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# PROCEEDINGS OF THE CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LXI

JANUARY 1968 TO DECEMBER 1968

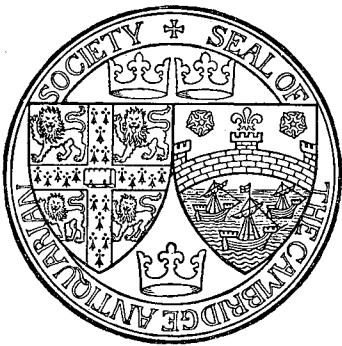
CAMBRIDGE  
DEIGHTON BELL  
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# THE ANGLO-SAXON S-SHAPED BROOCH IN ENGLAND WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ONE FROM LAKENHEATH, SUFFOLK

TERESA BRISCOE

## THE LAKENHEATH BROOCH

DURING the spring of 1958, after the field known locally as 'No. 1' at Lakenheath in Suffolk (N.G.R. 52/733833) had been ploughed slightly deeper than previously, an S-shaped brooch of the Anglo-Saxon period (Fig. 1a) was found lying on the surface.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately the exact find-spot was not marked, so further investigation of the site was not possible. The field in question has yielded Iron Age hearths, as well as Anglo-Saxon decorated sherds;<sup>2</sup> there is an extensive scatter of Roman sherds overall. The distribution of these surface finds, coupled with the fact that none of the previous excavations have yielded any trace of a cemetery,<sup>3</sup> suggest the presence of an Anglo-Saxon habitation site in this area.

The Lakenheath brooch would appear to be of debased type (see discussion below); it is of bronze and the S is reversed. Fastening was by means of an iron pin, sufficient of which remains to show that this included a spring. The one remaining complete terminal of the S takes the form of a bird's head with hooked beak, suggestive of a bird of prey. The other terminal is missing; the break is an old one.<sup>4</sup> There are

The following abbreviations are used:

Baldwin Brown	<i>The Arts of Early England</i> (G. Baldwin Brown).
De Baye I	<i>The Industrial Arts of the Anglo-Saxons</i> (Baron de Baye).
De Baye II	<i>La Cimeti�re visigotique d'Herpes, Charente</i> (Baron de Baye).
Lethbridge I	<i>The Cemetery at Lackford, Suffolk</i> , C. A. S. Quarto Publications (1951) (T. C. Lethbridge).
Lethbridge II	'The Anglo-Saxon Settlement in Early England', T. C. Lethbridge, <i>Dark Age Britain</i> , ed. D. B. Harden.

<sup>1</sup> Bulletin no. 5 of C.B.A. Group 7 (1958).

<sup>2</sup> Grace Briscoe, 'Combined Beaker and Iron Age Sites at Lakenheath, Suffolk; *Proc. C.A.S.* XIII (1949).

<sup>3</sup> The Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Lakenheath lay approximately half a mile to the south-west of 'No. 1' site and to the east of a green road known as 'Sandy Drove'. It is on considerably higher ground and is recorded in Cyril Fox, *Archaeology of the Cambridge Region. V.C.H. Suffolk*, I, p. 344.

<sup>4</sup> Miss V. Evison has pointed out to me that, if an outline of the brooch is reversed over it, the broken part cannot have carried a head of the same shape and size as the existing one. She suggests that the broken end may have had a tail of the type carried by the earlier continental brooches discussed in this paper. As it seems that the Lakenheath brooch cannot be much earlier than the middle sixth century and this would seem to be too late to incorporate this feature, it may be suggested that a second head was of a different shape, as is one on the Mildenhall swastika brooch (Fig. 2c).

incised lines marking the neck of the bird's head and outlining the profile of the S. The length of the brooch is 4·4 cm. It is now in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge.

