

THE ROMANO-BRITISH BURIAL AT WESTON TURVILLE

HELEN WAUGH

IN 1855 a Romano-British cremation burial with a number of grave-goods was found by a workman in the garden of the Rectory at Weston Turville. We owe our knowledge of it to the Rev. Arthur Isham, Rector at the time, who published a note and a sketch in the *Illustrated London News*¹ and in these *Records*,² and later gave the finds to the Archæological Society. They have recently been re-assembled in the County Museum and will shortly be put on display again after restoration. Although not in any way exceptional, a datable group of this sort seems worthy of fresh illustrations and a brief reconsideration.

The Rectory lies on the southern edge of the village of Weston Turville (National Grid reference SP 858104). Isham referred to Roman coins from a cottage garden in the village,³ and a few scraps of pottery have come from the grounds of the Manor House,⁴ quite near the Rectory, but no structural remains or other burials have been recorded. The Roman road which succeeded the pre-historic Icknield Way seems the best explanation of the presence of the apparently isolated cremation; although the exact course which the road took in the immediate neighbourhood is uncertain,⁵ it cannot have been far away. There is no record of other finds of the period within a radius of about a mile and a half. The nearest are a burial and a few stray finds from Aston Clinton,⁶ which are explained by the line of Akeman Street, pottery from Aston Hill, Halton,⁷ beside the Upper Icknield Way, some coins from unspecified find-spots in Stoke Mandeville,⁸ and a building, partly uncovered in 1858, near Terrick⁹ on the Lower Icknield Way.

Isham gave the following account of the discovery: "On Saturday evening, May 19th, 1855, a labourer was excavating in the Rectory garden; and at the depth of four feet six inches below the surface he discovered what proved to be a Roman Amphora used for a cinerary urn, of coarse yellowish pottery, which bore the trace of old fractures, and was further broken into fragments by the discoverer.

¹ *Illustrated London News*, 21st July, 1855, p. 77.

² *Records of Bucks.*, II, p. 242.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ County Museum, No. 789.44.

⁵ Between Aston Clinton and World's End there seems to be nothing to indicate the line definitely, either on the ground or in the aerial photographs of the R.A.F. National Air Survey.

⁶ *Records of Bucks.*, IV, p. 147.

⁷ County Museum, Nos. 12.53-16.53.

⁸ *Records of Bucks.*, IX, p. 209.

⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 53.

The clay in which it was found is cretaceous, very tenacious, and impervious to water. The hole which the Amphora occupied is about eighteen inches in diameter; the contiguous clay, being streaked with dark lines in a way which distinguished it from other portions around, bore marks of disturbance to the eye of a practised excavator."

There followed a list of the objects "within or under" the amphora. Those now in the County Museum are three nearly complete glass bottles and the base of a fourth, three plain samian vessels, two enamelled brooches, a bone pin, fragments of a mirror, and various small pieces of iron, some with studs and with traces of wood adhering to one side, which seem to be the bindings of a wooden chest, as Isham pointed out. His list also includes a bead resembling a glass bugle, a small part of a second "wooden pin", presumably bone, and a piece of leather with nails, all of which were catalogued in the Museum in 1908 but cannot be traced now. There were also some "little gilded or silvered beads (one bead with a wire in it . . .)"; tiny fragments of these have been found in the Museum among scraps of burnt bone from the cremation. There was another pot, described merely as "plain", possibly another glass bottle, and "a glass vessel in numerous fragments, the glass thin, part dim milky white, part clear blue". These and the amphora unfortunately do not seem to have reached the Museum, and do not appear in Isham's sketch.¹⁰

The two brooches and some of the beads were found lying in one of the samian dishes, which also contained leaves, and "some white substance, which emitted an aromatic scent when pressed". Isham sent this away for "chemical examination", and received the report that it was "the gum resin 'Olibanum', the ancient Thus or Frankincense".¹¹

This has supplied the one definite detail of the ritual observed at the burial. Isham's account strongly suggests, however, that the actual cremation took place elsewhere, the ashes then being collected and deposited in the small grave-pit, which need not have been any distance away. As none of the surviving grave-goods shows any sign at all of burning, it would appear that they did not accompany the deceased on the pyre, but were put directly into the pit with the ashes. Further details of their arrangement and of the pit itself would have been welcome. It is particularly unfortunate that more is not known of the amphora, "which bore the trace of old fractures"—was there here another instance of the deliberate smashing of an amphora during funeral ceremonies?¹²

