

THE SAXON CEMETERY AT UPPER WEST FIELD, SHEPPERTON

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INTRODUCTION

The Saxon cemetery at Upper West Field, Shepperton, was first brought to public attention by the appearance in print of three notes by Manwaring Shurlock in 1868 (Shurlock 1868a, 1868b and 1868c). These described discoveries made in that and previous years in the course of gravel extraction and may be summarised as follows:

A. Inhumations

(i) A group of eight inhumations, all supine and facing east, were discovered at a depth of one metre below ground level, buried without coffins. Three of the skeletons were side by side, one metre apart, the others randomly distributed. Two of the jaw bones were exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries and said to be of

a male, the enamel of those teeth were badly worn, and of a female whose jaw had a peculiar symphysis.¹

(ii) Within 100 metres of this group a flexed burial with pottery had been found in 1853.²

(iii) A warrior burial (Pl. 1) was excavated late in 1868 by Shurlock himself, with

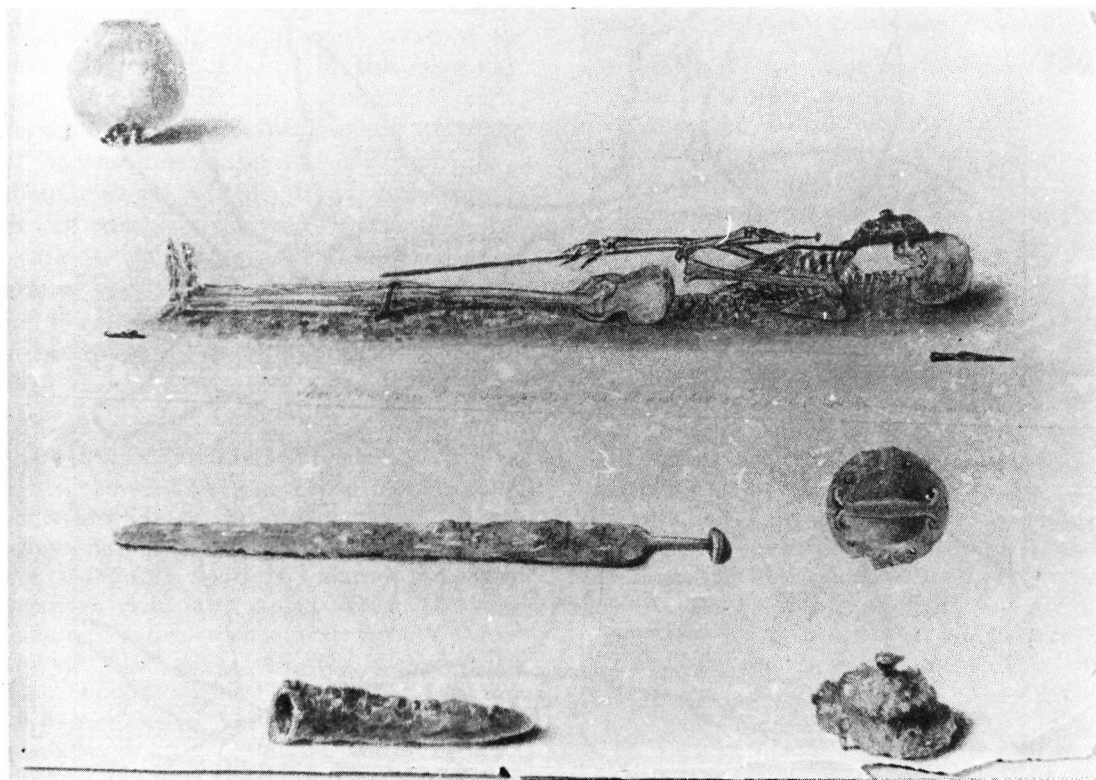


Plate 1. Upper West Field, Shepperton. Watercolour illustration of a warrior burial. The height of the skeleton is approximately 1.59m.

