

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME XLVIII

JANUARY 1954 TO DECEMBER 1954

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DEIGHTON BELL

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BRONZE AGE BURIALS AT HOW HILL, ICKLINGHAM

GRACE BRISCOE, F.S.A.

THE HOW HILL tumulus, capped with a group of fir trees, is a well-known landmark on the west verge of the main road between Barton Mills and Thetford, $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the south-west of Elveden. There is no record that this tumulus has been examined, beyond a note from the late W. G. Clarke, preserved in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge, saying that a 'cinerary urn had been found there and broken up'.

In January 1953 the field on the opposite side of the road, part of the Elveden estate of the Earl of Iveagh, was deep ploughed. On a gentle slope, 250 yards to the south of the visible tumulus, the ploughman noticed the upturn of some black patches of soil, put his spade into two of them and struck in one case a pottery vessel and in the other a skull. He reported to the police and I was asked to give an opinion on the date of the bones.

At the first spot (Nat. Grid 52/759760) I found a heap of spoil, containing many newly broken sherds of a collared urn, numerous fragments of cremated bones and pieces of charcoal. At the second spot, the dome of a skull was showing in the line of the furrow. The lower jaw and some teeth had been collected from the plough upturn.

The plough had turned up soil to the depth of 1 ft. It was clear that the natural chalk had a wavy surface, with ridges running in an east-west direction at intervals of a few yards, as the plough in travelling north-south turned up about 3 in. of chalk on to the surface and then passed through yellow gravelly subsoil. There was therefore a regular pattern running down the slope, of strips of chalk upturn alternating with gravelly strips.

SITE A. This site was in the middle of one of the chalk strips. The vertical section made by the plough and left untouched by the ploughman showed 9 in. of top soil with 3 in. of chalk, with black discoloration in the lower half. Below the discoloration was a hole in the chalk, reaching to a depth of 2 ft. from the surface. The ploughman had cleared the hole of part of the vessel and all the cremated bones. At the bottom of the hole was a circle of pottery, evidently the rim of a vessel upside down. White chalk was showing inside the circle. The remains of the vessel were removed with difficulty, as one side was jammed up against the wall of the hole and adhered to it. The chalk wall behind was cut through and the sherds detached after they had hardened. At the bottom of the hole and outside the rim there was a large base sherd which proved to belong to another pot. The only other find was a lump of slag in the black spoil.

