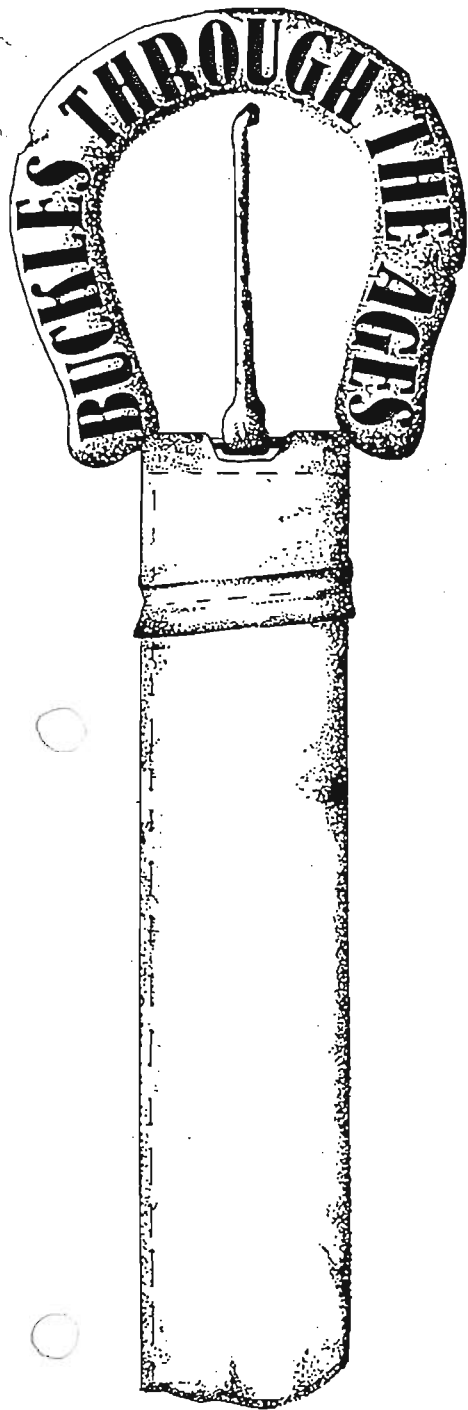# Buckles Through The Ages

by Chris Marshall

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Treasure Hunting

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Part One – Roman
by Chris Marshall

Over the next few months I shall be passing on to the readers of *Treasure Hunting* all the information on the subject of buckles that my recent research has produced. Hopefully, along with my drawings, this will form a useful catalogue of buckle types to enable the metal detective, and others, to identify their finds. There is certainly a need for this as my research has failed to find one book that includes all the range of buckles that I intend to cover – that is from the Roman to the Georgian period. However, although the relevant information is widely scattered, there are some useful works on individual periods and these will be listed with acknowledgements at the end of the series.

All the buckles drawn and described have been found in England either by archaeological methods, by chance, or by metal detectives, but this does not necessarily imply that they originated in England, particularly during the invasion and migratory periods. In many cases exact dating is not possible within our present knowledge, and therefore a date has only been given where a find has been made in a secure context, as for instance in a grave where other dateable objects such as coins are included. Even so this can be misleading as to take just one example, many Roman artefacts and coins are found in otherwise seemingly Anglo-Saxon period graves. Wherever possible therefore I have placed the buckles in periods by type, associated finds, and context.

The possible origin

The Oxford dictionary defines the buckle as a metal rim with hinged, spiked tongue for securing a strap or ribbon etc, and the name is derived from the Latin *buccula* (cheek-strap or visor). Here we have a clue to the possible origin of the buckle as a piece of cavalry or military equipment amongst the Romans, and it is true that there is no evidence of the use of buckles in England before the Roman invasion. It is likely therefore that they were introduced by the Roman soldier and subsequently copied and produced by the native bronzesmiths. (see fig 1:31)

The history of buckles is allied closely to the development of costume and the loose and flowing garments of the civilian Roman at this time did not require the use of buckles. This is clearly demonstrated when one compares the number of brooches and dress pins found on civil sites with the number of buckles. The Roman soldier certainly did use buckles on his swordbelt, baldrick, and also for strapping together his laminated plate armour, and this is attested by the numbers that are found on fortified sites. Roman villas have produced a few examples of military type buckles – particularly of the 4th-5th centuries – and this had led some people to conjecture that these sites may have been defended at some stage against Saxon raiding parties. By far the greatest number of these buckles however, particularly in the earlier period, have been found in Roman military contexts.

Whenever a strap or belt was used the buckle was the best means of providing a strong method of fastening which at the same time could be readily adjusted and no doubt at an early stage the buckle would also have been adapted for use on military horse harness. A particular type has not been recognised although there are several buckles illustrated that could have served this purpose (eg fig 14-18). Next month I shall be looking at late-Roman and sub-Roman types of the fourth and fifth centuries AD. ▣TH


DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF ROMAN BUCKLES

1 Separate hinge-pin passing through the drilled ends of the buckle-loop and joining all the component pieces – fig 1: no's 3; 4; 7-13; 35

2 Separate hinge-pin passing through cast rings on the buckle-loop and joining all the component pieces – fig 1: no's 20-33

3 Buckle loops 'D' and sub-'D' shape. Many of this type has involuted terminals – fig 1: no's 14-25

4 Buckle-loops rectangular or sub-rectangular with decorative knobs on corners of leading edge – fig 1: no's 2; 27-29

5 Tongues plain or incised decoration. The barred tongue, a feature of military buckles, appears early and late – fig 1: no's 28; 35

6 Some armour buckles have a double-hinge plate – fig 1: no 10

7 Buckle-plates either cast integral with hinge-rings (31), or sheet metal hooked over hinge-pin (34; 35)

8 Buckle-plates plain (35), inlaid enamel (31; 33), niello (32), or *repousse* (34)

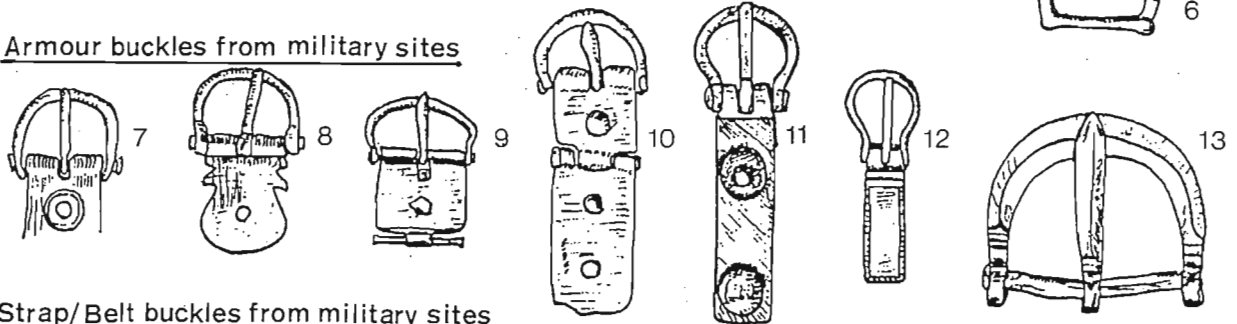## EXAMPLES FROM DATED CONTEXTS

First century AD – no's 7-10; 13; 30; 32

Late-first/early-second century AD – no 27

Early-fourth century AD – no 2

Fourth century – no 34

From Villa sites
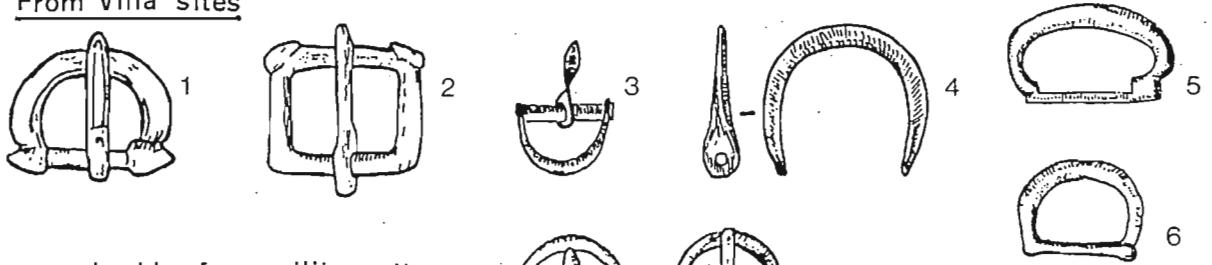
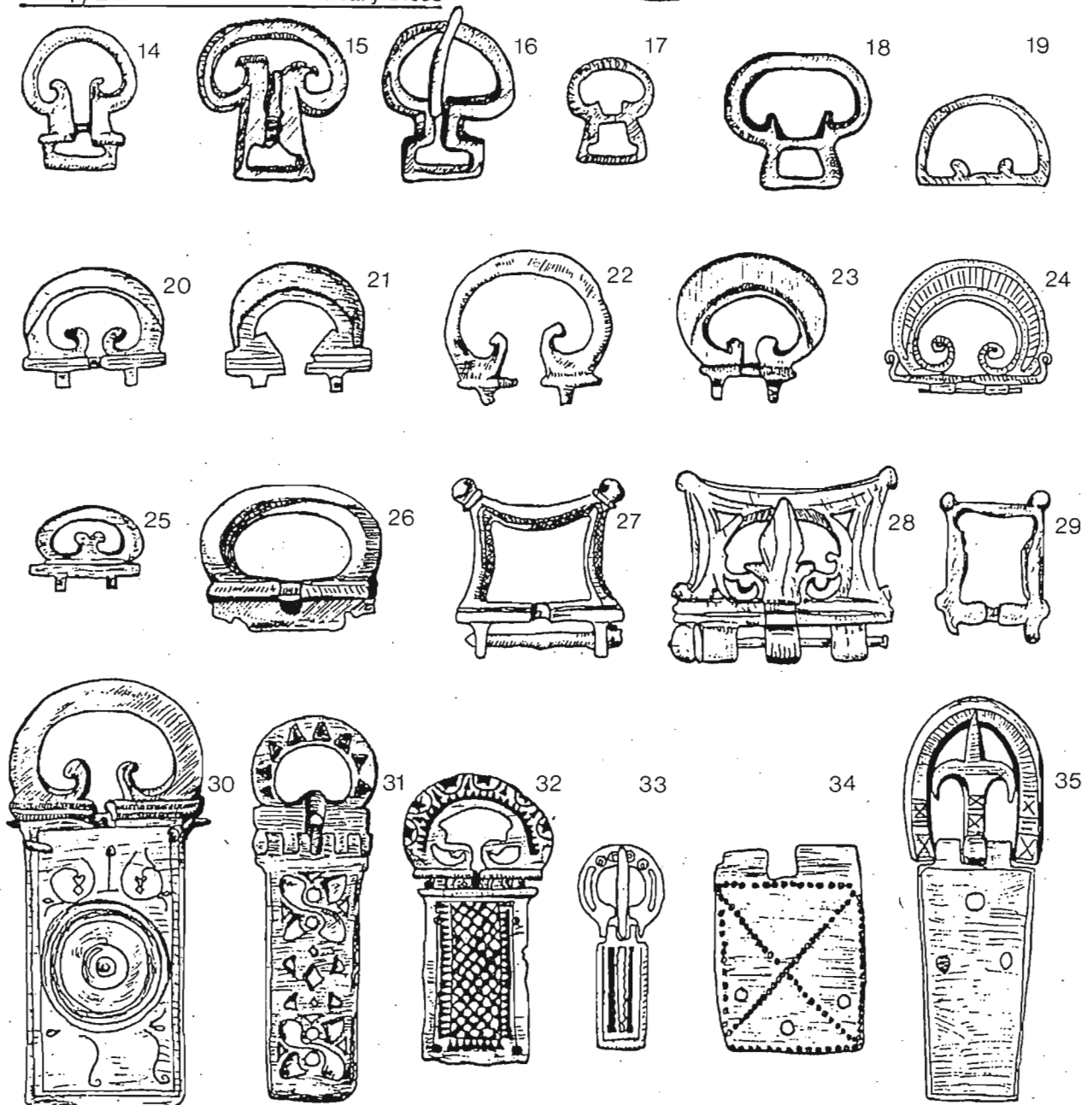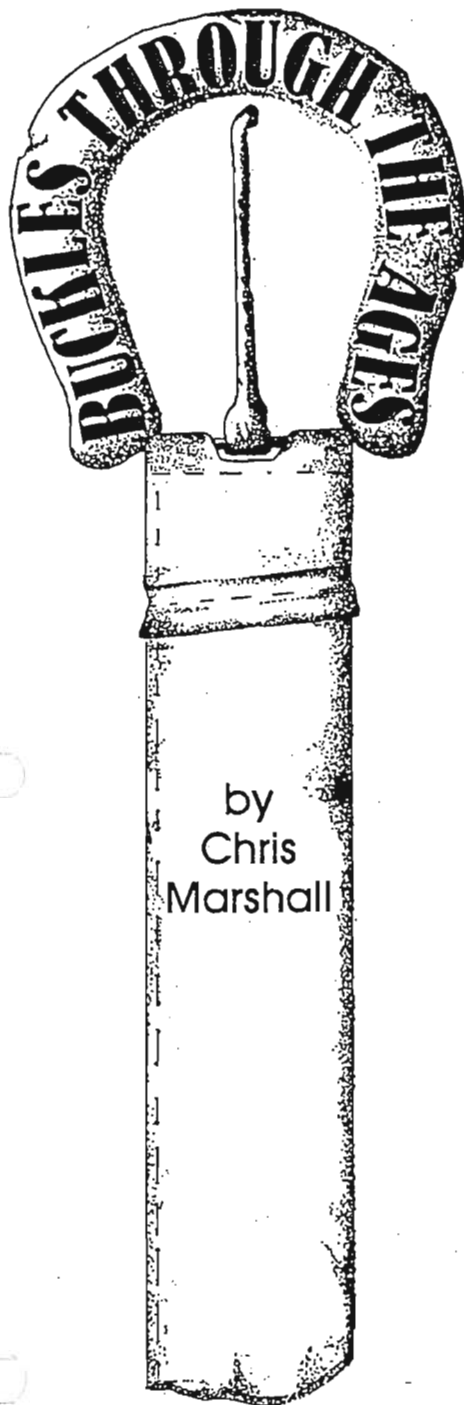Armour buckles from military sites

Strap/Belt buckles from military sites

Fig.1 Roman 1st – 4th century

Scale: 71%

BUCKLES THROUGH THE AGES

Part 2 – Roman and Anglo-Saxon Fourth to Fifth Centuries

by
Chris
Marshall

All the buckles described in this section have as a feature of their design, a representation of an animal, a decorative style known as *zoomorphic*. They have all been found in England on Roman military and civil sites and also in Anglo-Saxon graves. As with all the buckles in this series they have been found by a variety of method including the use of metal detectors. Several of these buckle types have also been found in other parts of the Roman Empire and yet others appear to be of native manufacture only.

These zoomorphic buckles were first classified by Hawkes and Dunning[1] in a pioneering article – *'Soldiers and Settlers in Britain, Fourth to Fifth Century'*. The article also included an important catalogue of finds that had been made up until 1961, and in which the typology of these buckles was first laid out. The conclusions of this paper were that some of this metalwork was of a Continental military type which was worn by Germans in the pay of the Roman army brought over from Northern Gaul by Count Theodosius in the time of Valentinian I (364-375AD). Some of this metalwork was then copied, with some variation in style, and produced by native craftsmen.

Over the last twenty-five years, these theories have often been challenged and occasionally amended, and indeed there is some reason to doubt the English origin of some of the Type I buckles, as they have now been found in some numbers on the Continent. Also, since the article was written, many more examples have been found in England from a variety of sites and one proposed theory is that these buckles formed part of a belt-set worn as a badge of office by civil as well as military officials. Of the Type I buckles from Anglo-Saxon graves,

all have been worn by women and if they were the wives of officials, these women may have worn similar belt-sets as a mark of their husbands' rank. Unlike the Romans, the girdle or belt was a normal feature of Germanic dress.

The original article by Hawkes and Dunning was therefore invaluable for the typology, for drawing attention to some previously neglected late-Roman metalwork, and for stimulating more research into the subject. The distribution of this metalwork is important for determining the events of a crucial period in our history, and I would therefore urge anyone who has found such a piece to record it at a Museum.

As stated, the above typology follows that laid down by Hawkes and Dunning, but at this stage I would like to suggest that there may possibly be another subtype not accounted for. I have seen two examples[2] with the double hinge-bar that have confronted 'dolphin' heads on the loop, and not across the hinge-bar as normal in type IIC – compare figs 23; 24 with fig 25. If this is accepted, then this new type should become Type IIC, with Hawkes and Dunning IIC reverting to a new category – Type IID. The typology then continues as before with Type III – the animal-heads facing across the hinge-bar.

That concludes the series of Roman and sub-Roman buckles. Next month I shall be describing some Anglo-Saxon types that have been found in England.

1. *Medieval Archaeology (1961).* My thanks to Mrs Hawkes for allowing me to base my drawings on those in her typology.
2. (i) G. Bailey in ***Treasure Hunting*** (June 1982)
(ii) Leahy in *A Prospect of Lincolnshire* (1985)

Figures in bold from Anglo-Saxon graves, the rest from Roman sites

TYPE IA – buckle with D shaped loop formed of confronted 'dolphins' with pellet between open jaws and straight hinge-bar cast in one piece with the loop (fig 2 no's 2; 3; **4**; 5; 8; 9; 10; 11). Decoration by punched dots, stamped ornament or transverse grooving. Buckle-plates are of sheet bronze doubled over the hinge-bar and riveted. Decoration by stamped ornament and engraved geometric design (fig 2 no's 1; 6; 7; 11; 12). Fig 2:12 is a variant with a separate hinge-pin.

TYPE IB – Similar buckle-loop to Type IA but developed into outward facing 'horse heads'. In some the 'dolphins' are still distinguishable but the horse heads are the dominant feature (fig 2 no's 13; **14**; 15). Buckle-plates same as above.

TYPE IIA – Buckles of separate loop, tongue, and plate joined by a separate hinge-pin (fig 2 no's 16; 17; 18; 19; 20). The loop is similar to Type IA but the terminals, instead of forming the hinge-bar for the tongue and plate, are turned inwards (involuted). The loop and tongue have rings which interlock with those on the plate and the whole is then hinged by the pin through the middle. The tongue is often barred (rather like a fleur-de-lis) and interlocks with the involuted terminals of the buckle loop. The buckle-plate is cast and is usually of openwork design (as no's 17; 18; 19), with punched ring-and-dot ornament.

