

## V.

NOTICE OF EXCAVATIONS IN CAIRNS IN STRATHNAVER, SUTHERLANDSHIRE, IN A COMMUNICATION FROM MR DONALD MACKAY, SKELPICK. BY JOHN STUART, LL.D., SECRETARY.

While engaged in collecting materials for a report to the Rhind Committee in 1866, on the remains in Caithness and Sutherland, which were likely to be suitable for examination, I had the opportunity of examining a group of remarkable chambered cairns in Strathnaver, and have made reference to them in my report. (Proceedings of the Society, vol. vii. p. 296.)

It appeared to me that it would be of importance to ascertain the structural character of the chambers and galleries in these cairns, as well as to discover if any traces of burial still remained.

The remoteness of the place makes it difficult to get the labourers necessary for such work, but Mr Mackay, the farmer of Skelpick, was so good as to undertake it.

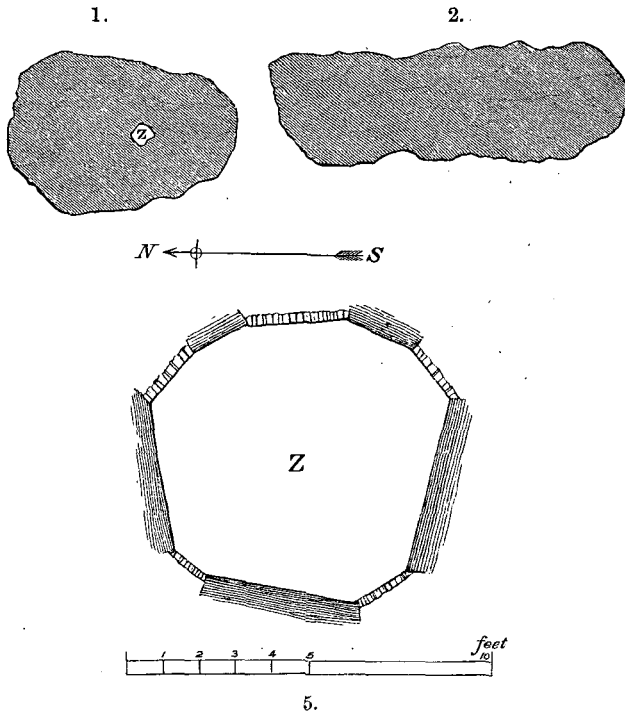
Accordingly, in the month of October 1867, that gentleman sent to me a statement with the result of various diggings which he had superintended, accompanied by sketches of the chambers so far as they had been traced. I then requested Mr Mackay to pursue his investigations somewhat farther, by clearing out the passages or galleries which led to the chambers, and by digging into the ground in both of these with the view of detecting traces of any deposits which might have been made, and then to make careful plans of the whole.

I have not yet heard from Mr Mackay, but I have reminded him of the matter, and in the meantime I submit to the Society the interim report of that gentleman, together with the sketches already made by him.

“SKELPICK, THURSO, 11th October 1867.

“DEAR SIR,—I write to inform you that, in accordance with the instructions contained in your letter of the 13th ult., I employed men to open up the several cairns in this neighbourhood visited by you last year, and regret to say that so far as we have gone we have found nothing.

I enclose you sketches and ground-plans of two of the cairns, along with explanations of the same. We also cleared out the chambers formerly opened in the round cairn to the south of this house, but found



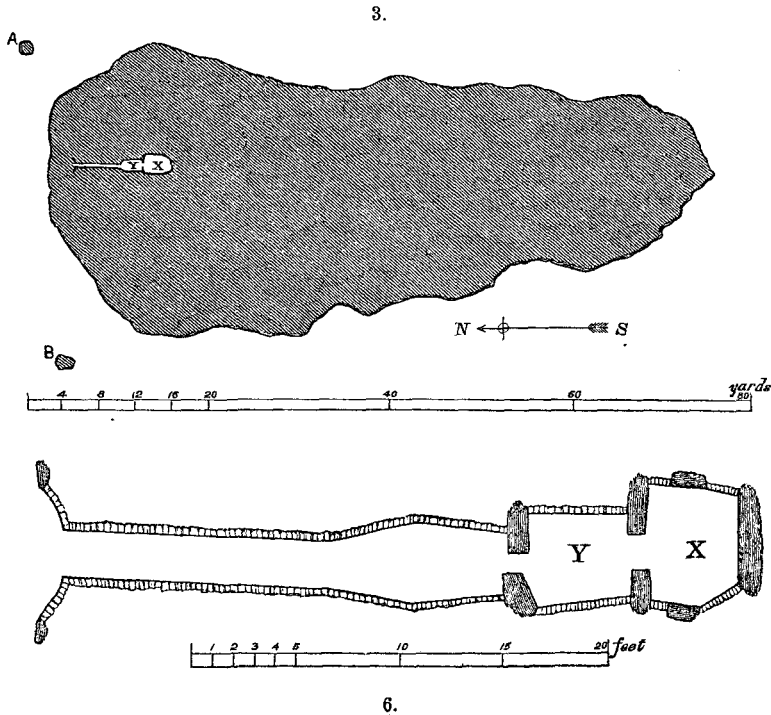
Ground-Plan of the Group of Three Cairns at Skelpick, Strathnaver,  
 Figs. 1 and 2. Ground-Plans of the First and Second Cairns.  
 Fig. 5. Enlarged Ground-Plan of the Chamber of First Cairn.

