

II.

PREHISTORIC CAIRNS AND A CROSS IN THE PARISH OF KIRKMICHAEL, BANFFSHIRE. BY REV. J. GARROW DUNCAN, B.D., F.S.A.Scot.

CAIRN AT EAST LYNE, KIRKMICHAEL.

For some years back I have been familiar with a rumour that there was a cairn on the farm of East Lyne here, that it had been opened some years ago, and that there had been found in it an "urn," which had been at once covered up again. In conversation with the factor of the estate I mentioned the matter, and asked if I might some time examine it. Permission was at once granted, but the war came on, and no man was to be had to assist me. It was only last year (1920) therefore that I was able to undertake the work.

In August last my man and I set out with the necessary tools, obtained permission of the tenants to deposit on their field any material displaced, as well as a promise of every assistance they could afford, and within an hour of starting we had struck the cover and side of the stone cist of a prehistoric burial, such as is usually attributed to the Bronze Age in Britain.

Let me describe our finds in detail.

The cairn (fig. 1) measures now about 30 feet long by 15 feet broad, and 6 feet high where the cist is situated. Originally, however, it must have measured 30 feet in diameter and formed a very complete circle. The materials of which it is composed are water-worn stones, which had been carried chiefly from the river-bed. The river is now about a quarter of a mile away, but at the time that the cairn was erected its course may have been just at the bottom of the field, some 200 yards off, for the field ends in a steep slope down to what seems to be an ancient river-bed. There had probably been no earth added to the cairn, or very little, originally, for there is very little still—sufficient, however, to nourish a stunted birch tree apparently of recent growth.

The field on which the cairn stands was first put under cultivation by the ancestors of the present tenants about a hundred years ago. Previous to that it had been used simply as rough pasture, it being the lower declivity of the Cromdale hill behind the house. Thirty-five or forty years ago the tenants decided to remove this heap of stones because of the trouble of ploughing round it. When they had removed about half of it and worked in to the centre, they came upon a very large stone cist. This was the "urn" spoken of among the people here,

and, as they did not wish to desecrate any place of burial, they stopped work at that point and covered up the cist again.

The steading, however, was undergoing repair, and the mason was in difficulties about a pair of lintels for the cart-shed doors. Not being a man of delicate scruples nor of superstition, apparently, and hearing of the large slabs that formed the stone cist recently discovered in the cairn, he unearthed the cist, and must have removed every slab of it. The two sides he used as lintels, in spite of the protests and warnings of the people around, who assured him that they would never rest away from their



Fig. 1. Cairn at East Lyne, Kirkmichael, showing Cist exposed.

proper place, but would speedily find their way back, as the cross¹ had done, or break in pieces.

The lintels assuredly did break after some five or six years. I saw the pieces lying there, and at once concluded that they had belonged to another cist.

The tenants informed me that I would find a "stone burial," but that one side of the cist had been taken away thirty-five years ago for lintels. The mason had quietened opposition by saying he only took a part of the cist, but he must have removed it all. In any case, no portion of the one I found is wanting, and the neighbours tell me it is not the grave which was first opened. No trace of the latter remains in the cairn.

The cairn being composed mainly of stones is very little denuded, and

¹ See *infra*, p. 212.

though such cairns are often treated as dumps for stones gathered off the field, there cannot have been much added in that way to this one.

Both cists had been placed almost in the centre of the cairn. Had the first despoilers gone a yard or two further in removing the cairn, they would have found this second cist. The appearance of the cairn at first suggested that there might be a third or even a fourth cist, but further examination pointed to the conclusion that there were no more in the mound. If permission could be obtained to remove the whole cairn, further burials might be discovered underneath it.

The cist is composed of five slabs; two of these, each 6 feet long and about 4 inches thick, well sunk in the soil and with an inward slope of about 3 inches to the top, form the sides; two of smaller size but of similar thickness and similarly sloped form the ends. Both the side slabs project 15 inches beyond those at the ends, and there is no slab for the bottom. The burial had been laid on the hard sub-soil, the surface mould evidently being removed. The covering stone measures 6 feet in length, 5 feet in breadth at the broadest part, and about 12 inches thick at the centre, thinning down to the edges, it being of a naturally rounded formation, so that no water could lie on it. It weighs about 10 to 15 cwts.

These stones had been picked up or dug up in the vicinity, for on examination I found that many other large slabs had been removed to the edges of the field when it was being trenched and prepared for cultivation. The sides of the cist are buttressed and kept in position by thick, heavy stone slabs of similar length laid flat, hard against the sides. The ends are so carefully let into the soil that they need no support to keep them in place, and the cover stone, though it by no means fits closely, has in its weight a sufficient guarantee against its being easily removed.

The burial space measures in length 3 feet 7 inches at the bottom, and 2 feet 10 inches at the top; in breadth, 2 feet 3 inches at the bottom, and 2 feet 1 inch at the top. Each of the end slabs thus slopes inwards about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and each of the side slabs about 1 inch. When cleaned out down to the sub-soil the cist measures about 2 feet in depth.

The cist is almost perfectly oriented, the ends pointing almost due east and west, or slightly E.N.E. and W.S.W., and the sides north and south.

No human remains were found, though carefully searched for.

The first cist, which had been removed, must have lain parallel to or in alignment with the second, a distance of about 4 feet separating their nearest points. The form of the cairn points to this. There is no trace whatever of a marginal setting of larger stones, nor of internal structures of any kind other than those described.

