

## EIGHT EARLY ANGLO-SAXON METALWORK PIECES FROM THE CENTRAL MEON VALLEY, HAMPSHIRE

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper describes and discusses eight early Anglo-Saxon artefacts recovered by metal-detector users from the central Meon Valley. It is argued that the pieces contribute to the diverse cultural influences evidenced in the Meon Valley in the 5th and 6th centuries AD.*

### INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades a number of important early Anglo-Saxon metalwork pieces have been discovered by metal-detector users working in the central Meon Valley, Hampshire, which throw new light upon the development of the region in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. There is one 'assemblage' and two other sites. Three complete brooches, plus two broken examples, have been recovered from Shavards Farm, Meonstoke (SU 618208), an important site which has produced multiperiod evidence, including an Iron Age burial (unpublished), a Roman building (King 1996) and an Anglo-Saxon cemetery and settlement (Hughes 1985; 1986; Stedman and Stoodley, *forthcoming*). Two other objects have been found in Warnford parish, and a third from Soberton parish.

#### BUTTON BROOCH 1 FROM SHAVARDS FARM, MEONSTOKE (WMS ID E86.1) (Fig. 1)

The brooch has been cast in one piece out of copper alloy, and is in good condition. The front is gilded, although much of the gilt has worn away with the remainder preserved within the features of the mask. The brooch has a diameter of 20 mm



Fig. 1 Button brooch 1 from Shavards Farm, Meonstoke (scale 2:1)

and a rim between 2 mm – 3.5 mm high angled at 70°. It has been damaged between the mouth and the rim by a perforated punch, diameter 2.5 mm at a 160° angle. The perforation was probably to allow the brooch to be suspended on a necklace. The pin on its reverse would have been aligned vertically when worn with the face on the front naturalistically displayed, and with the catch plate at the bottom. The hinge-lug was damaged and the pin and catch plate removed when the brooch was perforated.

This brooch belongs to a widespread type known as button brooches, datable to the late fifth and sixth centuries, and found mostly in southern England. It belongs to class Iii of Avent and Evison's (1982) typology. The face has hair represented by two vertical lines rather than the more usual helmet. A T-shaped nose, eyebrow detail, and angular eyes are also recognisable, with cheek pieces represented by narrow bars, those on the right side are straight, those on the left hand turned inwards towards the nose. The face has a

narrow mouth, its features still clearly definable although partly obscured by the perforation. The average diameter for class Iii brooches is 25.1 mm (Avent and Evison 1982, 78, table 1), so with a diameter of only 20 mm it is to date the smallest example of this class. It is also the only one with the pin fastening aligned down the face, except for one from Long Wittenham I 20 (Berkshire) (*ibid.* 86).

Examples of class Iii button brooches have hitherto been limited to Wiltshire and the Upper Thames region, so the Meon Valley example extends the distribution southwards. Avent and Evison suggested a middle fifth century date for Iii brooches (1982, 99 and fig 13). Dr Martin Welch, however, has cast doubt upon this, arguing instead that the most convincing date for the appearance of button brooches is the late fifth century (1985, 144).

#### BUTTON BROOCH 2 FROM SHAVARDS FARM, MEONSTOKE (WMS ID E86.2) (Fig. 2)

The second button brooch from Shavards Farm is again cast in one piece out of copper alloy, gilded on the front but with most of the gilt remaining. The diameter is 19 mm rim height of 2.5 mm at an angle of 60°. Part of the right hand side of the rim was broken off in antiquity, but it is otherwise in fairly good condition. The hinge and the catch plate on the reverse are both incomplete; the pin was aligned down the face of the brooch like brooch 1, with the catch plate from a pin at the bottom. It has traces of oxidised iron corrosion from a pin.



Fig. 2 Button brooch 2 from Shavards Farm, Meonstoke (scale 2:1)

The brooch belongs to class F of Avent and Evison's typology (1982, 84, plate 16). The face mask consists of a helmet, which is determined by a pair of raised and curved eyebrows. The eyebrows meet at the top of a triangular nose that in turn joins the two single-element cheek pieces. The eyes are angular to sub-rounded and the face has a somewhat distorted mouth in which a tongue may be discerned.

Avent and Evison list only three examples of the class F variant: two from Pewsey (Wiltshire) and one from Worthy Park (Hampshire) (Avent and Evison 1982, 84–5). The Meonstoke example is a significant addition to this small class, enlarging a distribution which is centred upon Hampshire and Wiltshire. The brooch is most similar to the Worthy Park example, and although its cheek pieces are less pronounced, the unusual character of the mouth and the rounded feel of the eyes are very similar. The diameter is close to the average of the class, 20.1 mm. Avent and Evison suggest that this class was in existence before the end of the fifth century (1982, 100), but the associated artefacts with the Worthy Park brooch imply that production of the type continued through the first half of the sixth.

