

# Later Prehistoric Finds Group



Issue 18

Winter 2022

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Welcome to the latest edition of the LPFG Newsletter. The combination of covid and lockdowns continues to present a challenge for archaeology, with restricted access to collections, archives and research causing many of us to adapt current projects as a result. John Smythe's article on Late Bronze Age plate ingots provides an excellent account of research in these unprecedented times. Despite the problems which the pandemic has resulted in, new publications continue to be released at a steady rate. Brendan O'Connor gives his thoughts on one such publication, the much anticipated *Les ors de l'Europe Atlantique à l'âge du Bronze - technologies et ateliers* by Barbara Armbruster. You'll also find a summary of the LPFG 2021 Symposium from our outgoing Chair, as well as information on how to join the group and information on how to join us in order to stay up to date with some of the latest developments in later prehistoric finds research.



Obverse and reverse sides of a ribbed plate from the Wantisden hoard. More details about these peculiar, much overlooked objects can be found in John Smythe's article on page 3.

## Welcome

The Later Prehistoric Finds Group was established in 2013, and welcomes anyone with an interest in prehistoric artefacts, especially small finds from the Bronze and Iron Ages. We host an annual conference and publish a bi-annual newsletter, in addition to a series of datasheets providing short, accessible introductions to different classes of objects. Members receive all our new publications via email, and you can download back issues for free on our website, <https://laterprehistoricfinds.com/>

Membership is currently free; if you would like to join the group, please e-mail [LaterPrehistoricFindsGroup@gmail.com](mailto:LaterPrehistoricFindsGroup@gmail.com).

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To submit articles, notes or announcements for inclusion in the LPFG newsletter, please e-mail Andrew Lamb at [lpfgnews@outlook.com](mailto:lpfgnews@outlook.com). Guidelines are available on the website, but please feel free to e-mail with any questions.

## Who we are at the LPFG

Chair: Helen Chittock (outgoing), George Prew (incoming)

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## Plate ingot: ‘the reasons for its existence are still obscure’

John Smythe

In 2017 a huge hoard from the Wilburton period (c.1140 - 1020 BC) was found during a metal detecting rally at Badlesmere in north Kent (Parfitt 2019, 34-5). The writer was tasked to report on the estimated 1,200 objects within Badlesmere I at the British Museum, as part of the treasure process just before the first Covid lockdown in 2020 brought everything to a sudden and frustrating halt. I had already done some preliminary homework, especially into what were described as the ‘plates’ within it. As a result of the ensuing lockdowns that research was widened somewhat to look at all Wilburton and then Blackmoor (c.1020 - 920 BC) hoards across Britain.

When first found, these plates were invariably overlooked or ignored as significant objects. For instance, Barnwell (1864, 214) adds “50 various fragments” to the end of his inventory for the Guilsfield hoard. Even a century later they are still relegated to the miscellaneous category, without any measurements (Savory 1965, 196). They have been called ‘slabs’ (Britton 1960, 280); ‘sheeting’ (Savory 1965, 95); ‘flat plate scrap’ (Burgess 1968, 37); ‘plate cake’ (McNeil 1973, 51); ‘plate scrap’ (Northover 1982, 100); ‘so called plate scrap’ or ‘alloyed ingot metal’ (Rohl & Needham 1998, 102; 105).

It was Gareth Davies (1967, 104) who first seems to have recognised what they were: “one appears to be dealing with a plate counter-part ... of the thicker cake typical of [later] founders’ hoards”. The ‘thicker’ cake had been recognised as an ingot, usually composed of copper, nearly a century earlier (Evans 1881, 422-424). These copper bun ingots appear in what are now called Ewart Park hoards (c. 920-800 BC).

This is an attempt to look at the plates in a little more detail. Overall, the number of Wilburton period finds has likely more than tripled since the late 80’s (Dalwood 1987, 40, fig 8) largely thanks to the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). The whole Assemblage, with perhaps 46 hoards, probably has about 4,139 plates in 13 of them (with c. 2,624 from the enormous Isleham one alone). A recent find in Norfolk (Neil Wilkin pers com 1 Sep 2021) is not included here, nor is Badlesmere I.

