

PROCEEDINGS

XXVII

OF THE

Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

OCTOBER 1924—MAY 1925

WITH

Communications

MADE TO THE SOCIETY

VOLUME XXVII.

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Cambridge:

DEIGHTON, BELL & CO., LTD.; BOWES & BOWES.

LONDON: G. BELL AND SONS, LTD.

1926

*Price Twelve Shillings and Sixpence net.*

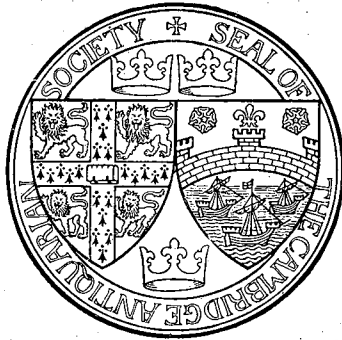
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY  
PROCEEDINGS AND COMMUNICATIONS

## NOTE

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OF THE  
**Cambridge Antiquarian Society**  
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VOL. XXVII.



1924—1925.

CAMBRIDGE:

PRINTED FOR THE CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY.

SOLD BY DEIGHTON, BELL & CO., LTD.; AND BOWES & BOWES.  
LONDON, G. BELL AND SONS, LTD.

1926.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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## PLATE

### *Cromwell's Stuart Descent:*

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## THE LA TÈNE AND ROMANO-BRITISH CEMETERY, GUILDEN MORDEN, CAMBS.

By CYRIL FOX, Ph.D., F.S.A., and T. C. LETHBRIDGE, B.A.

In the neighbourhood of Royston and Ashwell the boulder-clay-covered upland which forms the southern boundary of the upper Cam valley is from 300 to 400 feet above o.d. On the slopes the underlying chalk is exposed, and along this escarpment, between the 200 and 300 foot contours, runs a pre-historic track, the Icknield Way. Parallel to the Icknield Way, 100 feet lower down the escarpment, runs a second ancient way, linking up the villages which cluster round the chalk springs which feed the Cam. This way, probably pre-historic, was Romanized, and is here known as Ashwell Street. Overlooking Ashwell Street, in Guilden Morden parish, is a knoll ringed by the 200 foot contour, from which there is a fine view of the alluvial plain of the upper Cam, and of sites such as Abington Pigotts, Ashwell and Litlington, which have yielded ample evidence of settlement, pre-Roman or Roman<sup>1</sup>. This knoll forms part of the "Poor's Land" of Guilden Morden parish; it includes the parish chalk pit wherein from time to time during the past 60 years Roman pottery, burials by cremation, and skeletons have been found by the quarrymen<sup>2</sup>. One of us was asked in 1924 to investigate the site, as most of the objects found were scattered or lost, and the casual nature of such digging as went on deprived such finds as were preserved of most of their historical value. Two important objects, the Rhenish beaker of the II century in the Lewis collection, Corpus Christi College, discovered in 1879<sup>3</sup>, and a fine pottery lamp found by Mr C. Woodforde in 1924 together with a third discovery of which the tale

<sup>1</sup> See Fox, *Arch. Camb. Region*, Maps I, II, III.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, Map IV. See also the 1" Ordnance Survey Map, Cambridge District, whereon the Cemetery is marked: and the 6" O. S. Camb., LVII, S.E.

<sup>3</sup> See illustration in Babington, *Anc. Cambs.*, C.A.S. 1883, p. 60.



Woodforde of Ashwell interested himself in the matter, and the Trustees of the Guilden Morden "Poor's Land Charity" and the tenant, Mr R. Pearce of Cheney Water farm, gave permission for the excavation. To these gentlemen we tender our thanks for their practical interest in archaeological research. Mr L. C. G. Clarke, M.A., F.S.A., generously defrayed the cost of the investigations. Work was begun on September 15th, 1924, by the writers. For various reasons, only three weeks' work was found to be possible; the results, therefore, merely indicate the general character of the cemetery in a limited area. Its extent and the full range of date of its burials are alike unknown, and it is hoped that further work may at some future time be possible.

