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A SAXON CEMETERY SITE AT SHELFORD FARM, CANTERBURY

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This article records the discovery of a group of Pagan Anglo-Saxon finds on the outskirts of Canterbury. The site, at Shelford Farm, near Sturry, was first discovered in about 1925 when test pits for sand quarrying revealed a pair of Saxon shield-mounts in the form of birds of prey, now in the British Museum.¹

In March 1985, Mr T. Sewell, a member of the Thanet and Wantsum Metal Detecting Club, was surveying the same field as that of the 1920s' find, which is on the south-facing slope of the Stour Valley. The field had just been ploughed before the replanting of a crop of strawberries. Mr Sewell discovered a number of Pagan Saxon objects in the plough soil, comprising four copper alloy buckles, an iron spearhead and four fragments from the head-plate and bow of a gilt copper alloy florid cruciform brooch, and the find-spots were plotted by Mr H. Gough, Honorary Curator of the Herne Bay Records Society. The recording of the locations makes it clear that the finds came from the plough soil, as the Anglian brooch was badly damaged by the plough, and fragments of it were found on each side of a spur of land, some 60 m. apart. The detailed find-spots of the belt-buckles were not recorded. Mr Sewell brought the finds to the attention of Canterbury Museums soon after their discovery. In 1987, he deposited them at the museum, with the approval of the tenant, Mr H. Wood, and the landowners, Messrs. Bretts Ltd., generously agreed that the finds should be donated to Canterbury Museums.²

¹ Reg. nos. 1928, 6-6, 1 and 2. The mounts are of gilt bronze with silver *appliqués* and apparently came from the same burial as a shield-boss and spearhead; R. Bruce-Mitford, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, London, 1974, Pl. 7,b; and D.H. Kennett, 'Some decorative aspects of the Anglo-Saxon shield', *Beds. Journ. Arch.*, 9 (1974), 55-70, Fig. 5, c-d.

² Accession number 1988.57. Plans of the finds form part of the archive at the Museum.

The finds were examined by B.M. Ager at the British Museum and were subsequently conserved before being placed on display at Canterbury Heritage.

The field in which the finds were made has been farmed since 1937 by Mr H. Wood, who confirmed that the field has been regularly ploughed since before his arrival at the farm. Until 1979 the land was used for cereals and since then it has been used for a strawberry crop. The site has, therefore, been extensively ploughed.

It lies on the north side of the Stour Valley, close to the modern village of Sturry. The village place name derives from the archaic 'ge' or District of the Stour. The same element is preserved in the modern names of the other important Saxon centres of Lyvinge and Eastry.³ Recently, M. Gardiner has suggested that these centres should be regarded as *villae regales* clustering around Canterbury, on the model of Cologne.⁴ Other suggested *villae regales* in east Kent include Wye, Faversham and Milton, supported by the high status cemetery finds from Eastry, Wye Down and King's Field, Faversham.

It is reasonable to suggest that the finds from Sturry, which are discussed below, could have come from ploughed-out barrows on a false ridge crest, although the 1925 finds were located well below the crest of the ridge and were almost certainly *in situ*. Thus, Sturry can be seen as a *villa regalis*,⁵ with its cemetery above the presumed site of the Saxon settlement, overlooking the Roman road from Canterbury to Reculver and Thanet. The nearby cemetery at Westbere could also be part of the same complex.⁶ It is possible that the recent discoveries at Shelford Farm are the first to appear from ploughing on the vulnerable area of the ridge crest; continued ploughing and soil movement downslope could result in the exposure of further finds. A full explanation of the nature of the cemetery can only come from excavation.

D.D.

DESCRIPTIONS

Buckle-loop of copper alloy (Fig. 1, a); narrow oval with a fragment of a rectangular belt-plate and a separate tongue with a trapezoidal

³ S. Rigold, 'Sturry from 500 AD to Domesday', in (Ed.) K.H. McIntosh, *Sturry - the Changing Scene* (Ramsgate, 1972), 11.

⁴ M. Gardiner in P. Drewett, D. Rudling and M. Gardiner, *The South East to AD 1000*, London, 1988, 277-8.

⁵ See also S.C. Hawkes, 'Anglo-Saxon Kent c. 425-725', in (Ed.) P.E. Leach, *Archaeology in Kent to AD 1500*, CBA Research Report, no. 48, 1982, 64-78, at p. 75.

⁶ For references see A. Meaney, *A Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites*, London, 1964, 140.

