



BRONZE SWORDS IN THE BLACK GATE (C.  $\frac{1}{4}$ ).

1. EWART.

2. EWART.

3. BRANDON.

4. EBECHESTER.

## XII.—TWO BRONZE SWORDS FROM EWART PARK, WOOLER.

By J. D. COWEN, M.A.

[Read on 29th March, 1933.]

### THE EWART FIND.

About the beginning of February, 1814, two bronze swords were discovered at Ewart Park, near Wooler. The only account of the find we have is contained in a letter dated 23rd November, 1814, from Matthew Culley of Akeld, accompanying drawings of the two objects, and addressed to John Adamson, one of the secretaries of our society, in which he says :

“The originals, from which these drawings were made, were found last February at Ewart Park, near Wooler, and are now in the possession of Mrs. St. Paul, the Lady of the Manor, by whose obliging permission these drawings were taken. The earth having been turned up to the depth of six inches, on a grassy knowl hitherto unemployed, discovered the handles, the blades having been forced into the earth in a perpendicular manner, apparently for the purpose of concealment. The earth is a dry gravel, to which may be attributed their fine preservation.”<sup>1</sup> There follow conjectures concerning their use, whether as sword or spear, the precise nature of their material, and their age, the letter ending in a just comparison with the pieces figured in Grose's *Military Antiquities*,<sup>2</sup> including two from the Duddingston Loch hoard.

Through the good offices of Mr. John Brumell, on 14th November, 1814, Mrs. St. Paul kindly presented one

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Ael.*, I, I, 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. 2 (1812), vol. II, plate 60 and p. 367.

of the specimens to our infant society, before which it was laid on 18th February, 1815. It was not the first bronze implement of which we became possessed, being forestalled by an axe-head given some months previously; but it was the first bronze sword, and a well authenticated local find. It was accordingly illustrated in the first volume of *Archæologia Aeliana*, where a creditable engraving appears on plate IV, and it has ever since been a useful representative of its type in the local Bronze Age material in our museum. (Plate XIII, fig. 1.) The second sword was neither exhibited nor illustrated at the time, and was never heard of again.

The discovery was not, however, overlooked, and on the strength of its publication in *Arch. Ael.* passed into current archæological literature. It was mentioned in a number of local publications,<sup>3</sup> and was eventually noticed by Evans, *Bronze Implements*, p. 285. So that the facts came early under the notice of the writer, who was at one time much concerned as to the type and condition of the second Ewart sword, and as to whether in selecting which one she should part with to the Newcastle Society Mrs. St. Paul had preferred to exercise a certain self-denial, or had reserved for her own cabinet the showier piece.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, then, the matter stood when a search through John Bell's MS. collections relating to the history of the society was unexpectedly rewarded by the discovery of a tracing showing side by side *both* the swords found at Ewart Park (fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> The drawing proved the second sword to have been the finer; it was clear that the hilt-plate was undamaged, and indeed the whole piece appeared

<sup>3</sup> MacLauchlan, *Additional Notes*, 26; Richardson, *Table Book*, iii, 134; Sykes, *Local Records*, ii, 78; Mackenzie, *History of Northumberland*, i, 383; *Catalogue of Alnwick Castle Museum*, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Apologies are here offered for the narrative form of the following paragraphs. The account is relevant to the authenticity of the find, and the story is not in any case one which the writer is likely to repeat!

<sup>5</sup> Bell MSS. vol. III. From John Bell's annotation at the top of the page it would seem tolerably certain that the original, from which his tracing was taken, was the actual drawing sent by Matthew Culley, and mentioned in his letter (*supra*, p. 185).

copy of the Drawing of the two Roman Bronze Swords found at Ewart in Northumberland in 1814. see Transactions 6 July 1814

The Blade  
Figure 2 was  
present to the  
antiquarian  
Society, N.C. by  
Mrs S<sup>r</sup> Paul of  
Ewart, at the  
December Meeting  
1814 - the two  
Blades were found  
early in February  
1814 -

