XVI. *Account of the Collection of Sepulchral Vessels found in 1821, in a Roman Ustrinum, at Litlington, near Royston; and now preserved in the Library of Clare Hall, Cambridge. In a Letter from ALFRED JOHN KEMPE, Esq. F.S.A. addressed to Sir HENRY ELLIS, K.H., F.R.S., Secretary.*

Read 20th June, 1833.

DEAR SIR,

Rodney Buildings, New Kent Road,
18 June 1833.

I HAVE lately had an opportunity of inspecting the numerous collection of Roman sepulchral vessels preserved in the library of Clare Hall, Cambridge, and which were found in the year 1821, on one of the College estates at Lit-

lington near Royston, contiguous to that part of the Ickenild Street called the Ashwell Street Road. I hardly need observe, that this ancient way, crossing the kingdom from Norwich towards Old Sarum, had its appellation from the district of the Iceni, in which it began its course, and from its great antiquity was known in the Saxon times as the Iken-eld Strete, that is, the old street or way of the Iceni.

A brief notice of the discovery was communicated to the Society of Antiquaries in January 1822, by the Rev. Dr. Webb, Master of Clare Hall, the present Vice Chancellor of the University of Cambridge; and by favour of his lady, I am now enabled to exhibit the accurate and tasteful drawings which she has made from the different objects in the collection, the whole number of which amount to upwards of two hundred.

The village of Litlington lies at about a furlong of distance north of the line of the Ickenild Street, and various Roman foundations which have been occasionally struck upon in digging between the site of the church and the road, give evidence of the existence either of a Roman villa or a station on the spot; most probably the latter, as may be inferred from the sequel.

Immediately contiguous to the north side of the Roman road were some strips of uninclosed but cultivated land, which in ancient deeds, from time immemorial, had been called *Heaven's Walls*.

It is a singular fact, attested by the authority of Dr. Webb, who is the incumbent of Litlington, that a traditional awe attached to this spot, and that the village children were afraid to traverse it after dark. *Heaven's Walls*, at the witching time of night, were said to be frequented by beings of supernatural order.

Some labourers in 1821, digging for gravel on this spot, struck upon one of the old walls which had given name to the place, although all vestiges of them had disappeared from the surface of the soil, and the slips of cultivated land, where they were placed, were divided by green *balks*.

The structure was composed of flint and Roman brick; which last circumstance attracting the notice of Dr. Webb, he directed the workmen to follow up the line of the foundations, which proved to inclose a rectangular space, measuring from east to west thirty-eight yards, from north to south twenty-seven. On intersecting this area with trenches, at about the depth of a foot

from the surface, were found numerous deposits of sepulchral urns, containing the ashes of the dead, and surrounded as usual by other vessels. The urns had evidently been placed in rows parallel with the road, and at the distance of about three feet asunder.

Where the regularity of this disposition was interrupted, that interruption had been occasioned by the interment of numerous human bodies ; and in the graves where they lay, were found many fragments of sepulchral urns, which had thus been displaced. The striking and conclusive evidence was of course, that *urn burial* had been disused at length by the Romans, and the inhumation of the entire corpse substituted in its stead ; they still continuing, however, to inter their dead in the place which had been rendered sacred by earlier though different sepulchral rites. Only in one instance were the remains of a human skeleton found *under* a sepulchral urn.

This curious inclosure was then one of those large plots of ground environed by walls, to which the name of *Ustrina* or *Ustrinum* was given by the Romans, where the remains of the ordinary class of dead were burnt, and their ashes deposited in urns of earthenware, without much cost or ceremony, according to the trite quotation :

“ Hoc miseræ plebi stabat commune sepulchrum.”

An *Ustrinum*, according to Montfaucon, was square, and in compass about 300 feet. The aggregate dimensions of the *Ustrinum* at Litlington will be found to be about 390.

At the south-eastern and south-western angles of the inclosure, were two heaps of wood ashes, as much as would have loaded five carts ; these were undoubtedly the remains of the funeral piles. On the spots where these ashes lay no sepulchral deposits were found, so that they remained in all probability on the very places where the piles had been raised.

