

Plans and Views in the Village of Stone near Aylesbury, with Sections of Sepulchral Pit.

R O M A N
AND OTHER
S E P U L C H R A L R E M A I N S

DISCOVERED AT THE
VILLAGE OF STONE, NEAR AYLESBURY,
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

COMMUNICATED TO THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES
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LONDON:
PRINTED BY J. B. NICHOLS AND SON, 25, PARLIAMENT STREET.

1851.

FROM THE
ARCHAEOLOGIA,
VOL. XXXIV. pp. 21—32.

DISCOVERY
OF
ROMAN AND OTHER REMAINS,
&c.



IN the year 1847 Dr. Diamond communicated to the Society of Antiquaries an account of some excavations which he had superintended at Ewell near Epsom, when he exhibited various remains found in certain shafts sunk in the solid rock. The particulars of these discoveries, and Dr. Diamond's opinion thereon, have been printed in the *Archæologia*.^a

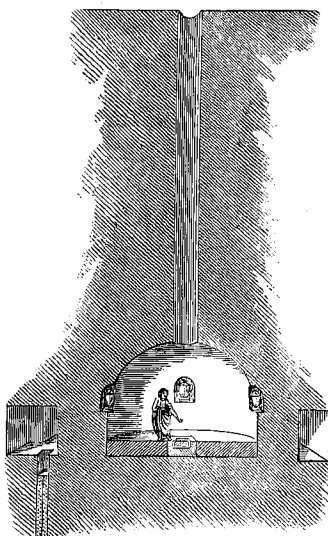
In the spring of 1849 I received intelligence, which was communicated to the Society, of the discovery of several pits of a similar description in the Isle of Thanet, having, in the mean time, found in the work of Bartoli^b additional proofs of their origin and use, tending to confirm the opinion advanced by Dr. Diamond, namely, that these systematically formed pits were designed for the purpose of sepulchral interment,^c and were neither "rubbish holes" nor wells, as had hitherto been supposed by some of our English antiquaries. For the better understanding of this peculiar mode of sepulture, and to save the trouble of reference, I have added a sketch from Bartoli's 50th plate, which shews the construction of a *columbarium* at Rome differing from those previously known. It was discovered, he informs us, on the east side of the Aventine Hill, in the year 1692. The shaft is perpendicular and sixty

^a Vol. XXXII. p. 451.

^b Gli Antichi Sepolcri, ovvero Mausolei Romani ed Etruschi trovati in Roma, etc. Folio, Roma, MDCCLXVIII. The plate of this tomb is incorporated in Montfaucon.

^c Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, vol. i. p. 328.

palmi (51 feet) deep, with holes on each side as supports for the feet and hands in ascending and descending. The steps leading into the vault are connected with a corridor which runs round the outside of the chamber, and ends in a space in the midst of which is a well six yards deep. The chamber is stuccoed, and the niches for the ollæ painted light blue. In the centre of the floor, which was paved, was a large slab of travertine stone, having a square plate of metal let into the centre and weighing sixty-three pounds, contained in a leaden frame weighing thirty-three pounds. The surface of the plate was very uneven, as if a bolt or ring had been once attached to it.



Here, then, we have the more perfect type of a mode of sepulture which appears to have been very frequently resorted to by the Roman possessors of Britain; a mode of all others, when the rite of cremation had been performed, the best calculated to protect the remains of the dead from violation, while it occupied a superficial area so very limited.

An account of the discovery of other pits, of a character similar to those already known in England, in the village of Stone, near Aylesbury, during the summer of the present year, may probably interest the Society; since it illustrates the habits of the former masters of the world and their Romanised tributaries, and sheds some light on the faint traces of customs which the spread of Christianity and the irruption of other races have nearly effaced.

