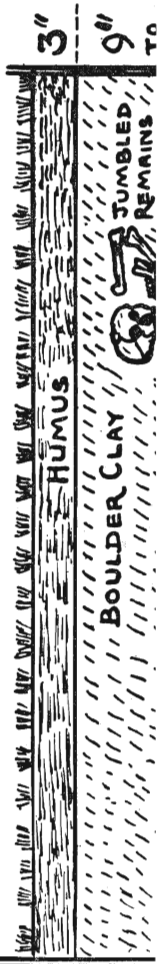


FIG. 2. PROPOSED RECONSTRUCTION. NOT TO SCALE

FIG. I. SITE OF LEIRE DISCOVERY.



3"

HUMUS

9"

BOULDER CLAY

JUMBLER REMAINS

TO

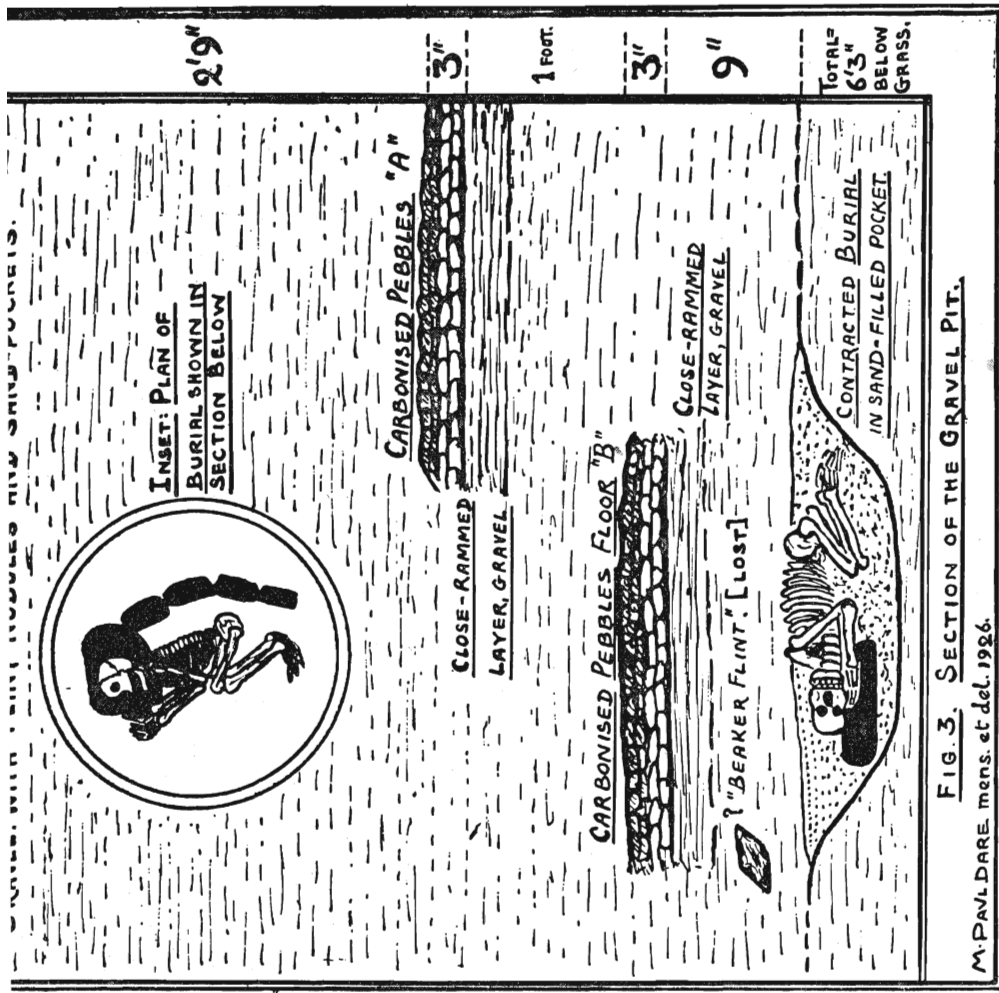


FIG. 3. SECTION OF THE GRAVEL PIT.

M. PAUL DARE, mens. et del. 1926.



**NOTES UPON A PREHISTORIC  
CONTRACTED BURIAL**

Discovered at Leire, co. Leics., on 11 December, 1926

ALSO

**NOTES ON AN EARLY  
SEPULCHRAL SLAB**

Discovered at Ayleston Church, co. Leics., July, 1926

By M. PAUL DARE

## A PREHISTORIC CONTRACTED BURIAL

By M. Paul Dare.

