

IV.

DISCOVERIES IN NORTH-WESTERN WIGTOWNSHIRE: CINERARY URN AND INCENSE-CUP AND PERFORATED AXE-HAMMER; MOULD FOR BRONZE-WINGED CHISEL; WHETSTONE FOR STONE AXES; CUP-MARKED ROCKS AND BOULDER; APRON OF MOSS FIBRES. BY LUDOVIC M'L. MANN, F.S.A.Scot.

About 1907 Mr William Kennedy of Low Glengyre, Kirkcolm Parish, Wigtownshire, picked up on his farm, on a field called Eldrig, a small, finely made perforated axe-hammer measuring only 2·7 inches in length (fig. 2), of very hard greenish volcanic stone, with two thin veins of white quartz running obliquely across it.

About 1918 he discovered lying on a field called Fey-more, on the same farm, half of a sandstone mould used for casting an object something like a bronze palstave without a loop.

In the spring of 1922 Mr Kennedy carefully scrutinised the place where the axe-hammer was found. The ground, after having lain fallow for some years, was being ploughed, and he discovered traces of a burial, which he did not disturb, but preserved by placing over it pieces of turf. He then wrote me suggesting I might visit the spot, which I did on 27th and 28th May following, when the field was being harrowed.

The field rises in a gently undulating style to a height of 333 feet, and the burial in question was practically at the highest point of the hill, about 1660 feet south of the farm steading.

What Mr Kennedy had seen was the upper part of a cinerary urn set upright, of which the plough had torn off the rim portion (fig. 1). I dug carefully into the place with a penknife, and found that a small circular excavation about 24 inches in diameter, which was now full of dark soil, had been made in ancient times. Its depth is not certain, as the original surface had been much disturbed, not only recently, but on previous occasions when the field was being worked. The cavity went down through hard reddish sub-soil to the living rock, about 18 inches under the present grass level.

It was seen that into the hole had been placed on its base a cinerary urn, which was nearly full of small pieces of cremated bones and wood char, matted together by the hairy roots of the grass. Fragments of burnt bones and char were also seen round about the urn. Perhaps most of these bones had been scattered from the inside of the urn when the rim was shattered; but some large lumps of charcoal about 1½ inch square were set, as if intentionally, round the outside of the vessel.

Working carefully into the cavity, we saw that another pottery vessel, much smaller and apparently containing a very small quantity of bones and fragments of char, was placed on its base, just outside the larger vessel (fig. 1).

Several stones had been placed round the edge of the ancient excavation, and some close to the urns as if to secure them in position. These were numbered and their position carefully noted. The stones were then

