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A HOARD OF LATE BRONZE AGE METALWORK FROM AYLSHAM, NORFOLK

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THIS paper records the discovery of a scattered hoard of Late Bronze Age metalwork on a new housing estate at Sir William's Close, Aylsham, Norfolk (national grid reference TG 19752695). The first finds were made in July 1968, and further material came to light in the succeeding months. A limited excavation was carried out in May 1969 by the writer close to the original findspot, but this yielded no further bronzes and failed to produce any information about the concealment of the hoard. The hoard is of importance in its local Norfolk context and of wider interest as regards some features. A preliminary note on the hoard has already appeared.¹

I—DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION

The first finds were made when Mr. and Mrs. G. L. Taylor unearthed two socketed axes and two spearheads lying together. A third socketed axe was found within a few feet (Nos. 1-5). All these implements seem to have been within a foot of the ground surface. Later more socketed axes, some damaged and others broken, as well as other fragmentary objects and a socketed hammer, were discovered in similar circumstances by the Taylors (Nos. 6, 10-24, 26) and their neighbours (Nos. 7-9, 25) in their respective gardens (Fig. 1). These later finds show that what at first seemed to be a fairly small and compact hoard was in fact larger and more widely scattered. Although the area has not been under intense cultivation in recent times, pigs were once kept in the field, and it was also an orchard before being built on; these activities may have intensified any earlier disturbance by farming. As far as can be discovered, the building operations themselves did not affect the area of garden which contained the major part of the hoard, but on the other hand they could well account for the apparent displacement of a few objects, concealed in disturbed topsoil, to a point some fifty metres distant. Thus, although it cannot be proved beyond every shadow of doubt that the objects numbered 7, 8, 9 and 25 belong to the hoard, the probability that they do is so great that they are in fact best considered to be part of it.

One or two of the objects were discovered so close to the garden fence that it was decided to carry out a limited excavation immediately outside the fence (the garden had already been completely dug over) in the hope of locating any further material and possibly throwing some light on the circumstances of concealment. However, the small area which it was possible to excavate on this building site in two rather damp weekends was distinguished mainly by its barrenness. The only prehistoric finds were two small sherds, both similar to Neolithic wares from other sites in Norfolk. An unknown number of similar sherds is said to have been found as surface strays in the garden soil.

