

## IX.

## SOME RELICS FROM KILDALTON, ISLAY. BY CAPT. R. B. K. STEVENSON, F.S.A.SCOT., KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

In course of the clearance of the Museum's cellars in 1939 a box was discovered containing relics from the excavation of a cave near Kildalton House, Islay. These relics were not described, but only summarily enumerated, in the account given in our *Proceedings*, vol. xxxii., 1897-8, pp. 36-9, some fourteen years after the excavation; for, to quote Sir Arthur Mitchell, "the collection of fragments has been lost, and repeated efforts to find it have been unsuccessful." He illustrated an axe and arrow-head which had been kept apart, and which have long been on exhibition in the Museum.

The collection newly discovered in the box consists of:

1. Pounders: a heavy pebble, 5 inches long and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, abraded at both ends, one end having two "facets"; a smaller pebble, 4 by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  by  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches, abraded obliquely at one end; another of more irregular shape,  $7\frac{3}{4}$  by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches, broken at the ends, which appear to have been abraded; and finally a purely natural unused elongated pebble of softer stone.

2. Pot lids: one  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches across, the other  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

3. Flints: seven waste fragments of various colours, and one of quartz; three utilised fragments and one of chert; a square scraper,  $1 \times 1\frac{1}{8}$  inch and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch high; a hollow scraper,  $1 \times \frac{5}{8}$  inch and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch high; and a broken knife tip reused as a scraper.

4. Three samples of earth and four pieces of charcoal (identified by Mr M. Y. Orr as hazel and willow), some small lumps of ferruginous stone, and a small lump of soft ruddle.

5. The "two objects regarded as bone pins formed out of the leg bones of birds," which may be entirely fortuitous; also two splinters and some tiny fragments of animal bone, one splinter being possibly deliberately sharpened.

6. Numerous bones, kindly listed by Miss M. I. Platt (Appendix).

7. The most important group is, however, the fictile. Sir Arthur Mitchell counted 291 fragments, "all of which were small"; the box contained some 220, and in addition about half a pot carefully restored. (The presence of this pot makes the disappearance of the collection somewhat strange.) In the account of the excavation all relics are said to have come from a single layer of dark soil about 2 feet thick. Black traces are still

adhering to some sherds, but almost all have a soft white calcareous deposit adhering to the sides and edges.

(a) The majority of the sherds are from the walls of large brown vessels, of which there are also rims and bases. The fabric is coarse, with grits and

