

THE THORNBOROUGH BARROW

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AMONG the material in the Braybrooke Collection, now in the Cambridge University Museum of Archæology and Ethnology,¹ is a group of objects excavated during the nineteenth century by the Duke of Buckingham in one of the Thornborough barrows. These objects were bought from the Duke by Richard Neville, fourth Lord Braybrooke, and a note of the purchase included among the Braybrooke papers is worth quoting. "The following articles were taken out of an ancient barrow measuring about 156 feet in diameter and 25 feet in height, in the parish of Thornborough near Buckingham, which was opened by the Duke of Buckingham in 1839. The small bronze lamp, and the whole of the vessels of bronze, pottery and glass were found upon a platform of rough limestone, nearly upon the level of the surrounding soil which, from the calcined appearance of the upper surface, had evidently been used as the funeral pile on which the body of the deceased had been burnt; it was protected by a wooden covering, some of the oak planks of which remain entire. The ashes and fragments of bone had been carefully preserved in one of the glass vessels, and near it was found a small lozenge-formed piece of gold of rude workmanship described as Lot 186."

With the exception of the small piece of gold the objects described in the above account survive in the Braybrooke Collection today, and in the main they agree with the earliest published account of the barrow, that given by Lipscomb in his "*History and Antiquities of Buckinghamshire*"² of 1847. An interesting discrepancy occurs with Lipscomb's list, however, when he mentions "a large dish, a bowl and the hilt of a sword." The large dish has been preserved, but the last two items are missing, and they are mentioned by no other authority. The sword hilt moreover would be a rather unusual object to find in a Romano-British barrow. On the other hand, there is a patera from Thornborough in the Braybrooke Collection, whose existence Lipscomb fails to note. It has only survived in a fragmentary state, and it is possible that in the pieces of its bowl, and in the handle which has broken away from them, we have our missing objects, mistakenly identified by Lipscomb as a bowl and the hilt of a sword rather than as a patera. Description of the piece of gold occurs in several published accounts,³ sometimes accompanied by the mention of a second gold ornament or gold ring; and 'traces' of iron weapons are also noted. The whereabouts of the gold and iron objects is unknown: they are certainly not in the Braybrooke Collection in Cambridge. It is, of course, possible that any ironwork which came to light was in too fragile a state to survive the excavation of the barrow.

The same account which mentions the ironwork also notes an investigation of the second Thornborough barrow. This was apparently opened at the same time as its more productive neighbour, but "no relics except loose stones,

evidently not in their original position, were discovered."⁴ Presumably the grave had been robbed at an earlier date.

The objects from the first barrow now to be found in Cambridge are the vessels of glass, pottery, and bronze. The large square-bodied jug (Pl. 4a) of greenish glass and familiar shape is presumably the largish glass vessel described by Lipscomb as "cracked and broken (as supposed) from the weight of the superincumbent strata" and as containing "ashes and fragments of bone." Its base is ornamented with three concentric rings, and its handle is reeded. The second handle shown in the photograph probably came from another jug of this type, and the neck and upper part of a third jug, of more rounded shape, of thinner glass and a paler green, also survives.

The pottery includes a Terra Sigillata bowl of Dragendorff Form 37.⁵ This bowl has an ovolo border just below the rim, and on the body, a series of medallions filled alternately by a bird and a seahorse: the medallions are separated by motifs consisting of a cable-twisted shaft which ends in an indeterminate double leaf. It may be East Gaulish ware of Antonine date. Part of a dish of Form 18/31 also survives, and most of a small cup, Form 33, with the stamp TITTIVS FE, presumably that of Tittius of Lezoux, a potter working during the Domitian-Antonine period. A poppy-head beaker, decorated with the usual panels of barbotine dots, and two small globular amphorae complete the list of pottery.

