

IV.

RUDE BONE PINS OF LARGE SIZE MADE FROM RED-DEER HORN, OBTAINED FROM THE CAIRNS OF COUNTY SLIGO, AND LOUGH CREW, COUNTY MEATH. BY COL. WOOD MARTIN AND MR E. C. ROTHERAM. WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND REMARKS BY W. FRAZER, F.R.C.S.I., HON. FEL. SOC. ANTIQ. OF SCOTLAND.

Through the kindness of E. Crofton Rotheram, Esq., Belview, Crossakiel, County Meath, I was enabled to examine and draw carefully some articles composed of bone, or rather of red-deer horn, specimens of which are sent for illustration. Mr Rotheram discovered them in May 1895 when excavating the central part of one of the series of cairns at the Lough Crew Hills on Slieve na Calliagh. The special cairn he explored is that designated R² on Mr Eugene Conwell's map, a portion of which was published together with the series of drawings of inscribed stones made by the late Mr G. V. Du Noyer, that I had the privilege of submitting to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and which are figured in their *Proceedings* for 1892-93.

Mr Rotheram has given a brief description of his researches in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. v. p. 311,

Documents relating to Scotland, ii. 197, No. 823). The provost was probably a member of the same family as the Alexander Barkar whose name is inscribed on the bell,—possibly his ancestor.

5th series. I believe, however, a fuller and more detailed record of those interesting bone objects, heretofore almost unknown, and unique, will be found useful.

What such implements constructed from portions of deer horn were intended for is a matter of conjecture: possibly they were employed as rude pins for fastening the hair or dress. The material they are made from does not appear possessed of sufficient hardness or strength to serve for efficient weapons of offence against man or beast. The idea also occurred to me, they might be utilised for constructing the meshes of fishing-nets; again, they somewhat resemble the implements required for carrying the thread across looms in making a web of cloth in primitive times. Of all such conjectural uses the idea of their being intended for rude bone pins seems most likely to afford the true explanation.

The special cairn where they were discovered was in a dilapidated state, almost level with the ground, and its contents bore traces of having been disturbed by some previous explorations. The large flags or stones that once formed the boundaries of its inner passages were removed. Its base, however, was still marked out by a circle of stones, flattened for a few yards of its circumference on the eastern side, where the entrance probably was situated. To recur to Mr Conwell's original description of it, he states that it is "sixteen yards to the south of cairn R, and fifty-five yards south-west from cairn T, is nine yards in diameter, and about two feet in height. Ten of the stones forming its circular boundary still remain, and outside the cairn, at a distance of from three to four yards, lie five large stones."

This description was written in the year 1873. Mr Rotheram found that, on removing the sod from its centre, the men employed came immediately upon a great quantity of bones, most of them being burned and broken into small fragments: in some parts of the excavation, which reached down to the yellow clay, the layer of bones mixed with charcoal was about 8 inches deep.

Together with these burned and broken bones and charcoal, fragments of clay urns, also broken, were obtained, the pieces varying from $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch to an inch in thickness, blackened by the action of fire on their

inner sides, and ornamented externally with rude patterns of lines or dots: some had the lines disposed in a herring-bone pattern. These fragments could be referred to at least portions of five distinct urns. Mr Rotheram believes this cairn was originally constructed with slabs, ornamented by scribed patterns, similar to those found in other cairns in the Lough Crew Hills, for he found one stone in the ruins having rude chevron and spiral markings. It was 2 feet 1 inch long by 1 foot 5 inches wide, and was $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. The exploration also yielded thirteen small round beads made from stone and bone, and one example composed of transparent greenish glass; also a few flint flakes, more or less injured from fire; six white-coloured, rolled pebbles brought from the sea-shore, several miles distant; a drilled fragment of rock-crystal, and part of an arrow-head of white flint.

