

Late Dark Age Finds from the Cherwell and Ray, 1876-86

By W. A. SEABY

RECENTLY, while engaged in making a comprehensive survey of pre-Conquest stirrups found in this country, I was interested to read the original entries in the Ashmolean Museum Accessions Registers of the finds made in the Ray at Islip during excavations for a new bridge in 1876 and in the Cherwell during dredging operations near Magdalen Bridge, Oxford, in 1884.¹ The two sets of objects form an interesting series from which it may be possible to derive information for the closer dating and classification of Viking and late Saxon objects.

Apart from the illustrations cited in note 1, no photographs or drawings giving measurements or details of the objects have been published, and no critical examination of the material has been made nor have the circumstances of the discoveries been set out in any detail. It seems useful, therefore, to publish the original entries in the Registers, examine closely certain of the objects, comparing the finds with those of similar nature elsewhere in the country, and attempt to classify and date some of the objects both by internal and external evidence.

I give first, verbatim, the text of the entries in the Museum Registers (explanatory comments being inserted in square brackets) :

I. THE GROUP FROM THE RIVER RAY AT ISLIP

1876, September. [Presented by] William Burns, Esq., C.E., Clerk of the Works.

1876. Stirrup-iron [PL. VI, B, FIG. 12, A] of a half oval shape with round sides which are spirally bound with narrow bands of thin gold [? brass]. The foot part widening from the sides to the middle and convex above by being hammered up from beneath and ungilt

¹ I am indebted to Mr. D. B. Harden, Keeper of the Department of Antiquities, for allowing me access to these registers and for permission to examine the objects at close quarters.

So far as I am aware the only publications of these finds are : *Arch. Journ.*, xxxiv (1877), 464 (Islip stirrup) ; the entries in the *Oxford Millenary Exhibition Catalogue* (1912), nos. 43, 44 ; a bare record in P. Manning and E. T. Leeds, 'Topographical Index : Oxfordshire', *Archaeologia*, LXXI (1920-1), 247, 253 ; the more discursive references by Leeds in *V.C.H. Oxon.*, I (1939), p. 368f., pl. xxix ; H. Shetelig, *Viking Antiquities of Great Britain and Ireland*, IV (1940), 12 and 'Viking Graves in Great Britain and Ireland', *Acta Archaeol.*, XVI (1945), 15, 52 ; and (the spur alone) *London Museum, Medieval Catalogue* (1940), p. 97, fig. 29, 3.

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except a bit on one edge. Found in a clayey gravel composed of rounded pebbles of Septaria, etc., under a stiff blue marl, in the Old Ford at Islip, Oxon., while excavating the foundations of the new bridge over the River Ray. Top of strap hole gone. Extreme height : $4\frac{3}{10}$ inches ; width : $4\frac{6}{10}$ inches. (See MS. Medieval and later articles Catalogue² No. 67a.)

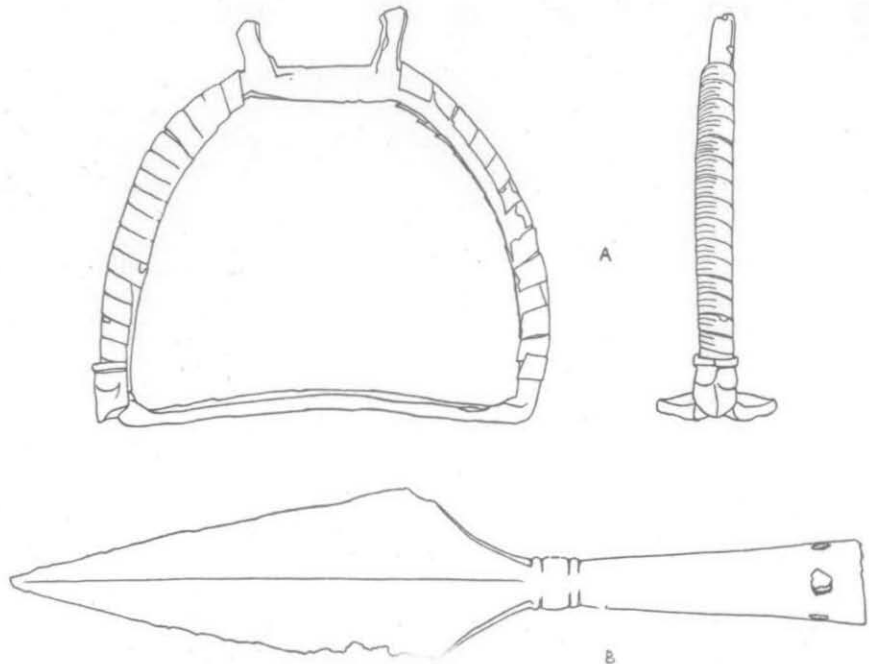


FIG. 12

LATE DARK AGE FINDS FROM THE RAY AT ISLIP

- A. 1876.95, iron stirrup bound with brass
- B. 1884.515a, iron spear-head with moulded socket

Scale : $\frac{1}{2}$

1884, 12 September. Presented by Arthur J. Evans, Esq., Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum.

1884. Iron spear-head [PL. V, B, FIG. 12, B], possibly Anglo-Saxon, but of a late period. In good preservation except one angle of the blade broken and the socket a little eaten in holes with rust. Whole

² The Keeper informs me that this was an ephemeral catalogue, now gone into desuetude.

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length : $8\frac{8}{10}$ inches. Greatest width of blade : $1\frac{8}{10}$ inch. Length of blade part only : $5\frac{4}{10}$ inches. There is a shallow moulding round between blade and socket, the lower part of the latter having three rivet holes for fixing it, and another hole broken out. Found near to, about the same level, and at the same time as the rare gilt Stirrup Iron (No. 95. 1876 in MS. List of Additions), when excavating to form the foundation of the bridge over the river Ray, at Islip, Oxon., 1876. Acquired in 1884 from the young man who purchased it when found and in whose possession it had remained since (see letter in letter book, 1884, p. 68). [The letter is from Henry W. Clarke of Leighton, Salop, 22 July 1884.]

