

HOARD

Unique ID: KENT-FE9DB2

Object type certainty: Certain

Workflow status: Published

A Bronze Age hoard comprised of one undecorated palstave and four palstaves with triangular decoration below the stop-ridge which date to the Middle Bronze Age (c.1500-1100 cal. BC). They belong Rowland's Class 3 'Birchington Type' Group 1, characterised by their straight sided triangular blade and triangular shaped depression (Rowlands 1976, 32-33).

1) Copper-alloy palstave, consistent with Rowlands (1976) Class 3 'Birchington Type' Group 1. Complete unlooped palstave with no decoration. The butt appears to have been broken and is now diagonally angled. The septum is made up of a long, narrow rectangular socket, with low triangular flanges and a straight stop-ridge. Beneath the stop-ridge, the sides taper outwards forming a straight sided triangular blade with a slightly curved cutting-edge. The casting seams remain visible, although corrosion and attached soil debris make identification difficult. The entire palstave is covered with green patina with areas of corrosion.

Weight: 430.4 g Dimensions: Max Length: 177.0 mm, Max Width at cutting-edge: 67.3 mm, Max Width at stop-ridge: 25.8 mm, Max Thickness: 27.2 mm

2) Copper-alloy palstave, consistent with Rowlands (1976) Class 3 'Birchington Type' Group 1. Complete unlooped palstave with triangular decoration. The butt is rounded and appears to have been broken, it is very heavily corroded. The septum is made up of a long, narrow rectangular socket, with low triangular flanges and a straight stop-ridge. Beneath the stop-ridge, there is a sub-triangular depression, which on one side is heavily pitted and corroded. There is a possible midrib moulding on one face of the blade; this is difficult to confidently identify due to the heavily corroded nature of the object. The sides curve outwards, slightly splaying to a curved cutting-edge. The casting seams remain visible on both sides. The entire palstave is covered with green patina, with mounds and areas of corrosion. There is soil debris attached to one side of the blade.

Weight: 411.4 g; Dimensions: Max Length: 161.0 mm, Max Width at cutting-edge: 63.5 mm, Max Width at stop-ridge: 24.2 mm, Max Thickness: 27.5 mm

3) Copper-alloy palstave, consistent with Rowlands (1976) Class 3 'Birchington Type' Group 1. Complete unlooped palstave with triangular decoration. The butt is straight and appears to have been broken slightly; there is now a fragment missing. The septum is made up of a long, narrow sub-rectangular, U-shaped socket, with low triangular flanges and a slightly curved stop-ridge. Beneath the stop-ridge, there is a slight sub-triangular depression, which on one side is concealed by attached soil debris. The sides taper outwards forming a straight sided triangular blade with a slightly curved cutting-edge, which has a lobe-shaped fragment missing. The casting seams are visible. The entire palstave is covered with green patina and soil debris.

Weight: 291.8 g; Dimensions: Max Length: 172.0 mm, Max Width at cutting-edge: 64.6 mm, Max Width at stop-ridge: 22.7 mm, Max Thickness: 26.4 mm

4) Copper alloy palstave axe, consistent with Rowlands (1976) Class 3 'Birchington Type' Group 1. Complete unlooped palstave with triangular decoration. The butt is straight. The septum is made up

of a long, narrow sub-rectangular, U-shaped socket, with low triangular flanges and a slightly curved stop-ridge, which on one side has a raised mound; likely the result of poor casting. Beneath the stop-ridge, there is a sub-triangular depression on both faces, in the centre of which is a deep sub-circular depression, which on one face is very deep; likely an accidental result during casting. The sides curve outwards gradually, splaying to a curved cutting-edge, which is slightly damaged, with one side of the cutting-edge broken off. The casting seams are not visible, but this is likely due to the attached soil and corroded sides. The entire palstave is covered with green patina with areas of corrosion. There is also a layer of attached soil debris covering the entire object.

Weight: 419.9 g; Dimensions: Max Length: 173.0 mm, Max Width at cutting-edge: 70.0 mm, Max Width at stop-ridge: 25.4 mm, Max Thickness: 28.2 mm

5) Copper alloy palstave axe, consistent with Rowlands (1976) Class 3 'Birchington Type' Group 1. Complete unlooped palstave with triangular decoration. The butt is straight and has rounded edges. The septum is made up of a long, narrow, sub-rectangular, U-shaped socket, with low triangular flanges and a slightly curved stop-ridge. Beneath the stop-ridge, there is a narrow, triangular depression. The sides taper outwards forming a straight sided triangular blade, with a slightly curved cutting-edge. The casting seams remain visible. The entire palstave is covered with green patina, with areas of corrosion. There is also a layer of attached soil debris covering the entire object.

Weight: 465.0 g; Dimensions: Max Length: 169.0 mm, Max Width at cutting-edge: 61.1 mm, Max Width at stop-ridge: 25.0 mm, Max Thickness: 29.5 mm.

