

# BEAKER AND BRONZE AGE BURIALS AT BRANTHAM HALL

by ROSEMARY A. GILMOUR

Brantham village is situated on the Essex-Suffolk boundary, north of the River Stour just opposite Mistley, at the point where the river broadens into its estuary, about 9 miles south-west of Ipswich. The site, at Brantham Hall TM/11653345 is situated on a low bluff about 50 ft above sea level overlooking the river (Fig. 32). Today it is marked on the Ordnance Survey map as a gravel pit adjoining Marsh Farm. The soil in the area is light and sandy. The land falls sharply from the area of the railway line to the river plain which is roughly grassed and cut by several water channels.

The site is difficult to reconstruct since the gravel pit was worked out by 1925, and is now heavily overgrown. There is a complete lack of contemporary records of excavations on the site, the only drawing being a crude sketch submitted to the Ordnance Survey Office in 1951. This was unfortunately so vague and uninformative as to cause an error to be made on the 2½-in Ordnance Survey sheet TM 13, which marks the site as 'Burial Ground', at TM/11903410.

The precise relationships between these several sites of archaeological interest within the area of the gravel pit are difficult to establish since the sketch made some while after the excavations does not always agree with the written records. These records imply that the several sites within the gravel pit were much closer together than the sketch suggests. It is possible that either the position of the ring ditch is inaccurately recorded on the sketch or that a second ring ditch was found and not indicated.

## HISTORY OF THE SITE

The first archaeological notice of the site was in 1914 when Mr. J. R. Keeble, the manager of Brantham Hall, presented a large urn to the British Museum (Fig. 34, 1). This urn is presumed, though not certainly stated to be, from the gravel pit. The urn is described in a short article as having been 'found at Brantham . . . at a depth of three feet from the surface of the ground'.<sup>1</sup>

The gravel pit was in use, it is thought, from about 1919-1925. Mr. Arthur Studd's father, who was a young man working there at the time the urns were discovered in 1923, recalls that they were

<sup>1</sup> J. Reid Moir, 'Two Late Bronze Age Urns from East Anglia', *Man* (1919), pp. 6-7.

BRANTHAM - SUFFOLK

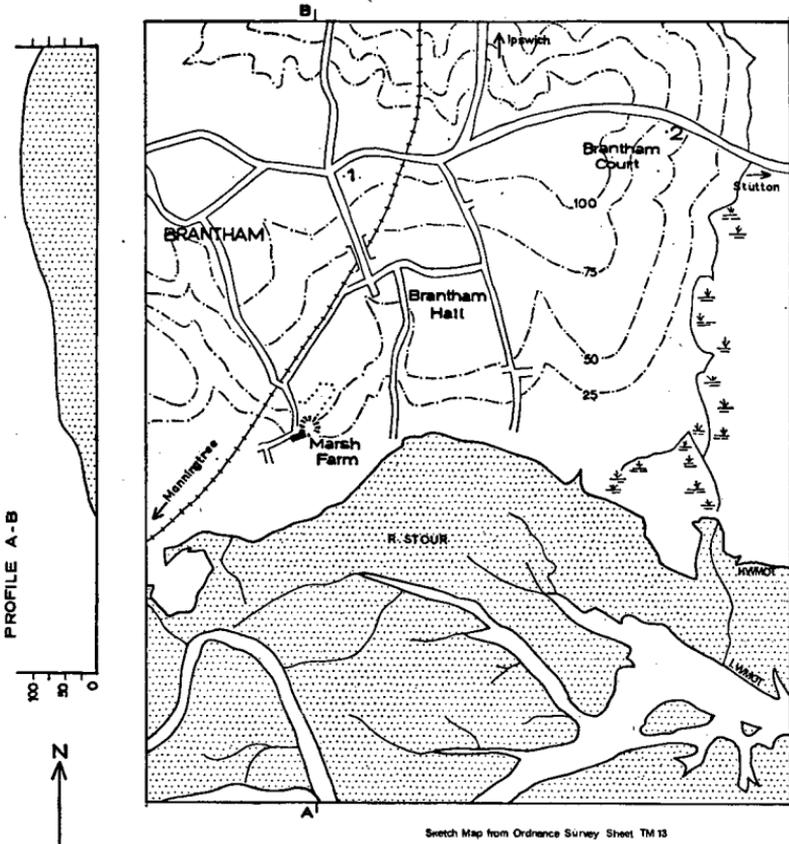


FIG. 32.—The site: an outworked gravel pit adjoining Marsh Farm.

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always finding broken pottery which was just shovelled up with the gravel. The site was recognised to be of archaeological importance by Mr. Keeble, who happened to be at the site when one of the urns was seen clinging to the face after a fall of gravel. The face of the pit was c. 12-14 ft high, but it could not be recalled at what depth the urns had occurred. It was in that same fall of gravel that all the urns, now in Ipswich Museum, were found.<sup>2</sup> After the urns were found the work at the face stopped as the gravel ran out. The face ran alongside a field under cultivation.

