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Nottingham Hill, Gloucestershire, 1972

This is an interim report by Michael Hall (Part I), and Christopher Gingell (Part II), on their September 1972 excavation on Nottingham Hill in the NW Cotswolds, where, within the defences of a hillfort, they had the rare opportunity of examining an undisturbed Late Bronze Age hoard, apparently deposited on an occupation surface. The hoard itself is now the subject of detailed technical examination, but we are glad to give our readers (albeit later than we had hoped owing to pressure on space) this summary advance statement. Mr Hall is Archaeological Field Officer for the Thames Conservancy, and Mr Gingell Field Archaeologist (Rural) for Wiltshire based on Devizes Museum; the drawings are by his wife, Mrs Josephine Gingell.

I THE EXCAVATIONS: Nottingham Hill is a bivallate hillfort of 49 ha. (120 acres), in the Gloucestershire parish of Gotherington (SO9828). It is the largest of the Cotswold forts, although, as FIG. 1 demonstrates, the defences and entrances have been severely mauled by quarrying. No formal excavations have been undertaken previously on the site, though various ambiguous references in county histories testify to stray Romano-British finds from Nottingham Hill. No such material has survived.

The ploughing up of two intact Ewart Park-type swords in 1972 was reported by the contractor, Mr Terry Lishman, to the landowner, Mr David Abbatt, who in turn informed Cheltenham Museum. Mr Abbatt's willingness to allow fuller investigation was welcomed by the Museum, who, in conjunction with the Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, instructed C. J. Gingell and M. R. L. Hall to undertake discreet and selective excavations. These took place after the harvest in September 1972.

Prior to any trenching, Dr Martin Aitken, of the Research Laboratory for Archaeology, Oxford, surveyed the area around the original findspot, with both proton magnetometer and metal detector. Regrettably, the area examined was too small to provide significant results supported by the magnetometer survey. Excavation in conjunction with the metal detector survey was, however, productive and economical. A total area of 122·5 sq. m. was examined, within Dr Aitken's original grid.

Tentatively, it is possible to demonstrate two periods of activity on this part of the site. The earliest is represented by a markedly worn 'track', running from north-west to south-east, along the longer axis of the fort. Trial-trenching confirmed the abraded nature of the oolite on this axis; a shelving depression in the ground, either side of the excavated grid, offers some hint of continuity.

Subsequent activity is represented by the remains of a hearth, in the middle of the track alignment. Five sub-circular soil-filled features were recorded, in the rougher oolite either side of the 'track', but it was thought irresponsible to excavate these at this time. Their destruction would indeed have added little valuable information to this limited exploration.

About 150 sherds of pottery were found, with their greatest concentration in the area enclosed by the unexcavated features. The pottery is much damaged by the plough, but displays a characteristic dark brown paste, tempered with limestone grits. Two sherds bear incised decoration, one of them a rudimentary

