

I.

REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS AT FETHALAND AND TROWIE KNOWE, SHETLAND; AND OF THE EXPLORATION OF A CAIRN ON DUMGLOW, ONE OF THE CLEISH HILLS, KINROSS-SHIRE. BY THE HON. JOHN ABERCROMBY, SECRETARY.

Fethaland.—On the 4th of June 1904 I paid a preliminary visit to Fethaland to inspect a site which Mr R. Haldane believed to be the ruins of a broch. The Isle of Fethaland is now connected with the Mainland by a neck of rough, shingly beach, 350 feet wide, and at the highest tides in rough weather this narrow strip is nearly swept by the sea. At a short distance to the east of the neck is a low grassy mound on slightly rising ground, surrounded on all sides, except to the north, by higher and rocky ground. This mound, about 5 feet high at the most, had the appearance of a very much ruined broch, or analogous structure. Close to it on the south side, and also on the other side of the neck, there are fully a dozen houses, the remains of a fishing village which formerly existed here. About fifty years ago several hundred persons inhabited this site and owned sixty boats, with an average crew of seven men. Twenty years ago the boats were reduced to forty, and now the village is entirely abandoned. The village, though not the mound, is marked on the 1-inch and 25-inch O.S. maps.

In the 12th volume of our *Proceedings*, page 203, in a communication to the Society, the Reverend G. Gordon incidentally mentions "the undoubted *broch of Feideland*" (Fethaland), and at page 206 Mr Cockburn is of the same opinion in this respect; both took the mound for the site of a broch.

Two men and a boy were engaged to excavate and clear out the mound, and I visited the site on the 12th, 13th, 16th and 18th June, but was not present during the whole time that the excavations were being conducted.

On removing the turf and clearing away the loose earth and rubbish the existing external wall was found to stand only a very few inches above the natural surface; it was completely razed to the ground. The outline of the structure, as will be seen on the plan (fig. 1), is far from circular, and seems a good deal damaged on the south side, near the entrance. Its greatest length measures 49 feet and its greatest width 37 feet. At A on the plan there is a slightly curved chamber 11 feet long by $3\frac{1}{4}$ feet wide, with an entrance $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet in breadth. At the west end of the chamber is a step about 3 inches higher than the rest of the floor. At B there are also remains of a curved chamber 6 feet by $3\frac{1}{4}$ feet, nearly closed at the south end by an upright slab 3 feet long. Between the outer edge of the slab and the inside of the outer wall is 10 inches. At C there seemed to be the remains of a beehive hut, as the walls on the north side, which are still 3 feet 4 inches high, are not vertical, but project a little forwards. The large stone to the right of C is 2 feet 2 inches long and 3 feet high. At present the highest part of the ruined structure lies between C and the paved road to the north, and there are indications that something more would be found by continuing the excavation in that direction.

The recess D, which seems to have been used as a fireplace, as quantities of ashes were found there, is formed by three slabs; that to the north is 31 inches high, that to the west 34 inches high, and that to the south only 18 inches in height. Its prolongation westwards, marked F, shows a row of horizontally placed slabs, extending for about

7 feet, and about $2\frac{3}{4}$ feet wide. They look like the roof of a drain or narrow passage, which on a future occasion it might be advisable to open up.

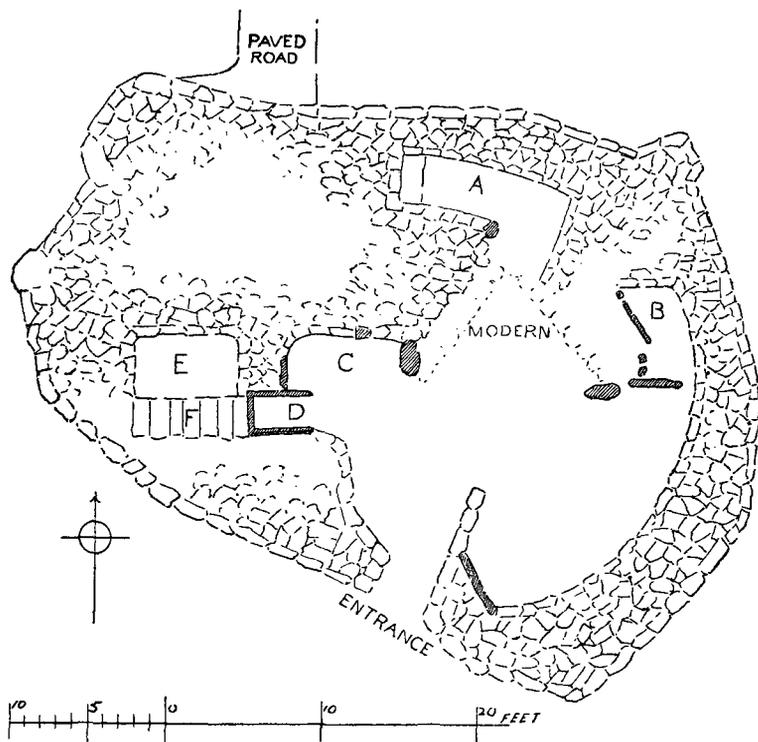


Fig. 1. Ground-plan of Structure at Fethaland.

