Welcome to the winter edition of the LPFG newsletter.

In this issue, we introduce new research on the intentional destruction and deposition of Bronze Age metalwork in South West England, as well as an investigation into British Early Iron Age horse-bits and associated harness fittings.

We present several new finds: a beautiful Iron Age linch pin from Suffolk (pictured to the left), and several mysterious objects from the Thames foreshore (interpretations are invited!).

We also review the British Museum’s new exhibition *Celts: Art and Identity*, which will move to the National Museum of Scotland in the spring of 2016.

Season’s greetings to all our readers!

Linch pin from Fressingfield, Suffolk (c) Suffolk County Council
Welcome

On 6th November 2015, the Later Prehistoric Finds Group and the Roman Finds Group held a joint conference at the British Museum, to tie in with the current major exhibition: *Celts: Art and Identity*. The conference was extremely well-attended, and many thanks are due to the organisers and speakers, with a special acknowledgement to Jenny Hall of the Roman Finds Group.

The LPFG has held two collaborative conferences this year - with the Roman Finds Group and the Prehistoric Society - but has not held a formal AGM. A formal AGM will be held in 2016, and an announcement made in due course. All members are welcome to attend, so please keep an eye out for further news!

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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 hold an annual conference and produce two newsletters a year. Membership is currently free; if you would like to join the group, please e-mail LaterPrehistoricFindsGroup@gmail.com.

We are a new group, and we are hoping that more researchers interested in prehistoric artefacts will want to join us. The group has opted for a loose committee structure that is not binding, and a list of those on the steering committee, along with contact details, can be found on our website: [https://sites.google.com/site/laterprehistoricfindsgroup/home](https://sites.google.com/site/laterprehistoricfindsgroup/home). Anna Booth is the current Chair, and Sophia Adams is Deputy. Elizabeth Foulds is Treasurer.

If you would be interested in helping to run the group, we would love to have you on the steering committee. It is open to anyone who would like to be involved. If you are interested, please e-mail us at the address given above.

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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 lpfgnews@outlook.com, and refer to the submission guidelines on the website.
An Iron Age linch pin from Suffolk

Andrew Brown

In 2015 an Iron Age linch pin of vase-headed type was found at Fressingfield, Suffolk, and reported to the Suffolk Finds Recording Team (PAS: SF-1007C4; Figs. 1 and 2). Although suffering from some corrosion and post-depositional damage, it remains the most complete example to date recorded within the county.

With its characteristic vase-shaped head, iron shank, and hoof-shaped foot, this example measures 116.73mm in total length, 34.85mm in maximum width (at head), and 195.42g in weight. The head has a decorated upper face with central recessed circle surrounded by a raised, corded border and three evenly spaced circular fields of red enamel. Traces of incised decorative elements are present surrounding the enamelled fields, perhaps originally these were continuous trumpet or cusp-shaped motifs. Similar decorative elements survive on one side of the head, consisting of triangular motifs filled with multiple punched dots. The decorative elements of the head are mirrored on the foot. One side of the foot, in line with the decoration on the head, has a circular field of red enamel surrounded by an incised circle with internal cusp and external trumpet-shaped motifs. The flattened terminal end of the foot reflects the upper face of the head, with similar recessed field and corded border. It is interesting to note, too, that the opposite sides of both head and foot to the decorative elements are partially flattened. This appears to be a result of use-wear, suggesting that the enamelled and incised decoration would have been visible, and presumably facing outwards when in use.

