

REMARKS ON THE ANTIQUITIES DISCOVERED IN THE MITCHAM CEMETERY.

BY

REGINALD A. SMITH, B.A., F.S.A.

[Reprinted from "*Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London*,"
Second Series, Vol. XXI, by permission of the Council.]

THE cemetery that now seems to have been worked out by Mr. Bidder and his friends is of an extraordinary character, and well repays the labour bestowed upon it for many years past. Of the total number of interments 43 are indeterminate, while to judge from the associated objects the remaining 24 were equally divided between the two sexes. Headless skeletons and one with the skull between the knees were noticed in the cemetery on White Horse Hill, Berks.;¹ and other examples might be adduced in connection with dismembered bodies at Mitcham.

The bones were generally very imperfect and decayed, and the expert evidence seems in favour of a large majority of males; if that is indeed the case we have here several exceptions to the rule that beads occur only in the graves of women, and it should be remarked that in the inventory of this cemetery, no weapon is associated with beads. Indeed, the only ornament found with a male skeleton is the buckle with triangular plate (Fig. 11), which is a common Kentish form evidently not confined to the feminine toilet, for a sumptuous example was found on the warrior in the famous barrow

¹ Davis and Thurnam, *Crania Britannica*, pt. ii, with plan.

at Taplow. Weapons wrapped in linen fabric are known from richly furnished graves at Bromfield, Essex,¹ and Coombe, Kent.² The careless burial of a woman near a man who had been interred with care in the ordinary direction has been noticed in other cemeteries both in England³ and France, and sacrifice at her husband's grave or self-immolation has been suggested in explanation.⁴

A marked difference exists between the two swords, which are of the usual two-edged type and of normal length, and the peculiar iron blade found in Grave 49 with the large pottery vase, iron-mounted pouch, chate-laine, keys, and other objects. As a short sword it would pass muster, but bears a close resemblance to a small group provided with an extension at the point almost like a second tang. At the tip of the Mitcham blade (Fig. 13) may be noticed a slight thickening, and I cannot help thinking that a continuation formerly existed. The other objects in the grave correspond closely enough with the rich furniture of two graves at Sarre, Kent, discovered in 1860⁵ and 1863.⁶ Of these two the second is the best authenticated, as the blade from the other was not well preserved; in both were found gold pendants on a necklace (coins and bracteates), pins, beads, iron knives, and fragments (of keys, shears, etc.), while the richly-jewelled circular brooch found in 1860 corresponds to four found on the later occasion. A well-preserved blade of this character from Ozingell, near Ramsgate, was illustrated by Roach Smith⁷ side by side with another (Fig. 14) from a rich grave on Chessell Down,⁸ Isle of Wight, and here again

¹ *Proceedings Soc. Ant. Lond.*, xv, 250.

² *Proceedings of the Bury and West Suffolk Archæological Institute*, i, 27.

³ As at Driffeld, E. R. Yorks. (Akerman, *Pagan Saxondom*, 16), and at Brighthampton, Oxon (*Archæologia*, xxxvii, 397).

⁴ As at Envermeu (Cochet, *Normandie Souterraine*, 1st ed., 266).

⁵ *Archæologia Cantiana*, iii, 46, plates ii, iii, iv.

⁶ *Archæologia Cantiana*, v, 310.

⁷ *Collectanea Antiqua*, vi, 147.

⁸ Plan given in Hillier's *Antiquities of the Isle of Wight*, 29, cf. pp. 30, 35; but better in *Collectanea Antiqua*, vi, pl. xxviii.



Fig. 13.—Iron Blade from Mitcham, Surrey.

Fig. 14.—Iron Blade from Chessell Down, I.W.

Fig. 15.—Iron Blade from Herpes, Dept. Charente.

