

## XII

### NOTES

#### 1. A BEAKER BURIAL FROM ALTONSIDE, HAYDON BRIDGE, NORTHUMBERLAND

IN MARCH 1976, Mr. Robson of East Millhills farm unearthed a cist burial, the cap-stone of which had been obstructing the plough for a number of years. I am indebted to him for prompt notification of the discovery and permission to examine the site.

The burial lay some 160 m SSW of the cottages at Altonside and only 6.5 m beyond the southern boundary of the Newcastle to Carlisle railway line (NY 856649). Although the land rises fairly steeply on the north side of the railway the site itself lies on the river-terrace and the field is uniformly flat up to the left bank of the River South Tyne (fig. 1).

The cist was constructed from two thick side slabs and two thinner end slabs, all of local sandstone similar to that which outcrops on the slope above Altonside, where there was formerly a small quarry. There was no base slab as such but the bottom of the cist had been carefully paved with thin slabs of the same stone. Slight gaps between the side and end slabs at two of the corners had been caulked with clay. Internally the cist measured 0.95 by 0.4 m and was 0.5 m deep, but the width at the top was somewhat reduced by the manner in which the north side slab leaned inwards. It was orientated East to West. The large cap-stone, which had been partly dragged to one side by the tractor, was 1.8 m long, 1.5 m wide and 0.15 m thick.

Fine silt covered the bottom of the cist to a depth of 90 mm but no skeletal material survived and, although the material was sieved, there were no finds other than the beaker which stood upright in the NW corner. The vessel is asymmetrical in form and the outer surface predominantly pink in colour. Apart from the grooves scored around the neck the decoration is executed entirely in tooth-comb, including that on top of and inside the almost flat rim. This beaker falls within Clarke's *North British/North Rhine Group*<sup>1</sup> or, more recently, Lanting's *Step 4*.<sup>2</sup> A generally similar vessel from a shallow pit-grave at Chatton Sandyford, Northumberland, has a radio-carbon date of  $1670 \pm 50$  b.c.<sup>3</sup>

The known burials of the period in this area of South Tynedale have been listed in a recent volume of this series, where it has been suggested that the population was probably small and scattered as compared with that of North Tynedale.<sup>4</sup> There is no good topographical reason for this and the correction of such an imbalance may be no more than a matter of time and the happy co-operation of local farmers.

