

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON ROMANO-BRITISH BROOCH TYPOLOGY IN THE PEAK DISTRICT AND ADJACENT AREAS

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INTRODUCTION

Romano-British brooches are a well studied class of find and often provide valuable dating evidence where their place in a typological development can be defined chronologically. However, their value as dateable objects all too often eclipses their value in addressing socio-economic questions and in defining the stylistic individualism of craftsmen in specific areas. In order to explore the potential for answering such questions in an area of northern Britain within which brooch production is known to have occurred, the author undertook, in the spring of 1992 and with financial support from the Kiln Trust, a survey of the known brooch finds from the Peak District and adjacent areas as far south as Derby, west as far as Manchester and east as far as Templeborough and Chesterfield. The present paper summarises some of the principal results of this work. The possible antecedence of a distinctive brooch type, apparently largely restricted to the study area, is identified and examined and other evidence for individual craftsmanship and for possibly significant patterns within brooch distributions is noted.

THE AREA AND ITS GENERAL BROOCH TYPOLOGY

The study area (Fig. 1) centres on the Peak District which lies at the southern edge of the 'upland military' zone of Roman Britain. In addition to auxiliary forts and their *vici* it contained the civil town of Buxton, a spa town (Hart 1981, 87), and Carsington, probably connected to the area's lead extraction industry (Ling and Courtney 1981, 74-6; Ling 1990, 53; Dearne, Anderson and Branigan 1995, 65-6). A quite dense pattern of rural settlement and cave usage is now recorded (Makepeace 1985, 76-84; Dearne 1990, 167-212; Branigan and Dearne 1992, 83-93) and may have grown up in and after the early second century in connection with lead mining (Hodges and Wildgoose 1980, 52; Branigan 1991, 62). The study area includes low lying land to the south, east and west of the Peak where are sited auxiliary forts and their *vici* like Manchester (Walker 1986) and at least one major civil town superseding a fort at Little Chester, Derby (Dool *et al.* 1985). Brooch production is testified to by lead mould formers for brooches and for brooch suspension loop collars as well as unfinished brooches and other metalworking evidence recovered from Poole's Cavern, a large cave near Buxton (see the full catalogue in Branigan and Dearne 1991, 43-50, which augments, and corrects some errors in, Bramwell *et al.* 1983, 52-61 and Branigan and Bayley 1989). Thirst House Cave, nearby, has also produced metalworking evidence (Branigan and Dearne 1991a, 102 nos. 3.38-45) and might also have been another brooch production site.

As with almost any region of comparable size in northern Britain, the study area has an uneven pattern of excavation at major sites and includes sites where preservation conditions are extremely poor. Moreover, there has been some systematic excavation of only a handful of rural sites and almost all brooch finds away from major sites have come from antiquarian work in

