

MERSEYSIDE: THE POST-ROMAN POTTERY

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Introduction

Ten years ago little was known of the ceramic history of Merseyside. The only published groups of medieval material were the 19th century stray finds from Meols (Hume 1863), the 32 sherds from West Derby Castle excavated in the summer of 1927 (Droop and Larkin 1928; Davey 1977a, 68-69), a few sherds from earlier excavations at Birkenhead Priory (Laing 1975) and a stray find from Frankby (Davey 1973) and St Anne's Well, Sutton (Davey 1981). A number of complete post-medieval coarse ware vessels in St Helens Museum had already been collected (Davey and Morgan 1981). Medieval pottery from the Old Hutte and Wright's Moat at Hale (Wrathmell forthcoming) and post-medieval pottery from Sefton Old Hall, was known, but had not been studied or published. A single clay pipe bowl was recorded from Speke Hall as early as 1857 (Watt 1856/57).

Since March 1976 a great deal of new material has come to light. Excavations carried out by the Merseyside Archaeological Society at South Castle Street, Liverpool in the summers of 1976 (Davey 1985) and 1977 (McNeil 1985) provided excellent sequences of 17th and 18th century pottery and other artefacts from contexts which could be independently dated with reasonable precision (Davey 1977b; Davey and McNeil 1985). Students of the University of Liverpool's Institute of Extension Studies and its Rescue Archaeology Unit undertook fieldwork and excavations in Rainford between 1977 and 1980. These recovered a 17th century clay tobacco pipe kiln group (Coney 1979; Davey *et al.* 1982; Davey 1982a; 1982b), a contemporary pottery kiln dump (Brown, Davey and Freke forthcoming) and a mass of field evidence for both industries over a wide area of St Helens District (Chitty 1981b; Lewis, Richardson and Dagnall 1982). A few medieval and post-medieval sherds and clay pipes were collected from field walking on the route of the M58 (Chitty 1977c; 1977b; Coney 1977; 1980), a single medieval jug handle was recovered from excavations at Wavertree (Chitty 1977a; Morgan 1977).

More recently, between 1980 and 1985 the Rescue Archaeology Unit, the Institute of Extension Studies, the Archaeological Survey and the North West Archaeological Trust have been involved in a series of excavations in Prescot (Holgate 1989; Freke 1989a, 1989b; McNeil 1989; Philpott 1989c). These have given us not only the first medieval kiln group from the county, but also a number of important 18th century and early 19th century kiln assemblages (Davey 1989a, b and c). In addition, a small 17th century domestic group was excavated from a building in Eccleston Street (Cowell and Chitty 1989). Elsewhere, more restricted excavations at Bromborough Court House (Freke 1981),

Speke Hall (Nicholson 1983, 33; Higgins forthcoming), Irby Mill (Chitty 1981a), Sefton Old Hall (Lewis 1981) and Ince Blundell have recovered useful collections of post-medieval pottery. Fieldwalking by the Society and the Survey has enlarged the geographical distribution of many of the wares found in excavation. In particular, Ron Cowell has recovered some important groups of medieval pottery from his 'sampling' exercises in a number of different parts of Knowsley District and the Society's regular visits to Hilbre Island have amassed an impressive group of 17th and 18th century wares from buried occupation soils being eroded from cliffs on the west side of the main island.

The evidence available for this survey is, nevertheless, far from ideal. First, there is nothing like enough excavation evidence, especially from the medieval period. Too few, even of recent excavations, have provided clearly stratified sequences with which to erect a chronological structure for Merseyside ceramics. Only the 1976 South Castle Street site can really claim close independent dating (Davey 1985a). Secondly, what excavations there have been are poorly spread geographically and almost certainly unrepresentative socio-economically, as castle and manorial sites predominate. Thirdly, the local kiln groups are both chronologically scattered, which inhibits the production of reliable regional typologies, and do not coincide with the periods covered by the best domestic assemblages. Fourthly, the examination of distribution and marketing patterns is made problematic by the lack of known production centres in surrounding areas and by the paucity of excavations in neighbouring market towns which might have allowed the degree of inter-regional competition to be assessed. Finally, the whole study is complicated by the curious geography of a 'politically' devised area. In particular, the marked contrast between the northern end of Wirral, which would be much more happily and reasonably discussed as part of the political and economic history of Cheshire, and those parts of rural south Lancashire which form much of the remainder of Merseyside, appears all-pervasive.

The survey which follows is an attempt to summarize what is known of Merseyside's ceramics, in chronological order, dealing largely with the major sites, but referring to individual pieces from others where necessary. An attempt is made to place developments in Merseyside within a wider context so that parallels from further afield are introduced where appropriate.

The 'Dark Ages'

The Roman presence is not particularly well represented on Merseyside so that at the end of the Roman period there were no established urban centres

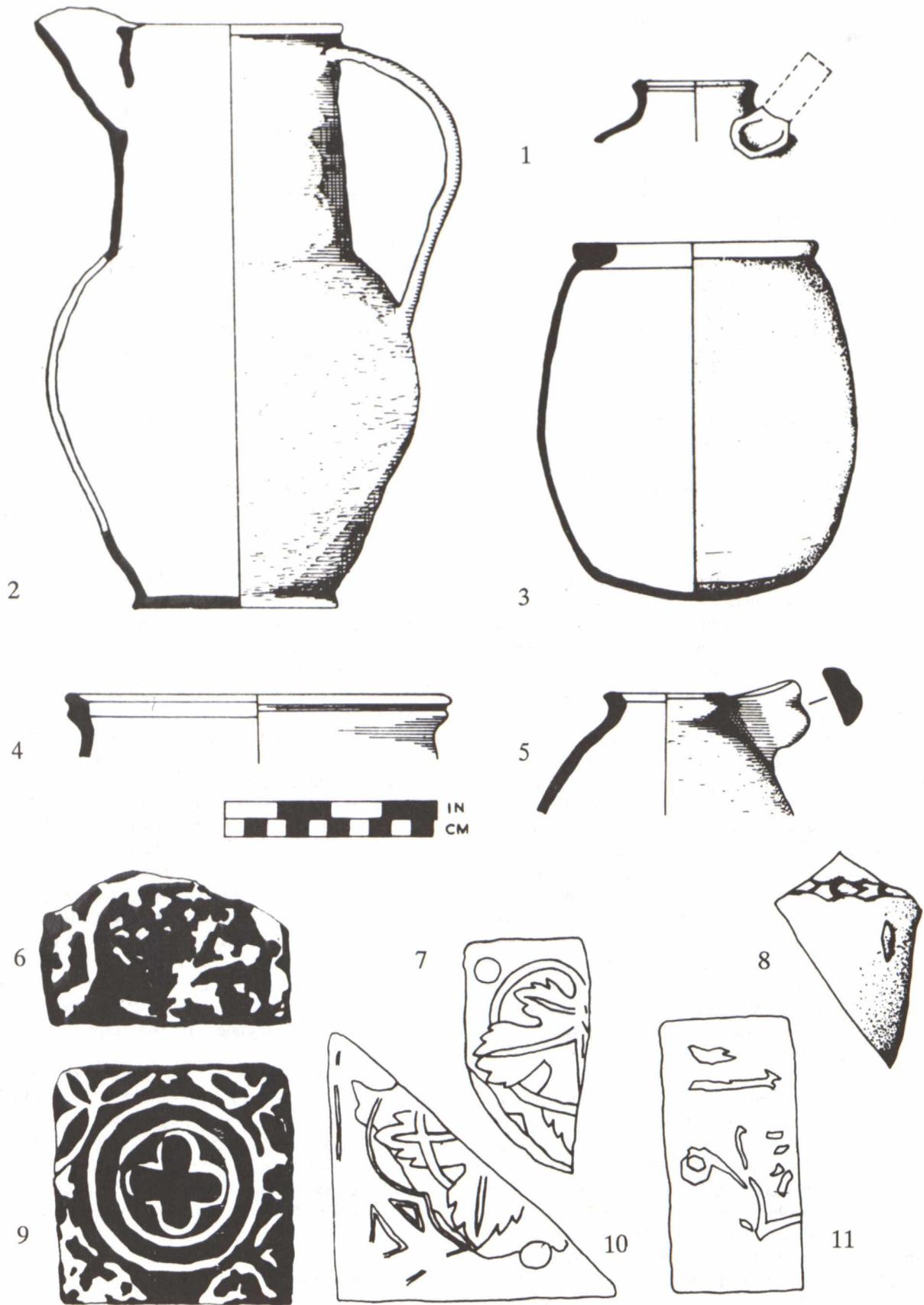


Figure 1: Birkenhead Priory: medieval ceramic finds (after Laing 1975, Fig. 9).

