

**Notice of the opening of a Celtic and Anglo-Saxon grave-mound at
Tissington, Derbyshire / by John F. Lucas.**

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Professor Rolleston
with John F. Lucas M.D.
NOTICE *Ufaia*

OF THE

OPENING OF A CELTIC AND ANGLO-SAXON

GRAVE-MOUND

AT

TISSINGTON, DERBYSHIRE.

BY JOHN F. LUCAS.

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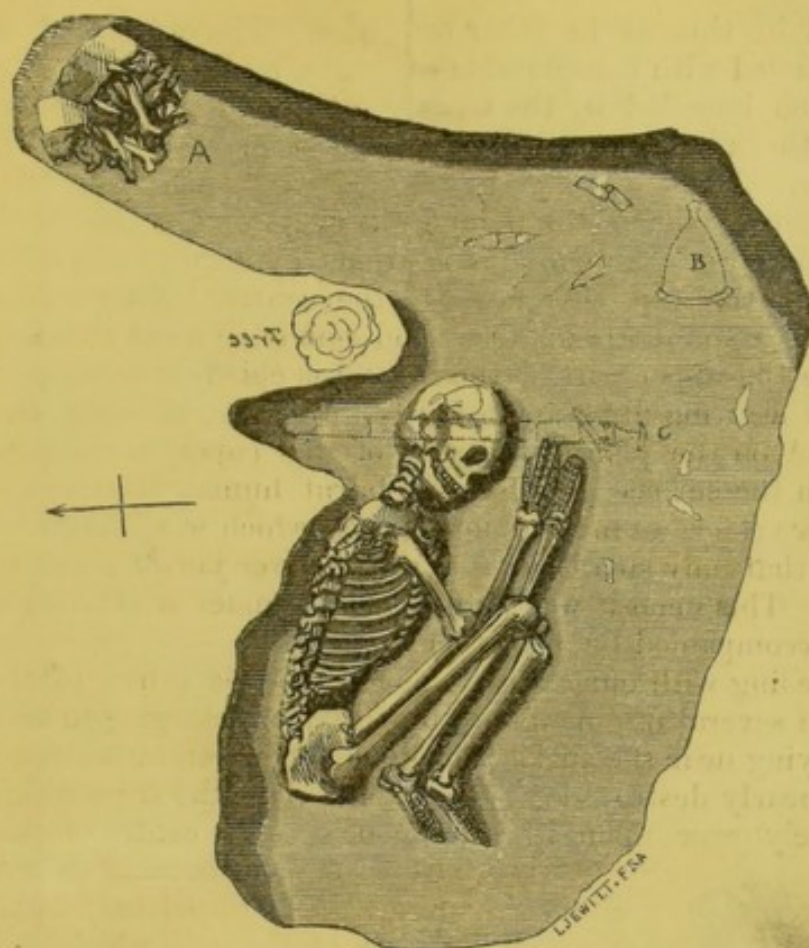
1865.

GRAVE-FOUND

WASHINGTON, D.C.

1880

THE NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES



NOTICE OF THE OPENING OF A CELTIC AND ANGLO-SAXON GRAVE-MOUND AT TISSINGTON, DERBYSHIRE.

BY JOHN F. LUCAS.

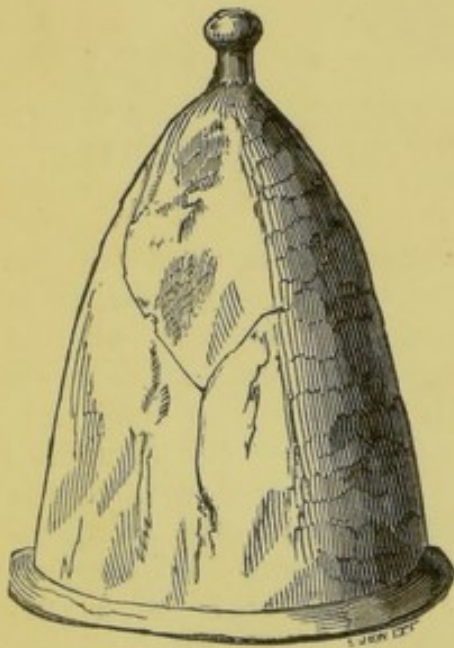
ONE of the most interesting tumuli which has yet been opened in the county of Derby, is that of Bowers Low, Boars Low, or Boslow, as it is variously called, at Tissington, to which considerable interest attaches, through its presenting the somewhat unusual feature of an Anglo-Saxon interment placed immediately above one of the Celtic period, which had been made on the original surface of the ground.

