
The Late Bronze Age hoard from Corrymuckloch, near Amulree, Perthshire: an interim report

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with illustrations by Alan Braby and Marion O'Neil

Introduction

On Saturday 6 May 1995, Mr and Mrs T Barker were walking across an area of rough pasture to the north of Corrymuckloch Farm, of which they are tenants. The lower portion of the area comprises an area of boggy ground where, in the spring of 1994, ditches had been excavated through peat to the surface of the till by a tracked excavator in order to improve the drainage of an old water-course. Mrs Barker was looking out for stones for a friend's rockery when she spotted what she and her husband initially, and understandably, took to be a metal helmet (later identified as the handled vessel) lying in the peat upcast from one of the drainage ditches. Immediately by the vessel was the tip of a bronze sword, while a search of the immediate area revealed three socketed bronze axeheads lying about a metre away, again in the upcast peat.

At the earliest possible opportunity, they took their finds to Perth Museum and Art Gallery for identification. One of the writers (MH) dealt with their enquiry, made an initial identification of the nature and significance of their discovery, and advised the finders of the Treasure Trove procedure in Scotland. That evening, the National Museums of Scotland were informed of the discovery and the following day a site visit was made (by TC, MH and RT) in order to assess the find-spot and evaluate its potential for further work. As a result of limited investigation that day, a further two fragments of the sword blade were recovered by metal detecting from the disturbed peat deposits upcast from the drainage ditch.

The site

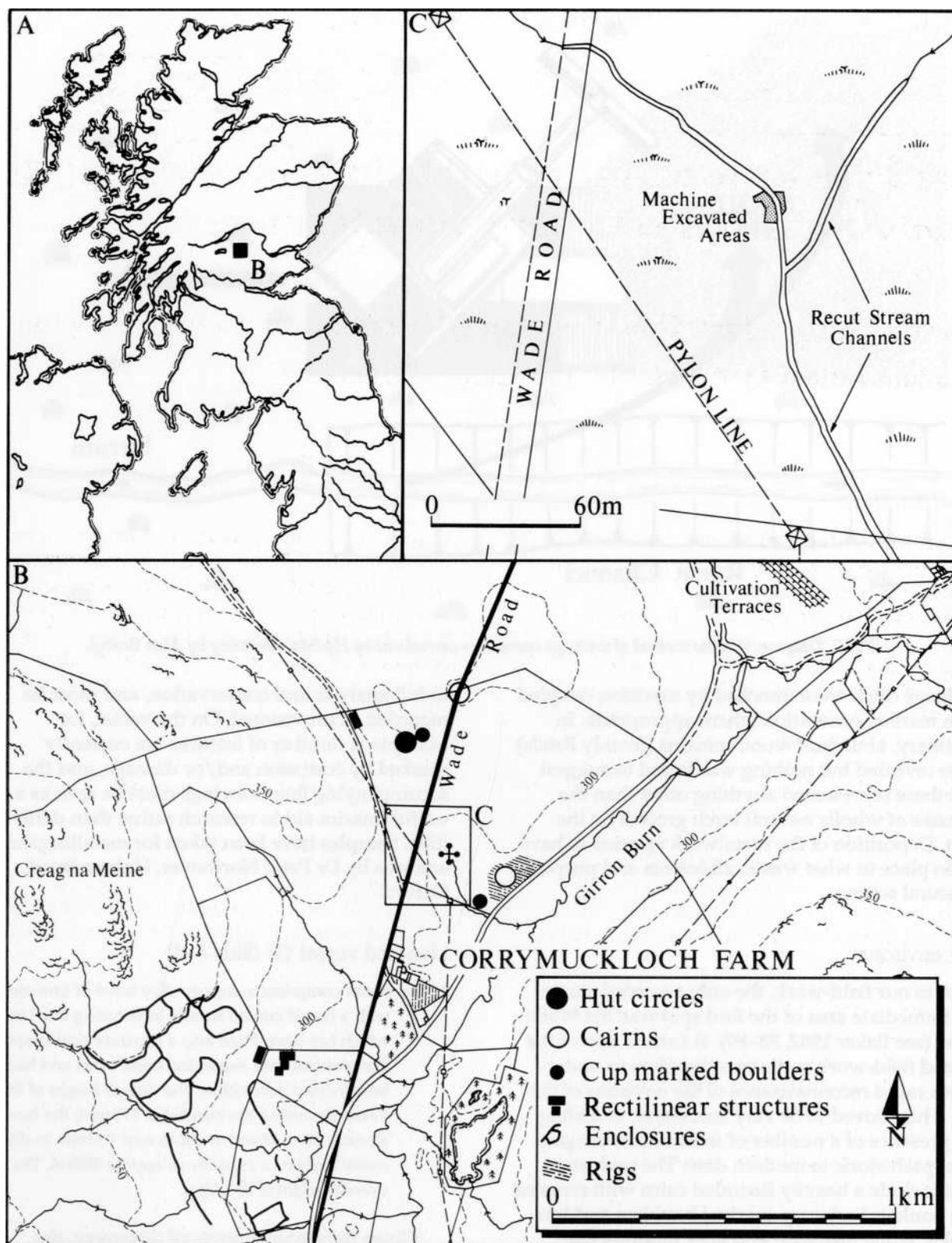
Immediately north of the farm steading at Corrymuckloch, some 2km south of Amulree in Perth-

