

An unusual pair of Roman bronze vessels from Stoneywood, Aberdeen, and other Roman finds from north-east Scotland

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with a contribution by D Ingemark and illustrations by M O'Neil

ABSTRACT

The provenance of two Roman bronze vessels in the collections of Marischal Museum has recently been discovered in the journal of Rev John Skinner's 1825 Northern Tour. The reliability of this source is discussed, alongside a consideration of the antiquarian networks of the time. The vessels comprise a dipper and strainer set: unusually, the strainer is unfinished, and possible implications of this are considered. An Appendix catalogues other, mostly unpublished, Roman material from north-east Scotland in the Marischal Museum.

INTRODUCTION

Roman objects from northern Scotland have attracted antiquarian and archaeological interest for more than two centuries. This interest has often focused on a search for Agricola's campaigns (eg Barclay 1792; Grant 1818; Hanson 1987; Maxwell 1990; Breeze 2002; Fraser 2005); more recent work has focused on the uses of Roman objects in native society (eg Macinnes 1984; 1989; Hunter 2001; 2005a). While recent discoveries continue to expand the corpus (see Appendix), there are also finds which have lurked largely unknown in museum collections for many years. Unfortunately, many of these objects have poor provenances or have been inaccurately described in the past, such as a Late Bronze Age sword and a medieval bronze tripod pot in Marischal Museum, both of which have been described as 'Roman' in manuscript and published catalogues. Such early documents can, however, record information about objects

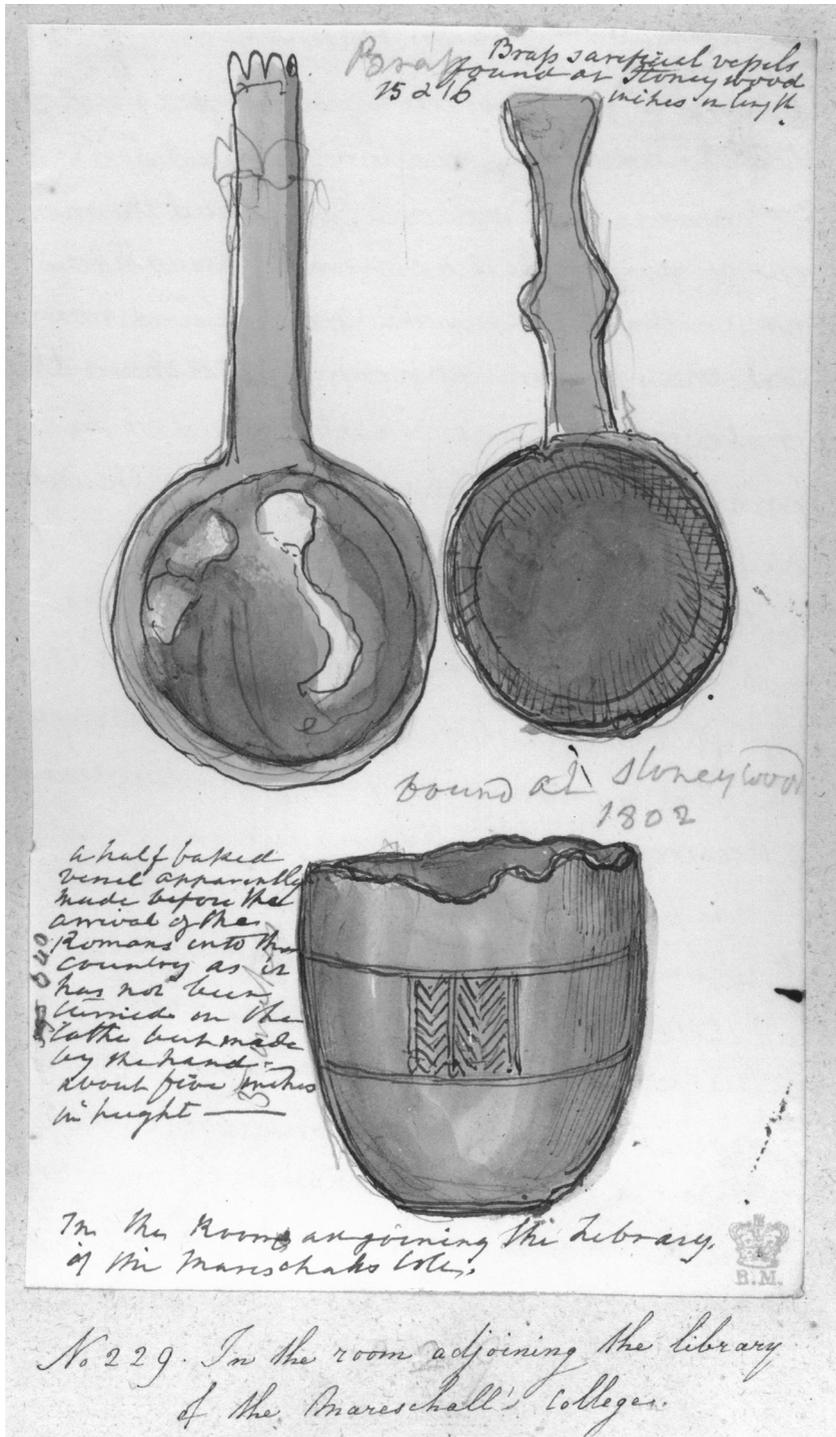
that has subsequently been forgotten. In the present case, antiquarian records allow us to restore a north-east provenance to a highly significant but ignored set of bronze vessels.

