

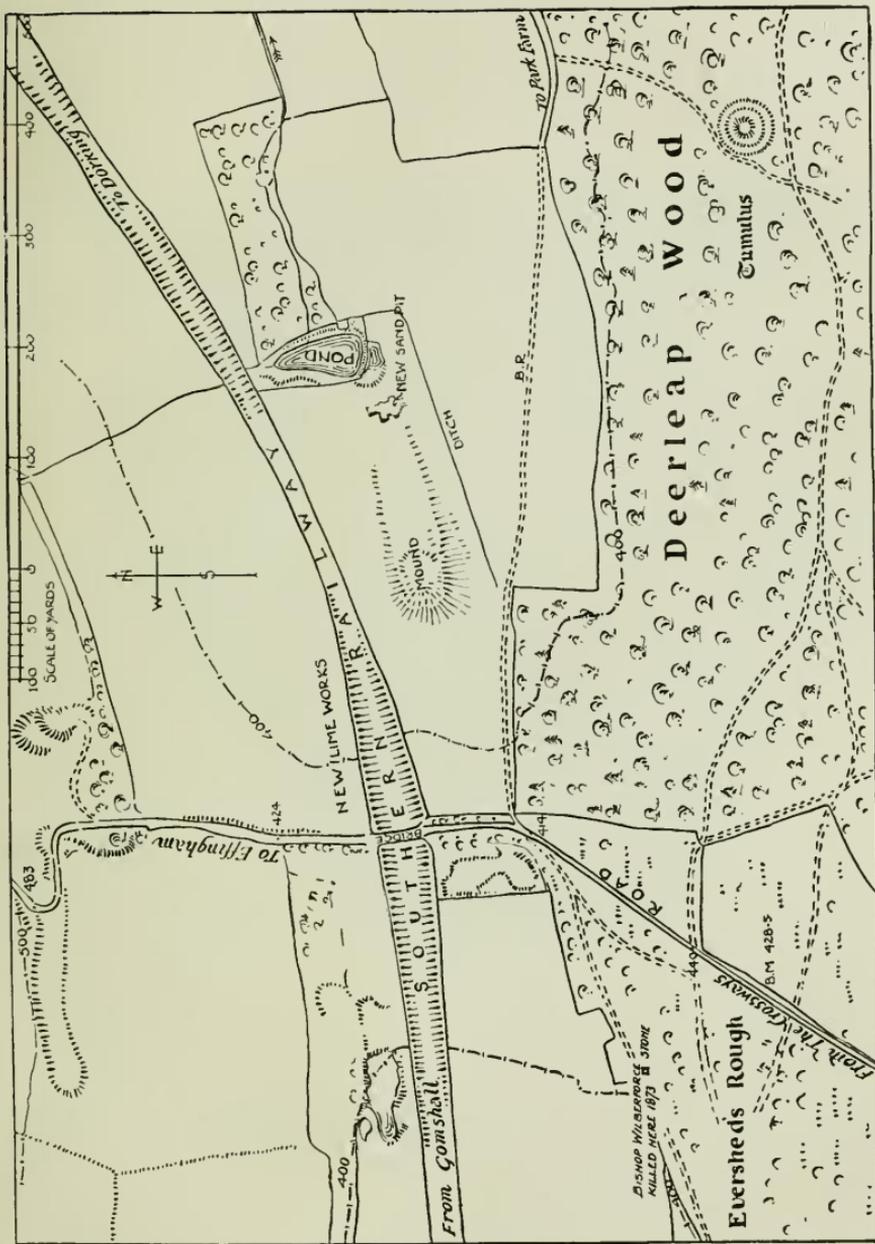
A ROMANO-BRITISH BURIAL-GROUND AT WOTTON.

BY

WILFRID HOOPER, LL.D.

ON July 17th, 1926, while engaged in examining a small sand-pit of rectangular form which had recently been opened in a field attached to Park Farm, Wotton, I noticed, lying on the bottom in one corner, some fragments of pottery. Attention was next turned to a heap of soil which had been excavated from and left in the pit, and a search of this yielded several more shards and a quantity of partly calcined bones and powdered charcoal.

