

# Later Prehistoric Finds Group



Issue 2

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Welcome to the second edition of the Later Prehistoric Finds Group newsletter.

This issue includes an overview of the Treasure Finds reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme in 2011, as well as notes on several recent individual finds of interest. We review September's successful *Prehistory in Shropshire* conference, and present a highly unusual bone spearhead from the River Thames, which has never before been published. The issue also includes, in time for Christmas, a selection of *Five Gold (Th)ings*: five beautiful precious-metal finds recently recorded by the PAS.

For all this, and more, read on...



Late Bronze Age socketed axe from Shropshire, with striations.  
Read more on page 12.

## First annual meeting of the Later Prehistoric Finds Group

The first Later Prehistoric Finds Group annual meeting and conference was held at the British Museum on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2013. This proved to be a really popular event, with all the available places filled – many thanks to all who came!

The morning was spent taking part in small-group tours and behind-the-scenes activities at the museum, and after lunch all attendees came together for the formal meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to establish the future direction of the newly-established group, and discussion centred on the group's aims and objectives, logistics and organisation, and the location and nature of future meetings. The day ended with a conference session, in which five short papers were presented highlighting some current research on prehistoric artefacts.

We will soon be planning next year's meeting – please keep an eye on our website or Facebook page for updates, and if you would like to be added to our mailing list, please e-mail us at [LaterPrehistoricFindsGroup@gmail.com](mailto:LaterPrehistoricFindsGroup@gmail.com). In the meantime, season's greetings, and a happy New Year!

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The steering committee for the LPFG currently includes: Anna Booth (University of Leicester), Dot Boughton (Portable Antiquities Scheme), Matthew Brudenell (Suffolk County Council), John Cruse (Yorkshire Archaeological Society), Marta Fanello (University of Leicester), Julia Farley (University of Leicester), Pete Girdwood (University of Southampton), Yvonne Inall (University of Hull), Jody Joy (British Museum), Anna Lewis (University of Leicester), Michael Marshall (Museum of London Archaeology), Peter Reavill (Portable Antiquities Scheme), Elizabeth Schech (Durham University), Stephanie Smith (Portable Antiquities Scheme), Neil Wilkin (British Museum) and Sally Worrell (Portable Antiquities Scheme / University of Central London).

The steering committee is at present open to anyone who would like to help run the group. If you would like to be involved, please e-mail us at [LaterPrehistoricFindsGroup@gmail.com](mailto:LaterPrehistoricFindsGroup@gmail.com) – we would be very happy to hear from you.

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The LPFG newsletter is published twice a year. To submit articles, notes or announcements for inclusion, please e-mail Anna Lewis at [asgl1@le.ac.uk](mailto:asgl1@le.ac.uk).

## Prehistoric treasure finds 2011

*Emma Traherne*

The Treasure Act 1996 requires the Secretary of State to report annually to Parliament on the operation of the Act including a list of all treasure cases. The treasure process can be lengthy which means that Treasure Annual Reports are usually produced a few years after the objects are first reported. The report containing information on all treasure items reported in 2011 is now nearing completion. The information regarding the prehistoric Treasure cases from 2011 is summarised here to illustrate the range and number of objects reported through the Treasure Act and how many items are acquired by museums for the public and researchers to investigate.

As many readers will be aware Treasure, as defined in the Treasure Act, includes gold and silver objects, groups of coins from the same findspot over 300 years old, and any prehistoric base-metal assemblages found in England and Wales. Finders of these items must report them, and if a museum wishes to acquire the item it will pay a reward of the market value which is split between the landowner and the finder. As a general matter of course, all items reported as treasure are recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database which can be found at [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk).

In the course of 2011 there were:

- 969 treasure cases,
- 53 Bronze Age cases, of which
- 28 have been acquired or are to be acquired by museums and 11 have been donated or partly donated,
- 26 Iron Age cases, of which
- 10 have been acquired or are to be acquired by museums and 4 have been donated or partly donated.

Although only 8% of the treasure finds from 2011 were prehistoric in date some of these cases contained hundreds of individual objects and fragments. For example the Boughton Malherbe hoard from Kent totalled 352 objects and fragments (PAS ID: KENT-15A293, Treasure number: 2011 T464) while the Vale of Wardour Hoard from Wiltshire contained 114 items (PAS ID: WILT-E8DA70, Treasure number: 2011 T684).



Figure 1: Vale of Wardour Hoard



Figure 2: A selection of the finds from the Boughton Malherbe hoard

The number of treasure cases generally increases every year. There was an increase of 34 cases of reported prehistoric treasure in 2011 compared to 2010. Through the Treasure Act 39 of the 53 Bronze Age cases and 14 of the 26 Iron Age cases have been acquired, or it is hoped will soon be acquired, by Accredited museums all over the country from Carmarthen to Norwich and from the Isle of Wight to Cumbria. Over 25 finders and landowners generously waived their right to a reward for their finds therefore allowing museums to acquire the objects at a reduced cost. Two Bronze Age cases and one Iron Age case are still to be decided on but it is hoped that if they are declared Treasure they will be acquired by a museum.