The main area examined was about 160 square yards, and in this small space at least forty skeletons and fourteen burials by cremation were found: Trial holes and trenches (and certain unauthorized excavations) carried out during the period of our investigations suggested that for a considerable distance to south and west, burials were equally numerous. The Plan (Fig. 1) shows the distribution and position (in relation to the eastern face of the chalk pit) of burials in the main area<sup>1</sup>.

The bodies lay in all directions, earlier burials being disturbed by later; there would appear to have been no visible memorials to guide the grave diggers. As to the cremation burials, these were so frequently broken up by later skeletal interments that it was impossible to tell whether they had been arranged in rows or no.

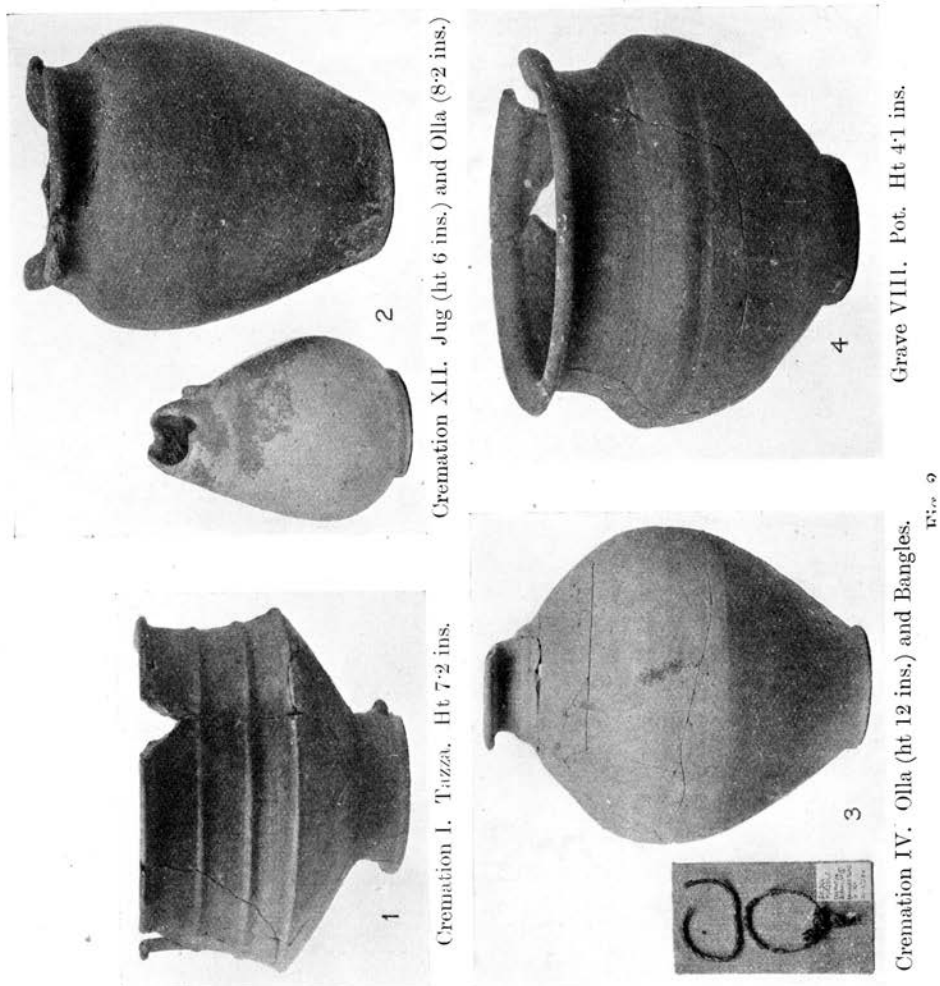
There was no hint of Christian burial, i.e. not a single body was in the normal Christian position, feet to the east.

The cremation burials may be considered first.

<sup>1</sup> On the 6" map Camb., LVII, S.E., the position of the excavated area is indicated by the first letter R of the words ROMAN CEMETERY.

## A. BURIALS BY CREMATION.

There were two definite periods of deposition; late La Tène circa 1-50 A.D.; and Roman (c. II to III centuries A.D.).