[Another letter about the find is in the Accessions Register. It is from Augustus W. Franks, British Museum, W.C. :]

Sept. 8, 1879

' Dear Sir,

Your question as to the spear and stirrup is not easy to answer. As to the forms of spears during the middle ages we know nothing. The spear does not appear true Anglo-Saxon, at any rate of the period of the Anglo-Saxon cemeteries though it *might* be of the later Anglo-Saxon times. I do not think that either specimen can belong to the Commonwealth. The angular ornament on one side of the stirrup seems to me a rude animal's head which might be Anglo-Saxon or Norman. On the whole it would be safest to place these objects among the medieval antiquities. Late British seems to me quite out of the question and I think I told Mr. Rowell³ so. I will keep your drawing and if anything fresh occurs to me will write to you.

Yrs. Truly,

AUGUSTUS W. FRANKS.'

II. THE FIRST GROUP FROM THE RIVER CHERWELL AT MAGDALEN BRIDGE

1884, 18 July. Presented by Prof. H. N. Moseley, Linacre Professor of Physiology.

1884. A well preserved iron Umbo or Boss of an Anglo-Saxon shield 513, 514 [PL. V, A, FIG. 13, A] wanting only one of the flat circular-headed rivets in the rim. The iron scarcely at all oxidized. Diameter :

³ G. A. Rowell, Assistant Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum from 1855 to 1879, succeeded by Edward Evans, who was responsible for all the entries in the registers here cited (including those of 1876).

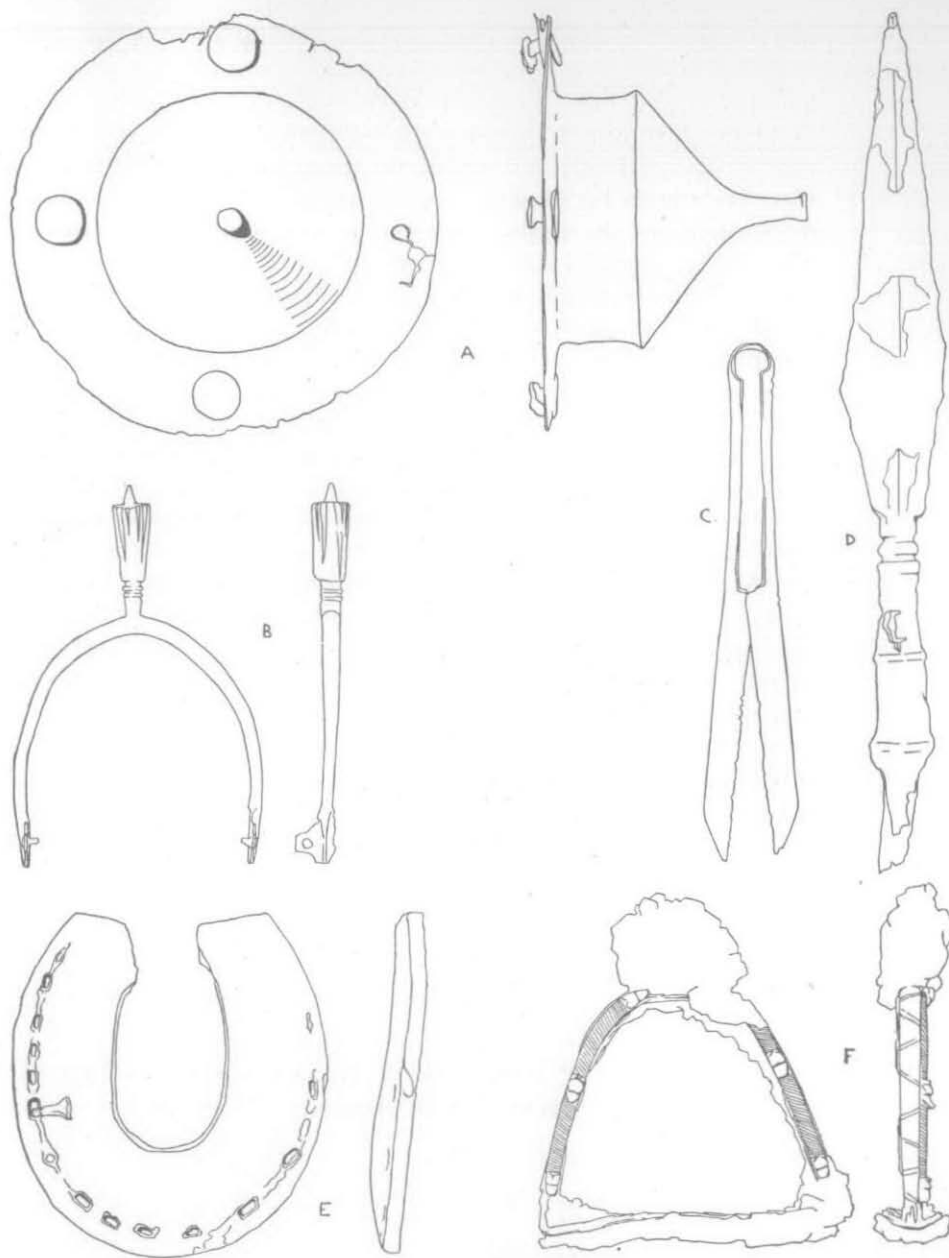


FIG. 13

FINDS FROM THE CHERWELL NEAR MAGDALEN BRIDGE

(all late Dark Age except E, which is late medieval)

