

A Roman Hoard of Ironwork from Sandy, Bedfordshire

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THE group of objects which forms the subject of this paper was discovered at Sandy¹ probably between 1893 and 1895, though the circumstances and exact find spot are not recorded. Although the accounts do not specifically state that it was a hoard there can be little doubt that this was the case. By 1905 they had passed into the collection of Mr W. Ransom, F.S.A., and he exhibited them to the Society of Antiquaries on 22nd June of that year. A terse account of the group was subsequently published,² but the first and only previous illustration of the group came in the *Victoria County History*³ where they are shown in a sadly inadequate photograph. The accompanying description is of little value since it fails to identify most of the objects and confuses some of those it does. In 1915 the group passed into the British Museum (Department of British and Medieval Antiquities) with much else from Ransom's collection.

The hoard is a fairly typical collection of scrap iron with a majority of pieces coming from carts. In this variety it reflects, on a smaller scale, the larger and better known hoards from Silchester and Great Chesterford,³ and can perhaps be most closely compared with the hoards found in 1962 and 1963 at Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxon⁵.

The exact dating of Romano-British iron objects is made extremely difficult by the continuance of types throughout the period. In the absence of associated material, therefore, a precise date cannot be given to this hoard with any degree of certainty. The Silchester, Dorchester and Great Chesterford hoards are all of the fourth century⁶ or later and there appear to be no hoards from the south of the province before this date, although several occur in parts of Scotland under Roman influence.⁷ There is certainly nothing in the Sandy hoard inconsistent with a fourth-century dating, and the linch pins, in particular, are only paralleled by material of that date. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, therefore, this would seem to be the most likely date for its deposition.

The reasons for the deposition of these hoards in the fourth century are uncertain. The most obvious explanation is that they were the stock, and in some

¹Nat. Grid. Ref. TL(52) 1848.

²*Proc. Soc. Ant.* (2nd Ser.) XX, 341.

³*V.C.H. (Beds.)* II, (1908), 11, pl. II.

⁴Silchester, *Arch.* LIV, (1894) 139 ff. (1890 hoard) and LVII, (1901), 246 ff. (1900 hoard); Great Chesterford *Arch. J.* XIII, (1856), 1 ff.

⁵Publication forthcoming.

⁶cf. op. cit., also Boon, *Roman Silchester*, (1957), 187.

⁷Piggott, Three Metal-Work Hoards, *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.* LXXXVII, 1 ff., and Curle, *Newstead* (1911), 119-120.

cases the tools as well, of smiths which were buried for security, but the fact that they occur mainly within walled towns¹ argues to some extent against this. In many ways they seem to parallel the great Iron Age deposits such as Llyn Cerrig Bach² and La Tène³ which were probably votive. That the fourth century saw a resurgence of pagan cults in Britain is certain and the possibility that these hoards are votive should be borne in mind⁴. With our present knowledge neither theory can be considered decisive, though concealment for security would, perhaps, seem to be more probable.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following works are cited in an abbreviated form in the Catalogue.

Piggott. Piggott, S., "Three Metal Work Hoards of the Roman Period from Southern Scotland", *Proc. Soc. Antiq. of Scot.* LXXXVII, 1952-53, 1ff.

Newstead. Curle, J. *A Roman Frontier Post and its People: The Fort of Newstead*, 1911.

Maiden Castle. Wheeler, R. E. M., *Maiden Castle, Dorset*, Soc. Ant. Lond. Research Committee Report XII, 1943.

O.R.L. *Der Obergermanisch-rätische Limes des Römerreiches.*

Jacobi. Jacobi, L., *Das Römerkastell Saalburg*, 1897.

Lindenschmit. Lindenschmit, L., *Die Altertümer Unserer Heidnischen Vorzeit*, Band I-V.

Richborough. Bushe-Fox, J. P., *Excavations of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent*, Vol. IV, Soc. Ant. Lond. Res. Commit. Report XVI.

B.M. (1922) Guide. British Museum, *Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain*, 1922.

B.M. (1958) Guide. British Museum, *Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain*, 1958.