ACQUISITION

Alongside a manuscript catalogue maintained by Professor William Knight (1810–21) and other records in the University of Aberdeen archives, the early history of the museum in Marischal College is illuminated by the journal of the Rev John Skinner who visited it on 3 October 1825 (Skinner 1825). Skinner was particularly interested in the Roman antiquities of Scotland, and his account of the Antonine Wall has recently been studied by Keppie (2003). Skinner's short visit to Aberdeen was prolonged by bad weather, allowing him to spend a couple of hours in Marischal College during which he recorded and sketched a number of items on display:

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ILLUS 1 Skinner's sketch of the Stoneywood vessels, 1825 (© British Library Board Add Ms 33689. All rights reserved)

As I had the morning before me, I proceeded as soon as breakfast was over, to the Mareschall College, and having procured the person appointed to shew the interior to attend me, visited the Library and the Museum; the latter alone seemed to possess attractions for my eyes; for as to the Paintings, they were of little interest.... There was also a rare Hebrew Bible, illuminated as I have not seen before; also some Roman sacrificial vessels of brass, found at Stoneywood, not far distant from Aberdeen.... (Skinner 1825, 26v)

On his sketch of these items he also noted that these 'Brass sacrificial vessels found at Stoneywood, 15 & 16 inches in length' had been found in 1802. The description and illustration (illus 1; Skinner 1825, 27) match two unprovenanced vessels still in Marischal Museum. While this provenance is not recorded in any other known source, the closeness of Skinner's descriptions of other objects to those noted by Professor William Knight in his later catalogue imply that both copied their descriptions from a common source, presumably a label that was displayed beside the object in the 1820s and 30s.

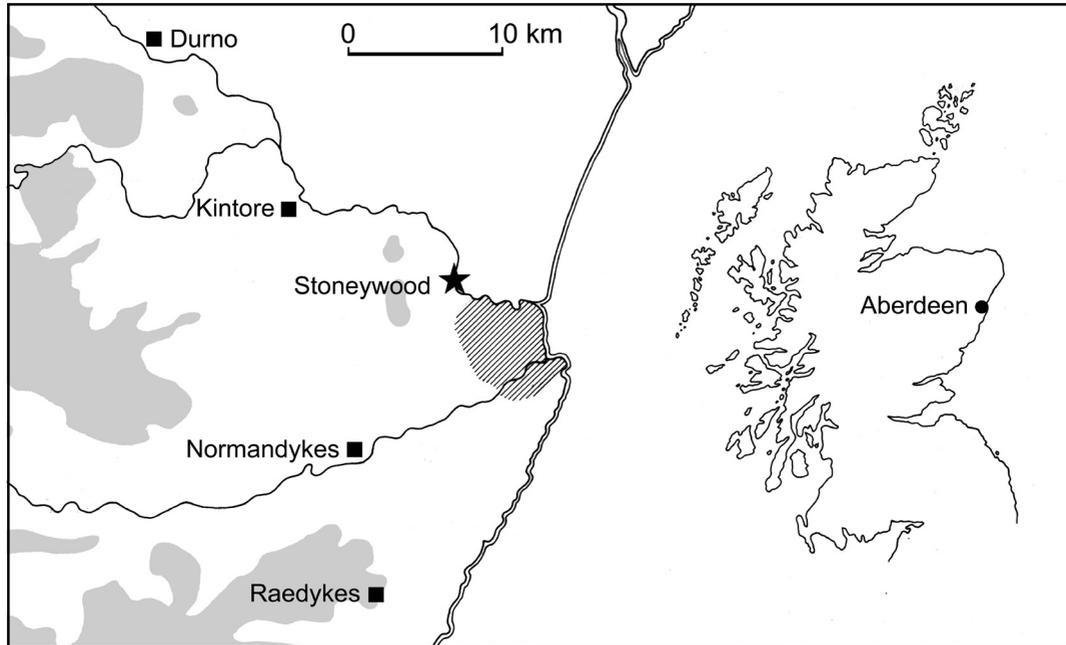
Following the fusion of King's College and Marischal College in 1860 to form the University of Aberdeen, the museum collections were re-organized to form the Archaeological Museum of King's College and subsequently, in 1907, the University's Anthropological Museum in Marischal College. The catalogues of these museums (Michie 1887; Reid 1912) do not record the findspots of these two vessels, though they both record them as having been donated by George Kerr in 1818. Indeed, the loss of provenance by the time of Michie's catalogue in 1887 led to them being listed in the 'Grecian and Roman' section, rather than the 'Romano-British' one that listed other presumed Roman items from the north-east. This ultimately led to both being given an Italian provenance by the later 20th century. Kerr also donated a leaf-shaped sword supposedly found near Raedykes Roman camp and a 'small figure of antique Brass of a Roman Soldier armed with Sword and Shield' (Knight 1810–21, 7). While the

latter has not been traced, the sword is part of a widespread group of replicas that is the subject of a separate study (Curtis forthcoming). Kerr did not donate any items from farther afield, giving credence to Skinner's record of the vessels as coming from near Aberdeen. It is also interesting that Kerr gave one of the replica leaf-shaped swords to Alexander Thomson of Banchory House, demonstrating his links with other local antiquarians who had an interest in the Romans in northern Scotland.

