

XV.—EXCAVATIONS AT DUNSTANBURGH CASTLE IN 1931.

BY THE LATE ROBERT CARR BOSANQUET : EDITED BY
JOHN CHARLTON.

This account of Robert Carr Bosanquet's excavations at Dunstanburgh is based on a paper by him, which was read to this society, at the site, on August 26th, 1931. Such additions and alterations as have been made are based on material in his field notebooks.

THE EXCAVATIONS.

Early in 1930 Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland, the owner of Dunstanburgh, offered the guardianship of it to the Ancient Monuments department of H.M. Office of Works. After the usual preliminary survey and report this public-spirited action was accepted on behalf of the nation. During the long and difficult process of repairing the structure, the foreman, the late Mr. Beveridge, formerly in charge of the work at Lindisfarne, kept a full and accurate account of all finds made in clearing the remains—a record which proved of great value when the excavations were started.

The finding of a brooch of "head-stud" type and a coin of Hadrian within and near the north end of the east curtain-wall led Mr. J. P. Bushe-Fox to ask me to investigate. After so doing I was convinced that some supplementary digging was needed to determine the

character and extent of the occupation with which the coin and *fibula* had been associated.

The North of England Excavation Committee agreed that the work should be done under its name, and voted £10 towards the cost. The Office of Works not only gave permission but put at our disposal skilled men, tools,

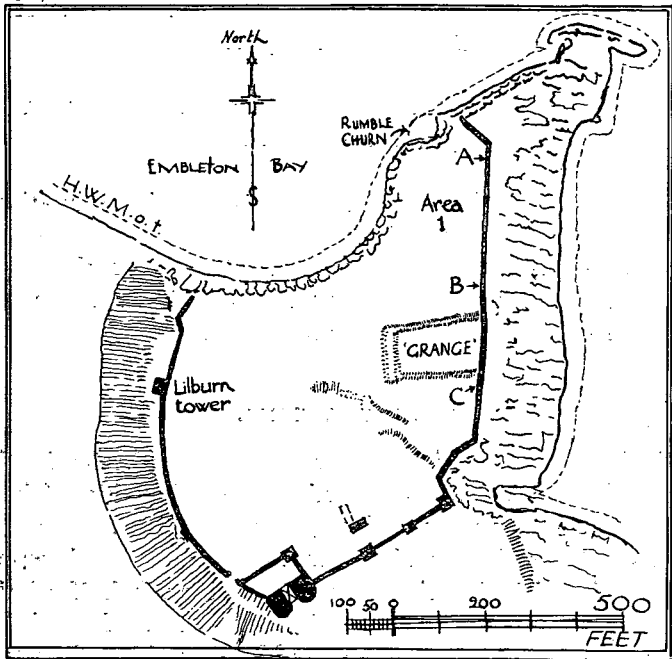


FIG. I. DUNSTANBURGH SKETCH PLAN.

THE LETTERS A, B AND C INDICATE THE NORTH, MIDDLE AND SOUTH GARDEROBES RESPECTIVELY.

an office and facilities for studying the mass of pottery and other finds accumulated during their work on the castle, together with their records concerning them.

Area i. Thanks to the careful way in which the finds—and particularly the pottery—had been labelled, it was clear from the first day that the area most productive of

Róman potsherds had been the strip within the east curtain-wall, and particularly its northern end, where the coin and brooch were found. Accordingly, trenches were dug, alongside the area already explored, by the workmen of the Office of Works.