The Fressingfield linch pin finds parallels in terms of form with the Kirkburn (Stead 1991, 44-47) and Stanwick (MacGregor 1976, 49-50) linch pins, as well as various examples recorded in recent years through the PAS (e.g. LIN-8598B5, SUR-660027, LEIC-568011, LIN-EFDAB2). A number of examples in neighbouring Norfolk also share similar characteristics in terms of form and decoration (Hutcheson 2004, 31-32, 109-111; NMS-248F38; NMS-A92100). Notably, those from Broome (Hutcheson 2004, no. 47) and Wymondham (NMS-A92100) demonstrate comparable incised decoration on the side of the head.
In Suffolk, however, linch pins remain unusual finds, and this type is so far paralleled only in an incomplete example with differing decorative elements from near Eye (SF-F0F267; Martin et al. 2009, 62, fig. 12a). Indeed, to date the Suffolk PAS and HER record the heads of just 10 linch pins including the Eye example noted above. One, from Thorington, is of crescent-headed type (SF-4CBC64), while two examples, from Assington (SF-7A11D5) and Palgrave (NMS-AS23, duplicated as NMS-36E5C1), are of more unusual form. Finally, a group of six linch pin heads are noted from the excavation of an Iron Age metalwork hoard at Westhall in 1854 (WHL 007). A total of six feet from composite linch pins are recorded from the parishes of Akenham (AKE 021; Martin et al. 2000, 497-498, Fig. 152d), Alderton (SF-AC9AD2), Kettlebaston (SF-42A1A0), Great Thurlow (TUG 014; Martin et al. 1999, 361), and two from St. Mary South Elmham otherwise Homersfield (SEY 017; Martin et al 2000, 507, Fig. 152c; SEY 022, SF1181). In later contexts, examples of iron linch pins were identified at the Roman small towns of Hacheston (Blagg et al. 2004, 128-129, no. 229) and Pakenham (PKM 005).

The small quantity of linch pins from within the county at present does not allow for detailed comment on their development or context within the Suffolk landscape. All are from areas with demonstrable Iron Age to Roman activity, but there is so far no clear pattern in their distribution. This new example is significant in terms of its rarity and remarkable preservation, as well as being an important addition to the small corpus of material from the county. These objects offer a glimpse into high status activity at the end of the Iron Age and it is hoped that future finds will add to our understanding both of the deposition and context of the current example, and of Suffolk’s Iron Age past.

Bibliography


Andrew Brown has been Finds Recording Officer in Suffolk since 2008. His doctoral research through Bristol University focuses on the Iron Age Mediterranean, with specific emphasis on the material culture of Greece and Anatolia, cross-cultural interactions, and emergent regional identities. He is currently Iron Age research lead for the Çaltılıar Archaeological Project (Lycia, Turkey).
The intentional destruction and deposition of Bronze Age metalwork in South West England

Matthew G. Knight

The deliberate destruction of Bronze Age metalwork has been commonly noted in hoards of the Late Bronze Age of Britain, and indeed across Europe. It is not exclusive to metalwork, or even the Late Bronze Age, and occurs in a variety of contexts, including settlements, burials, wetlands and hoards; however, wider discussion of this phenomenon has only relatively recently attracted attention (Nebelsick 2000; Rezi 2011; Turner 2010; York 2002). Explanations for why objects, and specifically metalwork, were destroyed and deposited are often linked to the life-cycle of individuals and settlements (Brück 2006; Turner 2010), as a method for communicating ongoing socio-political agendas or for economic purposes (Barrett and Needham 1988, 138; Becker 2006; York 2002). Identification of deliberately damaged, decommissioned or fragmented pieces of metalwork often relies on the obvious nature of such acts that could not have occurred through accident, use, or taphonomic processes (e.g. a folded sword, or a crushed socketed axe). Authors are generally less keen to attribute intentionality to more uncertain damages, such as bent spear tips and fragmented axe cutting edges, instead preferring to interpret these damages as resulting from use or accident.

Use-wear experiments utilising bronze replicas, however, rarely produce damage such as that seen on so many prehistoric examples; this is perhaps in part due to the brief nature of so many experiments, especially when compared to the (probably) long use-life of many Bronze Age objects, or alternatively idealised compositions of metal – after all why produce a replica that is liable to break? The intention with the current project is thus to explore not only the social relationship that might have been held with these objects, but also the technical properties of metalwork and the skills necessary to decommission different pieces. How easy is it to break and crush a socketed axehead, for instance? What material knowledge is required in order to bend and fold a sword? Are palstaves inherently weak and prone to break across the stop-ridge as is commonly suggested (see Fig. 1)? Experimentation involving the use and subsequent destruction of replica artefacts is planned to help answer some of these questions.

I am investigating this phenomenon specifically in relation to material from South West England (Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset), although exploration of these ideas and themes has great potential for understanding broken objects and hoards across the British Isles. While much research has been done into individual sites and discoveries in this area, especially in recent years, a wider analysis of the metalwork and its context has not been performed since Susan Pearce’s monograph in 1983. A recent update of her corpus (Knight et al. 2015) has enabled this project to focus on specific case studies.
beyond the initial data collection and link them with other processes in the landscape such as monument construction and settlement abandonment. A key aim is to develop ideas about destructive acts as social phenomena.