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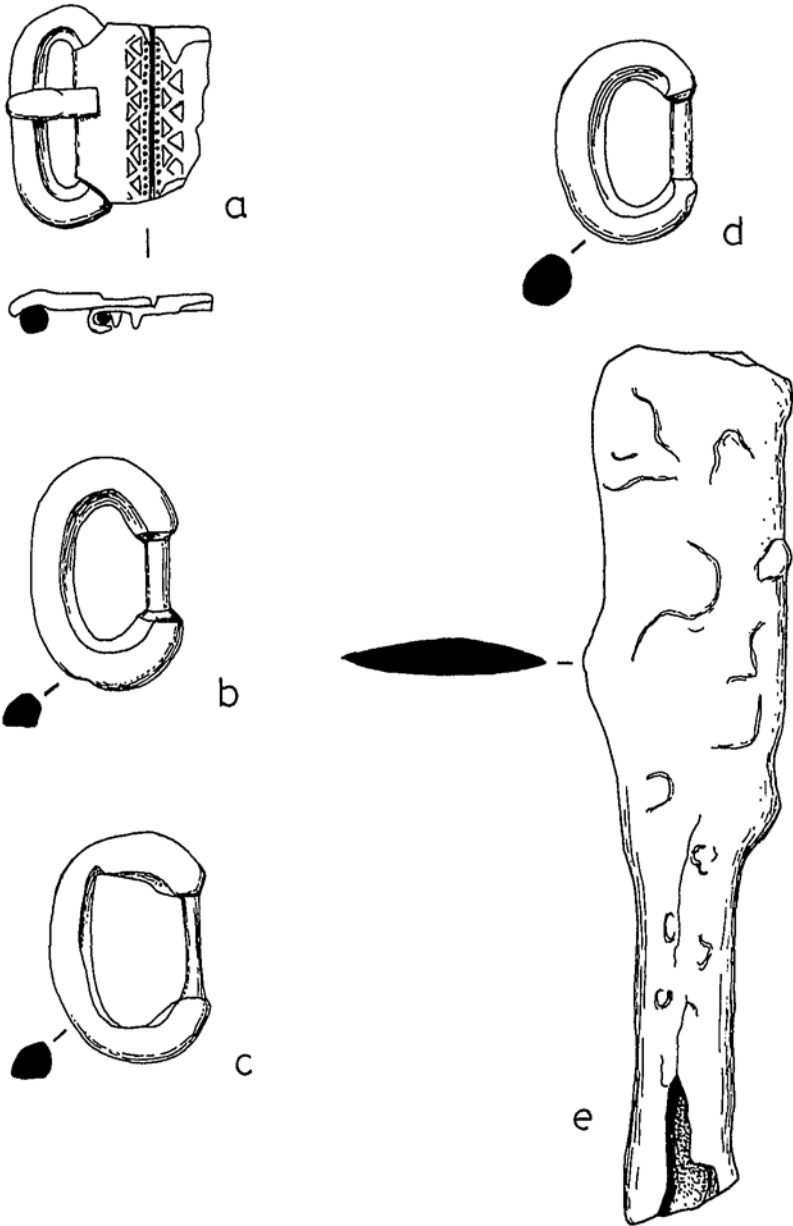


Fig. 1. Anglo-Saxon finds from Shelford Farm (Scale: 1/1)

basal plate (or 'shield'), of the same width as the belt-plate and cut away at the top corners; length: 25 mm. (surviving); width: 28 mm. The belt-plate is parallel-sided and decorated across the hinge end with a band of shallowly punched interlocking triangles and a row of punched dots along the edge. The underside of the belt-plate, which could have been either round or square-ended (see below), is hollow and the face is stepped down at the hinge end to two tabs with a slot between them, for the hook of the tongue to pass through, which project from the end of the plate and are folded round the hinge-bar of the loop. The tongue is stepped down to its flat basal plate, which is cast in one with it and serves to cover the hinge; a broken lug on the underside of this plate would originally have been hooked round the loop. The edge of the basal plate is decorated with a matching border of dots and triangles where it abuts the end of the belt-plate.

Buckle-loop of copper alloy (Fig. 1, b); oval, rounded at the front and flat underneath, with a faceted upper inner edge; length: 29 mm.; width: 19 mm.

Buckle-loop of copper alloy (Fig. 1, c); oval, with opening slightly askew at one end; length: 29 mm.; width: 20 mm. Rust stains on the hinge-bar and the loop opposite show that the missing tongue was of iron.

Buckle-loop of copper alloy (Fig. 1, d); oval, with slightly faceted, sub-circular section; the profile is more markedly angled round the lower front edge; length: 25.5 mm.; width: 18 mm.