At E there is a rectangular depression $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 4 feet; on the north side the height of the wall is 34 inches, on the east 30 inches.

Close to the north-west corner of the structure is a paved road, or perhaps the foundation of a wall, 5 feet wide, leading due north, and covered with turf, but I only followed it for a few feet.

The present entrance is about 4 feet wide, but this is the most dilapidated part of the ruins, and here the structure has suffered most from the hand of man. The entrance leads straight to a rectangular foundation of modern date, the site of a fisherman's house. In clearing out the angle now remaining were found ashes, a piece of a clay tobacco-pipe, a No. 6 steel fishhook, and a few links of an iron anchor-chain.

The other objects found during the excavations are all more or less fragmentary and of no special interest, as the workmanship is so rough and incomplete.

A small stone rectangular receptacle, 5 inches by 3 inches, with two lateral projections at one end. The measurement of the very rudely excavated hollow is 3 inches by $1\frac{5}{8}$ inches, by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch deep.

Small segment of a circular steatite bowl, $\frac{7}{8}$ inch deep. The bottom of a steatite vessel, hollowed out of a rough untrimmed block; the workmanship very rude. Half of a rough block of steatite, $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, hollowed on one side into a bowl-shaped depression $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches deep.

A small piece of steatite, squared on three sides, about $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches square, which seems to form part of a receptacle. It is slightly hollowed on one side by means of a tool, leaving very deep impressions.

Twelve fragments of steatite vessels showing segments of hollowed surfaces rudely picked into the face of the stone.

Fragment of a side of a steatite vessel, with flat bottom and smooth thin sides, of far better make and finish than the above fragments. It measures $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 3 inches.

Eight small fragments of plain, fairly hard, but hand-made pottery, the paste of which contains much mica. One of the pieces shows a flat bottom.

A roughly circular net-sinker, made from a beach stone, with a diameter of $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and with two perforations, a larger one at the centre and a smaller near the edge.

A net-sinker of slaty stone, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 5 inches, of irregular shape, and perforated near the centre.

A nearly circular pestle of hard, heavy, waterworn stone, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, with a diameter of about $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches, showing signs of use at one end. The other end is broken.

The lower end of a natural stone used as a small pestle. It is 4 inches long, of oval section, $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches. One end has been broken off.

A few bones of animals, the tooth of a small ox, and quantities of white whelks and limpets, were also found in excavating the site.

Trowie Knowe.—About half a mile north of Lochend, North Roe, Shetland, at the foot of the South Beorgs, on the property of R. C. Haldane, Esq., there is a sepulchral cairn known as the Trowie Knowe, —Trow being the Shetland form of the Scandinavian word Troll. On the Ordnance Survey map it is called the Giant's Grave, but this term, properly speaking, applies to two adjoining standing stones.

The cairn lies on a natural rise in the ground of low elevation, and has a diameter of 27 feet with a height of about 5 feet. When I saw it, it had been previously opened, partly by Mr Haldane after Dr Robert Munro's visit last year, and partly by a predecessor. Many stones, too, had been removed from it a few years ago, when the road to North Roe, which runs about 50 yards to the east of it, was constructed.

When I attacked the cairn on 2nd June 1904 the walls of the west chamber A (fig. 2) were exposed, but the floor was still covered with large stones. On removing these, I found the axis of the chamber lay due west (magnetic); its greatest length was 6 feet 4 inches, its greatest width 4 feet; the narrowest part measured 1 foot 10 inches, and the height from the floor to the roof, of which only a very small portion remained, was 4 feet 3 inches. The north and south walls of the chamber (fig. 3) were each composed of one huge stone (*a* and *b* on the plan). That on the north side (*a*, *a*) measured at least 6 feet 3 inches by 5 feet 1 inch; the dimensions of the other could not be measured, as the ends were concealed. The northern

stone was upright, but the other one was sloped at an angle of about 45°, so that the upper edge of it nearly touched the northern stone at the west end of the chamber. Here one lintel stone of the roof, covering a length of 1 foot 10 inches, remained in position; all the others had fallen in.

