

II.—A NOTE ON THE EASTGATE HOARD

J. D. Cowen

The first three notices of local antiquities to be published by our Society all, as it happens, relate to finds of gold- or bronze-work of the Bronze Age. The set of biconical gold beads found under a cairn on Chesterhope Common in July 1814 were by the generosity of the second Duke of Northumberland presented to this Society, in whose collection they remain.¹ Of the two bronze swords found at Ewart Park in February 1814, one was presented to the Society by Mrs. St. Paul of Ewart in December 1814; and the other by Mr. G. G. Butler (the widowed husband of her last lineal descendant) over a century later, in 1932.²

The third communication came in the form of a longish letter, dated 6th February, 1816, from the Rev. W. Wilson, Rector of Wolsingham, reporting the discovery of a hoard of bronzes found near the hamlet of Eastgate in upper Weardale; and is the subject of the present note.³

As the first two volumes of the quarto series of *Arch. Ael.* are today bibliographical rarities it may be convenient to summarize what is known of the circumstances of the discovery, and of the contents of the hoard. For the same reason the two admirable copper-plate drawings at natural size published with the Rev. Wilson's letter are here reproduced at a scale reduced to slightly over 3/5 (pls. V. and VI).

The pieces constituting the hoard were "found by a labourer, upwards of four years ago, in the parish of Stan-

¹ *A.A.*¹, I (1816), 1-10; *ibid.*, Donations, p. 6.

² *A.A.*⁴, X (1933), 185-189, pl. XIII, 1 and 2, with bibliography.

³ *A.A.*¹, I (1816), 13-16, pls. I and II. It says much for the standards maintained by our Society in those early days that (except for the second sword from Ewart) every one of the pieces comprising these three finds was illustrated at the time—and very creditably figured too!

hope, in the county of Durham, under some large rough stones casually scattered upon the declivity of a mountain, and covering nearly an acre of land. The place is at a little distance from the river Wear, on the south side, near a small farm house called Hag-gate; immediately opposite to a village on the north side, and near the river, called Eastgate. The place is well marked."

This account, as expressed, might well be read to mean that the bronzes were found scattered, under the large rough stones, over "nearly an acre of land". But I take that to be a nonsensical interpretation, possible only through weak drafting; and we may confidently assume that the bronzes were in fact found together under one stone (or even, maybe, a couple) among those forming this scatter.

The find was certainly made in the parish of Stanhope, and under this name it is referred to in the later literature, no doubt following Evans. But the site, as described above, lies a good three miles west of Stanhope, just south of the River Wear, and opposite the hamlet of Eastgate on the north bank. The attribution to "Stanhope" does, therefore, seem needlessly misleading, and I accordingly propose to adopt instead "Eastgate" as the name of this hoard.

In Mr. Wilson's opinion the contents were wholly Roman, and there follow speculations on the circumstances in which they came to be where they were found, and on the respective uses of the several types. His descriptive account of the objects, piece by piece, is painstaking and tallies well with the plates. But his conclusions on the circumstances of deposit, and on the purpose of some of the less obvious types, illustrate vividly the difficulties with which the early pioneers in our discipline had to contend, and how innocent they were of any concept of "the limits of archaeological inference".

The hoard consists of fifteen pieces, all of bronze, as follows (pls. V and VI):

- 1-5 Five leaf-shaped spearheads—all of Class V.

- 6 "Sword, fragment"—but see below, p. 34.
- 7 Socketed axe of unusual form (Wilson's "sharper"). Even if one assumes that the asymmetrical cutting edge is due to wear and "restores" it, I know of no satisfactory parallel for this piece. Evans, *Bronze*, fig. 165, seems the nearest; in a hoard from Bell's Mills, near Edinburgh, which (as here too) contained also a good example of the Yorkshire type—*ibid.*, fig. 164.
- 8-10 Three socketed axes—one of the Yorkshire type, the others broken and uncertain.
- 11 Ferule for a spear-shaft—similar to that in the Nettleham hoard, Evans, fig. 423.
- 12 Socketed gouge—as Evans, fig. 208.
- 13 Socketed hammer—as Evans, figs. 211 or 212.
- 14/15 Two thin *phalerae*.

The condition of the pieces is not good; all but three or four appear to have suffered major damage. But this seems not to be a hoard of scrap in the normal sense, so that a founder's hoard seems difficult to predicate, and the damage could be due simply to adverse soil conditions. If that were so, then the presence of the hammer and the gouge might encourage us to see in this collection the property of a travelling merchant, who was nevertheless competent to carry out running repairs by the application of some simple tinkering.

At all events the assemblage is in all respects fully consonant with a date in the Late Bronze Age in Britain; and more specifically with Late Bronze 2, to which is credibly assigned the material from the famous Heathery Burn Cave, only $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles away down the road to Stanhope.⁴ The resemblances between the two groups are too great to admit the idea of any great margin of time between them.

In this connection the most significant pieces from

⁴ Greenwell, *Archaeologia*, LIV (1894), 87-114, is the primary authority on the contents.