Except a substantial church, the village of Stone possesses no feature of interest. The high road from Aylesbury to Thame and Oxford passes through it. On arriving

at the western end of the acclivity a fine view of the Chiltern hills opens on the left. This spot, which is at a considerable height above the Vale of Aylesbury, and, though not appearing so to the eye, is, I am informed, nearly at as great an elevation as the average range of the Chiltern hills,—appears to have been in ancient times far more thickly populated than at present. A few years since, when the crown of the hill between the garden of the vicarage and the windmill was lowered, the workmen discovered several human skeletons, with the remains of oxen, a horseshoe, &c. It was conjectured at the time that these relics were the evidence of a battle on the spot, but subsequent observations and discoveries tend to shew that it had at one time been the site of a cemetery, and that too for a period extending in all probability over at least three or four hundred years; the discovery of the skeletons, the horseshoe, and the remains of weapons, proving the Teutonic character of the interments,—whether of Franks or Saxons it would be difficult to pronounce,—but certainly neither of Pagan or Christianised Romans. A short time previously a fibula of large size, and with the Christian emblem, was dug up in the vicarage orchard. The remains of coarse cloth still adhering to the fragment of the *acus*, naturally leads to the inference that it was interred with the body of the wearer. This fibula is engraved in the *Archæologia*.^a Subsequent discoveries in the midland counties of England afford a clue to the age of this relic, which, when compared with the fibulæ found by Sir Henry Dryden at Barrow Furlong, in Northamptonshire, and that discovered with some skeletons at Minchinhampton, in Gloucestershire,^b as well as those found in a stone-quarry near Ashenden in Buckinghamshire,^c we may with some confidence assign to a period ranging from the fourth to the fifth century. With the skeletons discovered at Stone, was found an obliterated coin of Magnentius; a fact of some importance, since it seems to limit the period of the interment.

I have already ventured on the expression of an opinion, founded on the consideration of repeated discoveries, that the Franks, and perhaps some tribes of Saxons, first made a settlement in this island at the period of the usurpation of Carausius.^d The discoveries at Barrow Furlong communicated by Sir Henry Dryden^e favour such a conjecture, since not a vestige of any Christian emblem was found within the whole area of that cemetery, while the interments, of evident Teutonic character, afforded

^a Vol. XXX. p. 545.

^b Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, vol. i. p. 270.

^c These fibulæ, described as “a pair of ancient scales,” were purchased by the Honourable Mr. Neville at the sale of the Stowe collections. They are engraved in the Journal of the British Archæological Association, vol. v. p. 113.

^d Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, vol. ii. p. 59.

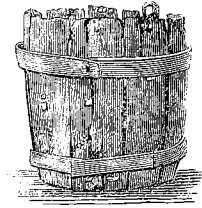
^e Archæologia, Vol. XXXIII. p. 326.

good evidence of their being those of a people in long and quiet possession of the district.

With the exception of the fibula already alluded to, no Christian relics have as yet been found at Stone. The two fibulæ discovered near Buckingham, and recently sold with the collections at Stowe, were of the same size and configuration, but without the Christian emblem.

The limits of the cemetery at Stone cannot now be ascertained ; but there is good reason for believing that the southern portion is now included in the garden of the vicarage, while the works of the sand-pit on the north side of the road, near the windmill, from time to time bring to light other relics both of the Roman and the Teutonic character. A few weeks since a skeleton was discovered with the usual spear-head, knife, and umbo of shield, and about the same time two very perfect urns, containing bones, were dug out, at a spot where the remains of a large fire evidenced that the Pagan rite of cremation had been performed. The workmen also laid bare a pit, twenty-seven feet deep, in which, fifteen feet from the surface, an urn was discovered. We have thus proofs that in this spot two distinct races of people had been interred. On the age of those of Teutonic character we may presume to speculate, guided by the historical and monumental data we possess, but on those of earlier times we cannot offer even a conjecture, and our perplexity is increased by the discovery of other interments about a furlong from the spot, on the left of the road, in a ploughed field, part of the vicarage glebe, lately appropriated as the site of the County Lunatic Asylum. Here, in the month of July last, while digging the foundations for the asylum, the workmen discovered what they supposed to be an old well abandoned and filled up. No relics of any description whatever had, up to this time, been discovered on the spot ; but, suspecting the character of this supposed well, I had no difficulty in persuading my friend the Vicar to have it explored, and this was proceeded with at once. In a short time we discovered evidence that it had been used for sepulchral purposes. At the depth of eight feet the workmen came to a stratum of hard blue stone, a foot in thickness, through which a circular hole had been made. Immediately beneath, a chamber was found, the dimensions of which are accurately described in the accompanying plan. In this portion of the pit were discovered many fragments of cinerary urns formed of dark slate-coloured clay, some of which contained human bones, the bones of some large animal, and portions of burnt oak and beech. Through the centre of this chamber the perpendicular shaft was continued eleven feet to another and thicker stratum of rock (see Plan). Beneath this again a second chamber was discovered and cleared out. The contents were similar, but with the addition of

