The importance of landscape context for portable antiquities: A pair of La Tène brooches and a banjo enclosure at Boverton, Vale of Glamorgan

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INTRODUCTION

In 2022 and early 2023, a pair of La Tène brooches were found by metal detectorist Mr Matthew (Matty) Poole in the Llantwit Major community, south of Boverton, Vale of Glamorgan. These were reported to, and recorded by, Dr Adelle Bricking, Portable Antiquities Scheme Wales (PAS Cymru) Finds Officer and Clara de Sousa Cunha, then PAS Cymru intern. Through the generosity of the finder and landowner, the brooches have been donated to Amgueddfa Cymru–Museum Wales (accession no. 2024.4H/1–2). Since its inception, PAS Cymru has recorded over 60,000 archaeological artefacts voluntarily reported by members of the public, most of which were found by metal detecting. This provides a rich resource for analysis. Discerning what objects tells us about landscape use, however, is challenging. The vast majority of finds on the PAS database exist primarily as 'dots-on-maps' and it is difficult to be certain how their distributions reflect past activity. Are we looking, for instance, at casual losses from settlement activity, the manuring of fields, or deliberate depositions, perhaps within burial contexts? Alternatively, or perhaps additionally, do they indicate the location of important communication routes, or the availability of the raw materials? In most cases, separation of these scenarios is impossible without additional fieldwork.

A significant number of Iron Age or Roman finds have been recovered in the Boverton area through metal detecting, but few are directly associated with known archaeological sites. The brooches discussed here were discovered around 400–600m from Summerhouse Camp,[1] a small multi-vallate promontory fort, but there was no evidence of later prehistoric settlement in the immediate vicinity of their findspots. Currently, only a small number of finds reported to PAS Cymru are followed up with subsequent investigation. These tend to be potential hoards where significant finds may still be *in situ*. While such work is welcome and important, the paucity of broader investigations is a missed opportunity to enhance further interpretation.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, La Tène I brooches, dating to the Middle Iron Age (*c*. 450–250 BC), are rare in Wales with only thirteen examples known (including these two), so they represent a significant discovery worthy of broader attention. Second, metal detecting finds such as these are seldom followed up by further investigation. However, as staff from Cardiff University's School of History, Archaeology and Religion were undertaking survey and other research in the area of Llantwit Major and Boverton, the opportunity was taken to collaborate with Amgueddfa Cymru–Museum Wales and explore the area around the findspots through geophysical survey. This has led to the discovery of a banjo enclosure, thus providing context to the presence of these brooches.

THE BROOCHES

The two La Tène brooches were found *c*. 200 m apart in fields south of Boverton. Brooches of this type are most often plain, but these feature intricate and imaginative forms (Figs 1 and 2). Their incompleteness,

and the uniqueness of their designs, means that neither fits a defined subtype. Both have characteristics of Hull and Hawkes (1987) type 1B: the bows have relatively high arches, and the surviving foot form and spring size are consistent with brooches of this type. However, one of the brooches (PAS NMGW-EB8564, Fig. 1) has a foot that appears to be cast to the bow, which is a defining feature of 2B type brooches (Adams 2013, 85, table 3.3, see 87 fig. 3.14). However, unlike 2B types, the foot only reaches the hip of the bow rather than the shoulder, which is again more similar to1B types.

Fig. 1. La Tène brooch with snouted foot and lateral nubs, possibly emulating a water bird (PAS NMGW-EB8564).

The decoration of this brooch (PAS NMGW-EB8564) is unparalleled to the best of the author's (AB) knowledge. The bow is decorated with moulded pointed nubs projecting from the sides at the apex of the bow, but is otherwise plain, although corrosion may have removed finer surface detail. The foot has a 'snout feature' similar to type 1Bb brooches (Adams 2013, 54). The combination of the snouted foot and the pointed lateral nubs may be emulating a waterbird with the catch-plate extending from the elongated neck; the resulting image is reminiscent of a swan preening or sleeping. The spring mechanism is unfortunately absent, likely from post-depositional or historic damage, but it would have been situated at the top of the bow ending in an integrally cast coil and pin.

The other brooch (PAS NMGW-7BACC9, Fig. 2) features an evenly spaced knobbed or segmented bow missing half of the spring, pin, foot and catch-plate as a result of historic damage. Without the foot, it is difficult to place the brooch into a subtype. The overall shape and arch of the bow is similar in form to 1Ba or 1Bb types, although the distinct knobbed decoration is yet unparalleled in British Iron Age brooches.

Fig. 2. La Tène brooch with knobbed bow (PAS NMGW-7BACC9).

