

II.

TWO SCULPTURED STONES RECENTLY FOUND IN ORKNEY. BY
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STONE FROM BURNESSE, FIRTH, ORKNEY.

In the autumn of 1922 I received word from a friend that a curious stone had come to light at a "pict's house" in Firth, where some excavation was being made to procure stones for dike-building. On going out, I discovered that the site was that of a broch—known as the Chapel Knowe, which lies close to the beach at the point of Burness, on the north side of the Bay of Firth. It was this site, indeed, that gave rise to the name Burness, and the fact of its now being called the Chapel Knowe simply shows that here, as so very often elsewhere in Orkney, a chapel has been erected at the site of a ruinous broch in order to get stones without quarrying. The precise site of the chapel is not now apparent, and the recent digging showed no trace of such a building.

A breach had been made into the west side of the mound, and a portion of inward curving wall was exposed to view—probably the inner wall of the broch. From the curve thus exposed I calculated that the interior must be about 20 feet in diameter. A puzzling feature, however, meets one in the inward batter of the exposed wall. The height exposed is only about 5 feet, but even on that small portion there is an inward batter of a foot. This may conceivably have been due to the weight of a huge superincumbent mass of ruins once upon a time, but the mere couple of feet or thereby of earth that is at present above the wall could not possibly have produced such an inward thrust, and I am very doubtful of any such explanation. But until further excavation takes place it is not possible to say anything definite as to the building, of which only a small portion has as yet been revealed.

The stones encountered in the cutting had been thrown out on each side, and it was among these that the present stone was first noticed by Mr Turfus, draper, Finstown, when on a visit there to view the newly-found "pict's house."

I brought the stone back with me, and reported the discovery to the estate factor, Mr Duncan J. Robertson, O.B.E. At their next meeting, the Stewart Endowment Trustees, proprietors of the Burness property, decided most generously to present the stone to the National Museum.

The stone itself (fig. 1) is a most curious and puzzling relic. It measures 40 inches in length, tapers slightly in breadth from 8 inches at one end to 6 inches at the other, and in thickness it tapers also from about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches at one end to about 1 inch at the other. It is of the dark grey or blue stone (Old Red Sandstone) which is so commonly seen on the Orkney beaches. Only one face shows any signs of human workman-



Fig. 1. Central portion of Sculptured Slab from the Broch of Burness.

ship, and, at first sight, this looks as if an idle boy with a pocket-knife or a nail had been amusing himself simply by making indiscriminate scratches or scorings all over it. Closer inspection, however, shows in addition to the scratchings a very delicately incised human figure about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height. It is wearing a gown or cloak reaching below the knees, and is depicted in profile looking towards the left. One of the two nearly parallel incised lines that may perhaps denote the open front of the cloak is produced upwards and curved to form the outline of the head. The other is continued round as far as the eyebrow, and at the

top of the head these two lines are connected by a series of short cross strokes. The most curious parts of the dress are three little crests that adorn the head. They are shaped somewhat like the figure 9—one, however, facing the other way—*e*. Along the foot of the cloak is a hem which seems adorned with zigzag ornament. What sort of person is represented I do not know. I have never seen any figure exactly like it, and content myself therefore by drawing attention to the accompanying illustration, which shows it better than any explanation.

In front of this figure are some puzzling incisions, which may be meant to represent some living object, but are too indeterminate to warrant any suggestion. Below the figure is something which might perhaps be interpreted as a phallic symbol, but that, too, is doubtful. The rest of the scratches seem altogether meaningless, but it should be noted that one end of the stone has been broken off, and though diligent search was made for it no trace could be found.

Only one other point demands notice. Is the stone to be ascribed to the chapel which stood somewhere close by or to the earlier broch? One cannot be positive, but (1) as it is unlike anything found, so far, in connection with a chapel, and (2) as the figure cannot be identified with any known ecclesiastical figure on sculptured stones or elsewhere, and (3) as no signs of the chapel foundations were revealed by the excavation, I am disposed to ascribe it to the earlier edifice.

SYMBOL STONE FROM GREENS, ST ANDREWS, ORKNEY.

On the 7th of December 1923 I was informed that a stone with curious markings on it had been unearthed at Greens, St Andrews, Orkney. The following day I went out to see the discovery, and recognised it at once as an admirable example of a Celtic sculptured stone.

It was discovered by Mr D. Laughton—farmer and proprietor of Greens—at a distance of only 3 or 4 yards from the north-east corner of his farm buildings. He had been digging a drain to draw off the surface-water that the phenomenally wet season had caused to accumulate round the house, when at the depth of only a foot he came upon this stone lying flat on its face. He most generously agreed to my suggestion of presenting the stone to the National Museum, and this Society is deeply indebted to him for the donation of so fine and interesting a memorial.

The stone (fig. 2) is an undressed slab of yellowish freestone—roughly a parallelogram in outline—measuring 6 feet 1 inch in length, 1 foot 10 inches in width at the broadest part, and from 6 to 7 inches in thickness.

The sculpturings occupy only a little more than half of one face. The incised figures are three in number, and have been graven carefully with a sharp tool. They are wonderfully well preserved, and the fact that they show so little weathering suggests that the stone had not stood erect and exposed to the inclemencies of the Orkney weather for any length of time.

The uppermost symbol is known as the mirror-case symbol, and, though rarely met with elsewhere, this is the third specimen found in Orkney. The lowermost symbol is the much more frequent mirror symbol, but, though there is ample room alongside, there is no sign of the comb that often accompanies it. The middle symbol is the most frequently occurring of all, and is known as the crescent and V-shaped rod symbol. The interior of the crescent is occupied by simple symmetrical ornamentation, and it will be noted that the projecting ends of the V-rod are dissimilar.

This special combination of symbols has not been found elsewhere.

The present stone is the fourth object reported from Orkney as exhibiting these Scottish symbols, and it is gratifying to know that all four have found a safe resting-place in the National Museum. The first was a triangular slab found in Firth and presented by Mr George Petrie. It is figured in *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, part iii. p. 20, fig. 16, and shows the rectangular symbol at the top and the crescent and V-shaped rod below. The second, *Early Christian Monuments*, part iii. p. 21, fig. 17, formed the sill of a window in St Peter's Church, South Ronaldsay, and was presented through Mr W. H. Fotheringham in 1853. On one side it has the rectangular symbol at the top and the crescent and V-shaped rod below, while on the other it has the crescent and V-shaped rod above and the mirror-case below. The third object was the phalangeal bone of a small ox found in the Broch of Burrian, North Ronaldsay, and presented by Dr W. Traill in 1872. On one side of this appears the crescent and V-shaped rod, and, on the other side, the mirror-case symbol. Outside of Orkney, the



Fig. 2. Symbol Stone from Greens.

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only example of this last symbol is that on a stone found at Kintradwell in Sutherland.

I am glad to say that Mr Callander informs me that the Greens stone now described is the best example of its special class to be found in the Museum.

I am indebted to Mr Thomas Kent, photographer, Kirkwall, for the photographs of the stones, from which the illustrations have been made.