

## IV.

THE CASTLES OF DUNNIDEER AND WARDHOUSE, IN THE  
GARIOCH, ABERDEENSHIRE. BY W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON,  
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Dunnideer is an elongated hogsbacked hill, with its long axis lying E.S.E. by W.N.W., about a mile west of the town of Inch, in the upper Garioch. Rising abruptly to a height of 876 feet, the hill is rendered conspicuous (fig. 1) by the single, lofty, and shattered wall of an ancient



Fig. 1. Dunnideer. General view from east.

castle that crowns it. This wall is pierced by a large ruinous window, forming a strikingly picturesque object which is seen over a wide extent of country. On a closer inspection, the old tower is found to stand within the wall of a vitrified fort, beyond which again is an earthwork rampart with a ditch on either side. The whole thus forms one of the most remarkable archæological *ensembles* in the north of Scotland.

The tower (plan, fig. 2, and figs. 3 and 4) has measured about 38 feet

in length by 29 feet in breadth, within walls 6 feet 3 inches thick. On the outer face of the west wall, which stands to a height of over 30 feet, there is a splayed plinth about 3 feet above present ground level, carrying the face 9 inches back. Remains of a narrow window with splayed jambs exist at the basement level in the east and west walls: the latter window has its ingoing crudely arched. The great window on the upper floor on this side, already referred to, has a pointed rear-arch, well though roughly formed in small flat stones; but its original shape below the arch is obscured by modern repairs. The masonry consists of excellent well-coursed rubble facings, with a core of pebbles grouted in run lime. Where this masonry has been patched, pinnings are freely employed, but on the undisturbed faces these are absent and the rounded or subangular pebbles are closely compacted together with flat chips bringing up to course—a mode of

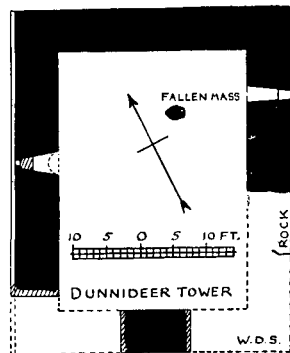


Fig. 2. Dunnideer Castle: plan of tower.

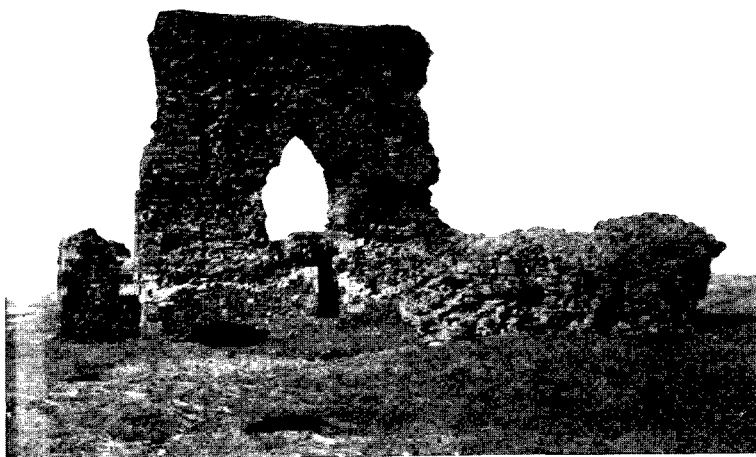


Fig. 3. Dunnideer Castle: view of tower from east.

building which with the regular coursing produces in the general effect a markedly striated texture. On the west and north inner sides the lower 9 feet of the facings have been peeled, and the walls have subsequently been refaced to a height varying between 3 and 6 feet.

At the south end of the broken west wall, and partly caught up by modern underpinning, are eleven courses of dressed yellow freestone at the first floor level (seen to the left in fig. 4), every alternate stone being a clored-away tusk, while the others are set to a uniform vertical line. The only probable explanation of this is that there has been a garderobe or some such projecting structure at this point.



Fig. 4. Dunnideer Castle: view of tower from west.

