

Three Post-Roman finds from the Temple Well at Pagans Hill, Somerset

By PHILIP A. RAHTZ, D. B. HARDEN,
G. C. DUNNING and C. A. RALEGH RADFORD*

THE well of the Roman temple at Pagans Hill, Chew Stoke, Som.¹ (FIG. 19), excavated in 1951, was 56 feet deep, and a summary of its stratification is shown in FIG. 20. The lower part of the well was filled with Roman debris, sealed by layer D (34-36 ft.) consisting of rubble and mud with much unburnt wood in its lower part, which may represent a temporary covering of the well, possibly in the middle of the fourth century A.D.² Above this was layer C (29-34 ft.), a grey-brown sandy silt, its lower part flecked with much charcoal and containing many large stones. In this layer were the glass jar and iron pail described below, together with fragmentary bones of ox and sheep. Above this the well was blocked with layer B (2-29 ft.), consisting of rubble and slimy mud, and finally layer A, the loose rubble and earth representing the destroyed well-mouth, which was not visible before excavation. The only finds from this upper blocking were the stone figure described below, which was in layer B at 21-23 ft., and a large freestone block in the same layer at 7-8 ft., which was probably part of the original well-head.

The glass jar and the iron pail appear to be connected with occupation of the site and use of the well in the dark ages. No other finds of this period were made elsewhere on the hill, and it may be that a living-site remains undiscovered. The temple itself would probably have afforded a good deal of shelter, and indeed apparently did so in the medieval period.³ The glass jar is an exotic find in such a context, and the circumstances of its deposition must remain a mystery.

The stone figure was found in two pieces and it may have been connected with some post-medieval use of the well, the squared hole through the body holding the end of a beam.

All the finds from Pagans Hill are now in the City Museum, Bristol.

THE GLASS JAR

The glass jar (PLS. X, B, XI, B; FIG. 21) found in layer C of the well clearly belongs to the dark ages, for it resembles very closely, in shape, metal and decora-

* The introductory note is by P. A. Rahtz (Archaeological Consultant to the Ministry of Works; the notes on the glass jar, the iron pail, and the stone figure, are by D. B. Harden (Director of the London Museum), G. C. Dunning (Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Ministry of Works) and C. A. Ralegh Radford (Fellow of the British Academy) respectively.

¹ See *Proc. Somerset Archaeol. Soc.*, xcvi (1951), 112-42 for the temple and medieval pottery; for a report on the well and the other buildings see *id.*, ci/cii (1956-7), 15-51.

² The Roman finds from the well do not appear to extend beyond this date, but the coins from the temple and other buildings include many of the later fourth century A.D.

³ *Proc. Somerset Archaeol. Soc.*, xcvi (1951), 123 and 137.

tion, not a few glasses of dark-age date from Britain and the continent, and it is certainly very different, in these three characteristics, from Roman glasses of normal type and from any known glass of the period after, say, A.D. 1000. It may be summarily described as follows:

Jar, dark blue with added trails of similar glass, very bubbly, with blowing spirals and some reddish streaks, no weathering. Part of one side missing. H. 8.65 cm.; D. rim (external) 7.2 cm.; greatest D. of body, 11.5 cm.

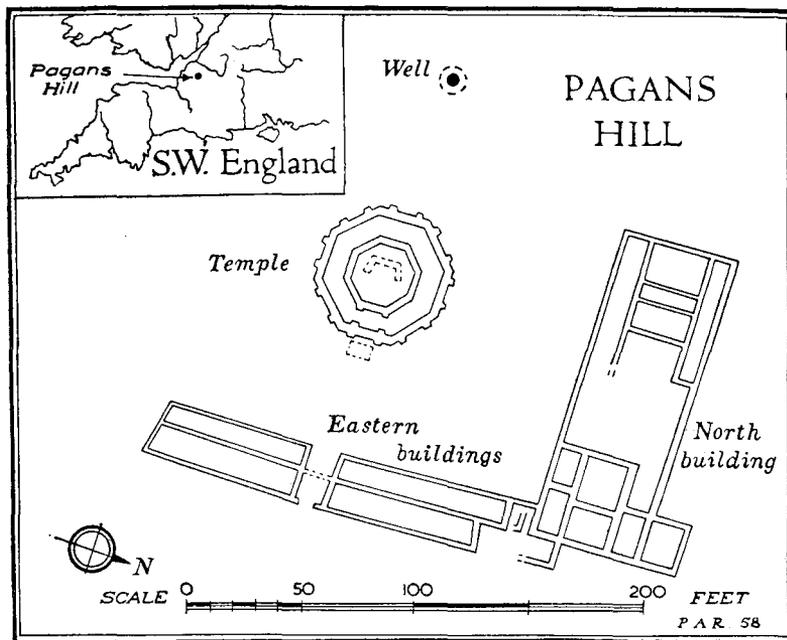


FIG. 19

Sketch-plan showing position of the Temple Well, Pagans Hill, Somerset (p. 104)