TYPE IIB – Similar to Type IIA but the loop and plate are cast in one piece (fig 2 no's **21**; 22).

TYPE IIC – Another variation of Type IIA, with two hinge-bars cast in one piece with the loop – one for the tongue and the lower one for the attachment of a strap or buckle-plate (fig 2 no's **23; 24**). There are two conjoined animal heads either side of the hinge-bars.

TYPE IIIA – In this category the buckle-loop terminates in open-jawed animal heads confronted across the hinge-bar (fig 2 no's **26**; 27). The buckle-loops are plain or decorated with chip-carving and incised or stamped designs. The buckle-plates are cast or cut from sheet metal folded double over the hinge-bar and are of semi-circular or square shape.

TYPE IIIB – As Type IIIA but the buckle-loop and plate are cast in one piece (fig 2 no's **28; 29; 30**).

TYPE IVA – Similar buckle-loop to Type IIIA/B but set inside a one or two-piece rectangular plate with chip-carved ornament (fig 2 no's 31; 32).

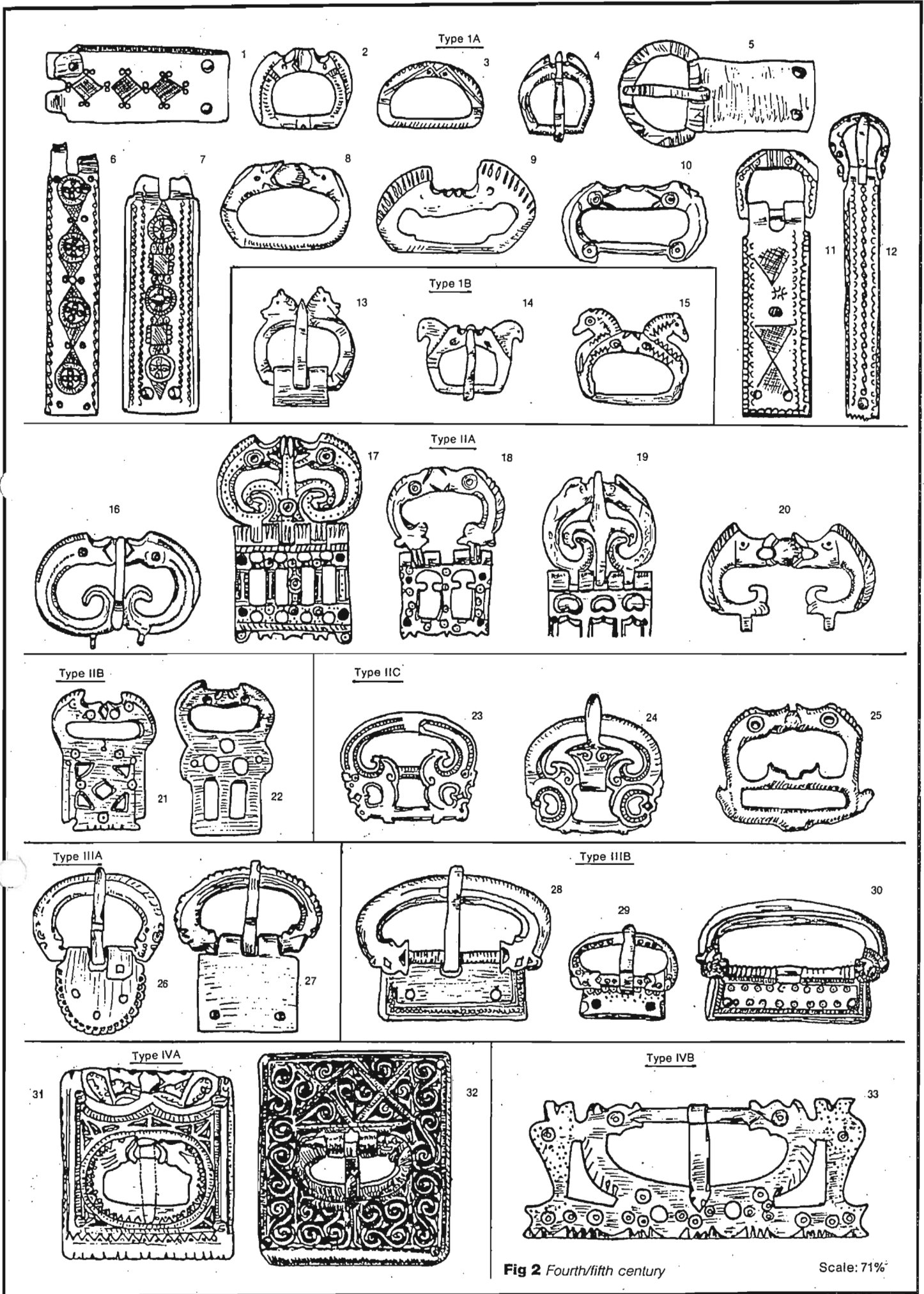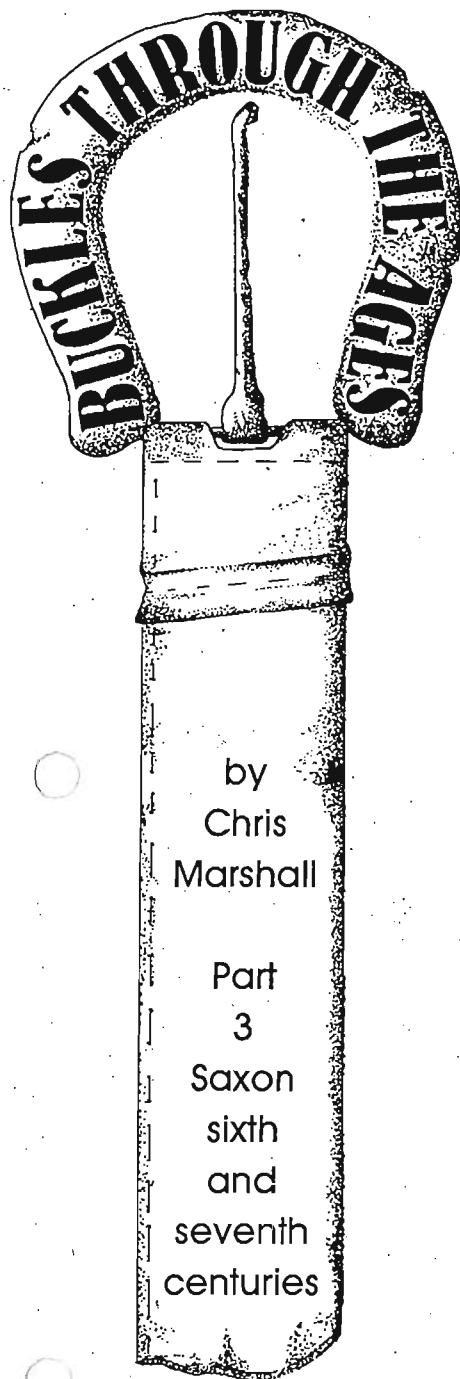**TYPE IVB** – Similar buckle-loop to Type IIIA/B but set inside an openwork frame (fig 2 no 33).

Fig 2 Fourth/fifth century

Scale: 71%

BUCKLES THROUGH THE AGES

by
Chris
Marshall

Part
3

Saxon
sixth
and
seventh
centuries

Much of the evidence for metalwork in this period is derived from the excavation of burial sites because the pagan Saxons, when not practising cremation, buried their dead in full dress and with all the equipment required for the afterlife. Habitation sites of this period have not yet for the most part been discovered or extensively explored, and in those that have there has been a shortage of metalwork present. Metal detectives of course can fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge by finding artefacts from previously unknown sites that have subsequently been ploughed-out.

The buckle was an important dress accessory of the Anglo-Saxons, and this is proved by the numbers that have been found buried with their owners. The quality of metalwork during this period was of an extremely high order attested by some of the magnificent examples that have been found, made in precious metals and inlaid with garnets and niello etc. The most famous buckle found to date is undoubtedly the superbly crafted gold buckle from the Sutton Hoo ship burial dated to 625 AD and possibly belonging to King Raedwald of East Anglia.

It is not completely beyond the bounds of possibility that a metal detective might find such a buckle – witness the Roman gold buckle from the Thetford hoard – and I personally know of one instance where a metal detective has found a silver buckle in association with a sceat, which is likely to be from the site of a burial. However, I have preferred throughout this series to concentrate on the types that are likely to be more commonly found and thus aid in their identification.

During the Anglo-Saxon period, the belt or girdle was in common use. No doubt for those for whom metalwork was not available the solution would be a simple tie or knot, but enough buckles have survived to suggest that, at least for those that could afford the luxury, the buckle was generally used. The metals employed in their manufacture were gold, silver, bronze and iron, with the techniques of gilding and inlaying with silver wire also being used.

Regarding the styles of the buckles, the loops are basically variations on the oval or D shape, with the occasional square or rectangular shape encountered (no's 12; 20; 34). Some of the loops are decorated and/or inlaid with silver wire (no's 3; 11; 21; 22). Transverse grooving on the loop – often grouped in sets of three – are indicative of a Saxon date (no's 21; 26-29).

Buckle tongues

The tongues are very often plain and completely functional but there is a class that has a very distinctive violin shape (no's 5; 7; 8; 12). Variations on this decorative type of tongue (no's 3; 4; 6; 9-11; 21). Two personal observations made on the buckle tongues of this period which may be used as a rule of thumb to aid identification are that they very often curve over the leading edge of the loop and that as a consequence, they are often longer than the loop itself and therefore protrude beyond it. Some of these tongues are fixed and only the buckle-loop is moveable.

There is probably a greater variety of buckle-plates in this period than in any other. They generally consist of the sandwich type, common in all periods, in which the plate is folded over the hinge-bar of the loop and riveted either side of the strap, or are of the type that is cast in one-piece with the loop and laid-on and riveted to the outside of the strap. Examples of this latter type include (no's 1; 13; 28; 29; 36). The one-piece cast buckles very often have openwork in the casting (no's 28; 29; 36).

The shapes of the plates are numerous. The triangular plate, very often decorated with large dome-headed rivets has been likened to a horse's head (no's 1; 2; 3; 4). There are several other shapes peculiar to this period including the heart and semi-circle (no's 23; 24), and sub-triangular (no's 9; 15-19; 25). Note the shape of the plates on no's 37 and 38 – these are very similar to the terminals on later zoomorphic tags that are generally of the 9th and later centuries.

Decoration of the buckle and plate as mentioned earlier, reaches a high point in the early and middle-Saxon period. The examples shown here however are fairly straightforward although no's 3; 11; 21; 22 are inlaid. The ubiquitous decoration known commonly as ring-dot is often used (no's 28; 29; 42; 44), but is of little use as an aid to dating as it appears on artefacts ranging from the late-Roman period through to the twelfth century. As a point of interest, number 4 is the only example that I know of that depicts a buckle upon a buckle.

Shoe-shaped

Another distinctive feature on some of these buckle-plates, are the rivets. In particular, the examples shown on no's 5 and 6 are unusual and are usually described as shoe shaped. They have also been found in association with buckle types 7 and 11 from both the same cemetery. The tang of these rivets is pierced to secure them on the inner face of the belt with a fine bar or wire. Other unusual rivets are the large dome-headed type featured on examples 3 and 4 which in the jewelled versions are often decorated with cells of garnets or pais lazuli – a mineralised limestone the colour of azure.

The last example for discussion is number 40, the reverse of which is number 41. The shape of the loop and plate are characteristic of the seventh century but the plate is unusual in being engraved both sides and having applied relief ornament consisting of a cast central midrib and twisted border, both of which have zoomorphic terminals. Even more unusual however is the means by which the five separate pieces are interlocked and held together by the ingenious use of only two central rivets. The fish on the reverse is the separate plate by which the rivets are secured. It has been suggested that the fish in this instance is a symbol of Christianity, and this may be so, as conversion of the pagan saxons to Christianity was gathering pace throughout the seventh century. Perhaps the owner of this buckle was not yet ready to proclaim his new found religion publically and therefore its symbol was relegated to the reverse of the buckle where it would still nevertheless afford protection to the wearer.

That concludes the buckles of the sixth and seventh centuries. It would be as well to remember at this stage that with the coming of Christianity and its influence on the burial practices of the time, that the evidence from grave goods is lost to us but some at least of these types may have continued in use to a much later date. Next month I will be looking at the buckles from the period 8th-12th centuries when metal work evidence is much scarcer. [TH]
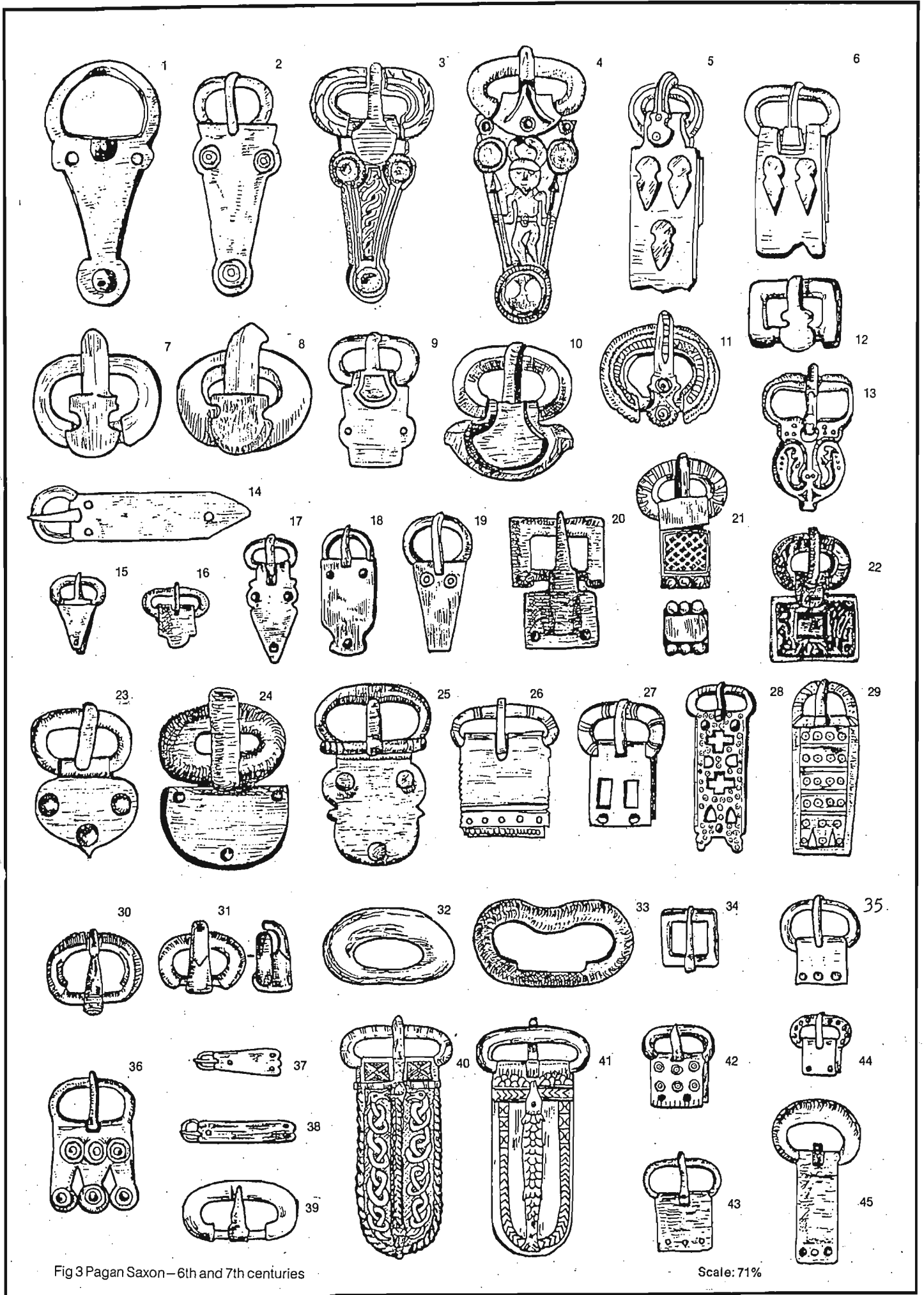
Fig 3 Pagan Saxon – 6th and 7th centuries

Scale: 71%

The evidence for buckles of this period from the 9th-12th century is irregular and consists of examples from hoards, excavations, chance finds, and increasingly by the use of metal detectors. The buckles in the accompanying diagrams have been arranged in a typological sequence which it is hoped will be a standard by which future finds, or those still awaiting recording, can be identified. They have been arranged under three main type headings – TYPE I (non-zoomorphic) with four sub-types; TYPE II (zoomorphic) with three sub-types; and TYPE III (zoomorphic) with four sub-types.

Catalogue

(All copper-alloy unless otherwise stated)

TYPE IA – buckles with undecorated loops (no's 1-3). Buckles as ordinary as these are difficult to date in any period, but these at least can be approximately dated by association with other artefacts. Number 1 is from the famous Trewhiddle hoard found in 1774 and deposited on the coin evidence to c 872-875AD. It was the only item in the hoard that was not made of silver. Numbers 2 and 3 come from the site of Whitby Abbey (Arch 89;1943) which was founded in 657AD and destroyed by the Danes in 867AD.

TYPE IB – buckles with decorated loops (no's 4-8). Number 4 is from York (Arch J 116;1959) and is described as Anglo-Danish. It has a chased pattern on the loop and traces of a white-metal coating. Numbers 5 and 6 are again from Whitby with a possible date range of 657-867AD. Number 5 is lightly engraved with a triangular pattern whilst number 6 has a roughly incised pattern on the loop. Number 7 is from the Cuerdale hoard which is dated before 903AD and it has a heavy loop decorated with birds. Number 8 was found by the author in an area which has produced metalwork of the 9th-11th centuries. It is decorated with ring-dot ornament on the loop.

TYPE IC – buckles with moulded decoration on the loop (no's 9-12). The published evidence for this type comes from Cheshire – *Ancient Meols*, Rev Hume, 1863, and is further expanded by Bu'lock (THSL 112;1960), who argues that the type may originate from earlier zoomorphic styles (see my Fig 2; no's 13-15). A similar type is also evident in the 13th century although the mouldings are by then much lighter in form. A date range of the 9th-11th century is tentatively suggested.

