

FIG. 1. VIKING SWORD FROM EAGLESFIELD, CUMBERLAND
($\frac{1}{2}$ ").

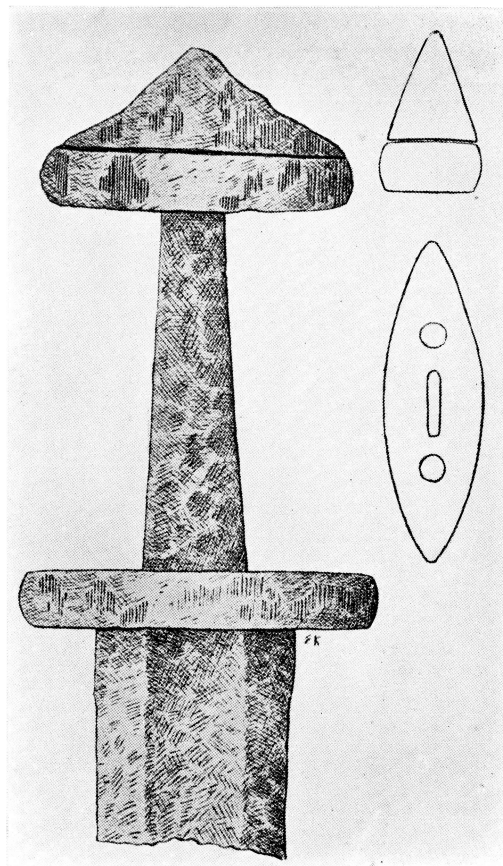


FIG. 2. VIKING SWORD HILT FROM NORWAY
AFTER PETERSEN. FIG. 87 ($\frac{1}{2}$ ").

III.—A VIKING SWORD FROM EAGLESFIELD NEAR COCKERMOUTH.

BY J. D. COWEN, M.A., F.S.A.

In the course of reorganizing our museums some fifteen years ago it was recognized, for the first time, that the Society had long possessed a sword of the Viking Period. It is badly decayed, and is broken in two. Previously one half had been in the Black Gate, and the other in the Keep. These were then reunited, and the form of the guard was sufficient to establish their period. There was, however, no clue to the provenance of the weapon, and it cannot be identified in any of the early Donation Lists.

The sword (plate 1, fig. 1) is of iron with no trace of inlay. It is badly corroded, and broken across the middle; it lacks the pommel, and most of the grip, and also nearly half the blade. It measures 20" in length ($8\frac{1}{8}$ " plus $11\frac{7}{8}$ ") overall; the blade is 2" wide, and the guard $3\frac{7}{8}$ " long. At the break the blade has been snapped off short with a clean fracture, of which the edges still fit. This indicates that the sword was probably whole when discovered, and was broken in the process of excavation. Neither at this point nor at the present end of the blade is there any evidence that it had been ritually bent at the time of deposition. The lower portion is now completely coated with a thin layer of paraffin wax, no doubt applied as a preservative, probably in 1885 or shortly afterwards, when the museum was first installed in the Black Gate and a good deal of work seems to have been undertaken on the collections. The upper portion has not been so treated, so that there is a considerable difference in appearance between the two portions, and this can be seen in the plate.

It is so corroded that practically no features are distinguishable, but traces of a fuller can be seen, and it is also clear that at no point is the blade now of the full original width, but must have been $\frac{1}{4}$ " wider at the hilt. The guard is of slim proportions, narrow between the two faces, straight, and quite plain. It is rectangular in section, and boat-shaped on plan. Without the pommel it is impossible properly to determine the type, but the guard shows clearly enough that the weapon falls within the earlier rather than the later half of the series of Viking swords. Associated grave-goods are not recorded, and are hardly to be hoped for now. No convincing date can therefore be offered. The closest parallels from Norway seem, however, to belong to Petersen's types H & I.¹ In that country type H, of which I is a development, is the commonest single variety of the Viking sword, and had a long life, from c. 800 to 950 A.D. (pl. I, fig. 2). The most recent view² indicates that the Norse occupation of Cumbria did not begin so early as I argued in the *Tullie House Catalogue of Viking Antiquities*.³ If, therefore, one may hazard a guess, I should suggest that the dates A.D. 850-950 would best suit such remains of this sword as are still preserved to us.

