

# A HUMAN CREMATION BURIAL FROM HENDON

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## SUMMARY

A human cremation burial of Roman date has been found in Hendon, London, N.W.4. The contents of the Urn have been examined and are considered to be those of a young person, possibly a child, although no accurate estimation of age or sex could be made from the surviving material.

## SITE

The Burial was found in the garden of No. 111 Sunny Gardens Road, Hendon, London, N.W.4. (TQ 22988998) by Sqd-Ldr. E. C. Rideal, O.B.E., in May 1966. The find was located 6 ft. 4 ins. from the west wall of the house and 3 ft. from the fence adjoining No. 113 Sunny Gardens Road. The surrounding area was clay with a noticeable quantity of carbon particles and a few pebbles and flints. The urn was less than 6 ins. below the surface at the site found but this was 3 ft. lower than the present level of the back garden as the house has been cut into a slope.

## THE CINERARY URN

The urn was found in a large number of fragments and appeared to have suffered considerably from soil compression. The fabric of the urn was a light sandy colour and in places the process of erosion was clearly visible. On reconstruction it was found that about one third of the rim was missing. Later examination of the cremation yielded a number of sherds of the urn mixed in with the cremated material. The urn was  $22\frac{1}{4}$  cms. across at its widest part although it must be noted that it is by no means symmetrical. The internal diameter at the neck is 14 cms., and the urn is  $21\frac{1}{2}$  cms. in height. The urn is considered to be dated to the end of the first century A.D., or to the beginning of the second. The general form can be paralleled with types from the Roman Kiln Site under excavation in Highgate Wood. (TQ 28258905). It has not, however, been possible to find any local parallels for the fabric.

## THE CREMATION

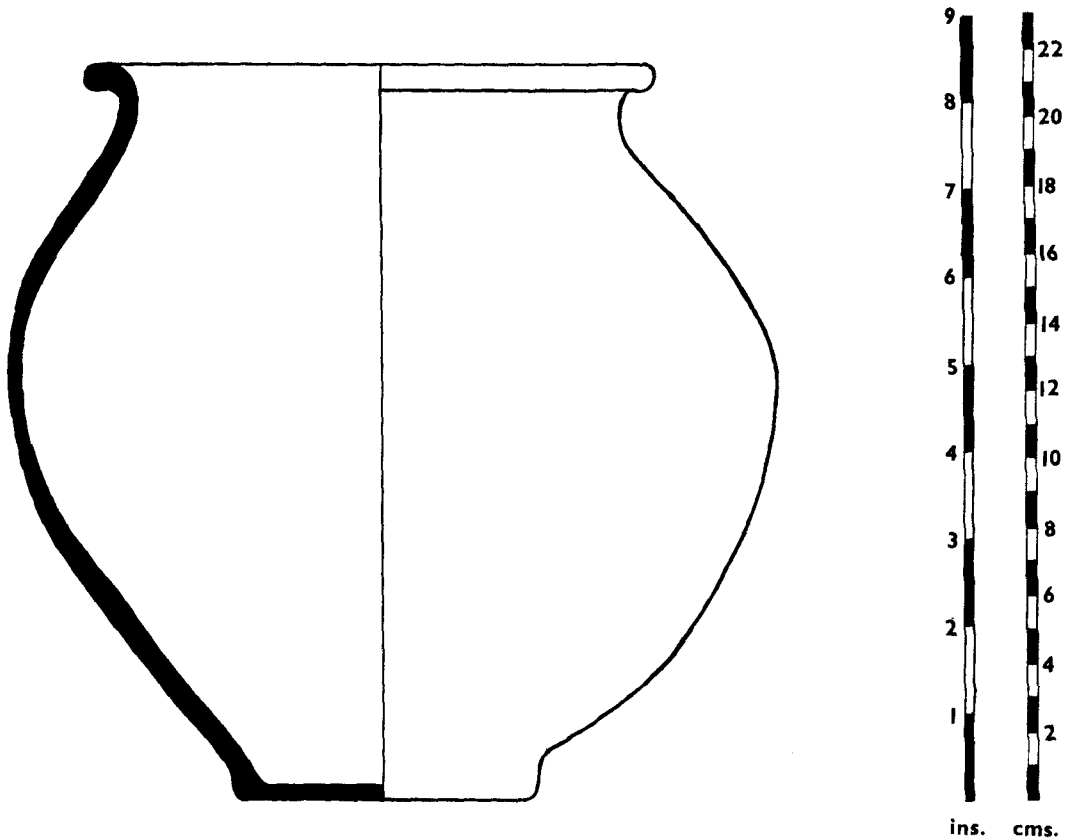
Raymond E. Chaplin (Passmore Edwards Museum, London, E.15) kindly provided the following observations:—

‘When received, a part of the contents had already been washed to separate some of the bones and soil. The washings, had, however, been kept and these and the remaining mass of clay, stone and bone were soaked in water and washed through a series of meshes (4, 10, 20 and 30 mesh). The bones and stone retained over the largest mesh were removed for gross examination under a binocular microscope (x 20) and samples from the other meshes under a monocular microscope (x 200). No botanical or zoological material was noted.

‘Of the non-osseous material recovered from above No. 4 mesh, pieces of shale, pebbles of flint and quartz, sherds of pottery from the urn, and pieces of slag or clinker were recognised. The same materials were found on the other meshes.

‘The bone recovered on the No. 4 mesh weighed 770 gms. This figure is slightly greater than the true weight of bone because of the presence of soil in some of the bones.

'The largest fragments were from limb bones and these were up to 6 cm. in length. Examination of the limb and skull fragments showed that not more than one individual need be involved. There is no evidence of the sex of the individual. Surprisingly, no fragments of teeth were recovered, no cranial sutures could be identified and only one fragment of long bone preserved part of the end and this appeared to show an unfused epiphysis. Because of this no reliable age estimate can be made. The probable unfused epiphysis taken with the slightness of the bone suggests a sub-adult individual and, therefore, any estimate of sex would be unreliable.'



ROMAN BURIAL URN from Sunny Gardens Road, Hendon.

#### OTHER FINDS FROM THE AREA

The human cremation burial reported here has been found in an area with few recorded Roman finds. It was located about three-quarters of a mile from a portion of a Roman Road established in Copthall Fields.<sup>1</sup> Slightly closer, half a mile south-west, fragments of Roman tessellated pavement and pottery were found in a pit in the grounds of Grove House, Hendon, in 1889.<sup>2</sup> The nearest recorded burial was found in 1774 in Well Walk, Hampstead.<sup>3</sup> This find had a number of urns with associated pottery and lamps.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### NOTES

- 1 Excavated at TQ 23229137 and at TQ 23259120 by Hendon and District Archaeological Society in August 1967. (Report forthcoming).
- 2 *Proc. Soc. Antiquaries*, 2nd Series, xiii (1889-91) 16.
- 3 *Gentleman's Magazine*. (1776) 169.