

# Sussex Archæological Society

## THE CEMETERY OF ST. MARY MAGDALEN, BIDLINGTON

BY GEOFFREY D. LEWIS

During the development of the Maudlyn Park Estate, Bramber, in October, 1959, a number of human skeletons were discovered some eighty-five yards south-west of Maudlin House (Fig. 1) and reported to the Worthing Museum. An investigation of the site revealed a number of graves in the chalk sub-soil, the burials from which were already badly mutilated by a mechanical excavator clearing topsoil for the foundations of 24 Maudlyn Park Way (TQ 178103).

In October of the following year further graves were discovered during the excavation of the foundations for the next house (No. 23, now known as Coombe Rise); overlapping the front garden of No. 21 and the adjoining pavement a pit was exposed containing a considerable quantity of medieval pottery. A few sherds of medieval pottery were also found on the surface of the back garden of this house where it abuts Sopers Lane.

Despite the most co-operative spirit shown by the builders who temporarily halted work to permit an examination of the site, it was possible to carry out only a very small amount of excavation and to record the main finds.

### THE CEMETERY (Fig. 2)

Forty-six graves were recorded from the sites of 23 and 24 Maudlyn Park Way, but as this total represents only those exposed in the foundation trenches of these houses the number of burials in this area alone is likely to have been considerably higher. However the north-eastern part of one plot (No. 24), cleared down into the natural chalk, revealed no burials and this may represent the eastern limit of the cemetery.

All of the burials excavated had been made with the head to the west. The disturbed nature of the soil both as a result of building operations and by a previous partial levelling of the site make it difficult to be certain of the original depth below ground level of the graves, but this was probably in the order of two feet six inches with the exception of graves XXI and XXII which were about two feet deeper.

A few of the significant bones from the burials were removed for further examination and have now been reburied beneath the pavement fronting 25 Maudlyn Park Way. Fuller details of the graves

