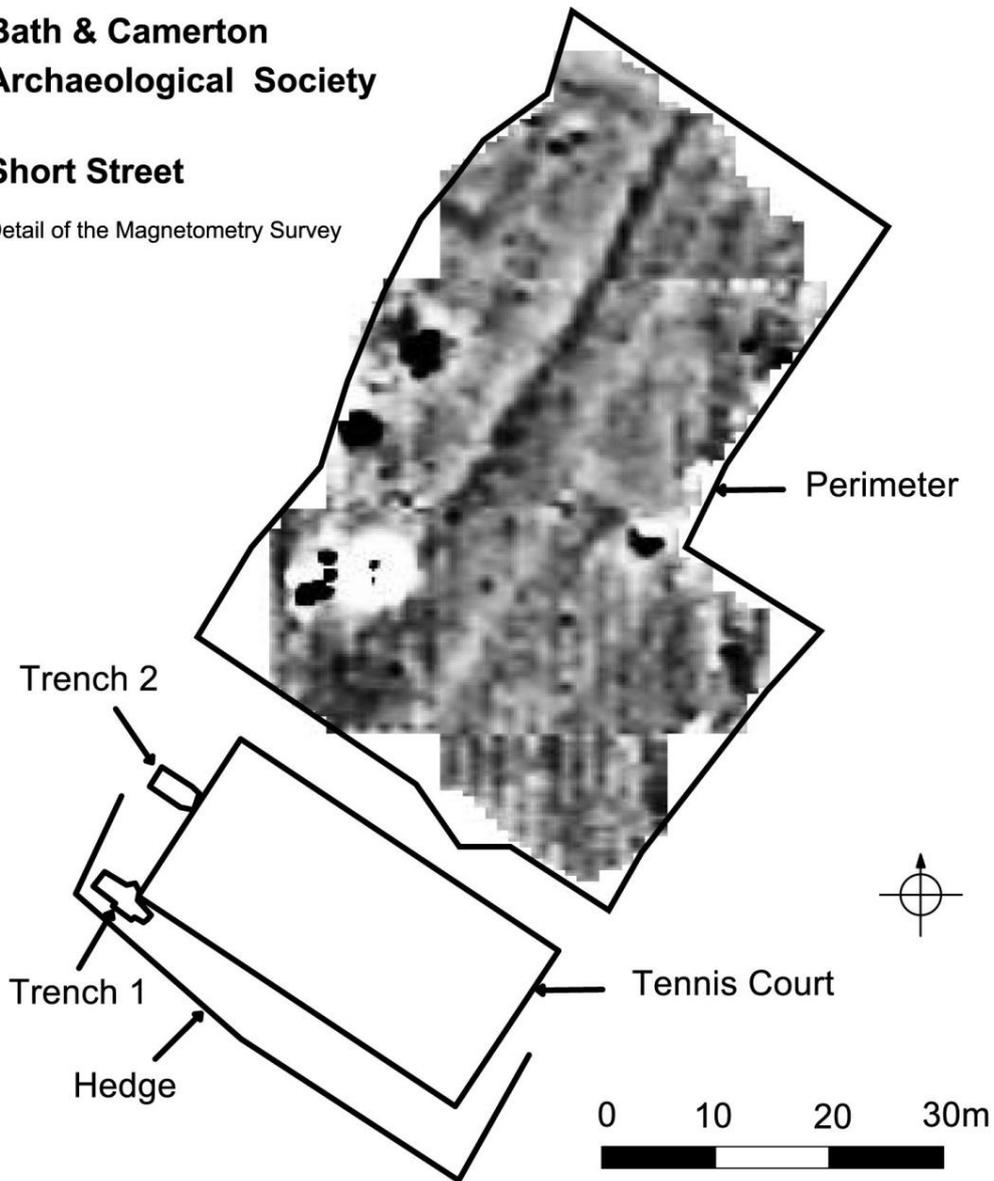


Plate 4. Trench 2, possible kick-wheel base

**Bath & Camerton  
Archaeological Society**

**Short Street**

Detail of the Magnetometry Survey



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Figure 3. Location of Trenches 1 and 2 and the BACAS magnetometer survey undertaken in 2005

*Geophysical Survey*

A magnetometer survey of the paddock to the north east of the tennis court was undertaken by Dr John Oswin of BACAS in 2005 (Figure 3). The results show a probable ditch aligned south west – north east with three high magnetic anomalies suggesting further regularly spaced kilns immediately to the west of the ditch. The regularity of the plan suggests a relatively large and well-organised industrial complex.

