

A PAIR OF GILT BRONZE MOUNTS IN THE  
GRAVESEND MUSEUM

By DAVID M. WILSON, M.A., F.S.A.

THE object of this short note is to publish a pair of gilt-bronze Anglo-Saxon mounts. I wish to suggest that they are Kentish workmanship of sixth-century date.

DESCRIPTION

In the Museum at Gravesend are a pair of openwork, gilt-bronze mounts in the form of animals (Fig. 1) ; there are minor variations in the detail of each animal, but generally speaking the description given

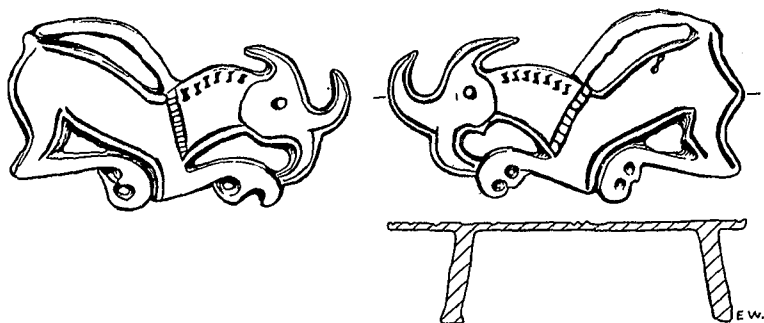


FIG. 1. A pair of gilt-bronze mounts in the Gravesend Museum. Probably from Northfleet, Kent.

here applies to both mounts. Each animal has an open curled-back mouth, a punched circular eye and a hook-like ear, the cheek line is defined by an engraved curved line which also forms the contour of the head. Along the back of the curved neck a series of punch marks of hour-glass form indicates a mane. At the base of the neck is a billeted collar. The body rises from this point to a hind-hip, and the two legs, terminating in slightly scrolled paws, bend forward naturally from the appropriate position of the body. The body and upper part of the limbs and the head and neck, save for the upper part of the neck, is bordered by a plain incised line. The tail forms an openwork loop between the rump and the collar. The ungilded back is plain save for a slight indented line in the position of the hind hip. Two rivets (each 1.1 cm.

long) are brazed in position behind the rump and behind the eye. The animals of the two mounts face in opposite directions and each one is 4.5 cm. long. The objects come from the Arnold collection and are almost certainly from the Northfleet cemetery.<sup>1</sup>

## DISCUSSION

The two objects were probably mounted on a shield or similar object of wood. Objects with such shanks are quite common in Anglo-Saxon contexts, but are usually circular, being little more than plain bronze or iron rivet heads, and have an iron or bronze strip<sup>2</sup> or washer<sup>3</sup> at the riveted end. The shanks pierced the wooden base and were riveted over the strip or washer. The example from Long Wittenham, Berkshire, cited in the last footnote, demonstrates the direct association of roundels of this sort with a shield: it was found together with a shield boss, the rim of which was decorated with similar rivet-heads. It is unnecessary to labour this point as such rivets are common and are familiar to all excavators of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries.

Occasionally the roundels take a more elaborate form, as at Faversham, where four bronze discs of similar size have a sheet of silver applied to the rim while the sunken centre is filled with gilt interlace ornament.<sup>4</sup> More elaborate are the series of discs and other mounts from the Caenby barrow in Lincolnshire. The ornamented gilt discs, which were set in a star pattern round an applied silver disc on the shield, have one central rivet on the back and four centering points of rivet-like form, which fixed them in position on the wooden board of the shield.<sup>5</sup> Some, but not all, of the mounts were inset in the board of the shield. Such mounts were not necessarily circular, an elaborate break-away from the circular form can be seen in the group of objects usually described as harness mounts from Faversham, Kent.<sup>6</sup> These objects have short shanks on the back and were presumably set in wood (if they had been set in leather they would have had small lugs on the back). Two equal-armed mounts from grave 13 at Sleaford bear a pair of rivets on their back face.<sup>7</sup> Two objects with similar shanks are fish-shaped,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Victoria County History, Kent*, i, 386.

<sup>2</sup> For example, an iron strip occurs at the back of a bronze rivet at Faversham (British Museum reg. no. 1021 '70) and a bronze strip at Finglesham. S. E. Chadwick, "The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Finglesham, Kent: A Reconsideration". *Medieval Archaeology*, II (1958), fig. 14, e.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., J. Y. Akerman, "Report on Researches in an Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Long Wittenham, Berkshire, in 1859", *Archaeologia*, XXXVIII (1860), 341.

