

A Late Bronze Age Site in Priory Park, Reigate

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with a report on the pottery by STEVE DYER
and on the flints by ROGER ELLABY

Following the discovery of a small group of bronze objects on the summit of the ridge in Priory Park, Reigate, a limited excavation recovered a small group of Late Bronze Age pottery. The finds suggest a settlement site. There were no accompanying archaeological features.

In early 1989 a small group of bronze objects was found by Mr T Lane using a metal detector in Priory Park (TQ 2515 4940). The group comprised a small socketed axe, a fragment of a sword blade and seven pieces of copper ingot. The axe and the ingot fragments were dispersed around an area of high ground at the east end of the prominent ridge, part of the Lower Greensand formation, which rises in the southern half of the park. The blade fragment was found about 150m away to the north-east, on the north-facing slopes. The group of bronzes lay in an area of bracken some 25m SSW of the commemorative seat at the east end of the ridge and just above a point where a footpath climbs up from Park Lane East (fig 1). It is understood that they were recovered from an area perhaps 5-10m across. None of the bronzes was reported to have been deeply buried; the shallow hole from which the axe was retrieved was still visible. Another fragment of ingot had been recovered by metal detector close to the present find some years previously.¹ A small excavation, which it was hoped would place the finds into a context, took place over the weekend of 27-8 May 1989 under the writer's direction and with the kind permission of the Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

Two trenches were opened, their eastern sides sharing a common alignment on the monument. The larger trench, measuring 4 × 3m, encompassed the find spot of the axe. However, apart from a tiny fragment, no further bronze objects were forthcoming. The only layer encountered below the humus was a fairly loose, light brown, rubbly sand, c300mm deep, which overlay sandstone bedrock. A slight ledge which crossed the trench in an east-west orientation is considered to be a natural feature, perhaps root disturbance. No other features were encountered. This trench yielded a small group of pottery of Late Bronze Age character, some of which joined, as well as 24 fragments of worked flint. In fact some sherds were recovered during initial bracken clearance prior to the trench being laid out. The remainder of the pottery was evenly distributed throughout the trench.

The second trench, measuring 2 × 2m, was located on flatter ground slightly further north. This met with a similar layer which was more compact and disturbed by roots. This smaller trench yielded a single sherd. A wide-ranging metal detector survey of the general area was undertaken by the late Bob Burtenshaw both prior to and concurrent with the excavation, but only modern material was recovered.

Conclusion

There is sufficient evidence here to suggest that the east end of this ridge may have been the site of some form of settlement in the Late Bronze Age and the surface context of some of the pottery perhaps emphasises the lack of ground disturbance since that time. The restricted area of habitable ground at this point suggests also that such a settlement,

