

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, A.D. 450—700.

By J. F. HEAD, F.S.A.

Foreword

I am under obligations to many kind friends for assistance in different ways, not only in the preparation of this paper, but over a long period of years in connexion with the subjects with which it is concerned.

To Mr. E. Thurlow Leeds I wish to offer my sincerest expression of gratitude for his counsel and generous response to requests for information. And especially do I desire to thank Mr. O. G. S. Crawford, Col. Guy Crouch, Mr. W. F. Grimes, Mr. F. G. Gurney, Mr. T. D. Kendrick, Mr. J. N. L. Myres, Dr. K. P. Oakley and Dr. A. B. Searle.

I am much indebted to Miss C. Baker of the Aylesbury Museum for her co-operation and the facilities afforded me at the Museum; to Mr. W. F. Grimes for his care and interest in the preparation and drawings of the maps; to Mr. H. R. Mann for his skilful and informative illustrations of the Buckinghamshire material and the foreign brooches; and to Mr. C. O. Waterhouse for his admirable rendering of the Mildenhall design.

It should be added that opinions expressed by the writer in the course of this paper are not necessarily shared by those whose names appear above.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, A.D. 450—700.

That obscure period in our national history which saw the withdrawal of the Romans and the arrival and establishment of our Teutonic forefathers is remarkable for an absence of reliable contemporary record, and the area which was formed some 500 years later into the county of Buckingham lies hidden in the darker of the shadows. Historically, the single and sudden gleam emitted by an entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle — a series of annals compiled several hundred years after the event to which they refer— does little but emphasise the difficulties and darkness which surround it. The familiar paragraph relates, under the year 571, how a West Saxon leader, Cuthwulf by name, fought with the Britons at a place called Bedcanford and took the four towns of Limbury, Aylesbury, Benson and Eynsham. A hundred and fifteen years later an exiled young prince — a descendant of Cuthwulf's brother but bearing a British name— took refuge in what was described as 'the deserts of Chiltern'¹ before emerging to seize the Wessex throne. And to some time between the middle of the 7th and close of the 8th centuries² may be ascribed the origin of that enigmatical record of assessments known to us as the Tribal Hidage. Compiled probably from a Mercian source and with some fiscal object in mind, it allots 4,000 hides to a folk named the Cilternsaetan who were then occupying the plain at the foot of the Chiltern Hills.³ If we are to assume the word 'hide' to mean the land holding of an average peasant from which he and his dependents drew their support⁴ this would indicate the presence

¹ Life of Wilfrid, 686. Eddi.

² J. Brownbill, *English Historical Review*, XL.497.
F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 294.

³ *English Place-Name Society*, II. Bucks, p.XII.
Map of Britain in the Dark Ages, South Sheet, O.S.,
F. M. Stenton, *op.cit.*, 43.

⁴ F. M. Stenton, *op.cit.*, 276.

of 4,000 households in the region at that time. But, as Professor Stenton has warned us, no accurate computation of hides could have been made by these primitive English peoples, while the use of round numbers connotes an inevitable exaggeration.⁵

The documentary evidence indicates, therefore, *prima facie*:

- a. The presence of Britons at Bedcanford and, by implication, their occupation of the Vale of Aylesbury in the year 571.

(It may be observed that the identification of Bedcanford with Bedford is not acceptable to the Place-Name Society, but Dr. R. H. Hodgkin has offered a reconstruction of the situation based in part upon such an assumption).⁶

- b. An absence of settlement in the Chiltern Hills around the year 685; or at most a sparse occupation not adverse to the presence of an outlawed leader with British connexions who, with his followers, was seeking to consolidate and seize the West Saxon authority.
- c. That by the second half of the 7th century a fair-sized and presumably thriving community had established themselves in the Vale of Aylesbury and the surrounding district.

The evidence of the place-names, in general, is not adverse to these conclusions;⁷ and responsible anthropologists have professed to see the existence in modern times of a dark-coloured Celtic element in the population of Bucks, and even more emphatically in Beds, exceeded only by that found in the

⁵ *op. cit.*, 292.

⁶ R. H. Hodgkin, *A History of the Anglo-Saxons*, I. 189.

⁷ *English Place-Name Society*, Bucks, Introduction.

west and south-west of England.⁸ It is probable that a closer examination of the place-names, field-names and furlong-names of the county will in time throw further light on this question,⁹ although it should be added that when applied to the south-western counties the seeming inconsistencies in such criteria have been thought to require further elucidation.¹⁰

But upon examining the archaeological material grave misgivings are at once aroused as to the credibility of the early Chronicle entries and in particular those relating to the establishment of the West Saxon dynasty. It is not possible in the space here available to recapitulate the evidence which was marshalled and analysed by Mr. E. Thurlow Leeds in an epoch-making article in 1925,¹¹ but so far from confirming the traditional story of a south-coast landing with a subsequent northerly advance to the Upper Thames Valley—the capture of the four towns is specified in exactly reverse order to such a line of march—there are strong reasons to suppose that the invaders came by a quite different route or routes, and at a substantially earlier date. Moreover, many past students of the period have found themselves unable to sub-

⁸ J. Beddoe, *The Races of Britain*.

W. Bradbrooke and F. G. Parsons, *Journal Royal Anthr. Inst.*, LI, 113.

Note. The grounds and statistics advanced in support of these assertions are open to obvious objections as, for example, uncertainty as to the average colouring of the pre-Saxon population. Nevertheless, I have frequently noted, for what it is worth, families who have been established in Bucks for many generations who persistently display those dark and alert characteristics more commonly associated with the natives of Cornwall and Wales, and, in my opinion, resembling those of the Basques of France and Spain.

⁹ And in particular the researches of our member, Mr. F. G. Gurney.

¹⁰ R. H. Hodgkin, *op.cit.*, pp. 167-172.

¹¹ *The West Saxon Invasion and the Icknield Way*, *History* X, 97, ff., and *Antiq. Journ.*, XIII, 229.

scribe to a situation which postulates the presence of a British enclave in our neighbourhood as late as the year 571. Solutions of the latter problem—which include a suggestion that the word 'Britons' had slipped into the entry 'inadvisedly' and that the adversaries the Saxons encountered were in fact another Teutonic tribe who had penetrated into the south-east Midlands,¹²—have been sufficiently numerous to testify to their inadequacy. But modern opinion is less hostile to the idea of a late native survival in our area, and a recent writer of acknowledged authority has said 'in the light of the archaeological and place-name evidence both the alleged date and the British identity of the losing side in this fight are in no way improbable. . . .'¹³

Consideration must now be given to the relief, soils and communications of the region for here may lie a key to the part solution of our problems.

The shape of the county can be likened in some degree to an irregular footprint divided conveniently across the instep by the Upper Icknield Way, and it may not be, for our purpose, an oversimplification to describe the northern half as a low-lying clay plain characterised by the number of its streams and marshes, and the southern half as a plateau remarkable for its comparative absence of water. (Fig. 1.)

¹² C. Oman. *England before the Norman Conquest*, 230.

¹³ R. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres, *Roman Britain and The English Settlements*, 408.

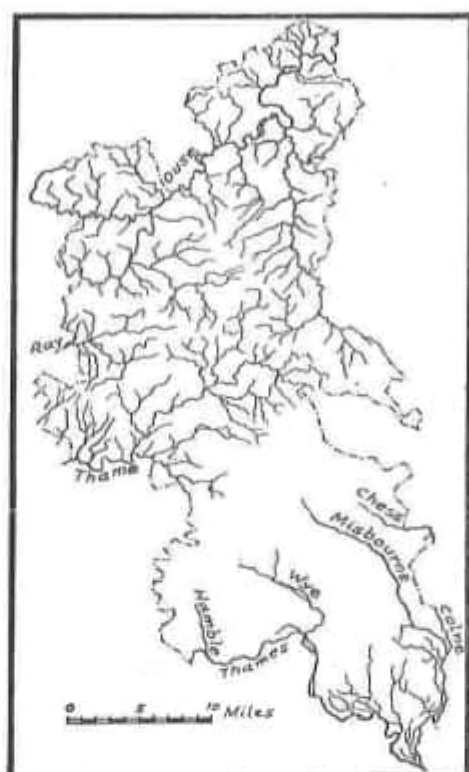


Fig. 1.

