

III.

A MISCELLANY OF ANTIQUITIES IN EASTER ROSS AND
SUTHERLAND. BY J. M. DAVIDSON, O.B.E., F.S.A.,
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Read April 14, 1947.

Tumulus at Cadbollmount.

On the eastern seaboard of Easter Ross, in the parish of Fearn, and on the estate of Geanies, stands a tumulus known as Cadbollmount. It is situated on the crest of an elevation just above the 250-foot contour line, some 700 yards from the north-western coast-line of the Moray Firth. To the north-east it is protected by an adjoining skirting of woodland, running at right angles to the coast. It commands an expansive prospect of the

Kyle of Sutherland with its mountain background, as well as the seaboard areas of the Cromarty Firth and Morayshire (Pl. X, 1).

The tumulus is a truncated cone about 95 feet in diameter at the base, with a flattish top 10 feet in diameter. Its height is 20 feet. From breaks in the surface caused by rabbit burrowings it appears to be built of earth and clay mixed with stones.

Cemetery at Balintore.

During 1937 when a mound of sand at Balintore, Easter Ross, was being levelled for the foundations of a new housing scheme, a cemetery was discovered, a number of human bones being unearthed.

The housing scheme is an extension to the south-west of the street forming the main road from Hilton to Balintore, and is within a stone's-throw of the sea. The ground on which it is situated has had a sinister reputation for ghosts, the local name for the locality being Ghost's Hillock long before the recent burials were found. This fact stimulated the concealment of the discoveries due to fears that the linking of the association of ghosts and burials would affect detrimentally the letting of the houses. Publicity was accordingly discouraged: the foundation work was carried on without the interruption of investigators, and no attempt was apparently made to place on record the nature or the circumstances of the finds.

Two skulls and a complete human skeleton were the first relics to be found in the sand. The skeleton was surrounded by stone slabs, and some flints or sharp stones were found in association with it. The skulls were found at the same place, but there was no sign of a stone tomb near them.

More recently burials have been found in some of the back gardens nearby. These were in short cists.

Dr J. J. Galbraith, at that time Medical Officer of Health for Ross and Cromarty, who examined some of the human remains, was of the opinion that the cemetery was a very large one. He did not see any of the later cists, but he thought they were similar to those previously found. "The curious thing," he says, "about the Balintore place is the superstition clinging to the site long before the finds were made, and which must go back a long time as no one living had any idea that it was a burial-place."

Mr Gordon Crawford, Schoolmaster at Fearn, has informed me that a generation ago people used to be frightened of the place and of a little hollow nearby, both of which places they tried to avoid. If, however, on going to bathe they chanced to go near, they threw into the hollow a small stone to ward off any evil.

From the slight evidence here brought together the discoveries might be related to the Bronze Age.

Instances of the tenacity with which superstitions cling to a site and

which have subsequently been proved to have been founded on fact are recorded from two English counties. The Lexden barrow, west of Colchester, Essex, harboured a belief that it was the burial-place of a king in golden armour with weapons and a gold table. Excavation in 1924 revealed a bronze table and ornaments of bronze and gold, with a skeleton clad in chain-mail and wrapped in tunic of a cloth of gold.¹

From Mold, in Flintshire, comes a similar tale of a woman who was passing a barrow and saw on it a man on horseback, the horse being clad in golden armour. A short time afterwards the barrow was opened and found to contain a gold peytrel or horse's breastplate which is now in the British Museum.²

Chapels.

On the Tarbat Ness peninsula are a number of sites of chapels, testifying to the existence of Early Christian settlements, some of them associated with the name of Saint Colman or Colmag.

(a) At Portmahomack, *Port-ma-Cholmaig*—Port of Saint Colmag—the site of a chapel is marked on the high ground at Chapel Street by a rough flooring of flat stones in a roughly oblong setting, approximately east and west. A hundred yards away is St Colman's Well, which is said to have been in continuous use for hundreds of years and from which water is still being drawn daily.

(b) At Balnabraich, *Bal-na-Bruach*—the village on the bank—a continuation of the village of Portmahomack, lies another chapel site some 50 yards inland on the shore-level from the village street. No remains are now discernible.

(c) At Ballone, on the opposite side of the peninsula, in the shadow of Ballone Castle, but on the shore-level, $\frac{1}{3}$ mile north-east of the village of Rockfield, are the rather indefinite remains of a chapel.

(d) At Cadbollmount, St Mary's Chapel is situated within a clump of trees about 50 yards west of Cadbollmount farm-steading. The site has been utilised as a dump for farm debris and no trace of the chapel site can now be seen.

(e) At Cadboll, on the shore-level, in rush-covered, swampy ground, is a well-defined rectangular earthwork about 84 feet by 60 feet. Within this enclosure traces of a chapel structure are clearly visible in the form of a small rectangular walled building measuring about 37 feet by 22 feet. The direction is due east-west, some 30° athwart its surrounding earthwork.

