

REPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS.

REPORT

PRESENTED TO THE

Cambridge Antiquarian Society.

AT ITS FORTIETH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

MAY 24, 1880.

WITH AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY
(INCLUDING THE ANNUAL REPORT XL),
1879—1880.

ALSO

Communications
MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

No. XXII.

BEING THE FOURTH AND CONCLUDING NUMBER
OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.

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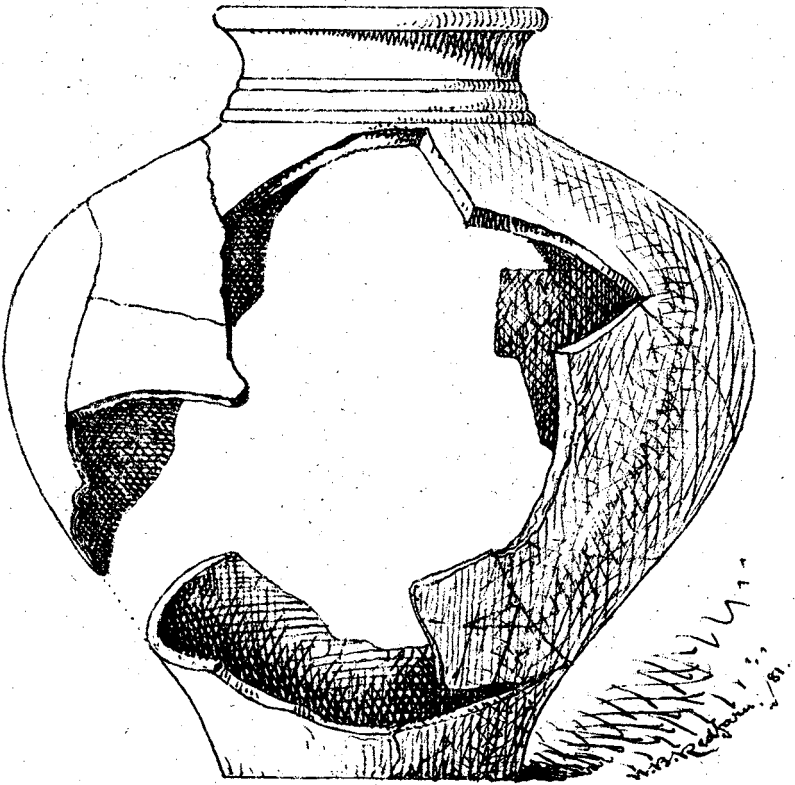
1881

