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## ANGLO-SAXON EASTRY: SOME RECENT DISCOVERIES AND EXCAVATIONS

KEITH PARFITT

The considerable importance of Eastry, near Sandwich, during the early Anglo-Saxon period has been discussed in some detail by Hawkes (1979). There are four separate cemeteries of this date adjacent to the modern village, namely Buttsale (I), Eastry House (II), Updown or Sangrados Wood (III) and Eastry Mill (IV), whilst the place-name evidence indicates that here was a Saxon royal centre (*villa regalis*) of the eastern region of the Kentish kingdom. Two chance discoveries and several recent investigations by the Dover Archaeological Group are reported here as a further contribution towards research into the early history of the village (Fig.1).

### CROSS FARMHOUSE

During the hurricane of October 1987 a large tree was blown over in the garden of Cross Farmhouse. (NGR TR 3097 5448) Amongst the exposed roots the owner, the late Miss Margaret Izard, discovered a complete Anglo-Saxon pottery vessel. Human bones were also exposed, confirming that the find was contained within a grave; from the arrangement of the bones it would seem that the vessel had originally lain on the chest. The soil filling the pot was found to contain a copper-alloy finger-ring.

The grave lay immediately to the south of the house, adjacent to the eastern side of the present-day main road through Eastry village. This road follows the line of the Roman road running from Richborough to Dover (Margary No. 100). Other Anglo-Saxon burials have been previously found in the area, for this is the site of the Buttsale cemetery (Cemetery I), first discovered by Mr Boteler in 1792. Boteler describes his initial discovery thus:-

'In March last (1792), in digging a cellar in the garden of a cottage belonging to me, eastward of the highway leading from Eastry Cross to But-

