

II.

NOTES OF THE EXCAVATION OF THE STONE CIRCLE AT CRICHIE,
ABERDEENSHIRE. BY CHARLES ELPHINSTONE DALRYMPLE,
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Although more than a quarter of a century has passed since this circle was examined with the spade, and notwithstanding the many explorations of the same kind which have since been made, it still remains, if I do not mistake, unique in some of its features. Dr John Stuart gave a short account of what it had yielded in his preface to vol. i. of the *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, but it is thought that fuller details, accompanied by diagrams, may prove interesting to the Society.

Broomend of Crichtie, the site of the circle, is situated at the north-west boundary of the parish of Kintore, in Aberdeenshire, within a quarter of a mile of the River Don, and little more from the small town of Inverurie—in a district which contained at no distant time a vast number of monuments of primitive antiquity, not a few of which still remain, showing evidences of early settlement in that region. The circle itself (fig. 1) stands on a platform 50 feet in diameter, surrounded by a moat 20 feet wide, A, B, excepting at the north and south, where there are entrances to the circle, CC, formed by the ground having been there left undisturbed.

The bottom of the moat is 6 feet below the level of the circle, and a feature which gives the place an unusual character is, that the soil excavated in forming the moat has been thrown up on the outside of it forming a *vallum* of such a height that, when perfect in its whole circumference, it must have made it impossible for any one standing in the area of the circle to see out of it, except through the openings to the north and south, where the entrance passages are left.

The circle consisted of six stones round the outer circumference, with a seventh in the centre. All but two had been taken away before our digging took place, but I had the benefit of the experience of a friend who remembered them *in situ*, and the marks of where they had stood

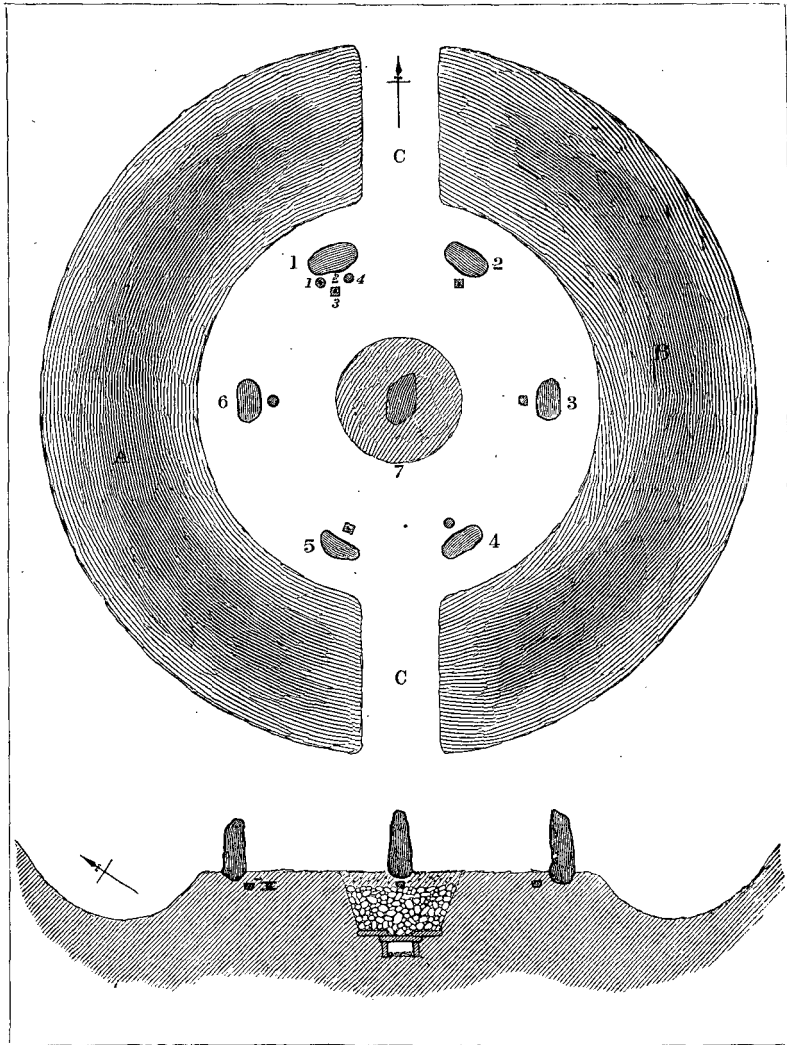


Fig. 1. Ground Plan and Section of Stone Circle, at Crichie, Aberdeenshire.
(Scale 25 feet to an inch.)

