

KEY (LOCKING)

Unique ID: KENT-4F1A6D

Object type certainty: Certain

Workflow status: Awaiting validation

An incomplete cast copper-alloy and forged iron key of Roman date (c. AD 43-410).

Description: The handle of the key takes the form of a male lion lying on all fours, its front two paws grasping the head of a prey animal which looks out from its locked jaws. No teeth are visible, but the snout of the lion, which has two incised dots for nostrils, rests upon the head of the prey animal whose ears extend up the sides of the lion's face. From the ears, a wide brow represented by a shallow ridge and which is incised with two dots for eyes meets a wide triangular snout. Two circular holes are carved into the end of the snout to represent nostrils and a moulded chin is separated from the snout by a deeply carved groove to represent the animal's mouth. The lion's moulded trapezoid snout meets its brow, a moulded ridge upon which hair strokes are incised. Underneath the brow, either side of the bridge of the snout, are circular engraved rings, representing the eyes of the lion. Within the mouldings of the mane, one either side of the lion's head are oval mouldings with concaving centres to represent the lion's ears. The lion is heavily maned, with moulded irregularly-shaped tufts of hair incised with lines which flow in a different directions for each moulded segment. These lines mimic individual hairs upon the mane. The mane extends on to mid section of the lion's back upon which a moulded tail folds back, extending down its right side. The lion's bent back legs protrude on each side of the lion's back quarter, the handle terminating in a damaged sub-rectangular collar just prior to the lion's rump so that the base of tail is not included. From this collar, most of which is now missing, the remains of a rectangular iron key shank extend in the opposite direction to the lion. On the underside, the space between the forelegs is also moulded, the prey animal's lower jaw included, though without textural detailing. The handle has a mid green patina and the remains of the collar are encrusted with iron from the key mechanism. Some iron staining extends up the left side of the lion and its back legs have some surface damage in the form of scuffing and chipping.

Measurements: length: 96.7mm; width: 33.4mm, height: 35.5mm; weight: 250g

Discussion: Handles depicting lions and wolves are recorded on this database e.g. BUC-BDD866, NMGW-0A2DDD, NMS-1447F6 with Lions being the more common animals decorating these key handles. They have also have been found on a number of sites in Britain, for example Fishbourne (Cunliffe 1971 p. 118 no. 144), Verulamium (Frere 1984 p. 47 no. 18) and Baldock (p. 136 no. 137). The first of these was recovered from a context dating to the early to mid 3rd century while the latter was excavated from a 3rd or 4th century context (Stead, 1986, p 136) .

Those depicting lions devouring prey include [SWYOR-F1D5D6](#), identified as a ram, however, the wide facial features and long ears of the prey animal represented in the example here do not provided a definitive identification.

Find of note status

This is a find of note and has been designated: Potential for inclusion in Britannia

Subsequent actions

Subsequent action after recording: Returned to finder

Chronology

Broad period: ROMAN

Period from: ROMAN

Period to: ROMAN

Date from: Circa AD 43

Date to: Circa AD 410

Dimensions and weight

Quantity: 1

Length: 96.7 mm

Height: 35.5 mm

Width: 33.4 mm

Weight: 250 g

Personal details

This information is restricted for your access level.

Materials and construction

Primary material: Copper alloy

Secondary material: Iron

Manufacture method: Cast

Decoration style: Zoomorphic

Completeness: Incomplete

Spatial metadata

Region: [South East](#) (European Region)

County or Unitary authority: [Medway](#) (Unitary Authority)

District: [Medway](#) (Unitary Authority)

To be known as: South-West Medway

Spatial coordinates

Grid reference source: Generated from computer mapping software

Unmasked grid reference accurate to a 0.01 metre square.

Stead, I.M. and Rigby, V., 1986 [Baldock: The Excavation of a Roman and Pre-Roman Settlement, 1968-72](#) London: Britannia Monograph Series No. 7