

# An Anglo Saxon Cemetery at Wigston Magna, Leicestershire.

by Peter Liddle and Samantha Middleton

with illustrations by Richard Knox

In 1795 an Anglo-Saxon cemetery was found at Wigston Magna and some of the objects from it drawn. The recording of surviving objects from the site has allowed a reappraisal, including relatively recent fieldwork. This suggests a sequence of occupation from the Iron Age to the early/middle Saxon. The cemetery material is principally sixth century A.D. in date and includes a high status element.

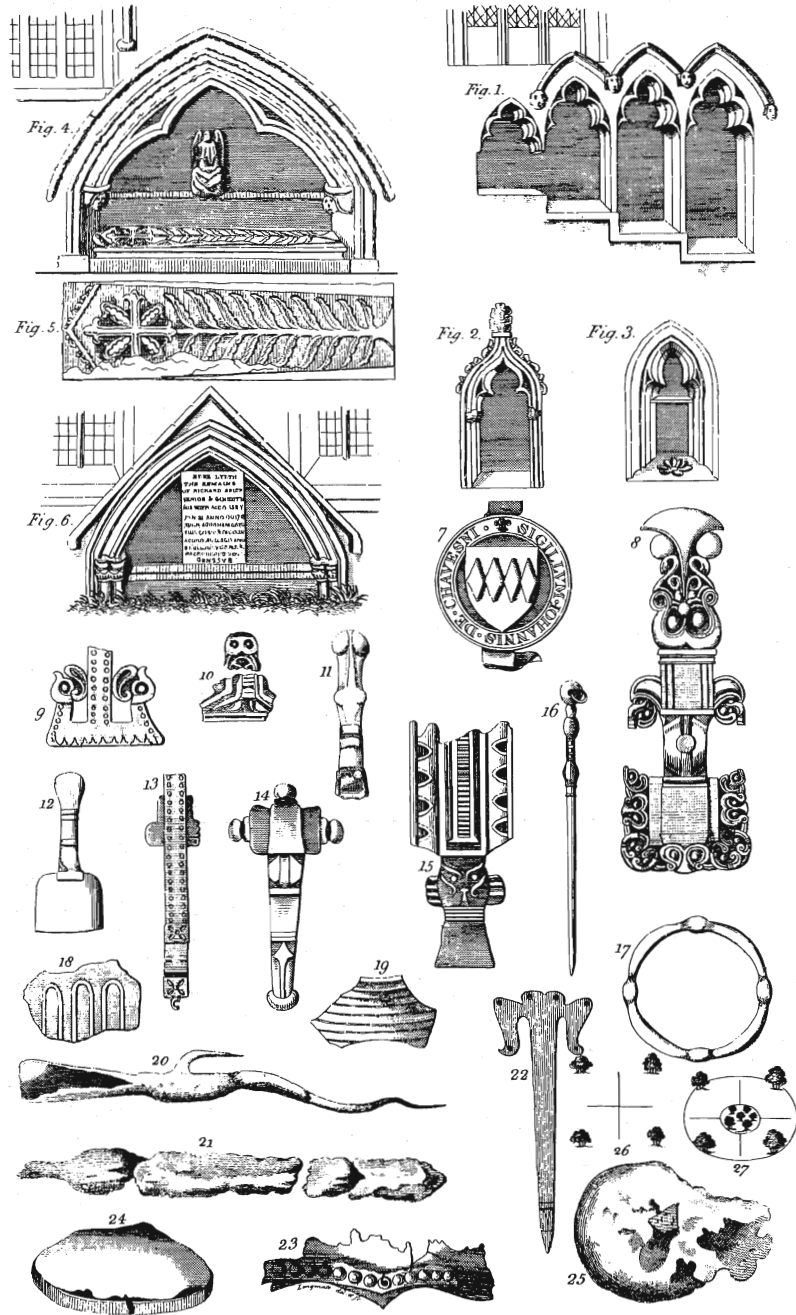
## Introduction and background

In May 1795, a new gravel pit was opened to supply gravel for the Leicester to Welford Turnpike Road (the modern A50). In June 1795, John Throsby, the Leicester historian, visited the site after hearing of the discovery of skeletons 'and, with a little trouble, procured from the labourers the principal part of the valuables found therein'. Two accounts survive of the discovery. One, which is relatively well known, was printed by John Nichols (1810) and is in the form of a letter from Throsby to Nichols, illustrated by drawings signed Longman (illus. 1). A second account (for which I am indebted to Mr. Stanley Woodward) is dated June 25th 1795 and appeared in the *Leicester Journal* of July 10th 1795. This includes some details not included in the Nichols account. In the 1930s, more material was found in grave digging in the modern Wigston cemetery. The material found by Throsby was not heard of again until 1976, when a group of objects appearing for sale at a London antique shop was identified by the British Museum as a parcel of the 1795 finds (on the basis of Longman's illustrations). They were briefly seen by Bob Rutland, Keeper of Antiquities for Leicestershire Museums, but had already been sold. The new owner could not be traced and they once again disappeared from view only to reappear in a Christies sale in October 1993. Bob Rutland again tried to acquire the material on behalf of the Leicestershire County Council Museums Service, but was outbid in auction. The new owner has, however, made the material available for recording and it has been drawn by Richard Knox and photographed by Mark Nelson. The present paper aims to make these records available and pull together all available data on the site, including the results of small watching briefs and trial excavations around the hill.

## The site (illus. 2)

Throsby states that the gravel pit was at the top of a hill ('the highest ground hereabouts'), with the land gently sloping in all directions. The pit was opened on sloping ground and worked upwards towards the hill top. What may be a schematic

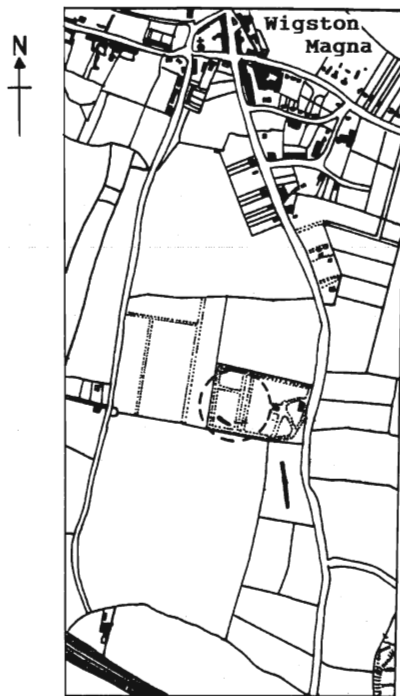
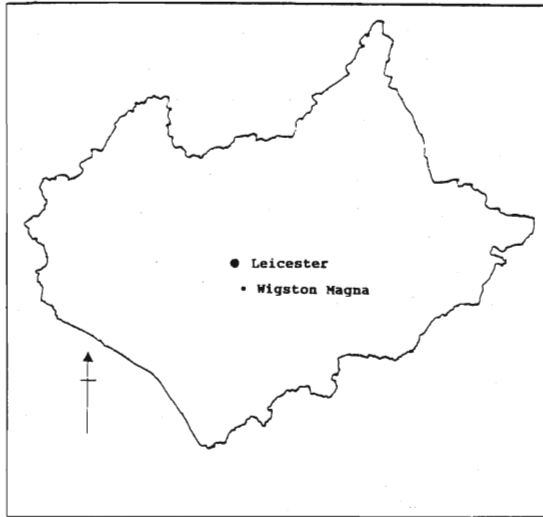
Vol. IV. Pl. LV. p. 377.



