

IV.

NOTICE OF A STONE CIST, CONTAINING THE REMAINS OF A HUMAN SKELETON, RECENTLY DISCOVERED AT ARDYNE, NEAR CASTLE TOWARD, ARGYLESHERE. By J. C. ROGER, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

A small promontory, jutting into the channel which separates the Argyleshire coast from the Island of Bute, in the Frith of Clyde, is comprehended within the ancient lordship of Cowall. Towards the north-west point of this headland are situated the lands of Ardyne, one corner of which, projecting into the channel, bears the name of Ardyne Point, interesting as a locality, which at various intervals has disclosed the remains of a remote antiquity. Regarding the earlier periods of the history of Cowall there is no authentic record, nor does it appear that the lands situated within its boundaries, down to the reign of Alexander II., were held by other tenure than the sword. It would appear that the lordship of Cowall was obtained by "Walter, filius Alani," High Steward of Scotland, in the reign of Malcolm IV., by marriage with an heiress of the clan of Lamont. "There are few traditions," we are informed by Skene, "more universally believed in the Highlands, or which can be traced back to an earlier period, than that the Lamonts were the ancient possessors of Cowall; and it is abundantly clear, from historical notices connected with the district, that they continued the possessors of the district, and their name the prevailing one, down to the middle of the seventeenth century."

The lands of Ardyne form part of the estate of Castle Toward. They are situated in the parish of Inverchaolain, within the boundaries of which, and in

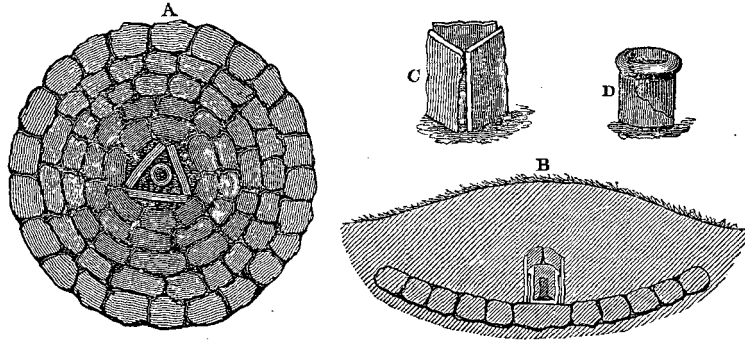
the neighbouring parish of Dunoon, *tumuli* are of frequent occurrence. Some of these, on being opened, revealed stone cists, enclosing human skeletons; in others were found clay urns, containing calcined remains. One of those cists, discovered at Ardyne by the falling down of a portion of a bank of sea-beach shingle, undermined by the swelling of the tide, consequent on the storm of 6th and 7th February last, forms the subject of this notice. The cist is situated in the face of the bank, immediately under the surface, the space originally occupied by the superincumbent gravel, being something less than a foot in depth. A few rude slates or flags of schist (about twenty in number, and of the thickness of two inches), appear to have constituted this monument of primitive sepulture. Of these, four flags, placed at intervals of 1 to 2 inches apart, compose the left side, three of which, together with the slabs forming the head and foot of the cist, remain in the position which they occupied at the period of inhumation. The stones of the right side, with the three flags which formed the cover, having been displaced in the descent of the bank, occupy the centre of the mound formed by the fallen gravel. At both sides of this mound the bank rises perpendicularly from the beach to the height of $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet, the space between which and the ordinary tide-mark having been occupied by the soil washed away by the flood. This cist measured inside 5 feet 2 inches in length, and 15 inches in breadth across the flags paving the bottom. From the surface to the bottom of the cist 22 inches, and from the former to the upper edge of the cist 13 inches—no indication appearing of mortar having been used in its construction. The cist, when first seen, contained a human skeleton, the bones of which having been displaced by the shock sustained in the fall of the bank, rested on the shingle inside the coffin. Enough, however, remained to indicate a skeleton extended at full length—a contracted pelvis affording evidence of the occupant having been a male. Most of the bones, rendered friable by exposure to the atmosphere, soon crumbled into dust. Of these there remain the frontal bone, and nearly all the bones of the face, more than half of the lower jaw, two pieces of a temporal bone, one of them being the portion in which is situated the mechanism of the inner ear, and fragments of what appear to be bones of the feet. Of three larger fragments, two seem to be portions of the bones of the lower limbs—the other the remains of the left scapula. It will be observed that the teeth are in number those of an adult. The continuation of the suture through the frontal bone, as exhibited in this remain, is rather an unusual occurrence. Among the gravel situated within the cist was found an implement of warfare, formed of a piece of flint, evidently the remains of a spear-head. This weapon, which presents the appearance of a wedge, is about two inches long, and $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch across the broad end. One of its sides is perfectly flat. The reverse, rising into a ridge along

the centre, slopes away towards the edges. The cist was placed—the head one point north of west, and the foot one point south of east.

