

IV.

NOTES ON EXCAVATIONS OF PREHISTORIC AND LATER SITES AT MUIRKIRK, AYRSHIRE, 1913-1927. BY ARCHIBALD FAIRBAIRN, F.S.A.Scot.

The district of Muirkirk, situated within the uplands of the central division of Ayrshire and on the upper reaches of the River Ayr, may, with the exception of the lower ground, be described as chiefly moorland. It is surrounded on the north, south, and east by hills, rising in the highest point to an elevation of 1944 feet, and from those hills the small beginnings of the Ayr have their source. On the west the prospect is wide and open, across the whole width of the county, following the river, to the sea. The hills and moorlands slope gently downwards, meeting cultivation along the lower reaches of the Greenock Water and the Garpel Water, tributaries of the river Ayr. The hill-sides and mosses, now treeless and heather-clad, show, in many peat exposures, evidence in root and branch of the primeval forest, once the haunt of wild ox, wolf, and red deer, as testified by finds of bone and horn.

In a district such as this, archæology is the more fascinating because of the change of natural features which has taken place since prehistoric times. The site of the Bronze Age hut-circle—a sheltered opening, we may suppose, in the forest—is now exposed to the blast on a treeless hill-slope, while the burial cairn on the rising ground no longer overlooks the primeval growth of birch, pine, oak, and alder trees which filled the hollows below.

Among the casual finds of archæological relics in the district mention may be made of the following: a bronze spear-head (fig. 1), found in a drain on Whitehaugh Moss; a bronze flanged axe (fig. 2), turned up by the plough at West Glenbuck; and half of a stone axe—cutting end—found near Marchhouse; the lower jaw of a wolf on Crossflatt; antlers of a red deer in a drain on the farm of Kames; and the bones and horn-cores of the British wild ox, found in the refuse heap of an ancient British settlement in the district.

Previous to 1913 very little seems to have been attempted in the district by way of archæological research. In that year, however, the late Col. J. G. A. Baird, F.S.A.Scot., made a beginning, and many ancient constructions were explored on his Muirkirk estate. After his death the research was continued by his daughter, Mrs Broun Lindsay, F.S.A.Scot., the author having taken part in all the work carried out.

PREHISTORIC SITES.

In the autumn of 1913 the excavation of two hut-circles was accomplished, and both are described in the *Proceedings*, vol. xlviii. p. 373.

It will be recalled that No. 1 hut-circle, marked No. 1 on the accompanying map (fig. 3), is situated on a heather-clad hill-slope, at an elevation of 900 feet above sea-level. The discovery of fragments of an ornamented beaker-like vessel (fig. 4) of the Bronze Age within the interior was sufficiently important to confirm the view that certain of the hut-circles dated to the Bronze Age in Scotland. The interior of this structure was again carefully explored in 1924, but, with the exception of minor fragments of the same vessel, no other relics were discovered.

It will also be recalled that No. 2 hut-circle (No. 2) is at the lower elevation of 700 feet, on the margin of the same hill-slope. The relics found among the debris under the turf consisted of coarse, glazed pottery, two rough pieces of flint, and some charcoal. In the centre of the interior a circular pit, 4 feet in diameter and 5 feet deep, was discovered. It had been filled in with cairn-sized stones. At the bottom the complete fragments of a decorated beaker-like vessel of the Bronze Age

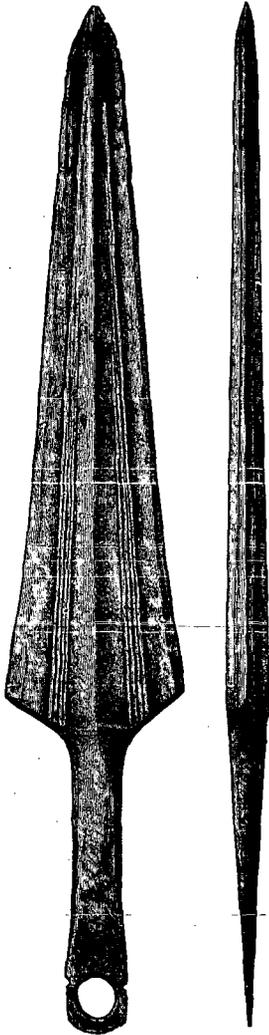


Fig. 1. Bronze Spear-head from Whitehaugh Moss, Ayrshire.



Fig. 2. Flanged Bronze Axe from West Glenbuck, Ayrshire.

were discovered (fig. 5) along with many fragments of carbonised oak. The glazed pottery, as will be seen, belonged to a late occupation of the site.

