TWO BRONZE AGE SPEARHEADS FROM THE RIVER THAMES

These copper alloy spearheads are about 3,000 years old. They were both dredged from the River Thames, one at Reading and the other at Old Windsor.

Dredging Up the Past. Reading Museum Service holds one of the best collections of archaeological river finds in Great Britain. Reading Museum was one of the earliest founded museums in the Thames Valley and from the 1880s onward it was the natural home for discoveries made during dredging work between the river’s source and west London. Our collection includes items found as far upriver as Lechlade to as far downriver as Teddington. One of these two spearheads was found in the Thames at Reading in the late 19th century. The other was dredged from Old Windsor Backwater by the Thames Conservancy Board in 1963 and forms part of the Thames Water Collection.

Points in Time. Bronze Age spearheads were developed in many beautiful shapes and forms. The spearhead found at Reading has an elegant blade of an elliptical shape, whereas the triangular blade of the spearhead from Old Windsor looks more functional. Bronze Age metalsmiths devised a variety of methods for securing the spearhead to its wooden shaft. The Reading spearhead has two small holes in its socket through which pegs were inserted into the shaft. The Old Windsor spearhead has small loops at the base of the blade which were probably used to tie the spearhead to the shaft. All these features can be used to compare and contrast different finds, to try to place them in a chronology. The Reading spearhead is thought to date to about 800BC. The Old Windsor spearhead is thought to be several hundred years older, dated to about 1400BC.

Gifts to the Gods? Many other weapons of the Bronze Age have been found in the River Thames particularly between Reading and London - perhaps too many for them all to have been careless losses. Were they gifts thrown to river gods? Were they remains from frequent river battles? Or were dead warriors buried on the river accompanied by their favourite swords and spears?

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