

ART. III.—*Recent Bronze Age finds from Cumbria.*
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Read at Kendal, September 10th, 1971.

THESE notes record three recent discoveries which have been brought to my attention by Mr Robert Hogg, Curator of Tullie House Museum, Carlisle, and Mrs Edith Tyson, Curator of Lancaster Museum. My thanks are due to them for enabling me to publish these items from the collections in their charge; and also to Miss Clare Fell for her welcome help with this paper.

**I. An Early Bronze Age axe from Skelton,
Cumberland.**

I am grateful to Mr Hogg for this opportunity to discuss the axe from Skelton, which I have previously described as a flat axe,¹ in greater detail. It was found by Mr William Keir of Prestfoldhill Farm, Skelton, near Penrith (Grid reference NY 427377); he picked it off a heap of stones which he had gathered from the garden area of the farm in April 1967. It is now in Tullie House Museum (Accession number 51-1967). Both faces of the axe are slightly convex, with their very rough surfaces showing no trace of smoothing by hammering. The edges are slightly faceted but again not hammered, the butt is rounded and possibly hammered, and the cutting edge, for want of a better term, remains notably blunt. Its length is 104 mm., its maximum width 55 mm., and it weighs 237 grams (Fig. 1, a).

The axe corresponds to the objects from Ireland described recently by Harbison as ingots. I remain

unconvinced that they are necessarily ingots rather than unfinished axes. Harbison argues that "the majority of them are so small that they could scarcely have been later cold-hammered to form axes"; but elsewhere in the same volume there are illustrated axes of equally small size which must have been hammered into shape from very similar rough castings.² It is not too long a step from the axe-ingot to a broad-butted flat copper axe with a sharpened cutting edge like that from Hardingham, Norfolk,³ or indeed to some of Harbison's Lough Ravel and Ballybeg axes; this point

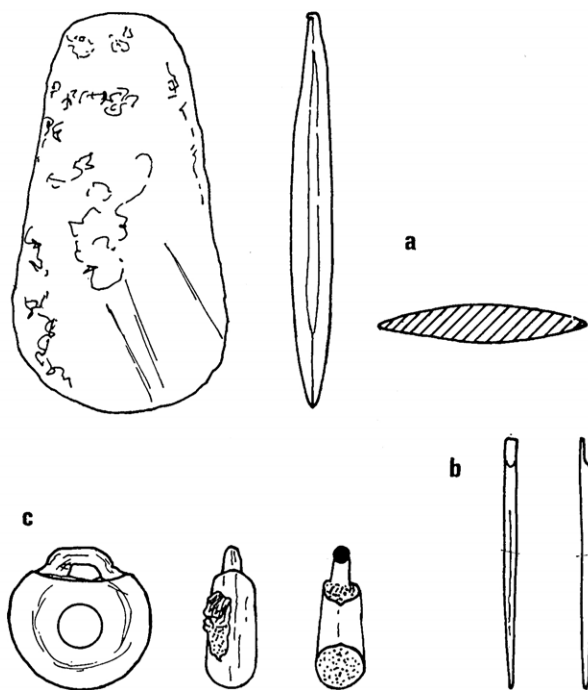


FIG. 1.—(a) Axe from Skelton; (b) Pin associated with the Kirkoswald cremation; (c) Looped guide-ring from Grange-over-Sands. Scale : $\frac{1}{2}$.

is also made by Case in his review of Harbison's corpus.⁴ An analysis of the Skelton axe-ingot would be most valuable for comparing it with other material of similar date, both British and Irish; perhaps it could also point towards the area from which the metal may have come.

The find is of particular interest because, whatever the function of the object, the type is certainly rare in Britain and not over-common in Ireland. The discovery reinforces the pattern of connections between Cumbria and Ireland in the Bronze Age which was traced earlier by Miss Fell.⁵ Harbison, while acknowledging that dating evidence is scanty, suggests that the Irish axe-ingots may date from roughly 1650 B.C. in view of their associations in the hoards from Carrickshedoge (Co. Wexford), Growtown (Co. Meath) and, less satisfactorily, Killaha East (Co. Kerry). As Case again remarks, this is likely to be a considerable under-estimate of age, and the Skelton axe is certainly one of the earliest metal implements so far recorded from Cumbria. Mr Hogg has pointed out to me that Skelton lies on the great arc of Carboniferous rocks which rings the northern and eastern limits of the central mountainous area of the Lake Counties. The occurrence of the axe at this point can be seen as giving further emphasis to the importance of this great limestone escarpment as one of the principal routes of Irish penetration into Cumbria. At this particular period, early in the second millennium B.C., if not before, one might expect to find in the Eden Valley a meeting place of those following beaker traditions and those bringing Irish technology. One knows from the existing distribution of finds that both are present, apparently in greater numbers than elsewhere in Cumbria. The evidence suggests that the two groups must overlap even if as yet one lacks positive proof in the form of an associated find.

II. A cremation from Kirkoswald, Cumberland.

A Bronze Age collared urn containing a human cremation and accompanied by a bronze or copper pin was discovered on 11 May 1970 at Kirkoswald. Mr Hogg has again kindly furnished me with the following details of its discovery and description of the urn.

