

I.

NOTICE OF STONE-CISTS DISCOVERED NEAR THE "CATSTANE,"
KIRKLISTON. BY ROBERT HUTCHISON OF CARLOWRIE, Esq., F.S.A.
SCOT. (WITH DIAGRAM)

The historical interest attaching to the "Catstane," since the attention of antiquaries has been more particularly directed to its probable origin, by the publication, a few years ago,¹ of Professor Simpson's elaborate paper on the subject, induced me, on 6th April 1864, to reconnoitre the field in which that venerable monolith stands, with the view of finding, if possible, some remains of the large tumulus which is reported to have formerly stood about sixty yards to the west of the "Catstane," and is said to have been opened in 1824, and found to contain several complete skeletons; but "nearly all traces of which," according to Professor Daniel Wilson, in his *Prehistoric Annals*,² "have now disappeared."

Having carefully examined the place indicated, and dug over a considerable area around the supposed site, without success, I was induced to try a little to the eastward of the "Catstane," partly from the position of the inscription upon the stone (which faces the east), and partly also from the appearance of the ground, which at that point, a few yards distant from the "Catstane," assumes the form of a slope or knoll, the "lie" of the ground being to the south and east, and the stone itself having been apparently placed at the north-west corner of this tumulus.

The soil throughout this knowe is different from that of the rest of the field, having evidently been "travelled" or "forced," and the mound raised in this manner upon the original ground-level. The earth is friable, dry, and sandy, and free from stones, while the soil of the rest of the field is of a tilly clayey nature, and is studded in some places, about a foot under the surface, with the common clay boulders, or land-stones which abound in the district.

Although unsuccessful in finding any trace of the tumulus mentioned to the west of the "Catstane," I was fortunate in finding what I shall now describe, seeing its existence has hitherto been unknown.

¹ *Vide* Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, vol. iv. p. 119.

² *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, p. 96.

We had hardly dug down into this knowe more than a foot, at a point about twenty yards from the "Catstane," when we came upon a large flat stone, which, on being struck, sounded hollow. Clearing away the loose earth, we found the cist marked in the diagram, third from the top of line D.

The cists on either side of this one were next discovered, and then the others in the same row, which terminated at the foot of the knowe with the small grave marked S in the diagram. This row contains thirteen cists.

The coffins in this, and in all the other eight rows, lay in regular order, side by side, with about a foot of space between each, and all faced due east. This point was carefully tested by the compass, and in no instance, except in that of cist marked T in line B, did this position vary, and I am inclined to believe from the displacement of some of the slabs forming this grave, that the difference in its position is the result of subsequent accidental interference, and has probably been caused by agricultural operations of a later date. Indeed, seeing that the average depth of all the cists from the surface of the ground is only about fifteen inches, it is rather singular that they should have so long escaped not only discovery, but also absolute destruction. In many places the marks of the plough-irons, grazing along the surface of the cist-covers, were quite visible; and this is, I think, an important point, tending to prove that the interments were all made at one time; for although the exact regularity of the cists, and the respective rows in relation to each other, seem to me of itself almost a sufficient proof that they were all placed there at one time, this supposition is strengthened, when we find the slabs forming the covers so level, and equally laid, and so firmly placed together, as to present a compact pavement-like surface, which could only be formed by their having been laid simultaneously *in situ*, and then regularly and carefully earthed over, and covered up.

The number of cists found was fifty-one; and I believe we discovered all the graves which ever existed to the east and south of the "Catstane;" and although a careful search was made to the westward and all around, no traces whatever of any other interments or mounds were found.

The coffins are all of the usual "long-cist" character, composed chiefly of rude, irregular, unhewn slabs of yellowish freestone, which varied in thickness from about one and a-half to three inches, each piece of stone being about two feet to three feet, and in a few instances four feet in length, and about eighteen inches broad. It was observed that thirteen of the graves were composed entirely of a black shaley stone, in pieces of similar dimensions to the freestone slabs. These were invariably the smallest cists found, and in no case was any coffin found composed partly of freestone and partly of black shale.

Those of black shale are marked on the diagram P.