(i) *Of the La Tène Period.*

One of the earliest dateable burials, No. 1, was perhaps the most interesting of all. A fine tazza of brown ware, wheel-made (Fig. 2) had been placed in a very shallow hole in the chalk so

that the rim of the tazza was only 8" below the surface of the soil and had been touched by the plough. The tazza contained nothing but burnt bones and charcoal, but close to one side of it—which had been broken away by the plough—lay an iron fibula, together with some scattered bones from the pot. The fibula (Fig. 5a) was very well preserved. It has an open foot, bilateral spring, with chord passing under the head. On the top of the bow (but not encircling it) are three raised knobs; these represent the collar that in the brooch of the preceding (La Tène II) period attached the return foot to the bow. The base of the bow is scored with vertical lines. The fibula resembles in form an example, also of iron, from Bottisham in the Cambridge Museum<sup>1</sup>. The date is late first century B.C. The brooch may well be older than the fragile pottery vessel with which it was associated; but since this is of the finest workmanship and shows no markedly late features, a date early in the first century A.D. may safely be claimed for it.

To the La Tène period may also be assigned four other cremation burials (Nos. II, VIII, XIII, XIV) of a simple type—mere holes up to 1 foot 9 inches in diameter and 9 inches to 1 foot below the present surface, scooped out of the upper layer of the chalk. Three of these contained burnt bones only; they are approximately dated by the occurrence, among the burnt bones in a fourth hole, No. XIII, similar in type, of the foot of a La Tène fibula of iron. This resembles the fibula found with No. I.

#### (ii) *Of the Roman Period.*

Cremation No. IV (see Plan) was enclosed in a tall globular olla of well-baked red ware, wheel-made (Fig. 2). The neck had been shattered to allow the bones to be put inside the urn and a hole had been made in the bottom before deposition. This piercing of the base was in frequent use for a variety of purposes, in the La Tène period. The urn was propped up by three stones in a hole in the chalk 4 inches deep and 1 foot square. Under the bulge of the urn to the west side of the hole there was a large number of hob-nails, as if a shoe had escaped the burning and had been placed in the hole to help keep the urn in an

<sup>1</sup> Fox, *Arch. Camb. Region*, Pl. XV.

upright position. Among the ashes were found two bangles of twisted bronze wire (Fig. 2) which had passed through the fire; from one of these hung a few links of a small iron chain probably once bearing an amulet of some kind.

Cremation No. V contained a Castor ware vase, probably of the first half of the III century, with scale-armour pattern. The upper half of this vase had been broken away to admit the ashes.

Cremation No. VII had been deposited near the surface and the associated pottery was injured by the plough. The ashes had been placed in an olla of coarse gritted ware; with the olla there was a globular jug with one handle, much broken, resembling examples found at Newstead (*A Roman Frontier Post and its People*, Fig. 33, Nos. 14, 15) and dated in the II century.

Cremation No. XII was found by a man casually poking at the side of our trench when we were not digging one Sunday. The deposit consisted of a coarse olla of gritted ware containing the ashes; and a pear-shaped jug of creamy ware (Fig. 2). The body of the jug was inside the olla; its neck had been removed by the plough. The date is early II century.

The remaining cremation burials were not important; a note on several that were found in a trench which was cut on the south side of the main excavation (see Plan) will be found on p. 61.

## B. BURIALS BY INHUMATION.

### (i) *Of the Early Roman Period, circa 50-200 A.D.*

The most interesting burial in some respects was No. 8. The grave was N. and S. 1 foot 3 inches deep, cut in the chalk; the head of the skeleton to the north. Round the head were the fragments of a pot intentionally broken and thus placed in position. These fragments were collected with care and the pot reconstructed (Fig. 2). It is seen to be of a type showing pronounced La Tène influence and dateable not later than the I century A.D. Walker<sup>1</sup> in 1908 found a broken pot the fragments of which had been similarly placed about the head and

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. C. A. S.*, XII, 1908, 270.