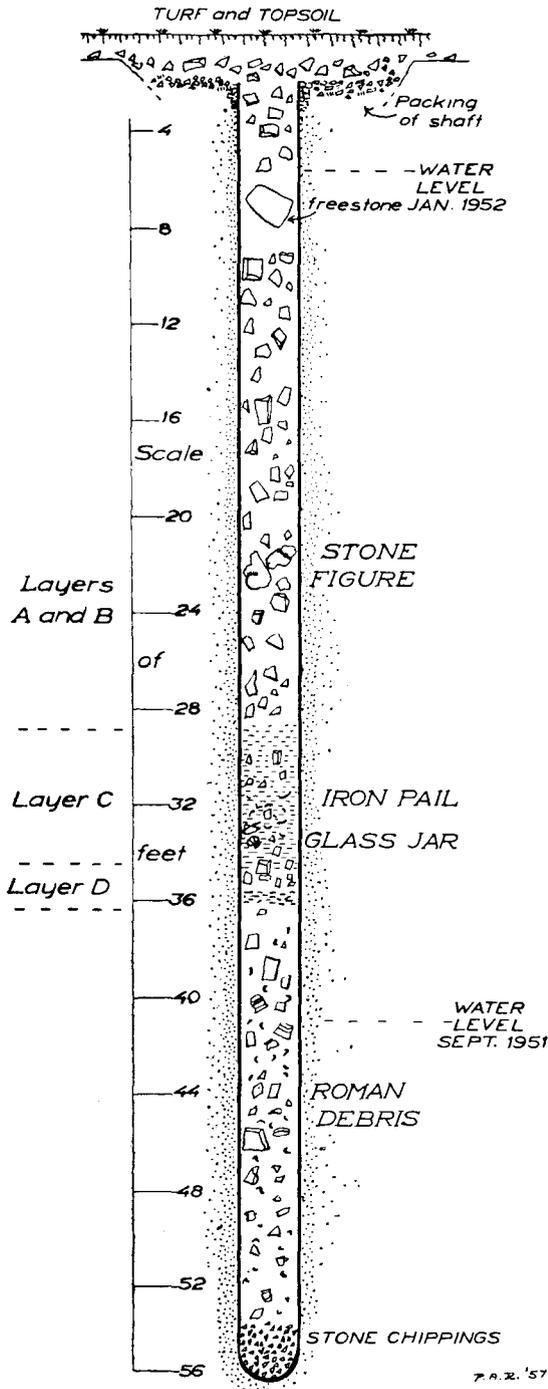
Rim outplayed and rounded in flame, concave neck, bulbous body, concave base, slightly kicked. Pontil mark over trails on centre of base (indicating that rim was finished after trails had been added).

Decoration of thick, applied trails as follows:

(a) On upper part of neck, horizontal trail with vertical nicks.

(b) On shoulder, horizontal trail running $1\frac{1}{2}$ times round the vessel immediately above tops of 8 vertical trails (c); in this trail there is a downwards nick made with the reamer at the top of each of the vertical trails and these nicks have been made as the trail was drawn out, for the first four are under the overlapping tail of the trail. This trail must have been applied after the vertical trails (c).

(c) On body and base, 8 double vertical trails from (b) to centre of base, each double trail consisting of a plain one overlying one nicked horizontally. The upper (plain) trails stop at the centre of the base but the underlying (nicked)



Pagans Hill ~ Section of Well

FIG. 20

Diagrammatic section of the Temple Well at Pagans Hill, Somerset (p. 104)

trails may run through from side to side in continuous lines as four 'diameter' trails.

