

ROMAN FINDS GROUP NEWSLETTER XVII

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ROMAN FINDS GROUP

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January 1999

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

The most important thing I have to draw your attention to in this Newsletter is the SUBSCRIPTION notice on p. 9. Please read and act appropriately.

There was a good response to the appeal for new committee members made in the last *Newsletter*, and I hope to have information about the make-up of the new committee in the next *Newsletter*. That will be the tenth that I have edited, and though it has been interesting, I do think that it's time someone else had a go. It's not fair to keep the enjoyment entirely to myself. So if you fancy your hand as an editor, please get in touch and I'll tell you what the job entails.

Contact addresses for the committee remain as before at present. Angela Wardle (1 Stebbing Farm, Fishers Green, STEVENAGE, Herts. SG1 2JB) deals with all membership matters (subscriptions changes of address etc.), and Jan Summerfield (English Heritage, Historic Properties South East Region, 1 High Street, Tonbridge TN9 1SG) handles all the other group secretary matters.

The deadline for the next Newsletter will be June 30th, 1999. 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,
West Bridgford,
NOTTINGHAM NG2 5BJ

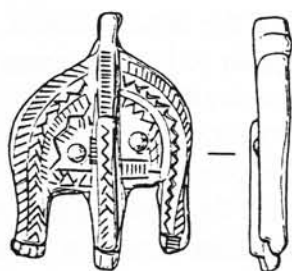
Tel/fax 0115 981 9065

Email: hilary.cool@btinternet.com

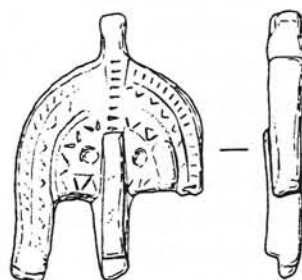
Mystery Objects from excavations at Scole, Norfolk/Suffolk 1993-4

Completion of the draft of this small finds report has still left a few weird ones unfathomed, and the writer would like to canvas the opinion of more learned members of the group. All information gratefully received and acknowledged. The first concerns two (near identical) possible casting models in lead. Evidence for lead working in the form of droplet waste and objects is widespread on the site (enhanced by extensive metal detecting survey).

Lead ?belt-fitting models



349



350

349 and **350** both unstratified from 1007SCL (Scole, North of Waveney) are considered to be possible models for belt fittings. Both are of lead, are in most respects identical and are considered together.

349 is complete and the best preserved of the pair, and the detailed description of this will suffice for both. The object has a flat undecorated underside, and an incised decorated upper surface. The use of lead would indicate that this is a model for a mould rather than a finished object itself, but the fine ornate nature of the decoration would indicate the latter, as such fine detail incised would normally be executed on the moulded object not the model. The form of the object is semicircular with three prongs extending from the flat edge, the central one continues as a raised

ridge about halfway towards the circumference continuing as a decorated line and emerging as a lug, the sides of which are notched in imitation of a transverse perforation. The decoration on the upper surface comprises arcs of incised herringbone or zig-zags, which delimit an unincised area either side of the central ridge which are occupied by two raised bosses (countersunk in **350**) which give the appearance of 'eyes' either side of a 'nose'. The prongs have stepped terminals on which the decoration continues, but which are either intended to allow them to slot into another object or to key into another element in order for the objects to lie flush.

The interpretation of the objects is problematic but the presence of the lug may suggest them to be models for the hinged element of a belt

buckle, the prongs being the pins resting on the buckle frame. One problem with this interpretation is that the stepped terminals would only work if they were on the underside of the prongs.

Nevertheless, there are similarly complex hinged buckle pins with double prongs, amongst the military belts of the fourth century worn by the Dominate, both examples coming from the Continent (Bishop and Coulston 1993, 174, figs. 125.1 and 126.1). One other possibility is that the objects are representations of belt buckles rather than functional objects or models for such. The giving or presentation of Roman *cingulum militare* (military belts) was symbolic of attaining particular status (Martin Henig *pers. com.* - see Bishop and Coulston 1993, 96 for terminology).

Batch tallies / gaming pieces ?