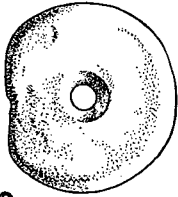
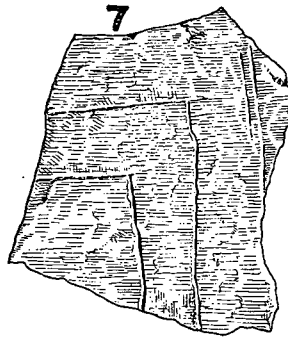
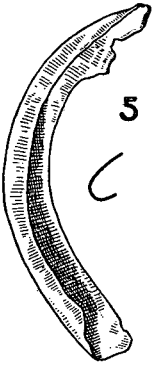
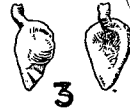
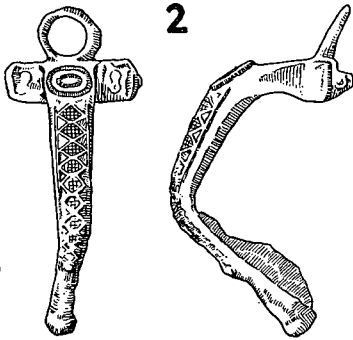
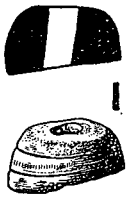
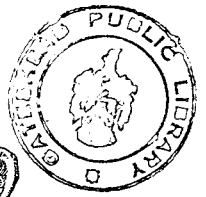
The first trench was carried northwards (i.e. on a line perpendicular to the east curtain) from the place where the brooch had been found, 46 ft. south of the north garde-robe and 37 ft. from the curtain-wall. At a distance of c. 100 ft. from the latter, laid clay was encountered, some 12 in. from the surface; 7 ft. further north was found a hearth of cobbles, packed with clay. The removal of this hearth resulted in the discovery of fifteen small sherds of native ware, together with three fragments of a black Roman cooking-pot, probably of mid-second-century date. Traces of occupation continued beyond the hearth for about 35 ft., but they were indefinite in character—patches of burnt earth and occasional stones set in clay.

A second trench, cut at right-angles to and at the east end of that just described, showed further signs of burning and some traces of clay, but nothing in the nature of a hearth. A yard to the north of the find-spot of the brooch, however, the rim of a grey Roman jar of late first-century date was found. At the very end of the excavations the trench was widened and the signs of burning were seen to extend eastwards as far as the clearance-trench made by the Office of Works. The chief find made in this part of our work was a fragment of the rim, with worn *óvolò*, of a samian bowl, form 37, which Mr. Eric Birley is inclined to assign to about A.D. 90. Trenches near the Rumble Churn produced no definite signs of occupation. A narrow trench carried southwards from Area 1 towards the "Gränge" resulted in the finding of three small Roman sherds and a spindle-whorl (fig. 2, no. 8) at a depth of 1 ft. from the surface. It may be noted here that the depth of soil is rarely greater than 2 ft. and is generally only c. 1 ft. 6 in.

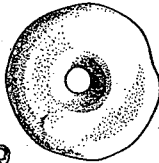
Area 2. Several trenches were dug in and around the foundations of the "Grange," a few fragments of Roman pottery having been found there by the Office of Works. This "Grange" is midway along the eastern curtain-wall and may have been in use—certainly the land has continued to be ploughed—until comparatively recent times; the lines of the riggs run down the slope to the eastern curtain-wall—a feature which accounts for the greater depth of soil there and in part, perhaps, for the greater accumulation of pottery at the foot of the slope. Quantities of slates, coal, burned lime and clinkers were found, but no traces of early occupation came from the "Grange" itself, though a trench parallel to its west side produced a glass bangle, which was lying in the loose surface soil. A little to the north, where the soil is deeper, a fragment of bronze (fig. 2, no. 5) was found 2 ft. from the surface.

Area 3. The remaining trenches were concentrated round the high terrace running between the Lilburn tower (fig. 1) and the inner bailey, and marked off by a broad curving bank running nearly north and south. At first sight this bank looks like a Roman earthwork. Sections showed it to consist of loose stones and earth, ill-compacted, without kerbing or ditch. The ground to the west of it has unmistakably been a garden, and trenching has reversed the original stratification; and, indeed, it seems likely that there was a garden here in fairly recent times. Dr. H. H. E. Craster has pointed out that Alicè, wife of Edmund Craster, is described in her will, dated 1597, as "Alice Craister, widow, of Dunstanburgh." The Lilburn tower, or some part of the gatehouse, was perhaps re-occupied towards the end of the sixteenth century.

To return, however, to our excavations in this part of the site: although the mediaeval or sixteenth-century disturbance had destroyed stratification, it was here that we secured one of our most interesting finds—a sherd of native pottery with finger-tip impressions by way of ornament.



