

## AN OPENWORK HANGING-BOWL ESCUTCHEON FROM WEST WICKHAM

J. BRENNAN

The hanging-bowl escutcheon has been kept in Maidstone Museum since 1967, on loan from Miss Joan Richardson. A short note on the escutcheon was published in *Archaeologia Cantiana* for the same year:

'An Anglo-Saxon escutcheon from a hanging bowl has been lent to the museum by Miss Joan Richardson, of Herne Bay. It was dug up by her some years ago in a garden in Hawes Lane, West Wickham.

The escutcheon is circular with an openwork design and a bird's head terminal to the suspension hook. It is one of bronze with traces of silvering. A description and drawing will be published in the next volume of *Archaeologia Cantiana* after the escutcheon had been treated for corrosion and cleaned'.<sup>1</sup>

The escutcheon is made of bronze, though as has been noted above, traces of silvering or tinning could be seen before it was cleaned.<sup>2</sup> It is practically circular in shape, filled with a design in openwork (Fig. 1; Plate I), and is relatively large, being 51 mm. in diameter, although extremely light in weight compared to other openwork escutcheons, which are generally smaller and heavier. The suspension hook and escutcheon were cast as one piece, the hook rising out of a large and bulbous but hollow 'collar'. The hook is longer and thinner than those on other openwork escutcheons. The hook terminates in a fairly realistic swan's head with large prominent eyes.

The design consists of two opposing openwork trumpet spirals which run round the sides of the escutcheon and are outlined by engraved lines. The layout of the design is such that an image of a large pelta, with a smaller inverted pelta with scrolled terminals

<sup>1</sup> D. Kelly, *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiii (1967), 299; the promised description and drawing never appeared.

<sup>2</sup> Kelly, *op. cit.*

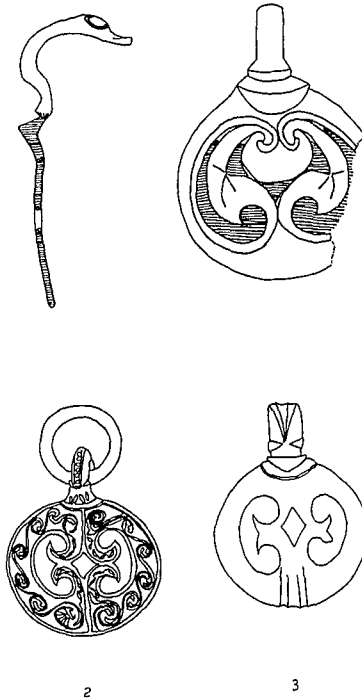


Fig. 1. 1. Hanging-bowl Escutcheon from West Wickham (Kent); 2. Hanging-bowl Escutcheon from Eastwell (Leics.); 3. Hanging-bowl Escutcheon from Baginton (Warwicks.). Nos. 1 and 2 drawn by Jane Brenan; no. 3 drawn by Robin Hillier. (Scale:  $\frac{1}{2}$ )

contained within, can also be seen. In addition to the engraved lines which accentuate the trumpet spirals, there are two sets of incisions in the fields between the trumpet spirals. Each set of incisions consists of three broken arcs set at right angles to each other. They have no apparent decorative function, but may represent construction marks for the layout of the openwork design.

Exact parallels for this design seem to be quite rare, at least among Early Christian period material. Certainly, the design cannot be paralleled on any extant hanging-bowls though the separate elements of the designs are quite common. A similar type of trumpet spiral can be seen on the escutcheon from Barrington (Warwicks).<sup>3</sup> A parallel

<sup>3</sup> H. Kilbride-Jones, *Celtic Craftsmanship in Bronze*, 1980, Fig. 81:3

for the pelta with scrolled terminals can be seen on the Chesterton discs (Warwicks.).<sup>4</sup>

Parallels for the swan's head on the hook terminal are also uncommon. The amount of realism is especially unusual compared to the hook terminals on other escutcheons. The large prominent eyes can best be paralleled with those on an escutcheon from Middleton Moor,<sup>5</sup> though they are different in many respects. The idea of using a swan's head for the hook's terminal may have derived from Roman examples. Four silvered escutcheons on a drop-handled dish from the Traprain Law hoard have hooks which terminate in swan's heads.<sup>6</sup> Other hanging-bowls have hooks which terminate in bird's heads, such as Castle Yard (York), Ford Down (Wilts.), and Hawnbly (Yorks.).