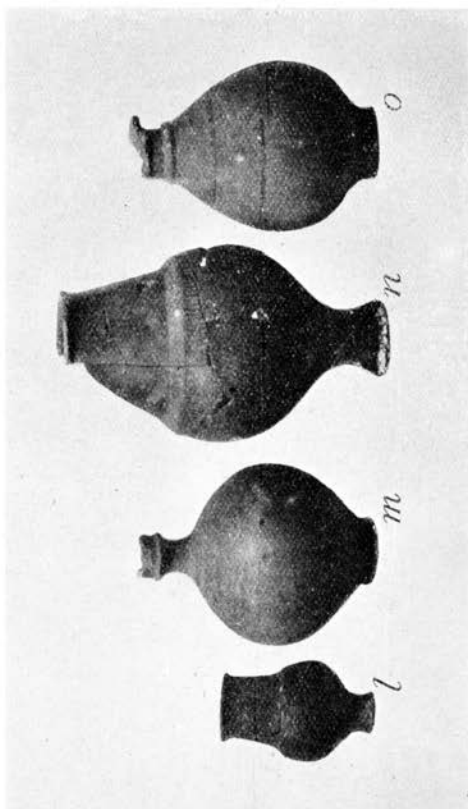
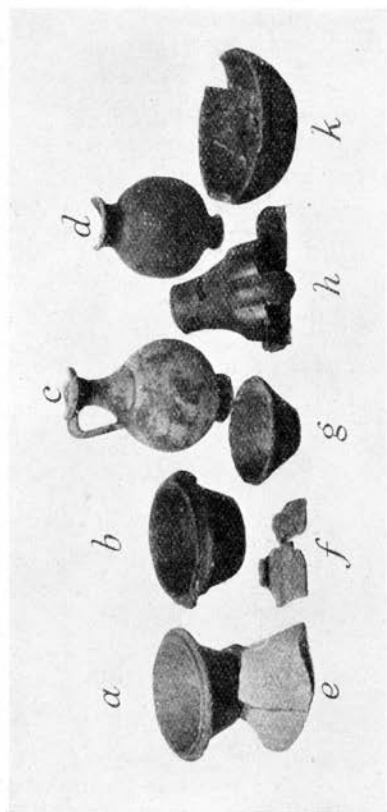
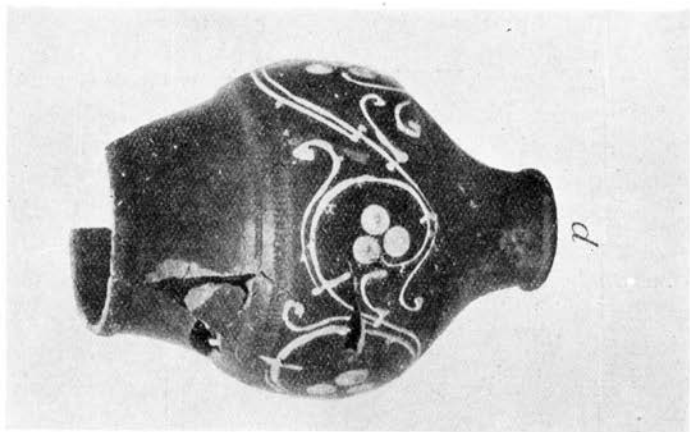


Fig. 3. Grave 4. *a*. Flanged dish. *b*. Flanged dish. *c*. Jug (ht 6.6 ins.). *d*. Vase (ht 5.1 ins.).  
*e, f*. Potsherds from disturbed Cremations. *g*. Dish. *h*. Beaker. *k*. Bowl. Grave 12 A. *m*. Globular flask (ht 5.7 ins.). Grave 11. *n*. Beaker (ht 7.8 ins.).  
Grave 21. *o*. Flask (ht 5.8 ins.). Grave 3. *p*. Beaker (ht 5.5 ins.).



face of a skeleton at War Ditches; in the grave was another pot, "the profile of which," as one of us wrote in 1923, "is strongly suggestive of I century date<sup>1</sup>." We thus have two inhumation burials in the Cam valley of the early Roman period characterized by a special rite—the ceremonial breaking and placing of a vessel of pottery round the head.

If, as we believe, No. 8 of the Guilden Morden series was a I century burial, then No. 5 was of the same century or earlier, for it lay at right angles to and had been cut across by No. 8, the skeleton being partly destroyed. There were no associated objects.

Definite attribution to the II century is possible in the case of Grave No. 3. This was fairly deep and nails were present at the head, feet and pelvis of the skeleton.

