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## SOME EARLY ANGLO-SAXON OBJECTS FROM EAST KENT

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Over the years kind friends and colleagues in Kent have sometimes sent me Anglo-Saxon metal objects for identification and comment.

In the first two instances below, while the finds have been discussed in correspondence, there has been no clear directive about publication or ultimate destination, with the result that the writer has been left in possession of objects that in reality belong to others. After a lapse of ten years such a situation becomes embarrassing. Hence this note to put them on public record before returning them to private ownership, though it is hoped that they will end up in a museum.

1. Sent by J. Bradshaw. Found by metal detector, March 1977, at Stowting, N.G.R. TR 1236 4228. 'Found in field below Anglo-Saxon cemetery.'

The object (Fig. 1), which is of copper alloy, is the fragmentary headplate of a *Cruciform Brooch*, max. width 37 mm., height 32 mm.

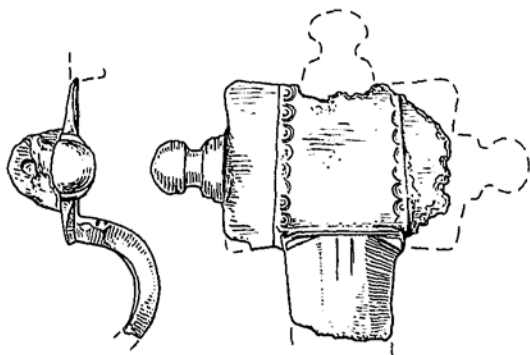


Fig. 1. Cruciform Brooch from Stowting (Scale:  $\frac{1}{4}$ ).

The major part of the head-plate is present, revealing moderately developed and slightly depressed side-wings, bordered on either side of the plate itself by a row of hemisphere-and-dot ornament. Only the left-hand knob survives, and this is cast, half-round, in one with the head-plate. The surviving top of the bow shows that it was short and steeply arched, with upper angles sharply faceted. At the back of the head-plate a single pierced lug is encrusted with iron oxide as from an iron pin. The broken edges are none of them new, being all patinated, so not the result of recent plough-damage; nor are the other surfaces of the brooch excessively worn. So it is hard to explain how the brooch fragment came to be picked up by a metal detector in its present condition unless, perhaps, as a broken and discarded remnant from the excavations in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Cruciform brooches are not uncommon finds in Kentish cemeteries. When I last wrote about them I knew of twenty-three examples,<sup>2</sup> since when at least two more have come to light, from Lyminge<sup>3</sup> and, with an unusual foot, from near Chartham.<sup>4</sup> Though the series contains some oddities none need post-date the fifth century, and there is still no secure evidence that they were ever manufactured in Kent. Most seem to have been imports from Jutland or other parts of South Scandinavia, but the Stowting fragment with its short bow and head-plate of Nils Åberg's Group II brooches<sup>5</sup> looks more like an insular piece. Admittedly some of the other Kentish cruciforms, for example from Bifrons and Milton Regis<sup>6</sup> have short bows and Group II head-plates, but the Stowting fragments most closely resembles early Group II cruciform brooches, whose headplates have the same proportions and marginal ornament, from the Cambridge and other Anglian regions.<sup>7</sup> These have prototypes or counterparts in North Germany and Scandinavia, and thus the Stowting piece may still be an import from abroad, but on the whole it seems more likely that it came to Kent from some more northerly part of eastern England, perhaps on the person of a bride.

<sup>1</sup> Audrey L. Meaney, *A Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* (1964), 137-8.

<sup>2</sup> Sonia Chadwick Hawkes and Mark Pollard, 'The Gold Bracteates from sixth-century Graves in Kent, in the Light of a new Find from Finglesham', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 15 (1981), 316-370, especially 322-4.

<sup>3</sup> B.M. Ager, 'An Anglo-Saxon cruciform Brooch from Lyminge', *Arch. Cant.*, xcix (1983), 59-65.

<sup>4</sup> Communication from David Kelly, 28.1.1987. This volume p.00, fig.00.

<sup>5</sup> Nils Åberg, *The Anglo-Saxons in England* (1926), 36-9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, figs. 34 and 40.

<sup>7</sup> Joachim Reichstein, *Die Kreuzförmige Fibel (Offa Bücher*, 34, 1975), Types Midlum, Stratford, West Stow, Little Wilbraham, etc., 42 ff., Abbn. 12-14, Tafn. 85, 91, 95, 107.

The finds from the Stowting cemetery in Maidstone Museum include annular brooches which might also be of northern origin. Inter-marriage or trade in jewellery between Kent and Anglian England is well exemplified slightly later by the two sleeve-clasps, adapted for secondary use as brooches, that were found in the Bifrons cemetery.<sup>8</sup>

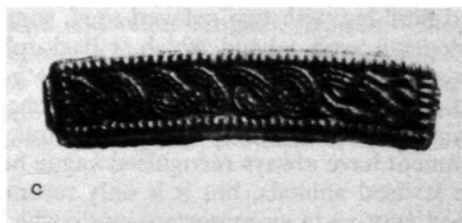
2. Sent by J. Bradshaw. Found by metal detector, March 1977, on the site of the Ickham Roman villa.

