

A Romano-British Settlement at Curbridge

By R. A. CHAMBERS

THE site (area centred SP 337089), was discovered during topsoil stripping for the Witney bypass.¹⁷ Pottery indicated settlement between the 1st and 4th centuries. Part of the site was re-used as a late Romano-British burial ground.

The site lay at approximately 275 m. O.D. on gently sloping ground between the Colwell Brook and the Curbridge-Witney road. The local subsoil was a variable, light coloured Head comprising mottled yellow to red brown sandy clay with small ironstone nodules. This formed the gentle slope between the Colwell Brook and the edge of the Cornbrash limestone (FIGS. 2 and 11). East of the Colwell Brook the subsoil is Oxford Clay.

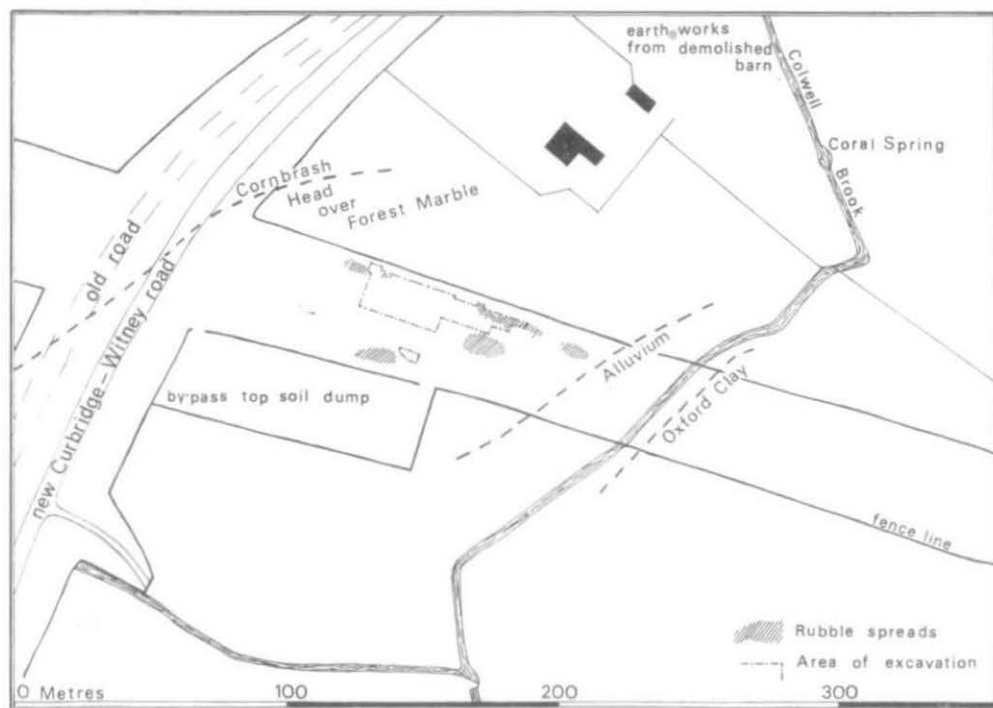


FIG. 11

Location of Romano-British settlement at Curbridge.

THE EXCAVATION

0.4 m.-0.6 m. of topsoil was removed mechanically leaving a broad section through this previously unknown site. Nineteen burials representing part of a small

¹⁷ The site records and finds will be deposited at the Oxfordshire Museum, Woodstock. P.R.N. 8880-1.

cemetery were discovered among the ditches, pits and dark occupation spreads of the Romano-British settlement. Traces of both rubble and timber (sill beam)-founded buildings were noted. Irregular topsoil stripping had removed some of the Romano-British occupation levels exposing the natural subsoil in places. Roadside sections indicated that later ploughing had effected the destruction of floor levels and original land surfaces. Ridge and furrow can just be seen lying parallel to the bypass, north of the excavation. The present field has been under grass for at least the last ten years.

The site was examined by careful and repeated cleaning of two areas (FIG. 11), followed by the excavation of the cemetery, and the planning and partial excavation of underlying features belonging to the Romano-British settlement.

The features are numbered, the number preceded by an F. These numbers are the ones used in the original recording of the site. Features containing more than one layer are numbered as F32.1, F32.2, etc. Unless otherwise indicated, depth measurements are quoted from the exposed subsoil surface.

The cemetery is described separately below.

F1 Large broken storage jar, base 0.4 m. below present field surface.

F2-5 Inhumations.

F6 Square post pit, 0.6 × 0.4 m., 0.25 m. deep, with remains of stone packing on E. and S. edges. Dark grey soil fill with charcoal and pottery. Cut by Grave F5.

F7-8 Inhumations.

F9 Ditch, N.-S., 0.75 m. wide; dark brown loam with natural yellow subsoil mixture at bottom. Sectioning and overdigging showed 3-4 lines of shallow stake holes from sharpened stakes (FIG. 14).

F10 Ditch, intermittent, possibly circular.

F11-16 Inhumations.

F17 Limestone rubble spread comprising Cornbrash, some burnt limestone and pottery fragments.

F18 Grey-brown loamy clay with charcoal specks, pottery and animal bone. Occupational debris.

F19 Inhumation.

F20 Post pit, rectangular, 0.55 m. × 0.3 m., 0.28 m. deep, stone packing, black soil fill with charcoal and pottery.

F21 Ditch, 0.2 m. wide; greyish-brown, hard clayey fill.

F22-3 Inhumations.

F24 Ditch 0.8 m. × 0.3 m. deep; homogeneous, loamy clay, dark brown-grey fill with occasional limestone lumps. Several lines of stake holes revealed in ditch bottom (FIG. 14).

F25-28 Inhumations.

F29 Random rough limestone cobble spread in black clayey soil containing much domestic refuse. Parts of this spread exhibited a surface formed from much use, and other areas exhibited voids and patterns from unidentifiable yard furniture or buildings, e.g. F39.

F30 Inhumation.

F31 Large pit 1.7 m. × 1.2 m., 0.9 m. deep.

