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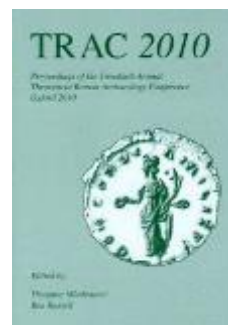
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# Pinning Down Identity: The Negotiation of Personhood and the Materialisation of Identity in the Late Iron Age and Early Roman Severn Estuary

*Caroline Pudney*

## *Introduction*

Technologies that ornament the body and monitor bodily margins are vital to understanding relationships between the self and identity. As changes in personal adornment and display indicate deeper social and personal change (Hamilakis *et al.* 2002; Joyce 2005; Sørensen 1997), a study of artefacts related to personal adornment should tell us something about people, their bodies, ideas and personhood. The archaeological record for the first century A.D. onwards in Britain indicates a general disappearance of traditional jewellery such as iron penannular brooches and torcs, which are replaced with continental types of brooches, necklaces, bracelets, earrings and rings. This shift in personal adornment and display should be seen as highly significant in the re-negotiation of social and personal identities and it is this subject that I wish to investigate further here. Brooches formed a major part of the dress and general appearance of people in Late Iron Age Britain and in the Roman world. While functional in purpose, in that they serve to hold together a person's clothing, the brooch may also serve to express something more. They were positioned in a highly visible place, on the upper torso/chest area and as such were prime tools for non-verbal, material communication.

Jundi and Hill (1998) have shown that a focus on specific items can allow insights into the significance of objects and changing perspectives over time. In their paper, the authors argued:

1. The possible roles brooches played in the materialisation of identity changed in significance between *c.* 100 B.C. and A.D. 75.
2. There was an apparent boom in the manufacture and use of brooches during this period, referred to by the authors as the Fibula Event Horizon (hereafter FEH).
3. The FEH phenomenon appears to occur at different stages in different areas of Britain and to varying extents where we find a change in brooch numbers, in relation to 'the brooches themselves and to the contexts from which they are recovered.' (Jundi and Hill 1998: 127)
4. The brooch thus became 'increasingly more than just a dress fastener.' (Jundi and Hill 1998: 127). When viewed alongside the introduction of other jewellery and toilet instruments, the FEH appears to demonstrate important changes in the way in which people's personal and social identities were expressed.

It is this final point that I wish to address here; namely that the brooch was *more than just a dress fastener*. In this paper I will take Jundi and Hill's research further and consider what roles brooches may have played in the construction and negotiation of identity through a study of their place within intentional deposits. Using case studies from the Severn Estuary, drawn from my doctoral research on the area, this paper will explore the possibility that the brooch may have played a more complex role than simply indicating identity, forming part of a person's being in a physical sense.

### *Brooches as intentional objects in the early Roman Severn Estuary*

A useful overarching concept when thinking about the relationship between people and material objects is that of “personhood”. In short, personhood consists of self, person and notions of “other”; the condition or state of being a person loosely characterizes the term “personhood” (Fowler 2004). Personhood is attained and maintained through relationships with other humans as well as objects, places, animals and the cosmos. Personhood is a mutually constituted condition that is realised in a reflexive way, *i.e.* it is an ongoing process. A person attains or maintains social, gendered, ethnic, caste and religious identities through different strategies and practices and in the process the composition and character of a person changes. These practices, like all human action, are social and as such, the categories of personhood are dependent upon these social relations.

The use of the brooch as an item of personal adornment was a widespread social and cultural practice across Iron Age and Roman northern Europe. But what was the connection between these brooches and the people that wore them? Archaeologists have acknowledged the powerful relationships that people have with objects (Hamilakis *et al.* 2002) and due to the personal nature of objects that adorn the body, they are often used to tell us something about the wearer; their origins, or that they belong to a specific household or group of people, or perhaps more significantly, that they *believe* that they belong to a certain community. Bodies are thus media for identity and expression; how the body is presented to others and in relation to others and how this changes is an important process in communicating how we, as humans, understand ourselves within the world and in relation to other social beings. Therefore, to wear a specific item or to change the item, or the way in which it is worn, reflects a change in the construction of the person. Deliberate decisions to alter dress are a product of a change in the person’s sense of self (Sørensen 1997).

The conscious self and physical body contribute to the person which can be understood as a *character* whose attributes are determined rationally (Mauss 1985). What I wish to stress is that as a result of this, the person exceeds the body and incorporates artefacts, other people, animals, places and ideas in its construction. An embodied person may not necessarily be bounded by skin, but extends beyond it substantively through objects and materials (Joyce 2005). The external surface and internal core of the body are thus bound together rather than being separated.

The brooch, and more importantly the link between the brooch and the person, becomes all important and it is from this point that I would like to consider the part that brooches may have played in the negotiation of identity and personhood in the Severn Estuary during the Late Iron Age and Early Roman period (first century B.C to the second century A.D.). It should be noted that this paper does not aim to produce definite interpretations of brooches or static uses of objects as symbols of identity; instead the objective is to suggest interpretive avenues for further work on the possible significances of certain items of personal display.

One way in which we can gain an insight into the significance of certain objects is by focusing on the special treatment of them, such as the inclusion of brooches in burials, or as votive offerings. It must be noted that I am not concerned with the specific use and/or meaning of brooches in everyday life, rather I am interested in the meaning and significance of these objects in relation to the self through a study of their inclusion in very specific, intentional and somewhat unusual practices.