Although a full analysis of the Wilburton Assemblage (sensu Needham 2017) is beyond the scope of this report, some interesting observations are apparent. Plate is much more frequent in the larger hoards, especially in the top 25% (eight of the 11 in that category). Associated objects tend to be martial, including swords, spearheads, chapes and ferrules, rather than axes or other tools. And geographically they are restricted to south-east England (Suffolk, Cambridgeshire,

Essex, London, Kent and Hampshire), and parts of Wales (the Vale of Glamorgan and Powys).

Badlesmere IV	PAS*: KENT-B824C4
Bentley No 1	Lawson 1999, 102-3
Bentley No 2	PAS: SUR-84FA31
Bramfield	PAS: SF-2596D4
Broxted	PAS: ESS-6FFC30
Guilsfield	Savory 1965; Davies 1967
Isleham	Britton 1960; Gerloff 2010, No 14, 71 f; Malim <i>et al</i> 2010
Penllyn	PAS: Gwilt, A, with Davis, M, NMGW-3BF02D
Pleshey	PAS: ESS-9A1663
Preston	PAS: KENT-DA6E86
Syon Reach	Coombs 1988, 575; 576; Northover 1982, 106
Waldershare	Parfitt (unpublished); David Coombs' unpublished notes, & drawings of over 100 items by Jo Bacon.
Wantisden	PAS: SF4728 - SF4734; others in SF-DC8632

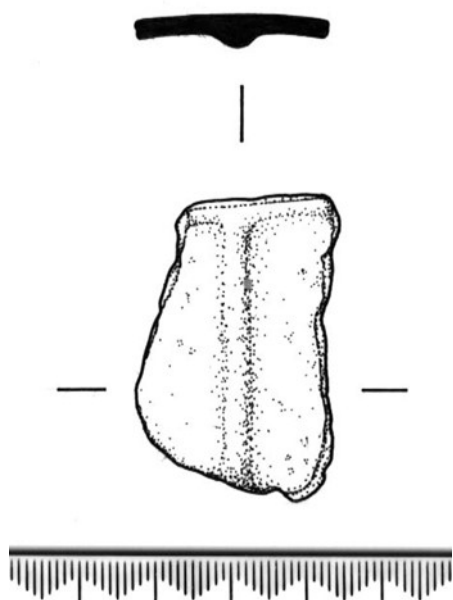
Table 1 - Key sources for Wilburton hoards with plate (in alphabetical order) \* PAS is at <https://finds.org.uk/database>

Plate is almost exclusive to the Wilburton Assemblage. It is certainly absent from the preceding Penard Assemblage (Needham 2017). And this research has found only three probable or possible examples in later hoards: one in the later Blackmoor Assemblage (Rainham, London) and two in the even later Ewart Park one (Borstal 1, Kent and Caythorpe, Lincolnshire, with one each). They are very rare in both. When those in PAS attribute them to Wilburton they are almost certainly right - unless it is only a single find that they are trying to date perhaps. In that sense they are chronologically diagnostic.

Furthermore, plates would seem to have been deposited towards the end of that assemblage span (cf. Northover 1982, 93). It's possible to construct a simple, internal chronology for some of these hoards, using the few radiocarbon dates available and their associated sword types. They are present in Bentley No 1, Guilsfield, Isleham and Waldershare, all of which should be later, and no plate is recorded in any of the earlier ones, including Wilburton itself. The majority of hoards with plate, however, cannot be dated in this way, either because they are composed of plate only (Badlesmere IV, Preston & Wantisden) or their associated swords are seemingly unidentifiable (Bentley No 2, Bramfield, Broxted and Syon Reach).

