

## VII.

THE "CAIRNMUIR" HOARD FROM NETHERURD,  
PEEBLESSHIRE.

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The discovery of this hoard of gold ornaments and coins in 1806 "upon the side of the *Shaw Hill*, near the house of New Cairnmuir, Parish of Kirkurd, Peeblesshire" was reported in some detail by the landowner, William Lawson, to Sir Walter Scott twenty-one months after the event.<sup>1</sup> The late Dr John Allan read a paper on the coins to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland on 9th November 1953, but this was not published; and apart from references to one or another of the objects which occur in publications dealing principally with other matters, no general account of the hoard has been made available since the original notice.

Before describing the hoard it will be necessary to discuss its location, in connection with which confusion has arisen. At the time of the discovery the Netherurd estate was owned by William Lawson of Cairnmuir, the latter being a house on an estate of the same name situated 7 miles N. of Netherurd, 2½ miles NW. of West Linton, in the upper part of the valley of the River Lyne.<sup>2</sup> About 1790 Lawson rebuilt Netherurd house and renamed it New Cairnmuir, a name which it bore until 1834 when, the estate changing hands, the new owner restored the ancient name.<sup>3</sup> It so happened that the hoard was discovered on Shaw Hill during the comparatively brief period when Netherurd was called New Cairnmuir; and although Lawson's letter, quoted above, made it clear that the objects came from Shaw Hill, the name "New Cairnmuir"—and later simply "Cairnmuir"—has generally been applied to the hoard.<sup>4</sup> Further confusion has arisen as a result of an entry in an account of the parish of Dolphinton, Lanarkshire,<sup>5</sup> which states that ". . . an ornament of fine gold, resembling the snaffle-bit of a horse's bridle, with about forty gold beads, having the impression of a star, was found" at a place allegedly in Dolphinton parish. At first sight the fact that this discovery was recorded in a different parish and in a different county from the Shaw Hill hoard might reasonably give rise to the impression that two hoards existed. But if the details of the locations of the hoards are closely

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Scot.*, iv, Part Second (1833), 217-19.

<sup>2</sup> J. W. Buchan and H. Paton, *A History of Peeblesshire* (1927), III, 148.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., *A Short Guide to Scottish Antiquities*, H.M.S.O. (1949), 15.

<sup>5</sup> *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, vi (1845), 57-8.

examined, it becomes apparent that both accounts must probably refer to one discovery (fig. 1). The Dolphinton account is itself confused. It refers

