

A Romano-British priestly head-dress from Farley Heath

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The copper-alloy head-dress from Farley Heath (fig 1) was passed to Surrey Archaeological Society in 1972 by the Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities at the British Museum, and deposited at Guildford Museum. It was reportedly found c1965 at a point some 6m south of the temple building and at a depth of 25-30cm (Guildford Museum accession register, AS 333; Atkins 1983, no D49).¹ The head-dress is illustrated in a recent paper on Roman Surrey (Bird 1987, fig 7.17) and is briefly described in the discussion of a group of similar head-dresses from another Surrey temple at Wanborough (Bird 1994, 93-4), but has not previously been published in detail.

Description

The central element of the head-dress is a small round cap bearing a finial in the shape of a double knob. Four equally-spaced chains originally hung from the cap and would have been linked round the wearer's brow by further chains or bands, to which they were joined by a looped fitting (fig 2). Apart from some shallow pitting on the cap, the surviving portions of the head-dress are in good condition.

The cap and its finial (fig 3) were cast in one piece; the maximum diameter is 51mm and the overall height 42mm. There is a fine incised line round the smaller upper knob, and a wider, rather unevenly incised line round the upper rim of the cap. The cap has three plain integral loops, one of which is now broken; they are set at right angles to each other and carried the chains. No loop is present in the fourth position, and a hole has been bored through the rim to serve in its place. It is likely that a fourth loop broke off in antiquity and was replaced by the hole; there are no obvious traces of damage or filing on the rim, but it is slightly bevelled at this point, as it is beside the three surviving loops (fig 3, right). The object is not quite symmetrical, and the hollowed interior retains the rough surface left by the casting process.

The surviving lengths of chain are all composed of round butt-ended links made from drawn wire; the wire varies in thickness even on single links. The links themselves vary between 9 and 12mm in diameter. The length of chain between the cap and the surviving looped fitting consists of thirteen links; the length from the hole in the rim consists of six links which are not securely in place; and the other complete ring carries one link plus a separate length of fifteen links now attached by thread. Few of the individual links are very tightly closed.

The looped junction fitting is also a single casting, but in this case the underside has clearly been filed smooth (fig 4). Its overall length is 46mm, the height 34mm. The top has a ring which carries the other end of the chain from the cap; the sides have larger D-shaped loops to carry chains or, more probably, bands round the brow of the wearer.

Technologically, the Farley Heath head-dress is close to Wanborough nos 6 and 7, where the cap and finial were similarly cast in one piece. With these two, the cap and finial were respectively of (leaded) bronze and bronze, while the chains of no 6 were of brass.² Although no analysis has been carried out on the Farley Heath head-dress, its appearance suggests a similar use of different copper alloys for the components: the cap and finial are heavy, with a dull and rather leaden sheen, while the wire used for the chains is distinctly more brassy in appearance.

