

PROCEEDINGS  
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CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN  
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



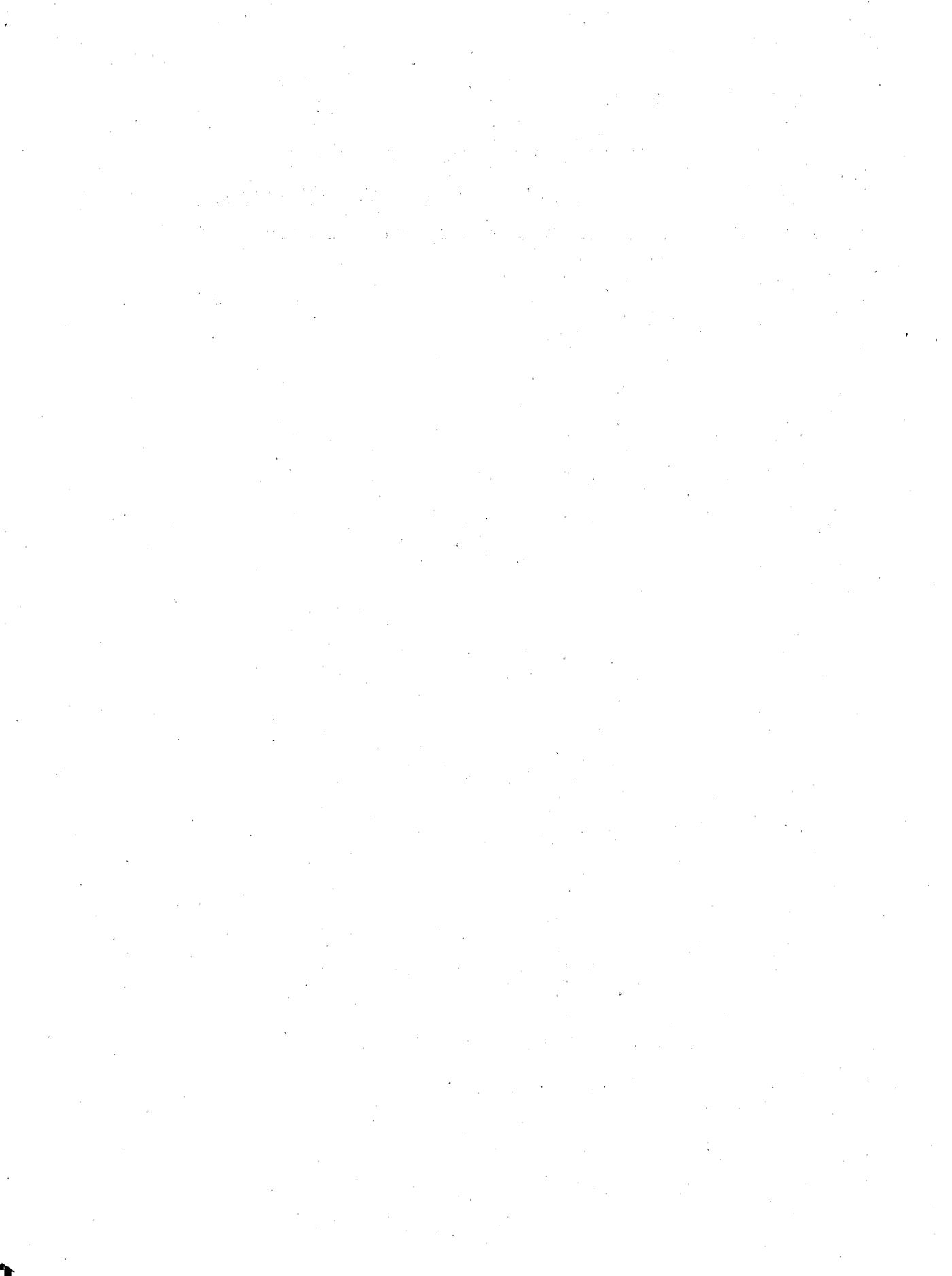
VOLUME LXIII

JANUARY 1971 TO DECEMBER 1971

IMRAY LAURIE NORIE AND WILSON

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# ROMAN BURIALS FOUND AT DULOE ROAD, EATON FORD, NEAR ST NEOTS, HUNTINGDONSHIRE IN 1968

