

ANGLO-SAXON BURIALS AT ELLESBOROUGH.

[BY ALFRED HENEAGE COCKS, M.A., F.S.A.]

An excavation, 30ft. long N. to S., by 8ft. wide, E. to W., almost true by compass, was made at the golf ground at Ellesborough, in October, 1908, for an additional bunker. The spot is perhaps 250 yards N. of the site of the Pit-dwellings.* In this excavation three skeletons were encountered, of which Dr. Woollerton kindly sent me word (through Mr. Liberty), and I went over on the 28th and 29th of that month.

The first body met with had been removed in the course of the digging; it lay (I was informed) in a somewhat contracted or huddled position, though precise information is wanting, about midway between the E. and W. banks of the cutting, and in a direction diagonal to the long axis, feet to E.S.E., head to W.N.W.

The grave was entirely cleared, but a slight discolouration of the chalk at bottom indicated pretty fairly the orientation, though not the length of the grave, as the slight stain extended from bank to bank. The bones, which were greatly decayed and very fragmentary, are those of an elderly person. Dr. Wm. Wright pronounces the skull to be that of a man aged about 60.

With this body was an iron knife, having the blade very slightly concave at the edge, and convex at the back, 84 mm. long, the point being imperfect; tang 52 mm.; total length 136 mm. Its position was not noted, but probably it had been suspended in a sheath from a waist belt, and most likely on the right side. The grave was between 18 and 20 inches deep.

In the east bank of the cutting, 13ft. north from the feet of the first skeleton, and a foot or so further east, the skull of a second skeleton was met with. This was recovered fairly entire, and the bones of the trunk and limbs were left undisturbed until my arrival.

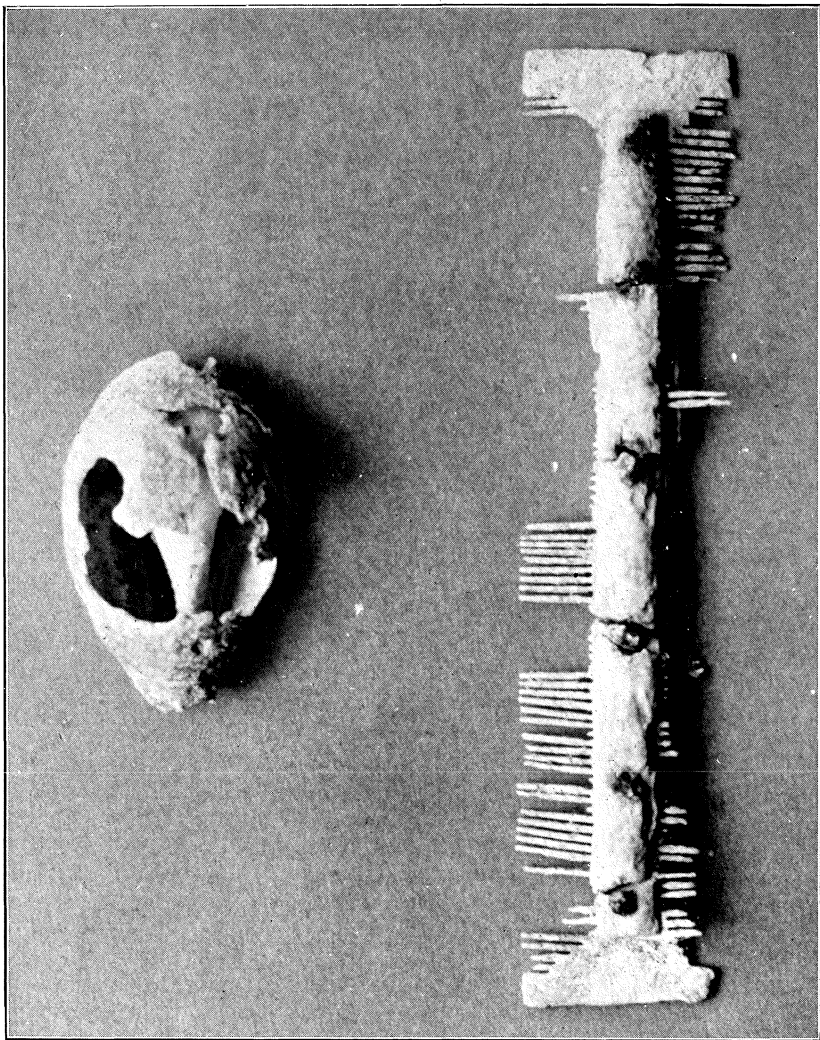
This second burial proved to be a man of middle age, hardly so much as 50; perhaps between 40 and 45 years of age. Dr. Wright agrees with this estimate. He was buried extended on his back, feet very

