

An Early Iron Age Site at Long Wittenham, Berks.

By H. N. SAVORY

GRAVEL-DIGGING immediately east of Pearith's Farm (PLATE I), in the parish of Long Wittenham, Berks., on the road from that village to Appleford has produced, particularly within the last decade, scattered remains of Bronze Age burials. Amongst the finds are a fragmentary beaker (Abercromby, type B), decorated with horizontal grooves, and various types of 'cinerary' urn, ranging from one pale-red in colour, with an overhanging rim neatly decorated with rouletted vertical sprays, to a poorly baked, rough vase of a debased Deverel-Rimbury class with a narrow, finger-impressed, applied band. There are, as well, small food-vessels of derived overhanging-rim type and small barrel-shaped vessels with finger-tip bands, the former buff-coloured, the latter rough grey.¹ The archaeological material seems to indicate an uninterrupted settlement from the beginning to the close of the Bronze Age, but with no traces of later occupation. These were not, however, very far to seek.

On one of our visits to Pearith's Farm, on the occasion of a discovery there in the autumn of 1934, Mr. A. Tame, who occupies a farm in the eastern angle formed by the junction of the Long Wittenham-Appleford road with that leading south from it at right angles towards Didcot, reported that he had discovered some pottery close to his house. The house is quite modern, but has been called Wigbalds by Mr. Tame, who has borrowed the name from the Saxon Charter of Appleford (G. B. Grundy, 'Berkshire Charters,' *Berks., Bucks. and Oxon. Arch. Journal*, xxvii, 145). The house stands in the SE. corner of the two roads. In the north-west corner of the field east of that in which the farmhouse itself stands gravel has been excavated in the past close to the hedge bordering the Long Wittenham road, and it was while engaged in filling the hollow thus left with material obtained by demolishing a low bank south of the depression that the pottery came to light.² On examination it was at once seen to belong to the Early Iron Age and moreover to an early stage of it.

¹ *Antiquaries Journal*, ix, 153 f. and fig.

² The site of the Iron Age discovery is marked by a cross on the photograph, PLATE I.

H. N. SAVORY

By kind permission of Mr. Tame, the site was explored during Michaelmas Term, 1934, by the Oxford University Archaeological Society. There was revealed a shallow excavation in the gravel, the outlines of which had already been obscured on the north side by Mr. Tame's activities, but which appears to have been roughly oblong, measuring 19 feet by 15 feet, with its longer axis orientated approximately north to south.

The northern edge of the pit lay 64 feet south of the roadside hedge, and its west side about 30 feet east of the gate leading into the field in which Mr. Tame's house stands. The sides of the pit sloped gently downwards and it had no well-defined corners. The top of the gravel into which the pit had been dug ran about 1 foot below the surface of the ground, and the floor of the pit was 1 foot 3 inches lower down. The pit was filled to the top with occupation-soil, rich black above, but becoming sticky towards the bottom as it approached the Oxford clay underlying the Thames flood-plain gravel. The filling produced a wealth of sherds and broken animal bones. At several points large portions of coarse jars lay broken *in situ*. This, coupled with the absence of post-holes round the edge of the pit (where exploration allowed this to be established), suggests that the pit had served as a refuse-dump. A dark layer containing occasional small sherds was traced up the gravel for a distance of some 25 feet, averaging about 3 inches in depth.

On air-photographs of the Pearith's Farm gravel-pit and its vicinity, which were taken about the same time by Major G. W. G. Allen, our attention was drawn to a dark line that from the hedge at a bend in the Long Wittenham road, about 300 yards east of Wigbalds farm ran westwards towards the Didcot road. Clearly visible in the eastern field, it can only be detected in the western as a faint line on the photograph, and no sign of it appears in the field on the west side of the Didcot road. This dark line represents a hollow on the ground in which rank grass grows. Mr. Tame recollects a time when the hollow was waterlogged. North of this, and running roughly parallel to it, there is a low bank, separated from the hollow by a wide berm; but this bank, though clearly visible on the surface, cannot be detected on the air-photograph. The Iron Age rubbish-pit lay close up against the north slope of the bank near its western end in the eastern field.

