

ROMAN FINDS GROUP NEWSLETTER XV

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ROMAN FINDS GROUP

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March 1998

Data Protection Act

Under the terms of the 1984 Data Protection Act, The Roman Finds Group is required to ask its members whether they have any objection to personal data about them being held by the Society on computer. The personal data consists of members' names and addresses used for mailing notices of meetings, and will be released only to archaeological organisations. If members have any objections to personal data about them being held by the RFG, could they please write to the editor

Editorial

First I must apologise for the late arrival of this *Newsletter*. Like many people in British archaeology I often have too much work and too little time, and the past few months have been one of those periods. One of the tasks getting in the way of producing this Newsletter will, I hope, be of use to the membership as January was taken up with proof reading and indexing the Castleford finds volume. This is packed with goodies and for a relatively small outlay a copy can be yours (see final page).

Another task has been fighting for the publication of a rather large glass catalogue that formed part of the finds report of a major excavation. A decision to do away with the microfiche in the report would have resulted in the disappearance of the catalogue. I was asked, apparently in all seriousness, if I would object to the catalogue numbers being removed from the published discussion because they wouldn't mean anything. It did not seem to occur to anyone that my objections might be to the loss of the data. Is this an isolated occurrence or have other members had recent experience of determined efforts to do away with catalogues? I would very much welcome your views on how much catalogue data we do need to publish, and would like to make those views a feature of the next *Newsletter*. Some topics to start you thinking. How often do you consult catalogues? Do you consult them if they are on microfiche? If they were published via the new Archaeological Data Service on the Internet, could you use them? I would be most interested to know what proportion of the membership has access to the Internet. If you do, email me at the address given below and I will report back in the next issue.

Members might like to be reminded of the committee members contact addresses. Angela Wardle (1 Stebbing Farm, Fishers Green, STEVENAGE, Herts. SG1 2JB) deals with all membership matters (subscriptions changes of address etc.), and Jan Summerfield (CAS, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, PORTSMOUTH PO4 9LD) handles all the other group secretary matters.

The deadline for the next Newsletter will be June 30th, 1998. As ever, all contributions gratefully received, no matter how short. If you feel inspired to write more than 1,000 words, I would be grateful if you could contact me first. Please send all contributions to:-

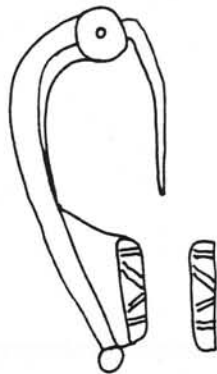
Hilary Cool,
16 Lady Bay Road,
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Research into Brooch Catchplate Return Decoration

A minority of Romano-British brooches have catchplates the outer face of the returns of which bear incised or cast decoration, usually groups of horizontal or angled lines.



Cracknell (1990) drew attention to 17 of these on a small number of brooch types from in and near Gloucester and suggested that they represented illiterate signatures like better known pottery stamps. Having encountered such decoration on a wider range of brooch types from a much larger geographical area, the author has been examining this suggestion as part of a wider study of catchplate elaboration. Though as yet mainly restricted to published sources the exercise has to date yielded 71 brooches which have catchplate return decoration; on one and two pieces Colchesters, Colchester derivatives (including a wide range of 'T-shaped' brooches), Aesicas, a Langton Down, 'Wroxeters', trumpets and even a headstud brooch. Most have incised lines but a few have patterns wholly or partly of cast ridges.

Geographically they appear from Upshaw Moor and Vindolanda in the north to Dorset and Nor'nour in the

south, and from Caernarfon in the west to Colchester in the east; but they cluster strongly in south west England with lesser numbers in central southern / south eastern England and only a few examples accounting for the rest of the distribution.