(See POSTSCRIPT.)

the points of resemblance are numerous. In the latter grave were five jewelled brooches, gold and silver finger rings (corresponding to silver ring at Sarre, 1863), bronze pail and two silver-mounted cups (corresponding to bronze bowl at Sarre, 1860), beads, iron key, and knife, crystal sphere in spoon with perforated bowl, and gold tissue, the three last-mentioned items occurring also at Sarre in the 1863 grave already mentioned. There are no details of the discovery at Ozingell (Osengal). I may add a specimen (Fig. 15) found in the Merovingian Cemetery at Herpes, Charente,¹ where several articles of jewellery belonging to Kentish and Isle of Wight types have been discovered. If the Mitcham specimen belong to this group it is the sixth at present known; and though what evidence there is points to their use by women, their actual significance is as much a mystery as that of the crystal and spoon that were found associated in two instances. Châtelaines or girdle-hangers with bar-links are known from Rhenish Hesse,² and were found, as at Mitcham, with remains of fabric in a barrow on Pains-thorpe Wold, E. R. Yorks.³

¹ *Bulletin et Mémoires de la Société Archéologique de la Charente*, 1890-1, p. 181, and album of plates. The bulk of this collection has been acquired by the British Museum.

² At Oberolm (Lindenschmit, *Handbuch*, pl. xxviii, fig. 3), and Selzen (*Collectanea Antiqua*, ii, pl. lvi, fig. 4).

³ J. R. Mortimer, *Forty Years' Researches*, pl. 35, fig. 281, p. 117.

The nearest parallel I can cite for the small square-headed brooches is one in the Town Hall at Croydon from a cemetery close by, which has other points of resemblance to the Mitcham discoveries; but the joint occurrence of circular brooches of the saucer type, those with applied plates, and those with pounced designs, is fairly frequent in England, as at Kempston, Beds., and

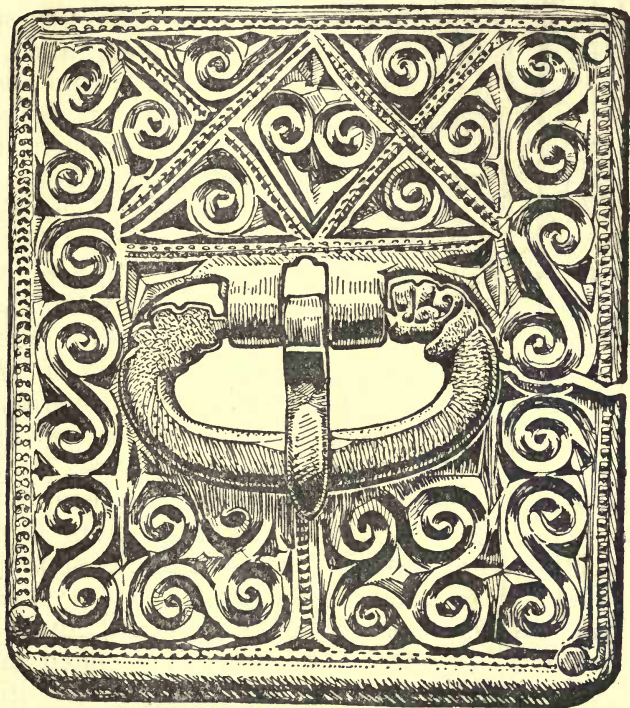


Fig. 16.—Late Roman Bronze Buckle found in London. (†)

High Down, Sussex. The saucer-brooches (Fig. 12) from Mitcham, however, bear no trace of the characteristic animal ornament of the Anglo-Saxons, and their decoration is evidently borrowed from the deeply incised gilt scrolls of Roman provincial art in the fourth century, generally known as *Keilschnitt*¹ or *Kerbschnitt*. A fine example of this style from London (Fig. 16) is here

¹ See especially *Die Spätromische Kunst-industrie*, p. 154, by the late Dr. Alois Riegl.

given for comparison, and the animal-head terminals of its buckle-hoop should be noticed as characteristic. These heads are sometimes arranged in another way on the hoop (as an example from Vermand, Fig. 17), and a prototype is thus afforded for the Mitcham buckle (Fig. 5). The curling terminals of the latter are well illustrated by Roman specimens from Hod Hill in the British Museum. The entire absence of Teutonic animal forms points to the first half of the fifth century as the date of the Mitcham cemetery, and the occur-

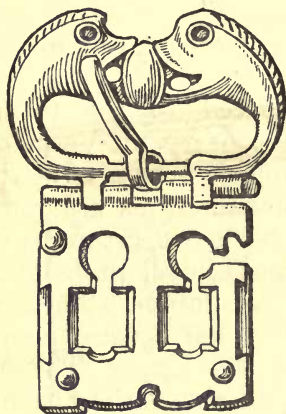


Fig. 17.—Late Roman Brooch found at Vermand, Dept. Aisne. ($\frac{1}{4}$.)

