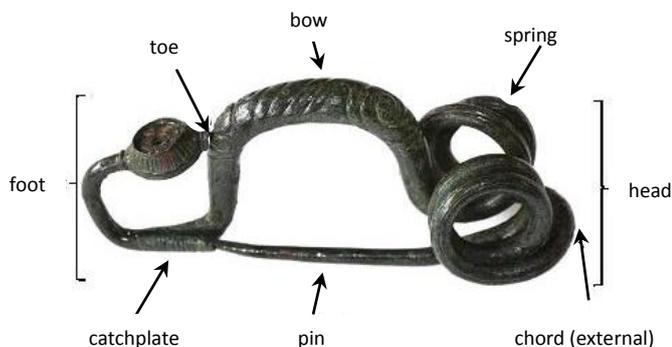




Brooches first appear in Britain in the fifth century BC. About 725 brooches, whole and fragmentary, are known from the 300 year period that is the Early and Middle Iron Age c.450–150 BC. They are made of bronze or iron or combine elements of both materials. No precious metal brooches are found before the last century BC. Less than 50 of the earliest bow brooches (Type 1A) have been found, some of which may be imports, others appear to have been made in Britain. In contrast c.230 of the subsequent Type 1B brooches, a British Early Iron Age form, are known. A further 370+ brooches may be dated to the Middle Iron Age. In the Late Iron Age, c.150 BC – AD 50, brooch production flourished with numbers increasing to the thousands (Mackreth 2011). Early and Middle Iron Age brooches have been found in archaeological excavations with varying levels of contextual data. More than 200 have been recovered during metal detecting surveys most recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Unfortunately many brooches in museum collections are antiquarian discoveries or acquisitions from dealers with minimal provenance records both in terms of context and findspot.

Fig.1. The parts of a bow brooch (Adams 2013)
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Form

At one end of the brooch (the head) is a spring or hinge mechanism that enables the pin to open and close. The pin pierces the fabric and is secured at the opposite end (the foot) by a shallow catchplate with a v-shaped pin rest. The bow is the visible part joining the head and the foot; it may be convex or concave but the former is more common. Brooch size varies both across and within types; the smallest is 24mm, the largest is 93mm long. Preservation is variable: the pins are frequently broken and many survive only as a fragment of the bow.

Dating

The earliest brooches have been recorded in stratified archaeological deposits dating to c.450 BC in England. These are often referred to as La Tène I or La Tène A brooches following the terminology of their continental counterparts. Brooches are known from earlier periods on the European Continent (e.g. Greece and Italy) as far back as the 8th century BC (Hallstatt C). None of these earlier types have been recovered from excavated contexts in England, Wales, Scotland or Ireland. The few reported are antiquarian imports or stray finds often spuriously associated with areas of Roman activity.

From the Middle Iron Age (c.300 BC) the quantity and variety of brooches increases. British types dominate the record indicating a distancing from the influence of continental forms. These have been referred to as La Tène II or La Tène C types equating them with the continental chronology despite the absence of parallels. At present we rely on a handful of associated radiocarbon determinations to date the brooches bolstered by examination of the technological and stylistic features.

Distribution

The distribution of these brooch finds extends across England and Wales with a concentration in southern and eastern England. To date only one Early Iron Age example is reported from Scotland; none are found in Ireland. In the Middle Iron Age more examples are known from northern England and Scotland.

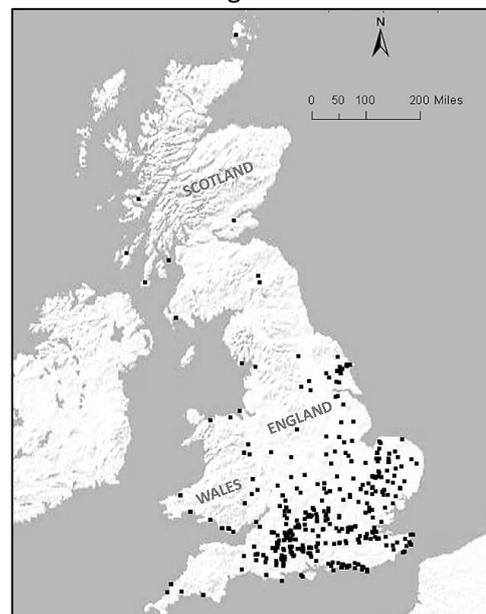


Fig.2. Distribution of findspots of Early and Middle Iron Age Bow Brooches (Adams 2013)

