

The swords of the Saxon cemetery at Mitcham

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The purpose of this paper is to gather together and interpret for the first time the detailed information on the seven surviving swords from the pagan Saxon cemetery at Mitcham. What follows is an appraisal of these weapons in the light of a recent lengthy investigative project undertaken by the authors. This looked into the background of each weapon, the accurate recording of measurements, evidence for manufacturing methods of blades, hilts, guards and pommel arrangements and a suggestion as to their combat usage. The weapons are put into context and explained in the light of contemporary comparative material across Europe. The Mitcham cemetery, with its higher than usual number of swords (at least thirteen), affords a greater amount of information to be drawn upon than is usually the case. Although the varying quantities of weapons in pagan Saxon burials may have more to do with differing regional ritual practices (Härke 1989, 59; 1990, 22–43), Mitcham does at least afford, through its seven surviving swords, the chance to consolidate a greater amount of information on roughly contemporary swords from the same site. Of approximately 238 burials at Mitcham, 47 were weapons burial rite graves, and at least thirteen of them contained swords. This compares with 272 inhumation burials incorporating 66 weapons burial rite graves and 27 swords from Sarre in Kent; 106 inhumation burials incorporating 49 weapons burial rite graves and five swords from Gilton in Kent and 151 inhumation burials incorporating 38 weapons burial rite graves and nine swords from Alfriston in Sussex. It is likely that the Mitcham sword total was higher than the confirmed figure of thirteen.

Introduction

On the north bank of the river Wandle at Mitcham lies a pagan Saxon inhumation cemetery. Situated in the present London Borough of Merton, the site stretches across both sides of the Morden Road to the west of London Road. The centre of the site is located at TQ 270 861. The finds from the cemetery indicate usage by the Saxon community from the mid-5th to the end of the 6th centuries with sparse evidence for further use into the 7th century (Bidder & Morris 1959, 128). A comprehensive history of the discovery and subsequent archaeological investigations of the cemetery between 1880 and 1922 has been well documented in the *Surrey Archaeological Collections* and elsewhere. These accounts are useful in that they include a summary of the artefacts uncovered as well as offering interpretations of the site in most cases (Bidder 1906; 1908; Bidder & Morris, 1959; Smith 1908; Wilks & Smith 1915–16). Figures 1, 2 and 3 are contemporary photographs showing some of the sword graves shortly after their discovery.

Of the thirteen swords known to have been discovered during both gravel extraction and subsequent archaeological excavations, only seven now survive: three in the collections of Kingston Museum; one in Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and three at the Museum of London. There are accounts of earlier activity on the site by workmen digging out liquorice roots in the mid-19th century, where an indeterminate number of swords was mentioned along with an enigmatic reference to some stone cist weapons burials possibly indicating high-status individuals (Bidder & Morris 1959, 53). It is therefore not possible to be sure of the total number of swords from the cemetery, but a number above the confirmed thirteen seems likely. There is also one copper-alloy pommel cover in the Cambridge collection, from a sword which disappeared prior to the donation.

Background history of the surviving swords

The three swords at Kingston Museum (L72, L73 and L74) came into the collection in 1924 from Col H F Bidder, DSO, FSA, although it is most likely that most of the material which



Fig 1 Saxon cemetery, Mitcham: photograph of grave 73. The skeleton is that of a young man with a sword. Photograph taken on 1 April 1906. The sword is in the Museum of London (acc no 56/106.13).

came into the museum at this time comprised the material actually purchased by Col Bidder from a Mr Wilks of Croydon whose gravel-digging activities were necessitated by the outbreak of war in 1914 and continued for some time after it (Bidder & Morris 1959, 55).

The three swords at the Museum of London have a different history. When (what was then) the London Museum received its first share of finds from the site (which included sword C2444), there was no continuous archaeological supervision during retrieval (Wheeler 1935, 116). The site was also frequented by G F Lawrence whose communications with Col Bidder were not always comprehensive. 'Stony Jack' as he was known, a prolific antiquarian and dealer, acted at the time as an agent for the Guildhall and London Museums (MacDonald 1996, 243). Over time the record has become confused. Sword no C2444 was lent to the museum by Col Bidder in October 1919, whereas nos 56/106.13 and 56/106.14 (the latter had been found prior to 1908 and presumably had been in Col Bidder's possession) are clearly later deposits made in 1956. The two 1956 deposits, along with other related material, were given to the London Museum by the Western County Secondary Boys' School at Mitcham. It is known, from records of correspondence held at the Museum of London, that Col Bidder gave the school headmaster some material prior to 1956 but it is not known exactly when.

The Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology seems to have acquired its sword and a copper-alloy pommel cap (from another sword, which had disappeared some time before the donation), from Col Bidder in 1958 and 1954 respectively. It is possible, judging from records at Kingston Museum, that some of the items at the Cambridge University Museum were originally part of the 1924 Kingston deposit and were subsequently removed by Bidder himself in 1929 and sent to Miss Kitson Clark, a relative of his at Cambridge.



Fig 2 Saxon cemetery, Mitcham: photograph of grave 89. The skeleton is that of a tall elderly man with a wound to the forehead apparently made during life. His sword, now missing, accompanies him (right side of picture). Photograph taken on 28 December 1919.



