RECENT ANGLO-SAXON FINDS FROM MERSEYSIDE AND CHERSHIRE
AND THEIR ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE (Figs. 4–5)

The purpose of this note is to place on record several recent finds of Anglo-Saxon metalwork from Merseyside and Cheshire which have been reported to Liverpool Museum over recent years. The objects are of great artistic merit but the significance of the finds is enhanced by the rarity of both pre-Conquest metalwork and material evidence of occupation in the lowland North-West. Their importance is further increased by the proximity of the findspots in each case to Romano-British material. The emerging pattern of Anglo-Saxon finds in close proximity to probable or certain Romano-British settlements supports the impression of continuity of general settlement location and of the use of core areas within the Mersey-Dee region from the Roman through to the medieval period.

DESCRIPTIONS

1. Copper-alloy small long brooch. Later 5th–6th century. Damage to the lobes of the headplate make the type of head uncertain but it appears to be undecorated; arched bow; upper part surviving only (Fig. 430).

Dimensions: c. 26 mm wide, c. 30 mm long.

Found by Mr E. P. Haberla with a metal detector at Rectory Field, Thurstaston, Wirral, Merseyside, some time before 1988.

Parallels In his seminal discussion, E. T. Leeds defined several classes of small long brooch.1 It is difficult to assign the present piece to any of Leeds’ types as the lobes of the headplate have sustained some damage and may originally have projected further.

![Anglo-Saxon finds from Merseyside and Cheshire: a. small long brooch from Thurstaston, Wirral; b. pin from Egerton parish, Cheshire; c. silver pin-head from Hale, Cheshire; d. enamelled strap-end from Hale, Cheshire. Scale 1:1. Figs 4–5 drawn by John Swogger, c–d by Julie McLinden](image)

Superficially the headplate resembles a simple trefoil-headed brooch but in most examples
the lobes of the head are separated distinctly from one another, while in the Thurstaston
example they are not demarcated by indentations. In its present state it could also be
interpreted as an example of the cross pattee derivative type where the lobes are rounded
and are separated by smooth curves. The date range for the class extends from the late 5th
to 6th centuries. 2

2. A silvered copper-alloy pin. The pin has a flat sub-triangular head with incised
decoration on one side. The shaft has a square section. The decoration is composed of five
elements; two similar circular elements with tripartite lobes; two similar ‘ears’ projecting
from the corners, and an asymmetrical interlace filling the central triangular space
(Fig. 4b).

Length: 58 mm; max. width of head: 12 mm; max. width of shaft: c. 1.3 mm; length of
head: 17 mm.

Found in the parish of Egerton, Cheshire in September 1993 by Mr Gary Rayson with a
metal-detector.

Discussion The overall form, though not the decoration, is paralleled by an 8th-century
pin found at Flixborough, Humberside. 3 Elements of the decoration are paralleled
elsewhere: the central upper and the lower roundels occur as a motif in several late 7th-
and 8th-century illuminated manuscripts, including the Echternach Gospels of the late 7th
or early 8th century, 4 the Vespasian Psalter of c. A.D. 725, 5 and the initial letter of St John’s
Gospel in the late 8th-century Barberini Gospels. 6 The interlace on the Egerton pin is a
truncated version of a similar pattern on a stylus from Whitby Abbey dated to the late 7th
or 8th century. 7 On stylistic grounds, a date in the 8th century seems probable.

3. Silver disc-headed pin, with opposed lug (Fig. 4c). The disc-head has a rounded
triangular lug on one edge and a longer, narrower lug opposite, now broken but with a
flattened oval section, which may have formed the shaft of the pin. The roundel has an
animal motif within a continuous border on one side, while the reverse is flat and plain.
The background of the decorated side at two points bears traces of possible niello infill.
The animal’s head is turned to look backwards and has a curved protruding tongue, a
nicked snout and small round incised eye. The neck has a collar marked by a double
incised line and both the visible fore- and hind-limbs have a paw denoted by a nick near
the end of the limb. Below the body is a forked decoration which divides into two leaf-like
terminals. The tail curves round over the hindquarters and ends in a curving knob. The
body is double-nicked along the contour and speckled with small triangular marks made
by the point of a graving tool.

