

Excavations at Cassington, Oxon., 1947

By J. S. P. BRADFORD

DURING two weeks at the end of March and beginning of April, 1947, trial excavations were conducted in the field adjoining Cassington Mill to examine several of the well-known crop-mark sites discovered from the air by the late Major Allen.¹ The sites in question, marked A, B and C on PL. I, were about to be engulfed by Messrs. Smith's gravel-pit, which has since been extended to cover almost the entire area covered by this photograph. Reference to the map in *Oxoniensia*, v, fig. 1 (= *Oxoniensia*, XI-XII, fig. 2), will show the relationship of the sites to the area as a whole. Cassington Mill lies half a mile up the River Evenlode, just north of the broad bend taken by the Thames above Oxford, and on the southern edge of a gravel terrace overlooking heavy clays.

The ring-ditch (A), first examined, gave no evidence of date. Its ditch, $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide and only 2 feet deep from the top of the gravel, had a uniform filling of reddish earth with admixture of gravel, as have so many Bronze Age ring-ditches in this area. There was no evidence for the position of a bank. At the centre of the circle lay a neat oval depression, $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, very clearly evident (PL. II, A) in the gravel but only 4 to 6 inches deep. Such enigmatic features are not uncommon in ring-ditches in the upper Thames valley, and suggest some phase or aspect of burial ritual at which we can only guess at present.

The second circle (B) proved of considerable interest (see plan of S. quadrant, FIG. 1, a). Its overall diameter including the ditch measured 60 to 64 feet. At the centre, the air photographs showed a dark spot in crop-mark form. On excavation, a pit was revealed by darker soil as soon as the shallow covering of 9 to 12 inches of top soil above the gravel was removed. At this stage its outline was irregular (PL. II, B), including minor hollows scooped out by the burial party. When fully excavated this burial-pit was oval with steeply sloping sides, and was $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep from the surface of the gravel.

The primary burial was of an adult, accompanied by the remains of a 'B.1' beaker which had been broken by the later secondary burial accompanied by an 'A' beaker at a slightly higher level in the same pit (PL. III, A, B).

¹ My own visits to Cassington for salvage excavations have been frequent since 1936. The work in the spring of 1947 was carried out under my direction with the help of the Ashmolean Museum and a grant from the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, Ministry of Works. It is desired to thank the members of the O.U. Archaeological Society who took part, and in particular Mr. I. W. Cornwall, Mr. R. Summers and Mr. M. R. Apted. The work was hampered by extremely wet weather.