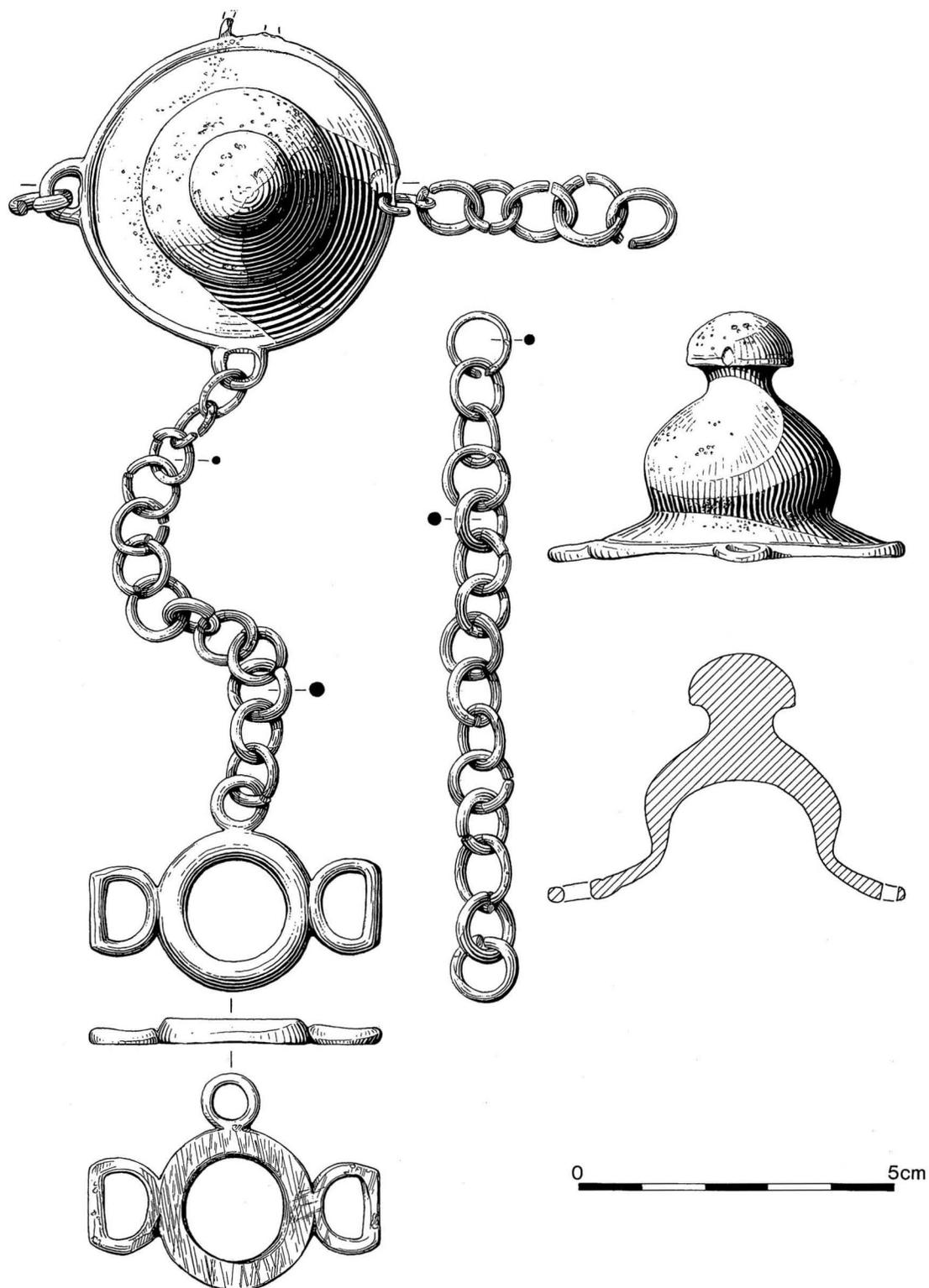


Fig 1 Farley Heath. The copper alloy head-dress (1:1). *Drawn by David Williams*

Discussion

The Farley Heath head-dress is close in general style to the five head-dresses from Wanborough, Surrey (Bird 1994, nos 5-9), all of which have a central cap from which four chains originally hung, but there is considerable variety in the details. Wanborough nos 6 and 7 have a wheel terminal instead of the heavy knob finial of the Farley Heath example, but share the butt-ended links; no 8 also has butt-ended links, but with a wheel terminal attached to a separate brass cap; no 5 has a smaller and more ornamental cap with loop-in-loop chains; while no 9 now lacks its original attached terminal and all but one distorted link of its chains. Similar small loops to those holding the chains at the edge of the Farley Heath cap are present on Wanborough nos 5 and 9, but nos 6 and 8 have simple holes bored through the rim; the rim of no 7 is missing altogether.

The double-knob finial on the Farley Heath cap has no exact parallel on other known head-dresses, the closest being the moulded spike set on the central disc of the bronze-strip crown from Hockwold-cum-Wilton, Norfolk (Henig 1984, fig 59). Henig notes the similarity of the Hockwold spike to the *apex* on the traditional head-dress of the Roman *Flamen* (1984, 137), and this may be an instance of the adaptation of a Roman ritual feature to Romano-Celtic usage.

