

AN ANGLO-SAXON GRAVE NEAR DARTFORD, KENT¹

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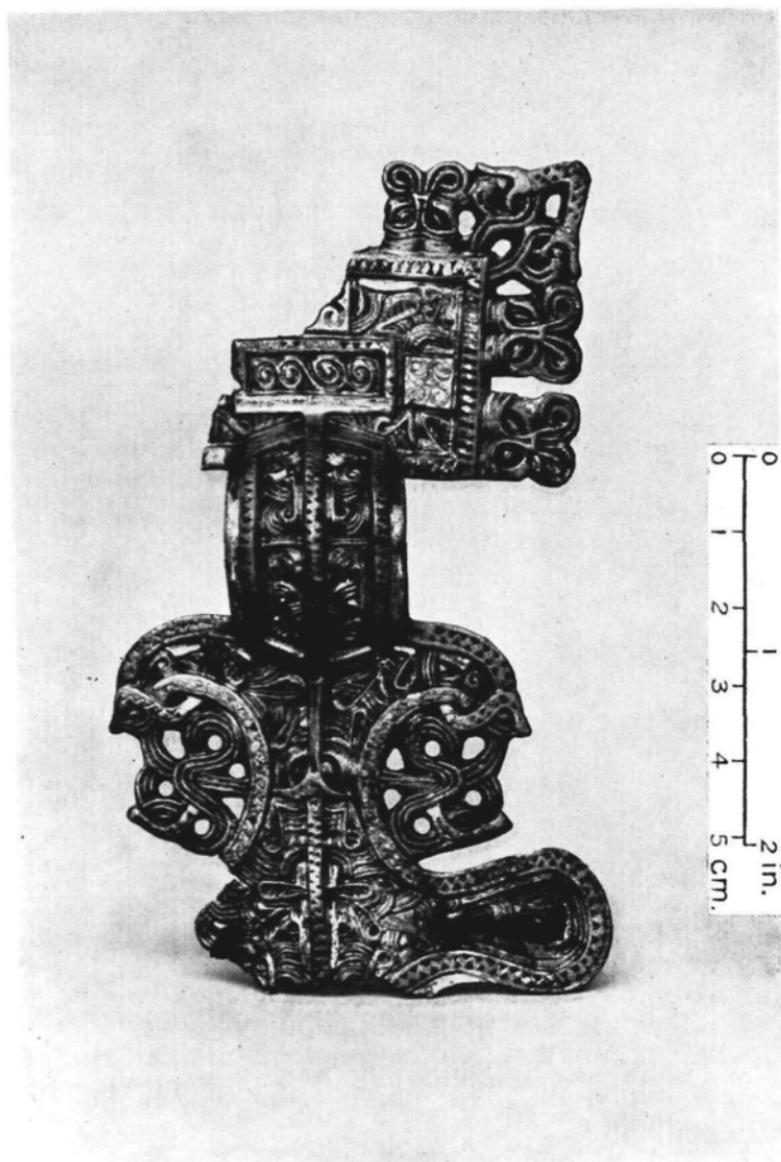
IN June, 1954, an investigation was made of a grave discovered while laying a telephone cable in the grounds of the Darenth and Stone Hospital, near Dartford, Kent (Nat. Grid Ref. 531735). A number of nondescript fragments of human bones were found, with a brooch and fragments of two bronze bowls.

THE BROOCH (Pl. I)

This is a square-headed brooch of Leeds's type B6,² it is broken and the surviving length is 4.4 in. (11.1 cm.). It is of silver-gilt and decorated with niello and chip-carving. The carving is Salin's style I, and legs and eyes are all that can properly be identified of the incomplete and broken up animal figures. Half of the rectangular head is missing, but sufficient remains to reconstruct its ornament in entirety. The border of the head consisted of a number of free standing masks, joined at the corners by a simple symmetrical interlace pattern of zoomorphic character. The masks are square in outline and have slanting eyes and a nose which is continued to give a suggestion of curled moustachios (Fig. 1); hair is suggested by three bands with a median line cutting across them. Inside the line of heads is a border which contains a series of double nielloed triangles touching at the apex. Inside this is a zone of carved animal ornament, in the centre of which is another panel defined on three sides by a border of single triangles and on the fourth by a nielloed straight line, inside this panel is a line of conjoined spirals. Dividing the animal-ornamented zone were (originally) three square fields with nielloed curled swastikas. The central panel is set rather low in the square head, and from it rises the bow with a high median ridge decorated with interlocking nielloed triangles and bordered all round by a plain band. Laterally inside this border are two decorated borders slightly raised and ornamented with nielloed triangles.

