

## BRONZE AGE ANTIQUITIES FROM THE LOWER MEDWAY.

BY R. F. JESSUP.

THERE is now a good deal of archæological evidence that the Thames-Medway estuary was one of the chief lines of penetration of Bronze Age culture into Britain, from the time of the earliest incursions of the Beaker Folk at a date that is conveniently stated as 2000 B.C., down to the arrival, during the last years of the sixth century B.C., of the urn-field people who foreshadowed the true Hallstatt culture of the Early Iron Age.

The purpose of this note is to describe a series of relics which have been found in the river Medway off Chatham, and on the marshland in the immediate neighbourhood, the majority of them during work undertaken in connection with the extension of the Royal Dockyard between 1862 and 1885.<sup>1</sup> The main excavation work consisted of the conversion of St. Mary's Creek, a shallow waterway which isolated St. Mary's Island from the peninsula of which it was geographically a part, into a chain of three rectangular basins and a series of dry docks, but all over adjoining parts of the marshland various buildings were erected from 1860 onwards, and much shallow excavation must have taken place, and in addition dredging operations were carried out in the bed of the main river in Chatham Reach. Very little building has taken place on St. Mary's Island itself and it is probable that the antiquities found "during extensions to Chatham Dockyard in 1871" if not discovered actually during the basin construction work, were found in the excavations which took place at the same time on the southern side of the creek. Although it has been possible to determine the site, unfortunately no information can be obtained regarding

<sup>1</sup> For details of the work, see *Vict. History Kent*, ii., 385-7.

the history of the discoveries, and no data are forthcoming to show whether any of the objects were associated or whether they occurred at a definite geological horizon. In these circumstances it is preferable to consider the various objects in the form of a catalogue rather than by artificial groups based on the general localities of the finds as quoted in museum accession lists.

#### STONE.

1. Narrow chisel of grey flint (Fig. I, top) 6·3 inches in length, with a thin tapering butt, and polished cutting edge which is slightly curved.

2. A similar chisel of the same length, but with a slight difference in width. Found in Chatham Dockyard, and presented to Maidstone Museum by the Admiralty, (?) in 1870.

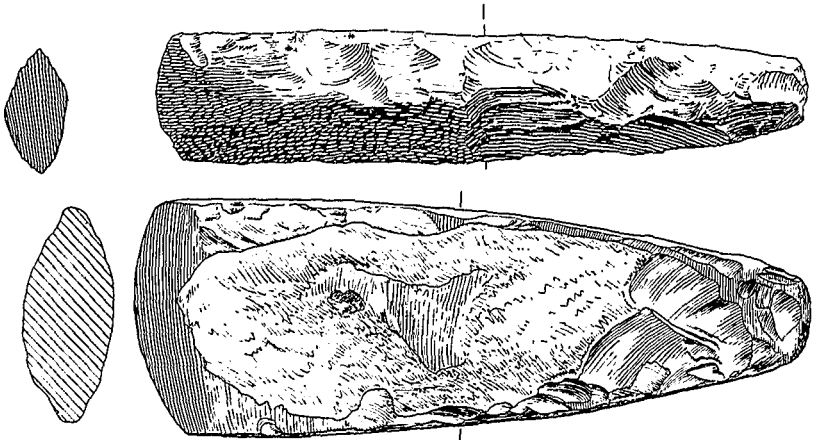


Fig. I. Scale ( $\times \frac{1}{2}$ ).

3. Partly polished axe of grey flint, length 6·7 inches (Fig. I, below). The sides are slightly flattened, and the butt thin and tapering; the cutting edge is curved, but the flattening of the sides indicates a late type.

According to current ideas of typology, these three axes would have to be regarded as neolithic. None of them exhibits any particularly late feature such as a straight

cutting edge or pronounced thickening of the sides, but it should be remembered that polished stone axes did not altogether go out of fashion in the Bronze Age, and to place a Bronze Age date on the present examples is not to go beyond the realms of probability.

4. An unfinished and unperforated axe-hammer of tough green stone, 5·4 inches in length and 2·6 inches in width. The sides are highly convex, and possibly the type intended was similar to that found with an Early Bronze Age riveted dagger in a barrow at Carder Low, Derbyshire.<sup>1</sup> In any case, an Early Bronze Age date is likely.