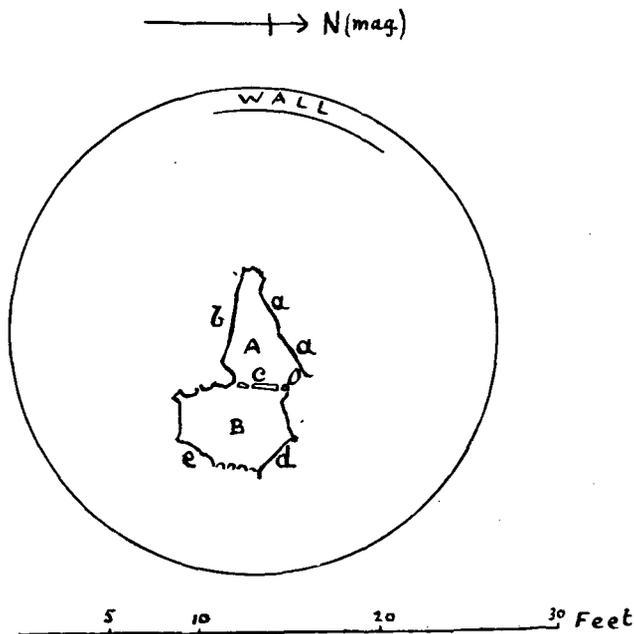


Fig. 2. Ground-plan, Trowie Knowe.

I am inclined to believe that these two stones were there before the chamber was constructed, and that their convenient position suggested the idea of utilising them to form a place of sepulchre, for no other stones in the cairn approached these in magnitude.

Near the bottom of the chamber were three flat stones, which probably formed part of the floor, lying in a grey-coloured mud, for

the bottom was very wet. Below the stones was a quantity of black mud. When dry, both kinds of mud were examined, and some of it was found to be very light in weight and to contain small pieces of charcoal. The only objects found in the chamber, and at a rather higher level than the mud, were two smooth beach pebbles of eruptive



Fig. 3. The West Chamber (A), Trowie Knowe.

rock, like brecciated lava, beautifully spotted and striated; one has a long diameter of 3 inches, the other of $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The workmen informed me that no pebbles like them were to be found on the beach at Lochend, but Mr Haldane has seen similar ones at Uyea, about 7 miles to the north-west.

The thin, low septal stones, marked C, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, at the
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east end of the chamber, suggested that another one lay to the east. This proved to be correct, for on removing the stones that filled it another chamber, B, roughly pentagonal in shape, was disclosed. It measured 4 feet 10 inches in length, with a maximum width of 6 feet. The two largest stones, marked D E, measured respectively

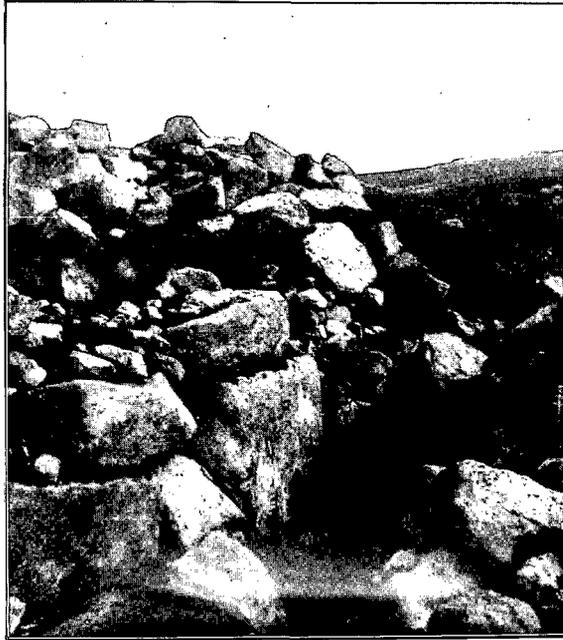


Fig. 4. Retaining-wall at west end of Trowie Knowe.

4 feet 2 inches in height by $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet in width, and 4 feet 2 inches in height by 2 feet 5 inches in breadth. This chamber was paved with flat stones, but nothing save a beach pebble was found in it.

On removing the peaty covering of the cairn, at a distance of 10 feet 10 inches west of the back of the chamber A, a well-built retaining-wall (fig. 4), fully 2 feet high and 1 foot 3 inches thick, in two tiers

of dry masonry, was found, and traced round the northern half of the cairn. The stones between this wall and the megaliths of the chamber had evidently been thrown in promiscuously, as they lay in all directions and had not been placed methodically.

