

I.

NOTICE OF THE EXCAVATION OF A CAIRN AT INVERLAEL, INVERBROOM, ROSS-SHIRE. By JAMES E. CREE, F.S.A. Scot.

About the beginning of June last year I happened to be in Sutherland with my son on a fishing expedition. There I received a letter from Mr A. O. Curle, the Director of the Museum, informing me of a communication he had had from Lady Fowler of Inverbroom, Ross-shire. This letter was to the effect that some roadmen, when removing stones from a cairn for road-metal—a custom much to be regretted—had discovered a cist, and Lady Fowler was most anxious that a proper investigation should be made, and careful notes taken of any phenomena likely to be of archæological interest. Mr Curle suggested that I, being in the neighbourhood, should undertake the work, and to this I readily agreed.

After corresponding with Lady Fowler, I found myself in a few days surveying the cairn, which I ascertained was on the property of Inverlael, belonging to Mr Gilmour, although it lay but a short distance from Inverbroom House.

Lady Fowler had in advance secured Mr Gilmour's permission to have the cairn opened up, and accordingly the work of investigation was at once proceeded with; Lady Fowler kindly furnishing the necessary labour and tools, while Miss Fowler and members of the house-party lent valuable assistance.

The cairn (fig. 1), which is indeed a remarkable one, is situated on gently sloping ground about 150 yards to the south of Inverbroom Post Office, and within a few yards of the main road from Ullapool to Garve. It is 42 feet in diameter, and has probably been a little over 4 feet in height. Unfortunately the cist containing the principal interment, which was approximately in the centre of the cairn, was, I believe, opened some twenty years ago by two young men who

expected to find treasure. Two or three other cairns in the vicinity, of similar dimensions, had also been opened by these young men about the same time, and, needless to say, the result of their work has been unrecorded. It is highly probable, however, that their hunt for gold would not be rewarded. The cairn had further been partly destroyed by the removal for road-metal of the smaller stones from about one-third of its diameter, indicated on fig. 2 by the dotted

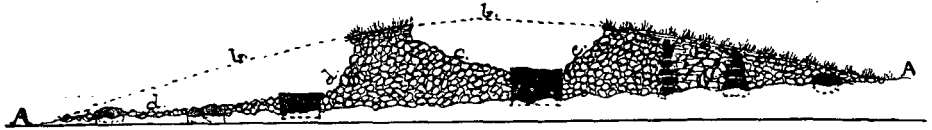


Fig. 1. View of the Cairn at Inverlael.

