

Excavations at Standlake Down in 1954: The Anglo-Saxon Graves

By TANIA M. DICKINSON

IN the late summer of 1954 Dr. H. W. Catling, on behalf of the Ashmolean Museum, carried out a rescue excavation on five ring-ditches threatened by the advance of gravel extraction on Standlake Down in Oxfordshire.¹ Very soon afterwards he left the country to work in Cyprus, and his subsequent involvement in the study of the Cypriot Bronze Age meant that his 1954 excavations have remained unpublished. In 1970, when I was making enquiries about the records and material from this excavation, Dr. Catling invited me to publish the Saxon material for him, which I am now very pleased to do. He has put at my disposal all the records, photographs, plans and material which he had. Unfortunately, they do not provide a complete account: the grave-plans made at the time of excavation have been lost, and some of the negatives, now deposited at the Ashmolean Museum, have also been lost or damaged. The objects have now all been accessed into the Ashmolean Museum collection, and the human bones are in the collection of the British Museum (Natural History).

THE SITE (FIG. 1)

Standlake Down is situated near the southern end of a gravel terrace which lies between the Rivers Windrush and Thames. Since about 1825 gravel extraction has revealed a rich series of archaeological finds, the well-known line of Bronze Age ring-ditches, areas of Iron Age settlement, and Anglo-Saxon burials, all of which were first scientifically investigated in the 1850s and 1860s by Stephen Stone.² His plan and enumeration of the ring-ditches, which give the site a convenient topographical framework, have been revised by Gr. Capt. Riley in the light of information from aerial photography.³

Catling excavated in the field bounded to the north by the old gravel quarry, to the west by the Witney-Brighthampton road, and to the south by the cart-track leading eastwards from the road towards the River Windrush (N.G. SP 386054) (FIG. 2). It is approximately on the 250 ft. contour line. Aerial photographs appeared to reveal six ring-ditches, which Catling lettered A-F, and a number of other possible features.⁴ Nothing could be found at Site E, and none of the

¹ Briefly reported in *Report of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum*, 1954, 15-17, and *Oxoniensia*, xix (1954), 119.

² *Proc. Soc. Antiq.*, 1st ser., iv (1857), 92-9; 2nd ser., ii (1864), 442-3; *Archaeologia*, xxxvii (1857), 363-70, especially Pl. IX.

³ D. N. Riley, 'A Late Bronze Age and Iron Age site on Standlake Downs, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, xi-xii (1946-7), 30 and Fig. 6.

⁴ Allen photographs 1106-7, 1114; Riley photographs 638-9 (Ashmolean Museum); Allen 1106 is published in J. S. P. Bradford, 'An Early Iron Age settlement at Standlake, Oxon.', *Antiq. J.*, xxii (1942), Pl. XXVIII. Catling's Site A = Riley circle 15, Stone 8; B = Riley 16, Stone 9; C = Riley 20; D = Riley 17, Stone 11; F = Riley 19, Stone 10.

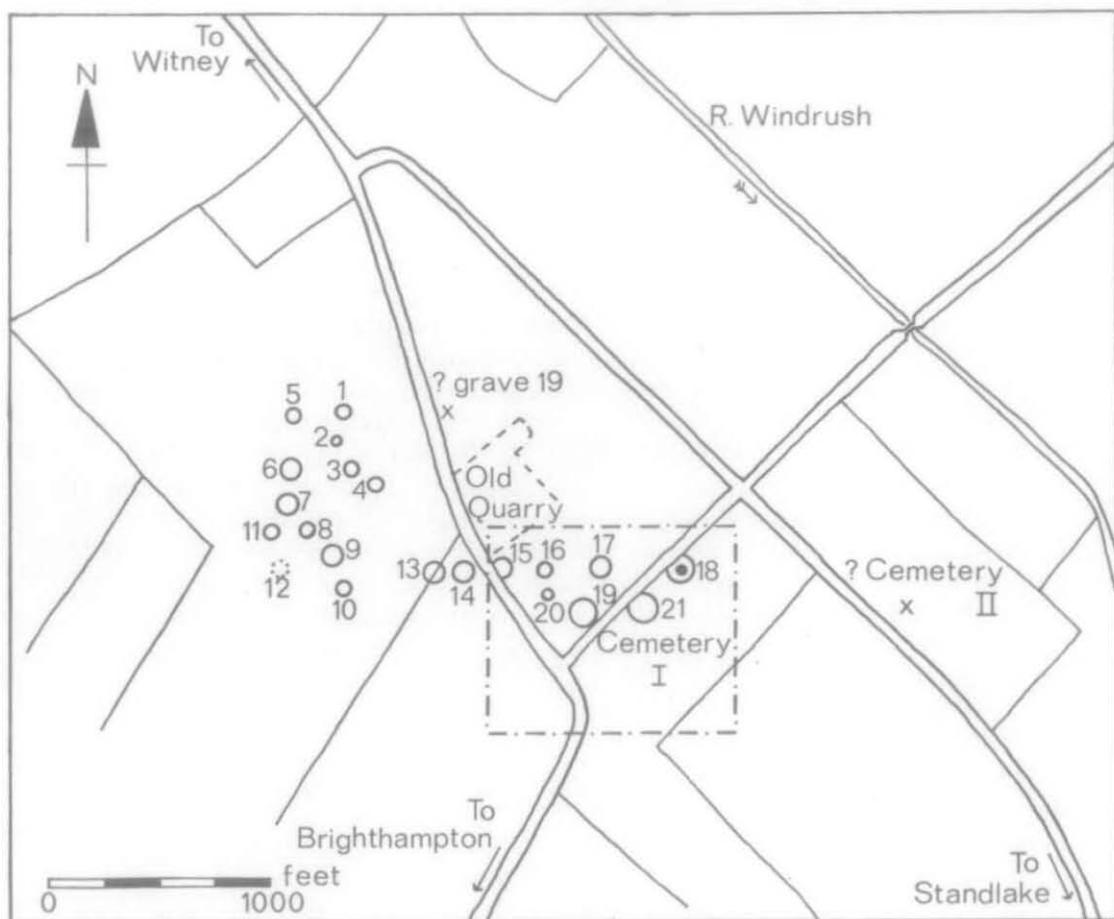


FIG. 1

Standlake Down, showing Bronze Age ring-ditches, principal Saxon cemetery (area within rectangle enlarged in Fig. 2, p. 241) and suggested sites of other Saxon graves.

other ring-ditches produced a primary burial, though the two Iron Age pits cutting into the centre of Site D might have totally destroyed an earlier burial.

THE ANGLO-SAXON GRAVES

The Anglo-Saxon graves were cut into and outside the south-east section of the ditch of Site D (FIG. 3). This ring-ditch was about 38 m. in diameter, and varied between about 5.5 m. and 7 m. in width; the ditch had a steep-sided central cutting about 2.5 m. across, and wide, slightly shelving edges. Catling excavated four graves, which he numbered 1-4, and in the course of the subsequent gravel extraction Mr. Arthur Fenwick reported that a further two graves had been destroyed, from one of which he managed to retrieve a single object. When Mr. David Brown of the Ashmolean Museum assessed both the 1954 and

