

## IV.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FORTIFICATIONS ON RUBERSLAW, ROXBURGHSHIRE, AND NOTICES OF ROMAN REMAINS FOUND THERE.  
By ALEXANDER O. CURLE, F.S.A. Scot.

The peak of Ruberslaw is a prominent feature in the landscape of southern Roxburghshire. Situated in the angle formed by the confluence of the Teviot and its tributary the Rule, it is nine miles distant from the nearest point of the English border, five miles as the crow flies east of the town of Hawick, and five and a quarter miles south-west of Jedburgh. Attaining to an altitude of 1392 feet, unlike the numerous hills of the district, it has a summit rugged and precipitous, composed of igneous rock much exposed and disintegrated, which has thrust its way through the strata of the old red sandstone lying on the flanks of the hill. Leyden has aptly described it in *Scenes of Infancy* :

“ Dark Ruberslaw, that lifts his head sublime,  
Rugged and hoary with the wrecks of time ;  
On his broad misty front the giant wears  
The horrid furrows of ten thousand years.”

Being an isolated peak, it commands a magnificent prospect of the surrounding country. To the east and south the Cheviots meet the skyline ; to the west range the grassy hills of Liddesdale and of Selkirk- and Peebles-shires ; while to the north lies the valley of the Teviot, and over ten miles of fertile champaign the triple heights of the Eildons assert themselves, with the more distant Lammermoors crowning the horizon. For a fort or post of observation it affords the most commanding situation in that region. Viewed from the west and south, the characteristic features of the hill are : the summit terminating in a precipitous rock, some 25 feet in height ; a plateau which from the base of that rock stretches round towards the south-east ; and about 50 feet below the edge of the plateau, a natural terrace passing round the hill from the east and south and drawing towards

the summit on the north. From the north-west a rough track leads through the heather, mounting the shoulder of the hill, and after passing between a number of rocky hillocks and intersecting the terrace, approaches the summit at the north-eastern extremity. Immediately to the south-east of the hillocks which form the left side of the pass, up which this track leads, is a similar but broader depression which, running in the same direction, meets it just below the summit and before it meets the terrace. This hollow measures about 25 paces in width, and is strewn at intervals with large boulders, which present such regularity of aspect, crossing it in rows, as to suggest that their position is not due to natural causes; and therefore I direct attention to them, though it may not be possible to form a definite conclusion concerning them. About 120 yards from the point of junction with the path, a ridge across the hollow suggests the existence of a wall; 15 paces nearer a line of boulders is met with; at 11 paces further on a similar line; and at 13 another; and for some distance onwards the boulders crop up irregularly over the surface in considerable numbers.

The summit, as will be seen from the plan, is roughly pear-shaped in outline, the broader end being near the entrance towards the north-east, while the narrow extremity bends slightly towards the south. Except at the entrance, where the approach leads up an easy gradient, it is flanked all round by steep banks and precipitous cliffs, which latter at the extreme south-western end rise about 25 feet above the plateau beneath. Near the centre of this cliff a chasm runs from top to bottom, which, from its occupancy and employment in Covenanted times, bears the name of "Peden's Pulpit." The greatest length of the summit is 265 feet; its maximum breadth, which occurs at 80 feet from the entrance, is 105 feet. The entrance (marked A on the plan, fig. 1) between two rocks is 8 feet in width, and across its sill there is a suggestion of the base of a wall. Proceeding inward, you enter a basin, the edges of which are chiefly natural rock; but in one place at least, on the north side, though grass-covered, there appears to be a wall filling up a gap between two rocks. The ground rises gradually, and at 65 feet inwards on the north side

