

IX.—*An Account of Excavations on the Site of some Ancient Potteries in the Western District of the New Forest: by JOHN YONGE AKERMAN, Esq. Secretary.*

Read Jan. 13, 1853.

IN the spring of the past year I received information from my friend the Reverend J. Pemberton Bartlett of the discovery of what appeared to be the site of potteries during the Roman possession of Britain, in the western district of the New Forest. Mr. Bartlett, at the same time, forwarded a hamper of the shards which had been turned up, and also a number of vessels which he had succeeded in obtaining by excavations on the spot. These examples were exhibited to the Society, and excited much speculation among those members who had made the subject of Roman fictile ware their study. At a subsequent period I had the gratification of exploring the localities, and in the succeeding autumn I again paid a visit to the Forest in company with my friend, whose zeal for the acquisition of all possible intelligence regarding these remains I cannot too much commend. But I must give, in his own words, the particulars relating to the discovery, and his account of repeated visits to the spot, which were continued until the close of the past year.

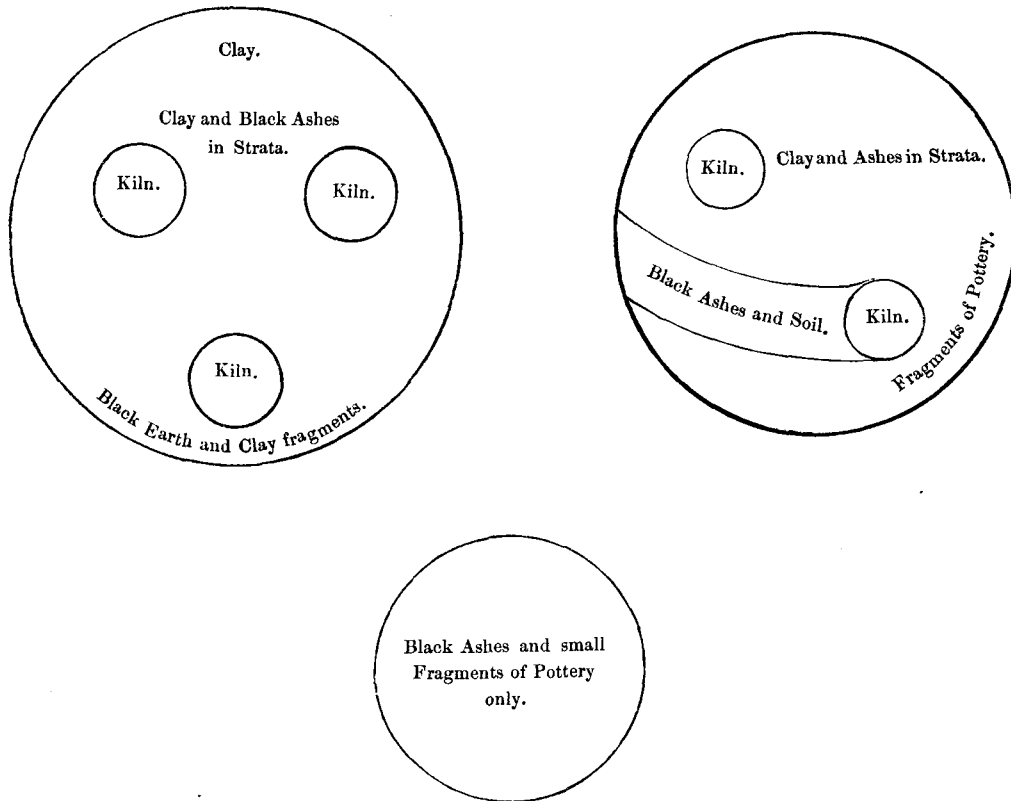
“DEAR MR. AKERMAN,

“Having at length concluded my excavations among the sites of the Romano-British potters’ kilns in the New Forest (at some of which you were present both in the summer and in the autumn), I am enabled to give you a detailed account of the results. It may not be uninteresting in the first place to mention that, had it not been for the previous operations of moles and rabbits, I should never have made the discovery of these interesting relics. In the spring of the present year, having heard that extensive draining operations were being carried on in the New Forest, I proceeded thither, with a view of inducing the workmen to keep a look-out for coins or other objects of antiquity likely to be found. Among some of the newly cast-up soil I speedily detected fragments of pottery, which instantly struck me as being Roman—an opinion you afterwards confirmed. Upon inquiring of the workmen if they had found anything like these pieces, one man, with evident surprise at my interest in such common-looking fragments, informed me that ‘at Crockkle’

there were plenty of shards like those I had in my hand. Upon making inquiries where the spot alluded to was, he directed me to a hill about a mile off, in the midst of the wooded part of the Forest, whither I instantly proceeded, and soon discovered what at first sight appeared to be three large depressed barrows. After searching among the grass and decayed fern, with which they were thickly covered, I found several mole-casts, which indeed consisted of numerous small pieces of pottery mingled with a fine, black, ash-like mould.

