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## THE ANGLO-SAXON PLANE FROM SARRE

By W. L. GOODMAN

Surviving woodworkers' tools from the Dark Ages are so rare that it was hardly surprising that the small object found in Sarre grave No. 26, when first published in *Archæologia Cantiana*, VI, p. 161, was described as an "iron lock, with bronze plate containing a hole for its bolt", and later in George Payne's *Catalogue of the Kent Archæological Society's Collections*, p. 19, No. 775, as "lock-plate, bronze, attached to wood". Closer examination has since revealed that this is indeed a small plane, with features relating it to roughly contemporary Frisian examples, and to their similar, but somewhat larger, Roman predecessors. It may be dated to about A.D. 600.

The body is of horn,  $5\frac{3}{8}$  in. long,  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in. wide and  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in. high, with a bronze sole  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. thick projecting at both ends to make the total length exactly 6 in. The turn-up at the front appears to have been cast, while that at the back has clearly been folded to shape, probably to accommodate it to the piece of horn used for the stock. The sole is fixed with three iron rivets passing through the stock and fastened at the top to small bronze plates, of which the middle one, immediately behind the iron, has disappeared. The plate at the back is roughly heart-shaped, while the front one is square with rounded corners. A finger grip is hollowed out behind the iron, which was probably about  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. wide, with a slope of 43 degrees. With the help of detailed drawings (Fig. 1) made by Mr. L. R. A. Grove, Curator of the Maidstone Museum, the writer has made a suggested reconstruction, in wood and brass, of the original tool (Plate 1). The rivet across the mouth is the only conjectural feature, but is well-vouched for by the Frisian and Roman examples previously referred to.

This little plane is remarkably easy to use, and although the setting of the iron is rather tricky, it takes off quite a respectable shaving. The nearest modern equivalent would be the so-called "thumb planes" used by coachbuilders, or the small "violin planes" still listed in the specialised catalogues. This has prompted the suggestion that some such tool as this may have formed part of the kit of the craftsman who made the famous Sutton Hoo harp.

Most of the known Roman planes<sup>1</sup> are about the size of a modern jack plane, but with one exception built entirely of wood, they all have a wooden stock with an iron sole attached to it by four rivets. Usually the stock was hollowed out between the rivets to form two handles, one at each end, but it is curious that the nearest both in space and time to the Sarre plane, the well-known tool from Silchester, dated to about

<sup>1</sup> *History of Woodworking Tools*, Practical Education, February-May, 1957.

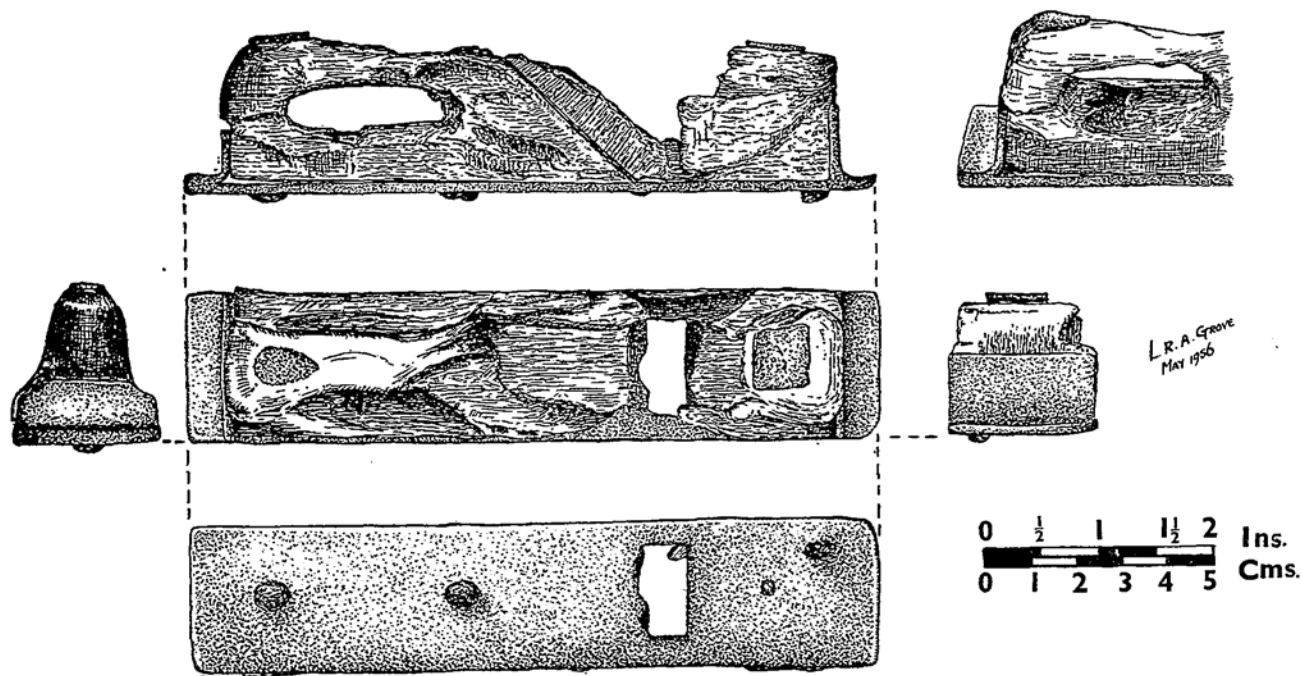


FIG. 1. Plane from Sarre.