The nearest example to the Lakenheath brooch in form is a pair of brooches from the cemetery at Sleaford, Lincolnshire<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1 b(i) and b(ii)), now in the British Museum. This pair also has the S reversed and has similar bird-headed terminals with hooked beaks. They are of bronze but the surfaces are tinned—which is unique—while the edges are outlined with stab punches. In size they are larger than the Lakenheath brooch, b(i) being 5·4 cm long and b(ii) 5·2 cm. Fastening was also by means of an

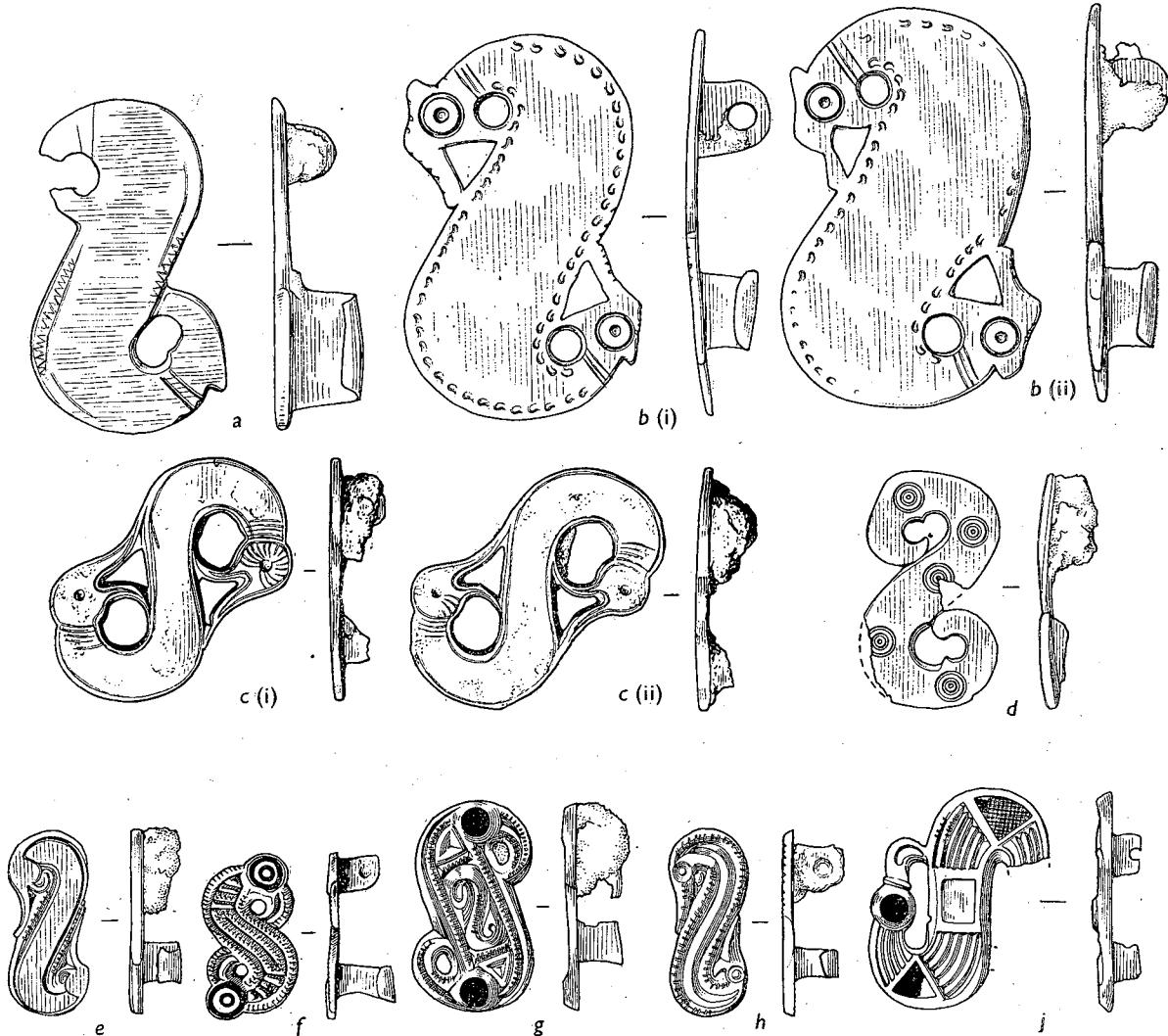


Fig. 1. S-shaped brooches. Actual size. a. Lakenheath, Suffolk. b. Sleaford, Lincolnshire. c. Haslingfield, Cambridgeshire. d. Howletts, Kent. e. Chessel Down, Isle of Wight. f. Haslingfield, Cambridgeshire. g. Howletts, Kent. h. Lyminge, Kent. i. Iffley, Oxfordshire.

