

A BRONZE TORC FROM KENNY HILL

by Colin F. Pendleton

In July 1984, whilst studying finds of Bronze Age metalwork made in north-west Suffolk, I was shown a cast spiral twisted bronze torc by Mr Percy Cole of Shippea Hill. The scarcity of these bronze torcs has prompted this brief note.

Mr Cole had found the torc (Fig. 26) some years ago, probably in about 1977, hanging from his plough share-beam while removing vegetation accumulated during ploughing a small plot of his land at Snare Drove, Kenny Hill. Fortunately the only damage incurred was slight grazing on a small area of the outer surface. This grazing caused Mr Cole to retain the piece, believing it to be brass. Having little success polishing the torc Mr Cole relegated it to his shed, where he had the good sense to retain it.

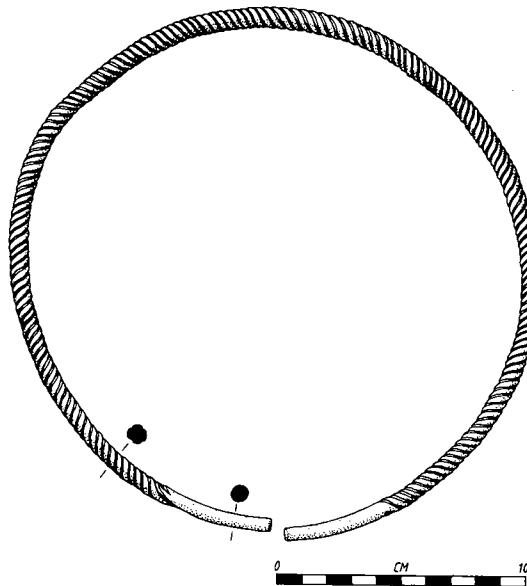


FIG. 26 — Bronze torc from Kenny Hill.

No precise findspot can be recorded due to the nature of its discovery. Fortunately, however, the field on which it was discovered is exceptionally small for its fenland location, only 1½ acres in size (TL 64 80; S.A.U. MNL 210). The soil of this field consists of peat fenland of the Adventurers Series (Seale 1975) which survives to a depth of up to 90cm at subsoil level. It would appear that the torc derived from within the peat, although the possibility of its origination in material excavated from the adjacent Baldwins Lode or field boundary ditches (and from beneath the peat) cannot be totally excluded.

The torc has an external diameter varying between 20.0 and 21.1cm and would appear to have been cast in its present form (having no internal constrictions to its spiral twists), although only metallographic analysis can confirm this. The spiral twists are tightly spaced at between 2.7 to 3.5 per cm (7 to 9 per inch) and consist of flat bands separated by shallow 'U' shaped grooves. This contrasts with the usual angular flanges and 'V' form grooves of the manually twisted torcs (Rowlands 1976, 17 and 90) and further supports a cast technique. The terminals

are plain and slightly tapered, unlike many other British torcs which have hook terminals. Only one other British plain, tapered terminal torc is known, that from Hollingbury Hill, near Brighton, Sussex (Butler 1963, no. 19). The Hollingbury torc is, in Butler's opinion, manually twisted (1963, 138) and its spiral twists have a much wider spacing than the Kenny Hill torc.

Forty-two other bronze torcs are known from England, one from Scotland, and two from Ireland (Rowlands 1976; Lawson 1979). The majority (thirty) of these come from the south-west and south coast regions with the other thirteen English examples from north-west East Anglia. Of the East Anglian examples, ten are from Norfolk, six reputedly in the Stoke Ferry hoard (Rowlands 1976, 251), two in the Barton Bendish hoard (Inv. Arch. GB7), one from Methwold (Butler 1963, 142), and one in the Hunstanton hoard (Lawson 1979). Two are recorded from Cambridgeshire, from Burwell fen (Butler 1963, 141) and the Green End Road hoard (Rowlands 1976, 205). The Kenny Hill torc is the only Suffolk example known at present.

Apart from the Kenny Hill torc, the occurrence of cast torcs in Britain would appear to be restricted to the thicker 'West Buckland' type which Smith (1959) included as part of her 'ornament horizon' and dated to the later Middle Bronze Age. On continental analogies this can now be seen to belong to MBA 2, of approximately the 14th and 13th centuries BC (see Taylor 1982 and O'Connor 1980). However, the finer form and plain terminals of the Kenny Hill torc do not readily compare with the 'West Buckland' type. According to Butler (1963, 140), continental examples with plain tapering terminals do not appear till Montelius III with the majority belonging to M IV, although north-west German and southern Scandinavian examples are known from M II (see O'Connor 1980, 79-80). The nearest continental torcs with tapering terminals are probably those from Belgium. Unfortunately these are undated, but may well derive from central German examples of M IV (O'Connor 1980, 80). The dating of these comparable, although not similar continental examples suggests a British date contemporary with earlier M IV, that is, the Penard 2 phase (Burgess 1976).

The Kenny Hill torc is possibly a direct continental import, as Butler suggested for the Hollingbury Hill torc (Butler 1963, 140), but it would seem more likely to be a local product with Belgian/north French (cf Taylor 1982) or Nordic (cf O'Connor 1980, 79) analogies. Indeed, British and continental connexions can be seen to be an influential element of the insular East Anglian Middle Bronze Age and Late Middle Bronze Age/Early Late Bronze Age industries (e.g., see Lawson 1979, but exclude the Clouston collection bronzes, the majority of which have now been confirmed as stolen: personal communication, Dr C. Shell).

The probable discovery in a wet peat location can be compared with other finds, for example, a rapier (see Coles and Trump 1967), a rapier/dirk (private possession) and spearhead tip (Mildenhall Museum, MIHLM 1979.16) all from the same field at West Row. River locations are also represented (cf Martin 1980). The reason for deposition in wet locations has been considered to be of a votive (cf Burgess, Coombs and Davies, 1972, 228) or sepulchral nature (cf Jope 1961, 321 and Davey 1971, 105). The sepulchral nature of hoards has also been demonstrated by Kristiansen (1979, 162) and Levy (1979, 49-50) and probably by the hoard from West Buckland (Taylor 1982). The distribution of Bronze Age metalwork from the north-west Suffolk fen edge (author, in preparation) suggests the sepulchral theory as most likely, although inferences over individual unstratified finds must at present remain inconclusive.

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