

III.

NOTICE OF THE RECENT DISCOVERY OF A CIST, WITH FRAGMENTS OF URNS AND A JET NECKLACE, AT LAW PARK, NEAR ST ANDREWS; WITH A NOTE OF THE DISCOVERY, NEAR THE SAME PLACE, OF A CREMATION CEMETERY OF THE BRONZE AGE, WITH MANY CINERARY URNS, IN 1859. BY D. HAY FLEMING, LL.D., F.S.A. Scot.

About a dozen years ago, a house named Balnacarron was built on the south side of the public road which leads from St Andrews to Mount Melville. The house and grounds occupy a field which, early in the forties of last century, was laid out as a nursery by the late Charles Howie, author of *The Moss Flora of Fife and Kinross*, and joint-author of *The Trees and Shrubs of Fife and Kinross*. The nursery was bounded on the north by the aforesaid road, on the south by the mill-lade, on the west by a house and grounds called Law Park, and on the east by a field in which many cinerary urns were found in 1859, and in which an interesting discovery has recently been made.

On the last day of February, I received a letter from my friend, Dr John H. Wilson, of St Andrews, stating that Colonel Boothby of Balnacarron was extending his policies into the field on the east, and that in the course of the operations, a day or two before, a remarkable grave had been found. He enclosed a rough sketch with some measurements and notes. On the 2nd of March I was in St Andrews, and took the opportunity of examining the grave with Dr Wilson.

The ground was being levelled for a tennis-court. About $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet beneath the lowered surface, or fully 4 beneath the previous surface, a large flat stone had been struck. This is a sea-stone, pitted with small holes on its lower surface, and measures 4 feet by $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and is $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. On the top of it, and towards its eastern part, there were two heavy whinstone boulders, of a type common in the neighbourhood, blue and very smooth. The larger one, which is somewhat round in form, measures 21 inches in diameter. The other, which

is more irregular in outline, measures 17 inches across. Besides these two whinstone boulders, there were five rough blocks of sandstone lying above the large flat sea-stone. The largest of the five is 18 inches long. There was a layer of earth between these blocks and the large flat sea-stone.

When this large flat stone was lifted up on edge, a cist, of which it had formed the lid or cover, was disclosed. It lay east and west, or nearly so, and was full of gravelly soil. Before either Dr Wilson or I saw it, all this soil had been shovelled out, and the cist was empty.

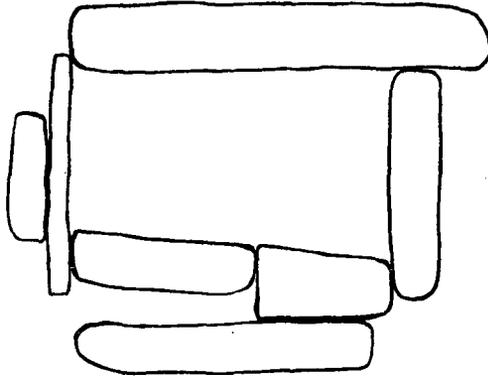


Fig. 1. Plan of the Cist. ($\frac{1}{4}$.)

No bones nor fragments of bone, we were assured, had been observed in the operations—nothing except a little bit of reddish pottery, and sand and gravel.

The cist proper (fig. 1) was formed of five stones, one at either end, one on the north side, and two on the south side. These varied much in size and thickness. The one on the north side was much the biggest. It measures 4 feet $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, averaging 1 foot in depth, and 7 inches in thickness. The one at the west end measures 2 feet 5 inches in length, 1 foot 10 inches in depth, and only $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness. The one at the east end measures about 2 feet 4 inches

in length, about 12 inches in depth at either end, and about 17 inches at the centre, and 6 inches in thickness. Of the two stones forming the south side, the more westerly measures 2 feet in length, 14 inches in depth, and about $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness. The other measures 17 inches in length, $14\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth, and 9 inches thick at the one end, and $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the other, the thinner end being at the east. Internally, the cist is 3 feet 4 inches in length on the north side, 1 inch more on the south side, 20 inches in breadth at the west end, and 2 feet at the east end. At three of the corners—the south-east, the south-west, and north-west—there was a levelling piece of stone. These were bedded with marly clay. The piece at the south-west corner was triangular in shape, measuring $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches on its longest side, and 8 inches at its broadest part, and 2 inches in thickness. The other two corner pieces were much the same in size, but different in shape. These corner pieces are not shown in the plan.

