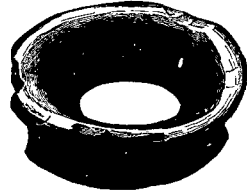


I.

NOTES ON SOME SEPULCHRAL CISTS, AND ON THE LATIN INSCRIPTION UPON ONE OF THE STANDING STONES NEAR YARROW KIRK, SELKIRKSHIRE. BY JOHN ALEX. SMITH, M.D., F.S.A. Scot.

In presenting to the Museum of the Society the small ring of cannel coal and portions of a coarse clay urn from Mr Currie, sculptor, Darnick, it is worth recording that these remains were found in long sepulchral cists, composed of large slabs or flagstones, containing traces of bones, which were discovered this spring, while the ground was being trenched, in the garden attached to a shepherd's cottage, a little to the west of Yarrow Kirk in Selkirkshire. Eight cists were discovered closely adjoining one another, and each measuring, it is said, some 5 or 6 feet in length, about the size of ordinary graves, and they lay apparently in the direction of east and west. The ring of cannel coal (which is well represented in the subjoined drawing) is of a rounded form, and shaped somewhat like the horn frame of a watchmaker's eye-glass. It has four small perforations, pierced at irregular intervals in its grooved sides, which pass through to the inside. The diameter of the larger margin of the ring is nearly $1\frac{7}{8}$ inch, and of the other or smaller side $1\frac{1}{2}$; it is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in depth on the side, and the central aperture measures nearly an inch in width.



The small pieces of the coarse clay urn, which was unfortunately broken at the time of its discovery, show the usual patterns of oblique and straight lines, formed by the twisted cord, round its upper part, similar to the class of clay drinking-cups found in cists of a primitive character. A flint arrow-head was also found in the immediate neighbourhood of the cists. A special interest was given to these cists, from their being in close proximity to three rude standing stones, which are placed in a line along the valley, running nearly east and west, at about a gunshot apart from each other; and it was at a distance of some 30 to 36 feet to the south of the eastern stone that the cists were found. Close by, a cairn or heap of small round stones was discovered, enclosing a considerable quantity of partially decomposed bones, which, after a few minutes' exposure to the air, crumbled into dust; and so numerous were the fragments of bones cast up by the workmen employed in digging the foundation of the recently-built shepherd's cottage,

which stands a little to the north of the stone, that they fancied the ground here had been the site of an old churchyard. A considerable space of adjacent ground presents the same uneven surface that the garden did before being trenched, and might reward a careful investigation. There was also an additional interest attached to these standing stones, from the fact of the one to the west still displaying traces of a Latin inscription, a circumstance of very rare occurrence on so rude a slab, more especially in our northern kingdom. The stone measures 5 feet 4 inches in height above the ground, by about 3 feet at its greatest breadth. Mr Currie had, at considerable trouble, taken a cast of this inscribed stone, which I have examined, but, unfortunately, the light, and time, at my disposal did not enable me to do more than raise doubts in my mind as to the correctness of part, at least, of the readings which have already been given of the inscription. I hope, however, we shall acquire a cast of it for the Museum, and the members would then be enabled to study it for themselves. The inscription now, I fear, partially obliterated, consists of six lines, which run the long way of the block, and cover the greater part of the breadth of the stone, they are slightly wavy in their course, and by no means very parallel to one another; the letters are apparently Roman, of a debased type, and seem to have been rudely carved, or rather scratched on the stone. Mr Currie has since kindly sent me a letter he had received from the Rev. James Russell, minister of the parish of Yarrow, which details the finding of the stone, and other particulars of interest, and from it, and another letter with which I have been myself favoured, I give the following extracts:—

