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IRON AGE SITE DISCOVERED in the ALKHAM VALLEY

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A discovery of major importance was made in the Alkham Valley recently when a farmer began clearing land for a barn. It was reported to the Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit that scattered pottery and discoloured soil had been spotted and Brian Philp, the Director, was able to organise our local archaeologists to be on site within the hour. With the permission of the landowner, Mr John Ullmann, further investigations were begun.

Archaeological excavation revealed four cremation burials which formed a small, but very select, cemetery, dating from about 50 bc. The burials contained pottery vessels, cremated bone and various other objects. Two of the burials were of outstanding importance because each contained a large wooden bucket beautifully decorated with bronze sheeting and fittings. The burials clearly represent a group of people of high social status living in the Alkham Valley over 2000 years ago.

The largest bucket had handle mounts decorated with superb bronze heads are among the very finest examples of Celtic metalwork ever found. The human faces are almost exactly similar to those on the famous Aylesford bucket found in a Kent gravel pit in 1886. It has taken over 100 years for another such discovery to be made,

The finds from the grave were given emergency first-aid treatment on site. The two buckets were very fragile. The slatted wooden sides were still in position and these had to be stabilised before being carefully enclosed in tin foil and plaster of Paris. They were then lifted and taken to the British Museum laboratory for urgent treatment. Mr Ullmann and his family generously decided to donate the finds to the British Museum to ensure proper treatment.

Replicas of the buckets and the actual pottery from the graves will be on display in the Roman Painted House, New Street, Dover, in 1991. The pottery vessels include a very fine pedestal-urn, which is a form of pre-Roman pottery of the very highest quality.

The discovery of this major site was featured in the archaeology series 'Down to Earth' on Channel 4 television early in December. A feature about how X-ray techniques were used to help determine the contents of the Alkham buckets appeared in the 'New Scientist' in November.