

# Two Roman bronze skilnet hoards from Hafod Lydan, Llanberis, Gwynedd

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## INTRODUCTION

Canon Ellis Davies, the doyen of archaeological studies in north-east Wales, published a report in volume 98 of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* detailing the discovery in 1942 of a hoard of four Roman skilnets from a field belonging to the farm of Hafod Lydan above the village of Llanberis in Gwynedd (Davies 1944–45, 129–33). By coincidence, a hoard of three further skilnets was found in the same field in 1986, possibly in close proximity, to the earlier find. The present paper firstly, examines the circumstances of discovery of the two hoards, secondly, publishes details of the three skilnets recovered in the 1986 cache together with a number of objects from the 1942 find which were not studied by Ellis Davies and, thirdly, discusses how the finds might fit into the social and cultural history of north-west Gwynedd at the time the objects were deposited during an episode in the Roman occupation of the area.

## DISCOVERY OF THE 1942 AND 1986 HOARDS

Both hoards were found in the field named Werglodd Uchaf which forms part of Hafod Lydan farm, Llanberis. It lies on gently sloping ground at approximately 200 metres above sea level on the north-facing shoulder of the valley of the river Hwch leading from Llanberis to the foothills of Yr Wyddfa in Cwm Dwythwch. The field-name Werglodd Uchaf (Welsh *weirglodd uchaf*, ‘upper meadow’) indicates the former use of the field as improved pasture, though today the field has become severely invaded by reeds that reflect the poorly drained peaty soils which underlie this enclosure within the *ffriddoedd* (‘mountain pasture’) of Eryri (Snowdonia).

### **The 1942 hoard**

The story of the discovery of this cache has been documented by Ellis Davies (1945, 129) and does not require to be repeated in detail. It was noted that the initial recovery of the protruding metal, undertaken at a period when wartime explosive devices were commonly to be found in upland Wales, was undertaken with a crowbar! Suffice is to say that the body of the outer vessel disintegrated in the process of excavation leaving this vessel to be represented by its base and the complete rim circle joined to the handle. The excavators continued to recover three more vessels of diminishing size which had been placed within the larger outer vessel. All three of the latter vessels were recovered intact and upon this the excavators split the proceeds between themselves. Two of the complete skilnets and the base of the outer largest vessel were kept by the late J. Ellis Jones of Mur Mawr, Llanberis whilst the third complete skilnet and the rim and conjoined handle of the largest outer vessel were kept by the unidentified second excavator, referred to by Ellis Davies as the ‘neighbour’.

Within a few months of the initial recovery the part find belonging to Mr J. Ellis Jones was secured on loan by the Bangor Museum and eventually deposited permanently in the collection and hence their

publication in 1944 by Canon Ellis Davies. The other part find was to disappear, only to reappear in 1956 shortly after the late Canon Alun Jones took up the incumbency of St Padarn's Church, Llanberis. Having acquainted himself with Canon Ellis Davies' report in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* he took it upon himself to enquire among his parishioners as to the whereabouts of the missing objects. He soon discovered they were in the possession of Mr Gruffydd Morris of 2 Mur Mawr, Llanberis—the 'neighbour' who had partaken in the excavation. It was his wish that the objects were to remain in Llanberis and hence their presentation to St Padarn's Church, where they are today mounted in a permanent display cabinet. It is these latter objects which remain unpublished and will be described with the other objects below.

There is, however, one further intriguing question that remains unsolved, namely the precise find spot of the cache. The location is fully recorded by Davies in his article as follows (1944–45, 129): 'The exact spot . . . is in the second field (Werglodd Ucha) to the south-east from Hafod Bach house, nine paces from the north fence and twenty from the east fence [Caernarvonshire, 6-inch ord. surv. map, Sheet XVI, S.E. Lat. 53° 7' 41", Long. 4° 7' 50"]'. This reference as it stands is a mixture of precision and ambiguity which unfortunately is not sufficiently accurate to identify the location of the find. First, the grid reference is erroneous, placing the find spot on the shore of Llyn Padarn. The correction of one digit of latitude by a single minute (7' to 6') places the reference in the right area but the longitude details are then incorrect. Second, there are two houses both a field's length distance apart, a ruin and a modernised cottage, which have borne the name Hafod Bach within living memory. Third, the name of the field as Werglodd Uchaf pre-dates the occupancy of Fferm Hafod Lydan by the Davies family.

Detailed archival research based on the Vaynol estate map of 1869 (Caernarfon Record Office, Vaynol Estate Papers 4195) has at least partly resolved the problem of house and field nomenclature in the vicinity of Hafod Lydan, but unfortunately has not led to the identification of a precise location for the find. Working from the premise that fragmentary pieces of copper alloy might still be extant in the field a grid was set out by EDM in the north-eastern quadrant which was then systematically surveyed with the aid of a metal detector. All locations emitting a positive response were plotted and as a result a number of areas were carefully de-turfed and the underlying surfaces scraped and cleaned. Unfortunately, no skilnet fragments were discovered amongst an array of corroded metal objects of modern origin. It must, therefore, be concluded that the precise findspot of the 1942 hoard remains unlocated.

### **The 1986 hoard**

By coincidence a further three skilnets were found by Mr Jo Davies of Hafod Lydan in a field situated approximately 100 metres to the south-east of the farmhouse in 1986. Mr Davies promptly excavated the find with a penknife thus causing untold damage to objects which were already in a parlous condition. Due to the manner of their retrieval only the more robust parts such as handles, rim segments and bases survive. Like the 1942 hoard the three skilnets had evidently been carefully placed one inside the other with the largest outermost. Further damage was compounded as the jumbled remains lay forgotten and untreated in an open box at Hafod Lydan until a friend of the family, the late Mrs Mary Vaughan Jones of Waunfawr, drew attention to the find at a Local History Day School in Llanberis in 1991.

The find spot of the 1986 hoard (SH 57505927) was readily relocated in 1991 as a small area of disturbance that had not returned naturally since the initial discovery had been made five years previously and which was notably one of the few areas free of reed growth in this field. An exploratory excavation of a 2-metre square area was undertaken and minute fragments of corroded tinned metal were recovered in a dark, humus-rich surface soil. A number of small protruding stones appeared to be associated with the area of disturbance and the un-grassed nature of the spot suggested that it this may have been due to the copper-alloy corrosion products still retained in the soil.

The precise relationship of the two hoards cannot be firmly established, though they seem likely to have been fairly close to each other.

#### SUMMARY OF THE SKILLETS FROM THE LLANBERIS HOARDS

Detailed description of skillets from the two hoards are given in the catalogue below. They are illustrated in Figures 1–7 and their dimensions are given in Table 1.

