

Notes on Museum acquisitions 1972-4

by Joanna Close-Brooks

Among the acquisitions noted briefly in the lists of donations to and purchases for the Museum (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 105 (1972-4), 319-27) there are some that merit further comment or illustration. The bronze ingot (fig 1; NMAS cat no. DT 5) found in the garden of Stack House,

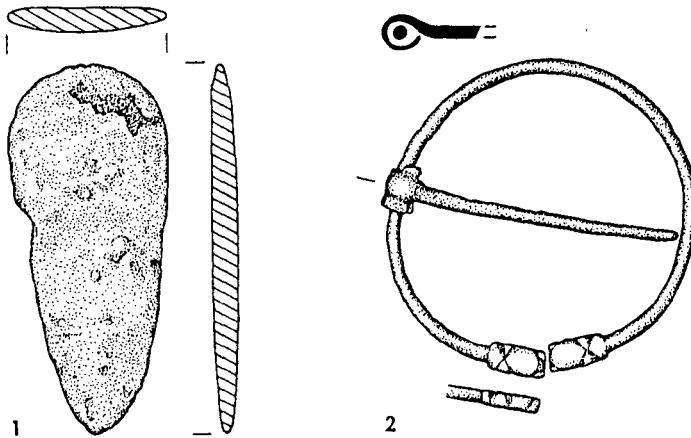


FIG 12 1, ingot from Gairloch; 2, brooch from North Berwick (1:2)

An Ard, Gairloch, Wester Ross, NGR NG 80507517 in 1972 is of particular interest (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 105 (1972-4), 319 no. 11). This small object (98 mm long, 43 mm wide, and 7 mm thick) seemed at first sight to be another of the 'ingots' common in Ireland (Harbison 1969, 22-4) but represented in Scotland by one specimen only, an ingot of arsenical copper from near Perth

(Coles 1969, 11; 96 (Pr 19), fig 3, 6), and possibly by one matrix on a stone mould from Burrel-
dales, Aberdeenshire (Britton 1963, 321, fig 10, left). A study of the Gairloch ingot by Dr H
McKerrell has shown, however, that it is a tin bronze with high arsenic content. The analysis is
as follows:

	% As	% Ag	% Sn	% Sb
SURFACE	3.8	1.3	67.5	0.7
INTERNAL	0.9	0.7	9.4	0.3

Dr McKerrell makes the interesting suggestion that the Gairloch object is a blank from
which a dagger blade was to be beaten out. This certainly accords well with the shape and the
small size of the object. To arrive at an idea of the size of the dagger that could be beaten from
the Gairloch ingot a comparison of weights was undertaken. The Gairloch ingot at 134 grams
compares fairly closely with some cast midrib daggers in the Museum, for instance one from
Auchterhouse, Angus (NMAS cat no. EQ 255; Coles 1969, 46, fig 37, 3). However, there seems no
reason to make up 'blanks' for cast daggers, and they are presumed to have been cast direct from
small cut scraps of metal. Of the possibly beaten-out daggers, the largest intact example in the
Museum, from the Auchnacree hoard, Angus, is 160 mm long and weighs 77 grams (NMAS cat
no. DQ 259; Coles 1969, 46, fig 49, 6), only just over half the weight of the Gairloch blank. Any
dagger beaten out of this blank must have been either substantially larger, perhaps approaching
the 224 mm long dagger from barrow G9, Oakley Down, Wimbourne St Giles, Dorset (Annable
and Simpson 1964, 39, fig 77), or considerably thicker than the Auchnacree dagger. Mr F K
Annable most kindly informs me that the Oakley Down dagger weighs 147.6 grams, including
two attached rivets, and thus compares closely with the Gairloch ingot. High tin bronze is not a
metal easy to beat or hammer out, and one might have supposed that dagger blanks would be
cast thinner than the Gairloch ingot to reduce the amount of working necessary. There is little
evidence on this point, yet, if Britton is right in interpreting some of the smaller matrices on
Early Bronze Age stone moulds as knife blades, the depth of the matrices suggests a certain thick-
ness to the blanks (Britton 1963, 266, figs 7, 10). A few of these matrices approach the size of the
Gairloch specimen (Britton 1963, 320 no. 4, 322 no. 10). The present identification of the Gairloch
ingot as a large knife or dagger blank is only tentative, and future research may alter the picture.

The fine white chert arrowhead found at Leadhills, Lanarkshire, NGR NS 887165, in 1973
(*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 105 (1972-4), 324 no. 6) is illustrated here on pl 34a. It is 47 mm long. The
Norse bone comb and a bone pin found on Freswick Links, Caithness in 1973 (*Proc Soc Antiq
Scot*, 105 (1972-4), 327), are shown on pl 34b. The composite bone comb, 85 mm long, with a
double row of bronze rivets, is related to combs found at Jarlshof, Shetland, in 13-14th-century
contexts (Hamilton 1956, 167 no. 62; 179 no. 1, fig 82; 187 no. 99, pl 32, 10; 189). There are two
other, more fragmentary, combs with this same stepped profile in the Museum, also from
Freswick.