This style of segmented decoration is seen on contemporaneous Continental examples, particularly those of 'Dux/Duchcov' 1Bd type from Czechia (see Kruta 1971, 8–9, pls. 1–2) and variations from the Champagne-Ardenne region of France (Hull and Hawkes 1987, 112–3, pl. 33; Stead and Rigby 1999, 57, nos. ML. 1604 and ML.1864). Although the example from Boverton does not have the distinct shape of the 1Bd type, it is perhaps significant that we now have a similarly decorated brooch from an Iron Age settlement near the southern coast of Wales. It is also notable that the decoration bears close resemblance to the style executed in an Early-Middle Iron Age torc from Hendre Bach, Clynnog, Gwynnedd, dating to *c*. 600–300 BC (Amgueddfa Cymru–Museum Wales 41.109/8; Savory 1976; Hemp 1931).

La Tène I brooches date from *c*. 450–250 BC (Stead 2006), though a lack of radiocarbon determinations associated with 1B types makes it difficult to assign more accurate dates. The majority appear to derive from Middle Iron Age sites, however, it is possible that these brooches were curated prior to deposition—indeed, several 1B type brooches have been recovered from Late Iron Age or Roman contexts in Britain suggesting long periods of curation or duration of use (Adams 2013, 108). Additionally, an inhumation burial discovered in 2005 near Boverton included a neck collar and bracelet pair that stylistically pre-dated the second century AD burial by fifty to one hundred years (Garrow *et al.* 2009, 113). In the absence of any other dating evidence for the brooches though, a fourth–third century BC date is assumed.

THE BANJO ENCLOSURE

Since 2016, Dr Tim Young of GeoArch has been leading an extensive campaign of geophysical survey in and around Llantwit Major (Young 2016, 2018, 2019a–c, 2020a–c, 2021a–c, 2022a–c, 2024a–c). The surveys have been either undertaken as part of Cardiff University's Dr D. G. Smith Memorial Project (investigating the context of the early medieval monastery at Llantwit Major) or, as in this case, carried out by students from Cardiff University as part of a training placement on an undergraduate module in which they learn the practical skills of geophysical survey. The village of Boverton lies immediately to the east of Llantwit Major. Fields to the south of the village are mostly in arable cultivation. They are periodically subjected to metal detecting and several important discoveries have been made in recent years including an early medieval enclosure (also discovered through geophysical survey investigating the context of PAS Cymru finds, see Young 2020a; 2023), the first century AD copper-alloy collar and bracelet pair from a disturbed inhumation burial (radiocarbon dates to the second century AD, see Nowakowski *et al*. 2009, 8–10; Garrow *et al*. 2009, table 2; Davis and Gwilt 2008, 168–70 and figs 9.14a–c) mentioned above, and the two La Tène I brooches reported here. In February 2024, permission was generously granted by the landowner to investigate the landscape context of the brooches through geophysical survey. A team from Cardiff University, led by Dr Tim Young and assisted by Dr Oliver Davis, undertook a magnetic gradiometry survey of 5.5ha over the course of two days.[2]

The results of the gradiometry survey are shown in Figures 3 and 4. The anomalies identified in the data can be attributed to several sources besides features of archaeological significance.

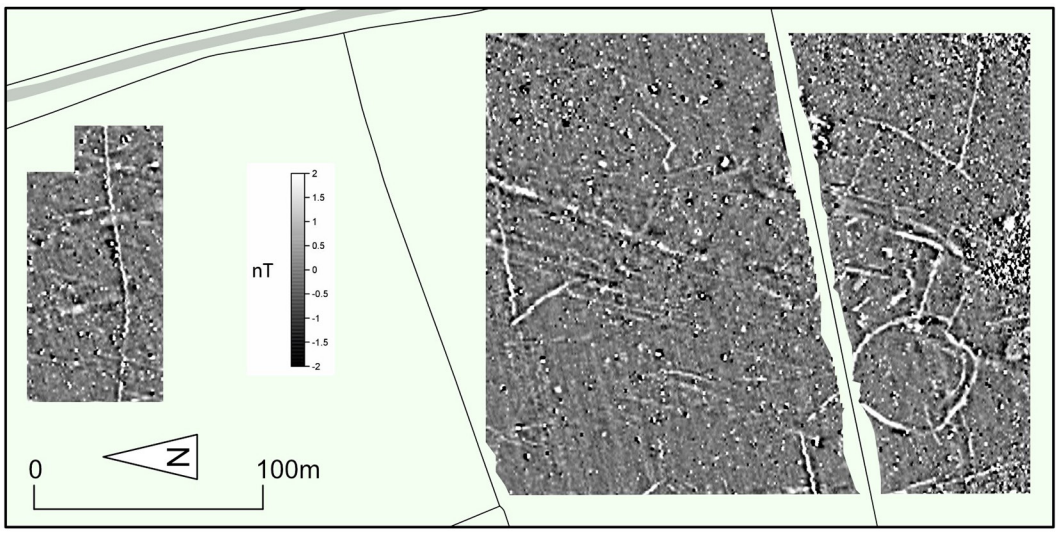

Fig. 3. Gradiometry survey results.