Taken as a group, the four vessels in the 1942 hoard are remarkably similar in form, although minor variations do exist. The most pronounced difference is the angularity of the body profile of vessel 2, as opposed to the curvature in the profile of vessels 1 and 3 and possibly vessel 4. Another feature identifies vessels 1 and 3 with a broad foot ring allowing the skillets to rest on the outer pad of the base, an attribute that is claimed by Moore (unpublished report) to be unparalleled in skillets from elsewhere in Britain. Skillet 4 is also notable since, with an outer rim diameter of 244mm, it is one of the largest of its type to have been found in Britain. On the interior of Skillet 3 there are seven graduated incised lines marked at intervals of 6mm, 31mm, 49mm, 65mm, 83mm, 97mm and 109mm, a feature that may also be replicated on Vessel 1. It is presumed that this is a scale for the measurement of liquids, and Moore (op. cit.) has estimated that Skillet 3 could have held a capacity of six *sextarii*, approximating to 3.25 litres of liquid, and that the capacity of Skillet 4 could have been as great as eight *sextarii*. Three of the vessels (1, 3 and 4) are decorated on the upper face of the handles with patterns formed from repetitive motifs of punched dots and one or more concentric circles arranged at the junction between the roundel and the handle plate. Skillet 2 represents the undecorated exception. Surface corrosion has obscured part of the decoration on Skillet 1, but on Skillet 3 the pattern consists of 15 concentric circles arranged in a roughly triangular design. On Skillet 4 the formation includes three sets of concentric circles. It is noticeable that in a number of examples only half of the outer ring of the circle may be imprinted. Maker's marks are stamped on Skillets 1, 3 and 4 but are difficult or impossible to decipher. In the case of Skillet 4 a rectangular depression on the roundel marks the location, but the lightly imprinted letters have been obscured by corrosion. On Skillet 3 the maker's inscription is partly visible on the roundel with the letters TAL[IO],

Table 1. Dimensions (in millimetres) of the skillets from the 1942 and 1986 hoards

	1942 hoard				1986 hoard		
	1	2	3	4	A	B	C
Height	91	102	138.5	?	?	?	?
Rim, inner diam.	148	160	201	224.5	c. 190	c. 170	c. 140
Rim, outer diam.	165	178	222	244	c. 216	c. 182	c. 180
Handle length	124	150	180	195	174	149	c. 129
Suspension hole, inner diam.	c. 14	15	17	17	16	13	c. 17
Suspension hole, outer diam.	60	66	83	83	78	69	c. 59
Base diam.	118	c. 114	155	167	133	130	118
Overall length of handle and rim	289	328	402	439	c. 390	c. 331	c. 289

and on the lower face of the handle a series of punched indentations may depict the owner's insignia. Skillet 1 has the letters CCV stamped on the roundel with the remaining letters covered by corrosion. These letters have been attributed to the name ABVCCVS, the possible Gaulish maker of the vessel. Moore (op. cit.) has suggested that Skillet 2, which bears the least affinity to the other three, may be of Campanian manufacture.

In the case of the skillets in the 1986 hoard it is not easy to assess the body profile of the three vessels but the larger fragments would suggest that all three had the standard curved body profile that is characteristic of the type though it is possible that Skillet B had a slightly more pronounced bulbar profile. The most notable feature of the assemblage is the decorative frieze that encircles the body of Skillets A and C. On Skillet A the elaborate but poorly executed frieze forms a continuous band below the rim formed from a combination of motifs that include a series of narrow indented vertical panels, punched circles, hanging pendants and a pointed arch motif (Fig. 5). The frieze on Skillet C is very crudely designed and executed and may be intermittently arranged below the rim. The principal motifs combine an incised fir tree pattern with punched circles (Fig. 7). Skillet B is undecorated but has a similar moulding below the rim to the four skillets in the 1942 hoard. Decoration is also featured on the handle plates of Skillets A and B but is absent on C. Motifs are based on single or triple rings which are often combined to form triangular arrangements. The largest group on Skillet B consists of 15 circles arranged in a similar pattern to that on Skillet 3 in the 1942 hoard and two further small groups are placed on the roundel plate. In general the punched decoration is poorly executed and arranged rather haphazardly, particularly on Skillet A. All three vessels have a tinned inner surface to the body. A band of highly stylised floral ornament below the rim is a characteristic attributed to Gaulish skillets and the decoration often forms part of the original casting. It is quite possible that both the decorated skillets are of Gaulish manufacture. It is difficult to establish how much importance should be attached to the decorative schemes displayed on the skillets. They all employ very simple, repetitive patterns which are crudely executed; this is in stark contrast to the quality and precision of the bronze vessel and thus creates the impression of leisurely doodling rather than of a more formal embellishment.

As noted previously, the two hoards formed graded 'nests' whereby the skillets had been placed in descending order of size within the next in progression. Both 'nests' had been placed upside down in the ground. The 1942 hoard appears not to have been unpacked since Skillets 1 and 2 still display the marks of the original grass packaging on their interiors. Moreover, the fresh and the originally complete condition of the vessels further suggests that they had not been used prior to deposition. Although the two hoards had been deposited separately (though possibly at the same time), it is interesting to note that, based on the inner diameter of the rims the three 1986 skillets would fit within the range of the 1942 hoard in the following ascending order: Skillet C (140mm), Skillet 1 (148mm), Skillet 2 (160mm), Skillet B (170mm), Skillet A (190mm), Skillet 3 (201mm) and Skillet A (224mm). The reasonably regular incremental order is perhaps due to more than chance and may suggest that the two hoards were associated with each other.

It is otherwise difficult, however, to draw direct comparisons between the two skillet hoards. Apart from the suggested variations in shape the most obvious difference between the vessels is the decorated frieze on Skillets A and C, whilst all the other vessels have an undecorated panel below the rim demarcated between two parallel mouldings. Decoration is another feature that links the skillets although again Skillets 2 and C represent the undecorated exceptions. All three of the 1986 vessels are tinned on the face of the inner bowl, which is a feature which is not replicated in the 1942 hoard.

Moore (unpublished manuscript) has suggested that Skillets 1, 3, and 4 from Llanberis are of Gaulish manufacture, noting that all are decorated on the upper side of the handle with ring and dot ornament. Skillet 2 may be of Campanian manufacture although the pronounced incurving of the body towards the

base is not a feature associated with this regional type. The three vessels in the 1986 hoard are likely to be of Gaulish origin but it has been suggested that the debased palisade decoration on Skillet A may point to a Capuan workshop.

#### CATALOGUE OF SKILLETS FROM THE 1942 AND 1986 HOARDS

**Skillet 1, 1942 hoard** (Fig. 1; Davies 1944–45, pls I–III, no. 1)

Location Oriel Gwynedd, Bangor.