At the time of the 1923 discoveries Mr. Keeble stated that many urns had been discovered in past years. It is not known if he was referring to the gravel pit in particular, or to his estate in general.

According to written records in Ipswich Museum, a single beaker was found at the same time as the discovery of the urnfield. This cannot be located and must be presumed lost. Presumably it was lost soon after discovery since it is not included in 'Notes on the Beaker Pottery in the Ipswich Museum', published in 1931.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately no drawings of the beaker survive.

A beaker is also recorded in an article on one of the urns as 'from a much earlier interment within a circular ditch as though in a disc barrow'.<sup>4</sup> It is not clear whether this statement refers to the lost beaker being found in a ring ditch, or to the surviving pottery from the ring ditch (see below).

In 1925 beaker burials were discovered, and also a ring ditch nearby producing beaker sherds. Mr. Guy Maynard (then curator of Ipswich Museum) assisted at the excavations and produced rough sketches of the inhumed burials which accompanied some of the pottery. He recovered beaker fragments from the central area within the ring ditch and a single beaker fragment was recovered from the silted annular ditch, itself. Both burials and ring ditch (presumably the remains of a barrow) were found within the area covered by the gravel pit.

A leaf-shaped, finely flaked flint dagger (Fig. 33, 8) was found in 1925<sup>5</sup> at the edge of the gravel terrace, overlooking the Stour estuary, a few yards away from the beaker graves which were being excavated at the time. Mr. Maynard was assured that no bones were found with the dagger, but as the bones recovered on the site were much decayed, the dagger may well have accompanied a burial of which all traces had disappeared. The flint dagger was

<sup>2</sup> Anon., 'Suffolk finds 1923', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xviii (1922-24), p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> J. G. D. Clark, 'Notes on the Beaker Pottery in the Ipswich Museum', *Proc. Prehist. Soc. East Anglia*, vi (1929-32), pp. 356-61.

<sup>4</sup> R. A. Smith, 'A Rare Urn from Suffolk', *Ant. Jour.*, v (1925), pp. 73-74.

<sup>5</sup> W. F. Grimes, 'The Early Bronze Age Flint Dagger in England and Wales', *Proc. Prehist. Soc. E. Anglia*, vi (1929-32), pp. 340-55. See footnote by Guy Maynard on location of Brantham dagger.

observed by the foreman of the gravel pit, lying on a pile of debris, that is, not *in situ*, and it is simply assumed to be from the area of the beaker graves. A cast only remains in Ipswich Museum. The original was in private possession and cannot now be traced.

In 1931 a further beaker came from Brantham. The register in Ipswich Museum states 'Found at Brantham, Suffolk'. It can only be assumed that it came from the Brantham Hall gravel pit area.

All the beakers, apart from the one that was lost, appear in J. G. D. Clark's article.<sup>3</sup>

#### BEAKER BURIALS

There are at least 3 graves, possibly more. Bones were recovered from one grave only. They were very fragmentary. More might have been present in other graves, and gone unnoticed, or may have been completely destroyed by soil conditions. It is impossible to reconstruct the exact relationship between the various graves, due to lack of adequate plans. It is often far from clear how some details should be interpreted, and no reconstruction of the site can be totally accurate.

The problem is highlighted by the question of how many skeletons were recovered from grave I. From the evidence available I have assumed there to have been one woman and two infants; Guy Maynard, who was on the site during the excavations, indicates in his notes three skeletons: a woman and two infants. The Museum records however state 'a woman and child'. Hence J. G. D. Clark writes of a woman buried with a child, yet a footnote initialled by Guy Maynard says the grave contained a woman and two infants.<sup>3</sup>

