

A Bronze from Winterfold Heath, Wonersh, and its place in the British Narrow-bladed Palstave sequence

by STUART NEEDHAM

In October of 1975 a Mr Guarieri of south-east London discovered a bronze palstave on Winterfold Heath. It was apparently found in a soil bank flanking a trackway which leads westwards from the lane between Peaslake and Cranleigh, at a point not far from this road (at approximately TQ 05754270). The findspot lies on the crest of the Lower Greensand escarpment which immediately overlooks the low clay belt of the Weald to the south, and the valley of the Wey to the west. The object was submitted to Guildford Museum where it was recorded, but remains in the possession of the finder.

The palstave is characterised by a long slender blade; slightly waisted, with only a moderate expansion at the cutting edge (fig 1:1). The centre line of the blade is reinforced by a medial ridge creating an almost hexagonal cross-section but with four concave sides. Above the blade on each face a straight stop joins with the flanges to produce a square-ended haft slot for receiving a split wooden haft; the cross-section of this haft end is a rather squat 'H' form. In profile the stops protrude a little way beyond the flanges whose slightly convex outlines converge towards a flat-topped butt. The waisting of the blade below the stop has resulted in an angular junction between the flange and blade sides defined by a neat bevel. On one side this bevel is straddled by a semi-circular loop with a hoop of sub-triangular section. Very slight depressions at the base of the blade sides are probably an incidental product caused by forging of the cutting edge; a transverse bevel at this lower end of the blade further attests such preparation for use, and may account for some, though probably not all, of the expansion at the edge.

In general terms the Winterfold palstave falls within Smith's Transitional class, encompassing narrow-bladed forms current during the later Middle Bronze Age in southern Britain (1959, 184). In northern England Transitional palstaves also occur later in hoards of the Wallington tradition, LBA 1 (Burgess 1968a, 7-14). By this stage Wilburton industries in the south were producing more developed, Late palstaves, and Transitional forms had probably been effectively replaced here around 1000 BC. Late palstaves continue the tradition of narrow blades established in the Middle Bronze Age, but are characterised above all by the form of the stop which has an abruptly out-turned underside in profile, perpendicular to the long axis of the axe. The Winterfold palstave with its sloped underside to the stop should then date to the later MBA, before 1000 BC. Certain features of the palstave, however, are unusual in the British series and suggest that this axe may have some further interest.

The origins of indigenous narrow-bladed palstaves are complex but seem to lie largely in two North French styles which have been recognised in small

numbers as imports to Britain, the Breton and Normand types (Briard and Verron 1976, 91–5, 101–4; Burgess 1969; Rowlands 1976, 36–8). In fact the Winterfold palstave with its narrow waisted blade with hexagonal section, its square-ended haft slot, convex flange profile, and a long blade : haft ratio (1.46 : 1), has much in common with the Breton series. Other features however suggest that it should not be classed with the small group of imports discussed by Burgess (1969). The sinuous curved sides, convex for the haft, concave for the blade, which are typical of Breton palstave shapes, are not reproduced on the Winterfold example. Here instead a rather unusual line was taken; a straight, gently flared flange side meets a concave blade side at a crisp angular junction (albeit obtuse) defined by a bevel. The underside of the stop is not as steeply sloped as on Breton examples, and the blade cross-section, although a well-known form, is a minority one (Briard and Verron 1976, 102).

The Winterfold palstave is thus best regarded as representing a local product modelled closely on the style of Breton prototypes. The presence of a loop on the axe is not inconsistent with this view. Briard reports that only 8% of Breton palstaves from Brittany itself are furnished with a loop, usually a 'weak' form readily susceptible to miscasting and damage and quite unlike the Winterfold loop (1965, 112), while some 15% from Anjou appear to be looped (Cordier and Gruet 1975). Many of these looped examples however, have a tendency for curved rather than straight stops, for gently flared rather than waisted blades, and they seem to exhibit a wider range of decorative motifs (eg Briard 1966, 571, fig 3:2; Cordier and Gruet 1975, 180, fig 13:1). These features should relate such axes to the contemporaneous Normand narrow-bladed palstave, dominant further east, but also differentiate them from the Winterfold example. Other British finds of looped palstaves may still be actual Breton imports such as examples from Wilmslow, Cheshire (fig 1:2; Davey and Forster 1975, nos 54–5), Beenham, Berks, and ?Cardiganshire (Burgess 1969, 150, fig 1 c-d; cf Briard 1965, 117 fig 38:6) with their more sinuous sides and steeper stop undersides.

