

## 2. PREHISTORIC CERAMICS

---

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the ceramic background of the Neolithic and early Bronze Age within Britain. The chapter is divided chronologically and describes the prevalent types and styles of ceramics within each sub-period. The initial spread of the Neolithic phenomena saw the inception of Carinated Bowl, Plain Bowl and Decorated Bowl pottery within Britain (section 2.3). This was followed by Impressed Wares which corresponds with the middle Neolithic period (section 2.4). The late Neolithic ceramics were characterised by Grooved Ware (section 2.5) with Beakers appearing at the end of the Neolithic and start of the early Bronze Age (section 2.6). The Collared Urn and sub-types and Food Vessels appear during the early Bronze Age (section 2.7). Period divisions have been taken from Clay (2006: 71) and are as follows:

- Early Neolithic c. 4000 to 3500 BC
- Middle Neolithic c. 3500 to 2500 BC
- Late Neolithic c. 2500 to 2000 BC
- Early Bronze Age c. 2000 to 1500 BC

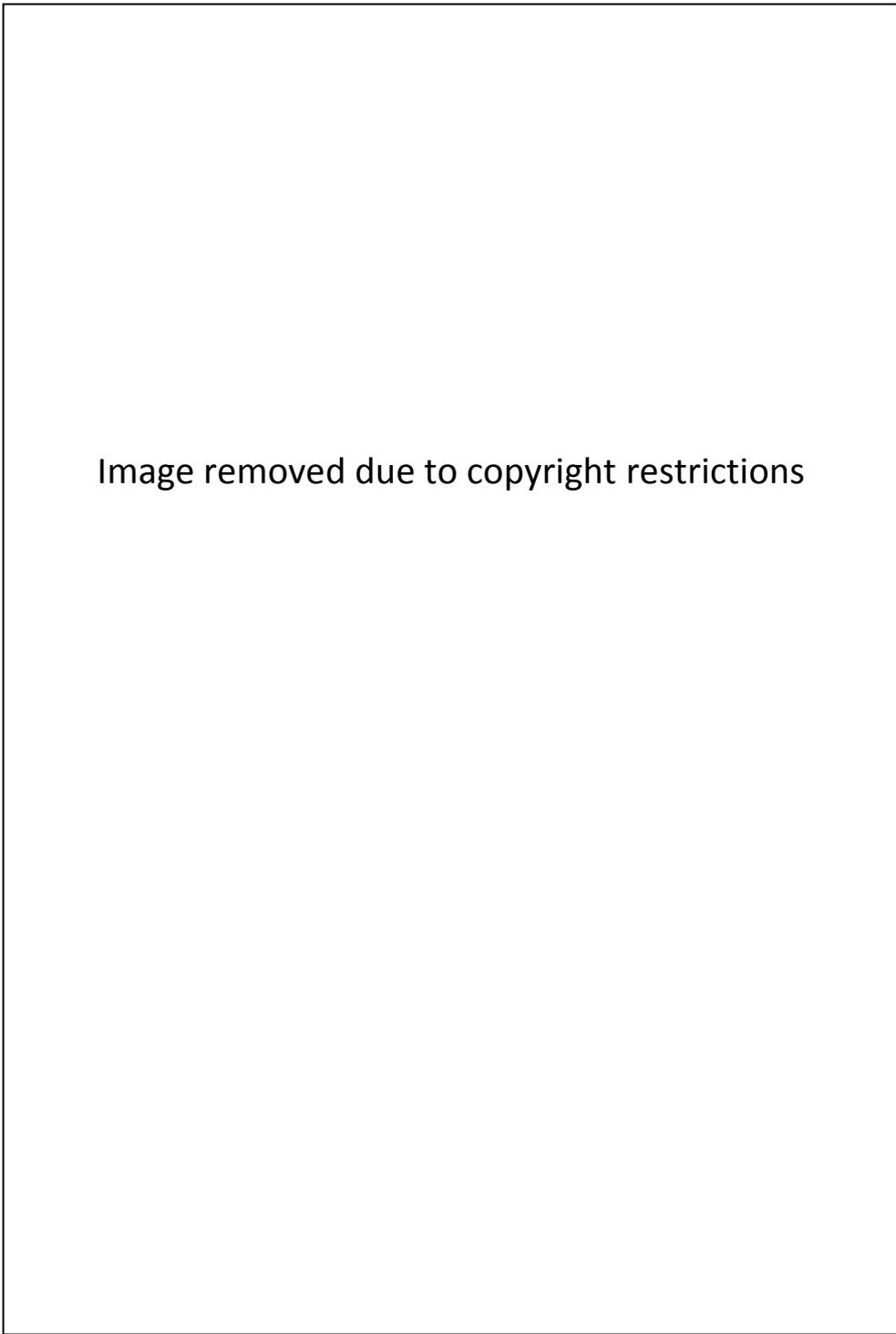
## 2.2 Ceramics in prehistoric Britain

Ceramics arrived into Britain as a fully developed technology (Gibson 2002: 69, Sheridan 2010: 189) alongside a number of other novel innovations. These included, the introduction of domesticated animals and cereals enabling people to settle and live off the land, new lithic technologies and the construction of different types of settlement and monuments within the landscape (Cunliffe 2012: 133-134). The majority of these innovations were tangible; however, there was also an intangible aspect to Britain's neolithisation – ideology. Changes in ideology, though difficult to pinpoint in the archaeological record, can be inferred from the construction of monuments and the ways in which they were used, the enclosing of areas, burial and deposition of human remains and the move away from marine to terrestrial resources as indicated by stable isotope evidence (Cunliffe 2012: 149), illustrating a different conceptual vision of the land and surrounding landscape (Darvill 2010: 77-130).

