

ROMAN CEMETERIES IN CANTERBURY, WITH SOME
CONJECTURES CONCERNING ITS EARLIEST IN-
HABITANTS.

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RAILWAY-CUTTINGS, drainage-works, and some partial excavations, have within the last few years laid open the sites of three Roman places of interment at Canterbury.

In two of these, the practice of cremation had prevailed; in the third, the funeral rites had been those of inhumation.

Of the localities in question, the first was at St. Dunstan's. It bordered the London Road, and extended southwards more or less towards the railway-cutting that passes through Orchard Place. The second appears to have been situated beneath the site of an ancient Christian burial-ground connected with, or closely adjoining, the house of the Nuns of the Holy Sepulchre. It abutted the Old Dover Road, the Saxon Watling Street, and no doubt also an ancient Roman way. The third cemetery was in a gravel-bed, near the newly-erected station of the "London, Chatham, and Dover Railway," and it extended towards the road leading from the Old Castle through Wincheap to Ashford.

The two first localities were situated respectively without the city walls, doubtless on ancient Roman roads; whilst the third probably connected the Roman camps towards Ashford and at Durolenum, with the station at Canterbury.

Besides these places of interment, Roman mortuary remains have been found, and are still frequently dug up in isolated spots; not only in the suburbs, but in the heart of the city itself.

In Wincheap Street, in the cellars of a house in St. Dunstan's, in St. Margaret Street near the church, Roman antiquities have been found. In the last locality with the ashes were discovered several pins of bone or ivory, and a large-eyed needle or bodkin, of the same material.

In the Castle, as recently as July last, about a foot below the present surface, which seems at some time to have been lowered, there was found about fourteen feet within the southern wall, a Roman urn, containing besides bones, several pieces of a white concrete mass.

Near this spot were the bones of animals, such as sheep and swine, and some fish bones, lying around the urn. Beneath the site of the present gasometer in Castle Street, a few years since, were dug out, at a considerable depth, several mortuary urns.

The cemetery at St. Sepulchre, discovered during the present year (1861) in making excavations for the cellars of some houses about to be erected, has proved rich in antiquities.

In this place had evidently been two distinct graveyards; one, about four feet below the present surface, was probably a general burial-ground attached to the nunnery, for the bodies were far too numerous for us to suppose the interments had been restricted to the former inmates of the Order; the other cemetery was a Roman one, found at a distance of five or six feet beneath the surface. Herein, the practice of urn burial had prevailed.

The dead in the upper layer were so closely packed, that there was something ghastly in the process which laid open their remains. Rows of skulls with skeletons

lying almost shoulder to shoulder, presented themselves to view. In these upper graves, there was vestige neither of coffin nor of shroud.

Had the wood decayed, or had the dead been interred uncoffined? a practice much more common, I believe, a few centuries since, than is generally supposed, and which it appears prevailed in a great degree in the present case; as among the Roman remains below, vestiges of wood were found, and portions of chests or boxes which had contained some of the most delicate of the urns and fictile vessels. Sometimes the interments had intermingled; broken pieces of pottery occurring among the Christian graves, marking where the earlier deposits had been disturbed by the sexton's spade. The most interesting relic perhaps of the whole collection, was a little vessel of bright polished red ware; in form rare, if not unique, deposited perhaps to accompany some child, to whom when living it was the means of administering nutriment; its height was four and a half inches. This relic was discovered about eighteen inches below the surface, as if thrown up in digging the later grave; it had, fortunately for the antiquaries of the present age, escaped detection; it is figured in the Plate, No. 15. The handle is at quarter distance from the spout, the bore of which is so small, that the orifice would not admit more than an ordinary-sized knitting-needle.

At the early part of 1861, many Roman vessels had been found in another part of this ground, in a portion purchased by Miss Wilks for the erection of a house. Some of these were presented by that lady to the Museum at Canterbury. Two of them are given in the Plate, Nos. 10 and 11.

