

ROMANO-BRITISH REMAINS AT COBHAM.

BY

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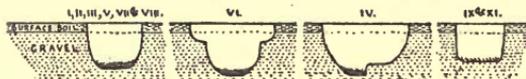
THE cutting of a carriage-drive on the Old Glebe estate, Leigh Hill, Cobham, has disclosed a series of pits that may be assigned to the native population



SECTION SHOWING CUTTING FOR NEW ROAD AT A. B.

Section of road with banks and fences (see opposite),
Scale about 17 ft. to inch.

just before the Roman conquest of south Britain. Through the kind offices of Mr. Frank E. Spiers, and by invitation of Mr. Fred. Higgs, an examination of the



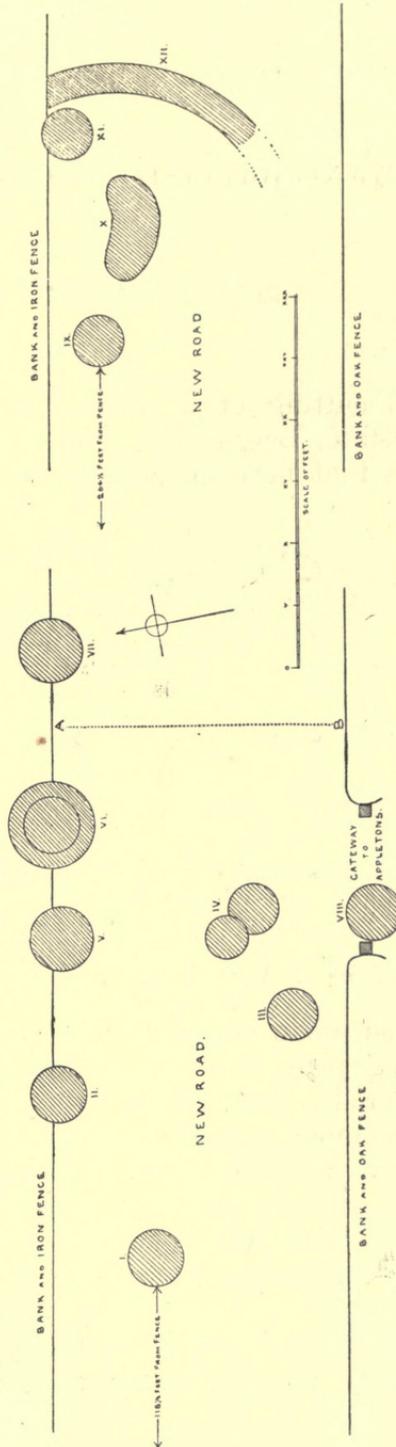
SECTIONS OF PITS.

Pit-sections of four different patterns. Scale about 17 ft. to inch.

site was made on 24th October, 1906, and the accompanying plan shows the relative positions of the pits discovered a few days before, as well as those met with in November further east. The work of exploration has been since continued at intervals under the auspices of the Surrey Archæological Society; and Lt.-Col. Gordon Clark, whose residence (Appletons) adjoins the site, has generously provided funds for the work done to the time of writing, the intention being to collect subscriptions if the preliminary operations seemed to justify further investigation. The Society has been

represented by Mr. Henry Horncastle, a member of Council, and Mr. Frank E. Spiers has devoted much time and energy to the work of superintendence.

The site is on rising ground that had to be cut through to a depth of 2 or 3 ft., and the northern edge of the cutting passed through the centre of four pits (II, V, VI, VII), that had been filled in some nineteen centuries ago. Typical sections are shown of the pits, indicating the depth of soil and the clean gravel below. This sufficiently contrasted with the filling-in of the pits to show a definite outline, the mouth of the opening below the old surface being from 4½ to 6 ft. in diameter: this contracts to a diameter of about 4 ft., the lower part of each pit being circular with fairly vertical walls, and the base being nearly flat at a depth of 3 to 4 ft. from the grass. The gravel had been removed for the new road to within 1 ft. of the



PLAN OF ROMANO-BRITISH PITS FOUND AT LEICH HILL, COBHAM, SURREY. 7

Plan of Romano-British Pits, Cobham, drawn to uniform scale, about 17 ft. to inch.

base of pits I, III, and IV, but probably all were of similar construction to those exposed in the northern bank. It should be noted, however, that IV is double, being 7 ft. from end to end, and the northern half being $3\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in diameter, and a few inches shallower than the other shaft, which measured 4 ft. across and contained the only perfect piece of pottery found—a rude hand-made cup or vase of brownish clay, with rounded base, and no attempt at ornamentation. Standing alone, this vessel would be hard to date, but it probably represents the rudest ware of the British population in use at a period when the potter's wheel had been known, at least in the adjoining county of Kent, for about a century.