The study of prehistoric pottery has a lengthy pedigree strongly rooted in antiquarian research. Early studies include *British Barrows* (Greenwell 1877), *A study of Bronze Age pottery in Europe* (Abercromby 1912) and *The Neolithic Pottery of the British Isles* (Piggott 1931). More recently several texts and regional syntheses have included the analysis of ceramics within their remit; these include Smith (1956), Clarke (1970), Longworth (1984), Gibson (2002), Morigi *et al.* (2011) and Whittle *et al.* (2011). With further advances in archaeological science, more advanced methods are now routinely used to microscopically analyse ceramics, most notably, ceramic petrography (Middleton *et al.* 1991; Reedy 2008; Quinn 2009; Quinn 2013), lipid residue analysis

(Evershed *et al.* 1990; Copley *et al.* 2003; Salque *et al.* 2012) and the dating of these residues (Berstan *et al.* 2008) and techniques of directly dating ceramics such as rehydroxylation (Clegg *et al.* 2011). This not only demonstrates the wealth of research being conducted into prehistoric ceramics but also the potential for further avenues of research.

There are a number of different styles of pottery that have either been named after the specific site in which they were found, such as 'Fengate' Ware, a sub-style of Impressed Ware, first located in the Fengate suburb of Peterborough (Smith 1956: 69), or named in association with their perceived function, for example, 'Beakers' for their presumed connection to drinking, 'Food Vessels' due to their unsuitability for drinking and 'Urns' for their frequent association with cremations. The early study of ceramics was undertaken without access to radiocarbon dating and with the majority of vessels and vessel fragments recovered from funerary and ritual sites rather than domestic deposits, initial categorisation of vessel types was not entirely representative. However, many of these studies were seminal works such as *Neolithic Pottery of the British Isles* (Piggott 1931) and helped to define many of the pottery groups that exist today, forming the basis for the typologies and terminologies used (Thomas 1991: 89). The evolution of pottery styles over time in the British Isles is displayed in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1** The evolution of pottery styles over time in the British Isles (Hey & Hayden 2011: Fig 8.18)

