

NOTICE OF
AN OVAL JEWELLED FIBULA

FOUND AT

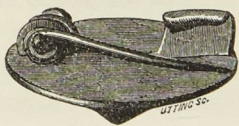
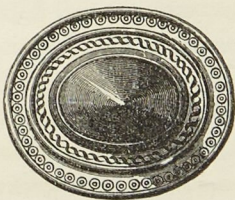
Swaffham, Norfolk.

BY ROBERT FITCH, Esq., F.G.S., Hon. TREAS. & SEC.

THE oval jewelled Fibula, of gilt metal set with an amethyst, of which a representation is given, was found in the neighbourhood of Swaffham, in Norfolk, in the year 1855. It is a very rare example of this personal ornament, very few having been discovered oval in form. It appears to be of late Roman character; but some doubt has been expressed with regard to its being of Roman workmanship, on account of its gilding, which as it had been supposed is unusual in works of that period; indeed, if one had not been exhumed in Suffolk, accompanied with Roman coins, &c., the doubt might have been entertained as to the early date of the example of *bijouterie* in question.

The few facts, however, I am enabled to give are, I think, strongly indicative of the Roman origin of the specimen now figured.

I am acquainted with no account of a discovery of an oval jewelled fibula earlier than the year 1788, when a single example was found in a field named "Four Acre Honeycomb," at Wickham Brook in the county of Suffolk, as mentioned in the 58th volume of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, page 702, and figured in a plate of Miscellaneous Antiquities in the same volume. Coins of Constantine,



OVAL JEWELLED FIBULA

In the Possession of ROBERT FITCH, F.G.S., Hon. Treas. and Sec.

Probus, Septimus Severus, &c., were found with it. The stone of the Wickham Brook specimen might have been an amethyst or a close imitation of that gem; but was so much injured that it had lost much of its original appearance. The setting was precisely like the Swaffham specimen, and also the gilding; with this difference, that, while in the latter the outer circle is composed of a series of roundels, or spots, the Suffolk fibula exhibited merely a hatched ornamentation. The size of both is identical.

It is to be regretted that the illustration in the *Gentleman's Magazine* only gives a front view, and neither the engraving nor the short description affords any idea of its nature, or of the means of fastening; but there can be no doubt that both are of one type, and the circumstances under which the Suffolk fibula was discovered, with its accompanying deposits, leaves no hesitation or surmise as respects the period to which they both belong.

The Roman origin of the Swaffham fibula is also strengthened, if indeed support can be considered necessary, by the discovery in 1838, during the demolition of an old bridge at Kirkby Thore, in Westmoreland, near the Roman Station of Gallagum, according to Camden, or the Brovonacæ of Horsley, of several studs or buttons similar in form and material to the Wickham and Swaffham ornaments, with lyre-shaped and various fibulæ, numerous coins, an aureus of Hadrian, and other Roman remains. A short notice of this discovery, with a woodcut of the "jewelled button," will be found in the volume of the Proceedings of the Archaeological Institute at York in 1846. The Kirkby specimen it will be remembered, however, was a button, or stud, having a loop at the back to receive a lace or thong of leather, and was without the characteristic pin attached to fibulæ; but I think there can be no question that the Westmoreland, the Suffolk, and the Norfolk specimens belong to the Roman era.

Since writing the above, I have received a letter from Mr. H. Syer Cuming, Honorary Secretary of the British Archæological Association, from which I extract the following remarks:—"I have no hesitation in affirming that your Swaffham fibula is a type of very great rarity. I do not remember the example from Westmoreland, but the Wickham one is familiar to me. The latter is evidently of the same age as your fibula; but whether they be late Roman or early Saxon is somewhat uncertain. Most of the *Roman fibulæ* found in this country are of bronze, either plain or decorated with enamel, and seldom exhibit symptoms of setting. On the other hand, the majority of Teutonic brooches are set, and their fronts are frequently enriched with eyelet holes and guilloche pattern. A bronze brooch-plate, found with Saxon remains in Gloucestershire, is engraved in the Journal of the Association, IV. 52, on which appears a guilloche band surrounding the bezel, as in your specimen. The presence of Roman coins would lead to the belief that these oval fibulæ were late Roman ornaments; but at present there is scarcely sufficient data upon which to ground a positive opinion. They are of much rarity, and cannot be looked upon as objects of trivial interest. The fact ought not to be lost sight of, that East Anglia appears to be the only district in England that has yet produced an oval fibula."