Unfortunately, little is known about George Kerr (c 1765–1825). He is recorded as having been born in Glenbervie, Kincardineshire (Anderson 1898, 365), attending first, second and fourth years in Marischal College between 1786 and 1790, but failing to graduate. Although incomplete, his education in the College would have emphasized the writing of classical authors, while the opening of the College's museum in 1786 would have further ensured that the discovery of Roman antiquities would have had a particular resonance. Kerr's papers include a diary of a whaling expedition (Kerr 1791; Savours 1959), while he was the author of *Observations on the Harveian doctrine of the circulation of the Blood* (1816) and *A brief memoir concerning the typhus fever, prevailing in Aberdeen, during the years 1818 and 1819* (1820). The latter records him as being 'Superintendent of the temporary houses of recovery', while the sale of his library in 1821 (Kerr 1821) described him as 'Surgeon in Aberdeen'. This sale, presumably for debt, was ordered by the Magistrates of Aberdeen and includes a wide range of books that reflect his medical and antiquarian interests. He appears to have died in 1825, with his family publishing his critique of the teaching of medicine in Marischal College the following year (Kerr 1826).

THE STONEYWOOD VESSELS

Stoneywood lies on the south-west bank of the river Don within the present City of Aberdeen



ILLUS 2 Location map. Squares mark Roman temporary camps (Drawn by Marion O'Neil)

council area (NGR: NJ 89 11; illus 2). Now surrounded by Aberdeen Airport, Dyce and Bucksburn, in the 19th century it was largely farmland around the policies of Stoneywood House and a series of mills that had been established along the river from Aberdeen to Inverurie. Today one of these mills, owned by Arjo Wiggins, covers much of Stoneywood near the river. No other Roman items are known from the area, though the findspot of a massive silver chain and Pictish stone at Parkhill some 3km upstream on the opposite bank may hint towards the importance of the area in the early centuries AD.

The form and condition of the two Stoneywood vessels indicate they are a pair (illus 3–5). Intriguingly, one of them is unfinished: it has a shallow thickened bowl with extensive hammermarks. They are described in detail below, but may be identified as a dipper-strainer set of Eggers (1951) Type 160; in this case the dipper is complete but the strainer is unfinished. Before turning to the implications of the

Stoneywood find, it is worth considering the type and its occurrence in Scotland. Such vessels have been summarized most recently by Petrovsky (1993, 98–102). They have a broad distribution, from Italy to the northern and western provinces, being common in Gaul, along the Rhine and Danube frontiers and in Britain. They are also frequent finds beyond the frontier in Free Germany, Ireland and Scotland (Armstrong 1923, pl IV no 3; Eggers 1951, Karte 45; Bateson 1973, 66; Lund Hansen 1987, 465–6, Karte 60; see Table 1). Petrovsky's review of their dating suggested a production span from *c* AD 35 to 160; they could of course have extended use-lives, as the heavily-repaired example from the fourth-century Helmsdale (Sutherland) hoard shows (Spearman 1990, 73–4).¹

The type (and the closely-related Eggers Type 161, indistinguishable in damaged specimens) is common in Britain (Eggers 1966), and saw use among the army in Scotland, with examples from Castledykes and Cramond (Robertson 1964, 161, pl 7, no 16; Holmes 2003, 109, illus

TABLE 1

Finds of Eggers Type 160 and 161 (E160/161) dippers and strainers from non-Roman contexts north of Hadrian's Wall. Pre-1975 counties are used. A handle from Traprain Law, East Lothian (Curle 1915, 196, fig 44 no 6; Burley 1956, no 444) is a late Roman development of the type; it is shorter, with a less pronounced expansion close to the body of the vessel, and is decorated with a criss-cross incised pattern. It is paralleled at Irchester (Northamptonshire), Burwell (Cambridgeshire) and Knaresborough (Yorkshire; Kennett 1968, 32–5, fig 9; Gregory 1976, 74, fig 5 no 15; Eggers 1966, Abb 41 no 4; for Continental parallels, den Boesterd 1956, no 60)

<i>Site</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Stoneywood	Aberdeenshire	Hoard	Dipper and unfinished strainer (E160)	This paper
Hurly Hawkin	Angus	Broch	Fragment	Henshall 1982, 228–9, fig 6, no 24
Gainerhill	Lanarkshire	Hoard	Dipper-strainer set (type uncertain due to damage)	Curle 1932, 306, 383; Wilson 1995, 23
Auldearn	Nairn	?Settlement	Dipper (E161)	Hunter 2005b, 393, fig 5
West Thirston	Northumberland	Hoard	Dipper and strainer (E160)	Thompson 1889
Midhowe	Orkney	Broch	Dipper (E160?) – heavily repaired, diagnostic parts lost	Callander & Grant 1934, 466, 501
Glenshee	Perthshire	Hoard	Dipper-strainer set (E160)	Curle 1932, 306, 386
Helmsdale	Sutherland	Hoard	Repaired strainer in fourth-century hoard (E160)	Spearman 1990, 73–4

99). Examples are also found in non-Roman contexts north of Hadrian's Wall, as Table 1 indicates. Some are clearly from Iron Age contexts, but there is an inevitable ambiguity over whether hoards and single unassociated finds should be considered as finds from *barbaricum* or deposits from Roman hands, a problem we face with Stoneywood (see Hunter 1997, 117–18 for further discussion). Bronze vessels were far from commonplace in Iron Age contexts, and it is likely that they were status goods of some value. In Scandinavia they occur as part of drinking sets in rich burials, perhaps to strain and serve alcoholic drinks (Lund Hansen 1987, 465–6), and a similar function is likely for the Scottish examples in native hands.