Two local finds from Surrey have some points of similarity with the Winterfold palstave, but are unfortunately in damaged condition so that their exact form is lost. The butt fragment from Farnham (fig 5:1; Guildford Museum S.7103) has a very square-ended septum, the stumps of a broken loop, and a median ridge along the extant part of the blade. Despite its fragmentary state it can be classed with the series of MBA narrow-bladed palstaves under discussion. The second piece is one of a pair found near Bagshot and although rather mutilated is essentially complete (fig 2:2; Phillips 1967, 34). It too has indications of a median ridge along its narrow, apparently waisted, blade. The loop is flat in section unlike that on the Winterfold palstave, but it retains a straight stop and a long blade : haft ratio. The palstave recorded in association is very probably that illustrated (fig 2:1) although this had lost its provenance at one stage and become attributed to the Crooksbury Hill hoard (Phillips 1967, 29; Guildford Museum S.7102). This narrow-bladed palstave has a more curved stop, and the stumps of a broken loop, and bears the remains of a converging three-rib, or trident, motif on one blade face. The two in association would neatly illustrate two quite distinct variants within the Transitional palstave series; they should belong to the Penard phase, MBA 3. The former may owe much to Breton progenitors; the latter has more affinity with Normand styles.

A plausible case can be made for local metalworkers being directly exposed

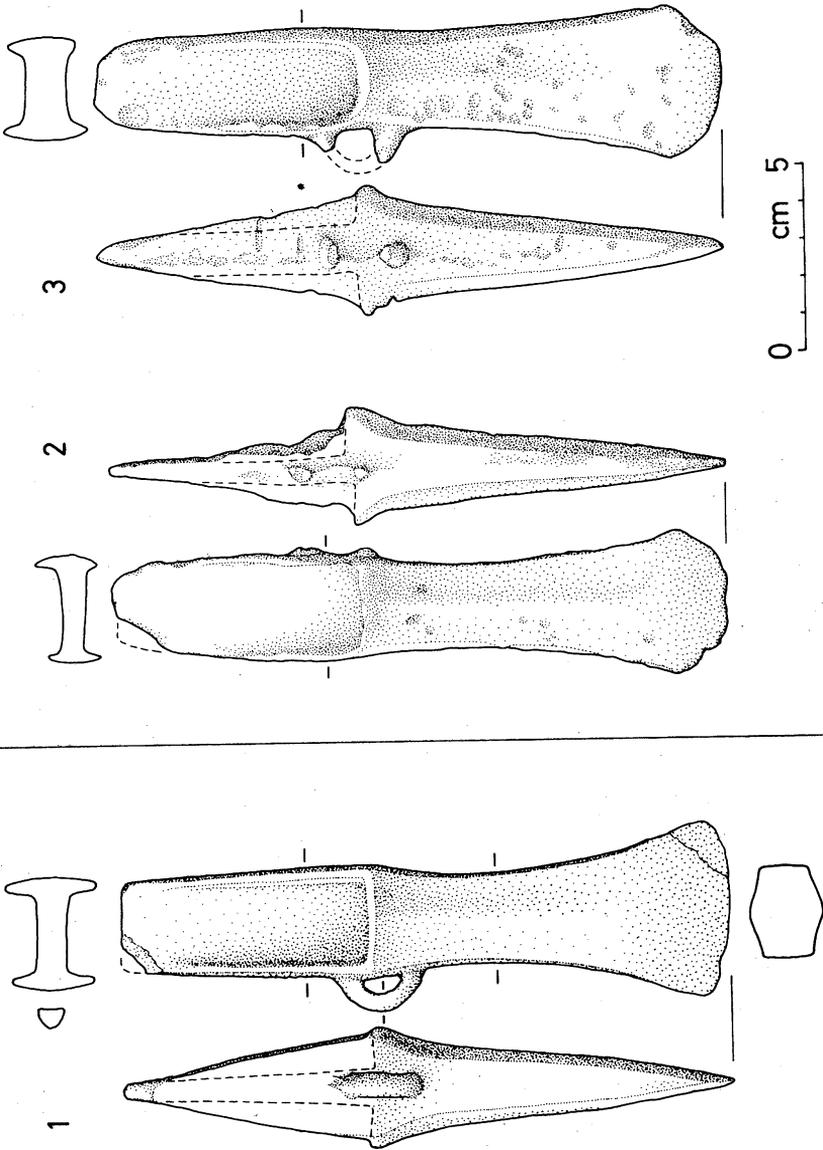


Fig 1 Narrow-bladed palstaves: 1 Winterfold Heath, Surrey 2-3 Wilmslow hoard, Cheshire

to North French influences on the basis of two further Surrey finds which seem to represent actual imports — one from either of the key areas indicated. A Breton palstave has been attributed to Sutton, although unfortunately no find circumstances are known (Hunterian Museum, Glasgow, B.1914.281). The piece is unlooped (fig 2:3) and typical in all features except its angled stop, which however is not unknown on the type. In contrast, a palstave found 1895 in the River Wey at Weybridge (Gardner 1912, 130, pl 2), belongs to the Normand narrow-bladed class to judge from its curved stop, gently flared and concave sided blade, and its convex flange profiles interrupted only at the base of the stop (fig 3:1; cf Briard and Verron 1976, 94, fig 3 left). A small pendant triangular hollow on one blade face is flanked by the merest traces of an enclosing 'V' rib.