The vessels which were deposited with the urns, containing the calcined bones of the dead, were placed in most instances with a degree of corresponding uniformity of arrangement. In the mode of their inclosure there was however some variation. A roof-tile sometimes covered the whole deposit ;^a sometimes a sort of square *septum* of roof-tiles environed it, or it had been

^a See Plate XLIV. fig. 1.

surrounded with a little wall of flints, or had been placed in a wooden box, the large nails and brass-work fastenings of which alone remained perfect ; ^b Dr. Webb says, in very few instances was the urn unaccompanied by a *simpulum*, or rather bottle, a patera or patella ; ^c sometimes it was covered by a patera. The shovel and pincers ^d used for collecting the bones and ashes, were in one instance found, these sacred implements being occasionally interred with the remains of those for whom they had performed the last melancholy office.

In Mrs. Webb's drawing, engraved in Plate XLIV. fig. 1, it will be observed, that the vases are represented three or four together, as nearly as possible in the order in which they had originally been placed in the ground.

I have long suspected that *household vessels* were frequently employed by the Romans as funeral urns. In this collection at Clare Hall, are some beautiful bottles of bluish green glass, which have been so appropriated ; and it is very remarkable, that in the instance of one of the smaller bottles, ^e containing perhaps the ashes of a child, the corner had been chipped off for the purpose of introducing the fragments of burnt bone, the mouth being too narrow to admit them. The broken piece had been afterwards carefully replaced, to close the aperture. Now, had the original appropriation of the vessel been sepulchral, we can hardly suppose that it would have been formed in a way so very unfit for receiving the remains of the defunct after cremation. Some favourite domestic vase, we may therefore conclude, was sometimes selected, wherein to place the relics gathered from the extinguished embers of the pile.

A splendid vessel of amber-coloured glass is among the vases from Litlington ; another of green glass, most elegantly formed, has the handle springing from the head of a divinity ; the concentric rings which ornament the bottom of one of the bottles, precisely correspond with the decoration embossed on the bronze lock of one of the sepulchral chests of wood, before mentioned. ^f

The little vessels with pointed bottoms, so many of which accompanied the urns, were of the lachrymatory kind, and evidently from their form intended to be thrust into the earth, the potter in their manufacture having had in his

^b See Plate XLV. figg. 24, 28.

^c Plate XLIV. figg. 5, 6.

^d Plate XLV. figg. 23, 27.

^e Plate XLV. fig. 6.

^f Plate XLV. figg. 11, 24.

eye the form and application of the amphoræ, which were usually plunged in sand to preserve the equal temperature of their contents. These lachrymatory vessels contained odoriferous balsams, kneaded and compounded with the tears of mourning relatives. Connected with this circumstance, I find I have made a note of an inscription somewhere recorded by Montfaucon.

“To Caius Lelius, son of Caius, born to the anxious desire of his parents, cruel Atropos cut short his thread of life in his eighteenth year. Fusca, his mother, left to grief and sighs, moistened a rich balsam (for his manes) with her tears.”

The bottles, dishes, and cups found at Litlington with the relics of the dead, were domestic vessels, set apart for the scanty repast allotted to their manes, so pointedly alluded to by Juvenal in his fifth Satire :

“Ponitur exigua feralis cœna patella.”

In the mouth of one of the skeletons at Litlington was found the *obolus* to pay the fare “across the melancholy flood,” to the “grim ferryman that poets write of,” a circumstance not here noted as of unusual occurrence ; it prevailed with the Egyptians and Greeks.

A vase, with a colander-like cover, was found. This, I think, is a *thuribulum* : the perforations form the word *INDVLCIVS*, perhaps the potter’s name. The potter’s marks on the Samian cups and pateræ from Litlington are noted in the margin,^f on the edge of several of the last is the pointed leaf, here represented, so frequently employed as an ornament by the Romans, and often as *a point* in the verbal division of inscriptions.^g

^f The stamps which are legible (for frequently the softness of the material, the action of the fire in baking, or accidental pressure, has rendered such brief attestations of the potter otherwise), are, PRIMVLI. CRACISSA F. PATER F. DIVICATVS. ELVILLI. CALAVA F. SACENO F. M. TITIVS. S. JVNIVS. MAR

^g If this ornament represents *a leaf* in a general sense, and not a particular species, it may be taken to indicate the herbs or leaves with which the ancients adorned the altars of their gods.

