

CINERARY URNS FROM KIRK IRETON.

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IN November, 1946, a cinerary urn was brought to light by the operations of a mechanical shovel working gravel in Kirk Ireton Gravel Pit belonging to Messrs. Hilton Gravel, Ltd. Owing to the method of excavation, only fragments of this urn (Urn I) were preserved, and these have been presented to Derby Museum by Major Blackwell, manager of the gravel pit. On discovering the first urn, Major Blackwell made a careful search for others in the same area. Two more urns (Urns II and III) were discovered intact and also two holes containing burnt bones were found. Although great care was taken in transporting the urns by the personnel of the gravel company, they were unfortunately broken through careless handling by visiting press photographers. However, the urns have been reconstructed in the workshops of the Institute of Archæology of the University of London. Photographs and drawings of the urns are reproduced with this paper to illustrate the detailed descriptions prepared by Professor Childe.

The gravel workings are developed in fluvio-glacial gravels and sands capping the south-western end of the ridge forming the divide between the River Ecclesbourne and Scow Brook. This ridge has been deeply dissected to the south by the Sherbourne Brook which flows south-eastwards into the Ecclesbourne. The finds were made

near the top of a small spur running westwards between two small streams flowing into Scow Brook. The site was in the field numbered 378 on the 25" map (Derbyshire Sheet XXXIX, 9) shown on the map, Fig. 1, which shows the field boundaries in the vicinity of the pit as they were before the gravel operations commenced. (Normal National Grid Reference 251497, Sheet III,

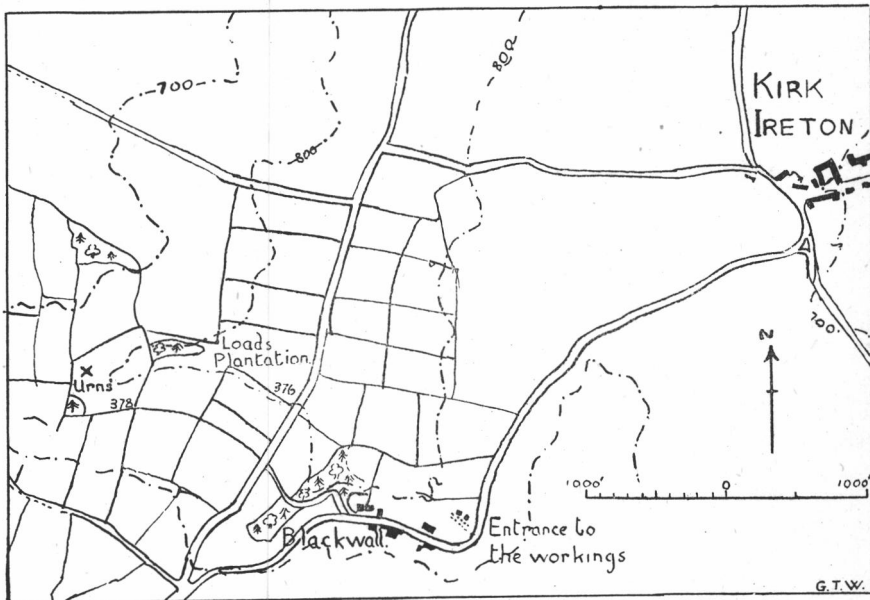


FIG. 1.—Based upon the Ordnance Survey 6" Map with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office

Titus Wilson & Son, Limited, Printers, Kendal.

O.S. 1" map, 6th edn.). All the finds were made within two feet of the surface on a small platform near the steep-sided crest of the hill. Urn I was a little apart from the others, but all were fairly close together.

The foreman at the gravel pit, Mr. Wilfred Ward, reported later that near where the urns were discovered, a small circular depression, about four to five feet in diameter and about four feet deep, was found. The pit

was lined roughly with sandstone and gritstone boulders which showed signs of having been subject to the action of fire. When discovered the pit was filled with gravel, but nothing else was found in it. At least two or three similar depressions were found in other parts of the workings, but the absence of any dateable evidence makes speculation regarding their function and possible connection with the burials of little value. None of these pits were preserved.

Seen in its relationship to the local area, the ridge on which the finds were made forms part of the larger watershed between the Scow brook, which is part of the Dove drainage and the Ecclesbourne belonging to the Derwent. Such a position offered a dryshod passage from the Low Peak to the Trent Valley, and by means of a low col this ridge is connected with the ridge running east-west between Ashbourne and Turnditch, now utilised by the Ashbourne-Belper main road (A.517). These ridges may have been utilised for movement in Late Bronze and Early Iron Age times, but that question is beyond the scope of this paper.

REPORT ON THE URNS.