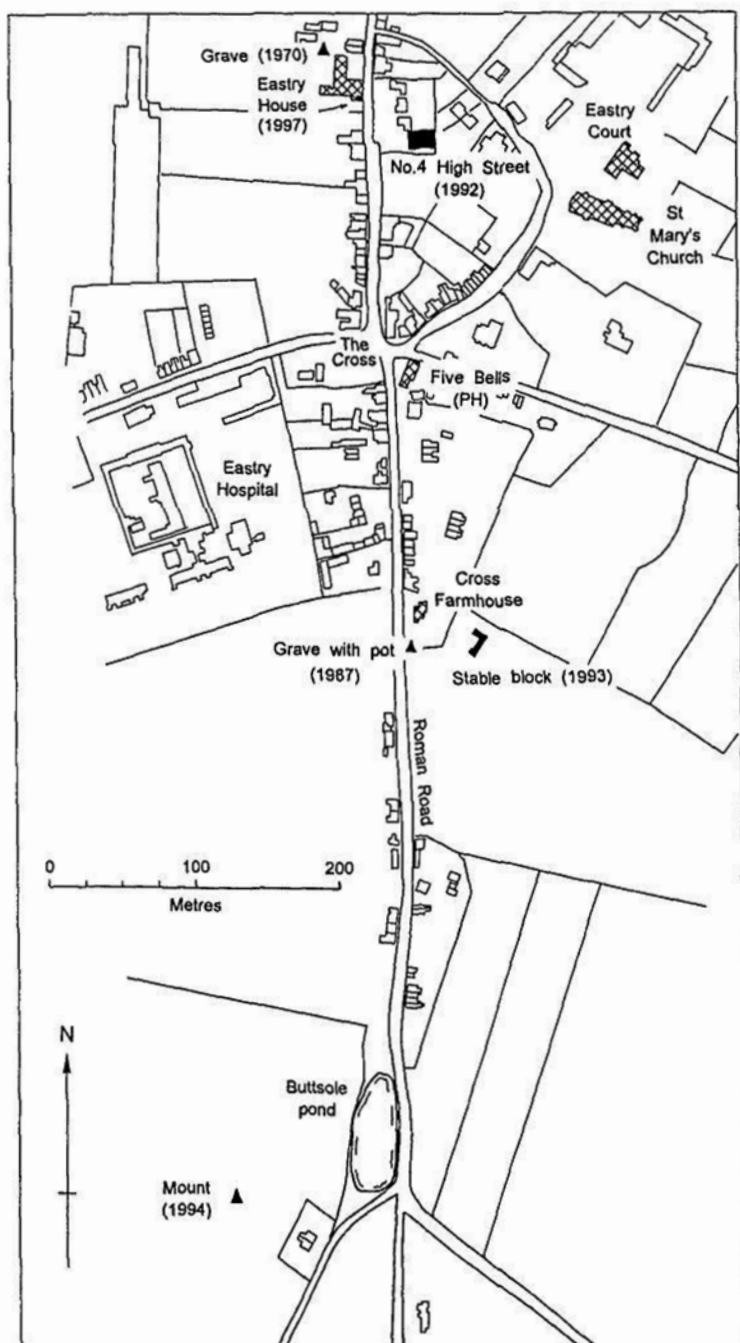


Fig. 1. Map of Eastry showing location of sites and Anglo-Saxon discoveries.

sole, I discovered the ancient burying ground of this neighbourhood. I caused several graves to be opened, and found, with the skeletons, fibulae, beads, knives, umbos of shields etc., in one an elegant glass vessel. From other skeletons that have been dug up in gardens nearer the Cross, I am of the opinion that they extended on this side of the road up to the Cross, now covered pretty much with houses. I mean at a future time to pursue the discovery. The tumuli that formerly covered them have long since been levelled by the plough. The graves were very thick, in rows, parallel to each other, in a direction from east to west' (quoted in Shaw, 1870, 3-4).

Further graves were discovered in the same area during 1860-1 when alterations to 'Southbanks' were being carried out (Shaw, 1870, 3). Miss Izard confirmed that Cross Farmhouse was formerly known by that name, indicating that these nineteenth-century finds must have been made very close to the present discovery.

The recently found pot has now been placed in Maidstone Museum (Acc. No. 1993.72) where other finds from the Buttsale Cemetery are already held (Acc. Nos. 38.1987). Further finds, probably made in the nineteenth century, are housed at Canterbury Museum (Acc. Nos. RM 7497-7502, 7504-7508).

Thanks are due to Mr John Walton and the late Miss Izard for bringing this discovery to the writer's attention. Nigel Macpherson-Grant has kindly examined the pot and provided the detailed description and drawing of the vessel (see below).

In November 1993 excavations for the foundations of a new stable block located some 33.5m downhill to the south-east of Cross Farmhouse were observed at the request of the County Archaeologist. (NGR TR 3103 5445) The shallow excavations required for the new structure revealed no graves or other archaeological features (Jones and Halliwell, 1993).

### *The Pottery Vessel (Fig. 2, 1)*

by Nigel Macpherson-Grant

The small jar from Cross Farmhouse is hand-made in a sandy fabric containing moderate quantities of fine chalk grains, mostly leached out, and some sparse organic inclusions. Disregarding the latter which may represent accidental inclusions or have been naturally present in the clay used, this fabric is superficially fairly similar to the Canterbury Fabric EMS 2, one of a number of early-mid Saxon fabric types recorded from the Marlowe Saxon sequence in Canterbury (MacPherson-Grant and Mainman, 1995, 819-20). These points together add to a little regional evidence suggesting that, despite community self-sufficiency, pots were made to a fairly similar set of fabric recipes across the East Kent region. Post-firing pot coloration is mostly a dark black-brown externally, with some totally black patches, surrounded by lighter brown haloes; the interior is variably dark-light grey.