The Upper Icknield Way — the Icenhytle of the Risborough charter and among the oldest routes of communication in England—emanates from East Anglia and crossing the county by way of Edlesborough, Wendover and Ellesborough passes below the Whiteleaf and Bledlow Crosses to continue its journey to the Thames at Streatley and beyond. Its original route, with perhaps a few exceptions, lies just above the level of the springs which, in Bucks, rise along the edge of the Chalk belt at the foot of the steep northwestward-facing Chiltern escarpment. That it was the spring levels and not the footslopes of the hills which determined the local variations in its course seems apparent from the fact that between Shirburn and Ewelme in Oxford-

shire, where the Chalk outcrop at the foot of the hills often widens with a consequent distancing of the spring-heads into the Vale, the route no longer adheres closely to the ins-and-outs of the hillsides but takes a line across the more open country well away from the crest of the hills. Nevertheless, except in the Wendover and Risborough gaps, the open chalkland of the juniper-clad escarpment and its immediate neighbourhood formed an advance guard to steep ranges of waterless hills; in the main clay-capped and bearing a close oak scrub. These ranges edged Icknield on its southern side and formed a wilderness and wall which, if not an actual deterrent, could have offered no attraction to prospective Saxon settlers in search of land to farm, and to them an adequate and easily accessible water supply seems to have been a primary consideration.

But neither, I suggest, was it practical for immigrants to turn northwards out of the Way into the Vale. There, those island sites formed by the outcrops of Portland and Purbeck Beds — and in particular the ridge of high ground upon which the villages of Stone and Dinton lie—are apparent from the route but between them and the Way, and below the spring levels, lies an uninterrupted boggy belt some two to three miles in width formed from the Gault and Kimmeridge Clays. To-day, well cultivated and comparatively well drained, this clay belt is often waterlogged and, except in times of drought, only to be crossed by established paths. In earlier times, unditched, uncleared and unfit for habitation or cultivation, the heavy waterlogged soil must have carried the densest of woods and undergrowth¹⁴ conspiring with innumerable runnels and swampy tracts to form an almost impenetrable barrier parallel to the Way, and separating it from the rising ground of the dip-slope of the Portland and Purbeck Beds.

¹⁴ H. A. Wilcox, *The Woodlands and Marshlands of England*, 14.

If this reconstruction is correct we may see in the Upper Icknield Way—as far as Bucks is concerned—a corridor of communication crossing the county but sealed off on either side; except perhaps where the Akeman Street on its course from abandoned Verulamium to Aylesbury and the west crosses the Way near Tring in the Berkhamsted gap.¹⁵

What other routes may have been favourable to initial Saxon penetration and settlement? None, I conceive, but the Thames and its tributaries. Mr. Leeds has shown that the Saxons in the main seem to have been guided in their first settlements by the river-systems and were influenced but little by the Roman sites and roads.¹⁶ And in any case the latter in Bucks, with the above-mentioned exception, were confined to the Watling Street where it crosses the neck of the northern peninsula, and the Silchester-Towcester road as it passes along the northern outskirts of the county.

In the sense of the Berkshire Ridgeway there is no through Chiltern ridgeway in Bucks—indeed for reasons which it is not necessary here to discuss I am doubtful whether the Chiltern ridgeway in Oxfordshire was ever of more than local importance—and the few other local tracks and branch ridgeways which existed can, in early Saxon times, have played small part in the settlement of the region.

The Thames forms, of course, the southern boundary of the Chiltern plateau as far as Fawley, near Henley, but whether those first colonists who established themselves so many years prior to 571 at Sutton Courtenay and beside its upper reaches came up the river, or, as Mr. Leeds so convincingly contends, along the Icknield Way, there is nothing in Bucks to confirm the former suggestion. The

¹⁵ T. Codrington, *Roman Roads in Britain*, 240-242.

¹⁶ *The Arch. of the Anglo-Saxon Setts.*, 17 ff.

Taplow barrow, on the earliest dating,¹⁷ cannot indicate more than the presence of early sixth century settlers on the Buckinghamshire banks, and at present no evidence exists to indicate a pagan penetration of the dry Chiltern hinterland, except along the valley of the Wye. Whether a hostile element at this time in the population of London was a discouraging factor in the use of the river route may eventually be deduced from the results of the excavations we all hope to see take place in the bomb-damaged sites of the City.

North of the Thames, its tributary the Colne forms the eastern boundary to the county, and its wide floodplain and spreads of black peaty low-lying marsh separate the Chiltern plateau from the Middlesex clays. Occasional small spreads of Reading Beds were used in Iron Age times as at Harefield on the Middlesex side, but the river appears to have had no attraction to early Saxon settlers, and no evidence at present exists for their presence or use of the stream. It is not improbable that the wide spreads of brickearth and clays around its delta together with the unattractive nature, in early times, of the surrounding country were insufficient inducement to early voyagers to leave the main stream of the Thames.

Areas of heavy woodlands and clays shut off the county on its Hertfordshire side; as did the forests of the Oolite belt in the north, and Bernwood in the west.

If then this unavoidably detailed mise-en-scène is acceptable it reveals, at the time we are considering, an almost islanded region, hard to reach and difficult to penetrate; offering at best a handful of sites indifferently suited to settlement. Mr. Myres has said: ' . . . that something did

¹⁷ T. D. Kendrick, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, 76 ff. 87-88.

prevent much Saxon settlement in central and North Buckinghamshire before the formation of Ceawlin's empire in the third quarter of the sixth century would seem to be a natural conclusion from the present state of the evidence.¹⁸ May not the explanation be found in the topographical conditions prevailing at a time when the volume of settlement was perhaps yet not disproportionate to the number of better and more easily accessible sites elsewhere available?

If we now turn to such archaeological material as is available from the county we shall see at once it is insufficient to permit of any drastic or far-reaching conclusions. Apart from the spectacular riches of the Taplow chieftain, which are in a class, as far as Bucks is concerned, by themselves, the material is in fact meagre and not very informative. But with the foregoing topographical reconstruction in mind this is only what is to be expected.

Supplementing the distribution map (fig. 2) the sites with their relevant details are noted below, and I have classified them under the routes or areas by which I think the initial settlement was effected.

¹⁸ *op. cit.*, 408.

