

Middle Bronze Age dirks and rapiers from Scotland: some finds old and new

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with illustrations by Marion O'Neil

ABSTRACT

Several Middle Bronze Age dirks and rapiers from Scotland are fully published for the first time; these include relatively recent discoveries from Loch Glashan, Argyll, and Skares, Ayrshire, and previously unpublished 19th-century finds from Blair Drummond, Perthshire, and Poolewe, Ross-shire. Attention is also drawn to several other dirks and rapiers from Scotland additional to the corpus of Burgess & Gerloff (1981); the net result is not only a reinforcement but also a significant widening of the Scottish distribution of such weaponry.

INTRODUCTION

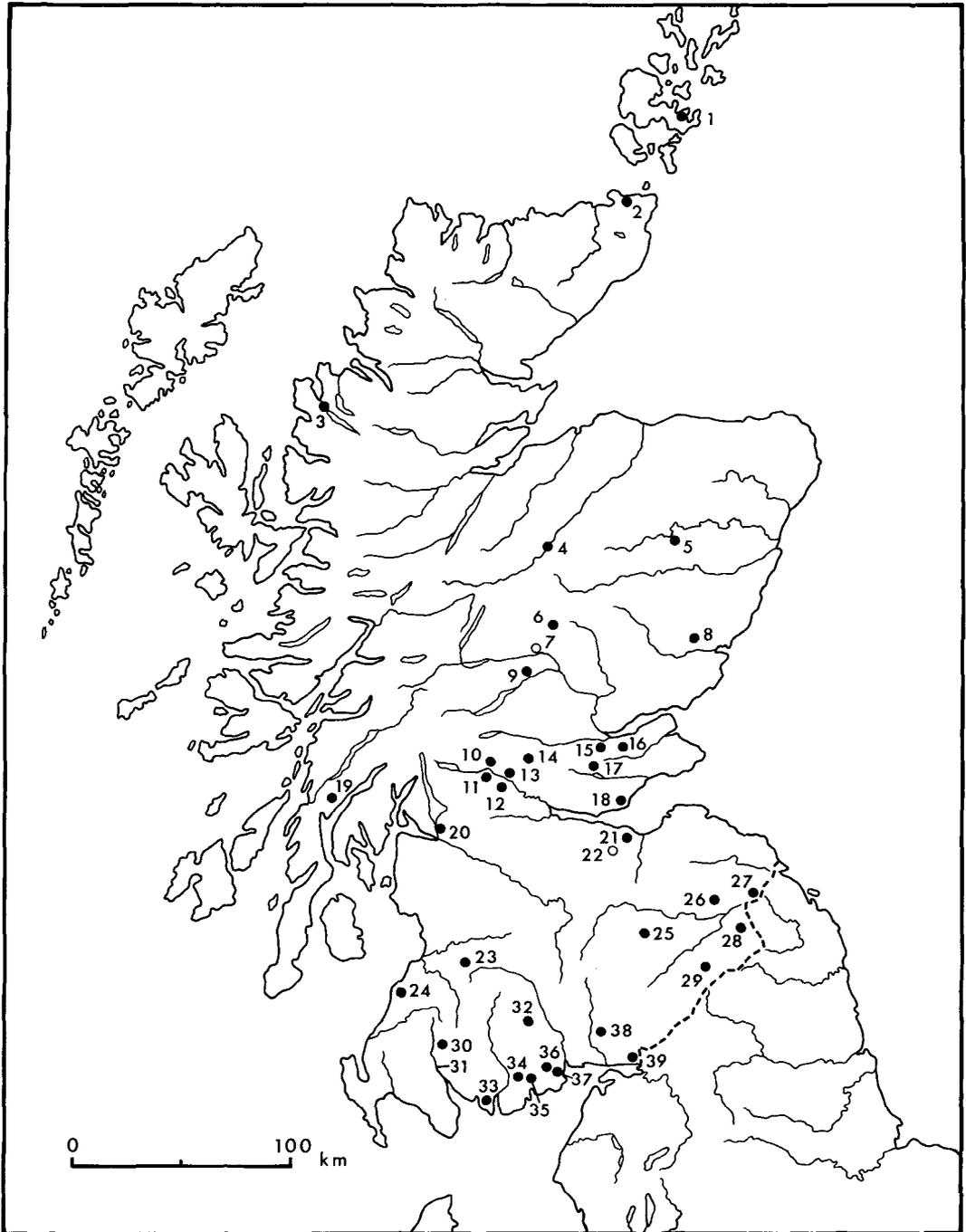
The original aim of this paper was to publish details of a Middle Bronze Age dirk found in Loch Glashan, Argyll, in 1979; in the course of subsequent research, it became clear that a number of old and/or previously unpublished finds were not included in Burgess & Gerloff's corpus of dirks and rapiers from Great Britain and Ireland (1981) and the opportunity has therefore been taken to update their inventory of material from Scotland.¹ Appendix 1 provides a revised list of dirks and rapiers from Scotland, and a key to the distribution map (illus 1).

The main concentration of such weapons is clearly still to be found in southern and eastern Scotland, and this is reinforced by the material presented here. In particular, the opportunity has been taken to publish fully some weapons for the first time: four, probably all from south-west Scotland, are from the collections of the Stewartry Museum, Kirkcudbright; the others include a rapier found in the 19th century at Blair Drummond Moss, Perthshire, and a particularly fine rapier discovered at Skares in Ayrshire in the 1950s but only reported to Glasgow Art Gallery & Museum in 1991.

Burgess & Gerloff's catalogue and distribution maps (1981, pl 117–24) suggest an absence of such weaponry from the north and west of Scotland. However, antiquarian sources and extant specimens indicate that individual artefacts can be identified from Orkney, Caithness, Wester Ross, Inverness-shire and Argyll; although few in number, these significantly widen the Scottish distribution and therefore merit wider notice.

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ILLUS 1 Map showing distribution of dirks and rapiers in Scotland (see Appendix 1 for key)

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE INDIVIDUAL DIRKS AND RAPIERS

For the purposes of this paper, it has proved convenient to classify and discuss this additional metalwork by groups according to the classification by blade cross-section (illus 2), set out by Burgess (1968) and used in the corpus of such weapons from Britain and Ireland (Burgess & Gerloff 1981). This scheme needs to be viewed in the light of the reservations expressed by Coles (1984, 420). Like some other terms, 'dirk' (a misnomer) and 'rapier' have become enshrined in archaeological literature in the absence of satisfactory alternatives. The dividing line adopted by Burgess & Gerloff is admitted to be arbitrary: weapons under 300 mm in length ('dirks') are seen as suitable 'for stabbing and as versatile weapons and implements which could have fulfilled the many functions of daggers and knives', while weapons with a length over 300 mm ('rapiers') are seen to be 'less versatile in size and proportions, and to be more specifically intended as thrusting weapons' (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 4–5). However, the term 'weapon' also requires some qualification: in view of the inordinate size or the extreme length, narrowness and fragility of many blades, and very often the weakness of the hafting arrangements, it is generally agreed that many dirks and rapiers may only ever have been intended for use as prestige or ceremonial items rather than employed in actual combat (*ibid*, 5; Needham 1990a).

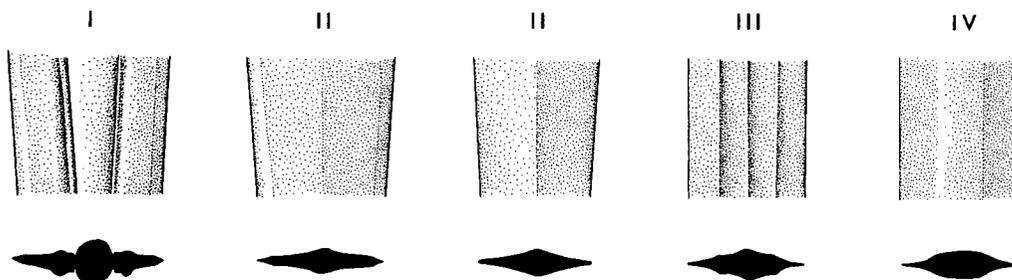
GROUP I: BLADES WITH ROUNDED MIDRIBS BORDERED BY GROOVES, RIBS AND CHANNELS

Lower Nunton Farm, near Doon Bay, Twynholm, Kirkcudbrightshire (illus 3a)