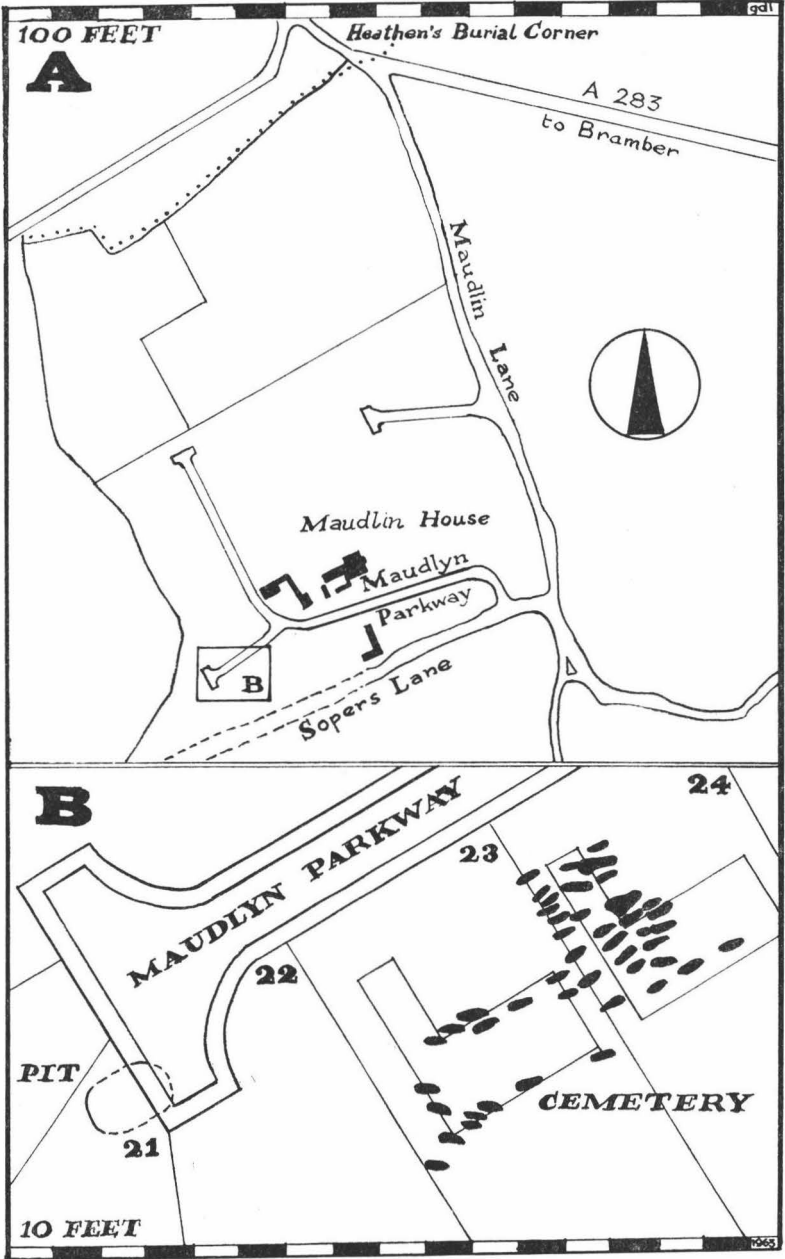


FIG. 1

A: SKETCH PLAN OF MAUDLYN PARK ESTATE AND ENVIRONS. Based on Map provided by Hoad and Taylor, Ltd. B: GENERAL SITE PLAN.

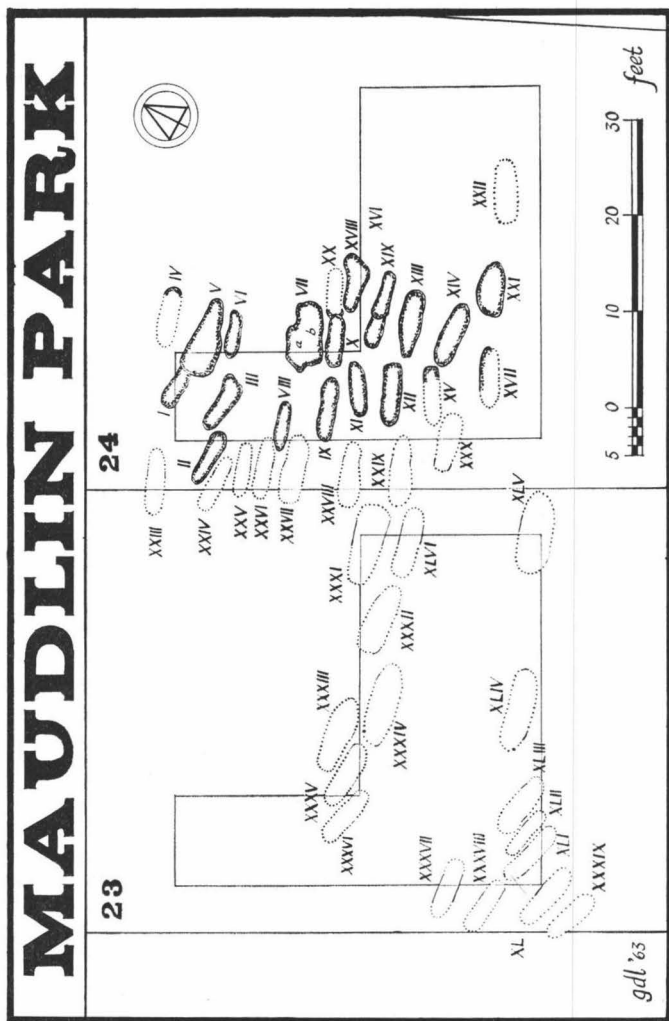


FIG. 2  
PLAN OF GRAVES EXPOSED AT 23 AND 24 MAUDLYN PARKWAY.

excavated are given in Appendix A (p. 7) together with a pathological report by Dr. H. B. A. Ratcliffe-Densham.

