

IV.

NOTICE OF A BRONZE SWORD, WITH HANDLE-PLATES OF HORN,
FOUND AT AIRD, IN THE ISLAND OF LEWIS. BY JOSEPH ANDER-
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The Bronze Sword which is the subject of this notice was found in August last by a crofter named Murdoch Maciver in digging on his croft at Aird, South Dell, in the parish of Barvas, Island of Lewis. It was turned up at a depth of nine feet in peat, and though nothing else was observed at the time of the first discovery, a portion of a second sword was subsequently found by the same crofter when digging in the same place in the month of February. He then examined all the soil round about the spot in which the two swords were found, but without result. As near as he could judge, the second sword was found within a foot or so of the spot where the first one was discovered. Both swords were recovered by the Queen's Remembrancer on behalf of the Crown, and are now in the National Museum.

The sword (fig. 1), which is almost entire, is of the usual leaf-shaped form, measuring 24 inches in length, 2 inches broad at the widest part of the blade at about two-thirds of its length, and $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches at the narrowest part at about one-third of its length from the hilt-end. A very small portion of the extremity of the point end has been broken off—scarcely amounting to a quarter of an inch. The blade swells slightly in the middle, but without any appearance of a mid-rib, and the edges have been drawn down with the hammer and planished smooth in the usual way. Between the slight swelling of the central portion of the blade and the hammered marginal strip which forms the edge on either side, there is a portion slightly depressed which forms a kind of shallow fluting following the outlines of the blade and becoming more pronounced towards the hilt. The usual notches made by the removal of the hammered strip which forms the edge extend for about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch beyond the termination of the hilt. The hilt-plate measures 4 inches in length from the projecting corners of the wings to those of the fish-tail like extremity, and is pierced by two rivet-holes in

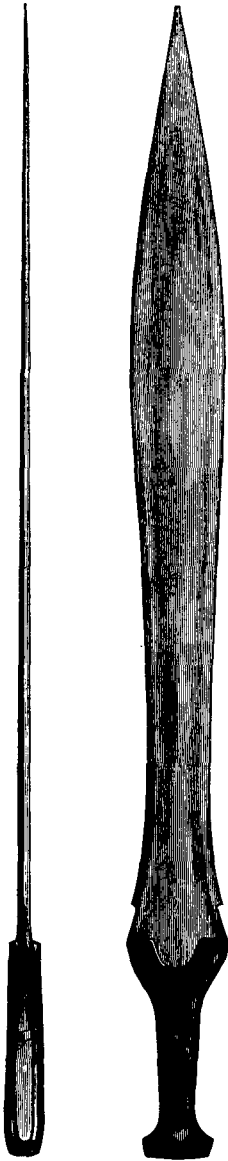


Fig. 1. Bronze Sword, with Handle-plates of Horn, found at Aind, Barvas, Lewis. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

the hilt and two in the wings. All the rivets are gone except one, and the hilt itself is broken across the middle. Unfortunately the spade seems to have struck the hilt just about the middle of its length, and not only damaged the plates of horn which were riveted on to the sides of the grip, but fractured the bronze hilt-plate itself midway between the two rivet-holes, where there seems to have been originally a flaw in the metal. The side mountings of the grip are of ox-horn, and cut out of the horn somewhat in the form of the legs of a tuning-fork, so that the two side-plates are held together by a solid portion of the horn projecting beyond the butt-end of the hilt, while they also fit closely to the faces of the hilt-plate, and are securely held in position by the rivets. In drying, the horn has shrunk slightly, but the lower parts of the side-plates, where they come on to the base of the blade, have the usual expansion and luration, the latter measuring 1 inch across the chord and half an inch in depth.

The second sword, found in the same place, is merely a fragment, $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches in length, of the hilt-end of a much narrower sword—also broken across the middle of the hilt—which shows remains of a rivet-hole at the fracture, and two in the wings. The blade, so far as it is shown, scarcely exceeds an inch in width, with edges almost straight, and an almost evenly convex section, the thickness in the middle being fully three-sixteenths of an inch.

Bronze swords, with the handle-plates of bone or horn, still attached by the rivets to the hilt-plate, are of exceptional rarity. Not more than three instances are hitherto on record in the British Isles, and it is somewhat singular that all three are from Ireland. Yet among nearly three hundred examples of bronze swords preserved in the museum of the Royal Irish Academy, there is no instance of the handle-plates remaining. Of the three that are on record, one is a rapier-shaped sword, $22\frac{5}{8}$ inches in length, and $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch broad at the base, which was found in a bog at Galbally, County Tyrone, and has been described and figured in the *Proceedings of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Society of Ireland* (4th series, vol. ii. p. 197) by Mr Wakeman, and also in *Ancient Bronze Implements of Great Britain* (p. 252) by Sir John Evans, in whose collection the sword now is. The blade has a broad, heavy, rounded midrib, and the haft, which is in reality a dark-coloured ox-horn, although it was at first described as whalebone, has been attached to the blade by four rivets arranged in a semicircle around the base of the blade. As the rivet-holes are now all empty, Sir John Evans has suggested that pins of hard wood may have been used in this case instead of rivets of bronze. The other two cases in which the handle-plates have survived are on leaf-shaped swords.¹ The first is a fine sword, $24\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, with a midrib of angular section running along the centre of the blade, like the sword in this museum found in the Tay near Mugdrum Island. It has two rivets in the grip of the hilt-plate and three in each of the wings, which are longer and more convex than usual. The side-plates, of which considerable portions are broken off on both sides, are of bone, which has been pronounced by Professor Owen to be mammalian, and probably cetacean. This sword was found in Listletrim Bog, Muckno, County Monaghan, and was originally in the collection of Mr Robert Day. The other case is that of a shorter leaf-shaped sword, 20 inches in length, found in draining a meadow in 1871, at Mullylagan, County Armagh, which was in the collection of Mr Knight Young, of Mona-

¹ *Journal of the Royal Archaeological and Historical Association of Ireland*, 3rd series, vol. i. p. 23; 2nd series, vol. vi. p. 72; and *Ancient Bronze Implements of Great Britain*, pp. 294, 295.

ghan.¹ In the shape of the blade, it is more like the second of the swords found at Aird, the breadth of the blade being about $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch. The side-plates of the hilt were supposed to be of deer-horn, but they are so much mutilated that it is difficult to trace the outlines of their shape, although Sir John Evans notices that at the wings of the hilt-plate the bone projects beyond the metal. A bronze sword, found near Kallundborg, in Denmark, had the side-plates of the grip formed of wood.
