

EXCAVATION OF TORRS CAVE, KIRKCUDBRIGHT.

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(Read 11th January 1937)

THE SITE.

Torrs Cave is situated on the eastern shore of Kirkcudbright Bay, at a point where the estuary of the Dee begins to fade into the Irish Sea. Beyond it the cliffs fall to a low, rocky shore, from which a belt of country free from boulder clay stretches inland to the cairns of High Banks. Up the estuary the cliffs line the shore until Manxman's Lake is reached, while across the Bay lie Little Ross Island, Meikle Ross, and Ross Bay. The level of the 25-foot beach appears to coincide with the present storm-beach. The cave is on a level with the 25-foot beach and its origin is to be found in a combination of dyke-intrusion and faulting.

Its use by man is indicated by the name given to it—"Dirk Hatteraik's Cove"—on Ordnance maps. Association with this Scott character is denied by the people of Creetown who have appropriated Ellangowan and other names for it. There is also a tradition current that a subterranean route exists from the cave to Balmae House, a mile away, a route presumably used by some of Hatteraik's colleagues. In the *Old Statistical Account* the following note occurs (vol. xi. p. 25). There is

. . . a remarkable cave in the precipice. From the entrance to the farthest end it measures 60 feet, but the height is unequal. It is narrow at the mouth, then gradually widens, rising to a height of 12 feet or more: again it contracts, and through the rest of the 60 feet diminishes. The door had originally been built with stones, and had a lintel, which is now fallen down, and buried under the rubbish. The cave itself is a work of nature. From its sequestered situation and difficult access amidst rocks and precipices, it appears to have been a hiding-place in ancient times. It was not improbably some Druidical cave.

The mouth of the cave, as we first saw it, was closed to within 5 feet of the roof by a mound which reached its maximum height just outside. There is no arch, but probably the aperture would have been completely closed if the mound had reached its greatest height at the entrance-passage. This mound sloped down rapidly inside the cave, became less

steep in the first chamber, and finally terminated in the second passage. There is nothing to disagree with in the note given in the *Statistical Account*. In the plan (fig. 1) the unroofed section at the

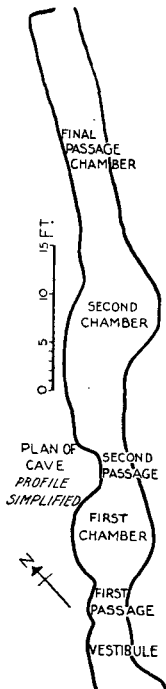


Fig. 1. Torrs Cave: Plan.

entrance, where the upward slope of the cliff-face commences, is called the vestibule. Thereafter, where the roof is definite, this vestibule narrows and forms the entrance proper. Beyond this entrance the cave widens to the first chamber, of semi-oval shape, but it expands rather more to the north-west than to the south-east. Curving inwards, the north wall forms a second passage, beyond which lies the second chamber, a narrow rectangle save for the backward turn by the south wall, which thus makes a recess at the far end. This recess prevents any genuine entrance to the third chamber, though the north wall again curves inward. Débris increases in height throughout this last division and eventually obscures the back wall of the cave, but a hole above the débris indicates a continuation of at least 10 feet.

Other features of the cave's formation need not concern us, since they have no significance archæologically so far as can be seen. The earliest inscription on the wall was dated 1800. At the rear an accumulation of limestone obscured the face of the rock, but we could not distinguish any carving beneath this cover.

At a distance of 6 feet from the mouth of the cave the mound sank very rapidly. This rapid fall we discovered later to be due to the presence of a buttress and structures adjacent to the mouth.

THE EXCAVATION.

Excavation has taken three seasons. During the first season a trench was dug to a depth of 6 feet from the top of the mound at the entrance; during the second a cut was made on the level of an adjacent cliff-terrace to find the relation of our cave to the 25-foot beach; the third was spent in examining structures discovered during the second, and which stand at the level at which water collects to-day. This last was our final datum-line, but we followed the apparent level of the beach in the cave so far as excavation was concerned. In front of the cave this datum was above a fine bluish clay at first, which changed to an equally fine brownish-yellow clay as we approached the outermost

wall of the structures. Inside the cave the level was marked by fine shingle and sea-worn boulders.