In the April of the same year, a general excavation was prosecuted under the auspices of our Society. A trench being dug about seven or seven and a half feet

deep, parallel to the high-road, the workmen came upon a portion of ground undisturbed by later graves; and one of the first discoveries was an interment, the detailed description of which, as it affords an example in some degree of others, may not prove uninteresting.

Drawing an imaginary line parallel to the road, there was found, placed on the further side of it, the small black vase (fig. 7). As it was too small to have contained the bone ashes, it was probably intended for food, or articles of that sort. In another grave, was a still smaller vessel (fig. 12), partly filled with a red pigment, nearly answering by chemical analysis to rouge; doubtless a *lady's* grave. Close to the black vase, described as above, were two patera; one of the red Samian ware, with the potter's mark "RHOGENI," being about seven inches in diameter, and another placed within it, of black ware, about one inch less in width; each were one and three-quarters of an inch deep. Beyond these, distant a few inches only, stood the mortuary urn (fig. 8), containing human bones, exhibiting the action of fire with burnt bones lying around it. This vessel was ten inches high, and twenty-four inches in circumference.

On the other side of the imaginary line was the narrow-necked vessel (fig. 13). It was of a very common form, composed of a light yellow clay, and intended doubtless to hold liquor.

Between this and the relics previously enumerated, were several pieces of iron, much corroded. They appeared to be the clams of a box or chest, for portions of decayed wood adhered to them, and they exhibited on their surfaces the heads of bronze studs, some of which were from an inch to an inch and a half in diameter.

In this chest probably, the whole or greater portion of the deposits had been placed. Several other urns were found protected in a similar manner. One vessel

of black clay, of extremely fragile texture, scarcely thicker than stiff cardboard, and of a curious barrel-shape (see fig. 14), was discovered by the earth slipping away from it, leaving it exposed in a kind of bank. A number of nails were found in immediate contact with this vase, as if they had fallen around it when detached from the woodwork in which it had been enclosed. Nails were also found in the urns amongst the bones; and here we might hazard a conjecture that as the remains of an ustrinum were undoubtedly discovered at the north-west corner of the cemetery close to the road, the body had been placed upon a wooden bier or litter, or some sort of framework nailed together, and the whole being consumed, some of the nails had been raked up with the bone-ashes, and deposited with them in the urns. These nails were not more than an inch and a half long; others were found in the ground, evidently coffin nails, of much larger dimensions. The ustrinum to which I have alluded consisted of a right-angled wall of clay, (at least this was all that remained,) about twelve inches thick, which had been thoroughly charred or burnt through. Within it, was a sort of floor composed of burnt ashes.

The dimensions of the urns containing the burnt bones found in the cemetery, were generally from twenty-four to twenty-eight inches in circumference, and from nine to twelve inches high. Some indeed, discovered before the excavations for the Society commenced, were of much larger dimensions, and in substance an inch thick. A few large amphoræ were found, which had probably been used for mortuary purposes.

The two vases numbered 10 and 11, the first exhibiting a somewhat uncommon shape, and the second being marked with transverse white lines laid on in a thick pigment which was as bright and as clear apparently as when first executed, were amongst the

specimens found in Miss Wilks's portion of the ground, and by her presented to the Canterbury Museum. Of glass deposited in the cemetery, the only specimens brought to light were the neck of a small lacrymatory, and the large square glass bottle (fig. 1) given with its ornamental neck handle. Its height is eleven inches, width three inches; it was found in juxtaposition with a mortuary urn, a small vase, and a patera of red clay. A bronze *stylus inscriptorius*, four and three-quarters inches long, and bronze tweezers, in length two inches, (Nos. 2 and 6,) were taken from the soil, belonging evidently to deposits which had been previously disturbed.

In some of the urns at St. Sepulchre, the burnt bones were clean and dry, and the material of the urn fine, with an appearance of art in its design; in others, however, the bones were mixed and sodden with wet clay, as if the remains had been gathered up with little care or respect. The vessels exhibiting the coarsest materials, may have afforded examples of "parish coffins" in the Roman times, funerals perhaps of the very poor, or at which no friends were nigh, and only indifferent officials at hand, to pay the last duties to the deceased.

