Notes on Saxon Sepulchral Remains found at Fairford, Gloucestershire. By C. ROACH SMITH, F.S.A. In a Letter addressed to J. Y. Akerman, Esq. Resident Secretary.

Read Jan. 23, Feb. 6, 27, 1851.

MY DEAR SIR,

5, Liverpool Street, City, April 7th, 1851.

On the 23d of January I exhibited to the Society, through the kindness of Mr. W. M. Wylie, some Saxon Fibulæ and Beads found at Fairford, with drawings of other objects of the Saxon period, which had been discovered in the same locality at intervals from 1844-5 to 1850.

At some of our more recent meetings other objects, most of which are the result of still pending researches conducted by Mr. Wylie, have been laid before us, and these I shall now allude to or describe, with a view to make a record of them in the forthcoming part of the *Archæologia*. I feel convinced in so doing I am meeting the wishes of the Society, and particularly of those Fellows who are more especially interested in this branch of the study of our national antiquities, by supplying authenticated facts, and placing them where, for purposes of reference, they will be accessible to all. It is in accumulations of such facts we must seek for a verification or correction of our opinions on the origin and character of such remains, on their several points of resemblance to analogous objects found in different parts of this and other countries, and, consequently, on the connection between the peoples who used them, their habits, customs, and usages. Too much stress cannot be laid on the necessity of registering and storing up the details of discoveries such as these as early as possible after they are made, before they fade from recollection, and before the relics themselves become lost or separated from each other and from the circumstances which alone render them useful to scientific and historical research. Even at the risk of appearing needlessly lavish, I would advocate the supply of the most copious illustrations, considering that it is not the mere novelty of type that gives value to such objects, but that it is the repetition and constant occurrence of particular things under similar circumstances which can alone warrant sound conclusions and classification. You must have often felt how comparatively worthless an elaborate verbal or written description has been rendered for the want of

drawings; on the other hand, how much the rudest sketches will sometimes contribute to explain and make intelligible the most meagre and imperfect description.

I commence with a brief history of Mr. Wylie's researches which that gentleman has kindly furnished me with. He states: "When we first resided at Fairford, in 1847, I heard that some bones, armour, &c. had been found, about three years before, in quarrying a field there. This field had long been in the possession of the family of the Rev. J. Keble, the poet, and had been sold by him to a benefit-club of the place, who proceeded to quarry stone for a wall. It was at that period divided into two inclosures of two acres each; one of these was arable, the other very old grass land, and the surface, I am told, was slightly undulating, but bearing no appearance of tumuli, or of ever having been disturbed. It bore the name of Water-slade; and the three adjoining fields are called Garrows, Garstons or Gascons, and Hempland. In 1850 the club was broken up, and the field sold in small allotments. Some of these were purchased by a mason of Fairford, who at once commenced a quarry to obtain stone for building, and he employed the same men who had conducted the former excavations. Toward the end of June, one of these men sent me some beads of *terra cotta*, porcelain, and some vitreous substance, incrustured with coloured patterns, and some rough pieces of perforated amber. These were found about the skull of a skeleton. I then directed I should be informed of any similar interments they might meet with, and accordingly in the early part of July I was summoned to the discovery of another grave. I immediately attended, and saw the earth carefully removed from a skeleton, which was perfect, even to the teeth, and lying about three feet deep upon the stone brash or rubble—"the rock," as it is here termed,—with the head to the south-west. No coffin had been used. The skeleton measured full six feet, but, as the head was depressed and the legs bent, I calculated that the height, in life, must have been six feet six inches. The bones were remarkably large, but the skull fell to pieces on being touched. On the right breast were two fibulæ (Pl. IX. fig. 4). They are of copper, richly gilt and ornamented in front. When exhumed the gilding shone brightly, but it soon tarnished on exposure to the air. The pins for fastening the fibulæ at the back were of iron, as is evident from the corrosion of the hinges. Some fragments of iron lay among the ribs of the skeleton. Near one hand were some perforated pieces of rough amber, and a large flattish round bead of green glass (an inch and a half in diameter lengthways), worked apparently for the bed or matrix of some coloured material. About the skeleton were some small pieces of pottery, and stones blackened by fire. I have since seen other skeletons exhumed on the same ground. The most remarkable measures seven feet. It was quite perfect, and is now in the possession of Mr. Cornwall, of

Fairford. By its side lay the boss and two handles of a shield, with some bronze ornamented studs, and a long well-wrought spearhead, fashioned like a bayonet, only with four sides. By another skeleton was a piece of red ochrous substance. By the head of another, that of a female, were a great number of beads, two bronze twisted ear-rings, and a large green glass bead. On either breast was a fibula, and a plain ring, apparently of copper silvered, round a finger-joint. Beneath a skeleton was a small vase of very porous black earthenware. Another somewhat larger, but in a very decomposed state, was found in one of the other graves.