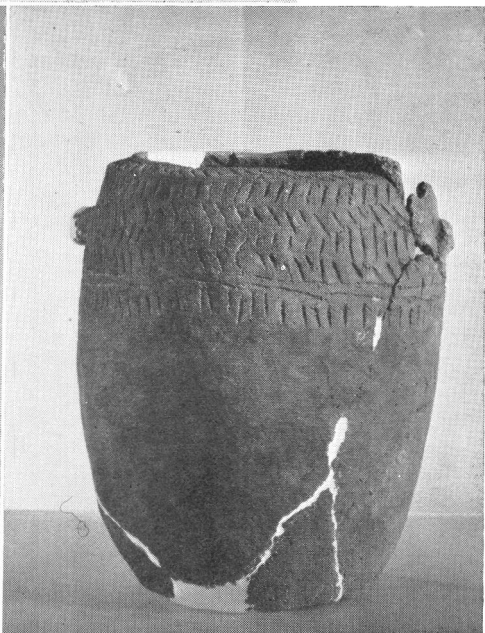
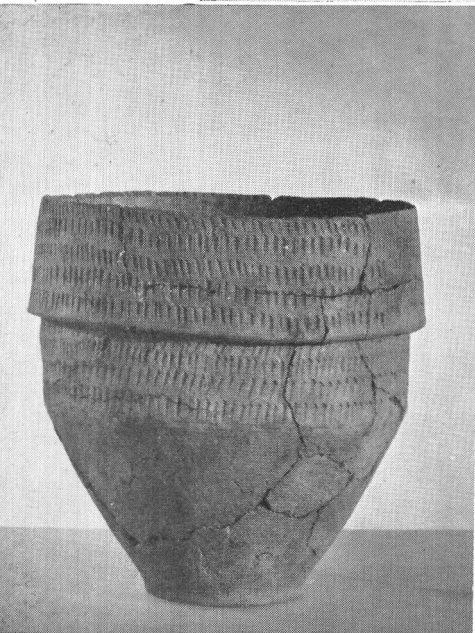
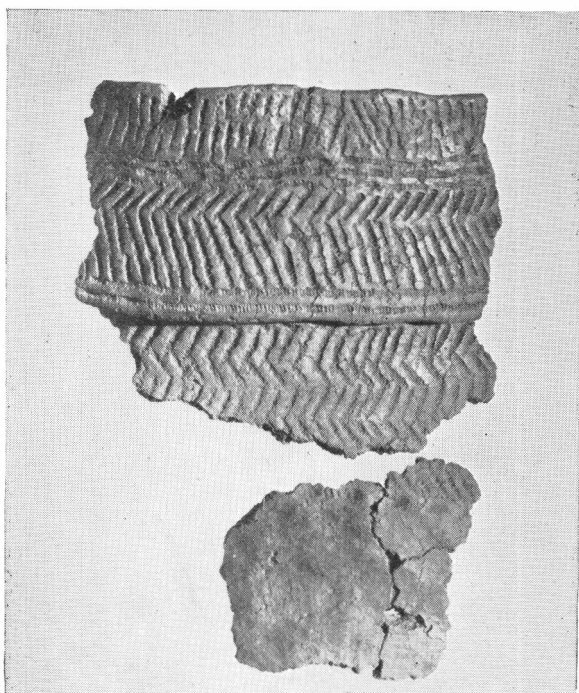
URN I, the first to be discovered, is represented by four fragments only, none of which join. They afford, however, sufficient indications of the vessel's profile to allow of the calculation of the rim diameter and a rather more hypothetical estimate of its height. The rim diameter is 14.2" (35.0 cm.) overall, the maximum diameter 14.8" (37.5 cm.) and its height a little over 15.5" (40 cm.). It belongs to the Overhanging Rim family, still showing a distinct overhang of the rim, but the shallow neck and flattened shoulder puts it late in the Middle Bronze Age group of Grime's degeneration series.¹

¹ W. F. Grimes, *A Guide to the Collection illustrating the Prehistory of Wales* (National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, 1939), fig. 30, p. 92.

It is made of coarse clay, comprising large lumps of white (limestone) grit which tend to break out. The surface is dirty reddish brown, and this reddening, due to oxidation, penetrates the core to a depth of about 0.2 cm. on the exterior. The rest of the core and the inner surface, save for the rim and the top of the body, is black. The interior bevel of the rim and part of the exterior are each decorated with a single band of herring-boning, while two such bands cover the neck; the band on the rim is bordered on both sides by horizontal lines on which is a band of oblique impressions. These motives have been formed by the impression of a coarse cord whipped tightly round an apparently flexible core, presumably another length of cord. Consecutive impressions of this instrument, probably with the potter's thumb, have been required to produce the horizontal lines and the long oblique lines on the rim, so that while the channels are continuous they vary perceptibly in depth. The shoulder, however, bears a single row of impressions that could have been made with the naked thumb.