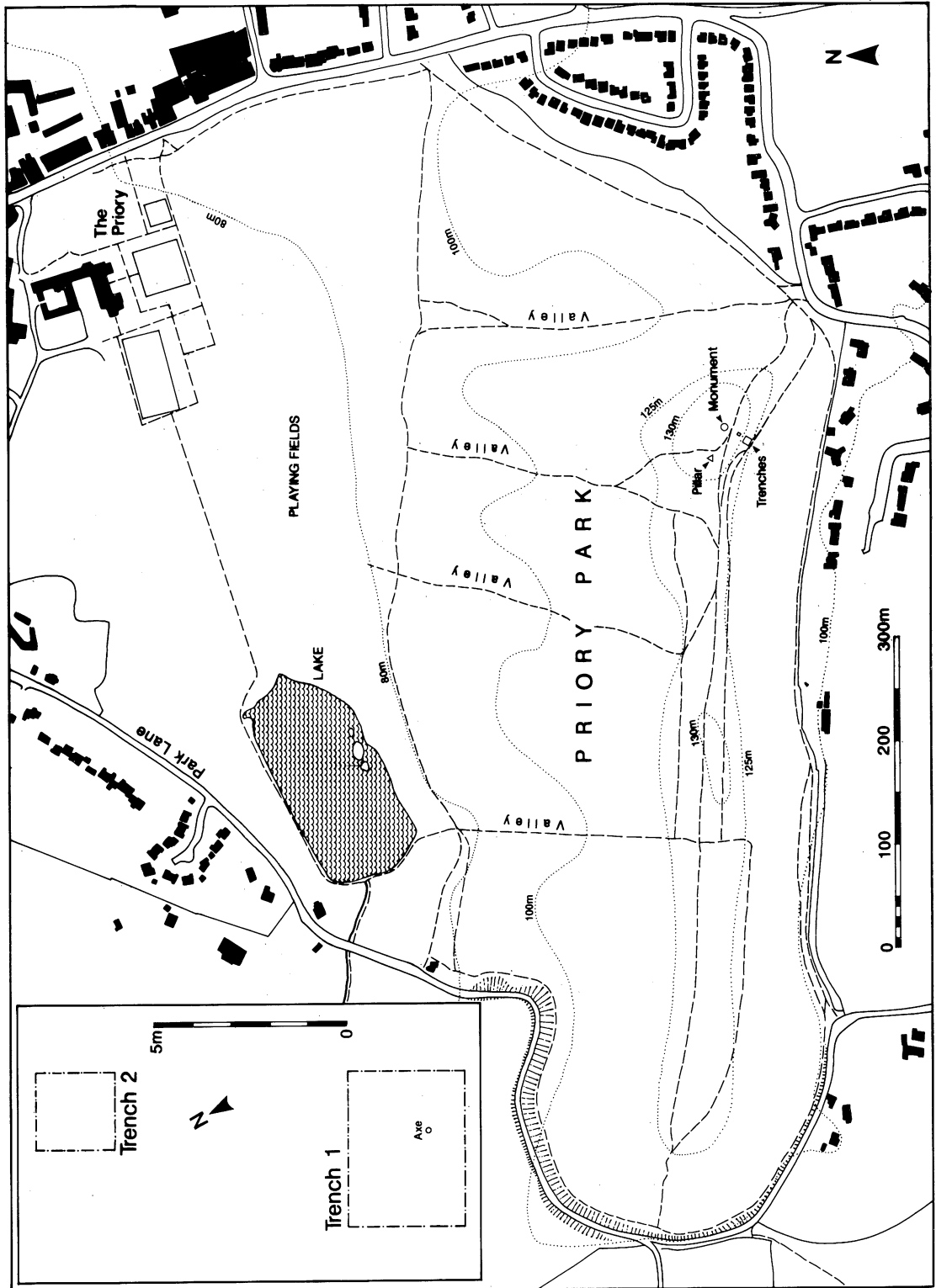


Fig 1 Priory Park, Reigate, showing location of excavation.

if it did not extend further along the ridge, may have been fairly small but it would have had potentially excellent views to the north, east and south and along the ridge to the west. There are no apparent earthworks. It seems more likely that the bronzes relate to the occupation of this settlement and are not elements of a dispersed hoard.

This is the first clear evidence for a prehistoric settlement site in the locality although prehistoric pottery has in recent years been recovered in very small quantities from a number of nearby sites.² Among other evidence for specifically, though earlier, Bronze Age activity close by are a flint arrowhead from elsewhere in the park, a second example from allotments abutting the west side of the park (fig 4) and, of course, the linear barrow cemetery on Reigate Heath. Bronze Age flintwork has been noted by Ellaby at Flanchford (Ellaby 1985). Needham (1987, 128) theorises a possible pattern of early first millennium BC settlements on Lower Greensand eminences (St Martha's Hill, St Catherine's Hill, Weston Wood) for which suggestion the present site may provide further support.

The Finds

THE BRONZES

1. Socketed axe of plain South Eastern type (fig 2a). Wt 94.5g. The axe has been treated, post-discovery, with some form of varnish.
2. Blade fragment from a sword of unidentifiable type (fig 2b). Wt 21.6g.
3. Seven fragments of ingot, presumed to be of copper.
Weights in g: 777.6;762.7;102.6;81;47.2;21.6;10.8.