shire, a very small and nameless burn drains eastwards from high ground to the west of the Crieff-Aberfeldy (A822) road. Just below the road, the burn joins the north-flowing Girron Burn (at NN 8977 3483). The find spot of the metalwork lies within an area of peat occupying the shallow valley of the minor burn, at approximately NN 8953 3507 (Illus 1). The peat is a consistent 1.40-1.50m deep across large parts of the basin, underlain by gleyed till, often with a thin veneer of fluvial sand and fine gravel between till and peat.

Investigation of find spot

The excavation of the drainage ditch by the mechanical excavator in 1994 had proceeded as shown diagrammatically in Illus 2. The Hy-Mac had been positioned on what was to become the west bank of the drainage ditch with its tracks parallel to the intended line of the excavation and the uphill direction of travel. The mechanical arm was then swung round at 90° to remove the deposits of peat in sections approximately equivalent to the width of the bucket; the spoil was then dumped in a low broad spread on the same bank as and behind the machine as it progressed upslope. From what we know of the method of operation, the metalwork seems likely to have been in material derived from the lower part of the peat.

The absence of any fresh breaks or any obvious modern damage on the finds of metalwork tends to support the idea that the group had been removed bodily within one bucketful of peat, spread as the Hy-Mac bucket disgorged its load of spoil, and that thereafter it had weathered out gradually over the course of the following year. Although the group of objects could not be pre-

