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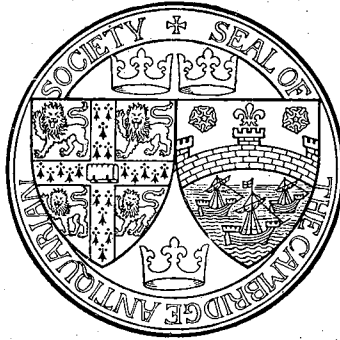
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY
PROCEEDINGS AND COMMUNICATIONS

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THE ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY, BURWELL, CAMBS.

By T. C. LETHBRIDGE, Director of Excavations.

The Victoria Lime Pits lie almost in Burwell village, in the acute angle formed by the junction of the Burwell-Exning road with the main street, which is here known as the Causeway. They have cut into the slope of a low chalk hill which rises out of the fen and is still crowned with a windmill.

In 1884 and the years immediately following, about fourteen skeletons were found in the Victoria Pits mostly close to the present South boundary. One or two skeletons are said to have been left under the present hedge, which separates the pit from the allotments belonging to Dr Charles Lucas, but no trace of them could be found in 1925. As far as can be now discovered, the majority were buried with their head to the West and many of them had with them knives and other associated objects mostly now lost. However such objects as have been preserved deserve to be mentioned.

The first of these is the gold disc pendant set with garnet and shell inlays probably of Kentish manufacture. It is in the Museum of Archaeology and of Ethnology, and is dated by Dr C. Fox in his *Archaeology of the Cambridge Region*, p. 262, as probably early VI century. A workman who was present at its discovery stated that it was found with the skeleton of a big man laid North and South with a knife at his side.

The second object is probably also of Kentish fabric. It is a fine bronze buckle in the possession of Sir William Ridgeway. The form is that of the large garnet-set buckle of gold found in the Taplow barrow. The pin is set with a shell inlay at its base, in the centre of which is a circular garnet on gold foil. Half-way down the chape of the buckle is a second garnet on gold foil, this time square. The but end of the chape has been broken in antiquity and joined on again with a strip of bronze. The type is uncommon in our area, the only two other specimens apparently being one from Little Wilbraham, and one inlaid

with silver wire found with the celebrated applied brooches with naturalistic ornament in St John's cricket field and dated possibly in early VII century.

With a female skeleton accompanied by that of an infant in an East and West grave were the following articles. A silver wire ring bearing two tooth-picks and a tiny perforated silver spoon (Dr C. Fox, *op. cit.*, p. 262 and Pl. XXXIV) at the hip. An amethyst bead and several glass beads at the neck. A beaver's tooth mounted in a bronze wire ring. A disc of silver on a bronze base ornamented with five bosses and a dotted star, also figured by Dr Fox on the same plate and dated by him in early VII century. Similar silver discs are not uncommon, and a later development is to be seen in the Beeston Tor fibulae.

In a North and South grave, as stated by the workmen, was found a chalk trough or box accompanied by knives. There is in the Museum a chalk trough or box of this description with some knives, pieces of wood and a bone pin, together with a very brief note stating that they were found near the Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Burwell and a very rough diagram representing a kind of chalk arch in which the box was said to be found. It seems possible that this in reality represents the head or foot of a grave with the joints of the chalk shown.

Lastly in one grave numbers of hazel nuts were found, on-lookers taking away handfuls of them. A similar case is recorded at Faversham, Kent, where hazel nuts were found in a bronze bowl—Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, Vol. 4, p. 468.

Dr Lucas of Burwell, who owns the land adjoining the Victoria Pits, was very anxious that his ground should be tested to see if the cemetery continued on his side of the boundary, and to this end excavations were carried out on behalf of the Society in March and April of this year (see Plan).

Skeletons were found in shallow graves in the chalk all over the allotment next to the boundary hedge. Twenty-four graves in all were discovered in an area of some 600 square yards. One had been rifled in antiquity (no. 5) and another contained two bodies (no. 2).