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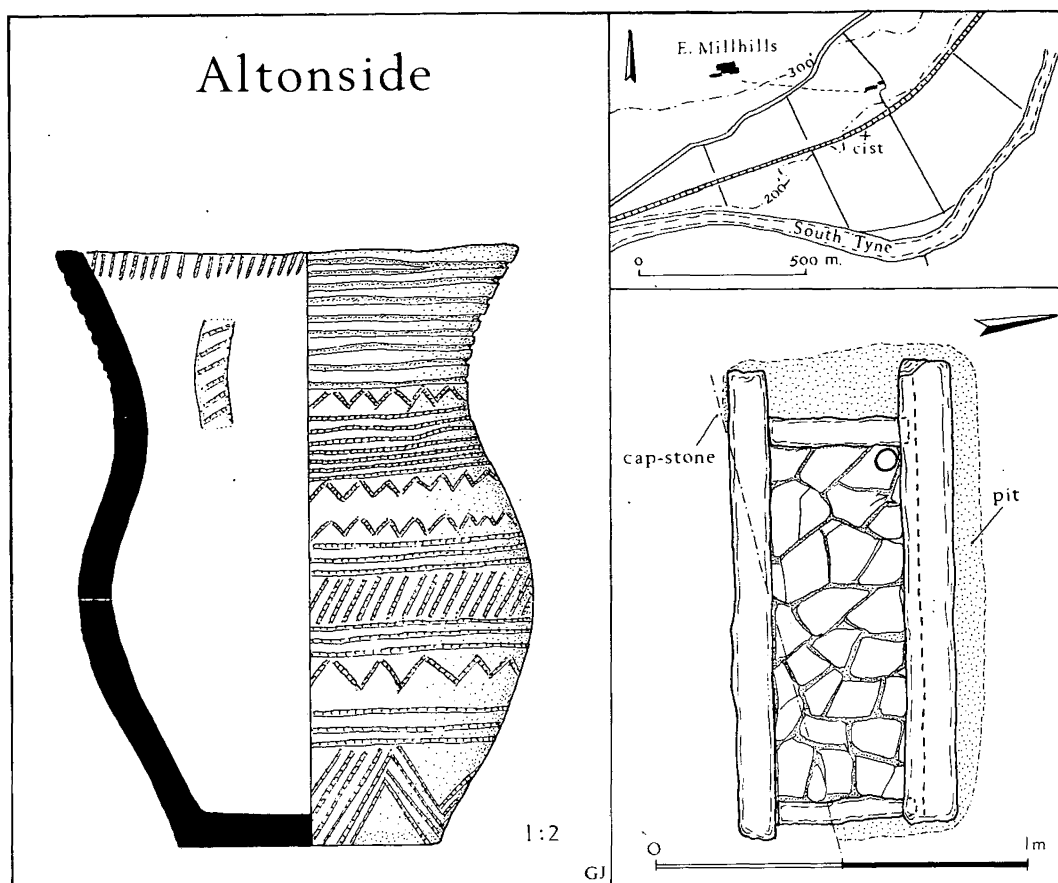
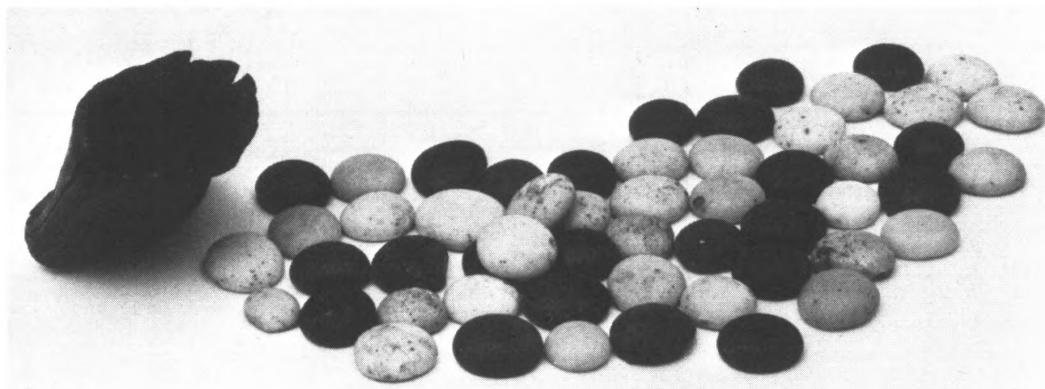


Fig. 1.

## 2. GAMES PLAYED AT CORSTOPITUM (pl. VIII)

IN 1964 a chest was found buried under the floorboards of a building at Corstopitum thought to be a workshop. In the chest were two almost complete *Loricæ segmentatae* or segmented cuirasses. The armour was in a wooden box also containing scrap iron, weapons, tools, a wooden dicing-cup, and fifty-three glass counters, thirty-one white and twenty-three black. (Pl. VIII.)

The cache seems to have been buried in a hurry in wet gravelly soil; the wood of the box was rotten, and the iron badly corroded. The dicing-cup was round when found, but when treated with carbowax for preservation the wood shrank and became oval. There were no dice with the dicing-cup. The glass counters were flattened hemispheres of about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " diameter, simulating pieces of black slate and white marble

*Arch. Ael. 5, Vol. VI**Plate VIII*

Dicing-cup and glass games pieces from Corstopitum. See Note 2. *Photograph: University Library, Newcastle upon Tyne.*

respectively; reminiscent of modern Go pieces. These pieces may have been a store of tic-tac-toe counters, or more likely part of an incomplete set of *latrones* for *Ludus Latrunculorum*. Several boards for this game have been found within the fort, and one in the site museum is an incomplete slab of sandstone inscribed with a grid of  $11 \times 10$  squares. The board must have been at least of this size and may have been larger.