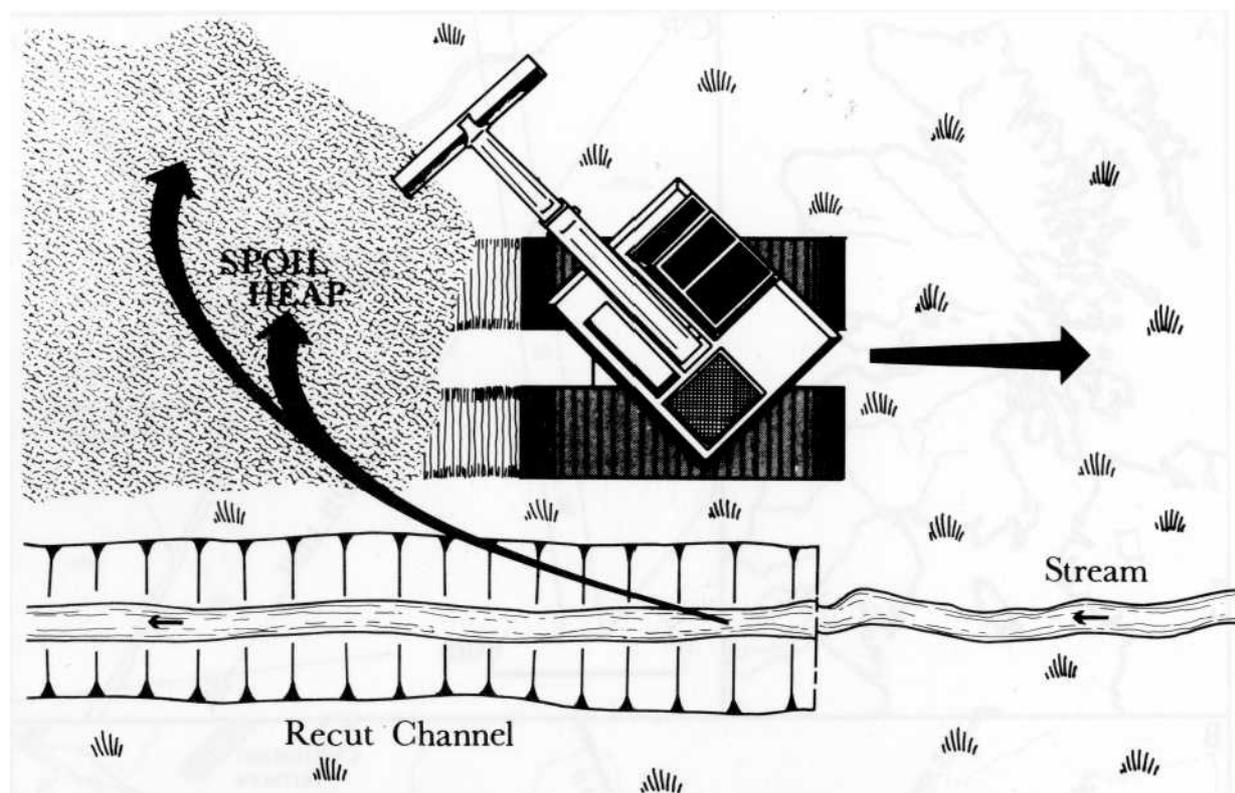


Illus 1. Location maps, showing A) location of the find spot, B) the distribution of monuments in its immediate environs, and C) the location of the machine trenches in relation to the drainage ditches (drawing by Alan Braby).

cisely re-located in terms of their exact position or depth within the peat profile, the circumstances are strongly indicative of a hoard deposit.

There were therefore some grounds for suspecting that the whole metalwork deposit had been re-

trieved and that the immediate context had been disturbed. However, in view of the significance of the find, the opportunity was later taken to assess whether any archaeological deposits lay in the approximate area of the find-spot. Both sides of the



Illus 2. Diagram to show method of drainage operations carried out by Hy-Mac (drawing by Alan Braby).

drainage ditch were trenched by machine, coupled with manual excavation where appropriate. In summary, abundant wood remains (mainly *Betula*) were revealed but nothing was found to suggest that these represented anything other than the remains of wholly natural birch growth on the spot. Deposition of the metalwork appears to have taken place in what was to all intents and purposes a natural setting.