Nos. 1, 3, and 4 were found in the extensions to Chatham Dockyard in 1871 (see above), and were presented to the British Museum by the Admiralty.

#### ANTLER.

1. Piece of beam of deer antler, 13·5 inches long, with burr removed, and one end of the beam sawn off at an oblique angle, the margin of the socket thus formed being rubbed smooth (Fig. II, right). Much of the cancellous tissue is still to be seen, impregnated with marsh mud. History as Nos. 1, 3 and 4 above.

Though there is some likelihood that this piece of antler may have been used as a hoe or an axe, it bears no signs of such use, and a more satisfactory explanation is that it served as a haft for a stone tool, the stone being held in the bevel of the working edge. It may be that the antler itself was hafted in its turn, two methods being possible for the insertion of the haft. The first, at right angles to the beam in the hole left by the removal of the burr, seems scarcely practicable owing to the small housing that could be obtained. Alternatively, the haft may have been thrust into the open end of the beam farthest from the cutting edge, and on the whole this seems the more likely method. In any case, the force with which the stone tool was driven back into the socket has split the haft for the whole of its length and rendered it useless. With a stone working edge and a handle

<sup>1</sup> *Archæologia*, LXXV, 85.

continuous with the line of the beam, the tool would have been well adapted for use in agricultural work as a hoe or digging implement.

Tools of deer antler are frequently found on prehistoric sites. Chisels made by cutting an oblique bevel at one end of a piece of antler are known in the Mesolithic cultures, and antler axes and adzes (the difference between the two is in the direction of the hafting hole) are prominent features of the Maglemose and Shell Mound industries in particular.<sup>1</sup> The long barrows have produced at least one antler implement, but better known are the miner's picks from the flint mines at Grimes' Graves and elsewhere, and from the hill fort of the Caburn in Sussex. Examples of antler picks used in the Early Iron Age found in the St. Catherine's Hill excavations are described in *St. Catharine's Hill* (1930), p. 125, and references there given to others found in Romano-British contexts. Mr. Reginald Smith<sup>2</sup> and Dr. Cyril Fox<sup>3</sup> have described antler tools belonging to the Early Bronze Age, and Mr. G. F. Lawrence<sup>4</sup> suggests that the hoe form, of which the Chatham tool is representative, lasted down to the Early Iron Age. A more precise dating is not possible.

#### BRONZE.

1. A small palstave having a splayed crescentic blade, and a deep rounded stop-ridge; an early type. Length, 5.75 inches. Evans, *Ancient Bronze Implements* (1881), p. 74. Found in Chatham Dockyard excavations, and presented to the British Museum by the Admiralty in 1871.

2. Spear-head of developed leaf-shape, 8.1 inches in length, with hollow cast central rib and transverse peg hole in the socket. The edges are ground. Dark olive green patina; one face is polished smooth, and the other pitted

<sup>1</sup> Macalister, *Textbook of European Archaeology*, Vol. I, pp. 562-3; and Burkitt, *Our Early Ancestors* (Cambridge, 1926), p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Archæologia*, LXIX, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Arch. Cambridge Region*, Plate V, 2, and p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> *Arch. Journ.*, lxxxvi., 69. And see many examples from the Thames in the London Museum.

