XI. *Letter from CHARLES ROACH SMITH, Esq. F.S.A., to Sir Henry Ellis, K.H., F.R.S., Secretary, communicating an Account of some Antiquities found in the neighbourhood of Sandwich, in the county of Kent.*

Read 10th March, 1842.

DEAR SIR,

City, March 9th, 1842.

MR. William Henry Rolfe, of Sandwich, has kindly placed in my hands, for the inspection of the Society, a variety of interesting remains, found within the last few years at Gilton, Coombe, Woodnesborough, and Richborough.

A recent exhibition of antiquities discovered by Lord Albert Conyngham in tumuli on Breach Downs, affords additional interest to both collections, as a slight examination and comparison will shew a close affinity between them; thus the two discoveries will be mutually illustrative, and furnish a store of facts, from the general and distinctive features of which deductions may be drawn with greater certainty towards a classification of the remains ascribed to the northern tribes, who successively over-ran Britain after the withdrawal of the Roman forces. As these nations have a near relation one with the other, with similar habits and customs, the correct appropriation of their works of art has been a matter of great difficulty, and can only be expected to be fully accomplished by a patient and systematic arrangement of the materials themselves, and the circumstances under which they are presented to us.

The parish of Ash, in the neighbourhood of Sandwich, is a locality long recorded as fertile in Roman and Saxon antiquities. Gilton and Coombe, in this parish, have been especially noted for discoveries of funereal remains, both prior to and since the time when the indefatigable and careful Douglas compiled his *Nenia Britannica*. Gilton, which supplies the greater part of the subjects of our present investigation (Plate XI.), lies about a quarter of a mile to the west of the village of Ash. This place and Woodnesborough, another

Fig. 1. 2. 3. 6. Fibulae. — Fig. 4. Sword Handle. — Fig. 5. Buckle.
Antiquities found at Gilton in the Parish of Ash, in Kent.

parish situate about a mile and a half to the east, form the termini of one long sandy hill, in various parts of which, and about two feet beneath the surface, fibulæ, rings, glass vessels, fragments of swords, umbones of shields, beads, and coins, are still occasionally discovered.

Gilton lies on the turnpike road from Canterbury to Sandwich and Deal, and the spot where the relics collected by Mr. Rolfe were found, is only a few rods from the road on the south or right side. Douglas has published a view of the sand-pit and mills on the site; on the right of that mill marked D in the Plate, stands the miller's house at the road-side, between which and the mill is a garden, and some ground whence sand had formerly been carried. When this portion, a few years since, was added to the garden, the labourers, in levelling the surface, found at intervals these remains. They consist of two bronze dishes, spear-heads, battle-axes, and swords of iron, umbones and bosses of shields, fibulæ, buckles, beads, a glass cup and crystal balls.

The larger of the metal dishes or basins is 21 inches in diameter and 5 inches deep. It is of copper, of thin fabric, and ornamented with a bead moulding round the edge; the handles, now detached, had been soldered to the vessel by means of semi-oval pieces of metal filled with lead. The other bowl is about 14 inches in diameter, of thicker substance, with angular handles, and stands on a circular rim with a perforated vandyke pattern.

On closely examining the larger of these bowls, I perceived some slight irregularities in the internal surface, and traces of figures.

1st 6ⁱⁿ diameter — 5ⁱⁿ high.

Having carefully removed a thick coating of green rust, three patches of metal riveted on the bowl were rendered visible, which had evidently been affixed for repairing the vessel. They are of a somewhat different kind of metal from the bowl, and are stamped in two instances with a figure with long hair and pointed short beard, dancing, and playing on a kind of harp or viol of six strings; from the left hand of the figure depends the head of an animal. The third exhibits undefinable fishes and quadrupeds on each side of a twisted scroll terminating in loose knots. Whether these ornamented pieces of metal were originally designed for the purpose to which we here find them applied, or whether they were punched from some other work which chance might have thrown in the way of the copper-smith, it is impossible to decide; but that their application is of a date long subsequent to that of the fabrication of the basin, there can be but little doubt. Unfortunately there is nothing sufficiently marked about the Gleeman or Harper, or the *mélange* of the non-descript animals and the *nexus* pattern, to indicate precisely the period to which these works may be referred. They have, however, all the characteristics of the Saxon works of art that are familiar to us, and although at the same time we are reminded of the Norman style, I am inclined to consider from their connection with the other remains and the locality, that we shall not err in attributing them to the Saxons. From the vast quantity of skeletons found at intervals, for at least a century, throughout these hills, there can be but little doubt of the locality having been appropriated as a place of interment during a long series of years, by the inhabitants of the Isle of Thanet, immediately after the Romans, probably down to the eighth or ninth century, when sepulture within the walls of monasteries was fast superseding the old modes of interment, although the edict of Charlemagne alone would shew that the habits and customs of a people are only entirely changed by the slow process of time. “Jubemus ut corpora Christianorum Saxonum ad cæmeteria ecclesiæ deferantur et non ad tumulos Paganorum.”^a