Site environs

Prior to our field-work, the only recorded site in the immediate area of the find spot was the Wade Road (see Baker 1982, 88-89). A further aim of the second field-work sortie was therefore to undertake a rapid reconnaissance of the environs of the site. This proved to be very successful, revealing the presence of a number of monuments ranging from prehistoric to modern date. The prehistoric sites include a heavily denuded cairn with remains of a boulder kerb, cup-marked boulders and hut circles, while medieval and later monuments include longhouses, enclosure systems and cultivation remains (see Appendix). The inventory of sites is almost certainly incomplete and follow-up survey is required to record the area in detail.

Description of the hoard

The descriptions which follow, and the accompanying line drawings, have been prepared prior

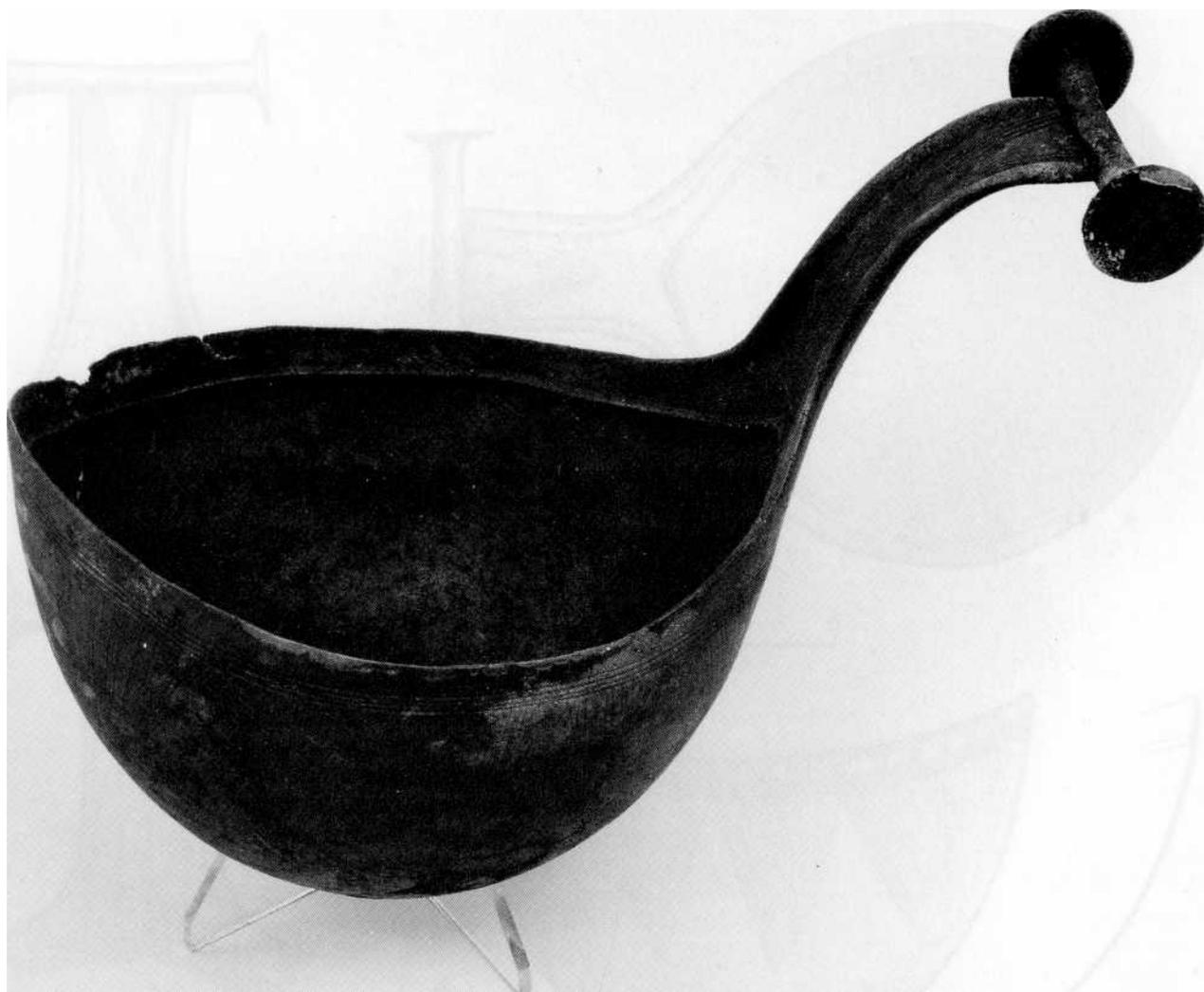
to full analysis and conservation, and must be regarded as provisional. On the vessel, for example, a number of features are currently masked by corrosion and/or damage, and the accompanying line drawings must be seen as a useful interim aid to research rather than definitive. Samples have been taken for metallurgical analysis by Dr Peter Northover, University of Oxford.