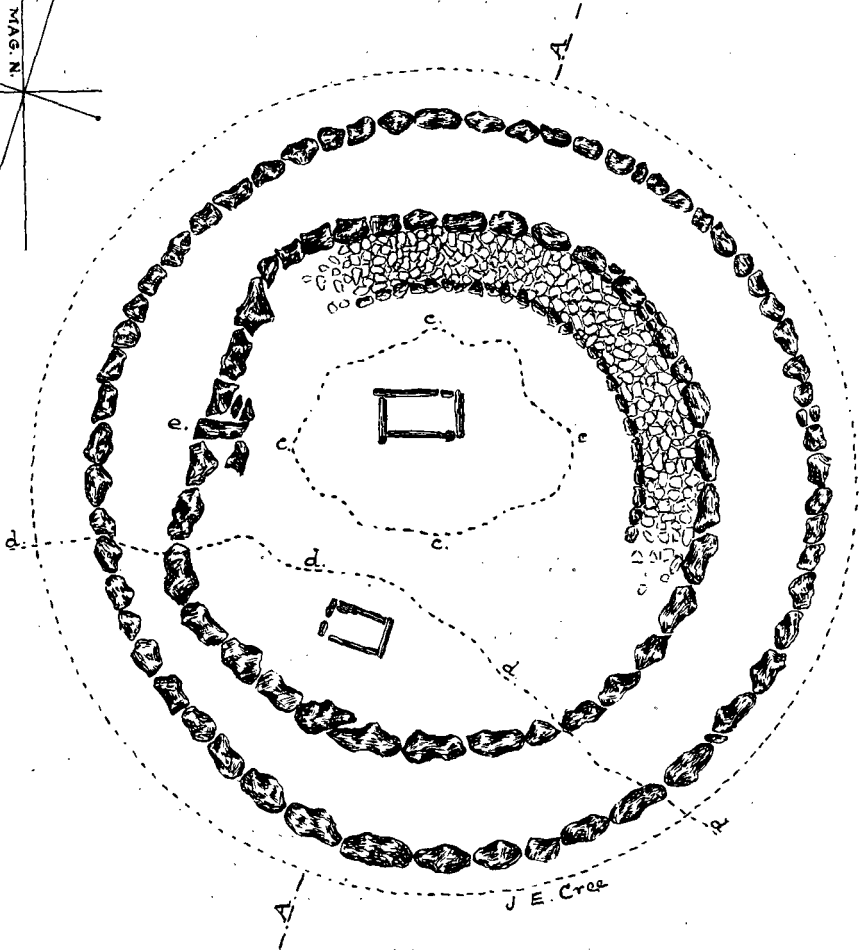
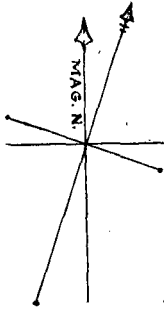
line and the letters *d. d. d.* It was when engaged in this operation that the roadmen discovered the second cist (fig. 3 (photograph¹) and 4 (plan)).

When Lady Fowler heard of the discovery of this cist, she at once requested that nothing should be disturbed pending a proper examination; but again the thought of buried treasure proved too strong for the roadmen, and they had raked through the contents of the cist with their fingers in the hope of finding gold. I mention this merely to make it clear that it was thus impossible for me to determine the

¹ Photograph showing small cist containing incinerated human remains, kindly taken by Miss Arthur, Inverlael Lodge.



Section through Cairn at A. A.
 b. b. Elevation of Cairn before excavations.



Ground Plan of Cairn.

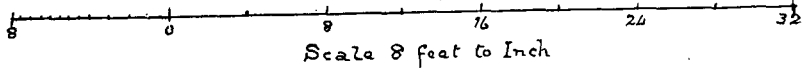


Fig. 2. Ground Plan of Cairn at Inveriael.

original position of any of the vestiges of human bones, or of the objects found in the cist. The interment here had been after in-



Fig. 3. Small Cist.

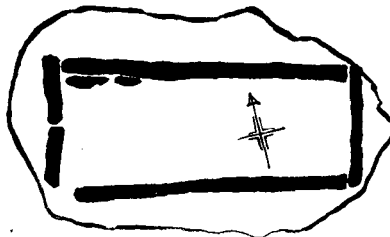


Fig. 4. Ground Plan of Smaller Cist in the Cairn at Inverlael.
Scale 2 feet=1 inch.

cineration, and the cist is of small dimensions. Its long axis lies west-north-west by east-south-east, and its measurements inside are as follows: length 37 inches, breadth at west-north-west end $11\frac{1}{2}$

inches, breadth at east-south-east end 14 inches, depth 13 inches. The bottom of the cist is formed of a single slab of stone, while one slab forms each side, that on the south-west side being $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness, and that on the north-east side being 2 inches in thickness. The east-south-east end is formed of one stone $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness, and the west-north-west end is of two stones, each about $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in thickness. The side stones are both inside the end stones. A single large slab had been used as a covering stone. It measures 4 feet in length by about 2 feet 9 inches in breadth, but this the roadmen had broken in two for easier handling. Only a small quantity of burnt human bones was recovered from this cist, and these, unfortunately, were found by Professor Bryce, to whom they were submitted, to be too comminuted to warrant him in expressing any opinion as to sex or age.

