

MIDDLE IRON AGE POTTERY FROM LONG CRENDON, BUCKS.

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Introduction

In October – November, 1978, workmen laying a waterpipe to the east of the village of Long Crendon, discovered two groups of pottery in close proximity to each other. Both groups (NGR SP 7006 0883, CAS 4405 and NGR SP 6990 0916, CAS 4437) contained sherds of the Belgic to Romano-British period, while the latter also contained a small group of pottery of Middle Iron Age date. As evidence for the latter period is scarce in west Buckinghamshire, it was decided to undertake an excavation to try to relocate the feature from which the pottery came, the pipe-trench by now having been backfilled. This was carried out in February 1979. The aim was to recover any further pottery that might remain in the feature with the object of expanding knowledge of ceramic styles for the Middle Iron Age in Buckinghamshire. It was also hoped that a small excavation might produce information about the nature of the site which would be of use in assessing its significance in the event of any future threat.

The village of Long Crendon is situated on an outcrop of Portland Limestone that lies on a belt of Kimmeridge Clay. The site lies on the eastern slope of a small valley, on the southern edge of the limestone, near its junction with the clay. The only other direct evidence of pre-mediaeval settlement in this area is a reputed Roman cemetery, (a on Fig. 1 b), which lies about 300 metres to the north.

The Trial Excavation

A small trench 5 x 2 metres was dug, and revealed two features cut into the limestone surface. The larger of the two was not totally contained within the trench. It was of very irregular profile, an oval in shape, about 85 cms. in diameter and quite shallow, on average about 5 cms. deep. Only the northern third of its circumference had a bold edge, and here the feature was about 11 cms. deep. The remainder of the profile was gradual and shelving. The smaller feature, roughly circular, was about 29 cms. in diameter and again had an irregular profile. It was on average 4–5 cms. in depth and 9 cms. at its deepest. The soft, fine green-brown silty fill of both features was indistinguishable from the layer that sealed the features.

Finds were sparse from both features. Of the five small sherds from the larger feature, three were of fabrics identical to those of the vessels of Middle Iron Age date already found, while the form of one very small rim fragment was probably also of Middle Iron Age tradition.

Of more interest was the fact that nearly half of the sherds found in the topsoil were of Romano-British form and fabric, indicating activity in the vicinity during this period. This makes the rather imprecise nature of the evidence relating to a Roman

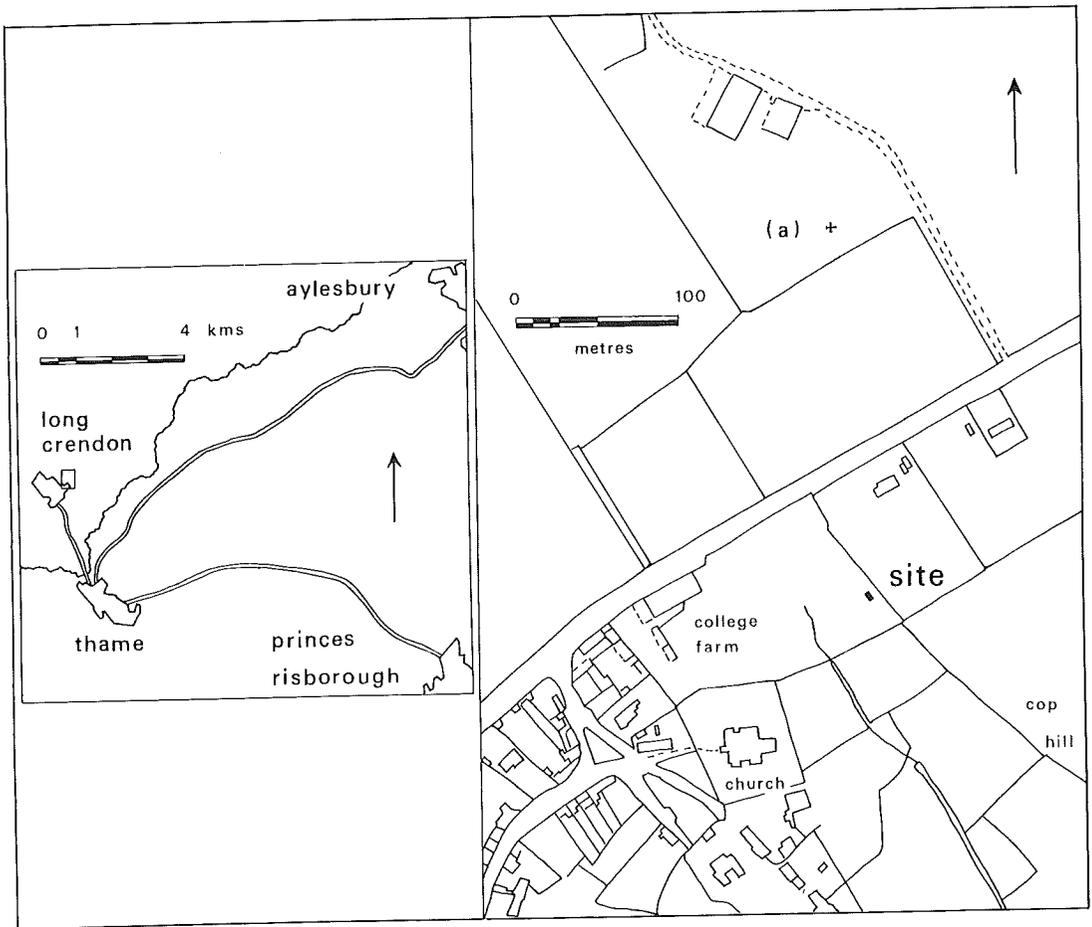


Fig. 1. Location of excavation at Long Crendon.

cemetery to the north more feasible. One unexpected discovery was a Mesolithic flint core, although it need be nothing more than a casual loss.