The appearance of the tower in 1788, when a great deal more of it was standing, is shown by a good etching in Adam de Cardonnel's *Picturesque Antiquities of Scotland*. This tower stands at the west end of the vitrified fort, which forms (plan, fig. 5) a rectangle with curved corners, measuring about 230 feet by 85 feet interiorly. In most places the vitrification has been very thorough. The largest remaining mass (fig. 6), on the north side near the tower, is 22 feet in length, 9 feet thick, and 7 feet in height. I found a fine piece of the melted stone showing

seven distinct impressions of charred wood, several of which are cut ends. The vitrified material was chemically examined by Mr Charles Proctor, who pronounced it to be composed of the same granite out of which the hill is formed.<sup>1</sup> At the east end a bank seems to mark the position of a cross-wall cutting off the curved end of the fort; but whether this cross-wall is prehistoric or connected with the mediæval castle it is impossible to say. At a distance of 36 feet beyond this east end a curved cross-ditch is drawn athwart the hogsback; it measures 29 feet broad and is now about 3 feet deep and appears to be traversed by a causeway of access.

The earthwork fortification (plan, fig. 5) encircles the hill at a distance

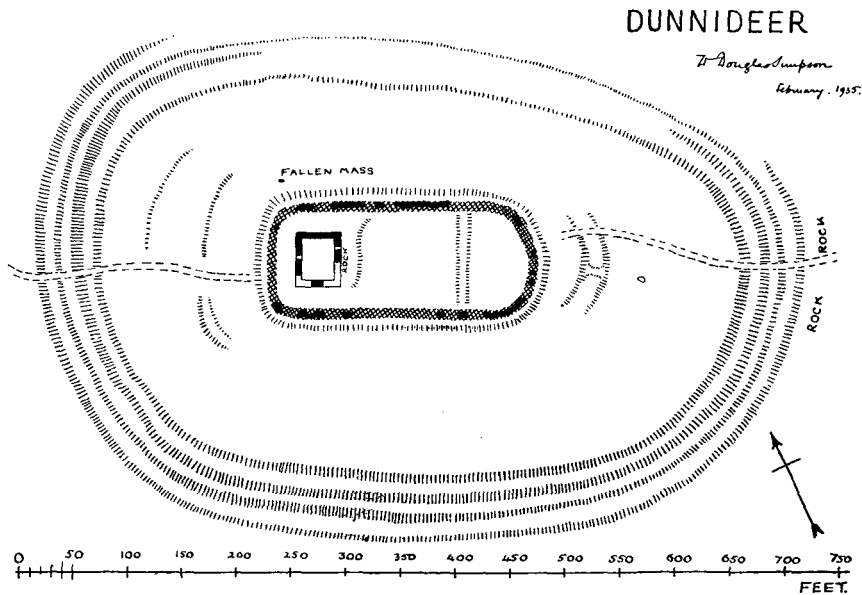


Fig. 5. Dunnideer. General plan showing mediæval tower, vitrified fort, and earthworks. (The line of the vitrified rampart is shown by cross-hatching; portions of vitrification cropping out *in situ* are tinted black.)

of roughly one-third below its summit, and encloses an egg-shaped area measuring about 600 feet in length and 360 feet in greatest breadth. It consists of a central bank between two ditches. These earthworks are most conspicuous at the two ends (fig. 7), and on the north side they are now reduced to a mere track along the hill. So far as surface appearances go, the chief dimensions (taken at the west end) are as follows:—

<sup>1</sup> See J. Macdonald, *Place Names in Strathbogie*, p. 52.



Fig. 6. Dunnideer. Vitrified mass *in situ*, on north side of fort close east of tower.



Fig. 7. Dunnideer. View of inner ditch and rampart at west end, looking outwards.

Basal breadth of rampart, 28 feet.

Height of rampart above present *solum* of outer ditch, 8 feet.

Breadth of inner ditch, 9 feet.

Breadth of outer ditch, 14 feet.

