

IX
Museum Notes, 1993

1. BARBED AND TANGED
ARROWHEAD FROM FLOW MOSS,
DRYBURN MOOR, ALLENDALE

ON 22 August 1992 a young French visitor to Northumberland discovered a barbed and tanged arrowhead at NGR 806537 on Flow Moss, Dryburn Moor, Allendale. The arrowhead was found on the ground surface and no other artefacts were noted. It is of grey mottled flint and measures 26 mm in length with a maximum width of 19 mm and a maximum thickness of 4 mm (fig. 1).

The area in which the arrowhead was found is one of eroding peat with exposed fossil birch; the moss has been killed by pollution from the adjacent lead-mining chimneys. In the past

four other finds have been made at Flow Moss: several similar arrowheads, knives, hatchets and thumb flints were found in the last century, and similar discoveries in the early 20th century from Flow Edge and Dryburn Chimneys. These finds date to the Neolithic or Bronze Age and the latest find would suggest a late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age settlement may lie beneath the moss.

The find was reported to the Archaeology Section of Northumberland County Council by Mr. and Mrs. Braithwaite of Hawick and donated to the Museum of Antiquities by the finder, Pascaline de Soras: Accession Number 1992.7.

Elizabeth Williams

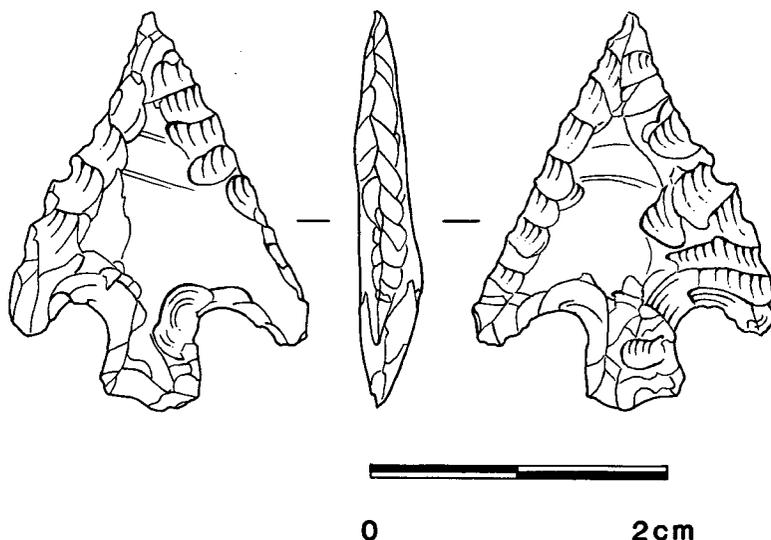


Fig. 1 Flint arrowhead from Flow Moss. Drawn by S. Hooper.

2. BRONZE AGE AXEHAMMER FROM FELTON, NORTHUMBERLAND

In May 1992 the Museum of Antiquities received a donation from Mr. Charles Dick of Felton, near Morpeth, of a Bronze Age axehammer which he had found in a ploughed field near his home.¹ The field in question is on the north bank of the River Coquet and rises steeply above the flood plain towards Mouldshaugh Farm.

The axehammer is of whinstone and is complete except for a spall which has become detached from one corner of the cutting edge in recent times, probably through plough damage. The surface shows brown iron oxidation and a deposit has formed around the shaft hole on both faces which may suggest that the object was lost or deposited with its shaft *in situ*. It measures 249 mm in length, has a maximum width of 86 mm and is 67 mm thick at the blade

and 58 mm thick at the shaft hole. The "hour glass" shaft hole has a maximum diameter of 50 mm and a minimum diameter of 34 mm. The distance from the centre of the shaft hole to the butt is 73 mm (approx.). One face is slightly dished between the shaft hole and the oblique cutting edge. The butt is narrow and rounded and falls within Roe's Type B butt form² (fig. 2).