8



9



10



FIG. 2. SMALL OBJECTS FROM THE EXCAVATIONS; ALL $\frac{1}{2}$ EXCEPT THE BROOCH AND THE BEAD. 1, BEAD; 2, HEAD-STUD BROOCH; 3-4, DRESS-FASTENERS; 5, BRONZE BINDING; 6, PASTE ARMLETS; 7, ENGRAVED SLATE; 8-10, SPINDLE-WHORLS.

Professor Gordon Childe, who examined the sherd, gave it as his opinion that it was much older than the fragments found in the hearth.

It will be seen, therefore, that the traces of native occupation are fairly widely distributed, though there is a concentration of them at the north-east of the site. Finds, too, were relatively numerous: eight querns (some perhaps mediaeval), a jet armlet, five other armlets of glass or paste (fig. 2, no. 6), and two haematite polishers such as are found on prehistoric sites in Scotland. Nevertheless, we are not justified in postulating continuous occupation, though evidence of a native village might possibly come to light if the area were further explored. As it is, we can only claim that occasional use was made of the ground by natives in the first and second centuries A.D. These people, living doubtless in temporary huts like moorland shielings, which would leave few traces of their presence, were, however, from time to time in contact with traders who brought them Roman pottery. By some fortunate accident they came into possession of two Roman mill-stones, of a portable type, made of the hard grey lava which was much more serviceable than the local free-stone, or even the mill-stone-grit which they had hitherto used. Lastly mention should be made of the occurrence of part of a name scratched on the outer surface of a late first-century *mortarium* fragment; but this does not prove more than the finding of similar *graffiti* at Traprain Law, admittedly a native site.

Thanks are also due to several of my friends: Miss Joan du Plat Taylor, who was of great assistance in the laborious task of classifying and labelling the finds—particularly the mediaeval pottery; Lieut.-Col. G. R. B. Spain; Mr. Eric Birley, who discussed the Roman pottery with me; and other members of the North of England Excavation Committee.

THE FINDS. BY JOHN CHARLTON.

I am indebted to Mrs. R. C. Bosanquet for sending me many of the finds and for information concerning the excavations generally. I have also to thank H.M. Office of Works for providing facilities for studying material relating to the site; in particular Mr. R. S. Simms and Mr. D. Jack; the former has contributed a note on the small finds of mediaeval date.

I. *Native Ware.*

Most of this was found in the hearth in trench 1; unfortunately all the sherds are small (none is as large as 2 sq. in.) and it is impossible to figure them. The ware is hand made; the clay is dark grey, coarse, and contains many small particles of grit; the outer surface is reddish-brown and rather hard. This pottery displays no datable characteristic, and there is nothing Roman in its composition: it is fortunate, therefore, that these sherds were found in association with Roman pottery. As it is, it is useful to know that ware of this class was manufactured in the Roman period.¹

In addition to the sherds from the hearth, there are three scraps of similar pottery from a trench to the west of the "Grange."

II. *Roman Ware.*

None of the Roman sherds are of sufficient intrinsic interest to merit illustration. A brief description of the chief finds (in addition to those referred to above) should suffice to show their types and distribution. Those found by the workmen of the Office of Works in clearing the east curtain-wall include fragments of a shallow pinkish-buff vessel, perhaps a mortarium, from between the south garderobe and the south end of the wall; two cooking-pot sherds from beside the middle garderobe; part of a grey jar, found 46 ft. south of the north garderobe; and a similar fragment from the "Grange" foundations.

III. *Mediaeval Ware.* (Fig. 3.)

The mediaeval pottery from Dunstanburgh, though considerable in quantity, consists chiefly of small sherds. Moreover, the rocky

¹ It bears little resemblance to the native ware found at Birdoswald, being altogether coarser and cruder. I have seen not dissimilar ware from a Scottish crannog excavated by Mr. A. J. H. Edwards.

nature of the site has militated against the accumulation of stratified deposits. Hence our only reliable evidence, other than typological, bearing on the date of these pots is the fact that the mediaeval occupation did not begin until the year 1313. This being so, no attempt will be made to describe the sherds in detail—indeed, space for the purpose is not available; instead examples of the principal types will be given, together with a few remarks on such collateral evidence as similar sites may furnish.

