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Medieval Britain in 1956

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IT IS INTENDED that year by year *Medieval Archaeology* shall include, as one of its main features, an account of the progress of medieval field-work and excavation and of the more important medieval chance finds made in Britain during the previous calendar year. The following summary for 1956 has very kindly been compiled by Mr. D. M. Wilson for the period up to the Norman conquest (Part I) and by Mr. J. G. Hurst for the period thereafter (Part II).

No compilation of this kind, however assiduously undertaken, can hope to succeed without the generous cooperation of field workers, from all of whom individual reports must be received if such a summary is to lay any claim to accuracy and completeness. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Hurst wish to thank all their many friends and correspondents who have so generously helped them this year; and the Editorial Committee, while joining them in this expression of thanks, would combine with it their thanks to Mr. Wilson and Mr. Hurst themselves for the time and trouble they have devoted to collecting and editing the material. [ED.]

I. PRE-CONQUEST

ENGLAND

CORNWALL: ISLAND OF TEĀN, SCILLIES (NG.910165). C. Thomas, B. Wailes and J. V. S. Megaw excavated a complicated sequence on a site on this uninhabited island, with a ruin of the late-18th century, a 16th-century cottage, a midden of the 12th(?) century, and a pre-conquest hut, midden, and supposed chapel, perhaps of St. Theona, the unknown eponym of the isle. The chapel, which partly overlay a series of undoubtedly Christian graves, invited close comparison with the small oratory on the neighbouring island of St. Helen's; the midden and hut yielded a sub-Roman native ware of Romano-British type, the 'grass-marked' pottery of West Cornwall, and a variety of the wheel-made imported wares. A general date of the 4th-7th centuries seemed likely for this earliest phase, though the chapel is presumably a little later.

HERTFORDSHIRE: MARKYATE. An important 8th-century Hiberno-Saxon gilt-bronze belt-mount was found in the garden of the old vicarage and is now on permanent loan to the British Museum. It is of the same shape and has very much the same decoration as a mount from the Oseberg ship burial (A. W. Brøgger, H. Falk and H. Shetelig, *Osebergfundet*, III, 221). The projections at the end of the Markyate mount differ from those on the Oseberg example in that they take the form of a human head. The nearest parallels in these islands are to be seen in the Navan find (A. Mahr, *Christian Art in Ancient Ireland* (1932), pl. xxxiii, 7). The Markyate mount is, however, of much finer workmanship than the Navan mounts.

LINCOLNSHIRE: FONABY, NR. CAISTER (TA/110030). This site, watched since August 1956 by the staff of the Scunthorpe Museum, was excavated by P. Gathercole. So far fifty-four find-spots have been recorded, of which thirty-six are burials with associated grave-goods. Some of the material, which it has not yet been possible to recover, had been removed from the site before watching-operations began. The burials are mainly inhumations and there are only two certain cremations. Finds now in Scunthorpe

Museum include pottery, some of which can be placed fairly early in Myres's series, brooches, beads, fragments of fabric and iron shield-bosses, knives, and typical weapons. The majority of the metal-work is badly corroded and it is impossible to say anything in detail about the brooches until they have been cleaned. All the main types are represented, and while there is one cruciform example similar to a specimen from East Shefford, Berkshire, probably dated shortly after A.D. 500 (N. Åberg, *The Anglo-Saxons in England* (1926), fig. 64), others are much more elaborate and are presumably rather later in the series. Some of the fabric has been seen by Miss A. Henshall, and one piece is a tablet-woven braid, with the central portion worked on 'diagonal' weaves similar to the Girdle of St. Cuthbert (*Antiq. J.*, XIX (1939), 58-63).

———: HALL HILL (WEST KEAL) (TF/357649). 21 urns with cremations from this cemetery were excavated by G. Taylor. The pottery is very similar to that from South Elkington cemetery, and no associated finds occurred. Now in Lincoln Museum.

———: HOUGH-ON-THE-HILL (SK/932473). The terminal of a whetstone, similar in general appearance to that found at Sutton Hoo, was picked up on the surface of a field during harvesting by a farm worker. The upper part of the whetstone represents the head and shoulders of a man, clean shaven. Hair and clothes are indicated by engraved lines on the stone. On the crown of the head is a socket of unknown use. The Hough whetstone seems to be smaller than that from Sutton Hoo, possibly only half its length, since it is tapered directly from top to bottom. The rock is a chloritic and micaceous sandstone similar to a rock from Dumfries. On loan to the Lincoln Museum.

———: LOVEDEN HILL (HOUGH-ON-THE-HILL) (SK/908458). Two inhumations and more than 70 cremations in urns were excavated by K. R. Fennell in this cemetery. More than 180 urns have been found on the site, in addition to the barrow excavated in 1925-6. A hanging-bowl was found between the inhumations, and in it was a small glass palm-cup. With the bowl were other objects including a broken sword, fragments of a large bucket, and a bronze cauldron. A second hanging-bowl contained a cremation. Its base had been patched. It is interesting to note that the hanging-bowls had all been purposely 'killed' by stabbing through the bottoms in a number of places. A third small bronze vessel has also been found. The pottery indicates that the cemetery had a long life, extending into the seventh century. The finds are in Lincoln Museum. The excavation continues.