No complete, or near complete, plate has been recognised, so there is no typical example to point to. In fragmentary form, in plan, they vary in size and shape with few consistent, distinguishing features. From the more detailed descriptions on PAS, and elsewhere, they are thicker than chapes or sheets for cauldrons and buckets, and most are probably 2 mm to 6 mm (See Bramfield; Broxted; Guilsfield, Penllyn and Pleshey; the ones at Preston could be slightly thicker). They have

been called 'flat' - which they are compared to bun ingots - but larger fragments in section can exhibit slightly curved faces; convex above and concave below perhaps (e.g. Penllyn; Wantisden). Some vary in thickness (e.g. Badlesmere IV) and some have distinctly raised edges (e.g. Waldershare). The few suspected original finished edges are often described as either bevelled or rounded (e.g. Broxted). Many have distinctive or fainter ribs on one face that are arranged in parallel, but not always. They can run in both directions (Figs 1 & 2). These are part of the original casting rather than being later applications. Some have ribs on each face (Fig 3). Some are plain (Fig 4).



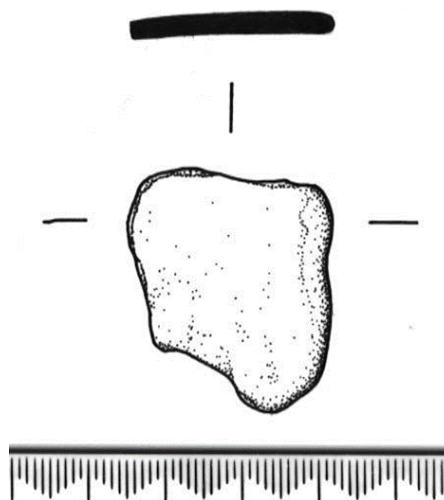
*Fig. 1 - Wantisden plate, with two ribs.*



*Fig. 2 - Photo of the two ribbed example in Fig. 1.*



*Fig. 3 - Middle one has a rib on each face;*



*Fig. 4 - Plate without ribbing*

It is intriguing that, out of over 4,000 examples, no complete plate has been identified - unlike the bun ingots where there are some complete ones. From that it could be argued that they were cast and, at least, partly broken soon afterwards. Nor have any of their moulds been found, which might suggest that they were made in a way that has left no surviving evidence. Were they cooled on a natural surface like gravel, sand, chalk or clay perhaps?

Nearly 40 years ago Peter Northover (1982, 84-86, 99-100) discussed the provenance of the metal in the plates, whether they derived from scrapped artefacts or ingots, and their possible role. He concluded that “the reasons for its existence are still obscure” (*ibid*, 85). This remains the case - though some progress has been made with provenancing the metal (Rohl & Needham 1998, 102-103, 180). Compared to the research effort invested in the later copper bun ingots (e.g. Le Carlier de Veslud *et al.* 2014; Wang *et al.* 2018; Radivojević *et al.* 2019), much less has been expended on plate ingots.

Given the uncertainty about their original morphology it would surely make sense to:

- metallurgically examine their structure to understand how they were made by the smiths, and on what surfaces they might have been cast
- examine their surviving edges in more detail
- increase the corpus of compositional analyses

It's surprising too, that no one has apparently tried to replicate how they, and especially their ribs, might have been formed.

Of course, there is at least one obvious advantage in a long delay. There are now many more examples patiently waiting to be examined.

## Acknowledgements

Lockdown meant less access to many sources. I am very grateful indeed to the following for providing that directly or indirectly: Sophie Adams, Grahame Appleby, Dirk Brandherm, Andy Jones, Matt Knight, Paul Majewski, Terry Manby, Katie Meheux, Ges Moody, Stuart Needham, Peter Northover, Brendan O'Connor, Keith Parfitt, Nick Pearson, Ben Roberts, James Rolfe, Marion Uckelmann, Jean-Marie Welter, Jennifer Wexler, Neil Wilkin and Rob Wiseman. Some also commented very helpfully on specific issues put to them: Sophie Adams, Andy Jones, Brendan O'Connor, Nick Pearson and Marion Uckelmann. None, of course, are responsible for the views expressed here. Those are my responsibility. Dedicated to Nigel Macpherson Grant, Pete Clark and Geoff Halliwell who died respectively in 2020, 2021 & 2022.



