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A LATE BRONZE AGE HOARD FOUND AT MONKTON COURT FARM, THANET

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INTRODUCTION

In September 1990 a Late Bronze Age bronze hoard was located in a field at Monkton Court Farm, Monkton, Thanet, the estimated position of the find-spot being at N.G.R. TR 27735 65540. The area is downland in arable use. Hereabout the geology is the Head Brickearth over Upper Chalk, the overburden varying in depth from 0.50 m. to 3.00 m.

This discovery was no accident, but the climax of a protracted metal detector search by members of the Thanet and Wantsum Relic Association. In 1981, a T.W.R.A. member found a socketed axe and several bronze fragments near the spot. These were brought to the notice of the writer, and were described and illustrated in a watching brief report with the comment that they might represent part of a larger hoard.¹ Since then, members of T.W.R.A. have often searched the field without result until September 1990 when a carefully planned and executed sweep by Mr Christopher Wren and Mr Colin Tyman met with success. The writer was called to the site within minutes of their uncovering the main concentration of bronzes. Apart from the palstaves found at St. Mildred's Bay² this appears to be the first such discovery where archaeologists have been present to explore and plan a hoard *in situ*. During nearby trenching for a water main in 1987, a number of pits and ditches were sectioned, these yielding Late Bronze Age material.³ The nature and extent of

¹ D.R.J. Perkins, 'The Thanet Gas Pipeline', *Arch. Cant.*, ci (1984), 85, 87.

² D.R.J. Perkins, 'The Selling to Thanet Trunk Water Main, Phase II', *Arch. Cant.*, cvii (1989), 267-73.

³ D.R.J. Perkins, 'A Middle Bronze Age Hoard from St. Mildred's Bay', *Arch. Cant.*, cv (1988), 243-9.

the features suggest the presence of an extensive settlement site. At the time of writing and as a result of these discoveries, an excavation of the find-spot is being planned in consultation with English Heritage. This intended rescue activity has some urgency because of evident plough attrition.

DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION

An intensive search for the hoard was initiated after the discovery of a sword blade fragment (see Fig. 3.1, 1b and 4) and a socketed axe (Fig. 3.2, 15). The find-spots of these objects, as also the 1981 finds, were all west of and in line with the plough marks shown as E in Fig. 2. They were distributed over a maximum distance of 67 m. from the hoard, probably as a result of their being lifted and carried by a potato harvesting machine.

On detection, the first main hoard components were exposed by spade in an area of about 30 cm. square, their upper surfaces being about 5 cm. below the interface between subsoil and disturbed modern topsoil. A theodolite was set up 3 m. from the bronzes. From the theodolite plummet, a datum line was passed over the finds and points on this were used to locate a 1 m. square plotting frame. The theodolite was then employed both to level the plotting frame and to find the position of the datum by triangulation from nearby fixed points.

Excavation of the hoard then proceeded, with objects being plotted as they were exposed. A powerful metal detector was used to pin-point the bronzes (in one case from 32 cm. above the object) thus defining the hoard area and saving much time. Small 'security probe type' detectors were also found useful in indicating the proximity and size of objects as they were approached vertically by trowelling.

The relative positioning of the bronzes is illustrated by a plan and section in Fig. 1. In the plan points A and B on the broken line show intersects of the datum line with the plotting frame; see also A and B in Fig. 2. The broken line SS in the section marks the subsoil surface, and S is the modern land surface. It should be noted that the brickearth from the subsoil surface down, around and under the bronzes yielded nothing in the way of pot-sherds, burnt flint, bone, etc.

The next step was to work out a square of 4 × 4 m. centred on the hoard; see Fig. 2 plan and section. Topsoil was then removed from this by hand, finds consisting of a few worn Romano-British pot-sherds, and others in post-Tudor fabrics. The surface so exposed was

BRONZE AGE HOARD, THANET

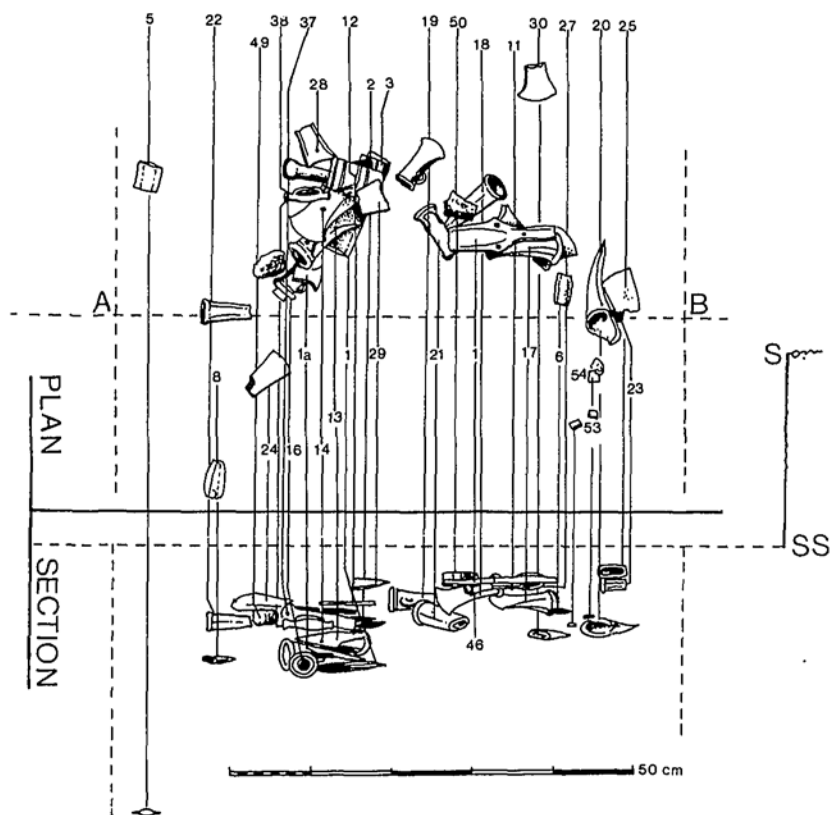


Fig. 1. Plan and section of the artifacts as excavated.

scored by subsoiler cuts (see E in Fig. 2), and exhibited many nodules of burnt flint. Pot-sherds in a local Late Bronze Age fabric were present, as was a large fragment of burnt greensand which appears to be part of a quern, see 'F'.