The barrow is situated at the angle where the high-road to the picturesque village of Tissington branches off from the turnpike-road from Buxton to Ashbourne; near the grounds of Tissington Hall, the seat of Sir William Fitzherbert, Bart., whose kind permission enabled me to promote the researches whose results I am about to detail. The mound, which is thickly planted with trees of considerable growth, is at the present time about forty yards in diameter. It has, however, originally been of much larger size, its diameter having been considerably reduced by cutting away its sides to form the above-mentioned roads. Its elevation is about ten feet above the surrounding land, but it became evident on examination, that there existed naturally a small elevation on the surface, on which the Celtic interment had been laid; and this, it is probable, was the reason why the spot was originally chosen as a place of burial, advantage being usually taken of natural mounds by the earlier races of

mankind in this as in other countries. The opening of the mound was attended with considerable difficulty, and indeed the operations were much impeded by the trees and their outspreading roots, nevertheless the results, as will be seen, were of a highly interesting character.

The first opening of the mound was made on the 15th of September, 1863, when we commenced operations by cutting a trench four feet wide from the east side towards the centre. After continuing the trench for some little distance, and removing some of the flat stones, of which the upper part of the mound is chiefly composed, and which lay in a slanting direction towards its centre, we came, at the point marked A on the plan at the head of this paper, at the depth of four feet from the surface, to a heap of burnt human bones. Along with these were a few animal unburnt bones, which were, however, so much broken, that only small portions of the lower jaw of a dog were recognizable. This deposit was simply placed under a slanting stone, and was unaccompanied by any other remains.

Proceeding with our excavations towards the centre of the mound, we found several fragments of human bone, belonging to an interment which, lying near the surface, had evidently been much disturbed, and indeed nearly destroyed, by digging to plant the trees which now unfortunately grow upon it. As we neared the centre of the tumulus



traces of iron became discernible, and rendered a scrupulously careful examination of the soil, which at this point contained but few stones, necessary. Here, at the depth of rather more than three feet from the surface, we were rewarded by finding, at the point marked B on the plan, lying on its side, and crushed into fragments, the umbone, or central boss of a shield, of the usual form of the Anglo-Saxon period. This extremely interesting relic, which is I believe the largest ever found in this county, is here engraved of one-fourth its original size, measuring nine inches in height, is, of course, of iron, and, as will be seen on reference to the engraving, is of the

same type as the one found at Sibertswold, and engraved in the *Inventorum Sepulchrale*.* The texture of cloth in which it had been enfolded when placed by the body of the hero by whom it was borne, is distinctly traceable on several parts of its surface. The umbone as it lay was surrounded with the wood, in a complete state of decay, which had once formed the shield, and small fragments of corroded iron, which were doubtless a part of the mountings of the shield, were scattered about.

* Plate XV. fig. 13.

Continuing our researches, we next came upon the remarkably fine sword, here represented. It lay a few inches lower down, and was much corroded and cracked by pressure. The position in which it lay will be best understood by reference to the plan, where it will be found at C. From the unfortunate fact of a tree growing close by, and indeed almost directly over where it lay, we experienced no little difficulty in removing the earth, which at this point presented the appearance of half-baked clay. The sword was, however, at length laid bare, and was found to have originally been enclosed in a wooden scabbard or sheath, which had apparently been covered with leather, and mounted with silver, which had been elaborately ornamented. Most of this ornamentation was unfortunately so much decayed as to be lost, but sufficient still remains to show that the sword had been of no ordinary beauty and value, and must have belonged to some person of note. The traces of silver ornamentation at the head will be seen indicated on the engraving. The chape, which is simply rounded, is of silver, and the rivets still remain, as are also those by which the leather was attached to the wood. The sword is thirty-four inches in length, and two-and-a-half-inches in breadth. Across its upper part lay a small fragment of the shield, and near it were a few pieces of iron spread about, some of which, when joined together, proved to be a spear-head of



excellent form. This spear-head is here shown, and will be seen to be of the usual form of the period. It had doubtless been broken and disturbed at the time when the bones were dispersed by the planting of the trees.

Being satisfied that the interment we had found was not the primary one, I determined upon continuing the investigation, and accordingly on the 28th of May, this year, we proceeded to enlarge the former opening, and to excavate it still deeper, and were rewarded by discovering the primary Celtic interment, at the depth of eighteen inches below where the Anglo-Saxon burial had been made. The head lay, as will be seen by reference to the



plan, immediately below the sword, but, as I have said, at a depth of eighteen inches below it. This interment was that of a man of mature age, lying on his left side, in the usual contracted position facing the South. The body had evidently been laid on the natural surface and a few stones placed round it, but no covering stones. No pottery or relic of any kind was found with the skeleton. My learned friend, Dr. J. Barnard Davis, author of that invaluable work, *Crania Britannica*, after a careful examination of the skull, which is one of more than ordinary interest, has kindly furnished the following notes upon its peculiar features:—

