

Three Early Bronze Age flint daggers from north Northumberland and their typological context

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SUMMARY

The flint dagger from Highfield Hope is reassessed and discussed here together with two other daggers from Northumberland which are in Scottish museum collections. An appendix provides details of a previously unillustrated parallel from Scotland for the Highfield Hope example.

INTRODUCTION

IN 2006, IN THE COURSE OF RESEARCHING DISPLAYS for the Great North Museum, Lindsay Allason-Jones recognized the flint dagger from Highfield Hope in store at the Hancock Museum in Newcastle as an item of some importance. Because of the proximity of the findspot to Scotland she drew it to my attention and kindly arranged for the dagger to be lent temporarily to National Museums Scotland so that it could be fully recorded. This provided the opportunity to consider two other early discoveries of Early Bronze Age flint implements from northern Northumberland which have both found their way into Scottish museum collections. The three items are published here in detail for the first time, with a consideration of their wider typological and chronological significance. Also described here is a previously unillustrated dagger from Angus which provides an interesting typological parallel for the Highfield Hope example.

THE HIGHFIELD HOPE DAGGER

This implement has had a chequered history since its initial discovery. The only information actually accompanying the dagger, which came to the Hancock Museum at an unknown recent date (registration no. Z334), was a label which reads: 'Spearhead found by Mr Robson near Highfield Hope, Tarsset'. In the initial note publishing this dagger, however, George Jobey indicated that this was a Mr R. Robson, who found the dagger near a spring close to Highfield Hope, and that in 1967 it had recently been acquired by the Border Forest Park Museum at Lewisburn (Jobey 1967). Highfield Hope (NY 7390 9121) is just outside the National Park in the Kielder Forest, to the south of the Dod Law hillfort. Mr Robson lived at Tarsset (R. Young pers. comm.), and this was presumably a casual surface find, though we do not know exactly when it was discovered or any other details of the circumstances of finding.

This kite-shaped flint dagger (figs. 1–2) has well-differentiated blade and tang zones, with two pairs of pronounced notches on either side where these two zones meet at the widest point of the artefact. Overall it is 124.5 mm long, 56 mm in maximum width, and 10 mm in maximum thickness, and it weighs 67.5 g. There is complete bifacial retouch which has removed all trace of the original surfaces of the blank on which it was made, though it seems

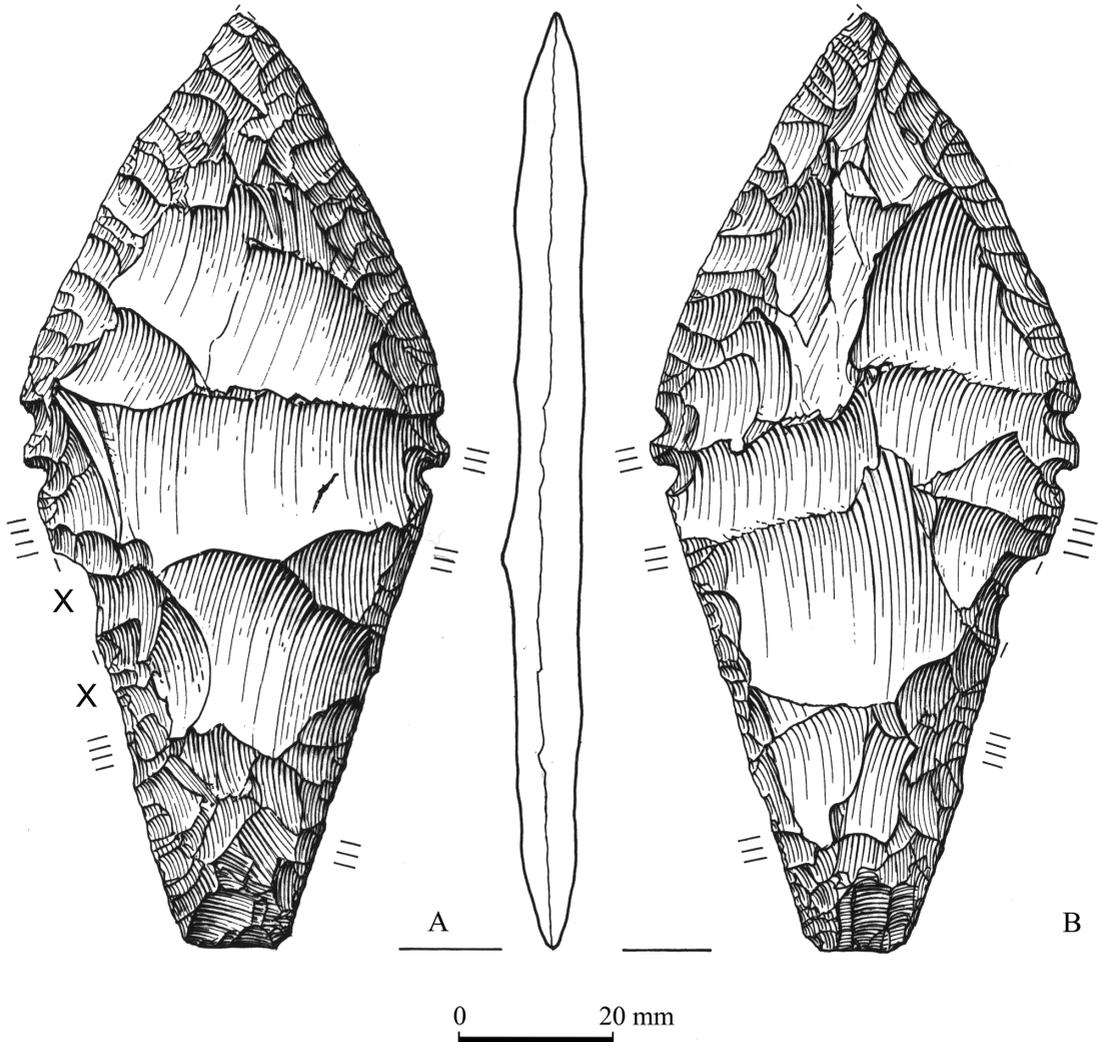


Fig. 1 The Highfield Hope flint dagger. Scale 1:1. Drawn by Marion O'Neil.

likely that the slightly flatter face (B) was originally the ventral surface of the parent flake. Clearly, since there is no remaining cortex, the dagger must have been made on a large flake from a substantial nodule of flint. Over the main surfaces on each face the flaking to thin the dagger has produced broad, shallow scars, whilst at the edges these are truncated by small, steeper scars completing the final shaping of the plan and sharpening of the edges. Some of the surface flake removals have hinged out, a feature which is particularly noticeable on face B of the blade. The tang is squared off at its base, where it is 13mm wide; from there it expands towards the notches with absolutely straight lines, except that on one edge the line has been spoilt by a couple of indentations (marked 'X' on fig. 1), which, although not modern, appear to post-date slightly the original edge retouch.