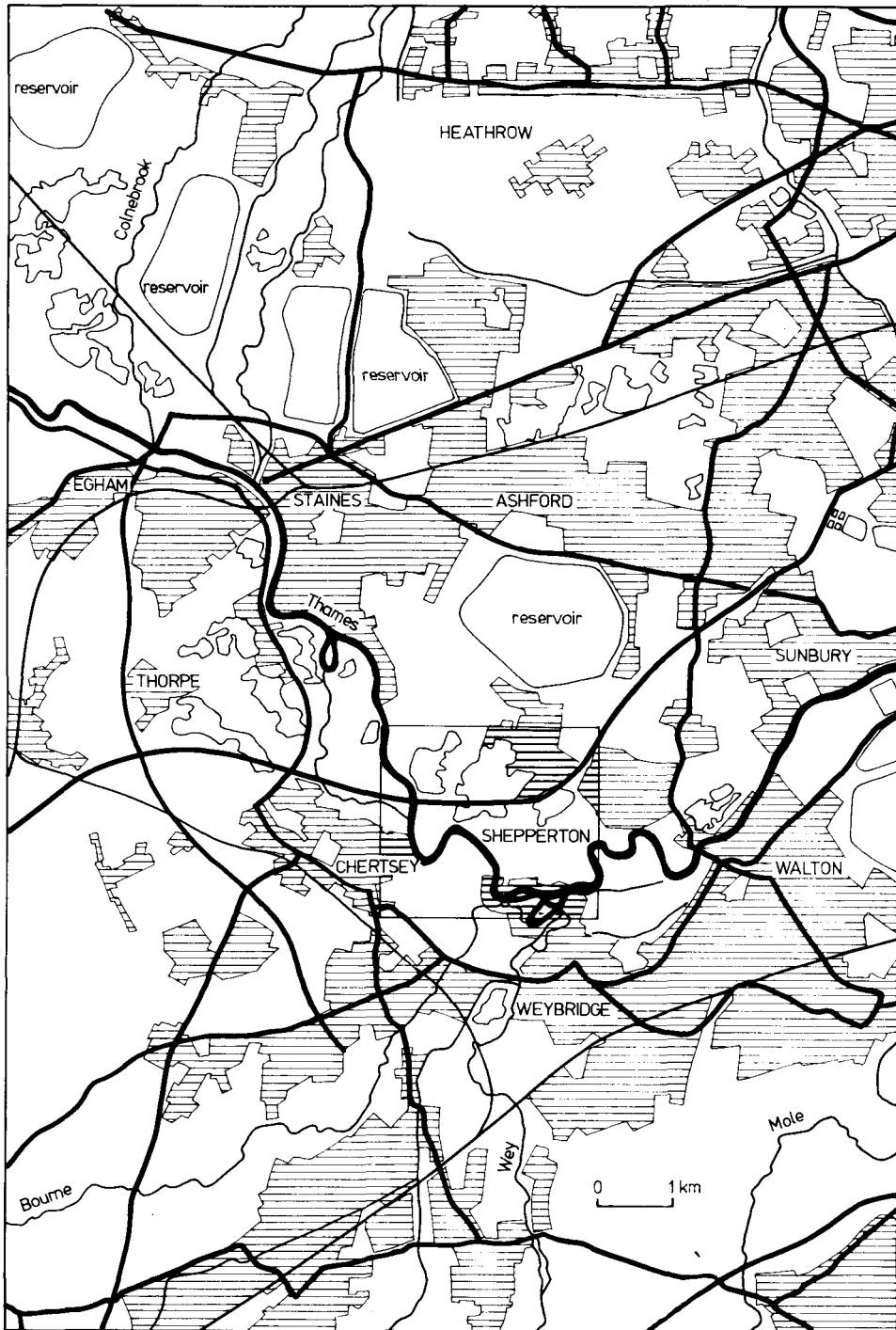


Fig. 1. The Shepperton area: location map.

some care (Shurlock 1868c). The person buried was *c.* 1.59m tall and carried a sword and shield with a spear 1.78m long by his side. The finds (items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6; see also 10) are described below.

- (iv) Many human bones and skulls, together with the hilt of a sword, an axehead and a dagger were found in 1817 (Anon. 1867, 18). These finds cannot now be located.

B. Cremations

A cremation urn found in 1812³ (item 9) was exhibited by Shurlock and a labourer reported that he had destroyed many others, which were all said to contain bones like 'neck of mutton bones'. Another urn (probably item 7) was reconstructed from fragments and was discovered four metres to the east of the group of inhumations.

Shurlock proposed that a formal excavation should be undertaken, but this was presumably never carried out and no subsequent Saxon discoveries are known. The site has, however, been referred to many times since and, in this process, confusion has arisen principally with regard to its location but also on a number of more minor points. Furthermore, though most of the finds have been described and illustrated in various publications⁴ they have never appeared as a group. It is the purpose of this article to redress these shortcomings so as to allow a just appraisal of the significance of this site.