G. T. RUDD AND C. DAINES

THE site, National Grid Reference TL 171605, lies in arable land known as Windmill Field on Duloe Hill, Eaton Ford, Huntingdonshire, 125 yards west of the Great North Road. It was discovered on 10 September 1968 by Mr D. Lincoln, when the mole drainer he was using struck the lid of a stone coffin. The find was promptly reported to the owner of the land, Mr G. Brittain of Hail Weston, who informed the police and one of the writers. When a rescue excavation was begun the same evening, the lid of the coffin had been removed, and the contents were found to be disturbed, so that excavation of the burial *in situ* was not possible. As many of the bones as could be recovered were collected for expert examination and were sent to Mr C. B. Denston of the Duckworth Laboratory of Physical Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, who kindly supplied the note added as an appendix to this report. No grave goods, other than four tiny body sherds of undatable shell-gritted pottery, were discovered. A fragment of decorative ironwork found in the coffin (Fig. 2, no. 1) could be a recent intrusion.

A rectangular cutting, 9 ft by 6 ft, was dug around the coffin in the hope of discovering its date and the manner of burial. When the topsoil had been removed, the shape of the grave could be seen as a slightly darker area around the coffin, approximately 7 ft 6 in. long and 3 ft 6 in. wide (see Plan, Fig. 1, Burial I). The grave was then excavated, and was shown to be a little over 2 ft deep below the modern plough level (section, Fig. 2). In its fill were scraps of featureless black and shell-gritted pottery, a base sherd of brown gritty ware, and a sherd of black colour-coated pottery with rouletted decoration of the late third or fourth century A.D. Fragments of human bone in the grave fill suggest that earlier burials had been made in the area.

At the S.W. corner of the coffin was a large post hole, about 12 in. in diameter and at least 15 in. deep, and at the N.W. and N.E. corners were smaller post holes, each 3 in. in diameter. These could have been the remains of a wooden framework erected over the grave to support pulley blocks used to lower the coffin into position. At the east end of the grave a slight slope down to the level of the lid was noticed.

Near the N.E. corner of the coffin, barely 6 in. below the modern plough level, was a pile of human bones (Burial II), none articulated, but carefully laid with the long bones lying more or less parallel. The skeleton was incomplete, and among the bones were many iron nails, suggesting that the burial had originally been in a