The thin slab forming the west end had another stone behind it and pressing hard upon it, measuring 16 inches in length, 7 at its greatest depth, and 4 in thickness. The south side was also strengthened by another stone, which measured 3 feet in length and 6 inches in thickness. It was placed hard against the thicker of the two stones on that side; but between it and the other there was a distance of $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. All the stones used in forming the cist, in levelling three of its upper corners, and in supporting its west end and south side, were sandstone.

Having noticed one or two little bits of bone, and one or two fragments of an urn, among the soil, sand, and gravel which had been thrown out, I suggested that the whole of the excavated material should be put through a riddle. With the help of a gardener, Dr Wilson did this, and did it most thoroughly and carefully. It is fortunate that there was such a man on the spot, so willing, so observant, and so competent. His labour was rewarded by the discovery of a jet necklace, many pieces of bone, many fragments of pottery, two little bits of flint, etc., all of which are now exhibited.

In the necklace (fig. 2) there are seventy-nine oblong beads, six flat

plates, and a triangular pendant. They have been arranged by Dr Anderson. The holes by which the flat plates are perforated have been skilfully pierced. The dotted patterns with which they are decorated are unequal in execution, some of them being more artistically done

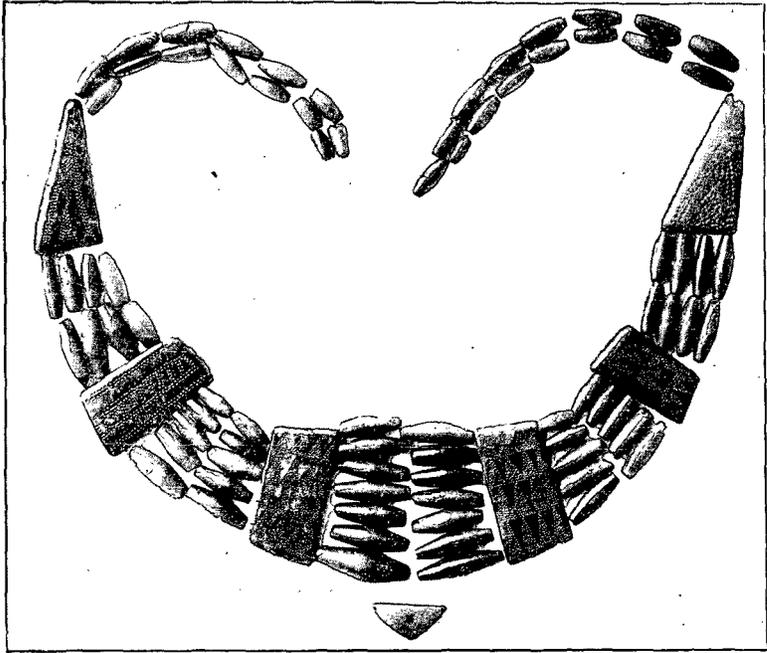


Fig. 2. Necklace of Jet Beads and Ornamented Plates from the Cist. (3.)

than others. The jet is also of two qualities. This necklace may have been constructed from the pieces of two earlier ones; or some pieces may have been made to supply the places of some missing ones in an earlier necklace. In the Museum there are nine jet necklaces of this type, more or less complete.

Among the pottery, there are fragments of two beakers. One of

these has been partially reconstructed, and is shown in fig. 3. It has been $6\frac{1}{8}$ inches in height, and belongs to the variety ornamented with horizontal lines of impressions of a plaited cord about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch apart, surrounding the vessel from top to bottom. There were also



Fig. 3. Beaker Urn found in fragments.

fragments of, I think, at least four cinerary urns, and of five late mediæval vessels. Of the two pieces of flint, one is a strike-light, and the other is a mere skelb. Most of the fragments of bone seem to have been calcined.

Unfortunately, from the way in which the contents of the cist and the soil over it had been thrown out and mixed, Dr Wilson found it

impossible to ascertain with certainty where any particular portion of it had lain. Some of the bits of pottery, however, had not been moved in the recent operations. Of these, three pieces of the partially reconstructed beaker were found about 2 feet out from the north-east corner of the cist, and about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet above the level of the cover (*i.e.* $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet above its level when in position). They were lying, with other fragments of pottery, at the bottom of the black soil and immediately above the gravel. To Dr Wilson it seemed certain that, if they were there when the cist was constructed, they must have been disturbed by the excavation at that time. They had certainly been disturbed at some period, for another bit of this beaker, which fits into one of these three pieces, was found sticking in the soil 2 feet south from the south edge of the cist, and 18 inches above the level of the covering slab. The bottom of this beaker was found among the soil which could not be localised. Dr Wilson thinks it quite possible that none of the pottery may have been in the cist.

