

DESCRIPTION OF SEPULCHRAL URNS EXHIBITED BY COL. MALCOLM,
C.B., OF POLTALLOCH. BY JOSEPH ANDERSON, LL.D., ASSISTANT
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These sepulchral urns were all found on the estate of Poltalloch, Argyleshire, and are preserved at Poltalloch House.

1. A very fine bowl-shaped Urn (fig. 1), measuring $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches across the mouth, widening to about 9 inches in greatest diameter, and 5 inches in height, the contour of the sides globular, and sloping rapidly inwards to the narrow flat bottom, which is defined by a slight circular ring or footstand a little more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch in width and almost 2 inches in diameter over all, the interior of the ring or footstand being $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, and the projection of the ring not more than $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch. On the exterior circumference at the widest part of the bowl there have been four projecting loops or ears, about 6 inches apart from centre to centre, which stand out about $\frac{5}{8}$ of an inch, and are pierced horizontally by circular openings little more than $\frac{1}{8}$ inch in diameter. Only two of these now remain. The whole of the exterior surface, except the footstand, is elaborately ornamented. The rim is sharply bevelled off with a bevel to the interior of $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch in depth. The exterior part of the rim for about the depth of the interior bevel is ornamented with from three to four irregularly horizontal lines of impressions of a toothed comb-like implement. Below this is a band $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in width, defined above and below by a very slight moulding with an edging of slight triangular

impressions, making a wavy border to the upper and lower sides of the band, the space between being filled with a pattern of parallel lines of toothed impressions, varying from six to eight in a group, and arranged alternately in vertical and horizontal groups. In the spaces between the projecting ears immediately below this band, which form a kind of shallow concave moulding in the horizontal line between the openings in the projecting loops, the ornamentation is a series of double lines of impressions of the same toothed character, lying

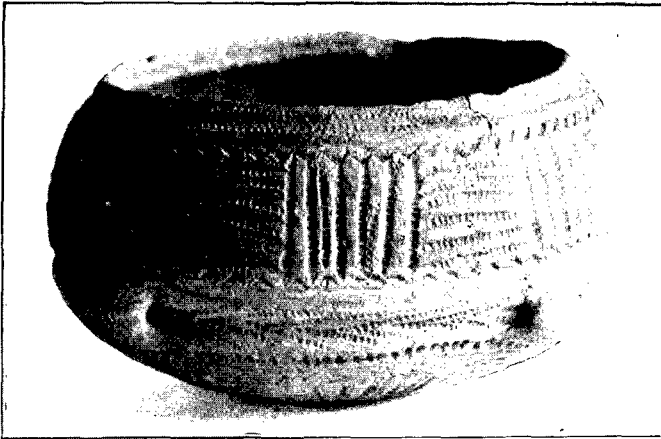


Fig. 1. Bowl-shaped Urn from a cairn at Kilmartin.

obliquely in the concavity of the moulding and meeting each other in its central line. The upper and lower surfaces of the projecting ears are similarly ornamented. Below the slight moulding from which the lower ends of the loops spring, the sloping surface of the under part of the vessel begins. It is surrounded immediately under the loops (as shown in fig. 2) by a line of oval concave impressions, somewhat less than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in length and set close together, and by two plain scored lines of about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch in width, and the same distance apart, parallel to the border line and to each other. Then comes a

band of about 2 inches in width exactly similar to the band on the upper part of the side of the vessel, but the groups of parallel lines are more irregular in number and character. A triple moulding of two scored lines, with a line of oval impressions between, and a double band of rudely triangular or curved impressions, some of which are suggestive of a thumb-nail, surround the footstand.