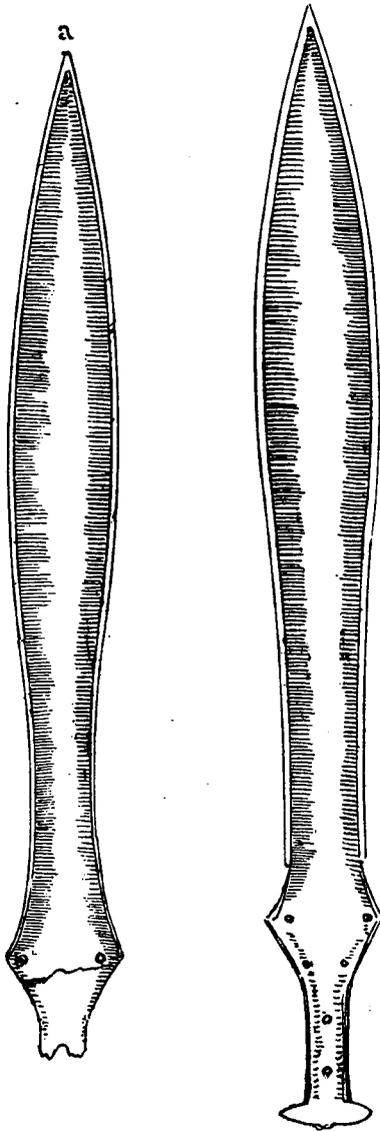


FIG. 1.  
FACSIMILE OF A TRACING IN BELL MSS., VOL. III (C. 3).

to be perfect. By this discovery the piece lost to science in Mrs. St. Paul's cabinet was in a sense reintegrated, sufficiently at all events to maintain among us at least a kind of notional existence. Partial success, however, led as always to attempts at first unthought of.

The present owner of Ewart is our member Mr. G. G. Butler, and upon him, after some correspondence, the writer called. It was already known that nothing like a Bronze Age sword was preserved in the house at Ewart Park, but down in the village there was a lumber-room not often opened, just worth trying. A small procession filed in. On the floor were stowed neat bundles of weapons, poor things for the most part, not worth a place on the walls. The first pile proved a blank; but in the second, between the steel shafts of oriental war-axes, showed the dull golden metal of a bronze blade. To Mr. Butler's immediate generosity we owe its presence in our collection alongside the companion piece from which it had been separated for 118 years. (Plate XIII, fig. 2.)<sup>6</sup>

Of the two, the new sword is, as already indicated, the finer. It has been slightly the larger weapon, and is in particular heavier in the blade. It is  $25\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, and is very nearly a perfect specimen. A modern effort to sharpen the point has deprived it of perhaps half an inch of its length, and there are one or two small nicks in both edges. It has been cleaned, but not so as to impair any detail of the design; traces of a dark green patina remain in recesses, and its condition at the time of discovery may be judged from the example already in our museum, which presents a hard, glossy, greenish-black surface. It is now a bright golden bronze, and no one could seriously regret the cleaning, as the present colour, beautiful in itself, probably more nearly represents its original condition, fresh from the founder's hands, than it would were the

<sup>6</sup> The late Mrs. Butler was a Miss St. Paul, a direct lineal descendant of the Mrs. St. Paul mentioned above. The Ewart property has, therefore, remained undisturbed in the hands of the same family ever since the find was made. The fact was not, however, at the time known to the writer, who must own to having drawn a bow at a venture.

patina, the product of centuries of preservation, still retained.<sup>7</sup> Both grip and rivets have disappeared, but the hilt-plate itself is complete. Of seven local examples of the type in our museum this is the only perfect one; what is more, it is a weapon which would be notable in any company.

Before proceeding to a brief discussion of the type generally it will be convenient here to mention two other swords recently traced, and by the kindness of Mr. G. H. Allgood of Nunwick added (on loan) to the Black Gate series.<sup>8</sup> Though both have previously been mentioned in print, and one has been illustrated, of neither have photographs hitherto been available.

