

**CONTEXTUALISING METAL-DETECTED DISCOVERIES:
THE STAFFORDSHIRE ANGLO-SAXON HOARD**



K377a - Photo Guy Evans

Notes from the Project Manager

This is the final Newsletter relating to the Stage 1 work which has run from March 2012 to May 2014. In it I'll report on what has been happening in the five months since we published the last Newsletter, what we have learned over the past two years, and what happens next.

With the end of Stage 1, the main contributions of some of the team members have been completed. This includes the work of Michelle and Rob at Lincoln who delivered all the X-radiographs, and many of our colleagues at the British Museum. They will stay part of the team through Stage 2, coming back at the end to revise their reports in the light of the Stage 2 research for the final publication.

We also say goodbye to Deb Magnoler who has been a conservator working on the Hoard at Birmingham.

The Grouping Exercise

When the project got underway in the spring of 2012, it rapidly became apparent that at some point all of the items would have to be brought together in a single venue so that suspected joins could be confirmed. At any one time during the first year and a half of the project, the Hoard pieces could be at any one of six places. Frequently Chris had noted pieces that were likely to be from the same object in as many as three or four separate geographical locations. The grouping exercise, as it was called, was planned to take place in the last two weeks of February of this year. By then Chris would have finished his preliminary cataloguing, and all the items would be clean.

Logistically getting all the material together was a challenge, and I am very grateful to Jenni Butterworth the Programme Co-ordinator, and all the museum staff for their work which made it possible. We are also very grateful to the directors of the museums for giving their permission as it meant that for six weeks, no items from the Hoard were on public display. This amount of time was needed as there was a period of two weeks before the research work when items were brought to the venue, conditioned checked and laid out. Then of course the process had

Her contract finished at the end of March, and she wrote a final blog post on the hoard website. In it she remembers the highlights of her three years working with the objects. You can find it at <http://www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk>

I'd like to take the opportunity here to thank the whole team for all their work during Stage 1, and indeed prior to that in the Assessment stage in 2011. We have come a very long way from January 2011 when I was putting together the first set of project documentation. I recall trying to come up with a quantification of what was in the Hoard at that point. Other than being able to say that a third came from swords and seaxes, and that there were a handful of Christian items and pieces from helmets, I was reduced to putting the majority in the category 'other'. As you'll see later in this Newsletter we can do a lot better now thanks to everyone's hard work.

to be carried out in reverse afterwards. The exercise took place in BMAG as their Paper Studio was large enough to accommodate all of the items laid out at once. There is a very good time lapse sequence on the hoard website that shows the laying out process.

The team for the grouping was Chris Fern, Pieta Greaves, Deb Magnoler, and David Griffiths. David was updating the secure Hoard research database in real time. This ensured that all the physical and stylistic joins were fully recorded. The main focus of the work was on the material that Chris had been working with since May 2012. The die-impressed sheets and reeded strips that had been at the BM have already been the subject of an intensive joining project. Fleur Shearman, who had been involved in that, spent two days as part of the grouping team and was able to make a few additional joins within that material from pieces that Chris had found in 'his' body of material.

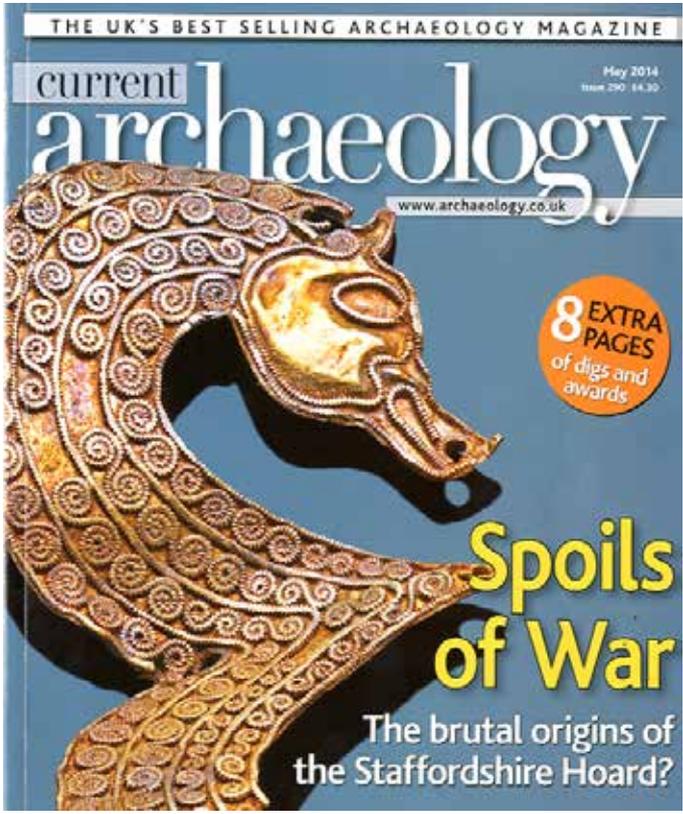
During the grouping exercise it was possible to confirm over 200 physical joins that had been suspected, and to identify just under 600 new ones. It was also possible to start grouping the items into suites



