

Later Prehistoric Finds Group



Issue 20

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Welcome to the latest edition of the LPFG Newsletter. From the damp and soggy wilds of winter we bring you news of some of the latest developments in the field of later prehistoric small finds research. From the famous Late Hallstatt and Early La Tène site of Dürrenberg bei Hallein, Austria, Wolfgang Lobisser shares some of the incredible wooden objects which have been discovered in the course of the site's research. Andy and Pat Chapman discuss the curious find of a miniature Iron Age loomweight from Magna Park, Leicestershire, with an appeal for readers who have encountered similar objects to get in touch. And Jörn Schuster has an update about the recent work by Cotswold Archaeology at Saxon Rise, Northamptonshire, and details of how readers can learn more about the wonderful range of Iron Age and Roman metalwork from the site. Finally, Meredith Laing reviews Matt Knight's innovative approach to Bronze Age metalwork hoards (now available from your local book shop).



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An Iron Age currency bar from the Saxon Rise, Brixworth, Northamptonshire site. Read more about this, and other finds, on page 13

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.

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To submit articles, notes or announcements for inclusion in the LPFG newsletter, please e-mail 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: George Prew

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Treasurer: Meredith Laing

Membership Secretary: Vacant

Newsletter Editor: Andrew Lamb (Outgoing)

Datasheet Editor: Leanne Demay

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Committee members: Sophie Adams, Anna Booth, Julia Farley, Yvonne Inall, Tess Machling, Andrew Reynolds, Steph Smith, John Smythe and Peter Walker

Letter from the Chair

Welcome to the Winter 2023 edition of the Later Prehistoric Finds Group Newsletter! We would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed their time and expertise to writing and editing this excellent edition.

On behalf of the LPFG Committee, I would like to thank all our members as they continue to support the group and help to promote the study of later prehistoric finds. In particular, I would like to thank everyone who attended our 2022 Online Symposium, most of all our speakers who provided an eclectic and fascinating selection of research topics. In an LPFG first, the talks can also still be seen on our YouTube channel: just search "Later Prehistoric Finds Group". I would like to extend our special thanks to AOC Archaeology for subsidising our Zoom account so we could host such a large audience.

This is a period of development and changes for the LPFG. On 3rd March 2023 we will be holding our annual AGM. Attendance is open to all. Our Newsletter Editor of six years, Andrew Lamb, will be stepping down from the role in order to step up to the LPFG's Vice Chair, which Jennifer Beamer will be vacating. I would like to thank Jennifer for all her hard work and contributions she made whilst Vice Chair. This means, of course, that we will be looking for a new Newsletter Editor. If you are interested in this role, or becoming our new Membership Secretary, please get in touch. We would love to hear from you.

On behalf of the whole LPFG Committee, we hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter and have great success in whatever aspect of the later prehistoric archaeological record you may be examining.

George Prew (LPFG Chair)



Wooden finds from an Iron Age settlement at the Dürrnberg in Austria

Wolfgang F.A. Lobisser

The Dürrnberg near Hallein is an exceptional archaeological site in Central Europe for Iron Age studies. The rich local salt deposits were the economic basis for the emergence of a distinct central place of supra-regional importance. Several hundred burials of Iron Age inhabitants have been excavated at the site. Their grave goods point to wealthy elites with extensive trade connections. In addition to the graves, we also know the mining areas in the mountains which date to the same period. The high salt content provided excellent preservation conditions for organic residues. In the last decades, extensive areas of the Iron Age salt mines on the Dürrnberg were scientifically documented within the context of an extensive research project (Stöllner 2002). The organic findings from the mountains allow far-reaching insights into Iron Age mining.

Additionally, evidence of several archaeological wooden building structures was found in the area, which gives us a picture of the local Iron Age settlement traditions. Particularly noteworthy is the Ramsautal valley, which stretches across a length of about 450m and a width of up to 100m in a north-south direction between the hilltops of the Dürrnberg. Here we find the only flat areas of the surroundings, which were perfectly suitable as settlement areas. Earlier rescue excavations in 1982 showed that the relatively moist soil conditions provided ideal requirements for conserving prehistoric wood finds (Zeller 1984).