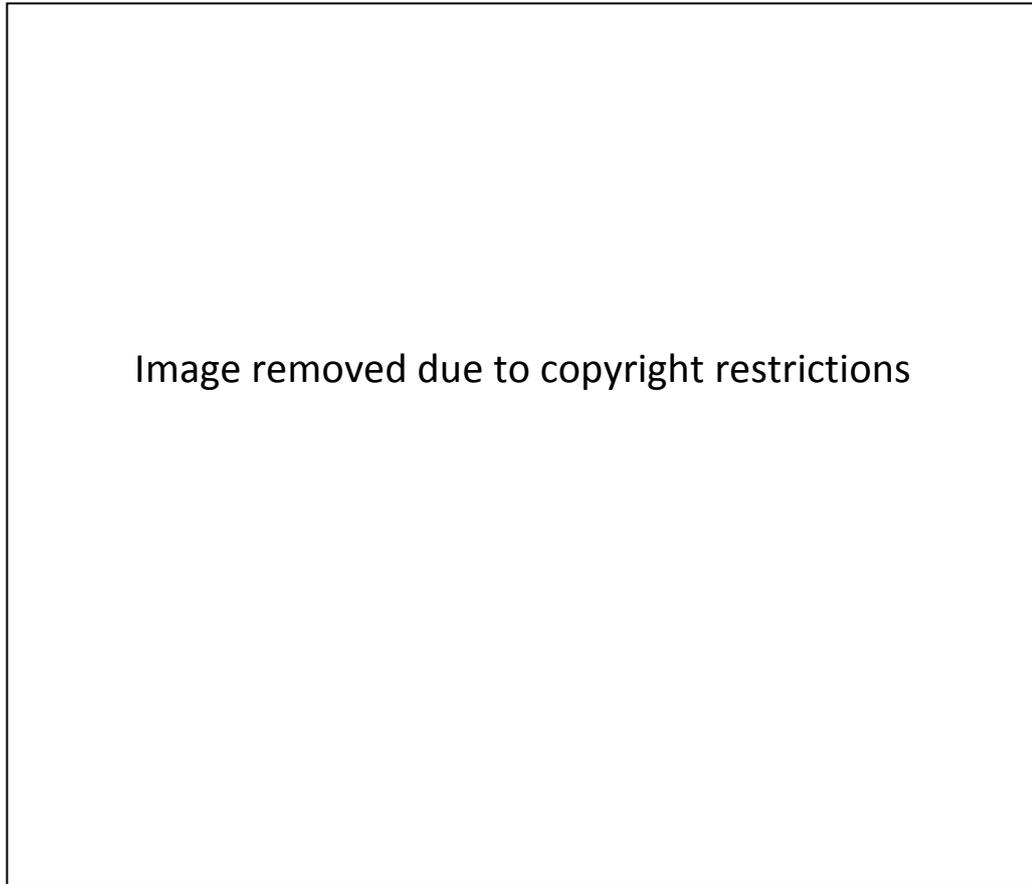
### **2.3 Early Neolithic Bowl Pottery (4000 to 3000 BC)**

Bowl pottery forms the earliest recognised ceramic technology practiced within the British Isles. Carinated Bowls (section 2.3.1) forms the initial wave of pottery in the first two centuries of the fourth millennium BC with Plain and Decorated Bowls (section 2.3.2) following in the second quarter of the same millennium.

#### **2.3.1 Carinated Bowls**

The earliest pottery style recognised currently in Britain is the Carinated Bowl tradition (Sheridan 2010: 191, Barclay *et al.* 2011: 458; Cunliffe 2012: 134) (Figure 2.2). This type of pottery was formerly called Grimston-Lyles Hill Ware after the two type sites where it was originally recognised, Hanging Grimston in Yorkshire and Lyles Hill in County Antrim (Gibson 2002: 69). This form of pottery, whilst being the earliest documented type in Britain, is far from the earliest in Western Europe, which had adopted the Neolithic style centuries earlier (Malone 2001: 230). The Linearbandkeramik (LBK) of the Low Countries and France had been in use for a millennium before the arrival of the Neolithic and its associated ceramics into Britain (Gibson 2002: 70, Whittle *et al.* 2011: 4-5). The Carinated Bowl tradition in Britain was closely related to the early Neolithic ceramics in Western Europe, including the Michelsberg, Wijchen and Hazensonk traditions (Malone 2001: 230). Why this phenomenon apparently took so long to cross over into Britain is still debated, though Price has speculated that the Atlantic seaboard was densely populated by hunter-gatherers slowing the spread of farming and alongside it the use of pottery (Price 2000: 17) and Cunliffe has raised the

possibility that climate change may have been a contributing factor (Cunliffe 2012: 136).



**Figure 2.2** Carinated Bowl forms (Brophy & Sheridan 2012: Fig 11)

Specific vessel types, or at least vessels during the early stages of their inception into society, would often be associated with monuments, burials or special depositional practices such as the long barrow at Hanging Grimston where Carinated Bowls were first identified. Although this link with ritual and monument is disputed by both Sheridan (2010: 189) and Bayliss *et al.* (2011: 757), stating that its recovery is often from non-monumental or pre-monumental contexts. It is possible that these ceramics, being a novel technology, would have been regarded as high status or special objects

and thus may not have frequently been utilised for everyday activities normally associated with pots such as cooking, eating and storage though this is not considered likely by some (Sheridan 2010: 189). It is possible that little domestic evidence survives from these types of early Neolithic habitation and consequently it is the survival which is unrepresentative. The latter is more likely with further examples of early domestic sites with Carinated Bowls being found, such as Lismore Fields, Derbyshire (Knight *et al.* 2004: 67). Dating of this type of ceramics has been revised recently as part of a wider study into early Neolithic causeway enclosures (Whittle *et al.* 2011). The radiocarbon dates for the inception of Carinated Bowls is 4185 to 3975 cal BC (95% probability) with an end date of 3715 to 3505 cal BC (95% probability) (Bayliss *et al.* 2011: 759). The authors state that the early start date is entirely due to one very early date from Yabsley Street, Blackwall.