In December, 1963, while searching for a water main, the builders disturbed graves XXV, XXVI and XXVII. They reported that an iron object (which disintegrated) was found by the throat of the burial in grave XXV and a small iron plate occurred in the rib-cage

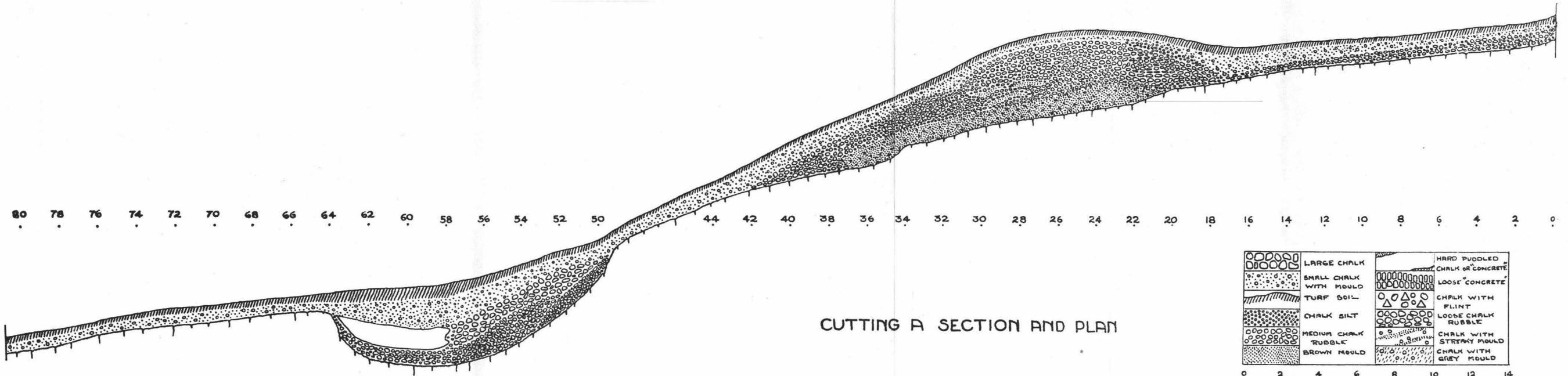
of burial XXVI. The bones in grave XXVII, however, appeared to them to be the lower part of the spine of a beast, possibly horse. The owner of 23 Maudlyn Park Way has exposed a coursed chalk wall a few feet to the east of grave XXXIX. This was at a depth of about two feet and was five feet long and nine inches thick. I am most grateful to the builders for this additional information supplied just before going to press.

### THE PIT

Although a disturbed area containing some medieval pottery was recorded during the laying of a gas main at the south-west end of the hammer-head to Maudlyn Park Way, it was not until a cesspool had been constructed in the adjacent front garden of No. 21 that the true nature of this feature was appreciated. Although the trench for the cesspool was some sixteen feet square and over seven feet deep only the western extent of the pit was revealed. It is estimated that the pit was at least twenty feet wide and, as a result of a trial boring, about eleven feet deep. It was filled with large chalk rubble intermingled with 13th century pottery and bone (See Appendix B) which are now in the Worthing Museum. A rusty-brown filling occurring lower on the pit edge and on the bottom probably represents rain washed silt; it contained a fair amount of humus and some oyster shells. The rim and base fragments rescued from the workman's dumps together with a few pieces from the remaining pit filling itself, represent forty different vessels. A small selection of the pottery is illustrated.

### THE POTTERY (Fig. 3)

1. Light orange-brown fabric, uniformly fired throughout. Patchy yellow-green glaze covering decoration.
2. Light orange-brown sandy fabric uniformly fired throughout; olive-green-brown glaze externally. Pinched spout; handle incised and ribbed at edges.
3. Black fabric, containing large pieces of flint and grit, which has fired red-brown externally.
4. Light grey, sandy fabric fired buff-orange externally with splashes of light green-brown glaze.
5. Grey fabric, containing flint, shell and grit, fired buff-brown. Incised line decoration.
6. Light grey fabric, containing small flint and shell fragments, fired light brown. Smoke-blackened on part of exterior.
7. Dark grey fabric with flint and grit fragments, fired orange-brown.
8. Grey fabric, containing small pieces of shell, fired red-brown. Pinched spout; decorated with punctuations on shoulder and top of rim.
9. Black fabric, with a little shell, fired grey-brown to black; burnished surface. Wavy line decoration.
10. Light grey fabric with flint and grit pieces fired orange-brown externally.
11. Black sandy fabric fired light brown.
12. Black fabric, with small pieces of flint and grit, fired mainly grey-brown. Pinched spout.



