

PAPERS RELATING TO THE DISCOVERY OF CHALK SARCOPHAGI AT HITCHAM IN 1873 AND 1874

- 1 Letter to Lord Boston from Archdeacon at Aylesbury, Aug 14th 1873
- 2 Letter from Lord Boston to James Rutland, Aug 18th 1873
- 3 Letter from James Rutland to Lord Boston, Aug 20th 1873
- 4 Draft letter by James Rutland to the Times, July 1884
- 5 Draft letter by James Rutland to Maidenhead Advertiser, 1884
- 6 Sketch by James Rutland of a sarcophagus, July 1884
- 7 Letter by James Rutland to Reading Mercury, Aug 1884

could you also inform us

What is the nature of the
stratum under which
this Coffin was found?

I am my dear Lord Protter

Very Truly yours

Edward Pickens et al

Mr. Hubbard, Nilesbury

Aug 14. 1873

My dear Lady Beclinn

W. Zelandes c. 5000

letzt, 2. in Kienburg

~~that~~ your communication

is of sufficient interest

to find a place in the

next number of the
Records of Buckinghamshire
Would you then allow
us to use your letter
& the illustration for
this purpose?

We are desirous to

know whether the material
of the Coffin Cover is
of Chalk, or of what is
provincially known as
Clunch. I presume
that it is of Chalk, which
would be found in
your district; and

Cham Coffin -



The Right Honble

Lord Boston

Esq

Heddon

Maidenhead

HOUSE
162

The Prebendal,
Aylesbury.



and also whether the
material is of "chalk"
or (as I read it) "clanch".
Would you kindly
write me whatever
has come to your knowledge
about these coffins, so
that I might send
your letter on to the
Archdeacon.

We shall probably return
to Bedford by Thursday
or Friday next. I remain
Yrs truly
Boston
Surely it was genuine
"chalk" you showed me.

Hotel Westminster
13 Rue de la Paix
Paris
August 18th
73

Rutland;

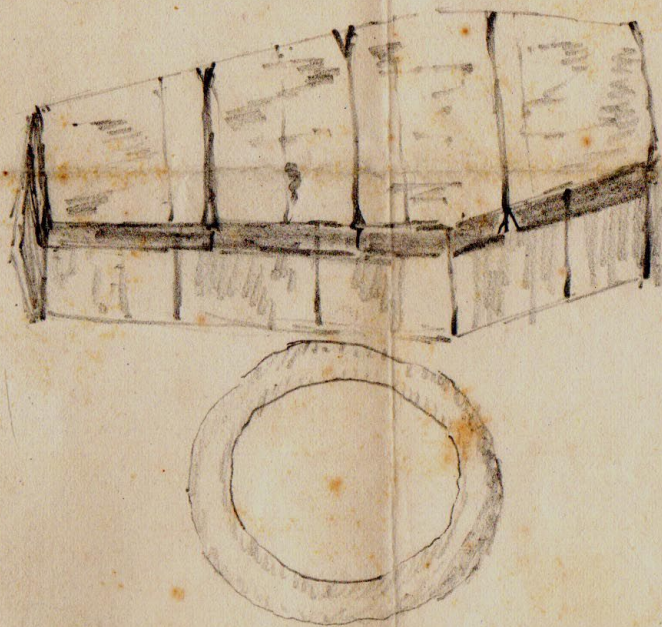
I daresay you
will remember some
few years ago when
you were making a
vault in Hitcham Church-
yard for "Oliver" you
showed me some
portions of a chalk
coffin, - which your men

had been obliged to
destroy in digging the
grave - and also
the side of another
chalk coffin. I thought
at the time that
the Archaeological Society
would be interested
in the matter, but
it escaped my memory
till the other day,
when seeing that Archdeacon
Bickerseth had presided
at a meeting of the Society

I wrote and told
him what I knew
about it, and I got
a friend of mine
to make a drawing
of the coffin as it
would be supposed
to cover the corpse.
Archdeacon Bickerseth
has written me a
letter (which I enclose)
asking as to the nature
of the "stratum" in which
the coffins are found,

faces of old chalk work, and without mortar or other binding mixture. There were not any stones at bottom of grave the side stones stood on edge round the grave, which I think would account for the small space between the bones and the under side of top slabs, not being more than two inches, as the superincumbent weight would press the side stones to a greater obliquity than first placed in this grave I ~~was~~ found a number of Iron rings, and coffin nails. 6 in diameter and a few Iron nails. the bones were much decayed. the whole of this grave had

to be removed. there was another similar grave to the east of this but not intended



when rebuilding the Porch in 1866. In digging for the foundation I came upon a similar grave the subsoil is chalk and in places some parts of the yard within 2 feet of the surface

Chalk, Cist, or Sarcophagus, Hitcham, July 1884.