Among the objects presented to the Museum in 1973 by the Queen's and Lord Treasurer's
Remembrancer is a bronze zoomorphic brooch from the foreshore at Rhodes Links, east of
North Berwick, East Lothian (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 105 (1972-4), 325 no. 39). The brooch was
found in a rock pool below high tide mark at NGR NT 57728562 in 1971. It could not have sur-
vived in such a situation for long, and is assumed to have weathered out of the cliff behind the
beach, and to have been found and thrown away again by earlier passers-by. Not far away from
the find spot a midden deposit that yielded an ibex-headed pin perhaps of similar date to the
brooch was investigated by J S Richardson in 1907 (Richardson 1907; pin NMAS cat no. FC 236).

The brooch (fig 12, 2) measures 84 mm (3.2 in) across the hoop, which is now slightly

distorted. The surface is weathered and pitted and the end of the pin is missing. The barrel pin-head was beaten out and folded round the hoop. The brooch is one of Mrs Fowler's Class F (Fowler 1964, 101) and is an addition to the main Scottish group of these and the closely related Class E brooches which are concentrated in Lothian. There are five Class E brooches at present known in Scotland (listed with references in Fowler 1964, 135-6); three from Lothian (two from Traprain Law, one from Barnton, Midlothian) and two others, one from Okstrow Broch, Orkney, and a recently recognised example from North Uist (Close-Brooks and Maxwell 1974 290). Of the six Class F or F1 brooches now known in Scotland (listed by Kilbride-Jones 1936 and Fowler 1964, 137-8), three are again from Lothian (Traprain Law; Longfaugh, Midlothian; and now North Berwick) while the other three come from Pinhoulland, Shetland; Aikerness Broch, Orkney; and Shurreray, Caithness. The concentration of E and F brooches in Lothian and the far north is exceedingly curious, but possibly distorted by the accident of discovery. The single F2 brooch from Mull, doubtless very much later, is thought to be an import from Ireland (Kilbride-Jones 1936, 409, fig 9, 23; Fowler 1964, 105).

The problems of dating Class F brooches have been discussed by Fowler (1964, 103-7). The brooch from North Berwick is typologically late in the series, and very similar to a Class F brooch found re-used as an armlet in grave 6 of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Bifrons, Kent (Kilbride-Jones 1936, no. 84; 447, fig 27), which provides a convenient *terminus ante quem* for the type. Mrs Sonia Hawkes kindly informs me that she would date Bifrons grave 6 to early in the 6th century AD or possibly a little later. A date within the 5th century for the North Berwick brooch is therefore probable.

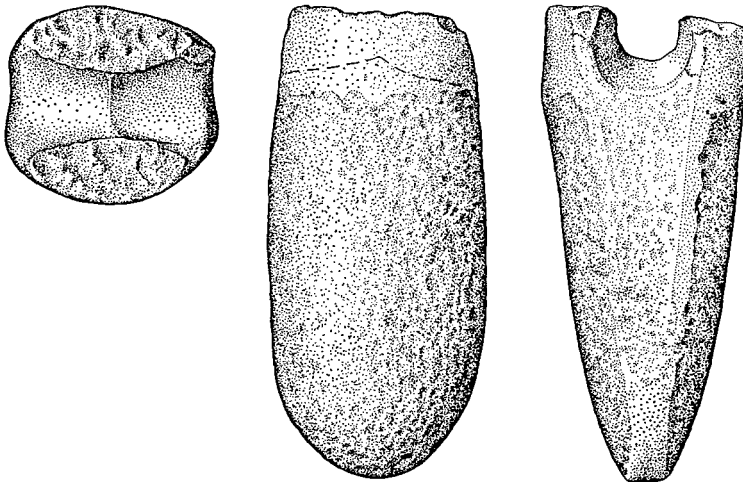


FIG 13 Axe-hammer from Longforth (1:3)

In 1974 half an axe-hammer was found in the garden of Longforth farmhouse, Auchenmalg, Glenluce, Wigtownshire, NGR NX 231523, and brought to our attention through the good offices of Mr S Pilling of Stranraer Museum (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 105 (1972-4), 324 no. 17). Mr G H Collins of the Institute of Geological Sciences has examined the specimen macroscopically and identified it as a coarse greywacke, common to the Southern Uplands of Scotland. The axe-hammer is unfinished, and provides some evidence about techniques of manufacture (fig 13). The surviving portion is 180 mm long, 82 mm wide and 70 mm thick. It seems to have broken in half relatively recently. Although the shaping is unfinished, the hour-glass perforation

had been completed; a contrast to other axe-hammers in the collection which have been completely dressed to shape, but whose shaftholes are only partly bored (NMAS cat nos AH 4, Craigton, West Lothian; AH 73, Mearns, Renfrewshire). The surface of the implement has been partly pecked to shape, but not yet ground. Round the shafthole, and on the blunt facet at the cutting edge, an original pebble surface survives, standing proud of the pecked area. This implement, therefore, was not made on a slab of quarried rock but on a large natural pebble of roughly the required final shape. The top and bottom of the implement are hollowed out at the blade end, so it falls into Mrs Roe's group of dished axe-hammers (Roe 1967, 67, 69), which are concentrated in Dumfries and Galloway.

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