

III.—AN EARLY BRONZE AGE BURIAL ON REAVERHILL FARM, BARRASFORD, NORTHUMBERLAND

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with contributions by Miss J. Weyman and C. B. Burgess

On 14th January 1964, at the instance of Lord Richard Percy, Lt.-Col. Richard Taylor of Chipchase Castle informed the second-named writer that a plough had displaced a large stone, beneath which were bones and a bronze dagger, on Reaverhill Farm,¹ west of Barrasford in North Tynedale, Northumberland. The burial was excavated by the writers two days later, and they take this opportunity to express their thanks again to Lord Richard Percy for his interest in the discovery, to Colonel Taylor for readily giving permission to excavate, for providing assistance, and for generously presenting the dagger and skeletal remains to the Museum of Antiquities of the University and the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne,² and to Miss J. Weyman and Mr. C. B. Burgess for their respective reports on the bones and the dagger (Appendices 1 and 2 below).

The burial was on the summit of a hill³ a quarter of a mile north of the farm buildings. Though not of great elevation (377' A.O.D.) the hill nevertheless commands a wide prospect of the North Tyne valley, including immediately the site of the now destroyed stone circle some ninety feet in diameter, that stood near the confluence of the Simonburn and the North Tyne in Nunwick Park, and the standing stones which formerly occupied Standing Stone Field near

¹ Known locally as "Riverhill" Farm.

² Accession no. 1964.2.

³ N.G.R. NZ/907737.

Barrasford School.⁴ Despite deep ploughing of the field there yet remains an indication of a mound or cairn that covered the burial. Presumably this is the tumulus mentioned by MacLaughlan as Kip Hill, "out of which some cists have been taken".⁵ It takes its place, therefore, with a number of barrows or cairns already recorded in the immediate vicinity, i.e. at Barrasford School House,⁶ Barrasford Burn,⁷ Barrasford Green Farm,⁸ and Catheugh Farm.⁹

The large, roughly triangular stone displaced by the plough measured 4 ft. across at its wider end, 2 ft. at its narrower end, and 6 ft. in length; its average thickness was 7 ins. It had covered a small oblong cist or chamber, internally 3 ft. 9 ins. × 2 ft. 3 ins., with sides formed of four rectangular slabs set on edge and sunk into the subsoil to a depth of 1 ft. 6 ins. All the stones, including the cover-stone, were quite plain. Smaller stones had been inserted in the interstices at the corners of the cist. The bottom of the chamber was simply the natural, firm sandy gravel. It was evident that the cist had been constructed in a shallow pit specially dug to contain it, the space between the sides of the pit and those of the cist being afterwards loosely filled with earth and stones. The long axis of the cist lay approximately north-east/south-west.

Unfortunately the contents of the cist had been previously disturbed. Most of the skeleton was missing and the bones remaining were in disorder, but they appear to have been those of a man aged 30 to 35 years and about 5 ft. 6 ins. tall (see Appendix 1). The survival and recovery of the dagger, however, may perhaps be regarded as compensating to some degree for the disturbance of the burial. It is an exceptionally fine and well preserved specimen, datable to the Early Bronze Age (see Appendix 2). With such a dagger a Long-Necked

⁴ *NCH* XV, 60; *A.A.*², VII (1871) 11, X (1874) 17.

⁵ H. MacLaughlan, *Additional Notes* (1868) 81.

⁶ *Trans. Nat. Hist. Soc. of Northd. and Durham* I (1865-67) 54.

⁷ *A.A.*², VII (1871) 14.

⁸ *Ibid.* 13.

⁹ *Ibid.* X (1874) 17.



Fig. 1. The two portions of the jaws articulated, demonstrating the freely moving occlusion and the edge-to-edge bite



Fig. 2. The mandibular fragment, showing the wide arch and the everted angle

Beaker, and even perhaps a V-perforated shale button, might have been expected, but there was no evidence that any other object had accompanied the body.

APPENDIX 1

THE SKELETAL MATERIAL FROM THE REAVERHILL BURIAL

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The skeletal remains were of one individual and consisted of many fragments of ribs, vertebrae, phalanges, long bones and talus, but only two pieces of the skull were present. These were part of the mandible and the maxilla (Pl. IV, 1).

