

## A GROUP OF BRONZES OF THE EARLY IRON AGE IN YEOVIL MUSEUM

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THE subject of this note is a small group of five bronzes of the Early Iron Age in the Public Library and Museum, Yeovil. When the present Librarian and Curator, Mr. E. A. Batty, F.L.A., took charge, these were displayed beside a bronze brooch of Italian (Hallstatt) type from the Roman villa at West Coker, 2½ miles SSW. of Yeovil. It is, then, suggested that the group came from this villa site ; all that can be said is that the patination of the bronzes and their character *are* consistent with their having been found together, and that a provenance in the neighbourhood of Yeovil is probable.<sup>1</sup>

The writer was invited by Mr. Batty to publish the bronzes and, finding that two of them were of particular interest, undertook the duty. Drawings of all five are reproduced in fig. 1 and Pl. V ; No. 5 is also illustrated by a British Museum photograph supplied by the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities, which I am kindly permitted to use.

The bronzes will now briefly be described ; a commentary on points of interest arising from their study follows.

### *Description of Bronzes*

No. 1. *Bronze penannular Ring*, hollow, of one piece with the join on the inner face : 3.0 in. in overall diameter, 0.32 in. in cross-section. The open ends are 0.9 in. apart ; heads of iron rivets show that a 'sleeve' originally joined these ends, making the circle complete. When the sleeve was torn out, the bronze ends were damaged (fig. 1, 1.).

No. 2. *Bronze penannular Ring*, constructionally the same as No. 1, undamaged save for the loss of the sleeve ; 2.4 in. in overall diameter ; open ends 0.65 in. apart (fig. 1, 2.).

<sup>1</sup> For the villa, discovered and excavated in 1861, see, primarily, the summary by F. Haverfield in *V.C.H. Somerset*, i, 331 (full references are here given) ; and secondarily, a short paper by Mr. H. St. George Gray, F.S.A., 'Roman Remains found at West Coker', in *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* lxi, (1915), ii, 162-5 ; for the Brooch, see Dobson, *County Archaeologies, Somerset*, (1931), Pl.IV. No record whatever exists of the bronzes.

No. 3. *Bronze Ring*, 2.2 in. in overall diameter, massive in appearance, 0.4 in. by 0.4 in. in cross-section, but hollow and light, being like the other rings, of sheet bronze. The ring was made in two halves, the joints being clearly seen on the inner and outer aspects (fig. 1, 3).

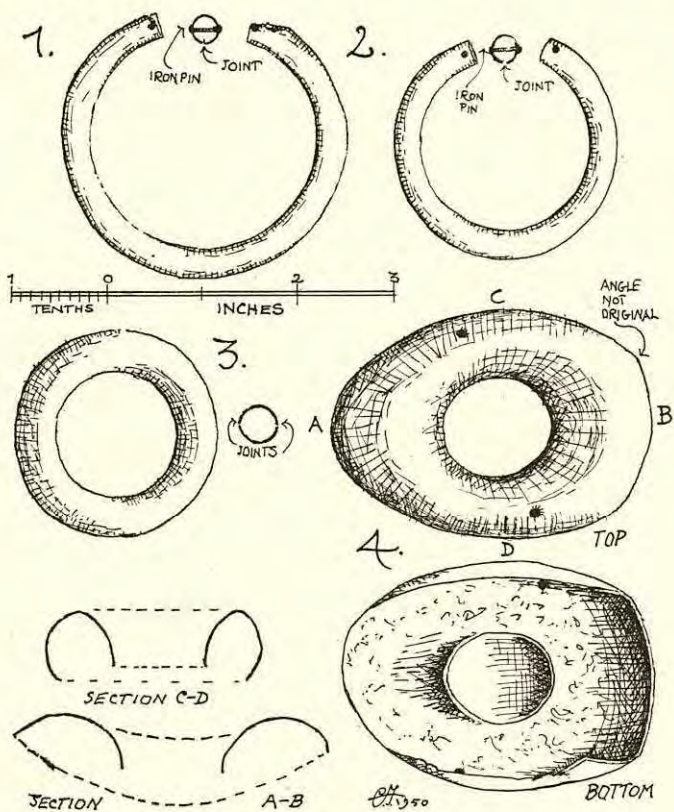


Fig. 1. Early Iron Age Bronzes in Yeovil Museum.

No. 4. *Bronze Mount*, of sheet metal, in places encrusted but elsewhere showing polish arising from use. It is oval, more pointed at one end than the other, curved upwards at both ends and with a large smooth central hole, the sides of which curve deeply downwards. The sides of the mount itself curve down and inwards. It measures 3.3 in. by 2.3 in. ; the hole 1.1 in. by 0.9 in. (fig. 1, 4.)

No. 5. *Bronze Ring (portion of) of a three-link Bit*, decorated. This is badly damaged, being about half the circle. The ring is



similarly constructed to Nos. 1 and 2, but it is larger and shows one of the holes (which has been enlarged by friction) for the knobs which kept the link of the bit within the portion of the circle occupied by the 'sleeve'. One rivet for this sleeve remains. The overall diameter of the ring is estimated at 3.95 in. and the cross-section at 0.35 in.