Except for two walls and their packing, since replaced, and the uppermost structures, none of the building has been removed.

At the point reached in the second chamber the upper and middle occupation layers had shrunk to a depth of 9 inches, compared with a depth of 17 feet or 18 feet separating these same layers at the entrance. None of the third chamber has been touched, but it looks as though the beach-boulders protrude on the present surface. This, together with the fact that all relics ceased before we reached our present position and that lime has accumulated heavily over the last sections, caused us to finish the excavation in the second chamber.

STRUCTURES.

Upper.—Just below the surface were the remains of a wall, which may in part have collapsed, and may, therefore, represent the building recorded in the *Statistical Account*. It rose from a base in the entrance, where the earth had possibly been disturbed, to judge by the several commingling bands of charcoal. There was no trace of a lintel or doorway, though possibly some of the long stones found in the cave belonged to some such construction.

Pottery was found below the foundation-stones; hence it seems reasonable to assume that the wall (with doorway) post-dated the pottery. Apparently at the time the *Statistical Account* was compiled the structure was in decay; the pottery is a black glazed ware of the eighteenth century. Probably the wall was, therefore, of mid-eighteenth-century date.

It will be noted that the south wall of the cliff is straighter than the north wall. Two recesses must be noted. There is a smaller recess between them, but it had no significance below the highest levels. The other two are named the first and third recesses. At the very lowest levels they merge to a large extent, but on the surface of the mound there was a projection of some 3 feet between them. At the point where this projection reached out to its full extent there was a buttress running to meet it from the opposite cliff, leaving only a narrow stretch of some 6 feet open. Across this space, and reaching to within 2 feet of the surface at its highest was a barricade, roughly built with large stones. When in use this must have prevented all entrance to the cave, except over the buttress, whence a way led into the entrance. At a later point in the excavation we came to the conclusion that it belonged to a

middle layer in the cave, but it is included here since it obviously belonged to the upper layers outside.

Lower.—Below and beyond the barricade, as we progressed towards the entrance, the lower structures began to appear. Immediately below, on the verge of recess 1, was a cist-like structure (fig. 2) with stones laid horizontally instead of vertically. Its dimensions were difficult to obtain, since the first shape revealed was semi-rectangular, but when fully



Fig. 2. Torrs Cave: Cist-like Structure.

uncovered it appeared very much larger and spread over the structures below it so as to coincide with certain of their walls.

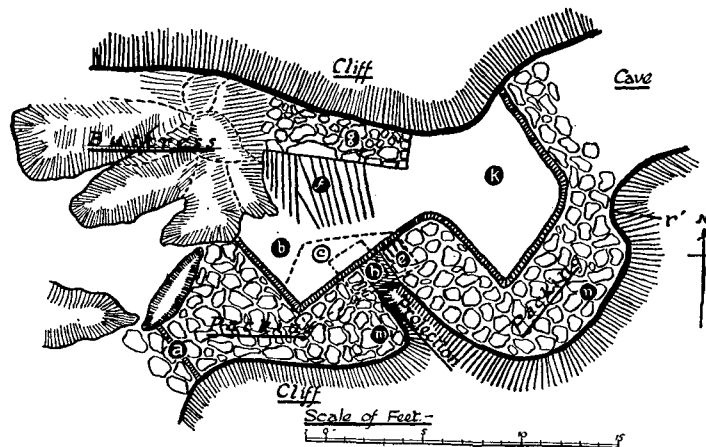
Beyond this structure, on the opposite side and in the angle of the buttress, was a larger erection whose base was not discernible at our second datum. When discovered its top surface sloped downwards to the entrance, but this was not original, since obviously stones had been removed to give it a slope. It stood in the angle between the cliff and the buttress and had two built faces, one running from the buttress, just short of its farthest projection outwards, towards the cliff at the entrance, and the other spanning the space between the termination of the first face and the cliff, a distance of some 2 feet. When fully excavated this erection was found to have a height of 8 feet 2 inches. Because of its flat top, which had been continued across the summit of the buttress, it was named the platform-structure.

