

OPENING OF A TUMULUS AT TAPLOW.

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A VERY interesting discovery of sepulchral and other relics has resulted from the opening of the well-known tumulus at this place. Situated in the old churchyard, close to Taplow Court, it is remarkable for the beauty of its situation on the angle of the hills, overlooking the valley of the Thames. The slopes in front of Taplow Court still bear the name of the "Bury Fields," showing that there the British Celts had their *beorgh*, or fortified hill-top, and the rich dark soil contains fragments of pottery and artificially formed flakes of flint. When the ancient church that once stood there was removed in 1828, to be replaced by one in a more central position in the village, the traces of the old ditch and *vallum* which formed this British stronghold were exposed. The very pond which, just below it, formed its only source of water supply, is said by local tradition to have been that in which heathen Saxons were baptised by St. Berinus. The very name of the village itself goes back into early history. Taplow, or Tap-hlœwe, is but the "Mound on the hill-top," and in the heart of the old Norman churchyard the mound still stands. It was an old occupation-site, and possibly a holy one, in the earliest days. Celt and Romano-Briton certainly lived there; and early Christendom consequently placed its church there. The mound is 240ft. in circumference and about 15ft. high, and on its summit were the dead remains of an ancient yew-tree, whose knotted trunk is nearly six feet thick, and whose age may be estimated at possibly six hundred years.

All archæologists must feel that they owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. Grenfell, lord of the manor of Taplow, and to the Rev. Mr. Whateley, rector of the parish, for their freely-accorded permission to ascertain the real meaning of the ancient mound; and still more to Mr. J. Rutland, secretary of the Berks Archæological Society, for personally undertaking the laborious task of superintending and carrying out the excavation. It was felt very

desirable to disturb the form and character of the tumulus as little as possible, so that it might be eventually restored to its former external condition ; and, irrespective of the enormous weight of the old yew-tree which rendered its removal extremely difficult, it was decided that if possible it should remain undisturbed. But the results have very fully repaid the care taken, and probably no richer or more instructive discovery has been made in the south of England. A line having been traced due north and south on the surface, a cutting six feet wide was made about four feet above the ground level on the south side of the mound until it reached the foot of the tree, and thence a shaft was sunk downward and underneath the root, and united with a second vertical shaft sunk on its north side. The earth material throughout the whole of the excavation was very loose and friable, and showed traces of the way in which it had been piled up. It was composed of the natural red sandy gravel of the surface, mixed and intercalated with black earthy matter ; and throughout it contained fragments of bones and teeth of horse, pig, and ox, and broken pieces of British and Romano-British pottery. One fragment of Samian ware, at a depth of sixteen feet, showed that Roman vessels had been brought there, and some pieces of coarse brown ware had their surface pinched up into rough knobs similar to those designated " grape cups " by Sir Richard Colt Hoare in his " History of Wiltshire." Flakes of flint and used " scrapers " were also numerous, but there were no decidedly human bones. All this pointed but to one conclusion—that, whatever the tumulus was erected for, it was post-Roman.

On October 15th, 1883, Mr. Rutland, with ten men, began the excavation. At a depth of twelve feet, a pair of bronze tweezers were found, but at about eighteen or twenty feet from the top of the barrow its sepulchral character became at last clear. In the dark brown earth were uncovered lines of gold, and these, on being carefully removed, proved to be the remains of gold fringe, about an inch wide. They lay as if forming the edge of a garment extending diagonally downward from the shoulder across the body. But all doubt as to the nature of the interment was set at rest by finding close to this a magnificent gold buckle, weighing about four ounces. In

length about four inches, as rich in colour as if just manufactured, enamelled and most richly chased with elaborate ornamentation, it seemed to have suffered little by its long entombment. Just below it was the owner's iron sword, heavily rusted in the sheath, and so friable as to break into fragments when it was removed; and near to this latter were two other gold clasps, smaller in size than the shoulder buckle, but equally beautiful, in one of which was a fragment of stamped leather. From the impression in a fragment of decayed wood which enclosed this, it seemed as if the upper garment had been composed of woven woollen fibre, gathered round the waist by a leather belt fastened by two buckles, and over all an upper gold-fringed cloak or tunic, fastened on the shoulder by the heavy brooch of gold. On the right of the sword were the remains of an iron knife, probably the "sceax." There were scarcely any traces of bone. The scarce fragments were very friable and broken; but from the presence of numerous decayed fragments, it seemed as if the entire body, clad in its Royal robes, had been covered over by broad planks of wood. Over the middle of the interment was a large pile of archæological treasure. Underneath was the heavy wood-lined and bronze-plated circular shield, resting on which were two drinking horns, the small ends of which were encased in gilded bronze, and the mouths encircled by embossed rings of silver.