In others, however, the affection of a friend or relative might have added to the grave, some relic of the departed one; the style with which he had written; the ring he had worn or used as a signet; a buckle, brooch, or the little pair of scales, with which he had weighed his money; nay, a solitary coin itself, cast into his grave, to propitiate the gods of the unknown land to which he had departed.

Thus, we occasionally find among the deposits in Roman cemeteries, though rarely any relic of intrinsic value is discovered, a considerable variety of articles. Lacrymatories in some places abound; little black vases are also common, designed perhaps to hold unguents or

incense: see fig. 3. Pateræ, red and black, glass vessels, and beads, bronze armillæ, pins, tweezers, bone instruments, rings, fibulæ, but rarely weapons.

Sometimes the burnt remains are deposited in quadrilateral glass vessels, as seen by the specimens in the Society's Museum at Maidstone; at other times a little urn within a wine amphora, as found not long since at Ash, near Sandwich, contained all that remained of the deceased.

The shaft at Bekesbourne, composed of heavy timber, a sort of coffin on a colossal scale, was another instance; whilst sarcophagi of wood, brick, tiles, or stone, afford examples. As the Roman soldiers in this country were conscripts from various continental tribes and nations, some traces of the usages of their own country might linger in their interments, at least among the higher grades of the legions. Amongst relics apparently Roman, found at Bigberry Hill, near Hartledown, in 1861, in the possession of the writer, were a share, coulter, and cattle goad; likewise, the iron tire of plough or chariot wheels, and an horse bit, and what appeared to be iron links or traces. In another Roman grave, as I have been informed, iron fire-dogs were deposited.

At the St. Dunstan's Cemetery, Canterbury, a few years since, a little figure of white clay bearing two children in its arms was discovered, in a mortuary urn. It is placed in the Canterbury Museum. The remains of a manufactory of similar statuettes, emblematical of fecundity or maternity, have lately been found in the South of France.

I have recorded two separate layers of interments at St. Sepulchre's, one above the other: there were even traces of a still older one; at all events there were some solitary graves, with remains of unburnt human bones found beneath the Roman deposit. These might have been of British or even Roman origin, for in another

direction, about a quarter of a mile distant, a Roman grave-yard was found, where the practice of interment by inhumation prevailed. This is the third cemetery; it was discovered about the commencement of 1861, when, in digging for gravel in a field called the Wall Field, south-west of the new railway station near the Dane John, several skeletons were exhumed.

With them were found a quantity of large nails about seven inches long, the greater portion of which were hollow from the head to the point, without however any outward orifices. Probably this condition was occasioned by the chemical action of the soil, which was a red gravel; concentric rings of iron from one to two inches distant from the nails themselves, were found in the concrete mass adhering to them.

The skeletons were placed mostly with the feet to the east. With two of them only were found relics; these consisted of bronze armillæ of decidedly Roman character, coloured glass beads, green and purple, cut into facets; circular pieces of bone, as of broken segments or ribs of a purse or bag; a pin of ivory, with head of green opal, the colour doubtless derived from juxtaposition to the bronze ornaments; also an iron hook. The head of the ivory pin exhibited marks of the turners' tool. One of the skeletons lay, however, with the feet to the west.

On the spot where a new railway inn has been erected, in making the necessary excavations in August last, about six feet below the surface, in a deposit of black earth, deposited in a deep trench which had been cut into the clay with perfectly vertical sides, there were found several mortuary urns, a black patera, and the urn in the Plate (fig. 5), evidently of the pattern of those manufactured by the Romans at Castor, in Northamptonshire; a coin of Constantine was also taken from this spot. From the Martyrs' Field during the railway ex-

cavations, were brought me a bronze celt and an oval brooch, with gold or gilded ornamented work around the centre, which was composed of a single stone,—a large rough black amethyst.

