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## A BRONZE SOCKETED MOUNT AND BLADE FROM SHAPWICK HOUSE, SOMERSET (Fig. 6, Pls. X, XI)

Work over a number of years has documented a complex sequence of post-Dissolution and post-medieval transformations of the gardens and parkland landscape around Shapwick House on the northern flank of the Polden Hills in Somerset.<sup>1</sup> Excavations and fieldwork show how a medieval moated manor house site of the abbots of Glastonbury Abbey and its surroundings were modified according to the tastes of its post-Dissolution owners to create the open parkland seen today.<sup>2</sup>

From the 8th century until the Dissolution, Shapwick was part of the estates of Glastonbury Abbey.<sup>3</sup> A survey of 1327 describes the demesne manor house as a 'Court with barton . . . the garden contains 5 acres'<sup>4</sup> and excavations in 1994 partially uncovered medieval structures and confirmed the alignment of the moat and the location of the great medieval barn. Standing-building recording has identified a surviving first-floor hall whose roof was erected soon after 1489, with a chamber over the E. wing and a detached kitchen to the W. which was roofed *c.* 1430.<sup>5</sup> This evidence can be correlated with the description in Abbot Beere's terrier of 1515 which mentions a 'hall, chamber, storeroom, kitchen, stable, garden and barton inside the moat'.<sup>6</sup> The overall impression is of an administrative and agricultural centre dedicated to garnering the resources on which the power and wealth of a major abbey like Glastonbury depended. These links were reinforced through ecclesiastical ties at the two successive church sites.

The immediate post-Dissolution ownership of the manor is complex.<sup>7</sup> The house was substantially re-organized in the early 17th century, probably by Sir (later Lord Chief Justice) Henry Rolle (1589?-1656) who also seems to have cleared away the buildings obstructing the view to the N. of the house and deposited the demolition rubble in the moat.<sup>8</sup> Finds of Merida-type red micaceous ware, 'Malling' jug, Cistercian ware and German stonewares confirm the date for the moat infilling as 1620-40 and hint at a family of fashionable taste, wealth and good contacts. Appropriately, Rolle's new terraced garden

N. of his house was symmetrically laid out and included a banqueting house and detached pleasure grounds.<sup>9</sup> Ornamental water ponds and moated garden features were added later and have survived, at least partially, because the later 18th-century park was laid out S. of the main house rather than being superimposed on top of the geometric gardens.

The process of emparkment began by 1765 and continued well into the 19th century.<sup>10</sup> In all 19 houses were vacated and demolished and the tenants rehoused. An engraving by Bonner, published by Collinson in his 'History of Somerset' in 1791, adopts the fashion for eye level illustrations and shows an uninterrupted view to the house from the new park with a proprietorial owner, presumably a member of the Templer family who had bought the estate in 1787, striding amongst his deer. Shortly afterwards even the Glastonbury Abbey great barn was removed and Rolle's banqueting house was cleared into one of the ornamental ponds leaving the grounds as they are depicted on the 1839 tithe map.<sup>11</sup>

In July 1996 excavations in the park S. of Shapwick House uncovered a sequence of post-medieval ditches and pits re-cutting and intersecting earlier features dating from the early medieval period. The later phase of the sequence represents the boundaries and streets between the demolished post-medieval houses and can be clearly correlated with features shown on a series of 18th-century estate maps. The object described below was found in a sealed late 18th-century context associated with the emparkment and can be pinpointed to the levelling process which followed the demolition of a building *c.* 1773.<sup>12</sup>

#### DESCRIPTION

The object has a tapering cast tubular socket with a sub-rectangular mouth and two damaged attachment holes at the rim (Fig. 6, Pls. X, XI, A). The terminal is a solid ball which is extended to form a pair of parallel animal masks, janus-like with a long rectangular slot between the jaws. In this a bronze blade is fixed by a large bronze rivet; the blade has tapering shoulders and in section is gently tapered from a median ridge. The outside of the hollow socket has four panels of incised stepped ornament, the sphere has cast notches and barred collars between the animal ears, while the animal heads have deeply cast lines on their foreheads and ridges along the snout. The blade projects at a slight angle to the line of the socket.<sup>13</sup>

