

## SAXON BURIAL GROUND AT BASTON, LINCOLNSHIRE.

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OWING to the exhibition of some fragments of ancient pottery in the Temporary Museum of the Lincoln Diocesan Architectural Society at Bourn, last year, I was led to make further inquiries as to the spot whence those fragments were obtained, and I found that they came from the parish of Baston, situated between Stamford and Bourn. Having obtained the requisite permission from Lord Chesham, the owner of the land where I wished to excavate, at the invitation of his obliging tenant, Mr. Thomas Bland, in conjunction with the Rev. C. P. Worsley, the vicar of the adjoining parish of Thurlby, I was enabled to superintend an examination of the ground where portions of urns and other relics had already been found, and met with considerable success on the occasion.

This curious circumstance may deserve notice, that the grass-close to which my attention was directed is called "Tinker's Urn," which is probably a corrupted term that appears to point to the finding of an urn there in days of old, as it has long been so designated. This close lies on the west of the village of Baston, and a little to the east of a branch of the Ermin Street, here called "King Street."

After digging into the soil, where on more than one occasion pottery had been previously disturbed, several groups of urns were discovered beneath the thin surface loam, in the sandy subsoil, and at a depth varying from 6 to 16 inches below the level of the ground. Although a very ancient pasture field, dotted with a few aged elms, its ridged surface clearly points to its having been subjected to the action of the plough at some period; and a fact connected with the discovery about to be described appears to throw back the date of that ploughing to a surprisingly early time, *viz.*, that the

urns were found at an average depth of one foot beneath the tops of the lands, which indicates that this piece of land had been arable *before* it was used as a cemetery by some Saxon tribe, because it is obvious that, had these ridges been thrown up subsequent to the deposit of the urns within them, the urns would necessarily have been found at a lower level.

Ten urns, altogether, were the fruits of the excavation. These are all of the same usual dark grey tint, and of soft, ill-baked ware. They vary from  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches to 11 inches in diameter; but unfortunately most of them crumbled into small pieces as soon as they were exposed to the air. Some of the urns have the effective raised knobs often seen on Anglo-Saxon pottery: the others are ornamented with surface scorings only. The forms of these urns are unusually graceful, so that, although their material is coarse, and the patterns that adorn them have evidently been executed hastily, their outlines may be safely compared with those of Etruscan and Roman vases, especially in one of the specimens, which is of very superior fashion and workmanship. On another appears two bands of those little concentric circles that formed such a favorite device with the Saxons in the treatment of bone and metallic articles, as well as of pottery.

Each urn was, as usual, nearly filled with fragments of calcined bones, and these seem to have been deposited on a small layer of the finest sifted gravel of a perfectly evenly sized grain, first placed below them. Unfortunately, little else but bones was found in these urns, although the hope was entertained in some cases that a richer deposit might have been discovered, from the fact of some stones, three or four in number, having been placed around some of the urns for their protection; in no case, however, was any stone found above, nor any covering to prevent the earth from mingling with the bones within the vases. Two of the most remarkable specimens discovered are given in figs. 1 and 2. In both of these the contour of the neck is skilfully moulded, and the varied scorings on the upper portion of one of them is worthy of notice.

Two pairs of very small iron shears, or scissors, were found in the urns, also a minute fragment of a bone comb. One of the former is here figured (see woodcut, figure 3) the size of the original. On a previous occasion, a fibula, also here represented, was found in an urn on the same spot; it is of



Fig. 3.



Fig. 1.

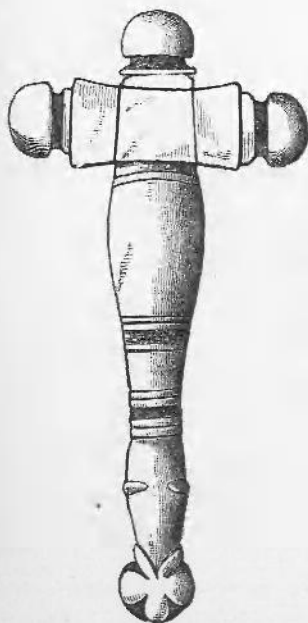


Fig. 4.



Fig. 2.

Saxon Urns and Relics found at Baston, Lincolnshire.

brass, and in most perfect condition, the hinge and catch for the *acus*, on the reverse of this ornament, being still in good order, although the pin itself is lost. It is figured the same size as the original relic. (See woodcut, fig. 4.)

I have previously adverted to the discovery of *portions* of combs in Saxon funereal vases, and I feel convinced that it was customary with the Saxons of Lincolnshire to deposit these fragments with their dead, the remaining portions being probably kept as reminiscences of lost relatives by those who first gave the bodies of the deceased to the fire, and then gathered up the fragments of their bones, which they deposited in urns and confided to the earth in particular spots or cemeteries set apart for that purpose, such as those of Quarrington, Ancaster, South Willingham, and Searby.