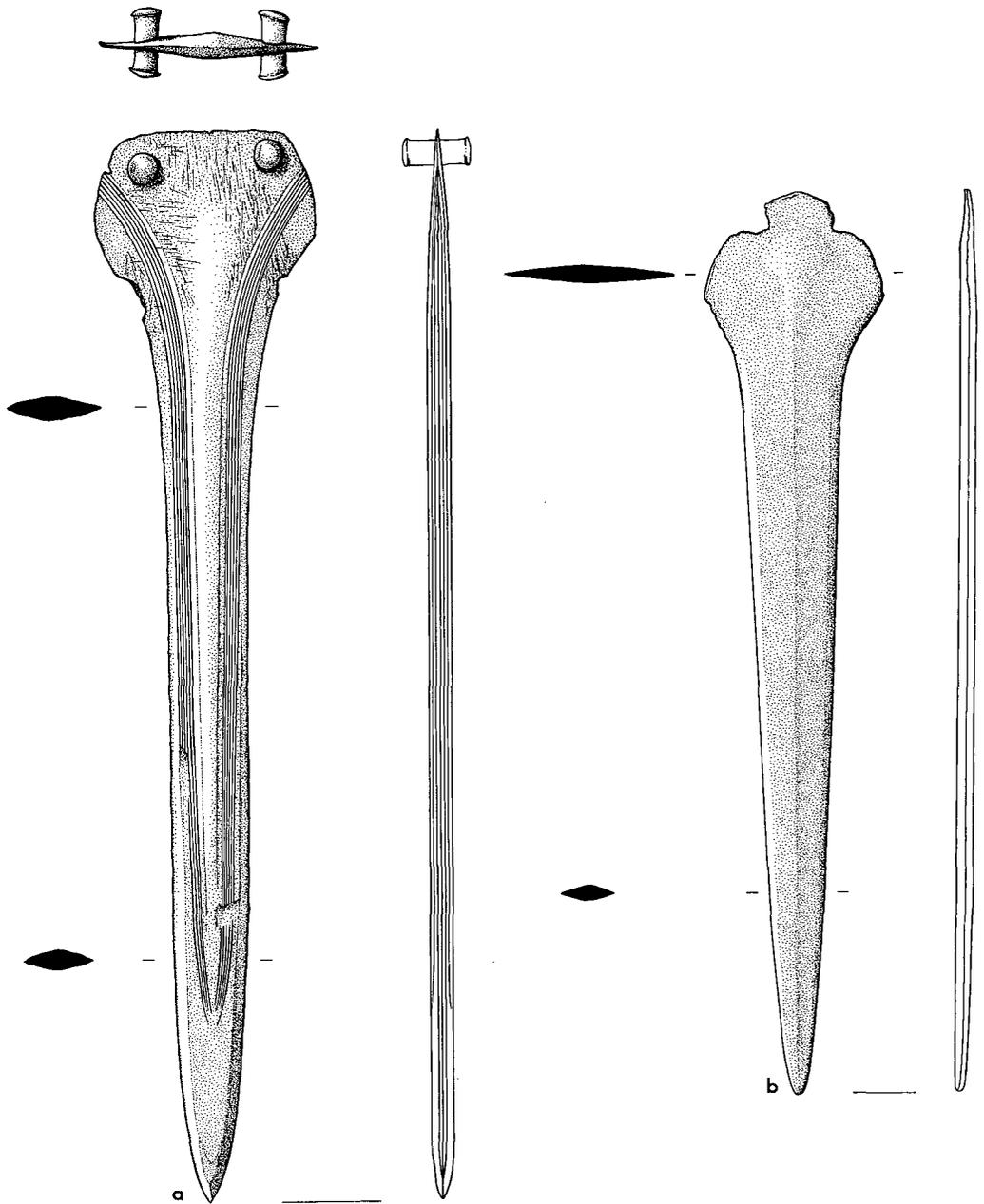
This fine weapon was found in 1957 by Mr Alex Smith at a depth of 0.6–0.9 m while trenching a field on the farm of Lower Nunton (approximately NX 652487), and was subsequently donated to the Stewartry Museum (Acc no: 5092).² It was recorded by Coles (1964, 145; 1965, 94, fig 8.4 for an outline drawing) but has not previously been described or illustrated in detail.

This weapon is complete except for some damage, apparently recent, to one edge below the shoulder. The surface has remains of a dark brown patina, some of which seems to have been removed. Two plug rivets remain in place in rivet-holes. The broad blade has a broad midrib flanked on each side by a single channel and a band of five grooves, which start from the butt and converge 46 mm from the tip. There are bevelled edges on the lower part of the blade, which remain distinct to the tip. Dimensions: L 295 mm; W shoulders 61.4 mm; Th hilt 5.4 mm; Th blade 6.5 mm; L rivets 8.7 and 9.2 mm; diameter of rivets 7 mm.

The Lower Nunton blade is just below the arbitrary 300 mm division between dirks and rapiers; it belongs among the earliest such weapons – Group I weapons with multiple grooves



ILLUS 2 The four types of dirk and rapier blades (after Burgess 1968, fig 1)



ILLUS 3 Dirks from (a) Lower Nunton, Kirkcudbrightshire; (b) ?Kirkcudbrightshire. Scale: 1:2

(Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 6–8). In size and blade cross-section, it may be compared with the example from Newry, County Down (*ibid*, no 4, pl 1). Multiple-groove weapons are most common in Ireland (*ibid*, pl 118) so the location of the Lower Nunton Farm find on the coast of south-west Scotland may indicate an Irish origin. This interpretation is reinforced by the overall scarcity of Group I dirks and rapiers in Scotland: one atypical example from a residual context in the hoard from Glentroot, Kirkcudbrightshire (*ibid*, no 61) and another from Pitcaithly, Perthshire (*ibid*, no 18). Multiple-groove dirks and rapiers probably appeared before the end of the Early Bronze Age (*ibid*, 15–19, pl 134), perhaps as early as the 16th century cal BC (Needham forthcoming).

GROUP II: DIRKS AND RAPIERS WITH LOZENGE-SECTION BLADES

No locality (possibly Kirkcudbrightshire?) (illus 3b)

This dirk was recorded by Coles (1964, 145; 1965, 94) but was listed, erroneously, as being from Kells; while a Kirkcudbrightshire find-spot is likely, the weapon should be treated as unprovenanced as the circumstances of its discovery and acquisition are uncertain (Stewartry Museum: 6052).³

The rounded butt of this dirk clearly does not represent the original form. There are two rough notches towards the centre. Otherwise the blade is well preserved, though its surface is worn and pitted and it has undergone some lengthwise distortion. There is a distinct midrib and bevelled edges, which converge at the tip. Dimensions: L 250 mm; W shoulders 48.7 mm; Th hilt 4.7 mm; Th blade 4.8 mm. The dirk has features characteristic of Group II weapons (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 19–41), but the condition of the butt prevents attribution to any specific type.

Aird, Weem, Perthshire (illus 4a)

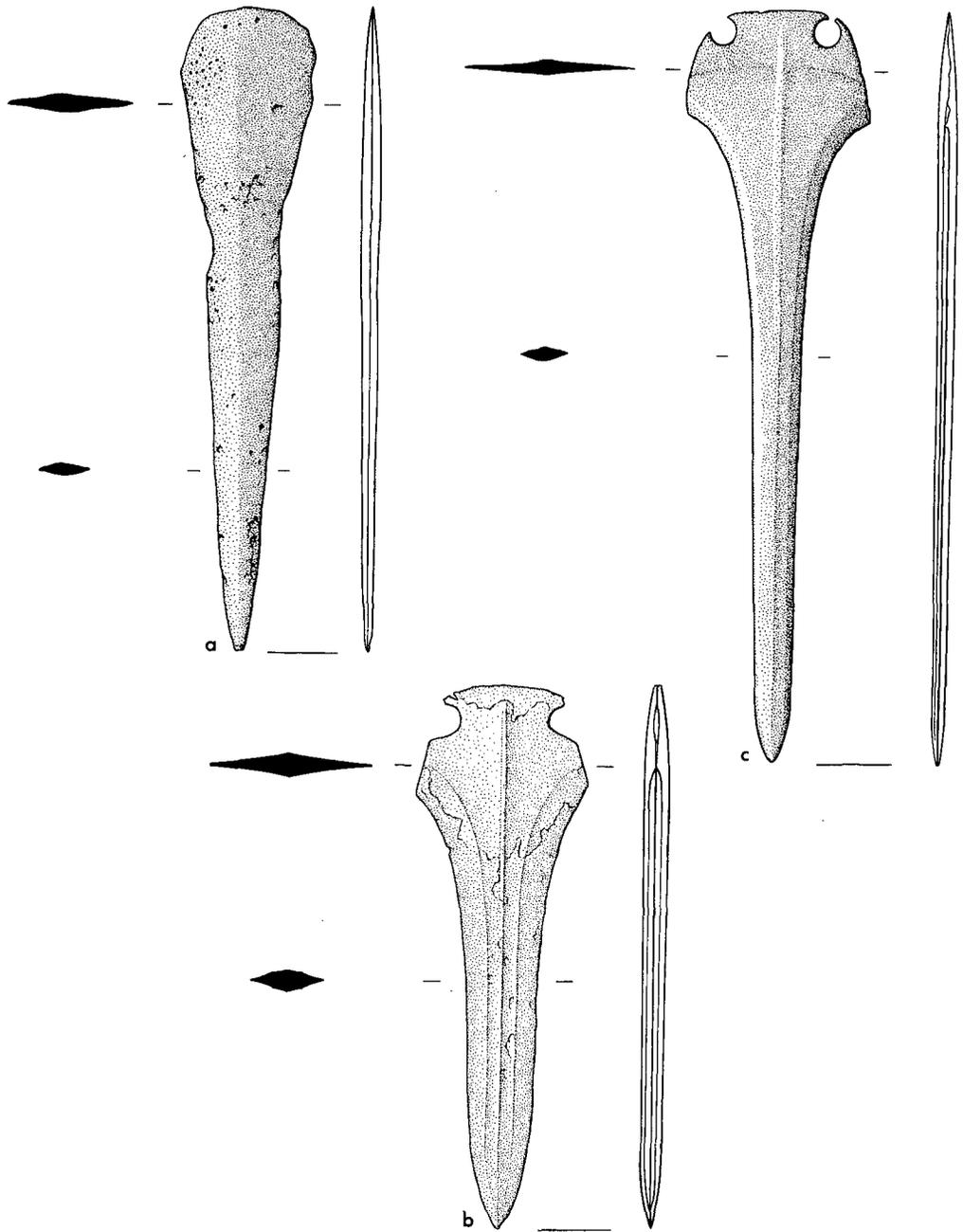
This paper presents an opportunity to illustrate and describe fully for the first time a dirk in the collections of Perth Museum & Art Gallery (PMAG: 2404 (134): see Callander 1929, 147, pl 22.3; Coles 1964, 146; Cowie & Reid 1986, fiche A7). Little is known of the circumstances of its discovery; according to museum records, the dirk is said to have been found about 17 October 1923 by a Mr J S Graham of Aberargie, at Aird, above Castle Menzies, Weem (approximately NN 8350). Apparently ‘half of it was stuck in the ground, and the other half was above the surface’.