<sup>1</sup> *Archaeologia*, L, pp. 798 and pl. xxiii, fig. 9; Baldwin Brown, IV, p. 799; De Baye I, pp. 43–4, pl. 4.

iron pin, the rusted remains of which on *b(i)* carries the imprint of a finely woven textile, while that on the back of *b(ii)* has traces suggestive of a coarse-woven fabric.

## THE S-SHAPED BROOCH IN BRITAIN

The S-shaped brooch of this period is fairly common on the Continent, mostly in early Frankish and Lombard contexts, and the distribution extends over the whole of Europe.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, rare in the British Isles,<sup>2</sup> being represented by only eleven examples (see Appendix). All these come from an area comprising south-eastern

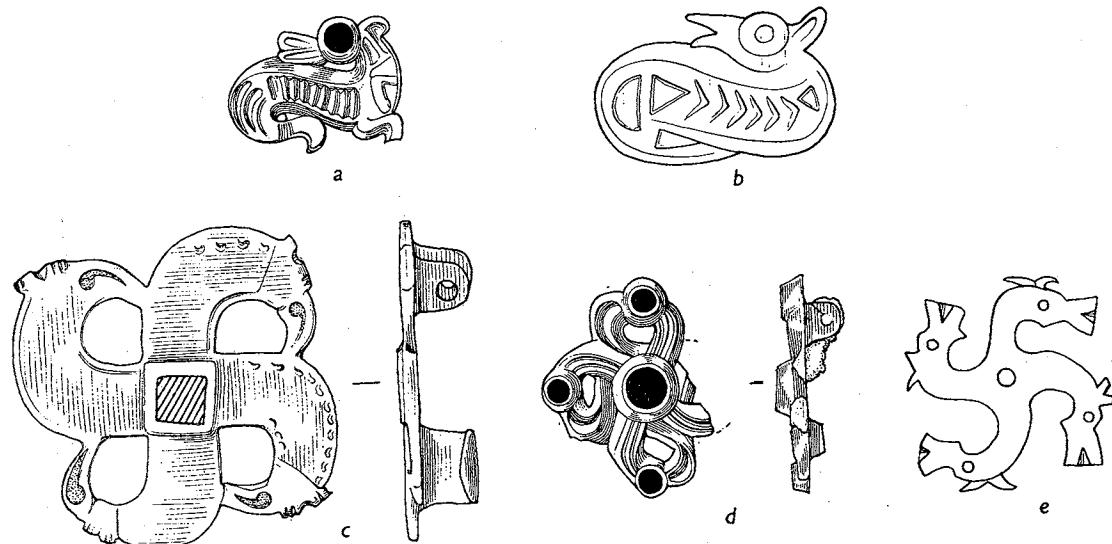


Fig. 2. Associated brooch types. Actual size. *a*. Herpes, Charente, France. *b*. Rhenen, Holland. *c*. Mildenhall, Suffolk. *d*. Herpes, Charente. *e*. ? Herpes, Charente.

England east of a line from the Isle of Wight to Grimsby. The distribution map (Fig. 3) shows that the finds come from the neighbourhood of navigable rivers or the coast, that is, from areas of early settlement. Of these a number are undoubtedly continental imports, but others are quite different in style and technique and, it is suggested, are of native manufacture.

*Continental imports*

The ornate gilt brooches from Chessell Down, Isle of Wight, Haslingfield, Cambridgeshire, Iffley, Oxfordshire, and Howletts and Lyminge in Kent are imports and can be paralleled by continental examples.<sup>3</sup>

The Chessell Down brooch (Fig. 1*e*) has stab ornamentation on the bends of the outer edges. It is 2·5 cm long and is of bronze with traces of gilding. The terminals are of the 'duck-head' type<sup>4</sup> (see below).

<sup>1</sup> M. Deansley, *History of Early Medieval Europe*, p. 255; N. Åberg, *Vorgeschichtliche Kulturekreise in Europa*, p. 64. <sup>2</sup> De Baye 1, p. 43. <sup>3</sup> British Museum Guide to Anglo-Saxon Antiquities (1923).

