

## IV.

NOTES ON EXCAVATIONS AT DUNDARGUE CASTLE, ABERDEENSHIRE, AND ON A STONE CIRCLE AND GRAVE AT NEW DEER, ABERDEENSHIRE. BY REV. W. BEVERIDGE, F.S.A. Scot.

The ruined Castle of Dundargue stands on the shore between Rosehearty and New Aberdour. Jutting out from the mainland is a narrow promontory of rock, in height 70 feet from the sea-level, and in length about 260 feet. The rock is red sandstone, and from the appearance of it the Celtic tribes of the district gave the place its name. Dundargue means "the red fortified place." On this narrow promontory of rock there had been built a fortification, the ruins of which remain to-day. At what time the fortifications were built or when the rock was first used as a habitation it is quite impossible to say. Approximate dates may be assigned to parts of the ruins, but as to the period of the first foundations history and research remain silent. The only fact we know, to start with, is that the place was a fortress early in the fourteenth century. It may be presumed, however, that it was fortified long before that date, and, as we shall see, there are indications pointing to an early Celtic inhabitation. On the whole, history is extraordinarily silent about Dundargue. Indeed, all that is really known historically might be put into comparatively few sentences, and probably there is little more to be gleaned than what we find in Pratt's *Buchan* (4th edition, 1901), to which reference may be made.

The appearance of the place, as described before 1911, may be briefly referred to. The authorities are mainly Cordiner's *Antiquities* (1780), the *Old Statistical Account, Collections* in the Spalding Club, and Pratt's *Buchan*. The writers in these volumes draw attention, first of all, to the ruins of the Castle on the narrow tongue of rock. At its broadest this tongue of rock is not more than 60 feet. The writers

draw attention to the foundations of buildings on the rock, and to a crumbling boundary wall. They describe, at the south point of the rock and next the land, what Cordiner calls "a strong arched gateway." A considerable part of this gateway still remains, and it appears that a portion of it was destroyed by lightning in 1873. South of this gateway, where probably there had been a portcullis, is a narrow neck of rock, at its widest about 12 feet. On the landward side, and south of this narrow neck, are what the *Old Statistical Account* calls "the outworks." These outworks stretch landward about 120 feet, until they end in a gateway. Apparently there had been a gateway on the inner side of "the outworks" as well as on the outer. The *Statistical Account* further says that there is "a fine level green where the outworks have been." Excavation has shown that this "fine level green" has its own story to tell. Beyond "the outworks," so called, there is a triple rampart. All the old descriptive writers refer to this triple rampart and triple ditch. The first rampart is partly earthwork (10 feet thick) and partly wall (5 feet thick). Beyond this rampart is the first ditch or moat, 20 feet wide, and, at the point where a drawbridge had been, 12 feet deep. Landward are two more ramparts and dry ditches. Certainly, on the landward side, "the outworks," so called, had been well guarded. The Castle on the tongue of rock was practically impregnable, and in the days before siege guns nothing but starvation could have reduced it. It might be added to this description that the triple rampart takes a crescent form.

These and other features revealed by the excavation are shown on the plan here given (fig. 1). The figures on the plan indicate the places where the following objects referred to in the subsequent description were found:—(1) two coins with lion rampant; (2) deer-horn, 3 feet deep; (3) jawbone of killer whale, 6 feet deep; (4) pair of smith's tongs, 3 feet deep; (5) large coins, 4 feet deep; (6) a hairpin; (7) a finger ring (fig. 2); (8) a bracelet (fig. 2); (9) a horse-shoe; (10) a coin; (11) melted lead, a goat's head, and a sheep's head; (12) an

