

## Appendix 5: Catalogue of Metal Objects

by Fraser Hunter & Andrew Heald

The objects are grouped in functional categories: tools, ornaments, fittings / mounts, nails and miscellaneous. For some objects the function is unclear or spans a range of possibilities. Measurements (in millimetres) are largely taken from X-rays, using the abbreviations: L length, W width, T thickness, H height, D diameter.

### Tools - Knives

Seven intact or fragmentary knives were recovered. Most show signs of re-sharpening, sometimes extensive. Their fragmentary nature causes problems for standard typologies which rely on complete objects (eg Laing 1975; Cowgill *et al* 1987; Goodall 1990; Ottaway 1992). Only three of the Bruach an Druimein knives can be classified using Ottaway's typology (probably the most useful): two fall into type A and one into type D. One (SF 13) preserves traces of an organic sheath, probably of leather.

Knife types can only be dated within broad parameters. Several of the types familiar in the Early Historic period have Roman antecedents (see Duncan 1982, 3; Ottaway 1992; Manning 1985, 116, types 17–20) – for instance, a knife with an angled back is known from Roman Iron Age levels on Traprain Law, East Lothian (Burley 1956, no 433). Equally some types continue into the medieval period (Goodall 1990, 835–60; Duncan & Spearman 1984, 354, illus 25.1; Ford 1987, 132, illus 65, no 80 & 81). However, while individual types may have a wide date range, from the overall composition of the assemblage it is possible to get a feel for the date. The best parallels for the Bruach an Druimein knives come from Early Historic sites in Scotland, Wales and Ireland (eg Munro 1882, fig 129, 226–7; Hencken 1937, 130, fig 6, C–D; Alcock 1963, 116, fig 21; Duncan 1982, 3; Alcock 1987, 105, fig 5.3; Nicholson 1997, 426–9; Lane & Campbell 2000, 161–3).

The interpretation of knives is a difficult subject. Even when they can be classified, the reasons behind the typological variation are often unclear, and a wide range of shapes and sizes were in use concurrently: Alcock has suggested that 'the form of knives was governed rather by the skill and fancy of individual smiths than by any strong typological tradition' (Alcock 1987, 107). There will presumably have been functional variation according to size, but the knife is the classic multi-functional tool and attributing detailed uses is difficult.

**Illus 26** compares key dimensions of the Bruach an Druimein knives to intact specimens from Dunadd. They fall within the range of variation seen in Dunadd's much larger assemblage; specimens

from the broadly contemporary sites of Buiston (Ayrshire) (Crone 2000, fig 199) and Bostadh (Lewis) (Neighbour in prep) show the same range. Some of the small, fine knives may have been intended for specialist tasks, as has been suggested for Dunadd (Lane & Campbell 2000, 161–3). Two knives (SF 93 and SF 94) are notably smaller (blade height 9–11mm) than the other more robust examples.

**SF 13** Knife, tip and tang broken. Straight cutting edge and upward-angled back, the blade broken before the return to the tip. Central broken tang, rectangular-sectioned; the blade/tang division is weakly defined with the tang expanding gradually to the blade. At the broken end of the blade the corrosion has flaked off, revealing orange-brown corrosion products on the blade surface which are the remains of an organic sheath, probably leather. No traces of the handle survive. Angled-back knives are typically Early Historic (eg Ottaway 1992, fig 229–30); there is a good parallel from Dunollie, Argyll (Duncan 1982, 4, fig 1; Alcock & Alcock 1987, 139 ill 8.14; SF 87, 019). Overall L: 74.5mm; surviving blade L: 50mm; H: 15–18mm; T: 5mm; tang section 7.5 x 6.5mm. Area 2, context 003, grid B2.

**\*SF 93** Knife blade. Intact parallel-sided blade with angled tip; vestigial stump of central tang. Ottaway (1992) type A. L: 62mm; H: 11mm; T: 2mm. Blade L: 54mm. Ditch section 3, context 405, grid A8. **Illus 26**.

**SF 94** Knife with rectangular-section stepped tang tapering to a point. The blade is mostly lost but its width and the concavity of the cutting edge show it has been heavily re-sharpened. L: 57mm; H: 9mm; T: 5mm. Tang L: 37mm, W: 5mm, H: 7.5mm. Ditch section 3, context 407, grid A8.