The Carinated Bowls of the earlier Neolithic had a great deal of uniformity in the shape and fabric of the vessels produced. Vessels were often burnished or had some form of surface-treatment. The vessel form is generally of open bowls and cups with a round base (Barclay *et al.* 2011: 458). Rims were simple and occasionally slightly squared with the shoulder sometimes angular, stepped or enhanced (Barclay *et al.* 2011: 458). Within the East Midlands region, here classed as Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Rutland, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire, Carinated Bowl has been found at a number of locations. These include Dragonby and Tattershall Thorpe, Lincolnshire, Langford Quarry (Clay 2006: 77) and Lismore Fields, Derbyshire (Clay 2006: 71) and Great Briggs, Nottinghamshire (Guilbert 2009: 100-108).

### 2.3.2 Plain and Decorated Bowls

During the second quarter of the fourth millennium BC, possibly around 3600 BC (Sheridan 2010: 191 although see below for radiocarbon dates) increasingly diverse pottery styles start to enter the archaeological record, perhaps representing emerging local variations (Barclay & Bradley 2011: 458). This section describes the styles and typology of the Plain Bowls and Decorated Bowls.

Within southern Britain a series of both Decorated and Plain Bowls enter the archaeological record at this time (Malone 2001: 231). The Plain Bowls included open forms similar to the preceding Carinated Bowls but also closed and neutral forms with heavier shoulders and rims and coarser fabrics (Bayliss *et al.* 2011: 759). Recent radiocarbon date analysis using Bayesian modelling has indicated that this style commenced usage in 3970 to 3715 cal BC (95% probability) and went out of use 3375 to 3095 cal BC (87% probability) (Bayliss *et al.* 2011: 762). The early date for the inception of Plain Bowls within southern Britain is acknowledged as being skewed by an unusual assemblage from Coneybury whose attributes are distinctive (Bayliss *et al.* 2011: 762).

The Decorated Bowls appear at much the same time as the first causewayed enclosures (Barclay & Bradley 2011: 458; Bayliss *et al.* 2011: 763) (Figure 2.3). This style of ceramics was frequently highly decorated, as the name implies, and various regional sub-styles have been postulated, mainly after the location in which they were first recognised and comprise Windmill Hill style originating in Wessex, Abingdon style

in the Thames region, Mildenhall style in East Anglia and Whitehawk in Sussex (Bayliss *et al.* 2011: 762). The styles are not mutually exclusive and assemblages have been found containing more than one type including the Windmill Hill causewayed enclosure where a number of Abingdon style vessels were identified (Barclay *et al.* 2011: 458). It is now recognised that these are likely variations within the Decorated Bowl tradition and not sub-styles (Bayliss *et al.* 2011: 762). The styles of the Decorated Bowls include closed and neutral forms with some open vessels, with pronounced shoulders and heavy rims. Decoration is characteristically linear with some punctiform elements (Bayliss *et al.* 2011: 762-763) although the East Anglian Mildenhall variant, closest geographically to Leicestershire, is usually heavily decorated with stabs, dots and lines around the rim and shoulder although the general form is similar to that of the preceding Carinated Bowls (Malone 2001: 232). Radiocarbon dates for the start of the Decorated Bowl tradition in southern Britain is 3745 to 3690 cal BC (95% probability) with the final usage at 3315 to 3245 cal BC (95% probability) (Bayliss *et al.* 2011: 763).