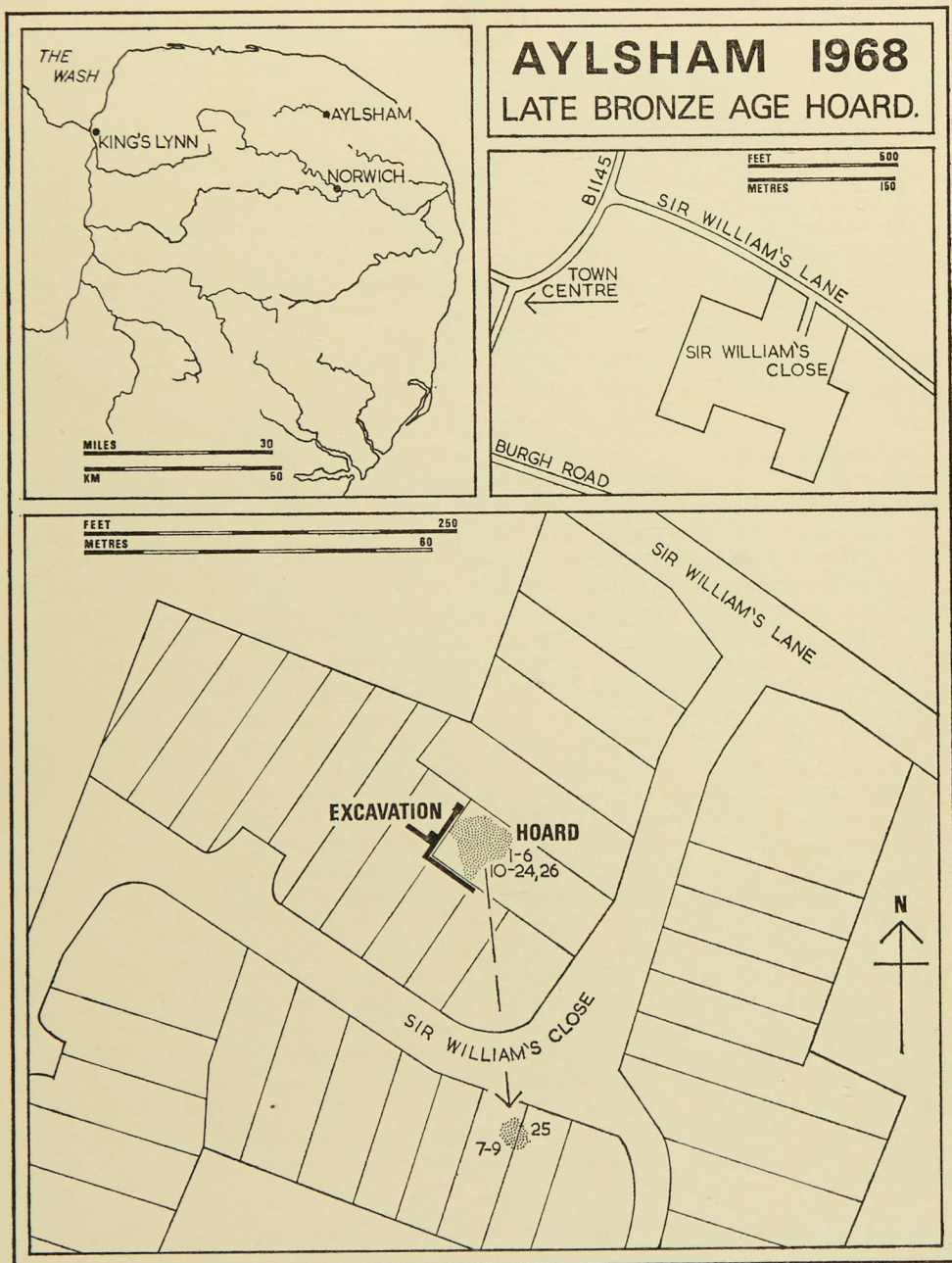


Fig. 1. Locality of the Aylsham hoard.

II—INVENTORY OF THE HOARD²

1. Socketed spearhead with leaf-shaped blade, edges bevelled; two opposed peg-holes in socket; midrib of rounded section, hollow to within about 4.0 cm. of point; partial hollowing of blade wings; point damaged; slight crack at base of blade. Length 23.5 cm.
2. Spearhead similar to 1 but smaller; casting flaw inside socket; flaw on one blade wing; contained organic material including moss *Schistostega pennata*. L. 13.8 cm.
3. Socketed axe of sub-rectangular section with single loop; heavy mouth moulding level with top of loop; cutting edge sharpened and splayed; casting flaw near loop. L. 8.3 cm.
4. Socketed axe very similar to 3; lower moulding well defined; cutting edge damaged but probably sharpened; two internal ridges. L. 9.0 cm.
5. Socketed axe similar to 3, but larger and with single mouth moulding; cutting edge sharpened, slightly splayed, damaged; casting flaw by loop. L. 10.5 cm.
6. Cast disc with high flange, broken; one complete and two broken rivet-holes in flange; broken ones by depression in flange at its highest point; rim of flange and joint of flange and base slightly thickened; decorated with at least two concentric ribs. Diameter 6.8 cm., height of flange 1.3—1.4 cm.
7. Cutting edge of socketed axe; sharpened, splayed and damaged. Surviving L. 6.0 cm.
