

FIG. 10—The Pottery (4).

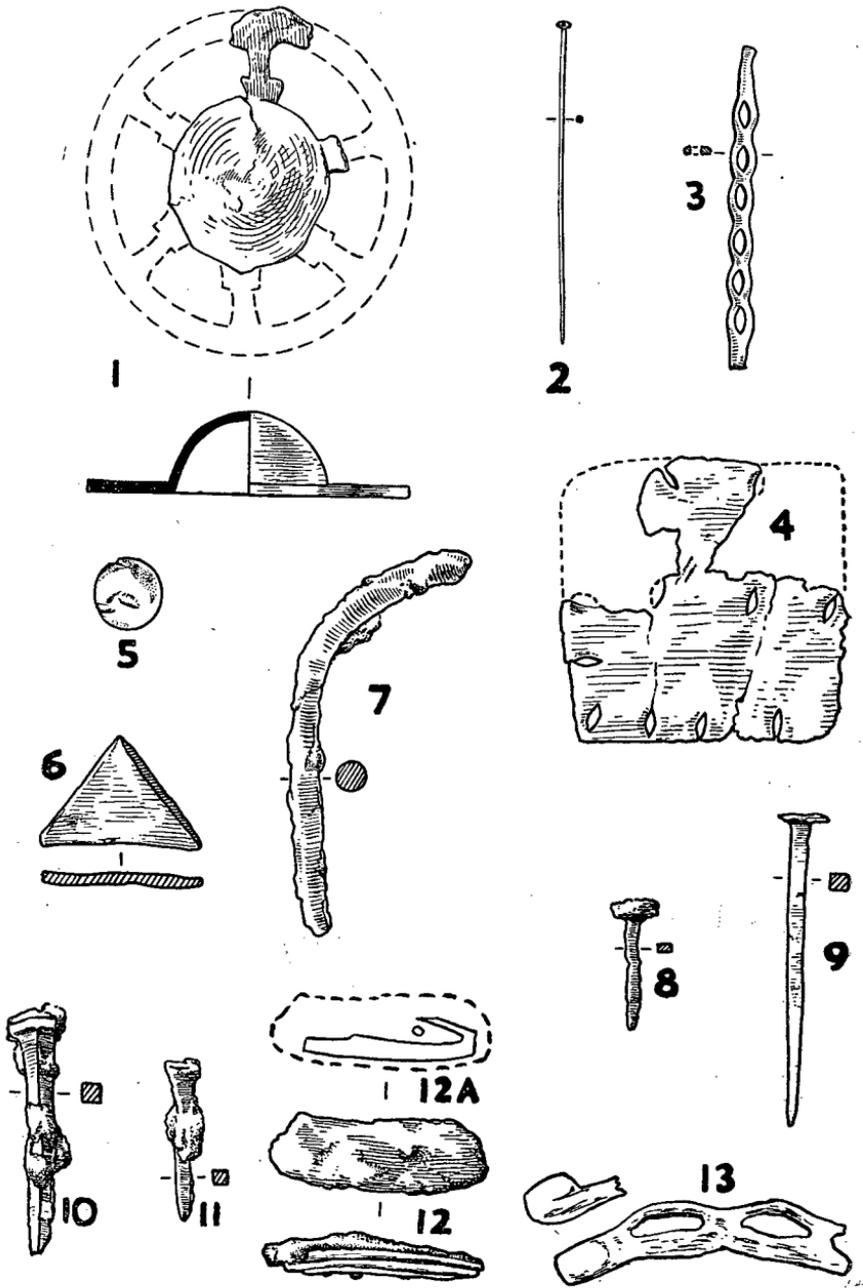


FIG. 11—The Small Finds (1).

PLATE XXX



a The larger Urn (approx. $\frac{1}{3}$)



b The smaller Urn and Unguent Pot (approx. $\frac{1}{3}$)

EXCAVATIONS AT GAINSBOROUGH ROAD, BURY ST. EDMUNDS

By A. R. EDWARDSON, *Hon: Curator, Moyses Hall Museum*

The discovery in surface soil of a few scattered sherds of Romano-British pottery in 1955 on the verge of a field at the extremity of Gainsborough Road, Bury St. Edmunds, led to an excavation being made. Five areas, each ten feet by five feet and numbered consecutively, covering a total area of twenty-five feet by ten feet, were excavated at the point marked X on map (Fig. 12).