A discovery of no small importance to students of pre-history in this district was made on 11 December, 1926, by a man engaged in digging beside the Leicester and Rugby Branch of the L. M. and S. Railway, between the Leicestershire villages of Leire and Broughton Astley. The spot, behind the Broughton railway station, and almost exactly half-way between the two places, is indicated in Figure 1, from the Ordnance Survey 6-inch Sheet XLIII S.E. (12). The portion of the field in which the gravel pit has been dug rises to a rather prominent hillock, which is in no sense a tumulus, and it was on the eastern side of this that the discovery was made. On the southern side of the field runs the boundary between the two parishes, and here the land slopes steeply to a spot called "The Ballas Hole,"<sup>1</sup> and thence to Stemborough Mill and a small stream. An eminence called "Clump Hill" rises to the east.

At a total distance of 6ft. 3 in. below the present surface of the ground, the workman came upon a human skeleton, almost perfect, lying in a contracted posture; he lit upon it by his pick coming in contact with the skull, and this attracted his attention as being an unusually large "stone" to find in a sand and gravel deposit. He made a careful mental note of the details, from which this description is in part compiled; but unfortunately, by the time I heard of the discovery and was able to visit the site, he had buried the bones under his flint and pebble siftings, as they were much decayed.

The body lay, with its head towards the east and its feet towards the west, in a hollow scooped out of the gravel and

<sup>1</sup>Ballas Hole=a place from which *ballast* (for the railway) had been taken.

bedded with sand. The head reposed on a flat bluish stone of approximately circular shape, and extending round the back of the skeleton in a half-moon disposition, was a number of other stones of medium size, evidently representing a crude form of cist protection for the body. There were no ashes and no signs of incineration.

When I visited the site, I was able to distinguish two distinct layers of pebbles, each 3 ins. deep, the lower being nine inches above the body, and the upper layer a foot above the lower one. (See Figure 3, section). Each layer bore distinct indications of carbonisation on its upper surface, and each rested on a bed of flinty, pebbly gravel rammed hard. Owing to the fact that the upper layer terminated at the eastern end, where the lower one commenced to go eastwards, the stratification, signs of fire, and the position of the body, suggest strongly that the deceased was buried beneath the sunken central portion of a hut-floor, the hearth. This suggestion is indicated in my proposed reconstruction, Fig. 2.

The workman informed me that he found near the body a "long tapering flint, shaped like a sword," which he unfortunately threw away in the rubbish, thinking it of no interest. It is unfortunate that this flint was lost; in the absence of other associated remains, it might have gone a considerable distance towards dating the interment; but half-a-day's search among the siftings by the present writer failed to reveal it. Mr. O. G. S. Crawford, F.S.A., Archæology Officer of the Ordnance Survey and the editor of "Antiquity," suggests that the implement may have been, from the description, one of the important "beaker flints."

In the overlying boulder clay just below the humus, the workman found the remains of another, a secondary, interment, consisting of a few jumbled bones much decayed, and evidently disturbed. He recovered part only of the skull, a fragment of the lower jaw, and parts of one femur and tibia. No other implements beyond the one recorded above were noticed by him, and none was discernible in the pile of siftings.

The significance of the discovery from the point of view of the local archæologist lies in the fact that it is only the third of

its class of which we have any record in this county, and that it differs from both the others in detail.

In 1853, some desultory excavations were made in the pre-Roman encampment at Burrough Hill, which is a Class B earth-work. Fragments of pottery "of the rudest workmanship," a flint arrow-head, and the remains of a human skeleton, were found in the course of the digging; the skeleton is stated to have been "buried in a crouching position at the north-west corner of the vallum."<sup>2</sup> Roman coins were also unearthed. The occurrence of the crude pottery suggests a Bronze Age date for this interment.

Then on 20 July, 1869, what is described<sup>3</sup> as a "kist-vaen" burial came to light when the foundations of the new porch were being dug for at Stonton Brudenell, alias Stonton Wyville. This occurred on a bed of gravel about 6 feet below the surface of the churchyard. The cist consisted of rough slabs of iron-stone so put together as to form a bow-shape at the west end (head), and a lid in two pieces shaped accordingly. The length of the cist was 3ft. 6ins. and the greatest width 22 inches. It contained the skeleton of an adult female lying on its side with the legs drawn up, the head being at the west end; with the bones was a large quantity of charcoal and ashes. Probably on account of this last fact, the *Victoria County History*<sup>4</sup>, dismissing the discovery rather summarily in the topographical list of the "Early Man" section (which has many sins of omission), adds the remark: "probably of the Bronze Age." It is highly probable that the presence of the ashes and charcoal indicates a "mixed" burial, part interment, part cremation. Whereas in the Neolithic Age we find the north of the country with an elaborate system of cremation and the south using inhumation, in the Bronze Age it is not uncommon to find both together<sup>5</sup>. The Stonton find, incidentally is comparable to some from Pytchley, Northants.

