

An Iron Age Brooch From Seymour's Nursery, Ewell

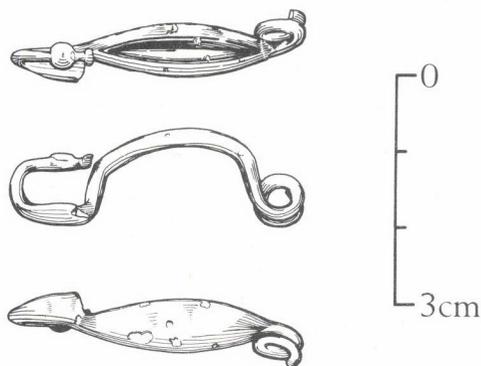
The bronze fibula (fig 1) forms part of a small collection of objects recovered by Mr Kevin Heasman during the summer of 1978, following the removal of topsoil from a section of Seymour's Nursery, Ewell (TQ 224 624).¹ The part of the nursery concerned is situated to the east of the Ewell by-pass (A24) and north of Cheam Road (A232), and lies just below the 46m contour at the junction of the Thanet sand outcrop with the Upper Chalk of the North Downs. Little has been recorded from the immediate area of the findspot hitherto, although ten 'shafts' of Roman date were discovered in the middle of the last century during chalk quarrying in the grounds of Pit House 200 metres to the southwest,² while sherds of 'Iron Age and Roman' pottery were found during post-war building work in Howard Avenue a similar distance to the north-east.³

Measuring 39mm in length, and possessing a pleasant green patina, the fibula has a slim, low, cast bow ornamented with vesica- or almond-shaped decoration, a short catch-plate and a snouted horizontal foot which meets the bow straight on. The spring mechanism is much damaged, and only one and a half coils of the original four coil spring with external chord survive, while the pin is missing.

Despite the damage done to the spring mechanism, the brooch probably belongs to a small but nonetheless distinctive insular group of developed La Tène I fibulae first recognised by Hodson,⁴ and characterized by a 'non-functional skeuomorphic spring', short catch-plate, horizontal foot profile and vesica decoration on a broad low bow. Probably datable to the 4th-3rd centuries B.C., the distribution of this group is largely restricted to the Thames valley, although outliers have been found as far afield as Barrington, Cambridgeshire,⁵ Bognor Regis, Sussex,⁶ and more recently on an undisclosed site 'in Norfolk'.⁷

The slenderness of the bow of the Ewell example is a slightly variant feature – others of the group tending to be broader – although it finds a parallel in the attenuated form of the bow on the fibula from Woodeaton, Oxfordshire.⁸ Excluding the Surrey reaches of the Thames, it is one of only five pre-Belgic fibulae from the County at present known to the writer – the others being the dubiously-authenticated Hallstatt 'leech' brooch from Farnham,⁹ an incomplete La Tène I fibula from Farley Heath, Albury,¹⁰ a recently re-discovered La Tène I fibula from Merrow near Guildford,¹¹ and a La Tène II fibula from Warlingham.¹² The few other pieces of early Iron Age metalwork from the County have been conveniently listed in Bishop's 1971 paper,¹³ with the bronze (?) harness mount lately found in Burpham the only major addition.¹⁴

The presence of such a brooch in Ewell is of special interest, as a number of local sites have produced pottery of early Iron Age type. In particular, 'Angular' pottery of arguably early La Tène date (Bishop's Period 2)¹⁵ with which the fibula may be contemporary has been found at Purberry Shot¹⁶ and at the rear of the King William IV Public House¹⁷ in the village itself, and at several other sites in the vicinity as well, notably Nonsuch Park¹⁸ and 'The Looe'.¹⁹ However, Barrett has suggested in a recent appraisal that the 'Angular Horizon' includes 'a wide group of chronologically diverse material' which '... cannot be used as a clear chronological horizon',²⁰ and in the absence of a full re-assessment of this material it is not here possible to press the case for contemporaneity between brooch and pottery.



La Tène I brooch from Seymour's Nursery, Ewell. Scale 1:1.

Setting such detailed problems of chronology aside, it seems clear, in the light of the evidence supplied by recent aerial photography and ground surveys,²¹ that the density of late prehistoric settlement in the lowland zone has been consistently underestimated in the past. Although sparse in comparison with the mass of Roman material from the village, the numbers of finds of Iron Age date coming to light in and around Ewell – to which the subject of this note can now be added – suggest that comparable understatement has also been the case here. Future work, in the form of fieldwork, excavation and the re-examination of old and privately-owned finds will perhaps help to redress the balance still further.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOOTNOTES

1. As reported in Bird, D G, *et al.* (eds) 'Archaeology in Surrey 1976-78' *SyAC* 72 (1980), 232. Other finds include a probably Romano-British decorative bronze stud in the form of a stylised human face, together with several Roman coins. The brooch and the coins remain with the finder.
2. Diamond, H W, 'Account of wells or pits, containing Roman remains, discovered at Ewell in Surrey', *Archaeologia*, 32 (1847), 451-455; Warne, C, in *Proc Soc Antiq London*, New Series, 1 (1861), 309-313. However, Diamond (*ibid* 455) mentions obtaining Roman coins from workmen employed on the 'adjoining farm', and that Sir George Glyn's father had a large collection of Roman coins which had been found 'in the immediate neighbourhood'. In addition, the large quantity of human bones found 'mixed with accoutrements' beneath a covering mound on the 'adjoining farm' in c. 1832 (*ibid* 455) may have been of Saxon date.
3. Information kindly supplied by Tom Walls.
4. Hodson, F R, 'Three Iron Age brooches from Hammersmith' in Sieveking, G de G (ed) *Prehistoric and Roman studies* (British Museum 1971), 50-57.
5. Fox, C, *The archaeology of the Cambridge region* (Cambridge 1923), 75, Pl. 18 no 3.
6. Pitts, M, 'A La Tène I brooch from Bognor Regis', *Sussex Archaeol Coll*, 117 (1979), 258 and Fig. 6.
7. Stanley Gibbons Currency List, 36 (October 1979), xi, Lot 244. I am indebted to Clive Hughes for drawing my attention to this reference.
8. Harding, D W, *The Iron Age in the upper Thames Basin* (Oxford 1972), Pl. 74 E. Although morphologically distinct,

- a fibula from Hammersmith shares the slimness of bow noted on the examples from Ewell and Woodeaton (Hodson *op. cit.* in note 4, 54, Pl. 13 B).
9. Frere, S S, 'Bronze objects from Farnham', *SyAC*, **49** (1946), 103-104.
 10. Discovered during Martin Tupper's explorations on Farley Heath (although not mentioned by him in *Farley Heath: a record of its Roman remains* (Guildford 1850)), this brooch was presented to the British Museum (Accession Number 53.4 - 19.69) by H J Drummond in April 1853 (information kindly supplied by Valerie Rigby and Stuart Needham). Apart from featuring in Cyril Fox's 1927 corpus (Fox, C 'A La Tene I brooch from Wales: with notes on the typology and distribution of these brooches in Britain', *Archaeol Camb*, **82** (1927), 110 No. 55), it has never been fully published. It measures 46mm in length, and has a simple flattened, 'wire' bow and a short catch-plate, although the foot is missing, having been broken off at the catch-plate. Only two coils of a presumably four coil skeuomorphic spring with external chord survive, enclosing part of an iron rod on which the pin originally pivoted, although the pin itself is now missing.
 11. Originally found in 1933, this brooch remained in the finder's family until the death of Mrs H Cheesman in August 1980, following which it was deposited with Guildford Museum (RB 3226) by her daughter Miss H M Cheesman (information kindly supplied by Matthew Alexander and Miss Cheesman). Measuring 35mm in length, the brooch has a high, cast bow with a central, possibly cabled, line extending along it, a short catch-plate, and an almost horizontal foot which meets the bow straight on. The foot terminal has a circular cupped recess for a coral, stone or possibly amber stud. Only two coils of an original four coil spring with external chord survive, while the pin is missing.
 12. Dunning, G C, (in Wheeler, R E M, & T V, *Report on the excavation of the prehistoric, Roman and post-Roman site in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire* (Oxford 1932), 69-71) cites a drawing in *Primaeval antiquities*, p 19, Society of Antiquaries.
 13. Bishop, M W, 'The non-Belgic Iron Age in Surrey', *SyAC*, **68** (1971), 1-30.
 14. Information kindly supplied by Matthew Alexander.
 15. Bishop, *op cit*, in note 12, 15-18.
 16. Lowther, A W G, 'Excavation at Purberry Shot Ewell, Surrey', *SyAC*, **50** (1946-7), 9-46.
 17. Excavations directed by Roger Caws and Martin Morris. Information kindly supplied by Dick Temple.
 18. Lowther, A W G, 'Iron Age pottery from sites at Ewell and Ashtead', *SyAC*, **50** (1946-7), 139-141, 143.
 19. Bird, *et al loc cit* in note 1, 232.
 20. Barrett, J C, 'The early pre-Roman Iron Age pottery' in Hedges, J, and Buckley, D, 'Excavations at a Neolithic causewayed enclosure, Orsett, Essex, 1975', *Proc Prehist Soc*, **44** (1978), 286.
 21. Aerial photographic surveys include those published for the upper and middle Thames valley, of which Longley, D, 'The archaeological implications of gravel extraction in north-west Surrey' Res Vol *SyAS* **3** (1976), 1-35 is of the most immediate relevance; ground surveys include such as those by Cunliffe, B W, ('Chalton Hants.: the evolution of a landscape', *Antiq J*, **53** (1973), 173-190), and Richards, J C, (*The archaeology of the Berkshire Downs: an introductory survey* (Reading 1978)).

JONATHAN COTTON