The object (Pl. Ia) is a *Small Square-Headed Brooch*, cast in copper alloy with decorated front surface covered in mercury gilding. Surviving length 38 mm., width of head-plate 24 mm. Parts of the upper corners of the head-plate and the bottom of the foot-plate appear to have been knocked off at some time, the pin-attachment and catch-plate are both damaged and the remainder of the foot-plate is bent. The damage might have been caused by the plough, but the breaks (if that is what they are) seem not to be new and otherwise the brooch is in remarkably fresh, unworn, condition, so it can scarcely have been lying around in the ploughsoil for more than a season. Had it been a failed casting, however, surely its maker would not have bothered to finish and gild it. Altogether its condition makes it something of an enigma. Such an object would anyway be more explicable in the context of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery than a Romano-British villa.

The head-plate has a plain border with beaded rim, around a rectangular panel framed with twin ridges in relief, which enclose a single Style I animal in crisp 'chip-carving' style. This lies across the top of the bow in couchant position and has a two-strand body, neck and hips, angled hind-leg with two splayed toes, something resembling an up-curved tail, and a head which is back-turned onto the neck. This head is of the type which used to be called 'helmeted', with strong brow and nasal features, above defined eye, cheek and beard, and with a prominent ear above. The terminology and perceptions of this style of ornament have always recognised vague human features attaching to the stylised animals, but it is only recently that David Leigh has clarified matters in an important study which features the Ickham brooch specifically.<sup>9</sup> He demonstrates graphically that Kentish jewellers in the early sixth century, like their Scandinavian predecessors, were masters of visual ambiguity in their Style I

<sup>8</sup> Maidstone Museum. John Hines, *The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England in the pre-Viking Period* (BAR, (British Series) 124, 1984), 333-4.

<sup>9</sup> David Leigh, 'Ambiguity in Anglo-Saxon Style I art', *Antiq. Journ.*, lxiv (1984), 34-42.



Anglo-Saxon Objects: (a) Ickham; (b) Bifrons, small square-headed brooches (Scale:  $\frac{5}{8}$ ); (c) Rochester, Metalworker's Die (Scale:  $\frac{5}{4}$ ).

creations. If one turns the animal images through a right-angle, 'surprising and entirely new conceptions appear. What were formerly animals's heads and ears have now become profile human masks, each with a horizontal head-band and a pointed device, somewhat like a feather, emerging above. The Kentish faces have severe downward sloping mouths.' His drawing of the creature on the

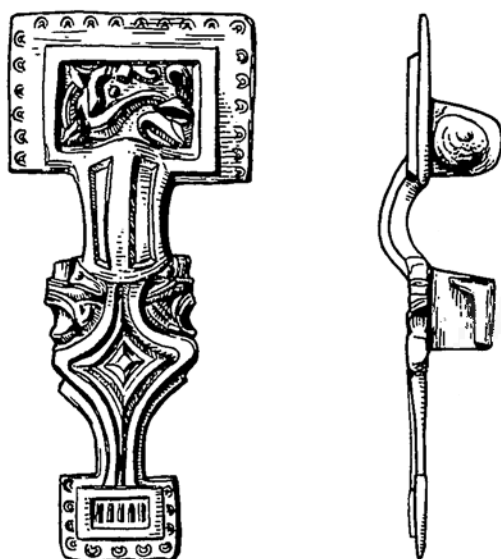


Fig. 2. Designs on Brooches from (a) Ickham, and (b) Sarre, after Leigh 1984. (Scale:  $\frac{2}{1}$ ).

Ickham head-plate (reproduced here with permission, Fig. 3) includes the alternative 'human' side-view.<sup>10</sup>

The remainder of the brooch is less remarkable. The bow is short with three vertical ridges, the central one nicked to enhance the glitter of the gilding, contained between broad raised median and side borders, which may possibly have been decorated with nielloed triangle ornament (unusual on objects of copper alloy). There is a similar border at the top of the bow and a double-ridge border at the bottom. The foot-plate when complete would have had a concentric lozenge-shaped central panel, comprised of nielloed, nicked and plain ridges around a solid central feature, and round or half-round lobes at the sides. At the foot, to judge from its closest parallels, there would have been a terminal lobe of rectangular form. At each top angle of the foot-plate is some more zoomorphic ornament in the form of an outward-facing 'helmeted' head with a leg and foot doubled up below it in a sort of 'foetus' position.

The Ickham brooch appears at present to be typologically the earliest amongst a stylistically related trio, the others of which,

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 1, i.