The crown of the bank runs about 10 feet south of the rubbish-pit, and passes over the dark layer which extends southwards from it. If, therefore, the bank belongs to the same construction as the ditch, the latter should be later in date than the Iron Age pit. A trial section through the ditch, however, produced nothing that could serve to date it, but revealed the interesting fact that it had been cut into the Oxford clay, the gravel having petered out between it and the rubbish-pit. It is best to leave all speculation as to the relation of these three



AN IRON AGE SITE AT LONG WITTENHAM, BERKS.

The position of the excavations is marked by a cross. The gravel-pit on the left has yielded Bronze Age burials.

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PLATE II



1

2

3



4

5

IRON AGE POTTERY FROM LONG WITTENHAM, BERKS. (pp. 4 ff.).

Scale, $\frac{1}{4}$.

LONG WITTENHAM, BERKS.

features, the ditch, the bank, and the rubbish-pit, pending the more thorough exploration which the importance of the material already obtained from the site demands.

THE SMALL FINDS

Axe-pendant (FIG. 1, no. 2). By far the most interesting single find is a bronze pendant in the form of an axe with widely-splayed blade, hanging from a ring which has its axis on the same plane as the blade. The length over all is $\frac{3}{4}$ inch.

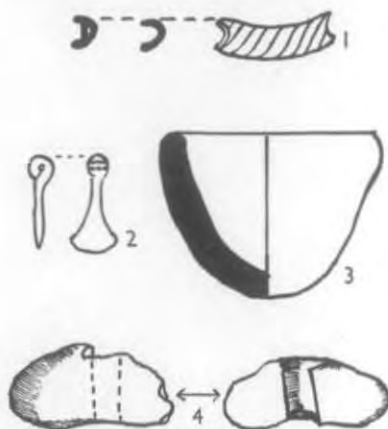


FIG. 1

SMALL OBJECTS (p. 3 f.)

1. Bronze Fitting.
2. Bronze Axe-pendant.
3. Pottery Crucible.
4. Pottery Spindle-whorl.

Scale, $\frac{1}{2}$.

The only close parallel to this pendant in England is a miniature axe with a ring for suspension attached to the side of the blade near its base, which was found at Arras in the East Riding of Yorkshire in a grave of the local Middle to Late La Tène chariot-burial culture.¹ On the continent triangular plaques of varying sizes, hung from rings with their axes at right angles to the plane of the plaque, are common during the late Bronze Age, and doubtless reflect a ramification of the cult of the axe: but no exact parallel has come to light there to the Long Wittenham pendant. The Arras pendant seems to represent a socketed axe,

¹ *Archaeologia*, LX, 303, fig. 57.

H. N. SAVORY

but the present example appears to recall the widely-splayed type of flat or slightly flanged axe which is found in the Atlantic zone at an advanced date in the Bronze Age.¹ This may provide a clue to its origin.

Bronze fitting (FIG. 1, no. 1). It is hard to explain this small, curved fragment of cast bronze, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long. The fragment is roughly semi-circular in section, bridged near the middle, and opens away from the radius.

Crucible (FIG. 1, no. 3). That metal-work was carried on near the site is suggested by this little pottery bowl (H. $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches, D. $1\frac{5}{8}$ inches) which may be identified as a crucible, because its hard and rough walls are exceptionally thick in proportion to its size.

Spindle-whorl (FIG. 1, no. 4). This is a roughly-made specimen of red ware, grey within, D. $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches. It may be compared with Cunnington, *All Cannings Cross*, pl. xxv, 1.

Worked animal bones. These include a gouge-like instrument made from a sheep's metatarsal, a common Early Iron Age type (cp. *All Cannings Cross*, pl. ix); small sheep bones and a splinter from a larger one, polished through having been used, in the first case as spools, in the second as a spatula, perhaps for burnishing pottery before baking; the base of a deer's antler, from which the upper part has been sawn off; and the worked tine of another.

