

ART. I.—*Prehistoric pottery from Furness*. By F. BARNES, F.S.A.

Read at Carlisle, July 3rd, 1970.

1. Birkrigg urns.

THE North Lonsdale Field Club dug indefatigably into most of the Furness prehistoric sites between 1907 and 1928; only a few of their excavations were properly recorded and most of their finds are no longer available for study. The Barrow Museum, however, possesses some of the material collected by the Club; part of this collection is on loan from Ulverston U.D.C. (CW2 li 174-175) and part was acquired after the death of Mr W. G. Atkinson. Three Bronze Age urns are included in the loan, one from the Birkrigg Stone Circle and two from the Appleby Slack Barrow on Birkrigg; these had all been smashed by "unlucky pushes of the spade" and had been comprehensively but inaccurately reconstructed, using a fearsome assortment of materials including cement, plaster of Paris, builders' plaster and wax. The resultant shape of the urn from the stone circle was not too misleading, though it now had a thick interior lining of cement, its diameter was exaggerated and its height curtailed; the Appleby Slack urns, however (one of which was illustrated in CW2 xiv 471), were ludicrously misleading since what are essentially Bronze Age collared urns were made to appear to be cordoned urns. Such parts of the original pots as were visible were in bad condition and deteriorating because they were surrounded, and sometimes partly covered, by hard cement; it was therefore decided to separate the original sherds from the additions. With care this was accomplished without any further damage, and it was then

found that in each case very little of the original pottery was missing. The sherds were hardened to facilitate handling, and it was then possible to reconstruct each urn with reasonable accuracy. Details are as follows:

Birkrigg Circle urn (CW2 xii 271).

This is a Collared Urn, reddish-brown in colour, the fabric fine with some coarse grits, the interior quite smooth. Collar and neck are concave and decorated with a lattice of twisted cords at 0.6 cm. intervals; the shallow internal bevel has two parallel lines of twisted cord.

Height 13.9 cm.; diameters — rim 12.3 cm., base of collar 13.5 cm., shoulder 13.9 cm., base 8.2 cm. Depth of collar 3.8 cm.; thickness at rim 0.9 cm. Walls 0.9 cm. to 1.3 cm. (Fig. 1, no. 1).

Appleby Slack urn, no. 1 (CW2 xiv 473)

Though at first sight this appears to be a bi-conical urn, the vestige of a shoulder proves it to be tri-partite. The fabric is fine, smooth, reddish-brown ware, the rim has a shallow bevel and the urn is quite undecorated.

Height 13.1 cm.; diameters — rim 9.2 cm., base of collar 11.2 cm., shoulder 9.5 cm., base 7.6 cm. Depth of collar 5.3 cm., thickness of rim 0.6 cm. Walls 0.6 cm. to 1.1 cm. (Fig. 1, no. 3).

Appleby Slack urn, no. 2 (CW2 xiv 475).

This urn was reported to be identical with no. 1 but no fragments have survived.

Appleby Slack urn, no. 3 (CW2 xiv 477).

The fabric is red-brown, coarse and badly fired, the interior stained dark brown to black. It is a larger, cruder copy of no. 1.

Height 18 cm.; diameters — at rim 13.5 cm., base of collar 17.7 cm., shoulder 15.9 cm., base 10.1 cm. Depth of collar 5.8 cm. The rim is rounded and the thickness of wall varies from 1.3 cm. to 1.5 cm. (Fig. 1, no. 2).

For the generally accepted classification of these urns, Dr Longworth's article in *Proceedings Prehistoric Society*, xxvii 263-306, should be consulted; the urn from the Circle falls within his Primary Series of

