

## III.

A BARBED POINT OF DEER-ANTLER FROM SHEWALTON,  
AYRSHIRE. BY A. D. LACAILLE, F.S.A.Scot.

My attention was drawn to a paragraph in *The Irvine and Fullarton Times* of 12th August 1938, reporting the discovery by Mr William Abercrombie, Irvine, in the bed of a river near this town of "part of a fish spear-head got from the horn of an animal, probably a deer." Perusal of the notice suggested to me that the discovery from a locality rich in prehistoric antiquities might be of considerable archæological importance.<sup>1</sup> I therefore communicated with my friend, Mr J. Graham Paterson, F.S.A.Scot., of the Union Bank of Scotland, Ayr, who resides in Irvine, and asked him if he could obtain the object for my examination. Thanks to him I was able to inspect the relic, which had come into the possession of Mr William Ross, publisher of *The Irvine Herald*. It exceeded expectation in respect of its features and wonderful state of preservation.

Mr Paterson ascertained by interrogating the finder that the antiquity had been recovered from the bed of the river (where it was noticed from the footpath, the water then running low and clear), below the Shewalton sandhills on the left bank, about the middle of the great bend northward.

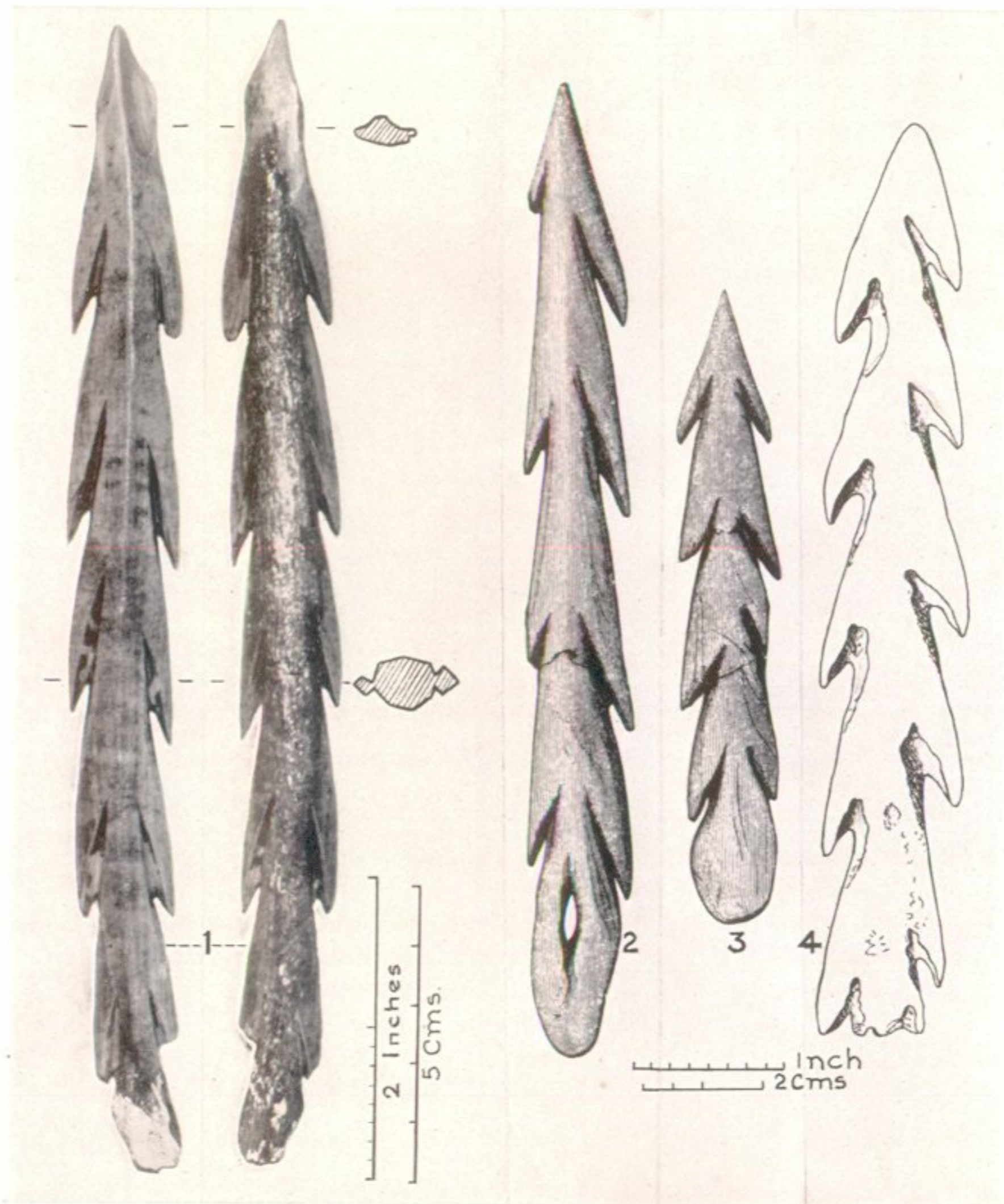
The find consists of a point (Pl. XXXIV, 1), now  $7\frac{5}{8}$  inches (0.194 m.) long, fashioned in antler, and provided with five pairs of barbs, the components disposed alternately along each side.<sup>2</sup> Damaged edges indicate ancient fracture of the extremities of the lowermost pair. Although standing out, the ten barbs are not quite free from the body as they are cut at an acute angle to the long axis. Considering that the implement bears signs of having been shaped and finished by means of stone tools it was made with remarkable skill. One face is smooth, and the other, exposing the cancellated structure of the bony material, partly so.

