

BITS AND PIECING

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Hundreds of fragments of Bronze Age bronze objects, but do any of them join together?

Large collections of complete and broken bronze objects have been discovered buried in the ground throughout Europe. Here in Kent we have several examples including the large hoard from Boughton Malherbe buried around 2,800 years ago. It contains approximately 352 items but many of these are fragments. Today I am trying to see if any of the fragments join together. I want to know why these different items have been gathered together and buried. Were any of them deliberately broken? Were the pieces buried together? Why?



Most days I am studying archaeological reports on excavated evidence for prehistoric bronze casting and working of gold and silver. So I relish this opportunity to actually handle the ancient artefacts (even if through gloves), rather than just reading about them. Digging and being the first to see, to touch, to smell an object or a surface, a structure, even the bottom of a pit, that's what inspires me. If I can't be out in the field then examining the objects off-site is a satisfying alternative. There are so many stages of discovery

in archaeology and these continue for years after the dust has settled on the excavation site. The detailed examination of artefacts is just one of those exhilarating stages.





Research is just one of the many activities I have the fortune to be involved in as an archaeologist. Take this week for example: for me it began on-site, digging with the Young Archaeologist's Club (18th century archaeology – see Andrew Mayfield's DoA post). This was followed by a Festival of Archaeology event at Knole House (17th century related) showing and sharing the tactile and sensory handling kit I have prepared for all visitors especially those with a Visual Impairment. Next it was library based research in London looking up metalworking sites (c.2500BC to AD 50). Today has been working on the Boughton Malherbe hoard and I'll finish the week with a Festival of Archaeology event at Maidstone Museum presenting the latest results on the hoard, and showing some of the objects to the public.

And what did I discover today? Most of the fragments don't join together. But there are two definite refits: a socketed axe and a socketed gouge. Should I let my mind's eye imagine a Bronze Age procession of people carrying a fragment to represent themselves? The pieces of the community buried together? One thing is for certain, I keep finding more and more questions in need of answers.



Thanks to Maidstone Museum and Kent Archaeological Society, Allen Grove Fund, for making the Boughton Malherbe hoard research possible. Thanks also to the National Trust for the opportunity to make the sensory handling kit for Knole. Extra special thanks to all the staff at Maidstone and Knole for their encouragement and interest.