In spite of some unusual features, this escutcheon does belong to a clearly defined group of hanging-bowl escutcheons; those decorated with openwork. These escutcheons have a number of additional features in common. Firstly, they are always circular in shape and the hook is always cast in one piece with the escutcheon. Heavy prominent 'collars' at the junction of the hook and escutcheon are common as is the placing of two seed-like bosses near the base of the hook, as can be seen on the Eastwell escutcheon (Fig. 1, 2). All escutcheons employ a pelta as the main motif, with the exceptions of examples from Eastry (Kent) and Faversham (Kent). Some escutcheons have additional enamel decoration on the surfaces between the openwork, such as on the escutcheons on the Baginton bowl (Fig. 1, 3). The total number of openwork escutcheons is not large; they represent about 10 per cent of the total number of hanging-bowl finds. Their geographical locations are wide, from Kent through eastern England to Scotland. An outlying openwork escutcheon has also been found in Ireland, in the river Bann.<sup>7</sup>

Other authors of hanging-bowl papers have remarked on a further number of features which are characteristic of this group. Stevenson has for example noted that all two-pelta escutcheons (which form the majority of this group) have a central diamond with an engraved horizontal line extending from it (e.g. Fig. 1, 3).<sup>8</sup> Kilbride-Jones

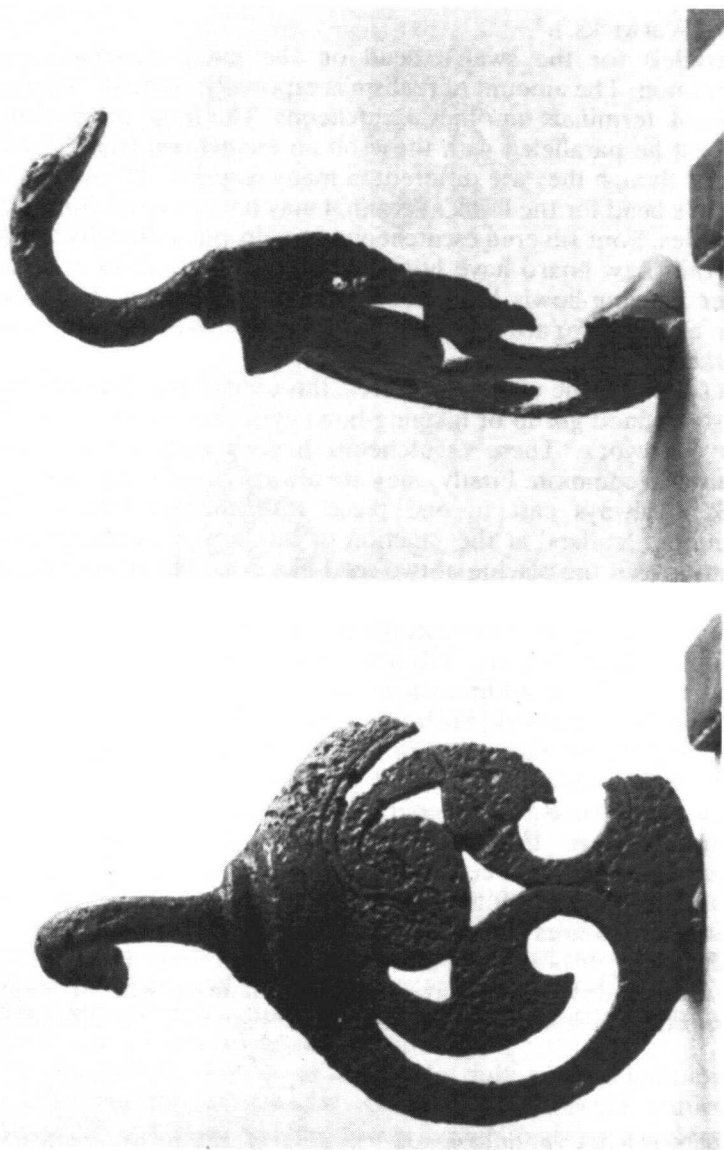
<sup>4</sup> Kilbride-Jones, *op. cit.*, Fig. 83:6

<sup>5</sup> S. Pegge, *Archaeologia*, ix (1789), 189

<sup>6</sup> F. Henry, 'Hanging Bowl', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquities of Ireland*, lxvi (1936), 215.

<sup>7</sup> F. Henry in D. Harden (Ed.), *Dark Age Britain*, 1956, 80.

<sup>8</sup> R. Stevenson, 'The Earlier Metalwork of Pictland' in G. Megaw (Ed.), *To Illustrate the Monuments*, 1976, 250.



Openwork hanging-bowl escutcheon from West Wickham.

remarked on the seed-like bosses which appear on the lower part of the hook on many of these escutcheons.<sup>9</sup>

The West Wickham escutcheon seems to introduce discord into a group that was relatively cohesive. As has already been mentioned, the design on the escutcheon is unusual. It does not have any seed-like bosses on the base of the hook, but it does have a 'collar' which is unusually large. The escutcheon has a central triangle rather than a central diamond and does not have an engraved line running down its vertical axis. The swan's head forming the hook's terminal also contrasts with the others in this group whose hooks are considered to have terminals with zoomorphic features.<sup>10</sup> It may, however, be possible to explain these differences.