## *The Finds*

### Romano-British Pottery. Mark Corney and Nik Morris

The circumstances and nature of the excavation make it clear that not all of the material recovered is currently available for analysis and an unknown quantity remains in private hands. 5878 sherds of pottery weighing 42105gm have been examined for this report, the majority being products of the kiln(s).

### Methodology

The material was examined with the aid of an x10 hand lens and assigned to a fabric series. Each fabric series is quantified by sherd number and weight and further subdivided into a typological series based on form, fabric and decoration. The incidence of each fabric and identifiable form is given in Table 1. Known fabric types are cross-referenced to the published national fabric series devised by Tomber and Dore (1998). All of the products of the Short Street kiln(s) are wheel-made.

### The Kiln Products Fabrics.

2 main fabrics have been identified with the reduced sandy grey fabric R1 dominating, this being the main product of the kiln complex. Many of the vessels are unevenly coloured or show some evidence of distortion suggesting seconds or wasters.

- R1 The fabric colour ranges from pale grey (7.5YR 7/0) to grey-buff (10YR 8/1) and dark grey (5/0-4/0, 7.5YR), occasionally with a paler core; it is hard, micaceous and sandy with very occasional calcareous inclusions <1mm.
- O1 An oxidised version of fabric R1 with pale brown/buff surfaces and core 10YR 7/4.

### Forms

The products present a restricted range of forms and the majority of the products are closed forms dominated by jars with everted or simple hooked rims. Overall, closed forms constitute 72% of the identifiable forms. Copies of North Wiltshire type fine ware bag-shaped beakers with a cornice rim are also present in fabrics R1 and O1

- J1 Everted rim jars, often beaded, with an average rim diameter of 12-16cm; the rim diameter is less than the maximum diameter of the body. The exterior of the neck may have lightly burnished wavy line decoration and the body a zone of burnished acute lattice. Predominantly in Fabric R1 but also produced in Fabric O1. Figure 4, nos. 1-2.
- J2 Everted rim jars with an average rim diameter of 20-24cm, the neck is plain and the body can be decorated with a zone of burnished acute lattice. Fabric R1. Figure 4, nos 3-4.
- J3 Necked jars with an average, bulbous body and an average rim diameter of 12-16cm with a cordoned zone of decoration below the neck comprising lightly burnished diagonal lines, acute lattice or a wavy line motif. Fabric R1. Figure 4, no 5.
- J4 Large necked storage jars with deep undercut rolled rim, bulbous body and an average rim diameter of 20-24cm. Figure 5, no 6.
- B1 Flat rimmed bowls with a flat base; average rim diameter of 16-20cm. None of the examples are decorated. Fabric O1. Figure 5, no 7.

- B2 Flat rimmed bowls with chamfered base; average rim diameter of 16-20cm and burnished inside. None of the examples are decorated. Fabric R1. Figure 5, no 8.
- B3 Undercut flat rim hemispherical bowls; average rim diameter of 28-32cm. None of the examples are decorated. Fabric R1. Figure 5, no 9.
- B4 Bag shaped beaker with cornice rim; average rim diameter of 8cm. Fabric O1. Figure 5, no 10.