the skull, teeth, and one horn of an ox, a portion of skin, tanned and preserved by the action of the sulphurous acid of the blue clay below, and wood burnt, unburnt, and partially consumed; twelve urns of various forms and sizes, two bronze rings, apparently formed for armillæ, of the rudest construction, two and three-quarter inches in diameter, and a bucket with iron hoops, and cleets for the handle, which could not be found.^a



The section of the pit, which accompanies this notice, from its opening to its base, will render any further details needless, and I shall therefore, after directing attention to it, proceed to describe more minutely the contents of this sepulchre.

The urns were of the kind generally found in places appropriated to Roman sepulture, some being of a light colour, and others of the dark slate colour, of the kind baked in "smother kilns," of which process an account will be found in the Transactions of the British Archæological Association.^b

From the foregoing facts it appears, beyond doubt, that interment in pits, as discovered at Stone and other places in England, was very generally adopted during the Roman occupation of Britain. To such a mode of sepulture, so well calculated to conceal and protect the remains of the dead from desecration, may be attributed the fact that traces of Roman and Romano-British interments, considering the length of time this island was occupied by the invaders, and its evident vast population, are *comparatively* few.

It is somewhat remarkable that, while the pits of the same description at Ewell and other places contained fragments of earthen vessels, bearing the stamps of the potters, not a single specimen with a potter's mark was found in the pit at Stone. From these, and other circumstances, I am led to conclude, so far as we can judge from what has been as yet discovered, that the Roman inhabitants of this spot, and their immediate successors, a tribe of Franks or Saxons, were of a humble though not of the humblest grade. We know from Horace, as well as from other writers,

^a An engraving of this bucket, from a Daguerreotype, taken shortly after its discovery, is here given. Its near resemblance to the common milking-pail still in use will be remarked. The edges of the staves are connected by wooden pins. Mention of the *situla*, or bucket for the well, occurs in Plautus, and various other ancient writers. It could not have differed widely from those in use at the present day, for the art of making wooden vessels, with staves and hoops, was known in the time of Pliny, who says, "Magno et collecto jam vino differentia in cella. Circa Alpes ligneis vasis conduit, circulisque cingunt." Hist. Nat. lib. xiv. c. 21. Pignorius, De Servis, p. 266, edit. 1656, gives us a representation of an ancient sculpture in marble, dug up at Augsburg in 1601, on which are seen the Vinitores stowing away casks formed like those used by the moderns. It may be sufficient, however, to cite the examples of hooped vessels in the sculptures of the Trajan and the Antonine columns, or the marble of Gruter, p. 818, No. 5.

^b Vol. i. p. 3.

that the remains of the very poorest of the population were cast, without the ordinary rite of cremation, into pits;^a but the care with which the interments at Stone were evidently conducted, does not favour the belief that the remains were those of the pauper, the friendless, or the criminal.