The symbolic deposition of brooches is not something that has been widely observed before in the Roman Severn Estuary. General metalwork hoards are not unknown in the Iron Age and

Roman periods, including Iron Age metal hoards such as those at Severn Sisters and Llantwit Major (both in south Wales), as well as hoards of Iron Age coins at Nunney and Farmborough in Somerset (Van Arsdell 1994). The later Iron Age hoarding pattern in Wales has been characterised as a bronze or brass event horizon rather than a fibula event horizon (Gwilt 2007). More work is needed to see if this pattern reaches around the Severn Estuary. However the general absence of brooches in these hoards, as well as the lack of a synthetic work gathering information on brooches that are included in such hoards, leaves us none the wiser about the relationship between people and brooches in the Late Iron Age and Early Roman period. This is not to say that no brooches have been found of either Late Iron Age or Roman date around the Severn Estuary. However, the brooches from around the Severn Estuary mostly derive from antiquarian excavations or metal detector finds and consequently their exact provenances often remain unclear. The case studies presented here have thus been selected from a handful of more recent excavations where we have evidence for the intentional deposition of brooches, but in which no particular attention has been paid to the part brooches may have played within the deposits.

This paper will firstly address brooch deposition in possible foundation deposits at the farmstead at Whitton in the Vale of Glamorgan and abandonment deposits at Usk legionary fortress. Finally, the inclusion of brooches in votive deposits at the Uley Temple complex and within burials from around the area of Gloucestershire will be examined (Fig. 1).

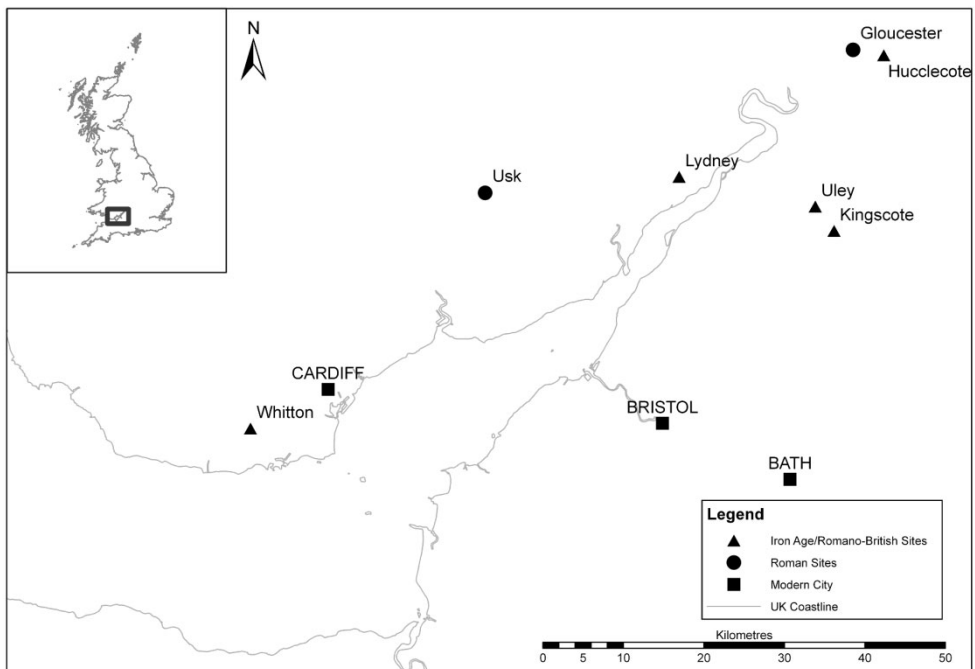


Figure 1: The Severn Estuary and site location (Background Mapping © Crown Copyright/database right 2010. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

*Protecting the home: foundation deposits at Whitton farmstead*

Foundation rituals, involving the placing of offerings in foundation trenches, have been interpreted as an attempt to secure divine protection over the building and/or the people within it. Items that held specific significance to people were often chosen to be deposited and could range from whole or fragmentary ceramics to complete metal objects as well as sometimes infant or animal burials (Pryor 2001; Wilson 1999; Woodward and Woodward 2004). This practice took place throughout the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman Britain (Bruck 1999; Pryor 2001). Durable items are often specifically chosen to be included in such practices and the presence of brooches in such possible deposits will be considered here.