The cist-like structure lies on top of several lower constructions and

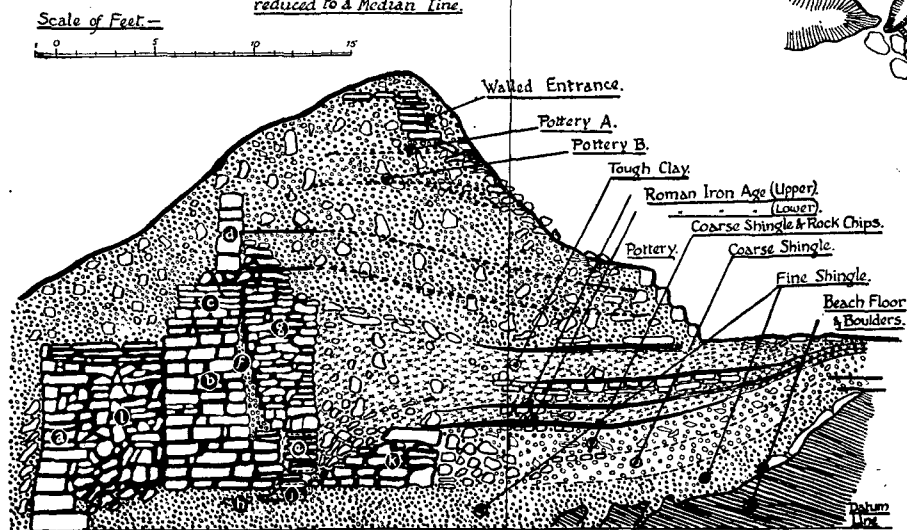
KEY
Plan, Section & Sketch.

- a. Front Wall.
- b. Front Blockhouse.
- c. Cist-like structure.
- d. Barricade.
- e. Steps.
- f. Stairway.
- g. Platform Structure.
- h. Aperture Wall.
- h'. Base of Aperture Wall.
- h''. Aperture.
- j. Base of Steps.
- k. Rear Blockhouse.
- l. Packing.
- m. Recess.
- n. Recess.
- p. Passage (packing removed).
- q. Large Corner Stone used by Lower Roman Iron Age.
- r. Section of Cliff at r'.

PLAN of ENTRANCE & STRUCTURES
reduced to a Common Plane.



SECTION THROUGH MOUND
reduced to a Median Line.



Torr's Cave: Plan and Section of Entrances, etc.

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PLATE VII.

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is obviously later than all except the front wall, and probably belongs to a people subsequent to those who were responsible for that erection.

Having completed the excavation of the above structures, a trench was dug along a level represented by our final datum-line. This datum is some 7 feet above the high spring-tides.

The first part of this excavation revealed what we had assumed to be a continuation of the buttress, but which proved to be a boulder some 4 feet high set on edge and parallel with the cliff, thus leaving an entrance 3 feet wide. Blocking this entrance was the outside wall, rising from the datum to a height of 9 feet 6 inches. The boulder was supported by the wall and its packing. Nearby there was another boulder, and yet another large boulder just appeared at the base of the mound. The string of boulders may represent a way up the outside walls from the beach to the top of the buttress and the cave.

This outside wall and its boulder lie at the place where the first recess begins to curve into the cliff. In front of the wall and behind it lay a packing of stones. Those stones behind the wall fill the space between it and the front wall of a blockhouse (fig. 3), and then continue between the side wall of this structure and the cliff in the recess. It was obvious, therefore, that the blockhouse was earlier than the front wall, and, though there were 12 inches of difference in height between the two, the packing served as a platform, 10 feet above the level of the beach. Above the blockhouse lay the cist-like structure. The blockhouse was earlier than the packing and the front wall which surround it, whilst the cist-like structure lay on the packing.

Packing-stones continued into the recess until the projection was reached. In between this projection and the blockhouse, and underneath it, was an aperture wall. In below the projection the space which allows egress into recess 3, a small wall confines the aperture to a width of 2 feet. Unfortunately the wall fell before a reproducible photograph could be taken, but it has been restored as well as circumstances allowed. Later photographs will show this reconstruction.