Eastgate are the two phalerae. For six analogous discs were found in the Heathery Burn Cave,⁵ and in recent years a wide interest has been shown in this class of object, on the Continent as well as in this country. An earlier generation believed these things to belong to the equipment or adornment of the human body. There is now wide agreement that they are to be seen as an element in horse-gear, probably on the headstall; but though some must surely have been bosses for bits the precise manner of their employment is not necessarily in all cases clear. The particular interest, however, attaching to these phalerae today arises from their value in providing links between the Late Bronze Age chronology of Britain and of the Continent.⁶

Since the original publication the hoard has never made much impact on the literature. In 1881 Evans gave full treatment to the several types represented, and included the find in his list of hoards as no. 58, referring to it, as already noted, under the name of "Stanhope".⁷

Later, in his well-known account of the material from the Heathery Burn Cave, Greenwell made the very slightest and uninformative of references to our hoard, again quoting only *Arch. Ael.*, Vol. I.⁸ A somewhat fuller but little more satisfactory summary of the same source, probably again by Greenwell, was printed in the Victoria County History.⁹ And recently Hawkes and Smith have briefly

⁵ *Loc. cit.*, 103, fig. 22.

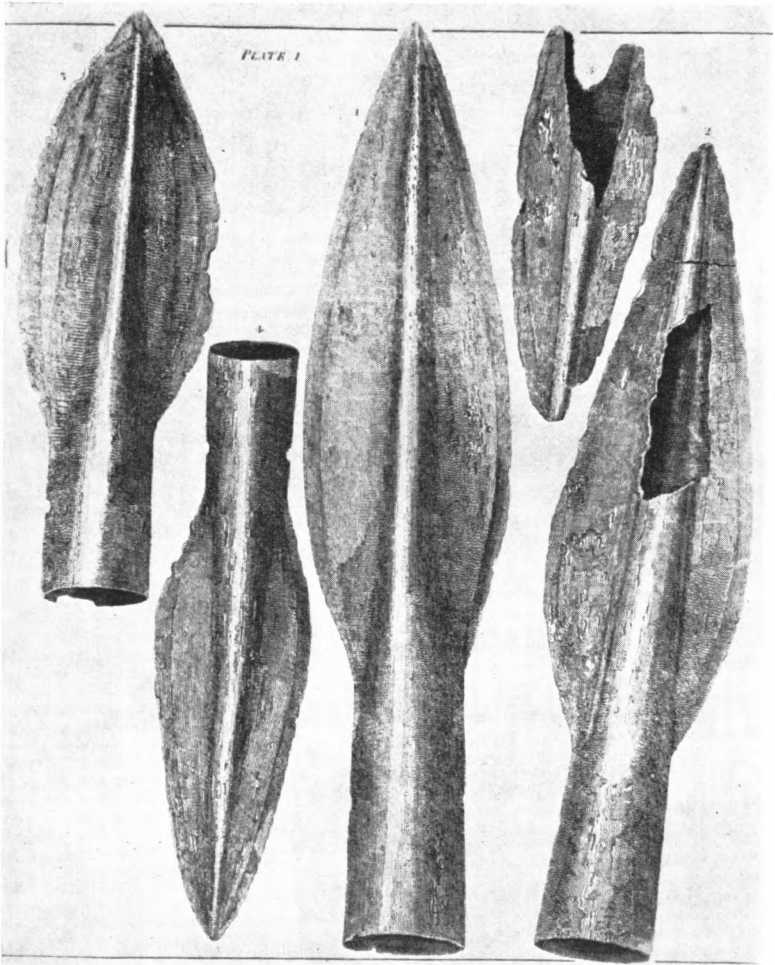
⁶ The *locus classicus* on prehistoric phalerae is: G. von Merhart, *Jb.d. Röm.-Germ. Zentralmuseums, Mainz*, 3 (1956), 28-116, where 130 sites (all continental) are listed, their product classified into eight groups, and nearly 160 examples figured. By no means all these types are relevant to the British material; the closest analogues to the Eastgate phalerae are Abb.2, 4-10, all of Merhart's group 2, the Four-boss Group.

The British material, including the pair from Eastgate, collected and presented in relation to the continental background by Hawkes and Smith, *Ant. Journ.*, XXXVII (1957), 155-56.

⁷ Evans, *Bronze*, 462, 466; for the types see his index, p. 500, s.v. Stanhope. His cautious approach to all archaeological evidence is splendidly illustrated by his refusal to rely on the accuracy of the admirable drawings in *Arch. Ael.*; to the extent, at all events, that he did *not* have them redrawn to illustrate his own great work!

⁸ *Archaeologia*, LIV (1894), 91.

⁹ *V.C.H., Durham*, I (1905), 200, 202.



