

TWO ANGLO-SAXON BROOCHES FROM THE CENTRAL MEON VALLEY, HAMPSHIRE

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses two early Anglo-Saxon brooches that were recovered from the central Meon Valley by a metal detector user. The form and style of both artefacts is discussed and their importance is evaluated against similar finds from southern England.

INTRODUCTION

A disc brooch of later fifth- to earlier sixth-century AD date was discovered in 2000, while a fragment of an earlier sixth-century AD small square-headed brooch was found in 2002. With the kind permission of the landowners, the finder immediately reported the artefacts, and their find spots, to the Portable Antiquities Scheme for Hampshire. The information was subsequently added to the Hampshire County Council Sites and Monument Record and the Winchester Museum Services database.

DISC BROOCH (FIG. 1)

The artefact was recovered in November 2000 from a location on the central eastern river terrace close to the village of Meonstoke within Corhampton and Meonstoke Parish. The copper alloy brooch is incomplete and in poor condition with the edges and exterior surfaces of the obverse of the artefact being heavily abraded. The brooch measures 30mm in diameter and weighs 15gms in total: with the thickness of the disc ranging from 1–2mm. The obverse has produced evidence of applied surface tinning and is decorated by

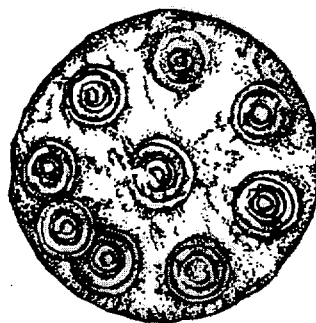
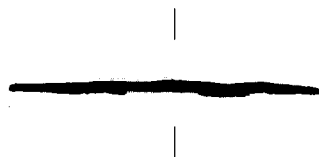


Fig. 1 The Meonstoke disc brooch illustrated (1:1)

nine heavily punched concentric ring and dot 'bulls eye' stamps, each measuring 2mm in diameter. A poorly stamped ring and dot motif was punched in the centre and is surrounded by eight well-spaced concentric ring and dot punches. One punch has been over punched by another which has disfigured the overall design symmetry. Fine notch marks are also present around the perimeter edge of the obverse with file marks being visible on the reverse. No evidence for the pin arrangement has survived on the reverse.

DISCUSSION

Hampshire has numerous examples of this later fifth- to earlier sixth-century brooch type which utilise ring and dot punches and notch marks as decorative design elements. Two were excavated from the later Roman period installations at Portchester (Cunliffe 1976, 205–7, fig. 136.44) and Clausentum (Bitterne) (Cotton & Gathercole 1958, 45, fig. 12.5). A further example was recovered from the environs of Carisbrooke Castle (Wight) (Stedman 1998, 112–115, fig. 3; Tomalin 2002, 55) where investigations revealed three sixth-century inhumation graves (Young 2000, 190–1). From within the Meon Valley a pair of unpaired brooches was recovered from the Droxford cemetery (Grave 36) (Aldsworth 1979, 132–4, fig. 29.2–3, fig. 52), while another was found at Shavards Farm, Meonstoke (Stedman & Stoodley 2000, 134–5, fig. 3). In northern Hampshire similar brooches have been recovered from the Portway East cemetery (Andover) (Cook and Dacre 1985, 73, 78–79).

Elsewhere disc brooches were deposited within graves at Beddingham Hill (Welch 1983, ii, fig. 62a), Alfriston (Griffith & Salzmann 1914, pl. 4) and Highdown Hill (Sussex) (Welch 1976, 7, pl. 3.10; Welch 1983, i, 58–9, 631, fig. 115 a-b & c). And in Wiltshire the cemeteries of Petersfinger (Leeds & Shortt 1953, 46, pl. 5x), Collingbourne Ducis (Davies 1985, fig. 8) and Market Lavington (Williams & Newman 2006, figs. 43, 38.308 and 31.19–20) have also proven to be productive. Brooches with very similar design forms to the Meonstoke artefact have also been excavated

from cemeteries in the Upper Thames Valley (MacGregor & Bolick 1993, 64–68).

SMALL SQUARE-HEADED BROOCH FRAGMENT (FIG. 2)

A fragment of a small square-headed brooch was retrieved from the western river terrace above the modern village of Exton, in the Parish of Exton, in September 2002. It was discovered close to the Southern Hampshire Ridgeway, the ancient stock track known locally as the *Whiteway* that runs over Beacon Hill in the direction of Winchester (Collins & Hurst 1978, 14–5). The gilded brooch has suffered a longitudinal break across the upper cusped projections of the footplate, but despite this it has been identified as an Aberg Type 131. At its fullest extent the artefact measures 22mm long and 18mm wide. The footplate is 1mm thick, with its form tapering downwards as an expanded rectangle. The decorative scheme is reasonably clear with gilt being thickly applied over 60–70% of the face. Wear patterns are present on the footplate centre, upon the terminal lobe, and within the lower left hand field. The missing upper half would have comprised a rectangular head plate with a raised rectangular moulding, an arched bow spine, and the upper elements of the cusped projections of the footplate.

