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A Bronze-Age Pin from Siddington, Gloucestershire

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Notes

A BRONZE-AGE PIN FROM SIDDINGTON, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

In 1997 a Bronze-Age pin, of the type sometimes referred to as ‘Picardy’, was recovered by Mr. E. Swain whilst metal detecting near Siddington in Gloucestershire. The pin (Fig. 1) is made of cast bronze, with a long slender shaft 20 cm in length. One third of the way down from the head is a slight swelling, 0.9 cm in diameter, which is horizontally pierced for attachment. The head is conical in shape. The upper area of the shaft is characterised by a corroded green patina which indicates how the pin was decorated. Beneath the head the shaft displays evidence of diagonal hatching for 2.5 cm and under that is a 0.4-cm band of five horizontal lines. Below that the remains of a cross or chevron decoration comprising three incised lines is apparent. A band of five horizontal lines at the point of the perforation completes the decoration.

Only six examples of such pins found in England appear to have been recorded. In 1854 one was dredged from the Thames opposite the mouth of the River Wandle; in 1929 three, comprising a small hoard, were discovered inside a hand-made pottery urn during building works at St. Lawrence’s College in Ramsgate, Kent; in 1938 one was found at St. Margaret’s-at-Cliffe, Kent (Hawkes 1942). Finally a neck fragment was found near Hadleigh, Suffolk, in 1974 (Burgess & Coombs 1979). More recently pins which have some affinities with the Picardy type but are not classed as Picardy pins have been recovered from as far afield as Hunstanton, Norfolk (Lawson 1979), and Gwithian, Cornwall (Rowland 1976b).

In 1942 Hawkes made a study of the collection that had been found by that date, and he compared it to four examples recovered from Picardy in northern France. He created a typological and chronological order which, if accepted, places the Siddington pin towards the beginning of the sequence; the pin is most similar to that dredged from the Thames at Wandsworth and to pin no. 3 from Ramsgate (Hawkes 1942, fig. 2, nos. 5 and 3 respectively). However, as Rowland (1976a, 84) rightly points out, the criteria used by Hawkes for defining the typology and chronology are dubious, based as they are on only nine examples of pin.

Dating the pins is extremely difficult given that most come from isolated contexts. However, the association with the urn from Ramsgate suggests a date in the late Middle Bronze Age. Both Rowland (1976a, 84) and Lawson (1979, 43) suggest that if such pins are viewed in the wider context of late Middle Bronze-Age pins, which show a variety of form and decoration, they can be classed within the range of Tumulus/Urnfield hybrid pins. It is not clear whether the Siddington pin is an import or, as Rowland suggests is possible, the product of a native metal worker influenced by France as the result of increased trade contacts.

Copies of illustrations and photographs of the Siddington pin have been sent to the British Museum for inclusion in the index of Bronze-Age metalwork. Mr. Swain, the owner, generously allowed research into the pin and the publication of this note, and kindly has donated the find to Corinium Museum in Cirencester. Cotswold District Council provided funds for the preparation of this note under the terms of its partnership agreement with Cotswold Archaeological Trust.

