

I.

NOTICE OF SCULPTURED STONES FOUND AT "DINNACAIR," A
ROCK IN THE SEA, NEAR STONEHAVEN. BY ALEXANDER THOM-
SON, Esq. of BANCHORY, ABERDEENSHIRE.

In plate xli. of the "Sculptured Stones of Scotland," two "fragments at Stonehaven" are engraved; and in the letterpress description it is mentioned "that they were found on the top of a rock named Dinnacair, about a mile and a-half south of Stonehaven, where they had formed part of a wall, and the two fragments are stated to be in the possession of Mr Ross," the intelligent manager of the gas work. I felt desirous of ascertaining whether any more fragments could be discovered, and any additional in-

formation regarding them be procured. I began by purchasing the two in Mr Ross's possession, and learning from him all he could tell about them. In 1832, he and two or three companions set out on a frolic along the coast to the south of Stonehaven. They climbed up to the top of Dinacair, an undertaking of considerable difficulty, and even danger, except to an experienced cragsman, at least in its present state. Then they found a low wall along part of the edge, and amused themselves throwing the stones over into the sea below. One of these, No. 1 of the drawings, he removed to Stonehaven next day, and has had it in his possession ever since. Many years afterwards, when sculptured stones began to be talked of, Mr Ross remembered that some of the others he had thus assisted in throwing into the sea had figures engraved on them. He went to look for them, and recovered the stone having the figure of a fish and triangle engraven upon it (No. 2 of drawings, see plate xli). It was completely covered with sea-weed; but when it was removed, it was found in tolerable preservation, at least sufficiently distinct to be drawn and engraved.

On hearing this detail, I thought it possible that other fragments might still be recovered, and I requested Mr James Christian, writer, Stonehaven, to send men to the spot, on the occasion of a low ebb tide, to search for them. They did so on two occasions, and found two small stones, of which drawings are herewith produced (Nos. 3 and 4). On getting possession of the four stones, and comparing them with each other, the first thing which struck me, much to my surprise, was to find that, instead of being four fragments of one stone, as I had taken for granted, the four were all different stones.

No. 1. is a grey flag of the old red sandstone.

No. 2. is of the lower beds of the old red sandstone, very dark coloured, and not very compact, closely resembling that which is now quarried for building purposes, near Stonehaven, at the Red Craig.

No. 3. is conglomerate of the old red, full of small rounded pebbles.

No. 4. is also conglomerate, but with very few pebbles.

It is self-evident that these four were originally separate stones, and never were portions of one mass.

No. 1, from its sharp edges, looks as if it were the fragment of a larger mass.

No. 2 looks as if it had been somewhat shaped and dressed when it was sculptured.

Nos. 3 and 4 look as if they had been rounded boulders when cut, and not altered; but this appearance may have been produced by twenty years tear and wear in the sea.

This having excited my curiosity, I paid a visit to Dinnacair, accompanied by Mr Tindal, procurator-fiscal for the county of Kincardine, on the 16th July last, when the tide was very low. It is situated at the bottom of a small bay, about a mile and a-half south of Stonehaven, and about half way between Stonehaven and Dunnottar Castle. It was of course my intention to get to the top of it and search there as well as at the foot, but I was much disappointed to find that, to me at least, it was wholly inaccessible.

Dinnacair is an isolated pinnacle of old red conglomerate, about 100 to 120 feet in height, 200 feet long, and 30 to 40 feet wide, as measured by the eye. The sides are generally perpendicular; at some parts overhanging, at others with a little slope, so that a very active man with a good head and firm hands may reach the top. One youth did so last year, but he required the aid of several others before he could get down again; in fact, I believe, very nearly lost his life.

