



Interior of Cist.



Cist with its surroundings.

TILE CIST AT NORTHUMBERLAND BOTTOM.

ON A TILE CIST DISCOVERED AT NORTHUMBERLAND BOTTOM, NORTHFLEET.

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DURING road widening operations on the Watling Street, an interesting cist was discovered 200 yards east of Northumberland Bottom, on the north side of the new road. The new road was cut through a drift-filled channel section, the sides of which were liable to slip in wet weather, and the site was therefore covered with a brick wall.

The cist was built of undressed flint nodules and massive tiles, cemented by a coarse mortar containing crushed particles of tile, which imparted the characteristic pink tint often seen in Roman mortar. In shape the cist was circular with an internal diameter of three feet six inches, and a height of one foot nine inches. The walls were about nine inches thick, and the roof, constructed of flanged tiles, sometimes three or four of them cemented together, was some seven inches thick. At one place the roof was composed of single tiles only, as if to form a lid, and it appears that this was the original opening to the cist, which was fastened, judging by the mortar round the tiles, after it had been filled. The most interesting feature was two irregular holes which had been pushed through the walls from outside.

A Roman date for the structure is most probable, considering the well known type of tile, the pink coloured mortar, and the position by the side of a Roman road. It was at first thought that the structure might have been a potter's oven, but the absence of a draught system, of a fire-proof clay lining, and of traces of fire, definitely disproved this. The probability of its being a tomb seems stronger. The small internal diameter prohibits an adult inhumation, even if the body were flexed, and indicates either a child's burial or a cremation. Although the floor was carefully sifted no

remains were found, and the cist therefore probably contained a cremation, for if a child had been buried there, some traces of its skeleton would be expected. It was empty when the workmen cut through it, the two holes in the walls suggesting that it had been robbed of its contents, a crime not uncommon when objects of value were placed in a tomb. The holes were made from outside, as the debris fell inside the cist, and it is curious that they should be just large enough to allow the passage of an arm. If the cist contained a cremation, it could scarcely have been built later than the middle of the third century A.D., but in the absence of datable material, any estimate of its period must be made with reserve.

References to Tile-Tombs—tombs where the burial group is surrounded and covered with tiles—in North Kent are not infrequent, but there is no record of a tile-cist.¹

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¹ At Milton, see *Collectanea Cantiana*, p. 32. At Allington, see *Journ. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, Vol. IV., p. 65, and remains from one at Murston in Rochester Museum.