



Neolithic pottery vessel from Needham, Norfolk

Prehistoric Pottery Resource Pack

Key Stages 1, 2 and 3
History

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www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk



Introduction

This Prehistoric Pottery Resource Pack is designed to work within Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum history syllabus. It provides extension material for the archaeology led session provided by the Education Department at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse. The session is based on objects in the First Farmers gallery. The pictures in this pack and information available online on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website compliment and extend the topics covered in the museum session but can also be used as stand alone resources.

The Resource Pack provides details from the website, photographs and drawings from the paper archives held by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology designed to help children develop an awareness of archaeological objects and how they can be used to understand the past. The pack also includes possible teaching activities and ideas for cross curricular working.

The pack is part of a series of Resource Packs linked to the National Curriculum available from Norfolk Landscape Archaeology. Find details and download other packs on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website:

www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk

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Background

Pieces of prehistoric pottery have been found by fieldwalkers, metal detectorists and in people's gardens all over Norfolk. Pottery in the prehistoric period varied greatly, but almost all of it was handmade using local clays. It wasn't until the very end of the Iron Age that pottery made with a potter's wheel was introduced. Most prehistoric pottery was fired in or under an open fire rather than in a specially made kiln. This means that sites where prehistoric pottery was made are very difficult to identify.

We do not know if there were any large production centres for pottery in Norfolk in the prehistoric period. It seems more likely that in most small settlements people would make their own pots from local clays. To stop the pots exploding when they fired them 'temper' was added. Different types of temper have been used and include small pieces of flint, grass, sand, broken pieces of pot or mixtures of these materials.

During prehistory pottery was made by joining together rings of clay that were then smoothed out by hand. Some smaller prehistoric pots may also have been made by pinching the clay into shape between the thumb and forefinger.

This doesn't necessarily mean that the pottery was coarse and undecorated. Decorations were added to prehistoric pots using a variety of different techniques. Stamps, sticks, fingernails, fingertips and bird and animal bones were used to impress designs. String and rope were used to draw lines around pots. Knives could also be used. Extra pieces of clay could be added to create rims and more complex designs.

In addition to the types of clays and tempers and decoration used on prehistoric pots there was also a lot of variation in the size and shape of the pots.

Pottery was first made in Norfolk in the Neolithic period. Pieces of this early pot were found in many of the Neolithic pits excavated at Broome Heath (NHER 36289). Neolithic pot has also been found at Spong Hill (NHER 1012) and Kilverstone (NHER 34489). At first the pottery was simple and undecorated but decoration is later introduced and becomes increasingly elaborate. Later decorated pot has been found at sites such as Hockwold (NHER 5311).

Prehistoric Pottery in the National Curriculum

Although the National Curriculum does not prescribe history content any longer it does suggest that teachers use a variety of historical sources. It is often difficult for teachers to identify and use historical archives and local case studies. This is why this series of Resource Packs have been created.

This pack contains photographs and drawings of prehistoric pottery from Norfolk. The pack and associated material has been created in consultation with local teachers, the Education Department of Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse and the QCA guidelines for Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 History. It will also be useful for teachers following other specifications and may be used in a variety of different ways. The packs give students a chance to interact with material evidence in a fresh and interesting way.

Prehistoric Pottery in the QCA/Department for Education and Skills Schemes of Work

History at key stages 1 and 2 (Year 3 and 4)

Unit 6A: Why have people invaded and settled in Britain in the past? A Roman case study.
Section 3 Who were the Celts and who were the Romans?

Tell the children that they are going to find out about the Celts, who lived in Britain before the Romans arrived. Give them information about and pictures of the Celts and the Romans (including the prehistoric pottery pictures). Ask the children to complete a three-column grid with the headings: 'How they did things', 'Celts', and 'Romans'. In the first column children can list aspects such as *dress, belief, language, towns, farms, art, technology*. They can use the other two columns to compare the two ways of life. Discuss the children's answers with them, drawing their attention to similarities and differences. How did pottery change in the Roman period? How can we tell if a pot has been handmade or made with a wheel? How did the Romans and the Celts decorate their pots?

