

# Bronze Age Burials at Weldon, Northamptonshire

By D. A. JACKSON

With a report on the pottery by T. G. MANBY

A number of fragmentary Bronze Age burials were revealed during ironstone quarrying at Cowthick, one mile south of Weldon and just east of the modern A43 road from Kettering to Stamford (FIG. 1; NGR SP 922886). Both inhumation and cremation burials were found, three of the latter being accompanied by small collared urns of the later secondary series (FIG. 5). There was no surviving barrow mound or ditch.

The site was first noticed by the writer in the autumn of 1970 during a visit to the quarry while the overburden was being mechanically stripped. When human bone and dark patches of earth were exposed the area was kindly avoided by the heavy machines so that an excavation could be carried out.<sup>1</sup> This work was undertaken for the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Department of the Environment during the November and December of 1970.

## GEOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

The site lay at 300 ft. O.D. in a shallow valley (FIG. 1, PL. 1). It is situated on a belt of Lincolnshire limestone which outcrops extensively in the area and has long been in demand as building stone. This outcrop is often sandy near the surface and this produces a well drained soil which was doubtless attractive to early settlers. Other Bronze Age burials were found in the parish, on the same limestone outcrop, at the end of the 19th century (see Summary below). The area is fed by streams but is not immediately adjacent to a river valley; it lies between the two Fenland rivers the Welland and the Nene, the site itself being some 4 miles from the Welland and 7 miles from the Nene.

## THE EXCAVATION

### THE EXTENT OF THE EXCAVATED AREA (FIG. 2, PL. 1).

An area of approximately 420 sq. m. was cleaned down to the natural bedrock in the area of the initial discoveries and a further 78 sq. m. was excavated from the modern surface, adjacent to this area on the east. After the excavation a large area lying to the north and east was cleaned mechanically, but no evidence of a ditch enclosing the burial area survived. On the west side the bedrock was left fairly clean after the initial scraping and any surviving archaeological features are likely to have been visible.

<sup>1</sup> Grateful thanks are due to the quarry owners, The British Steel Corporation, who by their help and co-operation made the excavation possible. Financial arrangements for the excavations were made by Mr. R. Robertson-Mackay and the plans used in the report were drawn by Miss J. Doby of the Ancient Monuments drawing office. Especial thanks are due to Mr. T. G. Manby for the pottery report, to Miss R. Powers for examining the skeletal material, and to Mr. R. M. Taylor for drawing the urns. Help with this report is acknowledged from Mrs. E. Healey and Mr. B. Dix.