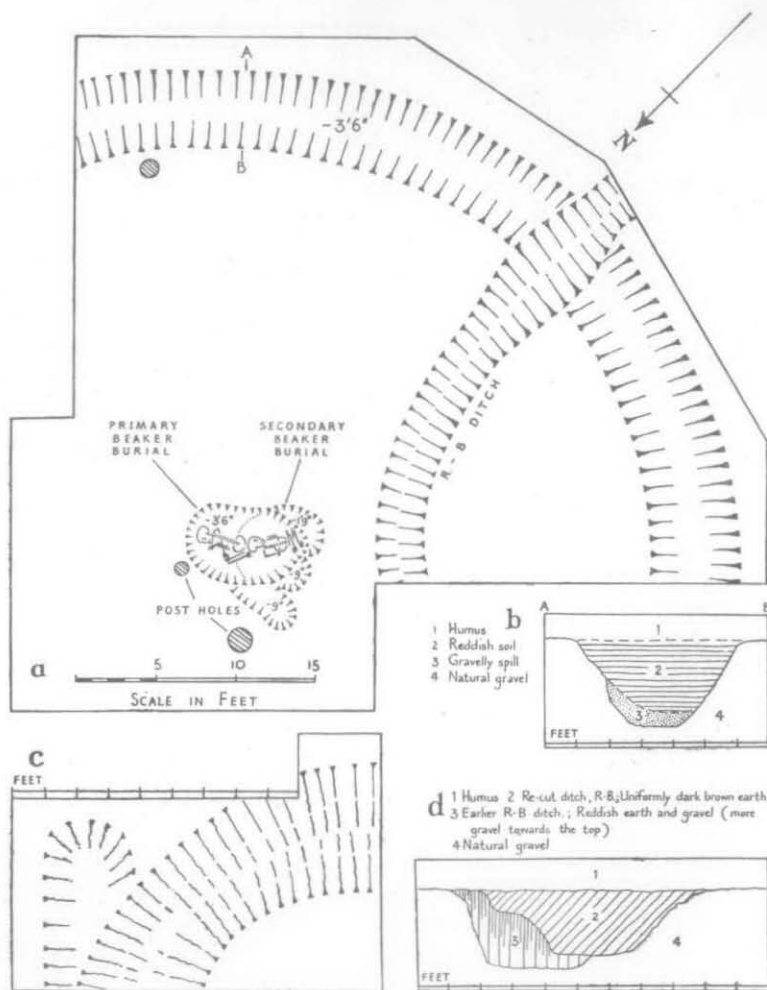


FIG. 1
CASSINGTON, OXON.

- a. Plan of excavated S. quadrant of burial-circle (Site B), p. 1.
- b. Section, A-B, through ditch of burial-circle (Site B), p. 4.
- c. Plan of N. corner of Romano-British rectangular enclosure (Site C), p. 4.
- d. Section mid-way along NW. side of Romano-British rectangular enclosure (Site C), p. 4.

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The primary skeleton lay on its right side with the right upper arm under the body and the left upper arm flexed upwards in front of the chest. The lower limbs were well flexed in the so-called 'crouched' position (PL. III, c). The fragmentary 'B.1' beaker just above the hip (Ash. Mus. 1947.305 : PL. III, D, 2, FIG. 2, *b*), since restored, measures $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height and $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches diameter at the rim. It is thin-walled, and fired pinkish buff. The lines of impressed cord-like ornament are neatly executed.

The original pit was slightly enlarged at one end to facilitate the later burial, which only barely overlapped the earlier, and without disturbing the

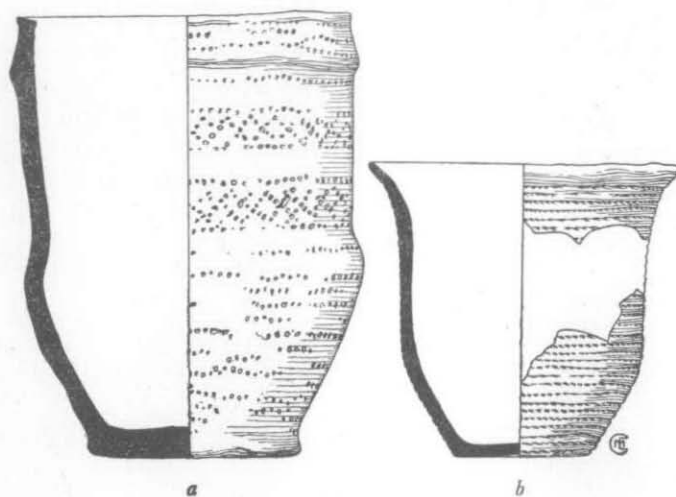


FIG. 2

a. The 'A' beaker, and *b.* the 'B.1' beaker, from the burial-circle (Site B), p. 3

skeleton. PL. III, A and B show the pit in course of excavation and the relative positions of the upper and lower burials. The secondary skeleton was of an adult, in a rather more extended posture, lying on the left side and facing slightly upwards. The right arm was half-flexed on the chest, and the left was flexed upwards to the chin. The 'A' beaker (Ash. Mus. 1947.306 : PL. III D, 1, FIG. 2, *a*) which lay at the hip measures $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches high, and 5 inches across at the rim ; it is thick walled and fired pinkish buff. The stamped ornament of rows of dots is roughly done. The little holes seem to be in groups of seven, implying the use of a small comb-like stamp.

