

## A Cinerary Urn from Ochiltree

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*The description of the Urn is by Mr. Livens, and is prefaced by a note on the discovery, based on a report by Mr. James L. Davidson, Archaeology Division, Ordnance Survey.*

### DISCOVERY

On Monday, 26th September, 1955, while drains were being dug at a new housing site at Ochiltree, Ayrshire, a cinerary urn was unearthed. (Map Reference 50142110.)

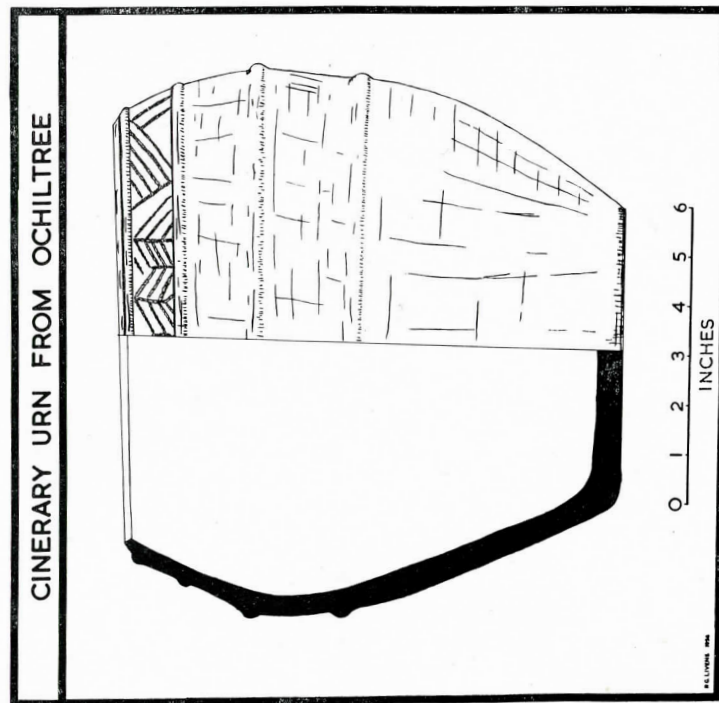
The urn was discovered by Mr. James Wallace, Hilltop Cottage, Mauchline, who recognised the nature of the discovery and caused work to be temporarily stopped at the spot. The Urn was removed carefully, but broke shortly afterwards when being taken to Ayr for examination. It has since been restored by the technical staff of the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow University, and placed in the Carnegie Library, Ayr, under the care of the Ayrshire Archaeological and Natural History Society.

The area of discovery is on a slight elevation (450 ft. O.D.), and the actual location of the urn was within an old plantation, circular and long-since cleared, some nine feet from its southern perimeter. This plantation has every appearance of having been a slight mound measuring some twenty yards in diameter and perhaps two to three feet maximum height. The sub-soil is sandy, and one foot three inches below the surface there occurs a layer of stones which probably extends at this depth over the mound.

The urn, which was inverted, was found 2 ft. 9 ins. below the present level and contained a large quantity of calcined bones. It rested on the natural clay base without a stone slab. Nearby, at a depth of 2 ft. 3 ins., a quantity of black wood ash was found.

Towards the end of 1955 the site was examined by Mr. Edward Henderson, Cumnock, a member of the Society, and a trial dig was made in the centre of the area. The basic clay was reached at a depth of approximately three feet and there was a scatter of charcoal.

Perhaps the mound contains further urns, and there is the possibility that this may be a tumulus containing a central cist and a number of secondary cremation burials.



## DESCRIPTION OF THE URN

This urn is a flat-based vase, with a distinctly rounded profile, standing a fraction over ten inches high. It is hand-made and somewhat irregular in form.

The fabric is thick and coarse, blackish-brown for most of its thickness, and surfaced with a chocolate-brown on the inside and a sandy colour on the outside face of the pot. The paste is heavily gritted with small angular stones.