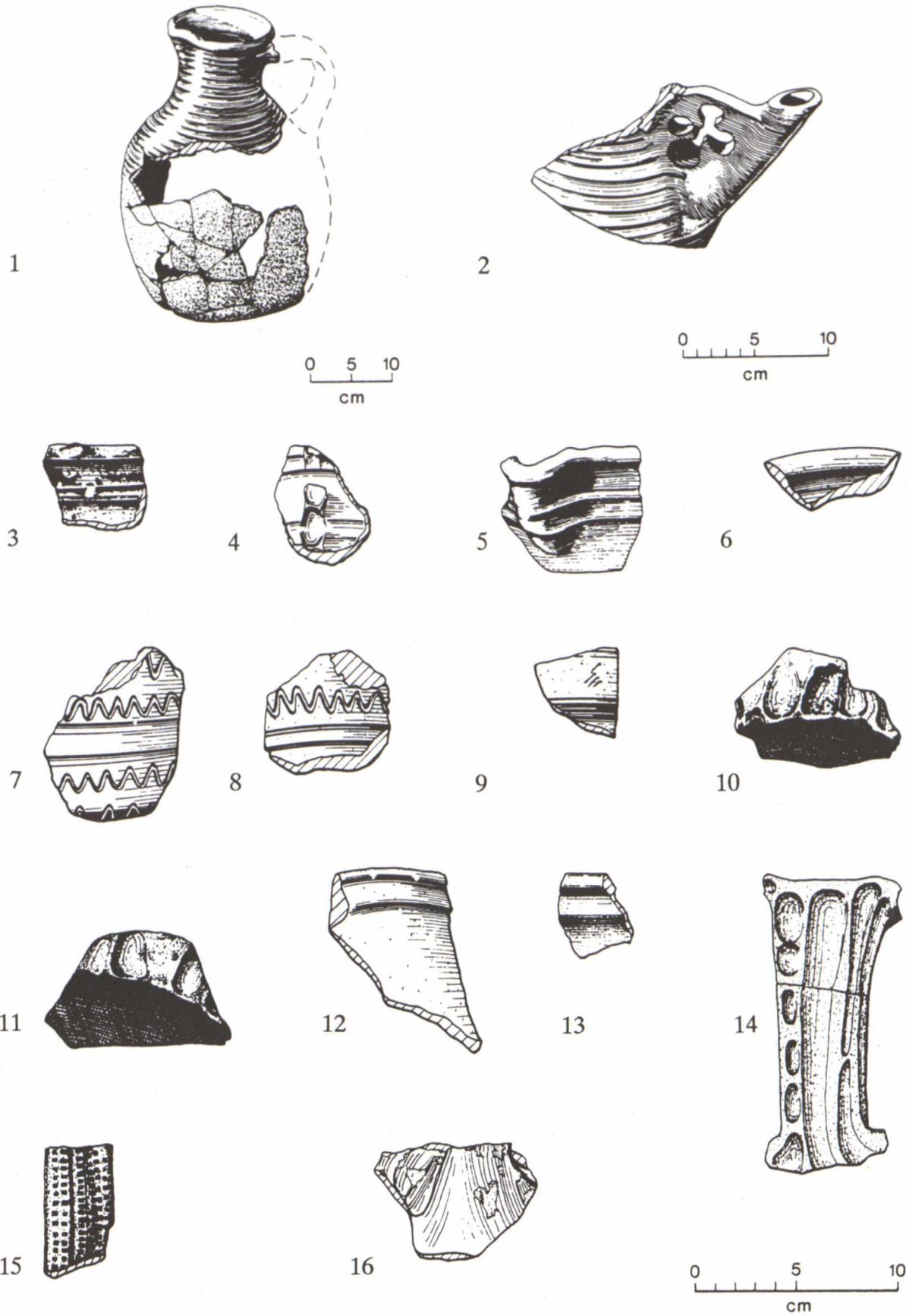


Figure 2: West Derby Castle: medieval pottery (after Droop and Larkin 1928; Davey 1977a, 69).

in which some kind of 'civilized' life could continue which might have produced or imported pottery. Neither did there develop centres of power in the Dark Ages such as might have attracted pottery from the continent. Chester is the only regional centre where both types of pottery occur in small quantities, though even there the evidence for any substantial urban activity is slight (Rutter 1985, 40). Within Merseyside the site at Meols is the only real contender as some kind of economic focus in post-Roman times. The paucity of finds which can be securely dated, their sometimes ambiguous history within the 19th century collections, and the lack of secure contexts, makes the site of doubtful status, despite the quantity of academic discussion (eg Bu'Lock 1960, 3-5; 1972, 35; Chitty and Warhurst 1977, 20-22) devoted to it.

Saxo-Norman pottery

From around AD 900 a locally produced ceramic type, 'Chester Ware,' makes an appearance (Carrington 1975; Rutter 1985). This wheel-thrown, thoroughly oxidized pottery, with its characteristic rouletted decoration, is part of a tradition stretching from Winchester and Exeter in the south to Gloucester, Hereford and Stafford in the west Midlands. It is tempting to link the spread of potting technology in this fairly sophisticated form to the Saxon movements into the region and the establishment of the first urban societies. This seems to be confirmed by the occurrence of 'Chester Ware' at the Saxon new town of Rhuddlan, founded c. 915, and to sites and areas known to be under their control in the 10th and 11th centuries. The nearest find of this ware to Merseyside is a single sherd from Ellesmere Port. Despite very extensive fieldwork, it is not known north of the Mersey, where the towns appear to be of later origin (Philpott 1988).

Thus, while Merseyside seems to have been truly aceramic until at least the Norman period, the question arises as to when pottery comes into general use. Here, the lack of dated sequences poses an insuperable difficulty. Post-Saxo-Norman pottery occurs in quantity in Chester, but absolute dating is not clear. At Norton Priory a small group of cooking pots was recovered from primary deposits associated with the construction of timber domestic buildings during the 12th century (Greene and Noake 1977, 54-55). No comparable material has been found on Merseyside sites. Although this might imply lack of pottery in circulation in the county until after 1200, the absence of excavation evidence which is clearly from this period and the marked differences between the pottery of later medieval date north and south of the Mersey, suggest that some caution is required.

The major medieval sites in the county do not provide a great deal of illumination. The small number of sherds from Birkenhead Priory include fragments of Saintonge mottled green which may be of 13th century date, but,

as this ware has a long production range, the Birkenhead finds could belong to the 14th or even the 15th century. The two jordans from the site and the floor tiles probably do date to the 14th century or later (Fig. 1). The rather larger group of clearly medieval finds from West Derby Castle has not been located so that comment on them has to rely on the published plates (Fig. 2; Droop and Larkin 1928; Davey 1977a, 68-69). Many of the pieces are clearly of high quality and reflect the status of the site. They all seem to be from jugs including examples with wavy line incised zones on the body and pulled handles with both thumb and rouletted decoration. One jug has a most unusual quatrefoil opening in the base of a bridge spout (Fig. 2, no. 2). Given the castle's abandonment around 1250, this group may well date from the first half of the 13th century.

The lack of finds of medieval date from the much more numerous moated sites in the county is particularly disappointing. Only a handful of sherds in total have been recovered from excavations at Sefton Old Hall (Lewis 1981), Speke Hall (Higgins forthcoming), Bromborough Court House (Freke 1981), The Old Hutte (Hurst 1961) and Yew Tree House, Halewood (Warhurst 1977). Whilst the back filled moats often produce ample evidence of post-medieval occupation such as the splendid series of finds recovered from Sefton by B.J.N. Edwards during the road widening scheme of 1964, on no site has sufficient area on the moated platform itself been explored for truly *in situ* finds to be made in any quantity. The ploughed fields around such sites might well provide better evidence of the wares in use during their occupation (eg the fieldwalking finds from near Melling House, Lewis 1982, 102). In terms of pottery finds alone, few of them can be shown to have been lived on during the medieval period.

The pottery from Meols was recently relocated in Liverpool Museum and will soon be published (Rutter forthcoming). It is a varied domestic assemblage, very difficult to date, but quite clearly different from fieldwalking material from the rest of Merseyside. The identifiable types are from Cheshire, north Wales and further south. In contrast is the kiln group excavated in Prescott, where, at Site D, 79 out of a total of 399 sherds are considered wasters (Fig. 3; Freke 1989a). The material recovered is highly fired with 'sandy' quartz inclusions and includes a number of fragments of glazed daub. Holgate found sherds of this type on Sites B and C at Prescott and a further 46 sherds were recovered from the sampling excavations (Philpott and Davey 1984; 1989). Fieldwalking groups from a variety of sites in Knowsley and Newton-le-Willows collected by the Archaeological Survey are also dominated by this 'Prescot-type sandy ware'. This first medieval production group from the county is important because it begins to close the gap between the known kiln sites in mid Cheshire and the next waster group north, in the Lune Valley at Docker Moor. The Prescott finds belong to the so-called 'northern gritty' tradition known from both

