

## II.

NOTICES (1) OF A BRONZE DAGGER, WITH ITS HANDLE OF HORN, RECENTLY FOUND IN THE ISLAND OF ROUSAY, AND (2) OF AN INSCRIPTION IN TREE-RUNES, RECENTLY DISCOVERED ON A STONE IN THE STONE CIRCLE OF STENNIS, ORKNEY. BY JAMES W. CURSITER, F.S.A. SCOT., KIRKWALL.

The relic which is the subject of this paper was acquired by me last November from Mr Frederick Inkster, tenant of the farm of Innister in the island of Rousay, Orkney, who informed me that it was found by him during peat-cutting, in the spring of 1905, in Flander's Moss in the Wasbister district of that island, at a place where peats had repeatedly been cut on former occasions. It is deeply to be regretted that no search for further portions of the implement was made at the time of its discovery, as from its fine state of preservation there is every reason to believe that the pommel of the handle might have been found, and considerable light shed upon a subject on which at the best we have comparatively little real knowledge. Consequently I find myself compelled in this notice to confine my remarks to a descriptive account of the implement.

It consists, in its present condition, of a thin flat blade of bronze (fig. 1) about 6 inches in length inserted into a horn haft.

It is attached to the haft by three bronze rivets, which are disposed in a triangular form through the butt of the blade where it is broadest, measuring  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches across. From this broadest portion the blade tapers regularly in a slightly hollow-curved line on both edges to a sharp point 5 inches from the centres of the nearest two rivets; the other rivet being in the centre of the base,  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches from the point. The blade is about  $\frac{1}{8}$  of an inch thick, and sharpened on both faces for about  $\frac{1}{8}$  of an inch from the edge. The rivets, which are complete, are similar on both faces, and have circular slightly dome-shaped heads  $\frac{3}{8}$  of an inch in diameter projecting very slightly above the horn.

The haft, which is in one piece, of ox horn, and is shaped in the form of the letter Y, measures  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches in length,  $2\frac{3}{8}$  inches in breadth, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in thickness. From its broadest front portion it tapers in a

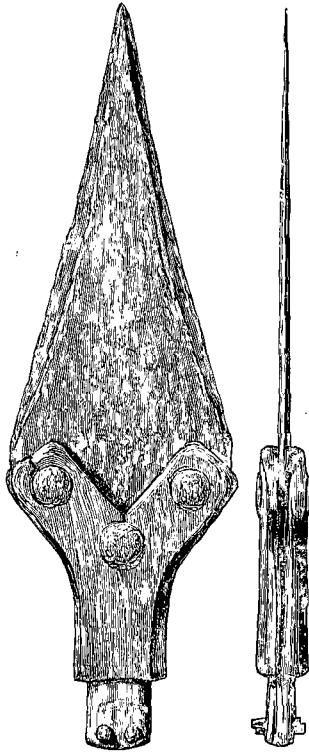


Fig. 1. Bronze Dagger with Haft of Horn. ( $\frac{1}{2}$ .)

curve to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch from its rear extremity, where there is a square-cut shoulder of about  $\frac{1}{8}$  of an inch all round, leaving a projecting flat tang,  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch thick and  $\frac{5}{8}$  of an inch broad, for insertion in a pommel or shaft, to which it was attached by two retaining-pins of wood  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in length, and which are still preserved in small holes

transversely bored through its base about  $\frac{1}{8}$  of an inch from its extremity. The front centre of the haft has a deep V-shaped notch on each face, and is cut laterally to receive the butt of the blade, which is thus secured in a chevron of horn  $\frac{3}{8}$  of an inch broad, having a rivet on each extremity and one at the junction of the arms.