The earliest scientific description of Dunnideer occurs in a remarkable paper on vitrified forts published by James Anderson of Monkshill in

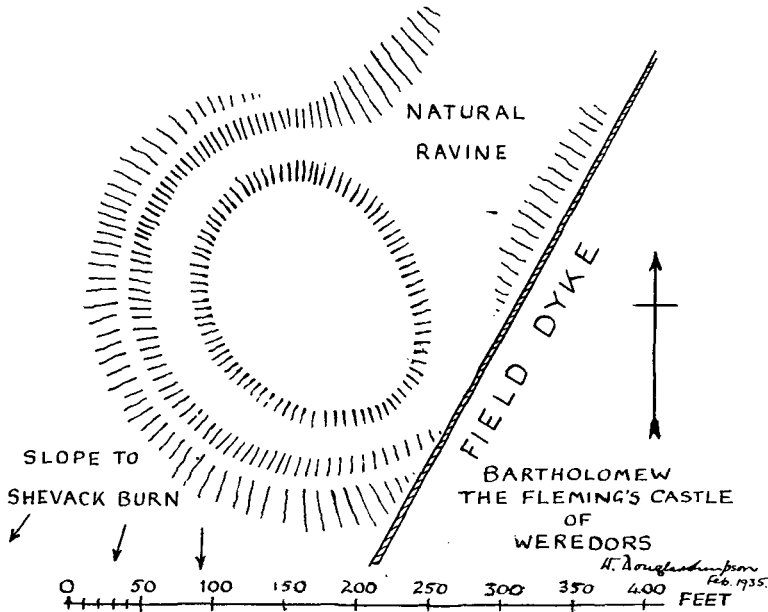


Fig. 8. Plan of moated homestead at Wardhouse.

*Archæologia*, vol. vi (1792), pp. 88–95.<sup>1</sup> In this account, which is illustrated by a sketch plan and three drawings, reference is made to a still lower line of circumvallation, of which no trace appears now to be visible, though there is a slight terrace on the north flank which may have given rise to the idea of a lower rampart. The large hollow marked G on Anderson's plan, outside the west end of the earthwork rampart, still exists. Possibly it is a quarry out of which stone for the tower was dug.

At the western foot of the hill are the earthwork remains of the old castle of Wardhouse (fig. 8). They form a typical example of a Norman *motte*—or rather perhaps a homestead moat, as there is no indication of the area within the ditch having been much mounded up above the

<sup>1</sup> Anderson republished this account, with the plans and engravings poorly reproduced on a reduced scale, in his periodical *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, vol. x. pp. 206–12, 274–8 (August 15 and 29, 1792).

surrounding level. The area is roughly oval, measuring about 176 feet in length and 140 feet in breadth, and is enclosed by a ditch about 60 feet wide, with an outer rampart. On the east side both ditch and rampart are obliterated. Immediately north-east is the farm of Mains of Wardhouse, representing the old demesne or mensal lands of the castle, from which the lord's table was supplied.

The earliest reference to Dunnideer Castle that I have met is in a note of an agreement, dated 1260, which is preserved in the Chartulary of Lindores. That great Tironensian abbey was founded in 1178 by David, Earl of Huntingdon and of the Garioch, brother of William the Lion. By him it was endowed with the revenues of eight parishes in his northern earldom, including Inch, in which Dunnideer is situated. The agreement referred to was made between the Abbot and Convent of Lindores and Sir Gocelin or Josceline de Balliol, lord of Dunnideer, and brother of Sir John de Balliol, husband of Dervorgilla, lady of Galloway, the founder of Balliol College, Oxford, and of Sweetheart Abbey within her own domain. Dervorgilla was a granddaughter of David, Earl of Garioch, and this is clearly the reason why the Balliol family had obtained an interest there.<sup>1</sup> The agreement mentions that Gocelin held "his lands in Garviach . . . of the gift of Sir John de Balliol, his brother." It narrates that "the aforesaid Sir Gocelin, for himself and his heirs, has given and granted in free and perpetual alms a free intercourse from the Ouri [River Ury], measuring four feet and a half in breadth, as far as the mill of Inchemabani [Inch], by the middle of the land which he has on the east of his castle of Donidor," on condition that "the aforesaid Abbot and convent shall give to the aforesaid Sir Gocelin and his heirs a pair of white gloves every year at Whitsunday at his castle of Donidor, in lieu of all service, exaction, suit, and secular demand."<sup>2</sup>

Somewhat earlier in the same century we meet, also in the Lindores Chartulary, with our first mention of Wardhouse, in a deed whereby Bartholomew the Fleming "grants to the church of St Drostan of Inchemabani a toft and two acres of arable land adjoining the toft in his vill of Rauengille between the great road and the moor towards Gillandreston"<sup>3</sup> . . . He declares that he has given his faith and bound himself and his heirs that the church of Inchemabani shall suffer no injury and

<sup>1</sup> See *Chartulary of the Abbey of Lindores*, ed. Bishop Dowden, pp. xxv-xxvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152-5. By the Water of Ury, what is now called the Shevack Burn is meant; what is now known as the upper course of the Ury, flowing through Culsalmond, was anciently called the Glen Water (emerging from the Glen of Foudland). The Shevack Burn is called the Burn of Inch in Anderson's plan.

