

EXCAVATIONS OF HISTORIC SITES AT MUIRKIRK

Legend of Map of Muirkirk District Showing Archaeological Sites

1. Hut Circle near Wardlaw Hill at Shiel Burn
2. Hut Circle near Wardlaw Hill between Knowehead and High Wood
3. Hut Circle near Wardlaw Hill between Knowehead and High Wood
4. Cremation Burial Cairn at Wetherhill near Ponesk
5. Cairn Site near Linburn
6. Cairn Site near Linburn
7. Cairn Site near Shiel Burn
8. Cairn Site near Cameron's Monument
9. Cairn Site at Rineknowe near Wellwood
10. Cairn Site at Marchhouse
11. Cairn Site at Netherwood near Polkeburn Burn
12. Cairn Site at Wardlaw
13. Ancient Mote at Castlehill near Hole Burn
14. Bronze Age Site at Blackside
15. Stone Age Hut near Cameron's Monument
16. Hut Circle at Junction of River Ayr and Greenock Water
17. Hut Remains at Shielburn
18. Hut Remains at Shielburn
19. Hut Remains at Shielburn
20. Mediaeval Homestead at Aikler Burn
21. Eleven Hut Foundations at Slackshaw Burn
22. Oblong Hut near Sanquhar Bridge
23. Two Enclosures at Netherwood
24. Hut Foundations at Middlefield Law
25. Hut Foundations at Middlefield Law
26. Ancient Kiln at at Lamon Burn
27. Enclosures at Grasshill Ridge near Priesthill
28. Enclosure at Ponesk Glen
29. Dwelling at Ponesk Glen
30. Priesthill, occupied by John Brown, Covenanter.

NOTES ON EXCAVATIONS OF PRE-HISTORIC AND LATER SITES AT MUIRKIRK 1913—1927

BY
ARCHIBALD FAIRBAIRN, F.S.A.A.Scot

From the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
Session 1926—1927

Reprinted from James Taylor's Book,
CAITNTABLE ECHOES

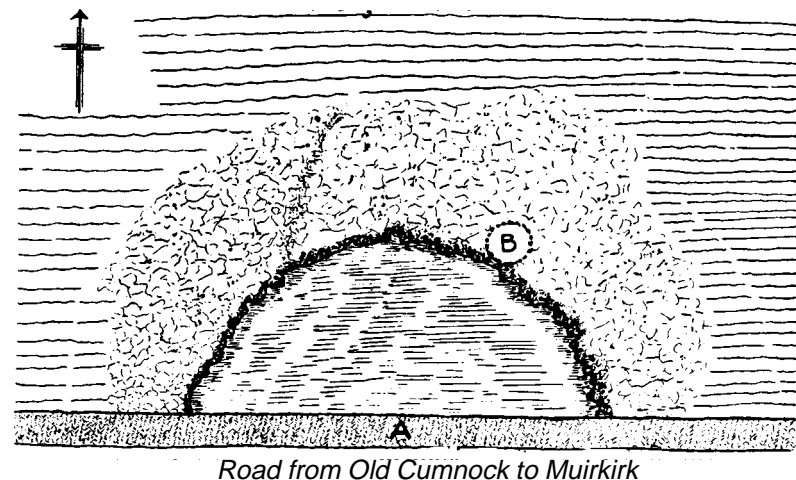
solemn occasion would demand a sure and speedy means of setting alight the funeral pile. The quantity of black ashes which, on discovery, filled the incense cup, suggests that this vessel may have been used to convey smouldering material from the burning hearth to the funeral pyre, the vessel being finally included within the cinerary urn, as a sepulchral rite.

The cinerary urn (fig. 2), which measures $13 \frac{3}{16}$ inches in height, $10 \frac{1}{2}$ to $11 \frac{1}{8}$ inches in diameter at the mouth, $11 \frac{5}{8}$ inches at the bulge, and $4 \frac{1}{4}$ inches across the base, is of dark brown colour, and has a heavy overhanging rim with a straight upright neck beneath, bordered at its junction with the tapering lower part by a slight cordon. The lip, which is sharply bevelled downwards on the interior, is decorated by a zig-zag pattern, and the broad overhanging rim by reversed triangles hatched with alternate parallel lines and bordered at top and bottom by double marginal transverse lines, all impressed with what seems to have been a thin cord wrapped round a core. The neck bears impressions of a round, blunt-ended, wooden or bone implement applied obliquely, and round the lower margin is a row of small narrow loops, the curved end upwards, formed by the impression of a twisted cord. On the encircling cordon is a row of impressions similar to those on the neck.