Sections were then cut across the square (see Fig. 2, Section C-D) and the hoard find-spot was expanded and deepened. This demonstrated that the horizon containing occupation material extended down for only about 10 cm. Below this was featureless brickearth, of which a sample was subjected to microscopic examination. The paucity of molluscan remains in the sample suggested a 'Tundra' soil that had never formed a temperate climate land surface. During the widening of the central square, nodules of 'ash-slag' were found, their position being shown as G in the Fig. 2 plan and section.

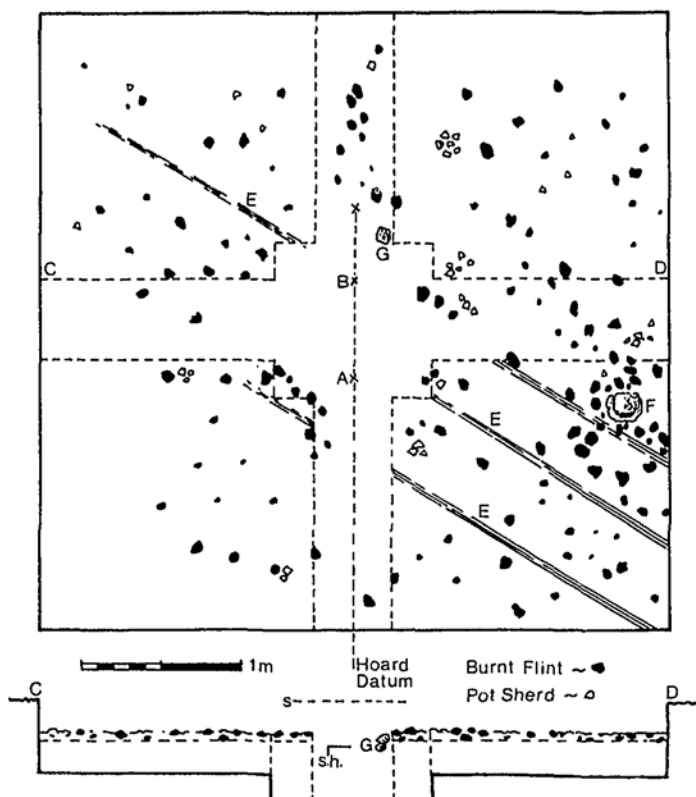


Fig. 2. Plan and section of the box excavation centred on the hoard find-spot.

THE HOARD CATALOGUE

All items are illustrated by Figure 3, 1-4, and at the scale shown. The catalogue numbers refer to the same objects as in Figs. 1 and 2.

Weapons (Fig. 3.1)

1. Five fragments of a sword that would have been about 50 cm. long when complete. Of the five, only the hilt terminal (1a) is slightly contentious as a component. It does not connect to the hilt fragment and lacks the ridged edges of the latter. This though may be the result of hammering, of which it displays some evidence. Blade fragment 1b

was found well away from the hoard, but its dimensions and patina match the other fragments perfectly. The weapon has narrow V-shaped shoulders and an almost straight ricassi that is typical of swords in the Ewart Park tradition. Of numerous parallels, some swords in the Blackmoor and Watford hoards are very similar.⁴

2 and 3. The heavy mid-ribs and incised lines identify these objects as blade fragments from Carp's Tongue swords.

4-6. These appear to be blade fragments from dirks or rapiers. Although such weapons would be somewhat anachronistic, being Late Middle Bronze Age types, they do, however, turn up in Late Bronze Age hoards.⁵ Fragment 5 is unusual in appearing to taper towards both fractures, although this may be a result of corrosion.

7. This is a blade fragment from a sword of Ewart Park type; it was found packed in the socket of axe no. 21, see Fig. 3.2. In section it is rather more robust than no. 1.

8-10. Fragments of spearheads. No. 9 was found packed in the socket of axe no. 15, and the shaft fragment (no. 10), was an insert in the socketed axe shown as no. 16 in Fig. 3.2.

11. This object may be a complete scabbard-mount, a middle-chape. It is similar in its section and in having crescentic mouths to some chape fragments in the Wilburton tradition hoard from Andover,⁶ and the Blackmoor hoard.⁷ Its dimensions (if accepted as rather flattened) would certainly accommodate a leather scabbard and blade.

12. A slightly curved (bent?), fragment of cast plate about 1.50 mm. thick. It is decorated with incised lines, some in ruled bands, and others taking the form of free-hand or compass-scribed circular decoration. Lacking an alternative explanation and from its associations it is listed here as possibly a fragment of a top-chape or scabbard mouth fitting.

Socketed axes (Fig. 3.2)

13. Socketed axe, looped, with a heavy collar and rib-moulding. Pendant linear moulded wing decoration with two pellets and horizontal 'stop'. It is similar to examples in the Leigh 1⁸ and Foulsham⁹ hoards.

