

More Finds from the Fens

by Maisie Taylor

A Bronze-Age palstave and socketed spearhead were recently brought to Fengate by a local farmer's wife. Both items were found on a farm near Peterborough. We have decided, however, not to publish precise details of the findspots here as several local farmers have expressed concern about the activities of unauthorised metal-detector users in the area. Full details have been lodged with the appropriate sites-and-monuments record.

The two bronzes are generally in excellent condition, although both were treated for patches of bronze disease by Robert Bourne at Fengate. The fields where they were found are situated on the edge of a Fen island on land where the underlying clay is being ploughed to the surface. The palstave was actually found in a clod of clay in a potato field. The locality where the bronzes were found is one of the areas where Mr David Hall, Cambridgeshire Archaeological Committee's Fenland Field Officer (see p. 13), is planning intensive field-walking. It will be interesting to see if any settlement evidence is revealed by his survey work. The large number of stray bronze objects in the Fens suggests that considerable activity of some kind was going on. It is difficult to estimate the full extent of the distribution of Bronze-Age metalwork in the Fens, partly because so much remains in private collections and partly because so little systematic survey has been done in the area. The work of David Hall, we hope, will solve many of the problems caused by the lack of survey. It is apparent, however, that a good many finds have been made in areas that would have been Fenland in the Bronze Age. This point was considered by Francis Pryor in his account of some Fenland metalwork of the Bronze Age in *Durobrivae* 6, 1978, 14, and again by the present author in a survey of prehistoric sites in the Fens north of Cambridge (*Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, forthcoming).

The Spearhead

The spearhead (fig. 10) is leaf-shaped with a slight bevel on the blade. The socket is broken, but the top of one side-loop remains. The spear is 12.4 cm long with the blade 5.0 cm wide at its widest point. It weighs 120 grams. Leaf-shaped spearheads with side-loops were mainly produced in the Middle Bronze Age and the larger examples are generally accepted to have been thrusting rather than throwing spears.

