

# THE CHILCARROCH PLOUGH

AN OLD SCOTCH PLOUGH IN STRANRAER COUNTY MUSEUM

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The heavy, rectangular-framed plough commonly referred to by agricultural writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the "old Scotch plough", has already been illustrated in diagrammatic form in the pages of this journal (Jirlow and Whitaker 1957:80). The first recorded surviving example of such a plough has now come to light in Stranraer County Museum. Its existence was brought to the attention of Miss E. McCaig, former County Librarian and Curator of the County Museum, by William Ronnie, blacksmith at Mochrum, and the late W. McLellan of Mochrum Schoolhouse, in 1955. It had last been in use about 1880-90. When brought to Stranraer, it was found to be badly worm eaten, its beam was broken, and the main handle was missing, having broken off at the point where the beam was morticed into it. The coulter is missing. Treatment has been given against wood-beetle, and the beam has been repaired. The missing stilt and coulter will ultimately be replaced, and it should be possible to achieve accuracy from the evidence of the surviving part of the stilt and from the diagrams in Dickson 1770: facing p. 182, and Gray 1814: I, Plate I. The plough is in store at present in the Old Castle of Stranraer. For the convenience of readers of this note, Gray's diagram, which is in all respects similar to the Chilcarroch plough, is reproduced in Fig. 1, along with a key to the names of parts.

This type of plough was universal in Scotland (apart from some areas of the Highlands and Islands) until it began to be replaced by the lighter, two horse ploughs that evolved in the eighteenth century, the best known being the chain plough developed by the Berwickshire ploughwright James Small in 1767. It was the old Scotch plough that carried out the hard, back-breaking task of bringing under cultivation more and more of the land in Scotland from early feudal times onwards, and made the way comparatively easy for the light swing-plough of the last two centuries. It must therefore, be awarded a prime place in the history of cultivation in Scotland,



The Chilcarroch Plough, showing the upswept rear of the mouldboard and the metal plated land-side.



The rectangular frame of the Chilcarroch Plough. The iron ring round the coulter mortice is known as the "sleeveband".





The griddled share of the Chilcarroch Plough.

and the Chilcarroch plough will form a most important exhibit in the extension that is being planned to the present Museum building in Stranraer.

The plough has a sturdy rectangular frame formed by the sole, the sheath, the lower part of the great stilt and the rear part of the beam. The flat wooden mouldboard has its ground-wrest and lower part plated with iron. The breast, or fore part of the sheath, the land-side and underside of the head and the side of the lower part of the great stilt, are also iron plated. The small stilt is bolted to the inside of the mouldboard, and was originally linked to the great stilt by three wooden rungs. The iron bridle is bolted to the end of the beam,