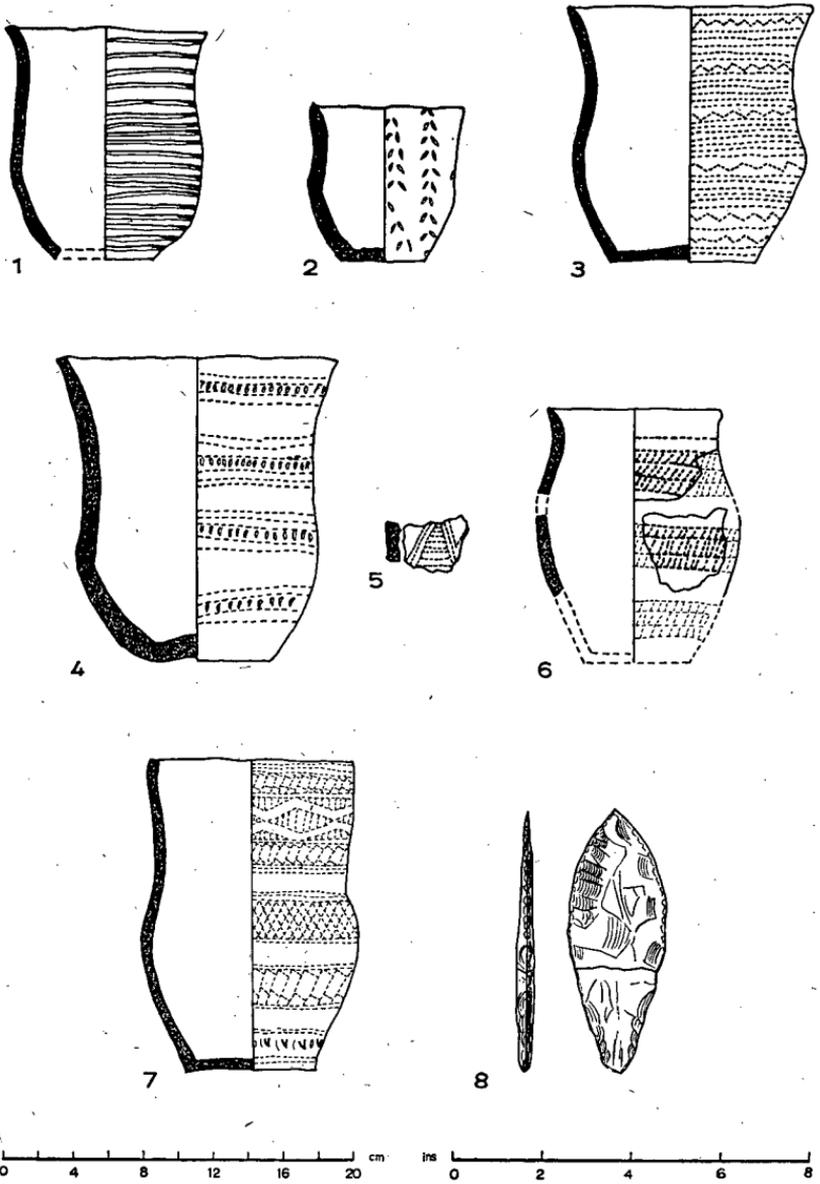
*Grave I.* Crouched inhumation burial of one woman with 2 infants in a pit 5 ft (1.53m) below old ground surface. The adult skeleton lay north—south on its right side. In the space between the bent-up knees and head lay the remains of two infants. Towards the feet by the shin-bones of the adult, were 3 beakers (Fig. 33, 1-3).

*Grave II.* Contemporary records suggest a re-use of the shaft of grave I at a later date. Apparently bones were found at the extreme southern end of grave I. It was tentatively suggested that these were the skull and some arm-bones of an adult. No pottery.

*Grave III.* Just a few feet south of grave I in a similar pit grave, 5 ft (1.53m) below old ground surface, a single beaker was found (Fig. 33, 4). No trace of bone was reported by the gravel diggers.

*Ring Ditch.* East of this grave complex, and clearly unconnected with them was a ring ditch with an overall diameter of 28-30 ft (8.53-9.10m). No bones were recorded from the site, but from the centre came fragments of one beaker (Fig. 33, 6), and from the silted circular trench came a single fragment of a second beaker (Fig. 33, 5).

Another beaker from the gravel pit is without context (Fig. 33, 7).



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FIG. 33.—Beaker pottery and flint dagger from Branham Hall.

*Pottery*

I have followed Dr. Clarke's system of classification for describing beaker pottery.<sup>6</sup>

Grave I. *European Bell Beaker 1*. Smooth, rounded profile with an everted lip. Exterior dark brown, interior varies from light brown to black. *Fabric*: fine with no grit. Surface slightly burnished. *Decoration*: evenly spaced, coarsely incised lines, about 1 mm in depth (Ipswich Museum 1925-1.2).

*European Bell Beaker 2*. Small squat everted bell-shape with angular profile. Uniform colour inside and outside of a dark sandy brown. *Fabric*: coarse with a muddy texture. Outer surface uneven with cracks, inner surface more roughly finished off. *Decoration*: poor, indistinct, made with small finger-nail gashes arranged vertically in pairs (I.M. 1925-1.3).

*European Bell Beaker 3*. Rather angular profile with wide everted lip and slight incurving at rim. Exterior dark brown with patches of burning, interior varies from brick red to brown. *Fabric*: fine with no grit. Surface smoothly finished off, the outer one being slightly burnished. *Decoration*: made with a comb, and consists of horizontal lines and zig-zags in evenly spaced zones all over the surface (I.M. 1926-1.4).