What then of the date of these imports to Britain? Breton palstaves are dated largely to Bronze Moyen 3 in Brittany, equivalent to British MBA 2, or the Taunton-Barton Bendish phase (Briard and Verron 1976, 103-4; Burgess 1969, 151). The narrow-bladed Normand style in question belongs to a similar phase, but in Normandy as in Britain, and in contrast to Brittany, this general form is secondary to predominant broad-bladed palstaves. Other British examples of Normand palstaves are mainly confined to the south coast where they occur in hoards dated to the Taunton-Barton Bendish phase, MBA 2, which provides a *terminus ante quem* for their production in France (Rowlands 1976, 37-8, pl 6:19-26; pl 7:3-4, etc). The Winterfold palstave, seemingly inspired by imported Breton implements, is best dated to MBA 2 or early MBA 3, perhaps c1300-1100 BC.

One of the perennial problems of bronze metalwork chronologies, especially when inter-regional comparisons are being made, is the extent to which the industrial 'phases' defined might overlap, and whether individual types have extended currencies. Any overlap will not necessarily show in the hoard record, especially if the hoard contents represent particular industrial groups operating in distinct regions. Two recent discoveries on the sea-bed just off the British coast at Moor Sand, Salcombe, Devon (Muckleroy and Baker 1979), and Langdon Bay, Dover, Kent (Coombs 1975) are of relevance to the present topic. Both comprise important groups of French bronze implements which seem likely to be parts of the cargoes of boats shipwrecked in the Bronze Age. The weapons from these two deposits can be attributed to North French Bronze Final I, equivalent to central European Bronze D — Hallstatt A, and if found in British land associations, would be expected in Penard contexts, MBA 3, or c1200-1000 BC (Burgess 1976, 74 — for relative chronologies). Both however also contain palstaves closely related to the types discussed here, and generally dated to a slightly earlier horizon.

Some of the palstaves in the Langdon Bay group belong to the French Rosnoën type, a heavy narrow-bladed form with a stout midrib on the blade, which was developed in northern France during Bronze Final I (Briard and Verron 1976, 105-8; Coombs 1975, fig 1:8), and they are thus contemporary with the weaponry. Others, however, seem to belong to Normand types (eg Coombs 1975, fig 1:5), traditionally assigned to Bronze Moyen 3. In the Choisy-le-Roi hoard three Normand palstaves of the broad-bladed variant are associated with swords datable to Bronze Final 1, although Mohen regards them as 'degenerate' examples representing the tail end of the class's production (1977,