So far over 200 objects from 125 findspots have been studied in museums across South West Britain, highlighting trends seen in other regions (e.g. Essex and Kent (Turner 2010) and the River Thames (York 2002)). A tendency towards the destruction of metal objects grows from the Middle to Late Bronze Age, with swords and spearheads predominantly suffering damage (see Fig. 2). Several large fragmented hoards have been discovered in recent years (e.g. St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall, and Langton Matravers, Dorset), which offer insights into ongoing social processes that can be compared with fragmented hoards in other areas. Isolated finds are rarely studied in investigations into destruction, but the large volume of data available through the PAS database means that trends in fragmentation are becoming more and more apparent, such as the breakage of socketed axe blades. It is possible that fragments previously assumed to be the result of use or accident are in fact intentional.

At present, one of the main aims is to put together a working methodology for identifying deliberate destruction in a way that has never been done before, using a combination of the archaeological record, academic literature, experimental archaeology, and knowledge held by non-archaeologists about the properties of bronze and how certain objects might have been used. As such, I would like to put out a call to LPFG readers who are willing to share their expertise, knowledge, advice and comments to help enhance this, especially those involved in ongoing or unpublished experiments utilising Bronze Age replicas that can inform about processes of damage or destruction.

The destruction of Bronze Age metalwork is a widespread process, not just in Britain, but across Europe, yet the study of it as a technical, or even as a social, process is still in its early stages. It is hoped that a collaborative approach involving experimentation will produce exciting results that can engage with research across multiple arenas.

Acknowledgments
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*Matthew Knight* is a PhD candidate at the University of Exeter and the University of Bristol under the supervision of Dr. Linda Hurcombe and Dr. Joanna Brück. He is particularly fascinated by the Bronze Age, and specifically the production, use and destruction of metalwork as a technical and social process across Bronze Age Europe. His ongoing research can be followed online at: [www.alifeinfragments.wordpress.com](http://www.alifeinfragments.wordpress.com). He can be contacted at: Mgk205@ex.ac.uk.
British Early Iron Age horse harness fittings: a reinterpretation of the winged objects from the Llyn Fawr hoard (c. 800-600BC)

Dot Boughton and Rena Maguire

Bronze bridle bits and other harness or cart or chariot fittings are very rare finds in British Early Iron Age (800-600BC) contexts, and we have no iron specimens. All of our British examples of harness fittings come from Early Iron Age metalwork hoards: the winged objects (here interpreted as kidney links or hame tugs, Fig. 1), the yoke mount and phalerae from Llyn Fawr (Rhondda Cynon Taff), the phalerae from Melksham (Wiltshire), a possible phalera from Sompting (Sussex) and the possible harness rings and strap fittings from Hindon (Wiltshire; Fig. 2) (Gingell 1979; Curwen 1948; Fox 1939). The small hoard from Stockbury (Kent, Fig. 3) is composed of one fragmentary bit and a small number of ingots (Treasure Number: 2011T110) and two fragmentary horse bits come from the same field as the Hindon Hoard (Wiltshire, Figs. 4 and 5), but were reported to the local FLO after recovery of the hoard (PAS references WILT-80FA63 and WILT-6D4FF8).

Aisling Nash discussed Later Iron Age (400BC-AD200) horse bits in Issue 3 of the LPFG Newsletter; in her article she investigated the control and manoeuvrability of Iron Age chariots using and comparing the set-up and layout of Iron Age and the current method of yoking. Like Nash’s paper, this contribution is also more concerned with examining Early Iron Age bits in terms of their functionality rather than their decorative style. Horse bits of the later Iron Age were classified in three main types (3-link, 2-link and a 2/3-link derivative type) which Nash found to vary in the severity of their action on the horse rather than in their date (Nash 2014, 9-10).