The right clavicle was stained green by a worn 1st brass of Hadrian which had obviously fallen from the mouth. (A coin was found in the mouth of a skeleton at Litlington<sup>2</sup>, but the practice of placing coins in the mouth is rare in our area.) Opposite the face lay a fine Castor ware pot with white barbotine ornament (Fig. 3p). Rhenish parallels enable us to place this in the late II century A.D. which agrees well with its association—a worn coin of Hadrian.

#### (ii) *Of the Later Roman Period, III and IV centuries.*

All the other inhumations with associated objects which are dateable are of the late III, or IV, centuries, in our opinion. Of these the most important is No. 4.

The skeleton was buried with head to the south in such a manner that it was just within the chalk, but the skull was partly in the overlying soil, here only 1 foot in thickness. When cleared it was found that the skull and neck vertebrae had become twisted off, and the skull was facing backwards in an unusual manner. There was a shallow bowl of coarse black

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*, Plate XVI. Walker cites another parallel (p. 272), the Lords Bridge, Barton burial; but this may have been disturbed subsequent to deposition. See also, Fox, *Arch. Camb. Region*, p. 190, and compare the Limlow Hill, Litlington burials: *Gent. Mag.*, 1833, i, 453.

<sup>2</sup> Fox, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

ware under the right leg, and portions of a coarse black indented beaker of late date (Fig. 3*h*) were scattered about the body.

Under the trunk and at right angles to the long axis of the grave was a hole 1 foot 6 inches deep in the chalk and 3 feet long by 1 foot 6 inches wide. This hole had obviously contained a wooden box, for the hinge fittings, an S-shaped fastening and nails were found. The hinge irons had broken with the lid and the collapse of the box had apparently caused the body to sink into the cavity thus formed, twisting the head and neck into the position in which they were discovered (Fig. 4).

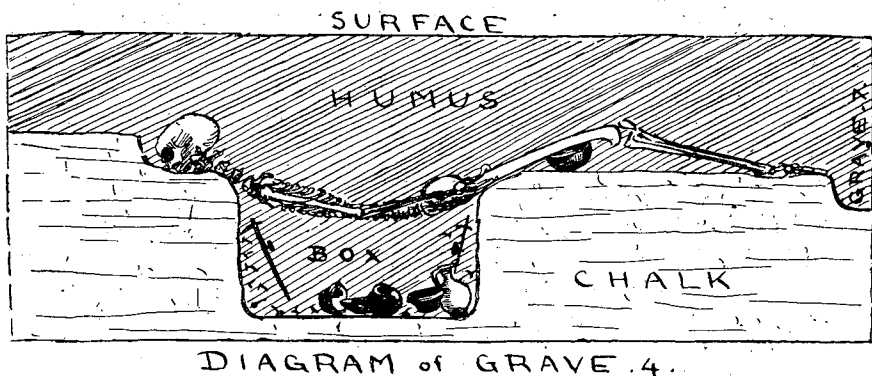


Fig. 4.

In the box and jerked up to its east end at the time that it was put into the grave were five whole vessels.

They were: (1) A one-handled jug of red ware (Fig. 3*c*).

(2-3) Two dishes with flanged rims of coarse grey ware with blackened surfaces (Fig. 3*ab*).

(4) A plain dish of coarse grey ware (Fig. 3*k*).

(5) A globular vase with a rather wide neck and small foot (Fig. 3*d*).

The handled jug has a "bung" foot, and this fixes the date of the deposit, in the opinion of one of us, as not earlier than the late III century.

A few fragments of burnt bone occurred outside the limits of the box hole on each side, and pieces of a red ware pot. It

was found that a cremation burial (No. III) had been partially destroyed by this interment. The hole in the chalk for this cremation, half of which remained, contained burnt bones and charcoal only.

Inhumation No. 11*a* had displaced another which had apparently been in a coffin. A broken vase of Castor ware with "engine-turning" pattern lay in fragments (Fig. 3*n*); it is doubtful whether it belonged to burial No. 11 or the earlier burial. It is of early IV century type.

Near the mouth of another skeleton (No. 12*a*) was a globular vase of yellowish-red ware, late III century type (Fig. 3*m*).