Letter to The Times, July 1884.

To the Editor:

e/ Sirs— A find of some Archaeological interest was made a few days ago in the Churchyard of St Marys, Hitcham, Bucks.

In digging a grave about 10 feet from the Church on the South side of the Norman Nave, a stone Cist was discovered, 4 ft 6 inches from the present surface, (this is the same Cist I noticed 14 years ago, when a grave was being dug, and a similar Chalk Cist was then found). With the remains were a quantity of Thow rings $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, also some iron nails, being indicative of there having been a coffin). The inside dimensions of the present Cist were 6 ft. in length, 12 ins. wide at the head, and 8 at the foot, 19 do. at its greatest width. The South side was composed of 5 slabs, the North do. of 6, the covering slabs were five in number, also 1 at the head + foot, 18 stones in all, 13 ins. deep at the head, + 12 ins. at the foot. The side stones averaging 4 ins. + the covering do. $5\frac{1}{2}$ ins. in thickness. The chalk or stones of which the Cist is composed were rudely squared, + hewn or axed on all sides, with a tool 1 in. wide, + rounded on the edge, one other tool 3 ins. in width, the axe marks being sharp + clearly defined. A large + perfect skeleton was enclosed, but no trace of a coffin, wood, or metal. The bed, or floor, of the grave was composed of fine gravel - pit sand. The bones were considerably crystallised, probably the

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metal. The bed, or floor, of the grave was
composed of fine gravel - pit sand. The bones
were considerably crystallised, probably the
body was covered with carbonate of lime, the

skull bore traces of having lain in a liquid, it was very friable + crumbled at the touch, the femur measured $18\frac{1}{2}$ ins. in length.

Jewellynn Jewett says, "The mode of burial seems to have been this, when the body was placed in the stone cist or sarcophagus, it was fully draped in its usual dress. It was laid flat upon its back, at full length, at the bottom in the cist, and any relics intended to be buried with it, were placed by its side. Liquid lime or gypsum was then poured in, upon + around it; the face alone being left uncovered with the liquid. The body was thus completely (with the exception of the face) encased in liquid lime, which when it became set, formed a solid mass. When these are brought to light + opened, a perfect impression or mould of the figure of the deceased appears on the bed of plaster or lime in which it had been enclosed, and in some instances the texture and even the colours, of the dress is clearly discernable. Some years ago a list was opened at York in which the body of a woman clothed in rich purple, with a small child laid upon her lap was clearly discernable in the plaster.

Whether this was an interment of the Romano-British, or Anglo-Saxon period, the orientation was very decided in this case, as in the five others I have seen in this spot, they all lying due East & West. Two thirds in length of this very interesting relic had to be

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in this case, as in the five others I have seen in
this spot, they all lying due East & West. Two thirds
in length of this very interesting relic had to be
removed, to obtain the depth required for the new

grave. I collected the bones and placed them in the
remaining third portion left undisturbed.

J. Ratland

To the Pastor of the Walden Church,
Sir Hitcham Anglo Saxon Remains

In digging the grave for the Interment of
the late Mr John Buckland in St Marys Church
yard Hitcham ~~the~~ ^{on the 3rd Inst} ~~about~~ ^{about} three feet six
from the surface an ancient stone list or
sarcophagus ^{formed of} Chalk ~~grave~~ was laid bare containing the
remains of a body which had
been placed in a coffin of wood. The coffin
had entirely perished except a very few frag-
ments. The skull was large & very thick. The
Arm Bones & Ribs were much decayed. It is
remarkable that probably for eight or nine
centuries this sepulchral deposit should
not have been disturbed long ago. This is
the fourth that has been discovered since
1866. during the ^{of the Church when} restoration ~~in that year~~
in rebuilding the Porch, and removing the
earth on the south side of the Church. Two
Chalk lists were discovered. a third was
found in digging for the grave of the late
Mr Ambrose Oliver. in which were found

