

ROMAN MATERIAL FOUND AT GROVE HOUSE, HENDON, IN 1889

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SUMMARY

This paper is a reappraisal of some Roman material found in Hendon in 1889. An attempt has been made to eliminate some of the considerable confusion that has surrounded this site. The few remaining finds described here give no real indication as to the nature of the site, which is now unfortunately lost to further investigation.

INTRODUCTION

The *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* of December 1889 contains a short reference to some Roman material found in the grounds of Grove House, The Burroughs, Hendon, London N.W.4.¹ This paragraph refers to a quantity of fragments of Roman pottery found by Dr. Henry Hicks, F.R.S., during the digging of a gravel pit. The report gives no further details except that the pieces, including some fragments of bone, were scattered about a foot below the surface.

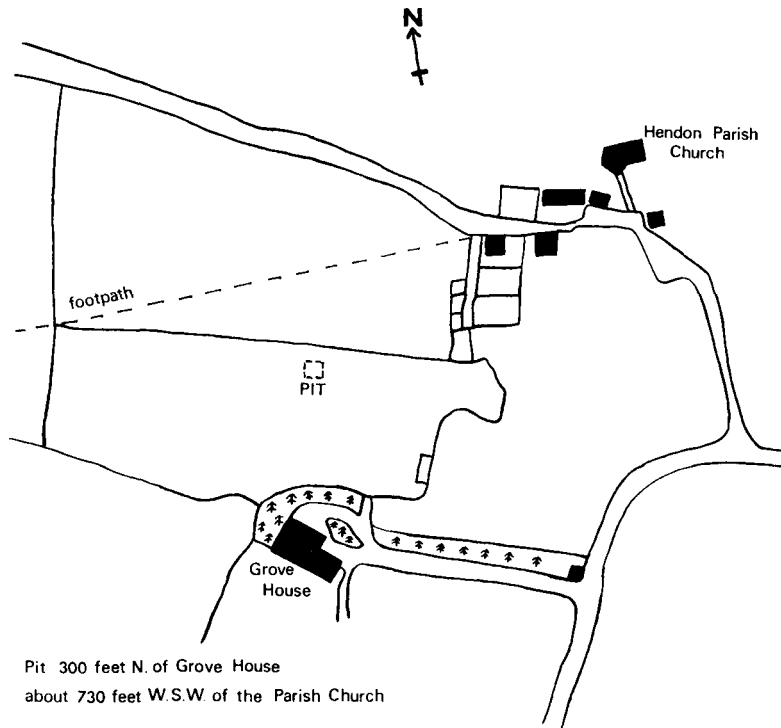


Fig. 1

Drawing made from sketch-map showing the location of the find made in the grounds of Grove House, Hendon. (Reproduced by permission of the Libraries and Arts Committee, London Borough of Barnet.)

A report in a local paper shortly afterwards specifically mentions “broken cinerary urns, mortaria, and water bottles (one being complete with the exception of the handle)” as being found at the Grove.² The report goes on to say that “there were also various kinds of Roman tiles, bricks and millstones, etc., indicating clearly that there must have been a Roman villa at or near the spot.” Since these two reports this material has been left uninvestigated, yet the rumours of a villa site have flourished and it was felt that it would be worth tracing those pieces that still survive, and studying them in detail.

Grove House was built in the early eighteenth century and after a succession of owners the house was demolished in 1934 and the ground it occupied opened as a public park. The exact site of the find of Roman material was recorded by Dr. Hicks on a sketch map and he placed the site of the pit as 300 ft north of Grove House and about 730 ft west-south-west of St. Mary’s Parish Church. Figure 1 is a drawing of the sketch map made from a photocopy of the original.³ As accurately as can be established, this site is at grid reference TQ 227894. This puts it under the playing field of the Hendon College of Technology, which was extensively landscaped during the construction of the college, so that any further evidence or possibility of new investigation has now been lost.