The coins found in the Ustrinum at Litlington were numerous; some of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Quintillus, Carausius, Constantine the Great, Magnentius, &c. an evidence that the interments had been made through a long period of the Roman dominion in Britain.^h

When Davus makes Mysis lay the child at the door of Chremes, in the play (*Andria*, Actus iv. Scena vi.) he gives her this direction :

Ex ara hinc sume verbenas tibi

Atque eas substerne——

Verbenæ have been defined by classical commentators and antiquaries to be any of the green herbs employed for the decoration of altars. On solemn festivals, these were each adorned with leaves or branches of the plant peculiar to their respective gods. Virgil calls the garlands with which the altars were distinguished *torques*, because they were *twined* round them :

Sæpe deum nexis ornatae torquibus aræ.—GEORG. iv.

To Jupiter the beech was sacred, to Apollo the laurel, to Minerva the olive, to Bacchus the ivy, to Pan the pine. These festivals were termed in the general way *verbenalia*; so prescriptive has the custom become, that it is still retained by us at the great Christian festival of the nativity of our Lord, when we decorate our houses and churches with green branches. The leaf above delineated, I am, however, disposed to think was peculiarly the ivy, an appropriate ornament for the wine cup or patera for libation, the vegetable sacred to the God of Wine. When placed in the hands of deities, in which position its intention has been a question with the learned, or the altar consecrated to the manes of the dead, it indicated, I think, an *evergreen* immortality. Such was, perhaps, its symbolic meaning in other places. It is found by the force of custom on the tombs of the primitive Christians in the catacombs at Rome. An erudite and voluminous writer on the Cemeteries of the Martyrs, &c. in that city, has strangely mistaken these sacred leaves for *hearts*, although he had the proof to the contrary before his eyes in the very inscription, which he copied thus :

FLAVIO ✂ ITALO ✂
INNOCENTISSIMO
PUERO ✂

and on the subject of this groundless fancy he observes, “ Apud primævos igitur Christianos frequens sepulchris imago cordis insculpta cernitur, ad amoris videlicet, ut enarratum est quo defunctum prosequebantur, vel certè ad innocentia symbolum apte edocendum.”—*Roma Subterranea* Pauli Arringhi, lib. vi. cap. i. 379.

^h I may be here permitted to remark, in incidentally recollecting the large hoard of coins found in an earthen vase lately exhibited to the Society, that such a mode of depositing treasure is recognised by the classic writers: thus Horace :

“ Oh si urnam argenti fors quà mihi monstret ! ut illi,
Thesaurο invento qui mercenarius agrum,
Illum ipsum mercatus aravit.”

HOR. SAT. lib. ii. sat. vi. lin. 10, et seq.

Many rare coins of the Saxon era have been dug up in the inclosures at the village of Litlington, which shews that that people had established themselves on the spot. It must not be forgotten, that at the distance of about thirty yards from the Ustrinum, within a regular building, twenty-seven feet by twenty-two, was found a stone chest containing the skeleton of a young person. This tomb had two projecting buttresses on each of its longer sides; (see plan in vignette, p. 376); and in this respect it bore a remarkable resemblance to the buildings discovered at Holwood Hill, in Kent, in 1828, the report of which discovery I had the honour to make to the Society.ⁱ At Limlow, or Limbury Hill, a remarkable tumulus on the downs, at a short distance from Litlington, several human skeletons have been recently found, with coins of Claudius, Vespasian, and Faustina; these, perhaps, were the vestiges of some battle with the aboriginal inhabitants, before the Romans had colonized the place; and where, in the face of an enemy, they might have had no opportunity to perform the usual funeral rites.

In conclusion, I beg to observe, that while our Director Mr. Gage's paper on the Roman vestiges at the Bartlow hills in the same county, most interestingly illustrates the interment of some Romans of superior rank, and perhaps of official dignity, the contents of the Ustrinum at Litlington have hardly ever been surpassed for number and variety, and are remarkable for minutely shewing the manner in which persons, few of whom were probably above the ordinary grade, were interred. The exception from this class would, I think, be for the ashes contained in vessels of *glass*.