Dimensions: diam. 16 mm; max. length 25 mm.

This and the next piece were found in 1986 within a hundred metres or so of each
other in a field at Hale, Cheshire by Mr Arthur Owen with a metal detector.

2 A. MacGregor and E. Bolick, A Summary Catalogue of the Anglo-Saxon Collections (Non-Ferrous Metals) (BAR British

3 L. Webster and J. Backhouse (eds), The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture AD 600–900 (London,
1991), 96, no. 696.

4 Ibid., 114–16.

5 Ibid., 197–99.

6 Ibid., 207.

7 Ibid., 142, no. 107c; C. Peers and C. A. R. Radford, ‘The Saxon Monastery of Whitby’, Archaeologia, 89 (1943),
64, fig. 15, no. 7.
The Hale object has a small sub-triangular lug opposed by a similar projection with a broken end which appears to have been a pin shaft. Despite the similarity in form to disc-shaped hooked tags, the complete lug is not pierced, and the diameter of the disc, its flatness and the fact that one lug is complete argue against it being a ring bezel.

The pin-head displays several of the decorative elements of the Trewhiddle style, named from the hoard deposited c. 875 near St Austell, Cornwall. Pieces from the hoard have been divided into three groups on the basis of style. Among the characteristics of the first group which appear on the Hale piece are the use of niello, speckled animals, a sub-triangular body, animal motifs which occasionally degenerate into leaf, and a nick between the snout and forehead. Additional features which are typical of the third group of Trewhiddle finds are also present, such as the double-nicked body and the collar of two incised lines. The use of double-nicked decoration largely replaced speckling of the body although occasional pieces are found with both features, as in the Hale example and a roundel from Whitby Abbey.

Leslie Webster has noted the parallel of the Hale piece with a group of finger-rings with disc-shaped bezels decorated with single spotted creatures. However, it should be noted that Hale find is a flat disc and is not therefore a ring bezel but is more likely to be a pin head. Webster notes the close similarity of the simplified version of the beast animal on the bezel of a gold finger-ring from Selkirk with that on a silver finger-ring from Coppergate, York, reinforcing the stylistic attribution of these pieces to a northern group.

The Trewhiddle style developed in the first half of the 9th century and the similarity of the Hale objects to the strap-end and roundel from Whitby Abbey may indicate a date in the early to mid-9th century. Trewhiddle-style ornament enjoyed a popularity over the whole of Anglo-Saxon England and examples have been found as far apart as Cornwall and the Highlands. The Hale objects then fall into a well recognized general pattern of finds.

Leslie Webster notes that pins, including elaborately decorated disc-headed types, became extremely popular in the 8th century. Disc-headed pins are recorded from Brandon, Suffolk and Talnotrie, Dumfries and Galloway, although the designs are unlike the Hale piece, and the opposed lug is absent. A shield-shaped pin-head from Brandon, Suffolk has a backward-turning quadruped with triangular body and legs terminating in interface, features shared by the Hale animal, as is the technique of speckling on the bodies of the border animals.

Strap-end, of copper alloy. The piece has two pierced rivet holes in the split end (Fig. 4d), which is damaged. One side is decorated, the other flat and plain. The field of the decorated panel is filled with an inlay which may be enamel, but has not been analysed. Under a x 10 lens the matrix of the inlay, which is now off-white in colour, contains red flecks and may indicate the original colour. The decoration consists of the surviving portion of a three-leafed plant at the damaged split end, a central panel with a stylized animal design, and an animal-head terminal seen from above. The central motif consists of a collared long-necked animal with an open mouth, an elongated triangular ear decorated with two circles, and the head turned back across the body to face the feet. The body has a double nick near the junction with the forelegs and another, but less prominent, at the

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9 Ibid., 193, no. 109.
10 Webster and Backhouse, op. cit. in note 3, 237, no. 203.
11 Ibid., 237–38, nos. 203 and 204.
12 Wilson, op. cit. in note 8, nos. 114 and 109 respectively.
13 Webster and Backhouse op. cit. in note 3, 84.
14 Ibid., 84, no. 66e.
NOTES AND NEWS

junction with the hindquarters. An annulet fills the corner of the field near the split end. The animal-head terminal has prominent triangular eyes, a cleft snout and vestigial ears. The border and reverse side are plain.