At the time of writing the bronze finds are in the possession of the Reigate Priory School museum and in the ownership of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

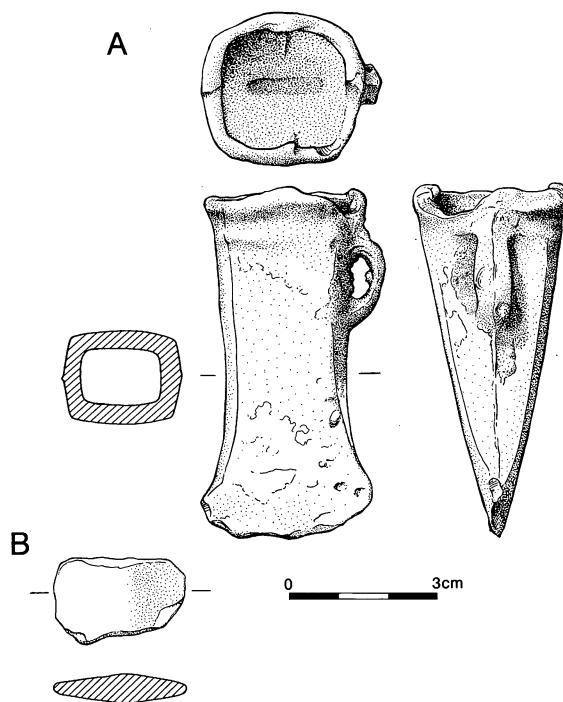


Fig 2 Priory Park, Reigate. Late Bronze Age socketed axe (A) and sword fragment (B).

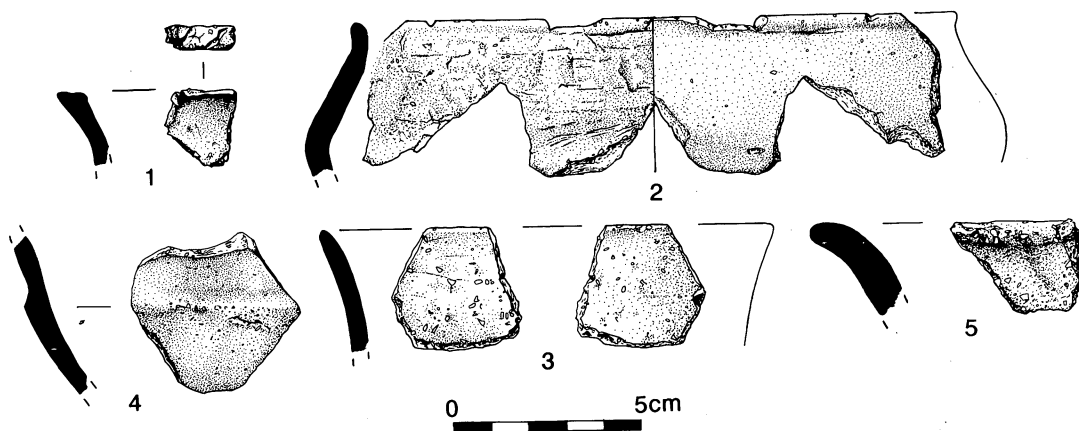


Fig 3 Priory Park, Reigate. Late Bronze Age pottery 1-5 (drawn by Alex Thorne).

- 1 Flattened expanded rim with fingernail impressions. Smooth fairly hard black fabric with fine and medium flint grits.
- 2 Thinned and rounded out-turned rim with part of shoulder visible, three sherds; outer surface smooth buff; inner surface fairly rough, wiped, grey; section grey.
- 3 Thinned upright rim; outer surface very smooth, buff (?slip/accretion) over grey; inner surface fairly smooth, buff over grey/brown; section buff to grey. Moderate medium flint grits.
- 4 Body sherd with shoulder carination (from carinated bowl); outer surface badly abraded but would have been fairly smooth, dark grey-black; section grey.
- 5 Rounded out-turned rim with finger impressions just below the rim; outer surface coarse, orange/buff; inner surface coarse, orange/buff; section dark grey. Slightly hard fabric, frequent fine and medium flint grits.

THE POTTERY, by Steve Dyer (fig 3; fig 5 Body sherds, drawn by Alex Thorne, microfiche 68)

See also *Catalogue*, microfiche 63-67

A total of 34 sherds of Late Bronze Age pottery, representing a minimum of 15 vessels, was recovered from the excavations. Where they could be identified all the vessels were jars or bowls. Seven different fabrics, four fine and three coarse, were identified but the group of sherds is too small to merit a fabric classification. The main tempering agent determined by visual examination is calcined flint grit of varying size range and density with the finewares forming a distinct group. Coarse calcined flint grit is present in three sherds, one sherd contains temper appearing to be grog and one sherd contains one grain of sand.

