

VII.

A HOARD OF BRONZE WEAPONS FROM GAVEL MOSS FARM,
NEAR LOCHWINNOCH, RENFREWSHIRE.

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In 1923, in a well-known article entitled "Scottish Bronze Age Hoards,"¹ Dr Graham Callander referred to a hoard consisting of a bronze dagger and two bronze axe-heads found at Gavel Moss Farm in Renfrewshire. More recently the hoard has been mentioned by the late Sir Lindsay Scott in his article "The Colonisation of Scotland in the Second Millennium B.C."² The hoard is on loan to Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum,³ and is now published, through the kindness of the owner, Mr David Patrick of Milverton Road, Whitecraigs, in the greater detail which its importance deserves.

The history of the hoard since its discovery is of great interest. The dagger and two axe-heads were discovered during ploughing at Gavel Moss Farm⁴ in 1790; Mr Patrick informs me that there is a tradition in his family that "armour" was also found, but was scrapped owing to its poor condition at the time of finding. The three weapons were given by Mr Latta, of Gavel Moss Farm, to his niece, Jean Kirkwood of Kersland, upon her marriage in 1810 to Robert Patrick of Ward. Mr David Patrick, the present owner of the hoard, is great-grandson of Jean Kirkwood. The association of the three bronzes with one another is therefore well established. All three have been carefully looked after during the century and a half since their discovery, and are in an excellent state of preservation.

The dagger (Pl. XI and fig. 1, A), unquestionably the finest found in Scotland, is a formidable weapon. Triangular in shape, with slightly waisted edges, it is $10\frac{1}{16}$ in. long and $2\frac{5}{8}$ in. wide at its broadest part; the trilobate hafting-plate has three rivet-holes, the original diameter of which seems to have been $\frac{11}{32}$ in.⁵ From a rounded base beneath the central rivet-hole spring three narrow ridges which, converging gradually, meet just before the point. The edges, themselves strengthened by slight ridges, show a well-marked ricasso. The dagger weighs $8\frac{1}{2}$ oz. In section (fig. 1, A) it displays a certain asymmetry which contrasts rather curiously with its otherwise skilful modelling.⁶

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, LVII, 127-30 *passim*.² *P.P.S.*, xvii (1951), 37-8 and 75.³ Reg. No. 1-52.⁴ Fig. 1: 6-inch O.S. map, Renfrewshire, XIV N.E.; Nat. Grid Ref. 26/332582.⁵ The two small holes in the hafting-plate have been drilled in modern times to accommodate the dagger in a haft.⁶ Mr P. J. Hartnett, of the National Museum of Ireland, in correspondence suggests that such asymmetry, sometimes found in ribbed daggers and rapiers, may be due to shifting of the valves of the mould, or to bad matching in the first instance. Distortion of clay valves before or during drying is a further possibility.

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The dark stain running across the dagger below the hafting-plate, and apparently ignoring the round base from which spring the central raised