- A. 1884.513, iron shield-boss
B. 1886.1232, iron prick-spur
C. 1886.447, iron shears

- D. 1884.514, iron spear-head
E. 1886.446, iron horse-shoe
F. 1886.445, iron stirrup with bronze casing

Scale : $\frac{1}{4}$

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$6\frac{7}{10}$ inches ; diameter of the central or raised portion only $4\frac{2}{10}$ inches ; diameter of the heads of the rivets : $\frac{1}{2}\frac{5}{10}$ inch. Projection of the boss from the shield : 4 inches. The apex ends in a flat round projection or button nearly $\frac{5}{10}$ inch diameter. The sides of the raised portion are but slightly hollow, are $1\frac{4}{10}$ inch high and have a ridge at the angle or joining with the sloping top. It appears to have received a blow as if by a spear or an arrow. Also an iron spear-head [PL. V, B, FIG. 13, D] found with it and apparently of much more elaborate make than is usual with Saxon spear-heads in general, the blade having a central ridge down each side and thickening towards the point. The socket has three raised horizontal ridges at the junction with the blade, and two single ones below ; the lower end having portions of two projecting pieces of iron at the sides, probably intended to protect the upper portion of the shaft as in the pikes, etc. of later times. There appears to have been a brazed joining down the side. It seems to have received a blow on one of its edges. Extreme length : $13\frac{5}{10}$ inches ; length of blade only : $7\frac{9}{10}$ inches. Present greatest diameter : $1\frac{7}{10}$ inch ; greatest diameter of socket : $1\frac{1}{10}$ inch.

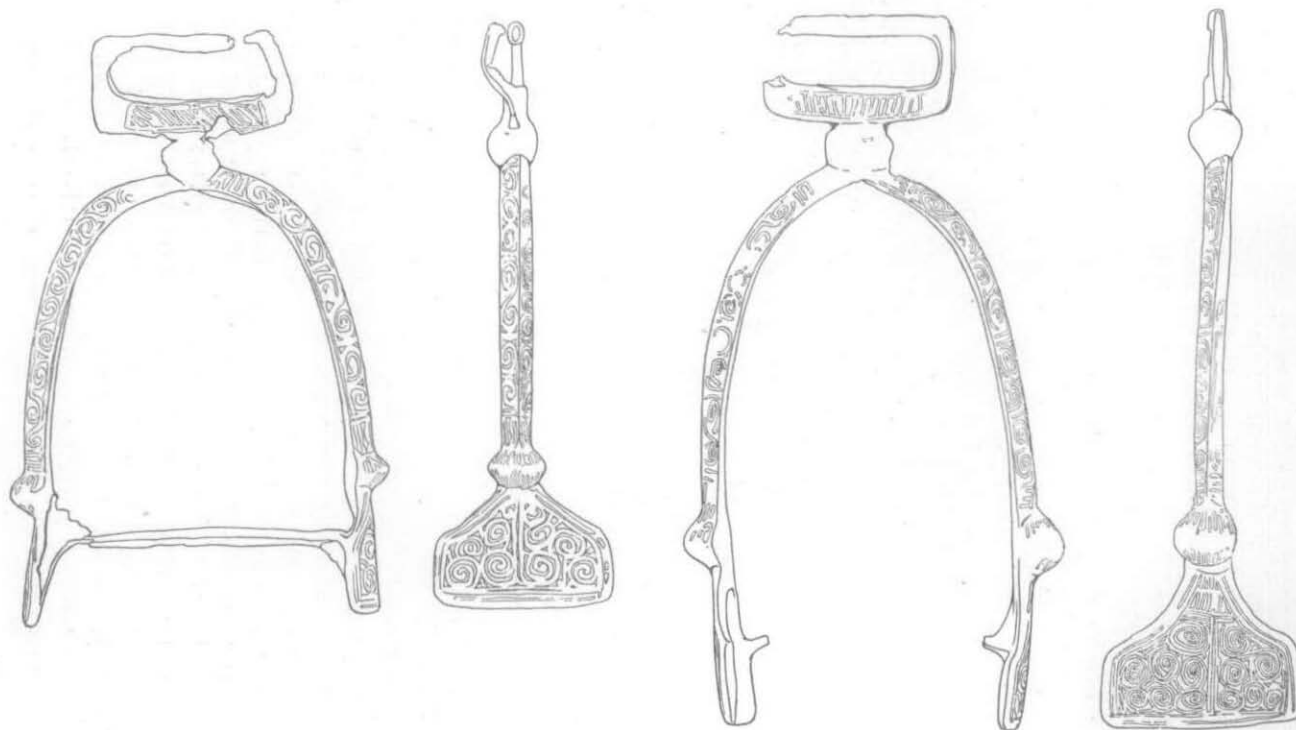
Found in May 1884 in dredging in the Cherwell under the arch furthest from Magdalen College, going east. (See letter in letter book 1884, p. 68.) [The letter referred to is from Moseley to the Keeper, A. J. Evans, 30 May 1884. It states that there are two Anglo-Saxon relics from bed of Cherwell beneath the arch farthest from Magdalen College.]

III. THE SECOND GROUP FROM THE RIVER CHERWELL AT MAGDALEN BRIDGE

1886, 14 June. Purchased for 6/-.⁴

1886. Two fine Stirrup Irons [PL. VI, A, FIG. 14], possibly a pair ; the sides inlaid or damascened with gold [*sic*] in a spiral pattern ; the hatchings to receive the gold [brass wire] being cut crossways and somewhat resembling network. Possibly Danish or Anglo-Saxon. Found in dredging the river Cherwell [see p. 36]. Length of No. 443 : $9\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Extreme width : 5 inches. This has lost its foot rest and the square-shaped loop at the top for to carry the straps has been broken on one side. No. 444 is complete except that the square loop at the top has been broken through. Length :

⁴ It is not clear whether this sum refers only to 1886.443-4 or to 1886.443-7.