Inside the cist there was a depth of 6 or 7 inches of very rich black mould, which we carefully passed through a riddle, keeping a watch for jet or flints. The cover stone was not a complete fit, but left a corner open, and mould could drop in—as indeed we found had happened, the mould in that corner being of a different colour from that in the rest of the cist. Only a small quantity had found its way in, however, there being very little soil in the composition of the cairn.

Amongst the dust brought home from the cist were two small black chips of what appeared to be charred wood. Only one little piece of bone was found, and it crumbled away to dust.

In 1894-5, while working with Dr Flinders Petrie at Nagada in Upper Egypt, we unearthed about 3000 prehistoric contracted burials. The knees were doubled towards the chin, the head was often cut off and placed in the bosom, and the body was almost always placed with head to the south and face to the west. The body was placed in this manner inside a sun-baked clay box about 3 feet by $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and the box was then filled up with sand—unless the sand had been allowed to get in by early plunderers. Almost always a reed mat was found under the body—the fragments being mixed with the filling—and both wood and matting were found.

In other sections of the cemetery the body was placed in this doubled-up position *in a corner of a large pit*, while pottery vases filled with various materials for food and drink were ranged round the sides. Often personal belongings of the dead were added, and among these were flint knives and weapons for shooting at gazelles to cut the tendon of the hind hoofs. Other implements of the same material were also found.

It is noteworthy that the contracted form of burial was used in Egypt even when the body was deposited in a pit 12 feet by 10, where the size of the grave cannot have been the reason for the contracted position. Similarly, it would have been as easy to make this cist at East Lyne 6 feet long by $2\frac{1}{2}$ broad, as to make it only about 3 feet by $2\frac{1}{2}$, with the ends of the slabs projecting beyond the cist proper. Obviously it was the custom to make contracted burials because this was regarded as the proper way to bury the dead. Very likely the custom arose through finding the body in this position immediately after death—with knees drawn up.

I have already indicated that there was in this cairn another and a larger cist, which was entirely removed, apparently by the mason, who did not wish to hurt the farmer's sensibilities, and led him to believe that he had taken only one side of the grave. I have therefore been unable to find any trace of the contents of that cist.

While I was at work examining the cairn, the wife of the neighbouring farmer told me that on a field on Dalrachie farm, 2 miles north of this, her father turned up the lid of a stone cist some thirty years ago. It was composed of six slabs, there being a slab bottom in this case. It measured only about 2 feet square, or 2 feet by $1\frac{1}{2}$, and about 18 inches deep, and contained only ashes—there being no trace of pottery. The slabs fitted closely together, and the cist was much more neatly made than that at East Lyne. This is one of many instances of a cist burial without a cairn, unless we suppose that the cairn had been removed; but it is obvious the cist had been buried some depth in the soil, and gradual attrition had at last brought the cover within reach of the plough.

CAIRN AT CHAPELTON, NEAR DRUMIN.

My attention was recently drawn to a cairn which stands in a field of the holding of Chapelton, on the Ballindalloch estate, just above the confluence of the Avon and the Livet, and on the left bank of the latter. It is visible from a long distance. At present it must measure from 15 to 20 yards in diameter, and at the highest point is quite 15 feet high. This is the only remaining cairn of a group of three, and though it has been enlarged all round the bottom, nothing has been added to its height, and it has obviously never been opened or examined.

The three cairns originally formed a right angle, one standing in the next field, about 50 yards due south of the first, and the other about 30 yards to the west. These two have been completely removed. The present tenant's father saw the middle one cleared away. In the centre was found an enormous circular stone, supported upon four upright slabs sunk into the earth, and standing about 4 feet high, so far as I can gather. The farmer declared that some form of tackle must have been used to put the stone in position, but it had doubtless been rolled into its place by an inclined plane. His problem, however, was how to remove it, but ultimately he lighted fires on it and thus got it split into pieces. This circular slab provided many loads of stones which were carted away for road making or building. No measurements and no records were kept, but the immensity of that slab is still remembered. Unfortunately the stone, the pillars, and the cairn are completely removed.

Beneath this slab, however, was found a small stone cist, much more neatly fitting in its parts than the one at Lyne, and inside it was a quantity of ashes.

Near by is the site of an old chapel, with its burial-ground, occupying a small rough knoll. Beside it is the carefully built Chapel Well, with

so copious a flow of water that smugglers built their bothy behind the burial-ground on the edge of the little stream, where I suppose they could carry on work at night without fear of interruption.

CROSS AT KIRKMICHAEL, BANFFSHIRE.

The cross previously referred to stands in Kirkmichael Churchyard, in the burial-ground of a family of the name of Gordon; it had been found lying in the graveyard. The cross is roughly hewn out of dark grey whinstone, common to the locality. It measures 6 feet 6 inches in length, 2 feet of which are now sunk in the ground; across the arms, which project $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches from the shaft on either side, it measures 2 feet 2 inches. The top arm, which is about 13 inches in length, measures 7 inches across at the top and 12 inches at the junction with the cross arms. The shaft, which measures 9 inches in breadth at the top, expands slightly towards the base; its general thickness is about 8 inches. The corners are rounded, and in the centre of the head on either face is a circular cavity 4 inches in diameter and 2 inches in depth.

The tradition referred to regarding the cross is that it had several times been removed and re-erected, but every time this was done the cross miraculously returned to its original site ere morning. Ultimately, though thrown into a pool in the Avon, it was found at daybreak in its old position. Evidently the churchyard was the only place where it could rest. Ill luck invariably followed every removal of the stone. A farmer having transferred it to his farm, his daughter and some of his animals immediately took ill. The health of the girl was only restored on the cross being sent back to the place from which it had been taken.

Possibly it is to these traditions that we owe its preservation.