THE HUNSBURY HILL FINDS.[1]

By REGINALD A. SMITH, F.S.A.

A generation has passed since the discovery of Early British remains at Hunsbury Hill or Dane's Camp, nearly two miles south-west of Northampton. A full description of the antiquities, now for the most part collected in Northampton Museum, could not be brought within the limits of a short paper, nor indeed is it necessary to repeat what has been published by Sir Henry Dryden[2] and Mr. Thomas George,[3] the Museum Curator. It must suffice to bring out certain features of the find that have a bearing on the date of occupation and on the general history of Britain in the early iron age, that somewhat shadowy period between the end of the bronze age and the Roman conquest.

It is chiefly on account of its freedom from Roman contamination that this group of antiquities deserves special attention, and a place in British archaeology alongside the wonderful series from the lake-village of Glastonbury. Though one is on a hill and the other in a marsh, the two sites have much in common; and in spite of some discrepancies may be considered in part contemporary.

All over the four acres enclosed by the oval earthwork were found circular pits to the number of 300, varying from 5 feet to 10 feet in diameter and about 6 feet deep, piercing the soil almost to the iron-stone bed, which was dug between 1876 and 1886. They were distinguished by a filling of black mould, and had evidently served for the disposal of refuse during the occupation of the camp. It was in them that most of the relics were found, including no less than 150 quern-stones of grit in the form of truncated cones, evidently thrown in at the time the camp was abandoned. A summary of the finds, a few of

[1] Read before the Institute, 25th July, 1912.

[2] *Assoc. Archit. Socs. Reports*, xviii (1885), 53.

[3] *Victoria History of Northants.* i, 147.

which are in the British Museum, is given in an accessible publication,[1] the most valuable specimen being a beautifully ornamented sword-scabbard of the period known as La Tène II (second century B.C.).[2] The pottery fragments included some of special interest as resembling finds at Glastonbury, and attributable to a culture that does not seem to have been connected with that of south-east Britain, where the Aylesford type of cordoned vase was in vogue at the same period. More light is needed on the Glastonbury ware, which may one day give a clue to the boundary between the two civilisations; but at present more precise information can be derived from other groups of antiquities.

One of the iron objects recovered (fig. 1) is of greater interest than beauty; and, like many specimens from other sites, was long regarded as an unfinished sword-blade. As a sword and bronze sheaths of others were found at Hunsbury, it should have been evident that the

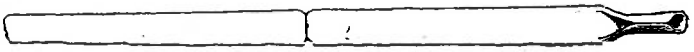

FIG. 1. IRON CURRENCY-BAR, HUNSBURY.
Length, 28½ inches.

bar in question contained too much metal for a sword of the period; and the occurrence of many other bars in the same condition, though not always of the same dimensions, should have prevented the application to pre-Roman Britain of such an advanced economic principle as the division of labour. The hoarding of unfinished swords in large numbers (as at Malvern) would inevitably have led to disaster in war; and the frequent discovery of these underground deposits in ancient camps of itself suggests that the bars were nothing but a cumbersome form of treasure.

The use of metal bars or blades as currency can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, and survives to-day in some parts of Africa.[3] The iron money of Sparta was

[1] *Iron Age Guide*, 129–130.
[2] *Archaeologia*, lii, 72.
[3] Col. R. C. Temple on *The Beginnings of Iron Currency* in *Journal of Anthropological Institute*, N.S. ii (1899), 99.

a deliberate archaism at a time when the rest of Greece enjoyed a coinage, with the origin of which the names of Croesus and Pheidon will always be connected. The latter is stated to have called in, and offered to the Argive Hera, the ὀβελίσκοι or iron bars that had till his time (before 600 B.C.) done duty as money; and one of the most interesting finds in the Heraeum, excavated some years ago by Prof. Waldstein,[1] was a bundle of iron rods that may well have been Pheidon's offering. The origin and development, or rather degradation, of these iron bars has recently been discussed with much learning by M. Déchelette,[2] who traces them back to the spits used for roasting flesh.

