

ON THE RECENT DISCOVERY OF A BRONZE SWORD, AT CHIPPENHAM, CAMBRIDGESHIRE,

WITH NOTICES OF SIMILAR DISCOVERIES IN THE
WESTERN DISTRICT OF SUFFOLK.

The greater part of the district over which the Suffolk Institute of Archæology, &c., has the nominal supervision, has been subjected for such a length of time to cultivation, by which its surface has been so thoroughly explored, that the discovery of the larger weapons of bronze is becoming more and more infrequent. Markedly is it so with the more prominent and uncommon member of the group, the leaf-shaped sword, and every instance of its discovery whether in the past or future should be carefully recorded in our Proceedings, and especially when it occurs under circumstances which admit of the belief that it was placed by design where found.

The great majority of the Celtic bronze weapons preserved in the public and private collections of this country were apparently lost by their former owners, and have been recovered in modern days from the peat of our fens, the bottoms of ancient meres and lakes, or dug from the beds of rivers, often at points where there were fords and where many a fierce encounter between hostile tribes or peoples may have taken place. Instances in which these objects in a perfect state have been found under other conditions are uncommon, and consequently worthy of the most careful notice, for from such discoveries alone can we hope in time to come to solve the question of the true age and origin of these classic weapons, and of the people who first brought them to our shores.



FIG. 1.



FIG. 2.

Within my archæological career two such instances of the discovery of leaf-shaped swords have come under my observation, the first some years since at Barrow, near Bury St. Edmunds; the second, the immediate cause of the production of this paper, at Chippenham, near Newmarket. This place, though not within the confines of the county, is included in the ancient bounds of St. Edmund and the jurisdiction of the Archdeacon of Sudbury,* and is so land locked by Suffolk as to form part of a district in which the archæologists of the two counties can well afford to meet and investigate the antiquities common to both.

The site of the discovery at Chippenham was upon the open field to the right of the road leading from the village street to Badlingham, and at about 85 yards from it and the fence separating the field from the strip of meadow land which intervenes between it and the brook. At this point, which is just below the brow of the rising ground, some men digging for gravel, in the middle of last December, unearthed the relic at a depth of about two and a half feet from the surface. It lay with its point directed to the North West and its hilt at a lower level, upon, and partly within, a stratum of picked flint stones of larger size than the average of those found in the surrounding soil, which is of a sandy nature and unprofitable for sifting. Around the handle-plate of the sword when it was first uncovered, was a blackish fibrous decay, which fell off when the weapon was lifted. This, there is little doubt, was the remains of the substance which formed its handle. Just clear of the bed of stones and some two feet further N.W. from the point of the sword, the men came upon a deposit of burnt matter, occupying a space of about two feet or so in diameter, and in quantity between two and three bushels, which they described as being "just like soot from a chimney." This they took the trouble to sift, but no fragments of bone or pottery were found in it, nor were any noticed

* Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archæology, Vol. 1., pp. 233 and 344.

in the vicinity of the sword. The position and character of the deposit I am assured of, for upon my visit to the spot shortly after the discovery, the men in pointing out the relative position of it and the sword, dug in the siftings and turned up some of the blackened soil for my inspection. At my suggestion also they continued their excavations in the whole ground beyond where the sword lay, but found it had not been previously disturbed. A few yards eastward of this point there is a slight rise in the surface of the ground in which some thought they saw the traces of a levelled tumulus, but after a careful examination I fear that it is far too low, ridge like, and irregular in outline to be such, but is rather the natural brow of the hill with a slightly greater increment of silt of the old river which formed the gravel bed beneath.

The Chippenham sword, which is represented in fig. 1 of the accompanying plate, is a very fine and perfect example of the broad form of the weapon. Its length is $27\frac{1}{4}$ inches, by $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches in greatest breadth, both of the handle-plate, and blade. The latter, except near the point, has no well defined central stem, or mid-rib, a slight fulness only traverses the middle of the blade and terminates in a point below the lozenge shaped portion of the handle piece. It is margined by a grooved and narrow feather edge, which is still perfect and sharp, except for a few inches at the broadest part of the blade where it is turned as from a blow delivered when in use upon some unyielding substance. The handle-plate is slightly flanged at the sides for the better retention of the material of its handle, and is perforated with nine holes in three sets for the attachment of the same, which was in place when first the sword was seen, and of the form of which there are indications in the erugo of the hilt.