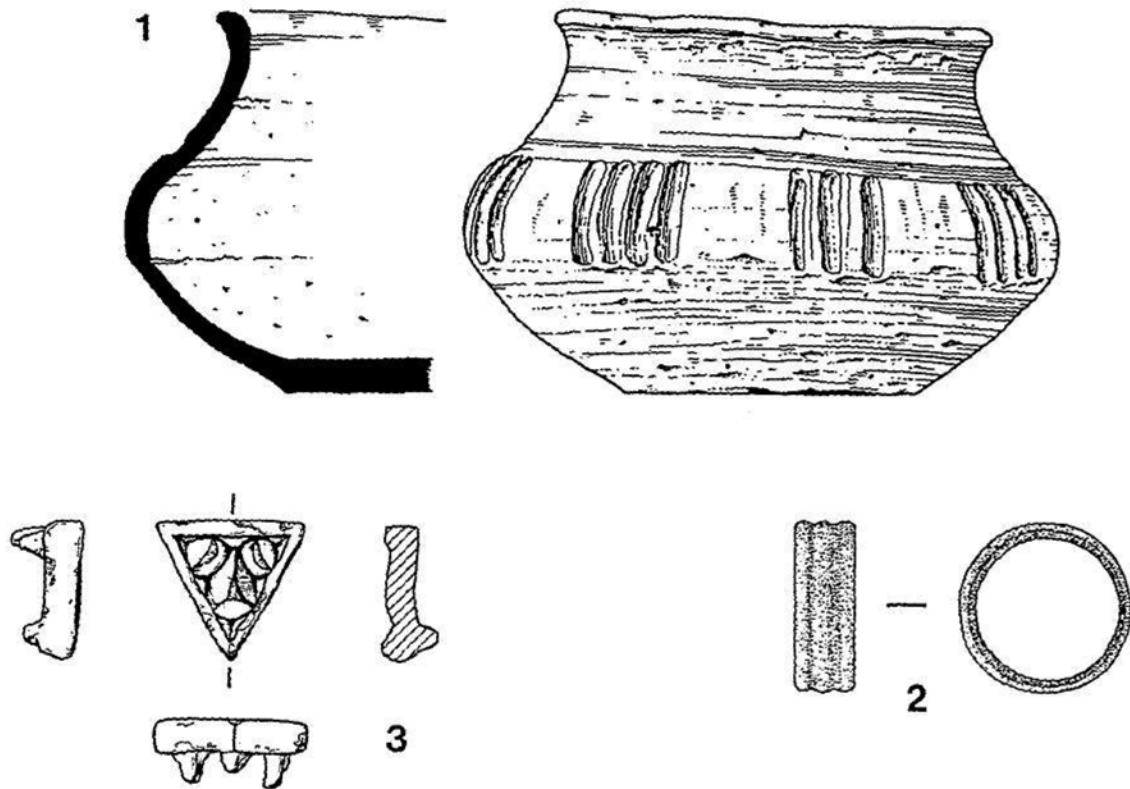


Fig. 2. Anglo-Saxon finds from Easry: 1 & 2, Cross Farmhouse; 3, west of Buttsale pond. Scale: 1, 1:2; 2 & 3, 1:1

Surface finishes consist of a mostly horizontal medium quality burnish externally (fairly even above the shoulder, less regular below) and a smoothed internal surface with only the inner lip burnished: the spaces between the shoulder decoration were burnished vertically. The base was lightly tooled flat. The neck-shoulder junction is defined by a single horizontal groove. Below this the broad shoulder 'panel' is decorated with eight groups of spaced vertical grooves, one with three grooves, one with five, the rest in groups of four. Though superficially neat, the grooves were fairly irregularly scored into the fresh clay surface and finished with a light perfunctory burnish.

