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The Faversham mounts

by Angela Evans¹

This paper is written for Kaye and Don as a reminder of the horse exhibition that never was. The Faversham mounts² would have made a worthy group in an exhibition that was designed to celebrate man and the horse. We ran a good race, but were finally pipped at the post!

Historical background

Five remarkable gilt-bronze mounts were found during the excavations of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery of King's Field, Faversham, between 1858 and 1868 (Fig. 1). They are a set and are decorated with panels of Style II interlace, gilt-bronze foils and silver appliqués (see Appendix). Since their discovery, they have been identified as horse *phalerae* and, while this is undoubtedly correct, neither their date and typological affinities, nor their precise function, have ever been explored.

The Faversham cemetery was excavated during the construction of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway³ and the finds, like so many finds from 19th century excavations, were collected by interested local antiquarians, in this case predominantly William Gibbs. The collection he made was bequeathed in 1870 to The South Kensington Museum⁴, and in 1895 the majority of the finds were transferred to The British Museum. While the finds were in The South Kensington Museum, a catalogue was undertaken by Charles Roach Smith (Roach Smith 1871). He had been aware of the Faversham finds since 1858 when he wrote: 'The most novel feature in Mr. Gibbs's collection is the fine ornamented plates [pl. III], with rings and other appendages: they appear to have decorated the harness of a sumptuously caparisoned horse, which there is every reason to suppose was interred with the body of its master, doubtless a thane of distinction. Before

the ancient Germans had been much influenced by intercourse with the Romans, and when cremation was more generally practised, we find that burning the war-horse was occasionally one of their funeral ceremonies. Tacitus observes, *sua cuique arma, quorundam igni et equus adicitur* (*Germania*, xxvii, l. 2-3); and the practice was continued down to a late period: traces of it indeed remain to the present day. Of course only persons of wealth or eminence could afford to make such a costly sacrifice' (Roach Smith 1858, 46, Pl. III).

In his introduction to the catalogue, Roach-Smith (1871, iii) wrote as follows: 'The Anglo-Saxon and other antiquities bequeathed by the late William Gibbs, Esq., of Faversham, Kent to The South Kensington Museum, were brought to light close to the town of Faversham chiefly during the formation of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway; and subsequently while excavations were being made for brick earth in land adjoining. They were purchased by Mr. Gibbs from time to time, as they were dug up, from the workmen, who were induced, from the liberality with which they were treated, to confine their dealings to him; and therefore it is believed that only a very few of the objects discovered were dispersed; although it is probable that some must have been sold here and there before Mr. Gibbs secured influence over the excavators'. Of the five *phalerae* he wrote: The most remarkable are the harness plates or ornaments. It would have been fortunate had we been afforded a survey of the circumstances under which they were exhumed, and thus have known whether they were found in a grave with a skeleton, and if so, with what other objects, or whether they occupied a distinct grave with the remains of the horse ('*ibid.* xvii). He describes them as 'Harness plates (five, with portions of another). Gilt or plated bronze, circular, with four equidistant projections,

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² BM P&E 1243'70: 1243a'70 – 1243e'70.

³ In 1858 the East Kent Railway opened between Chatham and Faversham and in 1869 the line, under the new title London, Chatham and Dover Railway, opened between Faversham and Canterbury (Canterbury East).

⁴ Now the Victoria and Albert Museum; the bequest was transferred to the British Museum in 1895.



a



b



c

Fig. 1 — a-b...Two of the five Faversham roundels; c...Back view of the roundel from the centre of the browband showing rivets and a repair. Scale slightly over 1:2. Photos: © The British Museum.



Fig. 2 — Gilt-bronze roundels from the bridle excavated beneath Mound 17 at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk: a and c are from the junction of the nose- and headbands with the cheekpieces, b) from the centre of the browband. Scale approximately 2:3. Photo: © The British Museum.

covered with interlacing and intricate patterns; to the borders, opposite the projections, have been affixed silver plates stamped with small triangles; the centres set with garnets; conjectured to have belonged to sumptuous horse furniture. Diam. of largest, 5 ¹/₈ in. These ornaments of an equipage that could only have pertained to royalty or nobility appear to be unique' (*ibid.* 15).

Description ⁵

The Faversham mounts are five large and heavily decorated gilt-bronze roundels with integral axe-blade terminals and three arms that have been interpreted as stylised fish (Speake 1989, 80). They have been repaired and refurbished and have degraded during burial. Although all five are broadly identical, they can be divided into two types by axe-blade terminals of different proportions. The diameter of the roundels is 77 mm, the overall length of Type 1 is 134 mm, and of Type 2 146 mm (Fig. 1).

The mounts are cast from common moulds with panels of tightly woven Style II ornament, stylised bird heads and zoomorphs. They were then gilded overall before being finished by hand with gilt-bronze sheet inlays and silver appliqués, achieving an end product that is quite unlike any other piece of early Anglo-Saxon metalwork.

On the backs, four rivets are set at the base of the arms, with an additional one towards their terminals and two and three on the axe-blade pendants depending on their size (Fig. 1, c). Their overall form is related to a variety of late 6th/7th century metalwork, particularly box and bridle fittings, where a field of interlace surrounds a central setting of a small plate garnet within a calcitic setting.

