

A Human Burial from Queen Street, Abingdon

By MICHAEL PARRINGTON

DURING contractors' excavations at Queen Street, Abingdon (FIG. 1), SU 49789713, in March 1974, human bones were recovered from a pile-hole by workmen. The pile-hole measured 1.40 m. E.-W. × 70 cm. N.-S. and human bones could be seen in its east section. Archaeological investigation of this feature took place and by undermining the sides of the pile-hole more bones and a quantity of pottery were recovered. The bones consisted of the upper half of a human skeleton. The lower half was not recovered and was left in position.

The burial was on a N.-S. alignment, head to the north at a depth of 1.50 m. The individual had been buried on his back with the arms folded across the chest. Mr. H. Carter of Reading Museum has kindly contributed the following report on the bones.

No stratification could be seen in the sides of the pile-hole and it would appear to have been cut into the fill of a large pit. Many parallels exist in the region for Iron Age burials in pits¹ and the Queen Street burial would seem to be a further example of this phenomenon.

REPORT ON BONES. By H. CARTER

General condition of the bones

As stated in Mr. Parrington's report, the bones are those of a single individual from the waist upwards. They are well preserved, lightly and evenly iron-stained.

Shape of the skull

The shape of the skull is very similar to that of a number of Iron Age and Romano-British skulls which I have seen.

Condition of the teeth

The teeth are free from disease, unlike those of most modern skeletons. They show a slight degree of over-bite, a condition which becomes increasingly common and severe from prehistoric times to the present day. The rate of wear was rather slow, much less than in typical medieval material but comparable with other Iron Age and Roman teeth known to me. There is some crowding and displacement of the teeth in both upper and lower jaws, which would be unusual in Saxon or medieval bones.

Age, sex and stature

The bones are those of a male 176 cm. (5 ft. 9 in.) tall and of slender build, aged about 25.

Indication of disease or injury

No such indications were found.

¹ Cf. H. J. Case, *et al.*, 'Excavations at City Farm, Hanborough, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, xxxix/xxx (1964-65), 47. Also A. Williams, 'Excavations at Beard Mill, Stanton Harcourt, Oxon 1944', *Oxoniensia*, xvi (1951), 14; and G. J. Dawson, 'Excavations at Purwell Farm, Cassington', *Oxoniensia*, xxvi/xxvii (1961-62), 2. A burial of this type was excavated recently on the Ashville Trading Estate site, Abingdon (forthcoming).

Evidence of dating

The archaeological evidence (see above) suggests a late Iron Age or possibly early Roman date, and the physical characteristics fit in well with this.

THE POTTERY (FIG. 67)

- 1 Wide-mouthed storage jar, coarse grey fabric with flint and quartz inclusions, grey surfaces.
- 2 Imitation Arretine cup, fine grey sandy fabric, grey surfaces (Cf. S. S. Frere, *Verulamium I* (1973), Fig. 100, no. 45).
- 3 Jar, grey sandy fabric, dark grey burnished surfaces.
- 4 Necked jar, grey sandy fabric, grey surfaces, burnished externally (Cf. A. Williams, 'Excavations at Langford Down, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, XI/XII (1946-7), Fig. 17, no. 14).
- 5 Wide-mouthed storage jar, fabric as 1, brown burnished surfaces.

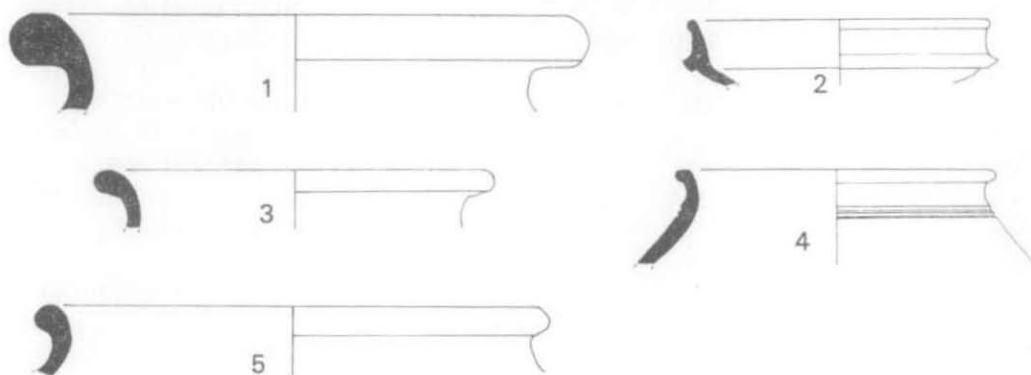


FIG. 67

Late Iron Age Pottery. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

In addition to the illustrated pottery (which was drawn by Mrs. D. De Roche) the following sherds were recovered from the feature. Three rim sherds of jars, one coarse fabric as 1, the others finer as 3. One base angle sherd of a dish in fine light grey fabric. One base sherd of a dish with internal burnished lattice decoration. Three body sherds in grey fabric with external black burnishing. Two body sherds and one cut-down base in coarse grey fabric. Six body sherds in a coarse grey, gritty fabric, patchily fired, some of the surfaces being grey and some pink.

Number 2 is dated to before A.D. 49 at Verulamium and a similar sherd to number 4 is dated to the first half of the 1st century A.D. at Langford Down. This would seem to indicate an early first-century, pre-Conquest date for the Queen Street burial.