This seemed a very singular place for the erection of the sculptured stones. I soon, however, satisfied myself, that at no very distant period it formed a part of the mainland. All round the picturesque little bay are perpendicular projecting *dykes* running out, some to a greater, some to a less distance from the land towards or into the sea. Immediately behind Dinnacair stands one of these, about 100 feet distant, and, on the spot it is impossible to doubt that, a few centuries ago, it and the pinnacle were united. Dinnacair itself has several masses of rather soft red sandstone, rising perpendicularly up through it. One of these has been washed out, and left a large block separate from the principal pinnacle on the land side. Another, similar, has been so far washed out as to make an irregular arch, through which one can easily walk. And I noticed another, which, to all appearance, will in a few years form another passage. The roofs of them will in time fall in, and, ere long, Dinnacair itself will probably disappear.

The bay opens full to the north-east, looking along the coast from

Stonehaven to Aberdeen, and the sea, in a storm from that quarter rolls in with enormous force—nothing to check its progress across the Northern Ocean—and perhaps made more destructive by being broken upon the projecting headlands of the Kincardineshire coast. The dykes of hard conglomerate run out a long way into the sea. Near the shore, most of them are now covered at high water; but from the top of the cliff they are seen gradually disappearing under the deep water.

On the whole, I was satisfied, that when the sculptured stones were erected, what is now a detached pinnacle formed part of the mainland, and probably for centuries after. Doubtless every winter changes its outline, and one season it may be much more accessible than another. I was told that, some years ago, an enterprising fisherman raised crops on the flat summit.

Before I visited the spot, I was perplexed by the diversity of the material of the four stones; but, on the spot, it was evident that they might all be found without difficulty within a few yards on the sea-shore, or even on the top of the rock. These details, however, belong more to the geology than to the archæology of the locality.

Along with this are produced drawings of the several stones, carefully executed by Messrs Keith and Gibb of Aberdeen.

No. 1 is a singular pattern, of which no account has yet been given, and which, indeed, seems to be unique, except that what is called the spectacle figure, occurs in the middle of it. Notwithstanding its irregularity, it is evidently done after a deliberate design, and doubtless has a meaning if it could only be *found* out.

No. 2 (see Plate VIII., fig. 1) represents a fish, which occurs on many of these monuments, and above it is a triangle, nearly equilateral, with an oval dot in the middle. The outline of the fish is well given. It corresponds tolerably with Yarrell's figure of the salmon. The tail is correctly formed, and the dorsal and ventral fins correctly placed, both relatively to each other and in proportion to the length of the fish. The opening of the gill-covers is in its proper place from the extremity of the snout. The salmon is found in all the rivers and along the coasts of the district.

No. 3. The sculpture on this stone represents an equilateral triangle

with a crescent on the apex, but not quite in equilibrio; there is more of the crescent to the right of the triangle than to the left.

No. 4 presents two rude circles, at a short distance from each other, with a dot in the centre of each. The larger is rather an oval than a circle. These four stones have been built, for preservation, into the garden wall at Banchory House.

I fully intend, on the first convenient occasion, to make another and a further search at Dinnacair.

No. 5 is a very small, but yet an interesting fragment. It was sent to me by Mr Smith, postmaster, Old Aberdeen, in consequence of the discussion of the subject which took place at the Spalding Club in June last. It was found by him as one of the building, or rather *packing*, stones of an old clay-built wall taken down by him a few years ago. It is only four and a half inches high by four inches on two sides, and nearly five inches on the other two. It is rudely sculptured on all the four sides, and I have no doubt the upper part of a small obelisk.

It will be noticed that all the figures cease within a certain distance of what I suppose to be the top, and only the upper part of each remains. It would be in vain to speculate on what the figures, when entire, may have represented.

The most important matter in connexion with this little relic is the proof which it gives that these remains may occur in any old wall. No place could be more unlikely than the wall of an old cow-house, built together in the rudest manner. It is also a proof of the value of the volume of "Sculptured Stones," which drew my attention to these remains, and it may be hoped that it is the earnest of many more similar discoveries hereafter.

