

## TWO EARLY SAXON CEMETERIES IN SOUTH NORFOLK

by Kenneth Penn with Steven Ashley

Evidence for two Early Saxon inhumation cemeteries in South Norfolk is presented here, along with a brief concluding note on their significance.

### **Burston: Dickleburgh Bypass, Shimpling (County Sites and Monuments Record No. 23345)**

#### *Introduction*

(Fig. 1a)

Fieldwalking and metal-detector surveys carried out along the route of the A140 Dickleburgh Bypass before and during construction recovered archaeological finds of most periods. To the west of Dickleburgh village, and within the former parish of Shimpling, now part of Burston, at TM 1665 8310, a scatter of finds indicated a minor Roman rural settlement, and included a number of Early Saxon objects, indicative of a small inhumation cemetery.

The site lies to the north of Dickleburgh village (where the modern A140 represents the line of the Roman road from Scole to Caistor St Edmund) at TM 1665 8310 (Ordnance Survey field 7000).

#### *Geology and topography*

(Fig. 1a)

The cemetery lies at a little over 30m OD in a region of heavy clays, on a gently sloping plateau, declining towards the south and dissected by small streams. The site overlooks, to the immediate south, the shallow valley of a minor tributary of the River Waveney. The heavy clays in early times inhibited intensive settlement. However, areas of south Norfolk and north Suffolk contain extensive areas of co-axial field systems — or their relics — which have been argued to be of Roman or earlier origin (Williamson 1987), although more recent considerations suggest a later origin is likely or possible (Hinton 1997; Williamson 1998). One of the north-to-south tracks that make up this 'system' lies to the immediate east, and is now represented by the eastern boundary of field 7000 or by the line of the parish boundary a little further east. The parish boundary at least is likely to be of some antiquity, lending some support to the idea of an early routeway springing off the Roman road, the modern A140 through Dickleburgh village.

#### *Archaeological background*

(Fig. 1a)

Following fieldwalking by Alan Davison in 1986–7, metal-detecting was carried out during bypass construction in April 1990 by a number of individuals, including Caroline Back, Stuart Garrod, N. and M. Gipson, Dennis Jordan, Mick Noble, Peter Rilings and Barbara Venn.

The finds reported here came from within the line of the bypass as it crosses OS field 7000 and could therefore be part of a larger scatter of objects, lying in part outside the area surveyed. Finds from this field, some from earlier fieldwork, included an Iron Age coin and a number of Romano-British objects some 200m to the north of the Early Saxon finds. These included pottery, animal bone, brooches and coins, and represent a small occupation site of Roman date.

