

II.

DISCOVERY OF STONE CISTS AT STENNESS, ORKNEY.

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There is no richer field for the antiquary in Orkney than the parish of Stenness, on which are located the famous standing stones bearing its name, and the chambered cairn known as the Maeshowe. In all the parish there appears to be no better part than the farm of Brodgar on which to unearth some relic of bygone ages. This farm lies adjacent to the standing stones—in fact includes them. The large circle lies at its northern end, while the smaller circle with the restored burial chamber lies approximately at the south, with other standing stones here and there on the fields. The fields lie in wedge-shaped formation, narrowing towards the Bridge of Brodgar, having the Loch of Harray on the north side and the Loch of Stenness on the south.

Amid such surroundings it is not to be wondered at that the proprietor, Mr Wishart, uncovered several cists, when ploughing, in the latter end of February last. The spot where they were found was about mid-way between the larger circle and the smaller on that part where the land narrows between the two lochs. The find consisted of a series of cists. Unfortunately, I did not see them *in situ*, but I shall try to describe them as nearly as possible from what the finder told me. There were four graves lying parallel to each other, in a line running north and south, with a smaller structure (it could hardly be called a grave) in addition, set at the northern end of the row. They were about 6 inches under the soil; each of the larger graves measured about 3 feet long, 2 feet broad, and 1 foot deep, while the smaller cist was about 6 inches square and as deep as the others.

The graves were formed by stones set on edge, having the main axis lying east and west.

Three of the large cists contained unburnt bones, which lay in the west end of each. In the other end of each grave was a rounded water-worn stone, the largest, measuring 5 inches by 4½ inches, and the smallest, 4 inches by 3½ inches, being shown on fig. 1. The fourth cist, at the south end of the row, was empty, as was also the smaller one. The bottom of the three cists first mentioned consisted of a flat stone, but there was no stone on the bottom of the fourth one, nor of the small cist.

Outside and overlapping the eastern ends of two of the large cists, those in the centre, was a flat triangular stone with its apex removed,

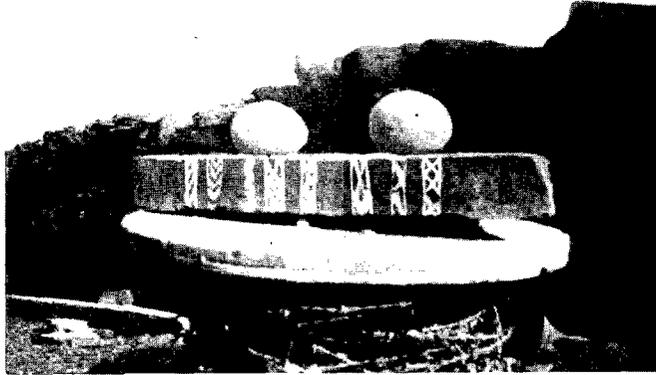


Fig. 1. Sculptured Stone and Pebbles from Graves at Stenness, Orkney.

set at an angle point downward, but separate from the cists. Mr Wishart, unfortunately, did not worry much about the find. His chief idea was to clear his field of offending and awkward stones, so he promptly removed the lot. Possibly the find would never have been recorded at all had he not observed curious marks on the last-mentioned stone. These marks consist of a series of sculpturings of a kind never before found in these islands, so far as I know. The markings consist of eight bands of lattice patterns between single marginal lines cut across the edge of the stone. It was two months after the discovery before I was informed about it. But immediately, with my friend and neighbour Mr J. Rae, I went to the farm, where we saw the spot and the stone, and obtained the foregoing description. A neighbouring farmer, Mr P. Leith, who was interested in antiquarian matters, had photographed the marked stone with two of the

round stones found in the cists, on its top (fig. 1). On our first visit we took a rough rubbing of the markings, but returned a week later for others. This stone measures 30 inches in length in front, tapering to 13 inches at the back, and is $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness.

Mr Leith, along with a friend, went to the trouble of digging in the hole after the cists had been removed. He continued to find any amount of stones, and at a lower level, about a depth of 5 feet lower down, came upon another cist, which contained nothing but ashes of reddish colour.

The field containing these graves appears to contain much of archæological interest, and as we have interested Mr Wishart sufficiently, we can depend on him giving timely notice of any further discovery he may happen to make.