

Notes and News

BARRED COMBS OF FRISIAN TYPE IN ENGLAND (FIG. 76)

Among the numerous composite bone combs from Anglo-Saxon sites in England may be distinguished a small group of particular interest to students of the early settlement period: these combs, whose closest continental affinities are shown below to lie in Friesland, are characterized by their curious method of construction, in which the (single-edged) tooth-plates are riveted between a flat plaque of bone on one side and two plano-convex bars on the other; hence they are usually labelled 'Frisian barred combs'. Many of them also have a small centrally-placed handle, often flanked by opposed zoomorphic terminals carved from the end tooth-plate on either side. Associated comb-cases display the same asymmetrical construction as the combs and may also have zoomorphic terminals, cut from the space-plates at either end.¹ A general discussion of the type has recently appeared, along with a description of an important group from Caistor-by-Norwich, Norfolk;² a larger concentration has been found in another Norfolk cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham, and will be published in due course. Apart from these two groups very few representatives of the type have been found in England and none has been fully published. I propose, therefore, to assemble details of these scattered examples³ and to review their archaeological significance.

The earliest recorded find was made in York during excavations "within and outside the city walls" between 1845 and 1855.⁴ This fine example (FIG. 76, no. 1) is assembled in the manner described above; there are three tooth-plates, of which the central one projects upwards to form a small handle, while those at either side are out-swept at the bottom and sinuously incurved over the back to terminate in zoomorphic heads. The decorative motifs employed are also typical: panels of vertical saw-cut lines ornament the plano-convex bars while the flat side-plate is bordered with multiple incised lines; an initial attempt to construct a continuous running loop motif within this incised border was apparently abandoned at an early stage and the remainder of the field filled with single or double ring-and-dot decoration, also used sparingly on the tooth-plates. Part of a smaller and less accomplished comb has been recovered more recently in York, during excavations in 1975 at the City Garage site, Blake Street,⁵ where it was found in a layer of late Roman or immediately post-Roman date.⁶ Although now incomplete (FIG. 76, no. 2) it was almost certainly provided originally with three tooth-plates but with no central handle; the surviving end-plate is more angular than that of the first York comb but incorporates a similarly out-swept bottom and zoomorphic terminal. Panels of lines again decorate the plano-convex bars, while a single row of double ring-and-dot ornament fills the panel outlined on the flat plaque; an additional

¹ Not all comb-cases of this type are associated with barred combs, however: see, for example, A. Roes, *Bone and Antler Objects from the Frisian Terp Mounds* (Haarlem, 1963), 13, pl. xi, 6-7; B. Schmidt, *Die späte Völkerwanderungszeit in Mitteldeutschland* (Halle, 1961), Taf., 82, h-i.

² J. N. L. Myres and B. Green, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of Caistor-by-Norwich and Markshall, Norfolk* (Oxford, 1973), 92 ff.

³ I am grateful to the Keepers of Archaeology at the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, University of Cambridge, the Ipswich Museum and the Yorkshire Museum respectively, for permission to publish these items.

⁴ Yorkshire Museum, no. 556.48 (Cook Coll., ms. cat., no. 145).

⁵ York Archaeological Trust, no. 1975.6/25.

⁶ Information from the excavator, R. A. Hall.

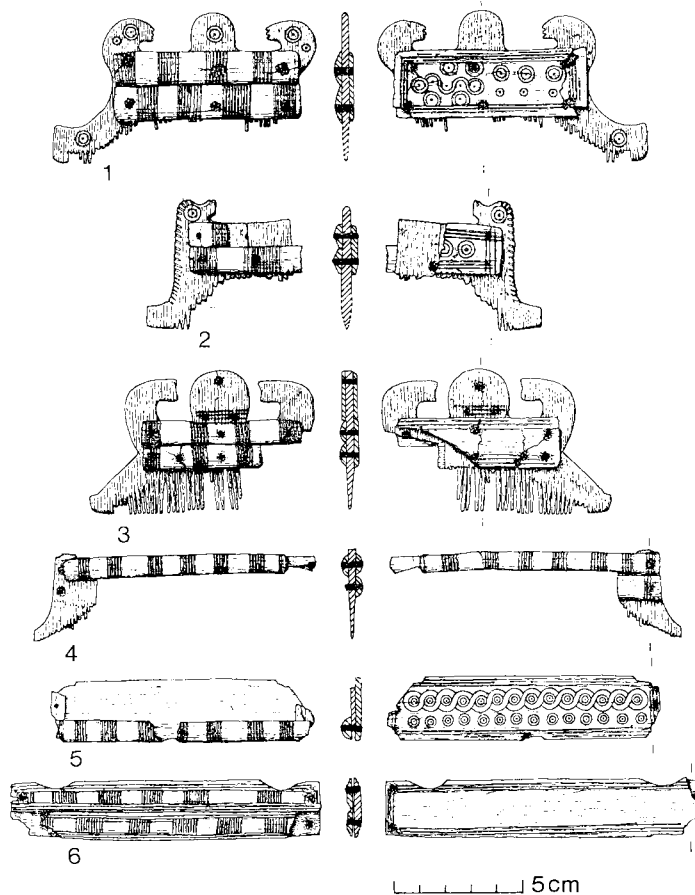


FIG. 76

BARRED COMBS AND CASES OF FRISIAN TYPE IN ENGLAND

1, 2. York; 3. Grimston End, Pakenham, Suffolk; 4. Lackford, Suffolk; 5. Comb-case, Lackford, Suffolk; 6. Comb-case, Girton, Cambridge. Sc. 1: 3 (pp. 195 ff.)