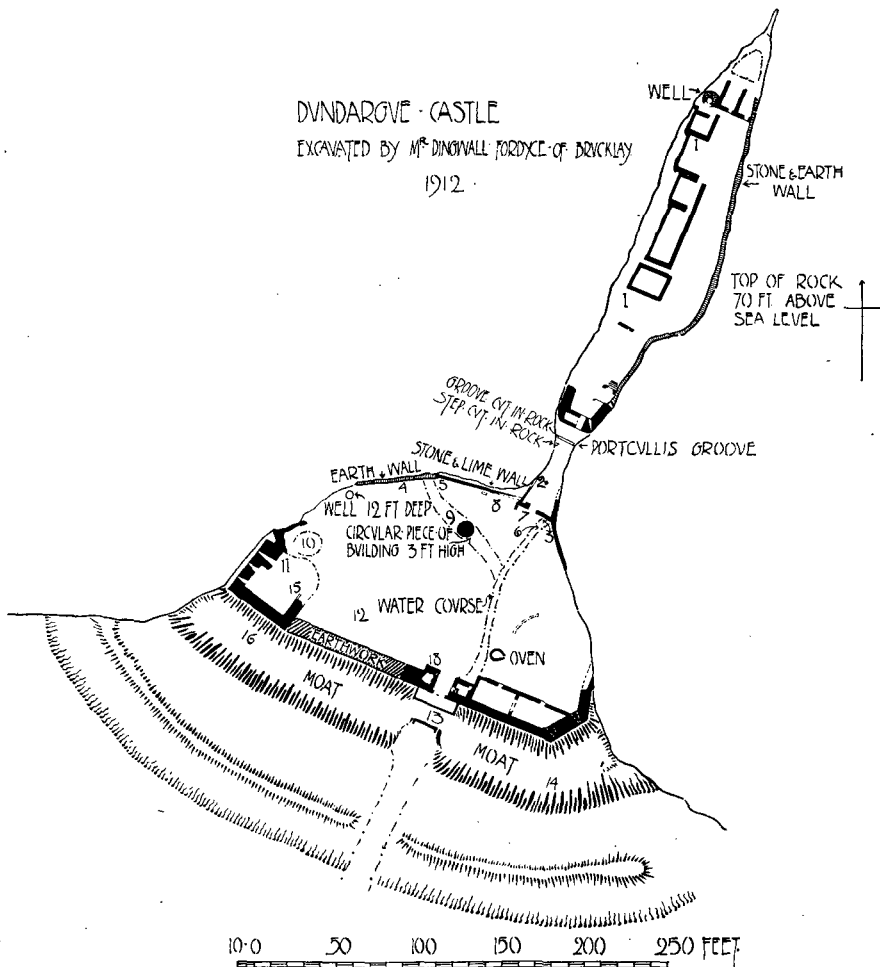


Fig. 1. Plan of Dundargo Castle.

Inverness halfpenny token ; (13) a small horse-shoe ; (14) a piece of leather ; (15) a piece of thick rope ; (16) an arrowhead of steel ; (17) portion of a head of a spear or battle-axe ; (18) a bullock horn.

Up to 1911 little more was known of Dundargue or its ruins. In the end of that year excavations were begun by the proprietor, Mr Dingwall Fordyce, of Brucklay, who has shown an example that might be more frequently imitated by the fortunate owners of ancient habitations. During the winter of 1911-12, and the spring of 1912, the excavations were most carefully carried out. The foundations on the tongue of rock were laid bare. The "outworks" were excavated, and the first moat beyond the first gateway was carefully cleared out. The results of the excavations have proved of considerable archaeological interest, and have well rewarded the enlightened policy of excavation.

On the Castle rock, which was probably the inner sanctuary of Dundargue, the spade revealed little, apart from laying bare the general structure of the buildings. Some coins, however, were found which, though not rare, have proved interesting. Two of them, with I.R. on the obverse side, belong to the reign of James VI., and were issued in 1589. They are not copper, but billon, an alloy of copper and silver. A third coin is so defaced that it is impossible accurately to determine its date, but it is probably a silver penny of the reign of Edward I., and struck in the London Mint.

