

ART. II.—*Middle Bronze Age urns from Furness.* By
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SINCE much of the Bronze Age funerary pottery found in Furness during the last century is known to have been destroyed it seems worth republishing a note on the urns, found between 1861 and 1864, in the civil parish of Urswick, close to Stainton Head, Stainton-with-Adgarley. The site is marked on the 6-inch O.S. Map Lancashire Sheet XXII N.W. (1919 edn.) where the date of the find is wrongly given as 1871; the National Grid reference of the spot is 34/242724. The most detailed account of the find was given by J. Bolton¹ and it was also mentioned by J. Richardson² and H. Barber³ in their books on the Furness and Cartmel districts. I quote Mr Bolton's account in full as it is the original description of the find and, incidentally, because it is an example of the much more attractive, though less scientific, description characteristic of antiquaries in times past:

"About 200 yards west from Stainton Head, and abutting on the south side of the road from Stainton to Dalton, is a small meadow nearly level, except the end next the highway, for an area of about a quarter of an acre, which rises rather suddenly and forms a small hill, composed entirely of quartz sand, which is dug out for building purposes, and a considerable quantity has been taken away, so that one side of it forms a sand cliff, eight or ten feet in height. About seven years ago a person, excavating in this breast of sand, laid bare one side of an ancient British Cinerary urn, which he thought would be full of gold, and was so anxious to be at it that he had no patience to remove the sand from about it so as to enable him to take the urn out whole, but seizing it roughly pulled it to pieces (it was composed of half-baked clay mixed with something like pounded brick)

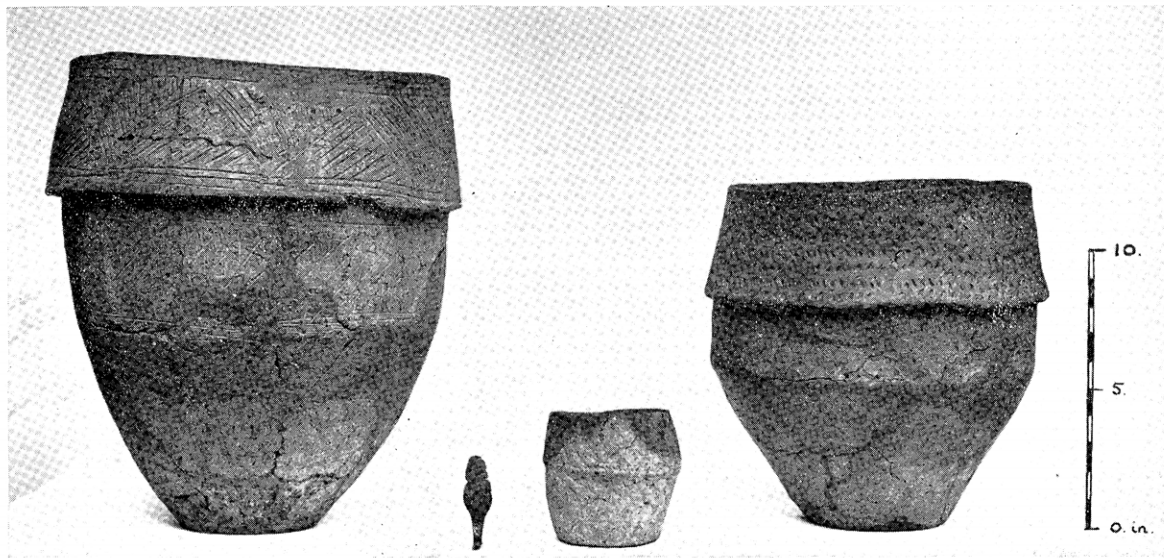
¹ J. Bolton, *Geological Fragments collected principally from rambles among the rocks of Furness and Cartmel* (1869), 138-139.

² J. Richardson, *Furness past and present, its history and antiquities* (1880), vol. i 37-38.

³ H. Barber, *Furness and Cartmel Notes* (1894), 38.

but instead of being a 'a pot of gold', it was filled with partially calcined human bones, and also contained a small bronze instrument something like a spearhead. A communication was immediately made to the Superintendent of Police, who sent an officer to take possession of them and bring the whole to the Police Station, believing they would discover a murder or something of the sort, but the Magistrates of Ulverston were not ignorant of cinerary urns and cheerfully gave them up to us, and we not only obtained all the pieces of the urn the police had collected, but we afterwards secured most of the fragments which had got into other hands, and with great labour and care put them together again. The urn was about the shape and size of a common straw bee-hive, and was set with the mouth upwards, covered with a rough undressed flag of Upper Ireleth Slate. About two years after this event, another urn was discovered in the same way, at the same place, holding human bones, with a smaller urn inside about as large as a pint measure, also filled with bones. With some difficulty we managed to obtain and dress these up like the first, and they are now in our possession. The large ones have a raised border round the mouth, five inches in breadth, ornamented in a very rude manner with diagonal lines from left to right, crossed with others from right to left, the design of both urns being nearly the same. The dry sand hill has been considered a suitable place for interment, and we have no doubt more urns will be discovered before all the sand is taken away."