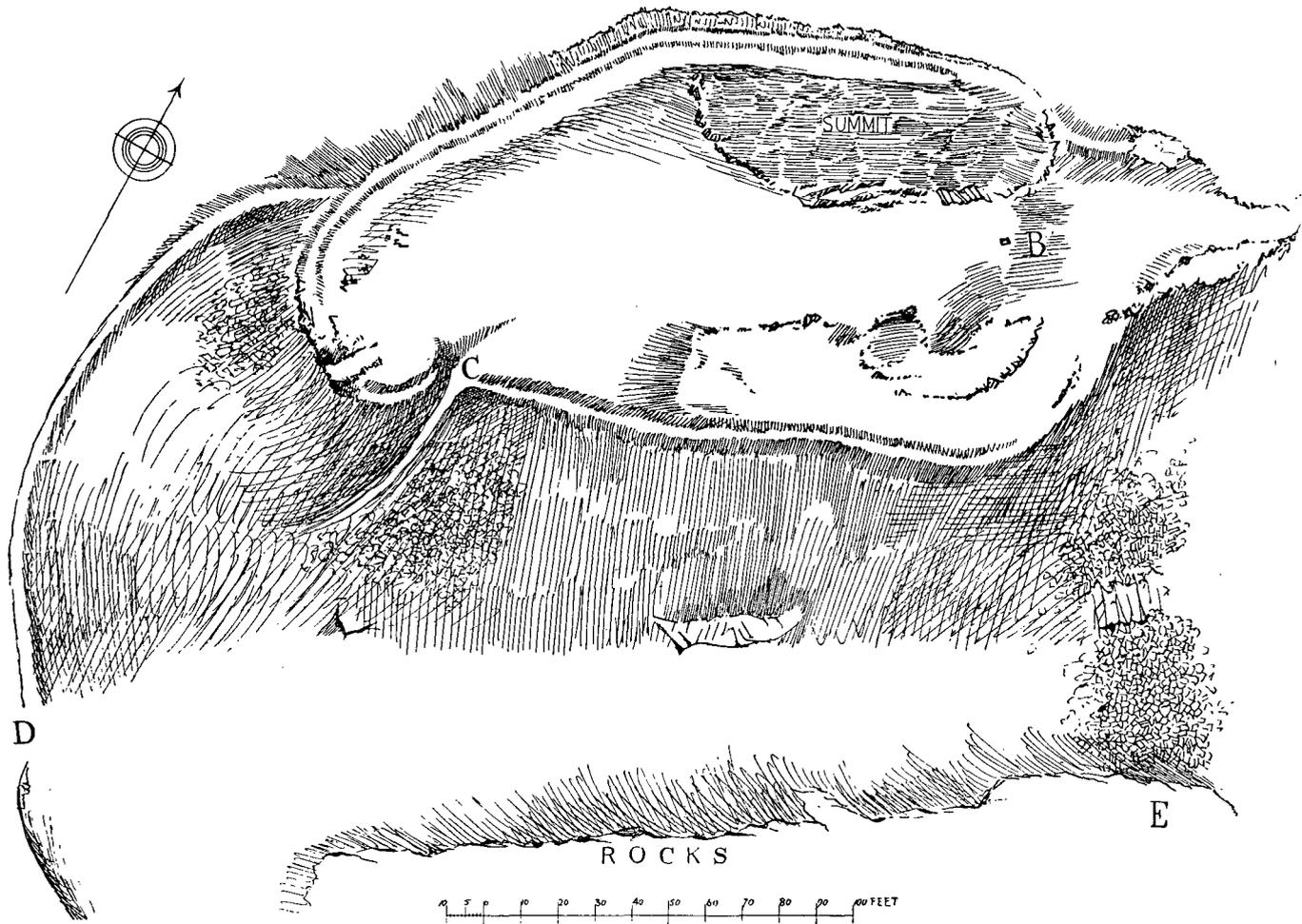


Fig 1. Plan of Fort on Ruberslaw. (By Thomas Ross, Architect.)

