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A BRONZE DAGGER FROM TICHBOURNE DOWN, CHERITON, NEAR WINCHESTER

Location and circumstances of find

The dagger was found by Mr J McGovern and his son in a field known as Dark Copse, which lies on Tichbourne Down. The map reference is SU591300. I am grateful to Mr McGovern for supplying this and the following information. The dagger was found in November 1982, 9 in (225 mm) down in a new plough furrow; a small excavation was carried out, but there was no evidence of a burial, or of a former barrow. No Bronze Age pottery has been found in the vicinity. The field is mainly on chalk with flint, but there are areas of heavy clay. Mr McGovern continues to survey this field as part of a survey of the Civil War battlefield.

Description (Figs 5 and 6)

Triangular bronze dagger with ogival shaped blade, slightly curved hilt plate with two rivets *in situ*, central rivet notch and omega-shaped mark in the centre. Four ribs extend three-quarters of the way down the blade each side of the convex midrib, which is decorated with a fine pattern of dots, or pointillé. The rivets are slightly squared with expanded ends, 11mm long and c 5mm thick. The dagger is a finely made piece, not heavily used, but it has damage consistent with some usage. The hilt plate is rather uneven across the top and both rivet holes are wrenched and split to the top. The blade has well-milled edges, although rather notched and battered, and is bent along its length. The ribs alongside the midrib are quite clear, but slightly polished out towards the tip. There are fine score marks on the butt

and some on the blade; some heavy scraping along one midrib may be due to modern damage. The dagger has an overall green patina with red patches of disease, and is 160mm in length, greatest width (across the hilt plate) 56mm.

Discussion

This dagger is a typical Wessex type of the Camerton-Snowhill phase (Gerloff 1975, 100), and can be placed within Type Camerton. Our dagger can indeed be closely paralleled by the type example from Timsbury, Camerton, and the pointillé is similar to the example from Edmondsham (Gerloff 1975, 104-5, Nos 175 and 182). These daggers are usually associated with cremations under barrows, sometimes with inhumations, and some occur in Arretton hoards (Gerloff 1975, 109). As a class, Camerton-Snowhill daggers are quite widely distributed in Britain, but those with pointillé decoration seem to be confined to south-west England, concentrating in south Dorset and the Salisbury Plain, with single examples from Devon, Cornwall and Hampshire. (Gerloff 1975, 115); Proudfoot suggested a source for them around Dorchester, because of their concentration there (1963, 410).

The decoration has aroused much comment by previous authors on its possible origins: Piggott drew attention to the similar decoration on spearheads and thought that it might be a logical extension of decoration using gold studs, and as seen on the Aldbourne Cups (1938, 62). Proudfoot pointed

