

## II.

### THE CRUSIE, OR ANCIENT OIL LAMP OF SCOTLAND. BY GILBERT GÓUDIE, TREASURER, S.A. SCOT.

The crusie, like many articles indispensable at one time in domestic use, has passed quietly out of view, superseded by more modern appliances. Too common, too trivial for the notice of the historian, it has left in its demise scarcely so much as an epitaph. The name, and a vague impression of what it may have been, is perhaps all that is known of it to the younger grade of the present generation.

Turning to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th edition, we find the following description of the primitive lamp of this country:—

The simple form which was used down to the end of the eighteenth century, and which as a "cruisie" continued in common use in Scotland till the middle of this century, illustrates the most elementary and most imperfect arrangement of a lamp. Here, as in the lamps of antiquity, the oil vessel lies immediately behind the burning point of the wick, with which the oil is about level when the reservoir is full. The wick is a round soft cord or fibrous mass. Such a lamp has no merit but simplicity. The light is thrown only forward and to the sides, the back being entirely in shadow. The wick, being a round solid mass, takes up the oil equally at the centre and circumference; but to the outer edges of the flame only is there any access of air; consequently combustion in

the centre is imperfect, resulting in a smoky unsteady flame, and a discharge into the atmosphere of the acrid products of destructive distillation. Further, as the level of the oil sinks in the reservoir, the wick has to feed the flame from a greater distance by mere capillary force, and, the supply thus diminishing, the light decreases in proportion.

Such is the latest, and probably the fullest and most authentic, description of the old Scottish lamp available for general readers; and, though imperfect, and with some slight misunderstandings, it is fairly accurate. But no drawing is given, and the precise form and dimensions are left to conjecture.

In the Rhind "Lectures in Archæology," 1876, Sir Arthur Mitchell alludes to the rapid extinction of the crusie, and two examples are figured.<sup>1</sup> Since then attention has twice been directed to it before English societies;<sup>2</sup> but though vast numbers of these lamps were, at no great distance of time, in use in Scotland, and several stray samples have found their way into the Museum, no account of them has ever appeared in the *Proceedings* of this Society. I desire therefore to put a description on record here, based upon personal acquaintance with them, and illustrated by examples in the Museum and in my own possession,<sup>3</sup> now exhibited.

The examples in the Museum are the following, viz. :—

*Crusies of Iron, with Hooks for Suspension.*

- 1-7. Crusies (one with iron stand), localities unknown.
8. Crusie, Lindores, Fifeshire. 1876.
9. Do. Buraland, Sandwick, Shetland.
10. Do. Shetland, probably Fair Isle. 1883.

<sup>1</sup> *The Past in the Present: What is Civilization?* Edinburgh: D. Douglas, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> Paper by Mr J. Romilly Allen, *Journal of the British Archæological Association*, vol. xxxvi. 1880; paper by Dr J. G. Garson, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. xiii. 1884.

<sup>3</sup> With a view to test the general information on the subject, I inserted an inquiry in *Northern Notes and Queries*, soliciting particulars from any one acquainted with the use of the crusie, or possessing a knowledge of the time of its disappearance in their district. The editor referred, in reply, to a specimen recently presented to the Alloa Museum, which he accurately described. No other correspondent volunteered to confess acquaintance with the extinct illuminator.

11. Crusie, Sumburgh, Shetland. 1883.
12. Do. Stonybrake, Fair Isle, Shetland. 1883.
13. Do. Upper shell, locality unknown.
14. Do. North Uist.
15. Do. Burra Isle, Shetland. 1887.
16. Do. Aboyne. 1883.
17. Do. Brass, with initials, Dundee. 1883.
18. Do. Square shaped, locality unknown. 1883.
19. Do. Iron, with wooden pin, locality unknown. 1884.

Of these nineteen the localities of nine are known, five of them being from Shetland, and the rest from different parts in Scotland, viz., Lindores, Dundee, North Uist, Aboyne. Not a single example comes from the south of the Forth, though it is as nearly as possible certain that the lamp in this form was common from one end of the country to the other.<sup>1</sup> In the Shetland Islands, as may be inferred from the predominance of preserved examples, it was in constant if not universal use, under the local name of the *kollie*, until within a quarter of a century past, when a tin lamp, in form resembling a coffee-pot, was introduced, supplanted in turn by a cheap form of the ordinary paraffin lamp.

