

Notes and News

A SAXON BURIAL FROM NORTON-ON-TEES, CLEVELAND (Fig. 1; Pl. XII)

In May 1982 a group of children discovered a burial near Mill Lane, Norton-on-Tees. The remains were retrieved by the police and it was some days before the discovery and its findspot were subjected to archaeological examination.¹ The burial was found at the top of the bank flanking the S. side of Mill Lane (NZ 4488 2256), a hollow way leading E. from Norton Green to the site of the former mill, thence as a track across the marshy Billingham Bottoms to the village of Billingham.

The skeleton was not complete and the retrieved artefactual assemblage comprises three glass beads, an amber bead, a fragmentary copper-alloy clasp, two small sheet copper-alloy triangles, the lower part of a copper-alloy girdle hanger and a small cruciform brooch.² It is understood that a substantially greater number of beads was originally with the burial; whilst the missing bones may have been lost following their discovery, the area has not yet been subject to archaeological excavation and other bones may still be *in situ*.

The beads comprise a small cylinder of green glass, a blue opaque glass bead with marvered white trail, a square section green opaque glass bead and a faceted amber bead (Pl. XII, 2–5; Fig. 1, 2–5). The smaller copper-alloy objects have been badly corroded, only part of a small clasp surviving (Pl. XII, 6 and 7; Fig. 1, 6 and 7). Two thin copper-alloy triangles each appear to have two perforations (Pl. XII, 8 and 9). Only the lower part of a copper-alloy girdle hanger survives, apparently broken in antiquity; the remains of an iron rivet near the broken edge may have formed part of a repair (Pl. XII, 10; Fig. 1, 10). The cruciform brooch has its foot missing, again broken in antiquity, and the pin, evidenced by an iron deposit at the hinge, is also missing (Pl. XII, 1; Fig. 1, 1). Traces of thread adhere to the face of the brooch, in such a way as to suggest that the brooch had been sewn on to a dress or shroud. The only thread trace at the back of the brooch is a straggle, as if the loose end had been tucked behind the brooch.³

The pelvis and skull confirm that the burial is female, estimated to be between 25 and 40 years. Her height can be estimated at 1.58 m (5 ft 3 in.). Green staining on the distal parts of the radius and ulna of both arms show that the forearms crossed and that a copper-alloy object had been deposited nearby. There was no evidence for the cause of death.⁴

Details of the lay-out of the burial are far from clear, but it seems possible that the body had been laid on the left side in a crouched position. It is clear that a number of beads is now missing from the assemblage and it may well be that more diagnostic artefacts were also originally present, although as it stands this is a typical Anglian assemblage of the late 5th or early 6th century. The damaged girdle hanger and brooch suggest that these items were keepsakes and not necessarily indicative of the date of actual burial, in which case the deposition may well belong to later in the 6th century.⁵

Occasional discoveries of human burials have been recorded from the vicinity of Norton Green and Mill Lane since the beginning of the 19th century. In most cases the accounts are not sufficient to enable a date to be assigned, although several of the burials appear to be of medieval date. The most interesting discovery, in the present context, was that of seven stone cists, found during building operations in Fernie Road in 1937 or 1938. The cists are remembered as being accompanied by 'bronze swords', but none of the finds has survived.⁶