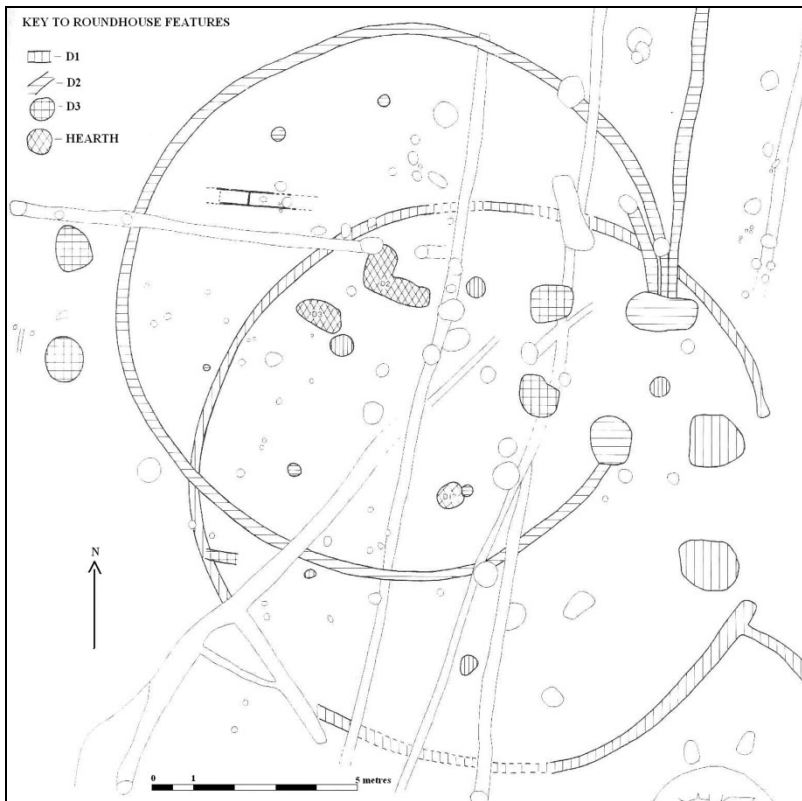


Figure 2: Plan showing roundhouses D1 and D2 at Whitton (after Jarrett and Wrathmell 1981: 31).

At the Iron Age and Romano-British farmstead of Whitton a trumpet brooch was recovered from within the fill of the right-hand posthole of the northern entrance of the central roundhouse, D2, which was constructed in or around the period A.D. 70–95 (Fig. 2). The posthole also contained a fragment of a copper alloy ovoid bracelet, some sherds of undecorated South Gaulish Samian, a Black Burnished Ware jar, other local wares, a spindle-whorl made from an orange ware sherd and another red/brown whorl that seems never to have been totally finished (J. Webster 1981). It is possible that this assemblage represents nothing

more than rubbish used as a fill between the packing stones of the posthole, but this seems unlikely. Rubbish is often imbued with particular social meanings which vary between different cultures (Douglas 1966). We must accept the possibility that items that appear broken or unfinished were specifically chosen to be included within the fill of a pit or other deposit (Hill 1995). As such, the possible implications of these items placed within the post-hole need to be considered.

It is perhaps significant to note here that while the other entrance posthole did produce some local coarse wares, it did not produce any other items suggesting that the brooch and whorl were specifically chosen to be buried in this location (the northern entrance posthole). The deposition of objects either side of doorways in and around Iron Age houses has been noted at many sites across Britain. Deposits were found in postholes on the right-hand side of entranceways of both roundhouses and enclosures at the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age domestic enclosures at Wakerley, Northamptonshire (Gwilt 1997), Mucking North Ring in Essex (Parker-Pearson 1996) and Gussage All-Saints in Dorset (Hill 1995), as well as at the Late Iron Age religious sites at Hayling Island in Hampshire, Harlow in Essex and Wanborough in Surrey (Haselgrove 2005). The case of Crick Covert Farm and Cat's Water in Northamptonshire show a continuation of this trend from the Late Bronze Age through to the Late Iron Age (Woodward and Hughes 2007), where there was a tendency for finds of all categories to be concentrated in the right-hand terminals. This appears to indicate that at certain sites there was a preferred positioning of particular objects or groups of objects perhaps deposited as part of specific acts or to mark special events.

The general pattern from Whitton for pre-Roman ceramics suggests that jars were most common and were of Glastonbury or Black Burnished local varieties, with the introduction of more "Romanised" vessels and fabrics occurring post *c.* A.D. 55/60–80 (P. Webster 1981). However, the majority of ceramics were local in origin ("Durotrigian" wares) and this makes the presence of the Samian more interesting and perhaps of significance as an exotic item that could have symbolised a different, and perhaps 'special' mode of dining or food consumption for the occupants of roundhouse D2 at Whitton. Equally, the Samian ware may have represented something different, foreign and unknown and therefore special or mysterious.

Out of the seven certain roundhouses excavated at Whitton, D1 was the first central structure within the enclosure, with roundhouses B1, C and E possibly located on the periphery during phase I, prior to the construction of D2 in phase III (Fig. 3). There is no clear evidence for the deliberate deposition of items within the entrance postholes of these previous structures other than roundhouse E, in which an undecorated South Gaulish plate (form 18) was recovered from the southern posthole along with a jar in a pink fabric which has been described as a possible Butt Beaker derivative. The northern posthole contained a jar in a light grey coarse fabric as well as a damaged whorl in an orange/black local pre-Roman fabric. The practice of placing objects in entrance postholes, therefore, may have already existed at the time roundhouse D2 was constructed, although the more numerous and varied objects in the posthole of D2 suggests that something very intentional was happening at this time and in this place. D2 was a re-building of the previous roundhouse D1 in the centre of the enclosure and thus the deposition of these objects may have been part of an act to solidify both the presence and/or the re-building of the house in the central place, the date of which perhaps significantly correlates with the now permanent Roman presence in the area.

