TWO BELGIC CEMETERIES AT BOXFORD

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(With a report on the bones by CALVIN WELLS, F.R.A.I., PH.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.)

In November 1966, pottery, which proved to be from a Belgic cemetery, was discovered in the foundation trenches of a house being constructed at White Street Green, Boxford. In 1926 another cemetery had been found in a gravel pit some 500 yards to the south-east. Both sites are between the 100 ft. and 200 ft. contours on the north-east slope of the valley of the Box, a tributary of the Stour, about a mile south-east of the crossing which forms the centre of the present village (Fig. 13). It is not known where the associated Iron Age dwellings were located. Some of the pottery from the cemetery found in 1926 was illustrated by R. R. Clarke in his article The Iron Age in Norfolk and Suffolk. It seemed advisable however to publish here a more detailed description, especially as fourteen of the vessels (those referred to by Clarke as L.1932–216) are no longer in the Ipswich Museum; consequently their future is uncertain and they are not readily available for study.

THE CEMETERY FOUND IN 1966 (TL/97453949)

The discovery was reported by Dr. J. A. R. Debenham, for whom the house was being built. He gave permission for the present writers to investigate the site with the help of a few volunteers, and most generously presented all but one of the pots (No. 9) to the Ipswich Museum.

Eighteen vessels were recovered; of these thirteen were lifted by the builder Mr. W. B. Kingsbury and his men before the arrival of the writers. Inevitably, since the pots were in a fragile condition, many of them were broken in the process, and in some cases only a few sherds survive. Also it was not possible to ascertain their exact location or which were found in association, and in most cases the contents, if any, were lost. One grave was excavated by the writers, and another, found subsequently by the builders, could be isolated and the contents preserved.

In both grave groups two individuals were represented. Group A consisted of four pots; one (No. 2) contained the bones probably of a young female and two bronze brooches, and another (No. 3) the

1 Arch. J., xcvii (1940), p. 52ff. The find was first reported in Ant. J., vi, (1926), p. 309.
Fig. 13.—Map of the Boxford area, based on O.S. map.
bones of a male. Group B consisted of two pots, an urn (No. 5) containing the bones of a child, and a bowl (No. 6) with an adult cremation. The only other cremation to survive, that in the ovoid jar (No. 9), was of a woman accompanied by an iron buckle and two iron brooches which had all passed through the funeral pyre. The bronze toilet set may also have come from this burial; if so it must have been placed in the urn when the ashes were cold as the objects are in good condition.

All the bronze brooches from both cemeteries were more or less fragmentary. They were submitted to the British Museum Research Laboratory in the hope that it might be possible to say whether they also had been damaged in the funeral pyre, but this could not be determined. At all periods it was a fairly common practice to mutilate objects before placing them in the grave, apparently with a view to making it easier for them to accompany their owners to the next world and perhaps with a secondary purpose of discouraging grave robbers. Probably on occasion the relatives of the dead person would bestow on him objects already damaged. Since none of the bronzes from Boxford shows any sign of distortion through heat it seems likely that the Belgic inhabitants of the settlement practised this economy. The bowl (No. 28) had certainly been repaired, and if the lead object, No. 44 (Fig. 14 k), was, as would appear, a plug poured into the base of a broken pot this would confirm the suspicion. Dr. Ian Stead states that several of the vessels which he has excavated from the Belgic cemetery at Verulamium were damaged at the time of burial. The Belgae used for their burials their normal domestic pottery, not, as in the Bronze Age, cinerary urns made for this specific purpose.

As far as can be ascertained there were originally six grave groups; five lay in an area 4 feet by 7 feet with an outlier 7 feet to the south. They were about 2 feet below the present surface in heavy clay soil and no nails were observed as in the other cemetery.2

THE POTTERY AND METAL OBJECTS
(Plate IX, and Figs. 15-17) (1966-122)

Grave Group A.

1. Carinated bowl (Birchall type IVb).3 Red core, black burnished slip, two small cordons. cf. Camulodunum type 2114 and two others from Essex, namely Lexden and Kelvedon.4

2. Large, high-shouldered jar with false cordons on neck and

5 J. P. Bushe-Fox, Excavations of the Late Celtic Urn-field at Swarling, Kent (1925).
Fig. 14.—Metal objects: a and b bronze, from No. 2; c—e iron, from No. 9; f bronze, probably from No. 9; g bronze and h iron, from No. 30; i and j bronze, from No. 16; k lead, from No. 44. (All ¼).
shoulder; dark grey with blotches of brown, matt surface but faint lines of burnishing near the unusually small base. *cf. Camulodunum* type 231. This jar contained the bones of an adult, probably of a young female, and the remains of two bronze brooches (Fig. 14 *a* and *b*). The first of these is of Colchester type. It has a spring of six coils and the cord is retained by a wire-like hook. The bow is plain and straight, the head bends at an acute angle, though this may be due to distortion. The springs are certainly distorted and the pin and catch-plate are missing. Mr. Hull regards this brooch as his *Bagendon* type D1. Of the second brooch, which probably resembled it, nothing remains but the spring and the side wings.