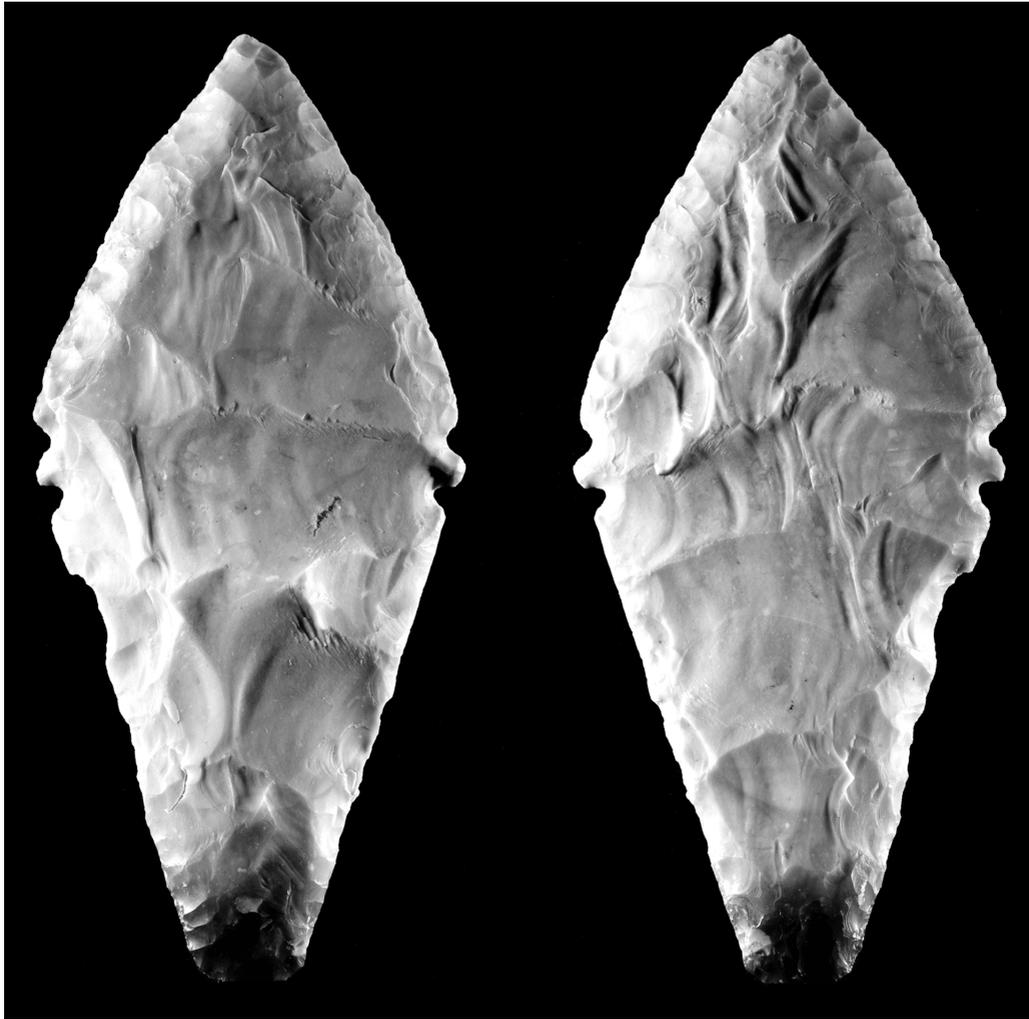


Fig. 2 The Highfield Hope flint dagger. Photograph: Duncan Anderson, copyright NMS, reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland.

The tang is the thickest zone of the dagger (10 mm), which is thinnest (8.5 mm) at the centre of the dagger. Here the double notches, formed by bifacial retouch, survive virtually intact. They are 2 to 3 mm wide and 2 mm deep, and isolate a spur about 3.5 mm wide which on both edges is angled slightly down towards the tang end of the dagger. The blade, which has a maximum thickness of 9 mm, has slightly convex edges leading to the point, the tip of which has been slightly damaged in antiquity by a small flake scar, and there is a short shallow concavity to the edge just below the tip on one side. This helps to create some asymmetric irregularity about the blade which, together with the 'chunkiness' and semi-abrupt nature of the retouch of the blade edges, suggests strongly that in its present form it has been reworked at some stage from a broader original.

