

### III.

NOTICE OF THE EXCAVATION OF TWO CAIRNS CONTAINING CISTS  
AND URNS, AT WOODFIELD, ON THE FARM OF HIGHBANKS,  
PARISH OF KIRKCUDBRIGHT. BY GEORGE HAMILTON, F.S.A.  
SCOT.

Last spring while a shepherd at High Banks Farm, in the parish of Kirkcudbright, was erecting stakes to hang his sheep-nets on, his crowbar disappeared into the ground, and was found to have broken into an underground cist. Information was given to the museum officials in Kirkcudbright, who went out and found an irregularly five-sided cist, 3 feet in length and 2 feet in width. The long sides were parallel, formed of two slabs of a slaty rock, the base being one slab of the same, and the apex of two smaller slabs meeting in an angle pointing S.S.W. Each slab was about 18 inches wide and kept in its place by a packing of small stones behind each slab. The top or covering stone, 4 inches in thickness, which had completely covered the cist, lay alongside. The flooring

was composed of two slates, which rested on the soil. Inside of the cist, which was quite clean, there was only found a little dust, two pieces of an arm-bone, a small piece of a skull, and a piece of a left under-jaw with three teeth, two molar and one canine. Close to the west side of the cist was a tall urn (fig. 1), which, though whole when first seen, soon fell to pieces. Its contents, we were told, were but a little earth. It was of burnt clay,  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches in height by  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches in width, and had a coarse ornamentation consisting of several lines drawn at irregular intervals round the body of the vessel, and between them short zig-zag lines of a chevrony appearance. This ornamentation was all over the outside of the urn from top to bottom. There was no attempt at ornamentation inside nor on the bottom of the urn outside. The urn did not stand quite erect, but leant to one side.

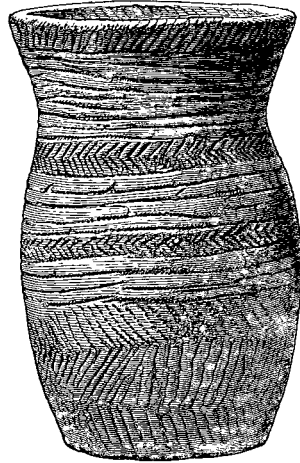


Fig. 1. Urn  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches in height.

In the same field in which this cist was found are two circular mounds, which, having obtained leave from Lady Isabella Hope of St. Mary's Isle, the proprietor of the land, the members of the Kirkeudbrightshire Museum Association opened by driving two trenches from the south and west sides to the centre. These two mounds were about the same height and circumference, being about 200 feet round, and were only some 6 feet from the ordinary surface of the field and covered with grass; the rest of the field had been in turnip, but these mounds had not been ploughed, being too stony. The mounds were about 150 yards from each other, and lay north and south of each other.

Operations were begun in the most southern one, which had at one time, about half a century ago, been occupied as a station by the trigonometrical survey while surveying the Stewartry of Kirkeudbright. In cutting the trenches, the natural surface of the field was kept as the

floor of the trench. At first the labourers pierced through a circle of small stones which has apparently fallen at different times from a cairn, of which it was evident the mound at one time had been the base. They then came upon a ring of large pieces of rock, chiefly quarried in the neighbourhood. Very few travelled boulders were found among them, but inside the ring, which had apparently formed the outside base of the cairn, were heaped up stones of all kinds, among which was found a flat stone with cup-markings and the peculiar dotted appearance caused by the peculiar sculpturing. On approaching the centre, the floor



Fig. 2. Urn 6 inches in height.

of the trench, which had all along been the original surface of the field, sank, and a rounded chamber, three feet in diameter, filled with very fine earth, was reached. This central pit was set round with largish stones laid lengthwise, and inside these were no stones at all. The fine earth was carefully lifted out by hand, and in a short time an urn (fig. 2) in pieces more highly ornamented than the one above described, was found, with a quantity of bones alongside it. The bones were in small pieces and considerable quantity, as if more than one body had been buried there. The urn is 6 inches in height and  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, ornamented outside with a running pattern and

encircling lines. The lip was bevelled towards the inside, and marked about an inch in depth with a highly ornamented border, almost like an inscription, but on the outside were two similar ornamental lines. The upper part of the vase curved slightly downward, and then bulged outwards to the centre, from whence it sloped to the bottom, the sloping part being ornamented with converging lines from the centre downwards. This urn was much thicker than the other one described above, and, though much broken, the pieces have been put successfully together.

As there seemed to be nothing else likely to be found in the centre of this cairn, the trenches were filled up, and the cairn to the north was treated in a similar way, cutting two trenches from the west and south to meet in the centre. The stones which formed the outer circle of this one were much larger than in the other. In a very short time the workmen came upon the pieces of a very plain urn,  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches in height and 4 inches in diameter, with no ornamentation except a few dots round the shoulder, as in the accompanying figure (fig. 3). There was a quantity of bones in small pieces lying around the urn. Near it also was a large flat stone, 3 feet by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet in size, which, on being carefully lifted, exhibited a layer of small pieces of bone resting on a second but smaller slab of stone, and on lifting this, another layer of pieces of bone, resting on another and still smaller stone, which was at the bottom of a sort of pit or well cut in the solid rock, and sinking 3 feet below the upper or natural surface of the ground. On reaching the centre of the cairn there was no urn or cist as in the other, so the trenches were filled up, and further examination left until another time.



Fig. 3. Urn  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches in height.

All the bones found in the two last-described cairns had been apparently cremated and placed as they were found in pieces of less than

an inch square, and the clay of which the urns were made was full of small stones—hard stones, such as bits of quartz. The urns were not well burnt, the centre of the walls of the urn being less burnt than the outside.

The field in which these remains was found is called Woodfield, at the farm of High Banks, in the parish of Kirkcudbright, and about half a mile from the archaic rock-carving on the same farm described in vol. xxiii. of the *Proceedings* of the Society, p. 125.