The pot comes from the same cemetery that in 1792 (Baynes, 1909, 364 and fig. 3) produced a pedestalled beaker decorated with long grooves between long bosses below multiple horizontal lines (Myres, *Corpus* No.3087, fig. 202) and a round-shouldered hollow-necked jar, taller than the present vessel and decorated with groups of three incised lines in an alternating arrangement of chevrons and vertical lines, again below multiple horizontal lines (Myres *Corpus* No.3088, fig. 279). Myres equated the beaker with parallels from north German and Frisian cemeteries, dating the general type to between c. AD 430 and 470 (Myres, 1977, 36). The other jar and the present pot belong to Myres' 'Kentish chevron' group (*op. cit.*, fig. 279), the shorter grooves of the recent find having general parallels with Bekebourne and Westbere, the longer grooves of No.3088 with the Canterbury Barracks jar, Myres No. 1078. He equates these with similar decorated vessels stemming primarily from Jutland, but also from Schleswig and Frisia, with (as assumed in 1977) a homeland date-range between the late fourth and early fifth centuries (*op. cit.*, 478). A date as early as this is unlikely for the present vessel and the dating quoted for the pedestalled beaker initially (c. AD 430-70) is likely to be nearer the mark.

There is one fairly close parallel from the recently excavated Marlowe periods 6I-7 Early-Late Saxon occupation sequences in Canterbury for the present pot's decoration (though the form is more angular). This is a probably somewhat residual sherd from a Period 6III-IV context dated to c. AD 600 (Macpherson-Grant and Mainman, 1995, fig. 356, no. 52). Though there is no fundamental reason why the present pot should not be dated to the mid-late fifth century, the Buttsale cemetery may have been used over a fairly long period. In the absence of more conclusive evidence, this Marlowe parallel allows for a sixth-century date.

### *The Finger-ring (Fig. 2, 2)*

Found within the pot, a worn copper-alloy finger-ring with an internal diameter of 18mm. Decorated with a continuous double groove and band around the circumference. Broadly similar to an example from South Shields Roman fort (Allason-Jones & Milet, 1984, No. 1110), suggesting that it is a Roman survival.

### BUTTSOLE POND (WEST OF)

In September 1994 a fine triangular Anglo-Saxon mount (Fig. 2, 3) was

discovered by Mr Garrie Thompson from California, U.S.A. during a metal detector search of a field situated a short distance to the west of Buttsale pond. (NGR TR 3085 5410) The item was purchased for Dover Museum and Miss Jo Bacon has illustrated the piece.

*Anglo-Saxon mount (Fig. 2, 3)*

by Cathy Haith

Cast, gilt copper-alloy triangular mount, probably from a belt, with a rudimentary, chi-carved Style I face-mask. The gilding only survives in the central panel; the border and sides are plain. On the back are three attachment rivets of square section; the one at the base is worn in comparison to the pair above. Height, 17mm; width, 18mm; section including rivets, 9mm. Date, first half of sixth century.

#### EVALUATION TRENCHING AT NO. 4, HIGH STREET

The site of the early Anglo-Saxon palace (*villa regalis*) at Eastry is generally believed to lie under the later manor house represented by Eastry Court (Hawkes, 1979, 95), although recent small-scale excavations there failed to produce any evidence of occupation before the eleventh century AD (Arnold, 1982). Some further excavation nearby, in the centre of the village, has recently been possible; this again failed to reveal any definite evidence of early Anglo-Saxon occupation in the area.

In connection with a planning application for the erection of a new doctor's surgery at the back of the modern bungalow forming No. 4, High Street, the Dover Archaeological Group was invited to undertake evaluation trenching on the site in order to establish if any archaeological remains were present. The site (NGR TR 3099 5482) stands on head brickearth at an elevation of about 25m OD, within the heart of the historic village. It lies about 110m west of Eastry Court, adjacent to the line of the Richborough-Dover Roman road (here represented by the High Street itself) and almost opposite the site of the Eastry House, (Cemetery II). Four trenches, totalling some 20m in length, were excavated by hand to the top of the natural sub-soil during May 1992 (Parfitt, 1992).