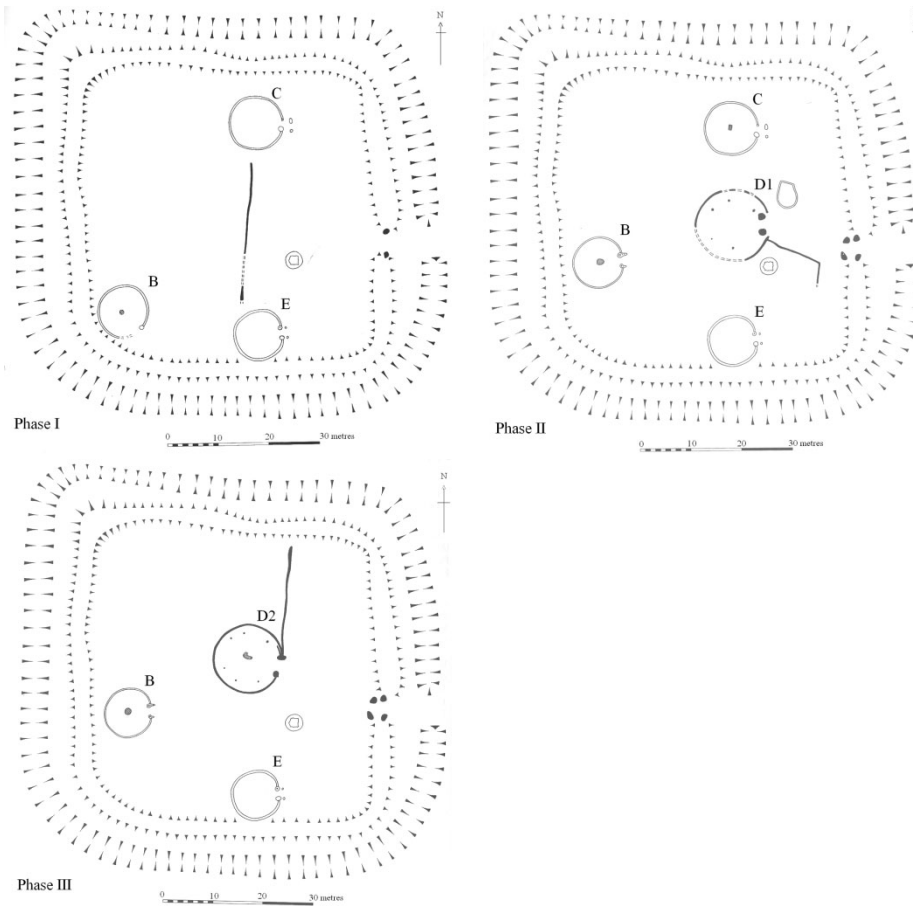


Figure 3: Phasing of roundhouses at Whitton (after Jarrett and Wrathmell 1981: 83, 85 and 88).

As a foundation rather than rubbish deposit, the inclusion of the brooch would suggest that there was special importance ascribed to the object. The fill of the wall-trench for the previous roundhouse D1 which lay underneath D2 also produced a brooch (a Nor'nour type) further suggesting a relationship between the deposition of brooches and the foundation of houses at Whitton. If we consider a direct link between the use of brooches and the material display of identity, the presence of such an item amongst a general domestic assemblage of ceramics could mean that the identity being displayed related to the household; the whorls especially relate to domestic, household activities and the Samian sherds too could represent a new household-oriented form of communal food consumption. A needle from the same wall-trench of roundhouse D1 could similarly have an association with household practices and identities. The brooch in the northern posthole was thus perhaps a symbol of a shared identity, the committal to the ground of which marked the beginning or foundation of the household and its identity. It was thus perhaps deposited in the ground as an offering to household gods to ensure that the identity (of the household) would be protected.

The brooch becomes a mediating object in the practice of foundation deposits and as such would likely have played a significant role in the relationship between individual, the collective of the household unit and the gods. The individual is bound to the brooch as a social object, which is then incorporated into the household through its deposition in the ground. In turn, the brooch is offered to the gods as part of a much wider world view. Person, divine being, and material thus became entwined through strategies that in turn, formed major components in the creation and negotiation of personhood.

### *Abandonment deposits at Usk legionary fortress: the end of an era?*

In contrast to the previous case study, here I shall address the deliberate deposition of objects as part of an act that signifies the abandonment of a place. At Usk several brooches were recovered from seemingly structured deposits (Manning 1981). A developed Polden Hill example was recovered from a large pit (69CN) along with two other brooches – a one-piece brooch and a Colchester derivative. Table 1 shows the items found within the pit.

*Table 1: Contents of pit 69CN (after Manning 1981).*

Ceramics	Severn Valley ware jars
	Terra nigra cup, jar and bowl
	Lyon colour-coated cup
	Central Gaulish flagon
	Local ware flagon
Glass	Pillar moulded bowl
	Jug
	Beads
Copper alloy	Statue fragment
	Lamp hook
	Small spoon or pin
	Colchester Derivative brooch
	One-Piece brooch
	Polden Hill brooch
Iron	Dagger and inlaid sheath
	Two spearheads
	Pyramidal ferrule
	Nails/pinheads and tacks.
Coins	Two copies of asses of Claudius I
Silver	“Silvered” spoon
Other	Two hone wasters
	A roughout
	A mortarium
	Three lava rotary querns (two of which were lower stones)

The pit has been described by Manning as one of the ‘most significant’ not only in size but also in its contents. The kidney shaped pit measured 5.0 m × 4.5 m and 1.8 m deep. It had a thick layer of daub that formed the base layer/lining and was overlain and sealed by a second century gravel layer which included Antonine pottery vessels, giving the pit its *terminus ante quem*. The pit is thus believed to have been dug late in Nero’s reign (Manning 1981: 51).



The presence of the brooches as part of this assemblage is worth considering. The Neronian date of the pit is contemporary with the general period of abandonment by the legion or at least a time of reduced occupation at the fortress and was most probably dug by *Legio XX* after many of the functional compounds had become redundant (Manning 1981). If this was a deliberate deposition of the items rather than a general rubbish dump during the demolition of the fortress, then the inclusion of the brooches would be of significance. Specific practices related to the abandonment of a place, including the explicit and structured deposition of objects, have been previously considered (Clarke 1997; Armit 1999; Fulford 2001; Fulford and Timby 2001). Clarke has argued that the finds from a series of pits at Newstead fort form part of structured deposits of objects relating to ‘...the continued development of a widespread prehistoric ritual activity’ (Clarke 1997: 80–81), and goes on to compare the pits with special deposits within disused grain stores at Danebury. Fulford remarks that in order for such deposits as these to be “ritual” they must show “irrational” characteristics so as to separate them from routine behaviour (Fulford 2001: 201).