In the southern half of IV a small quantity of burnt earth was noticed about 4 ft. from the grass surface, but, with the exception of a few pieces of wheel-made pottery and loom-weight, nothing else was found in this pit, which had, like pits I, III, V, VII, been previously cleared almost to the bottom by the workmen. Parts of two jars, of dark and grey ware respectively, are stated to have been found in pit VII; and the base of a wheel-made vessel was found casually a foot or two north-west of III, which was about 3 ft. from the fence that here runs parallel to the new roadway, the latter incorporating the field-path which ran above part of pit IV. The pits marked V and VI were finally cleared out at the time of our visit, and the former seemed to be a fair sample of the whole series. Here and there in the filling-in were fragments of pottery, the ware coarse and occasionally red on one surface, the other, as well as the body, being black with whitish grains. At a depth of 3 ft. from the grass, and consequently about 6 in. from the bottom of the pit, a definite layer of burnt earth was observed between 1 and 2 in. thick, while above it scattered about were a few burnt flint pebbles that had the appearance of "pot-boilers" or stones heated in the fire and plunged into water to heat it.

The original purpose of these pits is not quite certain, but they were probably used first as fire-places and

eventually as refuse-pits. The pottery, of which the original form has been deduced in several instances (figs. 1—22), points to the first century of our era, as the blackware bowl with flat projecting rim is a not uncommon form in Roman Britain. Other pieces might well be classed as Roman, but not a single specimen of the Gaulish redware,¹ usually called "Samian," has been found on the site, whereas at Ewell, 6 miles distant, several vessels of this ware and a large quantity of other kinds of Roman pottery were discovered some years ago in pits sunk 12—37 ft. in the chalk.² The triangular "loom-weights," of which fragments have been found of two different sizes, agree well with the date proposed; and the same type, with similar perforations across the corners for cords to attach it to the warp threads on the loom, is known from the pre-Roman marsh-village at Glastonbury.

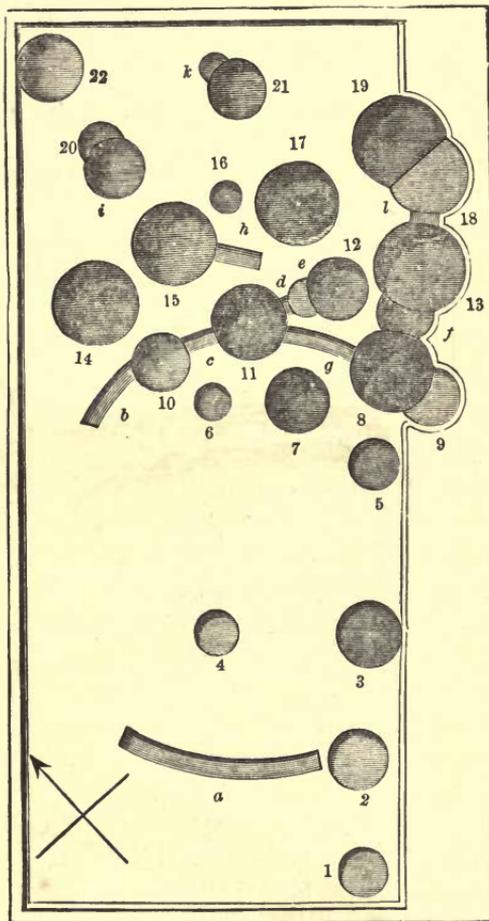
The progress of the excavation for the road subsequently revealed other pits further to the east where the workmen found fragments of rough pottery and wattle and daub, and a second visit was made, but only a few burnt pebbles were added to the pottery already collected by the workmen. The pits themselves presented some peculiar features, two (IX and XI) being only about 3 ft. deep from the turf, 4 ft. in diameter, while the third (X) was larger and of kidney-shape, 8½ ft. long, with an average breadth of 4 ft. and 3 ft. deep. Just beyond XI, and passing across the roadway for at least 16 ft., was a trench (XII), about 2 ft. deep and 2½ ft. in width, the whole apparently forming part of a large circular cutting. In this as well as other respects the site closely corresponds to an area excavated some fifty years ago at Standlake, Oxon., of which the accompanying plan is reproduced by permission of the Society of Antiquaries.³

¹ This ware must have become common in S. E. Britain soon after the Claudian conquest, in 43 A.D. One small fragment has been found in 1908.