Fig. 3. Square-headed Brooch from Sarre (Scale:  $\frac{3}{2}$ ).

though all found in east Kent, likewise have no good context or associations. One in the British Museum<sup>11</sup> is generally attributed to the cemetery at Sarre (Fig. 2) and the other 'found between Bridge and Bekesbourne in 1913' can probably be attributed to Bifrons<sup>12</sup> (Pl. Ib). However, there can be little doubt that they were early products of a workshop in the emergent Kentish kingdom, at a stage before the Frankish gem-style had had much effect. Leigh places them not long after the import of the latest Jutlandic pieces, i.e. c. 525/30, or thereabouts.<sup>13</sup>

3. Sent by David Williams. Found in April 1976 during excavation of a twelfth-century cess-pit in the garden of 30 High Street, Rochester. The find has been published in a German learned journal,<sup>14</sup> but is reproduced here to bring it to the attention of local readers. It is now in Rochester Museum.

The object (Pl. Ic) is a *Metalworker's Die* cast in a heavy alloy of copper in the form of a flat sub-rectangular strip, weight 6.2 gm., max. length 42 mm., width 10 mm., thickness 2 mm. The curvature of its long sides and the angle of the ends, which are not quite square, seem intentional. Its back is plain and shows no sign of secondary working such as hammering, and its edges still bear the original casting flanges which, presumably, were not filed off because they did not interfere with the production of *repoussé* metal foils from the front of the die. This bears ornament in relief which, according to

<sup>11</sup> 1893, 6-1, 231. Åberg, *op. cit.*, fig. 130. Leigh, *op. cit.*, fig. 1, j.

<sup>12</sup> Sonia Chadwick Hawkes, 'The Jutish Style A; a Study in Germanic Animal Art in southern England in the fifth Century A.D.', *Archaeologia*, xcvi (1961), 29-74, esp. 69 f., pl. xxi, c.

<sup>13</sup> David Leigh, *The Square-Headed Brooches of sixth-century Kent* (Ph.D. Thesis: University College, Cardiff, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> Sonia Chadwick Hawkes, George Speake and Peter Northover, 'A seventh-century Bronze Metalworker's Die from Rochester, Kent', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 13 (1979), 382-92.

Peter Northover, could have been transferred to thin sheet silver or gold by rubbing the foil onto the decorated surface of the die by means of a pointed wooden or blunted bronze tool. From the shape of the resultant foils George Speake concluded that they are most likely to have been used for the rim-mounts of drinking cups. Other similarly-shaped dies are known from Mitchell's Hill, Icklingham, Suffolk,<sup>15</sup> and vessels with decorated *repoussé* mouthpieces produced from such dies are known from princely graves at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, Taplow, Bucks., Farthingdown, Surrey, and from Dover and Faversham, Kent.<sup>16</sup>

None of these extant rim-mounts bears ornament exactly in the style of the Rochester die, however. This consists, within a beaded frame, of a single Style II creature facing right: its head has a right-angled eye surround and long, grooved, jaws which interlace with each other. Its serpentine body, rendered in imitation of filigree with fine beading between plain borders, is neatly portrayed as twisted into three Stafford knots of diminishing size, with its tail emerging in the top left-hand corner. Though not known in extant *repoussé* work, similar zoomorphic interlace is represented in other media on Kentish metalwork, notably in filigree on the snake-like creatures of the famous silver-gilt buckle from Crundale Down<sup>17</sup> and engraved on the exquisite bronze buckle from Eccles.<sup>18</sup> These parallels suggest a date for the Rochester die of c. A.D. 650.

With the exception, of course, of the church of St. Andrew, which King Aethelbert built and endowed for Bishop Justus in 604, and its associated burials, the Rochester die is the earliest Anglo-Saxon artifact to have been recovered from within the walls of Rochester. Though out of context, the presence of this metalworker's die suggests that, within the walls from a relatively early date in the seventh century, there may have existed a high-class jeweller's workshop which could have served the needs of the episcopal establishment or of the prosperous lay community, which must certainly have grown up alongside it. As the major crossing-point of the River Medway, it is unthinkable that Rochester did not contain at least the garrison of a King's Reeve to exact the tolls and taxes.

<sup>15</sup> Hawkes *et al.*, *op. cit.*, Taf. v, 19-20; George Speake, *Anglo-Saxon animal Art and its Germanic Background* (Oxford, 1980), Pl. 14,a and g.

<sup>16</sup> Hawkes *et al.*, *op. cit.*, Tafn. vi-viii; Speake, *op. cit.*, Pl. 14, i-n.

<sup>17</sup> Åberg, *op. cit.*, fig. 22; Speake, *op. cit.*, Pl. 7,d.

<sup>18</sup> Sonia Chadwick Hawkes, 'Finds from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Eccles, Kent', *Antiq. Journ.*, liii (1973), 281-6, fig. 5, Pl. Ivi; Speake, *op. cit.*, Pl. 9,e.