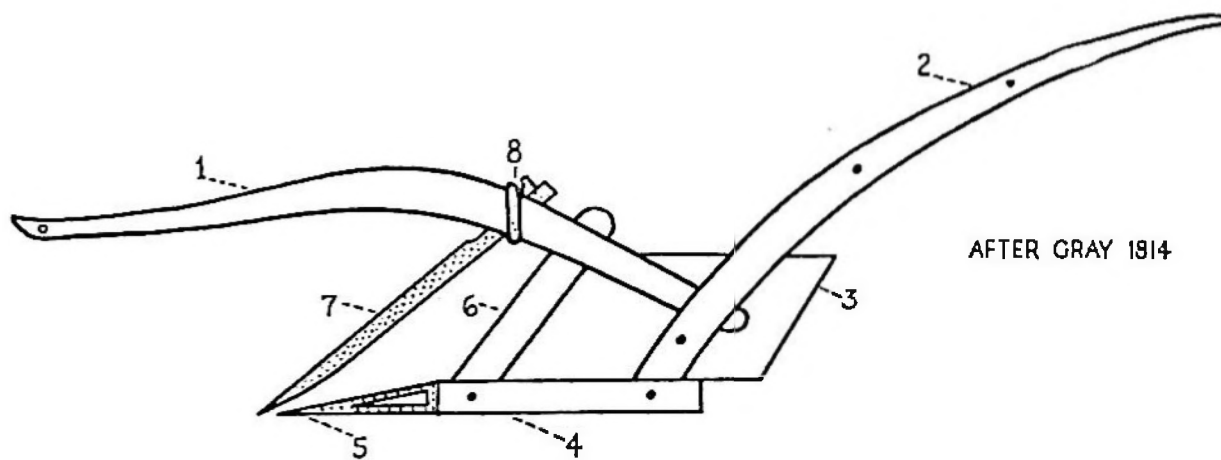


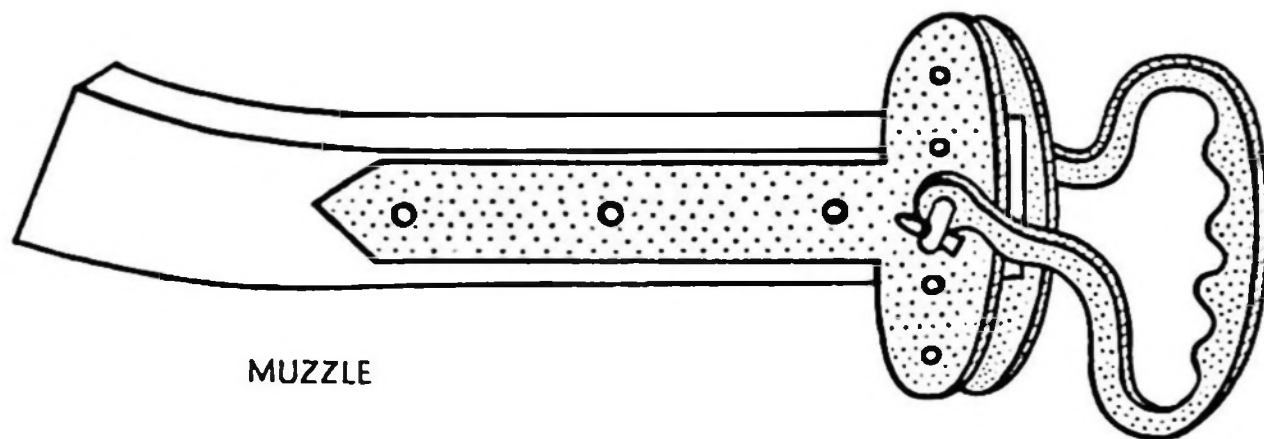
FIG. 1. GLOSSARY OF TERMS.

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|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. Beam  | 4. Plough-head                 |
| 2. Stilts or handles. The "great stilt" was at the land-side, and the "small stilt" at the furrow side | 5. Sock or share               |
| 3. Mouldboard  | 6. Sheath                      |
|  | 7. Coulter                     |
|  | 8. Wedge for retaining coulter |

and lateral adjustment of the plough in yoking was probably achieved by a detachable, horizontally notched iron loop, such as that illustrated by Dickson (Fig. 2).

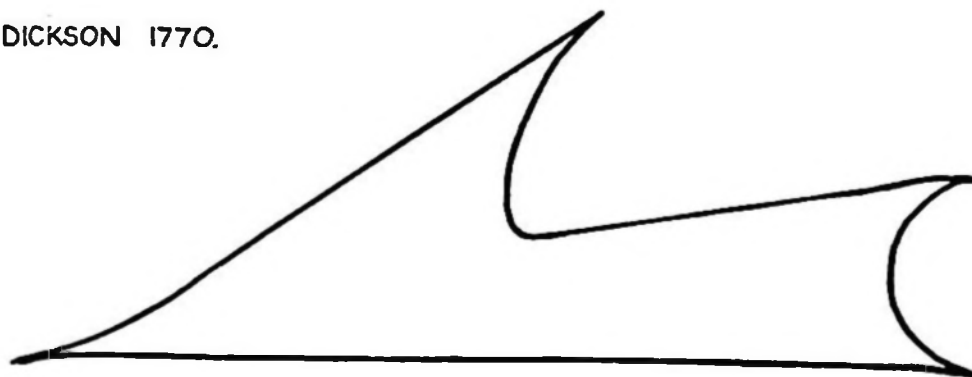
The plough is furnished with two massive shares or "socks", which were retrieved by John McQuaker, president of the Wigtownshire Antiquarian Society. One is spear-shaped, and of an open, gridded construction, suitable for use in stiff, stony soil. The other has a share with a feather or fin, of the type commonly found on horse-drawn ploughs of recent times, suitable for cutting through roots in weed-infested soils. Farmers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially those in Angus, Perthshire and Stirlingshire, liked to have plough-irons represented on their grave-stones. Shares of both kinds appear (Christison 1902:280-457; 1904:55-116), the gridded ones often being shown with a coulter thrust through

them. A share of each type was evidently part of each plough's equipment, as Dickson also shows (Fig. 2). Numerous examples of gridded shares are preserved in Scottish museums, and those from Aberdeen have been published (Payne 1957:184). They occur also in Northern Ireland, where, indeed, they were being used at least till the 1950s on wooden drill ploughs