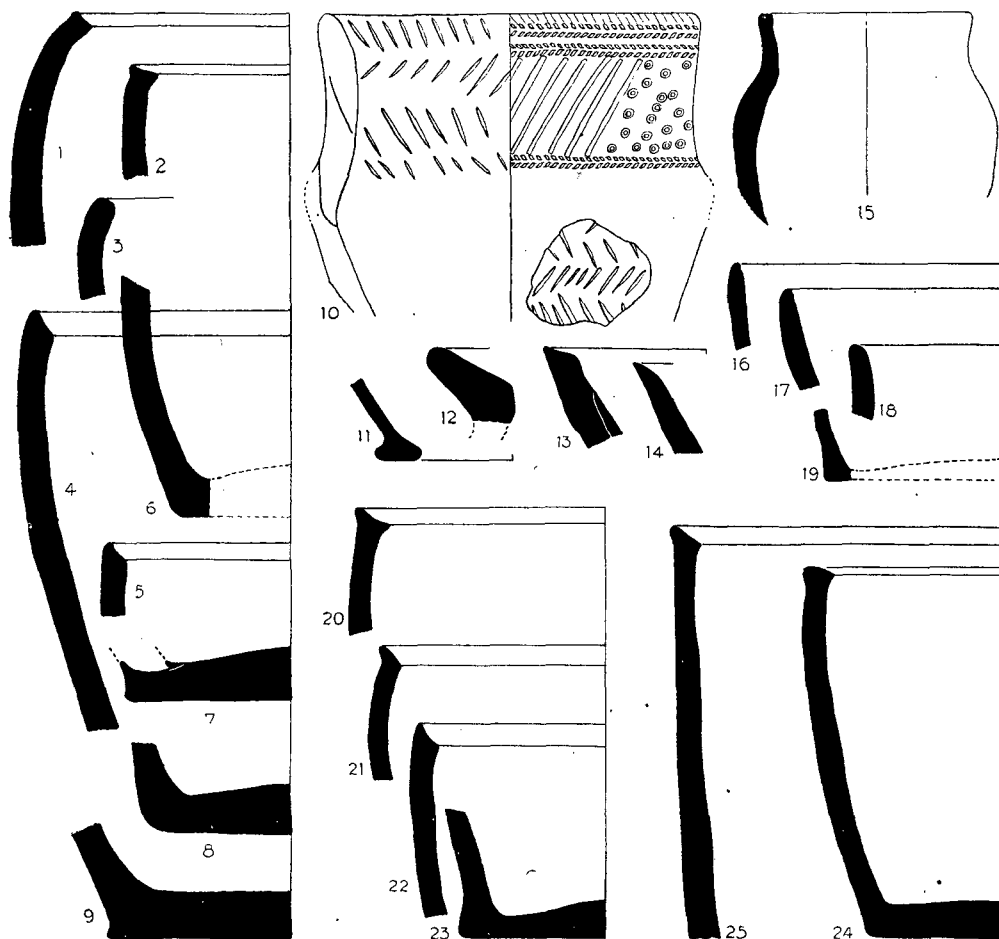


Fig. 1. Pottery from Kildalton (1-19); Covesea (20-24); and Ronaldsway (25), †.

small stones often giving the outer surface a lumpy appearance. It is not markedly friable. In the main this fabric belongs to the cinerary urn tradition. The vessels seem to have been bucket-shaped, incurving at the top with flattened or hollow-bevelled rims, more rarely rounded (fig. 1, 1-5). The rim diameters range from  $4\frac{3}{4}$  to  $8\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Two sherds are part of a most unusual rim, whose diameter could not be ascertained (fig. 1, 12). It is very sharply everted, forming a sloping brim. Of the flat bases two have

a marked external cavetto and outward splay, and two are simply rounded: diameters  $4\frac{3}{4}$  to  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches (fig. 1, 6-9). If the largest piece of base belongs, as seems quite likely, to the partly restored pot, its dimensions would have been height 8 inches, rim diameter  $8\frac{1}{4}$  inches, maximum diameter  $8\frac{5}{8}$  inches, base  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches (fig. 1, 4 and 9).

To a pot of similar fabric, with a slightly better finished surface, belong four sherds: two from the rim, one from close to the rim to the shoulder, and one just below the shoulder, there being, however, no "fits." The drawing, giving a suggested reconstruction (fig. 1, 10), shows the upper part of a vessel (rim diameter 6 inches) with a rounded and slightly outturned rim merging into a concave neck, while below a projecting shoulder the wall slopes down straight. The outside is highly decorated: first a close herring-bone of fine cuts on the lip, then four lines of twisted cord in pairs with alternate twist, then alternating panels on the neck consisting of oblique scores and reed-end impressions, and another pair of cord lines; below the neck the body had been covered with a herring-bone pattern of incised lines, only about  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch or less long, but up to  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch deep. The inside of the neck, despite its steepness, was decorated with three to four rows of lines like those on the body.

Two other sherds of the same coarse fabric may be noted as having one a deep, and the other a shallow, impression of a loose coarse cord; both impressions are probably accidental.

A base sherd of thinner quality, with a somewhat laminated structure, has a very pronounced outward splay below the external cavetto (fig. 1, 11). The inside is curved round as if there had been no bottom; it may be a sort of "false rim" due to an otherwise unknown variation of building. Another sherd of much the same fabric has some large grits, and on the outside it is decorated with roughly parallel scored lines.

(b) A small vessel, of which only the rim and upper part of the body remain, is made of a practically gritless fabric that had, however, some vegetable temper. It is finely laminated and rather soapy to the touch. The outside is dark brown, and smooth but covered with fine streaks. The inside is reddish with less finish. The rim is flattened, and below the vertical neck the wall curves out to form a globular body (fig. 1, 15). A sherd of a similar globular-sided pot is less well finished.

(c) A small sherd of buff vegetable-tempered ware, rather like that from Bronze Age Jarlshof.

