

# Later Prehistoric

## Finds Group

Issue 1

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Welcome to the first newsletter of the Later Prehistoric Finds Group. In this issue we present two prehistoric artefacts from the City of London, both discovered in Roman contexts and both showing intriguing evidence of secondary modification. We also feature two updates on Bronze and Iron Age artefacts recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme, which demonstrate the great range of prehistoric material that can be accessed on the PAS's database. In addition, this issue includes an introduction to the British Museum's Collection Online: this resource contains beautiful images of many items held by the Museum, such as the Snettisham 'Great Torc' pictured below.

Our first formal meeting and day-conference will be held at the British Museum on 11th October 2013, and will be open to all. Please keep checking our website for more information!



The Snettisham 'Great Torc' - read more on page 12. Image © Trustees of the British Museum

## Welcome to the Later Prehistoric Finds Group!

The idea for the group was discussed last year at the European Iron Age Artefacts Symposium (EIAAS) held at the University of Leicester in October. The conference was well attended and a wide variety of papers were presented, demonstrating how much the study of Iron Age artefacts (and artefacts more generally) is thriving and developing at the moment. Given its success, at the end of the conference the organisers raised the possibility of setting up a group focusing on prehistoric artefacts, which would offer a forum in which to continue discussion. This idea was well received by the conference participants and so an initial meeting was held at the British Museum in April 2013 to gauge interest and discuss the idea further.

As a result of this meeting it was decided that the group will focus on Bronze Age and Iron Age Britain, but that contributions dealing with European finds will also be encouraged. Given that groups dealing with prehistoric lithics and ceramics already exist, the LPFG will concentrate primarily on other materials, but no object types will be excluded. As the group is still in its infancy, for the present it will remain independent of any institution, open to all, free to join and informal in its organisation.

Over time we hope that the group will grow to offer a valuable means of building connections between individuals working in the field, sharing information and resources, keeping up to date with current research and connecting with the wider archaeological community. A provisional website and online discussion group have already been created to provide platforms within which we can continue to generate ideas, and we plan to hold the first formal group meeting at the British Museum towards the end of this year.

The newsletter will be published twice a year, and will be distributed electronically to all members as well as being available to download from the website. We welcome contributions, and are happy to receive notes or short articles (up to around 1,000 words) on any topic relevant to the group, such as new finds or resources, along with notices and reviews of any events or publications that might be of interest.

Please have a look around our website and Facebook page, and feel free to get in touch. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this first issue!

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The steering group for the LPFG currently includes: Anna Booth, Marta Fanello, Julia Farley, Anna Lewis (all University of Leicester), Michael Marshall (Museum of London Archaeology), Elizabeth Schech (University of Durham), Stephanie Smith (Portable Antiquities Scheme) and Neil Wilkin (British Museum).

## A first glance at two prehistoric objects from Roman London

Julian Bowsher and Michael Marshall

Two objects recently found by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) at Bloomberg Place in the City of London may be of interest to members of both the LPFG and RFG. They come from early Roman contexts on the banks of the River Walbrook but, while both may have circulated during the Roman period, their origins are earlier. One is a coin from the Late pre-Roman Iron Age, an East Anglian silver unit (as Cottam et al 2010 no.1657) belonging to the first half of the first century AD, which has been perforated between the horse's legs. The second find is much earlier, a small polished stone Neolithic axe head, but again there are signs of secondary working. There are partially drilled holes and transverse grooves at the butt on both faces, either decorative or perhaps to enable suspension.

There was no major Late Iron Age centre on the site of *Londinium* but the landscape was not empty (e.g. Merriman 1990; Holder and Jamieson 2004), and finds from a range of prehistoric periods are regularly found in Roman contexts in the City. Many are redeposited from truncated prehistoric features but this needn't always be the case, especially if there is evidence that objects had extended or multiple biographies.

