

# NEW BRONZE AGE FINDS AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM: WHEN...

July 29, 2011 Steven Matthews Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011, Education, Finds, Museum Archaeology, Prehistory Archaeology, Britain, British Columbia, British Museum, Bronze, Bronze Age, Bronze Age Britain, Bronze Age Europe, Ewart Park Phase, Great Britain, Hoard, http, Ireland, Isleham Hoard, Llyn Fawr, metal detectorists, Penard Period, Prehistoric Europe, Scotland, United Kingdom, Wales

So, I've just completed 4 hours of looking at one of the new hoards at the British Museum.

To put the next few posts about what I spent that time doing into context we'll start with 'when' the European Bronze Age, and more specifically British Bronze Age, was.

For those that know nothing about the Bronze Age, here's a couple of links:

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/cultures/europe/bronze\\_age.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/cultures/europe/bronze_age.aspx)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bronze\\_Age\\_Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bronze_Age_Britain)

The British Late Bronze Age lasted from 1300-600 BC. This period is broken down into a small number of phases, based on the bronze objects types, which we call LBA (Late Bronze Age) 1, 2, 3 and 4. These four metalworking phases have been given names taken from sites or finds that somehow best seem to describe what was around at the time. These are Penard, Wilburton, Ewart Park and Llyn Fawr. Of course, there were different things happening all over Britain, and lots of regional traditions in terms of the types of objects they had, and therefore different areas such as southeast England, western England, northern England, Wales and Scotland all have slightly different names for these phases, so as to reflect these local conditions. The phases I've mentioned mainly apply to southeast England but are applicable for England as a whole for the most part.

Although many researchers have contributed to this scheme over the years, and certain details have changed significantly, particularly in light of new scientific techniques in dating, this basic scheme was laid down as early as 1881 in a wonderfully modern book called 'The Ancient *Bronze Implements, Weapons and Ornaments, of Great Britain and Ireland*'. In the study of bronze objects, new isn't always better, and I and many others, still use this book today.

The hoard I was invited to look at came from our Late Bronze Age 2 phase, or Ewart Park phase. Some of the objects from this phase have been illustrated below. This phase is characterised, above all else, by the many hundreds of groups or 'hoards' of bronze objects, many of which appear in broken or damaged condition, and then buried in the ground.

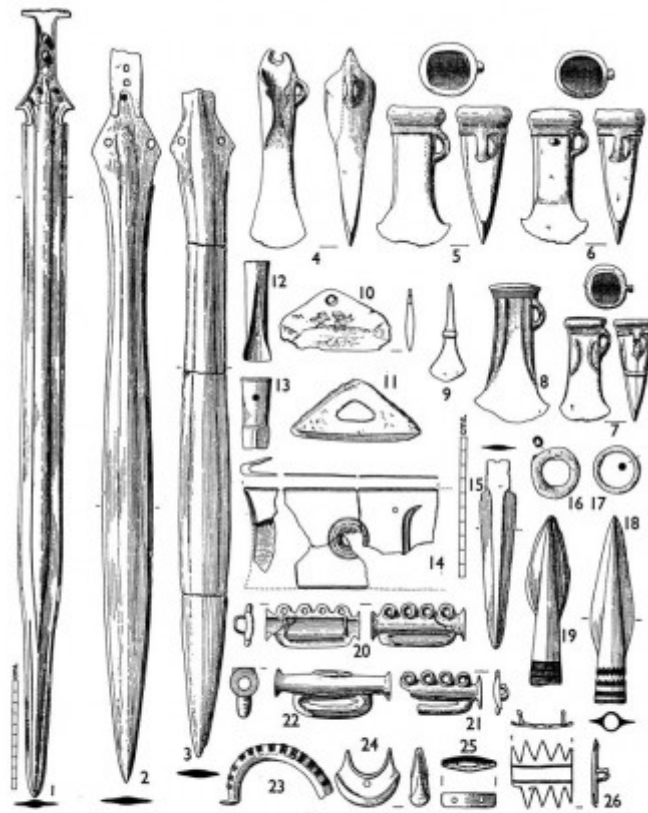


Fig. 13  
 1. River Thames (London Mus.); 2. Unprovenanced, Rosam Mus.; 3, 12, 14, 22, 23, 25. Watford hoard, Herts. (Watford Pub. Lib.); 4. Thames at Bedford (London Mus.); 5. Thames near Barrenca Bridge (Guildhall Mus., London); 6. Unprovenanced (London Mus.); 7. Thames at Old England (London Mus.); 8, 13, 25. Messer Tomia hoard, Fin. (Mus. P.F., Petrarck); 9. La Torche, Finouss, Fin.; 10. Leigh-on-Sea hoard II, Essex (Southend Mus.); 11. Bacon hoard, Norwich (Norwich Mus.); 12. Unprovenanced (London Mus.); 15, 17. Pissal hoard, L.A. (Mus. Narros); 18. Chingford Reservoir, Essex (London Mus.); 19. Vem en Moilan hoard, Fin. (Mus. P.F., Petrarck); 20. Prairie de Mauves hoard, Nantes (Mus. Narros); 21. Thames at Sion Reach (London Mus.); 24. Levington hoard, Suff. (Ipswich Mus.); 8, 13, 25 after Briard (1956-8); 16, 17 after Beard (1961); 9, 19 after Beard (1965)

Today, many of these hoards are found by metal detectorists, and often end up in a local museum where the objects are identified, not just for dating purposes but also to help tell us a little more about the lives of people at that time.

How do we do that? Essentially, we play a game of snap...