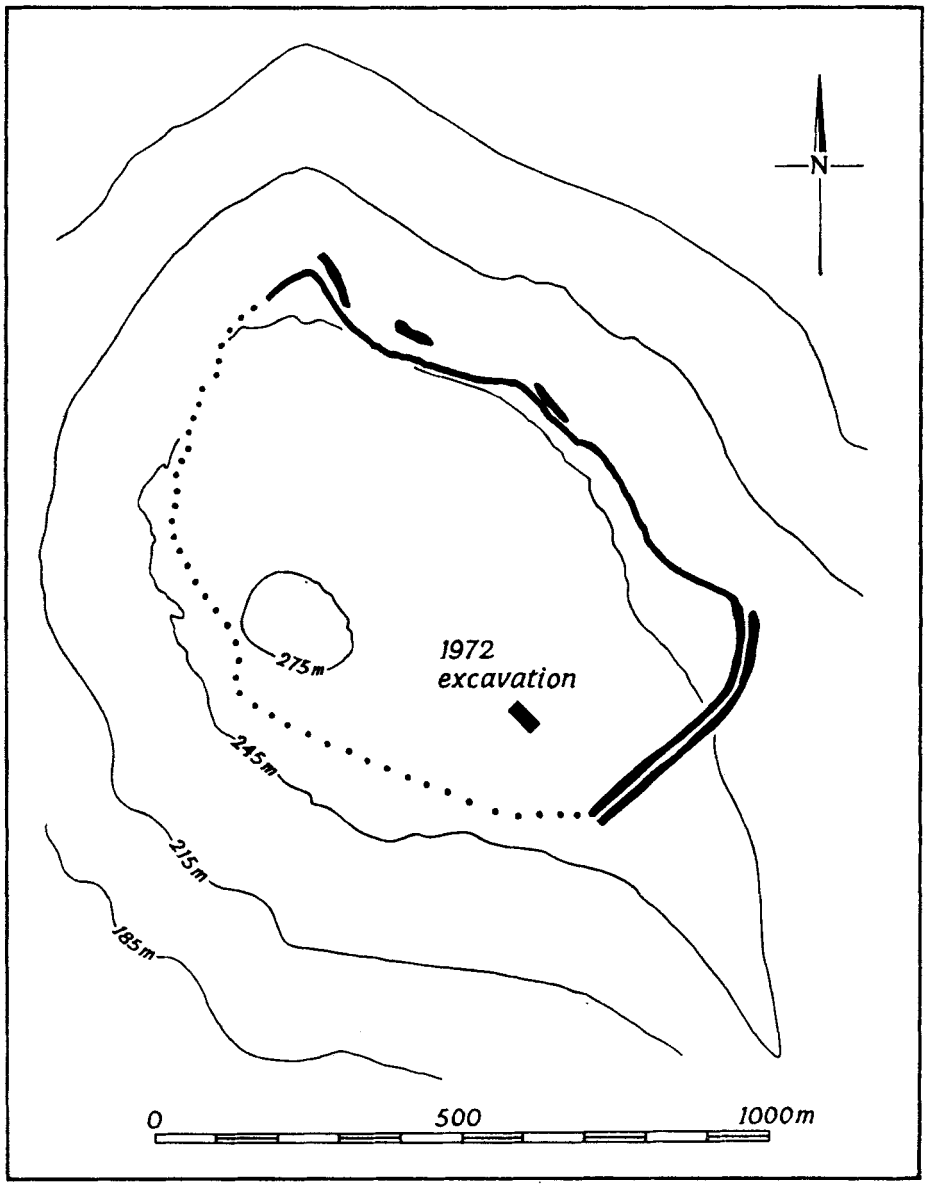


Fig. 1. Map of Nottingham Hill, Gloucestershire (drawn by H. A. Shelley after Michael Hall)

crosslattice motif. A discoidal flint scraper was found in proximity to the hearth. The group of Late Bronze Age metalwork, described by Christopher Gingell in the second part of this note, overlay the edge of the supposed trackway.

In view of the spectacular and destructive effects of deep ploughing on Nottingham Hill, constant observation of the site has been arranged. It seems that this threat, in conjunction with recently observed cropmarks and finds, will create the need for further investigations in the very near future.

II CONTENTS OF THE NOTTINGHAM HILL HOARD: These are briefly catalogued descriptively in relation to FIGS. 2–4 (see folder) with summary comparisons, references, etc.

Fig. 2

(1) Leaf-shaped sword with midrib. Flanged tang. Two rivet-holes in tang, in each shoulder one rivet-hole and one cast-in dimple, not penetrated. Tang broken and repaired, apparently by burning on. Blade bent by plough, and point ground by finder. Length: 63·3 cm.

(2) Similar to (1). Sharper profile to midrib. Rib on either side of rivet-holes on tang. Tang broken and burnt on at junction with shoulders. Length: 62·8 cm.

Cf. Ewart Park; J. D. Cowen, *Arch. Aeliana*, x, 1933, pl. XIII.

For method of tang repairs cf: Stoke Ferry; *Invent., Arch. GB 8* (Ashmolean Mus. accession no. 1927–2446). Gorleston; *Bronze Age metalwork in Norwich Castle Museum* (1966), 27 and Fig. 45a. Welby; T. G. E. Powell, *Arch. J.*, CV, 1948, 30, Fig. 2, No. 5. See also H. Drescher, *Der Uberfanggus. Ein Beitrach zur vorgeschichten Metaltechnik* (Verlag der Romisch-Germanisch Zentral Museum, Mainz, 1958).

(3) Short, leaf-shaped sword. Blade form and section similar to (1) and (2), but with marked ricasso and hammermarks surviving along edges of blade. Flanged tang. Three rivet-holes in tang, in each shoulder one rivet-hole and one cast-in dimple. Length: 46·3 cm.

Variant of Ewart Park type, showing some characteristics of Thames type, see J. D. Cowen, *PPS*, XXXIII, 1967, esp. pp. 412–16 and Pls. LXII–III.

Also affinities with smaller examples of Irish class 4 swords; cf. one from Dowris, Co. Offaly (BM 1854, 7–14, 283).

(4) Whetstone. Hole for attachment to cord or thong. Length: 17·1 cm.