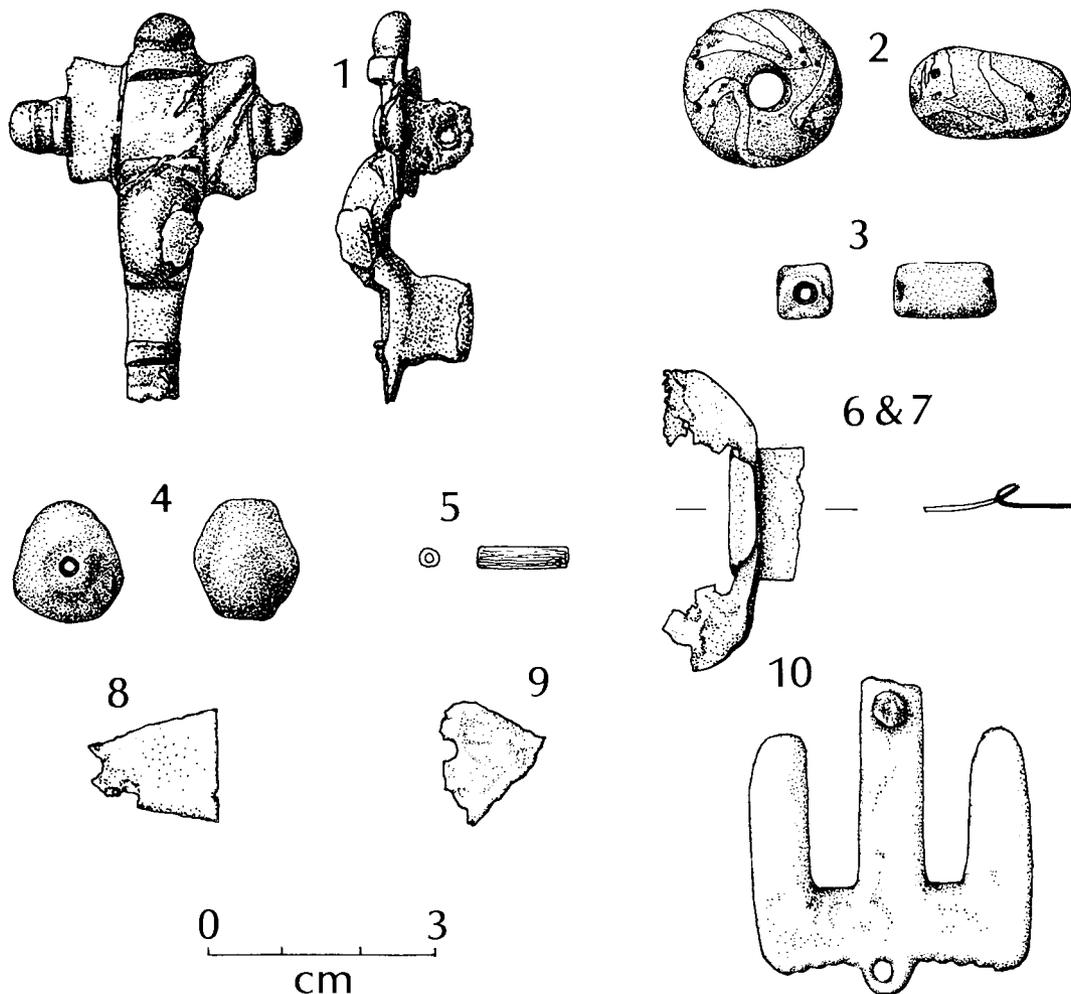


FIG. 1

Anglian finds from Mill Lane, Norton, Cleveland (drawing: L. Hayhow). Scale 1 : 1

Excavation in 1984 by Cleveland County Archaeology Section has revealed an extensive cemetery in Mill Lane, which, it is hoped, will be fully investigated.

The evidence for Saxon burial in Bernicia has recently been reviewed by R. Miket, who has drawn attention to the paucity of burial evidence and to the variety of burial traditions represented.⁷ The present discovery, as Professor R. J. Cramp has pointed out,⁸ tends to emphasize the value of the natural harbours and major rivers of the north-east during the early Saxon period and underlines the continuing lack of settlement evidence. At Norton the cruciform 10th-century church may have had collegiate status⁹ in a village which appears to have been an early estate centre, whilst at Billingham the nature of the settlement surrounding the later 10th-century church is again unknown, although early occupation is attested by a 7th- or 8th-century name-stone. The 10th-century settlements at Billingham and Norton may have occupied the position of the present villages, but the settlement to which our present burial belonged might have been elsewhere.

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NOTES

¹ I would like to thank Nigel Berryman and his parents for providing information about his discovery. Norton and Billingham police were also of considerable assistance in recovering the scattered finds.

