

## A Roman cavalry pendant from Westcott

The pendant from Westcott (fig 1) was a chance find recovered in 1998. It is cast in the shape of two lobes which terminate at the base in narrow arms curving outwards; between them is a longer pointed element with an acorn-shaped finial. There are two tear-shaped openings in the centre, and the surface is largely covered with small inlaid triangular cells; narrow mouldings define the finial. The back is flat, but a slight thickening at the top in the centre indicates the position of a suspension loop. The loop is missing, as are the ends of the arms and the edge of one lobe. The pendant now measures 42mm long x 40mm wide x 3mm thick at the thickest point, the centre of the finial. The metal has not been analysed but is likely to be brass, with inlay of niello (Justine Bayley, pers comm); any surface plating, such as silver or tin, has now disappeared.

The pendant belongs to a group of harness fittings dated to the 1st century AD which are associated with the Roman cavalry (Bishop 1988, 112–6). It is of the ‘trifid’ type classified by Bishop as Type 1; Type 1n is the closest, sharing the same outline and tear-shaped openings, though with a slightly different finial (Bishop 1988, fig 43). Such pendants were usually of brass with silver plating on the outer surface, and their niello decoration normally consists of vine motifs, graceful and spacious arrangements of leaves, tendrils and grapes; the niello used on silver-plated fittings would usually have been silver sulphide (LaNiece 1983, 285). Type 1 pendants were suspended from *phalerae*, large round studs fixed to the breast and haunch straps of the harness, and their position and use are illustrated on several tombstones of cavalrymen (eg Bishop 1988, figs 1–3, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13; figs 29–31 show reconstructions of full harness and fittings). Their purpose was probably both ornamental and apotropaic (Bishop 1988, 107–8).

The decoration of overall triangles is unusual on harness fittings, but similar designs are found on the rectangular belt-plates worn by soldiers in infantry units during the pre-Flavian period. Rows of triangles usually occur as borders to other motifs, but a belt-plate from the Claudian fort at Hod Hill has a central panel of latticing flanked by outward-facing panels of triangles very similar to those on the Westcott pendant (Grew & Griffiths 1991, fig 7, no 23). Such belt-plates were made of copper alloy, normally cast (Grew & Griffiths 1991, 48–9), and the niello used on them would usually have been copper sulphide (LaNiece 1985, 285), while analysis indicates that they often carried a plating of tin (Grew & Griffiths 1991, 53–4): this contrasts with the more expensive metals used by the cavalry. Bishop notes the occasional occurrence of infantry-style decoration on harness fittings, and suggests tentatively that it may indicate horses used by an infantry unit rather than a true cavalry troop (1988, 115).

Harness pendants of this type are dated in Britain from the Claudian conquest up to the end of the 1st century, but the style of decoration and its links with pre-Flavian belt-plates suggests a somewhat earlier terminal date for this example, before c AD 75. Its presence in Surrey is intriguing: clearly such pendants could be lost while riding but the distribution of them is overwhelmingly biased towards military sites (Bishop 1988, table 6). The only other recorded cavalry fittings from the county come from Southwark: two pendants and a *phalera* from 15–23 Southwark Street (Stevenson 1992, 82–4, fig 20, nos 4–6, pls 12–13) and a junction loop for harness straps from Montague Close (Townend & Hinton 1978, 287, fig 131, no 110).

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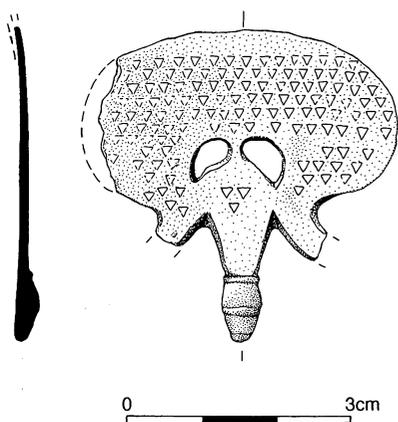


Fig1 Roman cavalry pendant from Westcott (1:1).  
(Drawing by David Williams)

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