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**Roman Remains from the Severn Bridge Approach at Aust**

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# Roman Remains from the Severn Bridge Approach at Aust

By T. W. J. SOLLEY

THE following is an account of the recovery of samian and coarse pottery from the M.4 motorway and service area, with references to earlier finds.

Ten miles north of Bristol the alluvial flats on the Gloucestershire side of the river Severn are broken by a slight promontory which rises to a height of 140 feet, leaving a sheer cliff face extending for about a mile (National Grid Reference S.T. 567898). From this point, referred to on one old map as Peter's Thumb,<sup>1</sup> a commanding view is obtained across the Severn towards Caerleon and Caerwent and inland to the camps at Oldbury-on-Severn, Elberton, Knole and Maes Knoll. (See Map, FIG. 1). The cliff is topped by Lias clays and below are the Rhaetic beds, the Tea Green Marls and Red Marls with deposits of pink and white gypsum.

In 1962 work on the M.4 approach road to the Severn Bridge (under construction) necessitated a deep cutting through the cliff face to bring the road down to the same level as the road section on the bridge. Subsequent earth levelling took place on the east side of the motorway in preparation for the service area. No structures or defensive works were apparent but rubbish layers produced a range of samian and coarse pottery, together with bones and fragments of iron. The finds are being given to the Bristol City Museum.

## *History of the Site*

The crossing of the river Severn from Aust to Beachley is the shortest at this section of the estuary—about one mile—and records of regular ferries go back many centuries, to merge into conjectures such as the meeting of the Welsh bishops with St Augustine in 602–603 and earlier to a crossing for the Roman Second Legion (Augusta) when moving to Caerleon under the command of Julius Frontinus.<sup>2</sup> There have also been attempts to place Aust as Traiectus on the line of the Antonine Itinerary, for the section from Bath to Caerleon.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. Walker, Report to Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty (1846), Bristol Central Library—File B 9805.

<sup>2</sup> A. H. Smith, *Place Names of Gloucestershire*, Part 3, pp. 127–8.

<sup>3</sup> S. Seyer, *Memoirs of Bristol*, 1, pp. 137–41.

