VIII.—A PAGAN ANGLIAN CEMETERY AT HOWICK, NORTHUMBERLAND.

By G. S. Keeney.

[Read on 23rd November 1938.]

The finds, which form the subject of this paper, were made at Howick Heugh quarry, which lies about a mile and a half to the west of the village of Howick, and about a mile to the north of Long Houghton. It is about a quarter of a mile to the west of the main Long Houghton-Howick road, just to the north of the branch road to Little Houghton. The site consists of a hillside of rock rising sharply out of the valley to the north and west, but overlooked by still higher slopes to the east, while to the south there is a gradual descent.

Here in 1928 top soil was being cleared away on the west side of the quarry in preparation for blasting operations, and it was during the course of this work that certain obviously ancient objects were turned up. These were brought to the notice of our late president, R. C. Bosanquet, who in consequence paid periodic visits to the site. No systematic excavation was carried out, but he was able to record most of the finds. It is only natural that information gained in this way was far from complete, and at times no doubt vague, but it is possible to learn much of importance from the manuscript notes which R. C. Bosanquet has left, and this report is an attempt to elaborate those notes into an account of the size, nature and period of this site, which from the skeletons found, was clearly a cemetery.

As it is the date of the cemetery which really makes it worthy of consideration, it will be as well to deal with this point at the outset. In the heading, the site has been referred to as a pagan Anglian cemetery, and with this ascription all the evidence agrees. Most distinctive, however, are three beads which were among the relics found with the skeletons, and which are clearly of an Anglo-Saxon type. There are first of all two small cylindrical beads of rather opaque green glass (plate XVI, fig. 9). When submitted to Mr. Horace C. Beck at the time of their discovery, and before any suggestion of an Anglo-Saxon date had as yet been made, he said, "your beads are so similar to some of the Saxon beads that I find it very difficult to believe that they are not of that period." He compares them in particular with some Anglo-Saxon beads from Castle Bytham, Lincs,[1] and in addition almost identical beads are to be seen in the collections in the Ashmolean museum, from Longcot, Berkshire, and Northleigh, Oxon.[2] This list of parallels does not pretend to be exhaustive, but it is adequate to show the affinities of the two beads.

The third bead is of opaque brown glass, with white spiral markings, and blue "eyes" of clear glass fused into it (plate XVI, fig. 8). Of this Mr. Beck writes: "It is the kind of glass and work that is found in Saxon times in this country, but with many of these fine specimens one looks to the Rhine or northern France as a probable place of origin." He quotes as a parallel a very fine bead from Wiesbaden, now in the Ashmolean museum, where the same technique is employed, although in this example there is a base of brown glass, with successive layers of yellow, white and brown glass fused into it, forming spirals and projecting eyes. Mr. Beck also quotes a bead in the Rouen museum, from Aubermesnil, near Foucarmont, again of

[1] Akerman, *Pagan Saxondom*, pl. XII, 4.
[2] I am indebted to Mr. D. B. Harden, of the Ashmolean museum, for assistance in identifying these last parallels.

similar technique, though different colouring. Also in the Ashmolean is a bead from the cemetery at Faversham, Kent, which employs the technique of fusing one coloured glass into another (in this case a blue base, with white and red superimposed), but there are no definite "eyes" as in our example, so it is not a strict parallel.

As with the two green beads, then, all the known parallels of this bead are of the post-Roman migration period, and this, with the locality in which our specimen was found, can only imply an Anglo-Saxon origin. So, of themselves, the beads are a sufficient justification for regarding the cemetery as of pagan Anglian date, and when it is seen that all the other features of the cemetery, while not affording conclusive dating evidence themselves, yet fall in with this ascription, a condition no other era could fulfil, any possible doubt will be removed.

This further confirmatory evidence is implicit in the nature of the site itself, which can now be dealt with in a more systematic way. Of primary importance is the question of the extent of the cemetery, and on this point there are two sources of evidence. There is first of all the number of skeletons found in the years 1928 to 1930, but from the nature of their discovery, this apparently simple point is not easy to decide. The skeletons are recorded by Bosanquet in a notation extending from I to X, the last one being on May 9th, 1930. However, this list is clearly not a complete record of all the skeletons found, but would seem to refer merely to those which Bosanquet himself saw. Skeletons I to VII were found in 1928, although no actual mention is made of III and IV. Three skeletons were found in 1930, and these appear to be VIII, IX and X.[3] No