When recently checking prehistoric material from our area now held in the British Museum, Mrs R. Kenward sent me a card showing three Bronze Age urns and a bronze knife said to have been found at Ulverston, Lancashire, now in the Greenwell Collection (Registration 1879. W.G. 1780-83). (Pl. I.) These urns and bronze implement correspond so closely with Bolton's description given above there seems no doubt that they are in fact the same. Canon Greenwell was a notorious collector of prehistoric remains and he no doubt obtained these direct from Mr Bolton, or at the time of his death and added them to his collection, giving an inaccurate location. I hold a letter from the Sub-Department of Pre-history and Roman Britain, British Museum, dated 12 October 1955 stating that the small pot was said to have



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Cinerary Urns and bronze knife from "Ulverston".

been found inside the largest urn and "it is therefore reasonable to suppose that the bronze implement was found in the other."

The urns are of overhanging-rim type, characteristic of the Middle Bronze Age. The larger, with its ill defined shoulder and plain incised decoration is of more degenerate form and possibly somewhat later date than the smaller one. The small biconical urn is a late version of the true "incense" or "pigmy" cups which seem to have their origin in Brittany and first occur in this country at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age.⁴ The smaller overhanging-rim urn is similar in shape and in the stabbed decoration to one found recently at High Barn Farm in the parish of Osmotherley.⁵ The tanged bronze knife is the most interesting feature of the find since bronze implements are not commonly found with cremation burials of the period. The knife is not included in Mrs C. M. Piggott's review of Late Bronze Age razors of the British Isles,⁶ but seems to belong to a group of finds in Lancashire, Yorkshire and Derbyshire where tanged bronze knives are associated with W. J. Varley's "Pennine Urns" attributed to a late phase of the Middle Bronze Age.⁷ One such find came from Lancaster Moor.⁸ These knives owe nothing to the new forms introduced in the Late Bronze Age but are related to an earlier Bronze Age tradition of metal work. Indeed, Mrs Piggott has suggested that tanged bronze knives, and their forerunners the plano-convex flint knives, were personal possessions of sufficient significance during life-time for them to be selected to accompany the dead to the next world. The Class I razors of the Late Bronze Age may well have developed from them when the custom of shaving spread from the Continent.

⁴ *Archæologia Cambrensis*, xcvi 31 f.; W. F. Grimes in *A hundred years of Welsh Archæology, 1846-1946*, 57-63 (published by Cambrian Arch. Ass.).

⁵ CW2 liv 5-6 fig. 1.

⁶ *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.* (1946), xii 121 f.

⁷ *Antiquaries Journal* (1938), xviii 154-171.

⁸ *British Arch. Ass. Journ.* (1877), xxxiii 125-127.

The other surviving Middle and Late Bronze Age pottery from Furness is preserved in the Public Library and Museum, Barrow-in-Furness, and includes two pygmy cups from a barrow at Roose,⁹ a squat overhanging rim urn from the stone-circle on Birkrigg,¹⁰ three cordoned urns from a cairn at Appleby Slack, Birkrigg¹¹ and the urn already mentioned from High Barn Farm, Osmotherley. The remaining pottery of the period found at Colt Park, Aldingham,¹² Scales Haggs¹³ and Ireleth Mill¹⁴ is known to have been destroyed. It is most satisfactory that the group from Stainton Head is now known to be safe and well.

⁹ *Archæological Journal* (1846), iii 68; *Barrow Nat. Field Club*, xi 96-97. A fragment of a Bronze Age urn of uncertain type from "Roose, Furness, England," is now in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh, no. EB. 8 of their 1892 Catalogue. Information from R. B. K. Stevenson.

¹⁰ CW2 xii 271 f. On loan from Ulverston U.D.C.

¹¹ CW2 xiv 472 f. On loan from Ulverston U.D.C.

¹² CW1 iii 29.

¹³ J. West (Close's ed.), *Antiquities of Furness*, 392 pl. V iv.

¹⁴ J. Bolton, *Geological Fragments*, 24.