attains its highest point, an outcropping rock swept bare by the winds, and from a few feet inside the northern edge reaching nearly half way across. On the opposite side of the summit another rock of smaller dimensions crops out to the surface. Joining these two eminences at the eastern end, there is a bank (marked B on the plan) which has all the appearance of being artificial. All around the summit, following the edge, runs a mound or rampart with a trench on the inner side. This rampart in some places is still several feet high, and, to judge from two sections, which seem to have been made by sheep, is composed of earth and small stones. From the face of one of these sections I picked out a number of minute fragments of bone, bleached with the elements. The trench is particularly definite on the northern side, and is here divided by transverse ridges of a foot or so in breadth, probably the bases of walls, into a number of rectangular enclosures, apparently for hut shelters against the rampart. I have noted seven of these along this side, the largest of which, nearest the outcropping rock, is 30 feet long, while the others, though all varying in size, are mostly about half that length. At the south end (at C on the plan) a pathway leads down a steep bank to the plateau beneath. Now, although there is no appearance of a built wall on the summit, except, as mentioned before, near the entrance, yet on the slopes around there lie rickles of stones many feet deep, either the wreck of a wall which crowned, or faced, the earthen rampart, or perhaps placed in their present position to impede the rush of an enemy.

Five-and-twenty feet or more below the summit, and to the south of it, lies the plateau already referred to. Towards the south-west it is more or less level and grassy; but on the south, and running parallel with the summit, is a mass of rock reaching for 210 feet eastwards, separated from the base of the slope, which runs down from the summit, by a narrow stretch of turf about 20 feet in width. This rock on the inner side rises gradually as the ground falls away towards the east, but on the southern face it is throughout rugged and precipitous, and forms a strong natural defence. The main part of the plateau is

surrounded by a rampart which starts at the base of the cliff, 43 feet to the north-west of Peden's Pulpit, and proceeds along the edge of the plateau. This rampart has also been slightly broken into at one point, and shows its composition to be stones, of no great size, and earth. Following it along, we come to the main entrance at a spot (marked D on the plan) exactly opposite the commencement of the narrow pass between the summit and the rocks, and 94 feet distant therefrom. This entrance is 13 feet across. To the south of it at intervals may be seen the lower course of a wall of rude masonry, composed of rough unhewn blocks of whinstone, and the debris strewn around shows that the wall must have been of considerable dimensions. This building is slightly below the level of the rampart, and apparently formed a facing to it. Proceeding onwards from the entrance the rampart meets the rocks to the south of the plateau on the edge of the southern face, and a grass-grown path the whole length of the ridge shows the line of the defences. Now, this ridge culminates in a cliff (E on the plan) which towards the summit, *i.e.* on the inner side, presents a face about 30 feet in height, and is distant about 40 feet from the rocks at the edge of the slope opposite. As this was undoubtedly a weak point in the natural defences of the hill, the fort builders erected an enormous wall to fill up the gap and link on the rocky ridge with the summit. What the height of this wall originally was we cannot tell, but the debris forms a heap across the gap several feet high and 24 feet broad. On the outer or eastern side of this mass of debris, and 14 feet back from it, there is an irregular row of boulders set on end, running parallel to it. It is difficult to see exactly what purpose these boulders could have served with a high wall in rear of them, but I think there cannot be much doubt that their position there is not accidental. On the plateau there are no hut circles or similar depressions as on the summit, from which we may infer that the occupants of the fort had their dwellings all on the latter situation, probably reserving the former for their flocks and herds. No springs of water are to be found at either elevation, nor is there any appearance of a well; but along a line at a level about 150

feet below the top of the hill on the south-west side, and commencing almost straight down from the entrance to the plateau, there are a number of excellent springs, this line probably representing the upper edge of the sandstone formation. At this level, and passing within a few feet of these springs, there are the remains of an old stone dyke which has at one time formed the upper boundary of a field or plantation. Towards the middle of this wall, and in the vicinity of the springs, one is struck by the huge size of the whinstones which the builders have employed, and also by the fact that for a considerable distance there appear three distinct rows of large boulders running parallel to each other, occupying a space of from 8 to 10 feet, each row being 2 feet apart. Such regularity does not seem to be fortuitous; but as the position of the stones is on the upper side of the springs, though within a few feet of them, their purpose is obscure.

