

IV.

NOTES ON A SLAB WITH INCISED CRESCENTIC DESIGN, STONE MOULD FOR CASTING BRONZE SPEAR-HEADS, A CUP-MARKED STONE, HOLY-WATER STOUP, AND OTHER ANTIQUITIES IN STRATHNAVER, SUTHERLANDSHIRE. BY REV. ANGUS MACKAY, M.A., WESTERDALE, HALKIRK.

An incised slab (fig. 1) was discovered on Angus Gunn's farm at the foot of Langdale during the spring of 1905, when they were trenching the land. It stood upright on a dry ridge, and was sunk so deeply in

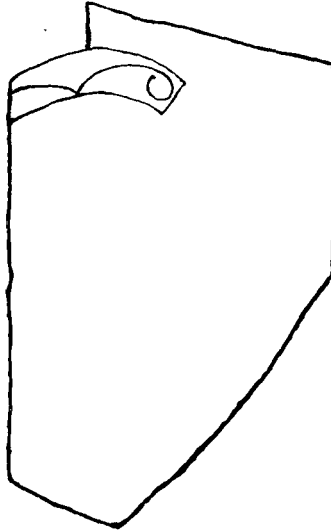


Fig. 1. Incised Slab found at Langdale. ($\frac{1}{16}$.)

the ground that its upper end was about 16 inches beneath the surface. At its base lay three rough boulders, each weighing about 56 pounds, but nothing else was found, notwithstanding a careful search.

The extreme length of the slab is 44 inches, its extreme breadth is 27 inches, and it is about 3 inches in thickness. One face is smooth,

but not hewn, the other is slightly rougher. Although it was removed from the ground uninjured, and remains as it was found, it is evidently a fragment of its former self. What remains of the device—part of a concentric figure resembling the crescent symbol of the sculptured stones—is so clearly and artistically cut into the stone that the designer must have used a sharp iron tool.

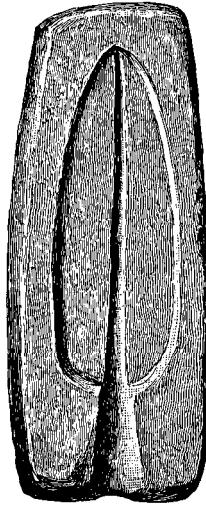


Fig. 2. Half of a Stone Mould for Spear-heads found at Langdale. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

Judging from the appearance of the edges, it looks as if the stone had been fractured vertically and horizontally, that is to say, the top part and a portion of the left side is gone. How the stone came to be planted upright in the ground so deeply after being thus fractured is a question.

The half of a stone mould for casting leaf-shaped bronze spear-heads (fig. 2) was found by Adam Mackay in gravel soil on his own land, between the foot of Langdale and the top of Skail, during the early part of 1905. The stone is soft and close-grained, and gives a sharp metallic

clink when struck smartly. It measures 5 inches in length by 2 inches in breadth. The hollow for casting is about $\frac{1}{16}$ inch below the plain surface of the mould, and a narrow channel, about $\frac{1}{16}$ inch below this second surface, runs longitudinally along the centre of the mould, getting deeper and broader as it proceeds, until at the outside edge it becomes $\frac{9}{16}$ inch in diameter. Unfortunately, when they were cleaning the stone with a sharp knife after discovery, under the impression that the longitudinal central line ought to run the whole length of the stone, a scar was made by the knife along this line from the upper or point end of the mould to the outside edge of the stone. The margin or outline of the leaf-shaped hollow was also slightly deepened in the same way; otherwise the mould is practically uninjured. The higher surface of the stone is even and well polished, so that it would lie close and flush with its missing half. Round the funnel and along the back of the stone there are unmistakable evidences of contact with molten metal. Indeed, from little pockets on the back of the stone red metallic dust can easily be picked out, but I have refrained from doing so. The stone-mould is now presented to the National Museum.

A cup-marked stone (fig. 3) was found by me in the burial-place of Grumbeg, Strathnaver, in September 1905, standing upright at the head of a grave, and showing about 6 inches above the ground. It is evidently a fragment of a larger slab: its extreme length is 20 inches, and it is about 15 inches at its broadest part. The three upper circles are $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep, very symmetrically hollowed out, but the fourth and lower circle is shallow and indistinct.

