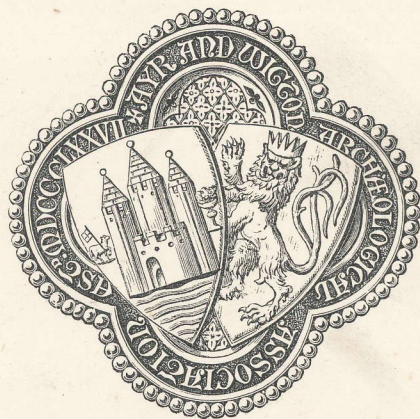


ARCHÆOLOGICAL
AND
HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS

RELATING TO THE COUNTIES OF

AYR AND WIGTON

VOL. III.



EDINBURGH

PRINTED FOR THE AYR AND WIGTON ARCHÆOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

MDCCCLXXXII

1882

Printed by R. & R. Clark

FOR

DAVID DOUGLAS, EDINBURGH.

III.

NOTICE OF EXCAVATIONS MADE ON AN ANCIENT "FORT" AT SEAMILL, AYRSHIRE.

FROM a little behind the town of Ardrossan there extends north-westward an elevated plateau, presenting towards the sea a steep escarpment, which overlooks a narrow strip of sandy soil lying between it and the beach. The geologist at once recognises here an ancient sea cliff, which, in the course of time, has become moulded into a succession of deep gullies, rounded knolls, bluff headlands, and occasionally overhanging cliffs of protruding sandstone strata, around which nature has thrown a variegated garb of the richest vegetation. Some of these knolls, which are merely portions of the table-land that have resisted the denuding agency of the streams that trickle through the gullies, have been converted at some former period, no doubt on account of their isolated and commanding situation, into a series of forts, but as to the period of their occupancy or the military exigencies that necessitated their erection, both history and tradition are entirely silent. The following reference to them I quote from the *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. v. page 257 :—

"Along the steep banks facing the sea-beach are placed a chain of little round eminences called "Castlehill," supposed to be the remains of a very primitive class of fortlets. They stand at unequal distances, apparently as suitableness of situation offered—some scarcely half a mile, others a mile and a half apart. In particular, they occur at Boydston, Glenhead, Seamill, and Ardneil. They are all constructed in the same manner, and are of very limited dimensions. A portion of the bank is detached on all sides and rounded conically; the enclosure on the summit, of about 30 or 40 feet in diameter, is surrounded by a rampart from 6 to 8 feet in thickness, faced on both sides with large undressed stones neatly laid, the interstice being filled up with small stones intermixed with earth. That at Ardneil stands on a finely isolated eminence called Auldhill, and in front of the enclosure or prætorium there is an esplanade of 46 or 50 paces in length, very exactly formed and

levelled. Something similar exists at Seamill,¹ but the rest are confined to the circular rampart alone.

"Near the Castlehill, at Seamill, about four years ago (1833), whilst the new line of the coast road was being executed, two entire urns of this sort were dug out in a stratum of gravel about 3 feet below the surface, but without the addition of any mound being raised over them. One of these, it is believed, has since been deposited in Anderson's Institution in Glasgow. These urns were formed of coarse red clay, of very rude manufacture, yet well proportioned, and modelled in the vase form. In hardening the fire appears to have been applied solely to the inside of the urn, that part being changed to a dark colour, whilst the outside remains of the natural red."

Mr. H. F. Weir of Kirkhall supposes the fort at Seamill to be the "Stronge Fort" referred to by Pont as near the chapel or early church of West Kilbride, "Kilbryde Kirke, a Perochiall Church, seatted in a fertille soyle, neir to wich anciently wes ther a stronge forte." That an early population existed on the low ground near the fort, requiring a chapel, Mr. Weir thinks probable, from the place-names in the neighbourhood, such as Chapelhouse, Chapelton, etc., from the finding of the ancient urns above mentioned, and from a recent discovery near the same place of human bodies enclosed in coffins made of flagstones, and lying at full length with the feet pointing eastward.