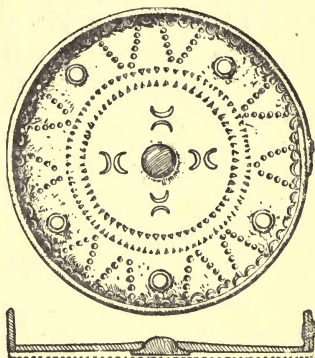


Fig. 18.—Bronze-gilt Brooch found at East Shefford, Berks. ($\frac{1}{4}$.)

rence of a coin of Constantius II (337—361) is in accordance with such a view, though in itself of little significance. The star pattern of one saucer-brooch closely corresponds to finds at Fairford, Gloucs., Leighton Buzzard, Beds., and Long Wittenham, Berks., all of which sites may well be included in the West Saxon area.

The remarkable fittings of a belt from what I think was a female grave (No. 45) are also reminiscent of Roman provincial art; and the cabochon settings of yellow glass may be best compared with those of a pair of brooches from East Shefford, Berks. (Fig. 18); these brooches are associated with remains of a some-

what later date than were found at Mitcham, but of much the same types.

It has been remarked by Mr. Bidder that the majority of graves pointed a little north of east, suggesting a greater number of deaths in the summer when the sun rose in that quarter. General Pitt-Rivers found the same variation in the Winklebury Hill Cemetery, Wilts., and offered the same explanation;¹ but I believe the contrary is the rule, as in the Frilford Cemetery excavated by Dr. Rolleston,² at Standlake,³ and in Normandy.⁴ In any case it is unsafe to draw conclusions from such variations, as the bearing may have been taken from the setting sun, and the inference would then be the exact contrary.

In the extensive burials attributed to the Gallo-Roman population of the fourth century at Vermand (Dépt. Aisne), weapons were extremely scarce, and the orientation not uniform. At Mitcham arms are more common, and their presence shows a departure from the Roman practice, so that we must in all probability refer the cemetery to a Teutonic population. There is hardly a trace of Kentish influence, but several points of resemblance to discoveries in the Upper Thames Valley, which seems to have been the earliest home of the West Saxons in this country. It was towards the close of the fifth century that the animal-motive was extensively adopted by the Teutonic peoples of Northern Europe;⁵ and supposing Kent to be in other hands, we may readily conceive that the first halt was made in Surrey by bands of immigrants proceeding up the river. Agreeing as it does with Christian usage, the regular orientation of the graves might at first sight indicate either a settlement of Romano-British Christians in the fifth century or of converted Saxons in the

¹ *Excavations in Cranborne Chase*, ii, 261.

² *Archæologia*, xlii, 420.

³ *Proceedings*, 1st S., iv, 98.

⁴ Abbé Cochet, *Normandie Souterraine*, 1st ed., pp. 192, 266; see also Ed. Henry, *Antiquités et Monuments de l'Aisne*, pt. ii, 129.

⁵ Bernhard Salin, *Die altgermanische Thier-ornamentik*, 355.

seventh. As the date is fixed within certain limits by the finds, the second alternative is out of the question; and as very little is known of a pre-Augustinian Church in this country, it is safer to assume that the orientation had nothing to do with Christianity in the present case.

Taken in conjunction with the cemetery on the site of Edridge Road, Croydon, the Mitcham burials thus throw a good deal of light on the earliest Teutonic settlement of what is to-day the county of Surrey; and in conclusion I would congratulate Mr. Bidder and the other members of his family on their investigations, and thank them cordially for the opportunity of visiting the site during the excavations, and of examining in detail the antiquities discovered.

POSTSCRIPT.—Further examination of the evidence renders it fairly certain that the iron blades figured on p. 28 were used in weaving, to close up the weft threads. In ancient Britain this was effected by means of bone combs, but in post-Roman times the Teutonic peoples used a "sword" (*spatha*), which answered to the modern reed, lay, or batten. An iron specimen, about 13 in. long, from Norway, of the Viking period, is illustrated by Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age*, ii, 368, fig. 1346, and Gustafson, *Norges Oldtid*, fig. 280, p. 73; and a modern loom from Iceland, of primitive type and provided with a somewhat similar "sword," is figured in *Early Iron Age Guide* (British Museum), fig. 128.

R. A. S.