

My 70-Year Love Affair



Fig.1. British penannular gold rings, torc type and striped, c.1150-750 BC, 17-21mm, 4.26gm and 7.76gm, ex-Chris Rudd collection, to be sold by DNW. (Image courtesy of Chris Rudd.)

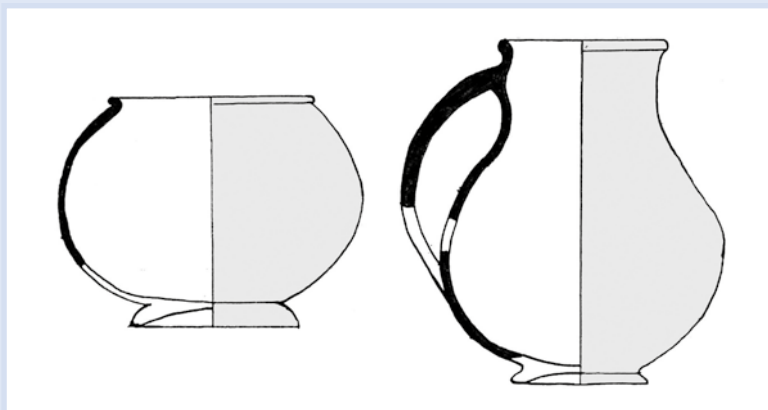


Fig.3. Fragments of Durotrigan earthenware bowl, 16cm, and flagon, 28cm, found by Chris Rudd at Badbury Rings. (Image courtesy of Dorset County Museum.)



Fig.2. Badbury Rings, Dorset, site of Romano-Celtic temple (arrowed), excavated by Chris Rudd, 1952-53, and by Martin Papworth, 2000. Probably Vindocladia ('White Ditches') of Antonine Itinerary and Ravenna Cosmography. (Image courtesy of Google Earth.)



Fig.4. Four of 15 Durotrigan coins (ABC 2169, 2175) found by Chris Rudd at Badbury Rings. Illustrated by Commander R.P. Mack in the *Sylloge of Coins in the British Isles* (1973), pl. VII, nos. 191-195. (Image courtesy of Chris Rudd.)

In September I'm getting divorced. I'm ending my lifelong marriage to ancient coins and artefacts. On Tuesday 5 September 2017, TimeLine Auctions will sell my personal collection of antiquities – mostly Stone Age axes, Bronze Age axe heads, Iron Age enamelled mounts, Celtic torc rings and Roman brooches, all of British provenance. The following week on Wednesday 13 September, Dix Noonan Webb will be auctioning my little collection of Roman coins of British interest, plus a couple of pieces of so-called 'ring money' (Fig.1) which I've always liked. I must say right away that neither sale – both to be held in London – has anything to do with the Celtic coin business of Chris Rudd Ltd. As most readers of *Treasure Hunting* magazine know, this is now Liz's business. I will of course be continuing to help Liz

with her Celtic coin research and with our publishing projects (three new books due to be published within the next year).

The Very Beginnings

My love affair with ancient artefacts began back in 1947 when I acquired my first Bronze Age axe head, a lovely looped palstave which I got from my friend Alan in Bournemouth in exchange for my collection of glass marbles. He thought he'd got a bargain; I knew I had. It was a beauty, in immaculate condition with a razor-sharp blade, just like one Sir John Evans bought in Bath. I sold it to Spink in the early 1960s so that I could buy a nice Nero *sestertius* which showed the harbour of Ostia on the reverse. That too disappeared when Mr. French of Glendining's sold my first collection of Roman coins in the 1970s to help pay for a costly divorce.

That's the problem with collecting old treasures, whether coins or artefacts, and getting too attached to them, as I've usually done; it can be painful when you have to part with them.

As a teenager I decided to become a professional archaeologist. So I studied hard, devoured dozens of old excavation reports, did 'O' level archaeology at school (I was one of the first to do so) and won a seat at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, to read archaeology and anthropology. I also did a lot of digging. I dug at Hod Hill, Dorset, with Sir Ian Richmond. I dug at Wroxeter with Dame Kathleen Kenyon and Dr. Graham Webster; I also dug with Graham at Chester where he was curator of the Grosvenor House Museum and was delighted when, some 40 years later, he subscribed to my Celtic coin catalogues. I also conducted my

Fig.5. Neanderthal model, Natural History Museum, London. *British Archaeology* magazine reported the Happisburgh finds well. As with *Treasure Hunting* magazine, I never miss an issue. (Image courtesy of Council for British Archaeology © Trustees of the Natural History Museum.)

