II.

ANCIENT WOODEN TRAP FROM THE MOSS OF AUQUHARNEY, ABERDEENSHIRE. By Professor R. W. REID, University of Aberdeen.

By the kindness of William Yeats M'Donald, Esq., of Auquharney, Aberdeenshire, there was presented to the Anthropological Museum of the University of Aberdeen an object of much interest, especially from its rarity and from doubts as to its use.

It corresponds in its characters to the ancient wooden traps—the so-called otter and beaver traps—described by the late Dr Robert Munro in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vols. xxv. and liii.

According to Dr Munro, up to the year 1917 only forty-one similar objects had been put upon record. All had been found in peat bogs in such widely distant countries as Germany, Austria, Denmark, Wales, and Ireland. No record had been made of any specimen having been discovered in Scotland.

The specimen, of which drawings are given in fig. 1, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, was found lying upon its side under 5 or 6 feet of solid black peat by Mr Charles Pirie, Hill of Auquharney, when he was cutting peats in the spring of 1921 in the Moss of Auquharney. Some feet of peat had been previously removed, and it is probable that at least 10 feet of peat had originally covered the specimen.

The Moss is situated upon a rapid slope on the side of a ridge which has an elevation of about 400 feet above sea-level, and with the surrounding ground generally inclining downwards. No flint or other implements, bones or remains of any kind were discovered in the vicinity of the specimen, with the exception of a horn of *Bos longifrons* which was dug up some 200 or 300 feet away, lying in solid black peat about 6 feet below the surface of the Moss. It is unlikely, therefore, that a lake dwelling had ever been in existence there.

The specimen consists of:—

(1) Body made of alder.
(2) Movable flap or door (A) made of birch.
(3) Bow (B) and two pegs (C) made of willow.

(1) The body is flattened and shaped somewhat like a boat, and is made from half of the trunk of a tree. It measures 1175 mm. (3 feet $10\frac{1}{4}$ inches) in length, 248 mm. ($9\frac{3}{4}$ inches) across the middle, 144 mm. ($5\frac{5}{8}$ inches) across

