

III.

NOTICE OF A CIST WITH AN URN, FOUND AT NORANSIDE, PARISH OF FERN, FORFARSHIRE. BY J. O. CLAZEY. AND NOTICES OF STONE CISTS FOUND AT DIFFERENT TIMES WITHIN THE PARISH. BY REV. J. FERGUSSON, FERN.

A stone cist was found in the policy, south of the mansion-house, Noranside, in May last, which measured 5 feet in length, 3 feet in height, and 2 feet in breadth, inside measurement. It was placed, as nearly as I could make out, east and west, in a gravel mound rising 15 to 16 feet above the general level of the policy, and covered with trees.

The cist consisted of large old red sandstone slabs, except the west end, which consisted of a hard white sandstone, which seemed as if it had been made quite smooth, either by a chisel or by rubbing, but it was without incision or mark of any kind. The top, front, and back of the cist consisted of one stone each, evidently taken from the banks of the river Noran, about half a mile distant. The top slab was quite $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 inches thick, and the others about 3 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, rough, and undressed in any way. They were in fairly good preservation. The front slab, that is, on the south side, and part of the top one, were broken when the gravel rushed down into the pit, which had been made by the removal of the gravel below. The depth of the bottom of the cist from the top of the mound was 10 to 11 feet. The roots of the trees and weeds had found their way into the cist—I presume, seeking nourishment.

There was no bottom slab to the cist, and the body had apparently been placed in a contracted or partially sitting posture on the gravel, so that when it began to decay, the head seemed to have fallen backwards to the west, and the body forward to the east, the vertebræ having been found at the east end of the cist, among the bones of the feet. Many of the bones of the skeleton were in good preservation, especially the thigh bones, but the skull and small bones crumbled to dust on removal. The lower jaw, containing several teeth, was in good state of preservation. The enamel of the teeth was quite white and sound, but soon began to show signs of decay after being exposed to the air. The

“wisdom teeth,” which were not fully developed, clearly indicate that the person buried did not exceed eighteen or nineteen years of age.

The urn (fig. 1), which was found in the north-east corner of the cist, was quite empty, but unfortunately got broken in being removed. It is now reconstructed, and is a fine example of the “drinking cup” type, or the tall, narrow, thin-lipped variety, with bulging sides and slightly everted brim, which is usually associated with unburnt bodies. It stands $8\frac{1}{4}$ inches high, and measures $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter at the mouth, and $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches diameter across the bottom. The ornamentation, which is of the usual character, arranged in parallel bands, is mostly composed of impressed or incised lines, those in the bands next the top and bottom being dotted or interrupted lines, such as would be produced in the soft clay by impressions from the teeth of a comb.



Fig. 1. Urn found in a Cist at Noranside, Fern ($8\frac{1}{4}$ inches high).

The following notices of Stone Cists found in the Parish are supplied by the Rev. J. Fergusson :—

The parish of Fern, the church of which is about five miles west from the celebrated old British fort of the White Catherthun, is, for its size, rather rich in prehistoric sepulchral remains. These have been discovered in at least four localities, viz., (1) at Balquharn, the Town of the Cairn; (2) at Drumcuthlaw, the Law of the Ridge of Battle; (3) at Noranside,—all on the upper arable slope of the parish; (4) at Mill of Marcus, or Markhouse, which, if not actually within, is only a few yards beyond the bounds of the parish.

These remains have been invariably found in mounds or ridges of morainic origin, composed not of sand, but of rough gravel, which is frequently used in the making and repairing of roads. So far as I know, they have consisted of the usual stone cists, and have been found lying in various directions, some almost due east and west, some south-east and north-west, some almost due north and south. As a rule, these cists have contained only skeletons, or skeletons and urns, or cinerary urns in which were deposited calcined bones. They have been found at various depths beneath the soil, from four to eight feet. In the history and description of the parish written by the Rev. David Harris for the Statistical Account of Scotland in 1836, it is stated that, in the vicinity of two stone circles, two stone coffins were found, and that near the Law of Drumcuthlaw, the materials of which had been removed, *many* urns, some of them entire, had been dug up.

I have been told by parishioners now living, that about fifty years ago three cists had been found in a mound about 100 yards west from the farmstead of Balquharn. In the same place last spring, other two cists were found, containing skeletons. The skulls, vertebræ, and larger bones were in a good state of preservation. The teeth were taken possession of by some of the farm-servants and others, and the skulls, after being knocked about for some days, were returned to the cists, the ends of which alone were uncovered, and are still there. The cists were about four feet below the surface of the soil.

So far as I can make out, two cists were discovered about thirty years ago at Drumcuthlaw, a little to the west of the road leading to Deuchar, and at the very edge of the road leading from Fern to Courtford Bridge, the site on which the Law once stood, and where Mr Harris said, in 1836, that many urns had been dug up. In one of these cists a beautiful urn was discovered. It was taken to Noranside, but I have been unable to trace its present whereabouts. Here at Drumcuthlaw, as well as at Balquharn, there had evidently been many burials.

In the beginning of May last year, in a gravel-pit at Noranside, the urn which is to be exhibited to the Society this evening was discovered by J. O. Clazey, Esq. of Noranside, who has written for the Society the particulars relating to its discovery, and to these I have nothing to add, except

that some teeth in the jaw-bone of the skeleton appear to have been partially decayed by toothache. This is a matter, however, on which the members, especially the medical members of the Society, are better able to give an opinion than I am. When first exposed, these teeth were beautifully clear and fresh-looking, as if belonging to a person between twenty and twenty-five years of age.

At Mill of Marcus two cists were discovered in 1888. They contained two urns, the larger of which was much broken, and the smaller quite entire. As these formed the subject of a communication to the Society by Mr A. Hutcheson, F.S.A. Scot., by whom interesting details were given of the mound and its contents (*Proceedings*, vol. xxiv. p. 470), I content myself with this mere allusion to them.