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FIG. 14
 1886.444 and 443, two iron stirrups of English Viking class, decorated with brass overlay, from the Cherwell
 Scale : $\frac{2}{3}$

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- 7 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches. Extreme diameter : 4 $\frac{9}{10}$ inches. They have been carefully cleaned of the incrustation by cutting it away with a sharp knife just down to the gold, it took over 12 hours altogether, the Assistant Keeper, E. Evans, cleaned them.⁵
1886.
445 Stirrup iron [PL. VI, B, FIG. 13, F], of a different shape to the preceding being more triangular in shape, but rounded above ; the front and outside encased with bronze ornamented on the front with close set oblique incised parallel lines, and six small bosses resembling dogs' heads, three being on each shank. It was entirely covered with thick gravelly concrete [ferruginous gravel], enough of which has been removed to show the character of the work, but not without some injury to the iron, which is much oxidized. Length : 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. Extreme diameter : 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. Found along with the preceding No. 443 and 444.
1886.
446 June 14th. Purchased. Wide Iron horse-shoe [FIG. 13, E], somewhat concave on the upper side, which fitted the horse's foot, and correspondingly round below. There are thirteen nail-holes, which have been cleaned out and possibly there may be more stopped up. One nail remains in one of them. Found in dredging in the Cherwell with No. 443, 444 and 445 preceding. Length : 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Diameter : 4 $\frac{9}{10}$ inches. Greatest width of the metal 1 $\frac{7}{8}$ inch and 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ inch thick.
1886.
447 Small Shears-shaped instrument [PL. V, B, FIG. 13, C], of iron or steel ; probably a scissors, and possibly Anglo-Saxon, as the scissors of that period were usually made with a spring as in this case, and not with a lever as in modern scissors. Whole length : 8 inches of which the blades are 4, and are $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide. Found in dredging the Cherwell at the same time and near to No. 443, 444, 445 and 446 preceding.
1886.
1232 Purchased for 5/-, Dec. 16th and presented by John Evans, Esq., D.C.L., etc.
- Iron Prick-spur [PL. V, B, FIG. 13, B] of rare form, the sides or shanks being cylindrical and forming nearly a semicircle, not angular, showing that it was in use previous to the introduction of greaves. The neck cylindrical and gradually enlarged from where it joins the other part to the end which is square except the projecting prick in the centre. The neck is deeply and rather rudely grooved longitudinally ; some of these grooves have remains of some hard substance remaining in them, ? if enamel. Probably Danish, as it

⁵ They were later cleaned scientifically in the Museum laboratory by Mr. W. H. Young.

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was found with the two beautiful gilt stirrup-irons (No. 443 and 444.1886 and the small shears and the horse-shoe and another stirrup 445, 446 and 447.1886 in the MS. list of Additions) by the little stream, the first below Magdalen Bridge, opposite the Botanic gardens, *not in the water* but in the bank above water line, when digging off the angle or corner during the dredging works of the Cherwell, in 1884. ? if it was not originally silvered. Length : 6 inches. Width : $3\frac{7}{10}$ inches. Length of neck, including the prick : 2 inches. Greatest diameter of neck : $\frac{11}{20}$ inch. Several

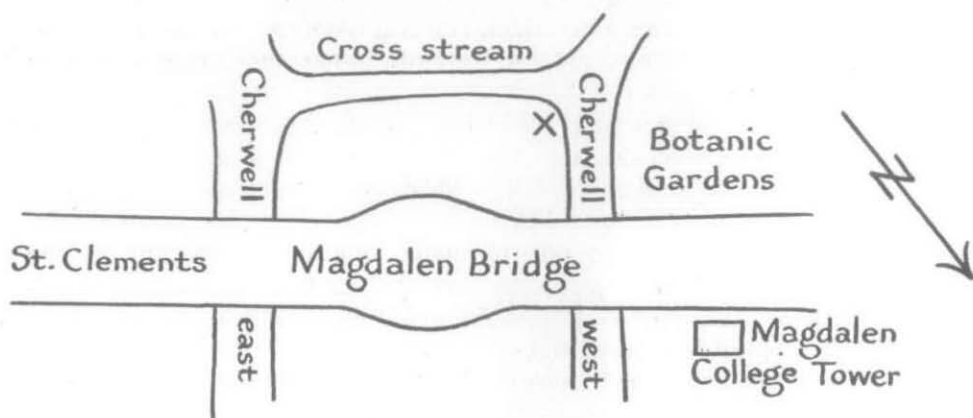


FIG. 15

Sketch-plan preserved in the Ashmolean Museum Accessions Register, which marks the site of objects found in 1886 when cutting back the edge of the island in the west stream of the Cherwell

horses skulls and bones and some human bones, particularly two human thigh bones were found about the spot. The thigh bones are said to have been sold to the Parks Museum and the other bones were sold to a dealer in St. Clements.

The Register also contains the following entry referring to the finds :

'Found on the edge of the west stream of the Cherwell opposite the Botanic Gardens just at the angle formed by the cross stream which connects the West stream with the East, being the first below Magdalen Bridge, when rounding off the angles formed by the said cross stream, during the dredging operations in 1884. Where the X is on the plan. [Here reproduced as FIG. 15.]

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'Horses skulls and other bones were found on the same spot which were sold by the workmen to a dealer in St. Clement's and men's thigh bones are said to have been sold to the Natural Science Museum in the Parks.⁶ The iron prick spur 1232.1886, the horseshoe 446.1886, the iron stirrup bound with bronze and much corroded and encrusted 445.1886 and which have also been partly cleaned, and the small shears or spring scissors 447.1886 were all found on the same site, but the spur was obtained of one of the same workmen later in the year. The prick spur was purchased for 5/-.'

