à M. Salomon Reinach
Souvenir de John Evans

ON

THE EXPLORATION OF A BARROW

AT

YOUNGSBURY, NEAR WARE, HERTS.

COMMUNICATED TO THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES

BY

JOHN EVANS, D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S.,

PRESIDENT.

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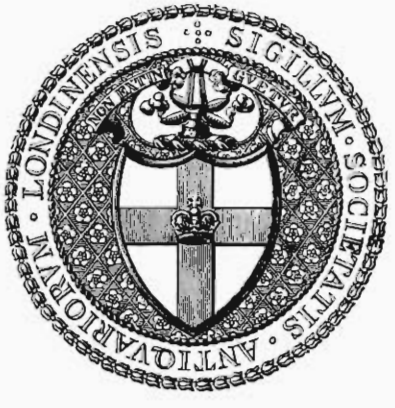

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FROM

THE ARCHAEOLOGIA,

VOL. LII.

ON THE

EXPLORATION OF A BARROW AT YOUNGSBURY, NEAR WARE, HERTS.

In treating of the parish of Standon, Salmon, in his *History of Hertfordshire*,[a] relates that "At the Extremity of this Parish are two large Barrows on the Brink of the Hill which overlooks *Thundritch* Church, between which and the Barrows is the Course of the *Rib*. This Place is called *Haven End;* probably for having been the Harbour where the *Danes* laid up their Vessels, which they brought from the *Thames* to *Ware* and *Hertford* to carry off their Plunder. Here they were well seated to have the *Roman* Road for Carriage of what they could pick up, and to drive the Cattle they stole. And these *Tumuli* being at that Haven, which could never be used as such by any but the *Danes*, helps forward the Conjecture that these in *England* are chiefly *Danish* Work, set up for Victory and Terror."

I have quoted this passage at length as a good example of the conclusions to which a vivid imagination not unfrequently led the ardent antiquary of the last century. Salmon had evidently not read or else had forgotten what Sir Thomas Browne[b] had written on such subjects: "But of these and the like Hills there can be no clear and assured decision without an ocular exploration, and subterraneous enquiry by cutting through one of them either directly or crosswise. For so with lesser charge discovery may be made what is under them, and consequently the intention of their erection." Under any circumstances, however,

[a] London 1727, p. 235.

[b] Certain Miscellany Tracts (1684), p. 154

the two tumuli mentioned by Salmon still exist, and are on the property of Mr. Charles Giles-Puller of Youngsbury, near Ware, and at a little distance from the house. Youngsbury lies about half a-mile to the east of the Roman road leading from Ware to Braughing, where the station *Ad fines* was situated, and where numerous coins, both Roman and Ancient British, as well as other relics, have from time to time been found.

The readers of *Fuller's Worthies* will remember the Hertfordshire proverb that "Ware and Wades-Mill are worth all London," which he assures you "is a master-piece of the vulgar wits in this county wherewith they endeavour to amuse travellers." "The fallacy lieth in the homonymy of Ware, here not taken for that Town, so named, but appellatively for all vendible commodities." On arriving at Wadesmill, which is two miles to the north of Ware, a road is seen in an easterly direction, which formerly after passing the house of Youngsbury continued to the north-east and went close alongside of the two barrows mentioned by Salmon. By some this road, as well as the direct road to Braughing, has been regarded as of Roman origin, and the position of the two barrows by the side of the road affords some countenance for such an opinion. Clutterbuck, indeed, about 1829, speaks of the barrows as standing "near the track of the old Roman Road called the Ermin Street"[a] and mentions the fact that near the spot a tessellated pavement was discovered in the year 1736, tesseræ from which were still to be picked up in the shrubbery at Youngsbury.

The more eastern of the two barrows is recorded to have been opened a hundred years ago by Mr. David Barclay, the then owner of Youngsbury, and there is a tradition of spearheads, coins, and other objects having been found in it, none of which however are now forthcoming. According to Clutterbuck's account, it was nevertheless Roman pottery and coins that were found in the barrow, which he says proved it to be of Roman origin. Judging from the appearance of the barrow a shaft has been sunk in it from the top, but I am by no means sure that the original central interment has ever been reached. This barrow is of much the same dimensions as the other, the opening of which I am about to describe, and in all probability it belongs to the same period.

