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**Earthworks at Abbey (Alveston) and Elberton (Aust)**

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*March 1983*

RONALD W.B. MORRIS AND ALISTAIR MARSHALL

## EARTHWORKS AT ABBEY (ALVESTON) AND ELBERTON (AUST)

The following two reports deal with surface finds from two so-called 'camps' near Thornbury. The material, which has been collected over the last twelve years, gives some partial dating and clarifies the extent of occupation.

A tentative fabric series for the pottery has been deposited along with the finds at the City Museum, Bristol.

I would like to thank Mr F. Weekes, of Grovesend Farm, and Mrs Hill, of the Grove, Alveston, for permission to recover the surface finds at Abbey Camp; and Mr and Mrs Bernays of Old Down, Tockington, for permission to investigate Elberton Camp.

## ABBAY CAMP

Abbey Camp straddles the old ridgeway, now the A38, just south-east of Thornbury, in the parish of Alveston. At this point (ST 649888) on gradually rising ground, attaining 91 m (350 ft), there are views of the Forest of Dean, the Severn Valley and part of the Cotswolds (see FIG. 1).

The earthworks form a rough ellipse and are mostly intact on the south side of the road, where a gap can be assumed to have given access to a settlement outside the earthwork. On the west side the camp is bounded by a lane leading from Vilner Farm on through the 'settlement' and probably at one time connecting with Dodsmoor Lane. Local tradition speaks of this lane as at one time 'flowing with blood', the tradition possibly originating from the discovery of human bones when the road was widened in the 1930s. A local field-name 'Long Strangers' could point to other similar finds.

The name 'Abbey' is difficult to explain but has been retained for a house on the edge of the earthwork. A cottage nearby on the A38 overlies Roman material discovered during extensions to the building. This is known as 'Little Abbey'.

Whatever the earlier date and function of the site may have been, there are all the signs of intensive Romano-British occupation up to the 4th century. Stone roofing tiles indicate a substantial building, although the foundations are not visible. In the pasture between the earthwork and the lane some uneven features need investigation in view of some reference to a possible barrow in the vicinity.<sup>1</sup> The finds came from the area shaded in FIG. 1.

1. *Trans. B.G.A.S.* LXXIX (1960), 101; Witts, *Arch. Handbook of Glos.* (1883), 1.

