

# A Middle Saxon buckle from Lincoln Road, Enfield

CHRIS GOING

ONE OF THE small finds from the excavations carried out at Lincoln Road, Enfield<sup>1</sup>, was a copper alloy buckle<sup>2</sup>. The object came from the fill of a ditch, F3 on plot 149 (also called F70 on neighbouring plot 2). Wherever emptied, the fill of this ditch was a uniform dark soil<sup>3</sup>. Other finds from the 13m (42ft) length excavated include 4th century pottery and coins, and unspecified bronze objects<sup>4</sup>. The ditch is dated to the final site phase (No. 4), to which were also assigned features on all plots excavated, including, on plot 2, "a series of rammed gravel surfaces damaged by ploughing, and several gravel and flint post bases, overlying all previous Roman deposits and constructed at 45° to the predominant Roman alignment". There was "no conclusive dating evidence for this phase"<sup>5</sup>, other than that it was later than the early-mid 4th century AD.

This note was prompted for two reasons: the buckle is of some intrinsic interest, and as it was stratified in ditch F3/70, may throw some light on the other features dated to the late or post Roman periods. Although no parallels were cited in the report, the object was described as late provincial Roman, or Roman/Saxon<sup>6</sup>. It has subsequently been cited as evidence for a late Roman military presence at Enfield<sup>7</sup>. A search for Roman parallels was not

very fruitful. While the resemblance is not particularly striking, the closest late Roman parallels to this piece known to the writer are buckles of Simpson's Group II<sup>8</sup>. Like the Enfield piece, they have triangular plates, but unlike it, they are of two-piece construction. Moreover, they are not common in the Western provinces of the Roman Empire; most of Simpson's Group II buckles are from Austria or Hungary<sup>9</sup>. Only one, uncertain, example is known from Britain. It was a grave good in Lankhills burial 13, dated to after c AD 360<sup>10</sup>.

Far closer form parallels, of post Roman date, are known much closer to home. Most were discovered in Middle Saxon contexts, primarily in Kent (see Fig. 1), where a series of well-furnished graves have produced the majority of the known insular British pieces<sup>11</sup>. Others, including some of the finest and most decorated examples, come from outside Kent. They include Shakenoak (Oxon.), Taplow (Bucks.), and Tostock, West Stow and Sutton Hoo (all Suffolk). The last – the great buckle from the royal barrow – certainly shares some characteristics with the Taplow, Enfield, and Kentish pieces, although its quality puts it in a class of its own<sup>12</sup>.

The grave goods accompanying these buckles provide their primary dating evidence. Most are

1. Anne Gentry, John Ivens and Heather McClean 'Excavations at Lincoln Road, London Borough of Enfield, November 1974–March 1976' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 28 (1977) 101-189.
2. *Ibid* 169, Fig. 30.18 and Pl. 9.
3. *Ibid* 106, 115.
4. *Ibid* 106.
5. *Ibid* 110, 117 and 125.
6. *Ibid* 169.
7. H. Sheldon and L. Schaaf 'A survey of Roman sites in Greater London' *Collectanea Londiniensia*, Studies presented to Ralph Merrifield. *London Middlesex Archaeol Soc Special Paper* 2 (1978) 59-88.
8. C. J. Simpson 'Belt-Buckles and Strap-Ends of the later Roman Empire; a preliminary survey of several new groups' *Britannia* 7 (1976) 192-223.
9. *Op cit* fn. 1, Fig. 2, 195-6, with references.
10. Giles Clarke *The Roman Cemetery at Lankhills*. Pre-Roman and Roman Winchester Part II. Winchester Studies 3. General Editor Martin Biddle. (1979) 273, Fig. 34.14.

11. Numerous examples are known from some ten sites in Kent. They include: Barfriston, Breach Down, Broadstairs (Dumpton and St. Peters), Finglesham, Guilton, Kingston Down, Sarre, Sibertswold, and Wickhambreux. The literature concerning the origins, affinities and dating of these buckles is wide. For references to all of the listed pieces above, see B. Faussett, *Inventorium Sepulchrale* (1856), Pls. VIII.9, IX.1-2, and text figures; S. C. Hawkes, H. R. Ellis Davidson and Christopher Hawkes 'The Finglesham Man' *Antiquity* 39 (1965), 17-27; and also V. Evison *Wheel-thrown pottery of the Anglo Saxon Period* (1979). A distribution of some of the more highly-decorated continental examples, and a brief discussion of their affinities, may be found in François Henry 'Irish Enamels of the Dark Ages and their Relation to the Cloisonné Technique' in D. B. Harden (ed.) *Dark Age Britain. Studies presented to E. T. Leeds* (1956) 71-88. See also S. C. Hawkes 'Anglo-Saxon Kent c 425-725' in Peter E. Leach (ed.) *Archaeology in Kent to 1500*. CBA Res Rep 48 (1982) 64-78.
12. For Shakenoak, see A. C. C. Brodrribb, A. R. Hands and D. R. Walker *Excavations at Shakenoak II* (1971) 108-10 and Fig. 46.65; Taplow, R. A. Smith *British Museum Guide to Anglo Saxon Antiquities* (1923) Pl. V.1-3; Tostock, N. Aberg *The Anglo Saxons in England* (1926) Fig. 225; Sutton Hoo, e.g. R. Bruce-Mitford *Sutton Hoo* (1972) 72-3.