DISCUSSION

It is thus seen that here are ten objects found at three different places during excavations in the two rivers. The first Cherwell group, 1884.513 and 514 (PL. V, FIG. 13, A, D), appear at first sight to be related both from the circumstances of the find, and the somewhat remarkable fact that both are damaged as if by a blow. The inference might lead one to suspect that here indeed is the spear which was thrown and the boss of the shield which received the blow. Let us examine the types. The *shield-boss* is similar to, but not quite typical of, the shield-bosses so familiar from the pagan Saxon cemeteries found throughout the S.E. half of Britain and dating from the fifth to the seventh centuries. The main difference seems to be in the flattened domical form and unusually long neck to the central projection; the rivets are four, equidistantly spaced, but one is missing.⁷ Shield-bosses are used throughout the early and middle Saxon period and persisted on the oval or circular shield or board in some form, but perhaps not essentially of iron, until the mid-eleventh century. Many examples are to be seen in the Cotton MS. Claudius B IV, Cleopatra C 8 and in the Harley MS. 603, all of which date about A.D. 1000. At this date, bosses appear smaller and *more pointed*, while in the border to the scenes depicting the Battle of Hastings on the Bayeux Tapestry some of the round Saxon shields have very large bosses of a type reminiscent of those of earlier times. These representations are difficult to interpret; they do not appear to be the mammiform type of pagan times nor the high domed variety mostly found in S.E. England and possibly of Jutish origin.⁸ Perhaps by the tenth and eleventh centuries Saxon bosses were no more than decorative survivals made of horn or wood, and therefore unlikely to leave any trace amongst groups of weapons dredged from river mud. The closest example in iron to these pictorial forms seems to be that found with jewelled pendant,

⁶ These cannot now be traced.

⁷ G. Baldwin Brown, in *The Arts in Early England*, III and IV: *Saxon Art and Industry in the Pagan Period* (1915), notes that this form is a local variation in the Upper Thames Valley, and cites examples from Fairford and Hinksey, as well as Magdalen Bridge, pp. 200, 658 and 664, pl. 23, no. 4.

⁸ G. Baldwin Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 199, pl. 23, nos. 1 and 3; *Richborough*, IV, pls. 63, 64.

sword, spearhead and urn at Twickenham, Middlesex, and thought to be seventh century West Saxon.⁹ Another surviving example is the high conical shield-boss from the Viking burial at Ormside, Westmorland, dating to the end of the ninth century.¹⁰ A pointed form of boss does therefore appear in the later Saxon period, when the typical Viking shape was hemispherical or half ovoid, without point.¹¹

The *spear-head* is a somewhat elaborate example of a type well known in the middle and late Saxon period, and related to the Carolingian winged variety. Dr. Jan Petersen, who has studied the drawing, suggests¹² that it may be from the Viking period, perhaps from the last half of the ninth century. Could it be that a Saxon thegn at Oxford, in the year 871 when the Danes had overrun most of Berkshire, snatched up the shield of his great grandsire in order to join in the defence of the town from an attack by a marauding party of Danes? Whatever the explanation, it might be argued that these pieces could both belong to the period of the earliest Viking raids.

The second Cherwell group, found when cutting back the island below Magdalen Bridge in 1886, is more complex. The discovery of men's and horses' bones together with the various pieces of military equipment offers one of two possibilities: (a) that here was a Viking burial on an island in the river¹³ (assuming that the stream ran as it does to-day), or (b) that the finds are a result of a fight which took place at this fording-place. The latter suggestion was put forward by Leeds, who says the find might well be the result of a Danish raid like that when Oxford was burnt by the invaders in 1009.¹⁴ But is this the full explanation? A critical examination again shows the pieces apparently to be of more than one date.

The two decorated *stirrups* (1886.443 and 1886.444) have at various times been described as a pair, but a glance at the illustrations (PL. VI, A, FIG. 14) will show that they are dissimilar both in size and in details of decoration. They belong to Wheeler's Class C¹⁵ and are similar in general form to some fourteen others found in southern, central or eastern England, most of which, like the Cherwell examples, are known to have come from the beds of rivers. In a paper read before the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1950, I showed the N.W. European development of the stirrup and compared the form of

⁹ *Proc. Soc. Antiq.*, 2s., xxiv (1912), pp. 327-9, fig. 2.

¹⁰ *Trans. Cumb. and West. Antiq. and Arch. Soc.*, n.s. xxxiv (1934), p. 172, fig. 1, pl. 3.

¹¹ Many in N. Britain, *vide* H. Shetelig, 'The Viking Graves in Gt. Britain and Ireland', *Acta Archaeol.*, xvi (1945), figs. 3, 7 and 17.

¹² In a letter dated 25 September 1950.

¹³ This suggestion, tentatively put forward by H. Shetelig in *Viking Antiquities of Great Britain*, iv, 12, was later enlarged upon by him in *Acta Archaeologica*, xvi, 15.

¹⁴ *V.C.H. Oxon.*, i, 369. Shetelig now considers the explanation advanced by Leeds as more reasonable.

¹⁵ *London Museum, London and the Vikings* (1927), 38-41.

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decoration with that found on stirrups of the same class (Rygh 590) in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. I showed that the English stirrup was parallel in form to those found in Denmark and Norway but that there were differences (most notably the junction and side bosses, the large decorated side-plates and the style of decoration) which were peculiar to this country. Further, I held the view that the stirrups, from the pattern of their find-spots, from the external evidence of the happenings described in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and from the debased vine-scroll form of the decoration, are likely to have been made by the settled Anglo-Scandinavian population of East Anglia and the Midlands, whose weapons would at least be of the same ancestry as that of the Danish Vikings and of whom many joined with Sweyn and Canute, providing horse and equipment in the land-borne raids which penetrated deeply into all parts of the Saxon kingdom. If this assumption is correct then the stirrups are probably chance losses during the attack on Oxford by Sweyn in 1009, as Leeds has suggested, or the almost unopposed entry in 1013. In the latter year the army had come directly south from their base at Gainsborough in Lincolnshire, picking up men and horses *en route* and ravaging wherever opposition was encountered beyond Watling Street.

