
Bronze Age metalwork from Kinnoull, Perth

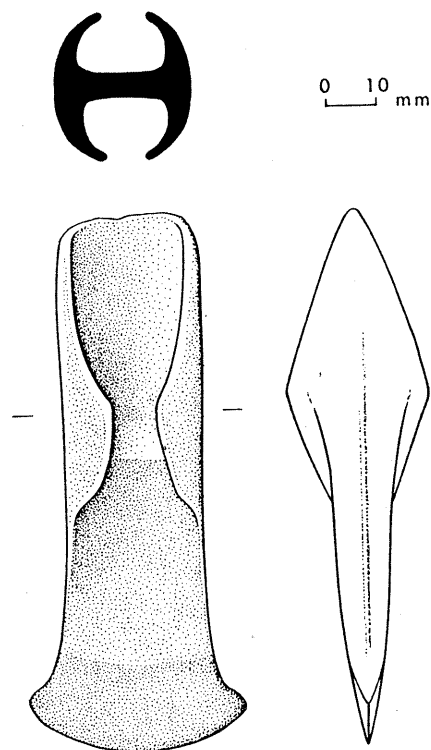
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The aim of this note is simply to draw attention to two finds of Bronze Age metalwork from the Kinnoull area east of Perth: an old, previously unpublished, find of a Middle Bronze Age flanged axehead, and a Late Bronze Age socketed gouge, found in 1989 and published here in detail for the first time.

Middle Bronze Age flanged axe

In the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin there is a bronze flanged axe (Accession no 1897:131) which formed part of an extensive collection of antiquities purchased from Seaton F Milligan of Belfast, a well-known antiquary in the north and west of Ireland (see *J Roy Soc Antiq Ir* 47 (1918), 97–8 for obituary notice). According to the Register of the Museum, these antiquities were obtained from various dealers and their provenances are derived from labels attached to the objects by Milligan. This axe bears a label 'Kinnoull [sic], Perthshire'. The Milligan Collection contains about seventy items of Bronze Age metalwork; all the others appear to be from Ireland, with provenances mainly from Ulster.

The axe (Illus 1) is complete. It has an irregular butt, which slopes up towards the right-hand side and is pointed in profile. Flanges run from the butt to just below the stop. The lower parts of the flanges are turned inwards over the stop, which is formed by sloping ledges separating the septum from the blade. The blade is rectangular in section. The sides of the flanges are straight and continuous with the sides of the blade. The latter diverge slightly towards an expanded cutting edge, which shows traces of considerable reworking. Traces of the casting seam remain on both sides of the axe. On one face the casting is incomplete in the septum and in the centre of the blade. Elsewhere the original surface survives and has a dark green patina. Length: 107mm; width of butt: 28mm; width of cutting edge: 44mm.



Illus 1. Flanged axehead from Kinnoull (drawing by Marion O'Neil).

The Kinnoull axe is a later short-flanged axe in the classification of Schmidt and Burgess (1981); its straight sides, sloping stop and relatively narrow cutting edge assign it to the Baldersby variant of the Lissett type (*ibid*, 104–5). Schmidt and Burgess list four Lissett axes from Perthshire (*ibid*, nos 608, 614, 633–4) and several from the north-east of Scotland, so although they include only one Baldersby variant from north of the Forth (*ibid*, 106, pl 119) there seems no reason to doubt the provenance of the Kinnoull axe. There is little direct evidence for the date of Lissett axes, but they seem to have been current during the Taunton and Penard phases of the Middle Bronze Age, that is, the later part of the second millennium cal BC.

In the Ulster Museum, Belfast (acc no: 181-1913), there is a further Middle Bronze Age axe from Kinnoull, purchased in 1913 at the sale of the Robert Day collection. Although the circumstances of its original acquisition are not known, there again seems no reason to doubt the provenance. Day was a very active dealer with strong contacts with Britain and with the north of Ireland (P Woodman pers comm). This axehead has been published by Schmidt and Burgess (1981, 144, no 845) and compared with a palstave type common in northern Germany (cf Kibbert 1980, 237-55). It is included by the Royal Commission in a distribution map illustrating early prehistoric settlement in south-east Perth (RCAHMS 1994, 42-3, 155).

Late Bronze Age socketed gouge

In spring 1989, a Late Bronze Age socketed gouge was found by Mrs W Garvie of Perth while metal detecting in woodland on the western slopes of Kinnoull Hill (NGR NO 132 229). She reported her find promptly to Perth Museum and Art Gallery, which in turn notified the National Museum of the discovery. The find was claimed as Treasure Trove and subsequently allocated to Perth Museum (acc no: PMAG 1990.137). It has been listed (*Discov Excav Scot* 1990, 42; RCAHMS 1994, 155) but not previously published in full.