Remains of armillæ, or bracelets, silver-rimmed and of bronze, with deeply serrated edges, lay near; and on the north-west side of the shield were the relics of a wooden bucket, encased with richly-stamped bronze. Mingled with these were the fragments of at least two vessels of thin, greenish glass, ornamented with parallel horizontal lines, similar to modern "Venetian" glass, and decorated with broad, projecting spikes of glass. Such vessels are known to be of Saxon times. Mr. Llewellyn Jewett pictures them, and their forms are well known; but the fragments of these at Taplow certainly show a larger and richer variety than those which have been hitherto found. The largest was certainly four inches wide at the mouth and eleven inches high. There was yet another vase of a similar character close to the large gold buckle; but all these were in fragments, and

so friable were the remains that it was impossible, even with the utmost care, to remove them other than piecemeal. It is probable, too, that, judging from the number of the bronze and iron fragments, some of them may be found to form portions of a helmet or of body armour; but this is at present merely conjecture. Over the wooden plank that undoubtedly protected these relics—for it was found completely enclosing and covering them—was placed the spear, which in this case had the point towards the west, and, moreover, had a barbed point, with a very long iron socket.

The rectangular grave measured twelve feet by eight feet. At the south-east angle of this was a bronze vase twelve inches high and sixteen inches in diameter, the dish of which is twelve-sided, with knobs at the angles, and with massive drop handles on either side. Underneath it was a small drinking-horn with silver-gilt terminals and bands. Near it lay the fragments of a glass vessel, and another bucket twelve inches in diameter, similar to the one at the north-west corner. In the north-east corner were also two umbos or bosses of war shields, each five inches wide by three-and-a-half inches high; one iron knife; and one iron ring four-and-a-half inches in diameter.

The exploration was completed on Nov. 8th by the discovery of another glass vessel and a small drinking-horn like the others; a silver-gilt ornament of crescent shape about six inches long, one-and-an-eighth inch wide, and three-quarters inch thick; an iron spear, about ten inches long; and lastly, about thirty circular tube-shaped rings of ivory about an inch high, the ends of which were closed by ivory discs united by a silver pin, probably counters for a game. A number of vertebræ were found in a connected line in the general direction of the grave, and a fragment of jaw-bone, containing one tooth, lay at the eastern end. Apparently the body lay a little south of east and north of west, with the head towards the east; and that the decorations are Scandinavian admits of little doubt. From the presence of so much treasure, under so great a mound of earth, its owner must have been a man of note. From the bronze bucket, which was used in Saxon ships of war, he possibly was one of those hardy pirates who ravaged the

coasts and rivers of Britain when the Romans had deserted them. There is much to be learnt from the discovery, as well as interesting relics to be treasured. Gold ornaments of exquisite workmanship are placed with bronze armour and with iron arms. The underside of the shield was strengthened with a ring of iron, as was also the bottom of the bucket. With gold for decoration, bronze for defence, and iron for offence, the discovery affords another and most satisfactory proof of how difficult it is to distinguish between, or argue dogmatically about, definite "ages of bronze and iron." Whoever the chieftain was, he lived on the borderland between the two.

The authorities of the British Museum believe the remains to be of early Saxon date, although they were described in the newspapers as Norse or Scandinavian. From the quantity of bronze armour, it would point to an early date when that metal was more commonly used for defensive purposes than iron. The later Anglo-Saxon was more of an iron-using man, and his armour of metal plates or rings sewed on a leather or woollen fabric resembled in character that of the Norman soldiers of William. Certainly he must have belonged to that great northern Teutonic race of which the Danes, the Saxons, the Angles, and the Normans themselves were all offshoots. So complete an example of the method of interment of these early chieftains of Britain has probably never been found in the southern counties of England.

The objects discovered are now placed in the British Museum. One of the glass vessels has been very carefully put together and restored. The collection has been very well drawn and engraved in the *Illustrated London News* of Nov. 17th and Nov. 24th, 1883.

A young yew tree has been planted on the site of the old one by the Hon. Mrs. Boyle, of Huntercombe.

Vide Paper read at Burlington House, Dec. 6th, 1883, by James Rutland, Esq., and article in *The Times* of Nov. 6th, 1883.