Unit 18: What was it like to live here in the past?

Section 4: What do pictures and photographs tell us about past life in our area?

Give the children pictures showing finds from the area including the prehistoric pottery (others can be found in the other Resource Packs and online on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website). Challenge the children to ask each other questions about each picture. Help them to ask open-ended questions, such as *What does it tell us about the area and people in the past?* Lead a discussion to sort the pictures into a chronological sequence and then make a visual time line for the classroom.

History at key stages 3 (Year 7)

Unit 1: Introductory unit what's it all about?

Section 2: What are we going to find out about in history in years 7, 8 and 9?

Brainstorm *How do we know about the past?* Ask pupils to work in pairs and give each pair one source including the prehistoric pottery showing finds from the area (other sources can be found in the other Resource Packs and online on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website). Each source should be on the same size piece of paper or card. Ask pupils to use simple data-capture sheets to analyse the source under the headings *What type of source is it? What does it show/describe? What does it tell you? What further questions would you want to ask of the source?* Ask each pair to report back, describing the type of source and topic. Do not attempt to tell the whole story: spend two minutes on each. Ask pupils to locate 'their' sources on the class timeline.

Possible Teaching Activities

- Challenge the children to come up with as many different uses for clay in the past as they can – to show its use for more than just pots – e.g. moulds, weights, figurines and ornaments, jewellery, tiles.
- Look at real examples of prehistoric pots from the pack. How many questions can you come up with that can reveal more information about the pot or the owner of the pot and their age, gender and status? Focus on – the shape, the decoration, the type of pot and its function. Get the children to work in groups to come up with a list of questions about a particular pot or ceramic – then give them to another group to try and answer.
- Challenge the children to design their own pot either on paper or using clay. Ask the children to explain their design – the shape etc and who it represents – use the types of questions as above.
- Contact a local potter to ask if you could visit their workshop or if they would come and do a demonstration – discuss handmade and wheel thrown pottery and how pots have changed over time.
- Make a pottery collection – go for a walk on the beach, poke around in your garden, ask in your local museum. This activity has endless possibilities including cleaning the pottery, creating a storage and display system for them, dating them, analysing them, writing captions for them and interpreting them.
- Sorting pottery. Give groups a tray each of sherds – can they sort them into handles, rims etc, then sort by colour or pattern, then by type?
- Dating pottery. Have a dating/chronology challenge first in groups – which group can get the order right? Earliest to latest?
- Give everyone a sherd – how much information can they get out of it? Write a card for the sherd as if it were going in a museum display
- Try out creating different decorative techniques either on slabs/pieces of clay or on homemade pots. Ask the children what they would use to decorate – go out for a walk and collect materials with which to decorate the pots. Get photographs from books or pottery sherd illustrations – can the children identify what made each decoration e.g. nail, fingertip, cord, wooden or bone tool etc?
- If you have the space and facilities, experiment with making and firing pots – or even sourcing clay if you can. Make a clamp kiln and fire your pots. Get different groups to try different tempers e.g. adding straw or shell etc to the clay to see what the result is. Once fired, look at the unsuccessful ones and see how the tempers have reacted – snip pieces off the failed pots and look at the section under a hand lens.
- Get round to your local charity shop/garden centre or raid your old china cabinet and round up a variety of different ceramics – cups, tea pots, plates bowls, etc. Either smash them in advance – use strong plastic bags tied tightly – then give each group a bag of broken sherds without them knowing what the item used to be or get the children to bring along an item and an old sock – and get them to put their item in the sock, tie the end then drop it on a hard floor or hit it with a hammer. Don't let them get

too enthusiastic or the reconstruction part could last all year! Use masking tape and cement glue (available in model shops) to reconstruct the pots. You can also use trays with sand in to support the reconstruction as it is built up.

