

Brampton Urnes

Sir Thomas Browne

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CONCERNING SOME URNES
FOUND IN BRAMPTON
FEILD IN NORFOLK
1667

I THOUGHT I had taken leave of urnes when I had some yeares past given a short account of those found at Walsingham, but a newe discoverie being made, I readily obey your commands in a brief description thereof.

In a large arable feild lying between Buxton and Brampton, but belonging unto Brampton and not much more then a furlong from Oxned park, divers urnes were found. A part of the feild being designed to be enclosed, while the workmen made severall diches & fell upon divers urnes, but earnestly & carelessly digging they broake all they met with & finding nothing but ashes or burnt cinders they scattered what they found. Upon notice given unto me I went unto the place * myself to observe the same and to have obtained an whole one, and though I met with two on the side of the dich and used all care I could with the workemen yet they were broake in the taking out. At every stroake on the dich side was heard an hollow sound at some distance, as though the ground had been arched, vaulted, or hollow about them. But many without doubt are still remaining in that ground, and divers were found by some who digged at randome thereabout. Of these pots none were found above 3 quarters of a yard in the ground, whereby it appeareth that in all this time the earth has litle varied its surface, though this ground hath been plowed to the utmost memorie of man; whereby it may be also conjectured that this hath not been a woodland as some conceive all this part to have been, for in such open lands, they usually made no common burying places in old times except for some speciall persons in groves. And likewise that there hath been an ancient habitation about these parts though nothing can be discovered of it from Antiquitie , for at Buxton also, not a mile off, urnes have been found in my memorie.

But in their magnitude, figure, colour, posture, &c. there was no small varietie. Some were large & capacious, able to contain above 2 gallons, some of a middle, others of a smaller sise. The great ones probably belonging to greater persons or might be family urnes, fit to receive the ashes successively of their kindred & relations, & therefore of these some had coverings of the same matter, either fitted to them or a thinne flat stone like a graye slat layd over them; and therefore also great ones were but thinly found, but others in good number.

Some were of large wide mouths & bellies proportionable with short necks and bottomes of 3 inches diameter, and neere an inch thick; some small with necks like jugges & about that bignesse; the mouths of some fewe were not round but after the figure of a circle compressed not ordinarily to be imitated; though some had small, yet none had poynted, bottomes according to the figures of those which are to be seen in Roma Sotteranea, Viginerus, or Mascardus.

In the colours also there was great varietie. Some were whitish, some blackish, and inclining to a blewe, others yellowish or dark red, arguing varieties of their materialls. Some fragments & especially bottomes of vessells wch seemed to be handsome neat pans, were also found of a fine corall-like red, somewhat like portugall vessells as though they had been made out of some fine bolary earth & very smooth; but the like have been found in divers places as Dr. Casaubone hath observed among the pots found at Newington in Kent, and as other pieces do yet testifie which are to be found at Burrowe Castle, an old Roman station not farre from Yarmouth.

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Of the urnes those of the larger sort & such as had coverings were found with their mouths placed upwards, but a great number of the others were, as they informed me, & one I sawe my self, placed with their mouths downeward wch were probably such as were not to be opened agayne & receive the ashes of any other after them; though some wondered at this position, yet I sawe no inconvenience in it, for the earth being closely pressed & especially in minour mouthed pots they stand in a posture as like to continue as the other, as being less subject to have the earth fall in or the rayne to soake into them; and the same posture hath been observed in some found in other places as Holingshead delivers of divers found in Anglisea.

Some had inscriptions, the greatest part none. Those with inscriptions were of the larger sort wch were upon the reverted verges thereof; the greatest part of those which I could obtaine were somewhat obliterated, yet some of the letters to be made out; the letters were between lines either single or double, the letters of some fewe after a fayre Roman stroake, others more rudely and illegibly drawne wherein there seemed no great varietie,