Later Prehistoric Finds Group

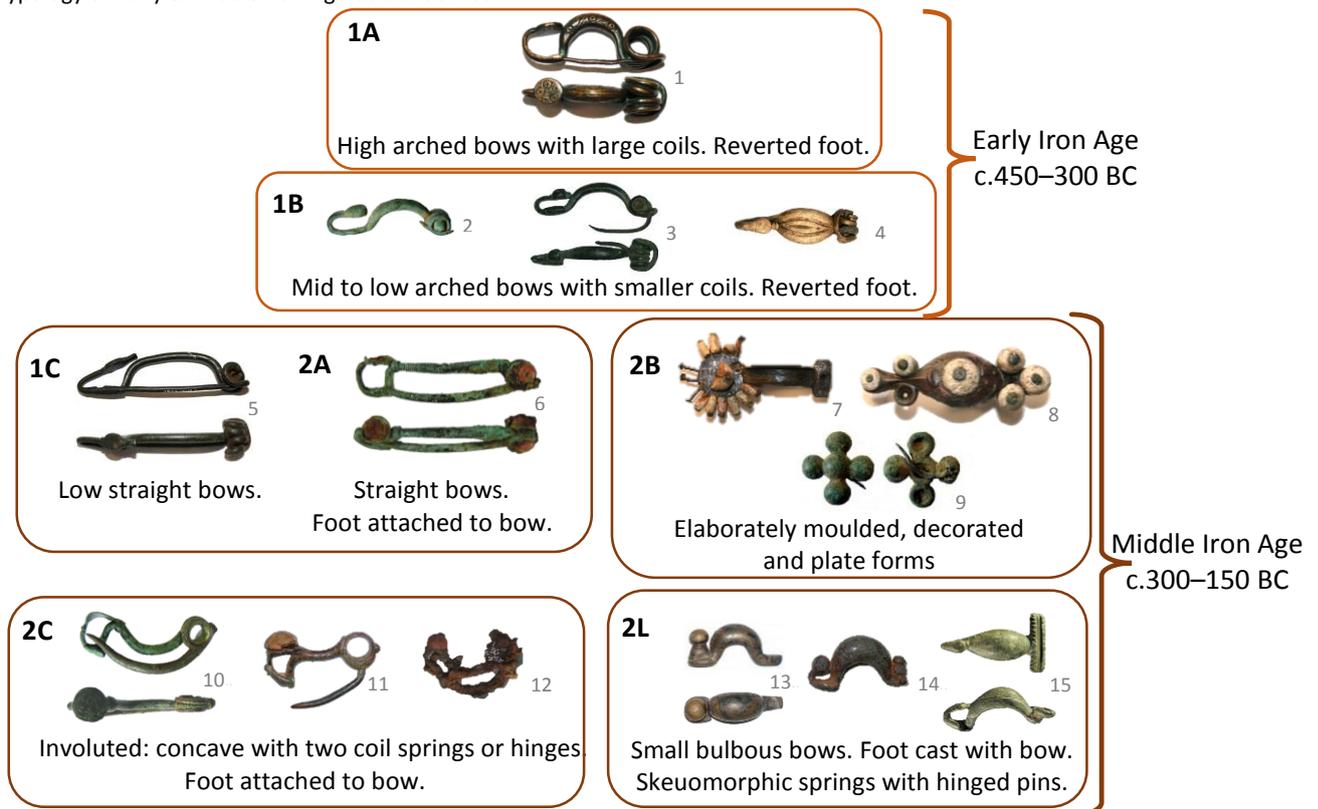
Object Datasheet No.1

Sophia Adams PhD

A Short Guide to Early and Middle Iron Age Bow Brooches from Britain



Fig.3. Typology of Early & Middle Iron Age bow brooches¹



Typology

Early Iron Age c.450–300 BC

1A: c.450 BC. Brooches have a high arched bow; a head consisting of a large four coil spring and a foot that bends up from the end of the catchplate and back to meet the downward curve of the bow (a reverted foot). The chord is outside the spring/bow (external chord).

1B: c.400 BC. The arch of the bow is lowered. The coils of the spring are much smaller and tighter. Many brooches are now made from 3 pieces which form a mock-spring. The reverted foot is still used.

Middle Iron Age

1C & 2A c.300/275 BC. Arched bows become flatter and straighter. From c.275 BC the reverted foot is now attached to the bow (2A). Hinges become far more common than springs.

2B, 2C & 2L: c.275/250 BC. A variety of brooches appear including elaborately moulded, decorated and plate forms (2B), involuted brooches with concave bows (2C) and small bulbous bows (2L: previously Hull and Hawkes' Hallstatt Group L).

After c.150BC the range of types increases. Involute brooches are no longer made. Finer arched bows and plate types abound and external chords are replaced with internal ones (Mackreth 2011).

The simple typology presented here is based on that published by Hull and Hawkes (1987) with revisions by the author (Adams 2013). The given dates indicate inception of each type and main period of use. Some features continue or reappear in later periods. A more comprehensive typology is available online (see Adams 2013) but the unique form of each brooch means it can be problematic identifying subtypes.

Materials and decoration

Most Early Iron Age brooches are bronze. From c.275BC iron brooches are as common and dominate in some regions e.g. East Yorkshire and Wales but are still rare in other regions such as the southeast. Decoration is often minimal but several Middle Iron Age brooches are cast with moulded swirling La Tène style designs. Further decoration is provided by the attachment of other materials such as coral, glass or stone to the iron or bronze brooch. Some examples include a combination of decorative techniques.

Adams, S. A. 2013. *The First Brooches in Britain: from Manufacture to Deposition in the Early and Middle Iron Age*. PhD Thesis: University of Leicester <http://hdl.handle.net/2381/28593>

Hull, M.R. & Hawkes, C.F.C. 1987. *Corpus of Ancient Brooches in Britain: pre-Roman bow brooches*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports British Series 168.

Mackreth, D. F. 2011 *Brooches in Late Iron Age and Roman Britain*. Oxford: Oxbow

¹©Trustees of the British Museum 1: Woodeaton and 5: Abingdon, Oxon; 6: Argam Lane, Rudston 11: Makeshift Cemetery and 12: Bell Slack, East Riding of Yorks; 7: Harborough Cave, Brassington, Derbys; 8: Mill Hill, Deal; 13: Hammersmith, London. PAS, CC BY: 2: Dorset SOMDOR-505E27 3: Dorset DOR-41F0C6; 4: Greater London SUR-0B2C37; 9: Berks BERK-4EFFC6; 10: W. Yorks. SWYOR-399938; 14: Surrey SUR-41D522; 15: Isle of Wight IOW-4DA383.