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*Camulodunum*, p. 310.

3. Ovoid jar, a clumsy native version of the butt beaker, with wide, flat cordons and flaring rim hollowed within for a lid; dark brown leathery surface. cf. Camulodunum type 115B. This pot contained the bones of an adult, almost certainly male.

4. Native copy of butt beaker, closer to the original that No. 3; flattened cordons, small rounded rim, faint rouletting, burnished lines above base. Light red ware with patches of grey; matt surface.

Grave Group B.

5. Pedestal urn, (Birchall type 1B), weak cordon above foot, quoit-shaped base, matt surface, grey with patches of black. The top had been removed by the plough. cf. Camulodunum type 202, Welwyn Garden City, Fig. 73.8 This urn contained the bones of a child, probably 2 to 3 years old.

6. Carinated bowl (Birchall type IVb) with small footring, matt surface, blotchy brown, grey and black. cf. Welwyn Garden City 8 and 9. The bones in this bowl were probably those of an adult, but the sex could not be determined.

Ungrouped.

7. Base of pedestal urn, with quoit-shaped foot, squatter than No. 5 and with a more pronounced cordon. Light grey with traces of a darker slip.

8. Plain ovoid beaker with bead rim and small footring, patchy black, brown and grey, traces of burnished slip. cf. Welwyn Garden City Nos. 31 and 32, and Birchall 146 from Southminster and 159 from Great Wakering, both in Essex.

9. Squat ovoid jar with bead rim and flat base, faintly burnished surface, black, brown and grey, similar in style and fabric to No. 8. cf. Bagendon, Fig. 54.1 and Birchall 145 from Southminster said to come from the same grave as No. 146. A similar jar, though with an omphaloid base was found at Ardleigh, Essex, with a pedestal urn,9 and another came from Colchester.10 This jar contained six lumps of partly fused iron. These were X-rayed in the Research Laboratory of the British Museum and were found to contain an iron buckle (Fig. 14 e), three fragments which appear to belong to one brooch of Colchester type with an open-work catchplate (Fig. 14 e), and the catchplate of another very similar

8 I. Stead, 'A La Tène III Burial at Welwyn Garden City', Archaeologia, ci (1967).
9 Colchester Museum Report (1962), Fig. 7, 2.
10 Souvenir of the Centenary of the Colchester & Essex Museum (1960), Pl. XXII.
brooch (Fig. 14 d). A brown substance adhering to this was examined by Dr. Wells, who comments as follows:—

It seems probable in view of evidence from other sites that accretions of this type are due to an interaction of organic and inorganic materials under the influence of firing. Sulphides (from hair, keratin, etc.) and collagen (from bone, etc.) may give rise to chemical and physical changes in the mineral content of the holocaust.

Fig. 16.—Boxford Pottery, 1966 (4).
To what extent such reactions are influenced by the intrinsic metallic elements of the body (such as the iron in haemoglobin) or by extraneous matter (such as metal ornaments, glass beads, woollen or leather garments, ivory bangles, horn goblets and even the timber of the pyre) is at present quite unknown. Much work needs to be done on the chemistry of these curious transformations.  

The iron buckle was adhering to a portion of the medial end of a right clavicle and the catchplate to the neck of a left femur.

The bronze toilet set (Fig. 14f) was removed from the site at the time of discovery and returned to Dr. Debenham some days later; it may have been associated with No. 9, but this could not be ascertained with any certainty. It consists of tweezers, ear-scoop and nail-cleaner similar to one from Deal. Although these sets are found mostly in Roman contexts they date from La Tene III times in France. A man buried in the war cemetery at Maiden Castle was wearing an ear-scoop on a cord round his neck and a nail-cleaner was found in the grave at Welwyn Garden City (Fig. 15).

The bones are those of an adult, almost certainly a rather lightly-built female.

10. Tazza with trumpet-shaped foot, dark grey ware, lines of burnishing below carination. cf. Welwyn B. Two tazzas from Welwyn Garden City, Nos. 10 and 11, are somewhat similar, though they have a central cordon and lack the flaring pedestal, while an example with a lower pedestal came from Ardleigh (Birchall 130).