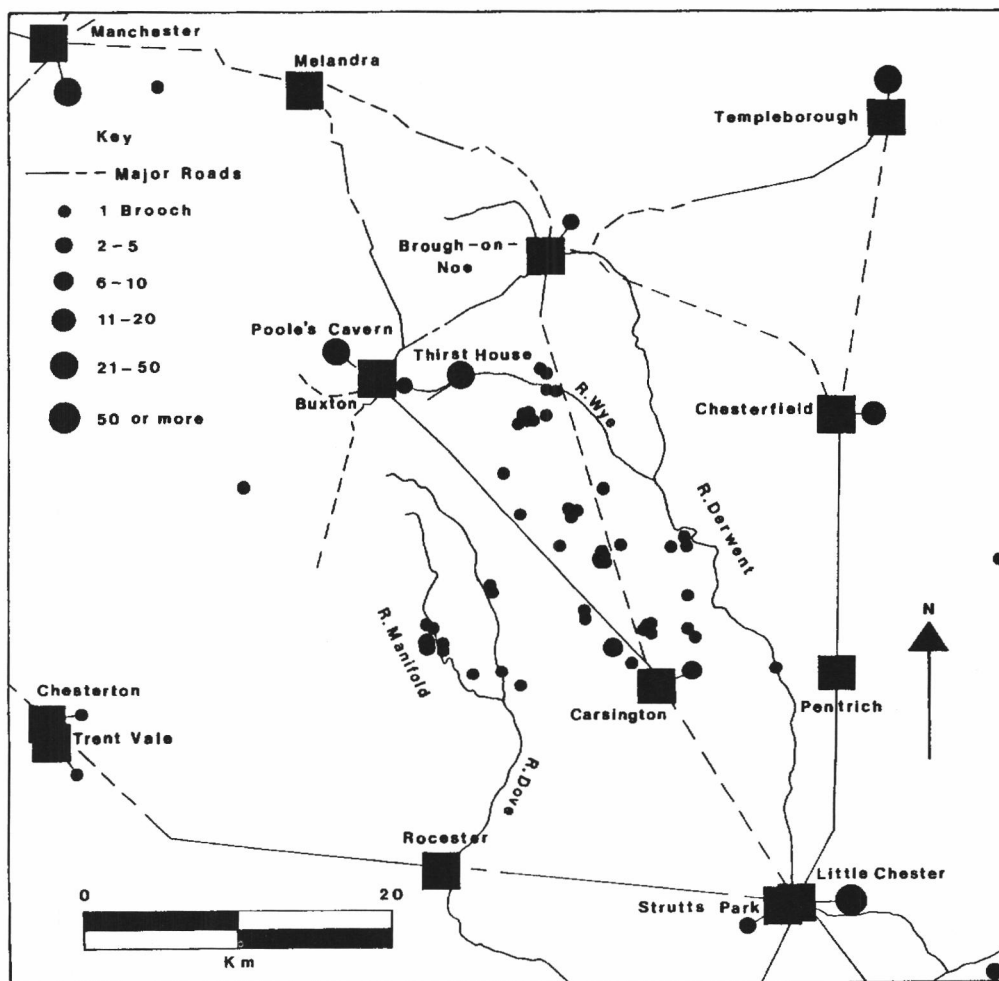


Fig. 1 Romano-British brooch typology: study area and overall brooch distribution.

caves or been found casually. Yet the broad characteristics of brooch typology are clear. Of over three hundred brooches recorded in the survey (which included all known finds except for a few from early excavations at Manchester and from north Staffordshire sites, details of which were not available) about 70% were bow brooches, the most common types being Trumpets and Colchester Derivatives using the 'Polden Hill' springing system, with smaller numbers of T-shaped, Headstud, Trumpet Derivative, Thealby Mine, Knee and other forms. Penannular brooches were not uncommon (c. 20% of the corpus) and, together with a range of plate brooches, represent the rest of the material. Sub-groups are recognisable among most brooch types, as is generally the case, and regional biases are identifiable, as for instance the westwards fall off of Thealby Mine type brooches (i.e. 'Thealby Mine A type' brooches as defined in Dearn and Parsons forthcoming, rather than all studless Head studs).