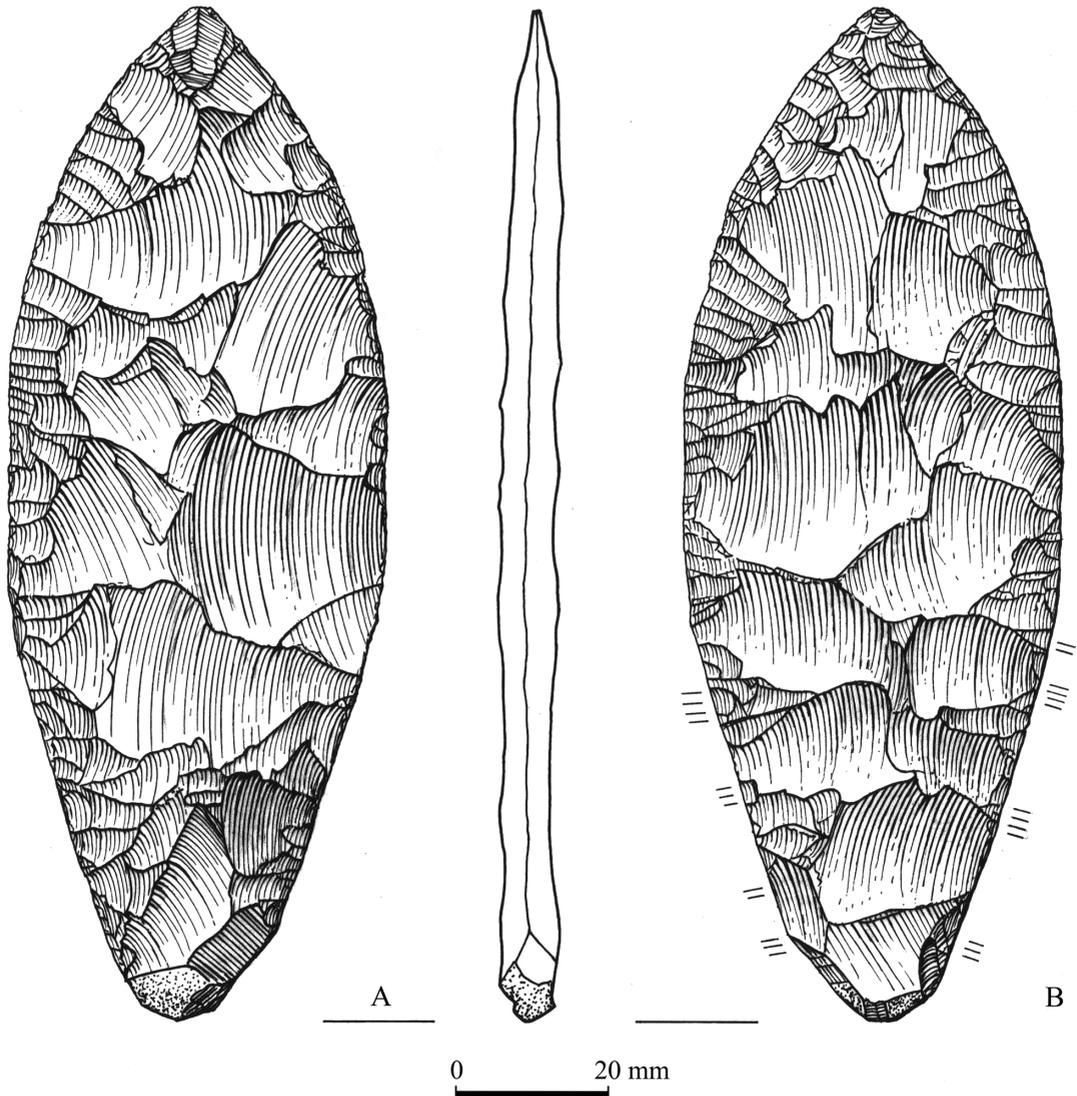


Fig. 3 The Lilburn Steads flint dagger. Scale 1:1. Drawn by Marion O'Neil.

There is a colour change affecting the flint across the dagger (see fig. 2; cf. Jobey 1967, pl. XVIII, 1). The lowermost *c.* 13 mm of the tang are uncorticated (*sensu* Shepherd 1972, 22ff; i.e. the surface is not discoloured by any post-depositional changes) and show the dark grey nature of the parent flint. The blade is discoloured by cortication to a medium/light grey, and this colouration continues to a point about 11.5 mm below the lower notch, where it turns to a medium/dark grey tone before the cortication stops towards the base of the tang. This could be a differential effect due to the former presence of a haft, although one would expect the hafting to have encompassed the notched zone, leaving only the actual blade exposed. There is otherwise only very minor indication of a former haft, in the form of some rounding and

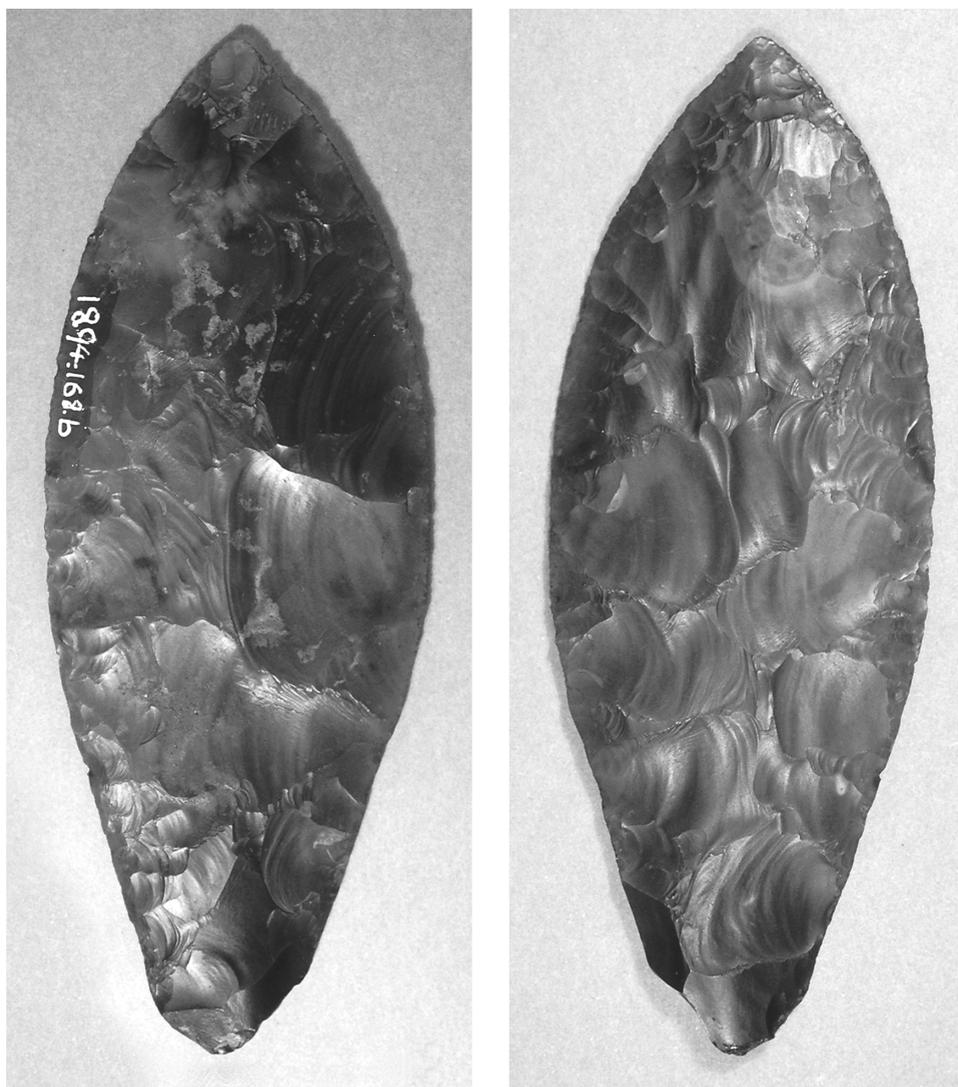


Fig. 4 The Lilburn Steads flint dagger. Photograph: Stuart Campbell.

dulling of the edges (visible under magnification at a few points; marked on the drawing by short lines perpendicular to the edge). Two high-points on the surface, one on the tang on face A, the other on the blade on face B, also show signs of wear.