A few days after the pit had been thoroughly investigated, five more urns of the paler colour were found, about fifty yards from the spot, by the workmen engaged in forming a drain for the asylum. They were deposited about eighteen inches below the surface without any apparent care, and contained a few human bones. This proves that the spot in which the pit is situated was a common burial-ground of the Roman or Romanised inhabitants.

Summary of the various remains discovered at Stone.

1. *In the vicarage garden.*—Large dish-shaped fibula with the Christian emblem. Engraved in *Archæologia*, Vol. XXX. p. 545.

2. *In the turnpike road*, between the vicarage garden and the mill, seven human skeletons, regularly interred, some lying on their sides, others on their backs, and one in a semicircular grave with large stones placed over the whole of the body.

An obliterated coin of Magnentius, and a fragment of the cranium of an ox, were found with one of the skeletons.

3. *In the sand-pit immediately adjoining the mill.*—A skeleton, with spear, knife, and umbo of shield. An urn at the feet.

β. A cinerary urn full of burnt human bones, and near it a small urn inverted and empty. Traces of a large fire over several square yards. Several fragments of cinerary urns.

γ. A shaft twenty-seven feet deep. An urn of light-coloured clay at the depth of fifteen feet. Stones at the bottom bearing the traces of fire.

4. *On the field on which the County Lunatic Asylum is now building.*—A pit, of which the dimensions and details are given in the accompanying plan. In the upper chamber about twelve cinerary and other urns, and in the lower fragments of about thirty urns of various sizes, some of which were broken by the workmen. Several contained both human and animal bones, portions of beech and oak, burnt and unburnt; on the latter the bark is still perfect. At the bottom of the pit, a piece of skin tanned and preserved, as already explained, by the action of the

^a Vide, inter alia, Suetonius in Domitiano, c. 17.—Festus, s. v. *Vespæ*; et ibid. s. v. *Puticuli*.

sulphurous acid of the clay ;^a a piece of wood with a square hole in the middle ; a bucket made of oak, the handle wanting. A mutilated cranium with the teeth of an ox (*bos taurus*), with the femur, ribs, and other bones of that animal, the core of the horn of a goat, and the phalanges of some young quadruped. A pair of rude bronze armillæ ; an iron disc about an inch in diameter, with a spike on each side ; the handle of an amphora ; and a few fragments of Samian ware.

5. About fifty yards north-west of the pit, two feet below the surface, a double-handled urn, one of smaller size, one with a single handle, and one smaller of dark clay.

6. About thirty yards south-west of the pit were found several fragments of cinerary urns two feet below the surface, of the coarsest fabric.

7. Near the same spot two coins in middle brass, one of them of Domitian, *Rev.* Spes, walking ; the other, of Vespasian, *Rev.* an altar between the letters S C.