Research into horse harness and bits of the preceding Early Iron Age (c. 800-600BC) is limited. The greater number of curb shanks we know from British Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age contexts were made from antler or bone, and due to their fragility the two objects from the Llyn Fawr hoard which were previously identified as curbs shanks or winged chapes may be better identified as highly ornamented variations of a modern driving assemblage’s kidney links or hame tugs, connected to the collar of a draft animal. The two winged objects from Llyn Fawr find no parallel amongst the British Early Iron Age metalwork assemblage but there are three parallels from the cremation cemetery at Court-St-Étienne (Brabant, Belgium: Tombelles A and Z; Fig. 6) (Mariën 1958).
These were traditionally interpreted as curb shanks which influenced the interpretation of the objects from Llyn Fawr (Mariën 1958, 24-25, 84 and 247). However, their light construction would suggest that they were not bit components, which require a robust construction to facilitate protracted pulling and resistance pressure from connected reins. The size of the objects would exclude their use as part of a bridle assemblage, as they would be obstructive to the animal’s sight and performance. As lightweight links for the collar of a driving harness, they match modern analogues closely, apart from their ornate appearance (Fig. 7).

Allowing for a reinterpretation of the two winged objects from Llyn Fawr as links connected to a harness collar, we can postulate that bronze curb shanks were unknown in the British Early Iron Age, with the simple single joint snaffle most regularly found in harness assemblage finds such as in the assemblages from Stockbury and Hindon. If shanks were used, it is likely that most were made from antler and bone rather than metal. British examples for Late Bronze Age antler shanks come from the Heathery Burn Cave, Co. Durham, which also included small phalerae and four nave rings, suggesting that a cart – or its fittings – had also been deposited inside the cave (Britton and Longworth 1968). Other examples of antler curbs were found at or near settlement sites which produced Late Bronze Age as well as Early Iron Age metalwork, for example Ham Hill (Somerset), Potterne (Wiltshire), Bledlow (Buckinghamshire) and Washington (Lincolnshire) (Roes 1960, 68; Britnell 1976, 25, fig. 1; Coles et al. 1979, 5-11; Lawson 2000).

There are no decorative harness fittings such as winged objects or yoke mounts in the Stockbury (Kent) or Hindon (Wiltshire) Hoards (Treasure numbers 2011T110 and 2012T46). The Hindon Hoard contains – amongst socketed axes and early iron artefacts – 39 rings and a few fragments of sheet metal (PAS reference: WILT-9439A7), which may have functioned as strap junctions or strap distributors, while the small hoard from Stockbury consists of only two fragmentary horse bits, two undiagnostic axe fragments and ingots (PAS reference: KENT-CD6A33). Unlike in British contexts, horse-bits are widely known from Early Iron Age
contexts in continental Europe, where bits like that from Stockbury are classified as having a central joint with or without separate curb shanks. Roberts suggests that the closest parallel for the Stockbury bit is a horse-bit from a grave in Steinkirchen, Bavaria, Germany (Balkwill 1973, 434f, 448f, see also fig. 5, 32A). He adds that in more recent and thorough reviews of Hallstatt horse-bits in central Europe by Pare (1991) and Metzner-Nebelsick (1994), the typological schemes encompassing the Stockbury horse-bit have been refined. Both Pare (1991, 9-12, fig. 9 Types B/C) and Metzner-Nebelsick (1994, fig. 7, Type 1) place the horse-bit in the Hallstatt C period (c. 800-625 BC) which is the equivalent to the Llyn Fawr metalwork phase (c. 800-600 BC) in Britain (O’Connor 2007, fig. 7).

This short contribution suggests that bronze or iron harness fittings and snaffle bits were extremely rare in Early Iron Age Britain and that most curb shanks were made from organic materials such as antler or bone. The winged objects from Llyn Fawr, previously interpreted as chapes or curb shanks, may be better understood as kidney links or hame tugs. They match modern kidney links in shape and their decoration is limited to only one side. Furthermore they match the associated yoke mount in decoration and style: they could have all been attached to the same yoke.

Figure 6: Winged object from Court-St-Etienne, Brabant (Belgium) © Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bruxelles

Figure 7: Reconstruction © Rena Maguire
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Celts: Art and Identity
at the British Museum and the National Museum of Scotland

Anna Lewis

Any conversation about European later prehistory is bound to turn at some stage to the Celts: to the people, their material culture, their language and their legacy, and the debates about all of these points which have rumbled through British archaeology over the past twenty years. The Celts – and the controversies around who, when and where the Celts actually were and are – form the subject of the British Museum’s current major exhibition, organised in partnership with National Museums Scotland: Celts: Art and Identity. The exhibition is structured into three distinct parts, dealing in turn with ancient Celtic art, medieval Celtic Christianity, and the development of modern Celtic national identities. Tying in with the exhibition, the Later Prehistoric Finds Group and the Roman Finds Group held a joint conference at the British Museum on 6th November.