STANDLAKE GENERAL PLAN

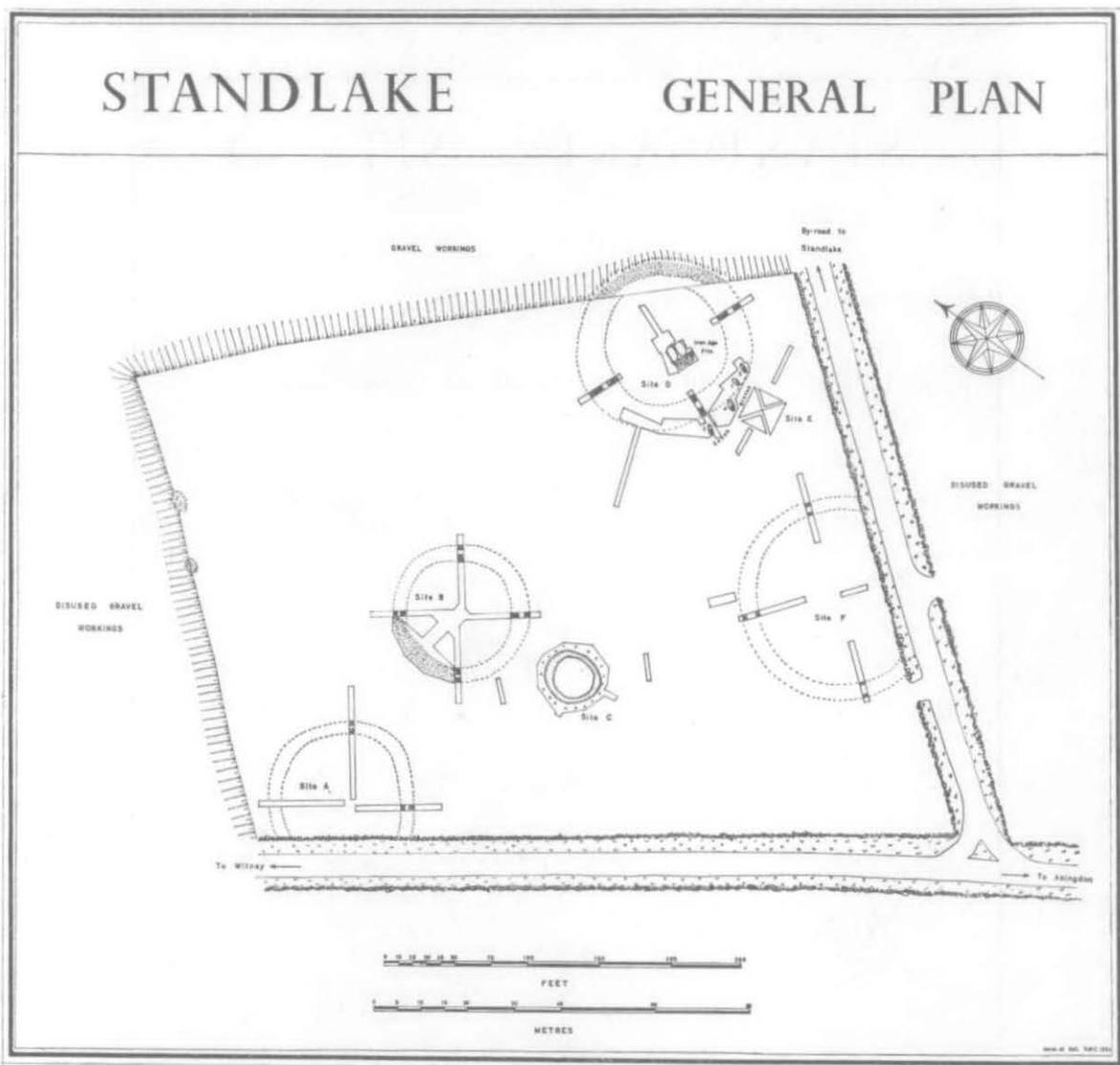


FIG. 2

General plan of 1954 excavations.

other material recently acquired from Standlake,⁵ he renumbered all the recorded Anglo-Saxon graves from the site, with the result that Catling's graves 1-4 have become Brown's graves 22-25.⁶ No numbers were given to the two destroyed

⁵ Material from graves excavated by Stone, and the zoomorphic disc found during earlier gravel digging, have recently been acquired by the Ashmolean Museum, greatly increasing knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon graves; *Oxoniensia*, xxxvi (1971), 112.

⁶ This enumeration will be used by David Brown in his forthcoming *Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Graves and Gravegoods in the Upper Thames Valley*.

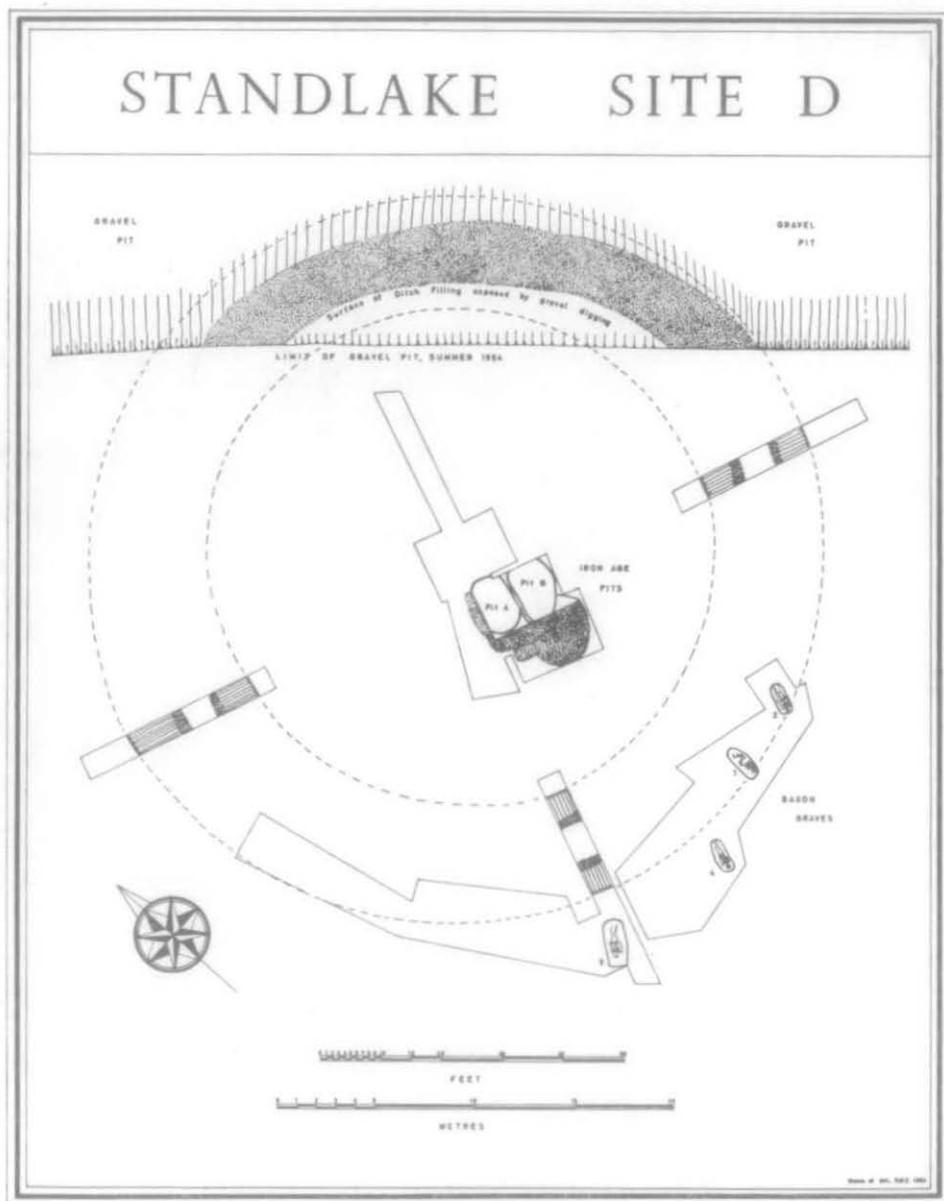


FIG. 3
Plan of Site D (circle 17) with Anglo-Saxon graves.

graves, but they could be added to the series as graves 26 and 27. There were probably far more than these six graves; Dr. Catling informs me that there had been extensive earlier gravel digging, particularly along the eastern hedge-line, which could have destroyed graves; the large areas which he was unable to trench in the available time may have contained others.

Grave 1 (= grave 22) (PL. XVIII, A).⁷

Orientation of grave recorded as 200°. Approximate length 6 ft. 4 ins., width varying from about 1 ft. 6 ins. to 2 ft. 3 ins. Head of grave is straight, foot is rounded. Grave cut into outer lip of ditch.

Skeleton of a mature adult female, about 40 years old. Orientation of skeleton nearer 180°. Crouched on r. side close to r. side of grave, with chest downwards, r. arm crossed under ribs, l. arm folded back on itself, and the legs flexed at right angles, the r. leg higher than the l. Well-preserved, but skull crushed.

No grave-goods.

Grave 2 (= grave 23) (PL. XVIII, B).

S.S.W.-N.N.E. 5 ft. 2 ins. by 2 ft. 5 in. Rectangular grave, cut into lip of ditch. In the upper fill there was a fragment of cremated bone (1971.560).

Skeleton of young adult male, aged 20-30.⁸ Grave was too small for body, so that the extended supine skeleton had its head twisted towards the r. and raised against the side of the grave, the spine twisted, and the feet turned inwards and pressed up against the lower end. R. hand across head of r. femur, l. hand by side with thumb across palm. Skeleton fairly complete. This person had suffered from, and probably died as a result of, an advanced case of osteogenic sarcoma in the l. leg (see below, p. 257).

Associated objects:

1. *Iron knife* (1971.558), just inside l. hand with point towards l. elbow (? originally held in hand). Very fragmentary with both tang and end of blade broken off. Length extant 67 mm., greatest width 11 mm. (FIG. 4, b).
2. *Amber bead* (1971.559), on 2nd thoracic vertebra. Disc-shape, 13 × 4 mm.⁹ (FIG. 4, a).