TYPE ID – buckles made of bone (no's 13-16). Bone and indeed ivory carving was a highly skilled art in this period – number 16 with its intricate interlace design attests to that. It has a bronze tongue and therefore could have been detected. Number 13 is from excavations at Goltho, Lincs (SMA Monograph 6) and from the traces of rust still adhering, could have had an iron tongue. Numbers 14 and 15

are from York (Arch 97; 1959). Number 14 is decorated with a triquetra knot.

BUCKLE PLATES – (no's 17-20) are usually of the sheet bronze 'sandwich' type – number 19 of those illustrated being the exception and is cast. Decoration is of three types – geometric (17/19), animal (18), and floral (20). The animal types at least continue into the early-Medieval period, and are often gilded.

TYPE IIA – three animal heads/two heads plus decorative knop (no's 21-25). This is the first of the zoomorphic types which is characterised by three decorative heads (as no's 21 and 22) or two heads biting the bar and a decorative knop on the loop (as no's 23-25). Number 21 was found at Old Sarum in 1817 and dated stylistically to the 9th-11th century. Number 22, (after Alan – *Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds from Exeter*, 1984) also has three heads and comes from an archaeologically dated context of 1200-50AD. Number 25 is dated as late as the 14th century in Ilse Fingerlin – *Gürtel des Hohen und Späten Mittelalters* by comparison to a buckle from the mass graves of the Battle of Visby (1361AD). There are however much closer parallels from sources nearer to home. A stray find from Beckhampton (number 24) is of the same type and is dated stylistically to the 12th century. Number 23 is a reconstruction of a broken example from Goltho, Lincs – a site which produced other late-Saxon/early-Medieval metalwork. This type therefore has its roots in the late-Saxon period with a possible continuation to early-Medieval.

TYPE IIB – two animals biting bar (no's 26-36). Examples of this group are the most numerous that have been recorded. Numbers 26/27 and 29/30 are again from Ancient Meols and date 9th-11th century. Number 28 (VCH Cambs1) was found with a skeleton on Royston Heath, and dated by its 'Trewhiddle style' to the 9th century. Number 31 excavated on the DMV site of Wharram Percy (SMA Monograph 8) and a more decorated example from Lyveden are dated stylistically to the 11th century. Number 32 from Whitby Abbey is a bone example with cresting around the loop. Number 33 is poorly cast in an openwork style reminiscent of the strapends in this style of the 10th-11th century. Number 34 is another poorly cast specimen with two animals and a 'blundered' triquetra knot (as number 14) at the head of the loop, and dates to the 11th century. Numbers 35 and 36 from the Thetford excavations (EAA22;1984) have highly stylised zoomorphic decoration.

TYPE IIC – two animals forming loop with heads to front (number 37). Only one example of this type has been recorded and it was found in the River Witham, Lincs. It now resides in the Alnwick Castle collection where it is dated to the 12th century. The buckle-plate is unusual in having a box-like frame to which is attached a 'winged harpy'.

Part 4 – Late Saxon to Early Medieval. by Chris Marshall

TYPE IIIA – single head to front of loop/buckle loop and plate cast in one piece (no's 38 and 39). Number 38 (Wilson, 1964) has two rivet holes in a stepped panel for attachment. The pin is of sheet bronze and is retained in an oval hole in the casting. Number 39 from Chichester is of a similar type but without the stepped panel.

TYPE IIIB – single head to front of loop/separate buckleplate (no's 40 and 41). Number 40 is again from Meols. Number 41 is an evolved example which was found 'with 13th century pottery' near Eastbourne and it may therefore be a survival of the type. However, it was found with a braid still intact between the buckleplates, of a type that was common around 1000AD. Some Medieval types with pointed loops may be related to this group.

TYPE IIIC – single head to front of loop/double loop (number 42). The animal head on this example is very similar to number 39 but this buckle from Northampton (NA16;1981) has a double loop which is most unusual on such an early buckle. The head is in the Urnes style – a Viking art form that persisted into the 12th century.

TYPE IIID – single animal forming loop/head biting bar (number 43). The example illustrated was found by the author on a Lincolnshire village site. It is cast in a very stylised zoomorphic form and has a bronze core with a heavy white-metal coating. The body forms the loop with tail to left and head biting bar to right.

REFERENCES

ARCH – Archaeologia
ARCH J – Archaeological Journal
EAA – East Anglian Archaeology
NA16;1981 – Northamptonshire Archaeology
SMA – Society for Medieval Archaeology
THSL – Transactions Historical Society of Lancashire
VCH – Victoria County History
WILSON – Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork 700-1100 in the British Museum (1964)

Fig 4 Late-Saxon to Early-Medieval.

Scale: 71%
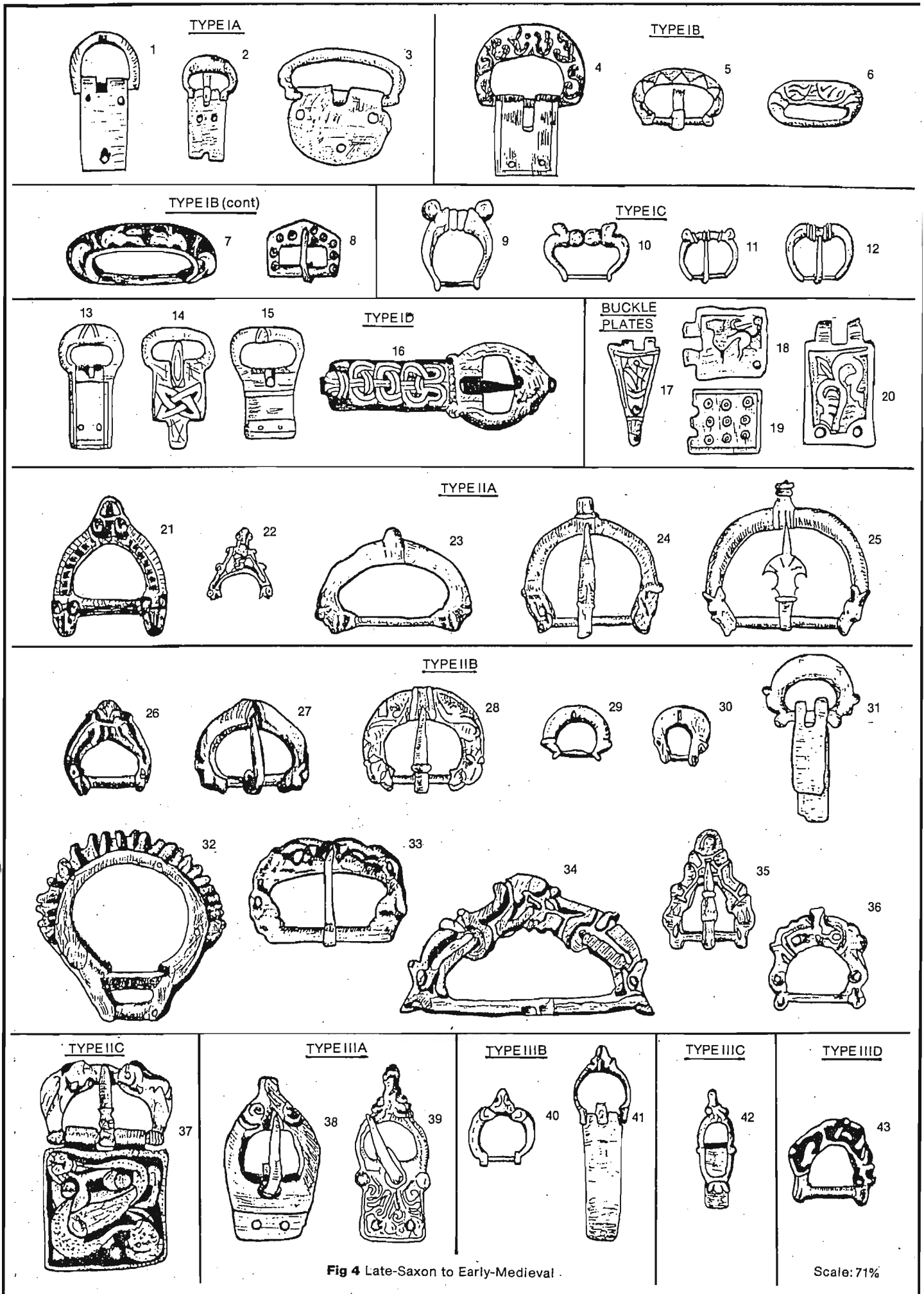
BUCKLES THROUGH THE AGES

Part 5 — MEDIEVAL
13th to 15th Century
by Chris Marshall

Metal detectives over the last few years have been responsible for locating very many buckles of the Medieval period. Although seldom of any intrinsic value, they were at one time quite rare artefacts for the very reason that nobody had bothered to save them. Now that we have the means of relocating them, comes the problem of identification and in particular the dating of Medieval artefacts is still no easy task despite the advantages over earlier periods of written records, mauscripts, paintings, monuments, brasses and even our knowledge of bequests in wills, of buckles in precious metals.

So much attention in the past has been focused on the earlier annals in our history, particularly the Roman period, that we had been in some cases, more knowledgeable of Roman artefacts than their Medieval counterparts. I have used the past tense because since the publication of the London Museum Medieval Catalogue in 1940 the imbalance has improved considerably.

This publication still remains the artefact 'bible' for the period but due to a much larger corpus of material now available for study, it is overdue for some revision. Metal detectives have of course contributed to this increase of material in recent years and some of the finds are reflected in these articles. There must be many interesting buckles however that have yet to be recorded and it is hoped that people will respond and have them recorded for the benfit of all.

As in my previous article I have attempted to place the buckles together in types with the addition that each type now has a dating guide. I have also tried where possible to introduce a certain amount of chronology between the groups and to the buckles within each group. However, I must stress once again that these dates can only be approximate, as much work is still to be done before we can use buckles as a dating guide in the manner of coins. Perhaps this will never be possible but until it can be done I believe these dates serve a useful purpose and for that reason they have been included here.

CATALOGUE — All copper-alloy unless stated otherwise

TYPE IA – buckles with enamelled loops (Nos 1-3). Date range 1200-1250AD. There is no proof that this type was ever produced in England as they are of the Limoge school of enamelling but some examples have been found which is not surprising when one considers the interplay between England and France at this time. Types are single-loop (No 2) and loop with separate bars for the tongue and buckleplate (Nos 1 and 3).

TYPE 1B – buckles with decorative loops (Nos 4-16). Date range 1250-1350AD. A large group of buckles of small module, many of which are reasonably common on Medieval sites. Number 12 has a thin sheet-bronze revolving cylinder on the loop. A distinctive feature on examples 15 and 16 are the two little projections on each side of the loop.

TYPE IC – buckles with 'crested' loops (Nos 17-22). Date range 1250-1350AD. These are unusual buckles that are not commonly found, number 22 being the least rare of this type and is probably later than the others. Number 17 is not far removed from the zoomorphic style of the later-Saxon period. They are usually of a larger module than the preceding group.

TYPE ID – buckles with loop and plate in one piece (Nos 23-29). Date range 1250-1400AD. Generally of small to medium size, these buckles were riveted directly onto a strap. They may have served among other things as spur buckles. Number 23 is early and may have originated in the later Saxon period. Number 26 has an openwork plate with a trefoil terminal, a feature which it shares with number 27.

TYPE IE – buckles with circular loops (Nos 30-33). Date range 1275-1425. Surprisingly these are not all that common. Numbers 30 and 31 are of iron with hooked terminals and are therefore spur buckles. Number 33 from my own collection is an interesting example. These have been mistaken for buckle-brooches in the past but the finding of this specimen with a buckle-plate still attached to the central bar has disproved that theory. The tongue is unusual in having a flat circular section, the centre of which has been filled with a white substance thay may have formed a setting for a 'paste' jewel.

TYPE IF – buckles with semi-circular or 'D' shaped loops (Nos 34-48). Date range 1250-1500 plus. A large group with sizes varying from small to large which would probably benefit from further analysis into sub-types in the future to allow for closer dating. Number 34 is the largest and earliest (13th c) of this group and is of iron with engraving on the loop. Number 35 has a small buckle-plate with two rivets forming the centre of an engraved floral design. Both buckle and plate are gilded. Number 36 was found in a context of 1330-1360. It also is gilded. Number 39 has a similar loop with the addition of a revolving cylinder. Number 37 is of an elongated shape and is from a context of

1300-1350. Number 38 is difficult to date as the type had a long life, but this example came from a context of 1275-1400. Numbers 40 and 41 have broader loops with rectangular plates and two rivets. Example 41 has a design cast in the loop and is gilded. Number 42 comes from a 14th century context. Numbers 44 and 45 have decorative loops that have been engraved or punched, and the style is believed to be 14th century. Example 46 is also of the 14th century and has characteristic spurs on the ends of the bar. Numbers 47 and 48 have similar loops but number 47 has a revolving cylinder similar to example 39. They are believed to date to the 1450-1500 period.

TYPE IG – buckles with pointed loop and forked spacer plate (Nos 49-51). Date range 1350-1400. A common type of small to medium module in which the forked extensions of the loop form the base to which the separate top and bottom plates are soldered. The forks and backs of the plates are roughly filed to key the solder, traces of which may often be seen on examples that are parted. Number 51 shows the basic structure with numbers 49 and 50 showing the buckle-plates. The zig-zag engraving on 49 is common on buckle plates and shapes of this period.

TYPE IH – buckles with pointed loop without forked spacer (Nos 52-58). Date range 1350-1450. Many of these are so similar to the preceding type that they must have been contemporary. Number 52 is larger than most and has a notch to locate the tongue, as do examples 53 and 54. Number 55 has the normal plate in which the strap is inserted and secured by rivets and both this and the loop are 'tinned' with a white-metal coating. Numbers 56 and 57 are the standard type but number 58 is broader with a decorative edge and dates to the 15th century.

TYPE IJ – buckles of trapezium shape (Nos 59-67). Date range 1350-1500. This is quite a large group although they are not so commonly found. They vary from small to very large size. Number 59 is early for this type and is rare. Number 60 is also early and has been gilded. Numbers 61-63 have decorated loops which have been punched in dot, circle and triangular designs. All three have a concave leading edge – a very distinctive feature. The buckle-plate of example 62 is engraved all over with various geometric designs. Number 65 can be dated to the late 15th century, from a context of 1485. Number 66 is dated 1400-1425 and number 67 is from a context of 1450-1500

TYPE IK – buckles with square or rectangular loops (numbers 68-74). Date range 1275-1500 plus. There are many buckles in this form which are of iron. Most of them would be used on harness and are Medieval and post-Medieval in date. Examples in copper-alloy are not so common, the most frequent type being numbers 68 and 69. Both would have had a revolving cylinder on the loop but number 68 has the two small casting 'spurs' on each side of the loop, whilst number 69 is plain and slightly more rectangular.
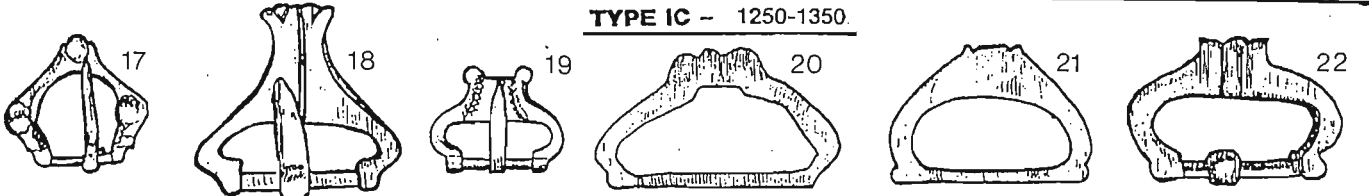
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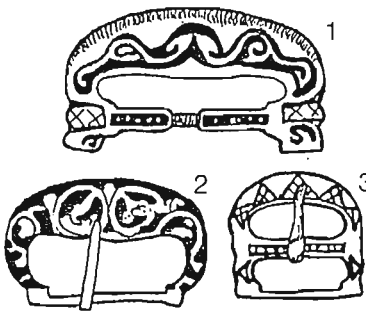
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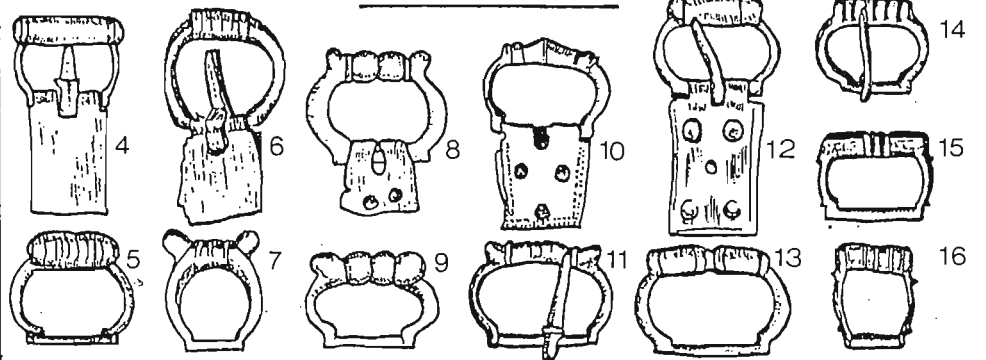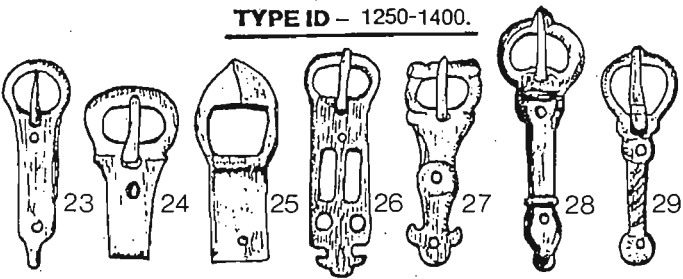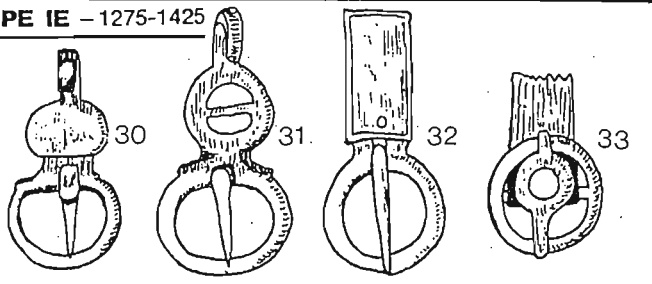
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TYPE ID – 1250-1400.