"Subsequently other fibulæ and beads have been found. One of the latter is a large piece of amber; another is of crystal accurately cut in squares. These also lay by the side of a skeleton. Animals' teeth were occasionally found. I have also a fragment of an ivory armlet (the ivory is perhaps that of the sea-horse), and a small brass coin of Gallienus, perforated for wearing as an ornament. One of the fibulæ, of bronze silvered, is a rude representation of a bird (Pl. X. fig. 7). Two others, of bronze gilt, are circular and concave (Ibid. figg. 1 and 5). One of large size (fig. 2) is particularly interesting: it had been broken and repaired, as appears by the perforations.

"During the excavations of 1844-5, thirty-six skeletons were found with fibulæ, such as Fig. 1 in the plate; bosses of shields; an ivory armlet; a bronze patera; some bones of a horse and horse furniture; and a long and very broad sword, measuring 2 feet 11 inches in length, the only one, I believe, then discovered, and only a few spear-heads.* All the skeletons hitherto exhumed are above eighty in number, in which are included several of children. Knives in iron were frequently found, and usually by the necks or about the ribs."

"*February 6th.*—Further excavations made. Discovered a very perfect skeleton lying with the head S.W. On each breast was a large bronze, gilt, concave, fibula. On a left-hand finger-joint were two plain silvered rings, such as gipsies wear. By the hip was a large amber bead, and about the body a great number of amber and various kinds of glass beads; also six ferrules, of either tin or speculum metal, which perhaps had been worn strung with the beads. By the head were several short pieces of bronze which appear to have been attached to the scabbard of a dagger, and a fragment of the iron still adhered. The most curious relic was a yellowish glass vessel, of singular construction, which was lying behind

* Many interesting relics doubtless perished at this period, and for whatever still remains we are solely indebted to Mr. Vines of Fairford. The persons of influence who might have preserved everything, unfortunately "cared for none of these things."

the head. It was sadly fractured, and probably was not entire when buried here, as much of it is still wanting, after a long search for the fragments.

“*March 4th.*—Found a skeleton lying on its side. By the head were a number of strips of bronze, measuring, when put together, about seven feet; perhaps these formed the frame-work of some head-dress; also a spear-head. By an arm was a lance, knife, and pair of shears. An umbo was by the knees, and at the feet a bronze vessel, which proved corroded, and broke on removal. It had an iron handle, and measured ten inches in diameter and six deep.

“*6th.*—By the head of one found to-day were a number more strips and dove-tailed ornaments, which seem to have been gilt, and perhaps formed a sort of barbaric tiara. By the hips was a lump of iron, and at the feet an iron ferrule, perhaps of the spear-staff.

“*7th.*—Another found, with remains of a bronze plated belt. A broad head of a spear was by the skull; a very perfect pair of bronze tweezers, by the arm; a knife and umbo, at the knees; and a ferrule, perhaps of a spear-staff, at the feet.

“Also another, perhaps the most interesting yet found. It measured six feet six. By the head was a wooden cup formed of small staves of oak, bound with brass. The whole was sadly corroded, but still hung together, and we were able to remove it. It is of a slightly oval form, four inches in diameter and three in height. By the right arm were a perfect pair of tweezers; by the hips a bluish green glass bead, with a wavy pattern painted round it; a large umbo was by the knees, and by the right side a very broad, pointed sword 2 feet 11 inches long.

“*8th.*—Another very perfect female skeleton, with some traces of a child. Nothing was with this but two plain fibulæ, and a quantity of charcoal ashes at the head, among which was a small hook, evidently used for hanging a vessel over the fire.

“Several skeletons have since been found, but no relics were with them. Altogether, therefore, up to this period, March 29, more than 120 graves have been examined.

“I have only mentioned to you such as appeared to me the most interesting. I have attentively observed the position of the skeletons, and find, as a rule, they were interred with head to the south. The variation in several cases has been, perhaps accidentally, to the south-west, and *one*, that with the bird-fibula, was lying, I am told, due east and west. I lately found the ashes of an infant in an earthen vase of the very commonest order. No relics were with it, and this is the only instance of cremation I have observed here.

“It may be worth remarking that we have invariably found the *umbones* on the *knees* of the skeletons, whereas, I believe, they are usually found on the lap. Then

the fibulæ have been found in pairs; sometimes one below the other; one on *one* breast; more usually one on *either* breast, but always on the breasts. Sir H. Dryden speaks of those found at the Marston cemetery, as being always on the *shoulder*. Does not this variation in the position of umbones and fibulæ point out these Saxons of Fairford as belonging to a different Teutonic tribe? "

The above is Mr. Wylie's statement, bringing the discoveries down to the 29th of March. It should be remarked that a brief notice was given of those made in 1844-5, in vol. ii. of the "Journal of the British Archæological Association," with engravings of two bosses of shields, a fibula, and the sword (Pl. IX. fig. 3). The last of these was engraved from a defective drawing, and incorrectly described as bronze; whereas it is of iron, but the upper and lower parts of the sheath were edged with bronze, which still adheres to the sword.