Cairn on Dumglow.—One of the isolated summits of the Cleish Hills that run along the southern edge of the county of Kinross is known as Dumglow, with an altitude of 1242 feet above the sea-level. Its southern face rises precipitously above the small Black Loch, and a little to the east of this lies the considerably larger Loch Glow. The hill of Dumglow, or Dunglow, on which may be seen traces of an ancient British earthwork, lies on the estate of Cleish Castle, the property of Mr W. Young, but rented to Mr William Stuart.

In the summer of 1903, when I happened to be on the top of the hill with Mr Stuart, I noticed what looked like a cairn or sepulchral mound. Having in the meantime obtained the requisite permission from the proprietor, on Saturday, 17th September 1904, I proceeded, in company with Mr Stuart and two workmen, to cut a trench across the mound.

The cairn has a diameter of 50 feet, with a height of about $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and operations were begun by cutting a trench (fig. 5) across it from east to west. From its commanding position it has happened that on great occasions, such as that of the King's coronation, bonfires have been kindled on the top of the mound. It was not surprising, therefore, to find great pieces of charred wood and iron hoops of tar-barrels on the summit. For some feet down the earth was reddened by the heat of the fires, and molten tar and the melted glass of whisky-bottles had penetrated to considerable depths.

Externally, the mound had the aspect of a cairn, as it was cased all over with stones of moderate size, but below the stony surface the interior was largely composed of earth, much of it of a clayey nature, mixed with stones. At the east end of the excavation nothing was found, but at a distance of $23\frac{1}{4}$ feet from this end, at a depth of 2 feet 7 inches,

a piece of melted glass was picked up. On approaching the centre of the mound, at about the natural level of the ground, this part of the trench began to fill with surface water, owing to the clayey, retentive nature of the soil. At the centre, at a depth of 6 feet 7 inches from the top of the cairn, what seemed to be a plank of wood or trunk of a tree, lying in a direction parallel with the trench, was felt by hand 2 or 3 inches below the muddy water. When extracted it was



Fig. 5. Trench through the Cairn on Dumglow.

found to be part of a hollowed-out tree-trunk of oak, measuring 7 feet 1 inch by 11 inches at the broadest part. But one end was certainly missing, and a good deal of the wood had decayed away. On the same level as the east end of the tree-trunk, a piece of slightly iridescent glass of modern date was picked up, and a smaller bit of dark bottle-glass.

This find closed the work for the day, and operations were only resumed on Saturday, 1st October, by which time the water in the

excavation had disappeared. Shortly before Mr Stuart and I arrived on the spot, the two workmen had found, about 3 feet north of the centre, and at a depth of 6 feet 9 inches, a small, perforated, lathe-turned disc of wood, with a diameter of $2\frac{5}{8}$ inches, like the wheel of a child's trolley-cart. The diameter of the hole is 1 inch, and the thickness of the disc $1\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch. It is evidently quite modern, and may easily have fallen in from near the surface, as, before knocking off work on the 17th, the excavation had been partly filled in, lest any of the sheep grazing on the moor should receive damage by falling into it. At a depth of about 7 feet we came upon the bed rock. The excavation at the centre was enlarged to cover a space of $10\frac{1}{2}$ feet square, and carried down to the underlying rock, without finding anything. The surface of bed rock was uneven; on the south side of the excavation it formed a sort of shelf or natural raised step, and the tree-trunk had been deposited on the lower level to the north of the step, which thus partly protected it.

Although it is not quite certain, it is highly probable that under the Dumglow mound we have an instance of tree-coffin burial. Dr Joseph Anderson has kindly drawn my attention to two Scottish examples of this practice. In the *New Statistical Account for Aberdeenshire* (xii. 354), the Rev. W. Donald, of Peterhead, records the finding in the parish of Longside of two oak coffins or chests in a tumulus of moss. One of them was entire. They had been hollowed out of solid trees, and each measured 7 feet by 2 feet. The sides were parallel and the ends rounded, and they had two projecting knobs to facilitate their carriage. No vestige of bones was found in either coffin. They had been covered over with slabs of wood, and lay east and west.

In dimensions, material, and orientation, these tree-coffins from Aberdeenshire agree very well with that from Kinross-shire.

In the other reference (*P.S.A.S.*, xiii. 336-8), the Rev. J. Mapleton describes the finding in a peat-bog near Oban, at a depth of 4 feet of made ground, of a roughly hollowed-out trunk of a tree, 5 feet $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by 2 feet wide and 1 foot 7 inches deep, of which a representation is given in fig. 6. It lay north and south, and was taken by

Mr Mapleton for a canoe. No signs of bones were noticed in it and no implements. Logs were placed lengthways along each side (the "gunwale") of the tree-trunk, and these were kept in place by stakes, the intervals between being stuffed with moss. The outside measurements of the structure were $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 2 feet, with a height of 2 feet 3 inches. The cover had been formed of branches of birch and hazel, and stuffed with moss.

