

III.

NOTES ON (A) A NEW DISCOVERY ON THE LINE OF THE SO-CALLED CATRAIL AT TORWOODLEE, GALASHIELS; (B) AN EARLY IRON AGE BLOOMERY AT LOANHEAD OF DAVIOT, ABERDEENSHIRE. BY H. E. KILBRIDE-JONES, F.S.A.Scot.

(A) A NEW DISCOVERY ON THE LINE OF THE SO-CALLED CATRAIL.

The late Mr J. H. Craw published a searching analysis ¹ of the available evidence which had given rise to the common conception of the Catrail as being that of a great trench with a bank on either side, which extended from Peel Fell at the west end of the Cheviots to a little beyond the fort and broch at Torwoodlee. A personal investigation of the country supposedly traversed by this earthwork led him to conclude that this common conception of the Catrail was quite unjustified, and that in reality it was capable of being divided into five distinct parts, each part having little relationship to the other. His arguments are set forth in the paper cited above. Here, in this short note, it is our intention to deal in some detail with a small part of Mr Craw's section E, which is said to extend from Mossilee, near Galashiels, round by the fort at Torwoodlee, and then down to the Gala Water, making up a total length for this section of roughly three miles.

Our immediate interest is in that part of the earthwork which is said to circle round three sides of the fort and broch at Torwoodlee (see map, fig. 1). Our aim, during personal investigations on the site, was to discover whether or not the earthwork really did take the course

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lviii. p. 40.

claimed for it, and the result of these investigations proved that it did not.

On the north-west side of the fort the existing earthwork is very well

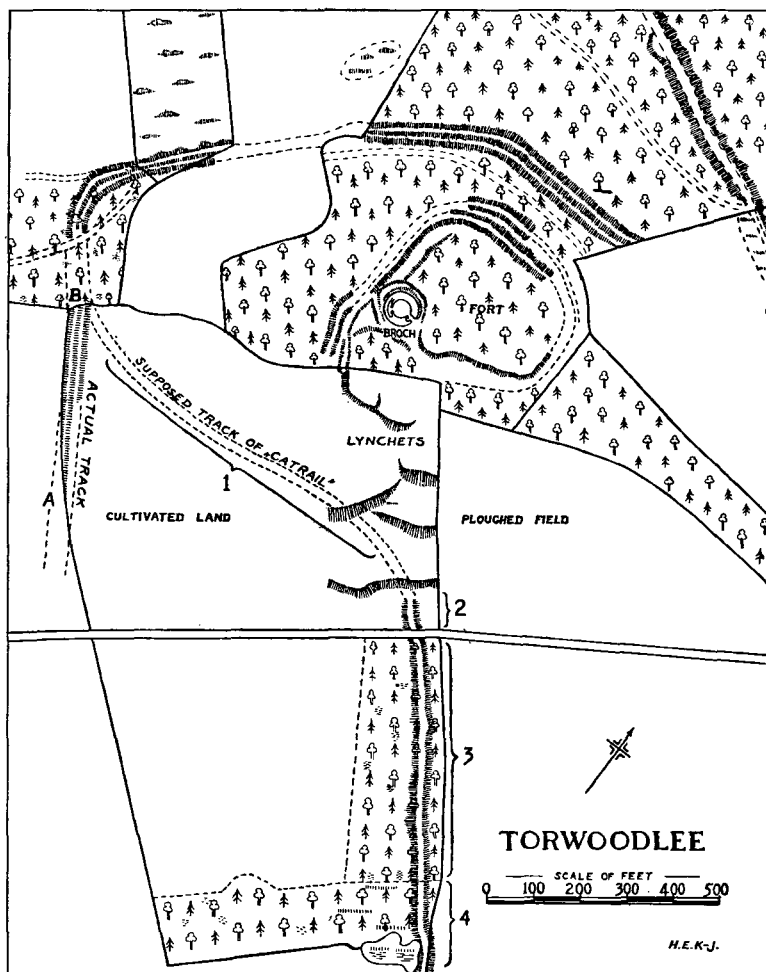


Fig. 1. Plan of the Catrail, Fort, Broch, and Lynchets at Torwoodlee, Galashiels.

defined, especially within the wooded areas; and even in the intervening meadow, where cultivation must have been responsible for its partial destruction, it can be easily followed on the ground. After proceeding in a south-westerly direction for a distance of about 850 feet it swings sharply round to the left, and then follows a south-south-easterly course

for a further 80 feet, when suddenly it ends abruptly. It is quite obvious that this ending was not intentional here, and that wanton destruction, perhaps at the time of the making of the cart-track which crosses it at this point, has alone accounted for its obliteration. This abrupt termination is the real cause of all the past speculation concerning the earthwork's subsequent course, when endeavours have been made to link up the existing section with sundry other banks elsewhere. A general concensus of opinions has caused it to be linked up with what has been described as a black dyke in a wood to the south-east of the fort, and the track which it is supposed to have followed, and which is taken off the 25-inch Ordnance Survey Map, is indicated on our plan of the site (fig. 1).