“Upon digging a few feet into the apex of one of the mounds, the spade brought to light innumerable fragments of different kinds of pottery, which convinced me I had discovered the site of a potter’s kiln. Having obtained permission to explore from J. H. Cumberbatch, Esq. the Deputy Surveyor (from whom I have received every kindness), I at once commenced my researches, which were continued at intervals as my more important avocations allowed. It may be interesting to remark, that the name of the spot where the kilns were found,—viz. ‘Crockle,’ as it is pronounced by the workmen,—is an evident corruption of Crock Hill; and, although the spot is not so named in either the Ordnance or the Forest Map, yet probably it is an ancient traditional name among the workmen and residents in the Forest, and had its origin from the fact of ‘crops’ being found here, the hill having at one time been the site of a Roman pottery.

“The circumference of the three mounds varied considerably. The largest was rather more than 100 yards, the next between 70 and 80 yards, while the third, which consisted chiefly of ashes, and small fragments of pottery, but bore no traces of a kiln, or any perfect specimens, was about 50 yards in circumference, and more depressed than either of the others. It was probably merely an accumulation of refuse ashes thrown from the kilns. Having opened a trench about three feet wide at the base, the workmen proceeded to undermine the artificial soil of which the mound was composed, and then by driving strong stakes into about two feet of ground at a time, the stakes being then pushed forward, the mass fell gently into the trench, yet in a sufficient body to prevent any perfect vessels that might be contained in it from breaking. By these means many good specimens were afterwards got out with the aid of a light garden prong, which would otherwise have been destroyed by spade or pickaxe.



“In the accompanying slight sketch of the ground plan, I have marked the relative position of the actual sites of the kilns, which were, I regret to say, only to be traced by a mass of crumbling red brick-like soil. The few bricks which were found at all perfect appeared to have been of a very rough description, probably moulded by the hand. Around the mass of decayed brickwork, we found in two of the kilns a circle of large sandstone boulders. I was in hopes that more perfect traces of the masonry of the kilns might have been discovered, similar to those brought to light by Mr. Artis in Northamptonshire, but in this I was disappointed. From the decayed state of the bricks of the kilns, the general coarseness of the pottery, and the fact that among the immense mass of fragments dug out not a single specimen was found with any figures or device (the only ornaments consisting of circles, lines, and dots variously arranged, burnt in with some white pigment, or indented with some tool), it would seem not probable that these kilns were of

an earlier date than those of Northamptonshire. The fragments, as also the more perfect vessels discovered around these kilns, consisted of the remains of variously shaped vases, urns, pateræ, mortaria, and one example of a fragment of a vessel which had probably been used as a colander, the bottom of which was perforated with small holes. I believe no specimen unique in form has been discovered.