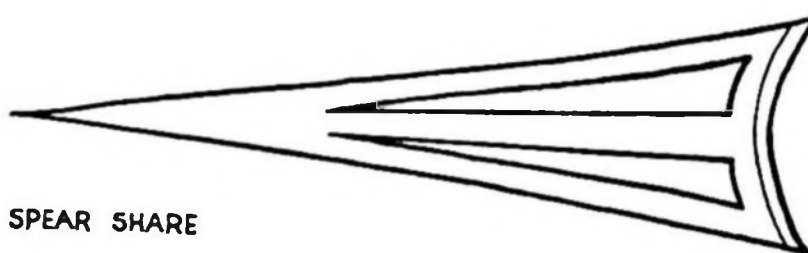


MUZZLE

AFTER DICKSON 1770.



WINGED SHARE



SPEAR SHARE

FIG. 2.

(Seaby 1958:85-6). The Scottish ones vary considerably in size, and were used on the light ploughs introduced in the eighteenth century as well as on the old Scotch plough. The Chilcarroch share is the longest so far found, though this is explained by the fact that the blacksmith at Mochrum Smithy, Mr. Milhench, put extra long points on when he was dressing them so that they would not need re-doing too soon at a busy period. There is little doubt that these old Scotch ploughs made

continuous demands on a smith's services. The markedly different planes of the land-side and the beam of the Chilcarroch plough would mean that the point of the share was digging hard into the land at an angle all the time. The friction and amount of wear must have been very considerable, and one of the reasons for the large plough-teams of anything up to twelve animals becomes evident.

The plough can be dated with reasonable certainty. The farm of Chilcarroch from which it originally came was tenanted by the family of Anderson for over 200 years. From Chilcarroch it went to the farm of Culbae, Whauphill, and then to the farm of High Elrig. It lay in the rafters there for eighty years before it came to the Museum. It is thought locally that it may have come to Chilcarroch about 1793. This view is supported by the literary evidence for the types of cultivating implements in Wigtownshire in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries. The parish descriptions in the Old Statistical Account show that there were in use in the 1790s four types of plough: a light, two-horse, chain plough similar to James Small's model, sometimes, known as the "English" plough, a light two-horse version of the old Scotch plough, a light, two-horse plough described as the "Carlisle" plough and the old Scotch plough for heavy or stony land, drawn by three to four horses with a driver at their head as well as a man holding the stilts. The latter was already rare in Mochrum by the 1790s (Steven 1796:567), and had gone almost completely out by the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century. In 1814, it was written about in the past tense as follows (Smith 1814:99-100):

"The old Scotch plough, but with some improvements, and of neater workmanship, long maintained its reputation, from the idea that the broken stony lands of Galloway were not adapted for any other. But it is now found that ploughs on the model of Small's, with the latest improvements made upon it, answer much better on almost every species of soil; and that the additional expence is more than compensated by durability arising from superior workmanship. It is proper to mention, that, at some of the ploughing matches in Galloway, ploughs were brought from Roxburghshire, Berwickshire, Northumberland, and other counties, the most celebrated for agriculture. Their respective merits being accurately ascertained; the tradesmen in the country afterwards copied from the most approved models among them, and soon equalled the originals."



Smith's statement, taken in conjunction with the evidence of the Old Statistical Account, completely supports the date of 1793 based on local information.

Dimensions: Overall length of plough, 10 feet 3 inches.  
Overall length of beam, 7 feet.  
Mortise in beam for coulter,  $2\frac{5}{8}$  by  $1\frac{1}{8}$  inches.  
Length of sole, 2 feet 9 inches.  
Length of mouldboard, 3 feet 1 inch.  
Depth of mouldboard, 1 foot 2 inches, tapering (upswept) at the rear to 9 inches.  
Maximum width of plough, 1 foot 6 inches.  
Gridded share, 2 feet 1 inch by  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches.  
Winged share, 1 foot 3 inches by  $6\frac{3}{4}$  inches.

This note is intended rather to draw attention to a unique survival than to be a definite study. Thanks are due to Mr. Wilson, Curator of the Stranraer County Museum, and his assistant Mr. Pilling, for their help and co-operation.

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