

### III.

ACCOUNT OF THE DISCOVERY OF A CIRCULAR GROUP OF CINERARY  
URNS AND HUMAN BONES AT WESTWOOD, NEAR NEWPORT, ON  
THE TAY. BY ANDREW JERVISE, Esq., Cor. MEM. S.A. SCOT. Com-  
MUNICATED BY JOHN STUART, Esq., Sec. S.A. SCOT. (PLATE XXII.)

About the end of October last, while workmen were trenching the grounds at Westwood, near Newport, the property of Harry Walker, Esq., they came upon traces of an old burial place, in the line of the road or carriage drive to the house which is now being built. Fortunately (although not before some of the urns had been broken and their contents scattered), Mr Walker's attention was directed to "the find," when he ordered special care to be taken of anything that might subsequently turn up. He immediately communicated with his brother-in-law, Mr Neish of The Laws, upon the subject; and, being in the locality at the time, Mr Walker also kindly acquainted me of the circumstance.

Accompanied by Messrs Walker and Neish, and by Mr Berry of Tayfield, I visited the spot in the course of a few days; and as urn No. 4 (on the east side of the circle) had, by Mr Walker's considerate orders, been left in the ground in its original position, I proceeded to remove it, and had the gratification of taking it out entire. It measures 5 inches in height,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches across at the mouth, and 3 inches at the base. The mouth was placed upwards, and the urn was filled with clammy earth, mixed with small stones or gravel, bits of bones, and charcoal.

Unprotected by stones of any kind, the urn was set upon a hard bed of burnt ashes, from 2 to 3 inches in thickness, and was quite surrounded by the same sort of ashes. The ashes seemed to be composed of burnt twigs, straw, and other vegetable substances, among which were particles of ears of grain or barley, together with small bits of bones. These facts appear to strengthen the supposition that, after the ceremony of burning the bodies was over, and the placing of the bones in the urn or shrine, that the ashes had been carefully gathered and placed into the hole or grave below and around the urn which contained the more important parts of the frame.

I also took the small urn, No. 9<sup>3</sup> (which lay on the west side of the circle) out of the remains of a larger one (represented by the fragments No. 9<sup>1,2</sup>). Like the remains in which it was found, the small urn was in an inverted position; it was placed about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the mouth, near the middle of the large urn, and among mould profusely mixed with bits of bones. The small urn was quite filled, in fact firmly packed, with the bones (now exhibited separately), among which are bits of the cranium, as well as bits of some other of the principal bones of the human body. The singed and rough look of the surface of many of the bones possibly show that they were calcined; while the singularly white appearance of others is somewhat remarkable; and, in that particular, appear to resemble those that were found about the same time near Old Windsor, which are described as being "almost as white as ivory."<sup>1</sup>

Urn No. 9 was similarly embedded among burnt ashes as was No. 4, and the workmen state that the whole of those found, whether in a broken or in an entire state, were either protected in the same way, or masses of charcoal were found in their immediate vicinity.

On no previous occasion of investigating tumuli or ancient funeral deposits have I found charred ashes made so evidently to do the duty of protecting urns from the surrounding soil as here. Possibly the expedient had been resorted to in consequence of the want of stone slabs in the locality. Urn (8 upon the plan) was accidentally smashed to pieces: it appears to have been surrounded with charcoal, and contained a large quantity of bones.

<sup>1</sup> *The Times* of 23d Nov. 1865.

The small urn No. 2 (found within the fragments of a larger one, of which small bits were only recovered) was similarly perforated as No. 9<sup>3</sup>, with two holes upon one side, about an inch apart. It is made of a different kind of clay from its fellow, and is more handsome in shape. It too contained bones, and lay with the mouth uppermost. It was upon the north-east side of, and a little within the circle.

But possibly the most remarkable feature in the discovery was that of the urns numbered 6<sup>1</sup> and 6<sup>2</sup>, where the first ( $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches high) rested upon its base, and in it was placed the latter ( $6\frac{3}{4}$  inches high) in an inverted and reclining posture, as shown in Plate XXII. These were on the south-east side of the circle; and, so far as I could judge, contained portions of adult and infant bones, promiscuously mixed, along with a sprinkling of charcoal, clammy earth, and gravel. Some of these bones also bore the appearance of having been scorched by fire; and, if I am correct in supposing that the bones were those of an adult and child, it may not be unreasonable to conjecture that they were those of a parent—possibly of a mother—and infant.

It ought to be noticed that the style of the manufacture or make of these two urns is somewhat different, the lower one being rather thicker than the upper, while the upper one presents the additional peculiarity of having been coated with a greyish sort of size or similar substance. The ziz-zag ornament round the outer lip of the first appears to have been more carefully formed than that of the latter, which looks like so many unequal lines made by some sharp instrument while the clay was yet wet.