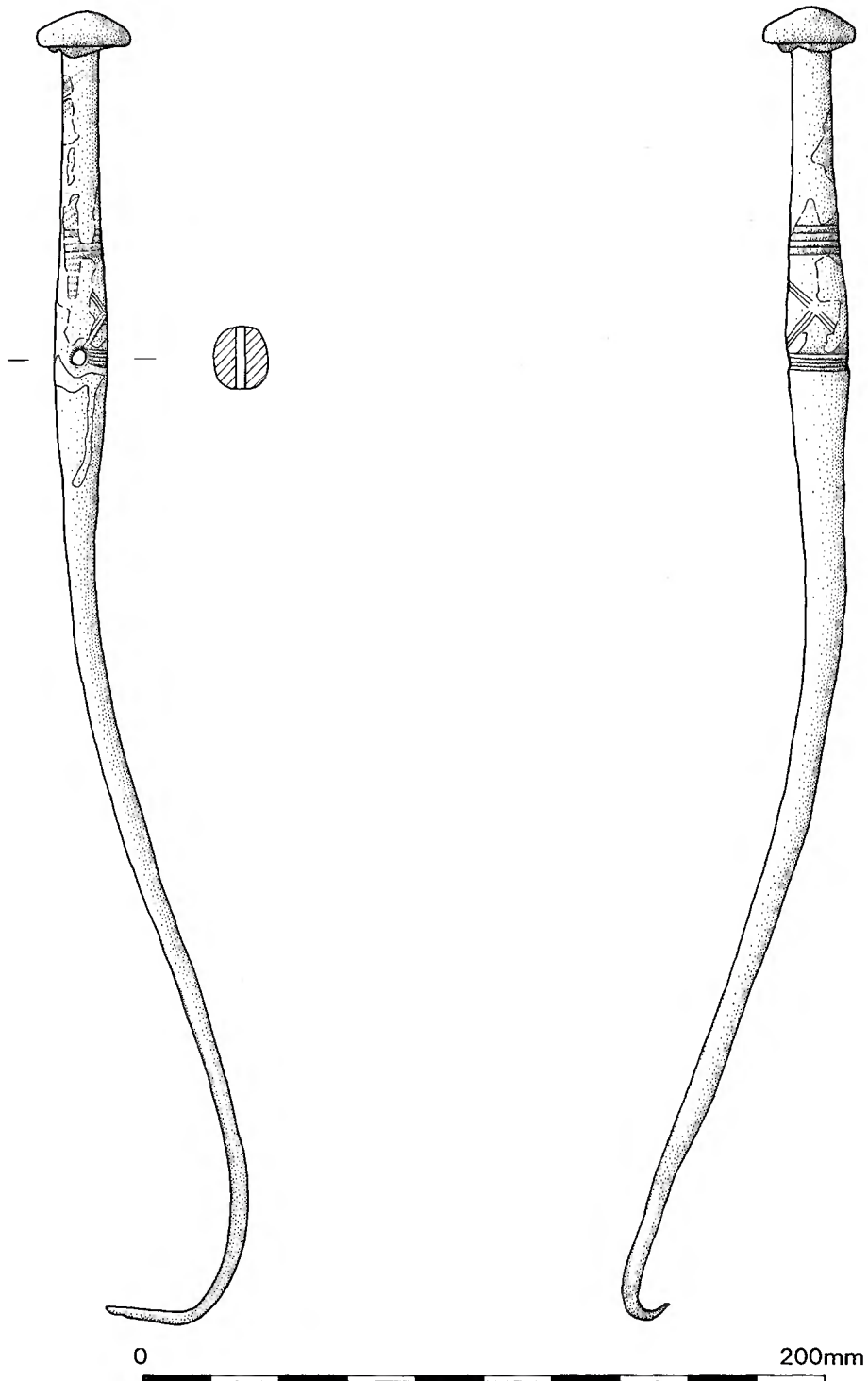


Fig. 1. 'Picardy' pin from near Siddington, Gloucestershire.

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DAWN ENRIGHT

A ROMAN RELIEF AT LITTLE SHURDINGTON

When Mark and Helen King moved into their cottage in Little Shurdington, Badgeworth, some years ago, they were intrigued by a small sculptured figure incorporated into one of the fireplaces.¹ They discovered that a previous owner, an interior designer, had constructed the fireplace in the 1970s. Little, however, could be learnt about the relief itself, although it was thought to have been found somewhere in the vicinity. There is the possibility that it was associated with the major Roman building (usually called a villa, but perhaps of a religious nature) at Great Witcombe, c. 3 km to the south.²

The relief (Fig. 1) is carved on a block of oolitic limestone, approximately 33 cm square and with a total thickness of 12 cm. The upper part of a muscular nude, male figure occupies much of the field of the panel. From his waist to the crown of his head he measures 31 cm and the depth of the relief is c. 45 cm. The lower part of the body and the legs were presumably carved on a second block. The youth faces frontally, being very slightly turned to the left, and he looks upwards. His left arm is bent at the elbow and the hand rests on his left hip; his right forearm is held at right angles to the body and holds an object with an expanded leaf-like head. The only objection to identifying this object as spear is that the shaft only descends a short distance below the hand, below which the stone appears quite smooth. The relief would have originally been painted and it is possible that the lower shaft of the spear was added in paint. The wide, leaf-shaped head is too broad for it to represent an arrow. The head of the figure is rather battered. If the figure was helmeted, the helmet would have to be very close fitting; conversely if it was bare-headed, the hair would have been very short. The subject lifts its gaze slightly upwards. In comparison with the highly accomplished modelling of the torso, the eyes are crudely bored holes. Were they, like those on the head of a female figure from Kingsholm, Gloucester, inset with pitch or some other substance?³ The rather elongated nose is another local feature.

In many ways the closest parallel to the sculpture is a figure of Mars carved in relief on the base of a marble candelabrum from Hadrian's villa, Tivoli, near Rome. It shows the god wearing a large helmet and a military cloak and in a relaxed stance to the left, with his right arm on his right hip and a spear in his left hand.⁴ The well-known statuette of Mars from the Foss Dyke, near Lincoln, Lincolnshire, is basically of the same type, similarly helmeted but with his body nude.⁵ The Little Shurdington figure is certainly that of a warrior; its prototype was ultimately the most famous example of Greek art of the 5th century B.C., the so-called spear-bearer