

NEW BRONZE AGE FINDS FROM THE BRITISH MUSEUM: WHAT...

July 29, 2011 Steven Matthews Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011, Museum Archaeology, Prehistory Ancient weapons, Axe, Britain, British Museum, Bronze Age, car brands, Ford, France, Hoard, Medieval weapons, metal object, Object, specialist, Toyota, Twitter, United Kingdom

So, a new find has ended up in a museum. Usually this is then studied by a specialist in the museum. But sometimes specialists like myself, who are also researching the same subject, are invited to look at these new finds and help make sense of them, and identify what they are. For those that weren't able to follow my Twitter feed this morning, I found this waiting for me at the BM at 10am...



My job then is start identifying the different objects in the hoard. Some things are obvious, or appear so. Such as a sword or an axe. Simple common sense tells us what the object is and what they were likely used for. Sort of like when we travel abroad to another country: we see a large moving coloured metal object with wheels and people inside, common sense tells us that in all likelihood it is a car and is used for transport, in much the same way as it would be back home. But sometimes, it's not that easy, such as in the case of this object from the new hoard...



But we'll come back to this later.

So, we think we know what some of our objects are. These axes from the hoard are a good example.



Even though there are a startlingly diverse array of axes available to us today, they are similar enough to us for us to be able to identify them as an axe, a cutting tool, particularly for cutting wood. Indeed, from timbers that have survived and been recovered, many have been found with blade marks from just these types of objects. That gives us our general category of object. Then we have to figure out what 'type' each one is... here's where we play a game of snap.

So, we all know what a car is, whether home or abroad. But there are also brands of cars: Ford, Toyota, etc. An objects 'type' is sort of similar, telling us a lot about which region the object may have come from, in the same way that car brands often have regional or national associations.

We do this by looking at lots and lots of pictures of other objects, and trying to find ones that look the same: snap.



Often, specialist books or catalogues of these exist. So, I spent part of the morning looking through a book of axes looking for ones that look the same as the ones in the hoard. In the book, similar brands or types will already have been grouped together, and help discern the different meanings or significance that the types have.

The four axes from the hoard, in the photo way above, are of (L/R) 2 x Type Welby, a Type South-eastern and a Type Meldreth.

The last two are good examples of the differing significance of these types. Type South-eastern axes are found widely distributed in southern England but mainly in southeast England, hence the name. In this region they are often found in great numbers, in hoards that consist of nothing but other axes. They also occur in hoards that consist of mixtures of local and Continental material, as illustrated in the previous post. These hoards are often called Carp's-Tongue hoards, connected to part of a cultural or specialised group distributed across northwest and northern France and southeast England, sharing certain types of objects. As our hoard was found in Nottinghamshire, representing the very most northerly point of the distribution of this type, it's not surprising that there was only one. The other axe, of Type Meldreth axe, however, is found widely distributed throughout the whole of Britain. It seems to have no particular regional emphasis or association, and only ever occurs in small numbers. This is not surprising either. Unlike the rather ubiquitous and not particularly well made South-eastern axe, those of Type Meldreth were well cast and well finished and, with their multi-faceted design, were a bit of a Mercedes...