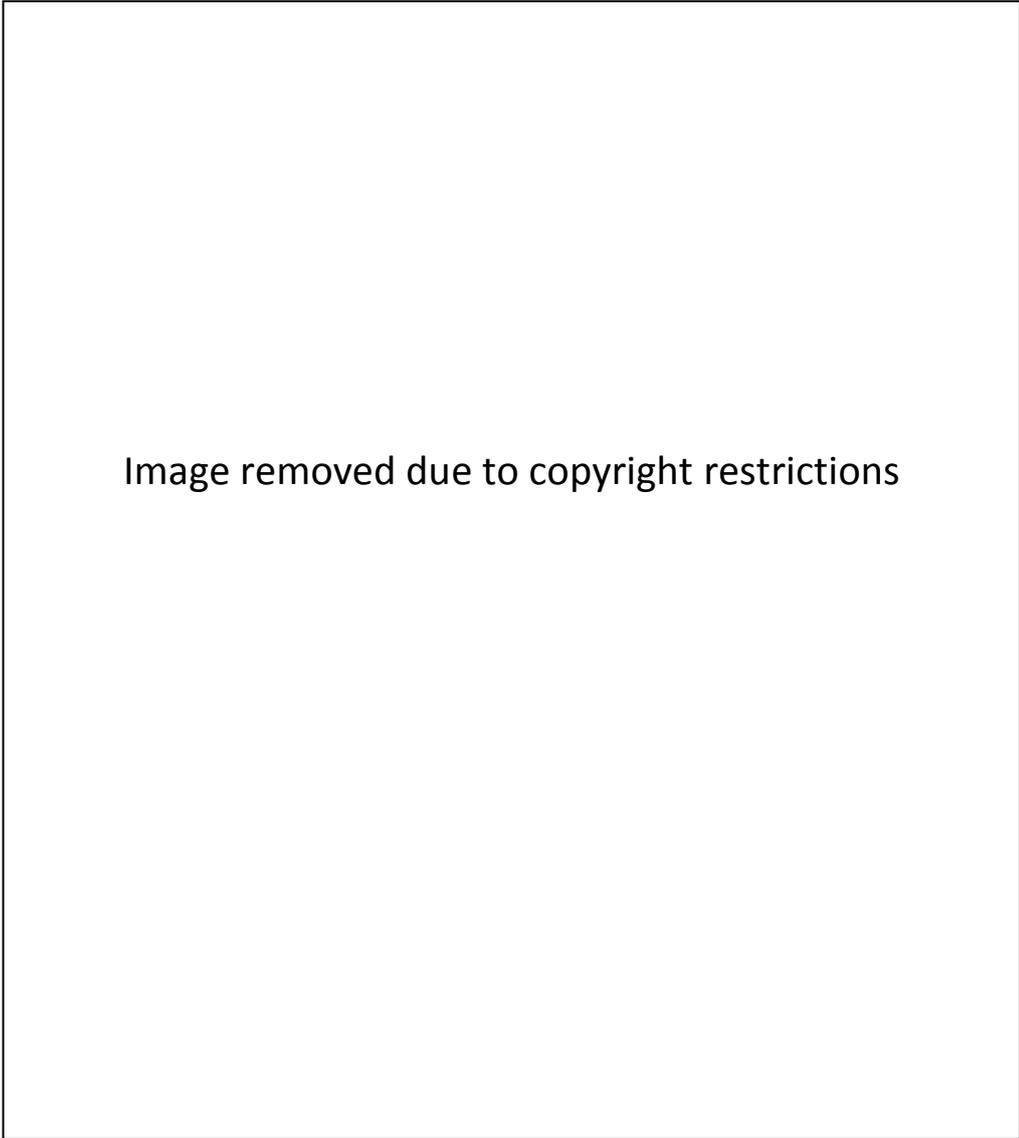


Image removed due to copyright restrictions

**Figure 1.3** Decorated Bowl vessels (Bayliss *et al.* 2011: Fig 14.91)

#### **2.4 Middle Neolithic Impressed Wares (3500 to 2500 BC)**

Evolution of ceramic forms and styles lead to what is now called the Impressed Ware tradition, formerly and still referred to as Peterborough Ware in publications (see for example *Willington* (Beamish 2009; also section 4.5.6)) and *Thames through Time* (Morigi *et al.* 2011). This ceramic tradition came into use in the later part of the third millennium BC (Marshall *et al.* 2009: 62-81). Impressed Ware is sub-divided into

Ebbsfleet (section 2.4.1), Fengate (section 2.4.2) and Mortlake styles (section 2.4.3). Originally assumed to have been sequential, evidence now indicates that these individual styles were broadly contemporaneous, such as demonstrated at Willington, Derbyshire, where examples of all three sub-styles have been recovered together in the same contexts (Tinsley 2009: 89). The following table (2.1) summarises the results of the programme of radiocarbon dating at Willington.