For the purpose of the present examination of the site at Torwoodlee it was found convenient to subdivide this section of the track into four parts, labelled 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively.

1. Between the west and east corners of the cultivated land no trace of the track could be made out. After the survey had been made of the lynchets during the spring of 1932¹ it at once became apparent that, if the earthwork had really followed the course claimed for it, it would have cut through two exceptionally prominent lynchets. This conclusion, of course, was based on the assumption that the earthwork would probably have post-dated the lynchets, which seemed to us to have been tilled by the occupants of both the fort and the broch. It may be considered unlikely that the so-called Catrail would have ante-dated even the broch, which, as we know, was occupied during the period of Roman domination in the Lowlands. The complete absence of any indication of any other earthwork, apart from the lynchets themselves, on what is almost undisturbed ground is therefore a powerful argument against the track having continued in the direction claimed for it here.

2. It will be noted from the plan that this part takes definite form as a plain bank without an associated ditch. It was easily ascertained that this part was in reality nothing more than an overgrown heap of field stones, collected from the fields on either side and tipped here to be out of the way.

3. This part extends for more than three-quarters of the length of a wood, the trees of which are roughly of the same age as those on top of the hill. Within this wood, and extending from the north-west end to the south-east end, are several rigs and mids, representing the remains of late mediæval cultivations in this area. As might be expected, at the base of the slope, at the south-east ends of the rigs, are the remains of

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxvii. p. 74.

a cross-ditch to carry off the water collected by the mids. Most of the rigs are of an even size; but it appears that one of them has been seized upon and defined as the continuation of the Catrail, merely because its top end happens to be opposite the heap of stones lying on the other side of the road, and which we considered in (2). There seems to be no other justification for choosing this particular rig in preference to any one of the other rigs in the wood. Here again, as we see, no associated ditch has been claimed for this part, so that we may say that the track, or indeed any form of black dyke, does not exist here.

4. The marshy nature of the ground here explains why it was necessary to drain the area now covered by the wood before the land could be cultivated. There appears to be no trace of either dyke or ditch here.

Our denial of the existence of any trace of the so-called Catrail in parts 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Torwoodlee section has left us with the problem of suggesting an alternative direction for the course which the earthwork must have taken after it ended abruptly near the cart-track. Fortunately, more by accident than by design, we stumbled across the alternative on our way up the hillside in order to inspect the earthwork on the west side of the fort. Anyone who is acquainted with the conservative nature of dyke-builders must know that it is hardly possible for any dry-stone dyke to be adjusted for height according to the nature of the ground upon which its foundations have been laid; so that the level of the top course of the dyke-stones may be said always to follow the various undulations in the surface of the hillside upon which the dyke has been built. At A (fig. 1) a significant hump was noted in the dyke which ascends the hillside here; whilst in the cross-dyke near the top of the hill a significant dip, B, was also noted. By standing at B and looking towards A, distinct traces of the almost obliterated remains of a ditch, with the suggestion of a bank on either side of it, were clearly made out. The general effect was enhanced by a healthy growth of vegetation. Midway from B to A the left-hand bank fades out, but remains of the right-hand bank and of the ditch are quite pronounced all the rest of the way to A; but beyond A all trace of the earthwork is lost.

Anyone can ascertain these facts for himself if he will but go to the site during the spring; and we feel that this newly discovered portion may be safely considered to be the real continuation of the so-called Catrail. It is, as we see, adopting a southerly course; but although we searched diligently for further remains in the field into which it disappears, and also in the meadow on the south side of the road, nothing further was observable. But perhaps an observer from the air could pick up the track.