Condition Complete and intact but superficial surface damage by corrosion; slight damage to edging of roundel.

Body Angular junction between body and base. External feature: two raised mouldings, respectively 1mm and 1.5mm wide, encircle at 10mm and 18.5mm below the rim. Junction between body and base demarcated by single raised moulding, 5mm wide, positioned 6.5mm above the base. Internal feature: single incised line, 9.5mm below rim, but evidence for further internal gradations obscured by internal encrustation.

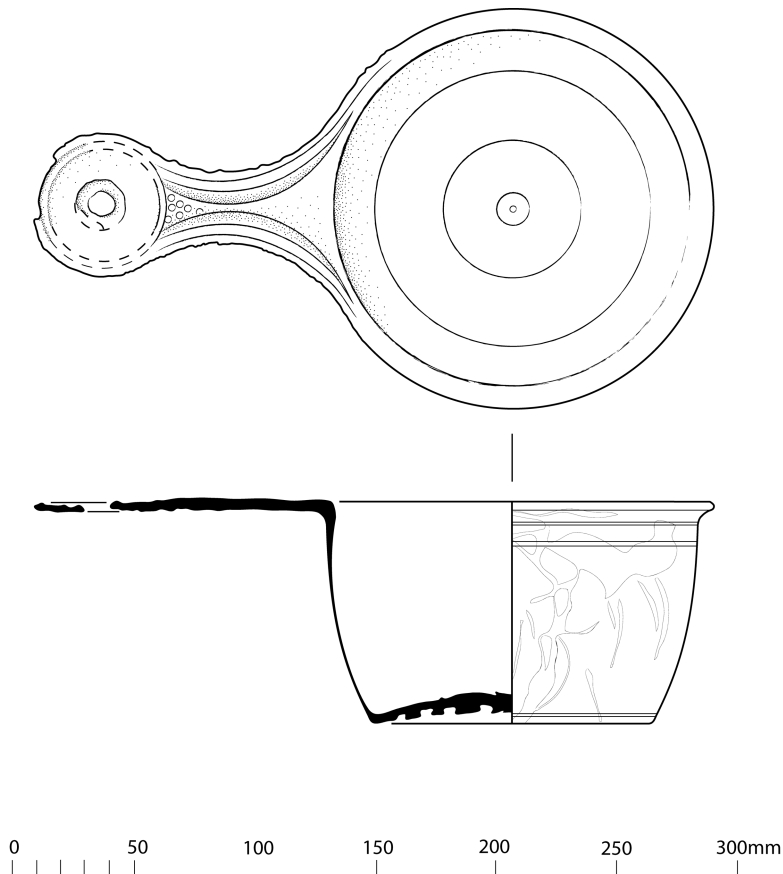


Fig. 1. Skillet 1, 1942 hoard.

- Handle** Waisted roundel handle with central suspension hole. Upper face: surface decoration obscured by corrosion but faint traces of concentric circle pattern at junction between roundel and handle. Illegible maker's stamp on roundel obscured by corrosion, which Davies partially identified as CCV (.VCCV...) and may represent ABUCCUS, although this reading is most uncertain (McPeake and Moore, 1978, 333).
- Base** Conventional rilled type. External face: concave with corrugated surface formed of five concentric ribs with additional shallow incised grooves on each rib. Outer rib forms pronounced basal bevel supporting vessel. Body heavily marked with grass impressions. Internal face: convex surface with central medallion and raised knob with median depression. Base has outer rim, two concentric and concave mouldings, with central button. Interior: bottom concave centre delineated by concentric mouldings.

**Skillet 2, 1942 hoard** (Fig. 2; Davies 1944–45, pls I–III, no. 2)

**Location** Oriel Gwynedd, Bangor.

**Condition** Complete; large crack in body; heavy surface corrosion especially on handle.

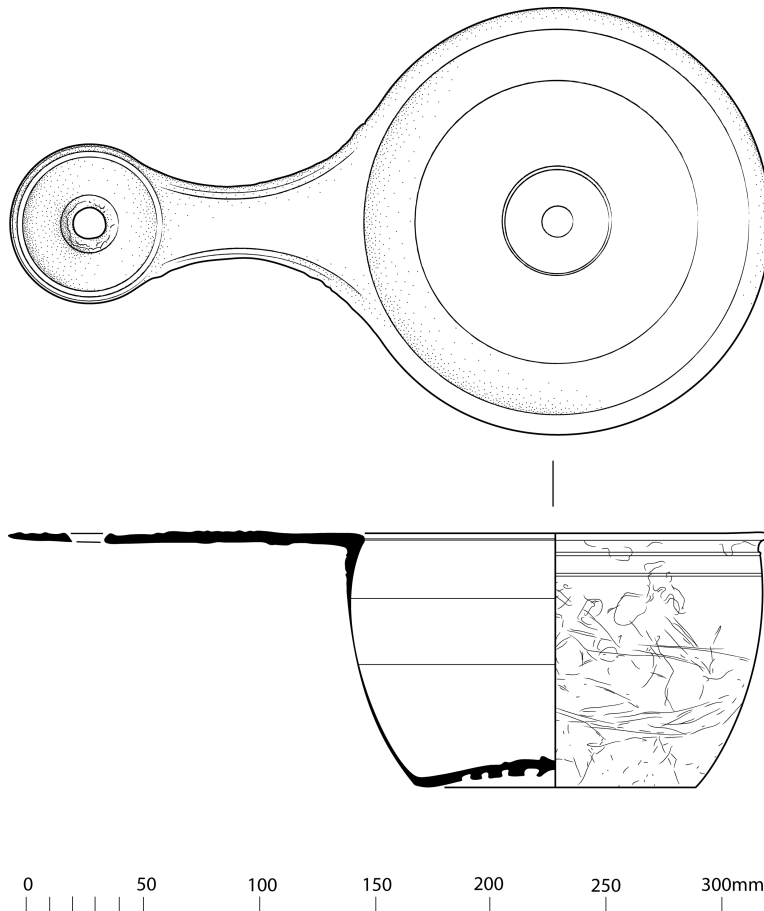


Fig. 2. Skillet 2, 1942 hoard.

Body	Tub shaped body gently tapering to base. External feature: two narrow horizontal mouldings, 1.5mm below rim, define raised band 15mm wide. No basal moulding with lower body joining base in continuous curve. Well preserved grass impressions, defined as brownish coloured stains etched in greenish coloured cupreous patina, forming random arrangement. Stains not referred to by Davies but clearly observed in his pl. II, no. 2. Internal feature: three incised lines, drawn at intervals of 31mm, 57mm and 83mm below the rim.
Handle	Waisted roundel handle with central suspension hole. Upper face: surface decoration obscured by corrosion
Base	Conventional rilled type. External face: concave with corrugated surface formed of four concentric ribs with additional shallow incised grooves on each rib. Vessel rests directly on outer rib of base. Internal face: convex surface with central medallion and raised knob with median depression.