Grave 3 (= grave 24) (PL. XIX).

S.W.-N.E. 6 ft. 11 ins. by 4 ft. by about 1 ft. 6 ins. Large sub-rectangular grave. A series of small marks, about 1 in. to 3 ins. long and of 'pencil-thickness', were observed within 4 ins. of the surface of the grave and were thought to be possible remains of wattle-lining. Across the head and foot, and along the l. side, but not the r. side, the grave, from just below the surface, was lined with remains of carbonized wood (visible as dark unexcavated ledges in the photographs); the feet were partially covered by this material, and a length of timber is visible in the grave-side above the l. arm. A slight internal ledge of gravel runs along the r. side, but the overlying carbonized material makes it unclear whether this continued round the rest of the grave; the section by the l. knee cut back through the dark soil to the grave-edge suggests that it did not. Loss of the detailed grave-plan makes it difficult to be more explicit about the structure of this grave (see below, p. 255).

⁷ The graves are described according to the following conventions. Brown's Accession Register grave number is given in brackets, and is used in the subsequent discussion; the grave is described first, giving orientation (head to feet), length, width and depth, where known, and then other recorded details; the Ashmolean Museum Accession Register number is given after each object; measurements of objects are in millimetres; l. = left, r. = right.

⁸ Miss Mary Harman has re-examined this skeleton, and considers it to be a young female, aged 17-21 (see below, p. 257).

⁹ Bead measurements give the greatest diameter first, the length second, where the length is taken as the axis of the bore-hole, the diameter as the axis perpendicular to the bore-hole.

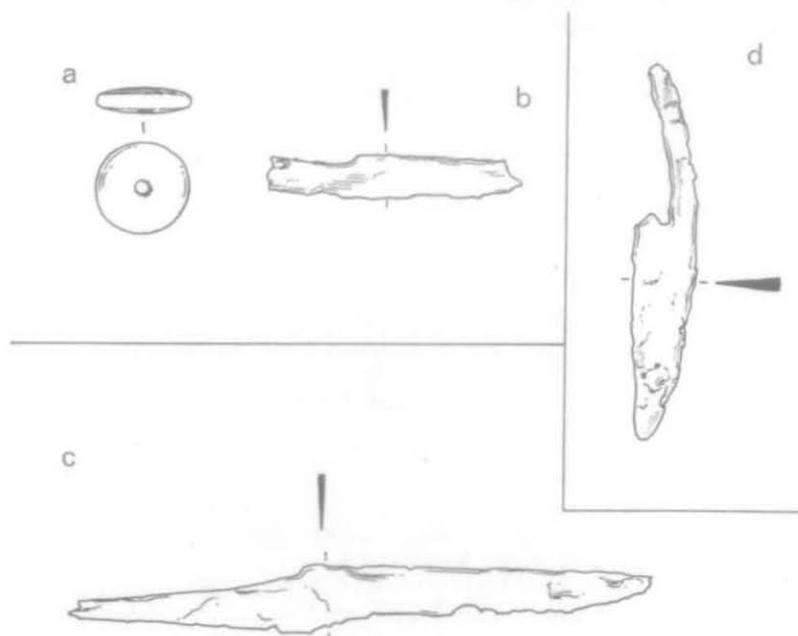


FIG. 4

(a) and (b) grave 23 ; (c) grave 25 ; (d) grave 26 or 27. Sc. : (a) 1/1, rest 1/4.

Skeleton of young female sub-adult, aged about 16-17. Extended, supine, head turned towards r., spine twisted, hands over top of femurs, knees together and feet apart. Skeleton fairly complete.

Associated objects :

1. *80 glass beads* (1971.559, 561, 566)¹⁰ (FIG. 5, 1).

Only 23 beads are itemized in the excavation notebook, few of which are now identifiable. They were found scattered over the entire body from shoulders to pelvis with an unspecified number in a group in the lower ribs. A large segmented bead and a large single bead, and one of the large cylinders decorated with green and red marvering of type f, were found behind the r. and l. knees respectively.

a. 3 dull red opaque double-segment cylinders, 8 × 12 mm.

b. 1 yellow opaque double-segment cylinder, 8 × 12 mm.

c. 1 white opaque double-segment cylinder, 8 × 12 mm.

d. 1 white opaque single cylinder, 8 × 7 mm.

e. 1 dull red opaque double-segment cylinder, one segment with marvered yellow opaque 3-coil spiral, the other with two interlacing yellow opaque trails and yellow spots between, 6.5 × 17 mm.

¹⁰ When Dr. Catling gave me the beads in 1970, they were divided into three separate strings, one odd bead and a fragment ; attached labels attributed the necklaces respectively to graves 2, 3 and 4, and the odd bead to grave 2. They have been accessed into the Ashmolean Museum collection in this way. The excavation notebook, however, records beads only for grave 3, except for one amber bead in grave 2 ; several of the beads in the string alleged to be from grave 4 can be identified among those described under grave 3. Dr. Catling assures me that only grave 3 did have beads, and it is very unlikely that grave 4 contained a *string* of beads, since it was an adult male (see below, p. 247). Where there is more than one bead of a type, only one has been illustrated as an example.

- f. 2 white opaque cylinders with two marvered interlacing viridian green trails and red opaque spots between, 10×11 mm.
- g. 1 white opaque elongated bicone ('barrel-shaped') marvered with randomly spaced red opaque spots, 9×12 mm.
- h. 1 white opaque oblate sphere with two marvered interlacing viridian green translucent trails, 8×5 mm.
- i. 7¹¹ minute yellow opaque double-segment spheres, 4×7 mm.- 5×8 mm.
- j. 28 minute yellow opaque single spheres, 3×3 mm.- 6×4 mm.
- k. 3 minute yellow opaque discs, 6×3 mm.
- l. 3 minute greeny-yellow opaque double-segment cylinders, 4×5 mm.
- m. 3 minute greeny-yellow opaque single cylinders, 4×2.5 and 2×2.5 mm.
- n. 4 minute apple-green opaque cylinders, 3.5×3 mm.
- o. 2 minute green translucent cylinders, 4×3 mm.
- p. 6 dark blue opaque discs, 4×2 mm.
- q. 1 dark blue opaque sphere with neck at each end of borehole, 4×4 mm.
- r. 1 dark blue opaque cylinder, 4×3 mm.
- s. 1 pale blue semi-translucent elongated cylinder, the glass having vertical striations, 3.5×14 mm.
- t. 3 decomposed (? originally pale blue semi-translucent) cylinders with vertical striations, 4×4 mm.
- u. 1 pale blue semi-translucent oblate sphere, 7×5 mm., and a fragment of another.
- v. 1 pale blue semi-translucent cylinder, 7×5 mm.
- w. 2 pale greeny-white semi-translucent oblate spheres, 6×4 mm.
- x. 1 pale greeny-white semi-translucent sphere with 3 irregular lobes and vertical striations, 4×3 mm.
- y. 1 purple opaque elliptical tube, 5×8 mm.

2. *Châtelaine* (1971.562) (FIG. 5, 2).

According to Catling's list of negatives, these objects were found in one compacted group underneath the left side of the chest; the notebook refers to a ? arrowhead by the l. forearm and another in the ribs, and to pieces of bronze in the area of the lower l. ribs; close to these, fragments of wood were found, but it is unknown whether they were associated with the *châtelaine* objects or with the postulated grave furniture. Most of the individual items from the group are now separated, and it is impossible to reconstruct them into more recognizable objects.

- a. 2 strips of rectangular sheet bronze, silvered or tinned on both sides, originally forming one piece of metal bent sharply in two; the inner side of one bears three transverse incisions; to the other a fragment of iron rod and an iron ring adhere with clearly visible replaced textile remains on it (see below, p. 254).
- b. Group of 4 iron rods with looped heads rusted together, greatest length 61 mm.
- c. 11 fragments of iron rods, some with looped ends; one has replaced textile in fine regular plain weave over it.
- d. Group of figure-of-eight iron links rusted together.
- e. Single figure-of-eight iron link, length 2.6 mm.
- f. ? buckle loop with part of tongue wrapped round it.

¹¹ This is the number of double-segment beads which I recorded in 1970; a year later, when I re-examined them, only four segmented ones remained, and there was one extra single bead. It would seem that two double-segment beads were lost completely, the third split in two, one of which was lost. These beads separate easily, so the proportion of double to single is perhaps a little arbitrary.