A deer's horn was found 3 feet deep on the neck of earth and rock between the Castle rock and "the outworks." The largest number of finds, however, were in the enclosure between the north and south gateways of "the outworks." There have apparently been various buildings in these outworks, some of them probably for cattle or horses. One interesting building near the north end seems to have been a sort of round tower. In these buildings and in the enclosure were found such suggestive articles as a button, a hairpin, a bracelet, a finger ring (fig. 2), a horse-shoe, and a smith's tongs, in addition to

a good deal of broken pottery, and bits of coal or lignite. Bones of goats, sheep, and other animals were also found. The most interesting of such finds was one about which zoologists were not at first quite certain. At the north end of the outer enclosure, beside the gateway leading on to the narrow neck, was found beneath 6 feet of black mould and gravel a curious jaw-bone. It has been identified by Sir William Turner, of Edinburgh University, as belonging to the killer whale (*Orca gladiator*). It is difficult to conceive how such a bone should have been deposited in such a situation, and should have been found resting under so much mould and gravel. In the same outer enclosure was found a copper coin from Inverness. It is a trade token, one of the many varieties issued towards the end of the eighteenth century to supply a deficiency in the copper coinage. Such tokens were issued not by the mint but by corporations or by private traders, and were accepted as legal tender till 1817. The Inverness coin is dated 1793. Some large pieces like coins or medals were also found, but they are so much worn and decayed that it has been found impossible to identify them. On one of them, however, there is distinctly the word "India." For assistance in identifying the coins I am indebted to the Rev. R. M'Kinlay, New Pitsligo.

In the moat or ditch outside the first rampart were found a small horse-shoe, a bullock horn, a metal leaf, and a steel arrow-head (fig. 2).

From an archæological point of view, probably the most interesting find was within the outworks enclosure. Below the foundation stones of the round tower already referred to (diameter, 8 feet), the spade uncovered "a kitchen-midden," in which were found, along with characteristic black mould, layers of shells such as periwinkle (*Littorina littorea*). The shells broke with a touch. Upon this "kitchen-midden" the foundations of the tower had been built, plainly proving that the "midden" was of greater age. The presence of this "kitchen-midden" must be regarded as a fact of archæological significance. In conjunction with this fact must be placed the finding of many stone

balls, stone whorls, a hammer stone, and an excellent flint borer—all within the same enclosure.

Such facts point to the probability of an early Celtic fortification,

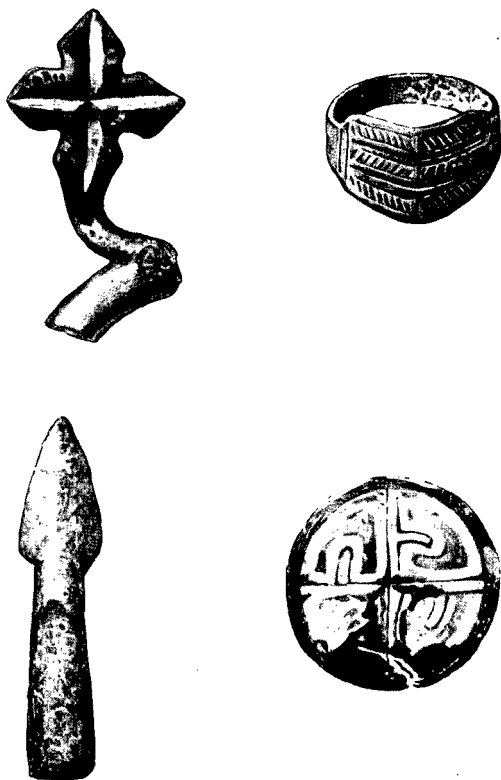


Fig. 2. Objects found at Dundargue Castle.

which, indeed, the name Dundargue itself indicates ; and it is probable that long before the buildings now in ruin had been erected there had been a native fortification. Probably, also, the three-crescent ramparts which now surround the enclosure are older than the time from

which the stone buildings date, and they may, indeed, date from the age when the Celtic inhabitants threw them up as a protection. A section made through these ramparts might reveal additional stone implements of an early date. In the meantime, and so far as excavation has proceeded, the remains found point to such a Celtic foundation as is suggested. Not for the first time in the history of our country have stone buildings followed on the site of a primitive fortification.

Thanks to Mr Dingwall Fordyce, I am enabled to exhibit to the Society the relics recovered from the excavations.