(d) A score of sherds are again of a quite different fabric. The body is fairly thin and hard, sometimes with a considerable amount of small grit. The surface is even and sandy to the touch. They are mostly black. The rims are simply rounded (diameter  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches to  $8\frac{1}{4}$  inches), and the walls upright (fig. 1, 16-18). One rim (fig. 1, 17) has a perhaps insignificant line traced outside parallel to, and  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch below, the lip. The only base sherd

(diameter  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches) has an almost vertical wall with slight external cavetto (fig. 1, 19). These sherds suggest an Early Iron Age fabric.

(e) Eight pieces that at first sight seem to belong to clay moulds, are rather puzzling. Those that belong to the mouth suggest that it had been as much as 6 inches in diameter (fig. 1, 13), while a piece from farther down is concave as if for casting a plain spherical surface some  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter. None of the pieces seem to be for casting flattish objects, nor are there pieces with tenons or mortises or other features usual to two-piece moulds. On the other hand, the grey inside and the red outside are quite unlike a crucible. If the pieces, as seems likely, all belong to one object, it may have been a vessel measuring internally about  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches across and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep, into which molten metal was poured.

A hard grey-black sherd of smooth grey-black fabric (fig. 1, 15) may be mentioned at this point. Its real character is not clear. The rim is very sharp.

(f) There are also some bits of fused vitreous material, one containing lumps of quartz, and others forming part of lumps of burnt clay. These may be the remains of a pot used as a crucible. In addition there are some lumps of unfused burnt clay. Finally there is a piece of friable grey fused substance, a little like cement in appearance.

To sum up, the leaf-shaped arrowhead of brown flint, and probably also the polished axe-head of black and brown igneous rock, seem in comparison with the rediscovered pottery to have been stray in the deposit, and can in consequence no longer be treated as if found truly associated with one another. The pottery itself, for all that it is said to have come from a uniform black stratum, may belong to several periods.

The grass-tempered wares are too scanty and unusual for much comment, but the fabric of the little pot (fig. 1, 14) is distinctly reminiscent of the "soapy ware" from the caves and promontory fort just across the sea at Ballintoy, Co. Antrim, which has been dated to the eighth-ninth century A.D.<sup>1</sup>

The thin ware with fine grit temper has an "Early Iron Age" appearance, the fabric being similar to that of much of the pottery from sites such as brochs and earthhouses. This fabric, however, as Prof. Childe<sup>2</sup> has pointed out, is actually less common in the lower levels at Traprain Law than pottery partaking of the cinerary urn tradition, as do the majority of the sherds from the Islay cave.

These, and with them probably the "mould," the poor flints (none of them of the brown translucent material of the arrowhead), and perhaps the pot lids and pounders and the animal bones—except the presumably

<sup>1</sup> *Ant. J.*, vol. xvi, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> Childe, *Prehistory of Scotland*, p. 250. His observation is confirmed by S. H. Cruden's more securely stratified finds, *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxiv, p. 57 f.

intrusive domestic cat—may be the remains of a “bucket-urn” people, whose importance in Scottish prehistory is still obscure. In her report on the excavation of the Sculptor’s Cave, Covesea, Miss Benton<sup>1</sup> said: “Almost the only shape (in the Bronze Age stratum) seems to be a pail-like cooking-pot with a rim which projects slightly inside. The pail is indigenous to Great Britain. The rim is essentially like those of cremation urns. I am not aware that the two have been found in conjunction in this country.” This conjunction now reappears in the Islay sherds, and the fabric is, in a general way, similar. Professor Childe has stressed the tendency of some Covesea rims to flattening (as in fig. 1, 24), but others (fig. 1, 20-22) are strongly similar to the Islay rims. The similarity in bases (fig. 1, 23-24) is less significant. Partly in consideration of the rim flattening, Professor Childe (*Prehistory of Scotland*, p. 172) has suggested a “Hallstatt” date for the Covesea pottery and equated it with sherds from Old Keig and elsewhere. The fabric of many of these, however, and particularly of the quantity of similar pottery from Loanhead of Daviot,<sup>2</sup> could hardly be taken for cinerary urn, but is rather what I have termed “Early Iron Age” fabric. More recently Professor Childe<sup>3</sup> has stated that the date of Old Keig ware is uncertain. It may, therefore, be suggested that Old Keig ware may represent a fusion of traditions comparable with the overlap and fusion at Traprain.