The Eastgate Hoard (i): c. 3/5



The Eastgate Hoard (ii): c. 3/5

revived the memory of our find, and in so doing have for the first time placed it in an up-to-date archaeological context.¹⁰

Late in 1815, apparently, or early in 1816, the Rev. W. Wilson allowed the hoard to be exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-on-Tyne.¹¹ From that day to this no one has ever claimed to have seen it, or any part of it, again. I well remember how, as an eager young fellow in the early 1930's, I decided to have a go at "collecting" this missing hoard in the interests of the Society, but for whose meritorious publication it would entirely have escaped the notice of scholarship. After a singularly fruitless spell I argued that if Canon Greenwell, one of the two most formidable collectors of prehistoric bronzes this country has ever bred, working over the ground for a good two generations before my own birth, from his permanent base in the city of Durham, so conveniently placed for access to Stanhope, where he had been successful in securing practically every prehistoric scrap that over a period of years came out of the Heathery Burn Cave—if, I argued, *Greenwell* had not been able to lay his hands on such a prize, for which he must inevitably have searched, then (a generation later still) *no* chance of success could remain! I concluded that if the hoard had not actually been destroyed (as I had come to believe) it must in any case by that time be deemed to be irrecoverable. And I desisted.

It was in 1965 that an archaeological friend (not particularly interested in prehistory), with a family background in the north-west, (and no connection with the north-east), mentioned to me in conversation that he remembered once seeing, in the house of a not-so-close relative in Westmorland, a small collection of bronzes that seemed to him to be prehistoric. They were kept in a glass-topped case in a dark passage, and though there seemed to be some notes with them, the notes could not be read, nor the bronzes more closely examined, because the key could not be found.

¹⁰ *Ant. Journ.*, XXXVII (1957), 155.

¹¹ Headnote to the original publication: *A.A.*¹, I (1816), 13.

There were, he thought, about a dozen or fifteen pieces; but beyond the owner's name and address that was all he could tell.

Instantly, if irrationally, the image of the Eastgate hoard burst upon the mind's eye. But what a hopelessly long shot! Could the small collection in Westmorland *possibly* amount to *that*? It did, indeed, amount to precisely that.

After some correspondence the identity was established by sending photographs of the engravings in *Arch. Ael.* to the owner, who confirmed the fact. And in April 1967 he kindly permitted me to visit his house, and to make for myself a first-hand examination of the pieces. It was at once possible to establish:

1. That all of the 15 pieces had indeed survived, and were present in the glass-topped case. The preservation *intact* of such a hoard for over a century and a half *in private hands* is phenomenal, and outside ducal circles must surely be unique.
2. The condition of the pieces had deteriorated remarkably little. I noticed only that the ferule had broken across, and that both phalerae are now (not unnaturally) much more fragmented, though not so much reduced in size overall as might have been expected.
3. I particularly noted the accuracy of the drawing in the plates published by our Society. So far as the identification of types is concerned, examination in the hand confirmed, in every case but one, the conclusions previously reached by an examination of the plates only.

The exception is no. 6 (above, p. 31), described as the fragment of a sword, where the draughtsman has hardly done himself justice, and which has always, accordingly, been difficult to interpret with confidence. In the hand, however, it is easily to be recognized as the greater part of a socketed knife of a familiar type.¹² Its identification in no

¹² Of the same general character as that from Shipley Farm, Dissington: *NCH*, XIII (1930), 18, figs. 12 and 13.

way affects, otherwise than broadly to confirm, the dating for the hoard as a whole already suggested.

Into greater detail I did not go, as at that time I had every hope, indeed reasonable expectation, of having a further opportunity of examining the whole of the material at leisure. This, however, was not to be.

The transfer across the Pennines was, without doubt, the prime cause of the hoard's being lost to sight, and of the failure of Greenwell and other predecessors to pick up the trail. How this came about is made clear on a slip of paper kept with the bronzes. The Rev. W. Wilson kept the hoard till his death, aet. 85, in May 1843. It then went to his niece Ann Wilson, who died in 1866; and on her death it "passed into the hands of her Residuary Legatee"—one assumes a relative of some kind, but with a different surname and residing in Westmorland. From him it has come by successive inheritance to the present owner, who bears the same Christian name and surname.

After seeing the hoard I sought to borrow it to be photographed and drawn with a view to full publication to modern standards. The answer I got, though not a flat refusal, was far from encouraging. So that, last summer (July, 1970), seeing an opportunity of again visiting the neighbourhood, I tried to arrange an interview to discuss just on what terms a loan might, after all, be arranged. In the sequel I formed the view that the owner was in fact profoundly reluctant *to do anything* in the matter; and so, for the second time in forty years, I desisted.

It has been a deep disappointment. But something, after all, is gained: first the knowledge that the Eastgate hoard *has* survived intact into our time; and secondly an enhanced confidence in the illustrations to the only first-hand record we have of it.

On the other side, we are (for the present at all events) denied the opportunity of making a record of the material that shall conform to modern standards of presentation and

publication. Far worse than this, we now know that, after its astonishing history of survival, the future continuance of the survival of the Eastgate hoard remains still at risk.