The lip of the urn has a small internal bevel and the decoration consists of two elements—applied cordons or “hoops” of clay encircling the body of the urn; and impressed, twisted-cord patterns. Four applied “hoops” encircle the upper half of the urn, the topmost being just below the lip; the twisted-cord patterns occupy the zone between the upper pair of “hoops” and continuous lines of cord-impressions flank the topmost “hoop” on both sides. Both the decorative techniques employed on the Ochiltree Urn are well known from other pottery of the Cinerary Urn class from Britain.

The motives employed in the twisted-cord decoration on this urn are purely geometric, consisting in the main of patterns of “hatched” triangles, such as are common on wares of this class from Southern Scotland and Northern England.<sup>1</sup> On the Ochiltree urn this pattern is irregularly spaced around the decorated zone and is interrupted by other motives, consisting of panels containing opposed, “hatched” triangles and also a “herring-bone” motive. Both these latter motives are known from other British Cinerary Urns, although the last seems to be relatively rare.

The Ochiltree Urn is a good representative of an exceptionally interesting type. The ordinary “Hooped Urn”<sup>2</sup> is normally bucket-shaped and is not infrequently decorated with impressed or incised patterns, but the Ochiltree urn is distinguished from most members of this class by its multiplicity of cordons and its wide, rounded form, which recalls that of Food-Vessel pottery.

It has now to be accepted that Abercromby's evolutionary sequence of Bronze Age pottery, which derived the various types and forms one from another, may have little chronological significance; some forms of urns which are typologically late

1. Hon. J. Abercromby, *The Bronze Age Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1912, Vol. II, Pl. lxxvii, Nos. 179, 180, 180b.  
2. Abercromby, *op. cit.*, type 5.



have now been shown to be early in date.<sup>3</sup> It can no longer be stated with any confidence that urns like the Ochiltree example, which bear both impressed and "hooped" decoration, are the penultimate stage in the evolution of the true "Hooped Urn," which bore no decoration apart from a pair of "hoops."<sup>4</sup> Still less can we be sure that other urns, bearing both "hooped" and impressed or incised decoration, such as the urns from Llanddyfnan, Anglesey,<sup>5</sup> and Boulby, Yorkshire,<sup>6</sup> which seem to be intermediate between the "Collared Urn" and the "Hooped Urn" types, do in fact represent stages in the evolution of the latter out of the former.

The recent excavations at Lough Gur, Co. Limerick<sup>7</sup> have demonstrated that the domestic pottery was ornamented both with cordons of applied clay and with geometric patterns of impressed, twisted cords, in the Western Neolithic settlement on the site. Although the lower chronological limit of the settlement is not absolutely certain, some at least of this domestic ware must pre-date the appearance of Beakers and Food-Vessels on the site.

It is not improbable, then, that this urn represents a type of pottery which may well have its ultimate roots in the Western Neolithic tradition; there is, accordingly, no reason to assume that this type need not have evolved at an early date in the British Bronze Age. The complete absence of any associated finds with the Ochiltree urn prevents us from being more precise as to the actual date of this example.

3. I. F. Smith & J. J. Butler, *Razors, Urns and The Middle Bronze Age* (London University Institute of Archaeology Annual Report, 1956).
4. A. S. Robertson, *A Bronze Age Cinerary Urn from Kinstearry, Nairn* (Trans. Glasgow Arch. Soc., New Ser. XII, 1939, pp. 37-8).
5. R. E. M. Wheeler, *Prehistoric and Roman Wales*, 1925, pp. 188 ff., and Fig. 75.
6. T. D. Kendrick & C. F. C. Hawkes, *Archaeology in England and Wales, 1914-1931, 1932*, pp. 143-4 and Pl. xvi, 1.
7. S. P. O'Riordain, *Lough Gur Excavations* (Proc. Roy. Irish Acad., lvi, Section C, No. 5, 1954).