As Smith (1920, 6-7) noted, partially following the precedent of Evans (1897, 348), flint daggers in Britain are normally between 5 and 7 inches in length (126-177 mm), 1½ to 2½ inches (38-63 mm) at their widest, and of lanceolate form, in most cases broadest near the point of the blade, whilst the butt is normally the thickest part. A glance at published illustrations of daggers with notches, such as those from Burnt Fen, Cambridgeshire (Edwardson 1958, pl. VIII), Demon's Dale, Derbyshire (Armstrong 1933), Doncaster, Yorkshire (Smedley

1951, 255), Flixborough, Lincolnshire (Armstrong 1929), Shorncliffe Quarry, Gloucestershire (Bradley 1995, figs. 4–5), West Cotton, Northamptonshire (Ballin 2011, 489; Harding and Healy 2007, fig. 4.4), and Ystradfellte, Powys (Cantrill 1898, 253; Green *et al.* 1982, fig. 5), confirms this, and also provides a reminder that these daggers have noticeably expanded convex edges to their broad leaf-shaped blades. All this supports the observation above, made purely on the basis of examining the Highfield Hope dagger itself, that in its present form it is reworked, and can be presumed originally to have been longer and with a broader, more convex-edged blade, which would have matched the other quoted examples more closely. At what point in its history this reworking occurred cannot be known, except that it was done in antiquity when the flint was still fresh and uncorticated; it could even have been a case of remodification *ab initio* after a knapping error, though this seems less likely (see below).

Specific similarities in shape can be seen between the Highfield Hope dagger and an un-notched example from Derbyshire in the Bateman collection (Howarth 1899, 39), which could equally well be reworked, and a notched but incomplete example from Kirkbuddo, Angus, in the National Museums Scotland collection (see Appendix and fig. 6). Partial reworking of flint daggers after damage was probably commonplace (cf. Mottes 2001, figs. 3 and 11), but is only readily recognizable when the modification is pronounced, as is thought to be the case with the Highfield Hope example.

THE LILBURN STEADS DAGGER

Another dagger was found, presumably in the later part of the nineteenth century, in a cist with a fragment of Beaker pottery at a location described only as Lilburn Steads (c. NU 029 235),¹ which is to the south-east of Wooler. The Beaker fragment and the dagger were acquired by Glasgow Museums (registration nos. 1894.168.a and 1894.168.b, respectively) as a purchase from a Mr John Lawson of 175 West George Street, Glasgow, and are currently on display at the Kelvingrove Museum.² The dagger was mentioned by Abercromby (1912, 33) when publishing the pottery fragment as part of his Beaker corpus. It was briefly noted by Smith (1920, 15), was included in the catalogue of daggers compiled by Grimes (1932, 355, and shown in outline on his fig. 1:77), was illustrated photographically by Tait (1965, pl. 4), and was figured schematically by Clarke (1970, fig. 816), but seems never to have been described in any detail.

This is an extremely finely made, refined piece of flint-working (figs. 3–4). Unlike the Highfield Hope dagger, the Lilburn Steads example has no side notches. It is of lanceolate shape, of very regular and symmetrical appearance, except where the outline is interrupted by a cortical anomaly at one side of the butt, and has a lenticular cross-section. The middle and upper parts of the dagger have regularly biconvex edges, which become just slightly concave for the lower third part. It is 135 mm long, 50 mm in maximum width (approximately at the middle of the dagger), and weighs 53 g. The maximum thickness is 8 mm at the butt end, otherwise the blade at its thickest is 7 mm. Complete bifacial flaking has removed all indication of the original bulbar surface. The small cortex patch at the butt wraps around the edge and surfaces in such a way as to indicate an anomaly on the parent nodule and does not clearly indicate which is the dorsal surface of the large flake from which the dagger was made. The flint is basically dark grey in colour, translucent in parts, and with no surface discolouration from cortication or staining, though one face (A) has some very thin calcareous deposit adhering in patches.

The upper edges are still sharp although they are clearly, when looked at under a microscope, not pristine and have presumably been used, although, given the passage of time since its discovery and the likely amount of modern handling, it would need a detailed microwear study of this dagger to assess whether or not this use occurred in antiquity. The lower edges for the lowermost 45 mm have edge blunting, probably indicative of hafting, though there is no pronounced surface wear, even on the high points. The upper blade is more finely edge-retouched than the lower.

In shape the Lilburn Steads dagger has an obvious parallel in the smaller Green Lowe, Alsop Moor, Derbyshire, example (Howarth 1899, 55; Smith 1920, fig. 6) and the larger Little Downham, Cambridgeshire, dagger (Lethbridge *et al.* 1935, pl. IX,b).

Clarke (1970, 492 and fig. 816) assigned the Lilburn Steads Beaker to his Developed Southern S2(W) grouping and pointed out that the daggers associated with these 'retain simple leaf-shape forms, without shoulders or notching' (Clarke 1970, 219), such as the examples from Llanellieu, Powys (Savory 1963, fig. 10:6; Green *et al.* 1982, pl. 38.c) or Middleton-on-the-Wolds, East Yorkshire (Clarke 1970, 386 and fig. 876). Similar daggers are, however, associated with Clarke's Primary Southern (S1) grouping, including two East Yorkshire examples from Acklam Wold 124 (Mortimer 1905, pl. XXVI, fig. 209) and Garton Slack 37 (Mortimer 1905, pl. LXVII, fig. 511), and the example from Barrow 1 at Raunds, Northamptonshire (Ballin 2011, 499; Harding and Healy 2007, 236), provides a further parallel in association with a long-necked Beaker (Case 2001, 371; Case's Beaker group Bb, see below).

