

JUTISH CEMETERY 1953-1955

In December 1953, workmen digging out foundations for a new mushroom shed in a field off Canterbury Road, Lyminge, discovered items buried in the soil that triggered great archaeological interest. An emergency dig was carried out in December 1953 followed by two further digs in the summers of 1954 and 1955.

The digs were led by Alan Warhurst and a Jutish Cemetery was discovered. The Jutes were a Germanic tribe from Jutland (Jutland Peninsula divided between Denmark and Germany) who invaded and settled in Southern Britain in the late 4th century. The Jutish King, Ethelbert, married Bertha, a Frankish princess and they welcomed St Augustine to Canterbury in 597 AD.

64 graves were excavated, some containing a skeleton and artefacts. The first grave to be discovered in December 1953 contained the skeleton of a well-preserved man, about 5 feet 10 inches tall, with various finds including an iron shield boss, axe, spear, knife, tweezers, a Roman coin, belt buckle with blue glass and a bronze pin across a spear head. The skeleton showed well marked evidence of widespread osteo-arthritis. Grave 24 was that of a child and included beads and a brooch as well as a clay wheel-turned pot.

The main finds within the other graves excavated included a complete glass bottle, knife, bronze buckle, beads and brooches, and an amber claw beaker.



Photograph of Grave 11 reproduced with the kind permission of Edney Eyres, a volunteer from Lyminge who took part in the digs

The finds from the digs can be seen in Maidstone Museum - Maidstone Museum & Bently Art Gallery, St. Faith's Street, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1LH

Some of the artefacts on display at the Museum are shown below:



Photographs © John Piddock



Further Information and Reading: The Lyminge Historical Society has published a chapter on the *Discovery of the Jutish Cemetery in 1953* in its publication, *Lyminge a history, Part Two*. This provides information on all the digs with information and photographs taken from a journal kept by volunteer archaeologist at the digs who lived in Lyminge close to the dig site. It is the only publication that describes the third excavation that took place on the site. **Please contact the Society if you would like to buy a copy.**

The Jutish Cemetery at Lyminge by Alan Warhurst. Published in *Archaeologia Cantiana* Volume 69 1955. This covers the digs carried out in 1953 and 1954 including an inventory of the graves and the artefacts found.