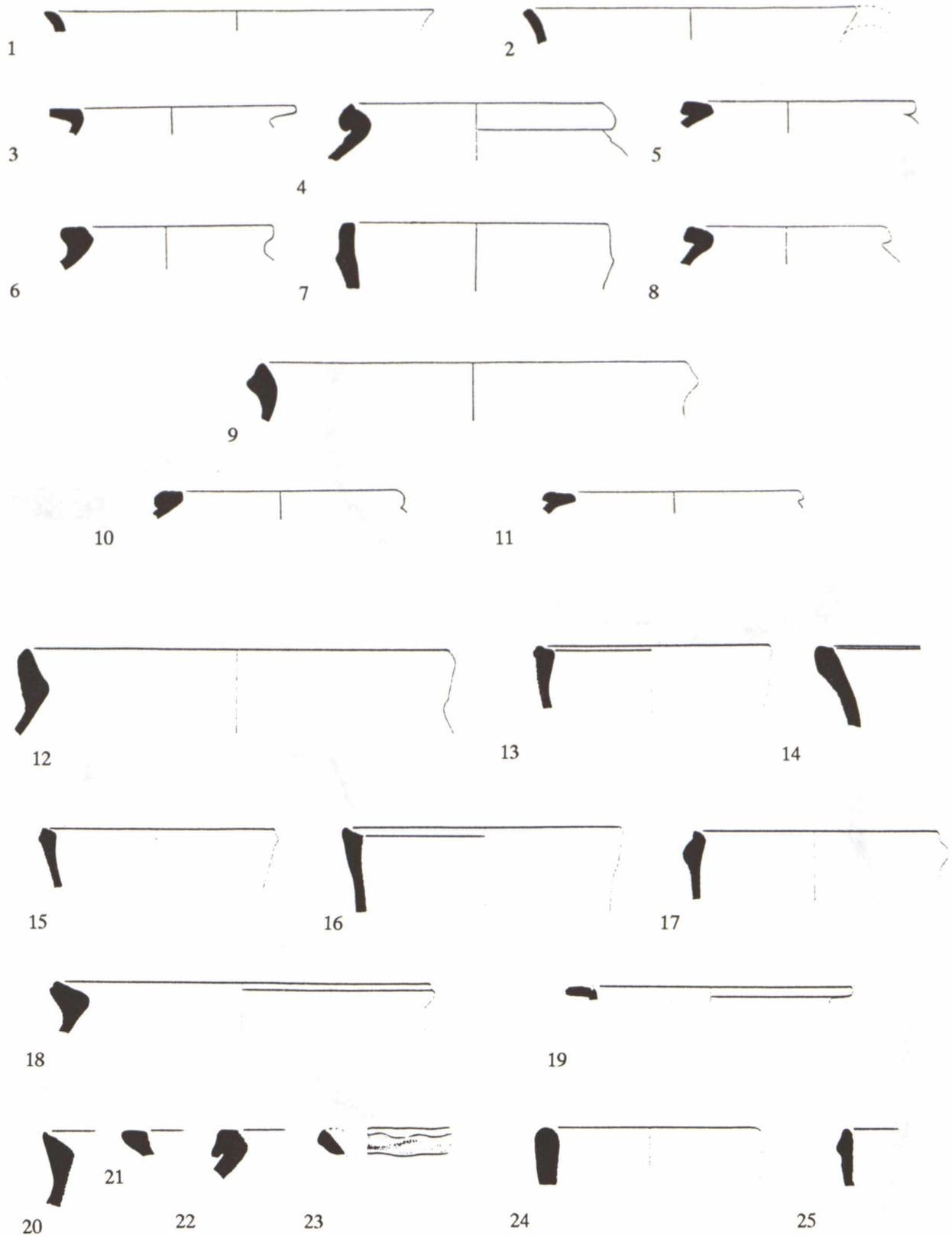


Figure 3: Prescott: medieval pottery. 1-13. Site D kiln group; 14-25. Site B. (after Freke 1989a, 19, Fig. 4.7, nos 37-50 and 54-64). Scale: $x\frac{1}{3}$.

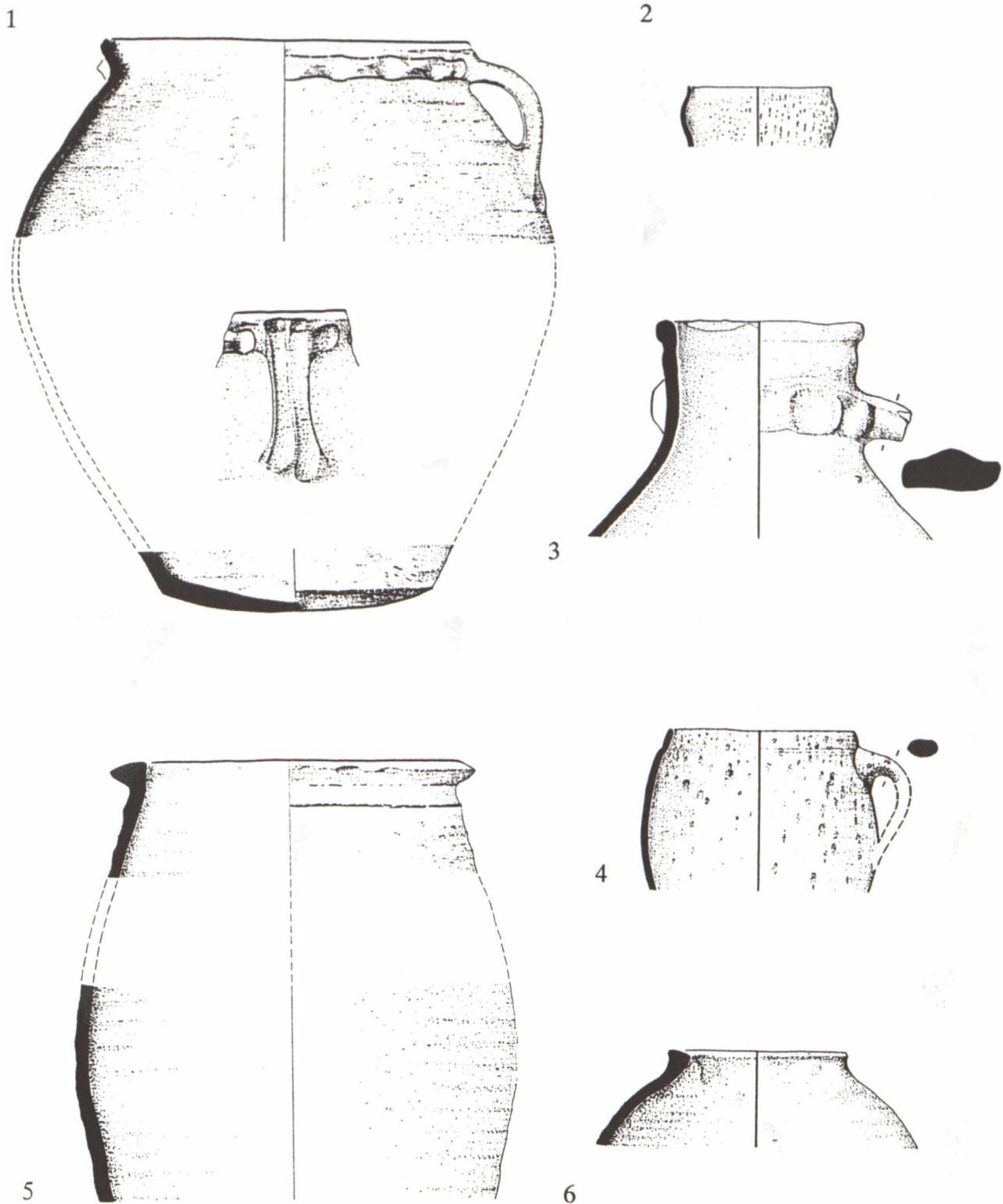


Figure 4: Speke Hall: the 16th century group (from Higgins forthcoming). Scales: 1. height 420mm; 2-6. $\times \frac{1}{3}$.

sides of the Pennines and seem far less sophisticated than products of the Cheshire/West Midlands area. These geographic differences seem to confirm the Mersey as a major cultural divide during the medieval period.

At the moment there is no satisfactory way of dating Prescott-type sandy ware. Although it does not seem to occur at either Birkenhead Priory or West Derby Castle, these are very small groups on which to base an argument from silence. The late development of urban market economies in the region suggests that a date in the later 14th or 15th century might be most likely.

The 16th century

In common with other centres in the Midlands and Yorkshire the late 15th and 16th centuries sees a major change in the technology, typology and cultural role of pottery in Merseyside. The highly fired 'purple' coarsewares and the brown glazed Cistercian wares fired in saggars in distinctly improved multi-flued kilns found on a range of Merseyside and nearby sites appear very similar to those known from the Midlands and West Yorkshire (Brears 1967). The forms show great diversification compared with those of the medieval period. There is a new range of tablewares which implies changes in table behaviour. The quality of the products also suggests that they had a much wider socio-economic distribution. Although no production groups have been found in the northwest, differences in detail between local finds and those from other areas, together with the first documentary evidence for potting in the Prescott area in the early 16th century suggest very strongly that they were made in the town (Davey 1978a; Davey 1989c). Whilst the largest groups of this early post-medieval material are from Bewsey Old Hall and Twiss Green moated sites in Warrington, the best dated finds are those from Norton Priory and Speke Hall. The Cistercian-type ware from Norton can be securely dated to after the dissolution as the major finds are from the cloister garth which was used as a rubbish tip in the period of the Brooke's occupation immediately after their purchase from Henry VIII (Green and Noake 1977, 58-59). Unfortunately, it is not clear whether there is a time lag, and, if so, for how long, between their removal to the site and the commencement of rubbish disposal in the cloister, nor is it clear for how long this process continued. Finds of clay tobacco pipes in these deposits dating from the period 1600-1640 suggest that it would be unwise to use the Norton material as evidence of an early date for these wares in the northwest. By contrast the very few fragments of both coarse utilitarian vessels and tablewares recovered from Speke Hall were certainly sealed beneath the floor of the west range known to have been constructed in the mid 16th century (Fig. 4; Higgins forthcoming).

Rural production in the 17th century

In the 17th century documentary and field evidence for pottery making on Merseyside begins to become more widespread (Cleaver 1982; Cowell 1982). The wills, inventories and rentals of farmers in St Helens district show quite clearly that, at least by the middle of the century, many farmers were producing pottery and clay tobacco pipes as part of their livelihood (Chitty 1981b; Pope 1982). Extensive fieldwalking has recovered quite a number of kiln groups from these rural sites. In 1978 a group of extra mural students excavated, close to Rainford Church, the dumped remains of at least three separate muffle bases (King 1982a; Withersby 1982) together with large quantities of wasted pipes, of the period 1640-1660, several of which were later reconstructed (Davey *et al.* 1982; Higgins 1982). Beneath the tip, a certain amount of apparently contemporary domestic pottery was recovered (Coney and King 1982). In 1979 and 1980 the same student group and the Rescue Archaeology Unit were able to excavate small areas of the same and an adjacent field during the construction of a spectators' stand for Rainford Tennis Club. These excavations recovered evidence for contemporary pottery production on the same site, almost certainly a farm complex, which was only replaced by the existing church in 1878 (Brown, Davey and Freke forthcoming).