Iron Age coinage did not suddenly disappear in AD 43 and, given its late date, the coin could plausibly have come into the city still in the possession of its local owner, either perforated in this urban setting or beforehand. LIA coins may have circulated as currency to some degree in the decades immediately after the conquest but are extremely rare in London, and are very unlikely to have done so much after c.AD 60. Pierced IA coins are quite rare generally, many being metal detected finds without context, but a pair was reused as jewellery in an Anglo Saxon grave (Leins et al 2008). Perhaps the Bloomberg Place coin too was reused as jewellery before finding its way into the Walbrook mud. The position of the hole preserves the design's integrity but if used as a pendant then the horse would have hung upside down, easily understood by the wearer looking down but less clear to anyone else. Other methods



Figure 1: Late Iron Age silver coin (as photographed on site), from an early Roman context at Bloomberg Place, London. Photographs © Museum of London Archaeology

of suspension are also possible, or perhaps the wreath and crescent design faced outwards. Could this be an expression of local identity, still treasured in this very 'Roman' context, or perhaps an immigrant looking for a little 'local colour'?

It is less likely that the axe spent the intervening centuries above the ground, but the discovery of Neolithic stone axes on Roman sites is a recurrent phenomenon that has seen much discussion (Adkins and Adkins 1985; Merrifield 1987; Ferris 2012), and Pliny (*Natural History*, 37) describes Roman interest in *ceraunia*: stones shaped like axe heads and associated with thunderbolts. Ralph Merrifield discussed some axe heads from London in this light and in relation to later folk beliefs that they could be protective charms. He noted several examples including a jadeite axe from Kings Street with secondary grooving (Merrifield 1987, 9 - 16), and more recently an axe hammer with a secondary perforation has been found at Gresham Street. Axes without signs of reworking are also known from Roman contexts in London but are more difficult to interpret.

These objects provide yet more evidence of how the Roman / Romano-British population engaged with older objects and landscapes in Britain and whether they are 'ancestor artefacts', charms or mere curios, context will be crucial in interpreting them. Neither of the Bloomberg Place finds came from within the Walbrook channel itself but, as Merrifield (1995) has argued, much of the bank material could be upcast from the channel to backfill revetments and our site has produced a range of evidence for votive activity. We're still digging and fuller details of context date, position and associations will become available during post-excavation. Both finds will be published in a forthcoming MOLA monograph. In the meantime we'd be very interested to hear if anyone else has prehistoric objects with clear evidence of reuse from Roman contexts and would gratefully receive suggestions for references on the topic of perforated Iron Age coins generally.



Figure 2: Neolithic Stone hand axe from an early Roman context at Bloomberg Place, London. Photograph © Museum of London Archaeology

## Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank the developers Bloomberg for their generous on-going support for, and interest in, the archaeology of Bloomberg Place. Thanks also to Jon Cotton and Gary Brown for useful comments about the axe head. We are indebted to the many colleagues in the field and post-excavation teams at MOLA whom we are working alongside on this project, especially Pat Connolly and Jason Stewart who found these objects on site and drew our attention to them at an early stage. The photographs are by Jess Bryan (coin) and Andy Chopping (axe).

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## A prehistoric update from the Portable Antiquities Scheme

Peter Reavill

The PAS has been recording artefacts from the later prehistoric periods for the past 16 years, and has to date:

- 13,000 Bronze Age objects within 6,800 records, of which 169 are classed as hoards
- 6,000 Iron Age records of which 36 are classed as hoards.
- There are also 42,700 Iron Age coin records with 74 coin hoards.

This short update will concentrate on some of the recent important finds and give a small flavour of the later prehistoric material regularly reported to the network of 38 finds liaison officers across England and Wales.



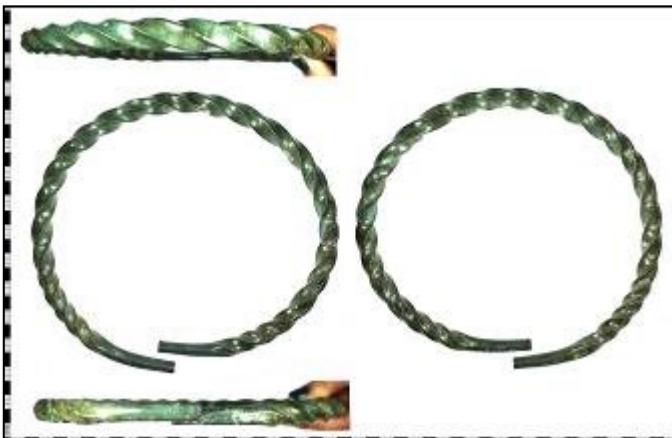
Highly decorated developed flat axe (NMGW-6A0686) from Penllyn in the Vale of Glamorgan, recorded by Mark Lodwick and dated c. 2050 - 1700 BC. The axe is complete but unusually small in size. The decoration consists two vertical lines of inverted 'V's on the lower blade – below the median bevel – which is highlighted by three parallel incised lines. The sides / long edges are also decorated with opposing linear diagonals.