Maximum dimensions: length: 37 mm; width: 12 mm; thickness: 1.1 mm.

Discussion Strap-ends are the commonest type of Anglo-Saxon metalwork to survive from the 8th and 9th centuries and recent metal-detector finds have added greatly to the corpus. The type has been discussed by James Graham-Campbell and Leslie Webster. Webster has drawn attention to the existence of regional variations within the large number of surviving strap-ends of Anglo-Saxon date. She defines the characteristics of the 9th-century type as having a riveted split-end and an animal head at the other end, but there is a range of chronological and regional variations within the type, northern finds tending to have the animal-head terminal with comma-shaped ears whereas southern pieces often have round ears.

Many of the stylistic elements found on the Hale piece are paralleled elsewhere. A group of seven strap-ends from Whitby Abbey, North Yorkshire, are ascribed by Wilson to the early 9th century. Numbers 115-20 have the three-lobed plant at the split end, which is damaged but almost certainly originally present on the Hale specimen, while five of the seven have an animal design in the central field, including such features as the nicked and contorted body and some have an inlaid ground, although in the Whitby examples this is niello. The animal-terminal, with some minor variations, is a feature common to this group. Beaded borders are found on some strap-ends of 9th-century date (e.g. Whitby no. 114), but other Whitby examples have plain flat borders, as on the Hale piece (e.g. nos. 115, 116, 119).

Stylistically the animal motif has much in common with examples from north-eastern England. The closest parallel for the animal motif occurs on a piece from an unrecorded site in York. Although the animal of the Hale find is rather more angular than the York example, the motifs are closely similar; the York piece has a triangle rather than an annulet filling the lower right corner of the field and the animal's body is pecked, lacking the nicked outline of the Hale find. However, these are all features common to the repertoire of the 9th-century decorative metalworker.

Some features are paralleled on strap-ends in the Ashmolean Museum. An example from Souldern, Oxon., has the same three elements of the three-leafed plant, central panel with animal motif, and stylized animal-terminal, but lacks the enamelled inlay and is rather cruder in execution. The three-leafed plant and nicked animal are features commonly found on 9th-century strap-ends, the former occurring on over half the recorded strap-ends of this period. The double collar is another characteristic element of 9th-century animal motifs, occurring on the Strickland brooch and the ring of King Æthelwulf. Strap-ends of similar form are relatively common and examples have been recovered from the Walbrook Valley north of London Wall, now in the Museum of

16 Webster and Backhouse op. cit. in note 3, 233.
17 Wilson op. cit. in note 8, nos. 114-20.
18 D. M. Waterman, 'Late Saxon, Viking, and Early Medieval Finds from York', *Archaeologia*, 97 (1959), 77, fig. 10, no. 3.
20 Ibid., 60; Wilson, op. cit. in note 8, 28.
21 Wilson, op. cit. in note 8, 22.
NOTES AND NEWS

London, Fenny Stratford, and in a metal-worker’s hoard from Sevington, Wiltshire, the latter with silver and copper-alloy objects and about 70 coins dating the hoard to c. A.D. 850. All of these have a beaded border and central animal motif.

The Hale example is rather unusual, though by no means unique, in having enamel in the field with the animal design in reverse. Some silver strap-ends have niello in the field to provide a strong contrasting background but this copper-alloy piece is one of only a few recorded examples with enamel. It may be significant that the findspots of four of the enamelled strap-ends lie in the north, another example coming from Wharram Percy, North Yorkshire, and two other unpublished metal-detector finds from Cumbria which have recently been reported to Liverpool Museum by Mr John Brassey and Mr Edward Bolton.

The stylistic links between Yorkshire pieces and the two Hale finds support a northern source, perhaps east of the Pennines for the latter items. Hale lay on the southern boundary of the kingdom of Northumbria, of which York was the diocesan centre.

