

51

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LII

JANUARY 1958 TO DECEMBER 1958

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A NEW HOARD OF ROMANO-BRITISH PEWTER FROM ICKLINGHAM

JOAN LIVERSIDGE, M.LITT., F.S.A.

IN April 1956, a bomb disposal unit of the Royal Air Force found a hoard of Romano-British pewter vessels at a depth of 2 ft. 6 in. while clearing high explosives from Berners Heath, Icklingham, Suffolk (Nat. Grid ref. 799754) on the estate of the Earl of Iveagh. The discovery was first submitted to Mr A. R. Edwardson of Moyse's Hall Museum, Bury St Edmunds, and the author is much indebted to him and to Lord Iveagh for the opportunity to study the objects and for information about them.

The hoard comprises nine pewter vessels and an iron key and saw blade, while a few animal bones and two small scraps of Roman pottery, one of them a sherd of Samian ware, were also recovered from the site. All the objects are heavily earth-stained and the pewter cups and bowls have been finished on the lathe, a practice which enabled the workman to decorate them easily with the concentric grooves which appear on most specimens. Their detailed description is as follows:¹

No. 1. Remains of shallow circular bowl, cracked and squashed out of shape. Diameter 5.5 in.

No. 2. Shallow bowl, diameter 5.6 in., exterior depth of wall 1.1 in. Two concentric grooves are visible both outside and inside rim (Pl. III *b*, no. 3).

No. 3. Shallow bowl, diameter 6.5 in., exterior depth of wall 1.3 in. Two concentric grooves inside rim, three concentric grooves about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. apart round exterior wall and three incised circles at centre of inner surface of base. Originally the bowl possessed a low raised foot but this has mostly perished.

No. 4. Shallow flat-bottomed bowl, diameter 6.6 in., exterior depth of wall 1.2 in. Profile more angular than the previous examples, circular groovings on inside and outside surfaces of wall and two incised circles on inner surface of base (Pl. III *b*, no. 1).

No. 5. Circular dish or tray, diameter 12-12½ in., much damaged and bent. Rim about 1¼ in. wide, slightly raised and grooved on the inside where it meets the body while the edge is slightly thickened. Three incised concentric circles 0.35 in. apart decorate the inner surface of the base, the outermost circle being 4.7 in. in diameter. Traces of concentric grooves occur under the rim and a raised circular ridge about 4.3 in. in diameter acts as a base.

No. 6. Fragment of the rim and part of the neck of a jug.

No. 7. Conical bowl or cup, 4.7 in. in diameter, and 2.5 in. deep. Slight flange below rim. Deep concentric grooves on inside of rim while the outer surface shows a shallower groove below the flange and two groups of deeper groovings on the body. These are visible in the illustration, Pl. III *a*, no. 2.

¹ Owing to the damaged and fragile state of the material most measurements can only be approximate.

No. 8. Cup with flat rim and pedestal foot, $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter, about 2.4 in. high. Upper surface of rim decorated with two deep and several faint concentric grooves, other faint grooves occur inside the cup (Pl. III *a*, no. 1).

No. 9. Oval dish, present length about 7 in. as one end is broken away, original length probably $8\frac{1}{2}$ –9 in. Flat rim $\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide. The interior surface is decorated with a stamped or incised drawing of a fish. The dish stands on a low footstand (Pl. III *b*, no. 2; Pl. IV *a* and Fig. 1).

Hoard and isolated finds of pewter are of not infrequent occurrence in the Fens but unfortunately little is known about them. Earlier finds from the Icklingham neighbourhood are deposited in the British Museum and objects found at Sutton, West Row and Isleham are now in the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. As it is among these hoards that we must look for comparative material for the new discoveries it may be useful to give a brief account of them.

The hoard from Sutton, Isle of Ely, consists of eight large plates or dishes, mostly with rims of the same type as our Icklingham no. 5, but larger in size, being about $14\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter. Two of them have only a simple upturned rim, while another is a square dish with a rim with a milled edge, a more unusual type. All eight might have been used as trays or dishes (*disci*) for serving food at the dinner table. Other large dishes from the same hoard are now in the British Museum.

From West Row near Mildenhall, Suffolk, comes a more varied collection of one large tray with upturned rim (15.2 in. in diameter); two plates (14.8 and 11.8 in.); and two small shallow flat-bottomed bowls; one resembling our Icklingham no. 4 and the other with the rim curving outwards and fluted on the inside and with a roundel containing seven small stamped circles decorating the inner surface of the base. Of the four cups one resembles our Icklingham no. 7 and is 5.1 in. in diameter and 2.3 in. deep with the interior of the bowl decorated with incised concentric circles; two are pedestal cups with flat rims; and a third has a narrower rim decorated with raised bosses *en repoussé*.