1. Plate from Nichols showing Longmans drawings.



Leicestershire



**KEY**

- Probable site of Anglo Saxon cemetery
- Roman ditches

2. Location of the site.

plan of the area is shown in the Nichols plate but is not explained in the text (and may not even refer to this site!). No sign of a barrow was noted, although the preconception in 1795 was that Anglo-Saxons would normally bury in barrows - which is not, apparently, the case in Leicestershire as we now know. Old Ordnance Survey maps mark the site of the discoveries in the centre of Wigston but this is clearly wrong. 'The highest ground hereabouts' is a patch of glacial sand and gravel to the south of the village, close to the A50. Various gravel workings are recorded on this hill, but the hill top is covered by the modern Wigston Cemetery, which may mask other gravel workings. That this marks the site of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery is strongly suggested by the discovery of Anglo-Saxon material, probably part of a grave group, in grave digging in the 1930s. W.G. Hoskins, who was actively working in the area at the time, states that they were found in the south-west quarter of the cemetery (and a recent inspection of headstones confirms that burials were being made in this area at that time) (Hoskins 1958).

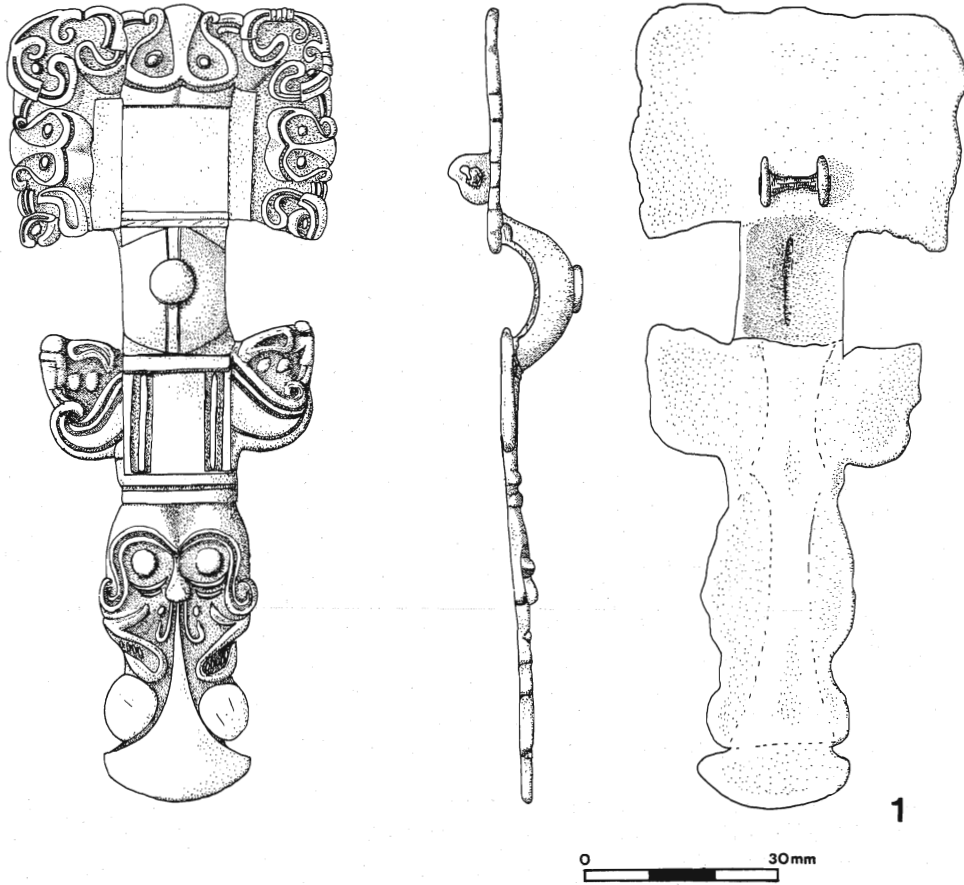
In 1946, an east-west ditch with Roman sherds in the fill was noted in grave digging and recorded by Frank Cottrill. He dated the sherds to the late first century A.D., but the material cannot now be located to confirm this. In 1959, a second length of east-west ditch was noted in a watching-brief during the levelling of a playing field south-west of the modern cemetery. This also contained Roman pottery and a quern. Dr Richard Pollard has kindly examined the six surviving sherds and notes that, while individual sherds could be as early as the second century or as late as the fourth century, the group could plausibly date from the first half of the third century. The quern is the bed stone of a Hunsbury-type quern and is typical of Iron Age or early Roman querns from Leicestershire.

In 1988, on the suggestion of Mr Duncan Lucas CC, a trial trench was cut in the field immediately south of the modern cemetery. This revealed a north-south ditch, which had been re-cut more than once, and other features. The material has been assessed by Dr Richard Pollard and Deborah Sawday. Their reports are lodged with the Leicestershire Sites and Monuments Record. They identified *c.* 12 sherds of middle to late Iron Age pottery, including East Midlands scored ware; over 200 sherds of Roman pottery, including both earlier and later material from a wide range of sources; some Roman tile; *c.* 10 sherds of early/middle Anglo-Saxon pottery; and 4 sherds which may be middle Saxon Ipswich Ware (although possibly Roman). In addition, six unidentifiable fourth century Roman coins were recovered from the back-filled spoil of this excavation in 1989.

Finally, in 1992, the Leicestershire Museums Archaeological Survey Team fieldwalked the former allotments on the north side of the cemetery recovering one sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery. The area of Roman occupation clearly did not extend this far north.

### **The Burials**

Throsby (in Nichols 1810) tells us that 'about twenty human skeletons were found all within a square of about ten yards' (although whether further quarrying produced more burials is not recorded), 'and, by most of them, some sort of furniture'. The first skeleton lay 'at the depth of about two feet, not in, but upon, the bed of gravel'. More were then found and 'the skeletons lay in different directions and at various depths'. 'A pile of stones, or bolders, some of which were half a hundred weight' was then found. In the Leicester Journal account he notes that they were 'very dissimilar to those found in the gravel'. In removing these stones



3. Square-headed brooch. Catalogue No. 1

'they found the remains of four human skeletons; but, although every part might be seen lying in a state perfectly undisturbed ever since their interment, yet most of them, except the leg and arm bones, were in such a state of decay, that they could not be moved by the hand without dropping instantly to pieces. These four lay nearly side by side at the depth of a yard below the surface of the gravel and with them many apparent war trappings; and near one of them part of the skeleton of a horse, and something like a bridle-bit, which I did not see: the men informed me that it was much perished and in consequence threw it away'.