Beyond the wall the packing continued, but in a more built fashion, as though the aperture had been closed by later occupants. The blockhouse showed signs of disappearing completely, but reappeared eventually at the reduced height of 3 feet 2 inches, as compared with its original 8 feet 4 inches. Another complication arose from the fact that opposite the aperture, and leaning against the blockhouse, were three stones, leading from the broken wall down to the base of the aperture. On top of the broken wall of the blockhouse, the base of the platform-structure was discovered. In an angle of the buttress was a stairway

(fig. 4). The upper part of this stairway had already been found in clearing the platform-structure at a higher level, but its significance had not been realised. In the entrance to the cave, beyond all the structures

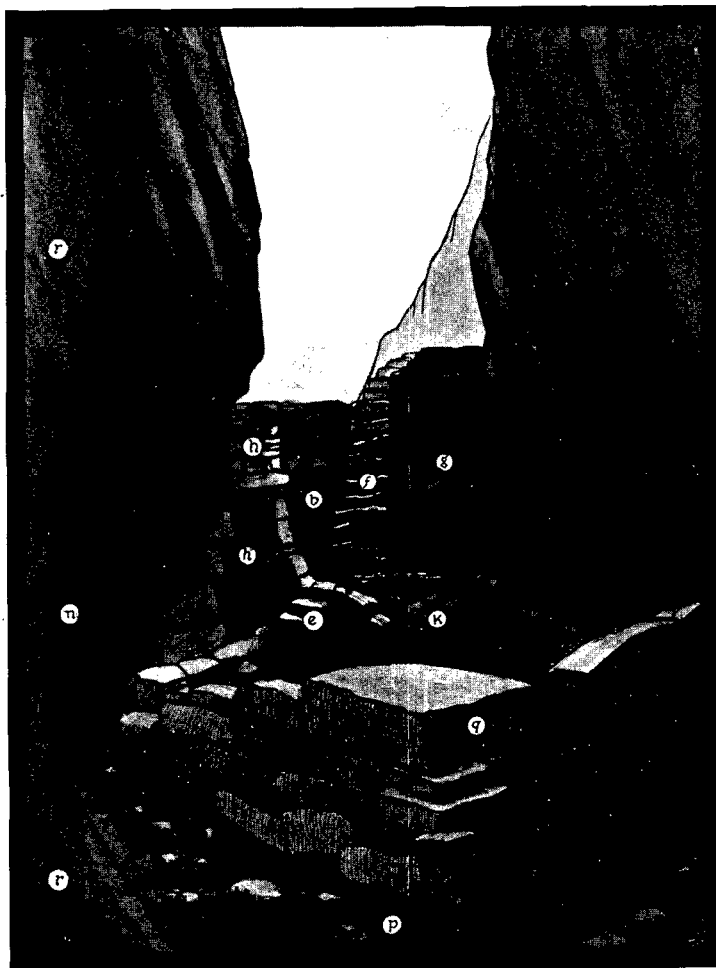


Fig. 3. Torrs Cave: Structures at Entrance as seen from within.

mentioned, lay charcoal of various occupation-layers, the latest being of Iron Age date, but beneath these layers was the last structure, the rear blockhouse, much dilapidated and not easily recognisable.

The lower structures were, therefore, (1) Rear Blockhouse, (2) Platform-Structure, (3) Stairway, (4) Steps, (5) Aperture Wall, (6) Front

Blockhouse, (7) Outside Wall, (8) Cist-like Structure. In addition, as terms to be used in this account, there is the window, situated between the packing over the rear blockhouse and the complete portion of the front blockhouse. The hollow made by the platform-structure, the stairway, the broken butt of the front blockhouse, the window and the packing over the rear blockhouse we named the Sentry-Box, since it appeared to have been used for the purpose of a look-out. Our section



Fig. 4. Torr's Cave: Platform-Structure and Stairway.

through the outside wall and round the blockhouses was the means of entry at the earliest periods, and was named the Passage.

It seemed fairly clear that the oldest part of all was the rear blockhouse, lying exactly at the entrance to the cave. The inner side at its highest point stood 3 feet above the shingle, while the outer wall was reduced in some places to a single stone, though the corner by recess 3 remained to a height of 3 or 4 courses. The blockhouse was built of boulders, some as much as 3 feet long, and the foundations were upon the shingle which sloped away from the north wall; no attempt to secure a firm, flat base had been made. Above what remained of the blockhouse was a layer of charcoal. A hearth lay on the inner corner-stone, and on the stones of this hearth lay charcoal.

