

VII.

NOTE ON A LATE CELTIC ARMLET OF BRONZE NOW PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL MUSEUM; WITH NOTES ON THE IDENTIFICATION OF TWO OTHER LATE CELTIC ARMLETS IN THE MUSEUM, AND ON A MASSIVE BRONZE ARMLET RECENTLY FOUND IN SUTHERLANDSHIRE. BY JOSEPH ANDERSON, LL.D., ASSISTANT SECRETARY AND KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

The presentation to the Museum by the daughters of the late General Sir John Macdonald of a Late Celtic armlet, in the form of a serpent spirally twisted, which was found in Rannoch before 1833, helps to clear up the history of two other armlets of the more massive form (with expanded ends containing sockets for enamel plaques), the localities of which had been lost and conjecturally restored, but erroneously, so far as at least one of them is concerned.

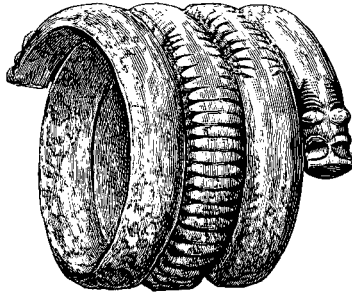


Fig. 1. Late Celtic Armlet found at Bunrannoch. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

The armlet now presented (fig. 1) is formed of a band or bar of bronze of a uniform width of about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, and fully $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in thickness in the middle, bent into the form of a cylindrical spiral of $3\frac{1}{2}$ turns, the exterior surface of the band being boldly rounded and the interior flattened. The diameter of the circular opening of the armlet is $2\frac{7}{16}$ inches, and the transverse internal measurement across all the coils is $2\frac{5}{16}$ inches. The whole length of the band or bar of bronze of which

it is made, if straightened out, is $31\frac{3}{4}$ inches. The middle part for a length of $10\frac{1}{4}$ inches (or $5\frac{1}{8}$ on either side of the centre) is ribbed transversely on the convex exterior of the bar, and the conventionalised heads at either end, which are about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in length, are boldly modelled, with very prominent eyes. The weight of the armlet is exactly 1 lb. 2 ozs. avoirdupois. It is similar in form and design to the armlets found at Pitalpin near Dundee (fig 2), and at Grange of Conan, near Arbroath, which are now in the Museum. These, and two

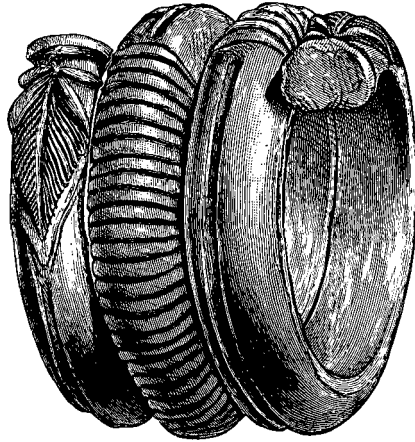


Fig. 2. Late Celtic Armlet found at Pitalpin. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

others—all that are known of this particular snake-like variety of bronze armlet—have been described and figured by Dr John Alexander Smith in a paper on Late Celtic Bronze Armlets.¹

In a letter accompanying the presentation, and dated Barnfield, Hill, Southampton, June 18th, 1903, Miss E. Macdonald gives the following particulars of the discovery of the armlet:—"As far as I know, this bracelet was found in Rannoch, at the foot of Schiehallion, along with a similar one and some other smaller articles, in a vessel of some kind

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. xv. p. 344 ; see also *Scotland in Pagan Times, The Iron Age*, p. 156.

which was broken to pieces at the time of the finding. The bracelet was subsequently given to Colonel John Macdonald of Dalchosnie, afterwards General Sir John Macdonald. The date of finding must have been somewhere between 1820 and 1830. At that time the property on which the find occurred belonged to a Stewart, Sir John's first cousin."