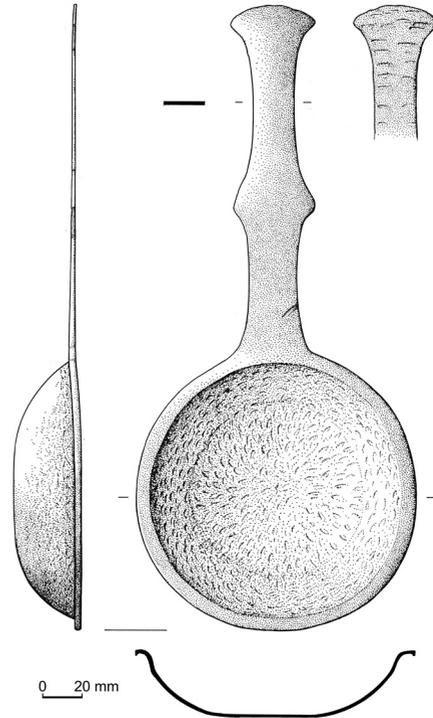
DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS

- 1 Dipper with a long, slightly damaged handle and about a third of the bowl missing, although the rim is intact; the handle is slightly angled upwards to the bowl (illus 3). Single piece, with no evidence of repairs. The rim is horizontal, slightly rounded on the inside and angled slightly upwards, with the edge thickened to create a flange. The bowl is relatively shallow, the sides initially steep, tapering rapidly into the rounded base; it shows traces of hammer-marks from manufacture. Areas of a grey deposit on the base of the interior are likely to be tinning. The elongated flat handle is double-waisted, the upper more tapered than the lower and expanding to a lost tip. The central asymmetrical swelling is a poorly-developed version of the typical paired forward-pointing lobes. A hole in the

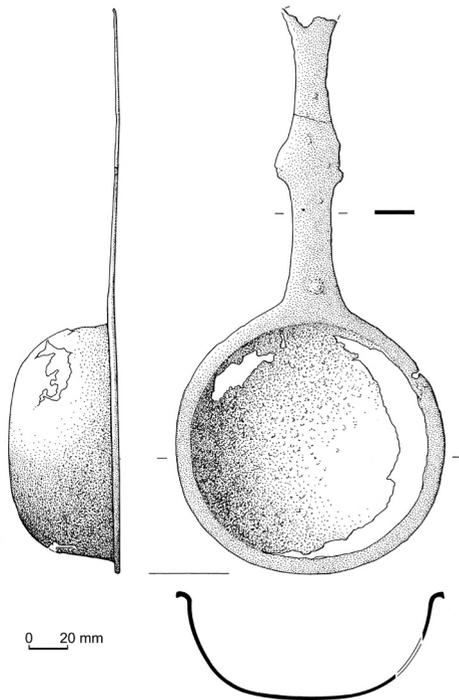
rim and a series of circular features on the handle are corrosion pockets, not rivet holes. The original patina is a good, glossy dark green one, suggesting burial in wet conditions. It is overlain by a patchy vivid green layer, representing secondary corrosion after discovery or a change in burial environment. This is present everywhere apart from an area of the underside of the base, where more of the original patina shows. Part of this area has been cleaned down to bare metal.

L 295mm; handle L 155mm, W 19–37mm, T 2mm; bowl D 138–40mm, H 55mm, T c 0.5–0.7mm; rim W 8–9mm, H 3.5mm. Alloy (from surface XRF by Dr K Eremin): gunmetal (with low Zn, high Sn). Catalogue number: ABDUA: 50108.

- 2 Unfinished handled vessel, in form much like 50108 but with a thicker, shallower bowl bearing extensive hammer-marks (illus 4–5). The long, flat handle (angled slightly upwards to the bowl) is of the same form as Cat no 50108, with the curved expanded tip intact. One of the central lobes is rather angular, suggesting it is unfinished.



ILLUS 4 The unfinished strainer (ABDUA:50109) (Drawn by Marion O'Neil)



ILLUS 3 The dipper (ABDUA:50108) (Drawn by Marion O'Neil)

The flat rim is slightly angled upwards, with the edge thickened. The bowl has shallow angled sides and a fairly flat base, with extensive small oval hammer-marks (typically 4–7 × 1.5–2mm). These occur on the sides in a circumferential band (c 30mm W) around the rim, and on the base in a series of radiating lines. They are barely visible on the exterior, indicating it was sunk rather than raised. Original filemarks are visible in places on the rim and handle, with more recent scratches on the bowl. Hammer-marks are also visible on the rear of the handle, especially up to 60mm from the end. Again it has two corrosion products, although the secondary corrosion is much less pronounced, especially on the interior.

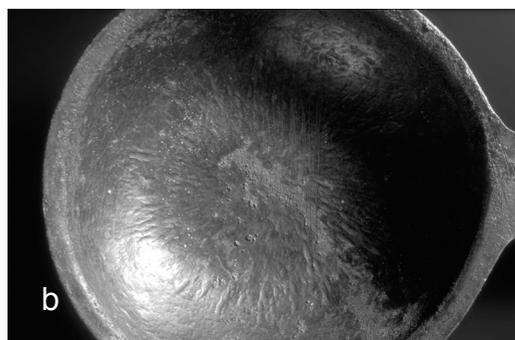
L 310mm; handle L 170mm, W 40.5mm, T 1.5–2.5 mm; bowl D 138–40mm, H 33mm; rim W 5.5–7.5mm, H 3mm. Alloy (from surface XRF): gunmetal (with low Zn, high Sn). The alloy is closely similar to 50108, within the limits of the technique, supporting their interpretation as a pair. Catalogue number: ABDUA:50109.