Handled vessel (1) (Illus 3-4)

1. The vessel comprises a copper alloy bowl of one piece with a broad curved handle terminating in a tang which has been fitted into a separate slotted spool-like terminal with expanded ends; bowl and handle bear incised decoration. The overall height of the vessel (including the handle) is 173mm; the bowl alone is 88-108mm in depth and 153mm in diameter and has a capacity of approx 800ml. The overall weight is 734.5gm.

Given the circumstances of discovery, the condition of the vessel is remarkably good. The main areas of obvious damage are around part of the rim where an irregular portion 20mm long and up to 6mm deep has been detached prior to discovery and close to this there is a minor tear in the rim.

The bowl is deep and almost hemispherical in form. Seen in elevation, the line of the rim is concave, forming a gentle curve extending from

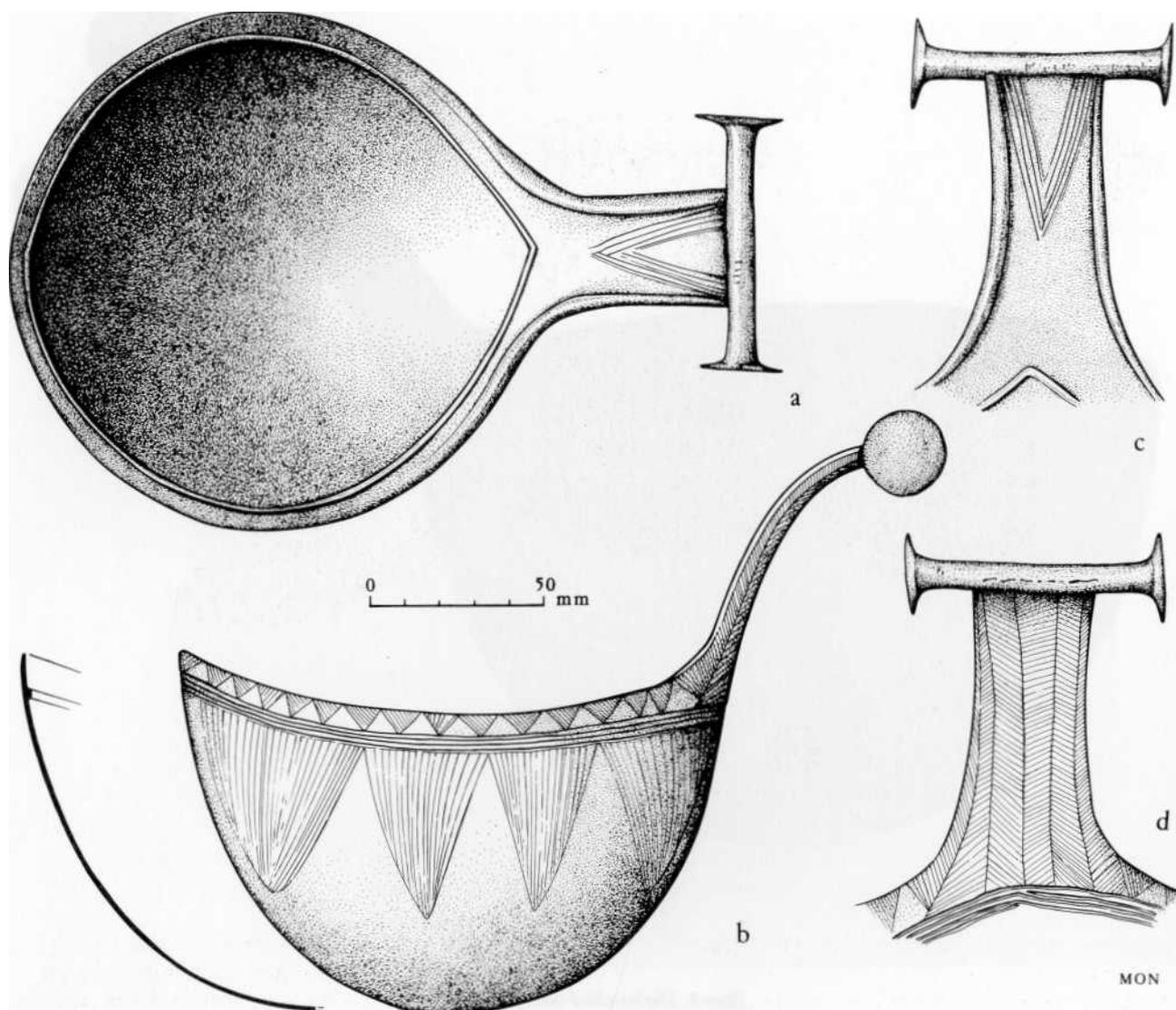


Illus 3. The handled vessel (NMS).

the base of the handle and rising again to form a slight peak at the perimeter approximately opposite the handle. Seen from above, the vessel is slightly asymmetrical, a mid-line drawn from the handle just missing the peak of the rim. If the vessel was used in the fashion of a ladle or dipper (ie pouring from the side), the curving form of the rim may have served a useful function by concentrating the flow of the contents, as well as being decorative. The interior of the bowl is plain, apart from a narrow moulding or rib 12mm below the rim. The function of this is uncertain: its position is mirrored by a band of relatively deeply incised lines on the exterior and it may possibly have been designed to reinforce the upper portion of the rim. About 6-7mm below the rim, and following its contours, there are four close-set incised lines forming a band about 5mm wide. Between the rim and the uppermost of these lines, there are a series of finely incised contiguous small pendant triangles filled with oblique hatching. Below the contoured lines, the upper body of the bowl is ornamented with a series of finely incised large

pendant triangles filled with oblique hatching.

The handle sweeps up from the rim of the bowl in a sinuous curve of even width with thickened or reinforced edges; the end of the handle has been reduced in width and thickness so as to form a tang or tongue which has been snugly fitted into a lenticular slot in the shank of the spool. At the point at which the tang has emerged from the reverse of the slot, it has been masked by hammering it flush with the surface (though the uneven line of metal shows quite clearly). The shank of the spool has a circular cross-section. The expanded ends of the spool are now heavily corroded but appear to have been plain; these are not quite circular in shape and also differ very slightly in size. While the spool itself appears to have been plain, both faces of the handle are decorated with incised lines. On the front (or inner) face is a simple chevron motif composed of multiple incised lines, which commence at the junction of handle and spool and converge down the convex surface of the handle. These lines have been executed in the same technique (and with the



Illus 4. The handled vessel (drawing by Marion O'Neil).

same tool?) as the contoured lines around the exterior of the rim.

On the reverse of the handle, bands of finely incised lines in a vertical herringbone arrangement ornament the whole surface between its junction with the spool and the incised contour lines below the rim. These have been executed in the same technique, and almost certainly using the same tool, as the patterns of filled triangles on the exterior of the bowl. Although the individual motifs are somewhat unevenly drawn and vary in details of size and layout, the overall effect is nevertheless very sophisticated.

Socketed axeheads (2-4) (Illus 5, right to left)

2. Socketed axehead with deep collar with multiple mouldings and faceted broad, baggy body. Length 84mm. Gillespie type (cf Schmidt and Burgess 1981, 191-197).
3. Socketed axehead with everted collar, low horizontal

moulding and three widely spaced vertical ribs on each face. Length 80mm. Yorkshire type (ibid, 223-239).