1 Dark grey clayey loam with much burnt material and ash.

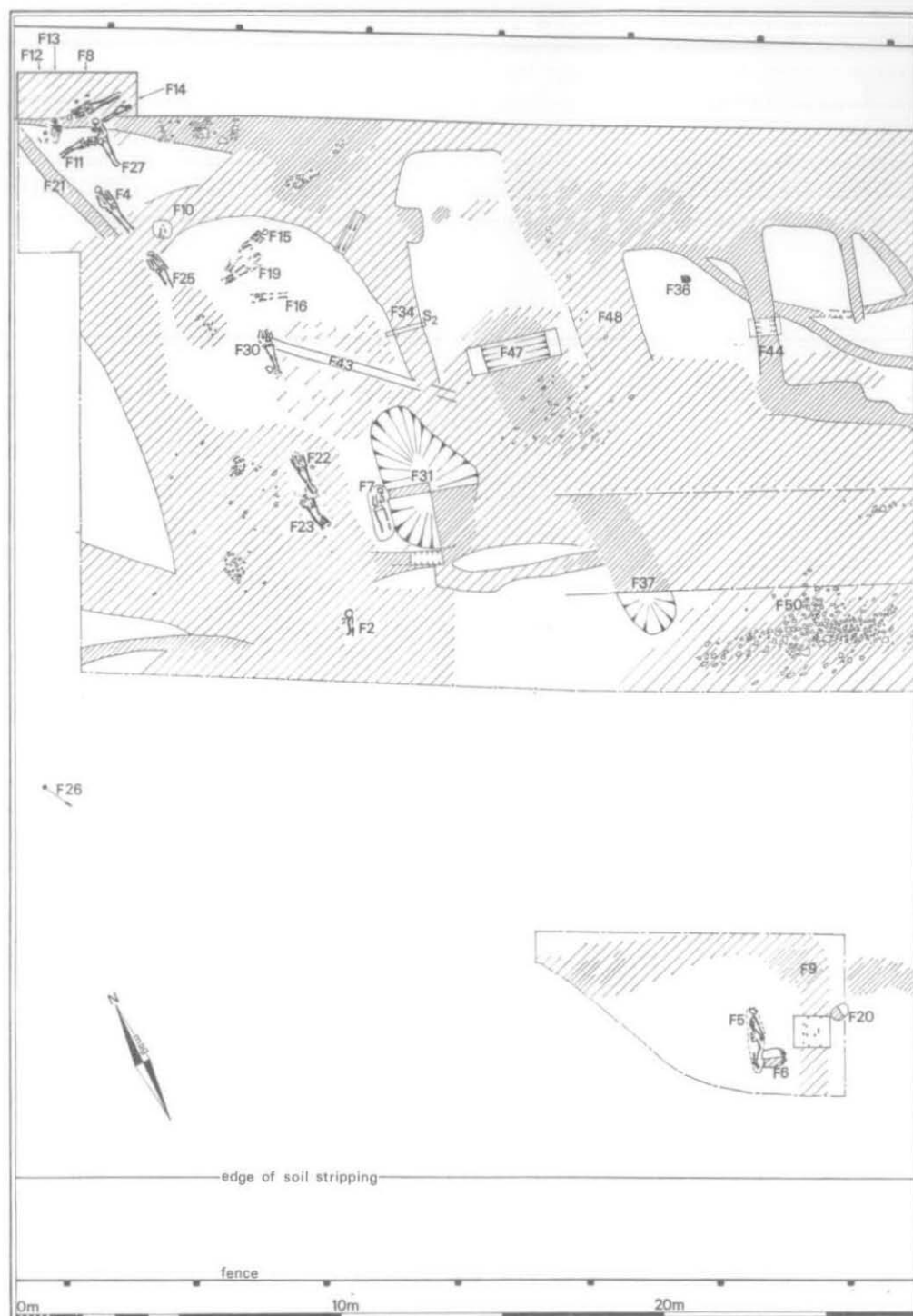


FIG. 12
Excavation at Curbridge, 1975—Western half of excavation.

- 2 Brownish grey loamy clay.
 - 3 Brownish grey loamy clay with charcoal.
 - 4 Brownish grey loamy clay with much burnt debris and large limestone lumps. Also 4 cattle scapulae lying close together in the centre of the pit 10 cm. above the bottom.
- F32* Inhumation.
- F33* Pit or ditch-end with black clayey soil fill containing charcoal flecks and pottery.
- F34* Ditch 1 m. wide, 0.25 m. deep; homogeneous, brownish grey loamy clay mottled at the bottom. Almost empty of finds.
- F35* Unmortared, well packed limestone rubble building foundations, mainly cornbrash and averaging 0.25 m. wide. Only one or two stones thick, approx. 0.1 m. (PL. I, A).
- F36* Post-hole, stone filled, 0.1 m. across.
- F37* Ditch.
- F38* Ditch, 4 m. wide and over 2 m. deep. Depth observed during earth-moving operations. The lower ditch fills contained much occupational debris and pottery.
- F39* One of the many shapes showing up in the 'yard' area F29, indicating yard furniture or buildings not identifiable in the circumstances.
- F40* Possible robbed foundation trench, one side deeper than the other (FIG. 14, S15-16) representing exterior and interior ground surfaces of a building of which F56 formed a part. Below F35.
- F41* Timber slot? Straight, parallel sides, dark loamy clay fill. Appeared to continue in the uncleared occupational debris as a line of stones.
- F42* Light coloured, parallel sided 0.25 m. wide line of well protected subsoil suggesting a timber sill beam which remained on the ground for a long period. Divisions between layers on either side respected it.
- F43* Similar to F42, did not show up until after three cleanings and a few days weathering.
- F44* Foundation trench? Homogeneous dark brown-grey, loamy clay fill, bottom of trench irregular.
- F45-6* The larger of several lumps and patches of bluey-green grey clay in the occupation debris.
- F47* Pit.
- F48* Ditch?
- F49* Well laid small rubble cobble spread preserved under single layer of wall foundation stones F54, by edge of excavation.
- F50* Wall foundation. Cornbrash limestone rubble, one or two stones deep.
- F51* Beneath F54 and F49, mottled mixed yellow and brown-grey soils.
- F52* Black soil with occupation debris and much Cornbrash limestone. Originally extended over all the building complex.
- F53* Dark soil-filled narrow foundation trench edge? for foundation F35.
- F54* Building foundation rubble, mainly Cornbrash limestone, some burnt pieces, earlier than F35. (PL. I, A).
- F55* Break showing natural subsoil beneath F54.



FIG. 13
Excavation at Curbridge, 1975—Eastern half of excavation.