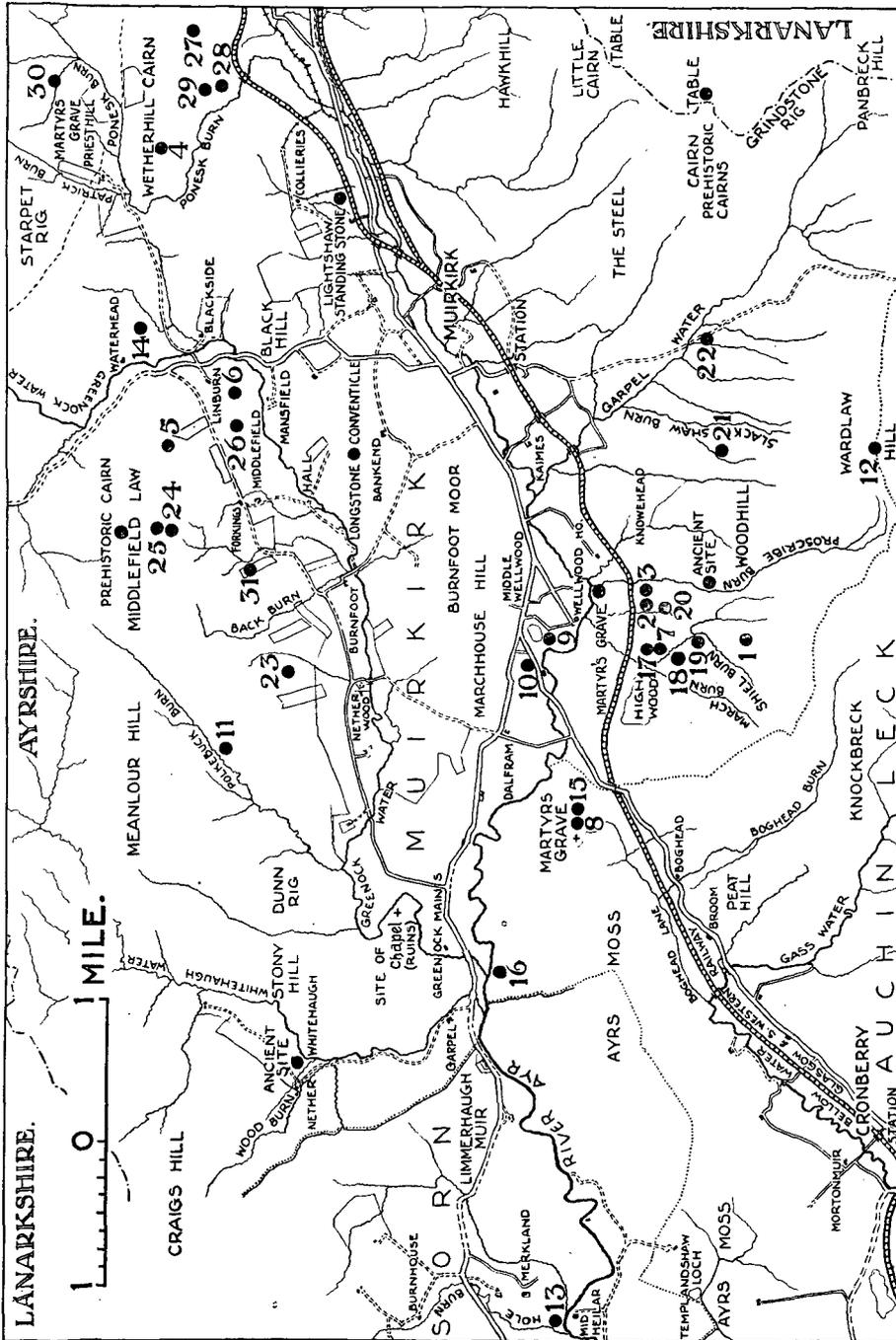


Fig. 3. Map of Muirkirk District showing Archaeological Sites.

It was decided in 1924 to re-excavate, at a lower level, the interior of this hut-circle, and to this end the upper level—chiefly rough cobble-stones over which the mediæval potsherds were found—was taken up and the debris cleared out. It was then discovered that the prehistoric floor lay beneath, consisting of clay and gravel firmly compacted and strewn with charcoal. This floor was taken up and carefully passed through the riddle, when fragments of five different vessels, ornamented and plain (fig. 6), apparently of the early Bronze Age, were recovered. Moreover, 12 feet west from the centre and 6 feet inwards from the wall, a

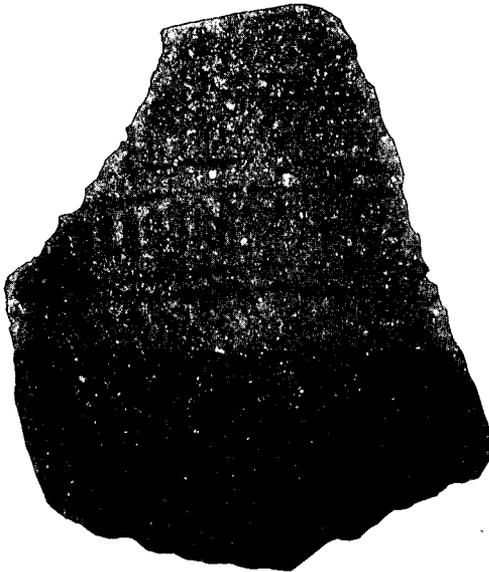


Fig. 4. Fragment of Beaker from Hut-circle No. 1, Muirkirk.



Fig. 5. Beaker-like vessel from Hut-circle No. 2, Muirkirk.

hearth of flat stones, without a kerb, was discovered, over which still lay a thick layer of black and red charred material. At 11 feet south-east from the centre and 3 feet from the wall a cooking-hole was discovered full to the brim of very fine dark-coloured charcoal of wood, plentifully intermixed with small fragments of burnt bone. The cooking-hole measured 22 inches wide and 12 inches deep, and was simply a hole in the ground.

The re-excavation of this hut-circle has brought to light a well-appointed Bronze Age dwelling with examples of the domestic pottery then in use, and it may assist in solving the enigma of the central pit and beaker-like vessel found in 1913.

The large area to be roofed over—a diameter of from 34 to 38 feet—would necessitate a central roof-tree of stout proportions, and from the fragments of oak found in the bottom of the pit it is reasonable to assume that the roof-tree was of oak. The mass of cairn-sized stones which filled the pit would be sufficiently weighty to hold a pole in position. The urn found at the bottom may have been placed there in

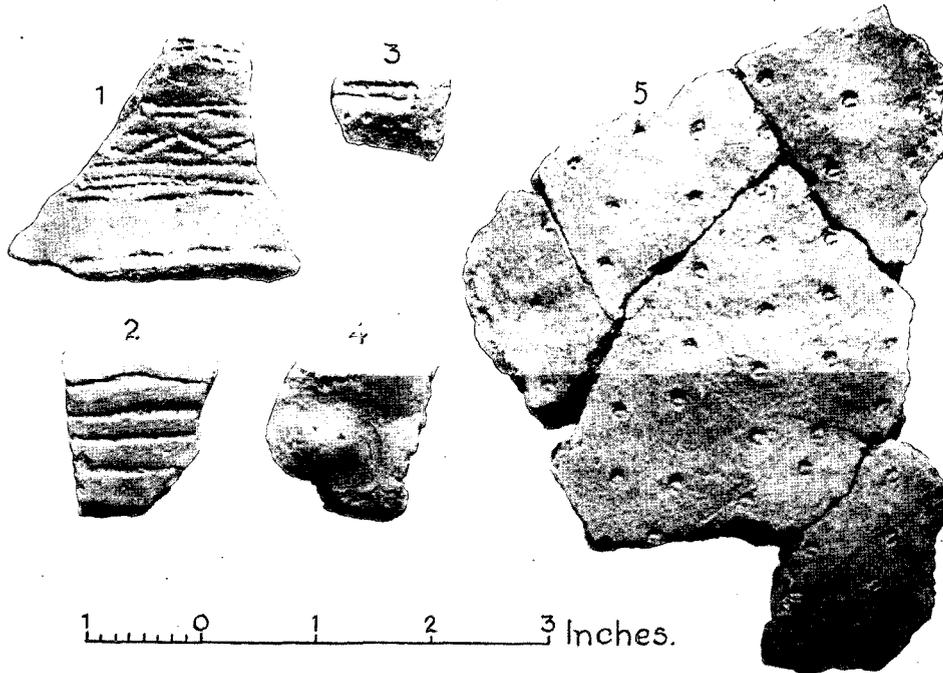


Fig. 6. Fragments of Pottery from Hut-circle No. 2, Muirkirk.

keeping with some ceremonial. The writer, who discovered and removed the fragments, found them close together, suggesting that the vessel had been placed there in a whole state.