² *Archæologia*, XXXII, 451.

³ *Proceedings*, 1st Ser., IV, 94; see also pp. 70, 215. The plan is referred to on pp. 95, 96.

In reading that account, care should be taken to distinguish between the Anglo-Saxon burials often found in



Plan of Pits, Standlake, Oxon.

(Scale, 13 ft. to inch.)

For comparison with Cobham series.

close proximity, and the numerous pits, trenches and rings, which date from pre-Roman times, and partly from the late Bronze period. On a gravel pit being opened, circular pits varying from 2 to 6 ft. in circumference were disclosed, with no definite arrangement. Some were double or continuous with others, while certain of them were connected by a trench or drain about 1 ft. wide. Another curved trench, not actually passing through any pit but perhaps a continuation of the other, is also figured on the plan but not precisely described; nor are details given as to the depth of the pits here referred to.

Another pit,¹ opened about 50 yards away, disclosed a trench 3 ft. wide at the top, sloping to 6 in. at the bottom and $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft. deep, devoid of relics. A few feet distant was a shallow circular excavation $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft. across and 6 in. deep, containing a few bones of animals and

¹ This is the fourth, described *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, IV, 96.

fragments of pottery; while close by was another $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in diameter and the same in depth, with a layer of fine mould 2 in. thick at the bottom, containing a large quantity of small bones, probably of mice. Another circular pit 4 ft. each way was full of ashes, soot, baked earth, charred wood, etc., but also contained half a bead (or spindle-whorl?), parts of a stone muller, and a pavement of stones at the bottom, while the inside from top to bottom was red from the effects of fire.

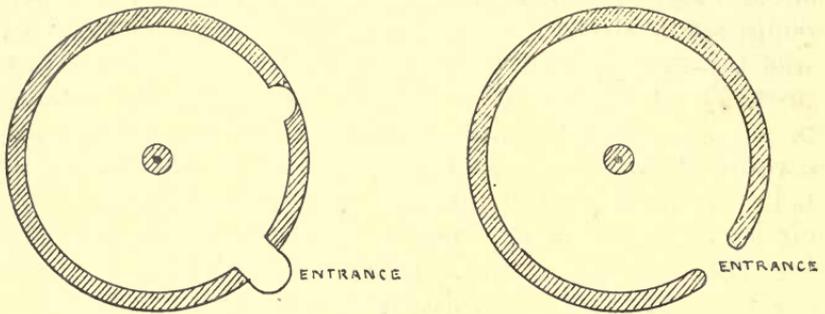
In the following year Mr. Stephen Stone observed on the Downs at Standlake several stones burnt red which had been turned up by the plough.¹ His previous experiences prompted him to excavate, and he discovered a trench 3 ft. wide at the top, 1 ft. 3 in. at the bottom, and 2 ft. in depth, which extended 45 ft. and then entered a circular excavation, beyond which indications of others were observed. No metal was found in the trench or pits, and no manufactured article but fragments of pottery, a peculiarly fashioned stone, and flint chips.

The above summary will show the close similarity of the pits at Standlake and Cobham, though their exact purpose is little clearer than before. Bronze Age interments, within large circular trenches,² were found in the vicinity at Standlake, but the pits and trenches adjoining them had not been used as burial-places, and were more probably the pit-dwellings and fire-places of the British population of the Bronze or Early Iron Age. Further excavation at Hawkshill, Fetcham (*Collections*, XX, 121), may elucidate this question, as on the Downs above Leatherhead have been found, in a circumscribed area, a large ring about 100 ft. in diameter, several pits, including a fire-place, and a number of Anglo-Saxon burials, exactly as at Standlake. Nor is it unlikely that trenching for the gardens of the houses soon to be erected on the Cobham site will reveal further traces of Early British occupation.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