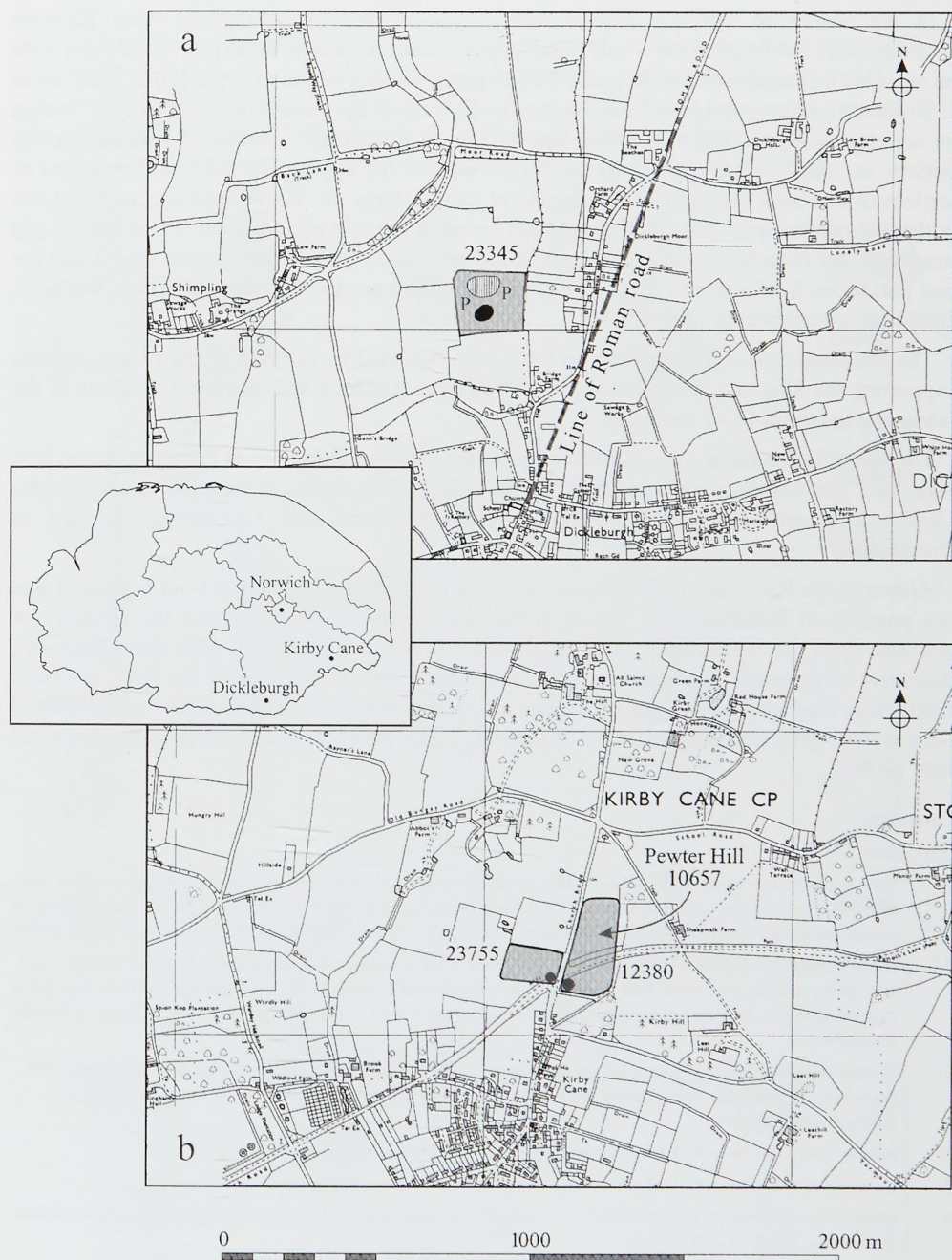


Fig. 1. Location maps

a. Dickleburgh: Site 23345, showing the line of the Roman road, the minor Romano-British settlement (stipple), the area of Early Saxon finds (black) and pits (P).

b. Kirby Cane: Sites 12380 (stipple), 10657 and 23755 (stipple). The locations of Early Saxon objects from Sites 12380 and 23755 are shown (black).

In the winter of 1986–7, before construction of the bypass began, Alan Davison systematically fieldwalked the whole of the bypass route. Within the north part of OS field 7000 he recorded a concentration of Romano-British pottery over a length of some 120m. There were c. 70 sherds (and one probable Early Saxon sherd). Work in the same field, in April 1987, within an area to the immediate west of the bypass line also produced a scatter of Romano-British pottery, its 'edge' being marked by an old pit west of the bypass. To the east, any traces of settlement had been removed by the digging of another large pit. The Roman site appears to sit at the end of the 'spur' of higher ground left between the two pits (marked 'P' on Fig. 1) and may therefore have been removed in part. It did not appear to continue beyond the pit into the east part of the field, nor into the field to the north, which produced just two sherds of Romano-British greyware pottery (Site 23344).

The settlement, therefore, appears to have been bounded by the line of the hedge, perhaps supporting the idea that this boundary was already in existence and that other elements of the landscape may also be of early date.

The Early Saxon finds were identified by letters, A–P (omitting O): B proved to be an Iron Age coin. The objects were all retained by the finders. Full details of the finds are held in the County Sites and Monuments Record, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, at Gressenhall.

Although the Early Saxon finds must represent the remains of ploughed-out burials, it was not possible to undertake any formal archaeological investigation beyond the recovery of artefacts from the mechanically-stripped surface. It is to be noted that after Alan Davison's discovery of the minor Roman settlement, strenuous efforts were made by the NAU to obtain funds from English Heritage for excavation of the site and potential key points in the coaxial field system lying in close proximity to the site. These efforts failed (*Eastern Daily Press*, 27 July 1990).

### Catalogue

(Figs 2 and 3)

1. Bronze *cruciform brooch* (Aberg Group II?), small rectangular plain headplate with curved upper surface and detachable side-knobs (now missing) and iron bar on reverse. Full-round top knob. Facets and incised lines on panels; traces of incised decoration on remaining fixed knob. Old break at foot; recent break at head. Small Find P.
2. Bronze *cruciform brooch* (Aberg Group II), headplate with detachable top and side-knobs (both missing), and iron spring and pin on reverse. Full-round top knob. Facets and incised decoration on panels and bow. Protruding eyes on terminal. Remains of suspension loop on terminal. Found in two joining pieces; fresh break in middle. Small Find D.
3. Bronze *cruciform brooch* (Aberg Group II?), upper part of headplate and knobs missing. Facets and stamped decoration on headplate, bow, panels and terminal. Fresh break on head, old break on foot at nostrils, pin missing. Small Find A.
4. Bronze *cruciform brooch*, detachable side-knob, incised decoration, flat reverse. Small Find N.
5. Bronze *cruciform brooch*, detachable side-knob, linear decoration, flat reverse. Small Find G.
6. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragment with two transverse cordons at pin-rest, incised linear and transverse cordons. Old breaks. Small Find H.
7. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragment; groups of incised lines, stamped decoration. Old breaks. Small Find I.
8. Bronze cast *wristclasp*, fragment (Hines Class B 12); grooved decoration and remains of attachment holes. Tinning/silvering. Small Find J.
9. Bronze sheet *wristclasp*, double-slot eye section (Hines Class B7); three attachment holes (two remaining). Small Find K.
10. Bronze *ring*, 43mm diameter. Small Find L.

