

Evaluation

at

26 West Lodge Road, Colchester

August 2000

**on behalf of
Crowdell Associates**



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CAT Report 80

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Evaluation at 26 West Lodge Road, Colchester

NGR: 9848 2477

Summary

A small evaluation trench on a plot to the south side of 26 West Lodge Road revealed a Roman cremation burial, probably of 1st-century date. The top of the grave had been disturbed by past activity, leaving the lowest 20cm intact. This consisted of an oval pit with a centrally-placed pot, within which was found a quantity of cremated bone and a broken clay lamp. Four metres to the east of the grave was a post-hole of indeterminate but possibly early date. The site lies 800m to the west of the walled town, within a Roman cemetery area from which many cremation burials have been recovered in the last 150 years (Hull 1958; Crummy et al 1993).

Introduction

On the 12th May a field evaluation commissioned by Crowdell Associates took place to investigate the archaeological implications of proposed development in the former garden to the south side of 26 West Lodge Road. The site was identified as one of potential archaeological interest since it lies within an extensive Roman cemetery area which flanks the main Roman approach road to the west of the town. Many early graves have been found in the vicinity of the site; among them were outstanding antiquities including the 'Colchester vase' and the tombstone of Facilis.

The evaluation followed the specification contained in the site Evaluation Brief issued by Colchester Borough Council's Museums Service, observing the requirements detailed in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1999) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996b). The current development proposal is the subject of Colchester Borough Council application no F/COL/00/0197.

Site condition

At the time of the evaluation the plot was a fenced garden to the south side of no 26 West Lodge Road.

Excavation

The evaluation consisted of a single trench, 6.5m long x 1.5m wide, situated in the eastern part of the site (Fig 1). Deposits were progressively stripped by machine using a toothless bucket. Excavation of features and final cleaning were carried out by hand.

Results

The overall stratigraphy was as follows (section: Fig 3):

- L1 Dark greyish brown loam, occasional small and medium stones, with rare modern glazed pot sherds and small fragments of peg-tile. 12cm to 15cm deep. Modern garden topsoil.
- L2 Mid-brown to greyish brown sandy loam, occasional small and medium stones, with rare fragments of flower pot and a piece of brown glazed path edging tile. 20cm thick. A topsoil with datable inclusions of c 19th-century and perhaps later date.
- L3 Brown to reddish-brown gravelly silt loam. A distinctly earlier material which continued to an overall depth of 45cm.
- L4 Natural gravelly sand.

Features

Three features were noted, all sealed by L3:

F1 (plan: Fig 2)

A post-hole, 34cm in diameter and 34cm deep. The uppermost 5cm of fill was a dark greyish brown gravelly silt loam, above a main fill of reddish-brown soft gravelly silt. Finds were confined to the uppermost fill.

F2 (plan: Fig 2)

A shallow elongated pit in the surface of the natural sand (L4). No finds were recovered from the reddish-brown gravelly silt fill. This is possibly a natural subsoil irregularity, rather than a man-made feature.

F3 (plan: Fig 2, section: Fig 3)

A Roman cremation burial. The burial consisted of an oval pit with a pot placed centrally within its brown to reddish-brown sandy loam fill. The uppermost part of the grave, including the top of the pot, had been removed by later activity. The pot was completely filled with soil. Near the top were pieces of a clay oil lamp. Beneath the lamp were fragments of cremated bone which were scattered throughout the soil within the pot. Cremated bone was also present in the grave fill around the outside of the pot, but confined to the top where the pot had been broken.

Finds

The Roman pottery

by S Benfield

The Roman cremation pot

The pot used to contain the cremation (Fig 4) is a coarse grey ware jar (*CAR 10*, Roman pottery fabric group GX: other coarse wares, principally locally-produced grey wares); however, it has been truncated, and the shoulder and rim are missing, so that the form type cannot be established and it can only be broadly dated as Roman. The lower part of the pot is lightly burnished over the foot and body to a height of about 25 mm, while the shape of the pot itself is slightly uneven with a shallow circular depression towards the shoulder possibly indicating that it is a sub-standard vessel or second.

Other Roman pottery

There is a total of 251 grms of Roman pottery from the site other than the cremation pot. This material is mostly body sherds, with fragments of one base, in coarse buff-coloured oxidised ware which probably represent the remains of several flagons. Much of this, from two or more vessels, is from the fill of the cremation feature (F3) and the layer (L3) directly sealing it, both of which also contain coarse grey ware sherds which appear either burnt or are possibly kiln wasters, suggesting that these may be connected with the truncated burial other than simply as residual sherds. Though they cannot be closely dated the flagons are most probably of 1st- to 2nd-century date. The remainder of the pottery is possibly also all of 1st- or 2nd-century date. Of note is one abraded sherd which is probably from an early fine ware vessel, most probably in Lyon ware, which can be dated to the early Roman (Claudio-Neronian-early Flavian) period, and two thick buff-coloured sherds which are probably from an amphora.

