

## VI.

### NOTES ON SOME STONE IMPLEMENTS AND OTHER RELICS OF THE EARLY INHABITANTS OF ORKNEY. BY MALCOLM MACKENZIE CHARLESON, F.S.A. Scot.

In the summer of 1896, I spent some time in Orkney, making Stromness my headquarters, and succeeded in finding, in the vicinity of that town and in the neighbouring Island of Flotta, a few objects of some significance in connection with the history of the primitive inhabitants of those districts, and which I shall now describe.

A short distance to the west of Stromness, I came upon the remains of a small barrow, which had been already opened and ransacked. The remains of what I took to be the cist were lying about, and, in turning these over, I found a small slab of sandstone (fig. 1), which I considered sufficiently interesting to carry away. This slab is 8 inches in length, about 6 inches in breadth, and 2 inches thick. About 1 inch from the top of the slab there is a sculpture in the form of three

small cups, which seem to have been formed by the use of an instrument to which a rotary motion had been given. The two side cups are of the same size, each measuring fully  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch across the mouth and  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch in depth, while the corresponding measurements of the centre cup, which is the smallest of the three, are about  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{1}{3}$  of an inch respectively. Surrounding the three cups is an incised line of an

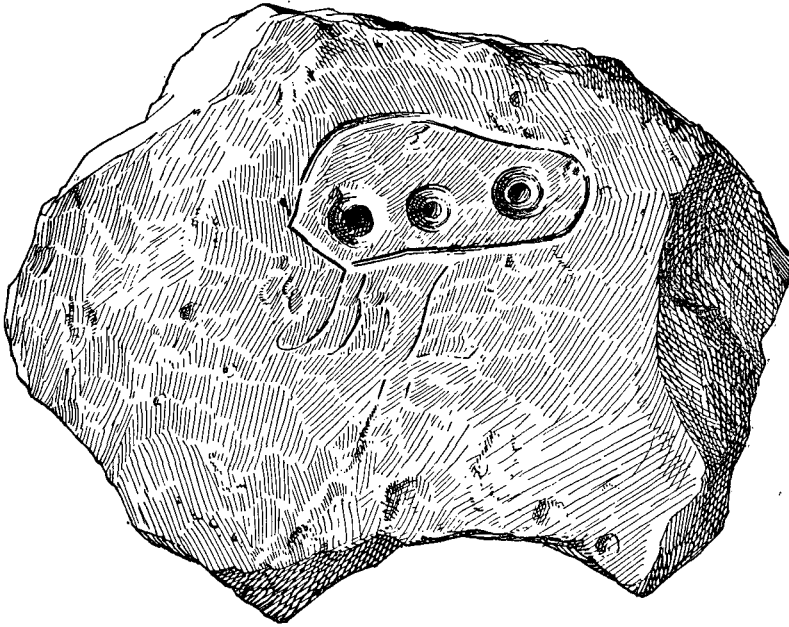


Fig. 1. Slab of Sandstone with three cup-marks. ( $\frac{1}{2}$ .)

irregularly oval shape, measuring fully 3 inches in length and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches at its broader end. Here the continuity of the oval is broken by a slight expansion of the top and bottom lines, to meet a straight line  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch in length, which connects the two, and lies at an angle of 45 to the plane of the enclosure.

There have, I may say, been occasionally found in barrows in

Scotland,<sup>1</sup> stones with sculptures upon them in the form of cup-marks, with one or more surrounding circles, the continuity of which is often broken by a duct leading out from the central cup, and which are closely connected with those seen on sculptured rocks, both in and out with that area; but, in view of the characteristics of the Orkney slab, we have more interesting evidence elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> in that, whereas the sculptured stones to which I have referred seem, for the most part, to have formed some part of the cist, usually the cover; cases have been met with in which stones similarly engraved have been found in various situations in barrows, with the incinerated deposits in which they are sometimes closely associated. We see, therefore, that the slab in question, by reason of the associations in which it was found and the markings that are engraved on one of its sides, appears to have some affinity to a class which is already well known, but it would be unsafe, without any corroborative evidence, to relegate it to this class, from the members of which it differs in three respects, viz. :—

1. The cups have been made by a rotating implement.
2. Instead of having a circle or circles round each cup, as is customary, all three cups are enclosed within one surrounding line, and
3. The continuity of this line is broken, not by a duct leading from one or more of the cups, but by a short, straight line, which serves to connect the top and bottom lines of the oval where they begin to expand at its broader end.

The initials "B.L.," I may add, that are rather more than scratched on the slab, are, there is reason to believe, those of a former tenant of the farm on which the barrow is situated.

One of the Brochs of the West Mainland is situate close to the shore at Yesnaby in the parish of Sandwick, and has been excavated, but, on the occasion of my visit, I found among the *débris* heaped up a few feet from its base, an implement of a more or less well known character. It takes the form of an oblong stone with rounded ends,

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Anderson, LL.D., *Scotland in Pagan Times*: "Bronze Age," pp. 87, 88, and 89. *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. vii. 270; *ibid.*, vol. xxix. p. 190, *et seq.* *Proc. Soc. Ant. London*, 2nd series, vol. vi. 257.