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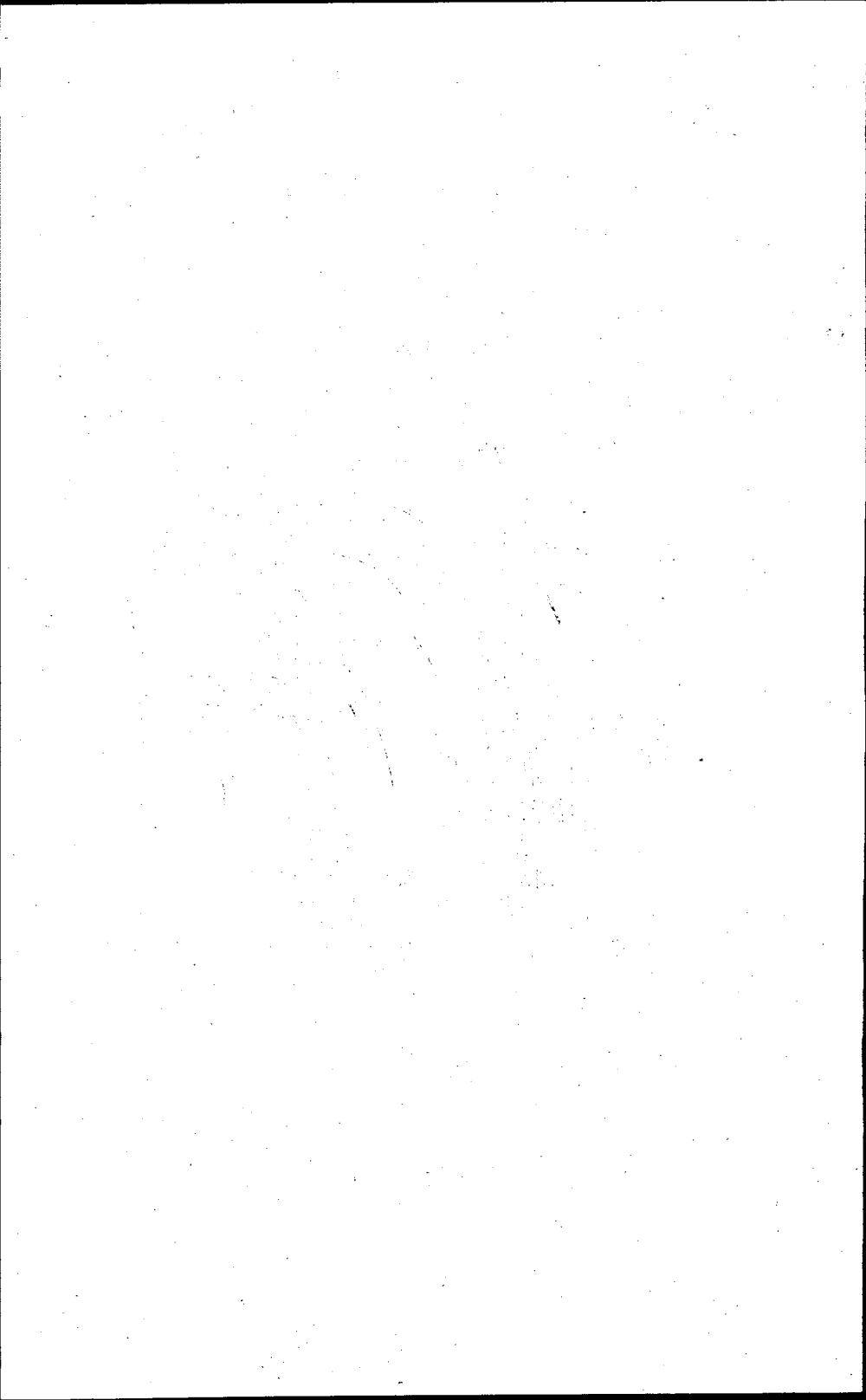
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ROMANO-BRITISH VASE

FOUND IN THE GRAVE AT HUNSTANTON.

Drawn about half the size of original.



XXXII. SHORT STATEMENT RELATIVE TO SOME ROMAN
GRAVES FOUND AT HUNSTANTON. Communicated
by WM. WHITE, Esq., Sub-Librarian of Trinity
College. (With one plate.)

[May 24, 1880.]

DURING a short visit to Hunstanton, in October 1879, a rumour reached me of some Pottery having been found by workmen who were employed in excavating for the new Esplanade and Swimming Baths, in course of erection there. On enquiring at the works, the men told me that they had dug up three urns; the first of which, having been broken, was thrown away; I have since ascertained that a portion of this urn was secured by J. H. Scott Durbin, Esq., of Hunstanton; the second was purchased by a gentleman passing at the time it was found; the third, which they produced in a broken state and which proves to be imperfect, is the one before you (figured on the accompanying plate), and is at present in my own possession. All three graves were discovered in September of the same year.

I am not aware that there is anything remarkable about the urn exhibited, nor would it have been brought before you, but for the evidence that it affords in support of my opinion that the workmen had come across some Roman graves.

