

A SAXON CEMETERY AT WICKHAMBREUX.

BY GEORGE DOWKER, F.G.S.

I HAVE to record the interesting discovery of another Saxon cemetery. I received in 1886 some portions of iron found in a gravel pit belonging to Mr. Thomas Bing, of Grove, in the parish of Wickham, near Wingham, which I recognized as portions of Saxon swords and spears. In January 1887 I received portions of a bronze bowl, or patera, found in the same pit; and, by the kindness of Mr. Thomas Bing, I am able to bring to notice a beautiful glass vessel and other relics from a grave which I had the opportunity of thoroughly exploring.

The graves are situated upon the high gravel ridge that separates the Greater and Lesser Stour Valleys, not far from the high-road between Grove and Wickham, about a quarter of a mile east of Supperton. They have been accidentally discovered in the process of excavating gravel.

This gravel is, in places, of considerable thickness, overlying the sandy beds of the neighbourhood. It is retentive of moisture; so that water is generally met with below the gravel, and these remains of interment are found at no great distance from the surface, just above the saturated stratum of gravel.

The graves may generally be detected by the presence of dark-coloured earth and disturbed gravel; but it is not easy to remove any of the relics, from such

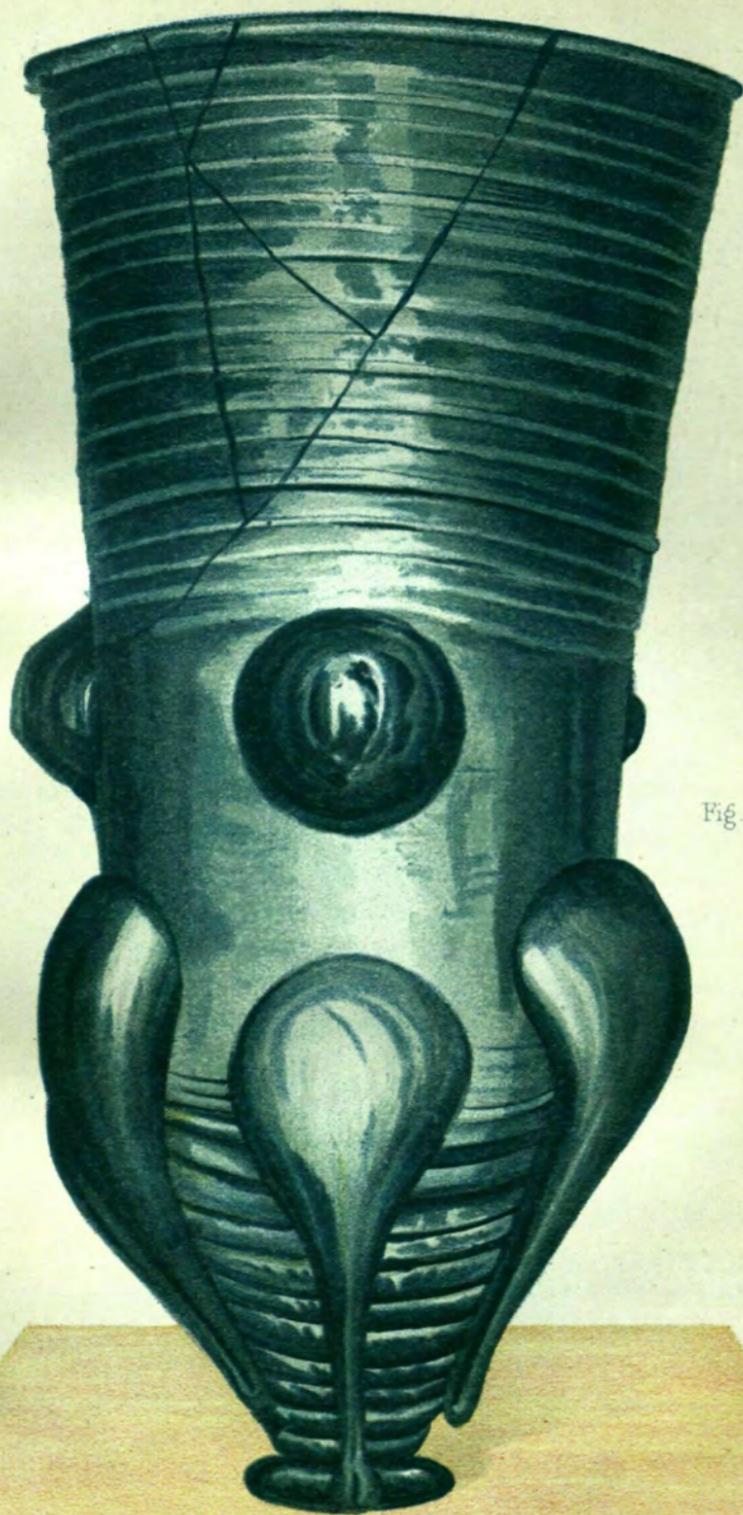


Fig. 5.



Fig. 1.

Saxon Bowl of Bronze (15 inches in diameter) found at Wickhambreux.