THE HIGH COCKLAW DAGGER

Publication of the two previous daggers presents the opportunity to draw attention to another north Northumberland find, also normally classified as a dagger (fig. 5), which is in the collection of National Museums Scotland (registration no. X.AA 215). There are no exact details of provenance other than that it is from High Cocklaw Farm (c. NT 95 54), in that area of the far north of Northumberland which lies on the north side of the River Tweed immediately to the west of Berwick. It was donated in 1929 to the former National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland by a Mr John Ovens, along with a jet spacer-plate and a fusiform bead found in a cist on the same farm (Anon. 1929, fig. 1). It appears that this dagger was an isolated find from somewhere on High Cocklaw Farm and is not necessarily associated with what seems to have been an Early Bronze Age short-cist cemetery there (Callander 1929). The dagger should not be confused with the fine plano-convex knife that is recorded as coming from one of the High Cocklaw cists (Callander 1929, 371, fig. 4; Finlayson 1997a, 310).

This dagger is a finely bifacially flaked tool (length 105 mm, maximum breadth 31 mm, maximum thickness 8 mm; weight 27 g), utilizing a piece of medium-to-dark grey flint which retains two patches of cortex and two small patches of a previously exposed surface (left blank on fig. 5) indicating that the maker has capitalized very successfully on an available piece of flint rather than preparing the blank from scratch. It is lozenge- or leaf-shaped with approximately biconvex sides, the outline being interrupted on both edges near to the butt as the result of subsequent edge-damage. The cross-section is lenticular. What is taken here to be the butt end is sharply pointed, but this results in part from the presence of the blunt patch of previously exposed surface. At the tip there is slight damage, but the original form was probably a slightly rounded, rather than a very acute, point.

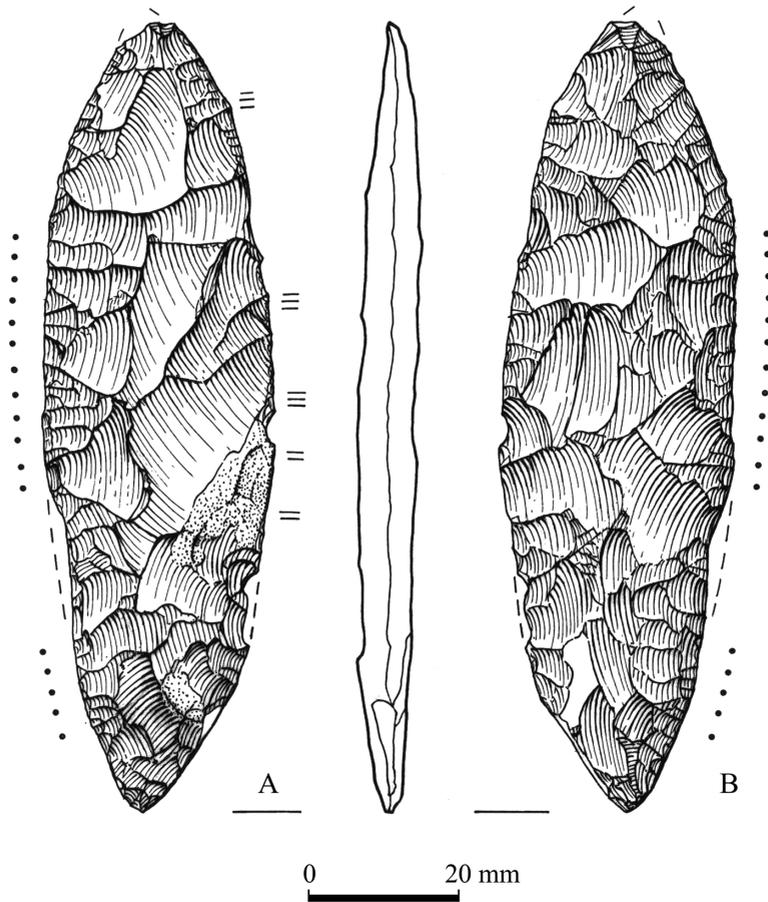


Fig. 5 The High Cocklaw flint dagger. Scale 1:1. Drawn by Marion O'Neil.

The dagger-like appearance of this implement is enhanced by the apparent 'tang' on the lower portion as illustrated, but this is actually the result of edge damage. In fact there are some signs to suggest that the High Cocklaw dagger may have functioned as a knife. There is dulling of the edge on one side (indicated by the short parallel lines on fig. 5), and pronounced bifacial gloss down the opposite edge (indicated by the dots on fig. 5), extending inwards for up to 10mm from the edge, particularly on the ridges. This tool was possibly, therefore, held and/or hafted on the side with the dulled edge, in which case probably the whole of the opposite edge would have been used as a blade, either in a cutting or a whittling mode.

The distinction between knives and daggers is usually made on the basis of a knife having a single cutting edge (or multiple cutting edges, but discontinuous), and the dagger having two opposed cutting edges meeting at a point. This distinction, together with the fact that it

was found hafted, is why the very small (*c.* 72 mm long, but broken at the tip) bifacial point found with Ötzi the Alpine Iceman is designated a dagger (Spindler 1994, 101; Dal Ri 2006).³ Daggers from Britain are normally longer than 120 mm, but shorter implements are frequently described as daggers (e.g. the 107 mm-long example from Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire; Humble 2011), and it would probably be unwise to rely exclusively on a purely metrical subdivision, particularly in view of evidence for reworking in some cases (cf. Lomborg 1975, 116). However, careful examination of the High Cocklaw dagger has suggested it may have actually functioned as a knife, and it has to be admitted that the two categories of bifacially flaked, basically lanceolate or foliate knives and daggers frequently overlap and are difficult to separate one from another without close inspection, especially just on the basis of published accounts (e.g. the 'dagger' from Hockwold, Norfolk: Healy 1991, 128 and fig. 64: L18). Moreover, there is also potential for confusion with other large bifacially flaked implement types such as certain 'plano-convex knives' (e.g. from Sherburn, North Yorkshire; Kinnes and Longworth 1985, 35 and fig. 13:2) or even some 'sickles' (e.g. from Mildenhall, Suffolk; British Museum 1968, pl. XI: 3). Further complexity is added by the use of the hybrid terms knife/dagger (Harding 2011, 94) or point/dagger (Harrison *et al.* 1999) for some unifacially scale-flaked knives (Harding 2011, 94); and typological confusion is created when an individual bifacially flaked and double-edged pointed tool, such as the one from Biggar Common, Lanarkshire, is described variously as a knife (Johnston 1977, illus 27), a large leaf-shaped point (Finlayson 1997b, 230), and a laurel-leaf point (Sheridan 1992, 207), or when the example from Kirkmichael, Ayrshire, is described as a knife or spearhead (Smith 1895, 184).