In size and form this is a typical axehammer of the Early Bronze Age (1850–1400 B.C.). Similar axehammers have already been found in the Felton district, two of which are in the Museum of Antiquities, both of whinstone. The first was found "near Swarland" during the Second World War and is a much squatter example having a length of 170 mm and a maximum width of 106 mm³ (fig. 3). The thickness, like the latest find, is fairly consistent: 60 mm at the blade and 63 mm at the shaft hole. The distance between the butt and the

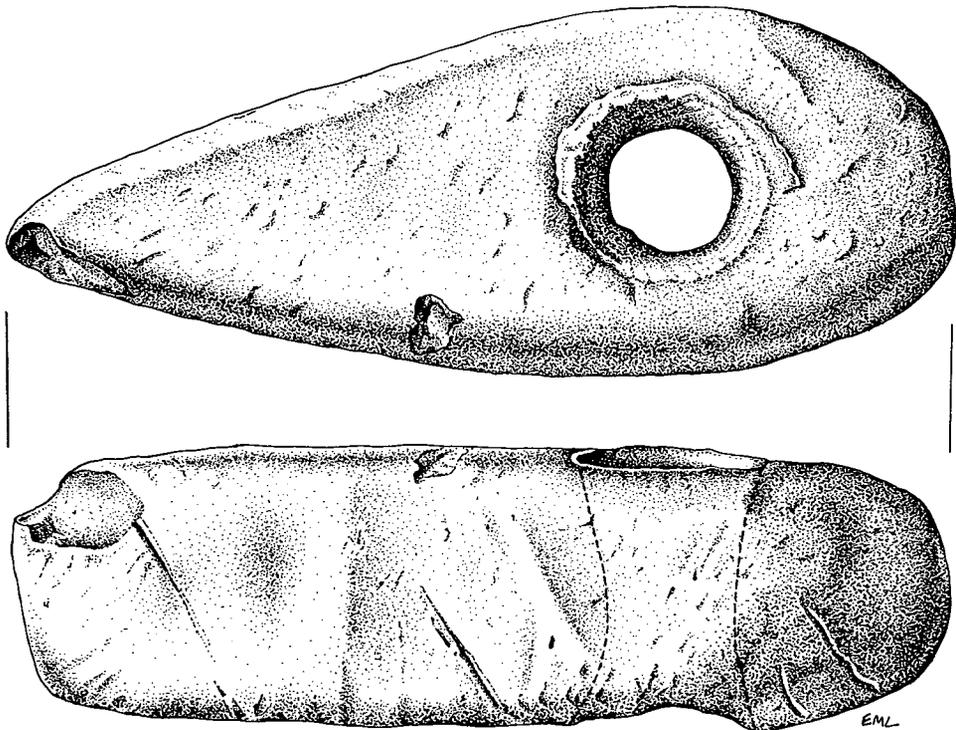


Fig. 2 Axehammer from Felton. Drawn by E. Lazenby. Scale 1:2.