TYPE IE – 1275-1425

TYPE IF – 1250-1500+
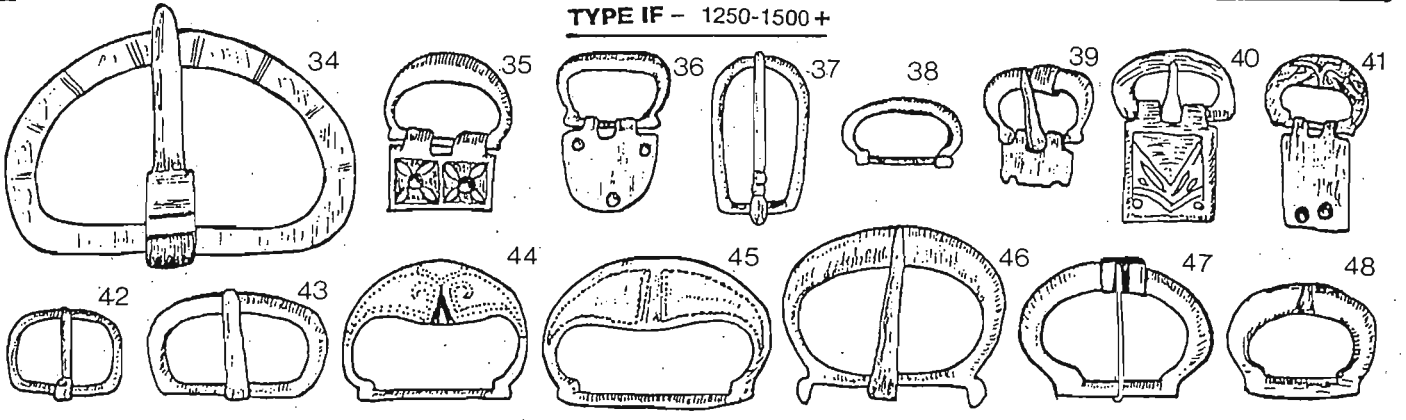
TYPE IG – 1350-1400.
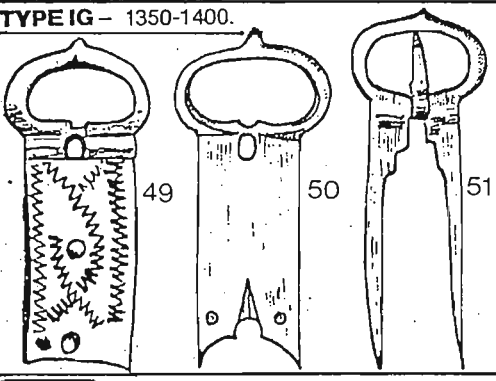
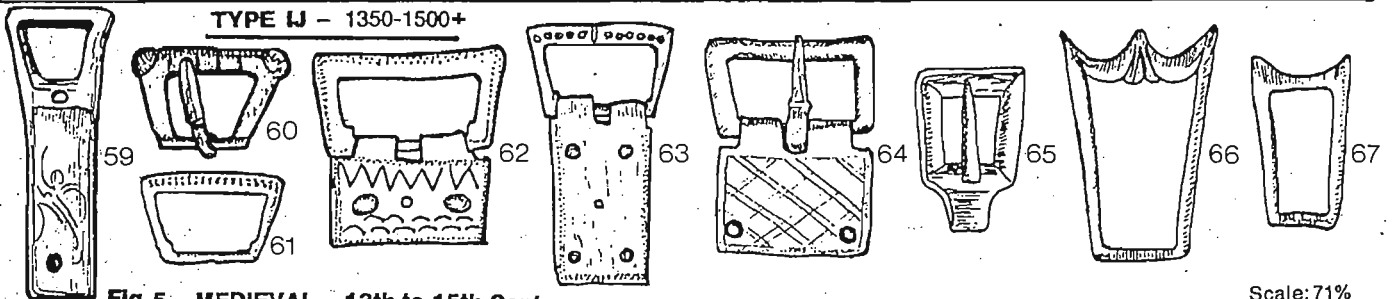**TYPE IH** – 1350-1450.
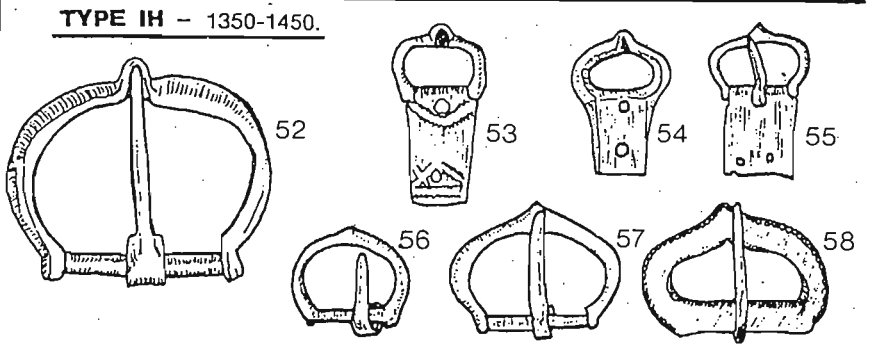
TYPE IJ – 1350-1500+

Fig 5 – MEDIEVAL – 13th to 15th Century

Scale: 71%

PART SIX MEDIEVAL 13TH TO 15TH CENTURY
(Continuation of single-loop types)

When found without the cylinder or buckle-plate, the loop of number 68 is indistinguishable from that of number 125 (Type IVB). Number 70 is from a context of 1375-1500. Number 71 of square form is of the 14th century. Number 72 has a square extension on the loop against which the tongue rests and is of the 14th/15th century. Number 73 has decorative knops of the loop and stops on the hinge-bar. Number 74 has incised decoration on the loop and is a late example in this group.

TYPE IL – one-piece cast buckles with circular loops (numbers 75-76). Date range 1350-1400. These decorative buckles are rarely found. Number 75 has a loop reminiscent of some Medieval brooches, and the plate also has elaborately cast ornament. There is a hole in the casting for retaining the tongue. Number 76 has a bar for the tongue and has the letters 'IHC' on the plate.

TYPE IM – one-piece lyre-shaped buckles (numbers 77-78). Date range 1390-1420. These are members of a well known and distinctive group of buckles and chapes although they are not commonly found. They are well represented on monumental brasses and this suggests use by the upper classes and also enables more accurate dating of this type than is often possible with others. Number 77 has a pierced trefoil terminal and unpierced side-scrolls.

Number 78 is similar but has a leaf terminal and internal trefoil on the loop. This example has been described as a chape but the hole in the casting is likely to be for a tongue. The internal trefoil would not interfere with the passage of the strap if it was inserted across the tongue from the side. This method became a popular means of fastening the belt in the later Medieval period and is responsible for some buckles reaching much larger proportions than in previous times.

The buckle was attached to the strap via the box-like plate and secured by two rivets. This example was plated with an amalgam of 70% tin and 30% silver. The strap-end chapes are similar but have no hole for a tongue and usually have a standing figure of St Christopher leaning on a staff and bearing Christ on his shoulders in the centre of the loop.

TYPE IN – buckles with kidney-shaped loops (numbers 79-82). Date range 1450-1500 plus. These are a late-Medieval type. Numbers 79 and 80 have very wide loops and short tongues. Number 80 has a separate iron hinge-pin for the tongue and plate, and is therefore an early example of this form of construction. Buckle loops of this type are usually cast but they are also known formed of sheet metal. The buckles of Type II are an intermediary style between the single-loop buckles (Types IA-IN), and the true double-loop buckles (Types IIIA-IIIC). I have yet to see an example of Type IIA with a buckle-plate attached and on many the strap must have been folded directly over the bar and riveted together.

TYPE IIA – buckles with separate strap and tongue bars (numbers 83-88). Date range 1375-1500. Many of these may have been used for hanging the sword and dagger belt but two of these were found during excavations at Guildford Priory which may suggest other uses. The oval loops are the most frequently found, with number 84 being the most common.

TYPE IIB – buckles with central hinge-bar and asymetrical loops (numbers 89-94). Date range 1350-1500 plus. Most of this group seem to be from the later-Medieval period. Numbers 89 to 91 are of iron. Number 92 has one extended loop which is engraved. Number 93 is of a similar type and is dated 1450-1500. Number 94 is a very unusual but not uncommon 'locking' buckle which could have been used on harness in the late and post-Medieval period. They are invariably found with the locking arm broken off. The buckles of Type III are the true double-loops with the strap or buckle-plate and the tongue attached to the same central bar. The loops (except in rare cases) are symmetrical and they only become common in the 15th century although examples are known from c1350 onwards.

TYPE IIIA – buckles with double-loops of square or rectangular form (numbers 95-97). Date range 1400-1500 plus. Buckles of this form are not so commonly found. Number 95 has circles punched around the buckle frame, whilst number 96, of a more decorative outline, has engraved lines. Number 97 has two straight sides and the two ends are of baluster shape.

TYPE IIIB – buckles with double-loops of circular form (numbers 98-103). Date range 1370-1500. These buckles of small to large module are reasonably common Medieval sites, number 101 being the type most commonly found. Numbers 98, 99, and 103 are not truly symmetrical but they obviously belong to this group. There is an example extant in which the leather strap is attached directly to the bar and as I have not seen an example with a buckle-plate, this may be normal for the type. The earliest circular buckle that I have located is depicted on a Flemish brass of Ralph Knevyton in Avely Church, Essex and it is dated to 1370. Number 99 and 100 have faceted frames that are most distinctive. Number 101 is the common form and these can be quite large. The loop section can be hemispherical or flat, but the round-section type of neater style is later and belongs to the Georgian period. Numbers 102 and 103 are most decorative and are later in this group.

TYPE IIIC – buckles with 'figure-of-eight' loops (numbers 104-119). Date range 1350-1500 plus. There is little firm evidence of this type before the middle of the 14th century but gradually from that time onwards it becomes more common until in the late and post-Medieval period it becomes the dominant style. Number 104 is the earliest of the larger examples and is from a grave of circa 1361. Number 106 is dated 1400-1430 and number 107 from 1450-1500. Numbers 105 and 108 are of the 15th century and the style of number 108 continued into the Tudor period. Of the smaller examples, numbers 109 and 111

are probably the earliest and may be related to the single-loop type with similar projections on the loop (see Fig.5:5). Number 112 with its slightly pointed loop and hook attachment is from a spur of the period 1400-1450. Number 113 dates from 1450 onwards. Number 114 is a very common type of the 15th century with angular body and flat back. They are often crudely made and must have been very ulitarian. Number 115 is also a common form of small size which seems to have had a longer life. Numbers 116-118 are of the classic 'figure-of-eight' shape which became common in the later 15th century and through into the Tudor period.

Examples of Type IV have been included here for completeness although, apart from one example, they have never had tongues and are therefore by the strict definition of the word, not buckles at all.
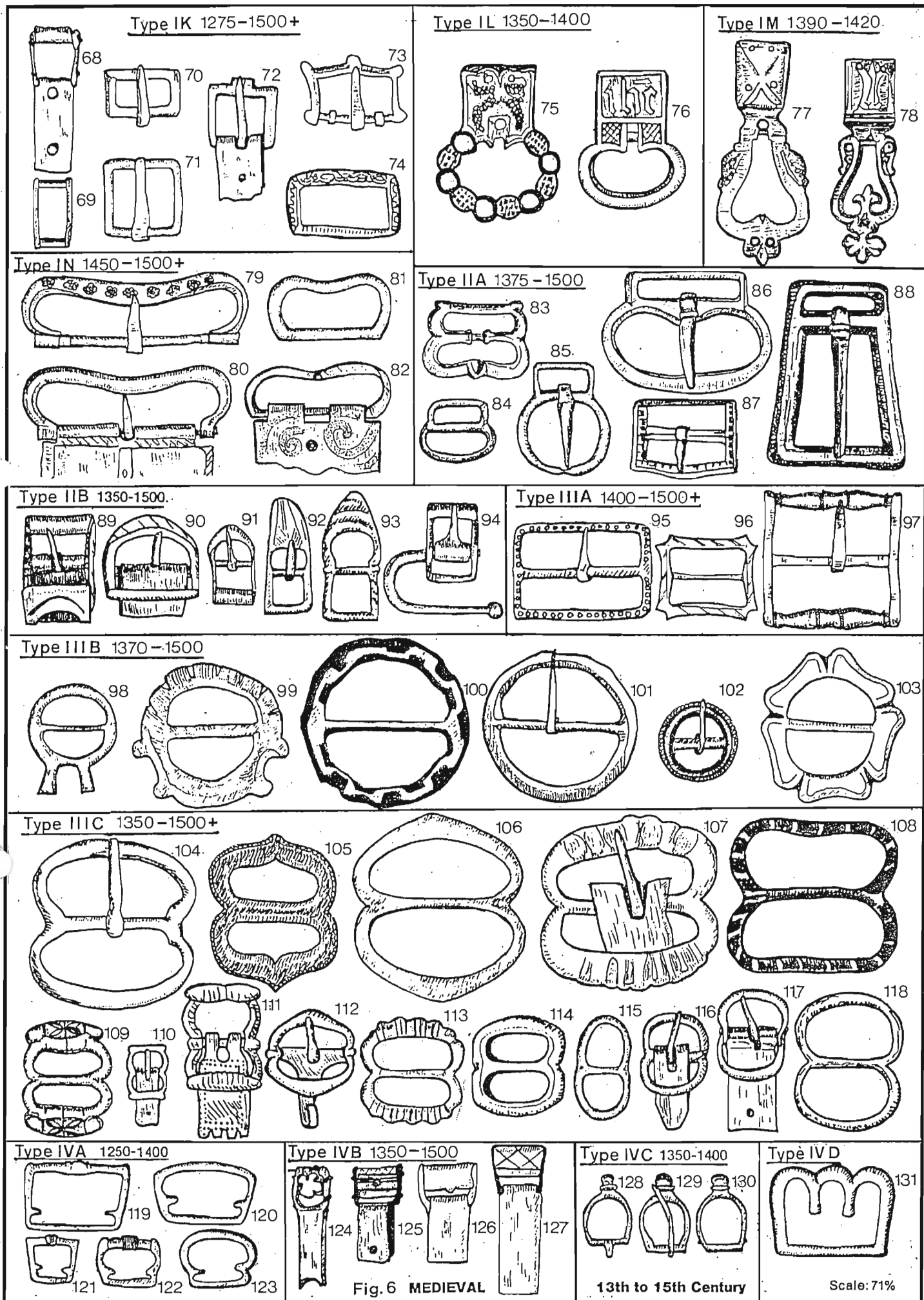
TYPE IVA – buckles with internal points (numbers 119-123). Date range 1250-1400. This type is common on Medieval sites and dated examples seem to be from the mid-13th century onwards. Of all the examples that I have seen, non has a tongue or buckle-plate and it is reasonable to suggest that they never did have. The purpose and exact function of these pieces is still uncertain. They could have been attached as a strap-end in which case they could have been used as a clasp or with a hook fastener. Alternatively, but less likely, they could have served as strap slides.

TYPE IVB – buckles with rotating closure on loop (numbers 124-127). Date range 1350-1500. These are usually of small size, although I have personally seen one example that exceeded three inches in length. Number 124 has a one-piece cast loop with forked spacers and soldered plates as in Type IG. It also has the two spurs on each side of the loop, and the rotating closure has a rosette riveted to it. Number 125 has a similar loop but with a 'sandwich' buckle-plate and the closure has a plain boss riveted to it. Number 126 has a loop consisting of four pieces. The two sides are drilled right through to take two pins – one for the buckle-plate and one for the rotating closure. Number 127 is similar but is a two-piece loop, with a separate pin for the closure only.

TYPE IVC – small loops with decorative knops (numbers 128-130). Date range 1350-1400. These are usually described as swivels and number 128 with its projection on the bar almost certainly is. Number 129 from my own collection has a tongue and must have been used as a buckle. Number 130 is similar but has the two 'spurs' on the loop as noted on other Medieval buckles.

TYPE IVD – large loop with two internal projections (number 131). Date range late-Medieval. Examples of this type have come from Lydford Castle, Devon and one is in my own collection from a Lincolnshire DMV. See also Dector User (June 1984; page 33). This is almost certainly a clasp rather than a buckle. TH

Type IK 1275–1500+

Type IL 1350–1400

Type IM 1390–1420

Type IN 1450–1500+

Type IIA 1375–1500

Type IIB 1350–1500.

Type IIIA 1400–1500+

Type IIIB 1370–1500

Type IIIC 1350–1500+

Type IVA 1250–1400

Type IVB 1350–1500

Type IVC 1350–1400

Type IVD

Fig. 6 MEDIEVAL

13th to 15th Century

Scale: 71%

BUCKLES THROUGH THE AGES

PART SEVEN
TUDOR
1485-1600
by Chris Marshall

Buckles continue throughout this period to be used as a practical means of fastening belts and in the early 1500s also for fastening shoes. The double-loop varieties become increasingly common as the trend away from the single-loop, which began in the 15th century, continues to take hold, and this transition is almost complete by the 17th century. Many, but not all, of these double-loop buckles do not appear to have had buckle-plates for attachment to the strap. Whether this is due to the increasing use of the double-loop, the practicalities of fastening, or as a consequence of fashion, is open to debate. Certainly the double-loop offered more scope for decoration and ornamentation but this does not appear to have been greatly exploited until the later 17th and 18th century.

Catalogue – all are copper-alloy buckles and the types are continuations of the Medieval typology unless stated otherwise.

Type IF – single-loop buckles with semi-circular or 'D' shaped loops (numbers 1-9). This type is of common form with minor variations in style throughout the Medieval and Tudor period. Number 1 is a large example from an early 16th century context. John Webb[1] illustrates one with the buckle attached directly to a leather strap. Number 2 is a horse-armour buckle of the mid-16th century from the Metropolitan Museum of Art buckle typology. Numbers 3-6, and 9 (which is of whitemetal) are generally of the late 15th to early 16th century.

Type IK – single-loop buckles with square or rectangular loops (numbers 10-12). Although of differing styles, all three examples shown have a notch on the loop for locating the tongue. Number 10 is of pewter. Number 12 has lightly incised lines on the loop.

