

II.

EXCAVATIONS AT THE DOUNE OF INVERNOCHTY. BY
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HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

When in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the ancient Celtic province of Mar emerges as a feudal earldom, we find that it was composed of five great lordships: the lordship of Braemar, the capital messuage of which was the Castle of Kindrochit; the lordship of Cromar, centred on Migvie Castle; the lordship of Strathdee, based on the Castle of Aboyne; the lordship of Midmar, with the castle of the same name; and the lordship of Strathdon, the capital messuage of which was the Doune of Invernochty. All these five pivotal castles, together with the main seat of the Earldom at Kildrummy, are known to have been in existence during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹ Kindrochit, Migvie, and Kildrummy appear from the outset to have been stone castles, though at Kildrummy there was an earlier *motte*, on a different site. Midmar and Invernochty began as *mottes*; but at the former place the early earthwork castle was superseded in the sixteenth century by a stone building in a new situation; while at Invernochty the *motte*, apparently at an early date, was crowned with a curtain wall enclosing buildings also of stone.

The Doune of Invernochty² ranks with the Mote of Urr and the Castle of Duffus as one of the three grandest examples in Scotland of a Norman castle in earthwork. Its size is so impressive, far exceeding that of the capital messuages of the four sister lordships, that we can hardly doubt it was designed as the principal castle of Mar, probably in the earliest period of infeudation, before the founding of Kildrummy Castle in the reign of Alexander II.³ The building of the great stone castle, ten miles down the valley, would deprive the Doune of much of its importance and doubtless accounts for the scantiness of its recorded history. Apparently the only specific mention of the place occurs in 1507. On 8th August in that year James IV. granted a large portion of the lands

¹ For fuller details see my paper on "The Early Castles of Mar" in *Proceedings*, vol. lxiii. pp. 102-38.

² Fuller details are given in my paper in *Proceedings*, vol. liii. pp. 34-45.

³ For the circumstances, see *Proceedings*, vol. lxii. pp. 36-42.

of the Earldom of Mar—then held by the Crown—to Alexander Elphinstone of that ilk. As Kildrummy Castle was still retained by the King in his own hands, it was necessary to fix a capital messuage for the lands made over to Elphinstone, and so they were constituted as the barony of Invernochty, and the chief messuage was declared to be *apud antiquam maneriem de Invernochty*.¹ Probably this was a purely formal provision in order to obtain a head place for the barony, where courts might be held and sasines taken; and it would be extremely rash to assume, on this

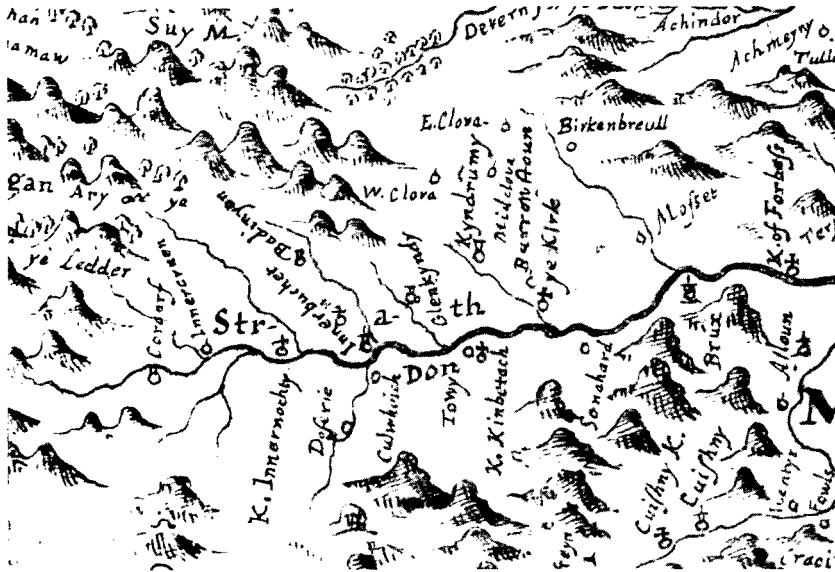


Fig. 1. Map of Strathdon, by Robert Gordon of Straloch. (Reproduced by permission from the original in the National Library of Scotland.)

