

II.

THREE FOOD-VESSEL URNS, A CUP-MARKED STONE, AND OTHER OBJECTS DISCOVERED AT SHERIFFTON, NEAR PERTH. BY J. GRAHAM CALLANDER, SECRETARY.

About the end of last year a group of prehistoric relics showing an unusual variety of types was brought to light on the Scone Palace estates, near Perth. During the winter months many trees growing singly and in clumps in cultivated fields were removed for the better cultivation of the land, and, as the ground occupied by them had to be ploughed, it was necessary to take out the roots, a process more easily accomplished by dragging down the trees with a steel hawser wound in by a traction engine, than by felling them in the usual fashion and digging out the roots. The operation of overthrowing the trees was facilitated by first digging a narrow, circular trench, about 2 feet deep, round the trees, some 8 feet from the trunk, and then cutting the spreading roots thus exposed. On 18th December last, Edward Suttie was engaged digging a trench round a large, single oak when he struck some vessels of clay with his mattock, breaking them into fragments. His opinion was that there were only two vessels, as the rounded cavities formed by the basal portion of two urns were clearly defined when the sand was removed. The shards were carefully laid aside, and afterwards were presented to the Perth Museum by the Earl of Mansfield, the proprietor of the ground. The day after they were received in the museum I examined the fragments of pottery, and found that pieces of the rims of three vessels could be identified without any difficulty.

On the last day of the year, Hogmanay, I accompanied several Perth gentlemen to the spot where the urns were turned up, and obtained particulars of the find from the discoverer. Our visit was particularly fortunate, as we were able to note a cup-marked stone, and secure the records of the exposure of a structure resembling a small grave, and a grooved stone, all of which had been laid bare in the immediate vicinity of the first discovery.

The sites of those finds lie near the middle of the Roman Camp of Grassy Walls, on the farm of Sheriffston, parish of Scone, about 3 miles north by west of Perth, and some 433 yards north-west of the nearest farm buildings (fig. 1). At the time of our visit three oak trees about 20 or 30 yards apart stood at this place ready to be overthrown. The urns and the cup-marked stone were found in the trench which had been dug round the most northerly tree, and the other relics were found beside

the tree on the south-east. The urns had been buried almost on the crest of a slight ridge which runs up through the fields in a gentle rise towards