In each of these graves 'lay... some sort of furniture of a metallic substance overlaid with gold'. He then describes the wrist clasp (catalogue nos.12a&b), the chatelaine ring (cat.no. 15) and 'pins of copper' (cat.nos.10 & 11). He then mentions the spear (cat.no.18), sword (cat.no.19), 2 shield bosses (cat.no.20), a bowl (described as a helmet) (cat.no.21), a pot (cat.no.22) and a glass vessel (cat.no.23). Unfortunately the text is not clear in which grave or graves the second list of finds was found, although there is an implication that they may also be part of the 'war trappings'.

The 1930s finds are said to have been found at a depth of about two feet during the digging of a grave. They seem likely to be from another (female) burial but human remains are not recorded as having been seen.

## Catalogue

### *Brooches*

1. Square Headed Brooch (Nichols No.8); illus. 3

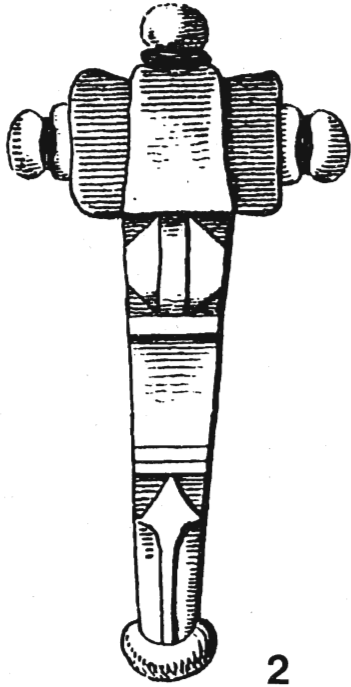
This brooch is an unusual class. It is a fusion of the Great Square Headed and the Cruciform types. It is classified by Leeds (1949) as a Kenninghall II type, Kenninghall (Norfolk) being the discovery site of the finest example of the group.

The frame around the headplate of the Wigston brooch comprises three anthropomorphic masks interspersed with zoomorphic ornamentation. The bow of the brooch bears a central stud but there is no evidence to suggest that this was originally enamelled. Zoomorphic lappets straddle the foot at its junction with the bow. The foot is the cruciform element of the brooch. It incorporates a male face comprising eyes, nose and a moustache. Beneath this are zoomorphic feet and legs. Below these are the two circles which represent the more recognisable animal which ornaments simpler cruciform brooches. The Wigston brooch terminates in a crescentic foot.

The double lug to hold the pin still survives on the rear of the brooch. A small section of iron rod survives between the lugs but the spring and pin itself are missing. Differential colouring on the rear of the foot preserves the shape and the positioning of the catchplate although the catchplate itself is missing. Catchplates of this type can be elaborately decorated and may include zoomorphic elements, gilding and silvering despite the fact that they were presumably only seen when the brooch was not being worn. The form and style of this brooch suggest it was made in the sixth century.

2. Cruciform Brooch (Nichols No.14); illus. 4.2

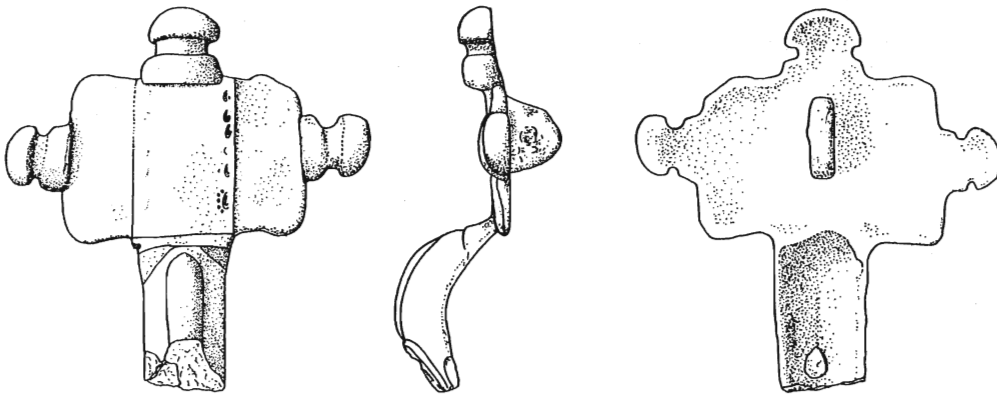
It is difficult to classify this brooch because Longman does not show the profile of the knobs on the headplate. This is a major factor for classifying cruciform brooches. Full round knobs usually belong to Aberg's Group I (Aberg 1926) and date to the second half of the fifth century. Half round knobs on a brooch with no lappets and half round nostrils belong to Group II, dating to the first half of the sixth century.



2

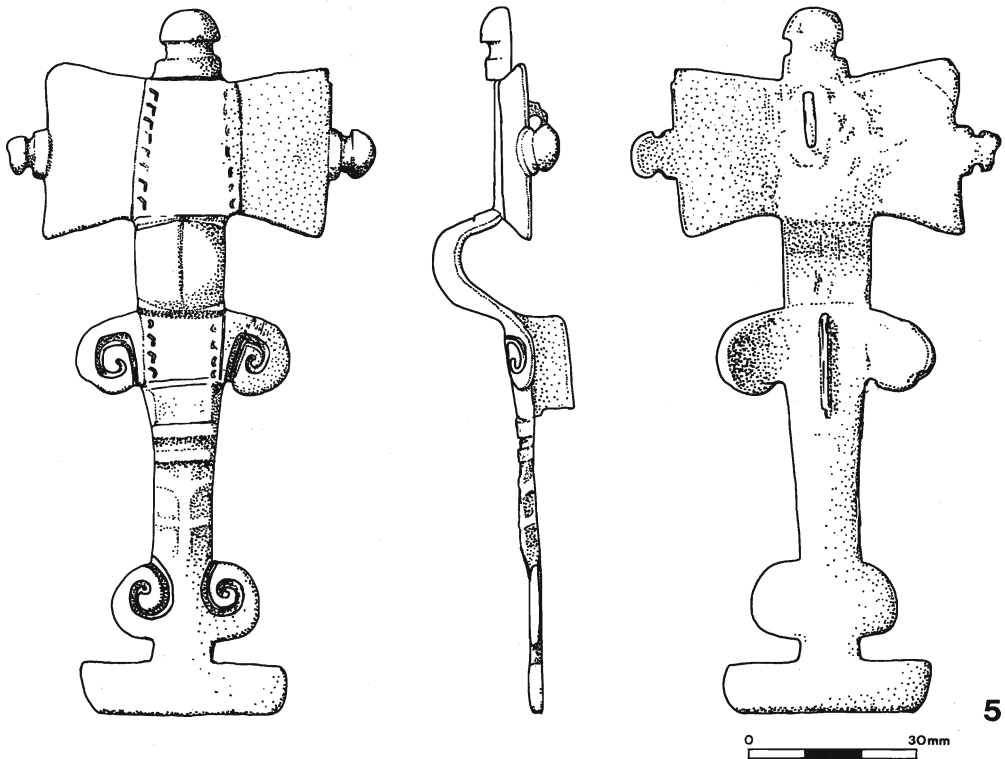


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4. Cruciform brooches. Catalogue Nos. 2, 3 and 4



5. Cruciform brooch. Catalogue No. 5

The zoomorphic element is not clear in Longman's drawing but the foot does terminate in nostrils which are grown together.