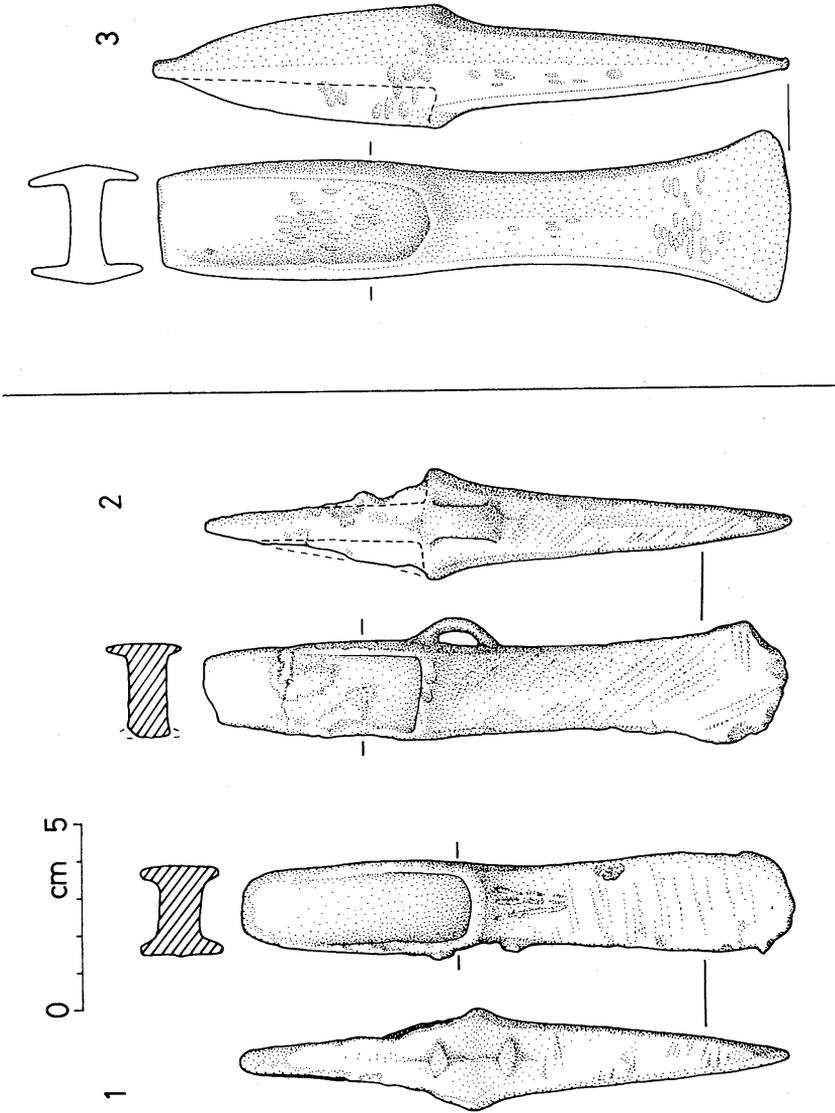


Fig 2 Surrey narrow-bladed palstaves: 1-2 Bagshot 3 Sutton

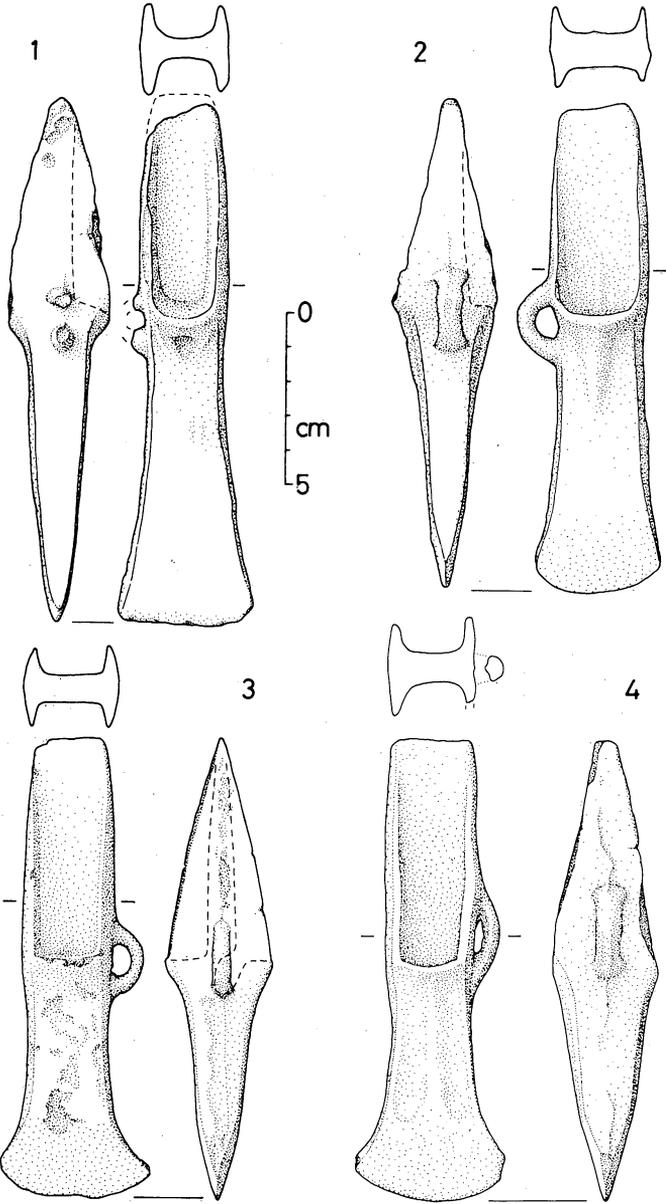


Fig 3 Surrey narrow-bladed palstaves: 1 River Wey, Weybridge 2 Island Barn Farm, Molesey 3 Weybridge 4 Glebe House, Chiddingfold

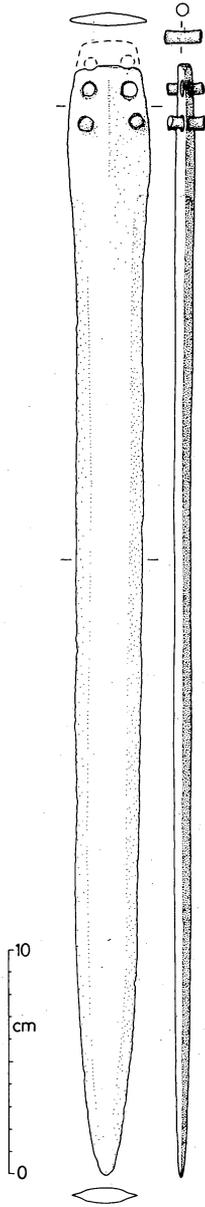


Fig 4 Rosnoën type sword from West Heath, Limpsfield, Surrey

91). The two palstaves from Moor Sand have been identified as Breton axes (Muckleroy and Baker 1979, 200–2). In fact this appears to be a simplification. One example (MS 78 1) may indeed be a classic Breton palstave, but the second (MS 78 3) has certain features which seem to deviate from this form, in particular a tendency for straighter rather than sinuous sides, and a much more prominent midrib suggest a development towards the later Rosnoën type. Small palstaves such as this piece, although unusual, are not unknown in Rosnoën period contexts (cf Briard 1965, 156, fig 50:4).

There may then be some conflation of material in terms of the conventional chronologies in both the Moor Sand and Langdon Bay groups. The time capsules represented by these finds, if really shipwrecked cargoes, could on this evidence be regarded as falling within a period of overlap, or transition between traditions. With uncertainty surrounding the full complement of bronzes originally deposited, however, caution is advisable, for old, redundant, implements might have been readily included in shiploads destined for foreign parts.

The Langdon Bay find has further significance for Surrey in containing a number of Rosnoën type swords, of which a fine example comes from West Heath, Limpsfield (fig 4; Phillips 1966). This is one of very few known British examples, mainly in fact Thames finds, and generally acknowledged to originate in France where they are relatively common (Burgess 1968b, 11, fig 7; 1976, 72). The Langdon Bay Rosnoën swords (Coombs 1975, 194) can now be seen to support this view, presumably representing examples in transit to Britain.