Function

The Faversham mounts are unusual in that they combine in a single casting the roundel and axe-blade pendants that are now familiar from Anglian finds of horse gear, in particular the bridle fittings from the high status grave beneath Mound 17 in the royal cemetery at Sutton Hoo (Fig. 2; Evans 2005, 221ff, figs. 111 and 112). However, roundels and axe-blade fittings like these can belong to a variety of objects and function is generally determined by associated organic material and the style or lack of fixings. The backs of the bridle fittings from Sutton Hoo and from the horse and rider burial in a grave at Lakenheath (Eriswell; Fig. 3; Evans 2001, n° 52, 27-29) carry rivets in a similar pattern to the Faversham mounts together with the mineral preserved remains of straps that intersect at right-angles. Axe-bladed mounts

⁵ Because of their ornamental complexity, the full description of the mounts is contained in the Appendix.

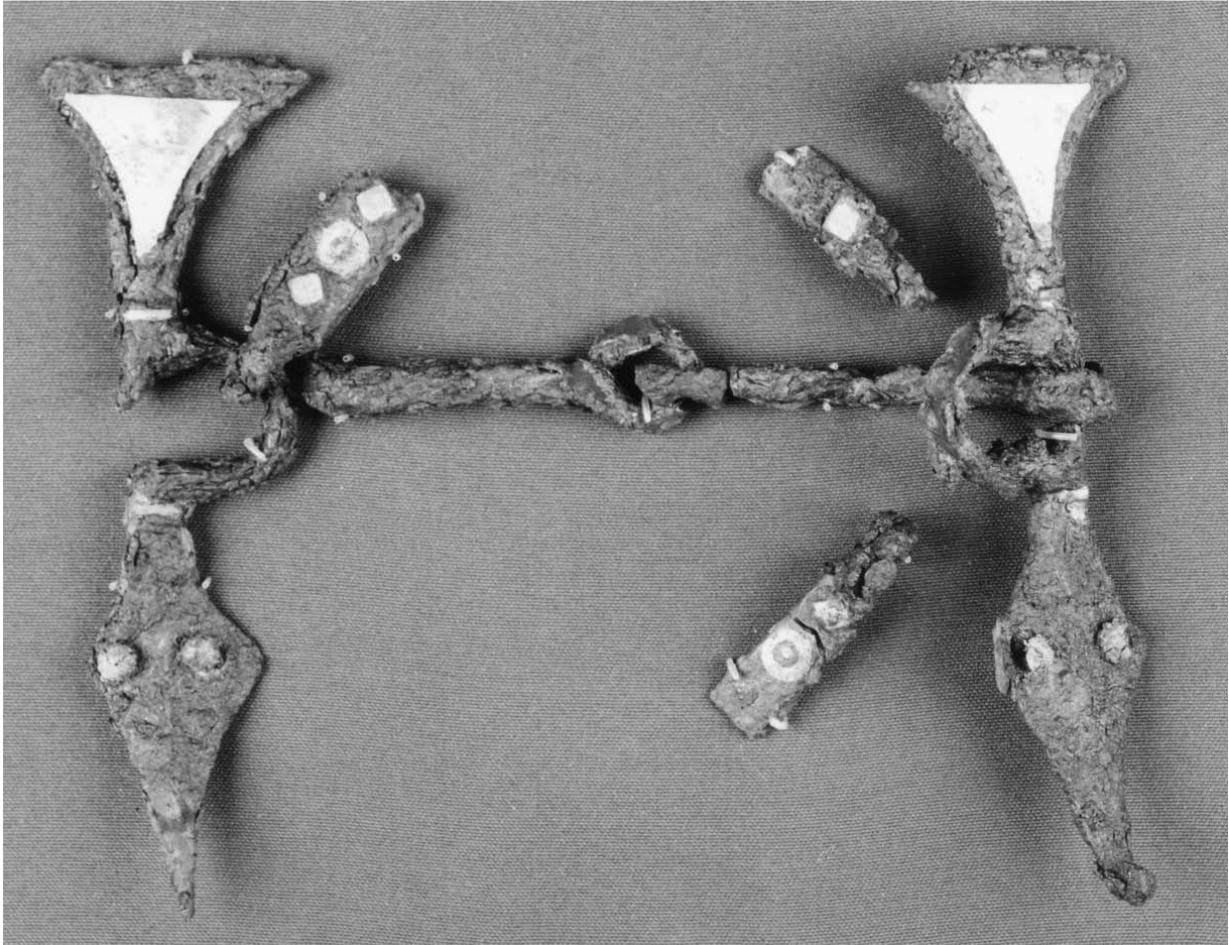


Fig. 3 — The bit with fixed mouthpieces from the horse and rider burial (context 4116) at Lakenheath (Eriswell), Suffolk. Length at centre 20 cm. Photo: © The British Museum.

