

# NOTES

## "LOVE AND KISSES" IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY?



Fig. 1. Two fourteenth-century (?) seals, from Aylesbury (left) and Weston Turville (right), scale:  $\frac{1}{2}$

In Volumes 31 and 32 of *Records* there have been short Notes about medieval seal matrices found in Buckinghamshire in recent years. In 1987 Mr. T. Clark discovered a further seal on the outskirts of Aylesbury which he showed to the County Museum. It was a very well preserved copper alloy seal matrix with a hexagonal shaft. The impression which it made was clear and represented two birds apparently mating, with a French motto \*ALAS IE SV PRIS (= Alas I am taken), as illustrated here (diameter

of face 19mm., height of shaft 20mm., with a broken terminal drilled through to allow a cord or riband). The matrix was puzzling since it bore no personal name or an identifiable heraldic badge. I am indebted to Dr John Blair of The Queens College, Oxford, for bringing to my attention the late Stuart Rigold's article on seal matrices.<sup>1</sup> He describes an almost identical matrix from the 1976 excavations at Bayham Abbey, Sussex, together with 4 parallel examples, and suggests a date of c. 1300.

By coincidence a seal depicting a comparable image was brought to the Museum for identification during 1991, having been found in garden topsoil in Weston Turville by Mr. Barry Lane. Also a bronze alloy hexagonal matrix, its impression is of a hare being seized by a hawk, with a French slogan \*ALLAS IE SV PRIS ALLAS (diameter of face 22mm., height of shaft 30mm.). The quality of the engraving is very fine with considerable detail and two circles of fine dots enclosing the legend, and its present condition is extremely good. I am grateful to Linda Babb for bringing it to my notice and to Mr. Lane for allowing me to draw the matrix.

Such seals were clearly not intended for attesting legal documents since they bear no proper name nor an heraldic emblem. Their legends, with an amatory overtone, and the

prey seized by a hawk (echoing some dress brooches of the 14th century) suggest a relationship of considerable intimacy. The assumption is that such seals were used for closing personal letters, in a similar way to that in which some of us in our youth initialled "S.W.A.L.K." on envelopes. The seals are an indication of the growing literacy of medieval society, which is also reflected in the correspondence of the Paston family's letters, though the frivolity of these two seals is far removed from the formality of Magaret Paston's style!

G. W. Lamb

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1. *The Antiquaries Journal* 57, (1977), p. 324 ff "Two Common Species of Seal Matrix" by S. E. Rigold.

#### DATCHET: SOME AFTERTHOUGHTS

It was accepted in the appendix to a recent paper<sup>1</sup> that Datchet (*Deccet* in 990)<sup>2</sup> is a Celtic place-name, meaning 'the finest of woods'. A possible objection is that the one Gaulish parallel, Decetia (now Decize) though mentioned by Julius Caesar<sup>3</sup> is hardly enough, since the element *dec-* does not seem to be otherwise evidenced in Celtic place-names. One concedes that it is unlikely that the compound existed in its own right; it was probably coined independently in each case. But there is a likely parallel in Cornish; the element \**daek-* 'full of riches' is proposed by Padel<sup>4</sup> as the adjectival qualifier of *tre* 'farmstead, hamlet' in such names as Treth(e)ake, giving the sense 'prosperous settlement, desirable residence'. Such formations are natural enough; one thinks of Greenland, so named by Eirik the Red to attract settlers from Iceland,<sup>5</sup> Mount Pleasant 'as containing nought to please, nor much to climb', and many modern house names.

However this raises another doubt. When sixth or seventh-century adventurers from Middlesex demanded the name of the forest, did a complaisant local Briton simply say 'Deccet!', meaning 'the best wood there is'?

In fact such a reply can hardly have been extemporaneous. In place-names with two elements the Celtic languages had originally placed the defining qualifier (here *dec-*) before the defined generic (*ceton*), forming a 'proper compound'; but Brittonic practice had changed, with a qualifier following the generic to form a 'name-phrase' in Padel's terminology.<sup>6</sup> Proper compounds could still be formed, but were poetic, formal or archaic. Grammatical (morphological) developments are harder to date than sound changes,<sup>7</sup> but it seems clear that this change, like so many others, had taken place during the chaotic fifth century;<sup>8</sup> not earlier, in view of the ample corpus of Romano-British place-names,<sup>9</sup> but hardly later, as it is common to Welsh, Cumbric, Cornish and Breton.

