

The Dover rune brooch.—Miss Vera I. Evison, F.S.A., sends the following: In January 1952 excavations¹ were in progress, under the auspices of the then Ministry of Works, of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery on Buckland, a hill on the east side of the River Dour overlooking Dover, Kent. Graves had been discovered during the cutting of roads, sewers, and house foundations for the new Buckland Estate and, although Dover Corporation showed the keenest interest in the archaeological discoveries and gave every possible assistance to the work, it was, of course, necessary for plans for the building to go ahead and some archaeological losses were inevitable.

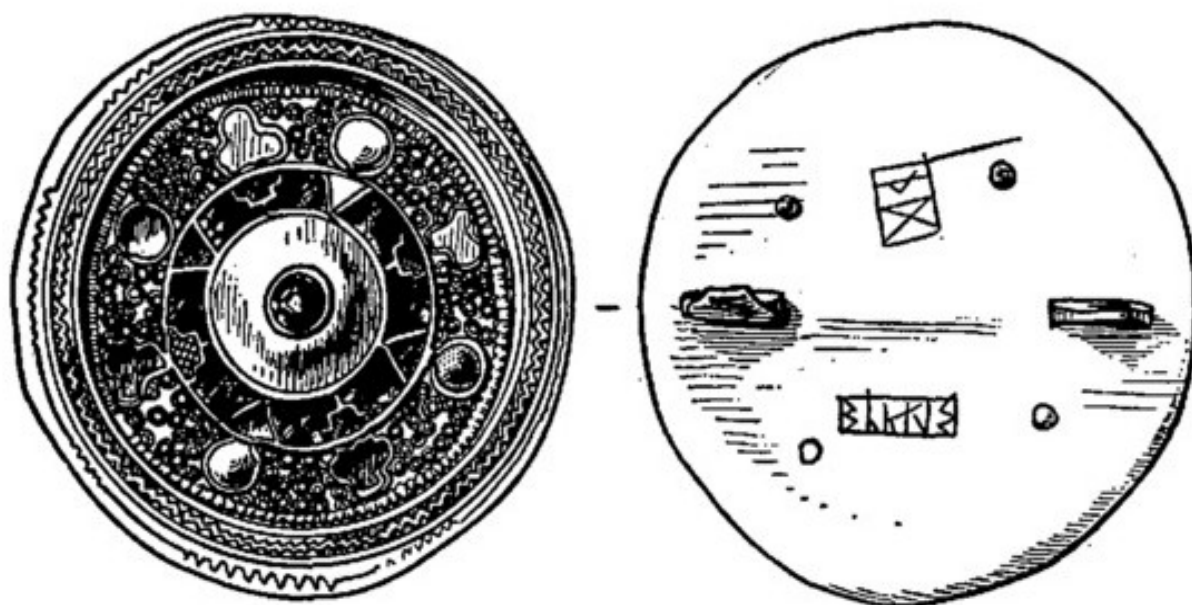


FIG. 1. The Dover rune brooch (♁)

Through the friendly co-operation of everyone concerned in the programme, these losses were kept to a minimum, but one of the casualties was the grave given the number 126.

During January 1952 a mechanical excavator on one part of the site dug up a skull and a brooch, which was picked up by one of the bystanders. It was not until April of that year that this incident came to light accidentally in a casual conversation; the finder was traced, and the brooch retrieved. It was immediately obvious that there was a runic inscription on the back, and the brooch was scrutinized to see whether this could have been scratched recently. This possibility could be ruled out, however, for the decomposition products on the surface of the metal spread over the runes in an undisturbed fashion.

The brooch (fig. 1) is a silver disc, with light and shade border and reserved silver zigzag and niello zone within; a central sunken field is covered with a gold plate fastened by four rivets to the back plate, and bearing on the outer zone a border of beaded filigree with four round cells and four trefoil cells arranged alternately in a field of beaded annulets; three of these cells are now empty, but two opposite round ones contain yellow cabochon glass, and another blue cabochon glass; two of the trefoil cells still retain flat shell. It is these trefoil cells which shield the rivets. Within this is a zone of cloisonné, surrounding a white shell *en cabochon* with a central

¹ Supervised by the author. The processes of cleaning, preservation and drawing of the objects have been delayed, but when this work is completed it will be possible to publish the report.

period, Bruce-Dickins's suggestion that the form was affected by the miniscule character is possibly correct.¹ This is not necessarily so, however, for a derivation from the usual \mathfrak{H} rune by elongation of the first upright and omission of the last seems an easier transition than influence from a cursive type of symbol. The symbol also occurs on the Chessell Down scabbard mount, but the interpretations of this inscription are not wholly satisfactory, and it may be that in this position the sound of s was not intended. In this connexion it should be noted that the symbol occurs in some continental inscriptions where other sounds are tentatively assigned to it,² and in Scandinavian runes it occurs as a .³ It also occurs on the Sandwich stone,⁴ in a name where the sound of s would be possible. On the Dover brooch the symbol is reversed, with the short stroke on the left, and it might be distinguished in this form also on the Gilton pommel. From the point of view of sense, however, the Anglo-Saxon word *bliss*—'joy' on the back of a brooch would be eminently suitable, following the custom of the earlier Latin inscription found on gifts: *utere felix*.

As we have noted, the \mathfrak{Y} on the Thames seax and Cuthbert coffin is an undoubted s , so that we know the value of the symbol to men educated in the Christian fashion. It may be that the Dover brooch is late enough in the pagan period also to be influenced by the Christians, if not the post A.D. 597 Augustine mission, then the earlier Frankish contacts tangible in the religion of Ethelbert's queen. This Class II type of brooch is often executed on a cruciform plan, but since some are based instead on a tripartite division, no Christian meaning need be read into this. However, the brooch from Kent,⁵ which is in a quartered pattern, shows a clear curvilinear Christian cross in the cloisonné zone, and from this zone branch out four pedestal crosses in cloisonné. It is likely, therefore, that along with the inscriptions on the Thames seax and Cuthbert's coffin, and of the early southern English inscriptions the Sandwich stone and various coins, the Dover brooch has Christian affinities. It is clear that the northern English runes, on stone crosses, gravestones and the like, are the work of literate Christians, particularly when they extend into lengthy, intelligible sentences or verse of non-magical purpose. The few southern inscriptions which must be pre-Christian amount to the Caistor knuckle-bone, the Loveden pots, the Chessell Down scabbard mount, the Gilton pommel, and the radiate brooch found in Kent, all of which could have been imported. It very much looks as though, contrary to accepted tradition,⁶ the knowledge of runes did not come over with the invading Anglo-Saxons, or at any rate, we have as yet no firm evidence of a practising rune-master in England before the advent of Christianity. In fact, although one of the Loveden pots bears an inscription certainly written by some one who knew his *fupark*, another pot⁷ has a meaningless jumble of lines giving the impression of runes, but obviously written by an ignoramus. This might be interpreted as evidence for the complete absence of a rune-master in the vicinity at the time. It is therefore suggested here that writing in Latin script and writing in runes must have arrived simultaneously, long after the invasion period. This question, together with the Dover inscription, will be discussed further elsewhere.