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PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LXI

JANUARY 1968 TO DECEMBER 1968

CAMBRIDGE
DEIGHTON BELL
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A ROMANO-BRITISH SETTLEMENT SITE AT BRICKHILLS ESTATE, EYNESBURY, HUNTS

GRANVILLE T. RUDD AND COLIN DAINES

THE site, TL/188593, lies beside Cemetery Lane in Eynesbury, on ground which rises from Hen Brook on the north and east sides, to the modern cemetery on the south. The theory has been expressed that Cemetery Lane follows in part the line of a Roman road from Sandy. Proof is yet wanting for this, but certainly Roman sites occur along its suggested route. The present site was discovered when the land was taken for building purposes, and the removal of topsoil for roads and the digging of trenches for foundations and mains services revealed dark areas and large quantities of pottery fragments. Work on the site began early in 1966 and went on through 1967.

Little detailed investigation of the site was possible since we were not able to follow features which ran under houses, brick-clamps and the like. We therefore had to content ourselves with the examination of such features as occurred in the open spaces. A considerable amount of pottery was collected in this way, but without giving us much idea of the overall nature of the site.

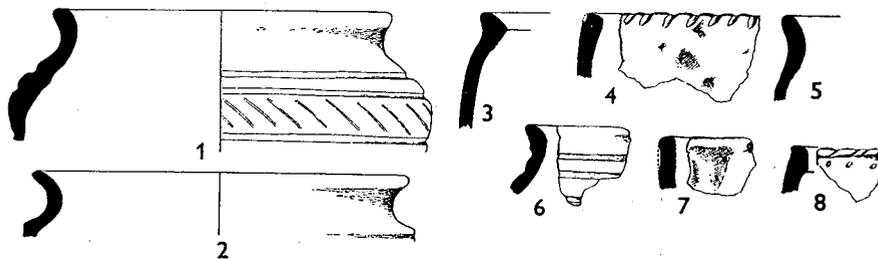


Fig. 1. Native Iron Age pottery from hut floor, Brickhills Estate, Eynesbury. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

Two features, apparently circular, about 15 ft across, surrounded by large cobbles, and having postholes at the edge, had a hard, black, level fill to a thickness of 6 in., containing fragments of burnt daub and domestic pottery (Fig. 1). These features could well have represented huts, but excavation was limited to cleaning and recording the sections cut by the builder's foundation trenches.

Many pits and ditches were cut into, as building work progressed, and several of these could be wholly or partly excavated. In general, those features on the south-west of the site, including the (?) huts mentioned above, were earlier in date than the majority over the rest of the area, and contained potsherds of late Belgic types, often handmade and dating from about 50 B.C. to about A.D. 50. Features over the remainder

of the site produced sherds mostly of the late first century A.D., but with a few which extended into the early third century A.D. A large V-shaped ditch was located and sectioned in several places and could have represented the boundary to the settlement, for, although pits occurred beyond it, they appeared to be fewer and to belong to the later part of the occupation on the site. A series of platters and cooking pots found as a stratified group in the fill of this ditch are illustrated in Fig. 2.

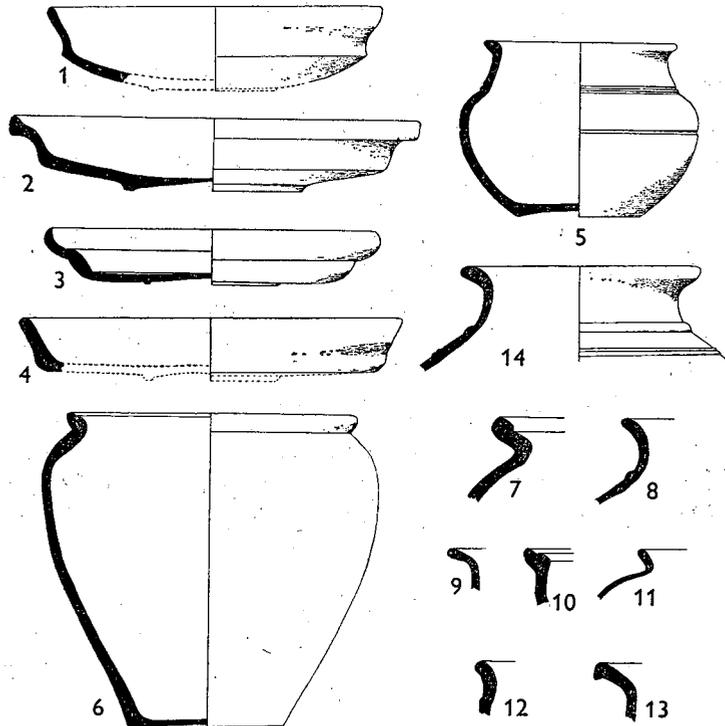


Fig. 2. Pottery from Roman ditch, Brickhills Estate, Eynesbury. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

