

THE LATE IRON AGE METALWORK FROM BULBURY, DORSET

By BARRY CUNLIFFE, F.S.A.

IN the autumn of 1881 it became known that a hoard of objects, mainly of bronze and iron, had been discovered towards the centre of the hill-fort at Bulbury (or Belbury), near Lytchett Minster, Poole. Edward Cunnington, a resident of Dorchester, immediately visited the area and managed to gather together much of the collection which, by then, had been dispersed. In one particularly charming passage he describes how, in visiting an old woman concerned with the find, he was told that she had given some objects to her son who was unwell, for the boy thought that if 'a' could have thic there little dog (one of the bulls) and nail un up over the door, a' would be better'. There, sure enough, Cunnington found the animal, though how the boy's health fared after its removal is not recorded.

In the following year Cunnington published an account of the discovery illustrating a selection of the objects (Cunnington, 1884): they were then deposited in the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester. This present reassessment of the finds is felt to be necessary for several reasons, not the least being that many of the objects have recently been cleaned for the first time, bringing to light details previously obscured; several finds from Bulbury not described by Cunnington have also been discovered in the Museum. Moreover, the assemblage can now be presented in the light of recent discoveries.

THE SITE (figs. 1 and 2)

Bulbury (SW 929942) is sited on a spur of London clay overlooking the valley of the Sherford River which flows into Poole Harbour about 2 miles away (fig. 1). A south-flowing tributary of the river has created a sharply defined valley along the east side of the ridge while a gully of lesser proportions delimits the west side. The hill-fort consists of a single bank and ditch enclosing an area of approximately $8\frac{1}{2}$ acres. Most of the earthwork has suffered considerably from ploughing. When Cunnington visited the site the rampart on the north side was the best preserved, surviving to a height of 10 feet (3 m.) above the silted ditch, itself some 41 feet (12.5 m.) wide (Cunnington, 1884, 115), but even then the eastern side was 'in process of destruction by the plough'. Cunnington suggested the existence of four entrances at the cardinal points, those on the east and west being provided with considerable inturns. The recent survey by the Royal Commission, however (fig. 2), recognizes only one certain entrance, on the south side, although it must be admitted that others may have become obscured in the last 90 years (*RCHM Dorset* II, 492-3).

SCHEDULE OF OBJECTS RECOVERED FROM BULBURY (figs. 3-6 and pls. LIV-LVII) 1-2 (pls. LV, LVI). Two bronze bulls with legs splayed for attachment to a structure of rounded section. Each animal, though stylized, is easily recognizable as a bovine. In each case the head is carefully moulded in a naturalistic manner with

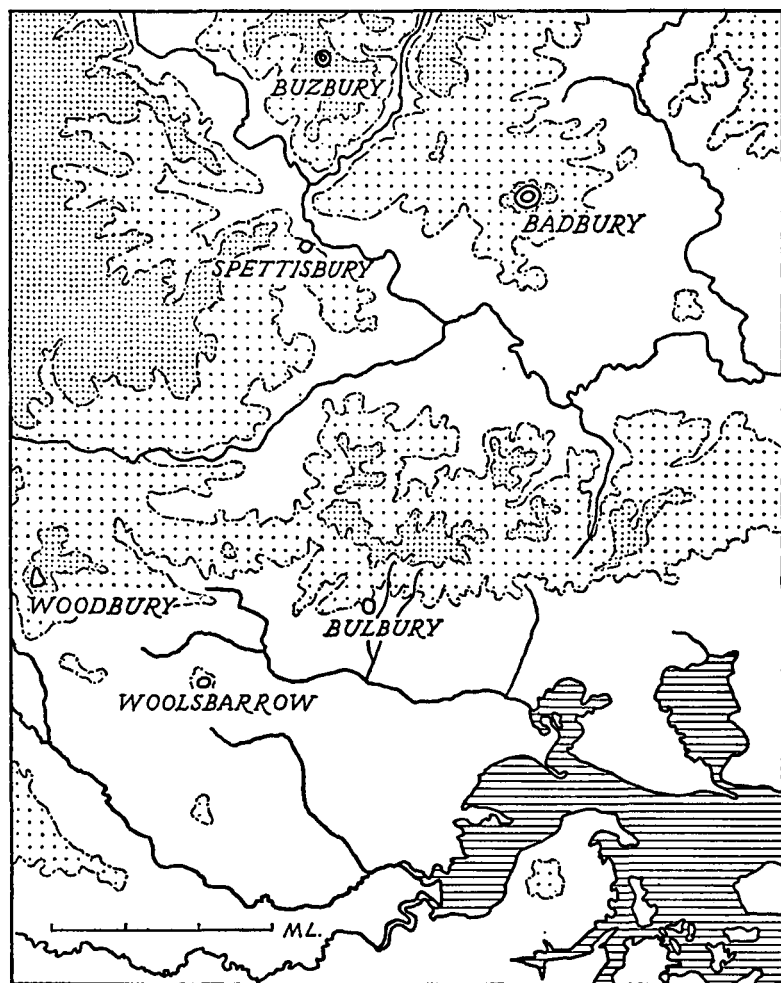


FIG. 1

the eyes, muzzle, and mouth clearly defined. The horns, cone-shaped with wide bases, project horizontally from a poll enlivened with simple curls. The body is formed by several curving planes sweeping upward and forward to form a thick tail terminating in an eight-petalled flower which, viewed from the front, can be seen above the head. The legs are simple, tapering towards undifferentiated feet, and are decorated with incised patterns in a herringbone fashion, presumably in imitation of hair. Both castings are closely similar.

Each beast was attached by means of eight rivets, two perforating each leg. Indisputable evidence of the function of these charming creatures is not readily forthcoming, but clearly they served as decorative fittings, presumably attached to the upper side of a timber structure of elliptical cross-section. The closest parallels

BULBURY

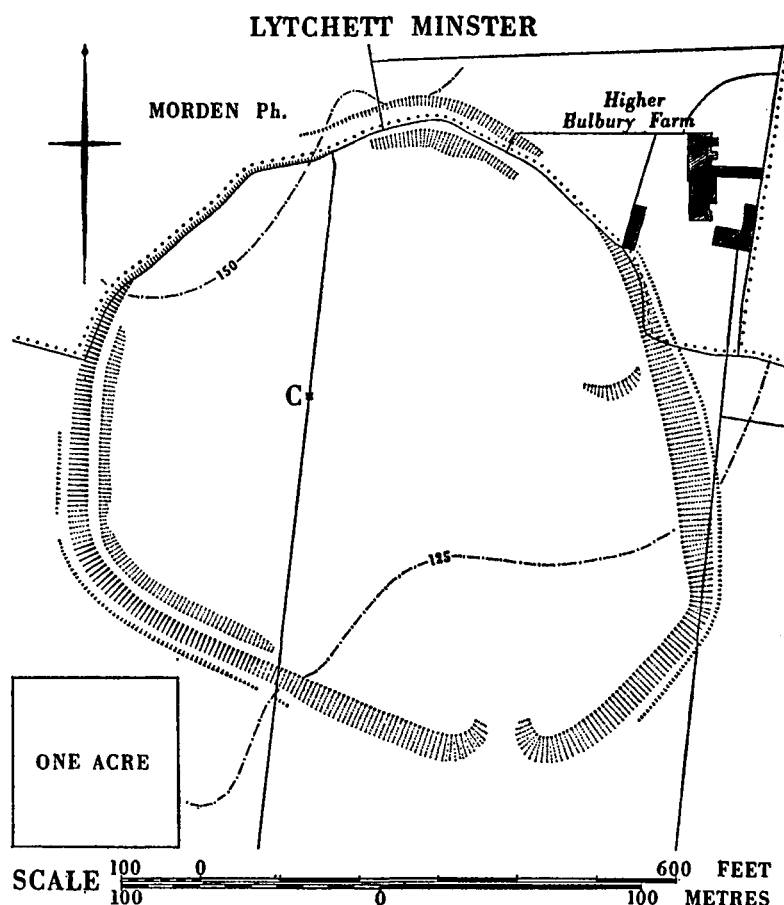


FIG. 2. C: find-spot of material discussed in this paper (plan by courtesy of Royal Commission on Historical Monuments)