The burial was found at a depth of two feet during trenching work for a small sewer on the north bank of Raven Beck, within the grounds of the College, Kirkoswald (Grid reference NY 554413). The find is now in Tullie House Museum (Accession number 39-1970). The urn was discovered lying on its side, its mouth covered with a sandstone slab. Unfortunately, its significance was not realised, the vessel was completely broken by the workmen, and the ashes which it contained were scattered. Some thirty-two fragments of the vessel were recovered, together with a small quantity of the cremated bones. The urn is of biconical form with a deep collar. Its estimated dimensions are: height 240 mm.; depth of collar 65 mm.; diameter of mouth uncertain, but body expanding to maximum diameter of c. 225 mm.; and narrowing to a base diameter of 90 mm. The rim is ornamented with oblique cord impressions applied about 5 mm. apart, and the collar is divided by a zig-zag motif into triangular areas each of which is filled with oblique lines of twisted cord impressions. The remainder of the vessel is plain (Fig. 2).

The surviving fragments of cremated bone have been examined by Dr Calvin Wells, who has kindly reported on them as follows:

These remains consist of about six dozen fragments of cremated bone, all small. Identifiable are: scraps of cranial vault and base; vertebral fragments; part of a scapula; splinters of shafts of long bones; scraps of femoral condyles, &c. These fragments are almost certainly from a fully grown adult, though no

greater precision of age can be risked. This person was very probably a male. Only one individual is detectable.

All fragments have been efficiently fired, and from the character of the warping it is likely that the temperature of the pyre was high — at least 950° C. Bronze staining is detectable on a few pieces.

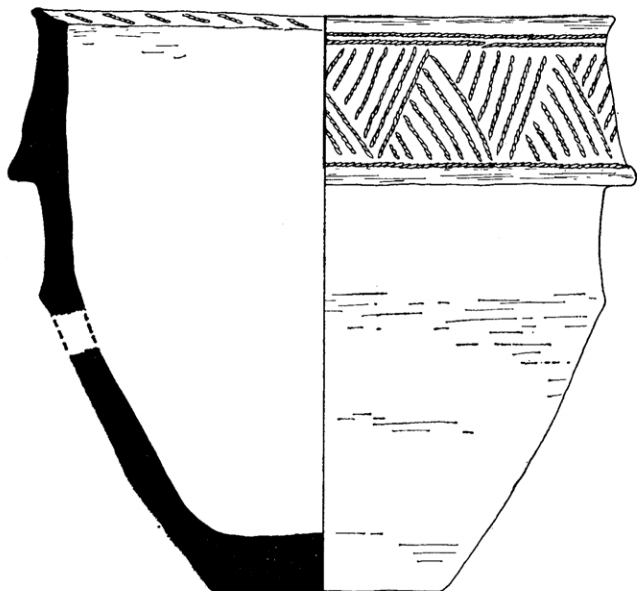


FIG. 2.—Collared urn from Kirkoswald. Scale : $\frac{1}{2}$.

The pin found with the urn, which may indeed be the cause of the bronze stains mentioned by Dr Wells, is about 66 mm. long, but the extreme point is missing. It is of rounded section with a narrow groove running along its length; it is flattened at the head end, where perhaps a decorative knob of wood, bone or antler might not be out of place; alternatively some form of roll-head, since broken off, is a possibility. Metal objects have only occasionally been found with Bronze Age burials in Cumbria,⁶ and this is the first well-attested instance of a pin occurring in such circumstances (Fig. 1, b).

Although numbers of collared urns have been recorded through the years in these *Transactions*, there is no detailed review of them. However, the new urn is similar in form and decoration to others from the Eden Valley area, even if most of these bear slightly more elaborate or more extensive decoration. Comparable collar decoration, consisting of filled triangles, is found, for instance, on urns from Aglionby (Waterloo Hill), Banniside Moor, Broomrigg, Garlands, Little Mell Fell, Netherhall, and Urswick.⁷ The new urn shows barely enough features or traits to warrant inclusion amongst Longworth's Primary Series of collared urns,⁸ and on that score would be counted a late example.

III. A Late Bronze Age Guide-Ring from Grange-over-Sands, Lancashire.

In June 1970 Mrs A. C. Lloyd of Netherwood Cottage, Grange-over-Sands (Grid ref. SD 417784), was moving rocks in her garden when she discovered the small bronze object described here and given by her to Lancaster Museum. I am most grateful to Mrs Lloyd for her help and to Mrs Tyson for enabling me to study the piece, which was exhibited at this Society's Annual General Meeting at Grange on 4 September 1970. It is a hollow ring of circular section cast in a two-piece mould around a dark grey clay core which still survives almost intact. At the top the ring incorporates a slightly asymmetrical loop beneath which the clay core can be seen; it is not clear whether the loop is also hollow but it seems more likely to be solid. On one side of the ring an impurity in the clay has reacted and swollen so as to burst through the bronze, which at this point is about 0.5 mm. thick. The object seems to have been in a finished state with the flashings almost entirely trimmed off when this breakage took place,

but it shows no signs of wear. The diameter of the ring, which is almost perfectly circular, is 38 mm., and the slightly elliptical central perforation is about 11 mm. in diameter. It can be described as a *looped guide-ring* (Fig. 1, c).