⁴ C. Burgess, and B. Coombs, *Bronze Age Hoards*, BAR (1979) 67, 99 and 197.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Danebury Hoard no. 3, 236 and Fig. 12.1, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Andover hoard, 93.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Blackmoor hoard, 99.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Leigh 1 hoard, 159.

⁹ *Bronze Age Metalwork in the Norwich Castle Museum* (1977), Foulsham hoard, 20, 29, 33.

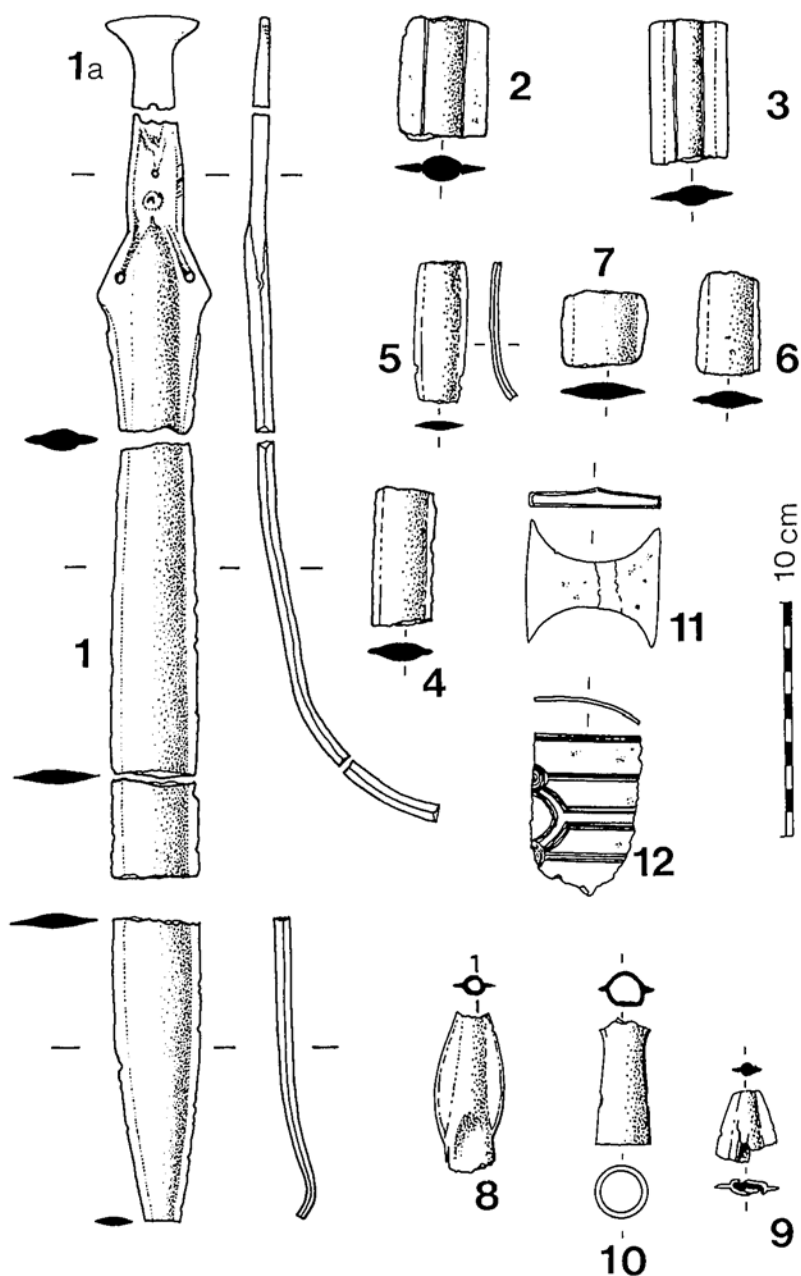


Fig. 3, 1. Weapon fragments, all to scale shown.

14. Socketed axe, looped, squarish mouth with rectangular body and curved cutting edge. Heavy collar and double rib-moulding with short lengths of double rib-moulding across back and front. Double vertical grooves cast in both sides.
15. Socketed axe, looped, squarish mouth and rectangular body, curved cutting edge. Collar and rib-moulding. Socket packed with five fragments, nos. 9, see Fig. 3.1, and 39, 40, 47, 48, see Fig. 3.4.
16. Socketed axe, looped, squarish mouth, rectangular body, and curved (damaged) cutting edge. A heavy collar and rib-moulding. The drawing shows the axe with the pegged spearhead shaft (no. 10) inserted.
17. Socketed axe, looped, round mouth, collar, octagonal faceted body and curved cutting edge. It is split and bulged on one side, perhaps broken in use by bad hafting. The socket held a number of bronze fragments (nos. 31, 34, 43, see Figs. 3.3 and 3.4), but they were loose and would not account for the damage.
18. Socketed axe, looped, round mouth, collar and rib-moulding (broken), decagonal faceted body and curved edge. The socket was filled with bronze fragments.
19. Socketed axe, looped, squarish mouth and rectangular body, collar and rib-moulding. A small axe, less than 7 cm. overall.
20. Socketed axe, no evidence of a loop (but axe broken), collar and seven faint incised horizontal lines in two groups of four and three separated by a clear zone. Decagonal body with fluted facets, crescentic edge.
21. Mouth and body fragment of socketed axe, looped, round mouth, collar and rib-moulding with pendant wing-ornament which is continued round the sides. The socket contained five fragments, nos. 7, see Fig. 3.1, and 32, 35, 36, 41, 51, see Figs. 3.3 and 3.4.