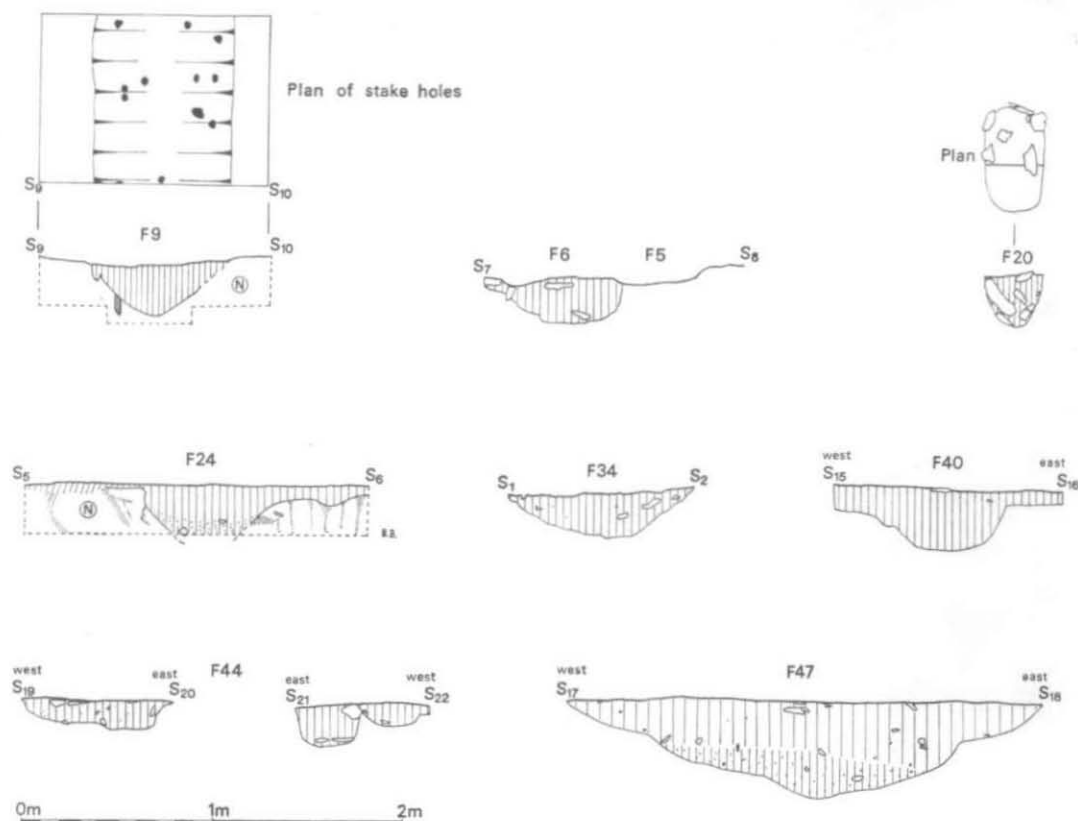


FIG. 14

Excavation at Curbridge, 1975—Sections.

F56 Building foundation rubble, mainly Cornbrash, forming a corner (PL. I, A). See *F40*.

F57-8 Natural yellow subsoil surface.

F59 Darker soil.

F60 Disturbed natural soil.

THE CEMETERY

This previously unknown cemetery (FIG. 12), lay within a part of the Romano-British settlement already described. The archaeological evidence suggested that the cemetery belonged to the late Roman period. Graves 8 and 27 have been sent for radio-carbon dating, and the results will be published in a subsequent *Oxoniensia*.

The inhumation burials represented the southern part of a small cemetery of unknown size. The graves were scattered, with a minor concentration in the N.W. corner of the excavated area. All the 19 graves recorded were shallow and their orientation varied greatly but demonstrated a preference for N.-S. burial (FIG. 16). Twenty-one bodies were recorded, including two infants which appeared to belong with the grave of a single adult woman. The cemetery appeared to extend under

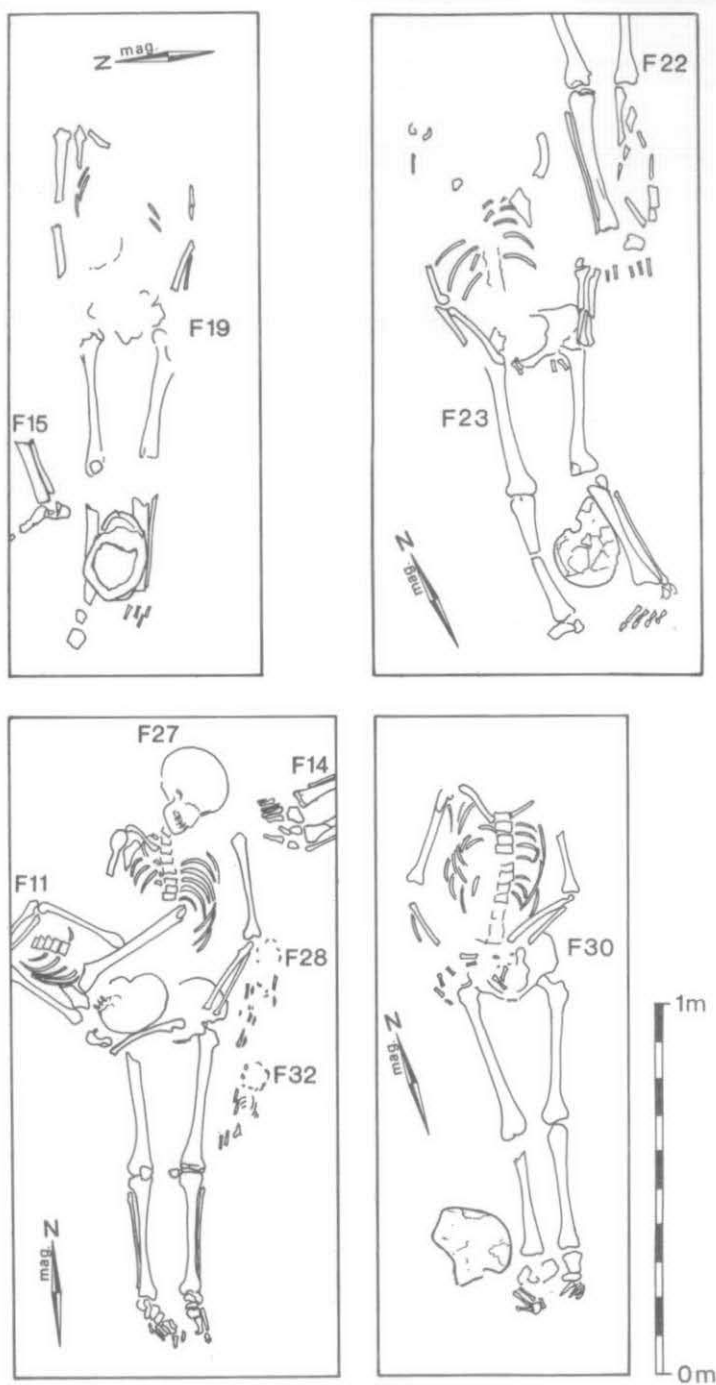


FIG. 15
Curbridge—The Unusual Graves.

the paddock to the north, and there may well be further burials beyond the southern edge of the carriageway, isolated from the main part of the cemetery, as was 5.