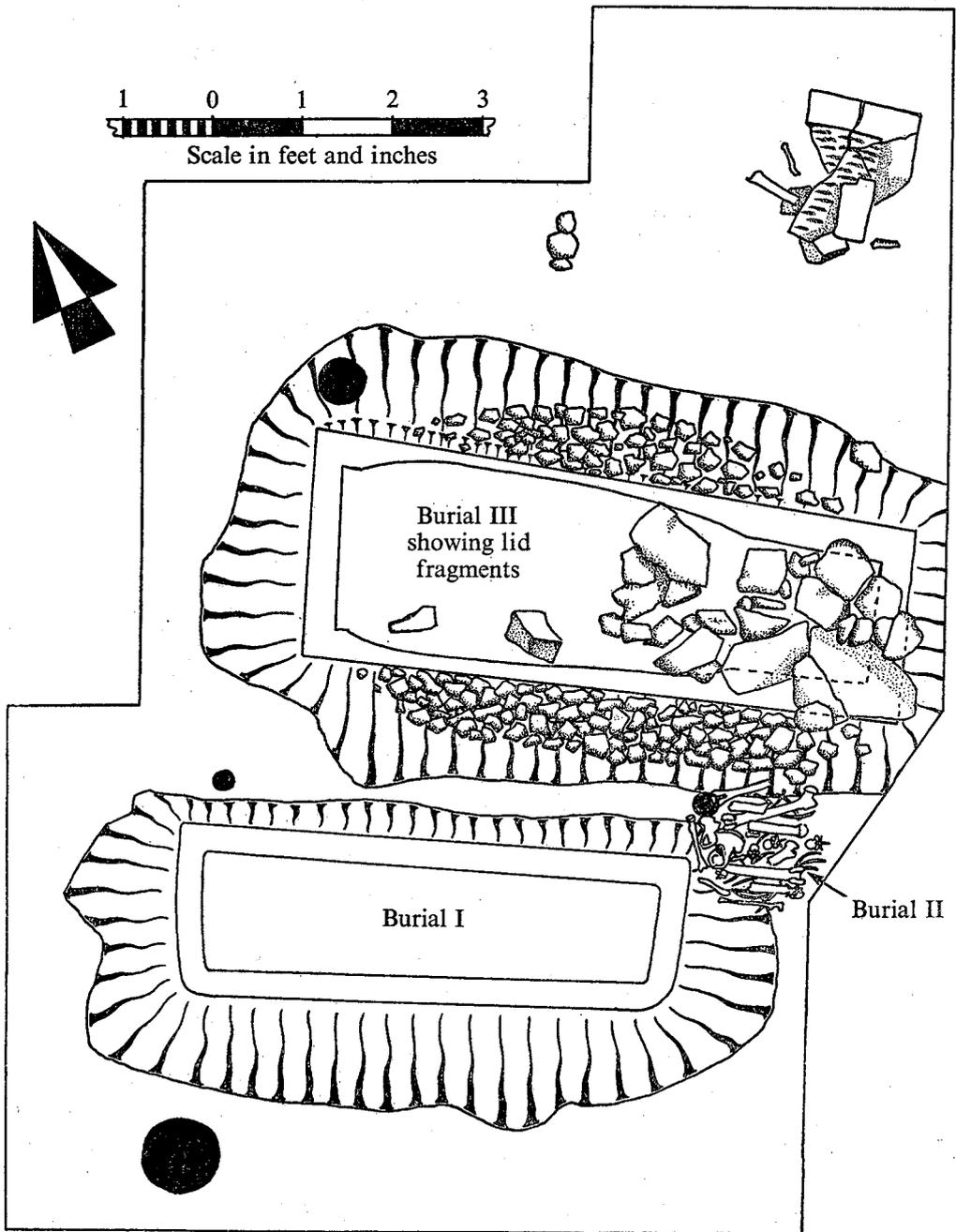


Fig. 1. Plan of Roman burial site at Eaton Ford.

wooden coffin elsewhere, and had been disturbed and reburied. A rim sherd of black colour-coated pottery among the bones suggests that this burial also was made in the third or fourth century, although it is clearly later than Burial I, since it overlay the fill of the latter's grave.

Along the north side of the cutting, an area of Barnack stone chips was found. These appeared to be the result of dressing a coffin or lid on the site. A slightly darker soil area was noted in the vicinity of the stone. At the junction of this dark soil with the bones of Burial II was found a small, twisted fragment of decorated bronze, probably part of a finger ring or bracelet (Fig. 3, no. 2). A small extension of the cutting northwards across the layer of stone chips, to ascertain its extent, struck the side of a second stone coffin almost at once. Thus the dark soil surrounding the stone coffin represented the fill of another grave, with the Barnack chips lying over it (see Plan, Fig. 1, Burial III).

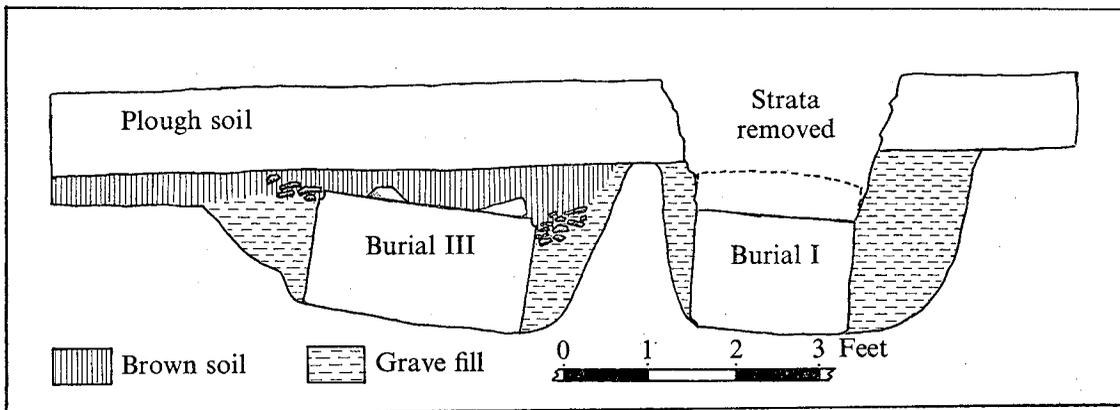


Fig. 2. Section across burials.