I specially mention this fact, because it seems to me that the employment of a different kind of stone material in the construction of the smaller cists, tends to indicate that these coffins contained the bodies of a people, or race, distinct from those interred in the large cists of freestone. This conclusion is greatly strengthened by the result of the ethnological examination of portions of the crania which were taken from some of the graves. Portions of four of the skulls have been put together and patched up by my friend Mr Turner, and are now on the table; and his report upon them will be afterwards read to this meeting.

Careful measurements were made of all the cists, and a table showing these is appended to this paper. The smallest grave measured in length only 2 feet 4 inches, while the longest was 6 feet 9 inches. Three cists measured 6 feet 9 inches.

The average length of the black shale graves is 5 feet $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches; while the average length of those composed of freestone slabs is 6 feet $1\frac{5}{8}$ inches; and it may be worthy of notice that while the difference in length of many of the cists is considerable, the variations in their breadth are immaterial. This probably shows that they all contained the bodies of adults; indeed this is pretty certain, because the crowns of the teeth found in some of the shorter black shale graves were as much worn on the edges as those found in the longest freestone cist.

All the coffins seem to have been built after the same fashion; but one of them calls for special notice, as different in its construction from that of the others. The cist referred to is the small one marked S at the south end of row D. It measures only two feet 4 inches in

length, 12 inches in breadth, and 20 inches in depth, being thus considerably deeper and shorter than any of the rest. Instead of being composed of slabs of thin stone or shale, it was regularly *built* of ordinary shaped stones, which bore no appearance of having been artificially fashioned or hewn, but seemed rather to be the common land or boulder stones, and were similar to those employed in packing round the slabs of the other cists as supports or partition walls. There was no stone bottom to this grave, and no trace of bones was found in it; but upon the natural level of the soil inside, which was here of a gritty nature, we observed the blackened charred appearance of what seemed to have been a fire. I confess I am unable to offer any conjecture as to this curious little grave, unless, perhaps, it may have been a cremation interment; yet why one solitary instance of the kind should occur amongst so many interments of a different description, is singular enough; especially as we know that a small grave has repeatedly been found in other barrows, similarly situated at the extreme south end of a row. For example, a small cist exactly the same in build, dimensions, and position in relation to the others, was found last year at Burnhouse (which is about six miles west from the "Catstane"), in conjunction with other six long cists which were found in a field, where like discoveries have from time to time been made.

In both cases the small cist is placed a little apart from the general line of graves, being about 4 feet from the nearest cist. These had no covers.

In noticing the difference in the construction of this small grave, it should be stated that when the "Catstane" was dug under by Professor Simpson and myself in 1861, we found it stood over what was distinctly the side walls of a built grave identical in masonry and material with this small cist; and this is worthy of note, as it connects the "Catstane" itself with this small cist, and, consequently, although indirectly, with all the other intervening graves.

The mode of sepulture generally employed at this barrow appears to have been somewhat in this manner. Large slabs having been placed upon the natural surface of the ground, without any excavation, the corpse was stretched upon these; the side and end slabs were then placed on edge, forming the walls round the body, and these were then supported by boulder-stones and earth thrown round them; the covers were

then carefully laid in their position, and the earth heaped over the whole, and piled up till the mound or tumulus was thus raised. Monoliths were probably set to mark the site and the boundary of the place of interment.

In opening the cists nothing was found but fragments of human bones, very much decayed, and which broke and crumbled away at the slightest touch. The sand had silted into the interior of the graves, and completely filled the interstices between the joints of the stones. The lower part of each cist contained the usual fatty clay of a black colour, in which were abundant traces of bones. The corpses had been laid at full length, and in all cases faced the east, and in most instances the arms were extended by the sides; although, in a few cists of freestone, the hands appeared to have been crossed over upon the thighs, a position which could not be found in any of the cists of black shale, in which the arm-bones were invariably found stretched down the sides.

My attention was particularly called to this circumstance as I minutely examined each cist for the bones of the hands, wrists, and arms, in search of armlets, rings, or other ornaments.

Although careful search was made, no urn, trinket, or weapon of any description was found in or around any of the cists; nor did they present the slightest appearance of having ever been previously disturbed.