for such fittings can be found among the yoke attachments from various European locations dating to the La Tène period. Yoke attachments can be divided into two types: those which incorporate an aperture which could serve as a rein guide, and those which are purely decorative. To the first category belong the examples from Nanterre, Mayence, Stradonitz (conveniently illustrated in Déchelette, 1914, fig. 510) and from La Courte in Belgium (Mariën, 1961, fig. 20). The non-functional fittings are usually in the form of columnar mouldings like those found at La Courte

(Mariën, 1961, fig. 20, 56), Weisenau, Karlstein, Stradonitz, and Bibracte (Déchelette, 1914, fig. 510).

The Bulbury bulls, with their carefully recurved tails, in all probability served as rein guides of a most original form, the reins passing through the almost closed loop formed between the tail and the back. In such an arrangement the fittings would have been placed on either side of one bow of the yoke, facing away from the centre. Each would then have taken one rein. Strictly, four guides would have been required for each two-horse yoke, two for each bow, but if it is supposed that only one horse was used, a simple wooden structure equivalent to half a standard yoke might well have been devised and accordingly only two rein guides would have been needed. Alternative explanations that the fittings were purely decorative, or even that they were not part of a yoke at all, cannot be ruled out, but unless similar objects are found in context, positive proof of function is unlikely to be forthcoming.

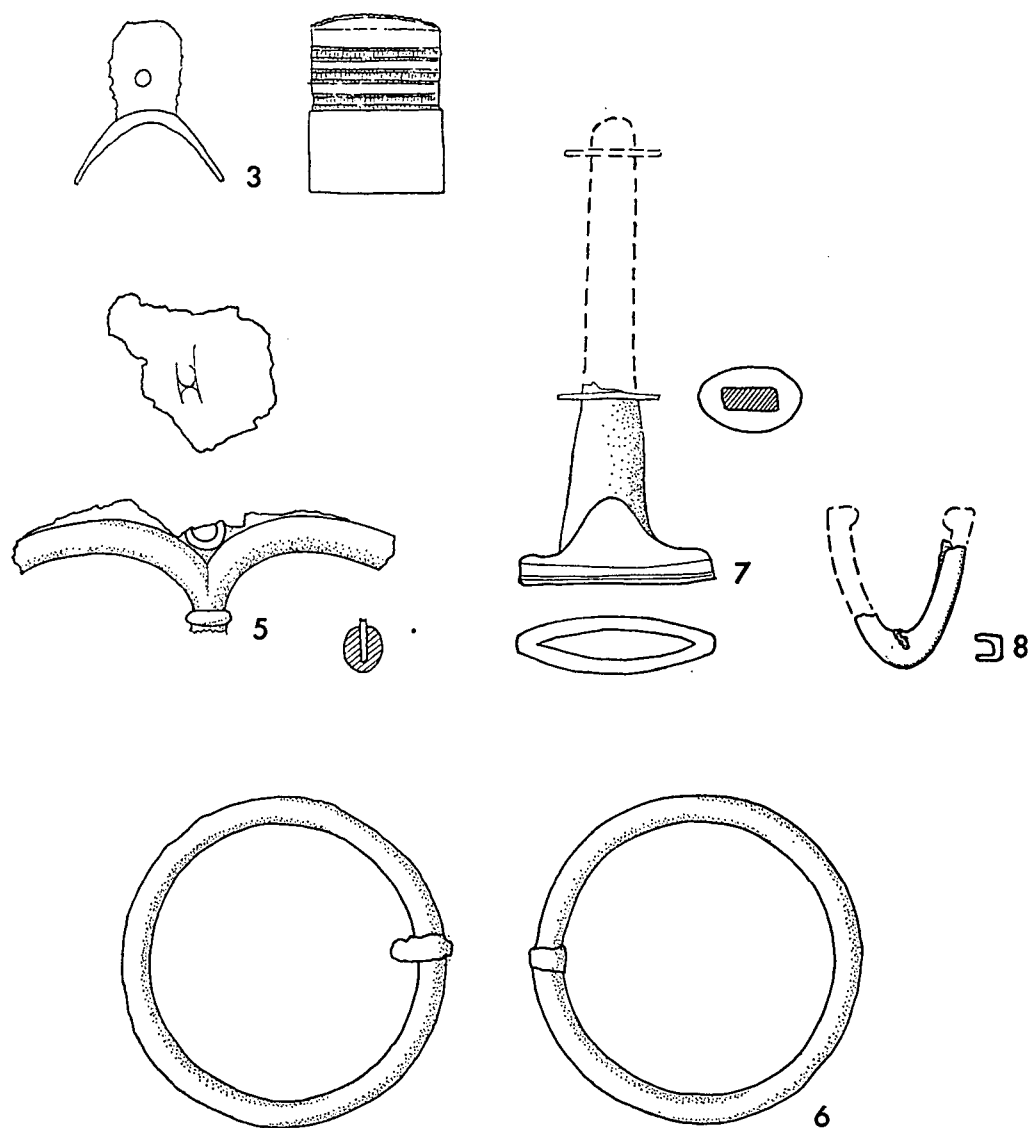
Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1884, pl. vi, nos. 1, 2. A. W. Franks, in a description of the objects (*ibid.*, p. 119), first hints at the possibility that the bulls served as rein guides on a yoke. That they were yoke mounts is also accepted by Fox (1958, 73-4). (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 114.)

3-4. Two hollow-cast bronze mountings with bases curved for attachment. Each mount is of roughly rectangular form with slightly rounded top. The upper surface is ribbed while each of the side faces bears three narrow ribbed bands. The ends are plain and both are perforated. The form of the attachment might suggest that these mountings were also for decorating wooden yokes, as were the bulls. Although the through perforation is of narrow diameter, it could have provided the means by which a rein guide ring was attached. Exact parallels have not yet been found.

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1884, pl. vi, no. 3. Cunnington records two objects of this type, but only one now survives. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 115.)

5. Part of a bronze mirror. Two fragments survive: (a) a small part of the mirror surface made from sheet bronze, now pitted with corrosion. The reverse face was inscribed with a simple curvilinear decoration, but little of the pattern can now be made out; (b) the base of the binding and part of the attached surface showing a fragment of the mirror plate slotted into the oval-sectioned binding. The handle has been broken away just below the upper ring moulding; its form is therefore unknown but it was probably a simple loop. At the point of bifurcation above the handle the mirror plate is decorated with an applied circle of bronze. The handle belongs to Fox's type IIIA (Fox, 1948, fig. 5) of which the simplest are in the form of a constricted loop.