While it is intended to notice the prehistoric excavations first, it may be of interest to mention here a discovery of a mediæval nature made while re-excavating this hut-circle.

In testing the ground for a probable refuse heap, traces of charcoal were encountered at a depth of 2 feet and at a distance of 15 feet north-

west of the hut-circle wall. This was followed up, and it led to the entrance of a squarely built structure, with an opening 2 feet in height and 2 feet 4 inches wide. A massive lintel-stone, 4 feet in length, bridged the entrance, which was at a depth of 4 feet below the present ground surface. By inserting a rod into the opening it was found to extend 10 feet forward, and at this distance a pit was dug, which finally disclosed a stone-lined kiln (fig. 7) similar in construction to that described in the *Proceedings*, vol. xviii. p. 378. The kiln and the flue are paved with superior flagstones. There is a projecting stone step half-way down the kiln, for the convenience evidently of an attendant getting in and out.

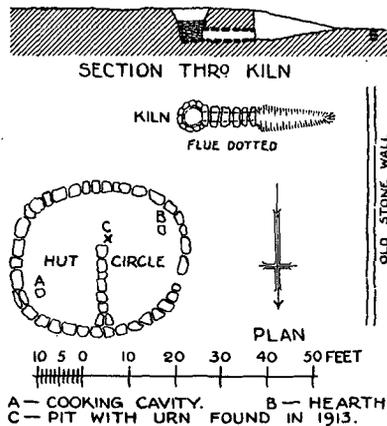


Fig. 7. Plan of Hut-circle No. 2, and Kiln, Muirkirk.

for drying grain in the straw. It is probable also that the cobbled hut-circle floor found in 1913, on which the green, glazed, mediæval potsherds were discovered, was the floor of a barn for the storage of grain in connection with the kiln. On disuse the kiln had been filled in and the whole construction completely covered over.

The next hut-circle (No. 3) is situated a short distance east from No. 2, and is described by the writer in the *Proceedings*, vol. liv. p. 210. Within this hut-circle fragments of two differently ornamented domestic Bronze Age vessels and one large flake of flint were discovered. One of the vessels was decorated by pinching the moist clay between the nails of the thumb and forefinger, and the other by impressing horizontal, vertical, and zigzag lines with a toothed stamp.

It was noted that there was a circular fire-marked area on the clay floor of this hut-circle. On the same floor-level a well-constructed hearth of flat stones was left intact in 1919. This was taken up in

The outer end of the flue was found to contain a mass of red, burnt ashes, the remains of the last fire when the structure was in use. What was that use? It is not suggested that this drying kiln, for such it undoubtedly was, had been associated with the life of the adjoining hut-circle. It is more likely to have been built out of the remains of that structure, the site chosen because of the building material at hand.

A late mediæval homestead has been discovered and excavated only a short distance to the south-west, and the furrows of very early ploughing are still visible on the heather-covered land close by. It is possible that the kiln was used

1924, and underneath was discovered a cooking-hole similar in size to that found in No. 2 hut-circle. It was brimful of very black charcoal, intermixed with a fair sprinkling of burnt bone.

From 50 to 80 yards to the south there are two circular formations of stones slightly below ground-level. In both flint chips have been plentifully found, but, so far as the excavations have gone, neither pottery nor other relics have been discovered.

It is noteworthy, in connection with the above hut-circles, that no small cairns nor tumuli have been discovered in their neighbourhood.

The first cremation burial cairn excavated was that on Wetherhill, 1128 feet above sea-level, which is described in the *Proceedings*, vol. li. p. 24.

This round cairn of the Bronze Age (No. 4) lies on the summit of a green knoll and is surrounded on all sides by a peat moss. It was formed over an outcrop of dolerite rock, on which the body had previously been burned. The excavation of the cairn yielded a food-vessel (fig. 8) and a cinerary urn (fig. 9), and contained a separate cremation deposit without an urn. Fragments of carbonised wood, scattered over the fire-scorched rock beneath the cairn, proved,

under expert examination, to be birch and oak, and in keeping with abundant evidence of root and branch exposed in the surrounding peat.

The excavations of the next five cairn sites were described by the writer in the *Proceedings*, vol. lvi. p. 126. Only the first cairn (No. 5) was intact, the others being mere ruins. The complete cairn lies low on the southern skirts of Middlefield Law at an elevation of 1050 feet. The structure had been formed on the clay, and peat had, in the course of ages, crept over it to a height of 3 feet 10 inches. Nothing was found within the cairn; but under it a complete circular trench was discovered, containing a cremation burial, along with a great quantity of charcoal of wood in unusually large fragments. Two worked knives, one of flint



Fig. 8. Food-vessel from Cairn on Wetherhill, Muirkirk.

and the other of chert, were recovered from the deposit. It was seen from the scorched and red burnt earth that the cremation had taken place on the circular platform within, and surrounded by, the trench, over which the cairn had finally been raised.

Regarding the four ruined cairns, one (No. 6) is situated a short distance west of Linburn Farm and to the south of the last cairn. The site occupies the highest point of the rising ground, and is 850 feet above sea-level. Only the circular base survived, in the centre of which, below the debris, there was a well-preserved cist without cover-stones. On being cleared out and minutely examined, a sprinkling of charcoal of oak and one fragment of thick hand-made pottery referable to the Bronze Age was recovered from the cist.