The dirk is complete, but is very eroded; no original surfaces or edges survive and the tip has broken off. The marked taper towards the butt (seen in longitudinal section) suggests comparatively little of the perimeter has been lost, so the absence of rivet-holes or notches may suggest re-working; the blade has a lozenge section. Dimensions: L 176 mm; W butt 37 mm; max Th: 5 mm.

River Forth, Fords of Frew, Culbeg, Perthshire⁴

One of two rapiers published by Morrison (1979, 52–3, fig 1a) came from the River Forth near Fords of Frew, north-west of Gargunnoch (Hunterian Museum, Glasgow: A.1978.1). The lozenge-section blade of this weapon is characteristic of Group II, while its hilt, with two rivet-holes and two notches, assigns it to the Taplow type (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 22–4).

These three finds can be added to 11 weapons of Group II from Scotland without significantly altering the distribution (*ibid*, 46, pl 119). Fords of Frew is the first Taplow type from northern Britain: these rapiers are most common in the Thames valley. Group II dirks and rapiers first appeared around the 15th century cal BC, during a complex period of change which saw the transition from Early to Middle Bronze Age metalworking traditions, but the type may have had a currency of several centuries (*ibid*, 42–5; Needham forthcoming).



ILLUS 4 Dirks from (a) Aird, Weem, Perthshire; (b) Loch Glashan, Argyll; (c) Kells, Kirkcudbrightshire.
Scale: 1:2

GROUP III: DIRKS AND RAPIERS WITH TRIPLE-ARRIS BLADES

Loch Glashan, Argyll (illus 4b)

In June 1979, a bronze dirk was found by a Yorkshire schoolgirl, Louise Hancock, on the shore of the north end of Loch Glashan, Kilmichael Glassary, Mid Argyll (NR 92529449); it was under a stone, lying on peat which was being eroded by a watercourse entering the loch from a north-easterly direction, about a foot from the edge of the loch. The dirk is in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland (NMS: DJ 44; *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 110 (1978–80), 542), and it is listed by the Royal Commission (RCAHMS 1988, 25, fig 26B).

The dirk is complete. Much of its surface, especially on the blade, is covered by brown patina with some patches of concretion; the matt surface below is pale green. The butt is slightly convex with two asymmetrical rivet-notches; these seem to be original features and not reworked from torn rivet holes. There is a nick in the butt above the left-hand notch. The hilt is trapezoidal, with straight sides which form obtuse angles at the shoulders. The sides of the blade are not quite parallel and converge towards a blunted point. A well-defined midrib runs from the level of the top of the notches and becomes indistinct within 10 mm of the tip of the blade. Until they, too, become indistinct near the tip, a pair of ribs follow the outline of the blade from the sides of the hilt, forming a triple-arris blade of concave section.

There is evidence that the blade has been reworked: under the microscope, the very tip of the blade shows clear indications of a number of transverse cuts, best explained as the result of cutting or snapping a damaged blade preparatory to re-shaping of the edges. Superficially, the edges of the blade curve smoothly towards the tip; under magnification, however, there is a marked contrast in the sharpness of the blade between its upper part and the edges as the blade converges to the tip; again this is strongly indicative of reworking. The original length of the blade is unknown, although the gradual convergence of the flanking ribs may suggest that relatively little of the original length of the blade may have been lost. Dimensions: L 158 mm; W at shoulders 50 mm; Th hilt 7 mm; Th blade 6 mm.

The triple-arris blade of the Loch Glashan dirk places it in Group III (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 46), though it is uncharacteristic of this group with respect to its small size and the presence of notches rather than rivet-holes. In size and outline it resembles some of the dirks with angular butts of Group II (*ibid*, 30–1), while rivet-notches are common only on weapons of Group IV (*ibid*, 82). Extensive reworking of a broken Group III weapon, possibly also involving modification of the butt so as to restore the overall proportions, may explain this combination of 'hybrid' features.

Most Group III rapiers were deposited in water and many were in pristine condition (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 60): the circumstances of discovery of the Loch Glashan weapon are thus in keeping, suggesting that it may have been a deliberate (perhaps votive) deposit. Mid Argyll is not rich in Bronze Age metalwork (listed in RCAHMS 1988, 25), though from the south-east shore of Loch Glashan there is a socketed axe of Sompenting type (*ibid*, fig 26B; Schmidt & Burgess 1981, 241 no 1576) dating from the end of the Late Bronze Age.

Skares, Old Cumnock, Ayrshire (illus 5 & 6)

We are grateful to Colleen Batey for providing the following details regarding the circumstances of discovery of this find. Late in 1991, a particularly fine example of a rapier was brought into Glasgow Art Gallery & Museum for identification by a Mr James Newall of Patna in Ayrshire. It transpired that the weapon had been found by his father whilst walking in the area of Skares, Old Cumnock, Ayrshire (approximately NS 529174), about 40 years previously. The rapier had apparently been found in an area of peat bog, lying blade upwards. The blade had been pulled upwards by the finder; had any traces of the organic hilt survived, it may be presumed that these were lost at this stage. Nothing further of archaeological significance was noted in the area at the time of its original discovery, nor in the course of a visit to assess the find-spot in 1991. The rapier was claimed as Treasure Trove and, following payment of a reward, was allocated to Glasgow Art Gallery & Museum in 1992 (GAGM: A9247).

The rapier is complete except for its point; the edges have incurred some damage and are slightly

notched along their entire length. There is a dull green patina over most of the surface with few patches of corrosion and some marks of recent wear and filing. The butt is trapezoidal and retains two well-fitting plug rivets; the heads of the rivets are asymmetrical in the plane of the missing convex haft. An omega hilt-mark and paler corrosion on the butt and along the length of the rivets suggest deposition with the hilt in place. The blade has a triple-arris section, with angular ribs and concave surfaces between. The central rib reaches the butt on one face and to within 5 mm on the other; the side ribs reach the butt on one side of each face, and converge with the central rib c 20 mm from tip. Dimensions: L 357 mm; W shoulder 55 mm; Th 8 mm; L rivets 18 mm.

The Skares rapier belongs to the classic Wandsworth type of Group III (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 50–4). It is considerably shorter than usual, most examples being over 400 mm long, but an example from Horningsea, Cambridgeshire, is comparable (*ibid*, no 350).

Kells parish, Kirkcudbrightshire (illus 4c)

Nothing is known of the circumstances of discovery of this dirk, beyond the fact that it was found in the parish of Kells and was acquired by the Stewartry Museum (accession no: 0844) from George Hamilton, Ardendee, Kirkcudbright, in 1881. It was recorded by Coles (1964, 145; 1965, 94, fig 8.11 for an outline drawing) but has not previously been described or illustrated in detail.

The dirk is virtually complete; it has an asymmetrical trapezoidal butt with two incomplete rivet-holes. A curving hilt-mark is visible on one face; on the opposite face the line is demarcated approximately by a slight colour change. The blade is slender, with midrib extending from the butt and flanking ribs, although wear means that the triple-arris profile is now indistinct. One face retains a brown patina but the other appears to have been cleaned with an abrasive in modern times to reveal the underlying metal. Dimensions: L 206 mm; W butt 51.2 mm; Th 4.75 mm; Th blade 4.3 mm.