Fig 3 Saxon cemetery, Mitcham: photograph of grave 89 showing sword and apparent fracture and callus to left leg. Photograph taken on 27 December 1919.

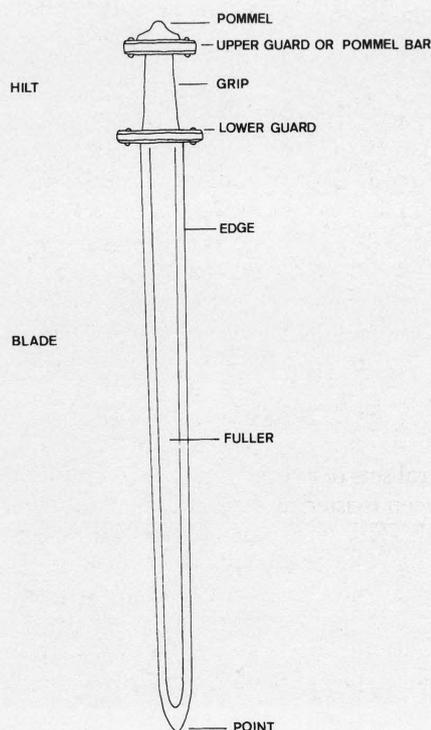


Fig 4 Saxon cemetery, Mitcham: a typical Migration period sword.

Detailed descriptions of the surviving swords

The published accounts of the graves in which the thirteen known swords were found are reproduced in the Appendix. What follows here is a description of each of the seven surviving swords based on recent observation. Figure 4 shows a schematic diagram of a sword of the period outlining the terms used below.

GRAVE 27: CAMBRIDGE MUSEUM 1958.3

The tang of this sword has been bent at the tip for reasons unknown. In terms of surviving metal, it is perhaps the best preserved of all the Mitcham swords. Despite the fact it has lost its pommel, upper and lower guards and most of its scabbard, it still weighs 1015g (2lb 6oz). Such a weight is surprisingly close to swords of a similar length from later periods and also very close to a well-preserved 6th century Saxon sword from Winterbourne Gunner (1010g), now in the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum. It must be considered that a weight in the region of 1300g (2½lb) perhaps represents an ideal for a weapon of this type. The blade tapers very slightly and despite the weight of the weapon, is not as broad as sword no L74 in Kingston Museum which was also a substantial weapon, but which had clearly lost more metal through corrosion.

Measurements

Blade length from tip to shoulder	718mm
Blade width at top across shoulders (corrosion here)	40mm
Widest part of blade near shoulders	45mm
Blade width at centre	43mm
Blade width immediately above tip	38mm
Shoulders to tip of tang	102mm
Overall weapon length	820mm
Weight	1015g

GRAVE 65: MUSEUM OF LONDON 56/106.14 (figs 5 and 6)

Despite its dilapidated appearance, considerable corrosion and loss of tang, pommel and bottom of blade, this sword is highly significant. The blade was pattern-welded and the construction is of special interest.

It is considered likely that the weapon was a long one because despite the loss of the tip of the blade, the pommel and part of the tang, the remaining overall length at 810mm indicates a very long sword. The existing blade has parallel sides, and X-ray examination revealed that both sides were fullered.

The sword was discovered with a shield boss (Museum of London 56.106/3) of a type that fits very well with Dickinson & Härke's description (1993, 21–3) of group 8 bosses that are dated approximately to the mid-late 6th century. The boss has a high wall and shallow convex dome and a small stud at the central apex with what appears to be the remains of a further attachment, perhaps a flat disc.

X-radiography revealed very clear evidence of a pattern-welded construction which Gilmour has analysed (Tylecote & Gilmour 1986, 172–6; Gilmour 1991 122). On one side of the blade, the pattern-welding consists of three central sets of twisted iron bars in herringbone pattern with the two outer rows alternating between twisted and straight pattern while the central row remains twisted along its entire length. This variation occurs on only one side of the blade, with the other side showing a typical Lang & Ager type B1 triple set of continually twisted rods side by side (fig 6). On both sides the twisted bars are welded onto a core strip of wrought iron.

The cutting edges of the blade consist of two halves welded together and in turn welded to the central core of the blade. Gilmour also noted that welded to the edge of the blade was a strip of low-carbon steel (fig 6).

Measurements

Blade length from broken tip to shoulder	680mm
Blade width at top across shoulders (incomplete)	44mm
Blade width at centre	49mm
Blade width immediately above tip (incomplete)	45mm
Total hilt length (incomplete)	112mm
Overall weapon length (incomplete)	810mm

GRAVE 73: MUSEUM OF LONDON 56/106.13 (fig 1)

This robust broad sword has a substantial, longish blade that X-rays reveal was pattern-welded (Gilmour 1991, 125). The evidence was not as clear as in 56/106.14, but it was clear that there were four twisted rods welded together with the twists of adjacent rods running in opposite directions, thus producing the pattern. This was repeated on the other side of the blade, so that in all, eight sections of rods were discernible. Its condition is fair to good despite corrosion and the loss of the top tang and entire pommel. It also lacks guards, upper scabbard mounts and shows no sign of the remnants of a scabbard. Its almost parallel blade edges taper

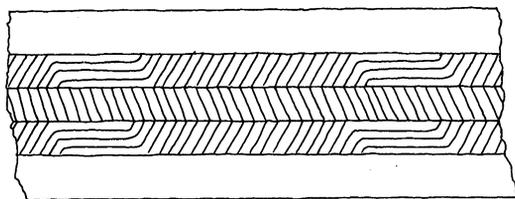


Fig 5 Saxon cemetery, Mitcham: pattern-welding on Museum of London sword 56/106.14 in plan. Diagram after Gilmour 1991.