- Alternatively break several different pots, china plates, mugs, decorated and plain things. Groups could sort them by fabric, then when they think they have found lots of one item, they can glue it together.
- Get some trays and fill them with earth. Bury several sherds of broken pot in them and get children to excavate carefully, brush, then wash then piece together. Bury as complete a pot as possible in an upright position (or even just the complete rim) so the children can discuss then tackle excavating a complete pot. Remove a couple of sherds from each bag for realism and to make it more tricky!
- Making clay objects. This needn't just be vessels. You could also attempt loom weights or moulds for metalwork.

Cross Curricular Links

ITC

Ask children to use the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website to find out more about each of the finds shown in the pictures. Have any similar objects been discovered close to their school or home? The website is designed for 12 year olds to use unaided but younger children may need assistance with this task.

English

Ask the children to think about how they might describe the pottery shown in the pictures. Ask them to write a short description of one of the objects.

Ask the children how they think the pots might have been used in the past. Ask them to write a description of how the pottery might have been used.

Art

The pictures include several archaeological drawings. Ask the children to use these as inspiration and draw one of the pots shown in the photographs.

Ask the children how they think the pottery might have been used in the past. Ask them to draw an illustration of how the pots might have been used.

Show the children half of one of the pots. Ask them, to imagine what the other half of the pot was like and to draw it.

Make a Prehistoric Pot

You will need:

Pencil and paper
Self-hardening clay
Water and a small piece of sponge
Tools and cutters
Piece of stiff card

1. Think about your pot and what it will look like. Look at the photographs of prehistoric pots to give you ideas. Draw your design on paper.
2. Make the base of the pot by rolling out or flattening a piece of clay to the right thickness and cutting it into a circle. Put this on the piece of card.
3. To make the sides of the pot, split a lump of clay into smaller pieces and roll them out into worm shapes. Make lots of them.
4. Take a worm shape and wrap it around on top of the clay circle base.
5. Smooth the sides of the pot so that you can't see any of the joins between the worm and the base.
6. Add more worms on top of each other, going round and round to make the sides of the pot. Smooth each worm as you add it to the pot.
7. Decorate your pot with your fingertips, fingernails, pencils, forks or by adding more worms to the outside of the pot.
8. Leave the pot in a warm place to dry.

You don't need to have any special tools to work with clay. You could use a blunt knife for cutting or incising decorations, pastry cutters, a comb, fork or bottle top to make patterns. If you have to leave your pot before it is finished put it in a cool place wrapped in a plastic carrier bag.



Prehistoric pots made during Archaeology Week 2006 at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse.

These instructions are also available online in the Crafty Ideas section of the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website.



Measuring and Drawing Pots

Archaeologists do not find whole pots very often. They have to work like detectives to find out the shape and size of a pot. In this exercise you become an archaeologist and work out the shape and size of a pot from a small piece or sherd.

You will need:

Pieces of pot
Pottery rim sheet
Pencil
Paper

1. Choose a piece of pot to investigate. Look very closely at the pot. What colour is it? Can you see any grains in the edge of the pot? Is it decorated? Record your observations.
2. Using the pottery rim sheet work out the circumference of the pot. To do this place the rim on the paper. Move the pot around until the curved part of the rim fits exactly onto one of the curved lines on the paper. Using your finger follow the curved line to the edge of the graph. Write down the number next to the line. This is the diameter of the pot in centimetres.
3. You can now begin to draw your reconstruction of the pot. Using a ruler draw a line the same length as the diameter of the pot at the top of a piece of paper.
4. Hold the rim of your piece of pot against this line and copy the shape of the edge of the pot.
5. Now you need to decide how tall your pot was. You can get some clues from the diameter of the pot and the shape of the piece you have. Draw the rest of the pot. Remember that most pots are symmetrical—both sides are the same. This can help you to draw an accurate reconstruction.
6. Using the observations you made earlier draw any decoration that you can see on the pot. Colour it in.
7. Look closely at your reconstruction—can you guess what the pot might have been used for?