As a result of the above discovery a new problem now arises: Did this earthwork, the so-called Catrail, extend as far as Mossilee, or did it take another direction? The obliteration consequent on the extensive cultivation of the fields here has not only deprived us of the chance of giving an immediate answer to that question, but it has also deprived us of the opportunity of substantiating our theory to the effect that the earthwork post-dates the lynchets: for, with the faint traces of the latter which still remain in the fields in this region, it is obvious that the so-called Catrail must have crossed them and at right angles to them.

(B) EARLY IRON AGE BLOOMERY AT LOANHEAD OF DAVIOT,
ABERDEENSHIRE.

In the account of the excavation of the stone circle at Loanhead of Daviot reference was made¹ to the discovery of no less than fourteen sherds of typical early Iron Age ware in a disturbance near the middle of a saucer-like depression situated to the west of, and at about 50 feet from, the stone circle. The soil here also seemed to be of an unnaturally dark colour. After consulting the Inspector of Ancient Monuments, H.M. Office of Works, it was agreed that the site, which is just within the area now under the guardianship of the Commissioners of H.M. Works, should be excavated. It was not until the second season's work was drawing to a close that there was found an opportunity of excavating the entire depression, when, as a result of that excavation, the present bloomery was brought to light.

The bloomery was exceptionally large, and it lay under about 20 inches of loosely packed loam. It was 22 feet in greatest length and 13 feet 6 inches in greatest width. The total area covered by the bloomery is represented on the plan (fig. 2) by the dotted outline, and the extent of this area was easily determinable owing to the bright-red nature of the soil. Examination revealed that this red soil, particularly near the group of stones labelled A, was as much as 6 inches thick, but the depth decreased towards the north end, where it was but 3 inches. At about a third of the distance from the north to the south end was a slight outcropping of soft rock, which, in spite of the fact that it lay under soil over 3 inches deep, had also been burnt a deep red. It will thus be apparent that the heat generated on the site must have been exceedingly intense.

Unfortunately there are no stones remaining which can be resolved

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxix. p. 170.

into a definite structure. All the stones which are marked on the plan were *in situ*, and they were well embedded in the soil, so that in most cases their upper surfaces were almost level with the surface of the surrounding red earth. The stones of group A appear to have been the most carefully placed; and scattered in between and upon them were numerous pieces, large and small, of iron slag, together with a quantity of charcoal. Nothing, however, could be made of these stones, and the same may be said of groups B and C. The only point worthy

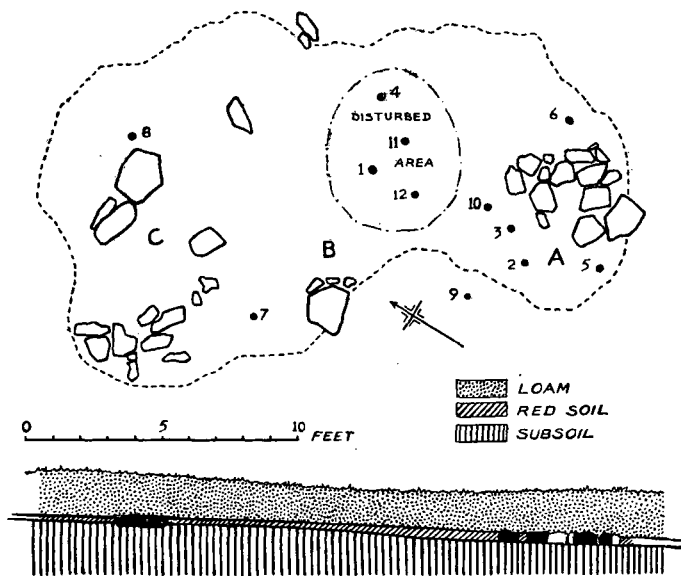


Fig. 2. Plan and Section of Early Iron Age Bloomery at Loanhead of Daviot.

of additional mention in connection with group A is the occurrence of a rough trough, with its opening to the west, in the middle of the setting. It was full of small fragments of charcoal mixed with a quantity of black earth. Generally speaking, charcoal was scattered in greater quantity about the stones of group A than was the case elsewhere within the area covered by the bloomery; and it is interesting to note that most of the pottery recovered during the work of excavation also came from round about group A.

From the scattered nature of the remains of the bloomery it would seem that it must have suffered destruction at a time not long subsequent to the period when it fell into disuse. The only further remark that need be added here, in view of the absence of structure, is that this bloomery must have served to provide the inhabitants of an early Iron

Age village with their tools and weapons; it was, in fact, the local smithy. Since during the same period of the Iron Age (as we shall see from a study of the pottery) the Centre Pit of the stone circle became the communal kitchen,¹ the site of the village cannot be far distant. Unfortunately there are no surface indications anywhere on the hillside to betray its presence.