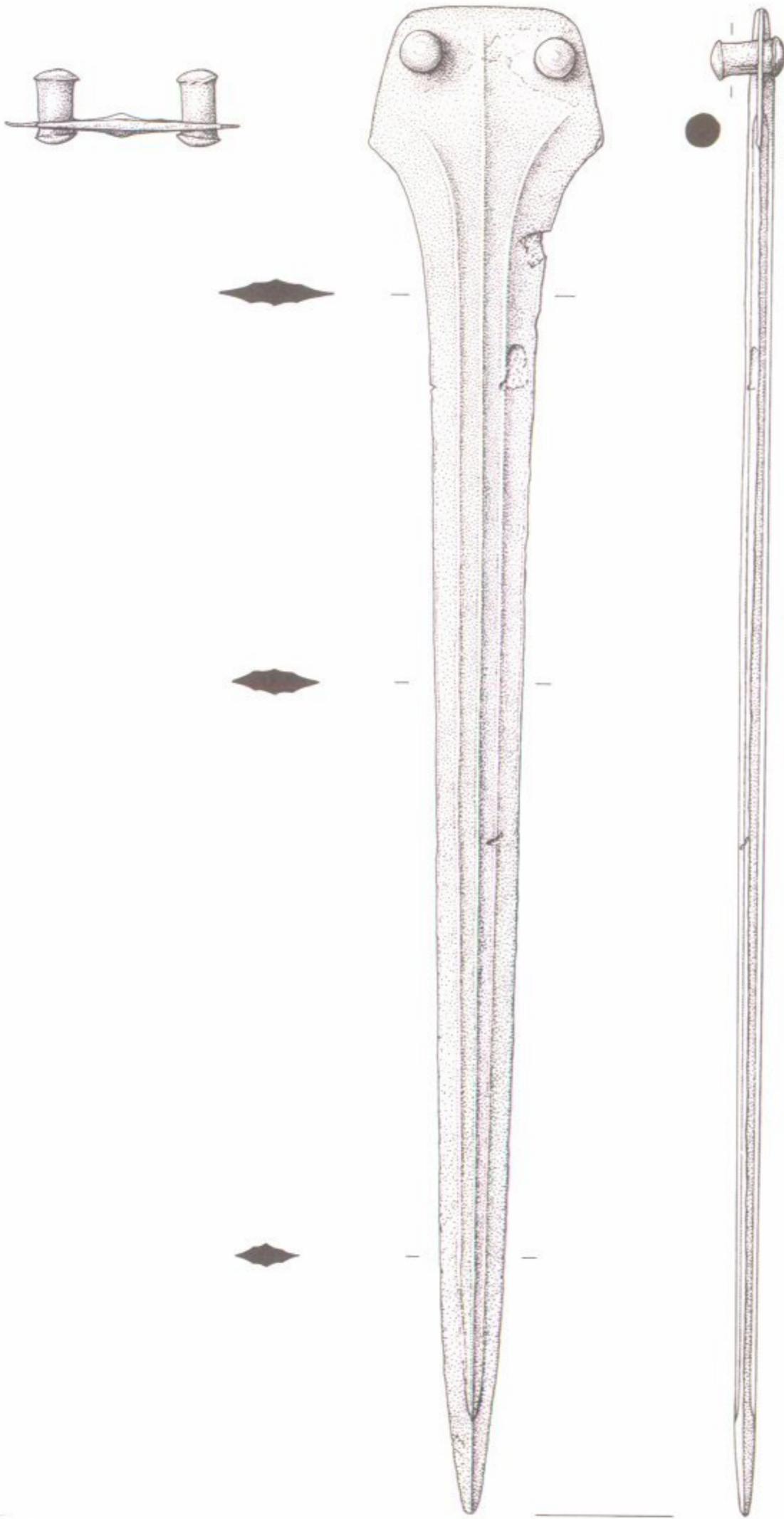
At around 200 mm in length, the blade from Kells parish is a small example, but it appears to belong to the classic Wandsworth type of Group III (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 50–1) and it retains the slender proportions of a larger rapier, in contrast to the Wandsworth dirk from the Thames at Battersea (*ibid*, no 351, pl 43).

No locality (probably from the Drumcoltran hoard, Kirkgunzeon, Kirkcudbrightshire) (illus 7a)

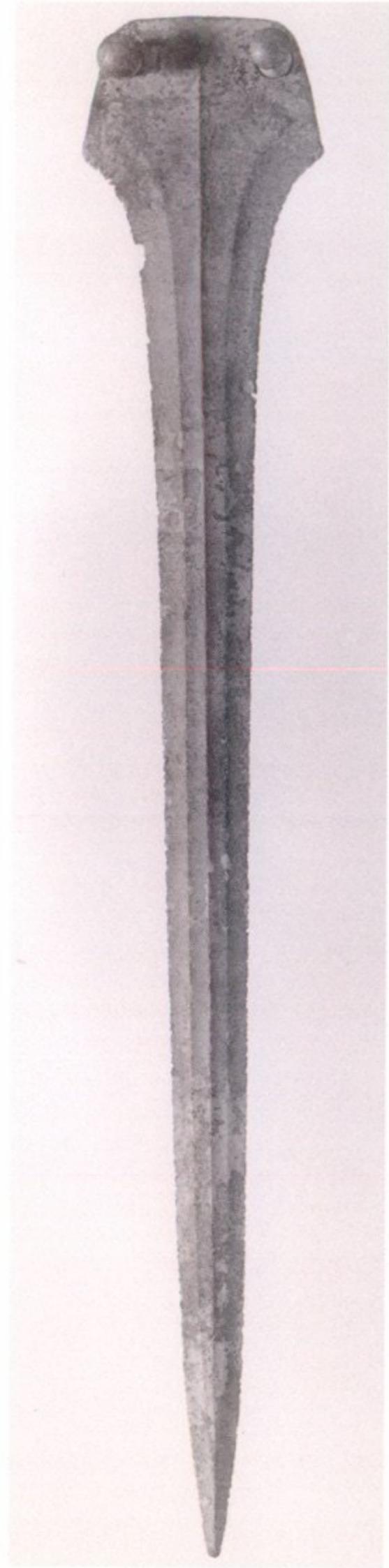
The details of the circumstances of discovery and dispersal of this well-known rapier hoard have been discussed by Corrie (1928a, 51–4; 1928b, 140–1) and by Coles (1964, 152–3). Twelve weapons were discovered in 1837, and another in 1867, of which only six (in the NMS and Dumfries Museum) can be accounted for wholly satisfactorily.

This rapier was listed by Coles (1964, 145; 1965, 94). It was subsequently catalogued by Burgess & Gerloff, the only weapon from Stewartry Museum to be included in their corpus (1981, no 425, with illustration, pl 56, based on a drawing by Coles). Both Coles and Burgess & Gerloff give the provenance as Drumcoltran without further qualification. According to information kindly provided by David Devereux, the weapon was donated by Alexander McLaren, Castle Street, Kirkcudbright, on 22 February 1897 (Stewartry Museum: 2870) but the circumstances of its discovery are unknown. A museum label gives the possible provenance as Drumcoltran, Kirkgunzeon, but this is not recorded in the register. While the provenance should therefore be treated with due caution, it may be noted that of the eight specimens of Group III weapons of this form known from Scotland, six are definitely from Drumcoltran. However, in terms of its present condition, the rapier does not compare particularly well with the specimens from the hoard in the national collection (NMS: DJ 30; DQ 319–20) as these have a glossy green patina, although this could be due partly to differential treatment following discovery.