There are two important literary references to *Ludus Latrunculorum*. First in the poem *Laus Pisonis* of Saleius Bassus, the “*tenuis Saleius*” of Juvenal, *Sat.* vii, v, 80 addressed to C. Piso.

The other reference occurs in Ovid’s *Ars Armatoria*, iii, 358. No mention is made in either account of dice, and therefore it seems reasonable to assume that they were not used in this game. Ovid states that a piece was captured by being surrounded by two enemy pieces on rank, or file; and that backward moves were permitted. Blocking was also permitted (*Laus Pisonis*, 201, *similisque legato obligat ipse duos*), but a blockaded man could be freed by a skilful player. The game was won by the player capturing most opposing pieces, and these were held in the hand, or placed in a bag.

One meaning of *latro* was a mercenary soldier, and *ludus latrunculorum* may be translated as “The Soldiers’ Game”. The pieces were known as *latrones*, and were made of bone, pot, pebbles, or coloured glass. Probably the moves of the *latrones* were the long orthogonal moves of the rook in chess; and capture was by interception, that is by trapping an enemy piece or pieces between two of one’s own on rank or file (fig. 2).

The description in *Laus Pisonis* suggests that the board was empty at the beginning of the game and that players placed their pieces in position, probably in alternate turns of play. Experiment suggests that instead of introducing a piece a player might move one of his pieces already on the board, either to make a capture or to avoid

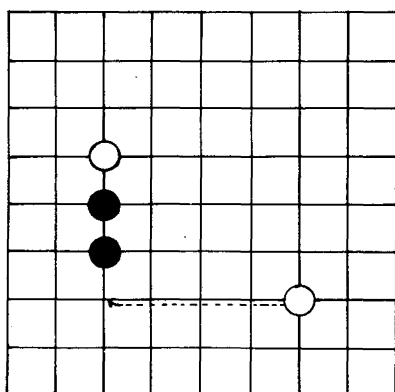


Fig. 2. Diagram to show capture of two black pieces by interception on White's indicated move.

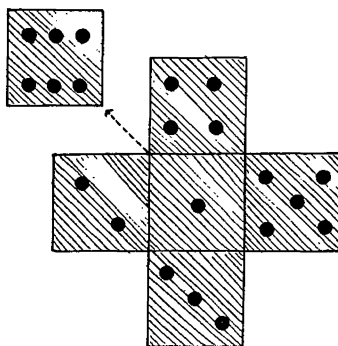


Fig. 3. Exploded drawing of a cubic die to show the arrangement of the pips on the six faces.

being taken. When all a player's pieces had been introduced onto the board he was compelled to move a *latro* at each turn, even if it were to the player's disadvantage.<sup>5</sup> If the game is played in this way it is wise to retain a few pieces off the board for use in the middle and end game periods.

Ludus latrunculorum boards varied in the number of squares, though the commonest sizes seem to have been  $8 \times 8$ , or  $8 \times 7$ . Larger boards lead to longer games. The site museum at Corstopitum also contains examples of cubic dice made of bone and of sandstone, with the sum of the opposite faces totalling 7, as is still customary today (fig. 3).

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank Dr. D. J. Smith for his assistance in the preparation of this report; Mr. C. M. Daniels the excavator of the dicing-cup and gaming pieces for permission to describe them before the official publication of the finds has appeared; and Mr. Francis Burton for help in studying and photographing the two stone gaming boards in the Corstopitum museum.

#### REFERENCES

- Austin, R. G. Roman Board Games, *Greece & Rome IV*, pp. 24-30, 1934-5.  
 ——— *Roman Armour*, Handbook of an exhibition held in Cardiff, 1969.