How the idea of using iron bars as currency reached this country is at present a mystery, as none of the peoples between Britain and Greece seem to have adopted the system; but that some of the Britons "used iron slats in place of money" is asserted by Caesar, who was doubtless an eye-witness of the fact. This brings the use of an iron bar-currency down to the middle of the first century before Christ, and recent research has brought to light a large number of specimens which exactly answer to the classical description. They are of graduated weights ("taleis ferreis ad certum pondus examinatis"), and no less than five denominations can now be recognised, in the proportion of 1, 2, 4, 8 and 16. It will, however, be more convenient to regard the denominations as $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, 1, 2 and 4, as there are reasons for believing the middle weight to have been the unit. A cheese-shaped bronze weight of 4,770 grains (about 11 oz. av.) has been found in association with enamelled bronze ornaments of Late Keltic character near Neath, Glamorganshire,[3] the whole find being presented to the Cardiff Museum by Dr. Bickerton Edwards. On the top of this weight, which is in excellent condition, is engraved I, and the same character, with others not yet deciphered, appears on the top of a basalt weight of exactly the same denomination in Mayence Museum.[4] These are sufficient grounds for regarding 4,770 grains

[1] *The Argive Heraeum*, i, 62, 77, fig. 31.

[2] *Les origines de la drachme et de l'obole* (*Revue Numismatique*, 1911, pp. 1–59, esp. p. 50).

[3] *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 6th ser. v, 144.

[4] Both are figured in *Proc. Soc. Antiq.* xx, 189.

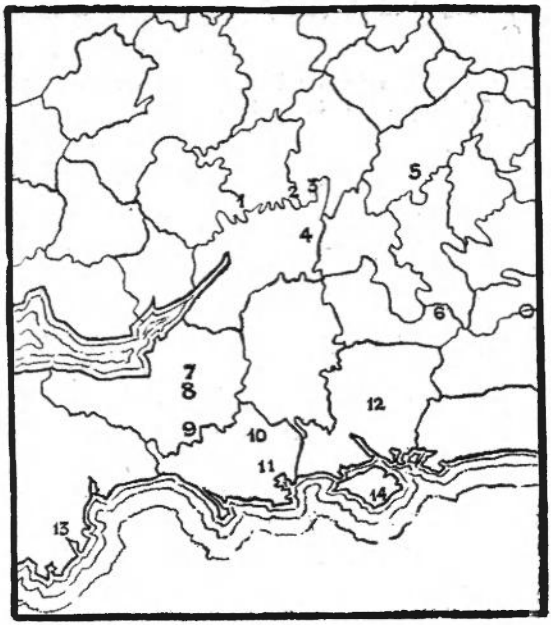

FIG. 2. MAP OF SOUTHERN ENGLAND SHEWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF CURRENCY-BARS.

DISTRIBUTION OF IRON CURRENCY-BARS.

No.	Denomination		¼	½	Unit	2	4
1	*Worc.*	Malvern			×		
2	,,	Littleton		×			
3	*Glouc.*	Meon Hill ..		×	×		
4	,,	Bourton-on-the-Water				×	
5	*Northants.*	Hunsbury ..				×	
6	*Berks.*	Maidenhead ..					×
7	*Somerset*	Wookey Hole ..	×	×	×		
8	,,	Glastonbury ..			×	×	
9	,,	Ham Hill (Hamdon) ..				×	
10	*Dorset*	Hod Hill				×	
11	,,	Spettisbury ..			×	×	
12	*Hants.*	Winchester ..				×	
13	*Devon*	Holne Chase ..					
14	*Isle of W.*	Ventnor					

[Details are given in *Proc. Soc. Antiq.* xx, 184; xxii, 342.]

as an ancient British unit weight; and the hypothesis is curiously justified by the weights of many iron bars discovered in Britain. The most usual denomination is the double unit (the standard being 9,540 grains, or about 22 oz. av.), which is that found at Hunsbury (1⅓ oz. short of standard), site no. 5 on the adjoining map (fig. 2); also at Glastonbury (no. 8) and Hamdon or Ham Hill (no. 9) in Somerset; Spettisbury (no. 11) and Hod Hill (no. 10) in Dorset; Bourton-on-Water, Glouc. (no. 4); and Winchester, Hants. (no. 12).

The unit weight has been found at least on five sites, generally in association with other denominations, and it should here be remarked that the Malvern specimens alone shew any serious deviation from the standard. One specimen of the few surviving from two hoards of 150 each is only 1½ oz. short; but four others, also in the museum of Malvern College, have each a deficiency of about 3½ oz. which cannot in their case be accounted for by rust, as the specimens are in specially good condition.[1] Any doubts as to the standard may, however, be removed by the Glastonbury finds, one of which weighed 4,653 instead of 4,770 grains, and the other 9,098 instead of 9,540. The half-unit is well represented by thirteen examples practically complete from Meon Hill, Gloucestershire, the average of ten being only 54 grains short of the standard (2,385 grains or about 5½ oz. av.). The hoard consisted of 394 bars, three of which, now in the Ashmolean Museum, have an average weight 20 grains above the standard, and another belongs to the unit denomination.