The discovery at Barrow was made in the spring of 1850, or 51, by some labourers engaged in widening a ditch by the side of the foot-path leading from the Great Green to the Rectory, and not far from the north-east

corner of the meadow in which is the moated enclosure of the old Hall.* Here at a depth of some two or three feet below the surface two leaf-shaped swords were found lying side by side. As in the Chippenham case they lay surrounded by stones and much blackened earth. It was currently reported also that they accompanied the bones of a large framed man, but this particular is not confirmed by the enquiries instituted in the village some time ago by myself and more recently resumed, nor by the Rev. William Keeling, the rector of Barrow, who in 1871, wrote in answer to my enquiry, "I was not present at the finding of the two swords, but remember afterwards observing a quantity of black soil (the natural soil being clay) at the spot where the labourers found the swords: leading me to suppose that an interment had taken place there. I do not recollect any other relics being discovered." These seem to be the facts of the case, and as the men who made the discovery are either dead, or gone away from the village, and no account of it was apparently published at the time, it is unlikely that any additional information can now be obtained.

In the neighbourhood it is generally believed that a battle took place not far from the site of the discovery, and it is not at all improbable—for Barrow is just outside the line of the ancient entrenchment known as the Black Ditch, and the ridge upon which the Hall stands is a commanding position, and one which would not fail to be occupied by the warriors engaged in defending the territory defined by the dyke. Odds and ends of arms too, are occasionally ploughed up, and it was not long since that a fragment of blade of a bronze sword was so recovered. Indeed the name of Barrow is so suggestive of earthworks, that it is very probable the formidable moat† with its rudiments, or remains, of

* The spot will be found carefully indicated upon the new large scale map of the Ordnance Survey.

† Not far from this, I have ascertained the existence of two considerable ancient burial places of undetermined age. As, however, Roman coins are occasionally found upon the surface of one of the sites (the Mill field) and urns with ashes, &c., have been met with in draining it, it may probably be referred to the period of the occupation of the country by that people.

ramparts is of much more ancient origin than the Hall of the Passelews and De Barewes it once enclosed.

Upon this point it may be interesting to quote further from Mr. Keeling's letter, he adds, "there is little doubt, I imagine, that the ground between the spot in question, and Barrow Bottom was a battle-field, for I remember hearing of bones formerly being found by the side of the hollow road which used to run across the open field and Barrow heath into the present high road from Bury to Newmarket, not far from the site of the large tumulus, which once stood on the rise of the hill from Barrow bottom."*

Of the Barrow swords one was presented to the Bury Museum† by the Rev. Mr. Keeling, and forms the subject of the engraving No. 2 of the plate. It is shorter by one inch than the weapon from Chippenham, but is the more elegantly formed of the two, characterised as it is by its lunetted hilt, bevelled blade, and well marked mid-rib, which extends from the sharp point, to the margin of the elongated slot which here served the purpose of the three rivet-holes in the grip of the handle-plate of the other specimen. Its blade is two inches in greatest width, and the points of the lunette of the handle plate are $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches apart. Upon the latter above the six rivet-holes can be plainly seen the surface covered by the hefting. This weapon is now coated with a dark green patina and is perfect with the exception of its feather-edge, in which are many small gaps and bruises on both sides from hilt to point, showing I think that it had taken its part in some close and deadly conflict.

The second sword was formerly in the possession of Goddard Johnson, Esq.; of East Dereham, the brother of the then occupant of Barrow Hall, and is believed to be the one which passed, some time after his decease, into the collection of the Rev. Wm. Greenwell,

* When this tumulus was removed in 1813, among other things found in it were some iron cusps of Spears referrible to the "late Celtic" period. Two of these are in the Bury Museum. See Vol. II. Suffolk Institute Proceedings, p. 207.

† Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archæology, Vol. II, p. 277.

F.R.S. of Durham. It is engraved one fourth size in fig. 343, page 279, of Dr. Evans' work on British Bronze Implements, where it is described "as a remarkably fine sword ($27\frac{1}{2}$ inches long) from Barrow, Suffolk, in which the long slot in the hilt plate is combined with ten small rivet holes. The central ridge on the blade is well pronounced, and the blunted part of the blade near the hilt is engraved or milled diagonally. The number of rivets is here larger than usual."