The Limpsfield sword then should be contemporary with the main currency of indigenous Transitional palstaves in the Penard phase, MBA 3. In addition to the Bagshot pair already mentioned there are a small number of local examples which increase the range of specific styles represented. An example from Weybridge (fig 3:3; Leicester Museum) has a plain blade, while that from Island Barn Farm, Molesey, has a short tapering midrib descending from below the stop (fig 3:2; Gardner 1912, 130, pl II:2). A Transitional palstave from Glebe House garden, Chiddingfold (fig 3:4; Haslemere Museum 64025 — OS Records SU93 NE20) has a rather longer midrib on a very thick blade whose corners are also emphasized by ribs. The axe has a narrow septum almost square ended, and its loop keeps close to the body. This piece seems a little exceptional amongst the British series and it may have affinities with some northern French implements, although it is difficult to point to specific parallels in the published literature.

Two remaining local Transitional palstaves come from hoards, found respectively on Hankley Common, Elstead (fig 5:2; Oakley, et al 1939, 163, pl XIV:1–3) and Crooksbury Hill, Seale (fig 5:4; Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology; Lasham 1895, 152). Both hoards are datable to the Ewart Park phase, LBA 2–3, on the basis of south-eastern socketed axes contained therein, and should not have been deposited before the 9th century BC, but at least two other MBA palstaves were apparently found in the Crooksbury association. These give an unusually late date of deposition for Transitional palstaves, and could conceivably indicate their usage well into the Late Bronze Age locally. It is noteworthy in this context that both examples have very short blades, quite possibly much reduced by repeated sharpening over a long period of time. A century or more of such use seems implausibly long, and it may in

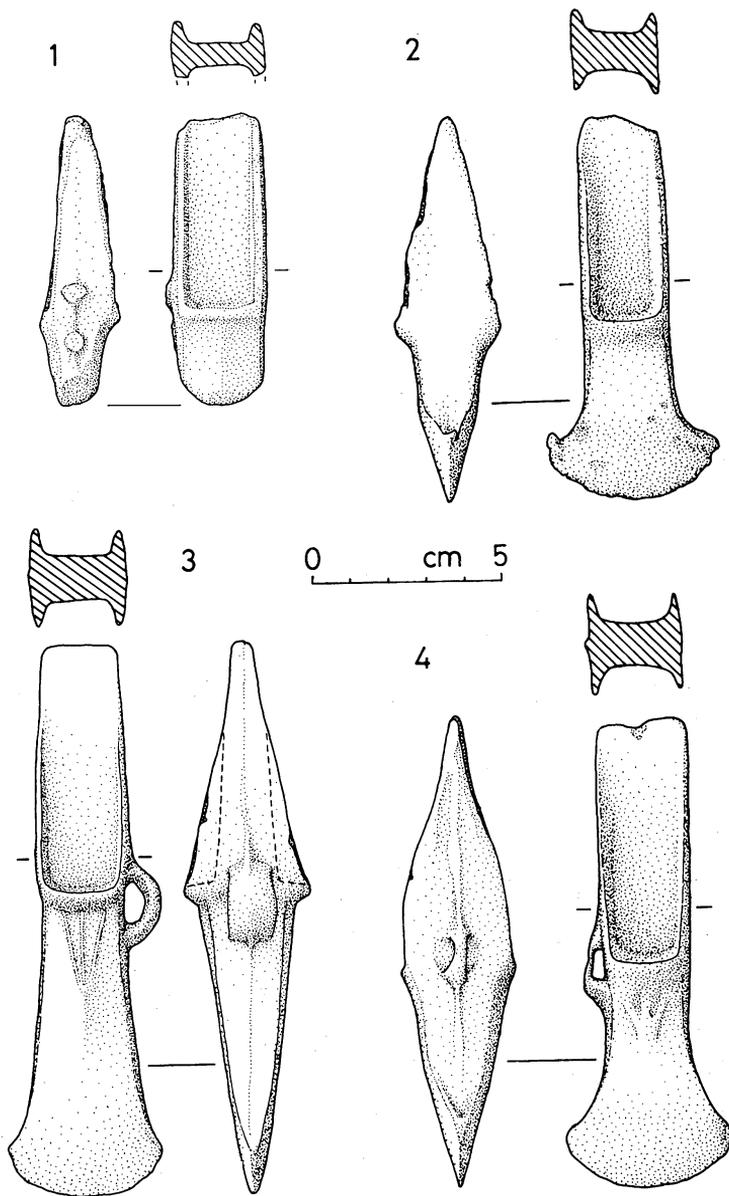


Fig 5 Surrey narrow-bladed palstaves: 1 Farnham 2 Hankley Common hoard, Elstead
3 Stoke Road hoard, Guildford 4 Crooksbury Hill hoard, Seale

fact be better to view them as items discovered in the Late Bronze Age, having been buried or lost some time earlier.

