

THE WHITEHEATH EXCAVATIONS

THE BEALE POSTE MSS. II

A. INTRODUCTORY NOTE

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IN *Arch. Cant.*, LXII, pp. 130-39, Mr. John H. Evans, F.S.A., reported details of some of the Beale Poste manuscripts in Maidstone Museum and gave a short biography of their author. Further search has revealed other items of interest. Probably the best of these is Beale Poste's account of his excavations at Whiteheath, Hollingbourne, which is quoted in full in section B below.

This document is in the form of an excavation diary. It would seem that Beale Poste forgot or did not bother to complete it for publication. He was content to allow the results of his efforts to be condensed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*¹ of 1842, in a brief note which named the finds as Roman. However he probably told of his discoveries to fellow members of the British Archæological Association for in the Proceedings² of that Society, under the date 28th July, 1847, it is reported that "Mr. Alfred Pryer exhibited coloured drawings of sixty-five beads, discovered at Whiteheath, Hollingbourne, Kent, in excavating a spot where, a short time since, some Saxon weapons and skeletons were exhumed. The beads themselves have since been submitted to the Council by Mr. Pryer. They are in coloured glass and clay, of various forms and sizes, such as have been so frequently found, especially in this country, in Saxon burial-places." Again, on 13th October, 1847,³ Mr. Pryer exhibited material from Hollingbourne—"a large quantity of glass and clay beads, of various forms and colours, including several in amber, found in Anglo-Saxon graves."

With these meagre accounts modern historians of the Anglo-Saxon settlements have had to be content and they cannot be blamed for any hesitation in choosing between inhumation and cremation for the Whiteheath burials, especially as Pryer confused the issue by mentioning skeletons⁴ and as students of distribution might rather expect

¹ Part II (1842), pp. 526-7. "Some Roman sepulchral urns have been found in a field opposite the Union House at Hollingbourne."

² *Journal British Archæological Association*, III (1848), p. 248.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 323. The text says "glass and clay heads", which is obviously a misprint.

⁴ See above.

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Jutish remains on the east side of the River Medway. It is greatly to the credit of Professor Baldwin Brown¹ and Mr. E. T. Leeds² that they have seen through the confusion.

On the 4th May, 1814, the Royal Assent was given to an Act "For repairing the Road from Barrow Hill in Ashford to a Place called New England in the Parish of Hollingbourne, and for making a new Road thence to East Lane³ in the Town of Maidstone." This Act superseded one⁴ "for amending, widening, shortening, improving and keeping in Repair, the Road from Wrens Cross, in the Town of Maidstone, in the County of Kent, through the West or Lower Harrietsham-street, by Harrietsham Church." The latter road passed through Mote Park and by Maginford and Milgate. It would have met the modern Maidstone-Ashford Road a little way west of the place still marked on the Ordnance 6-in. Map (XLIII N.W.) as "New England". The road approved by the Act of 1814 was virtually the modern Maidstone-Ashford Road and its proposed course was surveyed by a Mr. Dunning who sent a copy of his survey map to James Whatman, one of the Trustees of the Road. This copy is now in Maidstone Museum⁵ and James Whatman has written on it "The present Maidstone-Ashford T(urnpike) Road was made I believe about 1819-4? J.W. 1844." On Dunning's map an entirely-new section of road for construction is shown joining up Chrismill to Magpie Bank. On the north side of this proposed piece of road Hollingbourne Union Poor House was erected in 1836.⁶ Six years later, on 26th July, 1842, Beale Poste drew in his excavation diary a sketch map of the surroundings of the Union Poor House and showed the "New Turnpike Road" passing through the middle of his tumulus B2 and the superseded road to Milgate lying just to the south of tumulus B1. It may be presumed that finds produced whilst road work was in progress had led Beale Poste to investigate this district.

The editing of Beale Poste's manuscript has not been entirely straightforward. He left several gaps in his account, mostly where pottery dimensions were concerned. Luckily Edward Pretty, F.S.A.,⁷

¹ *The Arts in Early England*, IV, p. 741. "Two localities up the Medway, Maidstone and Hollingbourne by the Len, yielded Anglo-Saxon objects, and in each case there was a contiguous deposit of urns that have been called 'cinerary'. There is no proof that they actually contained ashes, so the case cannot be considered one of Jutish cremation."