#### DISC BROOCH FROM SHAVARDS FARM, MEONSTOKE (Fig. 3)

A metal-detector user recovered this piece from the spoil heap of the 1999 excavations at Shavards Farm. It was cast in one piece in copper alloy and is

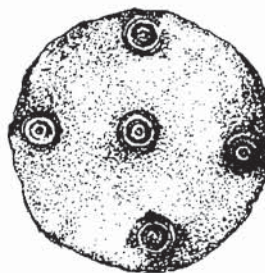


Fig. 3 Disc brooch from Shavards Farm, Meonstoke (scale 1:1)

in medium to poor condition having traces of corrosion on all surfaces and a worn patina. The brooch consists of a circa 1 mm thick disc, slightly convex, with a diameter of 34 mm. There is no evidence of tinning or gilding. The iron pin no longer survives, but the 'safety pin' arrangement of the catch plate and spring lug still remain *in situ* with iron oxidation being present as staining around each lug.

The front of the brooch has been decorated with a simple motif of five punched ring-and-dot motifs or 'bull's eyes'. Each ring consists of three concentric rings, in a simple cruciform pattern. The central punch has a diameter of 6 mm, while the four outer punches have diameters of 5 mm each. Ring-and-dot designs are particularly common on late Roman and early Anglo-Saxon metalwork, and disc brooches were especially popular within Wessex and the Upper Thames Valley. Various designs have been found in southern Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, including several within the late Roman installations at Portchester (Cunliffe 1976, 205), Bitterne (Cotton and Gathercole 1955, 29) and the possible fort at Carisbrooke (I.o.W.) (Stedman 1998, 112). Hampshire has not as yet provided a direct parallel for the Meonstoke brooch, although a similar ring-and-dot decorated pair of disc brooches was recovered from the Portway cemetery at Andover (Cook and Dacre 1985, 78, fig 64), and an almost identical brooch was found in East Sussex at Beddingham (Welch 1983, 58). A study by Dickinson has arrived at a secure chronology for the brooch type, placing manufacture between AD 450 and 550 (Dickinson 1979, 39).

#### SMALL SQUARE-HEADED BROOCH FRAGMENT FROM SHAVARDS FARM, MEONSTOKE (WMS ID. E87.19) (Fig. 4)

This decorated brooch is cast in one piece out of copper alloy. The front piece was originally gilded and traces of gilt are preserved within the plate's decorative elements. Despite being broken just below the junction of the bow, and thus missing most of its footplate, the remaining part of the brooch is in good condition. The headplate measures 11 mm by 19 mm, the surviving length 21 mm from the top of the headplate to the break at the top of

the footplate. The iron pin on the reverse has not survived, although its pin bar lug still survives.

The headplate is rectangular, consisting of a raised outer border punched with annular dots. The border is broken up at the upper and lower corners of the headplate by four radial lines connecting with the flattened central moulding of the headplate. The moulding encloses a rectangular frame line which in turn surrounds another rectangular frame, containing two separate bar lines. Two pairs of three distinct radial lines issue from the central moulding of the headplate. These continue downward, flanking either side of a curved short bow spine, with a marked carination, connecting the headplate to the missing footplate. The central moulding and the internally flanked bow spine thus forms a distinctive 'T' shape. The two outer radial lines connected with the footplate on either side of the bow spine. These lines would probably have formed border lines for Style I animal heads on the footplate; the only element surviving are two curved eye motifs within each of the footplate's upper corners.

The brooch is an early to middle sixth-century Kentish form, which was characterised by a rectangular expanded footplate (Arnold 1982, 55). It corresponds to a group of broadly comparable small square-headed brooches that have different decorative elements in regard to headplates, bow spines and footplates. In detail it is similar to examples from Bifrons, Sarre (Aberg 1926, 79–80) and Chatham Lines (Kent) (MacGregor and Bolick 1993, 121), High Down (Sussex) (Welch 1983, 73–74 and fig 87), and Chessell Down (I.o.W.) (Arnold 1982, 55 and fig 25).



