

THE
Archaeological Journal.

MARCH, 1847.

ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF BRONZE CELTS.

THE earliest history of all the Celtic tribes leads us back to a period, when the use of stone and flint for weapons or implements of social economy was universally prevalent: and when, after the lapse doubtless of many centuries, intercourse with other nations had afforded the aborigines of western Europe a knowledge of working in metals, the obvious advantages to be derived from such a change were easily felt, and at once appreciated. The stone hatchet and flint arrow-head must soon have ceased to be used, but in this great change, as in every other which a nation undergoes, the alteration, in one respect, as regards the forms of the weapons, appears to have been gradual. Thus we see in the earliest celts of bronze that the form of their prototypes in stone is strictly followed; and it is not until after a series of changes in shape, which indicate an increase of skill and ingenuity, that we at last reach to what may be regarded as the full developed celt. In arrow-heads the same rule may be distinctly observed.

As proof of this rather curious fact in the history of our Celtic ancestors, the accompanying series of representations of bronze celts (among which I have figured two of the same weapons, one in stone the other in flint) has been formed chiefly from the specimens preserved in the British Museum. If this notice can be of use towards enabling collectors to arrange these relics in what may be termed a natural order, my object in bringing this most interesting class of Celtic antiquities before the notice of archæological enquirers will be fully gained.

That we may more readily trace the gradual development in form, from the bronze celt, shaped like a *wedge*, to that which is socketed, finely proportioned, and often displaying embossed ornaments, we must endeavour to understand the various methods which would have been adopted for fixing these weapons into handles, as this consideration will I think mainly enable us to pronounce to which of the classes, now proposed, a bronze celt may with propriety be referred.

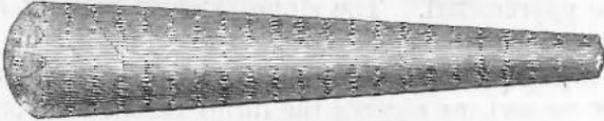
The following are the classes, with the characteristics of each, into which I propose to divide these objects.

1st. Those which are simply wedge-shaped, as in this form they most closely resemble the celt of stone or flint.

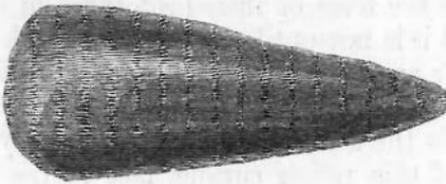
2nd. The wedge with sides more or less overlapping, blade thicker than the wedge for insertion into the handle, and a *stop-ridge* or elevation at the termination of the blade.

3rd. The wedge similar to the former, with sides greatly overlapping, with or without the *stop-ridge*, but having a loop or ear upon, and parallel to, its under surface.

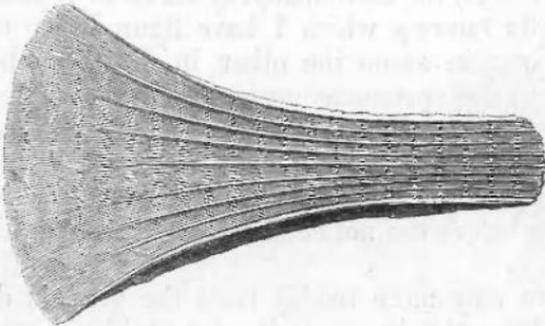
4th. When the ridge for insertion into the handle ceases to be adopted, the implement becoming *socketed* or *hollow*, and usually having an ear upon its under surface.



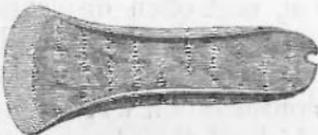
Flint celt, length, 9 in



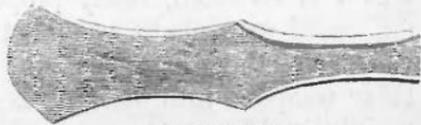
Stone celt, length, 6½ in



A: Bronze celt. Length, 8 in



(B), Length, 4½ in.



(C), Length, 6 in.

The representations here given supply examples of celts

of the first class, from originals existing in the British Museum.

The manner in which weapons of this form could be hafted, is well shewn by a stone celt, with its handle, which was discovered some years since in the county of Tyrone, near Cookstown, and which was, when I saw it, in the possession of Colonel Stewart of Killymoon. Another method of fastening weapons of this shape to a handle, is illustrated by the small hatchet of iron, of this wedge form, preserved in the Belfast museum, and I believe that it was brought from one of the South Sea Islands. The handle and ball are made of a species of bone.



Celt, with its handle, found in co. Tyrone.