3. Cruciform Brooch Foot (Nichols No.11); illus. 4.3

This fragment is the foot of a cruciform brooch. It is not possible to classify or date firmly but it is probably sixth century.

4. Cruciform Brooch Fragment (not in Nichols); illus. 4.4

Fragment of a cruciform brooch with half round knobs. The foot is missing. The section of bow adjoining the foot is corroded and confusing. An additional 'blob' appears to have been applied crudely to the bow. It is possible that the brooch broke in antiquity and that this is an attempted repair. There are traces of punched decoration on the central headplate. It probably dates to the sixth century.

5. Cruciform Brooch (Leics. Museums Acc. No. A21.1933); illus. 5.0

This cruciform brooch has half round knobs and punched decoration on the central panel of the headplate and the upper section of the foot. The lappets are in the form of spirals as are the nostrils on the foot.

The foot itself terminates in a peculiar rectangular projection. The brooch dates to the sixth century.

6. Applied Brooch Backplate (Leics. Museums Acc. No. A22.1933); illus. 6.6

This is a backplate of an applied brooch. The disc is pierced to allow a pin lug and catchplate to pass through it. The disc is made of copper alloy but has white metal on one side. The disc has been deliberately dished in contrast to the more usual flat form. However, other dished examples are known from Northwold, Norfolk and East Shefford, Berkshire (Evison 1978, p.273). This type of brooch is more usually found in southern, Saxon, areas rather than the Anglian Midlands. Evison (1978) argues that some of these brooches were made during the fifth century but probably continued into the sixth.

7. Small Long Brooch (Nichols No.12); illus. 6.7

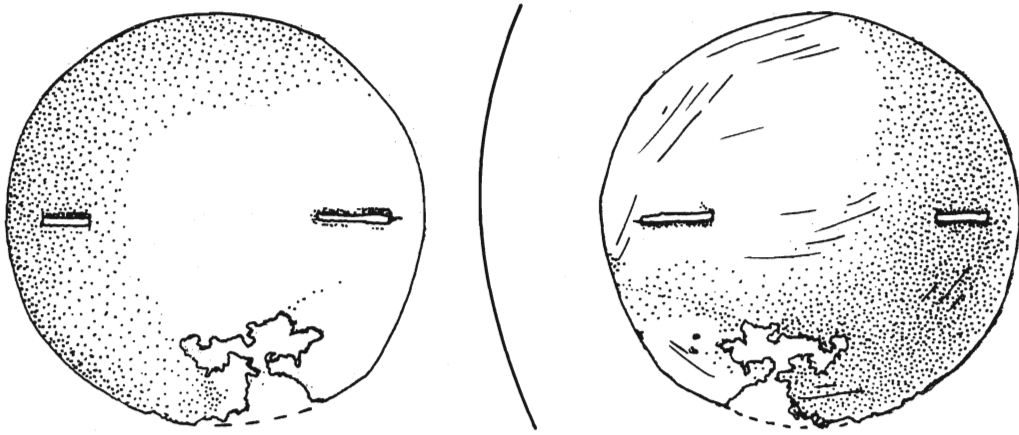
This is a square headed small long brooch. It is a plain, simple type with no decoration. There are two grooves on the rear of the headplate. The pin is missing. It probably dates to the sixth century.

8. Small Long Brooch (not in Nichols); illus. 7.8

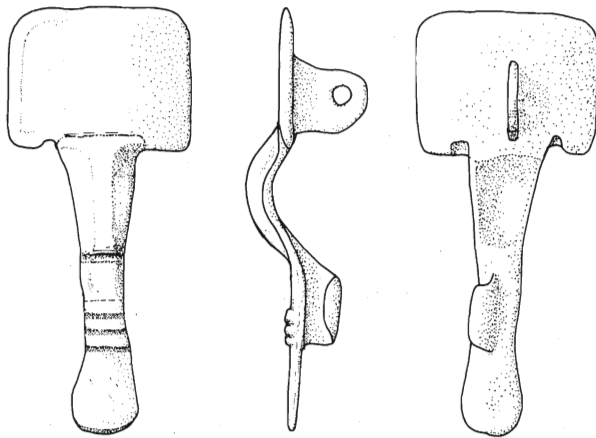
This has a trapezoidal head and a large crescentic foot. The headplate is damaged, with one corner missing. The rear of the headplate has a double lug and part of the iron pin spring remains. The pin itself is missing. It probably dates to the sixth century.

9. Small Long Brooch (not in Nichols); illus. 7.9

The brooch falls into Leeds' Cross Pattee Derivative Group E (Leeds 1945, p.26). The brooch is damaged having lost a corner of the headplate. There is punched decoration on the headplate and on the triangular foot. The pin lug and catchplate are present but the pin is missing. It probably dates to the sixth century.