The largest hoard comes from Isleham Fen and forms part of the Cole Ambrose collection.¹ It includes eighteen items, half of them dishes or trays resembling those from the other two hoards in the Museum. A flat-bottomed dish 7.6 in. in diameter is a larger version of one of the West Row examples, there is a smaller saucer with fluted sides and a pedestal cup with a flat rim. One cup has a turned down rim with a milled edge and another cup or bowl has its flat rim shaped at the edge into eight short sides instead of a circle. This idea seems to have been developed further with the two larger pedestal bowls or tazzas with their flanged rims cut away to form an eight-pointed star, the same shape as the well-known tazza decorated with incised symbols including the chi-rho monogram. This was found near Ely and may actually belong to the Sutton Hoard.² The Isleham finds also include two jugs.

When we compare the new Icklingham hoard with these finds it is apparent that it is very similar in character in its selection of plate, bowls and cups. The shallow bowl, no. 4, is paralleled by the slightly smaller example from West Row and a larger one from Isleham. The cup with flat rim, no. 8, is almost a twin to one in

¹ See also *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. XXXIII (1933), p. 166.

² *Ibid.* vol. XXXI (1931), p. 66.

the West Row hoard and the dish, no. 5, closely resembles a dish from the same collection and also one from Isleham. Other dishes of similar type are known from Whittlesea Mere (Hunts) and Abington Pigotts (Herts) and there are also the larger examples from Sutton already mentioned. The jug fragment, no. 6, may have come from a fine flagon resembling those previously found at Quaveney and Isleham.¹ For a parallel to the conical cup, no. 7, we must look further afield to a well-preserved cup recently discovered in London.² This bears a close resemblance to our Icklingham specimen but it has a pronounced outer lip instead of a flange and the sides rise from a ring foot. Both vessels seem to have been inspired by the Samian ware prototype, Dragendorff form 33.

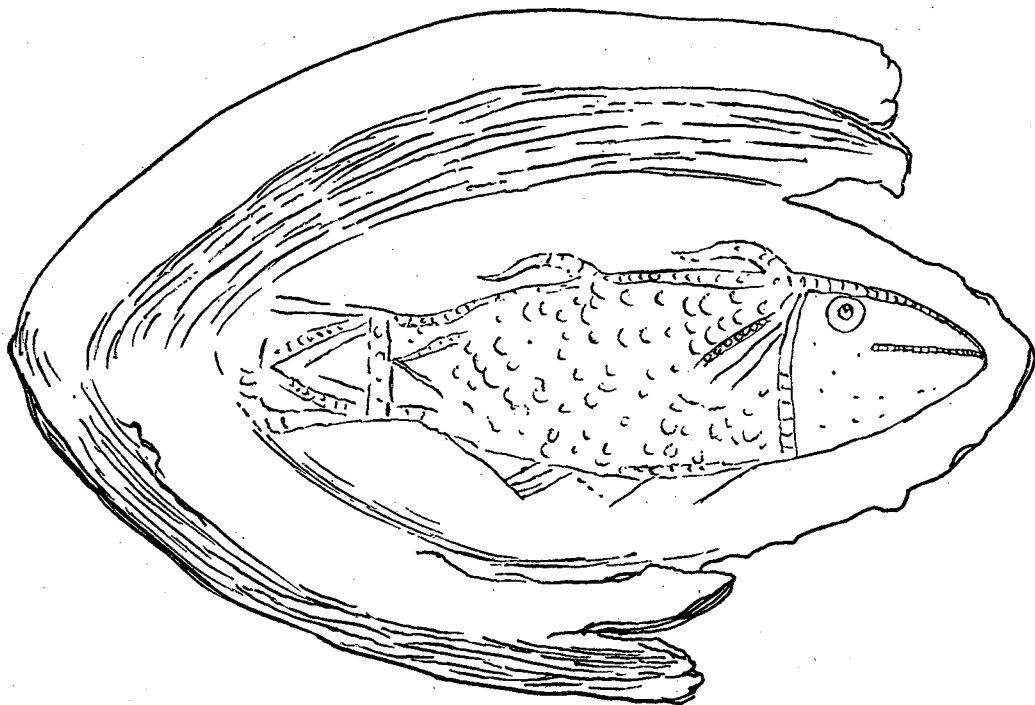


Fig. 1. Icklingham dish with fish.