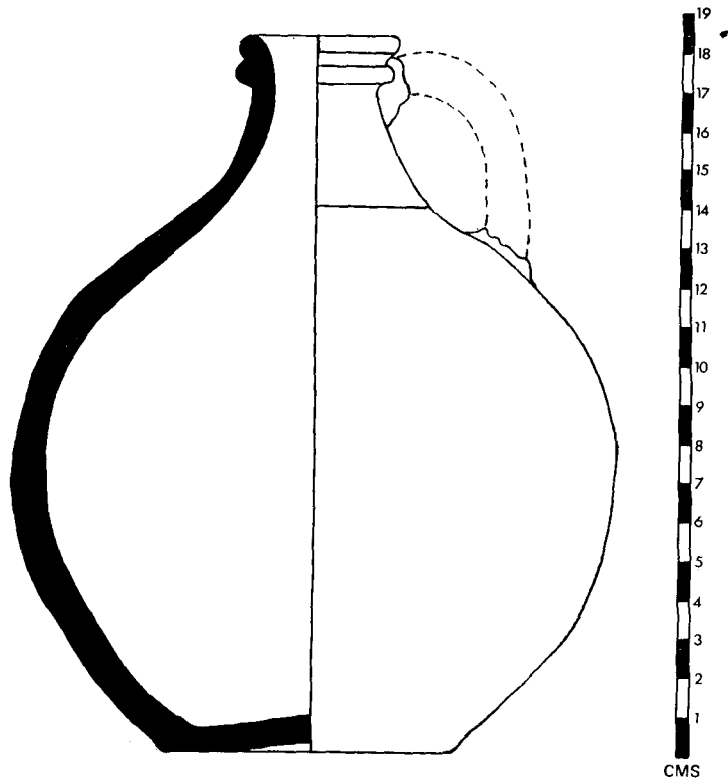


Fig. 2
Section of the ring-necked single-handled flagon

The Local History Collection of the London Borough of Barnet has four items catalogued as having been found at Hendon Grove. These are a single handled flagon (A.64), part of a circular brick (A.65), part of a tile (A.65), and a portion of tessellated pavement (A.61). By reference to the Library Donations Book and various items of correspondence filed in the Local History Collection, it is clear that the flagon, the brick and the tile were donated in March 1949 by Dr. F. H. K. Green, C.B.E., a relative of Dr. Hicks, as items found at Hendon Grove in 1889.⁴ This was confirmed recently by the donor.⁵ The portion of tessellated pavement, measuring 16 cm x 12 cm and consisting of 133 buff coloured tesserae is entered in the donations book later than the flagon, the brick and the tile, even though it was donated earlier, in December 1948, by Miss N. F. Waters. Although it is alleged that this portion of pavement was found in Hendon prior to 1890, there is no evidence to link it with the Grove House finds.⁷ Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that it was actually excavated in Hendon as opposed to having been brought from elsewhere as a collector's item. The position is further clarified by the fact that there is no mention of tesserae in either the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* or the *Hendon Times*. As other items are specifically listed and tesserae would be the sort of items most readily recognised, even in 1889, it is reasonable to assume that this portion of tessellated pavement is not related to the Grove House finds.

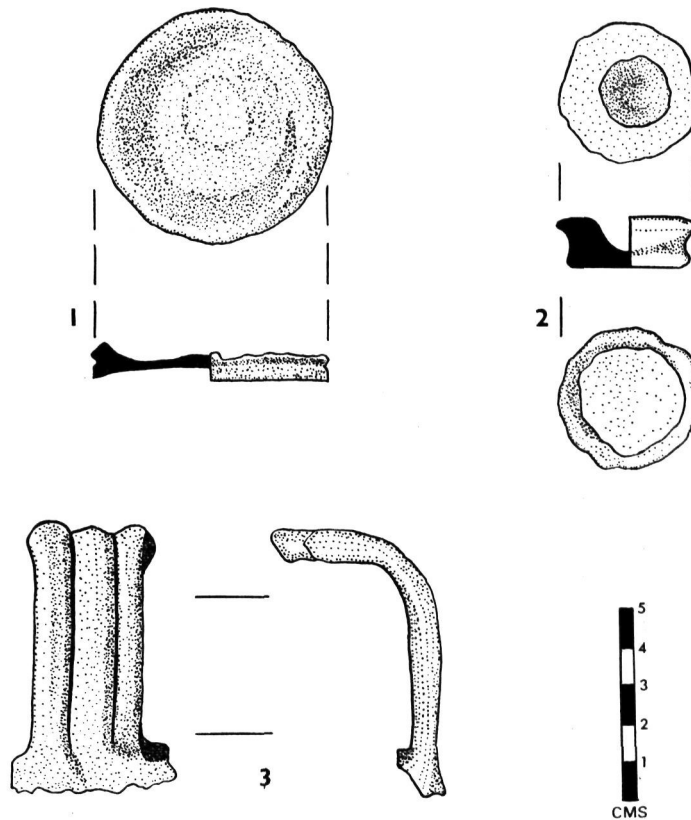


Fig. 3
Pottery fragments

It has long been considered that the few items mentioned above were all that remained of the Grove House discovery. There are, however, two further entries listed as Roman material in the Local History Collection list of antiquities. These are listed as "16 fragments of Roman pottery" (A.181) and "Lug from a Roman water jug" (A.185). Unfortunately there is neither date of donation nor the name of the donor, nor any indication as to the origin of these pieces. It has been possible to ascertain that these items were also part of Dr. Hicks' material from the grounds of Grove House.⁸ It has regrettably been impossible to study all these 17 pieces as only 3 items labelled A.181 and the single A.185 could be traced. Of these 4 pieces only 3 are Roman and the other is a handle of seventeenth-century date. This, therefore, calls into question the real identity and dating of the 13 missing pieces.