Pit 69CN stands out, in terms of its size and content, from other pits and artefact assemblages from the fortress at Usk and consequently warrants further explanation beyond “military rubbish”. This points towards the possibility that these items were deliberately placed in the ground as a special event or series of events. The relationship between the date of the pit and the events of the period suggest that this episode could have been an act of closure; to mark a specific occurrence like the end of the site at Usk as a military base, and thus committing the objects to the earth. Effectively this act ended the objects’ lives just as life of the fortress also came to an end. Similar “demolition” pits have been excavated at Inchtuthil, including the “nail hoard” from the *fabrica*. This pit was similarly sealed by a layer of gravel so as ‘...to prevent later recovery of its contents by the natives’ (Pitts and St Joseph 1985: 111), and also coincides with the end of the *fabrica* thus perhaps marking this event in a very specific way.

As a structured deposit that contained meaningful objects, the brooches in the pit at Usk would have been intentionally deposited. It is conceivable that due to the nature of the other objects within the pit that this was not the act of an individual but of several people, perhaps a military unit/group of soldiers, a family or kin group. We have already seen in the case of Whitton that identities could be both individual and shared. Did the brooches mark an identity that was attained by the soldiers on their arrival in Britain that was now being left behind at Usk as they moved on to Wroxeter? Identities were fluid and this fluidity may have been marked by the practice of depositing items in the way seen here at Usk. Identities relate to people, things and places and as part of these identities, the brooch, along with the other items in the pit, plays an active role in their negotiation. The presence of weapons in the pit, table wares (both coarse and fine), beads, tools and domestic items could represent the different aspects of daily army life: eating, drinking and food preparation; fighting and maintenance of weapons; practical objects such as lamps, spoons, tacks and pins; and finally the items related to personal adornment - the beads and brooches. Marking this event in this way suggests that not only was it the end of a daily routine in this place or the end of a phase of life but also, to some extent, of an identity - either individual or communal and perhaps of the fortress itself. The continual re-working and re-moulding of identities symbolises the organic nature of personhood.

### *Votive offerings at Uley*

The deposition of objects as part of specific acts has been discussed both as marking events at Whitton and Usk and as offering something to the gods in order to gain protection or favour. This case study expands upon this and considers the deliberate deposition of items as part of religious votive offerings. The Roman temple at Uley (West Hill) almost certainly had religious significance in the later Iron Age. Uley is one of the few sites that show continuity from the Iron Age well into the post-conquest period. Roman dedications to Mercury are known from the site and these are supported further by the numerous depositional offerings of weapons, bronze figurines and curse-tablets. In addition to these the large quantity of bones recovered highlights that sacrificial offerings of meat or feasting activities were common at the sites (although perhaps significantly excluding pig) (Henig 1995). The presence of brooches as votive offerings appears less common at Uley in comparison to other similar sites in Britain, such as Hayling Island. However, the practice of including brooches in votive offerings appears to have taken place in the late pre-conquest and post-conquest periods (Henig 1995). Votive offerings are described as such by Wheeler and Wheeler (1932) based on their direct affiliation with Roman deities or cults. However, it is more commonly accepted that the votive deposition of other “non-religious” items also took place.

During the Early Iron Age, Uley (West Hill) appears to have been a sacred place consisting of a ditched enclosure. No pre-Iron Age pottery has been recovered and no deposits from the ditches have allowed for radiocarbon dating, so we have no evidence for when these ditches were dug (Woodward and Leach 1993). However, the later Iron Age features include a probable rectangular timber-built structure, along with a smaller trapezoidal timber structure, while votive pits and human infant burials all provide evidence for either pre- or early Roman activity. The destruction of substantial timber palisades at the site has been dated by the presence of brooches to sometime in the early first century A.D., suggesting their construction may have taken place as early as the second or first centuries B.C. The votive pits (pits F251 and F836) that will be examined in this case study come from the next phase of building activity which has been dated to the early first century A.D. and which consisted of an extension to the enclosure ditch and palisades as well as the construction of a square timber building, Structure XVI (Woodward and Leach 1993).

Concentrating on the two pits from Uley we find evidence for the presence of brooches as votive offerings. Pit F251 was dug as part of a complex of slots, gullies and pits within a major ditch segment D264 that was orientated roughly NW–SE (Fig. 4). The ditch and pit complex appear to have functioned alongside the timber Structure XVI which lay just to the west and which has been interpreted as a shrine. Pit F251 was cut in a roughly central location within the ditch filled with ‘deliberate deposits’ (Woodward and Leach 1993: 21) which in turn contained, in the earliest deposits (924 and 926; Fig. 5) a Rosette brooch, two penannular brooches, an iron projectile head, and several bolt heads, all of which have been dated to the first half of the first century A.D. Both contexts 923 and 924 contained the remains of several decorated Malvernian jars, one of which had a pierced base, sherds of three Savernake jars (again one with a pierced base), and a carinated Severn Valley ware bowl as well as some animal bone. After a period in which context 923 may have been re-cut, contexts 901 and 911 were deposited. Context 910 contained the remains of a Malvernian ware jar and several oxidised Severn Valley ware bowls in addition to a Belgic shouldered bowl/jar, some bone, charcoal, eight iron projectile heads, a buff sandstone quern fragment and a whetstone. Context 911 produced further similar pottery and animal bone.

