

A find of Middle Bronze Age bracelets from Cranleigh

Three Middle Bronze Age copper alloy bracelets were unearthed by animal activity in 1995 in the spoil from an old, small sandpit approximately 2km east of Cranleigh church. Later examination of the area reputedly revealed a small ring with an approximate diameter of 2cm and made of a similar material, but this has not been made available for study.

There are two complete bracelets, of roughly the same size, and two fragments of a third, which is slightly smaller. All three are heavily mineralized internally and there is some surface decay and flaking through corrosion and bronze disease.

The largest and best-preserved bracelet is penannular, oval in shape and has butt-jointed, slightly expanded terminals (fig 1a). The bar is D-shaped in section with a gently convex inner face. A good olive green patina survives in large patches over much of the bracelet, but there is some corrosion particularly around the terminal ends.

Dimensions: 75mm x 65mm externally; 65mm x 55mm internally; bar is 5mm thick and 8mm wide; weight 52g.

The second complete penannular bracelet is round (fig 1b), with slightly overlapping terminals. This may be due to damage prior to, or during, deposition, but the bracelet has suffered from extensive corrosion, which obscures the original state of the terminals. Very small patches of an olive green patina remain. The bar is also D-shaped in section with a slightly convex inner face.

Dimensions: external diameter 73mm; internal diameter 63mm; bar is 5mm thick and 8mm wide; weight 57g.

The two fragments (fig 1c) although not actually joining, are most probably from a third, slightly smaller bracelet. They are oval in section, and from the curvature of the bar, the bracelet itself would also have been oval. The larger fragment has mostly a good olive green patina, the smaller one is more corroded.

Dimensions: bar is 4mm thick and 5mm wide; weight (combined) 16g.

None of the bracelets is decorated, and large enough patches of good patina survive for decoration to have been visible had it been present. Despite this, these bracelets with their D-shaped profiles most closely parallel the Liss type (Needham 1989, 36). Formerly known as Bignan and regarded as Continental imports, these types are now believed to be part of a North European tradition, with regional production schools, and as such, could have been made in this country. Other decorated examples of similar form were recovered at Norton Fitzwarren, Somerset (Needham 1989, 31–3, nos 5–8) and the circular, complete Cranleigh bracelet (fig 1b) most closely parallels one from the Croxton, Norfolk hoard (Needham 1990, 225–6, fig 2 no 3). These types are from the Middle Bronze Age and date the Cranleigh examples to between the 14th and 12th centuries BC, particularly given their lightweight nature. That they are not decorated, however, means that there is a possibility of them being of slightly later date.

This small assemblage could, in itself, constitute a hoard. Rowlands (1976, 100) indicates that 55% of Middle Bronze Age hoards contain fewer than five items. A similar hoard consisting solely of two penannular bracelets comes from Sonning, Berkshire (Rowlands 1976, 224 no 3). The circumstances of the recovery of the Cranleigh bracelets, however, may mean that it is not necessarily complete, which makes it difficult to discuss the composition of the hoard. As it stands, the collection appears to be a personal hoard (a few objects originally belonging to one individual) of ornaments only (ie no tools or weapons).

Ornament-only hoards appear to be concentrated along the south coast (Rowlands 1976, 104, fig 10). In the neighbouring area of the Weald there is a relative abundance of Middle

