

III.

A CINERARY URN FROM SANDMILL FARM, STRANRAER,
WIGTOWNSHIRE. BY REV. R. S. G. ANDERSON, B.D., F.S.A. SCOT.*Read March 28, 1942.*

At the farm of Sandmill, a mile to the north-east of Stranraer, facing Loch Ryan on the Shore Road, the land rises from the beach very gradually to a low ridge 50 feet above sea-level and about 150 yards inland. On this ridge, 40 feet from the march wall dividing Sandmill from the farm of Low Balyett, and directly opposite the farmhouse of the latter, is the site of a cinerary urn burial. As frequently is the case, the find was made through a passing plough shearing off the base of the upturned urn and exposing the resultant cavity to an alert ploughman. Fortunately in this instance, the ploughman knew enough about such finds as to proceed with caution; and, an expert not being at hand, managed to excavate the site without further damage to the vessel, and to secure most of the contents.

The ridge on which the burial was placed is largely composed of shingle, and is probably an old sea-beach. Its surface is covered with innumerable comparatively small stones, which were once mixed with many of a notably larger size. The latter, proving obstacles to the plough, have been removed, and the consequent deeper ploughing has led to the discovery of the prehistoric burial. There was no cist, the urn being deposited in the shingle about a foot and a half below the surface. No tradition has been connected with the site, and there are no signs to-day of any stone circle or cairn.

The urn (Pl. XX, 1) is of the cinerary type with overhanging rim, and of a fawn colour. Originally it would stand about 17 inches high; its greatest height now is $15\frac{3}{4}$ inches; the diameter over all at the mouth is $12\frac{1}{2}$ inches; the wall is $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in thickness. Like many others of this type, the wall has been raised by ring-building, and the exterior smoothed off producing a mechanical slip. The urn is both strongly and finely made. It belongs to the second stage of the Cinerary Urn type, where the rim is broadened and has a flange, the neck is still concave, and the shoulder prominent.¹

The collar of the Sandmill urn is $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep, with its flange projecting downwards over the neck for half an inch. A stab design of finger-nail curves covers the surface. Evidently the artist's intention was that these should be arranged in eight parallel rings surrounding the collar, whilst the various units of these rings, synchronising with those above or below, should suggest a series of vertical lines. But the worker has muddled

¹ Childe, *Prehistoric Communities*, p. 146.

his scheme, so that the number of rings varies at different points, and the details fall into confusion.

From the junction with the collar the neck of the urn measures $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches to the shoulder, and its curvature is quite pronounced. It is ornamented with a lattice design, which has been incised on the surface of the clay with a smooth square-edged tool, almost an eighth of an inch in breadth.

The shoulder of the urn is strongly marked, and gives no sign of disappearing, or of any immediate change to the third form in the evolution of this type. From the shoulder the urn slopes down in a slightly convex curve to the base. Unfortunately the base is entirely lost, but it appears to have been between 5 and 6 inches in diameter.

The rim of the urn, from a narrow edge on top, descends steeply into the interior for $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch, and is decorated with two parallel rings of the stab design.

The Cinerary Urn with the Overhanging Rim in England has been noted for the quantity and characteristics of the grave-goods frequently associated with it. The Sandmill burial, though falling far behind notable finds of the type in England, yet is remarkable for the number and character of the objects associated with it. The grave-goods consisted of a battle-axe, a bronze knife or razor, an ornamented bone bead, and three shaped stones. Two or three worked flints were discovered at the first excavation of the site, but there is no certainty that they had actually been in the urn. Several have been found since in the immediate neighbourhood.

The ceremonial axe (Pl. XXI, 1), made of volcanic rock, lava, a stone not uncommon in the south-west of Scotland, was found split into several fragments, perhaps by the heat of the funerary pyre, but has been put together completely. It is of the type that expands from the shaft-hole towards the blade and the butt. It measures $4\frac{5}{8}$ inches in length, and is $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide at the waist, and $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches at the blade. The butt end is a truncated cone, 2 inches wide at the base, and tapering to a disc $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter. The shaft-hole, equidistant from the ends, is cylindrical throughout, and 1 inch in diameter. The edges of the perforation, though slightly irregular, are not splayed or countersunk. The weapon is decorated by three narrow grooves forming a reeded outline to the sides.