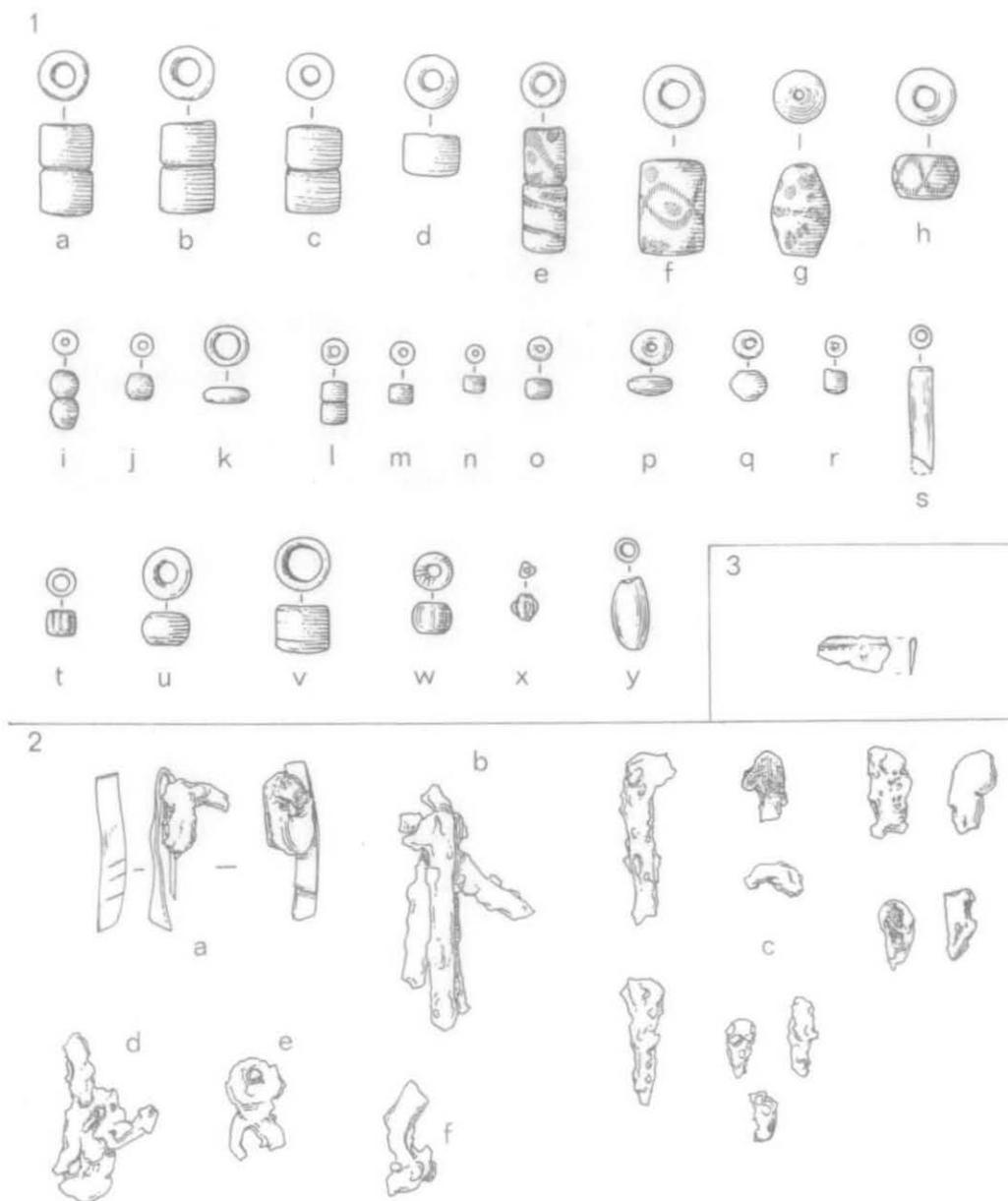


FIG. 5

Grave 24. Sc. : (1) 1/1, (2) and (3) 1/1.

3. *Fragment of rim-binding* (1971.563), apparently with objects belonging to châtelaine. Very thin sheet bronze folded in half, originally over some round-sectioned rod or similar edge, with row of punched dots along base of 'rim-edge'.

Length extant 18 mm. ; width extant 10 mm. (FIG. 5, 3).

Grave 4 (= *grave 25*).

S.-N. The record of this grave made by Catling has been lost, and unfortunately the photographs failed to develop satisfactorily, so that there are no details for it. Measured from the site plan, the grave was approximately 6 ft. by 2 ft. 6 ins. Dr. Catling says that this was the deepest grave which he excavated. In the grave fill from near the surface were fragments of cremated bone, a human incisor, a bovine molar, a fragment of charcoal and a prehistoric body sherd of soft, dark grey paste with a whitish-pink surface.

Skeleton of an elderly male, aged 50 or more. Extended, supine, head fallen backwards and lower jaw dropped on to cervical vertebra, r. hand in lap, l. hand by top of l. femur, and legs semi-flexed to l.

Associated object :

1. *Iron knife* (1971.564), under l. side of pelvis. Tips of tang and blade broken off and blade edge very eroded ; straight back to blade. Length extant 151 mm. ; greatest width of blade 18 mm. (FIG. 4, c).

Graves 5 and 6 (= *graves 26 and 27*).

No details of these graves are known, nor to which one the associated object belonged :

1. *Half of a pair of iron shears* (1971.565). Triangular profile blade, the back of which forms a continuous curve with the 'tang'. Cleaning has revealed an exceptionally smooth 'sheath-like' tip to the blade, and a diagonal line of similar metal a little above the point on one side only.

Length extant 98 mm., blade length 56 mm., greatest width 17 mm. (FIG. 4, d).

DISCUSSION

1. THE ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY AT STANDLAKE

The six Anglo-Saxon graves recorded in 1954 form part of a much larger Anglo-Saxon cemetery (see Figs. 1 and 2), which has been excavated and recorded piecemeal over the past century and a half. The earliest references are to about 1825, when at least forty skeletons were discovered during gravel digging ; the only extant item is a gilt bronze disc decorated with an interlacing serpent, said to have been found in the same grave as a bronze thread-box. In 1857 and 1863 Stephen Stone recorded that he excavated a total of forty-two inhumations, though details of only eighteen are known. In 1897 Percy Manning recorded another grave (grave 19), which contained a saucer brooch, a flat annular brooch, a number of girdle-objects, and a spearhead and two knives, which may imply that more than one body was, in fact, found (for further discussion of this grave, see below, p. 250). In 1943 Riley noted a further group of graves north of circle 18, only one of which he was able to record fully, and in 1945 he found a single grave just south of circle 21. In 1971 Pc. Wilkinson pulled remains of three skeletons from the quarry face close to this point.

The site of the 19th century finds has never been certain, but in this volume (see above p. 236) David Brown puts forward most convincing arguments for the site of Stone's 1857 and 1858 excavations having been in the area just south-east of circle 21.¹² There is no evidence at all for the site of Stone's 1863 excavations, but they must have been in the same general area, and one suspects, therefore, that the 1825 graves also came from some part of this region. We may envisage, then, a nucleated cemetery, centred on the four Bronze Age ring-ditches 17, 18, 19 and 21, from which we have records of nearly one hundred graves, but which, no doubt, contained far more than this number. Catling's 1954 graves may lie towards the western edge of this cemetery.

Within the cemetery, the graves do not all seem to have been laid out in a regular manner: although Stone's 1857 graves were in rows and oriented W.-E., he made no comment at all on the layout and orientation of his 1863 graves; grave 20 from 1943 was laid out E.-W. and the 1954 graves varied between S.W.-N.E. and S.-N. The arrangement of graves also appears to have differed in relation to the ring-ditches themselves. Grave 7 was part of a regular row of graves, and the fact that it cut the ditch of circle 21 was probably fortuitous, but the orientation of the 1954 graves in relation to circle 17 may have been deliberate. They seem to hug the south-east arc of the ditch, resembling the very orderly arrangement at Stanton Harcourt, Oxon.,¹³ where the bodies were placed radially around the east and south-east edge of a barrow-ditch. Although the Standlake graves are not truly 'radial' burials,¹⁴ they do seem to respect the ditch-circle. It would have been interesting to know whether there were other groups of graves at Standlake situated around the ring-ditches, and whether they formed contrasting groups to more densely-packed graves in regular rows.

The siting of the cemetery in proximity to the Bronze Age ring-ditches, which in Saxon times might still have been visible as slight mounds, was probably also deliberate. Anglo-Saxon cemeteries are frequently found close to prehistoric barrows, which were obviously recognized as ancient burial sites and regarded as suitable for further graves. Within the Upper Thames region, at least sixteen other burial sites occur close to, or even in, a barrow;¹⁵ in areas like Wiltshire or East Yorkshire, where prehistoric barrows are numerous, the number is even greater. There seems to be nothing chronologically distinctive about this custom.