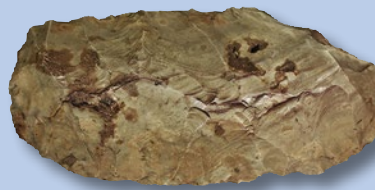
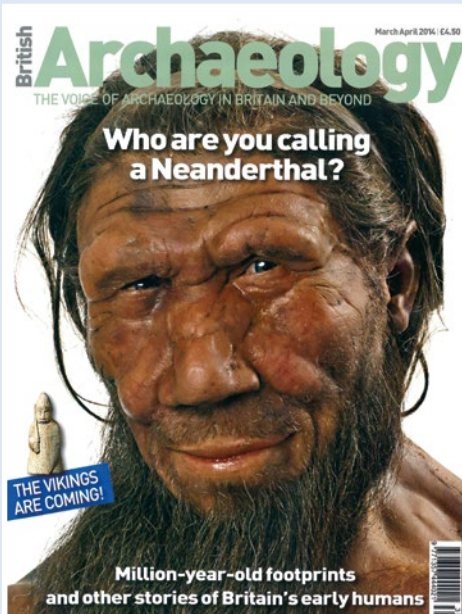
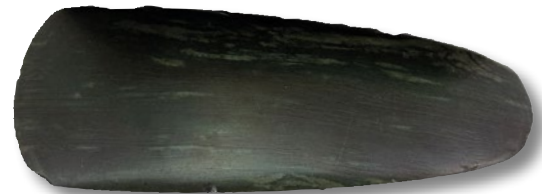


Fig.6. British Paleolithic flint hand axe, 12.5cm, found at Kessingland, Suffolk, and recorded with Suffolk Archaeology Unit. Ex-Chris Rudd collection. (Image courtesy of Michael Healy © TimeLine Auctions.)

Fig.7. Sea-worn British Neolithic flaked axe, 17cm, from Happisburgh beach, Norfolk, where 49 early human footprints and a 500,000 year old hand axe were found. Ex-Chris Rudd collection. (Image courtesy of Michael Healy © TimeLine Auctions.)



Fig.8. Colossal British Neolithic polished axe of Langdale greenstone, Cumbria, 27cm, found near Wickham Market, Suffolk, 250 miles away. Ex-Chris Rudd collection. (Image courtesy of Chris Rudd.)



own amateur excavations at Badbury Rings, Dorset, 1952-53, where I discovered traces of a Romano-Celtic temple (Fig.2) and early Iron Age settlement, plus masses of pottery (Fig.3), animal bones, oyster shells and other minor artefacts. Also unearthed were 15 Durotrigan coins, four of which are shown in Fig.4 and 85 Roman coins, all deposited with Dorset County Museum. I'd forgotten about this early excavation of mine until Robert Van Arsdell reminded me of it in 1991 after he'd come across my report in Dorset County Museum; at that time Bob was participating every summer in Sir Barry Cunliffe's excavations at Danebury hillfort, Hampshire. That's what I like about Bob. He's not an arm-chair academic numismatist; he's been an active collector and researcher of Ancient British coins and a hands-on, hands-dirty archaeologist. Which is why his book *Celtic Coinage of Britain* (Spink 1989) is such a good one and has stood the test of time, despite the snippy sniping from a few scholars when it first came out.

Axe Heads and More Axe Heads

For 70 years I've been attracted to British stone axes and British Bronze Age axe heads. Their deep antiquity has always appealed to me. The story of prehistoric axes is the story of the first Britons or, to be more accurate, the first people who lived in the land which later became

known as Britain, before the last Ice Age and while 'Britain' was still part of Europe; in other words, almost a million years before our prehistoric Brexit in c.5900 BC. Some of the earliest signs of human activity in Britain (Fig.5) were recently discovered on my doorstep at Happisburgh (known locally as 'Haze-bruh'), only a dozen miles from where I live in Aylsham, Norfolk. In March 2000 Mike Chambers was walking his dog on the beach at low tide at Happisburgh when he made an amazing discovery: a superb Paleolithic black-flint hand axe. Unlike previous Paleolithic finds of this kind, Mike Chambers' hand axe wasn't lying loose on the ground; it was half buried in a once-peaty deposit on the beach that was later dated to about half-a-million years ago, providing tantalising hints that Happisburgh held evidence of early humans at least as old as *Homo Heidelbergensis*, a tibia and two teeth of whom were excavated at a quarry in Boxgrove, Sussex, 1993-96.