ROMAN REMAINS—SEVERN BRIDGE APPROACH AT AUST

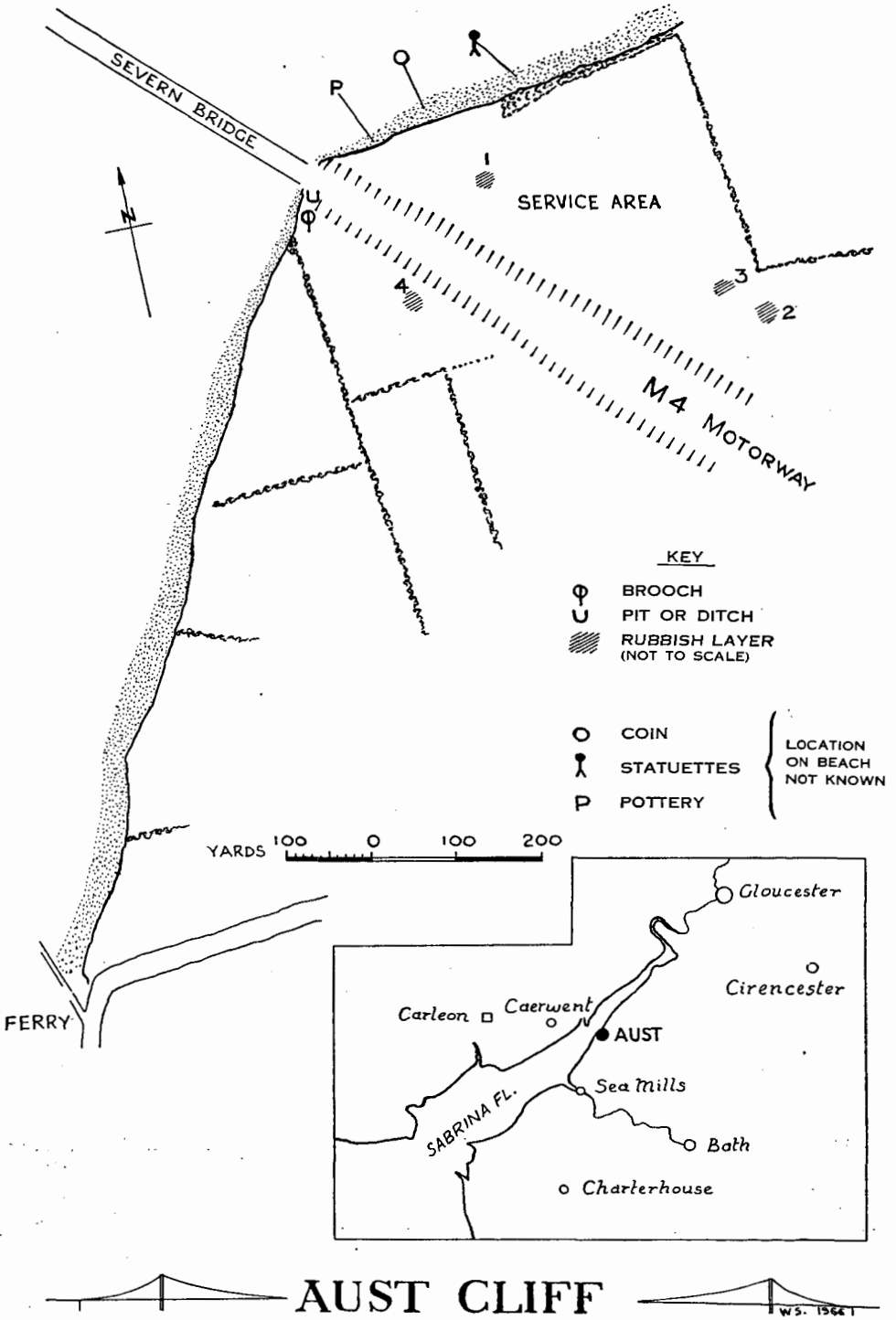


Fig. 1

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*Previous Material from Aust*

The following items have in the past been recovered from the foreshore beneath the cliff:—

A number of bronze statuettes of which only one can now be located. This is in the British Museum and resembles votive objects of the period from the 4th century B.C. to c. 1st century A.D. found on temple sites in southern Spain.<sup>1</sup>

Sherds of samian and coarse pottery found by Mr A. Selley. This material cannot be traced.<sup>2</sup>

A coin (*dupondius*) of Claudius found by Mr A. J. Sutcliffe in 1946.<sup>3</sup>

A samian pedestal base was found on a farm track near the present ferry by the writer in 1958.

*Acknowledgments*

Firstly to the Ministry of Works and the Rank Organization for permission to visit the site and remove finds, also to Mr S. B. Kirk, A.M.I.C.E., Resident Engineer for the facilities he offered. The Archaeological Section of the Ordnance Survey and the British Museum kindly supplied useful information on the bronze statuettes. Help in removing finds from the rubbish layers was given by Messrs Box, Durnell, Lee, Selway and Screen. Pottery from Rubbish Layer No. 4 was removed by permission of Mr W. J. Spratt, who also supplied information on previous field work in the area. Access to the fields nearer to the ferry was permitted by Mr G. J. Watkins. Mr L. V. Grinsell, Curator in Archaeology and History at the City Museum, Bristol, has supplied and given access to references to material from the site.

*The Rubbish Layers*

Rubbish Layer No. 1 extended over an area of about 6 yards by 3 yards, commencing 2 feet below turf level and having a depth of nearly 18 inches. It comprised of dark grey clay with a spread of stones and pottery, together with a dogs jaw-bone, iron fragments, water-worn sandstone and a few quartz pebbles (pot boilers?).

