

A wooden bowl from Talisker Moor, Skye

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Mr M E Graham of Fiscavaig found pieces of a lugged wooden bowl about 3 ft down when cutting peats on Talisker Moor at c NGR NG 323326 in 1979. The bowl was forwarded to the National Museum through the good offices of Mr Calum Neish of Skye Agencies. Unfortunately, despite attempts to keep it wet, the wood had partially dried out before it reached the Museum. Nevertheless the Conservation laboratory has been able to partially reconstruct the bowl after treating the pieces with acetone-rosin. The two halves have been largely rebuilt but are too warped to be joined together.

This vessel was hand carved from a length of alder (*Alnus*). It constitutes rather more than half the thickness of the tree stem from which it is cut, the midpoint of which is located some 25 mm below the rim and immediately adjacent to the edge of the lug handles (pl 42). The diameter of the tree was a little in excess of 300 mm.

The bowl (fig 1) is distinctly carinated with a sharply inturning shoulder rising and everting to a faceted rim. Its external diameter at the rim seems to have been approximately 200 mm, and the maximum external diameter at the shoulder, possibly 230 mm, and the maximum external diameter at the shoulder, possibly 230 mm. Its base is the area of greatest damage but it seems to have been round bottomed.

The external surface is highly ornamented. A series of six grooves encircle the upper portion of the bowl beginning on the edge of the shoulder and reaching 40 mm down the side of the vessel. These grooves average 6.5 mm wide and 0.2 mm deep. Microscopic examination eliminates the possibility that these are lathe-turned and several patterns of cuts which range diagonally across the grooves are clearly visible. These cuts were made with a sharp edged knife of some sort and seem to represent the residual marks from the carving of the grooves themselves (pl 42).

Beneath the band of grooves a series of short vertical 'gouge' marks fill the middle third of the vessel between the lug handles. These marks, measured on the surface of the bowl are 28 to

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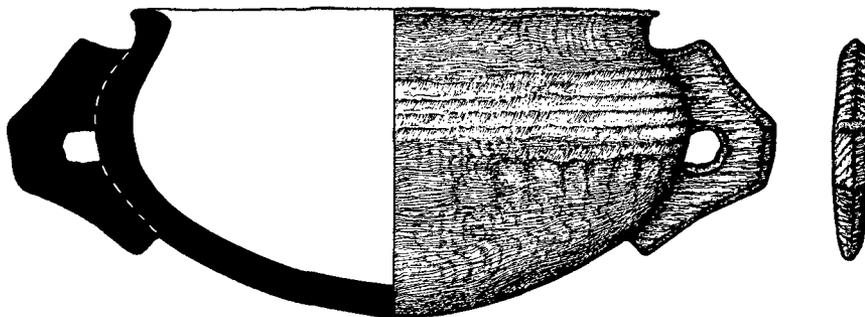


FIG 1 Wooden bowl from Talisker Moor, Skye

30 mm long, 10 to 15 mm wide and up to 0.9 mm deep. Detailed examination of these marks shows that each is produced by a series of oblique cuts (pl 42) rather than by a single cut from a concave gouge.

The fact that these various marks are deliberately created means that they must be seen as ornamental motifs rather than simple tool marks. This is, then, an ornamented, round bottomed, shouldered bowl and the question of its date and possible parallels with Neolithic pottery inevitably arise. Unfortunately we can offer no help in this respect. We have neither related peat deposits for dating by pollen analysis nor uncontaminated wood for C¹⁴ dating. It must therefore be allowed that the vessel can be of any date.

Stuart Maxwell has described three somewhat similar bowls in a note in these *Proceedings* (1951, 164). Like the present bowl they are round bottomed and carinated with everted rims but they differ from it in possessing a single lug-handle each. The first of these was found in a large (37 ft 7 in long) dug out canoe, exposed when Loch Laggan's water level was lowered in 1934. The other two are from mosses, the first from a moss near Ardgor House, Inverness-shire, and the second from Dalvaird Moss, Glenluce, Wigtonshire. Unfortunately all three are undated.