THE POTTERY

Fine ware. This consists almost entirely of carinated bowls, usually quite plain and nearly always with a dark grey or chocolate surface, sometimes yielding in places to buff; one bowl (FIG. 2, no. 6) had a uniformly buff surface. The attribution of an omphaloid base to the restored bowls (FIG. 2, nos. 6, 8-10) is founded on the analogy of the complete bowl (PLATE II, 3) and the presence of fragments of such bases among the smaller sherds: yet other fragments suggest that some bowls had wide, concave bases. The ware is hard and well-burnished; some fragments of bowls similar in form to those illustrated are exceptionally thin, hard and glossy to the feel. The fine ware from Long Wittenham is, indeed, distinguished from much of the Early Iron Age A2 and B ware of the Oxford district and of southern England in general by its harder texture and the absence of the soapy feel that characterizes the latter.

Of larger vessels, still moderately well finished, two types are represented. One, restorable from a fragment stretching from the rim to within a short

¹ Portugal: *O Archeologo Português*, ix, pl. i; Ireland: Coffey, *The Bronze Age in Ireland*, pl. i, first row.

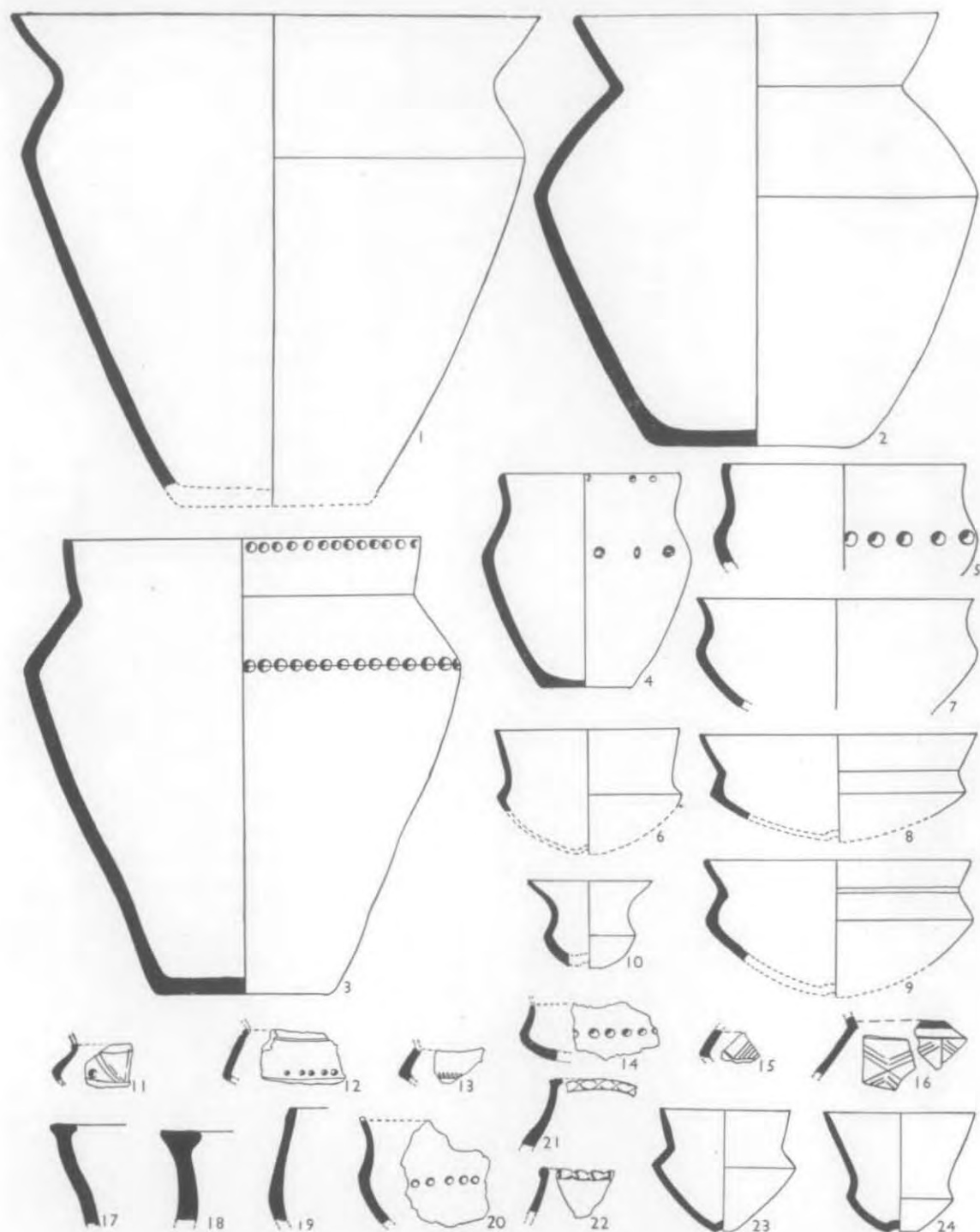


FIG. 2

1-22. Iron Age Pottery from Long Wittenham, Berks. (pp. 4 ff.). Scale, $\frac{1}{4}$.
 23-24. Parallel types from Continental sites (p. 8).

H. N. SAVORY

distance of the base, is a situliform vessel with flaring rim (FIG. 2, no. 1). The fragment has a dark grey surface, fired in places to a warm brick colour and burnished. The other has a biconical body and a tall flaring rim (PLATE II, 4; FIG. 2, no. 2) with a burnished surface, ranging from grey to buff in colour.

Decoration. A few fragments from dark grey burnished, carinated bowls (FIG. 2, nos. 11-14), bear a simple decoration of dimples placed in a row on or just above the carination. One of these (FIG. 2, no. 11) also has a decoration of groups of lines incised before baking between the carination and the neck-constriction to form chevrons, and a similar fragment (FIG. 2, no. 15) bears this decoration alone.

