

NOTES

A Late Bronze Age razor from South Croydon

A Late Bronze Age copper alloy razor was found in July 1993 during the archaeological investigation of a 0.69 hectare redevelopment site at 15-17 Brighton Road, South Croydon (TQ 3255 6428; site code BRR93). The site lies on second terrace gravels over the Upper Chalk of the North Downs, and within a dry valley originally forming part of the Wandle catchment. The investigation was carried out by the Museum of London Archaeological Service (MOLAS) (Potter 1993 & 1994).

In all, nine trenches were excavated, revealing a series of features of Roman and possible prehistoric date. In addition to the razor, prehistoric finds comprised 286 pieces of struck flint, mainly waste flakes but including a number of scrapers and blades. Dating is necessarily tentative but may embrace both Mesolithic/early Neolithic and later prehistoric activity. Most of the flints were residual within later contexts; there were four shallow features of possible prehistoric date, perhaps associated with cultivation.

Roman finds included a small dispersed hoard of 58 4th century coins, and a number of cut features, notably two ditches dating to AD 120-180. The ditches were aligned east-west, and thus at right angles to the modern Brighton Road: it has been suggested that the latter may follow the line of the original Roman route to the south coast (the London-Portslade road; Drewett 1974, 1).

The razor was found in the fill of one of these ditches (context 116). The surrounding deposit was waterlaid, and had formed naturally within standing or slow moving water (John Giorgi, Keith Wilkinson, pers comm). The razor could have been washed out of an adjacent horizon, though it is possible that it was deliberately thrown into the water.

The razor

The razor (fig 1) measures 100mm in length from the end of the tang to the top of the blade and 57mm in width at the latter's widest point; it weighs 28.42g. The two blade wings are separated by an axial four-ribbed moulding on each face, which leads from the base of the blade to a circular perforation some 7-8mm in diameter. This latter feature terminates a narrow V-shaped notch in the blade top, while the blade base droops slightly from the horizontal in relation to the tang which extends some 40mm beyond the blade.

The piece has an even matt black patina, though soil and brown corrosion products obscure areas of the metal surface. The edges of both blade wings are damaged, but one retains much of its original shape; green corrosion products are visible at the end of the tang and towards the tip of the blade. Deliberate scratching scores both faces of one blade wing, and the presence of corrosion products and dirt visible in the grooves under low magnification indicates that this had been done prior to burial (Virginia Neal, pers comm). X-ray fluorescence confirmed that the metal is a leaded copper alloy. (Cath Mortimer, pers comm).

Discussion

Cast, tanged, bifid razors of this type comprise Piggott's Class II (1946, 138-40), while the blade-form of the Croydon piece belongs within a heel-shaped sub-series (Needham 1980, 19-

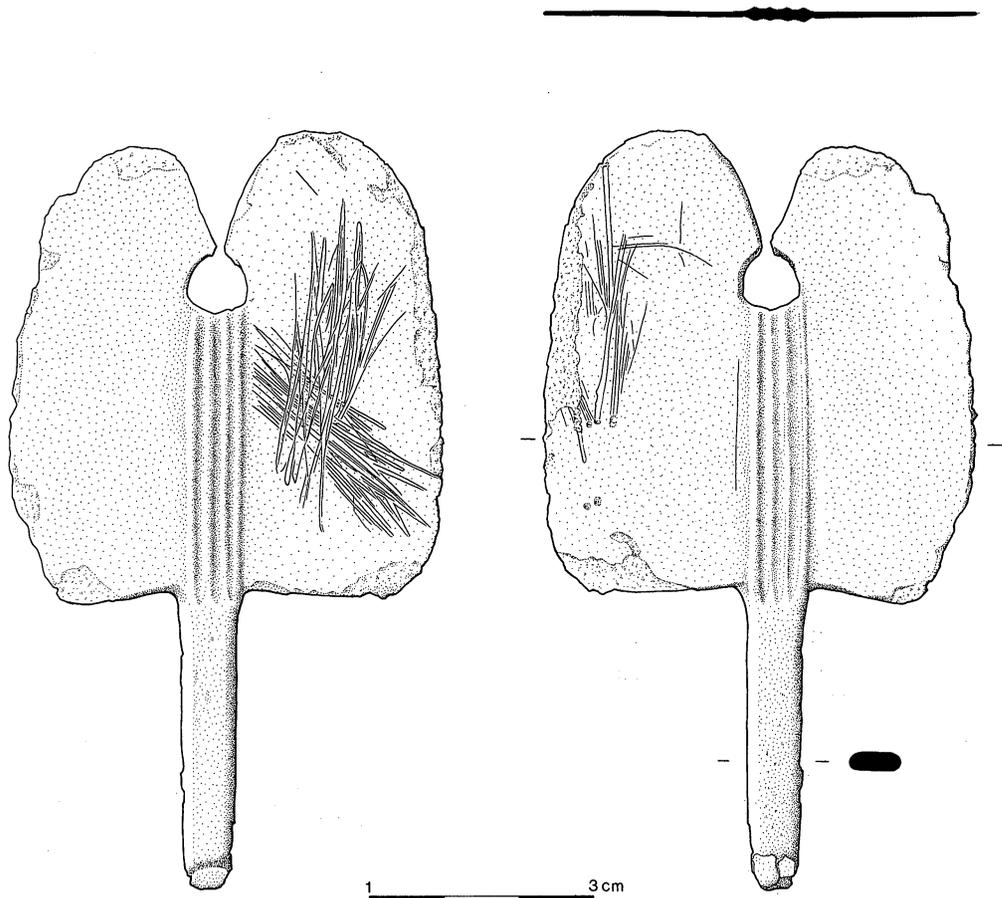


Fig 1. A Late Bronze Age razor from South Croydon (1:1)

20). Hoard associations, from Llanwyllog, Anglesey, and Feltwell Fen, Norfolk, in particular, suggest a date within the Ewart Park phase of the Late Bronze Age (LBA 2-3; 9th-8th centuries BC) for the type, although an earlier, Wilburton (LBA 1; 10th century BC), genesis is possible (Needham 1980, 20). The V-shaped notch terminating in a circular perforation and the reeded mid-rib of the present piece are features which can be paralleled on a number of razors recently listed and discussed by Needham (1980, 19-20). These include a miscast example encased in the remains of a clay mould recovered during David Longley's 1976 excavations at Runnymede Bridge, Egham.

The even black patina and general condition of the Croydon razor are unusual for a land-find, being more consistent with copper alloy objects recovered from the Thames. However, the identification of the fill of the feature in which it lay as 'waterlaid' may explain the disparity. How and why it came to be in the ditch are matters for speculation, although the heavy scratching of the metal surface could indicate a sequence of retrieval, testing for metal content and discard, all within the early Roman period.

Although therefore residual, the razor joins a growing body of Late Bronze Age material recovered from the North Downs dip-slope in the Croydon locality (summarized by Needham and Burgess (1980, 458-62 & fig 5)). In addition to the razor published here, recent relevant finds from the area include a possible promontory enclosure and associated metalwork on

Nore Hill, Chelsham (Skelton 1987; Needham 1987, 129), and a large hoard of socketed axes and ingot fragments recovered in late 1993 a mile or so to the south of the ring-fort at Queen Mary's Hospital, Carshalton (Stuart Needham, pers comm; Adkins & Needham 1985).

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GEOFF POTTER and JONATHAN COTTON