

March 26th, 1866.

THE REV. ASSHETON POWNALL, F.S.A., in the chair.

After the transaction of other business it was notified that the Society has removed from the room lately rented at the Permanent Library, Leicester, and that it now rents for the use of members, a room at Messrs. Crossley and Clarke's, which is open during the usual hours of business.

It was also Resolved that the usual summer meeting be held this year at Market Harborough, in conjunction with the Northamptonshire Society, and a sub-Committee was appointed to make the necessary arrangements.

The following antiquities, &c., were exhibited.

By MR. JOHN HUNT (Thurnby): Fragments of ancient pottery lately found in excavating ground near St. Margaret's Church, Leicester, belonging to Messrs. N. Corah and Sons. The fragments consisted of the upper portion of a huge two handled amphora, and parts of a mortarium. Mr. Hunt exhibited other miscellaneous fragments from St. Nicholas Street, Leicester.

By MR. WEATHERHEAD: An inedited Leicestershire tradesman's token, issued in 1669, by Henry Flower, of Loughborough, "His Halfpenny."

By MESSRS. J. AND T. SPENCER: A Latin manuscript on vellum, described as being a MS. Bible of the fourteenth century. Many portions have been destroyed.

By MR. VINCENT WING: An impression of the Common Seal of the Hospital of S. Bartholomew, Rochester, founded by Gundulph, in 1078.

By MR. NORTH: Several relics from an Anglo-Saxon burial ground, at Melton Mowbray, upon which he read the following remarks:—

ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY AT MELTON MOWBRAY.

Archæological research has clearly demonstrated that our Saxon ancestors in this country used two kinds of interment of their dead: cremation, or burning the body, and deposit of the remains of the bones in an urn; and simple inhumation, or burying of the body entire, dressed in its usual dress, and accompanied according to the sex, position, &c., of the person interred, by various warlike weapons, or personal requisites and ornaments. The second of these modes of interment was, perhaps, the more prevalent one in this country, and it is well for historical enquiry that it was so, because it is from the grave of the Anglo-Saxon that we learn almost all we know of the state of his civilization, and so are enabled to form opinions—crude though they may be—of his mode

of life, and of his personal appearance, as evidenced by the articles which (having been highly prized by him when alive) were, as marking the affection of his relatives and friends, deposited with him in the grave after death.

That the body was generally clothed is shown by the discovery in some Anglo-Saxon graves of shreds of woollen cloth, mere fragments, but sufficient to prove the custom referred to, which custom is also further demonstrated by the frequent finding of the buckle of the girdle which once encircled the waist, and from which in the case of the men, the knife and sword were suspended.

The objects found in the graves of the men of the Anglo-Saxon period—for to them, passing by the graves of the women, must my remarks be restricted this morning—are usually warlike weapons of offence and defence. Taking for example a grave opened some years ago on Chatham Downs (and we could scarcely, perhaps, find a better specimen of the mode of interment adopted in the case of an Anglo-Saxon warrior), near the right shoulder was found a spear head, the socket of which still contained a decayed portion of the wooden shaft; near the last bone of the vertebræ was found a brass buckle, which had formerly fastened the girdle or belt. On the right side, near the hip, was a knife, with impressions of its case still remaining upon it; between the thigh bones lay the umbo, or boss of the shield. On the left side was an iron sword, thirty-five inches in length, and at the feet of the skeleton was a vessel of red earth, globular-shaped, twelve inches in height, and five in its greatest diameter.

Similar objects—as is well known—have been exhumed in many other instances, our own county having furnished many valuable relics.

The length of the Anglo-Saxon spear was, as might be expected, by no means uniform, it varied from about five feet to eight feet. The length of the shaft is generally traceable in a carefully opened grave by a dark line of decomposed wood extending from the socket of the metal spear head to a ferule, which usually protected its lower extremity. The spear-head itself varies much in length, being sometimes as long as twenty inches or even more.

The Anglo-Saxon sword, as we gather from specimens found in graves, was usually a double-edged weapon, in length, including the handle, about thirty-five inches, in width about two inches. The hilt having been generally made of some perishable material (most probably of wood), has in almost all cases entirely disappeared. It, however, not unfrequently happens that a small cross bar is found at the extremity of the handle, which probably served in some way to secure the hilt of wood. Metal hilts have been found, but they are rare. The sword was worn in a scabbard made of wood, and probably covered with leather. The discovery of swords with portions of the wooden scabbard remaining upon them is by no means uncommon.

The knife suspended from the girdle on the opposite side to the sword was an article probably as much for personal domestic use as for warlike or defensive purposes. These knives vary considerably in size, and, like the swords, are sometimes found with fragments of the wooden case still adhering to them.

The Anglo-Saxon shield, from the fact of its central boss or umbo of iron with its fittings being the only portion discovered, was clearly of wood. The umbo is generally found resting on the breast, or between the thigh bones of the skeleton. It is usually conical in shape, terminating in what are considered the early interments, with a kind of button, and in those of later date with a point. Its diameter at the base is about five inches. At that part it has a projecting rim, through which it was fastened by rivets to the wooden shield. With the umbo is frequently found a strip of metal, which there is every reason to believe was the brace or handle of the shield. A circular piece of wood was cut out of the shield under the umbo or boss; across this opening, at the back of the shield, the strip of iron passed, and which, when grasped by the hand of the warrior, was protected by the boss on the outside.

In Anglo-Saxon graves is sometimes also found a vessel of earthenware or glass, of a type well known to antiquaries. These vessels are thought to have been appropriated to some rites having reference to purification by water or by wine.