feature is the 'mane' of oblique saw-cut lines on the edge of the end-plate. In the course of quarrying during 1965 at Grimstone End, Pakenham (Suffolk), part of what appeared to be an Anglo-Saxon hut was exposed; a few sherds of nondescript Anglo-Saxon pottery and two spindle-whorls were found and also a comb (FIG. 76, no. 3), which, although less elaborately decorated than those from York, is very similar in form.⁷ The three tooth-plates are secured in the usual manner, but in addition the central handle is reinforced by a small bone plate on either side, three iron rivets being used to keep them in place; the same construction was noted on one of the Caistor-by-Norwich combs.⁸ A fourth comb (FIG. 76, no. 4) from an urn at Lackford (Suffolk),⁹ although

⁷ Ipswich Museum, no. 965-33; E. Owles and N. Smedley, 'Archaeology in Suffolk 1965', *Proc. Suffolk Inst. Archaeol.*, xxx (1965), 188 f., fig. 25, a.

⁸ *Op. cit.* in note 2, 147, fig. 28.

⁹ Cambridge University, Museum of Archaeology, no. 49.6.B; T. C. Lethbridge, *A Cemetery at Lackford, Suffolk* (Cambridge Antiq. Soc., 4to publns, n.s. vi, 1951), 16, fig. 1.

different from those already described, is sufficiently closely related to merit inclusion. The top edge of the surviving tooth-plate is trimmed level with the plano-convex bars at its inner end but is broken at the outer end, just at the point from which the terminals spring on more complete examples; the double plano-convex bars with bands of saw-cut lines are typical, but on this comb a second pair of bars replaces the standard flat plate on the reverse. A comb-case from the same urn at Lackford¹⁰ is too small to have housed the comb, but its method of construction (FIG. 76, no. 5) clearly shows that it belongs to the same general class: traces of rivet holes at one end show that the partly-surviving plano-convex bar was originally one of three fastened to the flat plate with iron rivets, the two sides being separated by narrow vertical strips of bone at either end; an additional rivet secures the centre of the lowest bar. Although now broken at the extremities, the upper edge of the flat plate can be seen to have been notched at either end. The decoration is standard, except that one line of ring-and-dot has been modified to form a running guilloche pattern. One other comb-case may be noted (FIG. 76, no. 6), found during excavations in 1881 at Girton College, Cambridge.¹¹ The twin bars are in this instance too flat to be described as plano-convex but otherwise all the usual characteristics are present; the notches at either end of the upper bar are more easily seen than on the Lackford example.

Such evidence as exists for the dating of these English combs is generally limited to that provided by associated pottery: at Caistor-by-Norwich the identifiable urns containing combs of this class were of 5th-century date, all of them perhaps of the first half of that century,¹² while the Lackford *Buckelurne* which held the comb and comb-case is also of a 5th-century type.¹³ Less direct evidence of an early date may be found in the decorative schemes of hatched triangles which replace the more usual bands of incised lines on some combs, a motif which occurs on some of the earliest Anglo-Saxon pottery at Caistor-by-Norwich and elsewhere.¹⁴ The use of opposed zoomorphic terminals is immediately reminiscent of the late 4th and early 5th-century military belt fittings associated with Germanic *laeti* in continental frontier areas as well as in this country;¹⁵ the saw-cut mane on the newly discovered comb from York is a feature paralleled on many buckles of Hawkes and Dunning's type 1 B.¹⁶ There certainly was a Germanic element in the late Roman garrison at Caistor-by-Norwich (*Venta Icenorum*), while at York a number of cremations in Anglo-Frisian urns within one of the principal Roman cemeteries¹⁷ seems to carry similar implications.

The specifically Frisian affinities of these combs become immediately apparent when parallels are sought for them on the continent, for by far the majority of the known combs and cases have been found in the provinces of Friesland and Groningen in the Netherlands, with notable outliers in the form of a comb and case from Issendorf in Niedersachsen¹⁸ and a case from Kastell Deutz in the Cologne area.¹⁹ A very close similarity may be noted between certain of the Frisian combs and those from England: in particular, the Pakenham comb closely resembles one from Finkum²⁰ both in general

¹⁰ Cambridge University, Museum of Archaeology, no. 49.6.B; loc. cit. in note 9.

¹¹ Cambridge University, Museum of Archaeology, no. DEP.24.30; E. J. Hollingworth and M. M. O'Reilly, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Girton College, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1925), 12, 20, pl. v, 1.

¹² Op. cit. in note 2, 48 ff.

¹³ Op. cit. in note 9, 13, 16.

