

A Collection of Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon Brooches and Other Finds from East Bedfordshire

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INTRODUCTION

The brooches and other finds featured in this article are part of a private collection made by Mr Tim Morgan of Eaton Socon and were submitted to Bedford Museum for identification and recording between January and May 1989. All were found by metal detector and therefore do not come from stratified contexts, however they do significantly extend the range and distribution of types recorded in the county and have been published for this reason. The author is grateful to Mr Morgan for his co-operation in recording these finds; there may be many noteworthy but unknown archaeological objects from Bedfordshire in private ownership and it is hoped that more collectors will be encouraged to bring forward finds for identification or to deposit records of their collections with either Bedford or Luton Museums, or with the County Planning Department's Archaeological Service. Grouping of objects, provenances and grid references are as for the Museum acquisitions and enquiries published

in this journal. **All objects described below are copper alloy unless otherwise stated.**

ROMAN IRON AGE FASTENERS AND BROOCHES

FASTENER AND STUD

1 Button-and-loop Fastener Northhill (Hatch) Fig 2.1 [TL 15 48]

Button-and-loop fastener of Wild's type III, 'tear-drop or petal-headed fasteners', or Kilbride-Jones' 'boss-and-petal' form¹ with a pronounced, domed boss divided radially into eight cells round a single, small cell in the centre. There is red enamel in alternate cells and vestiges of red enamel on either side of the spur below the boss; the enamel in the other cells has gone completely. Length 107 mm, maximum width of boss 38 mm. This is by far the commonest type of button-and-loop fastener, on which enamelling is occasionally found, but their distribution tends more to N and W Britain, with a handful of outliers in SE Britain along the line of the Icknield Way.² The enamelled decoration on the Northhill specimen is more elaborate than is usual. Button-and-loop fasteners were probably used to fasten cloaks or other clothing and relate to native Celtic rather than to Roman dress. Boss-and-petal fasteners first appear in the later first century AD and continue well into the second.

2 Enamelled Disc-stud Eaton Socon Fig 2.2 [TL 17 58]

Small, circular stud with shank on reverse showing that it was intended as a decorative mount, perhaps for a leather strap. Within the copper-alloy rim the disc is set with blue enamel and eight dots of red enamel around a central copper-alloy 'bull's-eye' containing a white glass bead. Like the enamelled brooches below, it most probably dates from about the second century.³

