

LUCERNA



**THE ROMAN FINDS GROUP
NEWSLETTER**

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A late 5th – early 6th century context from Springhead, Kent

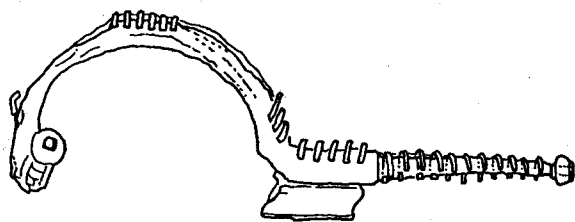


Fig. 1. Visigothic iron bow brooch (brooch drawn from x-ray)

In 2000 Wessex Archaeology carried out excavations along the line of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link at Springhead near Gravesend, targeted on the Romano-British roadside settlement of *Vagniacis* which is located at the head of the Ebbsfleet river. In the course of these investigations, a pit (1.47 x 0.64 and 0.25m deep) with a single fill was investigated. It lies, apparently isolated, approximately 20m east of the river, although the area further to the east of the CTRL development area has not yet been investigated. Subsequently, Oxford Wessex Archaeology (a joint venture between OA and WA) have been commissioned to carry out the post-excavation assessment, analysis and reporting of all archaeological remains in the Ebbsfleet Valley. The information below is provided by kind permission of Union Railways (North) Ltd and Rail Link Engineering.

The material from the pit includes a brooch, fragments of a jar or wide bowl with thumbnail imprints in a coarse quartz tempered fabric, sherds of a further vessel in a fine sandy fabric, and a few bones of cow and dog (Fig. 2). The pottery recovered from the pit has parallels among the early Saxon pottery at Mucking (e.g. Grubenhaus 19), just across the Thames from Springhead (Hamerow 1993, 35; 206 Fig. 19 GH19,12).

The iron bow brooch (Fig. 1), however, belongs to Schulze-Dörlamm's Type Estagel, a Visigothic type dated to the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th centuries AD (Schulze-Dörlamm 1986. Kazanski 1998, Fig. 4). X-ray photography shows that it is decorated with - probably - silver cramps across the body of the brooch. A distribution map of Visigothic bow brooches by Alexander Koch (1998, 83 Abb. 17) shows Type Estagel, predominantly found in southern France and central Spain, to have some outliers in Normandy, Picardie and Île-de-France. Very close parallels for the brooch from Springhead are the two iron brooches found in Grave 529 at Frénoeuville, Dép. Calvados (Pilet 1980, Pl. 141), which show a similar decoration of silver cramps and knobs either side of the spring and at the end of the foot.

Whether the Springhead brooch indicates the presence of Visigothic persons in south-east Britain, which is the interpretation suggested for their presence in Northern France (A. Koch 1998, 82 ff. Abb. 15-16. U. Koch et al. 1996, 841;847), or whether they are simply indicative of the wider political and economic circumstances providing a framework for the exchange of such objects, cannot be decided at present. It is, however, worth mentioning that there are several other objects, mainly from south-eastern England, including coins and dress accessories, with Visigothic or more broadly western Mediterranean rather than East Germanic origin (e.g. see Eagles and Ager 2004), for instance a three-lobed small long brooch from Grubenhaus 81 at Mucking (Hamerow 1993, 61; 244 Fig. 132,1) with affinities to a Visigothic type of *Blechfibeln*. Visigothic coins found in eastern England have been discussed by Rigold (1975) and Archibald (1991, 36), and among the latest of these is a *tremissis*, dated to the end of the 6th century, found at the Dover-Buckland cemetery (Evison 1987,181).

Thus, it might just be possible that the brooch from Springhead may not be as isolated in this country as it appeared at first sight. As far as we

know, it is the first of its kind to have been found in Britain but we would be interested to know whether you know of any others from this country.

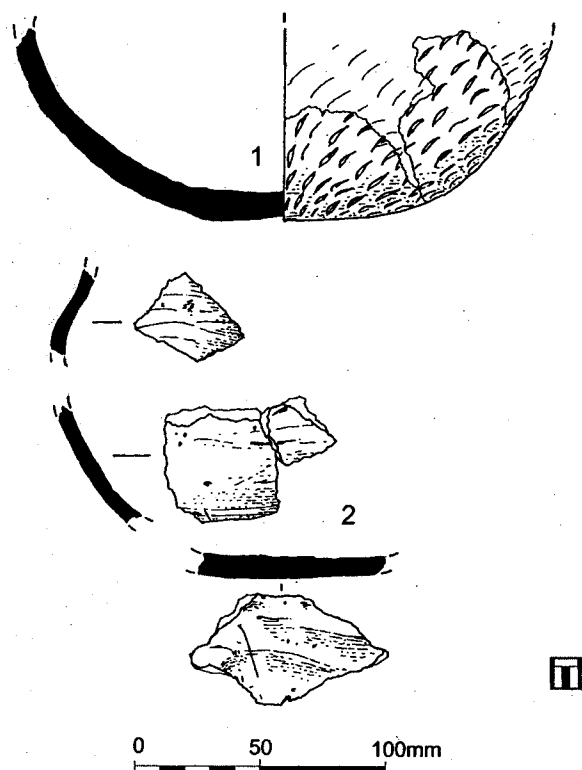


Fig. 2. Springhead, Kent. Early Saxon pottery.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Barry Ager and Martin Welch for information on Visigothic and East Germanic metalwork in England, to Stephanie Knight for identification of the animal bone and to S.E. James for the illustrations.

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The reference to Koch 1998 was unfortunately omitted from the published article:

Koch, A. 1998, 'Fremde Fibeln im Frankenreich: ein Beitrag zur Frage nichtfränkischer germanischer Ethnien in Nordgallien', *Acta Praehistorica et Archaeologica* 30, 69-89.