“This fine cranium of an ancient Briton, is the skull of a man somewhat advanced in years, probably midway between sixty and seventy. I consider it to be an excellent example of what I have designated the “typical” series of ancient British skulls. It is remarkably broad, especially in the posterior middle region, and very short and high. Although some fragments of the calvarium have been lost, it has been so well restored by its owner, that I have been able to gauge its capacity, which is very great. It has suffered a degree of *deformation* during infantile nursing, and presents “parieto-occipital flattening.” This has given rise to some obliquity in the calvarium, which is slightly more depressed on the right side of the occipital region, and correspondingly flattened on the opposite, or left side of the frontal region. These are common appearances among skulls of ancient Britons. All the sutures appear to be in their normal state. The left temporal region is flattened and slightly depressed, and has also perished in some degree, which are the results of the head’s having reclined for so many ages upon the soil on this side. Three of the upper front teeth on the right side, and one on the lower, have been lost, most likely by some accident, or act of violence, in early life. The alveoli, or sockets, have been entirely absorbed, and the maxillaries, or jaws, present exactly the same appearance as they do in the skulls of Australians and Kanakas, who have had their teeth punched out when young, as a mark of virility, sign of mourning, &c. The lower jaw is remarkably wide and massive; the face exhibits the features of that of the ancient Briton markedly. The measurements of the skull afford the following results:—A, internal capacity, 87· ounces of sand; B, circumference, 21·3 inches; C, fronto-occipital arch, 14·7 inches; *a*, frontal portion, 4·8 inches; *b*, parietal portion, 5·0 inches; *c*, occipital portion, 4·9 inches; D, intermastoid arch, 15·9 inches; E, length, 7·0 inches; F, greatest breadth, which is inter-temporal, 6·1 inches; *a*, frontal breadth, 4·9 inches; *b*, parietal breadth, 5·4 inches; *c*, occipital breadth, 4·9 inches; G, height, 6·0 inches; *a*, frontal height, 5·0 inches; *b*, parietal height, 5·0 inches; *c*, occipital height, 3·9 inches; H, face—length of, 4·9 inches; I, breadth of, 5·8 inches; J, proportion of breadth to length, taken as 100, ·87; K, proportion of height to ditto, ·85. This skull is of unusual dimensions, and exhibits a shortness and height uncommon even in the ancient British series. In degree of brachy-cephalism it equals the shortest specimens contained in the extended tables of measurements of ancient British skulls, appended to the “*Crania Britannica*.”

Its capacity is equally remarkable: 87 ounces of sand being equal to 105 cubic inches, or, reduced to their equivalent of cerebral matter, a deduction of five ounces having been previously made for the membranes and fluids of the brain, show an encephalon, or entire brain weighing fifty-eight ounces. This is much beyond the *average* weight of the encephalon in males, as deduced from Dr. Peacock's very careful observations, which make it a little more than fifty ounces. Hence, it may be safely inferred, that there were men among the CORITANI of ancient Derbyshire, who, like many of their successors, were by no means deficient in brains.

"In the case of the interment of Bowers Lowe Barrow, if the archaeological evidence had not at once been decisive that an ancient Coritanian Briton had found his last resting-place here, inhumed in the contracted position which was customary with his tribe, and a later Anglo-Saxon, of a different race, had been laid in the same spot, which had doubtless acquired some degree of sanctity as the burial-place of an aboriginal; if this could not have been clearly inferred on antiquarian grounds, the craniological evidence would have proved it unequivocally, as far as the Briton was concerned. The examination of this skull clearly points to the unquestionable features of the race to which its long-perished owner had belonged. This is by no means a solitary instance of an Anglo-Saxon's being buried in the tumulus of an ancient Briton; in all probability before the conversion of the former people to Christianity. Even in the county of Derby, the late Mr. Bateman met with many such examples. See *Vestiges of the Antiquities of Derbyshire*—Galley Lowe, page 39; Alsop Moor Barrow, page 67; Cow Lowe Barrow, near Buxton, page 91."

But few Anglo-Saxon grave-mounds have as yet been opened in Derbyshire, but of those which have been examined, some have been of a highly interesting character. The one most analagous in its contents to the one now under notice, was opened by the late Mr. Bateman, at Brushfield, in 1850. The skeleton was so much decayed as to be scarcely distinguishable. At the left side of where the body had lain was found a long broad iron sword, which had been enclosed in a scabbard or sheath of wood, covered with ornamental leather, as here shown. The hilt was very small, and underneath it lay a short iron knife, while near it were found two small spear-heads, which were united by corrosion, and several fragments of iron. In 1828, a similar sword, with the umbone of a shield, was found on the same farm at Brushfield, and these two are the only examples recorded as having been hitherto found in the county.

In conclusion, I beg to draw the attention of all who open tumuli to the fact, that the value of a skull, found even in the smallest fragments, cannot be over-rated, particularly where, as in this case, no instrument, or pottery of any kind, was found with the Celtic remains, which might from their close proximity to the Anglo-Saxon weapons, have been considered as belonging to them.

Middleton-by-Youlgreave.

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