

ROMAN FINDS GROUP  
NEWSLETTER I



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## Why a Roman Finds Group

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To those who are unfamiliar with the Roman Finds Group, a brief resume of its activities since formation might be useful. The idea of a group to bring together those interested in small finds of the Roman period sprang out of discussions at a weekend conference at Knuston Hall, Northamptonshire early in 1987. It was felt that a group similar in aims to the successful Finds Research group but covering the Roman period might fill an important gap. Irena Lentowitz followed this up by organising a meeting of interested parties at Leicester University in October 1987 which formally launched the Romano-British Small Finds Group as it was originally known (more name changes to come!)

A day school was held in March 1988 at Leicester's New Walk Museum covering aspects of *Personal Ornament*. Within this wide theme, brooches, intaglios, earrings, metallurgical analysis and the treatment of small finds in reports were discussed. The success of this venture led to the formation of an ad hoc committee and saw another name change to the Roman Small Finds Group.

A second day school at the Museum of London attracted 80 participants in October 1988 to hear about the results of work on *Extra-mural sites in London* and see a display of recent finds. This highly successful event saw contributions from both Archaeological Units working in the City (Dept of Urban Archaeology and Dept of Greater London Archaeology), and the British Museum. Our thanks go to the Museum of London for providing a venue and their help in organising this event.

Although primarily interested in non-ceramic finds the group decided to drop the "small" from its name as small find was an archaeologically esoteric and misleading term. (Try explaining "small find" to a member of the public!). From time to time ceramics would be discussed at meetings as was the case with groups from burials in London. In its new guise the Roman Finds Group organised a third day school at Leeds University in February 1989 entitled *Finds*

A Mid 4th century  
bracelet found at  
Rochester  
Harrison, A.C. 1981  
Rochester  
1974-1975  
Archaeologia  
Cantiana XCVII,  
95-136



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*from the Vicus.* This examined finds from northern Vici and included work on glass, the "sexing" of small finds, the problems of backlog excavations and approaches to publication.

A new departure was to have short contributions on interesting or puzzling objects. This will be a recurrent feature at these meetings although initial shyness (?) meant that the only short contributions at Leeds were from two committee members.

Having "tested the water" with these day schools, the Group has now taken the step of asking for subscriptions so its activities can be expanded. The production of a newsletter and provision of data sheets and bibliographies on different finds is the next stage. More meetings are planned for Bristol and Liverpool, and it is hoped to continue to hold at least two of these a year.

To subscribe to the newsletter and receive advance notice of meetings please send £ 3.00 to;

**Patrick Clay,  
Field Officer,  
Museums Annexe,  
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Leicester,  
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## Finds Spot

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In the current climate, with an increasing number of archaeological projects bringing pressure on staff to produce ever more quickly forward costings, Research designs and budget forecasts such assessments mean an ever increasing reliance on in house skills.

One aspect of this is of course the finds, and individuals responsible for managing finds processing often find themselves faced by the responsibility of giving off the cuff assessments of an artefacts importance.

In many cases groups of artefacts have been catalogued or published in full with lists of comparanda and are thus easily dealt with. However many other artefacts or assemblages are of interest not least because of their accessibility to the public at large. Yet providing an assessment of such artefacts is not always straightforward without extensive background knowledge. This series of short notes is intended to highlight new and interesting finds, to help with identifications, to provide a short bibliography of the major works and, over time, to generate a handlist which can be used as the basis for further work.

Furthermore it is hoped that we can encourage individuals to include problem objects such as those presented here by Justin Bailey and Patrick Clay. We also hope to encourage freelance and other specialists to advertise in this newsletter.

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## Can YOU help?

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As you may know, recent excavations in Castleford under the direction of Phil Abramson discovered hundreds of fragments of clay moulds, used to cast vessels that were then decorated with enamel. Most of these moulds were for casting vessels like that reconstructed by Miranda Schofield in the illustration below. There are foliage patterns (as in the drawing) and more geometric ones too, some with concentric bands of a number of different designs on the circular 'ends' of the vessel. These have a diameter of about 15 cm and are slightly convex. The cylindrical part of the vessel always has three bands of design, the middle one raised above the other two

The problem is that the only vessel of this type known to me was found in Istria (modern Yugoslavia) and is now in the museum in Vienna. I can't believe that they were all made for the export market and hope there may be fragments of similar vessels lurking in museum collections or in recent excavation finds. Have you got one (or more)? If so, do please let me know.