Notes:

The hoard comprises of one undecorated palstave and four palstaves with triangular decoration below the stop-ridge which date to the Middle Bronze Age (c.1500-1100 cal. BC). They belong to Rowland's Class 3 'Birchington Type' Group 1, characterised by their straight sided triangular blade and triangular shaped depression (Rowlands 1976, 32-33). This type of palstave is concentrated in south-eastern England (*ibid.*, map 5), with several other comparable palstaves found in hoards from Kent, including Birchington, Goudhurst and Near Canterbury (*ibid.*, 32-33; O'Connor 1980, 324-325).

Several factors suggest that the palstaves were deposited in a structured, non-functional way with reference to one another, and probably, therefore, within a relatively short period of time.

Firstly they were deposited within regularly spaced pits that formed a northeast-southwest alignment of similarly shaped/cut features with similar fills. Croxton (2013) observed that this alignment may have been made with reference to a nearby barrow monument. Secondly the axes, although not from the same mould, have similar forms to one another and to palstaves found together in 'closed' hoard deposits (*e.g.* the Birchington hoard, noted above). Thirdly, the arrangement of the palstaves is telling: the excavated examples (**Nos. 4 & 5**) were found to have been placed 'flat in the uppermost part of the fill' (i.e. with faces upwards/downwards) of their respective pits and to not only follow the direction of the alignment of the pits but also for the cutting edges of the blade to face one another. Further, palstaves **Nos. 2 & 3** were deposited at right angles to one another in the same pit (also seemingly in a flat position, faces upwards/downwards).

The possibility that the positioning of the palstaves was accidental is extremely unlikely and, on the balance of probabilities, the five palstaves were deposited intentionally and with direct reference to one another, despite coming from separate ('closed') pit deposits. This kind of structured deposition

is not uncommon during the Middle Bronze Age (*cf.* Barber 1999, 163-5), and appears to represent the structured archaeological traces of prehistoric ritual practice, the character of which is typically also highly structured and prescribed (*cf.* Richards & Thomas 1984).

In summary, the alignment and similarity of the pits, the consistent typological form of the palstaves and their arrangement, suggests that they were deposited in a structured and ritualised fashion. These factors suggest that they palstaves were deposited at once or in close succession as a ritual deposit.

Conclusion

Conventionally prehistoric base metal hoards (of two or more palstaves) from 'closed' deposits (or suspected to have been so prior to later disturbance) are suggested as qualifying as Treasure under the stipulations of the Treasure Act (1996) (Designation Order 2002). Although this is the case for palstaves **Nos. 2-3**, it was argued above that all five palstaves were deposited in separate 'closed' pits with direct reference to one another, most probably within a short space of time and with a ritual intent. Paragraph 15 of The Treasure Act 1996 Code of Practice (Revised) concerns coins found under similar circumstances Treasure status. It can be deemed that there is no *a priori* reason why this logic should not be extended to cover an episode of ritual deposition of closely related prehistoric base metal excavated and recorded to unusually high standards.

For these reasons, the five palstaves (**Nos. 1-5**) can be considered together as a Treasure find under the stipulations of the Treasure Act (1996) (Designation Order 2002).

References

Barber, M. 1999. 'A time and a place for bronze', In Brück, J. (ed.) *Bronze Age Landscapes. Tradition and Transformation*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 161-9.

Croxford, B. 2013. *Lower Hardres Bronze Age Axes: Archaeological Site Interim Report*. Kent: Unpublished Report for Portable Antiquities Scheme and Kent County Council.

O'Connor, B. 1980. *Cross-Channel relations in the Later Bronze Age*. British Archaeological Reports S91. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Richards, C. & Thomas, J. 1984. 'Ritual activity and structure deposition in later Neolithic Wessex'. In Bradley, R. & Gardiner, J. (eds), *Neolithic Studies*, Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 133, 189-218.

Rowlands, M. 1976. *The production and distribution of metalwork in the Middle Bronze Age of southern Britain*. British Archaeological Reports 31. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Authors

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Class: Palstave

Subsequent actions

Current location of find: British Museum

Subsequent action after recording: Acquired by museum after being declared Treasure

Treasure details

Treasure case tracking number: 2013T482

Chronology

Broad period: BRONZE AGE

Period from: BRONZE AGE

Period to: BRONZE AGE

Date from: Circa 1400 BC

Date to: Circa 1150 BC

Dimensions and weight

Quantity: 5

Personal details

This information is restricted for your access level.

Other reference numbers

Treasure case number: 2013T482

Materials and construction

Primary material: Copper alloy

Completeness: Complete

Spatial metadata

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

County or Unitary authority: [Kent](#) (County)

District: [Canterbury](#) (District)

To be known as: Near Canterbury

Spatial coordinates

Grid reference source: Generated from computer mapping software

Unmasked grid reference accurate to a 0.01 metre square.

Discovery metadata

Method of discovery: Metal detector

Current location: British Museum