Fig. 4 Small square-headed brooch fragment from Shavards Farm, Meonstoke (scale 1:1)

**SMALL-LONG BROOCH FRAGMENT  
FROM SHAVARDS FARM, MEONSTOKE  
(WMS ID E87.23) (Fig. 5)**

The brooch fragment is made of copper alloy and was cast in one piece. Unfortunately its surfaces are badly worn and pitted and a break on the bow spine has removed the lower footplate. The complete length from headplate to the break in the bow spine is 26 mm. The headplate is 20 mm wide and 13 mm long but the terminal at the lower right hand corner has been broken off. Both the breaks in the terminal of the bow spine and the headplate are worn, suggesting that the damage was incurred in antiquity. The iron pin has not survived, but as with the small square-headed brooch, the pin bar lug still survives on the back of the headplate. The square headplate has two semicircular notches separating its base from the bow spine. There is no decoration on the obverse of the headplate, yet the bow spine shows a raised transverse and lateral rib.

The 'small-long' brooch is generally associated with Anglian areas. The Meonstoke brooch belongs to a sub-type of Leeds's class III typology (1945, 26 and fig 16): Eii, a *cross pâtée* type with a square-topped headplate without basal notches and perforations. It can probably be placed in the first half of the sixth century (Welch 1983, 67). Parallels are not numerous and are mainly confined to Lincolnshire and central East Anglia. Other classes of small-long brooches are known from the cemeteries of Alfriston and Highdown in Sussex (Welch 1976, 9; 1983, 66-7), Collingbourne Ducis (Wiltshire) (Gingell 1978, 61), Andover (Hampshire) (Cook and Dacre 1985, 80) and Alton (Hampshire) (Evison 1988, 8).



Fig. 5 Small-long brooch fragment from Shavards Farm, Meonstoke (scale 1:1)

**BUTTON BROOCH FROM WARNFORD  
PARISH (WMS ID E42. 51) (Fig. 6)**

Discussion of the second assemblage begins with a button brooch from Warnford. The brooch is cast in one piece from copper alloy and was originally gilded: traces of this still remain preserved in the features of the mask. It has a diameter of 19 mm, with a rim 2.8 mm high at an angle of 80°. The brooch sustained serious damage in the plough soil resulting in the loss of most of the rim, only a small section on the right hand side remaining. Although the damage has been largely restricted to the rim, the face mask has also been affected at the 135° angle. In addition, the patina has suffered from the effects of bronze disease, while on the reverse the pin is missing and both the hinge and catch plate have also suffered. The iron pin would have been aligned across the face, fastening under the catch plate at the right hand side.

The design consists of a rounded helmet that contains a separate internal bar. It has horizontal eyebrows that display a slight curvature, and a nose with slightly flaring nostrils. The face has one small raised dot for an eye on the right side, though its counterpart on the left side is apparently missing. The eye rings are associated with very short bars that are almost non-existent, and the cheeks are represented by double-element pieces. The inner piece on the right side has a more distinctively curved form than its counterpart on the left. An apparently grinning mouth is also clearly definable.

The brooch seems to belong to Avent and



Fig. 6 Button brooch from Warnford parish (scale 2:1)

Evison's class Bi, which incidentally has a distribution in southern central England. The presence of an impressive moustache with upturned ends, however, suggests that this example should be placed in class B miscellaneous.

This class of varied brooches is found in southern England and France (Avent and Evison 1982, 82), with the brooches in England being recovered from Kent, Hampshire and Wiltshire, though none is directly comparable to the Warnford brooch. The most realistic date for the production of class B miscellaneous brooches is within the first half of the sixth century.

#### TWEEZER FRAGMENT FROM WARNFORD PARISH (Fig. 7)

This fragment belongs to a pair of tinned copper alloy tweezers manufactured out of copper alloy sheet. Unfortunately, the artefact is broken at the apex, and the other half was not recovered. The surviving half is 58 mm in length with a varying width: 9 mm at the bottom and 3 mm at the top.

The fragment belongs to the functional 'Roman' type that is robust in form. The upper ends of the arms are constricted so as to form a terminal loop, which probably held a ring, thus permitting the object to be suspended from a belt.



Fig. 7 Tweezer fragment from Warnford parish (scale 1:1)

In common with many examples, the distal ends are also expanded. It has been decorated, like many of these tweezers, with zones of incised horizontal and transverse lines (Myres and Green 1973, 105). However, a notable difference is that it has only one incised diagonal cross. A similar faceted design has also been found upon a late fifth-sixth-century bronze nail cleaner from the Roman building at Meonstoke (Stedman *forthcoming*). The piece also displays a row of rectangular punched squares along the lower half of the arm. Similar design elements have been found stamped upon a tinned copper alloy sieve-spoon from Northbrook Farm, Micheldever (Johnston 1998, 98–99).