First something should be said of the ware of the Dunstanburgh pots. Excluding certain small groups and a number of sherds of late or post-mediaeval date, four main groups may be detected. *Class 1* is mostly of coarse ware of rather close gritty texture and generally light buff or pink in colour; it may be taken as a survival of certain earlier twelfth and thirteenth century wares.² *Class 2*, the largest class, is of very smooth texture and usually grey or brownish-grey in colour; all the vessels of this class are pitchers or storage-jars; their surface has generally good green or brownish-green glaze. Their date is probably *c.* 1350-1450, though some have forms and ornaments³ suggesting a slightly earlier date. It may further be noted that this ware is more or less confined to the north-east of England. *Class 3* is of similar texture, but dirty cream or buff in colour; the forms in this ware do not vary greatly from those of class 2.⁴ *Class 4* is of rather hard smooth brown ware, probably of late fourteenth to early fifteenth century date. It is less characteristic than classes 3 and 4, and is not confined to the neighbourhood.

As to forms, the pitchers furnish all the more interesting varieties. Their rims are simple in character and belong generally to one of two types: the larger pitchers have a marked hollow moulding within the lip (e.g. fig. 3, no. 4); the lip of the smaller pitchers is generally plain, though occasionally the top of the rim is scored with a slight but distinct groove.⁵ There is usually, especially in the case of the smaller pitchers, a slight projecting moulding or cordon about an inch below the lip—a characteristic of thirteenth and fourteenth century ware.⁶

Spouts are usually only a slight depression on the edge of the lip (e.g. fig. 3, no. 1), but a few vessels, mostly of the second class of ware, have a northern variant of the bridge-spout. The normal mediaeval bridge-spout⁷ has some resemblance to a parrot beak; but

² e.g. Hawick (found with a coin of Henry II).—*P.S.A.Scot.*, xlvi, 18ff.

³ e.g. "pie-crust" ornament.

⁴ It is particularly common at Finchale Priory.

⁵ cp. a small pitcher with a rouletted cordon in Carlisle Museum.

⁶ e.g. *P.S.A.Scot.*, 1917-18, p. 68.

⁷ *Archæologia*, lxxviii, 116 ff.