The resemblance of such axes to those so common in Scandinavia during Montelius' phase III of the Northern New Stone Age has been often noted, and might suggest a derivation of the Sandmill axe from across the North Sea, especially as cognate forms can be cited from north-eastern Scotland. On the other hand R. A. Smith¹ has presented a typological series illustrating a local development of forms like ours in the British Isles from the flat-faced types associated with our Early Bronze Age (AC) Beakers, and

¹ *Archæologia*, lxxv. pp. 90 ff.



Urn, bead and blade from Sandmill.



Battle axe and "whetstones."

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has illustrated specimens with expanding blade and conical butt from English graves of the early Middle Bronze Age. Typologically as well as geographically the Sandmill axe would serve as a link between these and the closely related axes from south-western Scotland—Fardenreoch, Montfode, Nith Lodge,¹ and Chapelton,² in Ayrshire; from which in turn might be derived both the “Bann type” of Ireland and “mace-heads” like the celebrated one from Crichtie in Aberdeenshire. Even the reeded border which recurs again on the axes from Montfode and Chapelton as well as on some Bann axes and the Crichtie mace-head appears already in England at Goodmanham (Yorks).³ The Chapelton specimen, though very similar to ours, was associated with a Cordoned Urn that in the typology of funerary pottery is a stage or two posterior to the Overhanging Rim Urn from Sandmill.

The fact that the axe is formed out of a stone of brittle and unequal texture suggests that it was not intended for war purposes. It was probably designed for ceremonial or funerary use, for which it would be well adapted from its attractive appearance.

The bronze instrument (Pl. XX, 3) is incomplete and bent. It consists of an oval blade $2\frac{1}{8}$ inches long and the stump of a broad tang of which only $\frac{5}{8}$ inch survives, separated from the blade by slight shoulders. The greatest breadth of the blade is $\frac{7}{8}$ inch and its maximum thickness $\frac{1}{10}$. Round the edge is a paper-thin margin, $\frac{3}{16}$ inch wide, leaving the centre an elongated oval prolonged into the tang. The margin has been formed by hammering, but has been further thinned *on one face only* by bevelling.

It is not easy to decide whether this little blade should be classed as a razor or a knife. Razors have often been found with cinerary urns or contemporary cremations, and the smallness of our blade would seem more appropriate to a toilet article—it is actually only half the size of razors of the Balblair type. The grinding of the edges on one face only would, moreover, facilitate use in shaving. But the tang is relatively much wider than in the most nearly comparable razors like those from Balblair and Rogart in Sutherland⁴ and Pollacorragune in Ireland. It is not so different from a couple of razors from south-western England, *e.g.* from Priddy, Somerset,⁵ or the Irish Carrowjaimes type⁶ that is associated with very late Cordoned Urns.

On the other hand the Sandmill blade, though only half as large, does agree very accurately in plan with a knife-blade from the Late Bronze Age settlement in Heathery Burn Cave, Co. Durham.⁷

It is true that the latter knife is provided with an oval socket cast in one piece with the blade, and is thus a member of the large series of socketed

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, lxxii. p. 245, fig. 8.

² *Archæologia*, l.c., fig. 32.

³ Evans, *Ancient Bronze Implements*, fig. 256.

⁷ Evans, *Bronze Implements*, fig. 242.

² Childe, *Prehistory of Scotland*, fig. 32.

⁴ Childe, *Prehistory of Scotland*, fig. 54.

