

II.

NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY OF A SERIES OF CAIRNS AND CISTS, AND URNS OF THE BRONZE AGE, AT BATTLE LAW, NAUGHTON, FIFE-SHIRE, THE PROPERTY OF MRS C. H. A. ANSTRUTHER DUNCAN. BY ALEXANDER HUTCHESON, F.S.A. SCOT., BROUGHTY FERRY.

In the year 1873, while a field on Battle Law, an eminence situated in the parish of Balmerino, was being ploughed, a stone which obstructed the plough was lifted, disclosing a stone cist. On this being searched an urn was discovered. It was removed to Naughton House. I have seen Mr Samuel Johnston, farmer, Fincraigs, who was present at the discovery, and he tells me the cist was carefully searched. Bones which had apparently been burnt were discovered, but except these and the urn now to be noticed no other relics were observed.¹

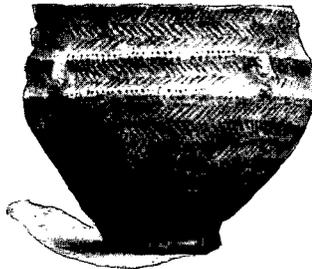


Fig. 1. Urn of Food-Vessel type (No. 1) found at Battle Law in 1873.

The urn (fig. 1) is a very fine specimen of the thick-lipped, wide-mouthed form, tapering to a narrow base only $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches diameter. It measures $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches in height and 6 inches in widest outside diameter across the lip. In form and finish it closely resembles the smaller of the two urns found at Kingsbarns Law, Crail, figured in the *Proceedings* (vol. x. p. 244), and, like it, has the earlike projections which in some specimens are perforated as if with a view to suspension; but in this urn, as in the one from Kingsbarns Law, the ears are imperforate, and

¹ After the examination of the interior of the cist, the cover was replaced.

one of the usual four ears is wanting, although the place for it is indicated by a hiatus in the ornament, as well as by a roughness of surface, as if the ear had been attached, as it doubtless was, after the urn was formed, and had either been so imperfectly attached as to drop off, or had been subsequently struck off by a blow.¹

The *Battle Law* urn is ornamented with the usual type of what is known as 'herringbone' pattern, in a succession of strips, a row of similar pattern running round inside the lip. Two ridge-like bands encircle the body of the urn, the summit of each ridge being ornamented with a double row of punctures, and from the hollow between these ridges the ears have their origin.

Whether, as seems not improbable, other discoveries have been made of a similar kind on this site, which have not been recorded, there can be no doubt of the existence of a widespread feeling in the district that further search would be successful in disclosing other burials in *Battle Law*.²

How far this local feeling may have been fostered by the tradition³ that

¹ I have observed similar deficiencies in mediæval ware, such as old Nuremberg jugs, where ornamental projecting parts had dropped off, leaving a comparatively smoothed and finished surface underneath, plainly testifying to insufficiency of attachment, and also illustrating, as in this urn, the processes of formation.

² The Rev. Dr Campbell, in his history of the parish,* refers (p. 40) to "cairns recently existing on this field, which were found to contain human bones," and "stone coffins, bones, and pieces of broken swords" discovered near it.

³ A local poet has embodied the tradition in some verses still recited in the district, one of which, since it contains the place-name, although otherwise scarce worthy of preservation, may be given.

"I stood upon the *Battle Law*,
Where mony a brave Scots man did fa',
Wha made his enemies flee awa',
Nae mair to see Ba'mirny." †

* *Balmerino and its Abbey*, by Rev. Jas. Campbell, D.D., F.S.A. Scot., Edinburgh, 1899. See also, at p. 6, notices of discovery of the first cist, and of other burial sites in the neighbourhood.

† The usual modern and supposed-polite pronunciation is Bal-mer-ee-no, but in all Scottish place-names beginning with Bal, the accent is on the second syllable, and this is the local pronunciation, "Bal-mif-no," or "Ba-mif-no."

this site has obtained its name from having been the scene of a sanguinary encounter between the Scots and the Danes, in the retreat of the latter from the legendary battle of Luncarty, it may be impossible to say.