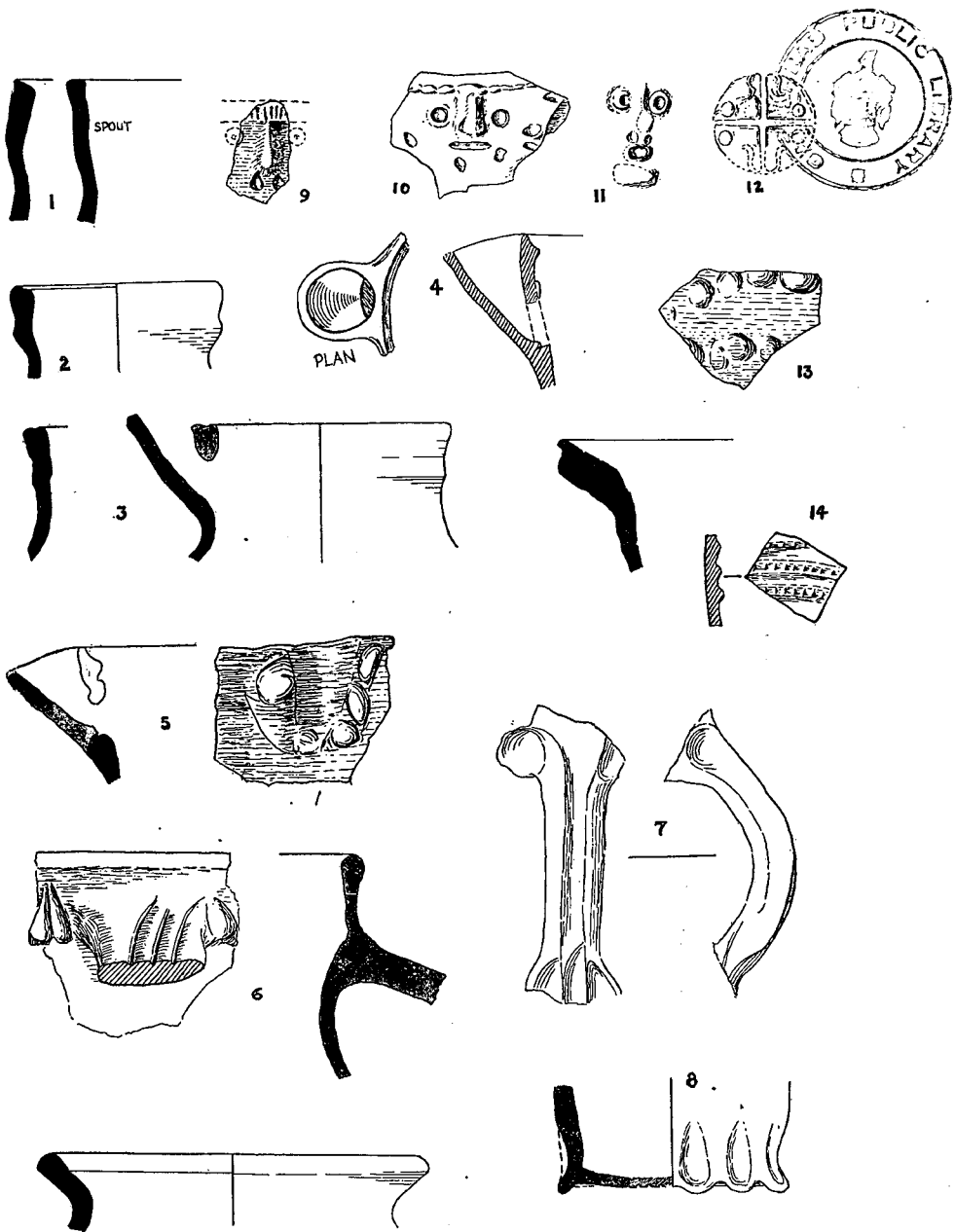


FIG. 3. MEDIAEVAL POTTERY. (4)

the northern variety is round in plan (fig. 3, no. 4) and shows a tendency to droop (fig. 3, nos. 4, 5)—in contradistinction to e.g. the Kidwelly or polychrome bridge-spouts⁸ which generally rise above the level of the rim. "Normal" bridge-spouts were, however, found at Dunstanburgh (e.g. fig. 3, no. 3), and it may be noted that other local examples have occurred at Newcastle and Carlisle.⁹

Fragments of *handles* were numerous but of little singularity. A fair proportion (about 40 per cent.) were "strap-handles," variously ornamented—grooved (fig. 3, no. 7), slashed (fig. 3, no. 6) and pierced—but most were of the later type, which is round in section. Nearly all had been "foliated" where they joined the body of the pot.

Bases, particularly of the second and third classes of ware, are nearly always rounded; indeed, they might fairly be described as almost sagging. In a sense this is a survival, for this rounding of the bases of fourteenth and fifteenth century pitchers is not accompanied on this site by the thumbing or frilling of the base often observed elsewhere. When a thumbed base does occur among the Dunstanburgh pottery it is of ware different to that of the four main classes described above (e.g. fig. 3, no. 8).

Decorated fragments were few. Of those figured the most interesting are the mask (fig. 3, no. 9) and the coin-like stamp. Other forms of ornament were: wavy lines, rouletted squares, etc., but the only unusual examples are those here figured.

Mention should also be made of the finding of part of a large three-handled jar, *c.* 1 ft. 6 in. in height (not figured), with a cordon of pie-crust ornament below the rim, strap-handles, and ware of class 2. It is probably, despite certain early features, of the second half of the fourteenth century, and may be compared with similar Scottish finds.¹⁰

On the whole the impression the Dunstanburgh material gives is that several features which in southern England denote a date in the thirteenth century or earlier—e.g. "pie-crust" ornament and sagging bases—occur on this northern site in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and that in using southern analogies a general scaling down of dating is necessary.

Fig. 3.

Pitcher fragments. (All sherds are grey with brown surface (class 4) unless otherwise stated.)

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁹ *P.S.A. Newcastle* (4), v, pp. 231-2.

¹⁰ *P.S.A.Scot.*, 1917-18, 69.