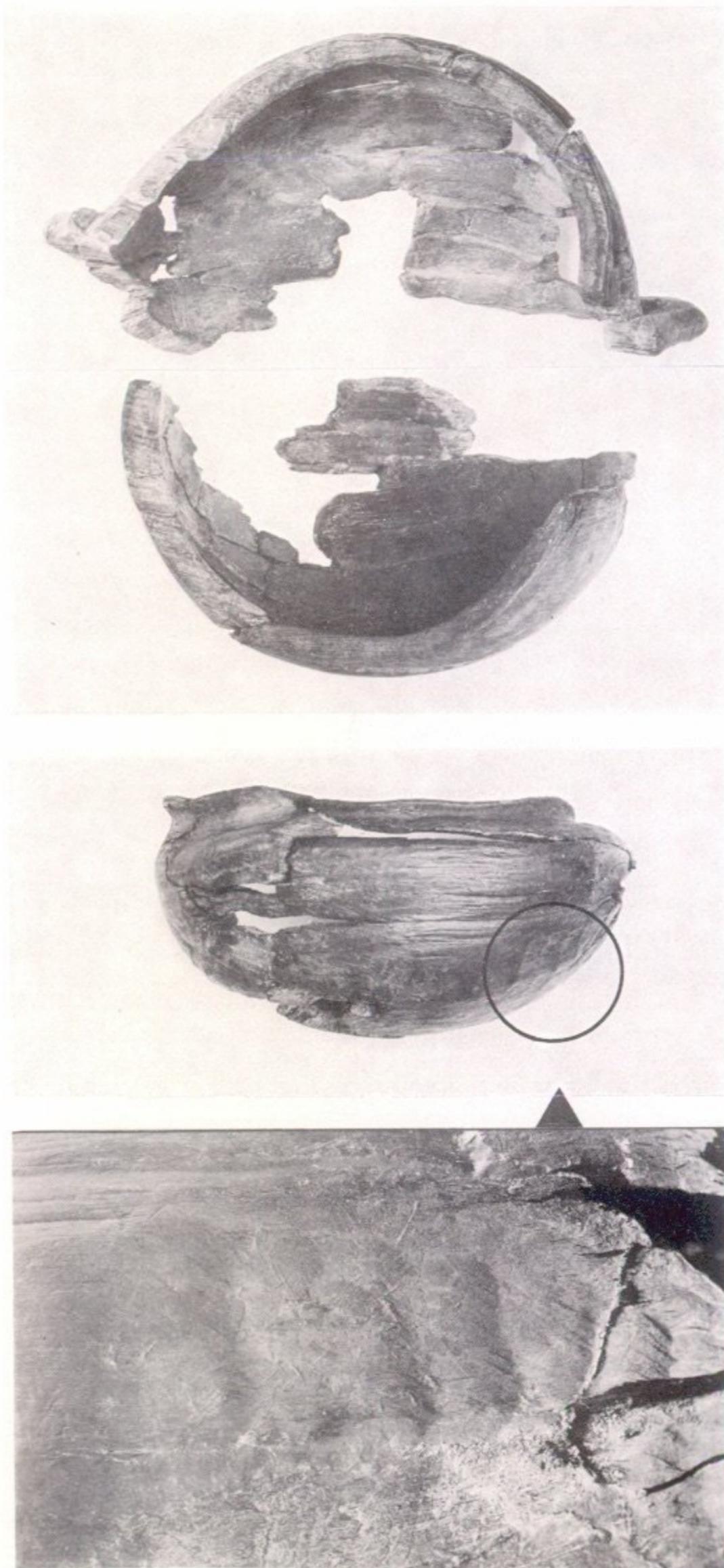
It is, perhaps, necessary to point out that the presence of the lug handles would not necessarily rule out lathe turning. Both bow and pole-lathes allow for part turning of bowl or other surfaces leaving handles or lugs upstanding.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The wood was identified by Theo Skinner of the National Museum's Conservation Laboratory. The plates are by M Brooks (CEU). I am grateful to Dr Close-Brooks for inviting me to examine this interesting vessel, and for directing my attention to Stuart Maxwell's paper. The illustration was prepared by Miss O'Neil and financed by the National Museum of Antiquities.

REFERENCE

Maxwell, S 1951 'Discoveries made in 1934 on King Fergus' Isle and elsewhere in Loch Laggan, Inverness-shire', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 85 (1950-1), 160-5.



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