All the graves so far known from Standlake can plausibly be dated to the 7th century. The overall impression that they give is of a cemetery-type characteristic of this period. Such cemeteries have been intensively studied by T. C. Lethbridge, E. T. Leeds, Mrs. M. Hyslop and Mrs. S. C. Hawkes, and

¹² I am most grateful to David Brown for allowing me to read a draft of his article prior to publication, which has enabled me to incorporate his findings in this report. He will forgive me for also taking the opportunity to comment on those points which I find less acceptable.

¹³ D. B. Harden and R. C. Treweeks, 'Excavations at Stanton Harcourt, Oxon., 1940, II', *Oxoniensia*, x (1945), 16-41, especially Fig. 7.

¹⁴ I discuss radial burials in greater detail in 'Cuddesdon and Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire: two early Saxon 'princely' sites in Wessex', *British Archaeological Reports*, I, (1974), 19-20.

¹⁵ E.g. Abingdon I, Bledlow Cop, Cassington II (Smith's Pit II), Chavenage, Cuddesdon (?), Clyffe Pypard, Dorchester III (Burcot), Hampnett, Lower Heyford (?), Lyneham, Oddington (Glos.), Marston St. Lawrence (?), Stanton Harcourt, Thenford, Upper Swell and Yarnton (?).

have been variously described by them as 'Christian', 'proto-Christian' and 'Final Phase'.¹⁶ Although these cemeteries reflect in many ways the reception of Christian teaching, they cannot be regarded as strictly Christian cemeteries, and I prefer to follow Leeds in using the purely chronological term 'Final Phase' for them. Classic 'Final Phase' features at Standlake include the arrangement of graves in regular rows, their W.-E. orientation, and the complete absence of grave-goods or presence of an iron knife only in many graves. Typical of the occasional rich graves found in 'Final Phase' cemeteries is grave 8, probably datable to the second half of the 7th century, which contained two gold pendants, one set with a cabochon garnet, a number of beads and a châtelaïne composed of an iron key, a silvered bronze-foil cross with interlace decoration, a bone ring, and an openwork bronze girdle-hanger. The 1825 grave with zoomorphic disc and thread-box should be another, and the unassociated bronze disc decorated in gold wire inlay with four 'Style II' animals (Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, PR 69/8386), presumably from this Standlake site, ought to represent yet another.

Some graves in the Standlake cemetery exhibit features more typical of the period immediately preceding the 'Final Phase', though there is no necessity to date them before the early 7th century. One such feature is the presence of a large number of amber beads; nineteen tiny beads were found in grave 10, which presumably was situated close to the other graves found in March 1863, including grave 8, mentioned above, and, if the unassociated necklace of 91 amber beads in the Pitt Rivers Museum also comes from this site at Standlake, it must represent another such grave. I shall argue below (p. 254) that grave 24 should also be dated to the earlier 7th century: its necklace, in particular, retains several features more typical of the so-called 'pagan' phases, rather than the true 'Final Phase' of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. The distinctions noted in the arrangement and layout of graves may also indicate consecutive phases of burial within the Standlake cemetery.

Thus, although the majority of the Standlake graves belong to the 'Final Phase', the first use of the cemetery must be dated several decades before Christian missionaries are known to have reached the Upper Thames (about 635), when objects typical of the later periods of completely 'pagan' cemeteries were still in vogue.

There are a number of other cemeteries belonging to the 'Final Phase' not far from Standlake, on either side of the lower Windrush, at Yelford, Ducklington and Stanton Harcourt, and also further away, on the upper Evenlode, at North

¹⁶ The characteristics and dating of these cemeteries are fully discussed by these authors, and in discussing the Standlake grave-goods, I shall not normally repeat references to these works justifying dating: T. C. Lethbridge, 'Recent excavations in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk', *Cambridge Antiquarian Society Quarto Publications*, n.s. III (1931), especially 47-8, 75-86, and 'A cemetery at Shudy Camps, Cambridgeshire', *ibid.*, v (1936), especially 27-31; E. T. Leeds, *Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology* (1936), 96-114; M. Hyslop, 'Two Anglo-Saxon cemeteries at Chamberlains Barn, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire', *Arch. J.*, CXX (1963), 161-200; A. L. Meaney and S. C. Hawkes, *Two Anglo-Saxon cemeteries at Winnall, Winchester, Hampshire* (1970), 45-55; S. C. Hawkes, 'The dating and social significance of the burials in the Polhill cemetery', in *Excavations in West Kent 1960-70*, ed. B. Philp (1973), 186-201.

Leigh, Chadlington and possibly Spelsbury and Lyneham. The area of the lower Windrush was settled well before the 7th century, but the increased evidence for Saxons there, and in the upper Evenlode, during the 7th century may indicate a penetration of Wychwood from the Thames-side settlements. It is possible that Standlake itself resulted from a shift of population from BRIGHTHAMPTON, nearly a mile to the south, where a cemetery of the later 5th and 6th centuries is well-recorded. At that date, the motive for shifting settlement or cemetery can hardly be Christianity.¹⁷

However, it may be possible to relate the Standlake cemetery to Saxon occupation even closer than BRIGHTHAMPTON. This involves a consideration of Standlake grave 19. It follows from the arguments set out above for the recognition of a pre-‘Final Phase’ stage in the cemetery that grave 19 is not ‘quite out of place’, as David Brown proposes (above p. 238), and I am unwilling to accept his objections to, and alternative suggestion for, the provenance of the material. The saucer brooch,¹⁸ which ought to be the best guide to the grave’s date, falls at the very end of the saucer brooch sequence and could be placed as early as about 600 A.D., but could just as well have been made, and no doubt worn, many years after that date. The beads, mainly typical of those found in ‘pagan’ cemeteries, have links with the beads in grave 24 (see below, p. 252). Although grave 19 reflects traditions of a period earlier than most of the Standlake graves, in terms of absolute chronology, it may be contemporary with the earlier graves of the nucleated cemetery.

Brown is quite right to point out the uncertainty over the position of grave 19 (on my map, Fig. 1, I follow the published evidence in placing it near the Old Quarry), but if we accept the detailed and convincing account of the grave given by Manning,¹⁹ presumably deriving from the labourer who found it, why should we reject his attribution of the finds? There is no necessity for the goods to have come from *two* women’s graves: there are only two brooches, and the bronze disc which might originally have been part of one of the rare ‘applied disc/saucer’ brooches,²⁰ was, at the time of burial, more likely part of a purse- or girdle-group. Moreover, there is at least one example of a woman’s grave provided with a spearhead!²¹ The goods could conceivably all have belonged to a single woman’s burial of this sort; but a more likely explanation is that it was a robbed double-burial, the spearhead and a knife being all that was left of an upper disturbed male burial, while the lower female burial remained intact.²²

Grave 19, then, can be attributed to Standlake Down, but presumably was

¹⁷ See Meaney and Hawkes, *op. cit.*, 53–4.

¹⁸ *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, 1 (1936), Pl. XXVIII, b.

¹⁹ *Berks Bucks and Oxon Archaeological Journal*, 14 (1898), ‘... found at a depth of about three feet, a skeleton lying at full length, with its head to the east’.

²⁰ Cf. a brooch from Barrington ‘B’, Cambs., in the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography.

²¹ Shudy Camps grave 76 (Lethbridge, *op. cit.*, 23), where the spearhead was part of a group of *châtelaine* objects.

²² Mr. A. C. Hogarth has kindly allowed me to say that this appears to have been the case in grave 54 at St. Peter’s, Broadstairs, Kent.

found some distance from the nucleated cemetery.²³ Is it possible that it is the sole survivor of a group of burials north of the Old Quarry and north-east of the Witney Road (Brown points out that there is little evidence of burials to the south-west of the road)? It may represent a group of burials prior to a transition to the 'Final Phase' cemetery, and it would recall a sequence of cemeteries observed at other sites, notably at Leighton Buzzard, where Chamberlains Barn I, dated to the late 6th and early 7th century, was replaced by the 'Final Phase' Chamberlains Barn II, some 80 yards to the south-east. Since grave 19 belongs to the same stage as the earliest graves of the nucleated cemetery, it presumably represents the latest stage of this hypothetical second cemetery.

There is, however, yet another cemetery which might precede the 'Final Phase' one. A number of burials was noted by Stone about a quarter of a mile to the east of his 1863 excavations,²⁴ but he was able to record only one grave, which contained a spearhead, not now extant, so that, again, there is no good evidence for the date of this cemetery. As Leeds pointed out,²⁵ this seems to be the same site as a gravel pit investigated by Stone in 1857, when it seems that he excavated a *grubenhaus*: double-ended bone points were recovered from a sunken area. Naturally, the precise location depends on where the 1863 site was, but since it must now be within the area of circles 17, 18, 19 and 21, this would place the other cemetery close to the lane which runs from the Witney road to Standlake village (see Fig. 1). But for the loss of so much evidence, Standlake Down might have provided a most interesting series of cemeteries, and possibly an associated settlement site.

