

ART. V. – *Unpublished bronze axes in Carlisle Museum and a recent find from Carrock Fell, Cumbria.*

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DURING routine cataloguing of the Museum's prehistoric collection it was noted that three bronze axes forming part of the Carrick Collection had not previously been recorded. Two of the axes lack data, while the provenance of the third is uncertain. The opportunity is taken to record here two further bronzes: a socketed axe found in the late 19th century near Ivegill, Cumbria, which was donated to the Museum in June 1982; and a flat axe discovered near Carrock Fell in 1978, which was brought into the Museum for identification in September 1981.

A) Carrick Collection (L-29·19)

This is a wing-flanged axe¹ with much of one flange broken off and a piece missing from the butt end (Fig. 1). There is some uncertainty about the provenance of this axe. A loose label found with the object states "Bronze Celt found at Cockermouth", while a faded label pasted to the axe appears to read "Found on the Farm at Ash-hill near Normanby by J. R. Wilson in the year 1824." The absence of a "Normanby" in Cumbria and the fact that the collector of this piece, Mr J. E. C. Carrick, moved from Haltwhistle, Northumberland, to Harrogate, Yorkshire, may well indicate a Yorkshire, rather than a Cumbrian find. It seems probable that the loose label found with this object relates to one of the other two axes (L-29·20 or L-29·21). Unfortunately, enquiry has so far failed to locate an "Ash-hill" in the vicinity of one of the four "Normanby"s in the county of Yorkshire.

The axe is in good condition with a fairly rough surface, of a black colour suggesting deposition in some anaerobic environment such as a bog. It is dull brown-gold where rubbed. The sides are ridged and surmounted by prominent casting seams of a distinctly Irish character. Slightly folded-over flanges extend below a curved slope-stop down the edges of the blade, which is gently dished on both faces. A curved chamfer line demarcates the blade facet.² Dimensions: max. length 12.4 cm, max. width across the cutting edge, 4.9 cm. Weight: 340 gms.

This wing-flanged axe is without close parallels either in northern England or Scotland, where such types are concentrated. Whether we should look to Ireland for its source, as the casting seams suggest, only further study can reveal. Within the north English/Scottish material, this axe finds its best parallels in the Baldersby and Balcarry types.³ Both of these are characterised by flanges which turn in over the septum, combined with the slope-stop and, frequently, prominent flanges. In both cases the stop and flanges tend to form a continuous curve, and in this respect the present axe is unusual in that the flanges continue below the stop, down the blade edges. Another feature shared by this axe and many Balcarry and Baldersby axes, is that the septum floor curves smoothly into the flange walls. It is not always easy to separate axes of the Balcarry and Baldersby types. The latter are characteristically small and straight-sided, so that the Ash-hill axe,

with its rather splayed form, inclines more to the Balcarry shape. Perhaps the closest parallels are two examples from associated finds; one in the Balcarry hoard itself,⁴ the other in the Glentrool hoard, Kirkcudbrightshire.⁵

The chronology of wing-flanged axes has been established in broad outline.⁶ They are characteristic of the Taunton-Bishopsland phase of the Middle Bronze Age in northern England, Scotland and Ireland, in absolute dates, the late 14th-13th centuries B.C.;⁷ surviving perhaps to the 12th or 11th centuries locally. Both the Balcarry and Baldersby types are well represented in hoards of the period, for example, a Baldersby axe in the Hotham Carr hoard, Yorkshire, which epitomises this stage in northern England;⁸ and Balcarry axes in the hoards from Caldonshill, Wigtownshire, Glentrool, Kirkcudbrightshire, and the eponymous Wigtownshire find. Both types are widely distributed throughout north Britain, and both have their major concentrations in Yorkshire and south-west Scotland.

B) Carrick Collection (L-29·20)

This is a looped narrow-blade palstave with damaged, unexpanded blade (Fig. 2). The object lacks data, and it is frustrating to record that an old label attached to the axe has had the findspot information torn off! The metal is in excellent condition, smooth, a very dark-brown in colour, and dull gold where rubbed, suggesting it has come from a watery environment. There is a piece missing from the butt end. Below the stop, the mid-rib extends roughly halfway down the blade. The edges of the faces are slightly raised as far as this same point. The lower blade bears extensive hammer markings. Dimensions: max. length 14·9 cm, max. width across the cutting edge 4·3 cm. Weight: 425 gms.