8. Small octagonal faceted socketed axe with single loop; slight mouth moulding and smooth collar; cutting edge sharpened, splayed, damaged; two internal ridges; split down one face. L. 8.2 cm.
9. Socketed axe similar to 3 but larger; cutting edge sharpened, slightly splayed, damaged; casting flaw on side opposite loop. L. 10.0 cm.
10. Socketed axe very similar to 9, damaged; cutting edge sharpened and splayed; two internal ridges. L. 10.0 cm.
11. Socketed axe very similar to 5, damaged; loop shows that it was cast in badly aligned moulds. L. 7.1 cm.
12. Socketed axe very similar to 9; cutting edge sharpened; two internal ridges; bad casting flaw near loop. L. 10.0 cm.
13. Cutting edge of socketed axe; probably not sharpened. Surviving L. 6.0 cm.
14. Socketed axe very similar to 9, damaged; cutting edge sharpened and splayed; one, possibly two, internal ridges. L. 8.7 cm.
15. Octagonal faceted socketed axe, damaged at mouth; collar defined by sharp rib level with top of loop; cutting edge straight, damaged; socket wider at bottom than middle. L. 10.0 cm.
16. Octagonal faceted socketed axe with very small loop; heavy mouth moulding, smaller moulding level with top of loop; splayed cutting edge (? trimmed at each side), damaged. L. 9.2 cm.
17. Socketed hammer of sub-circular section; slight collar; end smoothed by use. L. 7.6 cm.
18. Fragment of socketed spearhead; part of edge and body survive; elliptical interior section; squashed. Surviving L. 2.7 cm.

