

Ancient Monuments Lab Report No 4261

Some skull fragments from Billingborough, S Lincolnshire - an addendum to
AML Report No 3021

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Seven further fragments of skull (AM 830468) were submitted for examination. All but one piece showed some evidence for working or polishing of the bone. The individual pieces are described in the table below and their position on the skull illustrated in Fig 13.

No 366 is in many ways similar to L1 28 (Bayley 1980); it comes from the same part of the skull, the out edge is in an equivalent position and it is perforated. In this case, however, the perforation is not so neatly executed; it is oblong rather than circular and seems to have been made by cutting two roughly circular holes next to each other - a slight 'hourglass' shape is still noticeable.

No 333 also shows signs of cutting though the edges here are irregular rather than polished smooth. If the intention was to produce a skull vault 'bowl' then the cuts are rather low on the occipital though further working could have been planned but not carried out. Cuts in these positions suggest the removal of the head from the body.

Recently Marsh and West (1981) have published a group of skulls from London whose deposition they suggest was non-funerary. They comment on the Celtic practice of head-hunting (Marsh and West 1981, 95) and append a list of iron age sites which have produced skulls from non-funerary context. None of this material however is similar to the finds from Billingborough though the

perforated skull vault from Hunsbury, Northants and the similarly perforated fragment from Hillhead broch, Caithness (Parry 1928, 96) may have served similar 'ritual' functions to the skull 'bowls' from Billingborough which incidentally must have been made on site as both fragments of the 'bowls' and offcuts were included among the fragments examined. The list given earlier (Bayley 1980) of sites that have produced worked human bone can be augmented by the addition of a skull fragment from Earith, Cambs which was both perforated and crudely cut like a comb along one edge (Bayley 1984).

Table: Fragment descriptions

Find No

- 5 Fragment of parietal and occipital with partly fused lambdoid suture. The outer surface rather worn/polished.
- 6 Fragment of parietal with coronal and saggital sutures.
- 191 Portions of both parietals with a partly obliterated saggital suture. The outer surface is polished.
- 216 Portions of both parietals with an almost completely obliterated saggital suture(from just in front of lambda). The outer surface is polished.
- 333 Major part of the occipital bone from a juvenile (see Fig 11). The fracture shows two distinct areas of cutting, one in the centre and the other at the right hand side. The cuts are irregular and look as though they were made on fresh rather than dry bone.
- 353 Parts of frontal and parietal with an almost completely obliterated coronal suture. The outer surface is polished.
- 366 Fragment from back of left parietal with a small portion of the adjoining occipital (the lambdoid suture is partly fused). Both surfaces are somewhat polished and the edge of the bone in the parietal notch region is ground smooth. There is a roughly oblong perforation 12x5mm in the bone which was probably cut from the outside as two adjacent holes (see Fig 12).

References

- Bayley, J (1980) Billingborough: report on the human skeletal material. AML Report 3021.
- Bayley, J (1984) A worked fragment of human skull from Earith, Cambs. AML Report 4260.
- Marsh, G and West, B (1981) Skullduggery in Roman London?
Trans London and Middx Arch Soc 32, 86-102.
- Parry, T W (1982) Holes in the skulls of prehistoric man and their significance. Arch J 85, 91-102.

