

V.

BATTLE SITE IN GORTEN BAY, KENTRA, ARDNAMURCHAN.

BY THOMAS C. LETHBRIDGE.

The sandy bays between Gortenfern and Sgeir a Chaolais are held by the crofters of Kentra, Acharacle, etc., to be the traditional sites of at least two battles. One of these battles, which is referred to in this note, is variously described as "between Scandinavians and Scots," or "Och, it was about the time of the Danes"; the other was much later.

The bay known as Cul na Croise (not shown by name on the 1-inch map), between Sgeir a Chaolais and Sgeir nam Meann, is ideal for beaching a long ship or landing from ships' boats, and is certainly the best site for this purpose from Ardnamurchan Point to Kyle Akin—that is, from Skye to Mull. Ships can also be watered from a good burn in this bay. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that this spot has been the site of more than one bloody encounter.

Sandy Cameron of Gortenfern, whose ancestors have lived for generations in the same spot, remembers being told by his father as a boy that the "Red Rover" had fought a battle there (Cul na Croise), and

that an Irishman named Duing or Dewing ("The Brown") had fought nearby. Cameron had spent much time himself searching amongst the sand-dunes in the bay, and he showed me a silver penny of Edward I. minted at London, and a fine eight-spoked bronze brooch (fig. 1), mediæval in form and possibly fourteenth century. Cameron also had various copper coins, buckles, buttons, and other relics of a much more recent date.

Various other objects have been found from time to time in Cul na Croise with the shifting of the sand (no other bay of the series has yielded relics). Here the sand-dunes have, in recent times, encroached on older dunes upon which vegetation had gained a firm hold. The ancient surface, on which the remains occur, consists of dark peaty soil with rootlets and remains of small trees; this surface is here and there exposed among the dunes at a height of from 35 to 40 feet above sea-level. The best find of recent times was made by John Cameron of Acharracle, now a man of ninety, who, landing one stormy evening after fishing, found on a space cleared of sand by the wind four or five daggers, two or three spears, one still with traces of its wooden shaft, and several glass beads. I have also heard of a large penannular brooch and a blue and white glass bead found there, but now lost.

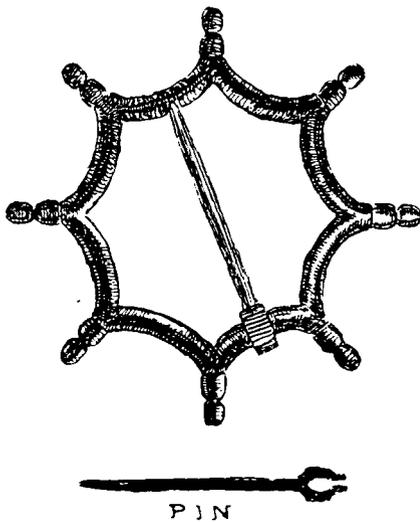


Fig. 1. Bronze Brooch from Gortena Bay. (†)

The result of about ten days' search by myself in August 1924 was:—

1. Numerous relics of prehistoric man: flint arrow-heads, scrapers, potsherds, etc., some probably of Bronze Age date.
2. Nearly one hundred clinch-nails of the typical Viking type (Du Chailu's *Viking Age*, figs. 996 and 997), also numerous iron nails, square in section.
3. Portions of six small daggers or knives, one nearly perfect (fig. 2).
4. Portions of six barbed and socketed iron arrow-heads (fig. 3).
5. Four glass beads (fig. 4, Nos. 1, 4, 5, and 6). No. 1 is of yellow glass, and is ornamented with knobs resembling grapes. Also a small white glass knob like the glass inlays on some Viking disc fibulæ (fig. 4, No. 7).