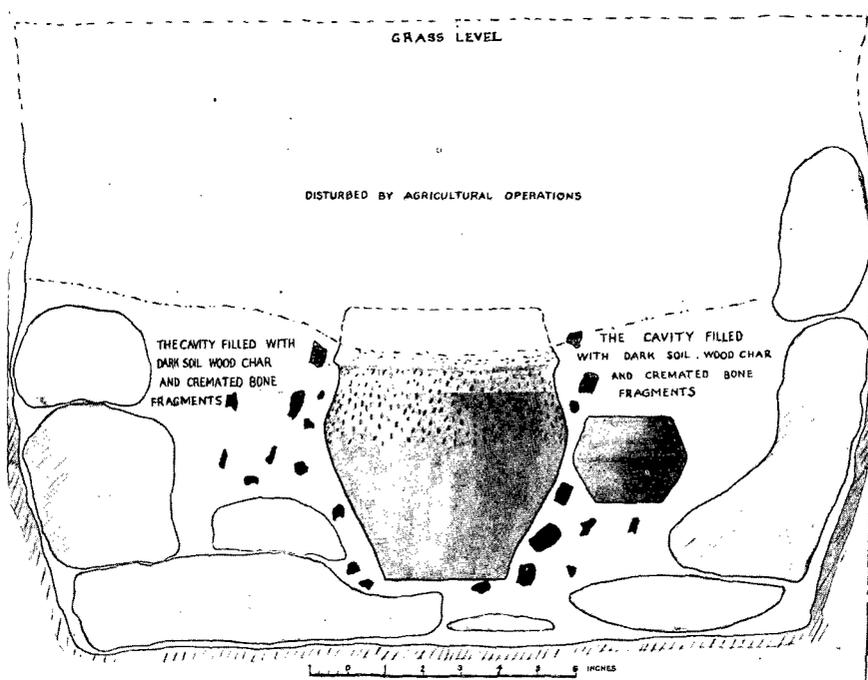


Fig. 1. Section across the cavity containing Cinerary and Incense-cup Urns at Low Glengyre.

taken to Glasgow with specimens of the soil, so that they could, if it were wanted, be used in a reconstruction of the burial.

Measurements of the relative positions of the two urns were taken by prismatic compass, both by reading the compass on and well above the ground.

A line from the centre of the larger to that of the smaller urn bore 330° east of north magnetic when the compass was on the ground, but 321° when the compass was read at a height above the ground, the difference being accounted for by some magnetite in the rock.

A thumb-nail scraper of flint and two small splinters of flint, all fire-

injured, were found in the dark soil of the cavity. The place where the two urns were deposited has been marked by setting two white quartz stones beneath the level of the plough's interference. In fig. 1 is shown a section across the site.

The axe-hammer was found at a spot 31 feet from the centre of the larger urn and at a bearing from that centre of 69° east of north magnetic, the reading being taken with the compass well above the ground.

It seems likely that on the top of this hill had once been a cairn now entirely demolished. The smaller vessel is quite plain and without perforations, and it is shaped like two truncated cones set base to base. It is 2·3 inches high, with an outside diameter at the rim of 2·2 inches, a diameter at the middle of 3 inches, and has a flat base 1·75 inches in diameter. It is of the type usually and fancifully styled "incense-cup." An urn, identical, except that it has one or two slightly incised lines of decoration, was found in Yorkshire, and is in the British Museum.

The larger urn is of the flower-pot type with overhanging rim, but of smaller dimensions than is usual in this class of pottery. Part of the top is broken off and the fragments could not be found. When complete, its height would probably be about 7½ inches. At the neck under the overhanging rim it measures 5·8 inches in external diameter, at the widest part 6·5 inches, and at the base 3·2 inches, while the wall is only ¼ inch thick.

The decoration beneath the overhanging part consists of indentations each in the shape and of the size of a grain of wheat, spasmodically set, and made before the clay was hardened by fire. On the higher part of the urn are groups of indentations, made, however, by sets of smaller oval objects ranged like grains on a stem.

The burnt osseous fragments were found to be very much decayed and mixed with black earth and char. This mixed material was put in a box on the spot and taken to Glasgow, where it was carefully sifted and all the osseous fragments separated. It would appear, however, that many of the pieces of bone, owing to disturbance of the surface of the ground, have disappeared, and, like the upper portions of the urn, are irrecoverable.

Dr Thomas H. Bryce states that "from the characters of the fragments as a whole only one skeleton is represented, and it is that of a child. No fragment can be attributed to an infant, that is certain—but all the bones may be those of a child. The bits of small bones are thin. There are fragments of epiphyses, and the long bones are represented by pieces of the shafts, in which the hard outer shell is thin and the marrow cavity is large. A portion of the astragalus shows that that bone was already of the size seen in later years of childhood. There are portions

of the fangs of two teeth. These cannot be fangs of milk teeth from certain characters, and although it is difficult to be certain, I believe they must be taken as fangs of bicuspid teeth. Now these erupt between 10 and 12 years of age, and the fangs are not fully developed at first. I conclude, therefore, that the individual represented was probably a young person in the later years of childhood—certainly over 8, probably over 12.