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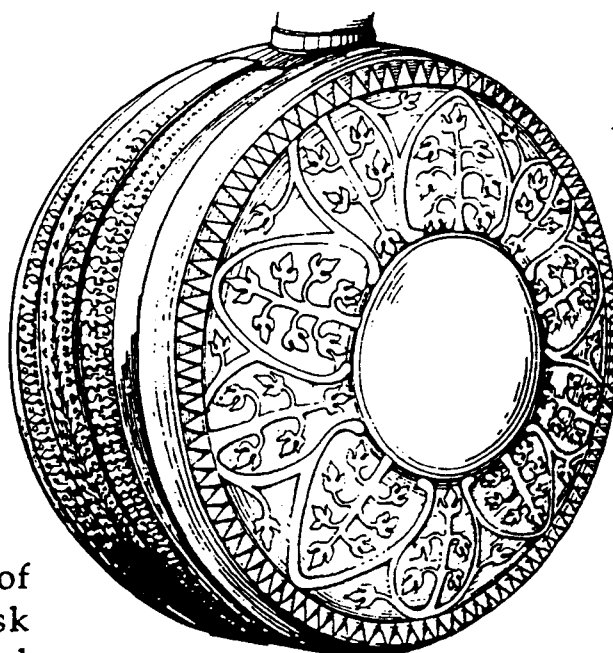


Fig 1 Not to Scale

Reconstruction of  
the bronze flask  
from the Castleford  
moulds.

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## A Roman Clasp Knife from the Shires excavation Leicester

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One of the most interesting objects amongst the fine collection of bone items from the St Peter's Lane site is a handle with a carved representation of a figure. The handle is from a Roman clasp knife but who this strange figure represents remains a mystery.

Roman clasp knives were small pocket knives - the equivalent of the pen knives of today. The iron blade folded on a hinge into the back of the main handle body so protecting the cutting edge. The handles were usually made of bronze or bone and were frequently highly decorated. Bronze clasp knife handles were often decorated with animals, one of the most popular forms being of a hound chasing a hare. An example from Brampton, Norfolk, shows a panther, which were often pictured in Bacchic scenes. Highly decorated bone handles are rare in Britain although several have been found in Germany. The finest example from Britain is of a beautifully carved ivory clasp knife handle of a gladiator holding a rectangular shield. The style of this carving suggests that it was manufactured in the late 2nd or 3rd century.

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### Alys or Pan?

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The St Peter's Lane knife handle although also carved with great skill is in a very different style from that of the gladiator. The carving is far more angular and shows a robed figure with a pronounced forehead and hooked nose holding pan pipes. A bronze rivet pierces the head which may have been used to secure the knife to a chain. A groove at the top of the figure shows where the blade pivoted into the protective slot along the back of the handle. The lower part of the figure differs in style from the upper and may depict stylised legs with cloven hoofs.

Who is this strange figure meant to be? It may be Pan with his pipes who has a goat's lower body and legs. However Pan is usually shown bearded and with horns, although the

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hooked nose is reminiscent of a representation of Pan on an intaglio ring from Kent. The missing horns may originally have been incorporated into an additional piece fitted onto the flat surface of the head to secure the pivot on the knife blade. Perhaps the bronze rivet is a way of showing a pseudo horn.

Another figure sometimes shown playing pipes is Alys, the shepherd boy consort of Cybele the Mother Goddess (first introduced to Rome in 204), who was connected with the eastern mystery cults which spread through the Roman Empire. Alys, however usually has a distinctive Phrygian head-dress, as shown on a jet plaque from Ipswich. Again if the upper part of the head is missing a similar head-dress may once have been present.