**Skillet 3, 1942 hoard** (Fig. 3)

Location	St Padarn's Church, Llanberis.
Condition	Intact; lower body plate pierced on retrieval. Active bronze corrosion masks surface detail especially on handle
Body	Small hole in lower body. Tub shaped body gently tapering to base. External feature: two narrow horizontal mouldings below rim, define raised band approx. 25mm wide. Two further narrow mouldings encircle the base. Body joins with base in continuous curve. Internal feature: six incised lines, drawn below a one millimetre wide groove, form a graduated series from rim to base, at intervals of 6mm, 31mm, 49mm, 65mm, 83mm, 97mm and 109mm..
Handle	Waisted roundel handle with central suspension hole. Upper face decoration: 15 circular punch marks forming a five row triangle at junction of handle with roundel. Detail of bottom two rows obscured by corrosion. Outer rings of circles only half imprinted reflecting defective die stamp. Maker's inscription on roundel partly legible: TAL (presumed TALIO). Possible inscription formed from series of punched indentations on lower surface (owner's insignia?).
Base	Conventional rilled type. External face: concave with corrugated surface formed of five concentric ribs with additional shallow incised grooves on each rib. Internal face: convex surface with central medallion and raised knob with median depression.

**Skillet 4, 1942 hoard** (Fig. 4; Davies 1944–45, pl. I, no. 4)

Location	Rim and handle St Padarn's Church, Llanberis; base plate Oriel Gwynedd, Bangor.
Condition	Two principal fragments; active bronze corrosion masks surface detail especially on handle.
Body	Upper body fragments adhering to rim to depth of 48mm. External feature: two encircling mouldings, both 2mm wide, at 16mm and 29mm below rim. Internal feature: two incised lines at 90mm and 180mm below rim.
Handle	Waisted standard roundel type with suspension hole continues to form vessel rim. Upper face decoration: three sets of incised marks consisting of stamped concentric circles of three and one ring type set in triangular and semi triangular formations. Maker's stamp: probably set in rectangular depression on roundel and flanked by base of circle setting; letters illegible due to surface corrosion.

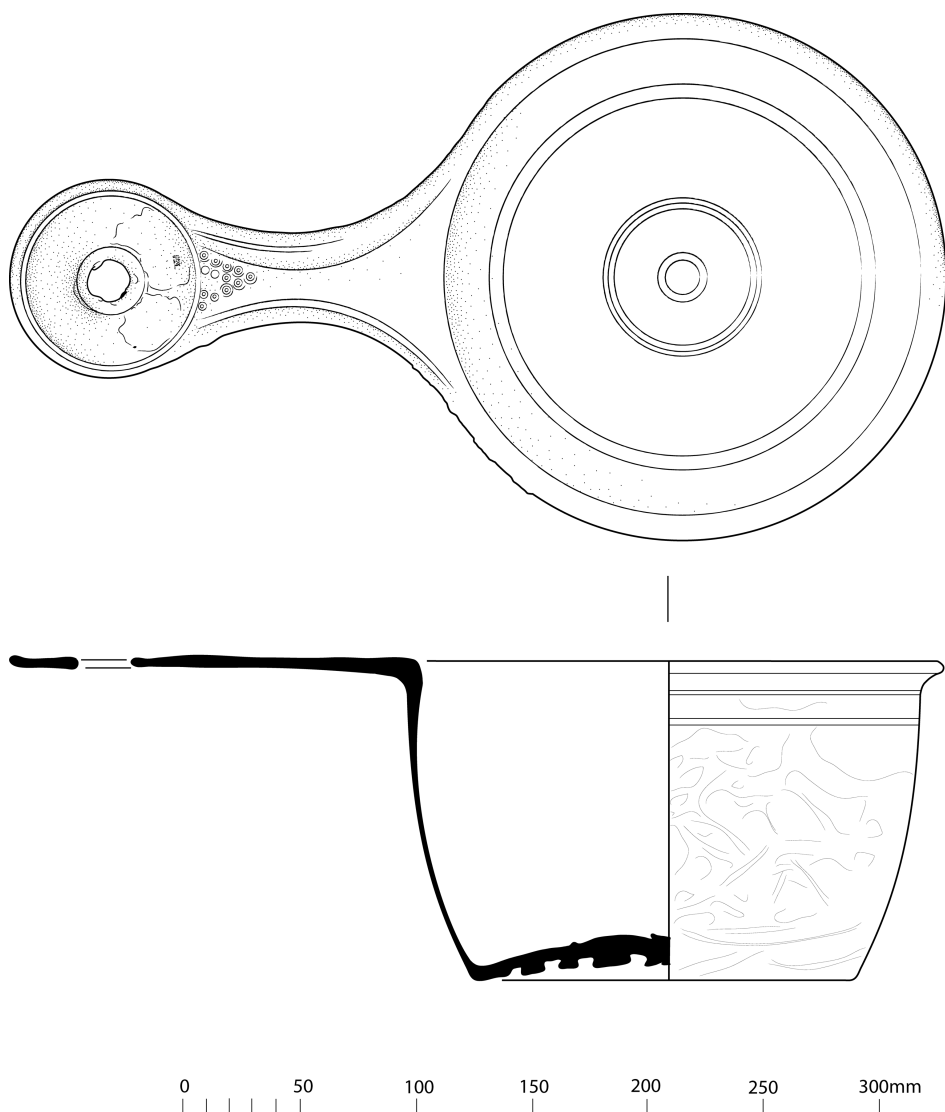


Fig. 3. Skillet 3, 1942 hoard.

Base

Solid metal plate. External face: concave with corrugated surface formed of five concentric ribs with additional shallow incised grooves on each rib. Raised horizontal band, 1.5mm thick, with accompanying incised line encircle the outer edge; incised line demarcates the lower recessed sub-section of the plate to form angular join with body. Internal face: convex surface with central medallion raised knob with median depression. Concentric rill marks indicative of lathe turning; whilst on the medallion itself light horizontal scuff marks indicative of polishing action using an abrasive medium.



