

VIII.

NOTICE OF SOME ANCIENT BURIALS IN ORKNEY.

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Grave mounds are very numerous in the Orkney islands; in fact they may be regarded as a prominent feature of the landscape, but I do not know that an exhaustive examination of them would prove as interesting as one might imagine. I have come to this conclusion from the fact that having, a few years ago, opened a number of barrows in the parish of Birsay, they were found to contain only deposits of incinerated bones, with cairns over them, or in small cists. Not one of those examined revealed an unburnt burial. The only feature of more than passing interest was the presence in one of these cairns of a rude stone implement, examples of which have been frequently found in the islands, generally on the surface of the ground. This implement runs from 10 or more inches in length, 3 to 4 inches in breadth, and 1 to 2 inches in thickness, the ends being rounded. Hitherto, the period to which this implement may belong has been matter for conjecture, but the discovery to which I have alluded would seem to show that it was either contemporaneous with, or anterior to, the time when burial by cremation was in vogue; in other words, the implement found in the Birsay mound may have been used by the people who erected the barrow, or it was picked up as an ordinary stone and thrown in along with the débris over the deposit of burnt bones. Here and there, however, throughout the group, burial mounds of considerable size are met with, and these are generally found to be more productive than the smaller variety.

About a year ago I investigated a burial in Harray which consisted of a large cist, the axis of which ran S.E. and N.W., and which measured 33 inches in length, 22 inches in width, and $28\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth. When opened, some time before I had an opportunity of examining it, the cist was found to contain a human skeleton in

good preservation, but careless handling and subsequent exposure reduced the remains to the very dilapidated state in which I found them. One-half of the skull, however, was intact, and this was submitted to Professor Alexander Macalister, Cambridge, who gave it as his opinion that the cranium was that of a male of advanced age, but its fragmentary state precluded his giving measurements. The index of the skull vault, however, was considered to be about 80, warranting the conclusion that the cranium was referable to the second immigration.

In this case the only industrial relic accompanying the remains was a whorl, probably of bone, which lay at the feet of the skeleton.

This is the first time, so far as I know, that a whorl has been found in Orkney in association with a burial; indeed, at the present moment, I should say, the first instance in Scotland in which such a discovery has been made. It has, however, been found with a burial at Weaverthorpe¹ in England, where a barrow, examined by Canon Greenwell, was found to contain a portion of one made out of clay.

An equally interesting discovery in the matter of grave goods was investigated by me in the course of last summer. A large mound in a neighbouring island was opened by a farmer who wished to settle the question whether or not the mound, which he knew to be artificial, contained anything valuable. Unfortunately, I did not hear of the excavation while it was being carried out, but I afterwards obtained a general description of the burial, and a view of the grave goods deposited with it, which are of a highly interesting character. The burial was after cremation, and the deposit of burnt bones was found about the centre of the mound, along with two fine bowl-shaped brooches of Viking type (fig. 1), an amber whorl, a bone (?) armband, and a portion of a bronze pin. When found, the brooches were 9 inches apart, and the other objects were in close proximity to them. In size and ornamentation the brooches are practically identical, and there can be no doubt that they belonged to one individual, whose body was consumed

¹ *British Barrows*, pp. 116, 196.

on the funeral pyre. Each brooch, which is convex externally and concave internally, measures 4 inches in length, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in breadth, and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in height in the centre. The body of the brooch is double, consisting of an outer and finely decorated shell of brass open-work placed over an inner shell of brass, which is plain, and no doubt originally highly polished on the upper surface, so that the polished surface would appear through the open-work above it. The upper shell is divided into four diamond-shaped spaces, bordered by unpierced