In most respects, this is a characteristic transitional palstave,⁹ a type which in southern England belongs mainly to the Penard phase c. 12th-11th centuries B.C.¹⁰ There is some evidence that in Wales, and especially in northern England, transitional palstaves remained an important axe type in the Wallington-Wilburton phase; the 10th century B.C.¹¹ The Carrick axe finds its best parallels in North British transitional palstaves of Shelf type, such as examples from Dane's Hill, Yorkshire,¹² the Shelf hoard, Yorkshire,¹³ the Wallington hoard, Northumberland,¹⁴ and Lovell Carr, Yorkshire.¹⁵ The disposition of the mid-rib between raised face edges is not common, but is matched for example on one of the transitional palstaves in the Shelf hoard.¹⁶ The Carrick specimen, like a number of transitional palstaves in hoards of the Wallington tradition, is atypical in that it bears features more appropriate to late palstaves; in this case the thick septum, and short flanges which descend to meet the septum, well below the butt. This is matched on a palstave in the Shelf hoard.¹⁷ That there should be evidence of late palstave influence in the Wallington tradition is not surprising, since late palstaves were already in use in the south English Wilburton tradition at this time. It is an interaction which must be seen against the wider relationship between the Wallington and Wilburton traditions around the 10th century B.C.

The distribution of transitional palstaves in northern Britain shows two major concentrations. The more important, in Yorkshire, especially south and west Yorkshire, is separated by a considerable tract practically devoid of finds, from a lesser concentration in Cumbria and Northumberland. Finds in Scotland are very few and widely scattered.

C) Carrick Collection (L-29·21)

This is a looped socketed axe (Fig. 3) lacking data, with a slightly everted lip to the socket and an encircling moulding at the level of the top of the loop. The mouth is markedly oval in plan, while inside the socket there are internal mouldings of an unusual opposed trident form, prongs downwards and shaft extending up to the lip of the socket. This pattern is not recorded in Ehrenberg's survey of ribs inside socketed axes,¹⁸ though it is a combination of her types 3b and 5a. The cutting edge is slightly convex and blunt, with the blade tips squared off. The metal is in good condition with some pitting, smooth and dark-brown in colour, dull gold where rubbed, indicating a watery findspot. Dimensions: max. length 7·2 cm, max. width across the cutting edge c. 4·95 cm, external socket measurement 4·15×3·13 cm, internal 3·42×2·3 cm. Weight; 210 gms.

This is a typical bag-shaped axe, characteristic of Ireland in the Dowris phase of the Late Bronze Age, c. 9th-8th centuries B.C.¹⁹ Bag-shaped axes are also widely scattered in Scotland and Wales, but are rare in northern England.²⁰ Several Scottish examples are similar in form,²¹ but these generally have a more rounded socket plan.

D) A socketed axe from Beacon Hill Farm, nr. Ivegill, Cumbria (c. NY 409 449). (Acc. No. 60-1982)

This axe was found sometime between 1893 and 1900 at Sunnybanks field, Beacon Hill Farm, by Mr. David Brown; the field being ploughed "for the first time within living memory." It was donated to the Museum by Miss M. Brown and Mrs M. I. Reed of Carlisle.

This is a looped socketed axe (Fig. 4) with rather flared mouth, below which the upper part of the body takes the form of a broad, low swelling, defined above and below by narrow mouldings. The small, slight loop is set notably low down, below the level of the lower moulding. Inside the socket there is a slight flange or webbing right at the base. The casting seams at the sides have not been completely removed. The metal is essentially good though pitted, dark-brown and black in colour, with some green staining and red-brown patches on one face. A thick green encrustation is present in the lower half of the socket, and much of the exterior surface has been polished or rubbed golden. The cutting edge is sharp and convex with slight blade expansion. Dimensions: max. length 7·95 cm, max. width across the cutting edge 4·05 cm, external mouth measurement 3·6×3·5 cm, internal 2·85×2·8 cm. Weight: 146 gms.

