

## Excavations at Alt Clut, 1974–5: catalogue of coins, metal objects and Romano-British pottery

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### INTRODUCTION

By a curious trick of the proverbial printer's devil, about ten pages of the original print-out did not appear in the fiche of the Alt Clut excavation report in *Proceedings*, 120 (Alcock & Alcock 1990). The loss of the summary of Cutting F is not too serious, because a full account is presented in the site archive. Much more significant is the omission of J D Bateson's coin report, which includes an important group of Edwardian silver pennies; P V Webster's catalogue of Roman pottery, posing the question of Roman occupation or 'reliquary' deposit (Alcock & Alcock 1990, 115–16); and descriptions of the only Viking finds from the site. Moreover, the inclusion of the following paragraphs is essential to a proper understanding of the character of the Alt Clut finds report.

The unfortunate omission was not noticed until late July 1992. (The fiche had not been seen by the authors before volume 120 was in the hands of Fellows.) When it was discovered, through the vigilance of Dr Bateson, the Editor readily agreed to make good the omission.

Because of the disturbed stratification on Clyde Rock, none of the finds can be dated in relation to a stratified context. In a few cases, such as the cluster of Romano-British sherds in Cutting D, or the Early Historic material, especially in the area of the rampart in Cutting E, the horizontal distribution of finds may be significant. These instances have normally been noticed in the descriptive accounts of the individual cuttings. In general, however, the only clue to date has been typological. This causes no problems with most of the Romano-British pottery. For the early medieval imported pottery, some metal objects, and some of the exotic glass, reasonable age-estimates may be proposed; but the dating of other sherds of glass is distinctly uncertain.

Except for the coins, which have significance in their own right, as well as being vital for the dating of Cutting B, the present catalogue is confined to objects certainly or probably datable to the first millennium AD. It should be stressed that this treatment necessarily ignores large quantities of pottery, often of very high quality, from the masonry castle, as well as some interesting groups of iron objects. All these would fittingly constitute important fields for research.

As in previous reports in this series, the finds are catalogued by material: first the coins; then iron and lead; then pottery. The description of each find begins with a number, running consecutively throughout the catalogue, and used to identify the object in both the excavation synthesis and discussion, and in the detailed excavation report. This is followed by a feature designation, consisting of the site code AC (for Alt Clut), followed by a cutting letter and a 3-

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figure feature number. Occasionally a special find number is also quoted. An asterisk \* denotes objects that are illustrated in the catalogue (Alcock & Alcock 1990, 115).

## THE COINS

J D Bateson

### DISCUSSION

Twenty-three coins are covered by this report. The most important consist of six Edwardian silver pennies and a Tudor threepence along with a late 16th-century billon hardhead of James VI and four 17th-century turners. Eleven modern coins complete the numismatic finds; a plain lead disc, originally thought to be a coin, is also listed.

The earliest coins from the site are the pennies of Edward I, three each from the mints of London and Canterbury. Two were struck in the 1280s and the remainder in the period 1302–10. All show considerable signs of wear. It has been suggested that the four pennies from the 1975 season (nos. 1, 3, 4 & 5) constitute a dispersed hoard (*Discovery Excav Scot* 1975, 19–20; Royal Numis Soc, *Coin Hoards II* (1976), 116, no 455) but the site provenances do not appear to lend themselves to this supposition and it seems preferable to regard all six as stray losses. The Edwardian penny is the most common coin find from medieval sites in Scotland whither it was brought in large quantities. Such groups are not now uncommon from Scottish sites of the period.

The fragmentary piece (no 4) has been described in a recent history of Dumbarton Castle as a 'cut halfpenny' (MacPhail 1979, caption to plate 1) but this is incorrect. The need to cut pennies for small change disappeared in 1279 with the issue of round halfpennies and farthings, and though some later cut coins are known, the piece from Dumbarton Rock is clearly broken, and in fact consists of somewhat over half the original coin. Furthermore, the break occurs along the 60°/240° line on the reverse and not along the arms of the cross as on the true cut halfpennies of earlier times.

The Edwardian penny had a long life in Scotland, being found in hoards deposited up to about 1380, but it is likely that those from Dumbarton Rock were lost somewhat earlier. The two struck in the 1280s may probably be assigned to the early decades of the 14th century, and the four struck 1302–10 may have been lost any time up to 1350. Some degree of activity is thus clearly indicated during the first half of the 14th century.

It may be worth noting the absence of any coin earlier than the Edwardian penny since finds of the long cross and short cross pennies of the 13th century have now turned up on quite a number of Scottish sites. More noteworthy, however, is the virtual absence of the minor Scottish billon coins of the 15th century (the pennies of James I–IV) and of the 16th (especially those of Mary and James VI). There is the English threepence of Elizabeth I issued in the 1560s but this is so worn that it should be regarded as a 17th-century loss. Elizabethan coins, especially shillings and sixpences, made up a significant part of the currency in Scotland during the 17th century and are found in hoards almost to the end of the century. However, there is no way of knowing at present how long after 1600 this threepence may have been deposited.