From this site the Cadboll Sculptured Stone was removed by the proprietor to the British Museum and thence to the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh.

¹ L. V. Grinsell, *The Ancient Burial Mounds of England*, p. 50.

² A. H. Verrill, *Secret Treasure*, 1931, p. 27.

Castles.

Numerous castle sites are recorded of which little trace can now be discerned.

(a) Geanies. This was quite unknown locally. The position is marked on the O.S. map as in a large field about 500 yards east of Mains of Geanies Farm. The site was under wheat, and no trace whatever was distinguishable.

(b) Castle Corbet was also quite unknown to the farmer on whose land it was situated.

(c) On an elevation on the edge of the 50-foot raised beach and at the mouth of a dry gully—Allt' o' Cháoling—are the remains of a structure, roughly circular, about 30 feet in diameter. The walling is of stone, standing some 18 to 30 inches high. A break in the walling, suggestive of a doorway, faces N.N.E.

(d) About 20 feet north-east, on a projecting spur of the beach, are the remains of a smaller circle some 28 feet in diameter and lying about 4 feet lower than the other. The walls in this case appear to be of earth and sand, with a doorway facing in the same direction.

The situation of the two circles is fine, overlooking the Kyle of Sutherland and Loch Fleet.

Sculptured Grave Slab.

There is a tradition in the Tarbat Ness district that some hundreds of years ago some bodies were washed up on the eastern shore of the peninsula from a shipwreck. Owing to the impossibility of determining the religious beliefs of the unfortunate drowned men, it is said that none of the local clergy would undertake their Christian burial and they were interred in a common grave on the shore-land near Ballone.

A large, weather-beaten stone slab was located on the seashore about 500 yards north-east of Rockfield. After clearing it of its encrusted fungi, the rude figures of an anchor, a windlass, and a bone, together with some groups of initials and the date 22nd March 1682, were revealed inscribed upon it (fig. 1).

The slab, which was 5 inches thick, was lying horizontally with the sculptured side up. It was of red sandstone. It measured 5 feet 2 inches long, and the width was slightly tapered from 2 feet 6 inches at the one end to 2 feet 2 inches at the other.

The stone was neatly dressed and trimmed, and the sculptor had carefully cut out a panel $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide all round the stone inset $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the edge. He began his lettering at the top left corner and continued across the top and down the right panels of the stone, where his inscription terminated with the date, leaving the bottom and left panels blank. The lettering was neatly and uniformly done in Roman capitals, but apparently he had

misspelled the word March by omitting the letter "R," but he corrected the error by wedging into the cramped space a badly formed Arabic "r."

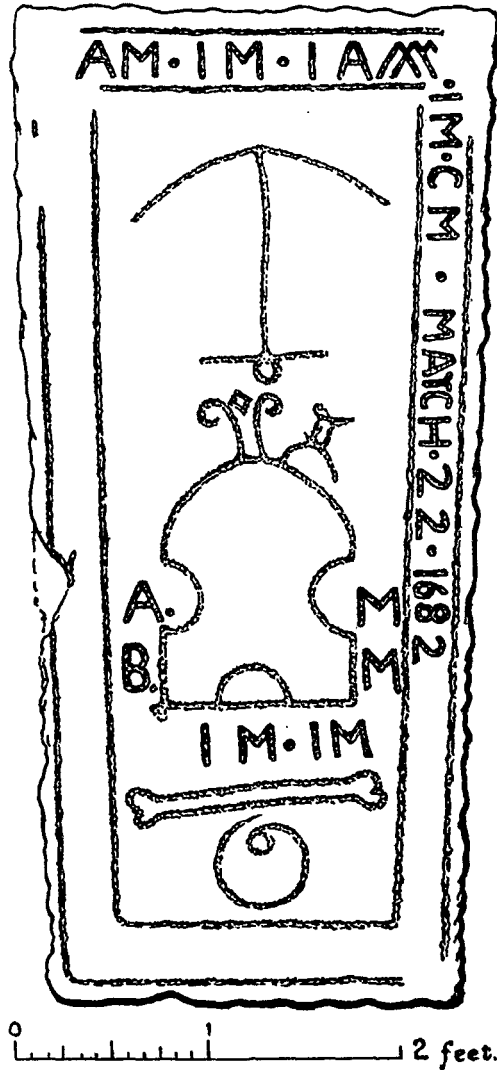


Fig. 1. Grave slab at Ballone, Easter Ross.

The main central panel was poorly executed. The arms of the anchor are flattish and unreal; the scroll above the windlass appears meaningless and the lettering is ill-balanced and crude.