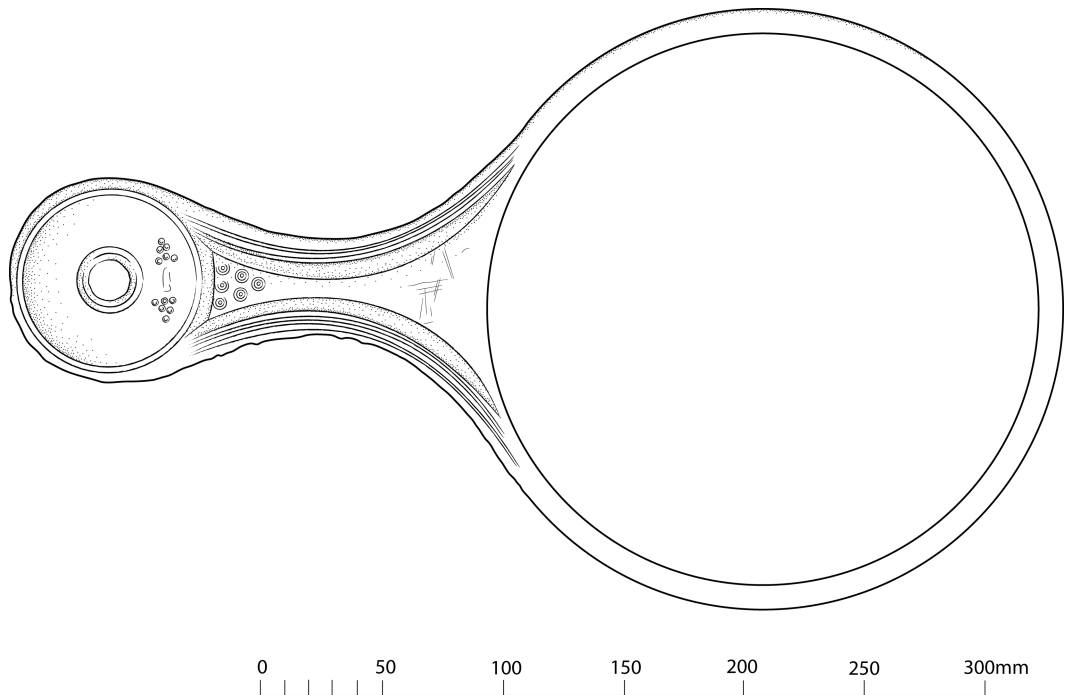


Fig. 4. Skillet 4, 1942 hoard.

**Skillet A, 1986 hoard (Fig. 5)**

Location Oriel Gwynedd, Bangor.

Condition 9 fragments in total

Body Fragments adhering to the rim to a depth of approx. 40mm. External surface: decorative frieze, enclosed between upper and lower horizontal mouldings, forming continuous band immediately below rim. Decoration consists of repetitive, narrow indented panels outlined on the upper side only by a zigzag line. Each panel is divided by a lightly scratched, double vertical line; above, a single punched ring is placed within each hanging pendant in the zigzag. The panel decoration may be interrupted by another motif based on a pointed arch motif. The intervening space between the motifs is infilled with a random series of single ring circles. All the decoration is poorly designed and badly executed. Internal surface: tinned with single, horizontal incised line drawn below rim, probably representing uppermost of gradation series.

Handle Waisted type terminating in a bevel edged roundel with suspension hole. Upper surface: covered by disjointed groups of poorly executed marks and punched motifs based on single and triple ringed circles, often forming triangular arrangements. Roundel undecorated. Section of roundel moulding is ribbed with additional row of ribbed hanging arches. Lower surface: undecorated.

Rim Sharply overhanging in seven fragments with two missing pieces.

Base Conventional rilled type. External face: concave with corrugated surface formed of five concentric ribs with additional shallow incised grooves on each rib. Internal face: convex surface with central medallion and raised knob with median depression.

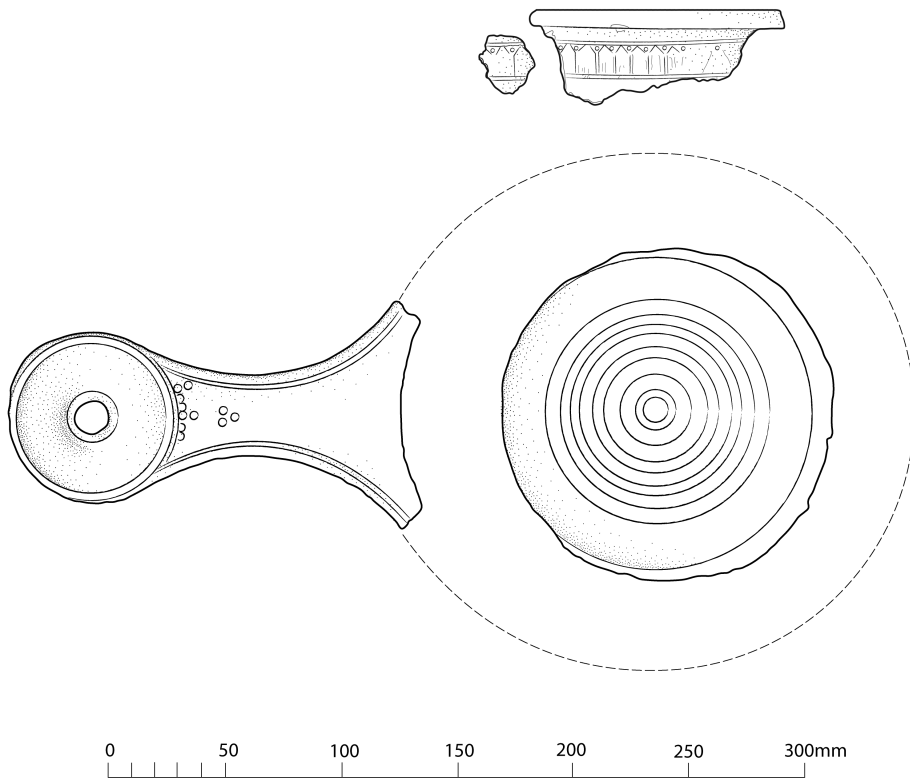


Fig. 5. Skillet A, 1986 hoard.

**Skillet B, 1986 hoard (Fig. 6)**

Location Oriel Gwynedd, Bangor.

Condition 12 fragments in total.

Body Represented by seven non-joining fragments; no body fragments adhere to the rim segments; body profile probably bulbar with short, but well demarcated, vertical neck. External surface: narrow double moulding demarcates carination between neck and body. Internal surface: tinned.

Handle Complete; waisted type terminating in bevelled roundel with central suspension hole. Between roundel and rim waisted section outlined by deep groove on either side. Upper surface decoration: three sets of punched, single ring circles; largest group at apex of roundel with handle consisting of 15 circles assuming a roughly triangular form; two groups of three circles in triangular arrangement on roundel plate opposite base of handle.

Rim 3 rim fragments; heavy, bulbous club shape.