The distribution is predominantly south-westerly, examples occurring at St. Keverne, Cornwall, Stamford Hill, near Plymouth, and Portland and Bridport on the Dorset Coast. The Bulbury example is closest to the Portland handle in that both have the ring moulding above the point at which the arms of the handle diverge.

FIG. 3 ($\frac{1}{2}$)

Found in 1881: Cunington, 1884, pl. vi, no. 9. Fox, 1948, 41. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 108.)

6. Two bronze rings, probably from a snaffle bit. The rings are 8.5 cms. in diameter and of circular cross-section. Both have narrow strips of metal wrapped around them to serve as attachments to the central link, which in this example may have been nothing more than a single strip of bronze.

Found in 1881; Cunington, 1884, 115. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 109.)

7. Part of a sword hilt. The rectangular-sectioned tang is of iron with a bronze guard in the shape of a cocked hat at the base. Halfway up the surviving part of the tang is a flattened ring of bronze, above which the tang has broken away. The handle belongs to Piggott's type IV A (Piggott, 1950, fig. 11, 5) comparable to other Dorset examples from Hod Hill and Stoke Abbott. The hilt plates would have been of wood.

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1882, pl. vi, no. 7. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 110.)

8. Part of a simple U-shaped sword chape of bronze, broken at both ends. Listed as 'unclassified' by Piggott (1950, 28).

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1884, pl. vi, no. 8. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 112.)

9. Bronze tankard handle in two fragments, composed of a central circular moulding flanked by two looped mouldings cast in one. The raised bands which decorate the junctions of the various elements are lip-shaped. The smaller fragment appears to be the attachment end of the same handle; its expanded, bifurcated terminals are each perforated by a single rivet hole by means of which the handle was riveted or nailed to the wall of the tankard. In Corcoran's typology of tankard handles, it belongs to his class IV which he characterizes as handles influenced by the style of mirror handles (Corcoran, 1952, no. 10, p. 99).

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1884, pl. vi, nos. 5 and 6. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 111.)

10. Bronze bindings, probably from a wooden tankard. Two fragments of different widths, one 2.7 cm. and the other 1.5 cm. Both have a ridged centre. Bindings of identical type were used on the stave-built wooden tankard from Pentuan, Cornwall (Hencken, 1932, fig. 30). The narrower fragment has an iron incrustation on the back.

Unpublished: in D. C. M. labelled 'Bulbury—Cunnington collection.'

11. Bronze bowl or bowls in five fragments probably belonging to at least two vessels (pl. LVII). One vessel, reconstructed here (fig. 4) is represented by part of the rim and three fragments of body (pl. LVIIa-d). The rim, though buckled suggests a diameter of about 20 cm. Bowls of similar type have been found on several sites in south-western Britain including Rose Ash, North Devon (Fox, A., 1961), Youlton, Cornwall (Smith, 1926), and Birdlip, Glos. (Green, 1949), all of which were made in a single piece to which ring handle attachments were riveted. The Bulbury bowl differs only in that the rim is undecorated. The one-time presence of handle attachments is indicated by a hole 0.5 cm. in diameter punched through one of the sheets presumably to take the necessary attaching rivet.

Two other joining fragments (pl. LVIIe, f) belong to a thinner walled vessel, the surface of which shows signs of lathe-turning. Though extensively buckled, the fragment appears to have had an omphalos base, close to the edge of which is a domed rivet 0.7 cm. in diameter. Such an arrangement is unusual.

Unpublished: in D. C. M. labelled 'Bulbury—Cunnington collection.'

12. Bronze fragment. Bronze sheet 0.2 cm. thick and centrally perforated with a raised edge around part of its circumference. The outer face of the raised border

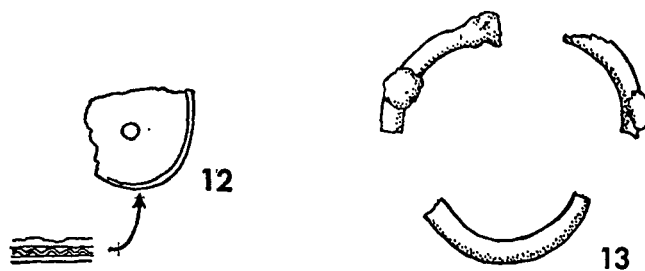
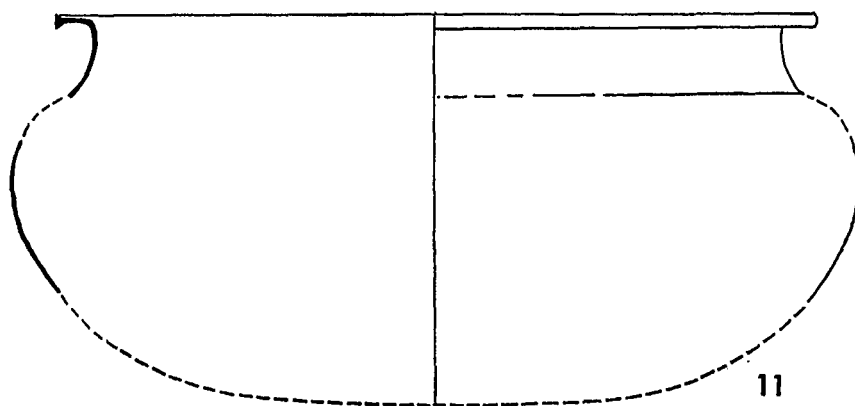
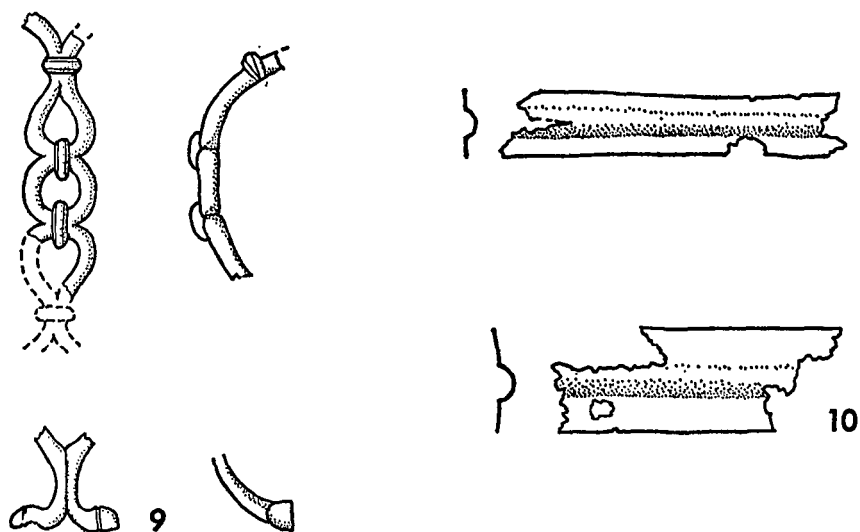


FIG. 4 ($\frac{1}{2}$)

is decorated with a wavy line, set in relief in a recessed band. This kind of decoration can be seen on the lips of the bronze bowls from Rose Ash (Fox, A., 1961), and Glastonbury (Bulleid and Gray, 1911, 179). The function of the fragment is unknown.

Unpublished: in D. C. M. labelled 'Bulbury—Cunnington collection.'