2. GRAVE-GOODS AND STRUCTURES FROM THE 1954 GRAVES

Since most of the known graves at Standlake belong to the 'Final Phase', and even those which typologically are of an earlier phase could be dated to *c.* 600 or even later, it may be expected that the 1954 graves also belong to the 7th century. None of the objects from them are 'leading types' in 'Final Phase' graves, and there are no general surveys of their classes of object. It is obviously easy to search for parallels amongst known 'Final Phase' cemeteries, but for an honest appraisal all Anglo-Saxon cemeteries should be examined, a task which seems unnecessarily exhaustive for the purposes of commenting on these few graves. I have contented myself, therefore, with drawing parallels primarily from my corpus of evidence from all the Upper Thames region cemeteries, much of which is unpublished; this at least gives a local perspective to the Standlake items.

Beads

The single amber bead found at the neck of the young man in grave 23 is of little assistance in dating the grave. There are some fifteen graves in the

²³ In *Oxoniensia*, VIII-IX (1943-4), 199, grave 19 is placed just north-west of the cross-lane between circles 17 and 21, that is north-west of grave 20 of the nucleated cemetery; this seems to be based on nothing more than a misinterpretation of Leeds's entry in *V.C.H. Oxon.*, I (1936), 363.

²⁴ *Proc. Soc. Antiq.*, 1st ser. IV (1857), 98.

²⁵ *V.C.H., Oxon.*, I (1936), 363.

Upper Thames region in which one or two amber beads have been found, ranging in date from at least the beginning of the 6th century right through into the 7th. Normally they are found by the neck, as if worn as a necklet, but they can occur by hands or hips. The Standlake grave is exceptional in being the only recorded burial of a male with beads of this kind, all others being females or children. Not surprisingly, beads are not characteristic male grave-goods, and when they do occur in men's graves can often be interpreted as sword-beads or toggles. Amber was traditionally thought to have magical properties, so perhaps the hope that some apotropaic object might ward off the mortal disease which afflicted this young man overrode normal customs. However, if Miss Harman is right, and it makes better sense of the grave-goods if she is, the skeleton in grave 23 is a young female; all the above arguments are obviated, and the grave becomes unremarkable.

All the other beads came from grave 24. Most of them were scattered all over the upper body, and it is now impossible to know how the original necklace was strung. The three beads recorded from underneath the knees may have had a different function, possibly ornamenting the ends of garter-laces, and similar in purpose to the bronze lace-tags often found by the feet or shins of 7th century skeletons.²⁶

Little work has been done in England on the dating of beads,²⁷ and there are few published excavations where the beads are adequately described. In particular, there is little evidence for the length of time that individual beads could survive in necklace combinations after their type had generally gone out of favour.

The beads from grave 24 may be divided into four main groups :

Group A = types a-d, monochrome opaque glass cylinders.

Group B = types e-h, marvered polychrome opaque glass.

Group C = types i-o, miniature glass beads, all but o being opaque.

Group D = types p-x, miscellaneous types, including semi-translucent and vertically striated glass.

Type y falls into no group, and is unusual. The closest parallel from the Upper Thames is a similar uneven tube of brown opaque glass from Long Wittenham I grave 123, datable to the second half of the 6th century on the basis of its saucer brooches imitating Kentish disc brooches of Leeds's Class Ia, and its stamped and ribbed silver bracelet of Anglian type.²⁸

Group A : This is the most diagnostic group. Beads instantly recognizable as 7th century are truncated bicones in plain opaque glass, often of terracotta red, bright apple green, dark turquoise and canary yellow, made by

²⁶ Dickinson, *op. cit.*, 7-8.

²⁷ On the continent, there has been more detailed analysis; see especially, F. Fremersdorf, *Das Fränkische Gräberfeld Köln-Müngersdorf*, Berlin (1955), 80-90; K. Böhner, *Die Fränkischen Altertümer des Trierer Landes*, Berlin (1958), 71-82; R. Christlein, *Das Alamannische Reihengräberfeld von Marktoberdorf im Allgau*, Kallmünz (1966), 71-3. Although some bead types occur at similar dates in Germany and in the Upper Thames, others do not, so these continental studies cannot be applied wholesale to the home situation.

²⁸ See D. H. Kennett, 'Pottery and other finds from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Sandy, Bedfordshire', *Med. Arch.*, xiv (1970), 27-8.

twisting glass round a rod.²⁹ They are known from six graves in the Upper Thames, two of which, Longcot, Berks., and the rich grave 8 at Standlake, also contained cylindrical red beads similar to our type a. Standlake grave 19 also contained a cylindrical red bead, and the unstratified grave-goods from Chavenage Glos. (all of late 6th or early 7th century date), included a red biconical bead and a cylindrical yellow one comparable to our type b. Cylindrical plain opaque beads, especially the segmented variety, seem to belong to the 7th century, though beads in this sort of glass, usually oblate spheres, are known from much earlier, and East Shefford, Berks., grave VIII, included a red rounded bicone.

Group B : As a corollary to the general preference for monochrome beads in the 7th century, marvered polychrome beads become rare, though they are not unknown. Despite the enormous abundance of these beads in the 5th and 6th centuries, it is surprisingly difficult to cite exact parallels for the Standlake grave 24 ones. Beads like type h are very common, yet most have marvered trails in translucent blue, or, if they are in green, another decorative element is added. Beads similar to type e come from Abingdon I grave 3, and East Shefford grave XIII, but they are both single segments. Type g seems to be more or less identical with two beads from Chamberlains Barn I grave 3,³⁰ which contained several polychrome beads. Dating of that grave is itself tenuous, but like the cemetery in general it seems to belong to the late 6th/early 7th century (see above, p. 249).

Group C : I have been unable to find many parallels for group C beads. They do occur amongst unstratified strings of beads from Faversham, Canterbury, Chartham Downs and Haslingfield in the Ashmolean Museum, the first three possibly coming from 7th century graves. Examples of type i occur, significantly, in the necklace from grave 11 at Standlake together with a green opaque bicone, and six beads of type k were among the Chavenage assemblage. Minute yellow opaque beads were in use in the 7th century, but they were produced at an earlier date. Mrs. Sonia Hawkes has drawn my attention to a necklace from a 6th century grave at Kingsworthy, Hants. : it included 2 miniature yellow double-segment discs and 21 single, 3 beads of our type n, 44 'pearl' beads, 134 amber and 2 rock crystal beads. In the Upper Thames, similar early contexts may be cited for some miniature beads ; Abingdon I grave 78 contained a small double-segmented green opaque sphere and a single cylinder in association with amber and 'pearl' beads ; East Shefford grave XII contained eight beads of type o together with polychrome, 'pearl' and blue opaque spirally-segmented beads (similar to type q), as well as a buckle with cast-in-one rectangular plate and vestigial confronted animal heads on the loop, reminiscent of both Hawkes type Ia and IIIb buckles,³¹ which may suggest a date in the 5th century.

Group D : Most of group D are also fairly tiny beads, but they differ little from many undistinguished beads from 5th/6th century necklaces : types p-r

²⁹ Leeds, *op. cit.*, 99, and other publications cited in n. 16 ; for continent, Christlein, *op. cit.*, 73.

³⁰ Hyslop, *op. cit.*, 167, 188-9, fig. 4, n-o.

³¹ S. C. Hawkes and G. C. Dunning, 'Soldiers and settlers in Britain, fourth to fifth century', *Med. Arch.*, v (1961), especially 41 and 60.

belong to one of the most ubiquitous of glass bead types, but are rather smaller than average. Type s is more distinctive, and can occur in blue or green glass in graves ranging from at least the early 6th century (Abingdon I grave 119) to the 7th (Longcot, Standlake grave 8 and Standlake unstratified). The small semi-translucent beads, especially types t, w and x, and also o, differ little in general appearance from 'pearl' or 'overlaid' beads, those spherical, often segmented, yellowy-white beads with vertical striations in the glass, sometimes clearly retaining their coating of gold or silver, and common from late Roman times on the continent and in England.³² None of these Standlake beads are 'pearl' beads, but they, and possibly the other small, spherical segmented beads, bear a typological resemblance.

The bead associations cited in this discussion suggest that a 7th century date for grave 24 is quite consistent. The fact that the necklace was very large in comparison with most 'Final Phase' ones, and that it included a number of beads common at an earlier period, may imply that the date is not very advanced in the 7th century.