The extreme weights are comparatively rare, as might be expected. Recent excavations by Messrs. Balch and Troup in the Mendip cave known as Wookey Hole, near Wells, have brought to light three specimens, of which the most perfect is the only representative of the quarter-unit denomination. It is 152 grains short of the standard, but has been cut across the middle and apparently trimmed in ancient times. The two higher denominations are also represented but merely by fragments, and their weights have only been approximately computed.[2] The

[1] *Proc. Soc. Antiq.* xxii, 340.

[2] *Archaeologia*, lxii, 574.

heaviest currency-bars known were found in a bundle of seven or eight in the Thames at Maidenhead bridge about 1894, and those that have been traced are fairly well up to the standard of 19,080 grains or about 44 oz. av.

The discovery of five denominations related in such an obvious manner should itself be enough to prove the truth of Caesar's assertion, which has often been questioned, the text itself having been altered time after time by commentators who read various meanings into the passage. The Neath and Mayence weights are further confirmation, and it is interesting to find that weights found at Charterhouse in the Mendips, a district in which bar-currency was in use, are approximately of 3 oz. 5¾ oz. and 11 oz. av. as against the 2¾ oz. 5½ oz. and 11 oz. deduced from the standard to which the iron bars conformed. More intricate subdivisions of the standard have been noticed in a set of leaden weights found at Melandra Castle, Glossop, which were published by Mr. Thomas May,[1] and later by Prof. Conway, in the report of the excavations.

The extensive subdivision of the unit weight suggests the possibility of connecting the system with that of the coinage. The gold stater averaged about 84 grains, and the quarter-stater of 21 grains was approximately of the same weight as the silver piece. The lowest iron denomination (1,192 grains) is slightly heavier than 14 gold staters; and the lowest weight of the Melandra series (147 grains, representing one thirty-second of the unit, or 149 grains) seems to stand in no closer relation to the coinage, which was probably based on a weight-system confined to the precious metals. Nor is the connexion in point of time quite clear. It will be seen from Sir John Evans's map of the distribution of inscribed coins that the area of the iron-currency was at one time occupied by people with a coinage, whether minted locally or imported from the south-east of England is immaterial. The inscribed coins go back at least to the time of Tasciovanus, who reigned from 30 B.C. to A.D. 5, and the uninscribed are held to begin about 150 B.C. The latter group is represented in Dorset where the iron currency also occurs, whereas "the introduction of the use of money into

[1] *Journ. Derbyshire Arch. and Nat. Hist. Soc.* xxv, 165; xxviii, 166.

Gloucestershire and the north of Wilts. and Somerset does not appear to have taken place until some time after the days of Julius Caesar."[1] The total absence of British coins on the Hunsbury site is not surprising in view of the early brooches to be presently considered; and it is quite possible that coins only circulated in the bar-currency area after the Julian invasions, though mints east of the line from Northampton to Portsmouth had then been busy for about a century. It is conceivable that the two currencies overlapped, but, to judge from the finds already known, the bar-currency was never adopted in Kent or East Anglia, where there is, on the

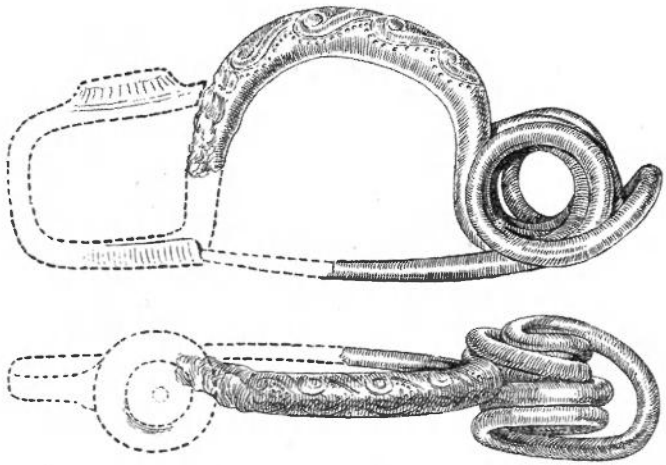

FIG. 3. BRONZE BROOCH, LA TÈNE I, HUNSBURY ($\frac{1}{1}$).

other hand, evidence of an early coinage; nor can the currency-bars be assigned to any one of the areas established by Sir John Evans for the various groups of coin-types, as the iron currency is found in his western, south-eastern and central areas.