Using the Images with an Interactive Whiteboard

You can find high quality images from this pack on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer Teachers' Resources gallery:

<http://gallery.e2bn.org/gallery587.html>

Look at each of the pictures of pots in turn. Think about the sort of information you could get from them if you knew more about them. In groups think of three questions that you could ask about the pots that would explain more about their use. Write the questions on the board using the Notebook function. Different groups can then answer your questions. Suggested questions: Can it be held comfortably? Is it decorated? Was it used for cooking? What task could have been performed with the pot? What skills were needed to make it?

Using the screenshade function hide half of the image. Ask the children what they think the other half of the pot looks like. Compare their answers to the image as you slowly reveal more of the picture. Do they change their minds about what the pot looks like as they are given more information?

Finding Out More

Websites

Channel 4, undated. Time Team—Prehistoric pottery. Available:
http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/T/timeteam/snapshot_pottery.html
Accessed 12 April 2007.

Crumbleholme, B., undated. Beaker Folk Bronze Age. Available:
<http://www.crumbleholme.plus.com/beakerfolk.htm> Accessed 12 April 2006.

Books

Elsdon, S.M., 1989. Later Prehistoric Pottery in England and Wales (Princes Risborough, Shire).

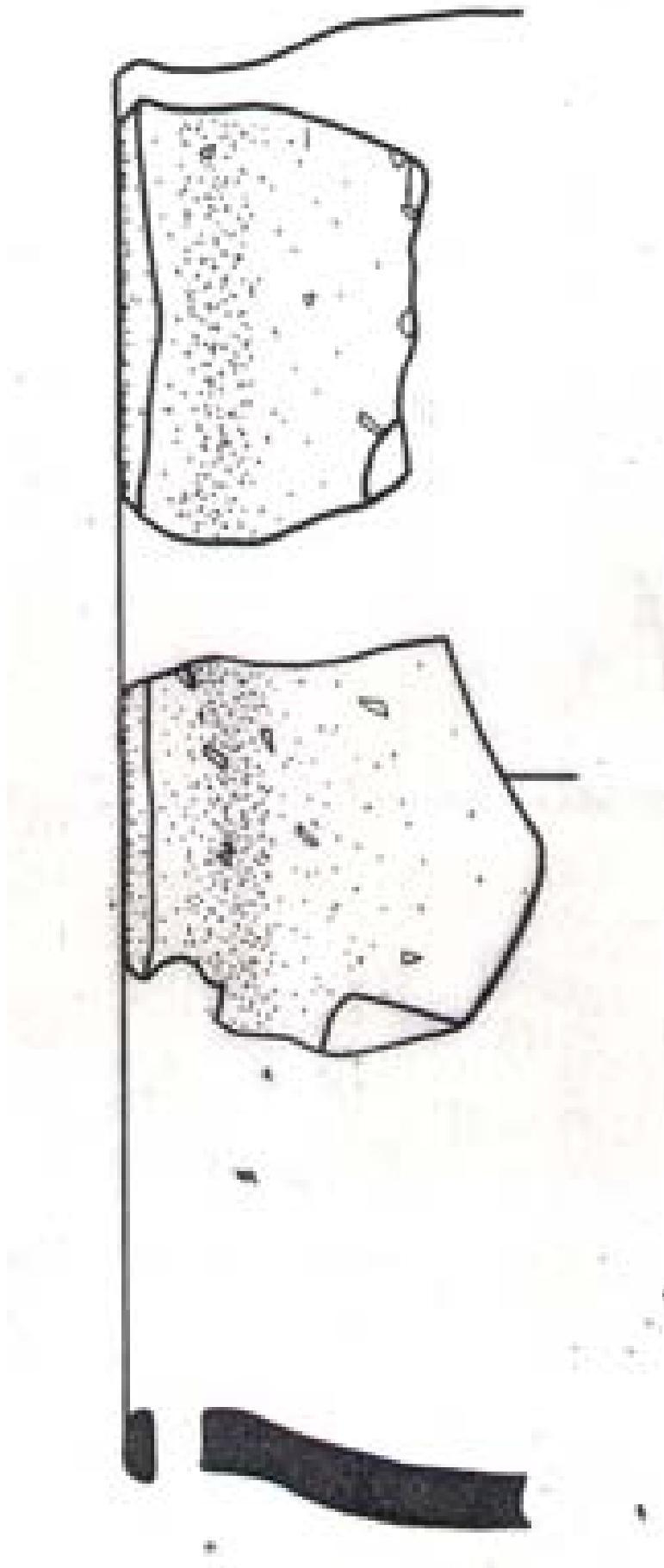
Gibson, A., 1986. Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Pottery (Princes Risborough, Shire).

