# Notes and News

## BRITANNIA ET ANGLIA

Medieval archaeologists must look with envy at their colleagues studying the Romano-British period who have just been presented with a magnificent history of the province by Professor Sheppard Frere. This is the first volume in a series on the History of the Provinces of the Roman Empire, and we look ahead with keen anticipation to the coming issues, particularly if they achieve the magisterial level of the opening one. Professor Frere makes a number of very interesting comparisons with the medieval period[1] and takes in some respects a rather different view of Roman Britain from that to which we have hitherto been accustomed. Although I am not qualified to write on this subject yet it seems to me that questions are raised which the medieval archaeologist cannot wholly ignore, and which, I hope, will be discussed more fully in the future by those far better fitted to do so than myself.

Professor Frere estimates the population of Roman Britain at two million (p. 311) and considers that after a substantial reduction in the post-Roman centuries 'by the time of the Norman conquest the optimum Romano-British level was once again in sight'. Population figures from periods where written records are wanting must always be to some extent a matter of guesswork but the guesses are always worth making. Some of us would perhaps wish to reduce this total by half or three-quarters of a million (Sir Mortimer Wheeler's old estimate) but this is an open matter for discussion; more serious from the medievalist's point of view is the comparison with the 11th century. The demography of early periods is mainly a question of the density of rural settlement so that, in effect, the author is saying that the density of population in the countryside of, say, the 4th century was not achieved until the 11th century. The implication would seem to be not only that there was not a significant expansion of cultivation at the expense of the forest (assuming that cultivated area and population are directly related) in the years of Germanic settlement, but also that the open fields and nucleated villages of the 11th century supported the same population as the villas and Celtic villages of the 4th. In a way this is the sort of view that Professor Duby gives us, looking back from the period of written sources; the early medieval period, indeed, seems to be under attack from both sides.

Without any disrespect to the province, the sort of picture of Roman Britain that many of us carry in our mind's eye is a little like Kenya before independence: an English-speaking (Latin-speaking) class controlling the elements of civilized life (government, roads and towns) and living in country farms (villas), and a large rural population living in villages of primitive round huts, set in very substantial tracts of untamed forest. The racial gulf was much greater in Kenya, where there was no large permanent garrison, but the analogy is probably better than that with British India, which is sometimes made, because the level of culture and density of the native population were closer in the former. As the ruling crust disintegrated, in the sort of way envisaged by Professor Jackson,[2] the native population, deprived of the ability to protect itself by 400 years of tutelage, was very vulnerable and incapable of resisting the Germanic immigrants. The real question is whether the invaders, intent on settlement as they were, merely wished to dispossess the native cultivators of their land, or whether they saw a sort of virgin territory and were prepared to extend cultivation by reclamation. No doubt the former was the first concern and the other followed. Had dispossession

[1] S. S. Frere, *Britannia, A History of Roman Britain* (London, 1967), pp. 262–3, 309–11, and *passim*, particularly chapters 15 and 17.

[2] K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), pp. 114 ff.

been the main objective we would surely expect that, not perhaps the names, but certainly units and divisions of the earlier cultivation (even if Celtic fields were replaced by open ones) and villages would have survived in the later. Except possibly in Jackson's area III this is notoriously not so. Furthermore, in the well-known instance of the great blocks of parishes aligned on Ermine St. (partly resettled by Danes) north of Lincoln (and elsewhere in that county), the type of settlement implies a complete disregard for what went before, except the Roman road itself. These and other arguments are too familiar to need labouring here; if they imply anything clearly it is that we are concerned with an alteration, presumably an extension, of cultivated area and not merely a displacement of existing cultivators.

The 5th century must have seen a substantial decline in population, as Professor Frere says, but the expected result of a great settlement of this kind surely is for people to thrive and multiply; might not something like the Romano-Celtic density have been achieved by, say, the end of the 7th century, then levelling out, increasing with Viking settlement and possibly declining a little by the late 11th century, before the big surge forward in the 12th century? These are only guesses, but are fairly consonant with what common sense suggests.

It is perhaps the end of Professor Frere's book, particularly his last chapter, that leaves us puzzled, because it is so difficult to reconcile with subsequent events. The province, in contrast with Gaul, was apparently flourishing, both in town and country, throughout the 4th and possibly the early 5th century. How did it come to such a rapid and ignominious end? Can a credible estimate be made of the number of invaders required to overwhelm a population of the size estimated by the author? In his admirable account of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, based upon a lifetime's study of the funerary pottery, that has just been published[3] Dr. Myres distinguishes two earlier phases of peaceful co-existence or even of open invitation (to *laeti* or *foederati*) from 360 to 450. It is surprising that during these three or four generations there was no extensive borrowing of vocabulary from Celtic or Latin, since one might have expected that the immigrants had a lot of new words to learn. Indeed the contrast between the Celtic (Welsh) borrowing from Latin before 400 and the negligible borrowing by the Anglo-Saxons from Celtic and Latin between 400–600 is eloquent of the break in continuity, in the field of agriculture as much as anywhere.[4] The protuberant decoration on the Saxon urns, if indeed it is an imitation of embossed decoration on Roman silver and glass, shows which sectors of Roman culture attracted the newcomers.