The secondary corrosion may suggest that the two vessels were nested, Cat no 50108 sitting inside Cat no 50109. This assumes the corrosion occurred during burial; there is nothing in the primary patination to confirm this, although the better condition of Cat no 50109 suggests it was buried lower than Cat no 50108, and was thus damaged less on discovery.

DISCUSSION

What sets the Stoneywood vessels apart from other finds is that one is unfinished. Petrovsky (1993, 98–102) has discussed the manufacturing evidence for the type. He notes that makers' names represented on the stamps are of non-Italian, predominantly Gaulish origin (ie names with a Celtic root), with no evidence that the well-known Campanian manufacturers were producing vessels of this form. He thus suggests a predominantly Gaulish origin for the type. While the arguments for a provincial origin are sound, the precise workshops remain hard to pin down. As noted above, the types are broadly distributed, while Petrovsky notes 23 different stamps for E160. Is it feasible to see production in Roman Britain, or even in Roman Scotland? Henig (1995, 79–80) has discussed the fallacy of the long-lived belief that people in Roman Britain could not manufacture quality material, with an assumption that good-quality non-Mediterranean objects must be Gaulish. This is seen clearly in the production of intricately-enamelled vessels, where there is strong evidence for a British origin, plausibly in the northern part of Roman Britain (Moore 1978; Künzl 1995). Occasional vessels of classic Roman forms bearing Celtic-style decoration support this, such as the E160 strainer from Risley, Lancs (Watkin 1883, 228). There is thus no reason why the type could not be made in Britain.

ILLUS 5 The Stoneywood vessels. (a) The two vessels; (b) detail of the bowl of the unfinished strainer; (c) detail of the handle of the unfinished strainer (Photos by Duncan Anderson, © Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)



However, it takes a further leap to explain why an unfinished example should end up in the Aberdeen area. As outlined above, the antiquarian sources seem strong, and there is no reason to doubt the Scottish provenance. Three obvious possibilities present themselves: manufacture by or for the Roman army when it was in the area; indigenous manufacture based on Roman types; or movement of the material northwards from the Roman world. Each may be considered in turn.

The vessels could be linked to Roman presence in the area. There is a well-known series of marching camps in Aberdeenshire, linked to Flavian and arguably Severan campaigns (Maxwell 1989, 56–8, 63–7). Stoneywood lies near two of the series, being 13km north-east of Normandykes and 12km south-east of Kintore, well within range of roving army units. Is it likely that such items were brought on campaign, especially in a half-finished state? This may seem intuitively improbable, but we are perhaps too influenced by the sterile nature of temporary camps: these clearly give a misleading impression, as recent excavations at the Kintore camp indicate (Cook forthcoming). While it is unlikely that the average soldier was carrying such items – indeed, the rarity of pottery from camps suggests even this was transported only in limited supplies – the officer class may have been less reticent about their luxuries, as ornate bronze vessel fragments from the Varus battle site indicate (Franzius 1993, 159–63). Craftsmen capable of making or finishing such items would have been present within the ranks of the army (Webster 1985, 118–20; Bishop & Coulston 2006, 233–8). This model should not be dismissed out of hand.

The local manufacture argument is unlikely. Production of Romano-British items, notably brooches and counterfeit coins, is attested on non-military sites in Roman Scotland (Hunter in prep; Holmes & Hunter 2001), but this took place markedly further south, within the area occupied by the Romans rather than in the campaigning zone. With the bronze vessels, which are well-

known types spread across several provinces, there is nothing to suggest their manufacture beyond the Roman world. Some vessels are known with Celtic-style decoration [eg Coygan (Carmarthen) and Risley (Lancs); Wainwright 1967, 85–8; Watkin 1883, 228], but these, like the brooches, fit best within the art of the frontier zone itself. There is evidence of hybridization of Roman styles in the north-east, notably in massive-tradition finger rings, but these products were distinctively different from the Roman norm (Simpson 1970; Hunter 1998, 344–5). The vessels thus seem unlikely to be local versions of Roman products.

A stronger possibility is that unfinished items came into native hands. It is impossible to reconstruct the detailed history of individual objects, and various mechanisms for the acquisition of Roman objects have been proposed, including looting, taxation, trade, and later (post-Roman) reuse and circulation. One of us has argued elsewhere that Roman objects were socially important items in Iron Age society (Hunter 2001), and it is likely that diplomatic gifts played a major role in their movement (eg Todd 1985). But why would an unfinished item be brought north? One interpretation would be to see it as ‘good enough’ – complete enough to serve as a vessel, though obviously not as a strainer. This would suggest that second-rate material was viewed as sufficient for barbarians. Although unfinished objects are otherwise unattested, there is evidence for the movement of second-hand material to Iron Age sites in the form of samian vessels with ownership inscriptions from Traprain Law, indicating a prior life among a Latin-literate community (eg RIB II.7, 2501.62). However, this need not be seen negatively; as long as they were still functional, there is no reason to assume that (in societies where one could not simply buy replacements) used goods were seen as second-rate. Indeed, items with a history may have been valued more than virgin ones because of their associations and genealogy. But an unfinished

object is rather different, and the idea of trading ‘seconds’ to the natives is not readily supported, as there was a general preference for good-quality material (Hunter 2001, 298–301). Instead, the Stoneywood vessels may have represented all that was available at the time; a commodity shortage on the Roman side among whoever was dealing with northern affairs – or, perhaps most plausibly, an expedient solution to a diplomatic problem encountered on campaign. There is evidence from coinage that supplies to frontier regions were not always regular (eg Hobley 1989, 69, fig 2), and this is likely to apply to other materials as well. These vessels may thus represent the scrapings of the Roman barrel rather than a deliberate slight. Another possibility would be to see the unfinished object as an asset rather than a second. Here was a creative opportunity for local bronzesmiths (well capable of working sheet bronze) to adapt the vessel to their own desired form – although, as noted above, there is no supporting evidence for this from finished products.