The portion of the lower jaw (Pl. IV, 2) consisted of the greater part of the body containing 14 teeth, $\sqrt{78}$ (i.e. the last two molars of the left side) being missing. The whole of the ramus was missing on the left, but on the right the lower part was still present. The upper jaw fragment was of the right side and included the palate and zygomatic process and six teeth, namely 765432/ (i.e. all except the last molar and first incisor).

The teeth were of average size and showed well marked attrition. There was no evidence of caries but there was significant bone loss due to progressive periodontal disease, and a certain amount of calculus was present on the exposed areas of root, which is a normal occurrence in this condition. Radiographs showed no evidence of periapical infection such as is associated with dead teeth.

Among the other fragmentary remains was a maxillary molar from the left side. This was prepared as a ground section and examined microscopically. It was found that although the enamel was generally well formed there was slight evidence of disturbance of the type associated with ill-health or nutritional deficiency. This appeared as three bands of mild pigmentation in the incremental pattern of the enamel, and corresponded chronologically with an area of more severe disturbance in the dentine. It was not possible to be sure whether the tooth was a second or third molar, and this systemic upset may have taken place at the age of about 5-6 or 10-11 years. In addition there was a suggestion of an overall deficiency in the calcification of the dentine, but the evidence was not conclusive.

The dental arch in the lower jaw was very regular and remarkable for its width, the distance between the centres of the first molars being 53 mm. The bony shape of the jaw was correspondingly wide-arched but gave no evidence of grossness and indeed was of rather fine form. The right angle which was still present was everted.

The two arches were articulated and it was seen that the occlusion was a freely moving one and was in accordance with the amount of attrition present. The incisors appeared to be in an edge-to-edge relationship, which was an expected finding in view of the arch form. It suggests a brachycephalic type.

It seems reasonable to conclude from the form of the talus, the build of the mandible and eversion of the angle that this was a male. In view of the dental condition and the finding that the epiphysis and the maxillary suture were recently closed, an age of 30 to 35 years is suggested. The musculature was not heavy judging by the areas of attachment.

Among the other fragments of bone was an almost complete right humerus, and from this it was possible to make an estimate of the stature using Dupertuis and Hadden's formula, and the height arrived at was 5 ft. 5 ins. to 5 ft. 7 ins.

Acknowledgment. I am grateful to Professor C. H. Tonge for his comments particularly as related to the talus and sutural development which have been included in the text.

APPENDIX 2

THE REAVERHILL FARM DAGGER¹⁰ (FIG. 1)

C. B. Burgess, B.A.

The dagger is roughly triangular in outline, with straight edges and a gently rounded butt retaining three rivets. The point of the blade is damaged, and the extreme tip is missing. The blade edges are quite well preserved; they are strongly bevelled, though the line of the bevel is often obscured by corrosion, and were probably hollow-ground originally. The blade is essentially flat, averaging 1.5-2 mm. in thickness, but at the centre there is a well-defined, triple-reeded midrib. This shows very fine workmanship, and may reflect the use of a bivalve, rather than a single-piece, mould. The

¹⁰ Many of the comments in this note arise out of research into the northern Bronze Age undertaken as a Sir James Knott Fellow of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