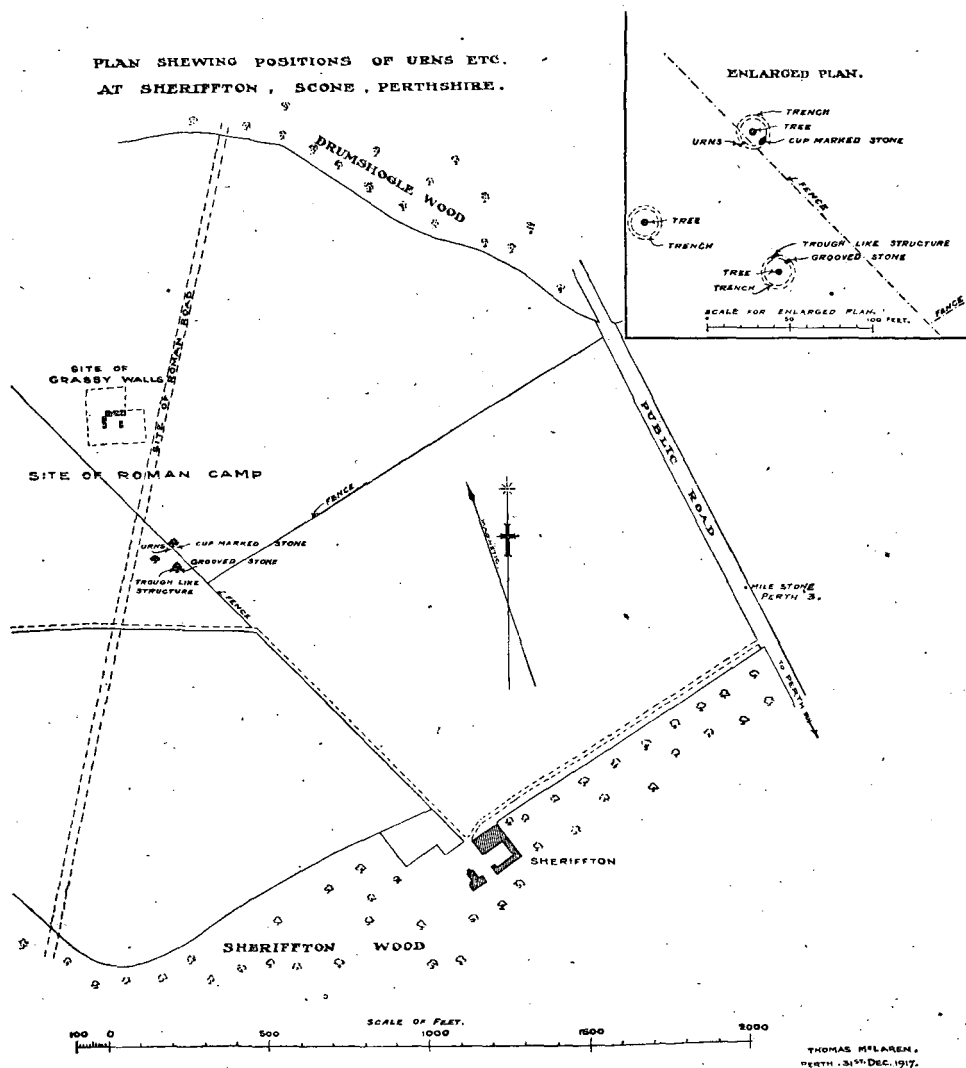


Fig. 1. Plan showing the positions of the discoveries at Sheriffton.

the northern boundary of the camp. While the ground to the east stretches away nearly flat, there is a sharp dip into a hollow running

down towards the Tay, at a distance of about 100 yards to the west. The soil consists of about a foot of good loam overlying fluviatile deposits of fine sand. The site of the "Roman Road" planned by General Roy,¹ and marked on the Ordnance Survey map, passes some 33 yards west of the spot where the urns were discovered, and the old steading of Grassy Walls, from which the camp took its name, and which was cleared away many years ago, stood about 200 yards to the north-north-west.

The Urns.—In digging the trench there was nothing to indicate the presence of the pottery except a darkening in the colour of the sand with which the vessels were surrounded, and this, no doubt, had been caused by some of the surface soil being thrown into the excavation when it was filled in. There was no cist or built structure of any sort, so apparently the urns had just been deposited close together in a hole dug in the ground, the bases of the vessels being placed some 2 feet 3 inches below the surface. They lay about 8 feet south-west of the tree, and, as indicated by the well-defined cavities formed by the lower parts of two of the urns, it was evident that they had been placed upright. These two vessels had stood almost touching, in a line running about north-east and south-west, and it is possible that the third had been placed near the southern end of the same line. It would seem that the mouths of two of them had each been covered with a small, flat stone, as two pieces of sandstone and grit, measuring $11\frac{1}{4}$ inches by $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 2 inches and $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 7 inches by 2 inches, were brought up by the blow of the implement which exposed the pottery; it is also very probable that the third vessel had been similarly provided, as we found another flat piece of grit, measuring $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 7 inches by 2 inches, standing on its edge in the outer side of the trench on the same level as the pottery. The position of this stone may be taken as an indication that the third urn stood in line with the other two.

One of the urns looks as if it had been whole before it was struck with the mattock, but, after making allowance for some of the shards being smashed to powder, the appearance of the fractures on certain of the fragments of the other vessels is such as to imply that they had collapsed long before they were brought to light.