Between this row of springs and the plateau winding round the hill, occurs the terrace I have before referred to. In appearance it resembles a grass-grown road, but I think its formation is natural. Following it round the hill from south to east, it passes by the base of the crags that flank that side of the plateau, and, proceeding onwards across the march dyke, falls away in a long, straight slope down to the base of the hill. Near the top of this slope, and not far east of the point where the march dyke crosses the terrace, are two contiguous and rectangular enclosures, contained each on three sides by a broad bank of earth and stones. The fourth side of these enclosures, that towards the north, is in each case the craggy face of a cliff. The upper enclosure is slightly the larger, its dimensions being 105 feet along the upper or western face, by 90 feet in length. The upper face of the lower enclosure is 15 feet shorter than that of the other, on which it subtends, but its length is about 120 feet. About 40 feet from the lower side on the front or south face an entrance is distinctly visible. The banks are on an average about 6 feet wide, and rise about 2 feet above the level of the surrounding turf. Where the two enclosures are in contact the breadth of the bank is much greater. By permission of the proprietor, Sir Robert Usher, I had

the bank dug into, and found it to be composed of large blocks of whinstone embedded in earth without any semblance of building. A couple of short trenches dug towards the centre of the upper enclosure disclosed no signs of occupancy—the soil was deep and the grassy surface hummocky.

Now, in connection with the fortifications on this hill there arises a subject of considerable interest. I have mentioned that the rock is igneous, and that it is exposed in great quantities about the upper part of the hill both in cliffs and shattered fragments. The builders of the walls or ramparts of the fort, having this unlimited material at hand, had no need to bring from any other part of the hill a supplementary supply of freestone. Yet wherever is encountered the debris of walls, or the rickles of stones around the summit and the plateau, there also are to be found a certain number of carefully dressed freestones both red and white in colour. The majority of these stones are in longitudinal section, roughly triangular, being about 12 inches in depth, the length of the face varying from 11 to 15 inches, with the breadth invariably 8 inches. A few of them are ornamented with well-defined diamond broaching (see fig. 2), exactly similar to that observed on many stones found in the Roman camp at Castlecary, on the Northumberland Wall, and other Roman sites. One stone I observed was neatly dressed on the face with a herring-bone or feather broaching. A few stones of from 2 to 3 feet in length have the appearance of lintels, or sills of windows. There can, I think, be little doubt to anyone examining these stones that the work on them is Roman, and we have here probably the remains of a Roman building of some sort which the builders of the fort at a later date made use of. But we are met with a difficulty. The Romans, as far as we know, never erected buildings or kept outposts on such lofty and exposed situations. On the suggestion that these stones might have been taken up to the summit from some camp lower down, though for what reason is not obvious, I made a careful search round the flanks of the hill for traces of Roman entrenchments or building, but found none

An examination of the stone walls, which in several places run high up the hill, showed that the stone almost invariably used in them was whinstone, and that only where the walls approached highest up the hill on the west and south sides of it, did freestones occur, and these



Fig. 2. Stones with diamond broaching.

showed the same workmanship. On the back of the hill, opposite the plateau, except in the immediate vicinity of the summit, I could find none of these stones. Finally, some of the stones are seen protruding through the turf on the summit itself. On the slopes immediately below, and especially on the south and south-east sides, they occur in