It would appear, then, that the Leire interment is the earliest of the three which Leicestershire can produce up to now. Strictly speaking there are four, but the fourth cist-burial, from

<sup>2</sup>*Trans. Leics. Archæol. Soc.*, VII., 23. (Mentioned in excursion of 1888).

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, IV., 7-10.

<sup>4</sup>*V.C.H. Leics.* I, 177.

<sup>5</sup>*British Museum Bronze Age Guide*, 2nd edition (1920) p. 14.

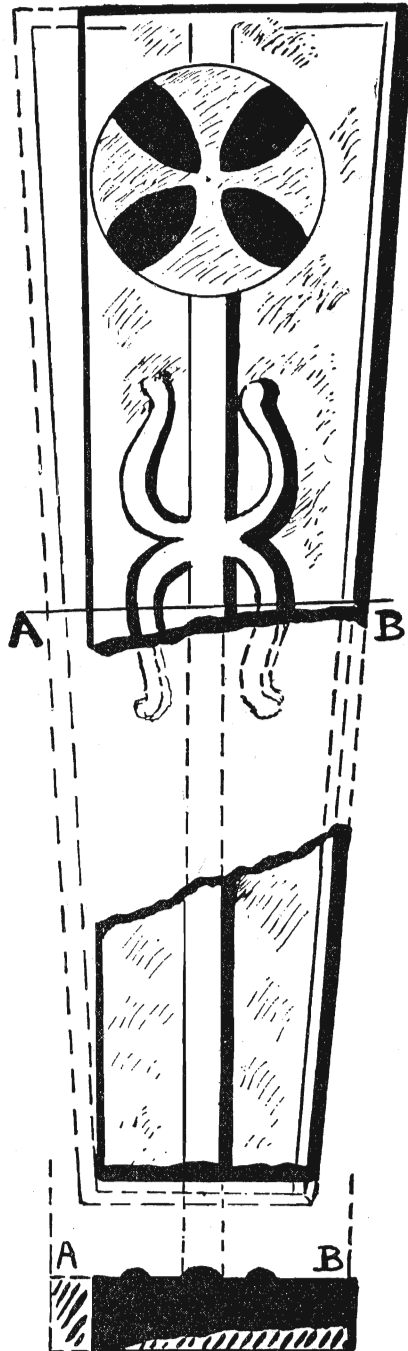
Waltham on the Wolds, is Roman<sup>6</sup>. As to Rutland, that county can show one certain Neolithic burial (though whether in the contracted or extended position is not stated), from Great Caster-ton, with a ground of polished flint selt, a muller, and three flint fabricating stones; and two uncertain ones from Ketton<sup>7</sup>.

The very name of Leire lays claim to a respectable antiquity, being associated with the water-god Llyr, the Keltic equivalent of Poseidon, who reappears in Welsh legend as a mythical British king.

<sup>6</sup>*Trans. Leics. Arch. Soc.*, I, 396-8, and *V.C.H. Leics.*, I, 218, which gives wrong date of find.

<sup>7</sup>*V.C.H. Rutland*, pp. 82-83.

SEPULCHRAL SLAB FOUND AT  
AYLESTON, LEICS., JULY, 1926.



SCALE 1 in. = 1 foot.

*M* mens. et del. '27.

## NOTES ON AN EARLY SEPULCHRAL SLAB

By M. Paul Dare.

In the summer of 1926, it was found necessary to take down and rebuild the south porch of St. Andrew's church, Ayleston, co. Leics., as it was discovered to be in a dangerous state and in danger of collapse. This, on investigation, was found to be due to the fact that the porch sides rested across graves, resulting in a sinking of the foundations.

The work of demolition brought to light a medieval stone sepulchral slab, of which a measured drawing is here figured. The larger portion of it had served, with the left edge sawn off at right angles to the top, as a sill for one of the windows. Careful search revealed the lower portion among the debris, but even now a section is missing. A restoration to the original dimensions, however, is not difficult, and the drawing is based on the measurements of a large number of similar examples, which as a rule vary from 1ft. 10in to 2ft. 1in at the top, and from 1ft. 0in. to 1ft. 2in. at the base, and are 6ft 0in or 6ft. 1in. in length.

The Ayleston slab is of the flat coffin-lid type, and is very rough-hewn on the lower side, varying from 4in. to 3in. in thickness. It appears by the pattern and execution to be of the 13th century. A border one inch wide is incised lightly round the design, which consists of a quarter-round fillet down the centre of the slab, having at its centre the ornament known as the double-omega\*, or "church door-hinge," and terminating at the head in a cross patée in relief within an incuse circle. It is now preserved at the west end of the church. This is the only sepulchral slab extant at Ayleston.

The new porch, dedicated by the bishop of Leicester on Palm Sunday, 1927, and executed by Mr. J. H. Morcam and Messrs.

\* See illustration.