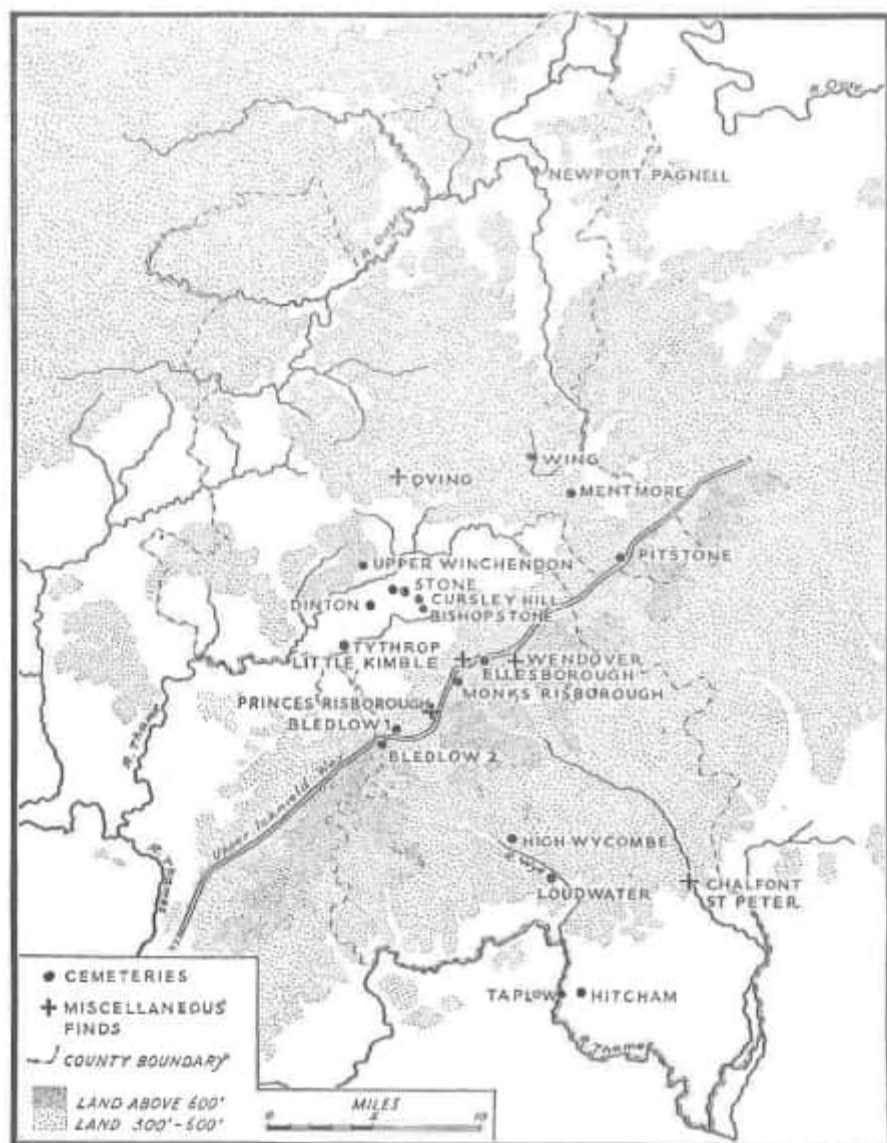


Fig. 2.

SCHEDULE OF SITES.

Groups.	Inhumations.	Cremations.	Saucer and Applied Brooches.				Other Brooches, Belt-Plates and Pendants.		Other Objects.		References.
			Geometric.		Zoomorphic.			No.		No.	
			Saucer.	Applied.	Saucer.	Applied.					
The Thames and Tributaries Group. <i>The Thames.</i>											
HITCHAM	5 E.							Sword. Shield-boss.	1 1	V.C.H. Bucks, I. 204.	
TAPLOW 1	1 A.									E. T. Leeds, Arch. of the Anglo-Saxon Setls., 67, and Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Arch., 64, 75-7. T. D. Kendrick, Anglo-Saxon Art, 76 ff., 85, 87-8. N. Åberg, The Anglo-Saxons in England, 10-11, 154. G. Baldwin Brown, The Arts in Early England, iv, 638. V.C.H. Bucks I. 199 ff.	
<i>The Wye.</i>											
LOUDWATER 2 ...	3 E.							Beads.		O.S. Dark Ages Map, E.7. Arch. XCI. 68.	
HIGH WYCOMBE ...	2 E.					Circular Gold Pendant.	1	Iron "weapon."	1	V.C.H. Bucks, I. 195. G. Baldwin Brown, The Arts in Early England, IV. 540. Inf. F. Colmer, Esqre., 12.1.39. Inf F. Skull, Esqre., 22.3.39.	

MONKS RISBOROUGH	...	30 E.									J. Sheahan, Hist. & Top. Bucks (1862), 187. O.S. 6in. Bucks, Sheet XXXVII N.E.
PRINCES RISBOROUGH 2	...										Miscellaneous Find, V.C.H. Bucks, I., Distribution Map, p. 194
BLEDLOW, The Cop	...	2 A.	5 A.								Records of Bucks, XIII. 321 ff.
BLEDLOW, The Warren	...	10 E.									O.S. 6in. Bucks Sheet XXXVII S.W. Inf. C. Skilbeck, Esqre., 23.10.'42.
Aylesbury Group. CURSLEY HILL, (nr. Bishopstone)	...	50 E.	2	1	2						Records of Bucks, V. 23. Arch. LXIII. 169, 172 (Saucer Brooches).
						Belt-plate, Bronze	1	Buckle (Iron) and			
						Small-long brooch.	1	Plate (Tinned).	1		
						Square-headed		Urn.	1		
						small-long	4	Axe.	1		
						brooches.		Spearheads.	9		N. Åberg, The Anglo-Saxons
								Knives.	7		in England, 17 (Saucer
								Swords.	2		Brooches).
								Shield-bosses.	3		E. T. Leeds, Early Anglo-
								Tweezers	3		Saxon Art and Arch., 7
								Pins, Bronze.	2		(Belt-plate).
								Bronze Ring.	1		G. Baldwin Brown, The Arts
								Pick and bronze			in Early England, IV. 563,
								tube on ring			637 (Belt-plate).
								Beads.			V.C.H. Bucks I. 199 (Belt
											Plate).
											Arch. XCI. 101, with Distribu-
											tion Map, fig. 24.
											R. Coll. of Surgeons Mus.,
											Nos. 4.2351-3.

BISHOPSTONE CHURCH	10 E.		1	Disc Brooches.	2	Aylesbury Museum.
STONE, Vicarage Garden ...	3 E.	1		Back plates of four applied brooches.		4 ? Br. Museum, Guide to A.S. 1 Ants. 35. 1 Arch. XXX. 545, and XXXIV., 1 23-26. 1 J. Akerman, Pagan Saxondom, pl. XXXVIII. No. 1 (Saucer Brooch). V.C.H. Bucks, 1.196-7.
STONE, Near old Windmill	20 E.	2				
DINTON	15 E.					1 J. Douglas, Nenia Britannica, 1 pl. XVI. figs 4, 5, 6, and p. 69. 2 Records of Bucks, ii. 137-9. 1 Arch. X. 169 and pl. xviii. V.C.H. Bucks, I. 197-8.
MENTMORE (various sites)	20 E.	1				1 Arch. XXXV. 379-81 and 1 LXIII., 168. 2 Proc. Soc. Ant., 1st ser., iii. 1 72-3. V.C.H. Bucks, I. 198. Arch. LXIII. 168 and fig 8, a. (Saucer brooch).
WING	3 A.					Arch. XXXV. 381. Proc. Soc. Ant., 1st Ser., iii. 72-3.

Newport Pagnell.	50 E.		±			Swords.	3	The Antiquary, XXXVI., 97.
						Spearhead.	1	V.C.H. Bucks, I. 204.
						Knife.	1	
						Lobed Glass		
						drinking vessel.	1	
						Pin.	1	
						Beads.		
						Bronze Disc.	1	
						Bronze rings and		
						attachments.	2	
						Bronze-mounted		
						wooden bucket.	1	
Miscellaneous Finds.								
OVING						Enamelled	1	E. T. Leeds, Celtic Ornament,
						Escutcheon.		149, 151, 163.
								Antiquity, VI., 169 ff.
								V.C.H. Bucks, I., 195-6, and fig.
LITTLE KIMBLE ...						Francisca (or		
						throwing axe).	1	Aylesbury Museum.
						Miniature.		
CHALFONT						Bead.	1	Records of Bucks, XII., 267.
ST. PETER								

Note

A—Ascertained from the report(s) of the Excavation of the site.

E—Estimated from the report(s) where no definite figures are available.

1The Taplow material is fully recorded and illustrated in most of the responsible works on the period, and it is not necessary, for the purpose of this paper, to recapitulate the finds or to discuss the involved question of their dating.

