

## ON SOME EVIDENCES OF THE OCCUPATION OF THE ANCIENT SITE OF TAUNTON BY THE BRITONS.

By JAMES HURLY PRING, M.D.

While fully recognising the unquestionable proofs of the former presence of the Britons all around us, and in our very midst, it is satisfactory to find that these views have, of late, received remarkable confirmation as regards the site of Taunton itself, from the actual discovery of some highly interesting British remains brought to light in the course of excavations which it was found necessary to make about two years ago within the premises of the Taunton Union Workhouse. By the discovery in question, we are furnished with specimens of the minuter handicraft of the Britons, exhibiting no mean artistic skill, and showing them to have made considerable advance in arts and manufactures, and not to have been merely the rude barbarians, which it has been too commonly the custom to represent them. It was in February, 1877, that at a depth of about three feet below the surface, the workmen employed in the Union grounds came upon a hoard of bronze articles. There was first a surface soil of about 1ft. 6in., beneath which, at about the same depth in the red clay below, the bronze objects were found to have been buried, without the least protection of any kind. The clay was stained a dark colour for some distance around and beneath, apparently from slight decomposition of the surface of the metal. The following is a list of the remains thus discovered.

1. Twelve celts or bronze axe-heads, of the usual forms, nine of them having a loop at the side, whilst in the remaining three the loop is absent. The pattern varies a little in each, one has a beautifully curved edge, and one a straight cutting edge. Another has flanges at the side for the reception of the handle, slightly incurved, showing an approach to the socketed form. In the greater number, however, no such incurvation is present.

2. A weapon or instrument with a socket for the handle, and a loop similar to the one figured in Wilde's Catalogue, p. 385. Another smaller, also socketed, with the point considerably blunted bearing a close resemblance in this respect to the point of a modern punch.

3. A spear-head of elegant shape, but somewhat broken.

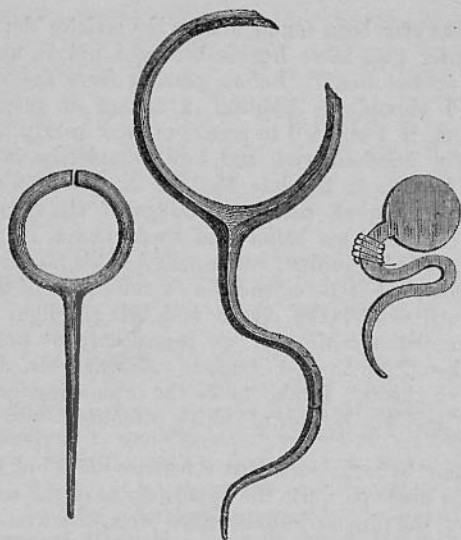
4. A portion apparently of a delicately shaped lance head.
5. Two sickle shaped knives, similar to those contained in a cist, discovered in a turbarry at Edington Burtle, near Glastonbury, which were presented to the Taunton Museum by the late Mr. Stradling.
6. A torque, of the usual twisted or funicular type, in fine condition, with the hooks entire for fastening around the neck, and also an accompanying armlet of the same pattern.
7. A singularly shaped object, consisting of a ring of metal, about three inches in diameter, with a curved stem of about five inches in length, somewhat resembling the half of a gigantic pair of spectacles. This, and portions of four others, bear some resemblance to similar objects which have been found in Ireland, though these latter are more curved, and have a solid disc of metal instead of the ring. The Irish specimens, with solid discs, have been described and figured by Wilde in his *Catalogue of Bronze Antiquities* in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, and are now regarded as "latchets," the curved stem passing through eyelet holes in the garments, and from their shape they have been styled "spectacle brooches," a name however which seems more applicable to ours, than to those where the ring is filled up with a solid disc of metal.
8. One or two rings apparently for the finger.
9. Several portions of fine small rings, varying in size, with some pieces of a fine metal ring of much larger circumference, supposed to have formed part of a girdle.