There remains for consideration the most interesting item in the hoard, no. 9, the fish dish, and for a parallel to this we must also look beyond the Cambridge Region. The same motif occurs on a dish which forms part of the large pewter hoard from Appleshaw (Hants) (Pl. IVb) but there it consists of a very small stylistic fish indeed, a little over an inch in length, within an oval interlaced border.³ The two dishes are of much the same size and shape, but the rim of the Appleshaw example ended in flat handles, one of which has been broken away, and the decoration is chased instead of being stamped or incised. The fish depicted on the Icklingham dish is so much

¹ *Proc. C.A.S.* vol. XXXIII (1933), p. 165.

² Guildhall Museum Publications, *Small Finds from Walbrook 1954-1955*, pl. VIII, no. 1.

³ *Archaeologia*, vol. LVI (1898), pp. 12ff.

larger and more realistically rendered that an attempt was made to identify its species¹ but this proved impossible. It does recall some of the fishes which appear on the mosaic surrounding an octagonal plunge bath at Lufton, Somerset, in a villa occupied from the end of the second to about the third quarter of the fourth century.² Such mosaics are, of course, often found in Roman bath buildings and the creatures which decorate them have been traced back to the Mediterranean sea fauna depicted on mosaics and wall-paintings at Pompeii. They seem to have found their way into the pattern books and reappear in the third and later centuries growing steadily more schematic and ornamental and less realistic.³ It should also be remembered that the fish is used as a symbol connected with Christianity, and the suggestion has been made that the Icklingham dish or even the whole hoard might be something in the nature of a deposit of church plate. None of the objects, however, bear the chi-rho monogram and without evidence of this nature there seem to be no grounds for believing the hoard to be other than it appears, part of a dinner service with one dish of a suitable size for serving an individual portion of fish.

Samples of pewter from the Icklingham, West Row and Isleham hoards were sent to the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, Oxford, to which we are indebted for a spectrographic analysis (Table 1). This shows that the Icklingham material contains a fairly high proportion of tin, 79%, compared with 21% of lead. With this we may contrast the 74% and 26% respectively of specimens from the West Row hoard or the varying range of 69–76% of tin and 24–31% of lead from Isleham. The inscribed tazza believed to come from Sutton had a higher lead content of nearly 38% as opposed to 62% of tin and these proportions agree remarkably closely with a small dish from Abington Pigotts. A larger Abington Pigotts dish, however, worked out at 70% tin and 30% lead.

TABLE 1. *Results of spectrographic analysis of Roman pewter*

(Analysis of tin/lead content in pewters)

Museum number	Site	Tin (%)	Lead (%)	Iron	Silver
83.774	?Whittlesea Mere or Burwell	43	57	Trace	< .05
51.344a	Abington Pigotts	62.3	37.7	Trace	< .05
22.753	Sutton (chi-rho tazza)	62.2	37.8	Trace	< .05
1891.41	Sutton	67.8	32.2	Trace	< .05
22.755	Isleham	72.5	27.5	Trace	—
22.758	Isleham	76	24	Trace	—
22.752	Isleham	69.2	30.8	Trace	< .05
H.192a base	Icklingham	79	21	Trace	—
51.344b	Abington Pigotts	70	30	Trace	—
H.192b rim	Icklingham	79.5	20.5	Trace	—
1914.107.9	West Row	74.25	25.75	Trace	—
1914.107.2	West Row	73.35	26.65	Trace	—

¹ For advice about possible fish we are much indebted to Dr Lissman, C.U. Dept. of Zoology.

² *Proc. Somerset Arch. and N.H. Soc.* vol. xcvi (1952), p. 100.

³ For a discussion of fish on mosaics see D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, vol. 1 (1947), pp. 596ff.

It is interesting to compare these analyses with those for the Appleshaw hoard worked out by William Gowland.¹ He divided his results into two classes: Group A with an average composition of 71.5% tin and 27.8% lead; and group B with 78.2% tin and 21.7% lead. Group A he believed to show the proportions preferred for the Roman pewter found in Britain; group B was known but less frequently used. His work also showed that one of the Appleshaw dishes contained 33.3% lead while a dish from Icklingham examined at the same time, one of the earlier discoveries now in the British Museum, contained no less than 53.34%! Gowland points out that such a high proportion of lead is unsuitable for domestic vessels on account of its poisonous properties, a consideration to be borne in mind when considering the Sutton tazza and also one of the *disci* which was also analysed (see Table 1). Gowland's groups A and B, are both represented in our other hoards, each hoard containing vessels made up of tin and lead in varying proportions as occurred at Appleshaw. The similarities in design suggest that all the pewter dinner services found in the Fens and the neighbouring areas could have emanated from one manufacturing centre and we must hope that further discoveries of pewter hoards in a more closely datable context may provide us with some clue as to its whereabouts.