**\*SF 125** Knife, intact. Convex curved back with slightly concave tip. Concave cutting edge implies resharpening, while the X-ray indicates the cutting edge was welded on. Stepped tang tapering to a point. Ottaway (1992) type D. Similar curved backs with stepped tangs are known from Dunadd, Argyll (NMS HPO 289 & 292; Duncan 1982, 4, figs 2 & 3), Lochlee, Ayrshire (Munro 1882, 124, fig 129), Buiston, Ayrshire (Munro 1882, 222–3, figs 227–8, 230) and Kildonan Bay, Argyll (Fairhurst 1939, 210, plate LXXVII, no 2). L: 111mm; H: 16mm; T: 4mm. Blade L: 78mm, tang L: 33mm, H: 6mm. Area 2, context 001, grid A7. **Illus 26**.

**SF 140** Knife blade fragment, lacking tip. Straight back and cutting edge. Badly corroded. L: 58mm; H: 18mm; T: 5mm. Area 2, context 202, Grid B9.

**SF 185** Knife with tapering rectangular-section stepped tang. Little of the blade survives, although its concave shape shows that it has been re-sharpened. L: 35mm; H: 10mm; T: 3mm. Area 2, context 001, grid B12.

**\*SF 213** Knife,?intact. Straight back with angled tip, concave cutting edge, stepped and slightly tapering tang. Ottaway (1992) type A. Overall L: 80mm. Surviving blade L: 46mm. H: 11mm; T: 4mm; tang L: 34mm. Area 2, context 003, grid B13. Missing; described from drawing. **Illus 26**.

### Tools - Punches

Four objects are probably punches, though three lack the working tip. One has an integral head,

two were probably tanged and one lacks the head. Punches such as these were commonly used in metalworking, especially blacksmithing for tools of this size; tanged punches could have a range of functions (Ottaway 1992, 517) although the size of this one would be consistent with iron working. The fineness of SF 239 suggests it was for non-ferrous metals.

**\*SF 149** Punch with rounded top for striking. Square section, changing to round at the broken tip. The shaft is slightly expanded below the head. Similar tools are known from Dunadd (Lane & Campbell 2000, 161, 163–6, fig 4.71, no 1298) and Whithorn, Galloway (Nicholson 1997, 421–3, fig 10.102). L: 95mm; W: 8mm; T: 9mm. Area 2, context 001, grid B9. **Illus 26.**

**\*SF 193** Punch, parallel-sided rectangular-sectioned bar, broken at one end, with tip rounded in one plane. L: 58mm; W: 7mm. Ditch section 3, context 407, grid A8. **Illus 26.**

**\*SF 239** Fine tanged punch, both ends damaged. The sub-square shaft is slightly expanded below the head, suggesting it was tanged, and tapers towards the tip. L: 70mm; W: 5mm; T: 6mm. Area 2, context 001, grid B12. **Illus 27.**

**\*SF 240** Tanged punch, both ends missing. Heavy-duty cylindrical bar tapering to a damaged point. Broken rectangular-sectioned tang at the top. Compare Ottaway 1992, fig 198. Tanged punches are less common on Early Historic sites than non-tanged examples (e.g. only five out of 81 awls/punches from Whithorn, Galloway; Nicholson 1997, 422–3, illus 10.102, nos 50.43; 50.54). L: 132mm; W: 12mm; T: 12mm. SE end of ditch, unstratified. **Illus 26.**

## Ornaments

An unusual iron double loop-headed pin was recovered from the site. After initial conservation this was tentatively identified as a La Tène I brooch, but X-rays make it clear this was wrong. The head of the pin spirals into two coils in the same plane, the end comes to a rounded point rather than a fracture and is coiled back on itself, while the terminal loop is tighter than the initial one. None of this is consistent with a distorted spring. The item is clearly the head and part of the shank of a stick pin. Similar pins come from Cahercommaun, Co. Clare, where the site is dated to the ninth century (Hencken 1938, 37–8). It is also paralleled at the Early Historic crannog of Lough Faughan, Co. Down, here looped in a figure-of-eight (Collins 1955, 59–61); the pin is unstratified but the site is broadly dated mid seventh to late 10th century from parallels to Lagore. An undated parallel in copper alloy wire comes from Gallanach, Coll (Beveridge 1903, 38 & illus facing p133; NMS HD 347), while Dunadd has produced a single-looped pin (Lane & Campbell 2000, illus 4.77, no 1954). It may be related to spiral-headed copper alloy types where the shank was split and the ends formed into loops (eg Laing 1973, 62–5; Laing 1975, 327; Nicholson & Hill 1997, 363, BZ13.4) for which seventh- to eighth-century dates are suggested. Presumably all these western examples are derived from the widespread Middle Saxon double spiral-headed type, which is usually of copper alloy. These are now dated from the sixth to eighth century or later (Hinton 1996,