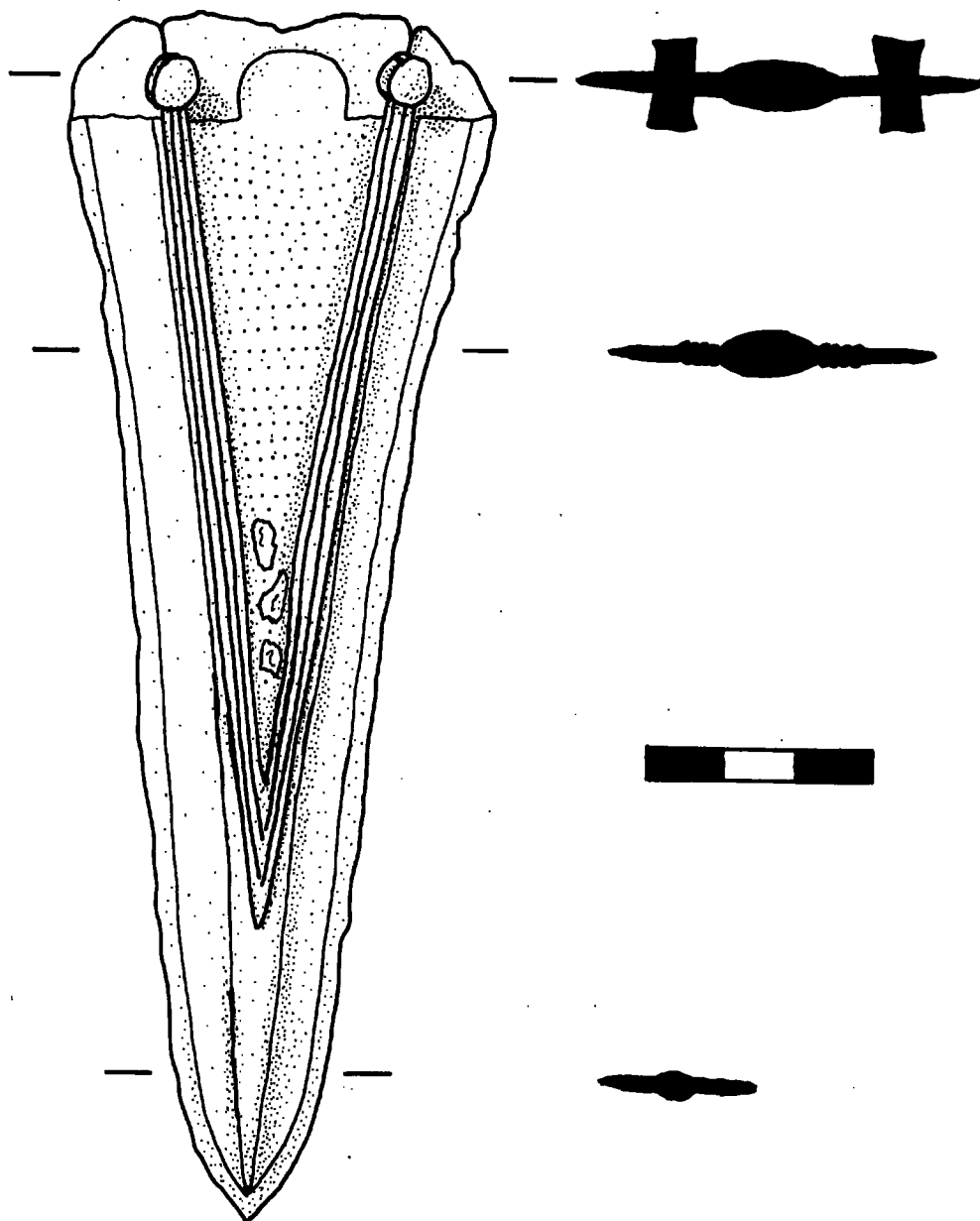


Fig 5. The bronze dagger from Tichbourne Down. Scale in cm.