After carefully passing the deposit through a small-meshed riddle, a flint arrowhead (fig. 5, No. 1), unfortunately slightly broken, and two flint scrapers (fig. 5, Nos. 2 and 3), with two fragments of another, together with a mussel shell and several small white quartz pebbles, were brought to light. The arrowhead measures $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length by $\frac{11}{16}$ inch in breadth across the barbs, which curve slightly inwards towards the tang. It is neatly chipped over both faces, which are equally convex, and the edges are finely serrated. The larger of the two scrapers is oval in outline, and has been made from an interior flake. It shows secondary working, and measures $1\frac{5}{32}$ inches in length, $\frac{13}{16}$ of an inch in greatest breadth, and $\frac{13}{32}$ of an inch in thickness. The smaller scraper has been made from an exterior flake. It is discoidal in shape, and measures $\frac{29}{32}$ of an inch in diameter, and $\frac{9}{32}$ of an inch in thickness. The arrowhead and scrapers have all been through the fire.¹

¹ The finding of calcined implements along with incinerated human remains is very rare in Scotland. Only two or three instances are known.

Mr J. Graham Callander, in vol. xlii. of the *Proc. Soc. of Ant. of Scot.*, at p. 218,

About 4 feet to the north-east of the north-east corner of this cist, a small quantity of charcoal, mixed with some sandy soil, was noticed in what might be described as a small pocket amongst the stones.

The work of examining the structure of the cairn was next undertaken. The portion partially laid bare of small stones by the roadmen revealed two concentric settings of large rounded stones crossing the cleared area. These large stones were followed with a view to ascertaining their extent. Proceeding with great care, it was found that both settings of large stones completely encircled the cists. These are set on the natural surface of the ground, and had been entirely covered by the agglomerated mass of small stones forming the cairn. The

describes the finding of five calcined arrowheads and some objects of bone, along with burnt human remains, in a cinerary urn found in a cairn in the parish of New Kilpatrick, Dumbartonshire.

Canon Greenwell (*British Barrows*, p. 15) says: "It is not an uncommon occurrence to find pins, generally made of bone, but sometimes of wood, with a deposit of burnt bones. In most cases they are calcined, and no doubt represent the fastening of the dress or covering in which the body was enclosed before the burning took place." Again, at p. 51, he remarks that "ornaments and objects of personal decoration are sometimes found associated with burials in the barrows. . . . They accompany burials after cremation, as well as those by inhumation. When met with in association with a burnt body, in many cases they have not been burnt with it, but have been placed amongst the calcined bones, after they were collected from the funeral pile; and the same may be said of certain implements of flint."

Mr J. R. Mortimer (*Forty Years' Researches in British and Saxon Burial Mounds of East Yorkshire*, p. 1 of Introduction) says, in reference to this subject: "It is difficult to explain the origin of the practice of burning and breaking tools and weapons, evidences of which are found with interments. The burnt instruments found accompanying cremated bones would seem to be the least difficult to explain. They probably were placed on the pyre along with the body as part of its equipment for the next world.

"The discovery of tools, which must have been purposely broken at the time they were placed in the grave, is most difficult to account for. Possibly this custom originated with some wily individual, who, . . . wishing to minimise the temptation there might be to deprive the dead body of its accompanying articles, made them useless, in this world, by breaking. On the call of its owner to spirit-land they would come forth, like himself, restored to their shape."

inner circle proved to be slightly flattened or "D"-shaped towards the west, and it was observed that the stones forming both the outer

