

### III.

NOTICE OF COFFINS (FORMED OF STONE SLABS) FOUND ON THE FARM OF MILTON, HADDINGTONSHIRE. BY MR W. T. M'CULLOCH, KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

The BURIAL KNOWE, where the stone cists were found, is situated on the farm of Milton, in the parish of Salton, Haddingtonshire, and lies about a mile south from Salton Hall, the residence of the family of Fletcher, the proprietors; and it was from this farm that Andrew Fletcher, who was Lord Justice-Clerk from 1735 to 1748, took his title of Lord Milton, when raised to the bench in 1724.

The Knowe, which is of sandy soil, rises by a gentle slope from the bed of a small stream, formed by the union of the Kinchie Burn and Humber Water. In the course of removing sand for building purposes, several stone cists or coffins were found; and this circumstance being brought under the notice of the Society, I was requested to make a personal inspection of the cists, and the place where they were discovered. Accordingly I proceeded to Milton, in company with the Rev. John Struthers, minister of Prestonpans, and James Mellis, Esq., both members of the Society. On arriving at the sand-pit, we had no difficulty in finding what we were in search of; for in the course of the removal of the sand, a slab had dropt down, leaving the end of a cist exposed.

We commenced operations by clearing away the sand which covered the top of the grave, to a depth of nearly three feet. Upon raising the flags which formed the lid, a firm bed of sand presented itself, which had no doubt percolated through between the edges of the undressed slabs of stone. This sand having been cleared away, a human skeleton was seen lying on its back, and extended at full length. The bones were very soft and brittle. The skull, portions of which are now on the table, had fallen on the breast. The cist was formed of undressed flags, nearly  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick, of mountain limestone, which occurs in the immediate neighbourhood. The length outside was 6 feet; the breadth at the head 18 inches, and at the foot 12 inches; the depth, which was uniform, being 12 inches; three slabs formed the bottom, three each side, and one each end; the direction in which the cist lay being due east and west, or very nearly so, with the head at the west end.

We next proceeded to open another cist, which was seen cropping out a few feet below the level of the former one, on the slope of the hill. When the sand was cleared away, and the covering stones lifted off, it was found to be filled with sand, which was carefully removed, but nothing was found to indicate that a body had ever been deposited there, although, as to structure, it was in every respect the same as the other.

To test if there were any other coffins, a spot was selected, about two feet farther up the hill, and straight above the cist first examined. After digging down between two and three feet we struck upon one; and after the sand which filled it was cleared away, a skeleton was found, disposed in the same manner as that in the first coffin opened. In attempting to remove the skull, it fell to pieces. These are now before you. This coffin measured 6 feet 7 inches in length, 18 inches in breadth at the head, and only 8 inches at the foot; the sides were 15 inches deep at the head and 7 inches at the foot, all inside measure. The position of the body was the same as in the first cist.

How the Burial Knowe came to be so designated no one in the locality can tell, not even the oldest inhabitant. There is a floating tradition that a battle was fought there with the Danes. The graves, however, do not appear to be those of men slain in battle. The manner in which the bodies have been disposed, the careful formation of the cists, as well as the fact that some time ago a small coffin was found amongst them,

containing the body of a child, preclude that idea. Indeed, there can be little doubt that this place is, as its name implies, a burial knowe or hill, or old cemetery. What people used it as such is a question replete with interest.

Similar interments are found to have been made not only in the district near Milton, such as at North Berwick, Gosford, and Cockenzie, but also in other parts of the country. In a grave at Cockenzie there was found in 1849 an iron key, preserved in the Museum of the Society, and now exhibited. At Cramond there were discovered in 1822 twenty-four stone coffins, arranged in regular rows, and curious enough, in one of them was found an iron key very like the one found at Cockenzie. An account of the discovery, and a drawing of the key, is given in the "Archæologia Scotica," vol. iii. p. 40. At Old Haaks, Fifeness, a group of thirty coffins, ranged in two parallel rows, was discovered in 1829. No ornaments were found in any of these coffins. Notices of others found at Ardyne, Argyleshire, at Largo, and also in Sutherlandshire, are detailed in the Society's Proceedings.

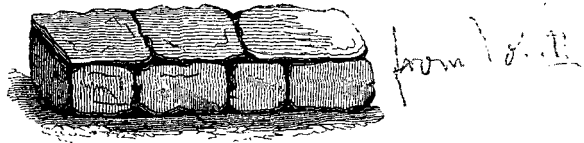
Cemeteries similar to that at Milton have been found in various places in England, and are described in the "Crania Britannica" of Drs Davis and Thurnam. They are assigned by English antiquaries to the Anglo-Saxon period, and range, as to date, from the sixth to the tenth centuries. The graves in which ornaments or weapons are found are ascribed to the earlier, and those in which no relics are found to the later part of that period. All those groups of bodies disposed east and west are held to have been buried after the introduction of Christianity.

The graves at Milton correspond in structure to those found in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in England. They were disposed east and west; and in neither of the cists opened by us, nor in any of those opened by the work-people digging out the sand for building purposes, were any relics found. It is therefore not improbable that the graves in the Burial Knowe at Milton are not of higher antiquity than the latest of those of the Anglo-Saxon period found in England.

The best thanks of the Society are due to the Rev. Mr Struthers and Mr Mellis for their assistance at the exploration; to Mr Milne, the tenant of Milton, for permission to make the excavations; and to Mrs Rait of Lampochwells, who communicated to the Society the discovery

of the graves, and also kindly furnished assistance in making the various diggings required.

A vote of thanks was given to the OFFICE-BEARERS, and the Society adjourned to the commencement of next winter session.



Cist found at Ardyne (Proceedings, vol. ii. p. 251), similar to those found at Milton, East Lothian.