

EXCAVATIONS AT DINTON.

BY J. Y. AKERMAN, Esq.

Society of Antiquaries, London,

27th Dec., 1859.

MY DEAR SIR,

I cheerfully comply with your request that I should give you an account of my researches in the month of June last at Dinton. I regret, however, that I have so little to communicate that may prove of interest to the Members of the Bucks Archæological Society. Many of its members have, doubtless, inspected a collection of natural curiosities and antiquities preserved at Dinton Hall. Among the latter are some Anglo-Saxon remains discovered just ninety years ago, during excavations for the foundations of the modern antique fabric, known as Sir John Van Hattem's Summer-house, on the right hand side of the road leading from Aylesbury to Thame, and about a quarter of a mile north of the Church of Dinton.

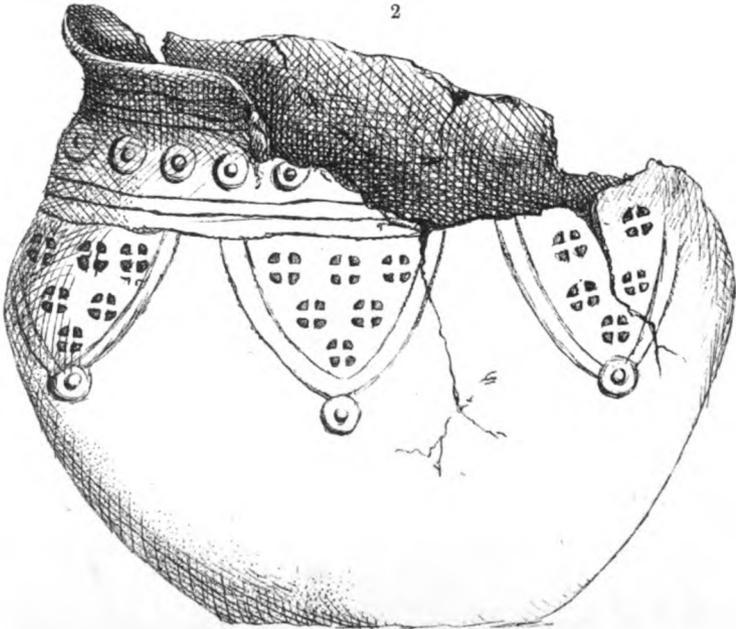
These relics have been faithfully represented in the Album at Dinton Hall, and in the "Nenia Britannica" of Douglas. They consist of the iron head of a spear, much corroded, a knife, and a long drinking-vessel, in shape, resembling a modern ale-glass, but without a stalk or base, so that when filled it could not be set down. This vessel has sustained much injury, doubtless at the time of its disinterment, which seems to have been effected by pure accident, and in the rudest possible manner. The decidedly Anglo-Saxon character of these remains will be readily recognized.

Knowing my devotion to this branch of our national antiquities, Mr. Goodall very kindly allowed me in the past summer to make researches on the spot; accordingly, on the 14th of June, I opened ground on the western side of the building, and within a very few feet of the

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wall. We had soon evidence that the ground in this spot had been removed in past ages, but no traces of interment were observed. The excavations were continued on the following day with the same result; but on the third day we were more successful. Continuing our trenches in a north-westerly direction, we came upon two skeletons, with the heads lying N.W. The first was of a woman, or of a youth, much decayed; the other of a man of moderate stature, the thigh-bone measuring seventeen and three-quarter inches. Proceeding in a still more northerly direction, we discovered two skeletons in very shallow graves. On the succeeding day the workmen came upon what appeared to be the skeleton of a woman, and subsequently to the remains of a young person much decayed. Near the waist we observed traces of what was probably a buckle or tag of brass, which had perished. In a line with this grave, another was found, containing the remains of a young person without any relic.

The ground at this spot is very unfavourable for extended research, being intercepted by a road-way and hedges, and occupied by fir-trees, planted there at the time of the erection of the building. Want of leisure compelled me to abandon the investigation, which I learn has been resumed by Mr. Goodall himself. The nature of these discoveries does not however lead me to doubt that these interments are part of an extensive cemetery in the immediate vicinity, the traces of which are only to be discovered by a systematic exploration.

I am, my dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

J. Y. AKERMAN.

REV. CHARLES LOWNDES,

Secretary, Bucks Archæological Society.

EXCAVATIONS CONTINUED, by the Rev. J. J. GOODALL.

Bromham Rectory, Jan. 3rd, 1860.

MY DEAR SIR,

You ask if I have any further particulars to give of the Anglo-Saxon burial-place at Dinton, in fact, what was the result of the diggings in October last? Alas! *nil*, or next to *nil*. My friend, the Rev. William Monkhouse, a great authority among the Archæologists in Beds, being with me last autumn, I resumed the diggings commenced under Mr. Akerman's direction in the summer, the result of which I believe he has given you.

In October we continued the trenches he had begun, and opened five or six fresh parallels, with one transverse cut, chiefly on the East and North-east of the ruinous building, commonly called "Dinton Castle," between the building and the turnpike-road. Finding nothing, and indeed it being quite evident the soil had never been disturbed there, I had a trench cut in the immediate proximity, North of the castle, and there, close to where five human frames were found in the summer, we came upon two more—one lying, like the others, nearly N.N.W. and S.S.E., the other evidently having been exhumed before, and little except the skull remaining. I believe there can be no doubt whatever, according to the rule laid down by Mr. Akerman, drawn from repeated observations, that, from the *filed* or *worn-down* appearance of the teeth, the remains were Anglo-Saxon. Whether this appearance, or rather effect, is caused by *actual filing*, or by the *nature of the food* eaten, I must leave to him or others to settle—the fact is patent! A quantity of broken pottery very fragmentary, probably Romano-British, or early Edward, with a few fragments of glass vessels, perfectly iridescent, were also found, with a large quantity of some black substance, mixed with yellow clay, which certainly resembled wood ashes, but which I understood Mr. Akerman to say was indeed a ligneous substance, but brought into that state by the action of water or damp.

At our first examination we came upon what looked like a well, quite circular, and filled with flat stones, each stone of which was packed flat and level as a barrel of oysters. This was left for future examination; and ac-

cordingly, in the autumn, this supposed well was emptied, and found to be not above five or six feet deep, the bottom being firm and level.

It having been suggested that further discoveries might probably be made if search were prosecuted on the other side of the turnpike-road, near a clump of trees, upon the brow of the hill, I had a trench dug in a circle round it, with one deep transverse cut, but nothing of consequence turned up, nor had the earth ever been disturbed.

There are one or two other likely localities which probably I may at some time or other investigate; but I confess I am wholly inclined to believe (what also our learned friend in the matter deems probable) that this spot was not a general burial place, nor that of a tribe, but only of a family.

It is to be remarked that we found no human remains ten paces from the castle walls. That building (erected, if I think right, in the year 1758) crowns the summit of the highest ground in the neighbourhood; and in digging the foundations of it a number of skeletons were exhumed, with a quantity of arms of various descriptions, a very beautiful Anglo-Saxon drinking-glass, and a glass bottle of the time of Edward the Second. How this last became deposited in such a situation—deponent sayeth not—possibly merely for concealment. My theory as regards the other is, that the father, as chief of the family, was buried with some of his treasures and arms, as indicating his rank and station, upon this spot of the hill, and that his family or dependants were clustered round him without other deposits of any kind. Mr. Akerman remarked upon this poverty, saying “it must have been the cemetery of the Poor Law Union of the time!”

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

J. J. GOODALL.

REV. C. LOWNDES.
