

A possible Roman buckle plate from Betchworth

During 1994 a copper-alloy buckle plate was found by the author in the back garden of Manor Cottage in The Street, Betchworth. The buckle plate was found immediately below the turf of a lawned area at approximately TQ 2111 5037 while testing a metal detector. The buckle plate (fig 1) has been simply formed from a folded sheet of copper alloy and has been pierced with three holes, two of which retain their dome-headed rivets. The plate is quite small and of simple D-shape with a faint incuse line on the upper face following its curved edge. There is a series of serrated punch marks on the upper face, where the plate has been folded, which may have been decorative. On the same face there is also a very small area of gold-coloured material around one of the rivets, which may indicate that the plate was originally gilded, although this would be very unusual.

Although the form of this buckle plate is not particularly diagnostic, it does not appear to be of a known medieval or post-medieval type (Geoff Egan, pers comm). The Betchworth example may, however, be compared with examples from Roman sites. There is a similar example from Greyhound Yard, Dorchester, which, although from a post-Roman deposit, may be dated by the surviving zoomorphic buckle to the 4th or 5th century AD (Henig 1993, fig 63, 51). There is another example from Winchester which has a simple D-shaped buckle mirroring the shape of the plate (Bishop & Coulston 1993, fig 126, 5). There is also a similar plate from one of the portico pits in Insula 5 at Wroxeter which was associated with mid-3rd century AD pottery (Quita Mould, pers comm). Both the Dorchester and Winchester examples had three rivets in the plate but the Wroxeter example had only one.

Given the similarity of the examples listed above and the lack of later parallels, it seems reasonable to suppose that the Betchworth example is most likely to be of Roman date. Roman material is not unknown from the area, with various finds of pottery having been made from the Betchworth sand pits some 1km to the west (Frere 1946; Toynbee 1959) and a janiform object having been found in field to the north of the village (Williams *et al* 1994). More recently Roman features have been excavated at a site some 400m north-west of this find (David Williams, pers comm).

During the spring of 1996 the lawn area where the buckle plate was found was mechanically landscaped and re-levelled. Site watching during the earth-moving operations showed that a deep garden soil containing 19th century finds covered this area. No evidence of any features cutting the underlying subsoil was seen in the exposed area. There were, however, a number of unstratified finds indicating former human activity in the area. These included a few pieces of struck flint and quite a number of sherds of medieval and later pottery. There were no other identifiable finds of Roman date, so the buckle plate is most likely to have been a stray find

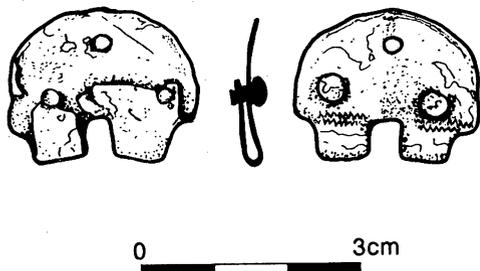


Fig 1 Possible Roman buckle plate from Betchworth: plans and section. (1:1)

rather than an object associated with a settlement site. Although from an unstratified topsoil context, this find adds to a growing body of evidence for activity in the area during the Roman period.

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