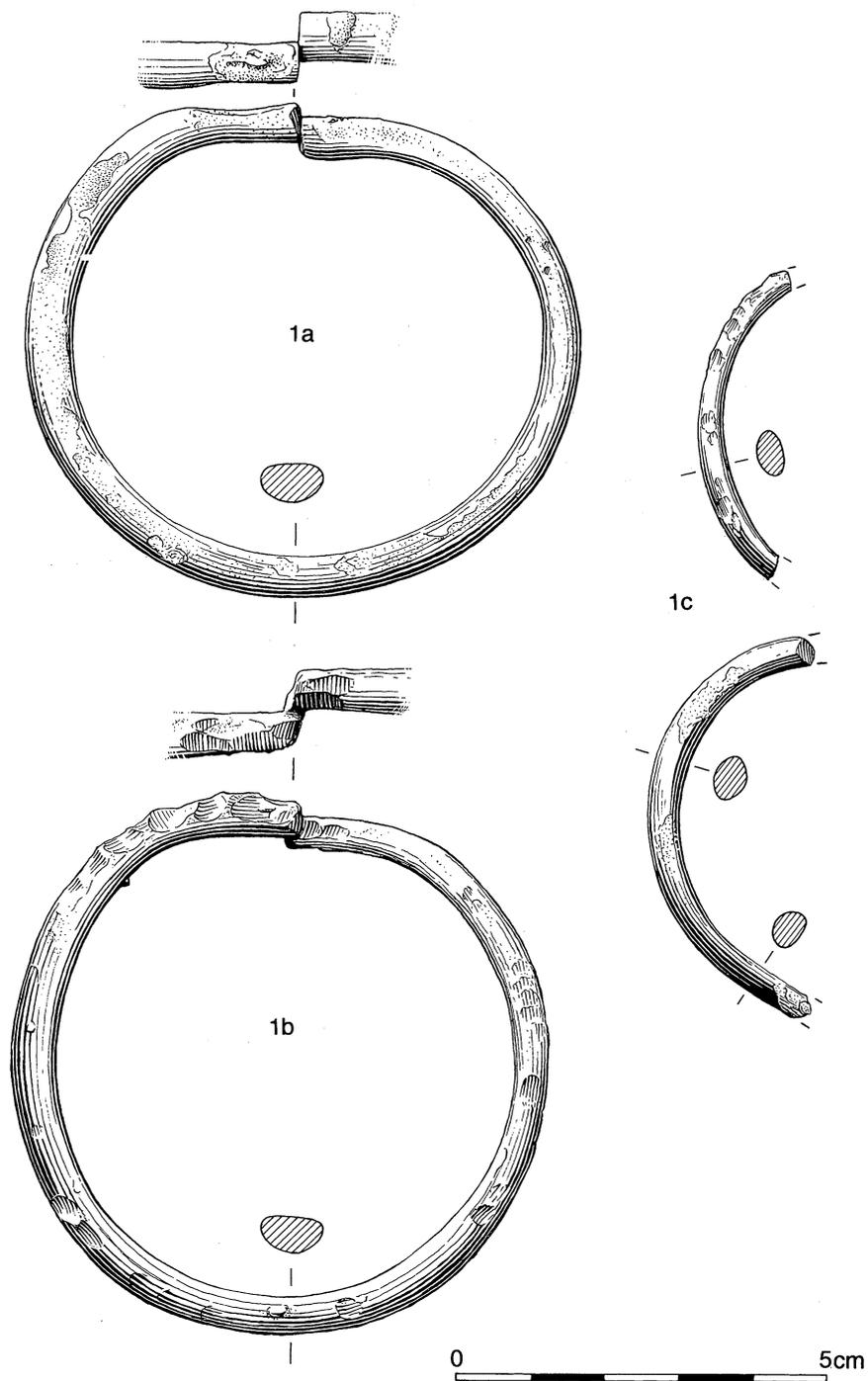


Fig 1 Middle Bronze Age bracelets from near Cranleigh. (Drawing by David Williams)

Bronze Age metalwork, including ornament groups, with 'Sussex loops' amongst the weapons and tools, and finds of weapons from Farnham, Guildford, Farley Heath, Albury and Reigate suggest a Middle Bronze Age metalworking tradition within Surrey itself (Needham 1987, 111). This find of bracelets from Cranleigh, therefore, need not be seen as out of place or unusual in terms of its location, especially as similar plain bracelets come from the Thames and Southall (Needham 1987, 114). There are two other bracelets, which were originally thought to have come from Reigate, but are now established as coming from Handcross in the Weald (Phillips 1967, 27). This does mean that, although not necessarily unusual, this find of bracelets from Cranleigh does seem to be unique within Surrey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Jon Cotton and Stuart Needham for their comments on the bracelets, and Stuart Needham for kindly commenting on this text. The bracelets have been generously donated to Guildford Museum by the landowner, Mr John Parker, where they can be located under acc no RB 4051.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Needham, S, 1987 The Bronze Age, in *The archaeology of Surrey to 1540* (eds J Bird & D G Bird), 97–137
 —, 1989 The bronze hoard, in P Ellis, Norton Fitzwarren hillfort: a report on the excavations by Nancy and Philip Langmaid between 1968 and 1971, *Somerset Archaeol Natur Hist*, **133**, 1–74
 —, 1990 The Penard-Wilburton succession: new metalwork finds from Croxton (Norfolk) and Thirsk (Yorkshire), *Antiq J*, **70**, 251–70
 Phillips, W E, 1967 Bronze Age metal objects in Surrey, *SyAC*, **64**, 1–34
 Rowlands, M J, 1976 *The organisation of Middle Bronze Age metalworking*, Brit Archaeol Rep Brit Ser, **31**, parts 1 and 2

SUZANNE HUSON