Celts is a blockbuster show which caters for a very broad audience, and has been well-received in the national press. Its greatest success is to have sourced so many marvellous examples of Bronze and Iron Age metalwork from across Europe, from the Gundestrup cauldron and the Torrs pony cap to the Basse-Yutz pair of flagons, with their handles in the form of elongated, almost serpentine dogs or wolves (Fig. 1), and the Trichtingen torc with its bull-head terminals. The visual presentation, especially in the first and second parts, is excellent. Soft, somewhat eerie lighting picks out the treasures from between pools of darkness. The high ceilings of the exhibition space are mollified by hanging gauzes, which follow the curves and sweeping lines of classic La Tène design – an inspired move by the exhibition architects – and amplify the atmosphere generated by the display of the artefacts themselves. Visitors pad from case to case through the gloom as though mesmerised.

The Art aspect of the show, then, is unfailingly impressive. The Identity aspect was always going to be more complicated. The exhibition sets out its theoretical stall quite clearly; speaking at the conference, John Collis said that it is the first major exhibition of Celtic material to be based on a “Celtosceptic” perspective. In essence, this is the argument that “the Celts” were not a single, self-defining people who, from the Bronze Age onwards, spread from a central European heartland across swathes of the continent; rather, “Celtic” is a label which has become attached to a range of different ethnic and cultural groups in Bronze and Iron Age Europe – including “true” Celts – who shared certain elements of material and social culture, and spoke related languages. The most controversial point of this thesis has been the claim that the British and Irish were never ethnically Celtic; and that therefore, while Celtic languages survive today in Wales, Ireland and Scotland, the self-identification of these modern nations with the ancient Celts is founded on a misreading of archaeological evidence.

Figure 1: Handle of one of the Basse-Yutz flagons (c) Trustees of the British Museum
The difficulty with using the exhibition to explore the question of identity is that, in the first section, there are no actual people – Celtic or otherwise – on display. There are no human remains, no every-day artefacts, and very little discussion of how different peoples in the period lived or thought. The people behind the glorious artwork remain obscure. This makes for a rather grating contrast with the modern section of the exhibition, where we are confronted with video footage of Irish folk-dancers, kilted bagpipe-players, and bards processing around the Eisteddfod. Like is not compared with like; inevitably, the revivalist aspects of modern national movements will look gimmicky next to the silent grandeur of the ancient art. There is a slightly mocking tone here to the deconstruction of modern Celtic identity, which arguably detracts from the serious underlying politics.

Between the ancient and modern parts of the exhibition lies the section on “Celtic Christianity”: the localised Christian traditions of Ireland and northern and western Britain in the early Middle Ages, distinct in certain key aspects from the Roman Church. On display are stone crosses, illuminated manuscripts – among them the St. Chad gospels – and smaller items of church furniture, including an iron hand-bell thought to have belonged to Saint Cuileáin (Fig. 2). Visually, many of these artefacts incorporate spirals, sweeps and sinuous patterns, combining echoes of La Tène artwork with Anglo-Saxon interlace and knotwork. It is here that evidence for cultural continuity from the Iron Age into the historic period can appear most convincing, in social as well as material culture: anyone familiar with medieval Welsh or Irish literature will recognise mythological tropes and themes working their way into the stories of the early Celtic saints, imbuing their own legends with pre-Christian magic*. From this point of view, it was extremely useful to attend the exhibition in conjunction with the conference, and to hear papers by Martin Goldberg and Fraser Hunter who spoke of “transformation”, “transfer” and “heritage” in Britain’s Roman and early medieval archaeology. These concepts are related to “continuity”, but significantly different, suggesting that successors to the insular Iron Age populations selectively adopted and adapted cultural elements from an earlier age.

Perhaps the modern Celtic renaissance can be considered in this tradition.

Celts: Art and Identity is at the British Museum until 31st January 2016, then moves to the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh from 10th March – 25th September 2016, in a revised format. Although it casts just a tantalising glance to the Celts themselves, it is a powerful celebration of the creative and technological achievements of Celtic art.