A more significant difference from the Wanborough pieces is indicated by the looped junction fitting on the Farley Heath head-dress. This is replaced on Wanborough no 6 by plain rings and on no 5, in keeping with its more ornamental style, by decorated rings carrying additional small round loops; the chains on no 8 were apparently simply linked together; and no junction arrangement survives for nos 7 or 9. While Wanborough nos 5, 6 and 8 clearly had chains round the brow, the shape of the fitting on the Farley Heath piece indicates that a different element was used here; a hooked band of sheet bronze is the most likely, though a strap of leather, a ribbon or a wreath of leaves³ are possible alternatives.

The two most complete of the Wanborough head-dresses, nos 5 and 6, have an additional longer chain hanging down from opposed junction rings, presumably from over the ears on to the breast; that on no 5 has a leaf-shaped pendant attached at the centre. A piece of chain 26 links long indicates that this chain was also present on no 8. The likely arrangement of these head-dresses in use is shown on Bird 1994, pl 17, reflecting the image on a silver Atrebatian coin from Petersfield which shows a horned figure, perhaps of the horned god Cernunnos (Boon 1982), perhaps of a priest in a horned cap, wearing what seems to be a wheeled head-dress like Wanborough nos 6-8, complete with the chain hanging below the chin (Bird 1994, pl 10).⁴ If such a chain was originally attached to the Farley Heath head-dress, it may have hung from a pair of junction fittings which carried an additional loop below the large central ring, rather than from the surviving fitting. Wanborough no 5, where the number of chain-carrying loops on the junction rings varied according to the number and position of the chains attached to them, shows that the individual components could be tailored to fit their place on the head-dress. In the presence of such a chain, the surviving fitting may therefore have been worn at the front or back of the head.

Head-dresses of copper alloy have now been recorded from several sites in Britain, mainly of Roman date but including a small number from the Iron Age. They are believed to have served as items of priestly regalia: several, including the Surrey examples, have been found on Romano-British temple sites and others have been recovered from caches of religious objects. There is a considerable range of styles, and a typology is set out in the report on the bronze-strip crown and other finds from an Iron Age burial at Deal in Kent (Stead 1995). In addition to the chain head-dresses, which make up his Type III, Stead's classification covers crowns composed of bronze strips, such as the one from Hockwold noted above (Type I), circular diadems (Type II) and solid helmet-like hats (Type IV).

Of the chain head-dresses of Stead's Type III, few are sufficiently well-preserved for detailed comparison with the Farley Heath and Wanborough examples. The two most



Fig 2 Farley Heath. The copper alloy head-dress, mounted on a modern leather cap to show the arrangement of the chains. *Photograph by Roger Prescott, courtesy of Guildford Museum*

complete were both found in caches of religious material, one with a pair of Type II diadems and a votive plaque on a probable temple site at Cavenham Heath, Suffolk, the second in an urn with other chain head-dresses, votive plaques and other religious objects at Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire. On both the central element is a disc with four holes at the rim, from which hang four chains with further chains round the brow; these chains are linked by four more discs in place of the rings, loops or simple joins of the Surrey pieces. On the Cavenham head-dress (Layard 1925, pl 28, no 1, fig 2) the discs are of approximately the same size (around 62mm diameter); they all have serrated edges and a pair of moulded concentric circles round an applied central ornament, probably of silver, of which only the attachment hole and traces of solder remain. The central disc has four holes at the rim, the outer ones only three; apart from rings in these holes, the chains are formed of S-shaped links.

