

6. A BONE RING FROM A BEAKER BURIAL AT MAINSRIDDLE,
KIRKCUDBRIGHTSHIRE.

A cist of sandstone and shale slabs, 4 ft. by 22 ins. by 20 ins., found early in January 1957 at Mainsriddle, Kirkcudbrightshire, half a mile from the present shore of the Solway (25/947565) was investigated and later described by Mr A. E. Truckell, F.S.A.Scot.² It contained the crouched skeleton of a heavily built man aged about thirty. Between the heels and the pelvis was a disintegrated beaker which had had a serrated-line design, fig. 6, 2. Among the finger-bones of the left hand was a bone ring, fig. 6, 1, which has been examined by kind permission of Mr Thomas and of Dumfries Burgh Museum.

The ring has been carved out of bone, as identified by Dr A. S. Clarke of the Royal Scottish Museum (see below) and independently by Dr Cameron.³ It measures 1.25 ins. in overall diameter and .6 in. wide. As seen in cross-section it is convex on the interior. One flattened edge is crossed by radial incisions; the other edge is decayed. The exterior is concave, with along the centre of the hollow a broad raised rib, which widens to allow two perforations to be made through it close together, each bored from either end, leaving rather large entrance holes. The bridge left over each perforation was narrow, the one still intact being only .15 in. wide. Though the surface of the bone has decayed considerably, there remains a high polish on the one flat edge, on part of the ridge, on the "bridges" and at the mouth of one perforation.

There is in the National Museum a broken bone ring⁴ which is very similar in design and size, but a little narrower (fig. 6, 3). It was found in 1866 at Broomend of Crichtie, Aberdeenshire, in a grave containing a double male interment with two beakers.⁵ It was illustrated and described in 1923,⁶ but the original "object made of clay or bone—may have been an ornament of a rude nature," ignored in *P.S.A.S.* (1919-20), p. 155, was simply quoted in the inventory of beaker burials in *P.S.A.S.* (1933-4), but omitting the last phrase.

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIII (1948-9), 242-3, LXXXIV (1949-50), 226.

² *Discovery and Excavation, Scotland 1957*, and *T.D.G.A.S.*, 1956-7, 112 ff.

³ *T.D.G.A.S.*, cit.

⁴ *Catalogue*, 1892: EQ 27.

⁵ *P.S.A.S.* (1866-8), 111-13, and Abercromby, *Bronze Age Pottery*, Nos. 226 and 227.

⁶ *P.S.A.S.* (1922-3), 155-6.

A third specimen, in Marischal College Museum, comes from a richly equipped male beaker grave at Clinterty, Aberdeenshire (fig. 6, 4).¹ It is more like the Mainsriddle ring than the other Aberdeenshire specimen in width, and in having radial lines decorating the edge, but close together and on both edges. It differs from each in having only one perforation, and in place of the broad central ridge a groove between two narrow, low ridges.

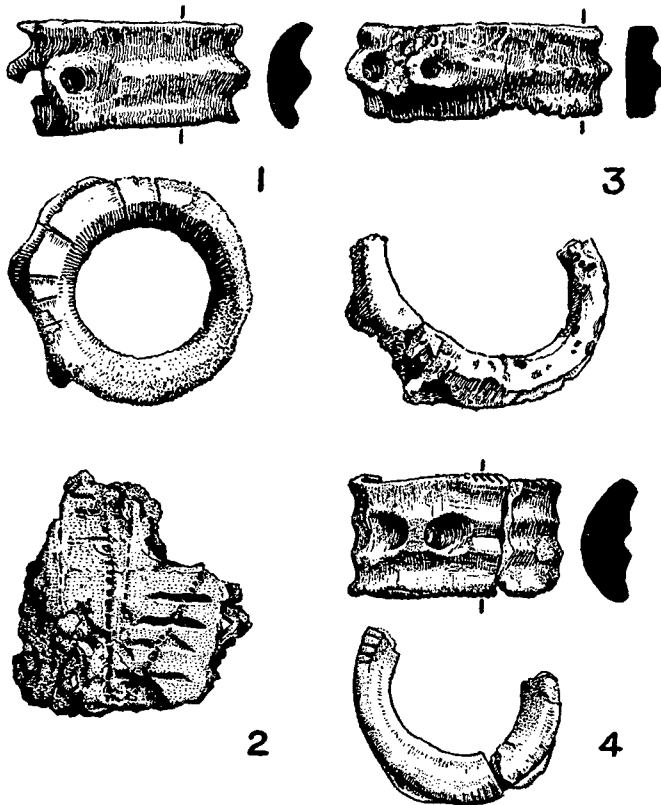


Fig. 6. Bone rings: 1. Mainsriddle, Kirkcudbrightshire (with 2. beaker sherd); 3. Broomend of Crichtie, Aberdeenshire; 4. Clinterty, Aberdeenshire. (1.)

The type does not occur in the classic English books on barrow-digging, though it must be closely related to the jet "pulley-rings" that Abercromby lists in five instances from them, four with beakers accompanying males. In the *Prehistory of Scotland* Childe overlooked the discovery here of two normal "pulley-rings," at Craigiehall, Perthshire (?), and Airngath, West Lothian.² These are flat inside and out. He did, however, mention as possibly related to the "pulley-ring" a number of Scottish jet rings that are rougher and larger, ranging from 1.1 to 2.05 ins. in diameter and from 0.6 to 0.7 in. thick. They are concave on the outside and convex on the inside like the Mainsriddle ring, but are imperforate

¹ *J.R.A.I.*, 1902, 383, and Reid, *Catalogue of Specimens from Prehistoric Interments*, 1924, fig. 27. Also illustrated by a drawing in W. D. Simpson, *Province of Mar*, p. 26. Professor Lockhart kindly sent it for examination.

² *P.S.A.S.* (1925-6), 260-1.

except for one from Yarrow that has two pairs of small holes, far apart, that go right through the ring. There is no parallel to the ridge on the bone rings. Mention, however, may be made of the bone object found with a collared cinerary urn at Over Migvie, Angus, which is shaped like a stout spool from which a small loop projects, which is in turn related to spool-shaped beads from Aberdeenshire and Ross-shire.¹

Dr Clarke reports that the ring from Mainsriddle "is from mammalian bone and cut transversely to the longitudinal axis of the original, which may have been either a limb bone or an antler. A section from either would be the easiest way of forming a ring, for this would take advantage of the marrow cavity in the former, or the central mass of spongy (cancellous) bone in the latter, case. I am uncertain whether or not I can detect differences in the micro-structure between antler and normal bone. If I can, as I think I may have been able to do, then the ring was not made of antler. However, I would put this no higher than an opinion. If then the origin of the ring was a limb bone then the obvious choice would be either the humerus or femur, probably the latter, of a beast the size of the small Celtic-type ox, and indeed an ox would be the most likely source of raw material. These remarks also apply to the two partial rings from Broomend of Crichie and Clinterty."

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