C.W. YEATES 1961.

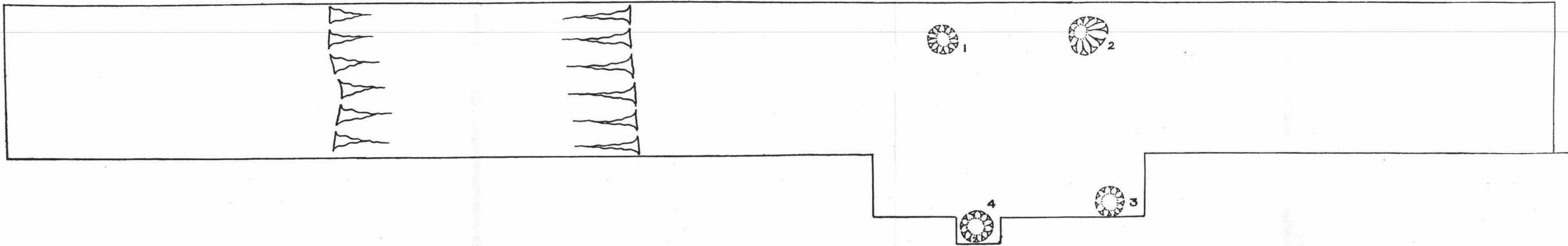


FIG. 3

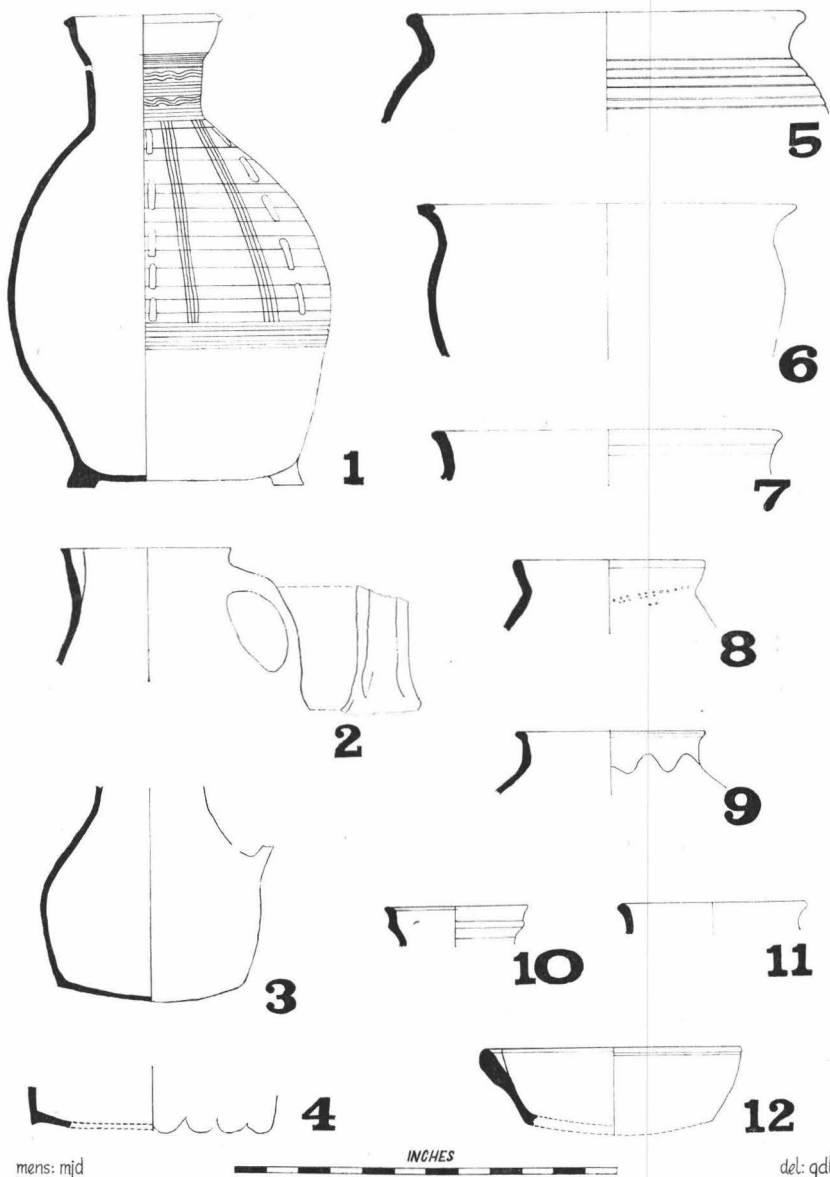


FIG. 3  
MEDIEVAL POTTERY FROM THE PIT.

## DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The site of Maudlin House, or Upper Maudlin Farm as it was formerly known,<sup>1</sup> has for long been associated with the Manor of Bidlington,<sup>2</sup> first recorded in 956.<sup>3</sup> In 1220, William Malmius, a leper was consigned to a *maladria* in Bidlington<sup>4</sup> and about twenty years later William Scuret was paying thirty pence annually to the Hospital of St. Mary Magdalen at Bidlington for land assigned to him by Philip de Brembre.<sup>5</sup> The first mention of a cemetery occurs in 1269 when an inquest between the prior and monks at Sele and the bailiff of Steyning was held in the cemetery of the Blessed Mary Magdalen of Bidlington.<sup>6</sup> There is also a reference to a church of the same name in 1272, which Mr. L. F. Salzman considers to have been part of the hospital<sup>7</sup> and in the same year there is confirmation of the hospital being for lepers.<sup>8</sup> Records of bequests to the hospital by Lady Margaret Covert of Sullington<sup>9</sup> and Richard Jay of Crawley<sup>10</sup> occur in the 14th and 15th centuries respectively and the hospital is valued at twenty shillings in 1535.<sup>11</sup> The latest reference to the hospital found is in 1553 with the Prioress of the hospital of Bidlington Magdalen in Bramber giving her consent to the grant of a lease of land.<sup>12</sup>

A quarter of a mile to the north of the site the interesting place-name Heathen's Burial Corner occurs. There is no evidence to suggest a connexion between this and the site under discussion.

## CONCLUSIONS

The obviously Christian character of the cemetery within such a short distance of Maudlin House, for so long considered to be the site of the Manor of Bidlington, and the phonetic connexion between the present house name and St. Mary Magdalen to whom the hospital at Bidlington was dedicated, point to the site being the burial ground of this lost medieval hospital and church. The 13th century date of the pottery from the pit, although not demonstrably contemporary with the cemetery, appears to be connected with it and lends weight to this argument.

There is little doubt from the documentary evidence that during

<sup>1</sup> Six-inch O.S. map, 1879 edition.

<sup>2</sup> A. Manver and F. M. Stenton *Place Names of Sussex*, part I (1929), p. 223

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* (*Birch Cartularium Saxonicum*).

<sup>4</sup> *Curia Regis R.* 72 m. 18d. (Victoria County History, *Sussex*, vol. 2, p. 98, no. 33).

<sup>5</sup> L. F. Salzman (ed.) *The Chartulary of the Priory of St. Peter at Sele* (1923) charter 163.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, charter 45.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, charter 46 and footnote.

<sup>8</sup> *Sussex Record Society*, vol. 7 (Feet of fines for Sussex) p. 80 (792).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, vol. 41, p. 198.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> *Valor Eccl.* (Rec. Com.), 1, 319.

<sup>12</sup> *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. 10, p. 124.

the 13th century, at least, the hospital was for lepers. Because of the necessarily hurried examination, only a small percentage of the bones were studied. Nevertheless evidence of leprosy has been found (Appendix A) but the possibility of a wider definition of the term in medieval times to cover most skin ailments should not be overlooked.

At what stage in the recorded history of the hospital of over three and a quarter centuries the burials were made, it is not possible to say.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to the directors of Hoad and Taylor, Ltd., for reporting the site and stopping work for a week to allow the discoveries to be recorded, and their formen, Mr. E. S. Quested and his staff for unfailing courtesy and help; to Major A. C. Roper for his constant help and advice throughout the work; to Mrs. C. Brown and the Headmaster, staff and pupils of Steyning Grammar School who assisted in uncovering some of the burials; to Messrs. G. P. Burstow, P. W. Felton and J. C. Ludlow for documentary evidence; to Dr. H. B. A. Ratcliffe-Densham for his work on the human remains and to two colleagues on the staff of the Sheffield City Museum, Messrs. M. J. Dolby and D. A. E. Spalding who respectively drew the pottery and reported on the animal remains.

