

## IV.

## BRONZE AGE GOLD ORNAMENTS FOUND IN ARRAN AND WIGTOWNSHIRE, WITH SUGGESTIONS AS TO THEIR METHOD OF USE.

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About 25th February 1921, Mr Finlay Kerr, while searching for building-stones for a new house at his mother's farm of Whitefarland, Kilmory Parish, on the north-west coast of Arran, dug up some slabs

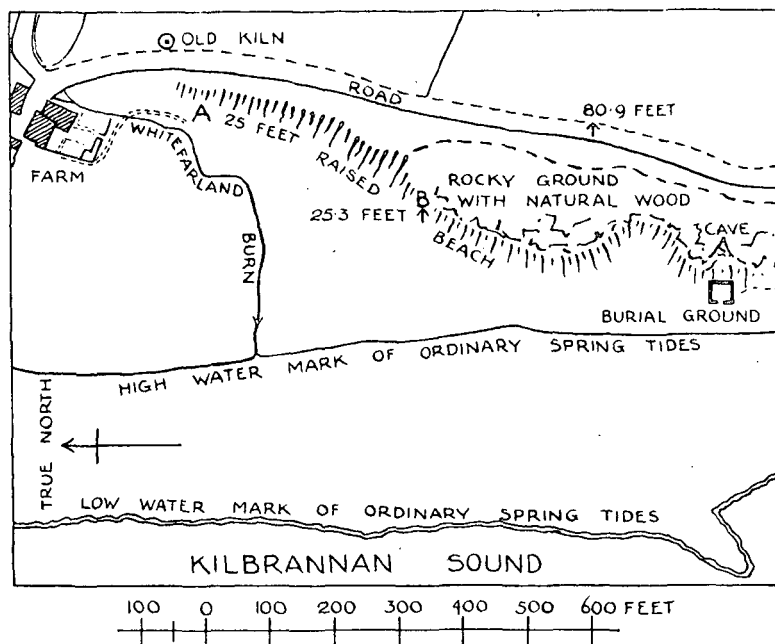


Fig. 1. Map showing Sites of Finds.

of the native schistose rock which were lying roughly and deeply set together in the flat stretch of the 25-foot raised beach.

Some 2 feet under the surface he picked up a gold bracelet-like object in perfect condition, weighing 3.030 oz. It was kept in the farmhouse for some weeks, and then sent to Mr Angus Stewart, Jeweller, Buchanan Street, Glasgow, who showed it to several persons.

Mr Stewart, Mr T. C. F. Brotchie, Mr Charles E. Whitelaw, and myself, in the hope of being able to complete a record of the circumstances and to secure associated objects, went to Whitefarland. The place of the find (A in fig. 1) is 65 yards south of the steading

and near the foot of the old sea-cliff, at that point a small declivity. For years the plough has been worked round the spot without disturbing it much because of the outcropping of the slabs. We dug over the site and riddled the soil, encountering many rock fragments and water-rolled stones embedded in the soil washed down on the top of the old raised-beach gravel. No definitely built structure was noticed, and no absolutely clear evidence could be obtained that the place had either been a tomb or a dwelling.

On the first day of the investigations I turned up within a few inches of the place where the first object had been discovered a very fine, hollow, penannular ring of gold of triangular section, also in perfect condition, weighing .255 oz.

An artificially cup-marked rock was noted 117 yards 1 foot south of the place of the discovery and 6 feet north-east of a bench-mark, the altitude of which is indicated in the Ordnance Survey chart as 25.3 feet (B in fig. 1).

There were also found about two dozen fragments of pottery characteristic of a late phase of the Bronze Period, and belonging to two vessels each of a type used for domestic as well as sepulchral purposes. Such pots have been occasionally found associated with or containing objects of gold.

The shards discovered belong to hand-made vessels, but only a few details can be made out because of the small number and size of the fragments. The larger vessel is biscuit-coloured on the outer and black on the inner surface. One fragment shows that its wall at places has been  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick. It is of coarse texture, and the paste has been mixed with small pounded pieces of stone evidently to prevent the pot cracking during the process of firing. The outer surface of the pot has been coated with a thin layer of fine clay in a finishing process before firing. On a fragment being placed in hot water this skin peeled off cleanly. The smaller vessel has been of dark colour, and may have been decorated by slight horizontal flutings. It has had a plain rounded rim.