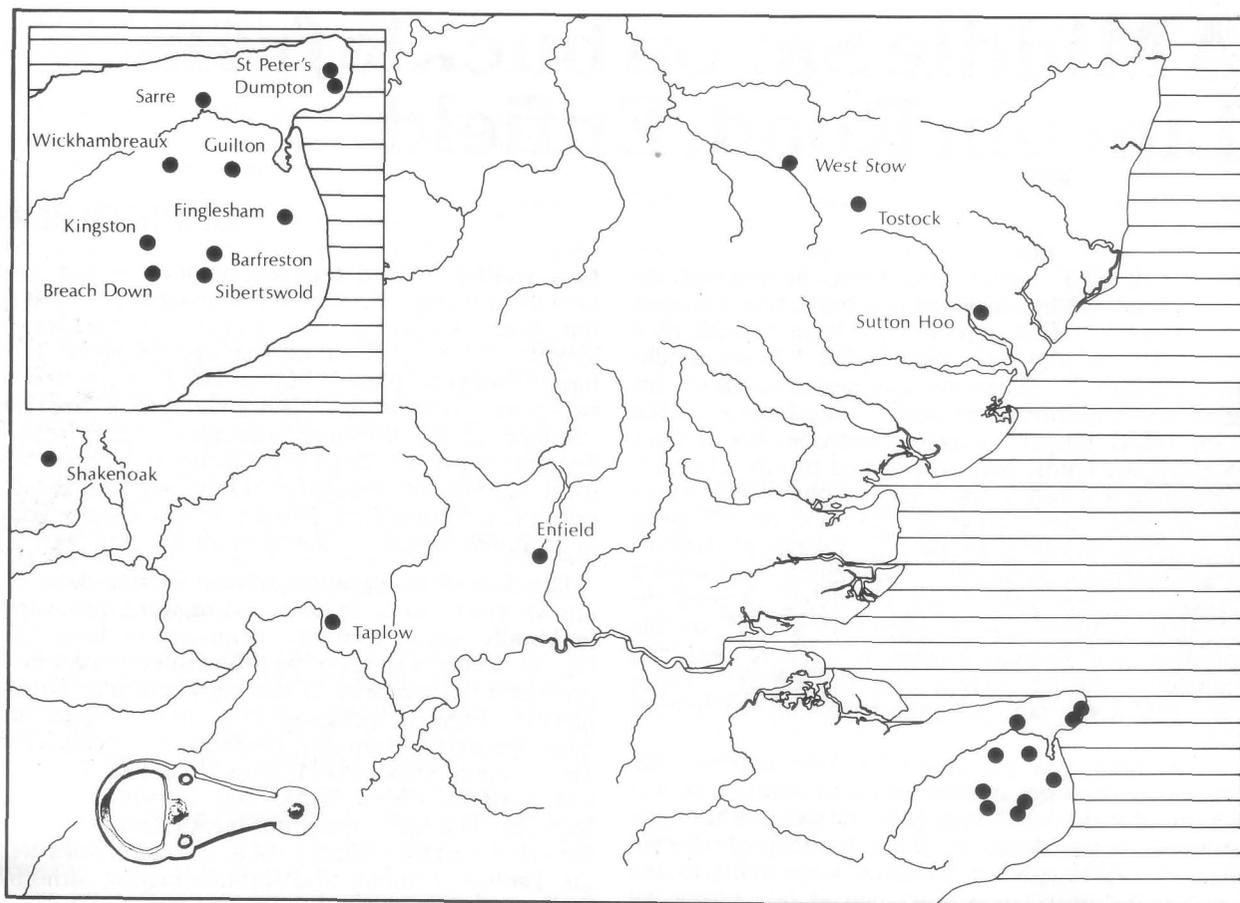


Fig. 1: distribution of Middle Saxon belt buckles of Kentish type. The example depicted is from Shakenoak, Oxfordshire (see footnote 12).

fairly securely datable to the later 6th and 7th centuries AD<sup>13</sup>. What light then does this find shed on the final site occupation at Lincoln Road? The lack of post-Roman finds, especially pottery, suggests the buckle may simply be a stray find incorporated into sinkage or make-up levels over a late Roman ditch. However, the section drawing<sup>14</sup> suggests the feature was truncated. There was “no silting” and the feature was probably fairly rapidly backfilled. There seems to be no reason to doubt that the find provides the ditch with a later 6th-7th century *terminus post quem*. If the occupation of the site is of this date, however, the absence of

‘chaff-tempered’ wares<sup>15</sup> is curious. Yet the ditch is not likely to have been backfilled in the later Saxon period, for then, at a time of increased pottery use, some contemporary sherds could have been expected in the ditch fill, or associated with some of the other features, particularly the ?gravel-floored buildings. It is possible that some sherds of Ipswich-type ware were found, but misidentified as Roman. Whatever the truth of the matter, the find is a useful discovery. If additional light is to be shed on the origins of Saxon Enfield, no opportunity to carry out further excavations in the vicinity of Lincoln Road should be missed.

13. The Dumpton Park buckle was found with a hoard of sceattas dated to c AD 700, while the buckle from St. Peters, Broadstairs grave 76, was dated to the 7th century by a wheel-thrown globular bowl (Evison, *op cit* fn. 11, Table 1, Fig. 36.j-k). The Tostock and Sutton Hoo buckles are also of 7th century date. See also fn. 11 for references to other Kentish and Continental specimens, and discussion of their dates.

14. *Op cit* fn. 1, Section 3, Fig. 13 upper, and p. 119.

15. Alan Vince ‘New light on Saxon pottery from the London area’ *London Archaeol* 4 No. 16 (1984) 431-9. Several new sites may be added to the published map, including two – Harlow in Essex and Ware in Hertfordshire – which are quite close to Enfield. (I am indebted to Mr C. Partridge for informing me of the Ware material, which is extensive.)