Both barrows stand at the edge of a field known as the Hilly Field, and are partially overgrown with whitethorns and maples. On my arrival at Youngsbury, by the kind invitation of Mr. Giles-Puller, on the 11th of June last, I found that a preliminary opening had been made in the upper part of the mound on the

[a] Vol. iii. 277 (1827).

south side. At its outer end this cutting extended over about a sixth part of the circumference of the barrow, but its vertical sides converged so as to leave a face about 6 feet wide at what was apparently the centre of the mound, and at this point the cutting was about 9 feet in depth. The diameter of the barrow as nearly as could be judged is 60 feet, and the height about 12 feet above the surface of the adjoining field.

It proved to have been constructed of successive somewhat irregular layers of the gravelly subsoil of the immediate neighbourhood and of the surface soil, intermixed in places with layers of a more argillaceous character.

In accordance with my suggestion a new trench was cut in the middle of the former excavation, but only about 6 feet wide. It was at first carried to a depth of 3 feet 6 inches only, gradually increasing to 4 feet 6 inches, with the view of tracing if possible the original land-surface, and it was carried forward in a northerly direction towards the vertical face left by the preliminary digging at the presumed centre of the barrow. There was some difficulty in tracing the old ground-level with accuracy, but in the blacker layer of soil which probably represented the old surface, and in the blacker seams in the body of the mound, a considerable number of rude flint flakes were found, as well as a couple of "scrapers," one of them very well formed. These worked flints, which must have lain in or on the old surface-soil, seem to afford evidence of the spot having been occupied by some early inhabitants of the country, probably in pre-Roman times. The use of flints, however, for various purposes, such as for procuring fire or fashioning the teeth of their *tribula* or threshing instruments was well known to the Romans. During the first day's work the trench was carried forward about 20 feet, and besides the worked flints a small shapeless piece of bronze was found and a portion of the neck of a large urn of red ware, evidently of Roman make.

On Thursday June the 13th the work was continued, the depth of the new trench being increased to 5 feet until it arrived at the face left by the first excavation, which thus attained the dimensions of about 14 feet in height and 6 feet or so in width. It then seemed as if we had reached the central axis of the barrow without finding any interment, and that all our labour had been in vain.

I was however somewhat doubtful whether after all the centre had been reached, and I directed that a tunnel should be made in the lower part of the face of soil in the hope that we might prove to have been mistaken in our measurements. Three or four strokes of the pickaxe only had been given, when an oven-like cavity, about 3 feet 6 inches by 3 feet was revealed. The roof of this cavity

was formed by a layer of hard and stiff clayey soil, which had proved sufficiently strong to support the upper part of the barrow, and to prevent it from falling down into the vacant space which, as will subsequently be seen, had originated with the decay of a wooden cist. The roof of the cavity was about 8 feet below the apex of the mound, and its floor consisted of loose gravelly material. This I proceeded carefully to clear away by means of a hoe and a pocket-knife, and I ventured to predict that we should find first the iron clamps or hinges of a wooden cist, secondly a sepulchral urn and probably an earthenware bottle, and thirdly, if fortune favoured us, a glass bottle or urn.

My anticipations were soon confirmed by coming across an iron clamp or rather a rough pair of hinges bent at right angles, about $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide, $\frac{3}{8}$ inch thick, and extending 9 to 10 inches in either direction. Of these hinges there were found four in all, and though the wooden chest has entirely disappeared, yet from the texture of the fibres preserved by infiltration with iron it appears that the material of which it was formed was in all probability oak. This chest was originally just over 3 feet long and 1 foot $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. Its exact height could not be determined.

Clearing out the loose gravel and soil still further, a magnificent sepulchral urn became visible, lying slightly on one side. It had split into three principal sections and a few smaller fragments, but is in wonderfully good condition, and has been well repaired by Mr. Talbot Ready.