These possibilities remain unprovable and speculative. In truth the circumstances of the Stoneywood find are unique and pose considerable interpretative difficulties. It clearly indicates manufacture of such vessels within Roman Britain. Beyond this, matters are more opaque. We are swayed by the unfinished nature to suggest that it had not moved far from its maker, and thus to suggest the transport and manufacture of such relatively luxurious items on campaign. However, whether it was deposited from a soldier’s hand or had passed to indigenous peoples in the evolving circumstances of the first contacts between the Romans and local elites is uncertain.

The final area to consider is the deposition of the vessels. The fine green patina suggests they were buried in wet surroundings, and deposition in a bog is likely. This is a typical location for metalwork deposits in the Roman Iron Age, and may plausibly be interpreted as votive (Hunter 1997). This antiquarian find, and

the recent discovery from Auldearn (Table 1), expand the distribution of Roman vessel hoards into a previously-blank area (Hunter 1997, fig 12.5). As discussed above, interpretation of such hoards is complicated because there was a strong tradition of vessel deposits both within and beyond Roman Britain (Hunter 1997, 117–18); these would be appropriate in both a military and an indigenous environment.

CONCLUSION

The rediscovery of the Stoneywood vessels highlights the complex interactions between Roman and native in the region. Until recently, the Roman impact on an area lying far to the north of long-term Roman occupation was generally considered to have been slight. Yet the apparent abandonment of the area of the Roman camp at Kintore by native settlement for some 400 years (M Cook, pers comm), and the increasing numbers of Roman objects discovered far from Roman sites is putting this into question: excluding coins, there are now 24 findspots of Roman material from Aberdeenshire and Moray, almost double the number recorded in Robertson’s (1970) synthesis. Brooches and other valued items, such as glass and tablewares, dominate the material, indicating that Roman objects were playing a major role in local society.

It remains unclear whether the Stoneywood vessels reached native hands, but they do suggest that life for some elements of the campaigning army may not have been as spartan as is sometimes imagined. Whilst not aiding the pursuit of Agricola’s progress quite as the early antiquarians imagined, it is somehow satisfying that the Stoneywood vessels re-emerge to play a part in the story of Roman Scotland. They also highlight the practices of antiquarian collectors and museums over the past 200 years and serve as a tantalising reminder of the treasures which lurk, in our museums as much as our soil, to enlighten and complicate our interpretations.

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NOTE

- 1 Spearman's dating of the hoard is unduly circumspect; the Irchester-type bowl (Spearman 1990, illus 4, no 2) is a well-known fourth-century type (eg Kennett 1968, 29–32; de Micheli 1992).

ABBREVIATIONS

RIB *Roman Inscriptions of Britain* = Collingwood & Wright 1995

RIC *Roman Imperial Coinage*. London

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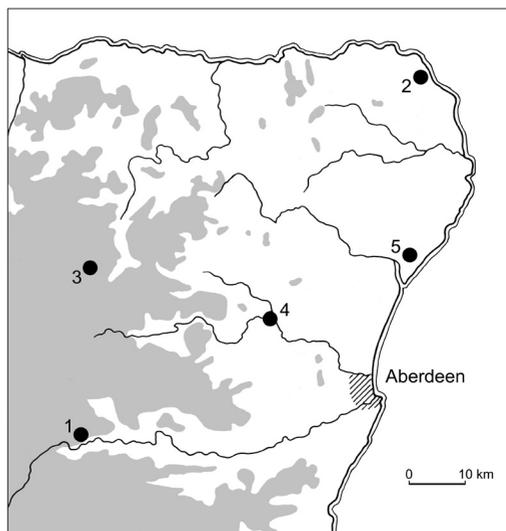
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APPENDIX: ROMAN ITEMS FROM NORTH-EAST SCOTLAND IN MARISCHAL MUSEUM

Alongside the Stoneywood vessels, the collections of Marischal Museum include four other Roman objects from Aberdeenshire: two further poorly-published antiquarian finds and two recent metal-detector finds allocated as Treasure Trove. We also discuss a problematic coin find from the area which antiquarian sources can elucidate a little. The findspots of the objects are indicated on illus 6. Metal-detecting finds are given four-figure grid references to protect the location; details are held in Marischal Museum.



ILLUS 6 Findspots of Roman objects from Aberdeenshire in Marischal Museum (Drawn by Marion O'Neil)



ILLUS 7 Glass bottle from Loch Kinnord (© Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen)

1 *Perfume bottle from Loch Kinnord* (illus 7)
(with Dominic Ingemark)

A blue-green glass bottle was acquired by Marischal Museum in 1969 from Arthur Keith-Falconer, 10th Earl of Kintore. A paper note accompanying the bottle says:

This Roman glass bottle was fished out of the Loch of Kinnord near Dinnet. It came from Lord Huntley's collection at Aboyne Castle. Note: The Romans encamped round Loch Kinnord; This was the most northerly point that they ever reached in Scotland. The bottle is possibly one of the earliest glass bottles in existence.