The second group of objects are considered to be batch tallies or gaming pieces. Objects **259-65** form a coherent group of seven small rectangular (generally 20mm x 20mm) pieces of thin lead sheet 1-2mm in thickness. They were retrieved from Scole, North of the Waveney. The upper surfaces bear crudely incised combinations of X (10), V (5) and circular punch marks which may represent single units (1). The nature of the marks indicates that the same tools were used in all cases (except perhaps **259**), and that they were executed by one person. The punch marks which occur on all but **259** are identical (2.5mm in diameter and up to 1mm in depth). The X and V marks are knife cut, vary in size between pieces, and are arranged randomly in rows, or in available space. **259** also differs in

being the only example to have numerals lightly inscribed on the reverse, and the fact that obverse and reverse figures agree (190) confirms that the symbols are intended as numerals. The single punches appear to represent single units because they never occur in multiples of more than four, although it is difficult to explain why inscribed lines were not used instead.

The pieces have all been clipped from a sheet of the same thickness, but none appear to be conjoining. The inference might be that the pieces were already offcuts from an unrelated process (given the apparently frequent use of lead on the site), and then formed a convenient material for producing what might be interpreted as tallies or counters for some form of game. The numbers represented 190, 88 (128), 51, 73, 44, 37 and 53 (103) do not, however, form any coherent pattern of multiples and so use in a game might be doubted. Another possibility is that they are batch marks for labelling the production of a number of items, in a similar fashion to the lead military sealings known from Leicester (Clay 1980, 317). However, in the present case there appears to be no way of attachment to the items involved. **266** is a similarly sized fragment of copper alloy sheet faintly scratched with the numerals CXX (120).

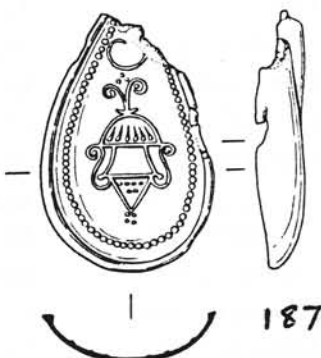
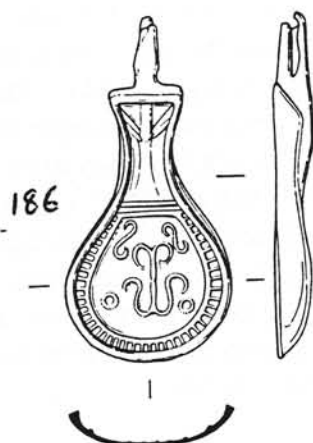
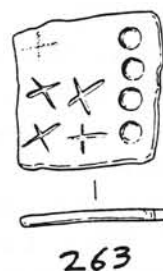
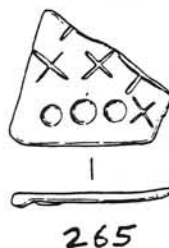
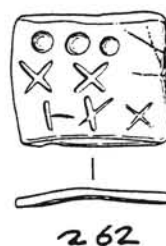
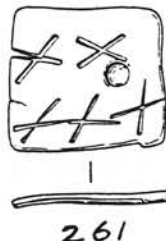
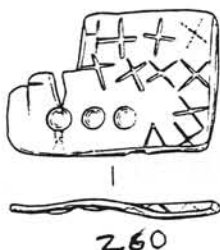
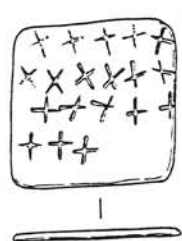
Decorated spoons

Two examples of decorated spoon bowls were also recovered. **186** is the 'mandolin-shaped' bowl element from a composite spoon of Crummy's Type 3 (1983, 69 fig. 73.2016-19). The element is cast (or stamped) and the inside of the bowl has scroll

decoration in relief, and a panelled border. The mandolin-shaped spoon appears to have been used throughout the Roman period. However, the occurrence of decoration on spoons is unusual. **187** is cast or stamped in pewter and in form fits into Crummy's Type 2 with pear-shaped bowl (1983, 69 fig. 73.2012-15). The decoration appears to be stamped in relief and comprises an ovoid ring of dots

framing a cantharus with trailing motifs and handles.