This specimen is considered rare; only two others similar to it having been discovered: it is attributed to the late Roman or early Anglo-Saxon period, and is engraved in a recent number of the *Journal of the Archaeological Association*.

Some extensive drainage works at Canterbury, commenced in October, 1860, which extended from the King's Bridge through the centre of the city in an easterly direction, onwards towards the railway cutting in the New Dover Road, laid open many remains of Roman Canterbury.

The work commenced at a depth of about eight feet, and lowered to twenty feet, to accommodate the level to the gradual rise in the ground. The workmen cut through the old roadways and thoroughfares, early English, Anglo-Saxon, and Roman; the average depth of the cutting through the city was ten feet.

The Roman ways lay about eight or nine feet below the surface of the present streets. The excavations at one spot in St. George's, showed that a morass or an ancient watercourse, long since filled in, had intersected the city, even in Roman times. It commenced near the site of Messrs. Drury's premises, and extended in width up the street about one hundred and forty feet.

Roman pavements of concrete, and the evidences of Roman buildings, flue tiles, drainage tiles, tessellæ, and a vast quantity of pottery in a broken state, were found on either side of this morass, but none within it.

Roman cornices, and the columns of some building, perhaps a forum, were discovered opposite the "Medical Hall," exhibiting an ornamentation of a cable pattern.

A curious sarcophagus composed of uncemented bricks

and tiles, containing human bones, had been constructed at no great distance eastward from the same spot; it was destroyed by the workmen, who had mined through it. A broken patera, potter's mark, "CLEMENS," drainage tiles, and a regular pavement of cement followed in succession, a fine Samian bowl in a mutilated state was also exhumed. Approaching St. George's parish-bounds west, at a depth of from nine to ten feet, the workmen encountered a Roman wall, or rather a series of walls, which had crossed the main street at right angles, portions of some ancient building destroyed perhaps even in Roman times. There were several of these brick and stone partitions, and they extended over a width of one hundred and eighty feet directly across the street.

At the Roman level, opposite the "Canterbury Bank," a large quantity of charred wheat was discovered, in a layer of from six to eight inches. The grain appeared to have been of excellent quality; how far the deposit extended beneath the pavement could not be ascertained, and it would be useless to conjecture under what circumstances it had been burnt.

Although the breadth of the drainage cuttings did not exceed four feet, a considerable quantity of broken pottery was taken from the soil; in fact, every foot of ground from the King's Bridge to the site of the ancient gateway of St. George, with the exception previously stated, was replete with Roman remains.

Flue tiles, about eighteen inches long, some of them scored over with patterns, and with side holes complete, and some *in situ*, were frequently exhumed.

At St. George's Gate, the discovery of Roman antiquities suddenly ceased, indicating perhaps that this boundary of the Saxon and Mediæval city, was its boundary also in Roman times. A few yards westward of this spot, within the city, at a depth of eight feet, where the soil appeared alluvial, a Roman mortuary urn filled with

burnt bones was dug up, and at no great distance from it, but at a higher level, was found a highly ornamented cross or fibula.

The soil below, subjected probably to the drainage of the Roman town, contained some animal remains. Amongst these might be noted the skulls of the *Bos longifrons*, known to have been domesticated by the Romans, and the skulls and tusks of a very small species of boar.

Canterbury must certainly have been of importance as a station in Roman times; and if we are to take into consideration two of the cemeteries described, the one at St. Dunstan's, and the other at St. Sepulchre's, as indicating the limits of the town, it was also of considerable extent.

Even whilst revising this paper, the finding of mortuary urns with other fictile vessels is announced, just within the wall of the cavalry barracks, parallel to the high-road to Ramsgate, proving perhaps, for the Romans loved such localities for their interments, that this way was another main road or "*iter*" from the city to some other station, Reculver, or perhaps Richborough.