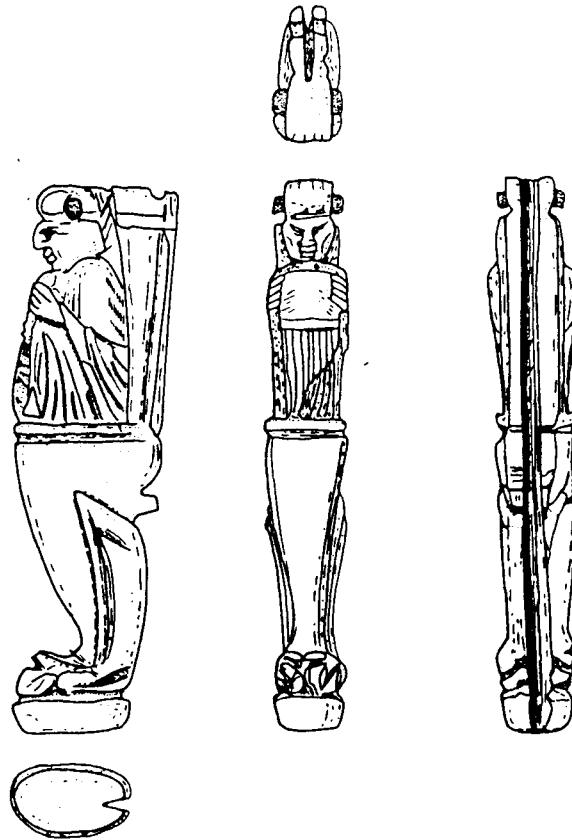


Fig 2 Clasp Knife Handle Scale 1:1

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## Gods of Everyday Life

Whoever the figure depicts it does indicate how important Roman Gods were in the everyday life of Roman citizens. Roman religions were concerned with success in all day-to-day activities and the gods were called upon to provide happiness, not condemn sin.

Images of the gods were ever present on everyday objects - coins, rings and even pocket knives. Different gods were intimately connected with all aspects of everyday life.

If this carving is indeed of Pan, then perhaps its owner was concerned with sexual powers as Pan was associated with sexual passion in all its forms!

Patrick Clay, August 1989.

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## An introduction to the literature on Romano-British brooches

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*A regular feature of the newsletter will be introductions to the literature of particular types of small finds. These will not contain exhaustive bibliographies, but the articles and reports cited will in turn provide many suggestions for further reading. It is hoped that these will be of use to the non-specialist.*

Brooches are one of the commonest copper alloy small finds found on Romano-British sites and generally take pride of place in small finds reports. As is to be expected there is a large literature on them but this does not include an overview that can be regarded as definitive. *Roman Brooches* by Donald Mackreth (1973) is a small booklet based on the collection of the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, and forms a useful introductory essay on the subject. The three volumes by Richard Hattatt (1982, 1985, 1988) are primarily catalogues of the author's collections which include many Romano-British types. Brief general notes to these types are given.

The late M R Hull was for many years the leading authority on Romano-British brooches and at his death in 1976 his Corpus was being prepared for publication. This contains the very large number of brooches which he had studied divided into numbered types. Some authors who have had access to the manuscript use the types established in the Corpus as the basis for their reports, see for example Crummy 1983. The majority of the Corpus remains unpublished although one volume dealing with the pre-Roman bow brooches has appeared (Hull and Hawkes 1987). The volumes dealing with the Romano-British brooches are being prepared for publication by Dr Grace Simpson.

Romano-British brooches can be divided into three categories - bow brooches, plate brooches and penannular brooches. The only category to have a universally accepted system of nomenclature is the penannular brooch. This is provided by Fowler 1960.

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There are three different systems of nomenclature for bow brooches in addition to that in the Hull Corpus

The oldest is that of R G Collingwood published in the first edition of *The Archaeology of Roman Britain* (1930). The current form of this is that published in the second edition of the book (Collingwood & Richmond 1969). The original system was one based on shape with the groups identified by consecutive letters of the alphabet. The revised version merges some of the original groups and re-arranges the resultant ones in chronological order retaining the original group names so that they now appear rather arbitrary.

The typology established in the report on the brooches found during excavations at Sheepen, Colchester in the 1930's (Hull 1947) divided the bow brooches into 17 groups known as Camulodunum Types I to XVIII. The site was destroyed by Boudicca in AD 60/1 and the typology is therefore of most use for the mid first century forms.

The third system of nomenclature is less formalised. Groups are identified either by the site at which a type specimen was found, for example *Hod Hill*, *Aesica* and *Backworth*; or after some feature of their physical appearance, for example *rosette*, *trumpet* and *knee*.

As an illustrative example of all these different systems, the brooch in figure 5 can be known as either a *Collingwood Group P* or a *Camulodunum Type XVIII* or a *Hod Hill* brooch after the many found there (Brailsford 1962).

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### Rosette, Langton Down, Nauheim Derivative, Aucissa and Hod Hill brooches.

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Rosette, Langton Down and Nauheim derivative brooches (figs 3-7) were all in use in Britain in the early first century, while Aucissa and Hod Hill brooches appear to have been introduced at the time of the Conquest. All of these types are rarely found on sites associated with the Flavian

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advance to the north, and most will have gone out of use by during the period AD 60 - 70.