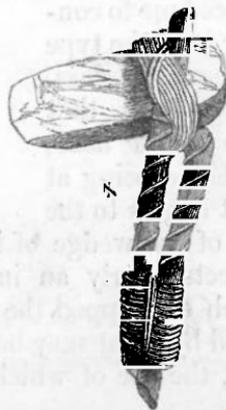
Celt, with handle, from the South Sea Islands.

The annexed figures exhibit modes of fastening weapons of this class, communicated some time since to the Royal Irish Academy in a paper by Robert Ball, Esq., curator of the University museum, Dublin. The first of these specimens was brought from a mine in Mexico, and the other from Little-Fish Bay, in Africa, presented to Mr. Ball by Capt. Adams, R.N.

Although in the three last examples which I have given, we have direct proof as to the manner in which the wedge-like implement could be most efficiently hafted, I am disposed to think the celts (figs. b, c) were attached to their handles somewhat differently. I think a curved piece of wood was procured which was of less diameter than the breadth of the axe; the wood being then split, the axe was inserted into it, and



Celt, with its handle, from Mexico

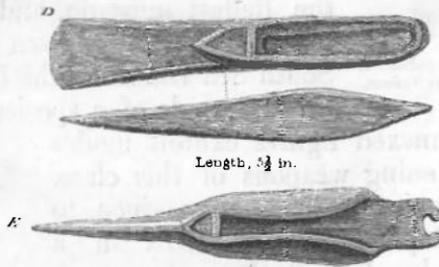
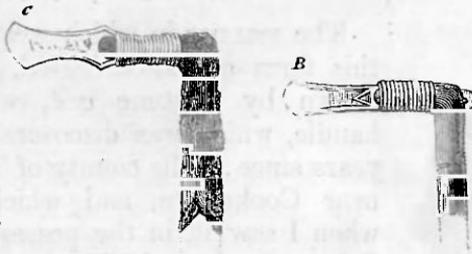


Celt from Africa

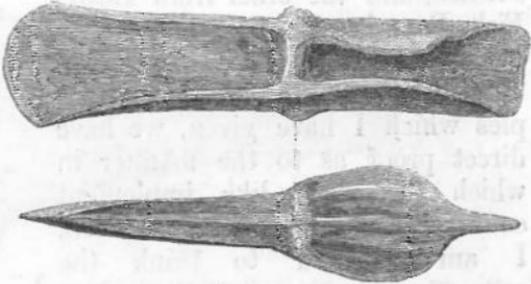
permanently secured by strapings round and round both the handle and the blade. In celt B, we find a rivet-hole at its termination, the use of which is shewn in the annexed sketch, but this feature is of rare occurrence.

Although this mode of fastening is one tolerably secure, yet the ultimate effect from using the weapon as an axe must have been such as would tend to the destruction of the handle, by splitting and bursting the tying, and to obviate this I suppose the contrivance of the *stop-ridge* was adopted (figs. D, E, F, from bronze celts in the British Museum), an addition in form to the axe-head, so material and so distinctive of a metallic implement, that it has induced me to consider it as the type of the second class.

Fig. E is that of a small *adze*, the blade being at right angles to the axis of the wedge of insertion, which latter projects nearly an inch beyond the sides which overlapped the handle, and is terminated by what may be considered as a rivet-hole, the use of which I have shewn in the

Length, $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Length, 6 in

Length, $4\frac{1}{2}$ in

sketch here given. This feature is curious and very rarely to be seen, and appears to have been introduced to prevent the celt from slipping out of its handle, in which from constant use it must have become insecure ^a.

Fig. F is the last example which I can offer of the second class, and probably the sides of the wedge for insertion were spread out as we see them, to obviate, if possible, the necessity of strapping the celt to the handle, which obviously must have been the case in the first example I have adduced.

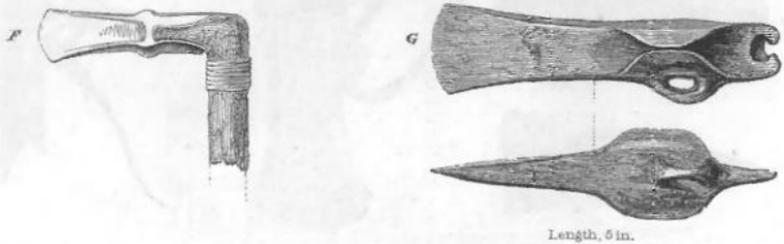
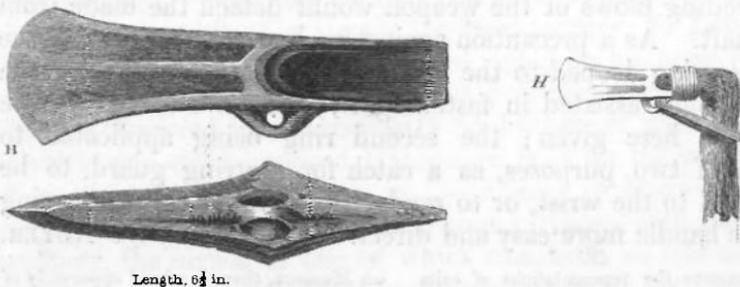


