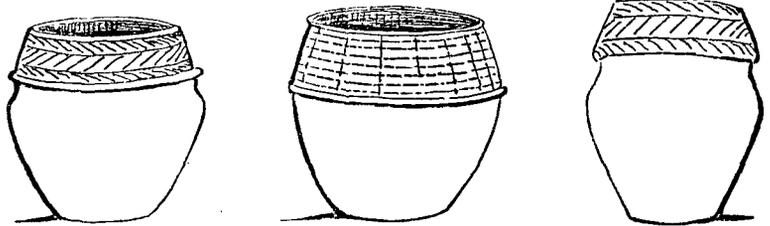


## VI.

## NOTICE OF CINERARY URNS DISCOVERED AT NEWPORT, FIFE.

By A. H. MILLAR, F.S.A. SCOT.

Towards the end of August 1882, whilst some workmen were employed removing a tree on the estate of Tayfield, Newport, they came upon two cinerary urns containing partially calcined bones. The urns had been deposited side by side, without any protecting slab either above or below them; and the tree, whose removal led to their discovery, had spread its roots around them. By the accidental disposition of these roots one of the urns was perfectly protected, and was found completely embedded



A and B—Urns Found at Tayfield, Newport, in 1882.

Urn Found near Tayfield in 1865.

beneath the spreading fibres; but the others had, unfortunately, been penetrated by some of the underground branches and seriously injured. They were both removed as carefully as possible to Tayfield House with their contents. The excavation was superintended by the Rev. J. M. Brown Murdoch, Riverhead Vicarage, Sevenoaks, who was residing at Tayfield House at the time, and who supplies the following information as to the mode of operation pursued:—

The urns lay in a line almost due east and west from the silver spruce fir (*Pinus picea*) which was being removed. The urn, with least decoration, was found first as it lay nearest the centre of the tree, and a chance

blow from a workman's spade partially destroyed it, exposing the calcined bones which it contained. The other urn, which lay side by side and in close contact with it, was next discovered, but as one of the roots of the tree had crushed it some difficulty was experienced in removing it. These roots were cut, canvas was placed around the injured urn, and the fragments of pottery and calcined bones were carefully removed.

The first urn was now partly exposed, and as it lay well under the arching roots of the spruce fir which thus protected it, the excavators confidently expected to remove it in a nearly perfect condition. But the workmen found, as they proceeded, that the root-fibres upon the eastmost side of this urn had destroyed it also, and it was at length removed in fragments. Mr Murdoch states—"I fancy that the men were not quite cautious enough in the work, and that the perfect (west) side of the urn became detached from the injured side, and falling over towards the west, came to pieces." This experience may be useful to future excavators.

Through the courtesy of Mrs Berry and Mr Wm. Berry of Tayfield, I was permitted to examine the relics, and after careful inspection find that the following is their condition:—The urns are both composed of dark-coloured clay, slightly mixed with sand, and only partially fired. They are very perfectly formed, both inner and outer surfaces having been finished with care. The ornamentation, though simple, exhibits some attempt at design, and has apparently been executed with a bone pin or or other blunted instrument whilst the clay was wet. The firing to which the vessels have been subjected has only been sufficient to harden them to a slight depth below the outer surface, leaving the remainder of the urn in the condition of a dried but unfired brick.

The shapes of the urns vary considerably. The smaller one (A) is narrower at the top than at the centre, and is furnished with a flange raised about half an inch above the highest bead-moulding, as if it had been intended to be fitted with an inner lid.<sup>1</sup> The base has been truncated

<sup>1</sup> The blocks of the outline figures of the urns which illustrate this paper are contributed by the author.

so that it might rest with its aperture upwards. I have not been able to ascertain the exact diameter of this urn, but from the descriptions of the discoverers, corrected by an ideal circle drawn from the remaining fragments, I find that it has measured about 12 inches outside, with an inner radius of about 5 inches. Its depth was probably 12 inches inside.

