

ART. VI.—*On a Bronze Tripod Vessel, found near Alston.*
By EDWIN JACKSON.

Read at Kendal, July 11th, 1907.

A FARMER digging turf to repair a fence in September, 1906, unearthed the bronze vessel of which a photograph by Mr. C. Varty Smith is given opposite. It lay in an inverted position some eighteen inches below the surface of the ground, and was embedded in charcoal. Unfortunately the greater portion of the handle had been broken off, but was found lying beside it. The site of the find is not far from Castlenook Farm and near a well, known as the Roman Well, on the Maiden Way, a short distance from Alston.

This interesting utensil is a fine and rare example of the mediæval skillet, dating, in the opinion of Mr. C. H. Read of the British Museum and Dr. Joseph Anderson of the Antiquarian Museum, Edinburgh, from the thirteenth century, and exhibiting some quite distinctive characteristics. It is considerably heavier in proportion to its size than any other with which I have been able to compare it. It is made of a kind of bronze known to antiquaries as latten, and has an ornamented band or ribbon round the body at its widest part, and a triangular lip or spout for pouring out the contents. Experts say that this scroll-work band displaying a dragon with protruding tongue barbed at the end, and with a long foliated tail, determines it as of thirteenth century design and make. In many of the illuminated manuscripts of that time this device is a noticeable and favourite design of the scribe, but it is rare on metal work of this kind, therefore we may safely assume that this vessel was made either for some person of high rank or for some particular purpose.



A THIRTEENTH CENTURY SKILLET FOUND AT ALSTON.

Photo. by C. Varty Smith.

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Skillets were, of course, put to all kinds of domestic uses, but were more frequently used for heating water or other liquids, and it may well have been that this one was made for the use of my lady in her own apartment to obviate the necessity of her having recourse to the kitchen and servants on every occasion when she required hot water or wine.

Having regard to its weight and thickness a further use has been suggested. In these *Transactions* (O.S., vol. viii., p. 23), the late Chancellor Ferguson refers to the sum of 100s. paid A.D. 1130, temp. Henry I., for rent of a silver mine at Alston, and it has been thought that this vessel may have been used for roasting and assaying samples of the richer ore from what would be a royal mine. Inside the rim at the top there is a slight ledge which might have supported a moveable cover or lid. This, taken in conjunction with the lip or spout, rather goes to support the suggestion that it was made for use as a caldron or boiler.

Mr. Joseph Cowper of Penrith, himself a chemist, to whom the exhibit belongs, has drawn my attention to certain directions in Culpepper's *Herbal* for making syrups, ointments, &c., in which the use of a bronze or pewter pot with a cover, and the aid of astrology, are considered to be necessary. Whether this vessel has ever been in use as an apothecary's gallipot it is impossible to determine, but it may well have been used for such a purpose.

Of the skillets with which this one has been compared in London, Edinburgh, and Carlisle, the nearest to it in point of size and weight is at Tullie House, where, in the Morton collection, is one rather larger, but lighter and without ornamentation and the lip, though with the curious handle and with ring markings on its upper surface such as this one has. All the others that I have seen are larger, proportionally lighter, and generally without the spout, but usually with a handle of the same character and with the ring markings on the upper surface.

I am informed by an Alston correspondent that some years ago another skillet was found near Alston, and it was for some time in the possession of the Alston Literary Society, but, like the Melmerby coffin chalice, eventually it disappeared. Unfortunately there is no record at Tullie House of the discovery of the Morton skillet.

Their respective weights and dimensions are:—

	ALSTON SKILLET.		MORTON SKILLET.	
	in.	in.	in.	in.
Height.				
Body	$4\frac{3}{8}$	4 ...	
Legs	$1\frac{7}{8}$	3 ...	7
		} $6\frac{1}{4}$		}
Diameter.				
Top	$3\frac{1}{4}$...	$4\frac{5}{16}$
Circumference.				
Widest part	...	$13\frac{1}{2}$...	$15\frac{1}{2}$
Length of handle	...	$6\frac{1}{2}$...	$5\frac{1}{2}$
Weight	oz. 3.10	...	oz. 3.8