

II.

THE EXCAVATION OF TWO CAIRNS ON THE KNOCK HILLS, EDGERSTON, ROXBURGHSHIRE. BY Mrs F. S. OLIVER, F.S.A.SCOT. WITH A REPORT ON THE RELICS FOUND, BY J. GRAHAM CALLANDER, F.S.A.SCOT.

These cairns are about half-way up the hill on more or less flat ground, and there was very little of them showing above the surface. The digging was carefully done, and took the better part of a week, most of the soil having been put through a riddle. It was in this way that we found most of the objects mentioned.

The larger of the two cairns lies about $\frac{5}{8}$ mile east by south of Edgerston House, at an elevation of rather more than 700 feet above sea-level, in the middle of an old pine wood, of which there are now only a few trees left. It is surrounded by banks, probably raised to protect the trees when first planted.

Close to the cairn itself there are traces of a circle about 80 feet in diameter. It is hardly visible at times, but quite clear when the sun is low, and one sees the shadow. It may have been originally a circle of stones, which have been removed, leaving an uneven surface.

The longer axis of the cairn lies east and west, and it looks almost as if the original round cairn had been added to at some time.

There were five separate burials, and a sixth deposit, which may have been a grave too, but which was quite different from the others. In this we found a great deal of charcoal, but no bones. It is described later.

The digging was started on the east side of the cairn, and the trench was continued for 17 feet before the first burial was found.

The general plan seems to have been that each burial was heaped over with largish stones gathered on the face of the hill, forming a heap of $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 feet high. Over this was a foot or so of earth and small stones, and finally above this were large land-gathered stones, forming the outer protection of the cairn. This was covered with a thick growth of turf, through which a few of the stones appeared.

In the other cairn, which lies about 300 yards further east on the same hill, the arrangement was the same, but the stones used were much larger, and had been carefully built over the top, being laid so as to overlap each other in a sloping position.

There were no cists in either cairn, but in the first cairn two of the graves were covered with large, flat slabs of stone—one being over 3 feet 6 inches long, and when unearthed was broken across the middle.

I. To begin with Cairn No. 1. It is 64 feet across from east to west by 38 feet from north to south, and about 3 feet 9 inches in depth to the ground-level, where the burials were found.

On the west side there may have been some slight disturbance of the ground near the surface, but on the east side it appeared to be undisturbed.

No. 1. The first grave was 8 feet from the centre on the east side, and a little to the south of the centre line. It was covered with large flat stones—one being 3 feet 6 inches long, and this one was broken across the middle when found. Here there were many small pieces of bone—two barrel-shaped lignite beads, beautifully polished and drilled, thicker in the middle and carefully shaped away towards the ends. One bead broke down the middle while it was being washed, and the method of drilling was exposed. It was evidently drilled from each end, and in this case the holes did not meet quite truly in the centre, which no doubt accounted for the break.

There was also a flint flake about 2 inches long and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch broad, and one small worked flint about 1 inch by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, and more or less circular in shape.

No. 2. Nearer the centre of the cairn, on the north-east side, was a hole about 3 feet in diameter, with a collection of charcoal. There were no bones, and this may not have been a burial. It was nearer the surface than the others, and contained some small stones—"chuckies" and other pebbles. Also a large water-worn stone—1 foot across, with curious hollows and some holes right through it. (Curiously enough there was a similar stone in the other cairn, but it was not so full of holes.)

No. 3. Below this hole (No. 2) and 6 feet from the centre was another grave. It was covered with biggish stones—was 6 feet long on the ground-level, and sloped up to 4 feet 10 inches at the top. The wide end at the north-east was 3 feet 4 inches across, but at the south-west end it was only 2 feet 3 inches. Here we found one jet or lignite button, thicker in the centre and cut away to a fine edge. Holes were drilled behind from each side, meeting in the centre. There were also a small, well-shaped, flint arrow-head, made of whitish flint and barbed and stemmed, some charcoal, but very little, and only two small pieces of bone.

