

Some Pre-Roman Remains from South Reading.

By WILFRED A. SEABY.

(I) RING EARTHWORK ON MARSHALL'S HILL.

In Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 72 of this Journal, there appeared the following note:—

“ The remains of a Disc Barrow (?) were found in 1909 [actually 1907] at Marshall's Hill, Grosvenor Road, Reading. Part of the Barrow to the east of the hedge was levelled about the same date [1909]. The remaining portion is about 65 feet from north to south and 42 feet from the western side of the hedge. The Barrow is about 102 feet from Grosvenor Road. Just within the Barrow, near the most northern point, was found a much broken Bronze Age burial urn. The pieces were taken to the Reading Museum, and were found to be similar to another urn which had been pieced together by the then Curator, Mr. T. Colyer. Fragments of a black Romano-British cinerary urn were found when Grosvenor Road was being made in 1907, between Marshall's Hill and 'The Meadow,' exact spot unknown. A bronze spear head was found in the same road, opposite 'Wynyates.' ”

L.A.G.

All that remains of the alleged barrow is the W. half of a very low circular bank upon which stands an 8 feet thorn hedge enclosing a rose-garden. There is now no trace of a ditch on the inside of the bank, as there should be in the case of a disc barrow; but there was a very shallow ditch outside the bank, which was filled up in 1908. Also there is no indication of a central tump, an apple-tree standing right in the middle of the circle. The old plough furrows may still be seen in the garden and certainly crossed the ring-work, although the recent setting out of flower-beds has prevented their showing up within the circle.

The ring is not marked upon a large scale map of Reading, surveyed between 1870 and 1880, nor is it to be found upon earlier maps. The site is an excellent one, for Marshall's Hill is on Plateau Gravel, having southern and western slopes, with

a fine view for many miles to the west. There is a bank or lynchet two-thirds way down this slope, much reduced by ploughing, which may well date from prehistoric times.

Whether or not the ring-work on Marshall's Hill is the remains of a barrow is difficult to say ; but that there has been a circular bank of whatever age and for whatever purpose is certain.

(II). POTTERY FROM MARSHALL'S HILL.

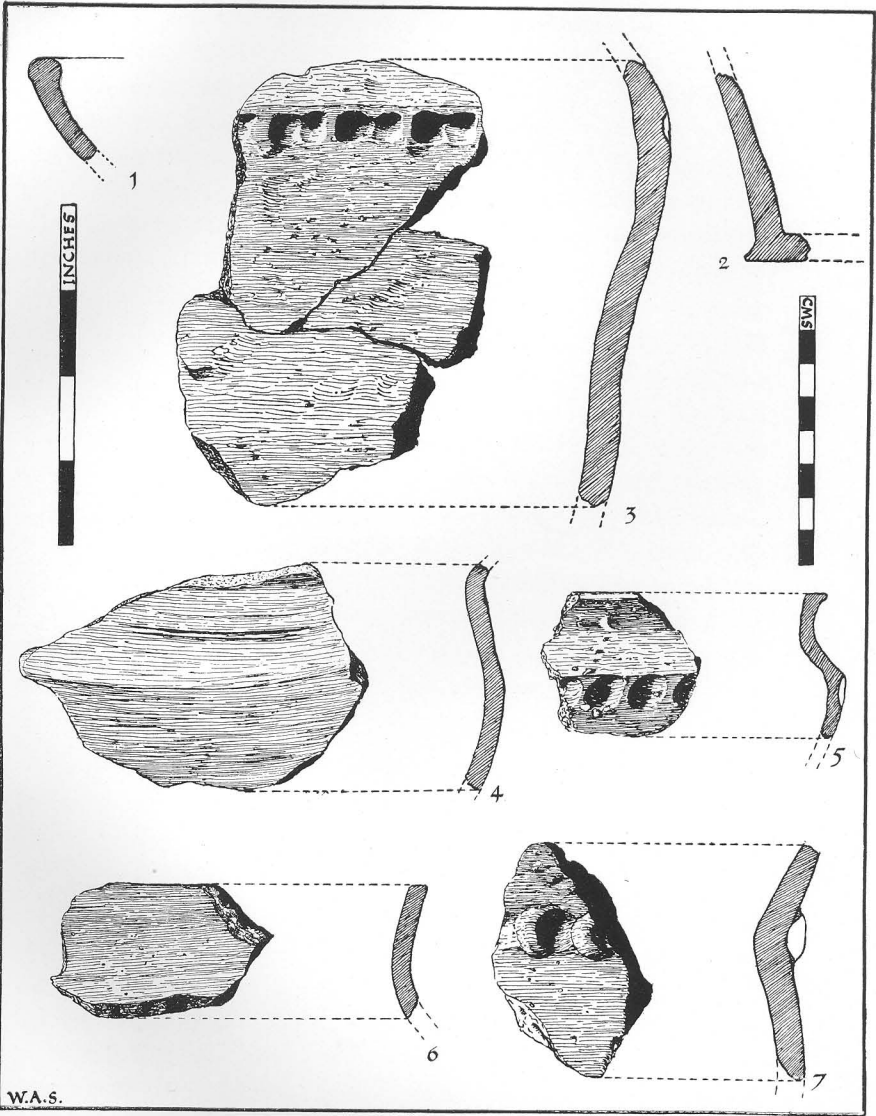
The pottery found within the ring-work, mostly near the northernmost point, was dug up during the construction of the rose-garden in 1909, and is now in the possession of Dr. Hastings Gilford. It is of an interesting character and probably belongs to an early period in the Iron Age (circa 6th Cent. B.C.). The impressed finger-tip decoration on the pottery is suggestive of a decadent Late Bronze Age urnfield culture, while the S-profile curve of several of the pots points to Continental influence of the first phase of the Early Iron Age (Hallstatt period).

