

AN EARLY BURIAL PLACE AT PULBOROUGH.

BY JOHN HARLEY, M.D.

IN a field (No. 883 of the Ordnance Survey), in the parish of Pulborough, on the high land overlooking Beeding Farm, on the hilltop at an elevation of 300 feet and forming the eastern ridge of the Roman Camp which extends from Borough on the west, I have made excavations for building a house.

The excavation is five feet deep and exposes sections of the rubble ("scrub"), sand, and bedded sandstone of the Lower Greensand, very porous and dry, and through which the cordlike roots of the *Silene inflata* frequently penetrate to a depth of more than five feet. Except in one place, to which I am about to direct attention, the ground, below the foot of soil which caps it, has not been disturbed.

On examining the cutting on the north side it was seen that the yellow, sand-coloured scrub was interrupted to the whole depth (5 feet), and from 4 to 5 feet wide, by a dark soil similar to that which formed the cultivated surface, and that the edge of a large rough, flat stone, lying horizontally, projected from the soil three feet below the turf. About two feet below this stone a layer of red clay, 6 to 8 inches thick, was exposed.

I carefully removed the stone, which was irregularly quadrangular, from 15 to 18 inches wide and long and 3 inches thick. It was quite untooled and very hard. Such a stone may be met with in almost any part of the adjoining hanger field. Proceeding carefully to remove the somewhat tenacious soil which lay underneath the stone, I picked out several fragments, from 1 to 2 inches wide, of dark brown rotten pottery which was about one-sixth of an inch thick, soft and cutting like cheese, the cut

surface presenting a porous appearance, the pores being darker than the substance, as if they had been formed by the decay of some organic ingredient of the pottery. Some of these fragments included the slightly-rounded rim of the vessel, which inferentially was about 5 or 6 inches in diameter at the orifice. The surfaces were sufficiently smooth and intact to have preserved any marking, but they were absolutely plain.

Lying just above the clay bed and immediately under the flat stone I was fortunate enough to turn up the lower portion and bottom of the vessel to which the fragments undoubtedly belonged, but which had long ago become detached, for their margins were rounded and water-worn. I say "I was fortunate," for the broken vessel was exactly of the same colour as the soil in which it was embedded, and it was so rotten that if the flat bottom had not separated from it, as a smooth stone often does from the soil, I may have passed it by unnoticed, even when thus in quest of it. The flat bottom was circular and $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter.

The broken base of the vessel is filled with what appears to be the common soil which surrounds it; but owing to the extremely rotten state of the relic, I have not yet disturbed it, hoping that it will harden by exposure.¹

In effecting the discovery I found ten well-worked flint flakes and one or two cores, and as I cleared away the soil from the surrounding scrub I exposed, here and there, detached strata of black wood ashes, out of which I picked one fragment half an inch square.

When the black soil was swept off the clay bed, this was found to be roughly saucer shaped, the concavity having no doubt been determined by that of the bottom of the pit. It formed an irregular surface of slightly elevated rounded projections and was about six or eight inches thick.

¹ The contents of the vessel were of a lighter colour than the soil, a portion formed a hard core, but this and the rest tended to break down into an impalpable powder of a faint brownish white colour.

Excepting here and there, where it had not been affected by the fire and where the natural sandy colour of the clay was preserved, it was uniformly brick red. Part of it was crumbly, like rotten brick, but the rest was of a variable cheesy consistence. Even under this bed of clay there were patches of black wood ashes. The clay was probably got from a neighbouring field. The soil around the urn contained many black and red stones—those of the common “scrub”—altered by fire. On further clearing out the pit more flint flakes, several fragments of pottery similar to that above described and several rounded pebbles, such as may be picked up on the sea beach, were found.

From the foregoing description it is evident that we have here the relics and results of an antient cremation and burial.

A pit was dug five feet deep. The funeral pile was edged round with clay, which, after having experienced a fire change, was first shovelled into the pit and trodden down so as to form a fairly even layer upon which to place the cinerary urn. This was then put in position, covered with the rude flat stone and then the pit was filled in with the wood ashes and mixture of earth and rubble upon which the pyre was formed. Meanwhile the friends of the deceased may have identified themselves with the ceremony by throwing into the pit some portion of their armamenta—selected pebbles² for slinging and the rude arrowheads of primitive civilization, together with those of the deceased.

The soil filling in the lower half of the pit was certainly more tenacious and moister than the surface soil; the pottery was moist and rotten and some of the lumps of clay were soft and moist. Considering the locality, a terraced promontory on the hilltop, and the fact that the pit was surrounded on all sides, excepting above, by dry sandy porous rubble, this is remarkable, for the saucer-shaped layer of clay was too shallow and imperfect

² Some of the pebbles are of flint and some of a hard fine grained stone, all naturally worn by detrition in geological times. Such pebbles hereabouts are very rarely met with below the soil.

long to retain the little water that would reach it. I am inclined to attribute the moisture to the saline character of the soil; a funeral pyre would furnish a large quantity of ashes replete with deliquescent potassium salts. Of these, no doubt, the soil has great retentive power, but even so one would have thought that in the lapse of so much time they would long ago have been washed out of it.