A glance at my type series of Anglo-Saxon glass⁴ will make it unnecessary for me to labour the point of its resemblance to Anglo-Saxon glass in shape and decoration. It clearly belongs to my class VIII, the squat jar,⁵ while its thick trails with or without nicks are characteristic of, e.g., the claw beakers (class II), the drinking-horn (class IV), and the bag-beaker (class VI) as well as of class VIII itself.⁶ There are not many good modern photographic illustrations of Anglo-Saxon glasses available in publications, but numerous parallels to the metal of this piece will be found if reference is made to F. Rademacher's plates in his article on Frankish glass,⁷ and to the Anglo-Saxon glasses exhibited in the British Museum. The dark blue colour of the glass is also

⁴ D. B. Harden, 'Glass vessels in Anglo-Saxon Britain', *Archaeol. News Letter*, III, 2 (July, 1950), 25, and *id.*, 'Glass vessels in Britain and Ireland, A.D. 400-1000', *Dark-Age Britain: Studies presented to E. T. Leeds* (ed. D. B. Harden, 1956), pp. 132 ff., fig. 25 (hereafter cited as Harden (1950), Harden (1956)).

⁵ The nearest parallels in shape that I have been able to find are two glasses in the Musées Royaux, Brussels, from Avernois, Liège (J. Capart, *Guide des musées royaux* (1935), p. 38), and a glass in the Victoria and Albert Museum, no. C. 104-1936 (W. B. Honey, *Glass* (1946), pl. xi, d, who wrongly claims it as probably Syrian: it is undoubtedly a western dark-age piece).

⁶ Harden (1956), pp. 139 ff., fig. 25, pl. xvi (class IV), xvii, A (class II), xviii (classes II, VI and VIII).

⁷ F. Rademacher, 'Fränkische Gläser aus dem Rheinlande', *Bonner Jahrbücher*, cxlvii (1942), 285 ff. and especially pl. xliii, 1; xlvi, 2; lvi, 3; and lxiv, 2 (this last also being somewhat akin in shape).

frequent amongst Anglo-Saxon glasses, and is particularly common in class VIII.⁸ The colour, however, alone would not prove a dark-age date, for it is equally frequent in Roman times, especially in the first century A.D. It is also worthy of note that reddish streaks in the metal are frequently found in dark-age

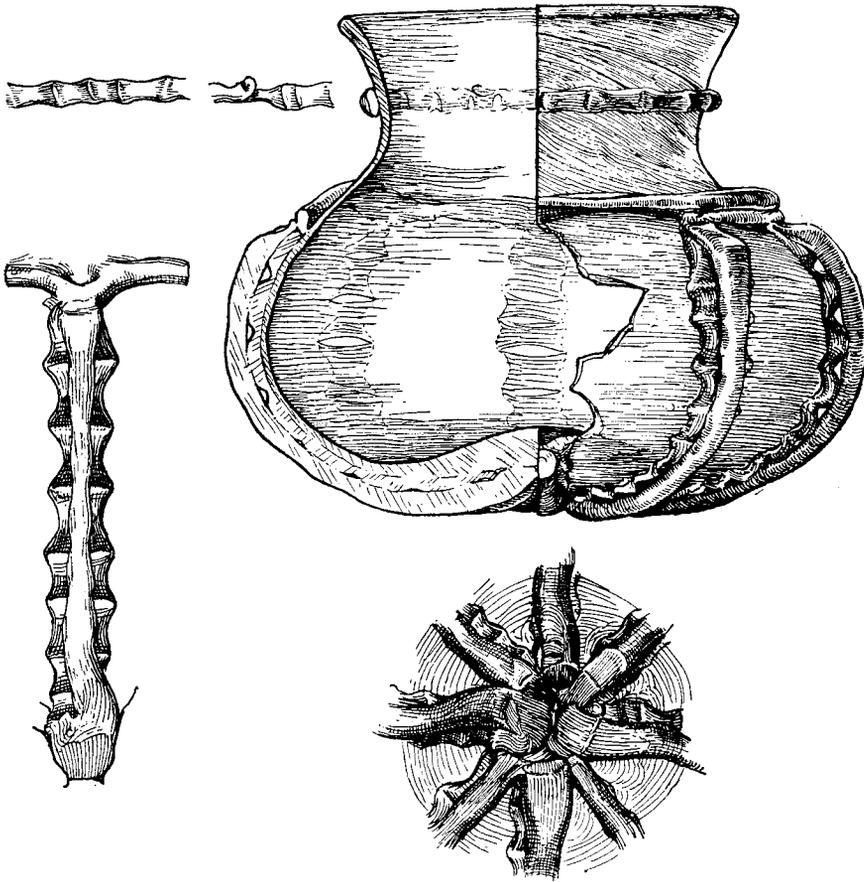


FIG. 21

Jar of blue glass found in the Temple Well, Pagans Hill, Somerset (p. 105 f.). Sc. $\frac{3}{4}$

glasses, especially of the seventh-tenth century,⁹ though these, again, may occur in glass at other periods also, being due to iron in the raw material.