Local museums are offered items of treasure first. If no local museum wishes to acquire the item it will be offered to the relevant national museum. In 2011 four Bronze Age treasure cases and three Iron Age treasure cases were acquired (or it is hoped will be acquired) by national museums. If no museum is interested in the items they will be disclaimed and returned to the finder or landowner to do with as they wish. In the course of 2011, 12 Bronze Age and nine Iron Age treasure cases were disclaimed. Two of the 2011 prehistoric cases on closer examination were found not to fit the definition of Treasure as set out in the Treasure Act 1996 and were returned to the landowner or finder.

Twenty seven hoards of Bronze Age material discovered in 2011 have been acquired or are in the process of being acquired including the Boughton Malherbe hoard and Vale of Wardour Hoard. A handful of hoards discovered in 2011 contained copper-alloy and gold items including a hoard from 'near Lewes' in East Sussex (PAS ID: SUSS-C5D042, Treasure number: 2011 T192). This hoard contains 79 objects including three copper-alloy palstaves, five copper-alloy 'Sussex Loop' bracelets (a type usually found only in this county), eight copper-alloy finger rings, four copper-alloy *tutuli* (a type of ornament), four sheet gold discs, a copper-alloy lozenge-headed pin, 19 amber beads, four copper-alloy twisted torcs and fragments of coiled spiral ring necklaces and 'quoit headed' pins. Unusually, they were all discovered within a large ceramic vessel, a mode of deposition that is more common on the Continental side of the English Channel.

Six Bronze Age gold penannular rings were acquired including one from Hungerford in Wiltshire (PAS ID: WILT-D50014, Treasure Number: 2011 T774) which was acquired by West Berkshire Museum, and a triple-stranded ring from Welton in Lincolnshire (PAS ID: LIN-9F2713, Treasure Number: 2011 T580) which was acquired by The Collection, Lincoln.





Figure 3: Items from the 'near Lewes' hoard. © Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 4: 2011 T580



Figure 5: Gold-alloy Iron Age bracelet from Tawton, North Yorkshire

A gold-alloy Iron Age (c. 100 - 50 BC) bracelet from Towton in North Yorkshire (PAS ID: SWYOR-681CE4, Treasure Number: 2011 T326) will it is hoped be acquired by York Museums Trust. The item was found in a stream and may be associated with a bracelet reported in 2010 which was also acquired by York Museums Trust (PAS ID: SWYOR-CFE7F7, Treasure Number: 2010 T350).

Fifteen of the 26 Iron Age cases contained coins. This includes a hoard from Charlwood, Surrey (PAS ID: SUR-34B636, Treasure number: 2011 T297), which has been acquired by the Surrey Archaeological Society. This hoard contained 13 Roman silver denarii, four miniature brooches, a fragment of a miniature socketed axe, a spindle whorl and two Iron Age gold coins. The coins are a Southern uninscribed British QC gold quarter stater struck in c. 50-20 BC and a gold quarter stater of Tasciovanos struck in c. 25/20 BC-AD 10. The mixture of coins and miniature objects suggests a votive element to the assemblage.

It is very encouraging that through the Treasure Act 1996 so many museums all over England and Wales are able to acquire items of treasure such as the ones summarised here for local people to enjoy. The Treasure Annual Report for 2011 will soon be available to download from the Portable Antiquities Scheme website along with the Portable Antiquities Scheme Annual report for 2012.

**Emma Traherne** is an Assistant Treasure Registrar in the Portable Antiquities and Treasure Department at the British Museum.

## A prehistoric bone spear in the British Museum's collection

*Yvonne Inall*

British Museum Object 1861,0304.3 is a bone spearhead donated to the Museum by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks in 1861, just one of more than 100,000 objects he donated to the British Museum. This spearhead, said to have been found in the River Thames, and thought to date to the Bronze Age or Iron Age, has not previously been published and has not been subjected to any systematic study. The spearhead attracted my attention on a recent visit to the British Museum to collect data on Iron Age spearheads held in the collections. This object is of particular interest as it is a bone spearhead which has been shaped to imitate metal forms. To my knowledge, this is a unique example and a hidden gem of the British Museum's collection. Consequently I thought this object would perhaps be of interest to the members of the Later Prehistoric Finds Group.

The spearhead, which appears to have been constructed from sheep/goat metapodial bone (Sewpaul, personal communication) measures 164mm in total length with a blade length of 103mm. The socket is formed at the distal end of the bone and features two rivet holes measuring 4mm and 3.5mm in diameter, suggesting that a pointed peg was used to secure the spearhead to a shaft, although no traces of either peg or shaft remain. The rivet holes feature straight edges most likely made using a parallel drill bit (Olsen 2003, 104-105). Both the blade and socket have been carefully shaped to imitate metal spearhead forms. Longitudinal striations are visible on the blade surface, made by a file, saw or scraper, used to shape the weapon. These longitudinal striations angle towards the tip, showing long, repetitive strokes were used to taper the blade to a sharp point. The edges of the weapon were highly polished and filed down to present sharp edges only 1.6mm thick. The edges and tip of the blade are chipped, suggestive of contact with hard surfaces (Olsen 2003, 109).