#### DISCUSSION

This piece is a remarkable assemblage of components of very different dates; the blade has been identified as a re-worked Bronze Age blade, given the simplicity of the resultant form it is not possible to identify the original bronze type.<sup>14</sup> The combined socket and holder finds its closest parallels, both decorative and functional, in early 12th-century Ireland on metalwork of a grander, more ambitious scale but with features in common with the Shapwick holder. Functionally it mirrors the great cross of Cong, dated by inscription 1127-36.<sup>15</sup> This has a hollow socket topped by a ball finial supporting a double-headed beast whose jaws grip the lower arm of the cross. This is a processional cross, a novel form in Ireland from the influential school of metalworking centred on the middle Shannon.<sup>16</sup> On the Cross of Cong the animal is in the romanesque style, new to Ireland. A 12th-century stylus from St Augustine's Abbey at Canterbury also has a double-faced head gripping the terminal and it would be interesting to know of other examples. The moulded profile and the style of the animal masks and the stepped incised ornament of the Shapwick find both occur in the decoration of the great tent-shaped portable shrine of St Manchan from Boher, Co. Offaly,<sup>17</sup> another contemporary product of the Shannon school of metalworking. On St Manchan's shrine the step pattern is made in enamel, but a related design also occurs cast in panels on the skirts of the shrine figures, including one said to have been found at Clonmacnoise.<sup>18</sup> The animal masks with their distinctive 'V' mouldings and ribbed snouts are echoed again on the more elaborate metal fittings on St Manchan's shrine (Pl. XI, B).

