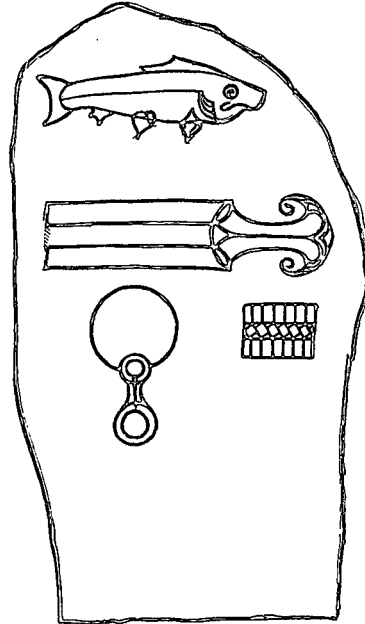


III.

NOTICES OF TWO ANCIENT GRAVES RECENTLY OPENED IN THE VICINITY OF DUNROBIN CASTLE, SUTHERLANDSHIRE. BY DR J. J. ROSS. COMMUNICATED BY JOHN STUART, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

Mr John Stuart read to the Meeting the following report regarding two ancient graves recently opened in the neighbourhood of Dunrobin Castle, which had been drawn up by Dr J. J. Ross of Golspie, for the Duke of Sutherland. This Report had been sent to Mr Stuart by the Duke, thinking that it would be of some interest for the work on Sculptured Stones on which he was engaged; and, with his Grace's permission, he now submitted it to the Society.

“On Thursday, May 24, I accompanied Mr Gunn to examine an old grave which had been recently opened, in the progress of the improvements now going on to the west of the new garden at Dunrobin. We found the grave just in the state in which it had been left by the workmen after clearing it out. It is about 8 feet long, the direction of its length being about from S.W. to N.E. It is built in at the sides with three flat pieces of sandstone, and regularly paved in the bottom with similar pieces; below this paving is the sand, mixed with round shingly stones, such as found on the neighbouring sea-beach. The grave had been covered on the top by three flat slabs of stone: two towards the foot, common pieces of sandstone like those encircling the sides, and one larger and thicker towards the head, and having the emblems shown in the accompanying woodcut cut on its upper surface. This sketch is an exact copy from the stone, quite correct as to the design and relative situation of the figures, and, I think, nearly so as to the proportionate size which they bear to one another, and to the surface of



the stone. The stone itself is irregular in shape, and quite devoid of any sculpture on its edges.

“The bones which had been removed from this grave were put into a box at the time, which was now submitted to me for examination. They consist of portions of two separate skeletons, both of adult men; of one in particular the bones are above the average size, with the prominences and tuberosities for the insertion of muscles highly developed. I particularly remarked the size of those forming the ankle and arch of the foot. The bones of this larger body are hard, white, and not at all in bad preservation. Those of the other are darker in colour, and very much decayed, mouldering away under pressure of the fingers like the rotten bark of an old tree. It would seem as if two people had been interred in the same grave, with a very considerable interval of time between. There were only portions of one skull, and these so much broken and decayed; as to give but a very imperfect indication of the type of the cranium. Such as they are, however, I have preserved them, as well as the bones of one arm and forearm of each subject, in case any future investigation may be required; and also the teeth, which are much smoothed and worn down by attrition.

“In this grave, along with the bones, was also found a cylindrical piece of metal [iron] hollowed in the interior, very much corroded and oxidised, evidently the handle of some instrument.

“A very long period of time must have elapsed since the persons, of whose bodies these bones formed a part, were interred; but how long cannot, as far as I know, be ascertained from the bones themselves.

“Having learned that the workmen, in the course of their operations, had come on other stones about the same spot, which might indicate the existence of other graves, Mr Gunn caused a search to be made, which soon resulted in the discovery of one, which was forthwith carefully opened in our presence. It lay a few yards to the west of the first, and its direction was nearly the same, from S.W. to N.E. The construction of the grave was also the same, enclosed at the sides and ends, paved at the bottom, and covered in at top by flat, thin sandstone slabs; but in this case there was no sculpture nor marks of any kind on any of the stones. The stones were not accurately jointed to one another. There was no appearance of anything like mortar or regular building; they were merely placed in the sand on edge, in irregular contact with one another. On removing those forming the roof or covering of the grave, a complete skeleton at once came into view, lying among the sand which had fallen in at the interstices between the stones at the top and sides. The feet were towards the N.E., the face of course looking towards this point also. The skeleton lay full length,

with the right leg crossed over the left at the ankle, the arms extended along the trunk, and the hands bent inwards, so as to lie one on each side of the pubis, in the fold of the groins. This skeleton was also that of a male; the bones dark, and so much decayed, so as to require very careful handling to prevent their crumbling to pieces. I removed the skull with the greatest caution; but notwithstanding all my care, a portion of one temple gave way. This, however, is of no consequence, as the skull is perfect enough for any information to be derived from it as to the form, size, and type of cranium of the person to whom it belonged. This skull I have of course preserved. It is perhaps a little narrow at the lower part of the forehead; but on the whole, is a well-shaped, well-sized head, with a good facial angle.

“This latter skeleton is about the same size as the smaller of the two found in the first-opened grave. It is evidently that of a man well advanced in life, as shown by the change of direction in the neck of the thigh-bone, which forms almost a right angle with the shaft of the bone.

“There was no vestige of anything like a coffin, or other covering of the body, and nothing was found in this grave except the bones forming the skeleton.”

Mr Stuart also exhibited the bones and other remains found in those graves, which were presented by the Duke of Sutherland to the Museum of the Society. Mr Stuart remarked, that the Sculptured Stone was one of a class which frequently appeared as Erect Pillars along the north-eastern coast of Scotland; and it was most probable that in the present case it had been diverted from its original purpose, to form along with other slabs a cover to the Cist.

From the locality, which was one often frequented and sometimes possessed by the Norsemen, there seemed a likelihood that the present Cist was a Scandinavian one.