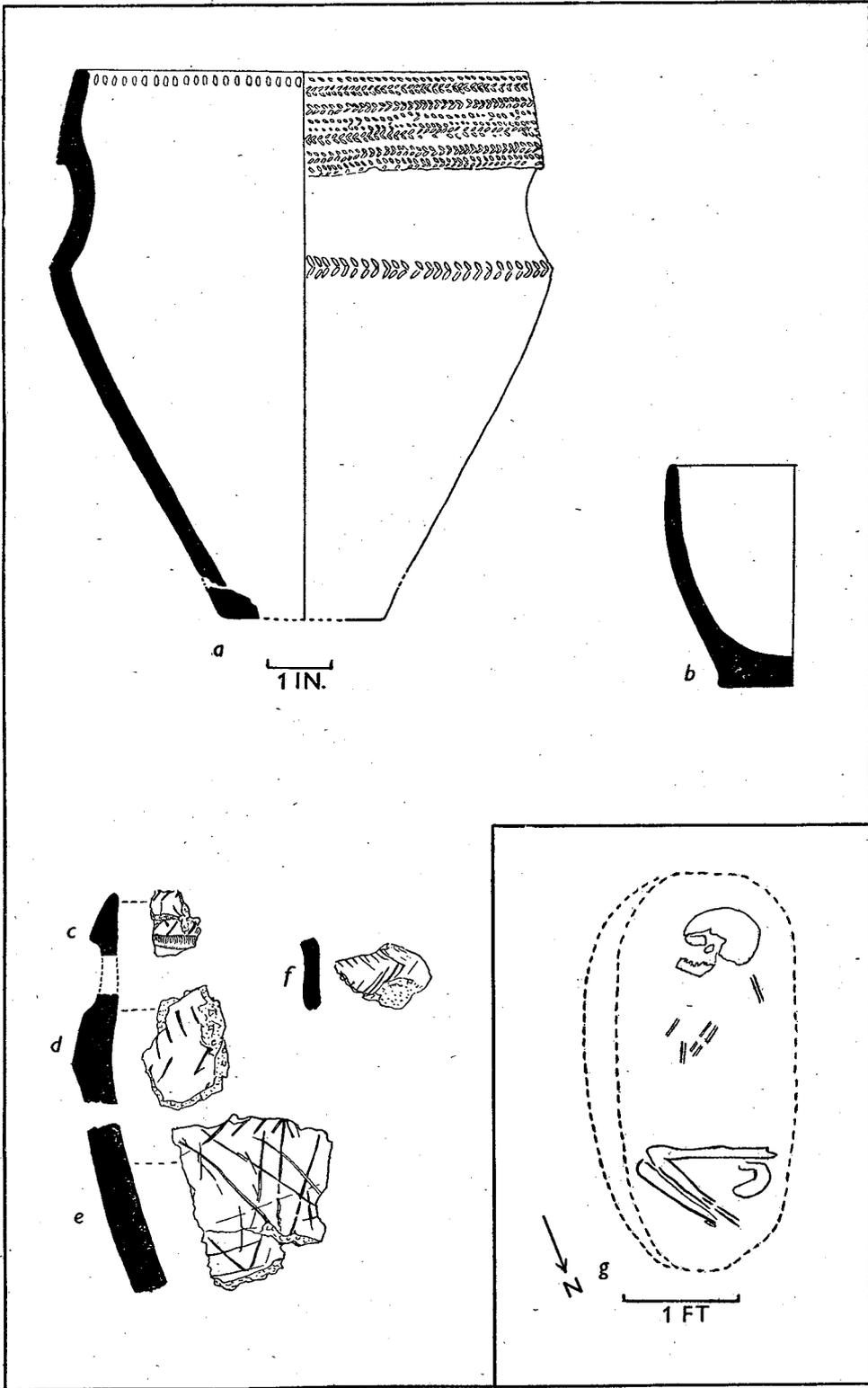


Fig. 1

- a. Cremation urn from site A. b. Accessory vessel from site A. c, d and e. Food vessel sherds from site C. f. Buff sherd from site C.
 (All the above are one-third natural size)
 g. Grave and skeleton from site B (scale as shown)

SITE B. Twelve feet to the north-west of site A, a black patch of soil covered a hollow in the chalk which contained a skeleton lying on its right side in a crouched position facing north-east (Fig. 1g). The grave was $3\frac{1}{2}$ ft. long, $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. wide and about 7 in. deep. The skull was in a fair state of preservation, the leg bones, though broken, were in position with the knees drawn up towards the chin, the pelvis had been reduced to powder and there was no sign of the vertebrae. The bones, probably those of a boy about 11 years old, were examined by Dr J. C. Trevor of the Duckworth Laboratory, Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. No grave goods were found.

SITE C. Black soil showed on the plough upturn 73 ft. to the north-east of site A. The underlying black patch measured 3 ft. by 2 ft., two-thirds in a chalk hollow, the rest in gravel. It contained some sherds of food-vessel type, charcoal, burnt chalk and stones, a scrap of bone and some yellowish patches of coarse powder which may have been decayed bone.

SITE D. Thirty-six feet to the north-east of site A another patch of black soil was noticed, but the underlying discoloured soil was shallow and nothing of interest was found.

SITE E. Nine feet to the north-east of site A a small piece of bone was seen in black upturn. The underlying patch of blackish soil was diffuse and contained more pieces of cranial bone almost certainly human from an inhumation. The only sherd of pottery found was dark grey with regular lines of rouletting.