<sup>1</sup> *Trans. BGAS*, xxiii, p. 323; *Later Prehistoric Antiquities of the British Isles*. B.M., pl. xxii, fig. 3; *Early Iron Age Guide*. B.M. (1925); *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, LXVIII (1938), pp. 51 f.; Horace Saunders, 'Pre-Roman Bronze Votive Offerings from Despenaperros, in Sierra Morena, Spain', *Archaeologia*, LX, p. 69; L. Russel Muirhead, *Blue Guide—Southern Spain*, p. 57 and lxxxix; A. Arribas, *The Iberians* (Ancient People and Places Series), pp. 162-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Trans. BGAS*, xxiii, p. 323. The A. Selley Diaries, Bristol Museum.

<sup>3</sup> *Trans. BGAS*, LXVI, p. 255.

The two sherds of samian, Nos. 5s and 6s and the mortarium spout No. 1a fall into a 2nd-century category. Other coarse ware is listed as Nos. 6b, 7b, 9c, 11c, 16c, 28c, 29c, 41c and 55c.

Most of the material originally in the layer was removed before the site was further lowered for the foundations of the service area cafe.

Rubbish Layer No. 2 appeared in section in a temporary bank left by the graders. A similar clay filling to that in No. 1 produced pottery of which the three samian sherds Nos. 4s, 8s and 11s are of mid to late 1st-century date. In the coarse ware Nos. 12c and 15c would also meet this dating. The other coarse sherds are Nos. 4a, 1b, 10b, 1c, 5c, 10c, 14c, 15c, 21c, 26c, 32c, 33c, 34c, 36c, 37c, 39c, 40c, and 45c.

Rubbish Layer No. 3 contained a few fragments of pottery not far from No. 2. Only coarse ware was recovered and no dating could be given.

Rubbish Layer No. 4 was discovered in cess-pit trenches off the motorway in the field behind the contractors' offices. The samian sherd No. 10s could be early 2nd century. Coarse ware is listed as Nos. 19c, 47c and 48c.

### *The Pit or Ditch*

Within a few feet of the cliff edge and showing in section through the motorway cutting was a 'U' shaped area about 4 feet in width and depth filled with burnt clay and layers of stones. No further investigation was possible without disturbing the cutting and cliff edge.

### *Conclusions*

It is hoped that the finds recorded and their bearing on the Roman occupation of the cliff-top will be followed by further discoveries of a more positive nature. The motorway cutting was after all only a random 'section' and the area towards the ferry is nearer to what was probably the old road and is more sheltered. Ploughing would not necessarily have disturbed some features, as was noticed from the original fields.

Further west on the North Devon coast, the camps at Martinhoe and Old Burrow have produced material suggesting occupation in the latter half of the 1st century, in connection with control of the wider reaches of the Severn.<sup>1</sup> Whether Aust served a similar function is not clear. An alternative purpose would have been a camp in association

<sup>1</sup> Lady (Aileen) Fox, 'Old Burrow and Martinhoe', *Antiquity*, xxxix, pp. 253-8.

with a ferry, but proof of the existence of beaching facilities is hardly to be hoped for.

Cliff erosion to the extent of some acres has no doubt been responsible for much material of interest being swept away by the fierce currents associated with Sabrina Flumen.

## THE FINDS

### *Mineral*

Bronze penannular brooch found by Mr L. V. Grinsell in a pit near the cliff edge, where work was in progress siting a derrick. (FIG. 2).

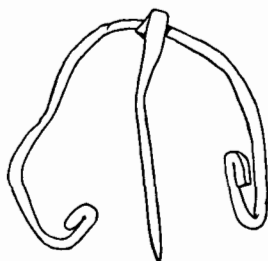


Fig. 2. Bronze Brooch (†)

Water-worn slabs of pennant stone and quartz pebbles (pot boilers?) and 'chalky' lumps of soft limestone from Rubbish Layer No. 1.

Two iron nails and two unidentified pieces of iron from Rubbish Layer No. 1.