“The most frequently occurring form, both in a perfect and in a fragmentary state, was a vase similar in shape to that found by Mr. Artis in Northamptonshire, and figured Plate X, No. 41, in your work the *Archæological Index*. These vessels were found of various sizes, from nine to three inches in height, and capable of containing from a quart to a gill in measure. They are for the most part made of a hard, dark, slatecoloured ware, which, when exposed to the action of fire, snaps and flies out like a flint, from whence I conjecture the clay was mixed with a large portion of silicious matter. Some of them, however, were formed of a red porous clay.

“The indentures in the sides of many of these vessels were evidently formed upon them when unbaked by the pressure of the thumb; in others, more neatly made, the indentations were probably formed by some instrument. A smooth, hard-polished stone which I found near one of the kilns, and which exactly fits some of the hollows in these vessels, was, I suspect, used for this purpose.

“I must not omit to mention here that some Roman coins were found at Cadnam, in the Forest, which were contained (as one of the men informed me) ‘in just such a thumb-pot’ as those I have described. A similar one was also dug up some years since in Winchester; and, what is still more interesting, I find in the volume of the *Archæological Institute’s* proceedings, when they met at Sarum in 1849, a drawing of a vessel found in a barrow almost precisely similar to these discovered in the pottery. The following is the description given:—‘A well-burnt urn of thin red pottery, found in a barrow south of Beckhampton, at the head of a skeleton lying at full-length; round it were nail-heads as if of a coffin; a few feet from this was a similar skeleton doubled up.’ The height of this urn was $4\frac{1}{8}$ inches, largest diameter $2\frac{5}{8}$ inches. Now it happens curiously enough that I have an almost exactly similarly formed vessel, ‘a well-burnt urn of thin red pottery.’ In height it is $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches, while its largest diameter is $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches; a very trifling variation from the size of the one found in the barrow. I also find at p. 104 of the same volume the drawing of a fragment of a small ampulla, of somewhat coarse pottery, found in a barrow near Silbury Hill. This is precisely of the same shape as several specimens discovered in these kilns.

“A few years since a small vessel full of silver Roman coins was dug up in

Amberwood, only about half a mile from the site of the pottery. One of the workmen who saw it before it was (as is too often the case) broken to get at the contents, informed me that it was the exact shape, not of the 'thumb-pots' just described, but of a vessel of which we had found several nearly perfect specimens.

"From these coincidences, do you think it would be too much to infer that probably all these vessels were originally manufactured at the Forest pottery? But to return for a moment to the actual digging operations. I found, as you will remember, that the bases of the artificial mounds which surrounded the sites of the kilns were composed, for the most part, throughout about half of the circumference, of a mass of fragments of variously formed vessels. In working further we found that a mass of black ashy soil (occasionally varied by strata of a yellow putty-like clay) ran up to where once had been the brickwork of the kiln. In the black soil and the clay the most perfect vessels were for the most part discovered. On the opposite side the fragments were not so numerous, but a mass of the same stiff clay, sometimes to the depth of three feet, extended throughout the remainder of the mound.

"I was disappointed in my hope of finding any remains of tools used in the pottery, as Mr. Artis succeeded in doing in the Castor pottery. About a pound of much corroded sheet-lead, and a lump of iron (about half a pound in weight), but so corroded as to render it impossible to form an opinion as to its use, were, however, dug up near one of the kilns. I have found no more coins (save one that crumbled to pieces on being touched) than the three brass ones you saw when you visited the pottery, two of which you pronounced to be Hadrian's, the other of Victorinus.^a

"While engaged in working the sites just described, one of the Forest woodmen reported that he had discovered another mound containing fragments about a mile off. Upon going to the spot I found a mound about 70 yards in circumference, which proved to be also the site of a pottery. Having since explored it, I found evident traces of two kilns; the brickwork, however, was in the same mouldering state as at the other pottery. Around these kilns I found several vessels differently shaped from any met with in the first pottery. The indented vessels before described were here also the commonest, both in a nearly perfect and a fragmentary state. I have not as yet been able to discover the clay of which the vessels were made in

^a Two of these coins were exhibited to the Society on the 9th December last (see Proceedings, vol. II. p. 278). They are of Valens and of Julian the Apostate; and, if their deposit may in any way be connected with these kilns, they support the view I have taken as to the age of the latter.—J. Y. A.