Base Conventional rilled type. External face: slightly concave with corrugated surface formed of concentric ribs and deeply cut grooves; inner grooves narrow; outer groove wide and shallow with outer pad on which vessel rests. Base pad gives base a splayed profile. Internal face: convex surface with encircling channelled grooves surrounding a small concave dimpled plug.

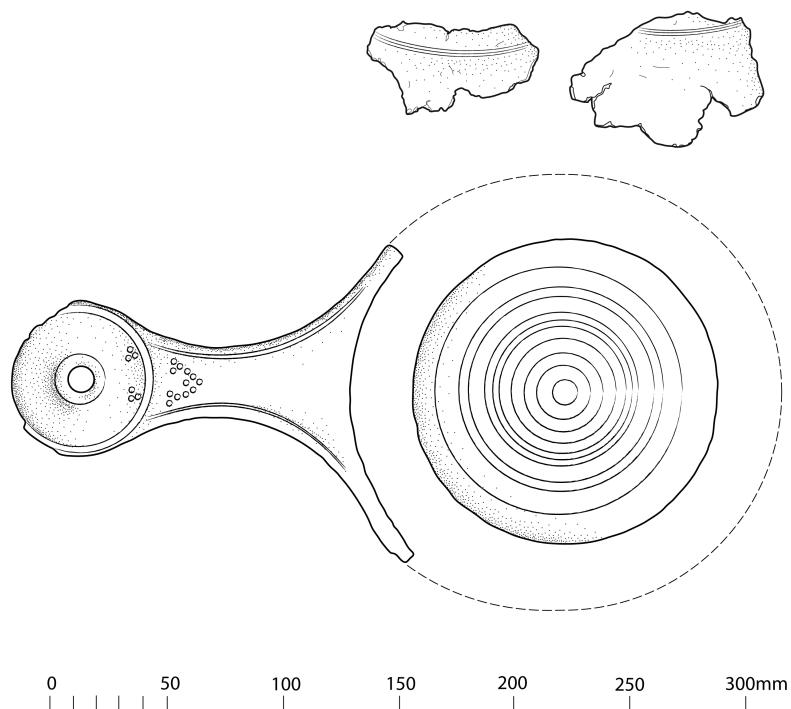


Fig. 6. Skillet B, 1986 hoard.

**Skillet C, 1986 hoard (Fig. 7)**

Location	Oriel Gwynedd, Bangor.
Condition	Very fragmentary condition
Body	Represented by three non-joining fragments; no body parts adhere to the rim segments. External surface: narrow double moulding demarcates panel below rim; panel decorated with crudely executed motif of incised fir tree leaf with punched circles bunched haphazardly on either side; decorative motif not continuous. Internal surface: tinned.
Handle	Waisted type represented in five fragments; handle outlined by mouldings on either side; shattered roundel outlined by encircling moulding and similar moulding encircles suspension hole. No decoration visible on upper face.
Rim	Fragmentary and much abraded.
Base	Conventional rilled type. External face: slightly concave with corrugated surface formed of concentric ribs and deeply cut grooves; inner grooves narrow; outer groove wide and shallow with outer pad on which vessel rests. Inner edge of pad is bevelled. Base encircled by incised lines. Internal face: convex surface with encircling channelled grooves surrounding a small concave dimpled plug. A raised line marks junction between base plate and body; above this line the internal face is tinned.

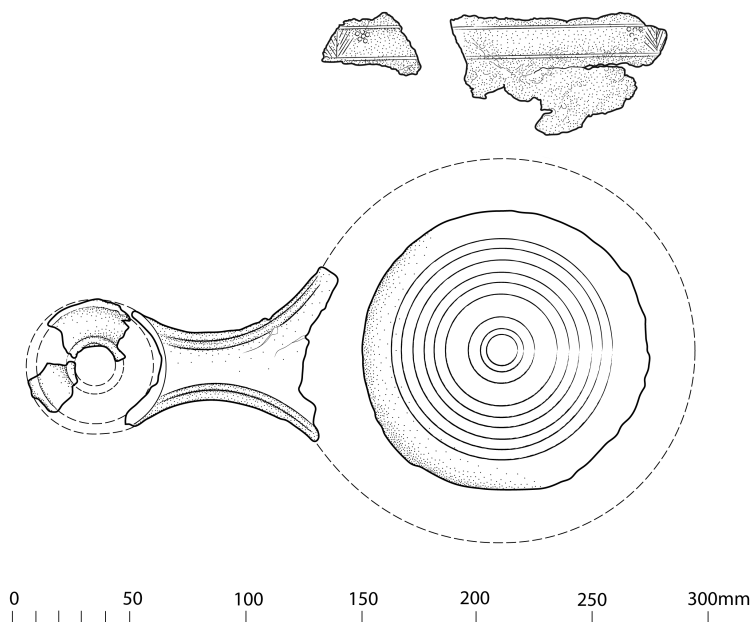


Fig. 7. Skillet C, 1986 hoard.

#### DISCUSSION

Skillets form a standard type of bronze vessel that appears widely in all parts of the Roman empire. Essentially, the vessel has a curved, tub shaped body attached below to a thick corrugated base and supported above by a robust, overhanging rim from which develops a wide, waisted handle with a roundel termination through which a central suspension hole has been formed. The vessels, which combine strength with lightness and versatility of use, are made from beaten bronze sheet and finished on a lathe, as illustrated by the rill marks on Llanberis Skillet 4. Skillets were made in two principal centres, in Campania in the region of Naples, and in Gaul, probably in the area of the middle Rhone around Lyon.

Skillets were probably multi-functional vessels sharing in both domestic and military uses. They are, however, inextricably associated with the personal equipment of legionary and auxiliary troops in the Roman army. As depicted on Trajan's column, each soldier carried this vital piece of culinary equipment alongside his personal load of weaponry and entrenching tools. In the domestic sphere such vessels would have formed part of the cooking utensils in the kitchens of the Roman aristocracy. A compelling case has been advanced by Curle (1931–32) that skillets were used in the preparation of wine and the mixing of wine with water and the graduated measurements on the interior of Llanberis Skillet 3 would support the opinion that the vessels were used as measuring gauges for liquids as well as solids.