Fourteen putative groups, of two to seven brooches each, might have some uniformity of catchplate return design but rarely do these have an observable geographical or brooch typological unity which might support their having a common workshop origin. The best case that could be made out for such an origin would be Cracknell's (1990) nos 14-7. However, three or four further brooches that might be linked to the catchplate return design here have less consistent typologies and findspots; and most of the 14 possible groups have no typological or geographical uniformity. Thus, whilst there might be a few catchplate return patterns that were specific to a single workshop, signatures as such seem to be unlikely. Rather the patterns seem to have been decorative. Cracknell's argument that they would be invisible in use may be discounted as many bow brooches, with slight asymmetry often caused by the precise position of a tensioned pin, would have turned one way or the other on any but the thickest garment. Besides the finest trumpet brooches at least carry other clear ornamentation on the catchplates.

Clearly the tradition of catchplate return decoration is tied to south western England and, be it for

chronological or other reasons, particularly though not exclusively to certain brooch types (Colchester derivative and 'Wroxeter' forms are especially well represented). In date the indications so far are that it belongs particularly to the first and (?earlier) second centuries, originating by perhaps c. AD 60. The date at which it ceases is less clear, though there may be indications of a development of the decoration over time. A fuller discussion of several aspects of cast, incised and pierced brooch catchplates will hopefully appear in

due course but one of the motives for the present note is to appeal for information on additional examples to provide a fuller picture of the evidence. The author would therefore be grateful for details, particularly of unpublished brooches with and cast / incised catchplate decoration and examples of piercing on brooch forms not habitually carrying it.

Bibliography

Cracknell, P.M., 1990. 'A group of marked brooches from Gloucester' *Britannia* 21 197-206

Martin. J. Dearne,
9 Junction Road.,
Edmonton,
LONDON N9 7JS

Caveat Curator!

There I was, minding my own business, watching an October episode of *Heartbeat*. Not something I normally watch, I hasten to add, but I was sewing name labels on school uniform! Anyway in this particular episode, the lovable rogue unearthed a Roman coin. My ears pricked up. The coin was shown in close-up and to my delight it was a coin made by Westair Reproduction Ltd and it reminded me that many years ago when these coins were first produced, Chris Jones urged me to

write something for the *RFG Newsletter* so that people would not be confused by them.

These reproduction coins first went on sale in the early 1980s. Several museums, including the Museum of London, lent coins to be copied. My feeling then (and still is) that if copies of Roman coins were to be sold, they had to be good quality and not the half, obverse only, type that had been produced previously. One of our stipulations about

reproductions was that a reproduction mark of some kind had to be visible on both sides of the coin so that they could not be mistaken for the real thing.

Various packs duly appeared on the market and over the years must have been sold in abundance, since most museum shops sell them (at a very affordable price). These coins are now being lost and disposed of in the streets and gardens of Britain. I wonder how many curators have had them brought in for identification? There may be others, however, unaware of this pitfall, so may I remind you what to look for. On each side of the coin is stamped WRL (Westair Reproductions Limited). On the obverse it is stamped on the neck of the emperor and in the field on the reverse. It is very easy to spot and once you know what it stands for, identification

could not be simpler! You may face disbelief from the finder but show them this article if they threaten violence! Over the years we must have had a dozen or so brought in for identification and I have yet another on my desk as I write this. It is surprising how quickly such things can become part of the archaeological record.

Now where was I? Back to Heartbeat! The lovable rogue took his coin to the local antique dealer who said that it was Roman (well he would wouldn't he? Heartbeat is set in the 1960s and these coins weren't made then!) and told him it might have been part of a hoard. Have you guessed the rest? Yes - he found a hoard of these coins in a very unlikely looking (?replica) amphora. What ever happened to authentic props?!

Jenny Hall
Museum of London
150 London Wall,
LONDON EC2Y 5HN

Appeals for Help

Face pots

Jill Braithwaite is writing up her thesis on Continental Roman face pots and is taking another look at Romano-British ones. She says that she has got out of date since her paper in 1984 but feels it would be useful to try to update and flesh out the paper as part of the wider study. So if you know of any new finds or re-found finds, please let her know.

