

## VII.

NOTICE OF THE EXPLORATION OF THE REMAINS OF A CAIRN OF THE BRONZE AGE AT GOURLAW, MIDLOTHIAN. BY FRED. R. COLES, ASSISTANT-KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

In December 1904, during the ploughing of a field which had lain fallow for twenty years on the farm of Gourlaw, Lasswade, the plough-share was arrested by the edge of a large stone. On this being reported to Mr R. M. Brockley, the tenant, means were taken to remove the stone, a ponderous mass of sandstone nearly 3 feet high, 2 feet thick, 4 in breadth, and standing upright. A cavity was prepared to the south of it into which it was canted over. During this operation, a great quantity of blocks and rounded boulders, mostly of sandstone, much to Mr Brockley's surprise, was disclosed. They lay closely packed over a space rudely curvilinear, extending to the S.E. and S.W. of the great stone for about 10 feet and downwards to a depth of over 4 feet, irregularly. The great stone being rolled over into the loosened soil, was there left until the 13th of January 1905, when Mr Brockley, now recovered from an illness, went to the spot, where, during the removal of other stones, there was disclosed, at a depth of over 5 feet, the base of a large Cinerary Urn inverted over a heap of incinerated bones. This discovery being reported to Dr Anderson, with the offer of the urn to the Museum, the Hon. John Abercromby visited Gourlaw on the 13th of February, and through his examination of the site, I was instructed to go out and draw up a full report of the circumstances, and if necessary to continue the excavation. This occupied me during the 17th and 18th of February, when, by the intelligent interest shown in the investigation by Mr Brockley himself and his son, and the care exercised by the workmen, sufficient notes and measurements were made for the compilation of the following account.

Gourlaw is the name attached to a conspicuous and extensive hillock of sand rising to the height of 629 feet above sea-level, and about

40 feet above the surrounding pastures and arable land.<sup>1</sup> The farm is the property of Col. R. G. Wardlaw Ramsay of Tillicoultry, and is situated about one mile and a half S.S.W. of Hawthornden Station and half a mile nearly east of Rossllynlee Station.

The southern slope of Gourlaw is the longest and the least steep, and it is here, on the ground known as the Stackyardfield, that the remnant of the cairn under notice was discovered.<sup>2</sup> The soil is a rich brown sandy loam mingled with very minute pebbles, but throughout the field there is a marked absence of stones or boulders of any considerable size. When, therefore, a continuous layer of large stones was disclosed, both extensive and deep, to the south of the great sandstone block scraped by the ploughshare, Mr Brockley's conjecture as to their being artificial was speedily corroborated by the discovery of the large urn.

On my first examining the site, scores of these large stones and boulders were lying down the slope of the field, removed from the space close to the great stone (A in the ground-plan, fig. 1). The inner edges of many more still protruded in a roughly curved line to the east and west. Assuming that the Cinerary Urn (at B on the plan) was the central burial, I measured off a radius of 6 feet (*i.e.*, a length equal to the original distance between the great stone A and this urn), and on the S.W. arc we disclosed the second urn, C,—a very small one of distinctly cinerary type. It was covered by a good-sized, flat, somewhat oval slab of whinstone, and lay, like the large urn, inverted. On raising it, it proved to be full of soil and pebbles, and the base was stained for about 1 inch in depth to an almost black hue, with a soft and rather unctuous substance.

Working round on the south arc at the same radial distance from A, we

<sup>1</sup> In the flat ground on the north of Gourlaw, there was found in 1871 a finely ornamented Stone Whorl, which was then presented by Mr Brockley to the National Collection, and is figured on p. 80 of the Museum Catalogue.