Skillets have been discovered at 15 sites in Wales (Fig. 8). A distinction can be drawn between skillets that occur as single vessels and those that form part of hoards in association with other bronze vessels. Single skillet finds appear to be closely associated with military sites such as the legionary fortresses at Caerleon (Boon 1984) and Chester (McPeake and Moore 1978) and auxiliary forts within the Welsh garrison at *Leucarum* (Loughor) (Marvell and Owen-John 1997), Brecon Gaer (Wheeler 1926), *Segontium* (Caernarfon) (Wright 1969), Llystyn Gwyn, Bryncir (Davies 1935), and the recently

discovered vessel from Llanio in Ceredigion (Michael Freeman, pers. com.). In general these vessels are characterised by their robust form and by handles that often terminate in large circular roundels. Another distinguishing feature is the use of the stamped circle decoration placed usually on the junction between the handle plate and the roundel, and although often very poorly executed, it features on the Llystyn Gwyn, Llanio and *Leucarum* examples and prominently on the Llanberis vessels. Decoration is also present on the Caerleon handle along with the maker's stamp MATVRVS and a further stamp denotes that the vessel belonged to a soldier serving with the first cavalry regiment of Thracians (Boon 1984). The Chester example is stamped CIPI POLI [B] indicating the Cipius family of Capua (McPeake and Moore 1978). Maker's stamps are present on the vessels from *Segontium* (SAGVS FE), Brecon Gaer ([ANSI EPAPH]RODITI) and, as noted previously, on two of the Llanberis skillets (ABVCCVS F on Skillet 1; TALIO on Skillet 3, inscription only partly legible). The maker of the Brecon Gaer vessel was a member of the Ansii family, also of Capua, whose products appear alongside that of the Cipius family throughout the empire during the mid part of the first century AD.

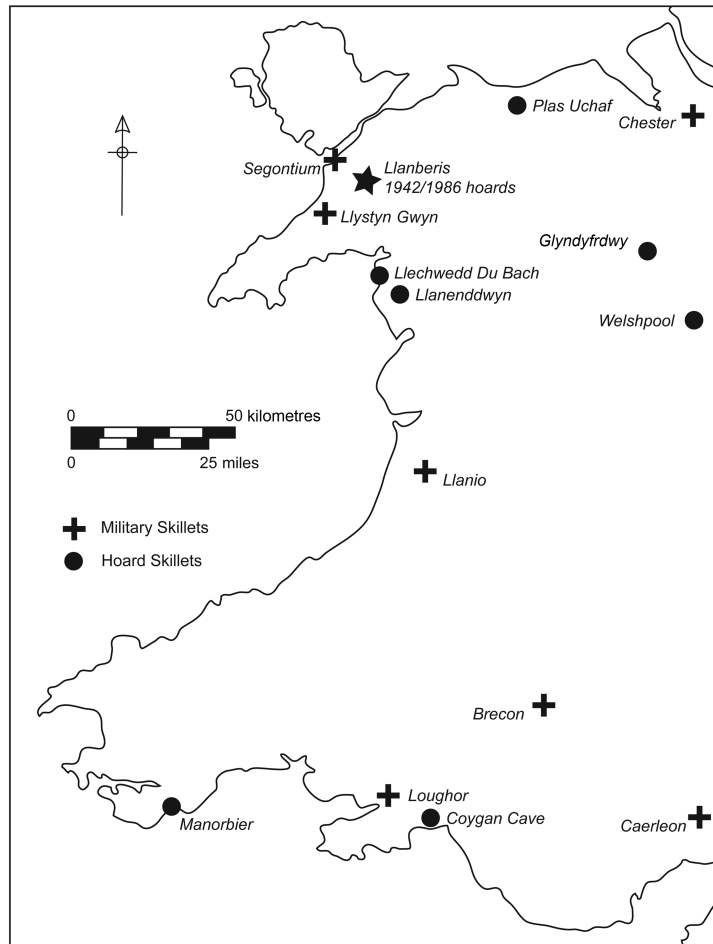


Fig. 8. Distribution of Roman skillets in Wales.

In contrast, most of the Welsh hoards have been discovered in areas that appear to be removed from direct Roman military control, as are exemplified by the Plas Uchaf assemblage at Abergele (Davies 1929), the two caches from the coast of Meirionnydd at Ynys Gwrtheyrn, Llanenddwyn (RCAHMW 1921, 103–4) and Llechwedd Du Bach, Harlech (Fox 1925), the hoard from Glyndyfrdwy (Willoughby Gardner 1927) and the very rich Welshpool hoard (Boon 1961). A similar pattern emerges in south-western Wales where hoards from two coastal sites at Coygan Cave, Carmarthenshire (Romilly Allen 1901) and the hitherto unpublished hoard from Manorbier, Pembrokeshire, in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, maintain the distribution.

It is significant that skillets in these hoards are not decorated with stamped circles and generally they have more elaborate handle terminals, such as the lunate suspension, the swan headed and trefoil loops on the Glyndyfrdwy skillets and dipper or the fluted ram's head and human mask handles in the Welshpool hoard. The two skillets in the Plas Uchaf hoard are smaller in size than the supposed military examples with light basal mouldings but both have large roundel loop terminations. The perforated roundel hole in the Ynys Gwrtheyrn skillets are, however, considerably smaller in diameter and the vessels are distinguished by heavy basal mouldings. The Coygan skillet has a similar perforated roundel termination to the Ynys Gwrtheyrn example and is stamped with the name of Cippius Polybius, showing that it was a product of the important maker's workshop in Capua (Wainwright 1967). A base plate displaying an openwork triskele motif was added to the worn under part of the skillet at an unknown later date. The skillet in the Manorbier hoard has a decorative plate in the form of openwork opposing S scrolls forming lyre palmettes and it is suggested that both this vessel and the Coygan example have been heavily influenced by native Celtic decorative imagery. Maker's stamps are represented on two of the Glyndyfrdwy vessels—respectively the swan's neck example CIPINICOMA MERCV from the very important workshop of the Cipii family in Capua which was in production during the middle of the first century AD (Bennett and Young 1981), and the partly illegible stamp ASEL(?) on the trefoil dipper. The interior of the skillet with the lunate suspension loop has a graduated interior with lines drawn at 560, 1170, 1720 and 2200 millilitre capacities, thus recalling the similar system drawn on the interior of Llanberis Skillet 3.

The Plas Uchaf hoard, when first discovered in 1862, contained approximately 50 items of which only 10 remain; included are a dipper and strainer, two plates, two small and two larger cups and the two patellae. A dipper was also represented in the Glyndyfrdwy assemblage with a fragmented bronze pan, whilst the Coygan skillet was accompanied by a strainer with a wide flanged rim and perforations forming a decorative motif of circles conjoined with running scrolls. The patellae in the rich Welshpool hoard were associated with native objects that included a wooden bucket with two bronze escutcheons, a cauldron, an iron fire-dog and two iron torchères, an interesting combination of the exotic with the fineries of indigenous craftsmanship. Native objects likewise accompanied the patellae in the Llechwedd Du Bach hoard in the form of a bronze mirror handle and plate and in the Ynys Gwrtheyrn hoard a bowl and cauldron of indigenous manufacture accompanied the three patellae. The Manorbier group contained in addition to the skillet four complete objects—two dippers and two strainers—and fragments that included the remains of two shallow flat-bottomed dishes and a cauldron with iron strengthening to the rim (Mark Lodwick, pers. com.). As noted previously, the Coygan and Manorbier hoards are again very heavily influenced by native Celtic decorative imagery added at a period later than the manufacture of the objects.