LOCATION OF THE SITE

Some uncertainty exists with regard to the exact location of the discoveries. This has arisen through a misleading approximate siting on the O.S. 1:10, 560 map of this area, perpetuated in later discussions of the site, lending a spurious accuracy to the location (Meaney 1964: TQ 067 673; Celoria and MacDonald 1966, 76: TQ 0675 6711; Longley 1976, 19: TQ 0675 6711). The O.S. siting symbol is in fact at TQ 067 671 and is centrally situated in *Upper West Field* from where the finds are known to derive. The original

reports, however, allow the discoveries to be located with more accuracy.

The finds were 'with one exception, from *Upper West Field* in the Parish of Shepperton' and were made 'in digging gravel on Shepperton Range on the banks of the Thames between Chertsey and Walton'. *Upper West Field* 'was until lately separated on the west by a hedge commonly known by the name of Domesday which hedge continued across Shepperton Range until it reached the bank of the Thames, that river being distant about 150 yards. The field adjoins the high road through Shepperton and is situated midway between Laleham Ferry and Walton Bridge. *The Upper West Field* and the field adjoining have from time immemorial supplied gravel for the repair of the parish roads' (Shurlock 1868a). The majority of the Anglo-Saxon material was derived from the vicinity of the Domesday hedge whereas Roman pottery and animal bones seem to have been discovered 50 yards or so to the west. The important points may be conveniently summarised:

- (1) The finds were made in *Upper West Field*
- (2) The finds were made in the vicinity of, and on the site of, *Domesday Hedge*
- (3) The finds were made in the course of gravel extraction
- (4) Roman pottery was found 50 yards to the west of this point.

Upper West Field was located by the Ordnance Survey from a tithe map of 1843 (O.S. card index TQ 06NE 13; Fig. 2a). This was a very big field however and in view of developments here in the intervening period, the accuracy with which the original discoveries might be located assumes importance.

It is suggested that Domesday Hedge may be equated with the present boundary between the parishes of Shepperton and Littleton. This suggestion finds support in the fact that the continuation of this line across Shepperton Range to the Thames, a distance of 150 yards, corresponds with the published description of 1868 (see above). The discoveries were made somewhere along this line.

The first edition (1816) O.S. 1:63, 360 map (Fig. 2a) indicates two anomalies, one on either side of the Domesday Hedge parish

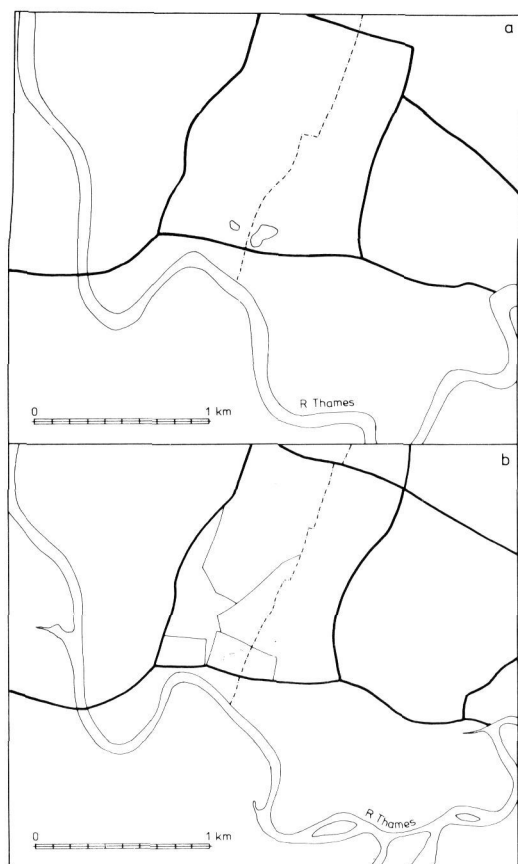


Fig. 2. Area of Upper West Field site. (a) Based on O.S. 1:63,360 map (1816); (b) Based on O.S. 1:10,560 map (1867-8).

boundary which may represent gravel pits contemporary with the earliest recorded finds from the area. The first edition (1868-72) O.S. 1:10,560 map (Fig. 2b), may indicate that the pit in Upper West Field was exhausted by the latter part of the nineteenth century although extraction presumably continued to the west of Domesday hedge. Gravel extraction in the first half of the nineteenth century might, therefore, have been restricted to the area 'in Upper West Field and the field adjoining' on either side of Domesday hedge and adjacent to the main road. This would be a logical location in view of the application of the gravel in surfacing the parish roads and explains the descriptive emphasis on the

adjacent high road and the proximity of the Thames.