Figure 1: Bone spearhead from the River Thames, British Museum object 1861,03043. © Trustees of the British Museum; photograph by Yvonne Inall

The Thames, from which the British Museum object is said to have come, has long been recognised as a focal point for depositional practices involving weapons throughout the Bronze Age and Iron Age (Bradley 1998). While nothing more is known of the provenance of Object 1861,0304.3 much can be said of bone spearheads more generally. Bone spearheads are well-recorded for the Bronze Age and particularly the Iron Age. They have been recovered from wet deposition sites and settlement sites, and are also known from grave contexts of the Arras Culture of East Yorkshire. Approximately 55 bone spearheads were recovered during 1981 excavations of the Iron Age

timber causeway on the River Witham east of Fiskerton, Lincolnshire (Olsen 2003). The causeway appears to have been a focus of depositional practices throughout the Middle Iron Age and Romano-British period with evidence for two earlier causeways, dated to the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, at nearby Washingborough (Field and Parker Pearson 2003, 159-166). The bone spearheads may have been

deposited as symbolic weapons, taking the place of more expensive metal weapons, too valuable to dispose of in a ritual ceremony; or perhaps these were the weapons available to those without the means to procure higher-value metal weapons.

Away from wet deposition contexts, 16 similar bone points were recovered from an Arras Culture barrow burial at North Grimston, East Yorkshire by John Robert Mortimer (1905, 151). Mortimer thought they had been used to secure a shroud or binding sheet. An anthropomorphic sword in this burial has been dated to the later second century BC (Halkon 2013, 118). Bone points have also been recorded at the Iron Age hillfort of Broxmouth in East Lothian, Scotland, where they have been interpreted as spearheads (Hunter et al., 2013). More than 60 bone points were identified in excavations of the Romano-British settlement at South Cadbury Castle, Somerset, where they were described as 'small pointed blades' (Barrett et al. 2000, 183-186).

Use-wear analysis of the bone spearheads from Fiskerton showed they were predominantly manufactured from complete sheep tibiae—though several examples were constructed from pig tibia, and sheep or roe deer metatarsals, and in one case a cattle radius—with the distal end of the bone sawn off or filed flat to accommodate hafting to a wooden shaft. Rivet holes preserved in most examples indicate that they were fixed to the haft by means of a nail or peg. Such a peg remains preserved within the base of a bone spearhead from Walthamstow, also held in the British Museum's collection (Object 1871,1012.2), thought to date from the Neolithic, Bronze Age or Iron Age. The spearheads were shaped by chiselling and filing with metal tools, many with longitudinal striations similar to those evident on the British Museum bone spearhead under discussion (Olsen 2003, 106).



Figure 2: Bone spearhead from Fiskerton. © The Collection: Art and Archaeology in Lincolnshire. Photograph by Yvonne Inall.

The function of these bone points has been long debated with interpretations ranging from weaving shuttles to gouges or scrapers to bone spearheads (Barrett et al 2000, 183-186; Olsen 2003, 107). The interpretation of this class of objects as spearheads has not been universally accepted, nor is it likely to apply to all sharpened bone objects. However, this bone object in the British Museum collection was indisputably made to function as a spearhead and appears to have been deposited in the Thames as part of the broader practice of depositing weapons in watery places throughout the Bronze Age and Iron Age in Britain.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Dr Jody Joy, Curator of the British and European Iron Age Collections, Prehistory and Europe at the British Museum. Dr Joy facilitated my research visit to view the bone spearhead and kindly granted permission for publication of the photograph used in this piece. Miss Naomi Sewpaul, who puzzled over my photographs, and provided excellent guidance on the subject of animal bone. Dr Peter Halkon and Dr Malcolm Lillie, both at the University of Hull offered useful comments on a draft of this piece. I must also acknowledge the kind permission of Professor Ian Armit and Dr Lindsey Büster who granted access to the Broxmouth material ahead of publication next month.

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## Two recent Late Iron Age finds from the Portable Antiquities Scheme

Sally Worrell

Iron Age pins are not common finds, and five ring-headed examples were recorded in 2012. However, the plastic style pin from Ropley, Hampshire (HAMP-C319B7) is particularly rare. The copper-alloy pin is incomplete but with a large spherical, knobbed head with multiple motif cast decoration and dates from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Parallels from Britain are unknown and although Irish ring-headed pins with plastic style decoration are known, those with bulbous heads such as this pin are not. Most pins are of the swan-neck or ring-headed form with a very wide date range: Hallstatt D - La Tène I, 800 - c.100 BC. The majority of English pins are usually found on settlement sites or as stray finds in south and central England, with concentrations in Wessex and East Anglia (Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk).



A copper-alloy bucket mount reported from Ipsden, Oxfordshire (BERK-783763), and of Late Iron Age date, is also of some rarity in its combination of a human mask, probably male, topped with a cap of hair and thick suspension loop, and a pair of cattle horns which curve forward on either side of the face. On the reverse some of the thin sheet of the copper-alloy vessel survives. The vessel is bent over at the top to form the rim, which is decorated with two or three moulded lines, presumably extending around the circumference. Provenanced examples include pairs of mounts from Baldock (Hertfordshire), Richborough (Kent) and Thealby (Lincolnshire) (Jope 2000, pl. 144 a-f; pl. 182i).