A second cutting, again 9 ft by 6 ft, was dug as an extension to the first on the latter's north side, in the hope of excavating a burial *in situ*. Immediately the plough soil was removed, an area of broken stone was visible over the grave, some of the lumps quite large and with flat, dressed faces. Further excavation revealed that these stones were the remains of the lid of the coffin, about 3 in. thick, which had been deliberately smashed in antiquity. Traces of charcoal and several iron nails were found in the upper level of fill in the coffin, suggesting that wooden boards had been placed over the coffin, and the remains of the lid piled on the top – perhaps to hide the results of grave robbing.

As the fill of the coffin was removed to the level of the bones, it became very apparent that the burial had been much disturbed, for with the exception of the feet and the left leg below the knee, the bones were scattered about the coffin in complete disorder. This disturbance must have taken place not long after the burial, certainly while traces of cartilage remained, for the skull and lower jaw remained articulated, as did several vertebrae. The right tibia and fibula were articulated at the ankle but

separated at the knee. No evidence of recent disturbance was found, in fact an unbroken Roman layer extended right over the burial (see brown soil layer in section, Fig. 2). Potsherds found in this layer were more plentiful, and consisted mostly of colour-coated wares, including the base and rim of a Castor Ware folded beaker. In this layer also were fragments of tegula and imbrex tiles, and part of a quern. Thus the lid had been smashed and the grave robbed during the Roman period, probably in the fourth century. Pottery from the fill of the coffin, thirteen sherds in all, ranged from Samian to Castor ware. A defaced coin, a typical small fourth-century type, was found in the coffin, and may have been Charon's fee or lost by the grave-robbers. A small fragment of iron wire twisted round a core may have come from the spring of an iron fibula brooch (Fig. 3, no. 3), and a short length of polished bone must be part of a bone pin.

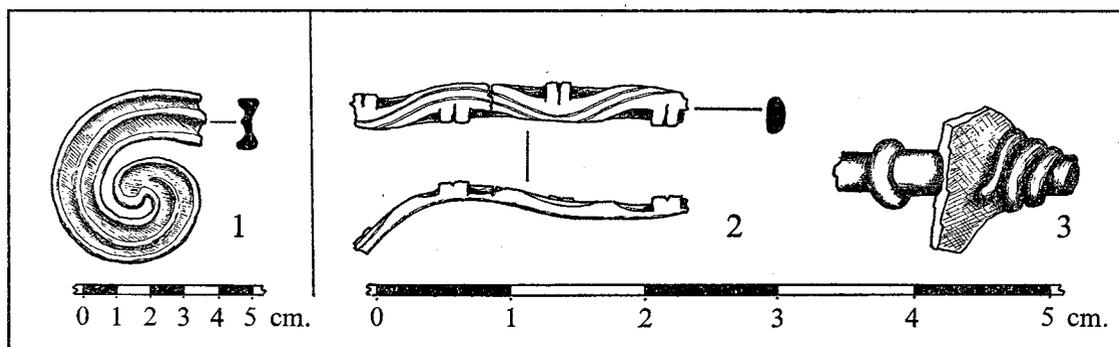


Fig. 3. Small metal objects from Roman burial site: 1. Iron mounting from coffin of Burial I. 2. Fragment of bronze finger ring or bracelet. 3. Spring of iron fibula brooch (?).

The fill of the grave was then excavated, and this, like that of Burial I, proved to be shallow and irregular, about 9 ft long and 5 ft wide. It contained a few sherds of coarse pottery, almost useless for dating purposes, but typical of late Roman wares.

A post hole, 6 in. in diameter and 12 in. deep, was found at the N.W. corner of the coffin.

Lumps of stone projecting from the section at the N.E. corner of the cutting were then explored by extending the cutting a further 2 ft to the north. They were found to be a broken fragment of the base of a third stone coffin, not buried, but lying immediately below the brown soil layer which covered, or perhaps represents, the efforts of the robbers. With the fragments were a tibia and clavicle of a fourth burial, clearly brought from elsewhere.