29–30). A broad seventh–ninth century bracket for this pin seems safest on current evidence.

**\*SF 119** Double loop-headed pin made from round-sectioned wire. The shank is broken, but the diameter increases from the head down the shank (from 1.5 to 3mm), indicating the shaft was slightly swollen to hold the cloth better. At the top the wire is twisted to form two loops perpendicular to and flanking the shank. One is tighter than the other, with the end tucked in. L: 39mm, head W: 13mm, H: 8.5mm. Area 2, context 001, grid A7. **Illus 27.**

{C} Fittings/mounts

Ten fittings or mounts were found. Their exact function is unclear, as all except one are fragmentary, but they are probably from furniture or domestic fittings. All are chronologically undiagnostic.

**\*SF 15** Thin bar, broken and damaged at the edges, slightly curved longitudinally. L: 55mm; W: 6mm; T: 2mm. Dump 3, unstratified. **Illus 26.**

**\*SF 74** Flat rectangular strip, one end?intact, the other expanding and broken. Wood traces in the corrosion on one side imply use as some form of mount or fitting. L: 41mm; W: 5.5–7mm; T: 2mm. Area 2, context 003, grid B2. **Illus 26.**

**SF 120** Bar fragment, plano-convex section. L: 21mm; W: 12mm; T: 6mm. Area 2, context 001, grid A7.

**SF 126** Fine broken hook, lacking ends; section varies from sub-rectangular to triangular. Head width 16mm, surviving arm length 24mm. L: 43mm; W: 3mm. Area 2, unstratified.

**SF 134** Bar fragment, plano-convex section. L: 26mm; W: 13mm; T: 5mm. Area 2, context 001, grid B12.

**\*SF 147** Bent bar, one end bent through 90°, perhaps original; the other end is distorted. Sub-rectangular section, broken at both ends. Possibly a large U-shaped staple, one arm now extended. Surviving arm length 44mm; overall L: 124mm; W: 5mm. Unstratified, 100–150 yards north-east of excavation area. **Illus 26.**

**SF 153** Substantial bar fragment, one edge partly inturned, both ends broken. L: 45mm; W: 25mm; T: 4mm. Area 2, context 001, grid B9.

**SF 155** Riveted bar fragment. Heavily corroded but there appears to be a sub-rectangular head of a rivet through a?rectangular strip. L: 30mm; W: 18mm; T: 4mm. Area 2, context 001, grid B9.

**\*SF 177** Mount, perhaps decorative. Sub-rectangular sheet with rounded ends and a sub-square hole at one end for a nail. L: 79mm; W: 32mm; T: 3mm. Perforation 10 by 7mm. Ditch section 3, context 407, grid A8. **Illus 27.**

**SF 199** Bent bar, tapering, sub-rectangular section, ends broken. L: 31mm; W: 9mm. Area 2, context 003, grid B12.

## Nails

The most common iron finds from the site were nails, with 19 examples. Square-sectioned rod fragments with no other distinguishing features were assumed to be nail fragments. A full catalogue can be found in the archive: only the key points are outlined here.

All of the nails had square-sectioned shanks. Only seven had surviving heads; all were flat and either sub-square or circular in plan. Only three nails survived intact (SF 34, 154a & 154b), with another two (SF 31 & 069) lacking only the tips; lengths varied from 16–74mm. One (SF 31) had surviving wood traces. Without more intact nails, further dis-

cussion is difficult, but a range of sizes are present, with head size varying from 10 to 23mm.