In addition to these ordinarily discovered articles, others are occasionally found which need not now claim our attention. Although solitary Saxon graves are sometimes met with, it is clear that as a rule the interments were made in groups or cemeteries. It is to one such cemetery existing in this county that I now again direct the attention of this Society.

About the year 1860, some men employed by Mr. Fetch, of Melton Mowbray (a member of this Society), found, when working for clay upon high ground on the north side of that town, a number of skeletons, and in one or more of the graves some beads, a knife, and some pottery, all of a character indicating their Anglo-Saxon origin. These were exhibited, and some valuable remarks made upon them, and upon the geology of the district, by Mr. Ingram, of Belvoir, at a meeting of this Society, on the 31st of March, 1862. Upon inquiry, Mr. Fetch found that very many interments had been previously discovered, and the contents of the graves scattered by the workmen, who, being ignorant of the value of such relics, took no care of them; indeed, the beads, &c., just referred to, were found in one of the cottages appropriated by the children as toys. Again, in 1862, seven skeletons were uncovered and were carefully examined by Mr. Ingram, and reported upon to this Society at the meeting just noticed. Upon that occasion no relics whatever were discovered. From circumstances then detailed,

Mr. Ingram inferred that the bodies had been interred without any clothing whatever. It is, perhaps, more probable that they belonged to the labouring class, the serfs and bondmen, who would be buried in their rude ordinary dress, without weapon and without ornament, every vestige of which dress would in the lapse of centuries entirely pass away. It should be remarked that the skeletons were found upon the substratum of gravel which lies at a depth of about two feet from the surface of the soil, and that their position was east and west, the feet being towards the east.

Nothing more—so far as I can learn—was discovered in this cemetery until a few weeks ago, when on removing a further portion of the surface soil, in order to work the gravel and clay beneath, more skeletons were found, and, with them, the interesting relics which I have (through the courtesy of Mr. Fetch) the pleasure of producing this morning. The interments appear to have been made with care and uniformity, and the disposition of the skeletons was still about east and west, the feet being towards the east.

In one grave were found the spear-head, knife, and umbo of shield now exhibited. The spear-head, found on the right side of the skeleton, measures 15 inches from the point to the barb, which is $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide at the greatest width; its entire length, from the point to the end of the socket, is $22\frac{3}{4}$ inches; an unusual length, from 10 to 15 inches being the ordinary one. The knife is $8\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, and was found close by the ribs on the right side of the skeleton. The conical umbo of the shield, being three inches high and $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter at its base, including the rim, with its brace $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, and its rivets, was found upon the centre of the skeleton. In other graves were found the other articles now shown, which include a second umbo of a shield, about the same size as the one just described, various spear-heads measuring respectively $16\frac{1}{2}$, 11, 11, 9, 9, and 6 inches in length, and three knives measuring respectively 5, $4\frac{1}{2}$, and 4 inches in length. In a grave—which, I cannot now learn—was found the urn now produced, measuring $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter at its mouth, and being $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter at its central or widest part. A smaller urn was found with the earlier relics. The last object claiming your attention is an excellent specimen of a double-edged Anglo-Saxon sword, $34\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, and $2\frac{1}{8}$ in width, having the small cross-bar mentioned before as pertaining to the hilt, and bearing upon it many fragments of the wooden scabbard in which it was originally encased. In cutting away the earth sheer down for several feet, the end of this sword was found projecting through the section. It was carefully taken out by Mr. Fetch and Mr. Hickson, and the spot marked for minute examination. Mr. Nevinson and myself, by Mr. Fetch's permission visited the spot on the 8th instant, and though the surface soil was care-

fully removed, neither there nor in several other places opened in our presence, were any other traces found of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Melton Mowbray, in which, according to Mr. Fetch's computation between fifty and sixty graves have already been disturbed. There is every reason to believe that other interesting discoveries will be made.

By MR. THOMAS HICKSON a hone or whetstone, found in 1860, in the burial ground just described by Mr. North.

Votes of thanks to the exhibitors and the Chairman terminated the proceedings.

May 28th, 1866.

THE REV. J. H. HILL in the chair.

The following gentlemen were elected members:—Rev. Septimus Andrews, Market Harborough; Augustin B. Fry, Esq., Kibworth House, Market Harborough; T. B. Saunt, Esq., Market Harborough; John Harris Cooper, Esq., Brox-hill, Oadby; the Rev. A. B. Wrey, Ashby Parva Rectory; the Rev. Richard Pulteney, Ashley; Mr. J. P. Jennings, Market Harborough; and Mr. Felix Gill, Narborough.

It was reported to the Society that the arrangements for the General Meeting at Market Harborough, on the 21st and 22nd June are now completed.

The following communication was received from Mr. North (Honorary Secretary), and ordered to be entered upon the minutes of the Society:—

“Southfields, Leicester, May 28, 1866.

“Dear Sirs,—It is with feelings of very considerable regret that I have to announce to this Society the decease of one of its founders, and of its first honorary officers, the Rev. John Morewood Gresley, M.A., formerly Rector of Overseile, in this county, and latterly Master of Etwall Hospital, in the County of Derby.

“At the first meeting of the Leicestershire Architectural and Archæological Society, held in this room, on the 10th of January, 1855, Mr. Gresley was one of the three honorary secretaries then appointed to carry out the resolutions of the Committee at its various meetings, to urge, as he best could, the claims of the Society upon all gentlemen in Leicestershire interested in local history and antiquities, and to press forward the claims of architecture and archæology to at least a share of that attention from men of reflective minds and education which it was deemed worthy of receiving. A reference to the minute book of the Society, and