Grave No. 38. This was a child's burial in a coffin, placed in an earlier grave, the contents of which had been disturbed by the intrusion. At the child's feet was a small olla of grey ware, very thin, in fragments; at its head a vase of plain Castor ware of late type; probably IV century (Fig. 3*l*).

At the foot of No. 21 which had been buried in a coffin displacing an earlier body was a globular vessel of yellow ware with bands of brownish paint, early IV cent. (?) (Fig. 3*o*).

Two of the inhumation burials had no associated pottery, but bronze objects were found with them. In Grave No. 24, the skeleton had a small ring of bronze wire on a finger of the left hand, and under the base of the skull in Grave 35 there was a tiny bronze hollow boss  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in diameter, evidently made for clipping on to cloth or leather (Fig. 5*b*). Similar bosses are illustrated by Déchelette and referred to the Hallstatt period<sup>1</sup>.

Casual and unauthorized digging on a Sunday led to the discovery of two skeletons, one with a fine shale armlet (Fig. 5*c*) above the elbow. The other, which was of a large male, had a little collection of belongings (Fig. 6) in a hollow cut in the chalk wall of the grave on the right side, close to the surface. These were: (1) a phallic pendant of bronze, (2) an iron thumb ring(?), (3) a bronze ferrule  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches long. The presence of rusted iron links at one end suggests that this may have shod a stick or bâton, from which the phallic object depended; there are traces of iron on the loop of the ornament; (4) an iron ferrule,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches long; this may have been fixed to the other end of

<sup>1</sup> Manuel, *Premier Age du Fer*, Fig. 358.

the bâton. The phallic pendant is cast, and worked over with the graving tool.

The general character of the inhumation burials may now be briefly summarized. There were in the main excavation (see Plan) 40 skeletons of which 8 only had associated pottery, and

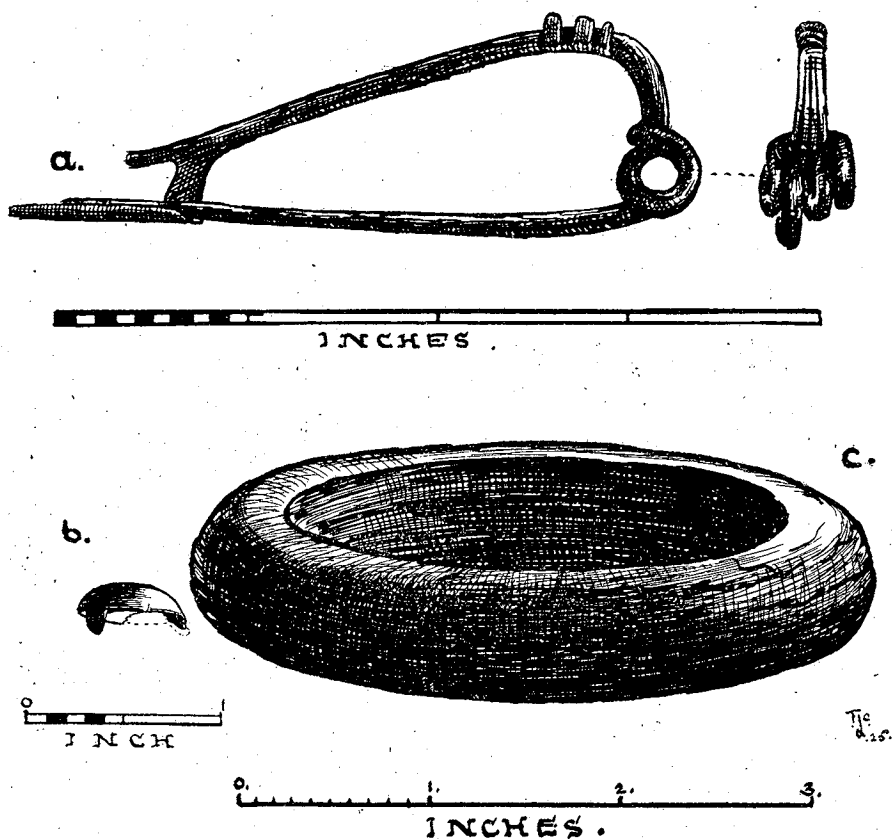


Fig. 5. *a.* Iron Fibula from Cremation I. *b.* Bronze boss from Grave 35. *c.* Shale Armlet.