evidence alone, that the Doune was still inhabited at this date. In any event Elphinstone within another twelvemonth received a further grant, including this time the custody of the Castle of Kildrummy, where thereafter became his seat. Further historic information about the Doune appears to be lacking. It is stated that the parish church of Invernochty originally stood on its summit, and in fact the church is marked in this position, between the Nochty and the Don, in the first draft of Gordon of Straloch's map of Aberdeenshire, preserved in the National Library of Scotland (fig. 1). As published in *Blaeu's Atlas*, 1654, the church occupies its present site, on the opposite bank of the Don; from

¹ *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Sctorum*, 1424-1513, No. 345; cf. *Antiquities of the Shires of Aberdeen and Banff*, vol. iv. p. 739.

which it may perhaps be concluded that the transfer had taken place immediately prior to this date. The older church on the Doune would doubtless have originated as the castle chapel. It is first on record in a deed dated between 1199 and 1207, whereby Gilchrist, Earl of Mar, impropriated the Church of Invernochty to the Augustinian Priory of Monymusk recently founded by him.¹ In 1409 a feudal servitude due to the Earl of Mar in respect of the lordship of Strathdon is payable at the south door of the church of Invernochty,² a circumstance quite in keeping with the idea that the church stood within the capital messuage of the lordship.

The history of Strathdon, during the period of infeudation from which the Doune of Invernochty must date, is almost an entire blank. But a remarkable archæological discovery, illustrating this obscure period, was made in 1822, when a hoard, consisting of two rings and several hundred silver coins, evidently buried in the thirteenth century, was unearthed in digging the foundation for a dyke on the north-west side of Tom Fuarach, about three and a half miles above the Doune and at a height of 1600 feet. With the exception of two coins that found their way into the National Museum,³ both coins and rings unfortunately seem long ago to have disappeared, but the very precise account of them given by the Rev. Robert Meiklejohn, at that time minister of Strathdon, is worth reproducing:—⁴

“One of the rings is gold, with a small dark sapphire. A ring precisely similar was discovered, 16th July 1829, with other relics, in the coffin of a bishop of Chichester, in the Cathedral of that city. The date of the tomb is A.D. 1146. The other was a broken iron gilt ring, with a pale sapphire, and is very similar to many Arabian and Indian rings. The coins are nearly all of Henry III. of England. Some of them are of William the Lion of Scotland, and two of them of King John. A portion of them was divided into halves, and others into quarters. Those of Henry III. have on the obverse the King’s head, full-faced and crowned, holding the sceptre with a cross pattee: reverse, a cross with a small cross in each quarter. They all have the names of the towns where they were coined, and of the mint-masters, such as SIMUN ON+CANT. (Canterbury). The coins of William have the King’s head in profile on the obverse, holding the sceptre with a cross. Reverse, a cross with a star in each quarter. Those of King John are stamped with a triangle on both sides. The effigy on the obverse is within the triangle. They are much defaced.”

¹ *Registrum Prioratus Sancti Andree*, pp. 374–5.

² *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, 1424–1513, No. 56.

³ *Proceedings*, vol. v. p. 31.

⁴ *New Statistical Account*, vol. xii. (Aberdeenshire), p. 546. The site of the discovery is shown on the 6-inch O.S. map, Aberdeenshire, sheet lxix.

With regard to this hoard Sir George Macdonald has been good enough to write me as follows:—

“The account of the coin find is all right. In those days and for long afterwards, English coins provided by far the larger part of the currency of Scotland. The proportion in hoards is usually somewhere about 30 : 1. The halving and quartering is quite in order.