² The finds were conserved by John Atkinson at the N.E.M.S. laboratory, Newcastle upon Tyne. The photograph was produced by Tom Middlemas of Durham University Archaeology Department. The illustrations are the work of Louise Hayhow.

³ The textile remains were kindly examined by Penny Walton, who reports that the thread is 2-ply, S-twisted from Z-spun yarns. The fibre is almost certainly flax.

⁴ I would like to thank Dr David Birkett for providing a pathology report on the remains.

⁵ I am grateful to Professor Rosemary Cramp and Dr Tania Dickinson for commenting on these finds.

⁶ Information on early discoveries in Norton has been gathered by Robin Daniels and Denise Jelley, and is filed on the Cleveland County Council Archaeology Record.

⁷ R. Miket, 'A Restatement of the Evidence from Bernician Anglo-Saxon burials', 289–305 in P. Rahtz *et al.*, *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries 1979* (Oxford, Brit. Archaeol. Rep. Brit. Ser. 82, 1980). The Fernic Road cists may be added to Roger Miket's list of long cist inhumations, as might the undocumented record of the discovery of inhumations at Greatham, 7 km to the E. of Norton.

⁸ R. Cramp, 'Anglo-Saxon Settlement', 263–97 in J. C. Chapman and H. Mytum, *Settlement in North Britain 1000 B.C.–1000 A.D.* (Oxford, Brit. Archaeol. Rep. Brit. Ser. 118, 1983).

⁹ R. Daniels, 'The Medieval Village of Norton', 27–36 in Cleveland County Archaeology, *Recent Excavations in Cleveland* (Middlesbrough, 1983).

THE BURGHAL HIDAGE: TOWARDS THE IDENTIFICATION OF *EORPEBURNAN* (Figs. 2 and 3)

Eorpeburnan, the first of the sites listed in the *Burghal Hidage*, has never been firmly identified.¹ The Castle Toll earthworks at Newenden, Kent, are generally considered the most likely location.² The length of these earthworks is uncertain, being somewhere between 385 and 450 metres; the *Hidage* assessment provides for a length of 445.5 yards — 411.2 metres.³

Eorpeburnan is often equated with the half-finished fortress recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as stormed by the Danes in 892; located 'four miles from the entrance to the estuary' of the Limen river. The evolution of the Romney Marsh area has been confused and complex, but the broad outline is clear.⁴ In late prehistoric times, a long and continuous shingle bank stretched most of the way across a wide bay that is today marked by a line of inland cliffs from Sandgate to a Fairlight Head that then reached much further out to sea. Behind this shingle bank lay a large lagoon into which the rivers Brede, Tillingham and Rother (Limen) debouched. With the passage of time, this lagoon developed into a miasma of marsh and mud flats. Large tracts of this were drained in the Roman period when the main exit from the marsh was by Lympe. Before the end of the 9th century a breach in the shingle bank developed where Old Winchelsea was later to stand. Some authorities opine that this was the principle mouth of the Limen-Rother river in the pre-Conquest period, with the main channel passing to the south of the Isle of Oxney. Other opinion would have the main flow passing to New Romney — a route it undoubtedly did take in later times. The northern Lympe branch was then probably but a dribble of its former self, most of its flow having been captured by the newer branches of the Rother. Given this uncertain picture, three places might reasonably be considered as a 'mouth of the estuary' of the Rother in 892: New Romney, Old Winchelsea, or given that the river from the Isle of Oxney was probably open marsh, Appledore (Fig. 2).

Newenden is not four modern miles from any of these. A further objection to the Castle Toll/*Eorpeburnan* equation is that Newenden is on the Kent side of the modern county boundary, and the *Burghal Hidage* document makes no other provision for the defence of that sub-kingdom.

Many of the *Burghal Hidage* sites developed into urban centres, about which the next comprehensive source of information is the *Domesday Book*. The most important urban site in the area at Domesday was *Rameslie* but there is no documentary evidence for the existence of this place before 1005. By 1086 it was fading in importance, giving way to a *NOVUS*