There were no artificial incisions or markings of any sort upon any of the covers; the only unusual object found was the white lump of hard mountain limestone now produced, which was found close to the small grave S., and which, from its hardness as well as its shape—being naturally flatter and more pointed at one end than the other—may not improbably have been used as a rude hammer in fashioning the slabs and lids of the cists. This is a stone quite unknown in the district; and the stones composing the cists themselves must have been brought from a considerable distance. A freestone, of similar nature to that employed, abounds along the coast at Queensferry, three miles distant; and the black shale was probably found in a quarry which crops out on the bank of the Almond, in the Craigiehall grounds, about a mile and a half distant from the "Catstane," and to which spot, at the present day, during harvest time, reapers resort for pieces of this black shale to be used as whetstones for their sickles.

At the north-eastern corner of the burial-ground, and at a distance of about twenty yards from the nearest cist, at the spot marked K on the diagram, about two feet under the surface, and upon the natural soil, traces of a large fire were found, and close adjoining it we discovered several bones. These were evidently not human remains, as that now produced will show, which was probably the one in best preservation for removal.

Lhwyd, the distinguished and accurate Welsh archæologist, writing, in 1699, in reference to the "Catstane," supposed it to be the tomb of some Pictish king, and describes it as "an area of about 7 yards diameter, raised a little above the rest of the ground, and encompassed with large stones; all which stones are laid lengthwise, excepting one larger than ordinary, which is pitched on end, and contains this inscription, in the barbarous characters of the fourth and fifth centuries:—'In oc tumulo jacet Vetta F. Victi.'" Four of these large encircling stones he refers to we found lying close together, about three feet under the surface, at the north end of the rows of graves, as shown in the diagram; and, from their position, they appear to have been thrown from their original situation into a deep hole dug for their reception, to be out of the farmer's way in conducting field operations. They are similar to the "Catstane" itself, but smaller, being rough, undressed masses of secondary greenstone trap, varying in size from 5 feet to 6 feet long, and from 2 feet to 3½ feet broad, and from about 18 inches to 2 feet 4 inches thick. Although carefully washed and examined on every side, none of them bore any trace of an inscription, or showed any artificial dressing or tool-markings whatever.

The only other noticeable feature in this spot of primitive sepulture was the fragmentary portion of an encircling rude wall, which we found extending along the north side, and which had probably originally enclosed the area of the graveyard. The height of the most entire part found was about 18 inches to 2 feet; and more fragmentary portions were observed extending along the north-east end of the cists; and beyond this line no cists were discovered.

There was no artificial dressing upon the stones, which seemed to be common land-stones; and the dyke had been built of these alone, without any cement or lime.

The question now occurs, Who were the occupants of this primitive place of burial, or to what era in the early annals of the district do they belong?

In the absence of any relic, weapon, or other collateral proofs to guide us in endeavouring to arrive at a satisfactory answer to this difficult and perplexing inquiry, the first circumstance connected with the cists that requires notice is their position, which, as we stated, is due east and west. We found that in every instance the body had been laid to face the east; and to many this may appear sufficient proof of Christian burial, and a not very ancient date might accordingly be assigned to the cists.

I do not think, however, that the mere direction of either the body or the cist is at all conclusive proof of either Pagan or Christian interment. No doubt it is possible, and, indeed, instances do occur to show that in early times regard was paid to the direction in which the body was disposed in burial; but I do not think we would in the present instance be justified in asserting, without better evidence, that the occupants of the "Catstane" cists, were Christian. Other considerations than those of religious rites and superstitions might lead to the disposition of the cists east and west. Convenience might have had something to do with it, or the first interment may have, by chance, been laid in that direction, and others would follow, and the regularly methodic arrangement of the cists which we found to exist may have led to all lying in one direction; and the desire to lay their dead in the small rising *dry* ground in an otherwise damp, wide, reedy plain, may have also led to a carefully methodic arrangement of the graves for their better preservation. It must also be borne in mind that the near proximity of the river Almond to the graveyard—being hardly a hundred yards distant—and the frequent flooding to which this and the adjacent fields were continually exposed, naturally led to the bodies being buried on the *dry* side of this little knove, protected from the river's incursions; and had they been laid in any other direction than east and west, they would have presented a much more destructible front to the inroads of the river.