The slightly damaged base is bevelled and imperforate. It would thus most closely resemble a barbed point, also of deer-antler, with plain butt from the MacArthur Cave, Oban (Pl. XXXIV, 3), and in general appearance and number of barbs it also compares with the largest point with holed

<sup>1</sup> The newspaper account stated erroneously that the discovery was made in the bed of the Annick Water near its confluence with the River Irvine at the "Water Meetings," that is to say on the right bank of the main stream and a little north of the Shewalton Sands.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Miss Dorothea M. A. Bate, Geological Department, British Museum (Natural History), to whom the specimen was handed for identification of the substance, for the following report, dated South Kensington, 21st October 1938:—

"Dr F. C. Fraser, of the Zoological Department, and I have come to the conclusion that this harpoon from Ayrshire is made from the distal portion of an antler of Deer, almost certainly Red Deer. We reached this opinion after comparing the specimen with sections of antlers of Red Deer and Reindeer, with long bones and with Walrus tusks."



Scottish barbed points of red-deer antler: 1, Shewalton; 2 and 3, Oban (after Anderson); 4, Kirkcudbright.

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[PLATE XXXIV.

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base from this Argyll site (Pl. XXXIV, 2).<sup>1</sup> Longer than this example from Oban, the Shewalton specimen, even in its present condition, I believe represents the largest point of the kind so far noted in Scotland, if not in Great Britain. As far down as the last pair of barbs the section of the body may be described as almost rhombic, but thence downward the faces flatten and the section gradually becomes elliptical.

At first sight one would classify this barbed point among the so-called harpoons of Azilian facies recovered by excavation in the caves and shell-mounds of the Argyll mainland and islands. Similarly, it could be ranged with the stray example found in the River Dee and now preserved in Kirkcudbright by the Stewartry Museum Association (Pl. XXXIV, 4).<sup>2</sup> The Shewalton piece, however, has features distinguishing it from others found in this country. Although resembling the points from the MacArthur Cave, and, like them, possessed of a midrib extending from the tip on the polished face half-way down the length and of a similar ridge on the other surface for the length of the head, the extremity also has something of the heads of certain Maglemosean bone points. Thus, it is elongated and rounded at the extremity, instead of being flattish at the tip with the apex simply formed by the meeting of the sides fairly near the uppermost barbs, as is ordinarily the case with Azilian specimens. A peculiarity discernible in the Ayrshire example is the grooving practised lengthwise in the thickness of the material near the tip on each side of the midrib to facilitate penetration. This refinement may well mark a stage in the evolution of weapons and hunting-gear. Another feature consists of a slight swelling, like the spring of barbs, on each side where the tip widens and merges into the body.

A discovery of this kind, although furnishing an important addition to the known distribution of barbed antler and bone points, has its tantalising aspect because of its incompleteness, as it is improbable that the industry which produced such a weapon will ever be known. As the implement was picked up so near the well-known Shewalton Sands, which have proved so prolific in various antiquities proclaiming continuous habitation and much industrial activity, it is permissible to assume that this relic was a product of food-hunters settled there.

To the student of Scottish stone industries of Mesolithic facies the possible association of the weapon with the Shewalton microliths is attractive, although the diminutive artifacts from more than one site here are by facies and workmanship of finer execution than stone implements of Azilian types.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated, the associations of the microliths of Shewalton Moor are such that, in

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Anderson in *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxix. pp. 223-4, figs. 11 and 12.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Munro in *Archæological Journal*, vol. lxxv. p. 231, and fig. 39, No. 1, p. 232.

<sup>3</sup> A. D. Lacaille in *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxiv. pp. 34-48.

addition to the advanced forms which occur, they may well represent a tradition surviving as late as the Bronze Age.<sup>1</sup> Still, it would not be surprising if ancient sorts of artifacts were also manufactured by the same people. This view finds support in the occurrence among the stone implements from Shewalton of tools suitable for working bone. The isolation of the north-western focus of industries influenced by ancient cultures and different contacts permits one to envisage the probability of hybrid and mixed contexts.

In respect of Scottish antler and bone points it will be recalled that the Abbé H. Breuil drew attention to the fact that the Ornsay "harpoons" seemed to have affinities with Baltic types.<sup>2</sup> In his reference to the various artifacts made of osseous substances from these and other Scottish sites Professor V. G. Childe has expanded on the subject.<sup>3</sup>

For the drawing of the Kirkcudbright implement found, it is believed, as fortuitously as the one forming the subject of these notes, I am indebted to our Fellow, Mr J. Robison, Kirkcudbright.<sup>4</sup> Finally, thanks are expressed to Mr Ross for permitting me to study and describe the barbed point exhibited this evening. It is gratifying to note that this has now been added to the national collection.

#### APPENDIX.

Dr J. G. D. Clark, in his masterly survey of Maglemose bone work, has advanced reasons against the loose naming of all barbed bone points as harpoons.<sup>5</sup> As this piece from the bed of the River Irvine may perhaps have formed part of a composite device, I have refrained from using a term employed widely to describe such gear.

<sup>1</sup> J. G. D. Clark, *The Mesolithic Age in Britain*, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lvi. pp. 279-81.

<sup>3</sup> *The Prehistory of Scotland*, pp. 16-19.

<sup>4</sup> This has not been figured in our *Proceedings*, but is illustrated half-size in the late Dr Munro's communication, *cit. supra*, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> *The Mesolithic Settlement of Northern Europe*, pp. 115-22.