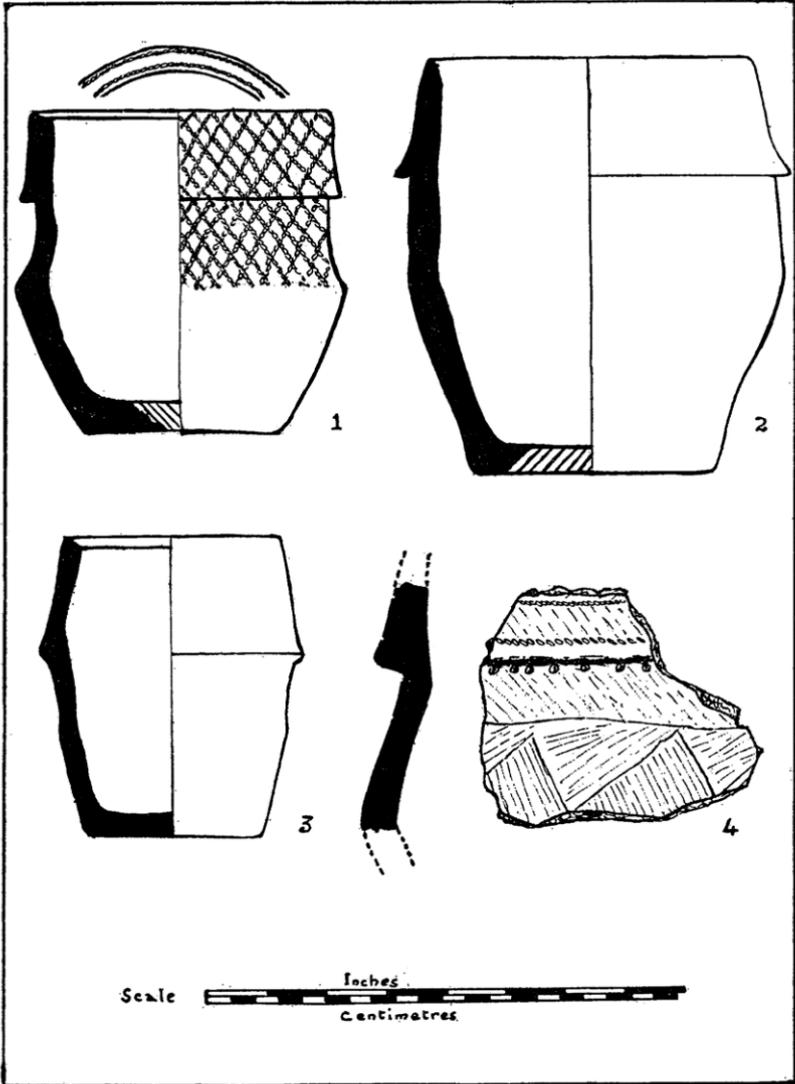


FIG. 1.—nos. 1-3 Birkrigg.
no. 4 Heaning Wood.

Collared Urns, and those from Appleby Slack in his Secondary Series; this is, of course, consistent with the fact that the first came from a burial site surrounded by concentric stone circles, while Appleby Slack was a shallow barrow containing several cremations with and without urns.

The lattice of twisted cords was used on many of the urns from Garlands (CW2 lvi 8-12, fig 4, no. 2; fig. 5, nos. 3, 6, 7; fig. 6, no. 13) while the profiles of the Appleby Slack urns can be paralleled in the same collection, e.g., fig. 5, nos. 5, 6.

2. Heaning Wood urns.

A portion of an interesting Bronze Age collared urn was recovered from a pot-hole at Heaning Wood, Urswick, by Mr E. Holland in 1958 (Fig. 1, no. 4). Though a lengthy search failed to reveal any more portions of this urn, parts of three human skeletons (two male and one female) were recovered, together with a large quantity of animal bones; the only other artifact recovered was a large stone-flake knife, 8.5 cm. long and 4.4. cm. wide, carefully worked on a flake of Langdale volcanic stone. Enough of the neck and collar of the urn survives to render its assessment possible. The fabric contains large grits but is smooth and well baked; the exterior is light brown, the interior stained black. The decoration in zones is varied and interesting. Only the base of the collar has survived and this has two parallel lines of twisted cord decoration 1.6 cm. apart, the upper cord being conspicuously finer than the lower one; the space between is filled with diagonal incisions. At the junction of the collar and the neck a series of pits, 0.3 cm. in diameter, has been made at approximately 1.3 cm. intervals. This is followed by a band, 1.9 cm. to 2.5 cm. in depth, of diagonal incisions similar to those on the collar. A line is next incised all round the urn, and below this

are large shaded inter-locking triangles. The diameter of the urn at the shoulder was 35 cm. and the thickness of the walls 1.5 cm. Though the urn carries unusually elaborate decoration when compared with other surviving Furness urns, it is easy to parallel the general type; for instance, the Lacra urn (CW2 xlvi 9) and the Osmotherley urn (CW2 liv 5); it would seem to fall within Longworth's Primary Series. The significance of "pit" decoration as a survival from Neolithic Mortlake bowls has been discussed by Longworth (*op. cit.*, 273) and Prof. G. F. C. Hawkes (*Ant. Journ.*, xlvii 198-208). The presence of the sherd and the accumulation of bones in this pot-hole can best be explained by postulating that a fissure in the limestone has been accidentally or deliberately used as a rubbish chute, since the cavity in which they had accumulated seemed to communicate with the surface by a fissure perhaps twenty feet deep (this pot-hole is not extensive but is extremely difficult by reason of the narrowness of the passages).

3. Trough Head pottery.

Mention was made in CW2 l 22 of pottery fragments being found in the boulder-clay cliff at Trough Head. Continued search at this site has been rewarded by quite an accumulation of fragments; unfortunately, it would appear that the pottery has been shattered and scattered by deep ploughing and as a result the fragments rescued are, in general, too small to evaluate properly. Large enough sherds, however, exist from three pots to enable a fairly accurate assessment to be made of their type.