It is still submitted, therefore, that the first English settlers heard the established and traditional name of the forest, adopted it correctly and transferred it to their compact village (British settlement would have been more dispersed).

It is worth noting that when two nouns are combined, the sense depends on which is

generic. As a proper compound Penchet means 'chief wood', but as a name-phrase 'top of the wood'. In Datchet, however, the first element is clearly adjectival.

A.H.J. Baines

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1. *Records of Bucks*, 32, (1990) 73.
2. P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (1968) no. 1454.
3. *De Bello Gallico* 7, 33, 2.
4. O. J. Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements* (1985), 80.
5. M. Magnusson and H. Päessen trans., *The Vinland Sagas* (1975) 50, 78.
6. Padel, *op. cit.* Introd. xv-xvi; Ekwall had called them 'compounds of the later type' and A.H. Smith 'inversion compounds'.
7. K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, (1953) vi.
8. Padel *op. cit.*, xv; Jackson, *op. cit.*, 225-6.
9. A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, (1979) *passim*. All compounds are 'proper'; the one exception is names in *Duro-* 'fort', an element which by convention stood first.

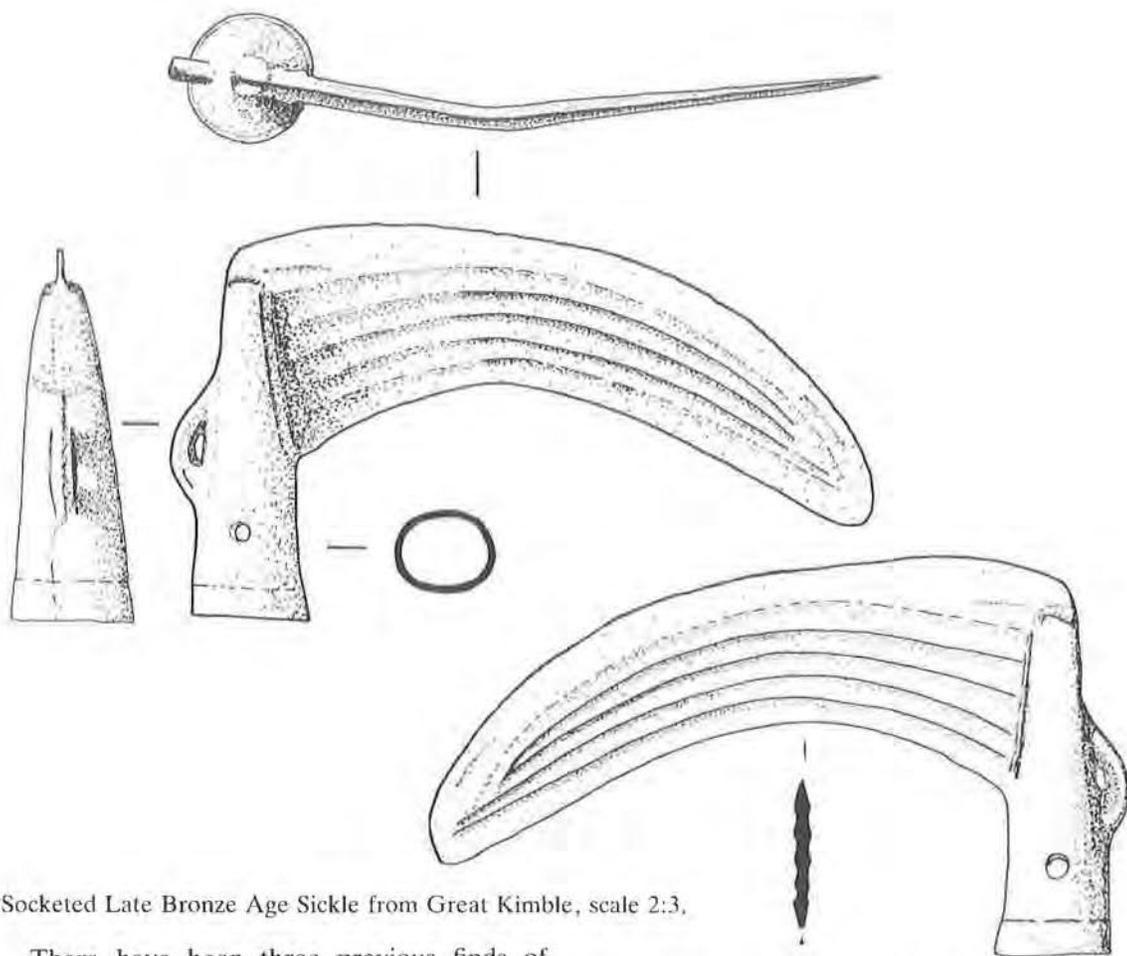
## A LATE BRONZE AGE SICKLE FROM GREAT KIMBLE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