The proximity to the sea and enveloping sands have dealt unkindly with

the grave itself. The wind has blown the sand from below the tombstone, leaving the latter to rock when balanced on the underlying stones, while there have come to the surface of the rock-filled grave some of the bleached bones of those interred.

The maritime emblems and the absence of Christian symbols make it appear not improbable that this is the sailors' grave referred to. Some kindly disposed person evidently had seen to it that their last resting-place was not left unmarked. How, in the absence of information regarding the religious tenets of the drowned men, their initials were ascertained must remain a matter of conjecture, although the prevalence of the surname initial "M" might indicate that the boat's crew were largely members of the same family. Perhaps a ship's log may have survived to provide some evidence of the names of the crew.

Saddle-Quern.

Built into the lower part of the north-west stone gate-post of the Portmahomack parish churchyard, abutting the Tarbet Ness road, is a saddle-quern with its concave face protruding.

Chambered Cairn, Kinrive.

To the Inventory of Cairns and Chambers, Easter Ross,¹ there might be added a further note regarding the Chambered Cairn, No. 8, Kinrive. This is known locally as "The King's Head Cairn," which has given its name to the hill on which the three cairns noted are situated, Kinrive (Gael. *Canna-na-Righ*)—the head of the King.

The cairn is completely demolished, the outer perimeter alone being now discernible by a ring of stones overgrown by grass and bracken. All portable stones have been removed, the site of the cairn being left somewhat saucer-shaped.

The central chambers have in some measure resisted the wreckers, some few uprights being still standing while others are prostrate. Two uprights are particularly massive, one to the west standing 7 feet high, 4 feet 6 inches wide, and 2 feet thick, the other to the south being 6 feet 6 inches high, 6 feet wide, and 18 inches thick. A large displaced capstone measuring 7 feet by 4 feet by 2 feet is still supported by fallen stones. The tangle of wreckage is so confused that it is difficult to determine the general framework. A small outlying cist 4 feet 4 inches by 3 feet 6 inches is probably the most recognisable feature. The chambered remains are crowned by a large and gnarled birch tree, the roots of which envelop the superstructure.

The demolition appears to be less recently done than the thirty years

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxviii. (1943-4), p. 31.

stated. The period of sixty years was mentioned locally, and from the tree growth surmounting the remains this might even be an underestimate. A human skull was said to have been found during the destruction of the cairn. This skull is now said locally to have been "the head of the King."

Stone Hatchet from Balvraid, Skelbo, Sutherland.

Some years ago a stone hatchet was found in the burn flowing through the Balvraid Wood, about one mile from its mouth near Skelbo Castle.

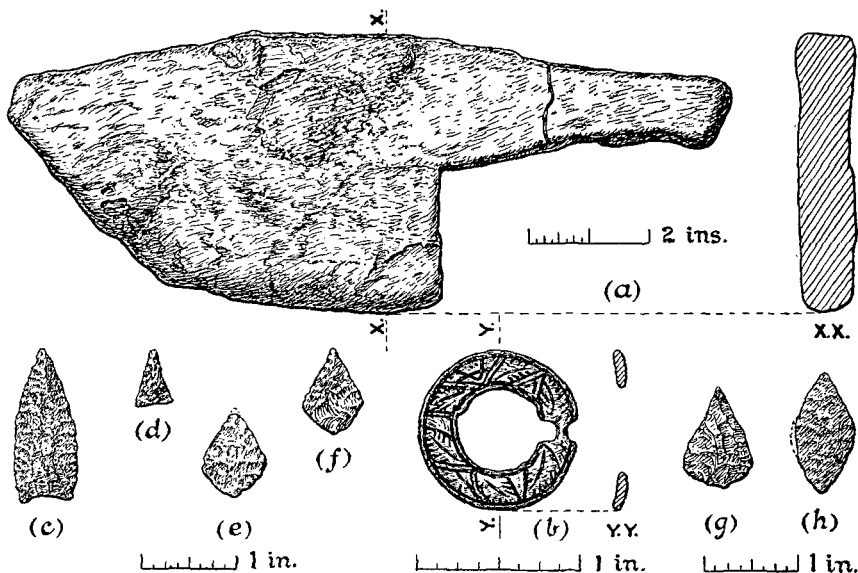


Fig. 2. (a) Stone hatchet from Balvraid; (b) Bronze brooch from Cuthill Links, Dornoch; (c) to (f) Arrow-heads from Golspie Links; (g) and (h) Arrow-heads from Cuthill Links.

The tool (fig. 2a) is neatly cut out of a flat block of hard grey millstone grit, and is 12 inches long, including the handle. The blade is $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, the thickness being uniformly about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. The weight is $2\frac{1}{2}$ lb. The butt edge is square and the utility edge rounded and abraded.

A polished stone axe was found at the same time and in the same place, but it was thrown back into the burn and has not since been recovered.