<sup>4</sup> De Baye 1, p. 44 and pl. IV, 9; V.C.H. Hampshire, 1, pp. 387–90; Baldwin Brown, III, p. 280.

The Haslingfield brooch (Fig. 1*f*) is silver-gilt and resembles a figure-of-eight, the 'eyes' being retained as roundels at the top and bottom; these however are filled with silver instead of the more usual garnet or red glass. It is 2·8 cm long and is ornamented with panels of chip-carving.<sup>1</sup> (It has been suggested that this brooch is

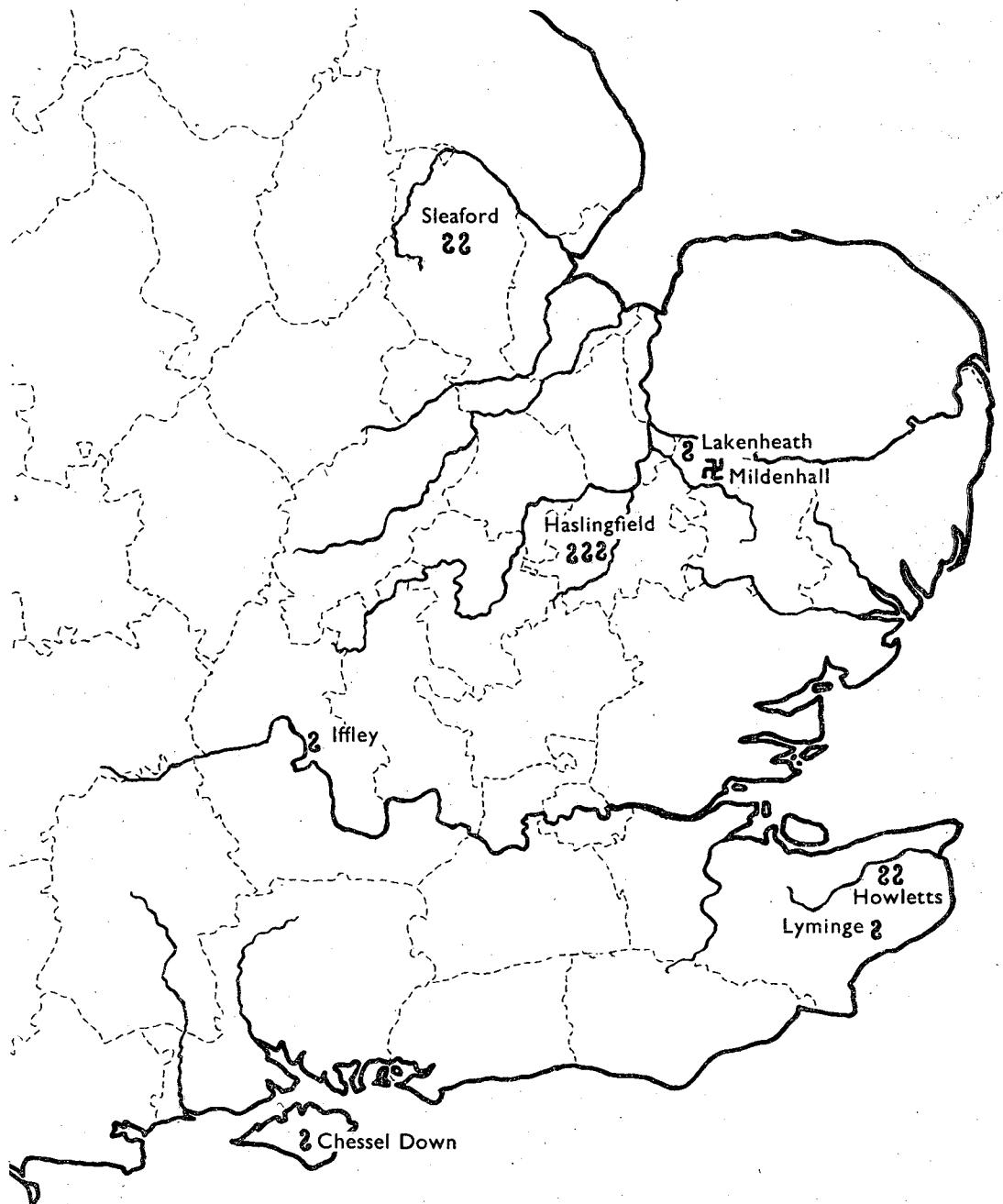


Fig. 3. Distribution map of Anglo-Saxon S-shaped brooches.