¹ The find was reported to the British Museum by the Management Committee of the Darenth and Stone Hospital, Dartford, and the site was investigated by Mr. R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, F.S.A. The objects found were given to the British Museum by the Management Committee (Reg. no. 1954, 12-4, 1); the thanks of the Museum should be tendered to Dr. Laing, the Medical Superintendent, for his co-operation in the investigation. It should be noted that a spear-head and a shield-boss (now in the Dartford Museum), which were discovered near the hospital in 1881, may belong to the same grave or to a cemetery in the area. The greater part of the area from which the find was recovered is now buried under a considerable earth bank.

² All references in this note to "Leeds" refer to Leeds, E. T.: *A Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Square-headed Brooches*, Oxford, 1949.



Square-headed brooch from Dartford.

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On either side of the median ridge are two fields containing more zoomorphic carving. The median ridge continues straight down the middle of the brooch and in the narrowest point of the constriction in the top arm of the foot branches out to form an oculi motif looking towards the bow with eyebrows and elongated nose, decorated with a line of niello; below it the median rib continues with its ornament of interlocking triangles. The main field of the foot of the brooch, with the exception of some of the fretted interlace ornament of zoomorphic character above the lobes, is bounded by a raised border of interlocking



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FIG. 1. Details of ornament from the Dartford brooch. *Above*: Applied mask on the foot of the brooch seen from the side. *Below*: Mask from the head of the brooch.

nielloed triangles. Inside the fields are more elements of the carving but on the one surviving lobe is the plastic representation of a mask with vertically scored hair, slanting eyes, suggestion of a moustache and a curled up beard, the nose is a rib between the eyes and is nielloed (Fig. 1): this feature perhaps suggests that parts of the masks on the head plate were also nielloed. This free standing head is attached by means of two rivets which are filed flat behind. The remaining two lobes are broken away but there is every reason to suppose, owing to the symmetry of the composition, that they also carried similar heads. On the back of the head there is the remains of an iron catch pin within two silver lugs.

The brooch is of very great interest in the light of what has been written about the type by the late Mr. Leeds. It is one of the richest

examples of its class so far found, and it is certainly the richest example of Leeds's type B6. One of the characteristics of this sub-type is the divided masks of the head: writing of this Leeds states, "the uppermost lateral knob, projecting as it does from the knob at the end of the upper row, makes an awkward fill-up between the four upper and lateral knobs and has no functional excuse for its existence."¹ This "awkwardness," as Leeds describes it, is thoroughly resolved in this case by the skilful treatment of the corner which is given zoomorphic character by the biting animal heads at either end of the confining border. This treatment has a reminiscence of certain other sub-types of brooch within Leeds's B class: one of the closest parallels is that from Linton Heath 21 (Leeds 86: B4 group). Other uncommon features on the head plate are the four square panels with the curved swastika ornament, and the presence of the four spirals in the smaller rectangular field; this motif rarely occurs in the English examples of the brooch type, although it appears frequently on the chip-carved saucer brooches and on certain very early buckle plates. Another unusual feature is the delicate and skilful fretwork of the interlace ornament above the side lobes on the foot. This is treated in an openwork multiple ribbon technique that is hard to parallel in the corpus of material. The nearest example to this florid interlace is to be seen in the brooches from Bidford on Avon (Leeds 71) and Offchurch (Leeds 72). The degenerate head, little more than an extended oculi motif on the foot plate, is not placed in a normal position for such brooches: in most cases the mask is closer to the bow.