* Described in THE RECORDS, IX. 349.

correctly orientated; his upper arms lay by his sides, but both arms were flexed at the elbow, the right forearm bent back as nearly parallel to the humerus as it would go, so that the subsequent settling of the soil, after the decay of the body, had forced the elbow joint apart; the hand and fingers were spread over the right side of the throat and upper chest; the left upper arm lay at a right angle across his waist.

After the removal of the bones, a small iron buckle was found at the bottom of the grave, as if a small strap had been used to keep the upper garment of the corpse in place, and buckled behind, not far below his arm-pits. During the process of decay, however, an iron object might easily have slipped between the ribs from the front of the body to the position it ultimately occupied, and in such slipping it might have travelled somewhat nearer to the shoulders than originally placed. A small piece of iron, which may have been a portion of a knife with a rounded end, was also under the upper portion of the body. This grave was 20in. deep.

Near the limit of the cutting on the west, 13ft. 6in. north of the head of the first skeleton, and 7ft. W.N.W. of the second skull, the feet of a third body were met with, and the leg bones were uncovered to the extent of the cutting, up to just above the knees, but the bones were left so far as possible *in situ* pending my arrival, and covered by sods to protect them. On opening out the remaining portion of the legs, they proved to measure about 3ft. $\frac{1}{2}$ in. to the great trochanter of the femur. Barely 2ft. 1in. further on we came to what appeared at first to be a group of at least three skulls, but on continuing the excavation this was found to be only the one skull belonging to the skeleton, flattened out by the weight of the superimposed soil, while on the lower surface the processes of the first two or three vertebræ were pressed through the foramen magnum, the great apparent disparity in the length of trunk and legs being caused by the grave having been dug several inches too short, so that the head and shoulders were bent upward. The clavicles were consequently crossed, and the arms reaching down below their natural extent, were crossed at the wrists,



A. H. C., Photo.

COMB, AND SHELL OF *CYPRÆA PANTHERINA*, FROM ANGLO-SAXON GRAVE,
ELLESBOROUGH.

$\frac{2}{3}$ LINEAR.

well below the hips. Owing to the chalk here being derived rubble (though hard) and not bedded, it was not easy to define the exact outlines of the grave, which was cut through the rubble and very lightly filled in again; but it appeared to me that the body, although bent as above described, was not actually leaning against the unmoved chalk, but that a considerable thickness of some material which had perished, had probably originally intervened. The skeleton was that of a fairly tall young person, probably under 25 years old. Dr. Wright pronounces this skull also to be that of a man, and agrees with the estimate of age.

Placed by the wrists, as if held in hand, was a large double-toothed comb with central rib, formed of close-grained bone. It is made of three pieces—the principal piece is about $\frac{1}{16}$ in. thick, and extends the whole length and breadth, namely $7\frac{7}{16}$ in. by $1\frac{5}{8}$ in.; but none of the central teeth remain perfect opposite each other. The teeth on each side are about $\cdot 6$ in. long, and the width of the central rib a fraction less (= over $\cdot 5$ in.). For a length of about $\cdot 3$ of an inch at each end, the bone is not serrated, but remains as a plate. There are from 13 to 14 teeth to an inch.