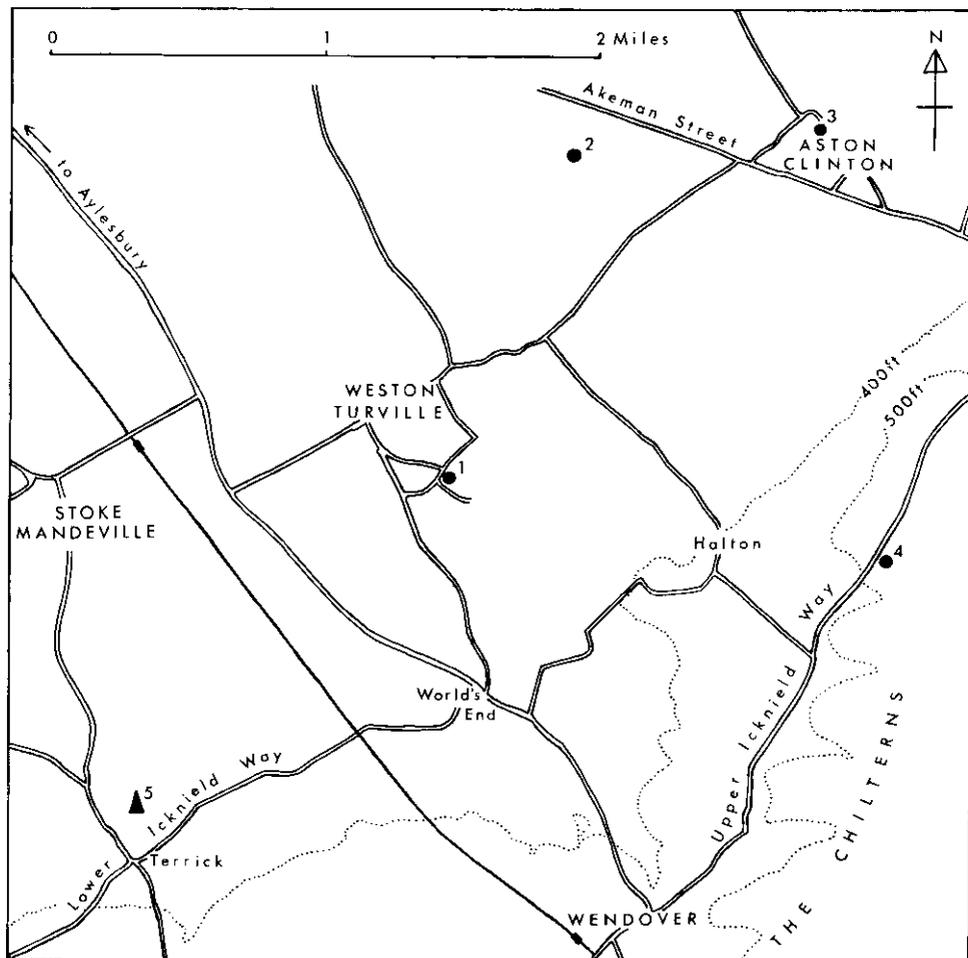
¹⁰ An incomplete pot was catalogued in 1908 as the one listed but not illustrated by Isham (D.2 in his list), but doubt attaches to it. It was not included in a manuscript note in the Museum, dated 1891, in which the other objects were identified; it appears to have been used as a money-box, and it seems unlikely that, if it had been among the grave-goods, Isham would not have referred to this; moreover, the accession register mentions various other pots which were "with the things from Weston Turville" but which have nothing to do with the burial. The pot has therefore not been included here. If in fact it was part of the group, it would not alter the suggested date.

The blue and white glass vessel suggests interesting possibilities. Isham describes all the other glass as green, so this evidently was of a different type. It is tempting to think of marbled glass, but the "dim milky white" might have been the effect of decay of the surface.

The only remaining item on Isham's list is "an apparently dried fruit nearly the size of a dried apple".

¹¹ *Records of Bucks.*, I, p. 151, and II, p. 243.

¹² Cf., for example, the broken amphoræ at the burial at Holborough in Kent: *Arch. Cant.*, LXVIII, 1954, p. 12.



Map showing field-spots of Romano-British Burial :

1. Burial, Weston Turville Rectory.
2. Burial, Aston Clinton.
3. Coins, Aston Clinton.
4. Pottery, Aston Hill, Halton.
5. Building and pit, Terrick.