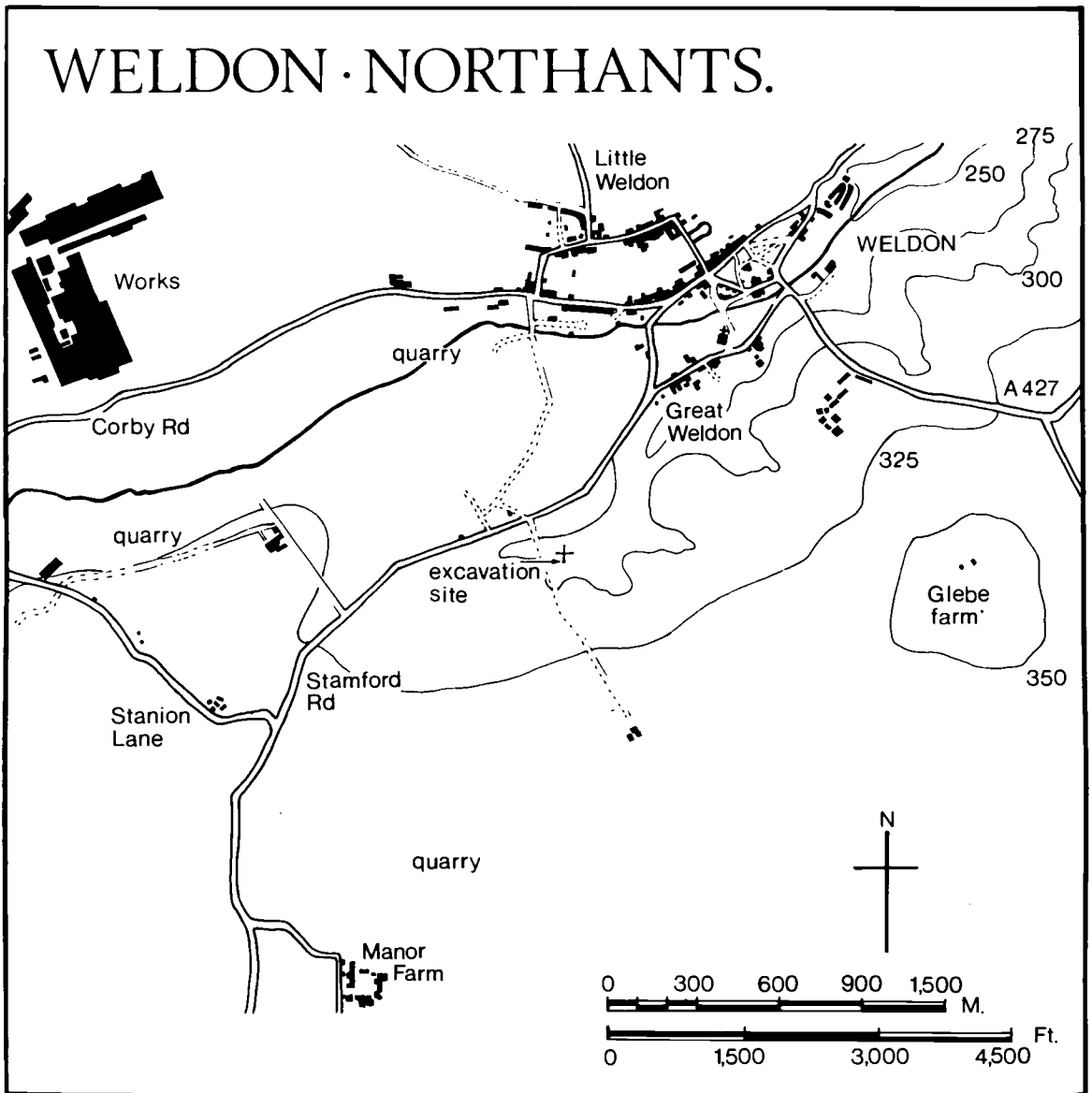
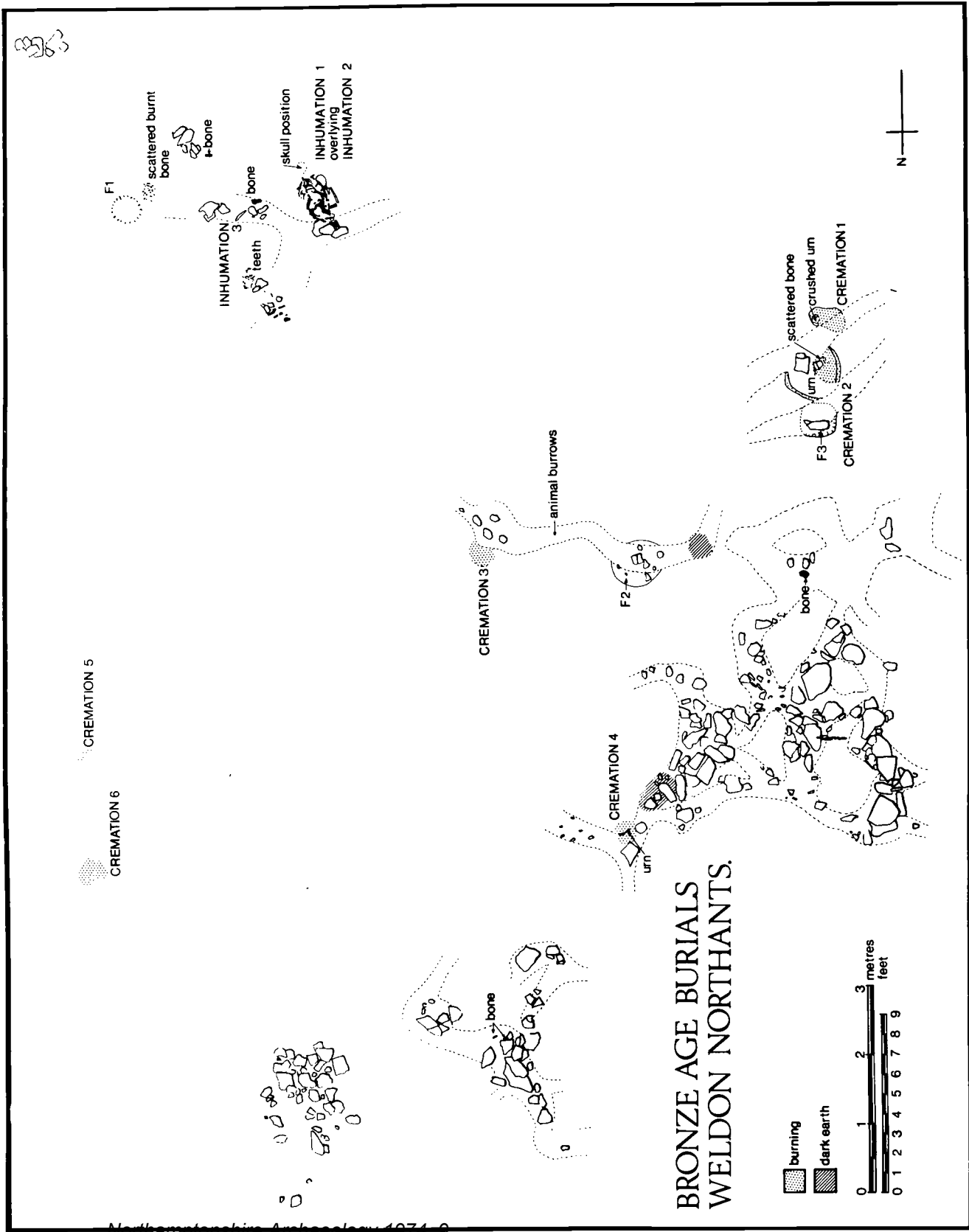