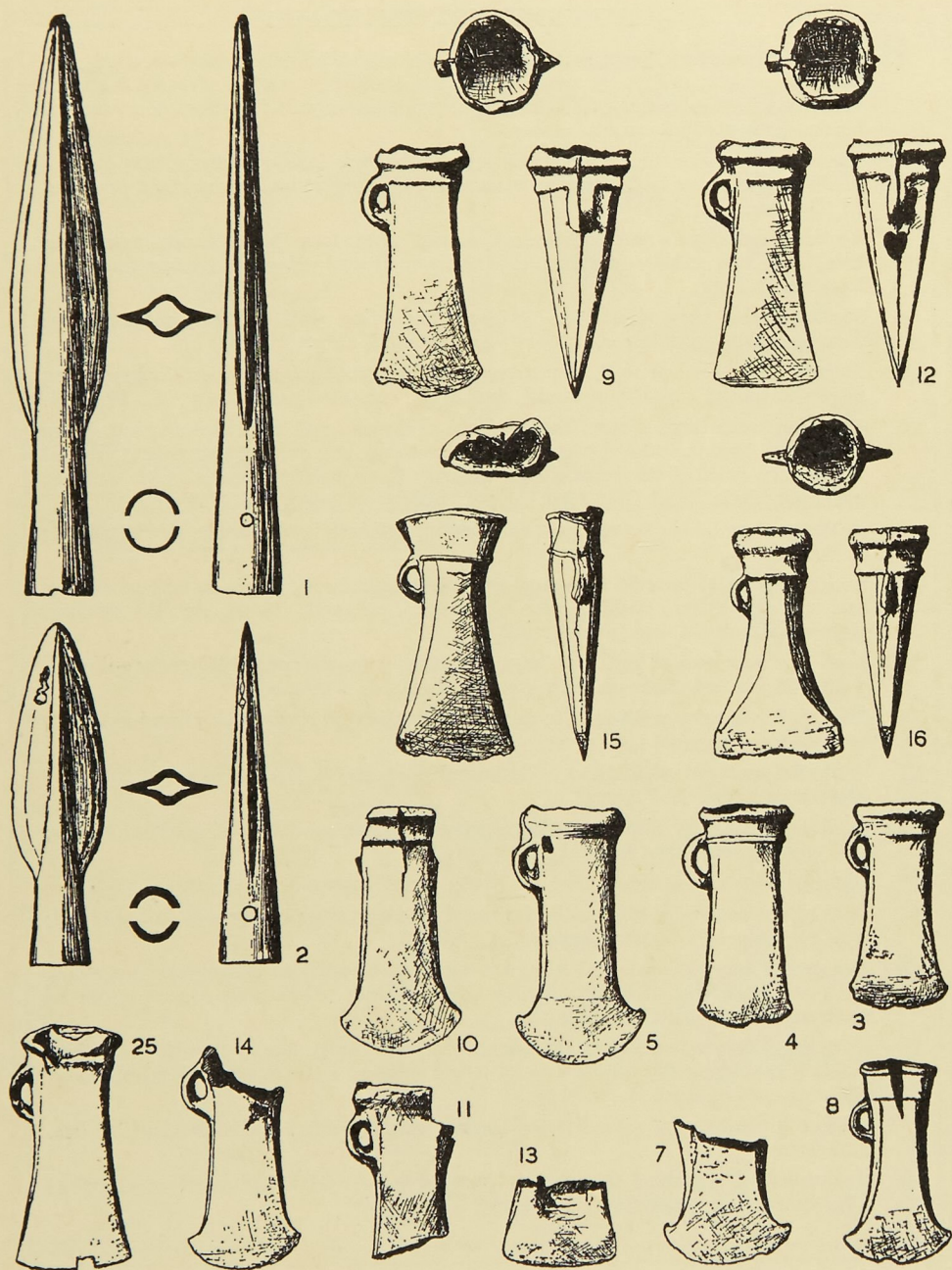


Fig. 2. Bronzes from the Aylsham hoard (scale $\frac{1}{2}$).

19. Fragment of rapier blade with bevelled edges. Surviving L. 3.9 cm.
20. Ingot fragment. Weight 52.85 gm.
21. Fragment of sword; lower part of tang, and butt with rounded shoulders and two rivet-holes on each side survive; two rivets lost before find was reported; straight ricasso with shallow notches; blade of oval section with broad central rib. Surviving L. 7.4 cm.
22. Tip of sword blade; pointed oval section with broad midrib. Surviving L. 11.8 cm.
23. Ingot fragment. Weight 190.6 gm.
24. Fragment of rapier blade. Surviving L. 3.4 cm.
25. Socketed axe very similar to 9; cutting edge sharpened, with notch cut out; loop and mouth badly cast; one internal ridge. L. 9.9 cm.
26. Small fragment of socket. Surviving L. 3.1 cm.

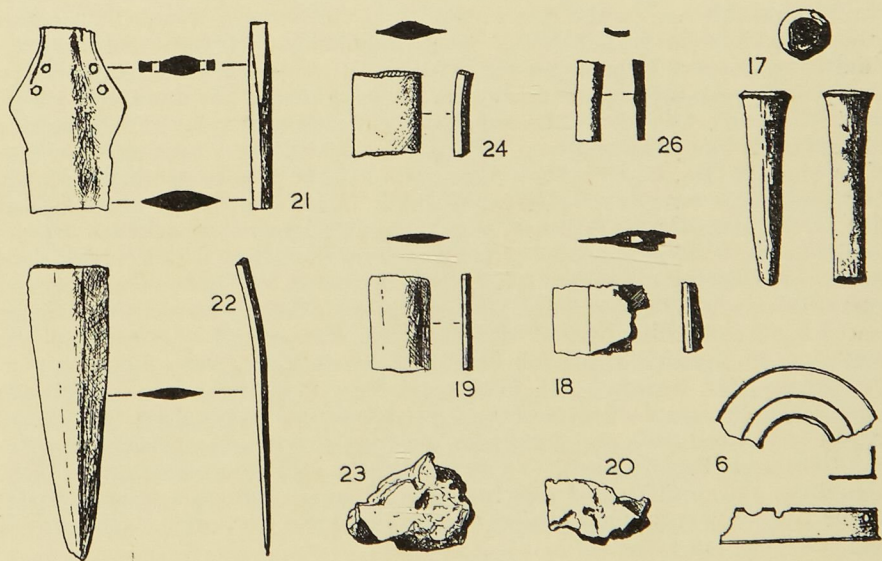


Fig. 3. Bronzes from the Aylsham hoard (scale $\frac{1}{2}$).