The first (plate XIII, fig. 3) was found on Brandon Hill, near Glanton, in 1857, with two others, of which one is said to have been in such a fragile condition that it was broken up at the time of the discovery and was not considered worth keeping, while the other, retained by the tenant, could not be traced by Dr. James Hardy in 1886. This, the third, passed to the landlord and has been preserved at Nunwick ever since. All the details known concerning this find will be found collected in *Hist. Berw. Nat. Club*, 1885-6, 283-5, with a woodcut of the Nunwick piece. It is in fair preservation, the hilt being complete, but the tip of the blade is wanting. In its present condition it is  $23\frac{1}{2}$  inches long.

The other (plate XIII, fig. 4), a much poorer specimen, was found in ploughing on the Law Farm, Ebchester, co. Durham, in 1855. It was exhibited to our society in 1891 by the then owner, Miss Allgood of the Hermitage, Hexham, on whose property it had been found.<sup>9</sup> The metal of this piece is not well preserved; the greater part of the hilt-plate is missing, as is the extreme tip of the blade, which is also broken across the middle. It is  $21\frac{1}{4}$  inches long.

<sup>7</sup> The above must not be understood as a plea for the indiscriminate cleaning of ancient bronzes!

<sup>8</sup> *PSAN* 4, V, 254.

<sup>9</sup> *PSAN* 2, V, 99. Cf. Evans, *Bronze*, p. 285.

With it was found a plain bronze ring, 2 inches in diameter. This is the third case in our area in which plain bronze rings have been recorded with Bronze Age swords. Two swords found at Tosson, near Rothbury, had with them two complete rings, while a single specimen from Cragside in the same neighbourhood was associated with fragments representing not less than two such rings. Though it seems likely that these rings were in some way connected with the sword-belt or its fittings, the precise manner of their use remains uncertain. The association seems not to be found elsewhere, and it may be that we have here some sort of a local development peculiar to our district. If that is so, it is a matter of quite unusual interest.

#### THE NATIVE TYPE OF BRONZE SWORD.

All these four swords are of the same type. It is a common type with a wide distribution in the British Isles, of which area it is distinctive. But though it must be perfectly well known and generally recognized, its existence has been taken for granted and it appears never to have received adequate treatment in print. Thus when a fragment of a mould for a sword of this kind turned up on Traprain Law it was noted simply as "of the usual type"<sup>10</sup>; while on the other hand the British Museum Guide, *Bronze Age*, does not even mention it as a distinct variety.

The only passage in which it receives formal notice is in Mr. Parker Brewis's paper, "The Bronze Sword in Great Britain,"<sup>11</sup> where the type is identified, and one or two of the leading facts about it briefly mentioned. In other authorities reference to the type is in general terms, and at best only incidental.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *PSAScot.* 56, p. 213.

<sup>11</sup> *Archæologia*, LXXIII, pp. 259-60.

<sup>12</sup> In the following observations on bronze swords in this country no use has been made of Mr. H. J. E. Peake's lettered types illustrated and described in his book, *The Bronze Age and the Celtic World*. These

This state of affairs is the more surprising when we remember that this is not only the most numerous, in many districts the sole, variety to be found in this country, but is also one of the few forms that we can claim as indigenous. The explanation must lie in its extreme simplification of design, and the consequent absence of any very obvious characteristics to attract attention or to serve as a basis for classification. Nevertheless, in spite of this, and of the fact that (besides the inevitable transitional and hybrid forms) the type comprises at least two varieties, a certain unity may still be discerned in all its members such as to establish without question the separate existence of the group as a substantive type.

It is not the object of these notes to present in any sense a full treatment of this type of sword. To do so adequately would involve a discussion of all the types of bronze sword known from this country, with an appreciation of their inter-relations, and a documented *statistik* of the material. Such an account has yet to be compiled. In the meantime all that is offered here is a general account of the type for the convenience of such members as might find the literature rather scattered, together with a few random observations on related points and some suggestions are based on central European forms, and though widely applicable are so much generalized, especially in the centre of the series, as to be of little use in dealing with the minor variations which distinguish the sub-groups of any one district—a purpose Mr. Peake himself expressly disclaims. Their use, indeed, in such a connection only involves confusion; witness the inclusion under Peak type F of hilts of the imported carp's-tongue sword together with those of a very late native Irish type with concave shoulders (as Evans, *Bronze*, fig. 354). The result is an anomalous distribution which leads Mr. Peake to account for it by an inference which has no basis in fact.

