

ART. IV.—*Viking burials in Cumbria.* By J. D. COWEN,  
M.C., M.A., F.S.A.

*Read at Kendal, April 10th, 1948.*

RECENT work in the Black Gate Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne, has established the provenance of a fragmentary Viking sword there. It has long been in the collection, and as early as 1852 its history had already been forgotten. The original label which accompanied it has now, however, been recovered, and it reads: "Part of a Sword found by the side of a Skeleton, at Eggesfield, near Cockermouth in Cumberland."<sup>1</sup> The mention of a skeleton shows that the weapon came from a grave, and thus adds one more to the short but growing list of Viking graves in north-west England, an area which for convenience, but in this context without any historical implications, we may call Cumbria.

When in 1933 Mr T. D. Kendrick published his popular but useful "Viking Period Antiquities in England,"<sup>2</sup> the first general account of the subject on modern lines, he mentioned only one grave from this area, the well-known Claughton Hall burial. The recent Norwegian publication *Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland*, Part IV, raises the total to five. But this is not quite all, and the addition of the new grave from Eaglesfield provides an opportunity to publish in brief form the list of such burials, as at present known, so that workers in the field and in museums may be on the alert to add to it.

(a) *Cumberland.*

1. *Hesket-in-the-Forest*, 1822. Tullie House Museum.

<sup>1</sup> AA4 xxvi, 55-61.

<sup>2</sup> *Trans. S.-E. Union of Scientific Socs.*, 1933, 42-9.

A richly furnished and well-known burial of about the second quarter of the tenth century (CW2 xxxiv 174-80, pl. I).

2. *Beacon Hill, Aspatria*, 1789. Lost. A richly furnished man's grave, certainly Viking, as the figures published in the primary authorities show (*Archaeologia* x 111-3, pl. IV; Hutchinson, *Cumberland*, ii 287-9 and plate).

3. *Brigham*, 1864-5. Tullie House Museum. A bronze ring-headed pin of Viking type, found in the foundations of the tower of Brigham church. Norwegian scholars classify Viking antiquities found in churchyards as evidence for burials; if this is justified, as well it may be, we must not exclude the Brigham pin, which surely got into the foundations of the tower from a burial in the churchyard (CW2 xxxiv 184, pl. IV).

4. *Eaglesfield*, near Cockermouth. Black Gate Museum, Newcastle. Fragmentary sword found "with a Skeleton" (see above). It seems to have been given to John Adamson, Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle, by a Mr Benson early in the nineteenth century. Can this Mr Benson be identified? Or is there any other line that might be followed to lead to further evidence about this find? Whellan in his *Cumberland and Westmorland* (1860) says of Eaglesfield (p. 297) "In removing the surface for the purpose of quarrying the limestone which abounds here, several human bones, teeth, and instruments of war have been found from time to time, at a place called Endlaw." I do not know his authority for this but, writing in 1877, William Dickinson mentions, under Brigham township, "the limestone bluffs of Thornberry and Tendlay, where six skeletons and a sword were found" (CW1 iii 343). This might be an unrecognised Viking cemetery. Are there any little known records, or unpublished MS material, which might throw further light on the problem?

5. *West Seaton*, near Workington, winter 1902-3. Lost (?) Sword found in a gravel-bank 67 yards south of West Seaton vicarage. It had been ceremonially bent before deposition, and therefore comes from a grave (CW2 iv 335; *Saga-Book of the Viking Club* iii 302).

(b) *Westmorland*.

6. *Ormside*, 1898. Tullie House Museum. Burial, probably of the second half of the ninth century, found in the churchyard in the course of digging a grave (CW2 xxxiv 171-4, pl. II and III, usefully corrected as to dating by *Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland*, Part IV, 18-9). The well-known Ormside bowl (York Museum) also came from this churchyard (CW1 xv 381); it is not Viking, but surely in such a context it can only be explained as Viking loot, and from a Viking burial.

— *Whitbarrow Scar*, Witherslack, c. 1895-6. Lost (?) A fragmentary sword. There is no evidence that this was a burial, but as all other swords in the area, even those without associations, do come from graves, it may well be that this did too. At the moment there is not sufficient evidence to say more (CW2 i 193 and fig.).

(c) *Lancashire*.

7. *Rampside*, Barrow-in-Furness, 1909. Barrow Museum. A sword of the second half of the ninth century, found in the churchyard. On present views this is acceptable evidence of a burial (CW2 x 301 and fig.; *Year-Book of the Viking Club* i 57).

8. *Claughton Hall*, near Garstang, 1822. Claughton Hall. A well-known burial of the first half of the tenth century, recently re-published (*Saga-Book of the Viking Club* xi 117-24, pl. I and II).

— *Hasty Knoll*, *Blackrod*, near Wigan, 1770. Lost. In a cairn of river stones were found "numerous fragments of iron and various military weapons." That is perhaps slender evidence on which to claim a Viking burial, but that is what the find may well have been—

the conjunction of cairn and weapons accompanied by other ironwork looks significant. Whitaker, in his *History of Manchester*, gives a circumstantial account, but in default of further information the question is best left open (*Lancs. and Chesh. Hist. Soc. Trans.* xxiv, 1872, 87; Whitaker, *op. cit.* ii 37).

It will be noted that even in the above short list several items cannot now be traced. It may be too much to hope now, ever to retrieve the contents of Beacon Hill, Aspatria, or Hasty Knoll, Blackrod, though both the early finds of Hesket and Claughton Hall disappeared for many years and came to light again. But at least the two swords from Seaton and Witherslack, both found within recent years, surely exist and can be traced. It would be useful to know where they are.