

ART. IV.—*The Late Saxon sword from the Thames found in 1840.* By VERA I. EVISON, F.S.A.

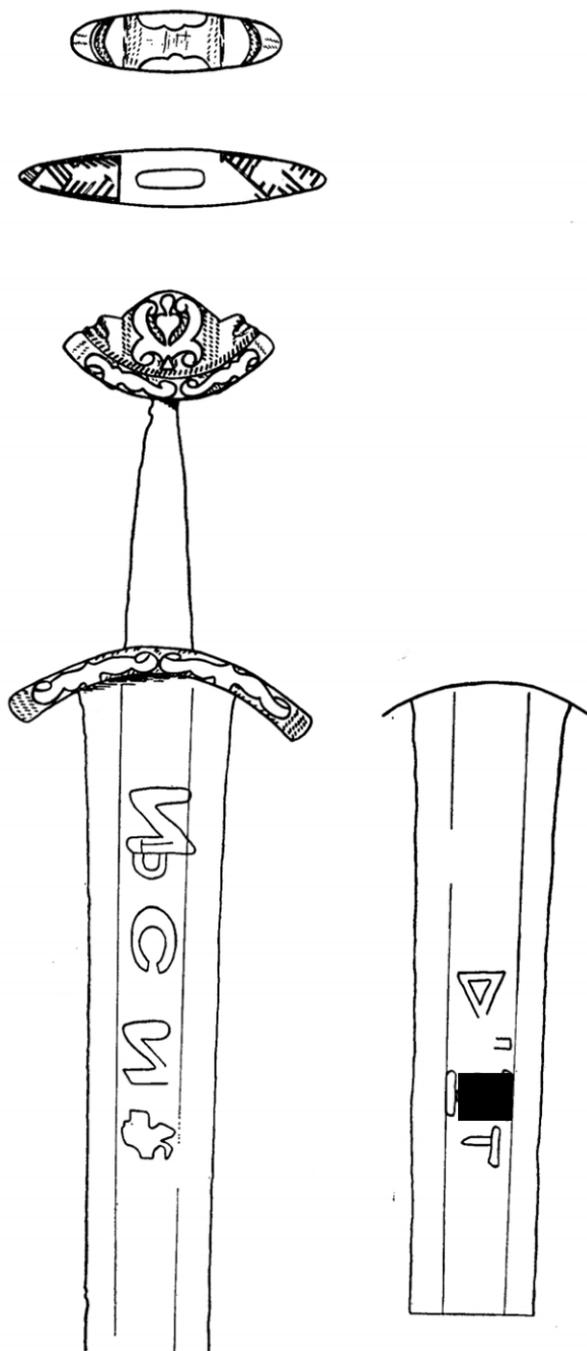
*Read at Penrith, April 6th, 1968.*

THE catalogue of objects of the Viking period in Tullie House Museum, Carlisle, published by Mr J. D. Cowen in CW2 xxxiv (1934), included photographs and a description of a sword found in the Thames in 1840, pls. II, 4 and III, 6, pp. 181-182. It has recently been possible to have the blade examined by X-ray and the hilt cleaned,<sup>1</sup> with the result that some more marks have been discerned on the blade, and the hilt is revealed as splendidly decorated (Plates A and B, Fig. 1).

The sword is complete except for the grip covering, which would have been of perishable material, wood or bone. The total length of the sword is 94.8 cm., of which the blade, 6 cm. wide at the top, accounts for 85 cm. The upper guard is 8.1 cm. wide and the lower guard 11.5 cm. Most of the inlay on the hilt is intact. The pommel is tri-lobed and flat; the middle lobe is the largest, and the two side lobes are dented in outline. The ends of the curved rod which fitted the pommel to the upper guard may be seen on the under-surface of this guard.

The design in the middle of the pommel is based on a triangle, from which springs a trefoil flanked by two leaf-shoots which divide and curl inwards towards the top of the trefoil and the opposite way towards the base. Three colours of metal are used for the inlay,

<sup>1</sup> This work was made possible by permission of the authorities of Tullie House and Mr R. Hogg who kindly arranged for the sword to be sent to London. The cleaning was expertly carried out by Miss Nan Shaw, and the cost was met by Birkbeck College. The sword has been fully discussed by the author in conjunction with others of the same type in "A sword from the Thames at Wallingford Bridge", *Arch. Journ.* cxxiv (1968).