Table: Roman pottery (other than the cremation vessel) from the site.

Context	description and comments	sherds	weight in grms	date
F1	coarse oxidised ware (<i>CAR 10</i> , fabric code DJ), body sherds from 2 vessels, probably flagons	3	5	probably 1st - 2nd century
F3	coarse oxidised ware (<i>CAR 10</i> , fabric code DJ), base and body sherds from 2 vessels, probably flagons	18	125	probably 1st - 2nd century
F3	coarse grey ware (<i>CAR 10</i> , fabric group GX), body sherds, possibly burnt or waster material, some sherds partly oxidised	8	45	Roman
L2/3	thick coarse buff oxidised sherds, probably amphora (<i>CAR 10</i> , fabric group AA)	2	25	probably 1st - 2nd century
L3	thin, very abraded sherd, possibly early (pre-Flavian) fine ware, either more probably Lyon ware (<i>CAR 10</i> , fabric code EB) or possibly early Colchester colour coat (<i>CAR 10</i> , fabric code EC)	1	1	Claudio-Neronian - early Flavian
L3	coarse oxidised ware (<i>CAR 10</i> , fabric code DJ), body sherds from 2 vessels, probably flagons	6	45	probably 1st - 2nd century
L3	coarse grey ware (<i>CAR 10</i> , fabric group GX), base and body sherds, body sherds possibly burnt or waster material as they are partly oxidised	4	5	Roman

The lamp

by Nina Crummy

Fig 5, SF 1. (9) F3. Almost complete picture lamp of Loeschcke's Type I, with angular volute. Only part of the top of the nozzle is missing. The fabric is smooth and buff-coloured, but the surface is much abraded and retains only small patches of a brownish slip. Length 91 mm, diameter 65 mm, height 21 mm.

The discus design is of a fox-headed monster with a human torso, long tail and seemingly faun-like lower limbs and feet. The loins and haunches may be covered in hair, though the detail is obscured and may instead be some form of clothing. The creature carries a sword and rectangular shield. This design is paralleled only at Colchester and Richborough, and only on lamps in a similar fabric. One example came from Colchester grave 21/67, dated c 50-60, and there are two others in the collections of the Colchester Museum (May 1930, 181, pl 71, 4). The Richborough lamp came from a context dated to before c 85 (Henderson 1949, 156, pl 65, 354).

The fabric and abraded surface of this lamp and the others referred to above are typical of those recovered from the lamp factory site at West Stockwell Street, which was destroyed in the Boudican revolt (Dunnett 1971, 33-5, 37, note 3; *CAR 2*, 77; Eckardt forthcoming). Though the discus design does not match any of the known products of the factory, some of those are only represented by small fragments, and the bulk of the assemblage was not recovered

under controlled conditions, suggesting other designs may have existed but were not collected. The lack of a known parallel anywhere other than Colchester and Richborough, together with the early colonial-period date for grave 21, is good justification for identifying all five lamps as Colchester-made. However, this suggestion should be treated with caution, as it has so far proved impossible to separate the fabric of the better-made Colchester lamps from some Central Gaulish products, and the lack of a match for the design among those so far known from the West Stockwell Street factory could instead indicate that the group are imports.

Cremated bone

by Alec Wade

The urned cremation burial (F3) recorded by the evaluation produced a total of 0.718kg of cremated human and bird or small mammal bone. Most of the human material (0.445kg) was recovered from wet-sieving the contents of the cinerary urn. A brief viewing of the bone found it to be mostly mid to pale brownish-white in colour with occasional fissuring and distortion of the fragments. Most body areas appeared to be represented, including parts of the skull, mandible, axis, vertebra, ribs, pelvis and lower limbs from a single adult individual of indeterminate sex.

A further 0.273kg of cremated bone was found scattered around or within the fill of the pit containing the urn. Although this was mostly identifiable as human (including skull and limb-bone fragments), a small quantity of either bird or small mammal bone was also present.