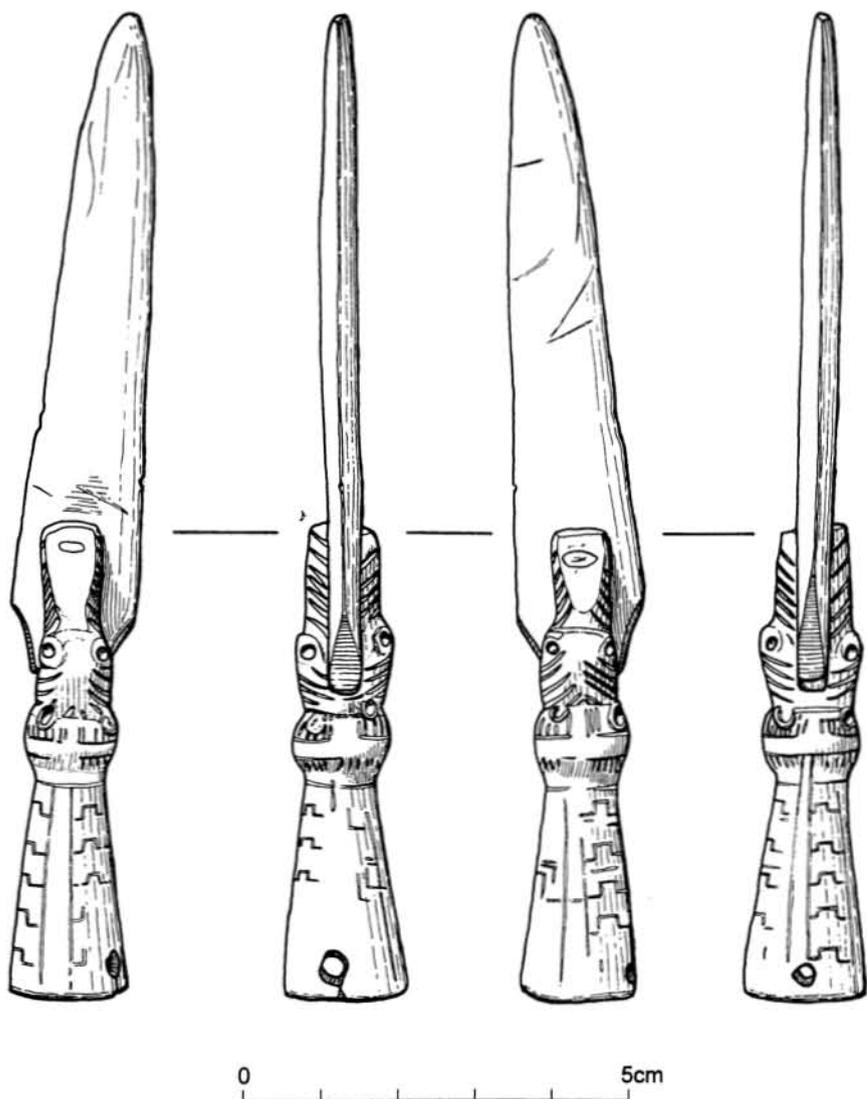


FIG. 6

Four views of the bronze socketed mount and blade from Shapwick, Somerset. Scale 1:1 (drawn by Rob Read)

These fine pieces of ecclesiastical metalwork provide a reasonable cultural context for the more modest Shapwick find; it is a finial for a rod designed probably to hold vertical a cross or flabellum. It was made in Ireland by the first decades of the 12th century but translated to Britain by means unknown. It is too late to be Viking loot but Bristol was an important focus of trading contacts with Ireland in the 12th century and a possible entrepôt for a piece such as this. The recent recovery of a contemporary sword-guard in Hiberno-Viking style from a wreck at Small Reef off the Pembrokeshire coast shows Irish-made fine metalwork in transit around the western coast of Wales.<sup>19</sup> The Irish connection with Somerset and Glastonbury, however obscure, was being emphasized by the Abbey in the

12th century<sup>20</sup> and perhaps the object was carried there by a monk or given as a gift. It may then have found its way to the Abbey's manor house at Shapwick or perhaps originally to the parish church. No explanation is entirely satisfactory but it seems plausible that the object may have been re-discovered or bought locally, possibly by a member of the Rolle family rather than a tenant. In any case by the mid-18th century the socket had been given a secondary function as a knife holder, the knife being a curio reworked to fit.<sup>21</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This work forms part of a much larger multi-disciplinary investigation, The Shapwick Project (1989–99), which is examining the settlement history of the parish. The project is co-ordinated by M. Aston (University of Bristol), M. Costen (University of Bristol) and C. Gerrard (King Alfred's College, Winchester) and eight annual reports are available from the Department of Archaeology, University of Bristol. A popular general account is published in *Current Archaeology*, 151, 244–54. Excavations and finds study are co-ordinated by C. M. Gerrard and further details can be found at [www.wkac.ac.uk/schools/shss/archaeology/arch-sta.htm](http://www.wkac.ac.uk/schools/shss/archaeology/arch-sta.htm). Work in 1996 at this site was co-ordinated by Philip Marter and will be published in the ninth annual report in 1998.

<sup>2</sup> For details of fieldwork and excavations on the moat platform and ditch, the Glastonbury Abbey great barn, and other 18th century parkland features see C. M. Gerrard, 'Excavations in 1994 at Shapwick House Hotel and Bridewell Lane', *The Shapwick Project, An Archaeological, Topographical and Historical Study, The Seventh Report*, eds. C. M. Gerrard and M. A. Aston (University of Bristol, 1997), 167–95.

<sup>3</sup> L. Abrams, *Anglo-Saxon Glastonbury: Church and Endowment* (Woodbridge, Studies in Anglo-Saxon History 8, 1996), 204–11; M. D. Costen, 'The Domesday Book for Shapwick', *The Shapwick Project, A Topographical and Historical Study, The Fifth Report*, eds. M. A. Aston and M. D. Costen (University of Bristol, 1994), 76–78.