Roman pottery was recovered by Frere in 1943 from a pit revealed in the course of gravel extraction at TQ 062 669 (Frere 1943; Fig. 3c). Fig. 3c plots the extent of extraction in the immediate vicinity from an aerial photograph taken in 1949 (HAS/UK/49/215). It is significant that the Roman pottery uncovered in the 1860s was some short distance (50 yards) west of the Domesday Hedge.

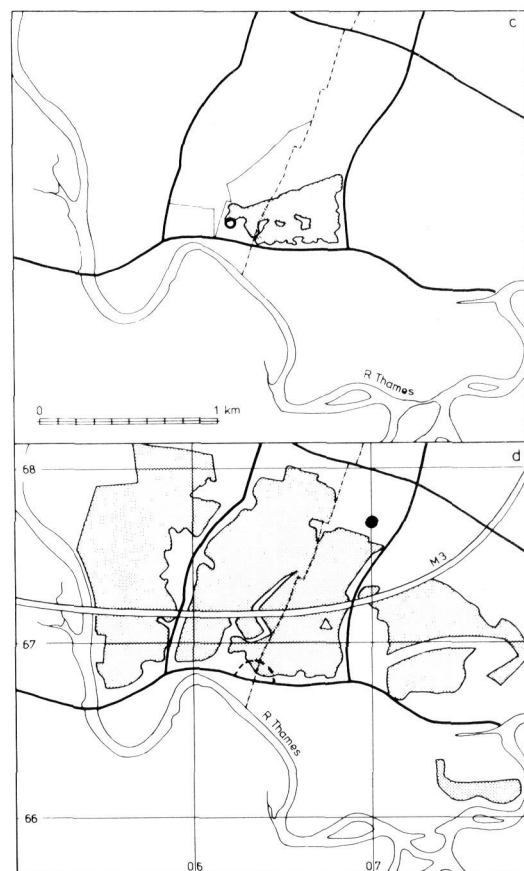


Fig. 3. Area of Upper West Field site. (c) Based on aerial photograph HAS/UK/49/215 (1949). Gravel pit shaded. O = Location of Frere's discoveries; (d) Based on modern O.S. 1:10,560 map. Extent of gravel extraction shaded. Grid lines at kilometre intervals: Δ = O.S. location of cemetery; --- = suggested location of cemetery; \bullet = Shepperton Green excavation site.

On the basis of these considerations it is here suggested that the Saxon cemetery at Upper West Field might more accurately be located in the area TQ 063 668, i.e. immediately north of Chertsey Road (B375) at the point where the parish boundary crosses it. It is of interest to note that while the scale and extent of mineral extraction has increased enormously in the Shepperton area in the last 30 years, a small area to the west of Domesday hedge remains intact (Fig. 3d), while the area across the Chertsey Road has never been quarried. Further examination of this potentially important cemetery site may still be possible.

CATALOGUE

The following catalogue has been compiled from a number of sources of evidence. Its foundation lies in the accounts of the site published by Manwaring Shurlock (1868a, b and c) and it is, therefore, unfortunate that manuscript notes by him, apparently containing additional information, can no longer be located.⁵ Subsequent publications, with the exception of remarks by Baldwin-Brown (1915, 219) on item 1, add little information that cannot be deduced from the surviving finds themselves. These are now in Guildford Museum and the Museum of London. The items in Guildford Museum are there on loan from the Surrey Archaeological Society, to which they were presumably given by Manwaring Shurlock or his executors.⁶ The artefacts in the Museum of London were acquired with the Layton collection from Brentford Public Library, but how they were originally obtained is unknown.

In view of the disappearance of a number of items mentioned by Shurlock and the sadly decayed condition of the surviving ironwork, it is fortunate that three 19th-century water colours illustrating both lost and surviving finds from the site exist.⁷

These illustrations are well executed, often with a note of the size or scale and are probably the work of Manwaring Shurlock⁸ since, as well as material obtained at the sites of Upper West Field and Walton Bridge Green, they depict an E.B.A. flat axe from St. Ann's

Hill, Chertsey, an area for which he was for many years local secretary of the Surrey Archaeological Society. That the drawings are a careful and accurate record can be demonstrated in two ways.