The sickle illustrated on Fig. 1 was found protruding from leaf litter on the floor of a densely-wooded valley near Kimble, Buckinghamshire by Mr. B. Payne early in 1981. The general area of the find was shown to the writer by Mr. Payne although the precise findspot was not determined. When first discovered the sickle's socket was filled with chalk. It could represent a casual loss, or perhaps derive from a hoard, but the steepness of the adjacent slopes and animal activity in the area could over time in any event have occasioned movement from the point at which it was originally deposited.

The closed-socket sickle is a well-known Late Bronze Age type, but this is the first example known from Buckinghamshire. It is exceptionally well preserved, having only a slight bend in the blade and a small dent in the socket. It measures 138mm from the tip of the blade to the top of the socket, and 76mm from the top of the socket to its base. The hollow socket, which tapers for the whole of its length, is perforated to take two rivets. The neck of the socket is thickened to form a slight collar, and half way along its length is a single loop, slightly hammered. Vertical casting lines divide the socket into two in the plane of the blade, the rear line passing through the loop. The blade, which has a maximum thickness of 3mm at the ribs, has four grooves on both faces and a hint of a fifth near the tip. Both faces are almost symmetrical but there are

slight differences of detail. The blade is sharp all around its circumference apart from two centimetres on the underside adjacent to the socket. At the junction of the blade and socket there is a rough ridge of metal on both faces giving the appearance that metal surplus to the casting of the blade has 'piled' up against the socket. Presumably at this point lay the junction between the two-piece socket mould and the blade mould. Whether the latter was a single or two-piece mould is not known.

British bronze sickles make their appearance in the Middle Bronze Age with a knob-bladed form having North European antecedents which is later replaced by the ring-socketed type, apparently an indigenous development. The latter type lasts into the Late Bronze Age but is largely superseded by the closed socket form which, it is suggested by Burgess, appears in his Penard phase (Burgess 1980, 257). The development of sickles has been discussed in some detail by Fox (1939) and more recently by Rowlands (1969, 46-47) and O'Connor (1980, 239), but the paucity of associations for the later sickles has not allowed a detailed chronology to be constructed. In the Llyn Fawr hoard two bronze socketed sickles are present with an iron copy of the type (Fox 1939).



Socketed Late Bronze Age Sickle from Great Kimble, scale 2:3.

There have been three previous finds of bronze sickles from Buckinghamshire: from the Thames at Taplow – a continental form (British Museum); from Boveney Lock, Dorney – a ring-socketed form (Guildhall Museum, Windsor); and from Aston Clinton/Halton (British Museum). The latter is most unusual, being a tanged sickle with two rivet holes through the tang. Sickles were clearly a regular part of the bronze smiths' production, for example a failed casting of a ring socketed form from Egham (O'Connell 1986, 46).

Although ribbed socketed sickles were among the repertoire of those smiths whose work was so frequently deposited in the Thames, the closest parallels to the form of the Kimble sickle are far-flung geographically. Perhaps the nearest is a sickle from Killaloe,

County Clare (Fox no. 29) which has very similar proportions, along with blade ribbing and the relatively rare attachment loop. There is also a not unreasonable match, lacking a loop, from Errol in Perth (Fox no. 26). Such distribution patterns however reflect only the relative rarity of the type.