CATALOGUE

The number following the name in each case is the British Museum Accession Number. All the objects are of iron.

i. LEAF-HEADED LINCH PIN (1915.12-8.331) with crescentic arms and a leaf-shaped head at right angles to the stem. Between the arms a pierced lug protrudes at right angles, and the leaf-shaped head ends in a conical point. Overall length 10.8 inches.

In addition to that illustrated there are three others in the hoard (1915.12-8.332, 333, and 334) with lengths of 10.3 inches, 10.5 inches and 9.9 inches respectively.

These linch pins are clearly derived from the common crescentic headed type which Ward Perkins (*Ant. J.* XX, 359ff.) has argued is Belgic in origin. This conclusion was, however, based on the fact that their distribution is confined to the south east of Britain. One example from Maiden Castle (*Maiden Castle*, 275, fig 90, 10) was found on a 'Belgic' road surface and so could as well be early Roman as Iron Age. The remainder, where dated, were Roman. A very typical specimen,

¹Silchester, Great Chesterford and Dorchester were all walled by the time the hoards were deposited.

²Fox, *A Find of the Early Iron Age from Llyn Cerrig, Bach, Anglesey*, (1946).

³Youga, *La Tène* (1923).

⁴Piggott (*P.S.A.S.* LXXXVII, 4ff.) considers this possibility at some length and then leaves the question open, at least for these late Roman deposits.

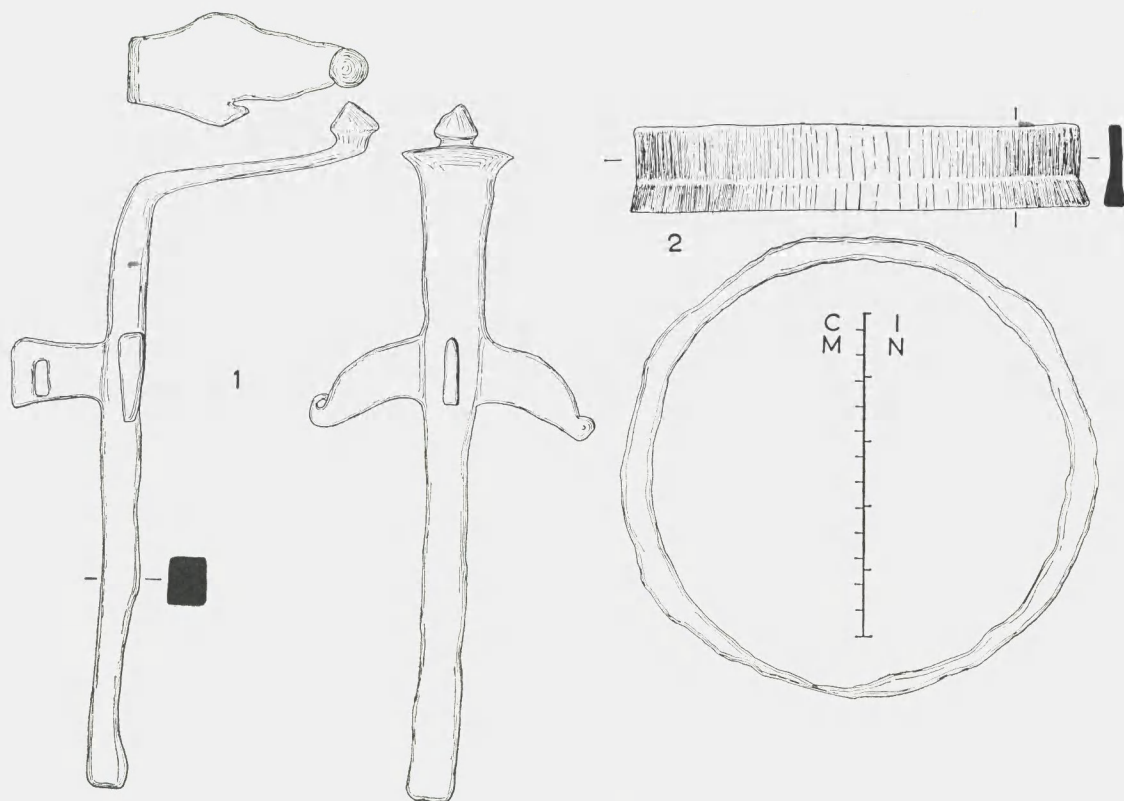


Fig 1. Roman ironwork from Sandy, Nos. 1 and 2.

however, is among the unpublished material from Pompeii in the Museo Nazionale in Naples, and is thus securely dated to before A.D. 79. It seems most unlikely that this can be the result of Belgic influence and it is more reasonable to assume that the crescentic-headed linch pin is a Roman type introduced with, or soon after, the conquest.