Fig. 1 Location map

THE STRATIFICATION

In the bottom of the valley a thin layer of glacial gravel and clay overlay the sandy bedrock (PL. 1). Although in 1970 there was nearly a metre of stony earth lying above this gravel, this appeared to be a drift deposit which had accumulated in the valley bottom due to centuries of ploughing. In the SE corner of the excavation a layer of darkened soil containing several Iron Age sherds was found. This layer was only 6 in. above the glacial gravel so it seems reasonable to assume there was only a thin soil cover in the area in prehistoric times. Cremations 5 and 6



**BRONZE AGE BURIALS  
WELDON NORTHANTS.**

Fig. 2 Site plan

(described below) were not found above the glacial gravel, despite excavation from the modern surface in that area. The shallow nature of the surviving features rendered sections relatively meaningless with the consequence that it is not worthwhile publishing them here.

It became apparent during the excavation that the site had been extensively disturbed, not only by the current stripping, but by intensive animal burrowing and possibly by early ploughing. The remains of at least 3 inhumations and 6 cremations were found but they had all suffered damage in some way (FIG. 2.). The shallowness of the burials, and a scatter of human bones in the animal burrows suggest there could easily have been other burials that had not survived.

A considerable amount of limestone, some of it in the form of quite large slabs, survived where the ground had been disturbed by animal burrowing. Presumably this had been undercut by the burrows and was originally in an artificial position on the old ground surface.

#### THE INHUMATIONS

Altogether the remains of three inhumation burials and a pelvis suggestive of a fourth were found (FIGS. 2 and 3). All were orientated from N.N.W. to S.S.E. with the head lying at the latter end, and burial might have been in a crouched or contracted position. No accompanying grave goods were found.

1. The burial of a young adult male had been made immediately above Inhumation 2. (FIG. 3 and PL. 2). No trace of a grave survived but the remains were at the same height as the top of the glacial subsoil. Much of the axial skeleton survived but the head and probably the right arm had been disturbed by the scraping. The left arm was folded below the elbow to the chest, but the former position of the legs is uncertain due to later disturbance.

2. A young adult female was buried in a grave, but this grave was sufficiently shallow for the later interment of Inhumation 1 to damage the skull and possibly also disturb the leg bones, which were missing (FIG. 3, PLS. 2 and 3). An animal burrow cut through the grave where the legs may have been, but the distance between the surviving pelvis and the edge of the burrow (or the end of the grave) was not more than 30 cm.: in view of this it is assumed the burial was formerly crouched or contracted, possibly with the legs folded or trussed up over the body. The arms were so arranged that the hands originally rested on the abdomen.

3. A few rib and leg bones of a girl, probably about 13/14 years old lay immediately above the glacial subsoil (FIGS. 2 and 3). Fragments of the leg bones were at right angles to the orientation of the body suggesting burial was probably in a crouched manner.

4. About 1m. south of Inhumation 3 a piece of human pelvis was found in an animal burrow. Subsequent examination showed this had not come from any of the other three burials.

#### THE CREMATIONS (FIG. 2)

The remains of at least six cremations were found, either placed in shallow pits or depressions or associated with dark ashy patches which may be interpreted as being the site of the fire or small pyre. In three instances (Cremations 1, 2 and 4) small collared urns were found with the bones, and two of these urns (Cremations