Jan Petersen, on stylistic grounds, says that these stirrups would be classed in Norway as belonging to the latter half of the tenth century, which is close enough dating for all practical purposes, since the activities of Sweyn and Canute extended from 994 to 1014. Many of the stirrups of this general class (Rygh 590) found in Denmark, including the fine pair decorated with silver inlay from Nørre Longelse, Langeland, and a somewhat similar pair from Velds, Jutland, are dated by J. Brøndsted to the tenth and early eleventh centuries.¹⁶ Also at Velds was found a pair of gilt bronze stirrup-plates (for the attachment of stirrup to strap), which are decorated with birds and acanthus motifs and which Brøndsted considers to be southern English of the early eleventh century.¹⁷ Stirrups of this same class have also been dated on internal evidence to the late tenth century at Birka, Sweden, by H. Arberman,¹⁸ and at Tuna, Sweden, by T. J. Arne. From the latter site are two examples of low-arched stirrups with several features, such as developed bosses at neck or side and treads set well above the ends of the expanded shanks, similar to those found on the English form; these come from Grave III and can be dated to about the year 1000.¹⁹

The *prick-spur* (1886.1232; PL. V, B, FIG. 13, B) is less easy to date closely in the absence of sufficient comparative material from abroad. Most of

¹⁶ *Acta Archaeologica*, VII (1936), 103f., 169.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁸ Birka, I, *Die Gräber* (Stockholm, 1940), pls. 35, 36, 37.

¹⁹ *Das Bootgräberfeld von Tuna in Alsike* (Stockholm, 1934), pl. 6, nos. 8, 9.

what is available is set out by J. B. Ward-Perkins²⁰ who says that the basic Viking and Carolingian form had a tubular point (type 1) and straight arms, which ended either in a flattened plate riveted directly on the strap (form A) or in a rectangular loop through which the strap passed (form C). Type 2 has a cylindrical neck with small projecting prick and type 3 has a neck expanding away from the arms grooved longitudinally, also with small prick; there is usually some kind of rib moulding near the junction with the arms. The Magdalen Bridge specimen is of this type 3 (A ii); a somewhat similar one, presumably from London, is in the Guildhall Museum, a third is in the Victoria and Albert Museum and a fourth (A 4993) with B form terminals, from London, is in the London Museum. Ward-Perkins considers this type to be a peculiarly English Viking class, lasting from the early eleventh century to perhaps the early twelfth century. Might it not be reasonable to date these spurs with Wheeler's class C stirrups decorated with scrollwork and to assign them an Anglo-Scandinavian parentage?

Closely related types of spurs are, however, found in Norway and Sweden, associated, in some cases at least, with burials. A pair with a pair of stirrups (Rygh 590) having cruciform-headed attachment plates for the leathers, was found in a knight's grave at Köping, Västmanland,²¹ dated 1000-1050, while a still more modified pair of spurs found with a pair of stirrups of Rygh 590 type came from Gjermundbu, Norway,²² and are dated to the late tenth century. It would thus seem reasonable to associate the Cherwell prick-spur with the class C type stirrups, and there seems good reason to think that they may all have been lost at the same time.

The form of the small iron *shears* or scissors (1886.447; PL. V, B, FIG. 13, C) is an early one (Ward-Perkins type IA/IB) and could well date from the eleventh century, since the loop at the junction of the two arms is less pronounced than that usually found in shears of the twelfth century and there is only a slight notch in place of the semi-circular recess at the point of junction (Ward-Perkins type II). An exact parallel are the shears found with the Viking burial at Gjermundbu, mentioned above, where, amongst other things in the mound, were a pair of stirrups (Rygh 590) and a pair of prick-spurs.²³ These shears have been dated to the late tenth century and a similar pair of approximately the same date was found at Birka, Sweden.²⁴

The *horseshoe* (1886.446; FIG. 13, E) presents several problems and one would like to know in just what relation it lay to the other finds. Its most

²⁰ *London Museum, Medieval Catalogue*, 94-101.

²¹ *Fornvännen*, 36 (1941), p. 87, figs. 2 and 3.

²² *Norske Old Funn*, viii, pl. 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, pl. 10, no. 10.

²⁴ *Birka*, 1, *Plates*, pl. 176.

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remarkable feature is the number of nail holes, some thirteen or fourteen, suggesting that it was used twice over. Its breadth, plain outline, fullered groove on the line of the nail holes and absence of calkins would suggest a date at least as recent as the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.²⁵

Dismissing the horseshoe as a late intruder, we can state that here is a group of four objects such as may have been carried by one or more horsemen of the early eleventh century, who perished crossing the river. That it is not part of a planned interment is only determined by its unlikely situation on a small island in mid-stream close to a Saxon town and by the fact that pagan burials with horse and gear of Dane, Norseman or Anglo-Scandinavian are virtually unknown in England at this date.