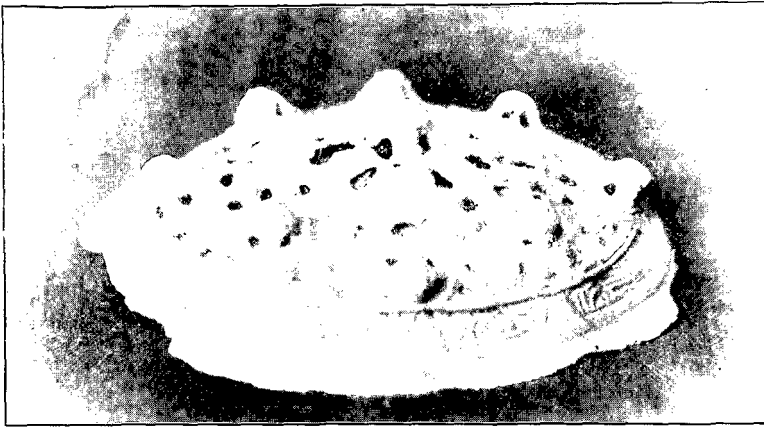


Fig. 1. Bronze Bowl-shaped Brooch of Viking type.

bands, which have a slight lineal ornamentation. The angles of each diamond-shaped space have knobs, pierced in four places. Each space is pierced throughout, the ornamentation consisting of combinations of straight lines. The border of the inner shell, again, is spaced and ornamented with alternating crosses and combinations of straight lines. Only one of the brooches had the pin, which is of iron, intact, and seems to have been fastened in much the same way as the modern brooch, a brass catch projecting from the concavity of the shell to receive the point of the pin. Adhering to the pin, one could distinctly see a fragment of cloth, which on examination I took to be

linen, the texture being extremely fine. On the whole, the brooches when in use must have gone far to enhance the appearance of their owner, who, there can be no doubt, was a woman. In the words of Dr Anderson,¹ "As the sword is the most characteristic object among the grave goods of the man, the brooch is also the most characteristic object among the grave goods of the woman. The brooch which is constantly found in these interments in Norway is a most peculiar ornament. It is always of brass, massive, oval and bowl-shaped in form, and is distinguished from all other brooches that are known, not only of this, but of every other area and every other time, by the fact that it is an article of personal adornment which (though as capable of being used singly as any other form of fibula might be) is almost never found singly, but constantly occurs in pairs, the one being usually an almost exact duplicate of the other. This singular type of brooch is the special ornament of the female dress which prevailed in Norway during the last three centuries of their heathen period. It differs entirely from the types that preceded it and succeeded it; and it differs as completely from the types of the Later Iron Age in all other European countries." The amber whorl (fig. 2) is very pretty, and measures 1 inch in diameter, being fully $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick. The bone (?) armlet (fig. 3) which accompanied the burial is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in inner diameter and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick. It is well made, and when polished would make a very presentable ornament.

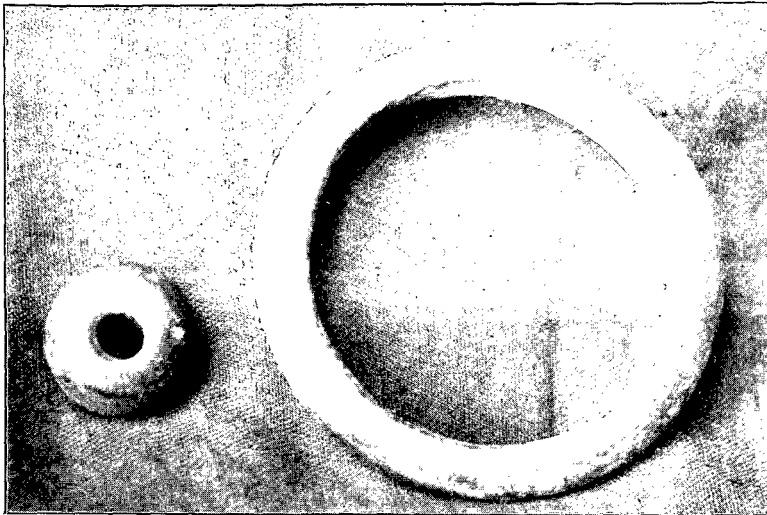
Ancient inhabited sites have not unfrequently given us human crania, but they have not necessarily any connection with the sites which may have been, and in many cases were, used as places of interment, the mounds covering the ruins being as serviceable for sepulture as any which could have been raised for the purpose.

In this connection I examined in 1898 an ancient inhabited site in the West Mainland,² and near which a human cranium in good preservation was found. There was nothing, however, in the circum-

¹ *Scotland in Pagan Times*,—The Iron Age, p. 34.