Against the view that the two blockhouses were built together there were several objections. The flat slabs of the front building contrasted with the boulders of the rear one; and the rough work, without foundations, the rounded or irregular corners, and the amount of destruction

in the latter contrasted with the well-built, sharp-cornered and well-preserved aspect of the front erection. It is possible, of course, to think of the addition of the front blockhouse after the other had been built.

At present, however, all that emerges clearly is that the blockhouses were built and that the front was broken to allow of the erection of the stairway and the platform-structure. Perhaps it fell into ruin, and the ruin was merely repaired to accommodate these structures. The steps were built over the broken wall and gave access into the sentry-box, which in its origin served some very different purpose from that of a look-out.

The main problem is the relation of the blockhouses to these alterations. In the case of the rear blockhouse, the layers of the third and fourth peoples were spread fairly horizontally over its remains, but both peoples were builders themselves and may have decided to level the rough surface for their own convenience. There is nothing to show the height of the rear blockhouse at the time of the second occupation. It may have acted as a support to the platform-structure.

At the other end of the sentry-box the stairway is steeply built of worn stones which are in many cases blocked underneath, and lead directly outwards from the cave. The buttress is solidly built of rectangular blocks. Though not bonded into the platform-structure, the whole stairway is dependent on it.

The sentry-box was filled with small slabs, often with bones underneath them, along with brown clay washed in from above. When the cist-like structure was cleared we found stone chips and clay filling the space underneath it. There seemed to be no completed end to that part of the blockhouse remaining intact. After being broken the ends of the blockhouse seem to have been left incomplete.

Owing to the slope of the stairway the adjacent platform-structure narrows towards its base.

The front wall is obviously the latest of all the erections, since as a result of its construction the passage was blocked. Suggestion has already been made that there is a continuation of the wall on the other side of the large boulder which keeps it in position on the north. In style it is like the other walls, with the exception of those of the rear blockhouse. The method of reinforcement seems to have been the insertion of a large stone at intervals.

THE RELICS.

The pottery of the highest layer has already been mentioned. It is quite modern and is probably of eighteenth-century date. Pottery B is less easy to place. It is coarser than A, though similar in its banded ridges, and it was probably covered with brown glaze. Its age cannot be determined, but it cannot be earlier than c. 1400 and is quite possibly a century or so later.

None of the layers below this yielded anything. But the Iron Age levels yielded bone worked for various purposes. Besides scrapers and other sharply pointed tools of bone, there were bones with holes pierced through them, a fish-hook (fig. 5, No. 1), two finely worked bone pins (fig. 5, Nos. 6 and 7) and a bone toggle (fig. 5, No. 3). The only pottery definitely assignable to this layer were fragments of two vessels of Samian ware. A blue melon bead (fig. 6, No. 1) was found in the débris of the passage, but this probably belongs to the same occupation. A spindle-whorl (fig. 6, No. 3), various polishing-stones, a stone axe, a piece of Roman glass, some fragments of iron weapons, one with its collar of bone still present, and an iron pin were also found. Nearly all these relics belonged to the lower layer, but some bones and possibly the second piece of Samian ware and a bone pin came from the upper level.

In the two lowest layers nothing was found except a bone handle-plate (fig. 5, No. 4) which lay underneath the stones of a pavement, which we thought to belong to the higher of the two levels, in chamber 1. A bronze bar (fig. 6, No. 6), fluted on two sides, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch square in section, $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, was found at the side of the cave.

In the packing there was found a piece of native pottery, undatable, on which were faint signs of ornament, also a core of flint.

THE LAYERS.

From the surface downwards there were nine distinguishable layers, excluding the recent occupations of the present and the former century. First there was the eighteenth-century layer with black glazed pottery A, and below that the layer yielding pottery B. Below were other two layers within the framework of the barricade outside. Both seemed to be marked by small fire-places at the second entrance. Below these levels there was a large accumulation of charcoal in the first chamber. This seemed to be connected with the barricade and the way over the platform-structure.



Fig. 5. Objects of Bone and Deer horn from Torrs Cave. ($\frac{1}{8}$.)
1. Fish hook. 2. Broken object of bone. 3. Bone hinge or toggle. 4. Bone handle-plate.
5, 8, 9. Bone objects. 6, 7. Bone pins.