Socketed axe fragments (Fig. 3.3)

22. Mouth and body fragment of socketed axe, looped, round mouth, deep smooth collar and octagonal faceted body. Similar to no. 17. Socket contained no. 33.
23. Mouth and body fragment of socketed axe, looped, round mouth, deep collar faceted to match heptagonal body. Socket contained fragments 42 and 44, see Fig. 3.4.
24. Blade fragment of socketed axe, rectangular body, almost straight edge.
25. Blade fragment of socketed axe, rectangular body, curved edge.
26. Blade fragment of socketed axe, rectangular body, crescentic edge. Socket contained fragment 45, see Fig. 3.4.

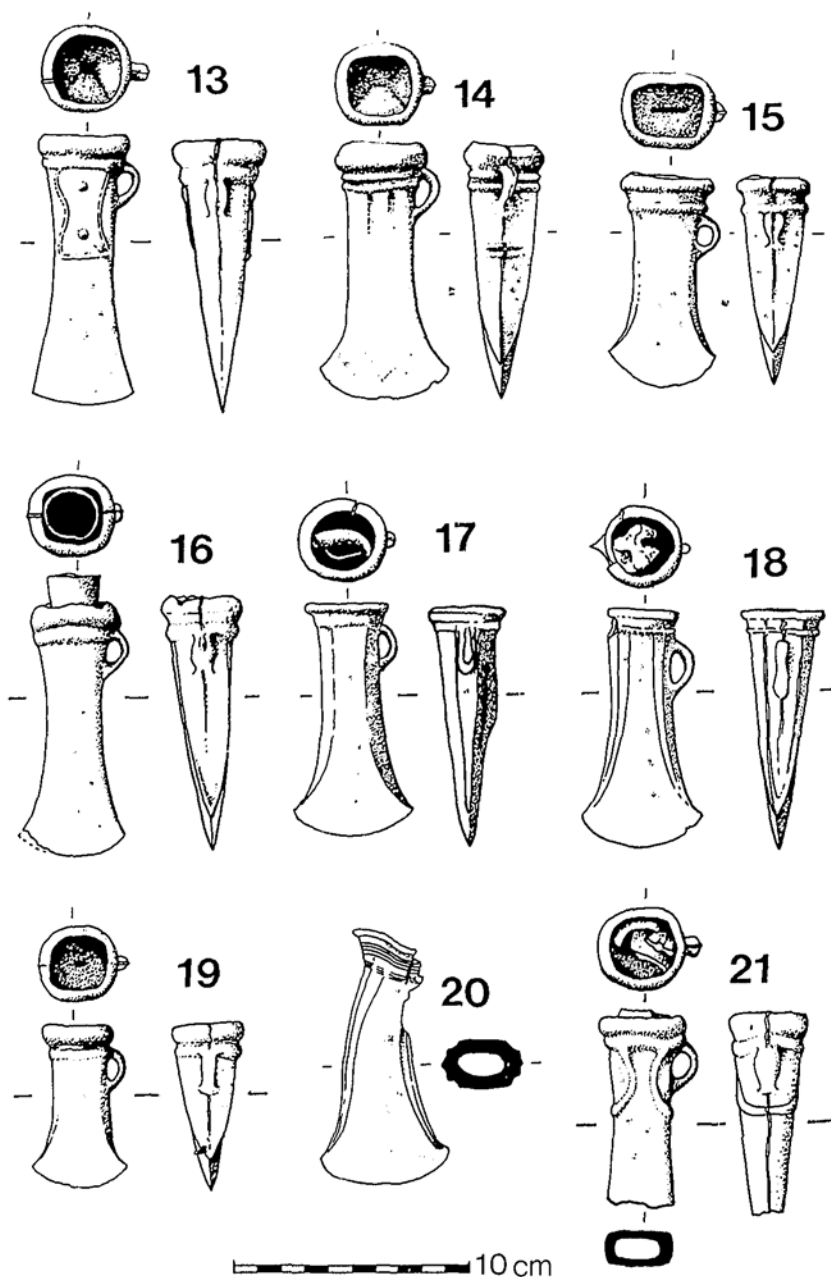


Fig. 3, 2. Socketed axes, all to scale shown.