A recent occasion gave Rev. Dr Campbell, minister of the parish, an opportunity to represent to Mrs Anstruther Duncan of Naughton, on whose property Battle Law is situated, the desirability of having the site of the discovery in 1873 thoroughly examined, to which that lady readily responded, and in the most handsome manner gave instructions to

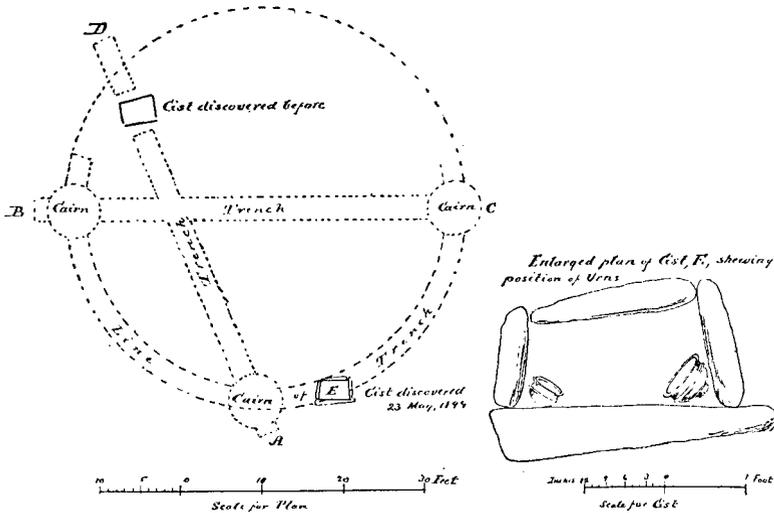


Fig. 2. Plan of the Lines of Exploration and Plan of Cist.

have the work carried out at her expense. By the obliging courtesy of Colonel and Mrs Anstruther Duncan, I was privileged to be present at the exploration, which was commenced on Monday, 22nd May 1899, and continued on the two following days. There were present Colonel and Mrs Anstruther Duncan, Rev. James Campbell, D.D., F.S.A. Scot., Mr Samuel Johnston, farmer, Fincraigs, and the writer.

The plan (fig. 2) shows the lines of exploration. A commencement was made at the south side of a very slightly marked circular enclosure,

which seemed to measure about 50 feet in diameter. This circle was fairly well marked along the western side, but round the north and east was not so apparent, if indeed it could be said to exist at all, although Mr Johnston said that when there was a corn crop in the field the circular outline could be fairly well seen all round. Be this as it might, a certain amount of corroboration of the circle theory was, it was thought, obtained when at the point marked A, and again at the point marked B in the plan, a gathering of stones seemingly foreign to the sub-soil was disclosed. To ascertain whether the theory would work out on the 50 feet basis, trenches were dug at the points indicated by the letters C and D on the plan, and here again at C a large gathering of stones was found, and was discovered to be piled on what was at first thought to be a large slab of stone, but further examination showed it to be rock.

Mr Johnston then stated that the cist in which urn No. 1 was discovered had a similar surface of rock for its floor. At the point D no stones were met with. The trench here was prolonged outwards and inwards several yards to determine whether the supposed circular wall or ring of stones would be met with, but without such a result. The gatherings of stones at A, B, and C were then cleared out; the subsoil beneath them being also examined for any evidences of interment, with negative results. The stones, which did not exhibit any order of arrangement, consisted of water-rolled pebbles and boulders, in dimensions ranging from 6 inches in diameter up to 18 or 20 inches, mixed with rough pieces more or less slab-like, or such stones as would probably be found at one time on the surface of the ground where it had not been cleared for cultivation. Whilst, then, the supposed circle of 50 feet in diameter obtained corroboration from the excavations at A, B, and C, it failed at D, which led one of the workmen to venture the shrewd remark that the entrance might have come in there. Had we stopped here, there might have been room for some very unprofitable theorising, but the investigation had to be carried further. Trenches A and D having been prolonged until they joined without anything being met with, it was then resolved to start at C, follow the supposed circle of stones to

A, a similar circular trench being at the same time dug from A to B, with the view of laying bare the circle; but so far from this result being attained, it was found that, by what seemed a strange coincidence, our preliminary diggings had struck upon the only collections of stones that were to be found in the whole circle, the remainder of which to the north was tested by probing with an iron rod. The coincidence was, however, more apparent than real. The collection of stones at C was in point of fact the only one adventitiously hit upon. The supposed circular outline, which, as we have seen, was not borne out by the excavations, was in the first instance by Mr Johnston probed all round with an iron rod. In this way the collection at B was detected before any digging was commenced there. When this collection was laid bare, the 50 feet diameter theory being applied, that at C was hit upon as I have said.