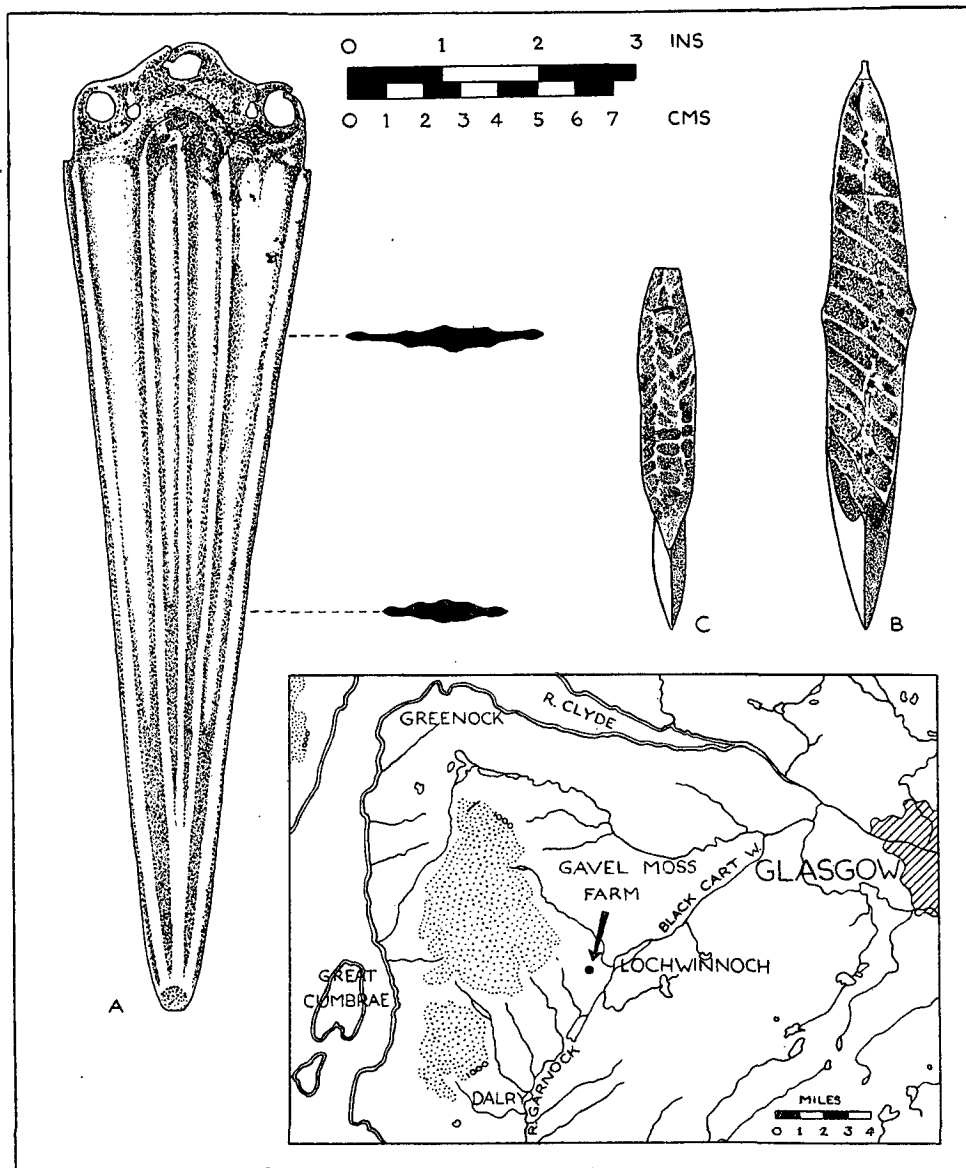


Fig. 1. Bronze dagger and two decorated axe-heads discovered at Gavel Moss Farm, near Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire.

ridges, calls for explanation. I am convinced that the modern haft, in which the dagger was for long kept, covered the dagger in just the area

represented by the stain, so that this area was unaffected by the cleaning of the remainder of the blade which took place from time to time: the same effect, from similar causes, can be seen on the two decorated axe-heads. On close examination, as was pointed out by Mr Hartnett, a darker shade can be discerned beneath one of the rivet-holes; on one face of the dagger this darker shade can be traced with confidence across the blade below one rivet-hole, then closely following the round base from which spring the central raised ridges, and finally across the blade below the rivet-hole on the opposite side. On the opposite face a similar stain is less easy to recognise except, fortunately, where it follows the round base of the central ridges. There is little doubt therefore that these darker stains are traces left by the two halves of the original grip and, further, that this grip left exposed the round base of the central ridges, so that the dagger was round-heeled.

The slight irregularity of the three central ridges gives the illusion that the dagger itself is curved. This illusion of curvature, the size of the dagger and the oblique dark stain caused by the modern haft, thus at first glance suggest that the weapon is a halberd, to be classed with Ó Ríordáin's Type 6.¹ However, as Professor Ó Ríordáin has been kind enough to point out in correspondence, the symmetrical form, the elaborate ribbing and the outline of the haft are all in favour of a dagger.

Perhaps the most unusual feature of the dagger consists of the three central ridges which start from a common rounded base. I am not aware of an exact parallel for this feature. Strengthening ridges, as distinct from a single central rib, appear in the dagger found in a double cist beneath a cairn at Wester Mains of Auchterhouse,² and in that from the cist beneath the cairn at Blackwater Foot, Arran.³ In the latter dagger three ridges are widely spaced across the face of the blade; in the former, the three ridges are so closely set in the centre of the blade as to form to all intents and purposes a single central rib. The Gavel Moss dagger seems to combine the advantages of each design; it, in fact, suggests a deliberate fusion between the ridged type, which found greater favour in the north, and the southern and western type with single central rib. The trilobate hafting-plate is also unusual, but Mr Hartnett informs me that a central-ribbed dagger from Draperstown, Co. Derry, now in the National Museum of Ireland, shows this feature.⁴ From the technical point of view, if one accepts the riveted dagger as a type, it is difficult to suggest any improvement in the design of the Gavel Moss dagger.