2Details of these finds are not available owing to the destruction of original records by enemy action.

The Thames and its Tributaries

Little is known of the site at Hitcham and the scanty material recovered seems to have consisted of a few not closely datable weapons.

Whether the sole burial in the Taplow mound, situated in the old churchyard above the river, is or is not earlier than has generally been thought it can hardly be regarded—as far as Bucks is concerned—as other than an unique and independent riparian site with marked Kentish affinities. No archaeological evidence exists for any attempt to extend away from the river into the Chiltern interior although the sites at Loudwater — of which no adequate account appears to exist—and High Wycombe may indicate some minor penetration, based on Taplow, up the valley of the Wye. At High Wycombe in the grounds of the Castle Hill property, opposite the front of the house and close to the road which runs parallel with the railway, was found in about 1901 an inhumation furnished with beads, iron 'weapon' and a circular gold pendant.¹⁹ Only the latter was preserved. The piece shows delicate gold filigree work and a star or flower pattern, while the now empty recesses may have held fittings of garnets and lapis lazuli-like glass. The filigree ornament can be compared with a specimen found as far away as Uncleby in the E. Riding of Yorks,²⁰ and the fine goldsmith's work on our piece indicates that it originated in the Kentish workshops. It may be dated to the sixth century or later, and we are perhaps justified in wondering whether we have here the burial of a daughter or some other relative of the Taplow prince.

But in any case both Taplow and High Wycombe confirm that in the absence of a practical overland trade route from London, such Kentish

¹⁹ Now in the British Museum and figured V.C.H. Bucks, 1. 195.

²⁰ E. T. Leeds, *Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Arch.*, Pl. XXVII, 31.

influence and contacts as we see in Bucks and the Upper Thames Valley, probably reached the settlements in the main via the Thames and its tributaries.

The accounts of the finds at Tythrop House, Kingsey, above the Thame, are inadequate, and several of the iron objects found eventually reached Taunton Museum where they still remain. There is nothing from the site to justify an early date, and a saucer brooch, now in Aylesbury Museum, showing decadent zoomorphic ornament separated by three plain diamond-shaped wedges may be assigned to the closing years of the sixth century. A feature of the site, not recorded elsewhere in Bucks except at Bledlow, was two cremations contained in decorated urns (fig. 3 a and b),²¹ now also in Aylesbury Museum.



Fig. 3a

²¹ An inaccurate drawing of the urn, fig. 3a, appears in *Records of Bucks*, Vol. 11. 137.

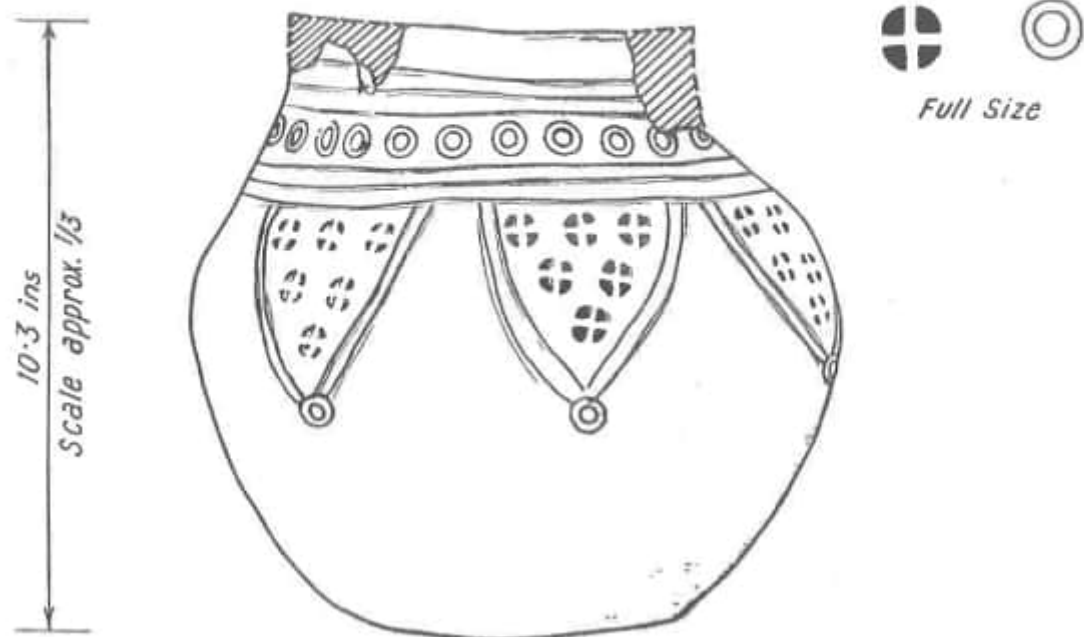


Fig. 3b.

Mr. J. N. L. Myres has very kindly commented upon the urns as follows. "These urns have what I call decadent panel style stamped ornament, a development from the earlier panel style with bosses, of which examples from Girton and St. John's, Cambridge, are illustrated in the *Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. XVII, Pl. 92. The second Kingsey urn (fig. 3b) shows this scheme still quite coherent, the triangular panels being outlined with lines and only the bosses having been dropped. The first Kingsey urn (fig. 3a) carries the degradation of the style a stage further leaving out most of the linear decoration and using an irregular arrangement of stamps in the panels. On the other hand this vessel has preserved a more sharply biconical profile than the decadent and shapeless contour of Fig. 3b. If one is justified in arguing from the late stage in development of these urns to lateness of

date I should say they belonged to a fairly advanced time in the sixth century. Unfortunately, it would be difficult to say with any confidence whether the decoration is influenced from the Cambridge—Bedford area direct or rather from the Upper Thames. While the Cambridge region seems to be the focus of the earlier phases of the stamped panel style the Upper Thames is perhaps, if anything, more likely as an immediate source. The Thames Valley cemeteries of Frilford, Cassington, Abingdon, Wittenham, Reading and Theale have all produced unbossed pots showing the later stages of this panelled ornament closely comparable with the Kingsey urns.”

The Abingdon cemetery demonstrates the extent to which cremation was practised in the Upper Thames Valley, and having regard to the remarks of Mr. Myres, the saucer brooch and the topography of the site I am disposed to regard the settlement as a ‘backflow’ from this area.

From Ashendon comes a pair of saucer brooches said to have been found with a skeleton in a quarry, and subsequently catalogued at the Stowe sale as a pair of scales. One is illustrated by Akerman in colour,²² and its exceptional size— $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter—and garnet inlays, indicating Kentish influence, denote a late date; it, and its wearer, may have been buried in the first half of the seventh century.

The Upper Ickniel Way

This chain of small cemeteries represents, as I think, small ‘family’ groups of peasant settlements thrown off by parties of immigrants journeying from East Anglia along the Way to the Upper Thames Valley. Unfortunately, none of these sites can at present be dated with any degree of confidence. At the Cop, Bledlow, secondary barrow-

²² Pagan Saxondom, Pl. XXXVIII.

burials yielded four plain urns containing cremations. A feature of the cremations which were six as against two inhumations, was the comparatively large number of combs which accompanied the urns. Combs, as far as I know, do not appear elsewhere in Bucks except at Ellesborough with an inhumation: also beside the Upper Icknield Way. The Bledlow examples include both double and single-toothed types: the latter longer, and perforated for suspension. In the present state of our knowledge the plain urns cannot be closely dated, but it is possible that eventually a clue may be found in their substance or firing. The material used at Bledlow seems to me not unlike that employed in a vessel from Drury Lane, London,²³ but which I have not been able to inspect. Two representative Bledlow shards were submitted to Dr. A. B. Searle and I am much indebted to him for the following observations:

'They appear to be made of a crude and very impure clay, exposed to heat, not apparently in a kiln, but on a fire, under highly reducing conditions, so that a considerable amount of black carbonaceous matter is present in the body of the shard. The vegetable or other carbonaceous matter from which this black material is derived appears to have formed part of the clay-mass from which the jar was made. (I do not observe any separate backing, the interior face being that naturally formed in shaping the vessel from such a clay-paste). The amount of heating has been so slight and so irregular that in some parts of the shard the clay has not been decomposed, but on removing a small portion and moistening it the clay regained a normal plasticity. Other portions were harder and more resistant—probably as the result of better heat-treatment..