If we try to pin the glass down more closely in date within the dark-age period, matters become more difficult. It seems clear, however, that the squat jar is not found in the earliest dark-age graves, either in Britain or on the conti-

⁸ Harden (1956), pp. 141 f., 164. All six examples of the squat jars with lattice trails, for example (Class VIII, a iv), are dark blue. For a summary list of 22 dark blue glasses from Saxon graves see *ibid.* note 38 (the list omitted the present piece as it was not from a grave).

⁹ Cf., e.g., H. Arbman, *Schweden und das karolingische Reich*, p. 32 f., pls. i-ii, in colour.

ment. Rademacher¹⁰ ascribes the type mainly to the seventh century, but starting in the sixth and running on into the eighth. It occurs even as late as the tenth century in Scandinavia¹¹ and fragments have turned up at the late Saxon site at Hamwih (Southampton).¹² The later types¹³ are, however, somewhat more elongated and less constricted on the neck than our piece and the trails are somewhat finer and more lissome. We shall probably not be far wrong if we date this Pagans Hill jar to the seventh-eighth century. As pointed out above (p. 104) we can only guess how a glass of such date reached a stratified position in a well on a late Roman site.^{13a}

THE IRON PAIL

The iron pail (FIG. 22) was found in the same layer (C) as the blue glass jar and we may assume on stratigraphical grounds that it was contemporary with the jar, i.e., of the seventh or eighth century A.D. Its fragments (60 or more) were found in several of the bucket-loads removed from this layer, so that the pail appears to have been smashed by the stone rubble which fell or was thrown down into the well, and its pieces spread throughout the silt. Sufficient of the pail and its handle was, however, recovered to show that it was complete at the time of its loss or concealment in the well, and not a discarded, broken or worn-out article. It seems highly probable that the pail was used to draw water from the well at this period.

Although broken into small pieces, all its component parts are represented, and it has been possible to arrive at a reasonably close estimate of its shape and size, and to work out the details of its construction.

The pail (FIG. 22) was broad and shallow, rather like a pan, with an estimated rim diameter of 35.5 cm. and height of 17.75 cm. The sides slope inwards to the base, which is 28 cm. in diameter. The side is made from two large sheets of iron, each about 61 cm. long, bent round into a half-circle, with the shorter edges overlapping by about 4 cm. and joined by rivets. The lines of junction are vertically below the handles, as shown by one large fragment of the side with the handle attached over the join. The base is a separate round plate, slightly convex or sagging below, 28 cm. diameter, with its edge bent up. The lower edges of the sheets forming the side of the pail were hammered over to overlap the edge of the base inside by about 2 cm., and the two were riveted together. A fragment of the basal junction has a strip of thin bronze which was used to repair a defect in the join. The strip is about 6.3 cm. to 7 cm. long and 2.5 cm. wide at the middle, and tapers to a point at each end. The widest part is against the inside surface of the pail, and the strip was folded together to pass through the crack with the pointed ends bent back outwards against the outside of the pail, rather like a modern paper-fastener.

The attachments for the handle are two inverted U-shaped loops of iron,

¹⁰ *Op. cit.* in note 7, 311 ff.

¹¹ Harden (1950), p. 24 and references *ad loc.*

¹² Not yet fully published: see Harden (1956), p. 153. ¹³ Arbman, *op. cit.* in note 9, pls. 8 and 9.

^{13a} While this article was in proof H. Roosens has published (*Archaeologica Belgica*, XLIV) a close parallel to this glass from a seventh-century Merovingian grave at Beerlegem in Belgium—a happy confirmation of the dating suggested above.

