

IX.

NOTE ON THE DISCOVERY OF AN INCISED SYMBOL-BEARING SLAB
AT EASTERTON OF ROSEISLE, ELGINSHIRE. BY THE REV. JAMES
MORRISON, COR. MEM. S. A. SCOT.

In the spring of 1894, Mr Dawson, the farmer of Easterton, in the parish of Duffus, in preparing one of his fields for turnips, turned up a number of human bones and skulls. Most of the bones when touched crumbled into dust. Some of the skulls, however, were got more or less entire. On examination, it was found that a great many bodies had been laid side by side in shallow trenches.

Some months ago the plough struck an earth-fast stone some 50 yards westward from the place where the skeletons were found. On trying to remove it, a cist-like construction (fig. 1) was found, the west side being formed by one large slab, which was subsequently discovered to have incised on it some of the characteristic figures of the Sculptured Stones of Scotland.

On Tuesday, 7th May 1895, along with Mr Cassie of Hopeman Free Church, I went to Easterton, had a long interview with Mr Dawson, and got full information as to the form and structure of the cist—information confirmed by Mr Cassie, who had seen it very soon after its discovery, and before the figured slab was removed. A rough sketch-plan was taken by us (fig. 2), which is forwarded with the notes we took. The bone-remains, which Mr Dawson states were found at two points near the south-east and north-east corners of the cist, look more like bone-dust mixed with sand. Mr Dawson is to send a specimen for examination. The charcoal found near the middle of the cist is also mixed with sand, and some of it will also be sent. Near the north-west and south-east corners of the cist there were a number of white, rolled, beach stones, and with them some darker ones, from 4 to 6 inches long, round, and about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch in diameter, and one oval-shaped. Some of these are flattened on the ends like hammer-stones, but if they have been so used, it has not been on any rough substance, as the ends are smooth. The whole of the bottom of the cist was roughly paved with stones of varied shapes and

sizes. The flat stones at the sides were thickish slabs of sandstone, on which were built similar slabs, all of them unshapen, and the height was about 3 feet. There was only one upright stone about 4 feet high. The sculptured stone (figs. 3 and 4), set on edge, with the mirror, sceptre, &c., facing the interior, formed the west side. Although the cist had been first opened in December 1894 by Rev. Mr M'Ewen, F.S.A. Scot., and Mr



Fig. 1. View of Cist at Easterton of Roseisle, looking North-West.

Dawson, these symbols on the face of the stone then exposed, as forming one side of the cist, remained unnoticed till March following, when they were observed by Mr Dawson, and it was only on 25th April thereafter that it was discovered by Rev. Mr Niven of Burghead, who then visited the place along with Mr Dawson, that the other side of the stone had figures on it also, viz., a large bird (apparently a solan goose), and beneath it a fish. Both are singularly graceful. The cutting is deeper and more sharply defined than that of the mirror, sceptre, &c., on the

opposite side. But what is still more singular, if the mirror side was first wrought, the stone had been turned upside down when the other side was wrought, for the bird and the fish are placed reversely to the symbols on the other side; and when they are turned the right way up, those on the other side are upside down. The dimensions of the stone