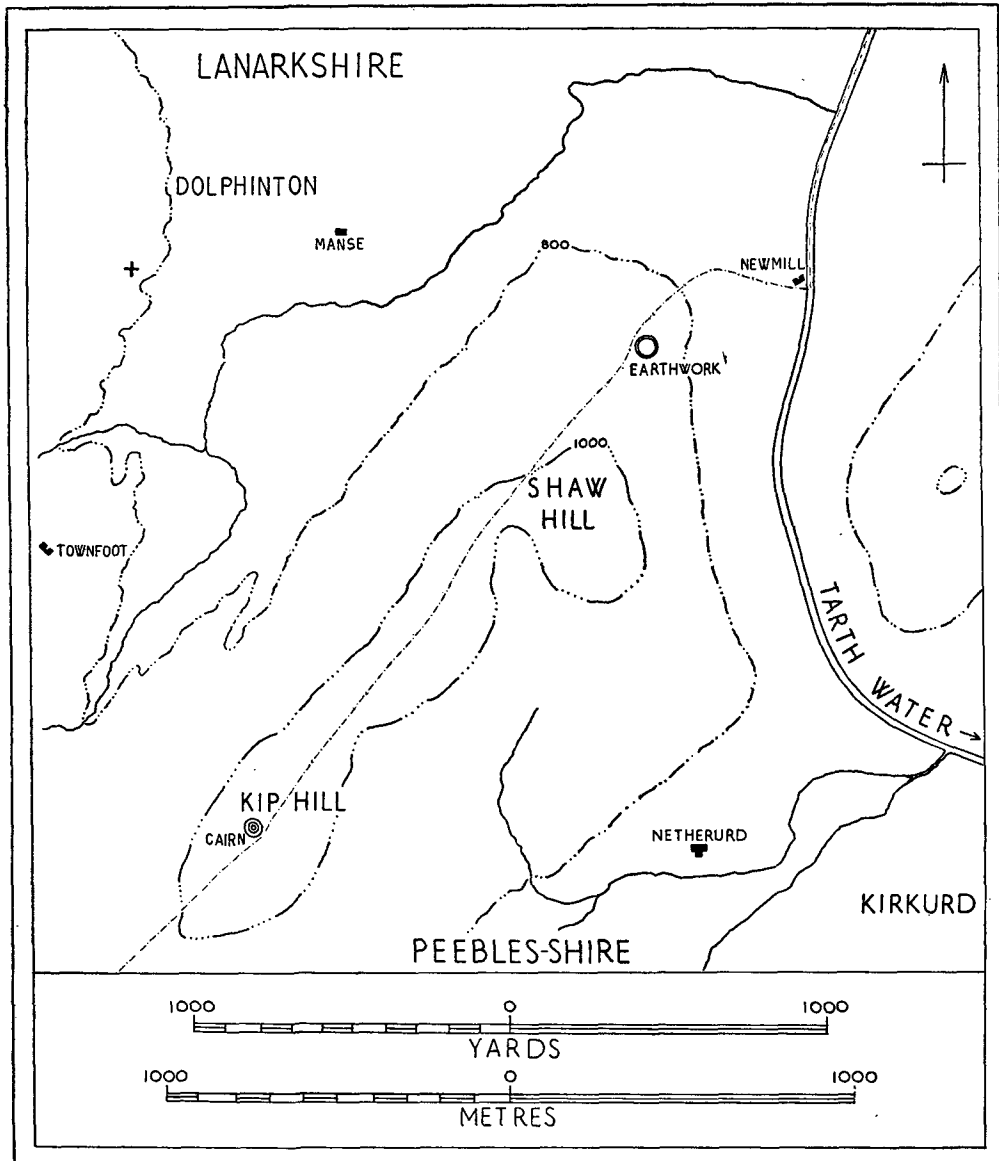


Fig. 1.

to a large "tumulus of stones" situated "on the height, about three quarters of a mile SW. of the manse . . .," which must be the large cairn on  
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Kip Hill (NT 104448). This, however, is not in the position indicated (which is in fact occupied by Townfoot farmhouse); nevertheless, the true position of the cairn—a little over 1 mile a few points W. of S. of the manse—must serve to identify it, as no degree of accuracy greater than that of ordinary conversation was necessary to the author of the passage quoted, and the discrepancy can be allowed. However, the passage continues to describe the cairn as “either a place of sacrifice under the Druids, or an enclosure of the summer residence of the native Britons,” and the next words are “A short way east from this station” the hoard “was found.” The use of the word “station” suggests that the small earthwork<sup>1</sup> lying on the NE. face of Shaw Hill a little over a mile NE. of the cairn on Kip Hill and a little over half a mile ESE. of Dolphinton manse may have been confused, in the mind or in the MS., with the cairn; for Lawson says that the hoard was found “within a quarter of a mile” of a structure which was probably this earthwork. Whatever may be the explanation of the curious details of the Dolphinton account, it is very probable that it contains merely a garbled and incoherent reference to the Shaw Hill hoard.

The exact find-spot of the hoard is not clearly defined by Lawson. He variously states that it was “within a quarter of a mile” of the earthwork; that it was “upon the side of the *Shaw Hill*, near the house;” and that “The place where they were found is in a sort of hollow upon the side of the Shaw Hill, a wild bleak muir, and the ground mossy and covered with heath.” In default of orientation it can only be suggested that the find was probably on the Netherurd side of the march dyke that here also forms the county boundary.

The hoard consisted of two identical loop terminal torques, one flat terminal torque, the single ring terminal of a multi-strand torque and “upwards of 40” globular coins—all of gold alloy. Of all these, only the ring terminal and two of the coins survive;<sup>2</sup> Lawson believed that the shepherd boy who discovered the hoard disposed of one of the loop terminal torques, the flat terminal torque and most of the coins to “some of the goldsmiths here” (Edinburgh), but stated that the other loop terminal torque was then (1807) in the possession of Sir George Montgomery of Macbiehill.

A. The loop terminal torques (Pl. XI (1), (2)). As described and illustrated<sup>3</sup> each of these identical objects consisted of two “thick golden wires” of circular cross-section twisted together in an anticlockwise direction into a penannular hoop terminating in a loop at each end. The internal diameter of the hoop was about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  ins. Each weighed 8 oz. 12 dwt.