But the most interesting piece appears to come from the flat shoulder of a large vessel akin to FIG. 2, nos. 1 or 2. It bears (FIG. 2, no. 16) a decoration of chevrons placed apex to apex in a panel below a number of horizontal grooves.

Coarse ware. The coarse ware, as usual on Iron Age A Sites, varies in hardness and finish. Some has a relatively smooth surface, some is very rough and uneven: the latter, in particular, is liable to have large pieces of fossil shell in its composition. The colour may be black, warm brick, or yellow.

The large vessels are normally situliform, with finger-print decoration on the shoulder and sometimes just under the rim as well. Two examples have been restored for exhibition in the Ashmolean Museum (PLATE II, 4-5, FIG. 2, nos. 3-4) and together with the small jar (FIG. 2, no. 5) provide examples of the finer sort of finish.

There are fragments of similar vessels with very rough, shelly surface. These, in particular, are liable to have a broadened, flat-topped rim like FIG. 2, nos. 17-18. There are also fragments of gently-carinated bowls with finger-print decoration on the shoulder, in dark, hard, and relatively smooth-surfaced ware (FIG. 2, no. 20).

Other shouldered jars of fairly coarse ware have flat-topped rims with a suggestion of cord-impressions upon the top (FIG. 2, no. 21), while on the lip of some flat-topped rims slanting incisions are found.

Affinities. (a) British. This pottery, it is clear, belongs wholly to Iron Age A, and the sharp profiles and good technique of the finer ware place it at the very beginning of this phase. Indeed, the lack of any marked development or degeneration in the various types suggests that the deposit accumulated over a relatively short span of time. It may, therefore, be regarded as a closed find, which, for the time being, will serve as a canon for the earliest phase of the Early Iron Age of the Oxford district. Practically all the forms represented at Long Wittenham have occurred at various other sites in the Upper Thames

LONG WITTENHAM, BERKS.

valley, notably at Allen's gravel pit near Dorchester,¹ but also at Radley,² Mount Farm, near Dorchester,³ and Bampton.⁴ At all of these sites, however, they were accompanied by wares belonging to later stages of the Early Iron Age, sometimes with no stratigraphical distinction.