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## Conference review: Prehistory in Shropshire

*Peter Reavill and Shelagh Hampton*

A well-attended conference organised by the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society was held on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2013 in Shrewsbury. Its aim was to review new research into the prehistoric periods specifically for Shropshire and the wider Marches area. The last specific county review was published in 1991 (Carver ed.) and partially updated by the West Midlands regional research framework undertaken in 2002<sup>(1)</sup>, recently part published (Garwood 2007 and Watt ed. 2011). Much has happened in the past ten years and so the day was an ideal opportunity to celebrate and review new finds and identify recent trends.

Much of the day covered aspects which will not directly appeal to all the members of the Later Prehistoric Finds Group, and so some papers will be addressed in more detail than others, with specific find information highlighted above that given by the authors on the day. It is hoped that a much more detailed published record of the day will be produced by the archaeological society to fill the identified gaps in the literature.

### Papers

#### **The Pleistocene of Shropshire in the context of West Midlands landscape evolution and its potential for providing evidence of early human occupation**

*Andrew Howard (University of Birmingham)*

This very good introductory paper set the scene for day. It specifically highlighted the formation of the varied and diverse Shropshire landscape upon which later archaeological and historical events take place. Howard identified the main landscape feature of Shropshire (around 30,000 - 20,000 BC) as being Lake Lapworth, the remains of which can be seen in the deep, wide meres in the north of the county, and the cutting of the Ironbridge Gorge.

#### **People, places and pots: recent work on the Later Bronze Age cemetery at Bromfield**

*David Mullin (University of Worcester)*

Mullin's paper focussed on the pottery from the large cremation cemetery at Bromfield (South Shropshire). As part of this analysis, inclusions within the fabric of the funerary urns were identified and the stone / rock sources traced. This showed specific sources for some inclusions, including a nearby site on the slopes of Clee Hill which is one of the highest points in Shropshire and dominates the local landscape. Other pottery from nearby excavations hints at a similar trend. The site of a hillfort on Clee Hill seems to suggest it was significant, long-lasting cultural locale. The inclusion of stone within these pots could be seen as a way of creating and cementing identity during the Bronze and Iron Ages. More information can be found in Mullin's new monograph based on his PhD thesis (Mullin 2012).



Figure 1: Unexcavated Bromfield cremation urn.  
© Shropshire Museum Service / Shrewsbury  
Museum and Art Gallery

### The site of the Broadward Hall hoard

Jodie Lewis (University of Worcester), presented by David Mullin

Recent excavation work at the findspot of the Broadward Hoard, South Shropshire was undertaken by the Universities of Worcester and Reading. The site was first identified when workmen in 1867 discovered a large assemblage of Late Bronze Age 'barbed' spearheads, some of which were acquired by the British Museum (OA.10890). The excavation identified the findspot: a large pit located on a spring head. Within this pit was a series of finds suggesting a very long tradition of deposition within the peat bog. The finds from the dig included a deliberately broken late Neolithic macehead, a shale bracelet, Middle Bronze Age pottery and an antler gouge, as well as a wooden pattern of later medieval date. The preservation of organic finds has revealed a detailed radiocarbon sequence for the site. As part of the project the original metalwork was also reinvestigated with grants from the Society of Antiquaries. Two radiocarbon dates from preserved wood within the spears have securely dated both the hoard and also the 'Broadward' spear type. A full report on the research undertaken including all the radiocarbon results will be published in *Antiquity* next year.

### Ten years of the Portable Antiquities Scheme in Shropshire: The later prehistoric evidence

Peter Reavill (Portable Antiquities Scheme)

The original paper addressed the entire prehistoric period. Only the Bronze and Iron Age finds are reported below.

Despite its large numbers of impressive hillforts Shropshire has often been dismissed as something of a poverty-stricken 'black hole' during the later prehistoric periods. Metalwork of Bronze and Iron Age date has traditionally been thin on the ground and the region seems to have been almost aceramic during the Iron Age. However, thanks to the impact of responsible metal detecting and the work of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), the picture is slowly changing. Increasing numbers of later prehistoric finds are being reported, meaningful distribution patterns are emerging and the range of recorded material has expanded to include both high-status and uncommon finds – some in categories previously unknown in this part of the country.

During the last ten years there has been a significant increase in the numbers of Early and Middle Bronze Age axes discovered. Among those recorded is the earliest-known Early Bronze Age axe (HESH-298206) to display three different kinds of decoration (furrowing, cabling and herringbone) on a single piece. The number of known Middle Bronze Age tools and weapons found has also increased dramatically, notably flanged axes and palstaves. A recent discovery of a rare trunnion chisel (HESH-51B7E2) from Bridgnorth highlights the distribution of this specialist tool which is largely confined to the North West Midlands and North East Wales.



Figure 2: EBA decorated axe. PAS reference HESH-298206

There is also a significant shift in the distribution pattern of recorded finds during this period from an upland pattern for the Early Bronze Age (which echoes the distribution patterns of Neolithic axes) to one in the Middle and Late Bronze Age with a marked concentration from watery locations. From the River Perry (which flows to the Severn through a marshy bog) has come a fine example of a penannular Middle Bronze Age gold bracelet (PAS-E92EA0).