Lower part of iron *spearhead* (Fig. 1, e); originally leaf-shaped with curved shoulders, the end of a cleft socket remaining; length: 111 mm. (surviving); width: 26 mm. The spearhead has recently been waxed and patches of a greyish paste at the broken end of the blade suggest an attempt to attach a further piece of the blade, now missing.

Four fragments of a *florid cruciform brooch* of gilt copper alloy (Plate I), comprising the top knob and one lateral one⁷ from the head-plate, part of the square central panel of which is attached to the lateral lobe; also two other pieces making up the low, flat-topped bow, which is broken across the middle; length: 100 mm. (surviving);

⁷ I.e. the right-hand one if the brooch is viewed conventionally with the head-plate at the top.



(Photo.: Royal Museum, Canterbury.)
Florid cruciform brooch from Shelford Farm.

width of top knob: 48 mm. The breaks are all old and the brooch appears to have been mangled by ploughing. The central panel is now bent upwards from the attached knob and is decorated with a low, cast Style I animal design, of which all that survives is a rear limb, parts of the body and possibly an eye; the panel has a plain double frame. The flattened, crescentic knobs are each decorated with a pair of back-to-back bird heads with pierced, scrolled beaks and separated

by a rounded edge T-shaped panel. Traces of solder on the centre of this panel on the top knob show that these panels were originally decorated with applied silver foils. The gilding survives only in the grooves and angles of the ornament. Beneath the heads a closely barred band in a plain rectangular frame, the bars in groups of three, runs across the width of each knob and the frames are demarcated from the head-plate by another similar band, but without a border. On the top of the bow is set a plain, raised, square frame with a lower inner border enclosing an m-like half-mask with round eyes between the uprights, though whether the base is towards the head or the foot-plate is uncertain because of the break in the bow.

Discussion

The buckles, with the exception of the first described above, which may be from a sword-harness, are probably all from belts and are of typical pagan Saxon forms. The first, with a basal plate on the tongue, belongs to the third group of Åberg's predominantly Kentish buckles with shield on tongue and rectangular belt-plate with square or rounded end.⁸ This type was introduced to this country from the Continent in the mid or late sixth century, and an early example is known from Chessell Down, Isle of Wight.⁹ But the Shelford Farm buckle can be dated to the end of the sixth or early part of the seventh century by comparison of its short, broad tongue-plate with cut-away shoulders with the plates on other buckles of this group, e.g. the garnet-inlaid examples from Gilton, Kent, Tostock, Suffolk, and the mound 1 ship-burial at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, coin-dated to the 620s or 630s and after 622.¹⁰ On the latter, which comes from a sword-harness, the tongue-plate is non-functional and cast in one with the belt-plate, but the likeness of a basal plate is maintained by the thick, stepped dividing cell wall across the belt-plate. Other buckles of similar form and date are known from Kent, e.g. from Bifrons, King's Field, Faversham and Stowting.¹¹ A fine Frisian example with garnet inlays and Style II animals in filigree from Rijnsburg, Holland,

⁸ N. Åberg, *The Anglo-Saxons in England*, Uppsala, 1926, 120-8.

⁹ C.J. Arnold, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of the Isle of Wight*, London, 1982, Fig. 28, 86.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.* in note 8, 127, Figs. 224-5; R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial. Vol.2. Arms, Armour and Regalia*, London, 1978, Figs. 337-8; D. Brown, 'The Dating of the Sutton Hoo Coins', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 2, BAR British Series, no. 92, 71-86.

¹¹ *Op. cit.* in note 8, Fig. 213; British Museum reg. nos. 1117H'70, 1117I'70 and 1927, 12-12, 24.

shows the close degree of contact between Anglo-Saxon and Frisian craftsmen at this time.¹²

The second buckle is similar to examples from Dover, graves 28 and 38, dating to the period *c.* 525–625.¹³ The lop-sided inner edge of the third is comparable with that of a buckle with shield on tongue dating to *c.* 625–650 from Dover, grave 42,¹⁴ and the fourth is of the stout type of *c.* 525–600. Buckled belts were worn by both males and females in the fifth and sixth centuries, but in the seventh they were largely abandoned in female dress fashion.¹⁵

The damaged spearhead could belong to either of M.J. Swanton's types C2 or C3, more likely the former, with examples dating from the fifth to seventh century.¹⁶ It indicates the presence of a male grave.