In the printed notice of plate xli., it is stated that there were other fragments at Dinnacair, which have disappeared. "One of them is supposed to form the hearthstone of James Brown, fisherman, Stonehaven."

After various unsuccessful attempts to discover and obtain this stone, Mr Christian has at last succeeded, and I have produced drawings of it by Keith and Gibb along with the others. In the meantime, Mr Christian's letter contains a sketch, which shows it to have the spectacle figure crossed by the sceptre. (See Plate VIII., fig. 2.)

The letter itself contains the following particulars.

Letter from Mr James Christian to Mr Thomson.

“STONEHAVEN, 6th February 1858.

“MY DEAR SIR,— . . . This is the stone which was built into James Brown’s house. It turns out that his son’s wife knew the place, but nobody thought of asking her. It came from Dinnacair about the year 1819, and has been used since that time merely as a building stone. I suppose it had been brought with other stones by James Brown, when he was building his house. There used to be gulls’ nests on the top of the rock when I was a boy, and I remember several accidents happening in harrying them, and that will explain the knowledge of there being building stones on the top.

“The stone you got from the gas-work was taken down by the gas-manager in 1832. It was only one day in the water. The two that you got last were thrown down in 1832, and brought here last year, on your employment to search. The other one, that had little or no sea-weed on it, was also thrown down in 1832, and brought here four or five years ago, when Andrew Gibb was making a drawing of the other.

“There is no very distinct recollection of the appearance of the wall. It was regularly built, or at least an intentional building, and that appears to be all that is certain.

“The top of the rock is not a bit less accessible now than twenty years ago. But I would not like to try up. However, Andrew Brown, tempted by the half sovereign, says he will be up before long. If he had been twenty years younger he would have had better speed. But his wife seems to be quite pleased, and I should not be surprised if she went up. I forgot to ask her what like the top was, but shall do so. I myself never was at the top, and that somewhat puzzles me, as we were seldom out of some danger or other.

“The cause of the gas-manager and his friends going up was this. An old man, Blair, the Cowie grave-digger, was constantly saying to them that if he were younger, he would be on the top; for almost every night he dreamed that there was a concealed cave, where a great quantity of gold was hidden. His constant repetition of this excited their curiosity, and made them climb up, and also dig through the guano and soil to the rock, when they discovered the dyke, but not the gold. Perhaps it is there still!

“ I suspect this idea of the old man’s must have arisen from some traditional habitation of the rock which he had heard of in his youth. But all these old people are now dead ; and, after all, fisher traditions are not of much value. . . . I am, &c.

“ JAMES CHRISTIAN.

“ ALEXANDER THOMSON, Esq. of Banchory.”

Mr John Stuart remarked that Mr Thomson’s observations had made it easier to understand the history of this singular rock, which, instead of being insulated as at present, had in former times formed the point of a projecting headland. In this state it had probably been fortified in the same way as Burghead in Moray, where a neck running out into the sea had been made into a British strength, and where sculptured slabs of about the same size as those at Dinnacair had been found in 1809. He gave several instances of sculptured rocks and slabs having been found in the neighbourhood of British forts, both in England and Scotland, and also remarked that sculptured stones of a similar type had been recently found in a “ Pict’s House” in Orkney, in some sort of connection with sepulchral deposits ; which last also frequently occurred near British forts, and rendered it probable that all these sculptured stones had a sepulchral meaning. The name of the rock, which probably was formed from the words “ Dunnet,” and “ Kair,” or “ Keir,” favoured the notion of its having originally been a fortified position.

Mr Joseph Robertson pointed out the resemblance which the rock of Dinnacair bore to the Craig of Downie, near the village of The Cove, in Kincardineshire, and to the rock on which stands the Chapel of St Skeoch or St Skae, near the mansion-house of Dunninald, in Forfarshire, and suggested that Dinnacair might, like these, have been chosen as the site of some early hermit’s cell, with its chapel and burying-ground.