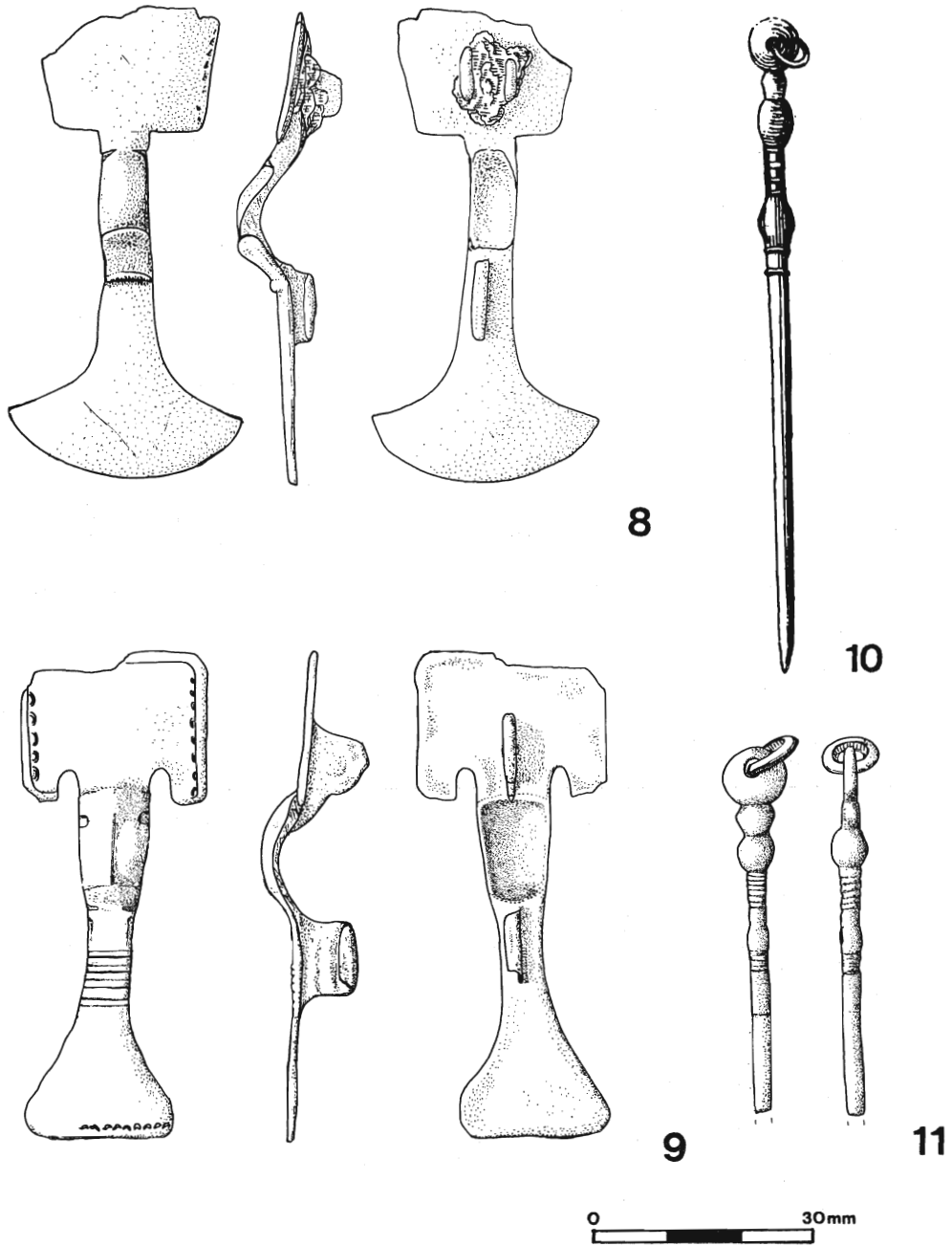
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7



6. Applied brooch backplate and small-long brooch. Cat. Nos. 6 and 7



7. Small-long brooches and pins. Catalogue Nos. 8-11.

*Pins*

Throsby notes: 'Of these there were several; some of which had the points broked off'.

10. Pin (Nichols No.16); illus. 7.10

A complete pin with a perforation at the top through which a wire ring passes. Longman's drawing shows the pin decorated with grooves and moulding.

11. Pin (not in Nichols); illus. 7.11

Upper section of a pin which may be a different object to that shown in Nichols. It is also decorated with mouldings.

*Wrist Clasps*

Throsby's collection included several fragmentary objects which he was unable to completely reconstruct or interpret. Some of these can now be identified as wrist clasps.

- 12a & b Pair of wrist clasps (Nichols No.15 and lower part of 10); illus. 8.12 a & b

In the Longman illustration No.15 resembles a peculiar type of brooch foot. However, it is in fact an almost complete wrist clasp. This object is composed of two parts which fasten together like a hook and eye. In Longman's drawing the hook and eye are closed. The lower part of 10 fits onto the upper end of No.15 and is not part of an equal arm brooch as suggested by Evison (1977). There is a very close parallel from Bagington, Warwickshire (Hines 1984, p.392). Hines classifies this as his form B18g which has a Midlands distribution and dates to the sixth century. The eye is extant.

- 13a & b Pair of wrist clasps (not in Nichols); illus. 8.13a & b

This pair matches the pair described above. Presumably they came from the same grave, one set being found at each wrist of the woman.

- 14a & b Pair of wrist clasps, both fragmentary (Nichols No.10 upper object and fragment not in Nichols); illus. 9.14 a & b

These objects go together to form the hook part of a wrist clasp. Hines (1984) classifies them as Form C3. This has a predominantly East Anglian distribution and dates to the sixth and into the seventh centuries. Other examples of this type come from Rothwell in Northamptonshire and Morning Thorpe grave 353 in Norfolk. Two fragments form part of the eye of this clasp.

*Rings*

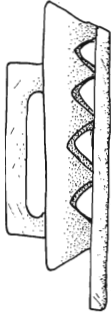
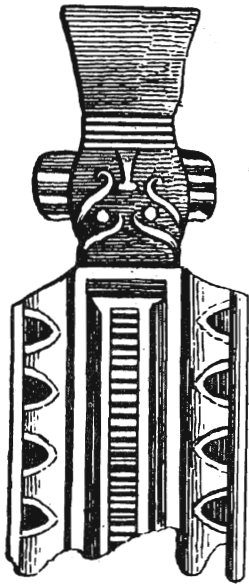
15. Ring (Nichols No.17); illus. 9.15

This is a chatelaine ring which is decorated with spherical mouldings. Throsby notes, 'Two were found exactly similar'. Only one now survives.

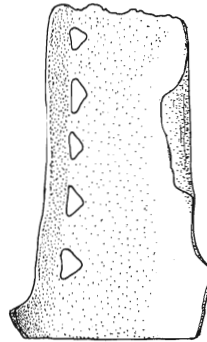
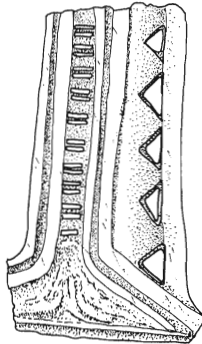
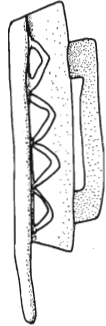
*Girdle Hangers*

16. Girdle Hanger (Nichols No.9 and 13); illus. 9.16

Nichols No.9 is the lower section of the object. No.13 is drawn upside down by Longman