The ground was first cross-trenched to see if any area was richer than another and then the whole ground was examined. Some graves were in very awkward places. One under the corner of the pigstye, another half under the haystack, and others among the apple trees.

Of the twenty-four graves

1 had the head to the North-West,

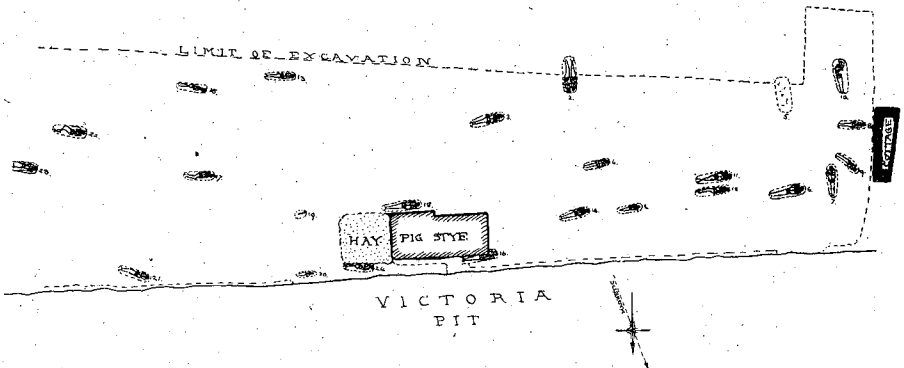
2 heads in one grave were to the North,

2 had the head to the South,

and all the rest had the head to the West as near as might be.

One was the grave of a very young infant (no. 19), and another (no. 20) was that of a child somewhere about ten years old.

There were no cremations.



Anglo-Saxon Cemetery, Burwell. Portion excavated 1925.
Scale: Grave 24 is 5' 6" long.

Most of the bodies had been arranged in an orderly manner before burial, but in one case (no. 9) the grave was very ill cut and the body thrown in.

There were no coffins as indicated by the absence of nails. But a bronze pin in one grave (no. 6) and a bone one in another (no. 7) seem to indicate burial in some kind of shroud.

The graves on the whole were much better cut than those in the Romano-British Cemetery at Guilden Morden. They only varied slightly in depth in accordance with the depth of soil above the chalk. The usual depth was about one foot in the chalk with perhaps eighteen inches of soil above it.

Nine graves had no associated objects of any kind with the skeleton. But of these no. 23 is of interest as both the left collar-bone and forearm had been broken in life and had healed up.

The Associated Objects.

No fibulae or weapons were found. In fact, with the exception of an object mentioned in the *Reports* of the C. A. S. for 1884 and 1887 as an iron fibula, no specimen of either has so far been recorded from the site.

Of the fifteen graves with associated objects, one (no. 5) had been disturbed in antiquity and contained only some scraps of iron and two big-headed nails recalling those found with shield bosses. As this grave was a big one it is possible that it may have been rifled for its contents, or as a test of daring after the well-known Viking manner.

The remainder can now be dealt with in order (head to the West unless stated otherwise).

No. 1. Had a small bronze cloak, or perhaps shroud, fastener under the skull (Fig. 1) and a fragmentary iron buckle on the right hip.

No. 2. Contained two bodies with their heads to the North.

Skeleton A. Two iron knives with points upwards on the left side at the waist, a stone bead or whorl on the left hip, and a little blue glass bead on a crumbling piece of silver wire, probably an ear-ring, below the left ear.

Skeleton B. A little bronze buckle (Fig. 2) patched with a thin strip of bronze, lay on the left lower ribs, the trace of the decayed leather strap which it had fastened was plainly visible in the chalky soil. A knife and a pair of shears (Fig. 8) had been stuck in this belt and lay under the ribs.