²³ *Ant. Journ.* XVII. 432.

The walls of the vessel are highly laminated, indicating that it was shaped from a clay paste which was too stiff and had been very imperfectly mixed with water. The shaping has been done with considerable skill and must, with such a material, have been a difficult task. This raises the question as to why a potter skilled enough to form a vessel from such unsatisfactory material did not take pains to prepare a better paste and to burn the vessel more completely. Also — with much more suitable clays in the district, why did he (or she) choose this particularly unsuitable one?

The pits cut to receive the urns were well spaced around a central inhumation indicating that the situation of each burial was known or marked in some way. The undisturbed inhumation furnished with a spear, knife and tweezers, gives an impression of poverty rather than the abandonment of old custom, and the site and material in general indicate, I think, a poor and primitive peasant community. In such circumstances continuance of the cremation rite would not be surprising, and the selection of a distant barrow on the chalk escarpment in preference to prominent and more easily accessible sites—but with no tumulus—lower down the hill may indicate the persistence of a barrow-burial tradition; particularly when—as at Bledlow—such an unmarked site appears to have been brought into use at a later period. The inhumations from the Warren were unfurnished except for a small knife,²⁴ and the remarks of Mr. Lethbridge²⁵ in regard to Christian Anglo-Saxon cemeteries formed away from 'the burial mounds of the heathen' are of interest in this connexion.

At Ellesborough, further along the Way, an inhumation—one of three—was accompanied by a comb with double row of teeth and a cowry shell.

²⁴ Inf. C. O. Skilbeck, Esqre., 19.8.46.

²⁵ Camb. Ant. Soc., Quarto Publications, N.S.111. P. 82.

These shells are known from no other Saxon Bucks sites, and it is perhaps not without significance that another was found with a pair of iron shears accompanying a female inhumation at Luton, also to be associated with the Icknield Way. Dr. Åberg²⁶ times the importation of these shells in Kent—where they occur with some frequency—with the development of animal ornamentation of Style 11 and the garnet industry,²⁷ and although he cites a grave from Alfriston yielding a Merovingian conical glass beaker and a probable Indian *Cyprea* to be assigned to the latter half of the sixth century, he considers that in the main they were deposited in the course of the seventh century. If such was the case, and having regard to the unusual length—8.4 inches — of the double-toothed Ellesborough comb, the site would appear more likely to be late than early.

No other Icknield Way sites in Bucks appear to have yielded datable finds, but it may be mentioned that Sheahan states that a 'vast number'²⁸ of inhumations were found near Whiteleaf about the year 1830. It may perhaps be surmised that had these burials been furnished, something would have been preserved or recorded.

The Icknield Way, which was later to see the passage of the Danish and Norman armies, must at all times have been a much used thoroughfare, while the overhanging hills—the 'Chiltern eaves' of the Risborough charter—offered ready facilities for ambush or retreat to hostile parties. The siting along the route of these settlements, which at Bledlow at least appear to have endured for an appreciable time, suggests reasonably settled and peaceful conditions during the period of their existence.

²⁶ N. Åberg, *The Anglo-Saxons in England*, 5 and 105-6.

²⁷ But see also Mr. Kendrick's views, *Antiquity*, 1933, p. 440.

²⁸ J. Sheahan, *History and Topography of Bucks*, 137.

The Aylesbury Group

Nothing from Dinton, Stone, Wing and Mentmore appears to relate to a period earlier than the closing years of the sixth century, and the Stone saucer brooch showing Kentish influence may well be later. On topographical grounds, I believe these settlements have no connexion with the Icknield Way sites discussed above, and the archaeological material available strengthens this opinion. This Aylesbury group, as I think, represents either the normal growth and extension of a parent settlement at Bishopstone, or a wave of colonisation spreading from the Cambridge region; or a combination of both. Archaeologically, there is some general resemblance between these sites and others to the north-east: Sandy, Toddington and Leighton Buzzard may indicate the route. Alternatively, the colonists may have come by Icknield as far as the Luton-Dunstable neighbourhood and then spread over the open downland-like country which there borders the Way; in marked contrast to Bucks where the clay belt comes close up against the route.

A funnel-shaped glass drinking-vessel, encircled with spirally-wound threads also of glass presumably to obviate slipping in the hand, was found at Dinton in 1769, and is now in Aylesbury Museum. It is well illustrated by Douglas,²⁹ and is literally of the 'tumbler' type which can only be set down upon the rim. Another good example was found at Kempston in Bedfordshire, and made in glass of this type, imported from the Continent, is unlikely to have reached our area before 600 or later.

Under the name of Bishopstone two sites are known: one in some sandpits on Cursley Hill (erroneously described in *Records of Bucks* Vol. V,

²⁹ *Nenia Britannica*, Pl. XVI. No. 5.

23-25, as Causeway Field),³⁰ and the other about three-quarters of a mile to the south-east, discovered in 1858 (or 1868) while laying the foundations of Bishopstone Church. The finds from both sites seem to have passed through several hands before reaching their present resting place in Aylesbury Museum, and some doubt arises as to the exact provenance of a few of the objects. Both sites are more than a mile distant from the high ground of the Stone and Dinton burials, and the Bishopstone Church site was, in early times, probably barely above the flood levels. But the objects illustrated in the *Records of Bucks*, V. Pl. 11. undoubtedly came from Cursley Hill, and indicate an early and comparatively large settlement established prior to the others recorded in North Bucks. The Church site appears to be later. On topographical grounds, I do not think that settlement of either site was made from the direction of the Thames, but rather from the Aylesbury direction or from the north-east by the Upper Icknield Way via Butlers Cross, and Terrick. At the latter place two and a half miles distant from Bishopstone, a Roman villa site occurs in the angle of the Way and the modern Bishopstone road, and it is possible that local clearing and cultivation in early times may have opened up the entrance to the low-lying clay belt at this point. Such archaeological indications as there are seem to point to a north-easterly association.

³⁰ I am indebted to our member, Mr. F. G. Gurney, for the following information: 'There is not and never has been a field or a close of the name of Causeway Field either in Sedrup or Bishopstone or the whole parish of Stone. It is a mistake by Lowndes, who must have mis-heard the true name, which was anciently Coselowe Hill Furlong and is now Cursley Hill, being a small part of the former large open field called Cursley Hill or West Field. Before the enclosure of 1776, the close was and had always been part of the great open West field of Sedrup hamlet, and although Sedrup itself lies mainly in Hartwell parish, this whole field as part of it is in Stone parish. The ancient name of Coselowe was no doubt that of the ruined barrow there, but the earliest known quotation for it is in a Hartwell Court Roll of October, 1345.'

Thanks are due to Mr. Gurney for his authoritative correction of a long-standing error.

The earliest object from Cursley Hill is certainly the bronze belt ornament in Romanizing style (fig. 4). Although in general appearance flat



Fig 4 1:1

and compact, the design in places shows indications of the chip-carving technique, while the elongated bodies of the confronted animals in the borders with backward-turned heads are decorated with small incisions which, Mr. Leeds has pointed out, is a common feature on the Continent of Gallo-Roman art of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, and is intended to represent fur.³¹ As Mr. Leeds has also observed in another connexion,³² the first arrivals in this country would have had little time or opportunity to gratify luxury tastes, and ornaments brought with them from the Continent were used until more settled conditions prevailed. But whether our piece is an import, or executed in this country by a native hand, it cannot, with its central linear ornament, be later than 500 and may well be considerably earlier.