Grave III. *European Bell Beaker 4*. Smooth profile, curving outwards from a lower point than previous beakers. Uniform colour inside and outside of a dark red-brown. *Fabric*: medium fine quality. Outer surface smooth and slightly burnished, inner surface more rough, cracked and pitted in firing. *Decoration*: made with a comb, and probably finger-nail. Consists of alternating decorated and blank zones, the decoration being several horizontal lines enclosing a band of vertical finger-nail impressions (I.M. 1925-1.1).

Ring Ditch. *East Anglian Beaker Sherd 5*. Same colour and fabric as beaker 6. *Decoration*: made with a comb, apparently consists of zones of alternating blank and hatched chevrons (I.M. 1925-4\*).

*East Anglian Beaker 6*. Reconstructed from fragments; one rim sherd and ten body sherds. Sinuous profile, globular, probably small and round bodied. May have protruding foot, common in this type. Uniform colour inside and outside of a light brown. *Fabric*: fine with no grit. Surfaces smooth and well finished off. *Decoration*: made with a comb, not very carefully executed. Probably consists of three zones of decoration of horizontal lines filled in with hatching, alternating with blank zones (I.M. 1925-4).

<sup>6</sup> D. L. Clarke, *Beaker Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1970, 2 Vols. For alternative Beaker typology based on continuity in regional development rather than artificial grouping see review of Clarke Beaker thesis in Dutch periodical published since this article was first written. J. N. Lanting and J. D. Van der Waals, 'British Beakers as seen from the Continent - a review article', *Helinium*, xii (1972), 1, pp. 20-46. Specific reference is made to the Brantham Hall beakers.

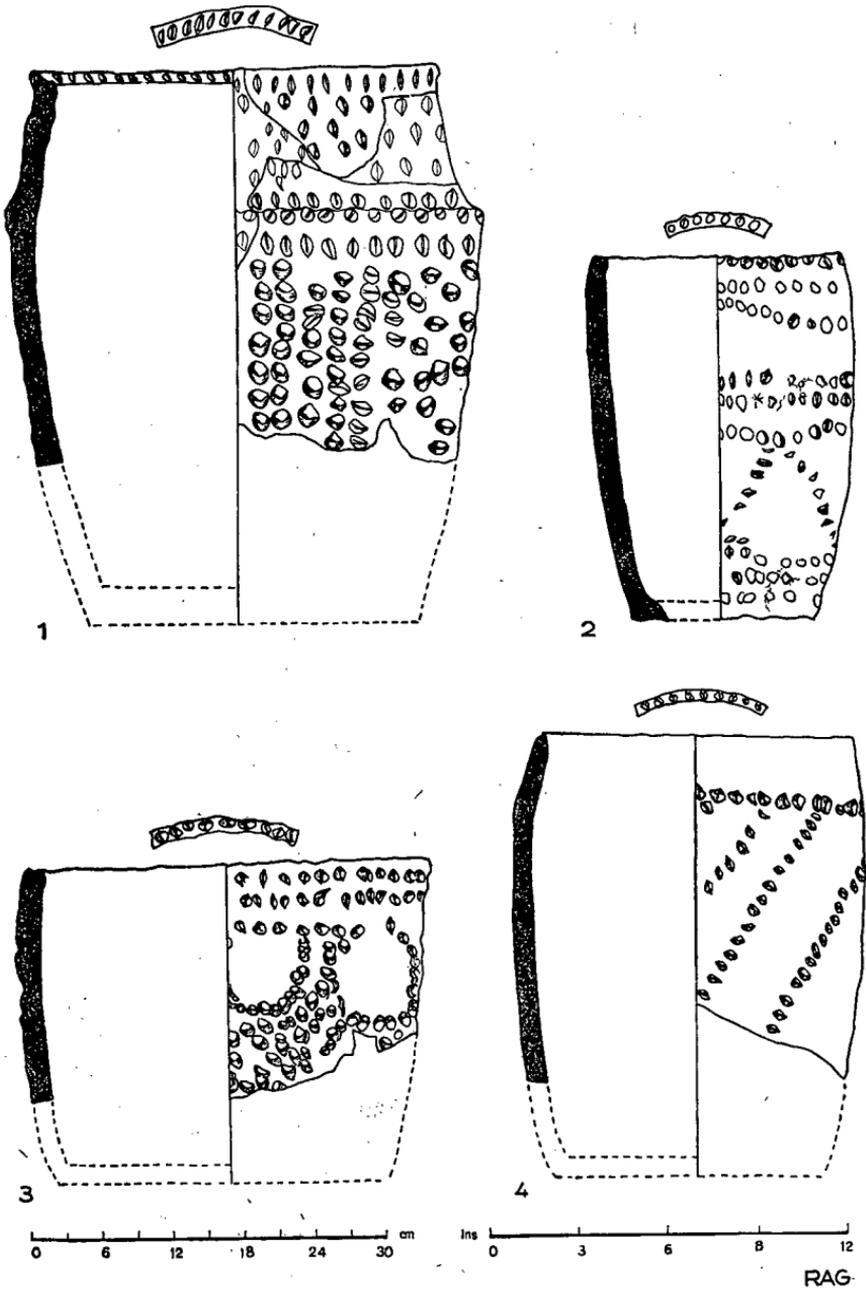


FIG. 34.—Bronze Age Urns from Brantham Hall.