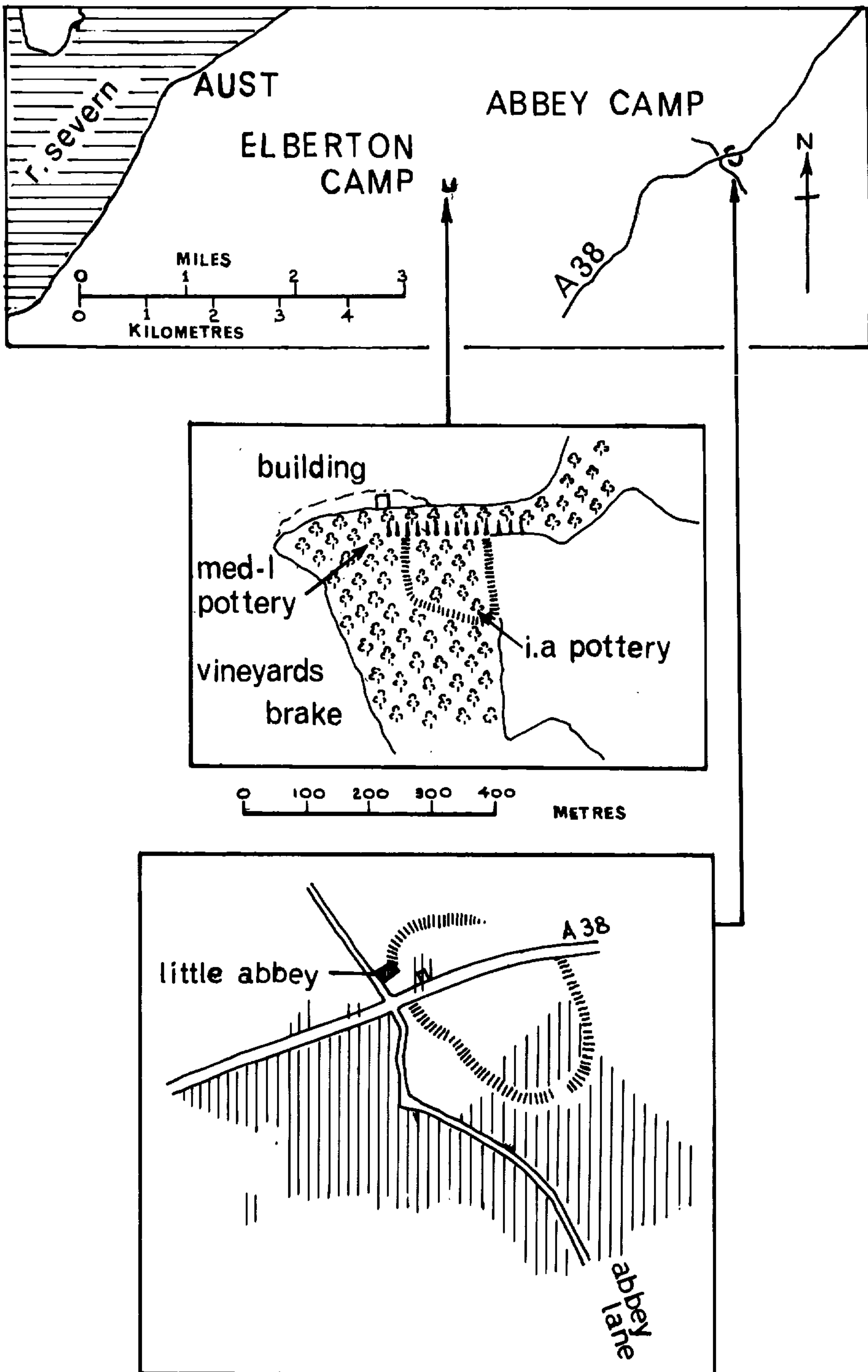


FIG. 1 Site location: Abbey and Elberton Camps

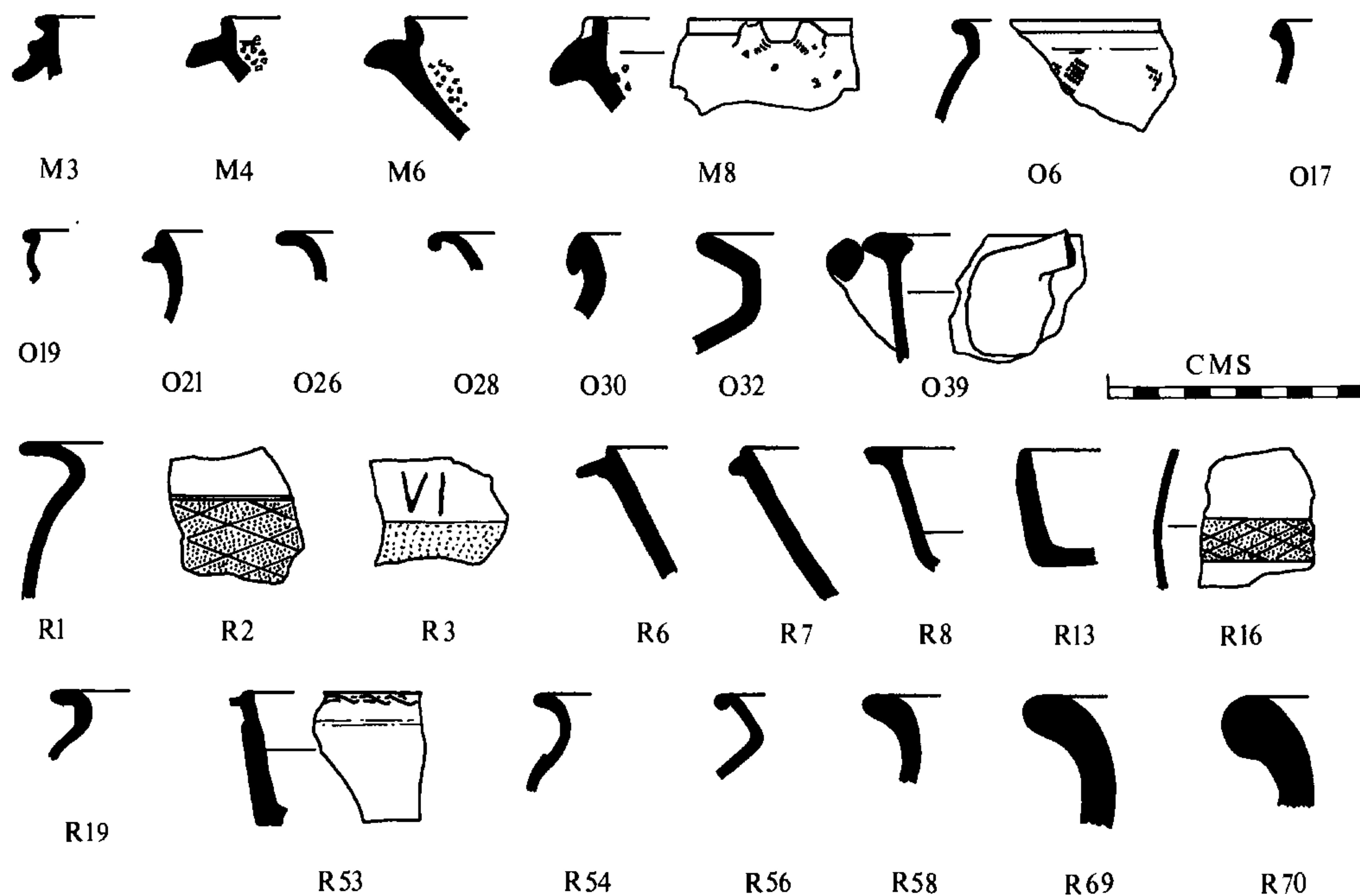


FIG. 2 Pottery from Abbey Camp

In the 19th century J. L. Knapp, a local writer and author of *The Journal of a Naturalist*, noted the preservation of brushwood and other vegetation under a track, possibly Abbey Lane. No dating material is mentioned.

### The Pottery (selected sherds illustrated FIG. 2)

The sherds recovered from ditches, badger's setts, mole-hills and cultivated land are mainly small and do not lend themselves to producing accurate vessel shapes. It has therefore been decided to concentrate on rim shapes, colour and fabrics. In order to condense the report the latter are omitted and it is intended that anyone wishing to study the material should make use of the fabric series at the City Museum, Bristol.

Each sherd is marked ABY followed by a number which relates to the field in which it was found. A key to the fields is also with the finds.

#### Samian Ware

- S 1. Plain Vessel. Form 18/31R.
- S 2. Rim. Form 15/17 or 15/31. S 3. Base with circular rouletting.
- S 4. Rim with leaves 'en barbotine'. Form 35 or 36.
- S 5. Potter's stamp on base: 'REGINVS' (Lezoux). Second century.
- S 6. Rim. Form 33. S 7. as S 6. S 8. Rim. Form 27?
- S 9. Decorated sherd. S 10. Rim. Beaded. Form 31R?

S 11. Potter's stamp on 'kick' of base: 'TITVS.FEC' (Lezoux). Second century.<sup>2</sup>

S 12. Decorated sherd.

### *Mortaria*

M 1; M 2; M 9: Body sherds. M 3; M 4; M 5; M 6; M 7; M 8: Rims. The last two include spouts.

