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A PIT DWELLING OF THE EARLY IRON AGE AT RAINHAM, KENT.

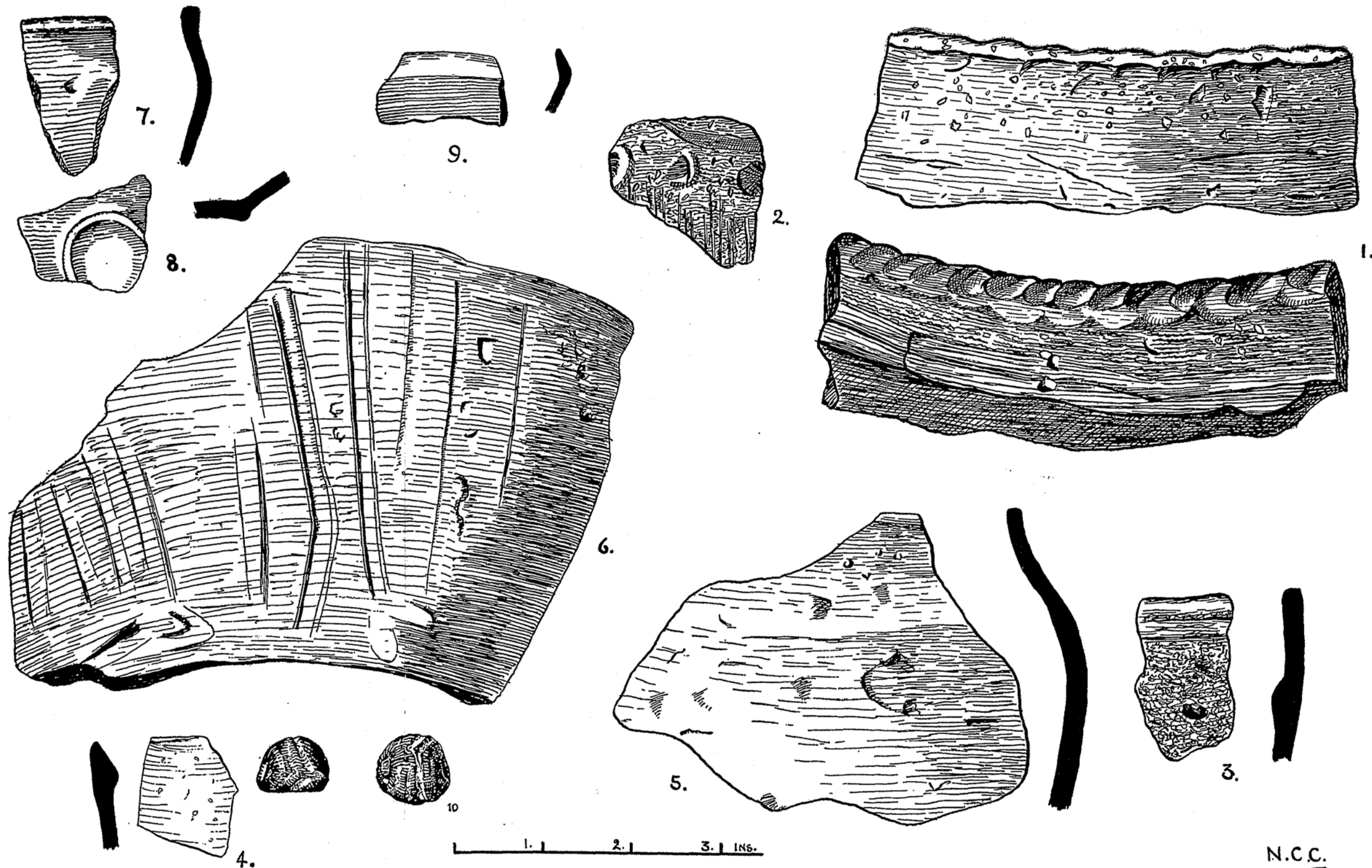
BY NORMAN COOK.