It may be added, the stone referred to by Mr Thomson as No. 1 having been engraved in the “ Sculptured Stones of Scotland” (plate xli. fig. 1), reference is made to that collection for it. The figures on No. 5 are curious, but of a different type from the others, and may be consulted in the drawings in the Society’s possession, kindly furnished by Mr Thomson. The accompanying Plate (VIII.) gives specimens of some of the mysterious symbols which occur on the Standing Stones and Crosses on the north-east coast of Scotland.

Fig 1.

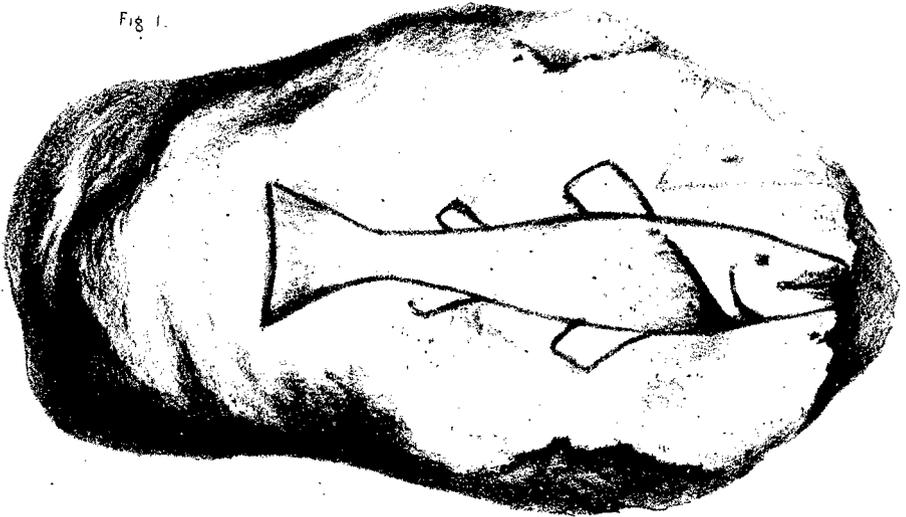
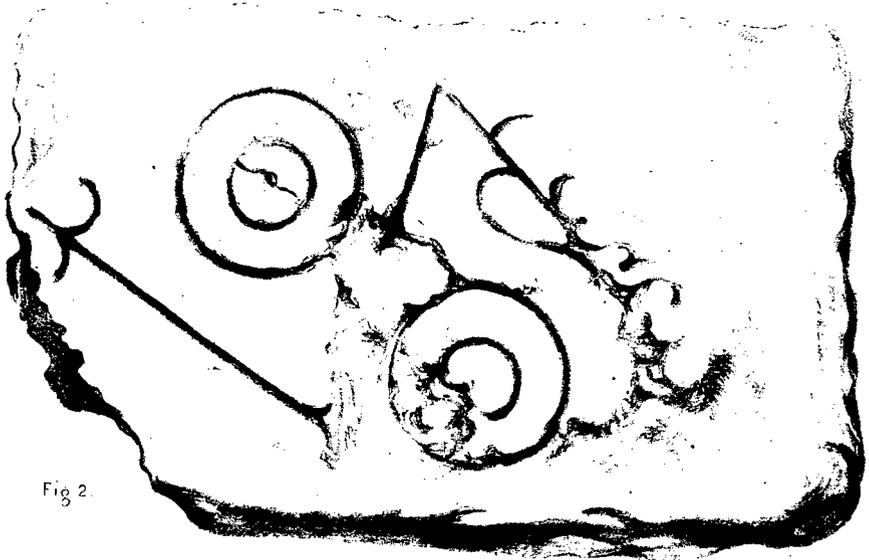


Fig 2.



SCULPTURED STONES FOUND AT DINNACAIR NEAR STONEHAVEN
FORFARSHIRE.

W. & A. G. Smith, Edinburgh.