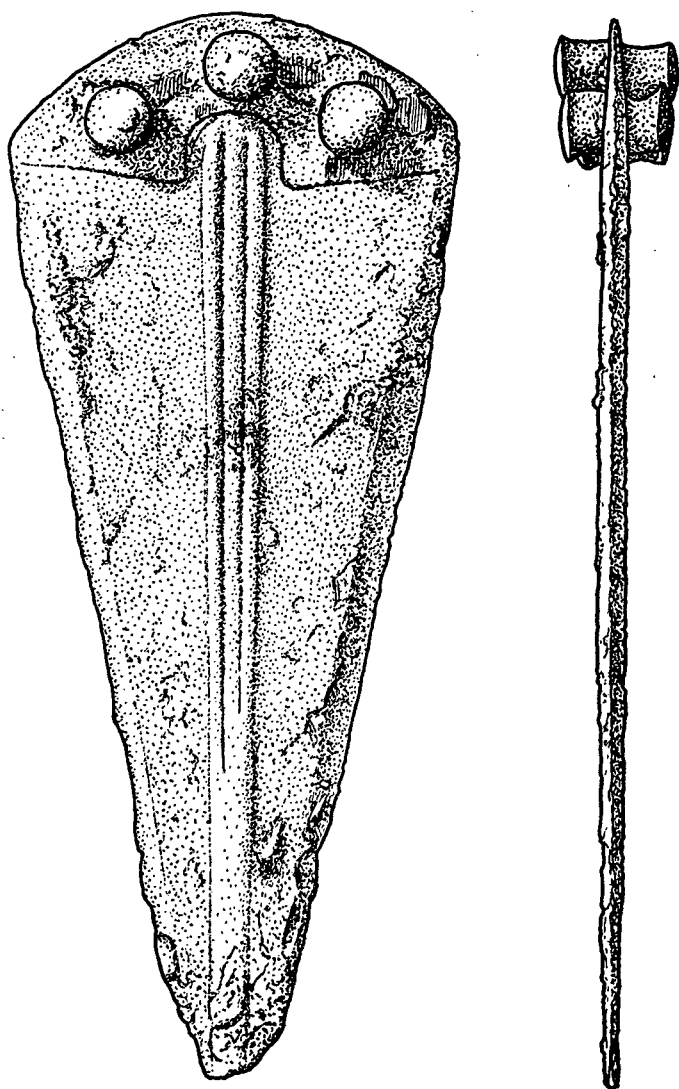


FIG. 1. THE REAVERHILL DAGGER (1:1).
Drawn by C. B. Burgess.

limit of the now-vanished organic hilt is marked by a strong butt-mark of "omega" form. For the most part this is a raised line, the product of differential corrosion, with the surfaces inside the mark on both faces differing markedly in colour and condition from those of the blade. Traces of the wooden hilt in fact survive, particularly around the rivets. The rivets are large, and have expanded, slightly domed heads. In profile, the blade tapers at the butt to a thinned end. The condition of the two faces differs considerably, but nowhere does actual metal survive at the surface.¹¹ The face drawn has a predominantly rough surface, its colour being various shades of bright green, but in places a smooth, dark green patina is exposed. There are small patches of reddish-brown encrustation, especially towards the point. The area inside the butt mark is a more yellowish-green. The other face is entirely covered with rough, brownish-green encrustation, which largely conceals the mid-rib and the line of the bevelled edges. The area inside the butt mark is less heavily corroded. The length of the weapon is 5.6 inches (142 mm.), and the butt is 2.3 inches across at the widest part (59 mm.). Altogether it represents a very competent piece of craftsmanship.

Affinities and chronology: The Reaverhill Farm dagger belongs basically to the series of riveted knives and daggers of the Early Bronze Age discussed by Fox and Grimes in 1928¹² and more recently by Piggott.¹³ While many of these weapons have flat or flattish blades, numbers have blades with some degree of central thickening, and a few possess definite midribs. The series is characterised by a rounded or arched heel, but the outline and size can vary considerably. About fifteen examples have been analysed, all proving to be of bronze rather than copper,¹⁴ so technologically the series as a whole should belong to the Early Bronze Age, c. 17th-15th centuries B.C., rather than the preceding Copper Age.¹⁵ No examples are demonstrably later than the Early Bronze Age.

¹¹ I am grateful to Mr. C. M. Daniels for his comments on the condition of the dagger.

¹² C. Fox and W. F. Grimes, "Corston Beacon: an Early Bronze Age cairn in south Pembrokeshire", *Arch. Camb.* (1928) 137-74.

¹³ S. Piggott, "Abercromby and After", in *Culture and Environment* (1963), 80-8.

¹⁴ Piggott, *loc. cit.*, 85.

¹⁵ The Copper Age of Professor C. F. C. Hawkes, as proposed in his Scheme for the British Bronze Age, presented to the C.B.A. Bronze Age Conference, London, December, 1960. The divisions of the Bronze Age used in this note are those suggested by Professor Hawkes in his Scheme. The Copper age may be regarded as lasting from c. 2000/1900-1650/1600 B.C., Early Bronze Age I (EBA 1) from c. 1650/1600-1550/1500, and EBA 2 from c. 1550/1500-1400.

In his recent consideration of these weapons Piggott concerned himself largely with flat examples and those which have been found with inhumation burials, in effect the bulk of the known specimens. He dealt with some 85 knives and daggers, dividing them into five typological groups. In basic form, the Reaverhill dagger falls into his Group II, which comprises the "larger triangular daggers, often with massive rivets, with the omega hilt normal".¹⁶ Group II weapons, like all those dealt with by Piggott, seem best attested in EBA 1; none can be shown definitely to belong to EBA 2, though this point should not be overstressed in view of the present slender state of knowledge of Early Bronze Age chronology in the Highland Zone. Moreover, the Reaverhill dagger demands special consideration by virtue of its midrib. There is no evidence that midrib versions of these flat daggers, though typologically and technologically more advanced than the flat examples, necessarily belonged to a later period.