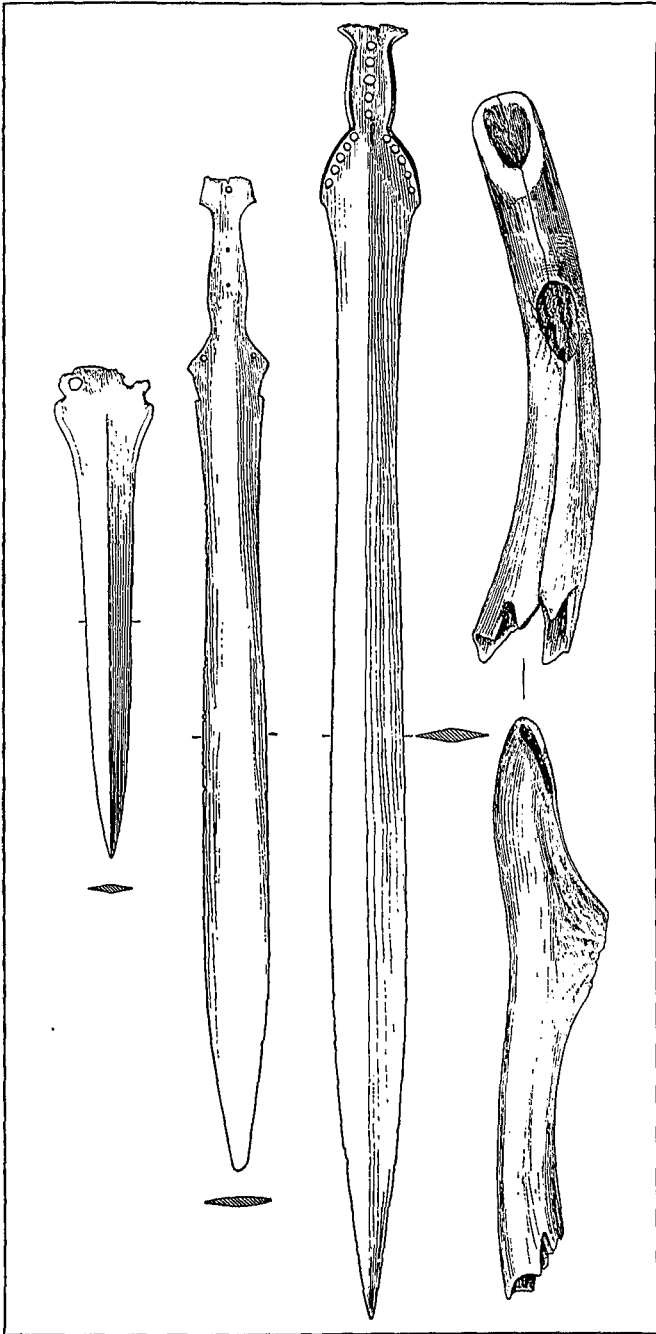


Fig. II.  
BRONZE DAGGER, SWORDS AND ANTLER SOCKET FROM  
CHATHAM.

Scale: approx. ( $\times \frac{1}{4}$ ).

heavily. Found at Chatham Dockyard, and now in Maidstone Museum.

This must date in the Late Bronze Age, but early in the period. Traces of the new foreign influence which was a feature of the Late Bronze Age are to be seen in the use of hollow casting, and in the development of the socket.

3. Dagger, length, 11·8 inches, with prominent central rib and four rivet holes in the heel, three of which have been torn out by the lateral strain imposed on the blade (Fig. II, left). The edges are well ground, and the weapon is skillfully cast. Brownish green patina; the surface is in good condition. Found in the Medway, Chatham Reach, and presented to the British Museum by the Admiralty in 1871.

A Middle Bronze Age type which eventually became elongated and developed into the rapier.

4. Small dagger with flat central rib and spade-shaped butt with two rivet holes. Length, 10·4 inches. The surface is in poor condition, and the point much corroded. On one face the patina is black; the reverse has been cleaned and exhibits the natural golden colour of the metal. Found at Chatham Dockyard, and presented by the Directors of H.M. Prisons to the Rochester Museum.<sup>1</sup>

This must also date in the Middle Bronze Age, cf. an example from the Thames at Richmond in the London Museum, for which see *Ant. Journ.*, VII, 297, No. 1.

5. A thin broad rapier 17·9 inches long with slight mid-rib and angular spade-shaped butt with two rivets for the hilt, one of which has been wrenched away. The edges are ground. The patina is dark coloured, strongly suggesting that the blade has lain in a bed of peat; at least two beds of peat were passed through in trial borings for the Dockyard Extension on St. Mary's Island.<sup>2</sup> History as No. 4, and if the patina is any guide, found with it.

A poorly designed rapier, the weakness of which is obvious. It must be attributed to the Middle Bronze Age.

<sup>1</sup> Probably from the extension to the Yard; the work was carried out by convict labour.

<sup>2</sup> Whitaker, *The Water Supply of Kent* (Mem. Geol. Survey), pp. 100, 156. The beds were at 2 and 17 feet below O.D.

6. Heavy rapier with prominent rounded central rib and rounded butt in which one rivet still remains. Length, 14.5 inches. The blade is much scratched by use, a fine engraved line which follows the contour having been obliterated in places. The weapon with its lozenge-shaped section would have been of little use for cutting, though (theoretically at least) efficient for thrusting. Its weakness is demonstrated by four fractures, one being at the point where the mid-rib merges into the blade. Found in 1909 on the site of the "British Queen" public house in Chatham High Street, and now in the Rochester Museum.