URN II, which is complete, measures 9" (23 cm.) in diameter at the rim and stands 9.8" (24.8 cm.) high. It also belongs to the Overhanging Rim family but, in view of the still less concave neck, would be assigned to the typological stage next later than that represented by Urn I. Paste and firing are as in Urn I. The surface has been wiped smooth but the mechanical slip thus produced has peeled off in patches. Decoration consists of short, nearly vertical, impressions of whipped cord. But this time the core may have been solid since the upper end of the impression is always deeper than the lower. Thumb imprints again decorate the shoulder. Short impressions on the internal bevel of the rim may have been made with the same implement as the longer ones on the exterior.

URN III, also complete, measures less than 5" (11.6 cm.) across the mouth but expands to a girth of 7.2" (18.4 cm.). It cannot be called an Overhanging Rim urn



Above: Urn I.

Below: (left) Urn II; (right) Urn III.

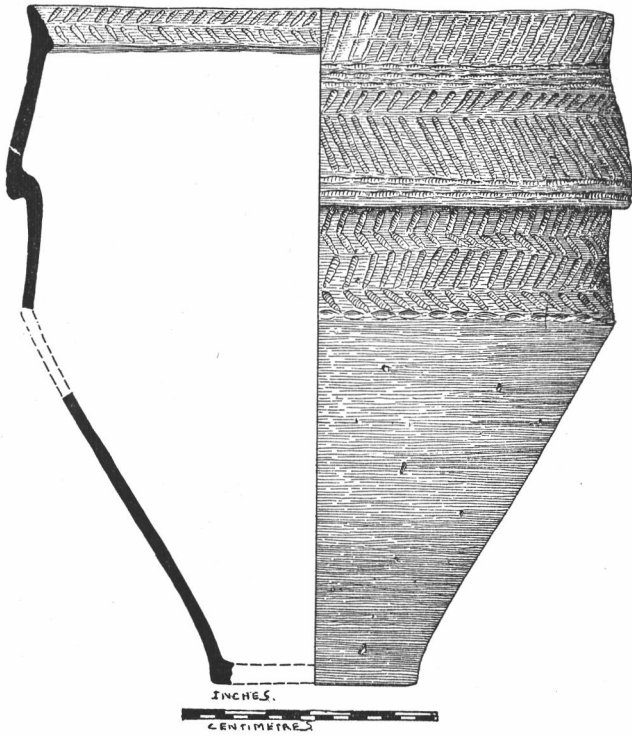


FIG. 2.—Urn I.

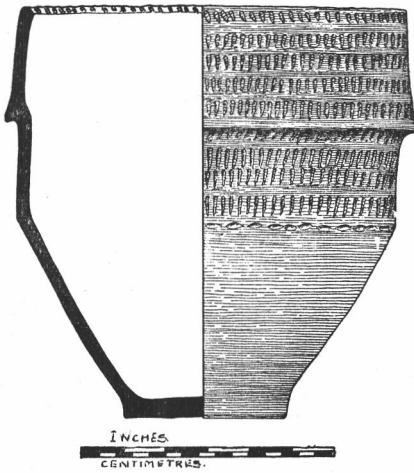


FIG. 3.—Urn II.

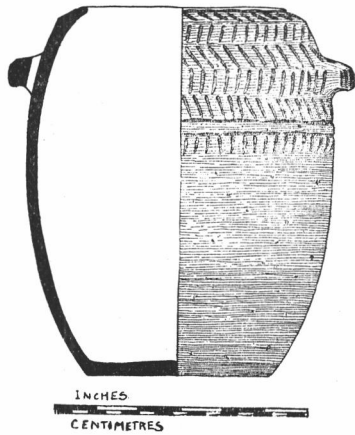


FIG. 4.—Urn III.

since it is barrel-shaped and the rim actually inverted; there are also two vertically pierced lug handles below the rim. The oblique imprints and continuous horizontal lines have in fact been executed by repeated impressions of a whipped cord, just as in Urn I there; however, the cord is finer and longer strips have been impressed at each operation. Moreover, it is made of finer clay than Urns I and II, without the large limestone grits, and is harder fired. The exterior is grey rather than orange-brown, and the core is grey throughout. On the other hand, the technique of decoration and the patterns produced thereby embody the same tradition as exemplified on Urn I. Hence the Bronze Age tradition cannot be denied, but, at the same time, some new influence must be suspected.

This suspicion is enhanced by the vertically pierced lugs. Such are unknown to the Bronze Age—though horizontally pierced lugs are known in Food Vessels, Deverel urns and in Cornwall—but occur on Neolithic A vessels and then in Iron Age A.² A survival of Windmill Hill traditions is unlikely, but influence from Iron Age A is conceivable. The barrel shape was, of course, popular in that context. So, on the whole our urn must be regarded as an Iron Age A vase in the Bronze Age tradition, or vice versa. Finds of pottery already recorded illustrate the penetration of Iron Age A up the Trent and into the Derwent valley. The survival of the Overhanging Rim Urn tradition of the Bronze Age until that period should not be surprising in an isolated outpost of the Highland Zone.

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² Fifield Bavant. *W.A.M.* xlii, 474; Swallowcliffe Down, *ibid.* xliii, Pl. vi, 5.