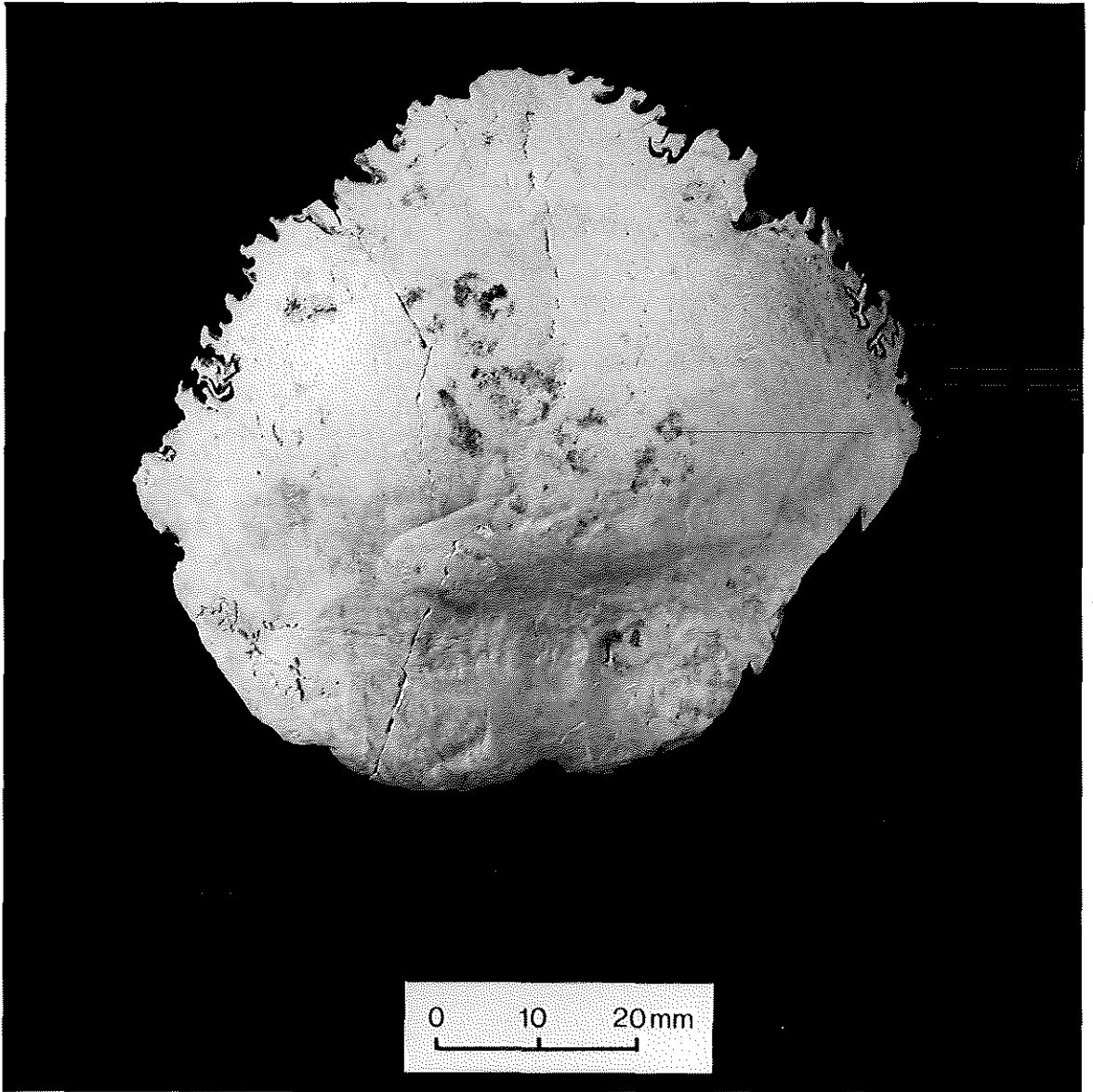


Figure 11 - Skull fragment 333

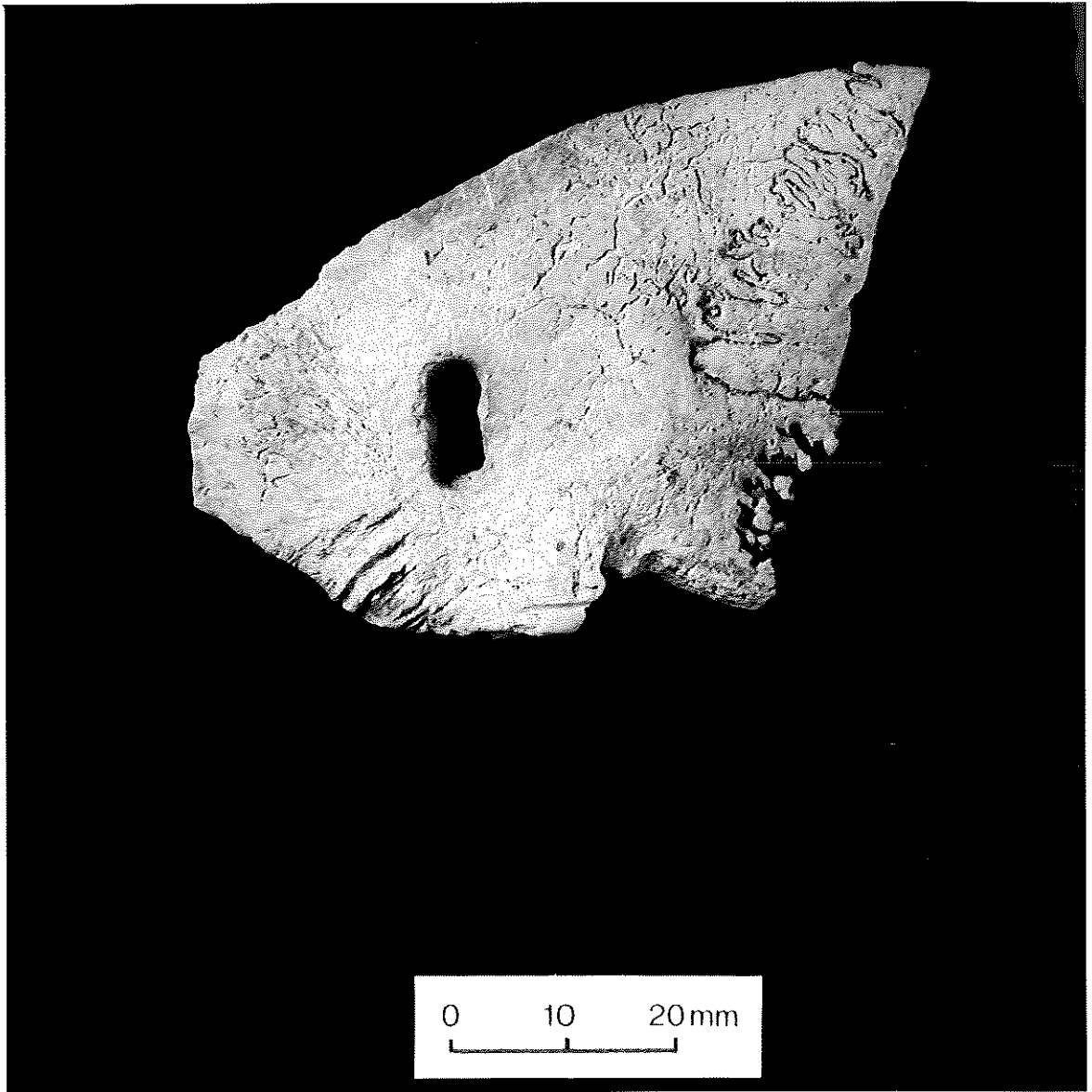


Figure 12 - Skull fragment 366