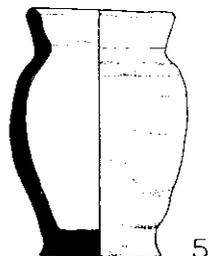
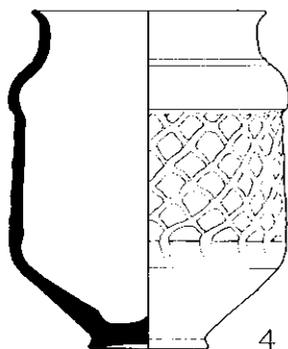
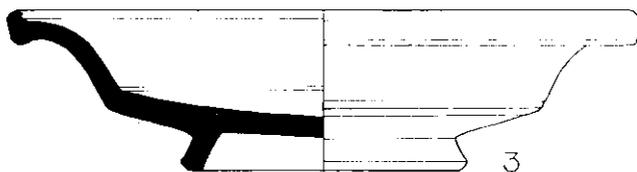
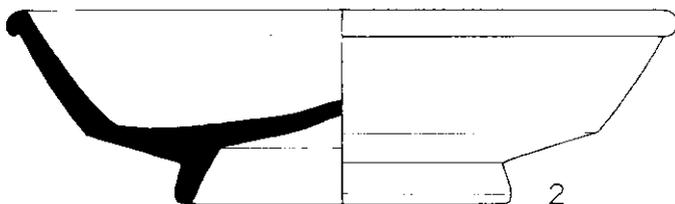
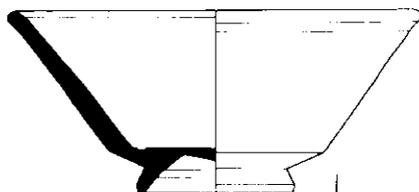
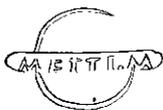


FIG. 1. Samian, nos. 1-3, and other pottery, nos. 4-5 ($\frac{1}{2}$).