4. Socketed axehead with flaring collar and slender faceted body. Length 92mm. Meldreth type (ibid, 204-211).

Fragments of sword blade (5) (Illus 6)

5. Three fragments of the lower portion of the blade of a leaf-shaped sword; none of the breaks is fresh and only two of the fragments certainly join. The profile shows considerable longitudinal distortion and the edges are buckled in several places. The condition of the blade is thus consistent with deliberate destruction in antiquity. Length of longest fragment 143mm.

Discussion

The context of the hoard

Owing to the circumstances of discovery, the original disposition of the material is unknown.



Illus 5. The socketed axeheads (NMS).

There is some inconclusive evidence to suggest that the metalwork may have been close to the base of the peat (here about 1.2-1.25m in depth). The nature of the peat deposits perhaps suggests that the group was deposited in boggy ground (possibly in a birch carr?) braided by minor water-courses, although further work is required to throw more light on the contemporary environmental conditions. There seems no reason to doubt that the group was originally deposited together, and it can reasonably be described as a hoard. The nature of the contents and the location invite interpretation in terms of votive deposition.

The contents and dating of the hoard

Initial research suggests that the form of the handled vessel is without close parallel, making this a discovery of international interest. Ladles (*Schopfer mit Hebelgriff*) are characteristic of the Early Iron Age (mainly Hallstatt C) in central Europe and northern Italy (Priissing 1991, 43-4; von Merhart 1969, 302-6, 374, Karte 2, Taf 34-5), though examples are known from the Late Bronze Age (ibid, 302-3, Taf 34, 6-8). In a definitive survey of bronze vessels from Hungary, Patay records only two examples of ladles (*Pfannen*), indicative of

the rarity of the form during the Late Bronze Age (1990, 46-47); these include a fragmentary vessel from Kurd hoard II (ibid, 46 no 69; see this paper Illus 7a for reconstruction) which was compared with a ladle or scoop-like vessel in a hoard from Sincraieni, Romania (Petrescu-Dimbovita 1977, 134, pl 321.11; see this paper Illus 7b). None of these continental vessels compares closely with the Corrymuckloch vessel, recalling the difficulty experienced by Pearce in attempting to find parallels for the *cast* bronze cups from the Glentanar hoard (1971, 63). The elaboration of the handle of the Corrymuckloch vessel *superficially* recalls the expanded terminals of the handles of the Glentanar cups, but the techniques of manufacture are markedly different.

However, what is of significance is the association of the ladles from both Kurd and Sincraieni with other sheet metal vessels. Kurd is eponymous for the central European type of bucket which must have inspired the insular buckets of the Late Bronze Age (Hawkes and Smith 1957, 134). In particular, the presence of a handled bowl, ladle and cup in the latter hoard is very suggestive of a specialised set of prestige eating or drinking equipment. This is charmingly borne out by one of the recurrent motifs in the situla art of the Early Iron



Illus 6. Two of the sword fragments, showing features consistent with deliberate damage and breakage (NMS).