Owing to the obscurity which thus surrounds the origin and history of these forts, the investigation of them became an object of importance to the Ayrshire and Wigtonshire Archæological Association; and, accordingly, the Secretary, Mr. Cochran-Patrick, M.P., having a few days to spare last summer, made arrangements with the proprietor, the Earl of Eglinton, to have one of them explored. The one selected was that at Seamill, situated on a green mound about a hundred yards north of the high road from Ardrossan, and close to a small stream which meanders through the picturesque little glen extending between it and the village of West Kilbride. In response to the invitation of the Secretary a numerous party of ladies and gentlemen, amongst whom were the Hon. G. R. Vernon, Captain Boyle, the late Rev. Dr. Boyd, Dr. Macdonald, etc., interested in archæological research, together with a gang of workmen, met on the spot, all intent on eliciting from the dumb mound some scraps of its forgotten story. Before my arrival systematic operations had made considerable progress. Some were minutely examining the stuff thrown out of the

¹ A few years ago, an opening being made in the ground outside of the rampart at Seamill, a considerable quantity of charcoal of wood, bones of cattle, and deers' horns, some of which appeared to have

been *sawn asunder*, were found a few feet below the surface, the materials of the wall having fallen down over the place.

FORT AT SEAMILL.

REFERENCE SHEET TO PLAN AND SECTIONS.

A A. Entrance to that part of Fort evidently used as a dwelling ; paved with flat stones, sloping outwards. "Socket stone" of door or gate found at inner A, in line of S.W. side wall.

B B. An older and to appearance an abandoned entrance. When opened up sides found to be built like A A. Above a pavement of coarser stones. Quantities of bones, horns, whelk and limpet shells dug out.

C C C. Space between double ramparts dug into at several places. Well down below surface. Quantities of shells, horns, and bones found. The same found on digging outside the ramparts on S.W. side.

D D D D. Line of rampart from N.W. corner round to entrance A. The dotted lines show where earth slips had carried away rampart at three places.

E E. Foundation of a cross wall built of stones, traced below surface 5 feet broad.

F F. A row of stones at the foot of earth slope to wall E E. Space outside this row of stones and within ramparts dug into at several places. Nothing found. N.W. corner when dug into showed rich black earth or "mould." At N.W. corner large stones were found under the surface, evidently placed to form an inlet and outlet between double ramparts and open space of fort.