were still plain. I must, in passing, mention that my friend, the late Mr Alexander Watt, who held a small farm on the Kintore estate, was of the greatest use in forwarding the work and supplying valuable advice during several days at Crichtie, and at many another exploration, several of which are described by Dr Stuart.¹

The section of the circle given in the diagram (fig. 1) is from north-west to south-east, and is drawn to scale, excepting as to the height of the stones. The stone, which is marked No. 1 in the ground plan, is one of those still *in situ*, and is a singularly rude block, broad and squat

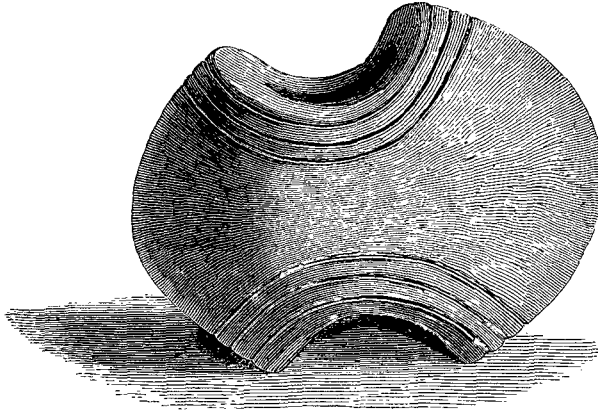


Fig. 2. Perforated Stone Hammer, from Stone Circle, Crichtie.

in its shapelessness, and not above five feet in height. On digging at its base, south-west side, 18 inches from it, was found, embedded in clay (1) a small circular cist (so to call it), 1 foot deep and 9 inches across, formed of slips of stones, evidently broken for the purpose, and arranged so as to taper to the bottom, and filled with calcined bones. Close to this was (2) a stone hammer (fig. 2) perforated for the

¹ I never knew a more true archaeologist, in the best sense, than Mr Watt, nor a more interesting example of real genius and acute powers of observation, making up for imperfect education. Mr Watt had recovered, or saved from destruction, in his own district, no less than seven of the Sculptured Stones figured by Dr Stuart, and was author of a valuable little work on Kintore and its neighbourhood.

handle, and ornamented with three incised lines round the hollowed parts of the edge, now in this Museum. A little outward from this, farther south, was (3) an urn (fig. 3) full of calcined bones, placed mouth downwards on a small flat stone, a similar stone being placed above it. South-east of the stone, still only 18 inches from it, was (4) a deposit of calcined bones unenclosed in either urn or stones.

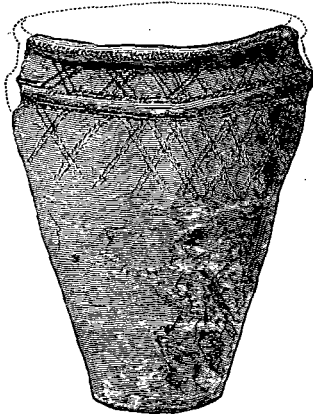


Fig. 3. Urn from Stone Circle, Crichtie (9½ inches high).

At the south side of stone No. 2 was found an inverted urn, full of calcined bones, a flat stone above and below.

At No. 3, south-west side, was a small square cist, 11 inches by 9, and 16 inches deep, filled with bones of the same character, a flat stone above and below.

At No. 4, north-west of stone, was a deposit of burnt matter and bone dust in a small round pit, without urn or cist.

At No. 5, north-east side of stone, an urn, placed like the others mouth downwards, and built round with slips of stone to protect it, filled with the same sort of bones, and with the usual flat stones above and below.

At No. 6, east side of stone, a deposit of burnt matter, enclosed.