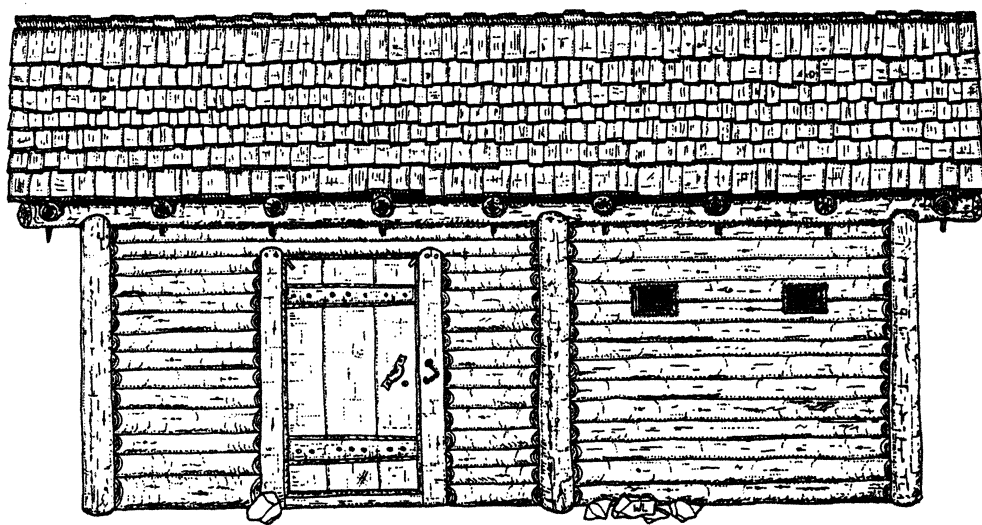


Fig. 1: Preserved earthfast posts and remnants from other construction woods on site allowed the reconstruction of different types of Iron Age wooden buildings at the Dürrnberg. House 4 was most likely used as a workshop building (Drawing: Wolfgang F.A. Lobisser).

Further excavations were carried out in the Ramsautal valley by the Austrian Research Center Dürrenberg in 1988/89. The excavation area followed a little stream called Glannerbach and covered an area of about 230 m² (Stöllner 1991). Here, too, moist soil conditions were encountered so that once again numerous wooden remains could be recovered. In the course of this excavation, four archaeological settlement horizons were found, which indicated an Iron Age settlement in the valley from the end of the Hallstatt period up to the 3rd century BC.

In total, around 9,100 archaeological wooden finds were unearthed in 1988/89, at various stages of preservation depending on the depth of the soil. This wooden finds complex is one of Europe's most important recorded sources for woodworking of the Iron Age. The dimensions of the objects ranged from chippings of a few centimetres to entire beams with lengths up to 8.5 meters. Some 1,800 pieces of wood were identified as building timbers and were published in 2005 (Lobisser 2005). The remaining pieces of wood - about 7,200 finds – were presented during a PhD at the University of Vienna (Lobisser 2017). The spectrum of preserved wood finds is extraordinary and includes tool parts, such as hafted angular handles, shovels and loam scrapers. In the case of the hafted angular handles, they can be distinguished by their characteristics as pickaxes, axes, and adzes.



Fig. 2: Different types of woodworking tools, the use of which could be proven at the Dürrenberg: from left to right: heavy grommet axe and flap axe on knee wood shafts, spoon drill, carving knife, bark sewing needle, scribing awl, pull saw, chisel, gouge and compass (Photo: Wolfgang F. A. Lobisser).

Several flat bottoms of wooden tubs or small wooden barrels show that they already knew elaborate overlapping techniques. Bowls and troughs have been ascertained from carved wooden vessels, broken wooden handles, and wooden plugs, showing that there must have been other large carved wooden vessels. Remarkably, a large part of the recovered wooden vessels had already been turned on a lathe. In addition to large plates with arched edges and simple bowls, there were large, clearly defined bowls and complex, small containers with tightly fitting lids, so-called pyxides, which were modelled after ancient Greek forms. Two remnants of broken rotary cores serve as proof that the wooden wares were mainly produced onsite in the settlement. The pyxides and the little buckets were probably used for salt trading. Preserved door latches indicate that the buildings in the settlement were also lockable. Indeed some hook-keys made of iron were found at the Dürrnberg. Wooden hooks indicate that many goods of daily life were hung on the walls to protect them.