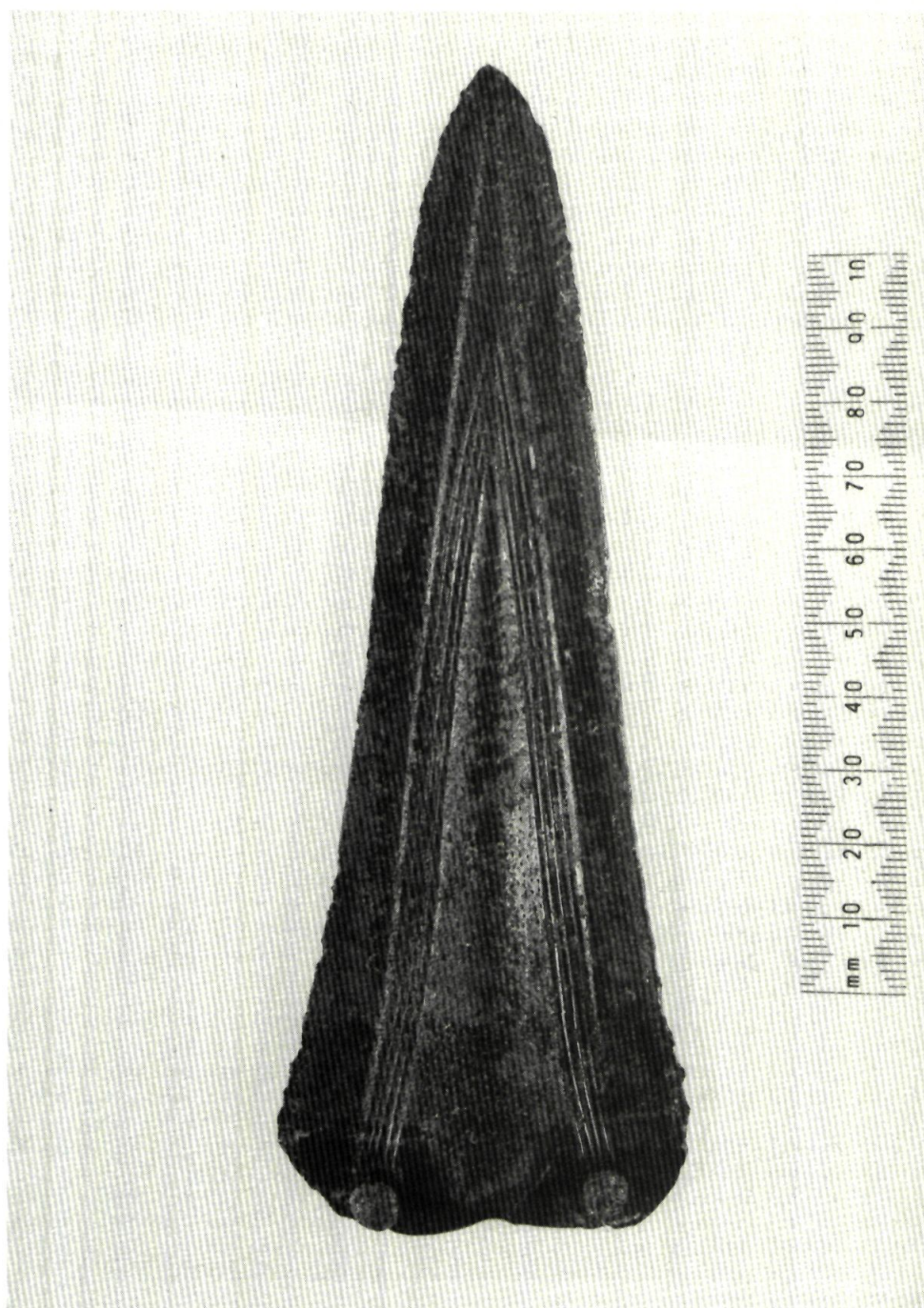


Fig 6. The bronze dagger from Tichbourne Down.

out that the form of decoration had frequently been used before the appearance of Wessex material and so was already familiar, but she did not disallow the possibility of influence from the Continent (1963, 411). Gerloff noted the presence of this decoration on flat and flanged axes, but drew attention to Continental pointillé-decorated daggers in Switzerland, the Rhône and middle Rhine regions and northern France, and the parallels in Apa swords and Sögel blades, also decorated and grooved, with omega hilt-marks (1975, 116-7); she opted for influence from southwest Central Europe via the middle Rhine and northern France (1975, 118).

Another feature of these blades that has been commented on is the wear and damage: Proudfoot noted the state of the Edmondsham blade and doubted whether it had been new at the time of burial, explaining it as a treasured status symbol eventually deposited in the grave (1963, 408). Ours seems to be damaged, but not greatly worn, and this 'dual standard' was observed by Gerloff in her corpus (1975, 109). Perhaps this could be linked to the uniformity of design in this type (Gerloff 1975, 100), and we could suggest a single design type or even workshop, whose products took varying lengths of time to reach the archaeological state. This single workshop concept has been suggested for other Wessex products (Coles and Taylor 1971) and may not be beyond reason, as Gerloff only lists fourteen Camerton type daggers (1975, 104-6). Whether we can detect regularities in

circulation time related to wear (Kristiansen 1979), from such a small sample, is another matter.

We have already mentioned the omega hilt-mark as being paralleled on Continental blades, and it may just represent a simple decorative feature on these daggers. It is not always present in daggers and varies considerably in size and shape: could it have some mechanical function related to the hafting? Perhaps this hilt shape would have strengthened the bond of the hilt in the lateral plane, by diverting some of the strains experienced in use away from the rivets. Experimentation might satisfy this point.

Conclusion

Our dagger, then, is of Type Camerton and falls within the group of Camerton-Snowhill daggers, typically representative of Wessex II (ApSimon 1954, 51). This would suggest an absolute date in the sixteenth century BC. It is slightly peripheral to the main area of distribution, but still within the Wessex Culture area. Although we do not have its exact context, it is perhaps more likely to have come from a ploughed-out burial than a hoard, as other items would have been recovered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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