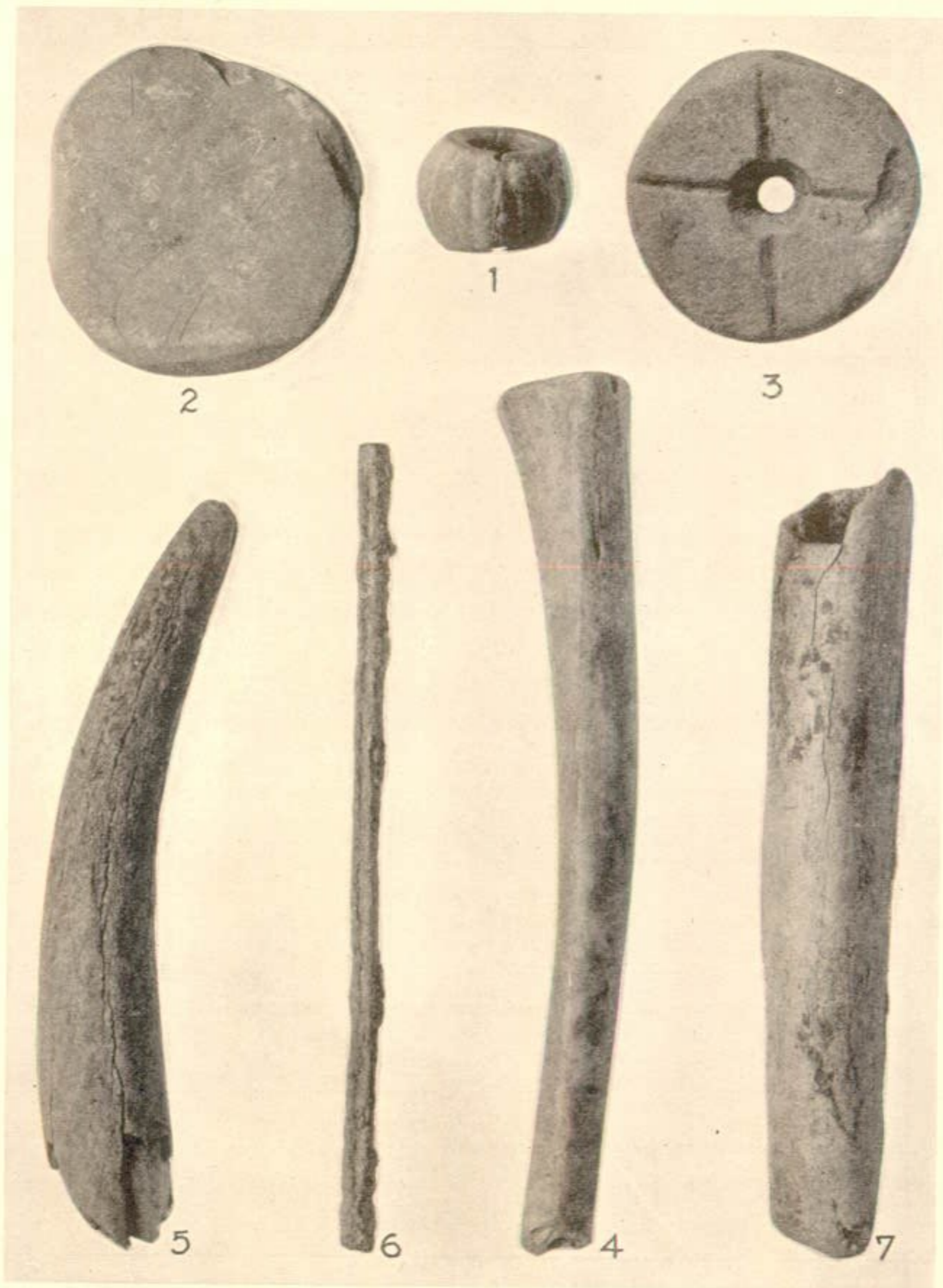


Fig. 6. Objects of Bone, Deer horn, Glass, and Stone from Torrs Cave.
(Nos. 1 to 5 = $\frac{1}{2}$ and 6 and 7 = $\frac{1}{2}$ ca.)