“One thing is certain, that the incense-cup cannot have been provided—so far as the evidence of the bones recovered goes—for an infant.”

Such small cup-shaped urns are often found perforated, but the larger intimately associated urns have unperforated walls. It has been generally understood that in many cases in which the position of the smaller urns in relation to the larger has been ascertained, the smaller vessel was found within the larger, and that where the contents of the smaller vessel have been determined, they have been found to be the cremated bones of an infant. It will, however, be seen that this most valuable and interesting discovery at Glengyre permits of a suggestion going more deeply into the problem.

It has been thought by some that the perforations, which are so very often characteristic of the smaller vessels, indicate that these miniature pots were used suspended for the carrying of incense; but this idea has in recent years been given up. Indeed, the Glengyre smaller vessel appears to have been, like its larger companion, a true receptacle for incinerated osseous remains. No reasonable explanation has so far been offered as to why the smaller vessel should have been so often perforated while the larger one was not, and why on occasion the smaller urn was not perforated. It is found that in some cases the perforations of the smaller vessel are only on one of its sides. This seems to rule out the idea that these vessels were suspended.

Another theory which has been put forward is that the perforations were made to assist combustion; but this hypothesis is unlikely, as cremation was performed before the ashes were placed in the vessel. I would suggest that the smaller urns were solely used as cinerary vessels, and that the perforations were intended to permit in some way of the spirit of the young person keeping in touch with that of the mother.

It is not unlikely that the perforated small urn set inside the larger was associated with the burial of a mother and young infant, and that in the case of a mother and older child dying together, the small urn was made imperforate and was set outside the larger vessel.

In the Glengyre case, owing to the small number of osseous fragments recovered, it cannot be stated whether the sepulchre is that of a mother as well as of a child, but it is known that the child had grown out of the stage of infancy.

Double burials in immediate juxtaposition, accompanied by a large cinerary vessel and a very small one, are exceedingly rare on the Continent. Several scores of them have been found in Scotland, England, Ireland, and the Channel Islands. It is by careful examination of relics in their original position (as well as their close scrutiny afterwards) that a knowledge of religious beliefs and burial customs of the prehistoric periods may be extended.

AXE-HAMMER HEADS.

The small size of the Glengyre axe-hammer (fig. 2) and the absence of any sign of wear upon it strengthen the belief that these objects were used not for utilitarian but for ceremonial or ritualistic purposes. It

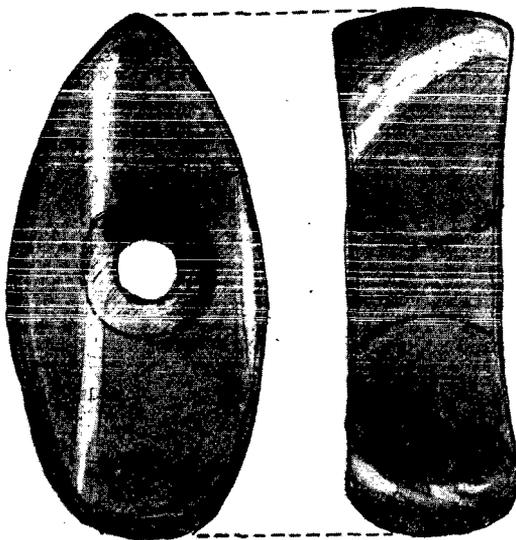


Fig. 2. Stone Axe-hammer from Low Glengyre, Wigtownshire. (†.)

has been made of an ornate stone, a piece chosen because of the white quartz veins which show up well against the dark green background of volcanic stone. It shows no sign of wear. The labour involved in cutting it out from a very hard stone must have been considerable. It was evidently a treasured object. It is so small as to be of no practical use. The shaft of the hammer, judging from the diameter of the perforation of the head, was very slightly thicker than an ordinary lead

pencil, measuring only .45 inch. The axe-hammer may have been symbolic, ritualistic, or ceremonial, and, like the freemason's mallet, more