similar to those from Sutton Hoo from Coddendam and Barham in Suffolk⁶, both with Style II bird heads, each have three stout rivets and, although free of association or organic remains, are most probably pendants from bridles. However, a set of roundels with associated axe-blade mounts from Caenby, Lincolnshire, found still inlaid into wood and secured with spikes and lugs rather than rivets, can be interpreted as box fittings (Speake 1980, pl. 15 j and l)⁷. Two gilt-bronze roundels from the chamber grave beneath Sutton Hoo Mound 2, one found in 1938, the other during the excavations at Sutton Hoo between 1983 and 1991⁸, are decorated with magnificent Style II ornament and have a single, centrally placed rivet. These are more broadly identified as box, saddle or shield mounts

(Bruce-Mitford 1975, 128, figs 71 and 87; Evans 2005, 258, fig. 122). Occasionally roundels and axe-bladed mounts with no fixings occur and these are assumed to have been inlaid into wood and glued in place – or, if made with a curve, perhaps soldered to a hanging-bowl⁹.

Although no organic material remains associated with the Faversham fittings, the multiple rivets indicate that they are from either a bridle or body straps associated with a saddle. Their positioning implies that the mounts were attached to straps that crossed at right angles to each other along the axes of the arms and this argues against their use on a horse's body as straps linking a saddle to the breeching- and breast-bands fall at an angle¹⁰. Although they appear large¹¹, they must belong on a bridle at the

⁶ Coddendam, West 1998, fig. 21.9; Barham, BM P&E 1984,0103.1, Webster & Backhouse 1991, 56, cat. n° 39.

⁷ BM P&E 1851,1011.1-5; Jarvis 1850, pl. opposite p. 36.

⁸ BM P&E 1991,0411.2203.

⁹ E.g. the roundel and axe-blade mounts on the Lullingstone hanging-bowl (BM P&E 1967,1004.1), Brenan 1991, cat. n° 40, pl. 40a-c. Some form of solder or filler was also used in the attachment of the Caenby mounts.

¹⁰ Hence the distinctive and asymmetrical arrangement of strap fixings on e.g. many Roman *phalerae*, Bishop 1988, fig. 34, Corbridge *phalera*.

¹¹ E.g. compared to those on the pony bridle from Mound 17 at Sutton Hoo (diam. 57 mm, BM P&E 1991,0411.2881- 2884), Evans 2005, 247, fig. 112.

The Faversham mounts



a



b



c



d



e

Fig. 4 — Details from the mounts: a...Gilt-bronze foil with crouching quadruped; b...Type 1 axe-blade pendant with bird heads at the corners; c...Type 2 axe-blade pendant with animal masks at the corners; d...One of the lateral arms in the form of a 'fish' with a bird-headed tail associated with a silver strip in the form of a double-headed creature; e...Upper arm with trifurcated tail, associated with silver strip with cast zig-zag. Photos: © The British Museum.

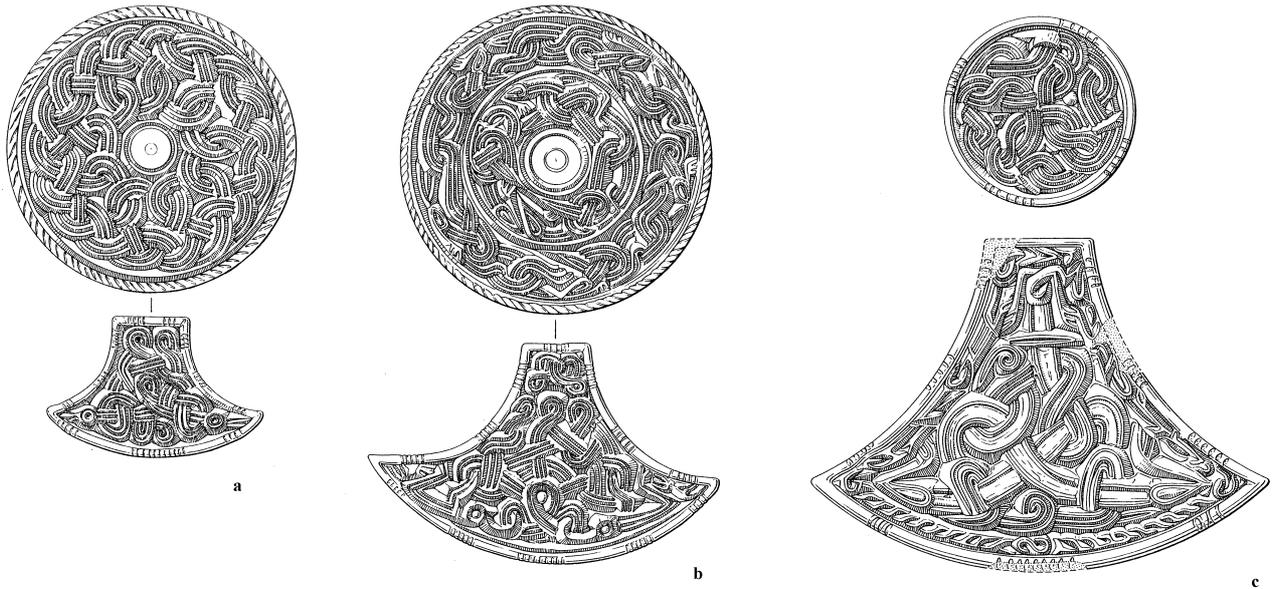


Fig. 5 — Style II Interlace on the gilt-bronze fittings of the Sutton Hoo bridle: a) from the junction of the nose- and headbands with the cheekpieces; b) from the centre of the browband; c) from the mouthpieces. Scale 1: 1. Drawings: James Farrant and James Thorn; © The British Museum.