POTTERY.

Most of the pottery recovered came from fairly near the surface of the red soil; but some of it looked as though it had been trampled upon, and it had subsequently got covered by about an inch of red soil. It is curious that so much purely domestic ware should have been found on the site; but the same conditions obtained at the bloomery at Wiltrow, Shetland,² where domestic pottery appears to have been mixed up with the iron slag, whilst other sherds were found adjacent to the furnaces.

The pottery recovered from the bloomery at Loanhead of Daviot was of precisely the same nature as the early Iron Age domestic ware recovered from the Centre Pit of the stone circle, which was described in the first report.³ That being so, a detailed analysis is not called for here. Of the rims, No. 1 is the earliest: it is of thick, coarse ware, containing fairly large grit, but quite well baked; Type 1, Period 1 of the local Iron Age.⁴ Rim No. 2 was of moderately thick ware, blackish-buff exterior, black encrusted interior, paste mixed with moderate-sized grit; Type 2, Period 2. Rim No. 3 was of similar ware to No. 2, but it had been slightly slipped; Type 2, Period 2. Rim No. 4 is unique so far: it can best be compared with No. 9 of Type 3 (fig. 12 in the first report): moderately thin ware containing small grit, fairly hard; Type 3, Period 2. Rim No. 5 is of Type 4, Period 2, but it is slightly coarser than the pottery typical of that period: light reddish-buff exterior, blackened, buff interior, not very well baked. Rim No. 6 is of moderately-thin ware containing fine grit, black exterior, reddish-black interior, slipped on both faces; Type 5, Period 3. Rims Nos. 7, 8, 9, and 10 are of similar ware; the first three are representative of later phases in Period 3 than is the case with No. 6, whilst No. 10 is the latest form of rim recovered from the site; all are of Type 5. The two bases, Nos. 11 and 12, both being of thick reddish-buff, though well-baked ware, are undoubtedly early. No. 11 can best be compared with the base of the pot found in the Centre Pit of the stone circle (fig. 10, No. 1, in first

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxi. p. 178.

² *Ibid.*, vol. lxx. p. 155

³ *Ibid.*, vol. lxi. pp. 197-213.

⁴ We use here the same type and period numbers which were adopted for the pottery described in the first report.