The single currency-bar can therefore take back the occupation of Hunsbury to the middle of the first century B.C. but other finds shew that the site was inhabited considerably earlier; and two of the small number of brooches recovered point unmistakably to the fourth

[1] Evans, *Coins of the Ancient Britons*, 41.

century B.C. It is easy to object that two specimens cannot prove so much, and may be only survivals, already of considerable age when brought to Hunsbury. This might be true of earlier periods, but in the early iron age fashions changed very quickly and intercourse was comparatively easy with the continent; for instance, a bronze bucket made in North Italy about the seventh century B.C. found its way to Weybridge, Surrey, and was lost before it had been used or injured. The number of brooches that have been found in England dating from the period of La Tène, not to mention still earlier examples of Italian origin, has considerably increased in recent

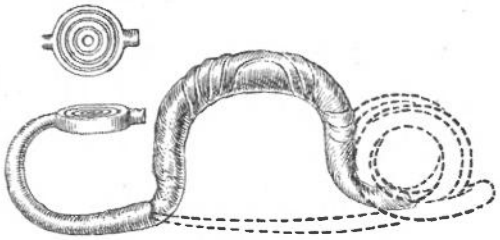

FIG. 4. BRONZE BROOCH, LA TÈNE I, HUNSBURY ($\frac{1}{1}$).

years, and unless distribution were expeditious, the changes of fashion would tend to confine the various types to the immediate vicinity of the factories. The earliest Hunsbury brooches (figs. 3, 4) resemble so closely the La Tène I type of Central Europe that there can be no hesitation in saying that they were not made in Britain but imported, and that in the century of their manufacture, the fourth before the Christian era. Archaeology has gone further on the evidence available, and now claims to date the La Tène series almost within a generation. M. Viollier[1] of Zurich Museum has had much experience of such finds, and proposes a subdivision of La Tène I under

[1] The latest writer on the subject (*C-R de l'Afas*, Dijon, 1911, 636). The well-known classification of Dr. Tischler has been amplified by Dr. Reinecke in several papers, e.g. in *Correspondenzblatt der deutschen Gesellschaft fur Anthrop, Ethnol. und Urgeschichte*, May, 1903, p. 36, where he gives a later date to such forms of La Tène I as those illustrated in *Vict. Hist. Berks.* i, 224, figs. 3–6.

three heads, the earliest forms including figs. 3 and 4, and dating from the early years of the fourth century.

The last of a long series of Italian brooches, easily recognised by the coiled spring on one side of the head, is called after the Certosa cemetery at Bologna, and dates from the fifth century B.C. It overlaps the earliest examples of the La Tène series, of which the leading feature is a bilateral spring, that is, the coil of wire giving tension to the pin is placed symmetrically on both sides of the head, and this arrangement persists into Imperial times. Classification is based on the bow and foot, the brooch framework being all in one piece. La Tène I brooches have a fairly high bow and a returned foot approaching but not touching the bow (figs. 3, 4); La Tène II includes brooches with the end of the foot attached to the bow by means of a collar or other fastening; and La Tène III brooches have the foot hollow as before, but the returned end incorporated in the bow (fig. 6).

This rough classification is now universally accepted, but M. Viollier ventures on a more precise dating and a further subdivision of La Tène I. He assigns the Certosa type to the middle of the fifth century, and the first of three phases of La Tène I to 450–400 B.C. The development of the brooch from a piece of wire is still apparent at this stage, to the end of which belong the two Hunsbury specimens (figs. 3, 4) as well as others found in Britain and Gaul. The second phase is marked by a lowering of the bow and the addition of ornamental rosettes and settings of coral or enamel; and the third stage of La Tène I shews a more solid and ornamental bow with baluster foot. These last two phases share the centuries between 400 and 200 B.C. There is then independent evidence from the large Swiss cemeteries of the period that the Hunsbury type dates from the opening of the La Tène division of the early iron age; and their resemblance to continental examples both in ornamentation and patina practically excludes the possibility of their being mere survivals.

The Hunsbury brooches have been kindly lent for illustration by Mr. Thomas George with the sanction of the Northampton Museum committee; and may be described as follows:

Fig. 3. Bronze brooch of La Tène I form, with double spring-coil on either side of the head and the chord outside: the bow engraved with a repeating design based on the classical palmette, and its lower part damaged, apparently by fire. The foot and terminal have been added from a very similar specimen in the British Museum, of unknown origin, but probably found in Britain. That the brooch was long in use is shewn by the rubbed condition of the bow.

Fig. 4. Bronze brooch of slighter build than the last, the spring and pin missing: the bow ornamented with concentric semicircles adapted to its curve, and the free foot ending in a disc with concentric circles, the disc having been accidentally bent into the plane of the brooch but represented in its original position. Other brooches with the bow decorated in the same way have been found in England and are in the British Museum.