### *Large Vessels (body sherds only)*

- A 1. Cream fabric right through. Small white, brown and 'dark' inclusions. Thickness 10 mm. Turning grooves inside. Fairly smooth. Fine mica dust.
- A 2. Buff – pink. Rough feel. Grey core with black and quartz inclusions. Thickness 13 mm. Deep turning grooves inside. Fine mica dust.
- A 3. Stone–buff right through. Rough feel. Dense black, brown and quartz inclusions, showing up in surface. Thickness 15 mm. Turning grooves.
- A 4. Buff – grey, mottled with cream outside; buff – cream speckled inside. Fabric brownish in section with grey core. Black and off-white inclusions. Slightly rough feel. Thickness 10 mm.
- A 5. Buff – pink, brown in section. Dark 'stone' core with white, black and brown inclusions also showing in surface. Very rough feel. Thickness 13 mm.
- A 6. Buff outside; brown inside. Crude with very rough feel. Dense inclusions of black, brown and quartz. Thickness 12 mm.
- A 7. Buff – stone outside; inside darker. Definite 'sandwich' in section, with buff – pink core. Brown, black and white inclusions. Mica dust. Thickness 11 mm., fairly rough feel.
- A 8. Buff – pink outside; orange inside. Black, white and quartz inclusions with brown core. Sandwich section. Thickness 10 mm.
- A 9. Buff – orange. Very hard and smooth. Grey core with black and white inclusions. Deep turning grooves. Thickness 8 mm.
- A 10. Very crude and 'heavy' sherd. Sandwich section, brown with black core. Large black inclusions, up to 5 mm. long. Outer face fairly smooth with fine 'wiping' marks.  
(The type fabrics for the above take the same numbers as the sherds, which include amphorae).