“The history of the finding and erection of this stone is simply this. When the ground was, for the first time, being brought under cultivation, now some fifty years ago, by the late Mr Ballantyne of Whitehope, on a spot presenting many verdant patches of grass, the plough struck upon a large flat stone, which was found to bear a Latin inscription. When Duke Henry of Buecleuch heard of it, he had the stone taken down to Bowhill, and got Sir Walter Scott, Dr John Leyden, and Mungo Park to examine it. The result was not very satisfactory. In the notes to the ballad of ‘The Dowie Dens o’ Yarrow,’ Sir Walter says, ‘The stone being rather scratched than engraved, and the lines being run through each other, it is only possible to read one or two Latin words.’ By the Duke’s desire, the stone was conveyed back to the spot where it had been dug up, and placed in an upright position. That this was not its original position is, I think, apparent; at the time of its discovery, it was lying horizontally, buried at a depth of eight inches; bones and ashes were found beneath it; it is thin and flat, quite a contrast to its round lumpish standing

companions; while the lines run lengthways along the block—circumstances which leave little doubt of its having formed the cover of a stone coffin. It bears the marks of a chain around it, by which it had been dragged to the spot.

“In 1833, I rubbed up the stone the best way I could, and though somewhat more successful than the party at Bowhill, owing to the rudeness and indistinctness of the hard block, I was able to trace only the following characters :—

HIC MEMORIAE ET
 HIC
 . . NVDI
 HIC IACENT
 IN TVMVLO DVO FILII
 LIBERALI

I could make out no names, which obviously occupy the space we have not been able to decipher. The third word ET must form part of the second line. One word in the second line looks like ANIMI; and the fourth line commences with something resembling DVM NOCENT. I think you have read SUO, where I had made it DUO; either word will give a good and intelligible meaning; but it is impossible to attach any sense to the last term in the inscription, and yet I think the letters are read aright. In the notice in the *Border Advertiser* newspaper which I saw, it was stated that a piece of the stone was wanting, on which a good many words were engraved. This is a mistake; the corner in question has been found, but there is no carving on it.

“Dr Leyden was disposed to regard it as a relic of the Romans, a view which seemed to me improbable. I was not aware of their ever employing unhewn *greywacke*, of which this stone consists, for monumental purposes, the altars, milestones, &c., along the line of Adrian’s Wall, being uniformly of *sandstone*, and in places where it must have been far transported. Besides, such an introduction as *Hic memoria* is foreign to the Latin idiom. I accordingly wrote my friend Professor Pillans of Edinburgh, asking his opinion as to the date and source of the inscription, and now give an extract from his reply—‘The demands on my time at this essay-reading season prevent me from making any extended researches or references, and I freely confess, that the *prima facie* inspection of the *fac simile* suggests to me nothing in addition to what you have yourself made out. The truth is, that without venturing to give a decided opinion on the matter, my impression is rather unfavourable to the idea of its being Roman. I do not derive this impression so much from the belief that the Romans were not in that quarter, for some of the lines of Roman road were not

very far off; but neither the words of the inscription, so far as they are legible, nor the material you describe, seem to point to classical antiquity. *Hic jacent*, in a prose epitaph, are words which I will not say are never to be found in a genuine antique, but at least they are so rare as to justify a suspicion that the stone where they are found is of Christian inscription. The *Dis manibus*, *D.M.*, or *D.M. S(acrum)* are almost universal.'