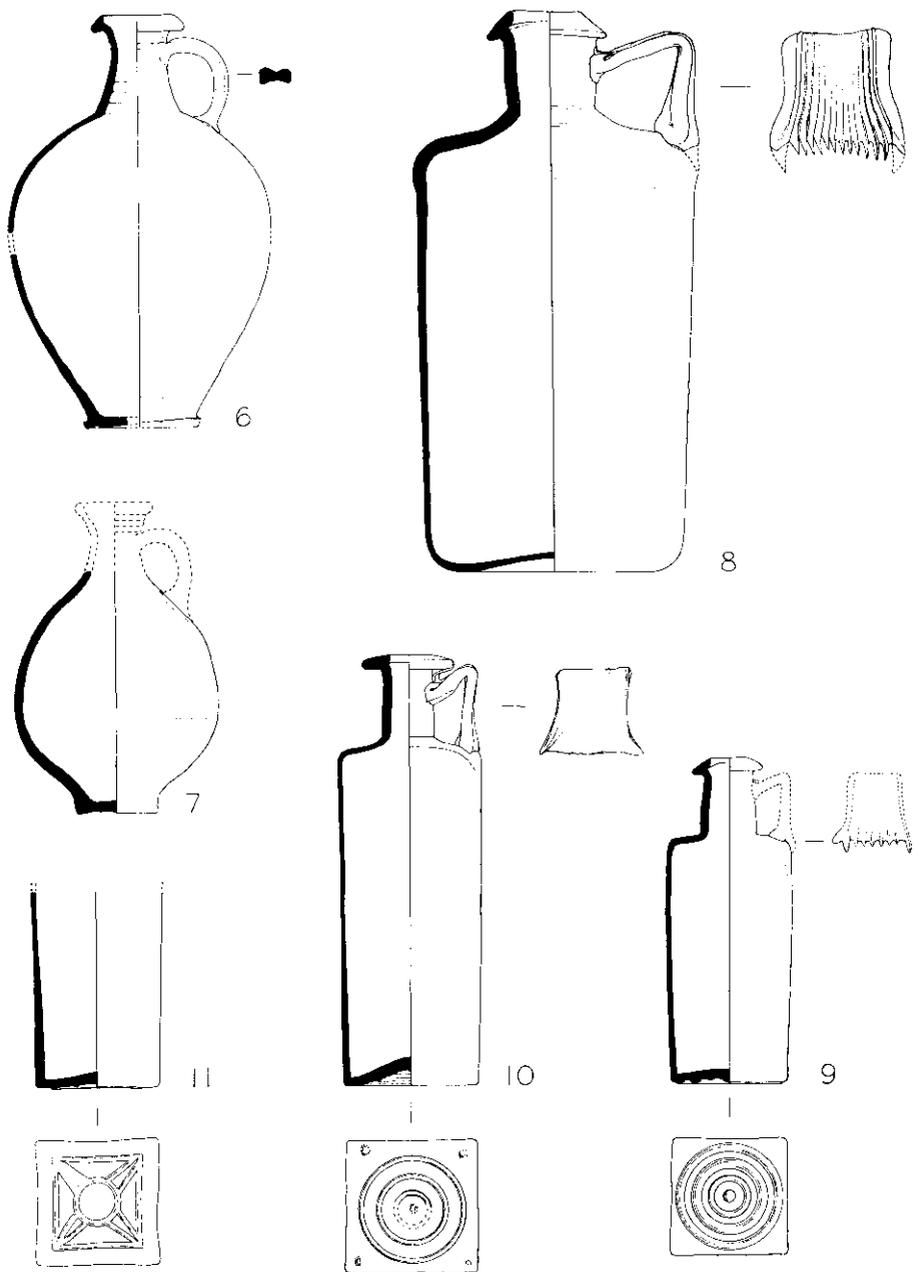


FIG. 2. Coarse pottery, nos. 6-7, and glass, nos. 8-11 ($\frac{1}{4}$).

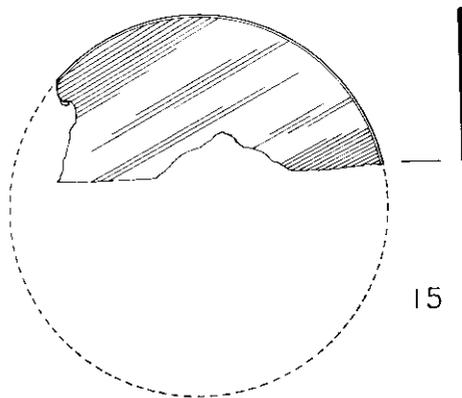
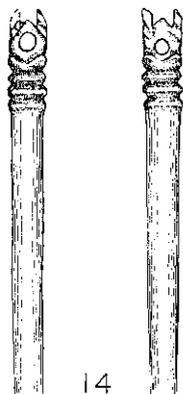
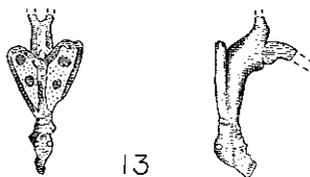
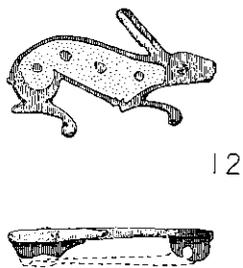


FIG. 3. Brooches, nos. 12-13; bone pin, no. 14 ($\frac{1}{2}$); mirror, no. 15 ($\frac{1}{2}$).

The burial may be dated to the middle years of the second century by the samian dishes and cup, which Dr. Grace Simpson, F.S.A., has put at *c. A.D. 150*, as a group. None of the other objects conflicts with this. The glass and brooches, taken by themselves, would be assignable broadly to the second century, and the coarse pottery includes a ring-neck flagon of a well-known type which was widely current in the middle and later years of the century (Fig. 2, No. 6).

One of the other pots is sufficiently unusual to deserve mention. It is a small colour-coated beaker (Fig. 1, No. 4) with a broad, marked cordon between the neck and the almost straight sides of the body, which suggests some sort of Belgic inspiration or ancestry. Barbotine decoration has been applied in a lattice pattern on the body, but in an unusually wet paste, with the result that the lines of slip have sagged a little and run slightly, producing an effect which is quite different from that made by the crisp, neat barbotine lines of lattice pattern on third-century Nene Valley beakers. Cordons and bulges appear on colour-coated beakers, usually rough-cast, from the Colchester kilns,¹³ and Mr. B. R. Hartley, F.S.A., has kindly informed me that a jar with a shoulder cordon was made in the Nene Valley in the early and middle second century; but the exact Weston Turville form does not seem to have been among the typical products of either group of potters, so far as can be said at present. There is a good parallel from Xanten¹⁴ on the Lower Rhine, with a definite cordon and marked carination, colour-coated but without barbotine; it is described as an uncommon form, and indeed other examples do not seem to be plentiful, either on the Continent or in Britain.