Such nails are chronologically undiagnostic. None were associated with buildings or structures, and only SF 218 and 238 (from Fill 405 and collapsed Wall 406 in the ditch section) came from a secure context. However it is worth looking at wider Early Historic parallels. Nails are rare on Early Historic sites, although in part this relates to selective retention by older excavators. There are only 57 from Dunadd (Craw 1930; Duncan 1982, 18–20; Lane & Campbell 2000, 169) and 12 from Dunollie, Argyll (Duncan 1982), where they occur only in post-tenth/eleventh century deposits (Alcock 1987, 141). At Whithorn the vast majority of the 3857 nails post-date the eighth/ninth centuries: only 156 were recovered from Period I deposits (sixth to eighth centuries).

This scarcity of nails is a clue to building traditions. Nails are surprisingly rare finds from crannogs (Munro 1882) and duns, while at Whithorn they were largely absent from the timber and wattle buildings (Nicholson 1997, 405–6). Clearly Early Historic building traditions did not make extensive use of nails, and those we have may come from internal fittings and furnishings rather than buildings. This dearth is even more marked in the Iron Age (Hunter 1998, 366–7). Exceptions are few and specific: the quantities recovered from Dundurn, Perthshire were linked to their use in timber-framed ramparts (Alcock et al 1989, 217–18, illus 15, nos 1, 18 & 49).

### **Miscellaneous objects**

Eleven fragmentary objects cannot be identified. Unidentifiable iron objects are a recurring issue: from the recent Dunadd excavations, 44% of the iron objects fell into this category (Lane & Campbell 2000, 160).

**SF 62** Lump. L: 22mm; W: 19mm; T: 14mm. Area 1, context 003, grid A2.

**SF 120** Sheet fragments (2), lacking diagnostic features. L: 39mm; W: 27mm; T: 2mm, and miscellaneous lump, L: 20mm; W: 18mm; T: 10mm Area 2, context 001, grid A7.

**SF 121** Lump. L: 40mm; W: 30mm; T: 10mm. Area 2, context 001, grid A7.

**SF 131** Sheet fragment, two surviving perpendicular edges with a semi-circular concavity at the corner with a raised lip. Function unknown. L: 33mm; W: 29mm; T: 5mm. Hole: 10mm. Area 2, context 202, grid B12.

**\*SF 152** Tapering fragment, missing one end. Oval section. L: 22mm; W: 10mm, T: 6mm. Area 2, context 001, grid B9. **Illus 26.**

**SF 197** Miscellaneous sheet fragments, no diagnostic features. 4 individual pieces. Area 2, context 003, grid B12.

**\*SF 200** Fragment of a thick sub-rectangular object. L: 41mm; W: 35mm; T: 8mm. Area 2, context 003, grid B13. **Illus 26.**

**SF 211** Sheet, thin. L: 43mm; W: 35mm; T: 2mm. Area 2, unstratified, grid B13.

**SF 250** Miscellaneous fragment. L: 42mm; H: 22mm; T: 3mm. No context.

**\*SF 251** Broken sub-rectangular fragment. No diagnostic features. Found along with three pieces of unclassified iron slag. L: 28mm; B: 25mm; T: 10mm. No context. **Illus 26.**

**SF 252** Sheet fragments x 21, no diagnostic features. No context.

### **Missing items (descriptions taken from site records)**

**\*SF56** Rod with expanded head, possibly nail. Grid A2. **Illus 26.**

**\*SF151** Rectangular bar. Grid B9. **Illus 26.**

**SF 158** Lump. Grid B12. Missing in June 1965.

**SF 169** Lump. Grid B9.

**SF 185** Portion of an iron artefact. Grid B3.

**SF 207** Iron fragment, about 1" long, slightly bent, round section. Grid B13.

### **Non-ferrous objects**

**\*SF 92** Rectangular lead strip, rolled into a cylinder and flattened. L: 21mm; B: 11mm; T: 6mm. Ditch section 2, context 405. **Illus 26.**

**\*SF 128** Copper alloy cylinder (SF 128a), apparently broken at both ends. Now missing; site records describe it as a 'bone or wooden point in a cylindrical copper case' (SF 128b) but it looks too crude to be a case and is more likely to be binding from the edge of an organic object. L: 23mm, D: 8mm. 'Oven trench', Square A8, topsoil. **Illus 26.**