While much of this note is either inaccurate or hyperbolic, it does offer an intriguing provenance. A wooden paddle and a fragment of a logboat from Loch Kinnord are also in the museum collection (Mowat 1996, 60–2, 97–8), while one of the few crannog sites in the north-east is in the Loch. The archaeology of the area has been well recorded since Sir Alexander Ogston's work on the Cromar estate (Ogston 1931), which noted the large number of surviving later prehistoric field systems and settlements.

The vessel is a unique find for Scotland: the few other intact glass vessels from the country are all from graves. It is an intact tubular unguent flask (Price & Cottam 1998, 169–70) in blue-green glass, 128mm in height, with a rim diameter of 28mm and a basal

diameter of 27mm. The colour and shape of the vessel suggests a first to second century date (Price & Cottam 1998, 169). Perfume flasks or *unguentaria* were produced in a wide variety of shapes and types during the Imperial period (de Tommaso 1990). They were mainly utilitarian vessels employed for holding perfume, scented oils and medical ointments (Charlesworth 1972, 206), and are most commonly found in Roman burial contexts, often in large numbers. Occasionally they have been found in baths (as at Caerleon; Allen 1986, 98–100), which demonstrates their link to hygiene and bathing.

The flasks were predominantly used as containers, and were probably not exported in their own right. A grave find from Stoneyford, Co Kilkenny, Ireland, which includes a small perfume bottle still containing the remains of a white powder (Bateson 1973, 72), supports this view.

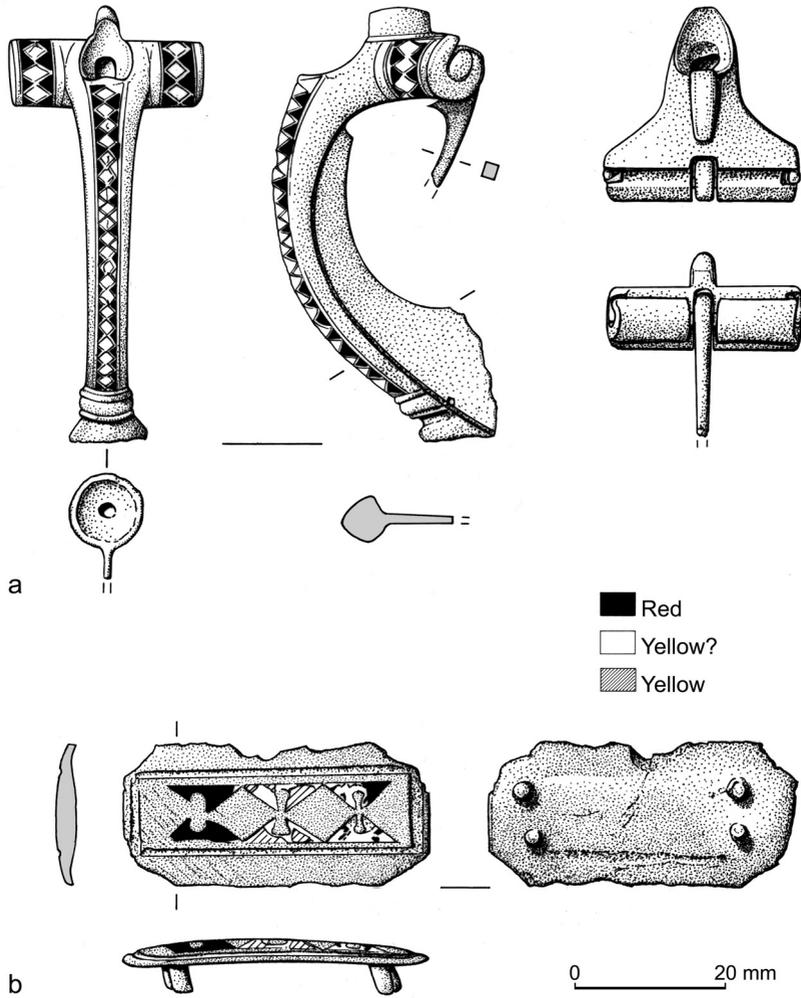
Unguent flasks are rare finds beyond the borders of the Roman Empire (Ingemark 2000, 176). Of this very limited number of finds, few are in common blue-green glass, underlining the wider importance of the Loch Kinnord find.

Catalogue number: ABDUA:36857
NGR: NJ 44 99

2 *Headstud brooch from Corsekelly, St Combs* (illus 8a)

Found by Gordon Innes while metal-detecting. Acquired by Marischal Museum as Treasure Trove in 2004 (TT18/03).

Enamelled headstud brooch, probably intact when buried although the headloop is lost, part of the pin and catchplate return have been damaged recently, and the inlaid studs are missing. The lost headstud (probably glass) was riveted in an oval hollow (8 x 12mm). A raised crest runs from this onto the head. The wings bear enamelled panels flanked by marginal bars and a low-relief curved moulding on the sides of the head. The design is a central column of discoloured (?yellow) lozenges flanked by marginal red triangles. A similar design of yellow lozenges flanked by red



ILLUS 8 (a) Headstud brooch, Corsekelly, St Combs; (b) Enamelled mount, Mains of Lesmoir, Rhynie (Drawn by Marion O'Neil)

triangles runs down the bow, with a low-relief raised rib on the flanks. At the foot is a tripartite moulding and a cupped hollow which once held another stud, the rivet hole drilled at a slight angle. The catchplate extends decoratively along the underside of the bow; there are filemarks at the foot. The hinged pin is held in an integrally-cast semi-cylindrical housing by a copper alloy axis, the housing stepped back from the front edge with a groove at the rear.

