



Introduction

The primary weapons throughout the Bronze Age were the spear and the hand-held blade (sword, rapier and dagger). The spear was formed by a bronze spearhead fitted to a wooden shaft and was usually hand-held in combat rather than thrown. The spearhead tip was used in thrusting moves and the sharpened blade edges in cutting and slashing moves. The wooden shaft also had combat use to knock the enemy off balance and to parry attacks from other spears or swords. Based on the archaeological record, Late Bronze Age spears with a bronze spearhead exceeded the number of contemporary swords by almost double (191%).

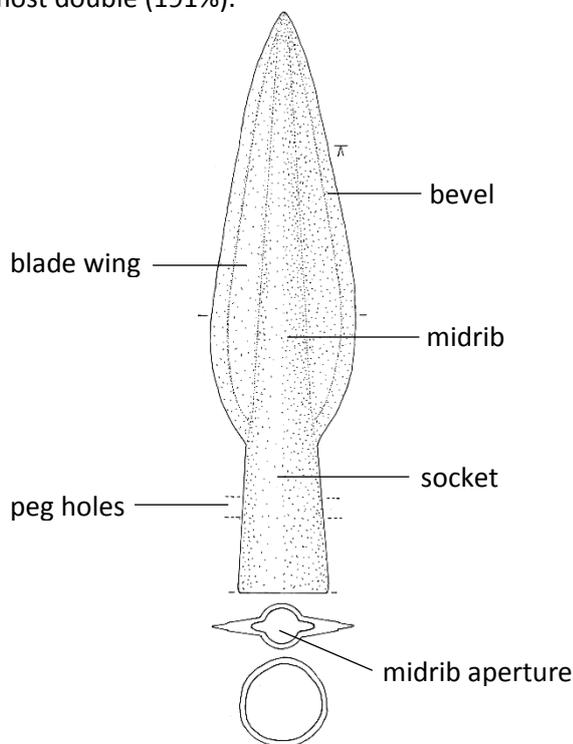


Fig.1. Spearhead Attributes

Form and Material

The basic form of a Late Bronze Age spearhead consists of a hollow socket to hold the wooden shaft, with blade wings on each side on the upper part. The upper socket is termed a midrib. In some cases the midrib aperture extends part way into the blade wings. There is normally a bevel at the blade edge, creating a sharp cutting edge. There are opposed peg holes on the socket (Fig. 1). Other attributes on certain groups of spearhead are described in the classification section below. The material used is bronze – copper alloy with tin and sometimes additional lead. The typical composition for LBA spearheads is 86% copper, 9% tin, 5% lead.

Dating

During the Middle Bronze Age, the spearheads were fixed to the wooden shaft using thongs through loops on the socket or blade base. As one of a number of changes in bronze technology at the MBA/LBA transition, the loops were replaced by peg holes in the socket through which wooden or bronze pegs fixed it to the shaft. The LBA spearheads with peg holes were current from c. 1100 BC until they were replaced by iron spearheads c. 800 BC.

Distribution

LBA spearheads have been recovered from England, Scotland and Wales, but there is a strong weighting to the south east of England from the Wash to the Solent (Fig. 2). A recent study has been published with a comprehensive catalogue and classification of c.1500 spearheads (Davis 2015). These have been grouped into regions in Fig. 2 and listed by percentage of the total LBA corpus.

Hoards account for 62% of the spearhead corpus in Britain in the LBA. These include several weapon hoards containing a large number of spearheads, e.g. Wilburton, Cambs, 87 spearheads; Blackmoor, Hants, 61; Broadward, Shrops, 45.

Region	%
South East	58
Scotland	12
Midlands	8
Upper Severn Basin	7
Northern England	7
South West	5
Wales	3

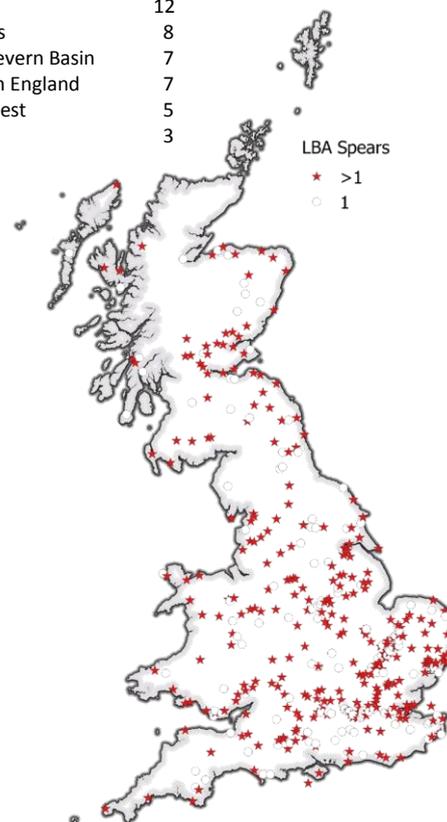


Fig.2. Distribution Map



Classification

A detailed classification of LBA spearheads has been developed in the recent comprehensive study (Davis 2015), and is listed as Groups 11 to 16.