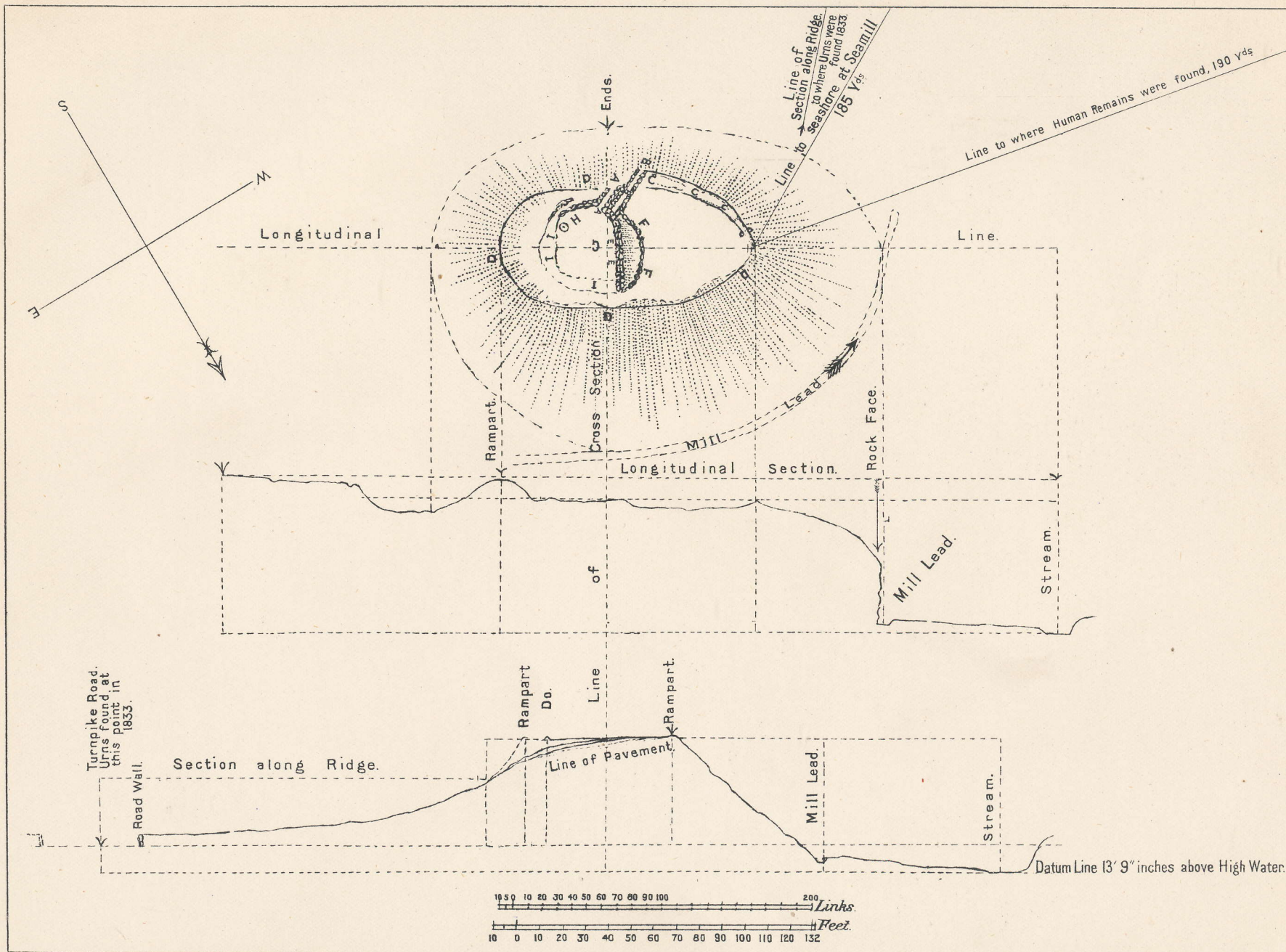
G. Area of apparent dwelling, bounded by the cross wall E E and by the other wall east of entrance A. The largest half of the S.W. area paved with flat stones same as entrance A, sloping also outwards. In the other smaller half small stones were used, beat into the soil very close.

H. Fireplace of dwelling. Subsoil burned all round. Three feet wide ; same in depth.

I I I I. Space between pavement of dwelling and foot of rampart.

Note.—No trace of any "well of water" found within area of fort. Water may have been got from the stream by dipping over the rock below N.W. corner, in the same way as from a draw-well, by rope and bucket.

H. F. W.



FORT AT SEA MILL.

trenches; others, with military experience, were studying the remains of the surrounding ramparts; whilst Mr. Cochran-Patrick and the laird of Kirkhall were busily occupied in taking the necessary measurements for the accompanying plans and sections. Though a complete tyro in the exploration of military forts, I soon fell in with the enthusiasm of the party, and, after a hasty inspection of the finds and general plan of proceedings, found occupation for my hands and eyes alongside the relic-hunters. It was a most lovely day, one of the finest the month of May 1880 produced. With all these advantages the explorations made rapid progress, and the only regret we have now to record is that the Rev. Dr. Boyd has not been spared to give a more detailed account of the proceedings, to whom this duty had been assigned.

The excavations were continued for about a week, and several trenches dug at different parts of the enclosure. During the operations two objects were steadily kept in view, viz.—

(1.) The determination of the nature and mode of structure of the fort; and (2.) The collection of relics and animal remains.