nothing. Having found nothing in any of them, I did not think it proper to proceed farther without first acquainting you.—Yours faithfully,

“DON. MACKAY.”

EXPLANATIONS OF PLANS OF CAIRNS.

*Group of three Cairns* (see the plans, pp. 520, 521).—This group of



with enlarged Ground-Plans of their Chambers.

Fig. 3. Ground-Plan of the Third Cairn and its Chamber.

Fig. 6. Enlarged Ground-Plan of the Chambers YX in Third Cairn.

A and B are Standing Stones in front of the Cairn.

cairns is situated near the road leading to Skelpick, a little south of the shepherd's house. It consists of three cairns (figs. 1, 2, and 3) in succes-

sion, as shown in the plan on pp. 520, 521. No. 1 was first opened at Z, where a chamber was found about 8 feet deep, some of the stones forming the side being of that height. No entrance was found to it, or if there had

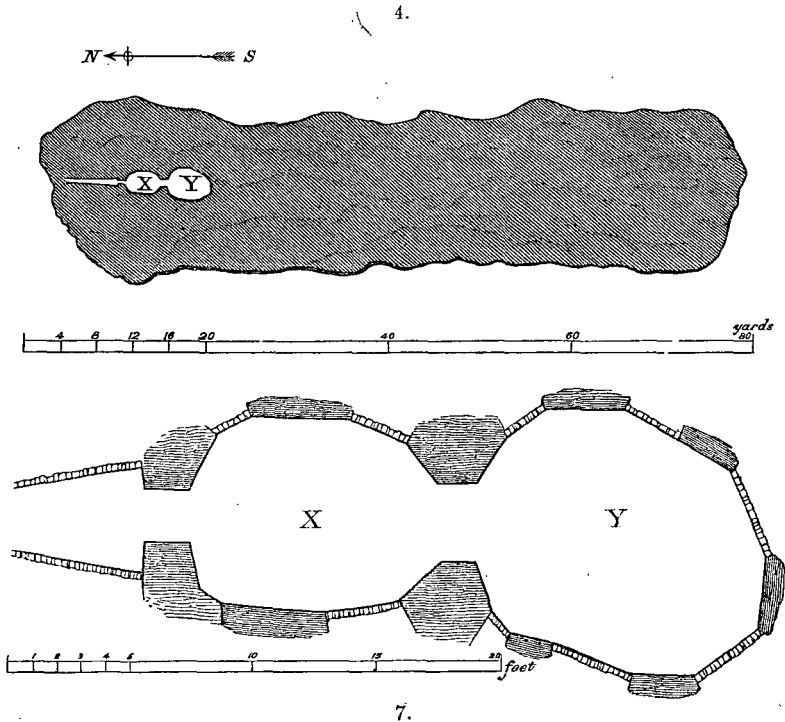


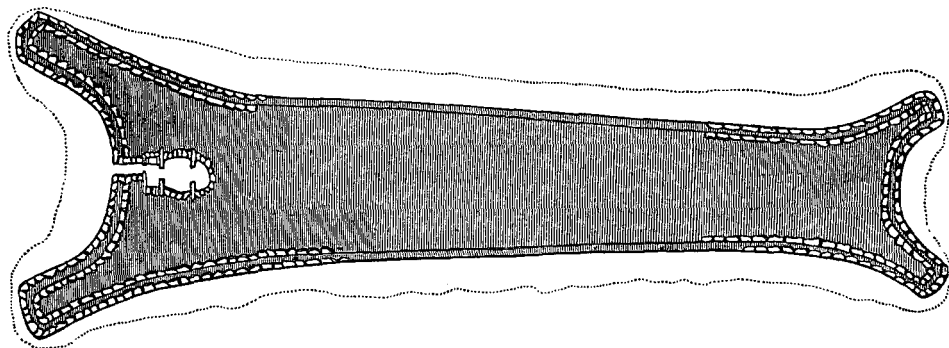
Fig. 4. Ground-Plan of Long Cairn at Skelpick.  
Fig. 7. Enlarged Plan of its Chambers, X, Y.