Recent agriculture: the magnetic data show a pervasive lineation attributable to ploughing (the current field system pre-dates 1840) aligned parallel to the west-south-west/east-north-east field boundaries. The southern field shows several areas with magnetic 'noise' of moderate amplitude that generates an area of speckled anomaly. These areas could be correlated on the ground with spreads of modern debris, at least in part, dumped into wet, soft areas of the field.

Fig. 4. Gradiometry survey interpretation.

Geology: as is typical of the Llantwit Major area, the anomalies include positive linear anomalies that can be interpreted as being associated with major joints in the bedrock. They mostly cluster into three sets: examples oriented just slightly west of north, examples aligned north-north-east/south-south-west and examples aligned east-north-east/west-south-west. These anomalies are typically, but not universally, broader and more diffuse than those of archaeological origin. There is, however, a degree of uncertainty over the interpretation of some examples: the east-north-east/west-south-west set is approximately parallel to the modern field boundaries, and the east-north-east/west-south-west set appears to be associated with a control on the modern topography and are thus parallel with a very slight, broad gully. These relationships mean that the anomalies of probable geological origin run parallel in some instances to those of archaeological features whose orientation was influenced by the topography.

Archaeological features: the survey located a subcircular ditched enclosure, 45m by 52m, centred upon SS 99172 66751—a point 300 m north-west of Summerhouse Camp. The area enclosed is approximately 0.18ha. The enclosure has an east-south-east-facing entrance, barred by a ditch, and flanked by a pair of ditches 14m apart that extend approximately 30m outside the enclosure. These ditches terminate at a belt of multiple anomalies, possibly suggestive of a trackway.

The enclosure is set within, and associated with, a broader rectilinear system of land division including a group of ditches to the west which appear to be adjoined to, or abut, the banjo enclosure. More extensive ditches on the same alignment also occur 150m and 32m to the north where, although they cannot be demonstrated to be directly related to the banjo, are oblique to the alignment of the post-medieval/modern field system. The GPS records for the findspots of the two brooches closely approximate to the line of these two ditches.

Banjo enclosures in south-east Wales

The Boverton enclosure is characteristic of a Middle to Late Iron Age ‘banjo enclosure’. This term was first used in the late 1960s by B. T. Perry to define a morphologically similar set of enclosures discovered

largely through aerial photography in Hampshire and Dorset (Perry 1969). These sites were characterised by small (0.2–0.6ha) sub-circular or sub-angular enclosures with elongated 'funnel-like' entranceways and adjoining antennae ditches. A large number of similar sites have since been recorded, primarily in Wessex, the Thames Valley and the Cotswolds (see Lang 2016 for the most up-to-date review). In the 1980s, aerial survey by Terry James (1990) identified similar enclosures in west Wales. These sites were analogous to the banjo enclosures of southern England, but distinguished by antennae ditches which curved back around creating a concentric inner and outer enclosure. These have been termed 'concentric antenna enclosures' and over 50 have now been recognised (Murphy and Mytum 2011, 267).

In south-east Wales, banjo-type enclosures have proved more elusive. In the 1950s, Aileen Fox highlighted a small number of multivallate hillslope enclosures with embanked entrances in Gower and on Margam Mountain (Fox 1952), but these sites have more in common with the concentric antenna enclosures of west Wales rather than the 'classic' banjos of southern England. However, aerial reconnaissance in the Vale of Glamorgan by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales in the mid-1990s identified a small (0.6ha) oval enclosure with a short out-turned entrance and adjoining antennae ditches at Seaview, St Athan, approximately 1.1km north-east of the Boverton banjo (Fig. 5). It was originally considered a possible concentric antenna enclosure (Driver 2013), but subsequent aerial photography has not identified an outer boundary.