The presence of Roman bricks and tiles in considerable quantities, especially in the old ecclesiastical buildings, such as in the church of St. Martin; in the ruins of the houses of St. Gregory, St. John, St. James, in the ancient St. Augustine's, in the city walls and the foundations of the Castle and other remains, attest the existence of numerous buildings upon the sites of which some of those just enumerated were probably erected. Beyond this indirect evidence we have other of more certain character.

Somner has particularized many Roman antiquities found previous to his time, mentioning amongst other instances, a Roman pavement discovered in digging a cellar in St. Margaret's parish; he notices also some

curious pits, once situated in the ancient market-place, which he supposes were the remains of Roman cisterns; a Roman pavement of mosaic work, discovered in St. Martin's parish, and in the parish of St. Alphage, an old foundation of Roman bricks strongly cemented, about four feet four inches wide, and four feet deep.

Hasted alludes to the "Druids' beads," celts, and Roman remains, consisting of tessellated pavements, found in various parts of the city. He relates that a fine Roman vase of red earth and elegant shape, and engraved with a pattern, and the words, "Taraget de Teve," was discovered near the city; the inscription doubtless is incorrectly given. He notices also, "a strong and well couched piece of Roman brickwork," once existing below the floor of a house in Castle Street. This neighbourhood has produced many Roman remains.

In Jury Lane, in digging a cellar, not more than three or four feet below the level of the street, "a fair mosaic pavement was found of a carpet fashion, the tessellæ being of burnt earth, red, yellow, black and white," varying in shape and size; some being nearly an inch over, others very small; the whole deposited in a bed of mortar of such hardness, that it might easily have been preserved entire.

None of these relics however seem to have been saved, and only within the last twenty-five years has any care been bestowed upon the collection and preservation of similar remains.

It is a prevalent opinion amongst antiquaries, that owing to the few Roman remains, architectural and monumental, discovered at Canterbury, it must have occupied a very inferior position amongst other Roman settlements, and that the fame the city acquired arose under the domination of other rulers, in Anglo-Saxon and Norman times. This notion cannot altogether be confuted; nevertheless a few remarks may be ventured upon the subject.

Located in a marshy district, amongst the branches of the river Stour, the earliest dwellings were probably lacustrine. Through series of years, the soil consolidated; artificial means narrowed and even closed up some of the streams of the river, for even in the Norman period there were fourteen water-mills existing between Fordwich and Chilham. Natural effects, such as the bringing down by winter torrents, of vast quantities of soil into the marshes contiguous to Canterbury, gradually raised the land through which the river flows.

The whole district from Chatham to Sandwich, has now become firm pasture land; although even within the last twenty years, the marshes a few miles below Canterbury, were subjected to floods, which covered them for many weeks in the autumnal and winter seasons.

The remains, if any, of a station thus circumstanced, when its embankments were neglected, by the withdrawal of a comparatively civilized population, were not likely to be of much durability, especially as Kent and its capital, at a very early period after the departure of the Romans, were subjected to the devastations of rival races.

It seems then not improbable, that the earliest habitations at Canterbury were built upon, or between the islands on the river.

The subsoil of Canterbury is partly an alluvial deposit and partly bog, such as frequently composes the estuaries of rivers. In digging a new foundation for the Arundel Tower of the Cathedral, some few years since, the bones of a man in an upright position and of two oxen, were exhumed, many feet below the surface; some ancient drover perchance, who had perished with his cattle in the bog.

The subject of lake dwellings, even if inapplicable to the ancient inhabitants of Canterbury, is one of considerable interest, as it seems extraordinary that primi-

tive races when they had the world before them in their wanderings, should have erected in beaver fashion, with considerable labour, their dwellings in the water.

Two reasons however may be assigned for this proceeding: greater security from sudden surprise by enemies; and greater facilities for obtaining food by fishing.

One of the earliest accounts of this practice is given by Herodotus, who tells us (book v. 16), that "the Pæonians, a Thracian tribe, constructed their dwellings in a small mountain lake of Pæonia, upon planks fitted upon lofty piles placed in the middle of the lake, with a narrow entrance to the main land by a single bridge."