Gravel-Pit (unlocalised). *Primary Southern Beaker 7*. Rather angular profile, shoulder and base clearly defined. Long straight neck. Well made. Uniform colour inside and outside of a light orange. *Fabric*: very fine with fine flint grit. Surfaces are smooth, and blank zones are slightly burnished. *Decoration*: made with a comb. Elaborate all-over design, the neck forming one zone with three lower zones interspaced with blank zones. The horizontal lines round the base enclose a form of decoration achieved by digging the finger-nail into the wet clay to make sharp gouged-out cuts, or by using some small instrument. The lozenge and hatching is a Primary British motif, the zig-zag a late Northern motif (A. 1931-222).

*Beaker Lost*. No information about shape and decoration.

#### URN BURIALS

It is hard to gauge whether the urnfield was confined to the gravel terrace or spread further under adjacent fields. From contemporary reports it is clear that these urns, all found at the same time, comprise a single group, and there are indications that there were probably more urns in the gravel pit which were not collected. There is no record of the exact findspot of the largest urn (Fig. 34, 1) found prior to the gravel pit discoveries. That it came from the same context, or even from within the bounds of the gravel pit is not known. Evidence of 'muddy pottery', indicates an urnfield covering a wider area than the gravel pit made up of several small groups of urns.

The group of at least 12 urns is made up of complete and almost complete specimens and many sherds. The incomplete urns all lack their lower parts which seems to confirm the contemporary statement that all appeared to have been inverted over the ashes of the cremations. No mention was made at the time of cremated bone on the site. The largest urn is stated to have been found 3 ft below ground surface, and apparently 'did not contain anything of archaeological interest'. It is not known whether or not it was inverted.

No contemporary record speaks of cremations on the urnfield site, yet several boxes containing minute fragments of cremated bone, supposed to have been collected from Brantham were located in Ipswich Museum. This material has recently been analysed by Dr. Calvin Wells. He identified 5 separate cremations, details of which are given below, p. 129.

There is no information with the bones to indicate definitely that they came from the urns. They may be simply 5 unrecorded cremations from the area in general, and not the gravel pit site. Also just how thorough a collection of the bones of these individual cremations this material represents, cannot now be ascertained.

*Pottery*

The urn pottery is representative of a regional group, of which the type site, Ardeleigh was established by Erith and Longworth.<sup>7</sup>

*Urn 1.* Slightly everted rim. Shoulder cordon. Much restored, especially lower half and base. Uniform colour inside and out varies from red to muddy brown. Patches of burning. *Fabric*: coarse with even gritting of flint. Surface lightly cracked and pitted all over, caused during firing. *Decoration*: all over finger-tip, with a band of finger-nail impressions just below the rim. Shoulder cordon has finger tipping along it. Above cordon decoration appears haphazard, below there appear to be vertical lines of impressions (B.M. 1914 7-20 1).

*Urn 2.* Incurving at rim and suggestion of foot at base. Uniform colour inside and out of a dull pale orange. Exterior has patches of burning. *Fabric*: coarse with no grit. Surface finely crazed all over, inner surface smoothed off. *Decoration*: finger-tip on rim, and in three horizontal lines below rim, one of which runs along the top edge of the urn and gives a scalloped effect. Below, a band of 6 horse-shoes made with finger-nail impressions are generally smaller and not so distinct, enclosed on either side by bands of 3 horizontal lines of finger-tipping (I.M. 1923-4.8).

*Urn 3.* Very roughly made, lopsided, more oval than circular in cross-section. Has a pair of repair-holes. Restored to a wide, shallow profile, but this is not necessarily correct. Exterior light brown-red, interior dark brown with patches of burning. *Fabric*: extremely coarse, thick, heavy, mudlike, though without added grit. Inner surface smoothed, outer surface slightly burnished in undecorated areas. *Decoration*: all over finger-tip, on rim, and two or three bands below rim. The rest is apparently haphazard except in one area where a definite pattern does emerge: 3 blank circular areas surrounded by finger-tip impressions (I.M. 1923-4-5).

*Urn 4.* Rather straight sides incurving at rim. Lower third and much of upper edge has been restored. Exterior light reddish brown with burnt patches, interior dark reddish brown. *Fabric*: coarse with no grit. Inner and outer surfaces have signs of being smoothed with fingers or spatula in production, as vertical marks made in damp clay are visible under the decoration. Slight cracks and crazing during firing have occurred on surface. *Decoration*: is finger-tip, on rim, and a band of deep impressions a little below, under which are evenly spaced diagonal lines of shallower finger-tip impressions (I.M. 1923-4.1).