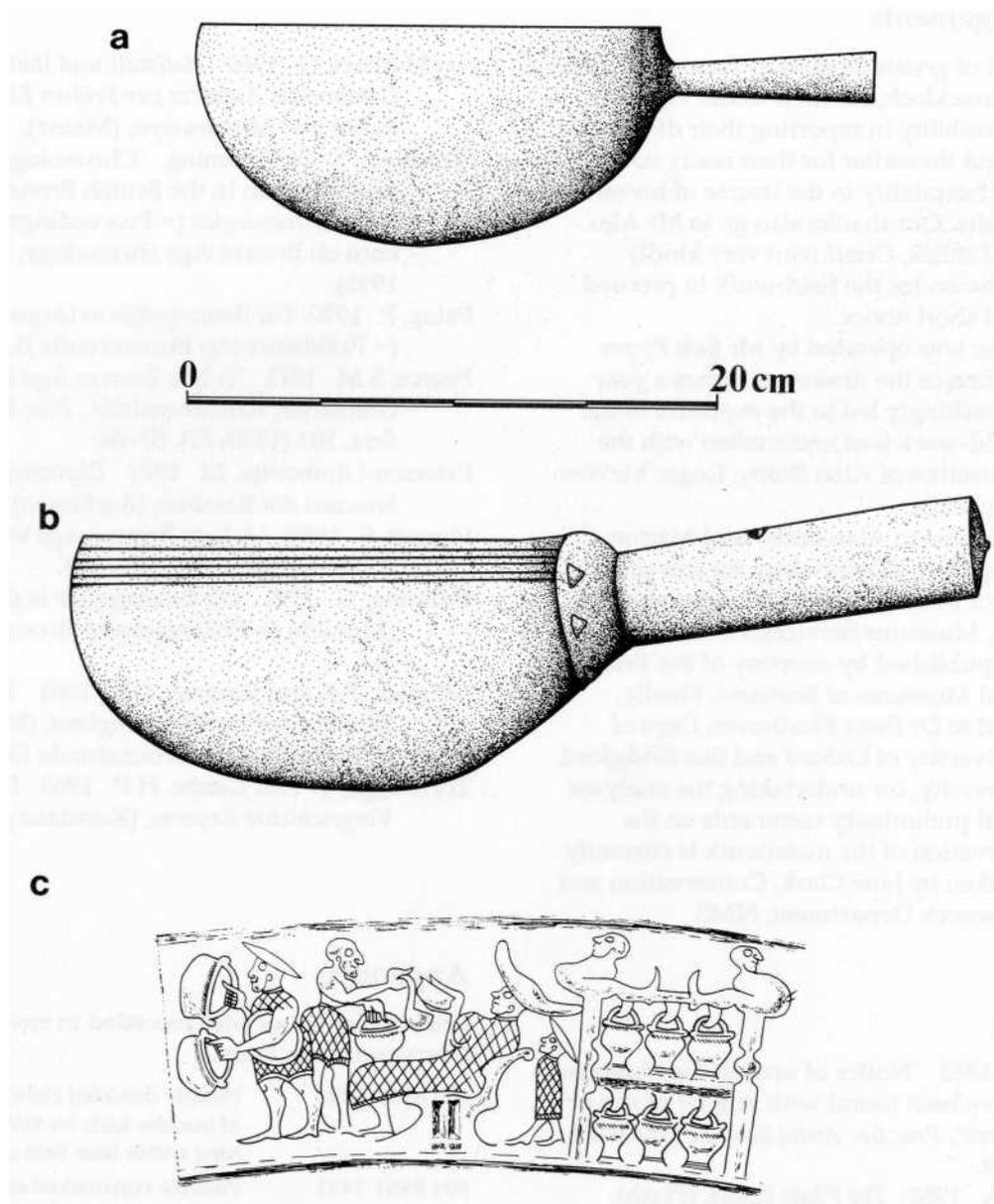
Age (Lucke and Frey 1962, 23-4, Taf 2 and 5, Beilage 1), for example on a situla found in an early La Tone burial at Kuffarn, Austria (*ibid*, 80 nr 40, Taf 56 and 75; Torbriigge and Uenze 1968, 174 *illus* 146; see this paper *Illus* 7c). This shows a handled vessel or dipper being used by a male to dispense drink or foodstuffs from a bucket into a vessel held up by a seated figure, presumably a lady of status. Over-indulgence might account for her rather tipsy look, perhaps betrayed by the jaunty angle of the hat and rather slumped posture! So it may not be fanciful to imagine that the Corrymuckloch ladle was used to serve some suitable northern beverage from a bucket like that from Flanders Moss, Cardross, Perthshire (Coles 1960, 29,88).

Although the form of the Corrymuckloch vessel is unparalleled, the presence of beaten bronze buckets and cauldrons is well attested in the Scottish Late Bronze Age suggesting that the *general 'context of use'* of such prestige items was perhaps more widely known than the biased inventory of metalwork finds would suggest (cf Piggott 1959). Two other points may also be noted here. Firstly, many such vessels may have been made from organic raw materials such as wood (cf Earwood 1993, 29-31) or horn; although of much

earlier date, the so-called horn 'ladle' associated with an Early Bronze Age beaker from Broomend of Crichtie, Aberdeenshire (Anderson 1883, 456) is perhaps particularly relevant in the context of drink and status. Secondly, although only a speculative observation, prestige drinking or feasting gear may have been personalised or customised, allowing scope for one-off artefacts. In either case, the search for particularly close parallels might well be frustrated.

Turning to the other items in the hoard, while none would be that unusual in a North British context, the socketed axeheads and portions of the sword would have formed a significant discovery in their own right. Three distinct types of socketed axehead are present and represent virtually a cross-section of the range found in the Scottish Late Bronze Age, while the sword clearly belongs to the general class of native British leaf-shaped swords known as the Ewart Park type (Colquhoun and Burgess 1988, 88-103).

These familiar components of the hoard - the axeheads and the sword fragments - currently provide the best indication of the date of the Corrymuckloch hoard. They belong to the so-called Ewart Park metal-working phase of the Late Bronze Age in Britain, named after the eponymous



Illus 7. Comparative material: a. reconstruction of fragmentary ladle from Kurd hoard II; b. hoard from Sin Craieni, Romania (a-b redrawn from Patay 1990 and Petrescu-Dimbovi(a 1977) c. detail from frieze on situla from Kuffarn, Austria (Lucke and Frey 1962)

sword hoard from Northumberland. Until relatively recently, this phase has been dated to the 9th-8th centuries BC (Burgess 1986, fig 1). However, the chronology of the British Bronze Age is becoming much more securely underpinned by radiocarbon and tree-ring dates and, as a result, metalwork of this phase is now considered to have been current from the 10th-8th centuries BC (Needham forthcoming).