“Meagre as the details are, they are sufficient to make it possible to say something about the date. Richard I., John, and (until 1247) Henry III., all used on their pennies the inscription HENRICVS REX simply. As ANGLIE TERCI did not make its appearance until the long-cross series began (in the year I have named), I take it these must have been long-cross pennies. Without TERCI or III. it is highly improbable that the finders would have ascribed them to the *third* Henry. But long-cross pennies *with a sceptre* were not struck till 1250. The moneyer’s name, however, proves that short-cross pennies were present also. Simon of Canterbury figures as mint-master in 1199 under King John, and he continued to strike short-cross pennies under Henry III. till 1242. You may take it, I think, that the deposit belongs to the third quarter of the thirteenth century or possibly the fourth.

“The coins of John must have been half-pennies. He put his own name (IOHANNES) on that denomination. These half-pennies are exceedingly rare.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND EXCAVATIONS.

The Doune (see general plan, fig. 2, and view, fig. 3) is an oval *motte*, carved out of a residual mass of fluvial gravel,¹ its long axis lying from north-west to south-west. Before excavation, it was evident from foundations that the summit had been surrounded by a wall placed on the edge of the scarp, with an entry at the south-east end, to which a niched pathway ascends the mound diagonally. Within the entry to the left a sunk area represented the interior of a building excavated prior to 1875. The enclosure on top of the *motte* measures 250 feet in length and 120 in breadth. Various lines of turf-covered foundations seemed to show that this area had contained a number of buildings, and one small fragment of wall still cropped out above ground. No doubt the stone curtain and interior buildings would be secondary: and evidence of this is afforded by the way in which the wall at the gateway is benched or set back into the substance of the *motte*. The *motte* is about 60 to 65 feet in height, and rises with a slope of some 50 degrees from within a ditch varying from 22 to 32 feet in basal width, with an average depth of some 20 feet, reckoning from the summit level of the counterscarp bank. The latter (doubtless composed of the upcast from the ditch) is expanded

¹ See A. Bremner, *Physical Geology of the Don Basin*, p. 119.

