

I.

NOTICES (1) OF A CIST, WITH "FOOD-VESSEL" URN, AT EASTER MOY, AND (2) OF A PREHISTORIC CAIRN ON CALLACHY HILL, IN THE BLACK ISLE, ROSS-SHIRE, WITH PLAN AND SECTION. BY WILLIAM MACKENZIE, PROCURATOR-FISCAL, DINGWALL.

On 4th June 1907, on the farm of Easter Moy, about 5 miles south-west of Dingwall, some workmen excavating material for the repair of a road came upon a prehistoric grave. The situation is typical; overlooking the valley of the Conon, and commanding a long sweep of the river, and a wide prospect to the east, south, and west. On the north the spot is sheltered by the now thickly wooded slope of the Hill of Brahan (480 feet), at the base of which, and separating it from the piece of ground in which the grave is situated, the public road passes on to the west. From the road to the river a quarter of a mile distant the ground declines southwards at a fairly steep angle, and has been under cultivation for generations, with the exception of a roughly circular eminence three-quarters of an acre in extent, near the centre of which the grave was found. There are indications that it had once formed the site of a cairn—probably a chambered cairn—for, 60 feet west from the grave there is a rectangular formation measuring 13 feet by 8 feet 6 inches, on the south edge of which there lies overturned a boulder of gneiss about 2 tons weight and measuring 6 feet in length and 4 feet in breadth. An attempt had been made to bore this block for blasting, but it was abandoned, no doubt on account of the hardness of the stone. This suggests the probability of there having been other blocks of softer material which were blasted and removed at some former period. At least a century ago considerable quantities of gravel had been excavated from the eminence, and the cairn, like many others, may have been found useful as a quarry. That these operations occurred so long ago is apparent from the fact that the uncultivated eminence is now studded over, even in its excavated places, with aged oaks. It is not

without significance that in the cultivation of the surrounding ground this little spot of less than an acre in extent should have been left untilled.

In their recent search for material the workmen had excavated from this untilled spot a perpendicular face 4 feet in height and about 8 feet in length, working inwards in a northerly direction. This face, or section, shows undisturbed pan for 2 feet on its west side, and forced



Fig. 1. View of Cist, with Urn, as exposed by excavation.

ground in the remainder. In the forced ground they found a sandstone slab in line with the section, which falling outwards disclosed the cavity of a cist, in which there stood an urn. The ground being still further cleared, another slab, in line with the first, fell outwards. These two slabs formed one side of the grave, and on their removal the whole interior became visible. The grave (fig. 1) was formed due east and west, and measured 3 feet $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, 21 inches in breadth, and $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth; while an average depth of 2 feet of mould lay on the top of the covering slab. The north and south sides and the east

end were formed of the native sandstone ; while the cover and the west end were of the abundant gneiss of the district. There was no stone in the bottom, but the floor had been carefully levelled and smoothed out of the pan, and an inch and a half of sand and clay spread over its entire surface. The urn had been placed at the west end of the cist. It was removed by the workmen, and unfortunately fell to pieces when handled ; but its contents had fallen into, and remained in, the cist. On arriving



Fig. 2. Urn found in the Cist.

at the spot I proceeded to collect the material in the cist, and passed it all through a fine riddle. Four small flints were thus found, and a small quantity of fragments of charred wood, all of which have been preserved. The flints and charred wood were all found among the material at the spot where the urn stood.

The pieces of the urn (fig. 2) have now been put together. It is of the food-vessel type, and of a reddish-brown colour, measuring 6 inches in height and $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter at the mouth, bulging slightly outwards from the neck below the thick, everted rim and tapering to 3 inches at the bottom. It is ornamented all round with incised parallel

lines and triangular impressions; the lines being rather roughly drawn as if done by the hand with a sharp implement.

Three of the flints are mere chips on which I can detect no secondary working; but the fourth is a pretty specimen of the implement known as a scraper, of the size and shape of the forefinger nail, and skilfully chipped into shape.

The ground has not been removed from the upper surface of the covering slab, nor from either end of the cist, but in so far as the stones are exposed no apparently artificial marks are discernible except upon the inside of the larger of two sandstone slabs forming the north side of the grave, but being still *in situ* the stone is not accessible to thorough examination. Beyond indicating that they are circular or oval depressions of varying dimensions, I refrain from any further description in the meantime, as they may or may not prove to be artificial.