¹ Last summer I visited Grassy Walls several times for the purpose of trying to identify the track of this road from the crops growing on it, but without success, neither was I able to detect any indications of its course from differences in the soil. It may be mentioned, however, that the line of the eastern rampart of the camp, which has been entirely obliterated by the plough, was clearly marked for a considerable distance by a more luxuriant growth of corn. From similar investigations on the site of the Roman fort of Orrea, at Bertha, which lies on the opposite bank of the Tay, nearly 1 mile to the south, and also from certain surface indications, I think it is not unlikely that the surviving rampart planned by Roy as the northern boundary of the fort was really the southern rampart. Two broad low ridges on the north and west may mark the limits of the fort in these directions.

The three vessels, which are all of a reddish colour on the outside, belong to the food-vessel type of urn, and two, if not three, varieties of this class of pottery are represented.

The best preserved urn has been restored, and it belongs to a well-known sub-type (fig. 2). Its mouth is wide, its upper part nearly vertical, and its lower half tapers to a narrow base. Two raised mouldings or cordons encircle the vessel, one at the shoulder $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches below the lip, and the other midway between the rim and the shoulder. There are



Fig. 2. Food-vessel Urn found at Sheriffton.

none of the small protuberances like incipient lugs round the shoulder which are often seen on food-vessels. Like so many vessels of its class, this urn shows a wealth of ornamentation on its exterior, which had been impressed on the clay before it was fired, and the same can be said about its two neighbours. In the broad, shallow groove between the lip and the upper moulding there is a row of rude chevrons with occasional vertical lines, formed by the impression of a thick, fibrous cord of two strands, and in the hollow between the mouldings there is a somewhat similar pattern. A row of triangular markings appears on the under side of the moulding just at the shoulder, and there are five transverse rows

of short, vertical lines drawn by a thin, sharp-pointed tool encircling the lower portion of the vessel. On the top of the brim, which is bevelled towards the interior, are radiating cord markings similar to those on the upper part of the wall. The urn measures $5\frac{7}{8}$ inches in height, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in external diameter across the mouth, $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches at the shoulder, and $2\frac{5}{8}$ inches at the base, and the thickness of the wall is about $\frac{7}{16}$ inch.

Probably less than half of the second vessel has been preserved, but, fortunately, there is enough left to give an indication of its form. It would seem to have been shaped very like the first, as there is one moulding about 1 inch below the lip, but it is impossible to say whether there had been another at the shoulder; the rim, however, has a more acute bevel towards the interior. The scheme of ornamentation is quite different from that on the first, as it consists of upright zigzags of three parts extending across the rim from its inner edge and down the outside as far as the moulding, the lines on the lip slanting from left to right. Below the moulding it is not unlikely that the markings were carried in straight lines, with breaks in them, obliquely to the right and nearly as far as the base; but this is a doubtful point, as I am unable to say whether all the remaining fragments of pottery belonged to this vessel or the third, or partly to both. The impressions, which have a breadth of about $\frac{3}{16}$ inch, at the first glance look as if they had been formed by pressing a twisted cord with the thumb against the clay, but the transverse markings do not cross the main line obliquely but at right angles, a design which might have been made either by a stamp or a thin cord wound round a core. The external diameter of the mouth seems to have been about $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and the wall is about $\frac{7}{16}$ inch thick.

Of the third urn, apparently rather more than the half of the wall has survived. The remnants display a vessel of quite different shape, because the profile of the upper two-thirds of the urn is curvilinear, and wants the angularity of the other two vessels, a shape accentuated by, if not resulting from, the presence of the mouldings which encircle them. While there is this difference in form, the ornamentation on this vessel, though arranged more simply, bears a strong resemblance to that seen on the second urn, in the individual marks which go to make up the design. The similarity of colouration has already been remarked upon. From these points of resemblance it may be taken that two forms of the food-vessel were made at the same time in this district. The discovery of different varieties of food-vessel urns in circumstances believed to indicate that they were contemporary has been commented on elsewhere.¹ A careful examination of the lip of the urn shows that though it now attenuates to a rather sharp rounded top, it originally had been

¹ Abercromby, *Bronze-Age Pottery*, vol. i. p. 103.

broad, like the usual brim seen in this class of ware, but the inner portion has scaled off in such a remarkably regular fashion as to convey an erroneous idea of its original shape. The ornamentation consists of parallel broken lines slanting from right to left, from the top of the brim to near the base. The only dimensions obtainable were the external diameter of the mouth and the thickness of the wall, and these are about $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches and $\frac{7}{16}$ inch respectively.

