

## II.

NOTICE OF EXCAVATIONS IN A BURIAL MOUND OF THE VIKING TIME  
IN ORONSAY. By MALCOLM M'NEILL, F.S.A. Scot.

On the 15th April 1891 Sir John M'Neill's attention was drawn to a low mound near the beach on the east side of the island of Oronsay, and on examining the western extremity, where rabbit-burrows and consequent sand-drift had cut into the elevation, he found one or two of the characteristic boat-rivets which experience has shown to be associated with Viking interments both in this island and in the neighbouring island of Colonsay. Continuing the investigation, two narrow stones (4 feet and 4 feet 6 inches long) were discovered in such a position as to suggest that they had originally stood erect on the summit of the mound, whence they had fallen when their support failed on their western side; slabs of schist were observed in various positions in the exposed section, and, on probing the undisturbed portions, the entire mound was found to contain this material,—here and there in large masses.

On the 17th April two trenches were opened on what seemed to be the true ground-level; the first proved unproductive, and passed through

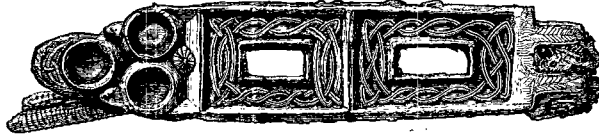


Fig. 1. Oblong Bronze Brooch.

clean sand mixed with shells, but as the second trench reached the centre, two skeletons were exposed, laid at full length with the feet pointing about S.S.E., and 4 feet below the summit; the skeleton which lay furthest to the east had, near the head, two beads,—one apparently of serpentine, the other of red amber; and, adhering to the left collar-bone, a bronze brooch (fig. 1), ornamented and gilt, with sockets (now empty), in which perhaps plates of amber may have been set.<sup>1</sup> There

<sup>1</sup> Another similar brooch was subsequently found with two of the amber settings remaining in their sockets.

was also found, near the head, a small ivory object in good preservation. Nothing else was found near the eastern skeleton except two portions of a bronze ring much corroded; the body was believed to be that of a female, owing to the small size of the bones and teeth (the latter indicating considerable age), and to the presence of the ornaments.

The western skeleton was then uncovered, and proved to be that of a large man; the skull was in a fragmentary state, owing to the burrowing of rabbits, but such of the teeth as have been recovered seem to indicate an aged person. No ornament whatever accompanied this skeleton, except a ring formed of limpet-shell, which might have been unnoticed but for the evident marks of grinding on the upper surface; there was, however, an iron knife-blade near the right thigh bone.

On the 18th April a third trench was opened and carried to the centre of the mound; this excavation passed through a considerable bed of charcoal containing boat-rivets and the pieces of bronze produced, but added nothing capable of identification except a stone-sinker with a well-drilled hole for suspension and some curious groovings on the sides and lower end.

The following conclusions are submitted for the consideration of the Society, viz. :—

1. The labour expended in constructing the mound, and the size of the large flagstones (transported for some distance) which it contained, indicate that the persons interred beneath were objects of special consideration.

2. On the other hand, the absence of property,—especially of arms,—is remarkable, and might justify the suggestion here hazarded that this may have been a case of drowning, perhaps in the attempt to land during an easterly gale, which here raises a dangerous surf. If this hypothesis be entertained, then ornaments attached to the person would alone be retained, and perhaps a spear, floated by its shaft, might be recovered.

3. For some reason or other a boat was burned close to the remains, and contained some fragments of bronze as well as a sinker,—probably for a sounding line.

The objects and bones discovered are exhibited to the members of the Society by Sir John M'Neill.

*Description of the Objects.*

1. Oblong Brooch of Bronze, 3 inches in length by  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch in breadth, having at one end a hinge and at the other a catch on the back for a pin of iron, which has decayed. The front of the brooch is divided into two oblong rectangular panels, each  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch in length by  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in width, pierced in the centre by a rectangular perforation  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch in length by  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch in width, having a sunk margin at the back apparently for the insertion of a flat plate of amber or glass. There are side holes for rivets, now gone, behind each of these perforations, the rivets being intended probably to keep the settings in place. The border of each panel is filled with a pattern of interlaced work, as shown in the engraving, fig. 1, p. 432. At the end of the brooch furthest from the hinge and opposite the catch for the pin are three sockets for circular settings, probably of glass or amber, but now empty. Under the point of the broken pin and around the catch is looped a portion of a circular cord about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch diameter, which has been preserved through the incrustation of the oxide of iron. Under the hinge end of the pin are also remains of the cloth in which the brooch has been fastened. This is the only example of a brooch of this special form which has been hitherto recorded.

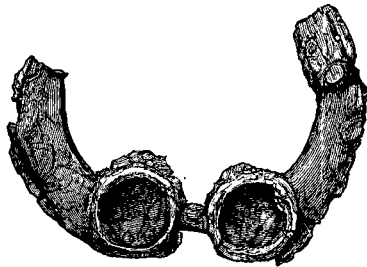


Fig. 2. Portion of Penannular Brooch.

2. Portion of a Bronze Penannular Brooch of Celtic form (fig. 2),  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inch in diameter, with two circular sockets for settings, each  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch in diameter at the penannular ends, which are joined by a small prolongation of the metal made in the mould between the sockets.

3. Portion of a small oval bronze ring  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch in diameter.

4. Bead of serpentine, a naturally formed and flattened ovoid pebble, 1 inch in greatest length,  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch in breadth, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in thickness, with a small hole for suspension perforated through the centre.

5. Bead of amber of dark red colour,  $1\frac{1}{8}$  inch in diameter, the perforation being fully  $\frac{1}{2}$  an inch in diameter.

6. Iron knife-blade, 7 inches in total length, of which the tang is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches, 1 inch wide at the butt-end of the blade, where the back is fully  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch in thickness, and tapering pretty evenly to the point.

7. Six portions of thin bronze, much corrugated, as if by the action of fire.

8. A quantity of iron rivets or clinker nails varying from  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch to about 1 inch in the length of the shank.

9. Stone-sinker, an irregularly wedge-shaped pebble of steatite, shaped apparently with an axe or other cutting implement. It measures  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches in greatest length by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in breadth and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch in thickness, tapering somewhat towards the top end, through which there is a perforation nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  an inch in diameter at the outside openings, narrowing to about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch in the middle.

10. Small finial of turned bone resembling the finials on the whale-bone ribs of an old umbrella.

11. Two flint chips. [Nos. 10 and 11 may have come into the sand-hill accidentally.]