Similar examples to this piece have been found from early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Wessex. Alton (Hampshire) has produced two examples (Graves 2 and 35) (Evison 1988), though the pair most similar was found in Grave 1 at Winterbourne Gunner (Wiltshire) (Musty and Stratton 1964, fig 5). Instead of having punched squares on its lower half it has two rows of annular stamps, though the upper half is very reminiscent of the Warnford example. Examples of tweezers similar in form and decoration are broadly datable to the fifth and sixth centuries (Welch 1983, 107).

#### SAUCER BROOCH FROM SOBERTON PARISH (Fig. 8)

The saucer brooch was cast in one piece out of copper alloy. The front was originally gilded and much of this still remains. The brooch has a diameter of 39 mm with a rim 6 mm high at an angle of 30°. The piece can be described as being in reasonable condition, although the rim has sustained damage in a number of places, most notably on the right side where about one third of it is missing. The pin was lost in antiquity and the hinge and catch plate are also both incomplete.

The brooch displays a seven running spiral design and therefore belongs to group 1.3 of Dickinson's typology (Dickinson 1976, 123; 1993). A boss in the centre is enclosed by a single concentric ring, and then by the seven running-spiral design, which is characterised by long ex-



Fig. 8 Saucer brooch from Soberton parish (scale 1:1)

tensions, or spurs, emanating from each coil and extending to an outer ring. Interestingly, an extension of the spiral form is a feature that is found on continental brooches (Böhme 1974, Taf 31.2; quoted in Evison 1988, 9).

The design is reasonably simple in form utilising two separate concentric fields, a design feature found distributed on brooches throughout southern England, such as those located at Singleton (West Sussex) (Welch 1983, 47 and fig 127c), Orpington (Kent) (Tester 1969, 145 and fig 9) and possibly a fragmentary example from cremation 78 at Andover (Hampshire) (Cook and Dacre 1985, 79 and fig 79). More complex examples displaying seven running spirals were excavated from grave 12 at Alton. This pair of brooches includes beading around the central boss and outer border (Evison 1988, 9). As a whole, the group of 1.3 saucer brooches is most densely concentrated in the Upper Thames Valley and Warwickshire. Thus an example from the Meon Valley widens its distribution and is an important addition to this class of saucer brooch. The group is dated to the sixth century generally, though some associations suggest that deposition took place in the later part of that century.

## DISCUSSION

Questions concerning the context from which the Meonstoke pieces were recovered have to be discussed. All these artefacts, except for the disc

brooch, were found close to the site of a known Anglo-Saxon settlement and ploughed-out pre-historic monument. The two button brooches from Meonstoke do not make an identical pair, which is not significant considering that they were not found in sealed burial contexts. Moreover, it is not unusual to find unmatched brooches in burial contexts, for example, a class Bii and G were recovered from grave 80 at Worthy Park (Hampshire). However, although such metalwork is usually found in a burial context, in this case it is argued that they were originally associated with the settlement, and were moved down slope by agricultural ploughing. This interpretation is preferred because they were also found with a cluster of late fifth- to sixth-century objects that included numerous lead loomweights – objects almost always found on settlements but not in cemeteries. A settlement context for these pieces is further suggested by the results of recent fieldwork and excavation carried out close to the find spots, demonstrating that the middle Anglo-Saxon settlement sampled by Hughes in the 1980s (Hughes 1985; 1986) continued into this area. On the basis of the pits excavated, which are concentrated in this area, it can be suggested that this was probably the industrial zone of the settlement (Stedman and Stoodley *forthcoming*). It could therefore be argued that the early Anglo-Saxon artefacts had been collected together as scrap for reuse by the craftsmen of this middle Saxon farmstead. A useful parallel is provided by a small-long brooch from Hamwic, which may have arrived within the mercantile settlement as scrap metal, perhaps to serve a recycling purpose (Hinton 1996, 5).

Overall, it is not surprising that these putative sites are closely associated with a river, and thus fit into the settlement pattern already strongly evidenced in Hampshire, as in the Itchen Valley (Eagles 1994, 16). At a more local level, the findspots can be seen as underlining the importance of fording points in regard to Anglo-Saxon settlement. For example, the artefacts from Warnford parish were found on a false declivity of a downland slope, above the Warnford crossing over the Meon. Also, the sites seem to be associated with traditional east-west stock routes, which extended across the downland into eastern

Wessex from Sussex (Stedman *forthcoming*). The artefacts are therefore important because they may tentatively suggest the continued use of ancient routes and attest to contact between neighbouring tribal groups.