¹⁴ Op. cit. in note 2, 44, 93.

¹⁵ S. C. Hawkes and G. C. Dunning, 'Soldiers and Settlers in Britain, Fourth to Fifth Century', *Med. Archaeol.*, v (1961), 1-70.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45 ff., fig. 15.

¹⁷ I. M. Stead, 'Anglian Cemetery on The Mount, York', *Yorks. Archaeol. Jnl.*, xxxix (1956-8), 427-35.

¹⁸ W. Janssen, *Issendorf: ein Urnenfriedhof der späten Kaiserzeit und der Völkerwanderungszeit*, 1 (Hildesheim, 1972), 49 f., Taf., 34, b.

¹⁹ Römisch-Germanisches Museum, Cologne, no. DEUTZ 147; K. Düwel and W.-D. Tempel, 'Knochenkämme mit Runeninschriften aus Friesland', *Palaeohistoria*, xiv (1968), 356 f. A comb-case of a related type from Obermöllern illustrated by Schmidt (loc. cit. in note 1) should also be noted.

²⁰ P. C. J. A. Boeles, *Friesland tot de Elfde Eeuw* ('s-Gravenhage, 1951), pl. xxvii, 14.

terms and in having a tripartite riveted handle, while the comb from urn Y17 at Caistor-by-Norwich compares closely with another from Hooebeintum.²¹ Decorative panels of multiple lines are common on the continental combs while ring-and-dot ornament is almost universal; the guilloche pattern on the Lackford comb-case is not paralleled in this series but is found on a number of contemporary round-backed combs from Friesland.²² Firm dating evidence was found with the Hooebeintum comb, which came from a grave containing a 5th-century cruciform brooch,²³ while the Issendorf cremation was judged to belong to the second half of the 4th century;²⁴ the type as a whole does not seem to have outlasted the 5th century.²⁵ Only very seldom is it possible to use bone combs as dating aids with any degree of precision, but those considered here not only form an homogeneous late 4th or 5th-century type but also have affinities within a very localized area on the continent. Too much intermixture of different ethnic groups is known to have taken place along the Frisian littoral to permit these combs to be used on their own as indicators of specifically Frisian elements in the immigrant population; there seems no reason, however, why the York combs should not take their place alongside the Anglo-Frisian urns mentioned above to indicate that there was a Germanic if not an actual Frisian presence in the sub-Roman city, and why those from East Anglia should not be used to point the way to the immediate origins of local 5th-century groups, whatever their ethnic affinities.

ARTHUR MACGREGOR

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLACE-NAME *WEALDHĀM* (FIG. 77)

This study has been undertaken as a result of recent archaeological work carried out at Waltham Holy Cross which revealed evidence of Anglo-Saxon occupation. It follows the work of Dr Margaret Gelling,²⁶ in which she showed that the name *wichām* was an appellative term applied to a place for a specific reason in the early Saxon period, i.e. because a Roman *vicus* had been there previously. On collecting information relating to the much smaller group of places now named 'Waltham' it was found that a common pattern emerged for each place and it seemed likely therefore that this name too was an appellative, though of purely Anglo-Saxon origin. Recent work by Dr Barrie Cox²⁷ has shown that names in the E. Midlands and E. Anglia with the suffix *-hām* can be related to Roman roads and for this and other reasons such names are likely to have been given in the early Saxon period. He points out that as they are near the roads they may have been settled before places with the suffixes *-ingas*, *-inga* and *-ingahām*, which occur generally in more isolated areas away from Roman roads. Whatever their relationship to places in *-inga* and *-ingas* it is generally agreed that places in *-ham* belong to the early Saxon period.²⁸ The distribution of places named *wealdhām* and their relation to Roman

²¹ *Ibid.*, pl. xxvii, 10.

²² Roes, *op. cit.* in note 1, pl. iv, 2-4.

²³ *Op. cit.* in note 20, 335.

²⁴ *Op. cit.* in note 18, 50.

²⁵ A distinct type of Scandinavian comb-case with a flat plate on one side and with two narrow bars at the upper and lower edges on the other side is clearly related. This type is known from 5th and 6th-century contexts: see B. Nerman, *Die Völkerwanderungszeit Gotlands* (Stockholm, 1935), 16, Textfig. 47, Taf. 52.

²⁶ M. Gelling, 'English Place-Names derived from the Compound *wichām*', *Med. Archaeol.*, xi (1967), 87-104. I wish to thank Dr Margaret Gelling, Dr Barrie Cox, Dr J. N. L. Myres and P. J. Huggins for reading the script and making suggestions for its improvement.

²⁷ B. Cox, 'The Significance of the Distribution of English Place-names in *-hām* in the Midlands and East Anglia', *Jnl. English Place-name Soc.*, v (1972-3), 15-73.

²⁸ The recent excavations at Mucking (a place-name in *-ingas*) have revealed a pagan cemetery with an early Anglo-Saxon settlement, so that at least in SE. England some *-ingas* names may belong to the earliest Saxon period: *Med. Archaeol.*, xvi (1972), 153.