Dagger (SWYOR-A11924) from Ackworth, Yorkshire, recorded by Amy Downes and Ben Roberts and dated 1900 - 1600 BC. This dagger is unusual and not paralleled with others on the PAS database: instead it fits within a sub-type that is found throughout Scotland, Yorkshire and the Pennines, which fits well with the findspot. The handle would have been held by the two rivets (one extant on the piece) and is likely to have been organic, being formed of bone or antler.



'Trunnion' type Chisel (HESH-51B7E2) from Bridgnorth, Shropshire, recorded by Peter Reavill and dated c. 1500-1150 BC. The PAS database contains a growing number of tools. This chisel is very well preserved: the trunnions are the two projections, one on either side of the chisel, which stabilise the blade during use and stop it being driven back into the handle. This form of chisel has a Western British and Irish distribution and is part of a distinct local geographic grouping in the Northern English Marches and NE Wales.



Spiral twisted torc (WILT-12B9D2) from Warminster, Wiltshire, recorded by Katie Hinds and Adam Gwilt and dated c. 1400-1250 BC. The main body of the torc is square in section with accentuated edges and has been twisted tightly. The terminals are undecorated. Similar earlier bronze precursors to gold torcs tend to cluster across parts of southern and eastern England and therefore the findspot lies within this pattern.



Dress (Picardy) pin (GLO-439E61) from Portbury, North Somerset recorded by Kurt Adams and dated to c. 1400-1200 BC. The head of the pin is globular with a hollow terminal which would have held a stone, below which is a grooved swollen area and a small side loop. The shaft is undecorated. This pin is part of a growing group of similar pins on the PAS database with a broad distribution in Southern Britain.



Single looped spearhead (SWYOR-FD8F64) from Threshfield, North Yorkshire, recorded by Amy Downes and Richard Davis and dating from the Late Bronze Age - Early Iron Age (1150-750 BC). The style of this spearhead is best paralleled against the leaf shaped spearhead of the Ewart Park phase. However the presence of a single side loop is unusual with very few others being known.



Sword hilt of late Hallstatt B3 Urnfield sword (SUSS-761CD0), recorded by Stephanie Smith and Dot Boughton with additional comments from Brendan O'Connor. Dated to c. 1150 – 800 BC. The sword hilt is a rare intrusion from continental Europe; the quality and complexity of these swords is certainly in contrast to the more standardised Ewart Park type current in Britain. It is most likely that this fragment was imported as scrap and as such lost its value when it crossed the Channel.



A ring headed pin (HAMP-A3A892) from Preston Candover, Hampshire, recorded by Katie Hinds and dating from 300 BC - AD 50. The ring-headed pin is well preserved, with a coral roundel and lost cells of enamel inlay.



A Taunton-Hademarschen (variant) socketed axehead (SOM-63A847) from Holford, Somerset, recorded by Laura Burnett and Frank Basford and dating from 1000-800 BC. It was also investigated by staff at National Museum Wales, Cardiff. This form of axehead usually has a square-shaped socketed mouth; unusually, however, this example is oval. Interestingly although the axe was found in what is now dry cultivated land, the stopping of the mouth with iron pan suggested it had been submerged in water for some time during its buried life. Therefore the axe was x-rayed to see if anything remained behind the iron pan.

This showed that some of the wood of the handle still survives in the socket. Analysis also shows that the axe is made of a leaded bronze with probably slightly less lead than average for the Late Bronze Age.

Finally, on the PAS database is a new and excellent guide to the metal artefacts of the Bronze Age, written by Ben Roberts (former curator of the Bronze Age collection at the British Museum) with contributions from many others. This guide integrates some of the British Museum collection with that of the PAS to illustrate some of the more (and less) common Bronze Age objects, linking them to the latest academic thinking and dating refinements. It is hoped over the next 12 months that the guide will become populated with more images to make it more user-friendly to those not familiar with the material of the period. The guide can be found at <http://finds.org.uk/bronzeage>.

