

XVIII. *Letter from the Rev. L. VERNON HARCOURT to Sir HENRY ELLIS, K.H. Secretary, describing several Vessels of glass and earthenware, and Ornaments, discovered near Chilgrove, in Sussex.*

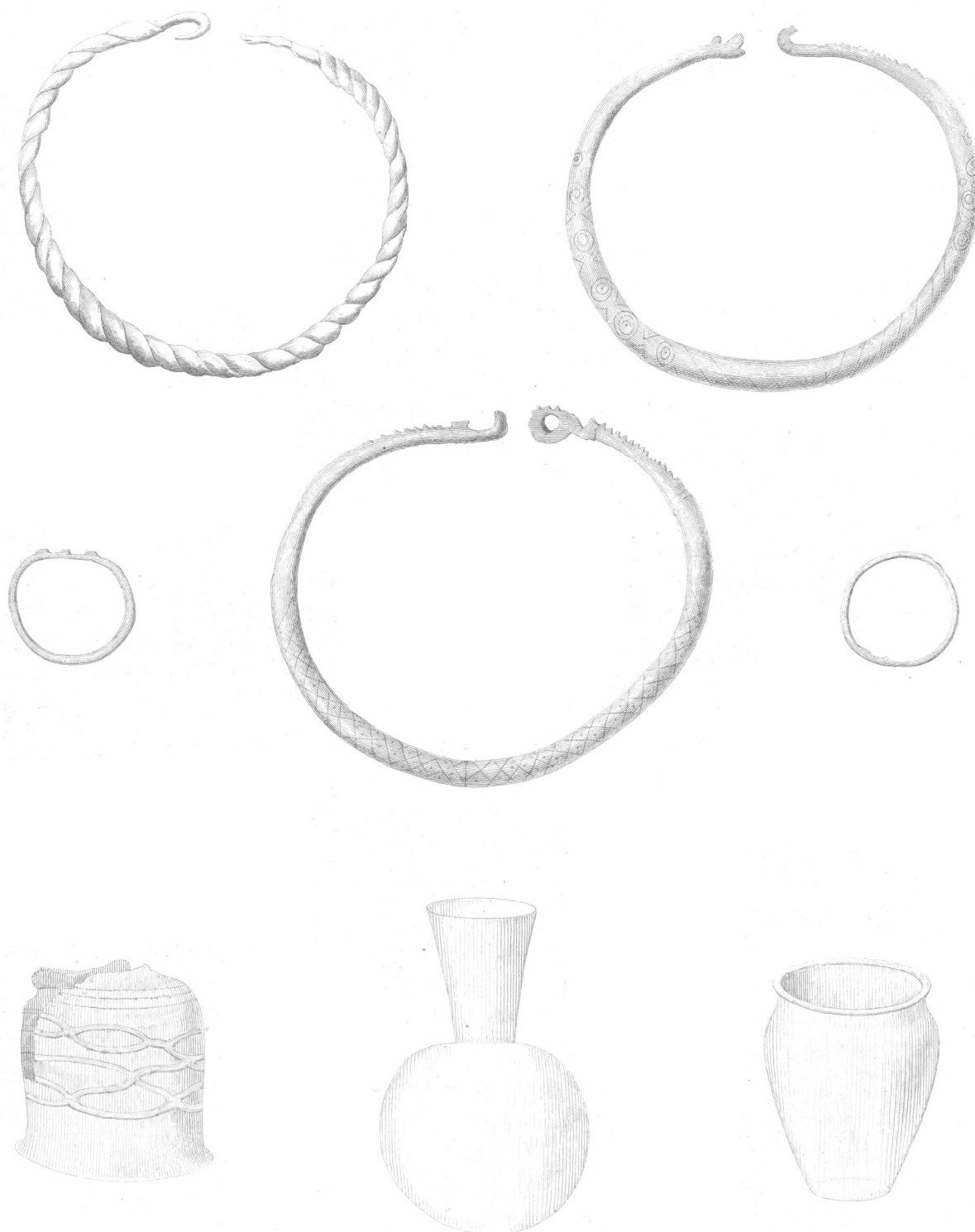
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Read 25th May, 1843.

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SIR,

I BEG leave to present to the Society of Antiquaries the accompanying drawings, executed by Mrs. Vernon Harcourt, of some Antiquities recently discovered on the estate of Leyland Woods, Esq. near his residence at Chilgrove, in the county of Sussex, about five miles from Chichester: they consist partly of vessels intended to hold liquors, and partly of female ornaments, bracelets, and rings. Three of the Vessels are of glass (See Pl. IX.), one of which has been broken most unfortunately, for the glass is much clearer than in the others, and it is curiously ornamented with a linked pattern. The others are of coarse clay, without inscriptions, or any elaborate ornament. I am aware that vessels of this sort have been found in such abundance that they might scarcely seem to deserve the notice of the Society, were I not desirous to discuss the question which has been raised, whether they are of British or of Roman origin. The former opinion rests upon the assertion, that glass is more a British than a Roman manufacture, and that it does not occur in Roman sepulchres; that the earthenware vessels display no refinement of art, and while they are too large for lachrymatories, they are too small for cinerary urns; that the ornaments are evidently of British manufacture; for I found by an analysis of some fragments, that one hundred grains contained sixty-eight of copper and twenty-eight of tin, the rest being earth accidentally mixed with them, and zinc to the amount of less than a grain: there were traces of iron, but nothing more. Copper and tin are the chief mineral products of this island. And, lastly, that the bodies near which they were found, had been interred instead of burnt.