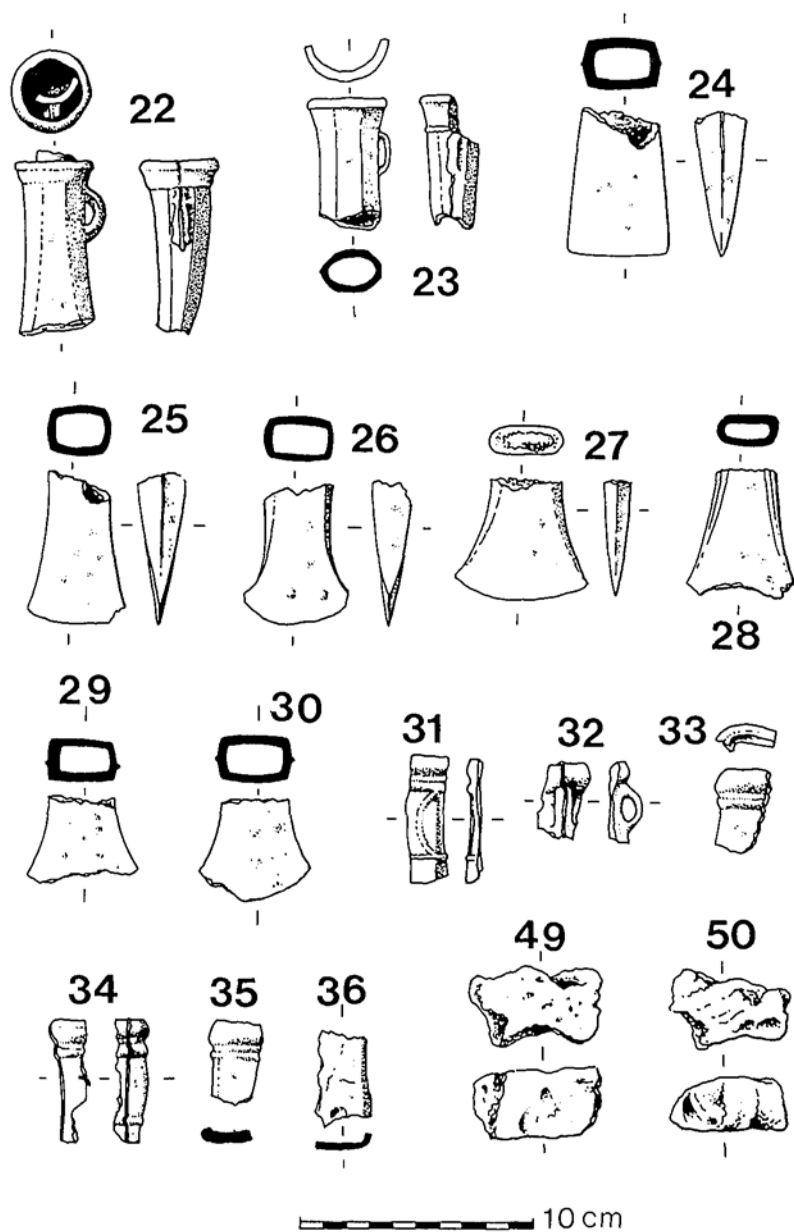


Fig. 3, 3. Socketed axe and ingot fragments, all to scale shown.

27. Blade fragment of socketed axe, becoming rounded front and back, curved edge.
28. Blade fragment of socketed axe, sub-rectangular body, fluting on front and back, edge broken.
29. Blade fragment of socketed axe, rectangular body, curved edge.
30. Blade fragment of socketed axe, rectangular body, curved edge.
31. Collar and body fragment of socketed axe, rib-moulding with pendant wing decoration attached to horizontal rib. Found packed in the socket of no. 17, see Fig. 3.2.
32. Mouth fragment from a socketed axe including the loop and collar. Found packed in the socket of no. 21, see Fig. 3.2.
33. Mouth fragment of a socketed axe showing collar and rib-moulding. Found packed in the socket of no. 22, see Fig. 3.2.
34. Mouth and body fragment from a socketed axe with collar, rib-moulding, and raised decoration across front (probably continued wing ornament). Found packed in the socket of no. 17, see Fig. 3.2.
35. Mouth and body fragment from socketed axe with showing collar and rib-moulding. Found packed in the socket of no. 21, see Fig. 3.2.
36. Body fragment of socketed axe. Found packed in the socket of no. 21, see Fig. 3.2.

Miscellaneous objects and fragments (Fig. 3.4)

37. Bulb-ended ferrule perforated transversely for a securing pin and vertically through the slightly flattened base for another pin that was secured inside. Both pins were found *in situ*. From comparison with complete finds¹⁰ and particularly because of the ring-ended pin in the base, there can be little doubt that this is part of a 'flesh-hook'. These are complex and decorative implements comprising mounts for a handle to which is attached a pair of long hooks. Their function would appear to be that of lifting boiling meat from cauldrons.
38. Bugle-shaped object or 'bugle-fitting'. These bronzes are usually assigned a role as horse-harness, in particular, as cheek-pieces, although the writer has found nobody (especially among equestrians) who could explain how they might have been used, or point out parallels from other periods. It has been suggested that this object is a whistle, and it can certainly be made to function as one.¹¹

¹⁰ *Later Prehistoric Antiquities of the British Isles*, British Museum (1953), 32 and IV.

¹¹ During conservation, it was seen by Mr David Steed, who remarked 'Oh they had dog whistles then'. On being assured of its robust condition, he held it by its 'handle' and was able to sound a note on it!

BRONZE AGE HOARD, THANET

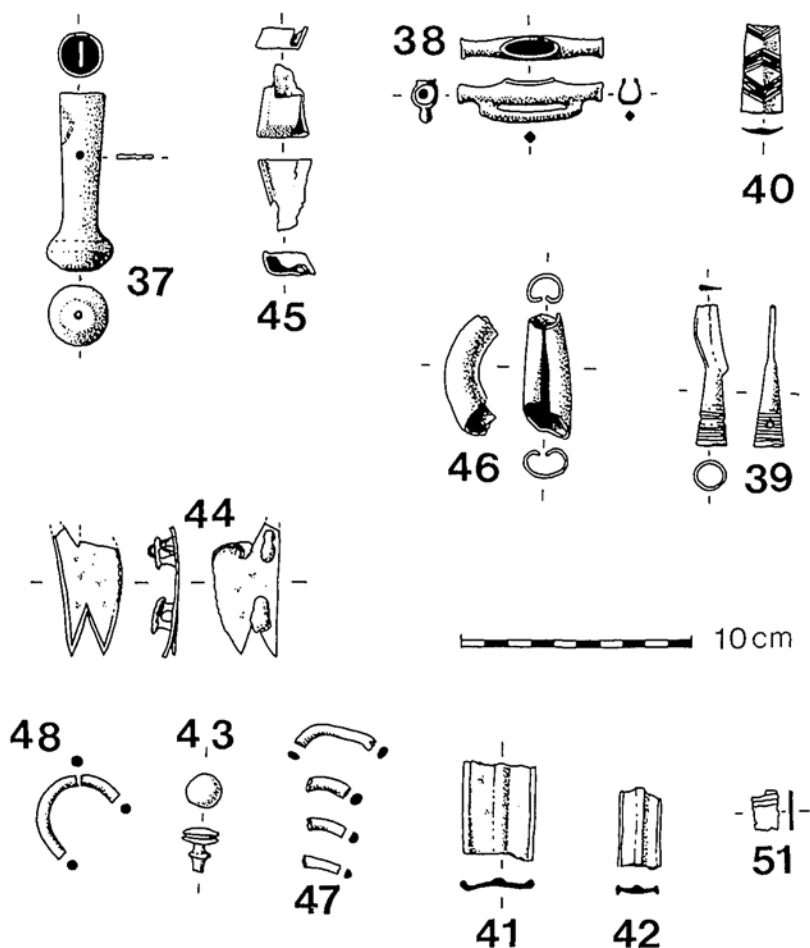


Fig. 3, 4. Miscellaneous objects and fragments, all to scale shown.