The Stony Stratford piece (Lysons 1817, pl 35, nos 2, 4; Layard 1925, pl 28, no 2; Stead 1995, fig 31, d) has a central disc some 68mm in diameter and very slightly domed; it is decorated with an applied border of twisted copper and silver wire and an applied silver roundel, and has four holes at the rim. The four outer discs are smaller (some 35mm in diameter), and carry applied silver roundels with large rosettes and beaded edges; two discs have three holes at the rim and two have four. One disc also has an applied border of twisted copper, brass and silver wire; since the two discs flanking it are the ones with four holes and since these additional holes carry portions of a further hanging chain, it is probable that this more ornate disc sat on the forehead. Apart from rings in the holes, the chains are composed of S-shaped links, with the exception of the hanging chain which includes rings and loops of twisted wire, and may have been repaired.

Other evidence for head-dresses with four chains hanging from a central finial includes a small number of finds of what are probably the central cap elements. They include a domed and waisted finial with four integral round loops from the Felmingham Hall hoard (Gilbert 1978, fig 5, B); a bronze finial with four holes in the rim and attached fragments of chain,

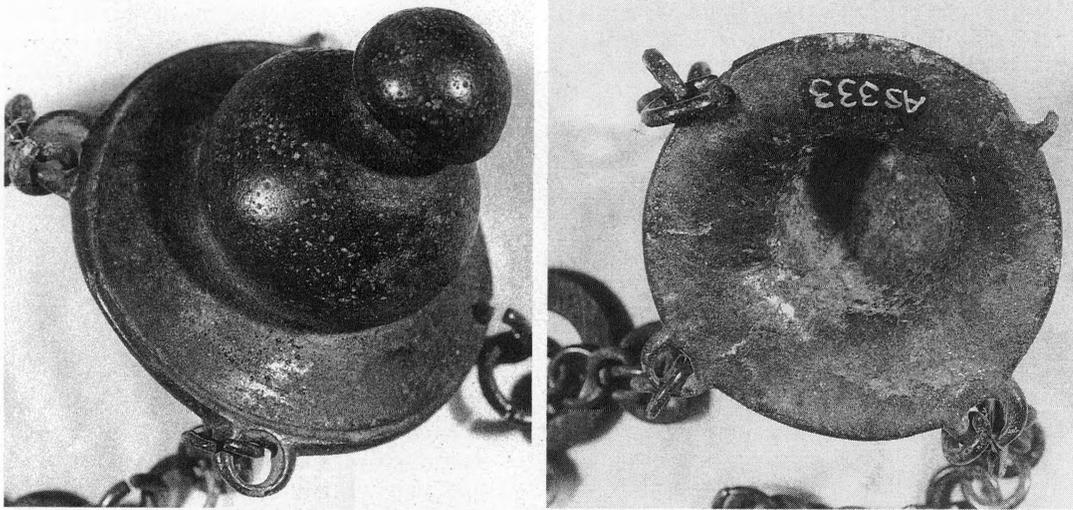


Fig 3 Farley Heath. Copper alloy head-dress: the cap (left) and its interior. The photograph at right shows the bevelling beside the hole through the rim. Diameter of cap 51mm. Photographs by Eric Hunter, courtesy of Guildford Museum

from an Iron Age burial at Newnham Croft, Cambridge (Gilbert 1978, fig 5, C); a deep domed cap, probably with four holes in the rim, and an attached fragment of chain, from the Stony Stratford hoard (Lysons 1817, pl 37, no 7); a bronze cap and finial with four holes in the rim, accompanied by parts of two smaller plain discs with rim holes and three separate lengths of S-shaped links, found in the Medway Marshes but since lost (Payne 1893, pl 22); and one or two domed discs with integral round loops, found with pieces of 'small chain' and two Type IV head-dresses at Ogmere Down, Glamorgan, but again subsequently lost (Anon 1871, pl 36, nos 3, 4). It has been suggested that elements of at least one chain and disc head-dress were present among the finds from the temple at Woodeaton, Oxfordshire (Kirk 1949, 36), but recent research has cast doubt on this identification (Bagnall Smith forthcoming).