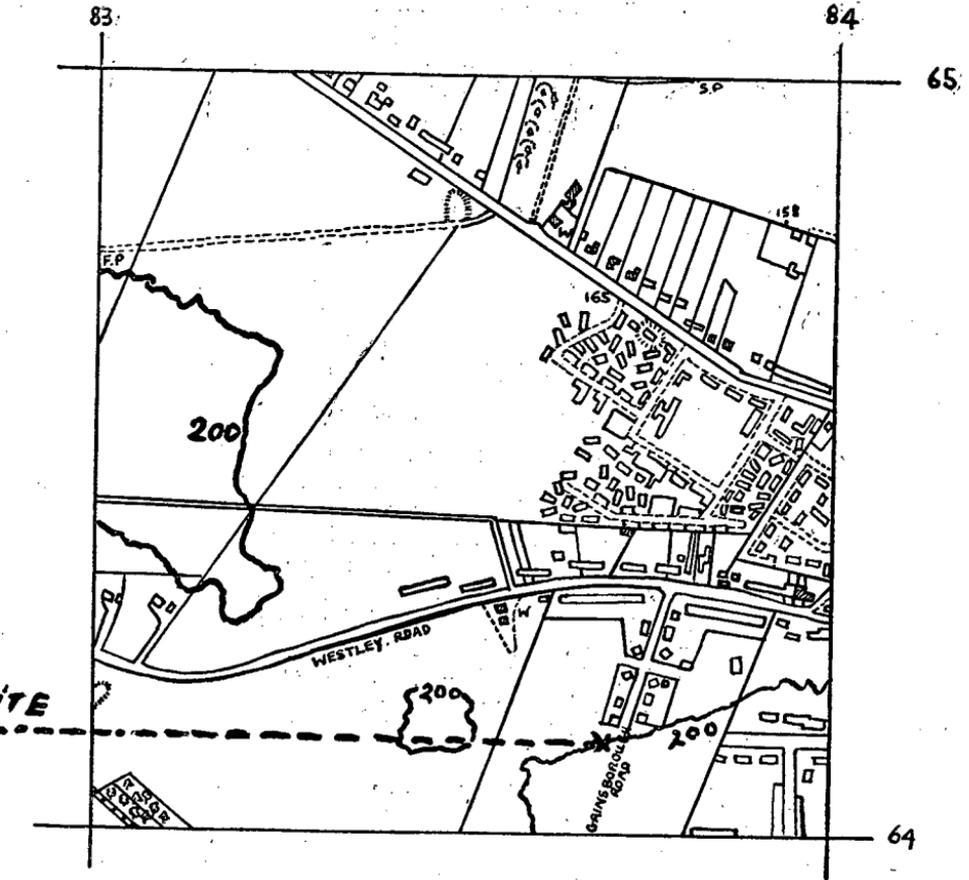


FIG. 12—Map of Site (6-inch series Suffolk, West, sheet XLIV N.W., Ref. 836642).

AREA 1

Surface soil to a depth of one foot was removed from an area ten feet by five feet, leaving red loam, which was removed to a depth of a further two feet. This exposed the irregular surface of the typical chalky boulder clay upon which rested two black-ware Urns and, by the side of the smaller of the two, a small hand-made Unguent Pot. The larger of the two Urns measures 6.4 inches high with a diameter of 6.7 inches and is cordoned: it has affinity to Belgic Ware. (Plate XXXa). The smaller Urn measures 6.9 inches high with a diameter of 4.9 inches and the small Unguent Pot is 1.6 inches high with a diameter of 1.4 inches. (Plate XXXb). Both Urns contained bones, and the following is a report on them by Dr. C. P. Bamfylde Wells, F.R.A.I., PH.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., of Norwich:

Fragments of bone from the 1st Century Cordoned Pot

Fifty-four fragments; six of these are undoubtedly animal bones and all should be readily identifiable. The remaining forty-eight heavily cremated fragments are mostly small and not identifiable. However, two pieces of human femoral shaft can be recognised, also a fragment of orbital margin and another of cranial vault. The texture of all the fragments suggests human, rather than animal, bone. It is possible that these remains are those of an adolescent or young adult female.