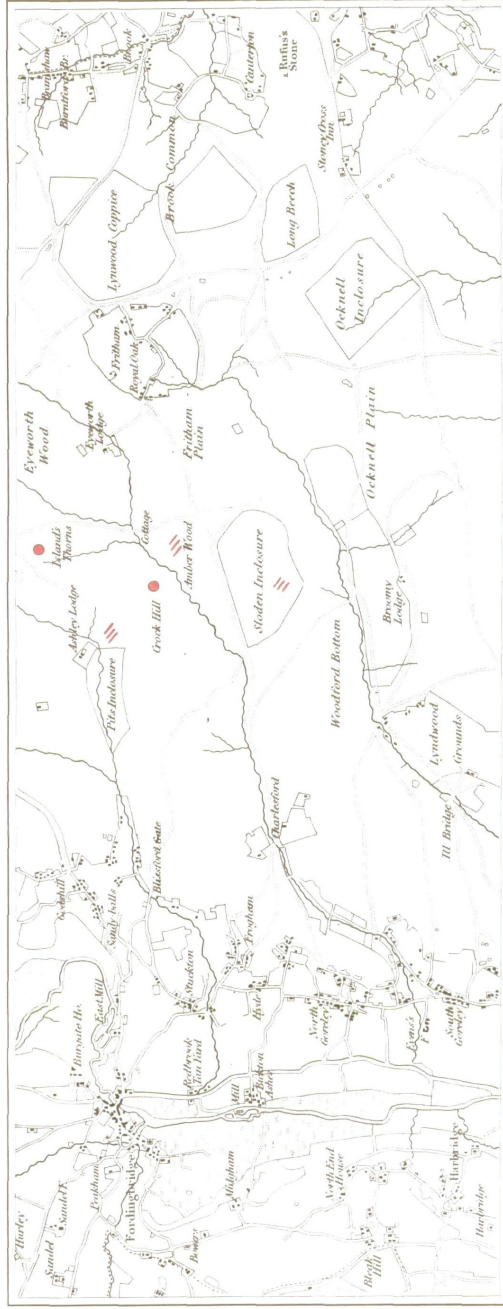
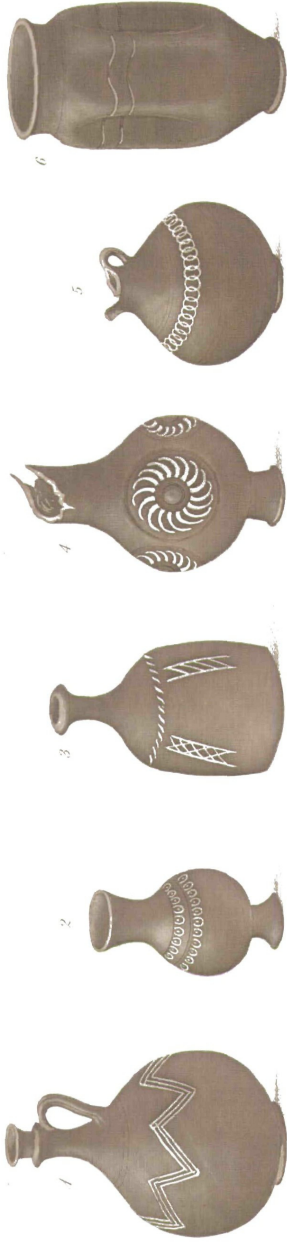
the immediate vicinity of the pottery, but most probably it is to be found somewhere in the Forest.

“J. PEMBERTON BARTLETT.”