<sup>3</sup> Now Glanderston, west of the Wardhouse Castle site. Ravengill does not now appear to be known.

lose none of its rights by reason of his chapel which he had made by leave of the Abbot and convent of Lundors (as contained in the charter in his possession) for the use of himself and his household [*privata familia*] only.”<sup>1</sup> This deed is titled in the chartulary “De Capella de Weredors.” It therefore affords the most satisfactory proof that the moated home-stead at Wardhouse was the residence of Bartholomew the Fleming; and we are greatly interested to find that these earthwork castles were introduced by the Flemish colony which is known to have been settled in the Upper Garioch in the thirteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Sir Bartholomew Fleming appears in later writs, one dated 1253; and others of his family—Edward, Everard, and Simon—are on record in the same chartulary.<sup>3</sup>

I have found no further mention of Dunnideer Castle until the fifteenth century, when John Hardyng, in his diagrammatic map of Scotland, made about 1465, shows the “castells of Strabolgy, of Rithymay, of Dony Dowre,” and mentions Dunnideer as one of the places where King Arthur was said to have held his court:

“He held his houshold and the rounde table,  
Some tyme at Edenburgh, some tyme at Striueline,  
Of kynges renomd and most honourable,  
At Carleile sumwhile, at Alclud his citee fyne,  
Emong all his knightes and ladies full femenine;  
At Bamburgh also, and Ebrank citee,  
At London, at Wynchester, with greate royalte.

“At Carlion, Cardif, and Aualyne;  
In Cornwaile also, Douer, and Cairelegion;  
And in Scotlande, at Perthe, and Dunbrytain,  
At Dunbar, Dumfrise, and Sainct Iohns towne,  
All of worthy knightes moo then a legion,  
At Donydoure also, in Murith region,  
And in many other places both citee and towne.”<sup>4</sup>

When in 1562 Queen Mary restored the Earldoms of Mar and Garioch to John, Lord Erskine, as representative of the ancient Celtic line, it was decreed in her charter, dated from Perth, June 23, 1565, that the Castle of Dunnydure, as the capital messuage of the latter earldom, should be the place where sasine was to be taken.<sup>5</sup> With this its authentic history appears to cease.

<sup>1</sup> *Chart. Lindores*, pp. 65-6.

<sup>2</sup> This Flemish colony has left its name in the farms of New Flinder, Little Flinder, and Old Flinder, westward from Dunnideer and Wardhouse. In the reign of Alexander III. the spelling is Flandres (*ibid.*, p. lxxv, and ref. in index). For the Flemings as introducers of *motte*-castles, cf. W. Mackay Mackenzie, *The Medieval Castle in Scotland*, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Chart. Lindores*, pp. 4, 8, 18, 91, 146, 184.

<sup>4</sup> *Facsimiles of National MSS. of Scotland*, pt. ii, No. lxix; *The Chronicle of John Hardyng*, ed. H. Ellis, pp. 126-7, 417-8.

<sup>5</sup> *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, 1546-80, No. 1637.



During the fifteenth century, when the Earldom of the Garioch was in crown hands, the mill of Dunnideer is on record in the Exchequer Rolls between 1461 and 1484.<sup>1</sup> It also appears in charters granted to Leslie of Wardhouse in the years 1508, 1511, 1557, and 1596.<sup>2</sup> In 1610 the lands and Mill of Dunnideer were granted to George Currou of Inchdrewer, and in 1617 they were sold by Peter Blackburn, son of the Bishop of Aberdeen, to William Buchan, merchant-burgess of Aberdeen; but in the same year the teind sheaves of the lands and mill were assigned to John Leslie of Wardhouse. In 1629 the Erskines, as titular Earls of the Garioch, appear to have made an effort to resume possession. In 1650 the teind sheaves are granted to Thomas Gordon in Kethokismylne and Catherine Leith his spouse; and in 1654 Cromwell as Lord Protector gifted them to Sir Robert Farquhar of Monny.<sup>3</sup> In 1665 Alexander Skene of Dyce obtained the royal confirmation of a grant from his father Gilbert of Dunnideer with other lands in the Garioch.<sup>4</sup> In 1684 John Tyrie is served heir to his father David in the lands of Dunnideer,<sup>5</sup> and the family held it until after 1724, when they were succeeded by the Leslies of Overhall, from whom it passed to the Wardhouse Gordons. The Tyries of Dunnideer are said to have lived in a house by the Shevack Burn, on the south side of the hill.<sup>6</sup>