2 bronze or shale objects. No hob-nails were found at the feet of the skeletons (with one cremation, IV, numbers were found).

There were two cases of bodies buried without their heads and but little room in the grave for a head. In other cases, where an earlier grave had been disturbed by a later, the skull

was usually re-buried in the later grave, so that the absence of skulls in Graves 18 and 24 is worthy of notice, though inexplicable on the data available.

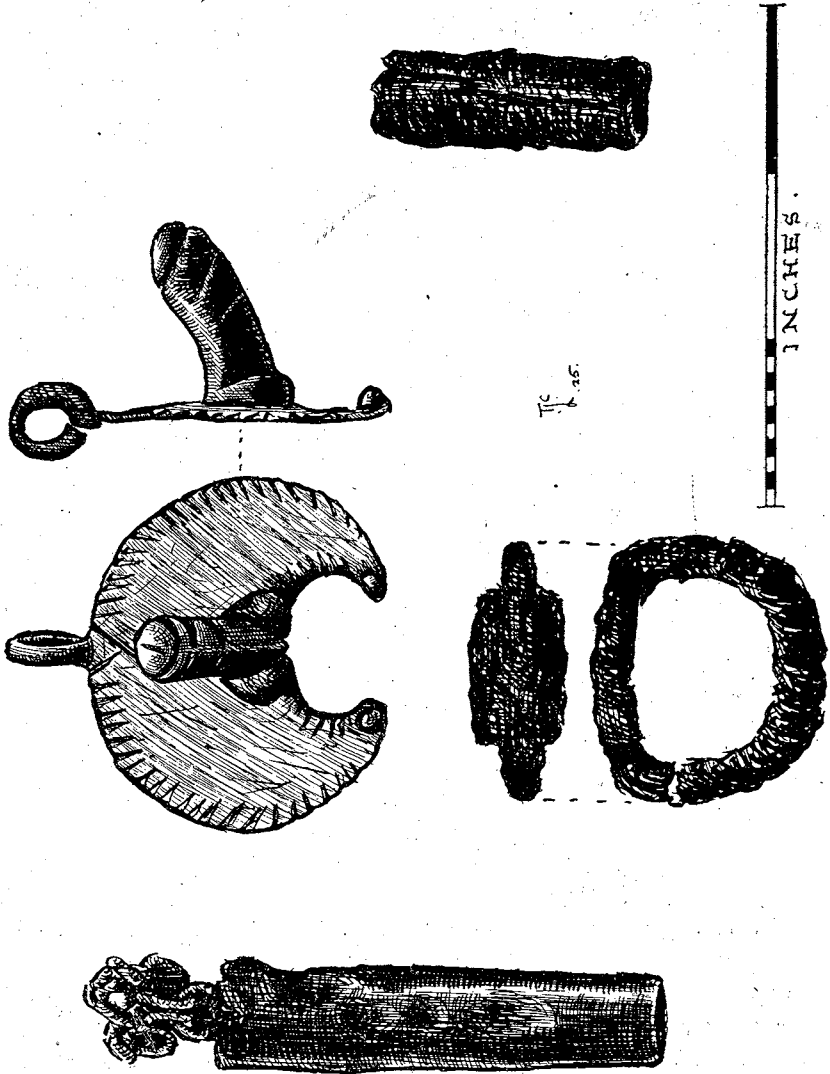


Fig. 6. Phallic pendant and Associated Objects.

Seventeen of the graves contained nails. Of these 17 burials, the bodies in six had been placed in some form of wooden box

or coffin (two had actual angle irons and one iron loops for lowering). Two or three had occasional nails only, insufficient in number to have secured the coffin; their presence is noted, but no explanation can be offered. The others had big nails at the head, feet and pelvis, and the skeleton may have rested on some form of bier. Twenty-three graves yielded no nails, and may be supposed to have been deposited without coffins.

The associated objects in the graves that we opened were on the whole of poor quality. We were evidently dealing with the burial area of a poor folk. The graves themselves were roughly dug. It may be noted that most of the best-cut graves contained no coffin.