The pottery which is in fragmentary condition consists of about fifty pieces of coarse gritted or sanded ware, for the most part hard and well-baked. Several of the sherds fit together, but in no case can a complete contour be ascertained. It is proposed here to describe the sherds in groups, rather than pots, making reference to those fragments figured.

Group 1. Eight sherds including a section of a rim with ornamented shoulder and flattened lip of a small pot (Pl. I. fig. 5). All the pieces are of clay mixed with large coarsely ground flint and contain a certain amount of ferruginous matter. Some have a dark brown coating, possibly a layer of ochre, now cracked, on the outer surface.¹ Three pieces which may be from the same pot show a finger-tip impression along the shoulder ; two other pieces fit together.

Group 2. This, the largest group, consists of a repaired piece from the side of a moderate sized urn with finger-tip impressions along the shoulder (Pl. I. fig. 3), four pieces from

¹ Mrs. M. E. Cunnington, *Early Iron Age Site at All Cannings Cross* (1932), p. 30.



W.A.S.

Pottery fragments from Marshall's Hill, Reading.

the base of another urn (Pl. I. fig. 2) and twelve other fragments, none of which appear to join, although several must be from the same vessel. All the fragments are more than $\frac{1}{4}$ in. in thickness with an outer surface of pale, dull or bright red. In one piece the clay was mixed with large pieces of flint, but most of the other fragments showed a paste containing a more finely ground grit. One sherd had a conglomerate of wood ash, stone and mud, adhering to the outer surface. The method of decorating the shoulder of the urn, mentioned above, is worth describing in detail. A practical experiment suggests that the rectangular indentations (see Pl. I. fig. 3) were produced by turning the still damp pot, with the mouth away from the potter, from right to left and impressing a digit on the shoulder at roughly equal distances until the circle was completed; then by reversing the position of the pot, turning it in the same direction, and pressing down the clay with the finger in the same way. By this method the little ridges between the indents are formed. Although with plasticine precisely the same effect can be obtained, it is evident that the finger-tip of a modern man makes an impression far larger than that seen on the pottery. It is probable that the modelling and ornamenting of this urn were carried out by a woman or trained child.

Group 3. Seven tiny fragments, less than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in thickness, of gritty ware. With the exception of one piece, which has a light red coating on both sides, all are of black clay throughout with a light outer surface.

Group 4. Nine fragments of a large urn with rounded bulge and diminishing rim, between which is an applied fillet with finger-tip impressions and crescent-shaped excrescences (Pl. I. fig. 7).² The black clay is mixed with somewhat coarsely pounded flint and has a bright red outer coating. In places where this has eroded away, leaving a grey under-surface, short black streaks of what appears to be carbonised vegetable matter may be seen. In all probability this is burnt grass.³

² cf *Archæologia* lxxvii. (1927), p. 187, fig. 22, pl. XX. 16.

³ *All Cannings Cross*, p. 30.

The decoration of this vessel is unusual and the writer has been unable to trace a parallel example. Efforts to imitate exactly with plasticine in a simple way this frieze of overlapping lunes or crescents have proved unsuccessful.

Group 5. Five sherds of well-baked grey-brown ware, all of which have been burnished on the outer surface. These fragments include part of a thin base and a turned-back rim with a flat top (Pl. I. fig. 6). One sherd burnished inside and out shows a chocolate colour on both sides. In each case the clay has been mixed with finely ground flint.