At No. 7, under where the central monolith had stood, was, first, a deposit of burnt matter, about 18 inches below the surface, resting on the centre of the top of what may be called an underground cairn of small boulder stones extending 5½ feet in depth, filling a hole 15 feet in diameter at top, narrowing to 10 feet below, where it rested on a pavement of heavy slabs, laid with considerable care. Two of these overlapped the ends of another, which was found to cover a cist containing the remains of a human skeleton; of which the skull and leg bones were tolerably entire, and along with which, about the centre of

the cist, lay a quantity of incinerated human bones, but no urn or implement of any kind.

Whether correct or not, the impression made on those who witnessed the laying open of this circle, and the discovery of these different deposits was that the great one in the centre was the *raison d'être* of the circle, and that the small ones round the circumference were subsidiary to it.

The calcined bones were mixed, both human and animal, many of them small, possibly of birds. In the urn first found was a lower jaw, small and delicate, apparently that of a woman or young person.

Whether in any way connected with it or not, a sculptured stone of the incised type stood a short distance eastward from the Crichton circle. It is figured in Dr Stuart's work, vol. i. plate x. This was removed and set up in the area of the circle, shortly after the operations described, for its better preservation. Also, running from the south entrance of the circle for some distance, was formerly a double row or avenue of monoliths, almost all, unfortunately, now removed. On the line of where they stood, however, various interesting discoveries of cists have been made, at different times, by Mr Tait, the lessee of the Crichton paper mills, who takes much interest in the antiquities of his locality, and the late Mr James H. Chalmers, F.S.A., a gentleman whose early death was a loss to the archaeology of north-eastern Scotland which has not been repaired, nor is, I fear, likely to be so. Some fine urns, the results of those researches, are figured in Vol. V. (New Series) of the *Proceedings*, showing also the unique object, whether a spoon or lamp is not easy to decide, which accompanied one of them, all illustrating an interesting article by Dr Joseph Anderson.

It is difficult to resist the conclusion that all these interments, deposits, &c., had relation to each other, though possibly varying a good deal as to date.

South-easterly from Crichton, distant $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile, stood two other circles near together. In the area of one of them, which had not been cultivated, the remains of many urns were found. One and a half miles further, in the same direction, a small intrenched circle stood near the foot of a low hill named "Tuack." It consisted of six stones, with a small dolmen in the centre. The circle platform is 24 feet diameter,

the trench 12 feet wide, but without entrance as at Crichie, nor has the soil been thrown up as at that place.

This circle yielded three urns, of a much larger size than those at Crichie, full of similar burnt bones, and placed in the same way, inverted with stones above and below. In two of them were small fragments of calcined bronze, the first instance, according to Dr Stuart, of such an occurrence. There were also various deposits of burnt stuff

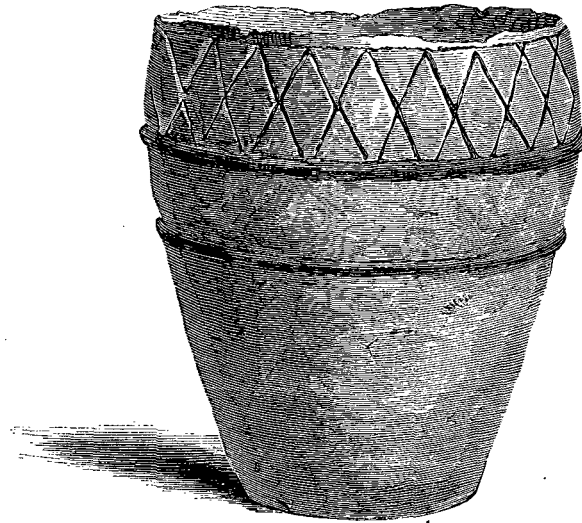


Fig. 4. Urn from Stone Circle at Tuack (12 inches in height).

unenclosed. Some years later than our examination of the place there was found on the brow of the little hill, 100 yards north from the circle, and associated with some burnt deposit, the nature of which I was not able to ascertain, a stone celt or axe, perforated, of precisely the same type and form as that found at Crichie, but with only one incised line of ornamentation.

Between the hill of Tuack and the two stone circles last mentioned there was, at Kintore, a remarkable tumulus now removed, surrounded

by standing stones, some of them sculptured, so that a line of pre-historic monuments connected the circles of Tuack and Crichtie. The valleys of the Don and Urie, however, teemed with such remains, of which enough still exist richly to reward the explorer, although agriculture is too quickly bringing about their demolition.