

III.

ACCOUNT OF THE EXPLORATION OF A CAIRN AT CRAIGBIRNOCH,
NEW LUCE, WIGTOWNSHIRE.¹ BY THE REV. R. S. G. ANDERSON,
B.D., CORRESPONDING MEMBER.

On the lands of Craighbirnoch, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile SW. of Pultadie farmhouse, and 60 yards E. of the New Luce-Glenwhilly road, opposite



Fig. 1. Cairn at Craighbirnoch showing Cist.

the projecting corner of an enclosed field, lies the more northerly of two dilapidated cairns (fig. 1). About 37 feet in diameter, one half of it is now entirely reduced to ground-level, save for a low marginal ring. The other half retains the foundation layer of large stones, arranged in concentric circles close together, sparsely covered with small stones. At one point only does the height reach to about 2 feet.

On the edge of this low heap, and almost exactly in the centre of

¹ Cf. *Inventory Royal Commission Ancient Monuments (Scotland), County of Wigtown*, No. 274.

the cairn, a cist is exposed. It is placed in a line NE. by SW., and its floor is sunk about 3 inches below ground-level. Its interior measurements are—length, 22 inches; breadth, $14\frac{1}{2}$ inches; depth, 15 inches. Two of the walls—an end and a side—are single slabs of greywacke, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick; the other side, of the same material, is irregular in shape and short, and must have been supplemented by other stones to raise it to the cover-level. The sides are sunk to floor-level, whilst the end stones have sills to rest on at ground-level. The floor is paved with medium-sized flattened stones, very neatly and exactly fitted. Unfortunately, the cover and the end stone towards the NE. are both missing, and inquiries of the roadman, who unknowingly uncovered this cist two years ago in his quest for road metal, elicited no information.

When discovered in June last (1916) the cist was almost filled with loose stones on a layer of earth that was level with the sills. No objects showed on the surface; but by riddling, the earth yielded over forty fragments of a food-vessel. These had been scattered throughout the cist; but the main pieces were found in the SE. corner, crushed together as if by violence. The original fracture probably took place by the collapse of the built-up portion of the side here, under the strain of the superimposed mass of the cairn. Altogether, about a third of the urn was retrieved, and, fortunately, enough to provide practically a complete section both of the structure and of the decoration (fig. 2). These proved to be of the characteristic type.

The food-vessel had been 6 inches in height. For $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches of this, the bowl swelled upwards from a base $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter to its greatest width of 6 inches at the shoulder, thence turning inwards to meet the rim. The rim was an everted curve, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch broad, finished at the top with a vertical band $\frac{1}{8}$ inch deep. The inner lip was a shallow curve— $\frac{3}{4}$ inch broad, set at a descending angle. The material of which the urn was constructed is a coarse black earth or clay, $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick, coated thinly both inside and out with a fine light reddish-brown paste.

From the base a space of $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height is encircled by 8 fluted rings, roughly equidistant, and with plain intervals. Above this are 8 more rings of a similar type, reaching to the lower edge of the rim, having their intervals filled with decoration. The two lowest intervals show hatching right and left respectively; the other six having zigzag ornament and hatching alternately. This zigzag decoration has been very simply and effectively produced by two series of triangular depressions, the upper inverted and fitted into the lower so as to leave the narrow surface-space between as a zigzag line, almost wholly in relief, encircling the bowl. Where the bowl begins to turn towards

the neck, the fluted ring is both deeper and broader than the others and shows greater exactness in execution. It is intersected by at least two low knobs. Above the 16th ring, the ornament of the rim consists of a narrow band of zigzag surmounted by the herring-bone pattern, whilst the narrow vertical band at the lip is filled with hatching. Three rows of hatching in alternate directions constitute the decoration of the interior of the lip. The design is executed with no little freedom

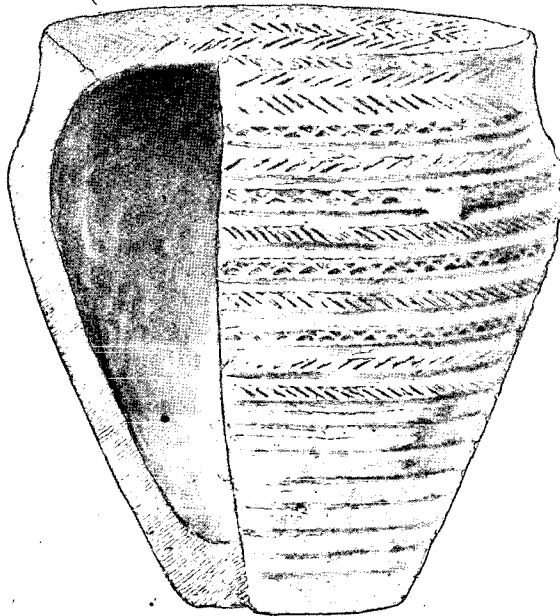


Fig. 2. Sectioned view of Food-vessel Urn found in Cist at Craighirnoch. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

and vivacity, suggesting considerable facility and ease in the skill of the decorator, as well as a decided artistic sense.

Close to the base of the food-vessel was found a small deposit of burnt bones. In the angle of the base itself, among some caked earth, traces of bones and charcoal were also found, probably introduced after the breakage. Throughout the whole cist and between the crevices of the stones fragments both of bones and charcoal were in evidence.

No other objects were found in the cist, and no evidences of any secondary burial were observed on the site of the cairn.

An examination of the charcoal by Mr H. F. Tagg of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, kindly obtained by Professor Bayley Balfour, shows it to consist of fragments of carbonised oak.

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REPORT ON THE BONES. By Professor T. H. Bryce.

The fragments of bone in the larger and smaller envelopes represent a typical deposit of burnt human bones. Portions of long bones, skull bones, and teeth occur, but no fragment is distinctive enough to enable one to determine the age or sex of the individual.
