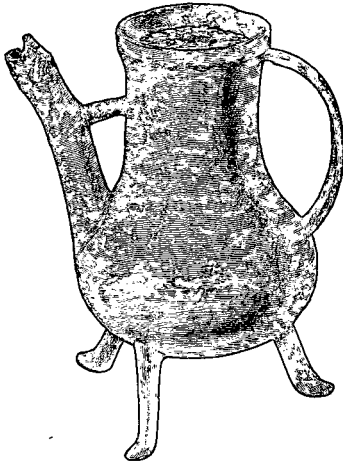


## III.

NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY OF A HOARD OF GROATS OF ROBERT III., ENCLOSED IN A EWER OF BRASS, AND BURIED IN THE CATHEDRAL GREEN, FORTROSE. BY MR W. S. GEDDIE, FORTROSE. COMMUNICATED BY J. R. FINDLAY, ESQ., VICE-PRESIDENT.

On 22d January 1880, the clay floor in the kitchen of the cottage of Mr Donald Junor on the margin of the Cathedral Green, Fortrose, was being lifted, with the object of having a flooring of cement laid down in its place, when, at a depth of a few inches below the clay, the tip of the spout of what appeared to be a kettle was struck. On examination



Ewer of Brass found at Fortrose  
(9 inches high).

it was found that a square cavity had been formed by four rough pieces of whinstone, and within this stood an antique vessel of brass, much tarnished on the surface, and of the form and dimensions shown in the accompanying woodcut. The top of the vessel was closed by a circular piece of lead,  $\frac{3}{4}$ ths of an inch thick, carefully fitted to the neck of the flagon. On removing this lid, it was found that the vessel was filled with silver coins of the reign of Robert III., King of Scots, and numbering, as was ascertained, 1100 in all. There was a quantity of black-looking liquid in the vessel,

but unfortunately it was poured off before there was an opportunity of finding out whether it was some preservative, or merely water that had got entrance by the spout. It was at first reported that there were some fragments of manuscript along with the coins, but this appears to be without foundation. The silver pieces were, with comparatively

few exceptions, in wonderfully good preservation. The majority were similar in size to the specimens sent herewith, others were smaller—evidently representing about half the value. The places of coinage are Edinburgh and Perth; but at least one was marked “Villa + de + Aberd.” The diverse spellings of the inscriptions and other details show that they have been stamped with a variety of dies; and among the different readings of “Scotorum” in the legend round the head of the King were “Scottorum,” “Scotoru,” “Scturm,” and “Setrum;” also “Gratia” instead of “Gra.,” &c.

The houses forming the square around the present Cathedral Green, including that covering the site of the “find,” are all of comparatively recent date; and they occupy part of the space forming the old “Yard” or “Green” of the Cathedral of Chanonrie—the name of Fortrose previous to its incorporation along with Rosemarkie by a charter of James II. In the centre of the space was the church, described by Neale as “of the purest and most elaborate middle pointed.” Around the Green were grouped the “manses” of the canons and presbyters of the Diocese of Ross, and the residence of the Bishop, surrounded by their spacious gardens. The accompanying rough plan will give an idea of the pettiness of the present surroundings (drawn in black ink) compared with the stately and handsome proportions of the ancient “Precincts” (marked in red); and it also indicates the spot where the flagon and coins have been unearthed.

About the period when the treasure must have been concealed, Chanonrie is believed to have been in the heyday of its prosperity. Its sunny southern exposure and attractive surroundings made it a favourite place of resort; and it became, under its band of leisured clergy, a kind of “Lamp of learning” in these northern parts. With the graceful Cathedral Church in its midst, the spacious Green, bounded by lines of fine old trees, and enclosed by the residences of the Chancellor, Treasurer, and Precentor, of the Arch-Dean and Dean, and of the Archdeacon of Kirk-michael, with the Manses of the parochial charges of Culliecudden, Lem-lair, Rosskeen, Alness, Kiltearn, Contin, Kilmuir, West Kilmuir, and