These spoons have clear similarities with the group of early Roman decorated spoons made of a lead-tin alloy discussed by Jones and Sherlock (1996), but the combination of the decoration with the mandolin-shaped bowl and use of copper alloy seen in **186** cannot be paralleled amongst the examples published there



Bibliography

Bishop, M.C. and Coulston, J.C.N., 1993. *Roman military equipment from the Punic Wars to the Fall of Rome* (London)

Clay, P.N., 1980. 'Seven inscribed leaden sealings from Leicester', *Britannia* 11, 317-20

Crummy, N., 1983. *The Roman small finds from excavations in Colchester 1971-9*, Colchester Archaeol. Rep. 2 (Colchester)

Jones, C.E.E. and Sherlock, D., 1996. 'Early decorated Roman spoons from London', in Bird, J., Hassall, M. and Sheldon, H. (eds.) *Interpreting Roman London* Oxbow Monograph 58 (Oxford), 165-75

Nick Cooper
University of Leicester
Archaeological Services,
University of Leicester
LEICESTER LE1 7RH

Email: njc9@le.ac.uk

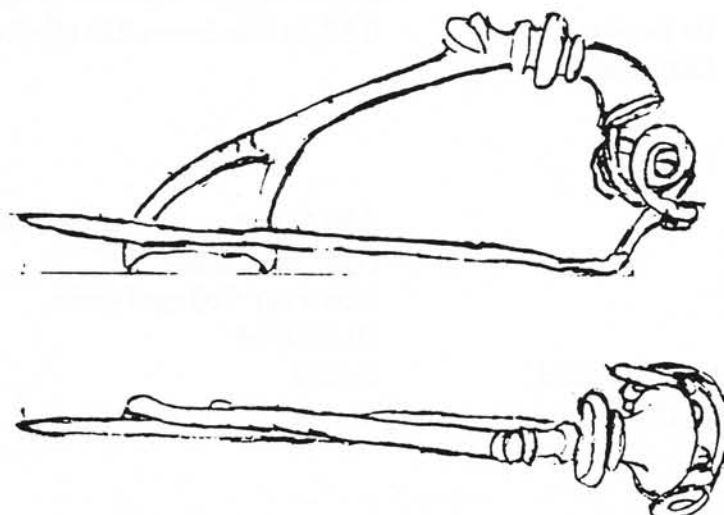
A fibula in Dublin

Between 1880 and 1911 Henry Brown donated to University College Dublin Classical Museum a number of artefacts. Amongst these was an interesting brooch (Acc. No. UCD 1166). Unfortunately we do not know the exact location in which it was found. What we do know is that Brown collected artefacts from Chester, York, London and Bonn during the period 1880-1911. Essentially it is a fibula brooch, but since fibulae occur in such a wide spectrum throughout much of Europe, we must be more precise.

The fibula in question is copper alloy and is 90mm in length, whilst 32mm in height. Although found intact, the fibula showed signs of being lightly corroded and repaired. The spring is heavy and elaborately moulded by

forking joins on either side of the receiver. The main features are those of a Roman trumpet brooch. Such brooches had a trumpet head, a button on the bow and were normally worn by women in pairs with a chain attaching them in the front. In this case, however, only one of such a pair was ever found.

Despite the fact that the main features are those of a trumpet brooch, it is highly unlikely that it fits into this category. Trumpet brooches have a striking tendency to be uniform (Snape 1993, 16). Typical features include a flanged edge, head loop and patterned foot, none of which the Dublin brooch has, and the foot tends to be solid rather than perforated as here.



The Dublin brooch also appears to have some tendencies of a La Tène III type fibula belonging to the 1st century BC. Our brooch has a 6 coil spring with an external chord. The 6 coils may have been intended to give extra force to the pin so that it would be secured tightly in the catchplate. But seeing that the catchplate is open it would be too weak, therefore the possibility of a decorative rather than a mechanical function must be considered in regard to the 6 coils.

