

JET AND SHALE IN
THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS
OF THE GROSVENOR MUSEUM, CHESTER

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The jet and shale objects are neither as large in number, nor as decorative, as the series of items found from other sites such as Silchester (Lawson, 1976, pp. 241-75), York (R.C.H.M., 1962, pp. 141-44, pls. 68-70), or London (Wheeler, 1930, pp. 100, 102-03, 105, figs. 30, 31, pls. XL, XLI), but the collection in the Grosvenor Museum is of some interest and importance to the region. The proportion of unworked or unfinished pieces of jet is high, which suggests that they were either lost by travelling craftsmen who had good contacts with the jet industry in Whitby (Yorkshire), or that small items were being produced on site. It is unfortunate that some details of the findspots for the worked items have been lost; but it is interesting to note finds of rings, bracelets, and beads coming both from within the *castra* and the surrounding area. Further fragments have turned up during recent unpublished excavations in Chester, and tend to reinforce the hypothesis that there was a modest market for this type of jewellery. Whether these items were worn by the soldiers or their women is not certain. The bracelets may have belonged to the latter, whilst the occasional ring or bead could have been worn by a man, as a talisman or a memento, whilst from the grave of a child in the Infirmary Field comes a large jet bead.

Two small fragments of jet bracelets from prehistoric Cheshire have already been published in an earlier number of this *Journal*, and are noted here in the appendix. No items of jet or shale are known from stratified medieval levels in Chester.

The illustrations have been drawn by Mr. P. Alebon of the Grosvenor Museum. The first draft of this note was most kindly read by Mr. D. F. Petch, Assistant Director (Museums Services), Cheshire County Council, and has benefited from his suggestions and criticism. Any opinion or flaw in the final version is the writer's.

C A T A L O G U E

Unworked or partially worked jet

- 1 6.6 x 2.2 x 1.75 cm.
Deanery Field, Chester. Probably the 1928 excavations, but not listed in the report.
Acc. No. 7.R.1977; marked '2 R 13' by Newstead, i.e. [block] 2 R[oom] 13.
For plan of barrack blocks and rooms, cf. Newstead and Droop, 1931, pl. VI.
- 2 2.7 x 5.0 x 1.35 cm.
Deanery Field, Chester, 1935.
Acc. No. 8.R.1977.
Newstead and Droop, 1936, p. 38 (g).
- 3 6.15 x 4.3 x 1.3 cm.
St. Michael's Street, Chester, 1926. Not in excavation report.
- 4 5.65 x 5.2 x 2.1 cm.
Ex colln. W. J. Williams, Chester. From bag marked 'Dig 120'.
Acc. No. 36.R.1977.
- 5 A flat sub rectangular block, through which a roughly circular hole has been cut.
4.75 x 4.5 x 1.65 cm.
Found among miscellaneous Chester material.
Acc. No. 10.R.1977 (Fig. 1A).
- 6 3.4 x 3.5 x 2.8 cm.
Ex colln. Davies.
Acc. No. 11.R.1977.
- 7 1.25 x 2.0 x 1.15 cm.
Ex colln. Lady Mary Grosvenor.

Bracelets

- 8 Shale, undecorated, roughly ovoid cross section.
Depth 0.7 cm. Length c. 5.0 cm. Diam. c. 8.0 cm.
Amphitheatre, Chester, 1965.
Acc. No. 288.R.1976 (Fig. 1B).
Thompson, 1976, no. 61, p. 198, fig. 29.