As this Taunton "find" is remarkable both on account of the rarity and great variety of the objects comprised in it, and as it has not hitherto received any notice, it is hoped that a few further observations in reference to it may now prove acceptable. It is generally admitted by the best authorities that bronze relics of the character just described are to be referred to the British era, and a similar mode of burying such objects is found to have prevailed very extensively. In a notice in vol. vi. of the *Archæologia Cambrensis* (4th series), of some bronze implements found in Radnorshire, it is stated that "finds of damaged bronze weapons and other articles, in confused masses and large quantities, occur frequently in the turbaries of Denmark, Scania, and occasionally in Mecklenburg, France (Amiens Museum), and in Ireland, to which we may add the finds at Willow Moor, near Much Wenlock in Shropshire, Pant y Maen, in Carmarthen," &c. When we examine then, the character of this find at Taunton, it will be found to possess features of peculiar interest. It must no longer be associated only with those of a somewhat similiar kind which have at times been made in the turbaries of Somerset between Glastonbury and the sea, but is found to embrace a wider range and to ally itself more especially with those in Ireland, pre-eminently the land of the Kelts. In the Taunton remains, No. 2, we have a specimen of the long, narrow, quadrangular, socketed variety of Celt, of that rare Irish type described and figured in *Wilde's Catalogue* and found at Keelogue Ford, Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Here also

<sup>1</sup> "Of this rare variety there are only five specimens in the Irish Collection" (p. 386, *Wilde's Catalogue*).

we have an instance, which I claim at the present time to be unique, of the peculiar latchet, or cloak-pin, which, whilst approaching in form to the spectacle-brooch of Ireland, and from its shape and character apparently employed for the same purpose, yet differs from it in some essential respects. The rarity indeed of this object would seem to demand for it a somewhat fuller and more special notice in this place. On a closer examination it will be found that this latchet, like the fine small rings, exhibits considerable delicacy of workmanship, whilst they possess in common the somewhat rare feature of the lozenge shaped form in their tranverse section. I have visited and inspected with considerable care the Albert Memorial Museum at Exeter, the Ashmolean and University Museums at Oxford, and the British Museum, without being able in either instance to discover any thing at all similar to these latchets. And in the case of the University Museum at Oxford, I have to acknowledge my obligation for the assistance so kindly rendered me by Professor Rolleston, and in the instance of the British Museum to make the same acknowledgment as regards Mr. Franks, who most obligingly accompanied me through the whole British department of the Museum, without however being able to point out to me any thing similar to these objects. I may mention also that with the like negative result I have examined Professor D. Wilson's *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, Worsaae's *Primæval Antiquities of Denmark*, Lubbock's *Prehistoric Times*, and many similar works; in fact, to sum up what may be said on this point, I will merely add that this form of latchet, or cloak-pin, is neither figured nor described in that copious repertory of such objects, the admirable descriptive Catalogue of the Antiquities in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, by the late Sir W. R. Wilde. After these remarks, however, the fact must not be allowed to pass unnoticed that the Taunton Museum contains an object bearing a near approach to these latchets, but of ruder form and workmanship, and with a straight instead of a curved stem. It has been described as a "Gwaell," or British brooch, found some years since in the Glastonbury turbaries, and it was presented to the Taunton Museum by the late Mr. Stradling, who refers to it in the Proceedings of the Somersetshire Society as "a curious British pin or brooch sometimes used after the arrival of the Phœnicians, for the purpose of fastening the robe at the neck."<sup>1</sup> Having quite recently been in correspondence with Mr. John Evans respecting the Taunton latchet or cloak-pin, I may mention that he has very obligingly sent me drawings of several "bronze pins" which he considers "bear a family likeness" to this object, which he speaks of as a "bronze pin longer and somewhat different in form from any thing of the kind which he has seen." He regards it as belonging to "quite the close of the Bronze Period, as its analogies seem rather with 'late Celtic' objects." Coming as they do from one of our highest living authorities, the value of these remarks, especially in assigning an approximative date to these objects, will be duly appreciated. In point of form, the Taunton latchet appears to me to hold an intermediate place between this British brooch and the Irish spectacle-brooch, resembling the former in having the open ring instead of the solid disc, and the latter in the partially curved character of its stem, as shown (one-third full size) in the engraving. The

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeological Society, vol. i, p. 51.



beautiful green colour and polished surface exhibited by these Taunton remains are due to their having acquired a patina or coating of malachite, formed on their surface in the long process of centuries, and which is rarely seen in greater perfection.

