

VI.

ANCIENT GRAVES RECENTLY DISCOVERED ON THE FARM OF WYNDFORD, IN UPHALL PARISH. BY REV. JAMES PRIMROSE, M.A., F.S.A. SCOT.

In March last, several graves were discovered in the farm of Wyndford, situated in the parish of Uphall, Linlithgowshire. The spot where they were found is about 130 yards N.E. of the farmhouse of Wyndford, and quite near the eastern bank of the Binny Burn, which shortly afterwards joins the Niddrie Burn. The name of the spot is Potknowe, given, it is said, because of a pot of gold once found concealed here. The graves were discovered by a contractor employed to level the surface of the field, the ground having fallen in at several places, through the mining operations of the Broxburn Oil Company.

When I paid a visit to Wyndford, unfortunately the graves had been removed. Particulars, however, have been obtained from several intelligent and trustworthy individuals who had seen them, and I have obtained a photograph (fig. 1) taken by Mr M'Laren, Broxburn, which shows their character and arrangement. All that was visible on my reaching the scene was a number of slabs that had been found in the graves, and which were lying at the foot of the hedge close by. The area occupied by the graves was 21 feet by 30 feet. There were two rows of graves, and traces of a third, each behind the other. There were over twenty graves altogether, and, generally speaking, only about a foot beneath the surface. The graves were all oriented except two, which were apart and lying north and south. There were no cists with relics. The oriented graves were merely lined with slabs of shale or freestone, set on edge—three or four slabs on either side, and one at the head and another at the foot. The slabs bore no tool marks, and were from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 inches thick. As a rule, the graves were full length, about 6 feet long—one of them particularly was measured, and found to be 6 feet long, 12 inches at the head, 17 inches at the shoulder,

and 10 inches at the foot. There were no slabs forming a bottom to the graves, but it would seem that slabs had been used as covers.



Fig. 1. Stone-lined Graves at Wyndford, parish of Uphall. (From a photograph by Mr M'Laren, Broxburn.)

In none of the graves were any bones discovered, but one contained a rich mould which was full of large worms, and it was observed that this

mould hardened after being exposed to the atmosphere for several days. The graves were about 3 feet apart, and the hillock or raised portion of the field on which they were found, slopes toward the north-east. Such are all the details I was able to gather.

It appears that similar interments to those just described are not uncommon in this neighbourhood and elsewhere. Oriented stone-lined graves to the number of thirty-five have been discovered at different times about a mile to the north-east of Wyndford, and within the area of Hopetoun Oil Works, where excavations were being made—so the manager informed me. An ancient cemetery also of fifty-one oriented graves was found in the year 1865, five miles to the east, and close to that venerable relic of the past, the Catstane, in the parish of Kirkliston (see *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, vol. vi. p. 186; and Dr Joseph Anderson's *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, 2nd series, pp. 247–250).

Going farther afield, oriented stone-lined graves were discovered at Hartlaw (*Proc. Soc. Antiq.*, vol. vi. pl. i., pp. 55–60), and near Lauder—in both cases associated with short cists containing cinerary remains (*Proc. Soc. Antiq.*, vol. ix. p. 223); while at Milton, parish of Salton, Haddingtonshire, oriented stone-lined graves were found containing skeletons.

In addition to these, I learn that at Kilwinning farm, Crail, several oriented stone-lined graves have been found outside the cornyard on the eastern slope of the hill; while in St Andrews and neighbourhood, such graves are frequently being exposed to view.

Stone-lined graves, it may be added, have also been found especially near the sea-shore, and not necessarily oriented. These are not claimed for antiquity, but are believed to be, in many cases, the burial-places of persons who have been drowned by shipwreck.

What now of the theory accounting for the facts?

1. In the first place, these Wyndford graves—being full length, not short cists in which the body is usually doubled up and associated with relics—show that they are probably not prehistoric Pagan burials.
2. The graves being oriented, lying in an east and west direction,

indicate that they belong to the period after Christianity was introduced. The practice of orienting the graves is said to have arisen from the early belief that when the Second Advent took place, the Saviour should appear in the East, in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. Hence the dead in Christian burial were placed with their heads to the west and their feet to the east, so that on the resurrection morning they might rise with their faces towards the east to welcome their Lord. This also explains why the graves in most of the old churchyards are oriented.

3. These graves at Wyndford not being associated with any church or chapel, enable us to assign to them an approximate date. Ecclesmachan churchyard is within half a mile to the south, and Uphall churchyard over half a mile to the north; this, then, makes it unlikely that any church existed in ancient times at Wyndford. There is no record of any such church, or any trace of a castle, or mansion suggesting a family burial-place. The inference in the circumstances is that this little cemetery on the Potknowe existed when Christianity prevailed in the land, but before parish churches with churchyards attached had been established, and that accordingly these graves belong to the period between the disuse of the Pagan burial customs and the substitution of the custom of Christian burial in cemeteries attached to the churches—so that, roughly estimating, they may take us back about a thousand years into the past.