Although the site lies on the Folkestone Beds of the Lower Greensand series the clay forming the pottery has a virtual absence of quartz sand. This indicates either that the clay or the vessels were imported to this site and the latter is the favoured interpretation. The fine, red particles which occur as very sparse, rounded inclusions in many sherds are probably iron-rich pellets naturally present in the clay. Given the lack of quartz sand and the presence of these iron-rich pellets it is possible that the clay for all the vessels represented here is derived from a single source.

The featured sherds recovered are too few to assess overall form and function but a settlement context seems likely. A number of sherds are slightly abraded but are unlikely to have moved far from their original place of deposition.

The study of the fabrics and forms available places the assemblage in the Later Bronze Age and ties in very closely with other published collections of Later Bronze Age pottery from Surrey, particularly those from Runnymede Bridge (Longley, 1980); Queen Mary's

Hospital, Carshalton (Adkins and Needham, 1985); Petters Sports Field, Egham (O'Connell, 1986); Renfrew Road, Kingston upon Thames (Field, forthcoming); and the published pottery from the unpublished excavations at Weston Wood (Russell 1989), a site in a topographically similar position 17km to the west of Reigate and also on the Folkestone beds.

A neck sherd from a Romano-British flagon and a fragment of tile, probably also Romano-British, were also recovered.

FLINTWORK, by Roger Ellaby

Thirty pieces of flint were recovered, of which 24 came from Trench 1. The weathered chalky cortex remaining on 15 pieces together with the predominantly grey and cherty flint both suggest local sources.

Eleven pieces are severely burnt; two walnut-size pieces may be described as pot boilers. The remainder are crudely struck flakes of which two show indiscriminate retouch. All the flints are unpatinated, indicating burial in a permanently acid soil, and all are relatively fresh. These two factors combined might suggest that there has been little or no agricultural activity on the site. The lack of stratification, however, makes dating of the flints impossible and all that can be said is that the general appearance of the pieces support a post Mesolithic activity.

Flint Arrowheads

Both were found close by.

- 1 Barbed and tanged arrowhead (not illustrated) of light grey flint. Found by Mr Vallins of South Park, Reigate in the 1960s on or close to the footpath which forms the southern boundary of the park, at the foot of the ridge. The find remains in the family's possession.
- 2 Barbed and tanged arrowhead of light grey flint (fig 4). Found by Mr Moses in his allotment at TQ 246 498. I would like to thank the finder for allowing me to record this find which remains in his possession.

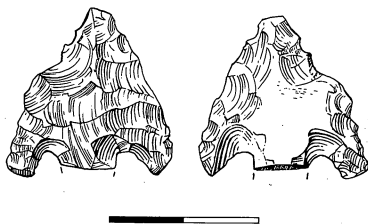


Fig 4 Priory Park, Reigate. Flint arrowhead from Park Lane (1:1)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to both Terry Lane and Bert Latham for bringing the discovery of the bronze objects to my attention. Without their having been reported it is doubtful whether the site would have been discovered. I am also grateful to Steve Dyer for his report on the pottery; to Roger Ellaby for examining the flintwork and to Alex Thorne for drawing the pottery. Grateful thanks are also due to the Reigate and Banstead Borough Council for allowing the excavation to take place.

Prominent among the excavation team were Roger Ellaby, Toby Mann, Steve Munro and Alex Thorne. The late Bob Burtenshaw's help with metal detecting was much appreciated. Finally I would like to record by thanks to Stuart Needham for his helpful comments both on the bronzes and on a draft of this paper. Any errors remain my own.

NOTES

- 1 At TQ 251 495 by a Mr Nash of Crawley. Information from Stuart Needham.
- 2 At Meadvale (TQ 269 491); Cherchefelle, Chart Lane (TQ 259 502); Wiggie, Redhill (TQ 285 510); Clifton's Lane, Reigate (TQ 239 515); and from a pit during excavations behind Bell Street (Area 3/5, TQ 254 502).

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