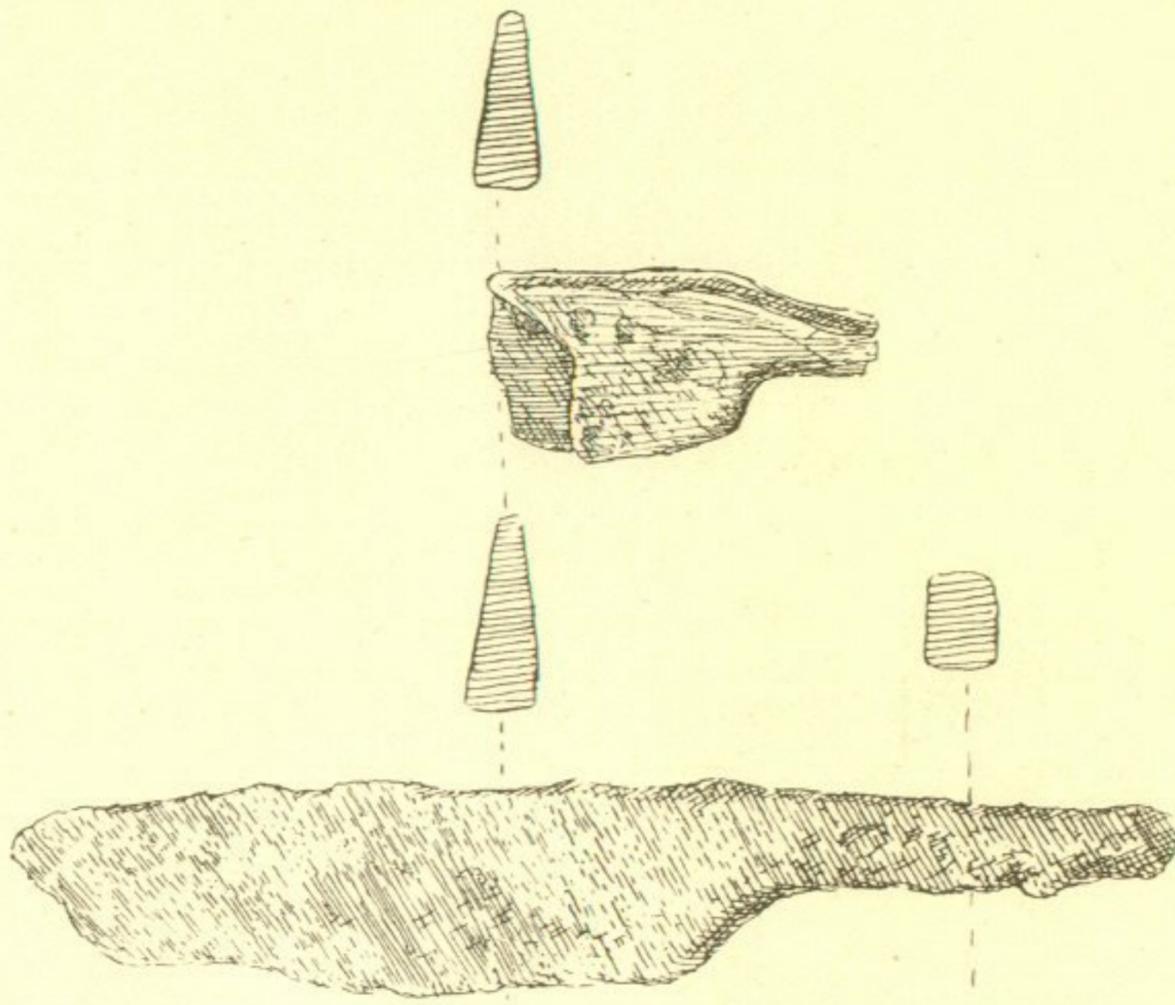


Fig. 2. Iron Knives from Gortén Bay. (4.)