The Archaeological Significance of the Finds

The Merseyside and Cheshire region has produced little in the way of Anglo-Saxon metalwork, with the exception of the coastal trading site at Meols and the urban site of Chester (Fig. 5). From the eroding shore at Meols have come a significant quantity of objects of Anglo-Saxon date, including several disc-headed pins and strap-ends, although none are close parallels of the present finds.

The present finds therefore represent a small but valuable addition to the corpus of recorded material. However, they have an archaeological significance beyond their intrinsic artefactual interest. This is derived from their potential as indicators of settlement or activity for a period which is very poorly defined archaeologically in the lowland North-West of England. In each case the findspot of the Anglo-Saxon object lies close to clusters of Roman finds. Furthermore, a medieval site lies close by in two cases. Additional evidence from excavations in the region indicates that the emerging pattern is not coincidental but has a significance for settlement location.

The early post-Roman period of the 5th to 7th centuries is particularly scarce in artefacts or known settlements. The only recorded finds are from the North Wirral coast at Meols, a bead of a type which is found in 7th-century Anglo-Saxon cemeteries recovered from Hilbre Island, and a 6th-century brooch and three beads said to come from ‘Deeside’. Lloyd Laing suggests that the Deeside group represents an Anglian burial but the provenance is not secure. Alan Thacker has argued on place-name and historical evidence for an Anglo-Saxon presence in Cheshire by the 7th century, and he suggests that this thin scatter of material may indicate no more than casual contact with Mercia rather than settlement per se; ‘the newcomers were few and entered Cheshire relatively late’. The small long brooch from Thurstaston is thus a rare addition to the material evidence of contact between the British occupants of Cheshire and an Anglo-Saxon presence during

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23 The last two in the British Museum, London.
Anglo-Saxon finds from Merseyside and Cheshire. Location map of Anglo-Saxon metal finds, and sites of Anglo-Saxon and early post-conquest date with Roman material.
the 6th century. Its location is also significant. The brooch was found in a field which has yielded at least a dozen Roman broaches, while coins dating up to the later 3rd century A.D. have been recorded in the close vicinity and only 300 m away an oval cropmark enclosure has been observed through aerial photography. Both of these sites lie within about 500 m of the moated manor of Irby, which was granted by Hugh Lupus to the abbey of St Werburgh, Chester in 1093. Too much weight should not be placed on a single portable find but the possibility of continuity of settlement from the Romano-British into the Early Saxon Period on immediately adjacent sites is an intriguing one.

The two 9th-century objects from Hale were found close together and they could conceivably have emanated from a dispersed hoard. However, the site lies close to the lowest fording point of the river Mersey on its northern shore. The sloping tongue of land projecting into the river which gave Hale its name28 has light, easily-worked, windblown sand deposits which were exploited extensively in prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval times for settlement. The finds were recovered from within a few metres of an oval enclosure cropmark in a field which has produced Roman finds of metal and pottery. It is likely that the finds constitute either losses from individuals in transit across the Mersey or artefactual evidence of Anglo-Saxon settlement.

The Egerton find also has Roman coins, including a dispersed late Roman hoard, recorded from the immediate vicinity. The place-name is Anglo-Saxon but is not recorded until 1259.29 With its medieval chapel, Egerton has been considered a deserted medieval village. However, in the North-West of England where non-nucleated settlement is common in the medieval period, it is more likely to represent the manorial focus of a dispersed settlement pattern within the ancient township. The find may hint at the location of the Anglo-Saxon settlement which is recorded in the place-name.

Further confirmation of the juxtaposition of Anglo-Saxon or early post-conquest activity with a Romano-British settlement site comes from Court Farm, Halewood. Here, a ditch containing discarded wood stakes, one of which yielded a radiocarbon date of A.D. 855 cal, had cut through a substantial Romano-British rural settlement. A scatter of medieval pottery around Court Farm itself suggests that its first record in the post-medieval period masks an earlier foundation.

In all but the last case the Anglo-Saxon material may be a casual loss unconnected with the earlier settlement pattern. The sample is small and coincidence cannot be ruled out. The possibility that this is a genuine association, however, is strengthened by the growing number of examples of the converse of this pattern, where sites of Anglo-Saxon or Norman date have produced small quantities of Roman material.