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A.D. 350-400, has room for only one grip, at the back (Fig. 2). It will be seen that in effect the Sarre plane is a smaller version of this, roughly about half the size, and shows that the Roman tradition was still active some 200 years later ; not, after all, such a very long time for those days.

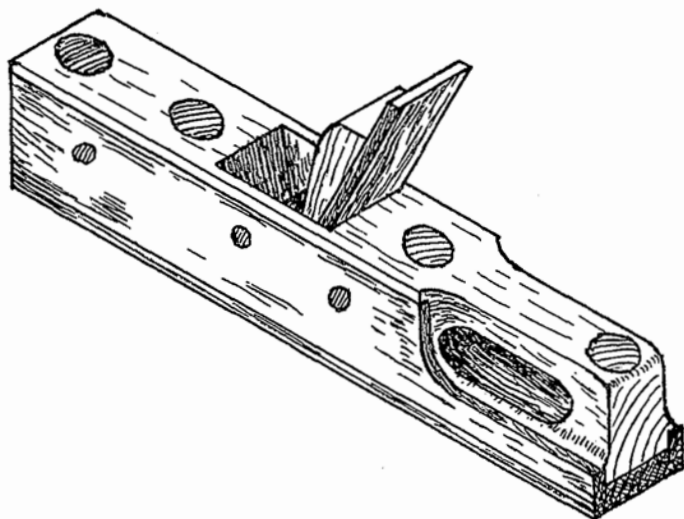


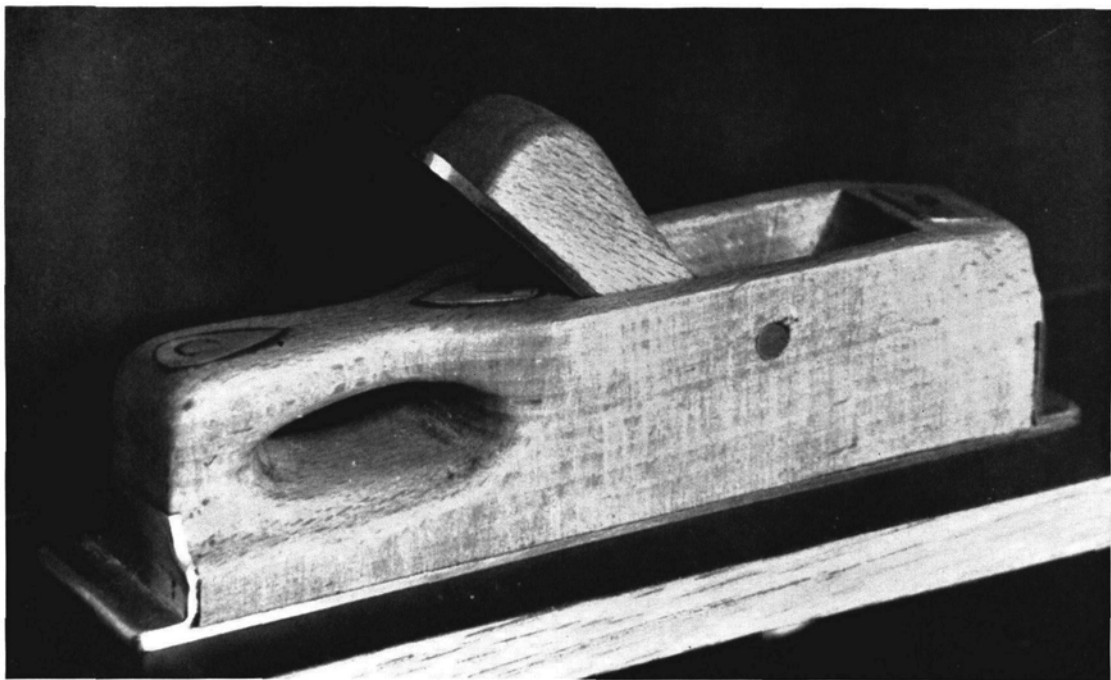
FIG. 2. Reconstruction—Silchester plane.

The nearest counterpart to the Sarre tool is the small plane found in the terp at Finkum, in Friesland, and now in the museum at Leeuwarden (Fig. 3). This is also of horn, with a bronze sole turned up at the



FIG. 3. Finkum plane.

front, and projecting slightly at the back, making the total length about  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in. The scroll-shaped handle abuts against a short upright pillar, and the bed of the iron is cut to an angle of 45 degrees. The hole for the peg across the mouth—the Roman method of fastening wedge and iron, which was in general use up to the middle of the sixteenth century—is clearly visible. It had previously been suggested that this Finkum plane was of Roman date, about A.D. 200, but three other little planes at Leeuwarden, from the terpen at Hallum, Beetgum, and Oosterbeintum,



Reconstruction of Sarre Plane. A.D. 600.

firmly dated to about A.D. 750 are similar in all respects, except that the bronze sole is lacking. Another plane at Leeuwarden, made entirely of wood, with interlacing carved decoration dating it to the early Carolingian period—A.D. 750-800—also has the characteristic scroll handle and little upright pillar, and Dr. Wassenburgh, of the Fries Museum, has recently conceded that the Finkum plane may also be of the late Merovingian period, roughly contemporary with our little tool from Sarre.

The use of horn for small planes was continued throughout the Middle Ages, as witness the little plane of stagshorn, with an iron sole, found by J. M. Greber at Burg Kreuzenstein, near Vienna. It is about  $4\frac{3}{8}$  in. long,  $1\frac{3}{4}$  in. wide, with a  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in. iron. The carving of a castle and groups of figures dates it to about the middle of the fourteenth century.