The old labels, all of the adhesive variety, are as follows :

- (a) On the hilt portion is an oblong label marked—
 "42 Locality Unknown."

This label belongs to the series which I have on a former occasion identified as those affixed in or about 1852, probably by Dr. Edward Charlton, when a complete catalogue of the Society's collections was in preparation.⁴ Thus by about 1852 the history of our sword was already lost.

¹ Petersen, *De Norske Vikingsverd*, pp. 89-105.

² *Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland* (1940), pt. IV, A. Bjørn, pp. 18-19.

³ T.C.W., N.S. xxxiv (1934), pp. 169, 172-4—for the evidence of date following Brøgger, *Den Norske Bosetningen*, pp. 205-6.

⁴ *PSAN* 4, IV, 252.

The hilt also carries a small square label with the figure 42 printed in heavy type. This series is to be identified with the last, and is found on many of our earlier acquisitions.

In addition on a very old circular label there is written in ink the number 134/1; to this, at a later date, someone else has added in the margin the number 19 or 61. The form and appearance of this label agree with those referring to the Society's original numbered list of accessions, with which also I have dealt previously.⁵ Unfortunately, however, it has so far only proved possible to link the consecutive numbers of this series with the Donation Lists up to no. 123 (presented 6 Dec. 1826), and no further.

(b) The lower half bears an exactly similar set of labels. An oblong label reads "51 Locality Unknown," and there is besides the same number in heavy type. An old circular label⁶ is numbered 134/2, and has also been over-written 19 or 61.

The presence of the subdivided number, 134/1 and 2, gives welcome confirmation to the assembly of the two pieces, which was prompted on form alone. The fact that the two 1852 numbers, however, are not consecutive, is fair evidence that by that date not only had the history of the weapon been lost, but that the two pieces were already dissociated. It will, however, be seen that though a certain amount of information is to be derived from the labels, they offer no clue to our real concern, the provenance and circumstances of discovery. The problem seemed incapable of solution, and it is long since all hope of solving it had, in fact, been given up.

In the course of a recent examination of the old Letter Books of the Society a fine stroke of good fortune has at last provided the answer. At the beginning of volume VI there are pasted in half-a-dozen old hand-written labels relating to objects in the museum. Among these is the following:

"Part of a Sword found by the side of a Skeleton, at Eggesfield, near Cockermouth in Cumberland,"

⁵ *Ibid.*, 252-3.

and in a different hand has been added "134." It is, of
I&I

course, the almost inconceivably fortunate addition of this number (already subdivided to cover two separate parts of the same object), that makes the attribution so absolutely conclusive. Eggesfield, now spelt Eaglesfield, is a village two miles south-west of Cockermouth; and the find must have been made in the immediate neighbourhood since on the label the word "at" (Eggesfield) is preceded by the word "near" crossed out. We can therefore be sure that "at" means what it says. We now have the provenance of our sword, and—what is more—we can say that it came from a grave, and add one more to the short but growing list of Viking burials in Cumberland.

It is worth while speculating briefly on how the sword came into our museum, though no final solution of this secondary point can yet be offered. It certainly does not figure in our Donation Lists. Although the Letter Book cannot have been started before Jan. 1842 (vol. v runs to this point), it begins with a handful of old papers which must have been preserved till then elsewhere. The first two or three all relate to the agreement with the Natural History Society under which our Society moved (11 Nov. 1834) from the Literary & Philosophical building into apartments in the new wing built by the Natural History Society. By an endorsement in his writing, and the many pinholes in their corners, it is clear that these papers must have been kept by John Adamson for ready reference in his house or office. It is between two of these, dated 4th June and 28th July, 1834, that the labels are stuck, and it looks as if this is no accident. The removal of the museum would be a likely occasion for the displacement of labels considered old or untidy. Though not proven, it does therefore appear probable that the objects to which these labels belonged were in our possession by the latter date, or at all events by the end of the year.