The whole result shows the danger of generalising from partial premises. Had nothing more been done than to disclose the three heaps of stones, supporting as they did the circle theory that theory might have been regarded as established, but it was now evident that if any mound, however slight, and apparently circular, did exist, it must have been superficial; but that would not prevent it from having a relation to the three cairns, the bases of which were disclosed by the operations. I have called them bases of cairns, because I think it not only probable but likely that these cairns at one time rose above the level of the present surface, and had had their tops removed in the levelling of the ground for agricultural purposes; but they could not have risen very high, as their bases did not exceed a diameter of six or seven feet. A more puzzling feature is the preliminary excavation of the subsoil down to the rock before the cairns were heaped up. Usually such cairns are piled on the surface; and if by reason of the weight of the stones they penetrate to some extent the subsoil, the fact is soon disclosed on examination to be only a partial penetration. Here, apparently, there was something more. Could these supposed cairns have been merely the débris of superficial cairns got rid of to clear the ground by the simple but not unknown expedient of digging a hole alongside of each cairn and filling

it with the stones? It may be so, and it is a suggestion worthy of consideration as accounting for the absence of any relics under the heaps of stones. At the same time we have the evidence of tradition as to the existence at one time of cairns here, as mentioned in Dr Campbell's book.

On a review of the circumstances revealed by the exploration, it seems not improbable that the cairns are not to be attributed to the period of the cists, but to more recent events, from which the designation "Battle Law" was probably derived. At all events, no associated system of separate small cairns superficially formed, and of stone burial cists subterraneously deposited, has ever been recorded; nor, so far as induction may be permitted, does there seem to have been here any other connection between them than that of locality. The supposed circular earthen mound, in like manner, may have been an accompaniment of the cairns, as it connected with them and embraced them; whereas, while it passed across the site of one of the cists, it did not touch the other. On the Muir of Cochrage, some miles to the north-west of Blairgowrie, are numerous circular earthen mounds associated with small cairns of stones, which I examined some years ago, opening a number of the cairns. These, in dimensions, formation, and the entire absence of anything in the shape of bones or other relics, corresponded closely with the cairns at Battle Law. If indeed reared in early historic times over the remains of the dead, the absence of any surviving osseous remains would be amply accounted for by the exposure to natural agencies involved in such a mode of burial so near to the surface of the ground; but be this as it may, the minutest and most careful search in and under the cairns at Battle Law as at Cochrage Muir failed to reveal any evidences of burial.¹

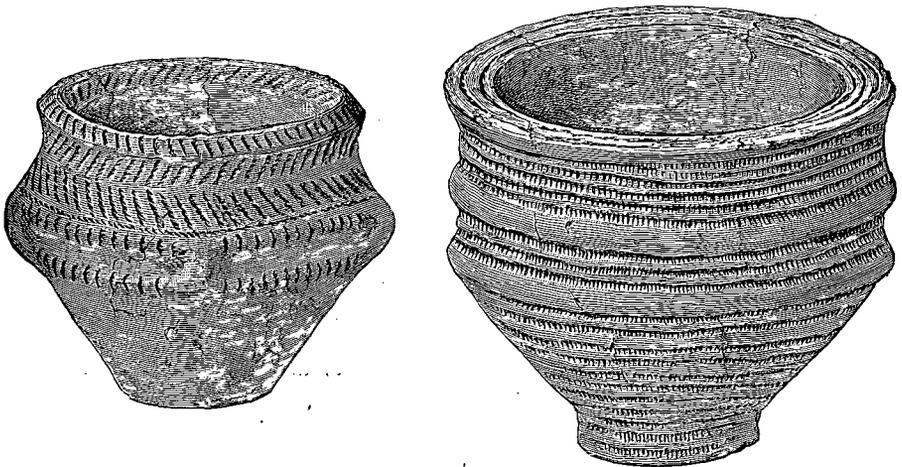
I have been thus particular in describing the whole steps taken in the excavations since it is only by recording minutely the course of the operations that we can estimate the value of the results, or arrive at