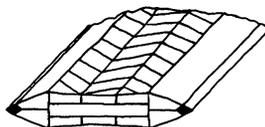


Fig 6 Saxon cemetery, Mitcham: Museum of London sword 56/106.14 blade in section. Diagram after Gilmour 1991.

mildly from 76mm (3 inches) above the tip where they start converging to form a moderately acute point. It is notable for having a significantly wide blade.

Measurements

Blade length from tip to shoulders	786mm
Blade width at top across shoulders	57mm
Blade width at centre	57mm
Blade width immediately above tip	50mm
Total hilt length (incomplete)	64mm
Overall weapon length (incomplete)	846mm

GRAVE 163: MUSEUM OF LONDON (fig 7, no 4)

This sword, like all the others, has no surviving guards and a pommel with no copper-alloy cap. The pommel is surprisingly low at just 6mm. X-rays do not reveal evidence of pattern-welding. The blade tapers only slightly. The form of this weapon is surprisingly similar to one in the British Museum collection (no 56, 7-1, 1403) which was apparently found in the London area and which clearly shows evidence of its broad shallow fullers to the naked eye. The blade width of the British Museum example is also 57mm at the shoulders and 55mm at the centre. The width immediately above the tip is 42mm, length of blade from tip to shoulders is 725mm and the pommel is just 7mm.

Museum of London C2444

Measurements

Blade length from tip to shoulders	738mm
Blade width at top across shoulders	57mm
Blade width at centre	55mm
Blade width immediately above tip	48mm
Pommel height	6mm
width	41mm
depth	10mm
Overall weapon length	860mm

British Museum 56, 7-1, 1403

Measurements

Blade length from tip to shoulders	725mm
Blade width at top across shoulders	57mm
Blade width at centre	55mm
Blade width immediately above tip	42mm
Pommel height	7mm
width	—
depth	—
Overall weapon length	840mm

GRAVE 192: KINGSTON MUSEUM L74 (figs 7–10)

This is the broadest of the Kingston Museum weapons with the blade slightly bent a quarter of the way up from the tip. This sword has a good surviving copper-alloy pommel cap with two bronze pins still in their appropriate holes. The cap is not perforated by the tip of the tang, indicating that it might have been put onto the hilt after the guards and grip had been added. The surviving blade is extremely thin. X-rays do not show evidence of pattern-welding. The blade survives well enough, however, to demonstrate that the sides were perfectly parallel all the way to a point just above the tip. Figure 8 shows the detail of the weapon at the hilt end. The remains of the gilding of the copper-alloy upper scabbard mount can be clearly seen, as can the best surviving intact copper-alloy pommel cap of all the swords in this study. X-rays also show that the iron fill of the pommel beneath the copper-alloy pommel cap does indeed fill the interior of the cap. This is not unusual and can also be seen in a sword from Faversham in Kent in the British Museum collection (no 952 70).

Measurements

Blade length from tip to shoulders	772mm
Blade width at top across shoulders	58mm
Blade width at centre	58mm
Blade width immediately above tip	58mm
Total hilt length	127mm
Pommel height	13mm
width	35mm
depth	12mm
Overall weapon length	899mm