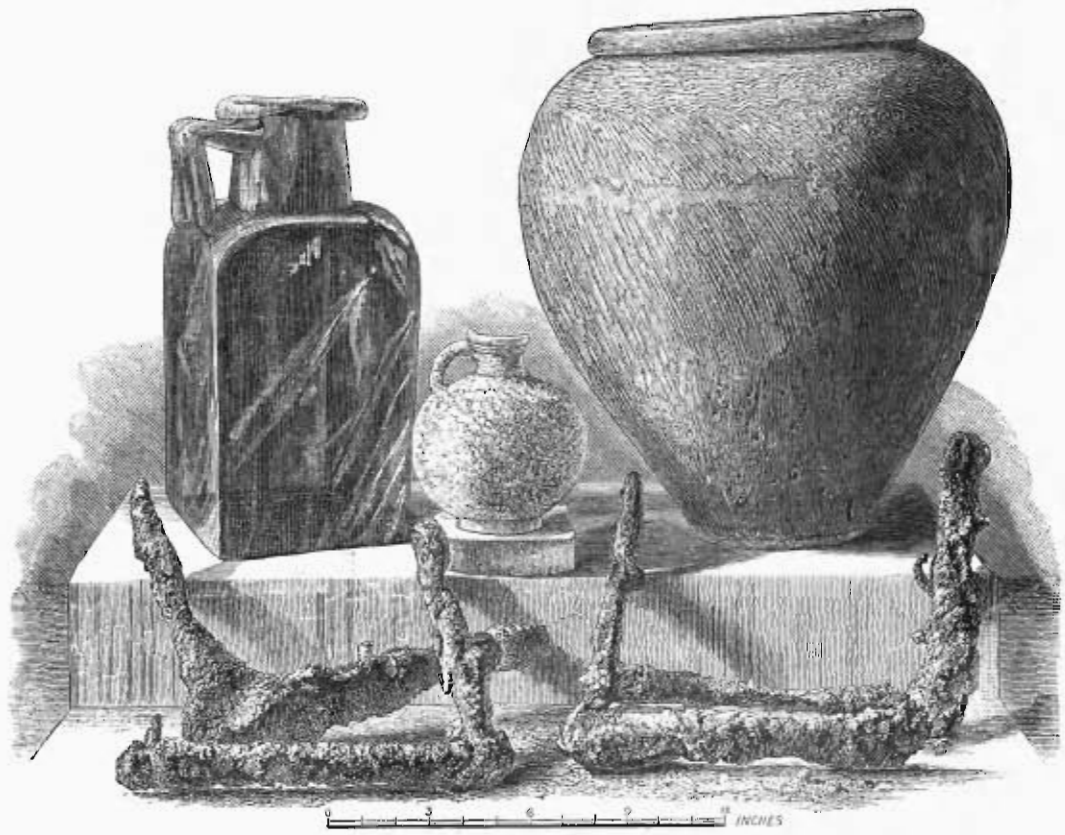
It is an *olla* formed of well-burnt grey ware, with a bold rim nearly an inch in depth round the opening, and its surface ornamented with parallel markings somewhat like corduroy. These at the neck are wavy, but on the body run in graceful curves. This ornamentation is by no means common, but is not unlike that which occurs on some Late-Celtic urns.

Its height is 1 foot $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches, its greatest diameter 1 foot $4\frac{3}{8}$ inches, the base is $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches across, and the opening of the mouth $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches in the clear. When found it contained a large quantity of apparently well-burnt bones in small fragments, of which I shall subsequently speak.

It is one of the largest Roman sepulchral *ollæ* ever found in this country, and larger than any of those in the British Museum. The largest of these, a plain *olla* found at Old Windsor in 1865, and presented to the Museum by Her Majesty, is 13 inches high.

In general form it resembles some of the sepulchral urns found in the Roman *ustrinum* at Litlington, Cambridgeshire, and described in the *Archæologia*,[a] but

[a] Vol. xxxvi. p. 368, pl. xliv.



VESSELS OF GLASS AND EARTHENWARE, ETC., FOUND IN A BARROW AT YOUNGSBURY, NEAR WARE.

its dimensions are larger. One of those found at Chesterford and described by Douglas[a] in the *Nenia Britannica* was 13 inches high and 12 in diameter. The exact character of this urn and of the other objects found in the Youngsbury barrow will be seen from the accompanying plate.