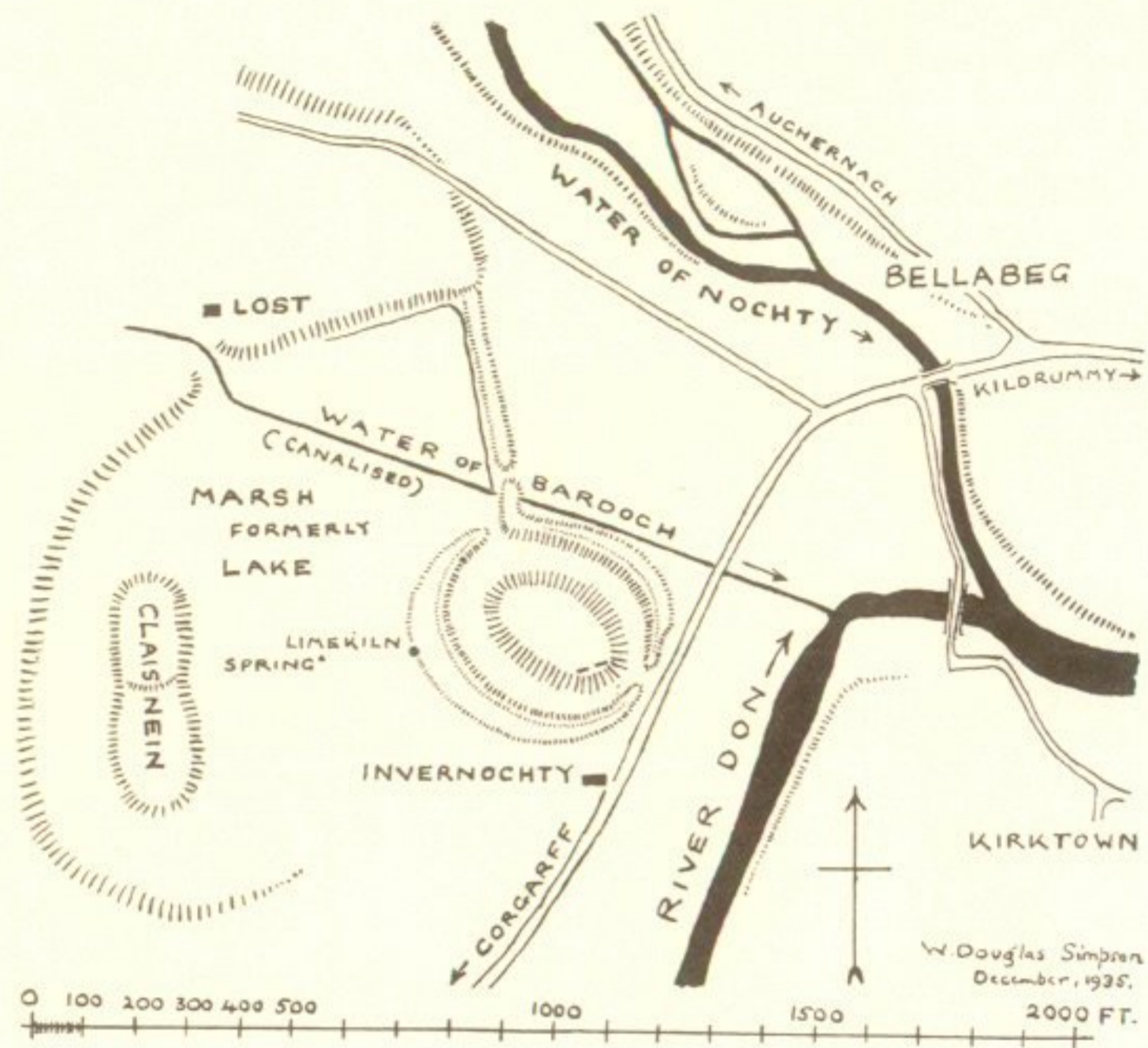


Fig. 2. Doune of Invernochty: General Plan.



Fig. 3. Doune of Invernochty: View from South. (From a photograph in the Macbean Jacobean Collection, Aberdeen University Library.)

on the west side to form a crescentic berm or platform, 74 feet in greatest width and raised about 8 or 9 feet above the surrounding fields. This platform, upon which foundations used to be visible, would form a kind of bailey; its relatively small dimensions probably are due to the unusual size of the area on the top of the *motte*. On the east side the bank is 10 feet broad at the north end, increasing to 25 feet near its south-east corner. All round the counterscarp a well-marked narrow mound exists, probably for the purpose of carrying a palisade.¹

Special interest attaches to the arrangements for filling the ditch. The ground to the north and west of the castle was formerly a marsh, fed by the brisk little Water of Bardoch. From the north-east corner of the counterscarp a great bank, 15 feet broad at top, 5 feet in height, and 150 yards in length, is carried across to the high ground farther north (below the farm of Lost), thus retaining the waters of the swamp, so that the whole area would be converted into a lake. Just within the bank a gap is left in the counterscarp, through which the waters of the lake would be admitted into the ditch. Another gap at the south end would allow of the ditch being emptied. These gaps doubtless were fitted with a penstock and sluice, so that the ditch could be emptied and filled, or the depth of the water regulated at will. The whole arrangement is as simple as it is well contrived, and affords a remarkable example, on a great scale, of Norman military engineering. A third gap, in the great bank about 90 feet out from its root, seems to be a modern cutting made to drain the lake.

The purpose of the excavations now to be described, which were carried out during October last by the proprietor, Mr F. L. Wallace of Candacraig, was to expose the ring wall on the crest of the *motte* and to trace out, as far as time permitted, the plan of the interior buildings, as a prelude to a systematic exploration of the site which it is proposed to commence next season.

