

II.

NOTICE OF SOME HUMAN AND OTHER REMAINS RECENTLY FOUND AT KELSO. By WILLIAM TURNER, M.B., F.R.S.E.

In the month of May 1864, whilst workmen were engaged in constructing a new system of sewerage in the town of Kelso, various relics of former inhabitants were met with, some account of which may perhaps interest the members of the Society of Antiquaries, and at the same time serve as a contribution to local history. Although not myself a witness of the excavations when in progress, yet having visited the locality shortly afterwards, I have been enabled, through information

received from various gentlemen resident in the town, amongst whom I may more especially mention Mr Andrew Robertson and Mr Clazy, to collect some of the most important facts connected with the objects discovered.

Locality.—Between the iron railing, now enclosing the east end of the ruins of Kelso Abbey, and the Grammar School, is an open space, leading eastward from which is a short narrow passage, called Butts Lane, which is separated from the burial-ground now in use on one side by a high wall. At its eastern end Butts Lane opens into a wide space named the Knowes, the eastern boundary of which is formed by the gas-works.

Objects found.—Through these different localities, drains of considerable depth were cut. At the south end of one drain, which ran across the Knowes from north to south, a short cist was exposed, $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet from the present surface of the ground. It was about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet square; and its roof, floor, ends, and sides were each formed of a single slab of freestone, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. The slabs were simply laid in contact with each other, and, from the absence of cement, earth had worked its way into the cist, and filled it. No bones of any kind were found in the cist; but, on removing the earth, a baked clay urn was met with, which unfortunately broke into fragments on being handled. These fragments came into the possession of Mr John Henderson, who has attempted a restoration of the urn, and has incorporated the pieces in his reconstruction. So far as can now be judged, the urn probably corresponded somewhat in size and form to the largest of the urns from Lesmurdie, now in the Society's Museum. The ornamentation is, however, very simple, and consists merely of horizontal grooves, arranged in groups of two or three, with short vertical grooves, situated intermediate to the group of horizontal ones. The urn will, I believe, be placed in the Kelso Museum. From the form of the cist, and the occurrence of an urn in it, this grave evidently belongs to an early period of Scottish history.

Another drain traversed the Knowes from east to west, and was prolonged in the same direction along Butts Lane. Whilst excavating for it in both these localities, several cists were exposed, which differed in their characters from the short cist just described. They were situated about 6 feet from the present surface of the ground, were 5 feet and

upwards in length, and were placed east and west. They were formed of freestone slabs, and in many cases so filled with earth that the bones contained in them were not recoverable. The mode of construction of two of these long cists was particularly noted by Mr Robertson. They were both built of loose slabs of freestone. Each possessed a head-piece at the western end, then widened out abruptly at the shoulders, and tapered somewhat towards the feet. These cists lay parallel, and were not more than a yard apart. The one situated more to the southward had the place for the head built of stones laid on their sides, whilst the northmost one was constructed of slabs placed on their edges. The latter possessed the following dimensions:—6 feet 4 inches long, 18 inches wide at the shoulders, and 12 inches deep. It contained a skeleton in the fully extended position, the head of which was at the western end of the cist. Wrapped around the skeleton was a large mortcloth, formed of a coarsely woven material, parts of which, still in an excellent state of preservation, showed very clearly the texture of the fabric. None of the bones contained in this cist were preserved. The covering slabs on the southernmost cist were not in such close apposition as on the one just described, so that the earth had entered it, and partially covered and displaced the bones. The skull, evidently that of an old person, differing in no essential features from modern Scottish crania, has been preserved. No trace of a mortcloth was found in this cist.

In addition to the human and other remains just described, a large number of loose human bones was met with, both in Butts Lane and in the excavations made across the open space between the Abbey railing and the Grammar School, unenclosed in cists or coffins. These occurred in such numbers in some places as to give the impression that no systematic burial had been performed, but that a trench had been dug, and the bodies thrown indiscriminately into it.

About three feet to the southward of the cist which contained the skeleton invested by the mortcloth, a number of coins was found lying loose in the earth. Those which I had an opportunity of examining were testoons or shillings, belonging to the debased coinage of the reign of King Edward VI. On the one side is a profile of the king, surrounded by EDWARD VI. D. G. AGL. FRA. Z: HIB. REX. Y. On the reverse, an oval shield, quartered with the arms of England, and surrounded by the motto

TIMOR DOMINI FONS VITE. MDXLIX. Y. In addition to the numerous specimens of this coin, Mr George Sim informs me, that in the course of the excavation a bodle of King Charles I. and a defaced bawbee were found, though in what locality, or in what depth from the surface, it is now impossible to say.

The circumstance of so many coins of the reign of Edward VI. being discovered, in such close proximity to the numerous loose bones met with in the neighbourhood of the Abbey, would seem to point to some relation as regards age between them. It is a well-known fact in Border history, that in the later years of the reign of King Henry VIII., and during the short reign of Edward VI., Kelso Abbey was the scene of many a fierce and bloody fight between the rival chieftains of the Scottish and English borders. These bones may perhaps be the relics of some of the combatants; and from the irregular manner in which they were arranged, and the absence of any remains of coffins around them, it would seem as if the bodies had been thrown into a trench, with none of the usual accompaniments of a formal burial.

The long stone coffins already described belong apparently to an earlier period; but it will be difficult to fix the time of their construction, for evidence is still wanting to establish with precision the dates when this mode of burial was first adopted, and when it terminated. From the form of the cists, however, more especially the existence of a distinct piece for the head, I am inclined to think that these coffins belong to the later rather than the earlier period of adoption of this form of interment; and it is probable that they must be ascribed to mediæval times. The existence of a woven fabric around the skeleton contained in one of these cists is a circumstance of some interest. Several examples of shrouds obtained from ancient tombs are already in the Society's Museum, as the knitted garment from a stone cist in Yorkshire, the leathern shroud from a stone coffin in Dunfermline Abbey, and portions of ecclesiastical raiment from the tombs of bishops in the Glasgow and Fortrose Cathedrals. But this specimen differs, both in its mode of construction and in the material of which it is composed, from any of those just alluded to. The fibre is evidently vegetable, and of considerable strength, but it is difficult to say from what plant it has been obtained. One might surmise that it is a coarse flax or hemp; but the characters by which

these forms of vegetable fibre differ from others of an allied nature are not sufficiently precise to enable one to pronounce with certainty as to its origin. In the process of constructing the garment, the fibre had at first been spun into a coarse thread, the thickness of whip-cord, which thread had been loosely woven by a simple interlacement of warp and weft, and the spaces between the crossing of the threads had then been partially filled up apparently by a felting process. The specimen now exhibited will be deposited in the Museum of the Antiquaries.

The relics of bygone times brought to light in the course of these excavations prove that the locality, which is still employed as a burial-ground by the present residents in the town of Kelso, had been devoted to the same purpose, not only by their mediæval forefathers, but by the rude inhabitants of the district in pre-historic times, and that, long before the stately pile of Kelso Abbey served as the last resting-place of monk and warrior, the ancient Caledonians had chosen as their place of sepulture one of the most beautiful sites on the banks of the silver Tweed.