### *Oxidised Wares (colour-coated)*

#### *White*

- 0 1. Flagon Base, and 0 2 Body sherd. Black inside and outside.

#### *Buff*

- 0 3. Base. Dark coat (black?) outside.

#### *Orange*

- 0 4. and 0 5. Bowl rim. Black outside; red inside.
- 0 6. Necked bowl rim. Red/brown coat outside.
- 0 7. Body sherd. Rouletting. Red coat.
- 0 8. Body sherd. Rosette stamps. Red coat.
- 0 9. Body sherd. Rouletting. Red coat. 0 10. Bowl rim. Red coat.
- 0 11. Body sherd. Rouletting. Scale or rusticated. Dark coat.
- 0 12. Bowl rim. Cream coat.

#### *Brown*

- 0 13. Bowl rim. Traces of white coat.
- 0 14. Body sherd. Shiny black coat. 0 15. as 0 14.

#### *Stone*

- 0 16. Base. Off-white coat.

2. I would like to thank B.R. Hartley, M.A., F.S.A., for confirmation of the two potter's stamps.

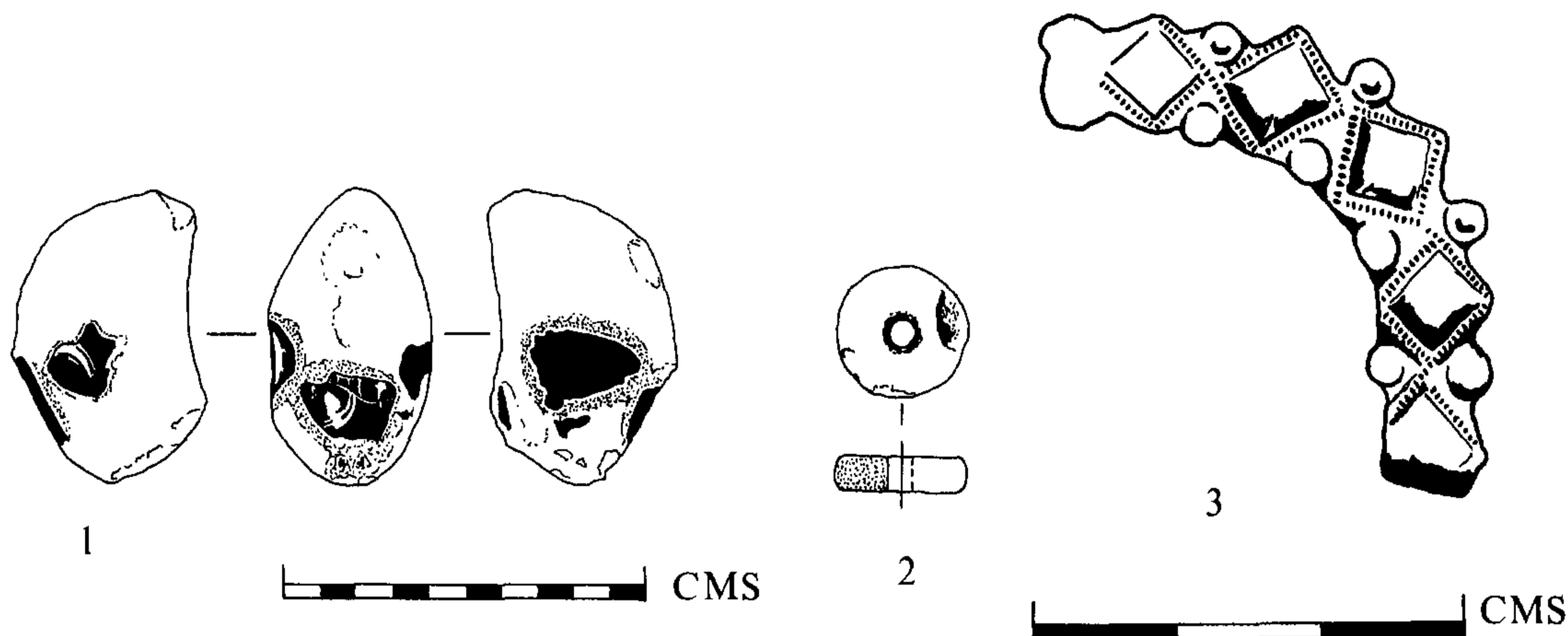


FIG. 3 Small Finds from Abbey Camp

*Oxidised Wares (not coloured)*

- 0 17 to 0 32 inclusive: Rims. 0 33. Flagon – ringed neck.  
 0 34; 0 35; 0 36: Bases.  
 0 37; 0 38; 0 39: Handles, the last being unusual, with horizontal loop.  
 0 40 to 0 52 inclusive: Body sherds.