It may possibly be of help to some one striving after an orientation theory to state that

|    |        |      |        |      |      |    |     |      |
|----|--------|------|--------|------|------|----|-----|------|
| 12 | bodies | were | buried | with | head | to | the | S.W. |
| 9  | "      | "    | "      | "    | "    | "  | "   | N.E. |
| 8  | "      | "    | "      | "    | "    | "  | "   | S.E. |
| 4  | "      | "    | "      | "    | "    | "  | "   | E.   |
| 2  | "      | "    | "      | "    | "    | "  | "   | N.   |
| 2  | "      | "    | "      | "    | "    | "  | "   | S.   |
| 2  | "      | "    | "      | "    | "    | "  | "   | N.W. |
| No | "      | "    | "      | "    | "    | "  | "   | W.   |

#### EXCAVATIONS AT THE HILL-TOP.

An idea that a barrow may have crowned the knoll and given rise to the custom of burial on the hill slope led us to run a trench from the summit to the main excavation. Nothing indicative of the former presence of a barrow was found on the hill-top, but about thirty yards down the slope a large trench running in a northerly direction was discovered. At the head of the trench was a broken olla of red gritted ware in fragments too small to permit determination of date. It had contained a cremation. Beneath the olla was a shattered skull and beside this ran a small narrow ditch-like hole in the chalk, about 6 feet long and 1 foot deep and varying in width from 9 inches to 1 foot. This was full of ashes and bits of human bone but no other relics with the possible exception of an *inoceramus* fossil.

Another cremation without an urn had been cut into in making the big trench. It contained no associated objects. In the big trench was a continuous line of skeletons of which six were uncovered. They appeared to have been thrown in without any attempt at seemly interment. One was doubled up in such a manner that his skull lay under his pelvis. Nothing was found that threw any light on the date of the burials; but all the bodies in the trench had obviously been buried at the same time, and the most probable explanation is that the men had been killed in battle or in some civil disturbance. The far end of the trench was not reached.

#### THE RITES OF CREMATION AND INHUMATION.

The history of the rites of cremation and inhumation in the period covered by the Guilden Morden burials is of interest. Early La Tène burials in the Cambridge region are by inhumation<sup>1</sup>, but during the I century B.C. the intrusive cremation culture associated with the wheel-made Aylesford pottery reached the Cam valley, and urn-burials dating from the last fifty years or so of independence are numerous. In this period, as far as our evidence goes, fall the earliest burials at Guilden Morden.

Cremation was the normal rite in Britain during the first two hundred years of the Roman occupation; but a considerable body of evidence from Cambridge and its neighbourhood has shown that inhumation was not infrequent during the earlier part of the period; and one of us, writing in 1923<sup>2</sup>, saw reason to regard the occurrence of inhumation in this period as a survival of the traditional burial rite of the La Tène Celts, which had been replaced by the Aylesford cremation culture in south-east England only.

Illustrations of the rule as well as of the exception occurred at Guilden Morden. Cremation burials IV, V, VII and XII are of the II and III centuries; while Grave 8 contained a burial of the I century (probably of the middle third) and Grave 5 was earlier than it. Grave 3 was of late II century date.

<sup>1</sup> Fox, *Arch. Camb. Region*, pp. 76-81 and 86.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 190.

During the III century the rite of cremation fell into disuse, giving place to inhumation, which rite was, under Christian influence, universally employed up to the end of the Roman period. To the same influence doubtless the scarcity of objects deposited with the dead in late Romano-British burials is due<sup>1</sup>. Twenty-eight of our inhumation burials had no associated objects and the great majority of these may safely be placed in the late III and IV centuries; this being so, the exception, Grave No. 4, which contained six vessels, is of the greater value as providing a group-find in a period wherein group-finds are rare.

The Guilden Morden cemetery, then, contained burials by cremation of the first half of the I century A.D.; burials by inhumation and cremation of the second half of the I century A.D. onwards to the III century A.D.; burials by inhumation of the IV century A.D.; and no burials definitely Christian or post-Roman.

Skeletons from the cemetery have been deposited in the Anatomical Museum, Cambridge, and have been examined by Dr W. L. H. Duckworth, to whom we desire to express our thanks for the annexed Report.

<sup>1</sup> For local evidence see Fox, *op. cit.*, p. 190.