I cannot conclude this communication, without observing how much it owes in interest to the illustration by Mrs. Webb's beautiful drawings, and that I feel most truly grateful for the handsome manner in which they have been entrusted to my care for the inspection of the Society.

I remain, dear Sir,

most truly yours,

ALFRED JOHN KEMPE.

Sir HENRY ELLIS, K.H. F.R.S.
Sec. S.A.

ⁱ See *Archæologia*, vol. xxii. p. 348.

REFERENCE TO THE PLATES WHICH ILLUSTRATE THIS ACCOUNT.

Plate XLIV. Urns, with domestic vessels, and lachrymatory balsam cups deposited in the Ustrinum at Litlington. Fig. 1, shews the vessels as covered with a Roman house tile, before they were taken up.

Plate XLV. Figg. 1, 2, 3, 4, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, belong to the class of *vasa unguentaria et lachrymatoria*. Fig. 6 is the small glass bottle, having the corner chipped off, to admit the ashes of the dead, as before described; Fig. 11 represents the bottom of this bottle. Fig. 7 is a beautiful vessel of green glass; Fig. 12 is the decoration of its handle. Fig. 8 is a portion of a vessel of beautiful amber-coloured glass. Figg. 16 and 18 are small vessels, singularly perforated, one at the top, the other at the side. Figg. 22, 23, and 27, are instruments used in collecting the ashes from the remains of the pile. Figg. 24 and 28, a lock and key of a sepulchral chest of wood,^k which had inclosed an urn. Fig. 25, some needles, and a pin found with the ashes in an urn. Fig. 26, also some beads of amber-coloured glass. Fig. 29, a bronze bracelet. Fig. 30, the thuribulum,^l or censer, perforated with the letters of the potter's name, before mentioned.

^k These sepulchral chests were of a cubical form. They were called *loculi*, or from their shape *cubi*.

^l Some of the principal sacrificial vessels, of which many have been found deposited with the urns of the dead, may be here enumerated: *Acerra*, the box for containing incense, which was taken out for use with the *Ligula* or spoon. *Thuribulum*, the censer in which it was burnt. *Præfericulum*, a brazen vessel in which the wine was placed for libations. *Patera*, into which it was transferred and thence effused on the altar, or in which the blood of the victim was received for the same purpose. *Simpulum*, the use of which appears to have been much the same as the *Præfericulum*. It was, I believe, either of earthenware or of glass; sometimes formed with a spout, to effuse precious liquors in a long and minute stream. Figg. 7 and 8, Plate XLV. of the Litlington vases, are probably *Simpula*. See *Archæolog.* vol. XXV. pl. xxiv. p. 202. *Capedines*, *Capeduncula*, vessels with two handles, used in sacrifices; the second is a diminutive of the first, and means a little pitcher; their bottoms were flat. A fine example is preserved in the Guildhall library, lately found in Walbrook. *Discus* or *lanx*, a large dish or bowl; in such vessels the bowels of the victim, or portions of the flesh, were placed. The large brazen vessels with long handles, terminating with an animal's head, of which Mr. Gage found a fine specimen at the Bartlow

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The Vignette, p. 368, represents the Ustrinum, the Ikenild road, and Limlow hill, or barrow, in the distance :

That in the present page is a plan of the site of the Roman remains, &c.

hills, were probably for such purposes. Large brazen *ollæ*, or culinary pots with sacrificial knives, were recently dug up at Honey-lane market, Cheapside. *Lustricum*, the vessel for containing consecrated water. *Aspersorium*, *Aspergillum*, the sprinkle used for scattering the lustral water. The Romish Church admitted and has preserved this ceremony among its rites. The lamps carried at the funeral ceremonies, which generally took place at night, and many other vessels and instruments employed, were deposited in the tomb, as consecrated by the occasion to the manes.

Sepulchral Urns with other Vessels, as found in the Roman Ustrinum at Littleton.

Unguentaria, Glass vessels, and other articles, discovered in the Ustrinum at Litlington