ENAMEL and GLASS INLAYS

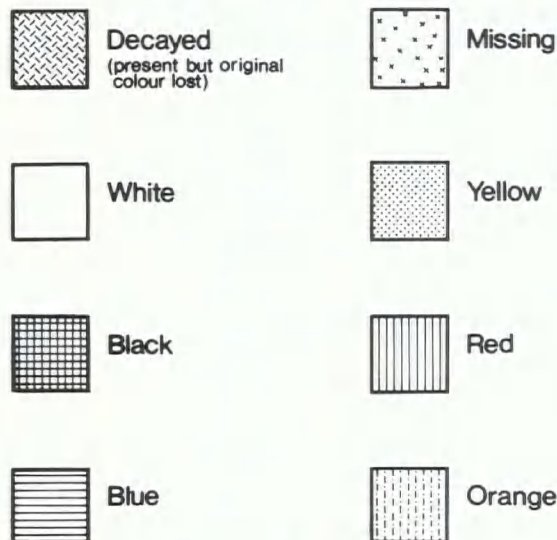


Fig 1 Key to enamel colours

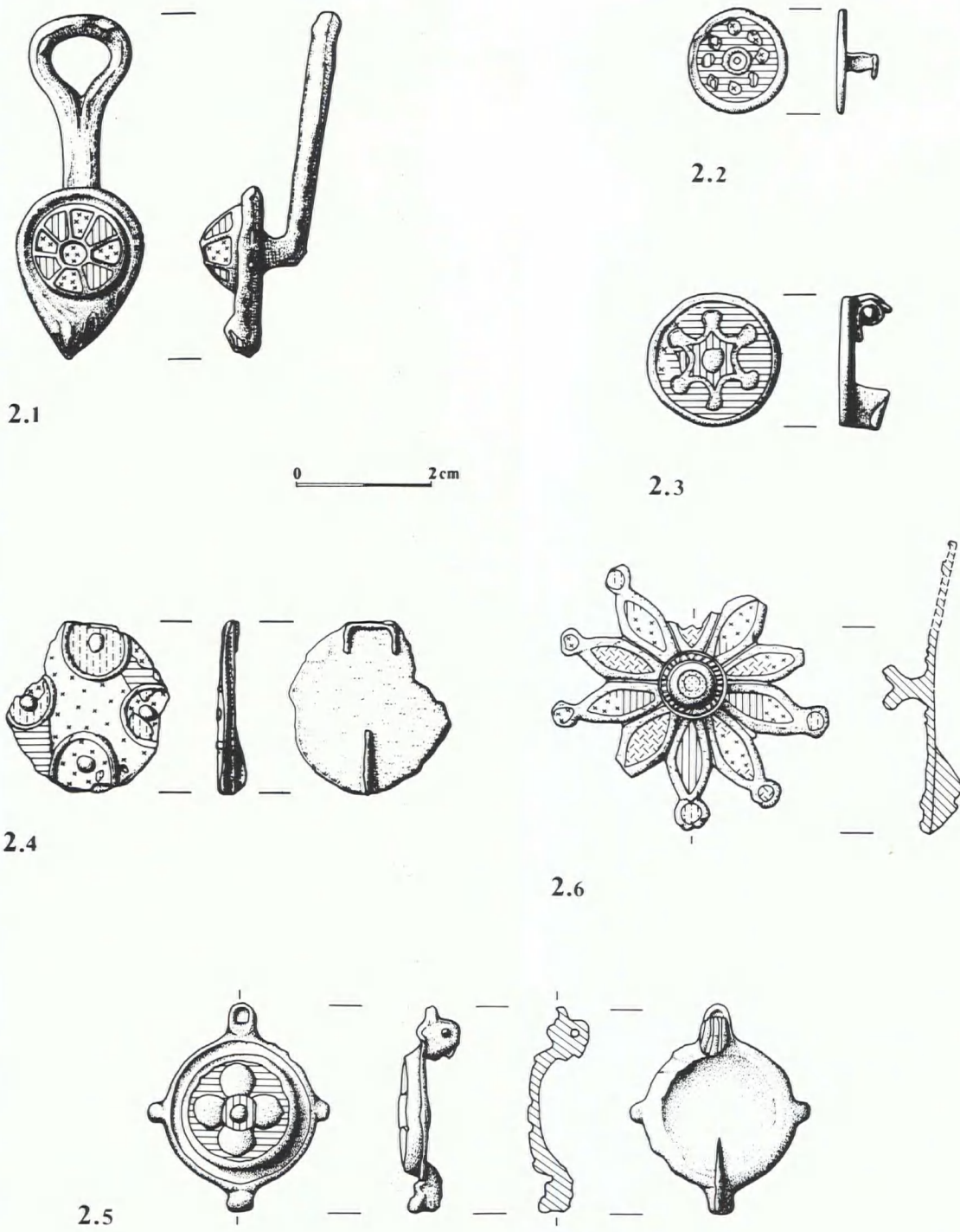


Fig 2 Romano-British enamelled copper alloy fasteners and brooches (x 1).
 2.1 Northill. 2.2-3 Eaton Socon. 2.4 Roxton. 2.5 Eaton Socon. 2.6 Roxton.