The glass bottles are all mould-blown vessels of blue-green glass and of standard types, plain and practical, with angular handles sensibly designed not to project beyond the body. They were produced in large quantities from the late first century to the end of the second century in the Rhine-Seine region, particularly in and around Cologne, but also in other glass-works of this northern group. Both the cylindrical bottle (Fig. 2, No. 8) and the tall elongated version of the rectangular bottle (No. 10) have very close counterparts in second-century grave-groups from the Tongres—Liège—Namur region of Belgium.¹⁵

The brooches, one in the form of a running hare and the other a fly (Fig. 3, Nos. 12 and 13), are examples of the small zoomorphic enamelled brooches made in great variety during the second and early third centuries. The running hare appears, in a number of slightly different versions, on brooches from Gaul, the Rhineland and the Danubian provinces, as well as from Britain; there is one brooch, however, from Lincoln,¹⁶ now in the British Museum, which might have come from the same mould as the Weston Turville hare. Fly brooches of this

¹³ M. R. Hull, *The Roman Potters' Kilns of Colchester*, 1963, Figs. 57, Nos. 8–15, and 58, Nos. 19 and 20.

¹⁴ P. Steiner, *Sammlung des Niederrheinischen Altertums-Verein*, 1911, p. 151, Abb. 21, no. 3.

¹⁵ Cf. bottles from the Riemppst tumulus: *Bull. Inst. Arch. Liégeois*, LXVII, p. 48 and Fig. 7; from the Avennes tumulus: M. Vanderhoeven, *Verres Romains (Ier—IIIe siècle) des Musées Curtius et du Verre à Liège*, 1961, Nos. 72 and 73; two bottles from Strud, Haltinne, also in Liège Museum; *ibid.*, Nos. 69 and 70; and a bottle from a tumulus at Champion, in Namur Museum: *Annales Soc. Arch. Namur*, II, p. 64.

¹⁶ British Museum *Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain*, 1951, Fig. 11, No. 43 (B.M. 1866. 12–3.143).

period¹⁷ are often variants of the trumpet brooch, with a plate on the bow forming the wings of a very stylized fly or moth. The Weston Turville fly, however, is not a true member of this group—it has no trumpet—and is closer to a brooch from Campsfield, Kidlington,¹⁸ in Oxfordshire, although not identical. The fly is treated in a slightly more naturalistic manner than the trumpet-brooch flies: the head is more insect-like and has been given eyes.

The best evidence for the manufacture of enamelled brooches comes from the Namur district of Belgium,¹⁹ which undoubtedly was a major centre of production of both geometric and animal forms. Enamelling was one of the techniques used in the workshops of the villa at Anthée,²⁰ and large numbers of brooches have come from second-century graves in cemeteries²¹ in the neighbourhood; many animal forms are on record or to be seen in Namur Museum and other Belgian museums.²² It may be pure chance that here hares and flies have proved elusive.²³ On the other hand, it seems extremely likely that there were other workshops; they would be the natural explanation of the differences in style and craftsmanship which can be seen among brooches in this class.²⁴ It is surely possible that the Weston Turville brooches, which are a little smaller and less stoutly constructed than the typical Namur products, were in fact made elsewhere, perhaps in some other part of Gallia Belgica or possibly in the Rhineland, where there is good reason to think that the geometric type of enamelled brooch was made, possibly at more than one centre.²⁵

Of the remaining objects, the bone pin (Fig. 3, No. 14) has a small carved head of unusual design, pierced right through each way and more intricate than the common run of bone pin heads. The small pieces of mirror tell us little; there may or may not have been a handle, and the back has perished. Mirrors, which are fairly common as grave-goods, varied in size and elaboration a good deal. The “gilded or silvered beads” survive only in very small fragments, and have not been drawn. They were about 4-5 mm. in diameter, of glass with a bright silvery gold appearance,²⁶ and seem very similar to some found with a burial at New-

¹⁷ For a recent discussion of fly brooches of a later type, see Z. Vinski in *Jahrbuch Röm.-Germ. Zentralmuseums Mainz*, 4, 1957, p. 136 ff. Cf. *Gallia*, 13, 1955, p. 149, Fig. 2: a brooch *d'époque barbare*.