The islets in the Irish Lakes, called *crannoges*, as described by Mr. Wylie, 'Archæologia,' No. 38, exhibit another example of these amphibious dwellings. These islands are sometimes wholly artificial, formed by placing oak posts at the bottom of the water, into which horizontal beams are morticed, and the timbered compartments filled with earth. In other crannoges, a stone wall raised on oaken piles, surrounded the islands. Some of these buildings yielded antiquities belonging to the iron age, others however proved the very early date of their existence by the discovery in and near them of stone implements, and other remains of the earliest recorded periods. Some of the antiquities in the Swiss Lakes, where similar habitations have been found, are described as Celtic. In the neighbourhood of Canterbury have been found similar remains, bronze weapons, weapons of stone, and very recently, two very fine armlets (twisted) of pure gold.

We have historical evidence that the river Stour, instead of flowing through Canterbury as at this day in two streams, had several minor branches or channels in Anglo-Saxon, and even Norman times.

We have on record the existence of several islands no longer to be distinguished, such as the island on which

part of the possessions of the Black Friars stood, approaching the Abbot's Mill; the island of "With," purchased for the Grey Friars by one of the bailiffs of the city, John Diggs, A.D. 1273.

Somner is strongly of opinion, that Canterbury was founded upon an estuary of the sea; he offers various reasons for this supposition more or less cogent. One is, that the river Stour was more anciently written "Æstur," as if from the Latin *æsturium*. In Domesday and other records, the village of Stury near Canterbury, is called Esturia and Estursete, derivations from the same source.

The discovery of the bones of extinct animals in the valley at Chartham, supposed by Somner to be those of the hippopotamus, but more likely to be remains of the *Elephas primigenius*, or the mammoth, is amongst his less conclusive proofs, inasmuch as these bones belonged to a far more remote period than the one with which we are dealing.

There is a passage however, in his 'Chartham News,' so applicable to this subject, that we extract it. "The most part of the city," says Somner, "not excepting the very heart and centre of it is made and raised ground, the tokens of foundations upon foundations to a very considerable depth daily appearing, and the ground as at Amsterdam, Venice, and elsewhere, for supporting superstructures in several places, often stuck and stuffed with piles of wood, or long poles, and stakes forced into the ground, as wells and cellar diggers have informed me."