The Islay and Covesea pottery, although from opposite sides of Scotland (*Prehistory of Scotland*, pp. 187-8) may represent one of the streams which met at Traprain and Old Keig. Their very similar rims (fig. 1, 1-5 and 20-24) appear to be less devolved than those from Traprain (*Prehistory of Scotland*, fig. 79), than which they are both probably earlier. This dating may be confirmed by the character of the decoration of the strangely shaped, if correctly reconstructed, pot (fig. 10) which suggests contact between the bucket-urn and purer cinerary urn people (*Prehistory of Scotland*, p. 170).<sup>4</sup> This is not inconsistent with Professor Childe’s comparison with coarse “Hallstatt” pottery in England. The Covesea and Islay pottery may now be regrouped with some isolated instances of undecorated non-cinerary bucket-urns, despite differences in size. A large urn from Glenluce sands, apparently from a habitation site, has the characteristic incurve of the wall at the top and a hollow bevelled rim which, although peculiar in detail, is in essence the same as examples from the two caves.

Through the kindness of Professor Mahr, I have a photograph of two complete urns found at Knockaholet, near Armoy, Co. Antrim, which also appear to belong to the same group as the sherds from Islay.<sup>5</sup> I am much

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxv. p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxix. pp. 197 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Annual Report*, Institute of Archaeology, University of London, 1939. The North of Ireland sherds mentioned in the *Prehistory of Scotland* were associated with the “soapy ware” cited above.

<sup>4</sup> Childe, *Prehistory of Scotland*, p. 170.

<sup>5</sup> H. C. Lawlor, *Irish Naturalists Journal*, vol. v. pp. 171-2.

indebted to Mr Arthur Deane, F.R.S.E., Curator of the Municipal Museum and Art Gallery, Belfast, for this reference and other particulars, and for permission to mention in this connection the urns, which are in his custody.

Professor O'Riordan<sup>1</sup> has illustrated and described a fragmentary urn found at Cush, Co. Limerick, the greater part of whose rim has an internal hollow bevel with an internal overhang. This part, he says, has been made by pinching the clay from the inside between thumb and forefinger, "but along a small portion of the circumference the clay had been pinched from outside, giving an external moulding on a horizontal rim," to which our fig. 1, 2 approximates. These variations in rim form do not thus necessarily denote real differences in idea.

Mention should further be made of vessels from a domestic site at Ronaldsway, Isle of Man.<sup>2</sup> Some had cordons applied close below the rim, in one case with a hanging semi-circle as well: also the fabric is quite unlike that of vessels we have cited so far, being more even without big grits and without burnish. The shape, however, of four partially restorable undecorated pots belongs clearly to our bucket-urn series. They range from 10 inches in diameter (fig. 25) to 5½ inches, one having a flattened rim. The westerly distribution of these find spots may be more than fortuitous.

In the *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. xlvii., 1942, published after this paper was written, Dr Hencken discusses the same wares and argues for a movement the reverse of that suggested here. It should be noted, however, that Scarborough pottery is paralleled in Scotland by Jarlishof rather than Covesea.

#### APPENDIX.—REPORT ON THE BONES AND SHELLS. By Miss M. I. PLATT.

*Red Deer*.—Fragments of metacarpal, metatarsal, phalanges, jaws, humerus.

*Ox*.—Jaws (fragments), molars, scapula, ribs, ulna, metacarpal.

*Pony*.—Molar.

*Pig*.—Fragments of scapulæ, humerus, jaws, phalanx.

*Sheep*.—Jaws, molars, ribs, metacarpals, radius and ulna, phalanges.

*Domestic Cat*.—Femurs, tibia, radius, humerus, ulnæ.

*Fox*.—Lower jaws.

#### *Shells.*

1. *Pecten maximus* (L.), one valve.
2. *Dosinia exoleta* (L.), one valve.
3. *Buccinum undatum* (L.) var. *littorale* King, one shell.
4. *Littorina littorea* (L.), one shell.
5. *Patella vulgata* (L.), six shells.

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings Royal Irish Academy*, Sec. C, vol. xlv., 1939-40, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiquaries Journal*, vol. xx, pp. 78 and 85. I have to thank Mr S. J. H. Neely and the authorities of the Manx Museum for permission to give these further details.