

REPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS.

REPORT

PRESENTED TO THE

Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

AT ITS FORTY-SIXTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

MAY 24, 1886,

WITH AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY,
1885—1886.

ALSO

Communications

MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

No. XXVIII.

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WITH APPENDIX.



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IX. SOME ACCOUNT OF THE SITE OF A ROMAN VETERAN'S
HOLDING AT ABINGTON PIGOTTS IN THE COUNTY OF
CAMBRIDGE. Communicated by the Rev. GRAHAM
F. PIGOTT, M.A., Peterhouse.

[March 1, 1886.]

ABOUT eight chains less than half a mile nearly north of the parish church of Abington Pigotts, there is undulating ground, in fact, a slight hill trending east and west, which has been turned over during the years 1879-84 for the purpose of excavating the coprolite under it.

I am induced, from a perusal of Mr F. Seebohm's excellent work on the *English Village-Community*, and from personal investigation and observation during the progress of the works in question, to say that we have here without much doubt the site of a retired Roman veteran's holding of some 25 Roman *jugera* or about 20 of our present acres. A ditch filled with black earth mixed with *débris* of pottery and bones was cut through during the working on the West, but no ditch was found on the North. On the East the land is pasture (possibly has been so ever since the Romans left the district); so that the traces are naturally more conspicuous than on arable land. Here the ditch is still visible, though very shallow: a section shews its original depth to have been 5 feet, the width diminishing from 15 feet at the top to 2½ feet at the bottom. On the South for some distance there was, evidently, at the time of occupation, and most likely much later, a morass, judging

from the deposit of mud dug through and from the fact of there being no coprolite in that distance. In fact, I believe that at the time the Romans were in England a great portion of this valley was under water, and consequently required little protection in the shape of trenches from beasts of prey or from robbers except in boats.

At the village of Litlington, distant $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile, is the site of a Roman villa. Possibly a commander or officer who lived there sent one of his veterans to occupy the highest ground northward of the neighbouring valley. For the hill lies about midway between the Croydon Hills and the Royston Downs, and in those days was doubtless nearly as fertile as at present and therefore to be desired for agriculture.

Be that as it may, there are many evidences of Roman habitation on the same hill, and I would more especially call attention to holes used for domestic purposes¹. I took special notice of one of them, March 9, 1882, when I was of opinion that they were receptacles for funereal urns, and I find from my notes that day, "The men employed in digging coprolite came across a hole 3 feet in diameter containing refuse, etc. The hole went through the seam of coprolite; from the surface of the ground to the coprolite bed was 14 feet; excavating the hole to the depth of 2 feet more, an iron bar was inserted 5 feet deeper, and then no bottom was reached.

"The marks of steps cut in the solid clay to enable the workers to get out of the hole were plainly visible.

"Too much water prevented me from going on with the work, and taking into consideration the depth we should have had to go to (7 feet more), and the limited space to work in (3 feet diameter), I felt that it was no use prosecuting the search for the urn which I thought was at the bottom of the hole."

My idea of the holes being receptacles for urns has since

¹ See Wright's *The Celt, the Roman and the Saxon* (London, 1875), p. 215.

broken down. Many more similar holes (but none of such depth) were found, and none contained anything but broken pottery and bones, and the stercoraceous matter spoken of by Mr Wright.

Two urns were found in a fragmentary state and have been put together in fair preservation. They are of dark material, and round the middle of one and the bottom of the other this black colour is changed into a whitish hue, apparently due to



hot ashes deposited in them. Both are perforated in the bottom with 5 or more holes; one, the workmen informed me, was inverted.

I think I do not "pile up the mound" when I say that more than two cart-loads of old pottery and querns were brought to light. (I must leave out the bones, for they would double the cart-loads, possibly quadruple them.) I append a list of things found on the holding:

Fragments of Samian ware (the fragments of one large bowl have rivets in them, shewing that it had been repaired before being finally condemned); fragments of a large vase with finger impressions on it; ditto of mortaria, one with *MATVCEN* inscribed on it; colanders, part of a vessel with holes in the side; two bottoms of large wine vases of reddish earth, also fragments of the sides of the same.

Four pieces of iron, circular ($3\frac{1}{2}$ in. diam.), weighing each $5\frac{1}{2}$ — $6\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. or thereabouts.

Part of a bronze sword or dagger, fluted, 4 in. long by $\frac{3}{4}$ broad.

Curious triangular pieces of sun-dried earth pierced with holes: size about 6 inch trian. by 3 in. thick. Some have portions of coprolite in them.

Querns, both of Hertfordshire plum-pudding stone and mill-stone grit.

Bone combs; antlers of red-deer, one worked to hold a sword or knife, with hole through it for suspension. Other antlers, shewing marks of saw to make handles for some weapon or other; roe-deer horns; skull of *Bos Longifrons* with mark in its forehead of pole-axe or weapon of the period used for slaying it.

Dogs' skulls: one has in its mouth fragments of bones, phalanges of hare or rabbit, as though it had been killed in killing.

A few fragments of human skulls, but only one entire skeleton and that 18 inches below the surface, presumably a late interment: head to west: bones slight: teeth perfect: possibly an adult girl.

I must notice how broken Samian ware in one case was thrown away. Along a trench about 4 feet deep on the south side of the holding, filled with black earth, bones, etc., fragments of a small bowl about $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. high and $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. across the top, were strewn for the length of about 24 feet. The coprolite men used to take what they call "a fall" of 4 feet at a time, and from each fall in this particular trench did I get fragments of the bowl, till I got the better half of it. Why should the people of that day be at the trouble of sowing (so to speak) a trench with fragments of this Samian ware?

I have some fragments of very delicate ware, very thin and prettily marked, but none that can be restored from the fragments, I fear.

I exhibited to the Society, March 9th, 1885, some of the small articles found in these works; pins, coins, &c., notably an undescribed gold coin of Cunobeline; but that might have been spoil from the Briton dropped by the Roman. I would further state, that several circular places were found about a foot below the surface, 6 to 7 feet in diameter, as though tents had been pitched, or huts of wattle (*mapalia*), which were thought quite good enough for the hardy veteran's followers to dwell in. I found in one a heap of burnt wheat, which gives an idea as to the fate of the holding.