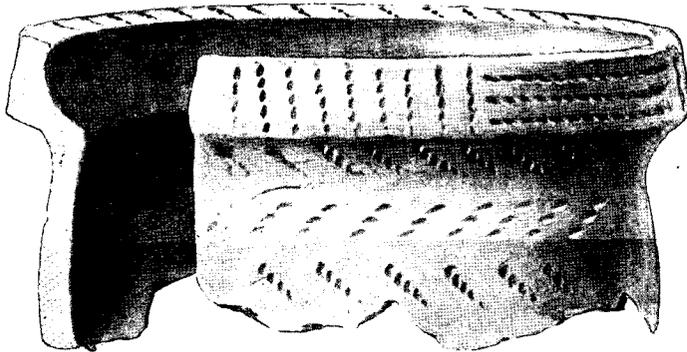


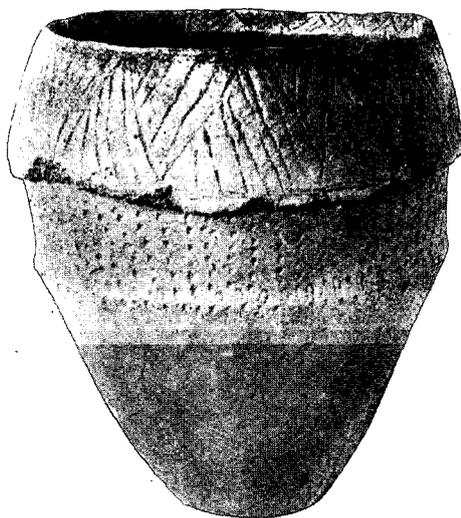
Fig. 9. Cinerary Urn from Cairn on Wetherhill, Muirkirk.

The next cairn base (No. 7) is on an eminence 830 feet above sea-level, on the edge of the moor overlooking the Ayr valley, and near the east bank of the Shiel Burn. At a depth of 2 feet, in forced soil, beneath the cairn, there was a thick layer of yellow clay. Immediately below this clay there was a concentrated deposit of charcoal of oak intermixed with dark grey mould containing a sprinkling of bone in fine particles. There was no evidence of a cist and no relics of any kind were recovered.

The remains of the third structure (No. 8) are near the south-east margin of Ayr's Moss, and a short way east of the monument to Richard Cameron, the Covenanter, and the resolute men who died with him there in defence of religious freedom. The central area of this construction was explored to a depth of 3 feet. At this depth much charcoal in small fragments was met with, intermixed with very dark soil. One unworked flake of flint was discovered, but no direct evidence of sepulchral rites was forthcoming.

Without this, or any evidence of fire, it is difficult to account for the presence of charcoal—chiefly of oak—in small cairns.

The last ruined cairn (No. 9) occupies very exactly the highest point of a wooded ridge called Kineknowe, 700 feet in height, near Wellwood. The west side of the cairn is slightly concave in form, with well-defined corners. The south-west extremity has still its corner stone—a large boulder—in position. In excavating the cairn, the interior, consisting of earth and stones, was put over the margin. On the ground-



1 0 1 2 3 inches

Fig. 10. Cinerary Urn from Cairn at Marchhouse, Muirkirk.

level several heavy flat stones set on edge and in a position east and west were discovered, suggesting the ruined remains of a cist. The soil in their vicinity was passed through the riddle, when five fragments of a Bronze Age urn were recovered. The largest fragment, part of the rim, has four transverse lines of decoration.

The next excavation site, that of a partially demolished cairn (No. 10), is only a short distance north-west from the last and slightly to the east of Marchhouse. This was described by the writer in the *Proceedings*, vol. lviii. p. 333. A cinerary urn of large size (fig. 10), ornamented, and with broad overhanging rim, was discovered buried in 2 feet of sand, in the bank of the newly widened roadway. This vessel was

inverted over a large deposit of incinerated human remains. On the ground, mouth upwards, and within the urn, was an incense cup (fig. 11),



1 0 1 Inch.

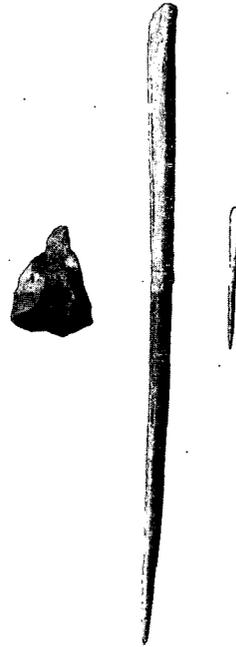
Fig. 11. Incense cup from Cairn at Marchhouse, Muirkirk.

with eighteen perforations round the widest part. It was full of burnt material in the form of fine black ash, similar to that found in the cooking-holes of the hut-circles. Inserted with one end in the ashes of the incense cup, and in a vertical position, was a pointed and polished bone pin (fig. 12), $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches in length, and, also within the incense cup, a bronze awl (fig. 12), pointed at one end and flattened at the other, and an unworked fragment of green chert. The exhaustive exploration of the site extended to the adjoining field, and disclosed, at a depth of 2 feet, under the ploughing, the northern half of a cairn base, giving a diameter of 47 feet, the urn burial occupying the centre underneath the cairn. The southern half of the base had been demolished by the construction of the original roadway. At 10 feet north-east of the burial, under the heaviest stones of the cairn, a shallow pit in the sand contained a large deposit of charcoal of wood and fragments of incinerated bone, the residue probably of the funeral pyre.

It is of interest to note that the stone axe referred to as one of the casual finds was discovered many years ago in the opposite bank of the roadway and within a few yards of where the southern margin of the cairn would originally extend to.

The next cairn (No. 11) was excavated in the autumn of 1925, and has not hitherto been described; it is situated on the farm of Netherwood, at the west end of what is locally known as the Blood Moss, at 950 feet elevation and on the margin of the steep

with eighteen perforations round the widest part. It was full of burnt material in the form of fine black ash, similar to that found in the cooking-holes of the hut-circles. Inserted with one end in the ashes of the incense cup, and in a vertical position, was a pointed and polished bone pin (fig. 12), $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches in length, and,



1 0 1 Inch.

Fig. 12. Bronze Pin, Bronze Awl, and fragment of Chert from Cairn at Marchhouse, Muirkirk.

slope which runs down to the Polkebuck Burn, 100 yards to the west.