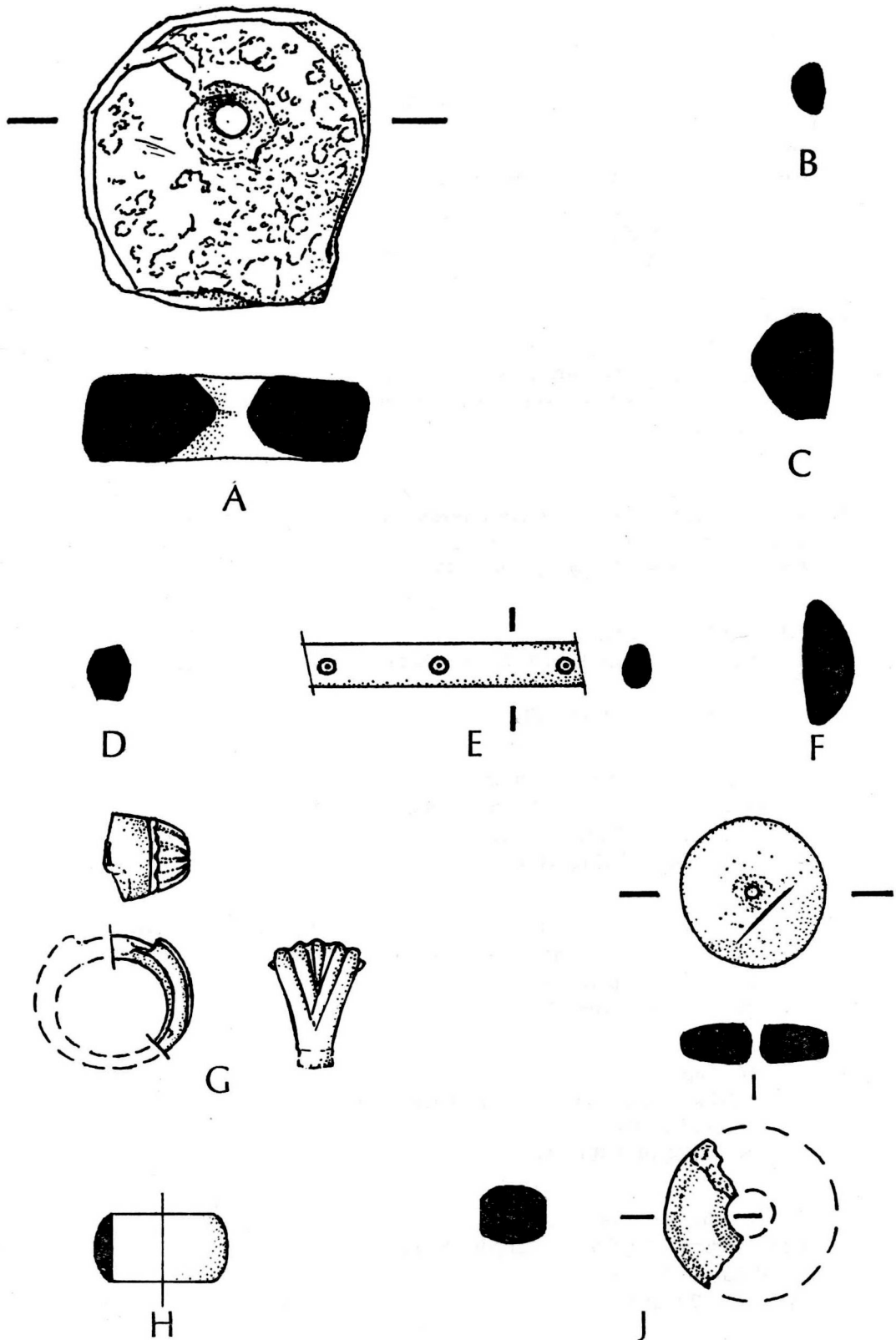


Fig. 1 — A Jet rough out, No. 5
 B—F Jet and shale bracelet cross sections, Nos. 8, 12, 13, 14, 15
 G—H Jet rings, Nos. 17, 18
 I—J Jet beads, Nos. 19, 20
 Scale — 1 : 1