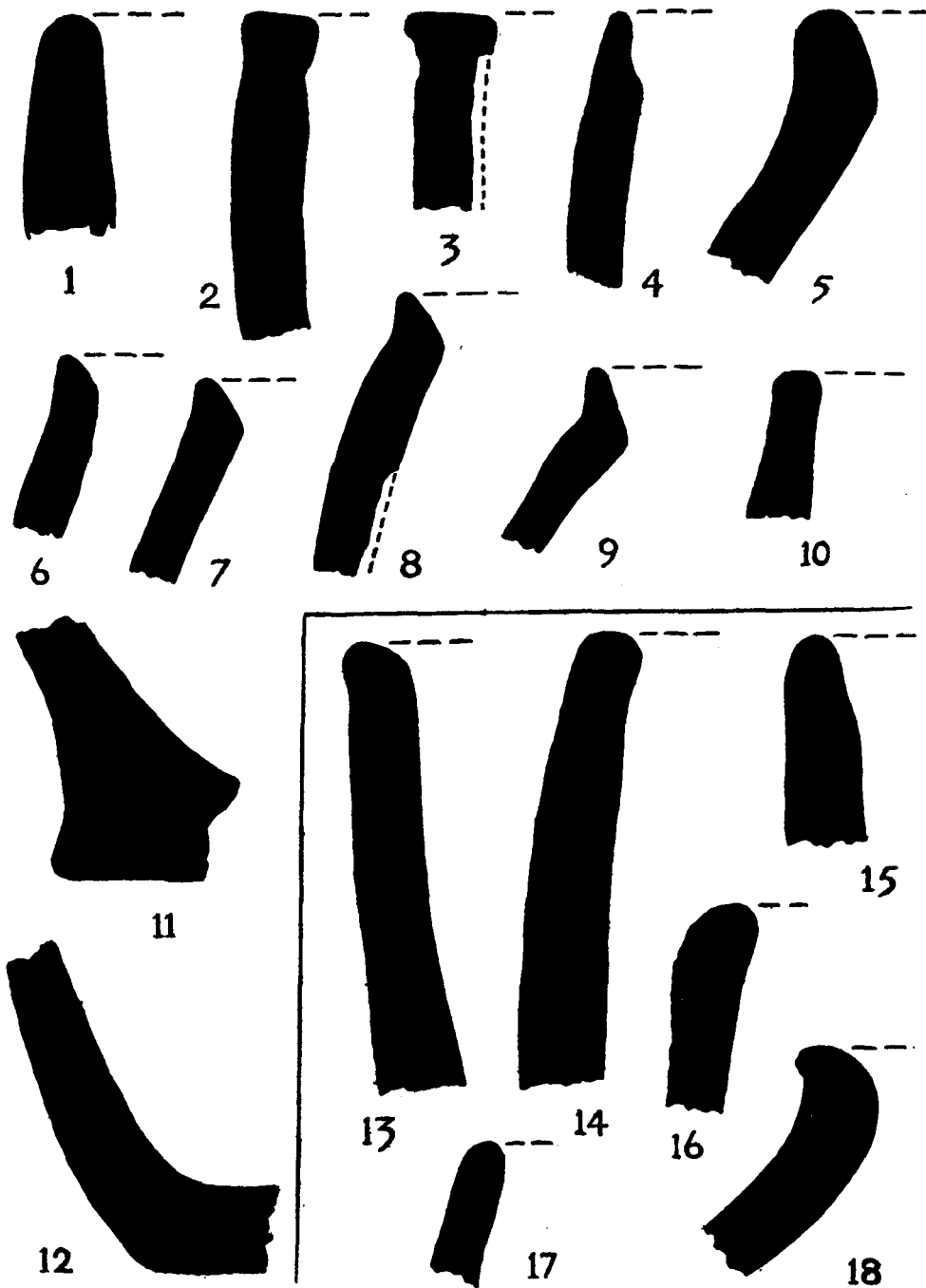


Fig. 3. Sections of Iron Age Pottery from Bloomery and from Secondary Floor of Cemetery at Loanhead of Daviot.

report), and it would therefore belong to a vessel of Type 2, Period 2. Base No. 12 must have belonged to a globular pot; possibly the rim would have been of a similar nature to No. 5.

When we review the above evidence we find that most of the pottery is representative of Periods 2 and 3 of the local Iron Age. There is only one rim of Period 1 and none at all of Period 4. This, doubtless, is a true indication of the period during which iron was being smelted on the site, and it shows that at about the time of the Roman invasion of southern Scotland the local Iron Age population had considerably dwindled in numbers. It will be recalled that the pottery from the Centre Pit of the stone circle revealed the same story: there were but four rims of Period 4, one of which belonged to a vessel which seemed to have been a native copy of a Roman pot. Probably by this time not more than a family or two were resident at Loanhead, and therefore there would naturally have been an insufficient demand for tools and weapons to keep the bloomery in operation. It may have been for purely economic reasons that the Iron Age folk moved elsewhere; but perhaps the most likely explanation would have been the increasingly unsettled conditions then prevailing—wars and rumours of wars—that caused these people, who were doubtless the descendants of a population continuously resident in the neighbourhood since early Bronze Age times, to flee to better defended sites.

On p. 290 of the account of the second season's excavations at Loanhead of Daviot reference was made to some sherds of early Iron Age ware which were found upon the secondary floor on the site of the late Bronze Age cemetery. All the rims are illustrated here (fig. 3, Nos. 13–18). Nos. 13, 14, and 15 are of Type 1, Period 1, and are of a coarse ware containing medium or large-sized grit, and not very well baked. No. 16 is a rim of red ware with a black matrix. It contains small-sized grit, is well baked, and is slipped on the interior surface, being smooth to the touch. With this rim, and with that of No. 18, which is of a blackish-brown ware containing fine grit, well baked, slipped on both surfaces, and having the outer surface burnished, we have two new additions to our Period 4. It is difficult to assign a type-number to No. 16 without creating a new type, but No. 18 seems to be related to Type 6. Rim No. 17, however, is distinctly related to Type 6, Period 4, being of a light-red, thin, and hard ware containing fine grit, and being slipped and smoothed on both surfaces. It would, however, be a little earlier than No. 1 of Type 6 figured in fig. 14 in the first report.¹

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxi. p. 207.