Stead also notes as a possible Type III head-dress some chains and a disc from the temple at Lydney (Wheeler & Wheeler 1932, pl 30, B). The disc is of sheet bronze, approximately 55mm in diameter, divided into fourteen segments by radiating lines of small holes; no

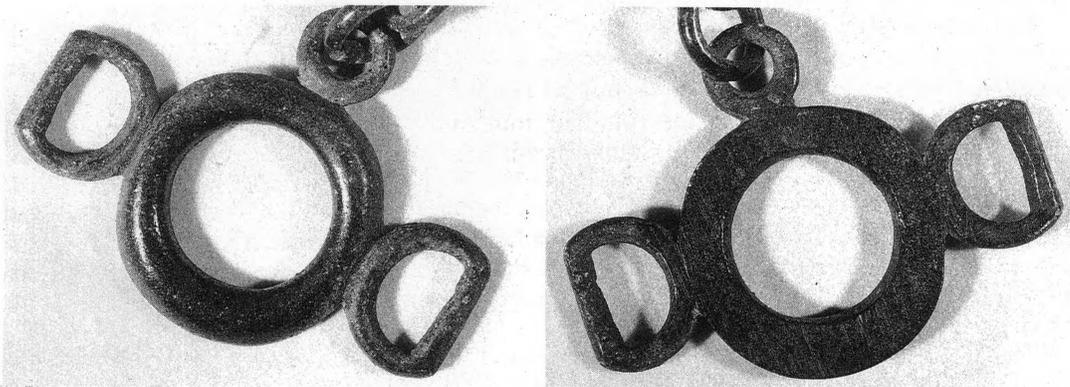


Fig 4 Farley Heath. Copper alloy head-dress: the junction fitting (left) and its under side, showing filing marks. Length 46mm. Photographs by Eric Hunter, courtesy of Guildford Museum

definite edge survives. The chains, of plain round links, consist of two lengths of double links ending in mail-like triangles of links, and a length of single links from which hangs a shorter length ending in a small lozenge of links. The disc most closely resembles the bases of a group of bronze strainers from Gaul, all of which have broken at least partially to show a similar disc-like effect (Tassinari 1975, pls 12-13, nos 51-7). This damage occurs where the radiating lines of holes meet the lowest of a series of concentric rings of holes running up the strainer sides, and it is possible that there are traces of such a ring of holes on the Lydney disc. If the chains come from a head-dress, its overall appearance was clearly considerably different from the other items discussed above. A fragmentary find from Woodeaton should also be noted here: it comprises a fragment of chain network, some of the links paired, from which hang two coins, one of Tetricus I and the other of the House of Constantine, perhaps Constantius II (Bagnall Smith forthcoming).

The remaining two head-dresses from the Stony Stratford hoard are not included by Stead, and both are notably more elaborate, consisting of differently-shaped plates linked by chains into a network. The more fragmentary one (Lysons 1817, pl 35, no 3) now consists of four incomplete bronze discs some 50mm in diameter, decorated with applied silver borders and silver triangles bearing three-armed leaves and beading; two of the discs had at least two holes at the rim, and one certainly had four. There are also nine rectangular silver plates, of which one is complete and measures some 40mm long by 10mm wide; they apparently all had a hole at each end. They are decorated along the long edges with feathering which echoes the decoration on the votive silver plaques from the same hoard. The chains are composed of mixed rings and S-links. Two lengths, of five and six links respectively, connect the most complete disc to two of the feathered plates; a second disc is joined by five links to a feathered plate; two of the feathered plates are joined by four links; and a fifth feathered plate is joined to a single link hanging from four others.