Precise parallels for the High Cocklaw dagger are relatively infrequent, but a recent find from Derbyshire appears similar (Makepeace 2003, fig. 2), and if the association of a comparable knife with an extremely fine leaf-bladed and side-notched dagger in a barrow at Herdsman's Hill, Newark, Cambridgeshire (Leeds 1912), is correct, this would at least confirm the contemporaneity of the two forms as Early Bronze Age types. The recent discovery of a rather similar implement, described as a foliate knife or a miniature dagger, found in direct association with a Collared Urn from Barrow 5 at Raunds, Northamptonshire, suggests post-Beaker phase continuity for this implement category (Ballin 2011, 492–3, 519; Harding and Healy 2011, fig. SS3.1).

DISCUSSION

From Northumberland the only other 'flint daggers' known to the author which have been reported in the literature are those from Amble (NU 26 04) and the River North Tyne (NY 632924). The Amble 'dagger' (Grimes 1932, 355, fig. 1; Hodgson 1899, 271; Thompson 1893, pl. V) was found in the early 1890s in a cist burial, along with a pottery vessel, now lost, which may have been a Beaker. Typologically, however, this relatively small leaf-shaped bifacial tool (L. 95 mm × B. 41 mm), which was only very tentatively listed as a simple leaf-shaped type of dagger by Grimes (1932, 345, n.2), is really not at all convincing as part of the dagger series. The artefact from the River North Tyne (Jobey 1967), which is of 'volcanic stone' rather than flint, is broken but is described as of similar form to the Highfield Hope dagger. From the illustration (Jobey 1967, pl. XVIII, 2), however, it does not appear to be of conventional dagger form and is best regarded as an unclassified large leaf point.

Given the exceptional quality and distinctiveness of the flint dagger form in Britain it is surprising that relatively little attention has been paid to it as an artefact type and that, very

regrettably, no illustrated corpus or up-to-date catalogue exists.⁴ The only typology, such as it is, derives from Grimes (1932), following on from Evans (1897) and Smith (1920). Evans (1897, 335–53) noted the lanceolate outline and greater breadth nearer the point than the butt, with or without side notches, as the characteristic feature of the dagger series, which he perceptively separated from large leaf-shaped knives. Smith (1920, 16–17) followed this by distinguishing between daggers that are broadest in the middle and those broadest above the middle.

Grimes erected a rather vague typological development scheme by defining as an initial type ‘... a simple leaf-shaped blade, the widest point of which is approximately at the middle. There is no distinction between blade and tang or handle ...’ (1932, 340). Two developments from this were firstly types where the ‘... lower part ... is elongated, so that the widest part is above the middle of its length, with gently tapering sides and a tendency to thickening’ (Grimes 1932, 340). Secondly there were types where the ‘... widest part is generally at the middle; the lower half is straight sided, the sides tapering more rapidly than in the first type, and often meeting in a point ... Notches for binding to secure the blade in its handle are frequently found on the edges of the tang’ (Grimes 1932, 340). The difference between these two developments was considered to relate to the former being directly hand-held and the latter hafted. A typologically late development was recognized in which ‘... the lower half becomes more and more tang-like by the reduction of the width at the base of the blade or immediately below the hafting-notches’ (Grimes 1932, 340).

Regrettably, Grimes did not specify in his catalogue (1932, 351–4) to which type he allocated each of the daggers then known to him, other than in the case of the five examples cross-referenced between the text and his outline drawings. From this, however, it is clear that the daggers from Acklam Wold (Barrow 124), East Yorkshire (Grimes 1932, fig. 1: 126; Mortimer 1905, fig. 209), and Green Lowe, Alsop Moor, Derbyshire (Grimes 1932, fig. 1: 27; Smith 1920, fig. 6) would be the classic examples of his simple leaf-shaped blade. Grimes does not specify any daggers as belonging to his first development, though one presumes that exemplars would be those from Gobs’s Barrow, Purbrook, Hampshire (Grimes 1932, fig. 1: 44) and from Durrington Walls and Stonehenge, Wiltshire (Grimes 1932, fig. 1: 123–4; Smith 1920, figs. 7–8). The second development is specified in un-notched form by the dagger from West Overton, Wiltshire (Grimes 1932, fig. 1: 125) and in notched form by those from Ystradfellte, Wales (Grimes 1932, fig. 1:7) and Nether Low, Chelmorton, Derbyshire (Grimes 1932, fig. 1:29; Howarth 1899, 40). No examples of Grimes’s final type with a pronounced tang are specified, but they would perhaps include the dagger from Braintree, Essex (Grimes 1932, fig. 1: 36), with the dagger said to be from Balsham, Cambridgeshire (Grimes 1932, fig. 1: 9; Smith 1920, fig. 9) as the extreme example.

Apart from the fact that this typology is rather vague and is reliant on subjective visual assessment without any metrical or strict definition of attributes, it would have to be regarded circumspectly as reflecting any kind of developmental sequence with the implication that separate chronological stages are involved. That Grimes felt the latter was the case is clear from his reference to the Ystradfellte dagger ‘... the late date of which, morphologically speaking, is fixed by its straight-sided notched tang with slight shoulders’ (Grimes 1951, 59). Grimes was undoubtedly influenced by the existence of the long-established developmental schemes for Danish flint daggers, as Smith (1920, 19) had been, but in Denmark the types are more distinct in terms of their attributes and their associations which confirm a chronological development (Apel 2001, 231–75; Lomborg 1973).