Another element for consideration in attempting to arrive at the probable date of these interments, is the fact that they are found in a district the possession of which was fiercely contested for centuries by the

Romans against the various aboriginal tribe, assisted by the Saxons and the Danes.

The frequency also with which stone cists, much akin in construction to those now under notice, have been found, both in groups and in solitary instances, in the neighbourhood of the "Catstane," and scattered over a wide extent of the surrounding country, points to the existence, at a very remote period, of a densely-populated province immediately to the south of the Wall of Antoninus.

These scattered cists, in so far as I have seen them, present analogous, but not identical, features to those found around the "Catstane." In all other cases—for example, as at Cramond, Craigiehill, Carlowrie, Dalmeny, Hanley, Gogar, Ingliston, Eastfield, Lochend, Newliston, Newbridge, Cliftonhall, Calder, Burnhouse, and Broadlaw—the *materials* of their construction appear the same; but in no other instance that I have been able to find out have so many cists been found together—most of the barrows consisting merely of a few graves, which were hardly so methodically arranged, although somewhat similar to those under notice. Occasionally a solitary cist has been found, as at Craigiehill, Dalmeny, and Carlowrie, and in none of these cases does regard seem to have been paid to the east and west direction of what otherwise seem identical cists; for in them the bodies had been laid north and south.

Lately a similar freestone slab cist was found at Standing Stone, near Dalmeny, during the progress of the branch line of railway to Queensferry, which lay north-east and south-west. A similar but *short* cist was found by myself at Carlowrie, a few years ago, which lay north and south in a position within half a mile of the "Catstane;" and the thirteen found several years ago on the banks of the Almond, opposite the field in which the "Catstane" stands, lay facing south-west. These were also *short* cists, and I am inclined to think they belonged to a still earlier date than those we are now considering, and were probably the graves of the aborigines of the district, because twenty-seven precisely similar cists were found when cutting away a "brae" from the old Roman road which originally led close past the "Catstane," and on removing the causeway-like metal with which this road is formed, to cut the "brae" away, the cists referred to were found underneath, and were broken up for road metal. This circumstance I have learnt from an old man who still

works as surfaceman upon the parish road, and who assisted at the straightening and levelling the road at the time. The spot where these twenty-seven pre-Roman cists was found is within 300 yards of the "Catstane," and farther to the south; and I lately had the curiosity to dig at the spot indicated, when I found the remains of two rude short cists of the same freestone material, and otherwise similar (excepting in length) to the "Catstane" graves.

The change to a more regular and systematic mode of burying the dead might result from an improvement in the social condition of the inhabitants, caused either by the introduction of a new tribe of allies, or by the forcible intrusion of some foreign race, whose manners and customs may have displaced the older, ruder, and more irregular customs of the land.

If, then, the systematic disposition of the body and the encircling cist in one direction in burial, and the much larger number of interments in one place, as found at the "Catstane," be indicative of a progressive advance, or change, or introduction of other races amongst the primitive inhabitants of the country, and taking into account the employment of the two distinct materials for cists as well as the two types of crania found in these cists, may this not be the resting-place of the VECTURIONES?—a mixed race—of whose existence, about A.D. 364, in this country, we have the contemporary historical testimony of Ammianus Marcellinus,¹ who describes them as "that Saxon host, leagued with the other Scottish tribes, the Picts, Scots, and Attacots in fighting against the Romans;" and again, in A.D. 368, as "Picts divided into the Dicalledonæ and Vecturiones," and who probably derived their name from their leader VETTA the son of VICTI, of the royal house of Woden, whose rude but lasting memorial throughout so many centuries has been, and is, the "CATSTANE."