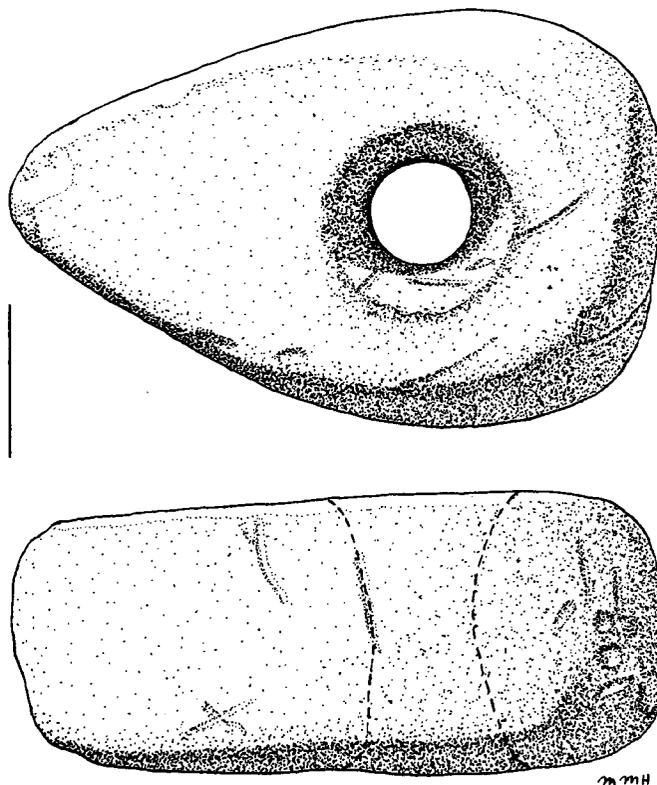


Fig. 3 *Axehammer from Swarland. Drawn by M. M. Hurrell. Scale 1:2.*

centre of the shaft hole is 55 mm (approx.). The "hourglass" shaft hole has a maximum diameter of 43 mm and a minimum diameter of 27 mm.

Of the second example, from Swarland East Hall, only the very narrow butt and part of the shaft hole survives⁴ (fig. 4). Its maximum surviving width is 85 mm and its thickness is 47 mm. The length between the butt and the centre of the shaft hole is 96 mm (approx.). The maximum diameter of the shaft hole is 43 mm, the minimum is 29 mm.

Lindsay Allason-Jones

3. AN ALTAR FROM CHIPCHASE, NORTHUMBERLAND

During the summer of 1992, whilst walking some three miles north of Hadrian's Wall in the area just west of Chipchase Castle, CRH found a small Roman altar lying half buried in soil and leaves (NGR NY 881759). It would appear that the altar had been lying for only a limited period of time, but it was fast being covered in lichen and already exhibited some surface damage. It was brought to the Museum of Antiquities for study⁵.

The altar is 200 mm high, 140 mm wide and 120 mm deep, and is carved from local buff sandstone (fig. 5). It is worn overall and is especially smooth on the bottom face and on the front of the shaft. There is some old

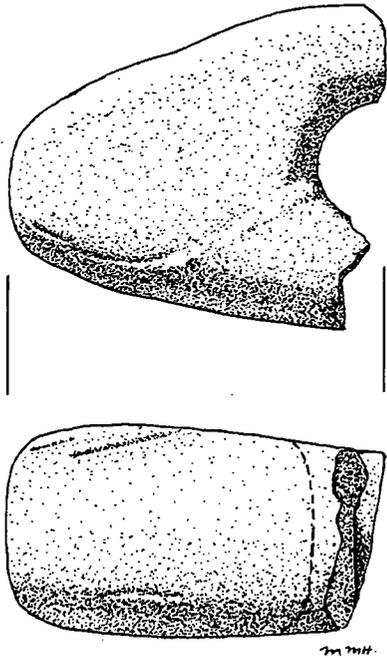


Fig. 4 Axehammer from Swarland East Hall.
 Drawn by M. M. Hurrell. Scale 1:2.

breakage on the side mouldings and on the sides and ends of the bolsters. The handle of a knife, sculpted in relief on the left side, has been shorn away. The back of the capital has a hairline crack. At present there is green lichen on the left side and perhaps some reddening from burning on the upper left front.

One moulding defines the altar's base and two delineate the capital. The shaft is featureless on the front, but has a long-handled axe on its right side and a triangular-bladed knife on the left, both carved in relief. The axe has a triangular blade and a heavy poll. The back of the altar lacks mouldings, and it was left in its roughed-out state, not chiselled smooth in the manner of the other surfaces. The marks of a point-chisel are clear on the back of the shaft and base. Furrows indicate that blows were delivered from the bottom right (on the altar as seen from behind), moving diagonally upwards towards the left. On the top of the capital there is a pair of shallowly defined, undecorated

bolsters flanking a recessed, elliptical *focus*. The latter exhibits no signs of burning. The top of the capital at the front is recessed with a 20 mm deep curving step, whilst the back has a similar feature, 23 mm deep.