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### 3. TWO EARLY ANGLO-SAXON BROOCHES FROM CHESTERS AND CHESTERHOLM

NORTHUMBERLAND is not so richly endowed with early Anglo-Saxon antiquities as to be able to allow even minor objects of the period to pass by unnoticed. It is therefore surprising to find no earlier reference to a small annular brooch discovered at Chesters in the 19th century, and for over seventy years on display in the museum there. The recent discovery of a similar brooch from Chesterholm provides the opportunity to make good this omission whilst at the same time setting these related examples against their common background.

#### *Chesters*

1. Annular bronze brooch (fig. 4.1) (diameter 30 mm, thickness 4 mm). The ring is in cast bronze with a flat back and convex face. Opposed bird heads with gaping beaks flank the swivel bar, their eyes indicated by circle and dot designs. Opposite, where the pin rested, are two confronting heads of a different character, with the upper jaw curled over the shorter lower jaw. The body of the brooch is further decorated with spaced groups of incised lines. Chesters Museum Accn. 1398a.<sup>6</sup>

The closest parallels to the Chesters example belong to a Yorkshire/Kentish group of relatively small annular brooches that, on the whole, appear to fall late in the series, probably in the 7th century.<sup>7</sup> The relationship between the Kentish and Yorkshire examples of annular brooch with heads in Style II was pointed out nearly seventy years ago, and it is therefore not surprising to discover similarities to the elements on the Chesters brooch occurring on examples from both areas.<sup>8</sup> Brooches from Uncleby, Yorkshire<sup>9</sup> and Faversham, Kent<sup>10</sup> are similarly decorated with the drooping closed beaks of Style II. Outside of these areas the only example which

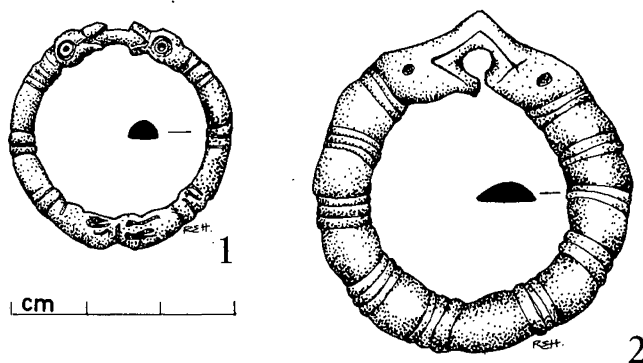


Fig. 4. Anglo-Saxon brooches from 1. Chesters; 2. Chesterholm (after P. Birley).

appears to exhibit the same features is the bronze brooch from Searby, Lincs.<sup>11</sup> The Searby example itself contrasts markedly with a group of annular brooches from the Lincolnshire area which may date rather earlier, bearing opposed birds heads and represented by examples from Ruskington<sup>12</sup> and Sleaford.<sup>13</sup> Although clearly related they nevertheless form a separate group, characterized not only by their larger size but by appearing more snake-like, (the design being simply delineated on the cast piece, either in incised lines or punch decoration), and usually with each head provided with two eyes.

The open beaked bird-heads on the Chesters piece, like the Style II element, also finds closest parallels amongst the Yorkshire/Kentish group, in particular on a silver brooch from Faversham decorated with grouped bands around the body.<sup>14</sup>

### *Chesterholm*

2. Annular brooch (fig. 4.2) (diameter 41 mm, thickness 41 mm, thickness 4 mm). Cast bronze brooch with flat back and convex face. The pin swivel is provided by the lower jaws of two confronting birds heads. Gaping jaws are further emphasized with incised lines and each bird has a single eye. The body of the brooch is decorated with ten groups of raised bands. Vindolanda Museum.<sup>15</sup>

The ribbed decoration on the ring of the Chesterholm brooch, together with its size and its flatness, link it more closely to the annular brooches of the sixth century which are widely distributed throughout Anglian areas,<sup>16</sup> than with its seventh-century relation. Parallels for the open-jawed animals can be found in the brooches from Ruskington and Sleaford already quoted but perhaps the best parallel comes again from Faversham where an annular brooch has a ribbed ring and similar open-jawed animals hold in the pin.<sup>17</sup> The Faversham brooch was unassociated, and could be sixth or seventh century. The Sleaford and Ruskington brooches are both probably sixth century.

