

3. SOME NOTES ON THE BRONZE CAULDRON RECOVERED FROM LOCH GAMHNA, INVERNESS-SHIRE

ON 1st May 1964 a partially disintegrated bronze cauldron was recovered from Loch Gamhna (or Gaun)⁵ (N.G.R. NH 892068) in the Parish of Duthil and Rothiemurchus, Inverness-shire. The loch lies on part of the estate of Lt.-Col. J. P. Grant of Rothiemurchus, held as a Nature Reserve by agreement with the Nature Conservancy.

The discovery was made by Mr J. F. Forsyth, a Nature Conservancy Reserve Warden, who was at the time patrolling the edge of the loch.

Loch Gamhna is a shallow loch of glacial origin lying some 850 ft. above sea-level. The cauldron was found lying on the surface of very soft peaty silt in about eighteen inches

¹ cf. J. D. Van Der Waals and W. Glasbergen, *Palaeohistoria*, iv (1955), 22-24.

² See list in M. E. Crichton Mitchell, *P.S.A.S.*, LXVIII (1933-4), 187, and distribution maps by Miss R. Crawford in *The Prehistoric Peoples of Scotland*, ed. S. Piggott, 1962, 78, 83.

³ *P.S.A.S.*, xciv (1960-1), 320 f., and *P.S.A.S.*, xcv (1961-2), 36, No. 259. N.G.R. NR 823915.

⁴ My grateful thanks are due to Miss Campbell for guiding me to this carved stone and for the measurements which she recorded.

⁵ Loch Gaun = the Loch of the Smith (?). Was this the site of an early metal worker's 'smithy'? Or is that too far back to be possible?

of water approximately 8 ft. from the eastern shore of the loch. The actual spot was marked immediately. It lies approximately 300 yds. from the outflow of the loch, opposite an extensive hollow in the bank.

The base of the cauldron was resting in a very shallow depression in the peat. Various bronze fragments lay scattered round it, also on the surface of the peat. A small amount of peaty debris and several bronze fragments lay inside the vessel. All of the fragments appeared to belong to the same object.

The find was reported to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

Several days later the site was visited again by Mr Forsyth when approximately twenty more fragments of bronze were recovered, again within a few feet of the place where the cauldron was discovered and again either on or within a few inches of the surface. After a visit to the site by Miss A. S. Henshall of the National Museum of Antiquities an attempt was made to recover further fragments or other objects by sieving the peat through a $\frac{1}{4}$ in. sieve. Various fragments were indeed recovered but none below the surface layer of the peat.

Subsequent visits yielded little or nothing and most of the material from the site appears to have been recovered.

In all, apart from the cauldron base, approximately forty fragments were recovered. All of these, apart from one small fragment, appear to belong to the same object. The base of the cauldron has survived in reasonable condition and consists of a saucer-shaped base plate some 12 in. in diameter, riveted to a second piece which curves outwards to give a maximum diameter of approximately 21 in. The whole cauldron appears to have been made from a number of sheets of bronze riveted together.

The rivets themselves are of interest and are of at least two types. The vessel appears to have been expertly made but has been repaired and patched by a less competent workman. The base plate itself appears to be a replacement.

Many of the smaller fragments are paper thin as the result of long immersion in the acid water of the loch. It was noted also that the peaty debris in direct contact with the bronze was discoloured by a greenish deposit, probably a copper salt.

The fact that the vessel was recovered *on the surface* of the peat, though submerged in water, is in itself noteworthy.

The loch is a very stable one with a seasonal fluctuation in level of less than twelve inches. It is fed by a very small stream which fluctuates little even in times of drought. The common reed (*Phragmites communis* Trinius) has colonised most of the shallow water, forming extensive beds over a considerable area. The very tough roots of this plant tend to stabilise the bottom while the decaying stems add to the continual build-up of peat. Round most of the eastern shore the trunks and branches of dead pines, birches and alders lie scattered about the bottom of the loch, mostly at right angles to the shore. These too add to the stability of the loch floor and to conditions which lead to continued deposition and accumulation rather than erosion.

Thus it was surprising that the bronze cauldron should be found on the surface and not buried under several feet of peat. One is led to the tentative conclusion that the cauldron was possibly found intact, perhaps twenty or thirty years ago, and was thrown into the loch by some person unaware of its significance, since when it has disintegrated.

It is however unlikely that the cauldron would be carried far from the place where it was originally found which still suggests that it belongs to some settlement on or near the loch.

The cauldron may also have been pulled out of the loch by a fisherman and immedi-

ately thrown away. (A bronze cauldron was recovered from Carlingwark Loch in 1866 by fishermen)¹.

While the cauldron may in fact have been cast up from a deeper part of the loch by wave action the factors previously mentioned suggest that this is unlikely.

The possibility of a crannog site in the loch is being investigated but so far there is no positive evidence of such a settlement.

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