The last item from this site, the iron *stirrup* partly encased with bronze (1886.445), may be discussed in conjunction with the somewhat similar stirrup from the Ray (PL. VI, B, FIGS. 13, F, 12, B). The Cherwell stirrup has the suspension loop and part of the hoop heavily encrusted with iron oxide, yet the general shape is plainly seen. It is clearly related in type to the stirrup from Islip (1876.95) but neither is directly related either in form or decoration to the Viking class C stirrups described above. The closest relative to these forms which I have been able to trace is a Romanesque stirrup, dated eleventh-twelfth century, which is of iron with brass casing, the end of the expanded tread being soldered or welded at the angle into a cast bronze lion's (?) claw; the suspension loop is rectangular. This stirrup came from Cologne and was in the collection of R. Zschille.²⁶

Another stirrup may also be mentioned, although it differs in several respects from the other three. This is an iron stirrup, with footplate welded in place by two bronze knobs, from Christ's Hospital, Newgate Street, London.²⁷ In this case, there is no bronze casing, no lion's masks or claws and the expanded tread appears as a separate piece. It has been dated not earlier than the twelfth century.

These stirrups are not unlike several depicted in the French and English illuminated manuscripts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but a triangular form, more typical of that used by the Norman knight and corresponding exactly in shape and style with many depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry, may be seen in several extant examples. There is one from excavations at Witney, Oxon., originally bronze-plated, which also has bronze knobs at the junction of arms and footplate;²⁸ another is from London, where the stirrup is similar

²⁵ For a similar type of horseshoe from the Town Ditch, Aldersgate, see *London Museum, Medieval Catalogue*, p. 116, fig. 37, no. 4 (A.24957).

²⁶ R. Zschille and R. Forrer, *Die Steigbügel*, etc. (Berlin, 1896), pl. II, fig. 8.

²⁷ *London Museum, Medieval Catalogue*, fig. 24, no. 3.

²⁸ Now in the Ashmolean Museum (A.M. 1886.581).

in general shape to the last, the iron being plated with bronze and the bronze knobs or bosses taking on a three-fingered hand or trefoil character;²⁹ others similarly bronzed are in the University Museum at Oslo and in the Stockholm Museum, in neither case apparently associated with datable finds.³⁰ A figure of one of the Oslo pieces shows terminals to the arms or shanks in the shape of animals' heads which grip the ends of the tread.³¹ Part of another stirrup of this type, badly bent, was found during recent road excavations at Ilchester, Somerset; only one arm remains, which is unusually long and terminates in what looks like a lion's head.³²

The stirrups from the Cherwell and the Ray are small and wide bowed, the lion or dog masks being stylized to a degree. Moreover, the style of decoration is not typical of the later phases of Saxon or of Viking art, although the motif of the animal biting its own tail is common enough at this period. They may therefore be dated at the earliest to the twelfth century, based perhaps on a S. European or Frankish prototype of the eleventh century; but this dating can only be tentative in the absence of more direct evidence.

Representations on documents of eleventh or twelfth century date are for the most part too small or too conventionalized to give the necessary evidence, although it should be noted that the Harley MS. 603 (an English copy of the ninth-century Utrecht Psalter, dating from about 1000)³³ shows mounted warriors brandishing double-edged battle-axes and lances using roughly triangular stirrups, apparently knobbed at the junction of arms and tread. A similar stirrup is seen in the representation of a horseman brandishing a sword, set within the upper enclosure of an initial B, in MS. Caligula A VIII, folio 121 (also in the British Museum) which can be dated to the beginning of the twelfth century.³⁴

The remaining *spear-head* (1884.515A; PL. V, B, FIG. 12, B) is of a small baluster-moulded form (Rygh 523) almost certainly of the later Saxon period; its late date is proved by the fact of the socket being closed and having two pairs of opposed rivet holes. The baluster form is well seen on examples from London and elsewhere in the Thames,³⁵ as well as on some from Cambridge-shire, which can be dated about 1000.³⁶

²⁹ Pitt-Rivers Museum, Farnham (*London Museum, Medieval Catalogue*, fig. 24, no. 4).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³¹ *Årsberetninger for Foreningen til Norske Fortidsminnesmerkers beværing* (1882), p. 149, no. 16a, pl. iv, fig. 21 (no. 10867).

³² On loan to Taunton Museum from J. Stevens Cox of Ilchester.

³³ T. D. Kendrick, *Late Saxon and Viking Art*, 12.

³⁴ Information from Dr. C. E. Wright of the British Museum, Department of Manuscripts.

³⁵ *London Museum, London and the Saxons*, pl. xi, fig. 40.

³⁶ H. Shetelig, *Viking Antiquities of Great Britain and Ireland*, iv, figs. 33, 35, 41.