Chris Stringer, director of the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain project (AHOB), says: "Since then, a total of six Paleolithic sites have been identified in the Happisburgh area (Fig.6), producing flint tools and butchered animal bones that push this evidence back further still. Dozens of cutting and piercing implements have been found in thick layers of sediment known as the Cromer

Forest Bed. Some of these deposits are thought to have been laid down either 840,000 or 950,000 years ago, making the artefacts recovered from them the earliest currently known in Britain, and indeed northern Europe." (*Current Archaeology* 288, March 2014, p.16.)

More recently, actual footprints of some of the earliest recorded Britons were revealed in the hardened grey mud of Happisburgh beach. First spotted by Martin Bates of AHOB and described by Nick Ashton of the British Museum in *British Archaeology* (March April 2014, pp.14-21), these footprints (49 in all) have now been washed away. But I managed to see them for myself and touch them before they eventually disappeared forever. Imagine feeling the footprints of human beings who lived in Norfolk nearly a million years ago. I found that a thrilling experience – maybe almost as thrilling as finding your own stone axe on Happisburgh beach. No, I haven't found one myself, but I have one in my collection (Fig.7). It is a large flaked axe, brown and sea-worn, Neolithic not Paleolithic, and it was found on Happisburgh beach, just north of the car park, near to where an older hand axe and flake tools were found (*The Searcher*, October 2014, p.64). My own garden in Aylsham has produced many small early Neolithic flint tools, plus part of a Bronze Age spearhead, about 70 Romano-British

Anatomy of Bronze Age Axe Heads

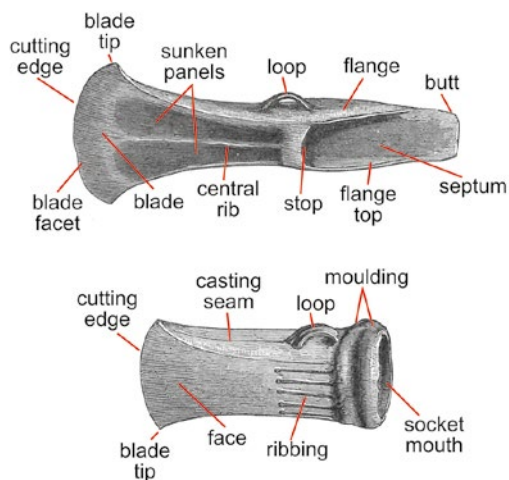


Fig.9. Above: Sleaford type low-flanged looped palstave from Bath, 16cm, Evans 77 (like one I got in 1947). Below: Welby type looped socket axe, ex Carlton Rode hoard, Norfolk, 10cm, Evans 132. (Image courtesy of Mr. Swain for John Evans, *The Ancient Bronze Implements, Weapons and Ornaments of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1881.)

Fig.10. British Midgale type decorated flat axe, c.2200-1950 BC, with 'rain pattern', 15.5cm, found Banffshire, Scotland. Ex-Chris Rudd collection, ex-Sir Richard Ground collection. (Image courtesy of Michael Healy © TimeLine Auctions.)



Fig.11. Irish Balbirnie type flanged axe head, c.1750-1550 BC, with 'triple herringbone' decoration, 14.5cm, found River Thames, Windsor. Ex-Chris Rudd collection, ex-Sir Richard Ground collection. (Image courtesy of Michael Healy © TimeLine Auctions.)



Fig.12. British Primary Shield palstave axe head, c.1400-1000 BC, with shield-shape pierced by midrib, 14.5cm. Ex-Chris Rudd collection, ex-Sir Richard Ground collection. (Image courtesy of Michael Healy © TimeLine Auctions.)



potsherds, a worn bronze *sestertius* of Septimius Severus, and a small Constantinian period bronze coin.