intersection of the cheekpieces with the brow- and nosebands and at the centre of the browband attached to a strap running over the poll to the headband¹². If this is the correct interpretation of the roundels, it is then possible to assign the two roundels with waisted axe-blade terminals to the junction of the cheekpieces with the noseband and the remaining three to the junction of the cheekpieces and browband, and to the browband itself. A further distinction might be made. On one of these three mounts, the eight panels of the inner frame are placed in a different orientation to all the others: the gilded panels with *faux* herringbone ornament lie on the cardinal points opposite the arms in contrast to the remaining four where the silver sheets occupy this position. This singleton could logically be placed at the centre of the browband.

Discussion

The Faversham mounts were identified as high status horse trappings immediately after their excavation in 1858 (Roach Smith 1858, 46), but they were an exotic type without a convincing archaeological context until the excavation in 1991 of a late 6th-century horse and rider grave beneath Mound 17 at Sutton Hoo (Evans 2005, 221-241). While many of their details are familiar from other early Anglo-Saxon artefacts, their individuality, allied to

the physical damage to their surface appearance during burial, has made it difficult to relate them to other examples of contemporary metalwork and Anglo-Saxon specialists have been divided in their opinion of their date of manufacture. The archaeological contexts to which they can be related, however, throw light on their date and stylistic associations.

Although the Faversham mounts display idiosyncratic surface decoration, typologically they can now be related to a new and rapidly expanding group of insular decorative bridle mounts that have their genesis in the early 6th century (see below). Hayo Vierck, writing in 1970 on the incidence of horse burial in early Anglo-Saxon England recorded less than 30 early Anglo-Saxon graves with either buried horses or horse gear and none of these contained decorated bridles (Vierck 1970-71, 218-20). Much has changed since Vierck's survey. Judith Oexle, in a survey of bits and biting in Merovingian Europe, worked with a pool of nearly 500 examples of horse burial, many with decorated bridles, dating from the second half of the 6th/early 7th century (Oexle 1992). The ready availability of horses for disposal as part of the ritual surrounding death in early Anglo-Saxon England has been brought into closer focus by the incidence of horse bones in cremation burials¹³. However, it was not until 1991, when the double grave of an élite male and his

¹² Cf. the magnificent roundel and axe-blade pendant at the centre of the browband on the Sutton Hoo pony bridle, *ibid.*, fig. 111 (BM P&E 1991,0411.2880); shown here as Fig. 2, b.

¹³ E.g. the Anglian cemetery at Spong Hill, Norfolk, where 23% of the cremation urns contained horse bones (McKinley 1994, 66, 92-6,135); cf. also J. Bond in Carver 2005, 279, table 28, for a recent discussion of the incidence of horse bones in cremation graves.

horse was excavated beneath Mound 17 at Sutton Hoo, that an archaeological context for metalwork like the Faversham mounts was finally established. Following the excavation of the Sutton Hoo bridle, a second decorated bridle with gilt-bronze and silver-plated Style I ornaments was excavated in 1997 in one of several warrior graves in the Eriswell cemetery, Lakenheath, Suffolk (Fig 3; Evans 2001, 27-29). While the Sutton Hoo bridle belongs to the later decades of the 6th century, the Lakenheath bridle is buried with an assemblage that dates from the early decades of the 6th century¹⁴. Both bridles, although belonging to different workshop traditions, share an ornamental symmetry and demonstrate that as early as the beginning of the 6th century, high-status Anglo-Saxon warriors were riding with decorated bridles.

The overall form of the Lakenheath bridle fittings, particularly the bit with fixed axe-blade terminals on the bit rings and swinging pendants on the brow, is apparently unique to early Anglo-Saxon England where finds of similar fittings suggest an early 6th century tradition of bridles decorated in similar style¹⁵. In contrast, the Sutton Hoo bridle fittings are part of a wider group of gilded copper-alloy mounts decorated with similar Style II triple strand interlace. Within this group are an increasing number with no context that have been found during metal-detecting or sold at auction. These include roundels, axe-blade fittings¹⁶ and mounts that combine roundel, arms and pendant in a single casting. It is the latter that relate most closely to the Faversham mounts¹⁷. The currency of this series of mounts, based on their Style II decoration, appears to be principally in the late 6th/early 7th century and their distribution is weighted towards the Anglian regions of early Anglo-Saxon England. A recent sale room find, however, suggests that the genesis of mounts with integral arms and axe-blade terminals lies in the first half of the 6th century¹⁸. The Faversham mounts belong within this context and (*pace* Speake 1989, 77) details, often missing or lost in corrosion on one mount, but visible on another, suggest that their maker was working in a late 6th/early 7th century milieu.