She is particularly interested in those from Kent of Sussex, but anything from Britain would be helpful. Her address is 79 Hampstead Way,
LONDON NW11 7LG

Braithwaite, G., 1984. 'Romano-British face pots and head pots', *Britannia* XV, 99-131

Mystery objects from *Clausentium*

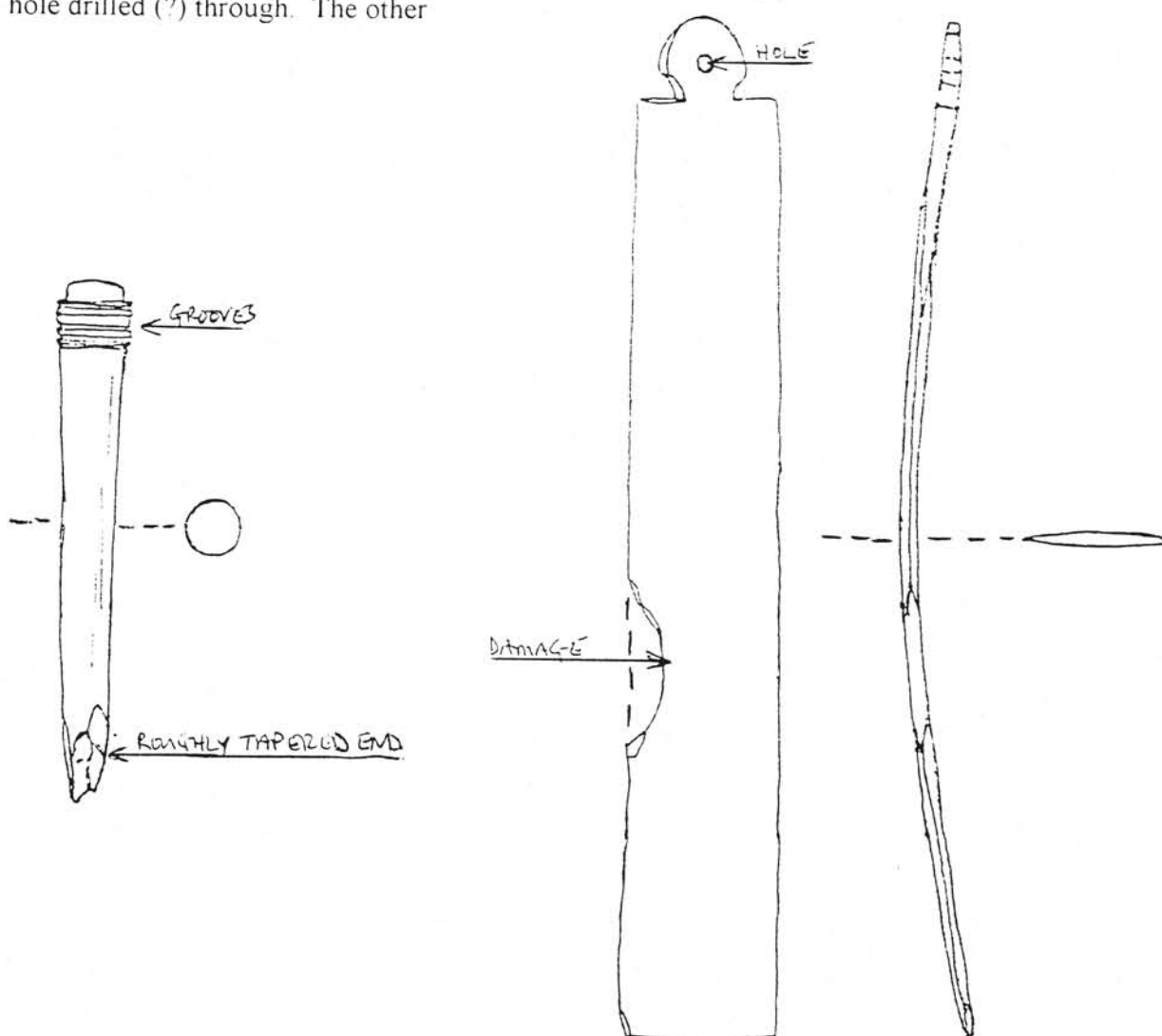
The two bone objects pictured here were found in the same pit in the Roman settlement of Clausentium (within the area of present day Bitterne Southampton), situated on the east side of the River Itchen.