Type IP – single-loop buckles with moulded sides (numbers 13-18). This is a new type with a date range of c1500-1600 plus. The distinguishing features of this group are the rounded sides and splayed feet of the loop at the junction with the bar. Number 17 is of pewter. Number 18 continues into the early 17th century.

Type IIA – asymmetrical buckles with separate strap and tongue bars (numbers 19 and 20). Both these examples are iron and have rotating cylinders on the loop. They are generally of a post-Medieval date and their size would suggest use on horse harness rather than for personal adornment. Excavated examples have come from Somerby[2], Lincs (number 19), Lyveden[3], Sandal Castle[4], and my own collection (number 20). Date range – 16th/17th century.

Type IIB – asymmetrical buckles with central strap and tongue bar (numbers 21-28). Both numbers 21 and 22 have hook attachments and are therefore spur buckles – in fact most of this group may have been used for this purpose. Numbers 24 and 25 are from the first half of the 16th century. Numbers 26-28 are late 16th century with a continuation into the 17th century. There is an obvious relationship in style between number 26 and number 47 – a double-loop variety.

Type IIIA – buckles with double-loops of square or rectangular form (numbers 29-34). Number 29 is a belt buckle with an additional small loop for attachment of the sword belt via a hook fastener. Number 31 from Grenstein DMV[5] has traces of whitemetal plating. Number 32 from a Lincolnshire DMV has rosettes on each corner and incised chevrons on the loop. Number 33 has incised lines on the loop and comes from Chelmsford[6] in a context of 1550-1590. A similar example in Webb is dated late 16th to early 17th century. Number 34 which is late 16th/17th century belongs to Type IIID.

Type IIIB – buckles with double-loops of circular form. No examples of this type have been identified from a 16th century context. This is rather surprising since the type is evident in the 15th century and also later in the 17th century.

Type IIIC – buckles with 'figure-of-eight' loops (numbers 35-64). Double-loops begin to predominate over other types in the 15th century, and the 'figure-of-eight' or 'spectacle' buckles are by far the most common form in the 16th and 17th centuries. Chronology of this type is not yet fully determined, particularly the transition from Medieval to post-Medieval types, but I have attempted to place these buckles into periods from their dated contexts or style.

15th-16th century – numbers 35, 36, 42, 48, 53, 55, 61. Number 48 is probably from a sword belt – see Type IVE, number 68 and 70.

Early 16th century – numbers 37, 39, 40, 52, 54. A similar buckle to number 52 can be seen on a shoe of the period 1510-1520[7].

Mid-16th century – numbers 57, 60. Number 57 is from The Manor of the More[8] where it is dated 1550-1575. Number 60 is from a shoulder belt or bandoleer.

Late 16th century – numbers 41, 45, 50. Number 45 with rosettes on the loop is a common type. Webb dates one 1570-1600. Another from Chelmsford is dated 1550-1590.

A general 16th century date – numbers 38, 49, 51, 56, 58, 62, 63, 64. Number 38 has openwork hearts on the loop and much of

its gilding remains intact. Number 49 is an armour buckle of the mid-16th century but the loop type is very common and would have been used for many other purposes also.

Late 16th – early 17th century – numbers 43, 44, 46, 47, 59. Number 43 is a common form that continues in the 17th century. Various examples have been excavated from Colonial America sites. Number 44 also has been found in Colonial America during excavations in Jamestown[9], Virginia where the type must have been deposited after c1612. Examples are also known from excavations in England, as here with the 'waisted' loops, and also with straight sides. Both types were found in the Sandal Castle excavations – the former from a context of 1485-1600, the latter unstratified. Date range c1550-1650.

Type IIID – buckles with double-loops of trapezium shape (numbers 65-67). This is a new type with a date range of c1575-1650, with the more elaborate openwork spur buckles, which are a development of the plainer forms, continuing until the later 17th century. Number 65 is a belt buckle of the late 16th century. Numbers 66 and 67 are spur buckles with hook attachments and these are also dated to the late 16th century.

Type IVE – 'figure-of-eight' strap slides (numbers 68-70). These 'buckle-like' objects are placed in group IV as they were never intended to have tongues. All three examples shown are belt-slides for adjusting the sword belt, and these would have had matching buckles (see number 48). Numbers 68 and 70 (with buckle 48) have similar designs of vine leaves cast in relief on a sunken ground. Webb illustrates three examples from a context of 1490-1540. One from Chelmsford is dated as late 16th-17th century and one from my own collection comes from a market site that has produced no coinage after Elizabeth I. A 16th century date would therefore seem likely. Number 69 is a similar belt-slide from a Lincolnshire DMV and is decorated in relief with scrolling vine leaves. For an almost complete sword-belt set of this type see the Chelmsford report previously cited, where a date of 1550-1590 is given. 🅣🅗

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3. Lyveden DMV. Journal Northampton Museum, number 9; 1971
4. Sandal Castle Excavations 1964-1973. Wakefield Historical Publications, 1983
5. Grenstein DMV. East Anglian Archaeology Report 10
6. Moulsham Street, Chelmsford. CBA Research Report 54, 1985
7. A History of Shoe Fashions. Northampton Museums and Art Gallery, 1975
8. Excavation of the Manor of the More, Rickmansworth. Archaeological Journal 116, (1959)
9. Archaeological Excavations at Jamestown, Virginia. Cotter J (1958)
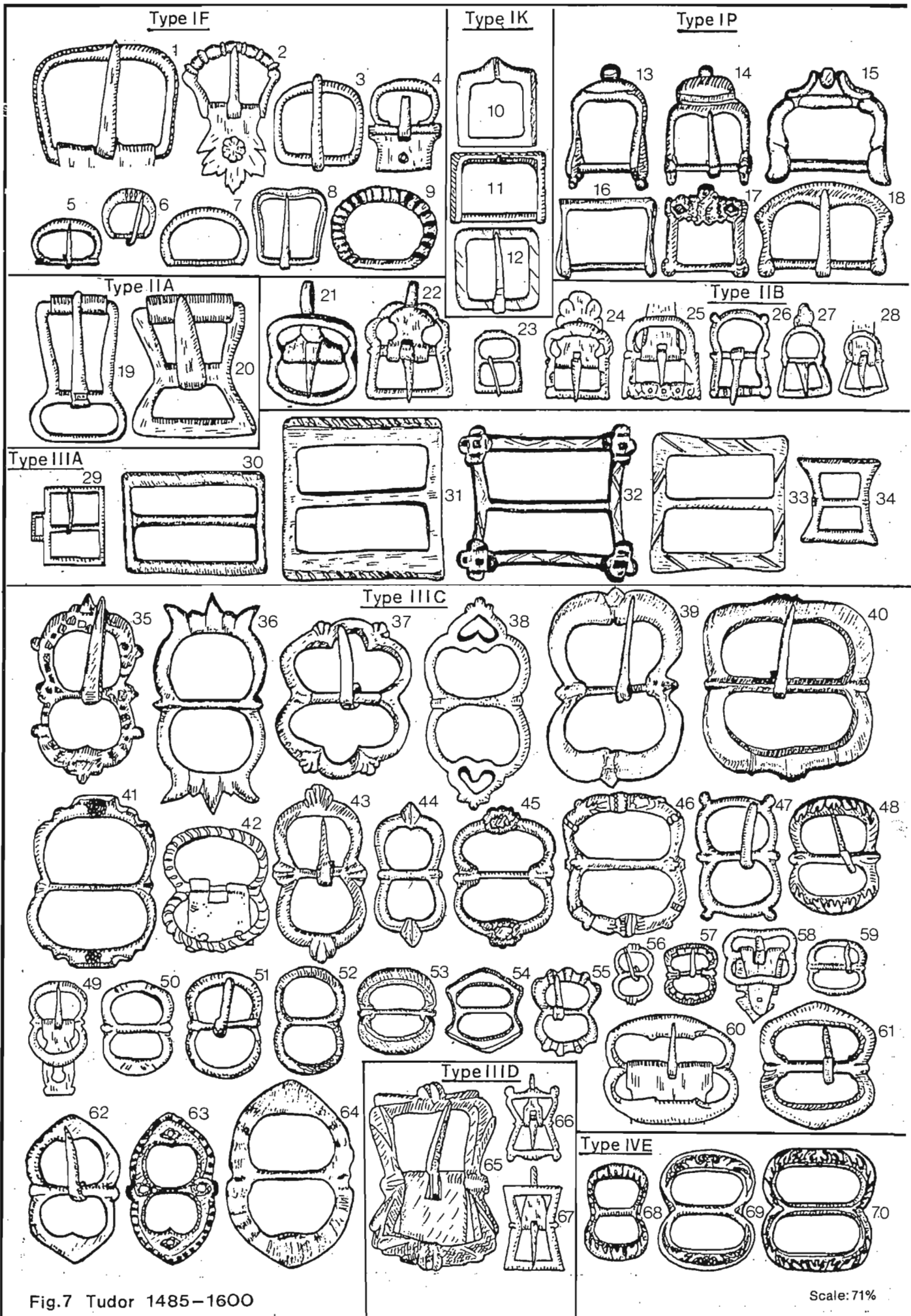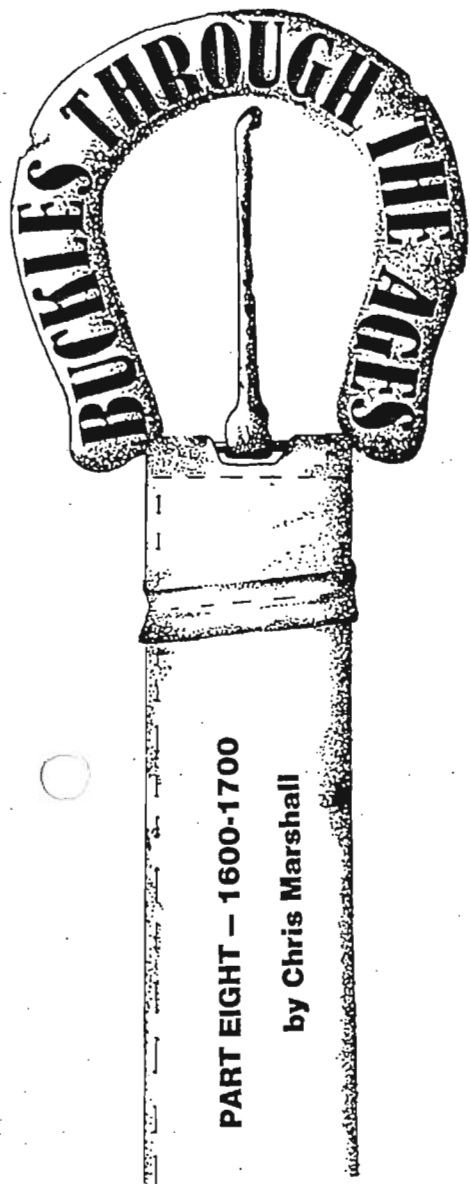
Fig.7 Tudor 1485-1600

Scale: 71%

BUCKLES THROUGH THE AGES

PART EIGHT – 1600-1700
by Chris Marshall

Transformation to the double-loop variety of buckles for personal adornment is almost complete by 1600, there being very little evidence for the use of single-loops after this date (see figure 7:18 for an exception). What evidence there is for single-loop buckles points to their continued use on horse-harness and most of these are made of iron. Some of the examples drawn for this period are from excavations in early-17th century English sites of Colonial America, as these buckles are very important for dating purposes. One would expect the occasional late-Tudor style to perhaps still be in vogue but it would be extremely unlikely that any Medieval survivals would appear on these sites. This is not very often the case in this country of course, where most sites investigated will have a very wide timespan of occupation, and dating of types is therefore often much more difficult.

Catalogue – All copper-alloy unless stated otherwise.

TYPE IIB – asymmetrical buckles with central strap and tongue bar (numbers 1-13). The larger examples of this type, as number 1, would have been used for fastening belts at the waist. This example dates to the first half of the 17th century. Number 2 is an armour buckle of the early-17 century. Many of the remaining examples of this group may have been used for buckling on spurs to boots – Boots with spurs became fashionable for walking from 1610-1660 and formed part of a gentleman's outdoor wear[1]. Probably as a consequence of this fashion, spur buckles of the period are reasonably common. A buckle similar to number 6 can be seen on a boot of the period 1670-1712[2] and it is likely that this type was used throughout the later-16th and 17th centuries (see also my figure 7:26-28). Numbers 11-13 were certainly used for this purpose and illustrate the continuing elaboration of decoration in the 17th century. All three have 'winged' extensions to the loop and this feature is also used to ornament buckles of trapezium shape (see number 48-51).

TYPE IIIA – buckles with double-loops of square or rectangular form (numbers 14-22). Number 14 is a decorated armour buckle of the late-16th to early-17th century. Number 19 is a baldric (shoulder-belt) buckle. Cunnington (see note 1) states that the baldric became common after 1628 until 1700. Numbers 20 and 21 may be spur buckles – number 21 of the mid-17th century also showing elaboration of what is basically a rectangular buckle. Number 22 with its curved frame is a shoe buckle of the late-17th century.

TYPE IIIB – buckles with double-loops of circular form (numbers 23-29). Number 23 of the early-17th century is another example of the 'winged' ornamentation common at this period. Number 24 is mid-17th century and number 25 with openwork extensions to its circular loop can only be given a general late-17th to early-18th century date. Number 26 with its faceted loop of triangular section if from Bolingbroke Castle[3] in a context of 1650-1675. Numbers 27-29 are similar oval buckles of mid to late-17th century date. Number 29 is silver decorated with rosettes and was found in Colonial America[4] – numbers 27 and 28 have English contexts.

TYPE IIIC – buckles with 'figure-of-eight' loops (numbers 30-45). Number 30 is a late-16th to mid-17th century type (see also my figure 7:44). Despite the earlier dating context of the Sandal Castle examples, most of the known buckles of this type (30) appear to be from the first half of the 17th century. In addition to the Sandal Castle examples, another comes from a dated context at Banbury Castle[5] which like Sandal was defended during the English Civil War period. The Banbury buckle which was dated to 1644-5 had the remains of a leather strap attached directly to the central bar. Number 31 is another reasonably common type that dates to the first half of the 17th century. Number 32 is also a common type of the same period, with numbers 33 (from Colonial America) and 34 (from Sidbury)[6] being more decorative examples with rosettes on the loop. Both are dated late-17th century, number 34 from a context of c1680. Numbers 35-37 are of very plain form. Number 36 is a well known type of baldric buckle of mid-17th century date. Number 37 is from Bolingbroke Castle (see note 3) from a context of 1650-1675. Numbers 38-42 seem to be a standard type that turn up fairly frequently in 17th century contexts, both here and on Colonial American sites. They either have four points of decoration (as number 38-40) or just two points at the head of each loop (as numbers 41 and 42). Number 40 is from Sidbury (see note 6) in a context of 1680. Number 43 is a similar type but has more strongly profiled loops. Number 44 was found in Jamestown, Virginia and its exact parallel was found by the author near Louth in Lincolnshire[7]. Number 45 is a late-17th to early-18th century example.

TYPE IIID – buckles with double-loops of trapezium shape (numbers 46-62). This type appears first in the last quarter of the 16th century. The two larger examples (numbers 46 and 47 are belt buckles, the rest for spurs. Numbers 48 and 49 exhibit the winged projections in common with other types of the 17th century mentioned previously, whilst numbers 50 and 51 (drawn to smaller scale) have very elaborate openwork-panel extensions to the loop. Numbers 56 and 57 are more commonly found with number 58 being a variation on the style. Numbers 60-62 are spur buckles of mid-17th century date and are fairly commonly found. On many of these the sides are becoming straight.

TYPE IVF – double-loop sword belt hangers (number 63 and 64). These are belt slides with a small loop attachment for hanging the sword belt via a hook fastener.