Looking into the literature of the subject for a similar blade and the purpose it might have served, the nearest approach to it I can find in Scotland is the fifth of the thin flat blades enumerated by Dr Anderson in his "Notes on a large Sepulchral Cairn at Collessie" in vol. xii. of the *Proceedings* (fig. 14 and page 456), which, though much more imperfect, bears a resemblance to this specimen. In Sir John Evans's *Bronze Implements of Great Britain* the blade shown in fig. 280, though much smaller and having only 2 rivets, more nearly resembles the shape of the present blade. I submitted a photograph of the implement to Sir John, who replied as follows: "The bronze spear-head with the horn haft is a wonderful specimen, and I hope that you will allow the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland to publish it. It is a remarkable variety of the Arreton Down type, and, as with them, it is hard to say with certainty whether it is a spear-head or a dagger. The hafting is singularly like that of some bronze daggers such as my fig. 298." Dr Anderson's notes on page 457 of the article above mentioned, as well as Sir John's remarks upon this class of implement, designate them knife-daggers; the term distinguishing them from the dagger-blade, which is characterised by the presence of a thickened midrib. This specimen, although agreeing so far as the blade is concerned, presents features, owing to the well-preserved state of its haft, which suggest to my mind the idea of its having been a spear-head rather than a dagger-blade. The length of the tang of the horn haft to my mind precludes the idea of its having been finished by the usual bone pommel characteristic of the knife-daggers recorded by Sir John Evans, as such a finish in this case would not admit of sufficient length for a hand-grip. At the same time it must be admitted, from the evidence afforded by the length of the wooden retaining-pins, that the handle (of whatever length) must

have been of an oval section at its junction with the intermediate horn haft, which is not in accord with present-day ideas of a spear-shaft. We must, however, remember that in early days light spears or javelins were frequently used for throwing, both in hunting and in fighting—a use to which, I think, the present specimen might well have been applied.

Since writing the foregoing I have been informed that the implement was not observed at the time of cutting the peats, but only discovered during the turning of them over in the drying process, so that the exact locality of its derivation could not be traced.

I have the pleasure of sending herewith, for presentation to the Museum, a plaster cast of the runic inscription recently discovered in the Brodgar circle of standing-stones, Stennis.

Last year the late Colonel J. W. Balfour of Balfour handed over the custody of the groups of standing-stones known as the Brodgar and Stenness Circles to H.M. Commissioners of Works, under the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, following upon which the Hon. Sir Schomberg K. M'Donnell, Secretary to the Board, accompanied by Mr Oldrieve, F.S.A. Scot., Chief Architect for Scotland, paid a visit of inspection to the principal ancient monuments in the county and arranged for certain preservative and remedial measures to be at once taken in regard to the standing-stones. These were carried out later in the year under the superintendence of Mr Myers, A.R.I.B.A., and consisted, among other operations, of searching for and pre-serving fragments, stumps, and socket-holes of former members of the great circle which have vanished.

In front of one of the larger broken stones, now standing about 3 feet high (and the most northerly stone in the circle), there was unearthed part of the upper portion of the stone, which had fallen inwards. It was upon this newly discovered part, which measures 3 feet in length and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet in breadth, that, after its being for some time exposed to the rain and wind, Mr John Omond, of Savedale, happened to discover the inscription and communicated his information to me. Shortly thereafter

I visited the place in company with Mr Oldrieve and confirmed the discovery, and returned later to make the mould from which the cast herewith presented was produced.

The characters (fig. 2), which are five in number, are arranged in a single line, clearly cut, and well preserved. There is also a well-defined cross beneath. The inscription is evidently complete. The first and

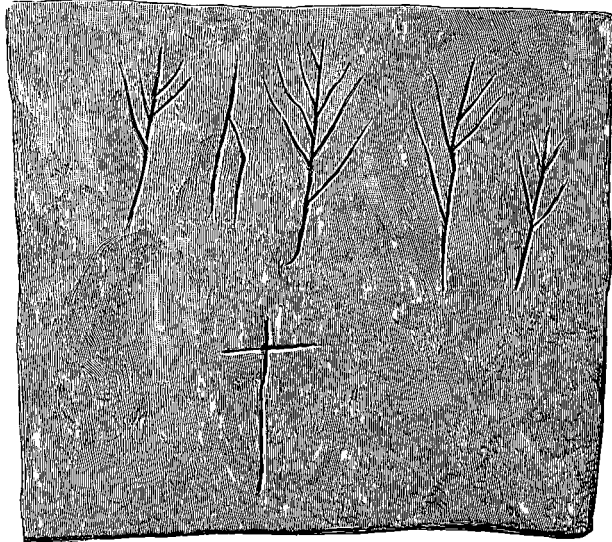


Fig. 2. Inscription in Tree-Runes.

the last three of the characters are of the tree-rune type, the second resembling an ordinary runic letter. Read according to the usual method they do not seem to me to be capable of any reasonable interpretation, but reading from left to right they may be fairly interpreted A.?. TH. A. A, which has very much the appearance of a proper name. I can only hope that some one more skilled in the deciphering of such obscure inscriptions may be able to throw more light on it.