The bronzes, now unhappily in rather a poor state of preservation, must have originally formed a fine group. On the larger of the two jugs (Pl. 3a) the junction of the neck and body is defined by a ledge or moulding; and the handle is decorated at the top with an upturned leaf to serve as a rest for the thumb when pouring. The relief at the base of the handle, shows a figure with its hand on a vase. It is probably a winged Cupid, although the wings are not very clearly shown. Above the Cupid's (?) head is an object which may be a mirror or a patera, and above that again is a second vase, beside which there is another object, difficulty to identify; it might be a cake or loaf of bread. Another figure adorns the upper part of the handle. This might possibly be a Triton blowing on a conch, since the lower limbs appear to terminate in upturned fishes' tails. The point of junction of the handle with the rim is decorated with heads of birds.

Beside this jug are shown (Pl. 4b) fragments of the patera. The reeded patera handle ends in a wolf's head, and the exterior of the base is ornamented with concentric circles. To the right of it comes the lamp, still retaining the small lid which covered the oil chamber, while the lowest rings of the chain by which it was suspended remain in position in the small lugs on either side. Its only decoration is the fine bronze crescent, ending in knobs, covering the ring-handle. A similar lamp from the Blacas Collection may be seen in the British Museum,⁶ and another one closely resembling it was found with a hoard of bronzes, chiefly horse-harness, at Westhall, near Halesworth,⁷ in Suffolk.

The shallow bronze dish has two handles decorated with ribbing. Lying in front of it (Pl. 4b) are two fragments of bronze turned over at the sides as if to fit on a core. The upper surface of both fragments is decorated with an

ivy leaf or interlocking heart design executed in blue champlevé enamel. On the larger fragment (to the right of the dish) this decoration forms the border of a curved piece of bronze, also with a rough backing. Both fragments have some kind of attachment at the back at one end, perhaps a rivet. Their purpose is obscure. A fragment rather resembling them especially in the pattern of the decoration was found at Wroxeter,⁸ and another piece of enamelled bronze fitted over an iron plate, excavated at Elmswell in Yorkshire, is believed to have formed part of the decoration of a wooden box or casket.⁹

Lastly, there is a smaller bronze jug with a pinched or trefoil mouth and a high, gracefully curving handle. This handle is decorated with a lion's head at the point of junction with the rim; while the rest of it is carved to represent a lion's paw terminating at the lower end in a claw foot. Between this foot and the body of the jug is inserted a small plaque of bronze on which is a running scroll in low relief. Such a handle is common on jugs of this type; another example closely resembling it, and found in a hoard at Santon Downham, may be seen in the University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. The only difference between the two jugs lies in a variation of the motif at the base of the handle. The closest parallel to the scroll on the Thornborough jug is on a jug in the Louvre.¹⁰

Considered as a group the contents of the Thornborough barrow are outstanding, rivalling in richness the burials found under the Bartlow Hills, and in certain Belgian tumuli. The individual objects are the usual grave-goods: jars of wine, dishes, and cups for the refreshment of the deceased, a lamp, and sacrificial bronze jugs and patera. The jug with mythological reliefs is closely paralleled by one found at Bayford in Kent.¹¹ The reliefs on the handle of this latter jug show a man with a sword, scabbard and cloak, with an ox and a decapitated goat at his feet, and other animals above his head, and, at the top, a seated figure holding a crook; while the same birds appear at the point where the handle meets the rim, and the same upturned leaf serves as a support for the thumb. Again, the Bayford jug bears a similar moulding at the base of the neck. Another jug with these features was found in Scotland in 1807 at Lesmahagow, Lanarkshire, and is now in the Hunterian Museum at Glasgow.¹² There the reliefs on the handle include a female figure standing by an altar, a Corinthian helmet, a winged genius or Cupid, and a draped shield decorated with a Medusa head; while below the figure at the base of the handle is a palmette, a feature which may also have existed on the Thornborough jug, where a jagged edge suggests that something has been broken away at this point. On the Continent jugs of this type have been found in Belgium in the tumulus of Fresin,¹³ and in Germany at Pforzheim¹⁴ and at Waldkirch.¹⁵ Developed from a Pompeian prototype, they seem to be of late first or second century A.D. date.