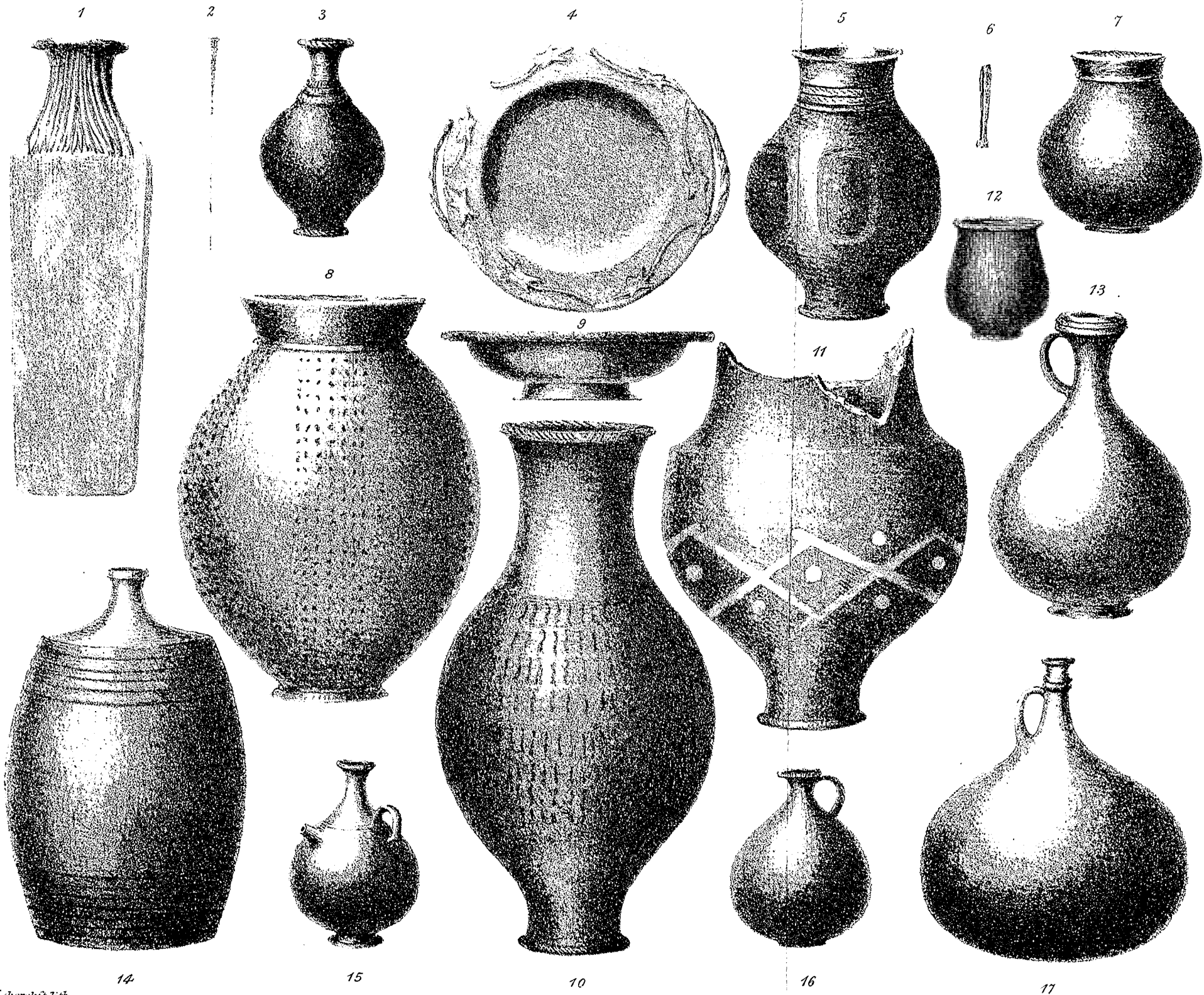
He gives some instances which Battely confirms by other examples, of stonework and timber being found from five to fifteen feet below the surface of the soil in various parts of the city. These facts prove that the surface of the soil since Canterbury was first inhabited, has very considerably risen. The finding of an anchor, (if authentic,) dug up at Broomsdown, as related by the same authority, in the level above Canterbury in the dry

soil, confirms the notion of an estuary, or wide extent of water navigable for vessels existing in former times, in and about the city, and extending to the sea.

In confirmation of his views however, that a branch of the river, of whose existence we have no historical account, once flowed through the centre of the city, by the Old Market at the Bull's Stake, now the Butter Market, he relates that, previous to his time, "various pits and tanners' utensils had been found in digging for cellars there."

As a summary of the whole; when we take into consideration the existence of ancient pilings and timber work, the many channels of the river which intersected the city and its suburbs, the islands formed by these streams, and their periodical flooding with other parts of the locality itself by the winter inundations, together with our knowledge that the Stour was navigable to Canterbury four hundred years since for vessels of ten to fourteen tons burden, we are led to conclude that the ancient settlement (and it has existed from time immemorial), must have been uninhabitable at certain seasons if its occupants had not made use of similar resources to those employed by the dwellers in the lacustrine districts above alluded to.

However, to draw any decided conclusion on this subject without further data, would be to pass those limits of proof and record, a reliance on which is the especial pride of the antiquary, and to enter within the hazardous and uncertain regions of speculation.



H. P. Owen del. Lith.

ANTIQUITIES FROM THE ROMAN CEMETERY ST SEPULCHRE, CANTERBURY.