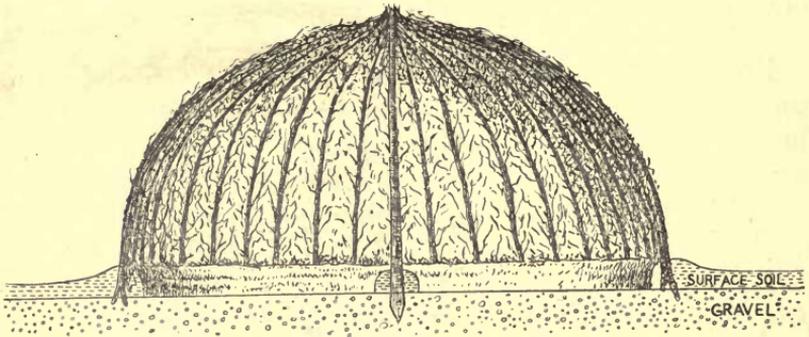
² *Archæologia*, XXXVII, Plates VIII, IX.

It must be confessed that the Cobham pits, even without the surface-soil, would be rather deep for fire-places,

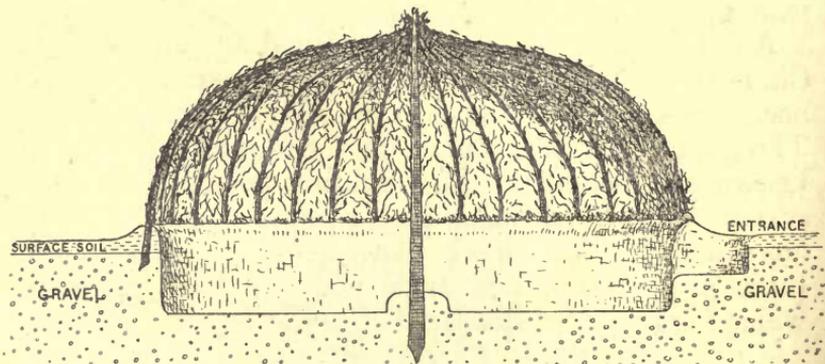


PLAN OF PIT DWELLING

PLAN OF HUT CIRCLE.



Section showing conjectural restoration of a hut-circle,
Hayes Common, Kent. (G. Clinch, *Jour. Anthropol. Inst.*, N. S., ii.)



Section showing conjectural restoration of a pit-dwelling,
Worms Heath, Surrey. (Johnson and Wright, *Neol. Man in N. E. Surrey*.)

and for rubbish-pits they contain very little, only a few

animal bones and horse teeth having been found besides pottery; nor do the pits excavated last year seem large enough for dwellings, even if they were roofed over with boughs and thatch as in the illustrations; further, there was no sign of an interment in any of them, and the presence of burnt earth near the base may be held to prove their original use as open-air cooking-places, the dwellings having been on that supposition above or below ground in the immediate neighbourhood. Hut-circles may well have existed, but cannot be traced after the surrounding bank has been destroyed; but pit-dwellings are more durable, as the ground was excavated to some depth and then banked round the opening. The two systems are illustrated here to make the difference clear.

Similar finds have been recently reported at Corhampton, Hants., by Col. Hawley, F.S.A.,¹ who excavated bee-hive huts and a drain 1 ft. wide cut in the chalk and running 70 ft. down a slope. The relics pointed to a late Keltic occupation, but several pieces of "Samian" and other Roman pottery showed that the site was not abandoned before Roman times. Finds at St. Mary Bourne, in the same county, have been described by Dr. Jos. Stevens² in his history of that parish; and sketches show that the pits in this instance were approached by sloping passages.

Another good parallel is furnished by discoveries at Cissbury on the South Downs, where excavations have been undertaken by several well-known archaeologists. The galleries sunk in the chalk for mining flint are well known and belong to the Neolithic period; but on the surface there were some small pits obviously of much later date, which closely correspond in dimensions to those at Cobham, and furnished the following relics, which have been illustrated.³ Pottery fragments of

¹ *Hampshire Chronicle*, 18th April, 1908.

² *History of St. Mary Bourne*, p. 25.