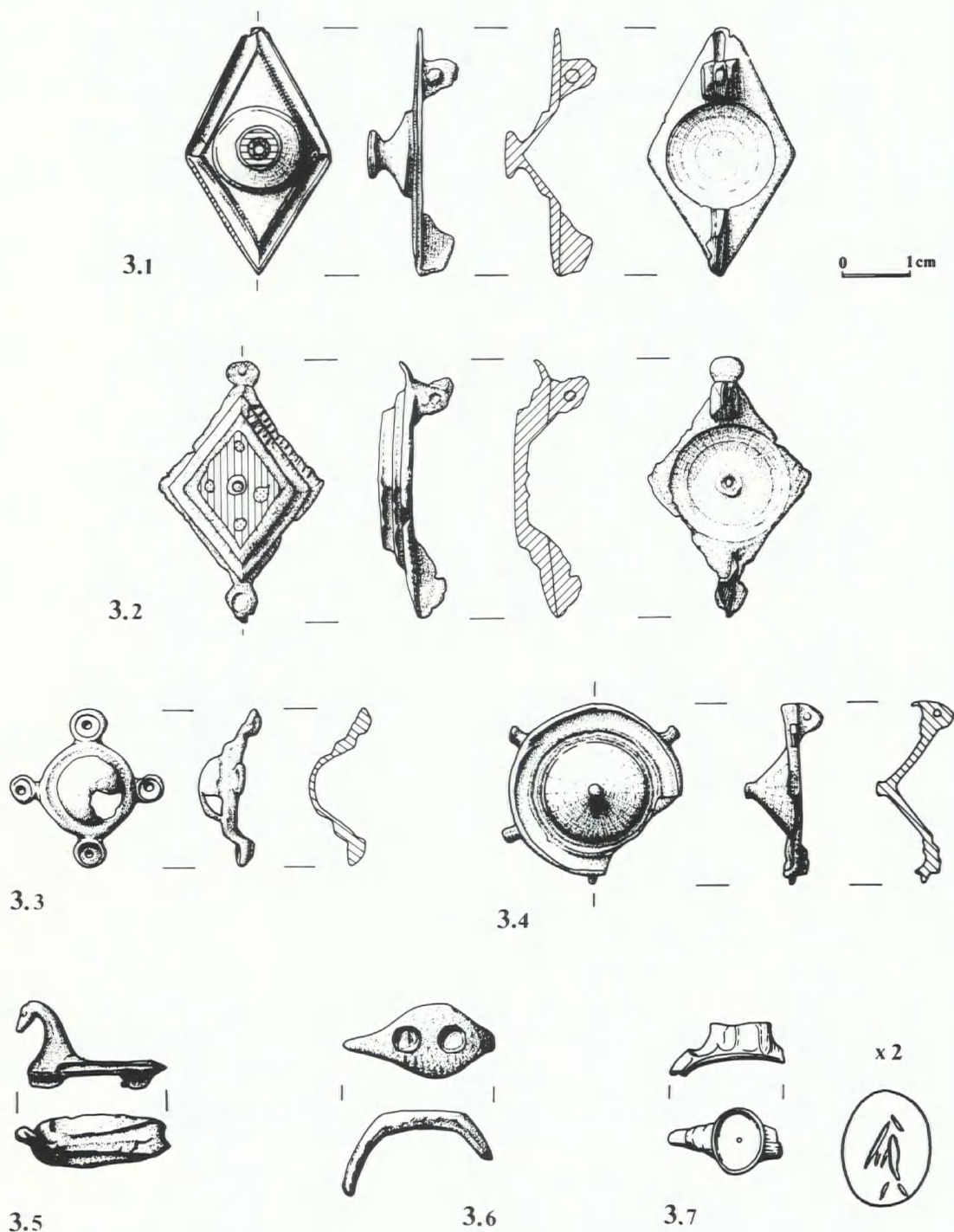


Fig 3 Roman enamelled copper alloy brooches. 3.1 Roxton. 3.2 Eaton Socon; unenamelled brooches 3.3-5 Eaton Socon (all x 1). 3.6 copper alloy ring, Roxton (x 1). 3.7 silver ring, Eaton Socon (x 1) and intaglio (x 2).

ENAMELLED BROOCHES

All the brooches described below fall within the general date-range of late-first to early-third century.

3 Circular Plate-brooch Eaton Socon Fig 2.3 [TL 16 58]

Small, circular brooch, 20 mm in diameter, with a six-point star-like motif and central button both in copper alloy. The enamel inlay is red in the centre around the star, and blue between the star and rim (except for a small, stray patch of red on one edge of the star). The black retains the catchplate and part of the copper alloy pin-spring with iron axis-pin *in situ*. This is one of the commoner types of Romano-British enamelled brooch which has a wide distribution and occurs in a variety of colour-schemes.⁴

4 Circular Plate-brooch as no. 3 (not illustrated)

Brooch identical in size and design to no. 3 and presumably from the same workshop but having lost all traces of its enamel inlay.

