

Some Anglo-Saxon Pottery from Luton

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SUMMARY

The acquisition of a pot from Luton by the British Museum, has given rise to an examination of the body of pottery from the Argyle Avenue, Luton cemetery. These vessels are illustrated for the first time and it is suggested that while two Buckelurnen and a carinated bowl are fifth century, a vessel with triangular panel style decoration is indicative of a late sixth century date.

In December 1963 the British Museum purchased an Anglo-Saxon pot claimed by its donor to have been found in Biscot Road, not far from the site of the Argyle Avenue, Luton, cemetery,¹ during development of the area in the late 1920s.² As the donor was a workman on the housing estate at the time, there seems little reason to doubt the attribution of the vessel to this provenance. It is certainly probable that other material from the cemetery may not have been collected by W. Austin and T.W. Bagshawe³ during their watching of the foundation and service trenches of the new houses.

In considering this additional vessel from the Argyle Avenue cemetery, it was decided to examine again all the pottery recovered. This, as far as it is extant in Luton Museum, has been drawn and catalogued. In view of the limited knowledge of this small group of pottery a discussion is therefore appended which considers afresh the pottery from Luton. One only (5), the footed Buckelurne of Myres group 1, is well-known. The other seven are figured for the first time, though photographs of two have previously been published.

Myres group 1 Buckelurnen, those with feet and decorated with linear or line-and-dot groove designs, with or without finger tipping, and/or dots, but *without* stamps,⁴ are fairly common in Bedfordshire. There are three from Sandy⁵ and one, known only from a Bradford Rudge water-colour, from Kempston,⁶ as well as this one from Luton (5). Their dating, most recently reviewed in the light of those from Sandy,⁵ can fairly safely be ascribed to the fifth century. Continental assoc-

iations, in particular two from Westerwanna, numbers 586⁷ with a late fourth century brooch and 1236⁸ with a late Roman zoomorphic buckle of Hawkes type IIIA, would suggest an early beginning, especially as the buckle can be paralleled so easily at the Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxon.⁹ grave. However, the only relevant English association is that from Lackford, Suffolk, with a cruciform brooch of Aberg's group I.¹⁰

Again probably to be placed fairly early in the corpus of Anglo-Saxon pottery from Bedfordshire¹¹ is the other Buckelurne from Luton (6). This very fragmentary vessel may on account of its stamps be from any of Myres groups with stamps, namely III, IV or V.¹² On the whole, the available evidence does not suggest a profusion of stamps and perhaps it would be safer to suggest either group III or group IV. Group III are those with stamps and with feet. Group IV are those with restrained use of stamps and without feet. It can be suggested that the curvature of the vessel makes a large pot likely and one is struck by the parallel with group I Buckelurne from Somersham, Hunts.,¹³ for the probable size. The cartwheel stamp is found again on a Buckelurne from Bedfordshire, an example from Kempston, of which only a sherd remains. It cannot, I think, be claimed that this is the same stamp on both pots, but it may be that the decorative schemes were similar. The Kempston vessel has vertical bosses, slashed with diagonal grooves, the cartwheel stamp and split horizontal bosses.¹⁴ The bosses at Luton are different, being plain horizontal and split vertical, but the arrangement seems to bear a slight resemblance to that from Kempston.

The new vessel (1) can best be discussed at this point for it can be seen as midway between a late example of a group III Buckelurne,¹² with feet and restrained use of stamps, and an urn with a pedestal or footing base.¹⁵ The latter come from a wide scatter of sites, and none of those published by Myres¹⁵ is exactly a parallel to this