Fewer finds of Late Bronze Age date have been recorded, particularly from the south of the county, with material of this date continuing to be concentrated around the northern plains. One recent discovery is that of a variant Meldreth-type socketed axe (HESH-07CD71) which bears striations across the body which may indicate a deliberate attempt to 'kill' the implement before consigning it to the ground.

The clustering of finds from wetland areas, both from the vicinity of the meres and lakes, continues to be apparent during the Iron Age. Finds of Earlier Iron Age date include an example of a rare copper-alloy swan's-neck pin (HESH-3C3293) from the Ellesmere area and a fine – and very unusual – Italianate brooch from Wroxeter (HESH-F631B8). Both of these fall into the period 700-300 BC. Several other brooches of slightly later date have been recorded from various locations in the county. Importantly two gold- and silver-alloy (electrum) torcs (WMID-C53CB8 and HESH-D6AEA2) are the first certain examples from the county have come to light. Both the torcs show evidence of deliberate cutting before being deposited.



Figure 3: Socketed axe with striations.  
PAS reference HESH-07CD71



Figure 4: Two gold and silver torcs.  
PAS references WMID-C53CB8 and  
HESH-D6AEA2

Other examples of high status Iron Age metalwork have also been recorded recently from the county. Several handsome terret rings and a fine cheek-piece bear well-produced decoration while other examples of horse / chariot gear include linch pins, strap slides and junctions. Fine decoration has also been recognised on several button-and-loop fasteners and toggles.

Parts of a number of vessels recently identified include tankard handles and several attractive bovine escutcheons (also known as 'bull's-head bucket mounts'). A razor / knife (WMID-4DICE0) also bearing bovine decoration has recently been discovered near Bridgnorth, and hilt and scabbard mounts have also been recorded.



Perhaps the most striking find from the county has been the pair of copper-alloy Iron Age 'divination spoons' (HESH-9A4B83) recorded a few years ago from the Nesscliffe area. Such spoons are usually found in pairs, often deposited in watery locations, occasionally associated with burials. Only 23 other examples are known and all – apart from a pair from France – have come from Britain or Ireland. The Shropshire find was the first for 80 years and is of particular interest as its context is securely located, being directly associated with a double-ditched lowland enclosure.



Figure 5: 'Bull's-head' knife or razor from near Bridgnorth. PAS reference WMID-4D1CE0

The picture of Shropshire during the later prehistoric period requires regular modification as more material emerges. Perhaps the most fruitful lines of enquiry in the near future will pursue the implications of the increase in finds from wetland areas and their relationship with the wider landscape.



Figure 6: Pair of 'divination spoons' from the Nesscliffe area. PAS reference HESH-9A4B83

### Hillforts and their relationship with smaller enclosures and the wider landscape

Andy Wigley (*Shropshire Council / Shropshire Archaeological Society*)

Shropshire and the Marches have some of the most impressive and most densely distributed hillforts anywhere in the British Isles, but these on the most part are poorly understood and have not been excavated using modern techniques. Much recent work, including a large programme of aerial survey, has been undertaken to understand both the position and role of the hillfort and to identify the landscapes within which they sit. This study has identified numerous small-scale enclosures within the lowland landscapes. Although these enclosures are smaller than hillforts, they still have monumental features. The aerial study has also suggested areas of dense population which must have been well organised. Interestingly, although significant items of high status metalwork have been found within recent years, there is still a general paucity of finds suggesting that wealth and value may have been expressed in different ways which are archaeologically problematic to see.

### Seeking the Cornovii

Roger White (*University of Birmingham*)

White drew on many years of concentrated and well-published research on Wroxeter, its hinterland, and the wider Shropshire landscape to identify the enigmatic and elusive tribe that the Romans labelled the *Cornovii*. The archaeological landscape shows that the *Cornovii* must have been powerful and organised to construct huge monuments – like the Wrekin Hillfort – but at the smaller scale they are difficult to identify, being mostly aceramic and not minting or using coins. However, the last ten years have helped to reveal more detail, with excavations near Shrewsbury identifying an Iron Age road, aerial survey identifying lowland sites, the PAS bringing in high status metalwork, and the final completion and analysis of the Wroxeter Hinterland project (White *et al* 2013; White and Gaffney 2007). White suggested that the wealth and identity of the *Cornovii* were wrapped up in their



Figure 7:  
Wroxeter forum  
inscription.  
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Museum Service /  
Shrewsbury Museum  
and Art Gallery

farming, which he has identified as being reliant on cattle. This would explain the paucity of some pottery – as most people used organics such as leather – and the abundance of Briquetage / VCP (Very Coarse Pottery) through the trade in salt from the Cheshire plains and Droitwich for meat preservation and leather processing.

## Summary

The varied and interesting day highlighted the rich and diverse archaeology of prehistoric Shropshire. It focussed on much of the recent work but also reminded all of the value of reassessing what has gone before: excavating the archaeological archives and museum collections. Most of all the day made people realise that we are only just starting to understand the varied archaeology of prehistoric Shropshire – the best is still to come, so the next ten years should be exciting ones!