In reviewing the evidence afforded by these cases, meagre as it is, one can hardly help being impressed by the coincidence presented, which indicate, I think, that the swords were buried with some care and under similar circumstances. They were lying apparently directed to the same point of the compass* and were perfect swords when committed to the keeping of the earth, and not broken or useless weapons, thrown aside to be re-cast. In both cases they were associated with stones† and carbonised earth, and the site of their burial was not far removed from an ancient boundary dyke, in some fraying in connection therewith, the chieftains who owned them, may have fallen. It is to be regretted that the evidence as to the finding of human remains in the Barrow case was so incomplete as to compel me to reject it, otherwise it appears to afford the most natural solution of the question, why these perfect, well balanced weapons, so superior to the iron ones that succeeded them, should have been thus hid away in the ground. The non occurrence of any bones in the Chippenham burial would to my mind have presented no difficulty, for in porous soil, as I have shown elsewhere, human bones, unless cremated, frequently decay entirely and leave scarcely any evidence of their former presence. In making these observations I am aware that no instance has been

* The ditch in the side of which the swords were found lies N.W. and S.E. and my informant, who was on the spot in the afternoon of the discovery leads me to believe, they lay along it.

† For the occurrence of stones in the graves of the latter part of the bronze period; see Kemble's *Horse Ferales*, p. 45.

recorded of bronze weapons of this type having been found in this country, or in Ireland, in tumuli, or in graves associated with human remains; but may not this have arisen from a want of due observation on the part of the finders, in the exceptional cases referred to at the commencement of this paper, who eager to secure the relic of value have been careless as to its surroundings? In Scandinavia a good proportion of the leaf-shaped swords of bronze have so been found. Thus in the tumulus, Treenhoi, near Ribe, in Jutland, cited by Sir John Lubbock,* on the left side of the corpse, which had been buried in woollen clothing which was remarkably preserved together with portions of the body itself, was a bronze sword 27 inches long, in its wooden sheath; and another burial in the same tumulus yielded with a javelin head of flint, and smaller articles of bronze, a second sword of that metal. So there appears some ground for the belief that in this country also; these objects may have been interred in some cases with their deceased owners.

Two or three other leaf-shaped swords are known to me to have been found in West Suffolk. One of these, a perfect weapon in citron coloured bronze of the second or narrow form of Sir Wm. Wilde,† is preserved among the antiquities at Hardwick House and was found, over a hundred years ago in cleaning out the river Lark at Icklingham.‡ This specimen is 24 inches and two tenths long, seventeen tenths of an inch in greatest width of blade, and 2 inches and two-tenths across the lozenge. It is furnished with a handle-plate of the same form as No. 1, perforated with six rivet holes, in the uppermost of the two in the grip the bronze rivet still remains, and is about six-tenths of an inch long. The blade has no mid-rib, but its faces are smooth, sloping away from a slightly thickened centre. The feather edge is sharp and intact.

* Prehistoric Times, p. 29. † Catalogue of the Museum, Royal Irish Academy, p. 443.

‡ Suffolk Institute Proceedings, Vol. I, p. 24.

In the Norwich Museum is another specimen of the same form, which was found at Woolpit, and was presented by Sir R. Beever. This is 21 inches and eight-tenths long, and is proportionately narrower than the last. It has the handle plate perforated for seven rivets and its blade is strengthened by a flat mid-rib, which terminates in a point in the handle just by the upper rivet hole of the tang. The conditions under which it was discovered are not recorded. Another example was obtained from near Mildenhall in 1851, by the Cambridge Antiquarian Society,* but further than "it was broken in half" no particulars of its form or dimension are given.

The leaf-shaped bronze swords found in the British islands and France present a considerable resemblance, which suggests a common origin, whilst from those found in Denmark and the adjacent countries of the continent, they differ chiefly in the greater beauty of their form and manufacture, and also in the circumstance that they were hefted with a material liable to decay such as wood, horn, or bone, and not like those of Northern Europe, the majority of which have handles of bronze, more or less ornamented. Very few weapons retaining their handles have from this cause come to light in the British isles, probably not many more than a dozen examples are recorded, and these chiefly Irish. Of these again only three are leaf-shaped swords of the types shown in the illustration, and the material employed in their hefting appears to have been deer's horn and bone of the whale.