The accompanying illustration (fig. 1) will show the appearance of the peculiar bone objects which I am desirous of submitting to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. When perfect, they must have been several inches long, terminating in sharp points, several examples of which are observable. The upper extremities consist of blunt, hemispherical heads, eleven of which were obtained, belonging to so many separate implements, not unlike button mushrooms in shape, being somewhat larger than the stalk-like stem proceeding from them, so that they resemble large nails, pins, or dowels. It will be observed that all these semicircular heads are grooved or hollowed out underneath where they are joined to their respective stems, and on some of them obvious traces of charring from the effects of fire are distinctly to be noticed. All these details will be perceived by inspecting the accompanying selected specimens presented to me by Mr Rotheram.

Some years since, my friend Colonel Wood Martin of Sligo submitted to me for examination and report portions belonging to three similar implements of bone. Of one the broken pieces were sufficient almost to reconstruct the complete size and shape of the original; the second consisted of detached pieces, forming altogether about half the length of the weapon or pin; and the third was represented by a small portion of its lower pointed extremity. They are now preserved in the collections of the Royal Irish Academy, and I have drawn the two larger and more

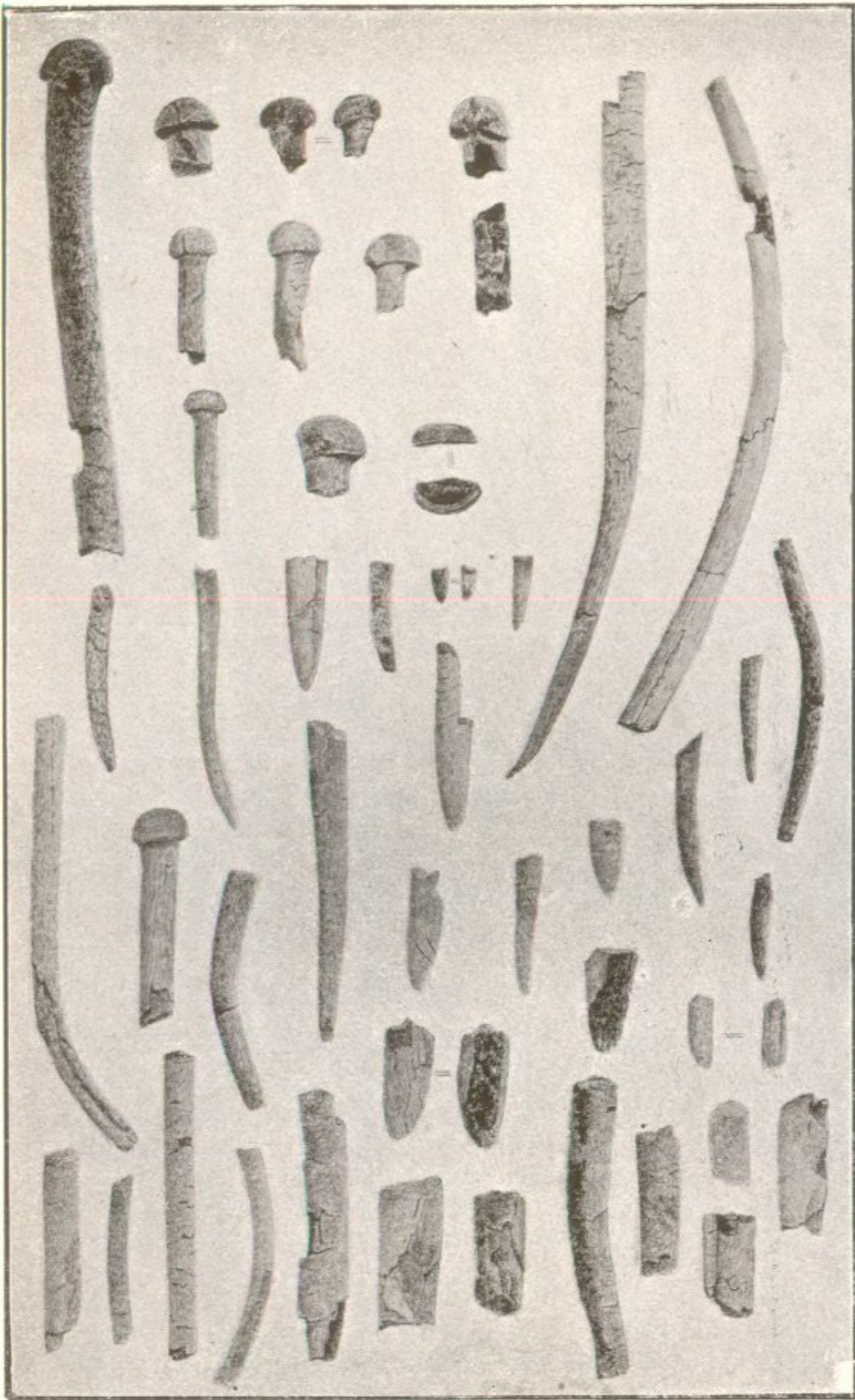


Fig. 1. Pins of Deer Horn, from a chambered cairn at Lough Crew, reduced to one-third the original size.

perfect specimens (fig. 2) for comparison with those found in the Lough Crew cairn. They were discovered by Colonel Wood Martin when exploring two of the cromlechs at Carrowmore, County Sligo, and are figured in his work on the *Rude Stone Monuments of Sligo*. I submitted sections of these objects to microscopic examination, and ascertained they consisted of some description of osseous substance, which, at the time, I surmised might be of Cetacean origin: the fragments felt solid, of exceptional density, and were much eroded, from the action of fire and long continued deposit under ground, resembling in external appearance certain objects made from the bones of whales, contained in the Dublin Science and Art Museum, brought back by one of the exploring expeditions to the Arctic regions. At the time it did not occur to me they could possibly consist of red-deer horn: however, on receiving the numerous specimens obtained at Slieve na Calliagh by Mr Rotherham,

