

III.

NOTE OF THE DISCOVERY OF A STEATITE URN IN HARRAY,
ORKNEY, NOW PRESENTED TO THE MUSEUM. By JOHN
FRASER, CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT.

The inland parish of Harray, with the exception of Stenness, probably contains more evidences of the ancient inhabitants of Orkney than any other district of the county. The Pictish brochs, which have been only partially explored, are situated on the shores of the lochs or in the close vicinity of the burns. The Norse burial mounds, of which there are several groups, are to be found on the bare uncultivated moorlands. Probably the early Norsemen preferred the ashes of their dead to be deposited as far from their habitations as convenient. Situated near the western base of Hinderafold Hill is a group of mounds known locally as the "Knowes of Trinwaan." About a mile S.E. from the spot are the barrows at the base of Trundigar Hill, where some gold discs and beads were found many years ago, the find being reported and secured for the Society by the late Mr George Petrie. Having obtained the permission of the proprietor of the ground and the assistance of some interested friends, we proceeded to "Trinwaan" on the 20th October 1902, for the purpose of making some examination of the mounds. We estimated the largest mound to be about 11 feet in height, the next in size 6 feet, and the three smallest not more than 3 feet each. Whether difference in size and construction would mean different ranks of the individuals "mound laid" or different periods of interment, was not to us apparent, but our investigations disclosed three separate methods in the disposal of the cremated remains. The largest mound was found to contain a well-formed cist, 27 inches long, 13½ inches wide, and 27 inches deep, constructed of dressed flagstones. The covering stone was partly removed from the top of the cist, which

contained nothing but earth. From the appearance of the top surface of the mound and the position of the covering stone, it was quite apparent that the "knowe" had been broken into at some former period. The cist was not situated in the centre of the mound, being much nearer the S.E. side, the line of length running about north and south. The opening of the mound next in size disclosed a stone-built and covered-in cavity, some 18 inches across and 2 feet in depth. This



Fig. 1. Steatite Urn from Trinwaan, Harray.

cavity was about half full of grey-coloured ashes (containing no bones), and resting upon and partly embedded in the ashes was the steatite urn (fig. 1) now presented to the Society, containing a pound weight of partly burned bones. The bones had seemingly been carefully cleaned from all refuse before being deposited in the urn. The urn, which measures 11 inches in height and $10\frac{1}{2}$ by 9 inches across the mouth, bore traces of both fire and smoke on the outside, and though slightly fractured before lifting was otherwise complete. Steatite is not to be found anywhere in Orkney, but is procurable in several

localities in Shetland. An examination of two of the smaller mounds disclosed neither cist nor urn, only ashes, fragments of bones, and some bits of round charred wood. In the construction of the largest mound a considerable quantity of rough stones had been used, the outside covering being earth and turf. The mound containing the urn was composed of earth and turf, the only stones found being the few forming the roughly built covered cavity. The smaller mounds appeared to be gatherings of earth and turf over and around the remains of cremation. Although a considerable quantity of material must have been used in the formation of the group of mounds, there was no visible evidence of the earth and stones being obtained in the close vicinity; however, there exists on the moorland, some 500 yards S.W., an ancient-looking quarry or pit, from which in all probability the material was taken.

The four mounds are placed in line about due east and west, and the fifth is situated 50 yards N.E. from the east end of the line.