To the central rib, on both surfaces, is affixed by six iron rivets, a half-round strip of bone, very slightly narrower than the original central rib, so that the beginning of each tooth shows below the half-round strip, and these half-round pieces stop abruptly about three teeth short of the unserrated ends. There are slight remains on the half-round pieces of ornamentation by cross-hatching. Among numerous Saxon combs in the British Museum there is not one quite similar.

On the right side of the waist of this skeleton, and no doubt originally hung to a belt, was a thin piece of iron with turned-back ends, and immediately below (when the wearer was standing up) was the shell of a Panther Cowry (*Cypræa pantherina*), $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches long. The centre of its upper side is broken away, and it seems likely that the iron had been fixed into the shell to suspend it (or there may have been an intermediate link of some material now perished). As this species of Cowry is a native of the Red Sea, its occur-

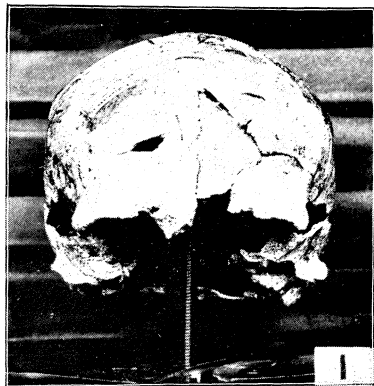
rence in a Saxon grave in Bucks is of considerable interest. I am indebted to Dr. Henry Woodward, LL.D., F.R.S., F.G.S., etc., for kindly authoritatively identifying it. Col. H. F. Ramsden, late Comptroller of Military Accounts in India (formerly Hants Regiment), has been good enough to give me a recent example, which he himself picked up at Suakin, to place with it in the County Museum, for comparison.

This grave was $31\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep.

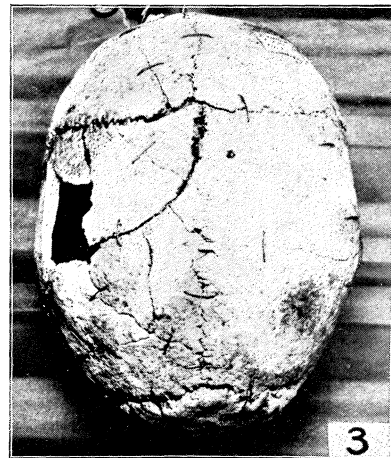
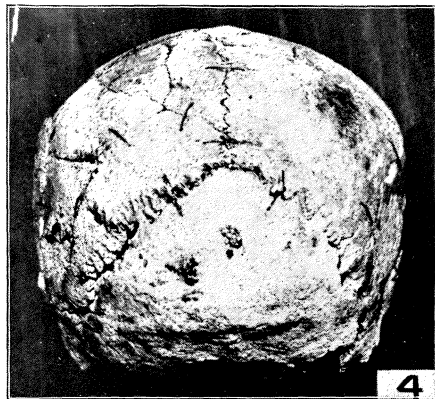
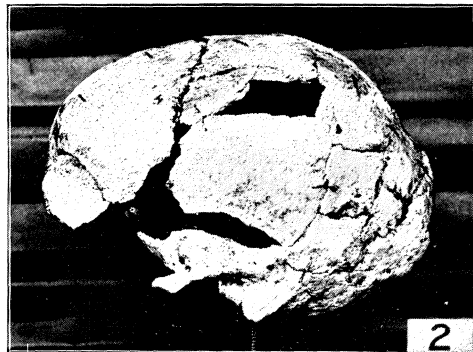
As to the date of these burials, Mr. Reginald A. Smith, F.S.A., in the *Victoria History of Bucks*, I. 197, discussing an Anglo-Saxon interment at Ashendon, remarks:—" . . . the custom of burying the dead in full dress was discouraged by the Christian Church, and ceased before the eighth century. . . ." The orientation of the Ellesborough bodies (absolute in two cases, and approximate in the third), does not necessarily indicate Christianity. The arrival of Saxons in this county seems to date from A.D. 571,* when Cuthwulf, brother of Ceawlin (sons of Cynric, the West Saxon king, who had died in 560), marching north to Bedford, took Lenbury (= Leighton Buzzard), Aylesbury, Bensington (Benson), and Eynsham. Thus the West Saxons overran the whole upper valley of the Thames, and formed a junction with the Middle Saxons to the north of London. In 633 Penda raised Mercia to be one of the three leading Teutonic states, and until he was killed by Oswiu in 655, Christianity can hardly have existed—it certainly was not general—in what is now Buckinghamshire.