The plan (Plate XXII.), copied by me from a rough but correct measurement made by Mr Hunter, the inspector of works at Mr Walker's house, exhibits the interesting particular of the urns or interments having been disposed in pretty nearly a circle. The circle was 14 feet in diameter, and in the centre lay the fragment No. 1, surrounded by a mass of burnt ashes and charcoal. This appears to have been the largest of all the urns; and due south of it, also in an inverted position, and embedded in charred ashes, was the next largest, No. 7. It is pretty entire, about  $14\frac{1}{2}$  inches high,  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches across at the mouth, and  $3\frac{3}{4}$  inches at the base. The urns were found at different depths below the surface, varying from 8 to 20 inches; and neither the form nor the ornamentation of

any two of them are quite alike. As already mentioned, they were unprotected by stones; and no stone of any size—slab nor boulder—is to be found in the locality. With the exception of the urns Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 6', the others were placed in an inverted position, which shows that different modes of interment were adopted in one and the same circle, points that possibly indicate the deposits to have been made at various periods, if not by different classes of people. Neither urns nor charcoal were found on the north-west side of the circle, so it is just possible that no interment had been made there, tradition and record being alike silent as to the fact of any previous discovery in the same locality.

I am not aware that any parallel cases of the disposition of urns and bones in circles have been got in this country, if we except those sometimes found in connection with stone circles, and those at St Maden's Knowe, near Airlie.<sup>1</sup> In 1825 a somewhat similar distribution of urns was got at Deveril, in Dorsetshire, and these were protected by stones;<sup>2</sup> while the only instances of one urn being found within another, with which I am acquainted, are those of Deveril Street, and Whitechapel, in London. These latter, it would seem, bore unmistakable evidences of having been made and used by the Romans when in South Britain.<sup>3</sup> But although, according to some authorities, the Romans had camps in North Britain at no great distance from Newport,<sup>4</sup> neither the style of the urns there found, nor, so far as I know, the way in which they were placed in the ground, bore any affinity to kindred works of the Romans.

Like most discoveries of human remains in Scotland, that at Westwood was popularly associated with some supposed conflict or battle. It is much more probable, however, that these urns only indicate the burial-place of early owners or inhabitants of the district who had died peacefully in their own rude huts, and been interred by the hands of relatives

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings, vol. v. p. 356.

<sup>2</sup> Wright's "The Celt, the Roman, and the Saxon," p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Archæologia, vols. xxvi. p. 470; xxvii. pp. 403-412.

<sup>4</sup> Roy's *Military Antiq.*, p. 130; Chalmers' *Caledonia*, vol. i. pp. 110, 168-9; Sibbald's *History of Fife*, p. 68.

or friends in the singularly careful and systematic way which the discovery of the remains has brought to light.

It is probable, from the many natural advantages which the site affords, that the neighbourhood had been peopled at a very remote period, and by men well skilled in the useful arts. On the west, south, and east, lay vast tracks of hill, dale, and marsh, which doubtless had been well stocked with most of the animals of the chase then known to Scotland; while the Tay, not only favourable for the then essential purpose of fishing, also formed a short and easy means of communication between the inhabitants and the opposite shores of Perth and Angus.

Westwood lies on the south bank of the Tay, upon the lands of Seamills, or Seymills, which were anciently a portion of the estate and barony of Inverdovat. The site commands an interesting and extensive view of the counties of Perth and Forfar, with the populous town of Dundee. The ground slopes rather rapidly towards the south and east, where it is bounded by a burn, which runs through a pretty dell. Mr Berry of Tayfield (the modern name of the lands of Seamills), says that about 1855, while workmen were holing trees near Westwood, they came upon a sarcophagus or stone coffin, composed of rude undressed flags of whinstone; it contained bones, but no urn. It also appears that some twenty years prior to that date, when Mr Berry's father was bringing a piece of ground into cultivation, which occupies the heights south of the farm steading of Northfield (about a mile east of Westwood), traces of a *circular* work were found, called a "Roman camp" (?): As such it is set down upon the Ordnance Survey map. This work was composed of earth, with a cairn of stones in the centre, in the middle of which a stone coffin was got containing a great quantity of bones. The coffin was of a large size, made of roughly polished yellow sandstone.<sup>1</sup> One of the slabs, which stands near Tayfield House, is about 6 feet long, 4 feet broad, and 6 inches thick. Possibly this is the heap or cairn of stones mentioned in a charter, dated about 1260, by which Richard of Lascels grants three acres from his lands of Frereton to the canons of St Andrews: "et congeriei lapidum juxta viam de Inuerdoueth versus Sanctam

<sup>1</sup> From Notes by John Berry, Esq. of Tayfield, to H. Walker, Esq.