(1) <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/historycultures/departments/caha/research/arch-research/wmrrfa/index.aspx>

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**Shelagh Hampton** is the newsletter editor of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society.

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

*Dot Boughton*

New discoveries of British Early Iron Age metalwork (dating from the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) are rare compared to new finds from the Later Bronze Age and the Late Iron Age. As most artefacts from known Bronze and Iron Age assemblages are made from either bronze or iron and thus found by metal detectorists, the difference in numbers of finds is especially noticeable on the Portable Antiquities Scheme's database ([www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)). The database holds information of about 140 Late Bronze / Early Iron Age single finds compared to about 300 finds from the Later Bronze Age. These numbers exclude the individual items in Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age metalwork hoards which can sometimes contain more than 500 individual objects. There are 25 Late Bronze Age and four Early Iron Age assemblages listed on the database, but none of the Early Iron Age hoards contain more than 500 objects. The largest Early Iron Age assemblage is the group of hoards from Langton Matravers, Dorset (HAMP-893364 and HAMP-2865F1), which were made up of 303 and 197 objects respectively.

Typically, there are not many single finds from the Earliest Iron Age and metalwork hoards of the period tend to be made up solely or largely of socketed axes, such as the above-mentioned assemblages from Langton Matravers (Dorset), Hindon (Wiltshire, WILT-9439A7) or multi-period assemblages like those from the Vale of Wardour / Tisbury (Wiltshire, WILT-E8DA70 and WILT-0594F7). Larger Early Iron Age hoards such as the assemblages from Langton Matravers and East Rudham (Norfolk, NMS241) are usually made up of small, thin-walled socketed axes while the smaller hoards are characterised by large, heavy specimens of Type Sompting, for example the small hoard from the Ulverston Area (Cumbria, LANCUM-3F84C4).

Type Sompting axes are normally large (c. 11-13cm long) and heavy (c. 300-400g) and there are only four certain specimens recorded on the database. One axe, from Wrenbury (Cheshire, WMID-B87DC3), was found in very good condition even though abrasion, caused by movement whilst within the plough soil, has resulted in a loss of some of the original surface detail. It is decorated with three long ribs terminating in small pellets which is the most typical decoration for Sompting axes. Axes of this type and with this decoration have been found in the assemblages from Llyn Fawr, Vale of Glamorgan, and Cardiff, as well as in the hoards from Hindon (Wiltshire, WILT-9439A7) which includes both copper-alloy and iron objects and securely dates this axe type into the Earliest Iron Age.



Figure 1: Type Sompting axe from the Ulverston Hoard, Cumbria. PAS reference LANCUM-3F7550



Figure 2: Type Sompting axe from Wrenbury cum Frith, Cheshire. PAS reference WMID-B87DC3

A much more decorated cast copper-alloy socketed axe of Sompting Type is known from Preston Capes (Northamptonshire, LANCUM-563E82). Socketed axes of Type Sompting 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. They appear to be found predominantly in wet contexts, but finds from dry land such as the specimen from Preston Caves are known. 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 (Cheshire)).



Figure 3: Type Sompting axe from Preston Capes, Northamptonshire. PAS reference LANCUM-563E82

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.

Even rarer than Early Iron Age copper-alloy axes are those made from iron, such as the example from Middleham, North Yorkshire (FAKL-38D115). Only about 30-40 Early Iron Age socketed axes made from wrought iron are known from Britain. While the socketed form is relatively easy to cast in a two-part mould and with a clay / sand core to shape its hollow socket, it would be very difficult to produce this shape in forging. This is why iron socketed axes never gained in popularity and were rapidly replaced by axes in which the haft passes through an eye, the type that remains in use today. 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 (Kevin Leahy pers. comm.).



Figure 4: Iron axe from Middleham, North Yorkshire. PAS reference FAKL-38D115

Even though socketed axes are the most common artefact type in Early Iron Age assemblages, one recently discovered group of objects did not include any axes: the Early Iron Age hoard from Stockbury (Kent, KENT-CD6A33). The hoard consists of seven objects 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. 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 (Ben Roberts, pers. comm.)



Even though single finds of socketed axes and other Early Iron Age artefacts such as razors and winged chapes (for example from Wymondham (Norfolk, NMS-01D7D8) and Thetford (Cambridgeshire, CAM-DD5580)) are important additions to our corpus of artefacts from the Earliest Iron Age, it is assemblages such as the ones from Stockbury (Kent), Hindon and the Vale of Wardour (Wiltshire) and East Rudham (Norfolk) that can tell us more about metalwork deposition during that period.

Nowadays, metal detectorists are much more aware of the importance of archaeological contexts, especially in the south and east of the country and we are very lucky that the finder of the Wiltshire hoards did not excavate the findspots immediately after discovery. The archaeological context here shows that the items were carefully placed in pits that may have been previously used for grain storage. This is what also happened at Langton Matravers, where hundreds of socketed axes were deposited at the same time in much the same style of deposition. However, it appears that in different regions different materials and different axe types were deposited. While the hoards from Dorset are nearly all made up of small, thin-walled axes with rib-and-pellet decoration, the Wiltshire hoards include a variety of objects dating from the Early and Middle Bronze Age as well as iron objects, which suggests that people in the Early Iron Age curated objects from earlier periods as well as embraced the new material, iron, which had been used to make the spearheads and sickle in the hoard from Hindon.