Overall execution of the work is inexact and the shaft has a slight lean to the left. There is no indication that the front of the shaft ever received a cut inscription. Possibly the altar was unfinished, as may be suggested by the state of the back. Alternatively, a painted inscription was added to the thin plaster layer which would have originally covered the completed stone. Sculpted details would also have been picked out in colour, as may be seen on a white-washed piece with red-lined mouldings recently found at South Shields.⁶

The triangular-based knife and the poll-axe decorate numerous altars from northern Britain, appearing alongside other objects associated with religious ritual, such as *paterae*, jugs, wreaths, musical instruments and *bukrania*.⁷ Their functions in the sacrifice of large animals are clearly depicted on a number of metropolitan propaganda sculptures. The head of an ox, for example, was held down by a *victimarius*. A poll-axe wielding *popa* standing beside the animal's shoulder then delivered the fatal blow. A second *victimarius* also held onto the beast with one hand, and in the other he held a triangular-bladed knife with which to slash the throat. This knife was then used with others to eviscerate and dismember the carcass.⁸

Axes and knives appear on altars of all sizes, dedicated to a great variety of Greco-Roman and native Celtic deities. Thus, by themselves they are not diagnostic. However, the small size of the Chipchase altar may be compared with the altars to such deities as Belatucadrus, Coventina, Ratis and the Veteres. There are also many unscribed altars of similar scale, ranging in height from 99 mm to 300 mm, an example from Carlisle (234 mm high) with axe and knife decoration providing a close parallel to the Chipchase piece.⁹ If the latter was finished, it may have been set up at the shrine of a native deity, the supplicant either not bothering with, or affording, a cut inscription. Such altars were small, commensurate perhaps