The distinctive mouldings on the upper part of the axe, a broad swelling defined above and below by a finer beading, have been discussed by many writers. This is a diagnostic feature of socketed axes *mit profilierten Tüllenmund*, characteristic of the northern Netherlands and north-west Germany in Montelius Period V;²² conventionally dated to the 9th-8th centuries B.C. The same arrangement characterizes bag-shaped axes of the Dungiven type in Ireland, which are also found in Scotland.²³ It occurs only rarely in other parts of Britain. The low position of the loop is typical of Scottish Dungiven axes, although nearly all are broader, more squat, and more "baggy" than the Beacon Hill axe. However, a more slender example and one which provides perhaps the best parallel, comes from just across the Solway Firth at Luce Sands, Wigtownshire.²⁴ Dungiven axes come mainly from central western Scotland²⁵ and were one of the many types of socketed axe in use in the Ewart Park-Duddingston phases in the North, c. 9th-8th centuries B.C.

E) A flat axe from Mosedale House Farm, nr. Carrock Fell, Cumbria (NY 3557 3227)

This splendid specimen (Fig. 5) was found by Mr A. E. Hamer of Manchester in April 1978, when operating a metal detector some 90 metres "up the fellside" from Mosedale House Farm. It was uncovered c. 30 cm below the surface and brought into the Museum for identification and recording, but at present is in the possession of Mrs E. C. Oatway, Cheadle, Cheshire.

This is a large flat axe with narrow butt, "thin-butted" in profile, having straight sides diverging to a widely expanded cutting edge. The dished faces rise to slightly raised edges. There is a median bevel and a narrow blade facet, while the sides are ornamented with a chain of pointed oval facets. The metal is in poor condition with rough corroded surfaces, various shades of green in colour, with some brown, and there is much laminating and splitting principally in the area of the cutting edge. The decoration, consisting of short punched diagonals arranged in bands and arcs, can be seen only on those areas of smooth brown/green patina which survive. On one face, the decoration has disappeared almost entirely. Dimensions: max. length 21.3 cm, max. width across the cutting edge 11.5 cm, max. flange width on one edge 1.4 cm, on the other 1.25 cm. Weight: 800 gms.

This is a fine and characteristic example of the Scrabo Hill type of developed flat axe.²⁶ Scrabo Hill axes, and the similar Greenlees type with only slight blade expansion, were overwhelmingly an Irish phenomenon as shown by the distribution of finds; about two hundred from Ireland, six or seven from Wales, thirteen from northern England and Scotland, and about fifteen from southern England. At least some British examples are therefore likely to have been imported from Ireland, as indicated by their distribution in north-west Wales, southern Scotland, and Yorkshire. The Carrock find is crucially placed in that, together with the specimen from Steilston, Dumfriesshire,²⁷ it helps to emphasise the Irish orientation of the type. The Carrock Fell axe has two parallels which are so close as to suggest that all three implements may have come from the same mould; an unprovenanced example from Yorkshire,²⁸ and one from Penrhyndeudraeth, Merionethshire.²⁹ At the least, the three are so similar in general character and style of decoration, as to suggest they emanated from the same workshop.

Scrabo Hill axes were one of the products of Early Bronze Age Stage VI metalworking.³⁰ Stage VI can be connected by a network of associated finds to classical Únětician metalworking in Central Europe, so the British context is the Bush Barrow phase of the Wessex Culture, and conventional absolute dates are the 19th-17th centuries B.C.