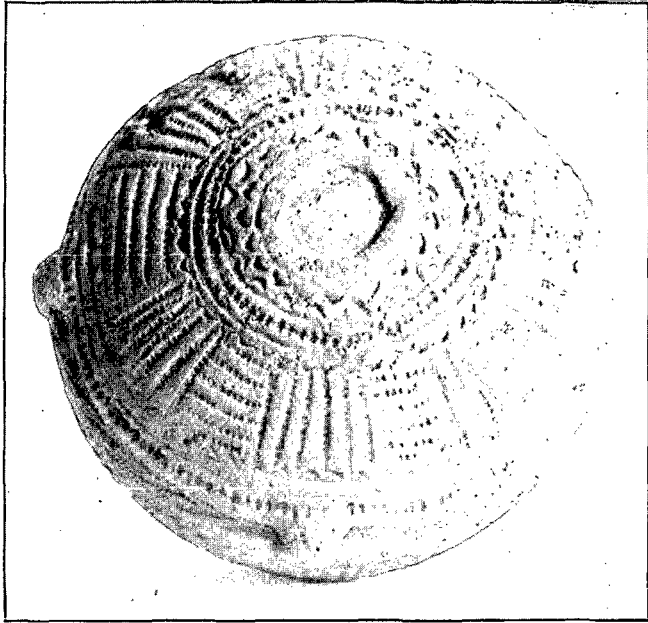


Fig. 2. Under part of bowl-shaped Urn from Kilmartin.

This urn is the one described in the *Proceedings* of the Society, vol. vi. p. 340, by Canon Greenwell, as having been found in a cist in the centre of a double circle of stones within a cairn 110 feet in diameter and $13\frac{1}{2}$ feet high on the glebe at Kilmartin. The cist was 3 feet 5 inches in length, 2 feet 4 inches wide, and 1 foot 9 inches deep. It was half filled with river gravel, and the urn was covered by the gravel.

A necklace of jet beads and plates, of which 28 were found, had been placed above the urn. Another cist, with an urn of food-vessel type, (figured in vol. vi. Plate XX. fig. 3) was found at the centre of the cairn.

2. Bowl-shaped Urn (fig. 3), measuring $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height, $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches across the mouth, widening to about $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and curving in again to a flat bottom of about 3 inches in diameter, with a very slight footstand of about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch in width. The rim is sharply bevelled towards the interior, and the bevel ornamented with oblique parallel lines of from three to five impressions of a toothed implement. On

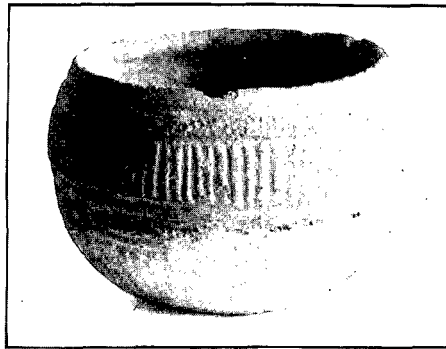


Fig. 3. Urn from central cist of a cairn at Duncraigaig.

the exterior the upper part of the rim for $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch is plain; under that there is a band $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in width, filled with oblique lines of toothed impressions, changing to horizontal lines at one side of the vessel. Below this a band of $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in width is filled with parallel impressions as of a piece of twig about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch in diameter, placed vertically and about the same distance apart. Round the middle of the vessel is a slightly concave moulding of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in width, with oblique lines of impressions in the hollow, and this is succeeded lower down (fig. 4) by a band of vertical impressions similar to that on the upper side, and a narrower band of oblique impressions of a toothed implement. All these bands are

separated from each other by slightly scored mouldings or borders less than $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch in depth and slightly more in width.

On the flat bottom, which is 3 inches in diameter, within a circular footstand of very slight projection, there are three groups of three to five nearly parallel lines of very slightly impressed ornament, produced by a toothed implement, and arranged in arcs of circles, the convexities of the arcs turned towards the centre of the base of the vessel.

This urn agrees in description and dimensions with the urn referred

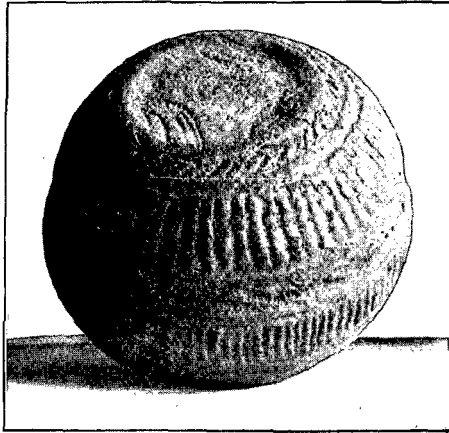


Fig. 4. Under part of Urn from central cist of a cairn at Duncraigaig.