1. Blue melon bead. 2. Polished stone. 3. Spindle-whorl. 4. Bone implement.
5. Smoothed deer horn. 6. Bronze bar $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, fluted on two sides. 7. Human bone,
shaped for some purpose.

The next was marked by a pavement and by the presence of charcoal. Farther down were the two Iron Age layers, which extended from the entrance into the second chamber. Below, again, were the two undefined layers of the earliest structures. These were not very largely developed, except in the second chamber, and their course has been sketched somewhat tentatively.

The third and fourth layers were within the framework of the barricade.

In the lower of the two Iron Age layers the charcoal was 6 inches thick and stretched half-way across the first chamber. The upper layer was thinner, varying from 1 inch to 3 inches in thickness, but it reached into the outer half of chamber 2. At the entrance both layers were distinguishable above the rear blockhouse. Farther out there seems to have been a considerable amount of building to raise the level of the lowest Iron Age layer over the aperture wall. Recess 3 may not have been filled up, since almost at the datum-line a small trough about 12 inches square was found. The trough was full of bones and bones lay all round it in the packing. In recess 1 conditions were different. About 3 feet from the top of the packing there was a collection of bones and shells, some of the former being worked. There were many bones of sheep of a kind resembling those from All Canning's Cross. It is definitely an Iron Age level and is probably the same as the lower of the two levels discovered in the cave. There were a few bones at this level. The packing above seemed to be the work of a later people. This would date the front wall to Iron Age 1, but the completion of the packing to the base of the cist-like structure as the work of a later people. That structure was, therefore, constructed not earlier than Iron Age 2 and it might be contemporary with the pavement layer. The latter period also probably saw the infilling of the sentry-box.

The two lowest layers were difficult to define. Charcoal was found in recess 1 at the foot of the wall, on a level with the second occupation layer. Charcoal was also found below the level of the stone supporting the aperture wall. At the same level it was found in the angle of the two blockhouses below the base of the steps. Further signs of charcoal were found at the lower level in the passage round the rear blockhouse, and at the higher level in the entrance to chamber 2. In chamber 1 there was also a small pavement at the higher level and indications of steps at the entrance from the passage.

In the second chamber there is a major development of both layers. Throughout, the main guide in tracing them was the nature of the

material in which they occurred. Thus the lower layer rested on the fine shingle of the beach, whereas between the two there was a coarser type of shingle, and above that was a clay-chip complex. Below the lower layer at its major development in this second chamber was about an inch of clay.

Nothing apart from bone has come from these occupation levels. The bronze bar and the bone handle-plate may belong to one or the other. The bones of the upper layer belonged to sheep and were calcined. The remains of one or two other animals were found, but in such positions that they might have fallen down the side of the cave. There is nothing from the lower layer, but it is possible that some pig bones found upon the charcoal near the steps were connected with it.

THE BONES.

The full report of these is given at the end of this paper, but a short summary is necessary here. In the first four layers below the surface nothing of note was found, though there were many animals represented. Sheep, ox, pig, rabbit, hare, dog, cat (wild?), field- and water-vole, common shrew, rat, frog, and several birds. The cist-like structure contained only the shank-bone of an ox and the antler of a red deer. Those in the sentry-box were mostly too rotten to distinguish. One human bone was found in the packing. It was part of a human tibia and had been worked (fig. 6, No. 7). In the Iron Age layers bones of early species of sheep and ox were found as well as those of horse, stag, pig, dog, fox, wild cat, and several birds.

The history of the cave may, therefore, be summarised as follows:—

(1) There may have been prior to the structures an early occupation which is responsible for the charcoal under the steps and aperture wall. On the other hand, this charcoal may represent the earliest traces of people who built the rear blockhouse.

(2) The first structure to be built was the rear blockhouse. To this was added the front blockhouse at a period presumably before the arrival of the second people. The second comers either cut the window or levelled the ruins to build the platform-structure. At this time the passage was more or less at its original level and the steps had to be made as a means of access into the hollow in front of these structures. To support the broken wall and narrow the entrance the aperture wall was made. The purpose of these structures is uncertain. There are fortified caves in Scotland,¹ caves used by the saints in the Early

¹ E.g., *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xliii. pp. 246-247.

