

II.

ON CELTIC SEPULCHRAL REMAINS AT TOSSON, NEAR ROTHBURY, NORTHUMBERLAND. BY GEORGE TATE, Esq., F.G.S.

Tosson is one mile westward of Rothbury, on the south bank of the Coquet, at a considerable elevation above the river. Northward of it Brough Hill rises to a greater height, with its summit encircled by a fortlet, enclosing about an acre of ground, and a little westward is the loftier hill of Simondside. Near to this place in 1858 an ancient sepulchre was discovered, which contained skeletons, an iron weapon, ornaments, and urns; and as no account has hitherto been given of skeletons or of iron weapons found in Celtic cists in Northumberland, a description of these remains may be worth recording, as tending to throw a little light on the condition of the early inhabitants of Northumberland.

Fortlets, tumuli, and remains of houses are found in the uncultivated parts of the county, so grouped as to show their relation to each other. Clusters of circular foundations appear on the slopes of the hills and in

the upland valleys; the most remarkable of these is on "Greaves Esh" at the base of Greenshaw Hill, near Linhope Burn, where the groups of circular houses are surrounded and defended by stone walls and rampiers. The sepulchre of the tribe was not far distant from the village, usually on high ground; and, in a strong position on some neighbouring hill was the circular fortlet of stone walls, or of rampiers made of earth and stone, to which the people might flee for refuge when attacked by a hostile tribe or foreign foe.

This arrangement is seen in the Cheviot range at Yeavinger. Groups of circular foundations—the ancient Celtic village—remain in the high and sheltered valley between Yeavinger Bell and White Law; at a little distance westward, on a high exposed "breezy hill," is Tom Tallon's Cairn, probably the tomb of a chieftain, and around it are many low tumuli; Yeavinger Bell overlooks the whole, and is a truncated cone, having a large and tolerably level area on the summit, surrounded by a broad wall of stone, now broken down, and within this large enclosure is a smaller fortlet. Fanciful notions have been entertained respecting Yeavinger Bell, and some still imagine it was a Druidical temple. One enthusiastic antiquarian even recognised the sacrificial stone, scorched and roasted by the fire which consumed the victim of Druidical superstition. But these fancies are destitute of foundation and exceedingly improbable; for the tops of other hills in the neighbourhood possess similar structures, and might therefore claim the distinction of temples; but we cannot reasonably suppose that such temples would in one district be numerous and near to each other. The summit of Yeavinger served a humbler purpose; unfitted, from its elevation and exposure, for a permanent residence, it was well adapted for temporary occupation, as a place of refuge, by the tribe whose houses were in valleys beneath, as the position was strong and easily defended, and because there was a considerable space for the pasturage of flocks.

Similar would be the arrangement at Tosson; cultivation has obliterated the sites of the houses in the valley, but the sepulchres and fortlet have remained to the present time to give us information of the past; and it may be noticed that, on the opposite bank of the Coquet, are other fortlets and barrows, and near to them is Cartington Cave, on which were inscribed concentric circles, similar to those on the rocks at

Routin Linn and Old Bewick in Northumberland,¹ and at High Auchinlary in Kirkcudbrightshire.²

The tumulus above the Tosson sepulchre was low, for it had been repeatedly ploughed over; but the gravel and soil being deep, the graves were not exposed by cultivation. There is, however, a limestone quarry near the tumulus, and the excavation having been made through it, four cists, near to each other, were discovered placed upon the surface of the limestone, each formed of rough slabs set on edge and covered with another larger slab. Two of them were $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and the others little more than 2 feet long; two lay from north to south, the others from north-east to south-west. An urn and a skeleton were in each cist. The bodies lay on their sides, with the legs doubled up, and the head was placed towards the slope of the hill in a southward direction.

Two of the urns were placed on a flat stone with their mouths downwards, the others were standing on their base; one of them is said to have contained about half a pint of dust. All were of the jar shape commonly obtained from Celtic sepulchres. They were made of coarse clay, and had a red surface with a black interior. I consider they had been burnt in the fire. Indeed, I doubt whether any even of the coarser kinds of Celtic pottery had been merely baked in the sun. I have seen most of the urns obtained in Northumberland, and all appear to me to bear indications of the action of fire. One of the Tosson urns has been preserved nearly entire, and is $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches high and 3 inches in diameter at the base; it is completely covered with incised chevron ornaments. A larger and coarser urn was broken; it was 8 inches in height, the under portion was plain, the upper was rudely scored with rows of zigzag lines.

Three ornaments, made of cannel coal, were taken out of one of the larger cists. They resemble large buttons, being circular, and 2 inches in diameter; the upper surface is slightly convex, but the under is flat, with two perforations near the centre, forming an internal passage, by means of which the ornament could be attached to the dress as a button or fibula. One of them still retained a bright jet-like polish. Similar ornaments have been found in Lanarkshire and Wiltshire, and this wide

¹ Johnston's Eastern Borders, plate viii.; and Tate in Trans. of Berwickshire Club, vol. iii., p. 129.

² Stuart's Sculptured Stones of Scotland, plate cxxiii., fig. 1.

distribution shows the near affinity of the tribes which at an early period peopled Britain. Cannel coal, or bituminous shale, appears to have been their fashionable material for ornaments, probably because it could be readily obtained and easily cut and polished. A necklace formed of this substance was found several years ago in a cist at Humbleton, near Wooler, hung around the neck of a female skeleton; it consisted of perforated oblong pieces strung together, and in the middle was a larger bead, studded over with gold points arranged in zigzag lines. The button-like ornament at Tosson very probably belonged to a female.