5 Circular Plate-brooch Roxton Fig 2.4 [region of TL 14 55]

The greater part of a worn circular plate, maximum surviving diameter 26 mm, with four 'eyes' inlaid with bright orange enamel spaced more-or-less equally round the edge. The remainder was originally inlaid with blue enamel. The 'eye' or dot-and-circle motif can be found on a number of enamelled plate-brooches but I have yet to find a close parallel for this design.⁵

6 Lugged Circular Brooch Eaton Socon Fig 2.5 [TL 16 58]

The plate has a diameter of 23 mm and, around the edge, four small lugs, the largest of which hides the mechanism for a (missing) hinged pin. A wide, shallow groove separates the rim of the brooch from the slightly-raised centre which is decorated with a moulded quatrefoil motif. The quatrefoil is surrounded by blue enamel and set with red enamel around the central spot. The 'quatrefoil' pattern is distinctive, the few recorded examples being scattered across SE Britain.⁶ Nearest geographically, though differing in details of enamel-colours and design, is a Northamptonshire example recorded by Hattatt, however closest in similarity is a brooch

quoted by the same author from Blandford Forum, Dorset, of identical design and colour-scheme but having the quatrefoil's petals orientated at 45° to the lugs instead of opposite them. They are presumably all products of a single workshop.

7 'Ten-petalled' Plate-brooch Roxton Fig 2.6 [region of TL 15 55]

The brooch is in the form of a flower or star with ten 'petals' each ending in a small, round disc and measuring up to 44 mm across from one petal-tip to that opposite. The plate is flat except for the raised central knob, inlaid with yellow enamel and surrounded at the base by a ring scored by tiny transverse lines. From the surviving traces of enamel it can be seen that alternating petals were red with orange discs, but it is now impossible to establish the colour of the intervening petals. Whereas no closely-comparable example has been found so far for this Roxton brooch, it does belong with a well-attested category, the so-called 'sunburst' or 'spoked-wheel' brooches.

8 Lozenge-shaped Brooch Roxton Fig 3.1 [region of TL 14 55]

The brooch measures 38 mm corner-to-corner lengthways and 22.5 mm in width. A broad, shallow groove runs around the edge with traces of light tooling along the inner edge and in one quarter, also along the outer. The circular, raised centre rises to a button set with a small annular bead of black glass in turquoise-blue enamel. From the reverse the circular recess is very even and shows signs of lathe-turning, not of the brooch itself but of the mould from which it was cast. Part of the catch-plate and mechanism for a hinged pin remain. See comments on no. 9 below.

9 Lozenge-shaped Brooch Eaton Socon Fig 3.2 [TL 16 58]

A similar brooch to no. 8 and again showing evidence for a lathe-turned mould in the recess although a little more corroded than the brooch above. It measures 41 mm in length and 25 mm in width. The lozenge-shaped centre is stepped, with vestiges of tooling along the outer edge and first step, and inlaid with red enamel. Within the enamel are set a yellow dot at each corner and an annular bead of white glass round a central bronze pin. Brooches 8 and 9 are both examples of a type imported from Gaul in the second century, common

features being the use of a lathe-turned mould; small black beads set in enamel; stepped centres and lugs at the corners (such as the two lugs surviving on no. 9). Such brooches are found in Gaul, the Rhineland and S Britain and exhibit many variations in details of shape, pattern and colour.⁷

UNENAMELLED BROOCHES

- 10 Domed and Lugged Circular Brooch** Fig 3.3
Eaton Socon [TL 17 58]

A small brooch with a plain, domed centre and four peripheral lugs, each of which has a dot-and-circle ornament, but appear not to have been enamelled. Maximum diameter across the lugs is 24 mm.

- 11 Lugged Brooch with Conical Centre** Fig 3.4
Eaton Socon [TL 16 58]

The brooch originally had six small, rectangular lugs round the rim and measures 25.5 mm in diameter. The hollow, conical centre is separated from the upturned rim by a broad, shallow groove and is finished with a small knob at the apex. Similar brooches with conical centres (though often without lugs) are widely distributed in Britain and Gaul.

- 12 Duck Brooch** Fig 3.5
Eaton Socon [TL 16 57]

This is an example of a popular type of Romano-British brooch representing a water-fowl, presumably a duck or a goose. It is smaller than most such brooches, measuring only 21 mm in length. The eyes and outline of the wings are just discernible but there is no suggestion of the enamelling that frequently decorates larger, more elaborate examples. Simple, unenamelled bird-brooches comparable to the Eaton Socon specimen are known from Caerwent and St Albans.⁸

ROMANO-BRITISH RINGS

- 13 Enamelled Copper-alloy Ring** Fig 3.6
Roxton [region of TL 14 55]

Only the bezel and part of the hoop survive but the hoop seems to have been plain and approximately circular, while the bezel is a flat oval, 14 x 11 mm,

inlaid with two circular cells containing traces of red enamel. Enamel or glass were frequently used in cheaper Roman jewellery in lieu of gemstones. The Roxton ring should probably be dated to around the second century.