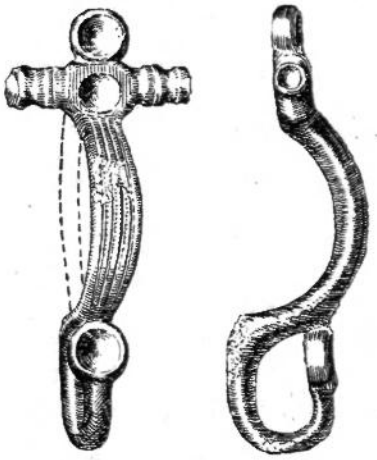

FIG. 5. BRONZE BROOCH WITH SIDE VIEW, SPRING AND PIN WANTING, HUNSBURY ($\frac{1}{1}$).

Fig. 5. Bronze brooch of massive make and exceptional form with the same dark green patina as fig. 3: spring and pin missing, the former probably consisting of one or more coils attached to the under face of the head by fixing the end in a small hole with a peg or button, like that seen on a specimen from Aesica described by Sir Arthur Evans.[1] The cross-bar has a hole in the centre, not communicating with that underneath, and recalls the long spiral coil of T-shaped brooches; while two dished cavities,[2] one on the extension of the head and the other at the engaged end of the foot, may have held coral or some other decorative substance. The bow is grooved on the top and broadest at the centre; though flatter than those of figs. 3 and 4, it would look practically semicircular if the spring were in

[1] *Archaeologia*, lv, 183, fig. 7.

[2] Other examples are illustrated by Lindenschmit, *Alt. unserer heid. Vorzeit*, iv, pl. 14.

place. It is difficult to classify, but may be described as a pre-Roman adaptation of the type known as La Tène I, and may date from the second or first century B.C. It should be noticed that the end of the foot does not clasp the bow as in La Tène II, while on the other hand the brooch is a casting, not made from wire. Length 2¼ inches.

Fig. 6. Bronze brooch of La Tène III type, of golden colour and in good condition, though the foot is imperfect: single coil on either side of the head and chord on the outside. The bow is grooved, with openwork foot shewing no trace of the earlier fastening of the foot to the bow. The form is found also in the earliest Roman period of Britain, but this probably dates from the first century B.C. Length 2·2 inches.

Fig. 7. Bronze brooch, complete but oxidised, with T-shaped spiral spring with chord underneath, and solid foot terminating in a square with longitudinal markings. Probably the latest brooch from the site, but not apparently connected with the Roman series. Length 1·8 inch.

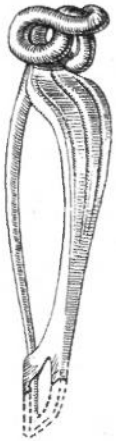

FIG. 6. BRONZE BROOCH, LA TÈNE III, HUNSBURY (½).

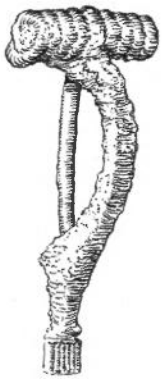

FIG. 7. BRONZE BROOCH, WITH SPIRAL SPRING, HUNSBURY (1/1).

It should be remarked that whereas haphazard excavation at Hunsbury yielded two typical La Tène I brooches, not a single example was found in the thoroughly explored lake-dwellings of Glastonbury. The latter site is dated provisionally by Dr. Munro from about 100 B.C. to A.D. 50, the two earliest brooches belonging to the period of La Tène II, or the second century B.C. if the current chronology can be adopted without modification for the west of England. The nearest centre for that type of brooch is the Marne district, and the middle La Tène period is well represented in the Morel collection

at the British Museum, that series being supposed not later than about 200 B.C. when cremation was introduced. Further precision will no doubt be possible before long, when systematic exploration of ancient cemeteries becomes the rule rather than the exception; but an imposing list of over 30 specimens of La Tène I has been drawn up for England,[1] and it is hardly possible that all were survivals and therefore poor evidence of date. The earliest may well have been imported, but the Britons evidently copied the continental models and produced some patterns that appear to be confined to this country. The brooch forms evolved from the same prototype on either side of the Channel were parallel, not identical.

[1] List given in *The Glastonbury Lake-village*, i, 185–188; the best Hunsbury specimen (fig. 3) is no. 33 in the list, and fig. 4 is no. 32, while fig. 5 is discussed in a footnote on p. 188.