Structure of Fort.—On this head there is not much to be recorded. The oval contour of the mound appeared to have supplied the only design of the form of the ramparts. On the side looking to the sea there were two walls, an outer and an inner, about 5 or 6 feet thick, and only a few yards apart, which coalesced into one at the north-western apex (see plan). On the north side the bank was very steep, and hardly any remains of a wall were seen. Between the mound and the projecting ridge from the mainland there was a hollow, overlooking which there still remained a considerable portion of what appeared to have been the strongest and thickest part of the rampart. In the construction of these surrounding walls large undressed stones were used, without any cementing element, and the interstices were filled with smaller stones and earth. A wall along the shorter axis of the enclosure divided it into two unequal parts, the smaller of which, that next the rising ridge from the mainland, was found, upon clearing out a large quantity of débris and stones from the fallen walls, to have been partly paved with stones. The stuff lying over the area of this rude pavement was nearly all trenched over, in the course of which were found abundance of charcoal and ashes, bones, horns, sea-shells, and all the following relics, except the hammer-stone, which was dug up near the centre of the outer enclosure.

RELICS.

I.—OBJECTS MADE OF STONE.

Hammer-stone.—This is a flat oval sandstone pebble, $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, and showing the usual markings at both ends.

Globular Ball.—An artificially rounded ball of hard stone, smooth, and almost a perfect sphere, except at one spot, where it is slightly flattened as if by rubbing. Its axis is $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch.

Polisher.—Portion of a circular polisher, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, made of friable mica-schist. Bit of sandstone, with a groove, as if for sharpening a pointed tool.

Quern.—Two fragments of an upper quern stone, made of granite, one of which contains the handle hole.

Spindle Whorl.—A thin portion of cannel coal, 1 inch in diameter, irregularly circular, and perforated in centre like a very light spindle whorl (Fig. 1).

Cannel Coal.—Several portions of cannel coal, some smooth and polished as if water-worn, and others having artificial markings; one, evidently a splinter, shows a circular edge at one side, indicating a diameter of about 5 inches; another similar fragment, but of smaller dimensions; and a third has half a small circle cut out of one side.

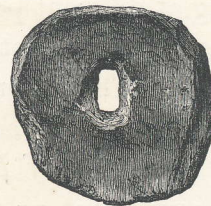


FIG. 1.
Shale Spindle Whorl.

II.—OBJECTS MADE OF BONE.

Pointed Implement.—This is made of the splinter of a leg bone, 5 inches long, and pointed at one end as if used as a borer.

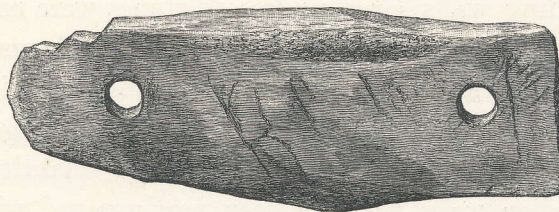


FIG. 2.—Bone Implement.

Fig. 2 represents portion of a bone cut by a sharp instrument, having one surface flat and the other slightly rounded and polished. It is pierced at each end by a hole with an interval of 2 inches.

III.—OBJECTS MADE OF METAL.

Iron.—A few fragmentary bits, from 2 to 4 inches long, but so much oxidised that only traces of the metal now remain. One looks like the front half of the blade of a knife, another has a round hole at one end, a third is part of a tapering tube like the socket of a spear, and the others might have been portions of a spear or dagger.

Bronze or Brass.—Fig. 3 represents a well-finished object, covered with verdigris. It consists of a short ornamental stem, ending in a circular loop at one end, and riveted at the other to the centre of a flat wheel. This wheel is $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter, and has a triangularly shaped

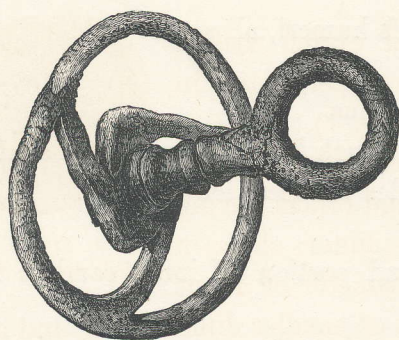


FIG. 3.—Bronze Object.