- (i) Rims :
1. Typical rim-section of the small type of pitcher.
 2. Rim showing groove on lip.
- (ii) Rims with spouts :
3. Bridge-spout of normal type, class 2.
 4. Bridge-spout of northern type, class 2 ware.
 5. Similar to 4; the thumb-marks round the beak are closely paralleled at Carlisle.
- (iii) Handles :
6. " Slashed " handle with applied ornament on neck of pot.
 7. Typical ribbed handle.
- (iv) 8. Thumbed base of rather dark grey ware; unglazed.
- (v) Masks :
9. On a glazed fragment of rim. This form of decoration was much favoured by the mediaeval potter in most parts of the country, and some work of this class is of fine quality.¹¹ The local pottery masks have their own characteristics. For one thing as ornament they are as a rule more functional than their southern fellows. The masks are nearly always placed at the upper end of the handle or at the level of the lip. The nose is made simply by tweaking the clay with the fingers; the eyes are mere stabs or a dot within an incised circle; the mouth is sometimes missing altogether; occasionally the figures are bearded, especially in Scotland, the lower end of the beard merging into the handle; lastly should be mentioned the two little pits below the nose, evidently intended for nostrils. Nos. 10 and 11 are examples from Carlisle and Newcastle. Their date may well be as early as the first half of the fourteenth century, especially when Scottish finds are taken into consideration,¹² but the ware of the Dunstanburgh specimen suggests a slightly later date for it.
- (vi) Stamped ware. This is represented by a series of small bosses stamped with the device here illustrated (no. 12); the general style of the cross, with its suggestion of a jetton, shows that the sherd cannot be put earlier than the fourteenth century.
- Nos. 13 and 14 show a decorative scheme of unstamped bosses, with brown glaze, and a rouletted design on cordons.

¹¹ e.g. the moulds and stamped sherds from Lincoln. (Brit. Mus.: *A Guide to the English Pottery*, p. 7, London, 1923.)

¹² e.g. *P.S.A.Scot.* xlvi, 392-3 and fig. 3.

IV. *Querns.*

Native querns of sandstone were found on the following sites: the interior of the "Grange"; the south end of the east curtain-wall (two pieces); the south moat embankment; the enclosure north of the Constable's tower; the oven in the outer courtyard (three pieces). The upper stones of these querns have all convex tops; the grinding face is generally slightly concave; all have dowel holes; their diameter varies from 12 to 15 in.

Two of the Roman querns are of dark grey lava; one, from the inner side of the north-west tower of the north gateway, has a diameter of 18 in.; the other, from inside the east curtain-wall, 50 ft. north of the south garderobe, has a diameter of only 11 in. and has a hole for a handle. A third is of hard, red conglomerate and was found in the first trench, at a point 129 ft. north of the east curtain-wall.

V. *Mediaeval Small Objects.* (Fig. 4.) By R. S. SIMMS.

The mediaeval small objects found at Dunstanburgh in recent years are not very numerous, but a few are somewhat unusual in character, and in view of the scarcity of published parallels merit detailed description.

1. Spoon of bronze alloy, with round, shallow bowl; on the back of the latter a letter W is inscribed. Probably late sixteenth or seventeenth century. (Fig. 4, no. 1.)

2. Bronze object, perhaps a leather fastening. It is flat, hollow at one end, and has on its upper side two hollow rolls, which are incised and pinned on to the main portion by two flat-headed nails. The upper side is also decorated with a line of stabs from which radiate similar lines. The back has ornament of the same type round the sides. It may be noted that the decoration has been put on after the rolls on the upper side were attached. (No. 4.)

3. Knife hilt. (No. 3.)

4. Belt tag, of which one end has a knob, while the other is split so that leather or other material might be fastened by two small screws. (No. 5.)

5. Hollow bronze bolt or pin-fastening for a small box. The top curves over so as to form a hook; below this there is a circular bulge which prevents the pin from slipping through the trap. (No. 9.)