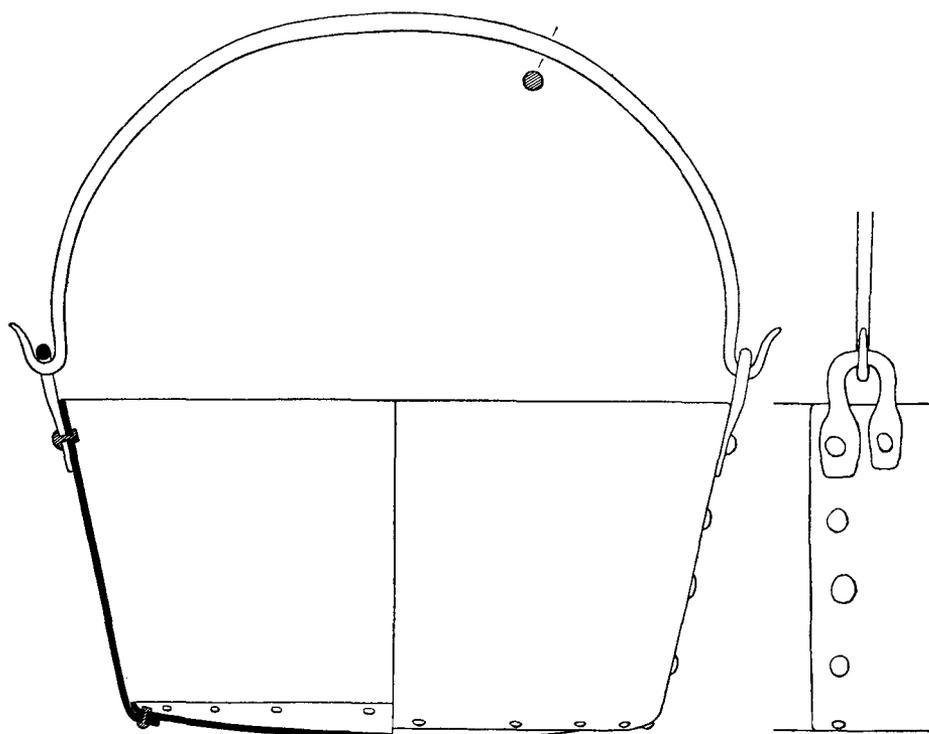


FIG. 22

Iron pail found in the Temple Well, Pagans Hill, Somerset (p. 108 f.). Sc. $\frac{1}{4}$

with the ends flattened and fastened by rivets to the outside of the pail. The handle is an iron bar, round in section, bent to a half-circle, with the tapering ends bent back after passing through the loops of the attachments.

In type and construction this pail has parallels in the early Anglo-Saxon period in England, and in the Viking period on the continent; it is thus a form of metal vessel widely distributed in the migration period.

In England the closest parallel is an iron container found by the late J. H. Edwards in the grave of a man in a small Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Harrold, Bedfordshire, in 1952. This differs from the Somerset example in its size and proportions, being about 23·5 cm. in rim diameter and 30·5 cm. high, but its construction is almost identical (FIG. 23). A sheet of iron was bent round to form the side, and the two long edges riveted together. The base is a separate plate, which was riveted inside the bottom edge of the side, exactly as on the Pagans Hill pail. The Harrold bucket makes it certain that iron containers of this construction were made in the pagan Anglo-Saxon period, in the sixth or seventh century A.D.

The excavation of Anglo-Saxon huts and villages may be expected to produce iron pails or buckets of this type, though their chances of survival in recognizable form on such sites are much less than when the containers were

buried in graves. However, in two houses of the Saxon village at Sutton Courtenay, Berkshire, fragmentary sheet-iron was found which belonged to vessels of this type.¹⁴ In House 9 was an iron sheet to the middle of which was riveted a diamond-shaped plate or patch. One edge of the sheet is upturned and has two rivets 3·1 cm. apart. In House 13 were several pieces of flat sheet-iron with rivets 4·5 to 5 cm. apart close to the upturned edge. Beneath the head of one rivet is part of the outer plate forming the side of the vessel, so that clearly these fragments are the base of a container at least 30·5 cm. diameter.