Conclusions

The results of the evaluation suggest that archaeologically significant material of Roman date survives intact to within 45cm of the site surface. Of the deposits above this level, the relatively modern topsoils L1 and L2 occupy the first 30cm. Between 30cm and the uppermost surviving Roman level was L3, which was distinctly different in character from the topsoils, free from modern inclusions and containing disturbed Roman material including pot sherds representing several vessels, possibly associated with the cremation burial F3 or nearby graves. The truncated condition of the pot in F3 suggests that approximately 30cm has been lost as a result of later ground disturbance. The dating evidence provided by the pottery suggests that the burial belongs somewhere within a broad 1st- to 2nd-century range, with the lamp more narrowly indicative of a possible pre-Boudican date.

Abbreviations and references

- CAR 2** *Colchester Archaeological Report 2, The Roman small finds from excavations in Colchester 1971-9*, by N Crummy
- CAR 10** *Colchester Archaeological Report 10, Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester 1971-86*, by Robin Symonds and Sue Wade
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- May, T, 1930 *Catalogue of the Roman pottery in the Colchester and Essex Museum*

Acknowledgements

The evaluation was commissioned by Mr D J Crowdell FRICS of Crowdell Associates on behalf of Mr B A Sadler FRICS. The evaluation brief was prepared by Mr M Winter, Borough Archaeological Officer, and the fieldwork was carried out by C Austin and B Harris of Colchester Archaeological Trust. The illustrations are by S Benfield and K Bainbridge.

*Carl Crossan
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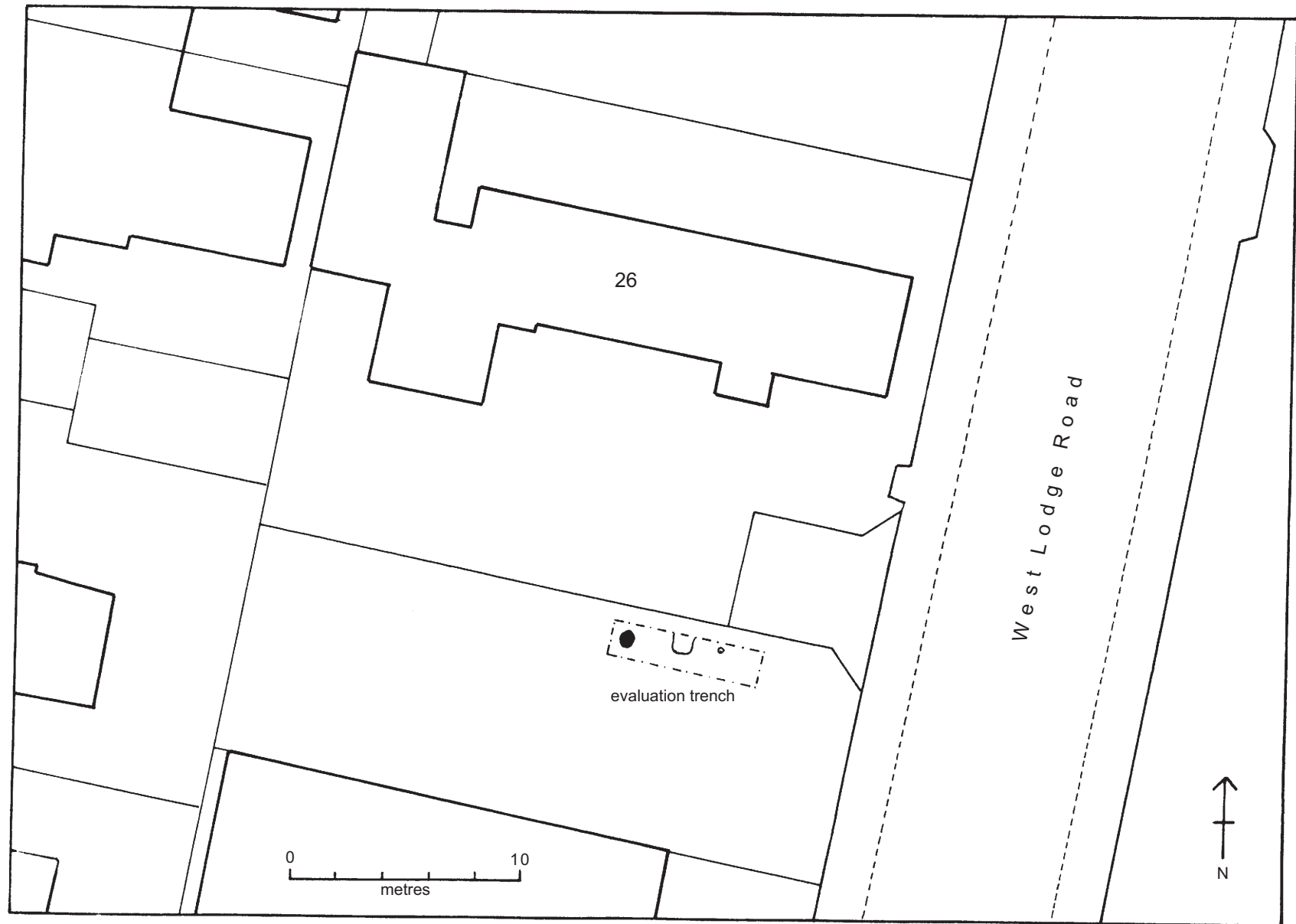


Fig 1 Trench location plan.