**Table 2.1** Radiocarbon dates for Impressed Wares (adapted from Marshall *et al.* 2009: table 10)

<b>Impressed Ware style</b>	<b>First Appearance</b>	<b>Last Appearance</b>	<b>Span</b>
<b>Ebbsfleet</b>	3520-3340 cal BC (95% probability)	3270-2900 cal BC (95% probability)	60-540 years
<b>Fengate</b>	3380-3110 cal BC (95% probability)	3090-2980 cal BC (95% probability)	20-370 years
<b>Mortlake</b>	3130-2920 cal BC (75% probability)	3060-2870 cal BC (95% probability)	1-310 years

#### **2.4.1 Ebbsfleet (3520 to 2900 cal BC)**

The Ebbsfleet styles of ceramics are predominantly round based bowls which were assumed to have developed from the earlier Neolithic Bowl traditions (Gibson 2002: 78). The earliest Ebbsfleet vessels were generally sparsely decorated although the amount of decoration increased later with twisted and whipped cord techniques becoming frequent in criss-cross and herringbone patterns (Malone 2001: 238). The vessels are round-based with 'S' profiled rims, with the decoration concentrated on the rim, neck and shoulders (Malone 2001: 238).

#### **2.4.2 Fengate (3380 to 2980 cal BC)**

These vessels were usually flat based, with splayed bodies and collared rims (Gibson 2002: 78). It is thought these collared rims were a precursor for the Collared Urn tradition of the early Bronze Age. However, given the apparent gap in dates, some 500 years between the end of the Impressed Wares and the start of the early Bronze Age, this may need reviewing (Gibson 2002: 82). A recent reevaluation of the early Bronze Age ceramics from Hallam Fields in Birstall, Leicestershire, has indicated that these are actually Impressed Wares of the Fengate sub-style rather than Collared Urns (Gibson *pers. comm.*, Clay *pers. comm.*). Given that petrographic analysis and Inductively-Coupled Plasma Spectroscopy undertaken on the vessels suggests a non-local origin for two of the fabrics, this could be of significance (Marsden 2009: 61).

#### **2.4.3 Mortlake (3130 to 2870 cal BC)**

Mortlake vessels were frequently highly decorated, with the impression techniques much more varied than the Ebbsfleet styles (Gibson 2002: 78). Techniques used included the twisted and whipped cord but also saw the use of fingernail and bird bone impressions (Gibson 2002: 78). The rims of the Mortlake vessels were larger than the preceding Ebbsfleet and Fengate styles, possibly as a receptacle of this increased use of decoration and were more heavy than the Ebbsfleet rims (Malone 2001: 238). Mortlake pottery has recently been found during excavations of the Rearsby Bypass in Leicestershire (Clarke & Beamish 2007) (Figure 5.5).

A number of examples of Impressed Wares have been found in Leicestershire within recent years although many of these examples have not been assigned to a sub-style. Isolated pits at Rearsby Bypass contained Mortlake sherds (Clarke & Beamish 2007), whilst Impressed Wares were recovered from Rothley Lodge Farm (Hunt 2005). Further find spots have been located at Lockington (Hughes 2000), Husbands Bosworth (Butler *et al.* 2002) and Oakham (Clay 1998). These sites have not been subjected to detailed assessment and await a specific sub-style classification. A reassessment of the ceramics from Hallam Fields, Leicestershire suggests that Fengate style Impressed Wares are present in stratified contexts (See section 2.4.2 above) in addition to a small number of residual sherds identified within a later Iron Age feature.

## **2.5 Late Neolithic Grooved Ware (3000 to 2400 BC)**

Grooved Ware replaced Impressed Wares across the country although it appears first within the north-eastern edge of Scotland in Orkney spreading southwards, eventually encompassing the whole of Britain (Brophy & Sheridan 2012: 30). This type of pottery spans the end of the Neolithic and into the early Bronze Age and was a relatively homogenous ceramic tradition but with some regional variations (Gibson 2002: 84). The range of radiocarbon dates from short-lived samples directly associated with Grooved Ware at Cheviot Quarry in Northumberland are 2920 to 2760 cal BC, 2890 to 2630 cal BC, 2880 to 2600 BC and 2880 to 2570 cal BC (all 95% confidence) (Millson *et al.* 2011: 32) although slightly later dates have been obtained from a pit at Milfield North. These were 2620 to 2460 cal BC and 2570 to 2340 cal BC (95% probability) (Millson *et al.* 2011:32). The types of vessels are fairly restricted, with tubs, buckets

and barrels being the main forms although vessel size could vary greatly, with some approaching 1m in height (Gibson 2002: 84). There are four variants or sub-styles of Grooved Ware which were identified by Longworth (1971). These were Clacton, Woodlands, Durrington and Rinyo (section 2.5.1). These were predominantly regional styles although as more examples are being found during fieldwork, these regional distributions are becoming less clear. Often Grooved Ware is found associated with ritual and funerary contexts, particularly henge monuments, but this is not always the case (Garwood 1999: 154).