Clay tile fragment. Surface find.

Pennant stone slab (pot cover?). Surface find.

Pennant Stone slab—with hole. Could be roof tile or stack weight. Surface find between motorway and ferry.

Glass fragment. Surface find, possibly from Rubbish Layer No. 1.

Small piece of slag. Surface find.

### *Animal*

Teeth of Ox. (*Bos. sp.*). Rubbish Layer No. 4.

Lower jaw and teeth of dog (*canis*) of medium size, from Rubbish Layer No. 1.

Further bones of horse, goat, sheep or deer were found in disturbed soil.

I am indebted to Dr M. L. K. Curtis for assistance with the mineral finds and to Mr P. F. Bird for his comments on the bones. (Bristol City Museum Departments of Geology and Zoology, respectively).

## THE POTTERY

Due to the nature of the site and work in progress, most of the items listed are single fragments although some rim sections were almost completed. All sherds found are recorded in the hope that they may be of use in future fabric assessments. Surface finds are always listed as such. Some pieces did not warrant drawing, hence the break in sequence of numbers in FIGS. 3 and 4. The system of allocating suffices 'a',

'b', 'c' and 's' was used to allow fresh finds to be added to the groups without re-numbering.

Thanks are here recorded for assistance with the pottery notes. For the samian ware, Dr Grace Simpson, F.S.A. and George C. Boon, F.S.A. For the coarse ware, George C. Boon, F.S.A., Max Hebditch, B.A. and John Rhodes, B.A.

Most of the pottery reconstruction was carried out by Master Roger Box.

THE SAMIAN WARE (FIG. 3)

Abbreviations:—*S.F.* Surface find. *R.L.* Rubbish layer.

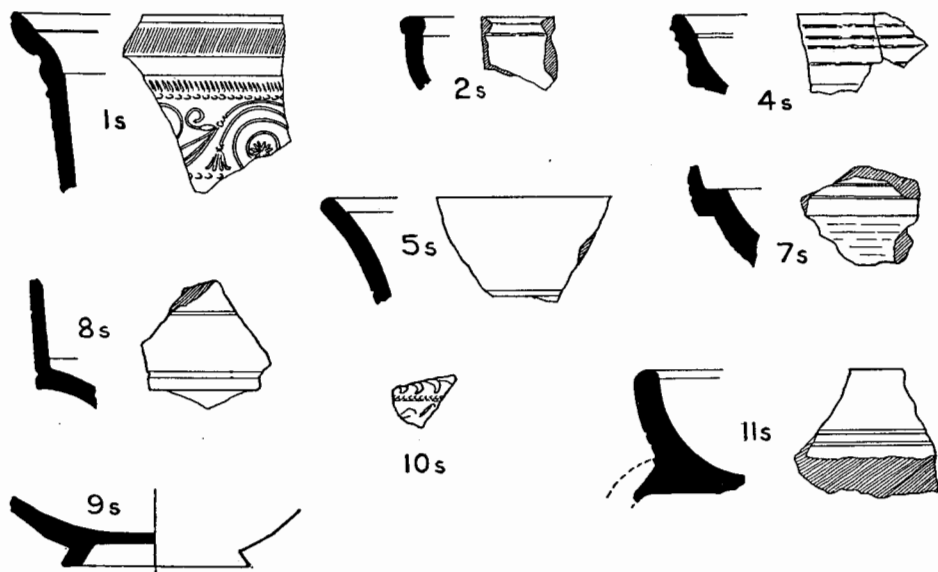


Fig. 3. Samian Ware ( $\frac{1}{2}$ )