Topsoil removal probably destroyed several shallower graves as evidenced by the skeletons in 3 and 8, the surviving parts of which lay outside the northern edge of the carriageway. Several burials may have lain unnoticed, outside the cleaned areas. This particular soil may also have concealed any deeper burials even within the two cleaned areas.

The grave pits, where observable, were rectangular with rounded corners. The bottoms of some graves, however, sloped considerably. The pits had been dug with varying degrees of care, the least care being exhibited in Grave 5, where the body had been inserted into a grave pit only wide enough for the body to lie on its side.

The presence of boundary ditches to form a graveyard were, if present, indistinguishable from the complex of features belonging to the underlying settlement. The preservation of the skeletal material was mainly poor. Some skeletons had been grazed and many crushed by machinery and in such cases little osteological information was retrieved. Where possible, the long bones were measured before a skeleton was lifted. Each skeleton was drawn, photographed and marked onto a site plan. This last action was necessary because soil conditions often concealed the edges of the grave pits.

Three graves, 19, 23 and 30, contained decapitated adults. The head had been placed between the legs in 19 and 23, and beside the feet in 30.

Five graves contained clusters of iron hobnails. In Grave 14 they lay around the feet, in Graves 22, 23 and 24 by the right, right, and left shin bones respectively, and in 8, around the left hand. The hobnails and unusual graves are discussed later.

This report is divided into two separate parts. The Grave Inventory lists the archaeological details of each grave and the information retrieved from the skeletal remains is described in the following section, *The Human Bones*, by Mary Harman.

In the following inventory the orientation of each extended body, where possible, has been calculated from the longitudinal axis of the skeleton, *e.g.* 270° indicates a west-east orientation. This is followed by the direction in which the head lay. If known, the age, height, sex, remaining grave pit depth and description follow.

The graves were back filled with their own spoil. The natural subsoil was generally more porous than pit and ditch fills and within the natural, bone tended to partial or complete decomposition.

GRAVE INVENTORY

2 22°; N. 0.05 m. Supine, fragments of skull, ribs and left arm remained.

3 13°; N. 20-25 yrs.; 0.45 m. below present field surface. Supine, the skull had been disturbed by Grave 8 whose fill revealed the missing cranium. The mandible rested on the top of the chest; shoulders and upper arms were also disturbed, a fragment of right upper arm remaining. Lower legs disturbed by Grave 11 in whose fill leg fragments were found. Upper legs and pelvic region destroyed during soil stripping. Not shown on plan, FIG. 11.

Two cattle scapulae were found to the right hand side immediately below the rib cage but both appeared to belong to the fill of an underlying ditch. One was crushed and incomplete.

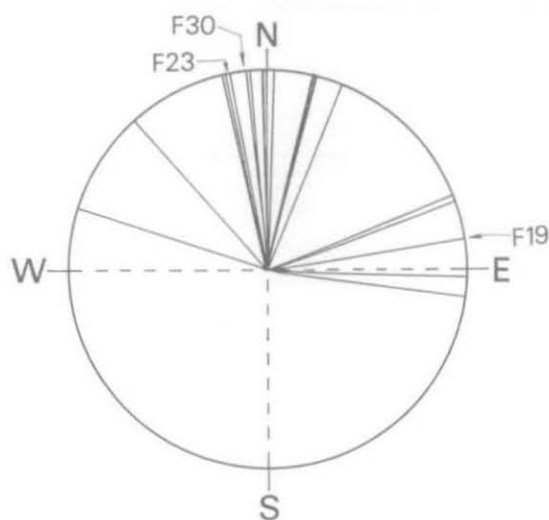


FIG. 16

Magnetic orientations of graves at Curbridge. F19, 23 and 30 were beheaded. Feet lie at the centre of the Pic Diagram.

4 347°; N. Over 40 yrs.; ♀; 0.1 m. Complete, supine, head upright, left arm straight, hand over femur; right arm slightly flexed outwards, hand on pelvis, legs straight and parallel. Apparently carefully laid out.

5 0°; N. 20-25 yrs.; ♂; 0.15 m. Damaged right femur and skull; laid on side in very narrow grave, facing east. Shoulder and pelvic bones folded over and collapsed along with vertebrae. Arms to the front, straight, left hand over the right, legs slightly flexed, feet together, right over left. Hands and feet might have been tied.

7 13°; N. Adult; ♀; 0.15 m. Grave bottom sloped slightly, upper legs and body remained. Supine, face turned east; left forearm across stomach, right arm underneath body, legs straight and parallel.

8 98°; W. Over 30 yrs.; ♂; 0.33 m. deep from present field surface. Supine, crushed, skull tilted to the right, arms straight and by sides, legs straight and parallel, toes damaged by the later Grave 14. 28 complete iron hobnails plus fragments were found by the left hand. Portions of a skull and other bone fragments were found on the left side of the grave. These may be attributed to Grave 3, cut by 8.

11 92°; E. Over 40 yrs.; ♀; grave bottom sloped 0.2 m., and the feet were machine-damaged. Supine, crushed, skull turned to face S.W. with lower jaw resting on left shoulder; left arm by side, slightly flexed, with palm of hand upturned, right lower arm across stomach with palm of hand down-turned over left elbow; knees and feet together.

This grave cut the earlier graves 3, 27 and 31, and much residual human bone was present in the grave fill.

12 N. or N.E.; Adult; ♂?; 0.5 m. Crushed remains from upper arm, shoulder bones, vertebrae and back of skull.

13 Approx. N. Over 40 yrs.; 0.5 m. Remains of crushed skull facing east, fragments of shoulders, upper rib cage, several vertebrae and upper left arm by its side.