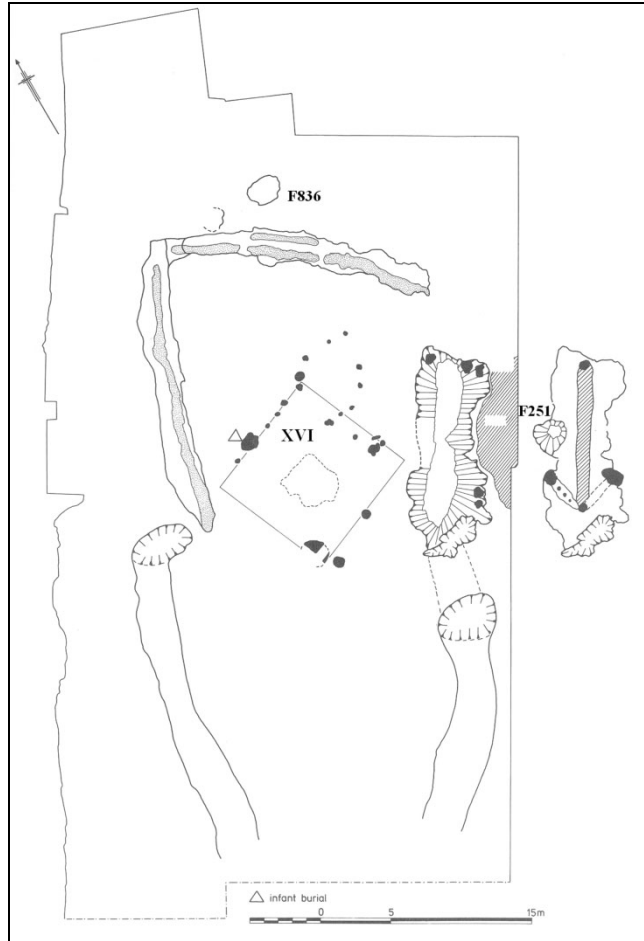


Figure 4: Plan of pits F251 and F836 from Uley (after Woodward and Leach 1993:17, © English Heritage).

A Hod Hill brooch included along with the foot and catchplate of an early C1 Strip Bow brooch and a hinged T-Shape brooch were recovered from the final deposit of a deep, circular feature (pit F836) which was itself likened to pit F251 by the excavators since the fill appeared to be a product of deliberate deposits (Woodward and Leach 1993). In fact, the pit did not produce many finds from the lower fills (other than some fragments of iron), but did produce a copper alloy toilet instrument from the upper levels of context 842 (Fig. 5). Context 835, above 842, produced further fragments of iron as well as the fragment of the Strip Bow brooch and the Hod Hill brooch. Context 824 above this then produced the T-Shape “Southwestern” style brooch of c. 100 A.D. along with a glass melon bead of Claudian to Antonine date, a probable iron stylus and a decorated copper alloy strip. The pottery assemblage from the pit consisted of the remains of several Malvernian bowls and jars which came from contexts 835 and 842.