Figure 5: Early Iron Age hoard from Stockbury, Kent.  
PAS reference KENT-CD6A33

**Dot Boughton** is the Portable Antiquities Scheme's Finds Liaison Officer for Lancashire and Cumbria.

## Five Gold (Th)ings

Peter Reavill

As this is the Christmas issue of the newsletter – the season of sparkly baubles and poorly remembered songs – I thought that it would be good to highlight five prehistoric finds made of precious metal (and therefore treasure) recently published on the PAS database. To date the PAS database holds records of more than 150 Bronze Age and 50 Iron Age finds (excluding coins) made of gold or silver.

**Basket-shaped ornament from Cholsey Area, Oxfordshire** recorded by Anni Byard (PAS) and Gill Varndell (British Museum)

PAS Record: BERK-0D1A05 / 2012-T774

One of the earliest metal artefacts on the PAS database is a recently-discovered Copper Age (Chalcolithic) gold 'basket-shaped ornament', possibly for use in the hair or as an earring. It has been cut from thin gold sheet into an elongated oval shape extending into a narrow tang. The piece has been flattened out and is crinkled both horizontally and vertically.

The oval plate is delineated by two concentric grooves following the edge, while the space within the oval plate is filled by four zones of grooves, giving four filled and three plain panels symmetrically placed. This class of object belongs to the earliest phases of metallurgy in Britain. Examples are usually associated with burials and are very rare, dating to the earliest phase of the Bronze Age (although some would describe this as the metal-using Neolithic), c.2400-2200 BC. Other examples have been found in pairs in graves dating to the early Beaker period. Whether worn in hair, on ears or as items of costume, they were rolled into a basket shape in use. Two other examples that were found in Radley, Oxfordshire, are now in the Ashmolean Museum.



**Lunula discovered in Thwing, East Riding of Yorkshire** recorded by Lauren Proctor (PAS) and Gill Varndell (British Museum)

PAS record: DUR-A24C08 / 2012-T811

This impressive and nationally important find of early Bronze Age date (2400-2000 BC) is the second lunula reported under the Treasure Act from England and Wales<sup>(1)</sup>. It was found in two parts and although broken is nearly complete, only missing one of the oval-shaped terminals. The lunula is crescentic in plan although both parts have been folded. The external edges are decorated with a dentate border of five lines. The areas near the tapering terminals (horns) are further decorated with a similar geometric design of lateral / transverse linear marks forming rectangular panels. Finds of lunulae are



very rare from Britain although they are slightly more common in Ireland. Taylor (1970) classifies lunulae as Classical, Unaccomplished or Provincial. The Thwing example falls within the Provincial group in terms of width, thickness and decoration. Classical lunulae are found chiefly in Ireland with three from Cornwall and two attributed to Scotland (Eogan 1994). Unaccomplished lunulae are exclusively Irish finds, while Provincial lunulae have been found in the highland zones of Britain and the western area of the European continent. An occurrence in East Yorkshire is thus outside the expected distribution.

**Gold decorated strip (bracelet?) discovered in Harrold Area, Bedfordshire** recorded by Teresa Gilmore (PAS) and Neil Wilkin (British Museum)

PAS record: WMID-3CBCF0 / 2013-T471

This example is similar to many of the precious metal artefacts on the PAS database, being incomplete, folded and abraded. The form is unknown but is possibly a bracelet fragment. It is formed on a rectangular sheet of gold with a series of ribbed (corrugated) embossed bands. Similar multi-grooved gold sheets of a Bronze Age date are known from throughout Britain and are difficult to date precisely. Parallels are possible with examples from Early Bronze Age dagger pommels in Scotland and annular rings of later Bronze Age date.



**Pennanular ring (ring money) from Lynstead, Kent** recorded by Jennifer Jackson (PAS) and Gill Varndell (British Museum)

PAS Record: KENT-0C58F2 / 2013-T67

This is probably the most common sort of Bronze Age treasure find with over 70 examples recorded on the database. This ring dates from the late Bronze Age (c.1175-750 BC) and has a gold content of 79-82% and a silver content of 14-17%, the remainder being copper. The folded gold sheet, visible at either end, indicates that it is formed around a base copper-alloy core. The finders of this ring donated it to Dover Museum, Kent. Other examples of pennanular rings have decorative silver and gold banding over a copper core – a very good example of this can be seen from Cublington, Buckinghamshire (BUC-A73107). The function of this artefact type has been much debated with many different terms applied; the best functional idea now is that it acts as a form of decorative hair ornament.



**Torc from Caistor area, Lincolnshire** recorded by Martin Foreman (PAS), and Jody Joy (British Museum)

PAS Record: NLM-605352 / 2013-T130.