III—DISCUSSION

The Aylsham hoard consists mainly of *socketed axes*. Most of these are plain axes of sub-rectangular section with single (5 & 11) or double (3, 4, 9, 10, 12, 14 & 25) mouth mouldings. They are of very mixed quality, and it is noteworthy how few would be usable in their present state; most display casting flaws, some slight and others quite extensive. A number of the axes have evidently been used, judging by the way their cutting edges are splayed by sharpening, but most have been so severely damaged that it would not be worth trying to sharpen them again. These axes give the impression that they have been bought up as scrap, ready for melting and re-casting; two cutting edges (7 & 13) are clearly the remains of unserviceable tools which have been deliberately broken up. On the whole they represent unusually poor workmanship.

Axes similar to these, especially with double mouth mouldings, are well known from Norfolk and neighbouring counties. In Norwich Castle Museum there are parallels in the hoards from North Elmham, Hoe, Carleton Rode, East Dereham, Norwich (Norgate Road/Peckover Road), Foulsham and Gorleston I, as well as single finds from several sites.³ These axes are thus entirely normal in a context such as that of the Aylsham hoard.

The other three socketed axes (8, 15 & 16) are of octagonal section. The first (8), a narrow axe with a single mouth moulding, is related to the faceted axes discussed by Butler,⁴ but is likely, because of its high collar and the low placement of its loop, to be a British version of this type. There are close parallels to this axe in the Kessingland and Gorleston I hoards.⁵ The two other axes differ in having double mouth mouldings (a feature which Butler thinks was adopted later under the influence of western rather than northern European types), although they also have a loop placed low down and a high collar. Their most distinctive feature, however, is the wide splay of their cutting edges; this is less pronounced on (15), which may not have been sharpened so often, than on (16), whose cutting edge seems to have become so widely splayed that the corners were eventually trimmed off. There is a parallel to the former (15) in the East Dereham hoard, which consists largely of socketed axes; a similar axe is found in the hoard of 141 axes from Foulsham, which is important for the wide variety of types which are represented in it. There are also several axes with somewhat splayed mouths and shallow collars (thus with their loops placed high) from other Norfolk sites including Bacton and Horstead, and the Gorleston I, Norwich (Unthank Road), Feltwell Fen, North Elmham and Snettisham III⁶ hoards. The facets on some axes with deep collars are emphasized by raised ribs, Norfolk sites including Hindringham (associated with a five-ribbed axe), and Swaffham, with the Eaton and Norwich (Norgate Road/Peckover Road) hoards.⁷ Exact parallels for (16) are elusive; among them is perhaps the unsharpened axe from the Waal at Nijmegen illustrated by Butler,⁸ which is somewhat similar to another of the Gorleston I axes even if that has a shallow collar.

The two complete *spearheads* in the hoard (1 & 2) are typical of class V B 1 ("half-hollow" or "sub-lozenge") in Butler's refinement of the Greenwell and

Brewis classification.⁹ In both the socket expands sideways into the blade wings.

The small spearhead (2) contained a quantity of organic material. Fragments of a moss amongst this were identified by Mr. C. C. Wilcock as *Schistostega pennata* (Hedw.) Hook. & Taylor. The diagnostic features were the two-ranked nerveless leaves composed of large elongated cells with pointed ends. The remainder of the material was later examined by Dr. J. H. and Mrs. C. A. Dickson, who made the following identification of what at first seemed to be wood fragments:

"We think they are derived from a herbaceous plant rather than a tree or shrub. If this is correct a herb with some development of woody tissue is involved. . . . Certainly the fragments are not from the heartwood of some tree, so it is misleading to talk of wood splinters."