Extensive experiments on the use of sickles of flint, bronze and iron were carried out by Steensberg (1943). He showed that bronze sickles were entirely satisfactory as harvesting implements when utilised in the manner frequently depicted in contemporary illustrations of medieval life, for example in illustrated manuscripts (Bodleian 1965, Fig. 18b), on a misericord, (Higgs 1965, Fig. 27), or on a font (Nesbitt 1849, 160); and still used in primitive

harvesting (Rasmussen 1969). The reaper stooped and grasped a handful of corn, generally not far below the head, and drew the sickle backwards and to the right of the reaper. Steensberg found that between five and seven cuts were needed for each handful of stalks. This practice inevitably left a long straw standing. As a method of harvesting it was not however necessarily suitable for all pre-modern cereals. Experiments by Reynolds, harvesting emmer and spelt wheats (Reynolds 1981, 25–32 and pers. comm.) have shown that hand pulling the ears of primitive wheats may be more efficient than cutting them, in view of the drooping habit of the ear and the brittleness of the ripe straw at a point immediately below the spike. Moreover Roman classical sources describing cereal harvesting in Italy show that even in quite a restricted region, practice varied depending on, for example, whether the remaining straw was regarded as being of value or not (Spurr 1986, 67–73).

Rees argues, on the basis of form and relative sparsity, that bronze sickles cannot have been the principal harvesting tool, and proposes instead that composite flint sickles may have continued in use through the period (Rees 1979, 448). Although this particular line of reasoning is not unreasonable some may

feel it hard to sustain since, as Rees herself notes, the form of the Bronze Age 'sickle' merges into the far more common iron 'reaping hooks' which she accepts were used in harvesting. The Kimble sickle however adds another layer of complexity in that the blade is sharp on both edges. This feature was also thought to have been observed on two iron tools from Danebury (Sellwood 1984, 349), and it is difficult to imagine what functional purpose this may have had. The debate over function is likely to continue. Although traditionally termed 'sickles' by archaeologists, it is arguable that such tools would in any event be better termed reaping knives since whatever was being harvested they were clearly never swung in the manner of sickles or of reaping hooks which rely on momentum for their cutting action. The distinction drawn between sickles and reaping hooks incidentally, certainly since the seventeenth century (cf OED sickle), is that the former were toothed and the latter smooth edged.

The drawing of the sickle is by Trevor Pearson. The sickle has been kindly given to Buckinghamshire County Museum by Mr. Payne, Accession Number 540.1981, SMR ref CAS 5000.

Michael Farley

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## IN THE HOUSE OF RICHARD TOMS

In the summer of 1543 Richard Toms of Long Crendon was convicted of stealing a ewe, and according to law was duly hanged that August. As a felon, his goods were forfeit to his lord, in this case not an individual but the Dean and Canons of St George's, Windsor. The consequent inventory provides one of the rare glimpses of the living conditions of the poor in the sixteenth century.

According to the manor court jury, Richard's entire worldly goods were comprised in the following list.

Two pairs of linen sheets,	price 2 shillings and 8 pence,
Two chests,	price 2s. 4d.,
One kettle,	price 6d.,
One plank,	price 2d.,
One broken brass pot,	
Two candles ticks,	
One old patched ( <i>depect'</i> ) wollen cloth,	12d.,
Two cows,	price 24s., and
Three shillings worth of firewood.	

Certain inferences can be drawn. Toms was evidently landless, since he had no implements of husbandry, but since he could graze cows he

had rights of common, and was therefore a householder and not a lodger or journeyman. There is a strong presumption here that there was only one room in the house, and it can also be inferred that he was unmarried. It may be conjectured that he slept on his plank, laid across the two chests, and he may have eaten off it too. The absence of a stool is striking, the lack of any tools even more so (even the ubiquitous knife is lacking) and arouse the suspicion that his neighbours may have taken advantage of Richard's misfortune to descend on the cottage before the manor bailiff got there. But if so, why did they not strip the place? The total value, 33s. 8d., is well above the average of 90 Shropshire felons in an analysis quoted by Dr Christopher Dyer (*Standards of living in the later Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1989).

The details are in the Long Crendon manor court roll for 35 Henry VII (a) (B.R.O. C 28) transcribed by Christopher Hohler, the transcript kindly made available to me by the late Simon Donald.