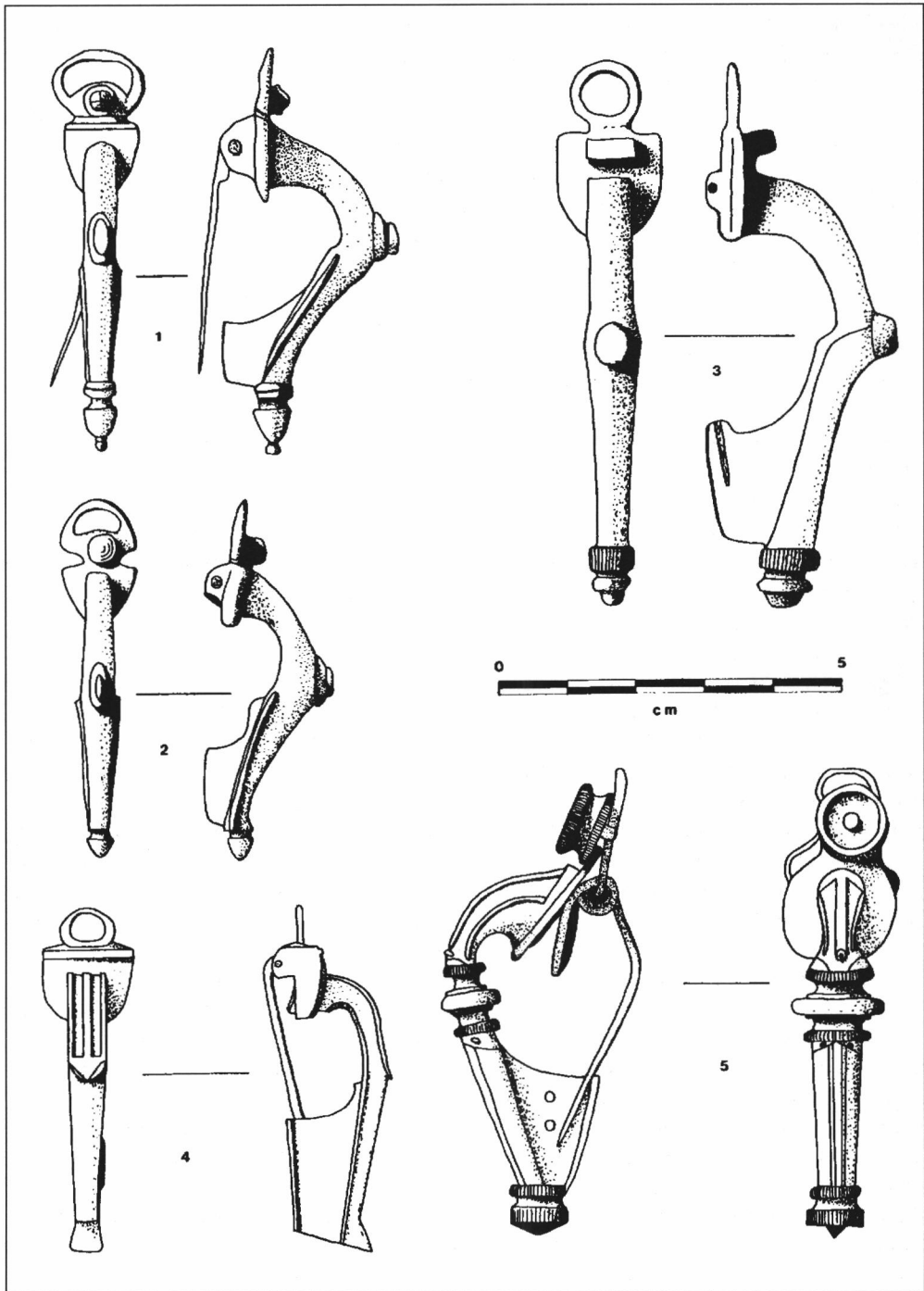


Fig. 2 Romano-British brooch typology: nos. 1-3, plate headed brooches (Thirst House Cave); no. 4, Wroxeter brooch (Thor's Cave); no. 5, trumpet brooch (Old Woman's Cave).

PLATE HEADED BROOCHES AND EVIDENCE FOR INDIVIDUAL CRAFTSMANSHIP

One recognisable brooch type appears to be virtually restricted to the area and presumably was developed locally. This type will be referred to as the Plate Headed brooch and is characterised by three examples from Thirst House Cave (Fig. 2:1-3; Branigan and Dearne 1991a, 88, nos. 2.6-8). The defining characteristics are: the pin held on an axis bar between a pair of pierced lugs; a head formed of a flat plate, curved at its base, flat topped and with a suspension loop which is often a crescentic pierced plate, decorated with some form of moulding; a markedly flexed, plain, but often faceted bow with a large boss at the point of inflexion; a large foot knob of one or more elements; and a rectangularised catch plate. Including those already cited, eight finished examples of the type are known from the area. The others are a probably damaged iron example again from Thirst House Cave (Branigan and Dearne 1991a, 90, no. 2.33); single copper alloy finds from Little Chester, Derby (Mackreth 1985, 293: no. 33) and Staden near Buxton (Makepeace 1983, 84: no. 6—misidentified as a Trumpet brooch); and two more in iron, one from Poole's Cavern (Mackreth in Bramwell *et al.* 1983, 56: no. 7); Branigan and Dearne 1991, 50, no. 6.1) and, though the identification rests only on the bow, one from Thor's Fissure Cave, Manifold Valley (Branigan and Dearne 1991, 65, no. 3.1). An unfinished copper alloy example comes from Poole's Cavern (Mackreth in Bramwell *et al.* 1983, 56: no. 6; Branigan and Bayley 1989, 35: no. 4; Branigan and Dearne 1991, 47, no. 4.13) and there are up to three lead mould formers from the same site (Branigan and Dearne 1991, 49, nos. 5.1-3) though one originally was erroneously described by Mackreth (in Bramwell *et al.* 1983, 56: no. 5) as a finished brooch, and Branigan and Bayley (1989, 42: nos. 126-8) erroneously described the others as for a Trumpet and a ?Colchester Derivative brooch.