[3] The dates of numbers VIII and X are not actually mentioned, but there is a flint labelled "April 9th, 1930, with a woman's skeleton, no. X," while in the notes we read, under May 9th, 1930, of the discovery of a "woman's skeleton with a piece of whitish flint." Both references, despite the substitution of April for May, would seem to refer to the same burial, no. X. In any case it is clear that X was one of the three found in 1930, for IX is dated February 11th, 1930. VIII is, no doubt, the third skeleton belonging to 1930.

mention, then, is made of 1929, but in a note on January 9th, 1930, we read of the appointment of a new foreman at the quarry, and that there were " probably three new skeletons since my last visit," that is presumably since VII in 1928, or some subsequent visit which is unrecorded. Finally in 1930, in the description of burial X, we learn that the foreman said that two other burials, not seen by Bosanquet, lay one to the north and the other to the south of it.

So in the computation of the size of the cemetery, we can be sure of the ten burials listed by Bosanquet, at least three made in 1929, and the two final discoveries of 1930, making in all fifteen burials. Moreover, from trenching carried out in September 1937, these fifteen burials seem to represent the full extent of the site. By 1937, the knoll, on which the discoveries of 1928 to 1930 were made, had actually been quarried away, but trenches were dug at all the nearest available points to the site of the earlier discoveries, and they all showed complete absence of any traces of disturbance. The only point where anything may possibly remain is on the west side of the quarry, where the presence of quarry dump precludes any investigation. The cemetery, therefore, was only of small size, although even so it is by far the most considerable find of its kind in Northumberland.

This introduces the next problem, the nature of the site. On this point there are three factors of importance to be considered: the type of burial, the association of the skeletons and the various objects found, and finally the nature, and, where possible, the date of these objects. All these three features will emerge most clearly from a description of the graves and their contents, which will be given below. Only those contained in Bosanquet's I to X notation are included, as clearly only these have any real information about them preserved.

1. Skeleton lying with head to the south. Skull in good condition. Most of the bones were dispersed before the

nature of the find was realized. No associated objects.

II. Skeleton, in crouching position and as if it had fallen over to the west. It was surrounded and partially covered by large stones, while the shoulders rested on a number of rounded boulders. A limestone flag 3 feet by 2 feet 3 inches by 5 inches partially covered the feet. The burial lay 16 feet to the south of I, and was at a depth of 2 feet. No associated objects.

III and IV. No record.

V. Skeleton, found under a rough cairn, at the highest point of the hill. It lay on its left side, head to the west and with the knees slightly flexed. The burial was only 15 inches below the original surface, and it is probably because there was little depth of soil at this point that stones were roughly piled around the body to form a cairn.

Two fragments of the blade of an iron knife were found lying across the pelvis of the skeleton, and two other iron knives (3 and 5)[4] are labelled as being found with burial V, although the circumstances of their discovery are not given.

An iron horse-bit (2) was found a few yards away from this burial, and about a dozen limpet shells were found in the soil near the skeleton.

VI. Skeleton, found 18 feet to the north-east of V, lying with its head to the north-east. Near the neck were found the two green glass beads (9) and an iron knife (6). Three quartz pebbles were also found.

Beyond the feet was a skull set upright in the earth.[5]

VII. Skeleton, lying to the north-west of V, on its left side and 1 foot 8 inches below the surface. The earth around the skeleton was disturbed as if by digging to fix a post, and in consequence most of the upper part was missing. A fragment of iron knife was found near the chin.

[4] The numbers in brackets refer to the illustrations of the objects on plate XVI.

[5] This skull most likely represents a burial subsequently disturbed, and so would raise the number of known burials to sixteen.

VIII. The only information preserved of this burial is that many limpet and periwinkle shells were found with it, and that an iron spearhead (10) was found near by.

IX. Skull, small and rather thin. The skeleton had seemingly been disturbed and there were no associated finds.

X. A woman's skeleton, lying with head to the north-west, the legs on the limestone and the trunk on patch of earth. Found with it, lying near the shoulder, was a piece of whitish flint.

In addition to the burials, there were also found an iron knife (4) and the central fragment of a Roman trumpet fibula (7), both of which are not associated with any burial. In the same category was the base of a jar of thick coarse ware, roughly fired and including pebbles in the clay (1). It is red on the exterior but with a black core. The brown glass bead discussed above (8) is said to have been found near the last burial of 1929, but this, it will be remembered, is one of those on which there is no information.

