

## IV.

A VIKING CIST-GRAVE AT BALLINABY, ISLAY. BY ARTHUR J. H. EDWARDS, F.S.A.SCOT., ASSISTANT KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM. WITH A NOTE ON THE SKELETAL REMAINS BY PROFESSOR THOMAS H. BRYCE, M.D., F.R.S., F.S.A.SCOT.

On the 24th June 1932 a Viking grave was found at Ballinaby by Mr Neill M'Lellan, shepherd, when effecting the release of a lamb which had squeezed through an opening between two of the stones on the north side of the structure. As he was freeing the lamb the shepherd saw an iron axe and some human bones lying inside on the surface of the sand, and suspecting a burial of some kind he had information of his find conveyed to the police authorities. Sergeant Duncan MacNair of the Argyll Constabulary visited the site and took temporary possession of the relics, making at the same time adequate arrangements for the protection of the grave until it could be examined by a representative from the Museum. I was not able to go there, however, until 10th July, when Sergeant MacNair gave me every assistance in making this record. It is to him that I am indebted for information as to the position of the skeletal remains and relics in the grave.

The burial was situated on a natural shelf near the top of a rocky knoll now covered with sand and overgrown with grass, about half a mile west of Ballinaby House, and about 400 yards west of the graves of a Viking man and woman of tenth-century date, discovered by the father of Mr Neill M'Lellan in 1878.<sup>1</sup> These burials had been made side by side, each surrounded by a line of stones set on edge, but the structure of the present find was that of a cist-grave, the long axis of which lay 65° east of north magnetic or nearly north-east and south-west. The grave was formed of four slabs set on edge on the north side (fig. 1), four on the south side, and four cover stones supported by those on the sides. There were no end slabs, but as a number of loose and broken stones, of a nature and appearance similar to those of which the grave was made, were lying about on the slope on the north side, it is very probable that end slabs had existed originally. Below the sand which partially filled the interior was the floor of natural rock. The slabs were of chloritic schist and varied from 3 inches to 6 inches in thickness. As can be seen in the illustration there are spaces between the slabs, but these vacancies were in all likelihood filled at one time by

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, vol. xiv. p. 51.

other stones. The grave lay about 1 foot 6 inches below the surface and measured internally about 7 feet in length, 2 feet in breadth at the west end, 2 feet 6 inches near the centre, and 1 foot 10 inches at the east end, the depth being 1 foot 9 inches. Although many of the bones of the skeleton were missing, it was possible to ascertain from what remained that the body had been laid fully extended with the head at the south-west end.

The relics consisted of an axe which was found on the left side of

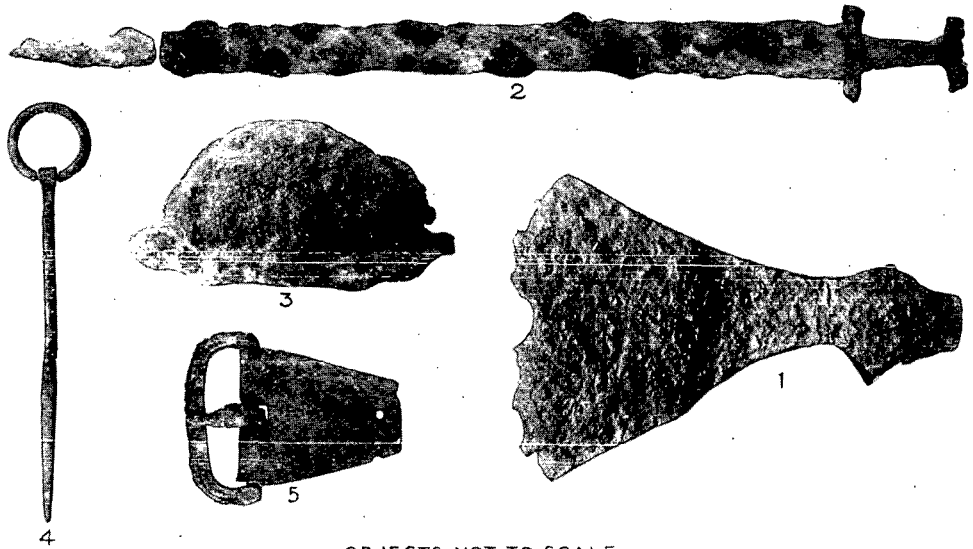


Fig. 1. Viking Cist-grave at Ballinaby, Islay.

the skeleton just about the position of where the right elbow would have been, a sword found on the right side with the hilt near the waist, the boss of a shield also on the right side and opposite the breast, and fragments of a sickle or knife which were so disintegrated as to make their exact identification uncertain. All these objects were of iron. In addition, a buckle and a free ring-headed pin of bronze were found near the centre of the body. The axe (fig. 2, No. 1), which has suffered a good deal from corrosion, measures 8 inches in length and  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches across the cutting edge. It is similar in type<sup>1</sup> to those we already have in the Museum from Reay, in Caithness and Kiloran Bay, Colonsay. The sword (fig. 2, No. 2) is now in four pieces through decay, and a small portion near the point is wanting.