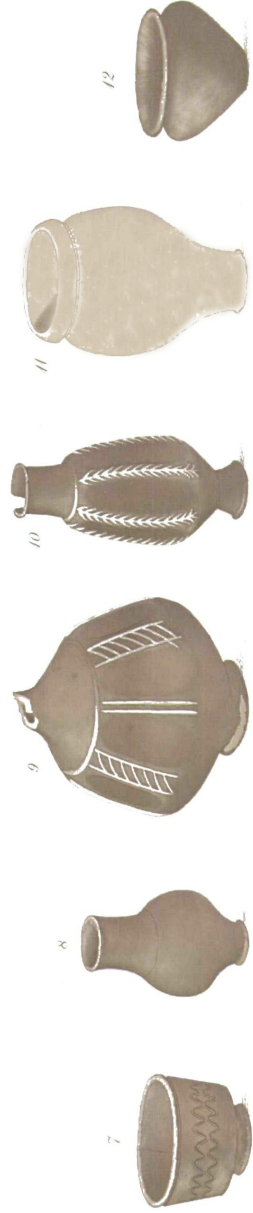
Such is Mr. Bartlett's account of the various excavations made under his directions, at several of which I was present. Of the vessels thus brought to light it may be observed that, with scarcely an exception, they appear to have been the rejected of the kilns, either rendered unsightly by over-baking, or cracked and unfit for use in consequence of their not withstanding the action of a strong fire. This over-baking has, in fact, imparted to many of them an appearance which caused some of our antiquaries at first to regard them with suspicion, since, owing to the vitrification of their surfaces, they have acquired a glaze, which has not hitherto been observed on Roman pottery. Thus changed, they have resisted decomposition, and appear as fresh as some of the ruder vessels of the present hour.

Diligent search was made for coins, or any objects which might assist us in forming an idea as to the age when these kilns were in operation ; but in this we were doomed to disappointment. With the exception of two pieces of Hadrian, in large brass, and two small-brass coins of the lower empire, nothing was brought to light which could be regarded as affording a sufficient clue to their precise date. These coins are, nevertheless, of some value in the inquiry. Those of Hadrian, besides being much corroded, by lying in the earth, had evidently been for a long time in circulation, their devices being nearly obliterated by friction, and the portraits only just recognisable. The small-brass coins were also much corroded, and likewise bore marks of wear. One of them appears to be of Victorinus, who reigned in Gaul, and probably in Britain, from A.D. 265 to A.D. 267 ; but, bearing as it does evident traces of its having been long previously in circulation, we may safely conclude that it was lost on this spot at least as late as the end of the third century. How long these potteries continued to be used after this period must be left to conjecture ; but it is not improbable that they existed here until the final abandonment of Britain by the Romans. Not a single fragment was found bearing a potter's name.

I cannot conclude these remarks without an observation or two on the localities in which these potteries are situated, and on the various specimens of fictile ware found in them. And first of the vases recovered : If the view I take of their probable age be incorrect, and they may be referred to a yet later period, we must still regard them as of Romano-British origin, distinguished by the characteristic features of the works of the former masters of the world, whose love of elegant form evidently triumphed over utility, and led them to prefer their most ordinary vessels of a shape



Map showing the situation of Ancient Potteries in the Western District of the New Forest, with examples of Pottery discovered in 1852.



which, for common purposes, must have been exceedingly inconvenient, and which offer a singular contrast to the earthen vessels of the mediæval period.

If we may assume that the vase found with the skeleton at Beckhampton was the produce of potteries of this district of Britain, it strongly favours the supposition that they were in operation at least as late as the end of the fourth century. The interment at Beckhampton is clearly of the Roman period, and subsequent to the days of Constantine, when the pagan rite of cremation fell into disuse. In the days of Theodosius, as appears by the words of Macrobius,^a it had been entirely abandoned.

With regard to the precise site of these potteries, the accompanying Map, Plate I. will afford the best indications. It will be seen that they were situated about midway between the town of Fordingbridge and the spot on which tradition says Rufus fell by the arrow of Tyrrell. In this map the places where perfect specimens of pottery were exhumed are distinguished by *circular patches of red*, and where shards only have been met with, by *lines* of the same colour.