When Thomas Kendrick wrote his seminal work on Anglo-Saxon art, he used the Faversham mounts to illustrate the decline of Anglo-Saxon Style II ornament, which he then dated to the late 5th/early 6th century (Kendrick 1938, 89). Describing them as ‘florid and weak’, he

wrote: ‘The crispness of the early work and the purposeful handling of the pattern have gone. Where there was once control and systematized decoration, we have here an insipid spread of plait-like ornament containing vestigial zoomorphic details.’ This criticism may be a response to the rather flat presentation of the interlace which lacks the high relief typical of the best Style II interlace, seen for example on the shield or box fittings from Mound 2 at Sutton Hoo (Bruce-Mitford 1975, fig. 71). Kendrick continued: ‘This is what Kentish art was really like in the days of St Augustine, a mere degradation of the animal pattern into a meaningless and tightly knit jumble of interlacing lines used recklessly as a complete surface covering’. While his overall impression is perhaps understandable in the context of his dating schema, it now appears unduly prejudiced in that the mounts are well produced, rich in detail and full of allusions to Anglo-Saxon metal-working techniques of the late 6th and early 7th century.

The problem of dating the mounts also exercised George Speake when writing his survey on the development of Germanic Style II in Anglo-Saxon England. In it he briefly alludes to the Faversham mounts by quoting Kendrick (see above) and appending a single sentence: ‘They are scarcely so early.’ (Speake 1980, 65). In his subsequent publication on Swallowcliffe Down, the burial of a high status Anglo-Saxon woman beneath a reused Bronze Age barrow, he again briefly discussed the mounts. He placed them in relation to a gilt-bronze roundel with gilded and silver foils, thought to have been mounted on a leather and wood ‘satchel’ found in the grave, and a singleton harness mount from Hardingstone, Northants (Speake 1989, 77, fig. 68). However, these mounts are all idiosyncratic, indeed unique. In effect, they are linked only by their individuality and their grouping is artificial in that they are essentially a discordant group that stands outside the more recognisable metalwork of the early Anglo-Saxon period. Although Speake considered them all to have been made in the second half of the 7th century (*ibid.*, 80), the five Faversham mounts and the Hardingstone mount incorporate features that have a more common currency in the first half of the century¹⁹.

Apart from the Style II interlace, features typical of the second half of the 6th century/early 7th century are the simple bird heads and animal masks that fill the flaring corners of the axe-blade terminals and two fragments of

¹⁴ In Evans 2001 these fittings are dated to the mid 6th century. A recent reassessment of the associated artefacts now suggests a date as early as the late 5th/early 6th century (J. Hines, pers. comm.).

¹⁵ Cf. a broken pendant refitted with a pin and used as a brooch from Mucking, Essex and recent finds of similar fittings from grave 127, Saltwood, Kent. I am grateful to Sue Hirst, Ian Riddler and Barry Ager for these unpublished references.

¹⁶ E.g. a bird headed axe-blade pendant, Barham, West 1998, fig. 7.70; axe-blade pendants with Style II zoomorphs, Coddenham, *ibid.*, fig. 21.9 and 10.

¹⁷ E.g. two unpublished finds with a Suffolk provenance found during metal detecting in the 1990’s.

¹⁸ Cf. a mount sold at Bonhams, April 21 2005, cat. 290, The Bonhams mount is decorated with Style I masks and discrete feet and must date from the early 6th century.

¹⁹ Speake’s assessment may also have been influenced by the dating of the Mote of Mark moulds (Graham Campbell 1975, 48-50) to the decades following the Anglian incursions into south-west Scotland in 638, and by what he thought was the relative scarcity of similar axe-blade pendants in Anglo-Saxon contexts.

gilt-bronze foil impressed with crouched zoomorphs and pelleted strands (Fig. 4). The bird heads which make the corners of the smaller, Type 1, axe-blade terminals are characterised by a clearly defined eye within a rounded head and a gently curving beak (Fig. 4, b) – features that are more commonly found on continental material dating from the early to mid 6th century but which are occasionally found in early Anglo-Saxon contexts²⁰. In contrast to the bird heads, the larger axe-blade (Type 2) terminals have flaring corners modelled in the form of a semi-realistic animal mask (Fig. 4, c). Such heads are rare, but occur very occasionally on high status metal work of the 6th century. They are related for example to highly stylised animal masks around the margins of the head plate of a square headed brooch from Barrington A, Cambridgeshire (Hines 1997, 196, pl. 90, unclassified, mid-6th century). The style of these frontal masks on the Faversham mounts can also be compared to the terminal of a fluted gold strip from the early 7th century ship burial beneath Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo (Bruce-Mitford 1978, 400-401, fig. 284)²¹. The mask at the end of the strip is carefully tooled with a long snout and two eyes made by punching through the metal. There is also an unusual continental example of an animal mask with ears on the foot of a 6th-century Alemannic radiate headed brooch (Typ Heilbronn-Bökingen) from the cemetery at München Aubing, Germany (Koch 1998, 42-43; Kühn 1974, Taf. 286 24,3)²². The Type 2 terminals are also decorated with zoomorphs that fill the lower curved frame of the pendant below the panel of Style II interlace. This concept can be compared to the panel of ornament on the bit ring pendants on the bridle from Sutton Hoo Mound 17, whose margins are filled with racing zoomorphs (Fig. 5, c; Evans 2005, 230-231, fig. 110).