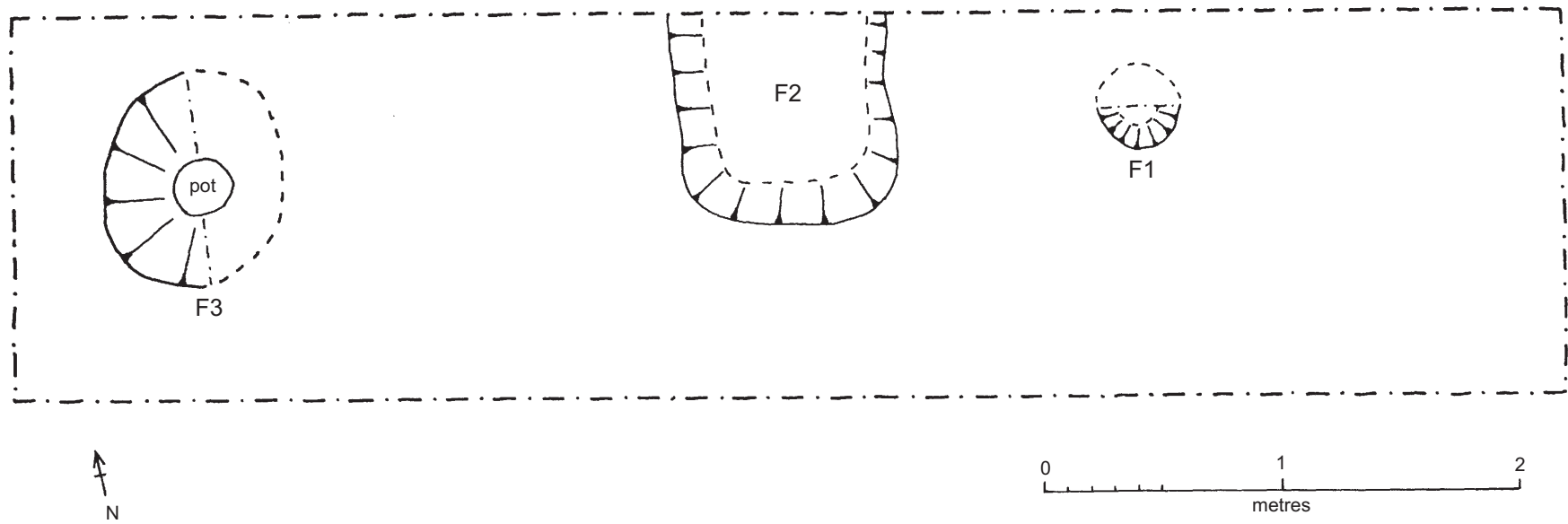


Fig 2 Plan.