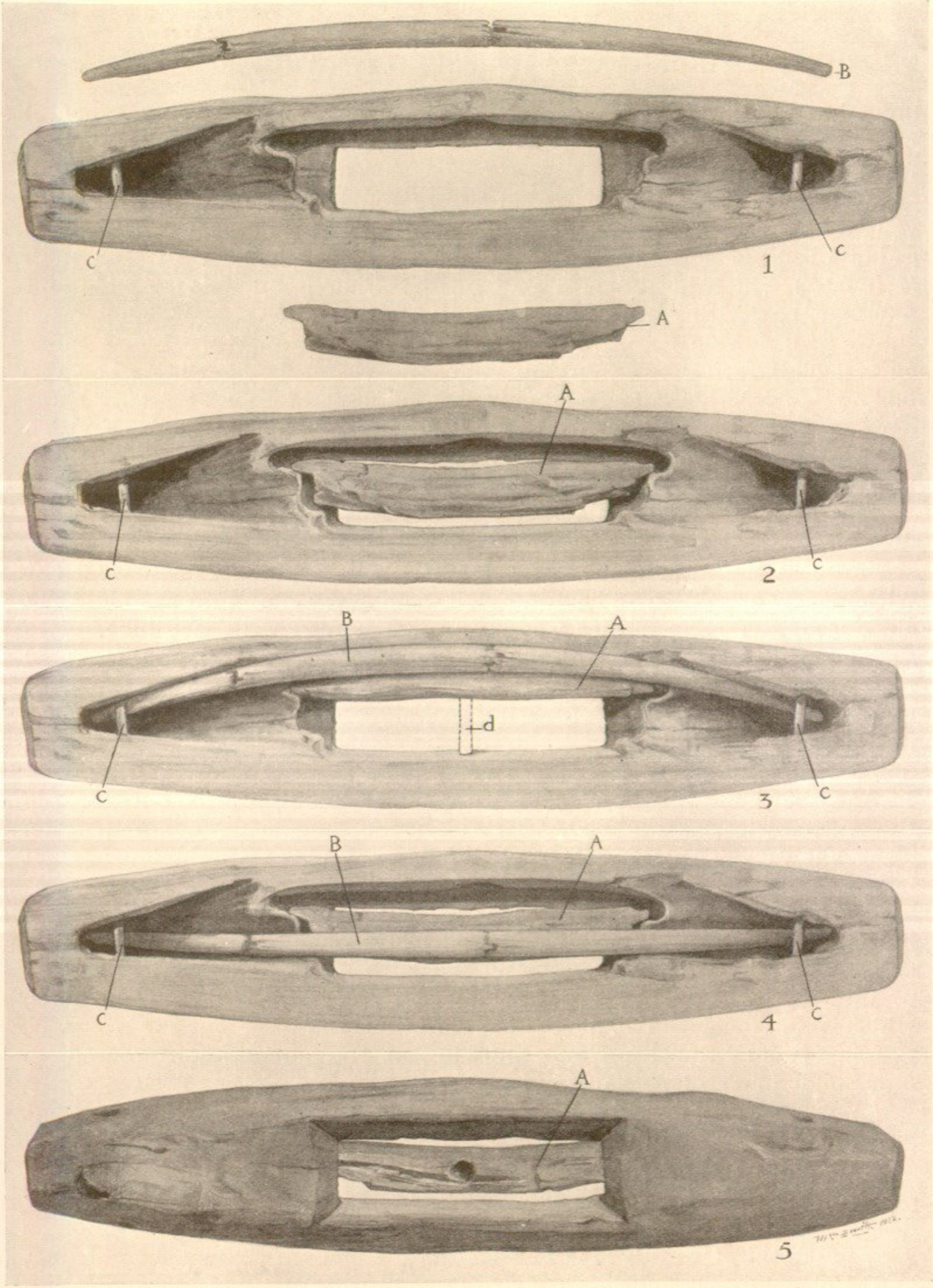

Fig. 1. Ancient Wooden Trap from the Moss of Auquharney, Aberdeenshire. (About $\frac{1}{10}$.)

1. Separate parts of trap; 2. Trap with flap in position; 3. Trap in open position; 4. Trap in closed position; 5. Under surface of trap with flap in position.

one end and 160 mm. ($6\frac{5}{16}$ inches) across the other, and 125 mm. ($4\frac{7}{8}$ inches) in its greatest thicknesses, which are situated about 200 mm. ($7\frac{7}{8}$ inches) from either end.

Its outer surface (fig. 1, No. 5) shows markings of its having been roughly dressed by means of a hatchet. It is perforated by a rectangular opening, measuring 375 mm. (1 foot $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches) by 102 mm. (4 inches,) which has sharply defined bevelling upon its two ends and one side, but with a rounded bevelling on the other side. This surface shows also a wide flat slope towards the central aperture and a more curved chamfering towards the ends, the result being that when the body rests by this surface upon a flat plane it does so by two blunt eminences corresponding to the thickest parts of the body, and so allowing of a gradual approach towards the central aperture and a tapering upwards towards the ends.

The other surface is flattened (fig. 1, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4) and smoothly dressed, evidently by means of sharp tools such as chisels and gouges. It shows in the middle the rectangular opening already mentioned but without any bevelling, and surrounded upon three sides by a flat platform cut out of the surrounding wood, and continuous with two incomplete sockets which extend from opposite corners for about 35 mm. ($1\frac{3}{8}$ inch) towards the respective ends of the body. On this platform lies the door, moving in the long axes of the sockets and prevented from being pushed through the rectangular aperture in the body which it does not completely cover.

At either end of this platform are grooves rapidly deepening towards the extremities of the body, in which the ends of the bow (B) lie. They show two groovings, which adapt themselves to the bow when it is in its bent or nearly flat state (fig. 1, Nos. 3, 4).

Leading into the deepest parts of the lateral depressions are two holes at either end of the body. They are elongated in the direction of the long axis of the body and measure about 45 mm. ($1\frac{3}{4}$ inch) by 25 mm. (1 inch). They are occupied by pieces of willow branch (C) which pass over the ends of the bow as these lie in the recesses, keeping them in position and allowing at the same time a to-and-fro movement of the bow as it is bent or flattened.