Prehistoric Sites near Dornoch, Sutherland.

On the Cuthill Links, some three miles west of Dornoch, through which the road to Ferrytown passes, are some sites of prehistoric interest. There

are evidences of some stone industries involving the use of flint as well as a number of native rocks: a shell midden of considerable size has furnished not only a great variety of shells and some bone refuse but also a large number of stone-flaked artifacts.

The links consist of sand-dunes piled up on the 25-foot beach, these being interspersed with wind-blown areas of gravel. On these latter patches many finds have been made. No stratigraphical evidence has been obtained, as all of them have been picked up from the surface. Among the more noteworthy of the objects found are:

(1) A small circular brooch of bronze (fig. 2*b*) measuring 1 inch outside and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch inside diameter. The circularity is broken both outside and inside by a recess for a looped pin. The metal is very thin, but the strength of the brooch has been greatly increased by a slight convexity on its decorated side. The reverse—concave—side is quite plain.

The decoration is a simple leaf motif repeated all over the surface. It is vigorously executed—the central stem of the leaf and the slanting veins being represented by bold cuts as though they had been impressed by a sharp, chisel-edged tool. A minute examination, however, reveals that the markings are not tooled or stamped but that the brooch was moulded and cast in its ornamented form. This is borne out by the fact that the plain, reverse side bears no evidence of chisel application, as would have been the case had each mark been impressed by a blow. The hinge for the pin is slightly rounded through wear. The pin itself was not found.

In the Dunrobin Museum, Golspie, are two bronze brooches of similar type, both found in Sutherland. One of about the same size, with indistinct markings, was found in 1879, while the other, found four years earlier in Lairg, is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, and has as its decoration a leaf pattern similar to the one described above.

(2) Arrow-head (fig. 2*g*) of amber-coloured flint delicately tipped at the point with "Buchan red."

(3) Lozenge-shaped arrow-head (fig. 2*h*) of mottled brown flint. One point was broken.

Arrow-heads from Golspie Links.

Golspie Links, from about two miles south of Golspie village to Littleferry, have long been recognised as an area prolific in prehistoric finds. Great numbers of arrow-heads and implements of flint have been found there over many years. A search for a prehistoric workshop floor was not successful, but the undernoted were brought to light:

(1) Arrow-head (fig. 2*c*) of clear quartz $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch long by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide. It is slightly convex on one side and somewhat unevenly flat on the reverse.



1. Tumulus at Cadbollmount, Easter Ross.

J. M. DAVIDSON.

ANTIQUITIES IN EASTER ROSS AND SUTHERLAND.



2. The Abbot's Cross, Lintrathen, Angus.

W. FENTON.

THE ABBOT'S CROSS.

[To face p. 32.]

- (2) Broken point of arrow-head (fig. 2*d*) of grey flint.
- (3) Arrow-head of white quartzite (fig. 2*e*).
- (4) Arrow-head of grey quartz (fig. 2*f*).

Cairn, Allt a' Mhuilinn, Brora.

In the Royal Commission's Second Report¹ this cairn is noted as having been excavated, two large displaced stones which may have been part of a chamber being exposed.

The cairn had been almost completely destroyed in recent years to provide stone for the construction of a water-supply dam before the factor to the Ascoile Estate prohibited the removal of further materials. The remains of two chambers only survive: one to the north, being 5 feet long, has two large flat stones upstanding, while the other chamber to the south has one upright standing and one prostrate.

In the immediate neighbourhood are numbers of the heather-clad tumuli which are so common a feature of the Sutherland moorlands.

Stone Circle, Ascoile.

About 200 yards from the east side of the road on the left bank of the Allt a' Mhuilinnburn, some 500 yards north-east of Ascoile, is a stone circle about 30 feet in diameter.

The situation overlooking the Strath of Brora from the north is striking, the elevation being on the 400-foot contour line. The stones are set on end and practically all are visible, none projecting above the ground more than about 2 feet.

Cairn, Greeanan.

On the north side of the Strathbrora highway and immediately adjacent thereto, about 500 yards east of the Ascoile Bridge, is a cairn about 35 feet in diameter. On the western perimeter is a ditch 5 feet wide and 3 feet deep. The cairn has been tampered with, there being evidences of two excavations, presumably to locate cists, but these latter are not visible.

Earthwork, Greeanan.

On the south side of the roadway one mile west of Allt Smeòrail burn are the remains of a circular earthwork. Rather less than half of this has been destroyed by the intersection of the road. The earthwork consists of a mound 27 feet diameter, surrounded by a ditch 6 feet wide. The upcast of the ditch has been heaped on the outer perimeter. In the centre are some large stones suggestive of the interior of a cairn, and large stones remain on the outer rampart and in the ditch.

¹ *Inventory of Monuments in Sutherland*, No. 43.