

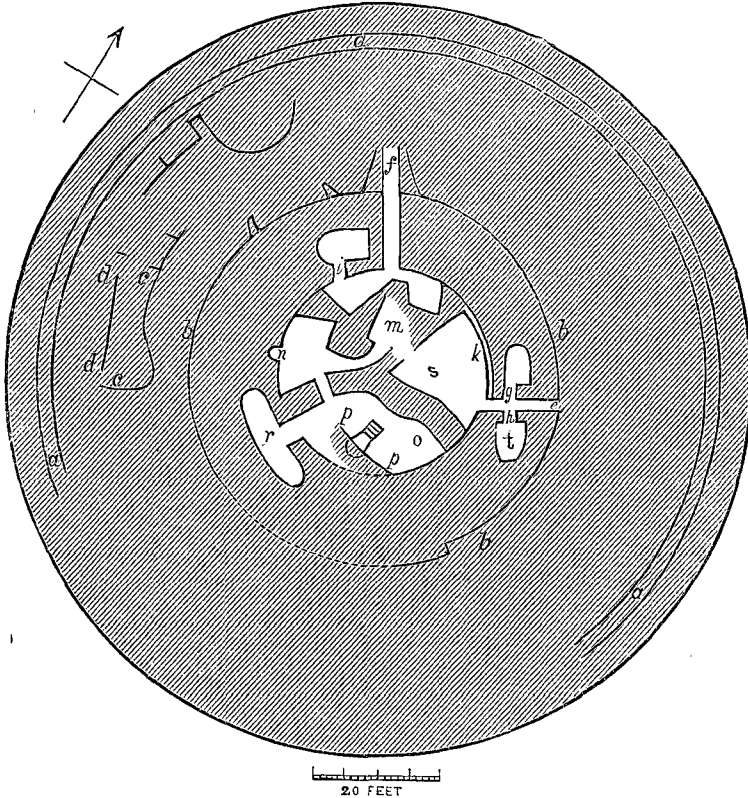
I.

AN ACCOUNT OF AN EXTENSIVE COLLECTION OF ARCHÆOLOGICAL RELICS, AND OSTEOLOGICAL REMAINS, FROM A "PICT'S HOUSE" AT KETTLEBURN, CAITHNESS, PRESENTED TO THE SOCIETY BY A. HENRY RHIND, Esq. F.S.A. Scot.

The interesting collection which I have now the pleasure of presenting to the Society's Museum, I procured in course of a thorough, archæological investigation of the ruins of a so-called "Pict's House," at Kettleburn, near Wick. The results of my excavation of that curious dwelling I have already stated at considerable length in a Memoir, contained in the 10th volume of the Archæological Journal; and it will scarcely be necessary for me to do more than refer to that paper for a detailed account of most of the objects I now transfer to the Society, and for certain general observations, which include explanatory remarks relating to the accompanying ground-plan. A glance at this plan (Fig. 1.) will excite regret that the ruins were not in a more perfect condition; but it will also serve to show, that enough remained to indicate the most characteristic features of the structure and its general outline. Its size, which exceeded that of most dwellings of the same type in the north of Scotland, was so considerable, that the work of excavation occupied several men for a period little short of three months.

Of the many objects discovered in course of the exploration, perhaps the most curious are the three here figured; and of those three the bronze pincers

Fig. 1.



(Figs. 2. and 3.) is certainly the most remarkable. The finished workmanship which it exhibits is especially worthy of attention, as is also its extraordinary size, which so widely distinguishes it from the small tweezers hitherto found with sepulchral deposits, that it is believed to be at present unique. The bone comb (Fig. 4.) will not possess much novelty for the members of the Society, as the Museum already contains two of the same type—one from Caithness, and one from Orkney. But it is otherwise with respect to the stone mortar, (Fig. 5.), which is a decidedly peculiar representative of the quern.

Since the paper to which I have already alluded was published, a portion of the rubbish at Kettleburn, produced by my excavations, has been removed in course of agricultural improvement; and anticipating that this process might disclose some additional relics which might previously have escaped observa-

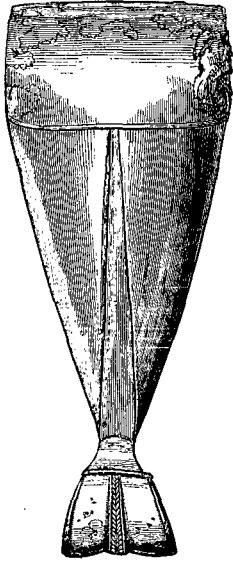


Fig. 2.

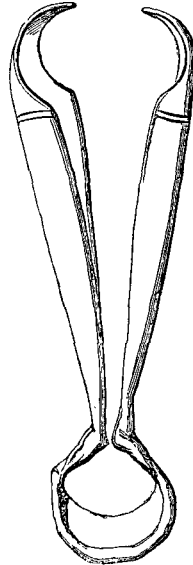


Fig. 3.