*Urn 5.* Roughly made. Exterior brick red with patches of burning. Interior dark brown with burnt patches. *Fabric*: extremely coarse

<sup>7</sup> F. H. Erith & I. H. Longworth, 'A Bronze Age Urnfield on Vines Farm, Ardeleigh, Essex,' *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, xxvi (1960), pp. 178-92.

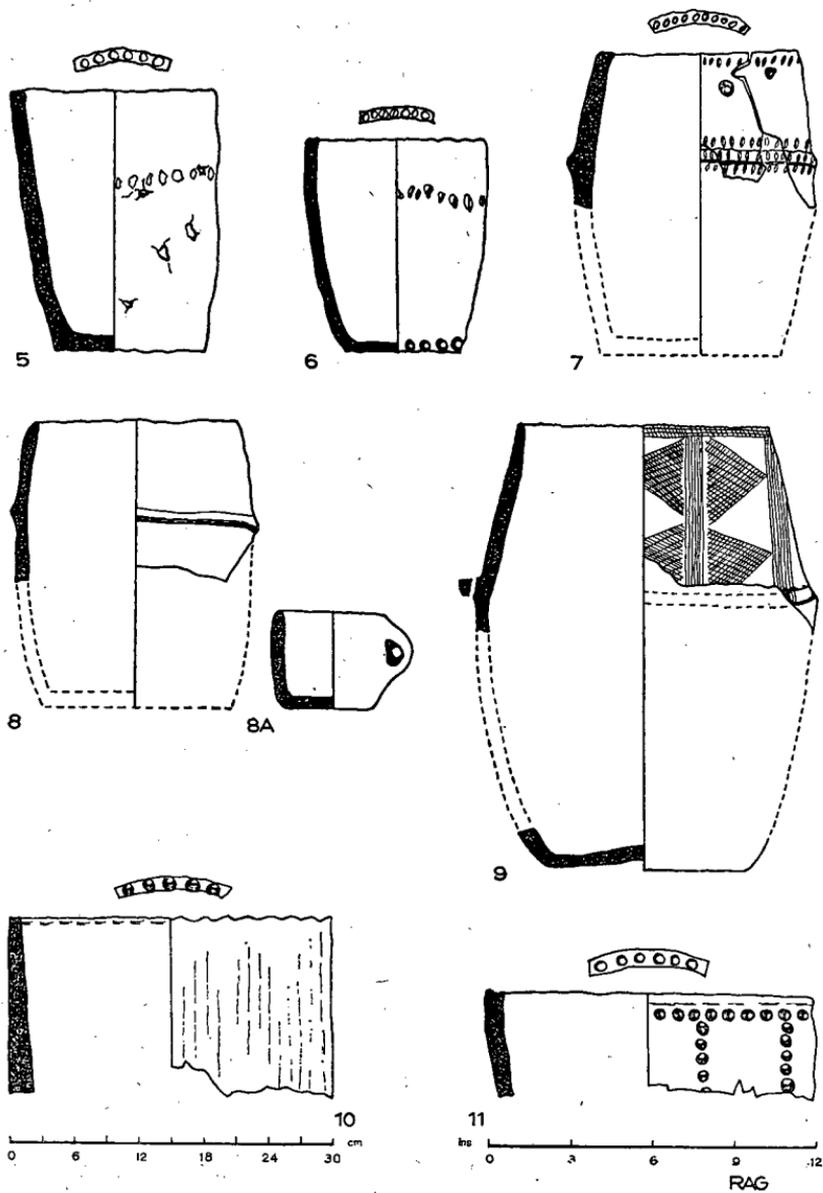


FIG. 35.—Bronze Age Urns from Brantham Hall.

and very heavy. Large pieces of flint clearly visible in clay. Inner surface smooth, compared to outer one which is cracked and pitted by the grit. *Decoration*: finger-tip, on rim, and a single line of shallow impressions round shoulder. This is indistinct due to poor execution and coarse quality of the fabric (I.M. 1923-4.2).

*Urn 6.* Roughly made, lopsided, with uneven rim, slightly in-curving sides. Uniform colour inside and out of a dark brown, with burnt areas. *Fabric*: coarse, with no grit. Surface smooth. *Decoration*: finger-tip, on rim, a single uneven band of finger-nail impressions at shoulder, and band of deep finger-tip impressions round base (I.M. 1923-4.9).