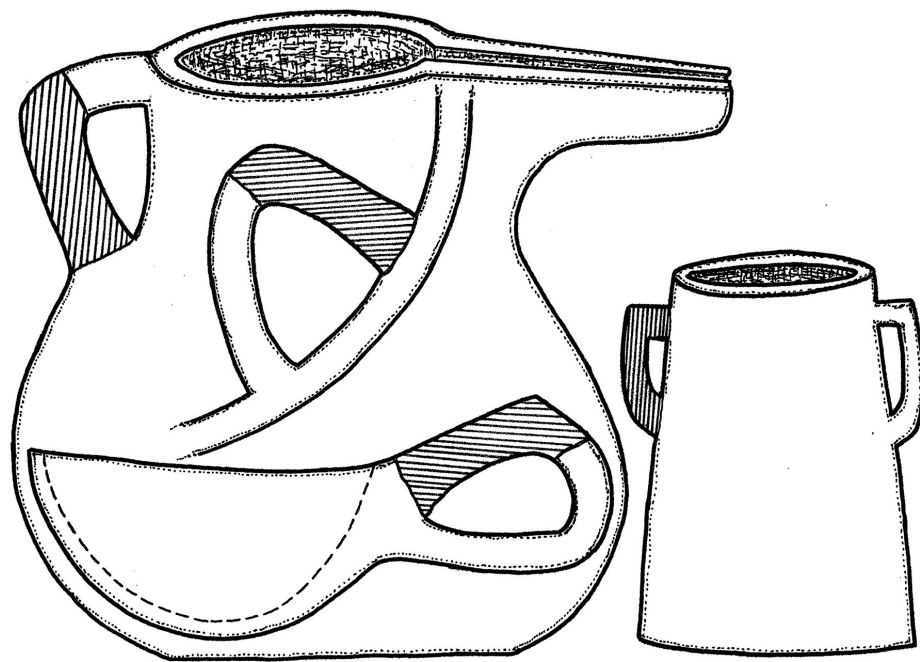


Fig. 3: Based on the grain structure various finds of wooden handles can be assigned to certain types of wooden implements: Wooden cans, wooden scoops and wooden buckets of various sizes were used on the Dürrnberg (Drawing: Wolfgang F.A. Lobisser).

Several hundred lighting chip fragments were recovered from the settlement, whose different dimensions permit interesting questions regarding lighting. Some of these pieces can be referred to as production residues, demonstrating onsite production. Remains of wooden roasting spits prove the roasting of meat. Numerous fragments of firewood enable conclusions to be drawn

for Iron Age heating and cooking practices. Residues of carding shows that textile techniques were also practised in the settlement. It is worth mentioning that two tally sticks, two peg-like kinds of wood, as well as the fragment of a wooden tube, are most likely fragments of Celtic musical instruments made of wood.



Fig. 4: Numerous remains of small wooden boxes, so-called pyxides, which could be closed with tight-fitting lids, were found in the Ramsautal valley. The production of these wooden vessels on the Dürrnberg could be proven by typical production waste. There is some evidence that they might have been used as containers for salt (Foto: Wolfgang F. A. Lobisser).

However, most of the small finds made of wood consisted of woodworking waste, which had been created both in the construction of buildings and in various handicraft practices in the settlement. These waste timbers allowed conclusions on Iron Age manufacturing techniques and woodworking habits to be drawn. The wooden findings were accurately documented in the processing and evaluating of the Ramsautal valley excavations of 1988/89. Particular attention was paid to processing traces, which allowed conclusions about working techniques to be made. As far as possible, wood species identification has been carried out, which permit statements on individual handicraft techniques as well as on Iron Age forest use habits. In addition to the Dürrnberg's famous salt mines, evidence for long-distance trade, and metalwork and ceramic production, it is clear that woodworking was also an activity of major importance for this community.

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Wolfgang F.A. Lobisser is based at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institut in Austria, and is a multi-period researcher, with his research focussing on the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Medieval periods. He specialises in experimental archaeological and practical reconstructions, in order to better understand how past technologies functioned. He has previously worked in reconstructing Bronze Age and Iron Age structures, an Iron Age glass furnace and a Neolithic Settlement. In addition to his research, Wolfgang has also advised on best practice in museum exhibitions and promoting archaeology to the public.