Chris hard at work during the Grouping Exercise. In the back you can see David updating the database
(Photo BMT)

that might have come from the same parent objects. We now have more groups of fittings likely to have come from the same hilt. As a result, we now have a very firm basis on which to build the second stage research. During that, we shall move from the fragment by fragment approach of current recording, to a catalogue that concentrates on single entries for items consisting of multiple fragments. We know, for example, that over 350 of the fragments relate to only 120 items. This makes Stage 2 easier to plan and cost, and also makes the mountain of 4,000 fragments easier to approach.

When the grouping work was finished the Owners invited the media to see the results. This resulted in useful coverage that allowed the wider world to see the progress that is being made. The May edition of Current Archaeology, for example, has a six page article on it.



The Third Project Meeting

The third project meeting took place in PMAG towards the end of March. It was a larger meeting than normal because as well as some of the core team, members from the wider team who will start work in Stage 2 attended. We were also pleased to welcome members of the Hoard Management Group and the Research Project Advisory Panel, as well as some members of the wider Anglo-Saxon scholarly community.

The morning had four presentations from the main strands showing what had been achieved. Summaries of these are given here, drawn from both what was said on the day, and information in the assessment documents that have been written for the Stage 2 project design. The afternoon was devoted to a discussion of the presentations, and the proposed structure for the final publication. This was a useful exercise as it has allowed fine tuning to what was proposed in the original project design.

Conservation at Birmingham

Pieta Greaves took us through what had been achieved at Birmingham. Readers of the Newsletters will be familiar with the results of the cleaning and recording, as the conservation team have been providing regular updates. What is useful to reflect on here is the figures she provided for the outreach programme that Birmingham has been running. This uses the work on the Hoard to engage the public with conservation. Over the years they have built up an international audience through social media, and they also run events at BMAG.

By the autumn of 2013, 51 video blogs and 41 written blog posts about the conservation had been placed on the hoard website. That had received approximately two-thirds of a million hits up to that point, more than half of which came from outside of the UK. The conservators also place videos on YouTube and these have had over 12,000 viewings. This confirms the continuing fascination that the Hoard commands.

Cataloguing and Typology

Chris Fern presented his initial findings. The range of material can now be summarised more usefully and this is done on the next page for the gold and silver items that can be securely identified. With regard to the hilt-plates these are minimum numbers represented because they are so fragmented. The helmet fittings are those other than the die-impressed sheets.

This quantification should be regarded as our first estimate as the Stage 2 work may be able to group more of the currently functionally uncertain material. There are, for example, over 700 fragments of sheet that are different to the die-impressed sheet, and presumably came from other items.

As can be seen, though, the Stage 1 work has strength-

ened the conclusion that this is fundamentally a male and military hoard. The top eight rows are sword and seax fittings and account for nearly 60% of the identified material. The proportion is higher once the gold rivets and washers, which probably came from such fittings, are included.

The Christian items have increased slightly as there is now possibly an additional gold arm from a second pectoral cross found inside a pommel when it was cleaned. There are also what may be termed the known unknowns. One is what Chris has termed suites of large cloisonné mounts. He has identified five suites which appear in some cases to form pairs. One stands out as it comprises two corner sections and a straight section. These look as if they were designed to fit along the edge of a thin board, perhaps