² E. Thurlow Leeds, *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, pp. 115-6.

³ Now King Street.

⁴ 33 George III c. 173.

⁵ Accession number 31.1951.

⁶ *Topography of Maidstone and its Environs*, 1839, pp. 77-8.

⁷ His drawings are in Maidstone Museum, Pretty MSS. Vol. I, f. 45, 91a. He was a friend of Beale Poste and first Curator of Maidstone Museum. Roach Smith has given accounts of him in *Collectanea Antiqua*, VI, pp. 311-14 and *Retrospections Social and Archaeological*, I, pp. 146-7.

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drew four of the pots¹ and gave dimensions. These dimensions have been checked on Beale Poste's own drawings which have no scale attached.

I have touched Beale Poste's text as little as possible, merely adding punctuation and some missing words, which are put in italics to distinguish them. The footnotes to the text are mine.

In the text Beale Poste has mentioned finds of spear heads and other objects of iron. He made drawings of these but omitted any kind of reference, so as they are of no merit I have not included them in my Plate of excavated objects. In the Plate I have dealt faithfully with Beale Poste's sketches but with numbers 1 to 4 I have preferred using Pretty's material as a basis.

On Ordnance Survey 6-in. map Kent XLIII N.W. tumulus B2 straddles the modern Maidstone-Ashford Road just north-west of the main or south entrance gate to Hollingbourne Union Workhouse. The centre of tumulus B1 is approximately 200 ft. west of bench mark 166.5 and almost the same distance due south of the same main entrance.

According to Beale Poste's sketch map of the site both mounds are round barrows. The finds show that they are of Late Bronze Age date with secondary Saxon interments. The sketch map marks B1 and B2 as a "Twin Barrow" and shows B1 as "where the Urns &c were found". As B2 was probably spoiled by the road making it may be assumed that all the finds described by Beale Poste came from B1. This conclusion is strengthened by Beale Poste's sketch of a section through a whole tumulus.² This is shown as 5 ft. in height in the middle and has the following caption :

- A. Sand evidently thrown up to cover the original hill, 2 ft. thick.
- B. Burnt sand from 1 to 2 ft. thick, some places not more than 6 inches. In it are found portions of bones and the Boss of a shield. The urns are just under that line.
- C. White sand and appears never to have been disturbed.

B. MEMORANDA RELATING TO OPENING THE BARROW ON WHITEHEATH 26TH JULY 1842

BY THE REVEREND BEALE POSTE

The occupier, Mr. Coveney, having sent some men to remove the sand from this spot, I paid attention to the progress of their work, and was so fortunate as to obtain 3 Urns and a drinking cup.

¹ I have been unable to trace the present whereabouts of any of Beale Poste's Whiteheath finds.

² The Pretty MSS., Vol. I, f. 45, 91b, contain a map which shows items 1 to 4 as coming from B1. Pretty also shows an area just south of B1 as the "site of the funeral pile".

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No. 1¹ is much broken so that I cannot give its dimensions but suppose it to have been about 7 Inches in height and 6½ Inches wide . . .

