

## Roman and Other Remains Recently Discovered at Sedgford.

COMMUNICATED BY

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My holiday this year was made more than usually enjoyable for, on excavating for the purpose of a bowling green, some ground within 150 yards of the house, I discovered that the workmen were turning up pieces of British and Roman pottery. This led me to dig trial holes in various parts of the Sedgford Valley, when I discovered that quantities of pottery in likely places were to be found throughout a great part of it. Indeed, I collected some thousands of pieces, and though they were but broken fragments, they formed a most interesting clue to the history of the locality in distant times.

Some of the Roman pieces were quite familiar, and are figured in the text books; such, for instance, as pieces of Samian ware, cooking pots and mortaria. Other pieces, however, bore a somewhat distinctive character, and the patterns of a number of thick rims are not, as far as my knowledge goes, figured in any of the books, and may therefore be of local manufacture. I do not intend to

convey by this that the pottery was made at Sedgeford, but that it may have been made somewhere in the locality, though of this there is no record.

Mr. Douglas Priestley, who was for two months engaged on the excavations at Wroxeter, roughly put the date of the British pottery at 300 B.C., and all the Roman pottery appears to be of the first and second century.

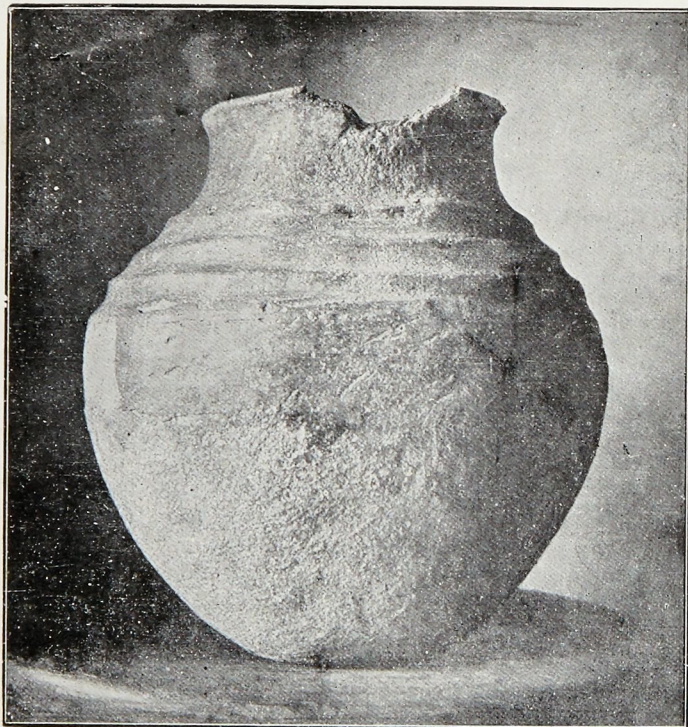
There being sufficient indications that a Roman villa must have existed on the spot, an effort was made to locate it, and though not successful, the search led to an interesting discovery. At a spot which seemed likely, from the circular depression of the ground, to have been the site of a British settlement we came across a slab composed of chalk and flints mortared together. This had been surrounded with a bed of clay, which must have been brought from a distance; and a number of large flints, chalk, and carr stones were found about and above the slab. It became quite clear as we proceeded that funeral rites had been performed here, and that the slab covered the remains of an ancient Briton. The clay on one side had been burnt a deep red, and showed signs of burnt charcoal or pitch, or some other black substance, all of which indicated that a body had here been burnt. On removing the slab, which was shaped like an irregular oval, we found similar signs, and the conclusion came to was that in all probability Suttee rites or their equivalent according to the ancient British custom had been performed, and some poor lady despatched to join her husband in his journey to the happy land. A small slab was found within a foot or so of the larger one, and before we had disturbed the latter, we thought it probable that the ashes might have been placed in an urn and put on the slab. No urn being found we modelled one as seen in the accompanying illustration. When, however, we discovered that the larger slab merely covered the





SCENE OF BRITISH TOMB.





SAXON URN DISCOVERED AT SEDGEFORD.

ashes of the deceased Briton, we were obliged to admit that the conclusion we had arrived at may not have been warranted. The point, however, is one that cannot be definitely determined, because the ground had been disturbed, and the urn, if ever there was one, may have been removed.