The current state of research on British daggers does not yet permit any equivalent compartmentalization beyond the basic association between flint daggers, especially the un-notched, lanceolate ones, and Beaker burials, which of course the Lilburn Steads dagger confirms. As Clarke (1970, 263) put the situation, the ‘... flint daggers directly associated with Beakers are unfortunately all of the simplest and undiagnostic forms’. However, the recent increase in the number of well-stratified and associated flint dagger finds, together with the ongoing refinements in our understanding of Beaker-period chronology, hold out a more optimistic prospect (e.g. Sheridan 2007; 2008, and pers. comm.). Case (2001, 374 and fig. 9) has actually classified the Beaker from Lilburn Steads within his group Bb Beakers, which have the most frequent flint dagger associations,⁵ and recent research on the Beaker phenomenon in Britain now suggests a particular link between flint daggers and long-necked Beaker types within the time-bracket *c.* 2250–1950 cal BC (Needham 2005). What is required, as already intimated, is a thorough techno-typological and associative study of the British flint daggers, but the discovery of two of the notched, broad-blade types of dagger with Beaker inhumations at Ferrybridge, West Yorkshire (Brooks 2005; Wheelhouse 2005), and another notched example with a Beaker inhumation in Barrow 6 at Raunds, Northamptonshire (Harding and Healy 2007, 226), has already confounded the possibility that the notched and un-notched daggers might have markedly different associations. Also, importantly, the two Ferrybridge daggers are directly associated with radiocarbon dates of 2340–1960 and 2290–1940 cal BC, respectively (Wheelhouse 2005, 48), and that from Raunds with a date of 2130–1820 cal BC (Harding and Healy 2007, fig. 4.4), thereby supporting the time-bracket proposed by Needham (2005).

Thus all the evidence for chronology from those ‘developed’ flint daggers which have any kind of archaeological context is that they are of Early Bronze Age (or Chalcolithic)⁶ date and are to be seen as associated elements of the ‘Beaker package’ (Grimes 1932, 354–5). As with the Lilburn Steads example, the original deposition of the Highfield Hope dagger may well have been to accompany an inhumation burial in a Beaker grave (presumably located somewhere in the general vicinity of the find-spot), since this would be an appropriate scenario. The good condition in which the dagger survives may perhaps suggest that it was separated from its archaeological context not long before being found.

It is generally accepted that flint daggers, like flint axeheads, range functionally through a spectrum from utilitarian to prestige/symbolic. Given its size and condition, the Lilburn Steads grave-group dagger can be seen as a prestige/symbolic one, and can probably be assumed to have been associated with a male burial (Sarauw 2007; 2009). Even in its reworked form, this could also apply to the Highfield Hope dagger, especially since reworked specimens are much more likely to be acceptable as such in areas far away from sources of raw material (Lomborg 1975, 116), rather than necessarily becoming utilitarian by virtue of reshaping (*contra* Lindman 1988, 121), though the reworked dagger allegedly from Corriegills, Arran, would be a likely example of the transformation from prestige to utilitarian (Scott 1962).

Both the Highfield Hope and the Lilburn Steads dagger belong to Grimes’s second group of daggers with differentiated blade and tang, which were clearly intended to be hafted (Grimes 1932, 340), though the ‘tang’ is obviously less marked in the case of the Lilburn Steads implement. Although neither dagger itself provides unequivocal evidence for hafting, and is not — because of extensive cortication in the case of the Highfield Hope dagger and the length of time and subsequent handling since its discovery of the Lilburn Steads dagger

— in an ideal condition for microwear analysis, other daggers have been shown to retain positive evidence for hafting and sheathing (Bradley 1995, 44; Grace 2011, 424; Green *et al.* 1982; Healy and Harding 2004, 182–3; cf. Van Gijn 2010, 189–93).

Discussions of the general distribution of flint daggers in Britain have tended to suggest that it is mainly eastern and that such artefacts are sparse northwards of Yorkshire (Grimes 1932).⁷ In reviewing this proposition Green *et al.* (1982, 497) concluded that the ‘distribution remains a lowland one, probably related in part to the availability of high-quality flint of large size in the chalk areas of Britain, with a scatter of outlying examples in the highland zone’. Apart from the fact that recent finds of daggers from central and northern England have been putting a new perspective on this distribution (e.g. Brooks 2005; Hall *et al.* 1995, pl. 17; Harding and Healy 2007; Hodgson and Brennand 2006, 43, 48; Nevell and Redhead 2005, fig. 5.18; PAS 2007, 29; Saville 1994), the original studies of this artefact type never considered the Scottish evidence. In Scotland, even further from potential supplies of suitable flint, the very large and developed (in Grimes’s sense) daggers from Nunraw in East Lothian (Anon. 1889, 18–19, fig. 16) and Glenochar, Lanarkshire (Anon. 1966, 337, pl. XLVI, 1), prove that local unavailability of raw material was not an insurmountable impediment to obtaining this type of implement. This is underlined even more by the fine lanceolate dagger from Blows Moss, South Ronaldsay, Orkney (Scott 1962). Acquisition of such daggers was presumably in the form of the finished product, rather than the raw material (or the knapping expertise), derived ultimately from the flint-rich zones of further south in England.⁸ This would make it less likely that the Highfield Hope dagger was originally made in its present truncated form, and would suggest that the modification of its shape occurred at some stage after its travel northwards.

APPENDIX: THE KIRKBUDDO, ANGUS, FLINT DAGGER

This incomplete dagger is in the collections of National Museums Scotland (registration no. X.AA 58), having been purchased for the former National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland at the sale of the Sturrock collection in 1889 (Anon. 1890, 12). It is marked on one face with the information that it was found at ‘Roman Camp, Kirkbuddo, 1865’. Roman Camp is the well-known Harefaulds temporary marching camp at Burnside of Kirkbuddo (NO 49 44), Angus, Scotland, recorded as an upstanding monument by William Roy (1793) in the 18th century but largely levelled by the mid-19th century. The dagger is assumed to have been a surface find from within, or at least in the close vicinity of, this camp. However, the fact that at least two Beakers are known from Kirkbuddo, found in 1806 and 1855 (Anon 1945, 175–6; Clarke 1970, 513), raises the possibility that there were Early Bronze Age burials in the neighbourhood with which this dagger may originally have been associated.