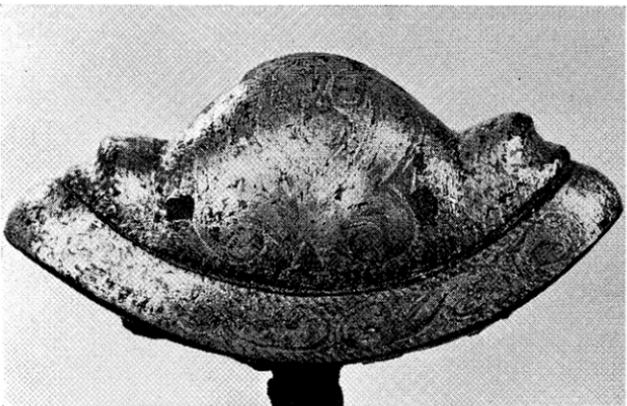


PLATE A.—Sword from the Thames in 1840 (Scale 1/1).

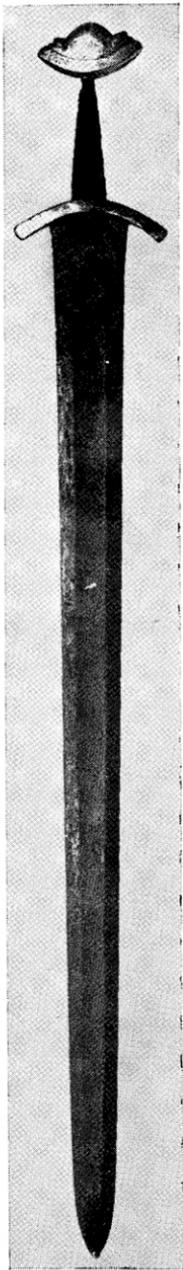


PLATE B.

a. Sword from the Thames in 1840 (Scale 1/6).

b. Detail of inlay on lower guard (enlarged).

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red, white and yellow, presumably copper, silver and brass. The triangle is in red, surrounded by a white border. The leafy shapes of the tree-form acanthus are in yellow with a border of a red line with a white line outside; spaces are filled in with red and yellow twisted wires, or, at the sides, red only. Red and white twisted wires fill in the space at the top of the pommel and the clefts of the lateral lobes and also divide the lobes. The inlay at the top has been worn down so that it remains only in the scratches of the criss-cross rusticated background. Red and yellow twisted wires alternating with plain yellow strips cover the top of the lateral lobes with the exception of a line of red and silver twisted wires along the middle of the top. The base of the pommel appears to have a border of two red wires twisted to one of silver, but this band is so wide and regular that it is more likely to have been inlaid as individual strips.

The upper guard has a similar scroll-like leaf design in two parts, each springing from a base and flowing in one scroll outwards and in a double scroll inwards. The spaces are again filled by red and yellow twisted wires, with red and white twisted wires set vertically at the extremities. The curved lower guard repeats this design except that each motif develops a double scroll each way. Red and yellow wires alternate with plain yellow at the ends, with red and white again on the extremities. On the elliptical top face of the lower guard is an open basketwork pattern of yellow strips.

Visible on the front of the blade are the figures **VI C VI** followed by an amorphous shape, all in inlaid iron which shows up because it is in a more advanced stage of decay than the blade itself. The radiograph shows a clear loop which appears to be attached to the outside lower part of the second upright of the first character, and on inspection this is a rusted part of the blade. On the back a certain amount is visible, *i.e.* a cross

followed by a T. The X-ray suggests extra bars to the cross at each end of the upright, and a triangular shape and a bar between the cross and the guard.

The inscription on the blade does not make sense, but it is suggested that it may represent the final devolution of the "Ulfberht" inscription, for the first two letters of this name often ran together, thus: **VL**. The loop at the base of the symbol might represent the horizontal stroke of the L. The elongated C may be meant for the C-shape with spiral terminals like the "eye" of a "hook and eye" which often occurs on blades of this period. The cross and diagonal line motifs on the reverse were common on "Ulfberht" and "Ingelrii" blades of the 9th to 11th century.

The hilt of this sword is very similar, both in form and ornamentation to a sword recently dredged from the Thames near Wallingford Bridge, and was probably made by the same smith. Another sword, no doubt also by the same hand, with a different shaped pommel but the same type of guard and ornamentation was found in the Thames at Battersea. These swords belong to a group which can now be recognized as of Anglo-Saxon manufacture, most of them having been found in the Thames.

The inlaid work on the hilts of the Battersea, Wallingford Bridge and the Carlisle Museum sword is similar in execution and the basketwork pattern on the top of the guards is used on all three. The acanthus pattern on two of them suggests a 10th- to 11th-century date, and this is supported by the form of the hilts and contemporary manuscript illustrations.