<sup>2</sup> Canon Greenwell, *British Barrows*, pp. 7, 341, 342, 342n, 402, and 433.

measuring 6 inches in length, and with a breadth across its abraded face of about 2 inches. One of the sides also shows traces of abrasion, and, as the implement at its smaller end fits well into the hand, it was probably used as a hammer. Outside the ruins of the Broch, and at a little distance from them, I found a sandstone pounder, showing traces of use, and measuring  $6\frac{3}{4}$  inches in length and 7 inches in circumference at the middle. It was taken, I have no doubt, from the Broch, and thereafter thrown away as of little value.

About a mile from the Broch, and at the edge of a cultivated field, I found an implement of unusual form. It is triangular in outline, but its edges are hollowed out at about three-quarters of its length from the pointed end until they reduce that part of the implement to a little more than 2 inches in breadth, and it is obvious that these indentations, together with the flattish groove between them on one side of the instrument, were intended for the adjustment of a ligature or handle. The face of the implement is bevelled from the side which has the transverse groove, and is not at right angles to the pointed end. It measures 8 inches in length, 5 inches across the face, and, a little from the end, 1 inch in thickness. In section its sides are flat.

Sometime prior to my visit there was turned up by the plough, in the above-named parish, a stone battle-axe (fig. 2), which was subsequently acquired by a gentleman in Stromness, who presented it to me. This axe, which comes under the category of those highly-finished and perforated weapons with blunt face and hammer-like end, measures  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches in length, about  $3\frac{3}{4}$  inches in greatest width, and fully 2 inches in greatest thickness; and its edges are hollowed out in the centre of their length, reducing that part of the implement intended for the shaft-hole to a thickness of  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches. This was done in the case of axes similar to the one now being described, and occasionally also in that of war-hammers, in order to reduce the length of the perforation, which, we cannot doubt, was executed with crude appliances, and, consequently, with considerable difficulty. In the Sandwick example, however, the perforation, begun as usual from both sides of the concavities in the edges, the intention being to meet in or near the centre, has proceeded only to the extent of rather less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  an inch in the case

of each side ; and this feature, together with that of the hollows being picked over their respective surfaces, shows that the axe is in an unfinished state. The sides, nevertheless, are quite smooth, and become ridged in their centre towards the butt-end, which is slightly truncated. In section, the weapon is more or less an oval, and its semicircular face

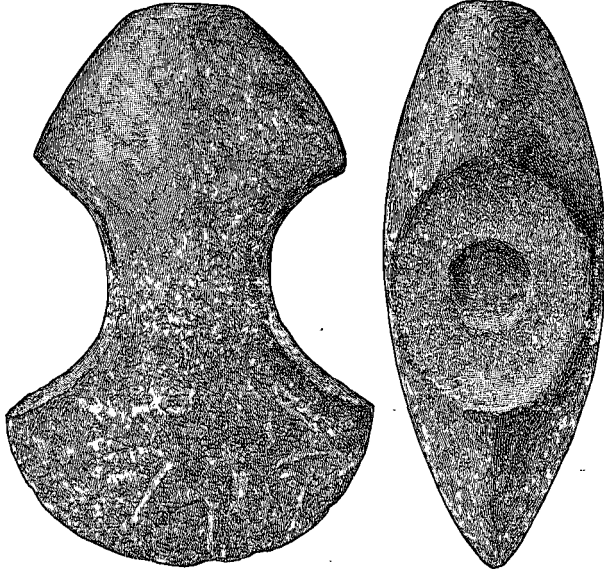


Fig. 2. Stone Axe-hammer found near Stromness. ( $\frac{1}{2}$ .)

shows traces of abrasion. This axe may be compared with that found some years ago in the bed of the estuary of the river of Wick.<sup>1</sup> In size and design the two are much alike, but the latter has a complete perforation, which, as in all examples of the kind, has been begun from both sides of the implement.

I got in Stromness also a whorl of steatite which is said to have been found in Shetland (fig. 3). It takes the form of a cone, and measures  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter by  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch thick, and it is rendered specially

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxix. p. 65.

interesting in having round the outside an inscription in Runes, the longer characters extending from the base to the flattened apex of the cone. Dr Anderson, who very kindly examined the inscription, has deciphered two words—

RIST RUNAR.

These evidently form the latter part of the inscription, and mean “wrote [these] Runes,” the preceding words, no doubt, standing for the name of the person who had the special qualification of being able to cut them, even though he has cut them badly.

From the neighbourhood of Stromness I have a rude sandstone implement which measures  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, about 7 inches across the face,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches at the butt-end, and about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick. The

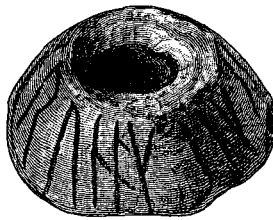


Fig. 3. Whorl of Steatite with Runes. (1.)

sides of the implement are more or less flat, and its edges are slightly indented in the centre of their length, as if for the adjustment of a ligature or handle.

