

V.

A BRONZE AGE BURIAL MOUND AT BLAIR DRUMMOND, PERTH-SHIRE. BY J. GRAHAM CALLANDER, F.S.A. SCOT., DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES.

Just outside the south-western corner of the garden at Blair Drummond is a big earthen mound with several large trees growing on it. The site is marked "Tumulus"¹ on the 6-inch O.S. Map, Perthshire, cxxxii., and lies a little above the 100-foot contour line.

An examination of the mound, so far as it could be carried out without disturbing the trees, was undertaken by Sir Kay and Lady Muir during 1927 and 1928. Thanks to the kindness of Lady Muir, I was able to pay several visits to the site while the work was in progress.

The mound is not quite circular, as it measures about 75 feet in diameter from north to south and about 65 feet from east to west, its height being about 15 feet. Before the excavations were started it seemed as if the monument consisted entirely of earth, but before the examination was completed it was found that it contained a small cairn of stones, heaped over a grave formed of large slabs and boulders which undoubtedly was the primary interment.

Commencing at the south-south-eastern edge of the mound, a trench driven in towards the centre, revealed the presence of a short cist which had apparently been disturbed at some previous time. A large block of stone formed the northern end and a large slab the east side. A smaller slab lay at the south end and another on the west side, but as the latter was too short to fill the space, a larger slab lay obliquely between it and the large stone at the north end. There was no appearance of a cover stone. The length of this grave was 3 feet 3 inches, its breadth 3 feet, and its depth 2 feet 3 inches. The longer axis lay practically north and south. No traces of human remains or relics of any sort were found here. This was evidently a secondary burial sunk into the mound as far as the original surface of the ground, and covered with about 4 feet of soil at the centre.

As the trees interfered with further excavations at this part, another trench was cut in from the northern arc as far as the centre of the mound, where an undisturbed cist, formed of large rough slabs and a

¹ A quarter of a mile west of south of this spot is another mound marked "Tumulus" on the map. On the summit is a late monument, but the site is a mote hill and not a prehistoric burial mound.

cover stone, was encountered (fig. 1). Although this grave was considerably larger in length, breadth, and depth than any of the numerous short cists that I have examined, I think it should be classed with them rather than with the large cist-like chambers sometimes found in long cairns. It was formed of two side and two end slabs. The sides were roughly parallel, but the slab at the southern end was placed obliquely so that the length of the grave was 4 feet 6 inches on the east side and 4 feet on the west side. The general breadth was 3 feet at the floor, and the depth 4 feet. Both side slabs converged towards the top. As the slabs on the east side and at the ends were not so high as that on the west, the spaces between them and the cover stone were carefully built up with smaller stones. A slight vacancy between the slabs at the south-east corner was filled in a similar fashion. A small cairn of clean stones without a mixture of soil had been heaped up over the cist, covering the lid to a depth of about 9 inches: the diameter of the cairn at the base was not ascertained. The depth of earth above the summit of the cairn was about 8 feet. But for a layer of a few inches of earth on the floor the cist was empty. Nothing was found except some small unburnt fragments of human bone, very much decayed, and a few teeth. Some small fragments of charred wood were found in making the trench and in the grave, but whether it was charred by natural carbonisation or by burning was not determined.

In making the trench just before the grave was reached, but at a higher level, a small portion of the cutting edge of a stone axe was found. It had no evident connection with the cist, and may have happened to be lying about amongst the soil that was piled up over the grave.

As there remained a space on the top of the mound which could be excavated without destroying any of the trees, it was examined. About 1 foot under the surface a cinerary urn was found in an inverted position. The base had been crushed in, and the wall was full of cracks into which



Fig. 1. View of Cist in Mound at Blair Drummond from north.

tree roots had penetrated. On taking it out the vessel was found to have originally been about half-filled with cremated human bones. These after examination were reinterred in the mound. No other relics were found in the urn.

The vessel (fig. 2), which is formed of buff-coloured clay with a tinge of red in places, is a cinerary urn of the cordoned variety belonging to the Bronze Age. It is encircled at the widest part, about $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches below the

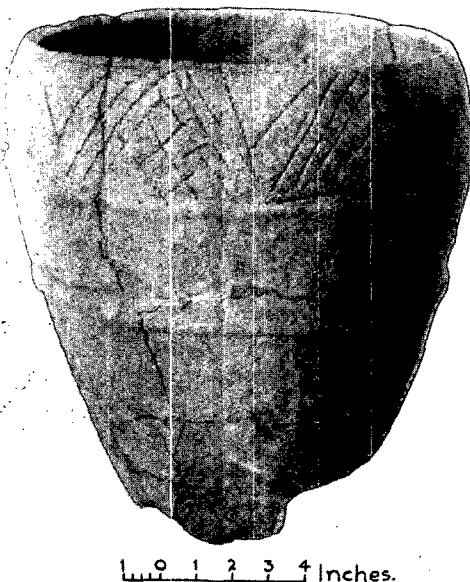


Fig. 2. Cinerary Urn from Blair Drummond.

lip, by a raised moulding or cordon, and about 3 inches lower down by another. The greater part of the vessel was recovered, but as the basal portion was completely crushed, it is impossible to ascertain the height of the vessel or the width of the base when complete. It measures $10\frac{3}{4}$ inches in external diameter at the mouth and $11\frac{7}{8}$ inches at the widest part: what remains of the wall is 13 inches in height. The rim, which is unusually thin for a vessel of this class, is only $\frac{3}{8}$ inch in thickness, and it is bevelled downwards towards the interior. The space between the upper cordon and the rim is the only part which is decorated, and here there is a row of large triangles, alternately plain and filled with a reticulated design, bordered above and below with a single marginal

line, all formed by pressing a twisted cord on the clay before it was fired.

In Scotland the greater part of our prehistoric burial mounds take the form of cairns of stone, there being few localities where there was not plenty of this material to be found lying loose on the surface. But near the Blair Drummond monument loose stones are not common, and after the small internal cairn had been made, the mound was finished off with soil. Earthen burial mounds certainly do occur in different parts of the country—in the neighbourhood of Perth there are a number—but generally speaking they are very much rarer than stone cairns.

Although no datable relics were found in either of the two cists, there can be little doubt that the central and primary grave and the one near the edge of the mound were formed at a considerably earlier period than that when the cremated remains in the cinerary urn were deposited. Other cases of Scottish Bronze Age burial cairns containing early and later pottery of the period could be cited.

The thanks of the Society are due to Sir Kay and Lady Muir for so kindly presenting the urn to the National Museum. I am also much indebted to them and to Mr R. W. Fairweather and Mr John Blacklock for assistance which made it possible to draw up this report.