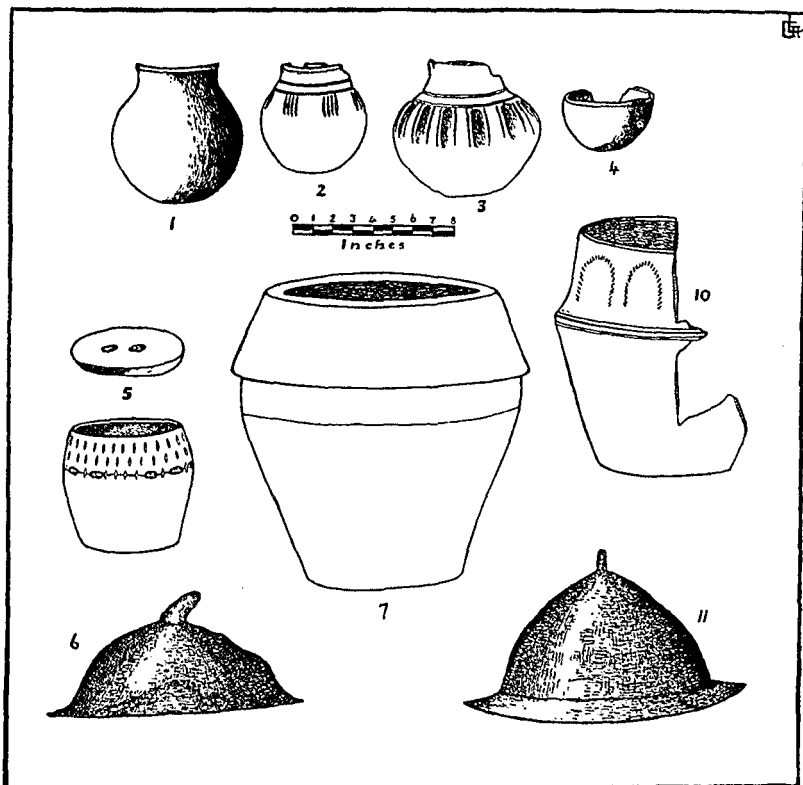


FIG. 1. Finds from Beale Poste's Whiteheath Excavation (Nos. 1-4 to scale. Nos. 5-11 not to scale).

of a dark color, approaching to a rusty black and contained bones evidently human. It was very rudely formed and devoid of ornament.²

No. 2 is like the former but less, about 5½ Inches in height and 5½

¹ I have retained Beale Poste's numbering for the drawings. Numbers 8 and 9 are omitted in the plate.


² A similar pot, typically Saxon, is in the Maidstone Museum Collection and was found at Chalk Hill, east of the Football Ground, Northfleet, in September, 1890. For comparative purposes it is worth remembering that on this site, according to notes in Maidstone Museum, some 20 skeletons were found. See also Baldwin Brown, *op. cit.*, IV, Pl. CXXXVIII, and London Museum Catalogue No. 6, *London and the Saxons*, Figs. 17 and 22. Wheeler ascribes the Savoy pot to the sixth-eighth centuries (p. 139). Douglas, in *Nenia Britannica* (p. 36, Pl. IX, No. 6) reports from a tumulus opened at Ash, Kent, in 1783, a vessel of this shape which was found at the feet of a skeleton.

Inches wide,¹ very rude, but slightly ornamented if 3 or 4 scratches about the swell can be deemed so. . . This also contained human bones, is of the same color as the first and apparently of the same earth. This was rather perfect.²

No. 3 is sufficiently perfect to shew its form and ornaments and had I been on the spot at the time it was discovered the whole might have been recovered. In height about $6\frac{3}{4}$ Inches, width $7\frac{1}{4}$ Inches. This Urn I consider of handsome if not elegant proportions, of a better earth, and fluted round the swell in a very neat manner. There is no comparison between this and the 2 others in respect of beauty of shape or ornament and the clay is much finer and smoother but of nearly the same color. This also contained human bones.³

No. 4 is a very rude cup, not quite perfect, one side broken. The clay & color the same as Nos. 1 and 2. It appears to have been a lump of clay flattened out and merely formed round the knuckles of the hand. It is as rude as possibly can be conceived. It is $2\frac{5}{8}$ Inches high and $4\frac{5}{8}$ Inches in width.

On the 12th of Novr. 1843, having previously obtained permission of C. W. Martin, Esqre,⁴ the Landlord, & Mr. J. Coveney, the occupier of the land, I commenced lowering the Barrows or Tumuli marked B1 & B2 in the plan, beginning nearly N.E. & working to the S.W. Nothing was discovered until thursday the 16th when the small Urn and cover marked No. 5 in the outlines was found quite perfect. The lid was not on it but was found a little distance from it.

This Urn is very rude. Round the swell are 8 nobs, 2 & 2. They were formerly united & had a hole through them, that is they were 4 nobs with a hole through each, large enough for a large packthread to pass through, and from friction or breakage have become of this shape . They are not placed equidistant but nearly so. The lid has also had a handle of the same sort which, by being broken away, also forms two knobs. I should suppose from this circumstance it has been used as a domestic article before being deposited in the earth. There is a rude attempt at ornament round the upper portion, having 3 or 4 rows of short scratches thus / / / / /. There were no bones in it

¹ Mouth diameter $3\frac{1}{2}$ in.

² This pot is of the type figured in J. N. L. Myres's *Some English Parallels to the Anglo-Saxon Pottery of Holland and Belgium in the Migration Period, L'Antiquité Classique*, XVII (1948), Figs. 1 and 2. "These bowls have been dated as early as the fourth century by some scholars, but their common occurrence in English cemeteries, especially on the east coast, shows that the form persisted at least until the later part of the fifth century in England, perhaps later."