Sir Richard Colt Hoare gives four examples of tree-coffin interments with skeletons, and six in which the body had been first cremated, but

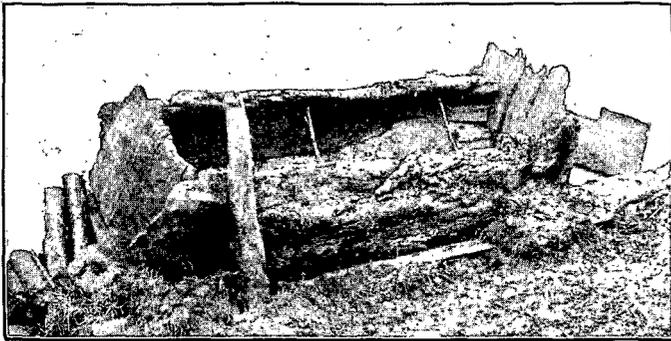


Fig. 6. Coffin of the trunk of a hollowed oak, found (1878) at Dalrigh, Oban.

these latter may be passed over. In every case objects had been laid in the grave which help to determine the age of each.

Near Warminster, in a large barrow 13 feet high, he found, at a depth of 5 feet, remains of a skeleton, deposited nearly east and west, in a wooden box or trunk of a tree. Among the bones was a small bronze dagger. On the floor of the barrow, a few feet from the centre, was a cinerary urn, now lost, standing upright, containing burnt bones (*Anc. Wilts*, i. 52). This interment probably belongs to a latish period in the Bronze Age.

Near Amesbury, in a large barrow 15 feet high, he found at the centre, on the natural level, a shallow oblong excavation, in which was a rude trunk

of elm, containing a skeleton, with its head to the north-east. Near the head was a beautiful red urn, with five handles on the neck, apparently turned on the lathe; near the breast lay a bronze dagger, $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and a bronze awl, $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, with a bone handle; near the thigh lay another bronze dagger with four rivets, measuring $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 2 inches (*op. cit.*, i. 122-3). All these objects are now in the Devizes Museum. If the urn is really turned on the wheel it must belong to a late portion of the Bronze Age; it is figured by Thurnam (*Archæologia*, vol. lxxiii., pl. 29, fig. 3), and compared by him to a jar for holding preserved ginger.

In the same district as the above, in a large barrow $9\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, Hoare found, in an oblong excavation at the natural level, a shallow wooden case of boat-like form, containing a skeleton, lying north and south. With it was a necklace of jet and amber beads, a knife-dagger and awl of bronze, and a small urn of neat form (*op. cit.*, i. 124-5).

In a barrow at Overton Hill he found, at a depth of 10 feet, a skeleton in an excavation in the native chalk. The skeleton was in a contracted position, with the head to the east; near it was a small knife-dagger, an awl and a little celt, all of bronze. The skeleton seems to have been inclosed in the trunk of a tree (*op. cit.*, 90). If the little celt was flat or slightly flanged—it seems to be lost—this interment must belong to an early period of the Bronze Age.

Canon Greenwell (*Brit. Barrows*, pp. 375-6) found in the parish of Rylston, West Riding, under a barrow 5 feet high, a coffin formed from the trunk of an oak split in two and hollowed out. It was $7\frac{1}{4}$ feet by 1 foot 11 inches wide; the trunk had been cut off at each end and then partially rounded, but on the outside it was left in its natural condition. The hollow within was $6\frac{1}{3}$ feet by 1 foot wide, roughly hewn out, and showing marks of the tool. It was laid north and south, with the thicker end to the south. The body had entirely decayed, and nothing was observed but an unctuous substance of animal origin. The corpse had been enveloped in a woollen fabric reaching from head to foot. Canon Greenwell believes the interment belongs to the Bronze Age.

and at p. 377, in a note, gives a few additional references relating to tree-coffins in this country and in Denmark.

In *Crania Britannica* is figured a coffin made from the trunk of a large oak split in two. It was found in a barrow at Gristhorpe, North Riding, in a grave from 6 to 7 feet deep, covered by a mound with a diameter of 40 feet and a height of 3 feet. The external measurements of the tree-coffin were $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet by $3\frac{1}{4}$ feet, but the interior length was only $5\frac{1}{3}$ feet. It contained the skeleton of an old man, and a bronze blade $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches long with two rivets, and the bone top of the handle. The body had been wrapped in skin, fastened at the breast by a bone pin 3 inches long.