A La Tène III type brooch with some of the features of the Dublin brooch was found in Norfolk (Hattatt 1985, 25 no 284). This is a long example of the usual form with the chord external. Enough of the catchplate remains to show that it was perforated. The button is a moulded sphere with two fine ribs above and below, all of which encircle the bow. The upper part of the bow is rectangular in section with a low facial ridge which widens to a

shoulder at the top before taking a rod form for the spring. The bow below the button is square in section, also with a facial ridge. The spring is of only two coils which is rare.

It must be said, therefore, that though the Dublin brooch is neither a definite La Tène III type nor a Trumpet brooch, it is likely to fall into a category between the two. One possibility is that it was manufactured in Britain or Gaul and that the smith whilst trying to manufacture a copy of a Trumpet brooch also incorporated native motifs. We base this assumption on the fact that much of our evidence pointed towards those areas.

Any further information on similar fibulae or other evidence which would confirm or reject our ideas would be much appreciated. Information can be sent to us via Dr. Birgitta Hoffmann at the address below.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Dr Birgitta Hoffmann and Dr. Christina Haywood.

Bibliography

Hattatt, R., 1985. *Iron Age and Roman Brooches*, (Oxford)

Snape, M.E., 1993. *Roman Brooches from Northern Britain* BAR British Series 235 (Oxford)

Julia Crimmins and Claire Keally,
Dept. of Classics
University College Dublin
DUBLIN 4
Ireland

Training - should we be organising some?

How does anyone who wants to follow a career in finds research gain expertise these days? This thought was triggered both by the number of project meetings I go to where nearly all of the finds element of the team are self-employed and working in isolation, and by the list of training courses that English Heritage are sponsoring this year (see p. 11).

The isolation of finds specialists has long been noted as a fact of life. For the individual specialist, it is probably less of a problem than it was. The MAP2 process *should* and frequently does, lead to closer integration of the finds work with all other elements of the project. From the point of view of the profession though, it's probably not healthy as the opportunities for younger people to work alongside more experienced people has diminished greatly. I may be wrong, but I have the impression that it is probably only MOLAS

amongst the units that still supports a relatively large finds team where in-house training would be a possibility.

Graduates from archaeology courses have rarely had any useful experience of finds work that would prepare them for the unmitigated messiness of actual finds assemblages, and don't necessarily know where in the literature to get help. There was never a golden age when archaeology graduates **did** come out with this experience, but at least in the more spacious days of the 70s and early 80s there was still the possibility of a benign government handing out a small but adequate 3 year research grant where you could spend time teaching yourself.

So how do people manage these days? Say you are a young graduate, you've got a precarious job (or series of jobs) with small units, and you've attracted to the finds side. You've

been involved with the on-site processing but the material is always then sent out to specialists. How can that person make the transition to doing the post-excavation work?

It seems to me that the format of the EH training courses might provide a route. From the prices being quoted (£30 for a 2 day course including accommodation), they have to be being sponsored. The low price is important as even with the cost of travel to the venue, the total cost should be within the budget of even a small unit or individual. The Roman pottery community have been more organised than we of the small finds world, producing a detailed research framework document (Willis 1997). In this they were able to identify perceived training needs, one of which was a specialist course on imports (*ibid*, 21), and low and behold this will now take place.

So I ask the question? Should we be identifying similar needs? Would there be a market for a two day course in basic Roman small finds analysis for beginners? Do you have

a longing to discover more about a particular aspect of finds work, that could be satisfied by a crash course on the subject, and if so what? I, for example, am taking myself on the stone course to refurbish my geology that I haven't used seriously in two decades.

Please get back to me with ideas, comments, suggestions if you have any and I'll report back in the next *Newsletter*

Bibliography

Willis, S. (ed.), 1997 *Research frameworks for the study of Roman pottery* (Durham/London)

Hilary Cool
16 Lady Bay Road,
West Bridgford,
NOTTINGHAM NG2 5BJ

Email: hilary.cool@btinternet.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS

You may have noticed that there has been a slight oversight in the collection of your subscriptions for the year 1998/9, in that you have not received a reminder to pay. The subscription year runs from October 1st, so you've had a free gift of 4 months. Angela says that many of you have already paid-up without any reminder. One person even paid in advance! Angela now says will all the rest of us please find our cheque books, write a cheque for £5 made

payable to THE ROMAN FINDS GROUP and post it to:

Angela Wardle,
1 Stebbing Farm,
Fishers Green
STEVENAGE, Herts SG1 2JB.

