

A MIDDLE BRONZE AGE HOARD FROM GREAT BARTON

by *Edward A. Martin*

In 1977 Mr A. B. Fuller of 3 Anglesea Place, Hall Park, Great Barton discovered a bronze palstave and arming whilst digging a post-hole for a fence on the south-eastern boundary of his property. The objects were found at a depth of fifteen to eighteen inches below ground level and were lying on top of the natural clay sub-soil. The discovery was reported to the Suffolk Archaeological Unit and the author visited the find-spot. No features were, however, observed and no further bronzes were discovered. The objects were returned to Mr Fuller after they had been recorded (S.A.U. index no. BRG 006; TL 8866).

The palstave is 14.9cm long, with a blade 5.4cm wide and a haft 2.8cm wide. The septum has straight sides and a 'U' shaped section. Towards the blade end the septum floor is slightly ribbed. The stop-ridge is sloping and is partly formed by the incurving of the flanges. The faces of the blade are decorated with median ridges.

The arming is formed from a bronze rod, of variable 'D' or round section, bent into a rough circle with a diameter of about 6cm. The rod tapers slightly towards the ends, which would originally have overlapped. The arming had almost been broken in two in antiquity; the final break, however, occurred when the object was found. Both the palstave and the arming have a blackish patination.

The palstave is closely paralleled by one in the bronze hoard from Rayne in Essex (Davies 1979, 165 and Fig. 8.8 no. 11); in fact the two are so alike that they could even have come from

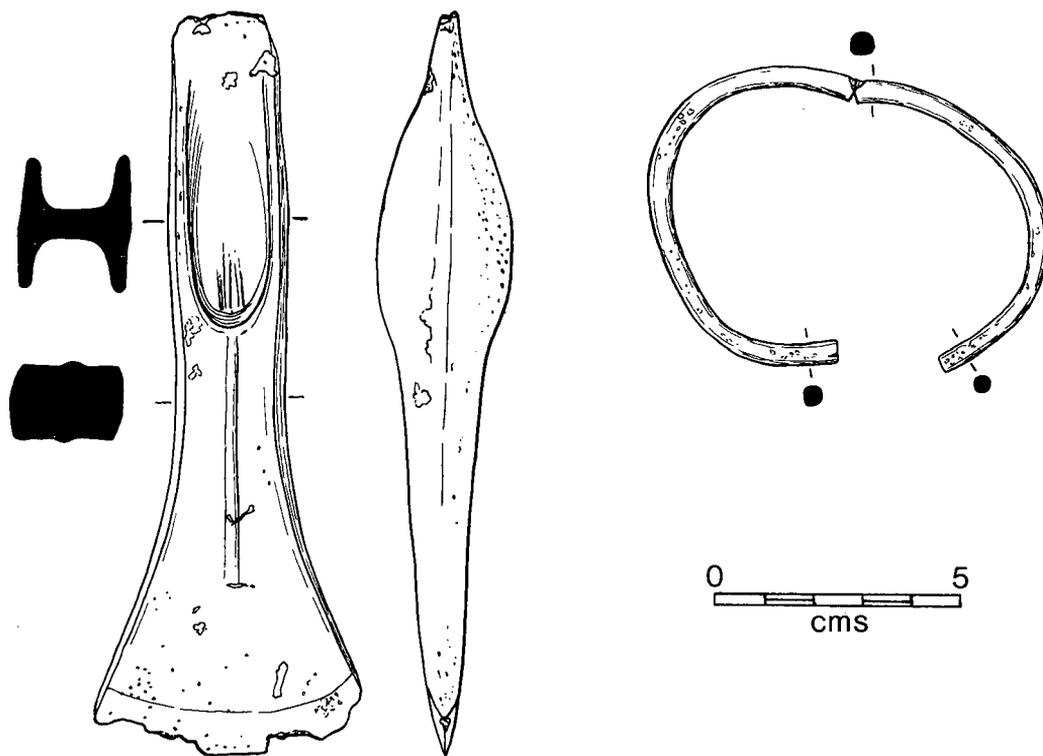


FIG. 35 -- Bronze hoard from Great Barton.

the same mould. Broadly similar palstaves have also been found in the Pear Tree Green and Gosport hoards (Rowlands 1976, 239, 241), and on a settlement site at Chalton (Cunliffe 1970), all in Hampshire.

Palstaves of this type have been broadly classified by M. A. Smith as the 'low flanged group of Southern British palstaves', a group which she saw as occurring principally in south-eastern and eastern England. Smith dated the 'low-flanged' group to her 'Ornament Horizon' of the Middle Bronze Age, which she saw as being broadly equivalent to the Montelius III period in Northern Europe (Smith 1959, 159, 167). In the more detailed classification by M. J. Rowlands, the Great Barton palstave can be assigned to his Class 4 (Werrar type) group 2; a group which he localises in South Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Rowlands has shown that the associations of this group point to a date in the late Middle Bronze Age (dated by him to c. 1200 – 950/900 B.C.). He has also drawn attention to the fact that the hafting technique of the Class 4 palstaves is atypical for the British palstave series, and has suggested links with Ireland or with the Tumulus Culture on the Continent (Rowlands 1976, 34, 40, 162). In the latter case it is worth noting an apparently associated find of a Class 4 group 1 palstave with another possible European import, a Taunton-Hädemarschen socketed axe, at Steeple Langford in Wiltshire (Moore and Rowlands 1972, 55). Although known on the Continent in Montelius III contexts there are now, however, more examples of this type of socketed axe known from Britain than from the Continent (Burgess 1976, 71).

The Rayne Hoard is not, unfortunately, very useful for dating this type of palstave as it is a Late Bronze Age founder's hoard belonging to the Carp's Tongue complex, and perhaps deposited c. 700 B.C. (Burgess & Coombs 1979, v). The Class 4 group 2 palstave may thus have been incorporated in the hoard as a piece of old scrap metal.

The arming is of a type common in 'Ornament Horizon' hoards of the Middle Bronze Age. Smith defined these as 'penannular bracelets' and pointed to their Montelius II – III background in Northern Europe (Smith 1959, 149). Rowlands has defined these as 'penannular armings' and the Great Barton example belongs to his type 2b: 'round sectioned-tapered, overlapping terminals' (Rowlands 1976, 91). A similar arming occurs in the late Middle Bronze Age hoard from Barton Bendish in Norfolk, thus suggesting that the palstave and the arming are contemporary late Middle Bronze Age products.

C. Burgess has recently suggested that the dating of the 'Ornament Horizon' or Taunton Phase of the Middle Bronze Age should be amended to run concurrently with Montelius II or early Montelius III on the Continent, and to date from the 14th – 13th centuries B.C. (Burgess 1976, 73 – 5). This would seem to place the Great Barton hoard around the 13th century B.C., as opposed to a more traditional dating to the 11th or 12th century. One effect of this re-dating would be to make the palstave in the Rayne Hoard some five or six hundred years old at the time it was deposited, as opposed to an age of about three to five hundred years suggested by the traditional chronology. This would seem to imply either that bronze implements had a long life-span or that old types of tools continued to be made long after their main period of use.

The finding of two Class 4 group 2 palstaves in East Anglia would seem to widen Rowlands's ascription of that group to the South Hampshire area, though Rowlands himself has suggested links between East Anglia and the Hampshire region in the Middle Bronze Age (Rowlands 1976, 29).

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