³ *Journ. Anthropol. Institute*, VII, Pl. XI, p. 431; see also pp. 423-5, 428, 430.

cooking-pot form, resembling some from Glastonbury; pierced fragment of terra-cotta ornament; fragments of two bone combs, one for weaving; iron sickle with socket for handle; terra-cotta bead (or spindle-whorl); rubbing stones and burnt flints in small pieces; iron latch-key, of a kind found on several British sites; portion of burnt clay-daubing preserving the marks of wattling; sling stone; and loom-weight of chalk. The purpose of these pits was not explained, but one at least seems to have been a fire-place; it measured 3 ft. 7 in. by 3 ft. 1 in., and though 3 feet deep from the turf, was only 5 inches in the chalk rock, and contained pottery fragments, mussel shells, scorched bones of birds, flint flakes, charcoal, burnt flints, and black mould. One of the larger pits, which may be regarded as typical, was 5 ft. by 4 ft., and 4 ft. 6 in. deep.

Relics in the Salisbury Museum from pit-dwellings at Highfield, in the vicinity, also show a remarkable similarity to those from Cobham, while the pits themselves are of about the same size, though undercut in the drift gravel so as to produce the bee-hive form of hut. They averaged $5\frac{1}{2}$ to 7 ft. in diameter at the base, and it was clear that the cooking was done outside.¹ Loom-weights of chalk were discovered, both of oblong and cylindrical form; others were of stone and baked clay. Of the last material were several pellets or sling-bolts closely resembling those from Hod Hill, Dorset, and Glastonbury lake-village, and consequently referable to the pre-Roman or early Roman period.

Perhaps the most useful parallel is that afforded by the late General Pitt-Rivers' exploration of the Romano-British sites of Rotherley and Woodcuts, on the border of Wilts and Dorset. Numerous pits of various dimensions were dug out, and yielded much the same kind of relics as Cobham, on a larger scale. Trenches, evidently used to drain off surface-water, were also noticed, and while at Woodcuts the huts seem to have been built on the natural level, many pits were found at Rotherley that

¹ E. T. Stevens, *Flint Chips*, pp. 57—68.

were obviously dwelling-places originally roofed with boughs and lined with wattle-and-daub.¹ Further illustrations will be drawn from the General's sumptuous volumes on a subsequent occasion; but it may be added that he regarded many of the pits close to the dwellings as refuse-pits.

A few other references to similar finds in south-east England will not be out of place, though details cannot be inserted here. It should be remembered that in other parts of England and Wales, where stone is abundant, these pit-dwellings are replaced by hut-circles of dry masonry as those at Birtley, Northumberland (*Archæologia*, XLV, 357); Treceiri, North Wales (*Arch. Cambrensis*, 6th Ser., IV, 1); and on various sites in Anglesey described by Hon. W. O. Stanley (*Memoirs on Remains of Ancient dwellings in Holyhead Island*, 1862-8).

Besides those at Standlake already mentioned, pits of the kind described above have been explored at Saffron Walden, Essex (*Trans. Essex Arch. Soc.*, New Ser., II, pp. 286, 317); Weybourne Pits, Norfolk (*Norfolk Archæology*, III, 232; VII, 170); and Hayes Common, Kent (*Jour. Anthropol. Inst.*, New Ser., II, 124), but the last, at any rate, seems to be a Neolithic site. Mr. Clinch adds a conjectural restoration of a hut, with external fireplaces; and the illustrations on p. 198 will show how the pit-dwellings of the Ancient Britons were thatched over and entered. It is quite conceivable that this kind of dwelling was in use from Neolithic to Roman times.

The above may be regarded as a report on the excavations conducted in 1907, and it is hoped that subsequent investigations on this site will explain what is still mysterious. Illustrations of some of the finds are reserved for a paper in the next volume of the *Collections*; but an adequate notion of the date and character of the pottery so far discovered (in fragments more or less diminutive), may be derived from the accompanying ideal restorations, which are all based on complete vessels in the

¹ *Excavations in Cranborne Chase*, Vol. II, esp. p. 53.

British and other museums that correspond closely in form and quality to the sherds from Cobham. For these identifications I am myself mainly responsible, and the finished drawings are the work of Mr. Frank E. Spiers, to whose assiduous attendance on the site and patient treatment of the fragments the Society is chiefly indebted for this display of relics. The vessels are arranged approximately in chronological order and drawn to a uniform scale of one-fifth linear, the section being on the left of each, and the elevation on the right.