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, vol. lxi. p. 204.

It is double-edged and measures 39 inches in length approximately. The blade is  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches in width immediately below the guard, tapering to  $2\frac{1}{8}$  inches in the middle and  $1\frac{3}{8}$  inch at a distance of 6 inches from the point. The slightly upwardly curved crosspiece of the pommel measures  $3\frac{1}{8}$  inches in length, and the guard, which is curved downwards a little,  $3\frac{7}{8}$  inches. There is no pommel stud now, but this may well have got detached and become completely disintegrated. The grip



OBJECTS NOT TO SCALE.

Fig. 2. Objects from Viking Grave at Ballinaby, Islay.

is  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, and traces of wood still adhere to its surface. The exact type of the sword is difficult to determine, but it probably dates to about A.D. 950 or 1000. The shield boss (fig. 2, No. 3) is of hemispherical form, and measures  $2\frac{5}{8}$  inches in height and 6 inches in diameter including the flange which is  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch in breadth. Remains of the four rivets by means of which it was fixed to a wooden shield can still be seen, and portions of the wood itself are still attached to the underside. It is analogous to one from Reay and two from Orkney now in the Museum.<sup>1</sup> The pin (fig. 2, No. 4) is of the free ring-headed type, the ring-head measuring 1 inch in diameter and the stem 4 inches in length, the lower part being flattened for  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inch from the point.

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, vol. lxi. p. 204.

The buckle (fig. 2, No. 5) consists of a bow and tongue with a doubled plate for attachment to the strap, the latter measuring  $1\frac{7}{8}$  inch in length,  $1\frac{9}{16}$  inch in breadth at the wide end, and tapering to  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch at the narrow end. The bow measures 2 inches in breadth by  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch in depth, and is decorated on its upper surface by a pellet decoration in relief. This is divided into two panels by a space on which the tongue rests; the whole has been gilded. The tongue is zoomorphic in character and has been silvered.

Although the relics are in no way remarkable they date the burial to somewhere between A.D. 950 and 1000. This form of grave, however, is unusual. It has been recorded that Viking graves have been found within roughly made enclosures or settings of stones, but in Scotland the Viking cist-grave is uncommon, and according to Brøgger<sup>1</sup> the people who favoured this particular style of interment were probably immigrants from the coasts of Møre-Trondelag and Nordland in Norway, where quite a number of such graves have been found, and where the tradition of the Early Iron Age was preserved into Viking times.

The Society is much indebted to Mr Angus M'Lachlan of Loch Gorm House, Bruichladdich, Islay, who has kindly presented the relics to the National Museum of Antiquities.

REPORT ON THE BONES. By Professor THOMAS H. BRYCE,  
M.D., F.R.S., F.S.A.Scot.

The skeleton from Ballinaby is unfortunately very fragmentary, all the bones having suffered seriously from post-mortem decay. The trunk is represented by the axis vertebra and various small fragments from other parts of the vertebral column. The ribs are all absent. There are only one or two small pieces of the pelvis, and no portions of either clavicles or scapulæ. The long bones of the limbs present have all lost their extremities and parts of their shafts; they are therefore not measurable with exactitude. The left femur, however, when compared with a series of complete bones, was found to correspond closely with one measuring 474 mm. This figure indicates a stature of about 5 feet 7 inches. There is no special flattening of the femoral shafts below the trochanters, nor is there any lateral compression of the tibiæ. Some fragments of metatarsal bones alone represent the skeleton of hands and feet. One of the metatarsals still has its proximal articular surface intact. The epiphysis is fully united.

The skull is represented by the vault, the base and face being absent. Even the vault is very defective, as most of the left side has

<sup>1</sup> Brøgger, *Ancient Emigrants*, pp. 121 and 122.

been destroyed. The glabella is flat and the supraciliary ridges are slightly developed; the superior orbital ridges are thin. All these are features pointing to the skull having been that of a woman, but the frontal bone is so much inclined backwards that it would rather appear that we have to do with the skull of a man. The condition of the sutures indicates, however, that the individual was far advanced in life, and it is just possible that the backward inclination of the frontal bone is due to old age changes in the skull bones.

No accurate measurements of the skull could be obtained save the maximum length. This is 194 mm., a figure which brings the specimen into the category of long skulls. From the characters of the vault there is no doubt that the transverse diameter was relatively small in relation to the maximum length, and that the skull, if whole, would have fallen into the dolicho-cranial class, or possibly into the lower range of the mesati-cranial category.

The jaw fragment indicates a moderately stout mandible with a well-marked chin. It might just as well have been that of a woman as of a man.

Three teeth have been preserved, a lower molar and two premolars. The crowns of the latter are worn quite flat, and the crown of the molar is worn down almost to the root. It is occupied by a large cavity possibly due to caries, an unusual feature in teeth of prehistoric times.

These dental characters, of course, support the conclusion drawn from the condition of the skull, that the individual was advanced in years.