The pottery consists of coarse red bodied and buff bodied earthenwares, including a range of drinking vessels and tablewares as well as larger containers, probably for use in the kitchen or dairy. The majority of the production appears to have been of brown or nearly black glazed red earthenware, the bodies of which become increasingly mixed with grog or laminations of buff firing clay as the pots became larger (Fig. 5, nos 1, 2, 9, 11 and 12; Cook 1980). Both the technology and style of the potting seems to descend directly from the 'local' Cistercian wares of the previous century and to match the continuum encountered in the excavations at Wrenthorpe (Moorhouse 1988). An individual drinking vessel with faceted stem appears to have been a distinctively local product and has been found on a number of sites in the region (Fig. 6, no 4). The buff bodied wares consist of small bowls and cups, the latter fired in saggars (Fig. 5, nos 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10). These are firmly in the 'Midlands Yellow' tradition, except that the Rainford products are more crudely made.

Clay tobacco pipes

The clay pipes made in the same farmyard are the first clearly south Lancashire-types. Although there is evidence of a pipe maker in Prescott in 1622 (Knowles 1980, 50; Davey 1989d), this is the first production group from the county and seems to represent the beginning of the Rainford industry, which, based initially on local supplies of pipe clay and fuel (Crofton 1889),

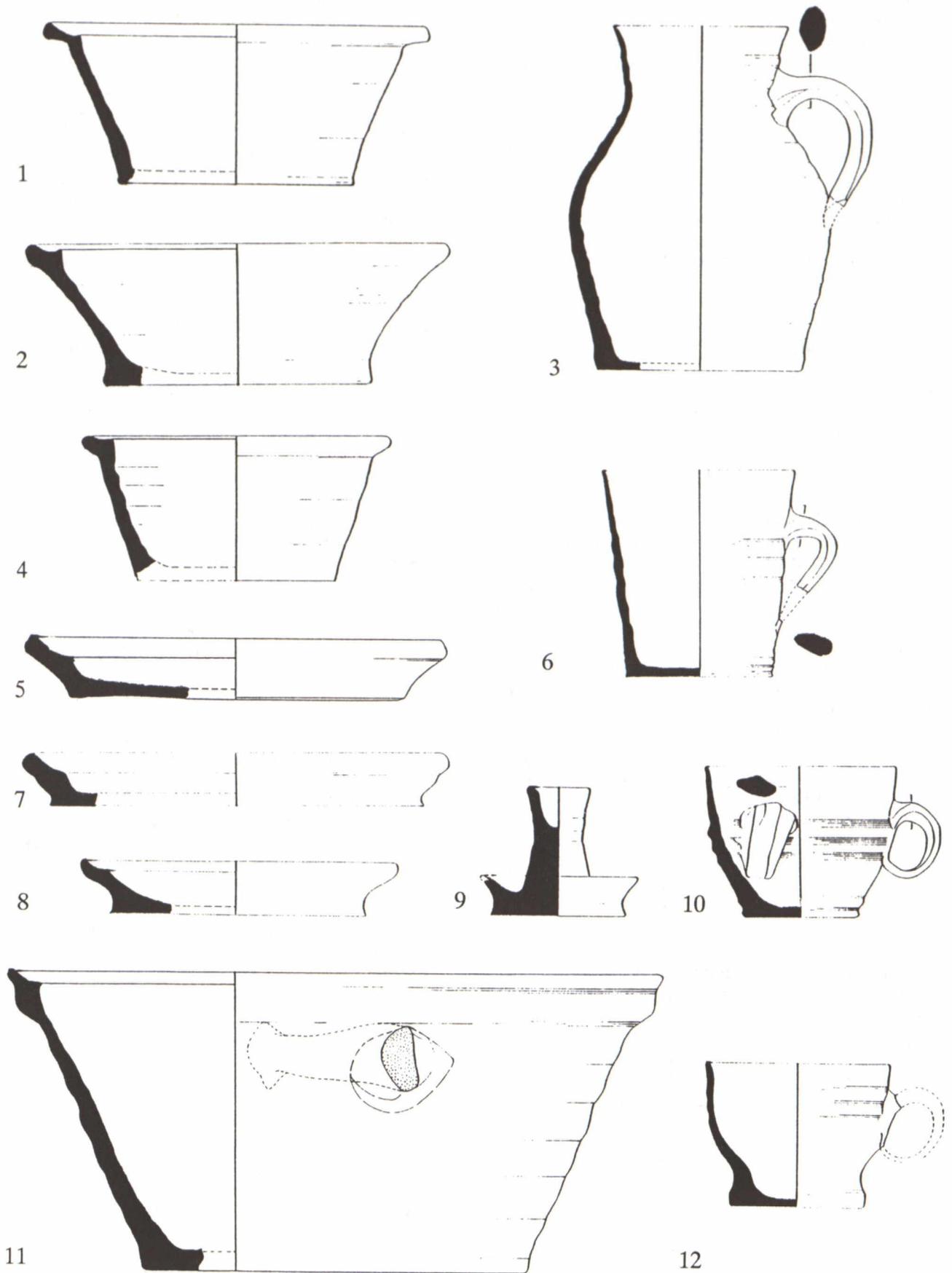


Figure 5: Rainford: part of the 17th century kiln group. 1. Speckled red earthenware; 2, 9, 11 and 12. Dark-glazed red earthenware; 3. Unglazed red earthenware; 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10. Yellow-ware. Scale: $x^{1/3}$ (drawn by A. and A. King).

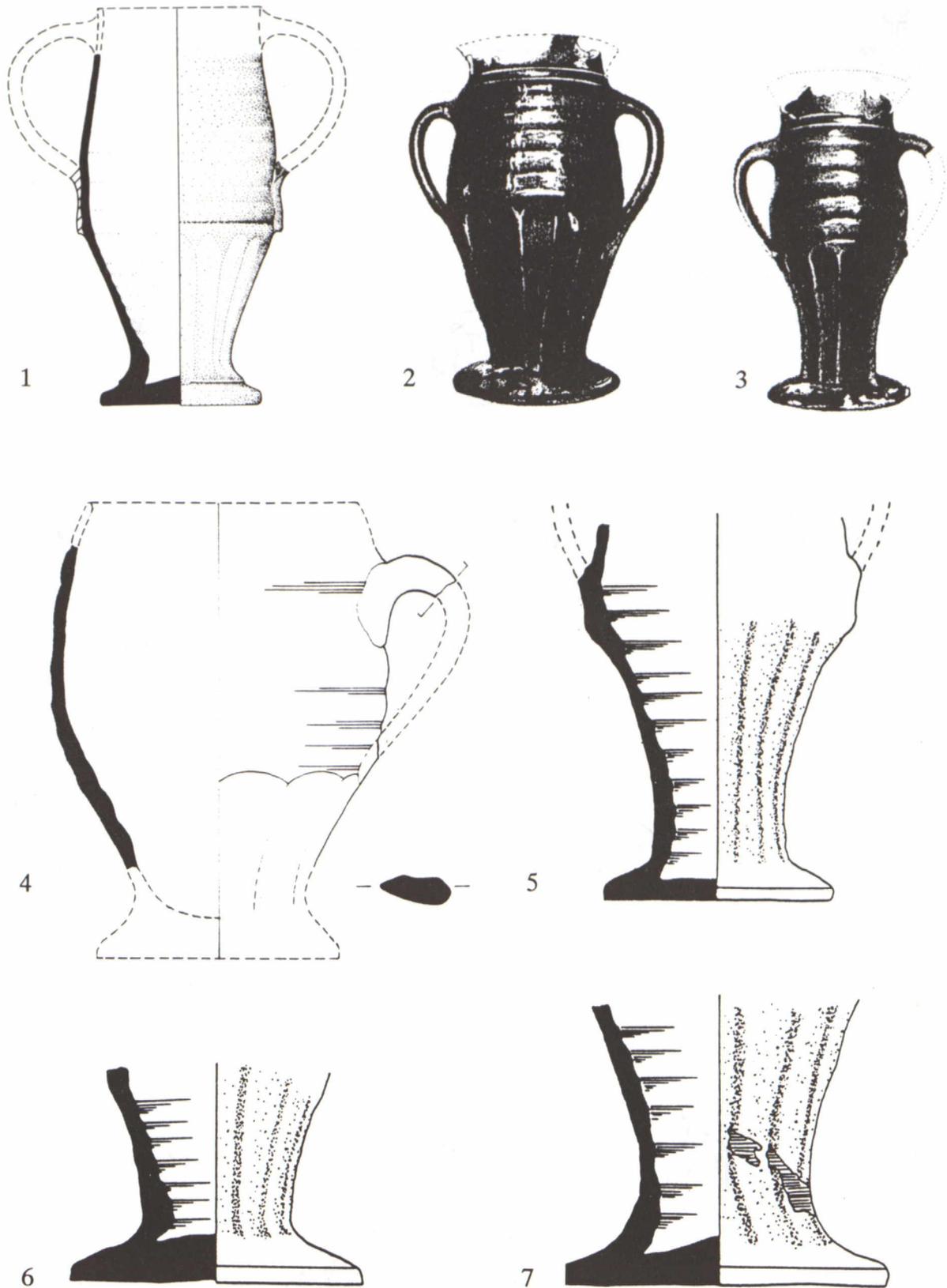


Figure 6: Some examples of faceted-stem drinking vessels from the northwest. 1. Chester (after Rutter 1990, Fig. 99, no. 76); 2-3. Rainford (after Gibson 1877, Plate 9); 4. Rainford kiln site (drawn by A. and A. King); 5-7. Prescott (after Philpott 1989a, 30, Fig 7.4); Scales: 1-3. $x^{1/3}$; 4-7. $x^{2/3}$.