Fig. 1.—Coarse hand-made ware ornamented by pinching the soft clay in the fingers. Like the rest of the series, this vessel has been ideally restored from fragments which suffice to show its diameter, decoration, and general character. Parallel specimen in the Ashmolean Museum from Standlake, Oxon.

Figs. 2—5.—Rough brown or reddish-brown hand-made ware, with grit added: the decoration effected with the finger-nail or pointed instrument of bone or wood to stab the soft clay in rows. The high shoulder is common to all, and figs. 2—4 have an expanding mouth, like a specimen from Rotherley, Wilts. (Brit. Mus.); while the neck of fig. 4 exhibits the curve commonly seen in Early Iron Age vases (as fig. 6).

Figs. 6, 7.—Well-made soft brown ware with white grit, turned on the potter's wheel: indented base, high shoulder, and slightly expanding lip, as frequently found at this period.

Fig. 8.—Wheel-made bowl of blackish ware, thin, and well-potted with clean-cut mouldings, resembling one from Kelvedon, Essex (Brit. Mus.), that was found with a bronze brooch of La Tène III type.

Fig. 9.—Restored after one from Aylesford, Kent (Brit. Mus.), which can be assigned to the first century, B. C.; and a Roman copy of this form has been found at Sandy, Beds. (Brit. Mus.).

Fig. 10.—Reddish-brown ware, wheel-made with rolled lip, like one from Silchester (Reading Mus.).

Fig. 11.—Hard grey ware, apparently of Roman make, but with neck and shoulder of rather British character. Restored after Roman specimen from the Durden Collection (Brit. Mus.).

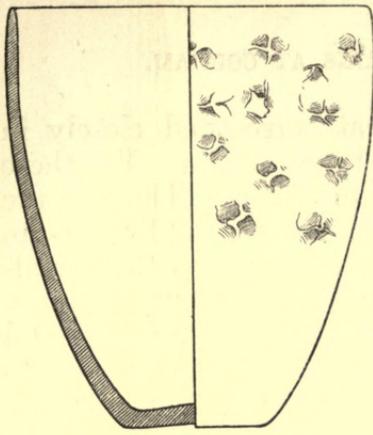


Fig. 1.

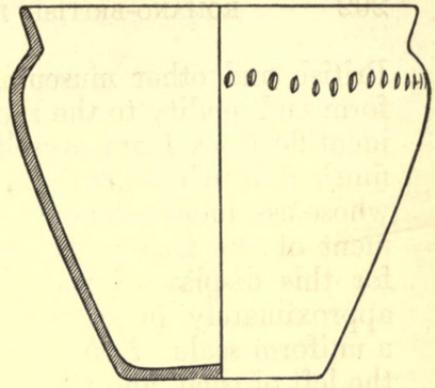


Fig. 2.

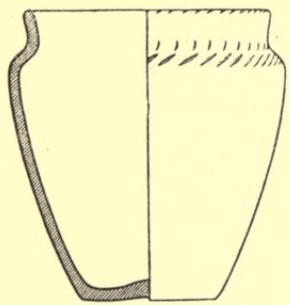


Fig. 3.

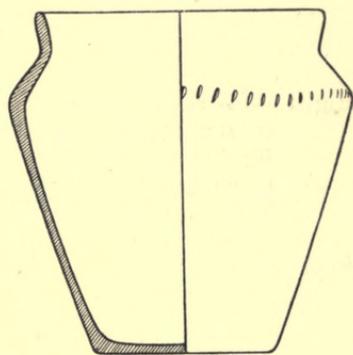


Fig. 4.

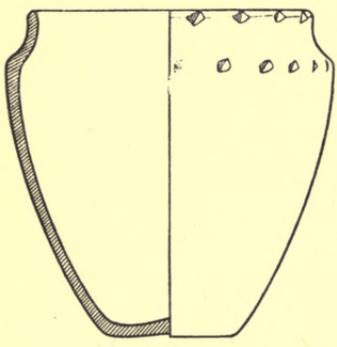


Fig. 5.

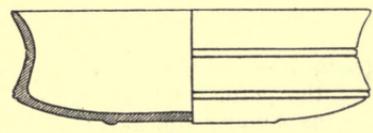


Fig. 6.