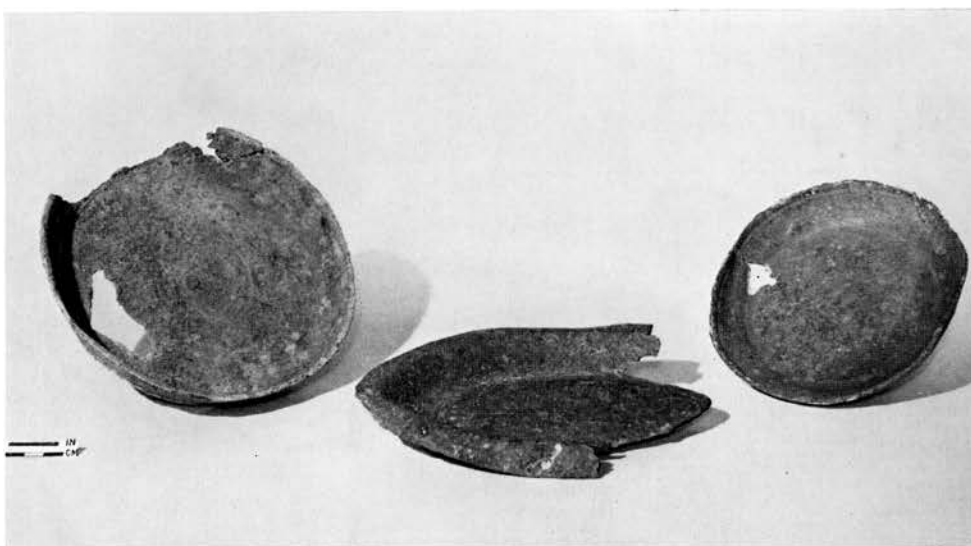
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the Trustees of the British Museum for Pl. IV*b*; to Mr L. P. Morley for Pl. III*a, b*, and Pl. IV*a*; and to Miss M. Hoather for the drawing, Fig. 1. Thanks are also due to the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities, British Museum, for facilities to examine the pewter in their collection.

¹ *Archaeologia*, vol. LVI (1898), pp. 13 ff.



(a)

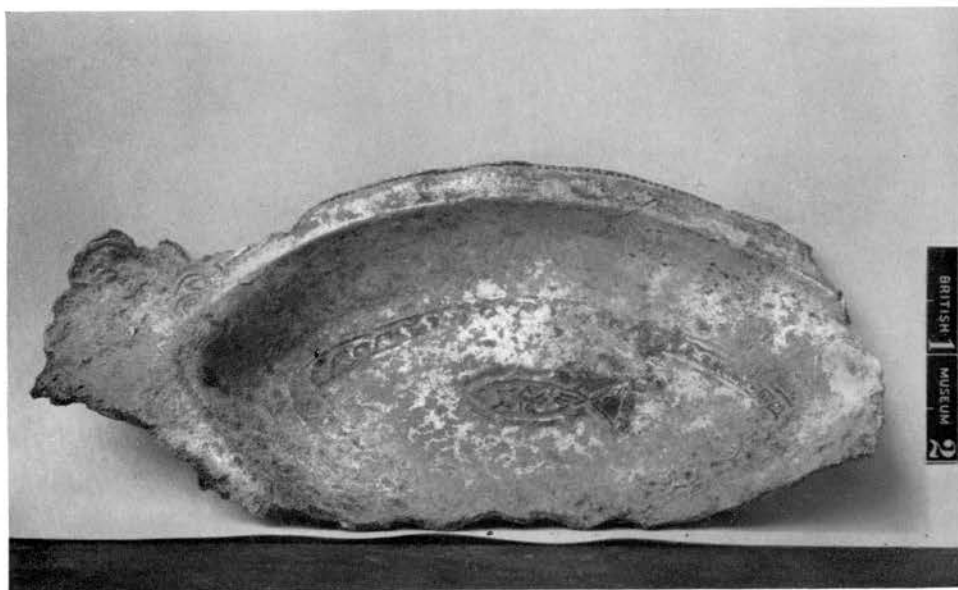


(b)

Pewter hoard from Icklingham. (a) 1, 2, cups; (b) 1, 3, shallow bowls, 2, dish decorated with fish.



(a)



(b)

(a) Icklingham dish with fish; (b) Appleshaw dish.

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