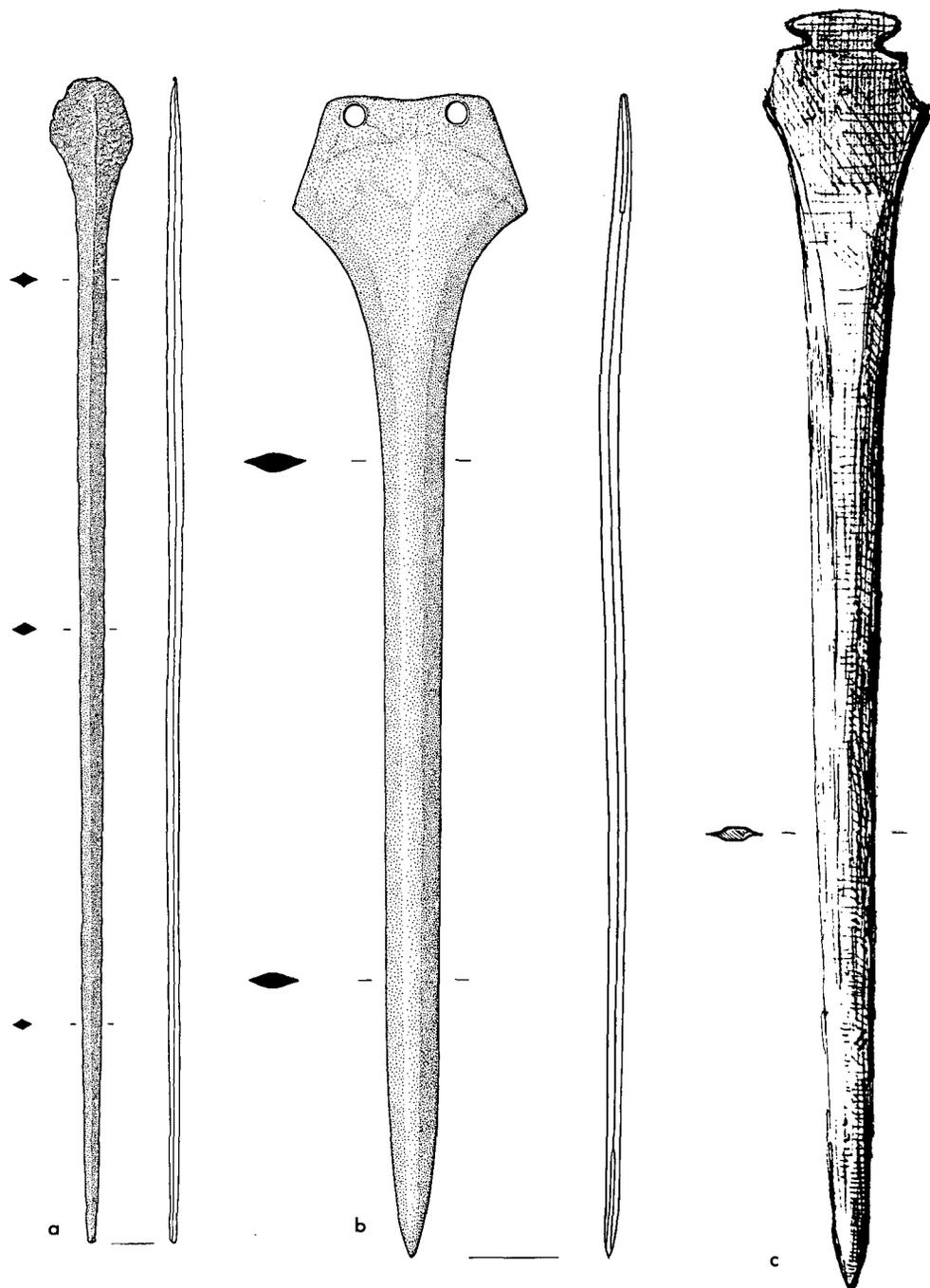
The rapier is badly eroded with much of the hilt, and the point, missing. The blade is long and very slender with a distinct angular midrib running from the hilt, and giving a concave section on the upper blade becoming a lozenge lower down. The original length of this rapier must have been over 650 mm. Dimensions: L 638 mm; W shoulders 46 mm; Th hilt 5.5 mm; Th blade 7.5 mm. It is an example of a Group III weapon with damaged butt.



ILLUS 5 Rapier from Skares, Ayrshire. Scale 1:2



ILLUS 6 Rapier from Skares, Ayrshire (Glasgow Museums)



ILLUS 7 Rapiers from (a) Drumcoltran (?), Kirkcudbrightshire; (b) Blair Drummond, Perthshire; (c) Poolewe, Ross-shire (pen and ink drawing by Alexander Ross). Scales: a: 1:4; b-c: 1:2

These four Group III finds add to 11 examples from five find-spots in Scotland, mainly in the south, plus one just across the Tweed from Carham, Northumberland (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, pl 121–2A). Apart from Skares and Kells only one Wandsworth-type rapier was previously recognized from Scotland (Callander district, Perthshire: *ibid*, no 365); the type is most numerous in southern England (*ibid*, 62). Group III rapiers are characteristic of the Taunton metalworking phase of the Middle Bronze Age (*ibid*, 60–1, pl 134); in the light of recent revision of the chronology of the British Bronze Age, the *floruit* of the Taunton phase can be back-dated to the 14th century cal BC (Needham forthcoming).

GROUP IV: DIRKS AND RAPIERS WITH BLADES FLATTENED OR SLIGHTLY ROUNDED IN CROSS-SECTION

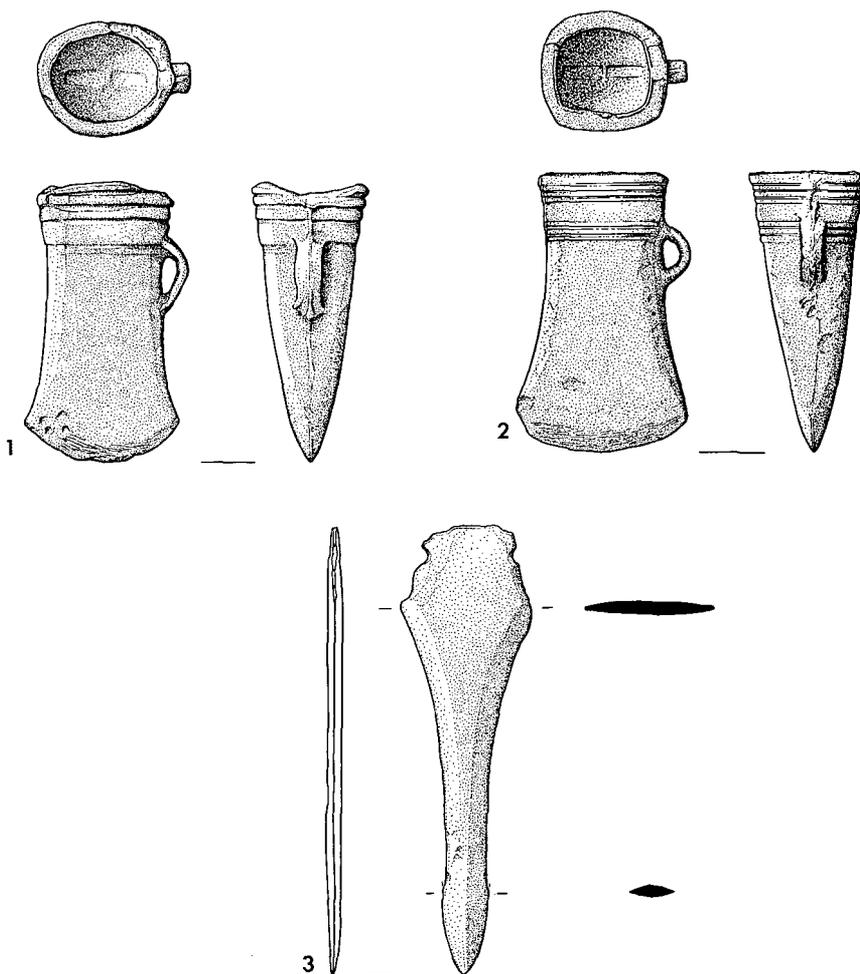
Vale of Leven, Bonhill, Dunbartonshire

The second of two weapons published by Morrison (1979, 53–5, fig 1b) was found in gravel from a quarry at Dalmonach, Bonhill, in the Vale of Leven, Dunbartonshire (Hunterian Museum: A.1978.2); in view of the circumstances of its discovery, the general provenance ‘Vale of Leven’ should be adopted. It is badly corroded and the loss of the original surface makes identification of the blade section uncertain. This dirk has a leaf-shaped blade and angular shoulders but the butt is broken off; the break shows a distinct midrib and concave section. A dirk with a leaf-shaped blade would be expected to belong to the Cutts type (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 90–7); but while some Cutts weapons have a short rib on the butt, the section of the Vale of Leven dirk resembles the flattened lozenge section of Ballintober swords (Colquhoun & Burgess 1988, 19–22). The poor condition of the Vale of Leven dirk makes confident attribution difficult, but there do exist from the Thames valley small versions of Ballintober swords similar in size to the Vale of Leven dirk (*ibid*, 19 note 1; Rowlands 1976, 79). In either case, the Vale of Leven weapon would belong to the Penard phase of the Bronze Age, with a *floruit* around the 13th/12th centuries cal BC, but probably persisting longer (Needham forthcoming).

Kincardine, Abernethy, Inverness-shire (illus 8)

This group, comprising a dirk and two socketed axes, was donated to Am Fasgadh in 1951 by the executors of the late Miss Peace, Grantown-on-Spey, and is now in the Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie. According to the museum records, the group was found about 1873 by a Mr Smith, Grantown, under a granite boulder at Kincardine, Abernethy, in Strath Spey (approximately NH 9314). There was, apparently, a local tradition that Colonel John Roy Stewart hid his arms and flags there in the aftermath of Culloden (for brief biographical details, see Forsyth 1900, 170–7); the finder stated that there were remains of silk cords attached to the loop of the axe-head [sic] and believed that it was a relic attached to Colonel Stewart’s flagstaff. The dirk was listed by Coles (1964, 145), and the axes have been recorded by Schmidt & Burgess (1981, nos 1025 & 1141, but note that the descriptions have been transposed). However, the details of this significant group of metalwork have not previously been published.

Socketed axe (illus 8.1) Socketed axe with multiple mouth mouldings; the uppermost moulding forming the rim is uneven and worn; the broad loop springs from the lowermost moulding; the casting seams have been hammered but are still clear on the upper portion of both sides; the sides are concave and diverge to meet the cutting edge; the blade has been sharpened and retains low hammer-marks and a series of fine striations on both faces; the mouth is oval and the body section subrectangular; a shallow septum is set in the base of the socket; smooth, dark green patina, showing gold where worn/polished. Dimensions: L 71 mm; width of cutting edge 40 mm; W of mouth externally 36 mm by 30 mm, W of mouth internally 29 mm by 23 mm. Weight 132.8g. Museum accession no: KIGHF: DE 3 (N2).