In Flotta I found two stone implements. The first measures  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, 4 inches across the face, which is considerably broken on one side,  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches at the truncated butt-end and 2 inches thick. This implement is slightly indented about the middle of each edge, evidently for the adjustment of some kind of ligature or handle, and approaches an oval in section. The next is a small hammer-stone showing traces of abrasion on one side, and measuring about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length and from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in breadth. I procured, in addition, two finely-formed flint arrow-heads from the same locality, the larger

specimen being found in the moss and the smaller on the hillside. The former has serrated edges which end in sharply pointed barbs about half-way down the broad, central stem, the apertures between them and it being most carefully made; while the other specimen is more leaf-shaped in outline, with shorter barbs, one being longer than the other, and pointed stem.

I again visited Stromness in the early summer of last year, and succeeded in getting a few things that had from time to time been found at or near an ancient inhabited site in the Mainland. I have as yet been unable to obtain any accurate information regarding this site, and I have been equally unfortunate in my inquiries as to the circumstances attending the discovery of the objects I am about to enumerate, but there were found together (1) a whale's humerus; (2) a portion of the skull of an ox (*bos longifrons*); and (3) a thin, flat disc of slaty stone,  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches in diameter.

There were also picked up a piece of sandstone  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, which may have formed part of some kind of vessel; two splinters from long bones, one of which is pointed at one end and measures 4 inches in length; while the other, measuring fully  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, has a polished surface and clean cut ends; four teeth of the horse (*equus caballus*), three of the ox, and one of the pig (*sus scrofa domesticus*); the lower half of a quern of sandstone, 18 inches in diameter and 2 inches thick; and lastly, a large stone, oval in section, measuring  $17\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length and  $14\frac{3}{4}$  inches in circumference at the middle, and with much abraded ends. This stone may have been utilised for sharpening purposes, as a part of its surface has a smoothness which could have been produced by being put to such a use.

I had recently sent me a human skull from the same site. The cranium<sup>1</sup> is that of a man well advanced in years, for the sutures are almost entirely obliterated. The teeth, except the right first bicuspid, the crown of which is flat and well worn, are absent. The glabella-

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Mr James Simpson, F.R.P.S. Edin., Assistant Curator of the Anatomical Museum, New University, Edinburgh, for the description of the skull.

occipital length is 192 mm., and the basi-bregmatic height 139 mm., giving a vertical index of 72.4. The greatest parieto-squamous breadth is 149 mm., so that the cephalic index is 77.6, bringing the skull under the mesaticephalic group. The horizontal circumference is 550 mm., and the cubical capacity 1660 c.c. The supraciliary ridges are very prominent, and one thing is worthy of note, that in the pre-maxillary region of the left alveolar border there is a cup-shaped depression, the dimensions of which are 11 mm. antero-posteriorly and 15 mm. transversely, and from a surgical point of view the question arises as to the cause of this depression, which rather suggests the theory that it may have been the result of an abscess. In every respect the specimen resembles the typical Scandinavian form.

I recently received also a stone lamp and two stone whorls from the parish of Sandwick. The former (fig. 4) is an oblong piece of sandstone  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, 3 inches broad, and 1 inch thick. The top

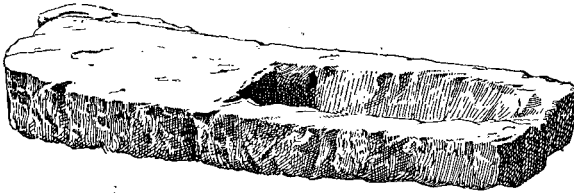


Fig. 4. Stone Lamp from Sandwick. ( $\frac{1}{3}$ .)

side is hollowed out from about the centre of its length to one end, where the cavity, which is 2 inches broad and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch in depth, and which was intended to hold the oil, becomes shallower and narrows to a point, on the same principle, indeed, as the shell of a crusie.

In the North, stone lamps were the immediate precursors of those of iron, but there is evidence, I think, to show that they remained in use after the introduction of the later forms, and that, too, in recent times. I believe they were occasionally used in Orkney about fifty years ago, at a time when the crusie must have been more common than the paraffin



lamp is at the present day. But if we are to judge by the specimen exhibited, which is perhaps more likely to be of modern than of ancient make, the stone lamps that remained in use when the crusie was in vogue were degenerated examples of earlier and better formed types; and, if this be so, we have here an illustration of those truths enunciated by Sir Arthur Mitchell, who, in speaking of another neo-archaic object, says:<sup>1</sup> "It is one of those changes so often seen in the decline of a supplanted art, which are in the direction of a lower and not a higher quality. It is a movement of deterioration indicative of coming death."

The whorls are discs of sandstone, and measure about  $2\frac{3}{4}$  and  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches in diameter, and each fully  $\frac{1}{2}$  an inch thick respectively, the larger being the more rude of the two.