11. Bronze ring, 48mm diameter. Small Find M.
12. Bronze girdlehanger, lower part, with grooved and stamped decoration. Old break on shank. Small Find F.
13. Bronze girdlehanger, lower part, grooved and stamped decoration, old break on shank. Small Find C.
14. Bronze sheet fittings from wooden bucket (c. 123mm diameter), rim of curved-over sheet fixed by rivets and four folded-over strips to hoop; plain sheet handle, remains of fixings. Small Find E.
15. Bronze mount, triangular; tinned/silvered, material on reverse. ?Early Saxon. (Not illustrated.)

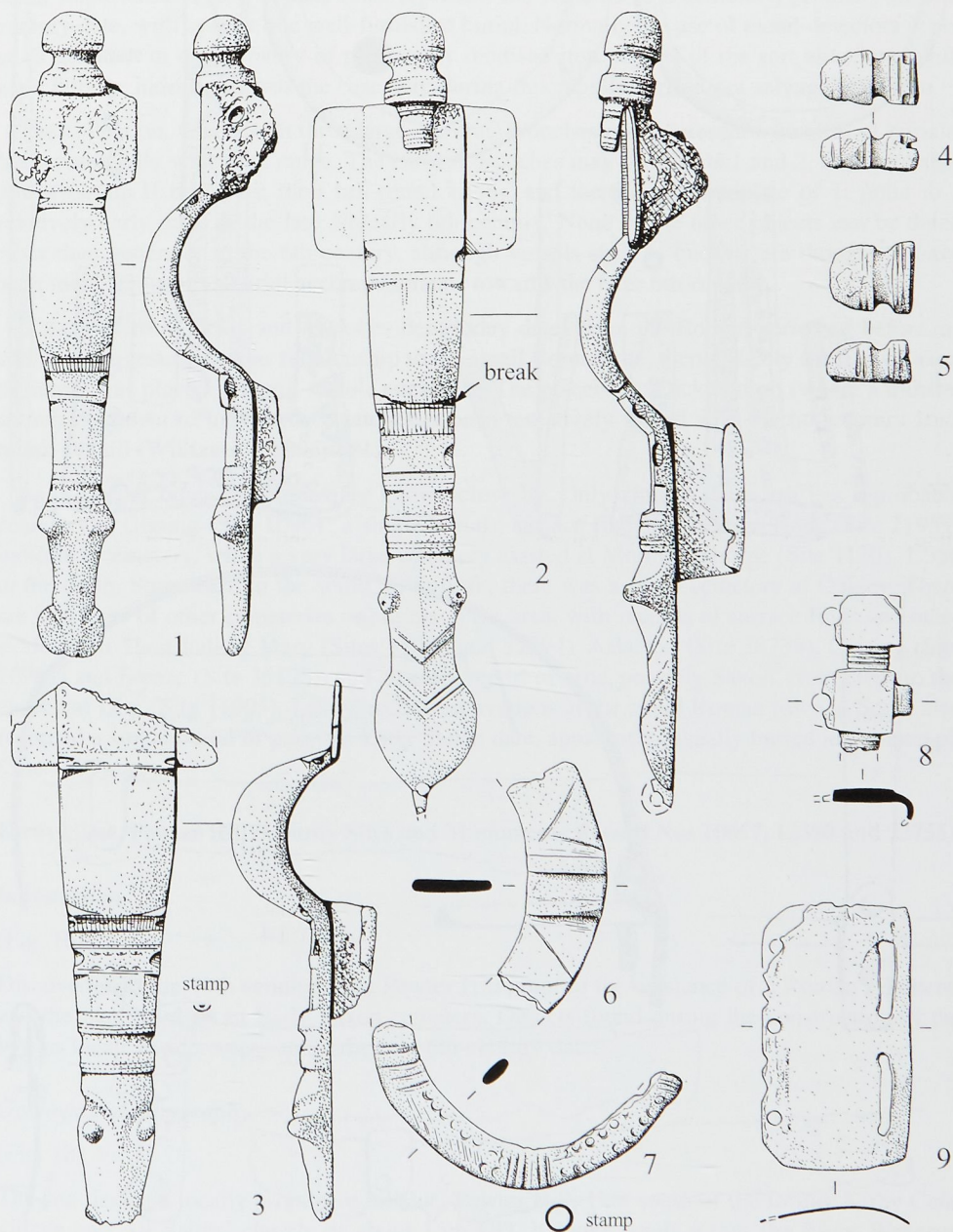


Fig. 2 Site 23345, objects 1-9. Scale 1:1

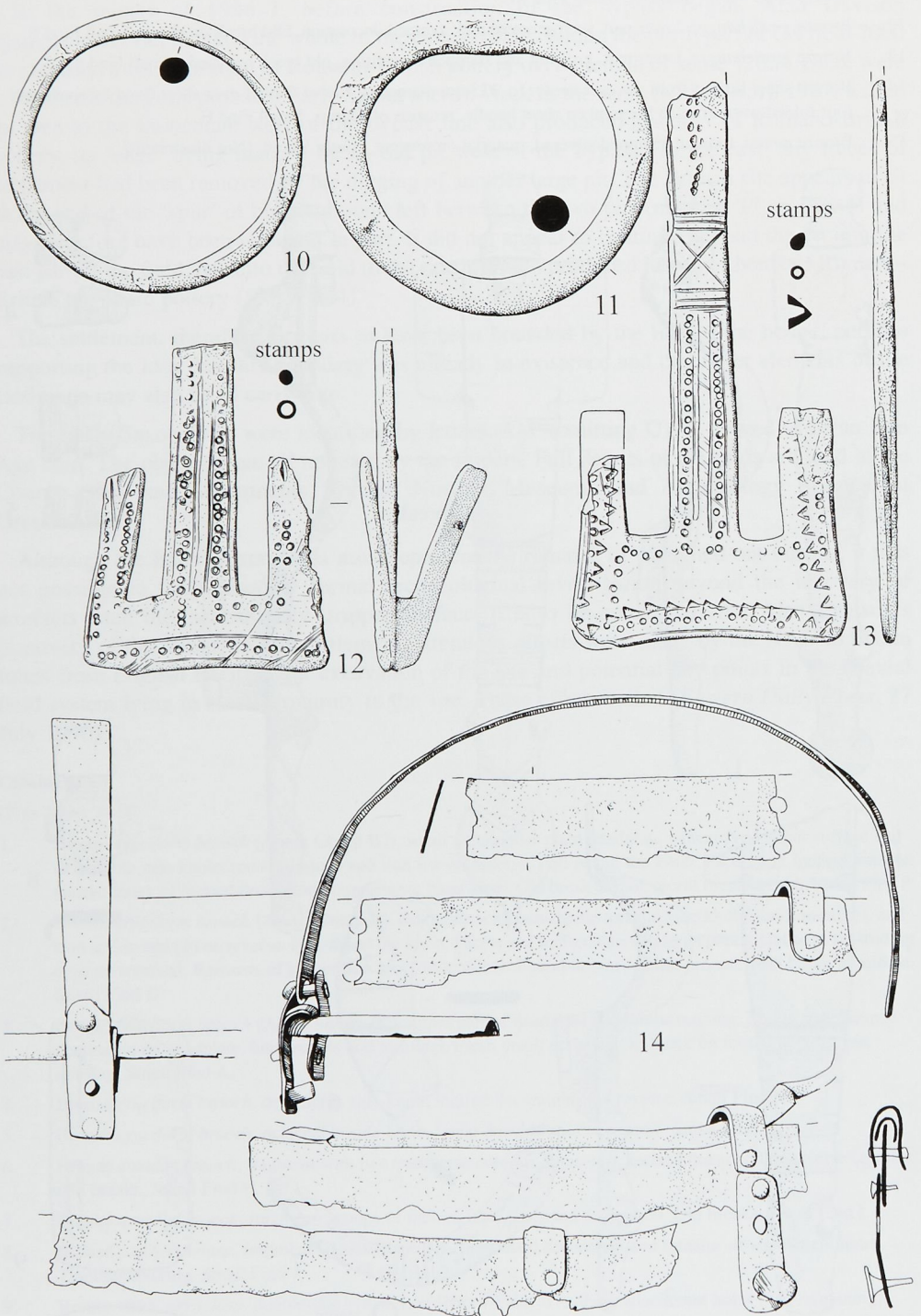


Fig. 3. Site 23345, objects 10-14. Scale 1:1

*Discussion*

The objects are nearly all parts of major female dress accessories (brooches, two fragments of girdle-hangers). Just one other item, the remains of a bronze-bound wooden bucket, was of a type more often found with males than females, but not exclusively so. This last may therefore have been an accompaniment to a male burial; the girdle-hangers indicate at least one woman of some importance. These objects must represent the remains of a cemetery, probably of 6th-century date, with at least one well-furnished burial. Normally the use of metal-detectors is not at all efficient in the recovery of profoundly oxidised iron objects of the sort associated with male burials; indeed this was the case here during this rapidly carried-out salvage operation.

The collection, which with three large 'central' brooches may represent a handful of burials, has a potentially wide date range. The earliest brooches may be objects 1 and 2, both probably Aberg Group II brooches; their full-round knobs, and the narrow headplate of 1, point to a relatively early date, in the late 5th/early 6th century. None of the other objects can be dated other than generally to the 6th century, although vessels such as buckets are thought to have been more frequent as burial accompaniments towards the later 6th century.

If the system of fields and tracks evident today dates from the Roman period or before, as could be suggested by their relationship to the small Roman site, then possibly the Early Saxon cemetery was placed in a still-visible enclosure. The placename Dickleburgh (where a minster church is known to have existed later) has been tentatively linked with the 6th-century Irish monk Dicuill (Williamson 1993, 151).