<sup>1</sup> V.C.H. *Cambridgeshire*, 1; 'Anglo-Saxon Remains', T. C. Lethbridge; Fox, *op. cit.*

in fact a local copy, but until more examples come to light it is perhaps wiser to class it with the imports, which it more closely resembles.)<sup>1</sup>

The Howletts brooch (Fig. 1g), which has lines of chip-carving outlining the three central panels and two garnet roundels for 'eyes', is 2·8 cm long; it is interesting that the centre panel of the three consists of an S ending in dolphin tails.<sup>2</sup> It resembles the Haslingfield brooch described above and is also figure-of-eight in shape. It was found in association with amber beads.

The Iffley brooch (Fig. 1j) is gilt and cloisonné. It is of the most common continental type, which is usually regarded as being of Lombard derivation.<sup>3</sup> It is 3·1 cm long and one of the bird's-head terminals is missing. The garnet cloisons alternate with similar-shaped panels of linear decoration; two garnets remain in place and the bird's head has a hooked beak.<sup>4</sup>

The Lyminge brooch (Fig. 1h) is also gilt and is 2·6 cm long; the terminals are of 'duck-head' type and the lines of the S are decorated with chip-carving.<sup>5</sup>

With the exception of the Iffley brooch, the imported brooches can all be attributed to Frankish inspiration.

#### *Native brooches*

The remaining brooches differ markedly from the continental types. The pair of brooches from Haslingfield, Cambridgeshire (Fig. 1c(i) and c(ii)) are of bronze and resemble the Lakenheath and Sleaford brooches in technique. This pair, however, have 'duck-head' terminals and linear decoration for eyes and a faint line outlining the S. The fastening is by an iron pin, on the rust of which on both brooches there appears to be the imprint of a fine textile.<sup>6</sup>

The Sleaford pair, and the Lakenheath brooch have been discussed above, but appear to fall into this group.

The second Howletts, Kent, brooch (Fig. 1d) is of bronze, with hooked beak terminals. The body is ornamented with ring-and-dot circles, which also form the eyes.<sup>7</sup> Appliqués of flat bronze bearing a similar ring-and-dot ornamentation were found in the Frankish cemetery of Spontin in Belgium and are now in the Archaeological Museum, Namur. It may be that this brooch is also an import from the Low Countries, but it is nearer to the British types in style than anything I have been able to find, so far, in continental contexts.

<sup>1</sup> T. C. Lethbridge in *V.C.H. Cambridgeshire*, 1, suggests that this brooch is 'apparently a copy of a frankish type' and Fox (*op. cit.*) remarks that the use of silver rather than garnets for cloisons is an Anglian fashion. However, the brooch is so similar to continental types, with the division of the decoration into three sections by means of chip-carved transverse ribs at each end and with the two vertical ribs similarly decorated in the centre, that, if it is a local product, it must surely be the work of a jeweller in contact with the Continent or trained there.

<sup>2</sup> *British Museum Quarterly Review*, xi (1936), pp. 51–2, pl. xv.

<sup>3</sup> J. Werner, 'Eine nordfranzösische Tierfibel von Basel', *Ur Schweiz*, xii.

<sup>4</sup> Baldwin Brown, III, p. 280; De Baye 1, p. 43, pl. iv, 8; N. Åberg, *The Anglo-Saxons in England*, pp. 95–7.

<sup>5</sup> A. Warhurst, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, LXIX (1955), 'The Jutish Cemetery at Lyminge'.

<sup>6</sup> *V.C.H. Cambridgeshire*, 1; Lethbridge, *op. cit.*; De Baye 1, p. 43, pl. iv, 7; Fox, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant.* xxx (1918), p. 107.