6. Small bronze fragment, decorated with a series of parallel lines, within which are a number of scratches. (No. 8.)

7. Flat bronze object with a handle decorated with two straight lines on its flat side. (No. 7.)

8. Belt hook with pin. Probably early seventeenth century. (No. 2.)

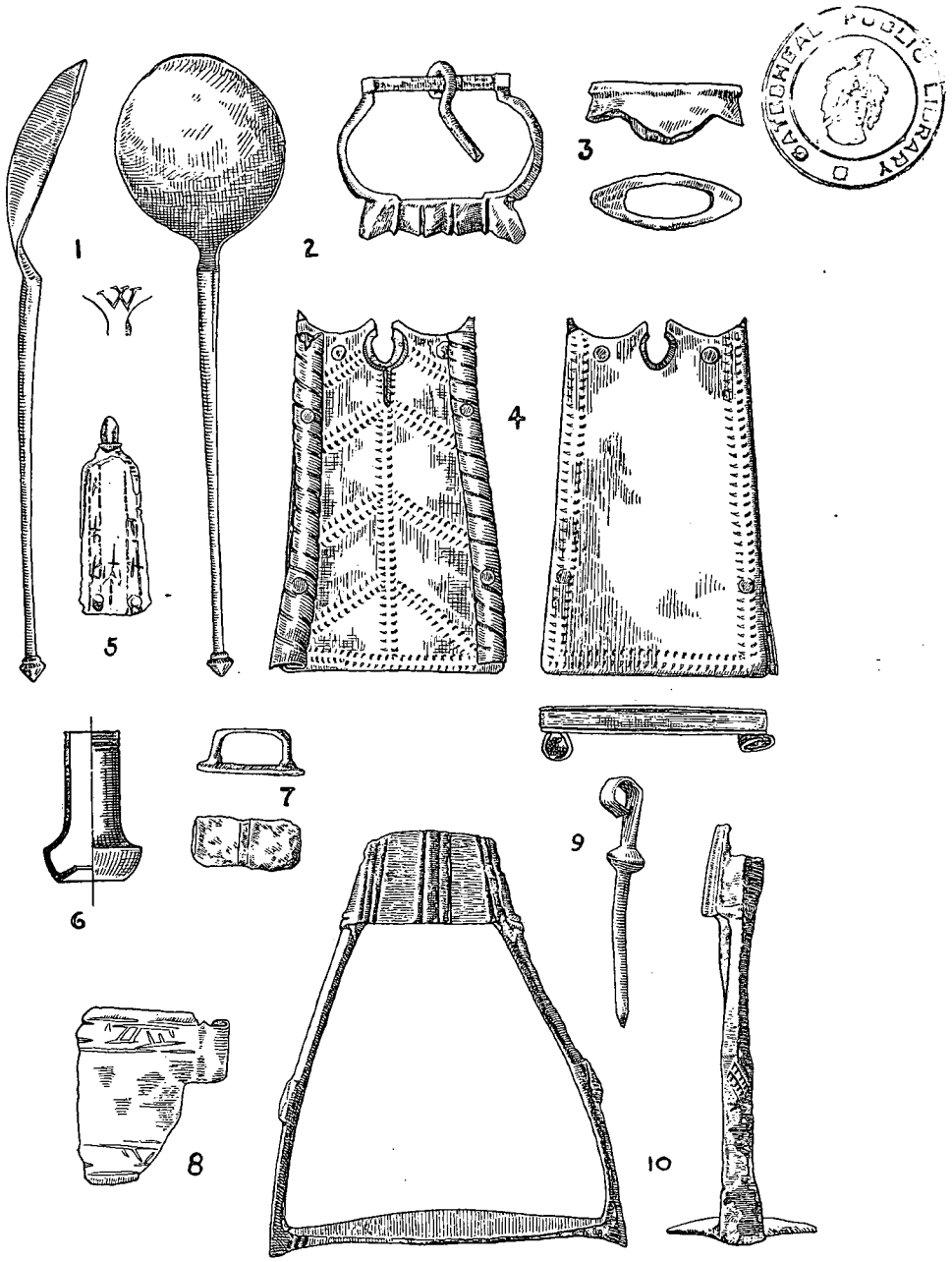


FIG. 4. MEDIAEVAL OBJECTS (ALL $\frac{1}{2}$ SIZE EXCEPT NOS. 2, 4 AND 8, WHICH ARE FULL SIZE).

9. Bronze stirrup with a small diamond-shaped ornament on its side. On the top is a piece of bronze (to act as an ankle-guard) which is decorated with rolled lines. Probably of early seventeenth century date. (No. 10.)

I have to thank Mr. L. Munroe for kindly drawing the small objects.

Coins.

Only seven coins were found, of which one was the *dupondius* of Hadrian mentioned above. Of the mediaeval coins, two were London pennies, one a Chester penny. The others were of eighteenth century date.