The sole Scottish billon coin is the hardhead of James VI issued in November 1588. Examples of this issue constitute one of the most common of late 16th-century coins found on Scottish sites. The present specimen is in very poor condition and seems well worn, so that this too seems best regarded as a loss after 1600.

The issue of billon coins had ceased in Scotland by 1600, and the minor issues of the 17th century consist of copper twopences or turners. There were three major issues of these in the

1630s, the 1640s and from 1663. Finds of all three issues are ubiquitous and plentiful. However, the four listed, found during the 1974 season, all belong to the 'Earl of Stirling' issue of 1632–9. The lack of much wear on them, combined with the replacement of such small light (13 grains) turners with the more normal heavy (44.2 grains) larger turners of 1642 onwards, would appear to indicate loss in the latter part of the decade 1632–42.

The remaining eleven coins are modern British of the late 19th and 20th centuries. They are no doubt the casual losses of the castle-garrison, or of visitors. However, it is odd that none of the very common Georgian copper, found on most sites, was recovered. There is thus no numismatic representation of 18th and early 19th-century activity on the Rock.

#### CATALOGUE

The coins are listed chronologically:

##### **Edward I** silver pennies

###### London

- 1 AC/D 603, SF 13: class III d (1280–1) worn and bent 1.03 gm (15.9 gr) 270°.
- 2 AC/D 006: class X c–f crown 3 (1302–10) fairly worn 1.28 gm (19.8 gr) 260°.
- 3 AC/E 303A, SF E 3: class X c–f crown 3? (1302–10) worn 1.20 gm (18.5 gr) 120°.

###### Canterbury

- 4 AC/F 006, SF F 2: class IV d (1282–9) worn and fragmentary 0.59 gm (9.1 gr) 60°.
- 5 AC/D 402, SF D 1: class X b (1302–10) worn 1.18 gm (18.2 gr) 90°.
- 6 AC/D 006: class X c–f crown 2? (1302–10) worn, corroded and ? clipped. 1.12 gm (17.3 gr) 220°.

##### **Elizabeth I** second issue (1561–82)

- 7 AC/D 405, SF D 14: silver threepence 156- initial marks illegible very worn and crumpled 0.82 gm (12.7 gr).

##### **James VI**

- 8 AC/B 008: billon hardhead 1588 (November) worn, chipped, broken (eight pieces) and repaired (Stewart 200).

##### **Charles I** copper 'Stirling' turners 1632–9 (Stewart 237).

- 9 AC/B 004: slightly worn, chipped and corroded 0.62 gm (9.6 gr) 180° (Stevenson 29).
- 10 AC/A 001: slightly worn and corroded 0.62 gm (9.3 gr) 0° (Stevenson 39).
- 11 AC/B 001: corroded 0.55 gm (8.5 gr) 180°.
- 12 AC/B 005: fairly worn and corroded.

#### **Modern**

##### **Victoria**

- 13 AC/D 204, SF D 15 silver threepence 1868.
- 14 AC/D 403, SF D 4 penny 1872.
- 15 AC/D 004 penny 1897.

##### **Edward VII**

- 16 AC/D 403, SF 5 halfpenny 1903.

##### **George V**

- 17 AC/F shilling 1927.
- 18 AC/D 001 penny 1936.

##### **George VI**

- 19 AC/A 001 penny 1938.
- 20 AC/A 001 brass threepence 1942.
- 21 AC/B 001 similar.
- 22 AC/D 001 two shillings 1948.
- 23 AC/D 202, SF 3 sixpence 1948.

**Miscellaneous**

23X AC/D203, SF12.

plain lead disc 20 mm diameter, unknown purpose, age indeterminate.

## METAL OBJECTS

## IRON

24\* AC/E 204, SF E 6. Tanged knife blade. Characterized by its heavily-whetted, thick-backed blade, and stubby tang; such knives are common on post-Roman, pre-Viking sites in Britain and Ireland as well as on the Continent.

25 AC/E 408, SF E 18. Blade, probably from a similar tanged knife, but too corroded to illustrate.

26\* AC/E 204, SF E 4. Pommel bar from a sword of Viking type. The bar is a pointed oval in plan; the lower surface curves slightly upwards, whereas the upper surface is largely flat, but tapers slightly downwards towards either end. The slot which accommodates the tang between the hand-grip and the pommel proper is skew to the long axis of the bar and off-centre with respect to the short axis; it splays irregularly towards the lower surface of the bar.