Although the mould formers are poorly preserved, only in the case of one (Branigan and Dearne 1991, 49, no. 5.2) need the type being modelled be seriously questioned (it may possibly be a 'Wroxeter' and not a Plate Headed brooch) and it is clear that Plate Headed brooch production was under way at Poole's Cavern. The mould formers, however, may have been discarded unused since they would have produced unusually small brooches. Given the high proportion of examples known from Poole's Cavern and other sites in the environs of Buxton, one suspects that the brooch type was the 'trade mark' of one or more workshops in the immediate vicinity. Only one possible Plate Headed brooch, from Ravenglass, Cumbria, has been noted from beyond the area being studied (Potter 1979, 65: no. 1—classified as a P-shaped form, but with such a small illustration that identification is uncertain).

In discussing the examples from Poole's Cavern known to him at the time, Mackreth (in Bramwell *et al.* 1983, 56-8) regarded them as variants of the well recognised 'Wroxeter' type of brooch, though he did not use this name in his discussion. He repeated his comments for the Little Chester example (Mackreth 1985, 294: no. 33) and the present author followed him implicitly in discussing the full corpora from Poole's Cavern, Thirst House Cave and Thor's Fissure Cave (Branigan and Dearne 1991, 47-50, 65; Branigan and Dearne 1991a, 88, 90), although the name Plate Headed brooch was applied to signal their variance from the main typological group. In assessing the full range of the area's brooches the possibility that part of the antecedence of Plate Headed brooches might lie in localised south Pennine developments of Trumpet brooches, as much as in the Wroxeter brooch, was noted. Wroxeter brooches (e.g. Fig. 2:4) are few and far between in the study area but do share characteristics with Plate Headed brooches. Both have double lug pin anchorages, plate-like heads and well curved bows with mid-bow ornament often marking a transition from a curved to a straighter profile. However, Plate Headed brooches show a greater elaboration of the head plate, with what is virtually a second,

often crescentically pierced, plate above the first with a bold raised moulding on many. Their bows are far heavier and more flexed than Wroxeter brooches and more often faceted, or with a very marked arris. Moreover, Plate Headed brooches have a bulbous mid-bow ornament of some size and generally lack the enamelled upper bow decoration of Wroxeter brooches.

Rather than viewing Wroxeter types as the only or main influence on Plate Headed brooches, the tendency for Trumpet brooches to have significant 'collars' around their heads, in the Peak District and its environs, should also be considered. Many classic Trumpet brooches exhibit some sort of small collar or flange around the whole or upper part of the head, but in and around the Peak District a number of otherwise classic Trumpet brooches have the head wholly or partly represented by a flat plate and not by the usual splaying of the upper bow (Manchester: Jones and Grealey 1974, fig. 43: no. 12; Rainster Rocks: Dool 1976, 18: no. 3; Thor's Cave: Branigan and Dearne 1991, 61, nos. 4.2-3). The most extreme of these, from Old Woman's Cave (Branigan and Dearne 1991, 37, no. 3.2), has a very clear plate head. A double lug pin anchorage and a crescentic pierced suspension loop/plate also occur on Peak District Trumpet brooches (e.g. Rainster Rocks: Smithard 1910, pl. 3; Middleton-by-Youlgreave: British Museum 1896.5-1.10) and more widely (e.g. Wroxeter: Hattatt 1987, 129-30: no. 950, citing others). The latter clearly derives from the partial obscuring of circular wire or cast suspension loops by circular ornaments fronting their real or imitation head loop collars (e.g. Mackreth 1985, 291: no. 26). This combination provides a context for the basic head development of Plate Headed brooches. Indeed, the circular ornaments below the crescentic piercings of Fig. 2:1-2 strongly suggest the influence of ornamented Trumpet suspension loops, like that of Fig. 2:5. The bow's antecedence is less obviously traceable. However, accentuation of the Trumpet brooch bow must be as likely an origin as development of the Wroxeter bow. The latter does share with Plate Headed brooches a single element mid-bow ornament restricted to the front of the brooch rather than a more elaborate multiple moulding, however, only one probable Plate Headed brooch fragment (Thor's Fissure Cave: Fig. 3:1) has the vertical enamelled cells often found on the upper bows of Wroxeter brooches.