The larger urn (B) is different from the one described both in shape and ornamentation. It has been narrower at the mouth than in the body of the vessel, and the lip, instead of having a flange to receive a lid, has been bevelled to the outer surface, probably for that purpose. The decoration is much simpler than that of the other, though evidently executed in the same fashion, and with similar tools. The fragments are not sufficiently large to admit of its exact dimensions being discovered, but it has likely been about 14 inches in diameter at the lip, extending to 16 inches (outside measurement) at the centre of the vessel, and contracting to perhaps 7 inches across the flattened bottom. A very neat bead had been formed near the centre of each urn, serving to divide the decorated portion from the plain base.

The bones which these urns have contained are partially calcined, but not pulverised. Sometimes the white appearance of bones, long buried but preserved from actual contact with the soil, deceives the casual observer, who expects to find traces of calcination; but a careful examination of these relics will show distinctly the action of fire upon them. Several of the fragments showed signs of having been split with some instrument *after the outer surface had been calcined*, probably to admit of their being placed within the cavity of the urn. The bones are too imperfect to form a correct index to the age and condition of the skeletons to which they belonged, and only very vague conjectures may be founded upon them. From the appearance presented by a portion of one of the cranial bones (*os parietale*), in which the processes of the coronal suture are very wide and laminated, whilst the plate itself is thin, it is likely that the smaller urn had contained the skeleton of a child; and the presence of two portions of knee-joint bones and well-developed (*metatarsal*) toe-bones leads to the notion that more than one

skeleton was enclosed in this urn. The bones in the other receptacle have been too much destroyed to admit of accurate identification, though several of the lumbar vertebræ of an adult were visible amongst the débris.

Though the formation of the urns seems to indicate that they were intended to have covering lids, no traces of the latter were found. The vessels have apparently been reversed, with their contents, upon the bare ground, and the decayed state of those parts which have been nearest the soil is thus accounted for. The places where the tree-roots had broken through the pottery would be similarly affected; and the calcined bones thus brought into immediate contact with the earth present a different appearance from those preserved from its influence. Though the urns were found at a depth of only 18 inches from the present surface of the soil, it is not improbable that at some time a knoll had risen over their site which had been partially cleared away. The tree which grew over them is certainly not more than eighty years of age, and the flatness of the plateau on which it grew rather favours the notion that the ground has been artificially levelled.

There have been remains similarly situated found upon the estate of Tayfield before this time. About the year 1835, whilst the father of the late proprietor was bringing a portion of ground on the farm of Northfield under cultivation, he came upon traces of a "circular work," which was supposed at that period to be a Roman camp. Further investigation disclosed that this erection was composed of earth, while a cairn in the centre enclosed a stone coffin of considerable size, containing a great quantity of bones. One of the slabs which formed this coffin was about 6 feet long, 4 feet broad, and 6 inches thick, and was made of roughly-polished yellow sandstone. In 1855 some workmen were employed boling trees near Westwood—at a short distance from the site of the urns now discovered, when they came upon a sarcophagus or stone coffin, composed of rude, undressed flags of whinstone, which was also full of bones. Neither of these coffins contained urns such as are usually found in such sarcophagi, but their absence was counterbalanced by a

discovery which took place in the neighbourhood a few years afterwards.

In October 1865, while some workmen were employed trenching at Westwood, near Tayfield, they came upon several cinerary urns disposed in a manner not hitherto noted by any Scottish antiquary. They were nine in number, and placed in a circle around a central urn, and at a radius of 7 feet. The depth at which they were buried varied from 8 to 20 inches, and though they had no slabs placed under them—as is frequently the case—some preparation had been made to preserve their contents from decay by the depositing of charcoal and ashes beneath each inverted urn. The vessels do not seem to have been at all equal in size to the two now discovered, as the largest of them was only  $14\frac{1}{2}$  inches high,  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches across the mouth, and  $3\frac{3}{4}$  inches at the base; whilst the smallest merely measured 5 inches in height,  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches across the mouth, and 3 inches at the base. The ornamentation of these urns was almost identical with that upon the more elaborate of the Tayfield urns. A notice of the Westwood urns from the pen of the late Mr Jervise, appeared in the Society's *Proceedings* for 1865, and they are now deposited in the Museum.

As Mr Murdoch was aware of the circumstances under which the urns were found at Westwood, he examined the ground carefully. The urns had been deposited closely together at the same time, without any measures being taken to exclude the earth from immediate contact with their contents. These interesting relics are now in the possession of Mrs Berry of Tayfield.