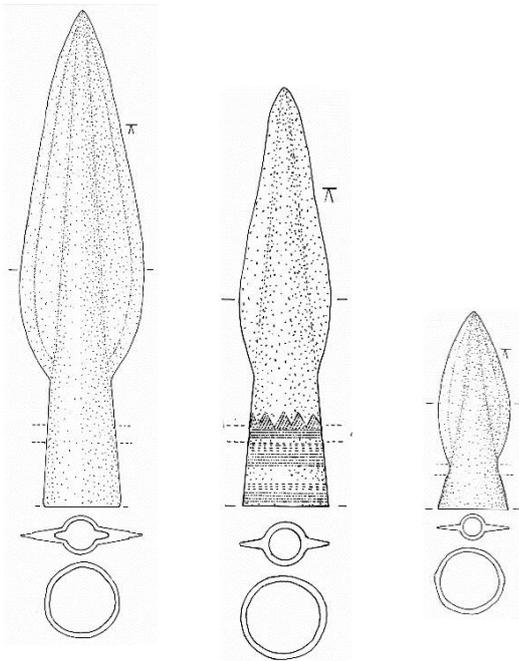


Fig.3. Group 11 Generic (examples)

Group 11: ‘Generic’ represents 72% of the corpus. Attributes are peg holes in the socket and various blade forms e.g. an even curve from blade/socket junction to the tip; a wide curving blade base with blade edges then leading straight to the tip. Overall spearhead length varies considerably from c.100mm to c.400mm. Several have incised decoration on the socket.

Group 12: has a ‘Hollow blade’ and no midrib

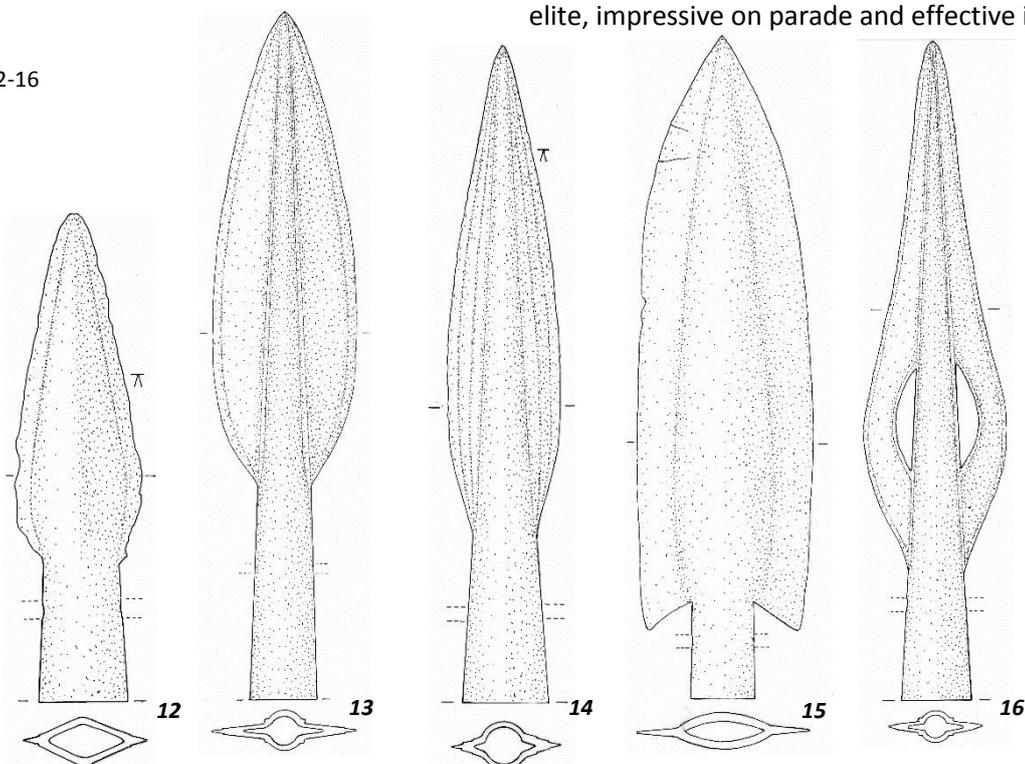
Group 13: has “Fillets” between the blade wings and the midrib

Group 14: has a “Multi-stepped blade” – two, three or four steps on the blade wings between the midrib and the blade edges.

Group 15: “Barbed” had a large, wide blade with large barbs at the blade base. It has a short socket and a low oval midrib with narrow shaft aperture. These spears are interpreted as ceremonial, parade weapons indicating rank, and would not be functional in combat.

Group 16: “Lunate” has large blade openings, normally with a half-moon shape on each side of the midrib. Other shapes of blade opening are large circles and slots. Some in the group are very large (over 400mm) and have additional decorative attributes. They are seen as weapons of the warrior elite, impressive on parade and effective in combat.

Fig.4. Groups 12-16



References

Davis, R. 2015. The Late Bronze Age spearheads of Britain. PBF V.7. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.
 Davis, R. 2012. The Early and Middle Bronze Age spearheads of Britain. PDF V.5. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner

Ehrenberg, M. R. 1977. Bronze Age spearheads from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. BAR British Series 34. Oxford: Archaeopress.