#### Date Range and Origins

The forms represented indicate a production span commencing in the later first century and continuing into the second century. The absence of classic first century forms such as bead rim jars suggests a start date no earlier than cAD80-90 and the further absence of classic later Romano-British forms such as developed, flaring everted rims and drop flange bowls indicate that the Short Street kiln output declined during the early third century. It should be noted that later Roman forms are present in the assemblage from Emmetts Piece some 270m to the south east and it is possible that production continues into the later Roman period elsewhere in the complex. The dominant forms from Short Street show typological influences from three established local Roman-British pottery industries. The everted rim jars, including those with the body decorated with acute lattice and a wavy line on the exterior of the neck show close affinities with the products of the South-East Dorset Black Burnished (DOR BB1 industry; Tomber and Dore 1998, p127). Short Street types J1 and J2 may be compared with the Greyhound Yard, Dorchester types 1-2, dated 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> century (Woodward et al. 1993, p231). The necked jars, J3, in both form and decoration, are similar to the products of the Savernake and related industries of eastern Wiltshire (Timby 2001, 73-84) of later 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century date. Bowls, B1 and B2, find affinities in the DOR BB1 industry and can be paralleled with Greyhound Yard types 22 and 23 (Woodward et al. 1993, p233-5), with a date in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. B4, the bag-shaped beakers with cornice rim and horizontal groove around the body are a well-known mid to late 2<sup>nd</sup> century type which may find inspiration from the north Wiltshire fine ware industry (Anderson 1979).

#### Non-local Products.

Small quantities of non-local wares were present in the assemblage. 1 sherd of samian ware, Central Gaulish in origin, Drag. 38; A small number of DOR BB1 products are also present including jars of Greyhound Yard types 1-2 and a flat-rimmed bowl with chamfered base of Greyhound Yard type 23; all of second century date (Woodward et al 1993). Two sherds of amphora are present; both are from a Dressel 20 originating in Baetica in south west Spain (Fabric BAT AM1).

#### Distribution

The fabric of the Short Street products is similar to many local grey wares encountered on Romano-British sites in southern Britain and gauging the distribution of the products is far from straight forward. If marketing via the probable 'small town' at The Ham, Westbury is accepted, a minimum distribution radius of 20km may reasonably be postulated. Examination of ceramic assemblages from Romano-British sites within this postulated distribution radius has identified probable Short Street products; these include the villas at Blacklands in Somerset (11km; Lawes 2006: 25-26), St Algar's Farm, Somerset (13.5km; Ceri Lambdin pers com) and Bradford on Avon (13km; Mark Corney pers com).

Other Romano-British sites in the area, such as the villas at Edington (RCHME 1995;9.5km to the north east), Storridge (AC Archaeology 2002;3.8km to the north) and Pit Mead (8km to the south east) have yet to be fully investigated but may also provide further evidence for the distribution of Short Street products.