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All images from the Wantisden hoard, reproduced with permission of Suffolk County Council on PAS. Creative Commons licence.

**John Smythe** is an independent researcher. After a career unconnected to archaeology, John studied for a MSc at UCL's Institute of Archaeology. He subsequently specialised in Bronze Age metalwork from Kent and helped excavate the Badlesmere site in 2018-9. But for lockdown he would be a volunteer on the Bronze Age treasure team at the British Museum, and thanks to Neil and Sophie will be returning very soon.

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## Book Review

### Les ors de l'Europe Atlantique à l'âge du Bronze - technologies et ateliers.

Barbara Armbruster. Association des Publications Chauvinoises, Mémoire LIV. Chauvigny, 2021. 300 p. ISBN 979-10-90534-64-3. €25.

([http://chauvigny-patrimoine.fr/Editions/fiche\\_memoires.php?sku=MEM054](http://chauvigny-patrimoine.fr/Editions/fiche_memoires.php?sku=MEM054))

Brendan O'Connor

LPFG members who deal with Bronze Age gold will have to brush up their French because this volume takes its place as the standard work on the subject. It is based on the author's Habilitation (higher doctoral degree) thesis, defended in Dijon in 2008, so does not include recent Treasure finds such as the Shropshire bulla. This is a compendium of about 30 years of research on gold working technologies, the equipment of fine metalworking workshops, and the main types of gold ornaments and vessels of the Atlantic Bronze Age. The 230 numbered figures include about 350 separate images of gold objects. They are mainly the author's own excellent photographs of objects in museums in Spain and Portugal, Britain, Ireland, France and Belgium, supplemented by drawings from other publications going back as far as Daniel Wilson. These photographs are reproduced at helpfully large scales and those taken by the author are listed at the end of the book in place of an index.

After an introduction setting out an interdisciplinary approach to the subject based on her own skill as a metalworker, the author proceeds to a chapter on goldworking which includes details



of the bronze tools involved. The core of the book is a series of thirteen sections on the main gold types. The precocious appearance of a diadem and some beads from Pauilhac in south-western France reminds us that gold was known elsewhere in Europe for many centuries before it was adopted in Atlantic region during the mid-third millennium BC. Most of these early sheet types are familiar in Britain and Armbruster herself has recently published an up-to-date survey of the basket ornaments (Armbruster 2021). The section on torcs uses an example in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/466359>), to characterise the 'untwisted' form known from Ickleton, Cambridgeshire and Greysouthen, Cumbria in England, Downpatrick, Co. Down in Ireland and Guînes, Pas-de-Calais in France - which has received less attention than the twisted form - as the Marne type. The extraordinary multiple twisted torc from Guînes merits a sub-section of its own. Of particular interest to Finds Liaison Officers will be the section on *Les petites parures annulaires en or ou plaquées de tôle d'or*, otherwise 'ring-money' or 'hair-rings'. The latter interpretation has been supported by identification of organic material between the terminals of rings from Covesea, Moray in Scotland as human hair, but analysis has shown this to be vegetable matter (Armit & Büster 2020, 125) and Armbruster prefers to regard these ornaments as body piercings. A final section summarises the development of goldwork in different parts of Atlantic Europe during the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age. The volume concludes with a short chapter on technique, technology and society, then almost fifty pages of bibliography.

Earlier works cannot be discarded, however. The late lamented George Eogan should be retained for his illustrations of associated finds, maps and typological lists (Eogan 1994), while Joan Taylor's corpus of older finds up to the early 1970s remains fundamental (Taylor 1980, 75-126).

Finally, great credit is due to the publishers for producing such a handsome hardback for only €25 .

