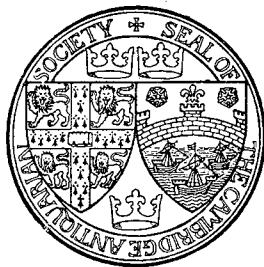


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PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

OCTOBER 1935—OCTOBER 1936



VOLUME XXXVII

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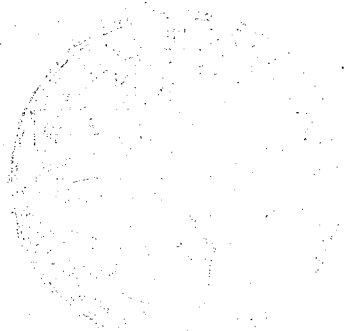


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ROMANO-BRITISH BURIALS AT LINTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

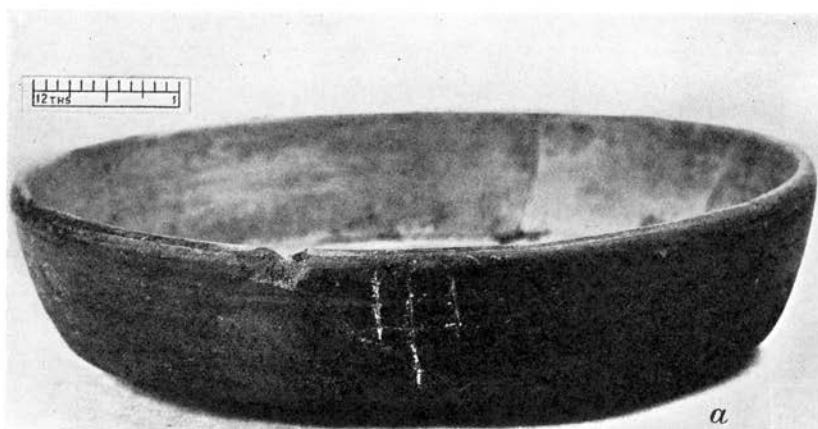
By T. C. LETHBRIDGE, M.A., F.S.A.

During the excavation of the trenches for the footings of the walls of the Warden's house at the new Village College at Linton two human skeletons were discovered. Dr Palmer was told of this, and at once asked me to come over and look at them. When I reached the site the two skeletons had been taken up, but it was possible to see the places where they had lain, and the bones of a young child were also visible in another part of the trenches. I thought it possible that the two adult skeletons were those of women, and suggested that as their skulls resembled some which I had recently excavated at Guilden Morden they also might belong to the Roman period. We therefore asked whether we might make an examination of the ground in the neighbourhood of the Warden's house to see whether any more burials were to be found there. (It should be noted that no burials had been discovered when the foundation trenches for the college itself were dug.) As a result of our efforts two more burials were in fact found, as well as ditches and pits, of the date which we had expected.

The site is very suitable for occupation, for at this point a low gravel terrace borders the narrow flood-plain of the "Linton river". It may possibly have some bearing on the early history of the place to note that a right of way to a ford over this stream passes the burials at a few yards distance. Dr Palmer is of opinion that this ford is not the one which gave its name to Chilford hundred, which was more probably about two hundred yards downstream. In any case we can be confident that the site was handy to the ancient crossing of the stream hereabouts.

It will be seen from the plan (Fig. 1) that the burials form a comparatively compact little group, and when we note that three of them were those of children and two probably of women we may perhaps be justified in thinking that they represent a single family burial ground, and are not outlying

PLATE I



a. Plate with graffito, grave 4.



b and *c.* Pots from grave 5.

units of a large communal cemetery. This view is perhaps borne out by the absence of any burials in the extensive

