

A ROMANO-BRITISH BURIAL FROM BINSTEAD, HAMPSHIRE

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THE discovery of a stone coffin by one Henry Long at Wheatley's, Binstead (SU 785400) is recorded by Franks (1852, 12 and fig. opposite). The coffin, made of 'malm rock' (Lower Chalk), is recorded as being five feet long and the top of its lid scratched by the plough. Hence a depth of burial of about one foot would seem likely. The coffin and seven miniature pots found within it are recorded as being presented to the British Museum. However, the Museum's records show that only the pottery was received (accession number 12.51.29 1 to 7). The note and illustrations in the *Archaeological Journal* led me to examine the pottery.

The coffin is now, unfortunately, lost but Franks' illustration indicates that it had an interior shaped to fit the body, rather than being simply rectangular. This may be accounted for by the nature of the stone, Lower Chalk, which is comparatively soft and easily worked. Although the skeleton is not illustrated in the original note the length of the coffin is given as five feet: hence a young person or an unusually short adult might be inferred. What is unusual about this burial is the presence of seven miniature pots

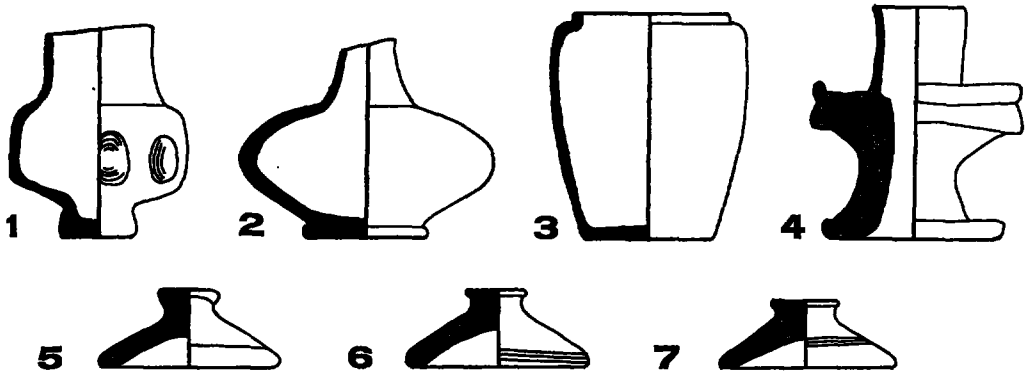


Fig. 1. Pottery from the Romano-British Stone Coffin at Binstead. (Scale $\frac{1}{2}$).

within the coffin. These pots (Fig. 1) are:

1. Miniature indented beaker, with six indentations made in dark grey to buff sandy ware.
2. Miniature flagon, in dark grey to buff sandy ware. The neck of the flagon has been broken in antiquity.
3. Miniature jar in dark grey sandy ware. This item consists only of fragments, most of the jar being missing.
4. Irregular candlestick-holder in grey to buff sandy ware.
- 5-7. Three, similar, small lids in orangey-buff sandy ware.

All the pottery is of similar character, being made of sandy ware typical of the products of the Alice Holt and Farnham kilns. The nearness to the Alice Holt complex may indicate that this is their origin. No. 1 is very similar in form to fragments found on the Neatham excavations (directed by D. Graham for the Farnham Museum Society, reports in preparation) in a third century context and a lid almost identical to No. 5 occurs in a stratified context at Neatham dated to the middle of the third century. Thus the assemblage suggests a date in the middle of the third century.

The presence of a stone coffin would seem to indicate a burial of some importance as such coffins are normally considered to indicate a fair degree of wealth. However, the fact that local stone is used may be indicative of a less expensive coffin. The presence of the unusual grave goods is also of some importance, possibly indicating some connection with the nearby pottery production centre at Alice Holt. In view of the size of the coffin indicating a young person the suggestion that miniature pots were childrens' toys is credible, also the suggestion that they might be potters' trade samples is credible as the kilns are so near. Although a number of burials are known in the general area (Millett 1974, 25) none are of similar date and there are certainly no stone coffins. The nearest Romano-British site is at Wyck (SU 759395), some 3 km away, where a bath-house was excavated in 1818 (unpublished plan in Hampshire Museum Service Library). Little is known of the site and thus any connection with the burial must remain uncertain.

In conclusion one may say with reasonable certainty that the burial was of mid-third century date but whether it relates to further burials, the Wyck bath house or the pottery industry must await further investigation. Nevertheless a stone coffin in this area is a find well worth note.

Acknowledgements

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