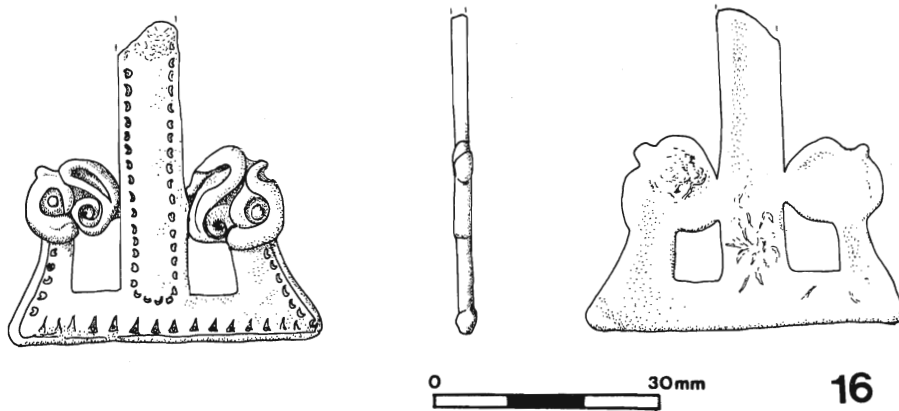
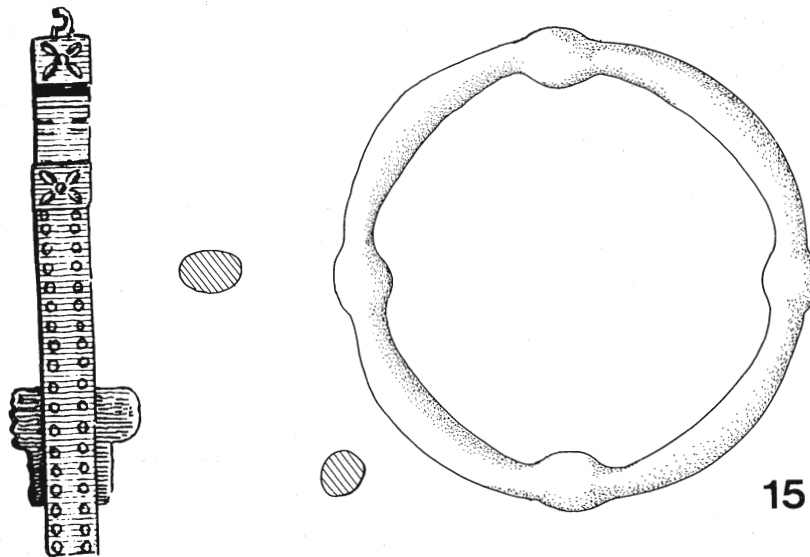
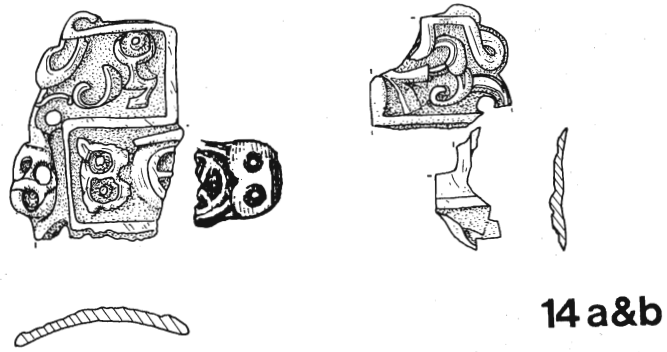


12 a & b



13 a & b

8. Wrist clasps. Catalogue Nos. 12 a & b and 13 a & b



9. Wrist clasp, ring and girdle hanger. Cat. Nos. 14 a & b, 15 and 16

and should swing round to join onto No.9 which then leaves the suspension loop at the top. The birds' heads terminals are unusual but can be paralleled at Morning Thorpe, Norfolk in graves 18 and 353. Grave 353 also has wrist clasps similar to 14a and b (see above). The extant girdle hanger has identical decoration to that illustrated by Longman but there is more shank surviving. This may represent illustrator error or suggest that there was originally a pair, as was very common.

17. Girdle Hanger (Nichols No.22); illus. 10.17

Due to an error in Nichols, this is described as a massive iron instrument (a description clearly intended for No.19). There is simple incised decoration at the top. The lower end has out turned fronds which may be stylised birds' heads. The drawing shows 4 small circles along the lower edge. These may be perforations or punched decoration. The form of the fronds, which bend back towards the shank and then have everted terminals, can be paralleled in grave 253 at Morning Thorpe, Norfolk and burial 61 at Broughton Lodge, Willoughby, Notts. The lower edge of the girdle hanger has a w-shaped projection. The writer has found no exact parallel for this but end treatments vary greatly (see Empingham II G22, Norton G1, Fonaby U/S).

*Spear*

18. Spear (Nichols No.20); illus. 10.18

Throsby describes this as being about 10" (25cm) long. The characteristic early Anglo-Saxon split socket is very clear. The apparent second point is presumably a second object (probably a nail) fused on by corrosion.

*Sword*

19. Sword (Nichols No.21); illus. 10.19

This had suffered very badly before being illustrated. Four fragments are shown and Throsby states that it was a very similar length to the spearhead. The drawing seems to show that they have tried to make the surviving pieces fit together by overlapping them, but some sections probably disintegrated when the object was lifted. Throsby notes that the metal could be crumbled in the fingers. Other fragments could have been lost before drawing. He notes considerable evidence of a scabbard, presumably wood remains preserved in iron corrosion products. This strongly suggests the object is a sword, not a spear.

*Shield Boss*

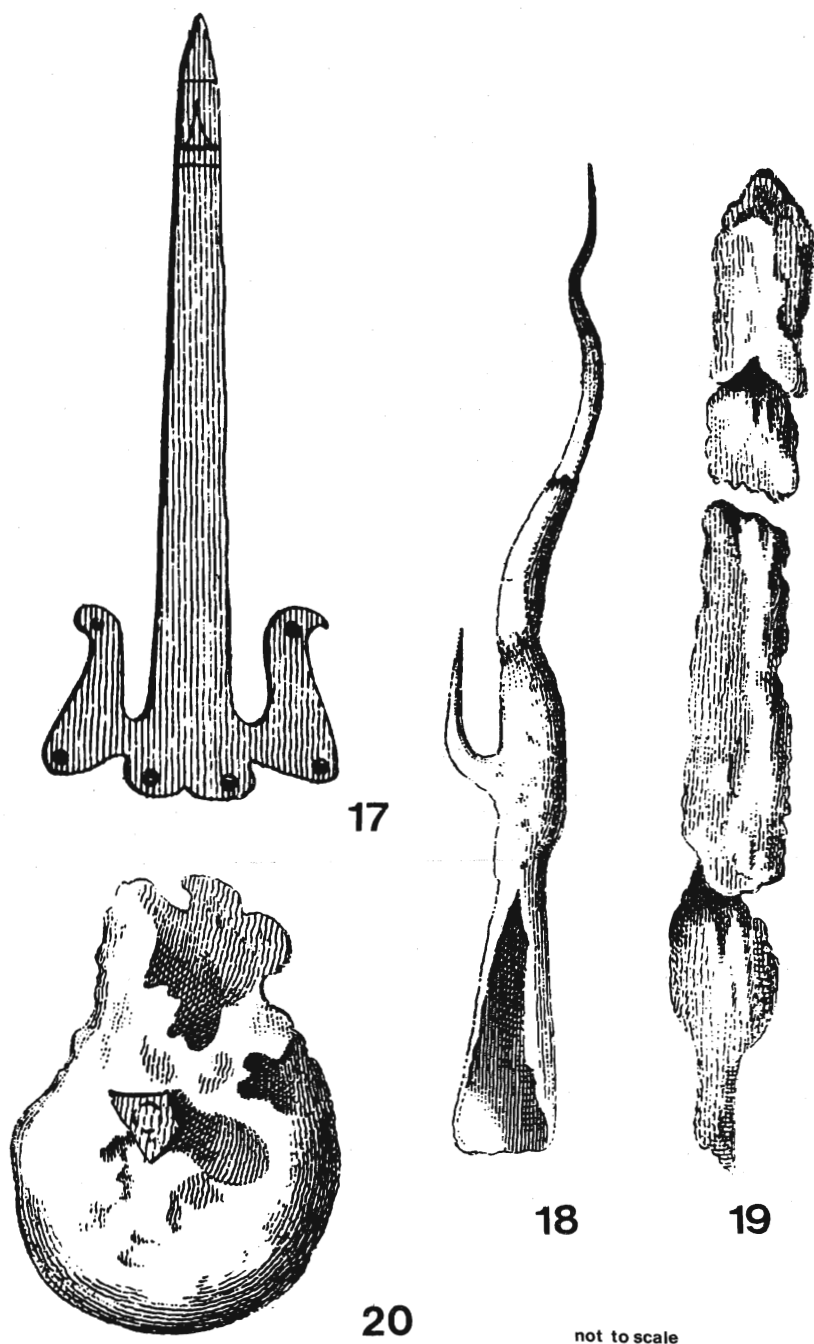
20. Shield boss (Nicholas No.25); illus. 10.20