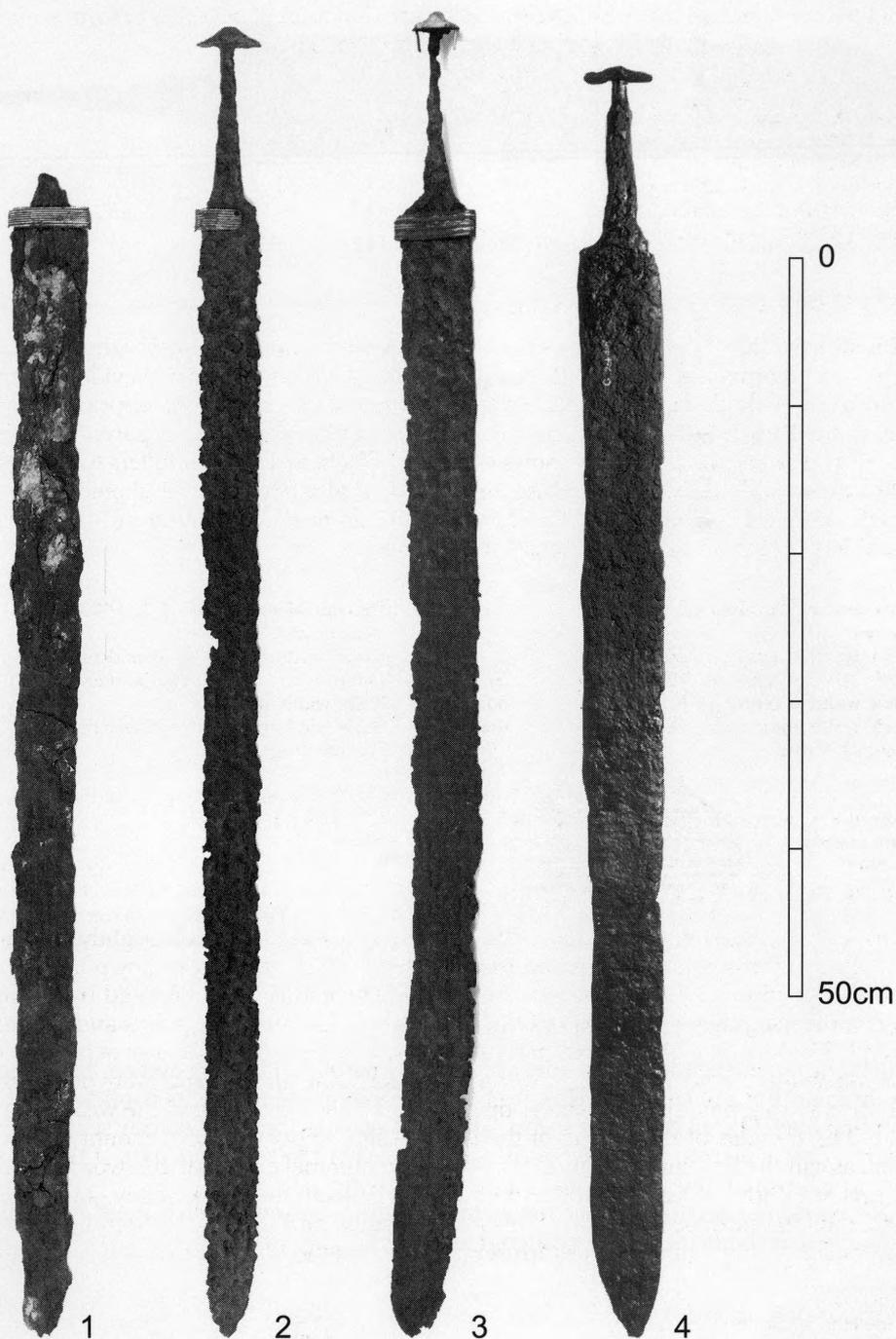


Fig 7 Saxon cemetery, Mitcham: 1) Kingston Museum sword L72 showing scabbard remains and upper mount; 2) Kingston Museum sword L73 showing pierced upper scabbard mount; 3) Kingston Museum sword L74 showing bent blade; 4) Museum of London sword C2444 (reproduced by kind permission of the Museum of London).

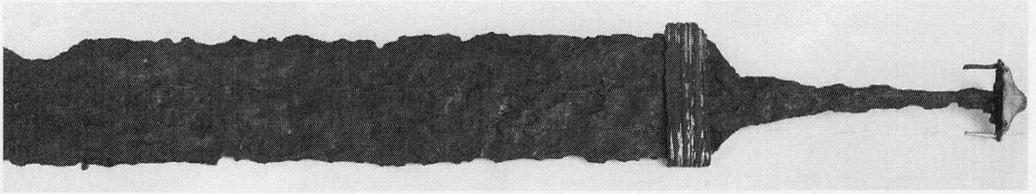


Fig 8 Saxon cemetery, Mitcham: Kingston Museum sword L74 showing hilt detail.

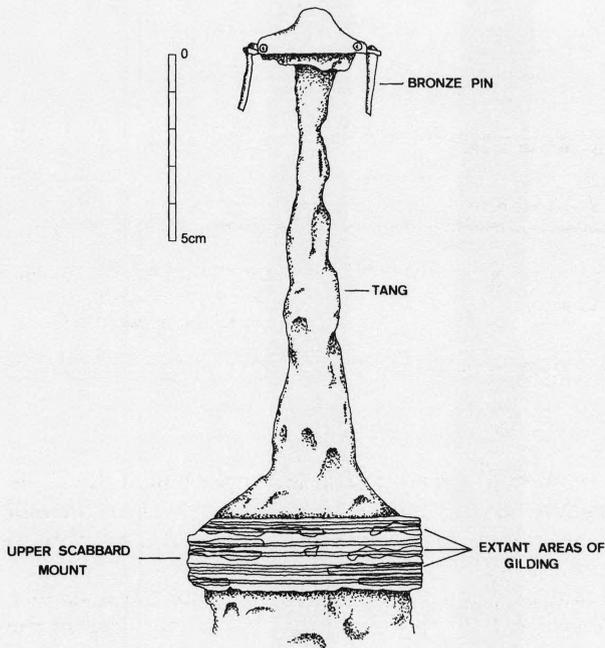


Fig 9 Saxon cemetery, Mitcham: Kingston Museum sword L74.

GRAVE 193: KINGSTON MUSEUM L73 (fig 7, no 2)

The blade tapers slightly and its sides are not truly parallel. The tang and cocked-hat pommel are present, but unlike sword Kingston L74 the pommel has lost its copper-alloy cap, if it ever had one. The gilded upper scabbard mount survives, but only on one side and only half length. This is pierced to receive a rivet and is clearly the rearmost part of the mount, the part which would have been worn closest to the body.