Little bits of bone were found everywhere among the matter that was riddled, and in almost every third shovelful. A little of the black soil, on which the sand and gravel had been thrown, was now and again incorporated with the mass that was being riddled; and the pieces of later pottery and the other recent objects may have been in that soil.

I sent my sketch of the cist to Dr Wilson, that he might verify on the spot and check the measurements; but before it reached him the soil had been filled in and the ground levelled. In the interval, however, between the removal of the large covering slab and the filling in of the soil, he had taken the opportunity to make a very careful examination of the cist and its immediate surroundings. He satisfied himself that the stone behind the west end and the stone behind the south side belonged to this cist, and formed no part of any other cist or cists.

He also dug down behind the large block of stone forming the north side of the cist, and, at a level almost as deep as the lower edge of the

block, he struck a very thin layer of finely divided charred material. This layer extended almost the entire length of the cist. Towards the eastern end, he found a portion of it forming a continuous sheet which ran right up against the stone, proving, as he thought, that the deposit had been made after that stone had been put in position. His trench was only a foot wide, but there were clear indications that the deposit stretched farther towards the north. In section it was little more than a streak of black, and he lost trace of it at the ends of the cist.¹ Beneath it lay 2 inches of gravel, then 2 inches of fairly white sand shading into the clay, which he found solid at 18 inches below the top edge of the long, large block.

If the clay formed the bottom of the cist, then it would be 18 inches deep; but in that case it would be lower than most of the enclosing stones. As nearly all the pieces of jet were found sticking in or to a clod of clay, the necklace may have been thrown out of the cist. In the same clod of clay there were two small pieces of bone.

A few yards to the south of the cist, a flat block of sandstone was struck, quite near the surface as levelled for the tennis-court. This stone measured from 22 to 34 inches in height, from 27 to 30 inches in breadth, and 8 inches at its thickest part. Its surfaces were fairly smooth. Across one face a groove had been cut, about 2 inches wide and $1\frac{1}{2}$ deep. The object had apparently been to break the stone across by the groove; but it had broken with a clean fracture higher up.

On the 7th of March another cist was discovered about 6 yards from the one already described, and, in relation to it, was a few points to the east of south. It had no connection whatever with the stone which had the groove cut across its face.

This second cist was less substantially constructed than the other.

¹ Before the covering slab was removed, Colonel Boothby noticed a thin layer of ashes above it. The workmen afterwards said that they had observed "some burnt soil and ashes, and pieces of pottery."

About 4 inches below the surface prepared for the tennis-court, there was a flat sandstone slab, nearly square, measuring about 4 feet on the side, and 4 inches in thickness. Beneath it there were three blocks of sandstone, somewhat flat, each of which could be lifted by a man. Beneath these three stones there was about a foot of earth, and beneath that earth there was another slab, which proved to be the cover of a cist. This cover was not quite so large as the cover of the first cist, but it was large enough to require four men with levers to lift it on edge. This cist lay almost, if not exactly, south-east and north-west, and was quite full of gravelly soil. In depth it was about 18 inches, and each of its longer sides was formed of two stones. There was a skeleton in it, the head being at the south-west end, and the face turned upwards. The spade struck the brow, and a small piece fell out, but the skull was otherwise intact when lifted. Most of the teeth, however, dropped out. The leg-bones, the pelvis, and some ribs were also lifted out. When this discovery was made, Colonel Boothby happened to be absent, and, as he does not like to see human remains disturbed, he ordered them to be at once replaced in the cist, the cover put on, and the ground levelled. The top of the cover now lies about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet below the surface. Dr Wilson did not see this cist, but an intelligent workman was able to give him the above details.

When Balnacarron House was built, all the sand and gravel that were required were dug out of the grounds ; and in the beginning of 1895, when more gravel was wanted, a stone (fig. 4) having the appearance of a spade-like implement was discovered. It measures about $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the broadest part, and the same from the edge to the far end of the tang-like projection. Through the kindness of Colonel Boothby, this stone is also exhibited. Mr Alexander Thoms, of St Andrews, who has examined it carefully, feels certain that it is one of the clay-iron nodules which are common in the neighbourhood. The tang-like projection has been formed by the breaking out of two pieces. This breaking, Mr Thoms says, may have been intentionally done by man ; but he is inclined to think that it is due rather to accident from natural causes.

