

The Ogmore Helmets: Theophilus Redwood's Memories of the Find-Spot

By L. A. TOFT

This is an addendum to the article 'The Nineteenth-Century Discovery and Loss of the "Ogmore Helmets"' in Archaeologia Cambrensis CXLVII (1998), by the same author.

In a detailed study of the late Iron Age glass beads and cannel coal ring found on Old Castle Down,¹ Glamorgan, it is now revealed that the place where they were found by a metal detectorist lies between Ysgubor y Warren and a nearby disused quarry, recently identified as the find-spot of the helmets.² Almost coincidentally with the appearance in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* CXLVII (1998) of the present writer's article on the Ogmore Helmets, an important letter came to light, written by an eye-witness who visited the helmet site. It confirmed that the late Iron Age helmet finds were made on Old Castle Down, not Ogmore Down as stated in *Archaeologia* 43 (1871), and it gave previously unknown detail. The letter was found by Roger D. Thomas during his researches into Old Castle-upon-Alun, and he incorporated it into his private manuscript. On the discovery of the letter, a photocopy was obtained by Mr Thomas, which was deposited in the Glamorgan Record Office at Cardiff.³ The whereabouts of the original letter are now unclear.

The letter was written in London by Professor Theophilus Redwood on 10 April 1865, and addressed to Isaac Redwood, his half-brother, in response to enquiries about the discoveries made in 1818 by Charles Redwood, their late brother.⁴ George Grant Francis, the then local secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of London was enquiring about ancient armour found on Ogmore Down and had written to Isaac Redwood on the subject. Obviously Isaac had passed the enquiry to Theophilus, and the letter of 10 April 1865 was his initial reply; his later communication⁵ contained the memoranda by William Weston Young and the helmet drawings which were printed in *Archaeologia* 43 (1871).

In the year when the helmet discoveries were made (1818), Theophilus was aged 12; his brother Charles was 16, and obviously took Theophilus on one or more of his site visits. Theophilus must have been a very interested observer and his letter augments the memoranda by W.W. Young and Charles Redwood which were printed in the appendix of *Archaeologia* 43, the source on which knowledge of the 'Ogmore Helmets' depends. Though written some forty-seven years after his site visits, the information contained in the letter of Theophilus is likely to be reliable, as he obviously had an *aide-memoire* to bolster his memories. To judge from the date sequence of the letters sent by Isaac Redwood to Grant Francis, this letter from Theophilus, written on 10 April, was the 'note' enclosed with Isaac Redwood's letter of 11 April 1865

In his letter Theophilus stated:

'I perfectly well recollect that some human bones and pieces of armour were found near Ogmore Down when I was a boy at home, and that W.W. Young and my brother Charles took a good deal of interest in the subject, and made drawings of the pieces of armour. I

visited the spot myself in company with Charles ... The facts as far as I recollect them are these. Some men in quarrying stones for a lime kiln found the bones and pieces of metal, which were taken to a neighbouring cottage, where they were examined by those curious in such matters. The cottage where I also saw them was at Old Castle upon Allam [*sic*], a small village near St Brides.’

The fact that the labourers who found the helmets etc. were engaged in the production of lime would also explain the ‘bed of small coal’ mentioned in Charles Redwood’s account.⁶ Walter Davies in his nineteenth-century economic study of South Wales, tells how common it was for farmers to have lime kilns sited in arable fields as in this instance, with culm (the waste from the mining of coal) used as the fuel.⁷ It is therefore possible that the artefacts which ‘lay interred upon a bed of small coal’⁸ were not where they had initially been found.

It is revealing that the finds were exhibited to antiquarians, presumably local, in a ‘neighbouring cottage’, thus making the knowledge of the discoveries more widespread than previously realised. They must have been extremely interesting to those antiquarians, and four decades later a fear that the finds could easily be forgotten may explain the pressure on Grant Francis to obtain any knowledge still available.⁹ The only ‘cottage’ specifically named in the original memoranda is Black Hall, and if this was where the finds were deposited, then it could explain why C.R.M. Talbot thought they had been made on his land,¹⁰ especially if he, then aged 15, had been taken to see them in a ‘cottage’ on his estate; at the time Black Hall and the field above it were part of the Margam Estate.¹¹

Theophilus Redwood went on to say:

‘I remember going with Charles to the field where they were found and where the men were at work. This was near to the cottage and must be close to the down which I think, in the parish is called Old Castle Down, but it joins Ogmore Down. It was a ploughed field and the quarry where the relics were found was on an elevated spot at one corner of the field.