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a matrix, in a perfect state. The graves cannot be detected from the surface by the usual methods of probing and digging. It seems certain therefore that we must be content to await the removal of the gravel, before anything else is brought to light.

I now proceed to describe what we have already found, viz., an iron spear-head, 12 inches in length, with portions of wood in the socket; portions of two or more broadswords; two umboes of shields; portions of spears (?) similar to those described by Mr. Brent in Vol. V. of *Archæologia Cantiana*, p. 312; masses of iron which I am unable to ascribe to any particular use, and probably two or more portions cemented together by rust. A bronze bowl patera (Fig. 1), 15 inches in diameter and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep, with two handles on opposite sides was found, similar to one from Wingham figured in Mr. Akerman's *Remains of Pagan Saxondom*, p. x; a similar patera was found at Sarre. Several portions of thick pottery, nearly half an inch thick, of dark grey colour, filled with small angular fragments of white flint the size of road grit. I do not remember any similar pottery; it was in such a fragmentary condition that I could not hazard an opinion respecting it. Apparently the bronze bowl was found in a large grave which had been partially excavated before I reached the spot. I continued the excavation, and on reaching the bottom of the grave I found a sword in its scabbard lying with the hilt towards the west; there were traces of leather covering, and underneath the sword and next the hilt was found a gold stud (Fig. 6), which passed through a circular piece of ivory or some such substance (Fig. 2). This stud has a raised centre, ornamented with a star and surrounding facets of coloured glass or stones, the

whole being encircled with a cable pattern in gold. Near this was found a buckle with a crescent-shaped ornament of gold and coloured glass; the buckle was of bronze, and had a tongue of leather overlaid with a gold plate, with a braided pattern of elegant design (Fig. 3). A somewhat similar buckle was found at Sarre, and is now in the Society's collection at Maidstone. Part of the tongue of the buckle was supported by bronze wires (Fig. 4).

On tracing the sword to its point we found near what must have been the eastern extremity of the grave, a beautiful thin blue glass vessel (Fig. 5), having three circular bosses projecting from the upper part, and six pear-shaped bosses below, the lower three reaching to the bottom of the vessel. Unfortunately this beautiful glass vessel was broken by the work-people, but most of the fragments were found. A somewhat similarly shaped glass vessel, of different colour, found at Reculver, is now in the Canterbury Museum; and another, met with at Sarre, is figured in Vol. VI. of *Archæologia Cantiana*, p. 168, Fig. 3. Above this grave a trench had been made in the soil crossing the grave at right angles, in which a few fragments of human bones were found; but, with this exception, no bones have yet been met with. In a contiguous grave, which had apparently been at some time disturbed, were found fragments of another glass vessel of amber colour.

It is most likely that many more graves will be met with when the gravel is excavated, but the work is suspended till next winter.

It will be seen that the relics I have just described indicate a grave of some importance, and they so far correspond with those found in Saxon cemeteries in



Fig. 2.



Fig. 4^a.

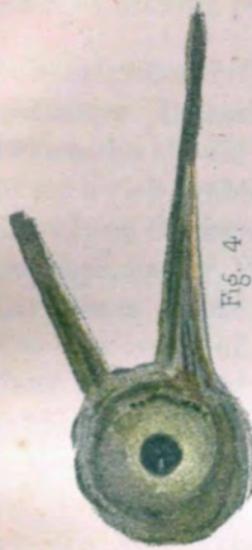


Fig. 4.



Fig. 6^a
back of Stud.

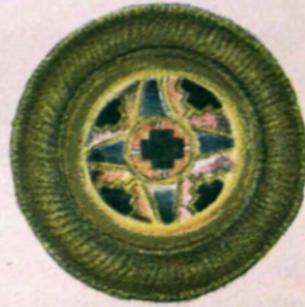


Fig. 6.



Fig. 3.

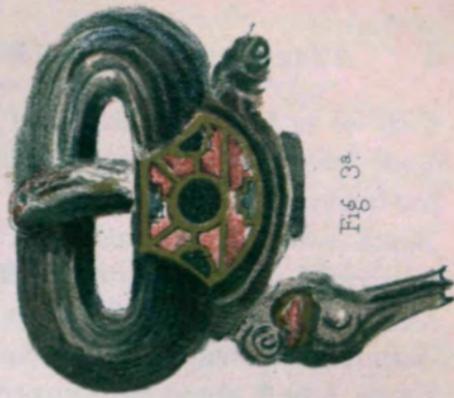


Fig. 3^a.

this neighbourhood as to leave no doubt as to their character. Indeed it is somewhat remarkable that these cemeteries should have been so thickly clustered about in such rich arable districts; Osengal, Minster, Sarre, Reculver, Stodmarsh, Wingham, Guilton, Woodnesborough, Eastry, Patixbourne, Barham, and Kingstone are places where similar remains have been found. The similarity of the Saxon ornaments found at all these places is not a little remarkable.

Saxon relics were, I believe, found at Stodmarsh Court, which is not far from this Wickham cemetery; but there is some doubt about the exact locality whence Mr. Akerman derived his specimens. At Stodmarsh Court, however, I have myself found Saxon or Roman pottery.