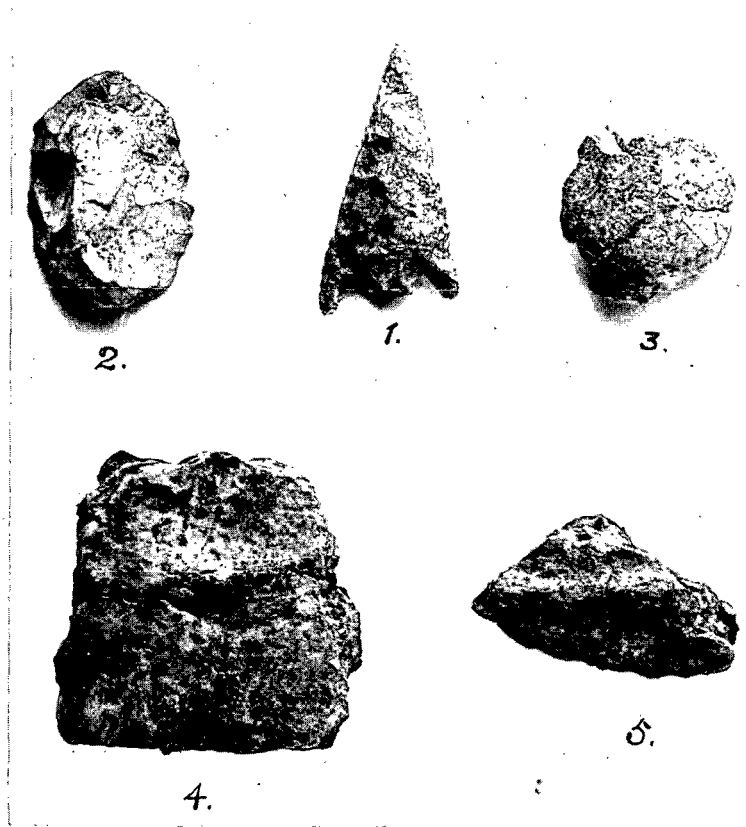


Fig. 5. Objects found in the Cists. (See pp. 116 and 122.)

and the inner circles were of larger dimensions on the southern than on the northern half of the cairn. The work of exposing the inner circle had not proceeded far when I noticed that the superimposed stones were not merely tumbled in, but were regularly laid with some

care, and a retaining wall extending for about 30 feet round the north-east portion of the cairn was brought to light (fig. 6).¹ By cross-cutting it was found that this wall was about 4 feet in thickness. Stones of moderate size, neatly laid, formed the inner face, and between the inner and the outer faces the stones seemed to have been laid irregularly. Owing to the ruinous condition of the cairn it is unfortunately



Fig. 6. Part of the Retaining Wall.

impossible to say how far this wall originally extended, but I am inclined to think that it may not have formed a complete circle.

It is quite possible that the small cist containing the incinerated remains may have been a secondary interment, and the wall in this direction may have been pulled down to make room for it.²

¹ This most excellent photograph, together with fig. 1, was taken by the Hon. Elsie Cameron Corbet, Inverlael Lodge, and sent to me by Lady Fowler.

² In the *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, vol. vii. p. 268 (1866-68), the Rev. Dr Joass describes a cairn which he excavated at Eddertoun in Ross-shire, which in some respects bears a striking resemblance to the cairn at Inverlael. He mentions that one of the "kists was almost surrounded by a double circle of boulders on the natural surface." In this case, however, only one setting of stones (the inner)

A large stone (marked *e* on fig. 2) occurs on the western side of the inner circle, approximately in the centre of the flattened portion or chord. It is situated nearly due west of the central cist, and measures 2 feet 6 inches in length by about 12 inches in breadth. Its long axis lies east and west, and it is set at a right angle to the course of the circle. Inside the inner circle, and immediately adjoining this boulder on the north side, are two stones, each about 15 inches in length, and this may have formed the terminal point of the wall in this direction; but unfortunately between the point indicated and the point where the wall at this end was definitely recognised—a distance of about 8 feet—the workmen had already cleared away the stones, and it is therefore impossible to say whether the wall extended further towards the south than the point noted on fig. 2.

On the south side of the boulder marked *e* lies a large stone measuring 18 inches in length by 12 inches in breadth. This, with one of the stones of the inner circle and the boulder referred to, forms a small triangular space which was filled in with smaller stones. Its excavation, however, revealed nothing of interest.