Two forms of midrib are known on these weapons, and both are rare. Firstly there is the simple, rounded midrib, as found on the examples from Cefn Cilsanws (Brecks.)¹⁷ and Musdin (Staffs.).¹⁸ The second is the very distinctive, and more sophisticated, triple-reeded midrib of Reaverhill type. This feature appears to be extremely rarely found on daggers of any form, whether in Britain or on the Continent.¹⁹ There appear to be only three close parallels in the whole of the British Isles, but in none of these cases is the weapon concerned exactly like the Reaverhill specimen in other respects. A dagger found under a barrow at Teddington (Mddx.; Fig. 2), with a cremation and flint chippings, and now lost, had the same triangular, straight-sided form, but, with a length of 7 ins., was much larger than the Reaverhill weapon.²⁰ Unfortunately the end of its butt was missing, so that it is impossible to be certain of its form, or how many rivets it held. The triple-reeded midrib is exactly like that of the Reaverhill dagger, descending from the arch of an *omega* butt mark. Size apart, it differs from the Reaverhill example in having a subsidiary double reeding, placed between the midrib and the bevelled edge, extending in a straight line from below the butt-mark, and converging on the midrib towards the point.

¹⁶ Piggott, *loc. cit.*, 84.

¹⁷ Webley, *BBCS* (= *Bull. of the Board of Celtic Studies*) XVII, pt. iii (Nov. 1957) 195, pl. I: 2.

¹⁸ J. Evans, *Ancient Bronze Implements* (1881) 240, fig. 300.

¹⁹ I am grateful to Miss E. Binchy, Professor R. J. C. Atkinson, Dr. D. Britton, Dr. J. M. Coles, Dr. J. D. Cowen, Dr. G. Eogan and Professor S. Piggott for their comments on the dagger.

²⁰ *Arch. J.* XIII (1856) 305, fig. I am indebted to the Royal Archaeological Institute for permission to reproduce this illustration.



FIG. 2. DAGGER FROM TEDDINGTON, SURREY (1:2).
By courtesy of the Royal Archaeological Institute.

Unfortunately, on the present evidence it cannot be dated more closely than the Reaverhill specimen, that is to the general Early Bronze Age. Its form does suggest parallels with the grooved, straight-sided, multi-rivet Bush Barrow daggers²¹ of Wessex I (i.e. EBA 1), but one cannot be dogmatic in discussing the affinities of such a damaged specimen.

A dagger from Wester Mains of Auchterhouse (Angus; Fig. 3)²² is more like the Reaverhill example in that it is basically a flat, triangular dagger of Piggott's Group II. It was found with cremations in a cist under a cairn. Like the Teddington example, it is larger than that from Reaverhill (length $6\frac{1}{2}$ ins.), and possesses, in addition, a horn hilt which was $3\frac{1}{8}$ ins. long when found. The most

²¹ ApSimon, *Univ. of London Inst. of Arch. Annual Report X* (1954) 37-62.

²² *PSAS XXXII* (1898) 205-20, fig. 1. I am indebted to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for permission to reproduce this illustration.



FIG. 3. DAGGER FROM WESTER MAINS OF AUCHTERHOUSE, ANGUS (1:2).

By courtesy of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

important difference from the Reaverhill dagger is its method of hilt attachment; instead of the usual three large rivets it has nine slender rivets, though these, significantly, are arranged in three groups of three, each group in a position in which a single rivet would normally be found. In other respects it is very similar to the Reaverhill specimen, having the same, fine, triple-reeded midrib descending from the arch of the *omega* butt-mark. It can be dated

no more closely than the Reaverhill and Teddington daggers, however.