**Peter Reavill** is the Portable Antiquities Scheme's finds liaison officer for Herefordshire and Shropshire.

## Early Iron Age metalwork recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme

Dot Boughton

New finds of British Early Iron Age metalwork (dating from the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) are very rare, especially in Scotland, Northern England and the South West peninsula. There are only three Sompting Type axes on the PAS database, a handful of Early Iron Age razors and no Gündlingen Type swords at all. The horse bit from Kent described below is the first of its kind to be discovered in Britain. We hope that the ever-growing number of bronze and iron Early Iron Age objects on the PAS database will help us in making the definition of British Early Iron Age metalwork more straight-forward in the future.



**KENT-CD6A33** (Treasure No: 2011T110): An Early Iron Age hoard consisting of seven objects from Stockbury (Kent) including a copper alloy horse-bit, an ingot fragment, a ring, a harness fitting and two axe/chisel blade fragments. Copper alloy horse-bits are very rare in Bronze Age / Early Iron Age Britain and this is very probably the first of its kind to be found in Britain. Horse-bits are widely known in continental Europe where bits like this are classified as having a central joint with or without separate cheek-pieces. The closest parallel appears to be a horse-bit from a grave in Steinkirchen, Bavaria, Germany.



**LANCUM563E83**: A decorated cast copper-alloy socketed axe of Sompting Type from Preston Capes, Northamptonshire. Socketed axes such as this one are comparatively rare finds. They either occur in hoards (e.g. Sompting (Sussex), Kingston (Surrey) and Tower Hill (Oxfordshire)) or as single finds, especially from the Fens and the Thames area in Central London. Others have been found whilst dredging the Rivers Trent, Ribble and Ouse. Generally, they appear to be found predominantly in wet contexts, but finds from dry land have occurred. Most Sompting Type axes bear unique ornaments made up of circlets,

pellets-in-circlets, ribs, zigzags and, more rarely, herring-bone ornament or crosses with small pellets in the centre (as known from Bottisham Lode (Cambridgeshire) or Winwick (Lancashire)). Early Iron Age Type Sompting axes are usually larger than Late Bronze Age axes, with a widely splayed cutting edge and it is possible that, rather than tools, they may have been used as weapons in combat.



NMS-AC1FC7: An Early Iron Age razor from Cranwich (Norfolk). The razor is 62mm high, 41mm wide and 0.2-1.3mm thin. It has a broken ring handle and an oval blade with a central openwork decoration. The closest parallels for this find come from South England, but unlike this single find, they both were discovered within hoard contexts: one razor was part of the large multi-period assemblage from near Salisbury (Wiltshire) while the other comes from a hoard found near Danebury (Hampshire). The latter is a much smaller multi-period assemblage which was found outside the Late Bronze / Early Iron Age hillfort. The two oval razors and this find from Norfolk, however, do not share the same openwork decoration: while the find from Norfolk displays three openwork triangles, the two finds from Southern England have three concentric circles in the centre of the razor.



FAKL-38D115: An iron socketed axe from near Middleham, North Yorkshire. The axe is one of a small number of socketed axes made from wrought iron. While the form is relatively easy to cast in a two-part mould with a clay / sand core to form its hollow socket, it would be very difficult to produce as a forging. Iron socketed axes were rapidly replaced by axes in which the haft passes through an eye, the type that remains in use today. This axe must, therefore, represent the transition from bronze to iron. Parallels exist for iron socketed axes with examples from Walthamstow (Essex) and Cold Kitchen Hill (Wiltshire), neither of which is quite like this find although the latter appears to share the curved loop side and straight back seen on the Middleham axe. A better parallel was found during excavations at Fiskerton (Lincolnshire).