Several Iron Rings about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch diameter and
nails the head of which were about 1 in. in diameter
these graves were East & West as is the present
custom. At the at an earlier period the Head was
placed to the South the Body lying on its right
side with the face to the East. Tree Coffin
are generally found thus placed. which were
of the Ancient British period. These Coffins were
of Oak ~~or Birch~~ a length of seven or eight feet was
cut off. split down the middle and the ends
hollowed out and secured with oak pins.

Tree Coffins are usually found in Barrows and
covered with Boughs and loose Stones. The
Anglo Saxons formed their graves with
rough stone slabs such as those in Hitcham
Churchyard. about 16 inches deep & from 3 to 6
inches in thickness the stones were placed on
edge forming an oblong shape being narrower
at the foot than at the Head. and filled up
level with the sides ^{and to the top of the coffin} and covered with similar
stone slabs. the stones had been roughly hewn
as the ancient marks were so sharp & distinct
as though very recently cut.

Aug 12th

James Rutter.

AN ARCHÆOLOGICAL DISCOVERY AT HITCHAM, IN BUCKS.

To the EDITOR of the READING MERCURY.

SIR,—A find of some archæological interest was made a few days ago in the churchyard of Hitcham, Bucks. In digging a grave on the south side of the (Norman) nave, a stone cist, or sarcophagus, was discovered 4 ft. 6 in. from the present surface. Fourteen years ago a similar cist was found; with the remains were a quantity of iron rings, $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter, and iron nails, but no other indication of there having been a coffin. The head of the present cist was then brought to view, but not disturbed. The inside dimensions of the present cist were 6 ft. in length, 12 in. wide at the head, and 8 in. at the foot; 19 in. at its greatest width. The south side was composed of 5 slabs, the north side of 6; the covering slabs were 5 in number; also one at the head and foot—18 stones in all, 13 in. deep at the head and 12 in. at the foot; the side stones averaging 4 in. and the covering stones $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. in thickness. The chalk or claunch stones of which the cist is composed were rudely squared and hewn or axed on all sides with a tool 1 in. wide, and rounded on the edge; one other tool 3 in. in width, the axe marks being sharp and clearly defined. A large and perfect skeleton was enclosed, but no trace of a coffin, wood or metal. The bed or floor of the grave was composed of fine gravel-pit sand. The bones were considerably crystallised; probably the body was covered with carbonate of lime. The skull bore traces of having lain in a liquid; it was very friable, and crumbled at the touch; the femur measured $18\frac{1}{2}$ in. in length. Llewellyn Jewett says: "The mode of burial seems this: when the body was placed in the stone cist, or sarcophagus, it was fully draped in its usual dress. It was laid flat upon its back, at full length, at the bottom of the cist; any relics intended to be buried with it were placed by its side. Liquid lime or gypsum was then poured in, upon, and around it, the face alone being left uncovered by the liquid. The body was thus completely (with the exception of the face) encased in liquid lime, which, when it became set, formed a solid mass. When these are brought to light and opened, a perfect impression or mould of the figure of the deceased appears on the bed of plaster or lime in which it had been enclosed, and, in some instances, the texture, and even the colours of the dress is clearly defined. Some years ago a cist was opened at York, in which the body of a woman clothed in rich purple, with a small child laid upon her lap, was clearly discernible in the plaster."

Whether this was an interment of the Roman-British or Anglo-Saxon period the orientation was very decided in this case, as in the five others I have seen in this spot, they all lying due east and west. Two-thirds in length of this very interesting relic had to be removed to obtain the depth required for the new grave. I collected the bones and placed them in the remaining third portion left undisturbed.

JAMES RUTLAND,

Hon. Sec. Berks Archæological and Architectural Society, and Maidenhead Field Club and Thames Valley Antiquarian Society.

The Gables, Taplow,
August, 1884.