It is possible that the sword was simply a donation to

the Society which escaped being put on record. A few such are known, but my impression is that, for the first twenty or thirty years, the records of the donations were very accurately maintained. There is one class of exception to this. Until the Society was able to instal its collection of Roman stones in "the Piazza" in the Natural History Society's building, they were accumulated at the house of our Secretary, Mr. John Adamson, in whose garden many of them stood. It is known that a number of these reached the Society without being reported in the Donation Lists, and it is to be assumed that John Adamson, who was a busy man with many commercial as well as literary and scientific interests, was satisfied if a stone was delivered at his house, and was not too punctilious about seeing it recorded in print. The same might well apply to other objects received by him, though this is not demonstrable, and is perhaps less likely. As far as we can make out smaller objects were usually sent in to be exhibited (and recorded) at the monthly meeting. It may, however, be a pointer in the other direction that at the end of the labels in the Letter Book there is pasted in a slip on which is written in Adamson's own writing "To go with the correspondence." This seems to confirm that the labels in question were sent down *by him* to be pasted into the Letter Book by John Bell. It does not, of course, follow that the objects to which they refer had also been accumulating unrecorded at his house—and indeed two or three of the labels do refer to gifts which are already adequately known through being listed as donations—but it is at least a plausible notion that that is what may have been happening to some of them.

There is, however, just a chance, and the possibility should always be borne in mind, that the sword came to this Society with other "Antiquities" from the collections of the Literary & Philosophical or Natural History Societies. Between 1829-1848 both these societies were housed in the same building as ourselves, so that transfers or loans would

have been exceptionally easy, and indeed natural. That the desirability of showing in one place all available museum exhibits of the same kind was realized at this time is shown by the arrangement made in 1834 between ourselves and the Natural History Society, under which the latter agreed to deposit with this Society "all specimens and remains of Antiquity whatever which may come into their possession." Nevertheless, several considerations make this solution somewhat unlikely. The objects lent were to be distinctively marked and listed, and in the case of objects from the old Allan Museum, we know that this was carried out. No such mark appears on our sword. Again the printed records, at least, of these societies contain, so far as I can find, no reference to the acquisition of any such object as this. And finally there is evidence that the sword was originally sent by the donor to John Adamson personally, and not to either of the sister societies.

One last clue may some day help us forward, possibly even to that more adequate contemporary account of the find which, after all, constitutes the ultimate objective of any further research into the matter. Immediately beneath the label in the Letter Book, and indeed touching its lower edge, is pasted a second slip of paper inscribed "John Adamson Esq with Mr. Benson's Comp's." The remaining labels in the book are not pasted close together like this, and it seems likely that this slip does indeed refer to our sword. No one of the name of Benson was a member of our Society in the nineteenth century, and I have not further tried to identify this gentleman, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that our friends of the Cumberland and Westmorland Society might be able to do so. The name of Benson is a common one in Cumberland, but this Mr. Benson may perhaps have been a landowner in the Cockermouth area, and it should not be forgotten that John Adamson was Secretary of the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway.

The standard histories of Cumberland record no old

discoveries such as this at Eaglesfield, but Whellan⁶ states : “ In removing the surface for the purpose of quarrying the limestone which abounds here, several human bones, teeth, and instruments of war have been found from time to time, at a place called Endlaw.” I do not know his authority for this, but William Dickinson, writing in 1877, mentions, under Brigham Township, “ the limestone bluffs of Thornberry and Tendlay, where six skeletons and a sword have been found.”⁷ Is it too much to hope that our neighbours to the west may now take up the story where we have left off, unearth unpublished or forgotten details, and establish not only the circumstances of this particular discovery, but even perhaps the existence of further burials, and an as yet unrecognized Viking cemetery ?

⁶ *History and Topography of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1860), p. 297.

⁷ *TCW*, O.S. III, 343.