ILLUS 8 Dirk and socketed axes found at Kincardine, Abernethy, Inverness-shire. Scale: 1:2

This axehead belongs to the Highfield type (Schmidt & Burgess 1981, 181–3) the characteristic features of which include multiple mouth mouldings and a relatively baggy shape, which may reflect Irish influence. These and the closely related Fulford type axes (*ibid.*, 176–7) appear early in the socketed axe sequence, and may represent the northern counterparts of Wilburton/Wallington axes.

Socketed axe (illus 8.2) Socketed axe with gently flared mouth and two bands of three narrow mouldings set immediately beneath and 15 mm below the rim; the loop emerges from the lower mouldings; gently faceted body; the sides are concave and diverge to meet the cutting edge; the blade has been sharpened and retains a series of fine striations on both faces; the mouth and the body cross-section are subrectangular; the casting seams have been hammered but are still clear on the upper portion of each side, especially where they cross the mouldings; a shallow septum is set in the base of the socket; smooth, dark green patina, with some chipping of blade and rim. Dimensions: L 72 mm; width of cutting edge 44 mm; W of mouth externally 33.5 mm by 31 mm, W of mouth internally 25 mm by 23 mm. Weight 130.3g. Museum accession no: DE 1 (N3).

This axehead belongs to a general category characterized by faceted broad baggy bodies and classified as Gillespie-type axes (Schmidt & Burgess 1981, 191–7), and more specifically the 'Luncarty variant' of that type, a small group with mouldings around the upper portion (*ibid*, 195–6). As noted above, multiple mouldings appear to be a typologically early feature of northern socketed axes, and this would be in keeping with the evidence for the emergence of the Gillespie type early in the Ewart Park phase (*ibid*, 193).

Dirk (illus 8.3) This small dirk is largely complete, though very worn, and the hilt is damaged; the remains of a very dark patina overlies the bronze surface, consistent with burial in peaty soil. On one face there are two casting faults where the surface is missing. There are traces of two rivet notches high up on the hilt, and possible remains of another lower down on one side. The hilt is flat and bevelled edges converge to a midrib which extends to the point. The blade is broader at its tip than at the centre. Dimensions: L 117 mm; W 34.5 mm; Th butt 3.2 mm; Th blade 3.8 mm. Museum accession no: DG 1 (N 4).

Despite its small size and relatively poor condition, the dirk from Kincardine can be attributed to the Cornacarrow type of Group IV (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 86–8) and compared to an example in the National Museum of Ireland (*ibid* no 718, pl 91). Such dirks belong to the Penard phase of the Bronze Age (see above).

As little is known of the precise circumstances of discovery, it is difficult to assess fully the significance of this group of material. The association of the metalwork with Colonel John Roy Stewart is intriguing but almost certainly spurious (perhaps reflecting the power of the 'Forty-five' to sway the heart rather than the mind). While the supposed remains of silk cords doubtless represent further uncritical embroidering of the traditional associations of the place, it is possible that traces of organic fibres had survived (cf Late Bronze Age hoards from Monmore, Perthshire: Stewart 1882, 28; St Andrews, Fife: Cowie *et al* 1991) but, equally, in his enthusiasm, the finder may simply have misinterpreted plant fibres (eg fine rootlets) adhering to the metal.

On the other hand, although it is lacking in detail, there seems no reason to doubt the basic account of the circumstances of discovery. A number of metalwork deposits have been recovered in similar circumstances (eg Glentool, Kirkcudbrightshire: Coles 1964, 153; Rigg, Skye: Coles 1960, 112). While recognizing that an accessible natural feature such as a boulder would have allowed scope for deposition on more than one occasion in antiquity, there are reasonable grounds for accepting the group from Kincardine as a single deposit. Previously, the presence of types of 'Middle' and 'Late' Bronze Age date might have been taken to cast doubt on the validity of this as an associated find; however, in the light of recent reconsideration of the significance and dating of the Wallington phase (now subsumed in Penard: Needham 1990b; Needham forthcoming), the combination of a typologically late dirk and typologically early socketed axes may be accepted with more confidence.⁵

Blair Drummond Moss, Perthshire (illus 7b)

In the Manuscript Collection of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, there is a pair of previously unpublished watercolours by G P Harding, dated 1842, and depicting part of a collection of antiquities found at Blair Drummond Moss (SAS: 504.49). It appears that the watercolours were intended for publication together with a paper presented at a meeting of the Society on 13 March 1871. In the paper, Henry Home Drummond of Blair Drummond had described a collection of antiquities in stone and bronze found under the Moss (approximately NS 7297). In the published *Proceedings* for that year, there is only a brief notice of the fact that the paper was presented and that it had been accompanied by an exhibition of objects (Drummond 1872): instead, the note referred the reader to a forthcoming volume of *Archaeologia Scotica* for publication of the paper. In fact, the Home Drummond paper was never printed and the significance of the two

watercolours subsequently appears to have become forgotten. However, further research was to show that a number of the items depicted in the watercolours, including the rapier, were still extant, having remained in the possession of subsequent owners of the Blair Drummond Estate (cf Evans 1881, 248; Corrie 1928b, 144); the rapier is published here by kind permission of Lady Elizabeth Muir.⁶

The rapier is complete and is in good condition although the top of the butt is somewhat irregular; the lengthwise distortion, visible in the drawing, may be due to the method of mounting since discovery. The bronze patina suggests a water deposit; although its boundaries are not well defined, a curving hilt-mark remains and it is possible that the weapon was deposited complete with its hilt. The trapezoidal butt has two rivet-holes; neither rivet survives, although one is depicted in the 1842 watercolour and is known to have been still extant in 1871. The illustration indicates that otherwise the condition of the rapier has not altered over 150 years. There are distinct shoulders, making an angle of a little more than 90°, and a slender blade. A broad midrib on the butt merges with arrises defining edge bevels below the shoulders to form a broad midrib along the blade. Dimensions: L 317 mm; W shoulders 65.2 mm; Th hilt 4.5 mm; Th blade 4.7 mm; L rivet 20 mm.

The combination of trapezoidal hilt and butt-rib indicates that the Blair Drummond rapier belongs to the Cloontia type of Group IV weapons (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 69–72).

These three finds and the lost weapon from Poolewe (see below) bring the Scottish finds of Group IV rapiers to a total of 14, and widen the scattered distribution. Cloontia rapiers are mainly from Ireland (*ibid* 110, pl 122B) so the two Scottish examples, from Blair Drummond Moss and from Midlothian (*ibid*, no 542), may be of Irish origin. The same could be true of the Kincardine and Poolewe blades, the first Scottish finds of the Cornacarrow type (*ibid*, 111–12, pl 123B). Group IV dirks and rapiers are characteristic of the Penard phase of the Bronze Age (see above). The Blair Drummond Moss rapier is typologically earlier than the other examples noted here.

LOST WEAPONS

In a number of cases, dirks or rapiers are known only from antiquarian sources. Despite attempts to locate them, their present whereabouts are unknown.

Mey, Caithness

Part of what was clearly a rapier was exhibited by John Nicholson, Nybster, at a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, held on 12 December 1910 (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 45 (1910–11), 15). Nothing is known of the circumstances other than that the piece had been found at Mey in Caithness (approximately ND 2872). This find has previously been listed by Coles (1964, 145).

The description published in the *Proceedings* refers to a 'portion of the butt-end of a bronze rapier-shaped sword 7 inches in length, the hilt-plate flat and 1¼ inches in greatest breadth ... upper part broken and showing no rivet holes ... blade ¾ inch in breadth at junction with the hilt-plate and ½ inch broad at the broken end where the greatest thickness scarcely exceeds ¼ inch.' Corresponding metric dimensions: L 178 mm, W 32 mm.

Ditch Park Moss, St Andrews, Orkney

At the Society's meeting on 13 June 1887, three bronzes from Orkney were exhibited by J W Cursiter, who described one as follows (1887, 340):

The dagger is one of the class known as rapier-shaped, having a long narrow blade and a short broad base; it measures 10 inches [254 mm] in length, 1 inch [26 mm] in breadth at the base of the blade, which expands to about 2 inches [51 mm] at the butt, which is semi-circular and has been attached to

the handle by rivets. It was found in April 1886 ... when peat cutting, and at a depth of six peats in the Ditch Park Moss, in St Andrew's parish, Orkney, about 400 yards from the house of Sillerdyke, in a straight line between Sillerdyke and Nether Bossack. The rivet holes are broken away, and no traces of the rivets or handles were found.