LATE DARK AGE FINDS FROM THE CHERWELL AND RAY

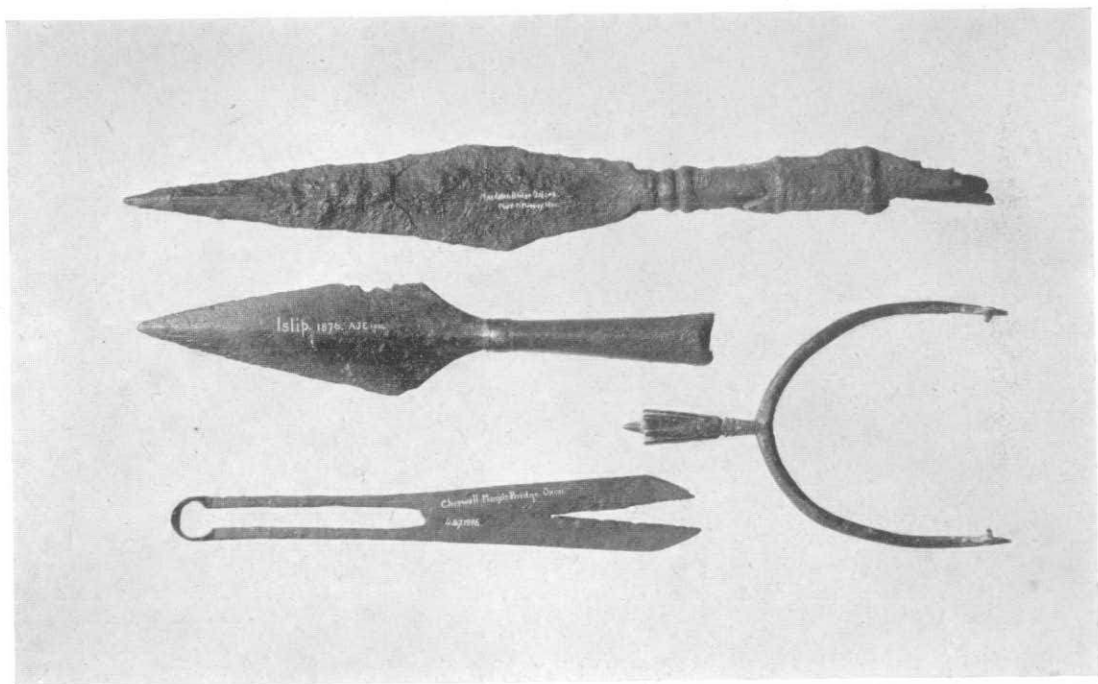
CONCLUSION

An assemblage of objects dredged or dug up from a fording place is unlikely to be of only one date, but concentrations of arms and other fighting equipment are bound to occur where organized resistance has been made at river crossings. With the exception of the horseshoe and possibly the two bronze-plated stirrups with raised animal heads, all the objects described above might have been in use at times covered by the period of the Viking raids on Wessex from 871 to 1013. That some of them were so used becomes increasingly clear, but a much closer agreement needs to be reached between archaeological data and contemporary historical evidence before weapons of this period can be assigned to individual conflicts.

PLATE V



A



B

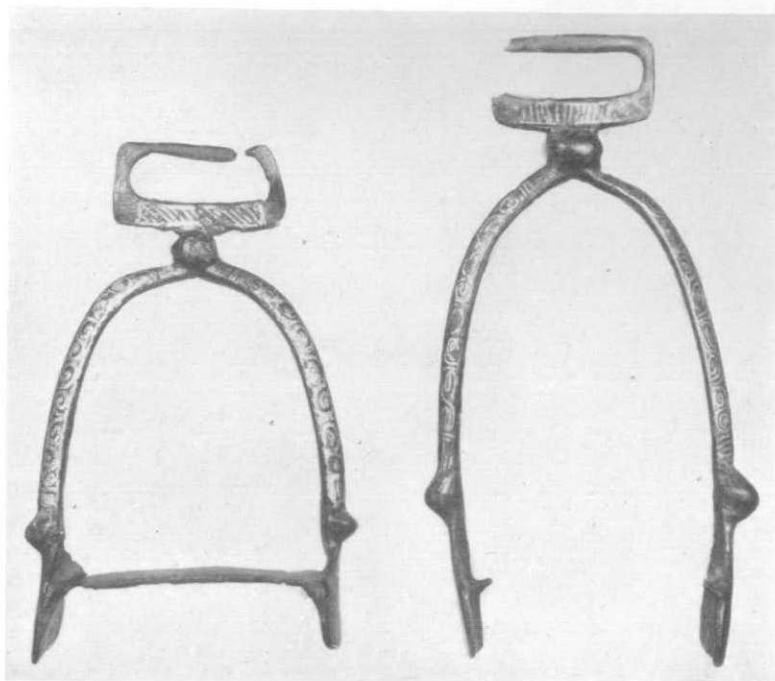
DARK AGE FINDS FROM THE CHERWELL AND RAY

- A. 1884.513, iron shield-boss, with long central projection, from the Cherwell
- B. 1884.514, iron spear-head with moulded socket, from the Cherwell
- 1884.515a, iron spear-head with moulded socket, from the Ray
- 1886.1232, iron prick-spur, from the Cherwell
- 1886.447, small iron shears, from the Cherwell

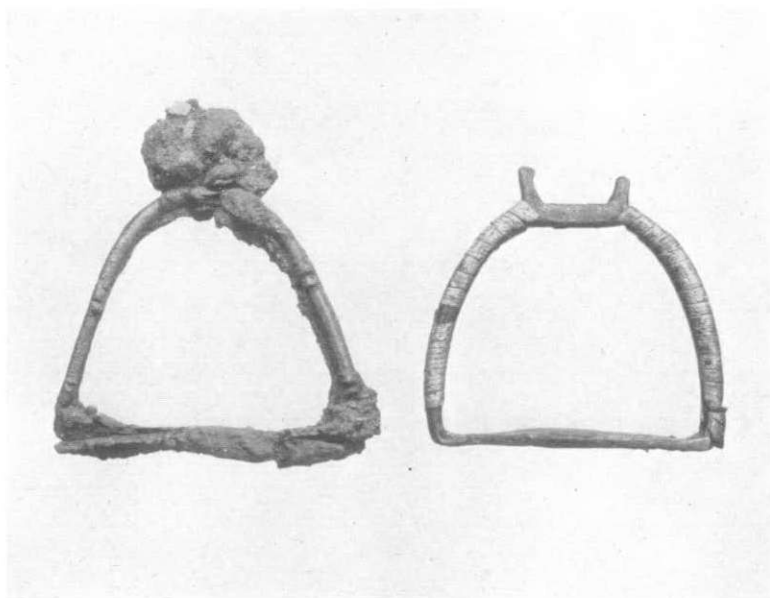
Scale : $\frac{1}{3}$

Phh.: Ashmolean Museum

PLATE VI



A



B

- A. 1886.444 and 443, two iron stirrups of English Viking class, decorated with brass overlay, from the Cherwell
 B. 1886.445, iron stirrup, with ornamental bronze casing, from the Cherwell
 1876.95, iron stirrup, spirally bound with brass and with ornamental terminal, from the Ray

Scale : $\frac{1}{8}$