

GOLD BRACELETS FROM LITTLE CHART

By M. S. GORDON

THE British Museum has a gold bracelet from Little Chart, Kent, (Accession No. 1869-9-20-1), which it acquired as Treasure Trove from the Lords of H.M. Treasury (See Plates IA and IB). It is illustrated and noted in the *Bronze Age Guide*¹ under 'Little Chard, Kent.' The Ashmolean Museum has two gold bracelets (Accession Nos. 1927. 2954 and 2955), which are listed in the Accession Book as being from 'Near Faversham, 1869' (See Plate IC). They were presented to the museum in 1927 by Sir Arthur Evans, being originally part of the John Evans Collection. Thus, for nearly a century these two museum deposits have existed entirely unconnected, except that Jessup² once associated them in a single sentence, but only in a cultural context. I hope to prove, however, with the aid of some documents^{3,4} and four newspaper reports,⁵ that the three bracelets were found in the same place, Little Chart, at the same time, by the same person.

The documents consist of a bundle of Treasury Papers on Treasure Trove found at Little Chart, now in the Public Record Office,³ and the depositions, in the Kent Record Office,⁴ of the accused and witnesses prior to a trial at the East Kent Quarter Sessions of two persons accused of concealing and disposing of the Treasure Trove. As the Treasury Papers contain copies of incoming letters, it may be assumed that the originals are still extant, together with, perhaps, other papers on the subject, but these have not been traced. Neither have the reports of the proceedings of the Quarter Sessions, and the earlier Ashford Petty Sessions, been traced, but the newspaper reports largely make up for this deficiency. Taking all sources together, it is possible to trace the early story of the hoard before it was split up; a short period, but nevertheless full of incident.

The find at Little Chart is usually referred to as Treasure Trove but I have found no evidence that a Coroner's Inquest was ever held on it. Indeed, it is my opinion that there was no inquest but I understand

¹ *British Museum Bronze Age Guide*, (1920), Fig. 38, 52.

² R. F. Jessup, *Archæology of Kent* (1930), 114.

³ Public Record Office ref. T.1/6903A, bundle wrapped with 16164/69.

⁴ Kent Records Office ref. Q/SDE5.

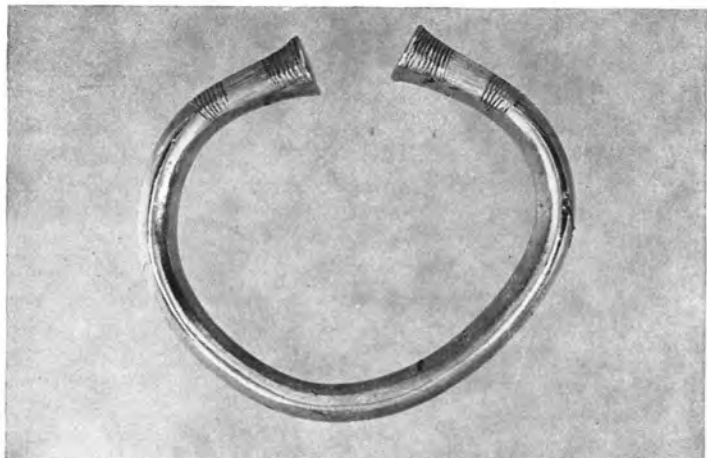
⁵ *Kentish Express and Ashford News*, 20th March, 17th and 24th April, and 3rd July, 1869.

PLATES IA and IB

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PLATE IC

Photograph Ashmolean Museum



A



B



C

GOLD BRACELETS FROM LITTLE CHART

this does not affect the legal position of the find as Treasure Trove.

Early in February, 1869, Henry Luckhurst, an illiterate labourer, uncovered three gold bracelets while draining in a meadow called Stag Paddock on Rooting Farm, Little Chart. (The meadow is now called Dock Field and is centred on TQ94754435. The farm is now called Rooting Street Farm).⁶ Working with him were John Pile and Samuel Mummery, the latter being the only one of the three who could sign his name. Be that as it may, Mummery, under one pretext or another, got hold of the three bracelets.