The legendary history of Dunnideer has been remarkable. We saw that in the fifteenth century popular tradition connected it with King Arthur. Even before that time John of Fordun claims it as the place where "King Gregory" died in the ninth century.<sup>7</sup> Fordun's "Gregory" is the literary ghost of the historical Giric, King of Alba, who reigned from 878 to 889, and died not at Dunnideer but (as earlier writers tell us) at Dundurn, the old capital of Fortrenn.<sup>8</sup> The confusion due first to Fordun was repeated by Boece and subsequent writers. To Boece apparently must be ascribed the credit for the famous yarn about "Dunidor, the hill of gold," where the teeth of sheep pasturing on its slopes took on a golden hue from the rich ore beneath the turf.<sup>9</sup> This story was amplified by various later authors.

The existence of specific documentary evidence about Dunnideer

<sup>1</sup> *Exchequer Rolls*, vols. vii and ix, ref. in index.

<sup>2</sup> *Reg. Magni Sigilli*, 1424-1513, Nos. 3242, 3556; 1546-80, No. 1196; 1593-1608, No. 508.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1609-20, Nos. 289, 1650, 1735; 1620-33, No. 1477; 1634-51, No. 2191; 1651-9, No. 257.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1660-8, No. 776.

<sup>5</sup> *Ant. Aberdeen and Banff*, vol. iii, p. 403.

<sup>6</sup> Sir Andrew Leith Hay, *Castellated Architecture of Aberdeenshire*, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Scotichronicon*, ed. W. Goodal, vol. i, p. 197.

<sup>8</sup> See A. O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, vol. i, pp. 364, 367, 368, 397.

<sup>9</sup> *Scotorum Regni Descriptio* (Introduction to Boece's *History*), Paris, Ascensius, 1527, folio xi, verso. (For the explanation of the story see Prof. Ritchie's note *infra*.)

Castle as a stronghold of the Balliols in 1260 at once raises the interesting question: how shall we correlate this evidence with the *befund*, to use an untranslatable but extraordinarily convenient German expression? The site of the castle on the hill top seems quite unsuitable for a *motte*, nor is there the slightest evidence that any such thing ever existed. Can the stone tower therefore be the veritable remains of the *castrum de Donidor* of 1260? Unfortunately, no distinctive architectural detail survives to help us solve this problem. The masonry has the close-packed striated character common in the earliest Scottish rubble-work, and is certainly quite unlike the normal slack texture of building in use in the north-east during the fifteenth and subsequent centuries. It has considerable resemblance to the masonry of Coull Castle, undoubtedly a thirteenth century building,<sup>1</sup> and also to that in the curtain wall of Balvenie Castle, which may well be a survival of the Castle of Mortlach on record in 1304.<sup>2</sup> Further afield, another close masonry resemblance, from the end of the thirteenth century, may be quoted in Lochindorb Castle.<sup>3</sup> All these parallels point to a very early date, and therefore it seems to me that we should not exclude the possibility of the present remains at Dunnideer being part of the castle existing in 1260. If this be so, they may well be the earliest authenticated example of a tower-house in Scotland.

As to the castle of Wardhouse, from *circa* 1465 to *circa* 1650 it belonged to a branch of the Balquhain Leslies: Sir William Leslie of Balquhain grants a charter from Wardres on May 23, 1453.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently it was in the hands of the Farquharsons of Invercauld, from which in 1730 it passed to James Gordon of Beldorney, ancestor of the present family of Gordon of Wardhouse. In 1647 the castle was unsuccessfully defended in the royal cause by "young Harthill" against General Leslie. Writing to the Committee of Estates on March 27, the General reports: "Vpon 25th instant Wardhouse wes reduced without much disput, wherein were fourteen Irish and a captain—all which I caused to be put to death, and left a sergeant there with twenty fyue men."<sup>5</sup> A manuscript account of the castle, drawn up about the end of the eighteenth century, says: "It had been built on a rising ground, in a valley between two hills,

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, vol. lviii, pp. 45-99.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. lx, 132-48; vol. lxiii, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> *London Morayshire Club Magazine*, new series, No. 4 (1931), pp. 33-42.