No. 3. At the left hip of this skeleton, apparently a woman, hung, or rather lay, a pair of iron girdle hangers connected by an iron chain (Fig. 10). To this chain had also been attached a strip of bronze bent over one link and riveted on to some flat object by two iron rivets (Fig. 5), a tiny gilded bronze hasp (Fig. 3) was found a few inches away in the crook of the left arm. A similar hasp of silver and about the same size was

found with the hinges of a small box in the rich grave at Kingston and is figured by Baldwin Brown, *op. cit.*, plate XCVII. no. 7. Perhaps some little wooden case originally hung from the girdle by the bronze strip and may have held a comb or similar object.

No. 4. On the left forearm had been placed a pair of iron knives.

No. 6. On the left breast of this body was a small bronze pin (Fig. 7) or tooth-pick, which probably secured a shroud. On the pelvis lay an iron knife and near it was a hasp similar to that found with no. 3 (Fig. 4), also another bronze object (Fig. 6) similar to the strip of bronze on the chain of no. 3, but with the bend worked into a more serviceable loop; an iron pin or tooth-pick lay between the two bronze fittings and it seems probable that it had been enclosed in a case which they secured.

No. 7. Head to the South. At the left hip was a rusted mass of iron so far not determined. Secured by rust to this mass was a third brass possibly of Constantius II, a tiny bronze washer and a stone whorl; on the pelvis lay a long iron knife and over the bones of the left wrist lay a very rude bone pin, recalling Bronze and Early Iron Age objects, which probably secured a shroud (Fig. 9).

Nos. 9 and 14. Figs. 12 and 13 had each a knife and iron buckle at the hip.

No. 16. An iron knife in the remains of a sheath lay at the left hip; it had hung from or been placed in a belt which had been secured by a little bronze and iron buckle (Fig. 11) of a type new to the museum but found in Kent. It is composed of a bronze bow and backplate all in one piece with a movable iron pin and a triangular plate of bronze riveted on to the under side of the belt and through the leather to the backplate with iron rivets.

No. 17. An iron knife at the left hip with a fragmentary iron buckle or annular brooch at the left breast. A blue paste melon bead, probably an ear-ring, lay among the neck bones (Fig. 14).

No. 18. Iron knife and buckle at hip.