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2) Catalogue – 'A History of Shoe Fashions' – Northampton Museum (1975)
3) Drewett P – 'Excavations at Bolingbroke Cstle, Lincs 1973' – Post-Medieval Archaeology 10 (1976)
4) Noel-Hume I – 'Artifacts of Colonial America'
5) Rodwell K A – 'Excavations of the site of Banbury Castle' – Oxonensia 41 (1976).
6) Carver – 'Excavations in Sidbury' – Worcester Archaeological Society 3: Vol 7 (1980).
7) This is a remarkable coincidence as Captain John Smith who founded Jamestown and was made the first President of Virginia, is a celebrated 'old boy' of my former school in Louth. Without suggesting that either of these buckles belonged to Smith, they do nevertheless provide a tangible link between the earliest English colonists to settle in America and the country which they left behind. TH
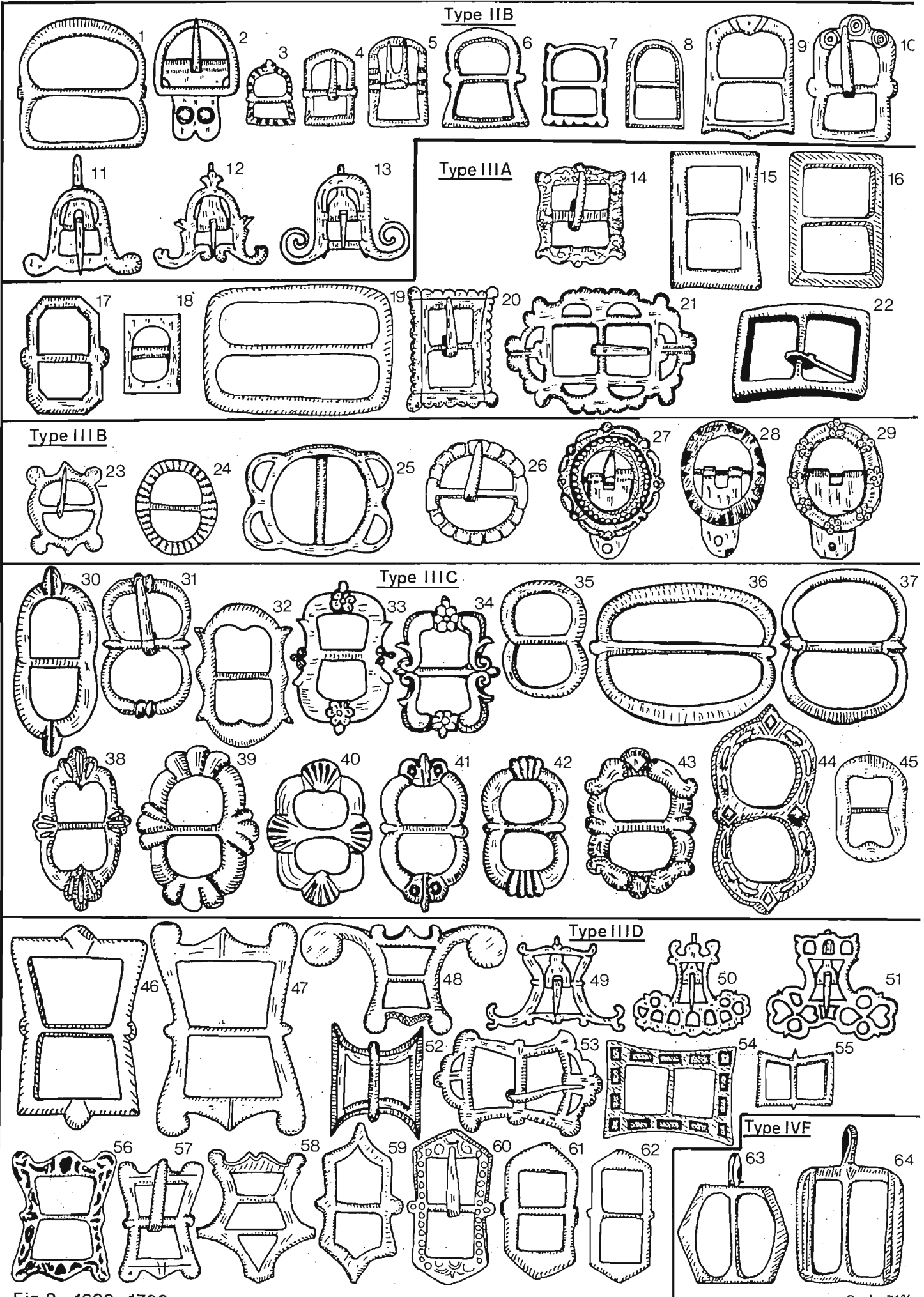
Type IIB

Type IIIA

Type IIIB

Type IIIC

Type IIID

Type IVF

Fig.8   1600–1700

Scale: 71%

by Chris Marshall

Having already looked at the buckle types of the 17th century in Part 8 of this series we again start in that period, but with buckles that are technically of a different form of construction. These are my **Type V** buckles and they are distinguished from all other types by having a double-loop frame (as Types IIA-IIID) but **with the frame drilled to take a separate pin or spindle.**

These Type V buckles were usually made so that they could be removed and were (when used for the shoe) attached across the instep by two straps called **latchets**. The buckle was attached to one latchet by **the chape** and the second latchet was then pulled through the **buckle-frame** to the required tension for securing the shoe and fastened by the spike of the **tongue**. See Fig 9:xix for the correct terms used to describe the parts of these buckles. Strictly speaking the chape constitutes all the moving parts with the buckle-frame but the term is used here to describe the type of fastening employed to attach the buckle to the shoe.

Although shoe buckles had been used in previous times, by the late 1500s they had been replaced by rosettes and ribbon ties and these continued in use through most of the 17th century. However, it is clear that by 1660 buckles were again being used for fastening shoes, at least by the upper classes, and that they were of this removable type...
'This day I began to put on buckles to my shoes', (the diary of Samuel Pepys—entry for January 22nd, 1660)

Chape types — 1660 to 1790

A **The stud chape** — 1660 to 1720s (number i). This is the most commonly found of the early methods of attachment. The buckle was attached to a shoe by the stud through a 'buttonhole' slit in the latchet. There is some evidence that this type of chape was first applied to one-piece buckles' and these would therefore have to be of the 'sandwich' type or hooked singly over the spindle. I have yet to encounter an example of the latter. Figure 8:27-29 (see previous article) may also be examples of this sandwich type that have lost their studs. The next stage appears to be the introduction of the separate steel spindle and I have an example in my collection (Fig 9:5) that has a sandwich type chape with stud. It is interesting to note however, that the buckle-frame is not drilled right through to the outer edge and this feature is a good indication of an early buckle of this type. Sometime towards the end of the 17th century or beginning of the 18th comes the method employed henceforth—the buckle-frame and cast chape drilled right through for insertion of the steel spindle (a few copper-alloy spindles are also known).

Stud chapes are invariably of copper-alloy but I have one D-shaped iron buckle in my collection that has an iron stud chape attached. This type of chape is always used with a single-spiked tongue and sometimes carries a maker's mark or initials. The stud is often missing on excavated examples suggesting that it

was insufficient to cope with the strain and this may have encouraged other methods of attachment to be employed.
B **The anchor chape** (number ii-vii). This type of chape in which the curved ends are slotted through a slit in the latchet is also used on early buckles of Type V. However, it is likely that only examples ii-iv with the single-spiked tongue were used for shoes up to the 1720s. After this time the anchor chape is used only occasionally, and disappears from the trade catalogues in the 1750s. This type of chape was also used throughout the 18th century for the attachment of knee-buckles. These knee-buckles normally have double and triple-spiked tongues (numbers v-vii) and can be distinguished if found without tongue by the greater distance between the two arms that attach to the spindle. Another aid to identification of knee-buckles is that generally the spindle spans the length rather than the width of the buckle frame.
C **The loop chape with single spike** (numbers viii/ix). This type was in use by the 1690s, the spike in the loop replacing the stud or anchor method of attaching the buckle to the shoe. This type and the following Type D are probably both used exclusively for shoe buckles. All examples known to me of Type C are copper-alloy and as with most buckles up to the 1720s, are used with the single-spiked tongue.
D **The loop chape with double spike** (numbers x-xiii). These are used from the 1720s onwards using the 'pitchfork' tongue (numbers x-xii) and also from the 1770s the large double-spike sawn from sheet-steel (number xiii). This chape and pitchfork tongue are used almost exclusively for shoes from the 1720s-1770s but after this time has to compete with Type E and G due, no doubt, to the ever increasing size of shoe buckles. Unfortunately, many of the later examples excavated will usually be in poor condition due to the predominance of the use of steel.
E **The double loop chape** (number xiv). Used from the 1770s onwards to maintain security and support for the very large buckles that were coming into vogue. In this type the tongue rests on the second loop of the chape instead of on the buckle frame. These are of all steel construction.
F **The multi-stud chape** (numbers xv/xvi). These are used from the 1720s-1790s to fasten the stock at the neck. They consist of a three or four-stud chape with a three or four-spiked tongue. The stock was a close fitting wide neckband of linen or cambric secured at the back of the neck by a tie or buckle.
G **The spring chape** (number xvii). That illustrated is the first of these — William Eley's patent (No 1427) of 1784. As with the Type E chapes, these were devised for more efficient security of buckles which in some cases had reached the dimensions of 4in across. In this patent the buckle spindle was covered by a steel box hinged at one end of the frame and with a press stud for closure at the other. With this arrangement the buckle frame could be raised out of the way whilst attaching and fastening the shoe, then closed and secured by the press stud. They are marked 'Eley's Patent' with a serial number. Other examples soon followed as Eley licensed his

patents to other chape-makers. Mens' buckles have a black leather insert to cover the chapes of this type.
H **Cast tube and tongue only** (number xviii). This class of buckles of Type V have no chape and are therefore not removable. They consist of a drilled frame and separate spindle on which is hinged a cast tube with spiked tongue, the number of spikes varying from one to three. These may have been used for garters and decorative examples for cravats.
Spindle terminals (numbers xx/xxi). Terminal type xx is used throughout the 18th century. Terminal type xxi is used in the later 18th century only (from c1770).

Buckle catalogue 1660s-1720s

Shoe buckles throughout this period are small compared to later examples but they gradually increase up to the 1720s attaining a maximum size of approximately 2 by 1in. With the increase in size the shoe buckle develops a curve to fit the foot and thus later shoe buckles are fairly easily distinguished from other types. It would also be as well to remember that shoe buckles, although in use for the upper classes by 1660, were not universally used by the lower classes until at least the 1680s. All buckles in the catalogue are copper-alloy except nos 30-33 (whitemetal).
Buckles with stud chapes (numbers 1-15). These were used for shoes and for fastening the breeches knee-band below the knee, and because of the small size of early shoe buckles these are difficult to tell apart. Buckles with a pronounced curve, as number 15 (early 18th century) are definitely shoe buckles.
Buckles with anchor chapes (numbers 16-19). Again used for knee and shoe throughout this period. Number 16 with openwork frame is a particularly early example.
Buckles with loop chape — single spike (numbers 20-25). Known examples with this chape date from the 1690s and continue until at least the 1720s. The slightly larger, squarer forms (numbers 24 and 25) are early 18th century.
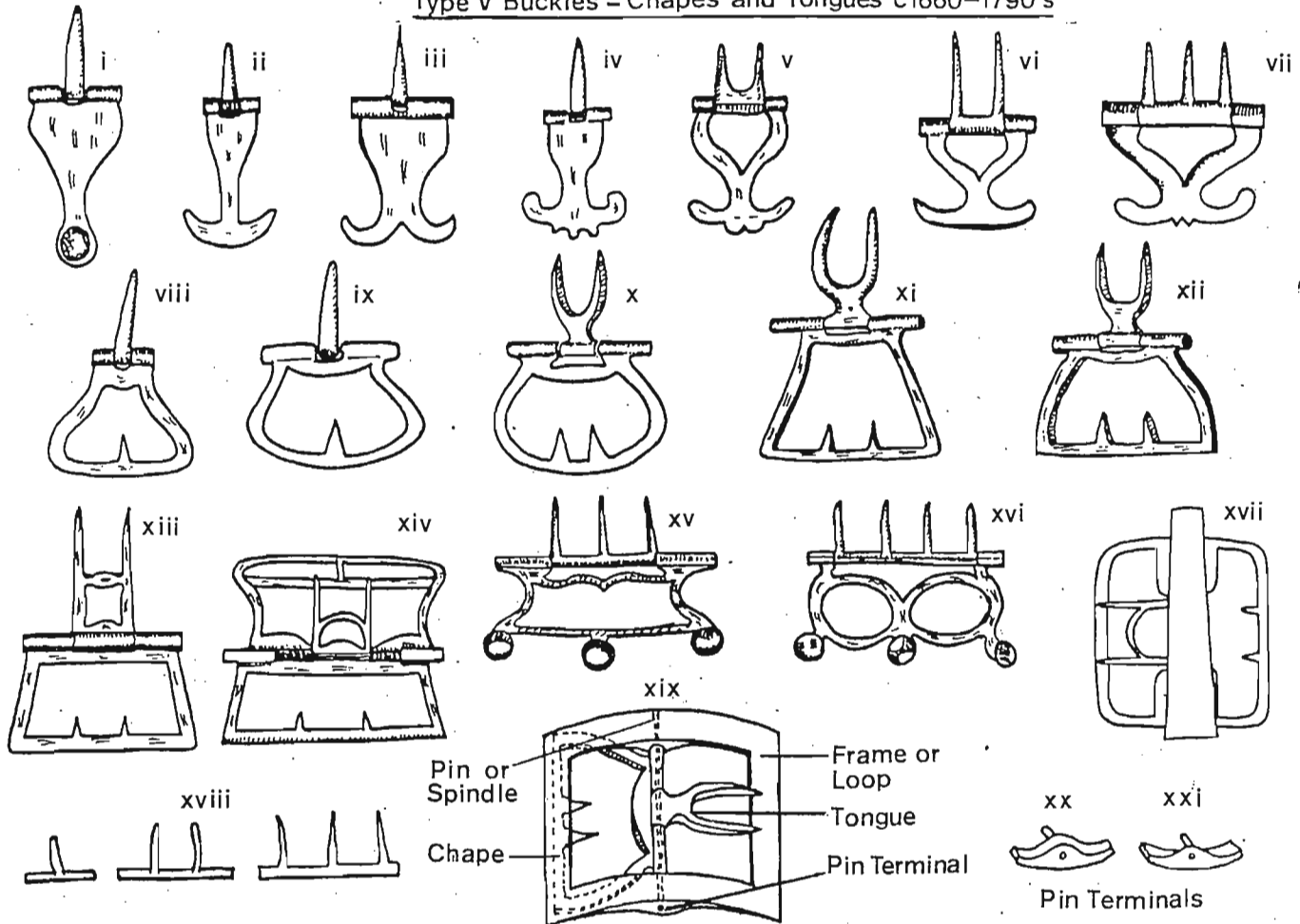**Buckles with cast tube and tongue only** (numbers 27/28). Shoe buckles of D-shape, usually with anchor chape are used throughout this period (and more rarely until c1750) but example 28, although stylistically of an early date, is unlikely to be used for the shoe due to the absence of a chape. Some may have been knee-buckles but their exact function is at present uncertain.
Buckles that have lost their chapes (numbers 26 and 29-35). Because of the use of iron or steel for the spindle, many buckles recovered will have lost their moving parts and the buckle frame can then only be dated stylistically. Most buckles of this period, however, appear to have used non-ferrous chapes and these may be recovered separately. The position is reversed after the 1720s when the vast majority of chapes are steel and corrode badly in the ground. Of those figured, numbers 26 and 30 are particularly early with the squarer forms (numbers 31 and 32) dating from the turn of the century.

Notes
John Webb — 'Buckles Identified' page 30 and Figure 112.

Type V Buckles – Chapes and Tongues c1660–1790's

i ii iii iv v vi vii

viii ix x xi xii

xiii xiv xv xvi xvii

xviii xix

Pin or Spindle
Frame or Loop
Tongue
Chape
Pin Terminal

xx xxi

Pin Terminals

Type V Buckles c1660–1720's

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

20 21 22 23 24 25 26

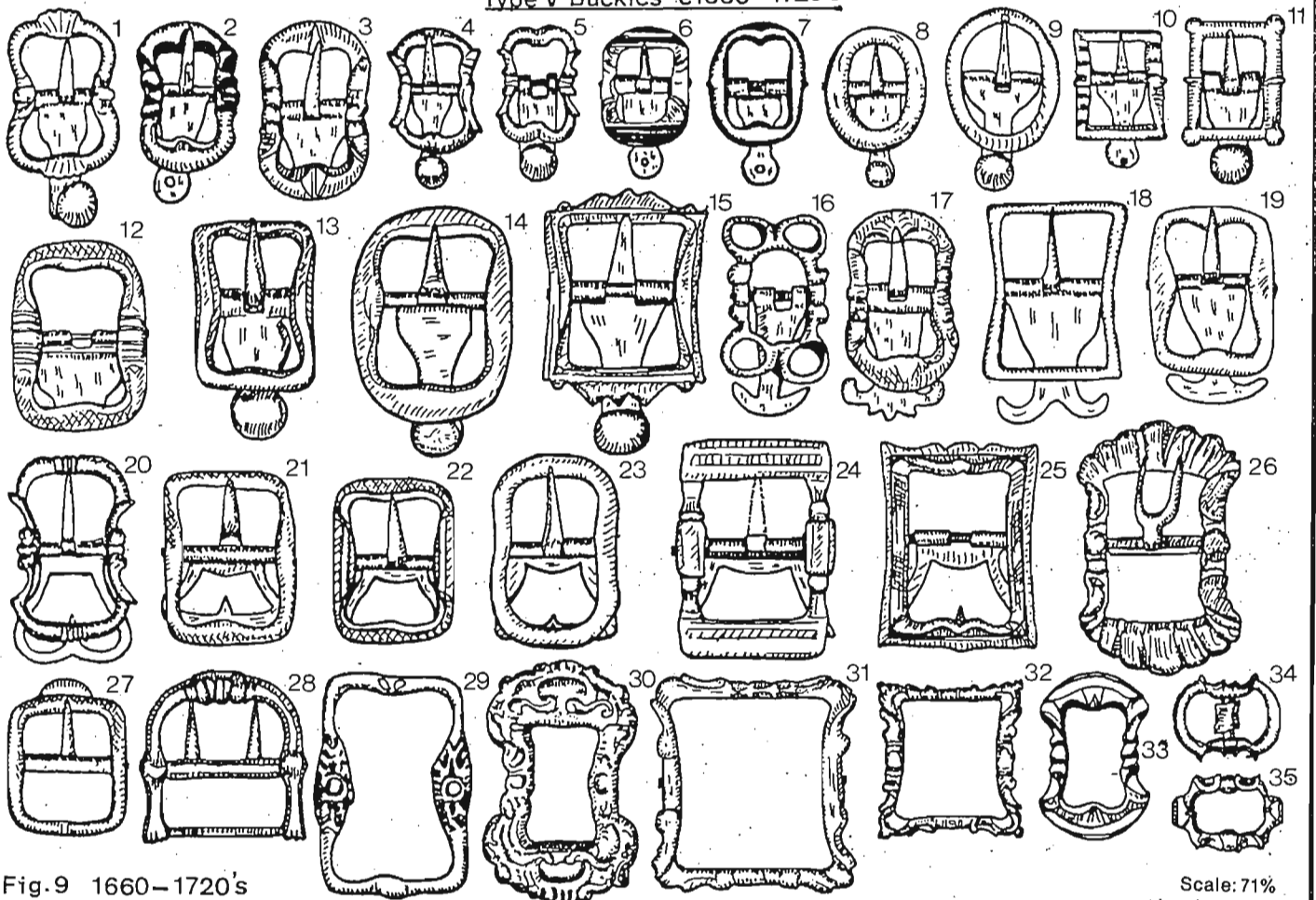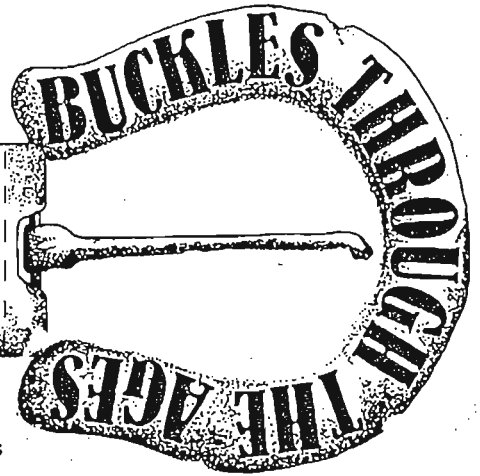27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35

Fig. 9 1660–1720's

Scale: 71%

PART 10 – GEORGIAN 1720's-1790's
by Chris Marshall

It is from this period that the greatest number of buckles have survived. The Lady Maufe collection at Kenwood House alone is comprised of 2,000 examples with hardly any exact duplicates of design. There is also an extensive collection of shoe buckles from this period in Northampton Museum along with the largest collection of boots and shoes in the country.