Having completed this part of the excavations, I next turned my

encloses what may be considered as the central cist, and this is also "D"-shaped. The outer setting of stones surrounds this one cist on three sides, but on the fourth side, instead of continuing the circle, the large stones have been placed in a straight line for a few feet, thus giving it more the appearance of a crook or sickle. Unfortunately, Dr Joass fails to mention the orientation of the cists within the stone settings, and therefore one cannot compare the "D"-shaped inner circle in the Eddertoun example with that found at Inverlael. In the Eddertoun cairn, there were no less than six cists, and the burials had been both by inhumation and after incineration.

Dr Joseph Anderson (*Scotland in Pagan Times*, p. 90) says that "in point of fact the two modes of burial are occasionally present in the same cairn," and mentions the Eddertoun cairn as an example. The two modes of burial found in the Inverlael cairn may therefore be contemporaneous. But if that be the case, then it is probable that the wall did not originally form a complete circle, as, had it been continued of a uniform thickness, it must have been built over one corner of the smaller cist, and this seems unlikely.

attention to a re-opening of the central cist, which, as I have already mentioned, was disturbed many years ago. The extent of the previous excavation is indicated on fig. 2 by the dotted line marked *c. c. c.* After clearing away stones and rubbish, which in the intervening period had accumulated in and about the central cist, the large side stones were exposed. No covering stone remained, but otherwise the cist (fig. 7) had suffered little or no damage. Its long axis lies east and west, and the slabs of which it is composed are massive. The stone forming the east end of the cist measures 2 feet 3 inches in length, and 10 inches in thickness, and it extends beyond both sides.

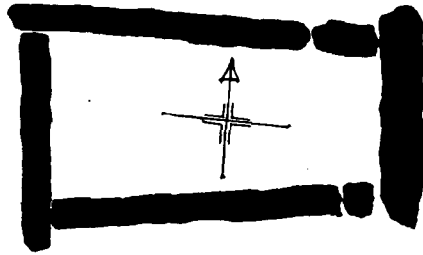


Fig. 7. The Central Cist. Scale 2 feet to 1 inch.

The north side is composed of rubble for the space of 9 inches in length. Adjoining this is a large stone 3 feet in length and 3 inches in thickness, and this extends beyond the west end. The stone at the west end abuts on the north-side stone. It measures 2 feet 3 inches in length by 4 inches in thickness. The south side is, like the side opposite, composed of a large stone 3 feet in length and 4 inches in thickness, which abuts on the west-end stone, and the small space of 5 inches remaining between the end of this stone and the east-end stone is filled in with rubble. The interior dimensions of the cist are as follows: length 3 feet 5 inches, width 1 foot 9 inches, and depth about 2 feet. The bottom of the cist is laid with small, irregular, rounded stones.

It will be noticed that the end stones, and also the two principal side stones, are of exactly the same length, and they seem to have been laid in the above position with a view of affording greater strength, and to enable the cist to withstand the pressure from the superimposed mass of stones. On the other hand, the introduction of rubble would tend to weakness; but whether the object in view in the construction of the cist was to impart greater strength, or whether the arrangement of the stones was merely fortuitous, it would be unsafe to hazard an opinion, and I must leave the matter by simply recording the facts.

At the east end of the cist a few fragments of unburnt human bones were found, and at the north-east corner I was fortunate in finding two small fragments of pottery (fig. 5, Nos. 4 and 5). It is thus possible that the previous examiners of the cist had found an urn in pieces, and that the two fragments mentioned had been overlooked by them. The larger sherd measures about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches square, and the smaller piece, which seems to have a slight moulding on its outer or convex surface, measures $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in breadth. Both sherds are about $\frac{5}{16}$ of an inch in thickness. These fragments are yellowish brown in colour; they have been well fired, and show a slaty grey in fracture. The paste has been mixed with small crushed stones and sand, and the potsherds are of a hard and compact texture.