This blade must also be considered with the large family of native rapiers belonging to the Middle Bronze Age.

7. Two pieces of a leaf-shaped sword, the tip and part of the central blade. Found in the Medway at Chatham Reach, and presented to the British Museum in 1871 by Mr. E. A. Bernays. Mr. Bernays was the Superintendent in charge of the Dockyard Extension scheme.

Late Bronze Age, probably a sword with degenerate V-shaped hilt.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hawkes has recently shown<sup>2</sup> that this type of sword can be related to the carp's-tongue sword invasion complex, since it occurs in hoards containing elements of that complex, e.g. at Bexley Heath and Stoke in Kent.

8. Leaf-shaped sword 23.75 inches in length with spade-shaped pommel and slightly flanged V hilt which was provided with five rivets for the attachment of the hilt plates, three in the middle of the grip, and two at the butt of the blade (Fig. II, left centre). The ricasso is prominent. The weapon is badly cast; the surface is pitted and has a golden green patina. History as No. 7.

This sword, while it displays late features in the V-shape of the hilt, the spade-shaped pommel, and undeveloped flanges, has a thin spindle like section, and lacks both the rounded mid-rib and distinctive ricasso of the carp's-tongue

<sup>1</sup> The typology of swords commonly recognized is that propounded by H. J. E. Peake, *The Bronze Age and the Celtic World* (1922) in which the shape of the hilt is the dominating feature.

<sup>2</sup> *The Archaeology of England and Wales, 1914-31*, p. 133.

swords. It would seem to be a native hybrid between that type and the degenerate V-hilted sword. See further for the influence of the carp's-tongue sword complex, Estyn Evans, *Antiquity*, IV (1930), 157, and Christopher Hawkes, *op. cit.*, pp. 133, 134, 135, who there gives further detailed references.

9. A heavy leaf-shaped sword, length 31.25 inches, with a short and small flanged hilt having fifteen rivet holes, five in the grip and five on each shoulder, and a fish tail pommel (Fig. II, right centre). The shoulders are markedly convex, the weapon thus belonging to the U-type. It is a remarkably clumsy weapon, and would need heavy hilt plates to counter-balance the weight of the blade. Brownish green patina. Found in the Medway, Chatham Reach, and presented to the British Museum by the Admiralty in 1871

A common variant of the early convex-hilted swords. Cf. *Archæologia*, LXXIII, plate XXXIX, 19 and Peake's type D generally. A date early in the Late Bronze Age is acceptable.

In view of the lack of particular information regarding these discoveries, and of the fact that they are of mixed type and period, their significance cannot be stated in other than general terms. While the finds from the river may indicate the site of a ford, the leaf-shaped swords there in all probability point out the route by which the peoples of the Late Bronze Age entered the Hundred of Hoo, the peninsula between the Thames and Medway Estuaries which has yielded no less than five hoards of Late Bronze Age date. In the absence of contemporary pottery it is unsafe to posit an occupation site on the marshland in the neighbourhood of St. Mary's Island, and indeed the discovery of a Late Bronze Age burial with barrel urns, between Chattenden Barracks and Islingham Farm one mile to the north-west of the Island,<sup>1</sup> shows that a gravel sub-soil was preferred to riverside alluvium for burial, and therefore probably also for settlement.

It is unfortunate that these discoveries do not throw any fresh light on the geography of the district during the Bronze

<sup>1</sup> R. F. Jessup, *Archæology of Kent*, p. 123.



Age. Had the geological position of the finds been recorded, the evidence which is so badly needed to supply a convincing date for the peat beds in the Thames-Medway estuary might have been forthcoming. As it is, we can add but little to what our member, Mr. F. C. J. Spurrell, wrote, as long ago as 1889,<sup>1</sup> that the uppermost peat bed seems to have flourished during the Bronze Age.

For permission to examine the objects described in this note, I have to thank Mr. Reginald A. Smith of the British Museum, Mr. Basil Schon of Rochester Museum, and Mr. N. C. Cook of Maidstone Museum.

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Geol. Assoc.*, xi., 210-30. *Arch. Journ.*, XLII, 269. Mr. J. P. T. Burchell has arrived at the same conclusion, *Proc. Prehist. Soc. E. Anglia*, V, 3, 288.