"It is a pity you could not make out the names of the individuals whom this block commemorates. My impression is that it belongs to the period of Border warfare. A considerable way to the east, you are aware there are, about 100 yards apart from each other, two unhewn massive stones, which are also unquestionably the monuments of the dead. Sir Walter, in his 'Minstrelsy,' connects them all with the old ballad of the 'Dowie Dens of Yarrow,' and lays the locality of it here. He was at first disposed to identify the hero of the ballad with a son of Scott of Harden, resident at Kirkhope, and killed by his kinsmen the Scotts of Gilmanseugh. Latterly, he believed the ballad to refer to a duel fought betwixt John Scott of Tushielaw and his brother-in-law Walter Scott of Thirlestane, which proved fatal to the latter. This duel, however, the late Lord Napier told me, took place at Deuchar Swyre, according to a record of it preserved in his charter chest. If the ballad therefore refers to this occurrence, the stones must commemorate a different event, as Deuchar Swyre is at a considerable distance from them. Sir Walter adds,—'The name of the murderer is said to have been Annan, and the place of combat is still called Annan's Treat.' Somewhat doubtful of this interpretation of Scott, I submitted it to the late Mr William Laidlaw, his great friend, a native of the district, and himself no mean antiquarian; and quite concur in the opinion he expressed,—'None but Sir Walter ever concluded that Annan Street meant anything but the *way* of Annan; *treat* never was a common Scottish word.'

"It is impossible now to unravel the details, or fix the date of the story in the ballad. The piece of ground to the west of Yarrow church appears to have been the scene of slaughter and sepulchre on a large scale, and probably on more than one occasion. From time immemorial it was a low waste moor, till about fifty years ago, when it was formed into a number of cultivated enclosures. Some diggings at the base of the eastern monument, the one connected with the cists, laid bare a considerable pile of small bones, while around the one in the centre, there was formerly a large cairn, under which lay a quantity of decomposed bones. On more than twenty different spots were similar cairns, in many of which fine yellow dust, and in one, part of an old iron spear, much worn away by rust, was found. The real tradition simply bears, that here a deadly feud was settled by dint of arms; the upright stones mark the place where the

lords or leaders fell, and the bodies of their followers were thrown into a marshy pool, called the Dead Lake, in the adjoining haugh."

From the information just given, it will be observed, that this inscribed stone had been set up in its present position at quite a recent period, and we are left to judge whether this was simply the restoring of a fallen standing stone to its original position in the society of its fellows, or was the putting in an altogether new position what had been the cover of a rude stone coffin, or the inscribed stone laid over a simple grave; apparently the latter is the correct view of the case, as well from the character of the stone itself, as from the remains found below it; and, may we suppose the stone to have been originally covered up to prevent its being destroyed by hostile hands, or merely that the soil, in the long course of years, had gradually become accumulated over it? I am inclined to attribute a much greater antiquity to this inscribed stone than the times of Border warfare; it reminds me strongly of the early so-called Romano-British inscribed stones which have been discovered in Wales, belonging, apparently, to the earlier centuries of the Christian era—from perhaps the fifth to the eighth century; and it would be very desirable to collate this monument with some of these inscribed stones, to which it seems to bear a considerable resemblance.¹ Its proximity to a place apparently bearing the well-known name of Street, so frequently applied to a Roman way, is also curious, and suggests the propriety of a further examination of the district. The other two standing stones are probably of a greatly more ancient date, and were possibly connected with the interments made in the long-shaped cists, which are of an early (though not of the earliest) character; if not, indeed, with the apparently still more ancient cairns, and the ashes of their tenants, found near their base.

In the letter quoted above, which I received from the Rev. Mr Russell, he says, it might be worth the attention of the Society to direct diggings to be made in the locality, under the superintendence of a competent person, and he has no doubt the Duke of Buccleuch would at once sanction any movement of the kind; the tenant, Mr Ballantyne, would make the party welcome to excavate anywhere they pleased, and he himself would be glad to offer the hospitality of his manse, and render every assistance in his power. The state of the Society's funds unfortunately does not allow us much scope for explorations of this kind, at least in the meantime, but I am sure the members will feel much indebted to the Rev. Mr Russell for his very kind and liberal offer of assistance.

¹ See *Archæologia Cambrensis*, vols. i. and ii., third series, 1855 and 1856, &c.

[I am glad to state that His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch, the proprietor of the district, having had his attention called to this interesting memorial stone, has caused it to be properly enclosed with a strong railing, and special care to be taken of it, so that, in all time coming, it may, as far as possible, be preserved from any chance of injury.]