The surviving part of the dagger (fig. 6) comprises a pointed blade (slightly damaged at the tip) with straight convergent edges and the notched upper portion of a narrow tang. The extant length is 93 mm, the maximum breadth 52 mm, and the weight is 50 g. The maximum thickness of 11 mm is at the tang, the blade thickness varying between 7 and 9 mm. Flint colour is medium to dark grey, becoming lighter towards the tip and with light grey-cream patches elsewhere. There is no cortex present, and no remaining trace of an original flake surface since the bifacial retouch covers both faces. The edges are trimmed to shape at a relatively steep angle given the thickness of the blade. Under low magnification only slight rounding/wear on the edges of both blade and tang areas is visible, most marked where indicated in fig. 6 (face B) by the short perpendicular lines.

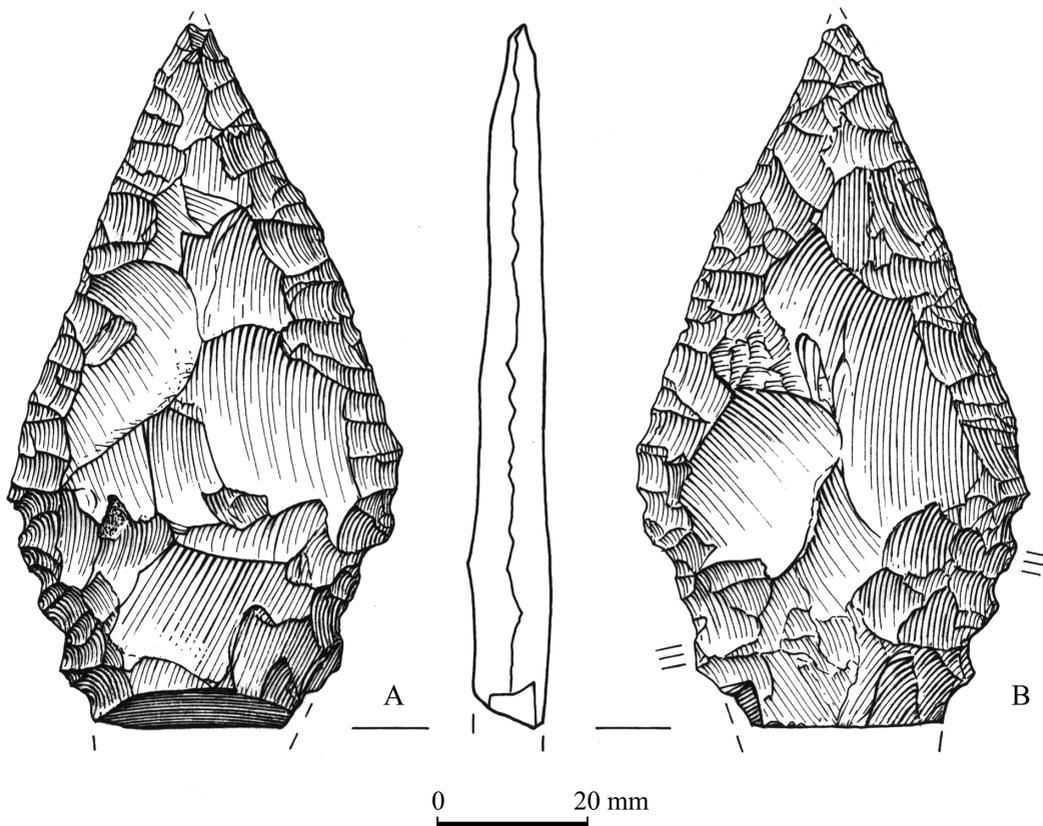


Fig. 6 The Kirkbuddo, Angus, flint dagger. Scale 1:1. Drawn by Marion O'Neil.

On the left side of the dagger (looking at face A, fig. 6) there are three definite notches and just possibly a fourth, though the lowest one is inconclusive because of the break. On the right side there are also three definite notches, albeit the uppermost one is less pronounced.

As with the Highfield Hope dagger, which this resembles, the shape and character of the blade are highly suggestive of it having been reworked at some stage from a form which originally had a larger and broader blade. If a UK-wide corpus of daggers is ever compiled, it will be of interest to see whether potentially reworked forms like these from Highfield Hope and Kirkbuddo, and more generally daggers of smaller size, are more common at a distance from the flint-rich areas of south and east England.

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NOTES

- ¹ This appears to be Lilburn Steads Farm, also known as Lilburn South Steads Farm. Tait (1965) refers to this location as Lilburnsteads.
- ² Also from this cist at Lilburn Steads is a human tooth fragment (Glasgow Museums registration no. 1894.168.c), which could potentially be used in future to provide a radiocarbon age for the associated finds.
- ³ Albeit that even in the case of the Iceman’s dagger there are grounds for alternative classification and confusion, since, for example, Barfield (1994, 14–15) referred to this implement specifically as a knife.
- ⁴ A research project being undertaken (in 2011) by Dr Cate Frieman at Oxford University is intended to address the problem of the current inadequacy of the database for UK flint daggers.
- ⁵ Case (2001, fig. 9) lists the Lilburn Steads Beaker as from ‘Lilburn Sands’, but since the reference he cites is Clarke (1970, fig. 816), where it is given as Lilburn Steads, this appears to be simply a typographic error.
- ⁶ It is becoming more common, and more appropriate, to apply the appellation Chalcolithic to this ‘Beaker’ phase, which until recently was often subsumed within the label ‘LN/EBA’ (Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age). In the absence of specific absolute dates for any of the daggers published here the general designation of Early Bronze Age has been retained.
- ⁷ Grimes (1932, 345) referred to the Lilburn Steads dagger as an example of ‘finds of beakers and daggers in remote areas’, by which he presumably meant remote in terms of the known distribution of these artefacts in association.
- ⁸ There is the probability that flint from the Lincolnshire/Yorkshire area would not be available in sufficient size and/or quality for the manufacture of large daggers (Brooks 2005, 148), in which case attention must focus on the flint-rich zones of southern England, especially Norfolk and Sussex, as likely centres of dagger production.

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