In the Leicester Journal letter, Throsby notes that two 'iron... round covers' were found. The illustration shows a standard shield boss with a button on the top, but with damage on one side. There is a suggestion of a cloth impression in this area.

*Bowl*

21. Bowl fragments (Nichols No.23 and 24); illus. 11.21

No.24 shows the base of a bowl with a heavy foot ring soldered on. No.23 shows the out turned rim with repousse decoration. There are local examples of these objects from Empingham I, North Luffenham and Queniborough (Leicestershire) and Willoughby,



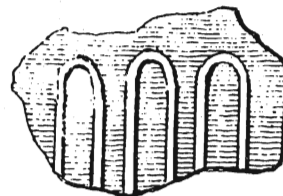
10. Girdle hanger, spearhead, sword and shield. Cat. Nos. 17-20



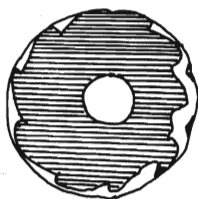
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21



23



24

11. Bowl fragments, potsherd, glass fragment and bead. Cat. Nos. 21-23 (not to scale) and 24 (scale 1:1).

Nottinghamshire. Such bowls were made of thin copper alloy sheeting and often show concentric turning marks. They are very fragile and easily deteriorate to the condition shown in the drawing (again, Throsby notes that the metal could be crumbled).

#### *Pottery*

#### 22. Pottery sherd (Nichols No.19)

The illustration shows a sherd with incised horizontal lines which is a common decoration for early Anglo-Saxon pottery.

*Glass*

23. Glass fragment (Nichols No.18)

This fragment was decorated with tight swags on the vertical axis.

*Bead*

24. Bead (Leics. Museums Acc. No.A2.1933)

This was found in the 1930s. It is made of dark, probably black, glass decorated with a white trail. This is a common Anglo-Saxon type.

**Discussion*****The Finds***

The recording of the surviving objects from the 1795 discoveries at Wigston gives us the chance to review a site hitherto only known from Throsby's accounts and Longman's illustrations.

Comparison with the surviving objects shows that Longman was a skilled illustrator (contrary to derogatory comments over the years e.g. Leeds 1949, p.81). Of the 20 pieces (objects and fragments) he illustrates, only five survive (the great square-headed brooch, the 'eye' side of the large wrist clasp, the girdle hanger fragment, the small-long brooch and the chatelaine ring). Unsurprisingly all the iron and sheet bronze objects, the pottery and the glass are lost. These would always be the most fragile. In compensation we have a 'new' cruciform and 2 small-long brooches, a second wrist clasp 'eye' and a substantial fragment of its hook (matching those illustrated), fragments of both the hook and eye of a different type of wrist clasp and half a pin. There is enough to show us that the 1795 illustrations were representative and not comprehensive. The best preserved of each type of artefact (with a few additional fragments) were illustrated. The quality of the illustrations is such that every fragment can now be positively identified.

*The Brooches*

Anglo-Saxon brooches are female dress fastenings. A woman's outer dress was made of a tube of material which fastened at the shoulders using brooches. As brooches are commonly found in graves it does suggest that women were buried fully dressed.

The small-long and cruciform brooches are common in Anglian areas. Small longs usually occur in pairs, either matching or odd, and are found at the shoulders, presumably originally fastening the outer garment. Cruciform brooches occur as either matching or unmatching pairs found at the shoulders but also as a third brooch found at the centre of the chest. This may have been used to fasten a cloak. It is just possible that cruciform fragments catalogue number 3 and 4 were originally part of the same brooch.

The applied disc brooch is unusual in that it is a Saxon type. However, brooches of this class have been found as far north as Yorkshire (Evison, 1978). The Wigston example has lost its decorative front. This may have happened in antiquity. It has also lost its pin and catchplate and could not function as a brooch in its present condition. A pendant from Willoughby, Nottinghamshire (Grave 107) is of similar shape and has a white metal surface. Re-use as a pendant seems possible.

The Kenninghall II brooch is an unusual type. It is Anglian, being a fusion of the squareheaded and cruciform traditions. Kenninghall II type brooches do not seem to occur as pairs and were probably worn as a third, central brooch.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about the brooch assemblage from Wigston is the absence of annular brooches. This is the most common brooch type from well recorded local cemeteries such as Empingham II, Leicestershire and Willoughby-on-the-Wolds, Nottinghamshire. It seems likely that annular brooches did occur at Wigston but they were either not collected from the ground or were not acquired by Throsby.

### *Pins*

Pins of this type are an Anglian female accessory. They are normally found at the neck and are presumed to act as a dress fastener, probably functioning as the equivalent of the third, central brooch. At Willoughby, Nottinghamshire they are found in three graves (12, 62/3/4 and 105). In each case they are found with annular brooches and Hines Type B7 wrist clasps. They are not seen in graves with early material and are probably a sixth century fashion.

### *Wrist Clasps*

John Hines has recently considered wrist clasps at some length (Hines, 1984). He has produced a very useful typology and discussed their origins and distributions. He argues that they are the major indicator of a migration from Scandinavia to Anglian England in the last quarter of the fifth century, but quickly established themselves as a typical part of Anglian female costume. In Scandinavia they were worn by both sexes but in England only by women. They show that a tightly sleeved garment, probably an undergarment, was the normal Anglian style.

Nine fragments of wrist clasp on the site can be reconstructed as 6 clasps, 4 being a full set (i.e. 2 hooks and 2 eyes) and the other 2 being an additional matching hook and eye. The first Hines classifies as his Form 18g. He notes this as a Midlands type and Wigston is in the heartland of the type. The other is a Hines Form C3, very similar to one from Morning Thorpe, Norfolk. This is predominantly an East Anglian type, although an example is known from Rothwell, Northamptonshire.

### *Ring*

This is an example of the so-called chatelaine ring. These were worn at the waist and are used to suspend other items, such as keys, girdle hangers etc. They do not appear to be closely datable.