14 70°; E. 16-20 yrs.; 0.6 m. from present field surface. Supine, head and shoulders removed by a later pit; right hand between thighs, left hand over/under right; left lower arm bones over left pelvis, right pelvis and head of femur disturbed, legs and feet together. 14 complete iron hobnails plus fragments by the left foot, 19 hobnail fragments by the right tibia.

15 68°; E. Over 45 yrs.; ♂?; 0.1 m. Badly decomposed leaving a fragmentary skeleton. Head upright, right arm by side and straight, legs slightly bent, feet together.

16 288°; W. Supine, bone mostly decayed. Fragmentary arms, lower spine, pelvis, and legs which were parallel and straight.

19 (FIG. 15) 81°; E. Over 40 yrs.; 0.10 m. Supine, decapitated, skull placed face down between lower legs, neck towards body; torso completely decayed, right arm by side and straight, left arm flexed with hand over right pelvic bone, legs parallel and straight.

22 2°; N. Adult. Supine, crushed skull, left arm by side, right arm flexed with hand over crutch, legs straight and parallel, feet straight.

Horse/cattle jaw directly under left arm and rib cage, apparently part of fill of underlying feature cut by grave. Four iron hobnails by right tibia. Grave 22 later than Grave 23.

23 (FIG. 15; PL. I, B) 349°; N. Over 40 yrs.; ♂; 0.1 m. Supine, crushed, decapitated, skull placed on left side between lower legs facing the knees; shoulders, upper rib cage, vertebrae and upper arm bones decomposed, left lower arm by side, right arm with hand over inside of right thigh; left leg slightly flexed, right leg straight.

Three iron hobnails found by base of right tibia. Grave 23 cut the earlier Grave 22.

25 348°; N. Adult; ♀?; 0.15 m. Supine, skull tilted facing east and crushed, left arm by side and straight, right arm by side with hand over left pelvis, legs straight and parallel, feet destroyed by machine.

26 318°; N.W. Exposed and then destroyed by machine.

27 (FIG. 15) 355°; N. Over 25 yrs.; ♀; 0.7 m. from present field surface. Supine, head upright, left arm slightly flexed with hand over left pelvic bone, right arm partly missing, finger bones over right pelvis; spine, lower left rib cage and right arm disturbed by later Grave 11; legs straight and parallel. 17 iron hobnails plus fragments found by left tibia.

Two N.-S. infant burials 28 and 32 lay on the left side parallel to the adult skeleton. Grave edges unclear but infants probably belonged with this adult female burial.

28 (FIG. 15) 355°; N.-S. Infant associated with adult in 27.

30 (FIG. 15) 354°; N. Over 30 yrs.; ♂; 0.10 m. Supine, crushed, decapitated with skull placed beside the right leg; left hand over stomach, right arm slightly flexed with hand over the end of the femur; legs together.

32 (FIG. 15) 355°; N.-S. Infant burial, associated with adult in 27.

THE HUMAN REMAINS. By MARY HARMAN

The condition of the bones varied considerably: five skeletons in particular, 8, 14, 27 and the two infants 28 and 32, were in good condition and not too badly broken; others were well preserved but very fragmentary, and some, such as 13, 15 and 22, were in very poor condition.

The sex of adult individuals was determined from the relevant features of the skull and pelvic girdle and the general size and ruggedness of the bones; the age was assessed from the state of tooth eruption and degree of tooth wear, and the state of epiphyseal fusion, using the criteria given by Brothwell;¹⁸ the age of the infants 28 and 32 was based on the diaphyseal length using the chart prepared by Miss R. Powers.¹⁹ Where possible the height of adults was calculated from the length of long bones using the formulae of Trotter and Gleser.²⁰ The state of the dentition is given where possible.²¹

As the condition of the bones was so variable, very little could be said about some of the skeletons. A list is given below.

3 ? 20-25 years.

Present: Skull fragments, cervical vertebrae, part right shoulder and arm.

Np 8 7 6 5 4 3 - - - 3 4 5 6 7 8 Np

Np 8 7 6 5 4 3 / 1 1 / 3 4 5 6 7 8 Np

¹⁸ D. R. Brothwell, *Digging up Bones* (1965), 47-8, 60, 69.

¹⁹ Miss R. Powers, pers. comm.

²⁰ M. Trotter and G. C. Gleser, 'A Re-evaluation of the estimation of stature based on measurements of stature taken during life and long bones after death', *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 16 (1958), 79-123

²¹ Formula as recommended in D. R. Brothwell, *Digging up Bones* (1965), 44-8. See above, p. 34.

- 4 ♀? Over 40 years. 5 ft. 1 in. (155.3 cm.).

Present : Virtually complete except for vertebrae and ribs.

8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	/	/	/	-	4	-	-	7 8
c															c

- 5 ♂ 20-25 years. 5 ft. 8½ in. (174.6 cm.).

Present : Largely complete.

Comment : There are at least two wormian bones in the lambdoid suture.

-	-	-	-	-	-	/	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
-	-	-	-	/	4	3	/	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 8

- 7 ♀ Adult. 4 ft. 10½ in. (148.5 cm.).

Present : Skull fragments, parts ten vertebrae, rib fragments, parts left arm, pelvis, both legs.

Comment : The mid thoracic vertebrae show signs of osteo-arthritis.

1	2	3	4	-	-	-	-	-
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

- 8 ♂ Over 30 years. 5 ft. 5 in. (165.0 cm.).

Present : Virtually complete except for vertebrae and ribs.

8	7	/	5	/	/	/	/	/	-	/	/	/	/	x	7	/
														A	c	A

- 11 ♀ Over 40 years.

Present : Skull fragments, few vertebral fragments, parts pelvis and all limbs.

Comments : There is at least one inca bone. Some thoracic vertebrae show signs of osteo-arthritis.

-	-	-	x	x	3	2	/	1	2	/	x	x	-	-	-
8	-	-	5	4	3	2	1	/	2	3	4	/	x	x	-
							c					c			

- 12 ♂? Adult.

Present : Few skull fragments.

- 13 ? Over 40 years.

Present : Skull fragments, parts vertebrae and ribs, part left humerus.

Comment : The skull is metopic and there is at least one wormian bone present. Several cervical vertebral bodies show moderate signs of osteo-arthritis, and one unidentifiable bone fragment is severely affected, having a large area of eburnation. One rib fragment shows signs of a healed fracture.

x	x	x	x	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	/	x	6	7	8
												c			A

- 14 ? 16-20 years.