The publication of a type-site for the Early Iron Age A1 of the Upper Thames valley may reasonably be made the occasion for a comparison of that group with the other local groups of A1 culture in England. Clearly our group presents several points of divergence from the A1 group of Wessex. The hematite surface-layer and the broad furrowing characteristic of the typical All Cannings Cross carinated bowl is unknown at Long Wittenham and is not characteristic of the Oxford district as a whole. The sharp-shouldered jar with flaring rim is not typical of All Cannings Cross: the shoulders of the jars found there are much gentler and the rims are short and vertical. The Long Wittenham group can hardly represent a late development of Wessex A1. Its sharp profiles and good technique suggest rather a group which has just been severed from its parent stock on the continent. In support of this view it may be noted that pottery strongly suggestive of Wessex A, particularly in its later phase, has actually been found in the Oxford district; the furrowed carinated bowl from Allen's gravel-pit⁵ and the Bampton shard already referred to, with its zig-zag band filled with pittings are the most striking examples. But it has not been found on a pure A1 site like Long Wittenham: only at sites which yielded material representative of all the later phases of the Early Iron Age known in the district. On the other hand, the decoration at Long Wittenham has general affinities with that found at All Cannings Cross. In particular, FIG. 2, no. 11 may be compared with *All Cannings Cross*, pl. 44, 6. This affinity at least denotes a relationship and a relative contemporaneity.

With the A material of the south-eastern coasts Long Wittenham has even less in common, for the profiles of the former are rounded and the fine ware has a characteristic rosy burnish. Further down the Thames valley, however, something more closely comparable may have existed, for coarse jars with sharp shoulder and flaring rim are known from Theale ballast-pit⁶ and Cobham, Surrey,⁷ and there is a black burnished, carinated bowl from Cobham in Guildford Museum. The rather heterogeneous collection of pottery from

¹ *Antiquaries Journal*, xv, 30, fig. 2 b-d (carinated bowls), and pl. VIII (a coarse, sharp-shouldered situliform jar).

² *Ibid.*, fig. 2a (carinated bowl).

³ *Infra*, pp. 25 ff., PLATE IV, FIGS. 6-9.

⁴ Figured in *V.C.H. Oxon.*, I, forthcoming (black-burnished, carinated bowl).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Cp. a sherd in Reading Museum.

⁷ *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, XXI, 201 f., pl. 1, 4.

'Wallington Camp' near Croydon, in Thornton Heath Museum, includes a buff-burnished, carinated bowl rather like FIG. 2, no. 6.

Another English A group, that which occupies the fringe of the Fenlands in Northamptonshire, Norfolk, and Cambridgeshire, is similarly connected with Long Wittenham by the profiles of its shouldered jars. In the absence of a full publication of the famous site at Fengate, Peterborough, that of West Harling¹ will serve as a type-site. The Fenland group, however, is not characterized by black-burnished, carinated bowls comparable in profile or in fineness of ware with those of Long Wittenham.

Clearly, then, though exhibiting general resemblances to other A groups, the Upper Thames valley pottery is sufficiently individual in character to merit a separate consideration of its continental affinities.

(b) Continental. Anyone who is acquainted with the French national collections at St. Germain, and who subsequently handles the best of the Long Wittenham fine ware, particularly the thin, almost egg-shell-like fragments of carinated bowls, cannot fail to be impressed by the resemblance which the latter bears to the early Marnian pottery and to the fine Urnfield ware of which the former in great measure preserves the tradition. In fact, the ware, and to a certain extent the profiles, exhibit a greater affinity to those of the La Tène I pottery of the Marne than do those of any other English A group.