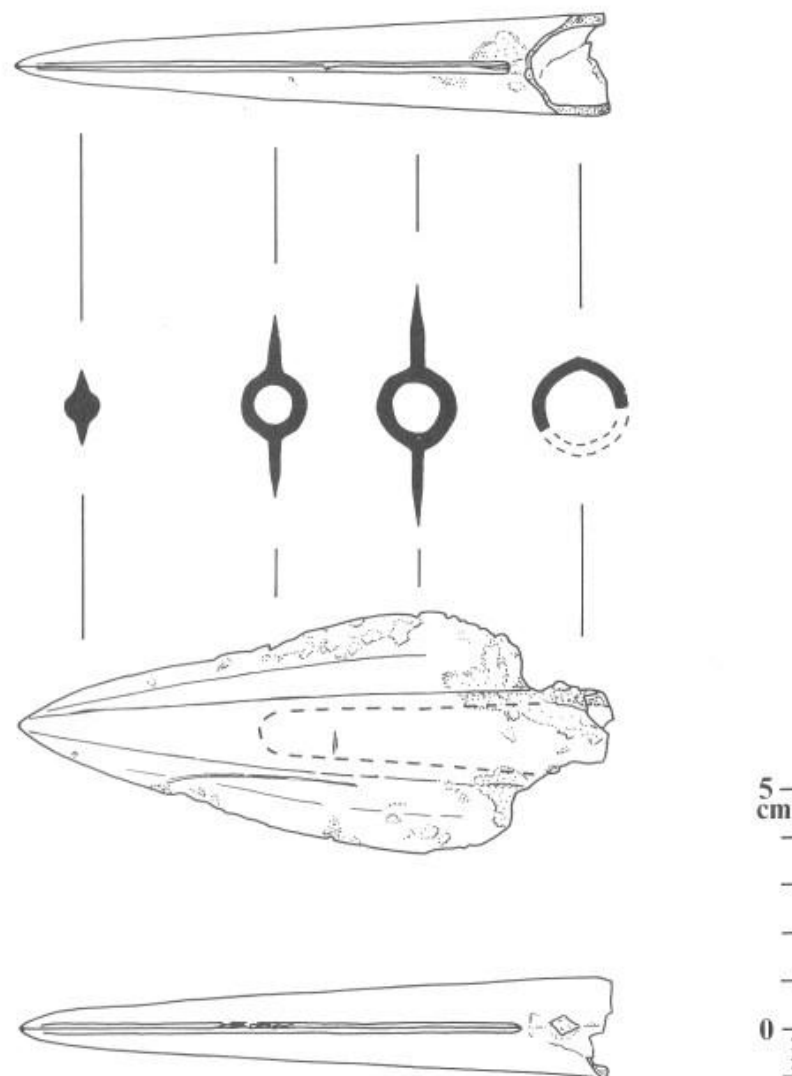


Fig 10 The Bronze-Age socketed spearhead

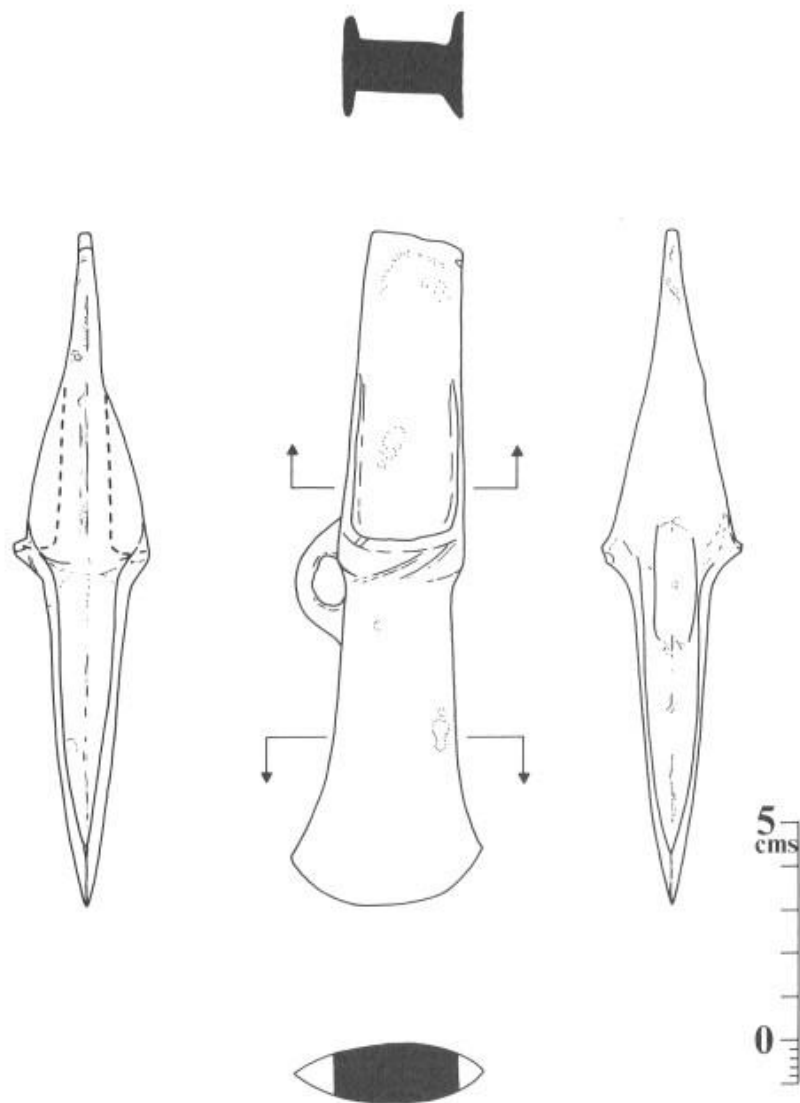


Fig 11 The Bronze-Age palstave

The Palstave

The palstave (fig. 11) is plain, looped and is comparable with the 'late' palstaves belonging to the Wilburton Complex of the Late Bronze Age. It is 15.5 cm long with the blade 2.4 cm wide at its narrowest part, flaring to 4.4 cm at the cutting edge. It weighs 400 grams.

An important and possibly unique feature of the palstave is that it retains the impression of a cord in its loop. The corrosion products of the bronze formed around the cord which then decayed. The impression of the cord is approximately 3 mm wide and shows a strong clockwise (S) twist. There are three twists in the 9 mm long impression. The surface of the impression is quite smooth and this, taken with the tightness of the twist in the cord suggests that the fibres which were used to make the cord must have been fairly fine. The cord impression is in the part of the loop furthest away from the cutting edge. This would be in keeping with the method of hafting illustrated by Langmaid (1976). The palstave was bound to its haft with the cord passing through the loop to make it more secure, and prevent it flying off, if the awkward elbow-shaped haft should break.

Bibliography

Langmaid (1976) N. G. Langmaid, *Bronze Age Metalwork in England and Wales*, 1976.