The fibulæ from Gilton are of two kinds; circular, in ornamented silver, set with garnets; and cruciform, in silver gilt and bronze, embellished with

^a Ap. Paluz. T. J. p. 254, conf. capit. 6.

grotesque heads of animals and fanciful designs, with an occasional introduction of the cross. Underneath the garnets, or coloured glass in some instances, chequered gold foil is laid to heighten the effect, a practice observable in Eastern works of art at the present day. It is further exemplified in the Alfred jewel, and in the beautiful buckle from the Gilton burial-place.

This buckle is of silver gilt, with gold casing, elegantly adorned with coloured glass and gold chords, surrounded with two rows of fine gold chain work. It has apparently belonged to a girdle or sword-belt, such, perhaps, as that with which, according to William of Malmesbury, Alfred girded his grandson Athelstan,—“*quem etiam præmature militem fecerat, donatum chlamyde coccinea, gemmato baltheo, ense Saxonico cum vagina aurea.*”^a

The Saxon broad-swords will be recognised in the fragments found at Gilton, which, although oxidised and mouldering, exhibit all the characters of that powerful and destructive weapon. The handle of one (Plate XI.) has been silvered and gilt.^b

The beads, indicating the interment of females, are of great variety of shape and material; they are ribbed, oval, oblong, and round, and are made of glass or porcelain, coloured clay, and amber, the last roughly worked, but the others evincing much neatness of execution. Mr. C. Masson, who has just examined them, observes they bear a close resemblance to those found in the topes of Northern India. Their workmanship displays taste, a good knowledge of smelting, and the preparation of colours to endure the fire. Those in amber seem to bespeak, from their inferior style, a home manufacture.

The glass drinking-cup resembles those found in tumuli on the Bartlow hills, on Breach Downs, and on the hills in the Isle of Wight.

In assigning these and similar remains to the Saxons, a question may arise on the general absence of coins of the national currency, while those of the Byzantine Empire and of the Merovingian epoch, as well as Roman

^a Lib. 2. cap. 6.

^b A thane of Æthelred the Second bequeathed to the king, among other valuable gifts, two swords with silvered handles:—“*Ego do Domino meo 200 mancusas auri, et duos gladios cum manubriis argentatis,*” &c.—*Monasticon*, t. i. p. 266.

coins of the Higher Empire, are frequently found in funereal deposits in and about the Kentish tumuli.^c I think this will be satisfactorily explained in considering these coins to have been buried solely because they had been regarded by the owners as amulets or charms, or prized as ornamental appendages to the dress; and this reason is supported by the fact of the Byzantine and Merovingian coins being often mounted either in a border of gold fillagree with a loop, or with a simple gold loop inserted in the coin. The circumstance, also, of the foreign coins being of gold, would add to their value as ornaments or amulets. Roman coins, when discovered in interments posterior to the Roman epoch, may probably be also regarded as having possessed some influence on the superstitious feelings of the owners, who readily ascribed virtues and supernatural powers to objects of an unusual character, which they could not explain or comprehend. This is a subject of great interest, and I am happy to find it has engaged the attention of Mr. Thomas Wright, and that at an early opportunity we are likely to reap the benefit of his researches.

The antiquities from Richborough, which Mr. Rolfe has forwarded to us, are clearly of two periods, the Roman and Saxon. To the former must be assigned the beautiful specimen of fresco painting, the intaglios in red and white cornelian, jasper, and onyx; to the latter, the intaglio in glass representing a cross erected on a kind of altar, the gold circular ornament set with coloured glass, and the buckles; the brass fish-hooks may belong to either or both.

I feel I have taken but a superficial view of the objects entrusted to my care, or rather have limited my observations on them; but I was unwilling to delay their exhibition to the Society, considering, at the same time, that the best foundation for successful investigation is in combined and accumulated facts recorded and preserved for reference, and forming, as it were, the statistics of antiquities. I am, dear Sir, &c.

CHARLES ROACH SMITH.

To Sir HENRY ELLIS, K.H.,

Sec. Soc. Ant., &c. &c.

^c See the *Nenia Britannica*.—The tumuli on Breach Downs, lately opened by Lord Albert Conyngham, contrary to those in other parts of Kent, examined by Douglas, yielded no coins, but in a small one, subsequently excavated by Mr. J. P. Bartlett, four Anglo-Saxon sceattas were found. *Proceedings Num. Soc.* p. 88. The importance of collecting facts before attempting to generalize is herein obvious.