The last of the Stony Stratford head-dresses is almost complete (Lysons 1817, pl 34). Its central cap is a small cone of folded sheet bronze; from eight holes in the rim hang single round links, of which seven carry long downward-pointing leaves. The eighth holds a large stylized vine leaf, recalling the small vine leaf pendant on Wanborough no 5; this must have lain on the wearer's forehead. Each pointed leaf is joined by three round links at the tip to a domed roundel; the roundels have three small integral loops at the top and sides for the attachment of chains, but on one roundel two of these loops have been damaged and replaced by holes in the rim. The roundels are linked to each other and to the central vine leaf by swags of chain made up of plain round links. The two swags flanking the vine leaf are now incomplete; the swags beyond them carry parts of a hanging breast chain, and the four at the back carry four shorter pointed leaves, linked in turn by further chain swags which would have hung low around the wearer's neck.

The number of chain head-dresses is small but, as can be seen from the descriptions above, there is considerable variety in their design. While the Surrey examples belong with the majority, those with four chains hanging from a central cap element, some of the individual features – the use of loops or rings for the junctions and the presence of wheels on Wanborough nos 6-8 – suggest that they may belong to a regional, Atrebatian, version of the same basic object. The chain hanging on to the breast is present on most of the more complete chain head-dresses but is not invariable, and is also found on examples of Stead's other types: of the chain head-dresses, it is present on Wanborough nos 5, 6 and 8, and on two of the Stony Stratford pieces, but not on the one from Cavenham. It has also been recorded on at least one bronze strip crown of Stead's Type I and on a closed crown of Type IV (fig 31, b, from Leckhampton; fig 31, g, from Cerrig-y-Drudion).

The unusual element of the Farley Heath head-dress, the looped junction fitting which would be more suitable for straps or bands than chains,⁵ has a possible parallel at Felmingham Hall. There a second domed centrepiece, originally surmounted by a bird of which only a foot remains,⁶ carries four rectangular integral loops, which would similarly have been better adapted for narrow straps or bands than for chains (Gilbert 1978, fig 5, A). From

the same site come several lengths of bronze band in three widths, some with hook terminals, and three small bronze masks with square loops at the top and sides; the masks have been restored, using leather straps, as the headband of a crown of Stead's Type I (Gilbert 1978, fig 9, pl 7).

Romano-Celtic temple sites, with their relatively small amounts of associated pottery, are frequently difficult to date closely, and the dating often depends on a sequence of votive coins. With the exception of the Wanborough finds, there is no close dating evidence for any of the Romano-British chain head-dresses, while a number of them bear signs of repair which would suggest that they continued in use over a long period. Loops for attaching chains were replaced by holes in the rims of the cap on the Farley Heath example and of a roundel on the Stony Stratford leaf head-dress, while the cap from the Iron Age burial at Newnham Croft had apparently had two of its holes replaced twice. The mixed links and twisted wire of the hanging chain on the Stony Stratford disc head-dress also indicate repair, and the bird terminal on the rectangular-looped cap from Felmingham Hall had been replaced. Additional holes at the back of the conical apex of the Stony Stratford leaf head-dress, on the other hand, may have been for the insertion of pins to hold it in place, since the eight regular holes were undamaged.

At Wanborough the stratified head-dresses (nos 5, 6 and 8) came from levels which predated the temple construction cAD 160/170, and which contained a large group of pottery dating from the first half of the 2nd century, while the use of brass for some of the components indicates manufacture after the Roman conquest. A date range from the second half of the 1st century to the first half of the 2nd is therefore likely for the Wanborough pieces, and the close similarity with the Farley Heath head-dress might suggest that it was manufactured and used at much the same time. However, as noted above, it has been repaired, while the design of such ritual items was probably very conservative. In the absence of any associated finds or context, it would be unsafe to suggest any firm dating within the life of the temple, which is at present dated from the late 1st century to the turn of the 5th.