The stone, he says, is not tough enough to have been used as an axe, but might perhaps have served as a spade or hoe.¹

It is noteworthy that it was in the same field in which the two cists, the jet necklace, etc., were so recently found, that nearly, if not quite, a

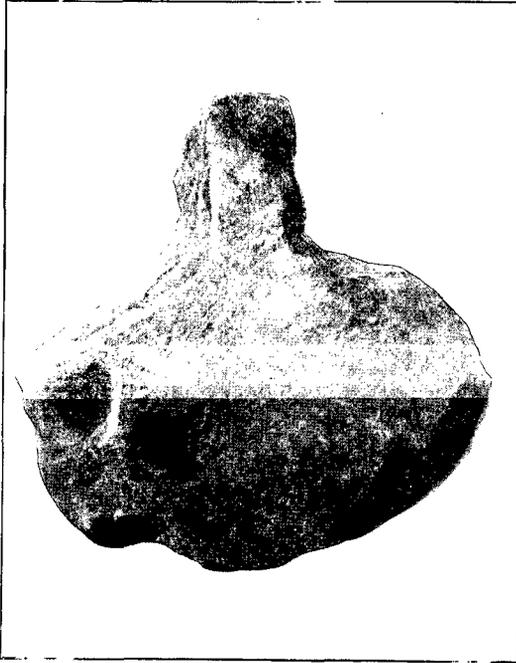


Fig. 4. Spade-like Implement (?) of Stone. ($\frac{1}{3}$.)

¹ A very similar stone was found in a deep trench, in St Andrews Priory, in 1887. It measures about $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the broadest part, and 3 inches from the edge to the back. The back is straight, having no tang-like projection. When Mr Thoms examined it, he felt sure that it was not artificially shaped; and when the late Mr Goodchild saw it, he was of the same opinion. It is now in the St Andrews Museum. In the National Museum there is a stone implement from Tiree, which in its general appearance is not unlike the Balnacarron specimen, but is deeper from back to front. See also an article by Sir Arthur Mitchell "On Spade-like Implements of Stone," in the *Proceedings*, vol. xxxii. p. 30, where four examples are figured.

score of urns were discovered in October 1859. As that discovery is not formally recorded in the *Proceedings* of the Society, it has been suggested that I should take this opportunity of giving a short account of it. Almost immediately after the discovery, Charles Howie wrote a paper on it, which was read to the St Andrews Literary and Philosophical Society on the 3rd of December 1859. The relative entry in the minute-book of that Society is so brief that it may be quoted :—

“Dr Adamson also read a paper, Mr Charles Howie’s, on the cinerary urns discovered by him near the Lawhead ; for an abstract of which see the annexed printed slip.”

No printed slip is annexed to the minute ; but the secretary no doubt intended to annex the report given in a local newspaper. My account must be chiefly based on that report, and on two communications which appeared in *The St Andrews Pictorial Magazine* for November and December 1860. The first of these communications was written by Charles Howie, and the second was taken from the paper which he had prepared for the Literary and Philosophical Society.

The farmer, in ploughing the field, was hampered by a large stone, and therefore resolved to get rid of it. In digging away the earth, he came upon some fragments of an urn—or, as one of the accounts has it, “the fragments of two urns, which contained bones.” Mr Howie saw these fragments, and at once arranged to explore the spot. In the course of two days’ work, with an assistant, “he fell upon no less than seventeen urns, either entire or fragmentary, but the greater number of them in excellent preservation.” “They were all filled with fragments of calcined human bones, many of them apparently as fresh as if newly deposited. Two flat pieces of bronze were also found among the bones.” Four of the urns were enclosed in triangular stone cists. Several of the urns were inverted. Those that stood mouth uppermost were each covered by a flat stone, and most of these were found broken as they stood. It is not stated whether those found in the triangular stone cists were inverted or not. One of those inverted, which was quite whole, was covered by another which was broken. When the bones

were emptied out of the whole one, it was found that several fragments of the broken urn were among them, and also earth and gravel. It was inferred that the first urn had given way when it was being deposited, and that its contents had then been placed in the other; and that the broken one, instead of being thrown away, was turned over the whole one. There was thus an urn within an urn, both standing mouth downwards.

In Mr Howie's words:—

“The urns vary considerably in size; the most entire of the large ones is $10\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter by $15\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height; and the smallest is only 10 inches high by $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. The dissimilarity in the quality of their workmanship, as well as in the forms or patterns of the ornamentation employed to beautify them, are curious and interesting features. In the latter respect no two of them are alike, and they vary from the most rude and simple scratchings to attempts at a higher style of art. Several of the designs appear to have been effected by twisting two rushes, or some other suitable material, into a cord about 6 inches long, and pressing this into the urn while soft, as may be observed where the passing of the ends at the joinings is visible. Some indications are also remaining of their having been under the action of fire from the inside, and of their having been dried in the sun; while a few appear to have been subjected to fire heat all over. A finer sort of clay appears to have been made use of in some cases, for the purpose of smoothing off the external surface.”