<sup>4</sup> *Coll. Aberdeen and Banff*, p. 541. A genealogy of the Wardhouse Leslies is given by A. and H. Tayler, *Aberdeenshire Valuation Roll of 1667*, p. 121. In 1446 Meikle Wardres was in the hands of Sir William Forbes of Kinaldy (*Ant. Aberdeen and Banff*, vol. iii, pp. 404-5).

<sup>5</sup> See W. Fraser, *The Melvilles, Earls of Melville and the Leslies, Earls of Leven*, vol. ii, p. 96; cf. W. Gordon, *History of the Ancient, Noble, and Illustrious Family of Gordon*, 1727, vol. ii, pp. 530-1. He gives the number of Irish hanged as 16. A traditionary account of the siege is given by Dr John Davidson, *Inverurie and the Earldom of the Garioch*, p. 290.

upon the water of Shevock. It has had a moat of water round it. The ditch may still be traced, but the castle is in ruins. It is said to have been a high house, but of little breadth or length. The walls had been very thick, and formed of rough stones, with very few windows, and of the narrow slit kind. The lowest flat had been arched. The entrance to it had been a drawbridge; it had been incapable of containing many men. There was a new house built beside the old castle, about 80 or 90 years ago; but it is in ruins also.”<sup>1</sup>

The quaint little pack-bridge which still crosses the Shevack Burn opposite the old castle site, and at present leads from nowhere to nowhere, is evidently contemporary with the later stone castle, to which it had afforded access. The voussoirs of the arch are neatly wrought, partly in granite and partly in red freestone, and show a 2-inch chamfer. The bridge is 12 feet 7 inches wide and has a span of 10 feet 2 inches.

I have to thank Dr John Craig, F.S.A.Scot., and Miss Annie Craig for assistance in making the survey. With the exception of fig. 1, which is reproduced from a block kindly lent by *Aberdeen Newspapers Ltd.*, the photographs were taken by Dr Craig.

#### THE GOLDEN-TOOTHED SHEEP OF DUNNIDEER.

Note by Professor JAMES RITCHIE, M.A., D.Sc., F.S.A.Scot.

For centuries tradition has related that the hill of Dunnideer bore sheep with teeth of gold. The story, which has a scientific explanation, is well told in Bishop Leslie's *Historie of Scotland* (1578); ed. E. G. Cody (Scot. Text Soc.), vol. i, p. 48:—

“In the Gareoth [Garioch] is ane montane, quhilke goldne thay cal, the vulgar and commone stile of this montane is Dunedere, because it is said to abund in golde. This thay collecte of the scheip, quhilkes ar fed in this mountane, quhais teith and fleshe in lyke maner ar yallow, as with the cullour of golde thay had bene littid.”<sup>2</sup>

The fact underlying the tale is that the teeth of the sheep were covered with a yellow coating having a bright metallic sheen, and this the “vulgar and commone” of long ago understood to be gold, while sceptics of more recent years have suggested, with equal inaccuracy, that it might be a deposit of iron pyrites.

The truth is that the yellow metallic deposit is not confined to the sheep of Dunnideer, but has been found on the teeth of sheep elsewhere,

<sup>1</sup> Davidson, *op. cit.*, pp. 222–3.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.* dyed, *cf.* “litster.”

as well as on those of many other mammals, including the ox, camel, tapir, eland, bison, hippopotamus, bear, and even man himself. Careful examination and analysis have shown that the incrustation is a deposit from the saliva, composed largely of lime, phosphoric oxide, and organic matter. The deposit is laid down upon the surfaces of the teeth in thin layers, and the deceitful metallic appearance is due to the refraction of light by the overlapping edges of the microscopic layers.

See Note by myself in *Scottish Naturalist*, 1921, p. 36.