39. Socket and part of the blade of a cutting tool, the socket decorated with incised lines and perforated for a rivet, the blade curved in the manner of a pruning knife. Found packed in the socket of no. 15, see Fig. 3.2.

40. A fragment resembling a piece of blade, although cast with a shallow crescentic section. It is decorated with chevrons in incised parallel lines. Found packed in the socket of no. 15, see Fig. 3.2.

41. A fragment of strip with central rib-moulding and cast flanges down each edge. Found packed in the socket of no. 21, see Fig. 3.2.

42. A fragment of strip similar to no. 41, but the edge flanges protrude on both sides. Found packed in the socket of no. 23, see Fig. 3.2.

43. Broken finial, perhaps the head of a pin. The slightly domed pill-shaped top is deeply grooved on the sides, and the shaft has a collar. Found packed in the socket of no. 17, see Fig. 3.2.

44. An object formed as a flat plate cast with two pairs of 'rivets', each pair having a common head. In shape it is like a fat crescent with the horns trimmed into fish-tails. The edges are decorated with an incised line on the front. With its paired rivets, it is reminiscent of the metal fittings on nineteenth-century military uniform, as for example 'shako-plates'. Found packed in the socket of no. 23, see Fig. 3.2.

For something similar, see the Watford hoard, no. 59.¹²

45. Part of an object of box-like construction, apparently cast rather than folded from plate. A corner fitting? Found packed in the socket of no. 26, see Fig. 3.2.

46. A piece of curving and tapering tube fashioned from sheet bronze with an unsealed seam. Part of an arm-ring?

47. Four fragments of round section rod, perhaps tapering pieces of a single object such as a ring or pin. Found packed in the socket of no. 15, see Fig. 3.2.

48. Two fragments of a ring (round section). Found packed in the socket of no. 15, see Fig. 3.2.

49. Small flat fragment of sheet bronze decorated with incised lines. Found packed in the socket of no. 21, see Fig. 3.2.

The last two objects are shown in Fig. 3.3.

50. Bun-ingot fragment exhibiting a cast impression of a half melted and fragmentary object.

51. Bun-ingot fragment.

DISCUSSION

The period and deposition of the hoard

There can be no doubt that the Monkton hoard belongs in the main stream of the Ewart Park phase, c. 900 to 700 B.C. In particular, the blade fragments from the Carp's Tongue swords locate the hoard to around 700 B.C. or even a little later.

Apart from three objects that had been disturbed and spread west by ploughing (nos. 1b, 4, and 15), all the bronzes were contained horizontally in an area of about 78 cm. × 50 cm. Vertically (with the

¹² Burgess and Coombs, *op. cit.*, 209.

exception of no. 5), they were stratified through about 15 cm.; see Fig. 1. No order is apparent in their distribution, as might be expected if they had been laid in place or been packed in a container. Making allowances for vertical movement due to worm action, they look as though they had been simply dumped into the pit.

The pit containing the hoard was cut through the occupation horizon shown in the Fig. 2 plan and section. This appears to be a floor, perhaps that of a working yard. So much of the lithic material from the floor was calcined, that it is tempting to propose that bronze casting was being carried out there. The nodules of ash-slag found (Fig. 2, G) seem to have actually been buried with the bronzes. Ash-slag does not, of course, constitute evidence of metal-working, but it is only produced at the high temperatures reached by metal smelting/working or the more sophisticated kilns.

The nature of the hoard: smith's stock or treasure?

Hoards such as that from Monkton are usually attributed to itinerant smiths working on the trading principle of 'new lamps for old'. The nature of the hoards in containing obvious scrap, moulds and tools makes a votive purpose seem most unlikely. However, the discussion of these sort of depositions carried on in twentieth-century terms, though probably continuing for some time to come, is unlikely to reach a fruitful conclusion, for as Friedman¹³ and others have pointed out there was probably little, if any, dividing line between religious and economic activity in prehistoric societies. Religion can function as economy and economy as religion.

What can be said with some certainty is that the Monkton hoard represents further supporting evidence for an emerging picture of a Thanet focus during Late Bronze Age times. Just how much the picture has changed in the last decade may be gauged by comparing a distribution map published in 1982¹⁴ and a map of the situation as it is known today, see Fig. 4, and key to the map as follows:

Key to map, Fig. 4.

1. Carp's tongue hoard and settlement evidence, Minnis Bay, Birchington.¹⁵

¹³ J. Friedman, *System, Structure and Contradiction: The Evolution of 'asiatic' social Formations*, Copenhagen. National Museum of Denmark, 1979.

¹⁴ T. Champion, 'Settlement and Environment in Later Bronze Age Kent', in *Settlement and Society in the British Later Bronze Age*, BAR 83.

¹⁵ F.H. Worsfold, *PPS*, ii (1943), 28-47.