The leaf-headed variety is rare; there is a single example in the 1900 hoard from Silchester (*Arch.* LVII, 247, fig 4) and two in the Great Chesterford hoard (*Arch. J.* XIII, 11, pl. I fig 10) where they are tentatively called wall pegs. Another from the 1958 excavations at Verulamium has a leaf-shaped head but is derived from the spatulate and not the crescentic headed type. The function of the leaf-shaped head is not obvious though it may have acted as a step into the vehicle or been intended to help in fastening the pin to the axle. These linch pins are more likely to be cart than chariot fittings.

In as much as no earlier examples are known the leaf-headed type would seem to be fourth-century, but the number of examples is too few for any degree of certainty.

(Previously illustrated in *B.M.* (1922) *Guide*, 40, fig 36, and *B.M.* (1958) *Guide* 50, fig 23, IIIe, 1.)

2. HUB RIM (1915.12-8.342). This is a simple iron band slightly thicker on one edge than the other. In use it was shrunk onto the outer edge of the hub. Parallels occur at Newstead (*Newstead* 293, pl LXX, 5) and Great Chesterford (*Arch J.* XIII, 6). Diameter 7.2 in.

3. HUB LINING (1915.12-8.339). This consists of a circular iron band with the ends turned slightly outwards to form flanges which would originally have been sharpened and driven into the wood of the hub to secure the band. External diameter 5.6 inches. There are three other hub linings in the Sandy hoard (1915.12-8.338, 340, 341) with diameters of 4.8 inches, 4.5 inches and 4.7 inches respectively. There is an example from Newstead (*Newstead* 293, pl. LXX, 9) and another from Silchester (unpublished), and the recent excavations at Verulamium.

4. AXLE GUARD BAND (1915.12-8.335) consisting of a wide ring with a long plate of semi-circular section attached to one side, and a square hole in the plate for the linch pin to pass through. It was fitted to the end of the axle with the plate running along it so that the ring and part of the plate extended beyond the wheel itself. Overall length 6.3 inches, diameter of ring 3.9 inches.

Although these guards bear some resemblance to the bronze object from the Charioteer's Barrow at Arras, E. Yorks, which Sir Cyril Fox has identified as a draught-pole sheath (*Antiq. Journ.* XXIX, 1949, 81, fig 1) I doubt whether their function was really the same.

Two similar guards in the Great Chesterford hoard (*Arch. J.* XIII, 3, pl. 1 figs 14 and 15) have nail holes in the plate and the Sandy example was probably similar in its original state though corrosion has destroyed too much of the plate for certainty. These guards were shown by Neville, their excavator, to a blacksmith who told him that "he makes the same thing now [i.e. 1854] for strengthening axles". There are two examples in Germany, one from Kastell Kapersburg (*O.R.L. B, Band 112, No. 12, taf VII, 35*) and another from Kastell Niederberg (*O.R.L. B, Band I, No. 2a, taf VII, 28*).

5. FARRIER'S BUTTRESS (1915.12-8.344) with a characteristically shaped handle and a blade of V-section. Overall length 9.2 inches. They were used for operating on horses' hooves.

There are two in Dorchester (Dorset) Museum from the Colliton Park House excavation (unpublished) and single examples from Eckford, Roxburghshire (*Piggott* 27, fig 6, E 17), Silchester (1900 Hoard, *Arch.* LVII, 248, fig 6) and Caerwent (unpublished). Of these the Eckford and Caerwent examples have broader and flatter blades than the others. Lindenschmit (I, taf V, 7) figures an example from Stotzingen, and Fox and Hope in publishing the Silchester example mentioned three others from Bar-le-Duc, Grenoble and Pompeii. This latter, which they figure (*Arch.* LVII, 248, fig 7) is of interest in having a small model on the handle showing the instrument in use.