Reverting now to the question of the type of burial, it will be seen from the foregoing list that there was no regularity either in the direction in which the skeletons lay or in the manner of interment. I lay with its head to the south, V with its head to the west, and VI with its head to the north-east. Again V lay with its knees flexed, but this does not seem to have been the case with any of the others. VII, for example, lay on its left side, while II would seem to have lain originally on its back with its shoulders resting on a large stone. All the burials were shallow, but this is inevitable on a site where the rock is only about 2 feet below the surface. This variety of interment is in itself no evidence of date, but it can be said that it is not inconsistent with Anglo-Saxon custom.

Turning now to the relationship of the various finds to the skeletons, there is some rather more conclusive evidence. In the first place it has been noted that several objects were not associated with any grave. This is probably due to the

piecemeal method of examination, and they may possibly represent unrecorded burials. By contrast, there were some skeletons (I, II, IX, X and probably III and IV) which had no relics with them whatsoever. These form a first type, and it is enough to say that most Anglo-Saxon cemeteries show some graves, presumably those of the poorer people, completely devoid of any associated objects. Moreover, all those graves which did produce relics afford types familiar in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and which cannot be paralleled in the mass from any other era. The spear, found with VIII, is the most usual accompaniment of the Anglo-Saxon warrior, and the fact that the spearhead was found near the burial would fit a find spot near the shoulder, where the spearhead is naturally to be found. The beads (VI), on the other hand, are a normal accompaniment of the female skeleton. Perhaps, however, the most convincing are the two instances where only a knife or knives were found. In Anglo-Saxon times, when no more could be spared, it seems to have been most usual to inter a knife with the woman as a symbol of her housewifely duties. Instances of this are too numerous to cite, but Akerman, for example, writes: "We have explored many tumuli in which this (i.e. a small knife) was the chief evidence of the age of the interment, no other deposit being traceable."[6] This habit of burial with this sole relic is one not attributable to any other age, and it is indeed a strong presumptive argument in favour of a pagan Anglian date.

The discussion of the nature and date of the cemetery brings us finally to a closer examination of the relics themselves. Here there are some objects which can for all purposes be omitted, their decayed condition making typological discussion difficult. The horse-bit, for example, falls into this class, although R. A. Smith thought it likely to be Saxon. The knives, too, are not only very corroded but also of an extremely simple type, which is by no means distinctive. However, no. (4), with its straight back and

[6] *Pagan Saxondom*, p. 22

rather clear cut angle where the blade and tang join, is a familiar Anglo-Saxon type.[7] The spearhead has its shape much better preserved, and despite its split socket, at first glance it hardly seems Anglo-Saxon, its leaf shape making this seem unlikely. This appearance, however, may quite well be due to sharpening rather than to its original shape, and in any case it is possible to find spearheads of Anglo-Saxon date of this type. There are two such examples in the Ashmolean museum, from Heyford and Hinchley, which provide parallels in shape.[8]

The appearance of the Roman *fibula* on such a site need cause no surprise. Roman objects, such as pottery, *fibulae* and coins, have often been found at Anglo-Saxon sites, and they were doubtless regarded as valuable and accordingly preserved. The presence of the *fibula* is indeed only an additional argument in favour of a post-Roman date. In short, as intimated above, all the features at Howick coincide with the crucial evidence of the beads to indicate that this site is a normal, if poorly furnished, example of an Anglian cemetery.

That it was, in addition, only a cemetery of small size was seen during the excavations of 1937. Yet the evidence is all against it being merely a burial site of the victims in some chance battle. One skeleton (x) was definitely that of a woman, the presence of the beads suggests that this was also the case in other instances. Again, the mere fact of the burials having associated objects with them is against the idea of hasty or irregular interment. All these things, then, suggest that it was a cemetery in regular use, and that we can postulate some sort of settlement as having been associated with it, even if it was small and perhaps only in occupation for a short time.

Such a conclusion means that the site is one of considerable interest in the present state of our archæological

[7] See, for example, *Invent. Sep.*, pl. xv, fig. 10.

[8] I am again grateful to Mr. D. B. Harden, of the Ashmolean museum, for the above explanation and for drawing my attention to these parallels.

knowledge of Anglian Northumberland. In the first place there are at most two sites in the county of which as much can be said. There is an Anglian cemetery at Hepple,[9] and a possible site at Galewood,[10] near Milfield. Moreover, it was on the Northumbrian coast near Bamburgh and Lindisfarne, that is in close proximity to Howick, that Ida settled in 547 and so founded the kingdom of Bernicia. In Howick one can see one of the early, and certainly pre-Christian, sites which mark the gradual expansion of the new kingdom round its centre at Bamburgh, and a certain support for the statement that this portion of the north-east coast was the original centre of the Anglian kingdom. For both these reasons, then, the site is not only unique archæologically in the county, but one also importantly linked with the historical data, and which, with further additions to our knowledge, can provide important evidence in the interpretation of the Dark Age history of this area.