Little attempt was made to keep the find secret, at least from the men's usual associates. In fact, by having the three bracelets weighed on a grocer's scale at 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ oz., and one by a watchmaker at 'about 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. Troy weight,'⁴ the reverse was the case. (The first newspaper report notes that 'one was found to weigh over a quarter of a pound; one between three and four ounces; and the three together made nearly a pound Troy.')

Eventually, Mummery contacted Richard Wallis, a local shoemaker to whom he owed money, and this pair made off to London with the bracelets, Wallis paying the fares. In London, the bracelets were sold to a Mr. Campbell, silversmith, of 83 Cheapside, for £34 0s. 0d. It is important to note that Mummery told Campbell his name was Baldock and that he came from Faversham, although Wallis, in his deposition, says he gave Campbell Mummery's real name and address.

On the way home, Mummery got drunk and, although it seems probable that Wallis ended up with most of the money, Mummery had enough left to give Luckhurst £3 10s. 0d. and Pile 10s. 0d. It was not long before the story broke and Luckhurst, Mummery and Pile were charged at the Petty Sessions, but eventually only Mummery and Wallis went up to the Quarter Sessions, where they were bound over.

Meanwhile, Campbell was reselling the bracelets for an unknown sum to Messrs. Johnson Walker and Tolhurst, of 80 Aldersgate Street, and Sir Edward Dering, the owner of the estate of which Rooting Farm was part, was informing the Secretary of State, Home Dept., of the events as he saw them. (It is unfortunate that Johnson Walker and Tolhurst Ltd., established in 1849, have no records before 1892.)

The Treasury were informed and got in touch with Johnson Walker and Tolhurst, who discreetly repurchased one bracelet for £17 17s. 0d.—4 oz. 9 dwt. 6 gr. at 80s. per oz.—from an unknown client, asked the Treasury for reimbursement, and informed that body that they were in touch with another client for the return of the other two. When this client refused to return the bracelets the Treasury were promptly informed he was Mr. (later Sir) John Evans.

⁶ *Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division 6 in. Record Sheet.*

GOLD BRACELETS FROM LITTLE CHART

Evans now entered into correspondence with the Treasury and, while at no time denying he had the two remaining bracelets, he refused to admit he possessed them. His denunciation—'the mischievous working of the law of Treasure trove is causing the destruction of antiquities that I cannot assist you in carrying out its provisions'—is indicative of his attitude towards the Treasury on this matter. There is some reason to believe that the Treasury, acting on the assumption that Evans would not destroy the bracelets, quietly let the matter drop as far as Evans was concerned.

Finally, Mr. (later Sir) Augustus Wollaston Franks, Keeper of the British and Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum, was called in for his advice as an expert. He assessed the intrinsic value of the returned bracelet at about £17 0s 0d.—4 oz. 223 gr. at £3 16s. 0d. per oz.—'or if the gold is above standard something more.' He placed the antiquarian value at £22 10s. 0d. and would 'have been disposed to fix a somewhat higher value if the ends had not been filed.' (The filing is slight and probably represents an attempt by the finders, or even Campbell, to see if the bracelet was solid gold.) The Treasury charged the British Museum £22 10s. 0d. for the bracelet.

The evidence for the Ashmolean bracelets being the two missing from the Little Chart hoard is thus, after the long lapse of time, entirely circumstantial, but I believe the coincidences in the story are too numerous for it to be otherwise.

The numbers add up correctly. The dates agree. So does the place, Faversham, when one recalls that Mummery gave an alias and said he came from there when the bracelets were sold to Campbell. As far as is known, Evans, a prolific writer, never mentioned the bracelets in any of his published works, yet it is almost certain that the Ashmolean bracelets, labelled 'Near Faversham, 1869,' were in his possession for nearly forty years before he died. I am sure he would have found a reason for doing so if there had been no restraining factors. One must also ask if the Little Chart bracelet(s) were noted as Treasure Trove, why were not the so-called Faversham ones? Why also are all circumstances of the discovery unknown?