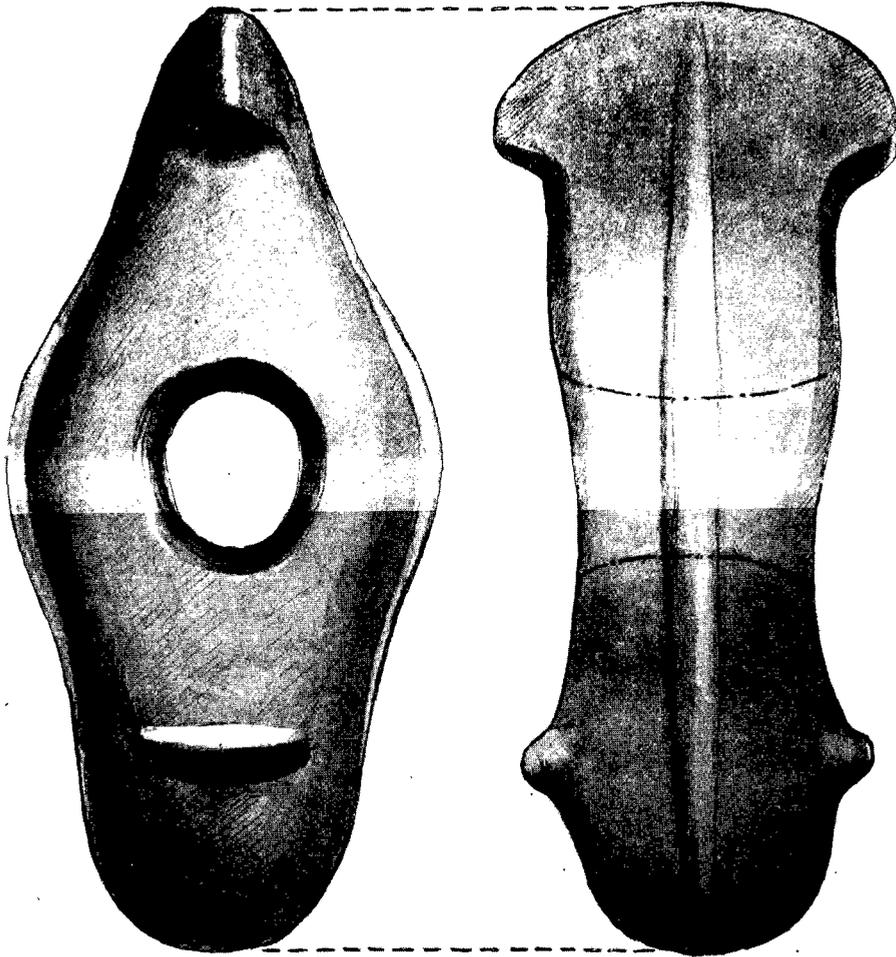


Fig. 3. Stone Axe-hammer from Lawfield, Renfrewshire. (†.)

ornate than utilitarian. But the same general remarks apply to other specimens found in Bronze Age and Neolithic graves.

The little imperforate axes of green stone found in Brittany's Neolithic tombs are too small to have been of everyday service.

About twenty years ago I discovered on the farm of Lawfield, near Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire, a small cavity, $1\frac{1}{2}$ foot in diameter, which had been cut down into the sub-soil about 18 inches, and contained an abundance of wood char and a small number of minute fragments