Châtelaine

Grave 24 also contained a group of iron and bronze items. The figure-of-eight chain links and the iron keys can be identified as components of a *châtelaine*. *Châtelaines* are usually recognized in graves as groups of objects strung out from the waist down the side of a leg; simple iron keys (usually rods with curved ends) are a basic item among the functional and ornamental items. The position of the grave 24 objects, in a compact group underneath the ribs, presents a little difficulty. It would not have been easy for a *châtelaine* strung from the waist to have slipped back into such a position, though allowance must be made for the evident collapse of the skeleton and the possibility of the *châtelaine* having been caught up in a fold of the dress, which, on decay, left the objects in this position. The replaced textile on all the iron objects could, however, have come from a purse rather than clothing, the piece of tablet weave probably represents a belt, and fragment f may be a buckle for a purse-strap. The objects may have been inside a purse; certainly the two bronze fragments were not suspended directly from the *châtelaine*, and must have been kept in a bag.

Only one *châtelaine* has been found *in situ* in the Upper Thames area, and that is in Standlake grave 8, where the objects were deposited by the right knee (see above, p. 249). Interestingly, the *châtelaine* complex included a number of pieces of glass, and possibly iron oddments, which must have been in a bag attached to the *châtelaine*. Yelford grave 16 contained a similar assemblage of objects, but these were deposited in a bag close to the skull. Graves excavated by Lethbridge in East Anglia also showed that *châtelaines* could be found either worn as in life from the waist, or deposited in a purse or trinket-box elsewhere in the grave;³³ he considered *châtelaines* to be another typical 7th century grave-good.

³² Fremersdorf, *op. cit.*, 86-7.

³³ E.g., Holywell Row 70, Burwell 42, 84, 121, Little Wilbraham 3B, Shudy Camps 19, 31, 42 and 76; in Burwell 76 the objects were in a group by the skull.

The custom of suspending oddments from the waist, notably toilet sets, rings and iron keys, either in purses or hung loose, was well-established during the pagan period.³⁴ The use of a long *châtelaine*, composed of metal rings or chain-links, however, does seem to be confined to the 7th century. The unusual position of the grave 24 assemblage makes it appear, at first glance, little different from purse- or girdle-groups found in pagan graves, but the presence of four or five iron links indicates that it did represent a *châtelaine*, albeit a relatively short one. Whether the *châtelaine* was inside a purse, and if so, why, must remain outstanding problems.

Shears (grave 26 or 27)

Shears are rarely found on settlement sites: half a pair was identified from the mass of mainly Saxon ironwork in the ditch at Shakenoak villa, Oxon., though the illustration of it is not particularly distinctive.³⁵ In the Upper Thames region, they are not very common as grave-finds either; a large pair was found in grave 23 at Fairford, Glos., together with a small spearhead, a 'lance' (? *angon*), a bronze-bound bucket and a bronze cauldron (last three items now lost, ? 5th or 6th century); an unstratified pair comes from the 'Final Phase' cemetery at North Leigh,³⁶ and a small pair from the late 7th century barrow-burial on Lowbury Hill, Berks.³⁷ Another pair was found in a grave at Smith's Pit II, Cassington,³⁸ but it is not clear whether the grave belonged to the Roman or Saxon period, and the pair among several stray finds from Ashdown, Berks, might belong anywhere in the Saxon period.

Although shears were occasionally put in graves at an earlier date, they may have been more popular in the 7th century: Lethbridge discovered shears in five graves from the 'Final Phase' cemeteries of Burwell and Shudy Camps.³⁹ In the 5th and 6th centuries, shears occur among the sets of miniature toilet items deposited in cremation urns, a custom noted both on the continent and in this country. Whether burial of life-size shears in inhumations at an apparently later date represents a development of the same beliefs expressed in the deposits of miniature shears in cremations, is an interesting, but probably insoluble, point.

The Grave-Structure of Grave 24

Lack of positive and detailed evidence for the grave-structure of grave 24 makes an interpretation of it most difficult. The extensive areas of soil containing carbonized wood should represent some internal wooden structure, of which the single timber-beam or pole may represent a part. The grave was cut very large, presumably to accommodate this structure. At the time of excavation, Dr. Catling had the impression that the corpse had been protected from super-

³⁴ Mrs. Hawkes makes some interesting comments on the social significance of keys in female graves in Hawkes (1973), 193.

³⁵ A. C. C. Brodribb *et al.*, *Excavations at Shakenoak III* (1971), 86.

³⁶ E. T. Leeds, 'Two Saxon Cemeteries in North Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, v (1940), 21, Pl. VII, c.

³⁷ D. Atkinson, *The Romano-British Site on Lowbury Hill* (1916), 17 and 21, Pl. VI, 2.

³⁸ *Oxoniensia*, xv (1950), 104-6.

³⁹ Burwell 2, 42 and 83 (last two are rich late 7th century graves), Shudy Camps 75 and 76.

incumbent earth, resulting, on decay of the body-tissues, in the collapsed state of the skeleton.

The absence of carbonized material along the right side of the grave, which can hardly be due to soil erosion, makes it difficult to envisage what sort of structure this might have been; it does not suit a conventional coffin, which would have been consistent with the extent of carbonized wood, nor a wooden lid, which should have left its traces over the entire grave. Perhaps the carbonized wood represents blocks of timber uprights which supported a light-weight (? wattle) roof, the timber pole being part of its external frame, but this still does not fully explain why no supports were necessary on the right side.

Grave-structures in some 7th century cemeteries have been studied by Mr. A. C. Hogarth.⁴⁰ He describes the occurrence of slots and ledges along grave-edges, some of which supported wooden lids, and in one case a pitched 'tent-like' structure; the position of some ledges suggests that they were not used to support lids, but unfortunately Hogarth discusses nothing comparable with Standlake grave 24. At Abingdon, Leeds did record evidence of decayed blocks of wood, often irregularly placed in the grave, e.g. graves 29, 77 and 78; graves 60 and 65 were completely surrounded by wood, implying the use of a coffin.⁴¹ Traces of wooden planks around most of the body were noted at Harwell, Berks., grave 6.⁴² As Hogarth points out, few complex grave-structures have been recorded; when more are recognized in excavation, it may be possible to produce an explanation of the features in grave 24.

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APPENDIX I: THE HUMAN BONES

by D. F. ROBERTS⁴³

Formerly, Department of Human Anatomy, University of Oxford

Grave 1: This fairly complete skeleton is that of a mature adult female, aged about 40.

The skull is extremely thick (13.7 mm. on the frontal, 17.0 mm. on the parietals)

⁴⁰ 'Structural features in Anglo-Saxon graves', *Antiq. J.* (forthcoming).

⁴¹ E. T. Leeds and D. B. Harden, *The Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Abingdon, Berkshire* (1936), 36, 43, 44, 46.

⁴² J. R. Kirk and K. Marshall, 'A Saxon cemetery near the village of Harwell, Berkshire', *Oxoniensia*, **xxi** (1956), 27.

⁴³ Dr. Catling has asked me to publish verbatim the report submitted to him by Dr. Roberts, who examined the skeletons *in situ*, as well as in the laboratory. Subsequently, Miss Mary Harman has studied these bones as part of her contribution on skeletal remains to David Brown's *Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Graves and Gravegoods in the Upper Thames Valley*, where she gives full details of dental formulae, long-bone measurements and pathology. Since this volume is soon to be with the press, I have incorporated points from Harman's study only where they give important additional information or contradict Robert's conclusions; I am most grateful to David Brown for allowing me to do this.

and the frontal sinuses are well developed. Estimated stature 5 ft. 3 ins. Crouched burial on right side.⁴⁴

Grave 2 : Skeleton fairly complete. A young adult male, aged 20-30, of light build. An advanced case of osteogenic sarcoma, the primary tumour being situated at the distal end of the left femur, where its dimensions were approximately 10 ins. (vertically) by 11 ins. (horizontally) ; a fracture had clearly occurred at an early stage, the tibia being displaced laterally 4 ins. to 5 ins. Numerous secondary lesions. Extended burial on back.⁴⁵

Grave 3 : Skeleton fairly complete. A young female, sub-adult, aged about 16-17, of light build. Length of long bones not measurable on account of lack of fusion of epiphyses. Extended burial on back.⁴⁶

Grave 4 : Skeleton fairly complete. An elderly male adult, minimum age over 50, very probably considerably older. Edentulous, with complete ossification of alveoli. Of medium build. Stature 5 ft. 4 ins. to 5 ft. 5 ins. Extended burial.⁴⁷

APPENDIX II : THE TEXTILES FROM GRAVE 24

by ELIZABETH CROWFOOT

Replaced textile is present on one, and in some cases both surfaces of all the iron fragments, the largest area (a) 6.0 cm. in length on the shafts of keys, lying in folds and layers. The clearest fragment (b) 1.7 × 1.4 cm. overall (FIG. 5, 2c), shows a fine regular plain weave, z-spun in both systems, count 16/17 per cm. ; from its appearance the fabric could have been wool or linen.