The florid cruciform brooch is an item of female costume jewellery and probably served to fasten a cloak. It is an exceptional find from Kent, since the main distribution area of the class as a whole is north of a line from the Avon–Severn confluence to the Suffolk Stour, *i.e.* in Anglian areas.¹⁷ The Shelford Farm brooch belongs to sub-group V(i) by virtue of its zoomorphic head-plate panel, large knobs with barred strips and the square knob on the bow. This was regarded as an East Midlands type by Leeds and Pocock;¹⁸ however, the discovery of a further example of this sub-group from Bergh Apton, Norfolk, grave 18¹⁹ suggests that the region of manufacture should be extended to include East Anglia. The closest parallel to the Shelford Farm brooch is the other Norfolk one, from Brooke (Plate II), although its lateral knobs are riveted on. The sub-group is datable predominantly to the later sixth century, a dating which is supported in the present case by the use of contrasting sheet silver *appliqués* on gilt metal. This is a feature of late Style I decoration claimed by

¹² *Op. cit.* in note 8, Fig. 223.

¹³ V.I. Evison, *Dover: the Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery*. H.B.M.C. Archaeological Report 3, London, 1987, Figs. 16.2 and 22.5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Fig. 25.3.

¹⁵ S.C. Hawkes, 'The Dating and social Significance of the Burials in the Polhill cemetery', in B. Philp, *Excavations in West Kent 1960–1970*, Dover, 1973, 186–201, at pp. 193–4.

¹⁶ M.J. Swanton, *A Corpus of Pagan Anglo-Saxon Spear-types*, BAR, no. 7, 1974, 8–10.

¹⁷ E.T. Leeds and M. Pocock, 'A Survey of the Anglo-Saxon cruciform Brooches of florid Type', *Med. Arch.*, xv (1971), 13–36, Figs. 1–2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19–20, 23, 33.

¹⁹ B. Green and A. Rogerson, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Bergh Apton, Norfolk: Catalogue*, East Anglian Archaeology Report 7, 1978, Fig. 75.c.



(Photo.: The British Museum.)
Fluted cruciform brooch from Brooke, Norfolk.

Dr H. Vierck to belong to the second half of that century.²⁰ Persistence of the use of these brooches into the start of the seventh century is not precluded, however, as it has recently been persuasively argued by Dr M.G. Welch that the terminal date for insular Style I should be placed somewhat later (to c. 590) than previously thought and that in eastern England social factors could have influenced the acquisition and wearing of Style I brooches 'for up to a generation after the introduction of Style II'.²¹ Also there are reasons for believing that, outside Kent, Style I ornament could have lasted into the seventh century,²² e.g. in the Anglian areas in which florid cruciform brooches were made.

Although these brooches are typically Anglian, it will be recalled that other items of Anglian craftsmanship, i.e. wrist-clasps (though re-used as pendants and brooches), are known from cemeteries south of the Thames at Bifrons, Kent, and Kingston-by-Lewes, East Sussex.²³ Together with the Shelford Farm brooch, these finds are perhaps indicative of marriage ties between Anglian and South Saxon and Kentish families during the sixth century, in the latter case not impossibly associated with royal missions to the court of King Aethelberht of Kent (c. 560–616) during his period of supremacy as 'bretwalda' over the English kingdoms south of the Humber. This is, of course, speculative, but the visit of King Raedwald of East Anglia to Kent to receive baptism²⁴ provides a historical example of such a mission taking place (presumably early in the seventh century) and the proximity of Shelford Farm to Sturry, important as a royal centre, from at least as early as the reign of Aethelberht, has already been commented on by Mr Dawson above.²⁵

B.M.A.

²⁰ H. Vierck, 'Zum Fernverkehr über See im 6. Jahrhundert angesichts angelsächsischer Fibelsätze in Thüringen. Eine Problemskizze', in K. Hauck, *Goldbrakteaten aus Sievern*, Munich, 1970, 355–95. It is worth noting here that conservation of the brooch by Ms V. Kelly of Kent Museums Service (K880314) revealed that more than one layer of gilding had been applied in some areas.

²¹ M.G. Welch, 'Reflections on the archaeological Connections between Scandinavia and eastern England in the Migration Period', *Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, 6 (1987), 251–59 at p. 257.

²² G. Speake, Review of J. Hines, *The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England in the pre-Viking Period*, BAR British Series 124, 1984, Oxford, in *Med. Arch.*, xxx (1986), 203–4.

²³ M.G. Welch, *Early Anglo-Saxon Sussex*, BAR British Series 112, 1983, Oxford, 114.

²⁴ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (Eds. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, 1969, Oxford), II, 15.

²⁵ The authors would like to thank Mrs. L. Webster, Mrs. S.M. Youngs and Dr M.G. Welch for their assistance in identifying the material and Mr D.B. Kelly for advice on the metalwork from Bifrons. Responsibility for the views expressed here must rest with the authors, however.