We may assume that Cursiter, writing in 1887, was following the terminology used six years earlier by Evans in his classic *The Ancient Bronze Implements, Weapons, and Ornaments of Great Britain and Ireland*, where the term 'rapier-shaped' is used to distinguish rapiers from daggers (Evans 1881, 247–54). Cursiter (1887, 340–1, fig 1) also exhibited a dagger found in Holm parish, which is preserved in the Hunterian Museum (B.1914.319) and included in the corpus of Gerloff (1975, 72 no 120). Coles included the dagger in his list of Scottish Early Bronze Age daggers (1969, 90, Orkney 2); however, the Ditch Park Moss weapon is not in that list nor in his published list of dirks and rapiers (1964, 145–6), nor is it in Trump's list of Scottish rapiers (1962, 101), nor in the corpus of Burgess & Gerloff (1981). The Royal Commission did note both the Ditch Park Moss blade and the Holm dagger (RCAHMS 1946, vol I, 59 fn 5 & 6), while the former has also been recorded by Lamb in the list of sites and monuments in the parish of St Andrews and Deerness (1987, 36 no 187: HY 49720772).

The present whereabouts of the weapon are unknown. An unprovenanced rapier (lent by W Moir Bryce), the same length as that from Ditch Park Moss, was displayed in the Glasgow Exhibition of 1911 (*Palace of History*, 882 no 31; Corrie 1928b, 145; Coles 1964, 146); unfortunately this cannot now be traced either. In any case, we are grateful to Andrew Foxon for pointing out that, as Cursiter was one of the other lenders to the Exhibition, it would seem unlikely that the Orcadian provenance could have been lost in the intervening period. Although no trace of the Orkney find seems now to remain, several rapiers (eg Burgess & Gerloff 1981, nos 67, 79, 175A, 855) have dimensions similar to those recorded by Cursiter, and since it seems reasonable to assume that he was able to refer to *Ancient Bronze Implements*, we may confidently add Ditch Park Moss to the distribution of rapiers in Scotland.

Poolewe, Gairloch, Ross-shire (illus 7c)

Among the manuscript collections of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (*SAS 502.iii*), there are several sheets of drawings by an Alexander Ross that were clearly prepared to accompany a paper by William Jolly (1880) describing material from Wester Ross, particularly the Poolewe hoard; unfortunately one of the illustrations never saw the light of day, for one find referred to in Jolly's text as a spearhead is, in fact, a previously unrecorded rapier (*ibid*, 48). It was discovered in May 1879 'about 3 feet [0.9 m] deep in the moss, at a point opposite the site of the large bronze find got on the north side of the river' (*ibid*, 46–7; see Coles 1960, 129 for further details of this Late Bronze Age hoard).

Jolly described the weapon as follows:

It is 14 inches long, 1½ inches broad at the base, expanding to 1½ inch, 1 inch upwards, and gradually tapering thence to the point which is pointed and perfect. The double edges are fine and sharp, and not indented in any way, showing that the weapon had been very little if at all used. A thicker ridge runs along the centre of the blade on both sides, gently sloping to the edges. At the base are two opposite openings in the blade close to the socket [sic].

This discovery was subsequently mentioned, and, in fact, illustrated, by Dixon (1886, 103–4, 117: drawing by Finlay Mackinnon): still described as a *spearhead*, the weapon was said to have been found 'in a peat cutting near Croft, not far from the place where the Feill Iudha was formerly held' [a large market discontinued in the early 18th century (*ibid*, 317)]. The findspot falls within the area of the present-day Pool Crofts (NG 805802).

Ross's pen and ink drawing (which more accurately describes the weapon as a 'dagger or poniard') appears to bear out Jolly's observations regarding the condition of the blade. The trapezoidal butt has two

deep rivet-notches (the 'two opposite openings' described by Jolly). The shoulder appears to be sharply out-turned at the tips; on some rapiers, the angle thus created may have been designed to hold supplementary rivets. Stemming from the shoulders, a broad flattened midrib appears to have run along the blade converging to a point some way from the tip. Dimensions: L 355 mm; W shoulders 48 mm; Th blade 4 mm.

Remarkably, Ross included a profile of the blade, clearly indicating that the weapon had the flattened cross-section characteristic of Group IV weapons; the butt shape allows the rapier to be attributed to the Cornacarrow type of Group IV, although it is longer than the average for this type, most being dirks and under 300 mm in length (Burgess & Gerloff 1981, 86–8: for comparison see no 736, pl 92). Although Mackinnon's drawing resembles one Stuntney rapier (*ibid*, no 656, pl 85), the Poolewe hilt does not appear to be characteristic of this type.

Southdean, Roxburghshire

In the course of a survey of local museum collections in Scotland, Anderson & Black (1888, 381) recorded what was described as 'apparently the portion of a narrow rapier blade' in the museum at Jedburgh. The piece was said to have been found at Southdean in the parish of that name (NT 6309); other bronzes appear to have been recovered from the same locality (*ibid*, 381; RCAHMS 1956, 14, and see also RCAHMS 1994, 7). It was later noted by Corrie (1928b, 144) and by Coles (1964, 146) by which time the object appears to have become lost.

Anderson & Black (1888, 381) recorded a 'blade $4\frac{1}{8}$ inch long by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch broad at widest part with small hole $\frac{3}{16}$ inch diameter at a distance $\frac{1}{8}$ inch from the butt end'; what has apparently not previously been noted is that this description would correspond with an item illustrated by Jeffrey (1864, 186, pl 11, no 5), and there described as a bronze knife discovered near Southdean. The blade would appear to have a well-defined midrib, but Jeffrey's illustration is too small and indistinct to give a clear impression of the form of the butt; the find may tentatively be interpreted as a small re-worked dirk. The corresponding metric dimensions would be L 118 mm; max W 19 mm.

CONCLUSIONS

As well as describing recent discoveries, this paper has provided an opportunity to draw attention to a number of old and largely unpublished finds. With the exception of the rapier allegedly from Drumcoltran, the finds noted in this paper may be added to the inventory of dirks and rapiers from Great Britain and Ireland compiled by Burgess & Gerloff (1981). Their corpus gives details of some 40 rapiers from 26 locations confined largely to southern and eastern Scotland (*ibid*, pl 117); although our additions are relatively few in number, the combined evidence of antiquarian sources and extant specimens presented in this paper significantly alters the Scottish distribution, and indicates that prestige weaponry had a considerably more widespread circulation in the north and west of Scotland than is apparent from that source (illus 1; Appendix 1). The characteristic deposition of dirks and rapiers as single finds, often in wet places, is reinforced. The associated find from Kincardine, Abernethy, helps to illuminate the chronology of early socketed axes in Scotland and contributes to revision of the phases of the Late Bronze Age in northern Britain. The finds attributable to diagnostic types show connections not only with Ireland but also southern England. They represent dirks and rapiers from their very earliest development, through the classic type, to their latest form, over a period of perhaps 500 years.

NOTES

- 1 Some of these had previously been listed, and in some instances illustrated, by Coles (1964, 164–5; 1965, 93–4, with fuller details in his unpublished card index of Scottish Bronze Age metalwork lodged in the Dept of Archaeology, NMS).

- 2 The museum label notes the proximity of the find-spot to the fort known as The Doon at Nunmill (NX 65744883) (see F R Coles 1893, 135–8).
- 3 We are grateful to Dr David Devereux for further details regarding this object. The accession number 844A cited by Coles is spurious, and appears to have been allocated in the absence of further information. The accession number 6052 was allocated in the course of recent re-cataloguing of the collection, as no entry in the register appeared to correspond with this dirk. However, an entry (Acc no 1914) for a bronze ‘spearhead’ can no longer be matched with any object in the collection: it is said to have been found in a moss at Culdoch (possibly Culdoach, Tongland: NX 705537), and was acquired by the Stewartry Museum from James Nicholson (Kirkcudbright) in 1886. Given that the rapiers from Drumcoltran were described as spearheads at the time of their discovery, it is just possible that the spearhead represents a misidentification of the dirk in question. If so, it remains unclear why the dirks and rapiers in the Stewartry Museum came to be omitted by Anderson & Black from their survey of the collection (1888, 398–401).
- 4 The approximate findspot (NS 692963) lies in that part of Kincardine parish formerly in Perthshire and subsequently within Stirling District, Central Region.
- 5 A question-mark has always hung over the status of the alleged ‘hoard’ from Callander, Perthshire. Said to have been found before 1830, the group comprises two rapiers of Groups III and IV, a socketed axehead and a spearhead with asymmetrical side loops (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 89 (1955–6), 463, fig 7; Burgess 1968, 38). Although the circumstances of discovery remain uncertain, the validity of this association may be strengthened by the revised dating and re-interpretation of the significance of the Wilburton/Wallington phases. However, the implications of the revised chronology for the northern British material will be considered more fully elsewhere.
- 6 An inventory of the material in the Home Drummond collection, detailing what was sent to the Society for exhibition also survives among the Society’s manuscript collection (SAS: 504.2: despite being in the same bundle of manuscripts the significance of the watercolours appears to have become lost with time). The rapier is there described as a ‘Bronze Pikehead 12½ inches long with flat Butt and two round holes in it’; one rivet, ¾ inch long, was also then extant. The collection of antiquities from Blair Drummond will be described in detail by the writers in a separate paper.

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In the case of discoveries published for the first time, it is appropriate to acknowledge the role played by the finders: the Loch Glashan dirk was discovered by Louise Hancock, Whitby, while on a school excursion to Scotland. The find was initially reported to the Yorkshire Museum through the good offices of one of the teaching staff, Mr Bryan Fewster, and thanks are due to Mrs Elizabeth Hartley of that museum for dealing with the find in the initial stages.