To the right of the large urn lay a small globular bottle of light-coloured ware with a lip and handle. It is $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches high and $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. It is of a very common type, of which numerous examples have been found accompanying Roman interments, both in Britain and on the Continent. Not to cite more examples, I may mention one that was found with glass vessels at Boxmoor,[b] Herts, in 1837. This is, however, less spherical in its proportions.

The third object found was standing in an upright position to the left or west of the principal urn. It is a very large square glass bottle with a thick lip and a nearly rectangular flat handle which is fluted or ribbed longitudinally. This vessel is perfect with the exception of a slight damage to the lip. Its dimensions are as follows:

Total height	15 inches.
Height of body to shoulder . . .	$11\frac{1}{4}$ „
Diameter of lip	5 „
Diameter of mouth	3 „
Width of handle	3 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ „
Width of side at top	7 „
„ „ bottom . . .	$6\frac{5}{8}$ „

The bottom is ornamented with a pattern in relief formed of an inner circle about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, and an outer circle of about 5 inches. Between them are eight segments of circles forming a kind of star pattern. Outside the larger circle there is in each angle of the base of the bottle a segment of a circle with two radial lines like a fragment of a wheel.

It is not a little remarkable that in 1829 there was discovered in a stone sarcophagus at Harpenden,[c] which like Youngsbury is in the county of Hertford, a glass vase of the same size and character and with the same pattern upon its base—in fact a bottle not improbably made in the same mould as the one now

[a] P. 137, pl. xxviii. 1.

[b] *Archaeologia*, vol. xxvii. p. 434. See also *Archaeologia*, vol. ii. p. 177, pl. x. fig. 6, for one found in a tomb at York.

[c] *Archaeologia*, vol. xxiv. p. 349.

before us. The Harpenden bottle was accompanied by four small cups of red pseudo-Aretine ware, and is now in the British Museum, having been presented by Mr. Charles William Packe. It is 14½ inches high, with sides 6½ to 6¾ inches broad. The lip is 5 inches across, with an opening of 2½ inches. The handle is about 3½ inches wide.

Another bottle-shaped vase of greenish-coloured glass and of about the same dimensions and form as that from Youngsbury was among the objects found by the late Lord Braybrooke when he opened the great Bartlow barrow[a] in 1835. It is described as "being seven inches and a quarter square, eleven inches and a half to the shoulder, and altogether full fifteen and a half inches high. The lip is five and a half inches in diameter, admitting the hand freely." It was full of burnt bones, as was also that now under consideration. Though so similar in form and size there is no record of the base being ornamented. This vase has, I believe, now perished by fire.

Another large vase of the same character was found at Boxmoor,[b] Herts, in 1837, in company with a spherical glass urn and other objects. It also is now in the British Museum. It stands 12 inches high and 9 inches to the shoulder. The body is 6 inches square. The lip is 4½ inches over, with an opening of 2½ inches, and the handle is from 2½ to 3 inches broad. There are two raised concentric circles on the base with a straight figure in the centre expanding at the ends like a dice-box.

Another bottle from Messing, Essex, presented to the Museum by the Earl of Verulam, is of the same height, and of about the same dimensions at the mouth, but the body is only about 5½ inches square. The largest vessel of the kind in the national collection is one obtained by Mr. G. Payne, F.S.A. from Bayford,[c] near Sittingbourne. It is 15½ inches high, the sides 7¾ to 8 inches across. The bottom is not ornamented.

A bottle of the same form, but only 10 inches high and 5 inches square, was found at Lincoln[d] towards the end of the last century and described by Governor Pownall.

In the large urn, besides comminuted burnt bones, with which it was nearly filled, were upwards of a hundred pieces of charcoal, remains of the funeral pyre. These have been kindly examined for me by Professor H. Marshall Ward, F.R.S.

[a] *Archaeologia*, vol. xxvi. p. 300, pl. xxxii. fig. 1.

[b] *Archaeologia*, vol. xxvii. p. 434.

[c] *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London*, 2nd S. vol. viii. p. 202.

[d] *Archaeologia*, vol. x. p. 345, pl. xxxiii. fig. 3.

who pronounces that the wood from which the charcoal was burnt was probably that of the ash. So far as I can judge, the small branches of the trees or saplings were used for the pyre, and not pieces of wood split from a large trunk.