to by Canon Greenwell as having been found in the central cist of a cairn about 100 feet in diameter at Duncraigaig. The cist was 4 feet 6 inches long, 2 feet 6 inches wide, and 2 feet 6 inches deep. On the cover-stone lay an unburnt body. In the cist were calcined bones and charcoal, the urn, and a few flint chips. Beneath this deposit was a pavement of flagstones, and under that, amongst clay, an unburnt body, in the usual contracted position. The only point left doubtful is that Canon Greenwell says the urn was "covered with ornament except on the bottom," but as the ornament on the bottom is scarcely visible

unless in a favourable light, it may probably have been overlooked at the time the urn was found.

3. Bowl-shaped Urn, measuring $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height, $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter at the mouth, widening to $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches at the bulge, and curving downward to a flat base $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter. The upper surface of the rim is flat and about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch in width. The bevel of the lip to the inside is $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch in depth, flat and unornamented. The whole of the exterior surface is covered with ornament, and the bottom is also most elaborately ornamented. Midway in the height of the side

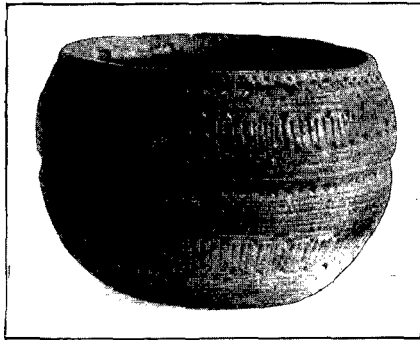


Fig. 5. Bowl-shaped Urn from second cist in a cairn at Duncraig.

of the vessel there is a hollow moulding $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch in width and about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch in depth in the centre, along which is a line of triangular impressions, with their points turned to the left. The upper and lower parts of the exterior, divided from each other by this moulding, are treated similarly, producing a symmetrical arrangement of the decoration. Immediately under the rim is a band $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch in depth, consisting of three rows of triangular impressions, the upper row having the points turned to the left, the second row with the points turned down, and the third row with the points turned upwards. The composite band between this upper band and the hollow moulding in the middle of the height of the vessel is $1\frac{3}{8}$ inches in width, bordered on the upper

side by three parallel horizontal lines of ornament produced by a comb-like implement, and on the lower side are five rows of the same. Between these borders is a band $\frac{5}{8}$ inch in width, consisting of short parallel lines of the same comb-like impressions set vertically, the upper and lower ends each impinging on a row of triangular impressions placed about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch apart, the points of the upper row pointing downwards and those of the lower row pointing upwards. The lower half of the exterior below the hollow moulding in the middle of the height is so

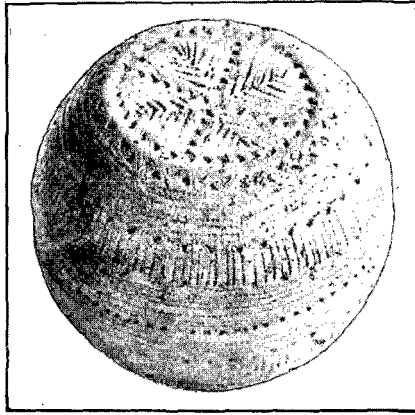


Fig. 6. Under part of Urn from second cist in a cairn at Duneraigaig.

similar that the description need not be repeated. The narrow band immediately above the flat bottom consists of two rows of triangular impressions, with a double row of comb-made lines zigzagging between them.

The bottom (fig. 6) is surrounded by a very slight circular footstand. Within this is a circle of triangular impressions, the points facing to the left, quartered by two diameters of similar impressions crossing each other at right angles in the centre; the points of the triangular impressions in the one diameter all face to the right, those in the two radii of the other diameter face in opposite ways to the centre. The quadrants

between each two of the four radii are filled in by lines of comb impressions placed parallel to the radii, and about equal distances from each other, meeting at an angle in the middle line of the quadrant.