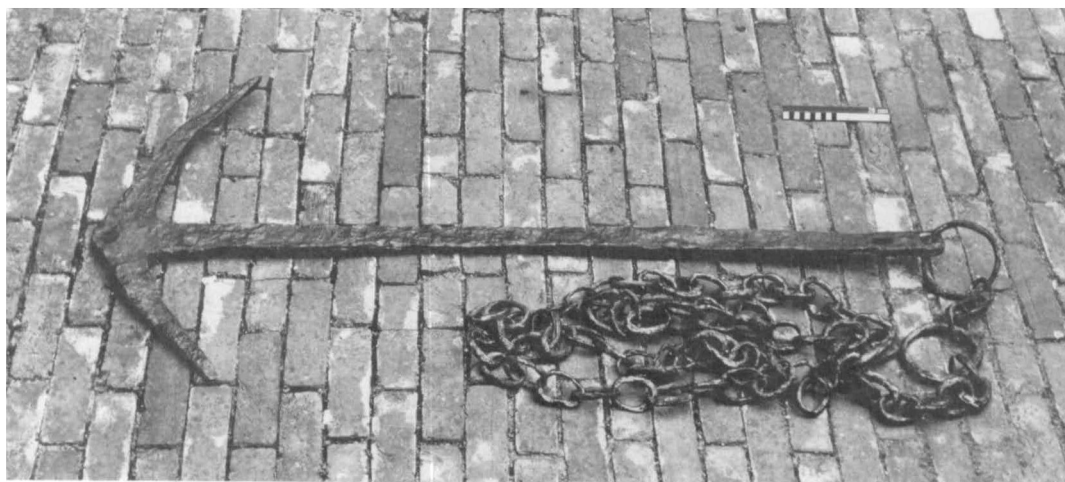
13. Three fragments of very corroded bronze rings.

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1884, 116.

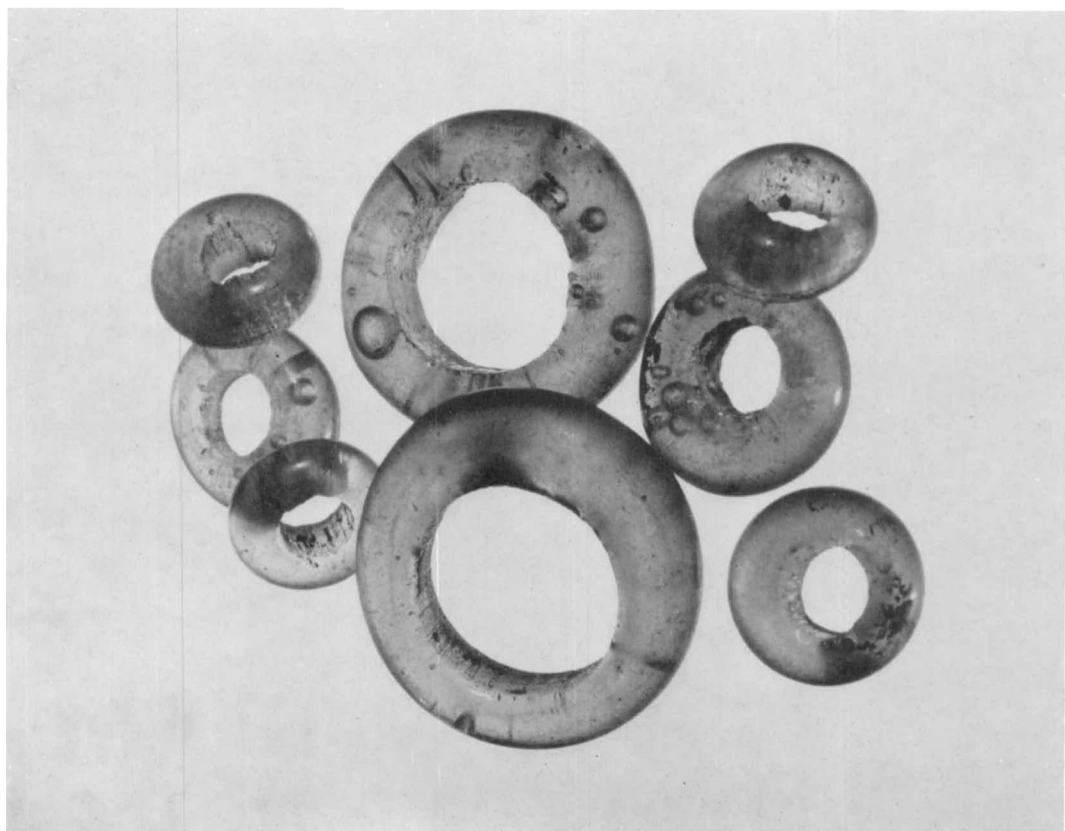
14. **Iron anchor and chain** (pl. LIVA). When found the Bulbury anchor, though well preserved at the fluke end, was a mass of corrosion where the links of the chain had rusted together around the stock end of the stem. It was not until 1967 that the true form of the object became apparent after an extensive programme of cleaning and conservation had been undertaken in the laboratory of the Dorset County Museum (described in detail in the appendix (p. 307)). The overall length of the anchor is 1.44 m. Its flukes, made in the same plane as the stem, are curved sharply back, and taper towards the points. Where they join, the stem projects slightly forwards and is perforated by a circular hole 2 cm. in diameter. At the proximal end are two perforations, a circular hole at the extremity for the attachment of the chain, and a rectangular opening, presumably to allow for the insertion of a slender stock at right-angles to the stem. Conservation and cleaning clearly showed that the stem of the anchor was flawed with large slag crevices. The chain consisted of 115 simple oval links, each c. 7.5 cm. across, adding up to an overall length of 6.5 m. The first and fifth links were larger, being some 13.5 cm. in diameter.

The anchor is of a well-defined type found sporadically in Roman contexts in Western Europe. In Britain a similar anchor is depicted on an altar, found in the Tyne at Newcastle in 1903, originally set up by the Sixth Legion to Oceanus (RIB 1320). The distal end is identical to the Bulbury anchor with the same shaped flukes and a basal perforation, but the proximal end has only one perforation, through which passes a single large ring: there is no aperture for a stock. Recently (1969) a substantial part of the end of an iron anchor was found while excavating in the bottom of a coffer dam on the Thames Embankment near Blackfriars Bridge. It is almost identical to the Bulbury example, the only exception being that the tips of the flukes were beaten out. The same general type is again represented by a large iron anchor, 2.5 m. long, from Villepey (*Gallia* xviii (1960), fig. 16 and pp. 48–9), but in this example there appears to be no perforation at the fluke end of the stem and only one perforation at the proximal end for attachment to the chain. A second French example, from the wreck off La Ciotat (*Gallia* xvi (1958), fig. 29, p. 25) and now in the Borelli Museum at Marseilles, represents the end of an anchor with sharply angled flukes. The closest parallel to the Bulbury example is undoubtedly the anchor from Pompeii, the stem of which is perforated at the proximal end both for the attachment ring and for a light iron stock, still preserved in position. The curvature of the flukes and the distal perforations are identical in both examples.