X-rays do not reveal evidence for pattern-welding, or any visible evidence of fullers. It is probable that the blade was not fullered at all.

Measurements

Blade length from tip to shoulders	775mm
Blade width at top across shoulders	43mm
Blade width at centre	39mm
Blade width immediately above tip	36mm
Total hilt length	110mm
Pommel height	12mm
width	43mm
depth	12mm
Overall weapon length	885mm

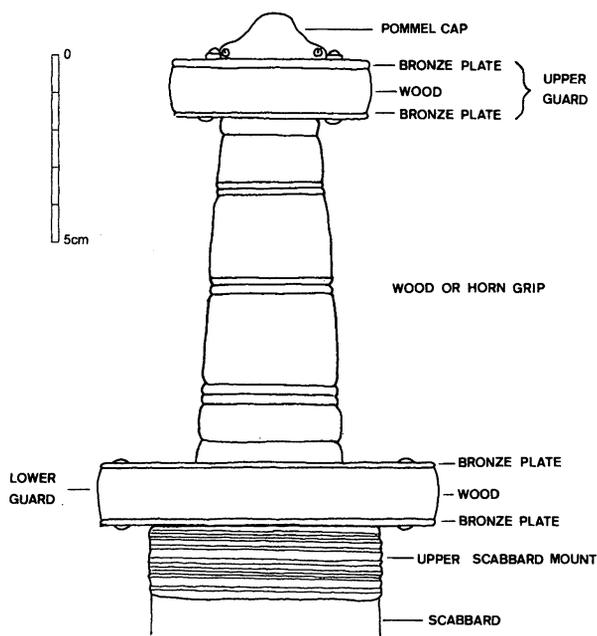


Fig 10 Saxon cemetery, Mitcham: conjectural reconstruction of the hilt of Kingston sword L74.

GRAVE 211: KINGSTON MUSEUM L72 (fig 7, no 1)

The hilt is missing. The sword has the remains of a scabbard on the upper half of the blade and small fragments of scabbard are still attached to the lower portion of the blade. One half of the gilded copper-alloy upper scabbard mount survives *in situ* at the top of the scabbard remains, near to where the hilt would have been.

X-rays showed faint but unequivocal evidence for a pattern-welded structure. The evidence was only clear in areas where the scabbard had survived and protected the blade from the greater degree of corrosion of the iron core, suffered in the less protected areas of the weapon. The evidence however is too slight for us to determine the type of pattern-welded structure adopted by the smith. The blade is of tapering form.

Measurements

Blade length: from tip to shoulders	770mm
Blade width at top across shoulders	51mm
Blade width at centre	40mm
Blade width immediately above tip	39mm
Total hilt length (incomplete)	20mm
Overall weapon length (incomplete)	790mm

Manufacture

BLADES

Many sword blades of the Migration period show signs of pattern-welding, a distinctive and highly decorative process of blade-manufacture. The technique involved the twisting and welding together of iron rods to form blanks from which the centre of the blade was made. The results of the pattern-welding produced a harder and higher-quality blade than those of a piled structure, possibly owing to the introduction of more carbon into the blade during

the process. The pattern manifested itself in a visual display of herringbone twists of dark and light metal running down the centre of the blade. Often associated with high-status individuals, the technique rose to a peak in the 7th century where 88% of examined swords showed evidence of the technique (Lang & Ager 1989, 107). The process then declined in the western part of Europe in the 9th–10th centuries (Davidson 1962, 32).

Of the seven weapons examined, the pattern-welding method of production was positively identified on three of them, although the Cambridge sword 1958.3 has yet to be X-rayed. The nature of the best surviving pattern-welded sword is outlined in figures 5 and 6. The complex processes involved in pattern-welding are well covered elsewhere (Davidson 1962, 32; Lang & Ager 1989, 85–115; Engstrom *et al* 1989). The Museum of London sword 56/106.14 from the Mitcham cemetery has, however, provided a new type to add to Lang & Ager's typology (1989, 88). Taking Lang & Ager's type B2 as the basis for the alternation of twisted and straight rods in three rows, the authors suggest that sword 56/106.14 represents a possible type B2c. Figure 6 shows Gilmour's analysis of the blade of this weapon, in which can be seen not only the three central rows of pattern-welded rods, but also a cutting edge made up in two halves welded together, with a narrow strip of low-carbon steel at the extreme edge welded onto the section. Parallel straight lines were also observed running across the ferrite grains of the blade, indicating that the wrought iron structure had been subjected to cold hammering after the final forging (Gilmour 1991, 122).

GUARDS AND POMMELS

This area is perhaps the most conjectural owing to the fact that so much of the hilt and pommel in Migration period swords were constructed from wood, bone, horn, or other organic and therefore perishable material. It is probable that the lack of evidence for upper or lower guards in any of the Mitcham weapons, is the result of a combination of corrosion and poor retrieval techniques carried out under non-archaeologically supervised conditions. Many English and Continental examples show a sandwich construction at both upper and lower guards of copper-alloy plates with organic material (usually wood) filling the gap between them and retained with bronze pins. It is inconceivable that these weapons had no guards at all; some security for the hand wielding the sword was surely needed. Guards also prevented the hand slipping down on to the blade. Given that the pommel of Kingston's L74 sword survives with two copper-alloy pins, which were clearly designed to fix an upper guard to the pommel, we must assume that these guards (both lower and upper) were present. It is likely that the pommel and guard arrangements of all the Mitcham swords were of this form. The modest and rather utilitarian nature of these guards and hilts is in marked contrast to the generally high quality of the blades. Figures 9 and 10 show Kingston L74 sword's hilt, guard and pommel arrangements as they appear now, and as they are conjectured to have appeared when the weapon was in use. Inspiration was drawn for this illustration from drawings and discussions of hilt, grip and pommel constructions in English and Continental Migration period swords in Davidson (1962, 252–3).