6. CURRY COMB HANDLE (1915.12-8.346) with three arms and a tang. The two outer arms end in elongated plates with two rivets through each of them, while the tip of the centre arm is expanded to receive a single rivet. These rivets fastened the comb to the handle and there is also a small rivet through the tang. Overall length 3.3 inches, overall width 5.5 inches.

I am aware of only one parallel from Roman Britain, that from the Newport (I.O.W.) Villa (*Antiq. Journ.* IX (1929), 148, fig 2, 22) which has only one rivet on each arm. The resemblance to the Sandy example was noted in the report but its purpose was not decided. A fourteenth century example from the Mount, Princes Risborough is figured in *Records of Bucks.* (XVI, 161, fig 12, 5) and a number of medieval continental parallels are quoted.

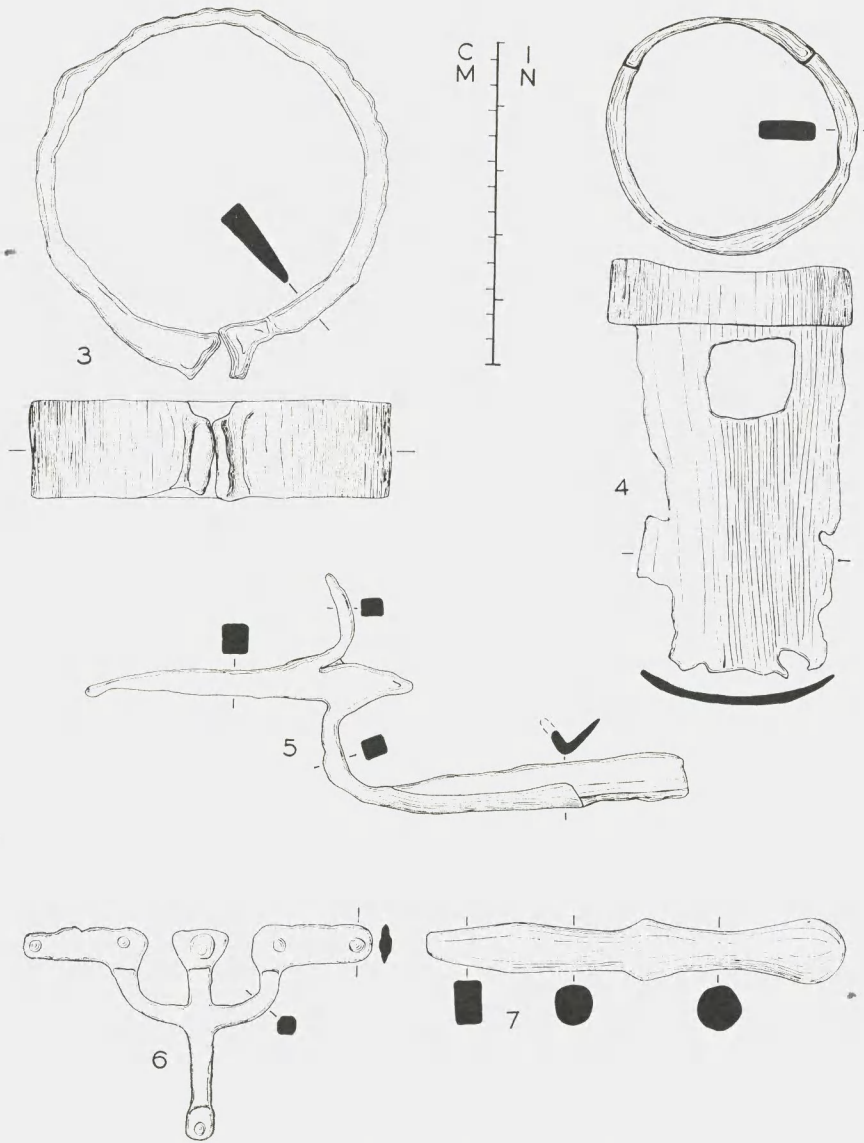


Fig 2. Roman Ironwork from Sandy, Nos. 3-7.