The smaller of the Arran rings (fig. 2) belongs to a well-recognised class of small, hollow, penannular ornaments of triangular section, made of three thin plates of gold fixed together without soldering and merely by overlapping the edges and closing them tight by hammering. The plates are skilfully joined by turning

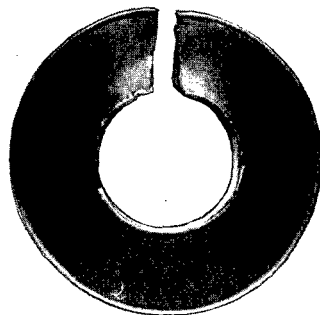


Fig. 2. Penannular Gold Ornament from Arran. ( $\frac{1}{4}$ .)

the edge of one plate over that of the other, the edges at the inner circumference being held apart by another plate (in the Arran specimen  $\cdot 6$  inch wide) with V-shaped ends, which thus wall-in the hollow of the ring. The relic is  $1\cdot65$  inch in diameter externally and  $\cdot 7$  inch internally.

There are eleven of these objects in the Irish National Museum—not one with a detailed history of its discovery or associated relics. Five are complete, but only three are in perfect condition. The weights of the five vary from  $\cdot 254$  oz. to  $\cdot 783$  oz. Lord Inchiquin has two Irish specimens weighing  $\cdot 315$  oz. and  $\cdot 309$  oz. The average of the seven known complete Irish specimens is  $\cdot 446$  oz.

Though evidence in support is not forthcoming, they have been usually considered to be ear-rings. Attachment to the ear would be difficult, and no specimen shows how such fixing could have been made. That they were hair ornaments is more probable. In early historic times in Ireland gold objects were used in the hair, according to *Irische Texte* (iii. p. 550), but their nature is obscure. The historically recorded examples may have been of much later type, like the objects of gold still worn in the hair by the Dutch peasantry.

These rare, little, penannular, prehistoric objects under review were probably coiffure bands. As well as being concentrically fluted, they are sometimes decorated with a band of incised diagonal lines or rows of incised dots along either side of the break in the ring. The Arran specimen is plain. Small penannular objects somewhat similar, usually of red porphyry, have been found as hair ornaments on Egyptian mummies, locks of hair apparently having been pressed through the break in the side and tightly filling the ring.

Such rings of British and Irish type occur only in gold and have not been found on the Continent. Being of particularly fine workmanship, they demonstrate better than almost any other kind of gold relic the high degree of skill attained by the British and Irish goldsmiths of the Bronze Age. The Arran specimen is the third found in the west of Scotland and the eighth in the whole of Scotland, as against fifteen recorded from Ireland, three from the north of England, and one from the north of Wales. Their home, therefore, was probably Scotland or Ireland.



Fig. 3. Penannular Gold Ornament from Glenluce. (3.)

A perfect and beautiful example found without definitely associated relics in Wigtownshire, near the boundary between the parishes of Luce and Stoneykirk and about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from the high-water mark (fig. 3), is perhaps the smallest known, weighing only  $\cdot 070$  oz. Its external diameter is  $\cdot 75$  inch, its thickness  $\cdot 2$  inch, and the diameter of orifice  $\cdot 4$  inch. It is ornamented on either

exterior surface with eight concentric flutings worked by hand on the gold plate by a graving tool.