An interesting feature of the site was a cremation burial of the later first century A.D.; the ashes were in a cordoned whiteware pot of which the upper part had been ploughed away, but which was reminiscent of face urns found at Colchester. With the burial were two small glass vessels, a flask in plain blue-green glass 10 cm high, and a 'test-tube' unguentarium 8 cm high, also in plain blue-green glass. The latter contained a blue-grey powder and a broken, but bluntly resharpened, bone needle, probably the remains of a cosmetic or ointment and the ligula used with it; the bone is stained green, as if it had been in contact with copper. The true nature of the contents is awaiting identification by analysis (see Fig. 4). A structure (see plan, Fig. 3), consisting of wooden boards 2 in. thick, supported by split stakes, had been erected around two sides of the burial, extending 7 ft to the north, where a return was made to the east. The boards had been covered with a thin layer of very hard, fine plaster, and had been painted with orange-red paint. This painted plaster remained on both

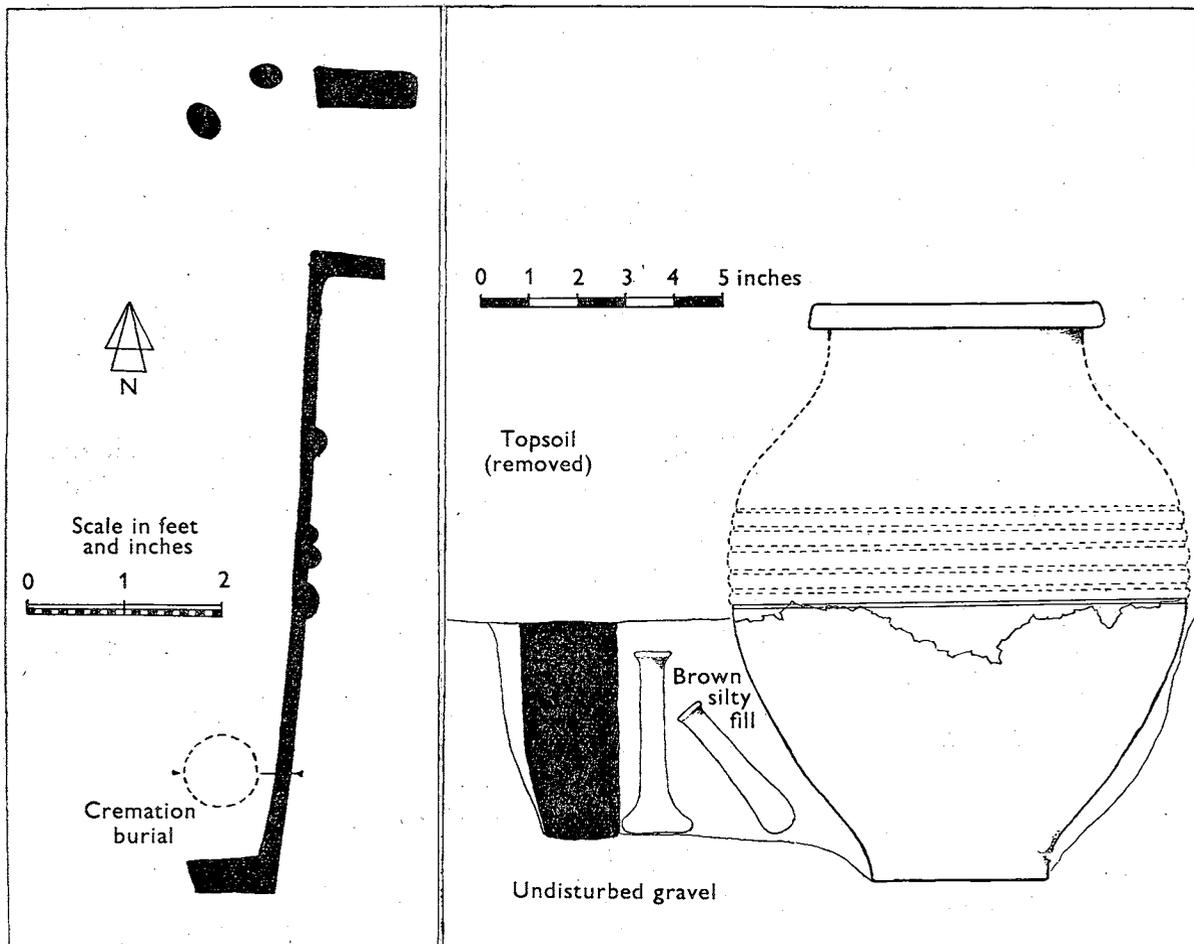


Fig. 3. Roman cremation, Brickhills Estate, Eynesbury. Left: plan of structure round the cremation. Right: diagrammatic section of the cremation burial showing its relation to the timber structure.