Email: wolfgang.lobisser@univie.ac.at

A miniature Iron Age loom weight from Magna Park, Lutterworth, Leicestershire

Andy Chapman and Pat Chapman

Iron Age triangular loom weights

Finds of fired-clay triangular loom weights with corner perforations are a relatively common find on Middle to Late Iron Age settlements across the country. They occur both as fragments and occasionally as intact weights, often as single finds but sometimes as groups of several weights within a single pit, presumably from a single upright warp-weighted loom, as in this stack of five weights at Coton Park, near Rugby, Warwickshire (Fig 1) (Chapman & Chapman 2020).



Fig. 1: A pit containing a stack of loom weights, at Coton Park, Rugby, Warwickshire

At a small Middle Iron Age enclosure on the chalk at Kennel Farm, Basingstoke (Chapman 2006) many of the loom weights had been deposited on the floors of deep storage pits, suggesting they were objects suitable for acts of structured deposition. These deposits included a complete but unfired weight fashioned in brown clay with flints that occurred naturally on the site.

Triangular fired-clay loom weights have quite a wide size range, standing c.130-200mm high and c.80-100mm thick, weighing between 1.0kg and 3.0kg. However, in a programme of archaeological investigations carried out by MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) at Magna Park, Lutterworth, Leicestershire (Morris 2022; centred on SP 492 863), a small assemblage of loom weights was recovered from an Iron Age settlement that included a possibly unique example of a miniature loom weight (Chapman 2022).

The miniature loom weight from Lutterworth

The majority of the assemblage from Lutterworth falls within the usual range of sizes, including a partial example standing 145mm high, up to 55mm thick with an estimated weight of c.1.2-1.4kg, a little smaller than average, which came from the same pit as the miniature weight. However, there is a marked contrast in size between this weight and the miniature loom weight (Fig 2: scale 10mm). In terms of date, pit 3493 contained early Roman pottery, but the loom weights may have been residual from the clearance of a previous roundhouse in this location of late Iron Age to early Roman date, 1st century BC to 1st century AD.



Fig. 2: A standard loom weight in comparison to the miniature loom weight from Magna Park, Lutterworth (scale 10mm)

The miniature loom weight (pit 3493, SF3005) is complete, standing 65mm high by 25mm thick, with sides 75mm long, and weighing 137g (Fig 3: scale 10mm). There are oval perforations, 11-15mm diameter, across each corner, with each showing wear on the inside edge. Concerning the fabric, it matches the other examples in the assemblage, and has similar surface colouration.



Fig. 3: The miniature loom weight from Magna Park, Lutterworth, showing the corner

In terms of size, the miniature weight is around a third to a half the height, and a quarter to a third of the width of a typical weight. Regarding weight, at 137g, it is only around a tenth of the weight of an average loom weight, which indicates that it could not have had any functional use. It therefore appears to be reasonable to suggest that this miniature loom weight may have been made either for a child or by a child, and most probably at the same time as a batch of full-sized weights were being prepared, and it was probably fired alongside them. However, the wear on the perforations does suggest that after manufacturing it had been kept suspended, perhaps even on a small model of an upright warp-weighted loom.

As a parallel to this miniature loom weight, the authors are aware of at least two examples of comparably small thumb pots of Iron Age date (unpublished), which are similarly likely to have been made for or by children, perhaps while shadowing a working adult (a parent or older sibling perhaps) after being allowed some clay for their own use, with the finished result being fired alongside the full-size vessels.

Such behaviour should be expected in societies where children would have grown up alongside the daily craft practices, but unfortunately surviving examples of such copying by children and/or

the manufacturing of miniature examples by adults as 'toys' for their children, have rarely survived from the British Iron Age.

If anyone else has come across a comparable miniature loom weight, we would be pleased to hear from them.

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Andy Chapman, BSc MCI(A FSA, now retired, was formerly Senior Project Manager, MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) Northampton. Following a long career in the field, for MOLA he had the oversight of client reports, and journal and monograph publications issued from Northampton, also providing some finds reporting.