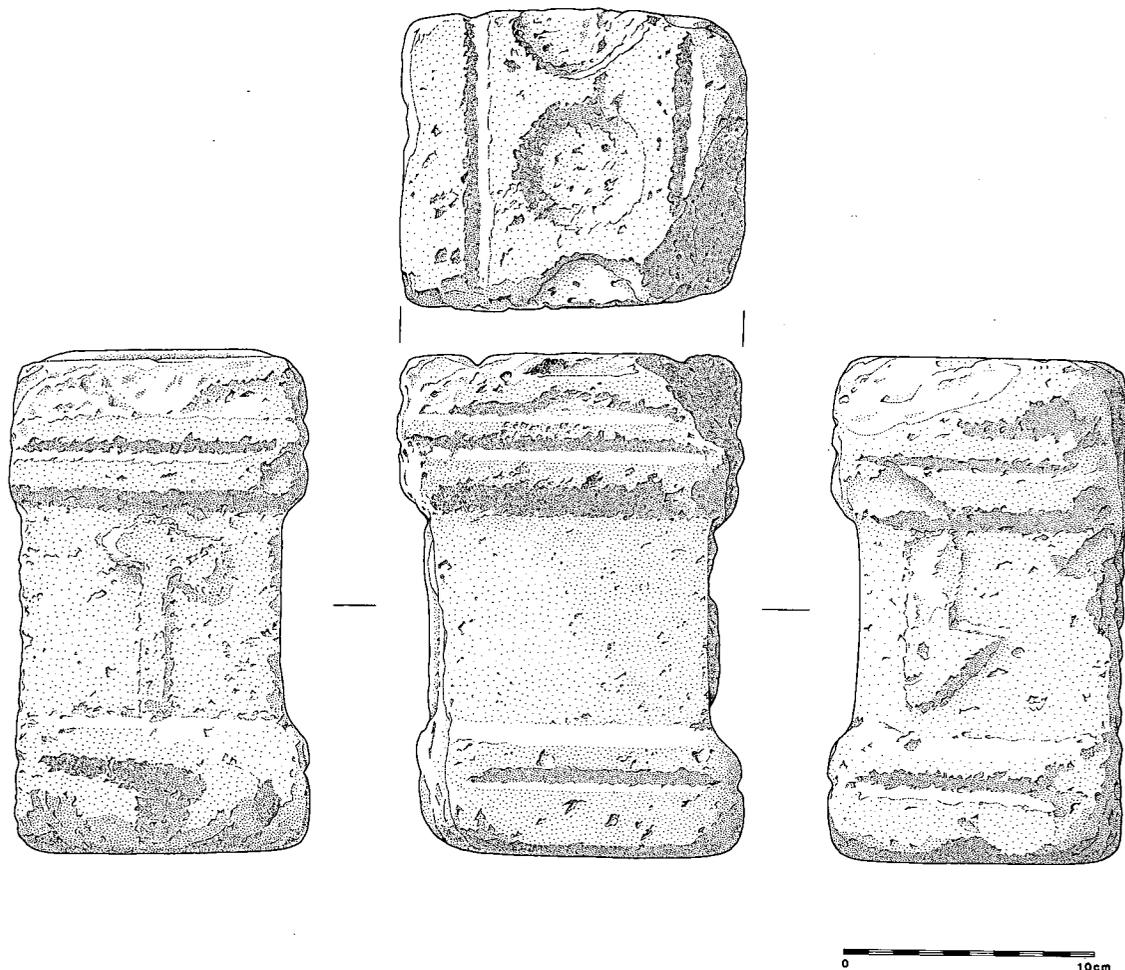


Fig. 5 Altar from Chipchase. Drawn by S. Hooper. Scale 1:3.

with such factors as the status of deity, status and wealth of worshipper, and level of favour being sought (or rewarded), but they would not have been "mobile" as such. It may be imagined that the dedicatee had a piece carved and positioned. He might have made just one small sacrifice on the altar, such as burning a pinch of incense or an incense ball on a small kindling fire, and then he was no longer concerned with it. A single observance (rather than repeated sacrifices) would not have left substantial burning in the *focus*, and, indeed,

few altars of any size exhibit reddening in this area.

The find-spot of the Chipchase altar is clearly secondary, most likely tertiary. Another uninscribed altar in the Museum of Antiquities had been reused in a stile close by, at Wark (NGR NY 866770).¹⁰ Both locations are only three miles north of the Wall, and both altars are likely to have been brought from Carrawburgh or Chesters in modern times.

J. C. N. Coulston and C. R. Hart

NOTES

¹ Acc. No. 1992.4. NGR 195008. My thanks are due to Andrew Newman of the Hancock Museum for his comments on this piece.

² Roe, F. E. S., "The battle axe series in Britain" *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* XXXII (1966), 199–245.

³ Acc. No. 1944.6.

⁴ Acc. No. 1957.3.

⁵ Acc. No. 1992.9. The writers gratefully acknowledge the kind assistance of Miss L. Allason-Jones during the study of this piece.

⁶ Pers. comm. Mr. P. T. Bidwell. Cf. Coulston, J. C., and Phillips, E. J., *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani (CSIR) Great Britain I.6. Hadrian's Wall West of the North Tyne and Carlisle*. Oxford, 1988, xviii.

⁷ E.g. *ibid.* nos. 49, 105–6, 182, 193, 197, 214,

221, 230, 234, 239, 245, 301, 303, 310, 341, 507; Phillips, E. J., *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani (CSIR) Great Britain I.1. Corbridge. Hadrian's Wall East of the North Tyne*. Oxford, 1977, nos. 11, 13, 24, 89, 92, 141, 149, 160, 178, 182, 186, 300, 315, 318; Keppie, L. J. F., and Arnold, B. J., *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani (CSIR) Great Britain I.4. Scotland*. Oxford, 1984, No. 2; Tufi, S. R., *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani (CSIR) Great Britain I.3. Yorkshire*. Oxford, 1983, nos. 35, 87.

⁸ Ryberg, I. S., *Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art* (Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome 22). Rome, 1955, 69, 85, 143, figs. 36b, 69a, 71a, 77c–d, 89a.

⁹ Coulston and Phillips, *op. cit.* no. 507. Cf nos. 136–7, 144–8, 181, 187–9, 280–3, 289–92, 296, 298, 307, 325–6.

¹⁰ Acc. No. 1848.20; Coulston and Phillips, *op. cit.* no. 287.