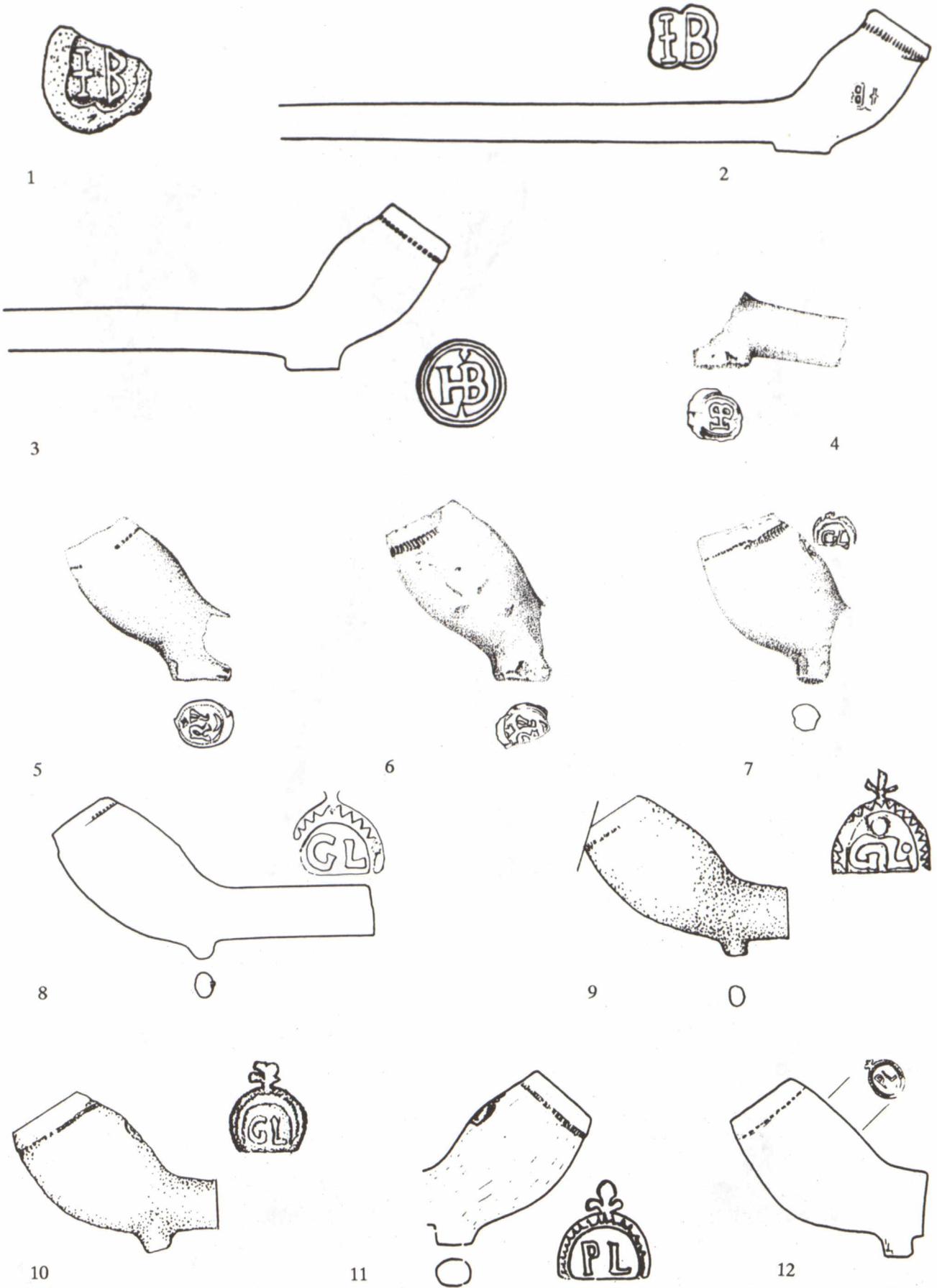


Figure 7a: (for caption see opposite).



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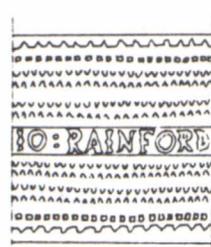
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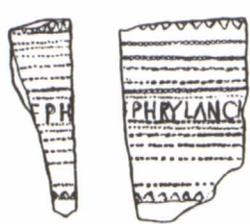
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Figure 7a: 17th century Rainford-type clay tobacco pipes from excavations in the northwest: 1. Buckley (Bentley *et al.* Fig. 4); 2-3. Rainford pipe kiln (Higgins 1982, Fig. 22); 4. Ordsall Hall Demesne Farm (Davey 1980a, Fig. 11); 5. Rainford (Davey 1978b, Fig. 2); 6-7. Ordsall Hall Demesne Farm (Davey 1980a, Fig. 11); 8. Peel Castle, Isle of Man (Davey forthcoming); 9-10. Chester (Rutter and Davey 1980, 131, Fig. 49); 11. Sandbach (Higgins 1987a, Fig. 2); 12. Hillis Tower, Dumfries (Williams 1980, 14).

Figure 7b: 18th century Rainford-type clay tobacco pipe roller stamps from excavations in the northwest. 1-6 Heel stamps, 7-12 Bowl stamps: 13. Castle Steet, Liverpool (Davey 1985d, Fig. 46); 14. Warrington (Higgins 1987a, Fig. 11); 15. Prescott (Davey 1989d, Fig. 4.8); 16. Rainford (Davey *et al.* 1982, 5, Fig. 2); 17. Warrington (Higgins 1987a, Fig. 11); 18. Rainford (Dagnall 1982c, 134, Fig. 4); 19. Ordsall Hall Demesne Farm (Davey 1980a, Fig. 9); 20-21. Rainford (Davey *et al.* 1982, Fig. 2).

Scales: Pipe bowls 1:1; Stamp details 1:1 or 2:1; Roller stamps 1:1 or 2:1.

managed to survive until well into the 20th century (Fig. 7a; Berry 1963; King 1982b). The obviously 'experimental' nature of the fabric of the muffles, made of pipe clay reinforced with straw, which is a method of strengthening rare elsewhere, suggests that the farmer/potters decided to diversify into pipe making of their own accord as a result of a commercial opportunity perhaps provided by the dislocation of longer distance trade caused by the Civil War or by the rapid increase in tobacco smoking which seems to have followed it.

There appear to be two main families of pipes from the mid 17th century onwards. The first, of which the excavated kiln dump provides the type examples, are flat-heeled, with relief stamps on the underneath. The second are spurred, with curious semi circular marks with crests on the front of the bowl facing the smoker. Both types begin with neat well made shapes not far different from London forms. These can be seen to develop into a regional series throughout the 17th and well into the 18th century. The later examples are often more poorly made and sometimes even grotesquely styled. Local clay sources seem to have been used until around 1750, when west country clays, which had been arriving at both Chester and Liverpool since at least early in the 17th century (Grant 1983), began to be shipped in and transported from Widnes overland. In the early part of the 18th century Rainford makers developed a distinctive form of roller stamped stem marking which seems to be the local answer to the better known decorated stems from Chester and Nottingham (Fig. 7b).

The major problem at present is to decide how far these 'south Lancashire' types emanate specifically from Rainford and how far the known Rainford products form part of a regional tradition. Although large quantities of both types of 17th century pipe have been recovered from fieldwalking in St Helens District, only three groups, all of the flat-heeled variety, are clearly kiln assemblages. The first is the excavated material from near Rainford Church, the second is a collection from ploughed land near Reeds Brow, Rainford, where pipes marked RY on the heel and kiln furniture were found (Fig. 7a, nos 6 and 7; Davey 1978b; Lewis, Richardson and Dagnall 1982, 100-101). The third is a rather equivocal group from fieldwalking at Primrose Hill, Rainford (Dagnall 1982b). So far there are no production groups of the spurred variety. Thin section analysis of similar pipes from South Castle Street suggested that these were made from imported clay (Davidson and Davey 1982; Davey 1985d). This raises the question as to how far and at what date the industry developed in Liverpool itself. From farther north, groups of pipes of the same date from the Fylde and Lancaster bear the same types of stamps with some different sets of initials and minor differences in moulding detail (Davey 1977c; Davey 1978c). The late 17th century attempts by the Lowther family to make pipes at Whitehaven appear to have involved families with typical Rainford names (Weatherill and Edwards

1971). Similarly the 18th century industry in Lancaster included makers with probable south Lancashire antecedents who also used similar roller stamping on their stems (White 1975). At Rainford itself a number of 18th century production site groups have been recovered including several roller stamped products of a Jo Rainford from fieldwalking at Orrets Nook (Dagnall 1982a; Hollis 1982) and a fine collection of decorated moulded bowls found during Pilkington's sand extraction at Rookery Farm (Dagnall 1982c).

Pottery and clay pipes from Rainford have provided essential evidence for the strength of the earth's magnetic field during the 17th century (Games 1980; Games 1981; Games and Davey 1985, 47). This research may, in the long term, provide an independent means of dating fragments of pottery which does not rely on finding an undisturbed kiln base.