Hoards overwhelmingly contain domestic objects many of which belong to the aristocratic table or represent lavish feasting and most particularly are involved with the conviviality of preparing and imbibing wine. This unifying feature manifests itself regardless of whether the social standing of the hoard has an imperial pedigree as in the Glyndyfrdwy and Plas Uchaf assemblages, or betrays elements of native acculturation as in the remaining examples, and this is regardless of the fact that significant chronological time spans may separate the individual hoards. It is possible that two of the hoards,

Llechwedd Du Bach and Welshpool, are associated with burials, but the rest are suggestive of hidden treasure. Boon (1970) has suggested that the Glyndyfrdwy and Plas Uchaf caches were deposited during the early Welsh campaign stages, respectively in AD 59–60 and AD 70, but it is difficult to comprehend how hoards of domestic content could fit into an essentially military scenario. As with all hoard material the date of production rarely corresponds to the date of deposition and this may appropriately refer to the Ynys Gwrtheyrn hoard with its skillet, native bronze mirror and coins of the Emperor Vespasian (AD 69–79). For those seeking a later date the presence of coins of Carausius (AD 287–96) in the Coygan hoard would be relevant, but without adequate dating evidence it is difficult to place the remaining hoards into a meaningful chronological scheme. However, the dominantly domestic structure of the hoards must be taken into account implying that some, at least, may belong to more peaceful episodes during the Roman occupation. Recent excavations have revealed an increasing number of prosperous civilian settlements that lay on the periphery of the military zone in Wales and had obviously flourished during periods of peaceful consolidation. Principal among these are the villas that appear in the Vale of Glamorgan and are known to spread westwards along the coast into Dyfed and more recently confirmed in Ceredigion. More enigmatic are the rich settlements identified on the northern coastal belt at Prestatyn, Tremadog and Tai Cochion in Anglesey and on the south east coast at Cold Knapp in Barry. Equally significant are the native farmsteads that are such a feature of the settlement pattern in north-west Wales at such sites as Cefn Graeanog in Arfon or Bryn Eryr and Din Llugwy in Anglesey. One can therefore conclude that many of the hoards discussed above could have belonged to, and originated from, these types of Romanised civilian settlements in Wales.

How does the above discussion therefore impact on the interpretation of the two Llanberis hoards? Both caches may be considered exceptional since they were not found in the vicinity of a Roman fort and neither do they contain other forms of bronze vessels. It therefore remains to ask how these two assemblages came to be buried in a remote field in the heart of Eryri, with no known Roman settlements or military installations in the immediate vicinity. There is, however, ample evidence for late prehistoric settlement in the area visible in the form of enclosed and unenclosed hut groups, field boundaries and lynchets, and a small hillfort (RCAHMW 1960, 169–71). Nearby, on the precipitous slopes of Cwm Beudy Mawr on the north-east slopes of Snowdon, was discovered by accident the fragmentary Late La Tène hammered sheet bronze bowl with an escutcheon handle decorated with an inlaid pattern of opaque red glass to resemble a feline zoomorph (Savory 1976, 62, no. 32).

The location of the field in Llanberis in which the two hoards were found is interesting since in the Roman period its position may not have been so remote. It lies at the entrance to Cwm Dwythwch and Cwm Arddu both of which would have offered accredited, if difficult, upland routes across the higher mountains to the south west into the Capel Garmon and Rhyd Ddu areas of Nant y Betws. More conventional routes, and the ones most probably used by the invading Roman armies would have followed the valley of the Rhyddalt, opening to the north west to the shore of the Menai Strait at *Segontium* and leading to the south east into the valley of Nant Peris. From here the route would have allowed access to the Roman marching camp at Penygwryd and, ultimately, would have linked with the fort of Bryn y Gefeiliau. This latter site lay on the arterial route way that linked *Canovium* southwards to Tomen y Mur and beyond. It is suggested that there would have been much activity along these routes in the period under discussion and the position of the field called Werglodd Uchaf on the flanks above the Nant Peris valley would not have been too distant from the bustle of commerce and transport.

The reason for the deposition of the objects in this field at Hafod Lydan remain uncertain. Did they arrived here by way of peaceful trade or barter? Or do they represent the spoils of war, or loot from a military storehouse? The presence of a few sherds of Black Burnished ware and Samian found on contemporary native settlements of north-western Gwynedd points to some trade with Roman merchants

though there is little evidence that this extended to prestigious bronze vessels. The idea that they represent the spoils of war may perhaps also be discounted. Although it is possible that Eryri may have been the theatre of battles between the native Ordovices and the invading armies of Suetonius Paulinus in the first half of the first century AD or Agricola in the latter half of the same century, the absence of the debris of battle—such as characterises the Seven Sisters hoard in the Vale of Neath, South Wales (Davies and Spratling 1976)—is a defining feature of the two Llanberis caches, as indeed in most of the Welsh skilnet hoards. The possibility that they represent loot may have more credence and was the explanation championed by Ellis Davies (1944–45, 133) with regard to the 1942 hoard. The suggestion that they may have been hastily buried after being looted from a military storehouse, perhaps at *Segontium*, 12 kilometres to the north, is perhaps supported by the fact that the vessels in the 1942 hoard appear to have been unused and remained unpacked from their original grass packaging. But were they hidden with a view to later recovery, or do they represent a votive deposit in the tradition of the Cwm Beudy Mawr bronze bowl or the Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard?

Finally, when was deposition likely to have taken place? Direct dating evidence does not accompany either of the Llanberis caches. If a military explanation is to be sought for the depositions then a date in the second half of the first century AD could be accepted and the Ynys Gwytheryn hoard could provide supporting evidence. Alternatively, if the explanation resorts to loot then the period of deposition could span the whole period of the Roman occupation of Gwynedd and, more particularly, the establishment of *Segontium* as a military presence in the area from AD 78 to its abandonment in the fourth century. Wheeler (1923) suggested that a period of looting could have followed the first evacuation of *Segontium* circa AD 140. The skilnet with the best authenticated date in Wales is the Caerleon example (Boon 1984) which was stamped with the first cavalry regiment of Thracians and provides a date of between AD 70–103 for its presence in the legionary fortress. Although this example has no bearing on the Llanberis skilnets the various interpretations reviewed by Boon (ibid. 406) as to its presence in Caerleon emphasises the point that establishing dating for these standard Roman vessels in Wales may be no more than guesswork.

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