Towards the beginning of the century, about the point shewn in the sketch exhibited, six stone cists were discovered under two of those tumuli, the latter situated in close proximity to each other. Three of these cists consisted each of two large slabs, forming the whole length of the sides, with two small flags composing the ends. The length of the graves did not exceed 4 feet.¹ In this instance the bottoms and covers were not found—a circumstance which, together with the absence of remains, affords a probability that the tumulus under which they rested had been previously disturbed. The other three were paved with flags, and covered on the top. Each contained a complete skeleton, extended at length, the bones of which, with the exception of some portions of the skull, crumbled down on exposure to the atmosphere. In 1816, not more than a hundred yards distant from the spot where the cist was lately discovered, the ploughshare revealed three graves, situated just within the stone fence which terminates the boundary of the field. Two of these, on the authority of an intelligent eye-witness, measured under 5 feet, the third being longer than the other two by several inches. This group was distributed in lines parallel to each other, extending from north to south, at the distance of four feet apart. Each cist enclosed an entire human skeleton, which rested on a clean sea-beach shingle, covering the inside of the cist. These remains, like the former, became speedily pulverized. It was observed that the skull contained in the largest cist was of larger dimensions than the two skulls found in the adjoining sarcophagi, and that the pelvis was much more contracted. The teeth, which remained in their respective sockets, were worn down by attrition. It is hardly to be doubted that these were the remains of an adult male and two full-grown females. Several hundred yards to the north-west of this group stood an immense cairn of stones, the remains of which were removed in 1806. Three stone cists, about 5 feet in length, each containing a human skeleton, were discovered in 1821, about 50 yards south-east of the old castle of Toward, which is situated upwards of half a mile to the eastward of Ardyne. About the same time were found within the ruin of the castle itself 200 to 300 small silver coins, said to have been of an early Scottish reign. In 1836 a *concave circle*, formed of the larger stones usually to be met with on the sea-beach, was discovered under a tumulus situated to the northward of the cairn just noticed (see woodcut, fig. A, and a section of the same is shown in fig. B). This consisted of a single stone, placed as a centre round which others were built in a series of circles, the diameter of the whole being exactly 5 feet.

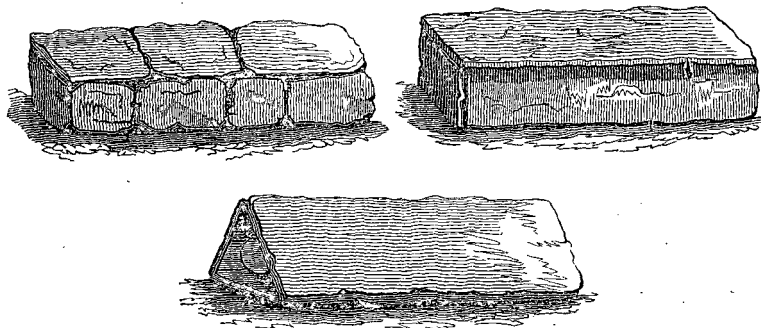
¹ The depth of these three cists was about 3 feet. I am inclined to think that in this particular instance, the remains inclosed must have been placed in a sitting posture.

In the centre of this circle was placed a clay urn (fig. D), about 6 inches in



height, containing a quantity of black ashes. The sides of this remain were nearly perpendicular, and round its upper edge was a circular moulding. It was inclosed within three small oblong flags (fig. C), the edges of which, resting against each other, presented a triangular opening at the top, which was covered in by another slab of smaller dimensions. Regarding other similar relics (containing fragments of bones and calcined remains) discovered at different points along the sea coast, no particular account has been preserved.

The stone coffins or cists occurring frequently along the coast in the locality of Castle Toward, are of three different kinds, of which I show sketches in the subjoined woodcut—those formed of an indefinite number of the smaller slates or flags, and those constructed of four single slabs extending the whole



length of the coffin, and closed at the ends. The third consists of a single slab, laid flat, forming the bottom of the cist; two other slabs of equal length being placed with their upper edges resting against each other—the whole presenting the appearance of a triangular prism.

Among nations which had embraced the Christian religion, a practice, founded on a superstition having reference to the advent of Christ, of burying their dead with the feet towards the east, was found to prevail; but the manner in which these coffins are generally found distributed leaves no room to suppose that the position of the body formed a subject of the smallest solicitude.

“Within the space now occupied by the villages of Dunoon and Kilmun,” says the statistical account, “and on the lands of Castle Toward and other localities, and where no indications whatever occur of those spots having been dedicated exclusively to the use of ordinary sepulture, these resting places of a race unknown are found to be very numerous.” It may be reasonably doubted, however, whether, in the primitive ages to which these remains must be referred, any particular spot of ground was set apart for the purpose of interment. On the contrary, it would appear that the dead were conveyed to the sea-shore, probably within the high-tide mark, and there deposited—a scanty covering of shingle often barely concealing the coffin from view. For a considerable distance from the sea-shore the subsoil consists of pure sea-beach shingle, which it seems probable has risen up since the period when these bodies were inhumed—the shingle covering the inside of the coffins presenting an appearance as if the tide of centuries had risen and receded over it.

Traditions, which speak of sanguinary conflicts between the contending houses of Lamont and Lochawe, may find a verification in the discovery of a hundred human skulls near the foundations of the ancient parish church; but the isolated position of those primitive graves, occurring at distant intervals, sometimes singly, at other times in groups of three or four, hardly consists with the idea of a battle; nor is it to be supposed, with reference to the fable of a Danish Hospital, that the Scandinavian monarch was followed to the field by soldiers of the other sex. Rating mere speculation at its lowest value, there are here certain facts too important to be overlooked—the appearance of the shingle on which, undisturbed for centuries, the skeleton is found resting, pure as if washed by the recent tide—the position of the graves, disposed without reference to any determinate plan—the occurrence of female remains, separating the locality from the ordinary notions of a feud, and the presence of the flint weapon—all point to a very remote period. There is nothing repugnant to reason in the supposition that the remains now submitted to your notice are vestiges of a period scarcely less remote than the earlier centuries of the Christian era.