There were also present nearly two hundred nails and pieces of nails of iron, now much rusted, some of which are coated with ashes that have adhered to them. Many of them are bent. These nails may either have been used in fastening the logs of the funeral pyre together or in the construction of some kind of wooden shell or the *feretrum* on which the body was carried, and eventually placed upon the funeral pile.

The chest in which the urns were deposited was put together with a certain number of large iron nails, besides having, apparently, a lid of two flaps, each of which opened on two of the hinges already mentioned. One of the Bartlow barrows contained a chest of the same character, in which the sepulchral urns were deposited; and the glass vessels discovered at Boxmoor had also been placed in a similar wooden chest, with heavy spikes to bind it together, and with iron clamps, or possibly hinges, of the same kind. It was these facts that led me to anticipate the discovery of the remains of a similar cist in the barrow at Youngsbury.

Among those who were present during the course of the excavations were Mr. Hellier Gosselin, Mr. Martin Leake, Mr. E. S. Hanbury, and Mr. G. B. Buckton, F.R.S., who was at the time staying with Mr. Giles-Puller. Mr. Buckton was good enough to take some photographs, showing the cavity in the middle of the barrow, and its contents, as well as the conductors of the exploration.

But to return to the ashes of the dead. As I have already stated, the large earthenware urn was nearly full of white, coarsely-powdered calcined bones, with only a few larger fragments intermixed, but the glass bottle was also nearly full of similar ashes, though with a greater proportion of large pieces among them. Most of the bones have been much distorted by heat, and from my finding a fragment of what appeared to be a very small skull in the mouth of the bottle, I came at once to the conclusion that it contained the remains of a child, while in the large urn were deposited the remains of its mother. This conclusion, too hastily adopted, has proved to be absolutely erroneous.

Professor John Marshall, F.R.S., and Dr. J. G. Garson, the well-known anthropologist, have both done me the favour of examining such of the bones as present any characteristic features, and both pronounce the remains to be those of an adult. The question arose whether, from the large quantity of ashes, they

might not be the remains of more than one individual, but of this there is no evidence; indeed, the presumption is strongly the other way. Among the remains, principally those deposited in the glass bottle, Dr. Garson has been able to recognise portions of the skull; vertebræ from the cervical, dorsal, and lumbar regions; a portion of the sternum, portions of ribs, two scapulæ, two femurs, two tibiæ, a humerus, radius, pelvis, and digits, all apparently belonging to one and the same individual. The epiphyses were united to the shafts of the bones, but the action of the fire has in some cases made the junction apparent. Among the ashes are some loose, white concretions, which at first were thought to be adipocere, possibly derived from the substances left by the imperfect combustion of the softer parts of the body. On testing a piece of this concretionary stuff, by applying it to a flame, I found, however, that it did not fuse, but that after a time it began to be burnt, and the products of combustion emitted an undoubted fragrance of incense. I was, in fact, burning some of the identical perfume which pious friends had mingled with the ashes of the deceased centuries ago when Britain was a Roman province. Some portions of the substance have been chemically examined by my son, Dr. P. Norman Evans, who finds that in the main it consists of carbonate of lime, which possibly, as burnt chalk, may have been gathered up together with the burnt bones, but that with this is a small amount of fatty matter, and some resinous gum, the melting temperature of which is high. I presume that this resin is what is known as frankincense; but who was the relative "Assyrios cineri qui dedit odores" we can only leave to speculation.

In the *Illustrated News* for July 21st, 1855, is an account of some Roman sepulchral remains found in the previous month of May at Weston Turville, near Wendover, Bucks. There were in this deposit five bottles of glass of various sizes, the largest cylindrical, and about $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches high and $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. Adhering to the fragments of this were pieces of bone, while a smaller bottle is described as having contained ashes. In another were some little silver beads, and in a patera of red ware were also ashes having among them leaves possibly of garlands, beads, and fibulæ; but there was also a "white substance, perhaps balsam, which emitted when pressed an aromatic scent." In the *Records of Buckinghamshire* (vol. i. p. 150), it is stated that some of this substance was shown by the Rev. A. Isham to an eminent analytical chemist in London, who thus reported upon it. "The aromatic substance you left with me I find to be the gum resin 'olibanum,' the ancient 'thus,' or frankincense. It was extensively used by the ancients, and a very long account of it is given in Pliny, lib. xii. cap. 14. It

is used as incense in Catholic churches (mixed with other resins) to this day. If you heat a small quantity of it on a piece of iron, you will readily recognise the odour." It is interesting to find a record of a parallel instance in the neighbouring county of Buckingham to that afforded in Hertfordshire of the durable nature of this perfume.