Reviewing the results of my excavation of this cairn, I am inclined to think that the structural feature of the segment of rubble retaining wall, partially encircling the principal interment, and the introduction of rubble building into the central cist are good grounds for attributing it to a very early period.

The two fragments of pottery seem further to confirm this view.¹ They are of a much harder and more compact texture than the usual

¹ See footnote on p. 124 *re* fragment of pottery found by General Pitt Rivers in the excavation of Wor Barrow.

pottery—the beakers and food vessels—of the Bronze Age, and I think, taking all these circumstances into consideration, one might not be far wrong in ascribing the cairn to the period of transition between the builders of the Neolithic chambered cairn and the builders of the Bronze Age short cist.

Occasionally circles, either single or concentric, and segments of circles of large stones have been found buried under the earth forming a tumulus, or under the agglomerated mass of small stones forming the bulk of a cairn,¹ but I am not aware of any built wall, such as was found partially enclosing the principal cist in the Inverlael cairn, having ever before been noted in Scotland.²

¹ Dr Joseph Anderson (*Scotland in Pagan Times*, p. 4) mentions an example of a large cairn at Collessie in Fife, where a segment of a circle of single stones was found to partially enclose the central cist.

Mr J. R. Mortimer, in his *Forty Years' Researches in British and Saxon Burial Mounds of East Yorkshire*, p. 100, gives a description of a barrow (No. 55) in which a single circle of large stones—not, however, quite complete—occurs.

Mr A. O. Curle, Director of the Museum, has drawn my attention to a further notice of the occurrence of a stone circle discovered in a tumulus excavated by Mr Willoughby Gardner, F.L.S., at Eglwys Bach, Denbighshire, an account of which is contained in *Archæological Research*, by the Nant Antiquarian Society (being the Hon. Secretary's Report for the years 1910–1913). The tumulus is a large one, measuring 72 feet in greatest diameter, and is 5 feet 6 inches in height.

“Buried within the body of the mound, and at some 15 feet from its outer edge a number of large stones were encountered by the excavators. These were . . . found to form a stone circle, which was erected upon the original ground surface.” It is constructed of stones of various sizes. “The larger ones are irregular boulders set upright upon or sunk in the ground at distances from 3 feet to 6 feet apart,” and in two instances it was noticed that “between these upright stones,” for short distances, “smaller stones are filled in, sometimes ‘uprights’ and sometimes ‘horizontal,’ the latter placed one above another, so as to form a rough wall.” Three interments were found in this tumulus, one primary and the other two secondary. All were by incineration, and from the relics and cinerary urn brought to light, Professor Boyd Dawkins, to whom they were submitted, considers the tumulus referable to the late Bronze Age.

² Wall-like enclosures were, according to Bateman (*Ten Years' Diggings*, p. 63), “commonly adopted by the Britons in the construction of their tumuli, by first making a circle of large stones, within which the interments were placed, and then covered with an accumulation of stones, until a mound was formed, surrounded

I cannot conclude my paper without mentioning that it was entirely through the praiseworthy initiative of Lady Fowler that I am able to place on record the interesting phenomena disclosed by the excavation of this cairn. Had the roadmen not been promptly stopped in their work of demolition, a very short time would have sufficed to complete its destruction, and all details would have been irretrievably lost.

by a kind of wall of one or two courses, consisting of the aforesaid circle; the whole was then covered with earth. . . ."

In *Excavations in Cranborne Chase*, by Lieut.-General Pitt Rivers, vol. iv. p. 82, he mentions, in describing the excavation of two primary interments in Wor Barrow, that "to the west of the bodies . . . is a line of nodular flints, which were placed together like the foundation of a wall." The only relic of any description found referable to these interments was a small fragment of "coarse British pottery," which General Pitt Rivers considers as "probably of the Stone Age" (see p. 86 and Plate 257, fig. 19).

Dr Joseph Anderson (*Scotland in Pagan Times*, p. 229) remarks that "in the cairns and circles of the Bronze Age there is occasionally some approximation to a structural character. . . ."