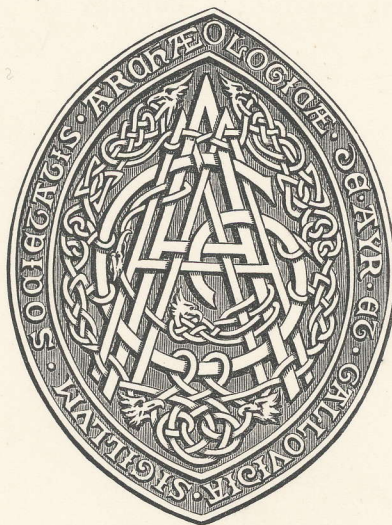


ARCHÆOLOGICAL  
AND  
HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS  
RELATING TO  
AYRSHIRE & GALLOWAY

VOL. VII.



EDINBURGH

PRINTED FOR THE AYRSHIRE AND GALLOWAY ARCHÆOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

MDCCCXCIV

1894

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## VII.

### TWO ANCIENT FIREPLACES AT SHEWALTON AND ARDEER.

“LEERGEBRANNT IST DIE STATTE.”

TO-DAY I visited the Shewalton Moor with Mr. Downs of Irvine, who, a few days ago, discovered, on the south side of the road, and towards the north-west part of the sandhills at Shewalton, what he had described to me as “an ancient fireplace.” When he first came to the spot there was a circular patch of dark-coloured sand which had been hoven up by the frost. This being so different from the surrounding sand, he began to scrape away the sand from the outside of the patch, when he found that there was a ring of stones. This was all that was done till we visited it together.

Leaving the outside ring of stones entire, we commenced to scrape away the dark-coloured sand from the centre of the patch, when we found that the stones were built in the form of a shallow basin two feet six inches in diameter. This basin we found to be filled with burnt sand, powdered charcoal (of wood), and branches of trees in the form of charcoal, and mixed through the whole were minute fragments of bones. Without disturbing the outer wall of stones we proceeded to dig into the centre of the structure, and found it to be built to the depth of fifteen inches entirely of stones. Below this depth the sand was found to be lying in its natural position. There can be no doubt that this curious structure had been used as an ancient fireplace, or more probably as an altar for sacrificial purposes, as Mr. Downs suggested. Unless it was used for the latter purpose it is difficult to understand why so much work should have been put upon it; and, taken in connection with the surroundings, the latter seems the more probable conjecture, as numerous fragments of urns are to be found all



round about the place, which seem to show that it had been built on a bit of sacred burial-ground. It had evidently not been much used, as the



FIG. 1.—Plan of Ancient Fireplace, Shewalton.

water-worn stones of which it was built showed little signs of having been roasted. They were “all about a size,” laid on their broadsides, and

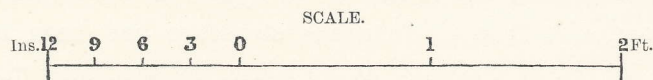
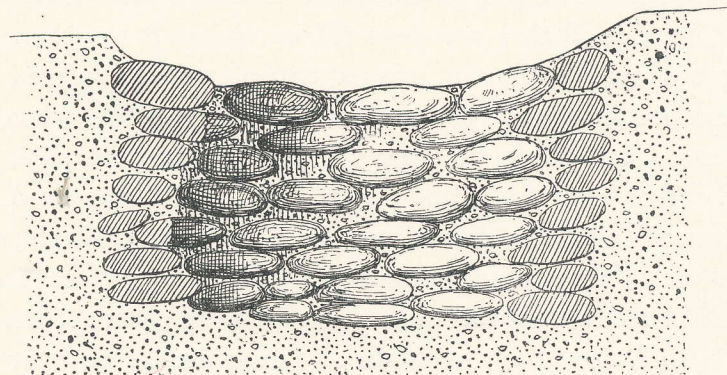


FIG. 2.—Section.

not cemented in any way. It was different with an ancient fireplace blown bare on Ardeer Sands about this time last year. It was much more simple



in construction than the Shewalton Moor one, being built of a single ring of water-worn stones, and had been used for a much longer period of time, as all the stones were completely roasted and broken by the heat. Like the Shewalton Moor one, all the fuel used for fire had been wood (branches).

During the progress of archæological discovery and investigation the remains of ancient fires and fireplaces, as well as the debris of conflagrations, occasionally turn up. Remains of fires were got in connection with the Ardrossan Shell-Mound<sup>1</sup>—a very ancient one. Mr. Cochran-Patrick discovered one in the Dalry Courthill, and another in the Hunterston Cave or rock-shelter. In the Lochlee Crannog Dr. Munro found a succession of fireplaces placed one over the other. In the Lake Dwellings of Switzerland the remains of fires are of frequent occurrence; and, strange as it may seem, many of the more delicate “finds,” such as the texture of cloth and wattle work, grains of wheat, apples, and such like substances, have owed their preservation to fire, for by a smothered combustion these substances have been converted into that all but indestructible (but by open fire) substance, charcoal. It seems to have been the fate of nearly all the Swiss Lake Dwellings to perish by fire—taken and destroyed, as some antiquarians think, by the enemies of their inhabitants, and during the conflagrations many thousands of ancient articles fell into the lakes, and were thus preserved for our study and instruction. During the Roman occupation of this country that people erected many altars, and a number of these have been found, all of sandstone, and are preserved. Some of them are of elaborate workmanship, as were many of the structures of that remarkable people, and very different from the humble and primitive one on Shewalton Moor. The Roman altars were often highly ornamented, and dedicated to some god or goddess. One found at Annandale, and preserved in the Edinburgh Antiquarian Museum, is, to make sure work, dedicated by Frumentius, a soldier of the second cohort of the Tungrians, to all the gods and goddesses.

JOHN SMITH.

MONKREDDING.

<sup>1</sup> *Collections*, p. 61.