Present : Distal end of left leg, both feet.

- 15 ♂? Over 45 years.

Present : Skull fragments, few fragments of all limb bones.

x	7	x	x	x	x	/	/	x	-	-	-	x	x	x	x
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

- 19 ? Over 40 years.

Present : Skull fragments, few fragments of all limb bones.

Comment : The skull is metopic. The unerupted canine can be seen in the maxilla lying at an angle between the incisors and the nasal aperture.

U
1 - 3
x x / / / x - -

THE FINDS

STONE (FIG. 17)

1. Whetstone, rectangular cross-section; complete, approx. 80 mm. long. Well worn on all four sides. I am grateful to Mr. H. P. Powell of the University Museum, Oxford, for the following identification: a fine-grained calcareous sandstone with scraps of shell and moulds of shell-fragments, ? from mid Jurassic beds of Oxfordshire, *e.g.* Stonesfield Slate level (but not from Stonesfield itself), or from Taynton Stone, which has sandy developments at various places.

FLINT

Several small, plain flint flakes were found at all levels of the excavation. Flint does not occur locally.

TILE

Not illustrated are two pieces of unstratified red tile, representing a tegula and an unidentified flat piece.

Ditch F38 contained an imbrex tile and a thick (45 mm.) coarser red tile with a coarse, curved, combed decoration.

SLAG

Two small fragments of glassy slag were found on the surface after topsoil stripping.

IRON (FIG. 17)

2. A selection of hobnails from Graves 8, 14, 22 and 27.
3. From midden over buildings F35, 54 and 56.
4. Nail, end missing, provenance as above.

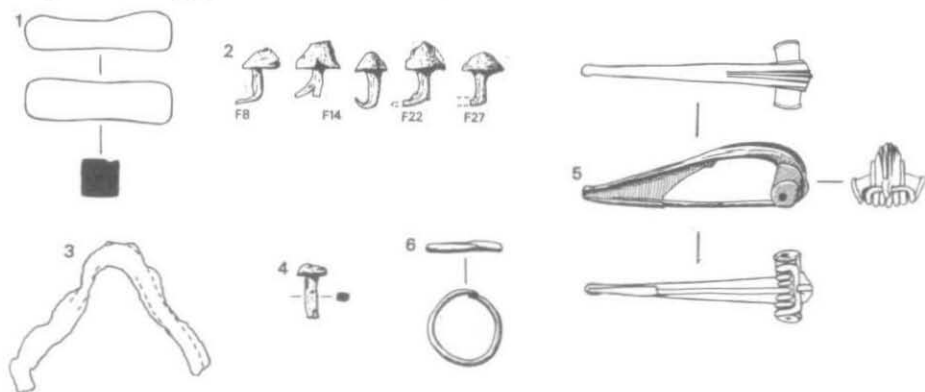


FIG. 17

Objects of Stone 1 ($\frac{1}{2}$), Iron 2 ($\frac{1}{2}$), 3 and 4 ($\frac{1}{2}$); Bronze 5 ($\frac{1}{2}$), 6 ($\frac{1}{2}$). From Curbridge 1975.

BRONZE OBJECTS (FIG. 17)

The Brooch. By D. F. MACKRETH

5. Colchester Derivative. Copper alloy. The spring is held in the Polden Hill manner: an axis bar passes through the coils and through pierced plates at the ends of the wings. The chord is held by a hook issuing from the rear of the head of the brooch. The wings are plain except that each has a moulding at the end. The junction of the bow with the wings is masked by a moulding. A ridge with two flutes runs over the head of the bow for a short distance. The rest of the bow is plain except for a bulbous foot-knob. From 3rd-4th century midden above buildings F35, 54 and 56.

This brooch belongs to a widespread type found along the Severn Valley and spreading into the Midlands. Very few have been found in datable contexts but it seems clear that the date range is from the later 1st century into the 2nd.

6. Plain bronze (finger?) ring, now with overlapping ends, 18 mm. av. outer diam. Found 0.40 m. below present topsoil surface, within apparently early plough soil.

COIN

From the topsoil came a Roman bronze coin of the usurper Magnentius (A.D. 351-3), bearing the chi-rho monogram.

Obverse : DN MAGNENTIVS PF AVG, *Reverse* : SALVS DD NN AVG ET CAES, Mint : Amiens AMB.²²

²² Kindly identified by the staff of the Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

GLASS

Not illustrated is a deep green, plain, spherical glass bead, 6 mm. diam., 5 mm. long, 2 mm. diam. axial hole for threading. From accumulated soil over F29.

WORKED BONE

Not illustrated are 3 slivers of bone, the largest 5 × 20 mm., with knife trimming marks. From fill of Grave 27.

THE ANIMAL BONES. By BOB WILSON

668 considerably fragmented bones and teeth and one oyster shell were examined from five early Romano-British features and a late Romano-British rubbish spread. The bones were well-preserved except for two more weathered fragments. Four fragments were burnt and four were dog-gnawed. 61% of the bones were recently broken. Only 20% of the sample was identified. 45% of these were cattle and horse bones and 44% of the unidentified fragments were likely to be from the same species.

TABLE 2
Fragment frequency at Curbridge

	Cattle	Sheep	Pig	Horse	Dog	Domestic Fowl	Oyster
Early Romano-British (F6, 31, 33, 37 & 38)	28	14	3	3	1	—	—
Late Romano-British (F29 and 35)	25	51*	5	4	—	1	1

* Includes 22 loose teeth

Total length measurements : Horse metatarsals 237, 240 mm. and cattle humerus 280 mm. est. (distal width, 78 mm.) from F29.

Fused epiphyses : 7 cattle, 6 sheep and 2 horse. A proximal femur epiphysis of sheep is unfused.

Butchery marks : one a trimmed cattle scapula spine (F31) and a posteriorly nicked proximal cattle metatarsal.

Pathology : A proximal horse metatarsal has up to 11 mm. of extra bone deposition on the medial side but the articulation surface shows no sign of fusion with the intertarsal bones.

THE POTTERY

For abbreviations, see Hardwick Finds section, p. 23.

