

From the Museum

by Martin Howe

The village of Eye in Cambridgeshire was the home of the Leeds family and the birthplace of Mr E. T. Leeds, the great pioneer of the study of Anglo-Saxon archaeology. Thus it is particularly apt that the objects here described should belong to the Anglo-Saxon period and were discovered at no great distance from Eyebury Farm, the home of the Leeds family.

The funerary pot and brooch which are the subjects of this article have been in the collections of the City Museum and Art Gallery since the early years of this century, but have never been accessioned; for until recently little was known of their provenance and history. Such information as was available was limited to two hand-written labels on the pot and the knowledge that the pot and the brooch had been found together. The labels, one stuck to the interior of the pot and the other on its base, read 'S. Egar' and 'Peterborough' respectively. The 'S Egar' mentioned was a local man, Mr Samuel Egar, who had been Agent to the Earl Fitzwilliam and who observed and noted details of his surroundings. However, the information relating to the objects here considered, although in part obtained from Egar, is to be found in the notebooks of George Wyman Abbott, the celebrated local antiquary. He recorded details of finds made in a ballast pit under what is now the Eye works of the Northam Brick Company (TF 23050324). The entry reads: 'In removing the gravel *cinerary* urns were found; also *human remains with iron knives and spear heads*'. From these notes it is evident that the cemetery accidentally uncovered contained both inhumation and cremation burials. Unfortunately no detailed information on the contents of individual graves survives and it is more than likely that both the information and artifacts found were bought from workers in the gravel pits after the graves had been destroyed.

Both the pot and the brooch retain traces of sand and gravel suggesting that they came from an inhumation burial and are objects which were buried with the dead to accompany them on their journey into the after-life. The pot (fig. 16) is globular in form, 152 mm high and has lost over half its rim, probably due to a shovel blow. It is well formed with a short neck and a slightly everted rim. The shoulders and rim are decorated with four irregular and lightly incised lines and between the second and third of these lines is a wide band decorated with nineteen impressed swastika designs. These are at regular intervals and were executed using a stamp probably made of deer antler similar to the example excavated from the Anglo-Saxon village of West Stow (Myres (1969), pl. 8b). The decoration of the pot is completed by four triangular panels of alternating rosette and raised-cross stamped designs. The motifs

used in the decoration had a symbolic importance to the Anglo-Saxons. The swastika was associated with the cult of Thor, the hammer-wielding god who fought the forces of evil, and who was concerned with birth, marriage and death (Myres (1969), 137). The rosette and raised-cross stamps had similar religious significance and by thus decorating the pot the potter was giving it a mystic power and an individual personality.

The brooch, made of bronze, belongs to the type known as 'small-long' brooches (fig. 16). The small-long brooch was worn exclusively by women and is considered to be a specifically Anglian brooch type, although a number of examples are known from non-Anglian areas. The brooch is 66 mm in length and is decorated on the head, arms and foot with 26 stamped designs which resemble an arrow-head. E. T. Leeds divided this brooch form into a number of different types and derivatives (Leeds (1945), 1-106). The Eye brooch belongs to Leeds' 'cross-potent' type which has close parallels with continental material and appears to have come into England at an early stage of Anglo-Saxon settlement (Leeds (1945), 14). However, the Eye brooch has stepped angles between its arms and a splayed foot, features which, according to Leeds, make it a later variant on the earlier form which has a straighter foot and rounded angles between the arms.

The dating of these two objects must now be discussed. As stated above the small-long brooch belongs to a secondary type of the cross-potent. However, the faceting on the foot is a survival from the earlier form and thus places the Eye brooch in the earlier part of the date range of the developed form. The stamped pendent triangles which adorn the body of the pot from Eye are, according to Myres ((1977), 20), a fashion of the sixth century. Thus, taking the form of the brooch in conjunction with this information a date just prior to the middle of the sixth century would appear to be appropriate for the objects under discussion. It is unfortunate that no further information survives from the cemetery to enable us to establish a firmer date range.