- 14 Silver Ring with Intaglio** Fig 3.7
Eaton Socon [TL 16 58]

Fragment of a small silver ring, incorporating one shoulder and the bezel which contains an oval intaglio 9 x 6.5 mm of honey-yellow glass. It is difficult to make sense of the engraved device: it may be a simplified or disjointed representation of a figure, or possibly a wheat-ear or (turned on its side) a dolphin swimming. A date in the third century is likely for this style of ring.

ANGLO-SAXON BROOCHES AND PIN

All copper alloy

- 15 Small-long Brooch** Fig 4.1
Eaton Socon (Little End) [TL 17 58]

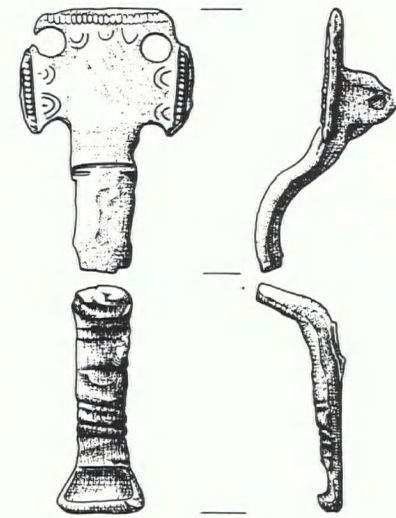
A slightly worn brooch in two pieces, broken just below the bow, and together measuring 67 mm in length. The end of the head-plate is pierced by a small, round hole at each corner and the other two corners are slightly incurved giving the head-plate the appearance of a cross pattée. The edge of the head-plate is decorated by a well-defined row of cable-moulding within which there is a row of engraved swag ornament. Small-long brooches are generally dated to around the sixth century AD. Among the many examples of small-long brooches recorded in the region, two from the cemetery at Barrington, Cambs, share a similar form of head-plate.⁹

- 16 Small-long Brooch as no. 15** Fig 4.2

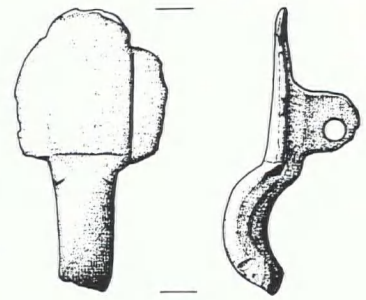
Part of a second brooch from the same site, the worn remains of the head and bow only. The edges of the head-plate are too damaged for its original shape to be discerned.

- 17 Fragment of Square-headed Brooch** Fig 4.3
Roxton [region of TL 14 55]

A rectangular fragment, 25 x 21.5 mm, apparently clipped off the corner of a square-headed brooch in

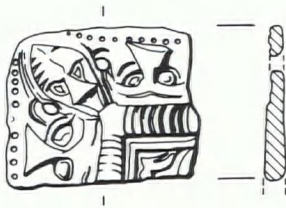


4.1



4.2

0 2cm

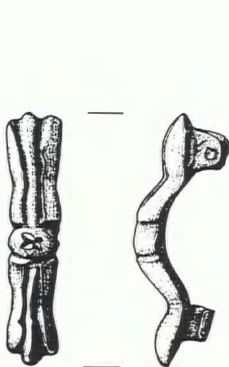


4.3

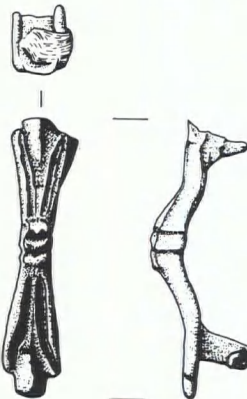


4.6

x 2



4.4



4.5

Fig 4 Anglo-Saxon copper alloy brooches (x 1). 4.1-2 small-long brooches, Eaton Socon. 4.3 square-headed brooch fragment, Roxton 4.4-5 ansate brooches, Eaton Socon. 4.6 Anglo-saxon copper alloy pin, Roxton (x 2).