Most of these survivals are from the p---iod after 1760 until the 1790's after v̱__ ;h shoe buckles were for the most part replaced by ties. And of course the collections mostly consist of examples from the 'top end' of the market, either having been saved for their precious metal content or for their superior workmanship. Earlier specimens are also rarer because buckles which had gone out of fashion or which were no longer required could be traded in for new.

Because of the vast range of buckles in use during this period it would be virtually impossible to describe every example, and it is certainly beyond the scope of this article, but I have condensed the main points to assist in identifying finds.

BUCKLE TYPES – shoe; spur; belt; stock; knee; hat

MATERIALS – gold and silver (plated from c1690), Sheffield plate (from 1742), pinchbeck (from 1733), pewter, tutania ((̩ 1772), copper, brass, tin, iron, cut steel (from late 1760's), pottery, wood, papier maché.

MANUFACTURE – Cast throughout period or pressed metal using stamping machines from 1769.

DECORATION – Mould ornamented, engraved, enamelled, plated, gilded, set with precious or semi-precious stones and 'paste' jewels.

Plain buckles particularly in base metals are found through the period. Jewelled buckles are solid set until c1750. Thereafter the backs are opened to distinguish true stones from paste which became popular for quality buckles.

From 1730's – cast in more intricate and rococo designs with rosettes, twisted ropes, scrolls, beads, nailheads and grooves.

From 1740's – tooling to suggest close-set faceted stones, some within milled edges.

From 1750's – increasingly elaborate rococo style – bold shouldered outlines with openwork patterns of scrolls.

From 1760's – faceted steel in imitation of jewels set in claws – becoming 'screw-in' studs from 1770's.

From 1770's – large faceted embossments, twisted ribbon effects, tiny facets (bright cutting), large rectangular shapes with plain surfaces and/or cut-out perforations.

MARKS ON SILVER – Hallmarked up to 1739. From 1740-1790, buckles weighing under ten pennyweights were exempt from hallmarking. Makers' marks still generally used and may be traced. From 1790 all silver buckles are fully hallmarked.

SHOE BUCKLE SHAPE AND SIZE – A general guide only as there obviously some exceptions to the rule.

Square – under 2in – early 18th century. – over 2in – post 1760.

Rectangular – 2-2½in long – up to 1760. Increasing to very large (up to 4in long) from the 1770's.

Oval to round – 2-3in – more common from the 1750's.

BUCKLE CATALOGUE – all copper-alloy unless stated.

PLAIN SHOE BUCKLES (1-5) Buckles with little or no decoration, particularly at the lower end of the market, are used throughout this period. Little can be said other than the larger examples (2 and 5) will date from the second half of the 18th century.

DECORATED SHOE BUCKLES (6-25) These can be sub-divided into square cornered (6-15), round cornered (16-20) and openwork (21-25) but this is not an aid to dating and I have not therefore differentiated between them in my typology. I have however placed these buckles into periods of thirty years based on evidence relating to shape, size and style.

1700-1730 – numbers 6; 7; 8; 13.
1730-1760 – numbers 9; 10; 11; 14; 16; 17; 18; 19; 21; 22.
1760-1790 – numbers 12; 15; 20; 23; 24; 25. Number 8 is iron and 20; 24 silver.

ARTOIS STYLE SHOE BUCKLES (26-29) These large rectangular and highly curved buckles can be dated from the 1770's-1790's. They are named after the Comte d'Artois who as French Ambassador to England introduced them into this country. They can be plain (26), decorated (27), or very commonly openwork (28 and 29).

HAT, KNEE AND STOCK BUCKLES (30-43) Generally these are less than half the size of shoe buckles and were rarely elaborately moulded but could be set with gems or engraved with ornamental devices. Unlike shoe buckles the spindle generally spans the length rather than the width of the frame. Numbers 30-36 may be hat or knee buckles. Hat buckles only became popular after 1770. Numbers 37-39 are knee buckles with anchor chapes. Numbers 40 and 41 have no chapes and this type may have been used for fastening garters. Numbers 42 and 43 with multi-stud chape and tongues are stock buckles. Both these examples are silver – number 42 (1760's) and number 43 (1778-95).

SPUR AND BELT (not illustrated) These do not generally fall into the Type V category; ie they do not have separate spindles, although I have seen one hooked chape that may have been used with a Type V buckle. I would be interested to see any examples of Georgian period belt buckles that anyone may have in their possession or indeed any buckle that cannot be identified from my drawings. [TH]

1 2 3 4 5

6 7 8 9 10

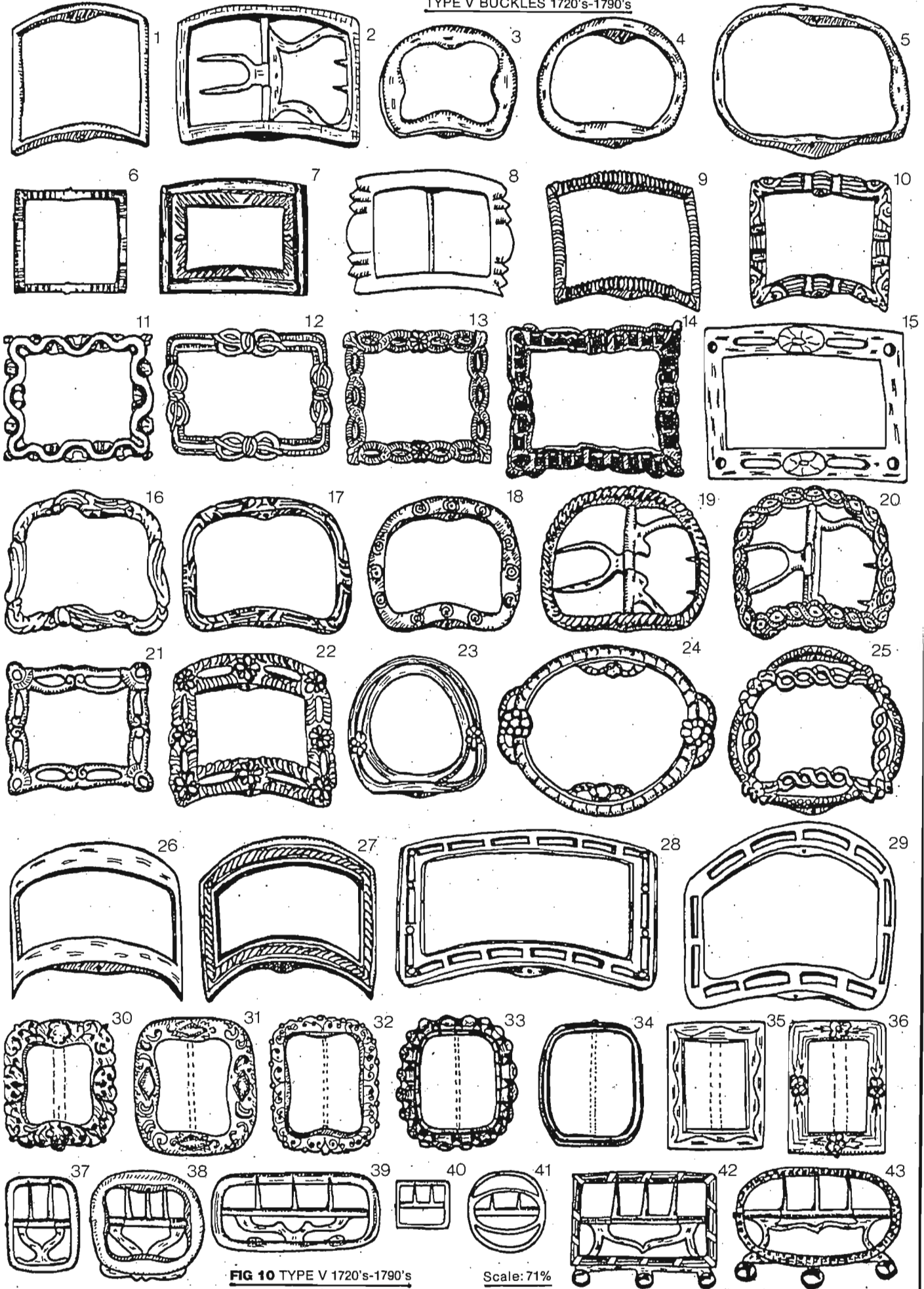11 12 13 14 15

16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25

26 27 28 29

30 31 32 33 34 35 36

37 38 39 40 41 42 43

FIG 10 TYPE V 1720's-1790's   Scale: 71%

THE HISTORY BEHIND THE BUCKLE

by Chris Marshall

As we have seen in part one of the buckle series, the buckle arrived at these shores with the coming of the Roman army in 43AD, but there is no doubt that the buckle was in use well before the time of Christ. A small bronze statuette found near Rome and dated to the 3rd century BC, depicts a naked (lish warrior, náked that is except for a norned helmet, a torc around his neck and a buckle-like loop on his belt (*Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*). As the belt is worn without clothing it must represent a form of status symbol. 800 years or more later another naked warrior with horned helmet and buckled belt appears on a 7th century Anglo-Saxon buckle-plate from Finglesham (see my fig 3:4) and provides us with the evidence for the survival of this long-held belief in the invulnerability of the naked warrior that is also alluded to in Scandinavian folklore.

Another very good representation of a buckle can be seen on a statue of a young Gallic nobleman (*Musée Calvet, Avignon*) and although much later than the bronze statuette, it does confirm that the buckle was used by the warriors of this race. However as both representations of buckles are featured on Classical w 's of Art and archaeology has yet to cc rm the use of buckles before Rome's influence, this evidence must be treated with caution. Certainly there is no evidence of buckles amongst the Celts in Britain before the Roman invasion.[1]

From 43AD – 410AD most of Britain was controlled by the armies of Rome and Roman taste began to influence metal-work. Celtic bronzesmiths working for their new masters produced a vast range of brooches intended for personal adornment as well as practical use and many were elaborately enamelled in the Celtic style. These brooches are found, often in great numbers, wherever there has been Roman military or Romano-British settlement. Buckles however are much rarer finds on anything other than military sites and even there the numbers are far less than for brooches. Some of these buckles also exhibit the enamelling for which the Celts were justly famous.

Towards the end of the Roman period in Britain, the zoomorphic types featured in part two of this series appear. Many of these buckles can be paralled on the Continent where they are believed to represent part of the uniform of Germanic soldiers or *laeti* . These laeti were barbarians settled by the Romans in the frontier zones of the Empire and given grants of land in lieu of payment for hereditary military service. Buckles of Type II and III are also found along the length of the Rhine-Danube frontier — many from late-Roman fortified sites and also from sites in North Africa. These zoomorphic buckles although probably produced to suit Germanic taste were made using Roman techniques including classical decorative motifs and the close similarities between all Type IIIA buckles has led to the suggestion that they were mass produced by Imperial work-shops and carried West by troop movements.

The implications

In England the implications of these buckles have yet to be fully determined. They are found in civilian and military contexts, both Roman and Saxon, encompassing the late-Roman and sub-Roman period up to the traditional date for the Saxon invasions of 449AD. For our purpose of identification and dating however it can be said that Type I buckles were in use during the second half of the 4th century with a poissible continuation into the 5th century. Buckles of Type II appear on the Continent from c330AD and were being copied in Britain from c350-70AD. Type IIC are believed to be an insular copy dating from the first half of the 5th century. By the 370's Type IIIA buckles were being made on the Continent and examples found in Britain will date after this period and into the 5th century. Type IIIB buckles are found only in 5th century contexts.

Another buckle type that may be related to the later examples in this series has recently been recognised (fig 11: no 3.[2] The dating has been confirmed by another similar find from London (fig 11: no 4).[3] In no 3 the mouldings at the junction of loop and plate are degenerate animal heads. Number 4 has the same construction with loop and plate cast in one piece with a triangular cut-out but in this example the animal ornamentation is not present. It also has ring-dot decoration and instead of a bar for the tongue, has a hole in the casting. A 5th century date is suggested for the type. Do these buckles provide a link between the late-Roman zoomorphic types and the common triangular-plate varieties of pagan Anglo-Saxon England?

Closely following the late and sub-Roman belt-fittings come the small series of buckles in the 'quoit-brooch style' which is a native style developed from late-Roman art and can be dated from around the mid-5th century (fig 11: no's 5-7). The magnificent belt-set from an Anglo-Saxon grave at Mucking, Essex and decorated in this style is claimed to be a link between the late-Roman military belt-sets and the insular quoit-brooch style of early Anglo-Saxon England. The buckles have loops and plate cast in one piece with a pin inserted through the casting on which the tongue swivels.

The quoit-brooch metalworkers also adopted the technique of using silver inlays that was first pioneered on the Continent. The best known example of this inlay technique is the buckle from Bifrons, Kent — probably an import from northern Gaul by a Christian Frank in the early-5th century. It is made of iron with plates of decorated silver-sheet hammered on which depict Daniel in the Lions Den with an inscription *'VIVAT Q...VI FECIT'* (Long Live the Man who Made (Me). The technique which is mostly used in the 5th and 6th centuries (but known in the 7th century too) also includes the use of silver or bronze wires inlaid in grooves on iron or more rarely bronze.

Much of the evidence for buckles of the early Anglo-Saxon period comes from the cemeteries of Kent and areas south of the Thames. One of the earliest types is that with oval loop and rectangular plate with Style I animal decoration around a central garnet (fig 11: no 8). Similar variations are known and they all date to the second half of the 6th century. Common amongst the Kentish examples are the 'shield-on-tongue' type and these can be divided into three varieties. The first, without plate (fig 3: 7,8,12) date from the late-6th into the 7th century.

The second and most frequently found type with shield tongue are those with a triangular plate and three large convex studs (fig 3: 3,4). The third variety have rectangular plates with the shield on tongue having straight sides and of the same width as the buckle-plate. The belt end of the plate has a row of small convex studs set at a lower level (fig 11: no's 9 and 10). Buckles of both these latter types are rpresented in the Sutton Hoo ship burial and they are generally dated to the 7th century. Many buckles of this type are richly decorated and along with the garnet-inlaid disc brooches must rank as some of the finest pieces of jewellery ever produced in this country.
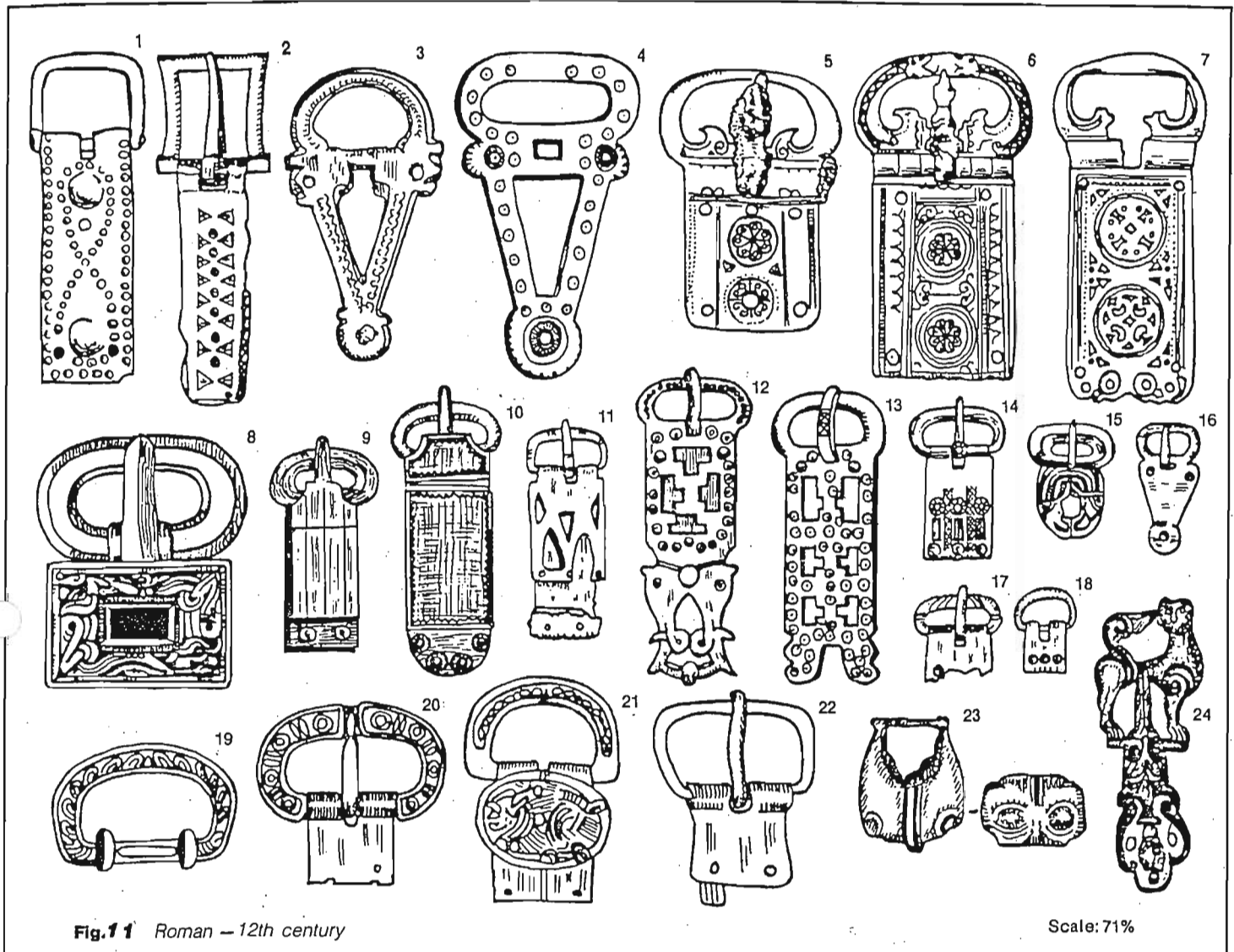
Fig.11 Roman — 12th century

1 and 2 Roman (number 1 – late-4th century). *3 and 4* 5th century. *5-7* Quoit brooch style – (5th century). *8-18* Pagan Saxon – (6th and 7th centuries). *19-22* Anglo-Scandinavian (9th-11th centuries). *23 and 24* Romanesque (11th-12th centuries)

Another distinctive but much lower class of buckle from the 7th century are the bronze examples with loop and openwork plate either cast in one piece with sheet-bronze plate (fig 3: 28,29 and fig 11: no's 11-13). In the earliest examples two animal heads can clearly be seen at the base of the plate but on later examples they are either absent or merely suggested by an irregular outline. It has been noted that the cut-outs in the plates conform to the shape of garnet inlays in the more expensive buckles and that these are a 'poor man's copy' of the same period ie the 7th century.

