

Gold armlets from Kilmallie, Inverness-shire

by Joanna Close-Brooks

The comprehensive list of late bronze-age gold ornaments in Scotland compiled by Coles includes two gold penannular armlets from Kilmallie, Inverness-shire, then thought to be lost (1960, 90). The earliest reference to these armlets is by Anderson (1886, 213). Speaking of the Irish type of armlet, he says: 'A pair of gold armlets, also of this type, were found in 1871 in the neighbourhood of Kilmallie, Inverness-shire. They passed into the possession of the proprietor of the estate on which they were found, and are said to have been subsequently lost.' These armlets are now (1975) in the possession of Sir Donald Cameron of Lochiel, and have been in his family's possession since the 19th century. Miss S Archibald of the West Highland Museum, Fort William, drew my attention to these armlets, and Sir Donald most kindly brought them to Edinburgh to be recorded.

Family tradition is that the gold bracelets were dug up by a crofter on his land as a result of a dream, and that he presented them to Lochiel who then remitted his rent for life. No record of the exact findspot has survived; the box containing the two bracelets has an old label 'Unearthed on the Lochiel Estate in the Nineteenth Century'. Anderson's description of the find thus remains the best indication of the findspot. Kilmallie (or Kilmallie) was a small township on the N shore of Loch Eil, about three miles from Fort William, and now merged with Corpach. Only the parish church at NGR NN 091770 retains the name Kilmallie, and the armlets were presumably found in this vicinity.

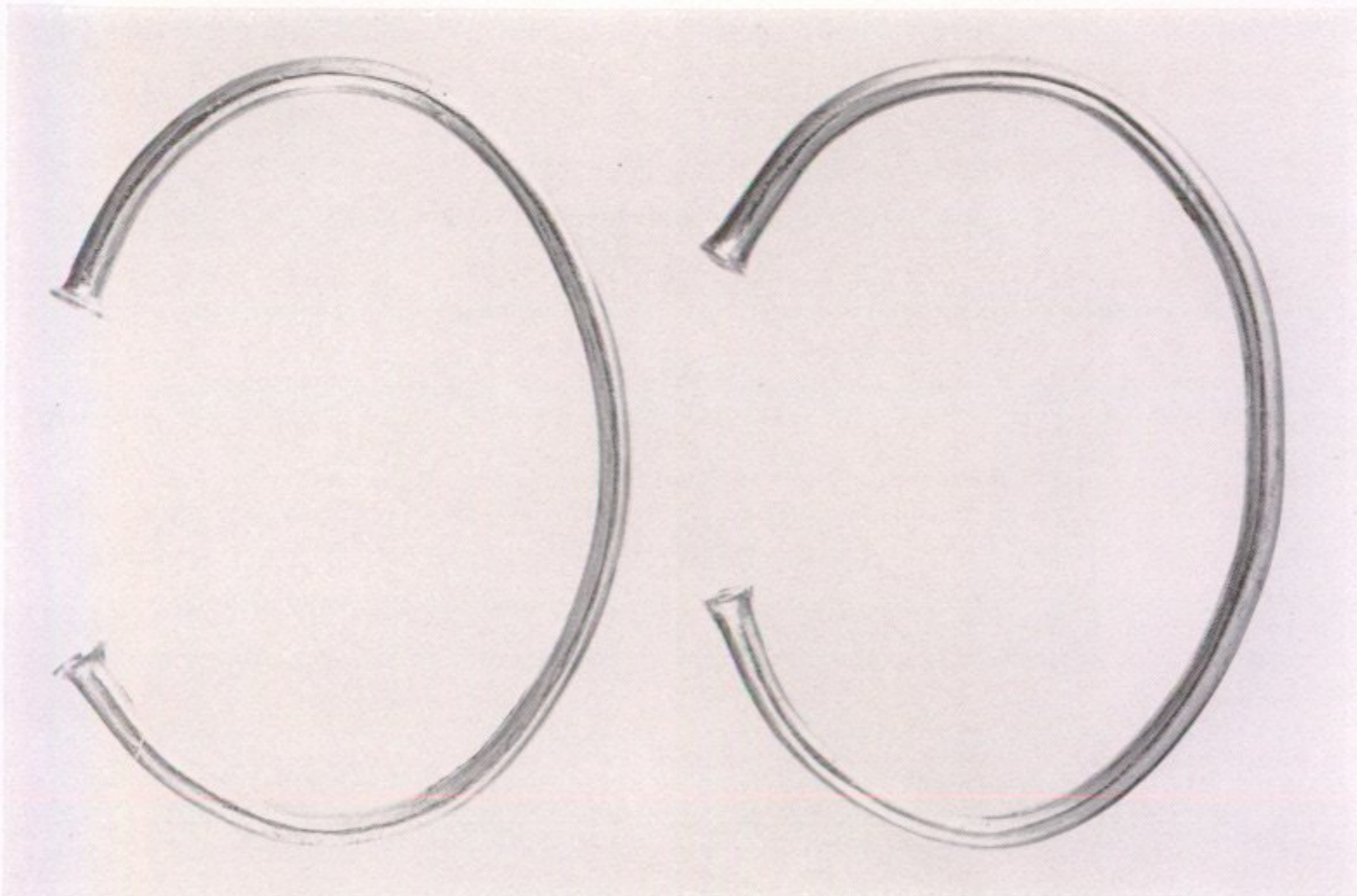
There can be little doubt that the two armlets now in Lochiel's possession are the two found in 1871. Callander (1923, 164) mentions two armlets from Kilmallie, 'which may be the two in the possession of Cameron of Lochiel'. A more useful reference is an entry in the *Official Catalogue of Scottish History and Archaeology Section, International Exhibition, Glasgow*, 1901. Item 27 on page 194 reads 'Gold bracelets or Tribute Money, belonging to the Bronze period, dug up by a crofter near Fort William on the Lochiel estate about twenty years ago. Lent by Donald Cameron of Lochiel.' The box for the armlets still has a sticker for this Exhibition attached to it.

The two gold armlets (pl 23a) are of the Irish type with terminals expanded all round. Armlet A, on the left of the plate, is 77 mm across, the terminals 7 mm in diameter, and it weighs 31.84 gm. Armlet B, on the right of the plate, is 78 mm wide, its terminals 5.5 mm in diameter, and weighs 30.99 gm. Both are generally round in section, but armlet A is oval in section and somewhat flattened on the inside in the centre of the hoop. The terminals of armlet A expand abruptly from the hoop, whereas in armlet B the hoop widens gradually towards the terminal. The edges of the terminals on both armlets are rather battered.

Coles (1960, 62) has mapped the distribution of Irish and Covesea gold and bronze armlets, of which the Irish gold armlets alone have been found in the west of Scotland. The Kilmallie armlets are plotted on his map.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, J 1886 *Scotland in Pagan Times: The Bronze and Stone Ages*. Edinburgh.
Callander, J G 1923 'Scottish Bronze Age hoards', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 57 (1922-3), 123-66.
Coles, J M 1960 'Scottish Late Bronze Age metalwork: typology, distributions and chronology', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 93 (1959-60), 16-134.



a Gold armlets from Kilmallie (scale 1 : 1)



b 'The Drosten Stone', St Vigean's no. 1