Email: andyc196661@gmail.com

Pat Chapman, BA, now retired, was formerly both a Finds Supervisor for MOLA, also providing finds reporting, and a proof reader and copyeditor for client reports and publications.

Email: patchapman47@gmail.com

Metalwork and Depositional Practices at Saxon Rise, Brixworth, Northamptonshire

Jörn Schuster

Readers of this newsletter might be interested to learn that a report on the excavations has recently been made available online by Cotswold Archaeology. I had previously presented some of the results under the title “Complete, completely broken, or only half there? Depositional practices observed on tools and weapons at a middle Iron Age to early Roman period settlement at Brixworth, Northamptonshire” at the conference ‘Hoarding And Deposition In Europe From Later Prehistory To The Medieval Period – Finds In Context’. This conference was organised jointly by The Roman Finds Group, Later Prehistoric Finds Group and Finds Research Group in collaboration with King’s College London and Instrumentum International Meetings at King’s College, London, 12th–14th June 2019.

The paper catalogues and discusses metal artefacts observed in several contexts which are part of a pit alignment outside a Middle/Late Iron Age square enclosure at Saxon Rise, Brixworth. This is followed by an examination of depositional practices. By examining the objects’ preservation conditions, it is possible to distinguish three preservation categories with distinctly differing frequencies recorded across the various functional categories in the assemblage, predominantly tools and weapons.



Fig. 1: An Iron Age currency bar from the Saxon Rise site.

The report on the metalwork can be found at: https://www.academia.edu/91919213/Schuster_J_2020_Appendix_F_Metalwork

Links to the entire excavation report as well as additional photos and x-radiographs of some of the finds can also be found on this Academia page in the section ‘Client Reports’.

Jörn studied archaeology, provincial Roman archaeology, numismatics, physical geography and Viking studies at the universities of Frankfurt, Nottingham and Göttingen. He has held posts as county archaeologist in Lower Saxony, finds specialist for English Heritage and PX-Manger for Wessex Arch and Cotswold Arch before going freelance as finds specialist with a focus on metalwork at ARCHÆOLOGICALsmallFINDS.

Email: js@smallfinds.org.uk

Book Review

Fragments of the Bronze Age. The Destruction and Deposition of Metalwork in South-West Britain and its Wider Context

Knight, M. 2022. Prehistoric Society Research Paper 13 Oxford: Oxbow Books. pp. 186. ISBN: 1789256976 £35.00 (hardback); £17.50 (Kindle edition)

Meredith Laing

This brilliant and lavishly illustrated volume is based on Matt Knight's AHRC-funded doctoral research, which focussed on the oft-overlooked broken bits and fragments of metalwork deposited throughout the Bronze Age, using a case study region of four counties of South-West Britain (Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall). The book will appeal to anyone examining the Bronze Age, new approaches to metalworking technologies and their social context, or with an interest in regionality within prehistory.

Chapter 1 provides a relatively short introduction to different ways in which ostensibly useable objects were damaged,



and the current interpretative framework surrounding those deposits, including discussions around scrap/recycling hoards, fragments representing a type of pre-monetary currency, enchainment, grave goods and ritual explanations.

In a refreshing approach, Knight closely examines the process of destruction. Summarising some earlier, and more recently his own, experiments with techniques of breaking and fragmenting bronze artefacts, he demonstrates the importance of heat to the process and the need for knowledge of the material, thereby indicating the probable involvement of the metalworkers themselves in the destruction of at least some objects. He puts forward Destruction Indicators (such as bending, twisting, breaking, fragmentation and stabbing) and sets out important terminology for wider use to help standardise discussions around fragmentation debates. Furthermore, he has devised a Damage Ranking System which helps to correlate visible damage to objects with the likelihood of deliberate action. Combining the Destruction Indicators with the Damage Ranking System creates a framework for interpreting trends in the treatment of the 1,735 bronze and gold objects which formed the study dataset.