¹⁸ *Oxoniensia*, XVII/XVIII, 1952-53, Fig. 26, No. 7 and p. 58.

¹⁹ *Annales Soc. Arch. Namur*, XXIV, 1900-4, p. 237 ff.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 251; for the Anthée villa generally, *ibid.*, XIV, p. 165 ff., and XV, p. 1 ff.

²¹ For example, Flavion and Les Villées, Berzée; *ibid.*, VII, 1861-2, p. 1 ff., and XX, 1893, p. 9 ff. respectively.

²² They include a horse, lion, stag, hunting-dog, cock, owl, peacock, tortoise, fish, dolphin, sea-serpent and hippocamp.

²³ There is one brooch in Namur Museum from the cemetery at Berzée which might perhaps be intended to represent a fly, but the design may well be merely formal.

²⁴ The differences may be seen in the collection of zoomorphic brooches in the Ashmolean Museum, which come from a number of different sites; or compare those illustrated in the British Museum *Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain*, 1951, Fig. 11, Nos. 41, 42 and 43: No. 41 in particular is a poor piece of work compared with No. 42, which looks like a Namur brooch. V. also *Annales Soc. Arch. Namur*, XXIV, p. 247.

²⁵ K. Exner in *Bericht Röm.-Germ. Komm.*, XIX, 1939, p. 41. It is suggested that Cologne, Trier and Mainz may all have been centres of production.

²⁶ It is difficult to say, from such tiny fragments, how this is produced, but it does not appear to be merely a shiny iridescent effect resulting from chemical action in the ground. Cf. R. E. M. and T. V. Wheeler, *Verulamium, a Belgic and Two Roman Cities*, 1936, Fig. 47, o, and p. 214: “gilded glass”; and the beads noted below.

stead,²⁷ dated to the second half of the second century. The missing “glass bugle” was a hexagonal bead, 4/10 of an inch long, according to Isham’s sketch and note.²⁸

The surviving pieces of iron are too corroded and fragmentary to give much idea of the wooden chest or box which they apparently bound, and to which they were attached with iron studs. It is clear, however, that it was something of this sort (and not a bucket, as might have been suspected) since two pieces are right-angled, and another seems to be part of a hinge. Unfortunately its size cannot be estimated; a large wooden chest might have explained the “dark lines” which Isham noticed in the “contiguous clay”, but it is of course also possible that the grave-pit itself was lined with timber.

The piece of leather with nails, now missing, no doubt belonged to the pair of strong shoes often provided for the deceased. A few hob-nails have been found among the scraps of cremated bone.

The burial suggests a thoroughly Romanized social background, and comfortable, but not affluent, circumstances. Most of the grave-goods are ordinary things, several of them the standard products of major Gaulish or Rhenish industries, turned out on a large scale, and among normal exports to Britain. There is perhaps a hint of an individual personal taste in the beaker and the bone pin, which are not commonplace, and in the fly brooch, which is not the most usual type; but none of these is costly or of particularly fine workmanship. The enamelled brooches are in fact in their appropriate context; it has been noted in Belgium that they have seldom been found in rich graves or under Roman barrows.²⁹ Taking the group as a whole, it is a very typical set for the furnishing of a “middle income-group” burial of the period, such as might have come from any of the northern Roman provinces.

Buckinghamshire has its share of richer burials: the earlier group from Radnage,³⁰ with its fine glass, ornamented casket and lavish supply of samian dishes, and the Thornborough barrows, one of which—and very probably both—must be more or less contemporary with Weston Turville. There the imposing mound, the splendid array of bronzes and the connections with the rich Roman barrows of Belgium mark a particularly striking contrast, whatever the exact explanation in social terms.³¹ Coming at an intermediate point on the scale between these and humble burials, such as the Fingest cremation with only two coarse-ware pots and a pair of shoes,³² the Weston Turville group adds a small but attractive detail to the Romano-British record in the county.

Figs. 1 to 3 illustrate the objects now reassembled in the County Museum, and a description follows.

²⁷ J. Curle, *A Roman Frontier Post and its People*, 1911, p. 336, and Pl. XCI, No. 24. The beads are described as “. . . tiny specimens . . . of clear glass decorated with gold leaf, which was in turn covered by a thin layer of glass”.