*Bracelets, Rings, and Vessels of Glass found at Chilgrove near Chichester in Sussex.*

Now it is quite true that the glass vessels found in tombs in this country have been pronounced British by Dr. Stukeley (Stonehenge, 45), and are regarded in the same light by Camden. (Britannia, p. 684.) Moreover, Strabo affirms, that the art of making glass (ὕλασκειν) was introduced into Britain by the Phœnicians, who traded there from Tyre (p. 307); and certainly there is no glass among the specimens preserved in the British Museum from Herculaneum and Pompeii at all equal in transparency or in elegance of pattern to one represented in these drawings: No. 1. They are cast, indeed, in as great a variety of moulds as the earthen vessels, and some are of great size; but the glass is variously coloured, not by design, as it appears to me, but by imperfect fusion; they are not more than semi-transparent, and some almost opaque, and when the colour is uniform it is more or less green; but the glass with the linked pattern is quite clear, so that it was difficult to give a true representation of its appearance. From this it may fairly be inferred, that the manufacture of glass arrived at greater perfection in this country than it did at the same time in Italy. But still the question is, whether the specimens discovered were in Roman or in British possession; whether they were interred in Roman or British graves. Now Camden says, that in Spitalfields many sepulchral vases were found, and seals, and urns containing coins of Claudius, and glass vessels, and small earthen ones with a certain liquor in them, which, he thinks, were the libations of wine and milk used by the Romans, when they buried their dead, or those odoriferous liquors mentioned by Statius, the *liquores* which *ansuram lavére comam*. (Britannia, vol. ii. p. 9.) Camden is here speaking of antiquities found in Britain, but decidedly Roman, and exactly similar in their materials and their apparent destination to those discovered at Chilgrove. Montfaucon extends the evidence of this custom over a much wider range: his testimony is, “Ils mettoient dans les urnes cineraires de ces petites phioles de verre, ou de terre cuite, qui se trouvent dans une infinité de tombeaux, en sorte que tous les cabinets de l’Europe en sont fournis: non contents de mettre dans ses phioles leurs larmes et celles des pleureuses, ils y mettoient quelquefois de baumes, dont ils faisaient un mélange avec ses larmes.” Tom. ix. p. 116. An inscription to Caius Labius, given by the same author, terminates thus: “Fusca mater ad luctum et gemitum relictæ cum lacrymis et

opobalsamo udum :” upon which he observes, that the tears and perfumes were doubtless contained in some lachrymatory urn. It may be said, however, that Montfaucon confines his notion of the Roman practice of burying glass vessels with their dead to cinerary urns, and that they were of a different construction from those represented here, which are much too large for lachrymatories, many specimens of which may be seen in the British Museum. But in Douglas’s *Nænia Britannica*, two glass vessels are shewn at plate xvii. exactly resembling those marked 2 and 3, from *La Roma Subterranea*, where, it is stated, glass vessels have been found with the remains of the primitive Christians in their catacombs, supposed to have contained balsams. (pp. 52 and 70.) If it be asked what Christians had to do with the libations for which these vessels were used, the remark of Douglas upon this subject may furnish a sufficient answer : he observes, “that many of the relics in the small tumuli might incline an antiquary to consider them with an eye to Pagan ceremonies, particularly when vessels have been found in them ; but as many Christian rites were founded on those of the Gentiles, and in the early ages of Christianity seem to be blended with each other, it is difficult sometimes to say whether the people inhumed were Christian or Pagan.” Whether therefore they were the one or the other in point of fact must be determined by other circumstances. In this case the skeletons, by the side of which the relics were found, were laid with their heads a little towards the north of east : there were seven or eight, more or less perfect, one of them evidently a female, which was also indicated by the ornaments ; they were not more than two feet below the surface of the ground on a bed of chalk, and it is surprising that at a distance so little removed from the influences of the atmosphere, some of the bones, especially two of the skulls, should have been found in such a perfect state of preservation ; but the principal circumstance deserving of notice is, that the direction of all the bodies was uniformly the same. Now it appears that the primitive Christians were accustomed to inter their dead in an east and west position ; and in the same direction the chief part of the Roman graves were formed on Chartham Downs, near Canterbury, in one of which a glass vessel was found like one of those from Chilgrove, and is now deposited in the British Museum. The earthen vessels, as I have already observed, are very numerous both here