If you could respond to this appeal it would be much appreciated, not least by Angela who will be spared a major subscription reminder mailing.

Conferences and Courses

Treasure Act Meeting

The Roman Finds Group is the co-organiser of meeting to be held on Wednesday 17th March 1999 on the impact of the Treasure Act. Full details of the meeting, its location etc. will be found on the flier enclosed with this *Newsletter*.

Brick and Tile Group

There will be a meeting on Saturday, 20th February 1999, in the Board Room of the Museum of London, at 10.30am.

This meeting will be taking place to discuss the formation of a group that will act as a forum for those who are involved in the processing, analysis, and publication of brick and tile primarily from archaeological excavations.

This is an open meeting - those who are interested in brick and tile, but have no experience of recording it, are also very welcome to attend.

Further items for the Agenda are welcome. If you cannot attend, but have items for the agenda, or points you want to make, please contact Sandra Garside-Neville (tel: 01904 621339, email: sgarside@csi.com).

Please notify Sandra if you are going to attend, so that we have some idea of numbers for provision of seats, tea & coffee, etc.

Programme:

- 10.30 Coffee and registration
- 11.00 Introduction (Sandra Garside-Neville)

- 11.10 Sandra Garside-Neville:
Recent work undertaken by
Brick and Tile Services, York
- 11.40 Hilary Major: Recent work
on brick and tile in Essex
- 12.10 What's on earth is this!?
(bring your mystery items for
the rest of the group to
identify)
- 12.30 Lunch (Museum restaurant)

1.30 Main meeting (There will be
a break for coffee)

DRAFT AGENDA

- Formation of the Group - eg. how formal will the group be?, methods of communication (such as newsletters, email, meetings, etc.), costs, membership, name of the group
- Group's remit - eg. other building materials, publications, etc
- Brick and Tile recording standards (what to do about them)
- Review of brick and tile research (who's out there? doing what?)
- Any other business

English Heritage Training Courses

English Heritage are sponsoring the following Training Courses from February to May 1999. Those interested in attending any of these courses and want to book a place, or require further information, should **WRITE or FAX** (please do not telephone) to:- Sarah Jennings, Central Archaeology Service, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO9 4LD, Fax no 01705 838060

All the courses are based on intensive tuition alternating with handling sessions and because of this numbers of participants are limited to between 12 and 15 people for each course.

Roman Imported Pottery and Fine Wares

Dealing with pottery from mainland Europe and the Mediterranean, this course will cover fine table wares, coarse wares, amphorae and mortaria. It will also give an introduction to the Roman National Fabric Collection. It will provide a firm basis for the identification of imported wares including more uncommon fabrics and forms, and cover dating and recent published works.

Tutors - Roberta Tomber, Valery Rigby, Robin Symmonds

Dates - 1st course 22nd & 23rd February; 2nd course 24th & 25th February 1999

To be held at the British Museum, Blyth Road and Museum of London Specialist Services, Eagle Wharf Road

Costs - £20.00 (covers tuition, lunches and handouts) participants to arrange their own overnight accommodation

The Identification of Medieval Continental Pottery Imported into Britain c. 1066 - 1530AD

This course will provide ceramicists with the opportunity to see and handle a wide range of sherds and whole vessels of imported wares from France, Germany, The Low Countries, Italy and the Iberian Peninsular. Handling sessions will be preceded by short lectures on each of the main groups, up to date information on correct nomenclature, fabrics and forms, and publications will be provided.