antiquity and still retaining some of its original gilding on the obverse. From this it is possible to reconstruct the decoration of the head: this would have comprised a central rectangular panel of dis-jointed animal-ornament, contained within a raised frame, and a row of outward-facing masks with pronounced eyes and snouts plus a single row of impressed dots around the edge. The extant corner has a lentoid, inwardly-facing mask at the corner of the frame which would have been repeated on the other side. Attempts to classify this brooch or draw comparisons with other square-headed brooches on the evidence of the head alone are of limited validity, but two particularly relevant parallels may be mentioned. One is square-headed brooch no. 5 from Nassington, Northants¹⁰ which displays a similar row of outward-facing masks with holes pierced between them (two such holes can be seen on the Roxton fragment) and plain lentoid bosses at the two upper corners. Another brooch with a similar mask-border is from grave 60 of the cemetery at Chessell Down, Isle of Wight,¹¹ here the lentoid corner-bosses have become masks, very similar to those on the Roxton example, although the piercing of the border is absent. The Chessell Down specimen belongs to Leeds' South Midlands group, datable brooches from which have been assigned to the late sixth century. Great square-headed brooches have not been especially plentiful in Bedfordshire, being confined mainly to the Kempston cemetery in the N and to cemeteries of the Luton area in the S of the county. However, given the relatively large numbers recorded from East Anglia and Cambs, it is not so surprising that one should come to light in the E of the county, and it appears to be in keeping stylistically with others from the S Midlands region.

**18 Ansate Brooch
Eaton Socon**

Fig 4.4
[TL 17 58]

This is an example of a type variously referred to as 'ansate', 'caterpillar' or 'equal-arm', brooches, a Merovingian/Frankish class of brooch of wide distribution in N Europe and dating to the seventh to ninth centuries.¹² It is cast with the distinctive bowed profile and has two deep grooves running the length of each arm; its total length is 33 mm. The pin is missing but the surviving mechanism shows it to have been hinged and it is presumably a Continental import, unlike 19 below.

**19 Ansate Brooch
as no. 18**

Fig 4.5

This is a similar type of brooch to 18, but 37 mm long and having arms splayed at the ends and tapering towards the centre. The most important difference however lies in the method of securing the iron pin which was looped through a hole in a plate between two small lugs on the reverse (the illustration shows the remains of the iron pin corroded *in situ* in the hole in the copper alloy lug). This feature identifies the brooch with a small group of ansate brooches all sharing this unusual fastening and with a distribution confined to East Anglia. Hattatt has suggested that they are all English copies and products of the same workshop in the vicinity of East Harling, near Thetford, Norfolk, and there is certainly a marked resemblance between the Eaton Socon brooch and other 'East Harling' brooches recorded by him.¹³ The only other ansate brooch recorded from Bedfordshire is that from Shirrell Spring, Totternhoe, and is of an earlier form with rounded terminals to the arms.¹⁴

**20 Pin
Roxton**

Fig 4.6
[TL 15 54]

The upper part of the shaft and head of a small pin, 26 mm long, the head being faceted and each of the eight facets decorated with a raised circle. There is no sign of these having been cells for enamel or stones. A mid-Saxon date is probable.

NOTES

- 1 Wild, J.P., 1970; "Button-and-Loop Fasteners in the Roman Provinces" in *Britannia* 1, 137-55; Kilbride-Jones, H.E., 1980: *Celtic Craftsmanship in Bronze*, Croom Helm, 159-69, especially 166-8.
- 2 Of over 30 examples of boss-and-petal fasteners cited by Wild and Kilbride-Jones, *op. cit.*, enamelling was recorded on just 4 fasteners: one each from S Ferriby and York (blue enamel) and 2 from Traprain Law having respectively a central spot of blue enamel and a trefoil motif; see Burley, E., 1955-56; "A Catalogue and Survey of the Metalwork from Traprain Law" in *PSAS lxxxix*, 118-221. To these may be added a blue-enamelled example from Colchester published in Hattatt, R., 1989; *Ancient Brooches and Other Artefacts*, Oxbow, 415 and 417 fig 7, no. 24; the Northill specimen brings the total of enamelled boss-and-petals to 6. Wild also included in his type III fasteners an enamelled pair from Traprain Law (Burley, *op. cit.*, nos. 233 and 234) which Kilbride-Jones defined as a separate "expanding spiral" form, an immediate forerunner of the boss-and-petal. Hitherto Traprain Law has been regarded as the sole, or at least main manufacturing site for boss-and-petal fasteners (see Kilbride-Jones, *op. cit.*, 167-8) however the marked contrast between the Traprain Law enamelled patterns, derived from three-pointed and trumpet-spiral motifs,