IN January, 1934, Mr. Carter of Rochester noticed a section of a pit in the face of a working in Eastwoods' Brickfield, Rainham. (Kent 6" Maps, Sheet XX S.W., Lat. 51. 21. 56., Long. 0. 37. 37.E.) The pit was filled with burnt material whose strong black and red colour was in striking contrast with the undisturbed brick earth. From the section exposed, the pit was seen to be 4 ft. 6 in. in depth and one side had a definite step or seat projecting. This feature was also noticed in the pit dwellings at St. Catherine's Hill, Winchester.

It was not possible to estimate how far the section was cut through the middle of the pit and it was decided to examine what was left of it very carefully. While arrangements were being made for its excavation we were informed that the workmen were already removing the top soil from above the pit and it seemed that if any information were to be recovered from it immediate investigation was essential. Mr. Carter therefore began to dig it out, assisted by Mr. Featherstone.

It was found that most of the pit had already been destroyed, for the section only extended for another 18 in. into the bank. It was impossible, therefore, to recover its original shape and dimensions. The filling of the pit yielded many fragments of pottery and one blue glass bead ornamented with white stripes. It is important to note that all of the pottery came from the same level, near to the bottom of the pit, and that there was every indication that all of it was deposited during the same period.

An examination of the pottery alone would lead to a different opinion. It would seem at first as if we were