Fig. 3

(5) Looped palstave. Blade unworn. Late type. Length 13·9 cm.

Cf. Ulleskelf; C. B. Burgess, *Bronze Age metalwork in Northern England* (1968), Fig. 21, No. 4.

(6) Socketed knife. Midrib. Blade and socket not quite aligned. Length: 12·5 cm. Thorndon type.

Cf. Reach Fen; *Invent. Arch.* GB 17 (Ashmolean accession no. 1927–270). Grays Thurrock; C. H. Butcher, *Ant. J.*, II, 1922, 103, Fig. 3.

(7) Bronze cylinder. Very slight taper. Possible ferrule. Length: 3·8 cm.

(8) Casting jet. Four runners; one broken off. Depth *c.* 3·5 cm.

(9) Scabbard chape. Oval section, rectangular outline slightly waisted. Ribs in relief at top and bottom. Length 3·4 cm.

Cf. Guilsfield; D. Gareth Davies, *Ant. J.*, XLVII, 1967, Pt. I, Fig. Ir (where section rhomboid and decoration incised). Stoke Ferry; *Invent. Arch. GB 8* (Ashmolean accession no. 1927–2450). (Lenticular in section, trapezoid in elevation, rivet-holes at sides and decoration incised.)

Fig. 4

(10)–(13) Cast conical-headed rivets. Average length 2·6 cm.

These are, in the belief of the present writer, unique amongst hoards of the Late Bronze Age from England. For the use of similar objects in a different context, see R. Rainbird Clarke, 'A hoard of metalwork from the Early Iron Age from Ringstead, Norfolk', *PPS*, XVII, 1951, 214 ff. Here these objects may have been used for attaching 'end ornaments': circular bronze discs—to either side of the boss of an oblong shield. For similar objects as surface finds from what appears to be a large Iron Age and Romano-British settlement at Owmby, Lincs, see J. B. Whitwell, *Lincs. History and Archaeology*, II, 1965, Archaeological notes, 4b, 25 and 26.

Interesting Continental parallels for use of similar objects as rivets on crested helmets from France, Germany and Austria, in the Late Bronze Age, will be found in Hugh Hencken, *The earliest European helmets* (Harvard, 1971), esp. 56–75, with Figs.

(14)–(17) Cast bronze rings with bronze strapwork. All drawn as found. Average diam. 2·0 cm.

For rings in association with swords, see J. D. Cowen, op. cit., 1933, 190.

(18)–(20) Three pieces of bronze wire.

(21) Bronze pin of roughly rectangular section. Length: 2·5 cm.

(22) Tanged 'chisel' with centre stop. Length: 9·0 cm.

(23) Tanged 'awl'. Points slightly damaged in antiquity. Possibly a double-ended tool. Length: 6·3 cm.

Cf. F. K. Annable and D. D. A. Simpson, *Guide catalogue to the neolithic and bronze age collections in Devizes Museum* (1964), Nos. 205, 225, 304, 415–31, 617 and 642.

(24)–(25) Two rivets.

Several fragments of copper-stained bone,

possibly the remains of a handle for one of the tanged tools, were found in the slight scatter of objects from the hoard disturbed by the plough. These are still undergoing conservation.

For an example of a hoard not consisting of scrap, compare that in the Ashmolean Museum from the Thames at Wallingford, which includes the tanged 'chisel', socketed knife, bifid razor, socketed gouge and octagonal socketed axe. See Evans, *Ancient bronze implements* (1881), 466, hoard 60.

For an example from England of a hoard found in the remains of a wooden box—see below—take the hoard from Winmarley, Lancs., in Warrington Museum and H. S. Cuming, *J. Brit. Arch. Ass.*, XV, 1854, 234–5 and Pl. 24, Nos. 2 and 3. Also *Arch. J.*, XVIII, 1861, 158.

Several Irish hoards deposited in wooden boxes are listed by G. Eogan, *PPS*, XXX, 1964, 301.

A well-preserved Continental example is that from Koppenow, Pomerania, illustrated in Behn, *Altnordisches Leben* (Munich, 1935), Pl. 21.

The Nottingham Hill hoard is important because most of it was recovered by controlled excavation.

It is important to the study of metalwork because one can state with almost complete certainty that all the metal objects deposited have been recovered. Because the relationship of the objects to each other in the hoard, and to a possible box structure, indicated by soil traces on the worn bedrock on which the hoard rested, can both be studied, and because the condition of the objects will permit detailed technical study.

It is important to the study of the Late Bronze Age because it was deposited on an occupation surface, from which come finds of pottery, within the area of a hillfort.