On the iron loop with bronze strip adhering (c) a tablet weave can be seen, clear area 1.3 × 0.6 cm., replaced, warp thread Z-spun, probably regular 4-hole tablet with 8 S-twists and 4-5 wefts per 5 mm. ; the braid or border must have been at least 1 cm. wide from deteriorated traces on some parts of the iron. One fragment has traces of the same S-twists and weft ends.

The plain weave fabric may come from the woman's dress, or possibly from a shroud or light blanket laid over the burial ; the tablet-weave is most probably a braid, either used for a belt, or used to attach the *châtelaine* objects to a belt.

The Society gratefully acknowledges a grant from the Department of the Environment for this paper.

⁴⁴ Harman thinks that the thickening of the skull and enlargement of the sinuses is due to a minor endocrine disorder. She notes that the left arm and hand bones are much lighter and shorter than those of the right, suggesting loss or reduction of use of that arm before growth was completed. The lower left 3rd molar had not developed ; the lower right 3rd molar and lower right and left 1st molars were carious. She estimates stature as 5 ft. 5½ ins.

⁴⁵ Harman considers this skeleton to be a female on the basis of skull features, the large sciatic notch of the pelvis and the slender bones ; lack of fusion of some epiphyses and of surface wear of teeth implies an age of 17-21. The malignant tumour, first recognized by Roberts and later discussed by D. R. Brothwell, 'The evidence for neoplasms', in *Diseases in Antiquity*, ed. D. R. Brothwell and A. T. Sandison, Springfield (1967), 331, Figs. 6d and 11b, has been confirmed by modern radiographs. Harman estimates height as 5 ft. 1¼ ins.

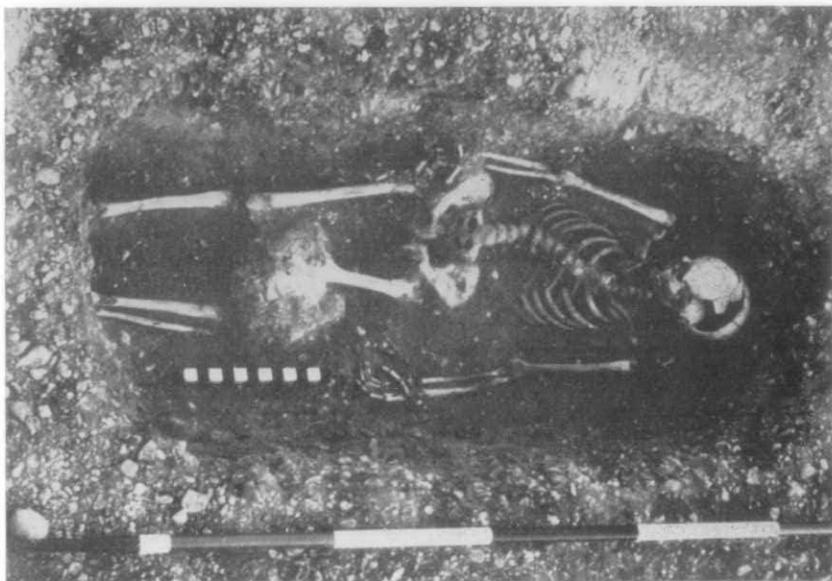
⁴⁶ Harman gives age as 16-20, and notes that the upper right 3rd molar is unerupted, while the lower 3rd molars are not developed.

⁴⁷ Harman estimates age as over 45 years and height as 5 ft. 5½ ins. She notes osteo-arthritis changes of vertebrae and ends of arm bones. All the upper jaw teeth, the 1st to 3rd lower right molars, and the lower left pre-molar, 2nd and 3rd molars had been lost ante-mortem ; abscesses affected six teeth.

PLATE XVIII



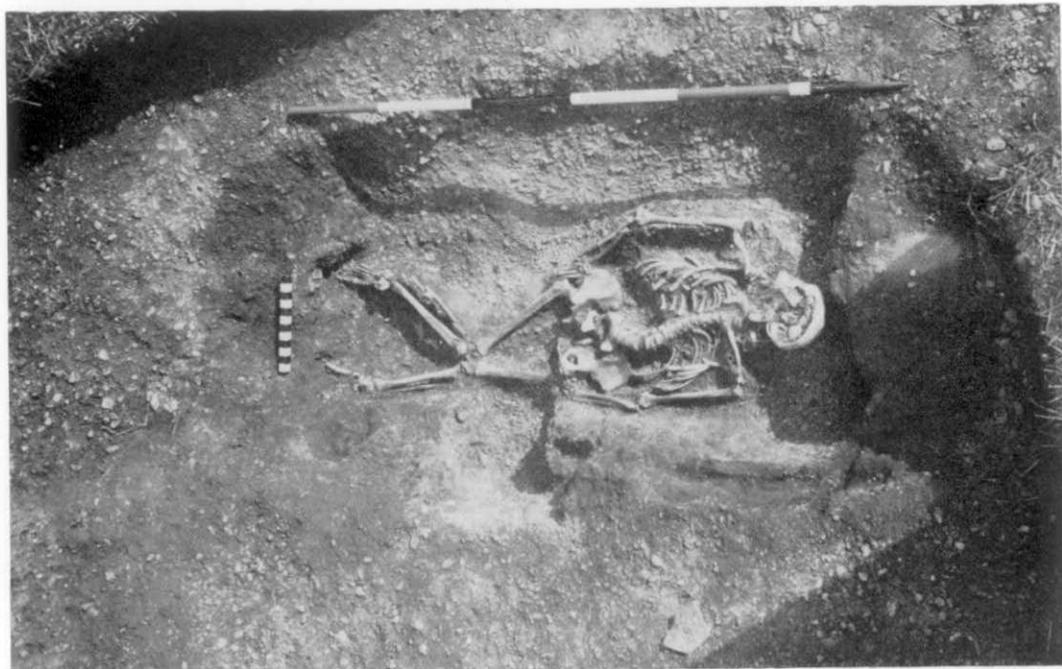
A : Grave 22.



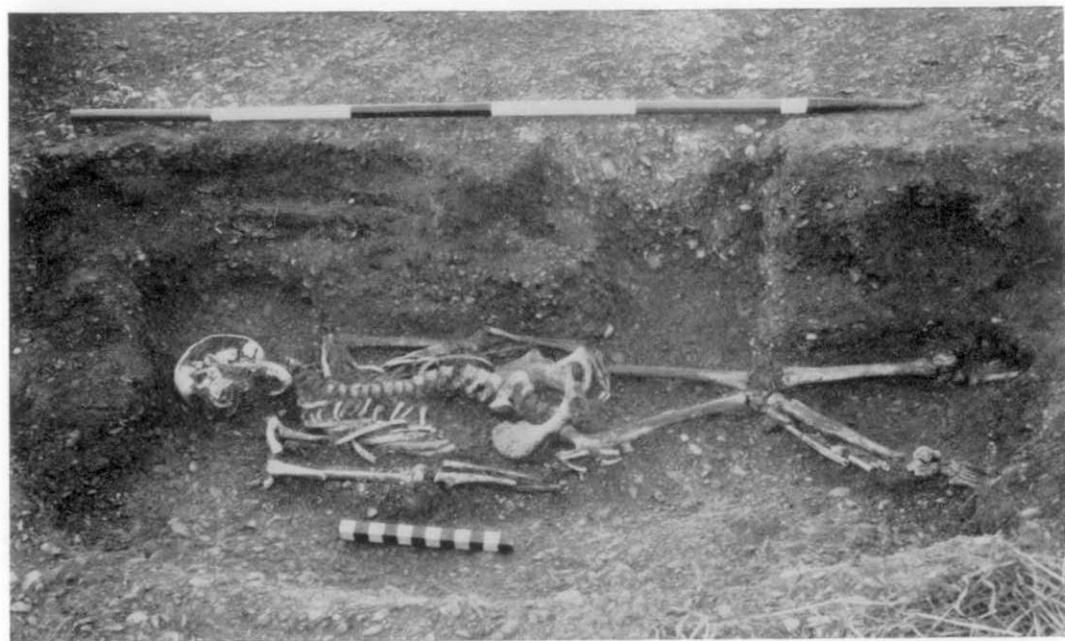
B : Grave 23.

Phh. : H. W. Catling

PLATE XIX



A : Grave 24.



B : Grave 24.

Ph. : H. W. Catling