Headstuds are one of the commonest brooch types from non-Roman contexts in Scotland, probably because their form and enamelling suited local tastes

(Hunter 1996, 122–3). This is a particularly fine example.

L 58.5mm, W 26mm, H 28.5mm
 Catalogue number: ABDUA:90149
 NGR: NK 05 62

3 Enamelled belt mount from Mains of Lesmoir, Rhynie (illus 8b)

Found by Ian Cowe in March 2002 while metal-detecting. Acquired by Marischal Museum as Treasure Trove in 2004 (TT16/02).

Rectangular belt mount, slightly lentoid in section, with four attachment tangs (L 4.5mm, D 2.5mm), apparently intact, on the rear. The edges of the mount are worn but the design is well-preserved. Incised unenamelled lines define a frame around the rectangular field. This has a central reserved row of lozenges with bilateral lobes at the junctions. The design is emphasized by enamelling in three zones, with red at the edges and a second discoloured enamel, probably yellow, in the middle.

The closest parallel found so far is an Antonine mount from the Roman fort of Strageath (Frere & Wilkes 1989, 146, fig 73 no 48), probably from cavalry harness; a similar interpretation is plausible for the Rhynie example. This puts it in a select minority, as there is very little Roman militaria known from non-Roman sites in Scotland. Most of it is cavalry harness: a harness mount from Hurly Hawkin (Angus), a similar mount, scabbard chape and part of a shield rib from Traprain (E Lothian), and an unrecognized harness strap junction from Dun an Fheurain, Gallanach (Argyll) (Burley 1956, no 332, 399, 381; Ritchie 1971, fig 2 no 8; Henshall 1982, 229, fig 6 no 26). This is in marked contrast to areas such as Scandinavia, where Roman weaponry is a major feature of burials and hoards, linked perhaps to mercenaries or returning auxiliaries (Jørgensen et al 2003). The absence in Scotland may be more illusory than real, as militaria generally was rarely deposited on sites.

The find also adds to the evidence for Tap o'Noth as a major centre in the Roman Iron Age. There has been no excavation on the site or its hinterland, but Roman pottery (Samian and Coarse ware) is recorded from the area, as is a late Roman Iron Age terret and a Roman Iron Age glass bead (Kilbride-Jones 1935, 448–54; Ralston & Inglis 1984, nos 13, 29). It is likely that this visually dominant hillfort was a major regional centre at the time (Ralston & Inglis 1984, 10–11), while a nearby group of Pictish stones suggest the area's importance continued into later centuries.

L 40mm, W 19mm, H 7mm

Catalogue number: ABDUA:64918

NGR: NJ 47 28

4 *Gold aureus of Vespasian from Port Elphinstone*

A slightly worn aureus, depicting Vespasian on the obverse with the inscription IMP CAESAR VESPASIANVS AUG TR P. The reverse depicts Aequitas with scales and rod, with the inscription COS

ITER TR PO. The type is RIC 277, dating to AD 70. The coin was found in a garden in Port Elphinstone, Inverurie, and presented to the museum in 1912 by Sir Arthur Evans, the excavator of Knossos, through Sir William Ramsay, having been purchased in Aberdeen by his father, Sir John Evans, in 1906. It is mentioned by Cramond (1895, 60) and published by Macdonald (1918, 247). The findspot in a garden raises some questions over whether it is an ancient loss, but there are no strong grounds for dismissing it.

D 18.8mm, T 2.2mm, weight: 7.15g. Die axis: 220°

Catalogue number: ABDUA:47477

NGR: NJ 775 200

5 *Gold solidus of Honorius from Meikle Loch, Slains*

This find was recorded by Macdonald (1918, 246) but further information has come to light about its discovery, leading to a mystery over its current whereabouts. The *Peterhead Sentinel & Buchan Journal* of 10 May 1876 records that 'Mr Alex Stott, son of Mr Jas. Stott, Whitefields, Slains, in ploughing a field after turnips on the vicinity of the Meikle Loch, Slains recently turned up a gold piece of the Emperor Honorius'. An account of February 1889 notes that this coin 'is an Aureus of the Emperor Honorius, AD 395–423. Reverse Victoria Avgg, figure of the Emperor with a standard and globe surmounted by a Victory, placing his foot on the captive. This valuable coin is in the Museum of the University of Aberdeen' (Dalgarno 1889). The account of its discovery strongly suggests this was an ancient loss.

The description matches the only, unprovenanced, coin of Honorius in the Marischal Museum collection (ABDUA:47476). Yet the equation is not so straightforward. The coin was exhibited (rather than donated) to the Society of Antiquaries in 1876 by James Dalgarno of Slains, author of the 1889 account (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 11, 1875–6, 516). However, Macdonald, writing in 1918, records it in the Edinburgh collection, and clearly saw it; there is indeed a coin with this description and provenance in NMS today (H.C14496). To thicken the plot yet further, the solidi in both museums are the same type (RIC IX, Mediolanum 35(c), minted in Milan AD 394–5), although they are not die-links or copies. While there is ambiguity in the early records, the authority of Macdonald and the provenance attached to the NMS specimen suggest this is likely to be the original coin find.

NGR: NK 029 308