Fig. G^b I regard as the first specimen of the third class, and in it we observe the same prolongation of the wedge for insertion, with the rivet-hole at the end, as in fig. E; we also find the sides which overlapped the handle extended to a singularly great amount, but the feature which I think places this celt in a class distinct from those already noticed, is the loop or ear upon its under surface, the use of which is shewn in the annexed sketch. This is a most admirable contrivance, but we shall see presently that it was much improved upon.

Fig. H is a celt of that form which is most commonly found when the wedge for insertion is not overlapped by its sides, and the ear is introduced; the method of fixing this weapon to its handle is also here shewn.

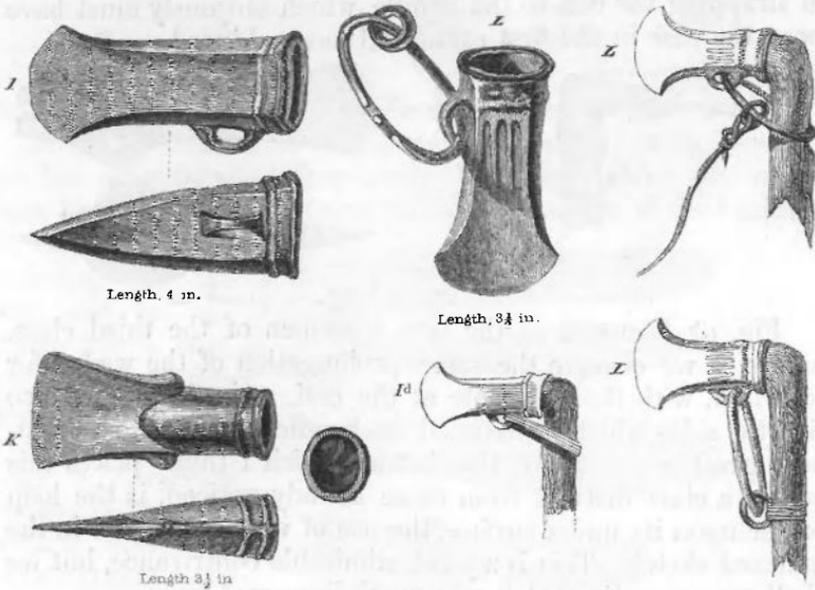


^a Compare an example from Sir William Hamilton's collections in the British Museum, given by Mr. Lort in his *Observations upon Celts*, *Archæologia*, vol. v. pl. x., and another by Mongez, in *Recueil d'Antiqu. Encycl. Method.* from the St.

Genevieve cabinet.

^b Found in the year 1806 on the sea beach near Eastbourne, immediately under Beachey Head.—*Archæologia*, vol. xiv. p. 363.

As celts of the fourth class we have figs. I, K, and L, in which the wedge for insertion is set aside, doubtless from the fact of its weakening the handle, and we have a socketed implement with the addition of the ear, when the implement was to be used as an axe, and without it when it was intended to be used as a chisel, as in fig. K. The method of fastening this celt is shewn in fig. I^c.



We may readily imagine that when a weapon such as that last noticed was in use, the tying, which extended from the ear round the handle, must have been exposed to frequent injury, and from its nature easily cut through, and then a few succeeding blows of the weapon would detach the blade from the haft. As a precaution against such a casualty we find the bronze ring looped to the ear of the celt, (fig. I,) and which might have assisted in fastening it, as I have shewn in the sketches here given; the second ring being applicable to either of two purposes, as a catch for a string guard, to be fastened to the wrist, or to render the tying of the larger ring to the handle more easy and direct. GEORGE V. DU NOYER.

^c Compare the representations of celts attached to their handles, given by Sir Samuel Meyrick, Skelton's Goodrich Court Armoury, vol. i. pl. XLVII.

^d Upon the large ring in this remarkable specimen, now preserved in the Brit-

ish Museum, there is a bead apparently of jet. This curious celt was found near Tadcaster in Yorkshire. It was exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries by Mr. John Crosse, March 5, 1807, and is engraved in *Archæol.*, vol. xvi. pl. 54.