John Chenevix Trench

## NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR ANGLO-SAXON ACTIVITY AT NEWPORT PAGNELL.

The documentary evidence for an Anglo-Saxon *burh* at Newport Pagnell has been discussed in these pages previously (Baines 1986). The earliest data may be numismatic. A mint appears to have been in operation just before, or as a result of, the monetary reform of Eadgar in 973 (Dolley and Metcalf 1961). The issues which were apparently struck at this mint, and which on the basis of the evidence presently available begin with the pre-reform coinage of Eadgar and end with one of the later issues of Edward the Confessor, are noted by Hill (1981, fig 225). A number of mintnames have been provisionally equated with Newport Pagnell. The identification of the names *Niwu*, *Niwanpo* is not entirely secure, however, whilst coins issued at *Niwan* during the reign of Ethelred II are die-linked with Shaftesbury

(Metcalf 1978) and may therefore be from a different mint entirely.

A likely context for the foundation of the *burh* was the rapprochement between Alfred and Guthrum after 878. By the time of the treaty of 886 the crossing of the Ouse by Watling Street at Stony Stratford marked the triple boundary between the English, the East Anglian Danes under Guthrum and the Mercian Danes. The establishment of a *burh* at Newport Pagnell, held by a pro-English Dane, would have provided a *port* for trade between London and Northampton (Baines 1986). Haslam, however, suggests that Newport Pagnell was one of two *burhs* built, according to the *Chronicle*, by Edward the Elder whilst staying at Buckingham in 914 (Haslam 1985). One of

these *burhs* was at Buckingham itself, but the other has not been satisfactorily identified, and the *Chronicle* entry referring to the two *burhs* is susceptible to other interpretations than that put forward by Haslam. Whichever way one interprets the *Chronicle*, Newport may well have been of strategic importance during the campaigns of 914–917, and there is no reason to rule out refurbishment of the defences at this time.

Analysis of the urban topographical development has also been undertaken. A probable line of the Anglo-Saxon defences has been proposed by Robinson (1975) based upon the layout of burgage plots and streets as well as limited place-name evidence, and despite a lack of early detailed cartographic evidence, there is no good reason to doubt Robinson's plan. Until recently, however, there has been no positive archaeological data to complement these studies.

During 1991 Buckinghamshire County Museum undertook a watching brief in advance of a development at Bury Lawn, between Union Street and the common known as Bury Field, Newport Pagnell (Beamish 1991). It has been suggested (Robinson 1975) that Union St follows the line of the northeastern defences of the *burh*, whilst the name Bury Field itself implies that it was on or adjacent to the defences. The watching brief was undertaken in order to recover such evidence as might have survived for early defences and/or subsequent expansion of the town.

On the development site itself, a ditch and pit were recorded some 65m from the edge of Union Street, beyond the presumed defences. These were undated but were likely to have been medieval.

Close to the Union Street pavement, a drainage trench revealed a substantial cut feature at least 1.3m deep, parallel to and partly beneath Union Street. The primary fill of this feature contained sherds of Late Saxon pottery including a shelly-ware rim in the St Neots tradition. Whilst the character of this feature as observed in the drainage ditch was not in itself incompatible with interpretation as a *burh* ditch, the feature was not observed in a trial

trench excavated by machine some 5m further to the southwest. This implies that the cut feature was not the *burh* ditch (unless there was a radical re-alignment in between the two trenches) but some other Late Saxon feature.

Inconclusive as this evidence is, it is the first Late Saxon material to be recovered from Newport, and the largely negative evidence may go some way towards supporting the hypothesis, advanced by Robinson, that the subsequent development of the *burh* was mainly to the east and south along the route to the crossing of the Ouse. The market place of the *burh* and the gates through the defences are all well away from the site of the investigations described here. An additional possibility is that Union St marks the position of the defensive ditch rather than an intra-mural street.

Thanks are due to McCarthy and Stone (Developments) Ltd for enabling the watching brief to take place and for co-operation on site, and also to Miss M. Archibald of the British Museum for providing information on the evidence for the Newport Pagnell mint. Mike Farley kindly commented upon an earlier draft of this note, but any faults which escaped him are the responsibility of the authors.

H. Beamish and J. Parkhouse

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