



To face p. 181]

I

2

3

Plate I. JUGS FROM A ROMANO-BRITISH REFUSE PIT AT SWANWICK, HANTS.

1. Hard dirty-cream clay. Pinched spout and two-ribbed handle.
2. Hard white clay.
3. Hard grey clay with black outside surface, decorated on the body with scored lattice pattern. Pinched spout and three-ribbed handle.

NOTE ON A ROMANO-BRITISH REFUSE PIT AT SWANWICK, HANTS

By CYRIL FOX, PH.D., F.S.A.

THE Bursledon Brick Company's works, situated on rising ground north-east of the Southern Railway's branch line from Southampton to Fareham, and some 660 yards east of the tidal River Hamble were the scene of the discovery, in 1927, of a hoard of bronze palstaves, and of a pit containing loom weights held to be of the Bronze Age. Both the find and the pit were reported upon in the *Antiquaries' Journal* in 1928.¹

Early in December, 1932, Mr. R. C. Ashby, Director of the Company, informed my father that a wooden construction had been met with in the course of the removal of clay for brick-making, the site being approximately 100 yards N.N.E. of the loom-weights pit.² Mr. Ashby very kindly consented to the intermission of the clay-getting at this spot until December 19th, when I was able to visit the site with our President, Dr. Williams-Freeman.

The geological formation is London Clay; the beds are at this point exposed in vertical section to a depth of 18ft., over which was humus 1½ft. in thickness.

Labour was kindly supplied by the Company under Mr. F. Ashby's direction; the wooden construction was isolated, and was found to be a roughly rectangular frame 4ft. 4in. in height, and measuring internally 2ft. 6in. by 3ft. As the frame had no floor this represents the size of the opening at the bottom. Three of the sides of the frame were approximately vertical, the fourth sloped inwards; the opening at the top was thus much smaller, being only 2ft. by 1ft. 6in. The inward slope was in part, if not wholly, due to decay of the timbers and pressure.

The frame was constructed of rough oak planks, split, and cut into the requisite lengths with an axe. Each plank was doubly notched at either end, the overlapping planks thus fitting into each other at the angles, and the whole structure becoming locked together by its own weight, without tree-nails.

During digging-out of the wooden structure the character of the surrounding clay was carefully studied. It was evident that the framing had been set in a roughly circular shaft varying from 3ft. 9in. to 4ft. 9in. in diameter, the filling round it being a blackish and ill-smelling sludge. Furthermore, the shaft was seen to extend for 2ft. 9in. below the bottom of the structure to a "table" or thin band of hard sandstone, usually met with by

1. Vol. VIII, pp. 331-336, by Charles F. Fox, F.S.A.; Vol. X, pp. 30-34, by Charles F. Fox, F.S.A.

2. See *Antiq. Journal*, loc. cit., figure 1.

the workmen at this level. The filling of this bottom section of the pit was of blue clay.

The soil overlying the wooden frame had been removed prior to my arrival; I was informed that the shaft leading down the frame was 5 feet or more wide and filled with clay and stones, clean, but differing in character from the adjacent undisturbed deposits.

We now can concentrate our attention on that zone of the shaft which includes the wooden frame. Lying immediately above the opening at the top a broken Samian dish, form r8/31, was found. The frame was then removed, plank by plank; and the upper part of the filling seemed to consist almost entirely of Romano-British jugs of black and grey ware. This first impression exaggerated the actual condition of affairs, for the pots were all at the margin; a cone of rubbish, gradually climbing higher, may have existed in the shaft, and such vessels whole or broken as were thrown in would tend to come to rest against the wall of the frame rather than at its centre. When the pottery was collected there was seen to be four practically perfect jugs, four portions of jugs, and many sherds. The remainder of the filling, that among the pots and below the pots, suggested a slow accumulation, partly accidental, which a pit left open near a dwelling might be expected to reveal. It consisted of fragments of twisted osiers (basketry); layers of leaves; bits of oak and twigs of hazel and other brushwood; a few flint flakes; stones; one boulder; varied-coloured clays, and sludge.

Time only permitted to me a brief inspection of the pottery. Three of the jugs had pinched spouts—a high proportion, since the type is not very common. In general, the wares suggest a date in the first half of the 2nd century A.D. for the accumulation in the frame—possibly the first quarter of that century. The jugs remain in the possession of the Company,¹ and Mr. F. Ashby has been good enough to supply illustrations of the outstanding specimens to accompany this note.

The history of the pit is clear. It was dug down nearly 20ft. to a hard layer of sandstone at about 100 A.D. Whether the diggers were intending to make a well or no cannot be stated; they certainly found no water, and could not have done so. After completion the unused pit silted up 2—3 feet. Then a wooden frame was lowered into it, or built *in situ* on the silted floor. The type of accumulation in the pit now changed, consisting of twigs and bits of wood as well as clayey sludge. Suddenly pottery began to form the major element of the deposit. This state of affairs continued until the pit had filled up to the top of the wooden frame; thereafter the pit was filled with clean clay

1. Since presented to the City Museum, Winchester.



To face p. 183]

PLATE II.

"NEW FOREST" BEAKER FROM SWANWICK, HANTS.

and stones, probably a deliberate filling at some date within the Roman Period rather than a secular process.

Though the original purpose of the pit is difficult to determine,¹ its presence and contents suggest that the clay-diggers will in no long space of time come across a "villa" on this fine site overlooking the valley and estuary of the Hamble.

A previous discovery (in October 1932) of a small New Forest ware beaker can also be recorded. It was found at a depth of two feet, near the mouth of the pit. The vessel is of hard grey clay with a smooth dark grey surface, and may be compared with one from Ashley Rails of late 3rd or 4th century date (Heywood Sumner, *Excavations in the New Forest Pottery Sites*, Pl. III, 9). It also has been presented to the City Museum, Winchester.

1. Parallels to the wooden construction in our pit are on record. For example, at the Roman Fort of Segontium, Caernarvonshire, square wooden frameworks were found in two wells; in one at a depth of 12ft. 4ins., in another at a depth of 8ft. 8ins. These wells were afterwards converted into rubbish pits.

See *Excavations at Segontium*, by A. G. K. Hayter, F.S.A., *Arch. Camb.*, 1921, pp. 31-32.