#### DISCUSSION

One wonders what can have occurred at our site. One would expect that a cemetery such as this must have been used by people living close by; people who could afford stone coffins in an area so far from the nearest supply of suitable stone must have been wealthy. A number of tesserae, of both the coarse and small decorative types,

building stone, tegula and imbrex and hypocaust-flue tile fragments, and potsherds have been found scattered over a large area on the surface of the surrounding land. Thus, we appear to have a prosperous community, living beside the Roman version of the Great North Road, and burying their dead on our site. Then, very soon after the burials excavated had been made, the situation seems suddenly to have become vastly changed. For the Romans to disturb a grave was a very serious offence, yet here we have disturbed burials, a freshly buried coffin robbed and its lid broken, and a third coffin smashed, dragged from its grave and left scattered about together with bones from it. Even if the brown layer which covers all this disturbance represents an attempt by the grave-robbers to level the site and hide their work, surely such widespread vandalism cannot have gone unnoticed, and an attempt made to tidy up, if people were still living as close as the surface indications suggest. Perhaps, at some future date, excavation of the settlement may provide evidence of its sudden end and devastation. It may not be reading too much into the evidence, however scanty it may be, to see here the results of the concerted raids of the Picts, Scots, Saxons and others that followed the Barbarian Agreement of A.D. 367, and during which much of England was laid waste as far south as London.

#### THE STONE COFFINS

The coffin containing Burial I was carved from a block of Barnack stone. Its sides are roughly dressed externally with an adze or broad chisel. The ends are slightly bowed. Internally the sides are finished very finely and are quite smooth, but the bottom is very roughly cut, as though it was meant to be covered by some sort of padding or lining. The lid is coarsely tooled externally with a smooth underside. The measurements are as follows:

Internal	External
Length: 5 ft 3½ in.	Length: 5 ft 10 in.
Width at head: 1 ft 5 in.	Width at head: 2 ft 0 in.
Width at foot: 1 ft 4 in.	Width at foot: 1 ft 11 in.
Depth at head: 11½ in.	Depth at head: 1 ft 4 in.
Depth at foot: 1 ft 0 in.	Depth at foot: 1 ft 5½ in.

The lid is 6 ft 1½ in. long, 2 ft 3 in. wide at the head, 2 ft 0 in. wide at the foot, and varying in thickness from 5 to 6 in. This coffin has been presented to Bedford Museum.

The stone from which the coffin containing Burial III was carved is described by Dr C. L. Forbes of the Sedgwick Museum of Geology, Cambridge as a 'perfect match with Ancaster limestone, but could easily be Barnack'. Externally its sides are roughly tooled into a diagonal raised pattern with the rim and edges dressed smooth. The angles are decidedly off-square. Internally the tooling is smooth, again with a very roughly cut bottom. The sides have been recut from shoulder to hip level by chipping out the walls to accommodate a broad body. The lid is fragmentary.

The measurements are as follows:

Internal	External
Length: 6 ft 0½ in.	Length: 6 ft 9½ in.
Width at head: 1 ft 7½ in.	Width at head: 2 ft 7 in.
Width at foot: 1 ft 2½ in.	Width at foot: 2 ft 1½ in.
(Recut width from shoulder to hip: 2 ft 1 in.)	
Depth at head: 1 ft 0 in.	Depth at head: 1 ft 5 in.
Depth at foot: 1 ft 0 in.	Depth at foot: 1 ft 3 in.
Lid thickness: 3-4 in.	

At the time of writing, this coffin has been retained by Mr Brittain at his farm at Hail Weston, Huntingdonshire.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writers would like to thank everyone who helped in any way with the excavation or with the preparation of this report. In particular, thanks are due to Mr G. Brittain for allowing them to excavate on his land and for providing equipment and labour in lifting the coffins, to Mr C. B. Denston for examining the human remains, to Dr C. L. Forbes for identifying the stone of the coffins, to Miss M. D. Cra'ster for her help and advice given in the preparation of this report and for acting as a 'clearing house' between the people involved, and to Dr Bushnell, Miss Liversidge and members of the Museum staff for their interest and help.

#### APPENDIX

*Human Remains From Duloe Hill, Eaton Ford, St Neots*

C. B. DENSTON

*Duckworth Laboratory of Physical Anthropology, Department of Archaeology  
and Anthropology, University of Cambridge*

#### BURIAL I

##### *Sex*

Features of the bones for ascertaining the sex overwhelmingly suggested the individual was a female.