Knowing the proneness of such men to impose upon likely purchasers, I asked to be shewn the spots whence

the urns had been taken. At the places indicated, I perceived that the face of the cliff presented sectional views of three narrow pits, the limits of which were marked out by a series of perpendicular and horizontal lines of shells. The first pit shewed only a white horizontal line of about 10 or 12 inches in length, being evidently the bottom of the pit, which was formed of the flat valve of the oyster, with a few other small shells intermixed; this I was able to trace back for nearly 3 feet, finding, as I did so, that the width did not exceed 13 or 14 inches.

The second pit presented in section a similar horizontal line to the last, with the addition of a perpendicular line at either end. By carefully removing the soil from between these lines, I hoped to find this pit in a comparatively perfect condition, but unfortunately, at a distance of only four inches, I was met by a facing of shells, shewing that the greater part had been dug away by the workmen, and that what I now saw was one end only of the pit. In this case the sides and end were composed entirely of mussels, the bottom, as in the last case, being covered with the shell of the oyster.

The third pit seemed more perfect, as in the section the outline presented the four sides of a square; but this also had been dug away, so that a very little trouble sufficed to lay bare the end. I found then that I had before me a cavity about 20 inches broad by 14 inches high, the sides and end of which were lined with mussels, and the top and bottom were formed of the flat valve of the oyster.

In removing the earth from between these lines, I came across a fragment of the urn I possessed, on the very spot where the workmen told me they had found it. This, of course, served to corroborate the truth of their statement that the urn was found there.

All three pits were on the same level, at about $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet below the surface, just resting on the top of the Carstone,—the

first having its longest length due North and South, the other two due East and West.

Now from the measurements, the position, and the depth below the surface, I do not think it too much to assume that these pits were really graves, their peculiarity seeming to consist in their being thus lined with shells. And assuming them to be graves, the spot appears to have been well chosen for such a purpose, for it is just here that the Chalk and the Red Limestone both crop out; so that, instead of finding not more than 8 or 10 inches of subsoil, which is the case all around, you have here a depth of 5 or 6 feet of subsoil, overlaying many feet of the soft Carstone, before you arrive at the hard Green Sandstone. Again, the finding of urns in these pits, goes, I think, far towards *proving* them to be graves; one, in all probability, having been placed in each. And, if we take for granted that they are graves, then the urns, without doubt, shew them to be Roman graves, seeing that these are of the common shape and make of the Roman urn.

Their proximity to Brannodunum, a Roman station about six miles north of this place, would also give force to this opinion, especially as a Roman Road, known as the Pedar's Way, which ran from Camulodunum (Colchester) to Brannodunum (Brancaster), passed close by the spot. And we know that it was the custom of the Romans to bury their dead by the sides of their roads, not only in Rome, along the Via Appia, but also in this and other countries. Most of the Roman curiosities discovered at Colchester were found on either side of the Roman Way. The famous bas-relief of the Roman Centurion, now in the very interesting museum of Mr George Joslin at Colchester, and figured both in Farrar's *Life of Christ*, p. 708, and Lewin's *Life and Epistles of St Paul*, Vol. II. p. 182, had fallen on its face on the Roman Road, thus fortunately preserving the figure, whilst its back had become smooth by the constant traffic.

The fact that no coins, bronze implements, nor ornaments of any kind have at present been found here, may perhaps be accounted for by considering this place, at that time, to have been but an out-station or village, and consequently that none but the poorer sort of people would be likely to be buried here.

It is probable that these graves were originally far in-land ; for we learn from Blomefield (in his *History of Norfolk*) that in his time the sea had gained on the land nearly two miles ; and, since then, every season has seen the fall and the washing away of large masses of cliff.

On this cliff, at a short distance to the north of these graves, stand the remains of a chapel said to have been built by St Edmund, but more probably built and dedicated to him about the time of Edward I. The little that remains of it shews it to have been constructed almost entirely of stones from the cliff. The story of St Edmund landing here, and remaining two years on this spot, whilst he committed to memory the whole of the book of Psalms in the Saxon language, will not bear investigation. That he landed here is perhaps not altogether improbable, as no doubt the beach was then of a very different character from that of the present day.