After removing the peat, which enveloped the structure, a round cairn, 28 feet in diameter, was disclosed, the lower stones resting on the clay. A large flagstone, suggesting the cover of a cist, was found displaced near the surface of the peat, and disturbance long ago was suspected—a surmise which proved correct. The cairn was excavated from the centre outwards, and a short cist without a cover was disclosed, formed of flagstones set on edge. The cist lies north-east and south-west and slightly to the west of the centre of the cairn, and measures inside 36 inches in length, 22 inches in width, and is 23 inches deep. One end and one side are formed by single flagstones 27 inches and 32 inches in length respectively. The cist contained dark-coloured soil—chiefly peat. No relics of any kind were discovered.

The summit of Wardlaw, 1630 feet high, commands, as the name suggests, a vast outlook, embracing the whole valley of the Ayr from its source to the sea, Ben Lomond to the north, and the hills of Galloway to the south.

The base of a round cairn (No. 12), 30 feet in diameter, occupies exactly the highest point, over which beacons have been lit possibly for centuries. Although the cairn had been much disturbed by visitors to the hill-top, it was decided to explore the base, and more particularly the ground underneath. The excavation was carried out in the usual way, but it was soon realised that nothing perishable by heat could survive. The ground below the cairn was trenched over to no purpose, but under a marginal boulder, outwith the fire-marked area, a massive late-Celtic finger-ring of bronze (fig. 13), $1\frac{1}{8}$ -inch and $1\frac{3}{8}$ -inch diameter, was discovered. No other relic was discovered throughout the excavation, and the cairn was restored.

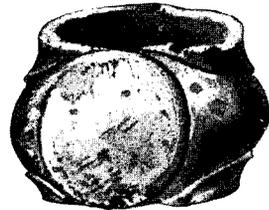


Fig. 13. Bronze Finger-ring from Wardlaw Cairn. (†).

At the junction of the Hole Burn with the river Ayr there is a high promontory, locally known as Castlehill (No. 13); the name, however, has no reference to any stone-and-lime building. The approach to the site from the north, along a high and narrow ridge, has the Hole Burn on the right and the Ayr on the left. Immediately in front, on the promontory, there is a steep mound resembling a mote hill and measuring 68 feet from base to summit, which is artificially flat, circular, and 46 feet in diameter. Immediately in front there is a lesser mound, and at its base beyond there is a square enclosure, 66 feet by 66 feet, and strongly protected on the west side by a

parapet of earth and boulders. On the opposite side this bank has long disappeared, probably by a landslide, where there is an almost perpendicular drop into the river Ayr below.

This enclosure is probably the bailey or outer court of an ancient mote. It has been proved that the flat summit of the larger mound has very dark soil of occupation and a clay floor at a depth of nearly 2 feet. Part of the west margin of the summit has been carried away by landslide into the Hole Burn, exposing a continuation of the parapet from the bailey as well as a refuse heap beyond the wall. From this exposure the writer has, from time to time, collected from a mass of red burnt ash, charcoal and pieces of slag, bones, teeth, and horn-cores of the British wild ox, and other relics. Only a preliminary excavation has been made.

The last of the early sites to be noticed is the one near Blackside, Muirkirk (No. 14), which was described in the *Proceedings*, vol. ix. p. 262.

Further than mentioning the excavation in the present summary there is little more to add. The site, before excavation, closely resembled other constructions in the district associated doubtless, in later times, with agricultural, notably sheep-farming, pursuits. It was revealed from the relics recovered that the site had been occupied and used from Bronze Age to mediæval times. Fragments of a coarse, undecorated Bronze Age vessel, pot-boilers, a hammer-stone, a knife and three scrapers of flint, a pointed knife of a grey stone and a scraper of chert, which were found were referable to the earliest occupation; a jet armet and saddle-quern indicated an early Iron Age occupation; glazed potsherds pointed to very late mediæval times; and finally, a brass shoe-buckle and silver button suggested an eighteenth-century occupation.

LATER SITES.

We now approach examples of the later sites, and a sufficient number will be chosen, and very briefly described, to illustrate the diversity of form and simplicity of structure of those small and early pastoral dwellings. Without exception, all of them seem to have passed out of local history, and tradition even is silent.

These sites are now unknown by name, and are so worn away by time and weather that only the faintest trace of them is visible above ground. In their construction lime has in no case been used, and where built of stone, the interstices of the remaining foundations have been packed with clay. Where the walls have been of turf—as in most cases—the divots have been laid, for most part, on a foundation of rough, unhewn boulders without tool marks.

A short distance east of the Martyrs' Monument at Ayr Moss and slightly east of the excavation already referred to there, on a low hillock of dry ground, three boulders, appearing through the bent and heather, suggested from their position the segment of a circle. The turf was stripped off and the floor of a circular hut (No. 15) was laid bare, measuring 14 feet in diameter. The hearth was on the floor slightly south of the centre, the red, burnt embers of the last fire heaped over it. Two kinds of pottery were found on the site, one fairly thick, buff-coloured, and wheel-turned, with a very thin and worn tinge of green glaze; and the other, light red, thin, and unglazed. Only a few small shards were found, and they appear to belong to the fifteenth or early sixteenth century. Fragments of chert, several unworked flakes of flint, and one small nodule of "keel," showing several faces of wear, were also recovered.

At the junction of the Greenock Water with the Ayr, high up on the margin of the "scaur" overlooking the river and on the northern edge of Ayr Moss, there are very compact foundation walls (No. 16), 35 feet in length and 3 feet in thickness and still below ground-level. The writer discovered them by kicking away the moss-grown peat to ascertain if such a magnificent outlook ever sustained the site of an outpost. The laying bare of the walls and the interior was carried out in keeping with this idea by an enthusiastic platoon of local volunteers on the outward limit of a route march, and to test the efficiency of their entrenching tools. The exploration, for lack of time, was confined to the limits of the structure, thus reducing the chances of finding relics, usually more prolific outside and within range of the doorway. Within the east interior of the walls a large circular stone hearth was discovered on the floor, over which was the accumulation of the last peat fire in red, burnt ash. The back or north wall must have disappeared ages ago over the scaur, which is now grown green. No relics were discovered, and the mystery of this site, in such a peculiar situation, remains unsolved.

Approaching the neighbourhood of the hut-circles (No. 17) there is a group of three hut-remains on the left bank of the Shiel Burn, a tributary of the March Burn. The walls—formed of earth—are so worn by the process of time as to be hardly discernible. The first has a length of 51 feet, formed by two low walls, 9 feet apart, and meeting with a curve at either end. There is a narrow opening, 9 feet from the south end, in front of which a section of turf was taken up, and underneath there was a heavy deposit of charcoal of wood and peat ash which had, in keeping with ancient custom, been thrown out of the doorway.