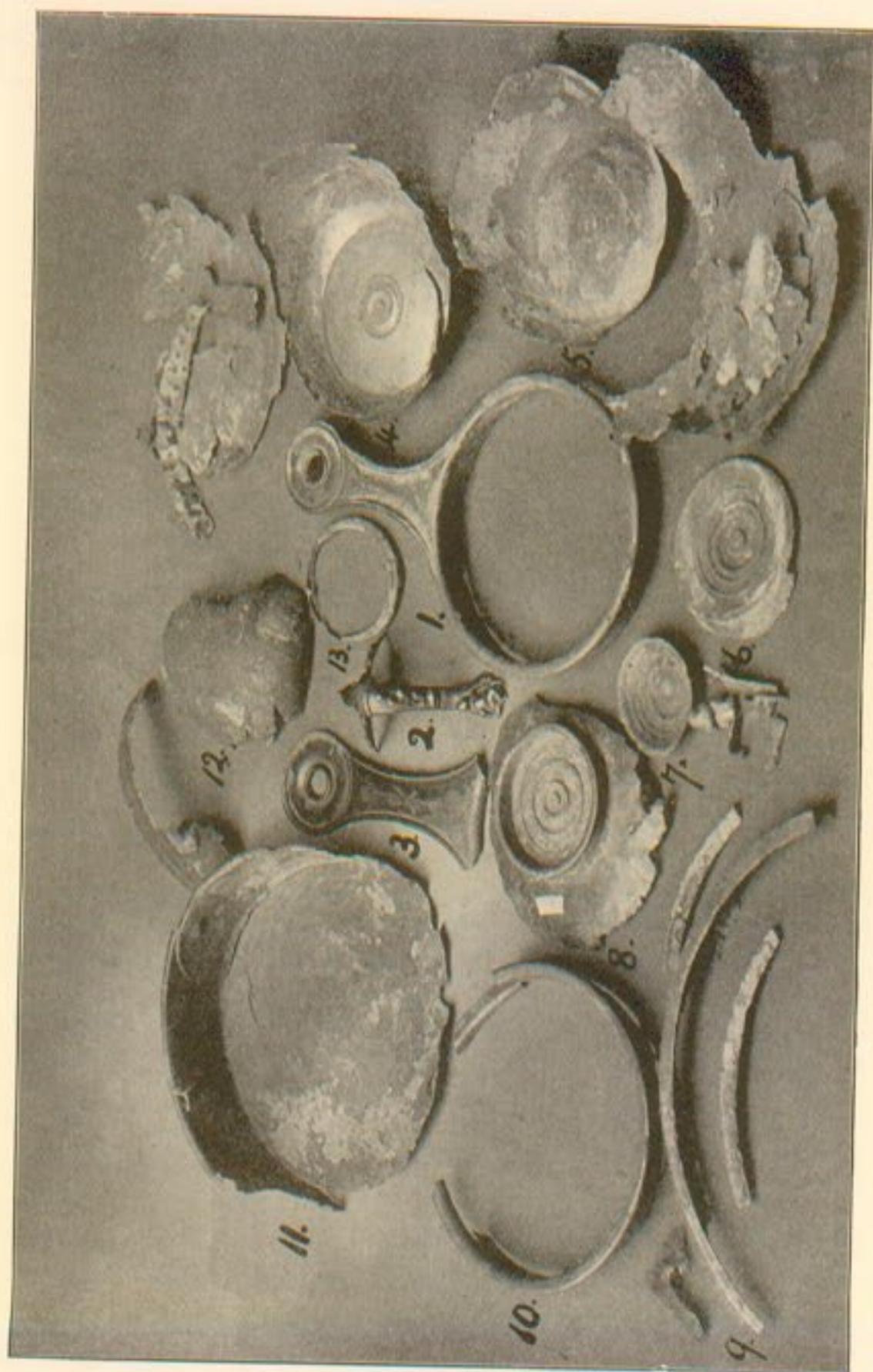


Fig. 3. Hoard of Bronze Vessels found at Ruberslaw.

greatest numbers; in the ruins of the wall around the plateau they are occasionally visible, and as you descend the hill they rapidly cease to appear. Without excavation it is impossible to arrive at a definite conclusion; but the evidence points to there having been a Roman building on the summit, whence a most extensive prospect would make it suitable for a post of observation, or for a signalling station. Three and a half miles due south the Wheel Causeway, which, though never identified as a Roman road, has had that character from time to time attributed to it, probably merged in the highway from Liddesdale to Jedburgh, near the farm of Cleuchhead.<sup>1</sup> The nearest ascertained Roman station is Cappuck, on the Oxnam, 8 miles to the east. In the year 1863 a workman employed digging field drains on the upper portion of the hill on the south side, discovered a hoard of bronze objects, which were placed in the Hawick Museum and noted in the *Report on Local Museums in Scotland*, by Dr Anderson and Mr G. F. Black, in 1888.