Our best thanks are again due to Capt. H. B. Burnaby, and the other members of the Golf Club, for their kindness in keeping the bones so far as possible undisturbed until my arrival; and also to the trustees of the Chequers Court Estate, through our member, Mr. Septimus F. Beck, for allowing everything to go to the County Museum. The estate has since passed into the possession of Mr. Arthur Lee, M.P., who is much interested at these finds, and who is carefully removing modern stucco, etc., from the ancient house, and bringing to light old features.

* *Anglo-Saxon Britain*, by Grant Allen, B.A., (*n. d.*), pp. 51, 92, 96. The first arrival of the Saxons in England was in A.D. 450.



ANGLO-SAXON SKULL, NO. I,
FROM ELLESBOROUGH.



I have had the three calvariæ restored, so far as possible, by expert hands at the Oxford University Museum, and subsequently submitted them to Dr. William Wright, D.Sc., F.S.A., etc., of the London Hospital, whose Report is appended. My own thanks, and those of the Society generally, are due to him for his kindness in undertaking it.

DESCRIPTION OF THE THREE ANGLO-SAXON CALVARIÆ
FROM ELLESBOROUGH, BY DR. WILLIAM WRIGHT,
M.B., D.Sc., F.S.A., &c. (THE LONDON HOSPITAL).

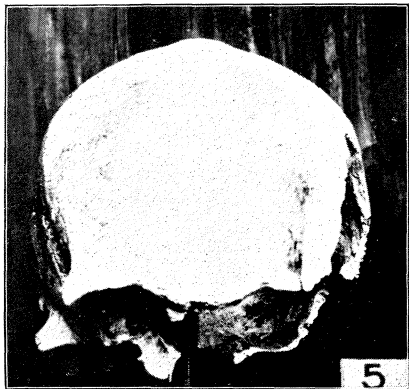
Skull No. 1. ♂ (Plate II.)

| | | | |
|------------------|---------|--------------------|------|
| Max. length ... | 187 mm. | Cephalic index ... | 73.8 |
| Max. breadth ... | 138 ,, | | |
| Min. Front. ... | 101 ,, | | |