³ For decoration compare the pot from Sarre in the Kent Archæological Society's Collections (*Arch. Cantiana*, XIX, Payne's *Catalogue*, p. 17, No. 249). This pot has no bosses on it and in four places between the vertical grooving there appears a depression akin to Beale Poste's fluting. The Sarre pot also has two lines of horizontal grooving, similarly placed.

⁴ C. Wykeham Martin, M.P., of Leeds Castle.

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but *it was* full of Black sand. Some pieces of iron. . . . apparently part of a flat ornamental chain, were also found this day but so decomposed it is almost impossible to conjecture what they may have been. They were found altogether, as if a small hole had been made in the sand for their reception.

Friday 17th Novr. This morning was found an Iron boss of a shield very much corroded outside. The inner part is in better order. It is hollow to receive the hand and appears to have been well manufactured (No. 6). The Iron boss & what I conjecture may have been a chain were found on opposite sides of the mound, 7 or 8 rods apart.

Monday 20th Novr. This day the Urn No. 7¹ in sketch was found. It was inverted but *there was* no tile or anything but the bare sand under it. It contained bones, apparently of a very young person or female. This was obtained perfect, is very rude and of the same sort of clay as the others. It is devoid of ornament. Being present when this was found, I had the ground searched but could find no coin² or metal of any kind and am confident there was none in the Urn, having had the contents carefully examined in my presence. No. 9³ appears to be part of a spear head or sword, found near the boss.

Decr. 6th. The Urn No. 10 was found. It was much broken by the men & some part lost through their carelessness. This Urn is very rude and of the color of whity brown paper. It contained bones and is very rudely ornamented.

Decr. 8th. This day, towards the S.W. side of the tumulus, were found the Boss of a Shield, No. 11⁴, two spear heads. . . . and an instrument of iron, much in the shape of a seax as given in the Pictorial History of England. They are much corroded but the rivets that fastened the Boss to the wood of the shield are of copper and very distinctly to be seen. One was so in particular & had a brass roove⁵ on it of *hexagonal* shape. The copper was quite rotten. The brass roove *was* quite good as when first used. Unfortunately it got broken off and is now lost.

¹ For parallels to Beale Poste's Late Bronze Age urns, see C. H. Woodruff on the Ringwold tumuli, *Arch. Cantiana*, IX, pp. 21-6, and Jessup's *The Archaeology of Kent*, pp. 119-22. Ringwold urn number 2 (in Maidstone Museum) is very akin to Beale Poste number 7, except that the latter is without decoration.

² It must be remembered that Beale Poste was a fervent numismatist and the author of *The Coins of Cunobeline and of the Ancient Britons*.

³ Not illustrated in my plate. Beale Poste's sketch could be anything!

⁴ Beale Poste notes on the drawing "broken or fell to pieces 20th Augt. 1844 at the Union." For a discussion of the various shapes of shield bosses see Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, III, pp. 197-202. He notes that amongst the examples of bosses from Bifrons the chief type is the mammiform, which has a slight straightening of the sides arising from the horizontal rim before the rounded profile properly commences. Both Whiteheath examples are in this category.

⁵ roove=roof.

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The two spear heads¹ are much corroded, the Iron being quite decomposed—but show the forms very well. The sockets contain the upper ends of the shafts and also the wood is quite decayed. It still retains the grain.

Decr. 9th. This day was found a hump of cement, about 6 or 7 lb. in weight & 4 inches thick. It was formed of coarse sand, bricks or pottery broken very fine & the lower half had some pebbles in it. It is of a dark color approaching to black & very hard.

Decr. 18th. This day was *found a spear head* near the place where the others were dug up. It is in the same state as the former.

In the previous week, on the 15th Decr., another Urn was found, but not being there at the time, it got broken and so much of it lost that I have only a few fragments of it, very rude and nearly black and devoid of any ornament. It contained bones.

¹ Of the three spearheads illustrated in Beale Poste's manuscript two definitely have open sockets and are angular in profile. The midribs are indistinguishable. "Both the absence of a structural midrib and the unwelded socket are evidences of cheap and slovenly workmanship, and are characteristic of the period of migration and early settlement." *London and the Saxons*, pp. 162-3.