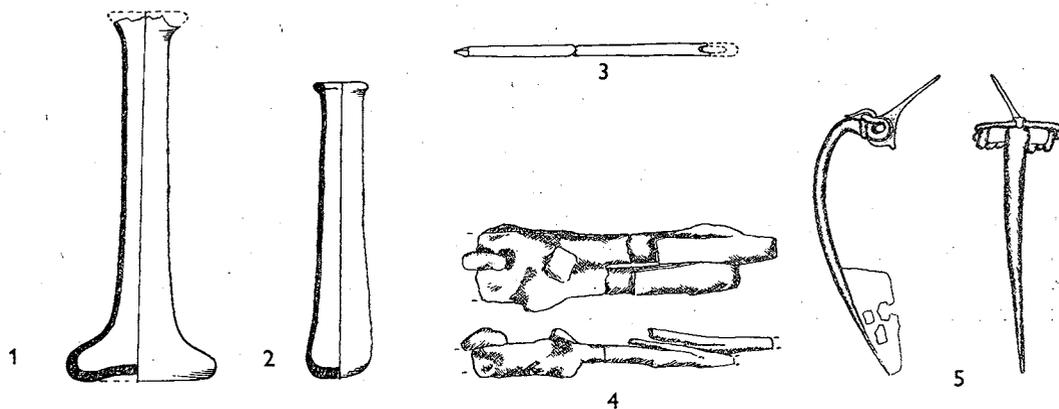


Fig. 4. Grave goods from Roman cremation burial. Scale $\frac{1}{2}$.

sides of the wood, indicating that the structure had probably been free-standing like a headboard rather than enclosing the area of the burial like a tomb. No trace of its having continued beyond the point planned could be found at either end, although a careful search was made. Its shape would therefore suggest that a second burial was intended for the other angle, but no evidence for this could be found, other than a few scraps of burnt bone which could equally well have been scattered by ploughing from the recorded cremation.

A bronze fibula (Collingwood Group F) in excellent condition was found, together with more traces of calcined bone, in spoil from a workman's trench nearby (Fig. 4, no. 5). This could have been from another cremation burial, but no pot or grave goods were found.

The writers would like to thank the builders, Messrs Henry J. Firman Ltd, and the Engineer and Surveyor of St Neots Urban District Council for their helpful co-operation.

THE FINDS

Native Iron Age pottery (Fig. 1)

Some of these sherds (e.g. Fig. 1; 1, 2, 6) appear to be Belgic wheel-thrown forms, but are in fact made by hand.

Romano-British pottery from ditch (Fig. 2)

1. Platter in black burnished ware. Rim diameter *c.* 7 in.
2. Platter in smooth grey-buff fabric. Rim diameter *c.* 8½ in.
3. Platter in fine grey-brown ware. Rim diameter *c.* 7 in.
4. Platter in buff gritty fabric. Rim diameter *c.* 8 in.
5. Small bowl in fine, sand-gritted brown ware. Rim diameter *c.* 4 in.
6. Cooking pot in brown, shell-gritted fabric with flaky surface. Rim diameter *c.* 6 in.
7. Rim in sandy fabric, fumed red to black. Internally grooved for lid. Diameter *c.* 9½ in.
8. Rim of cordoned cooking pot in brown gritty ware. Diameter *c.* 7 in.
9. Splayed rim in brown fabric with sandy texture. Diameter *c.* 7¼ in.
10. Rim in red, shell-gritted fabric. Internally grooved for lid. Diameter *c.* 6 in.
11. Rim in fine grey burnished ware. Diameter *c.* 4 in.
12. Rim in grey sandy fabric. Diameter *c.* 5 in.
13. Rim in brown fabric with mica. Diameter *c.* 11 in.
14. Rim of cordoned pot in buff fabric with dark grey core. Diameter *c.* 5 in.

Grave goods from Roman cremation burial (Fig. 4)

- 1, 2. Unguentaria in plain blue-green glass.
3. Bone needle, broken, but with re-cut point; green staining.
4. Iron object with sprung vanes; probably a fragment of a lock.
5. Bronze fibula, Collingwood Group F.

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