##### *Age at death*

30-40 years. This is a tentative estimate of age at death, as conflicting ages were suggested from the two criteria available, namely degree of closure of the sutures of the cranium and state of eruption and degree of attrition of the teeth. It is possible that the upper end of the age range is the more correct, as evidence of osteo-arthritis was detected on some vertebrae preserved, and it is more likely a person of forty years would suffer from this than one of thirty years.

##### *Stature*

Approximately 5 ft 3 in. Five long bones from the upper extremity and two of the lower extremity were sufficiently intact to enable the maximum-length measurements to be taken, so the estimate of stature can be regarded as fairly accurate.

### *General Pathology*

Of the vertebral column, the sacrum, the lumbar vertebrae, eight thoracic vertebrae, and four cervical vertebrae including the axis and atlas were sufficiently preserved to be examined for osteo-arthritis. Evidence of osteo-arthritis was detected in the form of 'lipping' at the border of the body of the sacrum, and in the form of osteophytic growth of bone on two of the thoracic vertebrae.

### *Dental pathology*

In the maxilla possibly fourteen teeth were present at time of death, with the first and second right molars lost *ante mortem*. *Post-mortem* loss had accounted for three molars, four incisors, two premolars, and one canine. Of the mandible, both third molars had never formed during life (congenital absence), the complement of teeth being fourteen. Of these, both second premolars had been lost *ante mortem*, and one incisor, one canine, and one premolar lost *post mortem*. A chronic abscess cavity extended over the area of the tooth sockets for the 1st-2nd right maxillary molars, completely obliterating the sockets and extending also to the sockets of the 3rd molar. Combined with the large abscess, a medium degree of periodontal disease was prevalent, the tooth sockets having a honeycomb appearance of minute foraminae. Medium deposits of calculus adhered to some of the teeth, and when occluded the dentition had an over-bite.

### *Non-metrical features*

A metopic suture was present on the frontal bone; a single parietal notch bone at the area of the left incisura parietalis; a possible slight degree of tori mandibulares, occurring bilaterally.

## BURIAL II

### *Sex*

The sex of this individual was male. The cranium was represented by only a few fragments, but one of the fragments was of a temporal bone displaying a large mastoid process, a male characteristic. The long bones were robust, and features of the innominate bones were typical of the male sex.

### *Age at death*

Approximately 30-35 years. This estimate of age at death is a tentative one, involving two doubtful criteria: the degree of closure of partial sutures of the cranial fragments and the appearance of one pubic symphysis.

### *Stature*

Approximately 5 ft 8½ in. One long bone of the lower extremity and four of the upper extremity were utilized to compute the stature.

### *General pathology*

Most of the vertebrae were either broken or eroded, but one thoracic vertebra displayed a medium degree of osteo-arthritis. The axis was ankylosed to the third cervical vertebra at the body area and also at the articular facets - possible cause, osteo-arthritis. Two other cervical vertebrae displayed signs of osteo-arthritis, one a slight degree, the other a medium degree. Evidence of osteo-arthritis was also present at the distal extremity of the 1st left metatarsal bone in the form

of 'eburnation' (the 'ivory' polish sometimes produced by bone moving on bone). One rib had been fractured during life.

*Dental pathology*

None.

*BURIAL III*

*Sex*

The sex of this individual was male. The skull was rather rugged, the long bones would have been large and robust though now mainly in fragments, and features of the pelvic bones confirmed the sex as male.

*Age at death*

Approximately 35-45 years. This estimate of developmental age was determined using three criteria: degree of closure of the sutures of the cranium; state of eruption and degree of attrition of the teeth; the appearance of the symphyseal face of the pubis. No conflict at all occurred between any of the criteria, all suggesting an age between 35 and 45 years at death.

*Stature*

Approximately 5 ft 6 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. Only two long bones were sufficiently preserved to enable the stature to be calculated, so this cannot be regarded as other than a tentative estimate.

*General pathology*

All the vertebrae were broken or eroded, but slight degrees of osteo-arthritis were noted on one lumbar vertebrae and one thoracic vertebra. Long bones of the upper and lower extremities exhibited possible light degrees of osteo-arthritis. Other bones affected were the 1st metacarpal bones of the hands, and the 1st metatarsal bones and phalanges of the feet. The metatarsals displayed slight 'eburnation'.

The cortical bone of the shaft of the left tibia had been infected during life, the bone displaying localized areas of thickening.