There is one final object which has been referred to as a brooch, from Sawston, Cambridgeshire,<sup>1</sup> which I have only been able to trace as an illustration. It does not appear to be ornamented and has plain terminals. It does not resemble any of the brooches discussed above or any continental types. The drawing suggests that it is deeper in section than the normal S-shaped brooch. The S is normal and the drawing shows no sign of any form of attachment or fastening. It may be a buckle, as was suggested in the original description<sup>2</sup> but it would seem more likely that it was a shield ornament or appliqué and related in type to the example of somewhat similar shape from Alvediston, Wiltshire,<sup>3</sup> but, without handling it, it is impossible to say.

There does not appear to be any rule as to the way the S faces, either here or on the continent. The imported brooches from Haslingfield, Iffley and Howletts and the native brooches from Haslingfield are all the normal-facing S, whilst in the remaining examples both imported and native the S is reversed.

In all cases, fastening is by means of an iron pin with spring and a simple clasp.

#### DISCUSSION

The Sleaford pair and the Lakenheath single brooch would appear to be the latest versions of the type. The native brooches seem to be copies by local craftsmen of the continental types brought in by early settlers with Frankish connections. So far, as stated above, I have not been able to trace any continental parallels for these plain brooches, which would support the suggestion that these are of British manufacture.<sup>4</sup> All six brooches differ from the continental types Nils Åberg illustrates in his *Vorgeschichtliche Kulturekreise in Europa*, those shown by J. Werner in his *Die Langobardischen Fibeln aus Italien* and in *Ur Schweiz*, XII, and those from France in the Ashmolean and British Museums, in that the body of the S is either cut from a thin bronze plate or, more probably, cast in a mould. Some of the ornamentation appears to have been added later. These brooches are nearer to the stylized S-stamps appearing on the cremation urns from Lackford, Suffolk,<sup>5</sup> than the continental examples, which are also more cursive and fluid in their lines and decoration. T. C. Lethbridge has already suggested that the ornate S-stamps on the Lackford Urn No. 50.47 (49.A.2) may be inspired by the garnet-encrusted continental examples of Lombard origin, which are represented here by the Iffley brooch.<sup>6</sup>

#### Terminals

The native brooches appear to follow two traditions in their terminals: the 'bird-of-prey' (or hooked beak) and the 'duck-head' types. These two types also occur on

<sup>1</sup> *Archaeologia*, xviii (1816), E. C. Clarke, pp. 340–3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Evison, *Ant. Journ.* XLIII, p. 43, fig. 21c. In a recent article on 'The Dover Ring-sword' in *Archaeologia*, CI (1967), Miss Evison illustrates the Sawston S-shaped bronze piece (fig. 14d) and identifies it as a sword pommel (p. 79).

<sup>4</sup> N. Åberg, *The Anglo-Saxons in England*, in a note on p. 97, refers to these brooches as follows. 'From England are also known a few non-typical S-shaped brooches which are not mentioned here.'

<sup>5</sup> Lethbridge I, pp. 42 and 54, figs. 20 and 32.

<sup>6</sup> Lethbridge I, p. 21, fig. 30.

continental examples. At times the whole outline in both types is softened into a figure-of-eight. When this variation is derived from the 'bird-of-prey' type it retains the eye in the form of a roundel filled with garnet or red glass, as in the imported brooches from Howletts and Haslingfield (Fig. 1*f, g*). The 'duck-head' type appears to lose the eye altogether, as in the imported brooch from Chessell Down (Fig. 1*e*). On the Continent a third type of terminal is found which has gaping jaws and a projection from the back of the head, which is usually accepted as being an ear. J. Werner traces the whole brooch-type to the sea-lion pins of late Roman times<sup>1</sup> though it may be argued that the head with gaping jaws is closer to the Roman 'hippocamp' than to the sea-lion: that both beasts were associated in art forms is proved by their occurring together in the second-century mosaic in Room 3 in the North Wing at Fishbourne, Hampshire.<sup>2</sup> This argument is reinforced by examples from the cemeteries of Herpes, Charente in France<sup>3</sup> and Rhenen, Holland,<sup>4</sup> where in two brooches the S has a 'horse' or gaping-jaw head at one end and a tail at the other (Fig. 2*a, b*). These cemeteries are dated to the fifth century at the latest, so that this type of brooch must be very early in the series.