Item: 097, Context : 015. Worked bone object made from a cattle rib. Naturally curved along its length, it has been worked at one end with a hole drilled (?) through. The other

end has been squared off. There is also some damage to one of its edges. The object is complete. General condition is very good.

Item: 098, context: 017.

Roughly tapered at one end. (I'm sure this is not damage). At the other end there are a number of grooves. Any help with their identification would be much appreciated.



Worked bone objects from Clausentium (Scale 1:1)

Vincent Allen,
City Heritage Services, Southampton City Council,
Civic Centre, SOUTHAMPTON SO14 7LP

Midland Brooches

John Darley is doing PhD research at the University of Warwick concerned with Romano-British brooches.

He is trying to locate as many of the unrecorded brooches from the

general Midlands area as possible. He would appreciate any help the membership can give.

His address is 143 Clinton Lane,
KENILWORTH, Warwickshire CV8
1AY

Lost finds from Hambledon Hill

Come in, HH86 small finds, your 12 years are up!

It has so far proved impossible to locate the Iron Age small finds from the final season of excavation on Hambledon Hill, Dorset. They may have been passed informally to a specialist for writing-up and may still be lingering in an inconspicuous corner in their by now very dusty shoebox. If anyone out there has

them, please inform Lorraine Mephram, Wessex Archaeology, Portway House, Old Sarum Park, SALISBURY, Wiltshire SP4 6EB Telephone 01722 32687

The site code is HH86. Approximately 12 finds are missing, with find numbers between 24 and 264. They include objects of fired clay, glass and iron.

Conference Report

The most recent Roman Finds Group meeting was held on 24th November in Canterbury and the theme for the day was the latest phases of Roman Britain. The meeting was enjoyed by an audience of about 40 - thanks to all those who helped make it such a success.

Ian Riddler kicked off by describing the unique burial from Stour Street in Canterbury. The family group buried together with an aged hound, confronts finds specialists with the problem of late/post Roman artefacts and their dating. In this case the

deceased females were buried with a number of items that are often found in late 4th century contexts, together with a number of beads described as 'Germanic' in origin, that have been dated to the 5th, or even 6th centuries. Was this a family of immigrants or a case of 'foreign' material culture being adopted by the indigenous population?

Ellen Swift continued the study of the Stour St. burial group by looking at comparable material from the continent. A Pannonian connection, as at Lankhills, was rejected in

favour of somewhat closer links with the areas around Tournai and Abbeville. Stylistic similarities may also bring the dating of the items of jewellery back towards the late 4th or middle of the 5th centuries.

Three speakers chose to concentrate on objects as status symbols. Don Macreath treated us to some fascinating snippets from his forthcoming Bumper Book of Brooches, while Justine Bayley's metallurgical work reveals a progression towards leaded brasses during the 4th century, perhaps as a result of recycling. Don has noticed that some time during the 3rd century brooches became badges of office as well as (or rather than?) functional dress items and their distribution is largely restricted to military and urban centres.

Mark Corney took up this theme in his projector-busting presentation on zoomorphic belt buckles and fittings previously described by Hawkes and Dunning. The narrow varieties concentrate in the south-west mainly from rural and urban settlements, particularly around Cirencester. Are these administrative / military badges of office too and how long into the 5th century were they in use?

Olivier Blin and Veronique Harnay gave us a brief view of the 5th century from two sites in France, the small town at Jouars-Pontchartrain en Ile de France and a mill site near Amiens. Although structural evidence extends into the Merovingian period, the excavations at Jouars suffers from that familiar 5th century malaise - a dateable artefact deficiency.