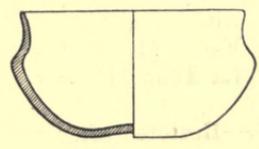


Fig. 7.

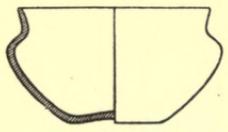


Fig. 8.

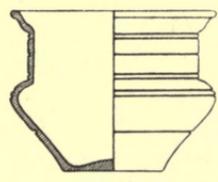


Fig. 9.

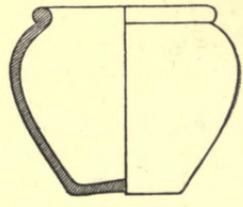


Fig. 10.

IDEAL RESTORATION OF POTTERY FRAGMENTS

found at Cobham, Surrey. ($\frac{1}{5}$)

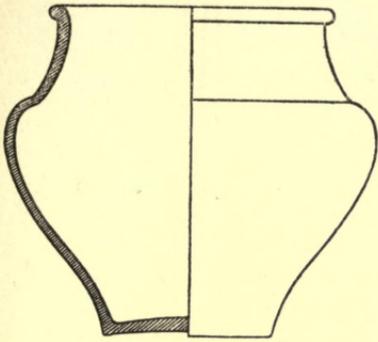


Fig. 11.

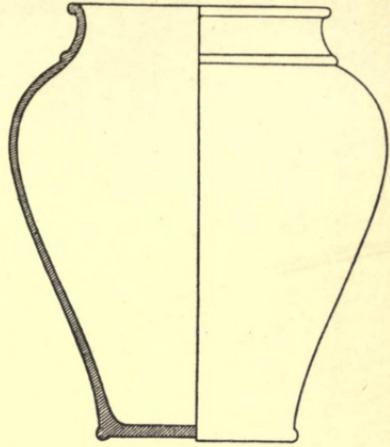


Fig. 12.

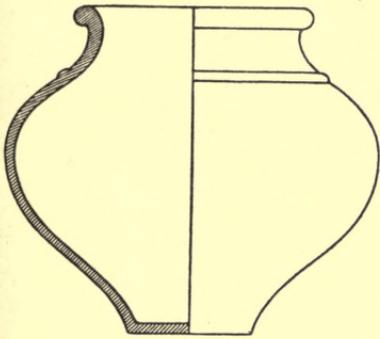


Fig. 13.

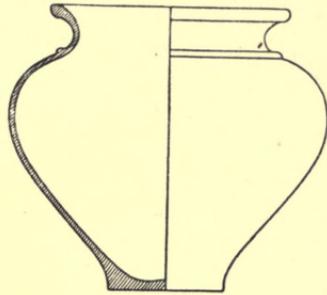


Fig. 14.

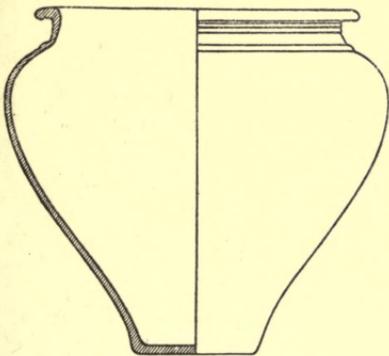


Fig. 15.

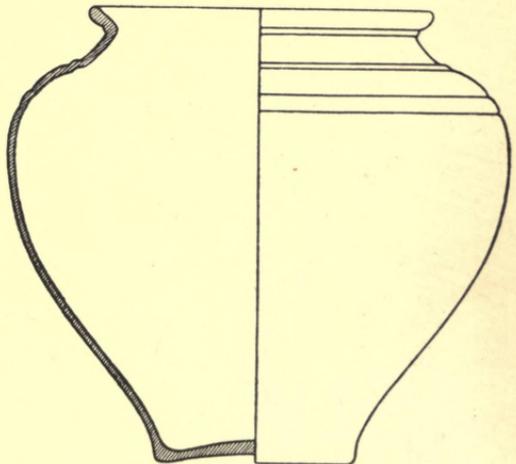


Fig. 16.