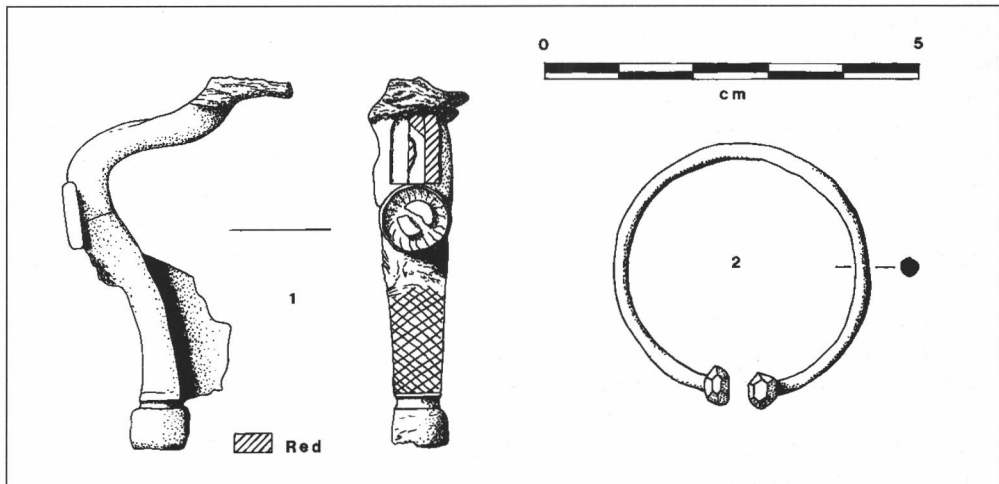


Fig. 3 Romano-British brooch typology: no. 1, ?plate headed brooch (Thor's Fissure Cave); no. 2, aberrant penannular brooch (Thirst House Cave).

In summary it is being suggested that Plate Headed brooches could have developed from certain Trumpet brooches, even if Wroxeter brooches also played some part in the parentage. However, it is the apparent parochialism of Plate Headed brooches, whatever their parentage, that should be highlighted. Their scarcity allows one to suggest that here we have a craftsman producing a new type of brooch by combining and developing aspects of other types familiar to him. The presence of up to three iron examples, when the area has produced no other iron bow brooch, may also be suggestive of innovation or experiment.

Plate Headed brooches are not the only innovative brooches possibly produced in the Peak District, particularly around Buxton. Both at Poole's Cavern and Thirst House Cave penannular brooches occur which are clearly outside Fowler's (1960; 1963) classification system and for which no parallels have been noted. From the latter site (Branigan and Dearne 1991a, 90, no. 2.28) comes an example with all-round hexagonally faceted terminals (Fig. 3:2). The nearest recognised group to this brooch is the mainly Dark Age group G4 (e.g. Dickinson 1982, 44), which stylistically, as well as chronologically or geographically, is a long way away. The second aberrant brooch from Poole's Cavern (e.g. Branigan and Bayley 1989, 35: no. 26: the attribution there to type D1 must be strongly rejected) has cast terminals in the form of flat topped knobs on the upper face of the hoop. Again only very distant, themselves aberrant, parallels appear (Hattatt 1985, 189: no. 658 from near Old Sarum with terminals of spiralled wire cones on the upper face of the hoop; Hattatt 1987, 299: no. 1292 from Dorset with another cited from Shetland with cast circular terminals on the upper face of the hoop but recessed for glass or enamel insets and perhaps related to Dark Age type H2). Two other slightly unusual penannulars, with incised double lines forming Vs on the terminals, at Thirst House Cave (Branigan and Dearne 1991a, 89, no. 2.27) and the Manchester *vicus* (to be published), may be additional evidence suggesting experimentation with brooch forms, but here at least one exact parallel is available from Victoria Cave, Settle (Lord collection, to be published).