It is the writer's view that the great majority of examples of the native variety would fall under Peake's type E. It is observed, however, that Mr. Peake himself would apparently classify a large number under type F, though it is difficult to understand how the Dowris type, with unmistakable U butt (actually quoted by Mr. Brewis as a specific example of the persistence of this feature), can ever have been identified (Peake, *loc. cit.*, p. 116) with a type of which the one distinctive criterion is a concave butt. But these are questions merely of terminology. Peake's general thesis tracing the evolution of the concave butt of the latest leaf-shaped blades ultimately from the lunar dagger-butt is here unhesitatingly accepted, and must be understood in all that follows as the implied background of continental development.

tions on the derivation of the type which the writer hopes may help to put this matter on a sounder footing. Living as we do in a sword-producing area,<sup>13</sup> it is time that we as a society had on our files some account, however imperfect, of this notable class of weapon; premising always that in the absence of a proper treatment, such as that outlined above, anything that may here be said can have only a provisional value.

As already suggested, this is a type which, once its features are grasped, stands out quite clearly defined, and is easily separable from other swords of the same period. Yet however readily the type may in practice be recognized, precisely to describe it is not so easy. The effort drives home the fact that the most characteristic feature of the type is its very lack of distinguishing marks.<sup>14</sup>

As a whole swords of this class are smaller than others found in this country. The blade, by contrast with certain other types, is genuinely leaf-shaped. The wings of the butt are as a rule nearly, often rigidly, straight; below them there may, or may not, be a notched *ricasso*, but while it is never conspicuous, it was never, the writer believes, consciously omitted. Where this in fact happens it seems to be rather the result of inept workmanship than of deliberate design. It is in the poorer, more degenerate, and therefore later examples that this takes place, a fact which would seem to deprive this particular feature of the chronological significance which has sometimes been attached to it. It might be argued that the swords without *ricasso* in fact preceded those in which the feature appears, in conformity with phenomena observed elsewhere; but in

<sup>13</sup> Bronze swords are by no means rare in Durham, and are common in Northumberland. From the latter county no less than 15 examples (excluding 20 from the Alnwick hoard) are recorded, as against the same number for the whole of Yorkshire (Elgee, *Early Man in North-East Yorkshire*, pp. 171-2); while an analysis of the metal of the Heathery Burn Cave bronzes shows an extraordinarily high percentage of lead, implying local manufacture with the use of Weardale ores, well known for their rich lead content.

<sup>14</sup> The sword selected by Mr. Brewis for illustration (*loc. cit.* fig. 28) makes an admirable type-example. A good Scottish example comes from Cauldhame, Brechin, and is illustrated in *PSAScot.*, LVII, p. 148, fig. 9, no. 5.

view of the general history of the type, and the degenerate character and poor finish of the pieces in question, such a view is here held to be impossible. The absence of all the more pronounced forms of *ricasso*-notch, taken in conjunction with the certainty that the type persisted down to the last possible stages of the Bronze Age in this country<sup>15</sup> prove as much. This would correspond with the disuse of the *ricasso* in the so-called Hallstatt sword, already inferred by Brewis from the inconveniently sharp shoulder of the notch in this type, the difference being that in the case of the Hallstatt sword the *ricasso* becomes functionally extinct by exaggeration, in the British by atrophy.

The tang has a marked tendency towards a flat finish, the reduced flanges which appear in some examples later dying out altogether. In outline the grip maintains a barely noticeable swelling in a profile of which the widest part is nearer to the butt than to the pommel. There is a strong preference for the use of rivets, but slots may occasionally be found. The pommel itself is rarely preserved, and the end of the hiltplate to which it was attached is frequently missing. When present it has been described as fish-tailed, but it is not literally so, and the term applies equally well, or better, to almost every other form of hilt-termination found in this country. It is perhaps most simply described as like the foot of a capital letter (say I or P), with *serifs*, more or less pronounced. In Irish examples the *serifs* frequently project so far as to constitute a true T-piece.<sup>16</sup> A straight base-line seems usually to be aimed at, though not always achieved.