7. FIRMER OR PARING CHISEL (1915.12-8.336.) It is unusual in having this form of handle made in one piece with the blade. Since it clearly copies a turned wooden handle it is of interest in showing one of the forms which these took. Although chisels are common in the Roman period this feature would appear to make the present example unique. Overall length 6.6 inches.

8. MOWER'S ANVIL (1915.12-8.330) with an octagonal head and a square sectioned stem. The two loops are formed from a single strip of iron which passes through a hole in the body of the stem. Overall length 9.6 inches.

These anvils were used by mowers in the field to rest their scythes on when beating out the kinks and dents caused by striking stones, and the loops or coils, of which there are normally two or four, prevented the anvil sinking too far into the ground. Sir John Evans in publishing those in the Silchester 1890 hoard in 1893 stated that they were still in common use in Spain and Northern Italy and were made in Birmingham for shipment to the Spanish settlements of South America (*Arch.* LIV, 143) but efforts made in 1957 to find if they were still in production failed and it is probable that they are no longer made.

They were a Roman introduction into Britain and are fairly common, occurring at Newstead in a first century context (*Newstead* 248, pl. LXII, 1), and at Blackburn Mill, Berwicks, and Eckford, Roxburghshire, in the late first or second century (*Piggott*, 48, fig 13, B38, and p. 28 fig 6, E19). They are present in considerable numbers in the fourth century hoards, with five at Great Chesterford (identified by Neville as anvil pegs, *Arch. J.* XIII, 3 pl. 1, 8), and eleven in the two Silchester hoards (*Arch.* LIV, 143, and LVII, 246). In addition there is an undated example from Caerwent. In Germany they occur at Stockstadt (*O.R.L. B.* Band III, No. 33, taf IX, 79), Marköbel (*O.R.L. B.* Band 122, No. 21, taf III), Zugmantel (*Saalburg Jahrbuch* V, (1921) taf II, 1) and Büdinger Wald (*Saaburg Jahrbuch* IX, taf 29, 15).

9. COBBLER'S LAST (1915.12-8.337). In general form this is very similar to modern examples with a stop ridge between the stem and the tang. Overall length 15.1 inches.

Others are known from Caerwent (unpublished) and Silchester, where two occurred in the 1890 hoard and one in the 1900 hoard (*Arch.* LIV, 142, and LVII, 247). Although the Sandy example is longer than those from Silchester it is very similar in design. The German Limes forts at Zugmantel (*O.R.L.B.* Band III, taf XVI, 29) and Saalburg (*Jacobi*, taf XXXVIII, 19) have each produced a single example and what may be a third is figured in Lindenschmit (*V.* taf 46, 788) from a hoard of ironwork at Heidenburg. In a relief from Reims (*St. Germain Mus. Cat.* I, 247, fig 264) a last is shown fitted to a low bench on which the cobbler sits as he works.

(Previously illustrated in *B.M.* (1958) *Guide*, 53, fig 24, 10, and mentioned but not illustrated in *B.M.* (1922) *Guide*, 40.)

10. L-SHAPED TUMBLER LOCK KEY (1915.12-8.343). This type is probably the commonest of all Roman keys. Overall length 6.1 inches.

11. ANVIL (Lost). Although exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries and illustrated in the *Victoria County History* this anvil was not presented to the British Museum nor to the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in Cambridge with the rest of Ransom's Collection. We are thus forced back to the account and photograph in the *Victoria County History* where it is inexplicably described as a farrier's buttress. It was seven inches in height and seven inches square at the bottom reducing with a distinct shoulder about half-way up to give a top face four inches