The find of two Late Celtic armlets at Bunrannoch before 1833 is referred to by Dr John Alexander Smith in his description of the armlets of this character in the Museum, printed in the *Proceedings*, vol. xv. p. 337, where an armlet of the massive kind is described and figured as the specimen presumably found with this one, and another of the same kind is described and figured which was presumed to be this one.

There can now be little doubt, however, that one of the two armlets thus described by Dr Smith did not come from Rannoch, but from Sticheil in Roxburghshire. Since the time when he wrote, the publication by the Scottish History Society of Bishop Pococke's *Tours in Scotland*, edited by Mr D. W. Kemp, has thrown further light on the matter. It shows, at p. 331, a drawing of an armlet of this kind made by Pococke in 1760, when the armlet was in the possession of Sir Robert Pringle at Sticheil House. The drawing is somewhat crude, but from certain characteristics which it gives, and which are possessed by none of the armlets known to be in existence except the one in question, there can be no doubt of its identity. Pococke's description of it as being much worn towards the broad part at one end, and only a little at the corresponding part on the same side towards the other expansion, also corresponds with these special features of the armlet itself. He mentions that half of another armlet also found with it is worn on the same sides. This apparently means that two of these armlets were found together, and he adds that they were found "three feet under ground in digging a well," at Sticheil. The half armlet is not now known to exist. The Sticheil armlet (fig. 3) measures $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in greatest diameter, 2 inches in the width of the band across the middle, and $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches in the width of each of the expanded extremities, the oval perforations in the expansions measuring $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in the longest diameter. The weight of the armlet

is $21\frac{1}{4}$ ounces, and its rounded extremities appear to have been partially pared away.

The other armlet, here shown as fig 4, and represented by Dr Smith as fig. 17 (*Proceedings*, vol. xv. p. 337), is undoubtedly the armlet found in Rannoch, along with the one here shown as fig. 1, and now presented by the daughters of General Sir John Macdonald. It is entered in the catalogue of the Museum printed in 1849 as an "Antique Bronze Armilla, in form of a snake, found in the district of Bunrannoch, Perthshire, on the northern declivity of Schiehallion." Although only one armlet from Bunrannoch is entered in the catalogue of the Museum of 1849, and nothing is said of its having been one of the two which were found together, it is fortunate that this fact can be established from the Society's records, for the two

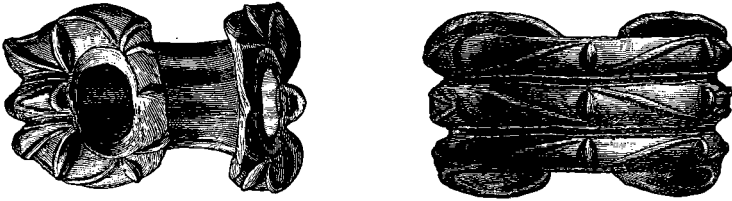


Fig. 3. Late Celtic Armlet found at Stichel. ($\frac{1}{3}$.)

had been exhibited together at the meeting of the Society held on April 22nd, 1833, as appears from the following entry in the minutes of that date: "There were also exhibited two bronze bracelets or armlets in the form of serpents, the one weighing 1 lb. 2 oz., the other 1 lb. $14\frac{1}{2}$ oz. avoirdupois. These armlets were found in the district of Bunrannoch, Perthshire, on the northern declivity of the mountain Schiehallion, and were exhibited to the Society, and temporarily deposited in the Museum, by Mr Alexander Stewart, Edinburgh."