As the stones covering the other graves are for the most part what is called rough mountain slabs, it seems to me that this cup-marked fragment was found in its present condition elsewhere, and placed here to conveniently show a lair.

Of the pre-Reformation church at Skail, which was then the principal church of the parish of Farr, not a vestige now remains. A few years after Strathnaver was cleared of its inhabitants, say about 1825, the stones of the old church were carted away to form an embankment

against the river opposite Riloisk. The stone font was removed along with the other material, but half way between the church and the embankment it was thrown out of the cart, as the driver did not wish to see it put to such an ignominious use. It still lies on the grassy bank on which it was placed that day.

The hollow for holding the water is oblong, and gently slopes from either end to the centre, where it becomes about 3 inches deep. The

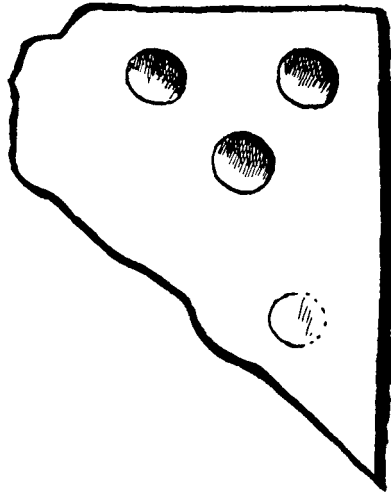


Fig. 3. Cup-marked Stone at Grumbeg. ($\frac{1}{3}$.)

longest diameter of the stone is slightly over 2 feet, and it should weigh about 2 cwts. The stone is of native grey striped granite.

I would like to take this opportunity of telling the Society of Antiquaries that there is a rich and practically unexplored field for antiquarian research in the northern half of Sutherlandshire, and that one of the richest nooks in that quarter lies along the valley of the Naver. When that valley was cleared of its inhabitants during the second decade of last century, the people up to that time had such a

dread of touching any old structure, lest they should incur the ill-will of the spirits of the ancient dead, that brochs, barrows, cairns, tumuli, etc. were left untouched. About four years ago the lower part of that valley was replanted with tenants under the auspices of the Congested Districts Board; and now that the ground is being improved in a way in which it never was before, interesting "finds" may be expected, and should be looked for. Nay, more, the old dread of ghosts is not now entertained by the new tenants, so that unless they are warned and directed, interesting structures may be ruthlessly torn down for stones to build drains, dykes, etc.

There is a plateau called Baile Margait (Margaret's town) on the west bank of the Naver, and about half a mile from its mouth, to which I would like to draw particular attention. Above it, on the rock of Ca an Duin, stands the ruins of a broch, and below it the river forms into a deep tidal pool called Pol na Marraich Mor (Lagoon of the Great Seamen). The plateau was inhabited by tenants up to about 1780, when the encroaching sand drove them away. In the spring of 1900, after a very stormy winter which blew away a good deal of the sand, I was enabled to trace out two brochs, one at the south and the other at the north end; one doubtful broch; two objects which I took to be large round houses, or more probably burial cairns; seven circular rings, which I took to be cattle-folds, all on the same model, and about 60 feet in diameter; nine smaller heaps, which looked like round houses; and nine oblong structures, some smaller and some larger, evidently the ruins of the 18th century buildings.

At the top of Carnachy (Cairn field), five miles up the Naver valley, there is a very rich collection of remains. At the north end stands the broch Dun Kealmie, at the south end the broch Dun Carnachy, and on the opposite side of the river the picturesque broch Dun Vidden. Three years ago Dun Kealmie was badly damaged in search of stones for building a bridge and a dwelling-house.

Tradition has it that a battle was fought on Carnachy, and that the mounds, etc. cover the dead. The tumuli, which lie toward the river,

are like the ordinary small burial cairns found in groups all over the country ; but the long mounds, serpentine and semicircular, lying nearer the foot of the hill, cannot, in my opinion, be accounted for in that way. At any rate I have never met with similar objects on other reputed places of ancient burial. All the objects lie on an absolutely level plain at the south-west end of the haugh, under the shadow of Dun Kealmie, and separated from it by the Burn of Carnachy.