- 1s—Form 29. Everted rim. Good gloss. Frieze style similar to Knorr (1919), Taf. 8B. Stalks of the scroll end in rosettes and four part bud, Taf. 21, details 5 and 21c. (Aquitanus A.D. 35–60?). See also Knorr (1952), Taf. 3B. *S.F.*
- 2s—Form 27. Plain ware with bead rim and lustrous gloss (early). *S.F.*
- 3s—Plain fragment of bowl with lustrous gloss (early). *S.F.*
- 4s—Form 15/17. Fair gloss. Camerton, fig. 29, nos. 38 and 39 (Pre-Flavian). *R.L.2.*
- 5s—Form 33. Poor gloss. Trajan—Hadrian. Camerton, xxiii, no. 44. *R.L. 1.*
- 6s—Form 31. Poor gloss. Thick section (10 mm.). Central Gaul. Antonine. *R.L. 1.*
- 7s—Form 30. Fair gloss. South Gaul. Flavian? *S.F.*
- 8s—Ritterling 9, cf. Oswald and Price (pl. 39). South Gaulish variety. See also Hawkes and Hull (Camulodunum) (1947), p. 187, S17 and pl. 40—S17B and C, which variants are Claudius—Nero at the latest. Not a common form in Britain and this example has a Claudian type gloss and fabric. *R.L. 2.*
- 9s—Plain base with foot-ring similar to Wroxeter (1913), p. 43, fig. 16, no. 83. Surface find by Messrs Grange Plant Ltd.

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- 10s—Form 37. Small fragment with small rams' horns and straight wreath such as in Central Gaulish Potters (1958), p. 37, fig. 10, no. 8. The very fine beaded border was used by the same potter or group of potters (IOENALIS style). See also Central Gaulish Potters, pls. 37, 436; 36, 427; 40, 462, c. A.D. 100–120. *R.L.* 4.
- 11s—Form 38. Flanged bowl—'Mottled' ware, rare on this imitation samian form. Found in the Rhineland; Vindonissa legionary fortress near Basle; and a little here and there in Britain. Dating uncertain, possibly late 1st to late 2nd century. *R.L.* 2.
- 12s—Base fragment, probably South Gaulish, accidentally burnt. Found near the Ferry.
- 13s—Ritterling 12. Worn sherd found under cliff (1965). Camerton, fig. 29, no. 37.

### THE COARSE WARE (FIG. 4)

Abbreviations:—

**r.** Rim sherd.    **b.** Body sherd.    **f.** Base sherd.    **m.g.** Mica gilt.  
*S.F.* Surface find.    *R.L.* Rubbish layer.

#### *Mortaria*

1a—**r.** buff; including spout. *R.L.* 1.    2a—**r.** cream; *S.F.*    3a—**r.** light cream; *S.F.*  
4a—**r.** brick—with grey core and buff slip. *R.L.* 2.    5a—**b.** cream; *S.F.*  
6a—**f.** brick—with inclusions. *S.F.*

#### *Amphorae*

1b—**r.** cream; 7½ in. dia.; inside rim. *R.L.* 2.    2b—**b.** cream ext./buff int. corrugated inside. *R.L.* 3.    3b—**b.** pink/buff, corrugated inside—**m.g.** *S.F.*  
4b—**r.** pink/buff, **m.g.** *S.F.*    5b—handle—pink/buff, **m.g.** *S.F.*    6b—**b.** pink/buff, **m.g.** white shell, 'iron'—light corrugations. *R.L.* 1.    7b—**b.** brick inc. mica, white shell and 'iron'. *R.L.* 1.    8b—**b.** pink/buff. *S.F.*    9b—**b.** orange—white bands in paste. *R.L.* 3.    10b—**b.** stone, gritty, with **m.g.** *R.L.* 2.    11b—**r.** stone, gritty, with **m.g.** *S.F.*