³¹ Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Arch., 4.

³² Ant. Journ. XIII. 242.

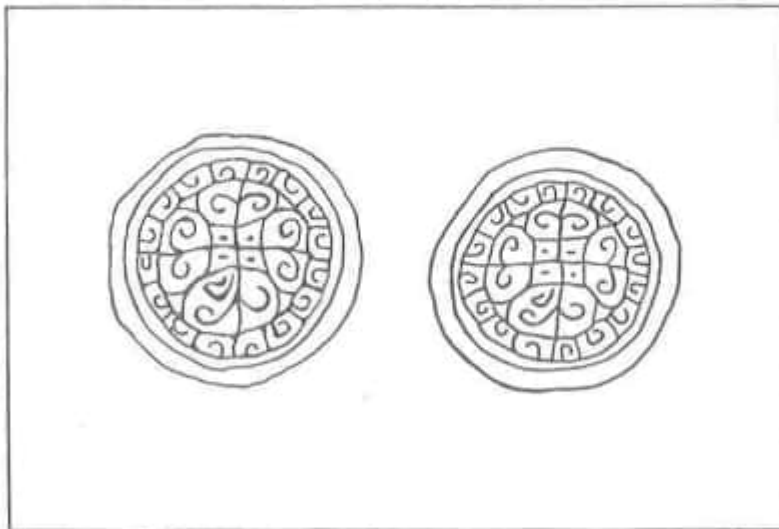


Fig. 5 1:1

Again from Cursley Hill come two small gilded saucer brooches with shallow rims and a 'chip-carving' cross-and-spiral ornament contained in a 'pot-hook' border (fig. 5). The execution in general is curiously irregular and crude, and the slight variation in the border patterns may have arisen from unpractised casting and subsequent adjustment. The brooches are in fact what might be expected from a local blacksmith turned jeweller who, at a time when trade in the more finished and sophisticated articles had not yet become established in the neighbourhood, was endeavouring to satisfy a need by copying—with all the *horror vacui* of a peasant—an existing design on to the now fashionable form of brooch.

The hook form of ornament is frequently found on the Continent on quite early Teutonic brooches and is derived from the spiral or acanthus tendril motive. It is seen in a fairly advanced stage of development, arranged in rows, on a silver and

niello brooch from Schleswig (fig. 6)³³ where it has assumed a check pattern with a small hook in each square although, as Salin has pointed out,³⁴ the design is in fact based on a swastika-like arrangement of the 'negative' acanthus hook.

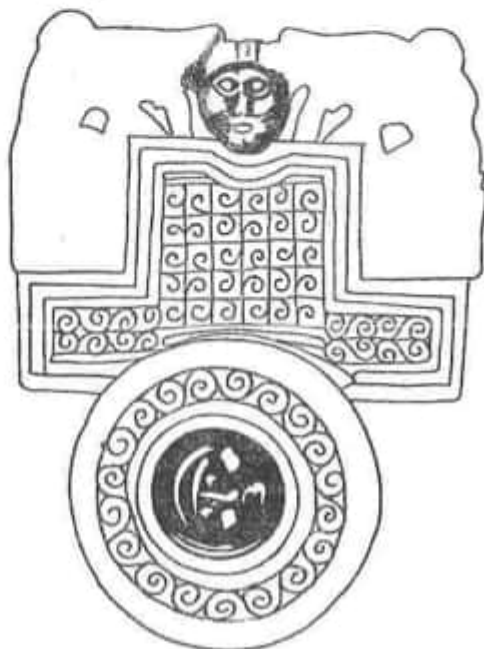


Fig. 6 1:1

This brooch, on Salin's own showing, is not later than 500 and may be a few years earlier, while the acanthus tendril motive, as employed on the Continent by the Germans in its more intelligible form, is assigned by him to the end of the fourth and fifth centuries. In a further stage of decadence the pattern disintegrates often eventually to re-form in a design of quite different character.

It may here be observed that interpretation of the origin of evolved geometrical composite devices, by tracing the development of a component adduced without regard to its context is, in the absence of

³³ After Salin, *Die Altgermanische Thierornamentik*, fig. 394.

³⁴ *op.cit.*, 164-5, and fig. 393.

convincing intermediate examples of the general design, often fraught with difficulty or even a matter of individual opinion. Nor is the difficulty lessened by the number of variations which can be credibly predicated to a few basic geometrical motives. It is therefore of interest to note that examples of the composite central design of our Cursley Hill brooches are to be found both in this country and on the Continent. Fig. 7 illustrates an elaborate bronze Roman brooch from Carniola (formerly Krain) in Northern Yugoslavia³⁵

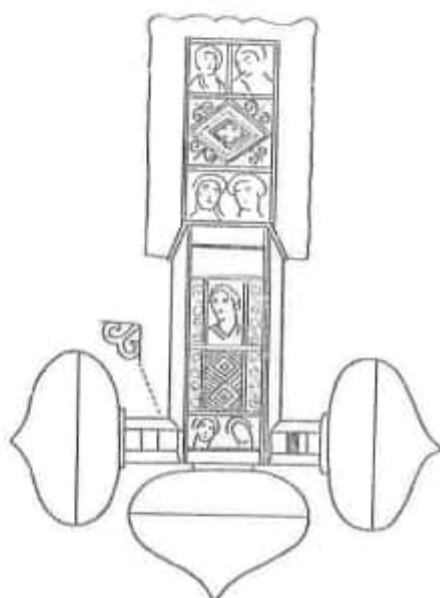


Fig 7 1:1

with a prototype, coherent and complete in essentials, of the design under discussion engraved on its foot. It has, however, here been adapted to conform to its rectangular setting whereas on the Cursley Hill brooches its employment has been suited to a circle or a square.³⁶

³⁵ After Salin, *op. cit.*, Fig. 68.

³⁶ My attention was first drawn to this feature by Mr. W. F. Grimes.

In regard to this country there is among the hoard of Roman silver recently discovered at Mildenhall, Suffolk, a large silver decorated dish which reveals, to the right of the central head, a dancer holding aloft a tambourine decorated with a motive (fig. 8) again strongly suggestive of our Cursley Hill pieces.

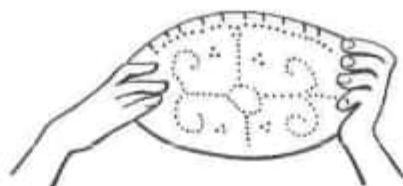
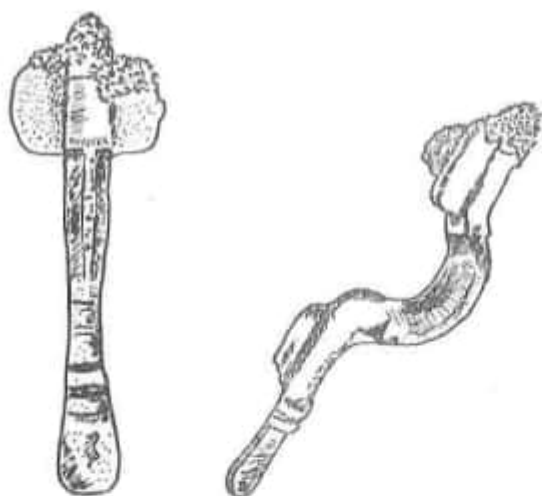


Fig 8 1:1

The design here is even less transformed, and permits, I think, of the suggestion that the developed composite arrangement was sufficiently well known in late classical times to serve for a model to Saxon craftsmen. It is hoped to discuss these brooches and their suggested prototypes in detail in a subsequent paper, but whether their central ornament is thought to have been derived from the spiral or acanthus tendril motive, or to have been taken over, comparatively unchanged, from a design current in late classical times, I suggest they are local work, and to be dated to not later than the opening years of the sixth century.