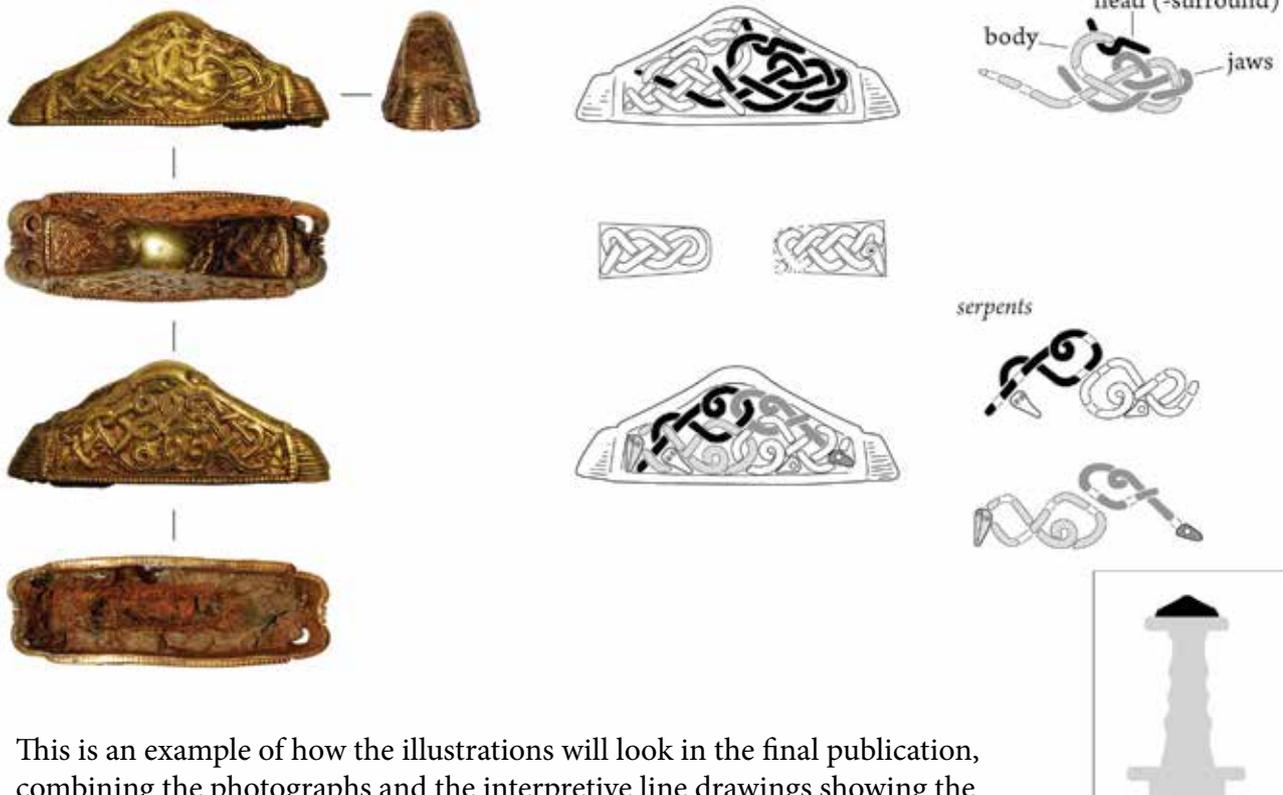
a book cover.

Other known unknowns are the suites of silver mounts with geometric niello inlay. These have been pieced together from 76 fragments include a pair of eye-shaped mounts and a fan-tailed one. They may all come from a single parent object. They have no parallels outside the hoard, and interestingly it has been established that the type of niello they are inlaid with, is not normally used on Anglo-Saxon silver.

As far as decorative techniques go, it can be seen that the focus of the Hoard is on filigree. There are nearly three times as many filigree-decorated pommels as there are cloisonné-decorated ones, for example. As anticipated the number of items decorated with Salin Style II ornament is now over 130 and will rise as the die-impressed sheets are studied. This more than doubles the amount of objects with that art style known otherwise from England. There is also an important group of silver pommels with Insular non-zoomorphic ornamentation.

Chris has produced a synthetic overview of what we know for the project design. Once that is agreed, the overview will be available on the Barbican website.

Type	Gold	Silver
Pommels	63	22
Hilt-plates	141	19
Hilt-collar	93	10
Hilt-ring	41	15
Sword pyramid/boss	8	2
Sword-rings	-	3
Seax hilt-fittings	5	-
Other sword mounts	128	7
Large cloisonné suite	81	-
Helmet fittings	-	4
C-edging	-	2
Buckles	2	1
Niello mount suite	-	7
Rivets, washers etc.	98	146
Crosses	4	-
Loose Foils	39	-
Other	-	3
Total	723	241



This is an example of how the illustrations will look in the final publication, combining the photographs and the interpretive line drawings showing the animal art. Photos and drawing by Chris Fern

Materials Analysis at the BM

The main focus of Ellie Blakelock's presentation was a report on the extended gold analysis programme reported on in the last two Newsletters. There are now over 500 surface and sub-surface analyses of gold from Hoard items and the additional pieces from the BM and PMAG collections included to explore the phenomenon of the surface enrichment / depletion. This can now be shown to be a deliberate and regular result of manufacturing. Some differences can be noted between what may be termed the core gold elements and the applied ones (filigree wires, cell walls etc.). There is no association with date, but there are intriguing hints that there may be differences associated with functional categories.