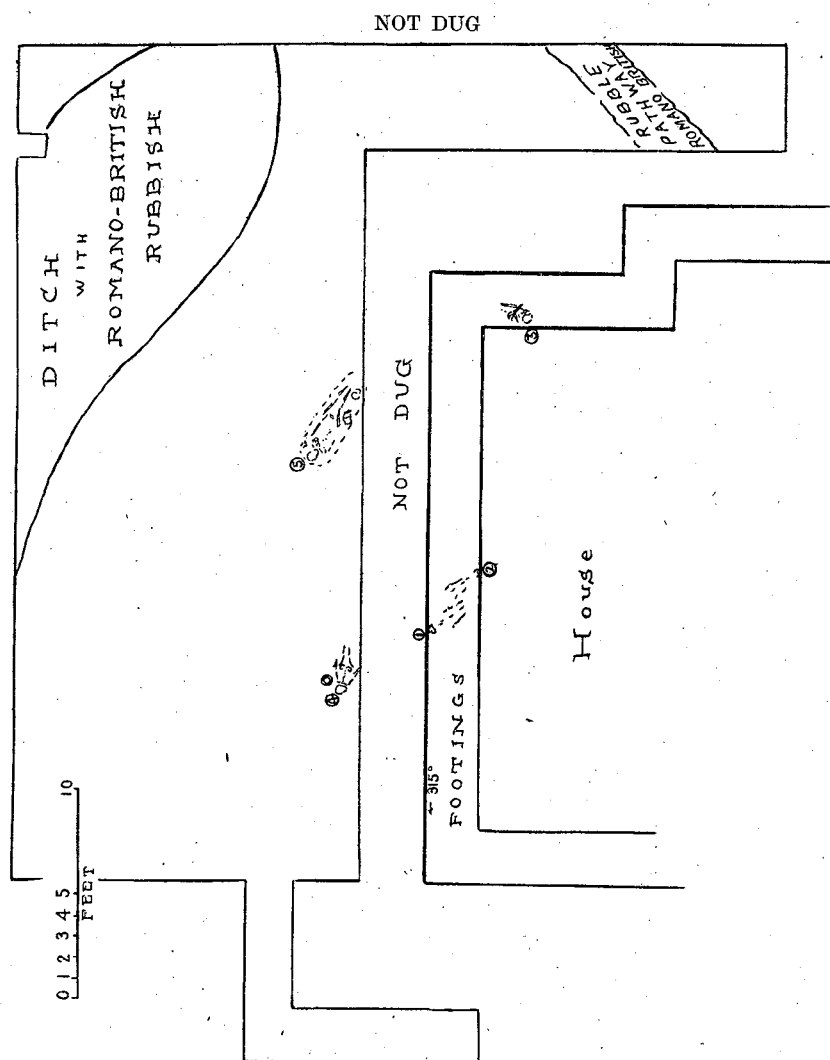


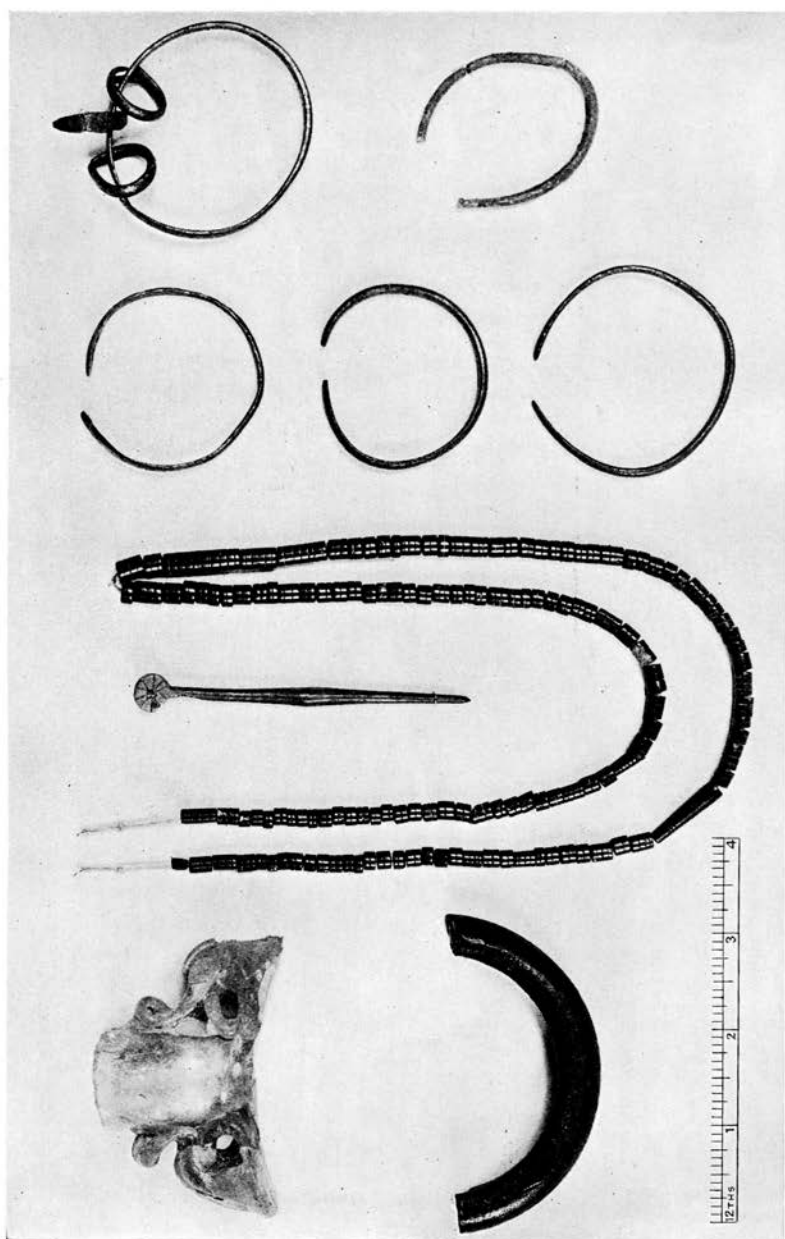
Fig. 1. Plan of the excavations at the new Linton Village College.