SCABBARDS

Four of the swords showed traces of wood and possibly leather on the blade. The best-preserved example, Kingston Museum L72 (fig 10), does not unfortunately repay close examination. It is however possible in some areas to discern an outermost layer which may be the remnants of the leather cover for the scabbard. Also, there are traces of what seems to be some of the original fleece which lined the scabbard and provided lanolin that acted as a rust preventative. Kingston Museum swords L72, L73 and L74, however, all display a characteristic upper scabbard mount of gilded copper alloy decorated with parallel grooves. These upper scabbard mounts reinforced the mouth of the scabbard into which the weapon was placed. Their distinctive appearance has led Menghin (1983) to identify the mounts from

the Mitcham cemetery as the Mitcham-Kempston type of upper scabbard mount. Figure 11 shows the distribution of this type of mount in Europe. The results are revealing; most distribution maps of sword fittings and attachments discovered in England during the Migration period show a distinctive continental density. The Mitcham-Kempston upper scabbard mounts, however, are predominantly, yet not exclusively, English. It seems entirely probable therefore, that at the very least, the scabbards of the Mitcham swords were made in England.

It is unfortunate that none of the Mitcham swords possesses chapes or scabbard furniture other than the upper scabbard mounts already mentioned. It is unwise to speculate too emphatically on the form of these, other than that their shape and appearance, are likely to have been similar to that of the chape on Croydon Museum sword M1992-10 from the

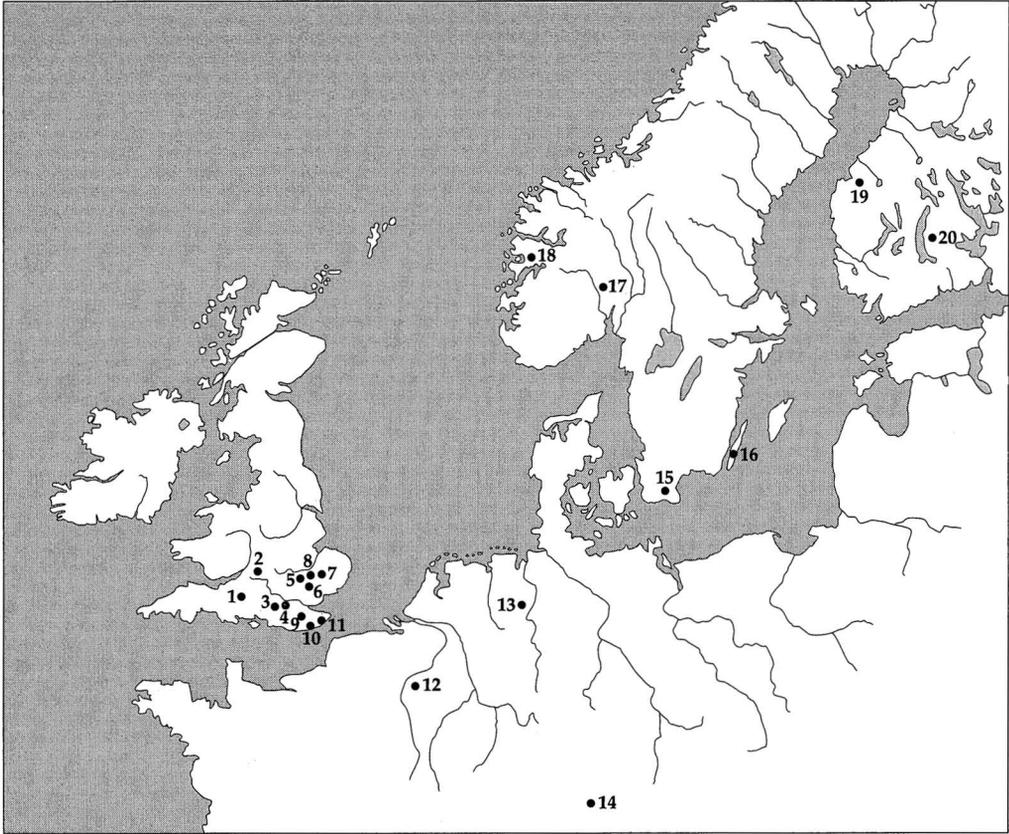


Fig 11 Saxon cemetery, Mitcham: distribution of Mitcham-Kempston-type upper scabbard mounts in Europe (after Menghin 1983).