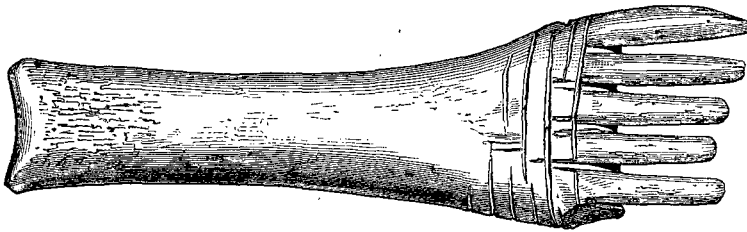


Fig. 4.

tion, I took measures to have the progress of the work watched, with the view of preserving anything deserving of notice that might occur. There were thus detected a portion of some bronze implement, of what appearance the smallness of the fragment renders it impossible to determine; a perforated pebble, being

the eighth bead or button-stone these ruins have yielded; and a flat piece of sandstone, which, as it was plainly intended for the upper part of a quern, is, though unfinished, an excellent example of the manner in which such masses were pierced for the reception of the axis, namely, by boring from either side until the holes met. Some broken querns were also recovered, and several stones in which small circular cavities had been hollowed out. As these stones are of no particular shape, and in other respects are just such rude blocks as may anywhere be met with, I suspect the cavities have been produced, not with any very definite object in view, but simply by the polishing of other bodies. I may add, that similarly marked stones are not of unusual occurrence in "Picts' Houses," and that I am possessed of one from a primæval dwelling of this class at Lynegar, in the parish of Watten, Caithness.

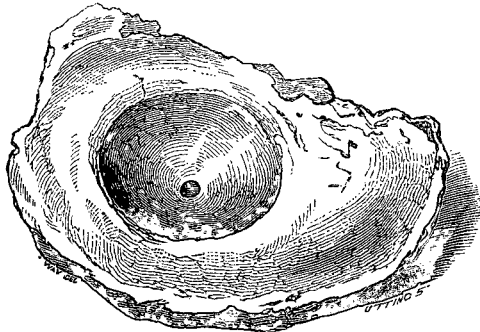


Fig. 5.

But besides all these relics, the recent removal of still more of the debris has brought to light a dagger-shaped bone, tapered to a point at one end, and adapted at the other to be fixed securely to a handle; a bone comb, as rudely formed as that originally discovered, but of which, unfortunately, all the teeth, save one, have decayed; and about one-half of a small stone cup,¹ which might perhaps be conveniently termed a *patella*, were it not that misapprehension might arise from using the name of a Roman sacrificial vessel. Among the "Druidical Pateræ" in the Society's Museum, there is one from Crookmore, Aberdeenshire, which, in size and shape, corresponds almost precisely with what the present specimen must have been when entire. Dr Wilson has already pointed out, in a paper communicated to the Society, that vessels exactly like

¹ These three objects were picked up by Mr C. W. Peach, and his son, Mr B. Peach, who obligingly at once handed them to me, along with several of the stone disks subsequently mentioned.

those known to Scottish Antiquaries by the rather pretentious name I have transcribed, are at this day in common use for familiar purposes in the Faroe Islands, as well as on the shores of Whale Sound, in the Arctic regions;¹ and the natural inference arises that many of the so-called pateræ were similarly employed in ancient times. This inference is confirmed into a fact in the case of the example from Kettleburn, which seems to have met the fate of ordinary household utensils, and then to have been cast aside among a heap of refuse.² I am not indisposed to think that the stone which I have described as No. 15, in the *Archæological Journal*, may have been another cup in process of formation.

The carting away of the rubbish has likewise disclosed many additional disks; but, of these, it will be observed, that none are so thoroughly circular as the examples mentioned in my paper before referred to, while two of them are of great size, and many have an unfinished appearance, exhibiting in some instances angular edges, and in others protruding points. They are of very various dimensions, being from 2 to 9 inches in diameter: and in one example the circular form has been entirely departed from in favour of an irregular oval figure. Whether all those chipped stones were intended to subserve definite economic purposes, it is impossible to conjecture; but when we remember how often in the present day we see children, with great apparent delight, sit patiently and diligently striving to fashion slaty stones, by means of others of harder grain, into circular shapes, we may be almost tempted to imagine that here we have, at least in some cases, the playthings of the young barbarians of Kettleburn. Or were those imperfect disks the unfinished work of "children of a larger growth," it is true, but still children in artistic knowledge? Whoever were the workers, we seem to recognise the improvised tool in a moderately weighty water-worn pebble, which is bruised and splintered at the ends as if it had been used in the manner indicated.

Scarcely less important than the articles which belong more particularly to the province of the *Archæologist*, are the osteological remains; and the value of these has been enhanced by their having been already classified by so excellent an authority as Mr Quekett, who very kindly arranged them when they were submitted to his inspection. Such remains have, unfortunately, been as yet preserved in only few instances, and in small quantity, which is the more to be regretted, as without them no accurate picture of primæval times can possibly be portrayed. But they will doubtless receive a much greater share of attention, now that the

¹ *Proceedings of the Society*, vol. i. p. 118.

² One of the finest pateræ in the Society's collection was obtained from a "Pict's House," also in Caithness.

science of comparative anatomy has attained such a degree of perfection as to render the dicta of its most successful cultivators unerringly precise. For interesting glimpses of the early *Fauna* of Caithness, I must refer to a note in the *Archæological Journal*,¹ which contains the results of Mr Quekett's examination of the bones exhumed at Kettleburn; but it will not be out of place to add, as a supplement to that note, that since it was written, Mr Quekett has demonstrated to his own satisfaction, as Mr Way informs me, that the comb (first discovered) and the spheroidal balls were formed from the lower jaw-bone of the whale, several small portions of whose osseous structure were likewise found in an unmanufactured state.