THE ROMAN FINDS

The descriptions which follow are of the remaining Roman finds known to have constituted part of Dr. Hicks' discovery of 1889. The items have been numbered for convenience and the London Borough of Barnet Local History Collection catalogue number appears in brackets:

1. (A.64) A ring-necked single-handled flagon. It is of grey fabric and is almost complete with the exception of the handle (Section Fig. 2). The flagon is 18.3 cms high and 15.3 cms wide at its widest part. The internal diameter of the neck is 3.4 cms. It is considered to date from the second century A.D. It has not been possible to find any local parallels and neither the form nor the fabric can be paralleled with any material from the Romano-British Pottery Factory under excavation in Highgate Wood.⁹ There is, however, a similarity of form with Gillam types 8 and 16 both found at Corbridge.¹⁰ Type 8 is dated in the north to between 140 and 180 A.D., and type 16 to between 175 and 250 A.D.
2. (A.65) Almost a quadrant of a circular brick of gritty red fabric, 4 cms thick. It is considered to be a Roman brick of the type used to build columns which would then have been faced with plaster. There are several complete examples in the Guildhall Museum in London, and the portion from Grove House can be closely paralleled to one 20 cms in diameter and 4 cms thick.¹¹
3. (A.65) This item is part of a Roman flanged roofing tile. The portion remaining measures 21 cms x 15 cms. It is flat, 2 cms thick and has a 4 cm flange.
4. (A.181) A double-grooved handle from a buffware flagon (No. 3 on Fig. 3.)
5. (A.181) A 6 cm diameter base of a grey coarseware vessel (No. 1 on Fig. 3.)
6. (A.185) A 3.5 cm diameter orange-buff coloured piece which has been considered to be either a pedestal base or the knob of a lid. Because of its small size and the convexity of its lip it has been judged most likely to be a lid knob¹² (No. 2 on Fig. 3.)

With the exception of the flagon the other pieces listed above are all difficult to date, but the general impression gained is one of late first or second century A.D.

DISCUSSION

Early in the research into the Grove House finds it was clear that many theories had been put forward about the site. This confusion is well illustrated in the *Victoria County History of Middlesex*, which has two entries under Hendon, both of which refer to the single find made by Dr. Hicks.¹³ Perhaps because of this confusion, authors have tended to ignore Grove House completely, or they have perpetuated the villa theory without justification.

There can be little doubt that in 1889 some material was excavated in the grounds of Grove House. This find consisted of material from a number of periods of which all that remains are six Roman items and one post-Medieval piece.

The tesserae incorrectly attributed to Grove House added weight to those arguments in favour of a villa. It is clear that the tesserae did not originate from the Grove and the remaining Roman items do not constitute sufficient evidence for a villa. It must be admitted, however, that while one cannot make a categorical statement, the finds might indicate an occupation site with some form of building.

One must also consider the possibility that the site was a burial. Dr. Hicks' original report states that there were fragments of bone and the pottery was in a "well defined longitudinal excavation under the soil and extending downwards for about 18 ins into the undisturbed sand below."¹⁴ This theory might explain the broken cinerary urns, water jugs and mortaria referred to in the local paper, but not, however, the brick or the tile.

A decision as to which of these theories is the more likely is difficult to take, since both are also possible in combination. Regrettably some of the items from the site, which might have added more information, have not been traced. The evidence from the remaining few items undoubtedly justifies their inclusion on any distribution map of Roman finds, yet the nature of the site must remain far from clear. It is hoped that this paper, in bringing the remaining material to light has removed some of the misconceptions surrounding the Grove House finds.

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NOTES

¹ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* 2nd series, xiii (1889-91), 16.

² *Hendon Times*, 13 December 1889, 5.

³ Published by permission of the Libraries and Arts Committee of the London Borough of Barnet.

⁴ *Hendon Public Libraries Donations Book*, 1938-52. Entry No. 3106, 14 March 1949.

⁵ Personal communication from Dr. F. H. K. Green, C.B.E.

⁶ *Op cit* in note 4, entry No. 3124, 28 February 1949. Letter of acknowledgement dated 10 December 1948.

⁷ Personal communication from Miss N. F. Waters.

⁸ Personal communication from Dr. F. H. K. Green, C.B.E.

⁹ A. E. Brown and H. L. Sheldon "Early Roman Pottery Factory in North London", *London Archaeologist* i, (1969), 39.

¹⁰ J. P. Gillam, *Types of Roman Coarse Pottery Vessels in Northern Britain*, Oriol Academic Publication (1968), 5-7 and Figs. 2-3.

¹¹ Guildhall Museum accession number 1930.215. Found in the City of London but exact provenance unknown.

¹² Personal communication. Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities, British Museum, London.

¹³ *The Victoria County History of Middlesex*, Oxford University Press, i, (1969), 72.

¹⁴ *Op cit* in note 1, 16.