

Mosaic

SAXON BURIALS AT THE GOBLIN WORKS

SINCE 1927, WHEN the first recorded find of human bones was made, archaeologists have been aware that a burial site might exist in the vicinity of the former Goblin Works at Leatherhead. The construction of a new administrative headquarters for Esso has provided an opportunity to test the site and has resulted in a number of important and interesting discoveries. Two factors were crucial to the success of the work: firstly, the whole-hearted cooperation of all parties involved in the redevelopment work, and in particular Esso's generous financial contribution, and secondly the enthusiastic and skilful help of the largely volunteer excavation team.

The excavation area was first stripped of topsoil by mechanical excavator. This revealed a total of 28 graves, either cut into, or on the surface of, the underlying chalk – though some were as little as 0.2m (8in) below topsoil, careful use of the machine kept damage to a minimum. The burials could be divided into two distinct groups. The larger was a series of 17 pagan Saxon burials of the 6th or 7th century A.D. Amongst these were men, women and children, all buried in grave pits cut into solid chalk to a depth of between 0.15 and 0.7m (6in and 2ft 4in). The bodies within were carefully laid out, either fully extended on their backs, or on their side in a 'sleeping' position. Many of the adult burials contained items deposited with the body, including two large and fearsome-looking iron spearheads, various daggers, bronze buckles and clasps, a bone comb and a cowrie shell. This far-travelled item, perhaps from the Indian Ocean, was probably a charm to ward off 'the evil eye'. The discovery of a necklace composed of amethyst, glass and bone beads with the body of a girl aged about 6 or 7 struck a more poignant note. It seems certain that these burials were originally marked at the surface in one fashion or another, as they are evenly separated one from the other; in one case slots cut into the grave pit at either end suggest the original presence of head and tail boards. Most of these pagan burials were laid out east-west, with the head to the west facing the rising sun, though a minority were orientated north-south.

This site is the third pagan Saxon cemetery in a radius of two miles. The other two are at Hawks Hill, Fetcham, and near the Mole crossing at Leatherhead. They form part of an interesting pattern of Saxon settlement in Surrey. The earliest Saxon settlement in England begins in the early 5th century and for a long time in Surrey was confined to the area around Mitcham and Croydon. It was not until well into the 6th century that the newcomers spread outwards as far as the North Downs. The lands they moved into had long been settled, as evidence such as the Iron Age site at Hawks Hill and the Roman villa and tileworks at Ashtead suggests.

In contrast to the pagan burials, the second group showed no regular orientation though they tended towards a north-south axis, and were obviously unmarked at the surface since several of the burials were disturbed by later interments. Taken as a whole, these bodies were deposited in a careless and casual fashion, usually at a depth of less than 0.3m (1ft) below top soil. Four of them had their hands tied behind their back, two were buried face downwards and two had been decapitated. All these burials seem to be adult males and the obvious inference is that they were executed criminals. Two of these burials were definitely later than pagan ones, and it seems likely that this site was chosen as an execution site after the conversion of the Saxons to Christianity in the later 7th century because of its heathen associations.

ROB POULTON

SAXON COUNTY SCHOOL, SHEPPERTON

EXCAVATIONS TOOK PLACE at the Saxon County School between 14 July and 26 September in advance of building works.

The work was directed by the author for the Conservation and Archaeology Section, Planning Department, Surrey County Council, and funded by the Education Department, Surrey County Council.

Earlier work on the site¹ had revealed a burial ground and an associated settlement site occupied between the 6th and 12th centuries A.D.

Little evidence for prehistoric activity on the site was found, apart from a scatter of worked flints, including a Mesolithic tranchet axe. A sufficient scatter of Roman pottery and tile was, however, recovered to indicate that a Roman site lies nearby, perhaps where a resistivity survey of the adjacent playing field area indicated the presence of stone building foundations below ground.

The character of earlier Saxon occupation remains elusive, but a notable discovery this year was a substantial midden deposit of early Saxon date, which had been dumped in a natural hollow. Finds from this included plentiful animal bone and pottery (including stamped and decorated sherds of various types), as well as a number of bone artefacts, including two combs. The main period of occupation was revealed by a number of ditches running parallel to those found by Canham. This confirmed his suggestion that the site had been regularly laid out and indicated that this had occurred in the late Saxon period. The site appears to go out of use in the 12th century, though a scatter of medieval pottery may be sufficient to suggest that occupation did continue in the immediate vicinity, perhaps on a reduced scale.

ROB POULTON

1. R. Canham 'Excavations at Shepperton Green 1967 and 1973' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 30 (1979) 97-124.

THE PUTNEY FORDHEAD

IN 1975 A SINGLE track Roman road 'Y-junction' was found in an excavation behind Putney police station on the Upper Richmond Road, with the main arm (30m, 100ft, long) aiming at the end of Spring Passage, which connects the Lower Richmond Road with the Thames. Spring Passage is thought to have been the site of the postulated Putney fordhead for various reasons (including Professor Grimes' Old Street route) which cannot be gone into here.

An excavation this autumn on a site inland from the Star and Garter pub on the Lower Richmond Road appears to have confirmed the existence and alignment of another single track Roman road, of which a short length and a partial section had already been found further east. The projection of the line of this second road meets that of the first one at the entrance to Spring passage in a somewhat similar manner to the two roads leading to the Southwark bridgehead.

Additionally, there is evidence for continuity as the new sighting lies underneath the site of a medieval headland whose boundary is preserved by a block of flats, while the short length found further east had medieval pottery mixed with upper surface. A report will appear in *The Wandsworth Historian* next year.

NICHOLAS FUENTES

NEW THRACIAN TREASURE FROM BULGARIA

IN LATE 1985 at Rogozen in northern Bulgaria a tractor driver noticed some metal in the mud while digging a trench for a water-pipe, and discovered the largest cache of Thracian treasure ever found, mostly dating to the 4th century BC. Archaeological excavation revealed a total of 165 silver objects, the largest number ever discovered. They are now on display at the British Museum, ten years after the success of the *Thracian Treasures from Bulgaria* exhibition (see Diary).