The second—of similar form—a few feet away, is 15 feet in length and 7 feet wide, with no definite entrance. The third, which lies several

feet to the north, has a circular wall, 12 feet in diameter, faintly showing above ground. The interior was carefully explored, when a hearth, with red-coloured ash over it, was discovered on the floor of clay to the east of the centre.

On the opposite bank there is a hut-foundation (No. 18), the earth and stone walls of which are formed by a parallel cutting into the sloping bank. The length is 17 feet and the width 8 feet. The interior was cleared out, when a constructed fireplace, 16 inches wide and 36 inches in length, was found full of ashes in the south end of the structure.

Continuing a short distance further up the burn on the same bank and in a sheltered position there is another small oblong dwelling or shieling (No. 19), which probably gives the burn its name. Before excavation the remains appeared so slightly above ground as to be almost invisible, except to the most observant eye. The interior length is 15 feet 9 inches and the width 8 feet. The interior was carefully cleared out, and, at a depth of about 15 inches, the hearth, with red, burnt ash still covering it, was discovered on the rudely paved floor. The walls had been formed of turf and clay with an occasional boulder in the foundations. In order to ascertain the probable time of occupation it was desirable to find examples of the pottery which the occupants had in use, and to this end the turf was removed over a section of green ground in front of a narrow opening in the south wall. It has been found that while heather may grow, as it usually does, over the walls of ancient sites, it rarely ever grows over the refuse heaps of spent ash in front of the doorways.

In trenching this section carefully over, a goodly number of potsherds were recovered with parts of rims representing eight different vessels of thin build, wheel-turned, and with a faint and worn tinge, for most part of green glaze, which might date from the end of the fifteenth to the early seventeenth century. With the pottery several flakes of flint and chert were picked up.

Further to the east and only a short distance south-west of No. 2 hut-circle, on the left bank of the Aikler Burn—the burn of the oaks, which have now vanished—the foundation walls of a mediæval home-stead of a later date (No. 20) have been brought to light. On being cleared of turf and debris it was found that the dwelling had a total length of 33 feet and a width of 12 feet, with foundation walls built of hill stones and clay, varying in width from 25 inches to 36 inches. The hearth, 4 feet in diameter and without a kerb, was on the flagstones of the floor of the larger compartment of the two into which the house had been divided. A great number of potsherds were recovered from under the turf beyond the walls, and all of them were of a thicker and

more robust nature than those of the Shiel Burn. Almost all the fragments had a superior green glaze with occasional examples of black, brown, and pale yellow. Several shards were of buff-coloured clay, soft in texture, and covered with a very thin white slip, easily flaked off, and certainly representing not more than one dish.

The inhabitants of this dwelling would in all probability use the drying kiln mentioned in connection with No. 2 hut-circle, and the almost entire absence of white or slip pottery may afford a clue as to the time when the kiln was in use.

Some distance to the east, on the west tributary of the Slackshaw Burn, and on a dry ridge of ground in the centre of the moor, at an elevation of 1000 feet, there is a group of eleven hut-foundations (No. 21) of peculiar character.

This little hamlet, possibly a group of summer shielings for the summer herding of grazing stock, has no local name and no place in local tradition, and has only recently been discovered. Its remote situation, away from any track or road, and the nature of the ground precludes the idea of any interference, such as the removal of the foundation walls. The individual members of this group of ancient dwellings are so much alike in measurement that they may reasonably be described as a whole. Their interior length varies from 15 feet to 23 feet, and their interior breadth from 8 feet to 10 feet, and all are without divisional walls or compartments. It is possible, however, that wickerwork and clay, or wattle and daub, may have been used for partitions. Two of the structures are oval on plan, and have earthen walls, while the remainder have had turf and clay walls built on stone foundations, which vary from 2 feet to 3 feet in width.

The stone foundations—now exposed—exhibit a decided line of advancement in early hut-building. The oldest, evidently, are those of oval formation, an improvement on the more ancient circular hut. The next development exhibits foundations of rough hill stones laid down in straight walls and semi-circular ends. There are others with straight walls and large boulder stones in each well-rounded corner; and the latest, and last occupied evidently, has straight walls and square corners.

The pottery recovered from this group has been found at a depth of fully 12 inches under the turf, among the deposits of peat ash and charcoal which had been thrown out of the doorways. The potsherds vary; most, but not all, have a thin, green glaze, the clay is soft in texture and red in colour, and all the vessels are wheel-turned. They may date from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth century.

From the excavations carried out, ten of the hut-remains are proved to have been inhabited. In the exploration confined to the interior of

one with semicircular ends, nine flakes of flint were recovered and only one shard of pottery. Throughout, neither glass, wood, nor metal have yet been discovered.

The last example to be given of an oblong hut (No. 22) in this neighbourhood is situated on a dry ridge, a short distance south of the Sanquhar Road Bridge over the Garpel. Its interior measurement, $20\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length and $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet in breadth, is in keeping with the others. Otherwise it shows more above ground, the remaining walls are of superior build, and it is probably of a later date. The hearth, without a kerb, was found on the paved floor at one end.

The entrance, 2 feet wide, faced the north, and on removal of a wide section of turf in front the usual accumulation of ash and embers was met with. From this, potsherds of four different vessels were recovered, probably of sixteenth-century origin. The metal foot of what may have been an aquamanile, a piece of red keel with rubbed facets, and several unworked flakes of flint were included amongst the finds.

The next example of primitive construction, probably of a more pastoral nature, is situated on the lower margin of the hill-slope, a short distance north-east of the farm of Netherwood, in the Greenock Water district. Here we have two circular enclosures (No. 23) formed by strong earthen banks, flanked on the south by a long, deep, and narrow stone-lined pen, opening into one of the enclosures. Adjacent to the west bank there is a long and a wider pen, paved with flagstones. On the east side there is another narrow pen excavated out of the ground for most part, and joining at the lower end with the one on the south.

Behind, to the north-east, there is a group of three hut-remains with stone foundations—one is circular and two are oblong. The stonework, both of the pens and huts, was buried deep under the ruined earth-walls, and cleared out only after considerable spade-work. The excavations disclosed probably sheep-folds and ewe-bughts for ewe-milking, and, judging from the nature of the potsherds recovered from the hut-remains, the whole construction was in use in late mediæval times.