The whole decoration of this urn is quite exceptional, both as regards the good taste of the general design and the boldness and dexterity with which it has been carried out.

This urn agrees in dimensions and character with the urn described by Canon Greenwell in the *Proceedings*, vol. vi. p. 347, as having been

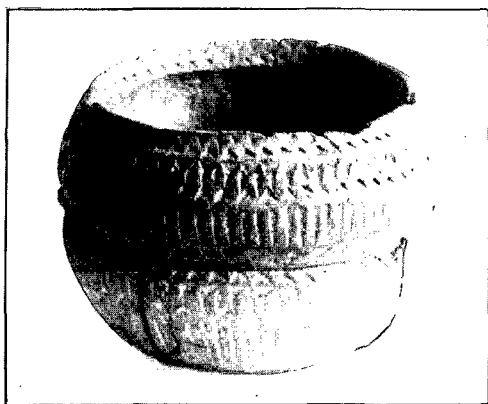


Fig. 7. Urn of bowl-shape from Barsleinsnach.

found in a second cist about 22 feet east from the cist in the centre of the cairn at Duncraig. The cist was 1 foot 6 inches long, 1 foot 3 inches wide and the same in depth, and was partly filled with gravel. Upon the gravel was the urn, and amongst the gravel were burnt bones and a few flint chips.

4. Urn of bowl-shape (fig. 7), $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, 5 inches wide at the mouth, widening to 6 inches, and curving inwards to a flat bottom $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. Like the last urn it has a concave moulding round the middle of its height $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in width, and the scheme of the ornament above and below this is much the same in character. The rim of

the vessel is ornamented both on the exterior and on the interior bevel by a double row of opposed triangular impressions. Between this exterior ornament of the rim and the concave moulding in the middle of the height of the side of the vessel is a band of ornament about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in width, the upper half of which is composed of an upper and lower border of opposed triangular impressions, and between them a band of vertical impressions of about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch in width and $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch or less in length, and about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch apart. Underneath this is a band of the same vertical impressions fully $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch in length and the same distance apart. The concave moulding below this has a row of opposed triangular impressions along its upper and lower margins, the points facing each other, with a narrow plain band between them. Between the concave moulding and the bottom, the ornament is a repetition of that on the band above the moulding, except that the vertical impressions are longer, and a single row of triangular impressions surrounds the margin of the base.

This urn has the name of its locality marked upon it as Barsleisnach, but no other particulars.

5. Urn of the usual "food-vessel" form (fig. 8), $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height and 6 inches in diameter at the mouth, widening to about $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter at the shoulder, from which it tapers to a flat bottom $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter. The rim is sharp, with a bevel to the inside of about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in depth, ornamented with a band of zigzags produced by short impressions of a comb-like instrument, and placed parallel to each other and vertically across the depth of the bevel. The exterior surface of the rim is ornamented by a band of herring-bone impressed ornament. Between the rim and the shoulder, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches below, the exterior of the vessel is formed in two shallow concave mouldings, with a slightly projecting moulding between them. The upper of these has the deeper curve, and is ornamented by a band of four parallel lines of impressions of a toothed implement running round horizontally, succeeded below by a band of three rows of small irregular impressions, which have one side rounded as if made by a small finger-

nail, the lower margin of the band being formed by horizontal lines of comb impressions like the upper. These composite bands of ornament are repeated over the lower part of the surface all the way to the bottom. The bottom itself is quite plain.

The exact locality of this urn has not been ascertained.

6. A portion of an Urn of "food-vessel" type, which has been at least 5 inches in height, is much more rudely ornamented with



Fig. 8. Urn of "food-vessel" shape, Poltalloch.

parallel horizontal and oblique rows of comb impressions, and has a rather thick lip.

The exact locality of this urn has not been ascertained.

7. A fragment of the upper part of a large hard-baked Urn of reddish clay, nearly an inch in thickness at a distance of $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches below the lip, has on the outer part of the rim two horizontal rows of rather irregular impressions, the upper as if made by the end of a broken twig and the lower as if scooped by a finger-nail. Underneath

is a band of large deep vertical flutings, each $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length and quite $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in width, bounded by a boldly raised rib above and below. This fragment is that described by Rev. R. J. Mapleton in the *Proceedings*, vol. vi. p. 355, as having been found amongst the rubbish and soil thrown out of the third compartment of a megalithic cist or chamber in a cairn at Kilchoan.