Thus these fragments do not represent a wooden shaft.

No other specimen of *Schistostega* is yet known to have survived from an early period.¹⁰ *Schistostega* is a minute species with a unique habitat. It grows in areas which never receive direct sunlight and where the light intensity is very low, such as caves, mine shafts and deep fissures, but although it can tolerate such deep shade, it cannot exist in the total absence of light. The species is mainly restricted in its present-day distribution to southern and western Britain. The only East Anglian locality so far known was only recently discovered at Wolferton, West Norfolk; otherwise it has been recorded no nearer to Aylsham than Northamptonshire and other Midland counties. Its distribution is unlikely to have changed significantly in the last three thousand years because of its limited habitat, and it is therefore most unlikely that *Schistostega* was able to grow in the socket of this spearhead after its concealment in the ground at Aylsham. Neither was it introduced recently, for this organic material adhered to the interior of the spearhead and was sealed in position by a quantity of earth. It is such a small and fragile moss that it can hardly have been placed deliberately in the socket as plugging or packing material. It therefore seems most likely that it was introduced by accident in antiquity. Possibly this spearhead had previously been concealed within an environment suitable for the moss, of which a fragment could have fallen into the socket and by chance have survived there until the present day.

The Aylsham "half-hollow" spearheads can be paralleled by others from a number of hoards from eastern England and elsewhere. Among those in *Inventaria Archaeologica* are the hoards from Stoke Ferry (Norfolk), Marston St. Lawrence (Northamptonshire), Bagmoor, Burton-upon-Stather (Lincolnshire); Great Freeman Street, Nottingham, and Newark-upon-Trent (Nottinghamshire); and the Heathery Burn Cave (Co. Durham). Many others are recorded in the Bronze Age card catalogue in the British Museum. Undoubtedly some examples of this type have so far escaped notice (as has one in the Eaton, Norwich, hoard) and will only be brought to light by examination of the actual objects, since earlier descriptions and illustrations often failed to take account

of details of interior form. These spearheads are known to have penetrated as far west as the Guilsfield (Montgomeryshire) hoard¹¹ which, although consisting largely of apparently left-over Wilburton material, also contains some objects, like the spearhead, which are normally found in slightly later contexts such as the other hoards mentioned above. Most of the spearheads of this type have come from sites within some 60 miles of the Wash, but others have been recorded from the Thames.

A third spearhead (18) is represented by a single small fragment. The straightness of the blade edge (so far as it survives) indicates that it is part of a barbed spearhead of Greenwell and Brewis class VI. This identification is supported by a reconstruction of the blade section; although considerably squashed, the amount of distortion and the present shape of the fragment together show that the section can hardly have been other than oval. This is typical of these spearheads, which are taken by Burgess¹² to be characteristic of the Broadwood tradition; their distribution lies mainly in southern England.

The bronze *flanged disc* (6) is an object whose form is not easily paralleled in Britain and whose precise function is difficult to identify. It is, according to one interpretation, designed to fit over the end of a wooden rod or pole. There is no sign of any internal flange or perforation. A symmetrical reconstruction shows that there were six slender nails or pins, two placed opposite each other, the remaining four being arranged to flank two semi-circular depressions at the highest points of the flanges. The one surviving depression, which shows no signs of wear, is somewhat roughly and irregularly made, and it is hard to be sure if it is a feature of the original casting. If the disc was fixed to a pole, this depression might imply a perforation through the pole; the nails or pins beside it might suggest that a certain degree of stress was anticipated, but one would not expect them to withstand any great strain. One of the surviving rivet-holes is slightly misplaced and only partly overlaps the dent indicating its intended position. The function of such a disc would be to protect whatever it covered from accidental damage and perhaps also from exposure to the elements and subsequent rotting. The fact that it is ornamented by at least two low concentric ribs suggests that it was easily visible; thus it was probably intended to please as well as to protect.