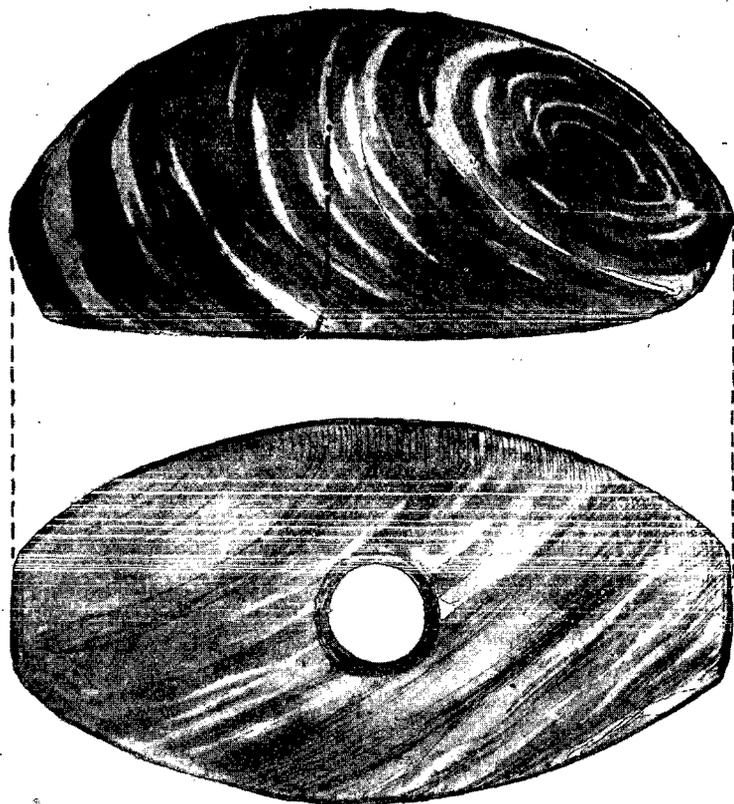


Fig. 4. Stone Axe-hammer found near Whithorn, Wigtownshire. (4.)

of cremated osseous remains (*Scottish Exh. Cat.* (1911), p. 828, item 12). At the base of the cavity I found the specially fine and curiously sculptured head of an axe-hammer, 4.95 inches long, which is shown in fig. 3.

Some feet from this place was found many years ago a cinerary vessel with overhanging upper part, which is now in the Kelvingrove Museum,

Glasgow. It is clear that on this site had been a cairn, as slight traces of it can still be detected.

There is also here illustrated a small perforated axe-hammer from Whithorn, Wigtownshire (fig. 4), and another found at the "Fossil

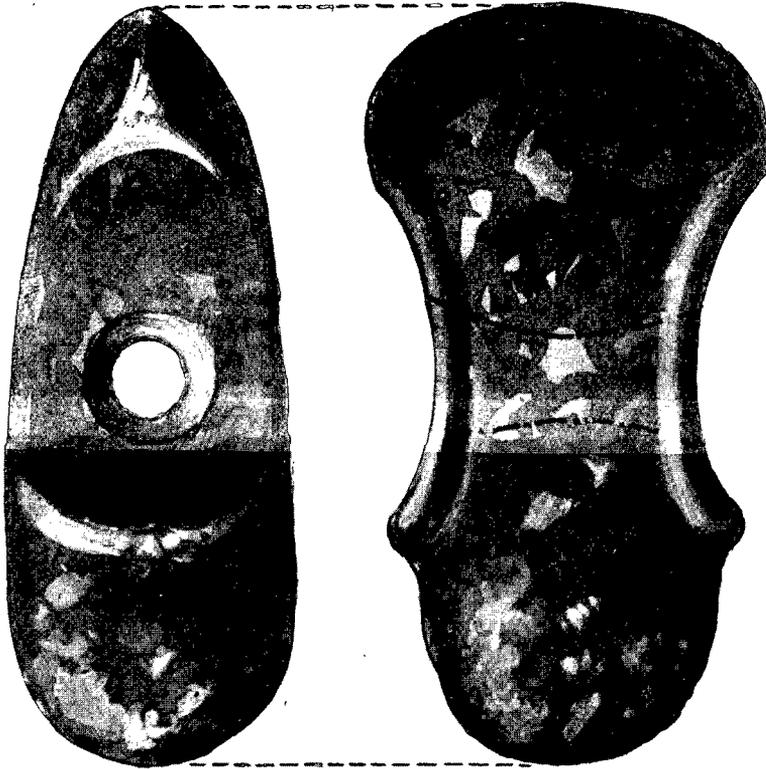


Fig. 5. Stone Axe-hammer found near the "Fossil Grove," Whiteinch, Glasgow. (†.)