Kincardine, each opening on the Yard by pointed Gothic archways; behind these the Bishop's Palace, the Castle, the houses of the Sub-Dean and Chanters, the Rectory of Kirkmichael, and the Manses of Logie, Obstill, and St Katherine's, with their orchards and courtyards, the old burgh must have had an air of ecclesiastical culture and retirement and even of dignity not common in its day or even in ours. The avenue of trees running near the present line of houses was cut down by Cromwell, who transported the stones of the Cathedral by sea to Inverness to build his fort there, and the only remains of the edifice are the south aisle of the nave and chancel, and the Chapter House, now used as the Town House.

It will be observed that the manse nearest the site of the "find" is that of Kiltearn—a parish near Dingwall. It is a curious fact—and probably is not a mere coincidence, but indicates the manner in which the concealer of the treasure expected to be guided in searching for it again—that a line drawn down the centre of the nave of the old Cathedral (which lay, as usual, east and west, or from corner to corner of the Green) would, as near as can be judged, pass through the site of the "find." Further, in the same line, but nearer to the Cathedral, there was at one time a mound or tumulus surmounted by a stone, and known as the "Holeridge." The discovery was made half-way—40 feet from each—between the "Holeridge" and the boundary of the ancient Green with Kiltearn Manse. The local tradition—which, however, assigns no date to the event—runs that some of the ecclesiastics of the place while strolling out near the outskirts of Chanonrie, perceived coming through the air towards the town in the likeness of a misty ball, one of the deadly pestilences which were frequent visitors to mediæval communities. The priests were equal to the occasion, and cleverly capturing the plague in a white sheet, they buried it, sheet and all, with "bell, book, and candle" in this corner of the sacred enclosure, in a line with the high altar. It appears from the annals of the burgh that when repairs were being made on the present boundaries of the Green, orders were given by the Council to excavate the mound, in order to see what might be beneath. The

records do not show any results of this search; but the popular account is that the burgh functionary charged with the task, fearing some irruption of evil spirits, or the setting free of the "plague," "scamped" or altogether neglected the work; and the matter fell into oblivion. When the present wall was built the stone was removed, and no trace of the place is now left.

Some clue to the motive that prompted the hiding of the treasure may possibly be found in the existence of the site of the old Castle behind the line of Manses, and the struggles that have taken place for its possession. It is said that the Mackenzies, starting originally from the west coast, pushed eastward as the clan grew in strength, and coming into this part of the country, captured the castle from its then custodiers, the ancestors of the Munros of Fowlis. The former owners repossessed themselves of it, but the Mackenzies mustering their forces again seized it, and getting into favour with the Crown shortly after, obtained a grant in their own name, and held it till it became uninhabitable. They are generally credited with possessing as little scruple in appropriating church property as in seizing on secular gear. The "Seaforths" were not the only marauders who were attracted to this pretty and fertile part of the Black Isle. At a much earlier date, the Norse rovers are said to have visited it, and the well-known monument of Celtic style in Rosemarkie churchyard, a quarter of a mile to the eastward, is said to have been brought from Denmark, to mark the spot where a sea-king had fallen. Not long ago, a stone coffin with bits of old pottery was found near Allangrange, in this neighbourhood. Old coins have not unfrequently been picked up about the Cathedral; and a tracing is forwarded of one (date 1602) found in what was formerly the garden of the palace. The late Captain Mackenzie, Fortrose, who took much interest in such matters, collected a number of these coins—both silver and copper—but none that I have seen are earlier than the Reformation, or, indeed, than 1681, unless several of Edward III. of England's reign are to be classed among those found in the Cathedral.

I am sorry I am unable to furnish the Society with more definite

information, but would be pleased if I thought that these particulars would help to show that the history and antiquarian lore of Fortrose (the original charter of which, as a royal burgh, dates from Alexander II.) are worth the attention of skilled archaeologists.