At least four other cemeteries are known close by. Only 2km to the north lies a probable cemetery at Gissing (Site 10961: a single burial); surface finds at Carleton Rode (Site 21959) indicate a cemetery, while a very large cemetery existed at Morning Thorpe (Site 1120), 12km to the north. Some 6km to the south, in Suffolk, there was a small cemetery at Oakley. There are also hints of other cemeteries or burials in the area, with records of surface finds and other evidence at Tivetshall St Mary (Sites 11008 and 32294), Aslacton (Site 28739), Gissing (Site 10961) and Frenze (Site 35125), and an early report of urns, possibly Saxon, from close to the church at Diss (Site 11005). Lastly, recent excavations at the small Roman town at Scole also recorded a single burial of possible Early Saxon date, apparently casually buried in an open pit (Site 1007).

**Kirby Cane, Pewter Hill (County Sites and Monuments Record Nos 10657, 12380 and 23755)***Introduction*

(Fig. 1b)

Discoveries in the 19th century from Pewter Hill point to the existence of a Roman kiln here, and the likelihood of an Early Saxon cemetery. Objects found during the construction of the bypass locate the cemetery and indicate a 6th-century date.

*Geology and topography*

(Fig. 1b)

The site lies on a locally prominent hillside, Pewter Hill, 1km south of the former Kirby Cane village and All Saints' church, at about 15m OD. It looks south across the River Waveney floodplain, the river itself lying about 2km to the south. Pewter Hill has been the site of various

archaeological discoveries, including finds recovered before 1855 (recorded as County Site 10657).

*Archaeological background*

(Fig. 1b)

Fieldwork and metal-detector survey carried out in 1986–90 along the line of the Kirby Cane bypass at Pewter Hill recovered objects of several periods. These finds include pottery of Iron Age, Roman and Early–Middle Saxon date, and Romano-British coins. The objects also include a number of Early Saxon items whose condition and concentration suggest they represent the remains of a small cemetery.

The probable cemetery site lies on both sides of a minor north-to-south road, but most of the finds come from Site 12380 east of the road, in the south-west corner of the field at TM 3723 9312. Two finds come from Site 23755 immediately west of the minor road.

Fieldwork was carried out by a number of individuals: A. Bond, A. Catchpole, B. Davison, S. Dunthorne, P. Durbridge, A. Hopkins, S. Runting, R. Rushbrooke and F. Welton. B. Davison walked over the field and recovered the Romano-British material.

Site 10657

(Fig. 1b)

In 1855 it was recorded that 'some workmen who many years ago were digging a ditch in a field called Pewter Hill came upon a confused mass of human bones, among which were three or four spearheads, a jewelled buckle and two swords ... Since that time, a kind of oven or kiln of Roman tiles has been found on the same hill ... In some excavation which I made upon the same spot, I turned up a considerable number of the bones and teeth of animals, and several fragments of blue, brown and black Roman pottery' (Chester 1855). In his survey of Dark Age Norfolk, Clark suggested that these were Early Anglo-Saxon burials (Clark 1940, 224–5); they were included in Meaney's *Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* (1964, 177), and are recorded as County Site 10657 but located only as 'Pewter Hill'. The discoveries of Roman date are mentioned in VCH I 1901, 339.

Site 12380

(Fig. 1b)

Since 1977, finds of prehistoric flints and objects of Romano-British, Anglo-Saxon and later date have been recovered by various individuals, the Early Saxon finds pointing to the existence of an inhumation cemetery. Pottery recovered includes five ?Early Saxon and several Ipswich ware sherds. These are recorded as County Site 12380 and were discovered in an area of bypass access during summer 1988, the Early Saxon finds coming from Context 5 at TM 3725 9311 in the south-west corner of the field to the east of the minor north-to-south minor road (Fig. 2b). Finds continued to be made until March 1991.

Site 23755

(Fig. 1b)

Amongst other objects from west of the minor road, two Early Saxon objects were recovered in A. Catchpole's detector survey in 1986–7 during road widening for the Bypass at TM 3723

9317, at the extreme south-east corner of the field (to the west of the minor north-to-south road), *i.e.* at its closest to Site 12380 Context 5. The other objects found were prehistoric flints, Iron Age sherds, Romano-British pottery and building material and a brooch.