Tutors - Duncan Brown, Alan Vince, David Williams

Dates - 1st course 12th & 13th April; 2nd course 14th & 15th April 1999

To be held at Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton

Cost - £30.00 (covering B&B, lunches and tuition)

Staffordshire Ceramics, late 17th to 19th century

Ceramics from the Stoke on Trent area were exported all over Britain, Europe and the rest of the world. The refined earthenwares and stonewares form the basis of all assemblages of the late 17th to the 19th century and were widely copied by many local potteries. They are date markers for most later post medieval assemblages. Participants will handle examples of all the traded wares and be able to see examples of the common and rarer vessels. Handouts and information sheets will be provided.

Tutors - David Barker, Miranda Goodby, Deborah Ford, Katey Banks
Dates - 1st course 15th & 16th March; 2nd course 17th & 19th March 1999

To be held at The Potteries Museum, Hanley, Stoke on Trent

Costs - £30.00 (covering tuition, B&B lunches and handouts)

Stone for Archaeologists

Stone is one of the more important archaeological materials but unfortunately as a general rule the identification of stone has been sadly neglected. Where available local

stone was extensively used for building, but special stone was often imported from some distance for more important buildings. Stone was also used for a range of portable artifacts where function might determine the selection of rock used, i.e. querns, millstones, mortars, and also tools such as stone axes, scrapers, honestones etc. Short illustrated talks will be given on the geological background, techniques for identification, the choice of particular stones for building and artifactual purposes, and methods of stone working. Participants will handle a wide variety of stones that have been used in the past for building or as artifacts.

Tutors - David Peacock, David Williams, Eric Robinson, Tim Tatton-Brown

Dates - 1st course 22nd & 23rd March; 2nd course 24th & 25th March 1999

To be held at the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton

Cost - £30.00 (covers tuition, B&B, lunches and course handouts)

Roman Archaeology Conference 1999

Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference 1999

This is being held in Durham from Friday 16th to Sunday 18th April. On Friday the RAC conference will be

devoted to Research Agendas in Roman Britain with the alternative of a session on transport in the afternoon for those who are allergic

to such things. On Saturday morning you get the alternatives of Gallia Narbonensis or Sculpture and Society. In the afternoon you can choose between the Roman North, Archaeological Approaches to Resistance and Roman provincial capitals. On Sunday morning, if you haven't flagged, there is yet more Roman North, a session on 'Sanctuaries: interpretation beyond the Ritual Context' and one on Images of Rome.

There will be four TRAC sessions. One on 'Rethinking the Late Antique Transition'. The second on 'Theory, Technology and Praxis' which, from the session abstract, looks to me like GIS dressed up in a theoretical overcoat. The third session is entitled

'Scales of Interaction: group identities in the Roman world' and the fourth is for the overspill.

Details of booking etc for both can be got from RAC99, Dept. of Archaeology, University of Durham, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE. Phone 0191 374 3621; fax 0191 374 3619; email: rac99@durham.ac.uk. There are also web pages. That for RAC99 can be found at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/~drk0www3> and that for TRAC at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/~drk0www2>.

Looks fun, see you there.

Notes and News

Books, books, books

Enclosed with this newsletter is a leaflet advertising the CBA's new handbook on Roman Vessel Glass by Jenny Price and Sally Cottam. If you are interested in this, you may also like to know of another recent introductory text on Roman glass. This is Denise Allen's *Roman Glass in Britain* (Shire Archaeology 76)

If you are publishing reports that you think might be of interest to the members, remember we are always happy to publicise them in the *Newsletter*.

A useful new law

Those of you who are, like me, self-employed may like to investigate a new law that came into force at the end of the last parliament in November. It is called the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998. The effect of this is that you can charge interest on the bill if it takes the organisation concerned more than 30 days to pay you. You'll find the text on the web at <http://www.hms0.gov.uk/acts1998/19980020.htm>.

This may be a coincidence but ever since I started including the mantra 'Your attention is drawn to the terms

of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998' on the bottom of my invoices, they have been paid with stunning speed.

Email

I now have a list of those RFG members who are prepared to admit they can be contacted by email. If you haven't got a copy and would like one, let me know and I'll add you to the list as well.

Contact me at :-

hilary.cool@btinternet.com