Stevenson has pointed out that little attention has been paid to the 'collar' and 'seed-like bosses' on these escutcheons.<sup>11</sup> He saw the 'collar' as being the muzzle of an animal, the 'seed-like bosses' its eyes. He compared these animal heads to that found on a swivel ring from Tiree in the Hebrides.<sup>12</sup> He also pointed out that the large bowl from Sutton Hoo has a 'muzzle-like attachment' and eyes.<sup>13</sup> The large Sutton Hoo bowl has another feature in common with the openwork escutcheons. Unlike the majority of enamelled escutcheons, which are fitted with a frame, the hook being cast in one piece with the frame rather than with the escutcheon, the escutcheons on the Sutton Hoo bowl (like openwork escutcheons) are cast in one piece with the suspension hook. This is also true of the Manton Common (Scunthorpe) bowl, which also has escutcheons with muzzles and eyes at the base of the hook. Bruce-Mitford had pointed out other similarities between the large Sutton Hoo bowl and that from Manton Common.<sup>14</sup> Both bowls also have hooks with zoomorphic terminals. Stevenson has suggested that the design of eight alternating peltae on the smallest Sutton Hoo bowl may have been the inspiration for the design of the openwork escutcheons.<sup>15</sup>

In returning to the escutcheons with bird's head hook-terminal mentioned above, it is interesting to note that these escutcheons are also cast in one piece with the hook, but they do not have muzzle-like attachments or eyes on the base of the hook. It seems then that hooks terminating in bird's heads and having animal's heads on the base of

<sup>9</sup> Kilbride-Jones, *op. cit.*, 239.

<sup>10</sup> Kilbride-Jones, *op. cit.*, 239

<sup>11</sup> Stevenson, *op. cit.*, 251.

<sup>12</sup> Stevenson, *op. cit.*, fig 2b.

<sup>13</sup> Stevenson, *op. cit.*, 250.

<sup>14</sup> R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, Vol. III (1983), 251.

<sup>15</sup> Stevenson, *op. cit.*, 251.

the hook, are normally mutually exclusive. The West Wickham escutcheon appears to be the result of a mixing of two different types of hanging-bowl escutcheon. The result is an escutcheon which is more sophisticated than other hook-escutcheons with bird's heads and more graceful than the normal openwork escutcheons.

To suggest a possible date for the West Wickham escutcheon is not easy. This is true of any hanging-bowl find since there are virtually no fixed dates around which a chronology could be built. It is used to be generally considered that all openwork escutcheons were 'sub-Roman' in date, which Bruce-Mitford appears still to support.<sup>16</sup> The relatively recent find of a mould for making a two-peltae openwork hanging-bowl escutcheon at Craig Phadrig (Inverness) has, however, opened the possibility of a much later date for this group. The mould was found 'in association' with three pieces of imported 'E-ware'.<sup>17</sup> 'E-ware' is now considered to date from the mid-sixth century, at the very earliest, to the beginning of the eighth century,<sup>18</sup> though there is a large discrepancy between this, and the C<sup>14</sup> date obtained from the site from the same horizon.<sup>19</sup> Stevenson has suggested that because of the similarities of the openwork escutcheons to each other and with the large and small hanging bowls from Sutton Hoo and because of the association of 'E-ware' with the hanging-bowl mould from Craig Phadrig, all these escutcheons should be seen as being more or less contemporary with each other and should be dated to around the beginning of the seventh century.<sup>20</sup> If the West Wickham escutcheon is seen as a misinterpretation, or different interpretation, of two different types of hanging-bowl design, it must be contemporary with, or possibly later than, most openwork escutcheons.

## CONCLUSIONS

The West Wickham escutcheon is large and somewhat unusual and probably dates to the late sixth or early seventh century. Its form and motives seem to have been partly inspired by those of other hanging bowls, and from traditional motives; in particular it appears to be the result of mixing two different types of hanging-bowl escutcheon. The result can be seen to be artistically more successful than the types used as models.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce-Mitford, *op. cit.*, 275.

<sup>17</sup> A. Small and B. Cottam, *Craig Phadrig*, University of Dundee Occasional Papers, no. 1 (1972), 43.

<sup>18</sup> C. Thomas, *A Provisional List of imported Pottery in post-Roman Western Britain and Ireland*, Institute of Cornish Studies Special Report no. 7, (1981), 27.

<sup>19</sup> Small, *op. cit.*, 43.

<sup>20</sup> Stevenson *op. cit.*, 11 250.