THE POTTERY

The cinerary urn from site A was badly broken, with ancient and recent fractures. As it was inverted the plough or spade had caught the base and smashed it into small pieces, though enough was recovered to define its shape. The urn is reddish buff in colour with numerous particles of grit, mainly thin chips of flint. Inside, the colour is a light yellow at the top merging into a dense black at the base. It seems probable that hot remains of the cremation were placed in the vessel when upright, since the paste in its lower half is hard and black (except for the outer surface), while the collared rim is buff coloured throughout and remains fragile even after being treated with preservative (Fig. 1a). The overhanging rim is ornamented with parallel rows of twisted string impressions with alternate rows showing the twist in the opposite direction. On the sharply defined shoulder there is a line of large deeply cut chevrons. The neck externally is hollow. The inside of the rim, immediately below the lip, is decorated with a regular line of stabs, and below this is a slight hollowing. This internal decoration and hollow neck suggests that the date can be placed early in the Middle Bronze Age period. The urn is $9\frac{1}{2}$ in. high. In general shape it resembles the large ($17\frac{1}{2}$ in. high) cinerary urn found by C. S. Leaf¹ in a Bronze Age barrow at Chippenham. A closer parallel in size and decoration is the urn from Water Newton, near Peterborough.²

¹ C. S. Leaf, *Proc. C.A.S.* xxxvi, pp. 142-55, Pl. VI.

² Abercromby, *Bronze Age Pottery*, II, p. 116, Pl. LXVII, No. 74.

A small accessory vessel was found in association with this cinerary urn (Fig. 1*b*). As described above its base was lying undisturbed at the bottom of the hole just outside the inverted rim of the urn. Other sherds were in the black spoil. The paste is coarse, badly fired and mud-coloured throughout. The grit consists mainly of small whole pebbles and lumps of chalk. The rim is straight, but in one sherd it enlarges to a bulge which is broken off, possibly the remains of a handle or lug.

The sherds found in site C probably all belong to one vessel, with one exception. The ware is thick and coarse, brick red in colour and contains a large admixture of flint. The collared rim is unusually small for such a large vessel and is decorated with slanting incised lines on internal and external surfaces (Fig. 1*c*). A rim of similar shape was found by J. G. D. Clark in the Early Bronze Age pottery at Peacock's Farm, Shippea Hill.¹ The shoulder is flattened and has a rough decoration of incisions, resembling the pattern on one of the Beacon Hill sherds (Fig. 1*d*).² The body has a network of shallow lines below a row of slanting incisions (Fig. 1*e*). One sherd of a thinner buff-coloured pot has a network of shallow closely grouped lines (Fig. 1*f*).

The small sherd found on site E does not resemble the other pottery in paste or colour or decoration. The dark grey ware is thin and smooth and the rouletted decoration is carefully done.

DISCUSSION

These rescue operations have disclosed the presence of inhumation and cremation burials, associated with Bronze Age pottery of early type.

The close proximity of a standing tumulus suggests that the remains are on the site of a ploughed out tumulus, of which no trace remains. It may have been one of a group of four, as 2 miles to the east there are the visible, though flattened, remains of four tumuli, spaced at intervals of 150–200 yards. Beacon Hill, 4 miles to the south-west, had four tumuli up to 1868, only one of which is visible at the present day. Fox examined this one and suggested a very early date in the Bronze Age for the burials.³

At How Hill the inhumation in a crouched position indicates an Early Bronze Age burial. The cremation urn (site A) with its decoration and slight hollow inside the neck suggests the early part of the Middle Bronze Age. The food vessel and the single sherd with rouletting indicate the period before the full Middle Bronze Age.

The whole group resembles the vessels found at Sheepdown, described by J. W. Brailsford,⁴ who regards them as a natural development from Food Vessel and Peterborough ancestors.

¹ J. G. D. Clark, *Antiq. J.* xv, p. 284.

² C. Fox, *Proc. C.A.S.* xxvi, p. 54.

³ *Ibid.* p. 47.

⁴ Atkinson, Wakefield and Brailsford, *Arch. J.* cviii (1951), p. 16.

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