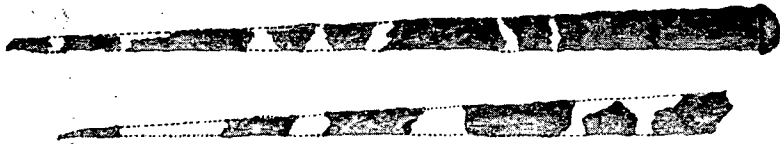


Fig. 2. Pins of Deer Horn, from a cromlech at Carrowmore, Sligo, reduced to one-fourth the original size.

which were in a more favourable condition for preparing sections, I was able to determine that all alike, whether from Sligo or the County Meath, should be referred to portions of the horns of the red-deer, an animal extinct in the present day in Ireland, except a few remaining in the woods of Killarney, though more than abundant three centuries ago in almost every part of the country. I likewise examined, for comparison, some of the tips of red-deer tines obtained in the older parts of Dublin in considerable quantities when excavating sewers, the residue of trade refuse, when making knife-handles, &c., and some fine heads of this animal got in our bogs, lakes, and river-beds, furnished with large branching horns, enabled me to ascertain there would have been no difficulty in procuring from them pieces of sufficient length and of suitable hardness

to fabricate similar bone pins to those now shown in the drawings and specimens. The red-deer in Ireland acquired a larger and more vigorous development in former times, and its antlers grew to greater size than subsequently, as the heads preserved in our museums prove. I have not thought it necessary to append measurements of these heads, several of which are mentioned in Sir William Wilde's paper on "The Ancient Animals of Ireland."

Microscopic specimens obtained from the discoveries made in Sligo and County Meath will accompany this communication, for the satisfaction of those desirous of inspecting them.

The points of interest appear to me to be the occurrence, as yet undescribed, of pins made of bone, of exceptional size (or whatever else these implements hereafter may prove to be). Of course, smaller-sized bone pins are very common, and we have bronze pins attached to fibulæ fully as large as the deer-horn pins now shown. Also the identity of such specimens as those discovered by Colonel Wood Martin in Sligo and by Mr Rotheram in Meath, localities widely separated in the East and West of Ireland, associated alike with fragments of broken urns, quantities of burned human bones, rude beads of stone and bone, and a few composed of coloured glass, with pieces of white quartz and rolled sea-pebbles, and some rare specimens of perforated rock-crystal, intended for wearing as rude ornaments,—in both instances obtained as the result of explorations inside cairns.