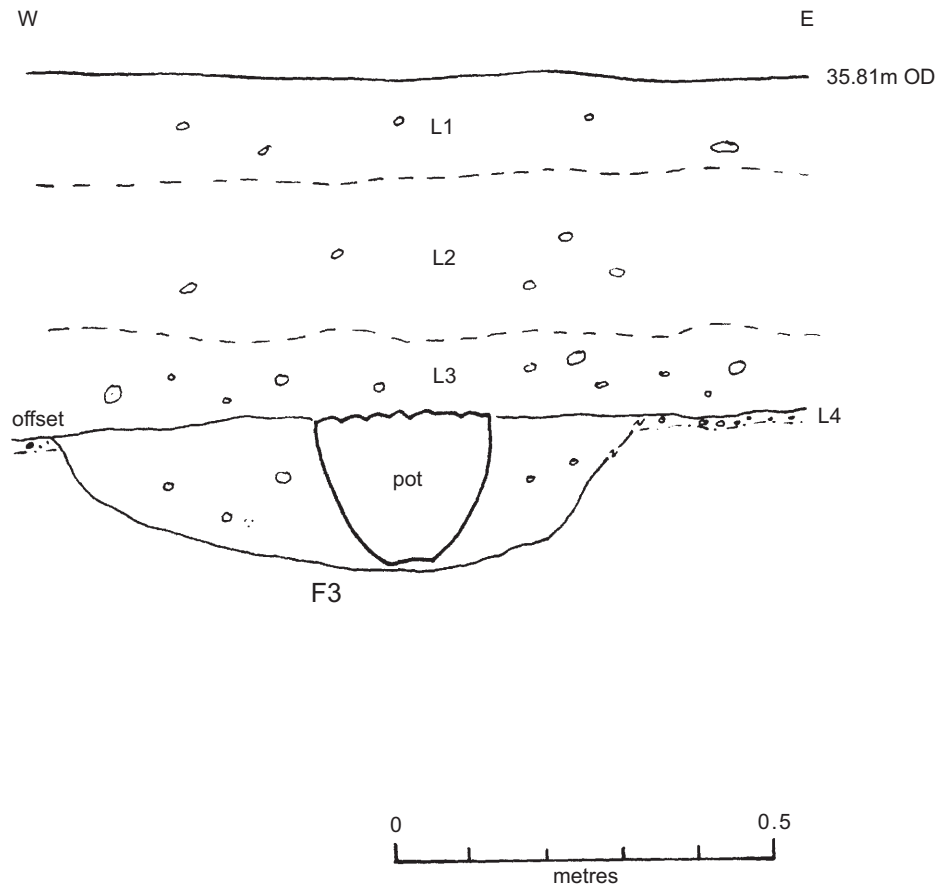


Fig 3 Section showing depth of cremation burial F3.

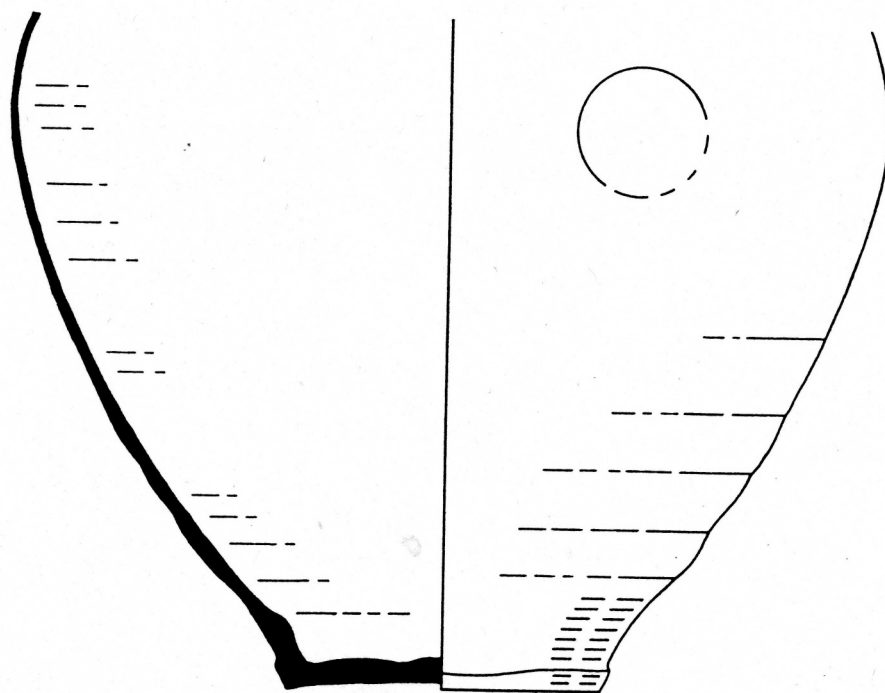


Fig 4 The cremation pot from F3 (1:2 scale)

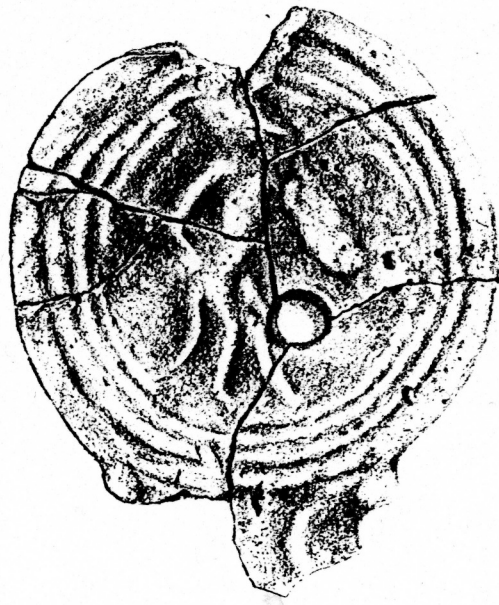


Fig 5 The lamp discus (actual size)