Andream ex tercia."<sup>1</sup> The locality of the so-called "Roman camp" rather favours this supposition.

These lands are situated in the parish of Forgan, anciently called Adnauctan and Nechtan.<sup>2</sup> There also appears to have been a chapel at "Seymills," dedicated to St Thomas;<sup>3</sup> but, although mentioned so late as 1690, the site of it is now unknown. The mother church of Athnathan, or Forgrund, with its chapel, were given to the canons of St Andrews by Patrick of Hay and Marjory of Lascelts—gifts which the said Marjory confirmed by charter, dated at St Andrews, in October 1266.<sup>4</sup>

The Lascelts, or Lessels, are the first recorded proprietors of Inverdovat, or Seamills, and the lands continued to be held, in part at least, by persons bearing the same surname, until after the year 1560.<sup>5</sup> Its future proprietary history may be briefly given from notes of the progress of titles of the estate kindly furnished by Mr Berry. It would appear by these that the lands were acquired by James, brother-german to Robert, Lord Elphinstone, 12th November 1599, from whose heirs they passed to the family of Hamilton, through the marriage of Ann Elphinstone with John Hamilton of Murehouse, whose eldest son succeeded to Inverdovat. On 8th February 1664, James Hamilton had a Crown charter of the lands of Inverdovat and the mill of Seamylls, in the baronies of Newtown and Naughtown. In 1712 the above portions of the lands of Inverdovat became united in the person of Gavin Hamilton and his son, with the other two portions of "Lyhton lands," or the "Bank of Inverdovat," which Hamilton had acquired from the old family of Nairn of Sandford, or St Fort. Hamilton, who subsequently assumed the name and title of Inglis of Murdieston, sold the lands to James Walker, physician in Edinburgh, in 1758. In 1782 Walker's trustees sold the property to John Lyon, merchant in Dundee; and in

<sup>1</sup> Reg. Prior. S. Andree, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> Reg. Prior. S. Andree, pref. xxxix. pp. 106, &c. Some writers say, upon what authority I am not aware, that the old name was *St Phillans*, and that the church was inscribed to that saint.—*Stat. Acct. (Old)*, vol. xvi. p. 88; (*New*), p. 505.

<sup>3</sup> Inq. Speciales (Fife), No. 406, &c.

<sup>4</sup> Reg. Prior. S. Andree, pp. 108–9.