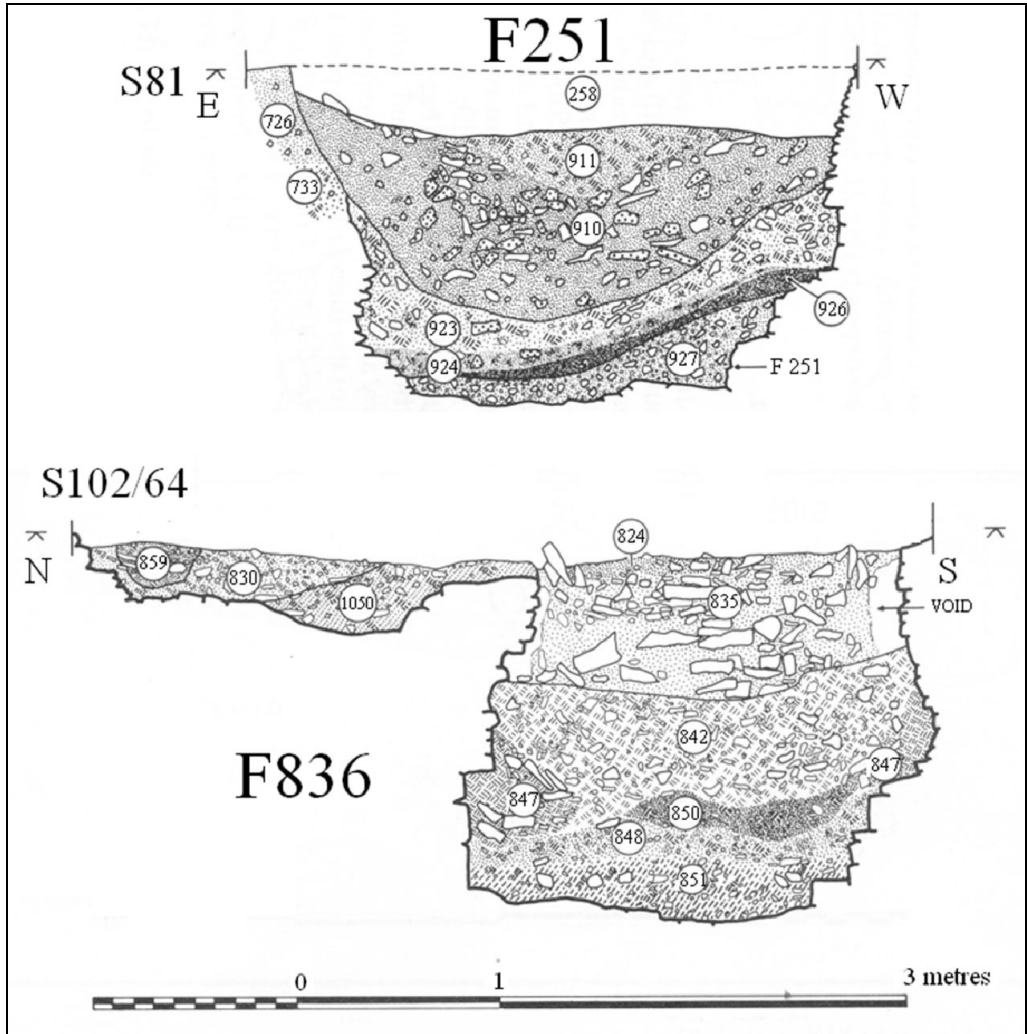


Figure 5: South facing section of pit F251 (top) and west facing section of pit F286 (bottom) (after Woodward and Leach 1993: 24 and 27, © English Heritage).

The pottery in pits F251 and F836 typifies the common types found in the area during the later first century A.D. and the influence of the conquest can be seen in the presence of the Savernake wares. The inclusion of brooches in votive deposits that appear to favour pottery and iron weapons potentially highlights that they held some significance for the people visiting the religious site at the time or perhaps their perceived importance to the gods. Personal objects such as brooches appear to have been used widely as *ex votos* at Uley, even if the most significant components, in terms of quantity, were pottery. The other major components were heavy bone and antler tools and full size iron weapons (Woodward and Leach 1993: 327). The

presence of brooches in these early pits thus stands out and suggests that they were of particular value or complexity. While most of the brooches relate to the early Roman structural phases in and around the temple building (Woodward and Leach 1993: 331), their continued presence in contexts that date on into the late fourth century (Woodward and Leach 1993: 328, Table 19), emphasises not only their prolonged inclusion in votive offerings but also their continued significance as objects.

The lack of any other objects (other than the copper toilet article) that relate to personal adornment or appearance indicates that brooches were the most common item of personal display used within votive offerings and were, therefore, perhaps the item of personal adornment that was most ingrained into the everyday life of those who visited the site. Items of personal adornment do appear to have been common votive offerings at Uley until the fourth century A.D. when similarly they are also deposited in votive contexts at religious sites across Britain. As such, the presence of the brooch in these early votive contexts suggests that they were actively chosen in addition to other items more commonly included.

The practice of ritual or structured deposition suggests that objects are deposited in the ground as part of a deliberate set of world views, actions and choices. The items deposited would have been specifically chosen in relation to the ritual taking place. In addition, the significance of the object in relation to not only the person, but also to the gods, would have factored in any decision to include it in the ritual practice. Through such ritualised acts of votive deposition, human, object and divine world become connected. The inclusion of the brooches as an element of such votive offerings would then have been part of a very intentional, purposeful and often personal act. While the brooch was likely to have been a familiar object related to personal adornment, the presence in these divine contexts suggests that its significance continued beyond the earthly world and into the celestial. The connection between people, these familiar objects and their deposition at religious sites suggests that these were perhaps not offered to the gods because of their intrinsic value or artistic worth but for some other, more personal reason; that they were perhaps offering something *of themselves*. People may have offered the brooches to the gods as a surrogate for their identity or as a part of themselves as a sacrifice of their personhood.

### *Beyond the grave: brooches as grave goods in Gloucestershire*

Moving from depositional practices through which people mediate their relationships with the gods, this case study considers the deposition of brooches as a practice that extends relationships beyond the grave. The inclusion of brooches in burials allows us to consider the link between brooches and personhood in the afterlife.

The site at London Road in Gloucester is a possible example where the inclusion of brooches may have been significant. The site has produced evidence for a mass grave radiocarbon dated to as early as A.D. 70. Multiple individuals were deposited in the grave: 201 articulated skeletons were recovered along with 419 objects that were recorded as small finds. Although the extent to which the bodies were entangled has not allowed for a complete count of individuals, it is thought that the total number was less than this (Simmonds *et al.* 2008: 17). The entanglement also suggests that the bodies were deposited in a single event rather than individually, though post-depositional movement of the skeletons left the excavators unable to directly associate many individual bones, articulated elements and objects from the grave with particular skeletons. The presence of brooches, buckles and footwear suggests that some of the

bodies were clothed at the time of burial (Simmonds *et al.* 2008: 18). A Wroxeter brooch of late first/early second century A.D. date was included in the grave with an early knee brooch and a penannular brooch. Also within the grave were two rings, a bracelet, hair pin, two iron bars and an angle bracket as well as shoes, the remains of a complete chicken and the left hind leg of a goat or sheep, as well as 168 sherds of pottery in addition to the mostly complete remains of six black burnished ware jars dating from the late second to early third century. Although the brooches could not be firmly associated with any of the skeletons, it was noted that all three had their pins intact and in place suggesting that they entered the deposit as part of worn items of clothing (Simmonds *et al.* 2008: 114) rather than disposed of as broken objects that had no further use.