KEY

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 Petersfinger grave 20 | 8 Little Wilbraham grave 96 | 15 Sjörup, ksp. Håglinge, Schonen |
| 2 Burford | 9 Long Wittenham grave 67 | 16 Dalby, ksp. Köping, Öland |
| 3 Mitcham grave 192 | 10 Gilton | 17 Veien, Norderhov, Buskerud |
| 4 Mitcham grave 211 | 11 Dover grave 98b | 18 Rongve, Hans, Hordaland |
| 5 Kempston grave 75 | 12 Haillot: Prov. Liège grave 16 | 19 Väyri, Pohjanmaa |
| 6 Linton Heath grave 64 | 13 Liebenau, Nernburg | 20 Rapola I Sääksmäki, Häme |
| 7 Little Wilbraham grave 42 | 14 Burbing: Irlmauth Idkr. Regensburg | |

Croydon Saxon cemetery. This chape is a modest U-shaped end-piece to the scabbard at the point end and measures only 4mm in thickness. It was gilded in the same way as the Mitcham upper scabbard mounts.

Usage

The swords of Germanic warriors were long, broad double-edged weapons designed primarily to achieve powerful over-shoulder hacking and cutting strokes or 'sweord sweng'. Their blades often had parallel or slightly tapering sides terminating in rather rounded points, and sometimes had broad fullers on both sides designed to lighten the blade and perhaps concentrate sword weight towards the blade edge.

It is the authors' contention that some of the swords of this period possessed fullers running down both sides of the blade in the form of a single shallow wide channel. The reason that the evidence for such fullers is scarce is owing to the depth of corrosion of many of the iron blades (in many cases right through to the core). Where blades do survive in very good condition (for example, river finds) the fullers are more often visible.

The form of the blades is significantly varied to invite comment. While Kingston Museum sword L74 is long and parallel sided, there are others such as MoL 56/106.13 and Kingston Museum L73 which taper. The degree of the taper in each case is not comparable to that of later Saxon and Viking period swords, where the tapers combine with large counter-balancing pommels to push the point of balance up the blade towards the hilt, thus allowing the weapon to be used in more than just an over-arm slashing fashion during combat (Davidson 1962, 39). However, the tapering of the blade in some examples of Migration period swords may be a development of the parallel-sided form designed to produce a more versatile combat weapon. The point of balance of the Mitcham weapons must have been remarkably low on the blade making them point heavy and rather clumsy. While this would enhance the weight and power of hacking blows, it inevitably increased the effort required to re-lift the weapon prior to delivering a fresh stroke, a further cause of combat fatigue. The relatively light weight of the pommel would not have redressed this imbalance.

Most of the Mitcham swords had tapering sides. These provided warriors with weapons which could be offensively wielded in several different ways, thus making them more useful in combat. They could still achieve powerful over-the-shoulder strokes but also straight thrusting ones because of the more pointed blade. These more multi-purpose swords may reflect the influence of warriors, who might have sought a better weapon, upon the designs employed by the sword smiths.

Warrior physique

It is likely that these swords remained primarily over-arm slashing weapons with some also designed for thrusting strokes. Härke's suggestion (1992) that the skeletons of weapons burial inhumations in pagan Saxon cemeteries in England indicated taller men than the non-weapons burial inhumations, perhaps comes as no surprise. The length and clumsy characteristics of these swords may reflect the physique of those using them. Sword graves 65 (MoL sword 56/106.14) and 89 (sword now lost) at Mitcham contained tall men (the former estimated at 1.88m – 6 feet 2 inches).

Conclusion

The date of the burials containing the swords must remain uncertain. Although Museum of London sword 56/106.14 can be dated by association with its shield boss to around the middle of the 6th century, the possibility remains that the weapon may have been either an heirloom or in the ownership of an individual or individuals for many decades prior to its

interment. It is therefore probable that these swords could have been deposited at any time between the end of the 5th century and the beginning of the 7th century.

The presence of pattern-welding in three of the swords is not unusual but does perhaps indicate a high status among some of the warriors of Mitcham. The nature of hilt, grip and guard manufacture does not, however, appear to be of the high quality construction found, for example, in Kent, although there is much missing from the Mitcham swords. Also, there is no evidence to tell us if ring swords were present at Mitcham.

The striking similarity between the Mitcham sword at the Museum of London (C2444) and the British Museum sword from London (56, 7-1, 1403) could represent the work of the same smith, or at least indicates the employment of some sort of common template in the final shaping of the weapon. This is an area which requires further research. So too does the whole question of the existence of fullers in the blades of Migration period swords. A nationwide project to X-ray surviving swords of the period might serve a useful purpose in this regard. The authors contend that the broad shallow fuller on both sides of the blade was far more prevalent than is usually stated.

The motives behind the foundation of the Germanic and presumably mercenary settlement at Mitcham may never be fully understood. The larger than usual number of weapons burials, particularly swords, points to the importance of the martial qualities of these settlers in reality as well as in ideal. Their presence in the Greater London area and the way in which their territory may well respect other early Saxon settlements such as the one at neighbouring Croydon – which like Mitcham seems to be conveniently placed astride a known Roman route into London from the south – gives the impression that some controlling authority in late Roman Britain had deliberately settled these people there for the defence of Londinium. Contact between the early Saxons of Mitcham and those settled to the north of the capital (as the Mitcham-Kempston upper scabbard mounts show) would have been possible through the city itself. The relative lack of Kentish related material in the Mitcham cemetery – with the exception of cheap imitation buckles as Bidder & Morris point out (1959, 130) – may well point to a different political situation in Kent where the formidable English presence was perhaps kept from making contact with the London satellite settlements.