The foundations of the ring wall (see plan of summit area, fig. 4) were revealed *in situ* round the whole circumference of the *motte*, a total length of 594 feet. At the entrance it is over 6 feet thick, and remains to a maximum height of about 4 feet. The wall here rests on a rough projecting base-course, and consists of a grouted core faced with large coursed boulders. The left cheek of the gateway is still distinct, although all dressed work has been torn out; the right cheek is well-nigh totally destroyed, but from some slight indications it appeared that the portal had been 7 feet 3 inches wide. On either side of the interior face are

¹ The structure described as a "well" in my former account, on the north-west side of the counterscarp, is an old lime kiln.

rough projecting corbels, or rather tusks of undressed stone, which may have been part of the supports for an overhead construction of timber. For most of its circumference the ring wall rests on a curious, irregular, external pitching or apron of stones, bedded without mortar in the substance of the *motte*, and extending in places to a distance of as much as

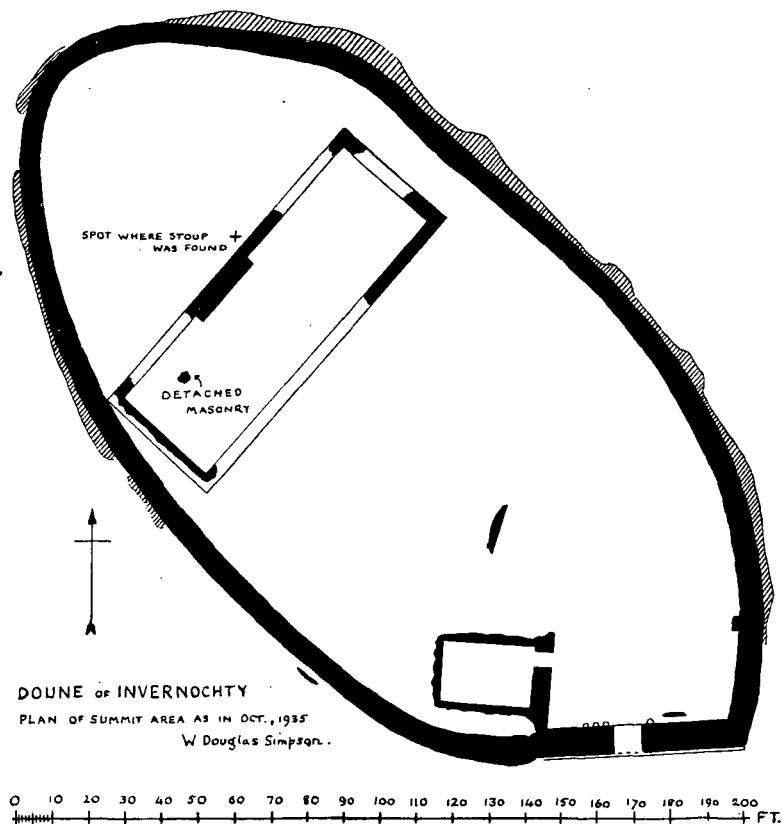


Fig. 4. Doune of Invernochty: Plan of Summit Area.

5 feet in advance of the wall. There is a small internal buttress on the east side near to the south corner. The gap at the north end of the ring wall (mentioned in my former account) from which a path leads down the *motte*, was found to be modern, *i.e.* there has been no postern here. On the west side is a small fragment of the inner facing of a second wall (as shown on plan), from which the front part has disappeared. This wall could hardly have been built immediately in front of the main ring

wall; it will therefore be older in date, and must have come to grief before the present curtain was erected.

Within the enclosure the building near the entrance, excavated about 1870, has been again cleared out. It measures 22 feet 8 inches by 15 feet 10 inches, within walls 4 feet thick, laid in clay. The side walls and the west end wall have no outer face, backing against the natural gravel into which the basement of this building has been sunk. In the east wall is the entrance, and opposite to it is a small buttress-like construction which may be the abutment of a fireplace.¹ The floor is of beaten earth.