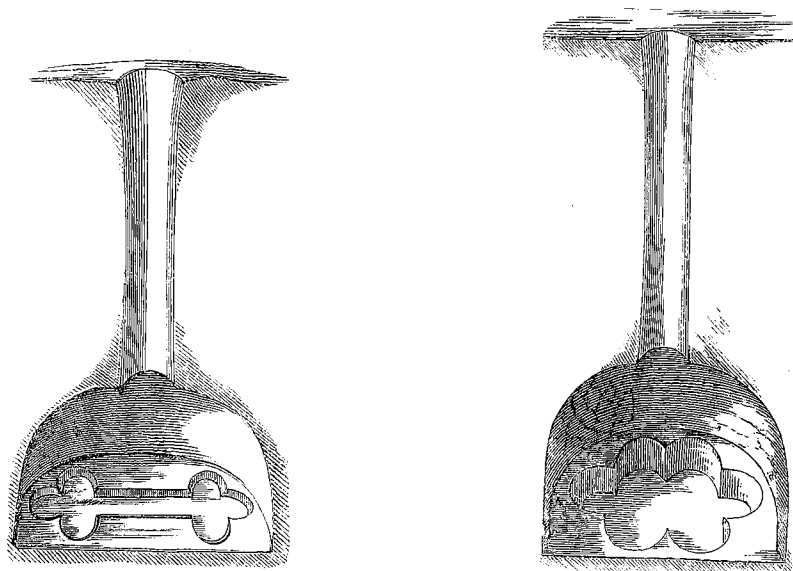
I had completed this account when my attention was directed to the very curious cave discovered at Royston, upwards of a century since, and a view of which was engraved by Stukeley in his *Paleographia Britannica*, No. I., pp. 5, 6. The following is his description of its discovery :—"In the month of August, 1742, some persons had occasion to set down a post in the market-house to nail a bench on for the use of the market-women. In digging, they struck through the eye or central hole of a mill-stone, underground, and found a cavity of about sixteen feet deep, as appeared by letting down a plumb-line. They took up the mill-stone and saw a well-like descent of about two feet in diameter, with holes cut in the chalk, at equal distances, and opposite to each other, like the steps of a ladder, for descent. It was accurately circular and perpendicular. The people, entertaining a notion of some hidden treasure being concealed in this place, set to work in earnest with buckets and a well-kirb, to draw out the rubbish with which it was filled. At length they emptied it, and drew out two hundred loads of earth and rubbish." ^b

Stukeley at once concluded that this place was formed as a cell by the Lady

^a The skins of beasts were used in lustrations. "Pellis Jovis. Sive pellis victimæ quæ Jovi immolabatur. Immolabant autem victimas Jovi Milichio et Ctesio, quarum pelles pellis servabant, Jovis nomine eas appellantes." Suidas, s. v. Διὸς Κώδιον.

^b The bottom, says Stukeley, contained "the purest garden mold ; and in that the corpse or skeleton of a woman, the skull of which I had in my hand, and well knew to be a female." *Paleographia Britannica*, part ii. p. 9.—How much it is to be regretted that this place was not explored by competent persons, and that an account of its then state was not drawn up by an antiquary less visionary than Stukeley.

Roise, or Roisia, a personage of great piety, who, according to Camden, set up a cross here some time after the Conquest. The Rev. Charles Parkyn, Rector of Oxburgh, ventured to dispute this opinion, and an angry contention followed. Stukeley's arguments, if such blind and absurd conclusions can be so designated, may be seen at length in the second part of his *Paleographia*. Both disputants appear to have remained in utter ignorance of the original purpose of this "cave," which is clearly a Roman sepulchral vault,^a and in construction does not differ greatly from that in the Aventine mount at Rome.^b Nor is this, in my opinion, the only place of the kind in England. There can scarcely be a doubt that the "caves" in the parish of Chadwell, near Tilbury, opposite to Gravesend, were designed and used for the same purpose. Camden speaks of them, and gives sketches of their form, which are here copied.^c "Near Tilbury are several spacious caverns in a chalky cliff, built very artificially of stone to the height of ten fathoms, and somewhat straight at the top."



^a That this vault was a tomb of the Roman period I think there can be no doubt, to whatever use it may have been converted in the middle ages. That it may have been used and tenanted by some recluse at a much later period, is very probable. The two niches would suggest the form of the recess for the *Piscina*, and it will be seen that a cross has been carved above one of them. Their identity however with the niches in the tombs cut in the rock of the mountain called *Bingemma*, is very apparent, as may be observed by reference to plate CCLXIII. figs. 1 and 2, in *The Voyage Pittoresque en Sicile*, etc.

^b Clutterbuck, in his *History of Hertfordshire*, gives the accounts of former writers, but offers no conjecture of his own. Vol. iii. p. 562.