### *Girdle Hangers*

Girdle hangers are another feature of Anglian female dress. They usually occur in pairs which are most frequently matching, but sometimes are odd. Therefore, the Wigston examples could come from two graves or one. Girdle hangers differ greatly in form and decoration, but the birds-head terminals are unusual, the only other examples known to the writer (S. J. Middleton) at present come from Morning Thorpe in Norfolk. The function of girdle hangers is uncertain. They resemble iron keys and have been interpreted as symbolising responsibility for the household, and by extension that the wearer was married.

### *Weapons*

A sword, spear and shield boss are illustrated but none survive. This makes classification impossible, but the three could well be associated with one another. The sword is a clear status indicator - only a small number of male graves is so furnished - and may well indicate noble status. Spears were the symbol of free status.

### *Copper Alloy Bowl*

This can locally be paralleled at Empingham I (Middleton & Liddle, forthcoming), Willoughby on the Wolds Grave 5 (Kinsley 1993), North Luffenham and Queniborough, where it is also known from a Nichols illustration (1815, pp. 135-6). Longman's illustration is a very gallant attempt at a very difficult problem: a recent need to illustrate the equally fragmentary Empingham bowl has brought the problems home to the present writers.

These have recently been discussed by Vera Evison (1987), in relation to finds at Buckland at Dover. She argues that they are of continental workmanship and are most commonly found in the Rhine and Meuse Valleys. In England they are mainly from Anglian areas and also in Kent with one each in Surrey and Essex. They are found with both men and women but are mostly in high status contexts. The Queniborough burial is of a 'warrior' with sword, spear, shield boss, buckle, 2 pots, lugged metal cooking pot and glass vessel, while the Empingham I find was, although badly plough-damaged, from a rich female burial with a silver square-headed brooch and wrist clasp and a pierced and faceted crystal.

### *The glass and pottery vessels*

Nothing very useful can be said about the pottery vessel. It was brought out of the ground in good condition but deteriorated quickly until only a rim sherd could be illustrated. The horizontal incised decoration can easily be paralleled at Thurmaston, for example (Williams, 1983). Similarly, the glass vessel is difficult to comment upon. If enough of the 'several fragments' in Throsby's possession had been illustrated the form of the vessel might have been apparent. The looped trails are the only clue. They may suggest a Kempston-type cone beaker, but this is not certain.

### *The Bead*

The single bead recovered in the 1930s is a lone survivor of what must have been an originally numerous class of objects. Again beads were presumably not collected or were not given to Throsby.

### *The Site*

#### *Occupation*

The recent trial excavation shows that there was middle to late Iron Age occupation on the south facing slope of the hill. This was succeeded by Roman occupation which lasted until at least the later fourth century. No details can be given of this settlement. All we have are a few short stretches of ditch. The amount of associated material clearly indicates that these are not merely field ditches but are closely associated with a settlement. The only evidence to suggest that this may be a villa are a few fragments of

tile (tegula and box flue). However, small amounts of such material does find its way on to low-status 'farmstead' sites as hard core, so no certainty is possible from such small scale excavation. The same area has produced enough early/middle Anglo-Saxon pottery to indicate occupation. Some may be from features but site documentation is deficient. A wide date range, from fifth to eighth century, cannot, in the present state of knowledge of hand-made pottery, be narrowed down. Deborah Sawday has tentatively suggested that 4 sherds may be Ipswich Ware. If so, this would be the first Ipswich Ware from the county. Its main distribution is East Anglian but is found in some quantity in Northamptonshire. In the absence of other local finds its presence here may suggest a high status for the site, and also indicate that it continued at least into the seventh and probably the eighth century.

The superimposition of settlements of Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon date is of interest. The conclusion that there is continuity from the Iron Age to the Roman period comes fairly readily (although material positively dated to the first century A.D. is lacking). The further assumption that there is also continuity, from the Roman to the Anglo-Saxon periods seems not unlikely. This site joins a growing body of evidence, produced mainly by field walking, of Saxons and Romans occupying the same sites (see Liddle 1994).

#### *The burials*

It is a great pity that Throsby does not assign objects to individual graves but this was not thought important in 1795 and he may not have had the information himself. It would seem that four contiguous graves were covered by stones and this may be a multiple burial. We can compare this with Willoughby graves 14, 15 and 16. This is a triple burial associated (as in the present case) with a horse burial and with stones in the upper fill. Burial 14 was in the upper fill above 15 & 16. The horse burial was associated with one of the four graves. Although Throsby did not see the bridle bit, there is absolutely no reason to disbelieve the identification - Anglo-Saxon bridle bits are of similar form to their modern counterparts. Local parallels include Wanlip (Liddle, 1980) and Willoughby with no less than 4 horse burials. In connection with the latter site, Gavin Kinsley (1993, pp.58-61) has recently discussed the rite in relation to earlier work by Hayo Vierck: 'Horse burials are associated with males and with relatively wealthy members of society'. Stallions were probably used for warfare and were buried with the owner in the same way as their weapons. Most of the horse burials are from East Anglia and the Midlands, but with a few outliers to north and south.

In the Leicester Journal account, Throsby goes on immediately from describing the four burials to describe the spear, sword, two shield bosses, the bowl, the pot and the glass vessel. It is possible that this group (although perhaps including only one shield boss) may be the contents of a single 'warrior' grave. The group is very similar to the Queniborough find (Nichols 1815). Certainly, the sword, bowl and glass vessel are all high status indicators and would be most appropriate in a burial associated with a horse burial.

The wrist clasp set, chatelaine ring and pins are also associated with burials in this group and clearly indicate a female burial. It seems likely that this is a family group, either buried simultaneously or with burials added over time and then sealed off with the stones. The group appears to be sixth century in date.

The date range of the cemetery as a whole is difficult to ascertain as only a small group of objects is available and most objects are not closely datable. The earliest may

be the small-long brooches, which could (at a pinch) be as early as the late fifth century. In truth, everything known from this cemetery could be easily accommodated in the sixth century. This cannot rule out either earlier or later activity.

We have already seen that the sword, bowl and glass vessel are all status indicators and we can add the wrist clasps, both sets of which are particularly elaborate. The form C3 wrist clasps (Cat.no.14) are also unusual for the Midlands (most examples coming from East Anglia), while composite brooches (Cat.no.6) are from the south - although whether this was a whole brooch or merely the back plate used as a pendant (cf Willoughby G.107) we will never know. The presence of such exotica may also be considered a high status indicator.

As we have seen the cemetery lies immediately north of an area producing some evidence of broadly contemporary occupation. This joins an increasing number of Leicestershire sites (e.g. Wanlip, Empingham I, Sandy Lane at Melton, Empingham II, Foxton and Huncote) where cemeteries and settlements appear to be directly associated (Liddle forthcoming). The suggestion that cemeteries served many sites in an area and were often located on boundaries now seems less likely. Instead, as apparently also in the Roman period (e.g. Scalford Brook at Melton, Rothley and Empingham villas 1 & 2), each rural site would have its own small cemetery. This is not to say that larger burial sites performing a different, perhaps a regional, role do not exist. Spong Hill, Norfolk, which has produced over 2,000 burials must be one of these. They are not, however, the norm and may be associated with other kinds of site, probably of a religious nature.

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