Elsewhere attention has been drawn to the apparent strengthening of links between Northumbria and the Southern kingdoms during the late sixth and early seventh century A.D.<sup>18</sup> which the Chesters and Chesterholm examples further underline.

Once the small long brooch said to have been found at Birdoswald was shown to have acquired a false provenance,<sup>19</sup> and the "Saxon angons" from South Shields and Carvoran shown to be quite consistent with a Roman context,<sup>20</sup> only three military sites along the northern frontier could be cited as having produced undeniably Anglo-Saxon objects.<sup>21</sup> These were: Benwell, where in 1935 a cruciform and a Great Square-headed brooch was recovered (although the glass vessel broken by the workmen was not)<sup>22</sup>; Corbridge, where the early excavations produced two cruciform brooches, a string of beads, and a small pottery vessel, but unfortunately no burials<sup>23</sup>; and finally the fine eighth-century pin from Birdoswald.<sup>24</sup> To these must now be added the brooches from Chesters and Chesterholm noted above, and a small ninth-century strap-end recovered in the 1976 excavations of the fort at Wallsend.<sup>25</sup> Additional to the apparent predilection on the part of many early church foun-

dations for sitings in or adjacent to, Roman military sites,<sup>26</sup> there have been repeated attempts to demonstrate convincingly the location of secular Anglo-Saxon settlements at a number of such sites.<sup>27</sup> Only for Carlisle, with Bede's account of Cuthbert's visit there in A.D. 685, is such reasoning beyond question<sup>28</sup>; paradoxically, a site which has so far produced not one single objection of recognizably Anglo-Saxon date! Such speculation will inevitably only be resolved by the careful and total excavation of fort and adjacent civil settlement. Until that time the discovery of unstratified Anglo-Saxon objects from such sites need indicate little more than the casual losses of an earlier generation of visitors.<sup>29</sup>

ROGER MIKET

# NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Clarke, D. L., *Beaker Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland*, I, 118–29.

<sup>2</sup> Lanting, J. N. and van der Waals, J. D., "British Beakers as seen from the Continent", *Helinium* 12 (1972), fig. 4 and p. 40ff.

<sup>3</sup> Jobey, G., "Excavation of cairns at Chatton Sandyford", *AA*<sup>4</sup> XLVI (1968), 29–30. (The Chatton vessel as illustrated by Clarke and Lanting does not have *continuous* herring bone decoration around the belly but is in metopes.)

<sup>4</sup> Newman, T. and Miket, R., "A Dagger Grave at Allerwash, Newbrough, Northumberland", *AA*<sup>5</sup> 1 (1973), 93–4.

<sup>5</sup> The pieces were not in a set position as in chess or draughts. We do not know if they were placed on the squares, as in draughts; or on the points as in Go, and Chinese chess.

<sup>6</sup> The number on this brooch has been identified by Dr. G. Simpson as being one of, "fourteen *penannular* brooches" (our italics), in E. A. Wallis-Budge, *An Account of the Roman Antiquities Preserved in the Museum at Chesters, Northumberland* (1903, 382, nos. 1139–52). Correspondence with Dr. Simpson has failed to reveal the reasons for her identification.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. the brooch from grave 31, Uncleby associated with bronze thread box and gold pendant of 7th century date. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of London*, XXIV, 1912, 145–58, and E. T. Leeds, *Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology*, 1936, 99.