<sup>4</sup> *British Museum, reg. no. 1222A '70*.

<sup>5</sup> E. Jarvis, "Account of ornaments and remains . . . in the parish of Caenby, Lincolnshire", *The Archaeological Journal*, VII (1850), 36-44. These features are mostly fragmentary.

<sup>6</sup> G. Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, iv, London (1915), pl. CI, 2 and T. D. Kendrick, *Anglo-Saxon Art to A.D. 900*, London (1938), pl. XXXVI, 1.

<sup>7</sup> G. W. Thomas, "On excavations in an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Sleaford, in Lincolnshire", *Archaeologia*, L (1887), 405 and pl. XXIII, 3.

from Kempston, Bedfordshire,<sup>1</sup> and from Kenninghall, Norfolk,<sup>2</sup> while a pair of similar mounts from Shelford Farm, Sturry, Kent<sup>3</sup> are in the form of birds. These birds are comparable to those mounted on the Sutton Hoo Shield<sup>4</sup> and on one of the shields from Valsgårde, Sweden.<sup>5</sup>

The parallels cited make it probable that the Gravesend mounts came from a shield, but the possibility that they were fixed to another object must not be dismissed.

The animal portrayed on these mounts is not easily paralleled in this country. The mounts themselves could be compared with a group of small brooches of north Frankish type, the form of which Werner<sup>6</sup> has derived from the dolphin motif so common in late Roman art. There are general and rather unsatisfactory parallels and the best of these, the small brooches from Cologne, Envermeu and Monceau-le-Neuf<sup>7</sup> show a development of the dolphin's fin into a claw-like foot as well as the expanding recurved jaws which relate them to the Gravesend mounts. Most of these brooches belong to the first half of the sixth century.

The nearest parallel in this country to the animals of these mounts is provided by a parcel-gilt bronze pin from Faversham, Kent<sup>8</sup> which unfortunately has no association, but which has a head in the form of a stylized dolphin. But the Gravesend objects and the Faversham pin draw our attention to the animals of Mrs. Hawkes' Jutish Style A<sup>9</sup> and particularly to such objects as the Bidford-on-Avon (Warwickshire) bucket mounts,<sup>10</sup> the Bighthampton, Oxfordshire, chape<sup>11</sup> and to the animals inside the outer border of the Sarre, Kent, quoit brooch.<sup>12</sup> The animal heads themselves are reasonably well paralleled on a bow-brooch from Bifrons, Kent.<sup>13</sup> All these are objects which Mrs. Hawkes has dated to the late fifth and early sixth centuries. The Gravesend mount, with its tendency towards the stylization of the Faversham pin

<sup>1</sup> British Museum, *A Guide to the Anglo-Saxon and Foreign Teutonic Antiquities*, London, 1923, fig. 85.

<sup>2</sup> *British Museum, reg. no. 88, 7-2, 22.*

<sup>3</sup> R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, "The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial", *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History*, XXV (1950), pl. VI, c. (wrongly captioned).

<sup>4</sup> British Museum, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, fifth impression, London, 1956, fig. 5.

<sup>5</sup> S. Lindqvist, *Från Upplands Fornrid*, Uppsala, 1945, pl. opposite p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> J. Werner, "Eine nordfranzösische Tierfibel von Basel (Bernerring)", *Ur Schweiz*, XIII (1949), 60-68.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 41, 4-6.

<sup>8</sup> British Museum, *Guide to Anglo-Saxon . . . Antiquities*, London, 1923, fig. 40.

<sup>9</sup> S. C. Hawkes, "The Jutish Style A. A study of Germanic Animal Art in Southern England in the Fifth Century A.D.", *Archaeologia*, XCVIII (1961), 29-74.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. XVII, d.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. XIV.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. XXI, f.

A PAIR OF GILT BRONZE MOUNTS IN THE GRAVESEND MUSEUM and the Continental series of brooches discussed by Professor Werner, should probably be dated to the first half of the sixth century, for in my opinion it is once removed from the Jutish style of pieces and is perhaps made under the early Frankish influence in Kent. This date accords well with the Frankish parallels quoted above.

I have thus committed myself to a Kentish origin for the objects, the technical parallels with the Faversham pin and the art-historical parallels with the Jutish style A objects indicate this.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Mr. Norman Cook, F.S.A., for drawing my attention to these objects and Mr. E. W. Tilley of the Gravesend Museum, who not only gave me permission to publish them but allowed me to study them in the British Museum.