A portion of the horn of *Cervus elephas* was in one of the larger cists, and in another was a small bronze buckle, which has since been lost.

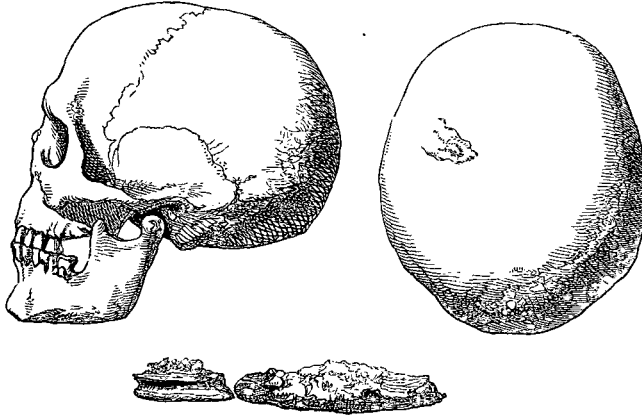


Fig. 2.

Fig. 1.

Fig. 3.

The greatest object of interest—an iron weapon—was discovered in one of the largest cists. It is a javelin head, broken into two parts, but the portions nearly unite. The blade was 4 inches long, and the tubular portion, which admitted the wooden pole, is 2 inches long. The wood still remains in the tube, though in a decayed state, and the iron is very much oxidised. A sketch of it is given in figure 1. This is one-fourth the size, and shows the simple spear-like shape of the weapon.

When the sepulchre was first opened the skeletons were entire; since then most of them have been destroyed. Part of the lower jaw of a

young person, probably a female, is preserved; it is narrow, and the teeth are sound and not worn.

One skull fortunately has escaped destruction, and of this I give a more minute description (figs. 2 and 3). It is nearly perfect, and in good condition, but the animal matter is gone, and the bone, when touched, adheres to the tongue. Most of the sutures are ossified, evidencing that the person was at least in the prime of life, if not in advanced age. On that part where the two parietal bones join the occipital bone, there is a marked depression, which is natural but unusual. There is another deep depression, which, however, is not natural, but might have been produced by a heavy blow on the right parietal bone. The occipital region containing the cerebellum is largely developed, and the anterior region is well formed. The distinguishing character of the skull is, however, its short and broad form, being indeed a good example of Dr Daniel Wilson's Brachycephalic type.

The teeth are free from decay; indeed all the teeth found in this sepulchre are in a nearly perfect state, but the teeth in this skull are remarkably flat in the crowns; the incisor and canine, as well as the molar teeth, possess this character.

The following are the measurements of the skull in inches and twelfths:—

Longest diameter from the root of the nose to the protuberance just above the occipital spine,	} 7.1
Transverse diameter from one meatus externus to the other,	} 5.
Greatest circumference from the root of the nose to the protuberance above the occipital spine,	} 21.
From the occipital spine over the head to the root of the nose,	} 12.6
From the meatus externus over the head to the other meatus externus,	} 13.6
Parietal diameter,	6.1
Frontal diameter,	5.1
Vertical diameter,	5.5
Intermastoid arch,	15.6
Intermastoid arch from upper root of zygomatic process,	5.
Intermastoid line,	4.

The annexed woodcuts (p. 61), figure 2 of the profile, and figure 3 of the upper part of this skull, have been carefully copied from photographs, and fig. 1 (the iron spear) is drawn to the same scale as the cranium.

The remains described I refer to the Celts inhabiting the Borders a little prior to the Roman invasion. The urns differ in no respect from the earliest specimens of British fictile art; they are made of the same kind of coarse clay, and scored with the same style of ornament. But the shape of the well-developed cranium, and the presence of an iron weapon, show that the period was not so remote as that, when the feeble primeval people had boat-shaped skulls and used weapons made of stone. Some progress had been made in civilisation. Land had been brought into cultivation, for the flattened and worn teeth evidence that hard vegetable food was to a considerable extent used. Accordingly, we find on the hill sides of Northumberland, in the neighbourhood of fortlets and Celtic villages, long irregular horizontal furrows, which are not referable to recent times, but seem to be the marks of ancient cultivation during the later part of the Celtic period. Though the use of iron indicates a considerable advance in metallurgic art, yet that art must have been practised in Britain before the Roman invasion; for Cæsar says that the Britains used pieces of iron for money, and it is reasonable to infer that this metal would also be applied to the manufacture of weapons and the construction of war chariots. True, it is seldom found in cists; but the iron weapon would be too valuable to be often laid by the side of even a warrior chieftain, and, when so deposited, its liability to oxidation, especially in moist situations, would cause it to decay. The Tossin cists were placed on dry jointed limestone, and hence the preservation of the weapon.

The Celts, therefore, who lived in the vale of the Coquet when the great Cæsar invaded the island, were far in advance of the earlier Briton, who waged war with stone weapons and followed the wild animals for food with flint-tipped arrows; they cultivated lands, adorned their persons with cannel coal, fibulæ, and bronze buckles, and when fighting threw the iron-headed javelin.

Some conversation occurred regarding the reference by Venerable Bede to Yeavinger as the "villa regia" of the Northumbrian king, when

Paulinus baptised great numbers of his subjects in the adjoining stream; and Mr Stuart exhibited a plan of the remains of the Celtic village near Linhope, and drawings of concentric circles on the rocks at the Routin Linn and at Old Bewick.