It is evident therefore that the Bulbury anchor was of a type in use during the Roman period, but iron anchors appear to have a pre-Roman ancestry in the west.



a. Iron anchor; length 1.44 m.



b. Glass beads; diameters 1.2 cm. (smallest) to 2.3 cm. (largest)

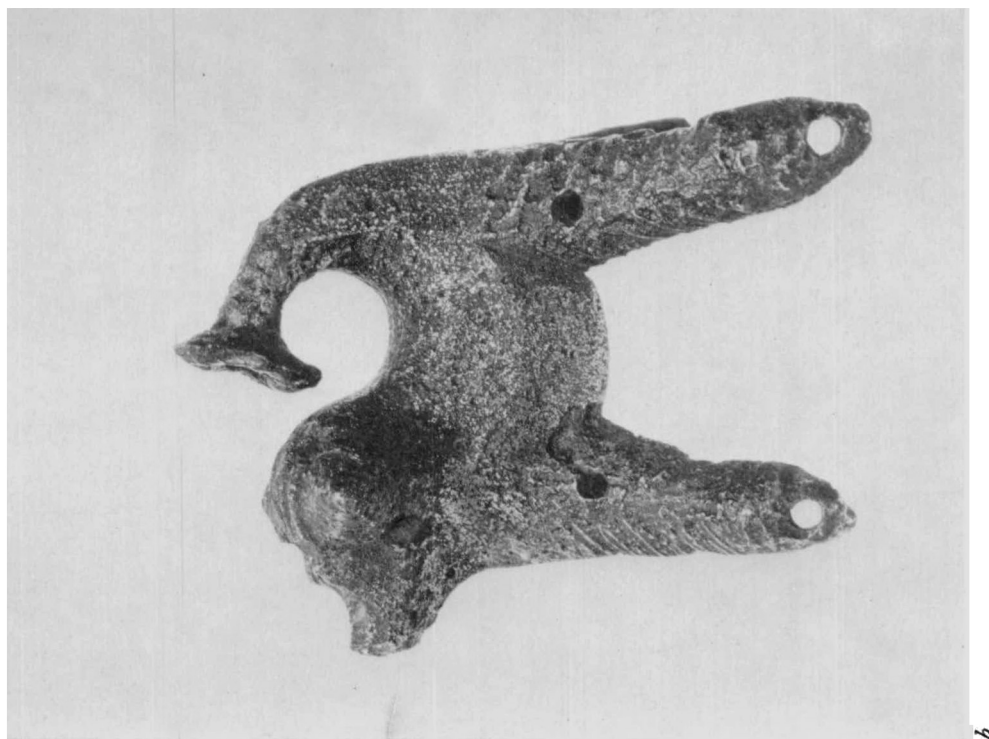
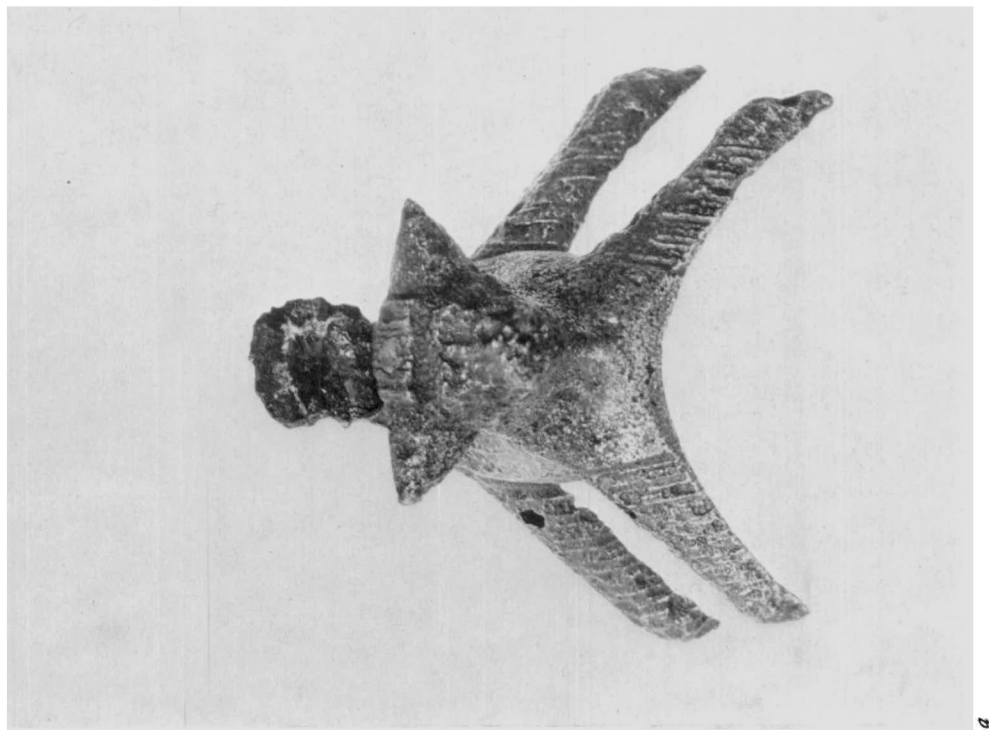
Bulbury, Dorset

(Photographs: David Leigh)



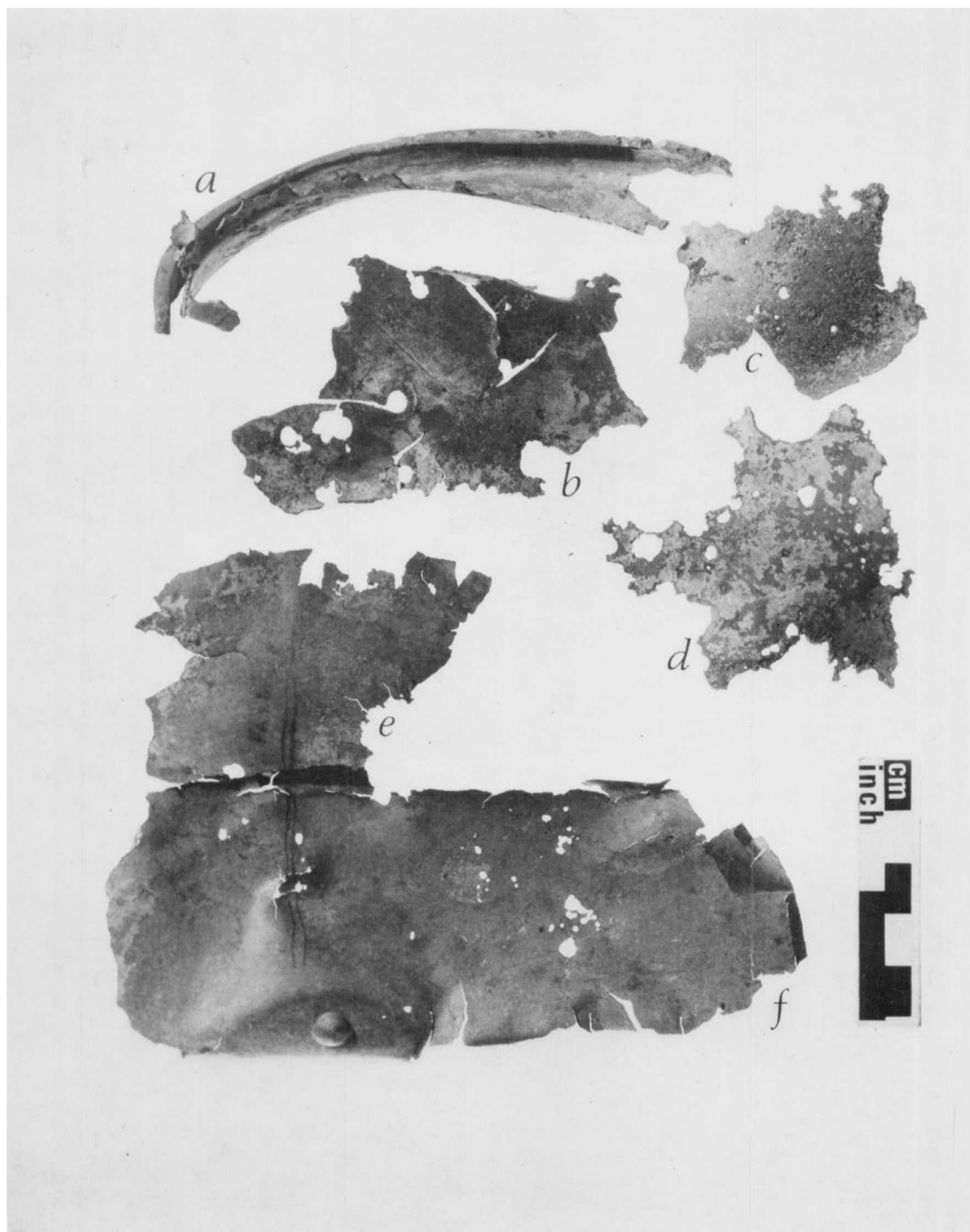
a, b. Bulbury, Dorset: front and side views of bronze bull no. 1 (full size)