The position of the field appears in the accompanying sketch plan. It is known locally as Sandy Meadow, and lies in the Holmesdale Valley on the northern edge of the Lower Greensand, immediately south of the railway between Reigate and Guildford. The field is divided through part of its length by a dry ditch from which the ground ascends on either side, sloping up on the south to Deerleap Wood and on the north to a low yet pronounced ridge, which extends westward from the neighbourhood of a pond for a distance of 200 yards and terminates in a circular mound, suggestive at first sight of a large tumulus, though proved by trial diggings to be of natural formation. The pit starts from the level on the southern side of this ridge, and at the time of my visits—it has since been enlarged—ran into the crest a distance of 30 feet, attaining a depth on its north face of $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet. It lies at a distance of a quarter of a mile north-west of the tumulus in Deerleap Wood, which, as already indicated, bounds the south side of the field; and three-quarters of a mile north-east of



SKETCH PLAN SHOWING SITE OF ROMANO-BRITISH BURIAL GROUND AT WOTTON.

the site of the small Roman Villa discovered in 1877 near Abinger Hall. Manor Farm, Wotton, where an interesting discovery of Early Iron Age vessels was made in 1914,¹ lies a little over half a mile to the south. The field was, I learn, under the plough within living memory; but it is now, and has for several years past been, in grass.

The shards found in the pit and among the heap belonged to four or five different vessels, and all save one fragment, which was of a coarse red paste, appeared to have been turned on the wheel. With the exception of this fragment, they were pronounced on examination to be Roman ware of the first century A.D.

In the hope of rescuing any other vessels before the pit was extended, I obtained permission to dig in and around the pit, and started operations the following week in company with a few friends who volunteered their services. On the 31st July we discovered, just within the east face of the pit and 1 foot below the surface, an urn *in situ*. This, though entire, was badly cracked, and on removal came to pieces. The top was covered with a piece of ironstone and fragments of coarse red tiling. The contents consisted of sand covering a quantity of calcined human bones, and on top rested a small flint flake. This urn (No. 6) has since been most skilfully restored by Mr. Reginald A. Smith of the British Museum, who kindly supplied the photo from which the accompanying plate is reproduced. Mr. Smith described it as rather fine ware of dark greyish brown, with burnished zones, and ornamented with chevrons on the shoulders which are burnished on a roughened ground. He puts the probable period as late first century. The height is 7.3 inches, and diameter outside the top 6.1 inches. The original has been presented by Mrs. Evelyn to the British Museum, and is at present exhibited in the Roman Room (Case 21). The bones were submitted to Sir Arthur Keith, who kindly sent me the following report:

“The incinerated fragments from Pot 6 at Wotton are the result of a single cremation; at least in the fragments I can detect parts of only one individual—probably a woman—so I judge

¹ See *S.A.C.*, XXIX, p. 1.



WOTTON BURIAL URN.

EXHIBITED IN CASE 21, ROMAN ROOM, B.M.

from the thinness of the skull bones, not altogether a reliable guide to sex."

In the course of subsequent excavations we discovered traces of four further burials, all outside but within a few yards of the pit. The most distinctive of these interments was situated slightly to the north-east of the pit, at a distance of 13 feet from Urn No. 6. The remains consisted of fragments of an earthenware urn, badly smashed in the past, enclosing a mould of blackened earth bound together by grassy rootlets. This held some calcined bones and two small objects of iron which were so badly rusted as to defy identification. The three remaining interments were found in a trench which was carried out in a straight line from the west side of the pit, and they occurred at intervals of 7 feet, 16 feet, and 26 feet respectively. In all three cases the remains had been greatly disturbed at a former period; while in only one instance was there any associated pottery, and in that merely a few shards. Operations were brought to a sudden end early in September, 1926, by a request from the Trustees of Mr. Evelyn, the owner of the freehold, to stop digging and to hand over the finds. I have been unable to resume the work since.

The site abounds with flint flakes and cores, pointing to a considerable industry in prehistoric times. The flints occur within a few inches of the surface and in colour are for the most part either a lustreless black tinged with green, or else more or less lustrous and of a blue to grey tint, owing to a whitish patination. The points and edges of many of the flakes are as keen as when they were struck. In the course of our digging we turned up a few implements of Neolithic or later type, including end scrapers, a graving tool, and small arrow-head with single barb and hollow base. The northern slopes of the Leith Hill range were favourite ground with the later Stone-age folk, and their settlements, as in this instance, extended into the valley.

My cordial thanks are given to the Mid-Surrey Lime Works, Ltd., lessees of the field, who readily granted me the necessary facilities, and to those who responded to my call for helpers.