The rim of the pommel bar is decorated somewhat irregularly with raised ribs, in bundles of three, each separated by a wider groove. On characteristic Viking swords, both the wider grooves and the narrow ones on the ribs would have been inlaid with silver and/or copper wires, perhaps alternating (for accessible examples, see Graham-Campbell 1980, 67–71, especially catalogue no 244). There are, however, no traces of such inlay *in situ*, nor as corrosion products; nor have analyses kindly conducted by Dr E A Slater revealed any metal other than iron. There is no doubt that in this case the sole decoration consisted of the ribs in relief.

In 1976 (before Dr Slater's results became available), Aidan Walsh kindly informed me that he believed 'the pommel to be Viking and to be Petersen type I', which on Petersen's chronology, 'occurs from 850–950 AD but is very common between 850–900'. Graham-Campbell, however, attributes a hoard with a Petersen I sword to the Middle Viking period, which he dates 'late 9th to the second half of the 10th century' (Graham-Campbell 1980, 69 for hoard; 7 for chronology).

Given certain crudities in the present example – the bodged forging of the tang-slot, the lack of silver or copper inlay, irregularities in the spacing of the decorative ribs – it may be asked whether it did indeed come from an actual Viking-manufactured sword, or whether it is an attempt at a copy, forged perhaps in Ireland, or perhaps by a British craftsman at Clyde Rock itself.

## LEAD

27\* AC/E 008, SF E 1. Lead weight, with glass inlay. 12.1 gm. The setting of ornamental fragments in lead weights is characteristically Viking (Graham-Campbell 1980, 88–9, nos 307–8); another example from Scotland, from Talnotrie, Kirkcudbright, was with coins of the late 9th century (Maxwell 1913).

Normally the ornaments are of bronze, often gilt or enamelled; but in this instance, a fragment has been broken off a bangle of blue glass decorated with white spots and blue and white cabling. Judith Carroll has demonstrated, in an undergraduate dissertation for University College Dublin, that this is a distinctively Irish type, with only one other example known from Scotland, and one from England. She suggests a date in the 8th–10th centuries.

28\* AC/D 603. Simple weight of truncated conical shape. 13.9 gm. There is no evidence for the date of this, though it may possibly be of the Viking age.

## ROMANO-BRITISH POTTERY

Peter V Webster

**Decorated samian**

29 AC/A 020 Form 37, Central Gaulish. The fabric is slightly micaceous and probably derived from Lezoux. Surfaces are abraded with consequent damage to the decoration. The ovolo would appear

to have had a straight tongue with rosette terminal and bead row below. Probably Hadrianic-Antonine.

- 30 AC/D 206C Form 29, South Gaulish. A fragment of the upper zone showing an abraded portion of figured panel. The front paws of an animal (? dog) running to the right are just visible. c AD 70–85.
- 31 AC/D 999 Form 37, Central Gaulish. Fabric and condition as no.1 above. A small portion of panel decoration bordered with what appear to be wavy lines survives. Impinging on one border is a fragment of what may be drapery. Hadrianic-Antonine?

#### Plain samian

- 32 AC/D 208C Bowl fragment, Central Gaulish. A variety of bowl forms are possible, but forms 31 or 31R seem most likely. Mid to late 2nd century.
- 33 AC/D 402 Dish fragment, Central Gaulish. The slipped surface is apparently flat, with part of a circle inscribed before slipping just visible. Probably form 18/31. Hadrianic or early Antonine.

#### Colour-coated ware

- 34 AC/D 606 Bowl sherd in orange micaceous fabric with a grey core and orange-red colour coat. The most likely source is the Oxford region which produced and exported this type of fabric c AD 240–400.
- 35 AC/D 205B Handle in very pale buff/off-white fabric with a dark grey-brown colour coat. The most likely source is the Nene Valley. Probably a flagon. Howe, Perrin & Mackreth illustrate a variety of flagons and handled vessels (1980, fig. 22, 63–8), all apparently of fourth-century date.

#### Other Roman pottery

- 36 AC/D 206B Flanged bowl in pink-buff fabric. Although this type of flange just below the rim is possible at other periods, it is most likely to occur in the later Roman period in imitation of Black-burnished and other late bowl forms. Probably later third or fourth century.

The collection is very small (only eight sherds), and comment upon it must, therefore, be extremely tentative. The chronological spread is particularly wide and the collection is almost exclusively tableware. The earliest piece (no 30) is of a type which went out of production in the early 80s AD and our piece is unlikely, therefore, to have been deposited much later than c AD 85–90. Other samian fragments (nos 29, 31–3) could well be contemporary with second-century Roman activity in Scotland. The remaining pieces, however, should all date from a period after Roman withdrawal, and they extend the selling of Romanized goods in the area into the mid-third century at the very least, and probably into the late third or fourth centuries. The classes of pottery recovered are equally unexpected. With a single exception (no 36) all are fineware, and should probably be classed as tableware. This pattern, if it truly reflects the pottery of the settlement from which it derives (and we must repeat that the available sample is very small), should imply a site of high social status.

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