(Photographs: David Leigh)



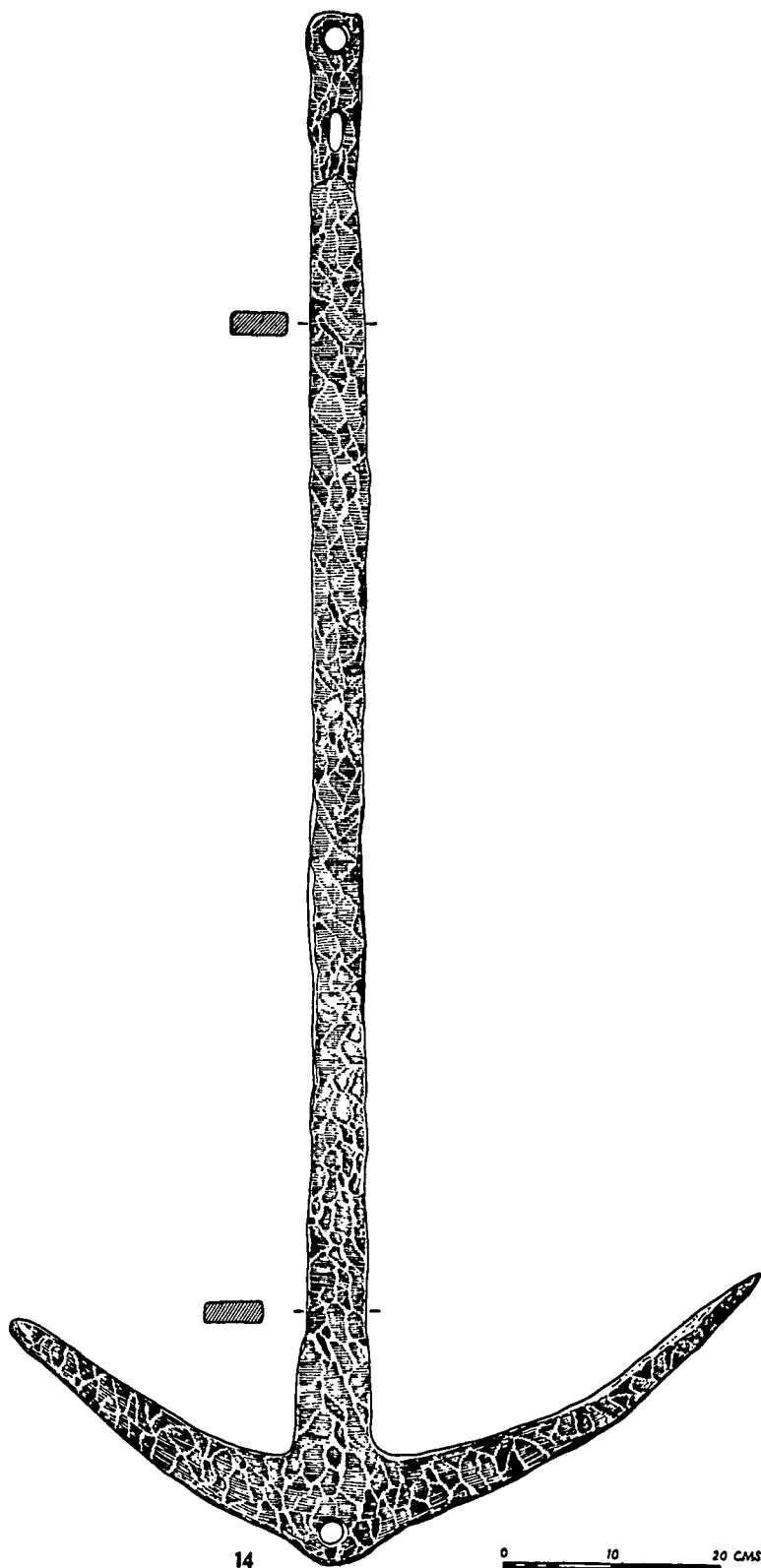
a, b. Bulbury, Dorset: front and side views of bronze bull no. 2 (full size)

(Photographs: David Leigh)



Bulbury, Dorset: fragments of bronze bowls (no. 11)

(*Photograph: David Leigh*)



14

FIG. 5

x

Describing the ships of the Veneti, Caesar (*De Bello Gallico*, iii. 13) writes of 'anchors secured with iron chains instead of ropes' (*ancorae pro funibus ferreis catenis revinctae*). Admittedly this does not necessarily imply iron anchors, but if the chains were of iron it is not improbable that the anchors were too. Cousteau, discussing the merits of the more normal Roman anchor of wood with a heavy lead stock, considers the loaded stock end to be necessary if ropes were used for attachment, for otherwise the stock would tend to rise and dislodge the flukes (Cousteau and Dumas, 1954, 139). With the more equally weighted iron anchors the problem would not arise if iron chains were used. Thus it could be argued (Frost, 1963, 18) that the existence of the relatively light iron anchor was dependent upon the use of chains. This still does not prove that the Veneti used iron anchors, but it might be thought to strengthen the case slightly.

On balance, it can be said that simple iron anchors may well have been in use in north-west Gaul as early as the middle of the first century B.C. and that they remained in use throughout the Roman period. Where within this bracket the Bulbury example belongs cannot be decided on typological grounds alone, but bearing in mind the pre-conquest nature of the rest of the collection a date within the first 40 years of the first century A.D. would not seem unreasonable.

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1884, 117. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 116.)

15. Iron axe-hammer, 16 cm. long with a perforation for an oval-shaped handle. No signs of use are apparent, but the axe-blade is broken and the iron shows several flaws resulting from the manufacturing process. It is possible that the object was rejected before use. Finished versions of shaft-hole axes usually have a more drooping flange like the examples from La Tène (Vouga, 1923, 110, pl. XLIII, figs. 6–8) and the British sites of Dinorben (Gardner and Savory, 1964, fig. 24) and Madmarston Camp (Fowler, 1961). This might suggest that the Bulbury axe was only in a rough-out stage. The type continues into the Roman period, e.g. at Newstead (Curle, 1911, pl. LXI), Carlingwark Loch (Pigott, 1955, fig. 9, C51), Richborough (Bushe Fox, 1949, pl. LXI), etc. More recently Manning (1966, 11–13) has discussed the type, emphasising the lack of closely dated Iron Age examples.