- 9 Jet, worn.
Cross section 0.6 x 0.9 cm. Length 2.7 cm.
Deanery Field, Chester.
Acc. No. 43.R.1963.
Ex colln. Paige-Cox.
- 10 Shale.
Max. diam. 11.4 cm.
Saltney, Chester. South area, site 14.
Unnumbered. This is probably the piece on display in the Newstead Gallery,
Autumn 1979.
Newstead, 1935, p. 16, no. 2.
- 11 Jet. Incomplete cross section but probably an elongated 'D' shape.
Depth 0.96 cm. Length c. 2.5 cm. Diam. c. 7.5 cm.
Castle Esplanade, Chester, 1950s or 1960s.
- 12 Jet. Roughly finished.
Depth c. 1.3 x 1.7 cm. Length 7.8 cm. Diam. c. 7.5 cm.
Chester.
Acc. No. 65.R.1976 (Fig. 1C).
- 13 Shale. Barrel shaped cross section.
Depth c. 0.9 cm. Length c. 4.5 cm. Diam. c. 6.0 cm.
Ex colln. W. J. Williams, Chester.
Acc. No. 35.R.1977 (Fig. 1D).
- 14 Shale. Oval cross section with dot and circle pattern on the outer face.
Depth 0.76 x 0.53 cm. Length 4.4 cm. Diam. c. 5.5 cm.
No details of find spot.
Acc. No. 64.R.1976 (Fig. 1E).
- 15 Jet. 'D' shaped cross section.
Depth 2.0 x 0.7 cm. Length 6.3 cm. Diam. c. 7.7 cm.
No details of find spot.
Acc. No. 66.R.1976 (Fig. 1F).
- 16 Jet. Roughly cut, damaged by fire?
Cross section 1.6 x 0.9 cm. Length 2.8 cm.
No details of find spot.
Acc. No. 67.R.1976.

Rings

- 17 Jet. Incomplete. A stylised raised palmette has been carved at the side where the hoop expands into the bezel.
Max. depth 1.4 cm.
Frodsham Street, Chester, 1966. Unpublished excavation.
Acc. No. 34.R.1976 (Fig. 1G).
- 18 Jet. Plain hoop fragment with narrow 'D' shaped cross section.
Depth 1.1 cm.
From Ashton, Cheshire. This was found among a collection of beads made in the district by Mr. George Leach. There is no note in the MS. catalogue of the beads, which can be taken as referring to this piece, and the find should, therefore, be treated with some caution.
Acc. No. 9.R.1961 (Fig. 1H).

Beads

- 19 Jet. Plain, disc shaped.
Depth 0.7 cm. Diam. 2.3–2.4 cm.
Amphitheatre, Chester, 1930.
Acc. No. 454.R.1930 (Fig. 1I).
Newstead and Droop, 1932, p. 35, pl. XI, no. 8.
- 20 Jet. Incomplete, roughly square cross section.
Depth 1.04 cm. Diam. c. 2.5–3.0 cm.
Linenhall/Trinity Streets, Chester, 1949. Not listed in report.
Acc. No. 33.R.1977 (Fig. 1J).
- 21 Jet. Plain, eccentric disc shape.
Depth 0.95 to 1.4 cm. Diam. 2.25 to 2.3 cm.
Infirmary Field, Chester, 1912, from a child's grave, no. 17.
Newstead, 1914, no. 17.1, p. 139.

Vessel

- 22 Shale. Incomplete, part of rim of bowl.
Depth 1.6 cm. Diam. c. 24.0 cm. Length 4.7 cm.
Found in box labelled 'Deanery Field 1922-3?', with other items marked 'Group VIII' by Newstead.
Lawson, 1976, pp. 259-62, figs. 7-10, lists some nineteen examples of shale vessels from Silchester. The large bowl, no. 74, diam. 25.4 cm, is perhaps the closest parallel.

The writer has, so far, been unable to locate any other fragments of shale vessels from the old collections, and this item may represent a rare luxury from Kimmeridge, or possibly the workshops of Silchester itself.

APPENDIX

Two fragments from two slightly different jet bracelets were discovered during excavations at the prehistoric tumulus at Woodhouse End in 1967. They are now in the Museum collections, no Z 108, with other material from the site. They are published by the excavator, Mr. G. Rowley, 'The excavation of a barrow at Woodhouse End, Gawsworth near Macclesfield', *J.C.A.S.*, 60, 1977, p. 19, fig. 13, orns. 1 and 2.

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