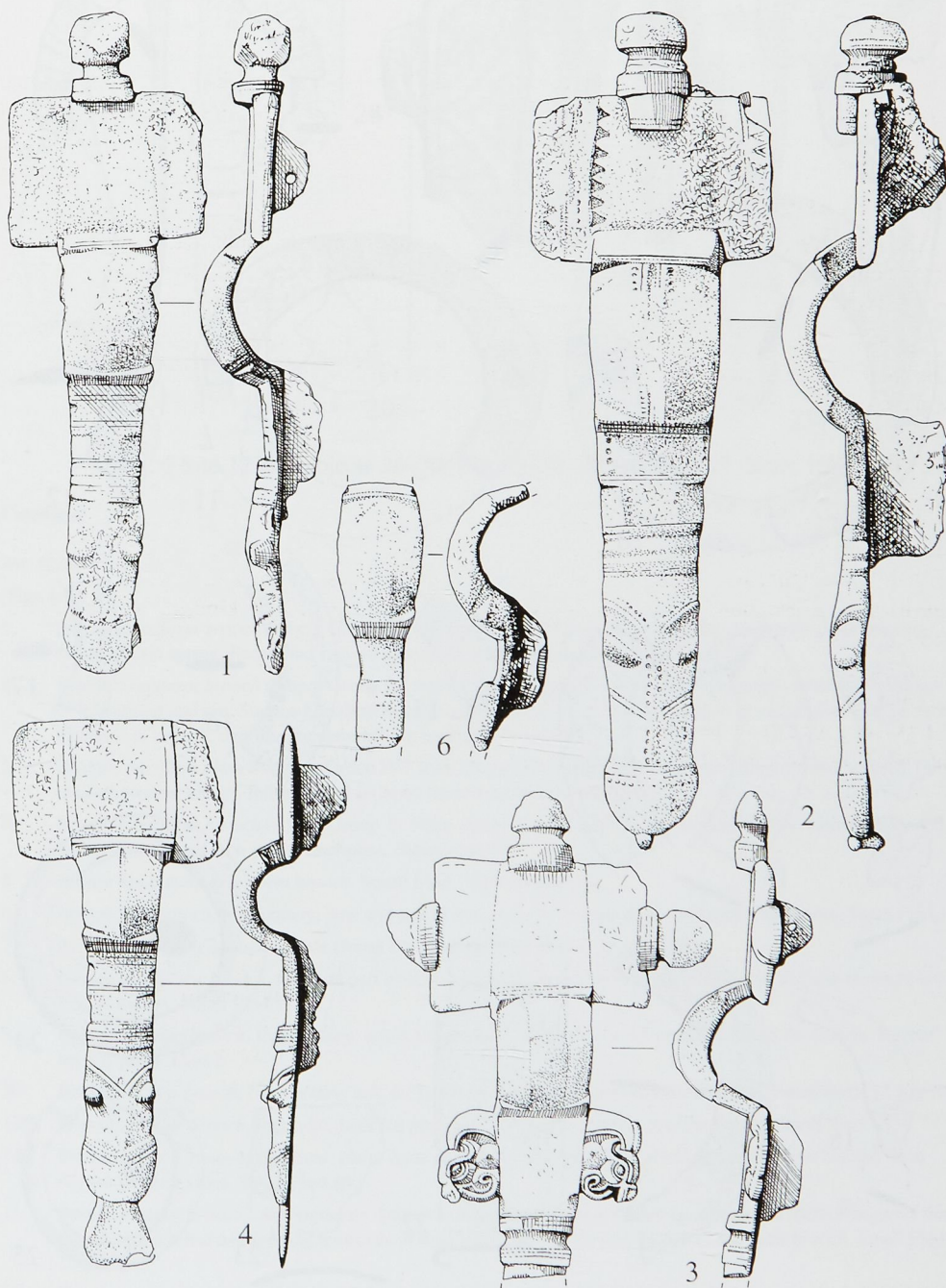


Fig. 4 Site 12380, objects 1-6. Scale 1:1



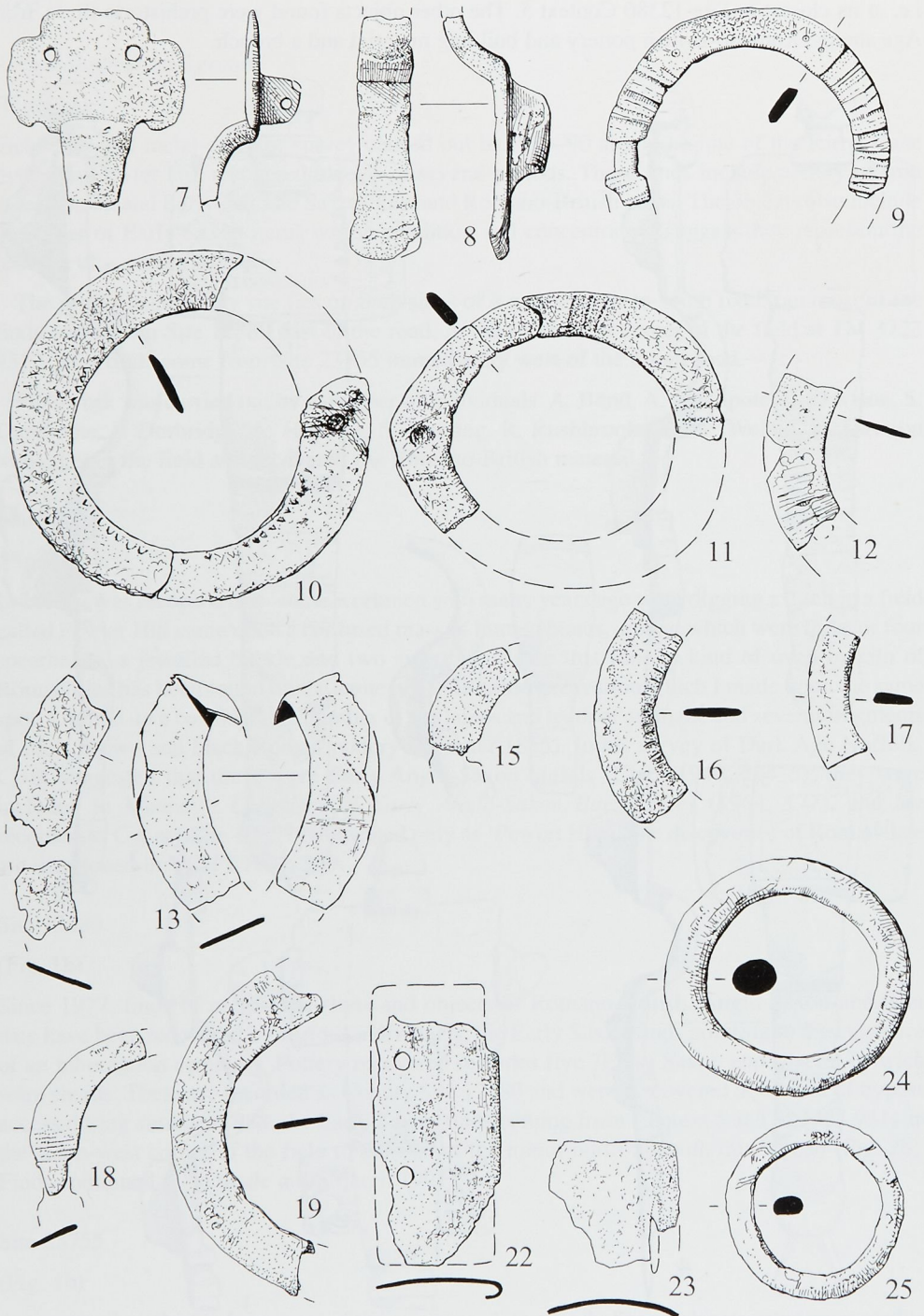


Fig. 5 Site 12380, objects 7-25. Scale 1:1

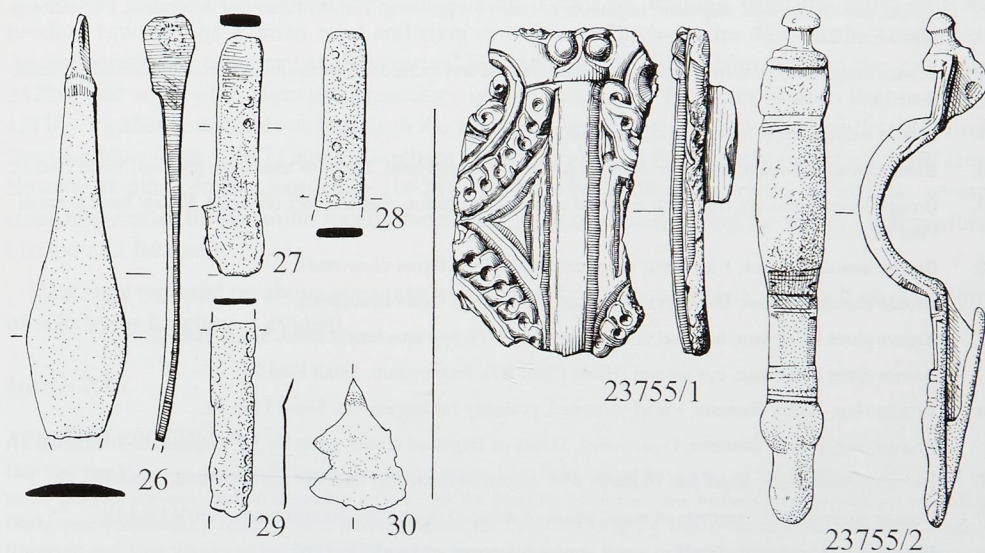


Fig. 6 Site 12380, objects 26–30; Site 23755, objects 1 and 2. Scale 1:1

### Catalogue

#### Site 12380

(Figs 4–6)

1. Bronze *cruciform brooch* (Aberg Group II); faceted integral top-knob, detachable side-knobs (both missing), traces of iron spring. Facets and incised decoration on panels and feet. Small Find 10.
2. Bronze *cruciform brooch* (Aberg Group II), with detachable round knobs (both side-knobs missing). Remains of iron spring and pin. Stamped decoration on headplate, bow and terminal. Remains of suspension loop on foot. Remains of organic deposits (nematode?) on headplate. Small Find 4.
3. Bronze *cruciform brooch* (Aberg Group IV), with integral flat knobs (left-hand knob ?miscast and broken). Foot missing (recent break). Raised panel on bow; lappets in Style I. Small Find 5.
4. Bronze *cruciform brooch* (Aberg Group ?). Plain square-headed type, facets and incised decoration; expanded terminal. Traces of iron pin in catchplate. Small Find 6.
5. Bronze knob from *cruciform brooch*. Small Find 7 (not illustrated).
6. Bronze *long brooch*, fragmentary; bow and part of foot, remains of iron pin in catchplate. Old breaks. Small Find 3.
7. Bronze *small-long brooch* (Leeds Group C), head and part of bow. Small Find 1.
8. Bronze *small-long brooch*, foot and part of bow; traces of incised decoration. Remains of iron pin in catchplate. Recent breaks. Small Find 11.
9. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragmentary; notch for pin-loop, transverse grooves and stamped decoration. Recent breaks. Small Find 2.
10. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragmentary; hole for pin-loop, stamped decoration, trace of textile. Small Finds 12 and 20.
11. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragment; hole for pin-loop. Transverse grooves. Recent breaks. Small Find 13.
12. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragment; plain, trace of hole for pin-loop. Two joining pieces (recent breaks). Iron deposit on both sides. Small Find 14.
13. Bronze *annular brooch*, two fragments. Stamped decoration. Tinning/soldering over part of surface suggests that that this brooch had overlapping terminals. A third fragment (SF 21) may be part of the same brooch. Small Finds 15 and 21.
14. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragment, plain; 6mm in width. Small Find 16 (not illustrated).

15. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragment; beginning of notch for pin-loop. Traces of stamped decoration. Iron staining. Small Find 22.
16. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragment; stamped decoration and incised transverse knicks around inner edge. Small Find 23.
17. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragment; plain. Small Find 29.
18. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragment; beginning of notch for pin-loop. Traces of transverse grooves. Small Find 32.
19. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragment; traces of stamped decoration. Surface very corroded. Recent breaks. Small Find 33.
20. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragments; decorated. Small Find 8 (not illustrated).
21. Bronze *annular brooch*, fragments; decorated. Small Find 9 (not illustrated).
22. Bronze sheet *wristclasp*, hook section (Hines Class B7); two attachment holes. Small Find 17.
23. Bronze sheet *wristclasp*, eye section (Hines Class B7), fragmentary. Small Find 24.
24. Bronze *ring*, 70mm diameter, round-sectioned, probably for suspension. Small Find 30.
25. Bronze *ring*, 5.1mm diameter, D-sectioned. Traces of ?replaced textile, probably for suspension. Small Find 31.
26. Bronze *girdlehanger*, upper part of shank with suspension hole and traces of iron bar. Small Find 18.
27. Bronze *girdlehanger*, fragment of ward; traces of stamped decoration. Recent break. Small Find 19.
28. Bronze *girdlehanger*, fragment of ward; stamped decoration. Small Find 26.
29. Bronze *decorated strip*, stamped decoration along edges. Small Find 27.
30. Bronze *sheet*, traces of tinning/silvering on one face. Small Find 28. (A further brooch was reported by S. Runting but not seen.)

Objects 2–6 and 8 were found fairly close together (Context 5). No features of obvious archaeological significance were evident on the line of the Bypass. The only features identified were associated with modern drainage and ploughing. Generally, numbers of finds recovered (of all periods) reduced significantly to the east of Pewter Hill, where the soils become heavier, predominantly clay.

#### Site 23755

(Fig. 6)

1. Bronze *square-headed brooch*, fragment; part of divided foot. Hines' Group XVI (Hines 1997).
2. Bronze *cruciform brooch*, Group I or II?, with narrow headplate, heavy 'hooded' catchplate and simple horsehead terminal.

#### Discussion

The objects figured here, are, like those from Dickleburgh (above) and without obvious exception, female dress accessories only, but include no beads or other non-metal objects. The collection is therefore probably not fully representative of the several burials that these objects indicate.

Although relatively few in number, the brooches potentially span several decades in date, with two Aberg Group II cruciform types and several fragments of annular brooches, the latter usually seen as potentially running on into the late 6th century. The two objects from Site 23755, to the immediate west, are also brooches. Object 1 is part of a great square-headed brooch, of early–mid 6th century date. This belongs to Hines' Group XVI, a large group of brooches of his Phase 3, which is represented by finds from across East Anglia. Local examples come from Bergh Apton Grave 65 (Green and Rogerson 1978) and Morning Thorpe Grave 214 (Green and Rogerson 1987). Object 2 is typologically the earliest object in the whole group. This is a brooch of Aberg Group I, with narrow headplate with no side-wings, and with a catchplate that runs the whole length of the foot. A date in the 5th century is likely.

The site lies close to probable minor Roman trackways running from the north-east and heading towards the Roman road and river crossing at Ditchingham 4km to the south-west. Another probable cemetery stood overlooking the river at Gillingham 4km to the east (Site 24254) and a possible cremation cemetery on low ground at Earsham 6km to the west (Site 11110). Further cemeteries or burials in the area may be indicated by recent metal-detector finds from Loddon (Site 17977) and Gillingham (Site 24254), and by an early report of 'urns' from Broome Heath, Ditchingham (Site 10628). On the other side of the river, in Suffolk, several small cemeteries lie in similar locally prominent positions overlooking the valley (at Bramford, Flixton and Bungay).

Both sites reported on above appear to have had a Roman component, although no continuity of activity or function is evident.

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our first thanks are to those individuals mentioned above who fieldwalked the routes of the bypasses and carried out metal-detector surveys, their finds being reported to the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service for recording. Finds were examined by Helen Geake, Barbara Green, the late Tony Gregory, David Gurney, Sue Margeson, Andrew Rogerson and John Wymer of the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service. Thanks are owed to Andrew Rogerson for his advice and support. The objects were drawn by the writers except for object 23755/1, which was drawn by Sue White.

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