Gibson, A., 2002. Prehistoric Pottery in Britain and Ireland (Stroud, Tempus).

Langmaid, N.G., 1978. Prehistoric Pottery (Princes Risborough, Shire).

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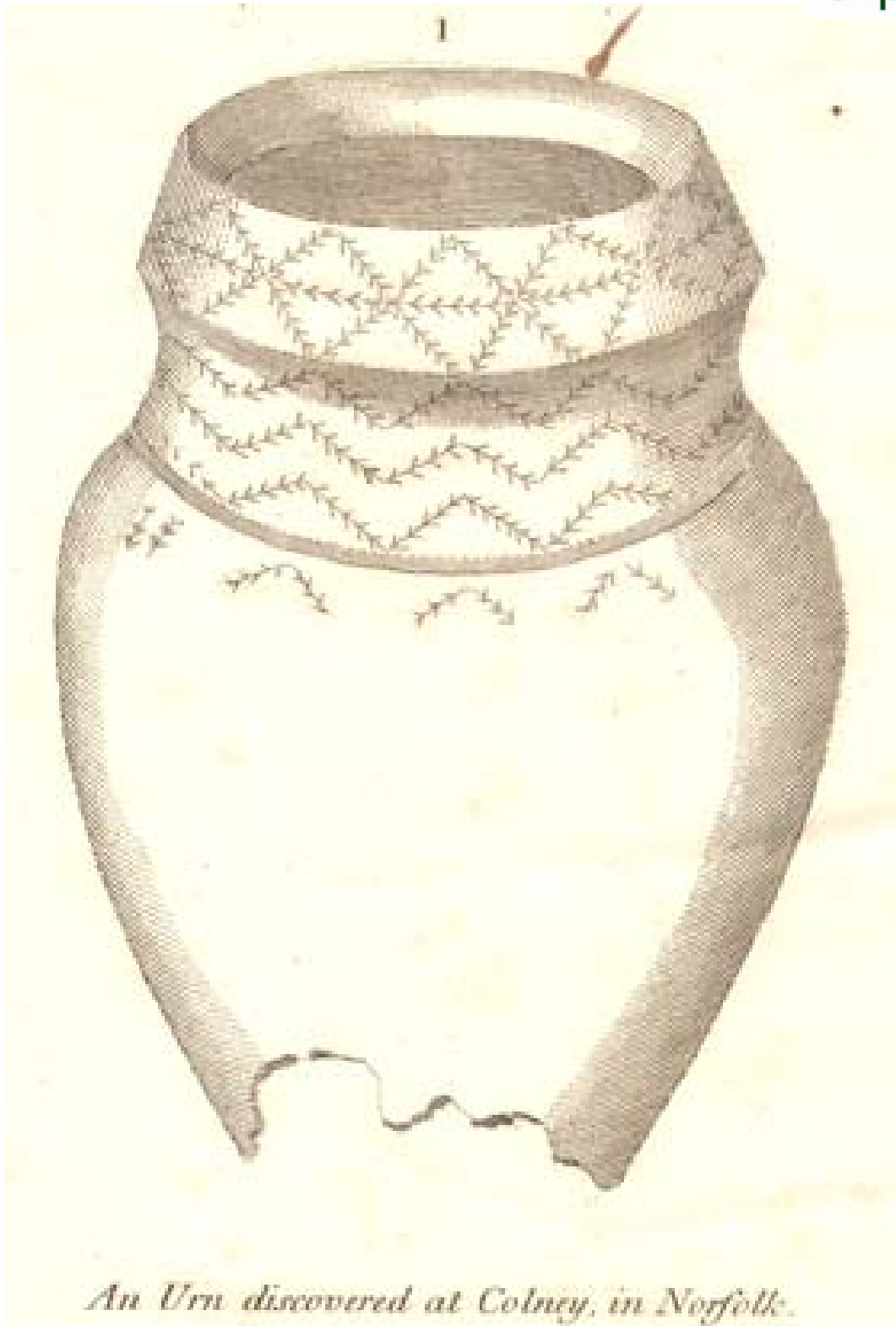