From this site eastwards, as far as Priesthill, a great many long, narrow, earthen enclosures or pens are to be met with on the lower edge of the moor. Several have been partly excavated, all of which are stone-lined, mostly paved, and measure from 4 to 5 feet wide and from 25 to 50 feet in length.

At about 200 feet below the summit of Middlefield Law, on the southern slope, and at an elevation of 1300 feet above sea-level, there

is a hut-foundation (No. 24), rectangular in form, described in the *Proceedings*, vol. xlvi. p. 377. Its size is 12 feet by 7 feet, the entrance, a foot wide, passing aslant through the eastern wall. It is well paved with flagstones, and has a fireplace in the north-west corner.

"The relics found were fragments of coarse pottery, glazed and unglazed. . . . For what reason the hut was constructed at such a height is far from clear. A summer sheiling would hardly be necessary in the locality; there are no signs of cultivation, yet it was undoubtedly made for and inhabited by human beings. Judging from the thickness of the overlying turf it must have been abandoned centuries ago." The pottery is probably sixteenth- or seventeenth-century ware.

Immediately above this hut site there was discovered a level cutting excavated across the lower slope leading to the summit (No. 25). The cutting is 120 paces in length, terminating in a filled-in pit at each end. Above the centre of the cutting there are two spring wells. One pit was opened to its original size, when it was found to be 10 feet wide on the surface and 10 feet deep, and cut into clay. At the bottom there was much silt, proving it had been used for collecting water, undoubtedly from the springs above. This effort of great labour may have been carried out by the inhabitants of the hut just described to collect and store water in times of great scarcity, and the means employed are both simple and practical.

The next excavation to be noticed in passing is that of an ancient kiln with flue (No. 26), and it is described in the *Proceedings*, vol. xxviii. p. 378. Its situation is 100 yards below the ruined homestead of Lamonburn, east of the farm of Middlefield. In the description of this kiln it is stated that "the diameter at the top is 6 feet 6 inches, and at the bottom 3 feet; its depth 7 feet 6 inches. It is faced with stone inside, and the bottom is neatly paved with flat stones. The flue is 9 feet long and 2 feet high, built with stones and paved like the kiln; its mouth, opening into the cleuch, is formed of three heavy stones. The mouth of the flue was full of ashes." The kiln is analogous to that adjacent to No. 2 hut-circle, and as both are situated on land which has been under cultivation, a common use may be ascribed to both.

Reference has been made to long, narrow enclosures, formed with earthen banks, lined along the ground-level interiorly with stone. High up on Grasshill Ridge, south-east of Priesthill, there is a construction of a somewhat similar nature (No. 27), 145 yards west of the standing stone, of modern erection, on the highest point of the ridge. The ground is rocky, and the enclosure, 33 feet in length and 4½ feet to 5 feet wide, is formed by heavy boulders arranged on either side. Near the centre and on the right or north side there is a shorter

enclosure, 12 feet in length and $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, leading from it. On the right of the entrance, which is in the east end, there is a row of ten large boulders, arranged in line, in front of the shorter chamber. On clearing out the larger compartment, and under 18 inches of peat, a flat, unornamented comb with several teeth remaining was discovered on the rocky floor.

In a line south-west, and at a lower level on the Berry Craigs, north of Ponesk Glen, there is a similar but larger enclosure (No. 28). This construction yielded no relics under excavation, although part of it closely resembles the remains of an earth-house minus the roofing flags. This part is 48 feet in length and curved, and varies from 2 feet wide near the entrance to 4 feet along its course. It is from 4 feet to 5 feet deep, and paved for most of its length. The entrance is 12 inches wide between two large boulders.

Adjoining this construction on the left, at a few feet from the south end, there is a filled-in trench, 36 feet in length, with several boulders in line, and terminating in a stone-lined chamber, 20 feet in length and 4 feet 3 inches wide. In clearing out this chamber several fragments of amber-coloured flint were found near the entrance.

After careful excavating it is not quite clear what those constructions were intended for. Both command an extensive outlook, but there is no distinct evidence of human occupation. It is now surmised they belong to a class of ewe-bughts associated probably with the ewe-milking practices of a bygone time.

Quite near to the last construction, and also on the Berry Craigs, there are the remains of a dwelling (No. 29), measuring inside 30 feet long and 8 feet wide. It has two compartments. The remaining walls are strongly built with stone and clay and are 36 inches wide. Thick turf covered the floor, which was found to be paved, the flat hearth occupying a position close to the divisional wall in the larger compartment. A few feet beyond the entrance there was a large mound covered with a sward of green grass. This mound—of ash—employed the excavating party fully three days in turning over. The pottery recovered was entirely of the sixteenth or seventeenth century, and all the fragments bore a superior green glaze, with the exception of several shards of red-coloured, unglazed ware.

Assuming that the inhabitants of this dwelling used the narrow enclosures referred to near them, it is of interest to note that there was no trace of white or slip pottery of any kind within or without the dwelling. This may afford a clue as to the period of occupation of the dwelling, and when these narrow constructions were in general use in the district.

Before bringing this summary to a close mention should be made of a site, very recently excavated under the personal supervision of Mrs E. C. Broun Lindsay, F.S.A.Scot., which had been occupied from at least the seventeenth century to comparatively modern times.

The site is that of Priesthill (No. 30), occupied for some time by John Brown, the "Christian carrier" of Covenanting times, who was shot there in the presence of his wife and children, on the 1st May 1685, by John Graham of Claverhouse, later Viscount Dundee.

The Priesthill in question is some distance north-east from the presently occupied homestead of that name, and the peat moss which lies between, and from which John Brown obtained his peats, is still made use of each year in May to provide fuel for the present Priesthill.

While the grave of the martyr, enclosed and monumented, is well known in its lonely situation, the actual site of his house has been vaguely guessed at, the structure having been removed early in the nineteenth century.

It was felt desirable to locate the site, and, if possible, to restore and preserve the foundations, if any remained.