<sup>4</sup> M. D. Costen, 'A Survey of the Manor of Shapwick in 1327 from the Egerton Manuscript 3321 in the British Library', *The Shapwick Project, A Topographical and Historical Study, The Second Report*, ed. M. A. Aston (University of Bristol, 1990), 79–86.

<sup>5</sup> The term 'barton' probably includes other farm buildings such as barns. For further details of the standing building recording see Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group, *The Vernacular Buildings of Shapwick* (Crewkerne, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> M. D. Costen, 'Abbot Beere's Terrier: A translation of that part of the manuscript applying to Shapwick', *The Shapwick Project, A Topographical and Historical Study, The Fifth Report*, eds. M. A. Aston and M. D. Costen (University of Bristol, 1992), 89–118.

<sup>7</sup> J. H. Bettey, 'Evidence concerning the rectory house at Shapwick during the sixteenth century', *The Shapwick Project, A Topographical and Historical Study, The Fourth Report*, eds. M. A. Aston and M. D. Costen (University of Bristol, 1993), 84–85.

<sup>8</sup> Two notes on the post-Dissolution documentary evidence and ownership have been published in N. Corcos, 'Post-Dissolution Documentary Research: An Interim Note', *The Shapwick Project, A Topographical and Historical Study, The Third Report*, eds. M. A. Aston and M. D. Costen (University of Bristol, 1992), 63–65; also J. Bettey, 'Shapwick after the Dissolution', *The Shapwick Project, A Topographical and Historical Study, The Fifth Report*, eds. M. A. Aston and M. D. Costen (University of Bristol, 1994), 64–69.

<sup>9</sup> M. A. Aston, 'An analysis of the village plan', *The Shapwick Project, A Topographical and Historical Study, The Third Report*, eds. M. A. Aston and M. D. Costen (University of Bristol, 1992), 21–26.

<sup>10</sup> Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group, *The Vernacular Buildings of Shapwick* (Crewkerne, 1996), 14.

<sup>11</sup> M. A. Aston and J. Penoyre, 'Analysis of the Village Plan', *The Shapwick Project, A Topographical and Historical Study, The Fifth Report*, eds. M. A. Aston and M. D. Costen (University of Bristol, 1994), 27–45.

<sup>12</sup> Somerset Record Office (SRO) DD/SG7; this house belonged to the rectorial manor rather than the main manor at Shapwick House and was probably exchanged for another house in the village, now the Village Hall, so that it could be demolished (Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group, *The Vernacular Buildings of Shapwick* (Crewkerne, 1996), 14); the tenant of the building was one William Chapman in both 1765 (SRO DD/SG13) and 1750 (SRO DD/SG16). Before the Dissolution the rectory manor contributed to the expenses of the almoners of Glastonbury Abbey (J. Bettey, 'Evidence concerning the rectory house at Shapwick during the sixteenth century', *The Shapwick Project, A Topographical and Historical Study, The Fourth Report*, eds. M. A. Aston and M. D. Costen (University of Bristol, 1993), 84–85).

<sup>13</sup> The dimensions of the object are: overall length 130.0 mm, holder 60.0 mm, socket length 29.7 mm, socket mouth 16.6 mm × 14.6 mm, knob width 12.0 mm, blade length 86.5 mm, blade maximum width 16.5 mm.

<sup>14</sup> Identification by Dr Stuart Needham, Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities, British Museum.

<sup>15</sup> F. Henry, *Irish Art in the Romanesque Period 1020–1170 AD* (London, 1970), 107–09; P. E. Michelli, 'The inscriptions on pre-Norman reliquaries', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 96, C (1966), 26–28.

<sup>16</sup> R. O'Floinn, 'Schools of metalworking in eleventh and twelfth-century Ireland', *Ireland and Insular Art AD 500–1200*, ed. M. Ryan (Dublin, 1987), 179–87.

<sup>17</sup> T. D. Kendrick and E. Senior, 'St Manchan's Shrine', *Archaeologia*, 86 (1937), 105–18; Henry op. cit. in note 14, 110–13, pl. 44.