This extract clearly identifies the find-spot as a quarry at the side of an elevated field on Old Castle Down. Owing to the lapse of time since 1865 it is not possible to know whether the statement ‘but it joins Ogmore Down’ was Theophilus’s way of telling his brother that Grant Francis had got the location wrong. This part of the letter confirms without doubt, however, that the location published in the present author’s recent study¹² is the correct one — NGR SS 9046 7543.

The last section of the letter reads as follows:

‘The parts of the relic that attracted most notice was some ornaments supposed to have belonged to a helmet. Mr Young made a drawing of such a helmet as he supposed they might have belonged to, and as he was at the time giving us instruction in drawing, this helmet formed a standard drawing lesson with us, so I have a distinct recollection of it. It was something of this sort. [This suggests that it was Theophilus who provided the second helmet drawing; see p. 71 of reference 2.]. The helmet itself was not found, or at any rate only fragments of it, but there was the skull and ornaments which I think were of silver with some parts inlaid with enamel.’

In the final paragraph of his letter Theophilus said how he would like to revisit ‘Old Castle upon Alam’.

This section is illuminating for describing the degree to which the helmets were fragmented and the way that W.W. Young had to approximate their shape. It also explains Theophilus’s caveat over the authorship of the drawings accompanying the pamphlet which he asks his brother to send on to Grant Francis.¹³ Finally the relationship between Young and the Redwood boys is revealed as tutor and pupils. Theophilus makes it clear that the precise accuracy of the drawings can be doubted; they were unlikely, however, to have been ‘band crowns’.¹⁴

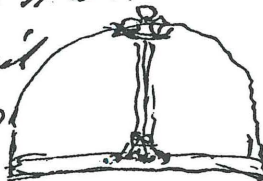
As a result of Theophilus Redwood’s letter of 10 April, the final facet of the saga requiring consideration is how the printed account of the meeting of 11 May 1865 held at the Society of Antiquaries in London (where Grant Francis presented his researches) came to contain a misleading account of where the original artefacts were found.

There is no doubt that Grant Francis actually received Theophilus Redwood’s letter of 10 April 1865, because the letter bears the stamp of the John Richardson Francis Bequest to the Royal Institution of South Wales, Swansea (John Richardson was the eldest son of Grant). All the other letters in the Archive replying to Grant Francis’s enquiries about the ‘ancient armour’ also bear the same stamp.

As regards misinformation, there is the mysterious ‘Castell y Lligiad on Ogmore Down’, of which no trace has been found,¹⁵ yet Grant Francis had in his possession a letter from an eye-witness which cited Old Castle Down and did not mention Castell y Lligiad at all. Again, there is the report that the original finds were sent to London and lost; this is odd because there is no reference in the Society of Antiquaries’ archives to them, either their coming or their loss.¹⁶ There is also the projected visit to the site which Mr Mansel Talbot of Margam Park ‘would be glad to join’ as he thought the site was on his estate.¹⁷ Theophilus Redwood would have been only too pleased to lead a visit, according to his letter of 10 April, but there is no further mention of it.

In short, the lack of attribution plus the misinformation in the preamble to the appendix in *Archaeologia* 43 does suggest obfuscation. There may have been a chance combination of circumstances which produced confusion, but the balance of probabilities suggests otherwise. The publication of this letter possibly closes the documentary story of the Ogmore Helmets. Only excavation will add to our knowledge.

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Extract from Theophilus Redwood’s letter, with reconstruction sketch of helmet.

Swansea Museum collection, Royal Institution of South Wales.

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3. Copy also in Swansea Museum.
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8. *Archaeologia* **43**, 555.
9. *ibid.*, 553.
10. *ibid.*, 553.
11. Margam Estate survey volume D/D Ma E/2, map Z₂ in West Glamorgan Record Office, Swansea.
12. L.A. Toft, *op.cit.*, fig.2, p.72.
13. George Grant Francis Archive, letter dated 18 April 1865.
14. Keith Parfitt, *Iron Age Burials from Mill Hill, Deal* (British Museum Press, 1995).
15. L.A. Toft, *op. cit.*, 73, 74, 75; also note under ref. 15.
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17. *Archaeologia*, **43**, 555.