The remaining Scottish examples, which are quite plain, are all preserved in the National Museum. One of .550 oz. was found in 1856 in a moss in the west of Scotland. The precise locality was not disclosed owing to a mistaken fear of the ancient law of treasure trove. It was part of a hoard of which there survive a pair of plain, solid, penannular gold armlets, slightly oval, and open at one side, the ends thickened and flattened into button-like extremities. The three objects from this

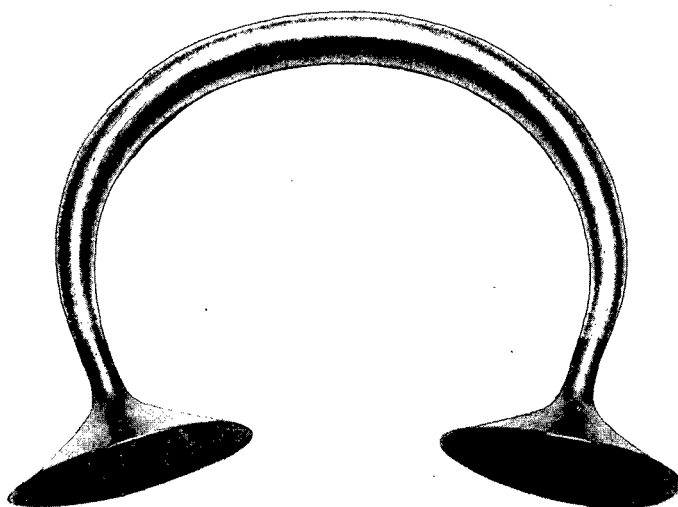


Fig. 4. Penannular Gold Ornament with cup-shaped ends from Arran. (†.)

hoard were bought by a jeweller in Dumbarton, who sold them to Mr Peter Denny, from whom they passed to the Museum. Another, which, like all the others, is triangular in section, was discovered, somewhat crushed, in 1811 at the digging of a gravel pit at Gogar House, Corstorphine. In the same pit were found a bronze sword with scabbard tip of the same period, and a bronze brooch undoubtedly of much later times. There is no evidence that the last-mentioned relic was found directly associated with the others. Four were found at Balmashanner, Forfarshire, with three other small penannular gold ornaments possessing bronze cores, a socketed axe, twelve penannular armlets, ten rings, and part of a bowl, all of bronze, and a necklace of thirty-one beads of amber and four of jet of round and flattened spheroidal form.

The larger object from Arran (fig. 4) has been made by bending into oval shape a solid gold rod, somewhat thickened in the middle of its

length, and by bringing the ends nearly together. To either end has been most skilfully melted on or sweated a calyx or trumpet-shaped piece. Though not on the Arran specimen, engraved lines sometimes occur inside and outside the calyx, and more rarely the neck joining the calyx and bar are likewise decorated, in some cases only on the outer side of the neck. The centre of the bar invariably remains plain, as if when in use that part alone was not seen. This type of object has seldom an over-all spread greater than 3·5 inches, which is the measurement of the Arran specimen. Its bar has a maximum thickness of ·3 inch. The diameter of one of the expanded terminals is 1·35 inches and that of the other 1·3 inches. The cross external diameter of the ring is 2·93 inches, and the distance between the extreme edges of the cup-shaped terminals 3·5 inches.

This relic, a bar of gold bent into an oval with open ends expanded like trumpets, belongs to a class of ornament often erroneously styled "fibulæ," which has repeatedly turned up in Britain and Ireland. The "fibula" does not seem capable of being fitted to a wrist, arm, or ankle even of small size. If so worn it would be extremely inconvenient. It is generally thought that the object was some kind of brooch or dress-fastener, but no pin has been found in association. It is clear that the ends, so very conspicuous, were meant to be seen when the object was in use, because only that part and its neighbourhood are decorated.

The suggestions as to these objects having been ring-money—some inquirers conjecture the rings were used as mediums of exchange—bracelets, dress-fasteners, or brooches have to be ruled out after the known specimens of the class are compared and critically studied.

The largest specimen of such "fibulæ" was found in 1819 in County Roscommon, at a depth of 5 feet in gravel, from which fifteen layers of turf had been cut. It has the extraordinary over-all spread of 10·75 inches. The hollow conical ends each measure 4·75 inches across, separated by a space of 1·375 inches. Its interior spread is normal.

