

## II.

### NOTICE OF TWO CINERARY URNS AND A PENDANT OF SLATE FOUND AT SEGGIECROOK, IN THE PARISH OF KENNETHMONT, ABERDEEN- SHIRE. By J. GRAHAM CALLANDER, F.S.A. Scot.

On the 16th of October last, while excavating material for mending roads, in a gravel-pit on the farm of Seggiecrook, in the parish of Kennethmont, Aberdeenshire, some roadmen exposed the rim of an urn, without, however, happening to notice it. Fortunately they stopped their work before the urn had got displaced or damaged, leaving it with the rim protruding from the face of the gravel, or rather decayed rock. That evening it was discovered by Mr Peter Gordon, son of the farmer, and by a friend who was along with him. They took great care in removing the vessel from the sand and gravel in which it was imbedded, and succeeded in getting it out intact, though badly cracked. Four days after the discovery of the first urn, and after the face of the gravel-pit had been further excavated, the workmen, at a distance of about 8 feet south-west of where the first urn was found, came upon a second urn, which had collapsed and was found to be in fragments.

In some parts of the pit the "rotten" rock comes right up to the layer

of surface soil, which has a depth of about 6 to 8 inches. In other parts the rock has become disintegrated to the consistency of rough sand to a depth of 2 feet under the soil, and it was in the rough sand that both urns had been buried. The pocket for No. 1 had been excavated right through this sand and about 6 inches into the "rotten" rock, the depth from the surface of the soil to the bottom of the pocket where the urn rested being about 3 feet. Urn No. 2 was found at about the same depth. The material immediately surrounding both urns was noticed to be darker in colour than the mass of the gravel in the pit, so much so, that, when approaching the place where the second urn was deposited, and before any of the fragments of it were exposed, the workmen suspected its presence from the darkness of the sand.

Both urns are of the cinerary type. Urn No. 1, which was found standing upright on its base, was filled nearly to the brim with burnt human bones, fragments of the skull, leg-, and finger-bones being recognisable. Among the bones were found several pieces of flint, calcined and turned white by the action of fire. One of the pieces shows signs of having been flaked, and looks as if it had been a scraper. There was no appearance of the mouth of the urn having been furnished with a lid or cover. The mouth was covered simply with gravel, which rested on the burnt bones. The same day, after the urn had been removed, and before anyone had disturbed the place where it had been found, Mr Gordon returned to the place, and using his pocket-knife he carefully picked away the bottom and sides of the pocket in which the urn had sat, in the hope that some relic might be found. At a depth of about an inch under the place where the urn had rested, a small thin pendant of slate (fig. 1), ornamented and perforated, was discovered. Mr Gordon could not say whether this object had been originally placed in the bottom, or whether it had fallen down from the walls of the pocket, but there is no doubt that it had been deposited in the material immediately surrounding the urn. It is roughly oblong in shape, with rounded corners, and is perforated at each of the two corners adjoining one of the long sides. If this object were suspended for wear

its longer axis would assume a horizontal position. The object measures  $1\frac{1}{3}\frac{5}{2}$  inches on its greater length and  $1\frac{5}{16}$  inches along the top and bottom edges. It is  $\frac{2}{3}\frac{2}{2}$  inch in breadth and  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch in thickness. The holes are countersunk from both sides, are  $1\frac{1}{16}$  inches apart from centre to centre, and measure  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch at their narrowest diameter. The object is ornamented on the face, and the back is plain. The ornamentation is composed of two lines drawn roughly parallel to, and at distances of about  $\frac{1}{16}$  and  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch from, three of the sides; on the fourth there is a single line.

Urn No. 2 had probably (like its companion) contained burnt bones, small pieces of which were noticed amongst the fragments of pottery and the blackened earth where the urn had sat. Unfortunately the greater number of the fragments of the urn were carted away with the gravel.

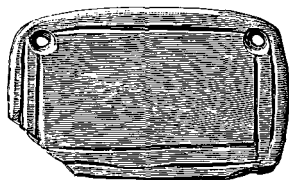


Fig. 1. Pendant of slate found under urn No. 1. (†.)

When I visited the site a few days after the discovery I was able to secure some small pieces. I also noticed many small bits of charred wood lying about, as well as some particles of burnt bones.