Stretching right across the summit area, from side to side of the *motte*, are the foundations of a long rectangular building, a fragment of which (as stated above) was visible before excavation. It measures 92 feet 8 inches by 30 feet, within walls 2 or 3 feet thick, laid in lime. Midway in the north wall is a solid internal projection, 20 feet long and 1 foot 9 inches deep. The orientation is 49° N.E. That this building is none other than the ancient parish church of Invernochty is rendered



Fig. 5. Basin found on the Doune of Invernochty.

very likely by the remarkable discovery, immediately to the north of it at the spot shown on plan, of what seems to be part of a Norman stoup or piscina. The fragment (fig. 5), which is in Kildrummy freestone, represents a shallow circular basin, the diameter of which had been about 10½ inches, while the lip is 2¼ inches broad, slightly bevelled on either arris. The under part of the basin is designed as a Norman cushion capital with invected or scalloped faces, and between each scallop is a narrow keeled moulding. Unfortunately, owing to its broken condition, it is impossible to say whether there was a drain or not. The basin appears to have been cloured away from the wall by a blow which broke it off and knocked away a large portion of the lip. Previous to its being made into a basin the under surface of the stone had been used as a whetstone, no doubt by the masons working at the castle.

It is interesting to note that the design of this basin is very similar to that of the cushion caps of the chancel arch at Monymusk Church.² In view of the historical connection between Monymusk Priory and its

¹ This small feature has been accidentally omitted from the plan (fig. 4).

² *Proceedings*, vol. lix. p. 61.

impropriated rectory of Invernochty, it seems not unlikely that this basin was carved by the same craftsman who did the Norman work at Monymusk.

Another Norman fragment was found in excavating the church. It is a small piece of Kildrummy stone, forming a jamb with a square arris. The face is wrought with two sets of "droves" or tooling lines, diagonally to each other, and meeting on a line so as to form a series of chevrons one within the other.

The importance of these discoveries lies in the fact that they are the first case recorded in Scotland of Norman stonework on a mount-and-bailey castle.

No other wrought stones were found, but chips and fragments of Kildrummy freestone were fairly frequent everywhere.

The only other portion of walling uncovered so far is the small length of foundation in the centre of the southern sector of the courtyard, as shown on plan.

NOTE ON RELICS FOUND.

Pottery.—84 sherds, mostly small. In so far as these possess distinctive characteristics, they closely resemble the wares found at Coull Castle,¹ also in Aberdeenshire, and suggest an early fourteenth century provisional date for the general *facies*. At all events no pieces demonstrably later have been noted. Two fragments fitting together are part of a large pitcher handle in coarse dark ware, oval in section, strongly ribbed, and showing a deep finger impression at the point of junction with the body of the vessel. Two other sherds form a complete handle, 7 inches long, with a curved section, hollow on the outer side, and showing finger imprints at both ends. A number of other sherds have these characteristic thumb or finger prints. Two types of brim are present: both are thickened and flat on top, but one is sharply everted and the other not. Both types were found at Coull; they are the rims Nos. 3 and 5 of Professor M'Kenny Hughes' sections.² The bases are obtuse angled and slightly convex on the bottom, but no crinkled or "pinched" edges are represented. Exterior ornamentation for the most part consists of the usual horizontal ribbing or striation, which is often present internally as well. One highly glazed fragment shows thin vertical ribbing, widely spaced. Four sherds have a horizontal rib toothed by cross hatchings, a ware exemplified at Coull by the pieces A 7 and A 9. It is the pattern of the vessel B 45 in the British Museum collection.³

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. lviii. pp. 81-8.

² *Archaeological Journal*, vol. lix. p. 236, pl. i.

³ *Catalogue of English Pottery in the British Museum*, p. 63.

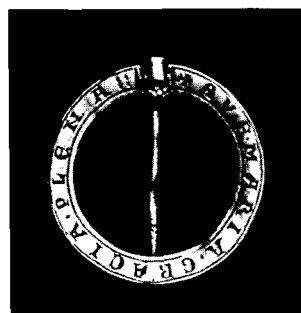
Another piece of this hard glazed ware shows oval studs in *appliqué*: this also seems to be a fourteenth century *motif*. The pastes exhibit the common gradations between fine hard pink and coarse dark grey gritty material, and the glazes vary from bright yellow through various shades of green to a kind of russet. There are the usual fragments of unglazed, soot-stained pipkins.