Drawing of a piece of Neolithic pottery found at Chedgrave, Norfolk, NHER 1038.

What do you think the complete pot looked like?

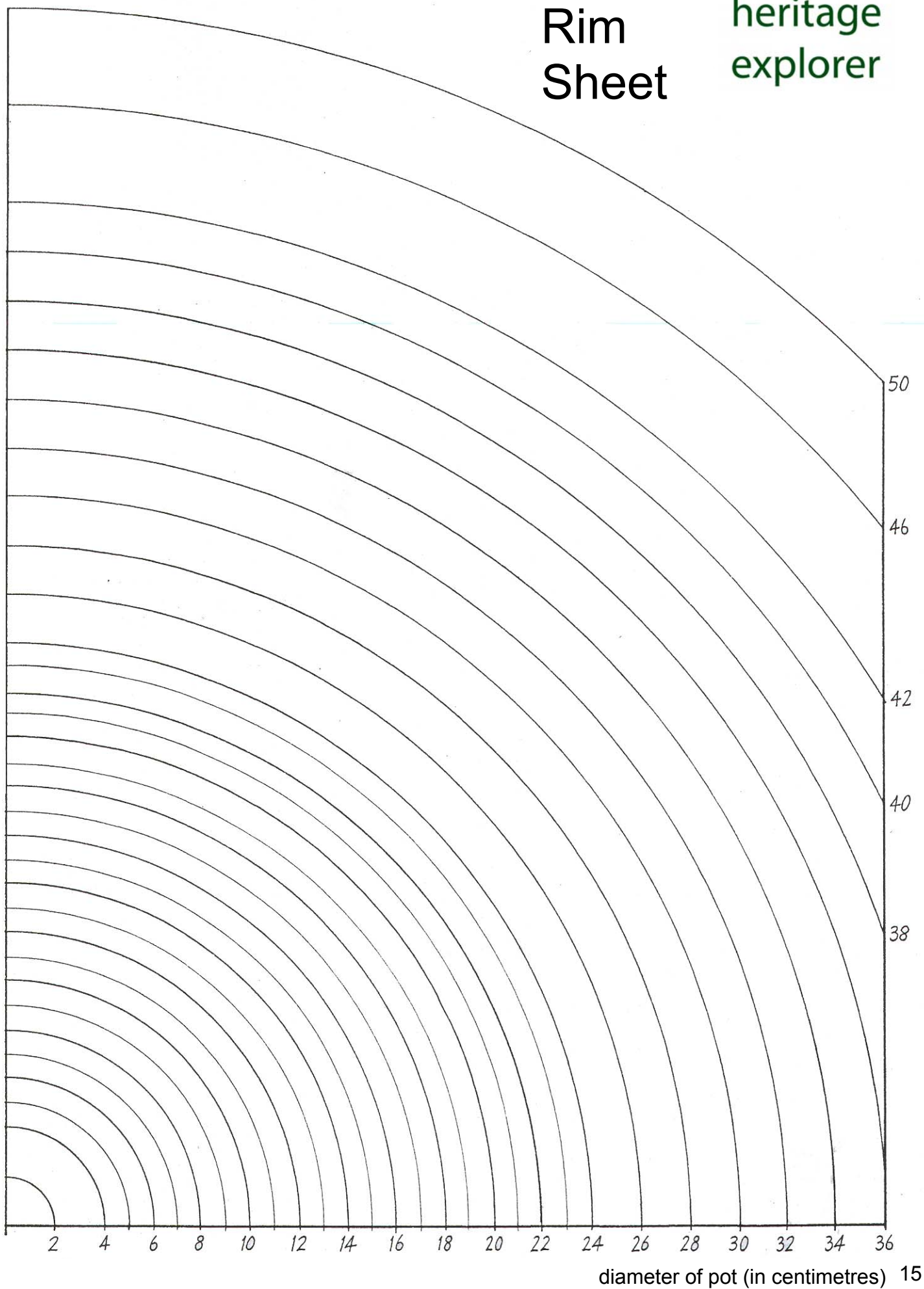
Available online at: <http://gallery.e2bn.org/gallery587.html>

