

IV.

NOTICE OF A STONE COFFIN WHICH CONTAINED AN URN AND JET ORNAMENTS, DISCOVERED NEAR PITKENNEDY, PARISH OF ABERLEMNO, FORFARSHIRE. BY A. JERVISE, Esq., Cor. MEM. S.A. SCOT., BRECHIN.

In the month of July 1857, while workmen were taking gravel from a hillock in a wood upon the estate of Pitkenney, belonging to Mr Chalmers of Aldbar, they accidentally came upon a stone coffin. It was near the middle of the knoll, about two feet below the surface, and the stones which composed the coffin were of the gray slate kind, common to the locality, with the exception of one piece, which was a red sandstone. The single stone which covered the top measures about two feet by three feet in size, and is about three inches thick; the sides and ends were of lesser stones, from eighteen inches to two feet high; and the gravel formed the bottom. No remains of bones were discovered, and a clay urn was in the east end of the coffin; but unfortunately it was broken to pieces upon the spot by a herd boy striking it with a stick.

It was chiefly in the east end of the coffin, near the urn, that the jet beads and ornaments were found, which are now exhibited, and it was only by the accidental discovery of some of these in October last that the fact of relics being found at Pitkenney became known to Mr Chalmers. He promptly inquired into the matter, and, on recovering the ornaments, kindly rewarded the labourers.

The beads (now shown) are oblong in form, and 104 in number, and, so far as known, with the exception of one or two, are all that were found. Each of these are pierced laterally, and the four pieces, of a square shape, are also pierced through in the same way, but each with four holes. The two end pieces, of a somewhat triangular shape, are likewise pierced obliquely by the same number of holes, and in these the thread upon which the beads were strung had doubtless been meant to terminate. The four square and two triangular end pieces are variegated on one side by a dotted ornament, resembling a lace pattern. A smaller triangular piece is plain, and had probably been one of the earrings; but its fellow (if such it ever had) has not been found.

Perhaps these articles point out the grave of some female of distinction; and the close resemblance of the jet ornaments now exhibited to those which were found in a barrow near Assynt, in Ross-shire, is very striking (see drawing of these ornaments, page 47), only that the spots of those, unlike the ones now shown, are said to have been studded with gold.¹

The hillock near Pitkenney, in which the coffin and ornaments were found, is quite natural, situated on the north-west side, and within the old boundary of Montreathmont Muir. In 1826, when a new road was being made betwixt Brechin and Dundee, nearly twenty urns and other traces of ancient sepulture were found in the tract of the present turnpike, which is only about eighty yards to the west of the knoll in which these ornaments were discovered. Very few of these last-named remains were in coffins; they were from fourteen to eighteen inches below the surface, and all were found within a range of from eighteen to twenty yards.

The lands of Pitkenney were at one time a portion of the old royal hunting forest of Montreathmont, throughout the whole of which traces of ancient sepulture are often found; but the name of Pitkenney itself, so far as known, is comparatively modern, and not met with until the seventeenth century.

The church of Aberlemno, in which parish the lands of Pitkenney are situated, is little more than a mile north-west of the spot where the remains were found; and in no district with which I am acquainted has there been found a greater number of stone coffins and other traces of ancient burials than in this parish. There, also, are the well-known sculptured stone monuments. But whether these traces could have had any connection with the battle which is said to have been fought at Aberlemno in A. D. 697, in which "fell Conquar MacEcha MacMaldwin, and Aod, the tall king of Daleraid,"² it is now impossible to say.

¹ Archæol. Scotica, vol. iii. pl. v. pp. 49-50. 1824.

² Johnstone's Extracts from the Annals of Ulster, p. 59. Copenhagen 1786. 4to.