*Reduced Wares (black)*

- R 1. Black burnished rim. R 2. Body sherd with burnishing and 'lattice'.  
 R 3. Body sherd with possible 'VI' scratched on. R 4. Bowl rim.  
 R 5. Bowl rim with flange 'notched'. R 6. Bowl rim. Burnished.  
 R 7. R 8; R 9; R 10; R 12: Bowl rims. R 11. Jar rim. R 13. Dish.  
 R 14. Dimpled handle. R 15. Body sherd, 'Lattice' with scroll.  
 R 16. Body sherd – thin section, with 'lattice'. R 17; R 18; R 19: Jar rim.  
 R 20. Dish rim. (Numbers R 21 to R 49 reserved for future additions)

*Reduced Wares (grey)*

- R 50 and R 51: Bases. R 52. Body sherd. Colour-coated?  
 R 53. 'Tazza' type notched rim. R 54; R 55; R 56: Jar rims. R 57. Base.  
 R 58 to R 63 inclusive: Rims. R 64. Bowl or dish.  
 R 65. Body sherd with 'ripple' incised decoration. R 66 and R 67: Handles.  
 R 68. Dimpled sherd. R 69, and R 70: Rim of large storage vessel.  
 R 71. Body sherd of large vessel. R 72. Body sherd with repeated cordon grooves.

**The Other Finds**

- Stone* Pot Covers: manufactured from pennant stone; 4 to 10 cms dia.  
 Quern Stones: two now in farm-yard near house.  
 Spindle-whorl: *illustrated* FIG. 3, no. 2.  
 Roofing Tiles: pennant stone; one complete and a fragment.
- Flint* Hammer stone with three areas flaked off to fit fingers; *illustrated* FIG. 3, no. 1.  
 Various flakes, including two mesolithic examples.
- Glass* Small bead: small fragments of uncertain date.
- Iron* Nails and slag.

- Coins* Claudius. Reverse defaced.  
 Domitian. Type 'Moneta'.  
 Diocletian.<sup>3</sup>  
 Valens. Emperor advancing r., holding labaram and dragging captive.  
 Constantine the Great. Principi Inventvtis. Mint Trier.  
 Constantine the Great. Soli Invicto Comiti. PLC or PLG. Left field TF.  
 Theodora. Reverse – Pietas Romana.  
 Gratian and one other.<sup>4</sup>  
 (All of the above are of bronze or similar metal.)
- Bronze* Part of decorated bracelet or ornament; *illustrated* FIG. 3, no. 3.

### ELBERTON CAMP

This earthwork is on a ridge some 62 m (200 ft) above the Severnside flats in the parish of Aust (at ST 608884). It is 4.5 km inland from Aust Cliff, where Roman material was recovered during the construction of the M4 service station at the bridge approach<sup>5</sup> (see FIG. 1). Historians have linked Elberton Camp with the control of an early crossing at Aust but the commanding view is now lost due to the wooded nature of the site.<sup>6</sup>

The regular outline of the earthworks has a Roman appearance but the pottery thrown out of the bank by badger workings indicates an iron-age date. An early report of Roman pottery being found 'below the camp' has not been substantiated but some sherds have been noticed some distance away in a field beside the track leading from Vicarage Lane to the church and manor house. The later pottery recorded here is from the wooded slope a short distance from the edge of the camp which faces the church and is part of the wood known as the Vinyard Break. Here in the dense undergrowth there are traces of banks and a trackway which may have been associated with a dwelling.

Local tradition of buried treasure having been found between the camp and the church adds to the problems of providing a comprehensive record of this site. As with Abbey Camp, no excavation has been carried out, all the finds being from the surface or badger workings.

To the north of the camp, on the margin of a field near Camp Farm, there are the overgrown footings of a small building of the 18th century.

### The Pottery (*selected sherds illustrated FIG. 4*)

#### *Iron Age*

In the south-east corner of the camp there is a large badger sett from which the following material has been recovered:  
 E 1. Rim with groove in outer surface and burnished on outside. Black fabric with white inclusions.<sup>7</sup>  
 A further eight body sherds are possibly from the same vessel.

#### *Romano-British*

E 33. Grey sherd from within the camp.