The general sequence of deposits exposed consisted of a layer of top-soil around 0.4m thick, over a layer of brown clay sub-soil about 0.3m thick, which sealed the natural brickearth and four features of archaeological interest. These features were cut into the brickearth and consisted of two pits, a ditch and a gully, all tentatively dated to the Iron Age on the evidence of the small amounts of pottery they

contained. One of the pits (Feature 1), however, yielded an eighth-century Saxon *sceatta*. This was contained within the uppermost filling of the feature and must be treated as an isolated, intrusive find. No pottery or other Anglo-Saxon material was found anywhere else on the site.

*The Sceatta (not illustrated)*

by David Holman

This coin has been previously noted in the 'Coin Register of the British Numismatics Journal (Volume 62, no. 244, 1992) and in Metcalf (1994, 575, with drawing). Details of the coin:

|                 |                              |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Site reference: | HSE-92-4                     |
| Date of coin:   | c. AD 710-725                |
| Denomination:   | 'sceatta'                    |
| Diameter:       | 11.5 - 12.5mm                |
| Weight:         | 0.88g                        |
| Die axis:       | 0°                           |
| Obverse:        | Wolf and twins               |
| Reverse:        | Bird on vine                 |
| Reference:      | North 120, BMC 7             |
| Notes:          | Series V. In good condition. |

This particular *sceatta* is a secondary type belonging to series V. All other provenanced examples of Series V have been listed by Dr D. M. Metcalf (1994, 571), with the exception of a specimen from a recent metal-detector rally at Waldershare Park, near Dover. On the basis of its distribution and stylistic links with other series, Metcalf regards Series V as having been minted in east Kent, although the location of the mint itself is uncertain (Metcalf, 1994, 571).

The obverse design, unique among *sceatta* types, is derived from the 'wolf and twins' reverse of the Roman Constantinian 'URBS ROMA' commemorative coinage of c. AD 330-335. This is a coin frequently found on late Roman sites and the Saxons could have discovered these by chance while working in the fields. The reverse design is purely Saxon in concept and not dissimilar to designs found on some illuminated manuscripts of the period. It is, therefore, an interesting example of a coin exhibiting both Roman and Saxon influence on the designs.

The weight, 0.88g, is at the lower end of the range for this series but the coin appears to be of reasonably good silver content.

## EASTRY HOUSE

In 1970 building work being undertaken immediately to the north-west of Eastry House, on the western side of the High Street, revealed



a rich late sixth-century female grave (Hawkes, 1979). This could have formed part of a larger cemetery (designated Eastry Cemetery II), although no other burials were exposed during the building operations and it is possible, therefore, that this was an isolated grave.

Further building work at Eastry House in 1997, associated with the construction of a new conservatory, allowed inspection of an area on the south side of the house, immediately adjacent to the High Street. (NGR TR 3094 5485) Here, some 9.5m of trench and a soakaway pit revealed natural weathered chalk at a depth of about 0.4m. There had been some previous disturbance of the area by services but no traces of any further Anglo-Saxon graves were revealed. The 1970 burial lay about 50m to the north-west.

## DISCUSSION

The various finds and observations recorded above provide some useful new information concerning early Anglo-Saxon activity around Eastry. The late fifth- or sixth-century pot discovered at Cross Farmhouse, apparently associated with a burial, represents the first find to be made at the Buttsole cemetery for more than a century and indicates that further graves still await discovery in this area. Observations at Eastry House, however, suggest that a late sixth-century grave found there in 1970 may have been an isolated one. The comparatively early dating of the pottery vessel from Cross Farmhouse is of interest. Other fifth-century material has been recovered previously from the Buttsole cemetery, indicating that Eastry was a centre of very early Anglo-Saxon settlement.

Direct settlement evidence continues to be elusive and trenching on the eastern side of the High Street failed to locate any definite Anglo-Saxon remains, whilst providing some limited evidence for an Iron Age origin for settlement at Eastry. The early eighth-century *sceatta* discovered in the top of a pit here must be intrusive but clearly provides additional evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity in the area. The sixth-century gilded mount found near Buttsole pond on the outskirts of the village probably represents a casual loss, derived from the adjacent settlement.

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