DISTRIBUTION

The distribution of brooches in the area studied shows some interesting patterns. Firstly, even allowing for excavation history and preservation conditions, the variety of brooch types at Little Chester (Mackreth 1985) is far greater than that at major northern and western sites included in the study area. More unexpectedly, brooch distribution (Fig. 1), in our present limited state of knowledge, reveals that brooch use in the study area, outside major sites, appears to have been confined to a specific part of the Peak. They occur in the southern Peak from approximately Carsington to the Wye Valley, between the rivers Derwent and Manifold and particularly east of the Buxton to Little Chester road. This distribution lies within the area most densely settled by cave and open site dwellers (Dearne 1990, fig. 8a-d). Settlement evidence in the form of sites and pottery/coin finds, however, is more extensive than brooch distribution and continues south of Carsington, north of and along the Wye Valley and into upper Dove Dale, all areas without brooch finds, except for the immediate environs of Buxton.

Whether this pattern is genuine or due to factors such as the largely chance nature of most finds is yet difficult to know and the possibility that it is due to the latter urges considerable caution. Yet if the pattern is real, it may reflect the existence of a 'core area' of more prosperous settlements. The known distribution of coin finds (Dearne 1990, figs. 8a-d) is very similar, and if anything more restricted, and may lend support. The area is also coincident with much of the probable focus of the lead extraction industry which would provide some explanation for differences in prosperity.