Perhaps the most distinctive single feature is, however, to be found in the profile and proportions of the butt. In all true examples of the type it is a simple matter, and a sure test, mentally to produce the four lines running up to the angles at the point of greatest width, when these should form a lozenge (or diamond of the playing-card variety, and of similar proportions). The method may seem

<sup>15</sup> Brewis, *loc. cit.*, p. 260.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Evans, *Bronze*, fig. 354.

cumbrous, but it is only by such a circumlocution that one can suggest a fact of design which after a little experience leaps to the eye.<sup>17</sup>

Variations there are, of course; but it is extraordinary within what narrow limits they range. By way of illustrating the extremes achieved we may cite on the one hand the Dowris sword,<sup>18</sup> on the other the imperfect example from the Bexley Heath hoard.<sup>19</sup> These may be said to constitute two distinct sub-varieties corresponding (in a modified way) to the difference between the U and V types already recognized in this country. Here, however, it will suffice to say that although we may recognize this element of divergence in the group as a whole when represented at its extremes, nevertheless a complete range of intermediate examples exists, and of many of them it would be quite impossible to decide to which of the sub-varieties they should be assigned.

Regarding our native swords as a whole, the simplicity of their design and execution makes them appear by comparison with foreign examples featureless and uninspired. By its avoidance of the exaggerated and the ridiculous the type does indeed achieve a certain dignity, satisfying by a robust yet economical use of the material. Of this phase of its development no better example could be found than that from Ewart Park. The same process, nevertheless, not only produces examples in the last stage of degeneration, but also lays open the whole group to the charge of a want of "interest" in its individual features, and of a lack of imaginative design in the whole. The British bronze sword is as a type, even at its best, derivative. Considering, however, the distance of these islands from the cultural *foci* in which the idea of the leaf-shaped sword was evolved, that is only what might have been expected.

That the type is an indigenous one is certain. Its

<sup>17</sup> An example from Wales, illustrating this point in an extreme form, is figured in R. E. M. Wheeler's *Prehistoric and Roman Wales*, fig. 51, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Brewis, *loc. cit.*, fig. 30.

<sup>19</sup> Kendrick and Hawkes, *Archæology in England and Wales*, 1914-1931, plate xiv.

common occurrence, wide distribution, and numerical preponderance over all other classes of bronze sword in this country imply as much. But the discovery of portions of clay moulds on prehistoric sites in Scotland—at Traprain Law, and again recently at Yarlshof in Shetland<sup>20</sup>—puts the whole matter beyond argument. The naturalization, then, of this particular class of bronze sword may be taken as established.

Though by no means uncommon in the southern and eastern parts, the "lowland zone," of Britain, there can be no question that the stronghold of the type is in the north and west. There not only is the relative predominance of the type unchallenged, but its actual numbers are in all probability greater than in the lowlands. To say that such a distribution is strictly complementary to that of the imported continental types of the south-east would be unduly to strain the facts. But it does coincide with the area of that highland complex of which the food vessel is one of the leading indices, and which includes such objects as those crescentic neck-ornaments which in northern Britain take the form of jet necklaces and in Ireland of *lunulæ*. Precisely the same area of incidence is disclosed by the distribution of the later encrusted urns, which ought on current views to be contemporary with our swords. At present there is no proving the point, but they cannot be far removed in date, and it is clear that if in the food vessel period Ireland may have taken the lead in cultural expansion, by the time bronze swords were current in Northumberland the influence was certainly all the other way. The facts in connection with the encrusted urns admit of no other interpretation, and as they can be shown to have entered Ireland from the north-east by the Mull of Galloway, so may other contemporary influences have passed the same way.

While, then, the type is distinctively British, it is more particularly a product of the highland zone. In strict accordance with principles which have now attained wide

<sup>20</sup> *PSAScot.* LXVI, 120. A full account is forthcoming, *ibid.*, vol. LXVII.

currency we find that it is an assimilation, a copy by local craftsmen of foreign goods. The process may have begun, indeed it probably did begin, in the south-east, in the Thames valley; but it was in the north and west that it had fullest play, that it continued longest. It is characteristic of our native independence that the copying was not simply literal, but proceeded on lines dictated by the individuality of the race; and it is only consonant with what later history might have led us to expect that the peculiar influence of the native genius on the continental sword-types was one not of exaggeration but of simplification, one leaning not to the enlargement of peculiarities, but to their elimination. And if to some the result appears devoid of interest, to others it will commend itself as remarkably businesslike.