Parallels for the patera handle and jug with trefoil mouth may be found among the bronzes dating from the middle of the first century A.D. in the Santon Downham (Suffolk) hoard already mentioned.¹⁶ In Belgium a jug of similar shape was found in the tumulus at Cortil-Noirmont (Brabant), a burial dated by coins and other grave goods to the reign of Marcus Aurelius.¹⁷

In construction the Thornborough barrow seems to have been of the usual



PLATE 3A. THORNBOROUGH BARROW. Bronze Jugs.



PLATE 3B. THORNBOROUGH BARROW. Amphoræ.



PLATE 4A. THORNBOROUGH BARROW. Objects of Glass and Pottery.



PLATE 4B. THORNBOROUGH BARROW. Objects of Bronze.

type,¹⁸ and it can be compared in size with the famous Bartlow Hills. There, the largest of seven barrows measured about 144 feet in diameter and 45 feet high when it was excavated, and its neighbours on either side had diameters of about 100 feet and were 35 feet in height.¹⁹ The largest barrow also contained rich grave goods in a wooden chest, placed on a platform of chalk and earth, an arrangement similar to the Thornborough platform of rough limestone with its protective wooden covering.

What is the probable date of the Thornborough burial? The big glass jug and the bronzes are of first or second century types. But it is unlikely that these objects were new when they were buried: they may, indeed, have been family heirlooms. As regards the Samian, the stamp on the Form 33 cup and the decoration on the Form 37 bowl suggest the Antonine period; while the poppyhead beaker and the two amphorae would support a second century rather than a later date. Such dating is supported by the comparative material. Moreover, many of the barrows found in both Britain and in Belgium appear to have been erected at this time. It was, then, perhaps in the later years of the second century that our Thornborough burial took place.

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NOTES

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² Vol. III, p. 115.

³ Finds from the Thornborough barrow are briefly referred to in the following: *Records of Bucks. II* (1863), p. 127; *V* (1884), p. 355; *V.C.H. Bucks. II* (1908), p. 12; *Royal Commission Historic Monuments Inventory, N. Bucks.* (1913), p. 298.

⁴ *Records of Bucks. V* (1884), p. 355.

⁵ The bowl resembles Oswald and Pryce "*Introduction to Terra Sigillata*" (1920), Pl. XIII, 6, in its general design.

⁶ H. B. Walters, "*Catalogue of Greek and Roman Lamps in the British Museum*" (1914), No. 101, p. 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 111, p. 19. This resemblance was also noted by Neville in *Archaeological Journal XII* (1855), p. 276.

⁸ J. Bushe-Fox, *Wroxeter III* (Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, V, 1916), Pl. XVI, No. 17.

⁹ *Antiquaries Journal* 20 (1940), p. 338 and foll.

¹⁰ A. de Ridder, "*Les Bronzes Antiques des Louvre*" (1915) II, No. 2754.

¹¹ G. Payne, "*Collectanea Cantiana*" (1893), p. 48, Pl. XIII. This bronze jug was accompanied by a large glass jug resembling our example from Thornborough, and by other articles of glass, pottery and bronze including fifteen Samian cups and dishes dated to c. A.D. 200. This group is now in the British Museum. For another jug of this type in the British Museum see the "*Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain*" (1951), Pl. VI, 3, from Faversham, Kent.

¹² J. Macdonald, "*The Roman Stones in the Hunterian Museum*" (1897), p. 95, Pl. XVII.

¹³ De Loë, "*Belgique Ancienne*" III (1937), p. 143.

¹⁴ "*Germania Romana*" V (1930), Pl. IV, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Pl. V, 1.

¹⁶ *Cambridge Antiquarian Society Proceedings XIII* (1909), p. 146.

¹⁷ De Loë, *op. cit.*, p. 102, Fig. 35.

¹⁸ For a discussion of Roman Barrows in Britain see Dunning and Jessup, *Antiquity X* (1936), pp. 37-53.

¹⁹ *Archæologia XXVI* (1836), p. 300.