# THE INHUMATIONS

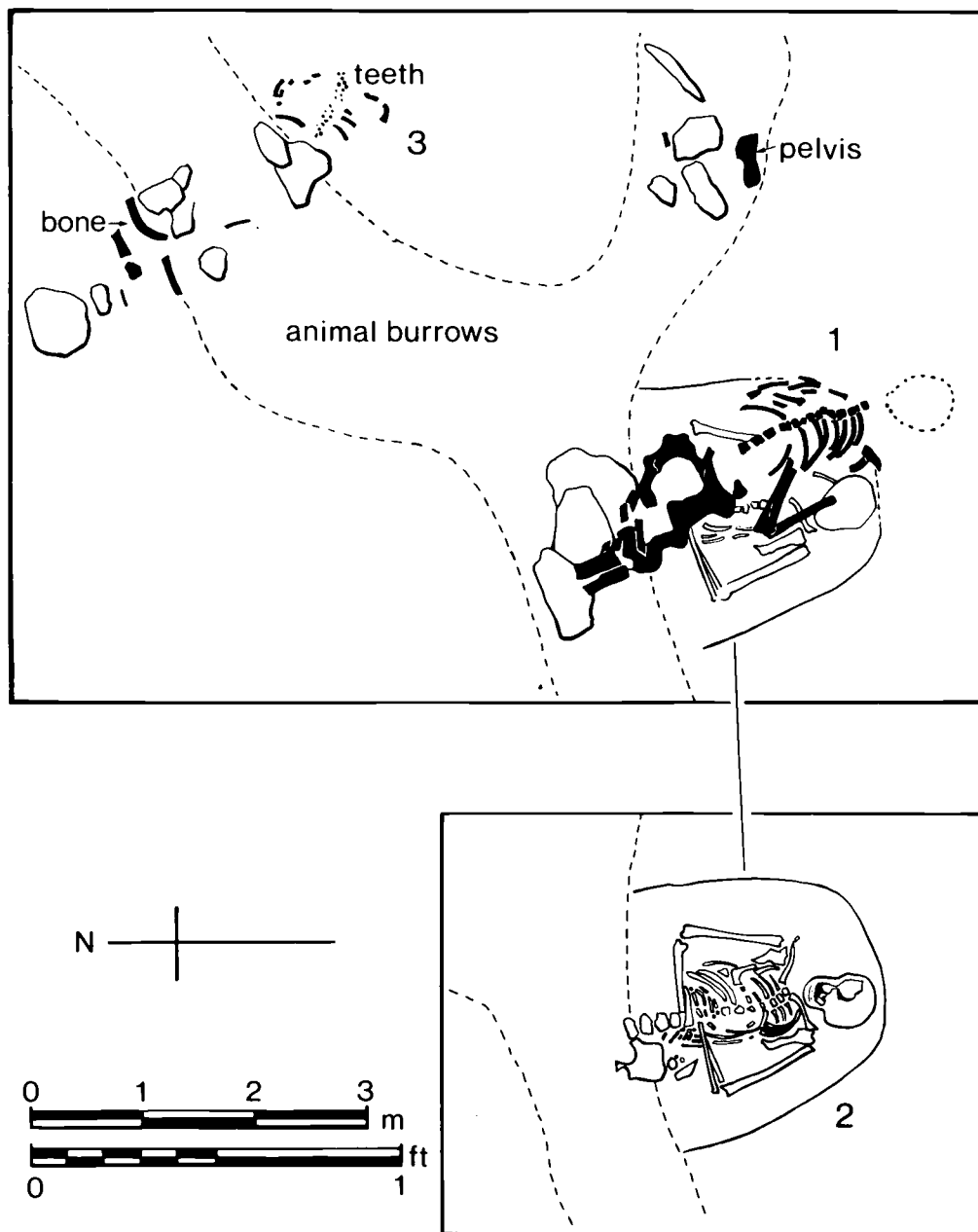


Fig. 3 The inhumations

2 and 4) were proved to have been accessory vessels placed with the cremations. Perhaps the bones were held in perishable containers of wood, leather or textile as is suggested below with Cremation 4.

1. (FIG. 4) Part of a small collared urn (FIG. 5, no. 1) and a few pieces of burnt bone were found in a patch of black ash which overlay the glacial subsoil. The urn was grey in colour as if it had perhaps been placed either on hot ashes or in a fire. The subsoil beneath the ashes showed traces of reddening, which suggests they were in situ, and that this had been the site of the fire.

2. (FIG. 4). A roughly circular pit, about 70 cm. in diameter by 25 cm. deep, lying almost adjacent to Cremation 1, contained a small complete collared urn (FIG. 5