It consisted of the objects shown and numbered in fig. 3, viz. :—

1. The handle and rim of a patera or pan—extreme length,  $12\frac{3}{8}$  inches; greatest breadth across the handle,  $2\frac{3}{8}$  inches; length of handle,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches diameter inside the rim,  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

2. Handle of a præfericulum, or bronze ewer (see also fig. 4), decorated with two figures of dwarfs in high relief. The upper figure has his right foot placed on the head of a bird of prey, probably an eagle, while the left, raised, rests on some object which may represent a cloud. The figure at the base of the handle is in a sitting posture looking upwards, and holds some indefinable object in his right hand. Between the bird and the lower figure appears some slight incised decoration of a foliaceous character. The horn-like projections which were attached to the rim of the vessel (see fig. 6) are rendered as the heads and beaks of birds—the eyes and feathers being clearly discernible. The eyes of the figures, the band which crosses the handle at the shoulder, and two prominences on the upper portion, have all been plated with silver. The greatest length is 5 inches; diameter between the points of the curved

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey's *History and Antiquities of Roxburghshire*, vol. i. p. 248.

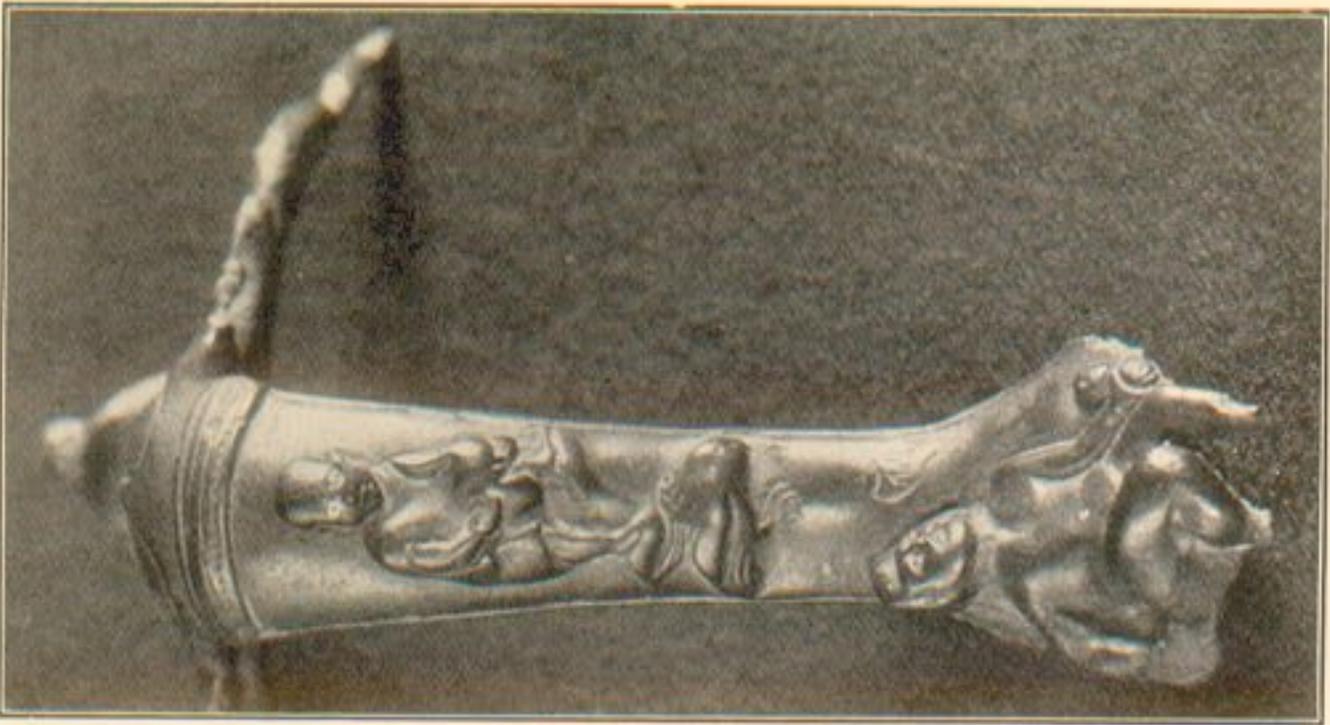


Fig. 4. Bronze Handle found at Ruberslaw.