(2) The movable flap or door (fig. 1, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, A) is somewhat decayed, but shows a shape corresponding to the rectangular platform around the four-sided opening. It has two projections or "lugs" which move in a hinge-like fashion in the two incomplete sockets already described. The edge of the flap which extends into the projection is very much thinner than the opposite edge which overhangs the opening, and which shows a somewhat continuous outline without any indication

of having been notched. On the middle of the surface of the flap next to the rectangular aperture is an oval depression (fig. 1, No. 5), which seems to have been burned out, and which measures 40 mm. ($1\frac{5}{8}$ inch) by 34 mm. ($1\frac{3}{8}$ inch), and with a depth of 13 mm. ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch).

The flap without the projection measures 419 mm. ($16\frac{1}{2}$ inches) long and 76 mm. (3 inches) broad. The edge which extends into the projections is 15 mm. ($\frac{5}{8}$ inch), while the opposite edge measures 39 mm. ($1\frac{1}{2}$ inch) in thickness. Each projection is 28 mm. ($1\frac{1}{8}$ inch) long, 25 mm. (1 inch) broad, and 13 mm. ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch) thick.

When in position the whole flap is allowed, even taking into account shrinkage in the process of drying, free play in its movements.

(3) The bow (fig. 1, Nos. 1, 3, 4, B) has been broken, unfortunately, in two places. It measures 1004 mm. (3 feet $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches) in length, 246 mm. ($9\frac{11}{16}$ inches) in thickness, and tapers to about 25 mm. (1 inch) at its extreme ends. It consists simply of a branch of a willow tree denuded of its bark, with the exception of the ends, which show some artificial tapering.

The pegs (fig. 1, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, A) consist of small branches of willow from which the bark has been removed. They have very free play in the apertures in the body and over the ends of the bow. Each is about 172 mm. ($6\frac{3}{4}$ inches) long by 23 mm. ($\frac{7}{8}$ inch) in diameter.

From the above description it will be seen that the specimen found in the Auquharney Moss shows a construction which is practically identical with the twelve univalvular wooden traps which Dr Munro has described as having been found—eleven in Ireland and one in Wales.[1]

The peat moss in which the specimen was found lies in a large tract of north-east Aberdeenshire, which local tradition maintains was, many years ago, occupied by small lochs and deep moss hags, forming thereby a very treacherous country for travellers—so much so that it is currently believed now that many persons, horses, and vehicles were engulfed there when following the will-o'-the-wisps which had their habitation in that region.

Mr W. Y. M'Donald, in whose estate the Auquharney Moss lies, has made inquiry, and finds that no inhabitant of that district at present has any recollection of ever having seen or heard of such an object, and consequently one can only surmise as to its use.

Its whole construction points to its being an implement for trapping animals, and the situation in which it was found suggests that these were animals which frequented marshy places. As no skeletal or other remains were found with the trap it is impossible to know the exact kind of animal which it was intended to catch.

[1] Robert Munro, *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxv. 1890-91, and vol. liii. 1918-19.

Fig. 1, Nos. 3 and 4 will help to afford a likely explanation of the method of working of the trap. Whether it was placed resting on its side, or lying flat supported and steadied by the bulges already described

