

III.

NOTES ON AN OAKEN SPADE FOUND IN A MOSS AT CRUDEN, ABERDEENSHIRE. BY THE REV. JAMES PETER, F.S.A. SCOT. COMMUNICATED BY WILLIAM FERGUSON OF KINMUNDY, Esq., F.S.A. SCOT.

The result of the inquiry into the extent, nature, and exhaustion of the peat-mosses in the north-eastern division of Aberdeenshire, designated Buchan, which I proposed some two or three years since to make, has, so far as antiquarian gleanings are concerned, proved disappointing.

I had hoped to discover and preserve a record of many objects dug out in the process of exhaustion through peat-casting, which had been thrown aside as worthless, or stowed away in odd corners of the cottages in the neighbourhood of the mosses; but I regret to have to say that the list of such relics embodied in my paper on the peat-mosses of Buchan, notwithstanding inquiry on every side, is meagre indeed. The result would go far to prove that the district, during the period embraced in the formation of the mosses, was, as compared with other parts of the country, very sparsely peopled, else more traces of its occupation must have come to light.

The list of relics found in or under peat-moss is given at page 32 of my printed paper,¹ a copy of which I have the honour to submit to the Society, so I need but enumerate them here without remark, except as to two of them.

1. Bronze Pot of the Mediæval period.
2. Solid Oak Spade.

¹ The Peat-Mosses of Buchan. By Rev. James Peter, M.A., F.S.A. Scot. Printed for the Club of Deer, 4to. Aberdeen, 1876.

3. Solid Silver Statuette of a Man on Horseback.
4. Short Bronze Sword.
5. Two large Stone Celts.
6. Flint Spear-head.
7. Spear-head of bronze.
8. Flanged Celt or Palstave of bronze.
9. Portion of a large rude Crossbow and Arrows.
10. Several Antlers of Roe and Red Deer.
11. Horns of *Bos primigenius*.
12. Canoe.
13. Bronze Celt.

Perhaps the most interesting relic noted, which I came across in the course of my inquiry, is No. 2, the solid oak spade, now, through the kindness of James Shepherd, Esq. of Aldie, on whose property it was found, presented to the Society for preservation in their Museum. It was found lying in a horizontal position under eight feet of moss. Judged from its appearance, it seems to be of considerable antiquity, pointing to a time when iron was scarce or the working of it expensive. Its form appears to be of an ancient type, but which in some of the remote and out-of-the-way districts of Scotland is found still extant and in use. The first impression is, that it is akin to that known as a *flaucher-spade*, used for cutting turf, and pushed before by means of a cross-bar of wood impinging on the breast of the person using it; but, on consideration, this I think must be discarded. (See the fig. p. 408.)

When travelling some years since in Ross-shire, and while in the neighbourhood of Poolewe, where the only ground available for vegetables consists of small patches on the successive steps and hollows characteristic of the Laurentian gneiss formation, I had the opportunity of seeing the mode of working the *Cas-chrom*, a spade peculiar to the Highlands. It was the season of potato planting, when the fishermen are busy at the necessary work. The spade was of the well-known kind, having a triangular blade shod with iron on two sides, and projecting from that a handle, so extended as to allow it to rest on the shoulder. At the height of the elbow was a round cross-bar inserted in the handle, by which the spade was held, a hand being on either side of the shaft. As soon as the potatoes were laid

in the drill the man took up the spade, laid it across his right shoulder, inserted the blade in the earth, and at much the same angle as that of the mould-board of a plough, when he pushed it before him, giving an extremely quick tilt the while with his right hand, so that the soil fell over with nearly as much ease and regularity as if the effect resulted from the action of a plough. I was so struck with it at the time that I thought, here is the idea or germ of the plough.

Bearing this in view, I examined narrowly the oak spade found in the moss of Aldie, and was struck with the greater abrasion of the wood of the blade on the left side,—presenting exactly the appearance that would have resulted had it been used in the same way as the Highland spade. That there never was any protection through an outside coating of iron is perhaps indicated by the condition of the spade itself, as the soft wood appears to be worn away, while the knot being tougher resisted longer the grating action of the stones, and stands out from the edge. From all this I infer that the pattern is of considerable antiquity, and may be regarded as an early development of that now usefully employed, where the contracted nature of the ground or its inaccessible position, as in the Highlands of Scotland in particular places, renders horse-work impossible.

The last relic mentioned (No. 13, bronze celt) has been omitted from my paper, through an impression, at the time of writing it, that the spot in which it was found had no connection with moss. This celt is now in the possession of Mr Yeats of Auquharney, proprietor of Muirtack, in the parish of Cruden, where it was discovered.

It would appear on closer inquiry, that on removing 3 to 4 feet of peat-moss, and trenching the ground underneath, which consists of a rather hard reddish clay, it was found imbedded at the depth of one foot from the surface of the solum. An outline tracing accompanies this of the exact size of the celt. The shape is elegant and the workmanship excellent, evincing both taste and skill. [The tracing shows the form of the celt to be that of the ordinary type of flat celt, similar in every respect to those of the same type found in different parts of the country, as shown in the Museum.]

In no other instance, I am aware, have the relics recovered been found beneath the surface of the solum.