Group 6. Three fragments of hard sandy ware, without trace of pounded flint. One is a fragment of a shallow bowl or dish, with a rounded inturned lip, upon which are two faintly impressed finger marks; these may not be intentional (Pl. I. fig. 1). The other two sherds are part of a round-bodied pot with turned-out rim (Pl. I. fig. 4). The exterior is covered with a smooth, thin, light brown coat, and an area on the right is blackened by fire.

(III). BRONZE SOCKETED SPEAR-HEAD.

Part of a socketed spear-head of Late Bronze Age type was found opposite the house, "Wynyates," in Grosvenor Road, now Cressingham Road, about 100 yards distant from the ring-work on Marshall's Hill (Pl. II. fig. 1). It was discovered when the road was being made in 1907. The point and the base of the socket are missing, and the weapon is covered with a bright green patina. There are ribs or grooves running parallel with the edge along either side. The present length is $5\frac{1}{4}$ ins. It is now in the possession of Dr. Hastings Gilford.

(IV). BRONZE SOCKETED KNIFE.

A bronze socketed knife or dagger of a rather rare type was found somewhere in Northcourt Avenue, a road adjoining Cressingham Road (Pl. II. fig. 2). It was purchased by the Reading Museum in 1916. It is $4\frac{3}{4}$ ins. long and consists of a narrow blade with an oval socket, pierced by a rivet hole. The marks of a file appear on the blade and part of the surface patination has been removed; the edges, too, seem to have been

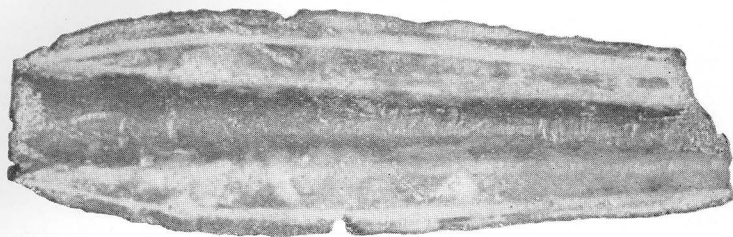


Fig. 1.

Bronze spear-head from Cressingham Road, Reading.

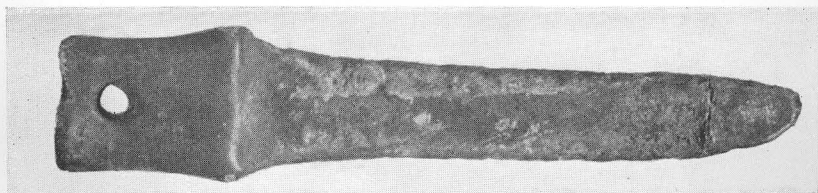


Fig. 2.

Bronze knife from Northcourt Avenue, Reading.

sharpened. It is possible that some ignorant person has made use of this weapon as a paper-knife. Sir John Evans in his "Ancient Bronze implements of Great Britain" (1881), p. 205, describes others of similar type found in the southern counties, several of which were dredged from the Thames (see below).

Several sites yielding pottery similar to that described above have been excavated and the finds reported on during the last few years. Mr. C. F. C. Hawkes gives some account of the better known sites where occupation extended from the Late Bronze Age to well into Early Iron Age times.⁴ At Castle Hill, Scarborough, an occupation site has revealed a sequence of pottery, from urnfield types with impressed applied bands to S-profile Hallstatt and early La Tène forms, in association with late bronze implements.⁵

It might be well to mention here that there is no dearth of Late Bronze Age material from the Reading district. The fine leaf-shaped sword dredged from the Kennet at Katesgrove is to be seen in the Reading Museum. Also a socketed sickle, a socketed knife, several spear-heads and socketed celts have been found. Beside these, parts of several urns have been unearthed at Grovelands gravel-pit, Tilehurst Road,⁶ in a gravel-pit on Whitley Park Farm, Southern Hill,⁷ in the Thames,⁸ and at Caversham.⁹ Bronze brooches found in the Kennet and at Battle Farm date from the early La Tène period.¹⁰

The writer would like to express his thanks to Dr. and Mrs. Gilford for permitting him to examine the pottery and spear-head and to publish the more detailed report of the Marshall's Hill finds.

⁴ In *Archæology in England and Wales* 1914-31, by T. D. Kendrick and C. F. C. Hawkes, (1932), pp. 147-151.

⁵ *Archæologia* lxxvii. (1927), pp. 179-200.

⁶ *Proc. Soc. Antiq.* xxi., 312.

⁷ Peake: *Arch. Berks.* (1931) p. 221.

⁸ Peake: *Arch. Berks.* (1931) p. 220.

⁹ Coll. of Mr. G. W. Smith.

¹⁰ *Vict. Hist. Berks.* i., 223-225.