It must, however, be conceded at once that the Marnian group includes many forms which do not appear at Long Wittenham. The carinated bowls in particular, almost invariably stand upon a pedestalled base and even the characteristic situliform jar does not as a rule have a flaring rim. Here the remoter analogy of the fine Urnfield ware becomes useful. The La Tène I pottery of the Marne is, after all, little more than the product of the reaction of an Urnfield ceramic tradition to southern influences. Before these influences supervene, the characteristic lake-dwelling bowl with its tall, cylindrical neck and pointed base has developed all over the vast Urnfield empire in France and the Low Countries into a carinated bowl with an omphaloid base. A bowl, from tumulus 3 at Cosne, Côte d'Or (FIG. 2, no. 24)² illustrates the form which this development took in Franche-Comté, Burgundy, and Champagne (the Jogassian culture)³. A bowl from Court-St.-Etienne, near Brussels (FIG. 2, no. 23)⁴ typifies the more conservative development of the Belgian Hallstatt group. There are strong objections, however, to deriving the Long Wittenham pottery

¹ *Proc. Prehist. Soc. of East Anglia*, VII, 1, 111 ff.

² This has been drawn from the original in St. Germain: for particulars of the site see Françoise Henry, *Tumulus de la Côte d'Or*, p. 109.

³ For the Jogassian culture in general, cp. Hawkes and Dunning, *Archaeol. Journal*, LXXXVII (1930), 156, 162-5; *Préhistoire*, v.

⁴ This has been drawn from the original in the Musées royaux du Cinquantenaire, Brussels.

LONG WITTENHAM, BERKS.

directly from any of the late Hallstatt groups in the interior of France. An irruption in strength of the Jogassian or an allied culture into England might be expected to have left as traces at least a few isolated finds of characteristic bronzes, especially fibulae, but few phases of continental metal equipment are as poorly represented in England as the Celtic Late Hallstatt. The bowl from Cosne, like the typical ware of Les Jogasses, has not been given a glossy, dark grey burnish; and the ceramic situla, so characteristic of the La Tène culture of the Marne, had, at the earliest, scarcely begun to appear before the very last phase of the Celtic Hallstatt culture. Situliform jars with short, everted rim were associated with very late Hallstatt fibulae in grave 188 at Les Jogasses¹ and in Thierot's grave 7 at Sogny-aux-Moulins² but such jars are not characteristic of the Jogassian group, or of any other of the Late Hallstatt groups of France as known at present, and the two graves just mentioned may really belong to an early stage of the Marnian culture, in which the La Tène I fibula had not entirely replaced earlier types. Situliform jars are quite unknown in the Low Countries during the phase to which the Court-St.-Etienne bowls belong; and to this same group, as indeed to the Jogassian, there belong various forms which do not appear at Long Wittenham.

But the examination of these better-known groups perpetuating the Urnfield ceramic tradition in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., though not directly productive, has at any rate indicated the direction in which further enquiry should be made. What is needed, it would seem, is a very conservative group of carinated bowls, which has survived long enough to take over one Marnian feature, the sharp shouldered jar, but not the pedestal base.

Now there is evidence, scattered, it is true, and much of it difficult of access, which suggests that the great expansion of Urnfield pottery in its later, Hallstatt B, phase reached not only Burgundy, Champagne, and the Low Countries, but the whole northern seaboard of France from Picardy to Brittany. It may well be suspected that the later development of some of the coastal ceramic groups thus founded, if it were better known, would go far to provide the solution to the problem of British Iron Age A origins.

Already, if one examines the western fringe of the Marnian culture represented by the cemeteries of the south of the department of Aisne, one finds a degree of the suggested conservatism. A dark grey-burnished, carinated bowl, without pedestal, seems to be quite typical of these cemeteries, which belong mainly to the fourth and third centuries B.C.³ This fact becomes all the more

¹ In Epernay Museum: found subsequently to the excavations published by the Abbé Favret, *Revue Archéologique*, xxv (1927) 326 ff., xxvi, 80 ff.