Though the ancestry of the type is in a general sense obvious enough, the precise steps by which it was evolved have never been worked out. Nor is it intended in this place to open up so wide a field for discussion. But one or two somewhat disconnected observations suggest themselves, and are here put forward for consideration.

That the type in question is descended from imported continental swords of the U and V types goes without saying. But it is not easy to fix upon either of the two leading foreign varieties as the immediate ancestor. In the British version we have traces of both U and V influence; of the former in such examples as the Dowris sword (*supra*) and in the repeated tendency, traceable throughout the series, to a slight curvature in the wings of the butt just before reaching the point of maximum width, producing a beaked effect; of the latter in the presence and form of the *ricasso* and in the almost universally rectilinear character of the butt.

On the other hand it is impossible to accept the current view of the development as expressed by the most recent writers who have dealt with this topic.<sup>21</sup> According to

<sup>21</sup> Mr. Parker Brewis, *loc. cit.*, p. 258; and Messrs. Kendrick and Hawkes, *loc. cit.*, pp. 124-5.

this view the U sword was the earliest to appear in this country, and in the course of time it gave rise first to the V type, and later by degeneration in native hands to the whole class of swords now under discussion. In a general sense this may be true. But the sword actually used to illustrate the argument is inadmissible in this context.<sup>22</sup> It is a grand example of an undegenerated V type of continental facies, and it has no place in a British evolutionary series. It is one of a small but clear-cut group of weapons which by their specialized character and rigid adherence to type show that they must be regarded not as an intermediate stage in a line of evolution, but as themselves the end of such a line, a type crystallized and static, incapable of modification towards further developments.<sup>23</sup> Apart from this, the type is a foreign one and cannot have been evolved on British soil from any form of the U sword known in this country. While finally the straight cutting edge; the sharp, almost acute angle at the point of greatest width, where the *ricasso* meets the butt; and the shape and prominence of the *ricasso* itself, all these show the "Brentford V" sword to be related rather to the carp's-tongue sword<sup>24</sup> than to any other, and to be perhaps a divergent modification of the same ancestral type domiciled in the Swiss lake-dwellings.<sup>25</sup> This is, however, no more than a suggestion, the value of which can be tested only by an examination of material in continental collections. What seems clear is that the "Brentford V" type can no longer take the place at present assigned to it in the British series.

On the other hand, without going into details, we suggest that one of the most promising lines of inquiry in this field at present appears to lie in the development of the hypothesis that the native sword was directly descended

<sup>22</sup> Brentford Museum, probably from the Thames at Brentford. Brewis, fig. 20; Kendrick and Hawkes, plate XI, fig. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Examples are: Brentford Museum (Brewis, fig. 20); British Museum, Thames (*Guide*, plate II, fig. 2); London Museum, Thames (Brewis, fig. 47); another (London Museum Postcards, A7-D, outline somewhat falsified by shadow).

<sup>24</sup> On this type see Estyn Evans, *Antiquity*, 1930, pp. 157 *seqq.*

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Estyn Evans, *loc. cit.*, plate III, fig. 1.

from that variety of which the Wilburton hoard fragments may be accepted as type-examples.<sup>26</sup> It is a type which seems commonest in East Anglia, but it is recorded from as far north as Poldar Moss, Stirlingshire;<sup>27</sup> however that may be, whatever its area of domicile, about its very close relationship to what we have been calling the "native" home-made type there can be no two opinions. But without further work it is impossible yet to establish conclusions of anything like reasonable certainty, and in the absence of documented proof no one scheme of development can claim to be better than any other.

<sup>26</sup> Peake, *loc. cit.*, plate xiv, fig. 3; and Fox, *Cambridge Region*, plate x, fig. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Edinburgh Museum, no. DL 40.