Nothing of this kind has been previously recorded from Cumbria, but a number of identical objects are known from elsewhere. One comes from the Welby (Leicestershire) hoard, where it was associated with a small cast bronze bowl and other bronzes of Continental inspiration as well as some well-known British types.⁹ There is another in the first Gorleston (Norfolk) hoard, which comprises mainly British types but also includes part of what seems to be a carp's tongue sword;¹⁰ this is a slightly earlier context than that of the Welby hoard which reflects late Urnfield/Hallstatt C influences. Two more identical finds were found at Woolpit (Suffolk) and have been in Bury St Edmunds Museum since its inception in 1898.¹¹ There is now no record of when or in what circumstances they were discovered, but it is likely that they were found together. Mr Edwardson, the Curator, tells me that both appear to have been cleaned at some time; one of them is fractured and again shows the clay filling. Both the Gorleston and the Woolpit examples have been referred to as "amulets", without any apparent justification. Another such ring, an excellent parallel, comes from the Horsehope (Peeblesshire) hoard, which was found in 1864.¹² In this case the loop has been broken off, but the ring bears significant traces of wear on the inside opposite the loop, showing that this example at least had been used. The distribution of these rings in Britain is widened still further by an example in the Parc-y-Meirch (Denbighshire) hoard.¹³ There appear to be none recorded from Ireland.

The known associations together suggest a 7th-century date for the Grange-over-Sands piece. Their

origins remain uncertain, but connections with the Continental Carp's Tongue and Hallstatt C industries hinted at in the hoards mentioned above are substantiated by the presence of an example in the hoard from Vénat, Saint-Yrieux (Charente).¹⁴

No further examples of these rings are recorded in the card index of Bronze Age metalwork in the British Museum, where they are somewhat misleadingly described as "slotted ring-fasteners". They are not slotted, but looped; and the evidence of the Horseshope find may be taken to argue that they were designed not as fasteners but as guides to a free-running loop or thong. To borrow from mountaineering experience, these rings were intended to fulfil a function similar to that of a karabiner used in a running belay. The loops for attachment found on these rings are so slight that they could hardly withstand the strains applied at a point of permanent anchorage. However, their precise function remains unidentified, like that of many other objects of Late Bronze Age date including the notorious "bugle-shaped" strap terminals. When such objects are found, they display a striking uniformity of size and manufacture, as if the smith was working to a standard. Therefore an object like that in the Green End Road, Cambridge, hoard which is cited in *Inventaria Archaeologica*¹⁵ as "generally similar" to the Welby ring is not a valid parallel; it is half as large again, is apparently not hollow but solid, and indeed looks like a terret.

The Furness district has yielded a number of comparatively exotic Late Bronze Age finds.¹⁶ They include the Skelmore Heads hoard of decorated socketed axes, the Butts Beck burial with sword and spearhead, and the Urswick knife;¹⁷ the latter is paralleled in the Whalley hoard from the Ribble valley and again at Winmarleigh near Lancaster. The Grange-over-Sands looped guide-ring is of similar date to these

knives, and its discovery may help to link Furness more closely to the rest of the Morecambe Bay coastal area.

References.

- ¹ CW2 lxix (1969) 30, no. 7.
- ² P. Harbison, *The axes of the Early Bronze Age in Ireland* (Prähistorische Bronzefunde IX. 1, 1969), 22 ff.
- ³ *Bronze Age metalwork in Norwich Castle Museum* (1966), 17 and fig. 1.
- ⁴ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, xxxvi (1970) 391.
- ⁵ CW2 xl (1940) 118-130.
- ⁶ CW2 lxix (1969) 4 and 18.
- ⁷ Several of these published by Miss Hodgson, CW2 lvi (1956) 1-17; see also CW2 x (1910) 342-353; l (1950) 30-42; lii (1952) 178-180; lvii (1957) 9-12.
- ⁸ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, xxvii (1961) 263-306.
- ⁹ *Invent. Arch.*, GB 24. 2, no. 8.
- ¹⁰ *Bronze Age metalwork in Norwich Castle Museum*, fig. 12.
- ¹¹ A. R. Edwardson, *Bronze Age metalwork in Moyse's Hall Museum, Bury St Edmunds* (n.d. but 1969) pl. II, nos. 115 and 116.
- ¹² PSAScot. lxxxvii (1952-53), 177, fig. 2, 15.
- ¹³ *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, xcvi (1941), pl. 41(b), top right.
- ¹⁴ *Invent. Arch.*, F 6. 5, no. 107.
- ¹⁵ *Invent. Arch.*, GB 24. 2, no. 8; *VCH Cambridgeshire I*, 281, fig. 20, no. 6.
- ¹⁶ CW2 lxix (1969) 19 ff.
- ¹⁷ Miss Fell draws my attention to the bronze armlet, supposedly from Furness, published in CW2 vii (1907) 40 f. and PSAL, 2nd ser., xx (1903-5) 335 f.