¹ Ammiani Marcellini Historiarum, lib. xxviii. c. 1.

| †† | * | C | †† | D | E | ** | ††† |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|-------|-----|
| A | B | 4 | 12 | SA | 25 | F | G |
| 1 | 2 | 5 | 18 | | 26 | 33 | H |
| P | 3 | 6 | 14 | P | 27 | SB 34 | 41 |
| | 3 | 7 | 15 | | 28 | SC 35 | 42 |
| | T | 8 | 16 | | 29 | 36 | 43 |
| | | 9 | 17 | | 30 | 37 | 44 |
| | | 10 | 18 | P | 31 | 38 | 45 |
| | | 11 | 19 | | 32 | 39 | 46 |
| | | | 20 | P | 40 | 40 | 47 |
| | | | 21 | | | | |
| | | | 22 | | | | |
| | | | 23 | | | | |
| | | | 24 | S | | | |

STONE CISTS DISCOVERED NEAR THE "CATSTANE," KIRKLISTON.

Note.—The cists are indicated by — lines, and are arranged in the order in which they were found. A table of their measurements is given on the next page. Portions of skulls were found and removed from graves Nos. 12, 34, 35, and 49, and are reported upon by Mr Turner in the following Appendix to this paper.

* Catstane.

†† Low walls.

*** Four large stones.

††† Traces of a large fire.

Inside Measurements of Freestone Cists.

| No. | Length. | Breadth. | Depth. | No. | Length. | Breadth. | Depth. |
|---------|---------|----------|--------|--|---------|----------|--------|
| 2, . . | 6 ft. 3 | × 24 | × 15 | 33, . . | 6 ft. 6 | × 24 | × 15 |
| 3, . . | 6 " | 7 | " " | 34, . . | 6 " | 9 | " " |
| 4, . . | 5 " | 10 | " " | 35, . . | 5 " | 11 | " " |
| 5, . . | 5 " | 9 | " " | 36, . . | 6 " | 3 | " " |
| 8, . . | 6 " | 1 | " " | 38, . . | 5 " | 10 | " " |
| 9, . . | 5 " | 9 | " " | 39, . . | 6 " | 5 | " " |
| 10, . . | 6 " | 7 | " " | 41, . . | 6 " | 9 | " " |
| 11, . . | 5 " | 10 | " " | 42, . . | 6 " | 0 | " " |
| 12, . . | 6 " | 3 | " " | 43, . . | 5 " | 9 | " " |
| 13, . . | 6 " | 5 | " " | 44, . . | 6 " | 0 | " " |
| 15, . . | 5 " | 8 | " " | 45, . . | 6 " | 7 | " " |
| 16, . . | 6 " | 1 | " " | 46, . . | 5 " | 11 | " " |
| 17, . . | 5 " | 11 | " " | 47, . . | 6 " | 5 | " " |
| 19, . . | 5 " | 8 | " " | 48, . . | 6 " | 2 | " " |
| 20, . . | 5 " | 9 | " " | 50, . . | 5 " | 11 | " " |
| 22, . . | 5 " | 8 | " " | 51, . . | 6 " | 5 | " " |
| 25, . . | 6 " | 2 | " " | Average length, 6 ft. $1\frac{1}{2}$ each. | | | |
| 27, . . | 5 " | 9 | " " | Small Built Grave. | | | |
| 28, . . | 5 " | 10 | " " | 24, . . | 2 ft. 4 | × 12 | × 24 |
| 29, . . | 6 " | 0 | " " | | | | |

Inside Measurements of Black Shale Cists.

| No. | Length. | Breadth. | Depth. | No. | Length. | Breadth. | Depth. |
|---------|---------|----------|--------|--|---------|----------|--------|
| 1, . . | 5 ft. 6 | × 22 | × 15 | 30, . . | 5 ft. 6 | × 22 | × 15 |
| 6, . . | 5 " | 2 | " " | 31, . . | 5 " | 7 | " " |
| 7, . . | 5 " | 6 | " " | 32, . . | 5 " | 9 | " " |
| 14, . . | 4 " | 9 | " " | 37, . . | 5 " | 2 | " " |
| 18, . . | 4 " | 8 | " " | 40, . . | 5 " | 9 | " " |
| 21, . . | 4 " | 10 | " " | 49, . . | 5 " | 6 | " " |
| 23, . . | 5 " | 6 | " " | Average length, 5 ft. $4\frac{2}{7}$ each. | | | |
| 26, . . | 5 " | 8 | " " | | | | |