

I.

NOTES ON A VIKING-GRAVE MOUND AT MILLHILL, LAMLASH, ARRAN. BY J. A. BALFOUR, F.S.A. SCOT.

In the year 1896, when the ground was being levelled for the erection of a house at Millhill, Lamlash, Arran, a small gravel mound had to be removed. This mound was situated about 170 feet above high-water mark. Some 3 to 4 feet from the surface of the mound some fragments of iron were obtained; these were happily preserved, and form the evidence of this Viking interment. The fragments found were handed to me for examination a few months ago, under the impression that they were but the parts of an old sword—perhaps, however, of interest. Of interest the fragments certainly are, and consist of two articles, an umbo and part of a sax. The umbo or shield-boss (fig. 1) is of iron, and had measured 205 mm. across the base; about half of the flange is wanting. The diameter of the cup is 105 mm. The height is 100 mm. A noticeable feature is that there is no sign on either side of the flange of rivets to attach the umbo to the shield. It would be a bold assertion to make that these had not been employed, and that the customary method of attachment had in this case been departed from, and we would hesitate so to assert. But equally it is difficult to account for the presence of a bolt-like

object on the under portion of the flange. This bolt, if for convenience we may so term it, its nature and purpose being equally obscure, has no appearance of an object accidentally having become rust-attached to the



Fig. 1. Umbo or Shield-boss of Iron from the Viking-grave Mound at Millhill, Lamdash.

umbo, as its long axis corresponds exactly with the edge of the cup and the outer side of the flange. Unfortunately the opposite side of the flange is wanting, and the help it would have afforded had a similar bolt

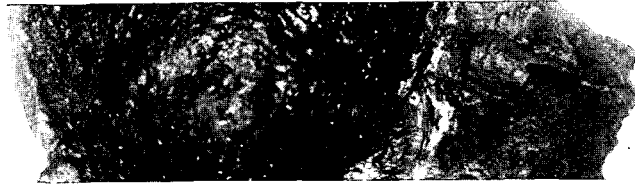


Fig. 2. Part of the under side of the Shield-boss, showing bolt-like attachment on the flange.

been found so attached is not available. I submitted a sketch of the flange (fig. 2) showing the attached bolt to Dr Haakon Schetelig, Bergen, and he replied that he had never seen anything like it: the Norse bosses hitherto found had all been attached to the shields with

rivets driven through. The fact cannot be overlooked that the under side of the flange is almost quite free from any adhering extraneous matter, all that is rust-attached being fragments of the wood of the shield. If the bolt were used for the purpose of fastening the umbo to the shield, then clearly it must have been driven lengthwise into the wood, not through, as in the case of rivets. But we prefer to leave it that the nature and the purpose of this object is an unsolved archæological problem.

The sax, or single-edged sword (fig. 3), is of the longer variety. The existing remains of the blade have a straight length of 490 mm. until the portion is reached which shows that it has been doubled; of the



Fig. 3. Fragments of Single-edged Sword from the Viking Grave-mound at Millhill, Lamlash.

lower portion of the blade only a curved fragment measuring 95 mm. has been recovered. I have assumed that it is the lower portion that is amissing, on account of the fact that the hilt was obtained and no portion to suggest the point of the sax. The most perfect portion of the blade shows a width of 60 mm. The hilt, of which there remains only the upper portion, measures 115 mm.; a sax of this type had usually a grip sufficient for both hands; it is therefore clearly evident that a large portion has been lost, there being only 45 mm. remaining below the upper guard. One part of the hilt shows very clearly the characteristic flat tang or spit of these weapons when denuded of their wooden covering; the remaining portion is coated with a mixture of wooden fragments and sand. A very unusual

feature in these swords is possessed by this weapon through its having had iron guards. The base of the guards measures 25 mm., the existing length of the remaining one is 29 mm., but obviously it has been broken; on the opposite side only the base can now be seen. A portion of the wooden pommel still remains, having on the top a circular hole, probably made by a nail to attach some ornamental portion.

When given to me, a portion of a plate was adhering to the hilt. When this was detached it was found to fit the flange of the umbo; this seems to point to the fact that the shield had first been laid down and the sax upon it, and when the shield had decayed, this portion of the umbo had become so firmly attached to the hilt that it broke off when shield and sax fell apart.

There might have been considerable difference of opinion as to the date of these relics had the sax alone been found, but the umbo puts the question beyond doubt, as it is exactly of the type found in the grave-mounds of Norway of the period of the eighth or early ninth century. Thus these relics proclaim this to be one of the earliest, if not the earliest, of Viking-grave mounds yet discovered in Scotland.

In conclusion, I desire to express my sincere appreciation of the very willing assistance rendered by Dr Haakon Schetelig in giving the benefit of his most valuable opinion regarding the date of the relics and on other points. To Mr Donald Mackelvie, Lamlash, I am indebted for collecting the local details of the find; and to Mr James Crawford, jun., the owner of the relics, for favouring me with them. I may add Mr Crawford has asked me to act as their guardian till they have been exhibited at the Scottish Historical Exhibition in Glasgow next year, and at the close of the exhibition handed over to the National Museum of Antiquities.