Fig. 9. Urn of beaker type, Poltalloch.

8. Urn of "drinking-cup" or "beaker" type (fig. 9), $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches in height and $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter at the mouth, the upper part straight but slightly everted, the bulge below the straight brim slightly narrower than the mouth, and the taper below the bulge almost straight to a flat bottom of $2\frac{7}{8}$ inches diameter. It is made of a rather earthy clay, greyish-white in colour, and has a lip fully $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in thickness. The ornamentation, as usual, is arranged in zones or bands, alternating with plain bands, of which there are two, one being immediately under the

straight everted upper part and the other immediately under the greatest width of the bulge. The upper band of ornament which covers the straight everted brim consists of three parallel lines of comb-like impressions, placed about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch apart, a band of short straight impressions placed vertically, and bordered above and below by a line of similar short impressions placed two and two at an obtuse angle instead of

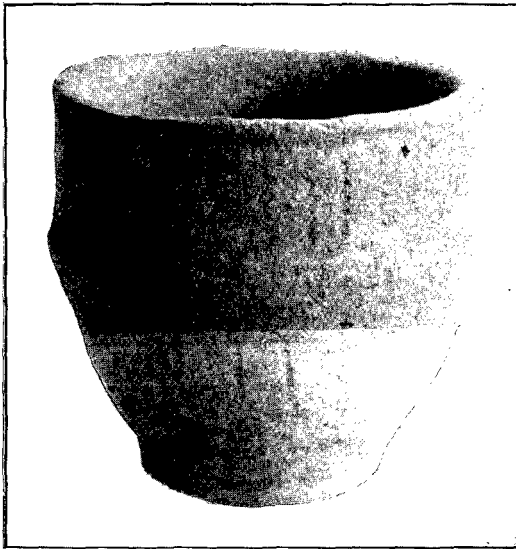


Fig. 10. Urn of "food-vessel" type from a cairn at Rudle.

horizontally. Underneath is a band of five parallel horizontal lines of comb impressions. A plain band of about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in width is bordered above and below with a bold line of short irregular impressions placed somewhat obliquely. Under this is a band of four parallel lines of comb impressions, then a plain band with upper and lower border of bold impressions of short lines placed obliquely, while the lower part of the vessel has a bold band of zigzags, bordered above and below by a band consisting of triple parallel lines of comb impressions, the ornament

finishing so as to leave a plain band of about $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch in width above the bottom ; the bottom also is plain.

The precise locality of this urn has not been ascertained.

9. A small fragment of the lip of a similar Urn of the "drinking-cup" or "beaker" type is prettily ornamented with a band of vertical straight lines of comb ornament, bordered by a line of zigzags placed horizontally, above which are two horizontal lines of the same ornament. The locality of this urn has not been ascertained.

10. Urn of "food-vessel" type (fig. 10), 6 inches in height and $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches diameter at the mouth, having a slight projecting moulding round the widest part at $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches under the brim, and tapering thence to a flat bottom $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. Immediately under the rim, and above and below the slightly projecting moulding, are horizontal lines of very faintly impressed markings of comb-like ornament, and a similar line about an inch above the base. Between the upper two and the lower two of these lines are vertical lines of a twisted thong ornament, very faintly impressed, and placed irregularly from an inch to half an inch apart. This urn agrees in dimensions and ornament with the urn described by Canon Greenwell in the *Proceedings*, vol. vi. p. 350, as having been found in a cist in a partially destroyed cairn at Rudle.

This collection of sepulchral vessels from Paltalloch exhibits an unusual number of remarkable features. The ornamentation of the bottoms, and the bowl-shaped contour of several of the vessels, along with the tasteful character of the general decoration, invest the collection with quite an exceptional importance. It is to be hoped that its claims to an interest much more widely scientific than merely local will meet with appropriate recognition.