Fragments of bone from smaller 1st Century Pot

Forty-seven fragments; ten are undoubtedly animal bones and most, if not all, these should be readily identifiable. The remaining thirty-seven are small, heavily cremated fragments none of which can be identified with complete certainty. However, one is probably part of the shaft of a distorted human tibia, another probably a splinter of femoral shaft in the region of the linea aspera, and the texture of the remaining fragments suggests human rather than animal bones. No indication of age or sex can be inferred from these small pieces of bone except that a young child can be excluded.

AREAS 2 AND 3

These two areas, of the same size as area 1, were then excavated without result, the features of the soils with underlying clay being repeated; no further material was recovered.

AREA 4

The excavation of this area followed the same procedure, surface soil to a depth of one foot being removed, followed by the removal of red loam to a depth of a further two feet. Upon the surface of the chalky yellow boulder clay being exposed, a roughly circular black patch was observed some three feet in diameter. (Fig. 13). This was excavated to a total depth of 28 inches and proved to be a pit in the chalky yellow boulder clay filled with dense black soil containing numerous small grains of charcoal.

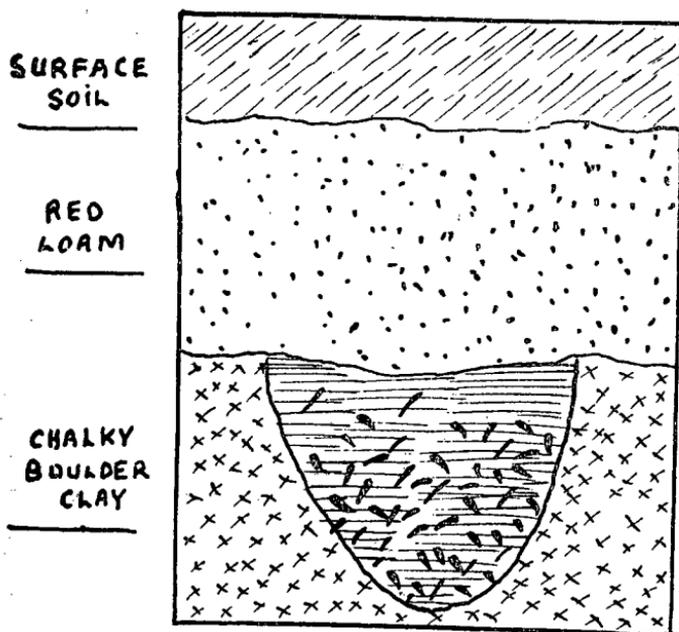


FIG. 13—Section of Area 4 (scale $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch to 1 foot).

Scattered throughout the black soil were four sherds of Beaker pottery; two being part of the bases of two separate vessels; also thirty sherds of rusticated hand-made decorated pottery, showing three zones of decorations (see Figs. 14 and 15). Associated were some twenty struck flint flakes *one* of which had been carefully worked as a scraper (Fig. 16a). An iron-stone nodule and several fragments of charred bone were also recovered: Dr. Bamfylde Wells's report on the bones follows:

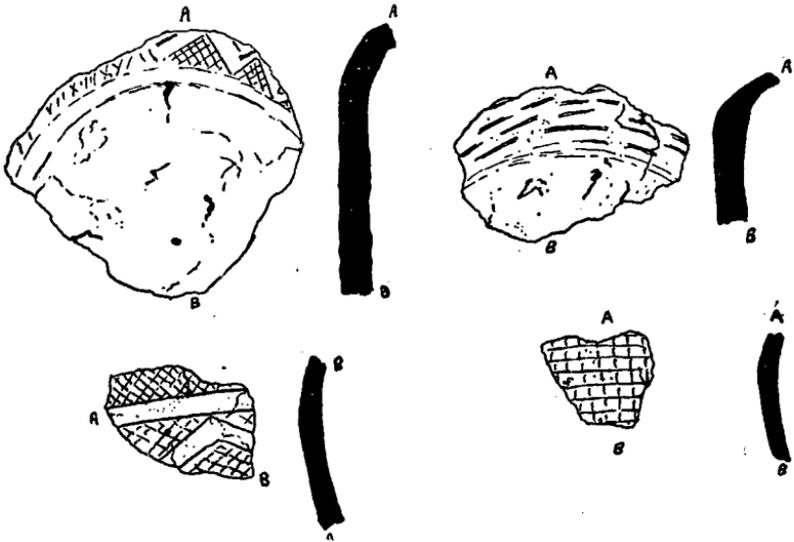


FIG. 14—Beaker Sherds ($\frac{1}{4}$).

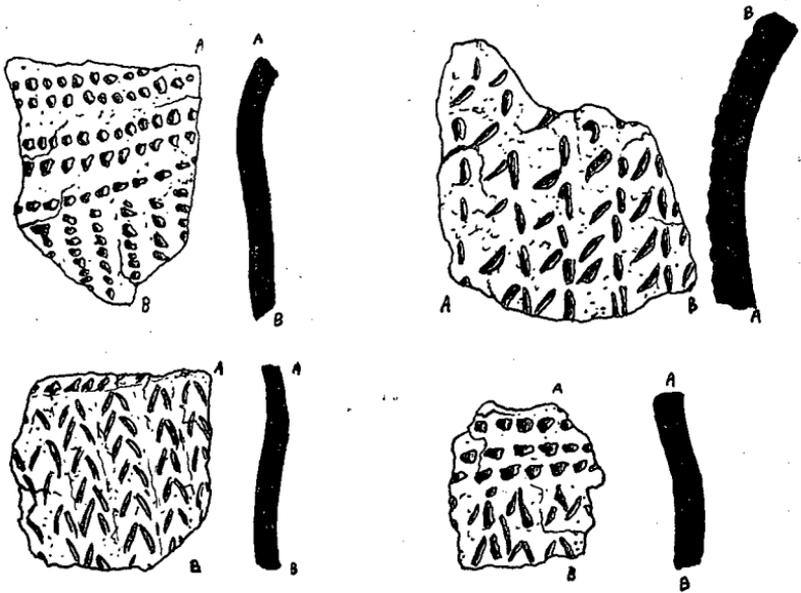


FIG. 15—Decorated Sherds ($\frac{1}{3}$).

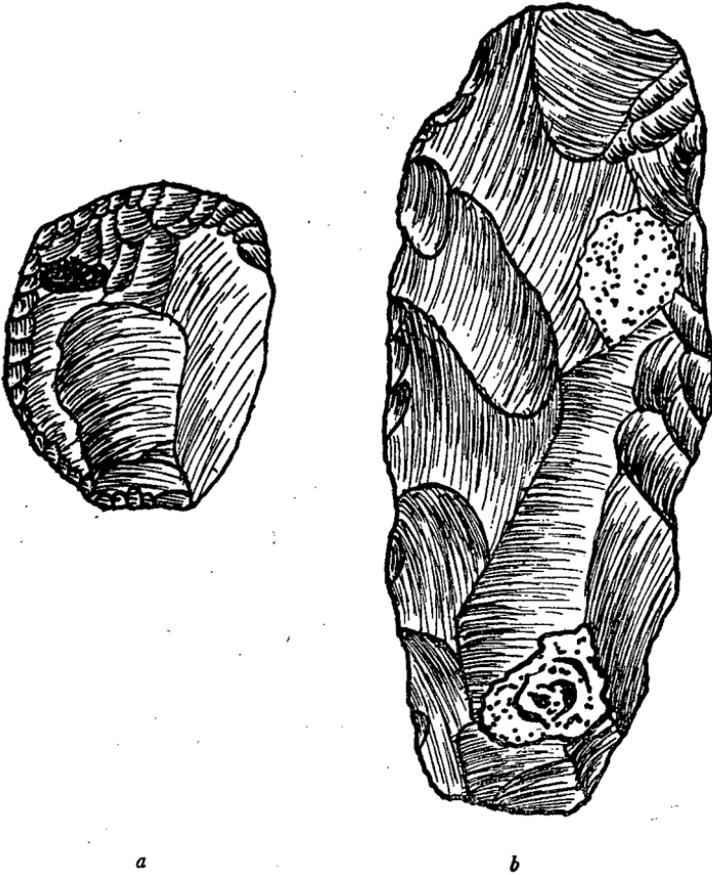


FIG. 16—Flints: *a* Scraper, *b* Adze(†).