Bibliography

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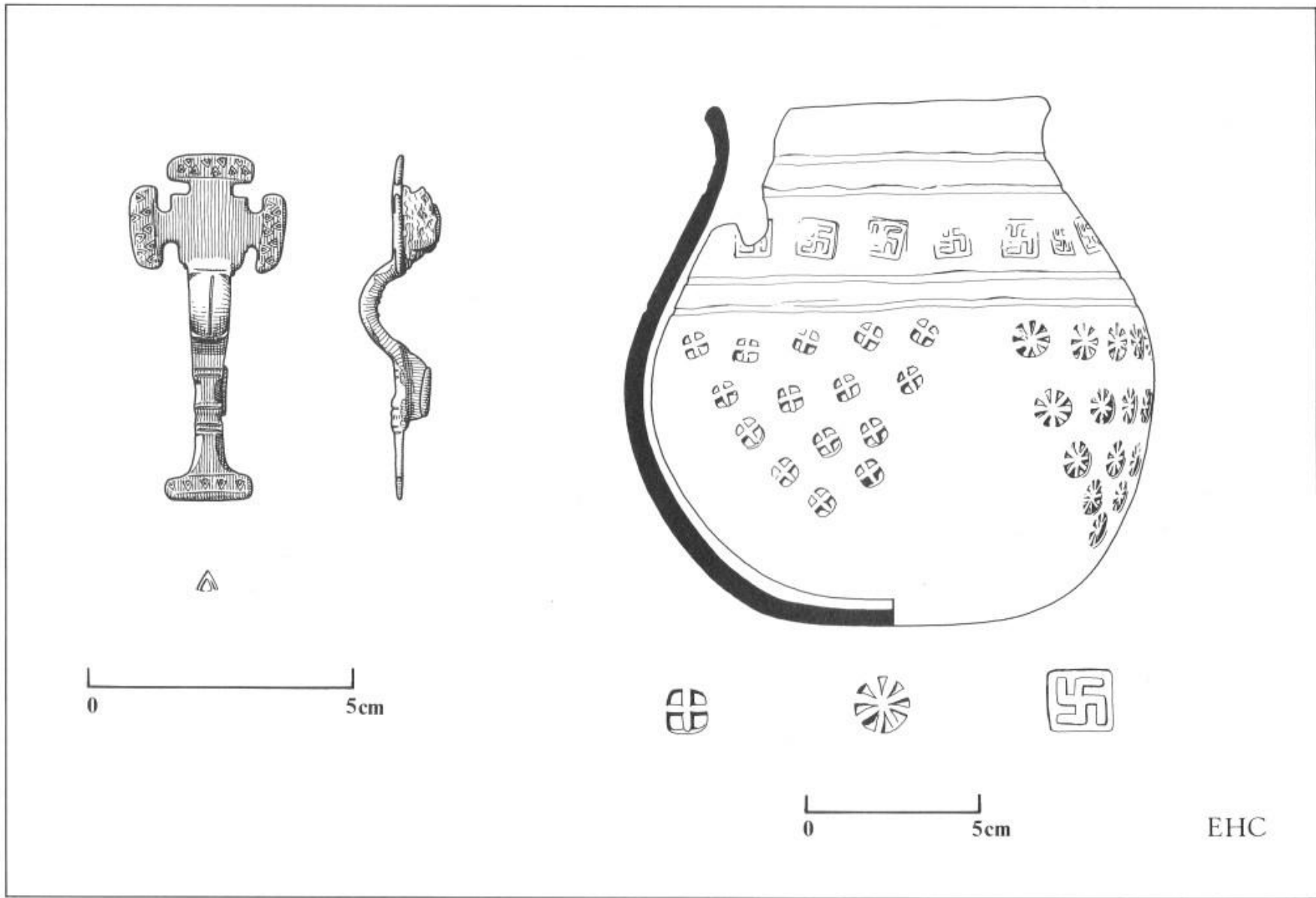


Fig 16 The Anglo-Saxon brooch and pot from Eye