The two fragments of zoomorphic foil with interlacing pelleted bodies (Fig. 4, a) are also typical of the late 6th/early 7th centuries and the interlace style is seen on many insular and continental finds²³. The more complete foil also shows a crouched quadruped with a bracelet on the back leg, an image that is again found on Style II metalwork of the late 6th and early 7th centuries, and is seen most appealingly in the tiny quadruped at the foot of the Sutton Hoo gold buckle or the semi-naturalistic zoomorphs on the rectangular foils around the neck of the

Sutton Hoo maple wood bottles (Bruce-Mitford 1978, figs 396, 406; 1983, 359, fig. 261)²⁴. Although the foil is fragmentary, the front leg and shoulder of a second quadruped can be seen in the space behind the braceleted leg, suggesting that the foil once consisted of a procession, possibly akin to a repoussé silver disc from Caenby, Lincolnshire (Jarvis 1850, pl. opposite p. 38; see also Speake 1980, 42, pl. 15k)²⁵.

An early 7th-century context for the use of non-matching foils is provided by the second hanging bowl from Sutton Hoo Mound 1, which has die-matched zoomorphic foil panels decorating the three hook escutcheons, but uses three different foils in the basal ring and patch (Bruce-Mitford 1983, fig. 199). Three of these (the patch and two panels), are filled with foils impressed with simple triple strand interlace, a fourth is cut from a similar foil to the hook escutcheons, the fifth is impressed with a twisted strand between billeted borders. Whether the non-matching foils represent repair is not clear, but such diversity seems not to have been displeasing to either the Anglo-Saxon metalsmith or his patron. This use of non-matching, and indeed reused, foils is seen again on the satchel mount from Swallowcliffe Down, a grave dated to the second half of the 7th century (Speake 1989, 75).

Other features of the Style II interlace on the Faversham mounts, particularly the use of a triple strand, can also be related to late 6th/early 7th century finds. This style of ornament occurs on a range of high status objects including for example the roundels from the pony bridle at Sutton Hoo Mound 17 (Fig. 2), box mounts from Caenby and cup mounts also from Faversham (Speake 1980, pls 14j, 15j and l). The interlace filling both the roundel spaces and the axe-blade pendants is tightly designed with no clearly defined zoomorphic elements. It is executed in lower relief in comparison to some Style II interlace which is finished with an almost ‘chip-carved’ effect²⁶, but this is not untypical of other bridle fittings – for example four roundels from the Mound 17 bridle are ornamented with a similarly featureless interlace which is endless, in that it has no beginning and no end, but fills the roundel with a single elaborately interlacing strand (Figs 2 and 5, a; Evans 2005, 231, fig. 112). The interlace, like that on the Faversham mounts, is equally low key. This is not necessarily an indication of poor quality so

²⁰ E.g. a bird brooch from grave 25A, Mill Hill, Kent (Parfitt & Brugmann 1997, 44, 166, table 10) and a radiate headed brooch from Market Overton (Baldwin Brown 1915 (vol. 3), 255, pl XXXIX/1), both Continental in origin; a silver-gilt pin head from Scarrington, Nottinghamshire (Ager 2004, n° 46) and a square-headed brooch (type XVII) with a bird head on each shoulder, Suffolk (Hines 1997, 133-41). Cf. also an S-brooch with bird heads and a distinct band above the curving beak from Iffley, Oxon (Smith 1923, fig. 68; I am grateful to Leslie Webster for this reference).

²¹ This little strip is believed by Bruce-Mitford to have been attached to a small wand, together with a filigree strip inlaid with cabochon garnets, a triangular gold-foil mount with two addorsed quadrupeds and a little wolf-like creature made in gold foil.

²² I am grateful to Noël Adams for this reference.

²³ For example, two copper-alloy dies from Bury St Edmunds, on the shield from Sutton Hoo Mound 1, particularly the foil panels associated with the metal rim binding, the dragon and the bird of prey, and on gold sword fittings recently found near Market Rasen, Lincs (Speake 1980, pl. 14, a and g; Bruce Mitford 1978, 55-65, 82-7; Evans 2004, 68-70, n° 58).

²⁴ P&E 1939,110-10.1 and 1939,1010.122-127.

²⁵ P&E 1851,1011.7

²⁶ E.g. the gold buckle from the Sutton Hoo ship burial; Bruce-Mitford 1978, 548, fig. 346.

much as a reflection of interlace adapted for a particular space and purpose – horse gear is designed to impress from a distance. The axe-blade pendant from the centre of the browband on the bridle from Mound 17 at Sutton Hoo also provides a parallel for the use of secondary strands to complete an interlace panel and also for the division of the ornament into two zones – with a discrete element at the top of the pendant above the interlacing zoomorphs (Fig. 5, b)²⁷.