A third parallel is provided by one of the halberds in the hoard from Inverkeithney (Banffs.),²³ but triple-reeded midrib apart this is a completely different type of weapon. In any case, its reeding is superimposed on a more substantial, rounded midrib. Most halberds, on analysis, have proved to be made of copper.²⁴ Undoubtedly they were therefore Copper Age weapons in the first instance, though examples apparently continued to be made in copper even after the introduction of bronze and the onset of the Early Bronze Age. Some bronze ones, too, were made at this later stage,²⁵ but it is not known how long the type survived in the Early Bronze Age. The Inverkeithney example is of developed form, one in a hoard of developed halberds, and could well be of Early Bronze Age, rather than Copper Age, date. Be that as it may, it provides no more precise clue to the date of the Reaverhill weapon than do the Teddington and Wester Mains daggers. Various reedings and fine ribbings are found on a number of other halberds, but these never provide as close a parallel as the Inverkeithney halberd, so are of even less use for dating purposes. Similarly, many other Early Bronze daggers exhibit finely ribbed or reeded blades, such as those from Gavel Moss (Renfrew),²⁶ Blackwatersfoot (Arran)²⁷ and the Thames at Hammersmith,²⁸ but these are altogether more sophisticated weapons, and the parallel is never close.

For southern England, the range of material available for study, particularly the rich grave groups of the Wessex Culture, permits a fairly rigid distinction to be made between EBA 1 and EBA 2. The material content of the Early Bronze Age outside the south is much more homogeneous, however. In the Lowland Zone, the principal metal types of EBA 1 generally speaking were replaced by more advanced forms in EBA 2; for example flanged axes superseded flat axes. The flat and Bush Barrow daggers of EBA 1 were replaced in EBA 2 by ogival, grooved daggers, particularly of the Camerton-Snowhill form, and other ribbed and/or grooved daggers. In the Highland Zone, however, the position is much less certain. In many regions EBA 1 types continued in use throughout EBA 2, and

²³ *Ibid.* LXXV (1940-41) 208-9; Britton, *PPS* (= *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*) XXIX (1963) 284, 315, pl. xxix.

²⁴ Cf. lists of analyses in Coghlan and Case, *PPS* XXIII (1957) 106-20; Britton, *loc. cit.*, 304.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Inventaria Archaeologica*, GB V (1958) 28.

²⁷ *PSAS* XXXVI (1901-2) 120.

²⁸ In the British Museum, no. WG 1706.

were never supplanted.²⁹ In Wales, for example, the flat axe remained the dominant axe form throughout the Early Bronze Age; the flanged axe is extremely rare there, and only occurs peripherally. Similarly, over much of the Highland Zone, the ogival, grooved dagger, and other advanced ribbed types which can be assigned to EBA 2, occur very rarely, whereas there are large numbers of the flat and related knives and daggers of the types being considered in this note. In Wales, such implements appear to have survived largely unchallenged throughout the Early Bronze Age, as did the flat axes.³⁰ No doubt there was similar survival in other Highland Zone regions, especially northern England, where scarcely any daggers of EBA 2 types have been found. In the north-east, for example, comparatively few Early Bronze Age knives and daggers have been found,³¹ but nearly all of these are simple, riveted specimens, most of them flat, poor relatives of, and no more closely datable than, the Reaverhill dagger. The obvious exception is the fine dagger from the Tyne at Elswick,³² which, with its heavy, ribbed blade and triple-arched butt, is very like the dagger in the Gavel Moss hoard. Multiple-ribbed daggers of this sort, generally large and heavy, seem to belong to EBA 2. The large, ribbed dagger from Ford (Nd.)³³ may be another north-eastern member of this series. The Elswick weapon in particular belongs to a tradition altogether more advanced than that represented by Reaverhill and the bulk of the north-eastern daggers, but it, and the Ford specimen, are very much in isolation. The fine, decorated flanged axe from Whittington (Nd.),³⁴ a representative of the same advanced tradition, is even more alone when compared with the large numbers of flat axes which have come from the North-East. The evidence thus points strongly to a local survival of EBA 1 traditions and metal types through much of the Early Bronze Age, augmented only occasionally by products of more developed metalworking, such as the Elswick dagger and the Whittington axe. In such circumstances, knives and daggers like that from Reaverhill could as well have been made in EBA 2 as EBA 1.

²⁹ Burgess, *BBCS* XX, pt. i (Nov. 1962) 86; and in a lecture to the Pre-historic Society, "Aspects of the Bronze Age in Wales and the Marches," London, January 1964.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Cowen lists the knives, *Arch. Ael.*, 4th Ser., XXIV (1946) 226.

³² *NCH* XIII (1930) 19-20, fig. 15.

³³ Evans, *op. cit.*, 244.

³⁴ Evans, *op. cit.*, 74, fig. 51, where it is incorrectly described as being from Chollerford Bridge. See *NCH* X (1914) 5, note.