Acknowledgements

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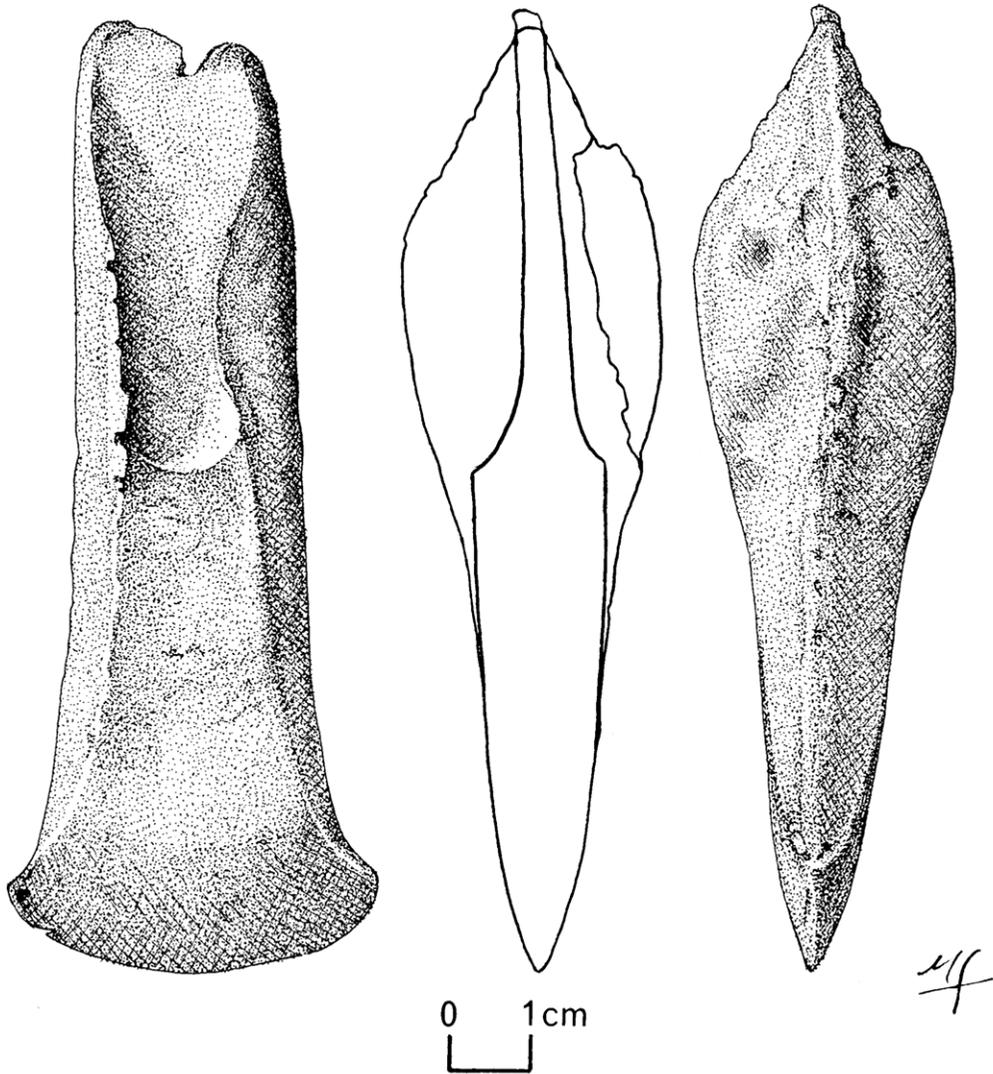


FIG. 1. - Wing-flanged axe. Carrick Collection (L-29·19).

