

A Roman Coffin found at Batheaston

By MARJORIE CROOK, M.B., Ch.B.

On July 5, 1947, when digging a drainage trench on a housing site at Batheaston, Mr. Vincent Harding came upon what proved to be a Roman coffin. Our thanks are due to Mr. Goldsmith, the Architect, who drew attention to the find, and to Messrs. C. V. Harding & Sons, the contractors, the clerk of the works, the foreman, and the chairman of the Bathavon R.D.C., who gave us every facility for examining it.

The site of the find was 400 ft. from the Fosseway, in ground which sloped gently downwards from E. to W. The exact spot was Lat. $2^{\circ} 18' 30''$, Long. $50^{\circ} 24' 30''$. (O.S. 6 in. map sheet VIII S.E. Somerset.)

The lid, which was 2 ft. below the surface, consisted of three slabs of oolite, of which that covering the head end had been broken into seven pieces by the workmen. The combined length of the three slabs was 6 ft. 2 in., the breadth of the head and middle sections 2 ft. 2 in., and that of the foot section 1 ft. 7 in.; the average thickness was 4 in. to 5 in.

Both lid and coffin sloped with the ground, and were orientated E. \times W., the head being towards the E.

The coffin, also of oolite, was bath-shaped, carefully made, and fairly symmetrical. The inside was smooth, while the outside showed tooling. A large piece of rim from the right-hand side had been broken out near the head end, and lost by the workmen; there was also an oblique crack, not of recent origin, right across the coffin.

The measurements of the coffin were as follows:—

External length	-	-	-	-	6 ft. 2 in.
Internal length	-	-	-	-	5 ft. 10 in.
External breadth (at shoulder)	-	-	-	-	1 ft. 9 in.
Internal breadth (at shoulder)	-	-	-	-	1 ft. 5 in.
External breadth (at foot)	-	-	-	-	1 ft. $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
Internal breadth (at foot)	-	-	-	-	8 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
Average depth	-	-	-	-	10 in.
Average width of rim	-	-	-	-	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ –2 in.

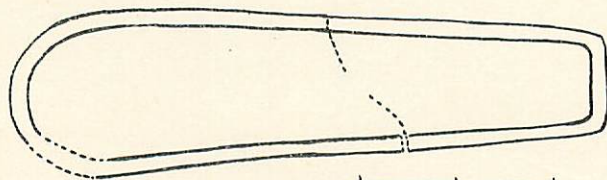


Fig. 15.

0 1 2 feet
Scale

The internal dimensions at the rim and on floor level were the same. The coffin was filled to the brim with a stiff, lightish brown clay, which must have been washed in, since it also filled the cracks between the parts of the lid.

The skull and bones of the upper part of the chest had been removed and smashed by the workmen, and many of them were missing. The head was said to have been facing towards the left. The skull could not have reached the head-end of the coffin, as several inches of undisturbed clay remained there. From the hip-joints downwards the bones lay in their correct anatomical position, but there were various signs of disturbance at an earlier date of the other bones, namely :—

1. The upper arm bones lay by the sides, but while the ulnæ and bones of the hands lay under the pelvis, the radii were above it, being dislocated at the elbow-joints.

2. No vertebræ were found.

3. The sacrum was reversed—the lower end pointing towards the head.

The only artifact found in the coffin was a small fragment of indeterminate pottery of Roman type, but as it lay several inches superficial to the left elbow-joint, it was presumably washed in, and therefore not contemporary with the burial.

REPORT ON THE SKELETAL REMAINS

The age of the individual, judging from the epiphyses of the femora and tibiæ, was about twenty years old, and the sex, from the narrowness of the pelvis and the angle of the femur, appeared to be male.

Calculated from the length of the femora, a height of 5 ft. 3 in. to 5 ft. 4 in. was suggested. There was no platymeria or platycnemia.

The skull had a length of 194 mm. and a breadth of 142 mm., giving a cranial index of 74, and being, therefore, dolichocephalic.