In every case of the examples shown, it will be observed that the crusie consists of an upper and under shell, the upper acting as the oil reservoir, and the under one serving the purpose of catching any dripping or overflow from it. The under shell and the upright *back* were usually made in one piece. The upper shell was a separate and somewhat smaller vessel, suspended on the toothed or notched bar which projected forwards from the back, at right angles, or on an upward incline. The back was always bent forwards at the top, and terminated with an attached hook, so as to adjust itself to the centre of gravity when in suspension. The *kollie* in Shetland was always the manufacture of the village or district blacksmith, and never, so far as known, imported. Its successor, the tin lamp, was the work of the tinker.

Attention is directed to the simple but ingenious contrivance for

<sup>1</sup> Since this was written about twenty more specimens have been added to the Museum, chiefly from Aberdeenshire and Banffshire. A fine specimen from Shetland is figured in Mr J. Romilly Allen's paper, p. 89.

keeping the oil for consumption at a nearly uniform level while the waste by burning of the wick goes on. This is accomplished by the mere movement from notch to notch on the projecting bar of the upper shell which contains the oil supply. The effect is to elevate the back, and, by consequence, to depress the front of the shell, thus equalising the level of the oil at the front of the nozzle from which the burning wick protrudes, so long as the oil lasts. The writer of the article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, before referred to, seems unaware of this contrivance, and represents the wick, when the oil is low, as being fed by mere capillary attraction. The wick was usually of cotton, or native worsted yarn,<sup>1</sup> and, as it gradually burnt down, was trimmed and pushed to the front of the nozzle by a slight wooden pin, which, for the purpose, lay in reserve in the upper shell. When not carried in the hand, the *kollie* was usually hung upon a nail, or suspended on a cord, by the small iron hook which formed the upper portion of the back, as shown in the figure. In many specimens this hook has now perished.

In the course of last Session of the Society, I placed in the Museum a decayed and wasted specimen of the Shetland *kollie*, but one possessed of some special interest. It is now produced, fig. 1.

This specimen was picked up in the island of Houss (Burra Isle), Shetland, in 1877, cast out of doors, discarded, useless. The owner, Mr John Inkster, now deceased, informed me that it had been made about fifty years previously, by a smith

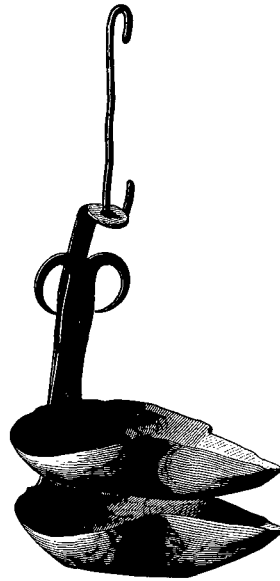


Fig. 1. Crusie from Burra Isle, Shetland.

<sup>1</sup> I am assured that, in the Scottish Highlands and elsewhere, the *pith* of growing rushes was commonly used for wick.

in the parish of Dunrossness, well known to myself; from whom, curiously enough, I had secured the veritable stone mould in which, in his early days, he had played the village Vulcan, in the manufacture of *kollies* as occasion required. In this mould then, which is also now before us, and added to the Museum, I have therefore confidence in