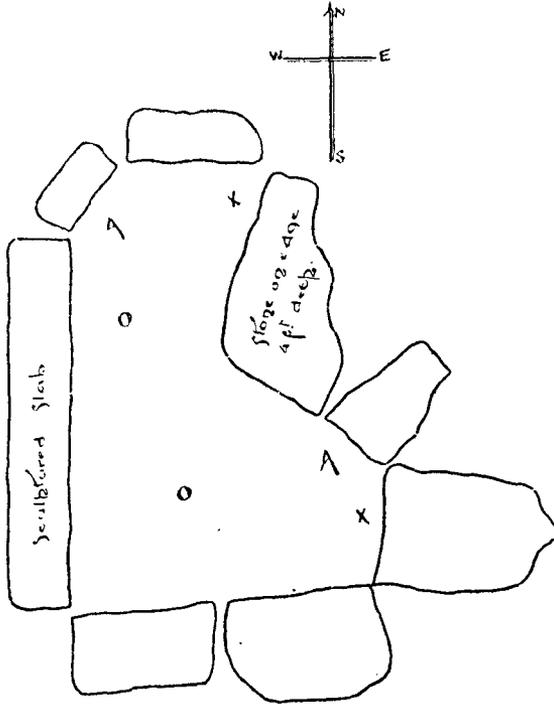
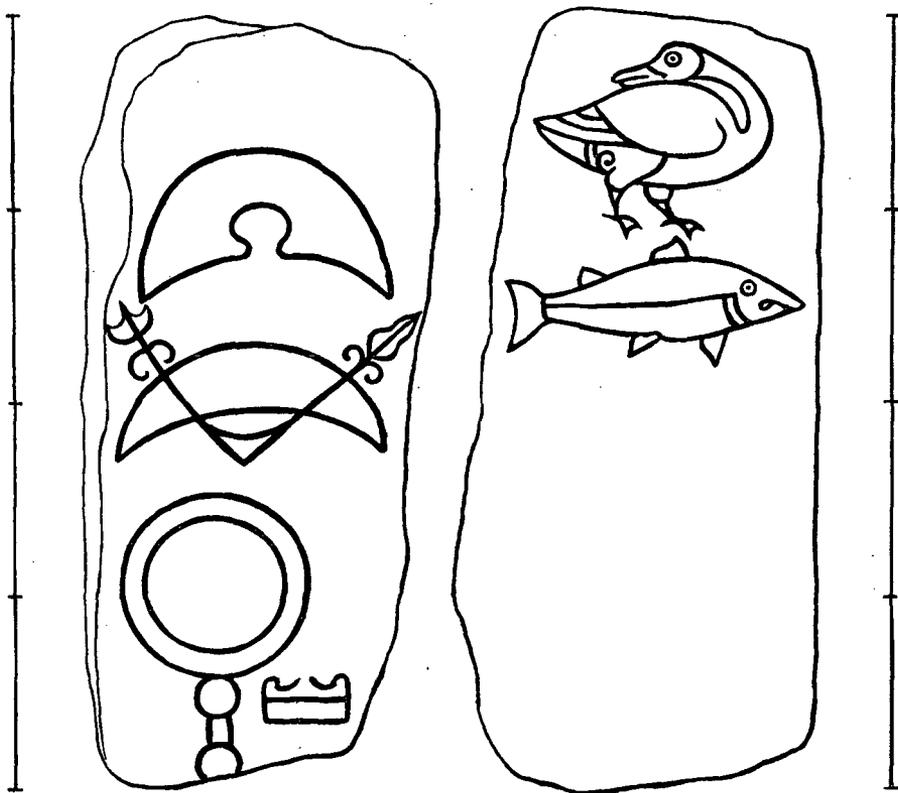


Fig. 2. Ground-plan of Cist at Easterton of Roseisle. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$ nearly. AA. Oval and round stones. XX. Bone dust. OO. Charcoal.

are 3 feet 9 inches in length, 1 foot 8 inches in breadth, and $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. It is just such a slab as might be got any day on the gently sloping sandstone rocks which overlap each other on the beach to the east of Burghead, like slates on the roof of a house, and which are under

high-water mark. On one side the sculptured stone is wasted and furrowed at the bottom, evidently by the action of the tides.

The cist has been filled up. There was no covering or lid on it. The



Figs. 3 and 4. Sculptured Slab, forming side of Cist at Easterton of Roseisle, obverse and reverse. ($\frac{1}{12}$.)

field on which it was found slopes down to a marshy swamp, a portion of the depression which extends from Lossiemouth westward through the Loch of Spynie, through Drainie, Duffus, and Alves, to near the mouth of the Findhorn.

It is a pity that this interesting monument is to be practically buried. The proprietor of the land has gifted it to Mr Young of Burghead, F.S.A. Scot., who is to place it in the harbour-office there, alongside of pieces of two of the Burghead Bulls, which are also kept in the same office.

[With reference to the latter part of Rev. Mr Morrison's paper, the Secretary stated that application had been made, on behalf of the Society, by Dr James Macdonald, Vice-President, to the proprietor of Roseisle, for a gift of this important monument to the National Museum, but without success. The Society is indebted to Rev. Mr Cassie and Mr Wittet, Architect, Elgin, for the ground-plan of the cist, and to Messrs Bemrose and Sons, for the loan of the blocks of the views of the cist and stone, made from photographs taken specially by Mr H. W. Young of Burghead, F.S.A. Scot., which appeared in the *Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist* for July 1895, in illustration of a paper by Mr Young, announcing the discovery.]