Grove," Bronze Age Cemetery, Whiteinch, Glasgow, about November 1886 (fig. 5).

In the field adjoining that of Eldrig at Glengyre was found one-half of a mould for casting an implement somewhat like a bronze palstave (fig. 6). It measures $6\frac{2}{16}$ inches in length, $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches in greatest breadth, and $2\frac{5}{16}$ inches in thickness. The field in which it was got is called Fey-more; and it is interesting that the name for the field adjoining

is Smithy Hill, which may point to a tradition respecting metallurgical work having been carried on there. A careful scrutiny of the field, however, did not disclose, and Mr Kennedy has never at any time noticed there, any signs of a smithy or of such work having been carried on.

The nature of the object, evidently of bronze, which was cast in the matrix can be made out readily from a casting which has been prepared



Fig. 6. Stone Mould from Glengyre, and Cast of Object made in it.

from the matrix (fig. 6). The object is unique in the annals of prehistoric archæology, whether in this country or abroad. It somewhat resembles the well-known bronze palstave of the Middle Bronze Age, but the direction of the "wings" is reversed and the butt is expanded. These are unique features, and indicate that the object has been a chisel, held like that of a modern stone-mason, by the thumb and first two fingers of the left hand, whether naked or wrapped in some cloth or skin, while the right hand plied a mallet, probably a wooden one of moderate size, against the butt.

Mr Kennedy has quite recently reported to me that about 138 feet to the north of where the small stone axe-hammer was found, he had come across a fragment of a stone, about 13 inches long by 6 inches broad and 5 inches thick, worn down at one side apparently by the whetting of stone axes. He also came across a worked stone 24 inches by 19 inches by $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, the purpose of which is not at all clear. It is a flat boulder of greywacke, and has neatly cut into it a slightly oval cavity measuring $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep and $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches by $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length and breadth. There is evidence that the cavity has been heated, as the surface round it is reddened by fire.

During my visit Mr Kennedy took me round a large number of prehistoric sites, such as forts, large and small, hut sites, and earthen rings, in the neighbourhood. We were successful in discovering for the first time in the western part of Wigtownshire a large number of living rock-surfaces and one boulder, at Corsewall, sculptured with cups and analogous designs, and made rubbings of most of them.

On the rocks at the top of Torcraigag (where there is a fine fort) are two groups of large oval and circular cavities. Another group was noticed at Drumdow. Twelve groups comprising small and large cavities occur at Killiemacaddicam.

We visited and made a ground-plan of several interesting sites and of the twin or coalescing round cairns, 1060 feet south-west of North Cairn Farm, near Corsewall. Such double barrows of the Bronze Age are rare in Scotland, but several may be seen near Stonehenge.

Some years ago a man digging just within the edge of one of the cairns found preserved in the damp clay a curious fringe of moss fibres which he sent to me. It is very well preserved. It is made of the long, wiry, tough fibres of the moss *Polytrichum commune* (after they have been prepared by rubbing off the hairy excrescences, as I proved by actual experiment). The fibres were made into skeins or hanks. The hanks were doubled at the middle, where they were knitted together by the same fibres along a twig of pliable tough wood. From this the hanks were hung closely together, making an apron-like object.

In 1878-9, in Lochlee Crannog, Ayrshire, was found a similar object of the same kind of fibres; and another, but resembling a basket in process of manufacture, was found at the Roman Station, Newstead.

There seem to be only three recorded "finds" of this class of relic, so far as known peculiar to Scotland, which apparently ranges in time from the Bronze Age down to the beginning of this era.