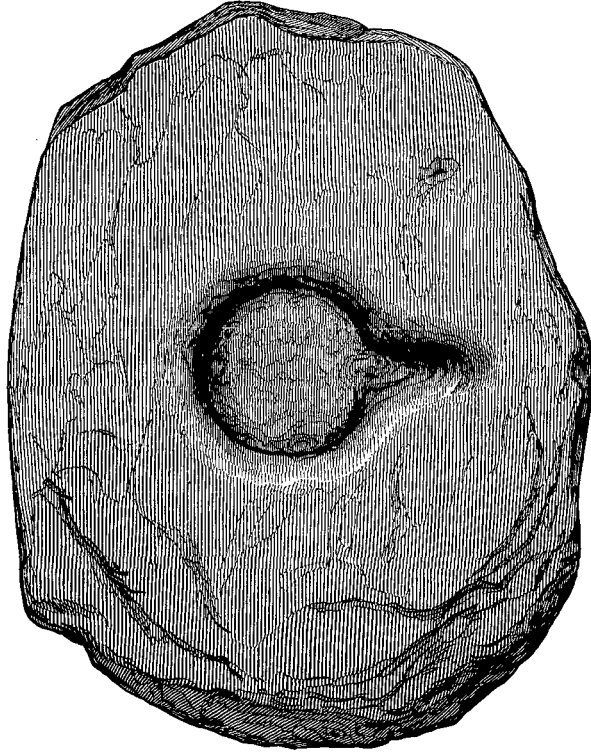


Fig. 2. Crusie Mould of Stone, from Shetland.

believing that the lamp in my hands was made more than half a century ago.

Some friends, whose opinion was entitled to respect, were for a time sceptical regarding the claims of this stone to be a crusie mould. A

similar stone from Orkney, which had been long in the Museum, had been regarded, in the absence of more definite proof, as a mould for metal mirrors of primeval type. The subsequent arrival of a similar mould, in 1884, from the island of North Uist, and of another, since then, from Orkney, coupled with my own personal testimony, put the matter beyond a doubt.

Separate moulds are recessed in either side of the stone. The larger is obviously for the first rough shaping of the sheet of iron; the smaller, which is more distinctly formed to the outline of, especially, the upper shell, is for completing the later stages of manufacture. After all this lapse of years, it will be observed that the lamp, expanded and battered by use and exposure, still coincides pretty closely with the matrix in which it was originally hammered out.

The measurement of this crusie is as follows, viz. :—Total length or height of back,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches; length of upper shell,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches; depth of cavity of upper shell, 1 inch; width of upper shell,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches. The under shell is very slightly larger than the upper.

It may be stated, without entering into further details of measurement, that most other crusies known are of the same general type and dimensions, though it will be understood that the taste of the maker, the quantity of metal at command, and the requirements of the purchaser, would have a varying effect in every individual case. Usually the crusies were of thin iron, but an article of a higher class was occasionally produced of copper. The specimen No. 17, of brass, is very fine.

I now exhibit (1) a crusie of copper, long in the family of Mr Spence of Pow, West Mainland of Orkney; (2) another, also of copper, which I procured from a tinker in Shetland; and (3) one of iron, for nearly a couple of centuries in my own family in Shetland. No specialty of character is claimed for these. They are simply average specimens of the class, as will be apparent on comparison with the other examples in the Society's collection.

One of the examples in the Museum is fitted to an iron stand (see fig. 3).

Another variety is that in which the upper shell is covered by a

metal lid attached to the upright back by hinges, of which several examples are in the Museum.

In the Shetland Islands, up to a recent period, imported oil was almost unknown. Oil, of home manufacture, from fish livers, was the article in almost universal use. Until recent times, oil measured in "cans" formed, apart from domestic use by the owner, an important

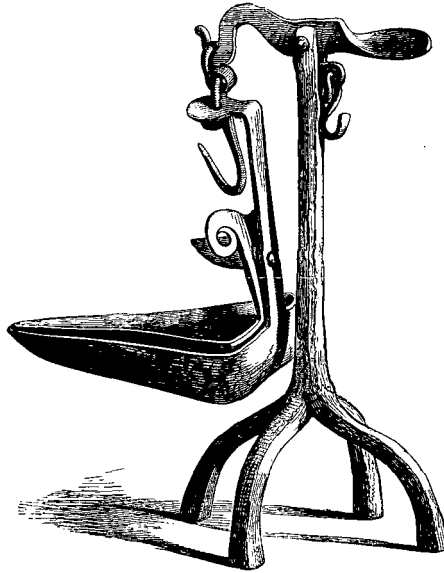


Fig. 3. Crusic, with Iron Stand.

element in the payment of rents and duties, which were formerly collected in *kind*, and also entered largely into local economics as a commodity of exchange or barter.

