

### 3. A DUG-OUT CANOE FROM CAMBUSKENNETH ABBEY

IN the second-floor room of the tower of Cambuskenneth Abbey there is preserved a canoe which was found in 1874 sticking out of the mud of the River Forth about 50 yds. below the Abbey ferry.<sup>1</sup> Considerable parts have been lost and the existing remains are warped, but the canoe can be recognised as a flat-bottomed dug-out of oak which must originally have measured about 22 ft. in length and 2 ft. 6 in. in breadth externally (fig. 2). The thickness of the wood varies but is generally about 3 in. except towards the ends where it increases to about 6 in. The stern, which may have been less pointed than the bow, and all the port side are missing, while a broken piece of one side which was inside the canoe on its discovery has disappeared. A considerable fragment of the starboard side is still present, although it is broken down to below the level of the gunwale so that no estimate

<sup>1</sup> *Stirling Observer*, 14th May 1874.

can be made of the canoe's original height. When discovered the canoe was seen to have been 'patched with a piece of wood about eight inches square, broad-headed nails made of malleable iron having been used in fastening it'. Nine holes, each about 1 in. in diameter, are bored along the centre line; the first is 2 ft. from the prow, the next seven are at varying distances from this and from each other (1 ft. 7 in. to 2 ft.), while the ninth is 3 ft. 10 in. from the eighth and 1 ft. 6 in. from the existing stern. In addition, several similar holes

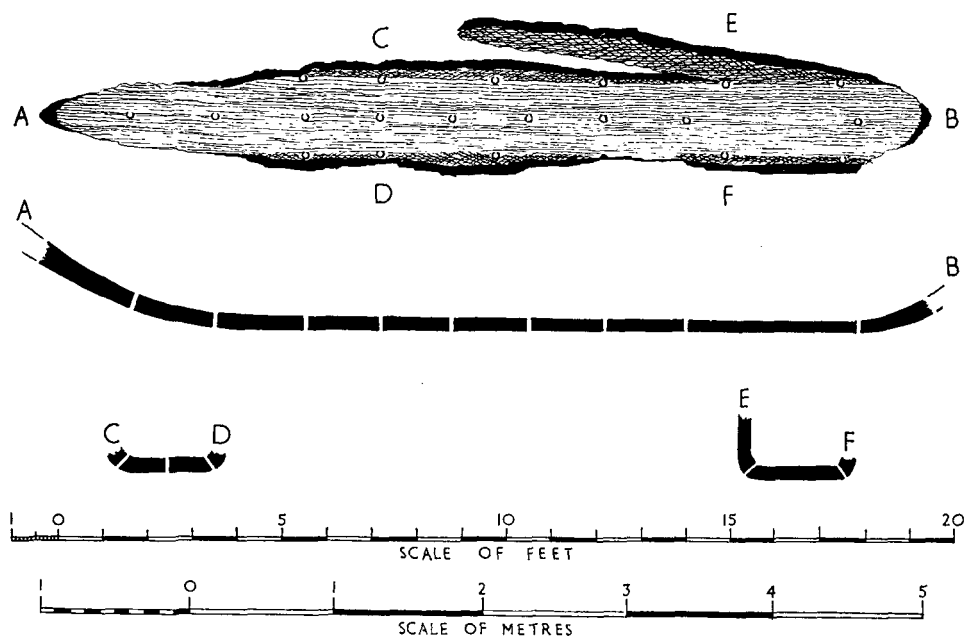


FIG. 2

can be seen in the angle between the bottom and the sides. These holes, which seem to have been bored in opposing pairs, and are inclined at an angle to the vertical, now first appear at a distance of 5 ft. 10 in. from the prow, but as the sides of the canoe are missing forward of this point it is possible that at least one more pair, if not two, originally existed. The first remaining pair and the next are both in line with holes in the centre, but the third pair fall between two of these. The single remaining hole of the fourth pair is again in line with a central hole, but the fifth and sixth pairs are not.

More than one hundred canoes, many of them dug-outs, have been found in rivers and lochs in Scotland,<sup>1</sup> but the problem of assigning even a broad dating to the majority has been very difficult. Such examples as have been found built into crannogs or in docks beside them have offered limited opportunities, while in other cases relics alleged to have been found inside canoes may be used cautiously as pointers.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, however, the application of the C-14 test to archaeological specimens, though difficult to come by and fraught with uncertainty, has raised hopes that some type-specimens of canoes will eventually be dated by this means.

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<sup>1</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXVI (1951-2), 220.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *P.S.A.S.*, IX (1870-2), 385, where the description of the canoe corresponds fairly closely with the Cambuskenneth example.