Fragments of bone associated with Bronze Age Pottery

Ten fragments of human cranium from an individual probably aged 25 to 35 and of indeterminate sex. None of these fragments have been cremated but all except one or possibly two, show evidence of charring.

In all but one of the charred fragments the firing appears only on the internal surface of the skull; in the remaining fragments firing, although present externally, is more extensive on the internal surface. The charring of these fragments raises problems of the greatest interest. Of the

eight pieces that show clear firing, one is from the lambdoid angle of the occiput; one is from the antero-medial quadrant of the right parietal, including about one centimetre of coronal, but no sagittal suture; one is from the obelionic region of the left parietal and includes a short length of sagittal suture; one is from the right parietal near the middle of its squamous border; one is from the middle third of the coronal suture region of the right half of the frontal and includes about 2 cms of suture; one is probably from the central area of the left half of the frontal. All these fragments show quite heavy firing but only in very small areas with wholly unfired bone between them.

The biggest fragment (right parietal) is roughly 45×45 mm., yet shows only 13×3 mm. of firing.

The left parietal fragment, roughly an equilateral triangle with sides 33 mm. shows two areas of firing, 14×6 mm. and 4×2.5 mm. respectively; the right frontal fragments about 40×25 mm., has a lightly fired area roughly 7×3 mm.

The left frontal fragment, a rectangle 23×17 mm., has rather more than half its surface fired. In several fragments, e.g. the occipital lambdoid angle and the left parietal, firing is conspicuously more marked over the raised, as opposed to the depressed areas of bone as viewed from the endocranial aspect. The curious distribution of these fired areas is most difficult to explain. Is it possible that the skull was used as an oil container to float a wick light? Is a hot metal contact a more likely explanation? Was it used to contain hot stones, perhaps as a utensil in some cooking process? If so might we hazard a macabre guess that the delicacy to be consumed was cooked human brains? At present and until we have further evidence from similarly charred skulls it is clearly impossible to make a decision. We must however regard these fragments as of very considerable importance and hope that further examples are discovered. In all the numerous specimens of early fired skulls I know of none which resembles this one in its remarkable pattern of charring. No theory of its causation seems to fit the facts of its appearance and distribution with any comfort or conviction.

AREA 5

This area was excavated without result except that a small flint adze was found in the surface soil (Fig. 16*b*).

References to material bearing some similarity to the sherds of early Beaker and rusticated ware, and to pits of a ritual nature applicable to this period are as follows:—

Rusticated pottery, being part of a large Beaker found at Great Barton, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, *Archaeology of the Cambridge Region*, Cyril Fox, Plate 11 (3), page 26.

Pottery of Rinyo-Clacton culture found in East Anglia in pits, possibly ritual, *Neolithic Cultures of the British Isles*, Stuart Piggott, page 337.

CONCLUSIONS

The presence of part of the bases of two Beakers together with the assemblage of material from the pit precludes an earlier date than that of the Beaker period at the beginning of the Bronze Age proper, and the complete absence of animal bones postulates that the pit in question was not in the nature of a hearth. The exceptional circumstances of the state of the charred skull fragments referred to in Dr. Wells's report, and the absence of any other human bones in the pit, rather points to the assemblage being connected with some ritual. The highly decorated sherds of the hand-made vessel of rusticated pottery, not forming any complete vessel, would again seem to point to a ritual breaking of pottery, which has been noted on Rinyo-Clacton sites. The presence of two first century Urns with cremated bones therein, only fifteen feet away, may be fortuitous, but there may well have been some surface indication of the Bronze Age site before ploughing for agriculture during the last few centuries obliterated it, and many instances are known of first century cremation interments having been placed, as an intrusive feature, above sites applicable to the second millenium B.C.

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