The earliest is a piece of a damaged rim, little more than 2.5 cm. long, of a Western Neolithic type bead-rimmed pot; the fabric is very hard and very thin with fine grit, dark brown to black in colour (Fig. 2,

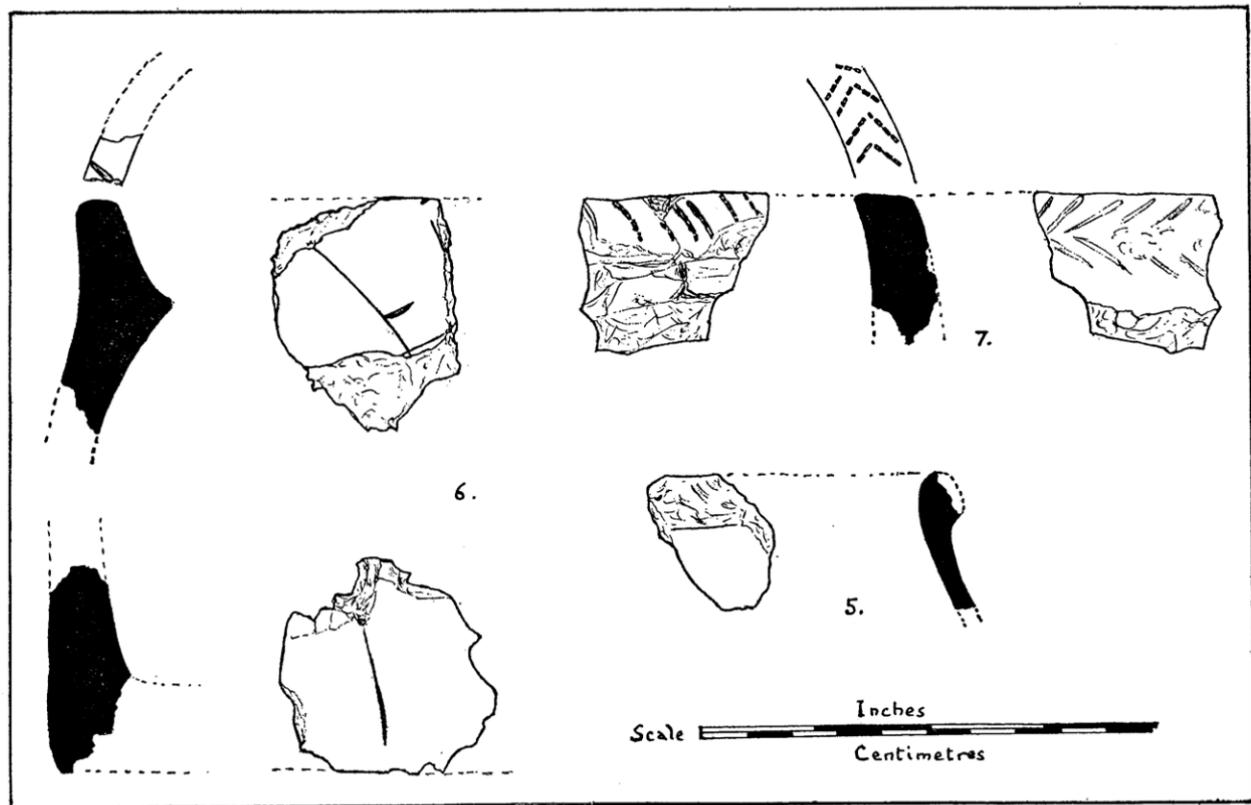


FIG. 2.—Trough Head, Walney Island.

no. 5). The sherd is not large enough to enable any useful estimate to be made of the diameter or profile. A handful of pieces from the wall of this or similar pots has been collected, but all too small to be significant.

The other two pots represented are food-vessels. One thick piece of rim has a deep concave internal bevel; the bevel is undecorated but the rim has diagonally placed thumb-nail impressions while the remnant of the neck has a diagonal incised line which appears to be crossed at right-angles by another; a single thumb-nail impression is placed at right-angles on the diagonal line (Fig. 2, no. 6). A piece of the base of this urn has also survived, thick and clumsy but definitely flat bottomed. These two pieces seem to indicate a rim diameter of about 20.2 cm. and a base diameter of 8.9 cm.¹ The second food-vessel rim section is badly shattered; the rim is squared off and ornamented on top by chevrons of square-toothed comb impressions (Fig. 2, no. 7). Similar comb impressions, diagonally placed, ornament what is left of the face of the sherd, while the inside of the neck also carries chevrons composed of impressions apparently by a similar tool. A tiny fragment of the base proves that this pot also was flat bottomed. Perhaps not enough of these pots has survived for any dogmatic statements to be based upon them, but they do suggest a settlement at the overlap between the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, perhaps rather earlier than the decorated bucket-shaped pots from Walney North End (CW2 lv 10, 12).

Acknowledgements.

I am especially indebted to Miss C. I. Fell, F.S.A., for her help in the compilation of this paper; without her

¹ The food-vessel from Springfield, near Ainstable, seems to be very similar in size, shape, fabric and rather slap-dash decoration (CW2 lxii 27-30).

encouragement and expert advice it could never have been completed. I have to thank, too, Mr E. G. Holland and his Furness Speleological Group; not only did he find the Heaning Wood site, but he bore the brunt of the arduous task of excavating the accumulated deposits, with the dubious help from time to time of members of my staff and myself.