^c This is a proof that these pits were objects of interest to the antiquaries of the days of Camden, while

Gough, in his edition of Camden, corrects his author as to the situation of these pits: "The caverns," he says, "placed by Mr. Camden in Tilbury, are, in fact, in Chadwell parish. Dr. Derham measured three of the most considerable, and found one of them fifty, another seventy, and a third eighty feet deep: the bottom a soft sand, over the top an arch of two hundred feet of chalk. They lie within the compass of six acres, near the highway leading from Stifford to Chadwell; and in East Tilbury, in a field called 'Cave field,' is a horizontal passage to the cavern. These have been supposed granaries of the ancient Britons, retreats of the Danish ravagers, and even King Cunobeline's gold mines."^a

It appears strange that one so devoted to the study of our English antiquities should review such vague theories without offering any opinion of his own. Morant says, "Some derive the first part of the name (Chadwell) from *Cealc*, chalk, thinking it occasioned by the great chalk wells or pits from which chalk was originally dug, or which were made to serve for granaries to the ancient Britons. The Danes are vulgarly reported to have used them as receptacles or hiding places for the plunder and booty which they took from the adjoining inhabitants during their frequent piracies and descents upon this island, and hence they have been styled *Dane* or *Dene* holes." He then proceeds to quote verbatim from his correspondent, "Dr. Derham, late Rector of Upminster, &c.," who, he says, "gave the following description of them in a letter of his dated 17 February, 1706. 'I myself measured three of the most considerable holes, and found one of them fifty foot six inches deep; another, seventy foot seven inches; another, in the wood northward, eighty foot; the depth of the western hole, near the road, fifty-five foot six inches: on the same side the road is another seventy foot seven inches; on the other side of the way, in Hangman's-wood, is another hole of eighty foot four inches. A cow fell into the hole fifty-five foot six inches, not killed nor much hurt, drawn up by a carpenter who went down and put ropes about her. The bottom is a soft sand, on which the cow alighted and was saved. Over the midst of the hole is an arch of two hundred feet of chalk. The holes lie near the highway, within the compass of six acres of ground, leading from Stifford to Chadwell.' Some of them are within the bounds of the parish of Little Thurrock. And in East Tilbury

our ignorance of their present state is a reproach to us. In the Transactions of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, vol. iii. p. 17, is an account, with views and plans, of some chambers at Baden, supposed to have been used by the Secret Tribunals of Germany, but which appear to be Roman, and of sepulchral origin, to whatever purposes they may have been afterwards applied in the middle ages.

^a *Britannia*, vol. ii. p. 52.

there is a field called Cave-field, in which there is a horizontal passage to the Cavern." ^a

Those who are interested in the inquiry as to the amount of credit which should be allowed to vulgar tradition, and its connection, however remote, with historical fact, will perhaps admit that at a later period of our history, long after the abandonment of these caves as sepulchral depositories, such places may possibly have been used by the marauding Danes as receptacles for booty; but even in this case some fragments of pottery will doubtless be found to indicate the purpose for which they were so carefully excavated.

In the county of Kent there are many similar places, which I cannot but believe are of the same origin. Hasted says, "There are now to be seen, as well on the heaths near Crayford as in the fields and woods hereabout, many artificial caves or holes in the earth, some of which are ten, some fifteen, and others twenty fathoms deep. At the mouth, and thence downward, they are narrow like the tunnel of a chimney, or passage of a well, but at the bottom they are large and of great compass, insomuch that some of them have several rooms or partitions one within another, strongly vaulted and supported with pillars of chalk." ^b He then cites the opinion of the neighbouring inhabitants that they were made by the Saxons, and concludes that they were the storehouses of those people in distracted times. A little further on, in describing the parish of Dartford, he remarks, "About a mile south-westward from the town is Dartford Heath, where there are a great many of those pits and holes so frequent in these parts. Some of these reach as low as the chalk, others no further than the sand. Many of them have been stopped up of late years, to prevent the frequent accidents which happen of men and cattle falling into them. The occasion of their being first dug has already been fully explained." ^c

The "full explanation" is that above quoted, with which the antiquary cannot be satisfied. Further inquiry and examination can scarcely fail to prove their Roman origin and use. The subject is well deserving investigation by our provincial antiquaries; and I have little doubt that ere long we shall be in possession of further evidence.