During my last visit to the spot, we endeavoured to discover traces of the sites of dwellings in this district of the New Forest, to form which the Conqueror, it is said, depopulated towns and villages; but, as may be supposed, the physical features of this extensive tract of land have greatly changed in the lapse of nearly eight centuries, and the debris of the Forest has doubtless obliterated many traces which might have been detected in an unwooded district. There are several spots on which it seems highly probable that there were homesteads in ancient times, and these may have been the *Tuns* of the Saxon churls after the Conquest. I cannot help thinking that the old and inveterate error of supposing that *tun* signified originally a *town*, an error which is still repeated in our cyclopædias, has, to some extent, been committed by the chroniclers in their account of the depopulation of this district by William the Conqueror. In these Saxon *tuns*, or homesteads, were fierce dogs, which the despot would justly consider prejudicial to the deer he desired to preserve, and their removal would be the consequence. The cruel mutilation to which large dogs were subjected in those days is well known. On the other hand, we can scarcely suppose that these potteries existed in old times in a spot altogether isolated, remote from any considerable town, in an age when land-carriage was subject to many serious impediments. We may infer, rather, that they were not far distant from a populous neighbourhood, dispersed at a later period of our history. Here, however, we are again abandoned to conjecture, for which there is a wide field, when

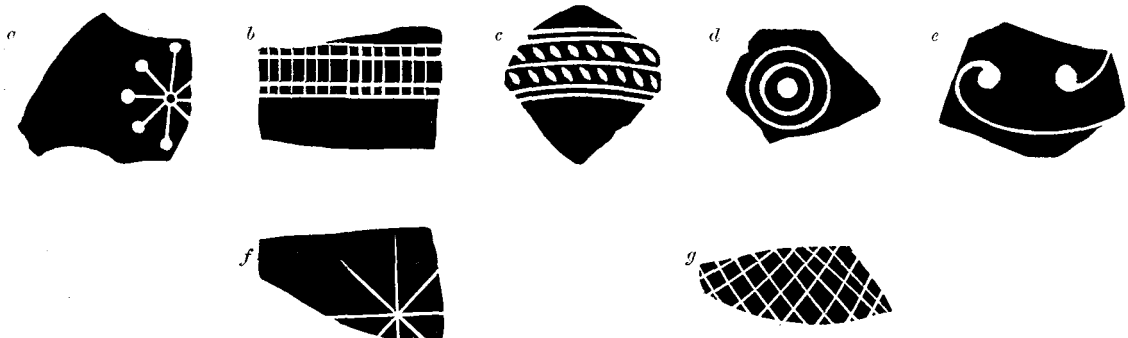
^a Saturnalia, vii. c.

we reflect that from the time of the departure of the Romans to the time of the Conqueror, is included nearly as long an interval as that from the Norman Conquest to the year of the discoveries under notice.