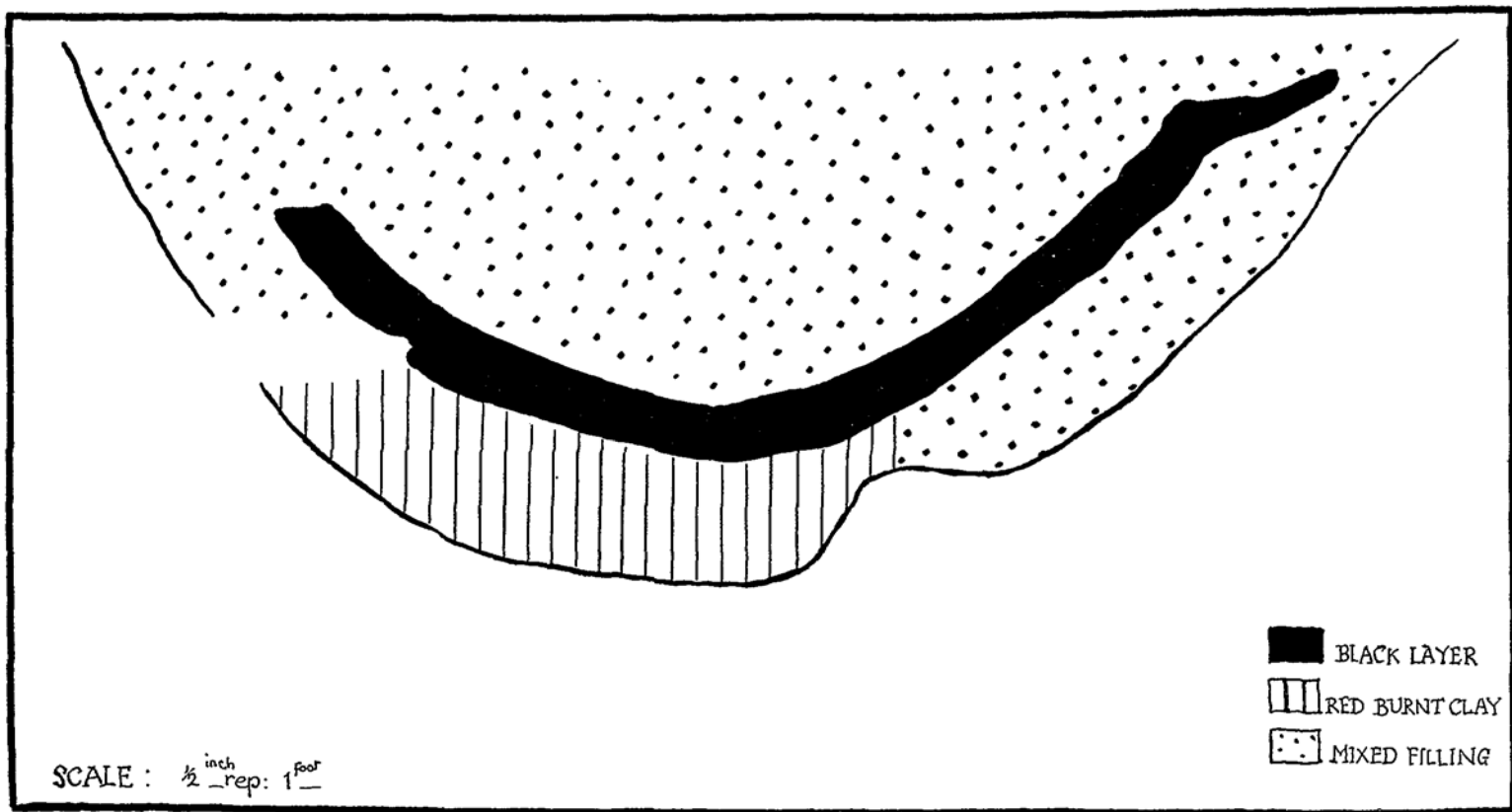


POTTERY FROM EASTWOOD'S BRICKFIELD, RAINHAM.

dealing with sherds of two different periods of the Early Iron Age, one group belonging to the beginning of the period and the other to its end. Viewed out of their context, one would be inclined to date the sherds of gritted ware with finger tip impressions at least as early as 300 B.C., while the second group would seem to be 200 or more years later. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that in S.E. England it is unwise to give an early date to sherds of the character of our first group unless that date is supported by other evidence. The material from the ditch sections excavated at Bigbury in 1934 and 1935 give added support to the belief that the domestic pottery of the first Belgic settlers in Kent showed well marked survivals of the Iron Age "A" tradition, due, one would imagine, to inter-marriage with the earlier Iron Age inhabitants of the county. Mr. Christopher Hawkes tells me that the evidence from Colchester still further strengthens this opinion. With the exception of a few coastal sites, the South East was not influenced by the Iron Age "B" whose characteristic developments are so well marked in S.W. of England and in Sussex which in prehistoric times formed an extension of S.W. cultural province.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE POTTERY.

1. Fine hard ware with small grits, colour shading from light to dark brown. The operation of smoothing the inside of the pot before firing, by means of the fingers and perhaps a tool of some sort, has given it a smeared appearance. The rim, which has an inside bevel, is ornamented by finger-tip impressions which gives it a "piecrust" decoration. This pattern is on the inside of the rim.
2. Same ware as above, but ornamented with a series of finger tip impressions round the bulge and with fine perpendicular combing below.
3. Rim fragment of same ware as preceding. The rim is square and there is a small bulge on the inside of the section about an inch below it.



DIAGRAMMATIC SECTION OF PIT AS SKETCHED ON SITE—3.11.34.

N.O.C.

4. Rim fragment of fine gritted ware with internal bevel. The surface is very smooth and the inside of the pot seems to have been burnished.

5. Very hard gritted ware of light brown colour and with a rough, uneven surface. Small square rim.

6. The basal part of a pot of hard ware with no grit. Light brown on the outside and black inside. It is decorated with longitudinal combing. This and the succeeding fragments belong to the second group.

7 and 8. Probably fragments of the same pot. The paste is lightly charged with grit and the surface smooth and light brown in colour. The basal portion shows an incipient foot ring,

9. Same type of ware as the preceding, though somewhat thinner and finer.

10. Blue glass bead, with cylindrical perforation and ornament of white stripes which was made by filling grooves in the glass with some white material which has now mostly been lost. The design is somewhat indefinite, but it looks like a blundered attempt to cover the blue glass with zig-zags of white.

All the objects from the pit have been presented to the Maidstone Museum through the generosity of Mr. W. Carter.

The section of the pit, p. 282, is based on a poor photograph taken on a rainy day and a sketch and measurements made under equally unpleasant conditions when I visited the site. None of the finds came from the mixed filling, but from the red layer and its junction with the black. It is possible that, since the burnt material covers the step or seat, it does not represent an accumulation of hearths, but the result of a conflagration that destroyed the hut. The black layer may represent the remains of a thatched roof.