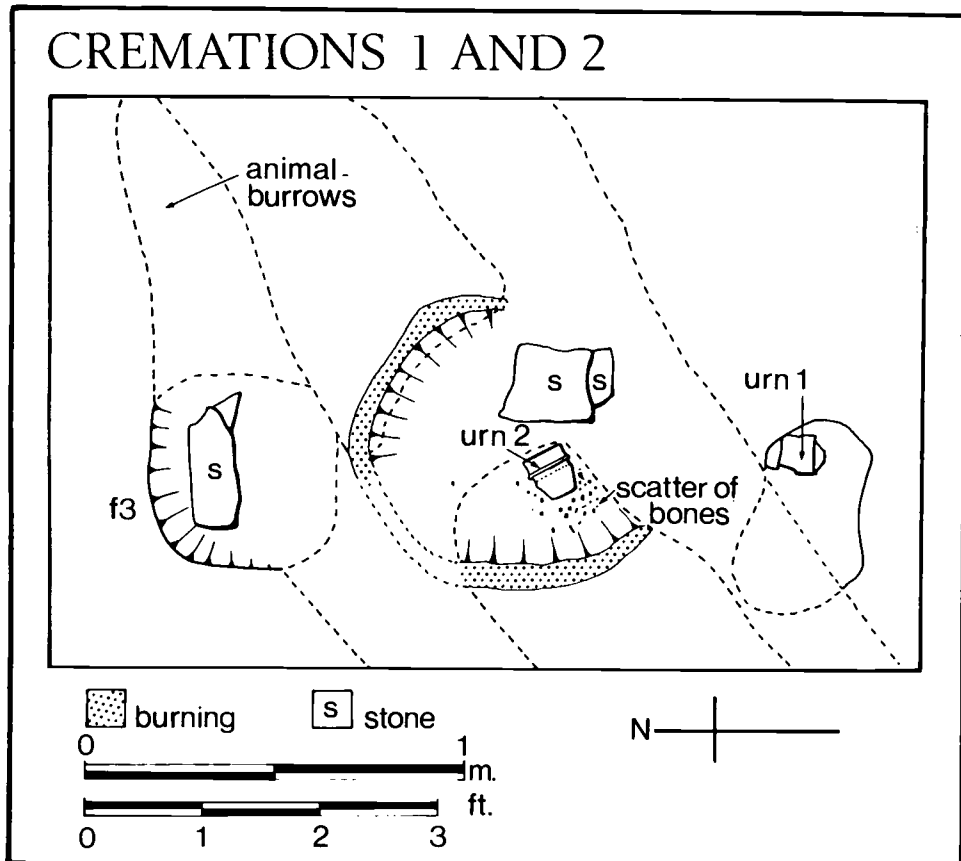


Fig. 4 Cremations 1 and 2

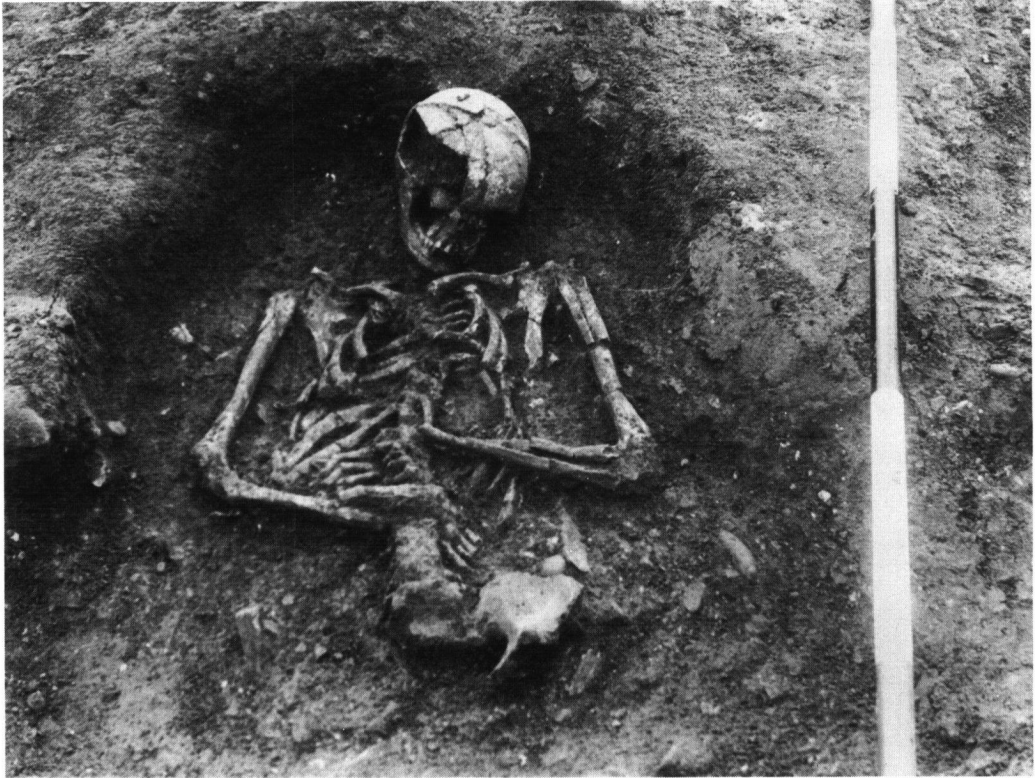
no. 2 and Pl. 4) and a scatter of burnt bones. The bones were found close to but not inside the pot. The pit had originally contained a fire, the sides being reddened for a thickness of up to 7 cm. Much of the pit had been disturbed by animal burrows, but fortunately the urn, which lay on its side, had survived destruction. The urn was greyish in colour where it had been in contact with the ashy bottom of the pit, and in the same position there was a large black stain on the inside of the urn (PL. 4).