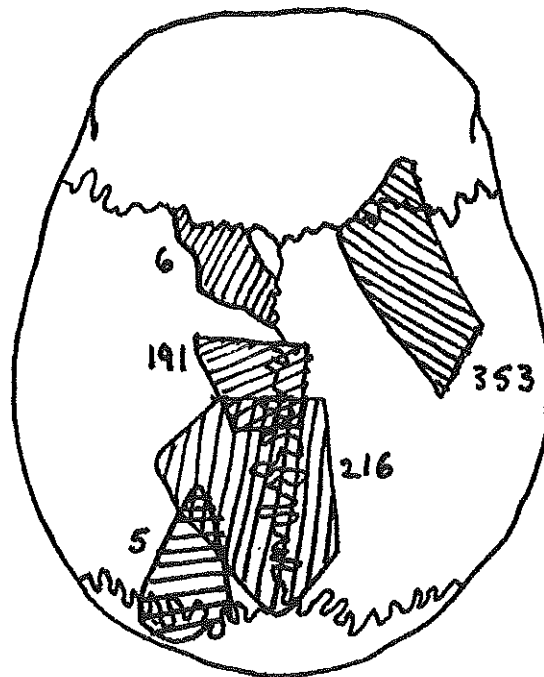
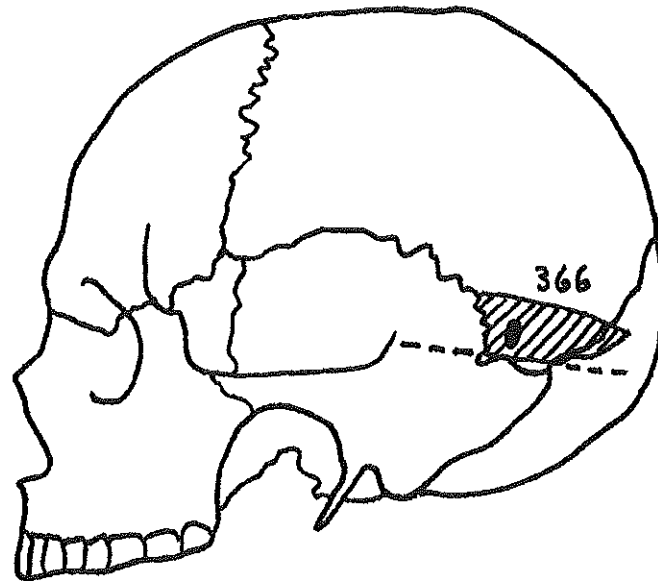


Figure 13 - Approximate location of skull fragments