To return to the Youngsbury barrow. The sex of the deceased cannot be positively ascertained; Dr. Garson, however, inclines to the opinion that the bones, which are for the most part fairly calcined, are those of a male. I owe to the same authority a further interesting discovery. Among the human bones are several fragments—not, I think, quite so well burnt as the others—which he at once recognised as belonging to one of the lower animals. On closer examination he has been able to recognise parts of the skull, the lower end of a humerus, the first, second, and seventh cervical vertebræ, bodies of other vertebræ, and part of the pelvis of what was undoubtedly a roe-deer.

The question arises how the intermixture of the bones of two such different beings can have originated. The roe is not an animal commonly offered as a sacrifice, and, even if it had been, it would have been offered at the side of the pyre and not upon it. It would seem rather to have formed one of those dishes of food which were occasionally thrown into the flames as being agreeable to the deceased, a practice recorded by Virgil in his account of the funeral pile of Misenus, in a passage already quoted in the pages of the *Archaeologia*, by one of our former directors, Mr. John Gage, in his account of the exploration of the Bartlow Hills.

Congesta cremantur
Thurea dona, dapes, fuso crateres olivo.[a]

This practice of offering to the deceased "savoury meats such as their soul loved," may well be a survival from an earlier stage of culture, when food so often accompanied an interment. Of this, numerous instances are recorded in Canon Greenwell's *British Barrows*, where also some speculations as to the origin of the custom will be found.[b] Among the Gauls, in Cæsar's time, funerals were sumptuous and magnificent; and anything that was dear to the living was cast into the flames of their funeral pyre, even, he says, animals.[c]

It now remains for me to consider whether there are any indications by which we may form an approximate estimate of the date to be assigned to this inter-

[a] Æneid. vi. 225. [b] P. 102. [c] De Bell. Gall. vi. c. 19.

ment. The practice of enclosing the sepulchral urns in cists of wood seems to have prevailed during a considerable part of the period of the Roman occupation of this country in districts where stone for such receptacles was not readily available. In some cases, however, brick was used as a substitute for stone. I have already remarked that in some of the Bartlow Hills such wooden cists were discovered inclosing the funereal vessels. Now, in one of these Bartlow barrows a coin of the emperor Hadrian[a] was found adhering to a portion of burnt bone. As the coin was probably not struck until about A.D. 117 it is evident that the interment cannot be of earlier date. But the coin was so much defaced, either by corrosion or wear, that the burial may not unfairly be assumed to belong to a period some twenty or thirty years later. In this case, however, the vessels were of a somewhat different character from those found at Youngsbury, and they had been deposited in a receptacle built of brick, and not in a wooden cist. Moreover, the contents of Roman barrows of course much depend upon the social position of those in whose honour they were raised; so that contemporary burials may vary much in their surroundings, and comparison of the funereal deposits be of little value in determining relative dates.

The large glass vases found at Youngsbury, Harpenden, and Bartlow, point, however, to a time when Roman civilisation in Britain had attained a high development; and though at first I was inclined to assign the construction of the Youngsbury barrows to the beginning of the third century after Christ, I am, on further consideration, doubtful whether we may not with more probability regard them as belonging to the latter half of the second century. Whether the ashes be those of a man or of a woman, there can be little doubt that they are those of an occupant of the neighbouring villa, who during life held a high social position. Not improbably the sister barrow contains the partner of his or her joys and sorrows. Of their names, ages, or occupations not the slightest record is left. "Who were the proprietaries of these Bones, or what Bodies these Ashes made up, were a question above Antiquarism, not to be resolved by man, nor easily perhaps by Spirits.—Had they made as good provision for their Names as they have done for their Reliques, they had not so grossly erred in the art of Perpetuation."[b]

[a] *Archæologia*, vol. xxv. p. 7.

[b] Browne's *Hydriotaphia*, ch. v.