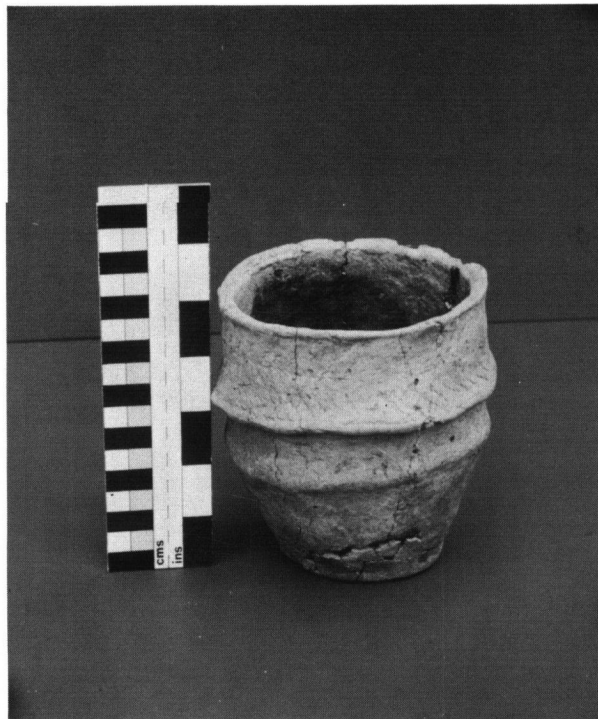
*Plate 1* Weldon: the site from the west



*Plate 2* Weldon: inhumation 1 overlying inhumation 2  
*Northamptonshire Archaeology 1974, 9*



*Plate 3* Weldon: inhumation 2



*Plate 4* Weldon: collared urn from cremation 2. Note the internal black stain  
*Northamptonshire Archaeology 1974, 9*



## BURIALS AT WELDON

3. A patch of black ash and a small amount of cremated bone were all that remained of this cremation. They lay in a slight depression in the top of the glacial subsoil. Further bone was found scattered in the adjacent animal burrows.

4. The cremated remains of a young female were found on one side of a small pit, 35 cm. in diameter and 28 cm. deep, as if they had originally been held in some, since perished, container. In contrast to Cremations 1, 2 and 3 there was no black ash, nor any trace of burning in the pit. A broken, but almost complete, collared urn was also found in the pit (FIG. 5, no. 3), its position suggesting it had been placed in the pit near the cremation. As it was standing vertically, with some pieces inverted, when found, this implies it was broken before deposition.

5. A small quantity of cremated bone was found scattered in the refilling of a shallow pit. The pit was some 40 cm. in diameter and 10 cm. deep.

6. A few unidentifiable fragments of burnt human bone were found in darkened soil, in a shallow pit or depression. This probably represents a further cremation.

A small pit or post hole (F.1), some 40 cm. in diameter and 20 cm. deep, contained only darkened soil, but almost adjacent to it was a scatter of burnt human bones perhaps implying that here was another cremation. Two other distinct features were noted. The first (F.2) was a shallow depression or pit, some 7 cm. deep, but containing no evidence of burial. The other (F.3) was a pit or post hole near the north corner of Cremation 2 but largely destroyed by a burrow. It was originally about 50 cm. in diameter and 30 cm. deep.

In addition to these, there were several areas where the infilling of the animal burrows appeared darker and sometimes these contained fragments of human bone. In one such patch, about 1 m. south-west of Cremation 4, a pottery rim was found which although it did not come from any of the other vessels was of similar type.

### ANATOMICAL REPORT

The bones were kindly examined by Miss Rosemary Powers of the Natural History Branch of the British Museum who tentatively suggests the following age determination and sex.

*Inhumation 1.* Young adult male, probably in his early twenties.

*Inhumation 2.* Young female. As with Inhumation 1, probably not much over 20 years of age.

*Inhumation 3.* Young female. Possibly 13/14 years old, but may be a little older if of dwarfish stature.

*Inhumation 4.* 1 metre south of Inhumation 3, part of a human pelvis was found in an animal burrow which did not come from any of the other three burials.

*Cremation 4.* Young female.

The other five cremations produced small quantities of burnt bone, but it was not possible to be definitive about these.

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

As much of the surviving burial evidence was found immediately above the bedrock, any graves or pits dug from the contemporary Bronze Age surface must have been very shallow. If deposited in a flat cemetery it seems likely they would

have been individually covered by low mounds. Alternatively and perhaps more likely, the burials could have been covered by a stone cairn or composite barrow which was later robbed or perhaps ploughed out. For although no trace of a surrounding ditch was found, the maze of animal burrows recorded is such as to be expected beneath a mound, and significant in this respect may be the not inconsiderable amount of limestone which had subsided after being undercut by the burrows.

The minimum diameter for a barrow or cairn large enough to accommodate all the burials found during the excavation could not have been less than about 15 metres, and as it is highly probable that the inhumation burials as well as the cremations are of Bronze Age date, several periods of deposition should be envisaged. It may be significant that Cremation 3 is centrally positioned in relation to the other burials, but Cremation 2 was in a fire pit and seems unlikely to have been a secondary burial despite its peripheral position (FIG. 2). The same reasoning could apply to Cremation 1 and it may be all the cremations are roughly contemporary. With regard to the inhumations, the evidence is clear that Inhumation 1 was deposited subsequent to Inhumation 2, but the intervening period need not have been lengthy. If the period of burial at Cowthick was relatively short it could be the burials represent a collective group such as was found beneath a cairn excavated ahead of the limestone quarrying at Hindlow in Derbyshire.<sup>2</sup>

The three small collared urns described below in the pottery report as belonging to the secondary series of Bronze Age collared urns, appear to have been accessory vessels which had been placed with the cremated remains (FIG. 5). The black stain found on the inside of Urn 2 possibly implies the urn contained some substance that melted in the fire or hot ashes (PL. 4).