For the following notes on the pottery found during the course of the excavation I am indebted to Mr Alexander O. Curle, F.S.A. Scot., the Director of the National Museum of Antiquities :—

#### NOTE ON THE FRAGMENTS OF POTTERY FROM THE EXCAVATION.

The fragments of pottery submitted consist of the remains of some fourteen or fifteen vessels. There are portions of five handles, also four handles that are practically complete. One handle, which is still attached to the neck of a large green glazed jar, is fluted on the upper surface, and has broad leaf-shaped depressions on the sides at the point of contact with the neck. Similar leaf-shaped markings are apparent on all the other fragments of handles, which tends to show that these vessels have all been of contemporaneous manufacture. The handle joins the neck very near the edge of the rim.

There are fragments of the bottoms of one or two jars of large diameter which show a marked convexity, and, to steady the vessel, the clay has been drawn down between finger and thumb at the edge so as to form a series of supports. The depressions thus produced are unusually deep, and the supports correspondingly serviceable; the markings appear to occur in groups of two or three at intervals around the base.

There are decorated fragments of three large glazed pots. One, of which there are a number of pieces, has been decorated with two bands of wavy incised lines between alternating ridges of dog-tooth ornament. Another vessel, of which a small portion only remains, shows rows of small vertical incisions crossing the ridges produced in the manufacture of the pot. A third piece shows the trace of a zig-zag incised ornament, and a raised fillet, marked at close intervals with vertical incisions.

The characteristic features of all this pottery indicate that it belongs to the fourteenth century, and, from the similarity of the various details, it was probably all made about the same time. One single piece of highly glazed black ware seems to belong to a much later period.

#### A STONE CIRCLE AND GRAVE AT NEW DEER, ABERDEENSHIRE.

On the farm of Standingstones, in the parish of New Deer, there stood about eighty years ago a remarkable stone circle. The stones of it were removed and broken up for building purposes, and the spot where the circle stood is now under cultivation. The position of the circle was on the southern slope of the Hill of Culsh. Adjoining fields on the slopes of the same hill have yielded at various times remarkable finds, such as cists, urn-cemeteries, stone implements, etc. Apparently, the slopes of the hill were the burying-ground of the inhabitants of the district in the bronze-age period. An account of some of these finds, and notably of a small urn now in the Museum, will be found in the *Proceedings* of the Society (vol. xxxv. p. 258). The writer has meantime in his possession several articles, including a jet bead and a small flint axe, found at the same time.

Graves and stone cists are still being uncovered in the same area. Last year, the writer and Mr Littlejohn, farmer, Standingstones, uncovered a grave of an oval shape, the walls of which were built of rough undressed stones. Some bones were found in the grave, and



in the walls of the grave was found a stone, 12 inches long, 4 inches thick, and at its broadest 11 inches wide, on one side of which was a large cup-mark. The cup was 4 inches in diameter and  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch in depth. Similar stones with cup-marks have been found in graves. One at Rayne is described in the *Proceedings* (vol. xli. p. 126). In this case the grave was built of rounded stones, and two small boulders were found, each with a cup-mark on the top. In a grave discovered at Fyvie, and described in the *Transactions of the Banffshire Field Club* (1887-88, p. 37), one of the top slabs had a cup-mark on it, and "in the building of the end of the grave was found a stone" with a ring-mark incised on it.

The site of the stone circle at Culsh has always been remarkable for the number of small white quartzite stones lying on the surface. These stones are scattered over an area 30 feet in diameter. It occurred to the present writer that an excavation of the site might give some interesting results. With the help of Mr Littlejohn and his sons, the excavation was carried out when the field was ploughed last year. On the area there were found several flints and a stone axe which had been partly broken through the process of agriculture. Throughout the area were also found masses of burnt soil. On carefully digging over the area four pits were found, two of these being 3 feet in diameter and 4 feet in depth. The other two pits were smaller. Two of the pits were filled with rough stones. At the bottom of these were found bones, greatly decayed. No stone implement was found in the pits, unless one much-decayed stone, like a rough axe, could be described as such.

The results of the excavation show that the site had been used for interments, and that in the burial rites fire had been used.