Evidence of human activity in the vicinity of Long Crendon can now be seen to stretch from the Middle Iron Age to the Belgic period, and into the Roman period, with a hint of an earlier presence, but the nature of that activity and the degree to which it is continuous must remain in some doubt until further work is done in the area.

Pottery

Although the pottery from Long Crendon is a small assemblage, a few generalisations may still be made as to its affinities within its period.

The pottery in question would appear to be of Middle Iron Age date. One example is certainly of globular form. Not enough remains of the other three rims to be sure of their forms, but it seems clear that they belong to the general tradition of straight or slightly everted rims with slack or rounded shoulders, as described by Harding (1974, 190-4). This tradition of globular, barrel and slack-bodied jars seems to have been

quite widespread in the south Midlands during the Middle Iron Age. This phase corresponds to Harding's Middle La Tène or Iron Age B period, which he would date from about the mid-fourth century B.C., and Saunders' phase Three in the Chilterns (Saunders 1971, 17–20). These types of pots lack the high or angular shoulder and finger impressed and occasional plastic decoration of pots as at Ivinghoe Beacon (Cotton & Frere 1968, Figs. 16–20), which are characteristic of the preceding Early Iron Age and possibly late Bronze Age. At Fengate near Peterborough, the globular phase follows on stratigraphically from the angular tradition, although absolute dating is not yet secure (David Knight, pers. comm.).

The terminal date for the globular tradition of pottery is marked by the appearance of Belgic wares, as at Cholesbury and Puddlehill (Saunders 1971, 19). At Weekly and Aldwincle in Northants it appears that a transitional phase, consisting of forms with bead-rims and incurving profiles, may be present between the two styles (Jackson 1977, 19).

Although the assemblage from Long Crendon is really too small to make detailed comparisons with other assemblages from the region, close parallels in form tend to occur on sites published from the Upper Thames, e.g. Cassington (Harding 1972, Plates 63, 64), rather than from the Chiltern sites. Aldwincle with pottery dating from the first century B.C. also affords rough parallels of form. The small assemblage from Woodham (unpublished) about ten miles to the north, also of Middle Iron Age date does not provide any good parallels of form. This suggests that we are not justified in looking for close parallels in form for more exact dating within the general globular and barrel tradition, particularly where such small assemblages are concerned, until further local, well-stratified assemblages are recovered from which firmer conclusions might be drawn.

1. Globular jar, everted rim, flattened with finger-nail decoration, fairly hard light brown sandy fabric, very occasional ill-sorted angular inclusion, faint traces of brushing on exterior. Hand-made. Water pipe-trench.
2. Jar, plain upstanding rim fairly hard light brown sandy fabric, quite common ill-sorted, 0.5–7 mm., inclusions of shell and limestone, traces of finger moulding below rim. Hand-made. Water pipe-trench.
3. Jar, slightly everted rim, fairly hard light brown sandy fabric, unevenly fired well-sorted, approx. 0.5 mm., occasional inclusions, finger-moulding beneath rim. Hand-made. Layer 2.

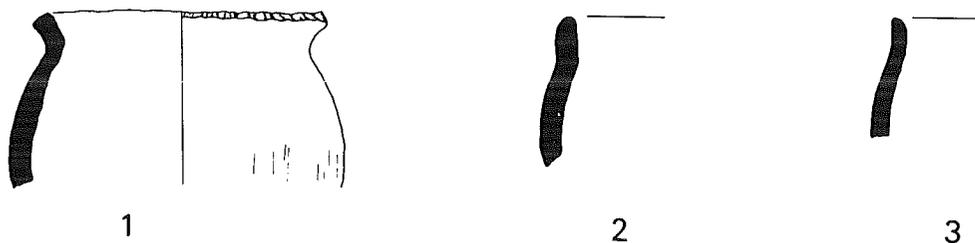


Fig. 2. Iron Age pottery from Long Crendon (1/3 size).

Also from the water pipe-trench and associated with the illustrated rims, were a dozen large sherds probably all from the same vessel which was fairly thick and hand-made. The fabric is a fairly soft, brownish-red oxidised, sandy ware with quite frequent ill-sorted, 1–12 mm., inclusions of several kinds, including iron-stone and quartz. Two sherds of this type of fabric, although not as coarse, were burnished. The pottery is deposited at the County Museum.

Conclusion

It is unclear whether the original feature that produced the pottery was relocated. The larger of the two features was almost exactly at the spot indicated by the workmen who made the initial discovery, and, of the pottery that it produced, four of the five small sherds compared with the Middle Iron Age fabrics or forms already found. But the form of the larger feature would have made it difficult for it to contain the amount of pottery previously found. It must be assumed therefore that the original feature had been totally destroyed by the pipeline and that the larger excavated feature was in close proximity to it and probably of the same period. It was not possible to date the smaller feature.

It can be concluded that there was some form of activity on this site within the Middle Iron Age, roughly the fourth to first centuries B.C., but unfortunately the nature of that activity and its duration within this broad time-span (see Pottery Section) must remain for the moment uncertain.

Belgic activity, indicated by sherds, seems to have been centred elsewhere. Finds of this period from the topsoil were sparse, but a little more numerous further to the south as revealed by the pipe-trench.

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