I found my first ever Roman coin near the top of Creech Barrow Hill, Dorset, in 1950, the year I joined Wessex Numismatic Society. It was a bronze or billon cent of the short-lived Licinius Junior who was made Caesar on 1 March, AD 317, and executed by his uncle Constantine when he was only eleven. In my opinion, this was not the greatest deed of Constantine the Great who had espoused Christianity just 12 years earlier. However, I digress. Another axe in my collection (Fig.8) that I'm very fond of is a colossal Neolithic polished axe, 27cm long, made of Langdale greenstone and found some years ago near Wickham Market, Suffolk, not far from where the Dallinghoo hoard of 840 late Iron Age gold staters was discovered in 2008-09 (see my report, King's gold hoard from Suffolk, *Treasure Hunting* magazine, February 2009, pp.16-19). Polished greenstone axes were highly prized in Neolithic Britain, probably even more highly prized than they are by collectors like myself today. Because they were tremendously treasured they often travelled huge distances, as mine had.

For example, polished greenstone axes that had been fashioned from jadeite quarried from the massive mountain of Monte Viso (12,602 feet high) in the Italian Alps have been found in the valley of the River

Dee in Scotland – that's over 1,000 miles from Monte Viso. My polished greenstone axe probably came from the Lake District in Cumbria, or to be more precise, from the barren rocky summit of Harrison Stickle or Pike O'Stickle, over 2,000 feet above the floor of Great Langdale. It would have taken literally hundreds of hours to polish the surface of my greenstone axe, grinding it first against some coarse material and then with progressively finer abrasives until finally a glass-like smoothness was achieved. Why go to all this trouble?

Neil Oliver says: "While polishing makes for a more beautiful object, it does not make a sharper or better axe. Often finished polished stone axes show lines and blotches of different colour-veins running through the pieces like lettering through seaside rock, adding to their allure. Those features would have been visible in the uncut block and in the rough-out and seem always to have inspired the completion of the finished axe that contains them. And yet such veins are faults in the stone and therefore points of weakness. By rights the maker of an axe intended for chopping down trees ought to have discarded such a stone at the very beginning. The first blow against something hard would likely shatter such an axe along the fault line, so that hundreds of hours work (not to mention a life-threatening climb up a mountain) would be wasted at a stroke. Such items, then, were never

intended to be used for work. Instead they were symbols, precious objects kept and admired, given names and attributed with power; passed from hand to hand, from parent to child and from clan to clan." (*A History of Ancient Britain*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2012, p.122.)

Even today, after some 5,000 years, I feel that there is something very special, something very precious, about my Langdale greenstone axe. I know that sounds rather sentimental, but even the most down-to-earth professional archaeologists have made similar emotive comments about these polished greenstone axes. David Miles, former Chief Archaeologist of English Heritage, says: "It is not every day that someone brings you a five-thousand-year-old gift. It happened to me in the mid 1970s when we lived in Woodstock – the English Woodstock, near Oxford, which has Blenheim Park at the end of its high street. We were laying the table for dinner when there was a knock at the door. A man stood there, holding a sports bag. He introduced himself as Bob.

"I work in the gravel pit at Stanton Harcourt and a couple of years ago I noticed this thing on the conveyor belt. I heard that you were an archaeologist and thought that you might be interested?" He stuck his hand deep into the bag and pulled out a smooth greenish object. I recognised it with delight: a large, Neolithic polished stone axe head. He passed it to



Fig.13. British Carleton type looped palstave axe head, c.1400-1000 BC, with midrib bisecting shield motif, 16cm, found Barton-le-Clay, Beds. 2015. Ex-Chris Rudd collection. (Image courtesy of Michael Healy © TimeLine Auctions.)



Fig.14. British Welby type looped socket axe head, c.800-700 BC, decorated with short ridges, 10.5cm, found Yorkshire. Ex-Chris Rudd collection, ex-Sir Richard Ground collection. (Image courtesy of Michael Healy © TimeLine Auctions.)