The inter-relation of Offa's and Wat's dykes

Mr David Hill, Staff Tutor in Archaeology in the Department of Extra-mural Studies in the University of Manchester, sends us this note which he sub-titles 'A traditional interpretation'.

A classic of the vintage years of British Archaeology is Sir Cyril Fox's *Offa's Dyke* (1955). The fruit of many summers of fieldwork on the frontier earthworks between Mercia and Wales, the book is impeccably produced, authoritative and accurate. It is only when the author moves from gazetteer and inventory, the bulk of the book, to conclusions of a very wide-ranging nature that one may entertain any doubts. These conclusions are senatorial, appear indisputable and are based almost entirely on the fieldwork. No one will ever question the detailed work of the inventory; apart from anything else the damage of the past fifty years ensures that it is irreplaceable. But so convincing is the argument, so commanding the tone and so numbing the recital of facts that for nearly half-a-century archaeologists have avoided the whole dyke system. It has remained to the conservators, ramblers and historians to keep up interest in this, Britain's largest archaeological monument. From 1934, when Fox completed his work, until 1972 there were only two archaeological sections on damaged or threatened sites. This would seem to be the sum total of research, with the honourable exception of Frank Noble and the Offa's Dyke Association which has acted as a focus for all forms of interest in the Dyke.

Since 1972 the Extra-Mural Department of Manchester University, in conjunction with the Offa's Dyke Association, has attempted to carry out work on the damaged sections of the Dyke during, or in advance of, destruction. In some of the nine excavations so far undertaken a great deal of structural information has been recorded. However, the most challenging information has come from a series of rescue excavations undertaken in northern Flintshire for the Department of the Environment (FIG. 1). At Tre-Abbot-Bach (SJ 112784) to the east of Trelawnyd, road widening on the A 5151 threatened the destruction of a length of Offa's Dyke. In advance of this destruction two trenches were cut across the line of the Dyke as a preliminary to the total stripping of the earthworks at this point and investigating both the Dyke and the underlying soil. It came as a considerable surprise to find no trace of any sort that was consistent with the Dyke having existed here. A third trench was cut in the same area with a similar lack of success. Two of these

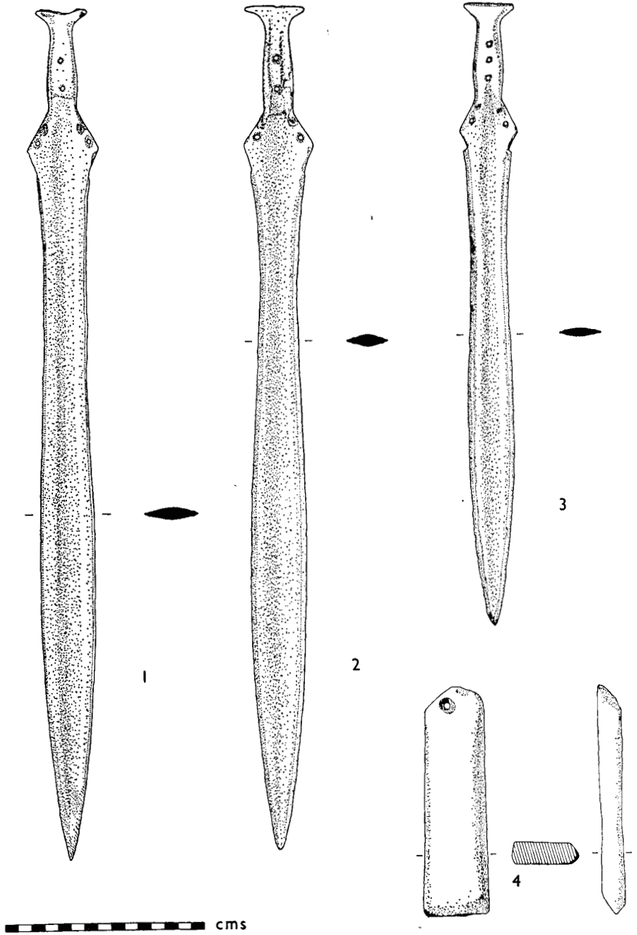
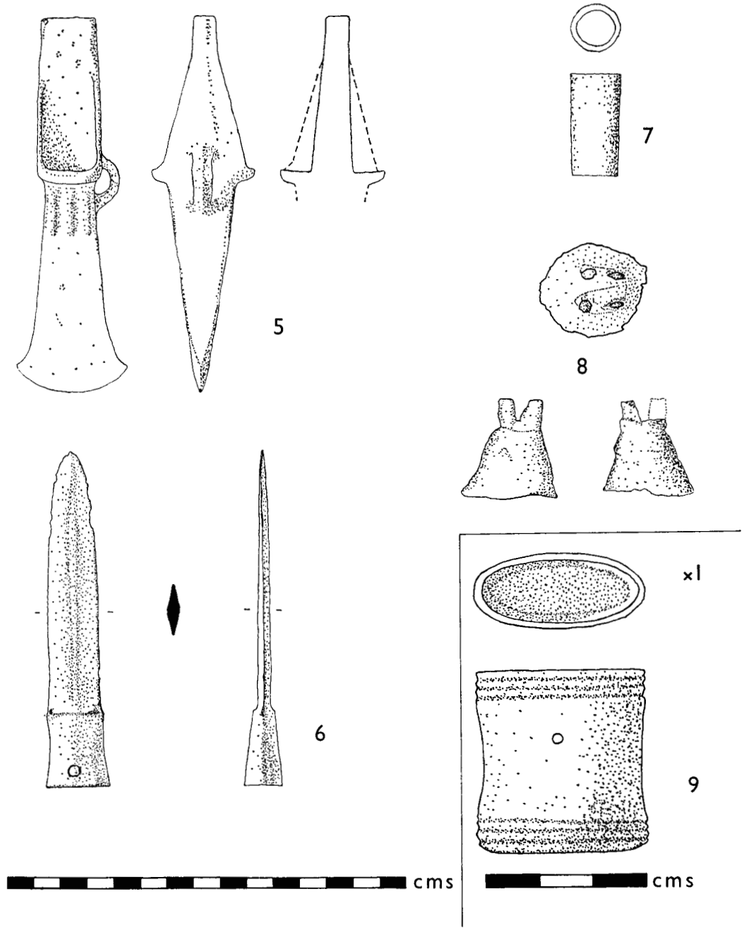