The most unusual feature of the brooch is the free standing relief mask on the lobe. This is unknown in the rest of the English material, and as far as I know is not present in the comparable Continental material. Free standing birds are, however, known on the early Saxon quoit brooches from Sarre and Howletts²: but these bear little relation to this example, the birds on the quoit brooches are charming but superfluous excrescences, and here they are an inherent part of the design. On many of the Leeds Class B square-headed brooches there is on each lobe a human mask with chin or mouth pointing inwards, and these, although sometimes moulded in relief, are cast in one piece with the brooch; this can plainly be seen for example on the brooches from Fairford (Leeds 80 and 97), Chessel Down (Leeds 79), Guidown 46 (Leeds 70) and Alfriston 43 (Leeds 69). Leeds has already suggested in reference to the brooch from Harlton (Haslingfield), Cambs., that these masks were sometimes riveted on,³ on this particular brooch there are

¹ Leeds, p. 62.

² British Museum, *Guide to Anglo-Saxon Antiquities*, London, 1923, fig. 59. *British Museum Quarterly*, vol. X, 1935-6, pl. xxxix, 1.

³ Leeds, p. 64.

AN ANGLO-SAXON GRAVE NEAR DARTFORD, KENT



FIG. 2. Distribution of square-headed brooches of Leeds type B6. (1) Fairford, (2) Abingdon, (3) Mitcham, (4) Luton, (5) Harlton, (6) Market Overton, (7) Horn-ton, (8) Marston St. Lawrence, (9) Coleshill, (10) Dartford.

blank spaces on each of the lobes in the centre of which are rivet-holes. The space on the foot lobe is pear-shaped and could perhaps have carried an animal head of similar shape. The Harlton brooch is the sole example on which such a feature occurs, and is of extra interest as it is of the same type as that from Dartford.

The Dartford brooch, then, seems to be the finest surviving example of its class. Not only is it richer in its decoration than any of the other brooches of the B6 type, it also demonstrates the logical conclusion of the free standing border masks, which seem, as Leeds has suggested, to have been cast solid and then cut out. Here, however, it may have been cast as it stands, and a satisfactory finish to the corner was produced that is not to be seen elsewhere in this group.

Leeds was puzzled by the widespread distribution of the B6 group of brooches (see map, Fig. 2), and this example from Kent casts the net wider still in providing the most easterly example so far found. Leeds tended to place the origin of this group in western England: this may still hold today, but one or two new facts appear through the Dartford brooch. First, there is the geographical fact of the brooch's location; secondly, there is the fact that it is much more probable that the brooch from Harlton actually does belong to this group, now that the Dartford brooch has demonstrated that the masks could be riveted on to the lobes. Another factor which I think it difficult to ignore is the use of the interlocking nielloed triangles on the various borders of the brooch: this is a feature that is used with great success on the jewelled Kentish type of square-headed brooch¹ and which rarely appears on objects from other parts of England. It appears, therefore, that this brooch may well be a product of the region of the Jutes. This, of course, is not to say that it was not a Saxon type: the distribution of the square-headed brooch obviously points to that identification, but this seems perhaps to be the local expression of the form. On the basis of Leeds's dating we can assign it to the last quarter of the sixth century.

THE BOWL

Fragments of a bronze bowl were also found in the grave: reconstructed this would consist of a solid foot-ring (a bar bent into a circle)² and a beaten bronze bowl to which was riveted a rim, decorated with a series of repoussé bosses. It could be held that the rim does not belong to the body of the bowl, but a complete example from the French cemetery of Herpes, Charente, now in the British Museum, shows a similar bossing and foot-ring.³

¹ Kendrick, T. D., *Anglo-Saxon Art*, London, 1938, Pl. xxx.

² The external diameters of the footring are 8·4 cm. at the bottom and 7·5 cm. at the top.

³ Cf. also Nenquin, J., *La nécropole de Furfooz*, Brugge, 1953, fig. 12, C4 (this is an earlier parallel).