The associated evidence for Romano-British chain head-dresses indicates that they were used in the rites of Romano-Celtic cults, and that they were not exclusive to any one deity. At Wanborough the wheel, a solar symbol used as the terminal for head-dresses nos 6-8, pointed to the Celtic Jupiter as the presiding deity (Bird 1994, 94, 97). Finds from the Woodeaton shrine, including model spears and images of the god, indicated Mars as the major deity there (Bagnall Smith forthcoming; Martin Henig, pers comm), while the Lydney temple was dedicated to Mars Nodens, probably in a healing aspect (Wheeler & Wheeler 1932, 39-43; Henig 1984, 51-5). The Stony Stratford head-dresses were found in an urn which contained feathered plaques bearing dedications to Jupiter and Vulcan and images of Apollo, Victory and the Celtic Mars (Toynbee 1978, nos 13, 14, 18, 25 and 32). The Felmingham Hall hoard, which was also found in a pot, included bronze heads of a bearded Jupiter, Minerva and Jupiter-Helioserapis, a statuette of a Lar, a wheel, and bird – probably raven – terminals from sceptres (British Museum 1964, pl 24, no 2).

The find from Farley Heath which is most informative about the deity or deities worshipped there is a bronze-strip sceptre binding with crudely incised figures and symbols, some of which have defied certain identification (Goodchild 1938; 1946-7; 1947; Green 1976, 219-20; Black 1985). They include the wheel symbol associated with the Celtic Jupiter, adjacent to a head which is apparently helmeted; also prominent is the smith-god, who is shown with his tongs, anvil and axe-hammer. The rather indeterminate animals probably include the dog and the stag, while the birds are probably ravens; all are creatures of religious and chthonic significance, regularly found in Romano-Celtic iconography (Green 1992, *passim*). Other finds from the site include a bronze eagle, a bird sacred to Jupiter (Green 1976, 219), but the sceptre binding does suggest veneration of more than one Celtic deity at the shrine.

Despite its protected status as a scheduled ancient monument, the Farley Heath temple, like that at Wanborough, continues to be attacked by looters with metal detectors. It would

be unrealistic to expect that other finds of comparable interest and importance have not been lost and damaged without archaeological record.

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NOTES

- 1 A Bronze Age palstave was recovered at the same time and was passed to the Society with the head-dress (Guildford Museum accession AS 336; Atkins 1983, no B7). Similar palstaves had been found previously at Farley Heath (Atkins 1983, nos B1-6, 8-9), and a single example is recorded from Wanborough (Bird 1994, no 1); the evidence from these and other sites suggests that such axes were regarded as suitable votive offerings at Romano-British shrines.
- 2 The analyses of Wanborough nos 5-8 were carried out by M Heyworth (Heyworth 1987), that of no 9 by M Cowell (Cowell 1994); both are summarized in the Wanborough catalogue.
- 3 Ross notes the association of leaf crowns with divinities in the Celtic tradition, citing Romano-British examples from Aldborough and Gloucester (1974, 61, 137, 178). A sherd from Betchworth in Surrey shows a figure of Jupiter wearing an oak crown with prominent acorns, though this may be a representation of the classical Jupiter rather than his Celtic counterpart (Toynbee 1959).
- 4 If the image on the Petersfield coin represents a priest, he may be wearing a horned leather or fabric cap to which the head-dress was attached by pins or stitching. Though no trace of any cap or lining was found during the laboratory examination of Wanborough nos 5, 6 and 8, a reconstruction by Matthew Alexander of no 6 showed that these chain head-dresses would have been extremely difficult to keep in place without such a cap. A small bronze pin was found close to no 8 (Bird 1994, fig 34, no 56), and the possible use of pins with the Stony Stratford leaf head-dress is noted below.
- 5 Martin Henig has drawn my attention to a paper on Iron Age strap junctions which illustrates three pieces in particular that are generically quite close to the Farley Heath fitting. They consist of two rings, rather heavier than the Farley Heath one, arranged in a figure-8, with side-pieces carrying vertical rods to hold the straps; they vary between 32 and 40mm in overall height (Taylor & Brailsford 1985, fig 4, nos 19, 20 and 23).
- 6 The significance of the bird crest, which also occurs on sceptre terminals from Felmingham Hall and Willingham Fen, is discussed by Henig (1984, 137, 141). For a discussion of bird-crested Celtic helmets, see Green 1992, 87-9.

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