Several examples of the occurrence of Roman material on later sites have been recorded in excavations by over the past decade by the Field Archaeology Section of Liverpool Museum. Five sherds of Roman pottery were recovered in excavations close to the Norman castle at West Derby, in a township which was a hundredal royal manor at the conquest. At Church Farm, Bidston, three sherds of pottery were discovered at a site close to the parish church. The church is first recorded in the later 13th century but is probably earlier in origin. Another Roman sherd was found in a small evaluation close to the isolated church at Overchurch, Upton, Wirral, which stands within a circular churchyard and is probably the source of a runic stone dating to the 9th century, which was found in 1887 on demolition of the successor church in neighbouring Upton among the stonework originally brought from Overchurch.30 A further excavated settlement at Moreton, Wirral, had a

29 O. E. *Eeghârt's or Eegharð's tan* (Ekwall, op. cit. in note 28, 161).
sequence of three buildings and associated ditches but was virtually aceramic and the
principal dating evidence was a penny of Eadwig (A.D. 955–59) in an upper ditch fill.31
Here a small quantity of Roman pottery and a 4th-century coin were found on the site,
while a Byzantine decanummium dated A.D. 540/1 minted in Carthage was found a short
distance away in a garden.32
In an area where during the Romano-British period the use of artefacts, even pottery,
was limited at rural sites, there is no extensive background scatter of material which might
regularly result in this kind of chance association. Instead, the discovery of even small
quantities of Roman material can reasonably be taken as indicative of nearby settlement.
The two-fold association of Anglo-Saxon finds close to Roman finds or settlements, and of
small scatters of Roman pottery or other objects at later Anglo-Saxon or early post-
conquest sites, suggests that settlement sites of the different periods are located close
together.
To take a minimalist view, the significance of the emerging pattern appears to be that
near-identical areas were chosen for settlement in the Roman Period and again in the
Anglo-Saxon Period with no implied continuity of community. To push the evidence a
little further, we might see in this repeated pattern the continuing exploitation of core areas
of cleared arable land by successive communities, from habitations that shift in location
through time, a pattern which Taylor has identified in other regions and termed 'settlement
drift'. This may relate to some general continuity of use of land units from the Romano-
British through to the Anglo-Saxon Period and beyond, although this does not necessarily
require continuity of the tenurial units.33 If the land units remain static, despite the drift of
the settlement from which they are exploited, the strong possibility exists that the
boundaries within which these resource territories are exploited are themselves of ancient
origin, particularly where they are marked by natural features such as streams or marsh.
These arguments are not new. Nick Higham has argued for the continuity of early
post-Roman estates in southern Lancashire such as Newton into medieval hundreds, and
the survival by Domesday of elements of a multiple estate system with little disintegration.34
Ron Cowell has postulated the survival of elements of a Romano-British settlement pattern
in certain areas of Merseyside into the medieval period, notably in Tarbock,35 while Mary
Atkin has identified a recurrent double-enclosure field pattern in use in the medieval
period in Leyland Hundred in Lancashire which she suggests represents fossilized elements
of a much earlier arable/pasture enclosure system.36 What is new is that the finds and the
excavated evidence are beginning to give physical reality at the local level to continuity of
land-use and settlement within an area of north-western England where rural settlement
of Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval character has until the 1980s has proved difficult to
identify and characterize.
Collectively the finds provide support for the view that settlement location shows a
strong measure of continuity from the Romano-British to the Anglo-Saxon Period. The
absence of an Anglo-Saxon ceramic tradition in the region means it is difficult to identify
settlement foci through field survey, and it is particularly difficult to bridge the long interval
between the archaeologically visible Romano-British and medieval settlements. The

emerging pattern of findspots provides a tantalizing hint that the vicinity of Romano-British rural settlements may be a fruitful starting point in the search for highly elusive Anglo-Saxon settlement in the lowland North-West of England. If this pattern turns out to have a more general validity, it should inform our strategies of evaluation and investigation of Romano-British and medieval rural sites within the region.

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