The evidence from these superimposed burials again emphasizes the

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'essential duality of the Beaker invasion of Britain', while also emphasizing the overlapping between them in the south and centre of the Island. The arrival of the 'B.1' Beaker people from Brittany is conventionally dated c. 1900 B.C., and that of the 'A' Beaker group deriving from Holland soon after 1800. However, 'the current nomenclature of the pots still continues to use a 19th-century typology which implied a chronology we now know to be inverted' (S. Piggott, *British Prehistory*, p. 111). The primary position of the 'B.1' beaker and the secondary position of the later 'A' beaker above it, in this burial-pit at Cassington, once more conclusively demonstrates the true sequence of these two cultures in this area, and, still more so, the element of cultural intimacy that developed between them.

Very close to the burial-pit lay two post-holes, 1 foot and $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep respectively, probably though not conclusively associated with it. A stray post-hole (FIG. 1, *a*) near the inner lip of the ditch was most probably referable to the Romano-British settlement, which was represented by the enclosure ditch of V-shaped section ($2\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep in the gravel) which crossed the ditch of the Beaker circle and was just visible on the air-photographs. It was of interest to note that the sections through the ditch of the Beaker circle showed clearly a spill of gravel as silt from the outer lip (FIG. 1, *b*), indicating a bank on the outer side.

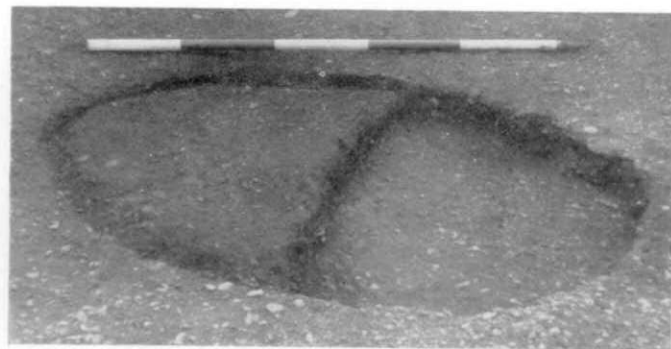
Trial trenches also located the corner of the large rectangular enclosure (PL. I, *c*, and FIG. 1, *c*), and other sections were dug along its length. Romano-British coarse ware was found in its lower levels. Along the long side nearest Cassington Mill it had been dug to follow the line of an earlier Romano-British enclosure ditch, as shown (FIG. 1, *d*) by one of the sections midway down its length.



CASSINGTON, OXON.

Air-view taken in June 1937 of two fields east of Cassington Mill (looking W.) showing the sites (A, B, C) examined in spring, 1947 (p. 1), which lay within the large enclosure ditch (note the entrance clearly visible on the SW.).