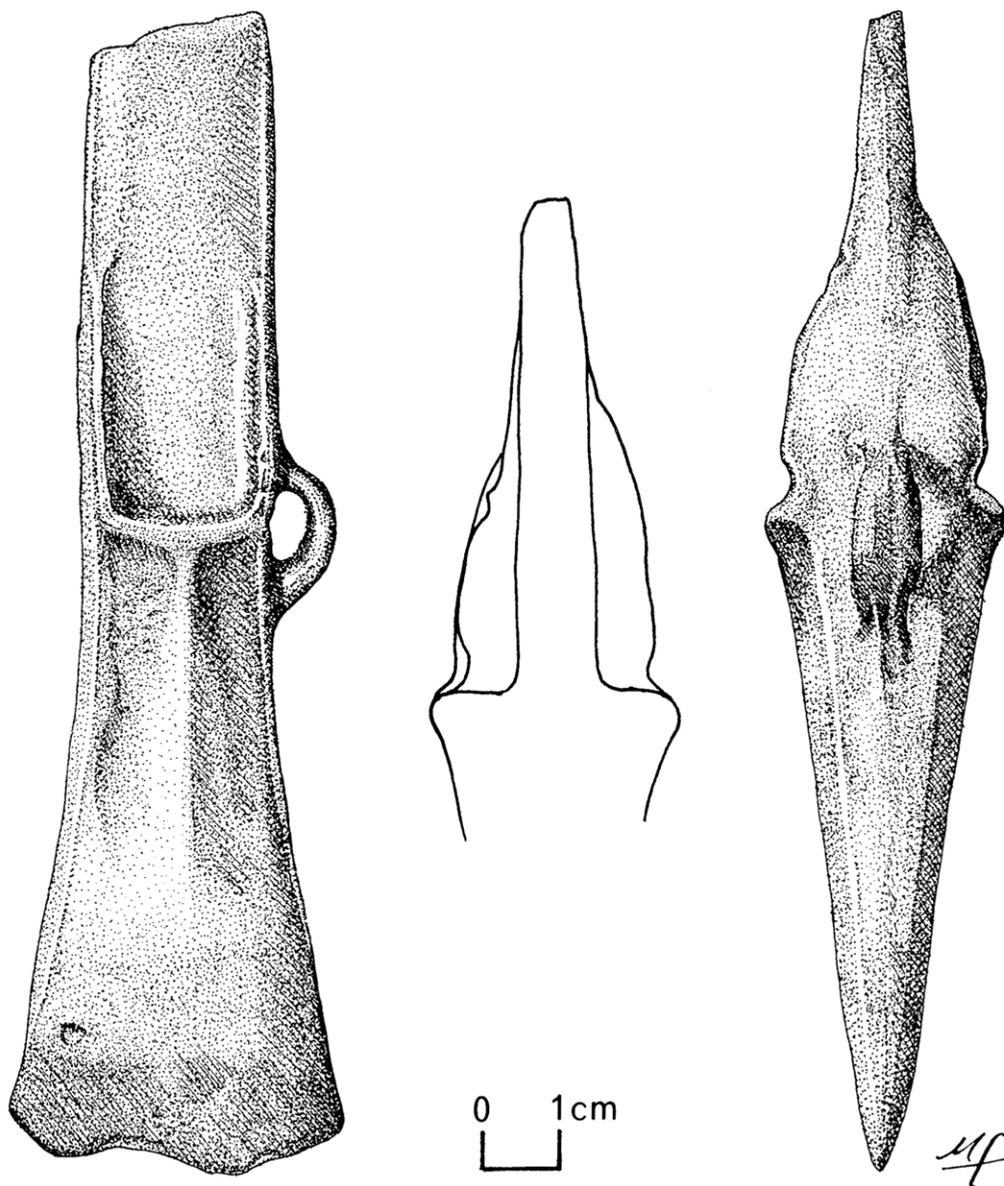


FIG. 2. - Palstave. Carrick Collection (L-29·20).

