

## Prehistoric and Roman Finds at Aston Tirrold and Didcot.

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**D**URING the last two years gravel for building purposes has been taken from a field at Aston Tirrold; and large quantities of pottery of second- and third-century date, animal bones, parts of two human skeletons, and three coins have been turned up by the spade. Below the gravel the teeth and bones of prehistoric animals have been found.

Aston Tirrold is geologically just within the strip of Upper Greensand which crosses the country in a nearly east-and-west direction from Wallingford on the east to Ashbury on the west, dipping south at Cholsey and Aston Tirrold. The soil is a strong grey calcareous loam with an intimate mixture of vegetable mould, chalk containing green grains and green-coated phosphatic nodules, and Oxford Clay. Deposits of gravel occur in patches in the Greensand in this ancient valley of the Thames, and it is in one of these patches that the 'finds' occur.

In the field where the pottery, etc., has been found the upper three feet of soil is Upper Greensand, below which is a gravel bed seven to eight feet deep, and in the latter was a V-shaped ditch or trench about five feet deep, and six feet wide across the top, which had been cut to form about one-third of a circle, surrounding about three-quarters of an acre. At the bottom of the ditch was much charred wood, with small fragments of red clay, moulded but unbaked. The ditch had been at some later period filled in with chalk imported from some distance, and above the chalk was a layer of charcoal.

In 1927 one complete skeleton and a skull were found at a depth of two feet in the gravel; the feet of the skeleton were towards the east, which may or may not indicate a Christian burial. These remains are now in the Ashmolean Museum.

Recently a large amount of Romano-British pottery of second- and third-century date has been turned up ; the red so-called Samian ware, fragments of well-made brown and grey vases, and domestic vessels, also a quantity of coarse brown spotted ware, with one curiously shaped vessel, something like a pilgrim bottle, having a cock's comb cresting along the upper half, with zigzag raised mouldings on both sides, on the one side in lines seven-tenths of an inch wide from side to side, on the opposite side similar ornamentation but in a semicircle round the upper half of the vessel. The colour of the pot is a blackish grey. Its height is about six inches, greatest breadth seven inches, and it stands on an elliptical foot four inches by three inches.<sup>1</sup> At present it is impossible to give the place of origin of this curious vessel.

Three coins have also been dug out, one brass of Carausius, A.D. 287-93, a third brass of Constantius Chlorus A.D. 300, and a very fine specimen of Tacitus A.D. 275-6 ; also a bone hairpin.

Below the gravel, at a depth of about twelve feet from the surface, several molar teeth of the mammoth (*Elephas primigenius*), one an uncut molar of a young animal, two teeth (a right and left upper molar), a left tibia and the os calcis of the woolly rhinoceros (*R. tichorhinus*), the invariable companion of the mammoth, and two teeth of a large pleistocene horse, have been unearthed. All are in a very good state of preservation.

Last year, when Mr. Morris of Orchard House, Aston Tirrold, was digging a well, he discovered at a depth of eight feet in solid clay several molar teeth of a mammoth, with portions of the right and left lower jaws, and a portion of the left hip bone. These remains are in a perfect state of preservation.

#### ROMANO-BRITISH FINDS AT DIDCOT

During the excavation of soil for the construction of a railway siding in the Government depot at Didcot, some human skeletons were disinterred which were shown to my friend Dr. Rice of

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Mr. Reginald Smith, F.S.A., for having the pieces put together at the British Museum.

Harwell, to whom I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness for bringing these finds to my notice, and for permission to exhibit them.

Much Romano-British pottery, all fragmentary and of coarse workmanship, of the second and third century, was turned up by the spade ; in August 1928 a skeleton was found at a depth of two feet from the surface ; it lay with the head to the east and the feet to the west, the face directed to the south ; the pelvis was flat on the ground, but the spine slightly twisted ; the right arm, flexed at the elbow, lay across the chest, the hand pointing towards the left shoulder. The skull (no. 1), quite complete, shows strong facial features with a prominent nose, and the head form, which one finds in Italian tombs of the second and third centuries, totally unlike that of the native British race of that date. In all probability the man was a Roman officer. At some period of his life, probably when about twenty years of age, he received a very heavy blow with a blunt instrument on the right side of the head, which caused a nearly circular fracture of the right parietal bone with a deep central indent ; the man must have lived for many years after this injury, for the fracture has completely united, but in all probability he suffered for a long period from severe headache, due to pressure.

Skull no. 2. This skull was found in fragments, and has been kindly pieced together by Sir Arthur Keith and Dr. Gauntlett at the College of Surgeons, as was also no. 3. There is no face, but the head form is typical of round-headed Gauls, who still form the preponderating population of France south of the Seine, as in Caesar's time. These south-Seine Gaulish skulls are common in British graves of the Roman period.

No. 3 is the skull of a long narrow-faced handsome woman, about thirty to thirty-five years of age. She had the head and face of the type most prevalent in Romano-British graves—long and narrow, with a low-vaulted skull, and may be regarded as a descendant of the Atrebates, the Belgic tribe, whom Caesar found in Berkshire when he invaded Britain.

No. 4. A skull recently disinterred, and not yet put together.

No. 5. The right humerus of a young man under twenty years of age, the upper end of the bone not having completely ossified.

No. 6. The femur of the same skeleton.

I am indebted to Mr. Child, the owner of the field at Aston Tirrold, and to Mr. Morris of Aston Tirrold for permission to exhibit their specimens of prehistoric bones.