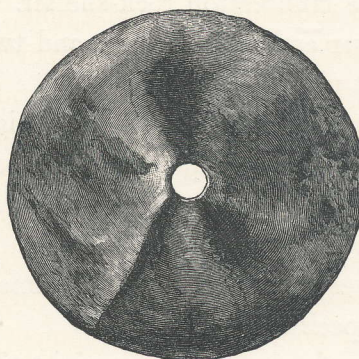


FIG. 4.—Bronze Disc.

nave, from which three curved and equidistant spokes radiate to the circumference or rim. One half of this wheel appears to have been wrenched inwards, and the other outwards, causing the twisted appearance it now has.

Perforated Disc.—A thin circular disc, $1\frac{7}{8}$ inch in diameter (Fig. 4). Three small fragments of a thin plate, very much corroded.

IV.—MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTS.

Glass.—Two small fragments of green glass.

Pottery.—A small bit of reddish pottery, showing, but very faintly, three parallel lines.

R. MUNRO..

REPORT ON ANIMAL REMAINS FOUND AT SEAMILL FORT.

Ox.—Two specimens of base of core of left horn, with portion of frontal bone, having the characters of *Bos longifrons*.

Left molar, etc., and right intermaxillary, with portion of maxillary attached.

Three right condyles of lower jaw, of small transverse diameter (two of them $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch, the other $1\frac{3}{4}$), one of the smaller with a coronoid process attached, measuring $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length, and $1\frac{1}{4}$ from before backwards at base.

Two smaller coronoid processes of the same strong shape.

Portions of small right scapulæ and one left, all of them similar to those from the Hunterston rock-shelter.

Lower ends of one right and two left humeri, all small.

Left ulna, small.

Ununited lower epiphysis of right radius.

A right metacarpal $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, 1 inch broad at middle of shaft.

Two first phalanges, short and slender for their length.

Two right acetabula, small.

Lower half of left femur, small, and portion of inner condyle from a larger specimen.

Lower end of a slender right tibia.

Three astragali, one left and two right.

A left scapho-cuboid bone.

The lower part of a metatarsal, similar in size to the metacarpal.

A large number of molar teeth, with some portions of upper and lower jaws, and some doubtful fragments.

A portion of left humerus, a right os calcis, and a right radius, appear to belong to a calf.

Deer.—Root and brow antler; two patinate portions, one of them breaking up into three branches, and other smaller portions of what may have been one horn. It is the "crowned hart," described by Owen, *Cervus (Strongyloceros) elaphus*. See *British Fossil Mammals and Birds*, p. 472.

Two right astragali of different sizes, the smaller much the heavier.

Lower half of left metacarpal.

Upper halves of right and left metatarsal.

A right fibula.

A terminal phalanx.

Four detached femoral heads, three of them marked with instruments, viz., one of them presenting a bore more than half an inch deep and $\frac{1}{6}$ inch diameter, another showing nearly half the diameter of a similar bore, and a third with a short score of the same breadth.

The antler is $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches in circumference at base, and has been cut with instruments in various places.

Pig.—Large portions of upper and lower jaw with teeth, mostly of an old individual, with some teeth and a portion of lower jaw of a younger individual.

Right ulna, lower half of right tibia, from an old individual.

Seventh cervical vertebra.

Part of left pelvic bone.

Portion of fibula.

Bits of rib.

A small scapula.

Seven metacarpal and metatarsal bones and two phalanges, some of them thoroughly adult, others with ununited epiphysis wanting.

Two small fragments of rib and a portion of femur, may be from a sucking pig.

Portion of shaft of left femur, rather small, but not very young looking.

Sheep.—Left lower jaw, incomplete.

Portions of right and left lower jaw of a smaller individual.

Right intermaxillary, very small.

A few separate molar teeth.

Seventh cervical, and a body of a dorsal vertebra.

A small scapula, incomplete.

Lower end of left tibia and a portion of a metatarsal, both belonging to the slender sheep found in other Ayrshire deposits; as also does the lower end of a right humerus.

The lower end of a left humerus is of thicker build, and may have belonged to a goat, the two posterior ridges of the condyles being parallel.

Various ribs.

Shells.—*Littorina littorea*, portion of a *trochus*, *Patella vulgata*, portions of valve of *Pecten maximus* and of *Ostrea edulis*.

J. CLELAND.