² *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxxii. p. 322.

stances attending the discovery of the skull which would necessarily associate it with the building brought to light, but that it was of considerable antiquity I have no doubt. The cranium was subsequently submitted to Mr James Simpson, New University, Edinburgh, who gave it as his opinion that the specimen resembled the typical Scandinavian form.



Figs. 2 and 3. Whorl of Amber and Armlet of Bone (?).

Sometime after the discovery of the skull another cranium (fig. 4) in capital preservation was found at the same site, and submitted to me for examination. I forwarded the skull to Professor Macalister, who favoured me with the following report thereon:—"A strongly-built male skull, long-headed (index $\frac{\text{breadth} \times 100}{\text{length}}$ 70·19). In this it agrees with the older Orcadian skulls described by Garson,¹ and differs from the later

¹ *Journ. Anthropol. Inst.*, 1883, p. 54.

ones, which are broader. The circumference is 550, a measure increased by the thickness of the bone and prominence of the muscular crests, but fairly agreeing with Garson's measures. In capacity it is decidedly small, being 1390 c.cm., while the smallest of Garson's males is 1440. It is thus a mesocephalic skull. In height it exceeds its breadth, so the height index $\left(\frac{h. \times 100}{\text{length}}\right)$ is 73.7. In this respect it differs from Garson's



Fig. 4. Skull from West Mainland, Orkney.

skulls, but agrees with some long-barrow skulls from other parts of the kingdom. The brows are unusually projecting, which makes the forehead look lower than it really is. This is due to an enormous frontal sinus (the air-space over the nose); the orbits are rugged-bordered, low-browed, the transverse length exceeding the width $\left(\frac{w. \times 100}{l.} = 80.49\right)$. In this it also agrees with Garson's dolichocephalic older skulls. The

nose is shorter and wider than usual, its index $\left(\frac{w. \times 100}{h.}\right)$ being 57.14.

All the other skulls from Orkney or Shetland hitherto described are a little higher and a little narrower, and so have a lower nasal index. I have, however, got some North Hebridean skulls which resemble it in this respect. The face is uncommonly wide and flat. This somewhat Mongoloid appearance of some of the long skulls from Orkney was noted by Garson.¹ Here, as in his specimens, the two zygomatic arches stand out from the sides of the skull, so that when the head is held out at arm's-length a clear space appears between these arches and the side of the skull. This great interzygomatic width, together with the shortness of the face, gives a low superior facial index, but this is always a variable character. The palatine arch is wide and the teeth moderately large, but when compared with the size of the skull they are not at all disproportional. The length of the five hinder teeth, when compared with the length of the basinasal line (Flower's dental index), gives an index of 37.5, which is well within the microdental class. The palatine index $\left(\frac{\text{palatine width} \times 100}{\text{palatine length}}\right)$ is 115, comparable with that in Garson's specimens. Altogether it is a typical specimen of a strong male skull of the older type.

In the summer of 1902 my attention was called to the discovery of an ancient inhabited site in the parish of Stenness. After investigation I found that the building brought to light, being in a very dilapidated state, did not present any features of special interest, but I ascertained that immediately above it, about two feet from the surface of the ground, an unburnt burial had been brought to light. Unfortunately, however, the cranium and long bones had not been so carefully handled as their fragile state demanded, and consequently the skull and other parts of the skeleton received injuries which render a full description impossible. I forwarded the cranium and long bones, however, to Professor Macalister, who subsequently sent me the following report:—

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

"The specimen is a very broken thin calvaria, probably of a female, with an index of about 76. Skulls of this index are generally supposed to belong to the second race. The fragments of the long bones are too imperfect to help us accurately to deduce the stature. As near as can be estimated, the femur, which is most complete, probably belonged to a person of 5 feet 2 inches. It looks as if it belonged to the skull submitted, but it is so much weather-worn that it is impossible to be definite." Along with the skeleton was found a large bronze pin, which must originally have measured at least $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, but which is now only $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches, the point having been broken off by the finder, who, I understand, wished to ascertain the metal of which the ornament was constructed, hoping, no doubt, that it would be of more valuable material than bronze. The ring through the top of the pin also was broken when I got the pin, but it was whole when found. The head of the pin is flat, and cut into facets. For about three-quarters of its length the pin is round, but towards the point it has been flattened out.