IDEAL RESTORATION OF POTTERY FRAGMENTS
found at Cobham, Surrey. ($\frac{1}{3}$)

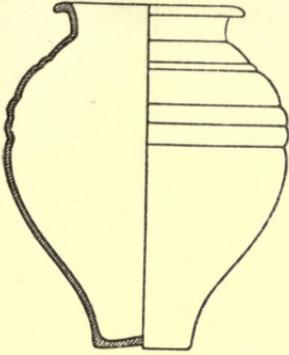


Fig. 17.

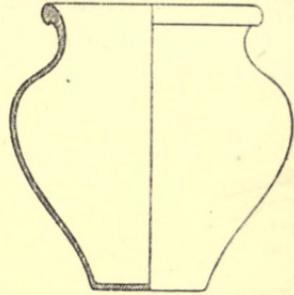


Fig. 19.

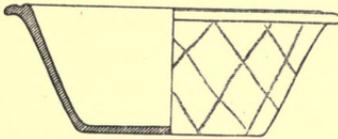


Fig. 21.

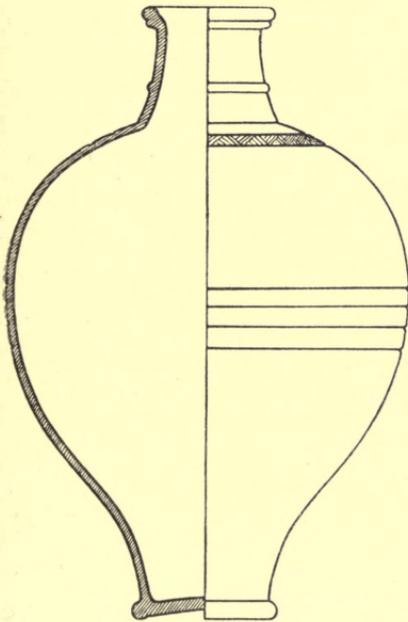


Fig. 18.

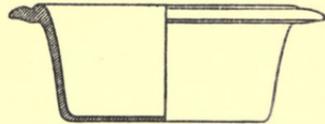


Fig. 20.

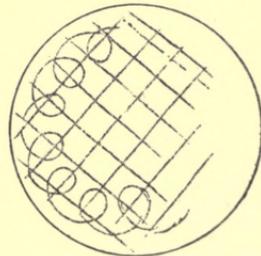


Fig. 22.

- Fig. 12.—Hard black ware, with cordons round neck and base, of British character, but probably of Roman manufacture, like one from Billericay, Essex (Brit. Mus.).
- Figs. 13—15.—Hard grey ware, of Roman make and character; moulding above shoulder common to all, but form of lip varies: fairly high shoulder, wide mouth and small base. Fig. 13 after one from Colchester; fig. 14 like Moorgate, London; fig. 15 like Farley Heath, Surrey (all Brit. Mus.).
- Fig. 16.—Of same character as last, but hard red ware, like one from Walthamstow (Brit. Mus.).
- Fig. 17.—Hard brown ware, much worn; showing increased use of round mouldings or flat cordons on body: greatest diameter at lower point than in preceding, and mouth smaller in proportion.
- Fig. 18.—Hard black ware, the neck and top of shoulder alone surviving. Rest restored after specimen from London (Roach Smith Collection, Brit. Mus.): others have been found at Silchester with tall narrow neck. Band of chevrons incised on shoulder, not of burnished black lines as usual.
- Fig. 19.—Hard grey ware, of purely Roman character; after specimen from Kingsholm, Gloucs. (Brit. Mus.).
- Fig. 20.—Grey ware, evidently a cooking-pan with flat moulded lip: type common in first century.
- Fig. 21.—Black ware, with burnished lattice-pattern outside; cooking-pan as last. The lattice is commonly found on cinerary urns of the Early Roman period, and was executed with a bone tool, which gave a slight polish to the lines. Cf. specimens figured by Pitt-Rivers, *Cranborne Chase*, II, 169; Cateaton Street, London (*Collections*, XX, 232); and Birkbeck Bank, Holborn (Brit. Mus.).
- Fig. 22.—Black saucer-shaped dish, the bottom with burnished pattern on outside as shown in illustration. The form is common, and the same kind of decoration occurs on specimen from London in the Roach Smith Collection (Brit. Mus.).
- Such were probably used as covers for cooking-pans like figs. 20, 21 (*Cranborne Chase*, II, 168).