An examination of the numerous specimens discloses that no matter what be the size of the expanded terminals or the thickness of the connecting loop, the oval enclosed space is practically constant, averaging a little less than 2 by 2·5 inches—a capacity clearly calculated to hold the whole hair of the head, as worn naturally in youth, gathered together at the nape of the neck. The object if thus used would have its dilated terminals placed facing upwards and outwards. As a coiffure band it was useful as well as ornamental. The plaited hair would perhaps be dressed in a catagon knot round the bar. Some modern but very rarely used combs with wings or expanded ends are so adjusted.

Three Bronze Age Irish specimens show ornamental engraved work on the parts of the bar nearest to the terminals and restricted to the outer side of the bar—a feature which indicates that when the object was in use the whole bar was not hidden at that point (as it would if it had been employed for gripping the edges of a garment of cloth or skin), but merely its central section and inner face, as would happen were locks of hair enclosed by the loop.

They have been found in Ireland on two occasions associated with sets of fairly large ovoid and discoid amber beads of graded sizes; also with bronze socketed and looped axe-heads, a bronze or copper penannular ring, and with plain complete bronze rings suitable for armlets. Two specimens were found in June 1919, 11 feet under the surface of a bog in County Cavan, with two penannular bracelets of gold with button-like extremities, and, most important of all, with a circular disc of thin gold lavishly decorated.

From other discoveries it is known that such a disc has almost certainly been the covering of a bronze disc which was employed, as a symbol of the Sun or Moon, mounted vertically upon a miniature horse and carriage of bronze.

The associated relics found in Scotland and England are similar, and confirm the testimony afforded by the Irish records. The weights of "fibulæ" with hollow cup-ends, or, as I think they should now be more correctly called, coiffure rings of the larger type, range from about 2.206 ozs. to 16.858 ozs. The two types of gold objects just found in Arran belong to the later stage of the Bronze Age, about 900 years B.C., with a possible range of 200 years on either side of that date.

The gold objects found in Arran have, so far as known, been treasures hidden for subsequent recovery. They have not been connected with graves, except a fragment of a fluted fillet found in the large cairn at Blackwaterfoot, and perhaps a penannular ring, now lost, said doubtfully to have been found in a cist at South Kascadale, Largie Beag, Whiting Bay.

What seems to have been an ornament very like the larger recently discovered Arran specimen is aptly described as a "piece of gold in the form of a handle of a drawer," and was found a few years before 1845 in Arran when a fence round a garden was being made. It was sold to a Glasgow jeweller, who melted it. This was an interesting discovery, as the record states that some non-golden matter was attached to the inside of the trumpet-shaped extremities. As this has been noticed in other cases in Scotland—in Islay and Ayrshire—it is possible that sometimes the hollow cones contained a substance, perhaps amber or vitreous material, introduced to enhance the decorative effect. At Ormidale, Brodick,

were found about 1864 four penannular armlet-like objects with slightly expanded extremities, weighing 1·008 oz., ·820 oz., ·739 oz., and ·437 oz. A bronze pin with a cup-shaped head found at Point of Sleat, Skye, with a sword, socketed spear-heads, and a curved socketed blade, all of bronze, may also have had its cavity furnished with some non-metallic, ornamental filling. Shortly before February 1865, in Arran were found together six rings of gold, each formed of several wires. Two of the rings are made of three wires plaited together. The other larger rings, apparently of eight wires, are interlaced so that two of them form a twisted ridge projecting round the circumference of the rings. One of these rings is imperfect. They weigh respectively ·270 oz., ·297 oz., ·412 oz., ·437 oz., ·445 oz., and ·487 oz. With them was found a small plain penannular object 1·1 inch diameter, tapering towards its opening extremity and weighing ·216 oz. With this hoard were two portions of apparently larger rings or armlets weighing ·360 oz. and ·383 oz.

While greatly differing in character, the two recently found Arran objects are of broken or unclosed ring shape. Apart from the brilliance of their material they attract attention because of their unfamiliar appearance, resembling no ornament or utensil of historical or modern times. They give rise to speculations as to their functions, which are not at all apparent. It is clear that they belong to a lost and long forgotten civilisation of some importance and refinement. They are types, however, well known to students of prehistoric archæology.