Firstly, the illustration PDI/14/5 can be compared with the surviving pot (item 12) and found to be in agreement in almost every detail. Secondly, Plate 1 shows items 1, 2 and 6, which all survive and are clearly drawn correctly both as to form and as to proportion one to the other. It is true, however, that this drawing is partially stylised, as shown by the positions of the feet and hands. The following catalogue, therefore, freely uses this illustrative evidence to supplement that of the surviving artefacts.

1. Sword (G.M.S6686) (Pl. 1 and Fig. 4⁹) Blade 865mm long, maximum width *c.* 50mm; tang 115mm with 'pommel' 37mm wide. This item is now heavily corroded with the point missing, but was apparently intact and quite well preserved on discovery (compare Fig. 4 with Pl. 1), and traces of wood suggestive of a scabbard also adhered to it. In view of this it seems worth reproducing Baldwin-Brown's (1915, 219 and Pl. XXVI) comments: 'It is a step in advance [on the sword without any metal pommel] when a separate piece is used as a cap or 'washer' the end of the tang perforating it, and this cap may very well have taken a form like that on the sword from Shepperton, Middlesex . . . where the end of the tang passes up through a hole in the iron cap and is fixed by being beaten out . . . This little iron cap is really the beginning of the pommel'.
Probably of late 5th-century date.¹⁰
Additional references: Baldwin-Brown, 1915, Pl. XVIII; Shurlock 1868b, 191.
2. Shield Boss (GM S5960) sharply carinated dome 76mm high and 111mm in diameter, with a flange with a maximum surviving diameter of 30mm. The contemporary illustrations suggest that originally it was 43mm all round. The dome is in reasonable condition, but the flange is now badly corroded, though one rivet hole probably survives (Fig. 4). Pl. 1 shows that four rivet holes were originally present. Late 5th or early 6th century.
Additional References: (Fig. 4) As for item 1 and also Evison 1963, 39.
3. Shield Grip (GM S5970). This grip goes with item 2 and is 158mm long, maximum width 31mm. The sides are upturned, presumably to grip a wooden crossbar. Remains of the two rivets still survive, but the decorative curved terminals are broken at one end.
Date and references as for Item 2.
4. Spearhead (GM S5959) (Fig. 4) Socketed (but broken at beginning of socket), surviving length 280mm (point missing), maximum width *c.* 40mm. Very

badly corroded, original form difficult to determine. 6th to 7th century (if actually Swanton type E3).

Additional References: Shurlock 1868a, 118 (possibly the one mentioned there, but difficult to be certain without measurements); Swanton 1974, 80.

5. Butt-Ferrule. This item no longer survives but the drawing (Pl. 1) indicates a corroded iron butt-ferrule with a closed socket (as opposed to the cleft socket of the spearheads 4, 6 and 11). No scale is given for the larger drawing of it but a comparison of its size in the main drawing with that of the sword suggests that it is full size. This gives it dimensions of length 61mm, internal diameter 10mm and an external diameter of 16mm. The ferrule is associated with Item 6 and together they indicate a spear 1.78m in length.

6. Spearhead (GM S5958). (Pl. 1 and Fig. 4) Socketed, length 182mm, maximum width 32mm, with a full-erred blade with a deep groove to the left of the central rib on either side.

Latest 5th or early 6th century—Swanton type J.

Additional References: As for Item 1 and also Swanton 1973, Fig. 48b; Swanton 1974, 80, where the 'associated weapons' column erroneously places Items 1 and 2 with Item 4, instead of 6.

7. Pot (PDI/14/3). (Pl. 2) Drawing of sherds from an urn with a reconstructed profile, labelled 'Found at Shepperton Green Gravel Pit, 1868'¹¹ Full size'. The drawing indicates that the pot is 205mm tall and has a rim diameter of 125mm. It is very probably the large badly broken vessel recreated and exhibited by Shurlock (1868a, 119). It is an example of Myres' (1969, 182) 'Biconical Linear Ornament with Stamps, I.'