* See: The Welsh Saints: Studies in patterned lives by Elissa R. Henken (Boydell and Brewer 2001)

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Two ‘Iron Age’ puzzles from the Thames

Bob Wells and Jon Cotton

Introduction

Following on from the mystery object from south Essex published in the last newsletter, this note draws attention to two further copper alloy puzzles recovered from the Thames foreshore in the Putney/Wandsworth area of west London. Both appear to be of Iron Age inspiration. These were found by the first writer who has persevered for over forty years with foreshore walking and licensed metal detecting and who has, as a result, acquired an intimate knowledge of the areas of interest and of changes that have taken place along the tideway.

The locality from which the pieces were recovered is visually unprepossessing and difficult to search, with much miscellaneous debris and shifting silts deposited thereon. It is also possible that material may have been dumped here from past dredging programmes, and from clearances in the city further downstream. Problems of taphonomy aside, the area has a history of producing stray prehistoric finds of all types and dates, encompassing objects of stone, antler/bone, ceramic and metal.

Puzzle 1

The first piece (Fig. 1) was found in August 2012 lying within a layer of black silt at a depth of 4 inches (approximately 0.10m) at a point close to low water. As with many Thames finds, it retains its bright bronze surface colours.

The piece comprises two conjoined hollow ovoid bosses 13mm deep, 62.7mm in overall length and 21.6mm in width, weighing 6.8g, apparently formed from thin (0.5mm-0.8mm) sheet bronze. There appear to be faint signs of hammering/planishing inside the bosses, one of which has a 9.8mm long fine crack ending in a tiny hole. At either end a rectangular tag projects 9mm from each boss. One tag is 8mm wide and is integral to its boss. The other is 6mm wide, and is attached to its boss by a copper alloy rivet. This tag is bent, does not currently swivel freely, and is set at an angle as if in an ‘open’ position. As such the piece clearly forms part of a larger object.

Figure 1: Puzzle 1, beaten copper alloy bossed piece (scale 5cms). Drawing by Jon Cotton
Initial research did not reveal any direct parallels and it was registered with the Portable Antiquities Scheme as a medieval mount (PAS LON-064-A57). However, the lingering suspicion that it looked and felt prehistoric prompted further research both online and through the good offices of Pamela Greenwood, another foreshore researcher of many years’ standing. This located a report concerning a group of objects discovered in 1953 at the bottom of a well close to the sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia, near Corinth (Caskey 1960). Among the finds were two complete plain hinged bronze anklets or armrings with eight hollow bosses, of Celtic rather than Greek inspiration (ibid. 174–6, nos. 16 and 17) (Fig. 2). Such hohlbuckelringe or ‘hollow bulge rings’ belong to a group of female adornments that originate in the area of southern Germany and the modern Czech Republic in the late 4th – 3rd centuries BC (Krämer 1961). Other elaborately decorated examples cast in high relief have been found further east, with western outliers including that recovered from the river Tarn in south west France (e.g. Kruta 1975, 80; Megaw and Megaw 1989, 139; Harding 2007, 121–122).

On the face of it, our piece shares a number of similarities with the plain series, and appears to comprise the detachable element of just such an anklet or arming. However, there are some obvious differences: the Thames piece seems to have been made of sheet rather than cast bronze, and is consequently of a lighter, less robust form. It is also difficult to see quite how the tags attached to the bosses would have connected the surviving piece to the rest of the anklet/armring: the continental pieces were hinged on pins and clipped into position by a catch (e.g. as in Fig. 2). Our piece looks as though it would have to have employed some sort of slotted arrangement. Moreover, it is eccentric to the main central European distribution of these objects (but so too are the cast pair from Isthmia), and appears to have no close British parallels. Such differences notwithstanding, could our modest little object represent a British version of an exotic object seen at home or abroad, perhaps on the arm or ankle of a central European migrant – or is it part of something else entirely?

Puzzle 2

Puzzle 2 comprises two closely similar objects (Fig. 3) found six years apart but within feet of one another on the edge of a barge scoop further up the same stretch of foreshore. Both lay at a depth of around 3 inches (approximately 0.08m), in a layer of small pebbles and black silt.

The first piece, found in February 2009 (PAS LON-93E-5A3), comprises a solid copper-alloy Y-shaped object, 74mm in length and 24mm wide at the widest point, weighing 35.58g. The
second virtually identical object (no PAS record at time of writing) was found in early September 2015 and is 78mm in length and 24mm in width, weighing 37.18g. Both pieces appear to have been cast, presumably by the lost wax process, but are so similar in form that they hint at the existence of a single crisply-modelled pattern.