It turned out also that I was wrong in thinking this to be the site of a British settlement. It is one of the few spots where no British or Roman pottery has been found, and that theory must be abandoned. Its cup-like shape is probably due to the fact of its having been once used as a marling pit, which would also account for the disturbance that had taken place.

A Saxon urn was found on the west side of the valley of Sedgeford, another, which was found to the north, having been sent some years ago to the Norwich Museum, where it presumably now is.

Many people have expressed to me their surprise at the pottery being distributed over so wide an area. Where a quantity is discovered together, as was the case on the site of the bowling green, it may be presumed to have been thrown out at the back of the villa or settlement, and been dug into the garden. In other cases it has no doubt been carted away with the refuse of the house or the manure in the yard and spread over the land. Exactly the same is happening at the present day, and it is almost impossible to move a step in some fields without treading on fragments of modern tile, brick, or pottery.

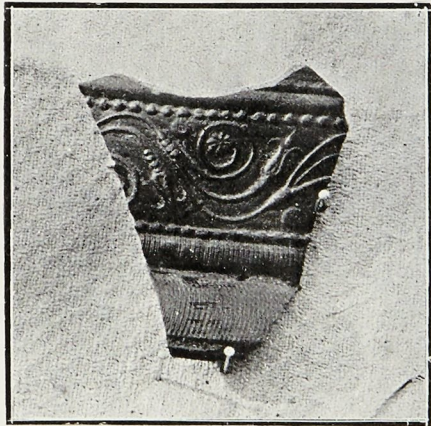
At one edge of the site of the above-mentioned interment we came across the foundations of a house and a considerable quantity of late mediæval pottery. There were many broken Bellarmine jugs, much glass beautifully oxidised, and various odds and ends, such as a thimble, a lady's ring, a sheep bell, all of which were of copper,



knives and scissors, a small round box, a great number of nails, and a still greater number of broken churchwarden pipes of the 17th century. One Bellarmine jug was whole and buried upside down, a sign, we suggested, that "no heeltaps" was the order of that house. One piece of glass had a wheatsheaf embossed upon it, and the accumulated evidence led us to the unavoidable conclusion that this had been a beer-house.

The only other discovery of interest up to the present is that of various skeletons. I have already given my opinion of these at an interview with a local reporter, and this has appeared in some of the papers. Many skeletons have from time to time been exhumed along the side of the stream that runs through the Sedgeford Valley, or in more or less proximity thereto, and previous accounts have surmised fierce battles between the Romans and Saxons or Danes and Angles, and so forth.

Several skeletons were turned up near my house, but in every case the remains were so disturbed that it was difficult to draw conclusions. Recently, however, my keeper, in digging out a rabbit burrow, came across a skeleton and brought the remains to the house. I thereupon took my men to the spot and carefully opened the ground, with the result that I was able to unbare two skeletons lying in the position in which they were originally interred. These had their feet to the east, and for that reason I came to the conclusion that these were Christian burials, and could not therefore be referred to any supposed encounters. Moreover, in the latter case, as far as one can judge, there must have been seven or eight interments. What between the efforts of the rabbits, the keeper, and the ploughshare, they had generally been disturbed, but except in one case, where the jaw of a grown man was exposed, they were all remains of young people, mostly children. Knowing something of the history



A SPECIMEN OF SAMIAN WARE.



of the Black Death and its ravages in Norfolk, I drew the inference that this was a case where the deceased persons had been hurriedly buried in the most convenient spot, the churchyard having been closed, and that the priest himself had been one of the victims, as was so often the case. On the other hand, Mr. le Strange, of Hunstanton Hall, suggested to me that they were more likely to have been buried at the time of the Interdict in the reign of King John. This point cannot be now determined. It seems, however, that we may both have been wrong.

The most perfect of these skeletons was taken to London, and, turning out to be a particularly interesting skeleton, now reposes in the Museum of the College of Surgeons. A certain distinguished anatomist belonging to the medical profession has given it as his opinion that these are the remains of a Saxon, and that there is evidence from the shape of the bones that they were those of a Saxon who had not yet adopted the sitting posture.

There I must leave the question, after having stated both facts and opinions.