In the *Rental of Zetland*, MS. 1628, preserved in the General Register House, the measures of oil are thus described:—

Ane can oyllie is the measure of a Scottis quart pryce thairof in the country is 12 s.

4 canis makes ane bull, and 9 bullis makis ane barrell oyllie.

According to Balfour, the measurement by capacity was—

48 cans of oil or 15 lispunds of butter = 1 barrel.  
12 barrels, 180 lispunds, or 576 cans = 1 last.

In the Earl of Morton's Rental of the Lordship of Shetland, 1716–1717, the proportions of the payments for landmails, scat, wattle, umbboth duty, and ox penny for the whole parish of Dunrossness, exclusive of the Fair Isle, were (estimated in Scots money)—

253 lispunds 18 merks of butter @ 30 sh. p. lispund, =	£380	11	0
205 cans oil, at 6 sh. p. can, is . . . . . =	61	10	0
Money, . . . . .	1002	13	0

So late as the year 1812, Lord Dundas derived for the same duties, from the same parish, 24 cans of oil, valued at 1s. 2d. per can, the greater portion of the payments having by this time been converted into sterling money.

In the foregoing remarks I have used indifferently the better known Scottish word *crusie*, and the peculiarly Shetland term for the same thing, *kollie*. The latter may seem somewhat barbarous, but its origin is pure. It is the simple Icelandic *kola*; and here etymological science comes in to the aid of archæology, for the occurrence of this primitive unadulterated root word in such early writings as the *Sturlunga Saga*, *Vilkins maldagi*, and the *Gisla Saga*, proves the enormous antiquity of our humble *kollie*, even if there were no other evidence; and indicates besides that in Orkney and Shetland its introduction is due to Northman influence rather than to the Scottish side.

In the old laws of Norway (*Norges Gamle Love*, ii. 247), it is prescribed that men should be provided with lights, either in lanterns or in “kollies,” of stone or brass (*edr i kolum af*

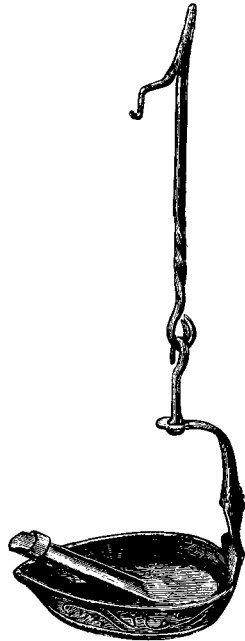


Fig. 4. Crusie from Italy.



*stemi edr eiri*). Hans Egede, the Danish missionary, whose account of Greenland was published in 1741, observes that the natives there called "*kollek*, a lamp, which in Nors is called a *kolle*."<sup>1</sup>

It is scarcely necessary, in conclusion, to allude to the Greek and Roman lamp, which both in metal and in the graceful forms of pottery, is essentially of the same type, though less complete. I have confined myself to the old oil lamp as it was known in Shetland in my own early days. In the paper by Mr Romilly Allen submitted to the present meeting, the evolution of lighting appliances has been exhaustively treated; and he has shown that lamps similar to those under consideration were known from the earliest times in Italy and other countries; and in recent times in Iceland, the Scilly Isles, in France, Algiers, and elsewhere. It ought to be observed, however, that the Continental form, like the ancient Roman, has only a single shell, whereas the special characteristic of the modern Scottish form is that it is double-shelled.

[At the meeting Sir Arthur Mitchell and Mr J. R. Findlay produced, by way of further illustration of the subject, a variety of specimens of oil lamps brought by them from France, Italy, and the Netherlands. The results of the comparison were interesting, exhibiting a tendency in Scotland and abroad to uniformity of pattern, but at the same time, the absence of certain distinctive features, especially the notched bar, for the regulated suspension of the upper shell, which marks the uniqueness, so far as known, of the Scottish *crusie*.]

<sup>1</sup> *Det Gamle Grönlands nye Perustration eller Naturel-Histoire*, Copenhagen, 1741.