Only a great deal more fieldwork in Rainford and in other likely 17th and early 18th century production centres, especially those with available local pipe clay sources and fuel supplies, will clarify this rather complex situation. What is clear is that south Lancashire was the focus for a major clay pipe industry from the mid 17th to the mid 18th century. Its area of influence lay largely from a line running from Liverpool and the Mersey probably as far east as Manchester and northwards at least to southern Cumbria. South of the Mersey the important industries at Chester, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Broseley seem to have restricted its market area quite considerably (Higgins 1987a). More recent documentary and field research by Dagnall has only served to accentuate the complexity and range of this industry (Dagnall 1985, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1988).

It seems unlikely that the few pipe clay wig curlers which have been found in the county are locally made (Philpott 1985c).

Later pottery production

During the 18th century the evidence for Merseyside pottery manufacture moves to Prescot and Liverpool (Fig. 8; Mayer 1855; Smith 1874; Hurst 1969; Hillis 1985). Lancashire potters also turn up in other production centres, such as the Ironbridge Gorge area (Higgins 1989). That Prescot pottery had some kind of reputation at least locally is evidenced by two entries in Nicholas Blundell's Diurnal. On September 24th 1702

'I went from Ditton to Mr Harrop at Warrington according to my Brothers orders, from thence I came to Prescot where I bought Fine Mugs of Mr Cubben thence I came to Leverpole'.

and in a household account of December 10th 1709 he records

'Coffy pots 6 of Prescot Wair3s 0d'
(Tyrer 1968).

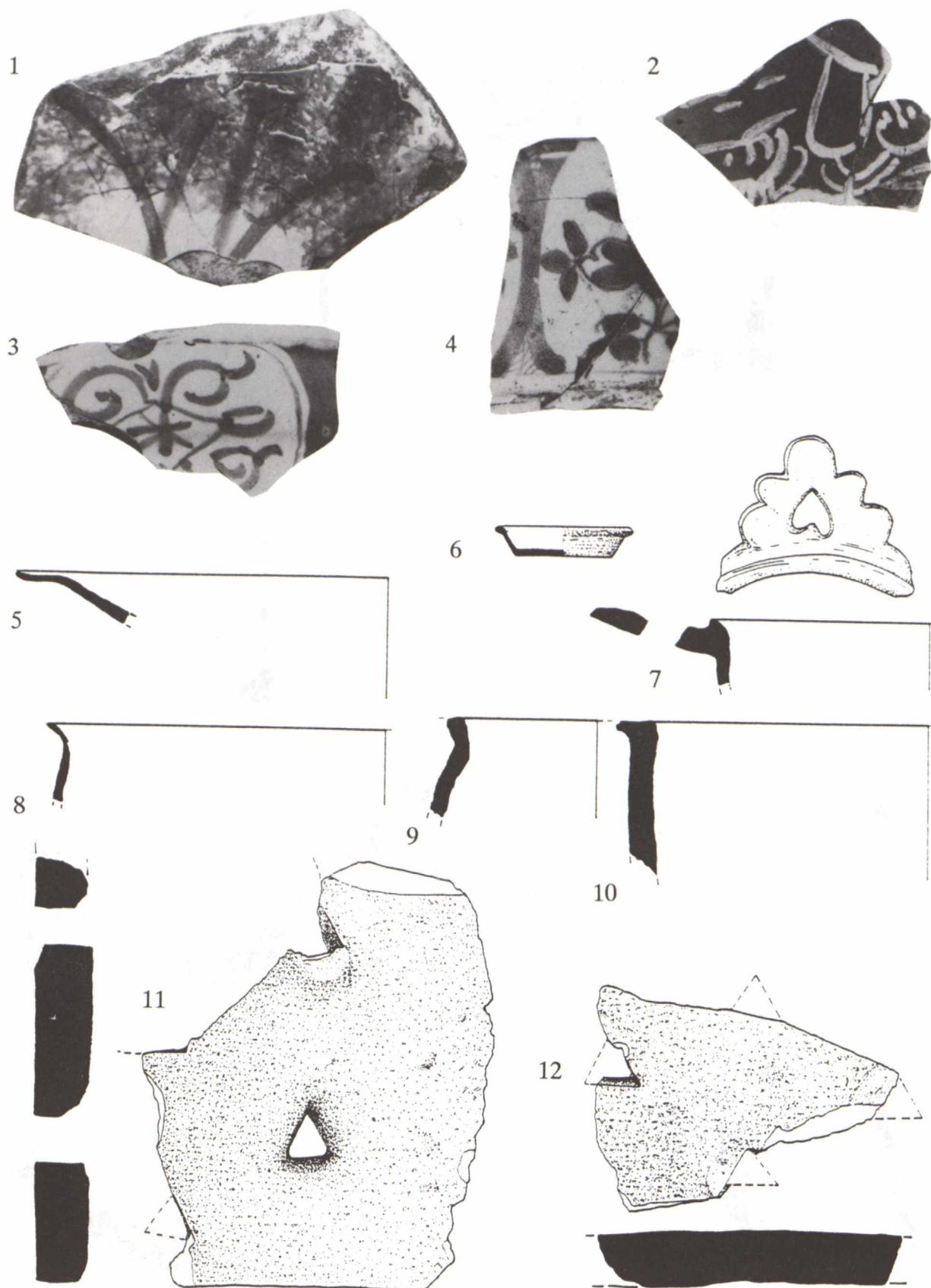


Figure 8: South Castle Street, Liverpool: Tin glazed earthenwares. 1-4. A variety of painting techniques; 5-10. Biscuit ware; 11-12. Sagger fragments. Scales: 1-4. $x^{1/9}$; 5-12. $x^{1/3}$ (after Morgan 1985, Figs 21, 22, 26 and 27).

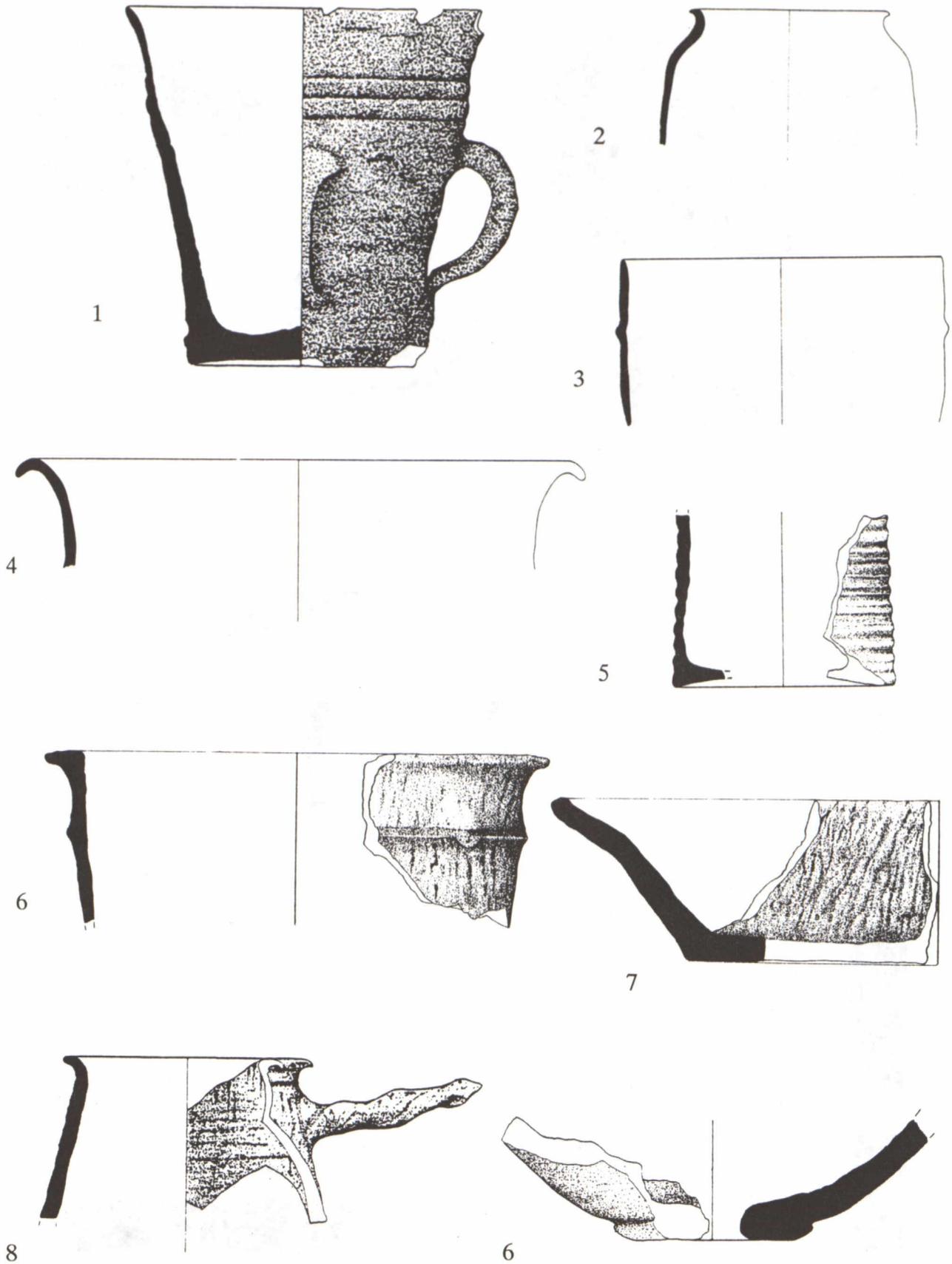


Figure 9: South Castle Street, Liverpool: 1-4. Dark-glazed fine wares (Philpott 1985b, Figs 30 and 31); 5-8. Mottled ware (Philpott 1985a, Figs 17-19); 9. Unglazed sugar mould (Innes and Philpott 1985, Fig. 4.2, no. 314 - there published upside down unwittingly). Scale: $\frac{1}{2}$.