Similar fittings have been found in other Late Bronze Age contexts in Britain, but they are few in number and widely scattered. They differ in detail but they seem to have been made for the same basic purpose. Other objects, like the bronze cylinder (possibly a pole-cap) from Leckwith, Cardiff,¹³ have at times been drawn into discussions of these decorative fittings but they are in reality so different that it is misleading to adduce parallels in them. The nearest find, geographically, is from the large Isleham (Cambridgeshire) hoard in Moyses's Hall Museum, Bury St. Edmunds,¹⁴ where, in addition to other fragmentary fittings and attachments, there are three similarly flanged discs, of less accomplished appearance than the Aylsham fragment. The best preserved of these is somewhat smaller (5.3 cm. in diameter rather than 6.8 cm.), lacks the concentric ribs and the depressions, but has roughly grooved decoration on the flange itself. Both it and its fellows have suffered damage in antiquity

of a nature which suggests deliberate and forced removal from the assumed wood. The same is true of the Aylsham piece. Other parallels differ in having a slightly concave section, like those from the Horsehope (Peebleshire) hoard,¹⁵ where there were two examples of the same diameter (6.8 cm.) as the Aylsham fragment but this time decorated with six concentric ribs and a central boss. Each had three nail-holes in the flange or collar, which was concave.

These objects are all designed to fulfil a similar function. Previous suggestions as to their use have involved wheeled vehicles of one sort or another, and this does seem a likely field of enquiry. From what is known of vehicles of the period, there seem to be few components which might need to be capped by a protective disc; these include poles for the draught animals, yokes and axles. If the depression on the edge of the Aylsham fragment does imply a perforation through the wood to which it is attached, it would take a dowel or pin of about 0.8 cm. in diameter. Many linch-pins are of about this size, and thus these discs could be axle caps, even if in this case the linch-pin would be very close to the end of the axle. One cannot unfortunately go so far as to suggest the type of vehicle involved. Professor Piggott (*in litt.*) has raised the possibility of the Horsehope examples coming from a model vehicle on the grounds of their small size; but they are very similar to the other flanged discs in this respect. If these fittings did come from models it would then be difficult to account for the apparent absence of similar but full-scale parts.

An alternative interpretation, that they may be decorative yoke fittings, was put forward by Mariën when discussing the finds from Tombelle 5, Court-Saint-Etienne.¹⁶ These included two similar discs, one of which was damaged; they differ in being oval rather than circular, with a maximum diameter of 5.5 cm. They are concave in section, like the Horsehope examples, and have a slightly splayed collar. Each had only two nail-holes, and one bronze pin survived. Neither was decorated in any way. Mariën cited parallels for these "*rosettes*" *du joug* or *Jochrosetten* from Oberwiesenacker, Thalmäszing, Biding, Gernlinden and, further afield, from Hradenín, Planany, Lhotka and Dejšina. He compared them in particular with the examples from Hradenín graves XXIV and XLVI. He saw them mounted on top of the yoke above the horse's shoulders, and acting as rein-guides. His description is based upon a careful reconstruction of harnessing methods following a comparison of the eastern and western material.¹⁷ Their shape may give a clue, for it seems unlikely that an axle would have an oval as opposed to a circular end-fitting. In view of these parallels, it seems preferable to suggest that the Aylsham piece is a decorative fitting of a type applied to the yoke rather than to the axle, not necessarily on top of the yoke behind the horse's neck as Mariën suggested but perhaps at its extremities. However, a final interpretation wants further evidence.

Leaf-shaped swords are represented by two fragments (21 & 22). The size of the pieces suggests that they were broken up for easy remelting. The hilt fragment seems to represent a somewhat devolved Ewart Park sword, an impression which comes as much from the poorly defined blade edges and un-

distinguished oval blade section as from the form of the butt and ricasso. The blade fragment suffers from a similarly vague definition of edge and section. These two pieces need not come from the same weapon. The two other blade fragments (19 & 24) are likely to be from *rapiers*, but they cannot readily be assigned to any particular class.