The majority of the pottery from the Curbridge excavation came from the midden covering the buildings F35, 42, 54, 56 and the yard area around F39. Included in the pottery from the midden were the following Oxford kiln products,²³ none of which have been illustrated: standard late Oxford mortaria type A, common from A.D. 250 onwards (*Young 1972*, Fig. 6, 26); white colour-coated imitation parchment ware bowl (*cf. Young 1973*, Fig. 3, No. 21); white colour-coated, red mortaria; red colour-coated imitation samian bowl Drg. 31 and mortaria Drg. 45; red colour-coated beaker with white barbotine trailed decoration and dark brown colour-coated indented beaker. Products other than from the Oxford kilns included imitation black burnished ware jars (*cf. FIG. 6*, No. 10) and dog bowls in a similar fabric. The pottery indicated a late 3rd-4th-century date for the midden.

The yard area around F39 provided both 2nd-, 3rd- and 4th-century wares, the 2nd-century wares included jars similar to types from Hardwick (FIGS. 6, 7, Nos. 16, 17 and 41-3).

Ditch F38 provided a barbotine dot and white slip decorated greyware beaker; a fine small red beaker base edge; grey wares similar to Hardwick (FIG. 8, No. 45) and also grey wares with coarse vesiculated surfaces and styles similar to Hardwick (FIG. 7, Nos. 28 and 31).

Pit F31 included an imitation black burnished ware bead rim bowl in a late form (*Brodribb et al.*, IV, Fig. 32, Nos. 565-8) and a white colour-coated Oxford kiln product mortarium.

Although there were several Belgic fabrics from the excavation, none of the pottery need be pre-conquest or even 1st century in date, as at Hardwick.

Post-pit F6 contained several sherds of a coarse, hand-made pottery; F10, F31, F33 and F50 contained pottery which may be ascribed to the first half of the Roman period.

Unstratified pottery included several of the Oxford kiln products mentioned above, including a pot lid and a plain 4th- or late 3rd-century flagon rim (*Brodribb et al.*, II, Fig. 38, Nos. 345-7; IV, Fig. 34, Nos. 606-9), both in grey wares. Two fragmentary greyware tankards were recovered, both with concave styled bodies and with strap type handles. Tankards occur at Shakenoak (*Brodribb et al.*, I, Fig. 20, Nos. 84-5 for rim and body form) but they do not occur in East or Southern Oxfordshire, indicating the influence of the Severn Valley in western Oxfordshire.

In this catalogue the description gives first the texture and temper of the fabric, followed by its colour (E = outside surface; I = inside surface; Bk. = cross-section).

Samian Pottery. Identified by DAVID BROWN.

The majority of the samian was unstratified, and none is illustrated.

Unstratified: 2 base fragments form 31R

2 rim fragments form 31

1 fragment form 18/31

4 fragments from the same form 37 vessel, decorated, 2nd half of the 2nd century.

1 fragment of a form 37, decorated, Hadrianic.

3 fragments unidentified.

From the midden covering the building footings at the eastern end of the main excavated area:

2 fragments of form 18/31, Hadrianic-Antonine.

1 fragment probably form 38, 2nd half of 2nd century.

2 fragments unidentified.

The presence of post 250 A.D. Oxford kiln products in the midden suggests that the above five fragments were residual.

²³ I am grateful to Mr. C. J. Young for identifying the Oxford kiln products.

F3 : Base, form 30, a decorated form.

F40 : 1 fragment decorated with a wavy line, probably Hadrianic.

1 fragment unidentified.

Other Wares (FIG. 18)

1. Dish ; fine, sandy ; E, I red, Bk. grey. From ditch F38, 2nd century. Similar to several dishes from the 1st half of the 2nd century at Shakenoak (*Brodribb et al., I*).

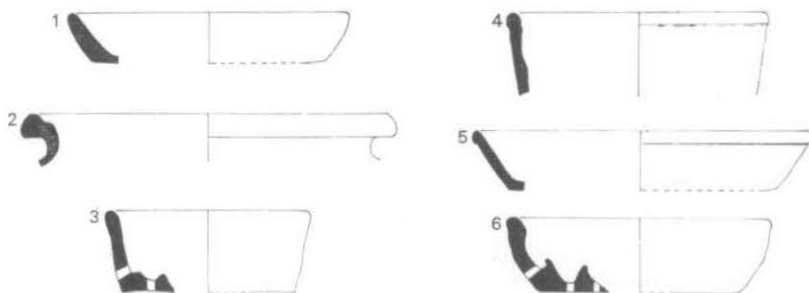


FIG. 18

The Pottery from Curbridge (4).

2. Jar rim ; E, I grey red, Bk. grey ; coarse grey grog gives 'digestive biscuit' surface finish similar hard fabric to No. 3 below and Hardwick FIG. 7, No. 32, where a similar ledge has been produced inside the rim for a lid.

3. Cheese dish, same as above. From yard area around F39.

4. Straight sided bowl ; hard sandy ; E, I grey, Bk. lighter grey. Copy of samian form Dr.33. Some exterior burnishing. From yard area around F29 and 35 (*cf. Harris and Young, Fig. 9, No. 41*). Probably an Oxford kiln product, 2nd century.

5. Bowl ; smooth, fine fabric ; E, I, Bk. grey ; copy of samian bowl form Drg.18. Probably an Oxford product. Unstratified.

6. Cheese press ; fine sandy, hard ; E, I grey, Bk. light grey. Unstratified.

CONCLUSIONS

At Curbridge the Witney bypass provided a section through a previously unknown Romano-British settlement, where, as at Hardwick, mechanical stripping had removed some of the archaeological stratigraphy. From the evidence in the limited area investigated, this Romano-British settlement appears to have begun during the 1st or early 2nd century A.D. The pottery included very few of the late Iron Age fabrics and forms found at Hardwick, and none of the Curbridge material need be pre-Roman in date. The area investigated appears to have been deserted during the 4th century, and part of the area was then employed as a cemetery, showing continued occupation nearby.

The northern and southern limits of the site remain unknown but the Colwell Brook clearly formed a boundary to the east, both an edge beyond which no further settlement features were discovered and also a geological boundary between the better draining Head and the Oxford Clay (FIG. 11). West of the Curbridge-Witney

road, the underlying Cornbrash limestone forms a very stoney topsoil, and here also, no further settlement features were recorded, although occasional features within the Cornbrash might easily have been missed.

Many of the pits, ditches and post-holes excavated proved almost sterile of datable material. Several deep features at the east end of the site were noted during later bulldozing operations, and of these only Ditch F38 had been recorded during the excavation. F38 appeared to contain only pre-250 A.D. material.