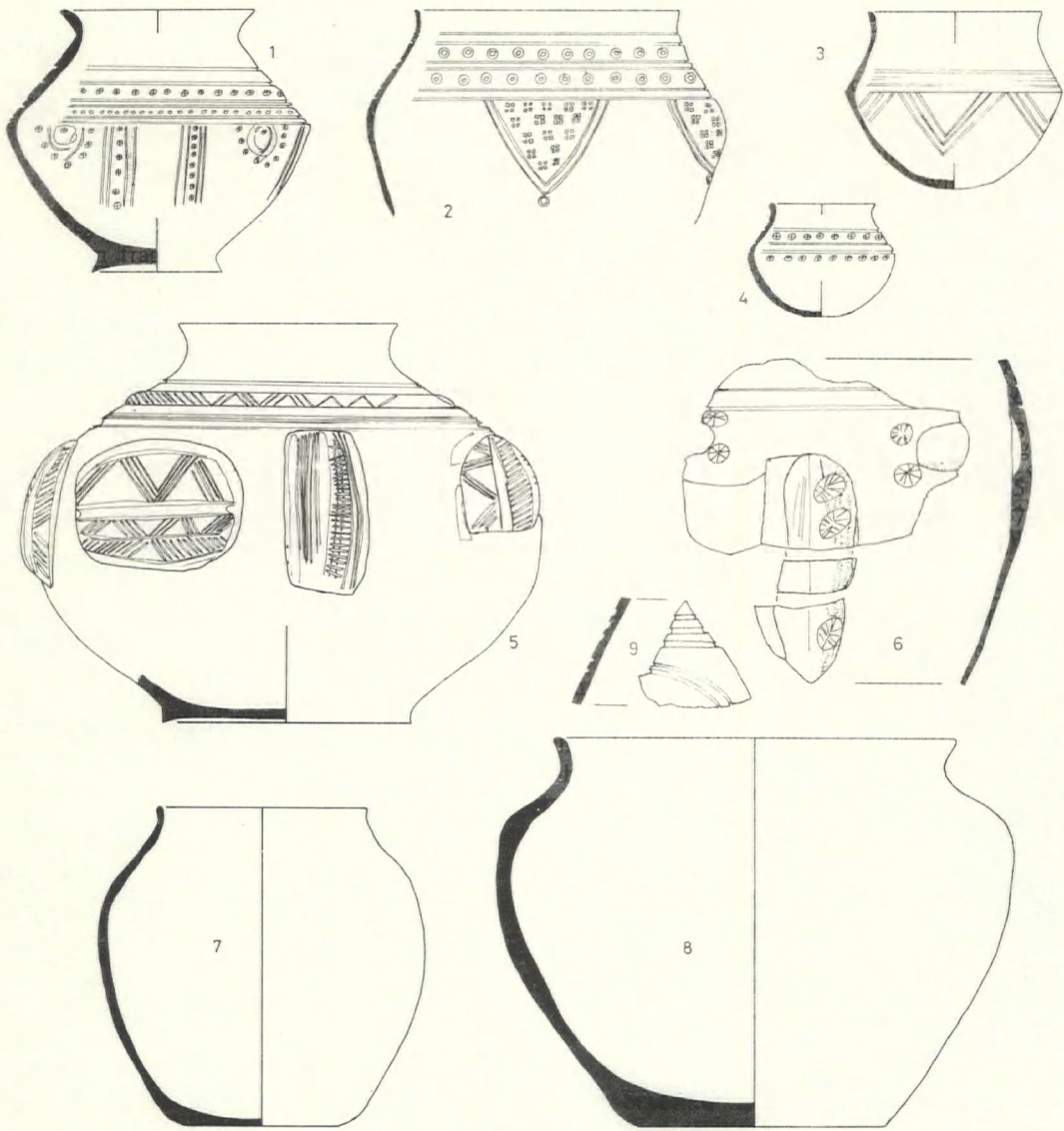


Fig. 1 Anglo-Saxon pottery from Luton (Scale $\frac{1}{4}$).

vessel. On the other hand the lack of a collar and the fairly light vertical bosses and hollow oval bosses do not make comparison with urns like that from Newton-in-the-Willows, Northants.,¹⁶ likely.

The general feel of the pot may suggest that an attribution to the late fifth century may not be incorrect. Dr. Myres, however, is of the opinion that the vessel probably dates to after 500 and compares with a late group V Buckelurne from Girton.¹⁷ It has also been suggested to me by R.K. Hagen that the vessel may be much later than this

and might in fact be a seventh century piece. Clearly no agreement seems possible on the date and affinities of the piece.