The three swords from the Mitcham cemetery in the Kingston Museum collection can currently be seen on display at the museum in Wheatfield Way, along with a reconstruction of one of the warrior inhumations. The London and Cambridge swords are in the reserve collections at those respective museums and the sword pommel at Cambridge was on display at the time of writing.

APPENDIX

Descriptions of all the known sword graves from the cemetery

The following descriptions of the swords of the Mitcham cemetery were first published, along with an inventory of other artefacts by Bidder & Morris (1959). Text in italics represents the present authors' comments.

- a) Grave 27 (*earlier listed as grave 73*): east. Face to the left.
By the left side lay a double-edged flat sword, with traces of wooden scabbard, the pommel level with the shoulder, 33 inches long, maximum breadth $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Over the face was a shield boss, with iron grip, diameter $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches. By the left of the skull was a spearhead. By the left side was a knife.
Cambridge 1958.3
- b) Grave 65: east. Face to the left.
Height 6 feet 2 inches, depth 1 foot 6 inches.
The skeleton had evidently been disturbed, the

bones replaced, and grave goods not removed. Most of the bones were in the right place, but the left thigh was by the breastbone, the jaw, upside down, below it, two ribs by the skull, and the pelvis by the knee. The left shoulder was in place, but the wrong way round, the ulna beside it; some of the vertebrae were at the heel. Diagonally across the body was a large sword, $35\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, $1\frac{7}{8}$ inches wide, the hilt above the right elbow, the point above the left knee, with much of the wooden scabbard remaining. A thin rectangular iron plate (now missing) at the hilt end of the scabbard may have acted as a catch to stop

- the sword wearing loose in the scabbard. Over the right knee was a shield boss, 3 inches high, with a shoulder blade between it and the knee. By the left arm was a short spearhead. Among the ribs was a small knife. Under the sword were the bones of a small dog.
London 56/106.14
- c) Grave 73: north-east. Face to the left. (fig 1)
By the left side lay a sword 36 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches long, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, the hilt above the shoulder, point to the feet. Above the right shoulder lay a spearhead. On the middle of the right shin-bone was a conical shield boss with a hand grip, and an iron ring, 2 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches in diameter, in the mould above it. On the left of the waist was a knife and on the right a boar's head buckle, with studs of bronze 'as in grave 50'.
London 56/106.13
- d) Grave 89 (figs 2 and 3): north. Face upward.
A tall man, height estimated at 6 feet 2 inches. Depth 1 foot 10 inches. A hole in the forehead was apparently made during life. The two lower bones of the left leg were grown together, so that the man must have walked on the side of his foot. The right collarbone was fractured. By the left side was a light sword, with a gilt band around the top of the sheath. From a photograph of the grave as excavated, the sword seems to have been 30–32 inches long. *Sword slightly bent in middle from photograph. Missing, last seen in a photograph at Ravensbury Manor in 1919.*
- e) Grave 93: north-east. Face upward.
A sword with cocked-hat pommel (*pommel at Cambridge – 1954.381*) lay across the waist. *The sword, with its pommel attached, appeared in the same photograph as the Grave 89 sword above, but is now missing.*
- f) Grave 163 (earlier listed as grave 27): east.
Reported by workmen and not seen by any archaeologist. Burial with a sword, a spearhead, with a shield boss over the head.
London Museum C2444
- g) Graves 181–184 (from the early discoveries of the mid-19th century).
- 'Three to four stone coffins, consisting each of four slabs with nothing on top or bottom with bones inside. A very large sword was in one of them'.
Unknown whereabouts
- h) Grave 186
A double-edged sword with no guard. 'Found in the liquorice fields before the railway was made. Mr Bridger put a handle on it over 60 years ago' (Mr T Kilby, pers obs)
Unknown whereabouts
- i) Grave 188
Sword, spearhead and part of an iron boss of a shield 'found while trenching in a field near Mitcham in Surrey called Deadman's Close. Bones had been frequently found in this field and tradition made it the site of a battlefield' (*JBAA* 1852, 442).
Unknown whereabouts
- j) Grave 192 (collected by gravel diggers, 1915 and subsequently acquired by Bidder)
Sword with cocked-hat pommel; with it a boss and a bead of spar, that must have come from a stone district (G Wilks, pers obs), Cambridge Museum 54.397 (*bead of spar*).
Kingston Museum L74
- k) Grave 193 (18 inches from 192).
A second sword with cocked-hat pommel, with it a small black pot 'similar to that from St Martha's, Guildford' (Wilks & Smith 1915) and two oblong scabbard plates (*ibid*) of silver and iron (*now missing*). Wilks's inventory lists the 'silver' plate only. 'A large spindle-whorl [...] or glass ring [...] perhaps attached to the sword hilt [...] on [...] the sword-knot of a warrior' (Wilks & Smith 1915), presumably came from this grave. One of the swords was exceptionally broad (2 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches wide: *ibid*). One of the pommels was of iron and in position, the other of bronze and loose. In either 192 or 193 were also a few glass beads and a pair of tweezers.
Kingston Museum L73

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