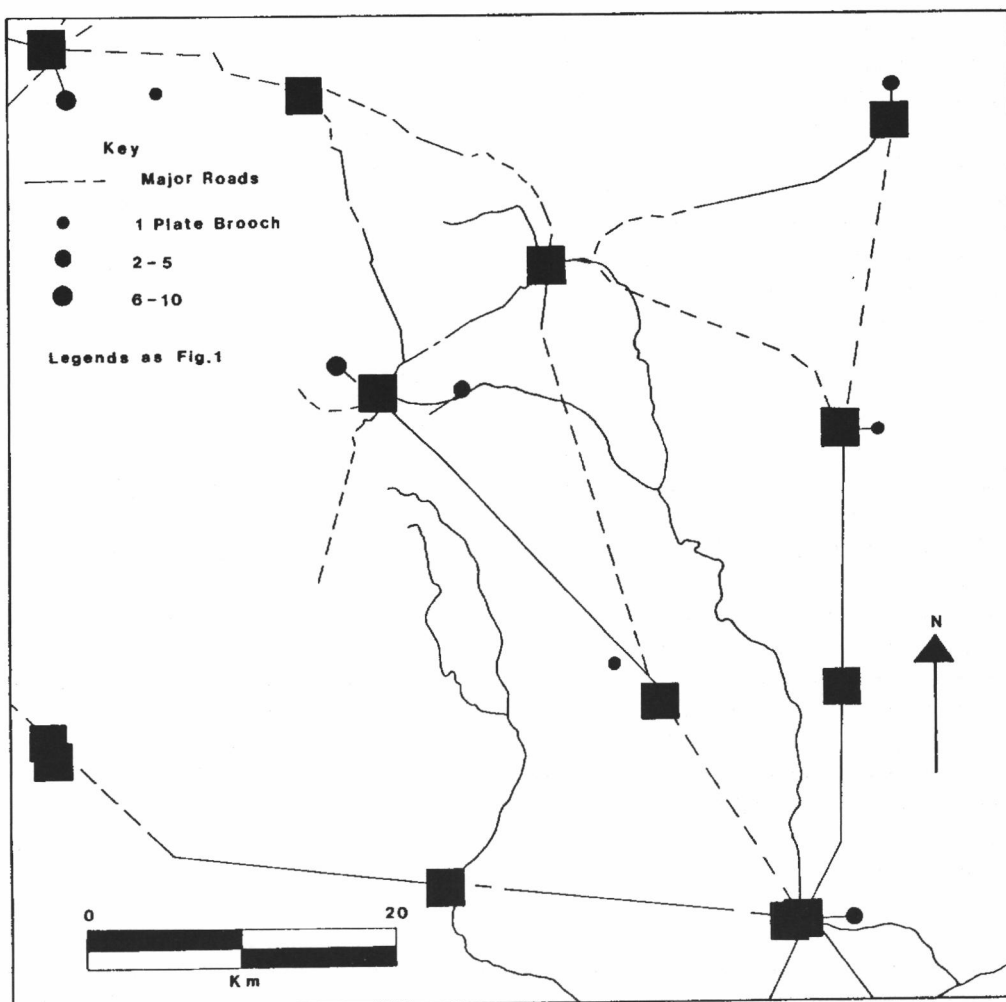


Fig. 4 Romano-British brooch typology: distribution of plate brooches.

Amongst most brooch types the general distribution pattern showing clustering at major sites and certain or possible production sites with concentration in one zone of rural settlement, holds good. Expected biases, such as the restriction of non-Colchester Derivative brooches of the first century (Hod Hill, Langton Down types etc.) to major sites, are due almost certainly to the scarcely Romanised character of rural settlement at that period. However, the restriction of Plate brooches to major sites cannot be so explained. As Fig. 4 shows, only two of the thirty-one examples known have come from areas away from the major sites. One is a probable late, gilded, oval brooch in a late fourth century hoard near Manchester (N. Redhead, Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit, *pers. comm.*) and the other is a decayed, lozenge shaped example from Rainster Rocks (Dool 1976, 20: no. 4). Again caution about the reality of this distribution pattern needs to be borne in mind because Plate brooches only make up about 10% of all finds, but possible reasons for such a notable disparity can be suggested.

The second century *floruit* of many Plate forms seems to rule out a chronological reason, for at this period other brooch types and finds attest a Romanised rural population. Possibly a social reason can be advanced, such as a military predilection for Plate brooches, fostered perhaps by their frequent use of bright enamels. Equally relevant might be Mackreth's (Bramwell *et al.* 1983, 59) observation that penannular brooches in northern Britain have particularly humped pins, probably to accommodate thick garments. Plate brooches tend to have straight pins with little space between the pin and the body of the brooch and are often much less sturdy than other brooches. It may be that their distribution reflects the use of lighter garments worn by town dwellers and not suitable for a hill farming life. It is also possible that Plate brooches were not always used as dress fasteners but were worn just for decoration among certain groups of the population.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions outlined above represent an attempt to use brooch evidence for more than site-based chronological purposes, an endeavour too little undertaken in the past on a regional scale. The results must be seen as provisional both because the area studied lacks an adequate sample of excavated, open, rural sites and because little work along similar lines has been attempted in other areas. However, quite clear evidence for individual craftsmanship, probably in the workshops around (and perhaps principally serving) the spa town of Buxton, has been identified and socio-economic explanations have been advanced for two biases observed in the distribution of brooches. Such results suggest that far more than simple chronological factors influenced Romano-British brooch use and that brooch typology ought, in some cases, to be considered as indicating socio-economic divisions among the population of an area. Further work in other areas is required to advance this avenue of research and to provide results to compare the provisional conclusions drawn for the Peak District, but ultimately an understanding of the social context in which brooches of different types were (or were not) used can only add to their value as evidence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The survey on which this paper is based was carried out on behalf of the Department of Archaeology and Prehistory, University of Sheffield, and funded by the Kiln Trust. The author is grateful to the Sites and Monuments Records Officers of Derbyshire, South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, North Staffordshire and Nottinghamshire and to the staff of the several museums, particularly Sheffield City Museum and the British Museum, and private individuals who provided information on or allowed him access to brooches.

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