

NOTE ON A HUMAN SKELETON FROM OLD WINDSOR

P. L. DREWETT

During the digging of a 3 ft diameter sump in the back garden of Priory Cottage, Church Road, Old Windsor (SU 99157460) in September, 1970, the workmen discovered a shallow burial. As the site is within the area scheduled under the provisions of the Ancient Monuments Acts as the site of King Edward the Confessor's Palace, it was investigated by the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, Ministry of Public Building and Works.

The skeleton (see detailed report by P. Sandiford) was found to have been in a shallow grave only 2 ft 7 in. below the present ground surface. The grave was 5 ft 9 in. long and 2 ft wide and was dug into the natural gravel. It was aligned east-west. The west end of the grave was 18 ft 6 in. from the western end of the newly erected extension to Priory Cottage and 20 ft from the eastern end.

Nothing was found with the skeleton, but stray Late Saxon/Early Medieval pot sherds, together with sheep, pig and cattle bones, were found in the disturbed areas and in the flower beds around the present garden. (See detailed report on pottery). None of the material is, however, directly associated with the burial. The dating of the burial, therefore, remains uncertain. The absence of any grave goods, together with the grave's east-west alignment and its proximity to the early Church of St. Peter, would suggest a Christian burial of Late Saxon or Early Medieval date.

THE POTTERY

Twenty-nine sherds of pottery were found. All nine rims, the one base and the two decorated body sherds are illustrated.

A. Late Saxon Grass tempered ware:

1. Soft roughly made black fabric with large

quantities of grass tempering burnt out leaving characteristic voids. Simple everted rim of small cooking pot.

B. Saxo-Norman Shell-tempered ware:

2. Shell tempered but with some sand tempering. Rim sherd from straight sided flanged bowl. The rim is thumbled on top. Developed St. Neots Ware.

3. Shell tempered but with some sand tempering. Body sherd with incised line decoration.

4. Shell tempered ware with sand tempering. Cooking pot with simple everted rim and marked shoulder. Early Medieval.

C. Early Medieval Sand-tempered wares:

- 5-6. Very hard grey sandy ware. Simple upright rim.

7. Hard grey sandy ware. Simple angular base.

8. Hard grey ware with reddish surface. Simple upright rim.

9. Hard grey ware with reddish surfaces. Body sherd with combed decoration.

D. Medieval wares:

10. Hard light grey gritty, well fired ware with squared rim.

11. Grey sandy ware with reddish outer surfaces and flat-topped flanged rim.

12. Light grey gritty ware with black surfaces. Incised decoration outside rim.

WHETSTONE

13. Round sectioned whetstone tapering to an oval section. Hard grey micaceous sandstone. Possibly Medieval.

The pottery and skeleton have been retained by the finders, Mr and Mrs Mitchell, whose help I should like to acknowledge. Mr David Freke drew the pottery.

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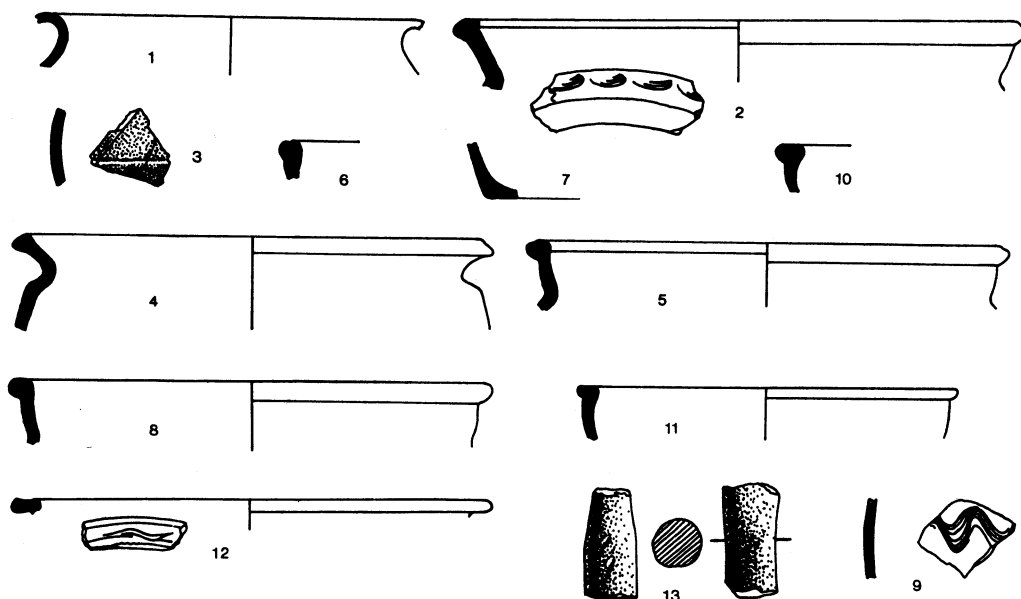


Fig. 1. Late Saxon and early medieval pottery from Priory Cottage, Church Road, Old Windsor, 1970.

HUMAN SKELETAL REMAINS

PETER SANDIFORD

A young adult male aged between 17 and 23 years.

General Description

The remains consist of 124 fragments comprising:

- 39 long bone fragments,
- 17 vertebral fragments,
- 13 skull fragments with a complete mandible,
- 4 pelvic fragments,
- 3 fragments of scapula,
- 43 rib fragments,
- 5 metacarpal fragments.

Considerable post mortem disturbance appears to have taken place, resulting in the fragmentation to a greater or lesser degree of every bone except some of the vertebrae. For this reason no osteometric data has been presented.

The Skull

Only the upper part of the skull is complete

but it is evident that as a whole it must have been fairly large. It is hyperbrachycephalic. Well developed mastoid processes are present together with well defined brow ridges although the frontal sinuses are small. Sutural closure is just beginning to take place. The mandible is complete and exhibits a prominent chin with strongly defined muscular attachment points, e.g., the myohyoid line and a flared gonial region.

The Post Cranial Remains

All parts of the post cranial skeleton are represented with the exception of the feet, most of the hands, the clavicles and the fibulae. In keeping with the skull these remains are large, robust and possess well defined muscular ridges.

Age Estimation

Epiphyseal fusion is not yet complete in some of the post cranial bones, for example in the iliac crest region of the ilium, the distal end of the right femur and the proximal end of the left humerus. Fusion is complete with

obliteration of the epiphyseal line at the distal end of the left humerus and the proximal ends of the radii. These considerations put the age of the individual between 17 and 23 years. This estimate is supported by the dental evidence. The third molars although completely erupted have not yet reached the occlusal level of the other teeth and occlusal wear is light with molar dentine exposed on the first molars only. These observations would suggest a similar age range of between 17 and 23 years.

Sex

The large and robust nature of the remains and the prominent muscle markings suggest that the individual was male. This is supported by the well developed mastoid processes in the

skull and the narrow and deep sciatic notch on the pelvis.

Anomalies

(a) Dentition.

On the right side both upper and lower molars and premolars exhibit a medium degree of calculus deposition, especially marked on the first molars. Calculus irritation was probably responsible for the neck caries on the mesial aspect of the lower right first molar. This resulted in the formation of a dental abscess below the first molar as evidenced by the presence of a small 'burrow' hole in the mandible at the tip of the molar root.

(b) Femur.

The right femur has a small exostosis on the medial margin of the popliteal surface, probably the result of trauma.