Soon after its discovery, a further metal detector survey of the area was undertaken by Mrs Garvie, Alison Reid (then of Perth Museum) and Trevor Cowie. The find spot lay within a gently sloping grassy area on the wooded western flanks of the hill. Mrs Garvie was able to identify several back-filled holes in the turf where she had investigated signals at the time of the original discovery. However, as the possible significance of the gouge had only been recognised on the finder's return home, it was no longer possible to identify the exact location. A 10m by 10m area was searched but as this produced no further signals of archaeological interest no attempt was made to investigate the site further. Judging by the shallowness of the excavated holes, it would appear likely to have been found in the humus close to the surface, suggesting that it may have been brought up by roots or animal activity. The original context of the gouge therefore remains uncertain.

The gouge (Illus 2) is incomplete, with old breaks present where it is missing approximately half of the mouth and part of one side. The surviving portion is in relatively good condition: apart from the loss of some small flakes from parts of the surface, corrosion is limited to the cutting edge and the areas of damage round the socket. Most of the surface is a matt brown colour but some patches of glossy green patina are present. From the slightly expanded oval mouth the sides taper before splay-

ing fractionally to meet the gently rounded cutting edge. Casting seams are visible on the upper part of both sides. Dimensions: L 55mm; W (of mouth) 12mm; W (of working edge) 12.5mm.

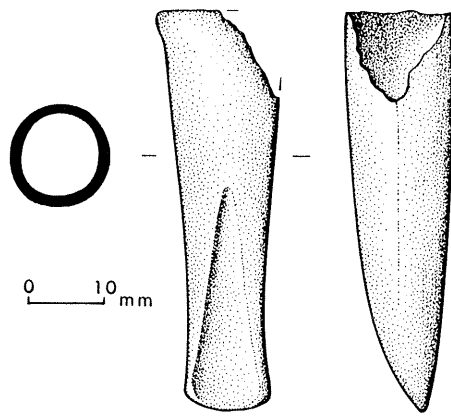
Finds of socketed gouges from Scotland have been discussed and listed by Coles (1960, 51, 87), who followed the twofold classification proposed by Burley (1956, 146). Type 1 is plain without a moulding or collar at the mouth, as in the Kinnoull example, while Type 2 is characterised by a wide flat collar or horizontal ribbing at the mouth. Coles noted that the two types appeared to have geographically exclusive distributions, Type 1 being restricted to the south and east of Scotland and Type 2 mainly deriving from the north and west.

Turnbull (1978) subsequently questioned the value of this typology on the grounds that it emphasises what is essentially a stylistic trait at the expense of the variations in the shape of the tool and its working edge which may be expected to reflect functional differences between tools. On that basis, she instead proposed three types, each of which may include tools with plain mouths or examples with mouldings or collars around the mouth (*ibid*, 25-26):

- I: parallel-sided gouges with round-sectioned tapering sockets and a triangular recessed area expanding evenly to the working edge, between 70 and 100mm long and 13 to 17mm in width at the working edge. Some examples appear to be significantly longer (up to 130mm) and of narrower proportions.
- II: gouges with an expanded working edge formed by the marked widening of the recessed part a few millimetres from the edge of the tool, but otherwise of similar proportions to Type I. These appear to be a predominantly Irish type.
- III: short squat gouges less than 70mm long with broad tapering sockets and widely splayed edges (varying between 20 and 35mm).

Despite its unusually small size, the straight-sided form of the Kinnoull gouge invites comparison with tools of Turnbull's type I, taking into account the likelihood that such gouges were periodically reworked, which could have resulted in some diminution in size and, potentially, some expansion of the working edge. Further work on gouges as a whole might throw more light on the formal, decorative and geographical variations which evidently exist.

Socketed gouges are interpreted as specialist carpentry tools; for example, it has been suggested that they would have been suitable for cutting mortices in wood or for a range of tasks associated with the preparation and finishing of hafts and



Illus 2. Socketed gouge from Kinnoull Hill. Drawing by Marion O'Neil.

other organic fittings required for metalwork. Across the Tay from Kinnoull, a tanged chisel – another specialist Late Bronze Age tool type – was found at Moncreiffe, but it is not clear whether it was associated specifically with the metalworking phase of that complex site (Stewart 1985, 145, no 21).

Socketed gouges have a long currency during the Late Bronze Age in Britain (Northover 1988, 79), but in Scotland associated finds of such tools are known only from the Ewart Park phase, early in the first millennium cal BC. There is no evidence that the different types have any chronological significance.

Conclusion

The circumstances of discovery of the two 'Kinnoull' axeheads are unknown, but as we have indicated above, there seems no reason to doubt their provenance. In the case of the gouge, prompt reporting permitted recording and assessment of the find spot. Although Kinnoull Hill is now heavily wooded and has been partially landscaped to form a network of paths, the discovery of the gouge flags up the possibility that traces of unenclosed prehistoric settlement may yet survive on its gentle, and in places somewhat terraced, western slopes. Together, the objects described in this paper form part of a larger cluster of prehistoric sites and finds in the rolling land immediately to

the east of Perth, between the Tay and the northern flanks of the Sidlaw Hills (RCAHMS 1994, 42–3, 155).

Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Attention is drawn to two finds of Bronze Age metalwork from the Kinnoull area near Perth.

Keywords: Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, metalwork, flanged axe, socketed gouge