The day was rounded off by Pernille Sorensen's thought provoking talk marrying material culture with ethnicity. Beginning with evidence from their southern Scandinavian homelands, she proposed a predictive model for Jutish graves in Kent. Despite the fact that there appears to be a distinct lack of continuity between Scandinavia and Kent, this method is still in its infancy. Anthropological approaches tend to view artefacts as symbols of social status and, although this must be true at some level, clearly the material expression of ethnicity was dynamic, being influenced by (as well as influencing) the immediate cultural environment. The meeting closed with this theoretical note and I look forward to learning how the speakers continued their research.

Peter Guest
47 Richmond Road,
Montpelier
BRISTOL BS56 5EN

Notes and News

Next RFG meeting

The group will be holding a meeting in Cirencester on Monday 13th July 1998. The morning will be devoted to lectures and in the afternoon there will be an opportunity for an extended visit to the collections of the Corinium Museum. John Paddock has very kindly agreed to get material out of the reserve collection for people to see. So if you want to look at such material write to him in advance giving the details of the items you want to see. (Corinium Museum, Park Street, CIRENCESTER, Glos. GL7 2BX)

Further details about the meeting will be mailed nearer the time.

TRAC 98

This years Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference will be held in Leicester on the 16th and 17th April. It has the following sessions. 'Embodi-building' - situated approaches to the study of built space. Perceptions and definitions of the body and gender. Negotiating identities and the end of Roman Britain. Discrepant discourses. The full programme looks quite jolly and can be read on the Internet <http://www.leicester.ac.uk/archaeology/arTRAC98.html>

The conference fee is £20. Cheques made payable to the University of Leicester should be sent to TRAC98

c/o Archaeological Studies,
University of Leicester, University
Road, LEICESTER LE1 7RH

ROMEC XI

The ninth Roman Military Equipment conference will be held on 10th-13th September, 1998 in Mainz Germany under the auspices of the Institute of Pre- and Protohistory, University of Mainz.

The main theme of the conference will be *Arms and Armour of Late Antiquity*. In addition there will be room for reports of recent discoveries and practical subjects. Demonstrations and re-enactments by several well known groups are planned for the third day.

If you are interested in attending contact Dr. Oldenstein. Johannes-Gutenberg Universität Mainz, Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Schönborner Hof Südflügel, Schillerstr. D-55116 MAINZ. Fax 0049 06131-226714. Email: archivfg@goofy.zdv.Uni-mainz.de

Masada's Bronzes

The last *Newsletter* had a note by Matt Ponting about his work on the analysis of the copper alloy artefacts from Masada and Gamla. The latest *Archaeometry* has the full report of this work.

Ponting, M. & Segal, I., 1998.
'Inductively coupled plasma-atomic
emission spectroscopy analysis of
Roman military copper alloy
artefacts from the excavations at
Masada, Israel', *Archaeometry* 40,
109-22

Metal detecting offer

If you have need of an experienced
detectorist to help with field work,
John Bradbury is prepared to help.
His address is 32 Chapel St.,
Holywell Green, HALIFAX, West
Yorkshire HX4 9HG Tel 01422
311052

Castleford

Over the years you may have
become aware via lectures of the
finds from the fort and *vicus* at
Castleford, West Yorkshire. Such
diverse items as moulds for
enamelled canteens, a very large
group of leather, a small but select
wood assemblage, the best mid
second century glass drinking vessel
assemblage in the country; a large

bone assemblage; over 150 brooches
and countless other copper alloy
artefacts; composite moulds for late
Roman spoons etc etc etc. were
found often stunningly closely
stratified.

It is with great pleasure that
I announce the finds volume is now
at the printers and will be available
in mid April for a ridiculously low
cost. It will be a must-have for
Roman finds specialists - but then
I'm probably biased.

Cool, H.E.M. and Philo, C. (eds)
1998. *Roman Castleford*
Excavations 1974-85. Volume I: the
Small Finds Yorkshire Archaeology
4 (Wakefield)

It's a hardback book of 400 pages
with 164 figs and 45 photos and will
cost £24 which includes postage and
packing. Orders should be sent to
the West Yorkshire Archaeological
Service, 14 St. John's North,
WAKEFIELD, WF1 3QA and
cheques should be made payable to
Wakefield Metropolitan District
Council