11. Similar tazza in reddish corky ware with chocolate brown slip, lines of burnishing below carination. This contained a few dozen fragments of bone, possibly of a young adult; the sex could not be determined.

12. Fragment of carinated bowl with three cordons in brown soapy ware. It probably resembled No. 29 and Camulodunum 211 though as no portion of the base survived it is possible that it had a pedestal like the tazza from Creeksea (Birchall 215).


14. Narrow-necked jar, small cordon above shoulder; blotchy grey and brown, matt surface.

15. Base of large beaker with faint bands of rouletting; light red ware.

In addition a few sherds were recovered of a bowl resembling No. 13 in pinkish-grey ware; a tazza resembling Nos. 10 and 11; and what appeared to be an ovoid jar with a flat base and bead rim with a slate-grey burnished surface, a larger version of No. 8.
As stated by Clarke in his article 'The Iron Age in Norfolk and Suffolk', this cemetery was discovered during gravel working. The urns were said to have been found in groups of three or four, some eighteen to thirty inches below the surface, perhaps placed in wooden chests as nails were numerous. It is not now possible to distinguish the separate grave groups, though seven cremations have survived. Fourteen pots are in the Ipswich Museum and a further fourteen, previously deposited on loan, are now in the possession of Mr. V. A. Dorling, who kindly allowed the writers to
borrow them for the purposes of this paper. This collection was formerly in the hands of Mr. Ellinger the lessee of the gravel pit. He never stated definitely that they came from this site as the landowner disputed his right to them, but it is virtually certain that they are part of the same cemetery.

POTTERY AND METAL OBJECTS FOUND IN 1926
AND NOW IN THE IPSWICH MUSEUM
(Plate X and Figs. 18 and 19) (1927.12)

16. Large native imitation of butt beaker with everted lip, three cordons, incised hatching, *Camulodunum* type 115 and *Verulamium* type 31. This contained the bones of an adult male and a pair of brooches. These are stated by Mr. Hull to be *Camulodunum* type III, continental form. cf. *Camulodunum*, Plate XCI, 34 and 35. One (Fig. 14, i) has a plain strap-like bow with a right angle bend at the head; spring of eight turns though only those on the left remain and these have been pushed out of position; broad flat hook; perforated catch plate; pin missing. The other (Fig. 14 j) is virtually identical; the catch plate is damaged. A small lump of corroded iron adhering to the spring is probably the remains of an iron pin, presumably a later repair.


18. Base of pedestal urn, burnished surface, grey and reddish brown.

19. Rather dumpy pedestal urn with upright neck and quoit-shaped foot, leathery brown ware with patches of black. cf. No. 7, *Hertford Heath* No. 1, Welwyn Grave 'C', and Chesterton. The bones are probably those of a young adult male.

20. Ovoid jar with weak cordons on neck and lines of burnishing on body. cf. *Birchall*, 147 from Southminster, Essex, and 206 from Colchester and the jar found with the Colchester mirror. The bones were those of an adult male.

21. Ovoid jar similar to No. 20 but with a foot ring; brown leathery surface with patches of grey, traces of burnishing on neck and shoulder. The bones were probably those of a female between 40 and 50 years of age.

22. Jar with double cordon on shoulder, lip missing; light grey matt surface. The bones were those of a male, probably between 35 and 45 years of age.

18 C. Fox, *Archaeology of the Cambridge Region* (1923), Pl. XII, 3.
19 C. Fox and M. R. Hull, 'The Incised Ornament on the Celtic Mirror from Colchester, Essex', *Ant. J.*, xxviii (1948), Fig. 9, 4.
Fig. 19.—Boxford Pottery, 1926 (§).
TWO BELGIC CEMETERIES

23. Narrow-necked jar with cordon on shoulder, and foot ring; dark grey matt surface. cf. Lexden, Camulodunum 234, and Birchall 390 from Saint Germainmont, Ardennes.

24. Jar with almost upright rim, false cordon on shoulder; small foot ring; reddish brown, matt surface with patches of grey, faint burnishing near foot.


26. Small carinated bowl (Birchall IVb), leathery brown surface. Similar to No. 6.

27. S-sided bowl with single cordon on shoulder; brown shading to grey, matt surface. cf. Swarling 23 and 25. The bowl contained five fragments of adult long bone.