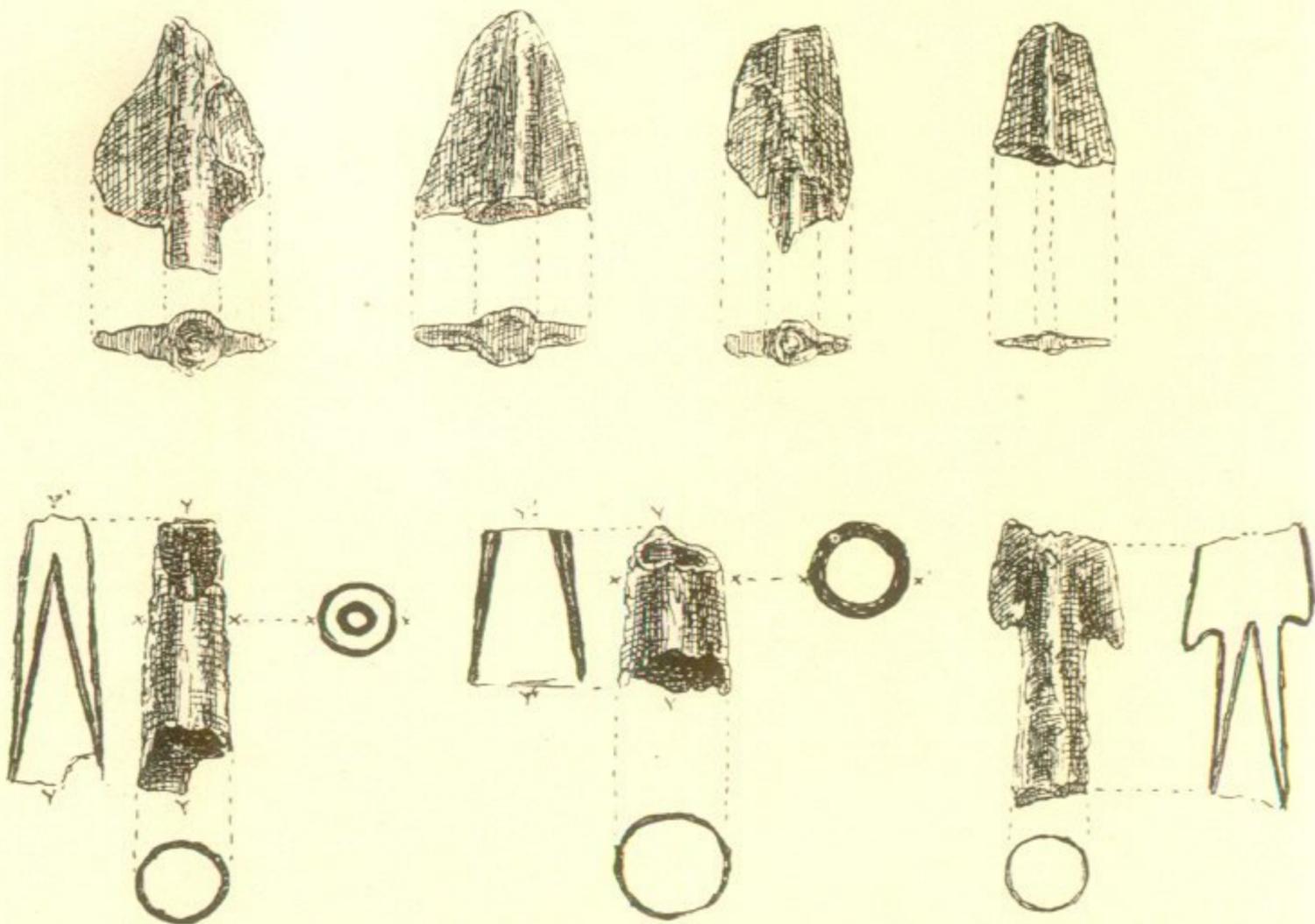


Fig. 3. Iron Arrow-heads from Gortén Bay. (4.)

6. Large quantities of vitrified material, possibly due to the lighting of extensive fires, it may be to the burning of ships, on the sand.

7. A small piece of iron chain; its links are parallel sided, about 1 inch in length.

8. Numerous relics possibly of a later fight: a coin of Charles II., musket-balls, a brass pin with twisted wire head of the type common before industrial revolution, and other objects.

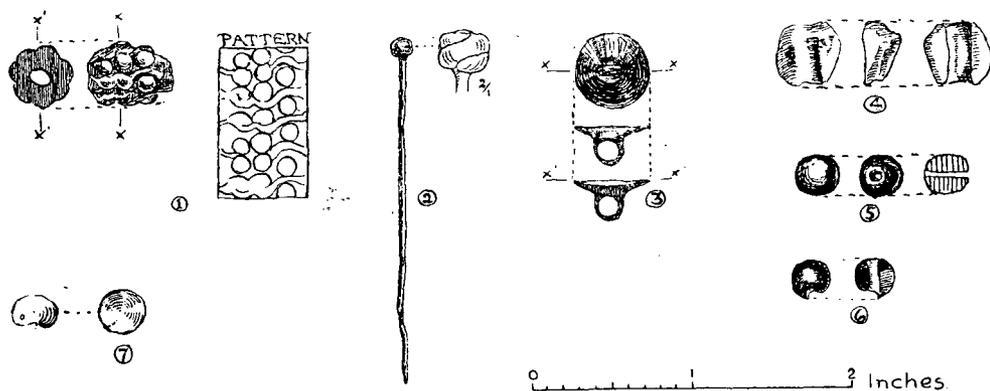


Fig. 4. Glass Beads and other Objects from Gortan Bay.

In conclusion, it appears that the spears, daggers, arrow-heads of iron, beads, and coin of Edward may be all included in one series of late thirteenth-century date. It is known that in A.D. 1297, Roderick of Bute and Lachlan MacRuari of Garmoran ravished Skye and Lewis, and burnt ships of Edward I. commanded by Alexander of Islay, Edward's Admiral of the Isles (Anderson's *Historical Documents of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 187). It is possible that some of this fighting occurred at Cul na Croise. Of course other coin finds may fix a later date than this, but with the facts at my disposal I find agreement of dates tempting.