²⁸ See notes 1 and 2.

²⁹ *Annales Soc. Arch. Namur*, XXIV, p. 239.

³⁰ *Ant. J.*, III, 1923, p. 334.

³¹ *Records of Bucks.*, XVI, p. 37. For Roman barrows in Britain generally, see *Antiquity*, X, 1936, p. 37 ff., which contains the suggestion that they “may well be the resting places of wealthy merchants from Belgic Gaul”; also *J.B.A.A.*, 3rd series, XXII, 1959, p. 1 ff.; and *Latomus*, LVIII, 1962, p. 853 ff.

³² *Ant. J.*, XVIII, 1938, p. 287.

Samian. Fig. 1, Nos. 1, 2, 3.

1. Dr. 33, stamped METT.M
2. Dr. 18/31, stamped MVXTVLLIM
3. Curle 15.

All are Central Gaulish. Weston Turville was included by Oswald in "Index of Potters' Stamps on Terra Sigillata" in the lists for METTIVS, whose range is given as Trajan-Antonine (p. 204), and MVXTVLLVS, Hadrian-Antonine (p. 215). The forms were evidently not known to him, but may now be added, as there is no doubt that these are the same vessels. His source was probably *Archæological Journal*, XXXV, p. 290, which mentions the stamps only.

Coarse pottery. Fig. 1, Nos. 4 and 5; Fig. 2, Nos. 6 and 7.

4. Small beaker. Dirty-white ware with dark, greyish-green colour-coat; brownish patches at the foot and inside the rim. Lattice-pattern on the body, applied in a rather liquid slip; the paste has trickled slightly below the decorated zone. Cf. the pot from Xanten cited in note 14. The same type may have been found at Flavion,³³ but the drawing, published in 1861, makes comparison difficult. For a devolved version of the form, see a rough-cast beaker from Silchester.³⁴

5. Very small pot, roughly made, especially towards the base. Dark grey ware with brown core.

6. One-handled flagon of ring-neck type. Fine hard cream-buff ware. Middle and later second century. Cf. (i) Jewry Wall, Ring-neck jugs type C, and (ii) South Carlton, type 2, especially 2C (A.D. 140-180); (iii) Gillam, No. 7 (A.D. 130-220) and 8 (A.D. 140-180) may also be noted.³⁵

7. Body of small one-handled flagon. Light orange ware. Size and form suggest a flagon resembling (i) Richborough No. 148 (A.D. 150-200) and (ii) Verulamium 1936, Fig. 27, No. 8 (A.D. 160-190). Cf. also (iii) Roman Colchester, No. 155B.³⁶ The neck and handle have been restored in the drawing on these analogies.

Glass. Fig. 2, Nos. 8, 9, 10, 11.

The metal is in each case bluish-green, with some bubbles, and has patches of iridescence here and there. Nos. 10 and 11 have become flaky at the base.

8. Cylindrical bottle with slight bulge at shoulder; single handle with two pronounced outer ribs and twelve smaller ribs between. Plain base. Cf. (i) Liège, Nos. 72 and 73, first half of second century; (ii) Cologne, Taf. 45 and p. 32, similar but smaller, Flavian; Isings, form 51b.³⁷

9. Rectangular bottle; single handle with two large outer ribs and six smaller

³³ *Annales Soc. Arch. Namur*, VII, Pl. 1, No. 1.

³⁴ T. May, *Silchester Pottery*, 1916, Pl. LI, No. 82.

³⁵ (i) K. M. Kenyon, *Excavations at Jewry Wall Site, Leicester*, 1948, p. 109 and Fig. 28. (ii) *Ant. J.*, XXIV, 1944, p. 129 and Fig. 7. (iii) *Arch. Ael.*, 4th series, XXXV, p. 184.

³⁶ J. P. Bushe-Fox, *Second Report on the Excavation of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent*, 1928, Pl. XXXI. (ii) R. E. M. and T. V. Wheeler, *op. cit.*, Fig. 27. (iii) M. R. Hull, *Roman Colchester*, 1958, Fig. 118.

³⁷ (i) M. Vanderhoeven, *op. cit.* (ii) F. Fremersdorf, *Das naturfarbene sogenannte blaugrüne Glas in Köln*, 1958. C. Isings, *Roman Glass from dated Finds*, 1957.

