

Notes and News

A BOAR FIGURINE FROM GULDEN MORDEN, CAMBS. (FIG. 60; PL. XIV)

In 1864 or '65 a cast bronze figurine of a boar was discovered during coprolite digging¹ in the parish of Guilden Morden, Cambs. It was presented to the British Museum in 1904 (reg. no. 1904, 10-10, 1) by H. G. Fordham, who had published the figurine in 1903.² He indicated that it had been found by his father.

The boar is in excellent condition; slight pitting can be seen on the surface, but there is otherwise very little wear. It is a crudely designed figurine, with very few features other than a greatly accentuated crest. The eye, eyebrows and nostrils are barely indicated, and possibly were punched after the casting; there are faint but clear traces of a tusk on the right side of the face. The front legs were cast as one, and were hollowed to form a socket 3.5 mm. deep; the hind legs likewise were cast as one, but were continued as a pin 6 mm. long. When the boar was found it had a tail in the form of a complete ring, but this was broken prior to Fordham's publication in 1903.

Probably on account of its simple and crude design, the boar has always been thought of as 'Celtic', and included in discussions of iron age figurines.³ However it shows very little similarity to other iron age and Romano-British boars from Britain,⁴ and even less to the typically 'Celtic' figurines on the continent. There is some evidence that the Guilden Morden boar formed part of a pagan Saxon grave group. Fordham mentioned⁵ that the boar was found with a small earthenware bead and other objects, now lost. The British Museum has a manuscript drawing of the figurine (PL. XIV, B), made between April 1882 and September 1883, in which the ring in the tail is shown as complete. On the same page as the boar are a bronze ring of uncertain function; and two beads, one of "amber glass", and the other of red glass with white inlay. Both beads can be paralleled by examples from pagan Saxon sites, e.g. at Mucking, Essex,⁶ and Bishopstone, Sussex.⁷ The paper states that these finds were "all found in a grave with a doubled-up skeleton". Unfortunately the name associated with the objects is Great Maldon, rather than Guilden Morden. It is likely that this was merely a mistake in copying, as Guilden Morden was specifically mentioned as the findspot by Fordham. The Fordham family is still today connected with the area as owners of the large brewery at Ashwell, the neighbouring parish to Guilden Morden. Also, despite extensive research, it seems that no settlement named Great Maldon exists, or existed in the 19th century, in any county of England.⁸

The probability that the Guilden Morden boar is Anglo-Saxon in date is supported by the fact that it is closely paralleled by the boar on the iron helmet from Benty Grange,

¹ R. Grove, 'Coprolite mining in Cambridgeshire', *Agricultural Hist. Review*, xxiv (1976), i, 36-43.

² H. G. Fordham, *Proc. Cambridgeshire Antiq. Soc.*, x (1901-4), 373-4.

³ e.g. *British Museum Guide to Early Iron Age Antiquities* (2nd ed. 1925), 147.

⁴ J. A. Foster, *Bronze boar figurines in iron age and Roman Britain. British Archaeological Reports*, 39 (1977).

⁵ *Op. cit.* in note 2, 373.

⁶ M. U. and W. T. Jones: in R. Bruce-Mitford (ed.), *Recent Archaeological Excavations in Europe* (London, 1975), 181, fig. 62,3.

⁷ Unpublished information from Martin Bell.

⁸ e.g. P. H. Reaney, *Place Names of Cambridgeshire* (Cambridge, 1943); E. Ekwall, *English Place Names* (Oxford, 1964).

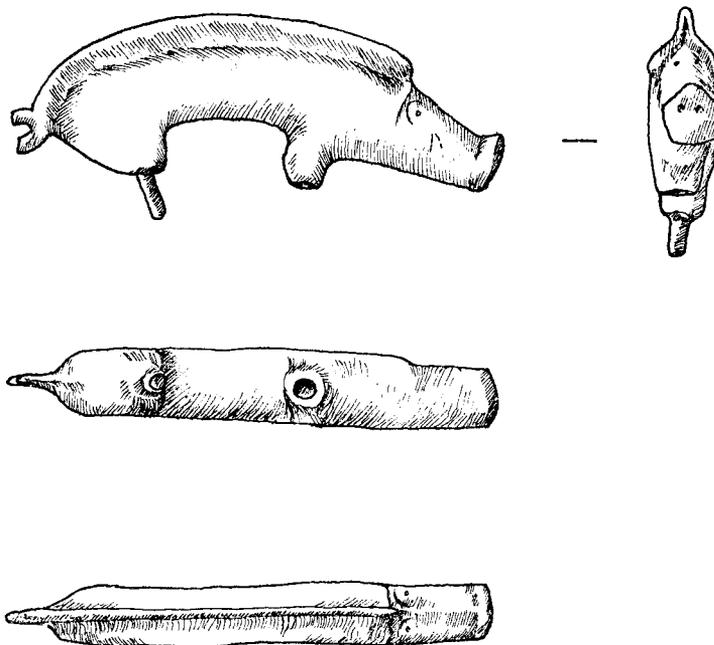


FIG. 60

ANGLO-SAXON BRONZE BOAR FROM GULDEN MORDEN, CAMBS. Sc. 1:1

Derbyshire. A full examination of the latter was published by Dr R. Bruce-Mitford,⁹ and after the removal of iron encrustation it can be seen that it is of similar shape to the boar from Guilden Morden. It has its back and front legs joined, and a long elongated snout thrust well forward. Even the stance of the body is the same. It is possible that the Guilden Morden boar is also from a helmet, as the pin and socket in its legs may suggest. It would then be another example of the well-known Germanic tradition, evidenced by various references in *Beowulf*, of boar figurines as helmet crests.

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CHAMBER GRAVE FROM SPONG HILL, NORTH ELMHAM, NORFOLK (FIGS. 61-4)

During excavation in 1976 at this Anglo-Saxon cemetery an inhumation contained in a wooden structure was discovered. This was felt to be of sufficient interest to be published in advance of the main excavation report.

Inhumation No. 31, was on the NE. of the cemetery, away from the main area of cremation burials, but close to other inhumations grouped along the northern edge of the cemetery.¹⁰ Another inhumation, No. 32, lay beside No. 31, within a circular ditch, some 10 m. in outside diameter (FIG. 61). It is not yet clear whether this ditch was annular of penannular, since part of it lay outside the area available for excavation in 1976.¹¹ There was an oval pit or posthole between the two graves, beyond their W. ends. Both posthole and ditch now appear shallow, dug some 30 to 40 cm. only into the subsoil;

⁹ R. Bruce-Mitford, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (London, 1974), 236-42.

¹⁰ Complete plan will be published in final report, *East Anglian Archaeol.* (forthcoming).

¹¹ Excavation in 1977 showed it to be annular.