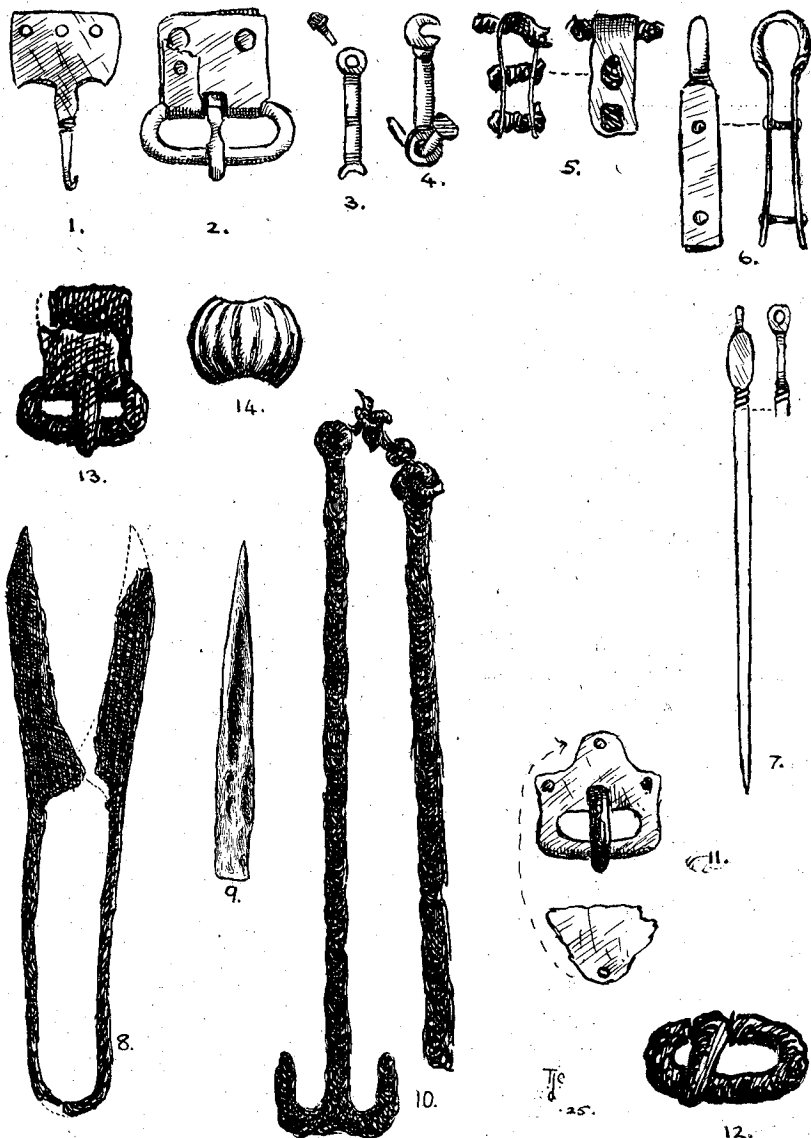


Fig. 1. Grave 1. Bronze Cloak Fastener. Fig. 2. Grave 2. Bronze Buckle.
 Fig. 3. Grave 3. Gilt Bronze Hasp. Fig. 4. Grave 6. Bronze Hasp.
 Fig. 5. Grave 3. Bronze Fitting. Fig. 6. Grave 6. Bronze Fitting.
 Fig. 7. Grave 6. Bronze Pin. Fig. 8. Grave 2. Iron Shears.
 Fig. 9. Grave 7. Bone Pin. Fig. 10. Grave 3. Iron Girdle Hangers.
 Fig. 11. Grave 16. Bronze and Iron Buckle. Fig. 12. Grave 9. Iron
 Buckle. Fig. 13. Grave 14. Iron Buckle. Fig. 14. Grave 17. Paste
 Melon Bead. All 1/1 except figs. 8, 9, 10, which are 1/2.

INHUMATIONS WITH GRAVE GOODS, BURWELL.



3.



7.



6.



2.

No. 21. Remains of knife at left hip.

No. 22. Iron buckle with bronze back plate at left hip.

No. 24. Two third brasses of IV century Emperors and not pierced for suspension were found at the neck. Possibly they had been sewn on to cloth without being pierced and had so ornamented a neckband. Half of one of the bronze objects with rivets as found with nos. 3 and 6 was found at the point of the chin. An iron knife, part of an iron buckle and an iron ring lay on the shoulders, the body lay on its face, and a spindle whorl rested on the lower ribs.

To sum up the results of this excavation. We have first of all a large percentage of buckles as follows. Twenty-four graves, thirteen knives, nine buckles. At Little Wilbraham only thirteen buckles are recorded from 188 skeletons which had 125 fibulae. At Barrington 144 skeletons yielded 24 buckles and 55 fibulae. In both these cases the percentage is very much smaller than at Burwell, while in some of the Midland cemeteries a buckle is extremely rare. This fact is noted, but no explanation is offered.

The graves although devoid of fibulae and other signs of wealth were yet made with considerable care and respect, arguing a very different outlook on the next life to that of the Romano-Britons of Guilden Morden.

The area excavated was evidently a poor quarter of an extensive cemetery, as objects of value were found on the site of the Victoria Pits and the graves were distributed all over the area examined.

No grave encroached on another and the presence of two graves side by side seems to indicate that there was either a small mound or some form of memorial to guide the grave digger.

Finally it is interesting if not definitely helpful to note that the Lord Brougham Commissioners mention an ancient Church, obviously older than the present parish Church, standing at or near this end of the Causeway. It seems possible that we may have here a more or less unbroken sequence of pagan and Christian use of this hill side for burial. There is however nothing to warrant this assumption from the finds.

Dr Duckworth has very kindly promised to examine the human remains.