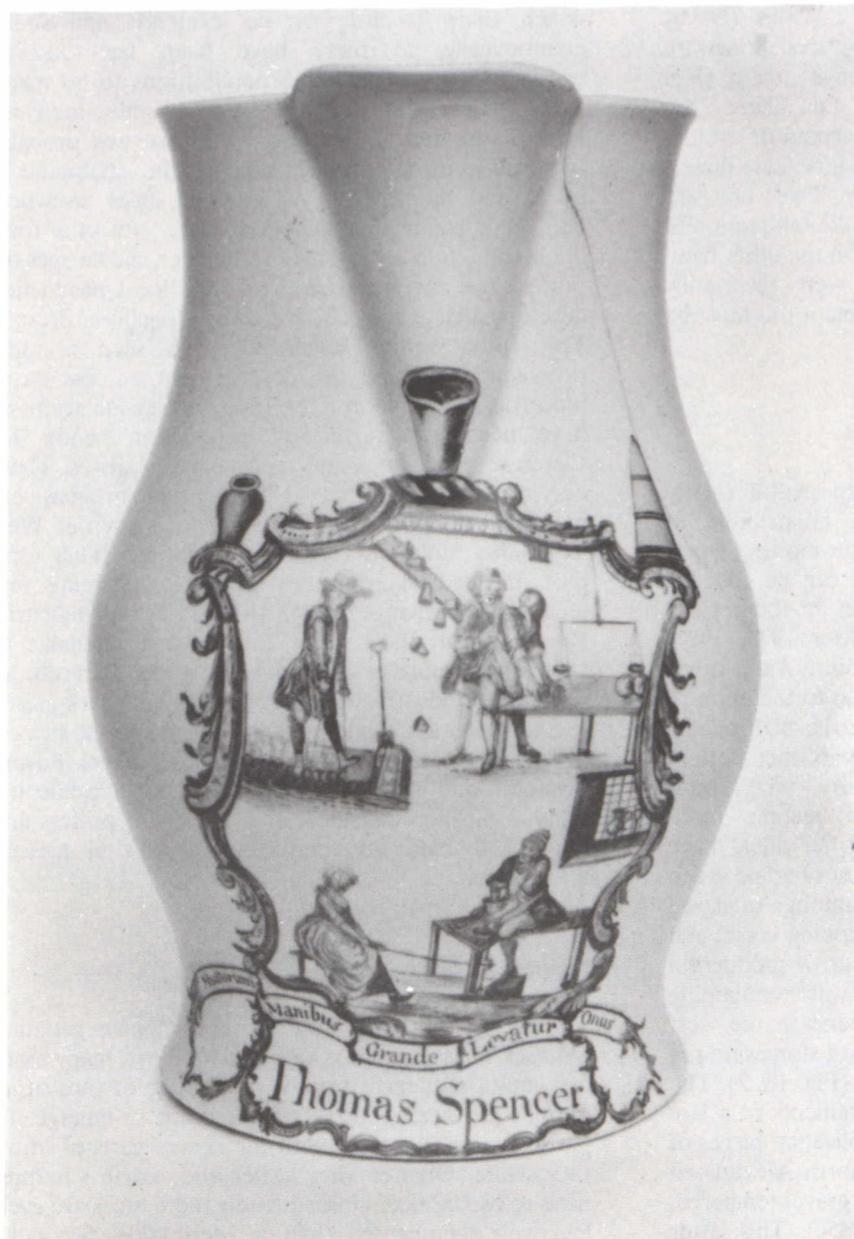


Figure 10: Prescott: Transfer printed porcelain jug from Richard Chaffer's factory in Liverpool, depicting Thomas Spencer's workshop, probably situated in Prescott, height 175mm (photograph courtesy of the City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent).

Excavated groups from Prescott show the production of mottled wares, dark-glazed (often previously referred to as 'black-glazed') red and buff bodied earthenwares and probably sugar moulds (Brooks 1989; Cresswell and Davey 1989; Davey 1989c; Philpott 1989b). According to documentary sources, both brown and white salt-glazed stoneware was in production there by the middle of the century (Oswald *et al.* 1981). Apart from a few possible scraps from Holgate's excavations, the only substantial stoneware evidence is for the production of wine flagons very late in the 18th century and in the first few decades of the 19th (Hollis 1989). At Liverpool, documentary evidence for tin-glazed earthenware is plentiful from the early 1700s. The South Castle Street excavations recovered saggars, test pieces and a good range of domestic delftware securely dated to before 1726 (Fig. 8; Morgan 1985). The Liverpool excavations also produced dark-glazed wares and mottled wares of a type indistinguishable from the

Prescott finds (Fig. 9; Philpott 1985a, 1985b) and a range of self-coloured and unglazed products including parts of sugar moulds (Innes 1985; Innes and Philpott 1985; Philpott 1985d). It is not yet clear how far these coarser wares were actually made in Liverpool or whether they were largely produced in Prescott for the Liverpool market. The move of the Liverpool potter Thomas Spencer to Prescott by 1754 might suggest that there was some kind of specialization being developed so that the red earthenwares were made in Prescott where both clay and fuel were available and the tin-glazed wares were focused on Liverpool as the material for their bodies and glazes had to be imported. The illustration of Spencer's pottery on a porcelain jug in Hanley Museum is, therefore, probably of his works in Prescott. It seems to show the owner of the works having a 'little accident' and upsetting shelves full of sugar moulds over his workshop floor (Fig. 10). The rest of the South Castle Street ceramic finds are more

enigmatic. The site produced a range of fine slipwares, particularly cups and press moulded plates (Davey 1985b) and also groups of brown salt-glazed stoneware with rouletted decoration, again of high quality (Fig. 11; Danby and Philpott 1985). So far there has been no indication either from Liverpool or Prescot that such wares were being made in Merseyside during the first quarter of the 18th century. The wares are similar to those from kiln sites in Stoke-on-Trent and may have been imported from there. On the other hand the Liverpool and Prescot potters were technically capable of such products. For the moment this must be left as an open question.

Imported pottery

Throughout the ceramic post-Roman period clearly identifiable imports have played a minor role in Merseyside. The first is the Saintonge mottled green jug from Birkenhead Priory. To this can be added a scatter of such finds from other sites in the region, particularly Chester (Davey and Rutter 1975; 1977; Davey 1983). Apart from this, the county lacks other medieval imports. This may well be due to the absence of domestic excavation evidence from the high middle ages, rather than to a lack of circulation of such pottery in the area. From the 16th century, when both fieldwalking and excavation groups become more common, a trickle of finds from further afield have been identified. From Speke, a fragment of a fine green Beauvais jug, sherds from two late Saintonge unglazed jugs, part of a Cologne stoneware drinking vessel and a bottle like vessel from one of the Surrey production sites were found in the upper fills of a water containing feature, probably an earlier moat, beneath the west range Higgins forthcoming). A Siegburg stoneware jug rim was excavated at Sefton Old Hall (Fig. 12, 2). The South Castle Street site produced fragments of a late Saintonge polychrome face mask, an olive jar, pieces of Westerwald stoneware, a sherd of ?north African red burnished ware and north Devon gravel-tempered, smoothware and slipware (Davey 1985c). This latter trade, evidenced by the Port Books (*cf.* Grant 1983) is particularly well illustrated by the pottery assemblage collected over the years by the Society from the Hilbre Islands, and by two nearly complete vessels, including a *sgraffio* dish from Sefton Old Hall (Fig. 12, 1 and 3), and a few stray fieldwalking finds. The group from Hilbre is particularly interesting in that it includes some good examples of 18th century Buckley slipwares. The most distinctive of these - red bodied, press moulded dishes with free, dashing and confident designs (Davey 1987, 102) - have yet to be found north of the Mersey, emphasizing once again the separation between the Chester/Cheshire orientation of Wirral and the relative isolation of the Liverpool area.

Conclusions

The post-Roman ceramic history of Merseyside is full

of lacunae, both in terms of long periods of time for which there is little or no evidence and socio-economically, as there have been far too few excavations for confident generalisations to be made. What is clear is that pottery use and production came late to the area and to begin with use was probably confined to those groups in society - the inhabitants of castle and monastery - whose life styles elsewhere demanded ceramic containers at table. Not until town life became fully established in the later middle ages did pottery use become widespread and local production develop, such as that discovered by Holgate in Prescot. The 16th century seems to have seen a rapid population rise and the development of coal based industries. From soon after 1500 Merseyside seems to have become a significant production centre for Cistercian-type wares and their coarse relatives. These developments and their 17th century progeny are paralleled in other Coal Measure areas such as West Yorkshire, Stoke-on-Trent and Ironbridge. They form part of the background to the rapid economic and technological changes which ushered in the Industrial Revolution at those same locations. The climax of Merseyside's pottery tradition came in the 18th century with the 'industrialized' production of dark-glazed earthenwares and stonewares in Prescot and the success of Liverpool's tin-glazed and porcelain makers. Future fieldwork and excavation should aim to elucidate the relationship between these two groups of potters and attempt to close the multitude of gaps in present knowledge.