From the late 6th century onwards the Anglo-Saxons were converted to Christianity and after the end of the 7th century grave goods were but rarely interred with their owners. Material evidence for metalwork particularly in the 8th century is therefore sparse and excavations that have been conducted on settlement sites have been fairly unproductive. As we have seen, buckles are found with grave goods right up to the end of the Pagan period even in poorly furnished graves and they are also evident in our next closely dated examples from Whitby Abbey.

Lack of dateable finds

Danish raids had commenced on England from around 800AD and in 867AD Whitby Abbey was attacked and destroyed. Subsequent archaeological excavations have revealed that buckles were in use up until that time (see my fig 4: 2,3,5,6,32) and we can assume that buckles were also in use during the 8th century. The problem we have therefore in the Middle-Saxon period is a lack of dateable finds rather than a discontinuation in the use of buckles.

Viking raids had continued unabated from 835AD and by 850/51 the Danish army was wintering in England. Not content with raids they were now banding together and aiming for conquest. Being between 865-880 the Danes won most of the Kingdoms of Northumbria, Eastern Mercia and East Anglia. The Treaty of Wedmore in 878AD between Alfred and the Danish leader Guthrum established a political frontier along the old Roman Watling Street to the east of which the Danes were allowed to settle. This area was known as the Danelaw.

Although there is strong evidence of this Danish settlement particularly in the use of Danish place-names, there was

until recently surprisingly little evidence in the form of metalwork. Excavations in Coppergate, York – the Danish *Jorvik* which became one of the main trading centres of Europe – has produced a large range of everyday artefacts of the 9th-11th centuries. This has included buckles though not in any great quantity and yet to be published. Evidence from Scandinavia suggests that buckled belts were widely used by men but a buckle has yet to be found in a Viking woman's grave.[4] These buckles have plain plates often with interlace decorated loops (fig 11: no's 19-22). Another type has a cast belt-slide loop attached to the same buckle-plate (fig 11: 21). Buckles in fig 4 (no's 4 and 14) are from York. Other buckles in figure 4 which exhibit a Scandinavian influence are numbers 16,34-36,39,42,43.

Notes:-
1) By buckle we mean a closure with a spiked tongue.
2) Cirencester. BAR 30, (1976)
3) Lincoln Road, Enfield. Trans. London & Middlesex AS 28/29 (1977/78).
4) The Viking World. Simpson J (Batsford, 1980) p 56   **TH**

THE HISTORY BEHIND THE BUCKLE
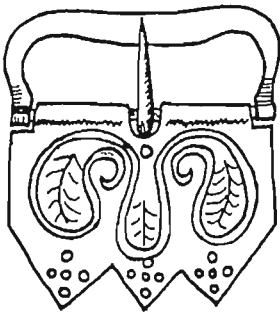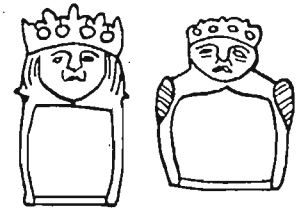
Part 2
by Chris Marshall

Buckles from the 13th century onwards have become fairly common finds on areas of habitation and although a general increase in metal work of all kind is apparent during this period, indicating the increasing wealth and prosperity of the country, this does also seem to coincide with a change in the method of fastening the girdle or waist-belt. Such evidence as we have for ? Medieval period prior to the 13th ,ntury is mostly derived from manuscript illustrations. For the 11th century, belts seem to be optional for men but a woman's gown is always shown with the girdle which took the form of a plain band or cord. For women in the 12th century the girdle was very long and decorative and made of a thick cord of silk, wool or linen, or of thongs plaited together in a broad belt ending in silk cords. All of these types were tied or knotted rather than buckled.

The evidence for men in the 12th century suggests that the girdle became more ornamental about 1150, tied like a sash with hanging ends at the front 1170-90, and then in the last quarter of the 12th century the girdle is depicted as fastened with oramental buckles. Buckles would also be used at the waist during the Medieval period for fastening the various straps and belts connected with the wearing of swords, daggers and er articles suspended from the belt. Some shoes were buckled in the Medieval period and as early as the 13th century according to Cunnington[1]. Certainly they were used for fastening some shoes with ankle straps from the 14th century onwards for we have in Langland's *Piers Plowman* speaking of Friars in 1362: *'Now they have buckled shoes, Lest they hurt their heels And hose in hard weather Fastened at the ancle'*. Various monumental brasses and effigies also depict shoes with ankle straps and buckled closures, although many more are shown without, and how far down the social order the fashion developed is still uncertain.

An enigma
Buckles of my Type IVB (fig 5) with rotating closures instead of tongues are somewhat of an enigma. Some of these have small projections on the front of the closure as if to catch in some material and it could be that they were used to secure the woollen hose commonly in use at this time. If so they are an early form of suspender although it must be said that plain annular buckle-brooches were also used for this purpose (see Cunnington, figure 19a), and this explanation would hardly suffice for the very large example featured on the September 1986 cover of *Treasure Hunting* magazine. The fastenings for hose would all be suspended by leather(?) straps from the breke-belt by brygyrdle as it was known. Whatever their exact purpose, I would suggest that all these tongue-less types are a kind of quick-release mechanism. Recently a new type of tongue-less buckle has been brought to my attention (see Fig 12:nos 28 and 29) and for obvious reasons they have been named kingshead buckles.

Buckles for horse-harness and iron buckles (other than for spurs) have for the most part been omitted from this survey and wait separate classification. I have also only briefly touched on the subject of the materials from which belts were made, but it would be a serious mistake to assume that all belts or girdles were made of leather. Archaelogical evidence has proved more than once that the residues of material that are occasionally found between the buckle-plates are of a woven braid. Various other materials are also mentioned in documentary sources including silk. For such materials a metal buckle-plate to attach to the buckle would be most essential but of course they were also used with leather straps too.

Reverend Hume[2] states that the buckle-maker followed a separate and distinct trade to that of the girdler or belt-maker in the Medieval period and this is mentioned in several of the Medieval treatises. In Mayer's *Vocabularies* we have noted '*Hic Capellarius, a bokyl-maker*'. Makers of buckles are also mentioned in the 13th century by John de Garlande who uses the Latin term '*Pluscularii*', interpreted as 'bogelers' in old English. However, the manufacture of Medieval buckles, particularly in the early period must have been on a scale little larger than a domestic or cottage industry and this would account for the minor differences of detail on many buckles of apparently identical type. Nevertheless, throughout Western-Europe buckles of this period exhibit, if not a common source, a common style and the possibility of some imports and copying as well as the import of the raw material should not be overlooked, particularly as England has no recognisable brass-founding industry of its own before the late-Tudor period. Because of this a great deal of scrap brass would have been collected and recycled for further use.

The majority of the loops for buckles were made by casting the molten metal in stone moulds, usually singly but sometimes in pairs or multiple moulds when demand became greater in the late-Medieval to Tudor period[3]. Although moulds have been found for brooches and other small artefacts it can only be by chance that none have so far been found for buckles. Some buckles are also cast with the loop and plate all in one piece (see my Fig 5:Type ID). An increasing number of buckles from the later 14th century onwards are of composite construction with separate loop and spindle. Some of these buckles were formed from sheet metal rather than from castings, and a few of my Type IVB tongue-less buckles were produced in this way. Buckle loops of Type IN are also commonly found constructed from sheet metal which has been twisted for added strength and then joined to a separate spindle. Evidence for double-loop frames with separate spindles is mostly confined to the period post-1660, but this form of construction may have been used from 1425. The type of chape used with these rare early examples is at present unknown.

Decoration of the loops
Decoration of the loops as in all periods is by ornamentation in the mould and hand finishing by engraving with fine chisels or punching with stamps. Many Medieval base-metal buckles were gilded with gold-leaf and plated or tinned with white-metal in imitation of more costly pieces used by the upper-classes and settings for stones (common for brooches but less so for buckles) were paste as the use of precious gems on base-metal artefacts was forbidden
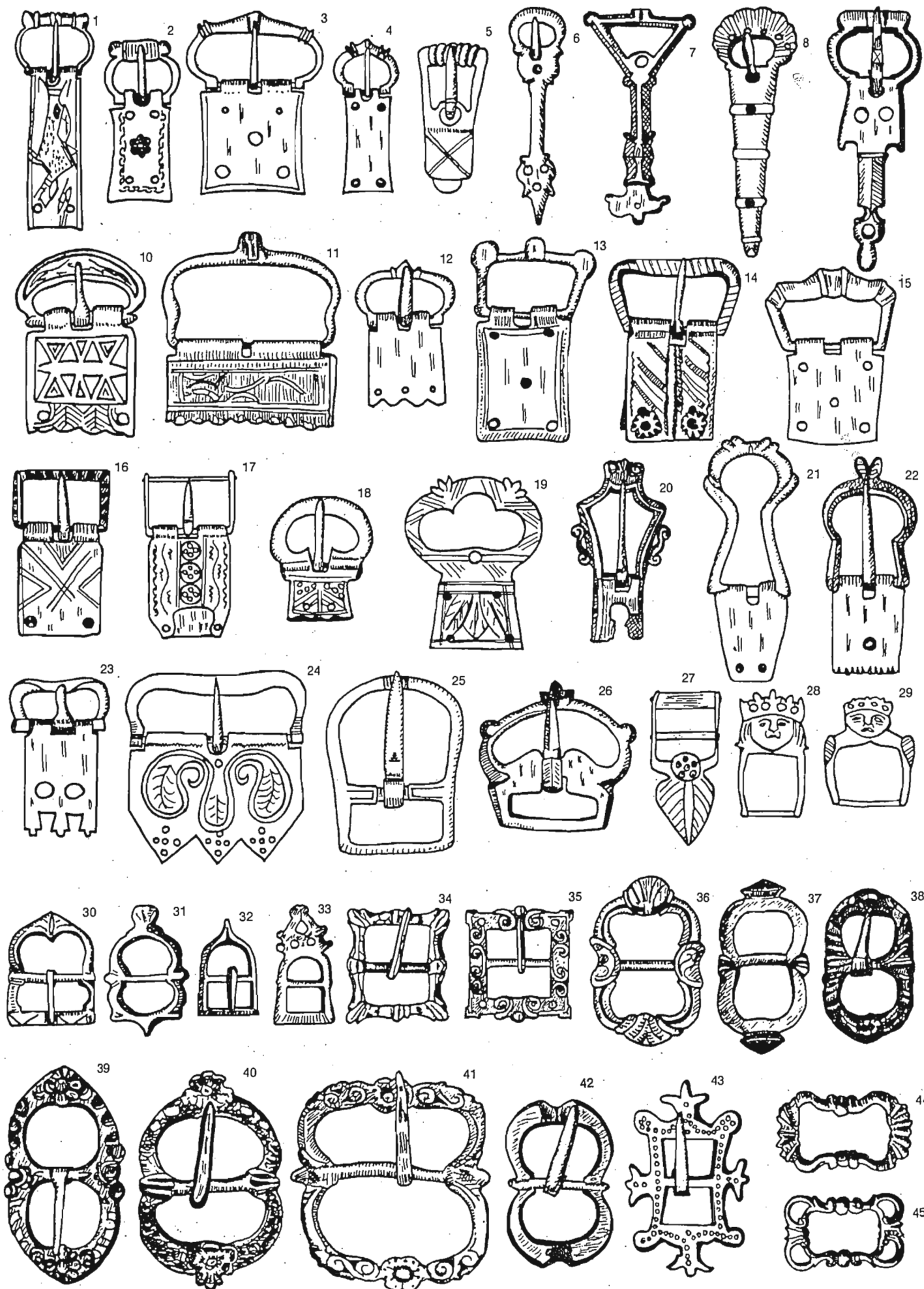
Fig 12: no's 1–29 – Medieval (13th–15thc.) no's 30–45 – post-Medieval (16th–17thc.)

Scale: 71%

by Sumptuary Law. Buckle-plates, when not cast in one piece with the loop, were cut from sheet-metal and folded over the bar of the loop, the strap being sandwiched between the plates and secured by rivets. These rivets may vary in number from 1-5 and some have decorative stud-like heads. Decoration of the plates is by engraving – zig-zag lines are common, and by punching – lines of opposed triangles are often used as borders and may also have been applied by a roulette. From the 15th century to the Tudor period the plates become more decorative and include repoussé decoration – the raising of the metal from behind using various punches to produce raised lines, pellets and cabling.

Evidence for the use of buckles of precious metal in the Medieval period is contained in Wills and enough documented examples have survived to suggest their common use amongst the er and knightly classes. Two examples are quoted below:-

'...I devise to Sir Randolf Munchensi my small sword and a buckle with emeralds, to Sir Robert de Bridishale a buckle with emeralds...'
Testament of Sir Hugh de Nevill, 1267AD[4]

'...Also I geue to the aforesaid John Forster a gudill of black sylke y- linyde with rede leather, with a gode bockyll and a pendaunt, and in the same pendaunt an ymage of seynt Christofre; in the gurdill bey XLVI stodys of seleur...'
Testament of Thomas Bathe, Bristol, 1420AD[5]

The various uses noted for buckles in the Medieval period continued in the Tudor period but it is possible in some cases to trace the evolution of types from monumental church brasses and effigies. For instance the change to double-loop buckles can be illustrated in this way by comparing the closures used for rd-belts in the 15th century when most will be of the single-loop variety – the brass of Sir Thomas Bromflete (1430AD) in Wymington Church, Bedfordshire is an exception. Conversely for the 16th century and later the buckles will be seen to be of the double-loop variety in nearly all cases. Again there are exceptions – the brass of Peter Coryton (died 1551AD) at St Mellion, Cornwall depicts a buckle with single loop. The brass of Humphrey Brewster (1593AD) at Wrentham, Suffolk depicts a buckle exactly like my Fig 7: no 29 and also illustrates the type of hook fastener that is associated with it. Much valuable evidence can be gained from these monuments and any future work on buckles will of necessity rely on them for much of the dating of types.

Shoe buckles

Shoe buckles we are told[6] were common in England during the early 1500's but were servicable rather than

handsome and stitched directly on to the shoe. From c1570 the high-shoe developed latchets or straps which were tied with multiple ribbons in oramental bows over the tongued front. From c1610 these bows were often replaced by large rosettes of roses and these were to remain in use until 1680 when shoe buckles again became popular. A particular type of shoe however, worn mostly by country people, continued to be fastened by buckles during this period. These were called startups or bagging shoes which were a high shoe of rough leather fitting above the ankles and laced or buckled on the outer side – 'A high shoe with yelow buckles' R Armin, A Nest of Ninnies (1608)

Shoe buckles came back into fashion for the upper classes around 1660, it is generally believed with the Restoration, but they are mentioned slightly earlier – 'I like the noble buckskin for the leg and the boucle better than the formal rose' Evelyn. Diary (1659)

Samuel Pepys' mention of shoe buckles in 1660 is well known but it was not until the 1680's that shoe buckles came into universal use by all classes – 'Certain foolish young men have begun to fasten their shoes and kneebands with buckles instead of ribbons... which surely every man will own were more decent than these new-fangled, unseemly clasps or buckles'. London Gazette

From the beginning these buckles were made so as to be removable and they became, in many cases, items of jewellery to be transfered or exchanged as took the fancy of the owner. By the end of the 17th century a substantial buckle making industry had developed centred on Birmingham having been introduced there from Staffordshire in the 1680's. By the latter half of the 18th century Birmingham was employing 4,000 people in the manufacture of buckles and turning out 2,500,000 pairs annually at an average cost of 2s 6d per pair. Much of this output was due to the stamping machine invented by John Pickering in 1769 and subsequently improved by Richard Ford of Birmingham, as now buckle-frames could be machine-pressed from prepared dies.

In the last quarter of the 18th century shoe buckles reached enormous sizes; the largest of which were called Artois buckles – 'All our young fops of quality, and even the lowest of our people in London, wear coach-harness buckles, the latter in brass, white metal and pinchbeck; the former in silver weighing 8 or 10 ounces'. The Gentleman's and London Magazine, June 1777.

Having reached the most extravagent stage possible, a change in fashion was almost inevitable, but the catalyst for change in this instance was the French Revolution when simplicity in dress became the order of the day and shoe

strings began to replace buckles. This change in fashion was gradually absorbed into England to the extent that in 1791 bucklemakers of Birmingham, Walsall and Wolverhampton found the need to petition the Prince of Wales due to the distress to the trade 'consequent on the fashion of wearing strings'.[7] By 1793 shoe buckles were completely out of fashion, except for some Court dress, but buckles for everyday wear never again regained their former glory.

I have chosen to end this present survey here at the end of the 18th century but of course this is not the end of the story. Victorian and later buckles must await further research and much remains to be discovered in other areas too. Buckles have been used, as we have seen, in all periods and for many different applications and it is likely that they will continue to be, for even in this high-tec age they have their uses. When you fasten your child's shoe, adjust your belt or tighten the girth on a horse, you may reflect that except for minor differences in style you are still using a type of fastner that has remained fundamentally unchanged through the ages for 2,000 years.

References
1   Cunnington C.W and P. – Handbook of English Medieval Costume (1969)
2   Hume A – Ancient Meols, or Some Account of the Antiquities...(1863)
3   Information supplied by Mr A de Reuk, London
4   Archaeologia, Second series, Vol 56, part 2; page 354 (1899)
5   Furnivall F – Earliest English Wills...
6   Hone W – The Every-Day Book, 2 Vols (1827)
7   Hamilton H – The English Brass and Copper Industries to 1800 (1967)

Corrections to Buckles Through the Ages
1   Part 4:no 42 – not Urnes style. Date is correct.
2   Part 4: Type IC – a serious doubt remains that these may not be Saxon in date despite their earlier publication as such by Bu'lock.
3   Part 5: Type IH – examples of this type have been found in early-mid 14th century contexts – CBA Research Report 35. The Austin Friars, Leicester. (1981)
4   Scale of figures not 1:2. All figures are reduced to 71% (B4-A4).