#### *Other Ware*

1c—**r.** black, **m.g.** *R.L.* 2.    2c—**r.** black, **m.g.** smooth outside and fine groove inside 7 mm. below rim. *S.F.*    3c—**r.** black/grey. *S.F.*    4c—**r/b/f.** black, **m.g.** *S.F.*    5c—**r/b.** black/grey, coarse, 'soapy feel', inside pitted. *R.L.* 2.  
6c—**r.** black, **m.g.** light corrugations inside. *S.F.*    7c—**r.** black, **m.g.** *S.F.*    8c—**r.** thin-grey core—brown/stone outside, **m.g.** *S.F.*    9c—ditto. Jewry Wall, fig. 25, no. 26 (form only). *R.L.* 1.    10c—**r.** brown/stone, **m.g.** *R.L.* 2    11c—**r.** light grey core—grey/brown inside and outside, brown inclusions, **m.g.** *R.L.* 1.    12c—**r/b.** black core, stone coating. *S.F.*    13c—**r/b.** grey core, orange inside and outside, brown inclusions—signs of cream slip inside. *S.F.*    14c—**r.** ditto. *R.L.* 2.    15c—**r.b.** black core, light grey inside and outside, black inclusions. (Swarling—Soc. of Antiq. No. V, pl. IX, nos. 22 and 25—for form only), *TBGAS*, LIX, p. 303, fig. 8. Rodborough. *R.L.* 2.    16c—**r/b/f.** possible slip inside. Jewry Wall, fig. 20, no. 2 (form only), **m.g.** *R.L.* 1.    17c—**r.** stone core, orange inside and outside—very hard. *S.F.*    18c—neck sherd, four ringed, orange. *S.F.*    19c—**r.** orange. *R.L.* 4.    20c—ditto. *S.F.*    21c—**r/b.** orange. *R.L.* 2.    22c—**f.** orange, brown inclusions. *S.F.*    23c—**f.** orange. *S.F.*    24c—ditto. *S.F.*    25c—**f.** grey core, brown inside and outside, brown inclusions.

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*R.L.3* 26c—**b.** black/brown core, stone inside and outside. **m.g.** *R.L.2.* 27c—**f.** black, gritty. **m.g.** *S.F.* 28c—**f.** black/brown core, stone inside and outside, white inclusions. **m.g.** *R.L.1.* 29c—**f.** black, brick outside. *R.L.1.* 30c—**f.** grey/black core, dense filling of 'calcite'. *R.L.3.* 31c—handle sherd, orange, ribbed. *R.L.3.* 32c-33c-34c—body sherds, grey core—orange inside

