

IV.

CORN BYKES OF CAITHNESS. BY MRS L. DUFF DUNBAR
OF ACKERGILL, F.S.A.SCOT.

In 1774 Thomas Pennant wrote in his tour through Caithness: "Here are neither barns nor granaries; the corn is thrashed out and preserved in the chaff in *bykes*, which are stacks in shape of beehives thatched quite round, where it will keep good for two years."¹

This method of storing grain, though now apparently obsolete, was in use up to twenty years ago at any rate. The last I saw was in 1910. The accompanying photograph, taken in July 1905, shows a byke at Mirelandhorn in the parish of Wick.²

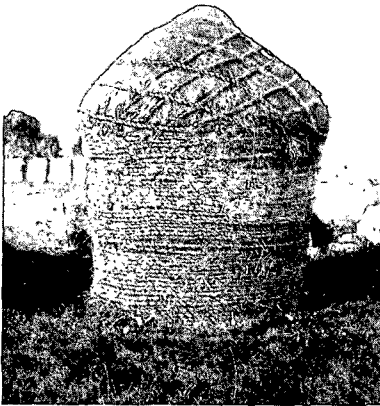


Fig. 1. Corn Byke at Mirelandhorn, Caithness, in 1905.

The manner of construction was as follows: A site was chosen on a spot of bare ground in a dry situation, and a ring, "a perfect round circle," is made of common spars or "stabs" driven into the earth, close together barrelwise, with a "mell" (hammer).

Chaff or "shillings" (husks of oats) to the depth of about a foot are then put in to cover the beaten earth, and above these a little straw, and then old bags. That

completes the flooring of the byke.

Next straw from sheaves thrashed with the flail, termed "gloy," is put round the outside up and down or round the structure.

The byke is then filled with corn. When the grain is nearly up to the top of the stakes, "simmons" (straw ropes) are wound round and round outside, and the whole is thatched over with a very deep thatch, and made firm with more simmons bound crosswise. This ingenious and simple granary keeps corn in an excellent condition, and it is said to have the merit of being rat-proof.

A byke that I measured in 1910 was 16 feet 2 inches round at the

¹ *Tour*, 1774, vol. i. p. 182.

² In fig. 1, beyond the corn byke, are to be seen two examples of the Old Red Sandstone slab fences so often met with in Caithness.

base and 19 feet at the eaves. The height to the eaves was 6 feet. It held about ten quarters of corn. It was made by an expert, Mr Alexander Doull, Mirelandhorn.

Such bykes were sometimes used as cornbins in a barn—of course much modified in construction and without wooden spars.

MONDAY, 8th February 1932.

CHARLES E. WHITELOW, Vice-President,
in the Chair.

A Ballot having been taken, the following were elected Fellows:—

ERIC BIRLEY, M.A., F.S.A., Chesterholm, Bardon Mill, Northumberland.
DAVID ANGUS BROWNLEE, Brownlee Cottage, Colston, Bishopbriggs.
MRS PENELOPE HOTCHKIS, Mid-Dykebar, Paisley.
ROBERT GELLATLY MACLEAN, F.A.I.(Lond.), 296 Ferry Road, Dundee.

The following Donations to the Museum were intimated and thanks voted to the Donors:—

(1) By Sir ALISTER P. GORDON CUMMING, Bart., of Altyre.

Rim and wall fragments of a Food-vessel, the wall ornamented by transverse rows of vertical impressions of an instrument pressed at a very oblique angle. It has measured $4\frac{5}{8}$ inches in external diameter at the mouth. Found with fragments of incinerated human bones and some pebbles covered with a limy incrustation in parts, in a short cist near Loch of Blairs, Altyre, Morayshire. (See subsequent communication by J. Graham Callander, F.S.A.Scot.)

(2) By JAMES S. RICHARDSON, F.S.A.Scot.

Scraper of black Flint, measuring $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch by $1\frac{1}{8}$ inch, found about 50 yards south-west of the cairn on Whitekirk Hill, East Lothian.

Scraper of highly patinated grey Flint, measuring $1\frac{1}{8}$ inch in length, and three worked Flakes of grey Flint, found by the donor on the sands at Gullane, East Lothian.

(3) By A. D. LACAILLE, F.S.A.Scot.

Small Acheulean Hand-axe (*coup-de-poing*) of Flint, measuring $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches in length, found by the donor at Swanscombe, Kent.

(4) By C. DALE, St Alban, Braid Road, Edinburgh.