The weight of the armlet now presented to the Museum being exactly 1 lb. 2 oz. avoirdupois, there can be no doubt of its identity with one of the armlets exhibited in 1833 and temporarily deposited in the Museum by Mr Alexander Stewart. In all probability this armlet was subsequently withdrawn and given to Sir John Macdonald, while the larger

armlet remained in the Museum, as testified by the entry in the catalogue of 1849. It is there described as being "in form of a snake," and though not so obviously serpentiform, it differs from the majority of the massive armlets of its class in presenting the appearance of a snake-like band, folded in opposite directions against the middle part of the body. There is indeed a discrepancy in the weight, which is given in the minute-book as 1 lb. 14½ oz. avoirdupois, whereas the armlet actually weighs 1 lb. 15¾ oz. avoirdupois. However this may be accounted for,

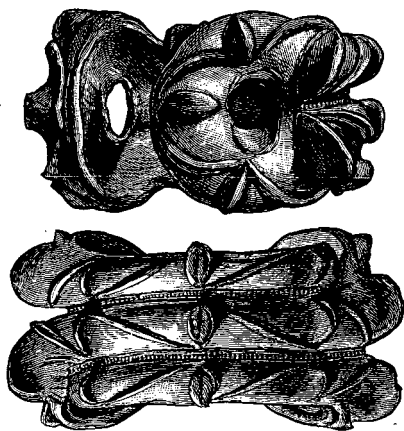


Fig. 4. Late Celtic Armlet found at Bunnanoch. (½.)

there is no question that in 1849 there was one of the Rannoch armlets in the Museum, which then possessed only two armlets of this class. They are described by Dr Daniel Wilson in the first edition of his *Pre-historic Annals of Scotland* (1851), p. 448, as being then in the Museum, without definite localities, but as one of them is figured, it is recognisable as the one which Dr Smith also figured as from Bunnanoch. Its weight is given by Dr Daniel Wilson as fully two pounds avoirdupois. The other, which is described as slightly smaller, was believed to have been dug up in Argyllshire, on what evidence Dr Wilson does not say, but as its dimensions, as given by him, correspond with the measurement of the armlet figured by Bishop Pococke and seen by him at Stinchell

in 1760, there can be no doubt that the two armlets in the Museum 1849-51 must have been these two, and that the larger came from Rannoch and the smaller from Stitchell.

There is in the Museum another Late Celtic ornament of bronze from Stitchell, which was presented in 1782 by Sir James Pringle of Stitchell, the son and successor of Sir Robert Pringle, who entertained Bishop Pococke in 1760. It is a massive collar of cast bronze formed in two moieties, jointed in the middle so as to open on a hinge in the back, and fasten in front by a pin and socket. The width of the slightly oval



Fig. 5. Late Celtic jointed Collar found at Stitchell. ($\frac{1}{4}$.)

opening is 6 inches one way and 5 inches the other, the breadth of the flattened ring being $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in the middle of the front. In the minute-book of the Society in which the presentation is entered, at June 25th, 1782, it is described as "an ancient Roman cestus of brass, discovered in the year 1747, when digging for a well, about 7 feet below the surface at the east end of the village of Stitchell." It is accordingly entered in the catalogue of the Museum of 1849 in the "Roman" section, while the other two armlets are entered under the "Bronze Period." The characteristics of the form and ornamentation of the

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collar, however, leave no doubt that it belongs to the Late Celtic; and not to the Roman group of relics. The evidence does not suffice to show whether this well which was being dug at the east end of the village of Sticheil in 1747, was the same well out of which the armlet seen by Bishop Pococke in 1760 came. But the probabilities appear to be against the view that there were two finds from two different wells, and perhaps Pococke's reference to the half of another armlet may be explained by the fact that this collar is jointed in the middle, and one-half of it may have been shown to Pococke.

MASSIVE BRONZE ARMLET FROM ROGART IN SUTHERLAND.

In the present connection there is an opportunity of putting on record the recent discovery of another of the massive bronze armlets of the Late Celtic period at Rogart in Sutherland (fig. 6), which has been communicated to me by Rev. Dr J. Joass, Golspie. It was found in April 1901 in ploughing a field on the croft of Achavrail, in the parish of Rogart. The crofter noticed it on the coulter of the plough, and threw it aside at first, but subsequently bethought him that it might have some interest for the Sutherland Museum at Dunrobin Castle, and brought it to Dr Joass "as some sort of old curtain-ring." It is of the transition variety, which assumes a conventional serpentine form, the band being folded in opposite directions against the middle of the body, and terminating abruptly at each side a little short of the commencement of the swelling of the bend to form the loop round the opening in the centre of each rounded end of the penannular armlet. It thus resembles the similar armlet from Bunnanoch, and also the one from Seafeld, near Kinghorn, and makes the third of this particular variety found in Scotland. The ornamentation is of the same general character of design and execution which is peculiar to this class of bronze armlets: As in the majority of cases, the enamel plaques which presumably filled the circular perforations have perished. The weight of the armlet is $28\frac{1}{2}$ oz. avoirdupois.