It is though clear that even if the new vessel (1) is not to be dated to the late fifth century, there are other vessels at Luton which are to be dated to fifth century. The sherd of a large cremation urn with stehende Bogen designs (9) is one such. Myres¹⁸ illustrates a selection and one can point to the use of arched bosses on the group V Buckelurne from Sandy¹⁹ as the only other use

of stehende Bogen in Bedfordshire known to me.

One, at least of the recorded accessory vessels (3) is likely to be similar in date. The shape of this carinated open bowl²⁰ is very like those from Milton, Northants.,²¹ and Lackford, Suffolk.²² That from Milton was associated with a fine group I Buckelurne.²³ The use of chevron ornament can be seen in Lincolnshire both at Lovedon Hill²⁴ and at South Elkington.²⁵ At the latter, six pots - numbers 87, 117, 161, 188, 201 and 204 - can be instanced. In this (fairly pure) form of chevron ornament an early date may be suspected.²⁶

If the recorded observation of the close proximity of (3) and (8) is indeed evidence of a valid association,²⁷ and there is some doubt that the record of two pots, one (8) with a cremation, and a spearhead does represent one rather than two internments, for the two pots were found on different dates - then it would reinforce the date range which can be offered for the plain shouldered urn (8). These are thought to date somewhere about A.D. 500,²⁸ on the basis of the association of an urn from Lackford with a cruciform brooch of Aberg's group II.²⁹

The other plain pot from Luton (7) is a sub-biconical urn, of which other examples in Bedfordshire include at least three from Kempston³⁰ and one from Sandy.³¹ The type is difficult to date beyond a general observation that they have a long life within the Anglo-Saxon period.

The small accessory vessel from grave 22 (4) has a most interesting association, a small-long brooch with horned headplate and lozenge foot³². This rare type³³ includes unassociated examples from Barrington A (a pair),³⁴ High Down, Sussex,³⁵ and East Shefford, Berks.,³⁶ and one other associated pair. These come from grave 30 at Linton Heath, Cambs., and were found with a string of beads, a pair of wrist clasps and a strap end.³⁷ The small pot itself (4) is clearly a small bowl with a restrained use of stamps³⁸ and is one suspects best placed in the sixth century, though it is difficult to quote any precise parallels. This would not be inconsistent with the probable date of the brooch, which on evidence of being a form derived (albeit tenuously) from more simple types is not likely to be early.

The final vessel to be discussed (2) is clearly an example of the triangular panel style of decoration³⁹ and belongs equally clearly to the small group distinguished by a stamp at the foot of the

triangle.⁴⁰ Other vessels with this trick are those figures in the last volume of this *Journal*. From Kingsey, Oxon., Brixworth, Northants, and Dunstable.⁴⁰ The bowed sides of the triangles and the plain intervals between them are found both on this Luton pot (2) and the Kingsey vessel.⁴¹ The style is also known at Kempston,⁴² where four such vessels were found, and elsewhere in the middle Ouse valley at Moggerhanger.⁴³

It could be noted that this last is something of a surprise, not it should be pointed out from a geographical standpoint, but rather from a chronological position. It has been suggested that cremation at Kempston is confined to the fifth and early sixth centuries.⁴⁴ It can now be seen that this is not so, for these vessels clearly date to the middle years of the sixth century if not to its second half.³⁹ A similar conclusion must also be made about the Luton cemetery, for this vessel (2) is obviously one of the two ornamented cinerary urns reported as being found in fragments.⁴⁵ The other is equally clearly the fragmentary Buckelurne (6). However, only fragments representing one plain cinerary urn (7) were discovered by the author in Luton Museum, and not the three recorded by Austin.