#### *Associated brooch types*

In considering this type of brooch, note may be taken of the swastika brooch from Mildenhall, Suffolk (Fig. 2*c*), five miles south of Lakenheath, now in the Fenton Collection in the British Museum.<sup>5</sup> This brooch seems unique in England; though other swastika brooches occur, it is the only one with 'bird-of-prey' terminals and is in effect two S-shaped brooches of the Lakenheath type joined together.<sup>6</sup> It is 4 cm square and in the centre is a square setting which originally contained red enamel, the use of which is a Celtic art and was unknown to the Anglo-Saxons;<sup>7</sup> it is cast in one piece. A somewhat similar brooch to the one from Mildenhall is illustrated in the catalogue *Merovingische Kunst* of the Royal Museum of Archaeology, Brussels (Fig. 2*c*); no location is given to this last piece, which is described in the catalogue as 'Roman', but it is associated in a case with horse brooches from Herpes. Other ornate swastika brooches occur on the Continent with a central boss and four roundels on the arms containing garnet inlay. Though these are not usually considered to be of a true ornithomorphic type, certain examples suggested the doubled S-shape brooch of Lombard type in their technique.<sup>8</sup> In the context of the Celtic enamel escutcheons from the hanging bowls, E. T. Leeds points out the evolution of the

<sup>1</sup> J. Werner, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Antiquity*, XXXIX, no. 155 (September 1965), frontispiece.

<sup>3</sup> De Baye II, pl. xv, no. 102.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Dr Bratt of Leyden University for showing me a preliminary catalogue of the finds from the excavation of the Frankish Cemetery at Rhenen. The brooch under discussion is not the one illustrated in the *Illustrated London News* of February 1955. This cemetery is still awaiting full publication.

<sup>5</sup> V.C.H. *Suffolk*, I, p. 346, fig. 15; Baldwin Brown, III, pl. XLVIII.

<sup>6</sup> Dr J. N. L. Myres in a letter to the writer points out that the swastikas on the urn from the Lackford Cemetery are made by crossing the S-shaped stamp. See Lethbridge I, fig. 30.

<sup>7</sup> E. T. Leeds, *Celtic Art*, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the brooch from Rhenen, Holland, in the *Illustrated London News* (February 1955), fig. 4.

swastika into a zoomorphic form<sup>1</sup> and this may have a bearing on this type of brooch. An example of the type from Herpes is now in the British Museum (Fig. 2d) and another was found in the Rhenen cemetery.<sup>2</sup>

In view of the nearness of the location and similarity in style of the two Suffolk brooches discussed above, it may be suggested that the Mildenhall swastika and Lakenheath S-shaped brooches come from the same workshop. The Lackford/Illington potter was exporting pottery as far afield as Leicestershire and Norfolk<sup>3</sup> so that it is quite possible that a community capable of supporting one industry might have included a jewelry workshop in the same area. The closeness and number of cemeteries in this area<sup>4</sup> indicate that there must have been a considerable number of Anglo-Saxon settlements in the district from early in the Migration Period, or even from late Roman times, as Anglo-Saxon federates.<sup>5</sup>

### *The S symbol*

The use of the S symbol is a feature of the Anglo-Saxon period, and, though it is claimed that the brooches under consideration are derived directly from the classical Roman sea-beast (see above), they may well in their double-headed form owe something to contact with the earlier Celtic dragonesque brooch tradition. It may be noted that a very fine dragonesque brooch from Lakenheath is in the Ashmolean Museum,<sup>6</sup> and de Baye illustrates a typically Celtic pair which, he states, comes from Faversham, Kent.<sup>7</sup> These brooches are undoubtedly Celtic and cannot conceivably be classed as Anglo-Saxon. The excavations at Faversham are completely unrecorded: the only other mention of this pair of brooches being in the *Catalogue of the Gibbs Bequest* by C. Roach Smith, where they are illustrated with an Anglo-Saxon square-headed brooch. They are referred to as being in a 'fragmentary condition', and now appear to be lost. In view of the lack of evidence, it would seem better to dissociate these brooches from the Anglo-Saxon grave-goods from this cemetery and to infer a Romano-British or Iron Age burial, which was not recognized at the time of excavation as belonging to an earlier period.

