



Gold Armilla found in 1847, near Wendover, Bucks.

Presented to the British Museum by Robert Fox Esq^{re}.

Account of the Discovery of an Armilla of pure Gold, in clearing a Coppice near Wendover in Buckinghamshire in 1847, in a Letter from Albert Way, Esq. to Sir Henry Ellis, Secretary.

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Westbourne Street, Hyde Park, 14th Nov. 1848.

NOV. 23, 1848. DEAR SIR HENRY,—A beautiful ancient ornament (Plate XV.) has been discovered during the last year in Buckinghamshire, which will be submitted to the inspection of the Society of Antiquaries this evening by permission of Mr. Robert Fox, on whose estates near Wendover this interesting relic was found. Mr. Fox informs me that it was turned up by the plough, in a piece of ground which had been covered with wood until 1845, when it was cleared and converted into arable.

The wood was called the Rideings Coppice, and the field bears the name of the Riddings. There is no tumulus to be seen near the spot, nor any tradition or indication of ancient habitation.

The ornament, which some have assigned to the early British period, is an armilla of pure gold, weighing four ounces twelve pennyweights, the intrinsic value being about twenty pounds. It is formed of two round bars or wires of gold of considerable thickness, twisted together very compactly, and of two small wires, each likewise twisted, and twined between the large wires, the entire four forming a torc or compact cord of a very curious nature, and highly ornamental. The four wires are united together at the extremities of this torc-armilla, which appear at some period to have been cut, so that the original termination or fastening of the ornament may be a matter of question. These extremities are now obtusely pointed, and evidently have been cut and filed, possibly for the purpose of obtaining a sample of the gold for assay.

The locality where this curious relic was found by the plough is on the brow of a hill, on the west side of the valley of the Chiltern range of hills, in which Wendover is situate. Many vestiges of ancient occupation are to be traced in this part of Buckinghamshire, although none may occur immediately adjacent to the place of discovery on Mr. Fox's estate. That gentleman has suggested to me, and the notion appears well deserving of consideration, that a great conflict is supposed to have occurred not far from the spot between the forces of the Britons and the Romans, when one of the sons of Cunobelin was slain.

Great Kimble, about three miles distant, is supposed to have received its name from that British chief, and ancient earthworks are pointed out termed Belinus' Castle. The conjecture seems quite admissible that this ornament may have been worn by some British chieftain who took refuge in the woods of the Wendover Dean, in the retreat from the discomfiture of the Britons on the occasion in question.

The armilla is, I think, certainly not of Roman character; it belongs to the curious class of ornaments, chiefly of gold, of the twisted type, which most antiquaries seem to concur in regard-

ing as Celtic. These torc-ornaments vary much both in the fashion of the twist and in dimensions, ranging from the size of the splendid collar found in Staffordshire, exhibited to the Society by her most gracious Majesty, to the torc-rings of the size of finger-rings. Of this last I had, on a former occasion, the pleasure of bringing before the notice of the Society two highly curious examples, one from Dr. Mantell's collection found in Sussex, the other from Suffolk, now in Mr. Whincopp's museum.

Some persons have, however, found an analogy between the armilla exhibited by Mr. Fox, and the silver ornaments found at Cuerdale; but, although many of those ornaments are fashioned in the form of cords, and are analagous to the torques of an earlier age, it must be observed that ornaments of gold, which may be assigned to the Anglo-Saxon age, are very rare, silver having been apparently more generally employed at that period.

On the other hand, the ornaments which are generally assigned to the earlier age are very commonly of gold.

In the neighbouring parts of England, at no great distance from the locality where the armilla communicated by Mr. Fox was turned up by the plough, a few specimens of ancient workmanship have been found, which may deserve notice. The torc-ornament, found at St. Alban's about the year 1744, deserves especial attention, because it appears to have closely resembled the armilla now laid before the Society, both in dimensions and general appearance, with the exception that it seems to have consisted of two large wires only twined together, and without the additional enrichment of the smaller intervening threads. The terminations, at the opening of this armlet, were perfect, and in the form, apparently, of two little acorn-shaped buttons, not very distinctly represented in the engraving, which may be seen in Gough's edition of Camden's *Britannia*. This ornament of gold is described as a *fibula*, but it is obvious from its general fashion and weight, namely, twenty guineas,—almost precisely the same as the weight of the armilla before the Society,—that this was also an armlet, and almost the counterpart of the one now brought to light. I am not aware whether the St. Alban's specimen still exists; it was found on the grounds of Caleb Lomax, Esq. of St. Alban's.

In the same county of Herts, adjacent to the district where Wendover is situate, two other armillæ of gold were found, and exhibited to the Society in 1816, by Mr. Charles Stokes, F.S.A. These, however, were of less massive dimension, weighing rather more than two ounces each. Their general form is not described in the brief notice given in the *Archæologia*, and it is to be regretted that no figure of these curious objects was preserved. It is remarkable that these, as likewise the armilla belonging to Mr. Fox, were discovered in woodland, not long previously cleared for cultivation.

The fashion of the armlets of the Roman age is well illustrated by the curious examples found about 1827, at Castlethorpe, in Buckinghamshire, with coins of Nero, Vespasian, Antoninus Pius, and other emperors. They are of considerable breadth, terminating in what seems to represent the head of a serpent, or some animal not distinctly characterised. These remarkable armillæ have been represented in the *Journal of the Archæological Association*, and are very valuable examples of the Roman age. Similar ornaments have been found in the canton of Vaud, and are figured in the *Transactions of the Antiquaries of Zurich*.

I must remark that the conjecture, which would assign Mr. Fox's armilla to the later age may

seem to be corroborated by comparison with the fine armlet found with a hoard of Eastern moneys, and figured in the annals of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries for the years 1842-43. The fashion of this armlet, discovered with objects precisely similar to those found in the Cuerdale hoard in our own country, bears very close resemblance to Mr. Fox's armlet, the work being in a slight degree more elaborate, and each smaller cord formed of *two* threads instead of a simple single twist.

It is in Ireland that the greatest variety of ornaments of the torc type, and formed of gold, have been found. A careful comparison of specimens found in England with these Irish antiquities would be very desirable; the want of a national collection for such purposes of comparison is constantly to be felt in researches of this nature. I am much gratified to be permitted by Mr. Fox to state that it is his generous intention to deposit the armilla found upon his estate in the British Museum as a contribution, and a very valuable one, towards the British series. I hope that so laudable an example may stimulate other possessors of antiquities to bestow them in like manner for this national purpose.

I remain, dear Sir Henry, faithfully yours,

ALBERT WAY.

Sir Henry Ellis, Sec. Soc. Ant. &c. &c.