Fig.15. British Salisbury type looped socket axe head, c.4th-3rd century BC, with faceted body, 10cm, only 102 grams, too light and brittle for practical use. Ex-Chris Rudd collection, ex-Sir Richard Ground collection. (Image courtesy of Michael Healy © TimeLine Auctions.)



Fig.16. Cernunnos in my garden. He is also in Cirencester, France, Denmark (Gundestrup cauldron) and on three Ancient British coins of the Regni (ABC 680, 683, 686). (Image courtesy of Carol Rudd.)

me. To hold such a thing, a survivor from our ancient past, is always a thrill. There is a kind of magic in something that has time-travelled; a stone, itself millions of years old, yet crafted and transformed by another person thousands of years ago: heavy, smooth and solid." (Prologue from *The Tale of the Axe: How the Neolithic Revolution transformed Britain*, Thames & Hudson, 2016, p.11.) Even if you are only vaguely intrigued by British stone axes, I cannot recommend *The Tale of the Axe* too highly. As I said earlier, the story of pre-historic axes is the story of the first Britons.

I love Bronze Age axe heads too (Fig.9), there is an almost magical alchemy involved in smelting copper from powdered rock. It must have been a truly

awesome sight 3,000 years ago. Neil Oliver says: "Smelting would have been a magical wonder for people watching it for the first time. I grew up in a world from which men flew to the Moon and back. Like everyone else alive in the developed world of today I take for granted wonders like mobile phones, computers, the Internet, Wi-Fi, Skype, the Large Hadron Collider and talk of quarks and String Theory – but with my hand on my heart I will swear that I have never witnessed anything more viscerally amazing than the transformation of powdered rock into molten metal. No matter how carefully the science of it all is explained, I defy anyone to watch the process without a lump forming in the throat. It is magical enough to make a man cry." (*A History of Ancient Britain*, p.172.)

I love the way British metalworkers (and others) spent a thousand years improving the technical efficiency of cast bronze axeheads. I love the way flat copper axes became broad butted bronze axes, and then narrow butted axes, and then long flanged axes, and then short flanged axes, and then median winged axes, and then loopless palstaves, and then looped palstaves, and then ribbed and grooved palstaves, and then finally became socketed axes (Figs.10-15).

I love the way that Bronze Age smelting and Bronze Age metalworking helped to develop Britain's trading relationship with mainland Europe, especially along the Atlantic façade and into ancient Massalia (modern Marseilles). Our main offering to Europe at that time was Cornish tin, because without tin you can't make bronze axe heads, bronze swords, bronze spearheads or bronze tools. One fascinating facet of the Bronze Age Atlantic trade network is that it may have produced and promulgated what we call 'Celtic'. Professor Sir Barry Cunliffe says: "The surviving, and recently surviving, 'Celtic' languages of the

west, taken together with what is known of similar languages once in use in central and western Iberia and France until the time of the Roman Occupation, are sufficient to suggest that closely related languages were spoken along the Atlantic seaways from Portugal to Britain by the middle of the first millennium BC. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to conclude that 'Celtic', as defined by Lhuyd (1660-1709, an Oxford museum-keeper and author of *Archaeologia Britannica*, 1707), was the Lingua Franca of the Atlantic community. It could be further argued that the language had developed gradually over the four millennia that maritime contacts had been maintained, perhaps reaching its distinctive form in the late Bronze Age when communication along the sea lanes was at its most intense, and when many aspects of the elite system, technology and beliefs had coalesced to create a broadly similar cultural continuum." (*Facing the Ocean: the Atlantic and its Peoples*, Oxford, 2001, p.296.)

Finally, my 70-year love affair with British antiquities has as much to do with their symbolic value and ritual usage as with their practical, everyday usage. For example, why were bronze axes carved on some of the stones of Stonehenge? Why were thousands of bronze axes made but never used as axes and instead buried in the ground or deposited in rivers and lakes? Maybe such questions might be addressed in another issue of *Treasure Hunting* magazine, deo volente. The Celtic deity I love most is Cernunnos 'The Horned One'. As he lives in my garden (Fig.16), I see him every day and he sees me.

Readers who may wish to examine a catalogue of my personal collection of British antiquities should contact Time-Line Auctions Limited, email: enquiries@timelinauctions.com

For all their help I thank Martin Bates, Elizabeth Cottam, Mike Pitts and Damir Radic. [TH]