About 45 yards south-east of the monument there was a large grass-covered mound, in front of which was a small plot of land suggesting a garden, and bearing traces of "lazy beds," a pastoral method of growing potatoes still in vogue in the locality. Immediately behind the mound—about the width of a roadway—the green sward appeared artificially flat, and there were two large enclosures, formed by feal dykes, to the left front and rear. The enclosures, doubtless sheep-bughts, measured 78 feet by 52 feet and 74 feet by 66 feet respectively, and the enclosing banks were 6 feet thick. There were other variously shaped, smaller, and deeper earth-works, which had led to a confusion of ideas regarding the site of the house, but it was apparent from the nature of the mole heaps that the mound was composed chiefly of burnt ash—the midden really—and therefore, according to early custom, it would lie in front of the dwelling (fig. 14).

The turf was taken up over the whole of the flat area behind the mound, and the remains of the foundation walls of Brown's house were gradually revealed. On completion of the removal of turf and superincumbent debris, the accompanying plan was made, illustrating very accurately the remains of the dwelling as now seen, while the accompanying ground-plan gives the position of Brown's grave.

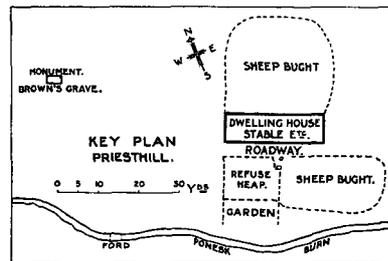
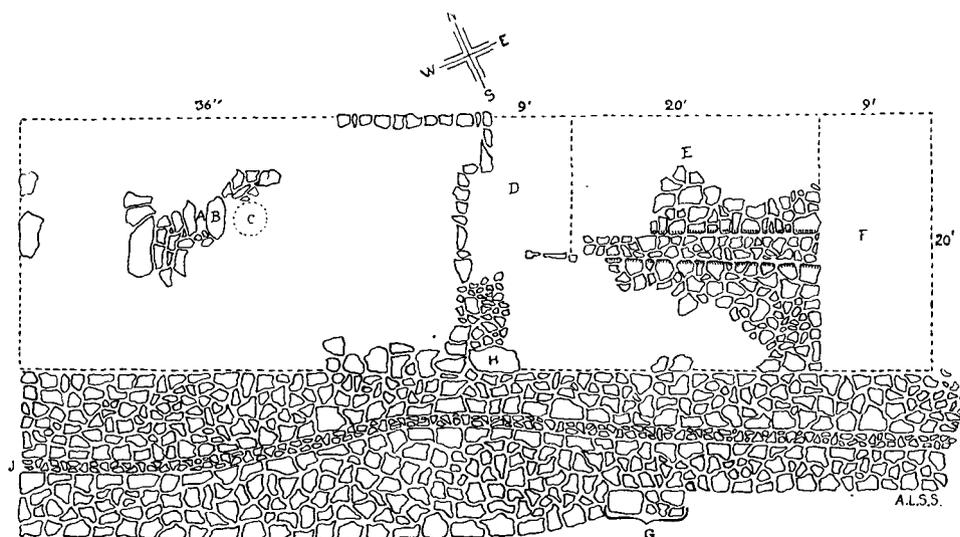


Fig. 14. Key Plan of Priesthill.

It will be seen that the house from the grave is 40 yards distant, and in a line 80° south-east. Although 242 years have elapsed since Brown's death at Priesthill, interest in this Scottish Covenanter has in no way declined. John Brown's name appears in the Kirk Session Records of the parish, and, from historical and local accounts, he was a man of superior intellect and independent mind. He refused to take the Abjuration Oath offered him by Claverhouse, and the penalty was



- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| A. Well fire. | D. Barn. | G. Loupin'on Stone. |
| B. Hearthstone. | E. Stable and Byre. | H. Doorstep. |
| C. Hearth. | F. Outhouse. | J. Gutter. |

Plan of Remains of John Brown's House, Priesthill, Muirkirk, 1926.

Fig. 15.

summary execution before two witnesses. From this—the concurrence of local tradition and the proximity of the grave—the execution was carried out at the house after Brown had taken a final farewell of his wife and children.

The house has been almost totally removed. From the remaining foundations (fig. 15), which are chiefly 3 feet wide, it was found that the length of the whole building was 74 feet, by 20 feet, with the dwelling-house, barn, stable, and byre in a continuous row. It is evident from the remaining portions of the floor that the house consisted of a "but and

ben," with a flat hearth, 30 inches in diameter, and a well-fire, 28 inches long, 13 inches wide, and 8 inches deep, in one end. Several flags of a stone floor remain.

The floors of the barn, stable, and byre are cobbled, and the flat open drain which runs down the middle is paved. The space between the house and the midden is 14 feet wide, paved, and has a gutter, 6 inches wide, running through the whole length.

The mounting pillar, or "loupin-on stane," is conspicuous, measuring 3 feet by 3 feet, the step of which is $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet by $1\frac{1}{2}$ foot.

The mound in front was a formidable undertaking to trench over, measuring 40 feet by 33 feet and 9 feet deep. Its thorough examination yielded many relics, including pottery, both of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and of later date, eight spindle-whorls, fragments of a wool carder and of three sickles, seven harrow-tines, five horse shoes, part of a horse's bit, two hooks, three hinges, an axle-tree pin, a pair of pincers, parts of a pair of sheep shears, part of a pair of scissors, a smoothing iron and other objects of this metal, eight very much corroded copper coins ranging from the middle of the seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century and a halfpenny trade token, eleven metal buttons, neatly cut leather soles for women's shoes, fragments of a buff coat with seven plain, flat metal buttons still attached, part of a heather rope, five globular blue glass beads, two pieces of slate pencils, half of a pair of eyeglasses, and a small glass phial. The mound yielded besides, a collection of upwards of eighty whole and very small tobacco pipe-heads of clay, all with broken stems and suggestive of a time of solitude and seclusion.

Priesthill, when a farm, had its cultivated land—now moorland—behind and on both sides of the house, enclosed by extensive fael dykes. The land in front is the peat moss, with a streamlet between, down to which there is still visible a cart track, and also a ford, for the carting in of peats.

An analogy can be found at Harwood, north-east of the farm of Middlefield, and entered in Weatherly's Plan of the District, dated 1826, as the "Site of Harwood." The situation of the dwelling—removed and turf-grown—the adjoining sheep-bughts, the refuse heap in front, and the finds within it, are much in keeping with those at Priesthill.

I desire to express my indebtedness to Miss A. L. Shaw Smith for visiting Priesthill and preparing the plans; and also to Major Dugald Baird, J.P., for preparing the plan of the kiln at No. 2 hut-circle.