Ph. : the late Major G. W. G. Allen



A



B

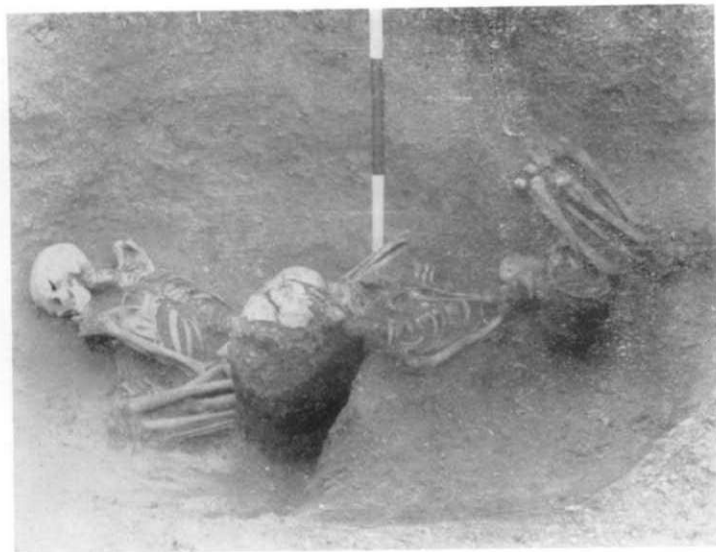


C

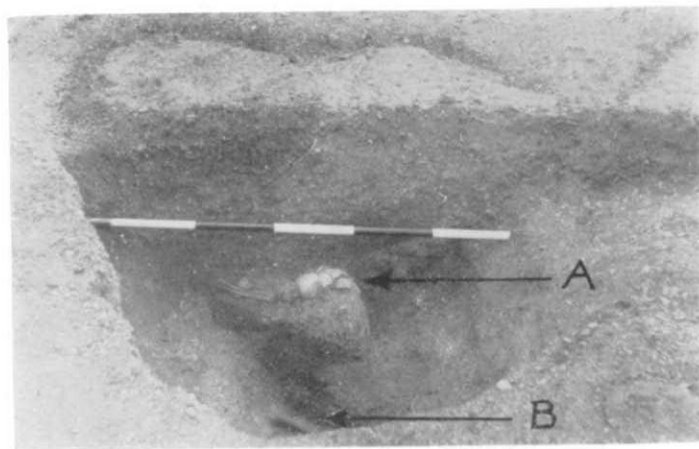
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- A. Ring-ditch (Site A) : shallow oval at centre (p. 1)
B. Burial-circle (Site B) : outline of burial-pit at centre, after removal of top-soil (p. 1).
C. Burial-circle (Site B) : portion of the ditch, with V-shaped Romano-British ditch crossing it (p. 1)

Phh. : J. S. P. Bradford



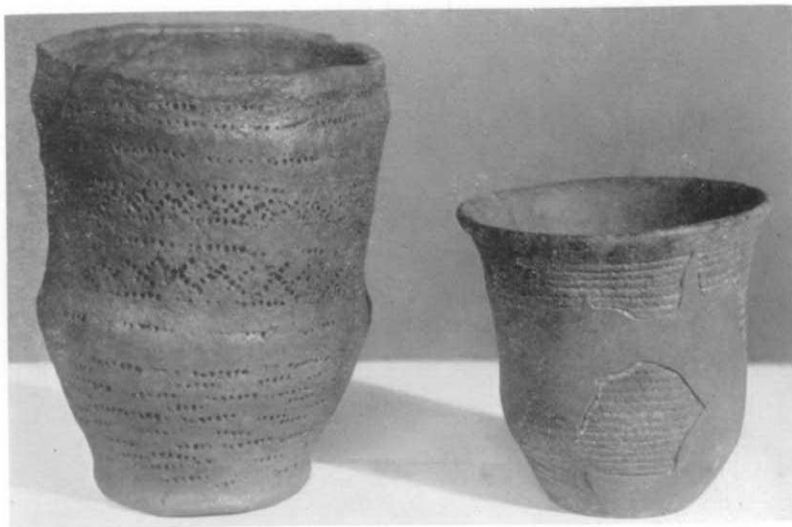
A



B



C



D

THE BEAKER INTERMENT IN THE BURIAL-CIRCLE AT CASSINGTON, OXON. (Site B) (pp. 1 ff).

- A. Skeleton with 'B.1' beaker (lower, left) and skeleton with 'A' beaker (upper right) in burial-pit at centre.
 B. Section through the burial-pit, showing the 'A' beaker burial (marked A) and the 'B.1' beaker burial (marked B).
 C. The primary 'B.1' beaker burial, fully excavated. D. The 'A' beaker (left) and the 'B.1' beaker (right) Scale: $\frac{1}{8}$

Phh.: A-C, J. S. P. Bradford
 Ph.: D, Ashmolean Museum