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## **LPFG 2021 Symposium Summary. Performing later prehistory: Recent work on Bronze Age and Iron Age finds**

Helen Chittock, LPFG Chair (Outgoing)

October 1st 2021 saw the LPFG's second online symposium, Performing Later Prehistory. This event aimed to bring together recent work on later prehistoric finds to explore the theme of 'performance' in its widest sense, and we enjoyed a diverse range of papers and short films covering the topics of making, design, repairs, hoarding, other forms of deposition and funerary practices. On behalf of the LPFG Committee, I'd like to thank all those who contributed their excellent work to the symposium, and well as everyone who attended and helped to create an enthusiastic environment and a lot of lively discussion. We'd also like to thank AOC Archaeology for once again lending us their Zoom Pro account for the day free of charge – their continuing support is very much appreciated by the LPFG.

The symposium began with an inspiring keynote presentation from Trevor Creighton of Butser Ancient Farm, who spoke to us about recent experimental work at Butser, providing valuable new insights into the construction and use of later prehistoric roundhouses. Following Trevor's keynote, we watched two thought-provoking presentations from Tiffany Treadway and Andrew Reynolds on the performances involved in the deposition of later prehistoric finds. Tiffany's talk explored the creation of collective memory through wetland deposition in Wales and Scotland, whilst Andrew examined shared performative behaviours in Late Bronze Age hoarding across wide geographical areas, using case studies from Wales and Poland.

Next, we watched two presentations providing exciting new insights on some well-known Iron Age metalwork finds. Rebecca Ellis presented a new approach to the imagery found on a well-known group of Iron Age buckets from England and Wales, discussing the movement and stories depicted on them. Following this, Tess Machling and Roland Williamson focussed on the so-called Grotesque Torc from Snettisham, Norfolk, considering its repairs in detail to reveal a new narrative on its biography.

After lunch, we watched a fantastic short film on experimental weaving by Jennifer Beamer, Knitting the Heddles, which documented the gestures and bodily engagement involved in her experimental work on later prehistoric weaving, showing the ways in which the presentation of this work via film can influence the way we view it. Next, Meredith Laing spoke about her research on children in Bronze and Iron Age Britain, focussing on the funerary performances associated with child death to answer poignant questions about how the loss of young community members was marked. Clodagh O'Sullivan then presented her ongoing PhD research on deposition practices in Iron Age Ireland, looking at how the study of these performative practices

can provide a window onto Iron Age identities.

The final session of the day opened with Rachel Wilkinson, who spoke about Iron Age hoarding, using detailed case studies to shed light on the processes involved in creating hoards and the spectacles they entailed. We were then treated to a second short film, *Broken Folk meets Broken Objects* by Broken Folk duo, Lunatraktors (Carli Jefferson and Clair Le Couteur). This beautifully evocative film, created as part of a collaborative project with Sophia Adams, Dana Goodburn-Brown and Maidstone Museum on Boughton Malherbe Late Bronze Age hoard, explored the artists' reactions to the hoard. It provided an atmospheric audio-visual experience, during which the audience was able to contemplate this fascinating find. This was followed by a talk from Sophia Adams, who provided details of the fantastic conservation, experimental work and analysis that inspired and informed the film.

The 2021 Online Symposium was free to attend, as the 2020 symposium had been. However, this year we asked for donations from those who signed up and we were absolutely blown away by the generosity of our friends and members. The LPFG is proud to be a free group, and we've resisted introducing membership fees in order to remain as accessible as possible. We generally rely on profits from our annual conferences to finance the running of the group. Since our move to free online events during the pandemic, therefore, our funds had begun to dwindle, and we're so pleased to be able to say that we've entered 2022 with a healthier bank balance. The funds raised through the symposium will go towards supporting our day-to-day activities, such as our website fees and the production of promotional materials, as well as supporting our annual LPFG prize and, hopefully, the upfront costs of our next in-person event. We'd like to wholeheartedly thank everyone who donated – you've made it possible to keep the group running and free for our members.

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## Call for Contributions

We're now accepting contributions for our Summer newsletter.

We welcome reviews of conferences and publications, research articles, introductions to new projects, information on new finds, and announcements about events.

Please visit our newsletter page here:

<https://laterprehistoricfinds.com/newsletter/>

Or, email us on [lpfgnews@outlook.com](mailto:lpfgnews@outlook.com) to find out more about submitting an article.



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