This sword, the blade of which measures 2 feet $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and the handle $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches, appears to be somewhat more rounded at the end than the generality of the Saxon swords which have been found in Kent and other places; but it is probably not so in reality. The scabbard has been protected with a bronze rim at the top and bottom, a peculiarity which I have noticed in other examples found in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire.

If we compare this sword with the engraving of one found at Londinières, near Dieppe, engraved in the "Revue de Rouen," Fév. 1848, we shall find that, although the scabbard was rounded, the sword itself is perfectly pointed. The example referred to in every respect seems to resemble that from Fairford. The other sword found by Mr. Wylie, without the scabbard-ornaments, is of the same dimensions, and *pointed*.

The large fibula (Pl. IX. fig. 2) of bronze gilt, and another from Fairford closely resembling it, are very similar to that found in the Saxon burial-place at Marston Hill, in Northamptonshire,^a to one found at Badby in the same county,^b and to others found in Yorkshire.^c A portion of one of very large size, found near Leicester, is preserved in the museum of that city. To the same class belong specimens found at Selzen, near Mayence,^d and one preserved in the Wiesbaden museum, to the lower end of which is attached an oblong bead and a large globular substance apparently jet. Circular concave fibulæ were also found at Marston Hill, the pattern on one of which accords with that on a specimen from Fairford, and also on one of the three fine examples found in Oxfordshire which I recently exhibited to the Society,

^a Archæologia, Vol. XXX. Pl. XIII.

^b Journal of Brit. Arch. Assoc. vol. i. p. 61.

^c Journal of Brit. Arch. Assoc. vol. ii. p. 311.

^d Das Germanische Todtenlager bei Selzen, von W. und L. Lindenschmit. 8vo. Mainz, 1848.

and which are now in the museum of Lord Londesborough. Other varieties have been found in Buckinghamshire, in Berkshire, and in Warwickshire. Fig. 5 of our Plate seems the counterpart of a pair found in a barrow at Oddington, near Stow-in-the-Wold, in Gloucestershire,^a with other remains analogous to those discovered at Fairford; it also resembles one found in a barrow on Shalcombe Down, Isle of Wight.^b Fig. 6 of our Plate belongs to another variety of the former class, many of which have been found in Suffolk, Norfolk, and Northamptonshire, as well as in some other counties; and Fig. 7 reminds us of the late Roman fibulæ in the form of birds, as well as of some found in Saxon burial-places in the Isle of Wight,^c and in Frankish graves on the Rhine.^d Fig. 4 is to me a new type. The guilloche pattern is evidently a copy of that common Roman ornament, and the interior pattern has also probably been suggested from some classical design, such as those in the Roman tessellated pavements, from which I think many of the Saxon ornaments were originally taken. The ∞ like figure certainly reminds one of that letter on the coins of Offa; but, if we examine the large fibula, a very similar figure, intended apparently for a face, will be found on three sides of the oblong part. These classes of fibulæ are seldom found in the numerous Saxon burial-places in the county of Kent.

The glass goblet or cup mentioned by Mr. Wylie can scarcely be described without the aid of an engraving. It resembles one in the Canterbury museum, stated to have been found at Reculver, and one engraved on p. 6 of the Messrs. Lindenschmits' discoveries made at Selzen, before referred to.

The object discovered on the 6th of March is probably the band of a small coffer or box. Mr. Wylie has forwarded to me a copper bowl found in one of the graves, which resembles precisely that figured in Nichols's *Leicestershire*, Vol. I. Part ii. p. 136, in the plate of Saxon remains dug up in Queneborow field.

I have also received from Mr. Wylie three small brass coins, exclusive of that of Gallienus; two are of Valens and Gratian; the other, which is illegible, has been perforated for wearing as an ornament.

I remain, my dear Sir,

Yours very truly,

C. ROACH SMITH.

To J. Y. AKERMAN, Esq.
Secretary.

^a Gentleman's Magazine, April, 1787, Pl. ii. Fig. 9.

^b Transactions of the Brit. Arch. Assoc. at Winchester, pl. 3, fig. 2.

^c Ibid. fig. 11.

^d Collectanea Antiqua, vol. ii. pl. xxxv.

Anglo-Saxon Remains found at Fairford, C^o Gloucester.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London, 23rd April 1851.

J. Basire del. et sc.