The Skares rapier was brought to the attention of Glasgow Art Gallery & Museum by Mr James Newall; having been claimed by the Crown as Treasure Trove, the rapier was allocated to that museum and we are especially grateful to Dr Colleen Batey for permission to publish the find and for information regarding the circumstances of its discovery. The print of the rapier (illus 6) is reproduced here by courtesy of Glasgow Art Gallery & Museum.

For permission to examine and publish details of material in their care, we are most grateful to the following: Dr Euan MacKie (Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow); Mike King (then of Perth Museum & Art Gallery); Mr Tom Collin and, latterly, Dr David Devereux (Stewartry Museum, Kirkcudbright), and Ross Noble (Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie). The Blair Drummond rapier is published with the kind permission of Lady Elizabeth Muir.

Thanks are also due to Hugh Cheape, Lesley Ferguson, Dr Andrew Foxon, Robert Gourlay and Roy Wentworth for providing useful information, while our indebtedness to the card index of Bronze Age metalwork compiled by Professor John Coles will be clear from the text. Robert

Mowat, National Monuments Record of Scotland, very kindly checked the locations of all the sites referred to in the appendix. We are also most grateful to Fraser Hunter, Dr Alison Sheridan, Dr Stuart Needham, Humphrey Welfare and an anonymous referee for their comments on this paper; in particular, Stuart Needham provided valuable advice on chronology.

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APPENDIX 1

A revised list of Bronze Age dirks and rapiers from Scotland

Notes:

- 1 The weapons are grouped broadly according to Burgess and Gerloff's typological scheme (1981); within each group, the entries have been listed by county order. Further details of location (eg current administrative districts/regions) are available from the National Monuments Record of Scotland.
- 2 Abbreviations: BG 1981: Burgess & Gerloff 1981; BM: British Museum; DUMFM: Dumfries Museum; GAGM: Glasgow Art Gallery & Museum; HM: Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow; NMS: National Museums of Scotland; PMAG: Perth Museum & Art Gallery; SM: Stewartry Museum, Kirkcudbright.

Site	Museum	BG 1981 cat no	Remarks/other references	Number on map
Group I: blades with rounded midribs bordered by grooves, ribs and channels				
Glentrool (Fell of Eschoncan), Minnigaff, Kirkcudbrightshire	NMS: DQ 238	61		30
Lower Nunton Farm, near Doon Bay, Twynholm, Kirkcudbrightshire	SM: 5092	–	see this paper	33
Pitcaithly (or Pitkeathly), Dunbarney, Perthshire	NMS: DJ 20	18	See also Gerloff 1975 cat no 222, where catalogued as Hammersmith type dagger	15
Group II: dirks and rapiers with lozenge-section blades				
Morlich Quarry, Towie, Aberdeenshire	NMS: DJ 35	294		5
Findowrie, Brechin, Angus	Brechin	199A	cf Schmidt & Burgess 1981, cat no 723	8
Bog Park, Newton Don, Nenthorn, Berwickshire	NMS: DJ 31	103		26
Fairholme, Lockerbie, Dryfesdale, Dumfriesshire	NMS: DJ 17	107		38
Gretna, Dumfriesshire	NMS: DJ 22	142		39

Site	Museum	BG 1981 cat no	Remarks/other references	Number on map
Kilrie, Kinghorn, Fife	NMS: DJ 21	150		18
Kirkconnell Moss, New Abbey, Troqueer, Kirkcudbrightshire	DUMFM: 1950.37	131		37
No locality (but possibly Kirkcudbrightshire)	SM: 6052 (Coles's 844A)	–	see this paper	–
Buttergask, Ardoch, Perthshire	NMS: DJ 16	198		14
Blair estates, Blair Atholl, Perthshire	Blair Castle	199		7
near Forest Lodge, Glen Tilt, Blair Atholl, Perthshire	Blair Castle	200		6
Craig-na-Cailleach, Ben Ledi, Callander, Perthshire	GAGM: '54–91	133		11
Fords of Frew, Culbeg, Kincardine, Perthshire	HM: A.1978.1	–	see this paper	12
Aird, Weem, Perthshire	PMAG: 2404 (134)	–	see this paper	9
No locality (possibly from Scotland, but not 'Ireland' as cited by Burgess & Gerloff)	NMS: DJ 12	76A		–
Group III: dirks and rapiers with triple-arris blades				
Loch Glashan, Kilmichael Glassary, Argyll	NMS: DJ 44	–	see this paper	19
Skares, Old Cumnock, Ayrshire	GAGM: A9247	–	see this paper	23
Kells parish, Kirkcudbrightshire	SM: 0844	–	see this paper	35
Drumcoltran, Kirkgunzeon, Kirkcudbrightshire	NMS: DJ 30	450		36
Drumcoltran, Kirkgunzeon, Kirkcudbrightshire	NMS: DQ 319	448		“
Drumcoltran, Kirkgunzeon, Kirkcudbrightshire	NMS: DQ 320	449		“
Drumcoltran, Kirkgunzeon, Kirkcudbrightshire	DUMFM: 65–470	426		“
Drumcoltran, Kirkgunzeon, Kirkcudbrightshire	DUMFM: 65–671	451		“
Drumcoltran, Kirkgunzeon, Kirkcudbrightshire	DUMFM: 65–672	424		“

Site	Museum	BG 1981 cat no	Remarks/other references	Number on map
Probably Drumcoltran, Kirkgunzeon, Kirkcudbrightshire	SM: 2870	425	see this paper	“
Dalbeattie, Urr, Kirkcudbrightshire	BM: WG 1236	394		34
River Cree, Kirkcudbrightshire	NMS: DJ 29	405		31
Callander district, Perthshire	NMS: DQ 322	365		10
Turner Cleuch Law, Berrybush, Yarrow, Selkirkshire	NMS: DJ 33	442		25
Group IV: dirks and rapiers with blades flattened or slightly rounded in cross-section				
Blair, Kirkoswald, Ayrshire	HM: B.1951.3255	506		24
Milne Graden, Coldstream, Berwickshire	NMS: DJ 23	915		27
Maqueston, Tynron, Dumfriesshire	DUMFM: 1934.54	698		32
Vale of Leven, Bonhill, Dunbartonshire	HM: A.1978.2	–	see this paper	20
Dunshelt, Auchtermuchty, Fife	NMS: DJ 18	652		16
Kincardine, Abernethy, Inverness-shire	Kingussie: DG 1 (N4)	–	see this paper	4
Meikle Seggie, Milnathort, Orwell, Kinross-shire	NMS: DJ 32	467		17
Duddingston Loch, Edinburgh	NMS: DQ 26	971		21
Midlothian	NMS: DJ 26	542		22
Midlothian	NMS: DJ 27	674		“
Blair Drummond Moss, Perthshire	In private possession	–	see this paper	13
Callander district, Perthshire	NMS: DQ 323	880		10
Poolewe, Ross-shire	Lost? (formerly at Inverewe House)	–	see this paper	3
Otterburn Farm, Morebattle, Roxburghshire	NMS: DJ 28	514		28
Ungrouped				
Mey, Caithness	Lost?	–	see this paper	2

Site	Museum	BG 1981 cat no	Remarks/other references	Number on map
Arieland Moss, Kelton, Kirkcudbrightshire	NMS: DJ 41	–	possibly an atypical halberd?	–
Drumcoltran, Kirkgunzeon, Kirkcudbrightshire	4 or 5 lost/in private hands?	–	see Corrie 1928a, 1928b; Coles 1964 for details of dispersal of hoard contents	36
Ditch Park Moss, St Andrews, Orkney	Lost?	–	see this paper	1
Southdean, Roxburghshire	Lost? (formerly at Jedburgh Museum)	–	see this paper	29
No locality (but possibly a Scottish find)	Lost? (lent to the Glasgow 1911 Exhibition by W Moir Bryce)	–	<i>Palace of History</i> , 1911, 882 cat no 31: see discussion of rapier from Ditch Park Moss in this paper.	–
No locality (but possibly a Scottish find)	Lost? (lent to the Glasgow 1911 Exhibition by the Revd Mr Fraser)	–	<i>Palace of History</i> , 1911, 882, cat no 35.	–

Corrigenda

Luce Sands, Wigtownshire	St Albans; Ipswich; – Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle	–	A blade from Low Torrs is listed and mapped by Coles as a Scottish find (1964, 146). However, as the blade is of East Mediterranean type, and two other blades of East Mediterranean/Near Eastern type are also alleged to have been found at Luce Sands, all three are probably collectors' pieces.	–
No locality	NMS: DM 15–16, DM 37–39 (Coles also refers to DM 17)	127, 238, 774, 948, 949	Coles listed a number of items as having 'no provenance' but, in the context, implying a Scottish provenance (1964, 146); however the objects in question form part of the Bell Collection (<i>Proc Soc Antiq Scot</i> , 7 (1866–8), 312) and an Irish provenance is therefore more likely.	–

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