

II.

NOTICE OF AN URN FOUND NEAR KIRKTON OF GLENELG, WITH REMARKS ON THE BONES FOUND IN URNS. BY ARTHUR MITCHELL, M.D., DEPUTY COMMISSIONER IN LUNACY, CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT.

In May 1867, Mr Fraser, the parochial schoolmaster of Glenelg, while levelling a hillock about thirty yards from his house, which is near the Kirkton, came upon an urn containing bones. In removing the urn it fell to pieces, but the fragments and its contents were carefully gathered and sent to me for examination. The results, which are not without interest, I shall briefly communicate to the Society.

1. *The Position of the Urn.*—It was found in a small hillock of sand and gravel, about 3 feet below the surface. A flat stone covered its mouth, but round about it there was no cist or building of any sort, nor was any cist or urn found in any other part of the hillock.

2. *Its Form, Size, and Character.*—Mr Fraser, who saw it before it fell to pieces, made a note of its size on the day it was found, and he describes it as "being about 2 feet deep and 15 inches in diameter at the broadest part, and 7 inches at the narrowest." These dimensions, even after deduction for the possible errors of a rough measurement, are those of a very large urn.

Though small fragments only were preserved, enough exists to make it easy to determine its form.¹

The Glenelg urn is of the roughest possible workmanship and material. The clay of which it is made contains much coarse sand and gravel, some of the pebbles weighing half an ounce. It is almost without ornamentation, and has been imperfectly fired. Its walls are everywhere thick, but the thickness reaches an inch at the bend.

3. *Its Contents.*—These consisted of fragments of bone. They were all small, and no entire bone was found among them.

¹ Several urns of the same style exist in the Museum. One of these, found near Alloa, seems to be exactly of the same type.

4. *Are the Bones those of Man?*—To this query I am able to answer definitely, that part of the bones belong to man and part to the sheep and other small animals. I have had the assistance of Dr M'Bain in determining this point, and it has been done with care. The great majority of the fragments are too small to make it possible to name them, but three bits of a human skull can be described. They are (a) the internal occipital protuberance and spine, with part of the lateral sinuses and cerebellar fossæ; (b) a part of the right cerebellar fossa; and (c) a part of one of the parietal bones. In like manner we can speak with precision of some of the bones of the sheep, none of which, however, are cranial bones. The longest is a fragment of the 6th or 7th rib, and others are fragments of ribs and long bones. The fact that the sheep is only of late introduction into the north-west district of Scotland, makes the finding of the bones of the sheep in a *cinerary urn* at Glenelg additionally interesting.

It appears, therefore, that this urn contained, along with human bones, those of the sheep, and that the last were in greater quantity than the first.

The same thing I believe to be true of the contents of urns generally. Fragments of human bones are not common in them, and in many they cannot be found at all, while fragments of the bones of lower animals abound. Among these last the bones of birds are common, and the other bones are not those of the larger animals, like the ox or horse. The osseous contents of urns are usually spoken of as human, but this is certainly a mistake.

5. *Were the Bones burnt?*—This is a doubtful point. If they were burnt, the burning must have been partial—that is, the animal matter cannot have been completely burnt out. And here it may be useful to state, that bones long buried, under certain conditions, may present the characters of burnt bones, and may with difficulty be distinguished from them. So far as concerns the contents of this urn, I think the probability is considerably on the side of their having been exposed to the action of fire before they were placed in the urn; but it must be kept in mind, that if this be true of the human bones, it is equally true of those of the sheep. Such burning as they got appears to be best described as scorching—that is, the outer surface appears to have been exposed for

a short time to a considerable heat. But I have not been able in any way to produce by fire the peculiar appearance which the osseous contents of urns generally present—the outer surface of the bones being cracked and fissured transversely, and the bones themselves bent.

6. *Do the Bones exhibit any peculiarity which is common to many of them?*—They do, and it is as follows:—All the long bones have been split up, and there is no exception to this. They are, in short, exactly in the condition of the split bones found in the so-called kitchen middens of our own and other countries. On placing these urn bones side by side with split bones from the refuse heaps of Caithness before our osteological antiquaries, I have always had this opinion confirmed. This observation appears to me to be full of interest, and the interest is greatly increased when I state that the contents of every urn I have examined present the same remarkable feature. I present illustrations from an urn found at Bognie in Aberdeenshire, from an urn found at Alloa, and from the nine urns found at Tayport. These last were of various sizes, one being very large. They were arranged in a circle 15 feet in circumference, and among them occurred two very large cups and one instance of the double urn, that is, of an urn *inverted* and dropped into another urn.

Iron Pin found at Glenelg (10 inches long).



7. *Was any other object found along with the urn?*—Some time after receiving the fragments of the urn and its contents I happened to be in Glenelg, and then learned that in the ground, almost beside the urn, there was found an object in iron, which more resembles the giant tongue of a giant brooch than anything else. It is ten inches long, and more than a quarter of an inch thick, and the workmanship is good.¹ (See woodcut.)

¹ At the request of Dr J. A. Smith, Dr Stevenson Macadam made a chemical examination of this iron pin, and the annexed note gives the result:—“*Analytical*

The most that could be asserted was that this object was found "almost beside the urn;" but if that should mean at the distance of a foot, and that a foot above the urn, it would seriously weaken the link which connects the two, and which, under the circumstances, should not be accepted as close or strong.

8. *Resumé.*—We have here, therefore, a large and rude urn, or "sepulchral pitcher," found in a gravel bank, three feet below the surface, with a stone above it, but with no cist enclosing it or near it. It was half filled with bones, some belonging to man and some to the sheep and other small animals. The bones present the peculiarities of the split bones of our own and the Danish kitchen middens. They may or may not have been exposed to the action of fire before they were placed in the urn. This point is doubtful. The contents of many other urns consist, like those of this one, partly of human bones and partly of the bones of the lower animals. The bones of birds are common, but the bones of large animals, like the ox or horse, have not been found. In other urns, as well as in the Glenelg one, the bones present the peculiarities of the bones found in the refuse heaps.