Two types of building foundation were recorded. F42 and F43 indicated sill beam structures with the beam laid directly on the subsoil. It was not possible to date F42, but F43 was sealed by the same black soil that sealed the rubble foundations F35, F54, F56 and the yard surface F29. F35, F50, F54 and F56 represented flimsy Cornbrash limestone rubble foundations for timber-framed buildings. The apparent absence of corner post-holes in F35, F54 and F56 indicates timber superstructures on the rubble walls (FIG. 13; PL. I, A). The partial clearing of a yard surface, F29, to the south of these buildings revealed shapes in the rough yard cobble suggesting either yard furniture or other, earlier building foundations. These buildings, after desertion, were gradually covered by a midden represented by black soil with much 4th-century material. Against the fine light coloured subsoil, stone spreads, invariably in black or dark soil, stood out fairly clearly within the width of the roadway (FIG. 11), indicating other, similar buildings, of which F50 was one such fragment cleared of rubble and soil overburden (FIG. 12).

Hut circles common in the later Iron Age and early Roman period could well have been present at Curbridge although they were not recognized. Their presence was suggested, however, by the curving boundary and enclosure ditches associated with that type of settlement building. Villages with rectangular houses are known in the south of England,²⁴ sometimes giving, as at Curbridge, remains similar to a deserted medieval village.

The cemetery at Curbridge contained 19 graves of which 18 were supine inhumations, and one, F6, lay on its side. The size and nucleus of this cemetery is unknown as burials appear to extend into the paddock to the north of the site. Many graves were badly damaged and any shallower burials, such as F3, would have been destroyed unnoticed. Of F3, only the torso remained beyond the edge of the stripped area. There was no evidence for coffins, although inhumation F6 appeared to have had its hands and feet either tied or tightly bound in a shroud before burial on its left side in a grave cut too narrow for the body to rest supine. Small residual sherds of Romano-British pottery came from several graves. In no instance was there any suggestion that they represented a vessel purposely broken for the occasion.

Three graves F19, F23 and F30 contained supine, beheaded inhumations with the heads laid near the feet (FIG. 15; PL. I, B). This practice is found during the late Roman, and more frequently in the Anglo-Saxon periods. Its purpose, and whether it was the direct cause of death or not, is unknown. The situation of the cemetery in a settlement area deserted in the 4th century and the absence of grave goods other than several sets of hobnails suggests a late Roman date for these burials. Such small

²⁴ P. J. Fowler and H. C. Bowen, 'Romano-British Rural Settlements in Dorset and Wiltshire', C.B.A. Research Report 7, ed. G. Thomas, *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain* (1966), 53.

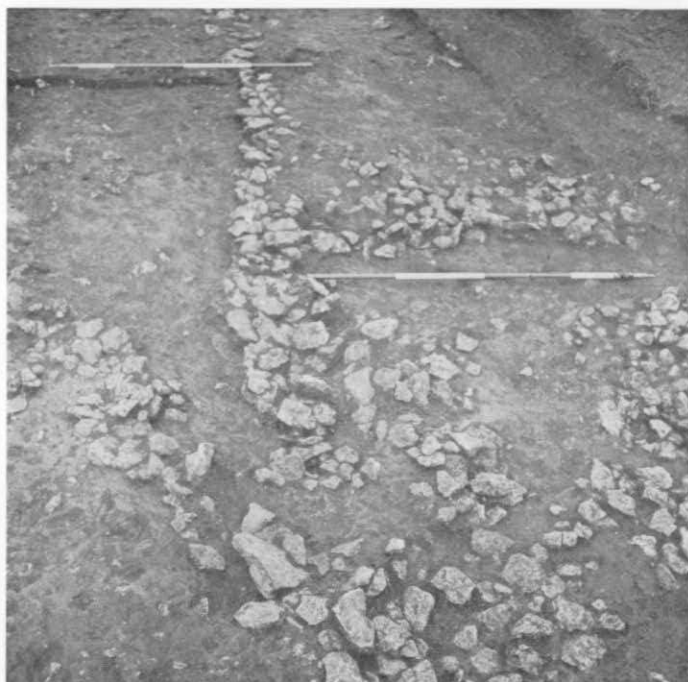
cemeteries are common on late Romano-British sites, a good published example being Lynch Farm, nr. Peterborough.²⁵

Two radio-carbon dates are to be obtained for the cemetery.²⁶

²⁵ R. Jones, 'The Romano-British Farmstead and its Cemetery at Lynch Farm, nr. Peterborough', *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, 10 (1975).

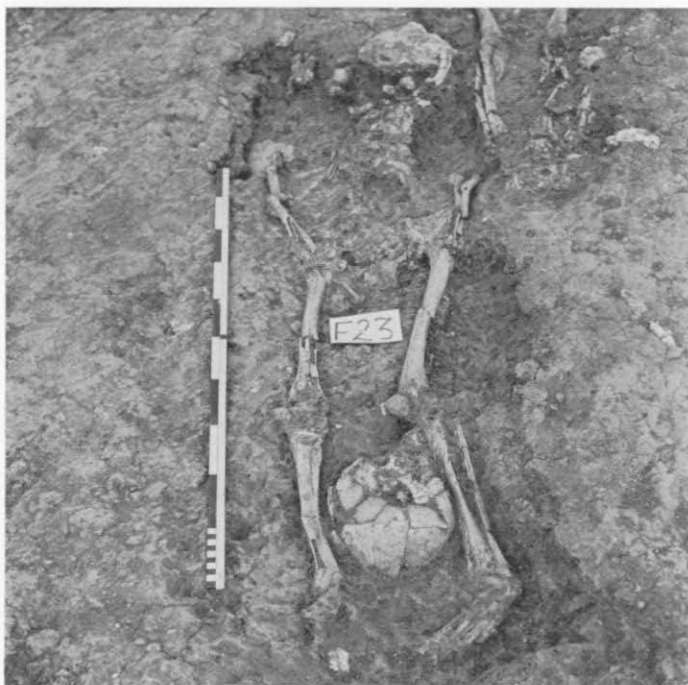
²⁶ These will be published in a later *Oxoniensia*.

PLATE I



A. Limestone rubble footings for three buildings F35, F54 and F56 within the Romano-British settlement at Curbridge, Oxon., 1975. North is to the right hand side of the picture.

Ph.: David Harrison



B. Grave F23 showing a decapitated adult male skeleton with its head placed between the lower legs. The lower legs from another grave, F22, are at the top right hand side of the photograph. North is to the top of the picture.

Ph.: R. A. Chambers