The pottery from Luton, Argyle Avenue, as has been individually noted, spans the whole of the cemetery, with the majority of dateable vessels belonging to the fifth century. One vessel (2) of itself must, though, be late sixth century, and another (4) because of its associations is also. Both the brooch associated with (4) and the pot (2) point to contacts between the Oxford region and the district near Cambridge.⁴⁶ At Luton, these contacts are wide. Both the great square-headed brooch⁴⁷ from grave 41⁴⁸ and its associated saucer brooches⁴⁹ have south-western links. It is seen also in the pair of short-long brooches with square headplates and a lozenge foot from grave 28.⁵⁰ One could continue by citing the links of the 'Kentish type' brooch⁵¹ with brooches from Brixthampton⁵² and Abingdon⁵³ on the one hand and Linton Heath⁵⁴ on the other.

Beyond these late sixth century links, the pottery from Luton reveals another important aspect of the cemetery found at Argyle Avenue, namely the fifth century finds. Five vessels (1, 3, 5, 6 and 9) probably date to this century and form part of the corpus of fifth century finds from Luton. The remaining pieces are two brooches and a fragment from a buckle plate. The

buckle plate of Hawkes' type IIA⁵⁵ was old when buried in grave 8 with a pair of disc brooches,⁵⁶ but the two brooches are among the earliest Anglo-Saxon finds in England. The saucer brooch with four rebated coils⁵⁷ finds its only parallel at Alten Buls, Kr Zeven, Hanover⁵⁸ and the other is one of three from England. This is the brooch⁵⁹ of what has been termed 'series 2 group B of the equal-armed brooch',⁶⁰ or can more succinctly be called the 'Stutzarmfibel'. Other examples in England are, like the Luton one, unassociated. One from Kempston⁶¹ may date to c 425 and that from Pakenham, Norfolk,⁶² may not be very different in date to this or Roeder's proposed date of A.D.400 for the Luton brooch.

The German parallels to this brooch point to the close contact of the Luton cemetery with the Germanic homeland in Lower Saxony and at the mouth of the Wesser. This is the same area in which the continental examples of Buckelurnen have been found. Both have been among the accoutrements of these.⁶³ Such is the importance of the Luton cemetery that is complete elucidation, which is beyond the scope of this short paper, deserves the fullest publication. To this end, the pottery has been here noted.⁶⁴

CATALOGUE

1 Small urn in dark grey ware fired to light brown and red brown surfaces with black patches. Four grooves at base of neck with a row of quadripartite circle stamps between the second and third rows and dimples below, with two grooves above the shoulder. On the body of the pot are vertical bosses in pairs ornamented with quadripartite stamps and between each of the four pairs of vertical bosses is a plain area with a small hollow oval boss surrounded by quadripartite stamps and with a central stamp. There is a foot ring to the base. Rim diameter 10.2cm, height 14.2cm.

Museum British Museum, register number 1963, 12-3, 1.

Literature unpublished; Myres, *Corpus*, 4125

2 Fragments of a biconical urn in grey burnished ware with shell grits included in the ware. Sufficient fragments are extant to give the shape of the upper part of the pot and the scheme of the decoration. Biconical vessel with a slightly everted rim with an

arrangement of three pairs of grooves separated by a row of concentric circle stamps. Below the lowest groove are pendant triangles filled with quadripartite stamps and terminating in a circle stamp.

Museum Luton Museum, accession number L/136/33.

Literature previously unpublished.

3 Grave 20

Small bowl, in a red brown ware, carinated with an everted rim. Three grooves above the shoulder and three line chevrons on the body. Rim diameter 9.2cm, height 9.5cm. *Museum* Luton Museum, accession number L/57/33.

Literature Austin, 1928, pl 37.2,1 Myres, *Corpus*, 2945.

4 Grave 22

Small pot in black ware, with neck grooves and two rows of cross-in-circle stamps. Rim diameter 5.6cm, height 6.1cm.

Museum Luton Museum, accession number L/66/33.

Literature Austin, 1928, pl 37.2.2; Myres, *Corpus*, 2941.