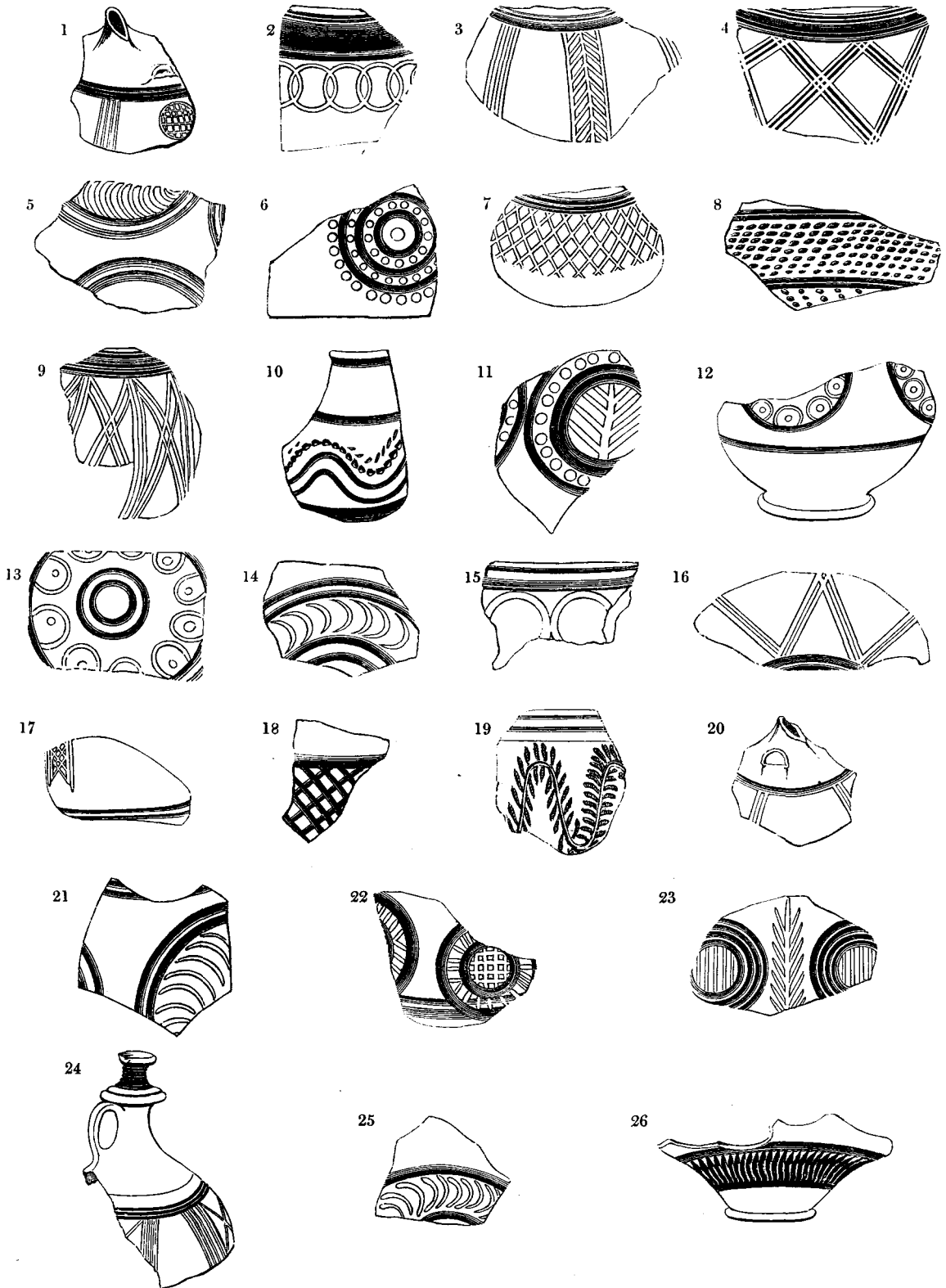
Since the foregoing was written, specimens of the vases have been submitted to the inspection of Sir Henry de la Beche, at the Museum of Practical Geology, who observes that from the distorted condition of some of them they must have been placed in the kiln in a comparatively soft state, and thus become injured either by want of proper adjustment in packing, or from some accidental pressure; a condition which would also account for the kind of cracking or separation of parts, should the firing have been suddenly applied or continued too long.

In the Plate are given representations of some of the more perfect specimens, while the various ornamental patterns selected from numerous fragments are delineated in the woodcuts.^a

J. Y. AKERMAN.



^a Examples of the more perfect vessels are given in the Plate, and specimens of the ornamentation on the fragments represented in the Woodcuts. The first seven (*a to g*) are white on a dark ground; the others (*1 to 26*) are ornamented both with an indented pattern and white figures, which are represented in outline only.



FRAGMENTS OF POTTERY FROM ANCIENT KILNS IN THE NEW FOREST.