No. 4. Grave in the centre of cairn, lying east-north-east and west-south-west, with one end about the centre. There were a few bones above it and a little charcoal. In it some very rough pottery fragments, one very thin flint flake, one tiny worked flint, rather beaked in shape.

No. 5. West of the centre line and on the north side of the cairn was another burial, 6 feet long, lying nearly due north and south. A

shale button, like the last one, was lying at the south end. There were also some flint flakes and a few round stones.

No. 6. Also on the west side, but on the south of the centre line, was the last grave. Nothing was found here but small bits of bone.

II. The other cairn on the same hill lay about the same level. There had been a circle of stones of 170 feet circumference round it. The cairn itself was round, measuring about 36 feet in diameter and 5 feet in height. Inside was a circle about 6 feet 6 inches in diameter, with big stones over it, and charcoal underneath them very near the original surface. Further below there were some bits of unburnt bone and a few small fragments of pottery—very fine and with a good design, and one porous water-worn stone 9 inches by 9 inches by $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches. This was all that was found here.

NOTE ON THE RELICS FOUND.

By J. GRAHAM CALLANDER, F.S.A. SCOT., Director of the
National Museum.

The objects found by Mrs Oliver in the course of her excavation of the two cairns on Knock Hill consist of relics such as might be recovered from any Bronze Age burial-site in Scotland. Still, as two of the objects found—the buttons of shale or jet—belong to a fairly rare class of relics, and as the majority of our prehistoric graves do not yield many of the smaller objects of antiquity, Mrs Oliver is to be congratulated on the results of her investigations.

CAIRN No. 1.

First Deposit.—Two barrel-shaped beads of shale or jet and a knife and flake of flint were recovered from this spot. The beads measure $\frac{25}{32}$ inch and $\frac{23}{32}$ inch in length respectively, and $\frac{5}{16}$ inch and $\frac{3}{8}$ inch in thickness at the widest part in the middle. One which split lengthwise when being cleaned, as Mrs Oliver has remarked, exhibits an interesting feature regarding the method of drilling such objects as the beads and thin, flat plates of shale or jet, which form the component parts of the elaborate necklaces made in these islands in the Bronze Age. It can be understood that, with the primitive appliances at his command, the man of this period would, at times, find difficulty in keeping his drill true to the centre when boring these objects. There was very little thickness of material to come and go upon, and a slight deviation from the central line would cause the drill to break through the side, destroying the object. In this bead the perforation has been

drilled from both ends, but one of the bores has tended towards one side, so that, instead of each meeting truly in the centre, there is a relatively large overlap where they join. Other split beads in the Museum, however, have been drilled completely through from one end, and it is quite possible that it was only when the angle of the drill showed that it had left its central course that it was necessary to complete the perforation from the opposite end.

Although by far the greater number of these barrel-shaped beads recovered from graves have formed parts of crescentic necklaces, it is more than likely that occasionally they were threaded on a single string. That smaller numbers and even single beads were sometimes worn is suggested by the presence of only two in the deposit we are discussing, and by the record of a single specimen found with a food-vessel at Scalpsie, Arran.¹

The knife is formed of the dark grey flint which was so frequently used in the manufacture of flint implements in Roxburghshire and Berwickshire. It is of a common form, being of crescentic shape, and flaked along the straight edge and on one face only. It measures $1\frac{3}{16}$ inch in length and $\frac{1}{16}$ inch in breadth. The other piece of flint found in the deposit showed no secondary working.

Second Deposit.—Nothing but charcoal was found here.

Third Deposit.—This place yielded a button of shale or jet, a calcined flint arrow-head with barbs and stem, some small pieces of charcoal, and two small pieces of bone. The button is in a perfect state of preservation. It is of circular shape, domed on the upper side and flat below, where there is a V-shaped perforation for attachment to the dress. The diameter is $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch and thickness $\frac{3}{8}$ inch. The form of this button is shown in fig. 1, where three specimens found at Keith Marischal, East Lothian, are illustrated. The arrow-head is a beautifully fashioned example with convex sides and barbs projecting beyond the short central tang. It is highly calcined, being now creamy white in colour, and it measures $\frac{2}{3}\frac{5}{2}$ inch in length and the same in breadth.

