

II.

NOTICES OF EXCAVATIONS AT PITMILLY LAW, AND ELSEWHERE
ON THE SOUTH-EAST COAST OF FIFE. BY THE REV. ROBERT
SKINNER, ST ANDREWS.

THE PARSONAGE, ST ANDREWS,
31st December 1868.

MY DEAR SIR,—Having some time ago visited, with yourself and other distinguished antiquarians, that portion of Fife which may be called the south-eastern district, in search of things dear to the fraternity, you will be pleased to learn that, a few weeks ago I revisited, along with a reverend

brother (Mr Monypenny of Pittenweem), the *Scaith Stone*, near the village of Kilrenny, with the kind permission of Mr Gray the tenant, and from that visit am now in a position to say that the stone does not likely mark the site of *human burial*, as, on a careful examination of the soil on all sides, even below the surface of the subsoil, we could discover no traces of interment whatever.

The Bents along the coast of this part of Fife are full of human bones, doubtless the remains of "Northmen," who had thought to make an easy prey of the inhabitants of that period, but who had evidently been beaten back to their ships, leaving many of their mates dead on the beach.

PITMILLY LAW, on the estate of Pitmilly, the property of W. T. Monypenny, Esq., is situated on the banks of the Kenly, within the parish of Kingsbarns. Having previously obtained the kind leave of the proprietor, Dr Adamson of St Andrews and I had agreed to meet here on the day specified, with two labourers in full digging panoply, furnished by his no less enthusiastic brother, Mr Adamson, the farmer of Burnside, immediately adjoining. The Law itself is of lowly proportions, but, as compared with the surrounding lands, there is a very perceptible difference in height, and I had always conjectured that it was an ancient barrow, other examples being prolific in the district, though not yet explored.

The Law is in form oblong, and, on careful subsequent measurement, we found it to be 72 yards in length by 44 in width, and about 30 feet high. My eye soon found the centre, which previous experience has proved to me to be the most likely place for a "find," and accordingly, in less than three minutes, the spade disclosed a flat stone, where no such stone could *naturally* be, and in a few more minutes the whole length and breadth and depth of a *cistvaen* were laid bare to view. It consisted, as usual in this part of the country, of rude slabs, perhaps taken from the adjacent burn, but cunningly wedged at the joints with smaller fragments. The cist was complete, and could never have been previously disturbed. The proportions were as follows:—Length, 5 feet 10 inches; breadth at head, 1 foot 7 inches; at foot, 1 foot 1½ inch; depth at head, 9 inches; at foot, 7½ inches. But judge of our surprise when, on carefully removing the soil internally, we found not the slightest vestige of remains of any kind. Firm red clay soil everywhere prevailed, internally as well,—the surround-

ing soil having gradually settled into the cist through the imperfect joints up to the lid itself. Every spadeful of earth as thrown out was examined, but not even a tooth was found, nor flake,—nothing, in short! I then bade the labourers dig about one foot south of the cist, and we exposed a similar one,—length, 5 feet 8 inches; breadth at head, 1 foot 5 inches; at foot, $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches; depth at head, 1 foot 1 inch; at foot, $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches: and immediately under this cist was another,—length, 4 feet 3 inches; depth, 10 inches. We could not make further measurements of this under cist without destroying the upper one. But in neither of them, like the first, did we discover any remains! One would suppose that the nature of the soil would have secured the preservation of remains; but, to be sure, the surrounding tree roots might have unduly dried the soil, and thus helped to hasten the decay of human remains, and yet, under precisely similar circumstances, I have found at least one entire skeleton at Law Park, near St Andrews, where there was even a drier soil. Surely teeth could not so easily have evaporated! Should it be denied, however, that there ever was an interment of a body in the present instance, then how can one account for a perfect cist underlying another, and no space whatever between? In fact, the bottom of the upper one formed the lid of the one underneath.

Before leaving the spot, my friend and I were joined by Dr Adamson and his brother, and arrangements were made for another archæological hunt in the same cover, the result of which I have now the pleasure to give you.

As I could not myself be present during the operations, Mr Adamson of Burnside kindly promised to superintend them, and, on the 17th of this month, on revisiting the Law, I had the pleasure to find that that gentleman had disclosed three more cists on the same side,—in fact, immediately west of the former group, the particulars of which are as follows:—

SECOND SERIES, WEST OF FIRST GROUP.

North Cist.—Length, 5 feet 5 inches; breadth at head, 1 foot 5 inches; depth, 9 inches.

Middle Cist.—Length, 4 feet 9 inches; breadth at head, 1 foot 2 inches; breadth at foot, 12 inches; depth, 9 inches.

South Cist.—Length, 6 feet; breadth at head, 1 foot 6 inches; breadth at foot, 12 inches; depth, 10 inches.

The general appearance of the soil indicates that the mound is natural, and the slabs of the cist last described might denote the place of sepulture of the chief of the family, as they were full of fossil shells (of which I send you a specimen), which may yet be found on the nearest beach. The slabs of the other five cists were composed of the ordinary freestone to be found near the spot. Mr Adamson therefore thought (and I agree with him), that from the fact of the slabs having been brought so far as half a mile, that greater pains had been taken with the interment of the last-described cist, which is also the largest of the whole group. From the circumstance that we had found no remains of human beings in the former cists we had little hope of these last three containing any, and so it turned out.

Does not this fact indicate a very remote antiquity for these sepultures? I have myself been present at a great many similar disinterments, but I never saw an empty cist but one, which was found on the grounds of Rathelpie, within the western district of the burgh of St Andrews, and even then there was an enclosed urn, very elegant in shape, of which I retain considerable fragments, and in the bottom of it was some black mould; that cist was divided into two compartments, each sufficient to hold a sitting figure, and one of them was quite empty. You once told me that the derivation of Rathelpie was the rath or fort of Alpin, king of the Picts. That cist was found on the summit of the highest part of the lands of Rathelpie, and it may have contained the remains of that illustrious monarch.

If you think the above particulars worthy of being communicated to the Society of Antiquaries you are most welcome to them.—I am, &c.

ROBERT SKINNER.

To JOHN STUART, Esq., LL.D., &c.