Further work

The hoard was claimed as Treasure Trove and, pending a decision on its allocation, the objects are currently in the care of the NMS for analysis, conservation and research.

No further excavation is anticipated at the find-spot itself in the immediate future; in any case, the site will doubtless be monitored informally by the finders. In an area which was previously devoid of recorded archaeological monuments (apart from General Wade's Military Road), enough elements of an upland prehistoric settlement pattern have now been located to provide a reasonable local context for the discovery of the hoard and demonstrate that it is not simply an isolated find from a bog. However, further field-work is required to survey and record in detail the field monuments noted in the environs of the site, while funding will also be sought to permit palaeoenvironmental study of the relevant peat deposits.

Acknowledgements

Our main debt of gratitude goes to Tom and Sheila Barker, Corrymuckloch, for their initial vigilance, sense of responsibility in reporting their discovery so promptly and thereafter for their ready co-operation and hospitality in the course of investigation of the site. Our thanks also go to Mr Alex Montgomery, Dellick, Crieff who very kindly granted permission for the field-work to proceed on his estate at short notice.

The Fly-Mac was operated by Mr Bob Pyper whose excavation of the drainage ditches a year before had unwittingly led to the exposure of the hoard. The field-work was undertaken with the invaluable assistance of Alan Braby, Roger McWee and Doug MacBeath.

We are indebted to Alan Braby and Marion O'Neil for preparing the drawings for this preliminary report. Photography was undertaken by Neil McClean, Museums Services, NMS, and Illus 3, 5 and 6 are published by courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland. Finally, we are grateful to Dr Peter Northover, Dept of Materials, University of Oxford and Sue Bridgford, Sheffield University, for undertaking the analyses and for helpful preliminary comments on the hoard. Conservation of the metalwork is currently being undertaken by Jane Clark, Conservation and Analytical Research Department, NMS.

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Appendix

Preliminary list of sites recorded in environs of Corrymuckloch Farm

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| NN 8965 3495 | Heavily denuded cairn, with remains of boulder kerb on SW quadrant; lying within later field system. |
| NN 8961 3491 | Possible cup-marked stone. |
| ce NN 897 350 | Area of rigs, field banks and small clearance cairns occupying ridge and slopes to west of A822 road. |
| NN 8922 3450-
NN 8955 3553 | Wade Road: in several places there are roadside quarries (particularly at NN 8948 3527). The road make-up is exposed at NN 8945 3514 where crossed by the course of the burn/machine-cut drainage ditch. |
| NN 8955 3553 | Possible site of a cairn, sited by the Wade Road. |
| ce NN 894 354 | A group of three hut circles defined by low banks and earth-fast stones, a cup-marked boulder, several small clearance cairns and minor stony banks occupy the area around NN 894 354 lying between the 310 and 320m contours. |
| NN 8925 3545 | Rectilinear structure (longhouse) approximately 10m in length by 2-2.5m in width, accommodated by cutting back the hilllope. |

NN 892 351	Traces of quarrying of rock outcrops, possibly associated with construction of the Wade Road.		interpreted as probable stock enclosure complex, probably related to the domestic structures at NN 8878 3446 and NN 8905 3445.
NN 8947 3463	Small area of rig on gentle slope immediately to rear of Corrymuckloch farmhouse.	NN 8878 3446	Rectilinear structure (longhouse) and smaller iklefined enclosures.
ce NN 887 345	Series of irregular curvilinear enclosures composed of earth and boulder-built walls (this complex is partially mapped by the OS, but extends further to the ESE):	NN 8905 3445	Rectilinear structures (longhouse and three smaller buildings) and a possible kiln occupying a sandy knoll.

Abstract

In May 1995, several items of Late Bronze Age metalwork were discovered by chance in the upcast peat from a drainage ditch at Corrymuckloch Farm, near Amulree, Perthshire. Almost certainly a disturbed hoard, the group comprises three socketed axeheads, portions of the blade of a leaf-shaped sword and an apparently unique handled vessel. Investigation of the find-spot revealed no further archaeological deposits, but fieldwalking of the surrounding area of upland resulted in the discovery of a number of previously unrecorded monuments.

Key words: axehead, hoard, Late Bronze Age, metalwork, peat, sword, vessel