5 Buckelurne in light brown ware, blackened in places, wide shoulders with everted rim above, divided by raised collar slashed with diagonal and chevron grooving, from the main pot. On the body of the pot are four horizontal bosses alternately set with four vertical bosses, each decorated with a different arrangement of chevron and diagonal lines. The lower part is plain except for a well moulded foot ring. Rim diameter 11.6 cm, height 21.7cm.

Museum Luton Museum, accession number, 45/41/27.

Literature Austin, 1928, pl 37.1; Myres, 1969, 190, fig 22, 2944; Myres, *Corpus*, 2944.

6 Grave 16

Fragments from a Buckelurne in a red ware, fired black. No base fragments extant, and only sufficient fragments to suggest part of the ornamental design. Grooves, probably on the shoulder, above cartwheel stamps at ends of horizontal bosses, and with a vertical boss divided by a median groove and set with

cartwheel stamps.

Museum Luton Museum, accession number, L/55/33.

Literature previously unpublished.

- 7 Plain urn in black gritty ware, reconstructed from fragments, and lacking most of the rim. Height 16.6cm, base diameter 8.6cm. *Museum* Luton Museum, accession number, L/34/33. *Literature* previously unpublished; Myres, *Corpus*, 2942.
- 8 Grave 20
Large plain shouldered urn, retaining cremation, in black ware. Rim diameter 21.0cm, height 21.0cm, base diameter 13.8cm. *Museum* Luton Museum, accession number, L/56/33. *Literature* noted Austin, 1928, 185 and 188, not illustrated; Myres, *Corpus*, 2943.
- 9 Sherd from large urn; black, heavily burnished ware. Three neck grooves and two arched grooves of a stehende Bogen type. *Museum* Luton Museum, accession number, BL/137/33. *Literature* previously unpublished; Myres, *Corpus*, 2946.

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NOTES

- 1 The contemporary account is Austin, 1928, with a preliminary note by W. Austin, *History of Luton* 1, (1928), 32-34; For location, see map, *Beds Arch J* 6, 1971, 24.
- 2 A brief comment on housing developments in Luton appears J. Dyer, F. Stygall and J. Dony, *The Story of Luton* (1964) 194. The author has in preparation a more complete analysis of housing developments in Luton in the early twentieth century.
- 3 Austin, 1928, 179. The lack of associations for many objects confirms the incompleteness of the record of the cemetery
- 4 Myres, 1969, 45-46; see also Myres, 1954.
- 5 Kennett, 1970, 18-21 and 30 with fig 6. 2-3 and Braybrooke; also Myres, 1954, 208 and pl 21.b-c, with provenance corrected to Sandy by Myres, *Ant J* 37, 1957, 224.
- 6 Fitch, 1868, pl 41 top; Kennett, *Kempston*, object 471.
- 7 Zimmer-Linnfeld, 1960, fig 78.586.
- 8 Zimmer-Linnfeld, 1960, fig 157.1236.
- 9 Hawkes, 1961, 10-21, 59-60, fig 20.
- 10 Lethbridge, 1951, fig 2.48.2491.
- 11 The publication of the Kempston pottery in detail will complete the corpus of Anglo-Saxon pottery from the county.
- 12 Myres, 1969, 45-47.
- 13 Myres, 1954, 208, pl 21a.
- 14 Bedford Museum, unnumbered, but clearly part of the vessel illustrated Fitch, 1868, pl 42 third row right. The sherd is Kennett, *Kempston*, object 389; the vessel, *ibid* object 474.
- 15 Myres, 1969, 49 and 196 with fig 25.

