

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

July 29, 2011 Steven Matthews Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011, Museum Archaeology, Prehistory Archaeology, Britain, British Columbia, British Museum, Bronze Age, France, Hoard, http, Llancarfan, metal, representative, researcher, Sword, Typology, Vale of Glamorgan, Wales

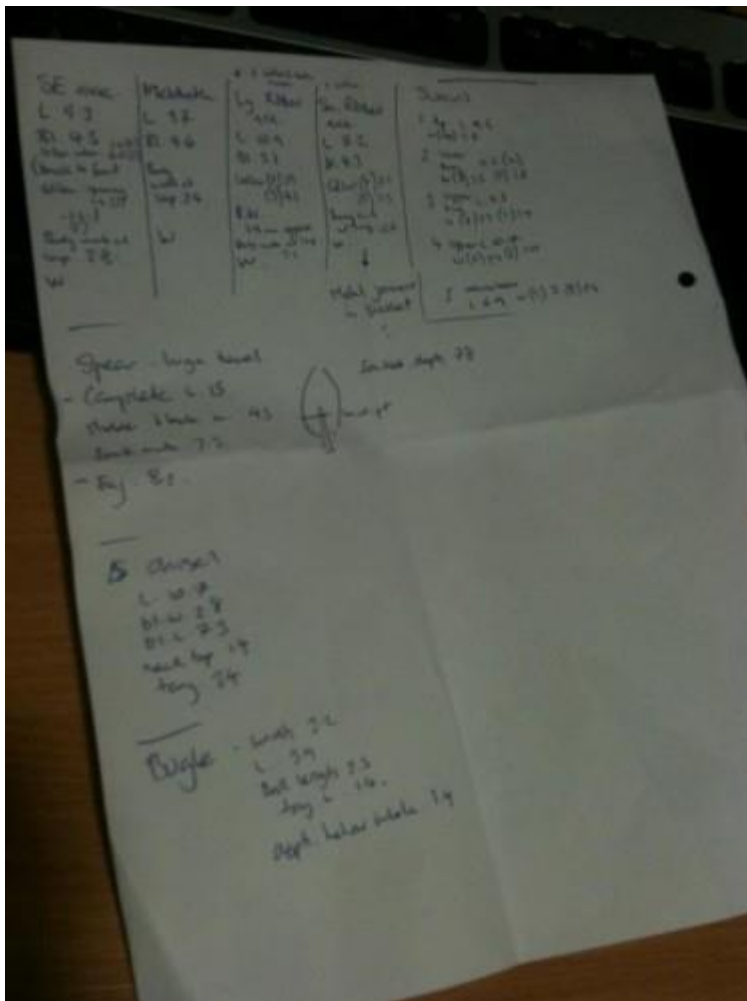
The point of all this is, of course, to produce a specialist report. In this case a Treasury Report for the Portable Antiquities Scheme that will eventually be.



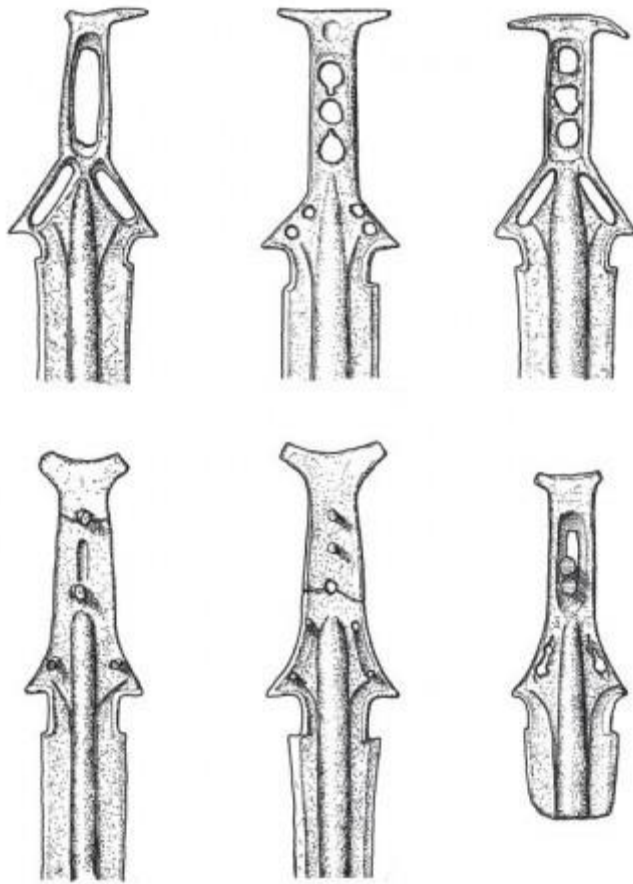
As a researcher, these are important, as in some cases they will be all that will ever be available or accessible in respect of the the finds in question, with some being returned to the owners rather than ending up in museum collections.

Accurate measurements, descriptions and typological assignments are important for assigning objects to specific periods, and must be reliable in order to be used as the basis for future

arguments and interpretations about these past communities. Of course, accuracy, particularly when in a hurry, need not be pretty...



For example, in the 2005/2006 Treasury Report, a hoard from Llancarfan, Vale of Glamorgan in Wales, was reported to have a hilt or handle fragment of a sword of Carp's-Tongue type (the bottom row of swords in the below picture). This association meant that the hoard should be dated to somewhere late in the period c. 950-800 BC. The same phase as our hoard from Nottinghamshire. However, subsequent work during 2007-2011 on swords of this type in Iberia and France, have revealed a type of proto-Carp's-Tongue sword, known as Type Huelva/St. Philbert (the top row of swords in the picture below). These swords, however, have been demonstrated to be dated to the period c. 1050-950 BC. This is the date of the Wilburton phase which, as we described in an earlier post (...: when...), is the period prior to the one our Nottinghamshire hoard belongs to. Tiny changes such as these can require us to radically revise our ideas about what types of objects we believe might have been available to people at any particular time, and the connections and relationships that they may have represented.



Such typological work on bronze objects, however, was for long out of fashion, snubbed and rejected by many in both the academic and commercial sector, in Britain. Less so on the Continent, however. This is partly because it was seen as a laborious and time consuming way of what is, so it was believed, merely cataloguing. But typology is and can be so much more. These tiny objects, whole and broken, represent the technological choices of the past communities that both produced them and consumed them, and the socio-political and economic conditions in which they existed. These little pieces of metal, and all the tiny idiosyncrasies of morphology, over which so many have laboured, are glimpses of styles and tastes, of changing fashions and fads. Aesthetics have always been important to people, not only as indicators of how we live but what we wish to communicate to others about ourselves, our choices and our relationship with our communities. What French ethnologists have long called ‘technological choices’.

This Maussian approach to metalwork typology very much characterises the modern typological endeavor. But whereas contemporary archaeological theory has attempted ever more elaborate sleights of hand to reveal the agency of the ‘individual’ in the archaeological record, Bronze Age

researchers are more frequently orientated to revealing communities, of which such objects are highly evocative.

So much of what we own, use, and wear defines us. Whilst the accessibility today of such things might have radically changed, as might approaches to their production, the significance of these pretty little things for persons and communities is far from being representative of a 'modern' condition.