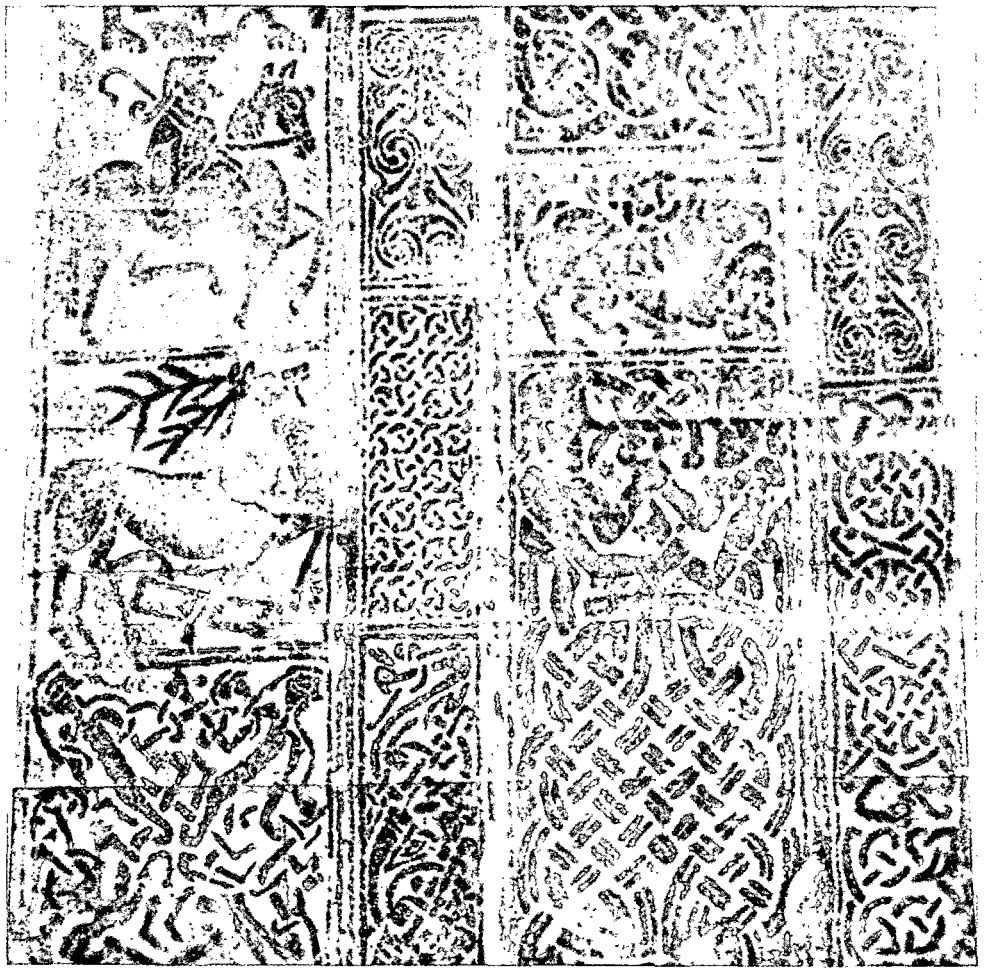

Fig. 2. Cross-slab at Clonmacnois, showing Stag in Panel on left.

as seen on its outer surface, it is hard to say. We think the latter is the more probable position, the trap having been placed with its central aperture over a depression in the marsh, in the bottom of which depression bait had been previously placed.

Fig. 1, No. 3 seems to show the position of the parts of the trap when

it is set or open. The door is raised from the central opening by a piece of stick (fig. 1, No. 3, *d*) (wanting in the specimen but represented by broken lines), placed by one of its ends in the depression on the door, and resting by the other on the edge of the central aperture.

The bow (fig. 1, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, B), being of supple willow, is forcibly bent over the elevated door, and kept in that position by the piece of stick described above, and by the pegs (fig. 1, Nos. 1, 3, C) overlying its ends in the lateral depressions on the body of the trap.

Any animal wishing to seize the bait lying beneath the central aperture will be obliged to enter by the side of the stick (fig. 1, No. 3, *d*), and in doing so will cause its displacement and subsequent closure of the door by the release of the tension of the overlying bow (fig. 1, No. 4, B), and thereby be enclosed within the subjacent chamber or caught by the neck.

It is conceivable that the foot of a larger animal, such as that of a deer, might be seized while passing over the trap, as the sculptured stone from Clonmacnois, Ireland,[1] appears to show (fig. 2).

As to the age of this specimen it is most difficult to give any opinion. All that can be said is that its dressing shows that it must have been fashioned by sharp tools such as axes, chisels, and gouges, probably of iron, and that should the carving on the Clonmacnois stone be reckoned as representing one of these traps, then the stone, which is regarded as dating from A.D. 700 to A.D. 800, may give a clue to the antiquity of this type of trap.

I wish to thank Mr Peter Leslie, M.A., B.Sc., Lecturer on Forestry, University of Aberdeen, for his kindness in identifying the different kinds of wood which comprise the several parts of the trap, and Mr William Smith, artist, Aberdeen, for the trouble which he has taken in the preparation of the accompanying drawings.

[1] Robert Munro and Patrick Gillespie, *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. liii., 1918–19, p. 166.