The upper right hand and left hand fields of the footplate were decorated with chip-carved Style I zoomorphic motifs situated within the surviving lower part of the cusped projections of the footplate. The animal art motifs were flanked by a broad, raised, longitudinal, moulded median line that issued downwards from the absent head plate. The longitudinal line ran over the missing bow, finally abutting against the lower footplate 'lobe' terminal. The median line is part of a wider longitudinal and transverse cruciform scheme unifying the head plate, bow and footplate. A border originating from the two outer radial lines of the head plate frames the upper left hand field of the footplate. Two radial lines also flank the raised longitudinal median line running down the bow spine and flute outwards to frame the

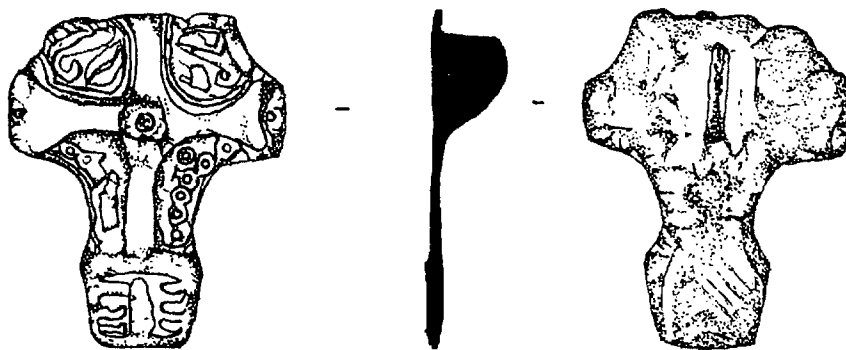


Fig. 2 Small square-headed brooch fragment (2:1)

Style I motifs, and the abbreviated lateral lobe moulding below. Two upraised forearms can just be discerned in the upper left and right hand cusped projection fields. The disarticulated limbs were part of a wider 'helmet-head' anthropomorphic design that comprised disarticulated limbs, hips, and eyes etc.

The transverse median moulding issues outwards into abbreviated lateral lobes that are terminated by two ovoid mouldings, each containing an annular punch measuring 1mm in diameter. These mouldings probably enclosed garnets or imitations of such, or perhaps contained inlaid niello. At the centre of the median ridge a single, large annular circlet punch, diameter 2.5mm, may also have been decorated in a similar way. The longitudinal median moulding divides the lower footplate into two separate fields. Within the lower right-hand field, seven interlocking annular punches, diameter 2mm, formed a single linear border offset from the transverse and longitudinal median mouldings. Two identical punch motifs, suggest that a similar design filled the opposite side of the lower footplate.

The sub-angular expanded footplate has a 'tongue' shaped lobe terminal with a badly worn surface, measuring 6mm long by 7mm wide and containing a slightly raised rectangular moulding divided vertically and horizontally into six rectangular billets that is formed by separate bars each measuring 1mm long by 2mm wide.

The patina of the brooch's footplate reverse is in reasonable to good condition and four closely set linear marks are identified which may be evidence of the tooling process, or post-depositional damage. The only part of the pin mechanism to survive was the lower section of the catch plate, measuring 5mm in length by 4mm.

DISCUSSION

A complete small square-headed brooch and two brooch fragments of this type are now known from the central Meon Valley and although not recovered from secure archaeological contexts their find spots can be associated with known Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. The complete example was recovered from a corpus of material that was rescued when the late fifth- to the sixth-century cemetery at Droxford was disturbed in 1900 (Aldsworth 1978, 136, 143, fig. 31.2). A gilded copper alloy brooch fragment (footplate) of an Aberg Type 131 brooch was also found within the environs of the Anglo-Saxon farmstead and cemetery at Shavards Farm, Meonstoke (Hughes 1986; Stedman & Stoodley 2000, 135; Stoodley & Stedman 2001; Stoodley & Stedman *forthcoming*).

Both the Exton and Meonstoke pieces can be linked to a pair of gilt copper-alloy brooches retrieved from Grave 2 (Barrow 2), Chatham Lines (Kent) (Aberg 1926, 91, fig. 152;

MacGregor & Bolick 1993, 123–4, fig. 14.9). This inhumation was accompanied by an assemblage that included amongst other items a copper-alloy button brooch, a pair of radiate-headed brooches and a sieve spoon (Douglas 1793, 6, pl. ii, 3–4). The Bifrons cemetery (East Kent) produced a pair of silver-gilt small squared-headed brooches in Grave 51 that had design elements and a form which are extremely similar to the Exton brooch fragment. This female was also interred with a rich assemblage that included a pair of gilt bronze bird-brooches, a silver toilet implement, a silver gilt spoon set decorated with garnets, a crystal ball in a silver sling and gold-braid fragments (Chadwick Hawkes 2000, 41–2, 44, fig. 24, 3–4).