Moreover these artefacts are important because it is not unreasonable to suggest that they were not casual losses but were originally associated with early Anglo-Saxon sites and act as indicators of where settlement took place. The saucer brooch from Soberton parish, extends the distribution of sites further south down the river valley. The most interesting site currently is Shavards Farm, Meonstoke, where the artefacts in conjunction with the evidence for sixth-century structures which were erected on the site of the abandoned Roman villa (King 1996, 60; Stedman *forthcoming*), may indicate a key area where the initial Germanic settlement was concentrated and is thus important for assessing the Roman to Saxon transition in the Valley.

These objects add to the growing corpus of early Anglo-Saxon metalwork from Hampshire. Until the discovery of the small-long brooch fragment these types had been conspicuously absent from southern Hampshire and also the Isle of Wight in the sixth century, which prompted David Hinton to surmise that they may not have been part of the 'Jutish' dress style despite the discovery of one in a later context in Saxon Southampton (Hinton 1996, 5). The button brooches are especially interesting. The evidence for such brooches in Hampshire has recently been highlighted following the recovery of two from Northbrook, Micheldever (Johnston 1998, 98). Their presence in the Meon Valley, alongside brooches from Alton, Droxford and Worthy Park, attest a much wider distribution than previously believed. In particular, the type F brooch from Shavards Farm is further evidence that this is a type with a limited distribution in Hampshire and Wiltshire, which probably reflects local production, perhaps even an itinerant smith (*pers. comm.* D.A. Hinton). The authors are also aware of other button brooches from the county, but because of the circumstances surrounding their discovery are unable to pass comment on them. However, the evidence is

starting to suggest that these brooches were much more prevalent than once assumed, and an assessment of the evidence from Hampshire is urgently required.

The mention by Bede (H.E. iv. 13) of the *Meanarorum prouinciam* (province of the dwellers by Meon) and the evidence of the place-name *Ytedene*, 'valley of the Jutes' near East Meon, suggests that the Meon Valley was home to a distinct group of Jutes settled within a wider Jutish province centred on southern Hampshire (Eagles 1994, 25; Yorke 1989). Although the historical and place-name evidence is generally accepted as reliable, the archaeological evidence for a Jutish enclave in Hampshire has not proved so incontrovertible (Welch 1996, 35). This is because the area has yet to produce material of a distinctively Kentish character, such as that found in Chessell Down cemetery on the Isle of Wight (Arnold 1982). The only cemetery in the Meon Valley to have been examined partly under modern archaeological conditions is the fifth- and sixth-century burial ground at Droxford (Aldsworth 1979). The artefacts recovered, such as disc, saucer and button brooches, suggest a settlement with a predominantly Saxon character. Only one brooch of Kentish and one of Frankish derivation were recovered. However, conclusions should not be based on only one partially excavated site.

In the absence of any other excavated cemeteries, finds of individual artefacts gain increased importance for assessing the cultural characteristics of the area. Yet the majority of pieces in the collection studied here again suggest culturally mixed communities, though with a strong Saxon characteristic generally. This is particularly relevant to the button brooches, which have associations with southern central England. Only one of the pieces has a direct association with Kent, and processes such as immigration need not necessarily be evoked to account for the presence of such metalwork in the area. Rather, gift exchange, marriage alliance, trade or the adoption of metalworking traditions by itinerant craftsmen could explain its presence. It must be remembered, however, that the artefacts were not found in sealed burial contexts, and moreover came from a number of different sites. They cannot therefore directly comment on the sites from which they came, but,

taken as a whole, contribute to the general picture which is emerging of the diverse cultural influences in the Meon Valley in this period.

## CONCLUSION

The paper has demonstrated that there is much that can be learnt from a modest collection of unstratified artefacts. The information that they have provided regarding settlement patterns and cultural influences in the Meon Valley is particularly important, and the prompt publication of other pieces is strongly urged. Moreover, the scheme for the voluntary recording of finds is in Hampshire producing a not insubstantial quantity of artefacts of early Anglo-Saxon date. The scheme is in its infancy, and not without its problems, but it is definitely a step in the right direction. If the problems regarding confidentiality surrounding certain artefacts and their findspots can be resolved, and the artefacts made available for study, the benefit of this for academic study would be enormous. This opportunity

should not be allowed to pass: during the next decade our understanding of the evolution of Hampshire and its place within England can be greatly increased.

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