<sup>8</sup> R. A. Smith in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of London*, XXIV, 1912, 146–58.

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.* and E. E. Leeds *op. cit.* (fn. 7), Pl. XXVII 2; also Baldwin-Brown. *The Arts in*

*Early England* Vol. III, 1920, 287, Pl. LI.

<sup>10</sup> Now in the British Museum.

<sup>11</sup> "Anglo-Saxon Antiquities discovered at Caistor and Searby and elsewhere in Lincolnshire now deposited in the Lincoln County Museum". Lincoln County Council Museums.

<sup>12</sup> F. H. Thompson, "Anglo-Saxon in Lincolnshire: Unpublished Material and Recent Discoveries". *Antiquaries Journal* XXXVI, 1956, 181 and fig. 2 no. 2.

<sup>13</sup> In the British Museum. Accn. 83, 4–1, 289.

<sup>14</sup> E. T. Leeds, *op. cit.* (fn. 7) 99 and *British Museum Guide to Anglo-Saxon Antiquities* 1923, 48 and fig. 49.

<sup>15</sup> In M. Henig, *Vindolanda Jewellery*, 1975, 13, fig. 5.

<sup>16</sup> E. T. Leeds, *Archaeologia*, Vol. 91, 1945, 46–9 and 106.

<sup>17</sup> *British Museum Guide to the Anglo-Saxon Antiquities* 1923, 48 and fig. 49.

<sup>18</sup> The late E. T. Leeds and M. Pocock, "A survey of the Anglo-Saxon Cruciform brooches of the florid type". *Medieval Archaeology* XV, 1971, 34–6, and R. Miket and M. Pocock, "An Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Greenbank, Darlington". *Medieval Archaeology* XX, 1976.

<sup>19</sup> J. D. Cowen in *AA*<sup>4</sup> (1965) XLIII, 12–14.

<sup>20</sup> J. D. Cowen in *AA*<sup>4</sup> (1948) XXVI, 142–4 with references, and M. J. Swanton, *The spearheads of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements* 1973, 30–1, and M. J. Swanton, *A Corpus of Early Anglo-Saxon Spear Types* B.A.R. 1974, 5 and 83.

<sup>21</sup> The small glass bead found at Newcastle in 1929 is not included as its relationship to the site of the Roman settlement has not yet been estab-

lished. *The North of England Excavation Committee*, 3rd report for 1929-30, 3-4. Museum of Antiquities Accn. no. 1929.65.

<sup>22</sup> Summarized with references in "An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Greenbank, Darlington" R. Miket and M. Pocock. *Med. Arch.* XX, 1976, 74.

<sup>23</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> R. Cramp, "An Anglo-Saxon pin from Birdoswald". *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society* LXIV, 1964, 90-3.

<sup>25</sup> R. Bailey in *Medieval Archaeology* XXI, 1977, 214.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Bewcastle, Ebchester, Chester-le-Street, Jarrow seems now unlikely to reveal the once postulated fort site.

<sup>27</sup> Leland in his *Collectanea* (London 1770) (Vol. II, 290) records the tradition held by the monks of Tynemouth that Oswy was born within the old

Roman settlement at South Shields, and R. Cunliffe Shaw following G. H. Wheeler argues that St. Patrick may have been born near to, if not at, Birdoswald, R. Cunliffe Shaw *Post Roman Carlisle and the kingdoms of the North West* 1964, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Bede in *Life and Miracles of St. Cuthbert* Cap. XXVII.

<sup>29</sup> I should like to express a debt of gratitude to David Brown of the Ashmolean Museum for much constructive suggestion, and to Malcolm W. Aitken for his valuable discussions concerning the problems of the annular brooches. Also to Leslie Webster for her kindness in arranging for photographs to be taken of the relevant brooches in the British Museum and for her advice on them. Thanks are no less due to Francis Burton formerly of Chesters Museum for permission to draw and record material in the collection. Mr. R. Herbert kindly drew the objects.