*Urn 7.* Biconical, with pinched up shoulder cordon. Has a pair of repair holes. Restored below cordon. Exterior light red, interior dark with burning. *Fabric*: not as coarse as previous urn fabric, with no grit. Texture not unlike that of a flower-pot. *Decoration*: finger-nail, round rim and a single line just below it. Cordon has finger-nail decoration along it, also, above and below. A single vertical line of 7 finger-nail impressions links band below the rim with that above the cordon (I.M. 1923-4.4).

*Urn 8.* Almost straight sided, with tendency to biconical profile, with simple pinched up shoulder cordon. Restored below cordon. Uniform colour inside and out of a dark red brown with burnt patches. *Fabric*: texture of clay, with no grit. Surface smooth, but fine cracking visible on outer surface. Undecorated. (I.M. 1923-4.3).

Found inside Urn 8: *Cup 8a.* Roughly made, lopsided, squat profile, simple pulled handle set at an angle of *c.* 45°. Handle seems rather small for size of cup. Colour and fabric same as urn. Undecorated. (I.M. 1923-4.3A).

*Urn 9.* Well made, biconical, pinched up shoulder cordon incorporated into which are four lugs, 3 cm wide, mostly restored, with vertical perforations. Clearly set as two pairs, one pair set 12 cm apart, the other 13 cm apart, with gaps of 29 cm and 27 cm between them. Restored downwards from cordon, though part of the base is present. Uniform colour inside and out of a light brown-red. *Fabric*: fine, smooth surfaces. *Decoration*: incised lines, confined to one area above the cordon, but bearing no relation to the placing of the lugs. Width of pattern 20 cm, consisting of three evenly spaced vertical bands of incised lines, linked at the upper edge by a narrow band of incised lines with one hatched. The two panels are filled with pairs of cross-hatched chevrons. No clear indication that decoration continued below the cordon. (I.M. 1923-4.7).

*Urn Sherd: Reconstructed 10.* Probably a large straight sided urn. Diameter approx. 30 cm. Exterior dull orange with burnt patches

interior dull red-brown. *Fabric*: coarse with fine grit, causing cracking and pitting in firing. Inner and outer surfaces show signs of being smoothed with fingers or spatula in production; vertical ridges made in the damp clay are just visible. Only extant finger-tip decoration is on rim, where outer surface is flush, but the inner surface bulges with each impression. The body is undecorated. (I.M. 1923-4.14).

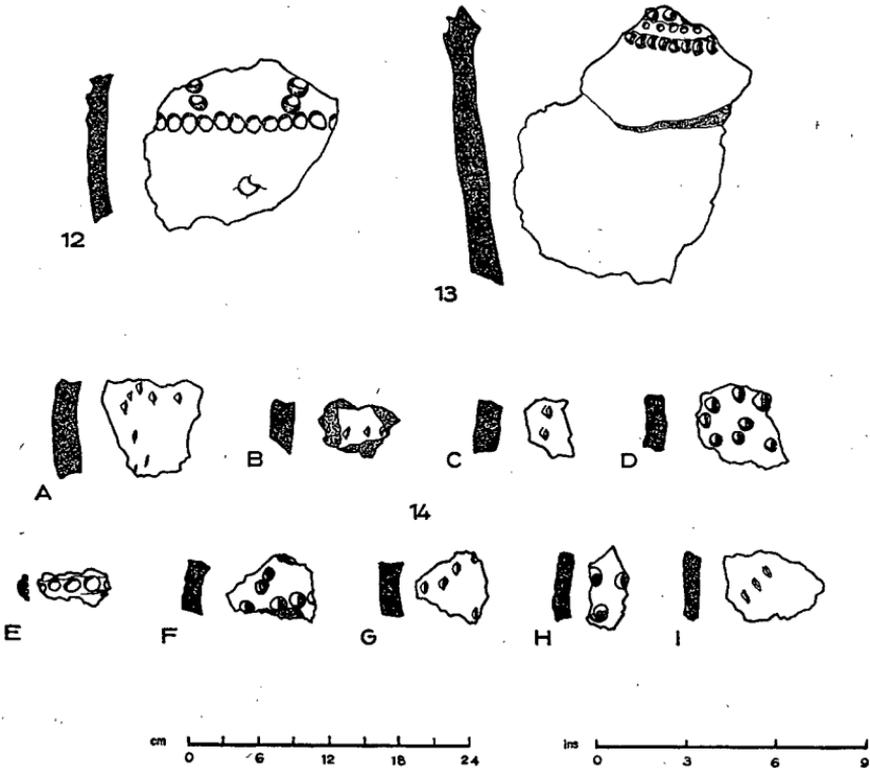


FIG. 36.—Bronze Age Urn Sherds from Brantham Hall.

*Urn Sherd: Reconstructed 11.* Probably a large urn. Diameter approx. 30 cm. Uniform colour inside and out of a dark reddish brown. *Fabric*: coarse, with no grit. Outer surface is rough compared to inner surface. *Decoration*: finger-tip, on rim and a single band just below it. Below band are evenly spaced vertical lines of finger-tip impressions. It is impossible to know how the pattern continued. (I.M. 1923-4.11).