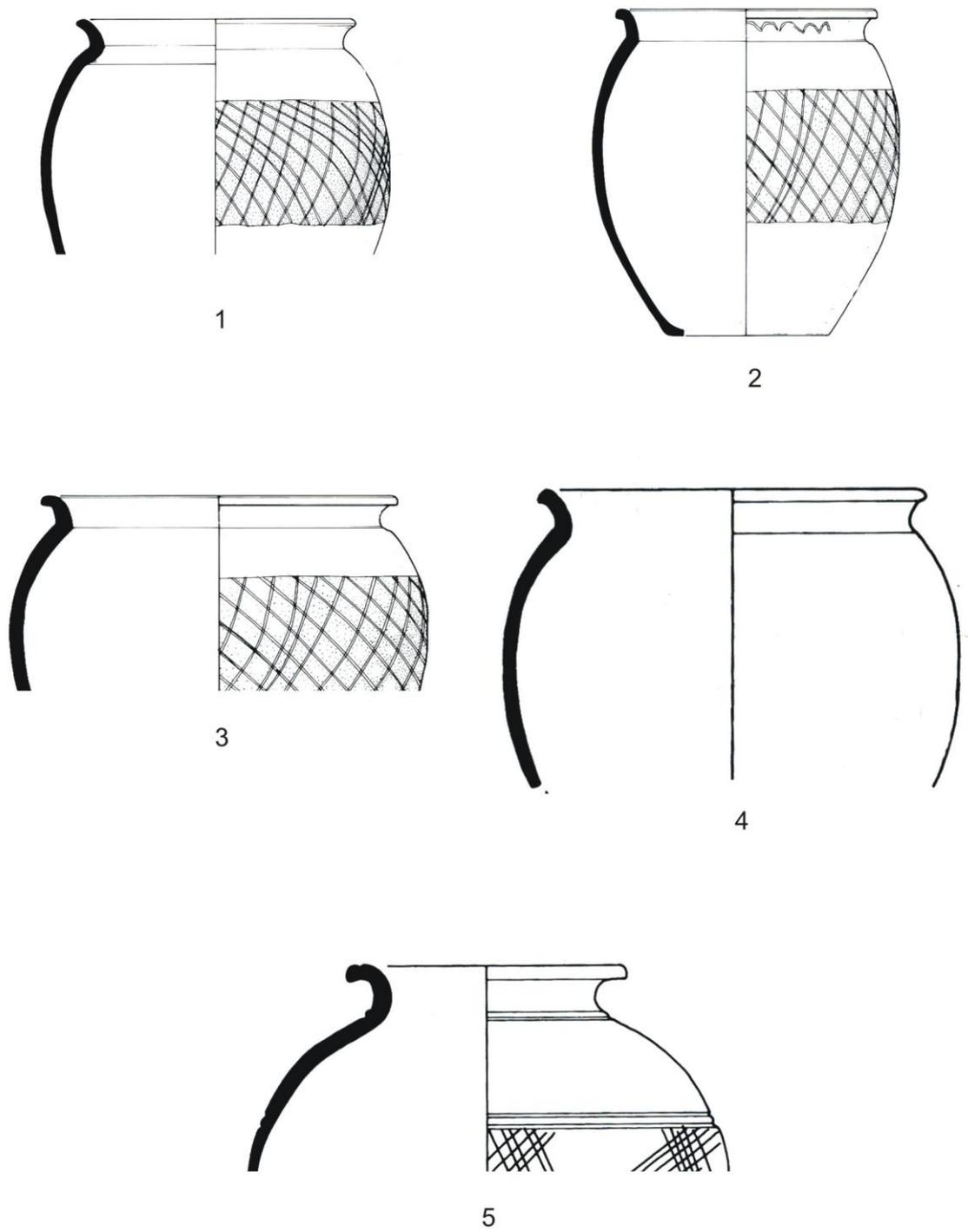


Figure 4. Type series. 1-2 Type J1, 3-4 Type J2; 5; Type J3. 1:4

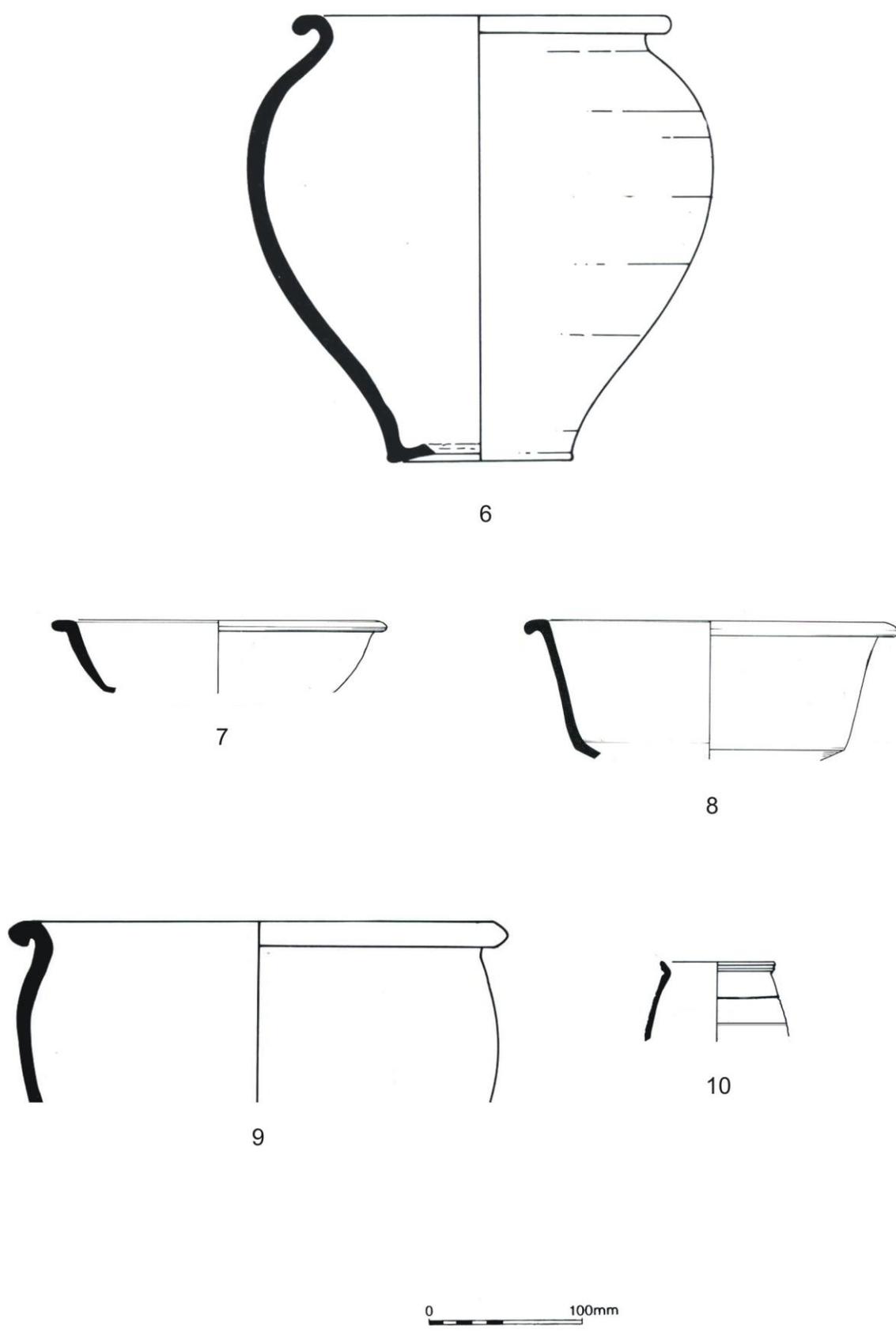


Figure 5. Type series. 6 Type J4; 7 Type B 1; 8 Type B2; 9 Type B3; 10 Type B4

## *CBM*

37 pieces of Roman CBM was submitted for examination weighing 543gm. The majority are from roof-tiles (tegulae). Box-flue tile, (*tubuli*) some with decorative combed keying on the external surfaces, are also present.

## **Discussion**

Although the circumstances and of discovery and subsequent investigations leave much to be desired in terms of detailed record, the recognition of a potentially large local pottery production industry at South Street is of great significance for the Romano-British archaeology of west Wiltshire.

The excavated evidence coupled with the geophysical survey suggests the presence of a number of kilns, bounded on the east by a ditch and laid out in a regular manner (although whether all these features are contemporary can only be established through further excavation). The excavated kiln and those located by geophysical survey are in a row parallel to the north west facing edge of a ridge and in a relatively exposed position; this is presumably deliberate siting to ensure an adequate draught to allow the kilns to reach the required temperature. Like the majority of other Romano-British pottery production centres in Wiltshire, Short Street is close to an area of former forest providing a plentiful supply of fuel (Figure 1; Draper 2006).

The large assemblage of pottery in a similar fabric from Emmetts Piece 270m to the south of Short Street suggests an extensive area of pottery production covering an area of at least 10ha. In addition to the kiln, the investigations produced evidence for a post-built structure, probably a workshop, within which lay the possible base for a potter's kick wheel.

The products of the Short Street kiln are restricted in form and fabric with reduced grey ware closed forms dominating. Of the grey wares the most common type is the everted rim jar (J1-2), close in form and decoration to contemporary products of the South East Dorset Black Burnished industry. The necked jars (J3) with zones of linear, lattice or wavy line decoration have stylistic affinities with products of the Savernake industry. Bowls, like the everted rim jars, show close stylistic links to contemporary South East Dorset Black Burnished products although the Short Street products generally lack any decoration (B1-2).