The lateral approach to this cist and the exposure of a vertical section of the ground reveals the *modus operandi* of the old neolithic people who constructed it. The boundary line between the disturbed earth and the undisturbed pan shows that they had dug out a space much larger than the actual grave, and that having constructed the cist in the centre of this space they filled and levelled up the excavation.

PREHISTORIC CAIRN ON CALLAGHY HILL.

In the *Proceedings* of this Society, under date 8th June 1885, there appears a paper by the late Major Colin Mackenzie regarding a Cist with associated flint scraper and a nodule of iron pyrites or "strike-a-light" in a natural mound at Flowerburn in the Black Isle. The district in which this mound is situated is rich in prehistoric remains—many of which are still unviolated and await investigation. During his residence at Flowerburn, Major Mackenzie appears to have done a good deal of work among the antiquities in the neighbourhood, and some of his tracks are still visible. Nothing could be more accurate than his description of the mound and its contents; the only slip that can be detected being an immaterial difference of a few inches in the length of

the covering slab of the Cist, which—as it happens—still lies in the spot where Major Mackenzie found it almost a quarter of a century ago.

Among the local antiquities that had attracted the attention of this gentleman is an ancient cairn on the top of Callachy Hill, as to which he does not appear to have made any communication to this Society, or to have left any written record. The hill, which is in close proximity to the mound in which he found the Cist, attains an elevation of 700 feet and is one of the highest eminences—if not indeed the highest—in the Black Isle. It forms the westward termination of a long ridge, and the cairn is erected in the usual position on the nose of the hill, from which the whole face of the surrounding country is visible in an unobstructed view. From the accompanying ground-plan and section of the cairn (fig. 3) it will be seen that it measures about 50 feet in diameter and 8 feet at its highest elevation. About the year 1883 Major Mackenzie caused a trench to be cut through it from west to east. The line of this trench passed slightly to the north of the centre, but on reaching half-way across it diverged by the right into the central point, and there a Cist was uncovered. He had evidently replaced most of the excavated material, but his track is well marked, and is shown on the accompanying plan. With this exception, the cairn had never been disturbed in any way until the operations about to be described.

In the summer of 1906 I assisted my friend Dr Maclean, of Fortrose, in opening a track from the south edge of the cairn towards the centre. Time pressed, and we did not excavate completely to the foundation, nor did we penetrate inwards beyond a distance of 14 feet from the outer edge. Here, and at a depth half-way between the upper surface and the ground-level, we discovered fragments of bone and a quantity of dry, crushed bone material, underneath which there was found a fragment of pottery, about 3 inches in length and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in breadth. It was found to be the rim segment of an urn, which, when whole, would have measured 5 or 6 inches in diameter, and was rudely ornamented with punctulated dots. There was no means of estimating its height.