³⁸ F. Fremersdorf, *op. cit.* C. Isings, *op. cit.*

ribs between. The base has three well-defined concentric circles in relief and central circular boss. Cf. Cologne, Taf. 112 and p. 50, early second century; and Isings, form 50b.³⁸

10. Tall rectangular bottle; single handle, quite plain. Three narrow concentric circles in relief on the base. Cf. Liège, Nos. 69 and 70; and Isings, form 50b.³⁹

11. Base of rectangular bottle, with geometric pattern in relief.

Brooches. Fig. 3, Nos. 12 and 13.

12. Bronze plate brooch in the form of a running hare. Champlévé enamel on the body, with four small dots of bronze; the paste now appears silvery, but was probably originally blue. The hinged pin is missing. Cf. in addition to the brooch from Lincoln already mentioned (see note 16), (i) Jewry Wall, Fig. 82, No. 5, and (ii) Brettenham, Fig. 2, No. 7, now in the Ashmolean Museum.⁴⁰ There are other hare brooches in the Ashmolean Museum's Evans Collection, from Amiens, with spring pin (1927.401), from Cologne (1927.399), and from an unspecified site in France (1927.400). For Pannonian examples, I. Sellye,⁴¹ Pl. XIII, Nos. 1-5; cf. also B. Svoboda,⁴² Fig. 17, No. 2. Richborough IV, No. 44 and its parallels are of a rather different type.⁴³

13. Small bronze brooch in the form of a fly. Champlévé enamel, now silvery, with bronze dots, on the wings, which probably had a very small beaded border, only traces of which are now visible. On the head of the insect eyes are indicated by tiny circles (of niello?). The tail divides, but is broken; what remains might be the beginning of a loop, but this is no more than a possibility. The catchplate is broken away, and only the hinge end of the pin survives; the hinge is clear in an X-ray photograph, which shows that in structure the brooch is very like the Campsfield brooch already mentioned (see note 18). For a group of fly brooches which belong to Collingwood's S ii,⁴⁴ a sub-group of the trumpet brooch, v. *London in Roman Times*,⁴⁵ Fig. 29, No. 32; a brooch from Barrington in the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; one from Brough Castle and one from Cologne in the Ashmolean Museum. A brooch probably from Lincoln in the British Museum perhaps just qualifies as a member of this group; v. *B.M. Guide*, Fig. 11, No. 23.

Other Objects. Fig. 3, Nos. 14 and 15.

14. Bone pin, broken towards the point, with carved head. Three mouldings at the top of the shaft, with a simple version of the acanthus moulding above; the head then becomes roughly square, and is pierced through, horizontally and from each side, by a circular hole; above this, each face ends

³⁸ M. Vanderhoeven, *op. cit.* C. Isings, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ (i) K. M. Kenyon, *op. cit.* (ii) *Norfolk Archaeology*, XXVI, 1935-7.

⁴¹ I. Sellye, *Les Bronzes émaillés de la Pannonie Romaine*, 1939.

⁴² B. Svoboda, *Cechy a rimské Imperium—Bohemia and the Roman Empire*, 1948, p. 244 (English summary) and p. 106.

⁴³ J. P. Bushe-Fox, *Fourth Report on the Excavations of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent*, 1949.

⁴⁴ R. G. Collingwood, *The Archaeology of Roman Britain*, 1930, p. 255 and Fig. 62, No. 67.

⁴⁵ London Museum Catalogue No. 3, 1930.

in a small, central, triangular peak with two vertical projections like ears on each side. This last feature has some resemblance to the motif surmounting a much more elaborately carved head, with a hand holding a bust, on a larger pin from London; v. *London in Roman Times*, Fig. 32, No. 1 (see note 45). 15. Pieces of a speculum mirror, originally about 10 cm. in diameter. The metal is highly polished on one side and left matt, with a slightly irregular surface, on the other, which was no doubt covered by a casing, probably of wood. There is a very slight bevel at the edge. No trace of a handle survives.

I am very grateful to Professor S. S. Frere, for much help and advice in the preparation of this note; and also to Dr. Grace Simpson, F.S.A., Mr. B. R. Hartley, F.S.A., Miss M. D. Cra'ster, Mr. H. W. M. Hodges, who kindly X-rayed the fly brooch, and Mr. K. S. Painter.

I am also much indebted to Mr. C. N. Gowing, F.M.A., Curator of the County Museum, for permission to re-publish the burial and for help and encouragement in many ways.