The Late type of palstave, the form normally associated with LBA hoards, is represented in Surrey by a fine example from Stoke Road, Guildford, with a trident motif decorating the blade (fig 5:3). This axe was very probably associated with a socketed axe of the plain south-eastern variety (Lasham 1893, 250), and the pair are most likely to have been deposited in the 9th or 8th centuries BC. By this date palstaves were uncommon in most parts of the country having been almost completely replaced by socketed axes, and the Guildford piece fittingly terminates a local sequence of narrow-bladed forms which have their origins in a series of French imports, such as the River Wey and Sutton examples, and early derived native products, as illustrated by the Winterfold palstave.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to Felix Holling of Guildford Museum who brought the Winterfold palstave to my attention, and established the details of discovery. Thanks are also due to the curators of other museums, mainly in Surrey, who have allowed me to study relevant material. Margaret Ehrenberg and Brendan O'Connor kindly read and commented on an earlier draft of this paper, which also benefitted through discussion with David Coombs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Briard, J. 1965 *Les dépôts Bretons et l'Age du Bronze Atlantique*. Rennes
 ——— 1966 'Nouveaux dépôts de haches à talon découverts en Bretagne.' *Bull Soc Préhist Française* 63, 565–82
- Briard, J. and Verron, G. 1976 *Typologie des objets de l'Age du Bronze en France: fasc III: haches (I)*. Paris
- Burgess, C.B. 1968a *Bronze Age metalwork in Northern England 1000–700 BC*.
 ——— 1968b 'The Later Bronze Age in the British Isles and north-western France.' *Archaeol J* 125, 1–45
 ——— 1969 'Breton palstaves from the British Isles.' *Archaeol J* 126, 149–53
 ——— 1976 'The Gwithian mould and the forerunners of South Welsh axes.' In Burgess, C.B. and Miket, R., eds 1976 *Settlement and economy in the third and second millennia BC*. (BAR 33) 69–79
- Coombs, D. 1975 'The Dover Harbour bronze find — a Bronze Age wreck?' *Archaeologia Atlantica* 1, 193–5
- Cordier, G. and Gruet, M. 1975 'L'Age du Bronze et le premier Age du Fer en Anjou.' *Gallia Préhistoire* 18, 157–287
- Davey, P.J. and Forster, E. 1975 *Bronze Age metalwork from Lancashire and Cheshire*. (Univ of Liverpool, Dept of Prehist Archaeol Worknotes 1)
- Gardner, E. 1912 'Some prehistoric and Saxon antiquities found in the neighbourhood of Weybridge.' *SyAC* 25, 129–35
- Lasham, F. 1893 'Neolithic and Bronze Age man in West Surrey.' *SyAC* 11, 244–51

- Lasham, F. 1895 'Camps, earthworks, tumuli, etc. in West Surrey.' *SyAC* 12, 145-56
- Mohen, J.P. 1977 *L'Age du Bronze dans la région de Paris: catalogue synthétique des collections conservées au Musée des Antiquités Nationales*. Paris
- Muckleroy, K. and Baker, P. 1979 'The Bronze Age site off Moor Sand, near Salcombe, Devon: an interim report on the 1978 season.' *International J of Nautical Archaeol* 8, 189-210
- Oakley, K.P., Rankine, W.F. and Lowther, A.W.G. 1939 *A survey of the prehistory of the Farnham district*. (SyAS — special volume)
- Phillips, W. 1966 'Bronze sword from Limpsfield.' *SyAC* 63, 168-9
- _____ 1967 'Bronze Age metal objects in Surrey.' *SyAC* 64, 1-34
- Rowlands, M.J. 1976 *The production and distribution of metalwork in the Middle Bronze Age in Southern Britain*. (BAR 31)
- Smith, M.A. 1959 'Some Somerset hoards and their place in the Bronze Age of Southern Britain.' *Proc Prehist Soc* 25, 144-87