### **2.5.1 Clacton, Woodlands, Durrington and Rinyo Wares**

The Clacton style is generally represented by a vessel with a fairly simple rounded rim with decoration including triangles, lozenges and rectangles or chevrons infilled with patterns (Malone 2001: 239). The style was first recognised at its type site at Clacton on the Essex coast. The Durrington style, also known as the Woodhenge style, was recognised at Durrington Walls, a major Neolithic settlement and henge excavated in the 1960s (Wainwright & Longworth 1971). The Durrington style has six characteristic elements. These are an internally bevelled rim which can also be decorated, grooved spirals and circles, and the exterior divided by panels by vertical grooved cordons with the panels infilled with triangles and incised lines with decorations done with impressed cords and incisions (Malone 2001: 239). This style is frequently found on ritual sites such as the type site at Durrington (Wainwright & Longworth 1971). The Woodlands style is a parallel style to the Durrington style and is usually recovered from settlement and domestic sites (Malone 2001: 239). The vessel size is smaller than

those of the Durrington style and is decorated by cordons forming a ladder effect across the vessels (see Figure 3.7). The vessels are also decorated with applied clay knobs on the cordons and rim and vertical slashes or fingertip impressions can mark the cordons (Malone 2001: 239) (Figure 2.4). The Rinyo style is most commonly found in Scotland and has internally bevelled rims which are occasionally scalloped externally and the body decoration is grooved on cordons (Malone 2001: 239).

Within the county of Leicestershire, an extensive assemblage of Grooved Ware has recently been located at Rothley Lodge Farm in association with an inscribed stone plaque and other items within probable structured deposits (section 3.3.2.1) (Hunt 2004). This assemblage has been assigned to the Woodlands sub-style of the Grooved Ware tradition. Clacton style Grooved Ware has been recovered from Braunstone (Albone 2001). Further examples of Grooved Ware are more frequent within the wider East Midlands and large assemblages are known from Willington in Derbyshire (Manby 1979).

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

**Figure 2.4** Clacton, Woodlands and Durrington styles of Grooved Ware (Garwood 1999: Fig 15.6)

## **2.6 Beakers (2500 to 1700 BC)**

This section introduces the Beaker style of pottery which spans the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age in Britain (Figure 2.5). There is also considerable overlap with the Grooved Ware tradition of pottery. The Grooved Ware tradition is thought to have extended to roughly 2000 BC, meaning an overlap of circa 400-500 years with the Beaker pottery style (Gibson 2002: 92) although a surprisingly early radiocarbon date has been obtained from a small pit containing Beaker and Grooved Ware sherds at Dunragit in southern Scotland. This was dated to between 2780 and 2590 cal BC (95% probability) (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2007: 6) indicating considerable overlap. Most dates put the influx of Beakers in the early second half of the third millennium BC (Garwood & Barclay 2011:402).

The Beaker Tradition, roughly commencing around 2500 cal BC, is a pan-European ceramic style and has been recorded across the continent from the North African coast through to northern Scotland and to Ukraine in the east (Darvill 2008: 42). The factors governing this pan-European spread of pottery have been postulated as being associated with the influences of a warrior elite who also introduced individual burial, elite hierarchies and metal working, oft quoted when the Amesbury Archer was found to have been of European origin and not indigenous to these isles (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2007: 7; Sheridan 2008: 63). Early Beakers within Britain appear closely related to those found in the Netherlands and may indicate one possible point of stylistic origin (Malone 2001: 242). The Beaker vessels can be finely made although more rusticated examples exist. The designs on Beakers varied greatly as is evidenced within the corpus