NOTE.—In the second report of the North of England Excavation Committee 1926, p. 18, where the discoveries of 1928/30 are briefly recorded, it is stated that "there was at least one case of incomplete cremation." R. C. Bosanquet also mentions in a private letter "evidence in one grave of a very perfunctory cremation," but in the manuscript notes on the actual burials there is no clear reference to this, although it most probably refers to VII, where "pieces of sandstone and limestone and some of the earth round the grave showed signs of burning." No mention is made of the skeleton itself having been partially burnt.

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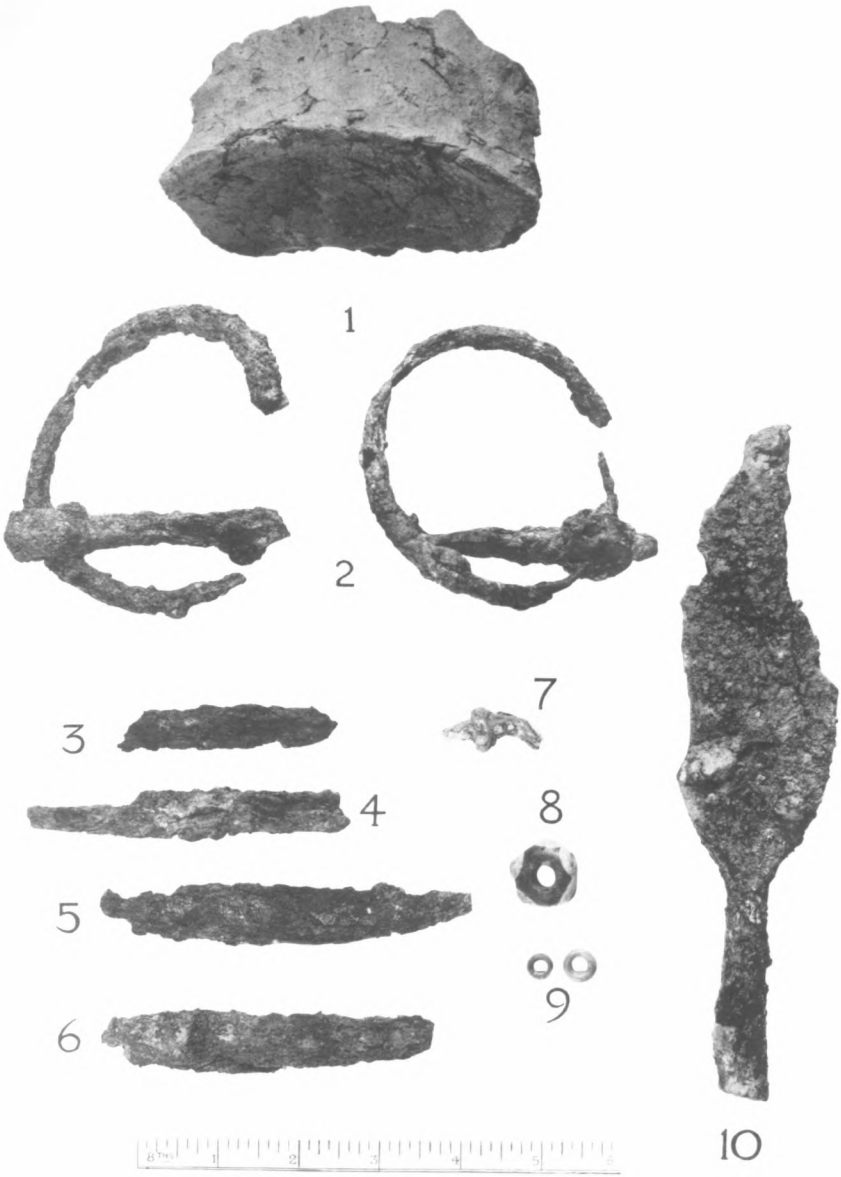
[9] Cf. Greenwell, *British Barrows*, 432.
[10] P.S.A.N.[4] VII, 15.



OBJECTS FROM THE ANGLICAN CEMETERY AT HOWICK.