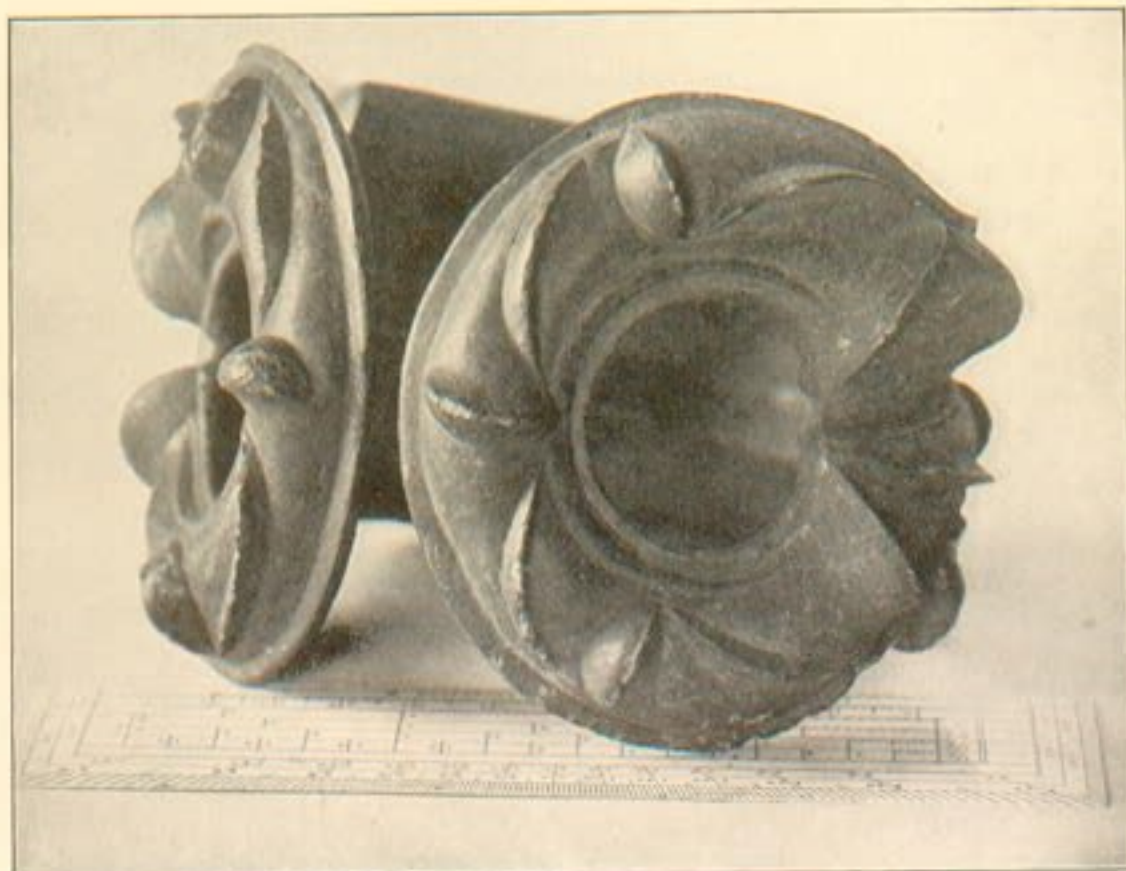


Fig. 6. Bronze Armlet found near Rogart, Sutherland. (8.) (From a photograph by A. M. Dixon, Golspie.)