2. Carp's tongue hoard and settlement evidence, Shuart, St. Nicholas-at-Wade.¹⁶
3. Carp's tongue hoard and settlement evidence, Monkton.
4. Carp's tongue hoard components found at Abbey Farm, Minster. Research continues.¹⁷
5. Carp's tongue hoard found 1893, settlement evidence found 1990, Ebbsfleet, Ramsgate.¹⁸
6. Hoard of two socketed axes, one containing a number of cast bronze dress studs. Attached fragments of clothing fabric still surviving. Cottington.
7. Extensive further discovery of Carp's tongue material (108 bronzes) and contemporary pottery sherds at hoard site, Hoaden, Elmstone.¹⁹
8. Carp's tongue hoard, Stourmouth.²⁰

Settlements. Evidence of occupation is widespread throughout the island and nearby. The following are major sites. Sites 14 and 15 candidates for high status settlement.

9. Settlement remains and bronze working evidence at Highstead²¹ (not shown in Fig. 4).
10. LBA settlement remains beneath Roman fort at Richborough.²²
11. Minnis Bay, Birchington. Settlement evidence and hoard.²³
12. St. Mildred's Bay, Westgate. Riverine settlement. Many features and considerable quantities of pottery.²⁴

¹⁶ D.R.J. Perkins, 'A Late Bronze Age Hoard from Shuart, Thanet', *Arch. Cant.*, cvi (1988), 201.

¹⁷ New discoveries by the Thanet and Wantsum Metal Detector Club, further research in progress.

¹⁸ *VCH*, i (1908), 322. Another much smaller hoard was found in 1991 at Cottington Hill, Ebbsfleet, in the area of a settlement site investigated by the Thanet Trust in 1990 (Perkins, pending).

¹⁹ T.C. Champion and J.D. Ogilvie, 'A Late Bronze Age Hoard from Hoaden, Kent', *Arch. Cant.*, xcvi (1981), 195. A hoard of 108 bronzes was, however, found by metal detector on the same spot in 1986; it was last in the temporary keeping of the British Museum.

²⁰ Burgess and Coombs, *op. cit.*, 181.

²¹ Pers. comm. C.A.T.

²² Champion, *op. cit.*

²³ Worsfold, *op. cit.*

²⁴ D.R.J. Perkins, 'A Middle Bronze Age Hoard from a prehistoric Settlement Site at Westgate-on-Sea', *Arch. Cant.*, cv (1988), 243.

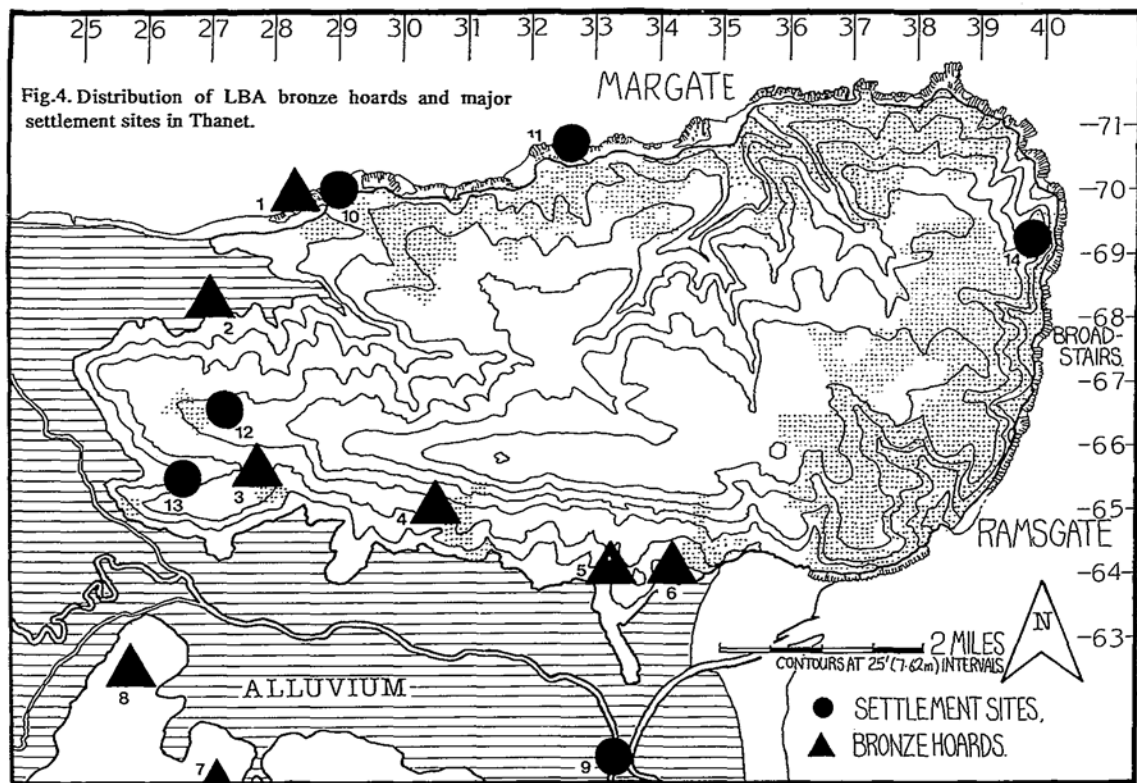


Fig. 4. Distribution map.