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1884, 117: 'an iron hatchet'. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 119.)

16. Iron sledge-hammer of approximately square section, perforated at one end for an oval-sectioned handle. The functional end is slightly expanded, suggesting some use. Hammers of this kind are uncommon.

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1882, 117: 'a large sledge hammer' (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 117.)

17. Roughly rectangular block of iron, broken at one end. There is a vestigial perforation, evidently cut when the metal was being forged, since the sides are rough and show signs of the cutting tool. The general appearance of the object is suggestive of a hammer or axe in the state of manufacture.

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1884, 117: 'a smaller hammer'. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 118.)

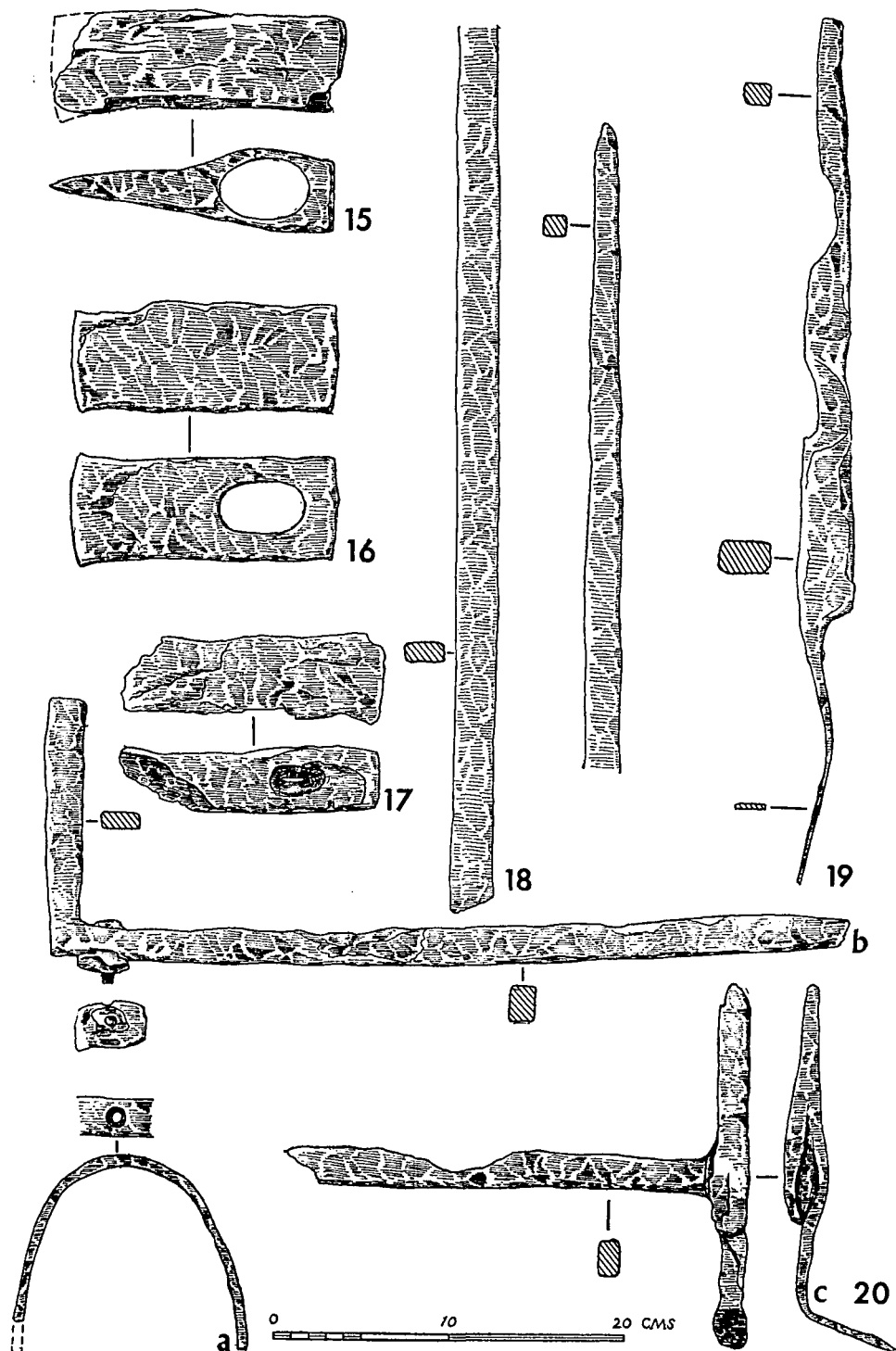


FIG. 6

18. An iron bar of rectangular section, tapered slightly at one end.

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1882, 116. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 121.)

19. An iron bar of approximately rectangular cross-section; one end has been beaten out flat.

Not noted by Cunnington, but accessioned as D. C. M. 1884. 9. 122.

20. Part of an iron fire-dog (?). The original account records 'a long iron bar with two feet, exactly similar to an andiron' while the museum accession card simply lists 'D. C. M. 1884. 9. 120—andiron'. The collection now contains three separate iron fragments which presumably once formed part of the object but, in the absence of original drawings and because of extensive cleaning, it is impossible to trace exactly how they fitted together. The probability, however, is that the U-shaped strip, A, was riveted close to the angle of B, where the rivet is still in position. If so, the bar could have formed the base strut of a 'fire-dog', the U-strip being one of the feet. The third fragment, C, consists of a T-shaped section with one arm fitted into a slit cut in the centre of the other, which tapers away at both ends. It cannot now be attached to the others. While, therefore, the possibility remains that the object was once part of a fire-dog, there can now be no certainty.

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1882, 117. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 120.)

21-8. Eight glass beads (pl. LIVb), made from yellow-green glass, were recovered, two c. 2.3 cm. in diameter, the other six c. 1.2 cm. across. Each had been made by producing a circular disc of glass perforated while semi-molten with a small hole. After cooling the central hole had been enlarged several millimetres by filing, the striations thus caused still remaining.

The general type is reasonably well known in late Iron Age contexts in this country and abroad: see, for example, Bulleid and Gray, 1917, 355.

Found in 1881; Cunnington, 1884, 116. (D. C. M. 1884. 9. 113.)

Objects now missing. Cunnington's account includes a brief mention of other finds which cannot now, with certainty, be identified. They are:

(a) 'Piece of bronze with iron ribs for strengthening.' It was not accessioned in the museum catalogue but it is just possible that he was referring to one of the tankard bindings (no. 10 above) which even though it has been extensively cleaned still has iron corrosion adhering to the back.

(b) 'Several fragments of bronze.' Again these are not accessioned but Cunnington may have been referring to the pieces of the bronze bowl or bowls (no. 11 above) which might have appeared to be formless and insignificant.

(c) 'Large nails [presumably iron], 6-7 inches long.'

(d) 'A piece of fine bronze chain or armilla.'

(e) 'Two or three rounded flat pieces of iron, which may be timber-clamps.'

(f) 'Fragments of black well-burnt pottery.'