The handles although mostly attached to the handle plates with rivets of bronze were in many cases, I am led to think, secured by pegs or plugs of wood, or of such material as the handle: or that the plates of bone, &c., were laced or braided on to the tang, through the perforations in the same, with cords of leather or gut. If this were not the case, the bronze rivets would be found with the swords oftener than they are.

*Abstract of Proceedings, Vol. 1, p. 7.

In elegance of outline the British sword bears comparison with those represented upon the painted Greek vases, which is suggestive of the models for these weapons, if not the art of casting them, being derived originally from an Eastern source, possibly by the agency of early intercourse with the traders of Phœnicia. Authorities are mostly agreed that this form of weapon was brought into use in Western and Northern Europe at a comparatively late stage in the Bronze period. On the other hand, there are some, of whom the late Mr. Thomas Wright, F.S.A., was the principal exponent, who contend that with the celts and other instruments of bronze, they came to us at a still later period, and are essentially Roman.* These gentlemen have, however, failed to show why so many of these objects should be found in those countries where the Roman legions never penetrated, and so few in Italy, the country of their supposed derivation.

Regarding the leaf-shaped swords as undoubtedly Celtic or in our case as British, I incline to the opinion that they may have been first brought hither by the Belgæ or some kindred people from the opposite shores of the continent, who are thought to have invaded this country and settled in it, some two or three centuries prior to the first Roman invasion, and of whom we may have traces in the lines of dykes which traverse West Suffolk and the neighbouring county of Cambridge.

In Ireland where these weapons are apparently much more common than in this country, having probably continued in use to a later period, they with other bronzes are attributed by some to a people known in the legends as the *Tuatha de Danann* who in remote times entered Ierne as conquerors and colonists subduing and coercing the older inhabitants, the Fir-bolgi, whom, if they ever existed, must have been people of the later stone-period, for the former race as smelters of ore, and workers in

* Journal of the British Archæological Association, Vol. 22: 80. The Celt, the Roman, and the Saxon, p. 74.

copper, bronze, and gold, were regarded by them as a race of magicians.

In this paper I have intentionally omitted all reference either to the bronze rapier, or to the leaf-shaped and triangular sword-daggers of the tumuli, of which forms some few examples have been found in the district; for the reader will have inferred from my observations, that I consider them to be antecedent to the type of weapon treated of in the foregoing pages, although no doubt they continued to be used by some tribes until long after the introduction of the more perfect weapon.

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Whilst these pages were passing through the press, information reached me of a further discovery at Chippenham in close proximity to the spot where the bronze sword was found. In the early part of last month, it appears, the gravel-raisers were set to work the same pit in an eastward direction, and after a few days digging, exposed what would seem to have been an oblique section of a short and shallow trench, trending West by North West, or thereabouts. In this at about two feet from the surface, they found lying near each other three portions of a bronze leaf-shaped sword, or swords, for it is not clear that the fragments belonged to one weapon, and a leg bone which the finders assert was human, but which I think was more probably that of some animal. At a distance of about four yards, N. W., from these they came upon a deposit of blackened earth and charcoal, in which were many flints and pebbles bearing the marks of fire, and among them several crude lumps of metal, either copper or bronze, the entire weight of which was near upon five pounds. Mingled with the disturbed soil the workmen found some few fragments of pottery, reddish yellow in colour and very friable, which from their description was probably of Celtic fabric.

From a careful inspection since made of the pit and my previous knowledge of it, I am led to the conclusion that the spot where the sword was found is aligned with the two later discoveries to the North West, and distant from the deposit of the lumps of metal about ten yards. It is evident also that in the remains of the hearth and its surroundings we have the site of an extemporized primitive foundry, the proximity of which to the buried sword tends not a little to weaken the supposition of the latter having been laid in the earth besides a corpse, although, why deposited, it is difficult to imagine.

The perfect sword with the other relics, are in the possession of W. M. Tharp, Esq., of Chippenham Hall, whom it is hoped will allow a careful analysis of the lumps of metal to be made to ascertain their true character, as well as of the fragments of Swords. Also that the excavation which it is purposed to make through the ridge in the rear of the pit, will set at rest the question of its origin, and at the same time yield further evidence of the ancient occupation of this sun-bathed grassy slope.

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