It has been proposed that the grave was a plague pit, but various problems arise from this interpretation (Esmonde-Cleary 2009). Another possible interpretation of the grave is that it was for the poor or lower status section of the community, a suggestion that could fit the marginal location of the grave within the cemetery. On the other hand, there is no evidence that suggests these individuals were less healthy than any others found within the cemetery (Simmonds *et al.* 2008: 140). The excavators have also questioned whether the *colonia* would even have had a large enough poor population to fill the pit, unless it was left open for quite a while (Simmonds *et al.* 2008: 140). The entanglement of the bodies, however, suggests a short episode of deposition in a grave that did not form part of a “managed” cemetery (Esmonde-Cleary 2009: 389).

Although the presence of three brooches in the grave may well merely represent objects that were habitually worn during life and at the time of death, we cannot assume this to be the only way in which the brooches came to be in the grave. Carol van Driel Murray (1999), in her paper on the significance of shoes, suggests that in many cases the items were considered a material projection of the self. Rather than a simple product of the deceased being buried fully clothed, the often specific positioning of shoes in burials appears to reflect deeper personal concepts and concerns. The deeply personal nature of shoes and the footprints that they create preserved the imprint of the soul in burials and other ritual contexts. Shoes in sacrificial contexts are suggested to serve as both a signature and a substitute for a person’s soul (van Driel Murray 1999:138). Could this also be the case with other personal items such as brooches? The general absence of any other grave goods stresses the unusual nature of the grave and as such the presence of the brooches could be more significant: if we directly relate brooches to a person’s identity, might it be possible that the brooches were deliberately buried with the deceased as a way of officially ending their lives? Thinking firstly about the brooch as a symbol of a person’s identity, and secondly about the likelihood that it was indeed the brooch that was of importance rather than the item that it was attached to (*i.e.* a cloak), it could follow that the inclusion of the brooches in the grave at London Road was a defined act.

Philpott (1991) has noted a paucity of brooches as grave goods in burials during the late first to mid second century, although more examples are being discovered on excavated farmsteads, rural settlements and associated burials. Karen Pollock notes that rural grave assemblages from Wales tend to include brooches and other items of personal adornment while those from urban or military sites do not (Pollock 2006). More research is required focusing on the types of brooches found, their positioning within the grave, and any patterns relating to the geographical distribution of sites where they are found in burials, before any possible regional or cultural practices can be discussed. The area of the Severn Estuary within Gloucestershire also appears to show potential for further similar work. The later prehistoric and Romano-British settlement at Hucclecote, which is situated a few miles southeast of Gloucester along

Ermine Street, has produced evidence for the inhumation of a 45 year old female with a trumpet brooch placed at her feet (Thomas *et al.* 2003). The brooch is the only grave good other than some hobnails. Thomas *et al.* (2003: 65), note that there is a similar burial at Kingscote, also in Gloucestershire. The burial contained a late first/early second century A.D. Polden Hill type brooch which was also seemingly placed at the feet of an adult, probably a male (Clifford 1963). If these cases are not isolated and a regional pattern does exist, it would suggest that brooches did indeed have a very special association with life, death and identity for the people that lived in the area at this time. It would then follow that the lack of brooches included in burials outside the Severn Estuary area during this period, at a time when brooch use was so prominent, may well have served as a way of expressing difference or “otherness” by keeping the identity (and the memory) of the deceased in the world of the living and thus very much still alive in some way.

### *Conclusion: can brooches pin identity down?*

This paper readdresses the way in which we think about familiar objects and the importance of identity in relation to the creation of personhood during the first generations of the Roman conquest in western Britain. While this paper has not discussed the Fibula Event Horizon (Hill 1995), the general increase in brooches that marks the FEH can be attributed, at face value, to contact with the *other*, in this case, most likely the Roman army and various associated people, practices and material culture which forced people to renegotiate their identities (Jundi and Hill 1998). Identities were challenged by this contact and as a result were reinforced using existing traditions for the materialisation of identity, including the brooch. The presence of brooches in votive, foundation and abandonment deposits in the Severn Estuary, as well as in burials, shows how important they were as functional items and objects of personal adornment, as well as intentional objects deposited as part of a practice or set of practices that marked specific events. In view of a link between brooches and identity, the incorporation of these items in such practices becomes a key point of discussion when thinking about past identities and the construction of personhood.

Brooches formed part of a network of materialities that helped communicate both personal and group identities. In order for us to step beyond functional and simplistic interpretations of artefacts we must consider the deeper significance these objects held within the knowledge of those who used and owned them. In view of this, brooches served as far more than simple clothes-fasteners or tools for display. Beyond this, their importance was recognised and retained by people living in the Severn Estuary through the late pre-conquest and Roman periods. The votive offerings at sites such as Lydney and Uley suggest that people were giving part of themselves to the gods through the deposition of brooches. The brooches deposited at both Usk and Whitton similarly can be interpreted as the material manifestations of identities, while the presence of the brooches in the mass grave at Gloucester could have been associated with the death of an identity and the reassurance of its presence in the afterlife. Depending on the context of the deposition, the significance of and meaning behind the brooch varied, but people continued to draw on this object as physical manifestation of identity.

What these case studies demonstrate is that identities could be individual, in the sense of the individual graves, or communal, in the sense of the household at Whitton or the soldiers at Usk; they also show that identities played a part in the mediation between both humans and the divine, and with the world beyond life, all of which play their role in the negotiation of

personhood. This paper has aimed to highlight that brooches were intricately tied to something deeper within the composition of a person. As Jundi and Hill (1998) suggest, the display of identity and the relational elements of personhood are far more complex than meets the eye. Identity was intimately linked to world views and physically manifested through material objects as part of a person, or group of people's, physical being. In this case the brooch perhaps served as more than a mere marker or indicator of a person's identity, but instead formed a physical part of themselves.

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