*Dental pathology*

All the maxillary teeth were present at death, but three incisors and one molar had been lost *post mortem*. Of the mandible, fifteen teeth remained *in situ*, with the third right molar possibly lost *ante mortem*. Periodontal infection, as judged from the recession of the alveolar borders, seemed likely to have been of a medium degree. Slight deposits of calculus adhered to some of the teeth, and the dentition when occluded had an edge-to-edge bite.

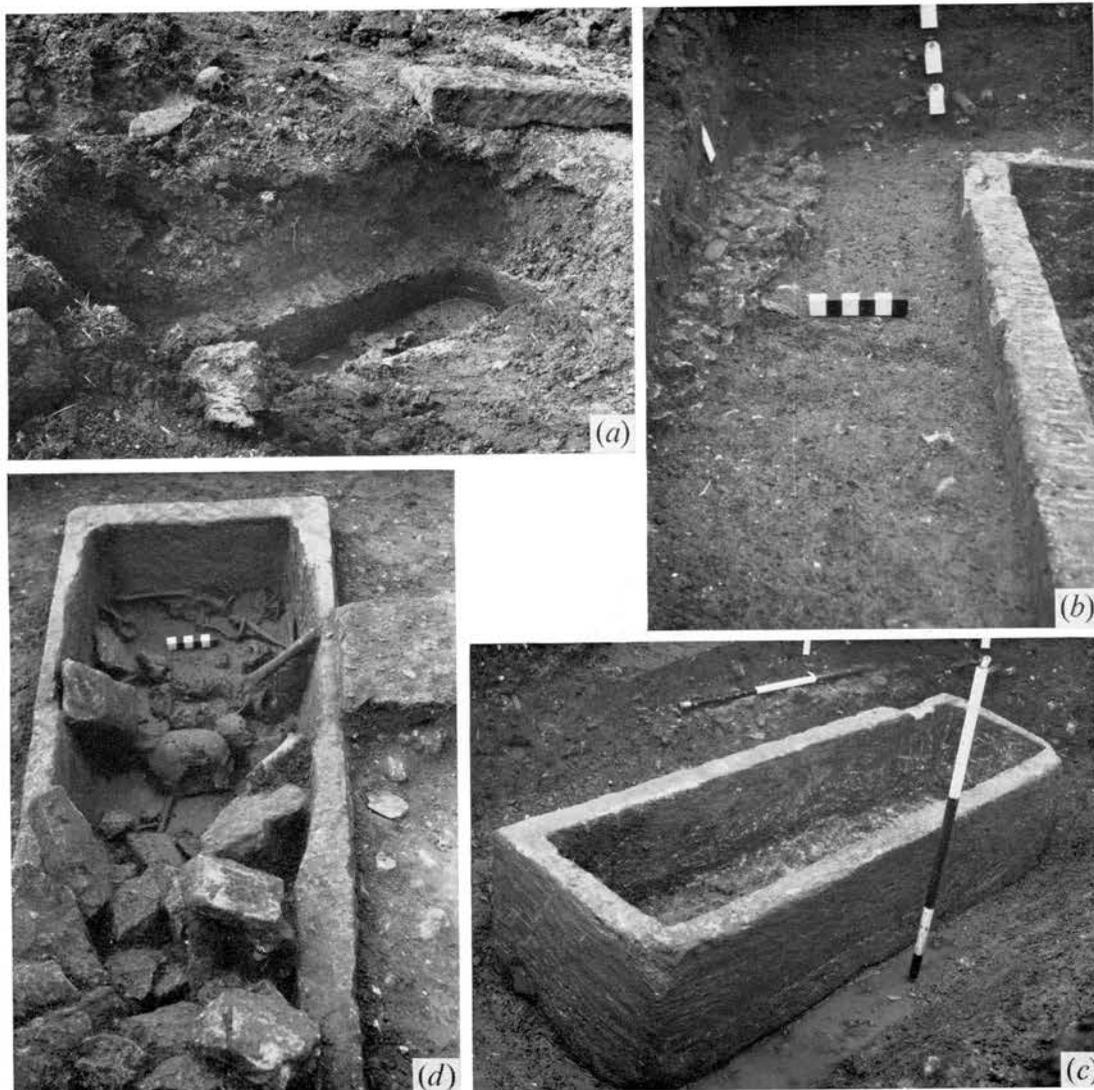
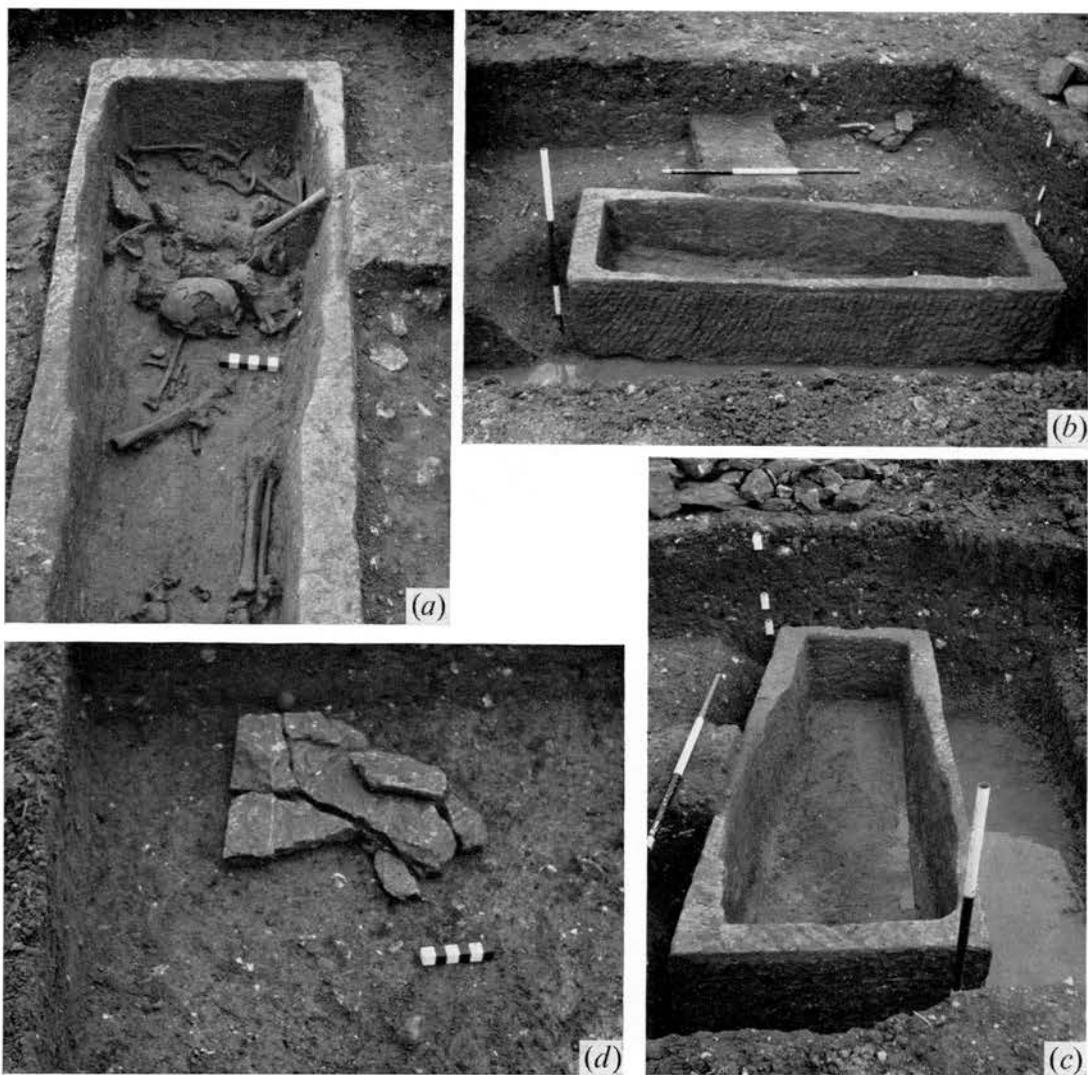


Plate I (a) Burial I as discovered, before systematic excavation began. (b) Burial I (right) showing bones of Burial II in section (at lowest label) and stone chips associated with Burial III. (c) The coffin of Burial I excavated within its grave. (d) Burial III, showing the smashed lid.



(Plate I(a and c) photos by Alexandra Studios of St Neots, other photos by C. Daines.)

Plate II (a) Burial III with the lid fragments removed. (b and c) The coffin of Burial III excavated within its grave, showing the internal re-cutting. (d) Fragments of a third coffin lying N.E. of Burial III.

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