Four barbed and stemmed Arrow-heads and two of triangular form, of grey and black Stone, found on an estancia lying between the eastern entrance to the Straits of Magellan and Cabo Penas, Tierra del Fuego, South America.

(5) By Lieut.-Commander G. E. P. How, F.S.A.Scot.

Silver Straining Spoon, with a perforated bowl and pointed stem, bearing the maker's mark MK, for Colin Mackenzie, Edinburgh, date c. 1700.

(6) By Mrs M'CONACHIE, The Manse, Lauder.

Two barbed and stemmed Arrow-heads of grey Flint, measuring $\frac{1\frac{3}{8}}$ inch by $\frac{1\frac{1}{8}}$ inch and $\frac{1\frac{5}{8}}$ inch by $\frac{9}{16}$ inch; four Scrapers of grey Flint, measuring $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch by $1\frac{3}{16}$ inch, $1\frac{7}{16}$ inch by $1\frac{1}{8}$ inch, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch by $\frac{1\frac{3}{8}}$ inch, and $1\frac{1}{8}$ inch by $\frac{7}{8}$ inch; a Saw of brownish Flint, measuring $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches in length; a worked Flake of grey Flint, measuring $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch in length; five sub-triangular Implements of grey and brown Flint, measuring $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch by $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch, $1\frac{3}{8}$ inch by $1\frac{9}{16}$ inch, 1 inch by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch, $\frac{1\frac{5}{8}}$ inch by $1\frac{3}{16}$ inch, and $\frac{1\frac{5}{8}}$ inch by $1\frac{1}{16}$ inch; Whetstone with an oblique perforation at one end, measuring $6\frac{3}{8}$ inches by 2 inches by $\frac{7}{8}$ inch; perforated Disc of Shalé, measuring $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch by $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch in cross diameters, and a stone Whorl of domical shape, measuring $1\frac{7}{8}$ inch in diameter—from Lauderdale, Berwickshire.

(7) By CHARLES E. WHITELAW, F.S.A.Scot., Vice-President.

Two Earthenware Pitchers, one with a yellowish brown glaze, measuring $13\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height and $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches in widest diameter, the other with a fine bright green glaze, and the neck encircled by a number of raised mouldings, measuring $12\frac{1}{4}$ inches in height and $9\frac{1}{8}$ inches in greatest diameter, dredged up from the Forth, near Gargunnoch, Stirlingshire.

(8) By the Misses Ross, 14 Saxe-Coburg Place, Edinburgh.

Cast of Royal Arms of Scotland carved in stone at Jedburgh Abbey, early fifteenth century.

There were acquired through the King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer:—

One Groat of David II. and two Groats of Robert II., found at St Ninian's Chapel, Drumnadrochit, Inverness-shire.

The following Donations to the Library were intimated and thanks voted to the Donors:—

(1) By HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT.

Journal of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, from January 1741-1742 to December 1749. London, 1931.

Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries. Interim Report, dated 1st September 1928. Final Report, part i., dated 1st January 1930, Final Report, part ii., dated 20th September 1931; and Oral Evidence, Memoranda, and Appendices to the Final Report, dated London, 1929.

(2) By JAMES K. STEWART, C.B.E., Inchmahome, Longniddry.

The Stewarts: a Historical and General Magazine for the Stewart Society. Vol. vi., Nos. 1 and 2.

(3) By RICHARD QUICK, F.S.A.Scot.

Bulletin of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, vol. x., No. 4; December 1931.

(4) By THE HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS.

Allan Ramsay: a study of his Life and Works. By Burns Martin, Ph.D., King's College, Halifax. Cambridge, 1931.

(5) By A. D. LACAILLE, F.S.A.Scot., the Author.

The Bull in Scottish Folklore, Place-names and Archæology. Reprint from *Transactions of the Folk-lore Society*, vol. xli., No. 3, 30th September 1930.

(6) By Dr R. PARIBENI, Hon. F.S.A.Scot., the Author.

La Famiglia Romana. Rome, 1929.

(7) By JOHN D. COMRIE, M.A., B.Sc., M.D., F.R.C.P., F.S.A.Scot., the Author.

History of Scottish Medicine. Vols. i. and ii. Second Edition, London, 1932. Published for the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum.

(8) By J. D. HUTCHISON, B.Sc., Egerton, Ashton Road, Luton, Beds, the Author.

The Church of St Bride, Douglas. London, 1932.

The following Communications were read:—