Other examples were retrieved from Grave 2 at High Down (West Sussex), which contained three examples, two of which formed a matching pair that can be closely paralleled to the Exton specimen (Welch 1983, 603). The form of the Exton footplate can also be linked to a brooch group from Chessell Down, Wight, whose footplates are generally divided by longitudinal and transverse median ridges and lobe footplate terminals (Arnold 1982: fig. 25, 12.13, fig. 26.18.19, pl. 7 b-c).

CONCLUSION

Several comparable examples of the Meonstoke disc brooch have been recovered from later Roman period military sites and Anglo-Saxon cemeteries around the Solent region. The Portchester 'Saxon Shore' fort being situated close to the mouth of the River Meon may have become a focus for settlement for Germanic migrants during the later fifth-century (Cunliffe 1976, 121–2, 301–2; Cunliffe 1993, 272). The evidence for an immediate Post-Roman phase at Clausentum (Bitterne Manor) is not so clear; although the presence of Anglo-Saxon material and associated burials dating to between the sixth to ninth century AD could provide a likely context for the recovery of a disc brooch (Cotton & Gathercole 1958, 45; Russell 2001, 23).

These simple ring and dot decorated disc brooches were part of a 'Saxon' cultural identity

that emerged during the later fifth century and influenced female dress styles and personal display in southern England (Dickinson 1979, 39; Eagles 2001, 217). Such dress fashions could easily have been adopted, or arguably adapted by the surviving native Romano-British female population, especially as a similar type of brooch was used in Roman Britain (Dickinson 1979, 48–53). Later Germanic brooch forms may have been acceptable to former Romano-British women or women who claimed descent from a Romano-British past (Dark 2000, 71).

The fragment of a small square-headed brooch from Exton can be closely paralleled with other brooches located either as stray finds or from funerary contexts throughout southern England. It belongs to a distinctive group of small square-headed types that date to the first half of the sixth century and has a broad range of different decorative elements, styles and forms with regard to individual head plates, bows and footplate components (Aberg 1926, 79, 80; Arnold 1982, 55), being particularly comparable to examples from southern Hampshire, Sussex and Kent.

These brooches are generally associated with well-furnished, female burials, but although the Exton fragment appears to be of comparable quality to these examples, Southern Hampshire has still to produce female inhumations with assemblages of grave goods of a similar repertoire and calibre to those that have been excavated from Wight and East Kent (Arnold 1982, 26–8; Welch 1996). In fact the actual use and final discard of this type of costume jewellery in the sixth century may not have been a straightforward process. Small square-headed brooches were worn singly, as at Harwell (Oxon) (Kirk & Marshall 1956, 30, fig. 10 d), as pairs, such as at Chatham Lines and Bifrons and even as a triumvirate of mismatched brooches, as found at High Down. The use of unpaired brooches may have resulted from the replacement of losses through inter-family/group gift exchange, or from their deposition in graves.

The small square-headed brooches from southern England are generally perceived to be 'Kentish' in origin and there is a variety of

possible explanations for their presence in southern Hampshire. The desire to emulate 'Frankish' costume jewellery fashions may have necessitated the importation of such brooches into southern Hampshire from Kent or Wight (Parfitt & Brugmann 1997, 135; Yorke 2001, 122) via the ancient routeways or the Channel/Solent seaways (Ulmschneider 2000). Peripatetic smiths from Kent could have been active in these areas hiring out their skills or brooch design portfolios to local metalworkers (Parfitt & Brugmann 1997, 35). Metalwork, along with a range of component cultural influences and goods, could possibly have been brought into the Meon through wider kinship networks. It is possible that 'Wight' or 'Kentish' brooch moulds were imported into the Thames Valley, Hampshire and West-Sussex areas, although there is no archaeological evidence to support such a notion. Finally, the possibility that they were locally produced copies should not be ignored.

The variation in form and design between the Exton and Meonstoke fragments could have local significance as Style I and II zoomorphic decorative motifs have been found on metalwork recovered from sites within the central and upper reaches of the Meon Valley, for example at Droxford (Aldsworth 1979, 136), Shavards Farm, Meonstoke (Stedman and Stoodley 2000), Privett and at Preshaw (Meaney 1964, 98–9). The distribution may be chronological, or it could have resulted from the specific cultural meanings that the brooches had within neighbouring communities.

The small square-headed brooches from

the central Meon Valley are an important resource suggestive of local processes of tribal cohesion during the sixth century. They may have been imported into southern Hampshire as a *bridewealth* marriage gift, a bi-product of a local trade agreement, or even cast locally as a 'Kentish' fashion accessory. At the same time they may have commanded political significance: as the Kentish kingdom became the emerging polity within southern England, brooches of this type may have been adopted within the Meon border country as a symbol distinguishing the Meonware and the Wight from their 'Saxon' neighbours to both the east and west, reminding individuals and groups of obligations involving tribal units, households and families within local Germanic society.

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