Further investigation of this important site is clearly required and further extensive geophysical surveying of the surrounding fields supplemented by methodical fieldwalking would undoubtedly allow greater definition of the scale and intensity of this industry.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Appendix 1

### Emmetts Piece

In 1994 an assemblage of Romano-British pottery was recovered by fieldwalking from an area 270m south of Short Street (ST839486). A total of 3954 sherds, weighing 21943gm was recovered (this total includes 61 sherds of medieval and post-medieval date). In addition to the Roman pottery the assemblage also included Roman CBM, pennant sandstone tiles, a small collection of metalwork and worked flint and stone. The Romano-British pottery was subject to a summary examination by Dr Jane Timby.

The results suggested that the pottery located through field walking, and the amount of wasters, indicated the close proximity of a kiln site in the immediate area (Nuth 1999:9). Experimental work undertaken by a local potter Mr Steve Humm, in which a number of pots were produced from local clay, produced a fabric similar to the material recovered from field walking suggesting a production site at Emmetts Piece.

The majority of the material is considered to be of local manufacture and includes reduced and oxidised fabrics and wasters similar to those from Short Street. As with Short Street, the reduced fabrics dominate the assemblage. In addition to the local material 33 sherds of non-local wares weighing 340gm were recorded and comprised Samian Ware, Oxfordshire colour coated products (cAD240-400), 4<sup>th</sup> century New Forest colour coated wares and South East Dorset Black Burnished Ware.

The remaining diagnostic assemblage of 2661 sherds with a weight of 23445gm comprised:

Rims	555	(20.86%)
Bodies/handles	1,916	(72.00%)
Bases	190	(7.14%)

The decision was then made to exclude the red oxidized wares from further examination as the material became very powdery and abraded, making identification of the rim types difficult. The remaining grey wares were then subjectively divided by rim type (see table below).

Rim Types	Number	Wasters
<b>Dark Grey Wares</b>		
Everted	54(26.5%)	3(1.2%)
Flanged	19(9.3%)	2(0.8%)
Simple/plain	31(15.2%)	1(0.5%)
Corniced	38(18.6%)	2(0.8%)
Lid lip	1(0.5%)	
Not able to be identified	50 (24.5%)	
Totals	193(94.6%)	11(5.4%)=204(100%)
<b>Mid Grey or partly oxidised</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>Wasters</b>
Everted	6 (3.3%)	
Flanged	21(7.9%)	
Simple/Plain	65(24.4%)	
Corniced	61(23.0%)	
Not able to be identified	44(16.5%)	
Total	266(100%)	

Appendix 2 - List of Romano British Finds in the Short Street environs held on the Wiltshire HER.

Parish	Site Name	NGR	Comments	SMR No
Chapmanslade	Emmetts Piece	ST83934868	Several boxes of Romano-British pottery found in concentrations in a field called 'Emmetts Piece'. A kiln site is strongly inferred in the vicinity.	ST84NW308
Chapmanslade	Near Chalcote House	ST83804855	A) Romano British copper coin hoard found in 1993 with associated pottery fragments  B) Pottery fragments	ST84NW304
Chapmanslade	Near Row and Thoulstone	ST838483	Romano British coins and pottery fragments	ST84NW310
Chapmanslade	North of Clearwood on Thoulston Farm	ST844472	Eighteen Romano- British coins, two brooches and a fragment of bronze	ST84NW313
Chapmanslade	Short Street Farm	ST83704875	Oval clay fired structures were revealed during an evaluation in 1999, possibly kilns	ST84NW309
Chapmanslade	South of Short Street Farm	ST83894852	Romano British pottery fragments	ST84NW309
Dilton Marsh	Hisomely	ST85804930	Romano British pottery fragments and a complete pot	ST84NE301
Dilton Marsh	North east of Blackdog farm	ST83654910	Romano British pottery fragments	ST84NW303
Dilton Marsh	North of Short Street	ST837494	A Romano British Coin	ST84NW302
Dilton Marsh	Ox Leaze Wood	ST84855271	Romano British occupation evidence	ST85SW301
Dilton Marsh	South West of Short Street Farm	ST838486	Romano British coin	ST84NW307
Dilton Marsh	Stable Block Chalcot House	ST84204891	Romano British pottery fragments	ST84NW305
Dilton Marsh	W of OX Lease	ST84625279	Romano British occupation evidence	ST85SW303
Dilton Marsh	W of Storridge Farm	ST84835270	Romano British Burial	ST85SW302