Certain individual elements of the Faversham mounts remain difficult to parallel. The gilded copper-alloy foils decorated with ring and dot ornament are apparently unique, although the motif is widely used to decorate metalwork, pottery and bone in the early Anglo-Saxon period. An analogous example to the all-over ring and dot motif on the Faversham foils can perhaps be seen in the annular disc of copper alloy that is mounted at the centre of the Swallowcliffe Down ‘satchel’ lid (Speake 1989, 60, fig. 53)²⁸. The ‘fish’ (Fig. 4, c-d) are stylistically unparalleled, although fish, in some cases interpreted as a symbol of Christianity, occasionally appear as appliquéés on shields, on high status buckles and hanging-bowls. One, uniquely cast in the round, stands at the centre of the large hanging bowl from the Sutton Hoo ship burial²⁹. None, however, are executed in the curiously abstract style of the Faversham mounts, although it seems that Speake’s interpretation of them as ‘fish’ is probably correct. The presence of the fish on the mounts may be related to the birds and animals that fill the corners and the margins of the axe-blade pendants. Combinations in various forms, particularly bird of prey and fish, man, boar and bird of prey, occur on a variety of early Anglo-Saxon and Continental objects, including high status belt buckles and shields. In this instance the combination of three creatures may represent air, land and water, the world’s natural order according to classical authors³⁰.

Despite decorative anomalies, which are not uncommon on high status metalwork, the ornamental detail of the mounts and their type place them in the world of the early Anglo-Saxon metalworker. From this revised perspective, we realise that the overall aesthetic of the Faversham mounts mirrors that of Class 2 Kentish plated

disc brooches and Class 1 composite brooches of the late 6th and early 7th century. On these brooches the decorative field is divided by four triangular elements springing from a large central boss and the surface is covered with garnet inlay and filigree scrollwork³¹. The Faversham metalsmith, working with a familiar type of harness ornament, has followed this scheme but replaced the filigree with panels of interlace and foil, creating an entirely original suite of mounts.

APPENDIX

The following description is based on details from all five roundels. Diameter of roundels 77 mm; overall length of Type 1 134 mm; overall length of Type 2 146 mm; length of rivets 5 mm. At the centre of each roundel is a cell containing a small plate garnet within a calcitic compound imitating shell or ivory (now missing on each roundel). Only one garnet survives and this, unusually, is set over gold foil decorated with a fragment of interlace³². The central setting is enclosed by three billeted strands, cast in imitation of a herringbone pattern and set within a narrow vertical collar. Springing from this is a cruciform device of four triangular panels with raised fluted borders between fields of low relief Style II triple strand interlace cast into the surface. Most of the triangular panels are filled with thin gilt-bronze sheet, held in place by three dome-headed gilt-bronze tacks and decorated with repoussé impressions of a ring and dot motif. Two, however, are clipped from larger sheets decorated with zoomorphic ornament. These are fragmentary and difficult to read, but one includes a crouched quadruped with a braceleted back leg and bifurcated foot above beaded interlace. The front foot of a second animal can be seen suggesting that the foil originally showed a procession³³. The second fragment is barely legible apart from a scrap of interlace with beaded strands between simple borders and is from a similar, if not the same, foil³⁴.

Surrounding the central field is a raised border of eight panels within an outer frame. The panels are filled with billeted strands cast in imitation of Z- and S- twisted wire. These alternate with sunken trays which are covered with

²⁷ Such a division can also be seen at the top of the strips from the front of the shield from Vendel XII, Uppland, Sweden (Stolpe & Arne 1927, pl. XXXV). These strips are so close to those mounted on the Sutton Hoo mound 1 shield that Bruce Mitford thought them to have been made by the same craftsman (Bruce-Mitford, 1978, 69, fig. 53). The date of Vendel XII is in the last quarter of the 6th century (Arrhenius 1983 44; cf. also Hoiland Nielsen 1998, 9-11).

²⁸ Cf. also a fragmentary roundel and axe-blade pendant decorated with all-over ring and dot ornament from Sculthorpe, Norfolk, found during metal detecting and recorded in the British Museum (Department of Prehistory and Europe, Submitted Finds Archive).

²⁹ Bruce Mitford 1983, fig. 174 and cf. Bromeswell, Suffolk, a shield mount in the form of a gilt-bronze fish additionally decorated with sheet silver, excavated in 2000 and dating from the mid 6th century (unpublished); the magnificent silver-gilt buckle from Crundale, Kent, mounted with a semi-realistic fish on the plate (Webster & Backhouse, 1991, 24. cat. n° 6); fish appliquéés on the hanging-bowl from Lullingstone, Kent (Brenan 1991, cat. n° 40, pl. 40a-c).

³⁰ For an interpretation of such imagery, see Adams 2006 forthcoming.

³¹ E.g. Avent 1975, pl. 54, Wingham (cat. 157, class 2 plated disc brooch), pl. 60, Faversham (cat. 170, class 1.1 composite brooch), pl. 62, Monkton (cat. 172, class 1.2 composite brooch).