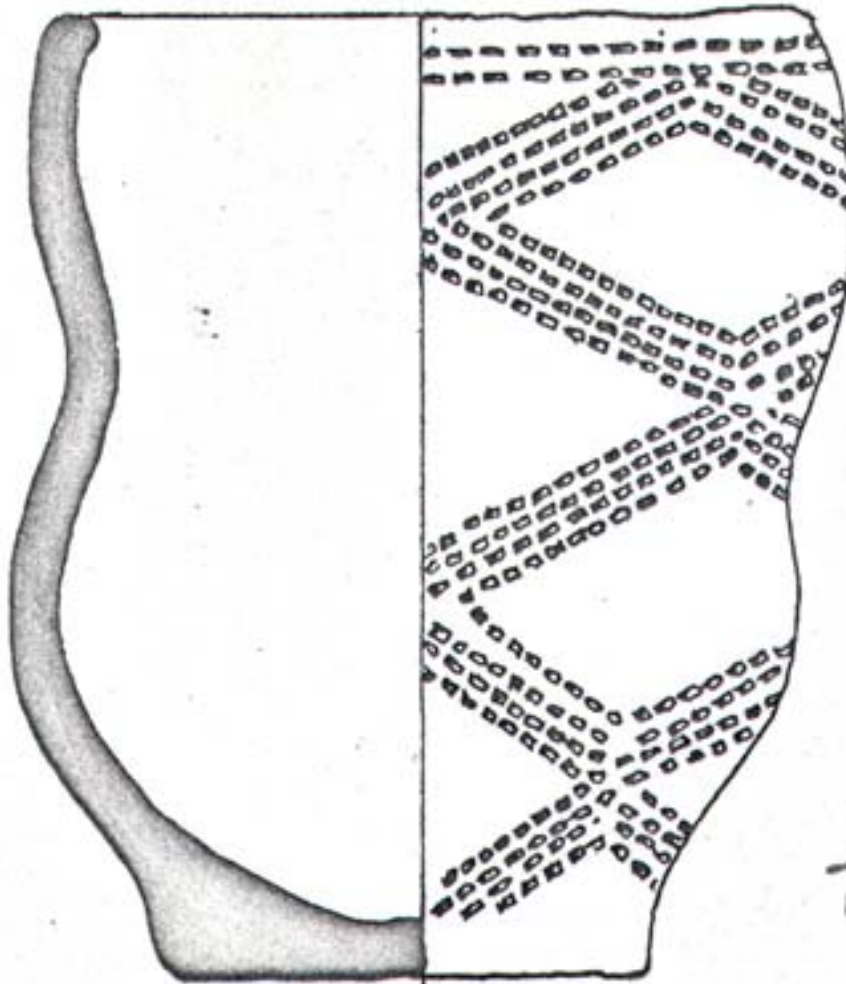
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A Bronze Age burial urn found at Colney, Norwich, Norfolk in the 19th century.
How do you think the decorations around the rim of the pot were made?