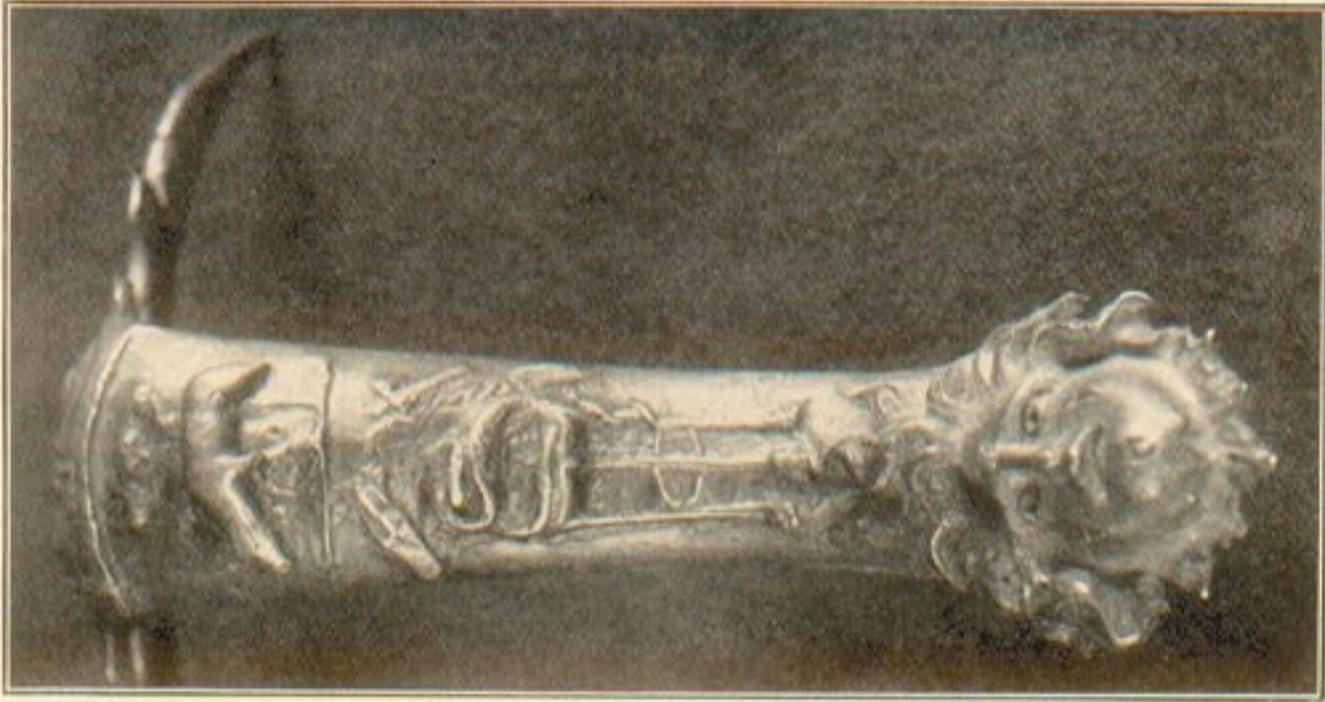


Fig. 5. Bronze Handle found at Cairnholly.

projections, 3 inches. Among the vessels with handles of similar form in the British Museum there is one found at Carlisle.