13. St. Nicholas-at-Wade. Hill-top settlement remains extending for 200 m.²⁵

14. Sarre. Hill-top settlement remains extending for 500 m.²⁶

15. North Foreland, Kingsgate, Broadstairs. Crop-mark of large defended hill-top settlement.²⁷

Even allowing for the strictures usually applied to distribution maps, the siting of so many Late Bronze Age hoards on either side of the length of the Wantsum Channel is striking. A similar distribution of hoards strung out along both banks of the Thames itself has been commented on elsewhere.²⁸ It is of further interest to note that the two distributions on either side of the Thames terminate in concentrations of hoards associated with settlement evidence at their eastern extremities. Thanet on the Kent side and Shoeburyness on the Essex coast, see Fig. 4a.

A further parallel may be seen in the matching of the large Ebbsfleet, Kent, hoard with 190 pieces, by the outstanding Essex hoard from Grays, Thurrock, with 200 pieces.²⁹ Thanet and Shoeburyness flank the northern and southern limits of the Thames Estuary, the doorway to the Continent. From here, upstream, the deposition of fine bronzes in the river itself trace the waterborne links between the affluent communities of the Thames valley with their European counterparts. The sea was no obstacle and items travelled in both directions³⁰ and at this time south-east England was closer, metallurgically, to north-west France than to other regions of the British Isles.³¹

Our Carp's Tongue hoards were paralleled by similar hoards in north-west France while close association between the Late Bronze Age communities in both the London and Paris regions is further suggested by the metal evidence. The development of waterfront sites like Egham in the upper Thames is also reflected in the discovery some time ago of a similar site at Choisy-au-Bac at the confluence of the Aisne and Oise. 'The complex patterns of the Thames valley have their mirror image elsewhere in Europe. The same applies to the

²⁵ New discovery by the Trust for Thanet Archaeology during road work watching brief in 1991 (Perkins, pending).

²⁶ D.R.J. Perkins, 'The Selling to Thanet Trunk water-main, Phase II', *Arch. Cant.*, cvii (1989), 270.

²⁷ Thanet Sites and Monuments no. 66, Kent S.A.M. NE 115.

²⁸ Burgess and Coombs, *op. cit.*, 188.

²⁹ C.R. Couchman, *Archaeology in Essex to AD 1500*, CBA Research Report no. 34, 1980.

³⁰ B. O'Connor, *Cross Channel Relations in the Later Bronze Age*, BAR S91, 1980.

³¹ C. Burgess, *British Prehistory - A new outline*, 1974, 208.

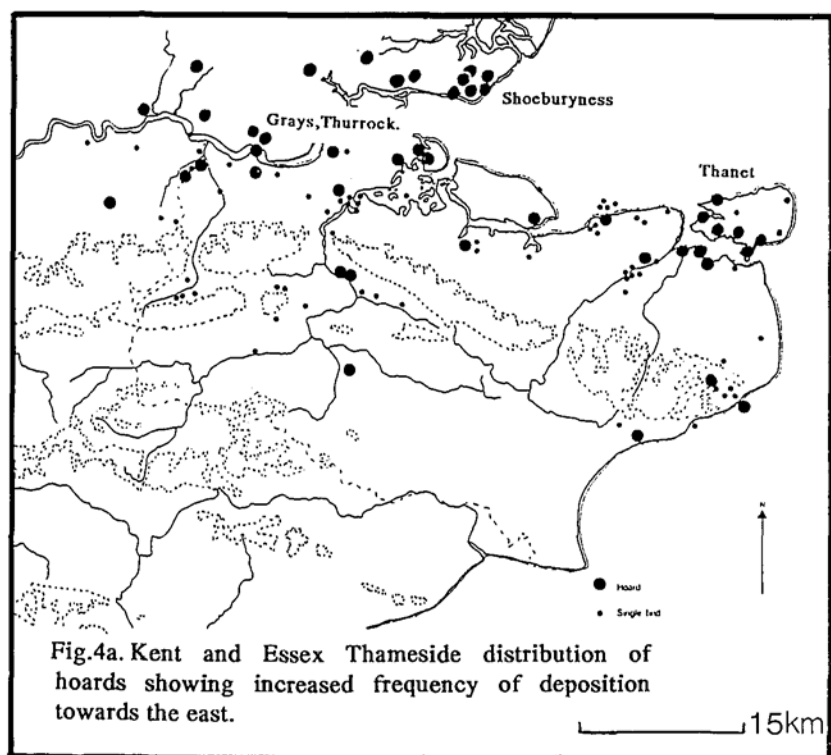


Fig. 4a. Kent and Essex Thameside distribution map.

deposition of this metal work which shows striking similarities in all these areas'.³²

Both Thanet and Shoeburyness were well placed to play an important part in the controlling of this traffic, but Thanet, being then an island may well have been of greater importance, and reference has been made to the special nature of islands as places of riverside control and exchange.³³

The Thanet hoards along the Wantsum must surely reflect an overriding interest – or can we say reverence for that particular waterway which offered a protected way into the Thames, thus avoiding the often rough and choppy seas off the island's north-east coasts. Such a route is known to have been taken by later mariners of Roman and Saxon times.

³² R. Bradley, *The Social Foundations of Prehistoric Britain*, 1984.

³³ *Ibid.*

Reference has been made elsewhere to the existence of high status sites during the Late Bronze Age, such as Egham, Runnymede Bridge and the rings at Mucking. T. Champion in his review of four east Kent sites would add others to the list.³⁴ There is as yet no firm evidence for such a major site in Thanet, although two candidates do exist. The large crop-mark at North Foreland suggests a multivallate cliff-top enclosure, while the recently discovered large scale settlement remains at Sarre on a hill-top site that would have overlooked the sea in Late Bronze Age times is of special interest. In view of the later importance of Sarre to both Romans and Saxons as an entrepôt, it seems plausible to suggest such functions may well have begun earlier in Late Bronze Age times. Only the hard evidence, or lack of it, will tell.

³⁴ Champion, *op. cit.*