

WESTELL CLOSE RESCUE EXCAVATIONS.
September 1990.

During the construction of wall footing trenches for a garage and kitchen extension to No.15, Westell Close, Baldock; the house owner (Mr.) discovered human remains and the local police were informed. In the course of events the matter was brought to the attention of Mr.G.Burleigh at Letchworth Museum, who in turn instructed three members of the NHDC Field Archaeology Section to visit the site and carry out such work as was deemed necessary.

In 1982 the area of Westell Close was investigated during the construction of the housing estate, and a large mixed rite, late Iron Age cemetery was uncovered - largely in the wall trenches of the new buildings. (Wallington Road Cemetery :BAL-11'82.) The main cemetery lay some twenty metres to the north of the present site, although a line of cremations ran southwards, with two examples under the semi-detached house now being extended, and one under the northern partition wall of the central garage in the block of three - to the south of No.15. A single, isolated inhumation was recovered approximately eight metres to the south-east of No.15. Perhaps these burials defined the edge of a track or path leading to the main area of the cemetery.

In preparation for the new extension to No.15, the northernmost garage was demolished leaving the original internal partition as the new external wall. Footing trenches were dug parallel with this wall and in the garden behind the garages - forming an open ended rectangle (see attached plan), the southern side protruding further towards the road than the northern trench which terminated by the south-west corner of the house.

The trenches were inspected for traces of archaeological activity but proved negative - apart from the two inhumation graves already disturbed by the builders. Both the inhumations had been largely removed prior to the arrival of the Field Team. Inhumation 1 (the nearest to the road) had been severely truncated during trench-cutting, the torso mostly removed from the site with the upcast from the trench. However the presence of human remains was realised and some of the fragments were retained. A workman had then proceeded to tunnel into the grave fill - through the section walls of the trench, in order to retrieve the rest of the skeleton - apparently encouraged by the police! By the time the archaeologists arrived at the site (within thirty minutes of notification) the inhumation had been completely removed from the grave, and the bones laid out in approximately their original positions on a nearby path. The householder made a video recording of the proceedings, and this together with the testimony of the workman, enabled us to establish the orientation and position of the individual. Inhumation 1 appears to have been lying prone in the grave, with the head to the south-west, and feet to the north-east. Initial assessment indicates that this burial was of an adolescent male. No grave goods were present.

Inhumation 2 was in a far worse condition. This was the first body to be disturbed during building work, and the remains were not readily noticed, nor recognised for their true significance until most of the skeleton had been removed from the site with the spoil. It is also possible that had the District Council Building Inspector not been present at this time, the householder and builders might have found it convenient to ignore the impli-

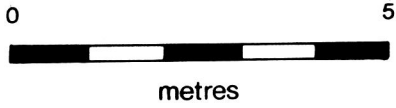
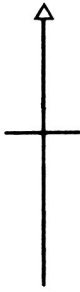
-cations of their discovery. The majority of the body had been removed by the trenching machine, although the householder managed to save the tibia and fibula from the right leg. The head of the grave (which was orientated SSE-NNW) had been removed during the construction of the garages in 1982, destroying the skull and the upper portion of the torso. All that was left in situ in the grave was the right foot. This was excavated, and it confirmed the supine position of the body. No pathological assumption have so far been made concerning this individual, except that the leg/foot appears to be that of an adult.

The sections of the graves exposed by the footings trench were recorded, and the remaining grave fills excavated stratigraphically. Only the fill of the grave containing inhumation 1 produced residual pottery - a fragment of coarseware dating to the late Iron Age. Neither grave contained grave goods.

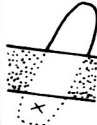
Photographs were taken, and plans made of the remains, the grave cuts and their locations. A final illustration of the grave positions was made from the field drawings. The human bones were processed and packed to await specialist reports.

DAW. 2.10.90

BAL 11'90



● cremation

 grave trench

WESTELL
CLOSE