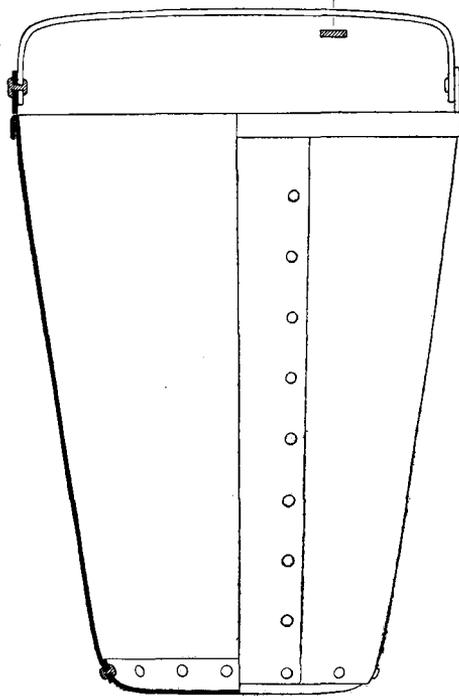


FIG. 23

Iron bucket from an Anglo-Saxon grave at Harrold, Beds. (p. 109). Sc. $\frac{1}{4}$

It is not possible to quote a parallel for such a pail dated to the middle or late Anglo-Saxon period in England, owing to the lack of material from excavations. But clearly pails or cooking-vessels of this type continued to be made in England for many centuries, since vessels of similar form and construction are known in medieval times, for instance one of bronze from London.¹⁵

The parallels quoted above, which demonstrate that vessels of this type date from the pagan Anglo-Saxon period in England, and that derivatives of the general type persisted down to medieval times, make it hardly necessary to

¹⁴ *Archaeologia*, LXXIII (1923), 167, pl. xxvii, fig. 2, a; *id.* LXXVI (1927), 68. The fragments were examined recently in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and identified as a container of the type under discussion.

¹⁵ *London Museum: Medieval Catalogue* (1940), p. 207, pl. liv.

search for analogous containers abroad. Mention may be made, however, of several iron kettles, formed of plates riveted together, that belong to the Merovingian and Viking periods in Norway.¹⁶ Some of these are hemispherical, while others are wide and shallow, straight-sided and flat-bottomed, and thus comparable with the English vessels. Petersen also illustrates bronze pails of the same form, provided with iron handles and fittings. In Norway, as in England, the type, either in iron or bronze and with separate fittings for the handle, persisted into medieval times.¹⁷ Finally, a remarkable bronze vessel may be quoted from the north-east polder of the Zuiderzee, where a medieval ship, dated to the late-fourteenth century by pottery, bronze cauldrons and weapons, was discovered in 1944. Amongst the cargo of the ship was a cooking-vessel of copper, 26 cm. diameter and 12·7 cm. high, formed of several plates riveted together, with a separate round plate for the base, and provided with iron fittings for the iron handle.¹⁸

THE STONE FIGURE

The stone figure from layer B represents an animal and is in white freestone (PLS. X, A, XI, A). It has been shattered into several pieces; the head and most of the legs are missing. The present height is 46 cm. Around the neck is a jewelled collar of which every third link is larger than the others. The animal was sitting up in a heraldic attitude. The figure is too imperfect to be certain whether it was intended to represent a talbot or greyhound, or a horse or some similar animal, perhaps even a unicorn. There is no trace of wings. The naturalistic modelling, the heraldic attitude and the jewelled collar all point to a date in the sixteenth century.

Animal figures of this type were used decoratively in the great Tudor houses. A favourite position was crowning the gate piers. The family of Saint Loe held the manors of Chew Magna and Chew Stoke till the reign of Elizabeth. Collinson records work carried out in their house at Sutton in the first parish in 1558, and in the old parsonage at Chew Stoke. In his day there were stone shields with the date 1529 recording the alliances of the family.¹⁹ The animal might have come from either of these houses, the latter being the more probable on geographical grounds.

Subsequently the figure was reused and a roughly square hole cut through the middle of the body. This hole was intended to take the end of a beam; it is rude work and may have been designed for use in connexion with the well.

¹⁶ J. Petersen, *Vikingetidens Redskaper* (1951), p. 369, fig. 199.

¹⁷ S. Grieg, *Middelalderiske Byfund fra Bergen og Oslo* (1933), p. 207, fig. 171.

¹⁸ P. J. R. Modderman, *Over de Wording en de Beteekenis van het Zuiderzeegebied* (1945), p. 78, fig. 29, no. 8.

¹⁹ J. Collinson, *History and Antiquities of Somerset*, II (1791), 96, 101.