<sup>2</sup> The exact spot where the Cinerary Urn was deposited can at any time be found by measuring westwards from the garden wall along the stackyard dyke for 57 feet 8 inches, and then vertically from that point down the field for a distance of 26 feet 5 inches.

next found a pretty large mass of charred remains (D on the plan) and material, which, being of the character of pottery but extremely soft, I recognised as probably all that was left of a third urn, with its contents of

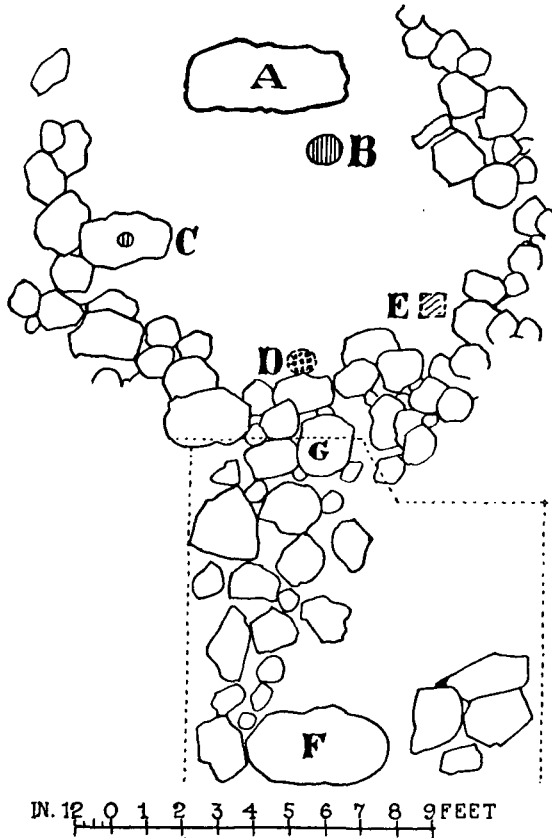


Fig. 1. Ground plan of remains of Cairn at Gourlaw.

burnt bones. All this material was passed through a sieve of  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch mesh and examined, but yielded no results. We encountered no covering slab in this instance, hence perhaps the decay of the sepulchral vessel.

On the S.E. arc we then found a simple deposit of charcoal and burnt bones, the latter extremely scanty. This, with much of its surrounding sand, was all passed through the sieve, but without disclosing any relics.

At a date subsequent to my visit to Gourlaw, Mr Brockley ordered the removal of a great many more of the stones still embedded in the soil to the south of D; and at a point about 2 feet 6 inches distant, below a large flat slab of white very soft sandstone (G in the plan), another incinerated deposit was discovered, of much the same simple nature as that already noticed at E.

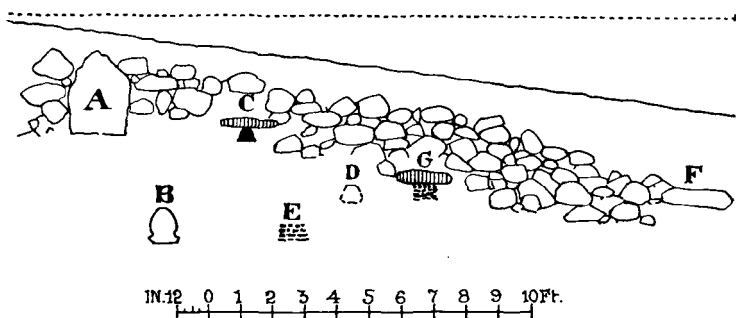


Fig. 2. Section of remains of Cairn at Gourlaw.

In the sectional view, I have attempted to show these several deposits in their true relation to each other and to the surface of the field (fig. 2),—the large Cinerary Urn (B) at a depth of 6 feet below the surface of the field, the small Cinerary Urn at a depth of 3 feet 6 inches, the deposit at D (placed within an urn too much decayed to be handled) at a depth of 5 feet 3 inches, and the plain un-urned deposit at E at a depth of 6 feet 6 inches.

It is improbable that the great block of sandstone first noticed (A on the plan) had really any intended association with any of these four interments; but it may possibly have been one of many similar blocks laid on the circumference of the sepulchral area in the usual

manner, the others on this, the upper edge of the cairn, having been removed for the purpose of building the dike at the stackyard. If so, the spoliation of the cairn must have occurred over a century ago, as there is no tradition of a cairn in the family of Mr Brockley.