- 16 Myres, 1969, 194, fig 24.744.
 17 D. Myres *in litore* to the author December 1972.
 18 Myres, 1969, 188 and fig. 21.
 19 Kennett, 1970, 30 and fig 6.1.
 20 Myres, 1969, 26 and 56 with fig 5.
 21 Myres, 1969, 156, fig 5.807; Kennett, 1969, 47 and fig. 1.3.
 22 Myres, 1969, 156, fig 5.900
 23 Myres, 1969, 190, fig 22.808; Kennett, 1969, 47, fig 1.2; Myres is the more accurate representation.
 24 Myres, 1969, 178, fig 16.1322 and 1356.
 25 G. Webster, 'An Anglo-Saxon urnfield at South Elkington, Louth, Lincolnshire', *Arch J* 108, (1951), 25-64, especially figs 4 and 5.
 26 Myres, 1969, 39-40.
 27 Austin, 1928, 185.
 28 Myres, 1969, 26.
 29 Myres, 1969, 154 and fig 4.914.
 30 Bedford Museum, 3763, 3776, and B.M. 114, respectively Kennett, *Kempston* objects 363, 376, and 408; Bedford Museum, B.M. 13 and an unnumbered vessel marked 'B.T.C.1865', respectively Kennett, *Kempston*, objects 380 and 381, are probably also sub-biconical urns, but lack the shoulder neck and rim to make identification certain.
 31 Kennett, 1970, 25 and 31 with fig 7.8.
 32 Austin, 1928, pl.30.3.
 33 Leeds, 1945, 38 and 101.
 34 Leeds, 1945, fig 23.h.
 35 Leeds, 1945, fig 23.g.
 36 British Museum, register number, 1893, 7-16, 37, unpublished.
 37 Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge, accession numbers 1948.1549-1551; *Arch J* 9 (1851).
 38 Myres, 1969, 228 and fig 41.
 39 Myres, 1969, 115-119 with map 9; and 204 with fig 29 and pl 6 for a full survey; supplemented locally by Kennett, 1971.
 40 Kennett, 1971, 40, and fig 3.
 41 Kennett, 1971, 42-43 and fig 3.394. This vessel is in Aylesbury Museum.
 42 Kennett, 1971, 41-42 and fig 2.
 43 Kennett, 1971, 41 and fig 1.
 44 Kennett, 1970, 26, drawing on Kennett, *Kempston*, whose pottery discussion is in the course of considerable revision.
 45 Austin, 1928, 185.
 46 These contacts are documented Kennett, 1971, 40-41.
 47 Austin, 1928, pl 29.
 48 Not included in the grave list in Austin, 1928, but given in summary fashion, *ibid* 182.
 49 Austin, 1928, pl 27.1.3. and 4.
 50 Austin, 1928, 191 and pl 30.1 and 2.
 51 Austin 1928, pl 30.4.
 52 E.T. Leeds, *Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology* (1936), pl 15, top row 4.
 53 E. T. Leeds and D. B. Harden, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Abingdon, Berkshire* (1936), 54 and pl 16.117.
 54 Leeds, 1945, fig 34.a.
 55 Austin, 1928, pl 87 and pl 32.8; Hawkes, 1961, 68 and fig 19 bis. a.
 56 Austin, 1928, pl 27.2.
 57 Austin, 1928, pl 28.1.2.
 58 *Archaeologia* 63 (1912), 195 and fig 22.
 59 Austin, 1928, pl 32.1-3 (for front, side and pin views).
 60 A. Plettke, *Ursprung und Ausbreitung der Angelen in Saschen* (1921), 21-25; as revised J. Werner, 'Kriegergraber aus der ersten Halfte des 5 Jahrhunderts . . .', *Bonn J* 158 (1958), especially, 376-379, with abb 4-7, and fundliste 407-408 with karte 1 (= abb 7); for illustrations of continental examples parallel to those from Luton and Kempston see F. Roeder, 'Typologisch-Chronologische studien zu Mittelsach der Volkerwanderungszeit', *Jahrbuch des Provinzial Museums, Hannover* 5 (1930); and E. Grohne, *Mahndorf* (1953).
 61 British Museum, register number, 1891, 6-24, 212; Kennett, *Kempston* object 212; illustrated accessibly *V C H Beds* 1 (1904) 179 and *British Museum Guide to Anglo-Saxon and Foreign Teutonic Antiquities* (1923).
 62 Ashmolean Museum, accession number 1927.139.
 63 e.g. Westerwanna and Mahndorf.
 64 Paper completed November 1972.

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