Two *ingot fragments* (20 & 23) confirm the impression given by the condition and variety of the other components of the hoard that it was part of a bronzesmith's stock-in-trade. A slender *fragment of socket* (26) was also recovered; this probably belongs to a spearhead of unknown type although it could be part of a ferrule. The *socketed hammer* (17) is a comparatively plain example but there are traces of a rudimentary collar. The end is smoothed by use. This piece is certainly an important part of the smith's personal equipment, and is in such good condition that it cannot be considered as scrap metal. Hammers have been found only rarely in Norfolk, among them one from the bronzesmith's hoard from Carleton Rode,¹⁸ a hoard which contained a quantity of tools normally associated with the Carp's Tongue complex. Fenland sites include the Isle of Harty and Reach Fen hoards.

IV—CONCLUSION

The affinities of the Aylsham hoard are made clear by the variety of bronze types within it. Socketed spearheads of half-hollow section are often found with eighth-century Wilburton material, but, as Burgess has pointed out, Wilburton types are liable to occur in misleadingly large quantities in later contexts such as the Guilsfield and Isleham hoards. Thus these spearheads are less important for dating purposes than at first appears; on the other hand, their distribution as it is known at the moment shows a considerable concentration in Norfolk and the Fens, and is therefore likely to reflect a trading pattern whose connections, in the light of Butler's research, are with northern Europe. The barbed spearhead fragment is typical of the Broadward tradition which Burgess has dated to *c.* 750–650 B.C. A rather greater date range obtains for most of the socketed axes which have such a wide distribution in Britain, although the faceted axes again have much stronger connections with continental material. Socketed hammers also occur in contemporary hoards elsewhere. The most critical piece is the fragmentary flanged disc, which reflects mature Hallstatt C influences according to the continental parallels for it. Thus, in common with other hoards of a similar composition from other sites in eastern England, the Aylsham hoard reflects continental influences which are felt in Britain about 650 B.C. or a little later.

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¹Clough, *Norf. Arch.*, XXXIV, 4 (1969) 350.

²The numbering of the bronzes reflects the order of their discovery; some are in the permanent collections of Norwich Castle Museum (Nos. 1-5, 7-9 and 25), and the remainder are on loan to the museum.

³*Bronze Age Metalwork in Norwich Castle Museum* (1966).

⁴Butler, *Palaeohistoria*, IX (1963) 86-91.

⁵Norwich Castle Museum records.

⁶A list of the Snettisham L.B.A. hoards is given in Clough, *Norf. Arch.*, XXXV, 1 (1970) 18, note 9.

⁷Clough, *Norf. Arch.*, XXXIV, 4 (1969) 350.

⁸Butler, *Palaeohistoria*, IX (1963) Pl. XII.

⁹*id.*, 106 ff.

¹⁰I am particularly grateful to Dr. Dickson for providing most of the detail which is incorporated in this discussion of *Schistostega*. Tragically the actual moss specimen is no longer extant.

¹¹Davies, D. G., *Antiq. J.*, XLVII (1967) 95-108, Fig. 26.

¹²Burgess, C. B., *Archæol. J.*, CXXV (1968) 40 f.

¹³Nash-Williams, V. E., *Antiq. J.*, XIII (1933) 299 f.

¹⁴Mr. A. R. Edwardson, Curator of Moyse's Hall Museum, most kindly allowed N.C.M. to borrow one of these objects.

¹⁵Piggott, S., *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, LXXXVII (1952-53) 175-86, Fig. 1. 4.

¹⁶Mariën, M.-E., *Trouvailles du Champ d'Urnes et des Tombelles hallstattiennes de Court-Saint-Etienne* (1958) 134 Fig. 20, No. 131.

¹⁷*id.*, 135, 246, 260 and Fig. 46.

¹⁸*Bronze Age Metalwork in N.C.M.*, 25 f.