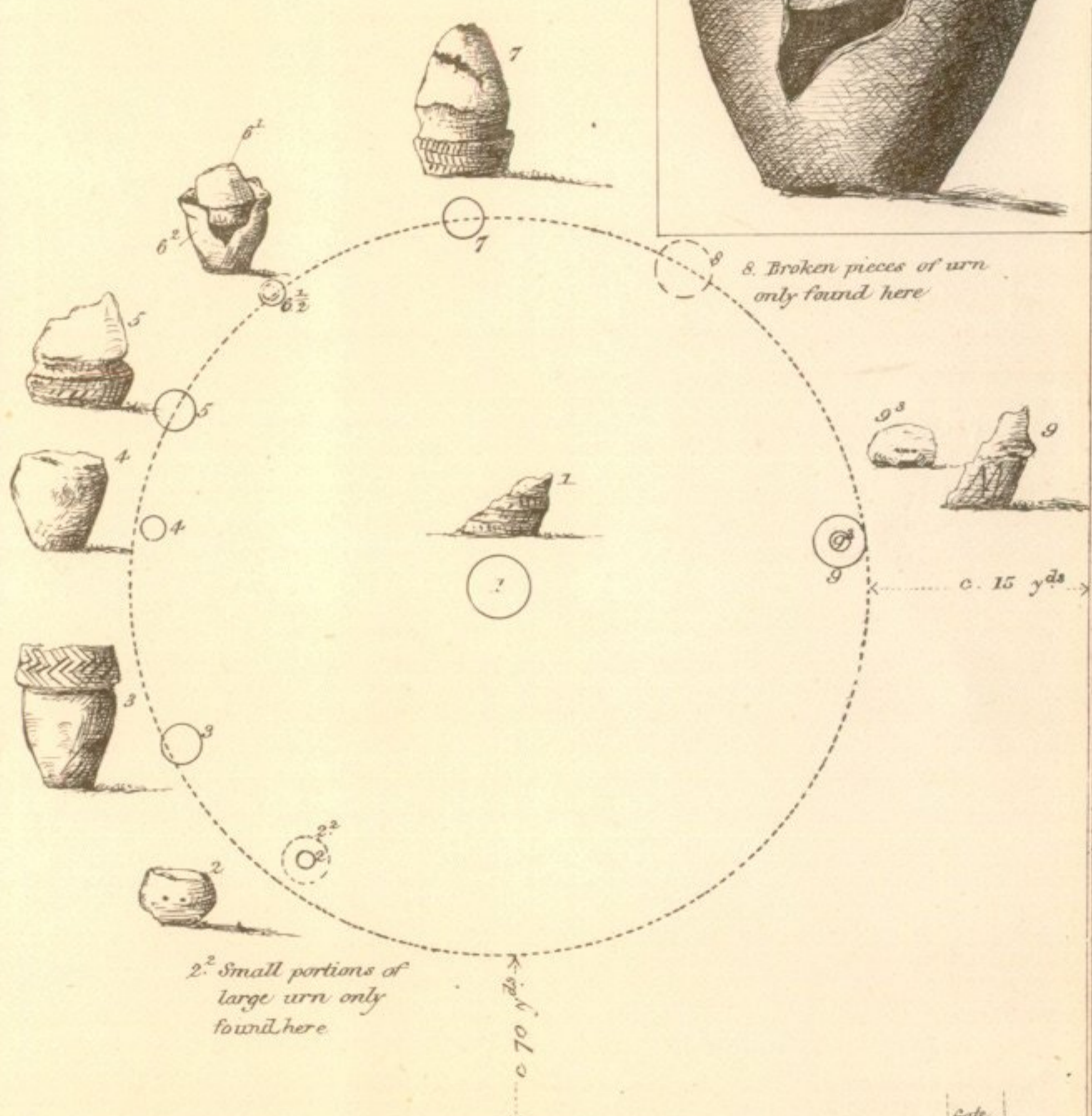
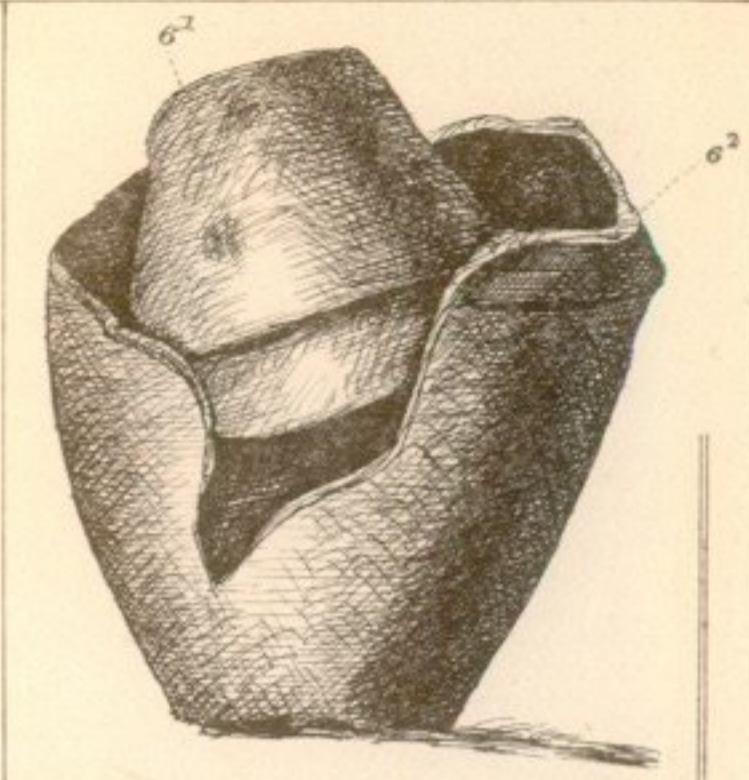
Inq. Speciales (Fife), No. 42.

1788 Lyon sold it to John Berry, of Wester Bogie, grandfather of the present proprietor.<sup>1</sup>

One word in conclusion, by way of thanks to Mr Walker for the very courteous manner in which he gave every facility to my inquiries while investigating into those singularly interesting deposits, but for which the curious features of "the find" might have been lost to our knowledge,—as well as for his so handsomely presenting the urns and bones, along with excellent photographs of the former, to our National Museum of the Antiquaries of Scotland.

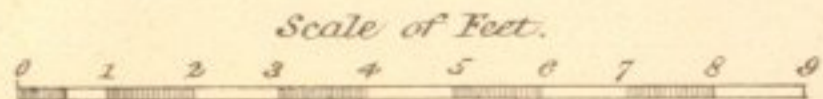


PLAN SHEWING THE POSITION IN WHICH THE URNS WERE FOUND ON M<sup>r</sup> H. WALKER'S PROPERTY OF WESTWOOD, NEAR NEWPORT, FIFESHIRE. 1865.



8. Broken pieces of urn only found here

2<sup>2</sup> Small portions of large urn only found here



Urns not drawn to scale

RIVER TAY