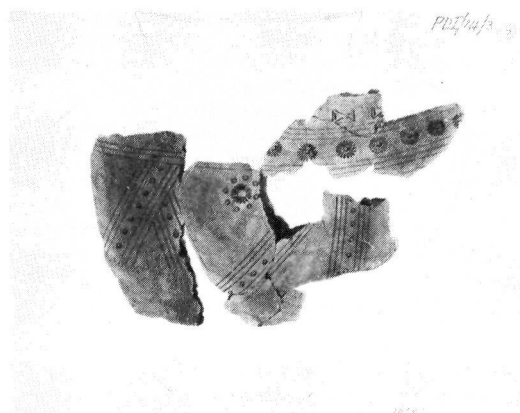


Plate 2. Upper West Field, Shepperton. Watercolour of sherds from a cremation urn, discovered in 1868 (Item 7).

Probably of 5th-century date.

Additional Reference: Celoria and MacDonald 1966, 75, No. 3 reproduce the illustration, but the caption erroneously states that the find spot and scale are uncertain.

8. Brooch (GM S6995). (Fig. 4) Bronze brooch, in good condition, found with the centre (male) one of the three aligned burials noted above (Shurlock 1868, 118).

Length 65mm, maximum width 24mm.

First half of the sixth century.

Additional References: Baldwin-Brown, 1915, Pl. CLVI, no. 6.



Plate 3. Upper West Field, Shepperton. Watercolour of cremation urn found in 1812 (Item 9).

9. Pot (PDI/14/4). (Pl. 3) Drawing of pot labelled 'Found at Shepperton Gravel Pit, 1812.'¹² Scale 6in to 1ft'. The urn is therefore 230mm tall and has a rim diameter of 88mm. The same urn is reproduced from a woodcut by Shurlock (1868a, 120) who states that it was purchased from a labourer by the Rector of Shepperton and that it originally contained bones. Myres (1969, 144 and Fig. 4) classified this with his Group II Buckelurnen, and it is interesting to note that this is the most southerly example of the type, which is otherwise almost entirely confined to East and Middle Anglia and Humberside.

Probably 2nd half of 5th century.

Additional References: Shurlock's woodcut is badly reproduced by Baldwin-Brown (1915, 635, Fig. 23) and Vulliamy (1930, 229). The water colour is reproduced by Celoria and MacDonald (1966, 75, No. 4), who erroneously state that the size is uncertain.

10. Pot (Guildford Museum drawing, no reference number). This vessel is depicted in Pl. 1 as a plain round profiled urn, upturned, with very approximate dimensions of 240mm tall, maximum diameter 240mm, and basal diameter 115mm (rim not measurable). Shurlock (1868b, 191) states that it covered a heap of calcined bones and was found 'a little to the north' of the feet of the warrior burial (above). It seems most probable that this represents an entirely separate cremation.