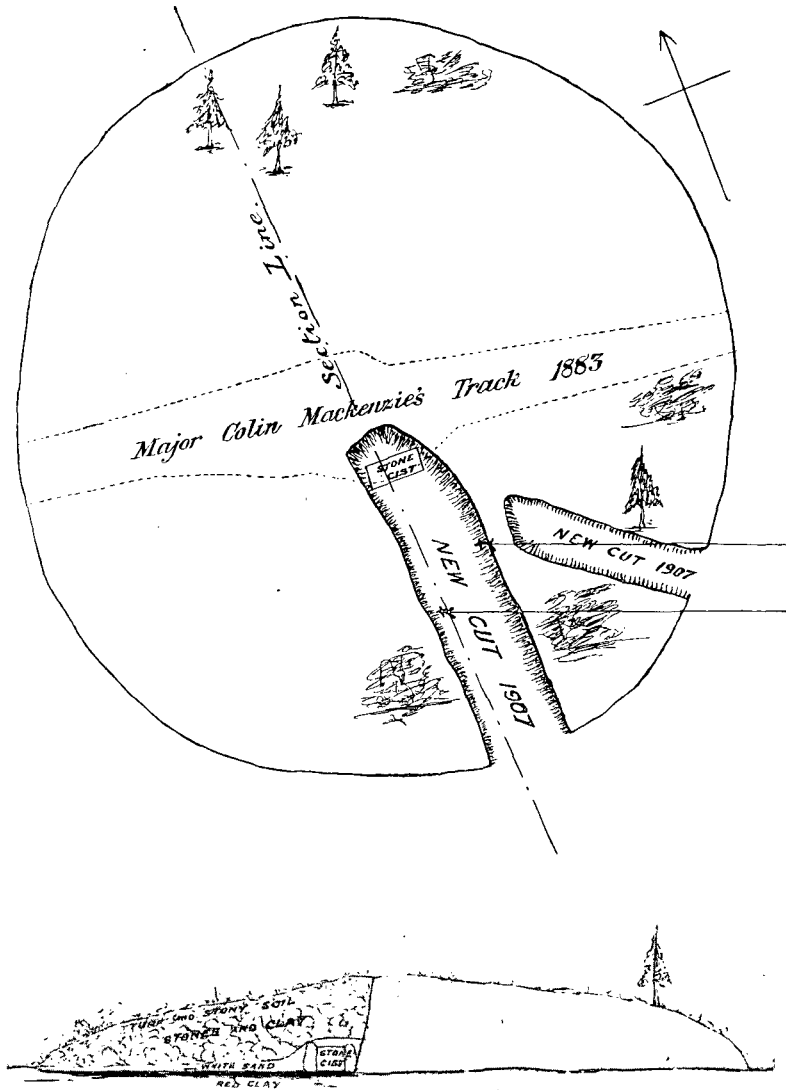


Fig. 3. Plan and Section of Cairn at Callachy Hill. (Scale $\frac{3}{8}$ inch to 5 feet.)

From the position in which this fragment was found, there can be no doubt that the urn had been placed in an inverted position over the bones.

Last summer I revisited the cairn on several occasions and carried out further excavations. In the first place, our track of 1906 was deepened to the foundation, and continued towards the centre, until we there joined the old workings of Major Mackenzie. We found the construction of the cairn to be as shown on the plan. On the top of the undisturbed red clay there was laid a layer of white clayey sand which gradually thickened towards the centre until it enveloped the Cist, the remains of which were discovered there. Above the white sand were placed the stones, and on the top of the stones there was a covering of turf and stony soil from 1 foot to 18 inches in depth. The central Cist lay east and west; and, as already indicated, it was approached by us from the south, while Major Mackenzie had reached it from the north. We found that the south side was formed of two slabs, and that these had never previously been disturbed, as was apparent from the condition of the white, clayey material in which they were enveloped. The covering slab had been removed, and no trace of it could be found. The Cist measured 2 feet 6 inches in length, 20 inches in breadth, and 18 inches in depth. The cavity was filled up with loose earth and stones, and this was manifestly the work of the previous excavators. The material was carefully examined, but in the *débris* nothing of interest was found except fragments of bone. On excavating around either end, innumerable bone fragments were discovered.

In the course of the operations there was found, at a spot 12 feet from the south edge of the cairn (as marked on the plan), a mass of black, unctuous matter, about 12 inches square and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth, between the red clay of the foundation and the layer of clayey sand. In this matter a great number of bone fragments were discovered, with marked evidence of the effects of fire. But there was no trace of any implement, or of pottery. Specimens of the bone fragments found both in this burial and in the neighbourhood of the Cist were forwarded to

Dr Joseph Anderson, and he pronounced them to be calcined human remains.

On a subsequent day in August 1907, a shorter trench was cut from the eastern edge inwards. No appearance of any burial was here discovered, but in the course of the work there rolled down from a spot about 18 inches below the surface a naturally rounded stone ball $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, having on its circumference two round, flattened, and polished spaces. Close to the spot where the ball lay there was found one very attenuated limpet-shell having the appearance of great age. No bones or other relics were associated with the ball and shell.

Within a radius of a few miles of this hill there are several large cairns—some of them long ago destroyed and only the large slabs of their central chambers left; others are still intact. There are also within the same radius two or three kitchen-middens, and on the seashore at least one cave in which recent excavations have revealed remarkable evidence of long prehistoric occupation.