A large fragment of unusual and rare decorated gold torc of later Iron Age / La Tene date, c.450-300 BC. The decoration is circumferential, being positioned around the terminals which are cast and moulded. The extant terminal is a flared trumpet-like 'buffer', shaped with a distinctive swollen, decorated collar and a concave or dished end. The body of the torc is abraded with ladder-like ornament. All the decoration is distinctly worn, perhaps suggesting the torc was of some age when it was deposited. This example fits well with Continental types, which have a distribution centred on north-east France and western Germany. A good parallel for this form of torc can be seen in the British Museum, (GR1867,0508.477)<sup>(2)</sup> and was acquired in the nineteenth century, although it has no more specific provenance than central France.

To date **no** gold torcs of this type have been discovered in the British Isles. This find should therefore be regarded as an import and as such is a highly significant discovery, as very few imports from the Continent are known from this period.



(1) The first, LANCUM-449151, was acquired by Tullie House Museum, Carlisle

(2) [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?assetId=1251907&objectId=1481824&partId=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=1251907&objectId=1481824&partId=1)

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## Call for finds: Late Iron Age circular ‘knives’

Andrew Fitzpatrick

A little over a dozen circular Iron Age ‘knives’ are known from southern England. These thin, circular, iron discs typically have a diameter of between 60-80 mm and a central perforation that sometimes has an internal collar of bronze. Some discs have one or two notches in their edges.

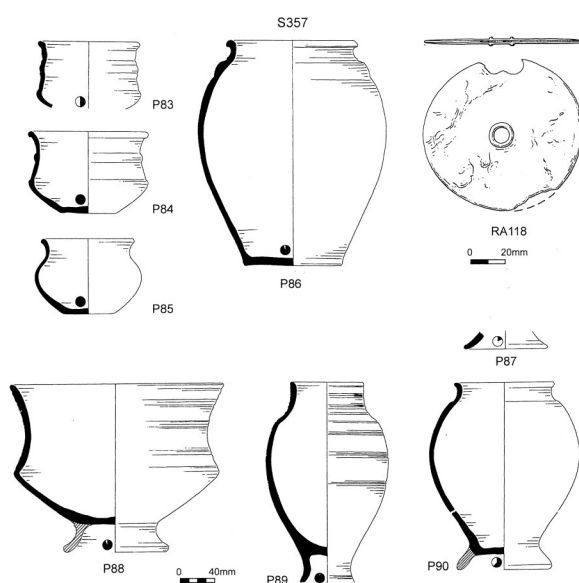
Most finds come from Late Iron Age cremation burials in central and south-eastern England but there are also settlement finds from Beckford, Worcestershire; Puddlehill, Bedfordshire and Danebury hillfort Hampshire, as well as the mass deposit from Spettisbury hillfort, Dorset. The dating of all these finds is consistently in the first centuries BC or AD. No finds are certain from either Middle Iron Age or Romano-British contexts.

Although often called ‘knives’, the function of these objects is unknown. While it has been suggested that they were circular knives akin to modern circular pizza cutters, perhaps for leather working, there is currently no evidence that their edges were sharpened.

It is also likely that the objects currently grouped under this heading did not all share the same functions. The iron discs from a burial at Hinxton, Cambridgeshire and the bronze ones from grave 4298 on the A2 Gravesend road scheme, Kent, are smaller and may well have been mounted on chains along with brooches, suggesting that these examples were ornaments.

However, the associations of both varieties of disc found in graves would suggest that they were buried with both females and males, several of whom would appear to have been of high status. Only one comparable find is known from continental Europe, which strongly suggests that these objects were an insular innovation of the Late Iron Age in southern England.

The actual functions of these knives are only likely to be elucidated by examining their contexts and associated finds, and systematic use-wear analysis. If readers know of any new or previously unpublished finds, could they please contact Andrew Fitzpatrick? Andrew can be reached at: [af215@le.ac.uk](mailto:af215@le.ac.uk).



**Andrew Fitzpatrick** is a Visiting Professor in the School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester.

Figure 1: Grave group S357, with circular iron knife, from Biddenham Loop, Bedfordshire. Reproduced by courtesy of Albion Archaeology

## Announcements

### We have a logo!

Many thanks to Julia Farley who designed the new LPFG logo - based on the Snettisham torc and the Market Rasen brooch - that adorns the front of this newsletter.

*Thank you to Justine Bayley for bringing the following announcements to our attention:*

The **Historical Metallurgy Society** has recently re-launched its website: <http://hist-met.org>. Datasheets can still be downloaded from the site, and are aimed at archaeologists working at all levels, from project managers and curators to fieldworkers. They are intended to provide brief introductions to particular metallurgical processes or topics, and the new series is grouped into three areas:

1. Recovering, recording, understanding and managing archaeometallurgical resources
2. Processes involved in producing and working metals
3. Archaeological and other evidence for the development of specific metalworking processes

The old series of datasheets is still available, but these will eventually be replaced.

The re-launched HMS website also allows ***Metals and Metalworking: a research framework for archaeo-metallurgy*** (first published in 2008) to be downloaded free of charge. This document provides a useful introduction to the finds and features that characterise metalworking at all periods, and to some archaeo-metallurgical topics of particular current interest.

**English Heritage technical reports**, which at different dates have been called Ancient Monuments Laboratory Reports, Centre for Archaeology Reports and Research Department Reports, have recently all been digitised and can now be downloaded, free of charge, from <http://research.english-heritage.org.uk>.

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