Doubtful Items

11. Spearhead (MOL Acc. No. 0.2062). (Fig. 4) Socketed,

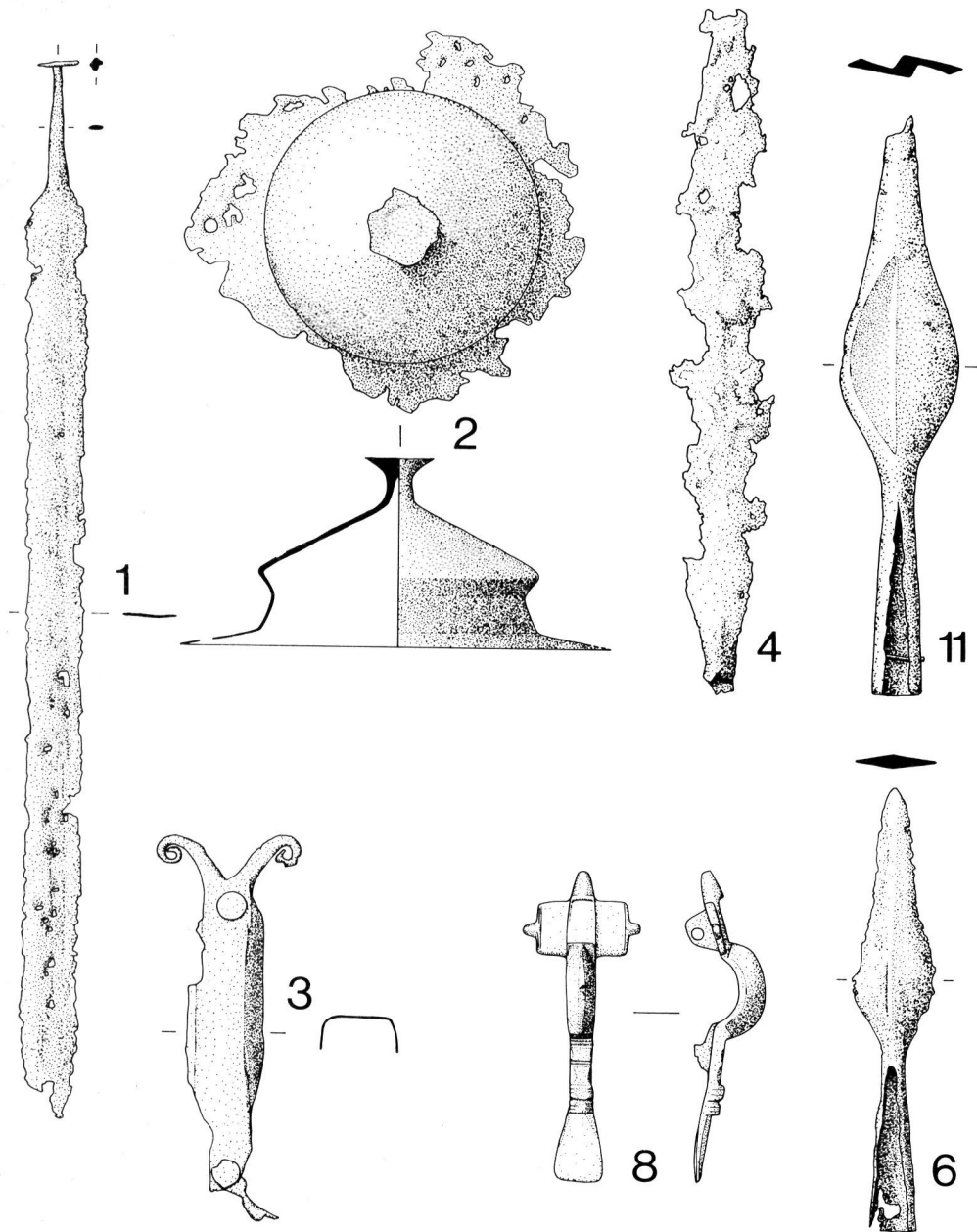


Fig. 4. Metalwork items discovered at Upper West Field. (Scales: 1 = 1/6; 2-4 and 11 = 1/3; 8 = 2/3).

- surviving length 238mm (point missing) maximum width *c.* 40mm, with a fullered blade with a groove to the left of the central rib on either side. The recorded location is 'Shepperton, Thames 1867 or 1847' which suggests that it is a river find. At all events, even if 1867 were the correct date and given the proximity of Upper West Field to the river, the item must be classified as doubtful.
12. Pot (GM S7038 and PDI/14/5). This pot has until recently been displayed in Guildford Museum as from Shepperton, but the caption to the water colour drawing stated 'found at Walton Bridge Green; height 7in; 1869' and this is almost certainly correct since the museum records suggest that the Shepperton provenance is later guesswork. Additional Reference: Celoria and MacDonald 1966, 74, No. 5.
 13. Pot (MOL Acc. No. P307). Myres (1969, 188, Fig. 21, No. 715), describes this as a sub-biconical urn with wide mouth and everted rim in a grey ware. It is decorated with three broad horizontal grooves on the neck above a large three groove *Stehende Bogen*. The attribution to Shepperton by Myres and Vulliamy (1930, 229) is guesswork since it has no recorded provenance.¹³
 14. Pot (Weybridge Museum L459, 1967). Heptagonal vessel with low footring, conical neck and everted rim, well made in light grey ware and decorated with vertical ridges between each facet (Myres 1969, 196, Fig. 25, No. 2373¹⁴). This vessel was formerly displayed in Shepperton Public Library and is owned by the Sunbury and Shepperton Archaeological Group and hence it has been suggested (Myres 1969, 196) that it belongs to the Upper West Field site. No records of its provenance exist and even if one could be sure it was a local find, the Walton Bridge Green site is equally likely.