## Digital documentation at the British Museum

Neil Wilkin and Julia Farley

As many readers will be aware, a large proportion of the British Museum's collection is catalogued on the 'Collection Online' database which is openly accessible to both researchers and members of the public. At the time of writing (May 2013), there were over 2 million objects with online records, and over 750,000 of these had one or more images. In recent years there has been a great push to increase the accessibility and quality of these records, including a concerted effort to improve the records for the prehistoric collections in the Department of Prehistory and Europe. Over the course of 2012 over 10,000 new images were added for prehistoric objects alone, and improvements were made to records for over 4,500 Iron Age objects, including all objects on display, material from Hertford Heath, Wetwang, Owslebury, Stanwick, Polden Hill, Giubiasco, and a large number of other pieces in the reserve collections, particularly metalwork.

The black and white archive images have now been digitised for both the Bronze Age and Iron Age collections. Many of these images are very beautiful, and some show objects pre-conservation or in historic reconstructions, now dismantled, giving an invaluable insight into the history of the collection. Highlights include a reconstruction of the Snettisham 'Great Torc', as it was found, with a bracelet and other fragments looped through the ring terminals.



Figure 1: The Snettisham 'Great Torc' (1951,0402.2), reconstructed to show how it was found.  
Image © Trustees of the British Museum

New record photographs are also being taken for objects in the reserve collections. These include important pieces such as the handle of the Battersea shield, which is not displayed in the gallery with the shield itself, but can now be viewed online.



Figure 2: The handle of the Battersea shield (1857,0715.2).

Image © Trustees of the British Museum

For anyone researching objects in the British Museum collections, Collection Online is an invaluable tool and we would like to encourage readers to make use of this ever-growing database. A new search interface has made great improvements to the accessibility of the records. You can try it at:

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_search\\_results.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_search_results.aspx)

Objects can be searched by type, period, material, findspot, and a number of other categories, all of which can be combined to create complex searches which we hope will take you straight to the objects you are looking for. High resolution images can be downloaded, and can normally be used free of charge for non-commercial purposes, including dissertations and many types of academic publication (for more information, see: [http://www.britishmuseum.org/about\\_this\\_site/terms\\_of\\_use/free\\_image\\_service.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_this_site/terms_of_use/free_image_service.aspx) ).

Our next push will involve updating the images and records of Bronze Age artefacts in the collection, including the impressive collections of metalwork and pottery, with work commencing in autumn 2013. Any members of the LPFG keen to know more about this phase of work, or who have an interest in particular types of Bronze Age artefact (e.g. for undergraduate, postgraduate or their own research) are encouraged to contact the Bronze Age curator, Neil Wilkin, for information and for ways of getting involved! (Neil's contact details can be found at: [http://www.britishmuseum.org/about\\_us/departments/staff/prehistory\\_and\\_europe/neil\\_wilkin.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/departments/staff/prehistory_and_europe/neil_wilkin.aspx) ).

The authors would like to thank the team of British Museum staff and volunteers who have contributed to the documentation of the prehistoric objects, and the maintenance and on-going improvement of the Collection Online database.

**Neil Wilkin** is the British Museum's Bronze Age curator. **Julia Farley** is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Leicester, and has also formerly worked as the Curator of the European Iron Age Collections at the British Museum.

## Announcements

### **We need a logo!**

We are holding a competition for the Later Prehistoric Finds Group logo. Please submit your original artwork or design via e-mail to: [laterprehistoricfindsgroup@gmail.com](mailto:laterprehistoricfindsgroup@gmail.com) by the end of September 2013. We will then share entries on the website for a vote for the best, with the winner revealed at our autumn conference. Please note: all entries need to be original and not infringe on any other copyrights, by submitting an entry you agree to your name and submission being displayed on the website, and that the winner's entry will be used in both print and digital media by the Later Prehistoric Finds Group.

### **Prehistory in Shropshire dayschool 2013**

**Saturday 14th September 2013, 10.20am – 4.15pm  
at the Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury**

This dayschool is a one-day meeting to review research into Shropshire during the Prehistoric period, and includes talks on the Pleistocene of Shropshire, the Bronze Age cemetery at Bromfield, the Broadward Hall hoard, recent prehistoric finds from the county, the relationship between hillforts, smaller enclosures and the wider landscape, and the search for the Cornovii.

The dayschool is organised by the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society and the Historic Environment Team, Shropshire Council. The cost is £20/person (£15 to members of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society), to include tea and lunch. Please visit <http://www.discovershropshire.org.uk/html/search/verb/GetRecord/theme:20130322120145> for a full programme and list of speakers.

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