DATING

In general it may be said that all the objects would be consistent with a deposition date within the first half of the first century A.D. If the more instructive of the objects

are considered individually, most will be seen to belong to the last decades of the pre-Roman Iron Age. The mirror, for example, belongs to a category which Fox considers, on purely typological grounds, to be connected to the more complex Colchester type which can be dated to the period *c.* A.D. 10–30 on the basis of associated pottery (Fox, 1948, 43; Fox and Hull, 1948, 134). Using stylistic arguments he believes the Birdlip mirror to be a little later, which therefore takes with it a *c.* A.D. 20–40 date for the burial and the two bronze bowls which resemble No. 11 from Bulbury. Lady Fox, however, suggests a slightly earlier date for the Rose Ash vessel (Fox A., 1961, 192–6), but since the vessel (or vessels) from Bulbury is not identical to these types it would be dangerous to put too much stress on the rather tenuous cross-dating. Finally, the tankard handle has been discussed by Corcoran, who, using different typological reasoning, suggests a date within 25 years either way of A.D. 1 (Corcoran, 1952, 90). The remainder of the material is even less closely datable. The glass beads are like those usually, but not invariably, of La Tène III date, while the axe-hammer and sledge hammer would not be out of place in any context from the La Tène II to the Roman period. Similarly the anchor is of a type current in Western Europe from the late pre-Roman Iron Age and throughout the Roman era.

All the objects therefore could belong to the last decades of the pre-Roman Iron Age. While it is true that there is nothing distinctively and exclusively Roman among the collection, it would be best to leave the possibility of a post-invasion date open by proposing the bracket A.D. 20–50 for the deposition of the collection, always allowing that some of the objects may have been old when buried.

THE NATURE OF THE DEPOSIT

The absence of an adequate description of the circumstances of the discovery makes any general assessment of the finds difficult. There are, as we have mentioned, two separate collections preserved in the Dorset County Museum, the main collection of 1881 listed by Cunnington and accessioned under the code 1884. 9. 108–24, and a separate box, unaccessioned but marked ‘Cunnington Collection’, containing the fragments of tankard binding and the bronze bowl. In all probability both collections were part of the same discovery, the unaccessioned box containing the ‘several fragments of bronze’ which Cunnington referred to but did not describe. The two groups will therefore be considered together.

The collection is remarkably comprehensive, and superficially has the appearance of a hoard with which general occupation debris (the pottery and the querns) had become accidentally mixed. Unfortunately we do not know whether all the metal and glass objects were found *in exactly the same place* or only *at the same time*. Cunnington’s account tells us only that ‘the objects and a large quantity of wrought iron were all found together . . . from 2 ft. to 3 ft. underground whilst draining the camp’. Admittedly the description seems to imply a single deposit, but it could equally well mean no more than that the finds were made at the time of the drainage works, in which case they may not all have been directly associated. The nature of the objects themselves is, however, informative. Of all the material the most significant are the glass beads, two large and six small, all clearly belonging to the

same set and most probably part of a necklace. This surely implies that we are dealing with more than a hoard of scrap metal or with general debris.

Excluding for the moment the iron, the remaining objects can be divided into two groups: the bronze bowls, the mirror and the necklace, all of which would be appropriate to a female burial, and the tankard, the sword and scabbard, the horse bit and probably the yoke, all fitting furniture for a male grave. Parallels are by no means difficult to find. The rich Birdlip burial for example, that of a 30-40-year-old woman, was provided with two bronze bowls, a mirror, a necklace, a fibula and an animal-headed knife; the cremated female burial from Colchester produced a mirror, a bronze bowl, a bronze pin and several pots, while the female buried at St. Keverne was accompanied by a mirror, bracelets, rings, brooches and a string of blue glass beads. Warrior burials with swords are becoming increasingly well known in southern and eastern Britain and it would not be surprising to find tankards of wood and metal instead of pottery, containing drink for the warrior to take to the after-life. Similarly the notional presence of the dead man's horses and cart is not infrequently indicated by a selection of horse-trappings in burials of the La Tène period. The Bulbury finds *could*, then, have belonged to a male and female burial. Indeed the beads and the unusual selection of the objects strongly hints at careful burial, but against this it might be argued that bones are not mentioned in the original account, and had any been discovered they would surely have been referred to—their apparent absence is therefore surprising.

The iron objects are more difficult to explain. The supposed fire-dog could have come from a burial, but on balance the range and state of the objects suggest a blacksmith's hoard. Both the anchor and the axe are flawed with slag crevices and might have been rejects, the strip (no. 19) is apparently unfinished, while no. 17 seems to be a hammer or axe-hammer in an early stage of manufacture. Taken together, the general impression given is that the iron constitutes a hoard of waste metal collected for reforging. The heavy and well-used sledge hammer (no. 16) found with it is certainly appropriate to the equipment of a blacksmith.

Thus, on the evidence of the material itself, it is tempting to suggest that three distinct elements are represented: the grave goods appropriate to a male burial, those for a female burial, and a blacksmith's hoard. This, it must be admitted, is a multiplication of hypotheses, and simpler explanations are possible. It might be that all the material belonged to a single deposit, possibly of ritual significance, or alternatively that the objects were part of a rubbish level scattered over a considerable length of the drainage trench and in no way related. On balance, however, the more complicated explanation would seem to be more attractive. It is conceivable that further excavation might clarify the situation and place this interesting collection in its correct context.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my grateful thanks to Mr. Roger Peers, the curator of the Dorset County Museum, and to his assistant Mr. Rodney Alcock for their constant help in the preparation of this report. The photographs of the objects are the work of Mr. David Leigh.

APPENDIX

THE CLEANING AND CONSERVATION OF THE BULBURY ANCHOR

By R. M. ALCOCK

The material found at Bulbury in 1881 was presented to the Museum in 1886. The anchor was then mounted on a stand in a horizontal position and remained untreated until the writer was appointed technician to the Dorset County Museum: the treatment began in December 1966.

At the stock end of the anchor was a great mass of corrosion weighing about 80 lbs. This had been wired to the shaft for support sometime during the anchor's residence in the Museum. The first stage of the treatment therefore was to cut the wire and to release this great mass of iron and iron oxide which was, in fact, the anchor chain. Once released the mass was immersed in a solution of 20% sodium hydroxide in distilled water, and was left in that solution for a week. When the mass of iron was removed from the solution the fragments of the links of the chain were released by picking by hand with chisel and hammer. The mass was extremely hard and while the sodium hydroxide had penetrated and softened it a little, the chain was still bound as a mass of iron oxide. The links adhered to each other so firmly that it was necessary to saw some of them apart. Only three complete links were extricated, the remainder came out in fragments. Each fragment was treated in the electrolytic tank and underwent an intensive washing process.

The treatment of the shaft of the anchor presented certain difficulties because of its size. Scale rust was removed from the surface. The anchor was then placed in a large sink with deoxidine, but was repositioned at regular intervals so that all the surfaces could be treated. After the deoxidine treatment the shaft was washed in distilled water and dried. It was then given a coat of varnish for protective purposes. Whilst undergoing treatment large slag crevices were found in the shaft, showing that the smith, when forging the shaft, had not worked sufficiently to remove the impurities. After similar treatment and washing the chain was reassembled and the links were joined together. Where there was at least two-thirds of a link it was used in the reconstruction of the chain. 115 links made up the chain which in all is 21 ft. 3 in. long.

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SUMMARY

The collection of iron, bronze, and glass found in Bulbury, Dorset, in 1881 is discussed in detail. It is considered to date to the early first century A.D.

The nature of the deposit is uncertain, but the possibility is examined that the finds divide into three categories: (a) fittings of a male burial, (b) fittings of a female burial, and (c) an ironsmith's stock in trade. Further excavation is called for.