Next comes a graceful little long brooch (fig.9) of what may be described the sub-cruciform type.



Scale : 1 : 1

Fig. 9

This brooch was found also at Cursley Hill, but the rectangular panelled head-plate with set-back wings, flat at the back and slightly rounded both at sides and angles, is too corroded to enable details of the terminal knob to be ascertained. Some moulding may occur at its base. The bow is highly arched, bluntly faceted and moulded both at the junction of the head-plate and the simple flattened triangular foot with rounded angles. The catch-plate has been broken but does not appear to have extended beyond the juncture of the bow and the moulding above the foot. A flat plate set at right-angles to the head-plate bears a single perforation which served to hinge the pin, now missing. This brooch, which I think should be associated with the Cambridge region, is not easy to date, but I would suggest ± 550 having regard to the context and our area.

The small square-headed long brooches, which include two with exaggerated crescentic finials, have recently been discussed by Mr. Leeds in a singularly comprehensive and illuminating monograph,³⁷ and our examples would appear to fall to the second half of the sixth century. The two specimens with developed finials are decorated on the edges of their head-plates with parallel incised lines and a bull's-eye circlet in the centre with another below the bow. A small serrated pattern is seen on the lower edges of the finials.

A saucer brooch* from Cursley Hill with a quatrefoil design bordered by late animal ornament may be assigned to the last years of the sixth century while two large gilded applied brooches from the same site — one with serrated rim and late zoomorphic ornament contained within a fifteen-point star pattern border, and the other with zoomorphic ornament in the last stages of Salin's Style 1—may have been deposited as late as the opening years of the seventh century.

A fellow brooch to that last mentioned is recorded as having been found at the Church site from whence also came the back-plates of four other applied brooches and two disc brooches (fig. 10) engraved with the usual bull's eyes circlets.

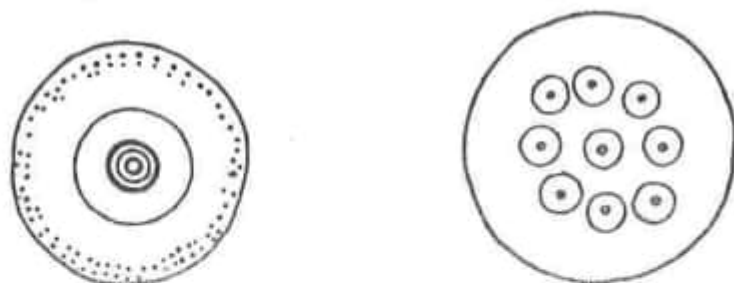


Fig. 10 1:1

³⁷ *Archaeologia*, XCI, 1-106.

*A pair of saucer-brooches from the same mould were found at Abingdon, Berks (E. T. Leeds and D. B. Harden, *The A/S Cemetery at Abingdon*), where they accompanied an inhumation, B 31. Above this burial was an undisturbed cremation, C 29, contained in an urn assigned to the late sixth or seventh century.

The attribution of finds to Hartwell appears to be an error.

No adequate record appears to exist of the Newport Pagnell cemetery or the material which has been forthcoming from time to time. A grouping of graves similar to that at Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire, has been noted and some finds have been deposited in Aylesbury Museum. These include a lobed glass drinking-vessel, small wooden bucket with bronze mounts and heart-shaped handle attachment pointing downwards and two applied brooches with light five-pointed star design enclosed in a dog-tooth border, all of which objects may be assigned to the late sixth or first half of the seventh centuries. Topographically, it would appear that the site should be associated with the Ouze and Kempston area.

Nothing is known of the circumstances in which the enamelled escutcheon from Oving was found. This and similar escutcheons have been discussed fully by Mr. Kendrick³⁸ and Mr. Leeds,³⁹ and all that need be said here is that they represent native work of a high order of excellence and that they occur only in the Anglo-Saxon areas.

Conclusions

The admittedly scanty archaeological material confirms a situation foreshadowed in the topographical appreciation and the general pattern is reasonably clear. It indicates:

1. The presence of a single, comparatively early—and for Bucks, comparatively large—settlement in the vicinity of Cursley Hill, near Bishopstone.
2. The existence of a chain of poorly furnished sites of uncertain date along the route of the Upper Icknield Way.

³⁸ T. D. Kendrick, *Antiquity*, VI., and *Anglo-Saxon Art*, 49-60.

³⁹ E. T. Leeds, *Celtic Ornament*, 149-151.

3. The sparse colonisation of the few suitable sites in the northern half of the county about the close of the sixth century or a little later.
4. The absence — apart from a minor penetration, based probably on Taplow, up the valley of the Wye — of any pagan Saxon settlement in the Chiltern region, comprising the southern half of the county.

There is some reason to think that, with the exception of Kingsey, settlement of the northern half of the county and the Icknield Way sites was effected from the north-east, and that Kentish influence or contacts occur during the time of the late expansion.

Why was the late settlement—such as it was—so delayed having regard to the surrounding settlements of Bedfordshire and the Upper Thames Valley established nearly a hundred years before? In the absence of documentary record it may be permissible to offer a theoretical reply. If we are to accept the Chronicle story we must assume that the obstacle was the presence of a hostile native population. But at Cursley Hill, in the depths of the Vale, was an Anglo-Saxon settlement yielding early and middle sixth century material, which appears not only to have maintained its existence for at least two generations but eventually to have overflowed to new ground near the present Church. I think the real difficulty was more likely to have been the nature of the terrain. At no prior period does the region appear, except beside the Icknield Way route, to have been other than sparsely occupied, and the same physical disadvantages seem to have operated in Romano-British times. The Romano-British distribution-maps reveal no settlement of importance in the county, and only a few villas or farms scattered along the routes of the Icknield Way and the Roman roads. In accordance with their usual custom, the Romano-Britons

appear to have made no attempt to cultivate the low-lying clays, and little evidence of their presence in the interior of the county occurs except upon a few island sites of rising ground. Whatever may have been the position in Iron Age times only weak Romano-British occupation is seen in the Chiltern interior — mainly on the chalk and alluvial soils in the valleys of the few streams which empty themselves into the Thames and Colne. These sites however—with the exception of Hambleden — were probably colonised from Verulamium, and access from that direction was denied to the Saxon invaders by the forests of Essex and Hertfordshire. No traces of occupation in any early period—as far as I am aware—occur in the Gault and Kimmeridge Clay belt save a single coin of Tasciovanus found at Stoke Mandeville, near Aylesbury.

As will be observed from the schedule of Saxon sites the total number of inhumations—as far as it is possible to estimate from the frequently inadequate reports — amount to 248, while only 7 cremation urns are recorded. They cover a period of at least two generations and include burials of both sexes. The figures have been generously estimated, and although little better than a rough guess, they are the only evidence we have in this connexion. But if trebled to provide for undiscovered or unrecorded burials the total would still not appear, after allowance has been made for old people and those engaged in essential food production, to have afforded at any one time much margin for warlike campaigns of suppression or acquisition in the region, had appreciable resistance been forthcoming.

It is of course always possible that there are large Saxon cemeteries in our area, or substantial additions to existing sites, awaiting discovery. But the combination of circumstances which led to

the discoveries of the past have now operated for many years, and I doubt whether new finds sufficient to vary these conclusions, are likely.

It is of interest to observe that there are in Bucks few Saxon cemeteries which are not on rising ground, and few which do not reveal traces of previous occupation either on the site itself or in the immediate neighbourhood. The outcrops of Lower Greensand in the Stone locality, (fig. 11), are of significance in this connexion.