DISCUSSION

The Upper West Field cemetery displays evidence for both cremation and inhumation rites. The relative proportions of these rites cannot be ascertained, but the 19th-century accounts clearly indicate that both were numerous and that the cemetery was large. The surviving finds are too few to afford any indication as to the wealth or status of the community whose burial ground it is. They are too few also to allow dogmatic statements of its date, but it may be significant that nearly all datable material is of the late 5th or early 6th century.¹⁵ Canham (1979, 110–14) has recently reviewed the evidence for Saxon settlement in the Shepperton area. It is

unnecessary here to repeat his discussion, but a number of comments on it may be made as a result of the evidence presented above. The site is now firmly located close to the Thames and close to the Parish Boundary. The early origin of such boundaries is once again emphasised (Bonney 1972) and this makes the precise location of the tessellated pavements 'near Shepperton Saxon cemetery'¹⁶ of some importance. Are they to be associated with the Roman pottery found just over the parish boundary in Littleton (Frere 1943)². Whether the villa lies in Shepperton or in Littleton, the type of positive correlation between Roman villa, Saxon cemetery and parish boundary noted elsewhere is strongly suggested (*cf.* Fowler 1976). Canham (1979, 111) has raised the question of settlement shift in the Saxon period. The Upper West Field cemetery can now be shown to be separated by about a kilometre from the Shepperton Green site excavated by Canham (1979), which suggests that they are representative of two quite separate settlements. Since no evidence suggests that Upper West Field continued after *c.* 550, and nothing at Shepperton Green need be earlier than that date,¹⁷ a shift of settlement from the one to the other is possible. Such a view of events in the Shepperton area would enable it to be fitted into the settlement pattern recently suggested for the Saxon period (Arnold and Wardle 1981) of early cemeteries, together with their settlements, located near to parish boundaries on light, well-drained soils which became deserted before the 8th century. Why a move from the Upper West Field site to Shepperton Green should have been made is not clear. Certainly it is not possible to explain it, as elsewhere, in terms of agricultural developments and increasing use of heavier soils, since both sites lie on, or close to, river gravels and brickearth.¹⁸

The explanation may have to be sought in wider terms than that of the local landscape. The cemetery developed at an early date and is situated close to the Thames, like the nearby site at Walton Bridge Green.¹⁸ It is tempting, in the circumstances, to adopt Morris' (1959) suggestion that Mitcham, Croydon and others are the cemeteries of communities placed to guard the approaches to London and view the Shepperton sites as intimately connected with the defence and/or conquest of London. When this strategic role ceased, the substantial settlement implied at Upper West Field may have declined and eventually been replaced by a smaller community, more centrally placed for their fields, at Shepperton Green. But so long as the status of London in this period remains obscure, this must be mere speculation.

NOTES

- Ox bones were found immediately above these skeletons and Shurlock (1968c, 172) interpreted these as the remains of a funeral feast.
- This could be a prehistoric burial.
- This is the date on the watercolour drawing. Shurlock (1868a, 119) gives 1817 as the date which may suggest it is identical with the urn containing bone fragments found by Francis Cook on 27 May 1817 (Anon 1867, 18).
- See references below and also Meaney, 1964, 167–8.
- Celoria and MacDonald (1966, 76) state that the notes were in Guildford Museum, but belonged to the Surrey Archaeological Society. Neither institution knows their current (May 1982) whereabouts.
- His executors certainly gave material regarding Chertsey Abbey to the Society (Surrey Archaeol. Collect 15 (1900) xvii).
- Part of a larger group, all evidently by the same hand, which are in Surrey Archaeological Society's Research Material—PDI/14/1–14. One watercolour (Pl. 1) is held by Guildford Museum (no reference number).
- He is known as the author of a fine series of illustrations of Chertsey tiles (Shurlock 1885).
- Slight discrepancies in the appearance of the hilt in these illustrations could suggest there was more than one sword. However, the clear implication of Baldwin-Brown's remarks is that there was only one, and the differences are therefore likely to be due to a combination of minor drawing errors and different states of cleaning or corrosion.
- The dates given are those suggested by the latest reliable study of the subject and are only intended as broad guides.
- This date has been overwritten by another hand.
- See footnote 3, above.
- It is significant that Myres (1969, 111) believed the Walton Bridge site to be on the opposite (Surrey) bank of the Thames to the Upper West Field site.

- It should be noted that this is a poor illustration, not at the scale stated. See also previous footnote.
- Only item 4 need be later and in its corroded condition any dating must be guesswork.
- Museum of London Archaeological Records F417.
- The earliest finds are a group of stamp decorated sherds, which could be 6th century (Canham, 1979, 115). Canham also suggests that a 5th century date is possible for some of the plain wares, but, as possible earlier material was so sparse and so fragmentary, it may be doubted if it indicates any substantial settlement.
- Note also the possible site at War Close which is also close to the Thames and lies between Upper West Field and Walton Bridge Green (Meaney 1964, 167 and Canham 1979, Fig. 9).

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