### APPENDIX A NOTES ON THE EXCAVATED GRAVES including macroscopic palaeopathology

BY Dr. H. B. A. RATCLIFFE-DENSHAM, F.S.A.

#### Grave No.

II Bones too badly mutilated for examination. A small piece of iron, possibly a nail, was found in the grave filling.

VII A double grave containing a male and a female, the left arm of the former overlay the right arm of the female which had been buried on the north side with three chalk blocks arranged around the skull.

(a) Female aged about 23-24 exhibiting slight alveolar infection and gross asymmetry of the mandible. Both tibiae showed periostitis near the centre of the lateral side of the shafts; this was also present on both fibulae with vascular grooving of the shafts, particularly on the right. Two metatarsals narrowed transversely.

(b) Male, aged about 23-24, with many resemblances to (a) above. The erosion of the nasal spine may have occurred *post mortem*. Slight alveolar infection. Both tibiae show periostitis near the centre of the lateral side of the shaft. A tiny periosteal swelling also occurred on the middle of the anterior surface of the left femoral shaft.

X Head laid on chalk pillow with chalk blocks on either side; hands laid across pelvis. The skull of burial XX (unexcavated), which appeared to be a later interment, lay at the feet.

A female, aged about 40, exhibiting dental caries and root abscess.



- XII Partially excavated.  
A male, aged about 17, with tiny periosteal swelling on centre of posterior surface of left tibia and slight periosteal thickening and vascular grooving on postero-lateral border of the right fibula.
- XIII Burial with hands laid across pelvis.  
A male in early middle age with ossified interclinoïd ligaments (sella turcica). Dental abscess. Periosteal thickening and irregularity on centre of back of shaft of left femur. Both tibiae "sabre-shaped"; periostitis and vascular grooving on posterior and lateral aspects of centre of right shaft. Periosteal thickening and vascular grooving also occur on both fibulae near the centre of the postero-lateral border. X-rays showed a small abscess in distal end of shaft of right femur and numerous striations at the lower end of the tibia, due to illness in early life.
- XIV Burial with hands laid across pelvis. A very small fragment of pottery, undateable, occurred in the grave filling.  
A male in middle age exhibiting osteo-arthritis in hip and sacro-iliae joints and periosteal thickening and vascular grooving on posterior aspect of the posterior half of the shaft of the right tibia.
- XVI Burial in poor condition.  
A child, aged 4-5. No obvious pathology.
- XVIII A large nodule of flint under the skull may have been intended as a pillow. Bones left *in situ*.
- XXI This grave, which was considerably deeper than those above, was filled with chalk blocks of some size and had caused considerable distortion of the skull. Skull only removed.  
A male, aged about 18, with right upper canine tooth grown sideways into the palate under the sockets of the incisors. Usura orbitae.

Colour photographs of a number of the above mentioned bones were sent to Dr. Vilhelm Møller-Christensen of Roskilde, Denmark, who has made a special study of medieval leprosy.<sup>1</sup> He remarks that the periostitis occurring on a number of the tibiae and fibulae is typical of leprosy (VII (a) & (b); XII; XIII; XIV); and the presence of usura orbitae<sup>2</sup> in the skull of XXI very suspicious of the disease.

It is very unfortunate that time and police regulations did not permit a full study of this interesting site.

## APPENDIX B ANIMAL REMAINS FROM THE PIT

BY D. A. E. SPALDING, B.S.C., F.G.S., A.M.A.

The small amount of bone material from the pit is somewhat fragmentary. However, from the identifiable fragments it is possible to separate examples of *Bos*, *Ovis* and *Sus* and there is no reason to suppose that there are other than domesticated animals represented.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. V. Møller-Christensen, *Ten lepers from Næstved, Denmark* (English translation, Copenhagen, 1955).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 128-141 *passim*.