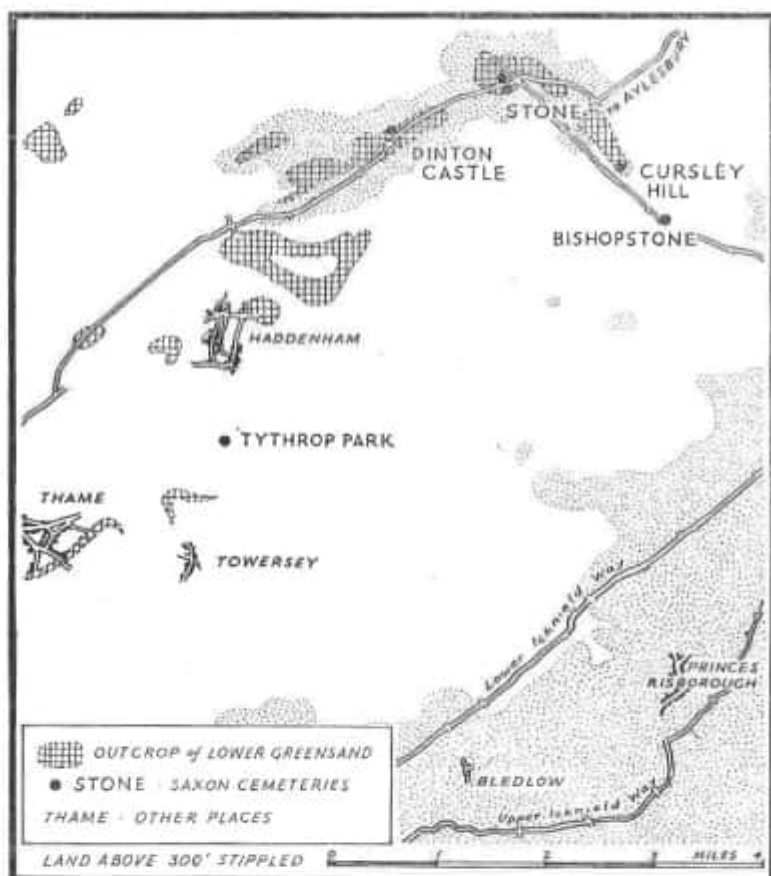


Fig 11

It seems probable therefore that until at least the close of the sixth century—perhaps before the Saxons had had time to multiply sufficiently to make the demand for land more competitive—Bucks was but lightly occupied either by Saxon or native.

What were the relations existing between such Saxons and natives as were to be found in the region? Again, little more than suggestions can be offered. But whatever may have been the case elsewhere, I do not believe our inland and isolated area was the scene of constant raids, conflicts and hostility culminating in a decisive battle in 571. Indeed, I conceive an opposite state of affairs. It may be asked whether it is not more probable that the primary actuating motives of the ordinary immigrants were to escape from such conditions on the Continent, and to establish new homes where they could cultivate the land and found a family. Apart from the inevitable bands of sea-pirates and gangsters, I am not convinced that the life of either the native or the average immigrant was spent in looking for trouble. If so, how did they live: and whence did they obtain their sustenance?

It is difficult to accept the vituperative verbiage of Gildas as history, and it may be that the emphasis laid by the early Chronicle entries on wide-spread Saxon aggression and battles is misleading. Understatement was seldom a failing of early Northern peoples.

The traditional exploits and genealogies from which the early Chronicle entries were culled were not originally recited to audiences for a historical purpose, but to help pass the long winter nights or to divert on especial occasions. Dull, matter-of-fact accounts of colonisation and every-day routine—only too familiar to the listeners—were not likely to figure in the repertoire. Like its modern counterparts, the popular film and 'thriller,'

heroic verse had to satisfy an inherent need and probably accommodate itself to a popular demand. And, we may think, it was equally representative of the real conditions of every-day life.

The extent of the preknowledge—either direct or from hearsay—of various areas, or even prior contacts by Saxon immigrants with the Romano-British population, may deserve more investigation than it has received. All that need here be said is that at different times the Roman forces serving in Britain and elsewhere included a substantial number of Germanic auxiliaries, and it may be asked whether, at a time when conditions on the Continent were giving rise to large-scale emigration, there were not many of such returned ex-service men whose minds inclined to the country where they had served and the neighbourhoods they had known. It is of course only possible to surmise as to the kind of reception they might have expected to receive upon arrival, but from such evidence as we have of early Teutonic preferences there can have been few more desirable districts than that occupied by the extensive agricultural Romano-British settlements beside the upper reaches of the Thames, and the Dorchester Saxon finds (which included the skeleton of a woman), in the heart of that region, are the earliest known burials in the whole of England. At Frilford and other Berkshire sites, the Romano-British burials were closely associated with Saxon interments.

But in our area as, with but few exceptions, elsewhere, no definite archaeological evidence—in the present state of our knowledge — for the survival of the native is forthcoming. Will such eventually be found among those burials now classified as Anglo-Saxon in origin; or among those indeterminate shards not infrequently found in a Romano-British context; or in earthworks—as at Chester — to be associated perhaps with the post-Roman period? Mr. Leeds has toyed with the thought that the disc brooches—those cheaper sub-

stitutes for more elaborate ornament — may represent 'a native element in the Anglo-Saxon jewellery-casket,' although he adds what little evidence is available for their association suggests that they were Anglo-Saxon creations on British soil.⁴⁰ Two of these brooches occur in the material from the later Bishopstone site near the Church.

It may be thought, therefore, that a policy of 'live-and-let-live'—if not active co-operation and intermarriage — was more likely to represent the conditions in the region at this time. Whatever may have happened at Bedcanford, the mention of the four towns has all the look of having originated in a desire to indicate the route. But a simple statement to that effect was not in the heroic tradition, and consequently they were 'taken' in the usual way. It is noteworthy that no archaeological evidence of any kind exists for the presence of pagan Saxons at Aylesbury, although of course it is possible that such may lie beneath the foundations of the present town.

In conclusion, it is interesting to observe the increasing influence of Kentish models on objects from our area, the construction of which typologically is to be dated to the late sixth or early seventh centuries.⁴¹ Mr. Leeds has suggested that this is to be associated with the great extension of power at that time of Ethelbert, the first Christian King of Kent.⁴² And although the Kentish preponderance declined with his death, it will be recalled that the influential Frankish bishop Agilbert was appointed to the see of Dorchester-on-Thames, in succession to Birinus, in the year 651. The presence of the Kentish-influenced ornaments suggest at least reasonably settled conditions and increasing trade facilities at the time of their construction.

⁴⁰ Arch. XCI, 83.

⁴¹ Mr. Kendrick's arguments for an earlier dating of the Kentish material are set out in *Antiquity* VII, 429-432.

⁴² Arch. LXIII, 192, and *Ant. Journ.* XIII, 245-6.

But such ornaments may have had a long life before they were buried, or contacts may have been late in reaching this inland district, and it is not improbable that some of the late sites where they occur may be more advanced in the seventh century than has generally been thought. Christianity is believed to have spread over the district about the middle of the seventh century, but the inhabitants are hardly likely to have seen the light *en bloc*, and the acceptance of Christianity does not immediately connote churchyard burial. Indeed, there is evidence elsewhere that old customs—with modified grave furnishings—persisted for an appreciable time, and it may be that the settlements represented by our late cemeteries, together with Mercian infiltrations and alliances, united to form the Cilternsaetan of the Tribal Hidage.

It is at such time, with natural increases of population and consequently intensified demands for new land, that one would more reasonably expect to find organised intertribal warfare with the forceable dispossession of any unabsorbed native population and their dispersion to the forests of Brill, or 'deserts' of Chiltern. And, unless eventually proved by excavation to be of Iron Age origin, it is to this time I would assign the Chiltern Grimsditches.