28. Bowl with upright neck, grooves on shoulder and pronounced foot ring; brown matt surface with patches of grey; three bands of burnishing on lower part of the body. A hole had been bored on either side of what was evidently an ancient crack; through these a leather thong would have been passed to strengthen the pot. cf. Camulodunum, Fig. 54, 34. Two somewhat similar bowls were found at Welwyn Garden City, Nos. 23 and 24, though these are smaller and undecorated.

29. Carinated bowl with concave cordoned walls, a line of burnished cross hatching between the two lower cordons, black burnished slip. cf. Camulodunum 211.

POTTERY AND METAL OBJECTS FOUND IN 1926 NOW IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

(Plate XI and Figs, 20 and 21)


This bowl contained the catch plate of a bronze brooch, and an iron object. The catch plate (Fig. 14 g) had one triangular piercing and plain narrow box; it was probably of the simple type shown in Maiden Castle Fig. 83, 9. The iron object (Fig. 14 h) was corroded and fragmentary; it was possibly the remains of a small knife.

31. Carinated bowl with domed lid; dark brown burnished slip. This is a more angular version of No. 30 cf. Verulamium 35 d, and a very similar bowl, also lidded, came from Colchester. 21

20 Souvenir of the Centenary of the Colchester & Essex Museum (1960), Pl. XXIV.
21 Ibid., Pl. XXII.
32. Carinated bowl, brownish-grey burnished surface, similar to No. 6.

33. Carinated bowl; grey, matt surface. Similar to No. 32, but without the bead rim.

Fig. 20.—Boxford Pottery, 1926 (1).
34. S-sided bowl with false cordons above shoulder and below rim; pink and grey rough gritty surface.

35. Bowl with flattened cordons on shoulder and foot ring, brown and grey pitted surface. cf. Verulamium 52, Camulodunum Fig. 54, 51, and Birchall 151 from Great Wakering, Essex.

36. Globular jar with flattened cordon above shoulder and pronounced foot ring; dark brown burnished slip. cf. Verulamium 45b.

This jar contained the bones of an adult, almost certainly male, probably over 30 years of age and accustomed to strenuous work.

37. Globular butt beaker with flaring lip hollowed out for a lid, and three cordons; between the cordons are two bands of decoration each consisting of three lines of triangular dots. These were evidently an amateurish attempt to reproduce the rouletting frequently found on Gallo-Belgic butt beakers, but whereas the regularity of the cordons shows that they were made when the pot was revolving on the wheel, the wavering lines of dots must have been done freehand, probably with a point rather than a comb. The beaker is covered with a bright chestnut burnished slip. cf. Camulodunum 115 B.

38. Upper portion of similar beaker with vertical combed decoration in groups of four, brick red burnished surface.
39. Dumpy butt beaker with bead rim and two cordons; black burnished surface. *cf.* Verulamium 31d.

40. Pedestal urn with high trumpet foot and small cordon on neck and foot; grey matt surface. *cf.* Camulodunum 204, which is stated by Hull to be virtually limited to Essex, and Birchall 125 from Ardleigh, Essex.


42. Base of pedestal urn with quoit-shaped base, heavy and flat, smooth grey surface. *cf.* one of the urns from Ardleigh.22

43. Base of pedestal urn with trumpet-shaped base, corky pink body, matt grey surface. Similar to No. 40, though the pedestal is lower.

44. Lead object (Fig. 14 k). This is roughly circular, some 3½ inches in diameter; the bottom is smooth and the top has the wrinkled appearance assumed by molten metal which has cooled in a confined space. Dr. Ian Stead suggested that it might be a repair for a pot, possibly a pedestal urn like No. 41 with a similar hole in the bottom. When the lead was poured in, the slightly hollow foot would act as a mould for the lower portion and the constriction would be formed by the remnants of the base.

DATE

The two cemeteries would appear to be roughly contemporary as several pots of similar type occur in both groups, *e.g.* the carinated bowls, pedestal urns and butt beakers. They were probably the burial places of separate families.

It is not easy to give an absolute date to Belgic cemeteries such as this. The brooches are referred by Mr. M. R. Hull to about A.D. 10–65 with no bar to a slightly earlier or later date, and the toilet set seems to show Roman influence. Dr. Ann Birchall places butt beakers in her late period which she regards as beginning about 15/10 B.C. As has been seen, several of the pots resemble those from the Belgic oppida of Verulamium, Camulodunum, and Bagendon near Cirencester. In the first of these the occupation extended from about 10 B.C. to the Roman conquest in A.D. 43, while the other two appear to have been founded some 20 years later and to have been abandoned about A.D. 60 or 70. The somewhat earlier oppidum of Wheathampstead, on the other hand, has produced pottery of quite a different type. Some of the Boxford pottery resembles that in richer graves containing imported objects.