The reports on the brooches from the early sites at Sheepen (Hull 1947), Skeleton Green (Mackreth 1981) and Braughing (Olivier 1988) are especially valuable because the brooch assemblages are large and the discussions detailed with many references to other material. The types are also well represented amongst the well dated brooches from the cemetery at King Harry Lane, Verulamium (Stead and Rigby 1989) and the material from the excavations during the 1970's at Sheepen (Bayley and Butcher 1985). Other reports which will be found useful include Mackreth 1982, 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1989 though the brooches discussed in these do not always come from well stratified contexts.

Figs 3-7 Brooches Scale 1:1

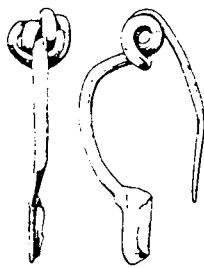


Fig 3  
Nauheim

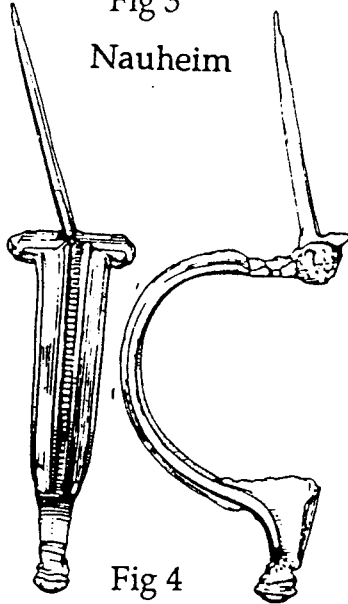


Fig 4  
Aucissa

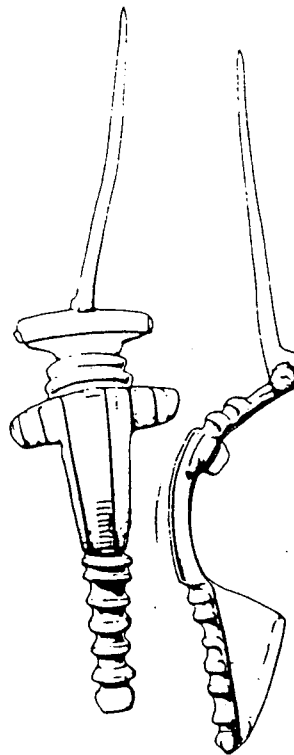


Fig 5  
Hod Hill

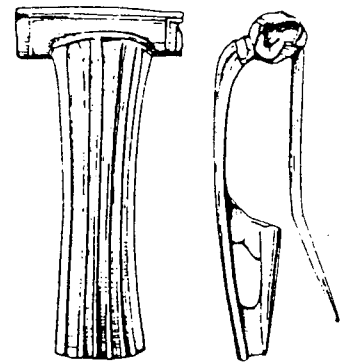


Fig 6  
Langton Down

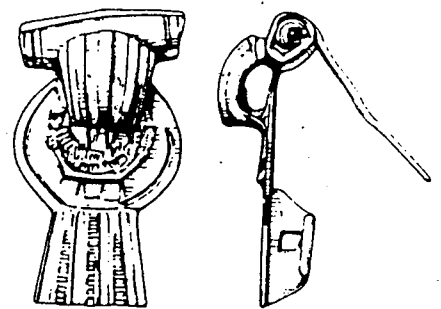


Fig 7  
Rosette

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The illustrations accompanying this article are taken from Olivier 1988, and we thank the editor of Hertfordshire Archaeology for permission to reproduce them.

H. E. M. Cool, August 1989.

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# Comb

Comb was recovered in east as gravel quarry. The find was archaeological monitoring. Since the discovery of an extensive area of and Iron Age flax retting pits and a major excavation on the banks of the

is situated within waterlogged peat deposits  
at the end of the site.