There is a slight discrepancy as to the precise number of the urns found. In the contemporary newspaper abstract of Howie's paper, the farmer is said to have found “fragments of an urn”; and Howie is said to have dug up “no less than seventeen urns either entire or fragmentary.” This would make eighteen altogether. This does not necessarily contradict the statement in Howie's communication to *The St Andrews Pictorial Magazine* for November 1860:—

“Twelve months ago, no fewer than eighteen entire and fragmentary urns were dug up, immediately east of the nursery possessed by Mr C. Howie, and presented by him to the Literary and Philosophical Society, and are now to be seen in the College Museum.”

But in the extract printed from his paper in the same *Pictorial Magazine* for December 1860, it is said that the farmer, in proceeding to dig up the large stone, “had thrown up the fragments of two urns,” and that the result of Howie's operations was “the discovery of no fewer

than eighteen entire and fragmentary urns." This would make twenty in all.

Dr John Stuart, in the appendix to the preface to the second volume of his *Sculptured Stones*, also makes the total number twenty; but I do not know whether he had compared these two accounts or had only seen one of them.¹

Among the urns in St Andrews Museum, there are six complete, one mended, five incomplete, and fragments of three others, still ticketed



Fig. 5. Five of the Urns and the two Bronze Blades found at Law Park in 1859, now in St Andrews Museum. From a photograph by the late Mr T. Rodger, and reproduced by permission of Mr G. E. Rodger, St Andrews.

as having been found near Lawhead by Mr Howie in 1859. Most of these, and also the two bronze blades, are shown in the accompanying illustrations, figs. 5 and 6. The bronze blades, which are also in the St Andrews Museum, are respectively $3\frac{1}{4}$ and $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length. Each has a tang. A flint flake was also found, and several teeth of the horse and sheep.

¹ Dr Stuart's very brief account of the discovery of the Law Park urns was embodied by Dr John Alexander Smith in a paper which he read before the Society (*Proceedings*, x. 436).

All were found near the big stone which the farmer wished to remove. It measured 5 feet by 3 feet, was of considerable thickness, bore marks of a seaside origin, and "stood on end, facing the south." To one of the stones of the triangular cists, "some shells and zoophytes, as perfect as when they lay by the seashore," were still adhering. The urns were standing in a subsoil of gravel about 5 feet below the surface, and were



Fig. 6. Seven of the Urns found at Law Park in 1859, now in St Andrews Museum. From a photograph by the late Mr T. Rodger, and reproduced by permission of Mr G. B. Rodger, St Andrews.

not only near the big stone, but were all on the south side of it. Mr Howie prepared a plan showing the relative position of the urns; but I have not been able to find out whether that plan is still in existence.

A few years before finding these urns, Howie dug up, near the same spot, "the foundations of a rude building 9 feet in diameter, being a circle, having an entrance attached to it facing the west, 12 feet in length, part of it [*i.e.* of the entrance] being covered with flat stones 3 feet in breadth; the height of the stones set on end were (*sic*) 5 feet." The floor of the circular building was covered with charred wood and

oats. No trace of mortar or of tool-marks was observed on any of the stones. I have a strong impression, amounting almost to certainty, that Howie once said to me that this circular building was not in the field in which the urns were found, but in his own nursery, and near its south-eastern extremity.

Before the urns were found, "quantities of flat stones and boulders" had been carried away, while others had been buried to be out of reach of the plough. The place is just beyond the first mile-stone on the road to Mount Melville. Both of the cists which I have described were constructed in what geologists term the hundred-feet terrace, and near the left bank of the Kinness Burn, where it has made a hollow for itself by erosion of that terrace.

Before closing this paper it may be worth mentioning that an unsuccessful attempt was made to follow up Howie's discoveries. This is proved by the following entry in the minutes of the Literary and Philosophical Society of St Andrews:—

2nd February 1861. "The Rev. Mr Skinner reported that, in compliance with the desire of the Society, he had, along with Mr Charles Howie and Mr R. Walker, made further search by digging in Law Park, but that no additional cinerary urns or other ancient relics had been found."

It may also be mentioned that at least four urns have been found within the town of St Andrews. One of these was found in or before 1864 at the Windmill Brae, and, at the same time and place, an article that was described as "an ancient inscription on a fragment of leather." Both the urn and the leather were presented to St Andrews Museum, but in making a catalogue of the local archæological objects in that museum three years ago I failed to find the leather. Two urns were found in Market Street, one in 1867 and the other in 1872. They were not more, I think, than twenty yards apart. One was found in North Street in 1882. All these four are in the St Andrews Museum. Another was found at Westerlee, in the suburbs. Its fragments are in my possession.