Various theories have from time to time been proposed to account for the singular fact that numerous groups of British remains similar to the present have so frequently been discovered buried in the way described in this instance. It was suggested by Stukeley that members of the Druidic order, or those holding the Druidic faith, resorted to this practice of "thus laying by these objects when they embraced Christianity."<sup>1</sup> It has been stated also that about the period referred to, several edicts were issued by the Roman senate; Phelps<sup>2</sup> refers to one A.D. 179, for the abolition of the Druidic superstition, or the suppression of Druidism. It would therefore seem not altogether unreasonable to suppose that in deference either to religious sentiment,<sup>3</sup> or to a mandate of the latter kind, the owners of such objects may have been led thus to conceal or dispose of them. The more modern view, which seems to enjoy present popularity, is, that these objects were the property of wandering artizans, amongst whom the strange practice prevailed of thus burying or concealing their "stock in trade." Whether this latter theory is more credible, or is to be preferred to either of the former, I leave others to decide, but would cite in reference to it the pertinent remark of Mr. Humphrey Wickham, who says, "although very many hoards of Celtic remains have from time to time been turned up in Great Britain, yet, I believe no melting

<sup>1</sup> *Archæologia*, vol. v, p. iii.

<sup>2</sup> *History and Antiquities of Somerset*, vol. i, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Even in recent times, the burial of these objects has been ascribed to religious influences. Thus, Worsæ, observing how frequently the articles had

previously been purposely twisted and damaged, was led to the conclusion that they were thrown into turbaries or the place of deposit, "in accordance with the superstitious practice of the people, as a votive offering to their deities." (*Archæ. Cambriensis*, vol. vi, 4th series, p. 19.)

pot or crucible has ever been found among the articles deposited. From this I should infer that these hoards belonged not to artificers, but to resident tribes or families.”<sup>1</sup> Before passing from the notice of these objects I feel I should be wanting in an act of justice to one no longer amongst us, if I omitted to point out how nearly their discovery had been already foreshadowed, and how completely it has served to confirm the predictions of the late Mr. W. A. Jones, who in a highly interesting series of papers, read at meetings of the Somerset Archaeological Society, expressed his belief that there was a British settlement on the ancient site of Taunton, and concludes his observations in these remarkable words. “For a confirmation or refutation of this hypothesis, we must wait until some lucky chance may bring to light the undoubted tokens of the occupation which we now regard only as probable.” Such “undoubted tokens” of the confirmation of what Mr. Jones modestly termed his “hypothesis,” I take to be the interesting group of objects to which I now have the honour of calling attention.

\* \* It may here be mentioned that a further “find” of British remains has recently been made on quite the opposite side of the town of Taunton to that on which the objects just described were discovered in the Union grounds in 1877. It was on the 30th December, 1879, that in the course of the construction of a sewer at *Sherford*, the workmen employed came upon a hoard of six bronze celts and a spear-head, all of which are now deposited in the Taunton Museum. Whilst this fact tends still further to establish the correctness of Dr. Pring’s general view as to the existence of a British settlement on the site of Taunton, it is right to add, that in that part of his paper which treated of the British roads round Taunton (but which want of space compels us to omit) a British trackway was for the first time assigned to this locality at *Sherford*, and it must be regarded as satisfactory that the accuracy of this observation should thus, as it were, so speedily have received confirmation by the actual discovery, after the lapse of a few months, of British remains at this very spot.

<sup>1</sup> *Archæologia Cantiana*, vol. xi, p. 125.