Ever since Haverfield's book with the word in its title, 'Romanization' has been a pre-occupation of students of Roman Britain; for medievalists it is their main concern, since it is against the background of incomplete Romanization, and perhaps because of it, that events of the 5th century took the course they did: the decision to abandon the province, its disintegration and the ease of the English settlement. A living testimony to the failure of Romanization in this country is formed by the substantial body of descendants of refugees from it who constitute the sole Celtic speakers in France. The vulnerability of an unromanized, or rather half-romanized, peasantry must have been very apparent to potential German invaders; by contrast, in Gaul and Spain the relative cohesion of the population allowed it to resist or assimilate intruders in much greater measure. It is hardly likely that we are dealing with geographical factors alone or even chronological causes (that France and Spain formed part of the empire for longer), and one wonders if there were some social cause, undetectable without written sources, that caused British society to maintain its Celtic features.

Professor Frere draws some interesting comparisons between populations of Romano-British and medieval towns. Although different in origin, plan and government

3 J. N. L. Myres, *Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England* (Oxford, 1969).

4 Cf. chapters iii and iv in Jackson, *op. cit.* in note 2. It is curious that Celtic seemed to be very willing to borrow from Latin or English whereas both the latter were very reluctant to borrow from Celtic: *ibid.*, pp. 242–3.

Roman towns in this country did not differ markedly in size from medieval ones. It would indeed be interesting if there were some correspondence in population size. The rebirth of the towns in the middle ages is associated with the robust trading stations of the Vikings and the fairly chaotic conditions of the 9th to 10th centuries. In the chaos of the 5th century the Romano-British towns made but an indifferent showing and, while they were not as fragile as Collingwood depicted them, one might hesitate to apply the adjective robust to them.

Each photograph of a Roman road or town bears testimony to the strength of will and purpose of the people who laid this network of civilization upon the island and its primitive inhabitants. It is gratifying indeed to have these 400 flourishing years of the province's history described for us. Every civilization must be judged by its finest hour (which some would place in the 4th century in Britain, rather than in Gibbon's admired 2nd century) and it would be wholly wrong to be preoccupied with the end when something is at its zenith. Nevertheless the closing phases of Roman Britain, the moment of truth so to speak, shed a flood of light backwards on its true character, to the time when the evidence was blank on certain aspects of its society.

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## A LATE 6TH-CENTURY CRUCIFORM BROOCH FROM TODDINGTON, BEDFORDSHIRE: AN ANGLO-SAXON CONNEXION EXAMINED (FIG. 61)

Among the objects in the Cooper-Cooper collections of the Central Museum, Northampton,[5] is a group of finds labelled Toddington (Beds.). These are mainly of the 17th century but include two Anglo-Saxon brooches. One of these (Northampton Museum D200/1955–6) is a tinned bronze disc-brooch, 4·2 cm. diam., of a common type, with a central dot-and-circle, and four subsidiary dot-and-circles on the face with nicked edges. The second brooch is a more unusual item, a large cruciform brooch of Åberg's group IV.

The brooch has not previously been illustrated, but it was included by Åberg in his list of cruciform brooches from England, though Åberg, presumably on account of it then being exhibited with a bone comb from Finedon (Northants.) gave that as being its provenience.[6] More recently it was listed among the Anglo-Saxon finds of Bedfordshire by Dr. J. Morris,[7] and I presume that the citation by Mrs. Meaney of 'Northampton' among the museums containing Anglo-Saxon material from Toddington refers to the two brooches.[8] The cruciform brooch (FIG. 61) is bronze, 13·9 cm. long with a maximum width of 7·8 cm. It has a winged head-plate, whose central panel is decorated with a double quatrefoil stamp. All three knobs are half-round with a square expansion; in the case of the two side knobs this is cut back at the join with the knob, and somewhat rounded through wear on the outside. The bow is short with a median bar topped by a small square knob. The lappets, which are elaborate, with a disjointed and dismembered attempt at animal ornament, belong to Åberg's type, *op. cit.* in note 6, fig. 70.36. The animal head at the foot of the brooch has scroll nostrils and is of Åberg's type, *op. cit.* in note 6, fig. 70.45. Above all, this is an extremely well-made brooch.

It is not difficult to find parallels for the individual parts of this brooch, though the whole forms an unusual combination. Nearest are two brooches from Nassington (Northants.) which differ in having plain lappets and no decoration on the field of the head-plate.[9] The large excrescences on the head-plate knobs are found also on several brooches from Cambridgeshire: examples from Newnham, Soham and Barrington are

5 I am grateful to the Central Museum, Northampton, for permission to study and publish the brooch.

6 N. Åberg, *The Anglo-Saxons in England* (1926), table I, no. 171 (henceforth cited as Åberg).

7 *Beds. Archaeol. J.*, I (1962), 75.

8 A. Meaney, *A Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* (1964), p. 40.

9 *Antiq. J.*, XXIV (1944), 109, 118, pl. 27, nos. 28 and M.