3. See 'Alveston Village History' (Alveston W.I., 1957).
4. City Museum, Bristol, File 678.M.
5. *Trans. B.G.A.S.* LXXXV (1966), 36–44.
6. *Trans. B.G.A.S.* XII (1887–8), 328.
7. Dating suggested by Prof. Barry Cunliffe (1968).

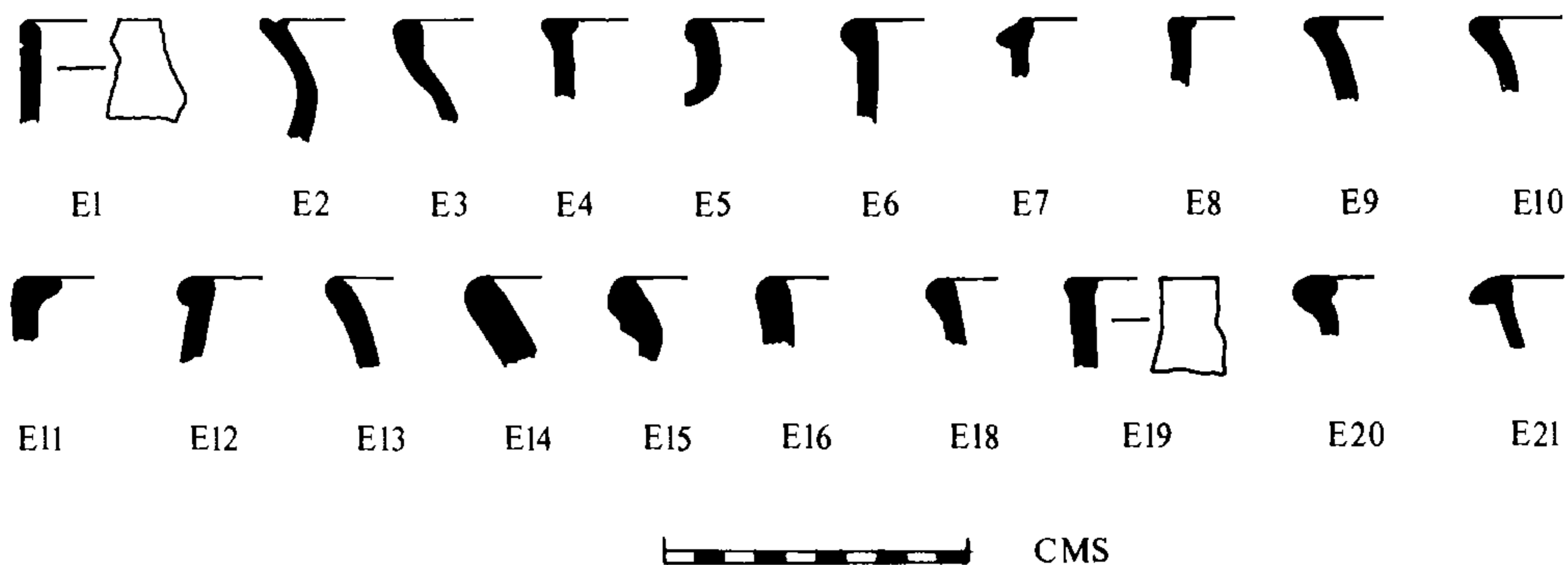


FIG. 4 Pottery from Elberton Camp

*Early Medieval*

E 2 to E 21. Rims.

E 22. Hard 'brick' fabric with grooved decoration.

E 23. Hard grey/brown fabric. Grooved decoration.

E 24. Similar to E 22, with applied strip across grooves.

E 25. Grooved decoration with very fine cordon markings.

E 26. Applied strip with thumb impressions.

E 27. Base/body sherd with diagonal 'broken' decoration.

E 28. Sherd of larger vessel (13 mm thick).

E 29. Glazed sherd.

E 30. Glazed sherd decorated with groove and 'rib'.

E 31 and E 32. Glazed sherds.

The un-glazed sherds appear to match the Prestbury Moat material, dating from the 11th to 13th centuries.<sup>8</sup>

**Bone**

The only other find was a (possibly left) femur of 42.7 mm dia. This indicates the sex as female, and a young person is indicated by the line of fusion between the capital epiphysis and the femoral neck.<sup>9</sup>

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8. *Trans. B.G.A.S.* LXXV (1956), 25-33.

9. I am indebted to J. Musgrove of City Museum, Bristol, for this report.