Fourth Deposit.—This deposit produced some very rough pottery fragments and two small flakes of flint, one showing very slight secondary working.

Fifth Deposit.—The relics found here consisted of another shale or jet bead, a large triangular flake of flint, and a few smaller pieces, all devoid of secondary working. The button was of the same shape as that found in the third deposit. It measures $1\frac{3}{8}$ inch in diameter and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in thickness. But for the surface being full of cracks and inclined to scale off it is in a good state of preservation.

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. xxxviii, p. 36.

Buttons such as the two under review have been found in different parts of Scotland, extending from Wigtownshire on the extreme south to Sutherland on the north. Sometimes they occur as individual finds and sometimes they appear in association with other relics. They cannot be considered common in Scotland: more of them have been found in England, but this is to some extent explained by the occurrence of considerable numbers in several graves. For instance, no fewer than thirty-nine were found with parts of a jet necklace in a barrow at Grindlow, Derbyshire. Including the two just described,

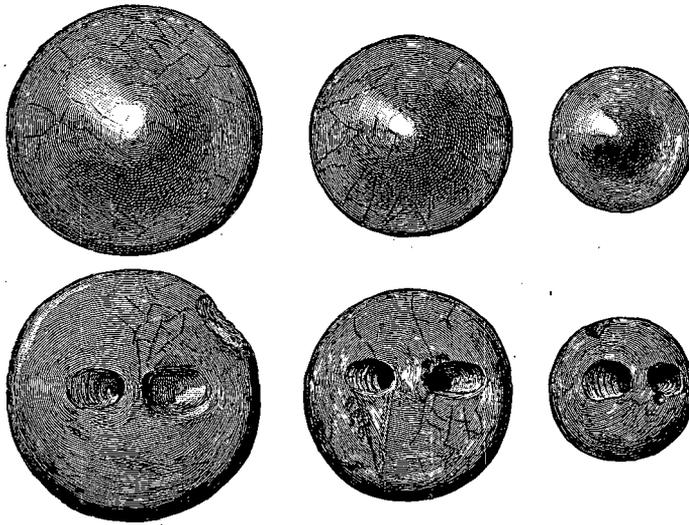


Fig. 1. Buttons of Shale from Keith Marischal, East Lothian.

twenty-seven examples have been found in eleven localities in Scotland. Six were found with flat bronze axes and other objects at Migdale, Sutherland; five on the Burnt Hill, Lochlee, Angus, and three beside a cinerary urn at Old Windymains, East Lothian. Four were found on the Glenluce Sands, Wigtownshire; and two at Letham, Angus, all being separate finds. One was found with a small axe-hammer and parts of three bronze armlets near a stone circle at Cairn Riv, Inverkeithney, Banffshire; one at Crawford Muir, Carstairs, Lanarkshire;¹ one in a short cist at Holmains, Dumfriesshire;² and one at Marshalmark Hill, New Cumnock, Ayrshire.³ All, with the exception of the Migdale examples and one from Glenluce, are in the National Museum. In

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. i. p. 218.

² *Ibid.*, vol. li. p. 199.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. lix. p. 110.

addition, a jet button, nearly square and flattish on the top instead of being domed like the others, was found in a cist on the Law Hill, Dundee;¹ it also is preserved in the National Collection.

Sixth Deposit.—Only some small fragments of bone were found here.

CAIRN NO. 2.

The only relics found in this cairn were five shards of a Bronze Age beaker, the largest, a rim fragment, measuring only about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch square. It is of buff-coloured pottery. The rim fragment is decorated on the exterior with closely set vertical zig-zags of four parts, and the other pieces with horizontal lines and a lattice pattern, all formed by impressing a toothed stamp on the clay while it was soft.

There is no difficulty in determining the period of the second cairn, as the pottery belongs to the early part of the Bronze Age. But, when we consider the relics found in the first cairn, it will be seen that they do not so definitely indicate a special period. However, there is no doubt that it also belonged to the Bronze Age, and probably to the early part of it.