trenches dug for the foundations of the college itself and the drains, etc. leading to it.

The first burial that we found, grave 4, was that of a child 2 ft. 6 in. long, with a femur 6 in. long; it was 3 ft. 3 in. deep in sandy gravel. Beside its left shoulder was a dish of grey ware with a graffito in the form of a trident scratched on it (Pl. Ia). The second burial, grave 5, was also that of a child. The skeleton was about 4 ft. long as it lay in the sandy gravel, and was very fragmentary. Close to the lower jaw, which was partly preserved by contact with the bronze, were five bronze bracelets (Pl. II), one hundred and forty-eight jet beads, lying in confusion, a tiny fragment of a silver wire ring, and a bone pin with a disc head (Pl. II). Between the thighs lay the neck of a glass bottle (Pl. II) and half a shale armlet (Pl. II). Beside the right femur was a small olla of grey ware (Pl. Ib), with part of the neck broken in antiquity, and beside the right ankle a flanged bowl of the same paste, apparently smashed at the time it was placed in the grave (Pl. Ic). A small iron nail and traces of charcoal were observed between these two vessels. The body had apparently been carefully disposed for burial, and lay on its back with its arms at its sides. It was too much decayed to be preserved.

Bronze bracelets. Three of these are of simple penannular form, two of them of flattened oval and the other of almost hemispherical section. The remaining two have their flattened terminals roughly formed into snakes' heads, and belong to a well-known class (cf. *British Museum Guide to the Roman Period*, fig. 81). The larger of these two has three smaller rings strung on it, also of bronze (or brass); one of them is a simple penannular ring, 0.7 in. in diameter; another, slightly smaller, has been broken in antiquity, and the third is a finger-ring with a broad, flat bezel flanked by flattened wings.

Jet beads. These are nearly all cylindrical, of varying lengths, encircled by one to eight incised grooves. The exceptions are two beads which appear to be shaped to resemble dentalium shells, and one small faceted bead (Pl. II). These three beads, and possibly one of the cylindrical beads, may perhaps have formed part of another and older string, as they are of a slightly different colour from the rest and are considerably more worn. The cylindrical beads are of a comparatively common type (cf. *Report on the excavation*



Ornaments etc. from grave 5.

of the Roman cemetery at Ospringe, Kent, by W. Whiting, W. Hawley, and Thomas May: *Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries*, no. VIII, Pl. LV).

Bone pin. We have not been able to find an exact parallel.

Shale armlet. These are comparatively common in the Roman period in this area.

Glass bottle-neck. This seems to have formed part of a large two-handled bottle, probably not less than 6 in. in diameter. The handles apparently represent conventionalized dolphins. The whole fragment has been carefully chipped so that no sharp edges remain, and was undoubtedly buried as an object in itself, and was not a vessel accidentally broken during the burial. Somewhat similar handles may be seen on a vessel from Ospringe (*op. cit.* Pl. XXXVIII, 448).

This burial seems to belong to the later part of the Roman period, probably not earlier than the second century, and it is unusual to find a Roman inhumation so richly furnished in this district. More remarkable still is the character of some of the objects and their disposal in the grave. It is hard to understand why the five bracelets should have been placed at the neck, why a finger-ring and perhaps two ear-rings should have been strung on one of them, why only half of the shale armlet was included, and above all why only a carefully prepared fragment of a glass vessel should have been placed in the grave. Single iron nails are not unusual in Romano-British graves, and are generally thought to have some ritual significance (cf. *B. M. Guide*, p. 43).

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