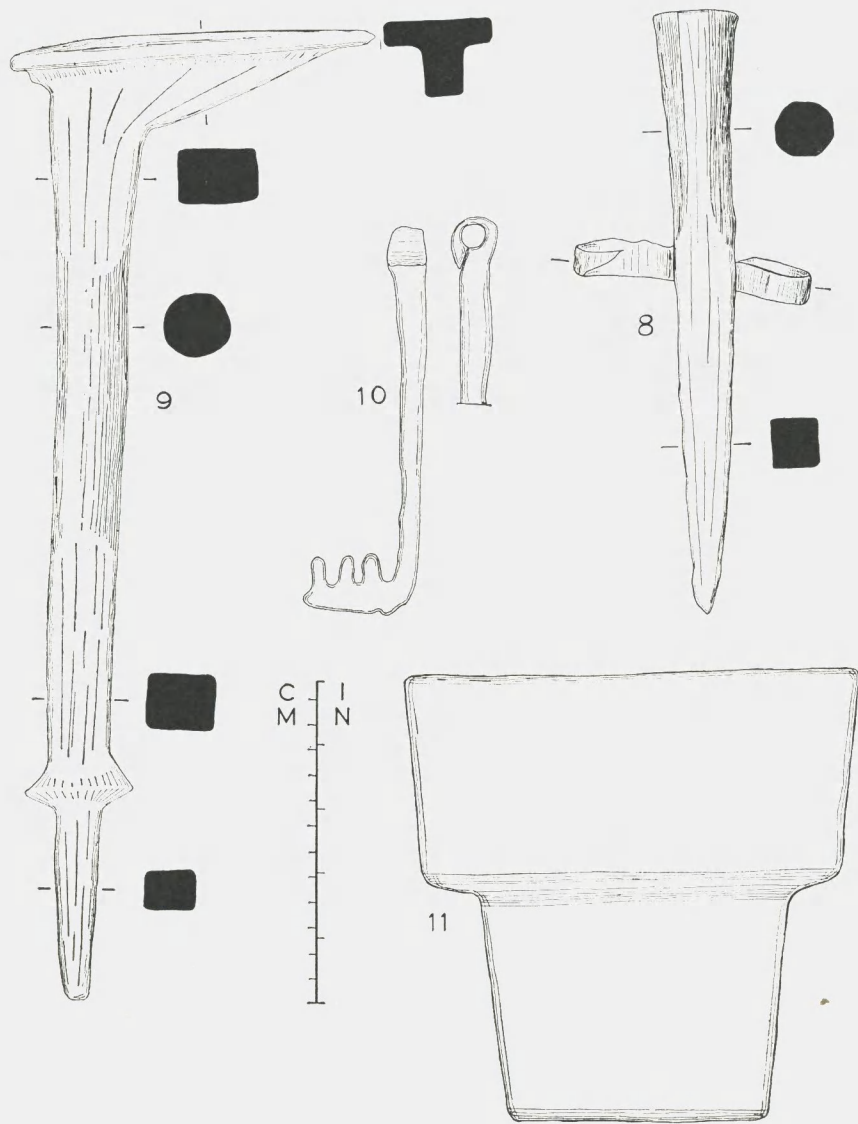


Fig 3. Roman Ironwork from Sandy, Nos. 8-11.

square. It seems most probable that it was upside down in the photograph (and therefore in the description) and was actually used with the larger face uppermost and the smaller one perhaps set in a recess in the work bench. Anvils of about this size and shape were common in the Roman world and are figured on many reliefs as well as occurring at Pompeii. The Sandy anvil was unusual in having such a large difference between the sizes of the two faces, but the closest parallel would seem to be the anvil from Sutton Walls, Herefordshire recently published by Tylecote. (*Trans. of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club* XXXVII, 1961.) (Redrawn from *V.C.H.* II pl. II).

12. AXE (1915.12-8.337) of the normal slightly curving type which is common in the Roman period. It is exactly paralleled at Great Chesterford (*Arch. J.* XIII, 3, pl. 1 fig 9), Richborough (*Richborough IV*, 154, pl. LXI, 341 and 342), and other sites. (*Not illustrated*).

I am indebted to the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to examine, draw and publish this hoard, to Mr J. W. Brailsford and Mr K. S. Painter for their ready help when I was doing so, and to Professor S. S. Frere who read the paper and made a number of valuable suggestions.