² *Revue Anthropologique*, 1930, p. 378 f.

³ E.g. Sablonnière: *Revue Archéologique*, 1906, II, 350, fig. 50, 1; *ibid.*, 363, fig. 65, 1-2.

significant when it is discovered that the same group¹ possesses situliform jars with flaring rims like the Long Wittenham type and that the most striking piece of decoration at Long Wittenham (FIG. 2, no. 16) has as its most essential feature, a diagonally crossed panel, a motive found commonly on the Aisne, notably on the tall, flaring rim of a situliform jar at Sablonnière.²

The Long Wittenham situla may conceivably have been inspired by the bronze situla locally, for examples of the latter have occurred in Britain. But it is more likely that it was brought from the Continent, for the other Long Wittenham forms certainly were, and from a part of the Continent in which situliform jars were already being made.

The Aisne, however, is still too rich in Marnian features which do not appear in the upper Thames valley to be the immediate source of which we are in search. But it can be shown that the Aisne group strongly influenced the coastal area to the north, where it has already been suggested that the parent group to Long Wittenham might be found.

Certain ceramic situlae and carinated bowls, with or without pedestals, which have been found near the coast in the Low Countries as far eastwards as the Rhine estuary are so close to the Marnian in form, ware and decoration that it is impossible to regard them as other than imported or made locally by Marnian potters (captured in the course of raids): except in the case of the carinated bowls without pedestal, it is impossible to discover for any of them a root in the local tradition, and even they are distinguished from the Court-St.-Etienne type by their angular profiles.

Ware of the new kind is quite characteristic of a cemetery at Ryckevorsel and a habitation-site at Neckerspoel, both in Antwerp province. Further inland, in the Meuse basin, pure Marnian pottery is lacking, but its influence is demonstrable in that ultimate phase of the Low Countries Urnfield tradition in pottery, to which a strong Germanic element has been added as a result of folk movements during the fifth century B.C. This phase, is represented exclusively at the cemetery of St. Vincent in Belgian Luxembourg³ and very nearly so at Weert in Dutch Limburg.⁴ It is precisely on this fourth-third century horizon in the Low Countries that is found a type of biconical flaring-rimmed vessel which is identical in form, ware, and finish with the Long Wittenham urn (FIG. 2, no. 2). Examples of this type have been found at St. Vincent,⁵

¹ E.g. Sablonnière: *ibid.*, 348, fig. 48, 1; Ciry-Salsogne: *Revue Archéologique*, 1902, II, 198; and Chassemy: Moreau, *Album Caranda*, III, pl. 105.

² *Revue Archéologique*, 1906, II, fig. 138, 14.

³ Baron de Loë, *Belgique ancienne*, II, 207 ff.

⁴ The material is in Leiden Museum, and is largely unpublished.

⁵ Baron de Loë, *op. cit.*, fig. 102, 9.

LONG WITTENHAM, BERKS.

at Weert, at Oostereng in the province of Utrecht¹ (here apparently, no earlier than late Harpstedt ware) and finally, at Ryckevorsel, associated chiefly with Belgian Marnian ware. But most of the ware of the Meuse basin has features, particularly of fabrics, which connect it with the English south-east coast A pottery, rather than with Long Wittenham. There is in Liège Museum, however, a low, dark grey burnished, carinated bowl, found at Reckheim in Hesbaye, which is similar to the common Long Wittenham form except in the addition of a lug, pierced vertically, at one point on the carination. Further west, material of this period is almost totally lacking. Only at Le Buissonnet near Compiègne in the department of Oise may the thread be picked up again, in the form of an urn, now in St. Germain Museum, of the biconical, flaring-rimmed type (FIG. 2, no. 2).

One may not, therefore, go far wrong if one places the homeland of the Long Wittenham Iron Age settlers somewhere in the area composed of Hainault, Artois and Picardy.

¹ *Oudheidkundige Mededeelingen*, 1933, fig. 30.