The outer face of the ring (as it hung from the pony's mouth) is decorated with an incised running pattern of curved lines, and with coils and scrolls. It includes one tiny example of the 'trumpet and boss' (or coil) motif. The pattern is sketched, extended (Plate V, 1), which shows that there is a 'central feature' at the point where the ring is broken. This feature is faintly seen in the photograph (Pl. V, 2). We may fairly conclude that a closely similar, or identical, design ornamented the lost half of the ring.

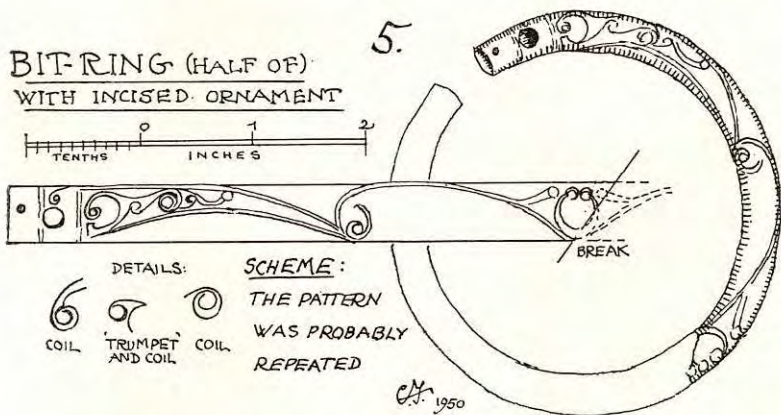
#### *Commentary*

The decorated bit-ring, No. 5, is the most important piece in this little collection and gives us the clue to its significance—objects connected with chariot and pony harness. Tubular bit-rings are known from three sites: Llyn Cerrig-bach, Anglesey,<sup>1</sup> two complete bridle-bits and four bit-rings; Hagbourne Hill, Berks., two bridle-bits; and Ringstead, Norfolk (unpublished), one bridle-bit.<sup>1</sup> The Llyn Cerrig-bach bits were regarded as exports from the S.W. (Dobunic) region (a view which receives support from this find); but the presumably earliest example of the technique occurs in Yorkshire<sup>2</sup> in a ring of bracelet size.

I can find no bit-ring with similar decoration to our example. It shows no Romanizing influence in detail, but the presumed duplication of the design, involving 'fold-over symmetry' points to a late date in the Early Iron Age. The 'trumpet' motif seen in the pattern was fully developed in the Llyn Cerrig-bach plaque which I now date not earlier than 50 B.C. The ornament (to which my sketch does not do justice) is delicately and beautifully wrought, needing a magnifying glass to bring out its quality; it was produced, then, at a period when the native art was in full vigour. I think the hollow ring where used for bridle-bits is a late feature; I should now date the Llyn Cerrig-bach bits of this class at the end of the

<sup>1</sup> *Llyn Cerrig-bach, Anglesey, Report*, (1946), Cat. Nos. 50, 51, 52, 53, 54 and 129; Hagbourne Hill, *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.*, (1939), Pl. XIX.

<sup>2</sup> Charioteers' Barrow: 'hollow ring of thin bronze', *Arch.*, ix, 278.



1. Drawing to show design and reconstruction of Bit-ring.



Ph Brit. Mus. Reproduced by permission of H.M. Stationery Office.

2. Surviving portions of Bit-ring, Yeovil Museum (I/I).



first century B.C. and I provisionally suggest this date for the Yeovil bit-ring. It is important as indicating a Dobunic source for the horned helmet from the R. Thames, now in the British Museum, which has similarly tenuous ornament ; influences from a north-eastern *atelier* cannot be excluded.

The smaller rings, Nos. 1 and 2, of the same character as the bit-ring, are of a type usually regarded as anklets or bracelets (for they have no stop-knobs) ; but when we know what the *complete* equipment of a chariot-and-pony harness in the Early Iron Age was like, such rings may find a place thereon. Llyn Cerrig-bach yielded one such ring, (No. 86, Pl. 22). The joined ring, on the other hand, may be part of the warrior's equipment, attached to the sword-leather.

Mount No. 4 is, I believe, unique ; but in my experience a writer on Early Iron Age equipment has only to use this term, for parallels to spring up all over Britain. No one drawing or photograph could give any adequate notion of its character, for it has so many significant curves in its design ; it is, then, hoped that the two sketches and two sections will be helpful to the reader.

It is, I think, evident that it was moulded to fit on to something ; so securely that it could not be got free—until that something mouldered away. Surely, a leather loop is indicated ; and, if a leather loop, it is most likely to have been the end of a trace, the free end, intended to be dropped on to a leather-bound knob on the swingle-tree or the chariot body—'leather-bound' as indicated by the wear around the hole of the mount. The other end of the trace would be hooked on to the collar ; such hooks are in the Polden Hill hoard. The subject of trace-traction is discussed in the Llyn Cerrig-bach Report cited above.<sup>1</sup> The mount, then, is regarded as a necessary, rigid, reinforcement of the loop, as well as a decorative feature.

I hope that members of the Society will agree with me that this group of Celtic bronzes, though small, is a valuable addition to our Somerset corpus of Early Iron Age antiquities.

<sup>1</sup> See *Archaeologia* xiv, Pl. XX, 2 ; and *Llyn Cerrig-Bach Report*, 24-5, and fig. 13 ; also *Antiquaries Journal* (1947), Pl. XVII.