Christian Era,¹ but there seems to be no known cave with structural developments in the entrance prior to the Iron Age.

(3) The people who built the front wall, and packed the hollows in the ruins of former peoples, possessed an Iron Age culture. They were akin to the peoples of Borness, though apparently less wealthy and skilled, especially in bone-technique. Strategically Torrs is not so well defended as Borness, where there is a large hinterland of forts, so that life at Torrs may well have been more precarious than at Borness.

(4) The pavement layer yielded no relics. Probably the filling of the sentry-box and the bones among its stones may belong to the same period as the pavement layer. The cist-like structure may also be contemporary, since it is difficult to imagine it in existence before the sentry-box was partly filled. From the amount of débris present it seems that several centuries elapsed before the pavement was laid down.

(5) The barricade layer is also two or three centuries later than its predecessor. It is possible to say very little about it or the following occupations. The two highest probably date to the end of the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century respectively.

The relics have been deposited in the Stewartry Museum at the request of the owner of the land, Sir Charles Dunbar Hope-Dunbar. It remains for me to thank him for permission to dig, and the tenant of Torrs Farm, Mr J. Picken, for his hospitality; and to acknowledge the debt I owe to Mr Robison of the Stewartry Museum, to the students who helped me at the first excavation, to Mr W. P. Seymour who helped at the third, and the various workmen who have always entered into the spirit of the excavation. I must also thank Mr K. R. G. Hart for drawing the plans and for the sketch.

REPORT ON BONES OF TORRS CAVE. By J. WILFRED JACKSON, D.Sc., F.G.S. (Manchester Museum).

1. In the packing of the first recess, around the front blockhouse.

Sheep.—Many bones, imperfect skull (small), mandibles, teeth (old, and few young). They are of a slender-shanked form, as Romano-British breed; slightly more robust than some I have from All Cannings Cross (Iron Age).

Ox.—Few bones and two teeth.

Stag.—Fragments of antler, including one long, curved tine. Intrusive rabbit bones in the same collection, one with fused foot-bones attached to radius.

¹ E.g., *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xliii. p. 152.

2. In cist-like structure.

Ox bone and deer horn.

3. From Iron Age layers at entrance.

Ox (small).—Numerous split and broken bones; calcanea and astragali of small size; teeth and fragmentary jaws; also part of frontal with small horn attached of the small Celtic Shorthorn type.

Sheep (small).—Few limb bones, teeth, and jaws.

Pig.—Humeri, broken bones, teeth, jaws, and broken skull.

Stag.—Imperfect beam of large shed antler; also tines from same and others.

Birds.—Several small bones.

Water-vole.—Several skulls and lower jaws.

Shell-fish.—*Buccinum undatum*, *Littorina Littorea*.

4. From Iron Age layers of chamber 1.

Horse (small).—Distal end of radius, distal epiphysis of tibia, distal end of slender metacarpal.

Pig.—Odd bones, teeth, and jaw fragments.

Ox (small).—Various broken bones, loose teeth, jaw fragments, etc. Astragali and calcanea, very small. One perfect radius. All belong to small animals of Celtic Shorthorn type.

Dog.—Fragments of lower jaw with teeth.

Sheep (small).—Various bones and teeth.

Stag (small).—Smoothed tine of antler, base of shed antler with deep cuts.

Birds.—Few bones.

5. From layers below Iron Age in chamber 1.

Sheep (small).—Many fragments of calcined bones.

The above were predominant, but a few others appear to have slipped down the cave wall.

Pig.—Two teeth and imperfect femur.

Dog.—Metatarsal.

Fox.—Ulna.

6. Layers immediately above Iron Age at entrance.

Ox (small).—Astragalus and ribs.

Sheep.—Various bones.

Pig.—Radius.

Dog.—Radius.

Bird (small).—One wing bone.

7. As 6, but inside chamber 1.

Ox (small).—Various bones, broken, and teeth.

Sheep (small).—Various bones, tooth and, lower jaw fragment.

Pig.—Two fragments of jaws.

Wild Cat.—Two right humeri, long and robust.

8. Second chamber bones.

Ox.—Tooth and foot bone.

Sheep.—Scapulæ and upper jaw with teeth.

Bird.—Two medium-sized bones.