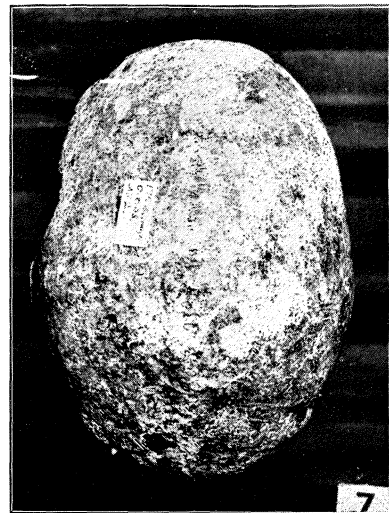
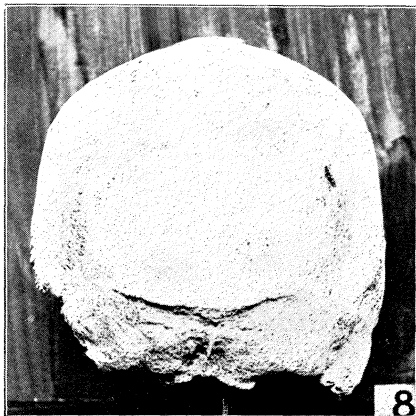
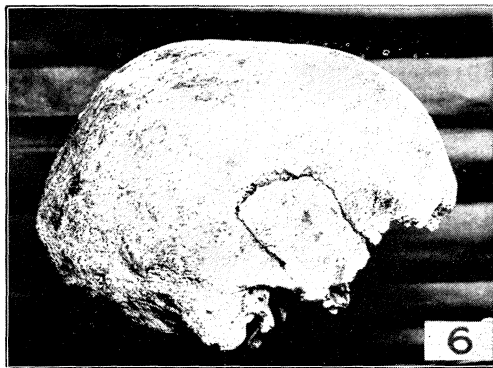
Calvaria of an ellipsoid shape, as seen from the *norma verticalis* (3); there is, however, a tendency to a pentagonoid shape in consequence of the protuberant and narrow occipital region. The frontal region, on the contrary, is wide, the metopic suture is open, as are also the sagittal and lambdoid, although the sagittal suture is in process of closing a little behind the bregma, and not at the obelion, as is most frequently the case. The long ellipsoid shape of the skull and the protuberance of the occipital region are well seen from the *norma lateralis* (2). The curve of the skull exhibits, as is usual in long skulls, a flattening in the post-parietal region. The supraciliary eminences and impressions for muscular attachment are faintly marked. The mastoid processes are small. From the *norma frontalis* (1) the forehead is seen to be broad, and of moderate height; from the *norma occipitalis* (4) the skull is seen to have the shape of a broad pentagon. The mandible is a mere fragment, and is largely edentulous.

Skull No. 2. ♂ (Plate III.)

| | | | |
|------------------|---------|----------------------|----|
| Max. length ... | 200 mm. | Cephalic index | 70 |
| Max. breadth ... | 140 ,, | | |
| Min. frontal ... | 99 ,, | | |



ANGLO-SAXON SKULL, NO. 2,
FROM ELLESBOROUGH.



Calvaria of an ellipsoid shape, as seen from the *norma verticalis* (7). All the sutures are in process of closing. The metopic suture is in no way evident. From the *norma lateralis* (6) a certain heightening of the curve between the bregma and lambda will be observed: this is due to a heaping up of bone along this part of the sagittal suture. It is significant that along the corresponding part of the suture on the inside of the cranium the groove for the superior longitudinal sinus is unusually deep. The supraciliary eminences are faint, the mastoid processes are large, while a well-developed occipital torus is present. The forehead is less vertical than that of No. 1. The minimum frontal diameter is also less in this specimen. The view from the *norma frontalis* (5) and *norma occipitalis* (8) shew clearly the heaping up of bone previously mentioned along the sagittal suture.

The superior maxilla is fragmentary, the teeth are much worn, the first right molar has had an abscess at its root which has eroded the floor of the antrum of Highmore, and opened into its cavity. The mandible is broken near the symphysis, the condyles and adjacent parts of the ascending ramus are wanting. The symphyseal ridge and chin are well developed, the angle is square, the teeth are worn, but show no trace of disease.

The right femur of this skeleton measures in maximum length $18\frac{1}{2}$ inches, giving a stature of 5 feet 7.3 inches or thereabouts.

Skull No. 3. ♂

Calvaria very distorted; it is, however, that of a man, and of an ellipsoid shape. The metopic suture is open.

The alveolar portions of the superior maxilla and mandible are present. The teeth are good, and only slightly worn. The wisdom teeth had not erupted. The symphyseal ridge and chin are well developed, the angles are square.

The femur measures $18\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and would therefore indicate a stature of 5 feet 8.2 inches.