

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

An Anglo-Saxon Cauldron from Kempsford, Glos

by R. D. Abbott
1962, Vol. 81, 196-197

© The Society and the Author(s)

AN ANGLO-SAXON CAULDRON FROM KEMPSFORD, GLOS.

The circumstances relating to the discovery of the bowl are somewhat confused owing to the long interval between its find and when notified to the police at Fairford, in 1955.

It was found by Mr James, a driver employed by contractors for levelling work on the southern periphery of the U.S.A.F. base at Marston Meysey (Fairford base).

Mr James stated that it was found with human bones and beads, and that the bowl covered the face of a skeleton. The police, when notified in 1955, removed the bowl and bones to their headquarters in Fairford, and after an 'inquest', the bones were re-buried in Fairford churchyard at the request of the Vicar.

The Department of Antiquities of the Ashmolean Museum heard of the discovery in 1955 and tried to investigate the matter, but by then all trace of the actual find spot had been obliterated. However, the finder was able to mark the approximate site of the discovery on a 25-inch O.S. map. This point is about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile north-north-west of Kempsford Church (approx. ref. SU 155 974).

The bowl was handed over by the police to an interested local family, where it remained for some time, until on leaving Fairford it was passed to others, when after another interval of years it was presented to the City Museum, Gloucester, through the good offices of Mrs H. E. O'Neil, F.S.A.¹

In 1961, the bowl was examined and restored by the Institute of Archaeology, University of London.

The Kempsford cauldron is of one-piece construction with turned-out rim, and with a pair of triangular ears already cut before the bronze sheet was beaten into shape. Its main dimensions are as follows:

Average diameter at rim: 8 inches
Internal depth: $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches

At some time in antiquity a fracture occurred in the wall of the vessel close to one of the ears, and this was repaired by placing a bronze patch inside the bowl, shaped to the side and rim, and secured in position by five bronze rivets.

The iron handle usual on vessels of this type, has not survived, but there are traces of iron corrosion around the suspension holes, and the distortion of these, together with the repair, suggest that the

¹ Glos. Museum Cat. A.5071.

cauldron had had a fair amount of domestic use, before being placed in the grave. A few scraps of cloth adhered to the surface, indicating that the cauldron was perhaps wrapped before its deposition.

The Kempsford find is another addition to a fairly common type of Anglo-Saxon metalware, which as suggested by Hawkes,¹ may be derived from the Frankish type cauldrons manufactured in the Rhineland. As yet there is no definitive study of Anglo-Saxon cauldrons in this country, but Thompson in his publication of a vessel from Stenigot, Lincs.,² appends a distribution map of known find-spots, and a list of the twenty-three bronze cauldrons of this type. This list makes no claim to be exhaustive, but amongst those listed, the closest parallels to the Kempsford vessel, would appear to be two cauldrons found in the inhumation cemetery at Bidford-on-Avon, Warks.³ One of these,⁴ found with the burial of a warrior, is very similar as regards dimensions and shape, but is slightly more globular.

It has been suggested that cauldrons of this type, when found in graves, represent the dead person's cooking-pot, and it is of interest to recall that two similar vessels were found in the Fairford cemetery⁵, not very far from Kempsford.

R. D. ABBOTT, A.M.A.

¹ C. F. C. Hawkes in *Aspects of Archaeology* (1951), p. 182.

² *Ant. Journ.*, xxxvi (1956), p. 192.

³ *Archaeologia*, lxxiii and lxxiv.

⁴ *Archaeologia*, lxxiv, pl. 7, fig. 3.

⁵ *Fairford Graves* (1852).



PLATE XX. Anglo-Saxon Bronze Cauldron.
From Kempsford, Glos. (1/3)