A small quantity of incinerated bones was found adhering to some of the fragments of the pottery.

Cup-marked Stone.—After examining the place where the urns had been deposited we directed our attention to a large, flat stone which lay partially exposed in the trench some 8 feet east-south-east of the pottery, and to the south-east of the tree. It was of irregular oval shape, measured 5 feet 11 inches in length by 3 feet 6 inches in breadth by 1 foot in thickness, and had been covered by about 6 inches of soil. From its proximity to the urns, and its shape—a slab and not a boulder—we hoped it might prove to be the cover of a cist and had it raised, but no sepulchral remains were found under it. Still, near the centre of its length, and towards its north-western edge, there was a pocket of disturbed soil, extending about 1 foot 6 inches in length and breadth and 1 foot in depth, which was easily distinguished from the surrounding sand. It was impossible to say whether this disturbance had been caused by the hand of man or by rabbits, which find the roots of these trees very suitable places for burrowing. The stone was replaced and its upper surface cleared of soil, when four cup-marks and a peculiar, chiselled groove were exposed (fig. 3). The two cup-marks nearest the groove measure $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter and $\frac{5}{8}$ inch in depth, but the other two, which lie nearer the opposite side of slab, and are of about the same width, are very shallow, as the stone has worn considerably at this part. The groove crosses the slab near the widest part and then turns sharply along the edge in a slight curve, there being a heel-like projection at the angle. Where it crosses the stone it is about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide and of little depth, but after the turn it shows as a V-shaped channel, deeply cut in the sandstone, and measuring $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch in width and $\frac{5}{8}$ inch in depth.

Grave-like Structure.—In digging the trench round the second tree, which stood about 70 feet south-south-east of the first, a trough-like structure, formed of small, flat pieces of sandstone set on edge, was encountered barely 1 foot below the surface. It lay obliquely across the trench to the north-west of the tree, the longer axis running north-east and south-west. There were no cover stones, and the southern end was open, but the stones forming these parts may have been removed during

FOOD-VESSEL URNS, ETC., DISCOVERED AT SHERIFFTON. 137

farming operations. The structure measured 3 feet in length, 1 foot 3 inches in breadth, and about 1 foot in depth, and the largest stone utilised in forming the sides was no more than 1 foot square and 2 inches thick. Only one of the stones—and it was on the west side—remained in position at the time of our visit, but the others were seen lying at

CUP-MARKED STONE AT SHERIFFTON,
SCONE, PERTHSHIRE.

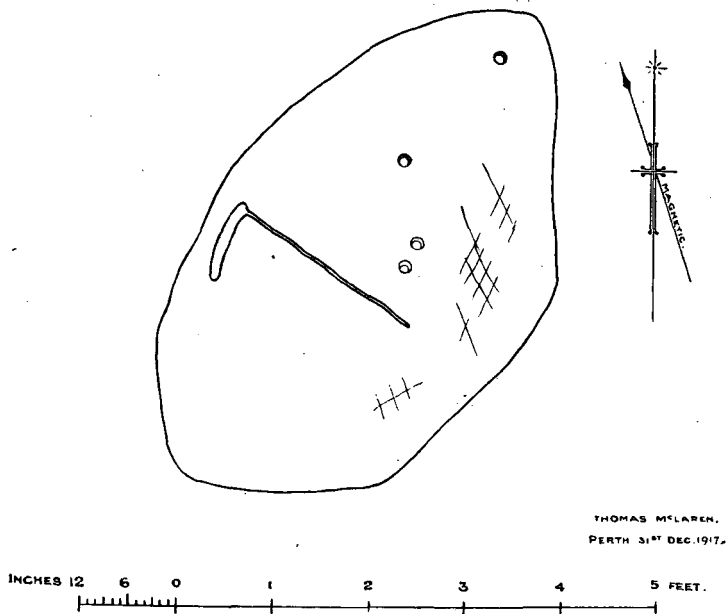


Fig. 3. Cup-marked Stone found at Sheriffton.

the side of the cutting. Nothing in the shape of bones, charred wood, or other relics was found in the structure.