¹ See, as to similar negative results from examination of cairns in Brown Muir, near Elgin, *Proc.*, vol. i. p. 206.

correct conclusions. Too often we look in vain in the records of such explorations for that precision of description and detail which are so necessary for comparison and analysis, and we are left groping in darkness, when a little more care in observation and greater fulness of description might have cast a light on many difficulties which at present wait for solution.

I come now to notice the discovery of the second cist, with its accompanying urns. It was while clearing out the trench C to A that the workmen came upon the cist marked E in the plan. The top of the cist lay at a depth of about 10 inches below the surface. The usual covering-slab was wanting. It had doubtless been removed by the plough at an earlier period; and it seems probable, from the way in which, on examination, the incinerated remains were found to be mixed up with the earth inside the cist, that a rough search of the interior had then been made, but fortunately without detection of the urns. The cist lay due east and west according to the compass, and was formed of four rough slabs of stone set on edge. That on the south side was much the largest, as it projected beyond the others at both ends, but was not deep enough to serve for the whole side, hence was pieced up underneath with two smaller blocks. The cist was very irregular in dimensions. It measured internally 2 feet 5 inches long at south side, 2 feet 2 inches long at north side, was 13 inches wide at west end, and 15 inches at east end, and was 17 inches in depth to the sub-soil on which it rested. It had, however, been sunk into the sub-soil to a depth of about 15 inches. The two urns lay on their sides with, in each case, their bases close in to the two southern angles of the cist—the smaller urn to the west. The urns may have originally stood upright, and have been canted over when the covering-slab of the cist was removed, and the superincumbent earth came down and filled the cist and the urns. Their position close in to the angles of the cist doubtless contributed to their preservation when, as I have supposed, the interior was searched at the time the top slab was removed by the plough. Apart from this supposed search, there seems no other way of accounting for the incinerated remains being found

mixed up more or less with the earth which filled the cavity of the cist. No unburnt remains were detected, although carefully looked for when clearing out the interior. Incinerated bones were found in greatest quantity close to the east end, and it seems probable that this was originally the point of deposit. No evidence of the presence of bronze was detected. After the removal of the urns, the whole contents of the cist were put through a fine riddle and carefully examined for relics, without any being thus discovered.



Figs. 3, 4. Urns found in the Cist at Battle Law, Naughton, Fife. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

The two urns were lifted out quite whole, but one of them was so badly cracked, with roots of plants penetrating the cracks, that several pieces of the urn fell away, but have since been replaced.

The smaller and more ornamental urn (fig. 3) measures 4 inches in height by 5 inches across the lip, and is of similar type and design to that shown in fig. 1, resembling it indeed so closely as to suggest the same maker for both. It is ornamented with lines of 'herringbone' pattern, and has also four imperforate ears. The base, which measures $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, is not flat as in most examples, but is finished with

a rim projecting downwards, like the modern jug or cup. In this feature it differs from urn No. 1, where the base is perfectly flat.

The other urn (fig. 4) is of less graceful make and ruder construction. It measures $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches in height and $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter at the mouth, the lip being $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in thickness. There are two projecting mouldings about an inch apart round the shoulder, and at the bottom a distinct pedestal $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in height. The whole surface is ornamented with impressed markings as if by the teeth of a comb in horizontal lines.

It may be worthy of mention that a stone cup was some time ago discovered on Battle Law, and is preserved at Naughton House. It is figured in Campbell's *Balmerino* (p. 8). The cup is of the ordinary type, with side handle, of which many examples, more or less ornamented, are preserved in the Museum of the Society. It measures $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter; or including the handle, 5 inches. The hollow of the cup is $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep. An incised line encircles the exterior of the cup just below the lip. The handle is hollowed out above and below, but not perforated. There is no suggestion of its connection with any interment.