The results are currently being analysed, and it is intended to make these available via journal articles so that they do not have to wait for the final publication of the Hoard.

The materials analysis programme has resulted in the useful identification of some organics such as bees-

wax associated with the cloisonné, and horn and wood in the pommels. There is also one puzzling material that has so far defied analysis. This is a green material used as a cloisonné inlay. We shall attempt in Stage 2 to analyse it by different methods to see if we can identify it.

Sue La Niece has made the interesting suggestion that that in old museum collections, it is not unusual to find empty cells which might once have contained material like this. Under older conservation regimes the gold would have been cleaned for exhibition in a way that might well have removed any evidence for it. The approach taken in the careful cleaning of the items of the Hoard to preserve as much information as possible for further analysis, provides a unique opportunity to explore this hitherto unknown type of cloisonné inlay.

Conservation at the BM

Fleur Shearman reported on this work, some of which was considered in the last Newsletter. There now appear to be c. 17 different die-impressed friezes. For at least two of them, sufficient fragments have been joined to produce a strip that would have been long enough to encircle a head at the temples.

It is felt that there is still much potential in the work on the friezes. In Stage 2 they will be studied from a typological point of view, and George Speake has kindly agreed to take responsibility for this strand.

The Wider Programme

It is useful to take stock of what is happening in the wider Programme. The Museums have been very active in raising money to display the Hoard during the life of Stage 1. In total they and the wider Mercian Trail have received over £800,000 for displays and touring exhibitions from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Arts Council, England has also been very generous. Grants to PMAG for both their current exhibition and to develop a touring exhibition, *Swords and Fire*, based on the Hoard amount to just under £170,000.

As well as this more traditional exhibition-based funding, there has also been a considerable investment on the artistic side as the Hoard appears to inspire a wide range of responses. People who have visited PMAG will not doubt have seen some of the wonderful and strange ceramic figures created by Catherine Morling as part of the Olympic celebrations in 2012. The Arts Council England funded these, and has also contributed to a fantasy short film *The Last Dragon Hunter* currently part of the exhibition at PMAG. This can be seen online



Catherine Morlings's piece *Split headed Fish and Sea Horse* inspired in part by K1497

at <http://www.chrisstonefilms.com/portfoliodragon.html>.

We can also give advance notice here of a theatre festival in the summer of 2015 called *Behold* which will attempt to tell some of the stories of the Hoard. This will take place in Newcastle-under-Lyme, in the New Vic Theatre. Again the Arts Council, England is

funding this with a bursary of just under £200,000.

I shall watch the development of this event with great curiosity. After all, archaeological projects do not normally feature on stage.

What Happens Next

The Project Design for Stage 2 has now gone to English Heritage and the Hoard Management Group. It is, again, very expensive. We shall discover if it can be afforded over the summer.

We hope to start Stage 2 in October. It is planned to be a 30 month project leading to the final publication. If it starts on time, we will issue the next Newsletter in December to explain what is happening and introduce the new team members. By that

time Stephanie will be back as editor of the Newsletter, having got all her other projects up and running. So normal service with cartoons will resume then. We'll hope also to bring you an account of the new permanent gallery for displaying parts of the Hoard that Birmingham will open in October.

I hope you all have a good summer, and thanks for being with us during Stage 1.

Hilary Cool

And finally

We could not finish without featuring another Hoard-related edible archaeology offering from *Current Archaeology* - especially as it was for our own dear Pieta.

Edible archaeology

I thought you might be interested to see this edible replica of K377, a pyramid mount from the Staffordshire Hoard. The cake was made by Alex Cantrill to celebrate the birthday of the hoard's Conservation Manager, Pieta Greaves - and yes, it did taste as good as it looked! All of us at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery are looking forward to more replicas being made shortly.

Teresa Gilmore
Finds Liaison Officer
(Staffordshire & the West Midlands)

You can read about the latest findings from the hoard - in our feature on pp.12-17.

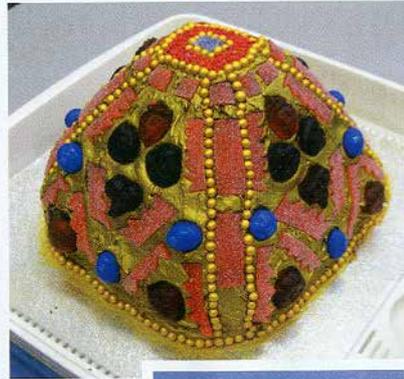


IMAGE: Birmingham Museums Trust