Grooved Stone.—The last of the relics uncovered was a rude block of sandstone or grit of fairly regular length, breadth, and thickness, measuring 2 feet by 2 feet by 10 inches (fig. 4). The end which lay tilted up in the trench formed an oblique angle with the upper surface. Its position was some 8½ feet east of the last described structure, and to the north-east of the tree. The upper surface and oblique end were

scored with a number of grooves at irregular intervals of about 2 inches, running parallel to each other longitudinally along the upper surface, and transversely across the oblique end of the stone. These channels were crossed at right angles by a few shorter grooves of similar character. There is no doubt that these marks had been cut with a chisel, and were neither ice scratchings nor hollows cut by harrow tines.

Except on sites of ancient inhabitation, it is very seldom that the discovery of four ancient deposits falls to be noted within such a



Fig. 4. Grooved Stone found at Sheriffton.

restricted area in Scotland, especially in arable ground, and the variety of relics is no less remarkable. Further, each of the four occurrences exhibits unusual features, even though two of them, the urns and the cup-marked stone, belong to very common Bronze Age types of remains.

In Scotland, food-vessel urns are found usually in short cists associated with unburnt interments, and the recovery of calcined bones with this class of pottery is deserving of notice, as is also the presence of the flat stones which seem to have been used as lids for the vessels. In the great majority of the records of the discoveries of Bronze Age urns in Scotland no mention is made of the presence of stone covers. I have been able to record finds of twenty of these vessels, but this is the first time that I have had to note this occurrence. Furthermore, I know of only one other instance in Scotland in which three food-vessel urns were found.

closely grouped together, and this was in a cist which was discovered at Duncra Hill, East Lothian, the urns found being now in our National Museum.¹ Dr Anderson described this discovery as a "most unusual, if not unique, experience."

With regard to the cup-marked stone, the groove sculptured on it differs from the usual duct or channel seen on this class of monument, in position, in length, and in character, as it is not directly connected with any of the cup-marks, is much longer, and at one part more deeply and widely carved.

The grave-like structure shows several peculiarities which should be noted. It contained no relics by which it might have been possible to determine its character and period; but although no trace of human remains were seen, this does not preclude the possibility that it may have been a grave, as the sand in which it was buried is said to have a strong disintegrating action on osseous remains. The building was quite different from that seen in the ordinary Bronze Age short cist, it was formed of much smaller stones, and the breadth and depth were much less than are displayed in these graves. It looked more like the stone-lined grave of a later period, intended to contain the body of a child placed in an extended position. Had it been orientated east and west we might have been justified in classifying it as a grave of the Christian period, but it lay north-east and south-west.

There is also much difficulty in classifying and dating the last of the four discoveries, the grooved stone. It may have been a block roughly dressed for quite a late building, but, as it was found within the bounds of a Roman Camp, the crossed grooves chiselled on the stone were at once suggestive of the rectangular tooling seen on stones dressed by Roman stone-cutters. Still, the block displays none of the regularity of outline, or of pattern cut on it, that we associate with these people. I can make no suggestion as to the date or purpose of the stone.

On the day of our visit Mr Henry Coates, F.S.A.Scot., Curator of the Perth Museum, took photographs of the various objects, and Mr Thomas M'Laren, Depute Burgh Surveyor, Perth, made plans of the site and of the cup-marked stone, and I am indebted to them for allowing these illustrations to be reproduced.

¹ *Proc. Soc. Antiq. of Scotland*, vol. xxxiv. p. 131.