

IV.

NOTICE OF SCULPTURED STONES AND OTHER ANTIQUITIES FOUND ON THE CASTLE HILL OF KINTORE, AND OF OTHER ANCIENT REMAINS FOUND IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD. COMMUNICATED BY JOHN STUART, ESQ., SEC. S.A. SCOT.

The district of Kintore formed one of the ancient divisions of land called Thanedomis. It lies on the Don, about thirteen miles north from Aberdeen; there are many primitive works in the adjacent country, and many remains have been found in the neighbourhood, which seem to attest its early settlement and populousness. At no great distance are the British strengths of the Barmekyn of Echt, with its triple walls and ditches; Bennachie, with its "Maiden Way," and Barra, near Old Meldrum; at Inverury is the Bass, a natural sandhill scarp and shaped, like the Doun of Invernochtie, into a place of strength. Many circles of stones,¹ sculptured pillars, and cairns are scattered over the country in the near neighbourhood. A very remarkable circle at Tuack was recently excavated, when remains of bones, urns, and fragments of bronze were discovered.² Another, at Crichtie, revealed even more remarkable results. On the moor between Kintore and Kinellar numerous cairns occur. One of these was opened about the end of last century, when a ring, to which was suspended four oblong square pieces of polished cannel coal mixed with oval beads of the same substance, were found.³

The Castle Hill of Kintore was a conical mound of about 30 feet in height, and of 150 feet in diameter, at the base of the east end, narrowing towards the west until the width came to be under 30 feet, sloping equally all round until it came to about half of that dimension on the top.

Recent operations on the great North of Scotland Railway led to the destruction of this ancient monument. From what occurred during these works, it appeared that the original surface of the hill had been about ten feet lower than that which has hitherto been recognised as such. This lower surface was covered with a layer of burnt earth of considerable depth, and along the east margin of the hill which had been projected beyond the circle, and for some distance backwards from it, were deposited, in an irregular manner, a quantity of stones, and among them eleven large blocks, one of them formed of Bennachie gra-

¹ See Statistical Account, vol. xii., p. 659. Edin. 1845.

² Sculptured Stones of Scotland, App. to Preface, p. xx.

³ These articles are now in the Society's Museum. See Synopsis of Museum, p. 12.

nite, the others of blue granite, such as is found in the neighbourhood of Kintore. Also one naturally formed for a seat (locally called "blue heathen"), a large block, was lying on the west end of it, about seven feet long, and about two feet broad, and about eighteen inches thick. Two of these had inscribed figures on them, and it is possible that more may have been inscribed, as some of them were removed and broken up before they were observed. From the appearance of the stones it seems probable that a circle of stones, connected by a wall, had formerly existed on the hill, and that they had been overthrown, and covered over with earth to the depth of about 10 feet, so as to form the modern Castle Hill.¹

On the south and east sides of the hill were sundry small pits at about 10 to 2 feet below the surface (that is from the surface of the top of the hill, measured at the time of cutting), of about 3 to 4 feet in length, 1 to 2½ feet in depth, and from 2 to 3 feet broad, rather of a circular or oval form, narrowing towards the bottom. In these were burnt clay, charcoal, and bones.

Similar pits were also brought to light by the cuttings of the Railway for several hundred yards to the eastward of the Castle Hill, where the soil was gravelly. These pits were about the size before described, and contained stones wasted with fire, charred earth, and bones. One of them was covered by a block of unhewn stone, and under it was a large urn of baked clay, containing a damp substance like meal. The urn was broken in removing the stone.

In others of the pits were found, besides the bones and burnt earth, fragments of iron, and some round pieces of solid tin, about the thickness of small gas pipes. These were found firmly imbedded round one of the pits in a vertical position, about eight feet below the surface.

Another sculptured monument was about the same time dug up by Mr A. Watt in the churchyard of Kintore. It had become covered up with soil, or been buried several feet below the surface; but as its former site on the surface was remembered, it was easily recovered, when attention was directed to it.

There were several other pits discovered on the banks of the Don, with burnt ashes and charcoal, which were distinguished from those before mentioned; they were of more modern date, and had been used for fires made for washing near the Don, and were much nearer the surface.

The following letter to me from Mr Alexander Watt, Townhead of Kintore, gives an account of a curious mound at Kinaldy, in the same neighbourhood, partially examined by him. Mr Watt is an active local antiquary, and has been the means of preserving and bringing to notice four or five sculptured pillars, which, but for his exertions, would have been destroyed:—

¹ Drawings of the Sculptured Stones at Kintore, occur in "The Sculptured Stones of Scotland," plates 109, 110, and 111. See also Notices of the plates, pp. 20-33.

“KINTORE, 16th March 1857.

“MY DEAR SIR,—I was favoured with yours, dated 14th inst. The place where the skull was found is near Kinaldy, about 700 or 800 yards south of the Don. In a natural *dry, sandy mound*, there had been four cists deposited. One was found some twenty years ago on the outer margin of the mound towards the east. It contained bones and an urn, which were not preserved. In April 1854, while the workmen employed by Mr Milne were removing the mound to fill up part of the old canal, the other three cists were discovered. Two of them had been opened before I knew of the discovery. I saw the fragments of bones and urns, and the stone slabs lying about. After making the best of them, I prepared to see farther into the mound, when, to my great pleasure, we discovered the *cist* where lay the *skull* which I sent you some time ago. The whole skeleton was quite entire. The body had been placed in a sitting posture, the legs having been bent in below the thighs, such as you would see when a tailor was at work. All the four cists lay due east and west. The back had been placed towards the north; the head had dropped between the thigh bones; it was lying on them with the face up. The urn was placed in front of the body towards the east end; it, as well as the other two, was split in pieces. They were all of the same description, red clay, and pretty hard burnt, ornamented with the herring-bone figures, &c. There was a deposit of *black, greasy mud* in the bottom; and part of the urn lay below the left arm-bone, which would seem to prove that the urn had been split before the body had been decomposed. There is no doubt that all the urns in this mound had been used for burning some fat, greasy substance, as all the slabs on the top of the *cists* were *marked with smoke* about one foot in diameter, immediately above where the urns were placed. I have seen in the vicinity eight cists opened, but never found the *urns* split and broken as by the effects of fire, like that at Kinaldy. The small urn I sent you for exhibition last year was found at Tullybin, in the parish of Kintore; when found, there was a whitish mealy stuff on the bottom, as well as in others which I have seen. All the cists about here are placed nearly in the same direction, east and west; and are of about the same dimensions, averaging about 5 feet long by 2 to 2½ wide, and about the same in depth. I have got one in this immediate neighbourhood preserved, which at all times shows a good specimen of what they are. In all I have seen opened I have *never* seen any armour nor implements of any kind *but one*, that of a flint arrow-head lying among the bones of the body.

“All the new discoveries which I have made to my collection is a stone about 20 inches long by 15 inches broad, and about 3 inches deep, scooped out like a boat. It is the third one of the kind I have seen; the other two were in frag-

ments, broken as by means of fire. This I believe to be the case. The one I have preserved complete bears likewise the marks of fire. I believe it to be one of the *very ancient cooking* implements used by the early inhabitants. It was found in one of these rings that are so numerous studded over our moors in this neighbourhood. The fragments of the other two were near the same place; and near to one of these rings the *stone celt* which I sent you last year for exhibition was found. I am, &c.

“AL. WATT.

“John Stuart, Esq.”