

III.

NOTE ON A POTTERY MASK AND SHERDS OF MEDIÆVAL POTTERY
FOUND AT THE BASS OF INVERURIE, WITH SOME PARTICULARS
OF THE BASS. BY ALEXANDER O. CURLE, F.S.A. SCOT., DIRECTOR
OF THE MUSEUM.

I desire to draw attention to three pieces of pottery which were brought to me last summer. They were recovered by Mr Robertson, the gravedigger at Inverurie, in the course of his work in an extension of the cemetery which comes close up to the base of the Bass. These consist of a bearded mask, a segment of the base of a large jug, and a portion of the lip of a similar vessel. The mask (fig. 1) is a rather well-modelled face of a man with a long beard, the latter feature projecting from the face, which has been fixed to the neck of a pitcher, at an angle of 45° or thereabout, to afford a grip and act as a side handle. At the base of the beard there appears a rude representation of a hand, from which probably an arm extended to the body of the vessel. This object is formed of a whitish material and is coated with a light-green lead glaze. It has been probably a part of such a pitcher as is illustrated in the first plate of the *Illustrated Catalogue of Early English Earthenware*, published by the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1914, and described as having "on each side of the neck a man's mask with long beard forming side handles, the beard spreading out at the end and grasped by a hand and arm in applied relief." Such representations appear to have been fairly common on pitchers of the fourteenth century, and in the last few years I have had occasion to refer twice to the discovery of such objects from excavations of inhabited sites of mediæval times in Scotland: first in the case of Kirkcudbright Castle in 1914,¹ and again in regard to an artificial mound at Kidsneuk, Bogsides, Ayrshire, in last year's *Proceedings*.²

The second piece of pottery, the segment of the base of a large jar, shows a continuous row of impressed thumb-marks around its edge, and by this feature tends to confirm the fourteenth-century date of the pottery mask. The third object is a portion of the lip of a pitcher of a light-red body coated with a thick lead glaze of deep-green colour. The section of this piece so closely resembles that of a fragment of pottery coated with a rather thick yellow glaze, found in the ditch of the mote of Hawick and dated there to the twelfth or thirteenth century, as to be

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. xlviii., 1913-14, p. 392.

² *Ibid.*, vol. lii., 1917-18, p. 68.

worth remark, though by itself it is hardly sufficient to add weight to an *a priori* argument for the occupation of the Bass in the twelfth or thirteenth century.

The Bass is a mound, in shape a truncated cone, about 50 feet in height, which occupies a strong position on the right bank of the Ury, close to the southern end of the royal burgh of Inverurie, and at the open end of a loop formed by the junction of that stream with the Don, the two



Fig. 1. Pottery Mask from Bass of Inverurie.

streams coming to within 250 yards of one another about a third of a mile distant from the point of confluence. On the eastern side of this mound there is a prolongation eastward at about half its height for a distance of some fifty yards, known as the Little Bass.

In 1849 the sides of the Bass were trimmed and the top levelled, so that the mound has now a more regular appearance than it originally possessed. Many legends have attempted to account for its peculiar formation, but the true origin was discovered in 1883, when, during the laying out of an extension of the churchyard, a pathway was cut between the Bass and the Little Bass. The section of soil then exposed was examined by Mr Hinxman of the Geological Survey, who happened to be

in the neighbourhood at the time, and who, in a letter to the Aberdeen newspapers, thus described its origin: "This isolated fragment of the ancient river bed, preserved possibly from the effects of denudation by its position in the angle between the two streams, remains a relic of a time when Don and Ury flowed at a level 30 or 40 feet higher than their present course. . . . The section shows alternations of fine and



Fig. 2. Bass of Inverurie.

coarse sand with a few beds of shingle, marking deposition by currents of varying velocity. The finer beds are often false-bedded, and all are composed mainly of water-worn fragments of granite rock. An excavation of the top of the Bass proper shows the upper portion to consist of rearranged sand with no traces of bedding, and it is probable that a few feet of the capping of the mound, together with the smooth conical outline, are the only parts of the structure due to human agency."

The illustration (fig. 2), from a photograph taken before the churchyard extension, shows the Bass with the Little Bass closely attached to it, not separate as it now appears.

There are no visible remains of any stone work on the summit of

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either portion of the mound, and there can be little doubt from the general features of the site that we have here another example of the mount-and-bailey castle or mote, such as was introduced into England from Normandy by William the Conqueror, and brought into Scotland by the Anglo-Norman nobles who came northward in the reigns of David I. and William the Lion.



Fig. 3. Peel of Fichlie.

Mr Ritchie, our excellent corresponding member, to whom I am indebted for all the information here given about the Bass, has furnished further details which show that, as was so often the case, a ditch surrounded the mote. On the west side of the Bass, between it and the old churchyard, there was formerly a piece of low-lying ground, known as Killiewalker, which was subject to flooding when the Ury was high, and which would therefore have silt deposited on it. This hollow has now been filled up and made level with the rest of the extended churchyard. But round the foot of the Bass, quite beyond the reach of this flooding, there extends a deposit of soft black earth quite different from the rest of the soil in the neighbourhood. It is encountered when graves

are being dug, and much of it was exposed when, some years ago, a drain was laid round the Bass to carry off water which occasionally interfered with churchyard operations. It has all the appearance of being the remains of a moat, and it was in this black soil that the broken pottery above referred to was found. While this moat has not been systematically traced along its whole course, sufficient indications of it have been found to show that it surrounded both the Bass and the Little Bass. Its nearest edge is about 4 feet from the foot of the Bass; it has a width of about 10 feet, and its depth is at least $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet, probably a little more, as the bottom of it was not reached at that depth. No whole pieces of pottery have been discovered, and it seems probable that those found were the remains of broken dishes thrown away by the inhabitants of the castle.

When the footpath between the Bass and the Little Bass was made in 1883, some pieces of oak were found which appeared to be the remains of a stairway leading up the side of the Bass.

Mote-hills are fairly numerous in certain parts of Scotland, and other two are to be seen farther up the valley of the Don—the Doune of Invernochty, described by Mr Douglas Simpson in the previous communication, and the other known as the Peel of Fichlie (fig. 3), situated half way between Kildrummie and Invernochty. Mr Ritchie describes it as being about 60 feet high, slightly oval in shape, with a flat top, and surrounded by a moat, now dry. No buildings now remain on the top, but vitrified and wrought stones are said to have been found there. The period of the erection of the mote-hills as the twelfth to thirteenth centuries is little open to doubt, but of the length of their endurance in occupation we are still ignorant, though the refuse from their ditches, which no doubt exists in abundance, will some day reveal that fact to us. That the Bass of Inverurie, at least, was in use till well into the fourteenth century, these sherds are sufficient evidence.