Ironwork.—30 items. Of these 20 are nails. They show the usual four-sided section, but the heads are all flat and circular, and the quadrilateral type, often found at Coull,¹ is not represented. The nails vary in length from $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches to 2 inches. The remaining determinable objects are: a horseshoe, 5 inches in length; a flat object, 2 inches long, rounded on the edges and looped at both ends, apparently a link for uniting two pieces of belting; part of the blade of a broad, blunt-pointed knife; and a pin or ferrule, 4 inches long.

Flint.—A small piece of worked yellow flint, possibly for a strike-a-light.

Gold Brooch.—Much the most important relic yielded by the Doune was a talismanic "Annunciation" brooch in gold (fig. 6), found during the excavations of last century. It is now preserved at Newe. The brooch is circular, and plano-convex in section—*i.e.* flat in front and rounded behind. Its pin, which is oval in section, flattened frontally at the point, has a collar or flange immediately below the loop hinge on which it is swung, and this collar is enriched with tiny pellets or granulations, like the drupes of a miniature bramble. The loop is thickened and jointed on top. The face of the ring is margined with incised lines, and contains the talismanic inscription, in fine Gothic lettering † AVE MARIA GRACIA PLENA. The over-all diameter of the brooch is $\frac{13}{16}$ inch. This beautiful brooch belongs to a well-known type current in Scotland about the year 1300, which has been exhaustively studied by Dr Graham Callander.² It should, however, be noted that, unlike so many of the examples described by him, there are no signs whatever of illiteracy in the inscription, which is superbly executed.

Bones.—The following note has been furnished by Professor James Ritchie:—



[Photo by G. A. Clarke.]

Fig. 6. Gold Brooch from the Doune of Invernochty.

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. lviii. p. 89.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 160-84.

ANIMAL REMAINS FROM THE DOUNE OF INVERNOCHTY.

BY PROFESSOR JAMES RITCHIE, M.A., D.Sc., F.S.A. SCOT.

The bones of animals are not numerous, consisting of about 220 pieces, mostly fragments and almost all showing weathering. They represent for the most part the refuse of meals, many limb-bones and jaw-bones being split longitudinally for the extraction of the marrow. The composition of the food materials is instructive in that the remains of wild animals are very rare, and it seems surprising that in a district well stocked at the time of the occupation of the Doune with wild creatures and animals of the chase, so little advantage should have been taken of the natural products of the countryside. That the inhabitants relied almost wholly upon their domestic stock of food indicates how completely the more primitive hunting stage of existence had been superseded by the sophistication of an agricultural civilisation.

Of the domestic animals used, while remains of sheep are not infrequent, those of pigs are rare, and the mainstay of the food supply was the rather small domestic cattle of the times. In this respect the collection differs from many other Scottish food collections where sheep are predominant; and it may indicate that cattle-raising rather than the herding of sheep was the chief stock industry in the neighbourhood at that time.

Amongst the bones which I have seen there is not much indication that they were put to any special use. But the upper end of one of the bones of a hind limb (the right tibia) of an ox has been cut in a short section which rests firmly upon a level base, while on the upper surface the natural central hollow of the bone forms a socket, roughly an inch in diameter and about an inch deep. The appearance of this small stand, about 2 inches high, suggests that it may have been used as a rude holder, perhaps to carry a burning faggot as a light.

Other bones which have been cut and have a smoothness suggesting use are the lower end of the femur of a sheep, the shaft of which has been trimmed with a long slanting cut so that it forms a narrow scoop; part of a long bone from the limb of an ox, the end of which is trimmed to a chisel shape; and the base of a red deer's antler attached to part of the frontal bone, and trimmed to a rough wedge-shape by a few heavy cuts.

A few bones are calcined.

The animals represented in the collection are red deer (*Cervus elaphus*)—the fragment of antler referred to above and a tooth; domestic cattle

—many bones of a small breed, representing adult and young animals as well as at least one unborn calf; domestic sheep—a number of bones of jaws and limbs, the latter showing that the breed was small and fine-limbed; domestic pig—a fragment of jaw and loose teeth; and horse—represented only by two molar teeth of an individual of a robust type.