



Leda and the Swan Brooch

This brooch was found at Coddanham after some ditch clearing, next to an arable field adjacent to Sharpstone Street. This was a highly industrial area in Roman times, with many Roman kilns discovered, including the only known kiln in Suffolk to produce mortaria, better known as grinding bowls.

The brooch is an openwork plate brooch manufactured from a copper alloy and is complete with pin and catchplate. It depicts Leda reclining with the swan in an erotic pose. The subject matter is not recorded in any of Hattatt's four volumes on Roman and associated brooches and is therefore extremely rare. There are prints from the 1960's showing a nude couple looking out through the beak of a swan into a waterfall and one wonders if the inspiration originates from the subject matter discussed here.

Leda and the Swan is a story from Greek mythology in which the god Zeus, in the form of a swan, seduces, or rapes, Leda. The subject matter was used on small-scale sculptures with both reclining and standing poses, and in cameos and engraved gems, rings, and terracotta oil lamps.



Leda and the Swan, a 16th-century copy by Peter Paul Rubens, after a lost painting by Michelangelo



A mosaic from Cyprus (c. 3rdC AD)