Hitherto no cairns have been recognised in Northamptonshire but there seems no reason why they should not be raised in areas such as Weldon where stone would have been readily available, and perhaps the most convenient material. Other Bronze Age burials found 1 mile N.W. of Cowthick (at approximately SP 909894) might suggest the existence of similar sites. Here it was reported that the remains of six cinerary urns 'of fair size' were found together with 'a bronze dagger of early form'. As at Cowthick there was no indication of a tumulus mound, although 'a skeleton was found in a sitting posture'.<sup>3</sup> Nearer to Weldon other smaller cinerary urns have been found, which almost certainly include an incense cup now in Northampton Museum alongside some of the larger vessels.<sup>4</sup> Likewise urns found by early quarrying elsewhere in the county, as at Brixworth, Desborough, Rothwell, Cransley and Loddington,<sup>5</sup> may originally have been under barrows or cairns.

<sup>2</sup> P. Ashbee, *The Bronze Age Round Barrow in Britain* (1960), Fig. 11, and "Excavation of a Barrow at Hindlow, Derbyshire" *Archaeological News Letter* 5 (1954), 134-5.

<sup>3</sup> T. J. George, *An Archaeological Survey of Northants* (1904), 3. Four of the urns are illustrated in J. Abercromby, *A Study of the Bronze Age Pottery of Gt. Britain and N. Ireland* (1912), FIGS. 66, 69, 71, 101. For the type series, I. H. Longworth, "The Origins and Development of the Primary Series in the Collared Urn Tradition in England and Wales" *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 27 (1961), 263-306.

<sup>4</sup> George, *op. cit.*; no details are given.

<sup>5</sup> Abercromby, *op. cit.*, FIG. 274.

POTTERY FROM WELDON NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

By T. G. MANBY

*Cremation 1.* Collared Urn (FIG. 5, 1).

5 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches (13.6 cm.) high; 3 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (8.9 cm.) dia. rim; 3 inches (7.6 cm.) dia. base. Grey-buff fabric, slightly recurved rim without a marked internal bevel, vertical neck and weak shoulder.

*Cremation 2.* Collared Urn. (FIG. 5, 2; PL. 4).

5 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches (13.1 cm.) high; 4.4 inches (11.3 cm.) dia. rim; 2.7 inches (7.0 cm.) dia. base. Internally bevelled rim. Pinkish orange fabric, dark grey core, small stone inclusions. The side of the vessel in contact with the bottom of the pit had a sooty colour with dark grey patches. Parallel with this on the interior of the vessel is a large black stain. Impressed cord decoration.

*Cremation 4.* Collared Urn. (FIG 5, 3).

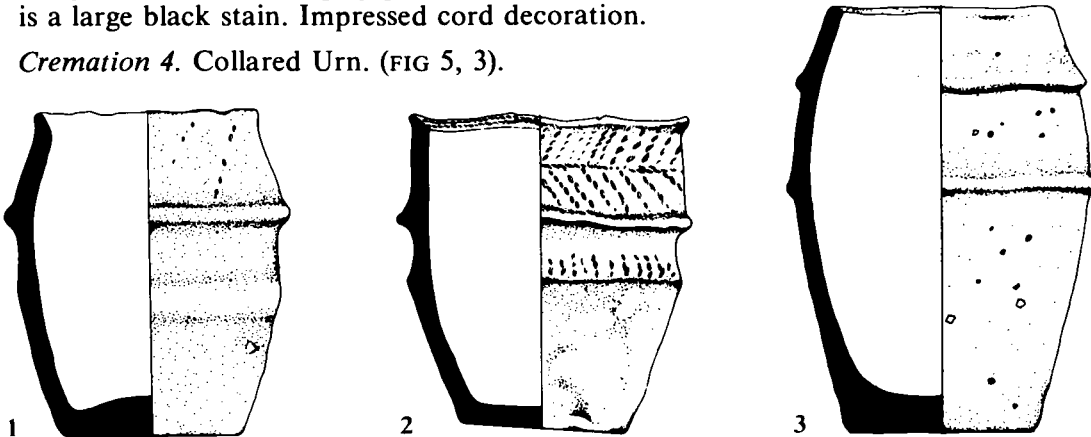


Fig. 5 The collared urns. Scale:  $\frac{1}{2}$

7 inches (17.7 cm.) high; 3 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (8.9 cm.) dia. rim; 3 inches (7.6 cm.) dia. base. Smooth orange buff fabric with small pieces of crushed limestone grit.