22 Colchester Museum Report (1962), Fig. 6, 5.
Boxford Pottery and Brooches, 1926.
Boxford Pottery, 1926.
from the classical world. The grave recently excavated at Welwyn Garden City yielded a silver cup dated by Dr. D. E. Strong to the last quarter of the first century B.C., while a pair of somewhat similar cups found at Welwyn in 1906 may be rather later. No. 20 resembles a jar found with an engraved bronze mirror which Sir Cyril Fox considered to have been made between about A.D. 10 and 25. With all such valuable objects there is however the possibility that they may have been heirlooms somewhat older than the more mundane material with which they are associated. A carinated bowl closely resembling Nos. 1, 32 and 33 was found at Lexden with a flagon which at Camulodunum came mostly from post-Conquest levels, and a butt beaker like No. 39, excavated in 1966 at Verulamium, was accompanied by a 'thistle'-brooch of a type considered by Mr. Hull to be of Claudian date.

The general date of the cemetery would appear to lie between about 25 B.C. and 50 A.D. Probably however the later part of this period is indicated as the strong similarity of the pottery to that of Essex suggests that it was brought by the Belgae spreading northward into the territory of the Iceni; an advance which was abruptly halted by the Roman Conquest. Belgic pottery is known only from the southern part of Suffolk, Sudbury, Long Melford, Boxford, Great Waldingfield and Butley, with a large settlement at Burghby-Woodbridge; a single pot from Chediston, near Halesworth, is probably the result of trade and may well be post-Conquest. Belgic coins found in Suffolk come from the same area and from Breckland; they are all coins of Cunobelinus of the first century A.D. A single stater of the Whaddon Chase Group, about 40–20 B.C., was found some ten years ago in the crop of a chicken reared at Long Melford and has just been generously presented to the Ipswich Museum by the finder, Mrs. Charles Row.

SUMMARY

Two Belgic cemeteries, 500 yards apart, have yielded between them at least 43 pots, together with a bronze toilet set and portions of two iron and five bronze brooches. The cemeteries seem to have been roughly contemporary and to have covered a fairly short period, probably the first half of the first century A.D. The bones of thirteen individuals were recovered. The expectation of life was comparatively high: three had reached the age of 35 and only one child was represented, though this may be due to the fact that children were not as a rule accorded full burial rites. In Roman

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23 J. P. Bushe-Fox, op. cit., Pl. XI, 1 and 2.
24 Camulodunum, p. 315.
25 Information from Dr. Ian Stead.
Britain infant burials were often deposited under the eaves of a house with scant ceremony.

The cemeteries were probably the burial grounds of two families: settlers pushing north into the territory of the Iceni.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our gratitude is due above all to Dr. and Mrs. Debenham who most generously gave their finds to the Ipswich Museum and furthermore permitted their house foundations to be undermined; they also provided hospitality to the excavators during decidedly inclement weather.

Our thanks are also due to Mr. W. B. Kingsbury and his men for salvaging so much of the pottery; to Mr. and Mrs. V. A. Dorling for allowing us to borrow their collection; to the Misses B. and R. Copinger Hill and Mrs. B. Hawkes who helped in the excavation, and to the children and others who helped to restore the pottery when the Museum was without a Technician; to Dr. Calvin Wells for his masterly report on the cremated bones; to Mr. M. R. Hull for his comments on the brooches; to Dr. Ian Stead for allowing us to see his report on the burial from Welwyn Garden City and drawings of his grave groups from St Albans in advance of publication; to Dr. A. E. Werner and Miss M. Bimson for X-raying the lumps of corrosion in which several brooch fragments lay concealed; to Mr. F. W. Simpson who prepared the photographs, and to Miss P. M. Butler who placed at our disposal the resources of the Ipswich Museum.

POSTSCRIPT

Additional information received since this paper was written indicates that Nos. 7, 13 and 14 constituted one grave group, that No. 8 was found in isolation, and that No. 9 was accompanied by a bowl, probably No. 12 or one of those in an even more fragmentary condition.

NOTES ON THE CREMATED BONES

By Calvin Wells, F.R.A.I., Ph.D., M.R.G.S., L.R.C.P.

No. 2. This consists of several hundred fragments, most of which are very small. Most areas of the body are represented here, identifiable are: cranial remains, including many pieces of vault, part of a petrous temporal bone, a small length of superior orbital margin, and pieces of facial skeleton. A few vertebral and pelvic fragments can be identified and many pieces of long bones, including parts of the articular surfaces of humeral, radial and femoral joints.