Fig. 2. See p. 308 (Scale $\frac{1}{4}$)



(Scale $\frac{1}{2}$) *Fig. 3. See p. 308* *(Scale $\frac{1}{1}$)*

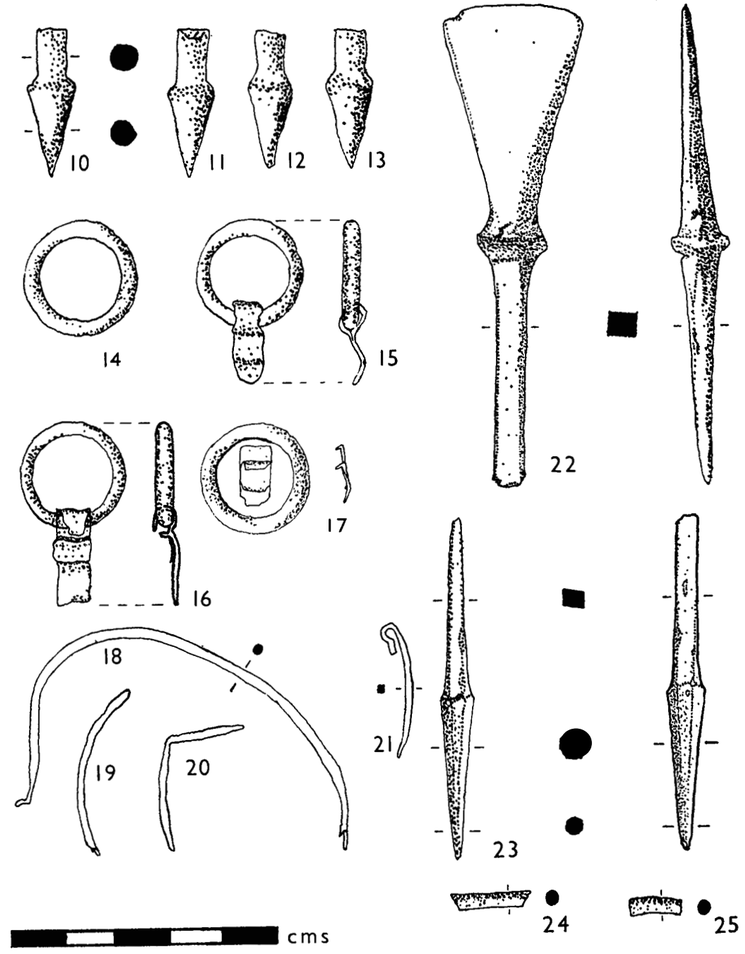


Fig. 4. See pp. 308–9 (Scale $\frac{1}{4}$)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00058270 Published online by Cambridge University Press