B. The flat terminal torque (Pl. XI (3)). This was described and

<sup>1</sup> To be described and illustrated in the forthcoming *Inventory of Peeblesshire*, R.C.A.M. (Scotland).

<sup>2</sup> National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. Catalogue Nos. FE 46, FE 47, FE 48.

<sup>3</sup> *Arch. Scot.*, loc. cit., and Pl. X, No. 2, from which the illustrations of these lost torques, shown in Pl. XI (1), (2), are derived.

illustrated<sup>1</sup> as having been discovered broken. It was made of one gold wire of square cross-section twisted clockwise to give a fluted appearance, and the ends were "beat out flat." The internal diameter of the hoop was about  $3\frac{1}{4}$  ins., and it weighed 8 oz. 10 dwt.

C. The ring terminal (Pl. XI (4)). This object, now in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, one of two that originally formed the ends of a multi-strand torque, is a little finer than those from Snettisham, Norfolk, and much finer than those from North Creaque, Norfolk and from Hengistbury Head, Hampshire.<sup>2</sup> It weighs 4 oz. 5 dwt. and is made of an alloy of gold, silver and copper.

D. The coins (Pl. XI (5)). The two survivors of the two score originally recovered are Gaulish coins comparable to examples found in the vicinity of Soissons, Chalons and Rheims which are attributable to the Suessiones or the Remi.<sup>3</sup> A coin of this sort was made by joining two hemispheres of electrum cast in separate moulds, one of these being plain while the other provided for the casting of a raised four-pointed star. The joints are not neat and an equatorial bulge disfigures the appearance of the coins. They measure about  $\frac{2}{5}$  in. in diameter and weigh about 100 grains.

It is certain that none of the objects composing the Shaw Hill hoard originated in or anywhere near the district in which they were found. The coins are of non-British origin, but the British character of the other articles would suggest that the hoard came rather from an area of distribution in south-east Britain than directly from the land of origin of the coins. The only other record of what may have been coins of this type having been found in Britain is an indistinct one<sup>4</sup> which states that "In one place [in the parish of Dunnichen, Angus] there is said to have been found a number of small golden bullets . . .," but nothing further is known about these. The ring terminal and the two loop terminal torques probably belong to south-east Britain;<sup>5</sup> the latter are generally comparable to the bronze specimen numbered 31 among the forty-eight complete or fragmentary examples, of gold alloy, tin and bronze, found at Snettisham.<sup>6</sup> The flat terminal torque is of an uncommon type, not represented at Snettisham; a smaller example, with the terminals rolled, in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, is from Ireland.<sup>7</sup>

The hoard is small, but it is probably complete, as it may be assumed that its immediate vicinity was examined at the time of the discovery. It consists of pieces of valuable metal among which are the two parts of

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Scot.*, Pl. X, No. 3, from which the illustration of this lost torque, shown in Pl. XI (3), is derived.

<sup>2</sup> *P.P.S.*, xx (1954), 63-8, Pl. XVI and Pl. XVII (3), (4), (7), (8).

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Mr D. F. Allen, F.S.A., for this information.

<sup>4</sup> *N.S.A.*, xi (1845), Forfar, 146.

<sup>5</sup> *P.P.S.*, loc. cit., 70.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-51.

<sup>7</sup> FE 26.

one broken object and one item that is a mere fragment of another much larger one. Such a collection might have belonged to a worker in metals or might have represented the personal treasure of an individual. It is likely to have been buried at the end of the 1st century B.C. or at the beginning of the 1st century A.D. at a time when, it is generally supposed, there was a considerable amount of movement of people northward from the turbulent areas further south.<sup>1</sup> Although gold objects of this period are not common in this region, it can be noted that a torque or bracelet of gold wire, probably contemporary, was found at the hill-fort at Braidwood, Midlothian,<sup>2</sup> distant about 10 miles NE. of Shaw Hill.

The photograph used for Pl. XI was taken by kind permission of the Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland by Mr G. B. Quick, Senior Photographer, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, and I am indebted to the Commissioners for permission to publish it.

<sup>1</sup> *P.P.S.*, loc. cit., 71.

<sup>2</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIII (1948-9), 11, footnote 1.