Future research

The most serious problem for post-Roman ceramics research in Merseyside is lack of data. First, many more excavation sequences from a wide range of sites of all periods are needed for a clear picture to emerge. In particular, relationships with the nearer parts of south Lancashire, Greater Manchester and north Cheshire need to be clarified. Unfortunately these areas are even less well documented than is Merseyside. Secondly, many more kiln sites need to be located, so that distribution patterns and regional variation can be properly assessed. These require extensive field work combined with documentary research throughout the northwest.

The sourcing of the most common earthenwares, both medieval and post-medieval, remains a major difficulty. Although it has proved possible to distinguish some of the local pipe clays by thin section analysis (Davidson and Davey 1982), most of the earthenwares derive from glacial till deposits which are poorly differentiated by geologists and very hard to define. A possible solution might be to turn attention to the sources of lead in the glazes used on the pottery by the use of trace element or isotope profiles. If, for example, Staffordshire post-medieval ware used Derbyshire lead and Buckley/Liverpool ware used Flintshire ores it might be possible to use differences in the raw materials from the two

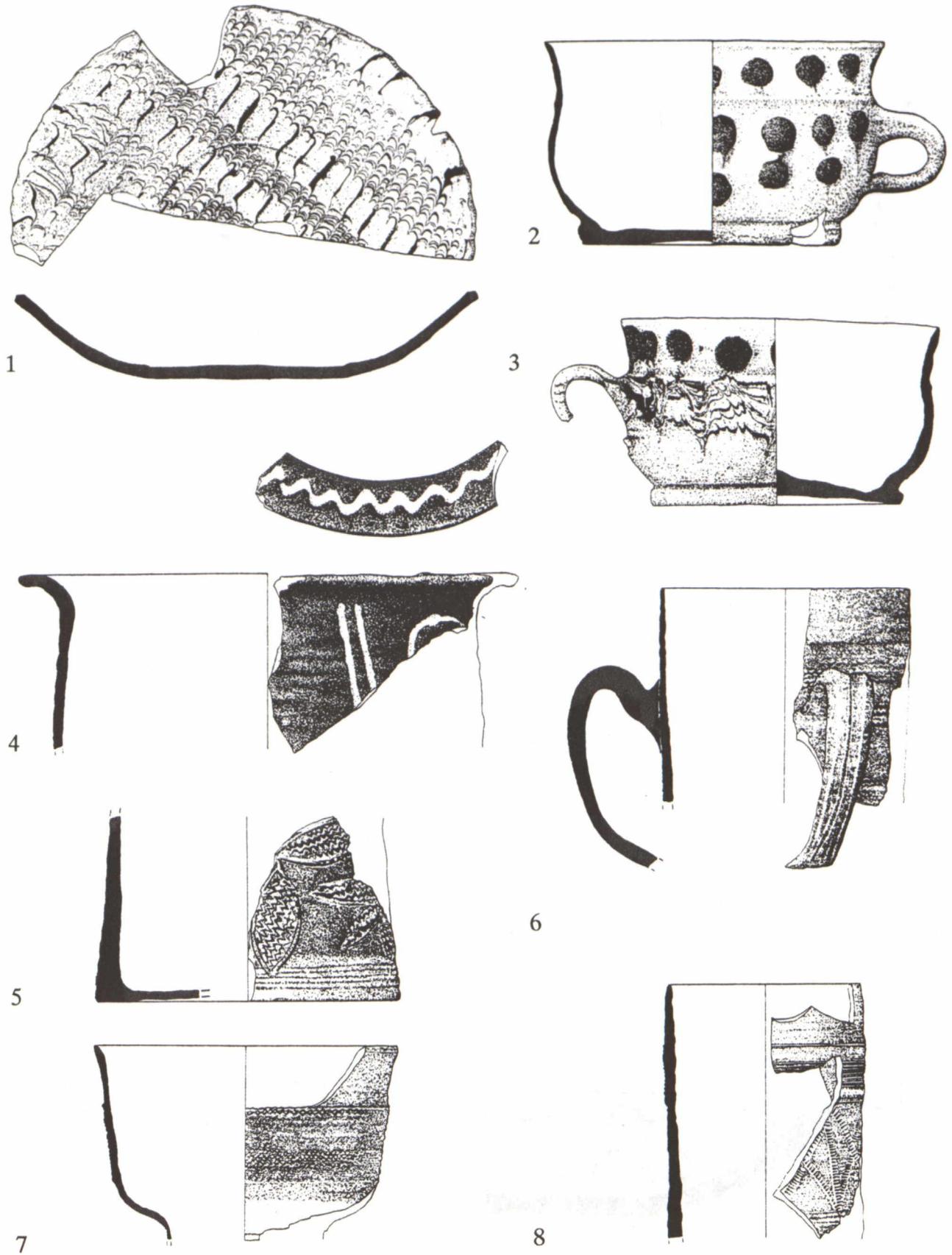


Figure 11: South Castle Street, Liverpool: 1-4. Slipware (Davey 1985b, Figs 10, 12, 15, nos 64, 2, 1 and 25); 5-8. Stoneware (Danby and Philpott 1985, Fig. 28, nos 155, 152, 159 and 156). Scale: $\frac{1}{2}$.

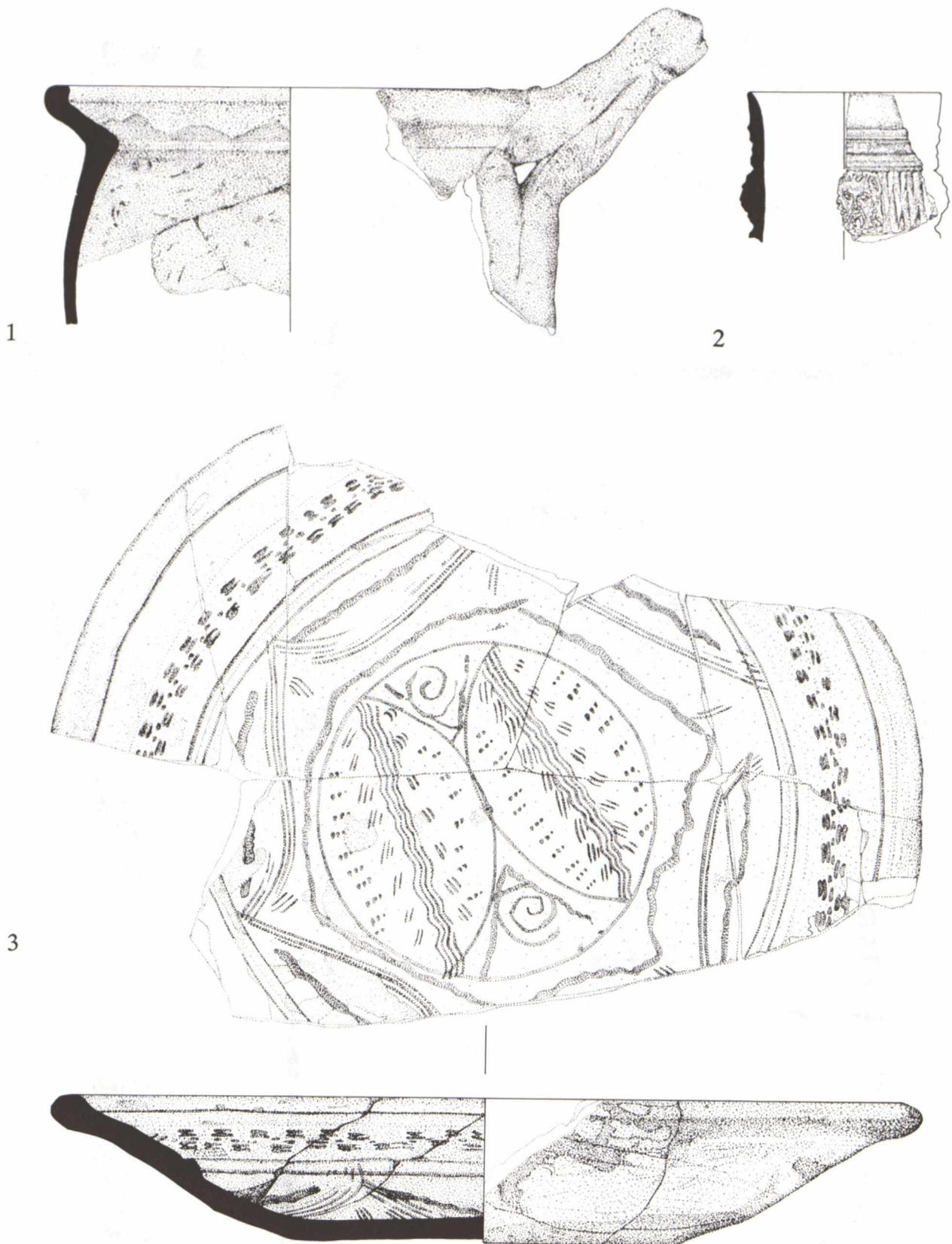


Figure 12: Sefton Old Hall 'imported' pottery: 1. Pipkin in north Devon gravel-tempered ware; 2. Stoneware jug rim from Siegburg, with moulded 'Janus' head motif; 3. North Devon slipware dish with *sgraffito* decoration. Scale: $x^{1/2}$.

areas to distinguish the products of those two industries.

The use of pottery to define socio-economic differences is, so far, poorly developed in the region. Once again, much more data from sites of known status is needed in order to develop this approach. The chronology and social pervasiveness of pottery use in the middle ages is still a matter of conjecture.

Finally, a significant contribution to the understanding of post-Roman ceramics in the region would be achieved if all the archaeologists involved were to publish the many excavation and fieldwalking groups which languish in our local museums and unit stores.

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