

Antiquity

A Quarterly Review of Archaeology

VOL. V No. 18

JUNE 1931

Editorial Notes

ENGLAND is the home of paradox ; and it is not therefore surprising that a country which has produced some of the greatest pioneers of scientific archaeology should be open to the charge of neglecting its own origins. We are not for the moment thinking of the prehistoric period, though much that we shall say applies with equal force to that period ; nor, on the other hand, are we criticizing the activities of the State or the leading societies and museums. These all have played their part in maintaining, by endowment and organization, the study of British archaeology and the conservation of British antiquities and records. What we have in mind is the astonishing fact that, so far as we are aware, there exists no University Chair of what may be called Old English Archaeology.



We use the expression ' Old English Archaeology ' to cover the antiquities of the Saxon, Danish and Norman periods. Of pagan Saxon antiquities (falling between, say, A.D. 450 and 650) such knowledge as we have is concentrated in a very few individuals whose numbers are barely maintained, much less increased, as the years go by. It is to be feared that, unless the situation is retrieved by the endowment of a chair, this knowledge may lapse altogether. Nor is it altogether to our credit that some of the most recent monographs on Anglo-Saxon antiquities should have been written by distinguished continental

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scholars like Aberg and Roeder. That we sincerely welcome such contributions to knowledge goes without saying ; but we do so with a slight feeling of shame that our own garden should have to be tended by our neighbours.



The number of specialists in Anglo-Saxon archaeology is indeed extremely small. We doubt whether there are more than half a dozen people in the whole country who know the difference between a Saxon and a Jutish brooch, assuming for the moment that any such difference exists. Such a state of affairs is a definite obstacle to progress, for without a lively atmosphere of informed criticism, without constant discussion and the occasional re-examination of first principles, opinion is bound to crystallize into dogma. Probably no one knows and regrets this so much as the expert himself ; for what is more profitable or more pleasant than to talk about the problems of one's own period with someone else who is trying to solve them ? Moreover there is the risk that, as time goes on, some critic may discover that the foundations are built on sand. We have often wondered whether the foundations of Anglo-Saxon archaeology are well and truly laid. We know of no modern attempt to lay bare and examine the first principles upon which it is based.



Contrast this state of things with that obtaining in Romano-British archaeology. Here the number of students is large and the foundations secure. What is the reason ? By general agreement it can be attributed to the influence of one man—the late Professor Haverfield of Oxford—whose former pupils are still working under his inspiration. Professor Haverfield was able to accomplish his great work because he had the leisure and opportunities of personal contact afforded by a University Chair. It is to the Universities that we look for a lead, and particularly to those most concerned with historical teaching. For historians are agreed that in archaeology (together of course with the study of place-names) lies the chief hope of light in their dark places ; and we feel confident that the policy we advocate will have their warm support.



Few people, again, realize the extent of our ignorance about the archaeology of Britain during the centuries before and after the

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Norman Conquest. Take the two most important classes of remains—pottery and earthworks. Is there a single pot that can be *proved* to belong to the period A.D. 700–1000? Such may exist, but even so there is certainly no general knowledge of the wares of the period. There cannot be until a habitation-site, deserted about 1000 and not re-occupied, has been scientifically excavated; or until a ‘sealed’ find of such pottery comes to light in some other way. Of Saxon and Danish earthworks we know, from archaeology, nothing. There are certain towns, such as Wallingford, Cricklade and Wareham, enclosed within rectangular ramparts that are generally, and probably rightly, regarded as of late Saxon construction; but this has never been proved, or even tested, by excavation. There are many places where the Danes are known, from statements in the Chronicle, to have ‘wrought a work’; but not one of them has been excavated. Of relics of the Danes themselves we possess a few battle-axes, but no pottery whatever that can in any way be associated with them. Being but temporary raiders they may not have made pottery, which under primitive conditions is nearly always the work of women; but they can hardly have lived a whole winter at places like Thanet, Sheppey, Nottingham and York without at any rate using the pots of their unwilling hosts; and even a few fragments of these would be welcome.



Of Anglo-Saxon earthworks we know hardly anything. Of the period 700–1000 the only remains which are known to survive are Offa’s Dyke and the before-mentioned town-ramparts.



This state of affairs can only be remedied by the appointment of a Professor of Old English Archaeology at one of our leading Universities. It would be essential to appoint a trained archaeologist, not merely a historian who is interested in archaeology. Such a man could create a School and do the work, of guidance and inspiration, that has at present to be done by overworked college tutors and museum curators. The necessary funds might be found by abolishing a few of the many useless professorships that abound. However, this is perhaps an idle dream. New endowments are usually reserved for those who tread the well-worn tracks of history, art and literature, or for subjects which might well be left to look after themselves. Was there, for instance,

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any urgent demand for a Chair of Belgian Studies (whatever they may be) at London University? Would not a Chair of Old English Studies have been more appropriate?



We have very gladly assented to the wish of the Director of the British Museum that we would insert in the present number the memorandum on Treasure Trove prepared by him. We may also mention that his paper on 'The Law and Practice of Treasure Trove', printed in *The Antiquaries' Journal*, July 1930, is full of interest for those who wish to know more on this subject, about which very hazy ideas are held.



We feel we owe an explanation to our readers and also to authors and publishers for the delay in printing reviews of some of the many books we receive. We very much regret it, but it is inevitable. The number of books, many of them very good books, appearing nowadays is so great that it is difficult to deal with them adequately. We intend in our next number to print a list of Books Received which we cannot, for the reason mentioned, review at length. Meanwhile we cannot forbear mentioning three outstanding books that still have to be reviewed—Sir Arthur Evans' *Palace of Minos*, vol. 3 (Macmillan); Professor Oswald Menghin's *Weltgeschichte der Steinzeit* (Anton Schroll, Vienna); and Mr R. G. Collingwood's *Archaeology of Roman Britain* (Methuen). Though differing entirely in character, each is a landmark in its way, whether of synthesis, of succinct statement, or of the progress of knowledge.



We regret that the plan of Cissbury Camp facing page 67 of our March number was incorrectly described. With the present issue is enclosed a revised print which should be inserted in its place.