Fig. 3. Large Cinerary Urn found at Gourlaw, Midlothian.

DESCRIPTION OF THE URNS AND RELICS FOUND IN ASSOCIATION.

The large Cinerary Urn (fig. 3), apart from its size, which is also noteworthy, presents at once two features not common amongst sepulchral vessels of this period. It possesses a remarkably deep hollow "neck" just below the overhanging brim. In the Museum there is only one

other cinerary urn having this well-defined "neck"—the urn that was found on the Braid Hills golf course in 1901. But the curvature and modelling of the "neck" in the Gourlaw example surpasses the other in both depth and exactness of line. The walls of the body of the Gourlaw urn, moreover, are beautifully curved downwards towards the base, this feature being carried out with a precision not observable in any other of the cinerary urns.

The second remarkable feature is, that the inner surface of the Gourlaw urn bears decoration extending downwards from the lip for a space  $2\frac{3}{8}$  inches in depth. The photograph, from which the illustration (fig. 3) is reproduced, was taken before the broken pieces of the

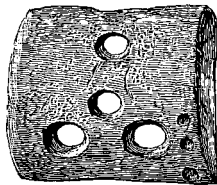


Fig. 4. Perforated bone object found among the burnt bones in the large urn at Gourlaw.

base were cemented to the urn; and it therefore does not show its height in full.

The dimensions are: vertical height,  $14\frac{3}{8}$  inches; diameter of mouth,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  inches; diameter of base,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches; diameter of neck,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  inches, and diameter of the rim,  $13\frac{3}{8}$ . The pottery is of fine and well-mixed clay.

The decoration of the urn consists on the inner surface of a band  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches deep, bounded by horizontal lines containing a large chevron pattern. On the outside, a similar band of chevrons quadrupled, also  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches deep; and in the "neck" a band  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep, consisting of a triple row of chevrons larger and bolder in style than the others.

Amongst the incinerated bones covered by this large urn, there was found a small bone object (fig. 4). It measures 1 inch by  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch, and is

$\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick. It is slightly convex; and is pierced by four cleanly-drilled holes, with three small circular depressions slightly sunk, along the margin. There is no object in bone in the Museum at all resembling this curious little piece.

The small urn (fig. 5 and C on the plan and section) is specially interesting because of the great resemblance it bears to the typical specimens of cinerary urns proper. In this respect it is unique among our urns. It measures in height  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches, across the mouth  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches,



Fig. 5. Smaller Cinerary Urn found at Gourlaw, Midlothian.

across the base  $2\frac{2}{3}$ , and across the widest part of its overhanging brim  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches. It is made of a fine clay, much darker in hue than that of the large urn, and smoothed almost to a glossy surface. Like the larger vessel, this urn has decorative lines within as well as without; but the scheme of ornamentation is quite different. The lip, which slopes very slightly inwards, has two horizontal rows of impressions, as if made with a twisted cord; next, on the inner wall of the vessel, there are numerous vertical lines, made in the same manner, and placed about half an inch apart. The exterior surface of the brim of the urn is divided into five large triangular spaces, each of which is marked

across horizontally by five, six, or seven lines, all of this being done as if with a twisted cord. About  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches below the brim runs a horizontal line crossed by numerous vertical lines  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch apart, done in the same manner as the rest. The spacing of the triangles on the brim not being sufficiently accurate, one space has been filled up with a vertical line.

During the removal of the many large stones lying to the south of the deposit (D on the plan), and among the charred matter discovered below the large stone (F), Mr R. Brockley found a fragment of a slender whetstone or small polishing stone. It is only  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch long and  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch in thickness, and is triangular in section.

The dotted lines in the lower part of the ground-plan indicate the area that was dug through by Mr Brockley, jun., on a date subsequent to my last visit to Gourlaw; but this examination proved barren of results.