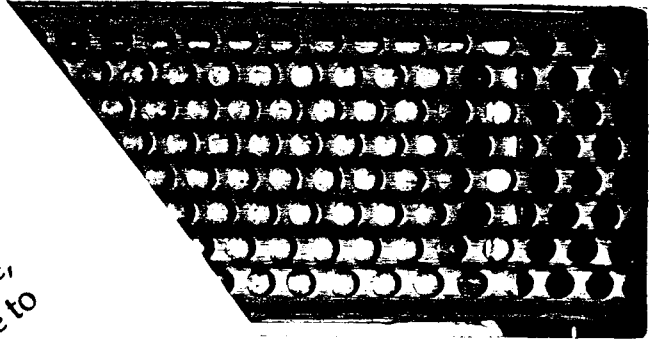
A single piece (or simple \*), double-edged comb is of good, having both fine (10 teeth per cm) and coarse (5 teeth per cm) teeth and is of lentoid section. Only one end survives and this is convex in shape. Two incised horizontal lines mark the boundaries of the solid zone, providing a guide for the depth to which the teeth were to be sawn.

Several parallels for this form of comb are known from Britain; two from Portchester (Cunliffe 1975, 262 nos 322 and 323), one from Winchester (Clarke 1979, 246 no 194) and over twenty five from Vindolanda (Birley 1977, 123-3, pl 60). Continental examples are also known (Roes 1963, 6; Rieche and Schalles 1987, 55).

MacGregor notes that Northern European combs are generally restricted to manufacture in boxwood whereas Mediterranean examples are known in ivory (ibid, 78).

The dates of the British parallels range from late 1st - early 2nd century AD (Vindolanda) to the late 3rd - 4th centuries AD (Portchester and Winchester). The Bedfordshire example was a chance find and therefore can only be assigned, on the basis of the above parallels, to the 1st - 4th centuries AD.

\* Following Galloway's (1976) terminology



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The use of these combs is generally thought to be associated with "fashionable women's hair" (Birley 1977, 123) as in the case of the Winchester comb which was situated beside the skull of inhumation 155 (Clarke 1979, fig 60). However, the evidence from Vindolanda, where one comb still contained coarse textured animal hair (Birley 1977, 123-4) indicates use in the process of tanning. The Sandy comb retained no evidence of use.

Simple, double-edged combs are found throughout the Roman Empire, dating between the 1st and 4th centuries AD. They appear to have been used as both personal cosmetic items and in some industrial processes. This type of comb is commonly found but few examples are published (Galloway in Clarke 1979, 264 ft 3).

The comb was retrieved by Bedfordshire County Council Planning Department, Archaeological Service in whose care it is before being accessioned into the collections of Bedford Museum. Joe Prentice drew the comb.

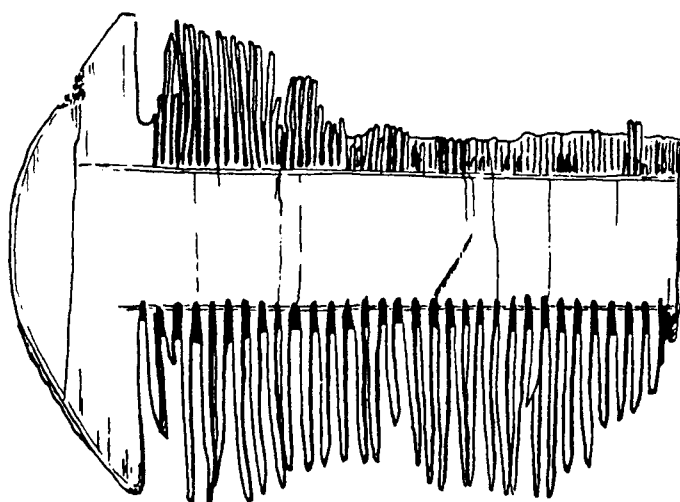


Fig 8 Boxwood Comb Scale 1:1

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## Forthcoming events:

### **LIVERPOOL 12th February 1990**

The next meeting of the Roman Finds Group is planned for Liverpool on 12th February. Details are available from;  
Dr Hilary Cool,  
Centre for Archaeological Studies,  
Department of External Studies,  
University of Leeds.

### **YORK 30-31st of March 1990**

A joint meeting is planned between the Roman Finds Group and the 700-1700 Finds Group, at York on the 30-31st March to discuss "The Philosophy of Finds Research."  
Details to follow.

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## Specialist Services

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Dr G Lloyd-Morgan

Dr Lloyd-Morgan is now accepting freelance work since leaving her previous post with the Grosvenor Museum;

Enquiries to:  
147 & 149 Market St  
Broadley  
Whitworth  
Rochdale  
OLR 8RU.

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## Any Suggestions

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If you have any suggestions for material to be included in this newsletter please contact the editor;

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MK42 9LS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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