Urn No. 1 (fig. 2) belongs to the type of cinerary urn in which the heavy overhanging upper part is absent. It is of a light yellowish-brown colour, except a part of the inside which is coloured black. The vessel is made of a rough paste of sandy clay mixed with broken bits of stone. It is rather under the average size of cinerary urns, being  $9\frac{1}{4}$  inches in height, from  $6\frac{3}{4}$  to 7 inches in diameter across the mouth,  $7\frac{3}{4}$  inches at its greatest breadth, and  $4\frac{3}{8}$  inches across the base. The thickness of the walls is  $\frac{5}{16}$  inch and that of the bottom  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch. The rim is  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch broad. The urn is in the form of two truncated cones placed base to

base. The two portions join at a point at about two-thirds up the wall of the urn, where the junction is emphasised by the presence of a rounded and slightly raised moulding about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch in breadth and about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch in height. Below the moulding the urn tapers towards the base, flower-pot-like, for a distance of  $6\frac{5}{8}$  inches, and this part is quite devoid of ornament. Above the moulding the urn narrows, but at a less angle than the lower part, for a distance of 3 inches to the lip.



Fig. 2. Cinerary Urn (No. 1).

This portion is covered by a broad band of ornament  $2\frac{5}{8}$  inches in breadth, composed of crossed oblique lines contained within two lines encircling the urn, one  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch below the rim and the other the same distance above the moulding. The rim, which is angled downwards towards the inside of the urn, is decorated with a series of crossed lines, forming a continuous band of diamonds or lozenges about  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch long and  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch broad. All the lines of decoration on the urn have been

drawn with a pointed tool while the clay was soft, and it is apparent that the urn was held upright during this process, as all the lines other than the horizontal ones have been drawn downwards. The potter has been careful, when commencing to draw the lines, to start exactly on the upper horizontal line, with the strokes slanting both to the right and to the left, so that while the lines always meet on the upper line at an angle, yet the intersection of them at the foot is seldom on the lower line, and consequently they often do not end in an angle. From the intersections of the lines it is seen that those slanting to the right were drawn first. Seeing that the urn had been held upright when the lines of ornamentation were being drawn, it is quite evident, from the slant at which the strokes cut into the outer skin of the vessel, that the artist must have been right-handed. The crossed lines occur at irregular intervals, some being  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch and others  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch apart. They are drawn at such angles as sometimes to form three lozenges and sometimes two complete lozenges and a half of a lozenge between the upper and lower inclosing horizontal lines.

The recovered fragments of urn No. 2 are so few and so small that it is impossible to restore the vessel. However, several parts of the rim and walls allow of some of the dimensions and decorative features being ascertained. Apparently the urn had somewhat resembled urn No. 1 both in size and in the scheme of ornamentation. Its mouth, judging from the arc of the circle formed by the remaining fragments of the lip, was of nearly the same size as that of urn No. 1. The rim was of the same angled type, dipping towards the inside, and was of the same thickness— $\frac{1}{2}$  inch. The walls of the urn were the same thickness— $\frac{5}{16}$  inch; and it has been encircled by at least one raised and rounded moulding of the same dimensions as the moulding on urn No. 1. The ornamentation on the parts recovered has been impressed on the soft clay with a twisted cord of two strands, possibly formed from grass or hay. The urn has been encircled, at a distance of  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the rim, by two lines close to each other, and the band of ornament below this was composed of oblique crossed lines  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch apart, forming lozenges

about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch long and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch broad. The twisted cord has been impressed on the moulding encircling the urn, and also in the centre of the rim going round the mouth of the vessel, where it has been crossed with short lines slanting from left to right about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch apart.

Since this was written a third cinerary urn was found, two or three feet from urn No. 2. Unfortunately its fragments were removed with the gravel, but charcoal and burnt bones were noticed.

The site of these interments, which lies a little above the 700-foot contour-line, is on the eastern slope of the ridge of a hill which rises towards the north. The hill is under cultivation, and the site of the burials is about 200 or 300 yards from the top of the ridge. There were no signs above ground of any interments. As in each case the top of the urn was more than a foot under the deepest furrow that could be made by a plough, the burials would probably never have been revealed by agricultural operations. No doubt many such burials have taken place throughout the whole country, and will only be brought to light by unusually deep excavatory work. Nearly a mile to the south of the burials, on the west, north, and east sides of the Bin Hill, Leslie, there are marked, on the Ordnance Survey map, "Site of Tumuli," "Supposed Cromlech," and four times "Site of Cairn." All these remains would probably be swept away when the land was being trenched preparatory to cultivation.

The Society is indebted to C. E. N. Leith-Hay, Esq., of Rannes and Leith-Hall, for kindly allowing the relics to be exhibited.

It may be well to record here that the sculptured stone formerly at Newbigging, Leslie,<sup>1</sup> has been removed by Mr Leith-Hay to the policies adjoining Leith-Hall, for better protection and preservation.

Another sculptured stone, the one which was formerly at North Redhill,<sup>2</sup> has been removed by Lt.-Col. Foster Forbes of Rothiemay, to Rothiemay Castle, and re-erected close to the castle for safety.

<sup>1</sup> Described and figured in *Early Christian Monuments*, p. 177, fig. 192.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154, fig. 161.