of Beakers in Great Britain and Ireland (Clarke 1970). Decoration often consists of geometric shapes repeated over the body of the vessel. Some of the rusticated Beakers possessed fingertip pinch or fingernail decorations, again frequently covering most of the vessel (Gibson 2002: 89-90). Early Beakers (2500 to 2000 BC) within Britain appear closely related stylistically and typologically to those found in the Netherlands and may indicate one point of origin (Malone 2001:242). These early Beakers were frequently made in a fine reddish clay fabric with geometric decorations covering the body of the vessel using cord and comb patterns in horizontal bands (Malone 2001: 242). Vessel profiles were generally 'S' shaped with everted rims and a low belly (Malone 2001: 242). Later Beakers (2000 to 1700 BC) became more highly decorated and saw wider bands of decoration using diamonds, triangles and both filled and open patterns. These were executed using cord impressions, finger tips and tools. Profiles changed to a shorter neck and wider belly (Malone 2001: 242). The final stage of the Beaker style dating to roughly 2000 to 1700 BC saw profiles change yet again with the neck becoming straighter and an almost bulbous body with patterns on the neck and belly consisting of cord impressions, zones of geometric patterns and zig-zags (Malone 2001: 242-243). The use of Beakers extended into the early Bronze Age and overlapped both with Grooved Ware, Food Vessels and Urns. Attempts at producing a coherent typological and chronological synopsis for Beakers has been on-going for decades (for example see Clarke 1970, Boast 2002). However classification and synopsis has not been easy and recent new avenues of investigation, such as engendered associations, social context and materiality have clouded the picture (Barclay *et al.* 2012: 460).

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

**Figure 2.5** Examples of Beakers from the Thames Valley region (Garwood & Barclay 2011: Fig 15.10)

## **2.7 Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Ceramics (2500 to 1500 BC)**

Food Vessels and Urns came into use within Britain at around 2200 BC, just prior to the start of the Bronze Age (Gibson 2002: 93). Food Vessels and Urns are found throughout Britain and Ireland and various sub-styles are known such as Collared and Bi-Conical Urns (Barclay & Bradley 2011: 461).

### **2.7.1 Food Vessels**

The term Food Vessel was introduced by early antiquarians to help distinguish them from Beaker vessels, which were assumed to have been for drinking (Gibson 2002: 93-95). The most common forms of Food Vessels are bowls and vases. Fabric quality and decoration style is varied with some vessels being made in a fine clay fabric whilst others have been found made in a coarse fabric with large rock inclusions. Decoration can be precise geometric patterns to rough and crude patterns and some do not have any decoration at all (Gibson 2002: 95). Examples found within Leicestershire include several at Cossington (see Figure 4.9).

### **2.7.2 Urns**

Urn pottery dates to approximately 2200BC and come in a variety of styles, such as Cordoned Urns, Handled Urns and Collared Urns (Gibson 2002: 96). These were often found in association with burials hence the use of the term 'urn' (Gibson 2002: 96). The most frequent style identified is the Collared Urn, named because of its heavy hanging collared rim often decorated with impressed or incised geometric patterns (Gibson 2002: 96). The fabric can range from fine through to coarse and the size of the

vessels can also range widely from less than 0.1m to over 0.5m in height. Examples have been located at Cossington (Thomas 2009) (Figure 4.10) and Lockington (Hughes 2000).

## **2.8 Summary**

This chapter has presented a rudimentary background to the ceramics of the Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age within Britain. Whilst it is not possible to provide a complete catalogue of every style, form, fabric or association of the various identified ceramic groupings, a broad synopsis has been outlined. It is obvious that ceramic studies are still progressing and evolving and new techniques and methods (See section 2.2 above) are contributing to a better understanding of ceramic technology and the societal implications behind these. Crucial to this contribution is the increased utilisation of Bayesian modelling and radiocarbon dates (Sheridan 2008: 57-58).

Within Leicestershire, Bowl pottery has been recorded at Oakham (Clay), Eye Kettleby (Finn 2011) and Husbands Bosworth (Clay 2006: 77). Impressed Wares have been recorded at Hallam Fields in Birstall (Speed 2009), Rearsby Bypass (Clarke & Beamish 2007) and Rothley Lodge Farm (Hunt 2004). Grooved Ware has also been recorded at Rothley Lodge Farm (Hunt 2004), Rothley Temple Grange (Speed 2011), Syston (Meek 1997) and Castle Donington (Coward 2004). Beakers are known from Rearsby (Clarke & Beamish 2007), Syston (Meek 1997) and Castle Donington (Coward 2004). Food Vessels and Urns are known from Cossington (Thomas 2009) and Eye Kettleby (Finn 2011).