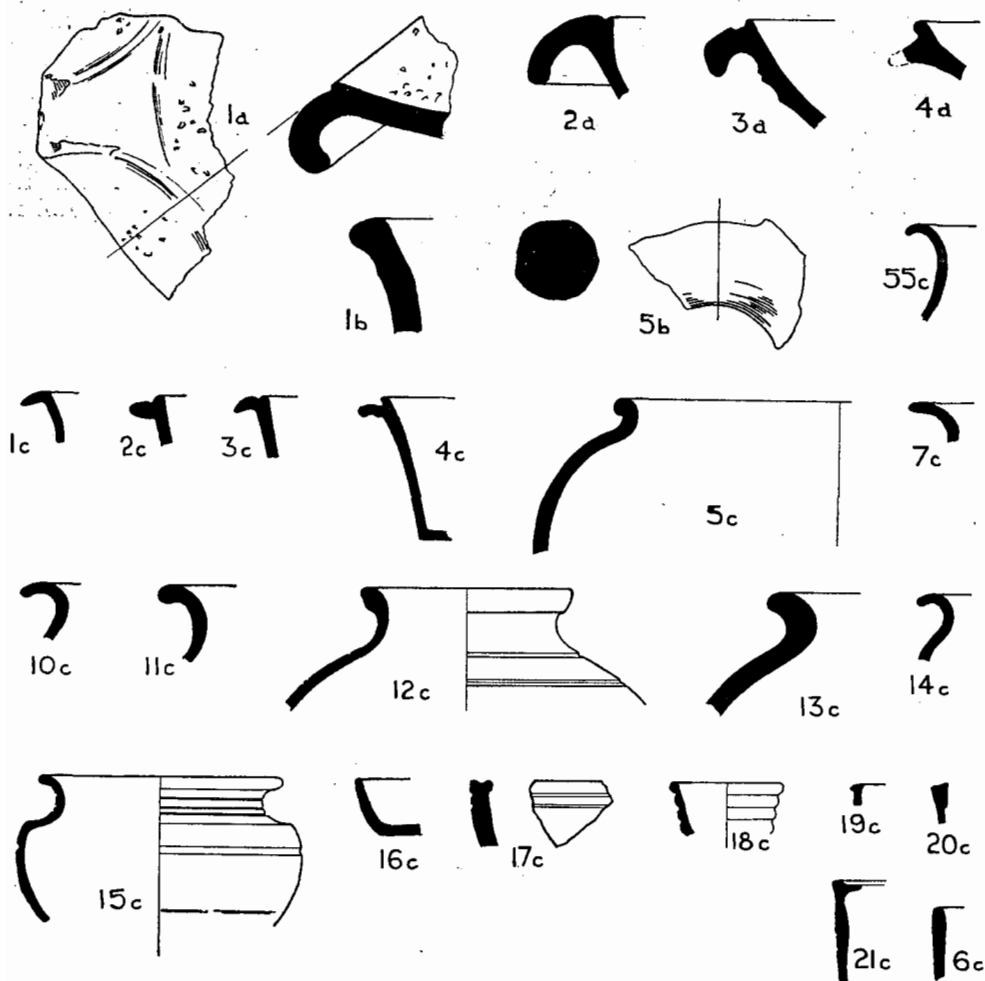


Fig. 4. Coarse Ware (1)

and outside with brown and white inclusions, cordon grooves,  $\frac{1}{16}$ – $\frac{1}{4}$  in. thick. *R.L.2.* 35c-36c—body sherds, orange with brown and white inclusions, cordon grooves,  $\frac{1}{8}$ – $\frac{1}{4}$  in. thick. *R.L.3* and *R.L.2* resp. 37c—**b.** grey core, brown inside and outside, large dark brown incl.  $\frac{1}{8}$ – $\frac{1}{4}$  in. thick. *R.L.2.* 38c—**b.** pink core, grey inside and outside, with brick, brown, black and white incl.

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$\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{3}{8}$  in. thick. *S.F.* 39c—**b.** dark grey/black with off-white coating inside, black incl.  $\frac{5}{16}$  in. thick. *R.L.2.* 40c—**b.** medium grey, many incl. (black, white, brown),  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. thick. *R.L.2.* 41c—**b.** medium grey. **m.g.**  $\frac{5}{32}$ – $\frac{5}{16}$  in. thick. *R.L.1.* 42c—**b.** medium grey, large brown incl.  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. thick. *R.L.3.* 43c—**b.** dark grey, light brown incl. giving mottled effect.  $\frac{1}{8}$ – $\frac{1}{4}$  in. thick. *S.F.* 44c—**b.** light grey, black incl. shoulder similar to 15c.  $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{5}{16}$  in. thick. *S.F.* 45c—**b.** part of large vessel, grey core, orange inside and outside, brown and white incl.  $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{3}{8}$  in. thick. *R.L.2.* 46c—**b.** similar to 45c.  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. thick. *R.L.3.* 47c—**b.** dark grey, 'corky' feel.  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. thick. *R.L.4.* 48c—**b.** black core, light brown inside and outside, 'corky' texture—'soapy' feel.  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. thick. *R.L.4.* 49c–50c–51c–52c—**b.** grey/brown fabric, 'pitted', many incl. 'soapy feel'.  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. thick. *S.F.* 53c—**r.** brown with large incl. Thick and everted. *S.F.* 54c—**b.** thin section, part of large vessel. Hard grey fabric. *S.F.* (near cliff-edge pit). 55c—**r.** grey core, light-brown inside and outside. Jewry Wall, fig. 25, no. 26 (form only), **m.g.** *R.L.1.* 56c—**r.b.** orange ware. Found under cliff.