ever been one, it had fallen in. The southernmost cairn, No. 3, was then opened at the end next the standing stones A, B, and the mouth of the entrance passage, about 2 feet square, was found, which on being followed

up for about 21 feet, led to the chamber Y (fig. 6, p. 521), and thence to X. The height of these chambers is 6 feet 9 inches, and the other dimensions are shown in the plan, in which it is also shown where the wall is composed of single stones, and where it is built.

*Cairn No. 4* (see figs. 4, 7, p. 522).—This cairn is situated across the burn of Skelpick on the way up to the broch or dun. The chamber Y had previously been opened by Captain Horsburgh about 13 years ago, and the chamber X has now been opened, in front of which there seems to be the entrance; but as it has fallen in, it could not be followed beyond a few feet. The chambers (X, Y) are about 8 feet high, and are much larger than those in No. 3, the lintel over the opening leading from the one to the other being 9 feet long, 3 feet 6 inches high, and one foot 6 inches thick. As shown in the plans, the cairns as yet have only been excavated for a short distance, beginning at the north end.

[Judging from the form of these cairns, the situation of their chambers, and the crescentic expansion at the entrance (see fig. 6, p. 521), they appear to be a variety of the Chambered Long Cairns, with "Horns," which are as yet known only in Caithness. See the previous paper by Mr Joseph Anderson, on "The Horned Cairns of Caithness," in the Proceedings, vol. vii. p. 480, from which the annexed ground-plan, showing their peculiar form, is taken.]



Ground-Plan of Chambered Long Cairn, with "Horns," at Yarhouse,  
Caithness, 190 feet long.

MONDAY, 9th March 1874.

ARTHUR MITCHELL, Esq., M.D., Vice-President, in the Chair.

After a ballot, the following Gentlemen were elected :—

*Corresponding Member.*

JAMES DALGARNO, Esq., Merchant, Slains.

*Fellows.*

JAMES T. HAY, Esq. of Whitmuir.

EDWARD BURNS, Esq., York Place.

The following Donations to the Museum and Library were laid on the table, and thanks voted to the Donors:—

(1.) By the Right Hon. the EARL of STAIR, K.T., F.S.A. Scot.

A Sculptured Stone, formerly built into the wall of the mill at Dromore, Wigtownshire. This stone is described and figured (as it appeared in the wall) in a communication by Dr Arthur Mitchell in the Proceedings, vol. ix. p. 582. Its removal, however, has disclosed the fact that it is sculptured on both front and back, and also that part of both edges of the sculptured face represented in the figure (at p. 582 of vol. ix.) had been concealed by the building. (This interesting stone will be further described and figured correctly in a subsequent communication by Dr Mitchell.)

(2.) By the Most Hon. the MARQUIS of HUNTLY.

Cast of a portion of a large Sculptured Slab in the Churchyard of Aboyne, with interlaced ornamentation, and having two lines of an Ogham inscription cut upon it, one running along the moulding on the edge of the stone, and the other nearly parallel to it. (See subsequent communication by W. F. Skene, Esq., for a reading of the inscription.)

(3.) By Mr JOSEPH ANDERSON, Keeper of the Museum.

Tortoise Brooch of brass (similar in form and ornamentation to those

found in Scotland), dug up from a grave-mound of the later Iron Age, in Haukadal, near Christiania, in 1872.

Carved Norwegian Powder-horn,  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, obtained with the next in Christiania in 1872. The lower end is fitted with a bottom of wood carved with a geometrical pattern. Two inches below the nozzle there is a collar with two cross bands cut out of the horn for the fastening of the suspending strap. The body of the horn is engraved and carved in low relief with subjects from sacred history and mediæval romance. The different groups are arranged in panels, with inscriptions between each. The centre panel, which is the largest, represents the Temptation in the Garden of Eden. In the centre is the tree of knowledge, with the serpent twining round its trunk, and Adam and Eve on either side. The serpent is represented as bending down towards Eve with an apple in its mouth. Eve has raised her left hand to receive the apple from the serpent, while Adam stands with his hands outstretched in an attitude of deprecation. The inscription is ADAM MAN · EVA KVINDE. In the two next compartments are representations of Daniel in the lion's den and King Theodrik and the Dragon, inscribed respectively, DANIEL and TIDRIG; while below them Samson is represented rending the jaws of the lion. The four compartments round the bottom of the horn contain representations of warriors on horseback armed with round shields and falchions, heroes of the middle-age romances, which were so popular at an earlier period over the whole of Europe. They are inscribed respectively, ROLAND, OLGER, BVRMAN, and OTVL. Above these is an inscription which seems to read: K.V. BERGE AÑO 1751.