- and the eight-celled symmetry of the Northhill fastener's design, and its markedly longer shank, caution against assigning all boss-and-petals automatically to the same source. The find-spot of the Northhill specimen lies some 10 miles N of the Icknield Way which links it with other finds of boss-and-petal fasteners at Hockwold, Norfolk; Gadebridge Park, Hemel Hempstead, Herts; and Lowbury Hill, Berks, and from Colchester the enamelled fastener (above, Hattatt) and an unenamelled one quoted in Wild and Kilbride-Jones to complete the list of this type recorded in SE Britain (see Kilbride-Jones, *op. cit.*, 168 for discussion of significance of Icknield Way as a trade route in relation to button-and-loop fasteners).
- 3 A similar type of stud which may have contained enamel, was excavated at Milton Keynes from a fourth-century context, see Mynard, D.C. *et. al.*, 1987; *Roman Milton Keynes — Excavations and Fieldwork 1971-82*, Bucks. Arch. Soc. Monograph Series No. 1, 138 no. 96 and 140 fig 44. A number of small enamelled studs were excavated at Verulamium from contexts dated to the second half of the second century, see Frere, S., 1972; *Verulamium Excavations*, vol I, Soc of Antiq. of London, 126 nos. 96-100.
 - 4 This type is described by Hattatt as of wide distribution (Hull's type 253). A specimen very similar to the Eaton Socon brooch and with the same colour-scheme, came from Cold Kitchen Hill, Wilts. See Hattatt, R., 1982; *Ancient and Romano-British Brooches*, Dorset Publishing Co., 138 no. 118; and Hattatt, R., 1985; *Iron Age and Roman Brooches*, Oxbow, 141 no. 518.
 - 5 The best comparison is with a group of brooches nos. 1031-34 in Hattatt, R., 1987; *Brooches of Antiquity*, Oxbow, 168-9 and 171 fig 55, all of which however have 6 'eyes' around a central circle.
 - 6 Hattatt 1985, 146-7 and 144 fig 61, no. 538A (Blandford Forum) and Hattatt 1987, 184 and 182 fig 50 no. 1066 (Northants.). Mention is also made of an example from Woodeaton, Oxon., recorded by Hull.
 - 7 For brooches similar to 8 and 9 see: Brown, R.A., 1986; "The Iron Age and Romano-British Settlement at Woodcock Hall, Saham Toney, Norfolk" in *Britannia XVII*, 39 fig 25 no. 183; Hattatt 1985, 156-61 nos. 567, 568A and 569; and Hattatt 1987, 197-202 especially nos. 1087 and 1096. Another enamelled lozenge-shaped brooch was excavated at Sandy in 1989 by Beds. County Planning Department's Archaeological Service (publication forthcoming).
 - 8 Frere, S., *op. cit.*, 118 fig 31 no. 22, an unenamelled simple duck brooch from a context dated AD 150-155/160. For note on other simplified brooches of this type (including Caerwent example) see Hattatt 1987, 227 and 229 fig 71 no. 1159.
 - 9 Fox, C., 1923; *The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region*, Cambridge University Press, plate XXX.
 - 10 Leeds, E.T., 1949; *A Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Great Square-Headed Brooches*, Oxford, 65-7, brooch 107 (Nassington 5).
 - 11 Arnold, C.J., 1982; *The Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of the Isle of Wight*, British Museum, 30 no. 60i, 54 and fig 15 no. 60i.
 - 12 Evison, V.L., 1966; "A Caterpillar-Brooch from Old Erringham Farm, Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex" in *Med. Arch. 10*, 149-51. Both 18 and 19 share with the Old Erringham brooch a solid, moulded construction and trefoil terminals which, by comparison with dated examples from the Netherlands, suggest a date in or around the early ninth century.
 - 13 Hattatt 1987, 325-29 and 382-3, nos. 1328, 1329, 1424 and 1424A.
 - 14 *Dunstable Library and Museum Annual Report 1925-6*, 7 and fig 9.