⁶ Childe, *Prehistoric Communities*, fig. 48.

two-edged knives from the British Isles. But Dr Estyn Evans¹ has pointed out that such socketed knives were probably derived from tanged knives with similarly shaped blades in the same way as socketed spearheads of the Arreton Down series were derived from tanged spearheads. The Sandmill blade might therefore be regarded as representing a tanged version or precursor of the Heathery Burn variety of socketed knife. From faint indications on the metal it would seem that the handle met the blade in a line similar to that marking the junction of the blade and socket on the English knife (the finder of the urn recovered a piece of bone, "bent and something like the half of a jaw" that may have been the original handle, but threw it away as valueless!), while the small shoulders are very similar to those on tanged knife-blades. Still our instrument is so small and slender in comparison with normal tanged or socketed knives that, if a knife at all, it might almost be regarded as a miniature. Miniature tools and weapons were made in the period when cremation was in vogue in Denmark, Sicily, and other parts of Europe.

Finally, the bend of the blade deserves notice. For nearly $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch from its tip the blade is virtually flat, but the rest of the blade with the tang is bent along the line of its major axis. This curvature suggests comparison with the well-known curved knives from Late Bronze Age hoards. But in these knives the whole blade is bent in an arc while the hilt is straight.² So the bend in our blade is more probably due to distortion by the heat of the pyre.

The Wessex chieftains and their disciples among the Urn folk carried perforated whetstones in their kits. No such article was associated with our burial; but in the urn were three pieces of sandstone that seem from the marks upon them to have been put to a similar use (Pl. XXI, 2).

The largest, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, 2 inches broad, and 1 inch thick, is made from a fine-grained whitish sandstone, probably of the Carboniferous-Calciferous series, not of local origin. The second is a flat yellowish coarse-grained sandstone, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick, $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches in greatest length, and $2\frac{5}{8}$ inches in greatest breadth. The bronze blade has apparently lain on the low triangular shelf in the upper left-hand corner which was deeply stained with verdigris. The third, $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches long by $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches wide, bears on one face an axial groove that might have been made in sharpening a pointed tool.

Among the cremated bones in the urn was a tubular section of bone, possibly the legbone of a bird, $\frac{7}{8}$ inch long and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick, engraved on the surface with fine lines forming a chevron (Pl. XX, 2). It was evidently a bead and might indeed be compared to the segmented beads of imported faience found in English graves of the Wessex culture.

¹ *Archæologia*, lxxxiii. p. 190.

² As shown in the illustration by Evans, *Bronze Implements*, fig. 247, and Callander, *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, liv. p. 125.

The Sandmill burial forms a valuable addition to the short list of closed finds associated with Cinerary Urns in Scotland. In particular, the blade offers a possibility of correlating the funerary record with that constituted by hoards of bronzes, though, owing to the anomalous character of the instrument, this correlation cannot claim to be very precise. Whether the implement be classed as a razor or as a knife, comparable relics would be expected in hoards only of the Late Bronze Age. The Sandmill burial should then fall within this long period. On the other hand, the urn is typologically of a type that might in southern England be found with the relics of the preceding Middle Bronze Age. It appears therefore that fashions in funerary ceramics were more conservative than those determining metal equipment. Even this relatively early form of Overhanging Rim Urn arrives in Scotland in the Late Bronze Age when it had already been superseded by new styles farther south. In southern England the relevant razors seem in fact to belong to the Deverel-Rimbury phase or Period VI in Childe's division.

In the urn the grave-goods lay among the cremated remains of the body and wood ashes from the pyre. Altogether the contents filled about a quarter of the urn space, the greater part being wood ash. Cremation had been so thorough that little could be learned concerning the body.

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I have to thank Mr John Hardie, the finder of the urn, for bringing it to my notice, and Mr Nelson, the tenant of Sandmill, for permission to work in the field. My thanks are also due to Mr A. J. H. Edwards for the illustrations which he has kindly made for this paper, and for assistance in acquiring necessary information.

Finally, I have to acknowledge my great indebtedness to Prof. Childe who, by a generous contribution from his wide knowledge of the subject and his experience, has in the argument of this paper helped me to clothe the skeleton of the past and make the dry bones to live.