NORFOLK: NORWICH (63/233090) (R. R. Clarke, and D. R. Howlett). While digging foundations for new science block at Norwich Grammar School middle-Saxon, late-Saxon (Thetford, St. Neots, Stamford) and medieval pottery were found. A clay floor was found with middle-Saxon (Ipswich) ware below and late-Saxon (Thetford) ware above.

63/234090: this site was further explored eastwards (by A. P. Baggs) in the bishop's palace garden in an excavation for Norfolk Research Committee. More middle- and late-Saxon pottery was found as well as later wares, a bronze buckle (probably Saxon) and a stone mould.

———: THORNHAM (53/726425). A Christian inhumation-cemetery of the seventh century was excavated by R. R. Clarke within the fortified enclosure of a Roman signal station. About half the burials contained grave-goods which included iron knives, small buckles, a silvered escutcheon from a hanging-bowl, and a bronze disc with animal interlace.

NORTHUMBERLAND: OLD YEAVINGER (NT/925305). Excavations on the site of the Anglo-Saxon royal township have been proceeding since 1953. They originated from the remarkable crop-marks photographed from the air by J. K. S. St. Joseph in 1949, and have been directed by B. Hope-Taylor for the Ministry of Works. The work carried out in 1956-7 brings the operation to a stage at which a general statement of the site's significance can be made.

It is now certain that this was indeed the site of the *villa regalis ad Gefrin* mentioned

by Bede in his Ecclesiastical History. Bede refers to it as the place to which Paulinus went with King Edwin in 627, to preach Christianity to the Bernician people; but the excavations have shown that the township was established well before Edwin's time and long survived him.

The earliest structure on the site was a large timber fort, of remarkable and at present unparalleled form. As a crop-mark it appeared to be a normal defensive earth-work with two parallel ditches, although its circular entrance-works showed that it was of a type previously unknown, in Britain at least. Excavation showed that the seeming ditches were in fact foundation-trenches: the outer for a simple palisade, the inner for a formidable double palisade with a fighting-platform. This is a work of probably the second half of the 6th century.

The development of the township proper, outside the fort, began early in the 7th century, probably in its first decade, in the reign of Aethelfrith. A massive timber hall was erected and lesser halls were set about it. While most of the latter were probably the private halls of noble retainers, there was one with various unusual features, suggesting a pagan temple, later converted to Christian use. One building of more primitive type is interpreted as a native servants' house.

The most remarkable feature of this and the two following phases was a large timber grand stand for open-air assemblies, resembling in plan one *cuneus* of a Roman theatre. All the evidence shows that it served a permanent need, and it is identified as the meeting-place of the moot.

The next phase was marked by the replacement of the great hall by another of more ambitious design, by the building of additional smaller halls and by the radical enlargement of the moot. This phase is equated with the reign of Edwin. Its end was a disastrous fire which destroyed the whole township. There is evidence that this was a deliberate act of destruction, and it probably marks the ravaging of Northumbria by Cadwallon after Edwin's defeat and death in 632 (Bede).

The township was then rebuilt, but in a different architectural style. The new buildings were of lighter construction and several had the new feature of annexes or porches at the gable ends. The return from exile of Oswald is historically associated with the introduction of influences from the Celtic church, and the new architectural style is thought to have come from the same source. A notable feature of this phase was the erection of a Christian church, around which there grew an extensive cemetery.

The new township dwindled, several buildings going out of use; and then a second fire destroyed it. This event is tentatively equated with the ravaging of Northumbria by Penda, in 651, when he laid waste all the towns and villages in the region. Bede describes his attempt to reduce Bamburgh by fire.

Thereafter the great hall, two smaller halls and the church were rebuilt. A Merovingian coin found in the great hall indicates that its occupation went on until 670 at least. It seems not unlikely that the reorganization which necessarily followed Egrith's calamitous expedition against the Picts, in 685, brought about the abandonment of Yeavinger, in favour, as Bede says, of another called Melmin, near by. The site of Melmin has now been identified with great probability, but it will be left untouched, at least until the great body of evidence from Yeavinger has been fully considered and published. Publication of the results of the Yeavinger excavations will be made as soon as the very considerable research and preparation it demands has been done. Meanwhile, the final phase of excavation will be carried out in the summer of 1958.

WILTSHIRE: DOWNTON. Saxon pottery and Norman scratch-marked sherds were found during a Romano-British excavation (*Wilts. Archaeol. Mag.*, LVI (1956), 248 f.).

YORKSHIRE: YORK. Excavations on The Mount produced Anglian sherds and part of a bone comb in disturbed 19th-century levels. It is now almost certain that the Anglian cremation-cemetery is on the site of nos. 1 and 2, Dalton Terrace, and partly within the garden of no. 150, The Mount.