

SKELETONS FOUND IN READING.



During the excavations now in progress for the foundations of the new premises of Mr. Arthur Newbery, on the site adjoining the Athenæum, in Friar Street, Reading, human skeletons have been exhumed from time to time. The last discovery was made on August 21st, when some fragments of human bones, and portions of one skull were dug out. The remains were about 4ft. in depth; and with them bones of domestic animals. On the same plane, and in the same premises, but in the frontage near the street, in August and September, 1888, remains of what were calculated as belonging to no less than six skeletons were found, the bones consisting of arm, leg, and thigh bones, parts of skulls, and upper and lower jawbones. The bones and the site were examined by Dr. STEVENS, who found the bones which had not already been disturbed lying in very irregular form, without order or arrangement, in debris made up of blackened earth, rubbish, and gravel, the matrix having the appearance of having been disturbed and re-deposited, as the human remains were mingled with bones of ox, sheep, and pig, which had apparently been used for food; and bones of dog were recognised. It was stated at that time that at an earlier period skeletons had been disinterred on the south of this working site; and there was a tradition that they were the bones of persons buried after dissection. However that might be, the only relics which tended to throw light on the skeletons of 1888 were a farthing of Charles I., and two brass hand-made pins of rude manufacture, which were found with the remains, and which Dr. STEVENS took with him to the Museum. The presence of the Charles coin, and the bodies having apparently been buried without order, and at hardly a sufficient depth for ordinary burial, and there being no signs of coffin materials, implied the possibility that the bones were those of persons killed at the siege of Reading, in 1642. The pins have an interesting significance; and are not unlikely of the same period as the coin. Pin-making was one of the industries of the Oracle in Minster Street, when it was a place for the encouragement of various trades in the manufacture of materials of wool, flax, etc.; but during the Civil Wars of Charles it was converted into a garrison for soldiers. The date on the old gates of the Oracle at St. Mary's Hill is 1628. In association with pin-making, it is worth noting that during the excavations for new buildings in Broad Street, and notably at the site of Mr. Colebrook's premises, some wrought bones were found, which were employed in the shaping of pins. The ends of the implements are quadrangular, and divided into small slits, in which the points of the pins were rendered smooth during the process of manufacture. These examples of early trade implements of the town are now in the Museum. In connection with the subject of human remains, it should be stated that the thigh-bones of a male of very tall stature were taken out during the late summer, while the excavations were going on for the building of a kitchen under the New Town Hall.