For comparison there is also shown here (fig. 5) a similar handle found at Cairnholly, Kirkcudbrightshire.<sup>1</sup> It is  $6\frac{1}{4}$  inches in length, and has a diameter of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches between the projecting points. The lower portion of the handle takes the form of a Medusa head; the main part is divided into two compartments; on the lower and larger appears a tripod, with a serpent entwining its body around one of the legs; above

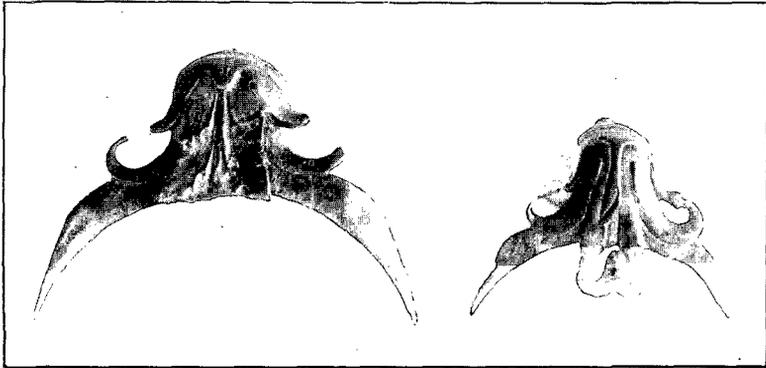


Fig. 6. Tops of the Handles, seen from above.

the tripod, on one side, a cithera; on the other, a bow unstrung and a quiver of arrows. The higher compartment shows a stag browsing in a forest. The upper portions of the two handles (fig. 6) are very similar.

3. Handle of a patera, 7 inches in length, and  $2\frac{5}{8}$  inches in breadth across its widest part. The device on this handle is almost identical with that on a specimen from Herringfleet in Suffolk, on which occurs, however, the name "Quattenus." It is illustrated by Mr F. Haverfield in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London*, vol. xvi., and differs but slightly from that on the handle of one of the saucepans found on Lambertton Moor, and illustrated in this volume.

<sup>1</sup> Now preserved in the National Museum of Antiquities.

4. Fragment of a tinned pan, the diameter of which inside the bottom is  $4\frac{3}{8}$  inches.

5. The lower portion of a pan, the diameter of which inside the bottom is  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

6. Do. ; interior diameter,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

7. Do. ; diameter,  $2\frac{1}{8}$  inches.

8. Do. ; exterior diameter,  $3\frac{9}{16}$  inches.

9. Fragment of a rim ; diameter inside the extremities,  $11\frac{1}{4}$  inches.

10. Do. ; longest interior diameter,  $6\frac{1}{16}$  inches.

11. Bottom and portion of side of a flat-bottomed vessel ; interior diameter,  $8\frac{3}{4}$  inches ; height of side,  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches.

12. Fragment of the side of a vessel and portion of the foot ; height,  $3\frac{3}{4}$  inches.

13. Small circular rim ; outside diameter,  $3\frac{1}{8}$  inches.

Nos. 12 and 13 are probably fragments of the vessel of which No. 2 formed the handle.<sup>1</sup>

These relics are preserved in the Hawick Museum, and are here figured by kind permission of the curators.

On the same side of the hill, but several hundred feet lower down, near a place called the Crawbrae, on the farm of Hallrule, some workmen opening up a quarry discovered in a cavity of a stone, nearly 2 feet below the surface, two copper coins, one of which is said to have been a coin of the reign of the Emperor Maximinus, while the other was apparently lost before being identified.<sup>2</sup>

In conclusion, I may mention that no indications of fortifications on this hill are to be found on the sheets of the Ordnance Survey ; but in Timothy Pont's Map of Teviotdale there may be seen surmounting the summit a symbol, which I interpret as indicating the existence of a tower. This does not, of course, imply that Timothy Pont was a more careful geographer than the officer under whose direction the

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Mr Alex. Inglis, Hawick, for kindly making these measurements for me.

<sup>2</sup> MS. Journal of the late Walter Deans, Hobkirk.

recent survey was made ; but that in his time, either the remains of the fortifications were very evident, or, more probably, the site of a tower which is believed to have stood on the slope of the hill was, in a chart on such a small scale, placed on the top.