Powder-horn similar to the last, but flat-sided,  $7\frac{3}{4}$  inches in length, and apparently of considerably earlier date. The subjects of the carvings are for the most part the same, but differently treated. In the centre group we have Adam and Eve at the tree of knowledge as before, but in the present instance Adam is helping himself from the tree at one side, while Eve is receiving an apple from the serpent at the other. The inscription is on the one side of the panel, ADAMEN, and on the other, EVAENMAN. In the smaller panels, as before, we have the figures of mounted warriors, inscribed ROLAN, ENDE, OTEV, GARSJ, KLAR, BVRM; and only one subject from sacred history appears, viz., King David with the harp, inscribed DAVE. On a band running round the middle of the horn is the following

inscription:—HABAR OLAF STRANGSON; and on a band round the bottom, A. LAGMASSON EGEN HANT—which may be rendered respectively, Olaf Strangson possesses (this horn), and A. Lagmanson (made or carved it) with his own hand.

(4.) By Mr ROBERT SPALDING, Schoolhouse, Dun, Forfarshire.

Forty-Penny Piece of Charles II.

(5.) By Mr ARCHIBALD BOYD, 14 Scotland Street.

Small Guatemalan Gold Coin.

(6.) By CHARLES DE FLANDRE, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

Proof Impressions of Engravings of Mary, Queen of Scots, from the Miniature by Janet at Windsor Castle, and of the Portrait of Mary from the Coinage of the Period.

(7.) By DAVID LYELL, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

A Forged Guinea Note of the Commercial Bank of Scotland, 1818.

(8.) By the late Mrs Scott, Mansion House Road, through George Sim, Esq., *Curator of Coins*.

Declaration of Liberty of Conscience by King James II. Printed on two leaves folio, 1687.

*The Scots Courant*, March 14, 1712.

*The Caledonian Mercury*, January 11, 1724.

Three pairs of Magnifying Spectacles used by the late Mr John Beugo, the well-known engraver, father of the donor.

Burgess Ticket of the Burgh of Hamilton in favour of Mr John Beugo, engraver, 25th July 1810.

Diploma of Admission by the Council of the Royal Company of Archers, dated 26th Dec. 1795, in favour of John Beugo, engraver, with Seal of the Company attached.

Letter of the Earl of Buchan to John Beugo, engraver, as follows:—

“DEAR SIR,—As I think you are entitled to have a place in my series of Scots Artists at Dryburgh Abbey, that you were made known to me by my eminent kinsman, the learned and excellent Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, and that you are my ancient acquaintance, I must look to-



wards some rainy Sundays for your portrait painted by yourself on pannel of the *closet size*, 15 inches by 12½, such as you have seen here in my parlour, for which end if you give me leave I will send you a piece of pannel.

“Your Earl of Denbigh will I think justify even in the sight of good judges this mark of attention from, dear Beugo, your well-wisher and obedt. servt.,

BUCHAN.

“EDINBURGH, George Street, 62,

“Nov. 21, 1808.

“Willison’s portrait of you is so like that I should prefer it to be copied.”

(9.) By Rev. THOMAS GREENBURY, Ilkley, Leeds, F.S.A. Scot.

Original Letter to Sir Matthew Blakiston, Lord Mayor of London, anent a Collection for the Poor, dated 9th March 1761, with signature of George the Third.

(10.) By DAVID MASSON, LL.D., Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature in the University of Edinburgh, the Author of the work.

Drummond of Hawthornden: the Story of his Life and Writings. 1873. 8vo.

(11.) By J. M. BEATTS, Esq., the Author.

The Municipal History of the Royal Burgh of Dundee. Dundee, 1873. 8vo.

(12.) By the Right Hon. the MASTER OF THE ROLLS.

Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts, 1603–1624.

There were also exhibited by Rev. WILLIAM ROSS, Haddington.

A small collection of Coins, Crucifixes, and Triptychs of Brass, some of which are enamelled and adorned with sacred subjects, &c., chiefly from Kertch.

The following Communications were read :—