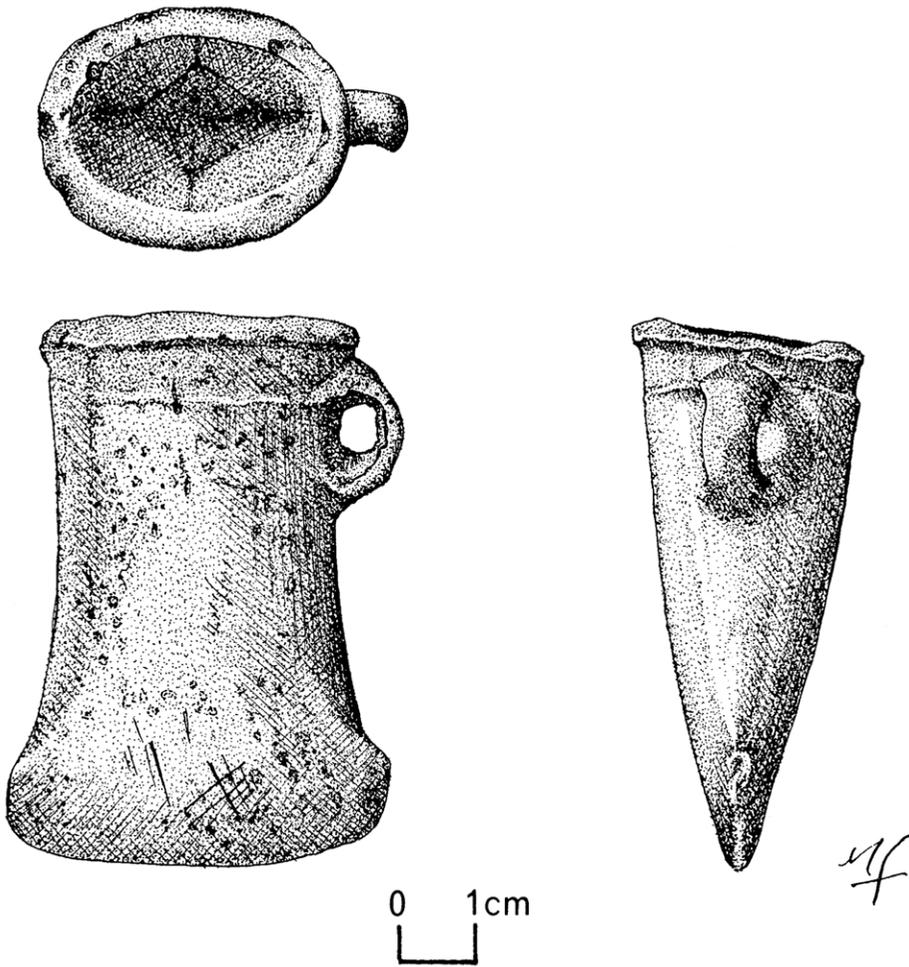


FIG. 3. - Socketed axe. Carrick Collection (L-29:21)

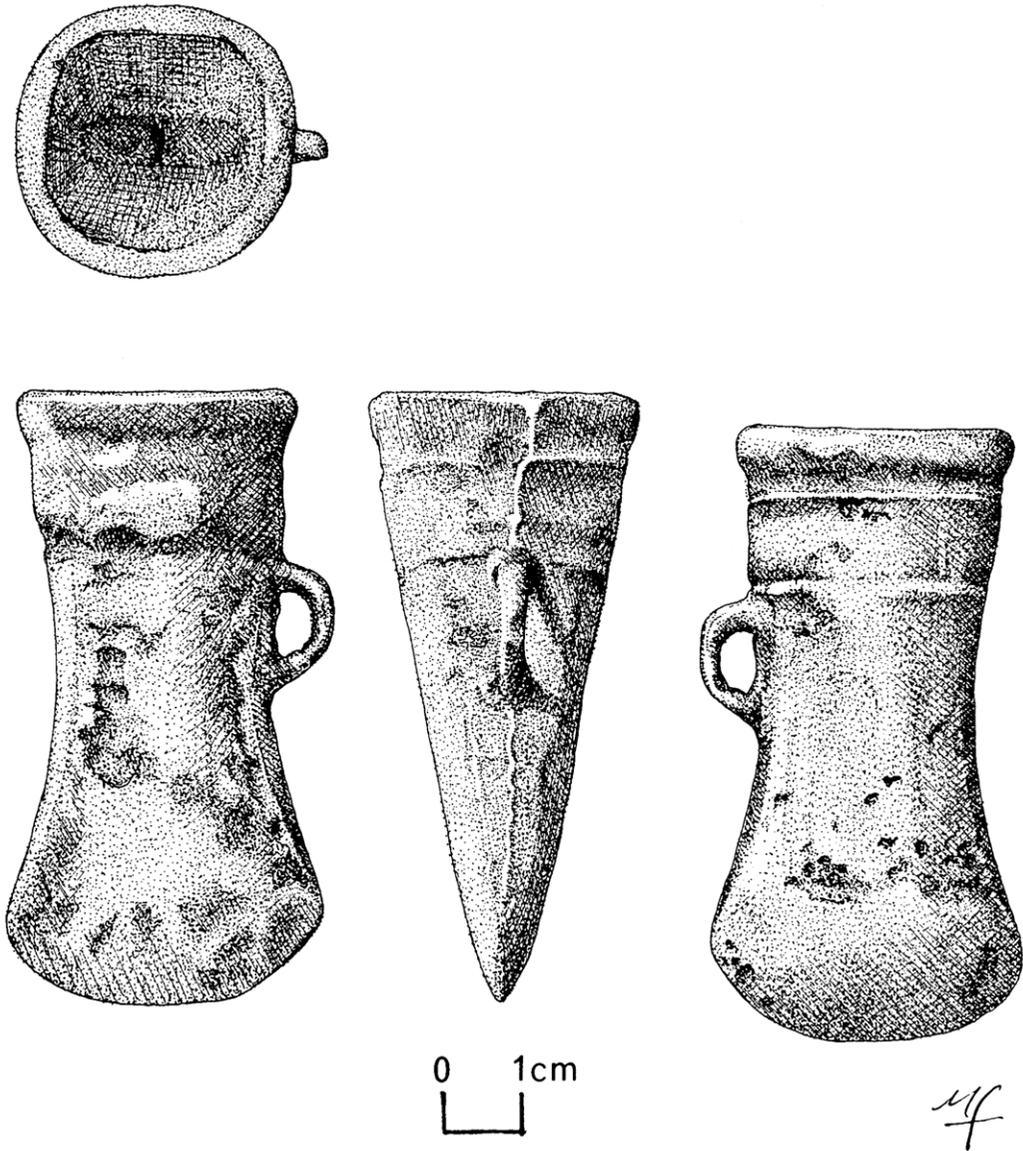


FIG. 4. - Socketed axe from Beacon Hill Farm, Ivegill, Cumbria.

