

## III.

## NOTE ON ANCIENT GRAVES AT BELHAVEN, EAST LOTHIAN.

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While staying at Belhaven, near Dunbar, last summer, I examined an interesting series of stone cists there, of which I find there is no record in the Society's *Proceedings*. These were originally laid bare by a severe storm, accompanied by unusually high tides, in September 1891, and they are briefly referred to in the *History of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club*, vol. xiii. p. 318.

They are situated on a low range of cliffs on the seashore, on the eastern side of Belhaven Bay, about a mile or so to the west of Dunbar. The perpendicular front of the cliff faces nearly due west, and at high tide the sea comes up to the very foot of it. Its total height from the top to high-water mark is about 12 feet. It is composed of a coarse brown clay and sand, several feet in thickness, under which there is a deep layer of sea-rolled gravel mixed with shells, exceedingly hard and closely compacted; the whole resting, again, upon narrow horizontal strata of red and white sandstone, intermixed. The surface is covered with finer and more newly drifted sand, with turf of coarse grass and bent. The cists are all of them in the shell-sand, at a uniform level of about 4 feet from the surface and 7 feet above high-water mark. They are almost at the exact distance of 6 feet from each other, and are not crowded together, as if they had been constructed hurriedly. Their uniformity and regularity, indeed, suggest that they resulted from some common calamity. The length of the cliff-face in which they appear is 30 yards, and in this space I counted nine separate cists. At one place towards the north a considerable part of the cliff has fallen, and there the regular succession of graves is interrupted, though originally, doubtless, it was maintained. Only one or two of them, however, are in even a partially perfect state, most of what remains being evidently only the eastern ends of the cists; but the situations of the others are distinctly indicated

by hollows in the shell-sand, in the case of some of these, portions of the slabs which composed them being still *in situ*. They were "long graves," lying due east and west, 14 inches broad by 10 inches deep.

The slabs of which they were composed are pieces of the adjacent free-stone rock, which splits easily, and they have no dressing of any kind. In no case do the sides seem to have been formed of single slabs, the imperfections in those employed for this purpose being supplied by smaller pieces. The tops consist of narrow slabs laid across the side ones, and

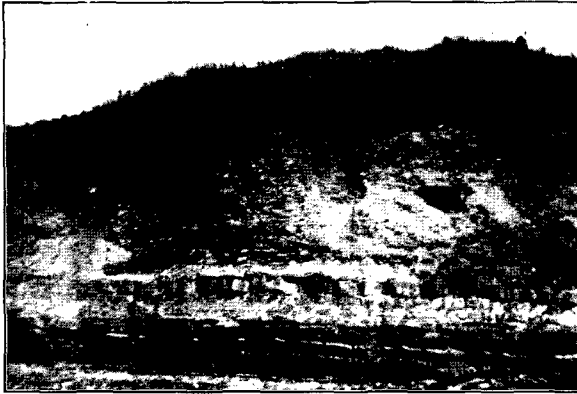


Fig. 1. Exposed face of cliff, with cists in the shell-sand, at Belhaven Bay, Dunbar.

in none is there any single heavy cover. The bottom of each cist seems to have been formed of one thin slab. All the graves were empty, though fragments of bones appeared here and there. But protruding from the shell-sand at one place, where, according to the regular order, a cist should have been, I found two portions of some bones—a *radius* and an *ulna*. These I succeeded in excavating, with considerable difficulty, however, owing to the hard and compacted nature of the soil. So far as I could discover, there were, curiously enough, no traces beside *these* of any slabs of stone forming a cist or grave.

The accompanying small photograph (fig. 1) furnishes a fairly good

idea of part of this ancient cemetery, the chief features of which I have tried briefly to describe. The situation of some of the cists which have quite disappeared, owing to the effects of the weather and the sea, may be noticed in the photograph, on either side of those which still remain in a more perfect condition.

Local tradition asserts that the graves are those of shipwrecked vikings. They belong probably to an early Christian period.