The earlier urn finds from the adjoining parishes of Weldon and Corby display the characteristic traits of Longworth's Primary Series of Collared Urns.<sup>6</sup> Such Primary Series urns are numerous in the Jurassic country of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire.<sup>7</sup> In contrast the three recently excavated Weldon urns can be assigned to the later Secondary Series of Collared urns that are locally less numerous.

The vessels with cremations 1 and 2 are notable also for their small size in relation to the majority of Collared Urns. The study of Collared Urns has tended to concentrate on matters of typology and decoration, and consideration of function and size require more attention. Until a national corpus of Collared Urns is available it is possible to base some provisional conclusions on regional studies and museum catalogues.

<sup>6</sup> Longworth, I. H., "The Origins and Development of the Primary Series in the Collared Urn Tradition in England and Wales". *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 27, (1961), 267-275.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-165. nos. 109-130 and 164-171.

At the extreme range of Collared Urns are miniature urns up to three inches tall that belong to the Pygmy Cup range of accessory vessels. Small urns may be considered to range in size from four to six inches high; in comparison with large and medium sized vessels they are not numerous in some regions. In northern Wiltshire such small urns form only 5% of Collared Urns in the collections of Devizes Museum,<sup>8</sup> and at the other extreme of the distribution range, small urns are not represented in south-western Scotland.<sup>9</sup> However, from the East Midlands and Yorkshire small urns are numerous and in the East Riding of Yorkshire form 20% of Collared Urn finds. The associations of small urns are essentially in the role of accessory vessels accompanying cremation deposits. Comparable in size, decoration and profile with the Weldon urns are the Secondary Series urns laid with cremated bones in scoops in the mound material of a barrow at Corp's Landing in Eastern Yorkshire.<sup>10</sup> Small urns have been found in some instances lying beside heaps of cremated bones as well as standing beside or in the middle of burial deposits. A further type of association is represented at Cleethorpes, on the Lincolnshire coast, where three small urns and a bowl were found inside a large urn containing a cremation.<sup>11</sup> Small urns were also deposited as accessory vessels alongside larger Collared Urns holding cremated bones like the Derbyshire Stanton Moor Quarry site.<sup>12</sup> A further series of burials accompanied by small urns are inhumation interments represented by two burials at Goodmanham Barrow LXXXIX.<sup>13</sup> However the use of small urns was not exclusively in an accessory role; a small urn, of Primary Series, held a cremation at the West Overton Barrow in Wiltshire.<sup>14</sup> Of great significance are a number of small urns without burial deposits but occurring in pits sometimes with charcoal and dark soil. Many small urns found in a 'non-burial' role come from barrow and cemetery sites, like Bedd Branwen in Anglesey,<sup>15</sup> and Burn Ground in Gloucestershire,<sup>16</sup> where a votive function is apparent.

The third Weldon urn, with its barrel-shaped profile, is unusually tall in proportion to its width. The lower edge of the collar has almost become a cordon and the shoulder has become a bold cordon. The extreme degeneration of the tripartite urn profile of the vessel has a few parallels. Larger urns of closely similar profile but cord decorated, come from the Cleveland district of Yorkshire from sites near Whitby<sup>17</sup> and Boulby.<sup>18</sup>

The Society is grateful to the Department of the Environment for a grant towards the publication of this paper.

<sup>8</sup> Annable, F. K., *Guide Catalogue of the Neolithic and Bronze Age Collections in Devizes Museum* (1964), Nos. 484 and 533.

<sup>9</sup> Morrison, A., "Cinerary Urns and Pygmy Vessels in South-West Scotland", *Trans. Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur. Hist. Antiq. Soc.* 3rd ser. 45 (1968) 80-140.

<sup>10</sup> Unpublished Grantham Collection, Driffield.

<sup>11</sup> Hawkes, C. F. "Prehistoric Lincs", *Archaeol. J.* 103 (1946), 6-7, Fig. 1, a-e.

<sup>12</sup> Storrs-Fox, W., "Bronze Age Pottery from Stanton Moor", *Derbyshire Archaeol. J.* 49 (1927), 202-203, FIG. 4, 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Greenwell, W., *British Barrows* (1877), 297.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, I. F. and Simpson, D.D.A., "Excavation of a Round Barrow on Overton Hill, North Wiltshire", *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 32 (1966), 128 and 132, FIG. 4, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Lynch, F., "Report on the Re-excavation of Two Bronze Age Cairns in Anglesey: Bedd Branwen and Treiorwerth", *Archaeol. Cambrensis* (1971), 26-27 and 57-58, FIG. 8, D, K, M.

<sup>16</sup> Grimes, W. F., *Excavations on Defence Sites 1939-1945* (1960), 106-7, FIG. 42.

<sup>17</sup> Sheffield Museum, J.93-776.

<sup>18</sup> Hornsby, W. and Laverick, J., "British Barrows Round Brotton" *Yorkshire Archaeol. J.* 25 (1918), 49, Fig. 11.