and on the continent, and two are represented in the *Nænia Britannica* exactly resembling two of these drawings; but, as Winkelman remarks, it is very singular that the ancient writers make no mention whatever of the deposit of these vessels in the tombs, except those which contained ashes, the large cinerary urns, and the vessel of oil, which, according to the testimony of Aristotle, it was customary to place by the side of the dead (*Eccles.* 535); but there are frequent notices of their contents, of the liquors, unguents, and balsams, which were used in sepulchral rites. Festus, for instance, gives this reason why *Respersum* is a name for wine, because on certain occasions the graves of the dead were sprinkled with wine—*quia in sacris Novemdiabilibus vino mortui sepulcrum spargebatur*; and if such libations were poured upon the graves, much more were they likely to be poured upon the corpse at its interment. But Ausonius is much more explicit; he calls for wine and perfumes, and balsams, and roses to be scattered over the ashes of the dead:

“Sparge mero cineres, et odoro perluce nardo,  
Hospes, et adde rosis balsama puniceis.”

*Epitaph. carm.* 36.

And if these rites were to be performed over the ashes of the dead, they were equally due to the corpse when it was interred, for inhumation without burning was not unknown to the ancient Romans: it was not altogether disused at Rome till the time of Marius; it continued to be practised in the country about Trebbia, and, as in this case, without the use of coffins (*Winkelman's Histoire des Arts chez les Anciens*, vol. ii. p. 297), and the practice was gradually resumed in general after the introduction of Christianity. The opinion of Camden that milk too was one of the libations contained in the vessels which we find in sepulchres, was also maintained by Wolfgang Sozium, in his *Commentary on the city of Rome*; on what authority I know not, unless he inferred it from the fact affirmed by Winkelman, that they were considered as emblems of the victuals which it was customary to leave for the souls of the dead. “For we know,” says he, “that in the last words which were addressed to the deceased, they were exhorted to drink to the health of the friends and relations whom they left behind;” and he produces an inscription upon a sepulchral urn to this effect: *Hanc. Argenti Tu Nobis.*

Bibes. 298. But probably the main motive which actuated these depositors was simply to do honour to their friends, whom they had lost; a desire which was carried so far at Rome that its extravagance was restrained by the laws of the XII. tables, in which the portion of myrrh is particularly mentioned; and it is supposed that, their pious intentions being thus restricted, they endeavoured to make up for it by entombing with the dead the vessels appropriated to the funeral feasts. Those vessels were called *Simpulum* and *Olla*, both of which are mentioned by Tertullian, in his *Apologeticæ*, 13. To such empty offerings it is probable that Virgil alludes, when he makes Anchises, anticipating the death of Marcellus, propose to scatter roses on his grave to please the spirit of his descendant, as a substitute for the gifts and honours which he would have offered had he been living on the earth at the time of his decease.

“ Purpureos spargam flores animamque nepotis  
His saltem accumulem donis et fungar inani  
Munere.”

*Æneid.* lib. viii.

In this case, however, it would seem that the glass drinking-cup actually contained wine at the time when it was deposited, for the lower side is deeply stained with marks of the lees of wine.

Upon the whole, then, the relics furnish evidence that they were deposited by Roman Christians residing near the spot, but too poor to employ costly materials either for libations or for personal ornament. Perhaps the Heathen inhabitants had one burial ground, and the Christians another; for about six or seven hundred yards from the spot where they were found, a large cinerary urn was discovered some years ago, and it is remarkable that, supposing a straight line to be drawn between these two spots, there is a place without the vestige of a building on it, not far from the centre of that line, which is still denominated *Castle Corner*: now the name of castle, where there is no castle, usually indicates the former existence of a Roman *castellum*, or small camp. Thus, in Lancashire, the site of a Roman station is called *Giant's* or *Tarquin's* castle, in *Castlefield*; on *Stainmoor* there is a *Maiden* castle; near *Oldcastle*, in *Brecknockshire*, there is a tessellated Roman pavement; at *Castleacre* Roman remains are found; and at *Castle Rising*, in *Norfolk*, vestiges of Roman fortifications are apparent: a writer in the *Archæologia*, vol. XIV. p. 227,

fortifications are apparent : a writer in the *Archæologia*, vol. XIV. p. 227, concludes, that Castle Chum, in Cornwall, was a Roman station, and many other instances of the same nature might be adduced. Near the top of the Down, at the bottom of which these antiquities were found, a straight embankment is still visible, which sufficiently corresponds in situation with a Roman encampment noticed by Gough, in his edition of Camden's *Britannia*, on a hill, which he calls Gonshill ; the form which he describes is no longer discernible, and the name is not now recognised by the inhabitants of the vicinity ; but it is possible that it may have signified the Consul's hill, though I must not conceal my suspicions that a more ignoble etymology may be the true account of it : for, having been a noted rabbit-warren, its genuine name may have been the Coney's hill. In either case its title is no greater deviation from the original than the present name of a very large British earth-work in the same neighbourhood, which is called the Trundle, *i. e.* the round hill.