Both are gently curved in profile and terminate in a robust loop which shows no obvious signs of wear. At the point where the loop joins the shaft there is a well-moulded collar with a rounded pointed terminal facing the inside curvature. Further along where the shaft bifurcates are two globular mouldings also terminating in rounded points facing inwards. On the better preserved second piece the end of the shaft furthest from the loop has a slotted terminal and a transverse perforation some 3.5mm in diameter (Fig. 4). The latter houses an iron pin used to secure a now-broken iron figure-of-eight link turned through 90 degrees within the slot, which must have articulated with another element. It is unlikely that this would have been the first piece, however, as there is no sign of a slot in the (albeit damaged) corresponding terminal of the latter.

Stylistically both pieces belong within the late Iron Age tradition of metalworking (whatever that might imply about their actual date of manufacture), though so far a search has produced little in the way of direct parallels. Both fall within the generic class of objects usually characterised as vehicle- or harness-gear. Various and more specific suggestions as to function have been offered, encompassing bridle-bits, mirror-, tankard- and bucket-handles, though none of these seem to us especially convincing.

One suggestion offered here re-visits the harness option and focuses on the gentle curvature of the pieces as seen in profile, and the three inward-facing pointed terminals of the collared and domed elements. Both of these features – the gently curved profile and the pointed studs – could work in the context of articulated decorative fittings attached to nose- or brow-bands of horse bridles, with the curvature of the pieces accommodating the profile of the animal’s head, and the pointed terminals helping to prevent the fittings slipping off the leathers. Other pieces with curved longitudinal profiles have cast loops projecting from the back or inside face (e.g. MacGregor 1976, nos. 32–35) which provide an obvious and
more direct means of securing them to leather straps. Pointed elements on the rear faces of longitudinally curved pieces have occasionally been noted too, as on the strap mounts from Rainsborough, Northants and Dragonby, Lincs. (e.g. Jope 2000, pl. 271 d–f and g–h).

An intriguing alternative possibility, suggested to the first writer by Melanie Giles, is that the pieces could have adorned the collar of a hunting-dog or mastiff. If so, the two pieces indicate a large animal as the curvature of the pieces point to a collar close to 8 inches (approximately 0.20m) in diameter. Whether from a bridle or a collar, however, Iron Age harness-type gear is not especially well-represented in the London area (e.g Worrell 2007, fig. 2), and these latest Thames pieces add further interest to a stretch of river already notable for Iron Age metal finds including daggers, shields and brooches.

The writers would welcome comments on the identifications offered for either of these puzzles, and would be pleased to hear of any comparable finds. Our thanks are due to Melanie Giles, Pamela Greenwood, Michael Marshall, Courtney Nimura, Mansel Spratling and Kate Sutton for their help thus far.

References


Bob Wells is a retired Police Chief Superintendent with a lifelong obsession with all things historic. Born on the Kent coast with a tradition of beach combing, his fate was sealed upon seeing the Thames at low tide. Jon Cotton is a freelance archaeological consultant with a long-standing interest in the prehistory of the London region and the archaeology of the Thames.
A note on LPFG datasheets

Sophia Adams

With this issue of the LPFG newsletter we present the second in our series of finds datasheets: A short guide to Early Iron Age socketed axes in Britain (c.800-600 BC) by Dot Boughton. Dot has recently been awarded a doctorate for her research on these artefacts. Congratulations Dot and thank you for the datasheet. We’re sure our readers will find this a useful addition to our series.

We are keen to produce more datasheets on later prehistoric finds. Please do contact us if you have research that you would like to share in this way. The sheets are published on our website and sent to all members. The sheets are designed to give a brief introduction to finds based on in-depth research. They are limited to two sides of A4 and should include a description of the artefact or artefact type, illustrations and/or photographs of examples and information on their distribution, dating and form, plus a short list of references and preferably contact details of the author so readers can contact them with any further questions. We are able to help with design and formatting.

If you would like to volunteer to write a datasheet please contact me via the LPFG email: laterprehistoricfindsgroup@gmail.com.

Sophia Adams is Deputy Chair of the Later Prehistoric Finds Group.
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