To recur to the funereal pits of the simplest form discovered in England. From all that has come under my notice, I do not think we are in any danger of confounding them with the well-like excavations which are often found within the walls of towns. These latter, for want of a better term, may be designated "rubbish holes," for their contents are in all cases widely different from those found in the pits which

^a Hist. of Essex, vol. i. p. 229, fol. 1768.

^b History of Kent, vol. i. p. 211.

^c Ibid. p. 226.

are the subject of this notice. Several pits were met with during the excavations for the approaches to the new London Bridge, the contents of which I myself saw thrown out and examined, but not a vestige of sepulchral usage was discovered, not a fragment which could lead to the inference that they had been used for funereal purposes. On the contrary, the pits discovered at Ewell, at Richborough, and at Stone, afforded good evidence that they were designed for the reception of cinerary-urns, and that in considerable numbers. It will be seen by reference to the plan of the pit found at Stone, that it differs in some respects from the others, the excavation extending some distance under each stratum of rock through which the shaft is formed; a contrivance well adapted to protect the urns from being crushed by the superincumbent earth.

That pits of the simplest and rudest construction were designed as depositories for the ashes of the humblest classes of the Roman people, I think there cannot be a doubt. We have, however, little information in classical writers on this head,—the unhonoured and the needy were of course interred in the least ostentatious manner, and the simpler rites observed on such occasions are not detailed; we are consequently not instructed as to the funereal observances of the common people in the various elaborate antiquarian treatises on Roman burial. The dismal picture drawn by Horace of the common burial-ground without the walls of Rome, is so well known that I must apologise for quoting it:—

“ Huc prius angustis ejecta cadavera cellis
 Conservus vili portanda locabat in arcâ.
 Hoc miseræ plebi stabat commune sepulchrum,
 Pantolabo scurræ, Nomentanoque nepoti.
 Mille pedes in fronte, trecentos cippus in agro
 Hic dabat, hæredes monumentum ne sequeretur.
 Nunc licet Esquilis habitare salubribus, atque
 Aggere in aprico spatium, quâ modò tristes
 Albis informem spectabant ossibus agrum.”

Sat. Lib. 1, viii.

Many of the *cellæ* or *puticuli* received the unburnt corpse; but there is every reason to suppose, that in this vast charnel-house the rites of cremation were not refused to such of the poor as died amidst their friends. When cremation became common to the Romans, no better contrivance could have been devised for the preservation of the remains of the dead than that which appears to have been often resorted to by these people in this country. In the full conviction that by making the foregoing facts known to the English antiquary it will lead to the more careful

examination of Roman burial-places, I urge upon those who have leisure and opportunity the exploration of the more extensive and more scientifically formed pits in Kent and Essex, to which reference has been made.

In conclusion, it would seem that the word *culina* was applied to the *bustum* on which the viands for the funeral repasts were burnt, from the circumstance of this ceremony being performed in places where these pits were prepared. *Culina* in the older glossaries meant a cess-pool or cloaca,^a and such was its obvious original signification; but that in after ages it signified a sepulchral pit we may infer from the following passage in Aggenus Urbicus, “sunt in suburbanis,” he says, “loca publica, inopum destinata funeribus, quæ loca *culinas* appellant.”^b

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^a Lavatrinum et culinam conjungit. Varro, de L. L. 4, 25. Vet. gloss. ἀφεδρων, culina; atque ἀφεδρων, cloaca, sive latrina est. Eadem glossa ἀποπατος, *culina*. Isidorus quoque culinam, in glossis *latrinum*, secessum interpretatur. Sorani, Thesaurus Eruditionis Scholasticæ, a Gesnero, Lipsæ, fol. 1726.

^b Aggenus Urb. in Sext. Jul. Frontinum de Agr. qualitate com. de contr. s. xi. Amsterdam, 1661, p. 301.