The actions of Evans should be seen in relation to the campaign which he and other leading antiquaries were waging against the parsimony of the Treasury in rewarding the finders of Treasure Trove, because they believed this meanness was causing the destruction of antiquities. Obviously, in this case, the Treasury knew, and Evans was fully aware they knew, that he had the two bracelets. But the Treasury would be reluctant to prosecute a leading figure like Evans and make public the defects of their case. At the same time, Evans cannot have been eager to face being charged with a criminal offence, with the inevitable finding of guilty. The law may have been changed

GOLD BRACELETS FROM LITTLE CHART

quickly as a result, but the record could have had a disastrous effect on the Victorian social life of Evans and his family. This was the situation facing Evans had he, at any time after taking his initial stand, admitted possession of the bracelets. Although the Treasury yielded some ground during Evans' lifetime, it was not until 1931 that the demands of Evans and his contemporaries were fully met. Sir George Hill⁷ has written on this progress, Dr. Joan Evans⁸ has noted briefly some of the steps taken, and Evans himself^{9,10,11} has made some strong remarks on the subject consistent with the quotation above.

But it is the weights of the bracelets which must clinch the proof that the Ashmolean pair were found with the British Museum example at Little Chart. In order to avoid confusion I have had each bracelet weighed in grammes and converted to troy and avoirdupois. The weights are as follows:

			Troy		Avoir.	
			oz.	gr.	oz.	gr.
B.M. 1869-9-20-1	..	139·00	4	225	4	395
A.M. 1927.2954	..	111·77	3	285	3	412
A.M. 1927.2955	..	109·31	3	247	3	374
Totals	360·08	11	277	12	306

The British Museum example is the only one for which there is an accurate, i.e., precious metal, 1869 weight. Including the weight of 4 oz. 225 gr. given in the Accession Register, there are three separate weights all within 3 grains of each other. This is undoubtedly the one weighed by the watchmaker and the one noted in the newspaper report as over a quarter of a pound. The reference to 'one between three and four ounces' is almost certainly an error for 'two between three and four ounces.' These two notes must be referring to avoirdupois weights, otherwise, error or no error, the reporter would be guilty of repeating himself if the weights were troy.

It is the total weight, however, which is the conclusive evidence. The newspaper reported they weighed nearly a pound troy and the actual weight is 203 grains, less than half an ounce, under one pound troy. The three were also weighed on a grocer's scale at $12\frac{3}{4}$ ounces.

⁷ G. Hill, *Treasure Trove in Law and Practice*, 1936—select bibliography given.

⁸ Joan Evans, *History of the Society of Antiquaries*, (1956), 273, 333, 419.

⁹ *Numismatic Chronicle*, 3rd Series, 6 (1886), 176.

¹⁰ *Proc. Soc. of Ants.*, 2nd Series, 11 (1885-7), 379-81.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14 (1891-3), 217-22.

GOLD BRACELETS FROM LITTLE CHART

The deduced weight is within 22 grains of this figure and it is almost certain that a grocer's scale in 1869 could not measure this difference. This is surely too close to be accidental.

TAILPIECES

In March, 1878, nine years after the find, a Treasury official was complaining in a note that 'this story is left tiresomely incomplete. Did Mr. Evans ever disgorge the 2 bracelets he got and did the rascals who sold them never get looked after.' It would be ungracious of me, a civil servant, to bite the hand that feeds me by commenting on this gem.

About 1949, Mr. Rogers, the present farmer at Rooting Street Farm, was told by an old inhabitant to keep his eyes open for a golden horseshoe on the farm. On asking what it was all about he was told that one of the Derings (he has never been able to find out which one), thought so much of his wife that he had her horse shod with golden horseshoes. One was cast on the farm and never found. It is not known if this legend came into existence before or after the finding of the bracelets. The first newspaper report, however, notes that the bracelets were horseshoe-shaped.

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