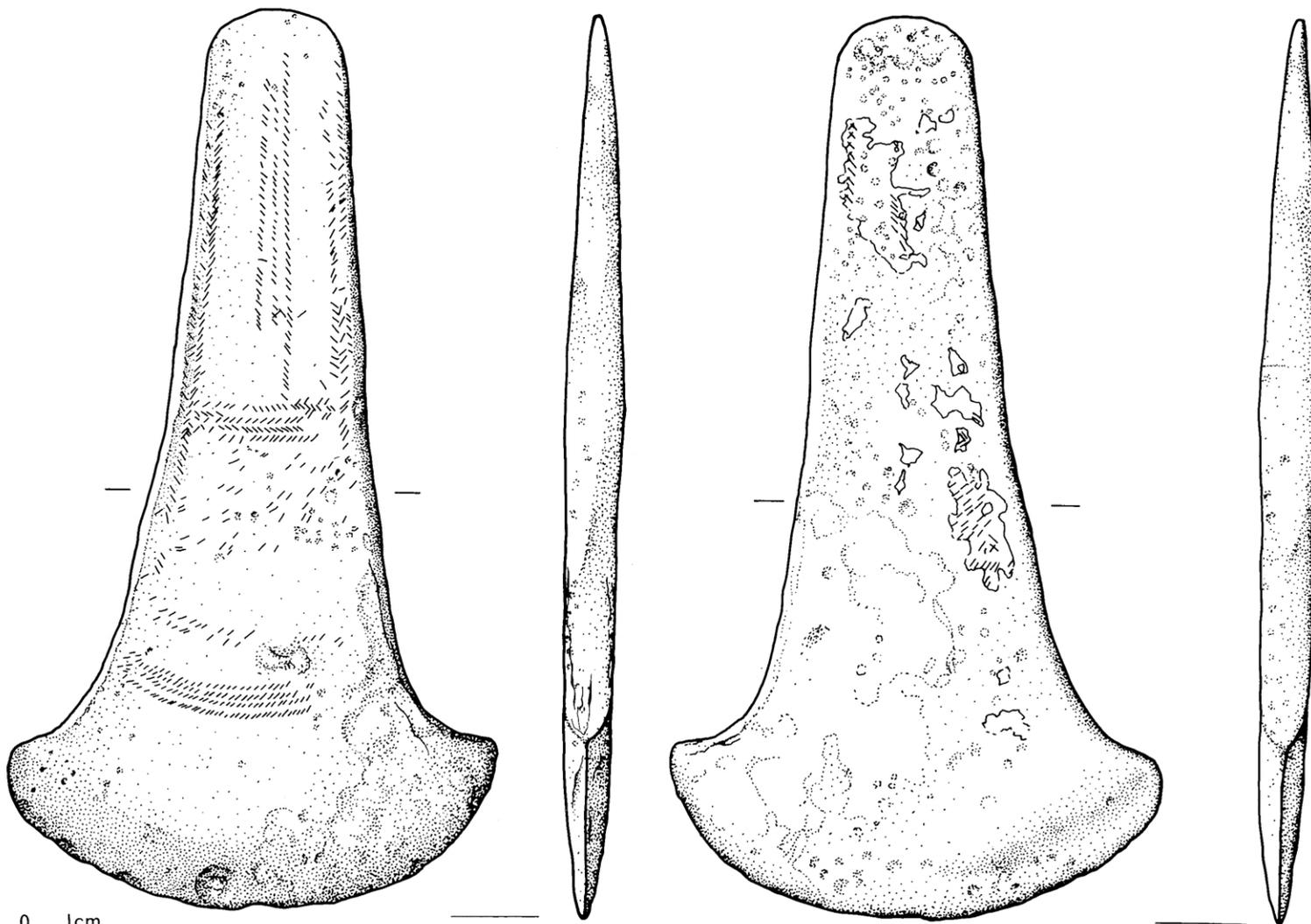


FIG. 5. - Flat axe from Mosedale House Farm, Carrock Fell, Cumbria.