Having established the research framework and methodology, there follow three broadly chronological chapters, exploring metalwork damage and deposition during the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age (Chapter 3), the Middle Bronze Age (Chapter 4) and Late Bronze Age – Earliest Iron Age (Chapter 5) within South-West Britain. Chapter 3 highlights an interesting dissonance between the study region being a known source of metal (especially tin and gold) during the Bronze Age, yet comparatively few objects being deposited, and of those only 10% bearing clear evidence of acts of destruction. Axes were the commonest find, but the lack of evidence for deliberate damage suggests they were deposited before they ceased being useful tools. An interesting potential diachronic link with the deposition of Neolithic stone axeheads highlights continuity transcending the three-age system.

Chapter 4 focusses on the Middle Bronze Age (c. 1500-1150 BC), during which rates of metalwork deposition increased, along with evidence for deliberate damage. Regionality of depositional practice is clear, with most data for this period coming from Somerset, with the rest of the study area producing sparse evidence of intentionally damaged artefacts. The chapter includes illuminating descriptions and discussion of the Taunton Union Workhouse and Priddy hoards (both from Somerset), including their landscape and social contexts, and the possibility of gendered association of objects. Of note is the tendency for palstaves to be buried in an undamaged state, whereas other tools, weapons and ornaments were more frequently subject to breaking or damage.

Chapter 5 contains a wealth of data for the period 1150–600 BC, during which large quantities of metal work were deposited across much of southern Britain. Late Bronze Age (c. 1150-800BC) deposition shows a differing regional distribution to that in the Middle Bronze Age, as

well as considerable diversity in the makeup of hoards, and localised distinctiveness within depositional practices. In depth analysis of the data highlights interesting connections to south Wales and northern France, and shows simplistic interpretations of hoarding practice to be inappropriate. The complimentary discussion of single finds of the period and their landscape or domestic placement provides a nice counterpoint to more familiar discussions of hoard composition.

A change in depositional practice occurred around 800 BC with a shift to axe head dominant hoards of largely complete objects of the Llyn Fawr tradition, with many examples deposited as-cast and afunctional due to high lead content, which Knight links to social events referencing connections and performative consumption and deposition, rather than functional explanations linked to a collapsing bronze industry.

The discussion in Chapter 6 draws out an interesting parallel between destructive aspects of the creative process of metal production (such as crushing ores and breaking moulds to remove cast bronze objects) and destructive depositional practices. A discussion of exchange brings a different angle to more familiar enchainment themes, with accumulation of material in large hoards to which material was added and removed, thus blurring its original associations. The key point is made that deposited items would (like burials) represent an exception, with most metal remaining in circulation, and thus interpretations must be cognisant of that.

The chapter focusses on different depositional environments and locales, thereby situating the more detailed object specific data within contemporary landscape contexts. Discussion of deposition within occupational sites encompasses the wider ambit of non-metal deposits, with an interesting highlight being the general exclusion of weapons from the repertoire of suitable items to deposit domestically. Deposition in watery places is explored in relation to rivers (for which it seems deposition in them was not widespread compared to deposition near them), and the link between water and weapons is explored. An intriguing conclusion is drawn from the data that destruction was unnecessary for objects placed in rivers, but essential for those placed in bogs, lakes and marshes, showing how important a more nuanced understanding of different watery locations is for our comprehension of the diverse reasons behind superficially similar practices.

An exploration of Late Bronze Age hoards pulls out the different stories which can be told by unpicking individual objects and their treatment within hoards, including possible different approaches taken to items of local versus foreign or supra-regional origin, which hints at the complexities of contemporary understandings of geographies and networks.

The final concluding chapter highlights the experiential qualities of destruction – its sights, sounds, sounds and smells – as aspects of communal performance and memory making, and so

helps reunite the broken artefacts with the people responsible for breaking and burying them. The object centred approach of Knight's work, with its deliberate inclusion of and focus on the small pieces, so often omitted from previous research, brings fresh insights into cultural practices. By combining a quantitative approach to damage categorisation, with an embedding of object data within temporal depositional landscapes, Knight is able to situate individual actions within broader ideologies, and provide statistical confirmation of diachronic and geographic differences in how metalwork was treated pre-deposition.

Meredith completed her PhD at the University of Leicester, researching children in later prehistory through combining burial practices for the young dead, with evidence of their craft activities through fingerprint and fingertip impression analysis.

Email: mjilaing@gmail.com

Twitter: [@MeredithJLaing](https://twitter.com/MeredithJLaing)

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 to find out more about submitting an article.



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