Available online at: <http://gallery.e2bn.org/gallery587.html>
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GAYTON THORPE 1962

TF/747189

Prins Haier H. Birkbeck,
Wosters High House

N50/FBA Bunker

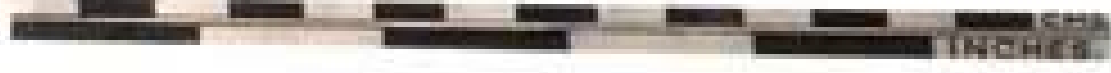
A complete Neolithic pot found in Gayton Thorpe, NHER 3738.
When it was found there was a "black substance" in the bottom of it. What do you think the black substance might have been?

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A Neolithic food vessel from Needham, Norfolk. NHER 11071.

What kind of food do you think was kept in the pot?

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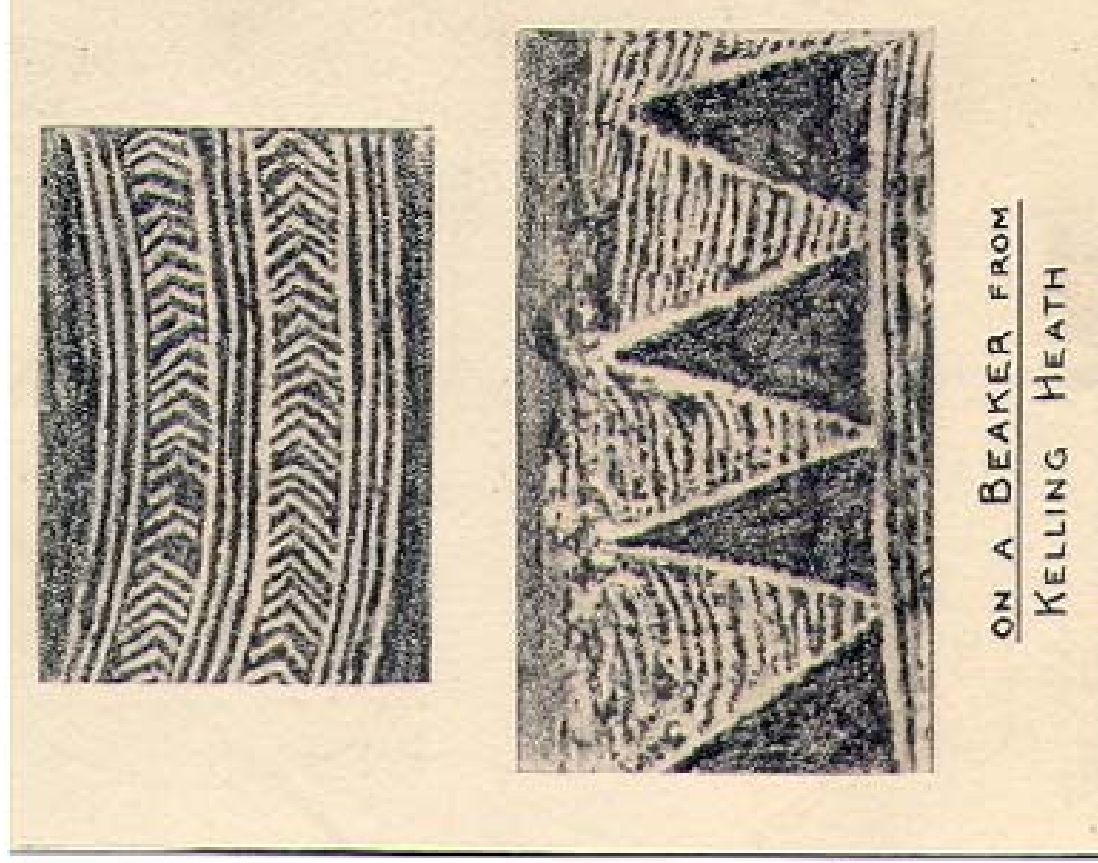


A piece of Neolithic decorated pottery found at Barwick. NHER 1978.

What shape are the decorations? Do you think the decoration went all around the pot originally?

Available online at: <http://gallery.e2bn.org/gallery/587.html>

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A complete Beaker period decorated pot from Kelling Heath, NH 6227.
The detail of the decoration can be seen to the right. Can you design some other simple decorative designs for a pot?
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