*Sherd 12.* Body sherd, from probably a large urn, judging by size of decoration. Uniform inside and out of a dull orange. Exterior has burnt patches. *Fabric:* coarse, with fine gritting, causing cracking and pitting in firing. *Decoration:* finger-tip, consisting of a horizontal band of impressions and near vertical lines which meet it on one side. (I.M. 1923-4.15).

*Sherd 13.* Body sherd with pinched up shoulder cordon, probably from a large urn judging by thickness of sherd and decoration. Exterior is dull orange, interior dark reddish brown in colour. *Fabric:* coarse with flint grit, surface pitted and cracked in firing. Inner surface has signs of being smoothed with fingers or spatula in production, as faint horizontal ridges are visible. *Decoration:* finger-tip along cordon and above and below it. (I.M. 1923-4.16).

*Sherd 14A.* Body sherd, probably from small urn in comparison to previous sherds. Exterior reddish orange, interior dark and burnt. *Fabric:* coarse, with grit. Surface cracked and pitted in firing. *Decoration:* finger-nail, with haphazard impressions all over.

Possibly sherds 14B and 14C are also from the same urn (I.M. 1923-4.17).

*Sherds 14 D—I.* In general fabric very coarse, with grit clearly visible. Sherds D—H are dark brown. Decoration seems to be haphazard finger-tip. Sherd E is probably the remains of a shoulder cordon. Sherds D—H represent at least three urns judging by the variation in finger-tip technique. Fabric of sherd I differs from the other sherds. Reddish in colour. *Fabric:* still coarse, but surface is smoother and slightly crazed all over. *Decoration:* indistinct finger-nail impressions (I.M. 1923-4.17).

## SUMMARY

<i>Date of find</i>		<i>No. in text</i>	<i>Provenance</i>	<i>Present location</i>
1914	Urn	Fig. 34,1	Perhaps from gravel pit area	British Museum
1923	Several urns + 1 beaker	Figs. 34-36	All from gravel pit	Ipswich Museum.
1925	Beaker burials	Fig. 33, 1-4	All from gravel pit	Lost Ipswich Museum
1925	Ring ditch + beaker sherds	Fig. 33, 5,6	All from gravel pit	
1925	Flint dagger	Fig. 33		Lost. Cast in Ipswich Museum
1931	1 beaker	Fig. 33,7	'found at Brantham'. ?from gravel pit	Ipswich Museum

From the material evidence recovered from the gravel pit and its vicinity, the burial site at Brantham Hall indicates a lengthy period of occupation in the locality. The beaker pottery is characteristic of the regional variations found at this time. The 3 beakers from grave I are important in that they show the diversity in methods of decoration and in design at one time. The urnfield, known only in part, is small compared with other sites in the regional Ardleigh group. The pottery shows the wide variety in size and finger-tip decoration. It is difficult to find, at present, any parallels to urn 9 among contemporary native pottery.<sup>4</sup> Further excavation is necessary to establish a more complete picture of the Ardleigh group within the southern Deverel-Rimbury complex.

#### NOTES ON THE CREMATIONS

by Dr. Calvin Wells, F.R.A.I., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.

*Cremation A.* ? Male. Age 25-35. This consists of a few dozen fragments, mostly very small. They are almost all from the cranial vault or splinters of long bone shafts. There is no indubitably diagnostic element for the sex of this person, but it is highly probable that this was a male. Muscle markings are well developed. Pieces of cranial vault with early sutural fusion suggest, but do not completely prove, the age range indicated above. Firing of the remains has been efficient throughout. Collection of the fragments was poor. Only one person can be detected here. No animal elements were found.

*Cremation B.* Unsexable. Child ?5-10 years. This consists of many dozens of fragments, but most of these are little more than grains or spicules of dust. A few small pieces of cranial vault and long bones are recognizable. Firing has been uniformly efficient. Collection of surviving fragments was poor. Only one person seems to be represented here. No animal remains were detected.

*Cremation C.* Male. Adult. This consists of a few hundred fragments, all of which are very small. Most of these pieces are splinters of long bones. Only a very few tiny fragments of cranial vault are present. Also a few vertebrae, and small bones of hands and feet. Part of the superior margin of the L. orbit makes it virtually certain that this was a male. All fragments have been well fired. Collection of the remains was no more than fairly efficient. Only one person is detectable. No animal fragments were found.

*Cremation D.* Male. Adult. This consists of several dozen fragments, all of them small. They are almost entirely splinters of long bones, but a few scraps of vertebrae, hand and foot bones are also present. Fragments of cranial vault are virtually absent. Surviving pieces with muscle markings suggest that this was a fairly robust