

A Middle Bronze-Age Hoard from Aston Rowant

In July 1982 a hoard comprising five palstaves and a fragment of copper-alloy with a round section, possibly from a bracelet, was discovered by a metal-detector user near Woodway Farm, Aston Rowant (Fig. 1). All the axes are transitional palstaves of the Penard assemblage.¹ Hoards comprising solely transitional palstaves, or these axes with one other object, are relatively common, and have a wide distribution. However, the hoard provides an important regional association and the find is one of ten Penard hoards known in the Thames valley.² As a group these are quite diverse, and the Aston Rowant hoard adds to the impression that the range of associations typical in the Penard metalwork corpus are present in the region.³

The finds were deposited on loan to the Ashmolean Museum, and returned to the owner in 2005. The site was visited by A. Sherratt (Ashmolean Museum) and C. Chambers (Oxford Archaeological Unit); no traces of occupation were found in the immediate area of the findspot, and a metal-detector survey of the area did not produce any further objects. Two nearby locations for the findspot are recorded: the National Bronze Index gives SU 730 895; whereas the Oxfordshire HER records SU 732 979. Both are at the bottom of a chalk escarpment on the north-west side of the Chiltern Hills.

The hoard came to the attention of the author during research on the newly digitized National Bronze Implement Index at the British Museum. Further enquiry failed to obtain the hoard for inspection, and it is regrettable that the find has disappeared from archaeological view. The following illustrations and descriptions are based on notes and sketches made by Stuart Needham whilst the objects were on display at the Ashmolean Museum.⁴ Precise measurements were not made, but complete transitional palstaves are typically between c.150 mm and 190 mm in length.⁵

Hoard dominated by a single function class of object – tools, weapons or ornaments – are characteristic of the wider Penard assemblage,⁶ and the Aston Rowant hoard broadly follows this pattern. However, the possible identification of a bracelet fragment makes the find slightly unusual. Other known hoards that solely or primarily comprise transitional palstaves include the following: Wantage (Berks.);⁷ Edgebold Brickyard, Meole Brace (Shrops.);⁸ East Knoyle (Wilts.);⁹ Roundhay (West Yorks.);¹⁰ Palethorpe Farm, Bolton Percy (North Yorks.);¹¹ and Craig-a-Bhodaich, Farr (Highland).¹²

¹ C.B. Burgess, 'The Later Bronze Age in the British Isles and North-Western France', *Archaeological Journal*, 125 (1968), pp. 3–9; B. O'Connor, *Cross-Channel Relations in the Later Bronze Age: Relations between Britain, North-Eastern France and the Low Countries during the Later Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age, with Particular Reference to the Metalwork*, BAR IS, 91 (1980), pp. 95–6; P.K. Schmidt and C.B. Burgess, *The Axes of Scotland and Northern England*, *Prähistorische Bronzefunde*, 9:7 (1981), pp. 145–57; M.A. Smith, 'Some Somerset Hoards and their Place in the Bronze Age of Southern Britain', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 25 (1959), pp. 144–87.

² S. Needham, 'Assemblage, Structure and Meaning in Bronze Metalwork Studies: An Analysis of the British Penard Assemblage', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 36:2 (2017), pp. 111–56.

³ *Ibid.* figs. 11–15.

⁴ I would like to thank Stuart Needham for kindly lending this material for publication.

⁵ Schmidt and Burgess, *Axes*, plates 62–6.

⁶ Needham, *Assemblage, Structure and Meaning*.

⁷ M.J. Rowlands, *The Production and Distribution of Metalwork in the Middle Bronze Age in Southern Britain*, BAR, 31 (1976), p. 225.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 254.

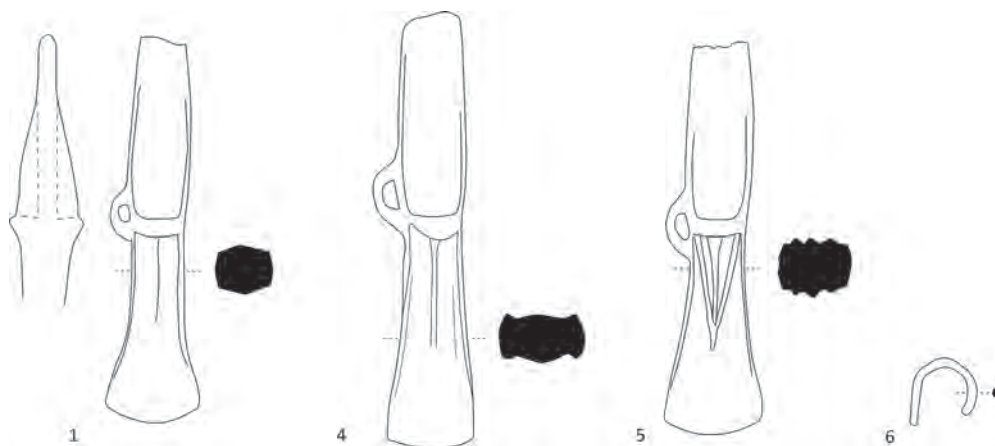
⁹ Portable Antiquities Scheme, YORYM-954174.

¹⁰ Schmidt and Burgess, *Axes*, p. 147.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 148.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 146.

Hoard Catalogue:



1. Transitional palstave. Mid-rib decoration. Lower half of blade-face rippled due to hammering.
2. Transitional palstave. Very similar to 1, but probably not from the same mould.
3. Transitional palstave. Very similar to 1, but shortened blade due to working, and ancient loss of butt and loop.
4. Transitional palstave. Mid-rib decoration. Irregular side flanges.
5. Transitional palstave. Trident decoration. Extensive hammering on blade-face.
6. Fragment. Round section. Possibly from a bracelet.

ALEX DAVIES