The serpent symbol is found from Neolithic times and also occurs on Pictish stones (Class I) where C. Thomas attributes to it a 'religious or talismanic meaning',<sup>8</sup> and it is also found in later Norse contexts.<sup>9</sup> G. Schwantes in 'Arbeitsweise und

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the brooch from grave 20 from Vors, Hungary. K. Sergi *Acta Archaeologia* (1964). Here the zoomorphic origin of this S-shaped brooch has nearly disappeared into an abstract design. E. T. Leeds, *Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> *Illustrated London News* (February 1955), fig. 4.

<sup>3</sup> J. N. L. Myres, *Medieval Archaeology*, III, p. 13 (the reference is to pot no. 50.33 in fig. 30 in Lethbridge I); Lethbridge II, pp. 113 *et seq.*

<sup>4</sup> Fox, *op. cit.* map of the Anglo-Saxon period; H.M.S.O. *Map of Britain in the Dark Ages*.

<sup>5</sup> Lethbridge II, pp. 113 ff.; Grace Briscoe, *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology* (1953), 'A Romano-British Settlement at Lakenheath', p. 80; J. N. L. Myres, *Dark Age Britain*, ed. D. B. Harden, 'Romano-Saxon Pottery', pp. 20 and 27.

<sup>6</sup> Fox, *op. cit.* pp. 97 and 106; *V.C.H. Suffolk*, I, p. 271 and plate facing p. 272.

<sup>7</sup> De Baye I, p. 44, fig. 9.

<sup>8</sup> C. Thomas, *Arch. Journ.* CXVII (1961), pp. 53-6 and CXVIII (1962), pp. 57 and 81.

<sup>9</sup> Holger Arbman, *The Vikings*, p. 30.

einige Ergebnisse der Vorgeschichtliche Sinnbildforschung' in *Offa*, iv (1939), claims that the S form is in fact a sun symbol and illustrates its use on many forms of prehistoric jewelry as well as an Anglo-Saxon urn from Cuxhaven, Germany.

The comparative rarity of these brooches compared with other types of the period, and the use of the S-stamp on cremation urns of this same period, are suggestive of some significance other than just pure ornament or usefulness.<sup>1</sup>

#### DATING

The dating of these brooches in England is difficult as most of the British examples were found in unrecorded or poorly recorded circumstances. The exception, as stated above, is the Lyminge brooch: A. Warhurst, writing of the cemetery and the brooches found there as a whole, states that they are 'unlikely to be later than 600 A.D.'.<sup>2</sup> The cemeteries at Chessel Down and Howletts have also been dated to the fifth and sixth centuries,<sup>3</sup> and Sleaford to the sixth century.<sup>4</sup> In view of this dating it may be suggested that this group of brooches can be confined to the late fifth and early sixth centuries, the Lakenheath and Sleaford examples perhaps coming nearer to the middle sixth century.

The writer would like to thank the many people who have helped and encouraged her in research for this paper, and with its preparation; she is particularly grateful to Miss Leslie Dobson, of the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum, and Miss V. Evison for reading the paper prior to publication and for their helpful comments and advice.

<sup>1</sup> J. Werner, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> A. Warhurst, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Evison, *The Fifth Century Invasion South of the Thames*; S. C. Hawkes, *Archaeologia*, xcvi (1961); *Ant. Journ.* xxx (1918).

<sup>4</sup> *Archaeologia*, l.

#### APPENDIX

##### LIST OF BRITISH S-SHAPED BROOCHES

Provenance	Nos.	Museum	Remarks
Chessel Down, I.O.W.	1	British Museum, London	Gilt, continental type
Haslingfield, Cambs	3	Ashmolean Museum, Oxford	(1) Gilt, continental type; (2) bronze, native type
Howletts, Kent	2	British Museum	(1) Gilt; continental type; (1) bronze, native type
Iffley, Oxon	1	British Museum	Gilt cloisonné, continental type
Lakenheath, Suffolk	1	Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge	Bronze, native type
Lyminge, Kent	1	Maidstone Museum, Kent	Gilt, continental type
Sleaford, Lincs	2	British Museum	Bronze with tinned surfaces, native type



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