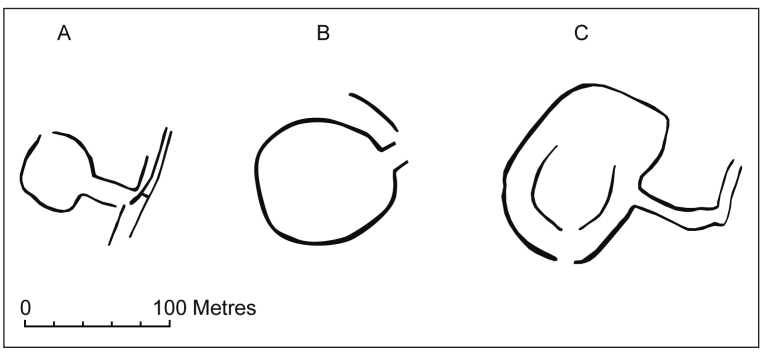

Fig. 5. Simplified plans of banjo-type enclosures in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan (A: Boverton; B: Seaview, St. Athan, based on Davis 2017, fig. 7; C: Plasdŵr, Radyr, Cardiff, based on Hart *et al*. 2024, fig. 2).

A number of other sites with external antennae ditches, have also now been identified primarily from cropmarks (see Davis 2017, fig. 7). However, the most convincing evidence for a 'classic' banjo similar to Boverton comes from recent excavations by Cotswold Archaeology (Hart *et al*. 2024) at Plasdŵr, Radyr, north Cardiff, where a sub-oval enclosure was found, 0.9ha in size, with a principal entrance on its eastern side defined by a pair of antennae ditches (Fig. 5). An 11m-wide section of the enclosure ditch was subsequently in-filled on its southern side to create a secondary, south-facing, entrance. This aligned with an entrance into an incomplete internal enclosure containing the remains of a post-built structure, possibly a roundhouse.

The emerging evidence suggests that banjo-type enclosures were more common in south-east Wales than previously realised. Whether they represent a coherent group of sites is, however, less certain. Morphologically, the Boverton, Seaview and Plasdŵr enclosures have more in common with the banjos of southern England, rather than the concentric antenna enclosures of west Wales, but questions about their chronology, role and function remain. Only Plasdŵr has been excavated, and this produced several unusual features when compared to the English banjos. The enclosed area of 0.9ha makes it a relatively large example (most classic banjos are less than 0.6ha according to Lang 2016, 343) and four radiocarbon determinations from the ditch fills cluster in the sixth–fourth centuries BC suggesting the site is much

earlier than other dated examples. But, if the two La Tène I brooches are associated with the use of the Boverton banjo, then we might expect a slightly later fourth–third century BC date for that site. However, the relationship between the brooches and the site remains unclear. While their presence may be the result of occupation debris moved by the plough it is probably more likely that they derive from disturbed burials situated outside the settlement.

CONCLUSION

The discovery of a banjo enclosure and related trackways and field systems at Boverton was unexpected. None had been recognised before, even in this area, which is rich in cropmarks, and suggests our later prehistoric landscapes in Wales may have been much 'busier' than previously realised. The investigation was prompted by the recovery and reporting of two La Tène brooches by a metal detectorist through PAS Cymru. Unquestionably, PAS Cymru has been a major success. Very large quantities of material have been properly recorded and brought to the attention of the broader archaeological community. The significance of the distributions of these objects has, however, been much more difficult to discern. This work at Boverton has demonstrated that the further investigation of findspots can be of considerable research value. This is not a radical point of view. Over the last couple of decades, several important finds and potential hoards declared to PAS Cymru have been followed up with subsequent surveys and excavations including the Pembrokeshire Iron Age chariot burial (Current Archaeology 2019) and the Llanmaes midden (Gwilt *et al*. 2016). However, the paucity of funding has meant that such investigations have been the exception rather than the norm. We argue that the contextualisation of PAS Cymru findspots, especially groups of finds, should be standard practice if we want to advance our knowledge of the archaeology of Wales. The challenge, of course, is finding the resources to undertake such work. There are no easy solutions, but the first step must be to open up the conversations that can facilitate closer collaborations and sharing of resources between the major archaeological organisations in Wales. We see this short article as a call to arms – PAS Cymru has shown us *where* things are, let us now try to understand *why* they are there.

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NOTES

1. Summerhouse Camp is a scheduled monument, reference number GM032 <https://cadwpublic-api.azurewebsites.net/reports/sam/FullReport?lang=&id=3497>
2. The survey was undertaken with two Bartington Grad 601 Dual fluxgate gradiometers. Data were collected at 0.125 m intervals on traverse 2 m apart, giving an effective traverse interval of 1.0

m (singe density; a data grid of 0.125 m x 1.0 m). Grids were walked on south to north traverses in a zig-zag pattern. Data were downloaded from the instruments, assembled and cleaned using DW Consulting's 'Terrasurveyor Lite v3' software. The grids were assembled, the data clipped and the destriping function employed for data in which there was an imbalance between the two gradiometers. The data were then exported from Terrasurveyor and interpolated to a 0.125 m node-spacing using Golden Software's Surfer package to reduce pixilation where required.

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