

# Further Discoveries of Burials at Fir Tree Road, Banstead

by S NELSON

On 22 June 1978, in the course of laying a water main in Fir Tree road, Banstead, opposite the entrance drive to the old Banstead Residential School, which is now known as Sycamore Rise (TQ 2389 6024), a skeleton was uncovered under the road at a depth of about 1m. The burial was aligned roughly east-west with the head upright and arms to the side; it was photographed in situ by the police before removal and examination by the Area Consultant Pathologist, Dr P Pullar. He was able to identify the remains as those of a young adult male, of about 20-25 years, approximately 5ft 10in in height. He could find no obvious signs of the cause of death or any other pathological condition. There were no finds with the skeleton. Unfortunately it has not been possible to locate these photographs.

More recently, on 23 September 1982, a further burial was discovered during construction works extending the 1978 residential development to the east along Osier Way (TQ 2410 6029). This area had been playing fields of the former Residential School and the ground slopes slightly away to the north from Fir Tree road. About 30cm of topsoil covered the broken and fractured surface of the Chalk which is fairly level but contains sporadic shallow deposits of greenish Thanet Sand. The surface had been graded off to meet the level of the new access road and a water main trench had exposed the bones of the lower limbs of a human skeleton in a shallow depression 3m south of the new kerb line and aligned roughly east-west (pl 1). The line of the grave-cut survived on the east and south, where machining had not cut deeper, but its overall depth would have been no more than about 30-40cm. This small pear-shaped hollow (about 60cm by 1.4m) had been dug solely to accommodate the two lower limbs and parts of the pelvic bones which remained in situ. Most of the foot bones were missing and the pelvic area had been displaced and crushed as if the groin had been cut through and the two legs separated before burial. Little remained of the original fill which appeared to consist of small chalk lumps and a little loam; there was 'pea-grit' over the bottom of the grave. The only object recovered was a small iron nail, from the surface near the left knee, which was possibly the result of recent disturbance and may be of 17th or 18th century date. Both burials, of which the bone survives in fairly good condition, have been deposited in the Bourne Hall Museum, Ewell.

These latest finds may be related to the two burials discovered in 1925 in the same area, reported in the *Collections* (Lambert 1926). There are also other references to human remains being found nearby. Lambert (1923, 4) refers to two prehistoric skeletons being found in the railway cutting in about 1903 and Manning & Bray (1809, 581) mention finds of human bones and weapons from a barrow on Ewell Downs. These may all be connected with the four Gally Hills barrows some half mile to the east and perhaps with the 1918 find of a burial with a knife noted by Lowther (in Morris 1959, 133) north of the Isolation Hospital. Excavation of one of the barrows (Barfoot & Price-Williams 1976) showed the primary burial to be of late 7th or possibly early 8th century date. There had, however, also been inserted into it at least five later burials, presumed to be later medieval gallows victims; the Gally Hills site is traditionally that of a gallows, and a large post-hole was noted cutting into the centre of the mound.

The burials found in 1925 contained three urns apparently of late 6th century date. Keith, who commented on the remains at the time (Lambert 1926, 92) considered that more burials would be found in the vicinity and suggested they could form part of a Saxon inhumation cemetery. It may be that these two latest finds are indeed part of such a cemetery, but as no grave goods have been



Plate 1. Burial found on 23 September 1982, Osier Way, Banstead.

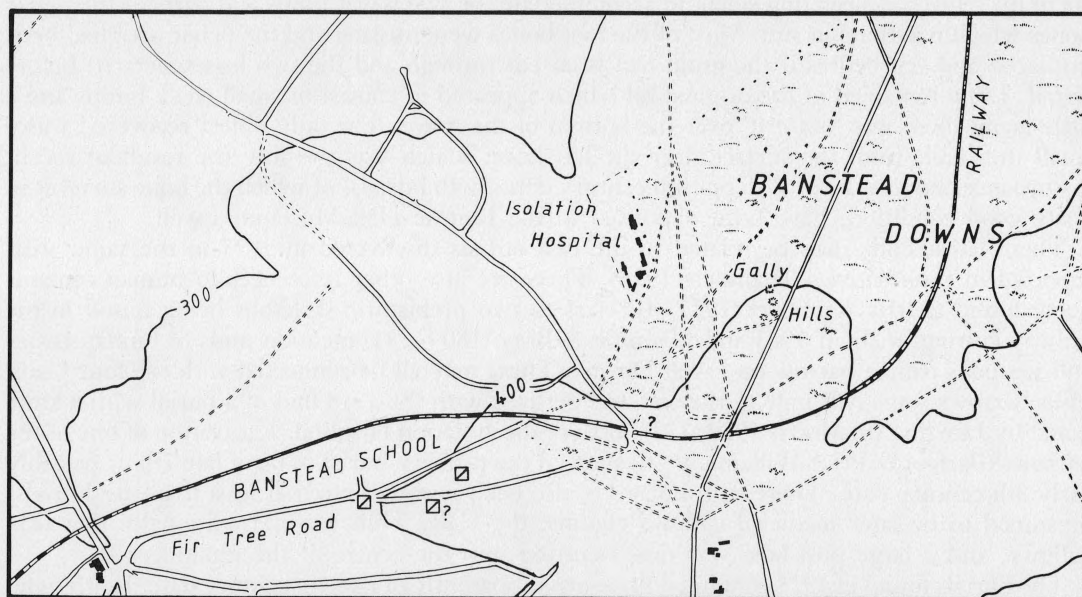


Fig 1. Map of Banstead Downs area taken from OS 6" map (1933 edn), showing Gally Hills barrows, Fir Tree road burials (indicated by crossed squares) and probable sites of other burials recorded (indicated by question marks).

found, and in view of the mutilated state and shallow burial of the skeleton found in 1982, their date remains uncertain. It would be tempting to surmise that this latest find might be the result of casual burial of part of a quartered gallows victim; this is unlikely however, as the Gally Hills are some quarter of a mile away and there is no tradition of a gallows at this point. What is clear is that when plotted on the map (fig 1), these burials are situated on or near the 400ft contour, which in this area forms a slight spur along the line of Fir Tree road. It has not been possible to position accurately the second of the burials discovered in 1925, that found on the land of Mr Heather Coy, but it might have been near 40, Fir Tree road; its possible position is indicated on fig 1, with a question mark. It will also be seen that the burials follow the line of the old track crossing the 19th century railway line from the area of the Gally Hills.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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