The larger of the two decorated axe-heads (Pl. XI and fig. 1, B) is of Mr and Mrs Megaw's Type III.⁵ It has practically straight sides expanding somewhat as they approach the blade, which has the crescentic cutting

¹ *Archæologia*, LXXXVI, "The Halberd in Bronze Age Europe," by S. P. Ó Ríordáin, p. 246.

² *P.S.A.S.*, XXXII, 211, fig. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 120, fig. 41.

⁴ Reg. No. 1880: 28.

⁵ *P.P.S.*, IV (1938), "British Decorated Axes and their Diffusion during the Earlier Part of the Bronze Age," by B. R. S. Megaw and E. M. Hardy, p. 276.

edge and exaggerated tips found in many specimens of this type. The cast stop-ribs and side flanges are slight. Both faces are plain; the sides are decorated with cable ornament.¹ The axe-head is 6 in. long, $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. broad at its widest part and 1 in. in maximum depth; its weight is 1 lb. $5\frac{3}{4}$ oz. The dark mark visible in the photograph across the centre of the axe-head shows where it was mounted in a modern haft.

The smaller decorated axe-head (Pl. XI and fig. 1, C) is also of the Megaw's Type III. It has almost straight sides expanding slightly as they near the blade, which has a crescentic cutting edge but tips not quite so exaggerated as those of the larger axe-head. The cast flanges are well marked, and there are no stop-ribs. The sides have chevron ornament; the faces have chevron decoration, somewhat loosely spaced in vertical lines, above four horizontal rows of punched dots, of which one row is less distinct than the others.² The length of the axe-head is now $3\frac{1}{16}$ in., the greatest breadth $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. and the greatest depth $\frac{3}{8}$ in.; its weight is 7 oz. In modern times the axe-head has had a short section sawn away from the butt, and a large hole drilled through it to facilitate mounting in a wooden haft, the mark of which can be seen on the butt.

Whether the association of dagger with flanged and decorated axe-heads should be considered to link the Gavel Moss hoard strictly with those from Plymstock³ and Arreton Down⁴ is doubtful, though all belong to approximately the same stage in the development of the Early into the Middle Bronze Age. The discrepancy in number of weapons between the Gavel Moss hoard and the southern English hoards seems to imply a difference in purpose. The Gavel Moss hoard bears every indication of being the equipment of a single warrior.⁵ Too much reliance cannot, of course, be placed on the tradition that "armour" was associated with the hoard when it was discovered; nevertheless, even without the dubious support of the "armour," the hoard gives the impression of being personal property, or a gift, rather than a merchant's stock-in-trade. Sir Lindsay Scott⁶ has given reasons for considering this and other hoards of gold, bronze and fine stone as ceremonial gifts designed to promote good trade relations; he has also demonstrated the importance of the Garnock-Black Cart pass for the early trade in copper.⁷ Yet even though the Gavel Moss hoard were

¹ See previous note, fig. 6, where ten axe-heads of Type III with this system of ornament are shown to have been found in Britain.

² See *ibid.*, fig. 6, where five axe-heads of Type III with this system of ornament are shown to have been found in Britain.

³ *Arch. Journ.*, xxvi, 346.

⁴ *Archæologia*, xxxvi, 326.

⁵ Mr Megaw writes concerning the two axe-heads: "The association with a normal-sized axe-head of an axe-head of smaller proportions, 4 inches or less in length (there is not much missing from the butt), recalls the Westbury and other S. English hoards, and I have no doubt that these smaller tools had a special use."

⁶ *Op. cit.*, 17 and 37-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 38. It may be mentioned here that there are flat bronze axes from the lower Clyde area besides that from Kilmacolm given in his first footnote.

ceremonial or votive in origin, that it was ultimately a sepulchral deposit is also possible.

I would like to express my thanks to Mr David Patrick for his ready permission to publish the Gavel Moss hoard; to Mr P. J. Hartnett, Mr B. R. S. Megaw and Professor S. P. Ó Ríordáin for valued opinions generously given, and to my wife for the accompanying map and drawings.