³² Generally plate garnets are placed over gold foil stamped with a geometric pointillé or ‘waffle’ pattern.

³³ Cf. a repoussé silver mount found at Caenby, Lincolnshire; Jarvis 1850, pl. opposite p. 38; Speake 1980, 42, pl. 15k.

³⁴ But see Baldwin Brown 1915 (vol. 4), pl. CI.2, for an early photograph of this foil in a more complete state.

silver strips decorated with contiguous triangles whose borders contain traces of niello inlay. One roundel has two unique panels, one with a cast zig-zag motif, the other with two zig-zag lines and a median wavy line, representing the body of a double headed snub-nosed zoomorph (Speake 1980, fig. 11i, where they are interpreted as miniature boars' heads). Traces of niello survive on both strips. Each of the other mounts has a missing silver strip and, on each, the empty tray is treated in various ways. On two, the floor is incised with hatching or cross-hatching, the third is left entirely plain and the fourth is covered with a piece of gold foil impressed with a billeted herring-bone motif. The outer frame is narrow and divided into four by arms which spring from the raised edge of the inner border. The spaces between the arms are each filled with a single skein of remarkable triple-strand Style II interlace with one run of long flowing flattened loops running beneath threads pulled out from the margin of the interlacing strand to form a thorn-like projection decorated with a single dot³⁵.

The arms themselves consist of an axe-blade 'pendant' and three which can be read as cryptic fish (Speake 1989, 80). The pendent arms divide into two types, both decorated with asymmetric Style II triple strand interlace within a plain border. Two are deeply waisted with an almost straight lower edge (Type 1). Their lower corners are in the form of a rounded bird head with well defined beady eye and a curving beak which butts against or extends into a zig-zag border. The interlace is complex and tightly woven: the top of the panel is filled by two interlocking loops and from each of these a single strand drops through a discrete figure-of-eight loop to fill the remainder of the panel with two zoomorphs that combine with a filler strand to form an asymmetric interlace of considerable ingenuity. The remaining three (Type 2) have stepped edges, reminiscent of cloisonné cell-work, falling to a curved lower edge with flaring corners designed as outward-looking canine masks with pointed muzzle, pricked ears and oval eyes. The curved edge continues the animal motif and is made up of a pair of snake-bodied creatures whose heads lie nose to nose at the centre of the curve. Each has a blunt billeted profile, open jaws and an oval eye immediately below a backward lying ear. Their billeted bodies run towards each corner, twisting at the mid point and ending in a pointed tail. The ornament filling the panel begins, like Type 1, at the top

with a pair of interlocked triple strand loops representing heads, which connect to a pair of tightly interlacing beaded ribbon bodies that fill the panel.

The 'fish' iconography of the three remaining arms is complex, with subtle differences in detail. On the lateral arms of all five mounts the head lies across the outermost register of the roundel with the blunt mouth resting against the raised inner border. It takes the form of a vestigial axe-bladed terminal, defined by a beaded triple strand border. Within this is a clearly defined eye with a depression suggesting the pupil. The body is a sunken field filled with oblique cross-hatching that can be interpreted as imitating scales³⁶. It too is outlined by a triple strand border springing from a dimpled boss that is flanked by two stylised bird heads with curving beaks forming the tail. The border makes a twist on either side of the body suggesting fins before running beneath the edging at the back of the head, emerging to either side of the eye and looping beneath the 'jaws'. On four of the mounts, the fish making the uppermost arm has a trifurcated tail and the eye formed by a twist of the border that defines the body. The upper arm on the fifth roundel, which has other anomalies (below), has a tail that matches the lateral arms.

On the back of each roundel, towards the edge and invisible from the front, are four rivets with thick shanks and slightly expanded ends suggesting that they were once burred over washers. These are set towards the edge of the mounts in opposing pairs on the central axes. An additional fixing point is provided towards the end of each of the three upper arms, while the pendent axe-shaped terminals carry two and three rivets reflecting the proportions of the terminal, suggesting that these were attached to tabs of leather as opposed to straps³⁷. No trace of organic material remains associated with either the rivets or the back of the mounts. The roundels are also pierced by the fixings that attach the foil panels and the silver strips. On four, the ends of these are neatly snipped off flush with the surface of the metal, but on the fifth, the shanks are bent over and hammered flat, suggesting a different hand at work (Fig. 1, c). This mount has also been repaired: the axe-blade terminal has been re-attached to the roundel using a thick copper-alloy strip to bridge the fracture. This is attached to the back of the mount by three copper-alloy rivets whose large domed heads break the symmetry of the surface decoration.

³⁵ An analogous technique is found a 7th-century gold pendant from St Mary's Football Stadium, Southampton; Evans 2002, 54, n° 78.

³⁶ Cf. the fish in hanging bowl 1, Sutton Hoo Mound I (Bruce Mitford 1983, 224, figs. 174-175).

³⁷ Cf. the axe-shaped terminals, 25b and c, from the bridle found beneath Mound 17 at Sutton Hoo, Evans 2005, 230, fig. 112.

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