The incense cup (fig. 3), which measures $1 \frac{15}{16}$ inch in height, $2 \frac{1}{2}$ inches diameter at the mouth, $3 \frac{3}{8}$ inches at the bulge, and $1 \frac{5}{8}$ inches across the base, is buff coloured with a tinge of red in places. In shape it is like two truncated cones placed base to base. Round the rim are two transverse incised lines and the wall is irregularly pierced at the widest part by eighteen small perforations.

The bronze awl (fig. 4) which measures $1 \frac{2}{3}$ inch in length, has a thin, flat, spatulate tang, and the bone pin (fig. 4) which is $7 \frac{3}{8}$ inches in length, is pointed and rounded at one end, and broken across about one-third from the thick end.

Fig. I
Plan of Denuded Cairn near Marchhouse



taken up and the ground underneath carefully trenched over, when it was seen that the construction had been laid down on a very poor and shallow soil overlying the sand.

At point "B" indicated on the plan, and underneath the part of the cairn where there were most stones, the discoloration of the soil led to the discovery of a small pit which had been dug in the sand, and which contained a rich deposit of burnt wood charcoal, intermixed with small fragments of incinerated bone. Possibly this was the method adopted for the disposal of the residue of the cremated ashes of the body, but there was absolutely no trace of the cremation having taken place on the spot, neither over any part of the base of the cairn nor underneath it.

In view of the importance of the find of the complete urn and its accompanying relics, the following particulars, gleaned on the spot, may be of interest.

The snowy whiteness of the burnt osseous fragments emptied from the cinerary urn was most noticeable, rivalling the description of the cremated remains of Hector. There were very few, not more than eight to ten fragments of burnt wood charcoal associated with the deposit, showing how carefully the ashes of the body had been gathered from amongst the cooled charcoal of the funeral fire.

The separate deposit of char, mixed with minute fragments of incinerated bone, found buried under the cairn strengthens the idea of methodical care, combined with sympathetic feeling, suggested by even the minor details.

Because of the problematical meaning and use of these diminutive urns, called "Incense Cups," found on rare occasions within, or associated with, cinerary urns, it is unfortunate that this one, otherwise in a perfect condition, should have been emptied of its contents before a minute examination had been made. I am, however, indebted to Mr James Neilson, who emptied both cinerary urn and incense cup, for the following details regarding the latter, and the position it occupied within the cinerary urn. The incense cup had been placed on the ground mouth upwards. It was filled with fine black ashes and a sprinkling of a white material, in small particles, presumably collected from the incinerated bone deposit which had been heaped over it within the urn. The bone pin was found in a vertical position, one end inserted into the contents of the incense cup and other projecting several inches above its mouth. The bronze awl had also been placed within the incense cup, where it was found.

It is noteworthy that the pointed end of the bronze awl exactly fitted all the eighteen holes pierced through the widest part of the incense cup, while the flattened end of the pin fitted equally well the two circular grooves ornamenting its rim.

It is also worthy of note, that the incense cup was not used in this interment as an urn to contain cremated remains, and it is a matter of interest to inquire into the meaning of the perforations encircling it. Fire-vessels, ancient and modern, temporary and otherwise, have perforations constructed or pierced in them for the indraught of air to assist combustion. The means of fire-raising, in remote times, must have been both slow and uncertain, and a fire once kindled would then, as now, in outlying districts, be carefully attended and kept burning, for convenience if necessary; as a shepherd conveys a smouldering peat to set alight the heather. When such an important ceremony as a cremation burial had to be carried out, the

NOTES ON EXCAVATIONS OF PRE-HISTORIC AND LATER SITES AT MUIRKIRK 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 smallest beginnings of the Ayr have their source. On the west the prospect is wide open, across the whole width of the county, following the river, to the sea. The hills and moorland 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, archaeology 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 tree-less 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 archaeological 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 archaeological 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 ornamental 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 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.

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 mediaeval 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 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

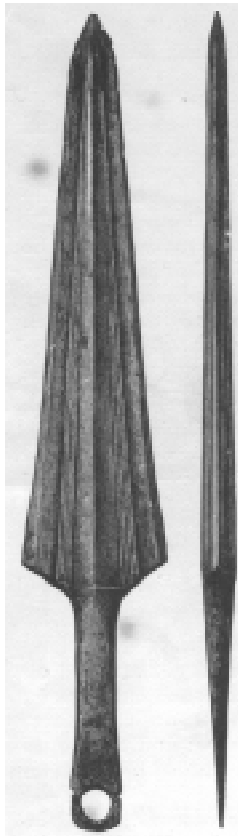


Fig. 1. Bronze Spear-head from Whitehaugh Moss.

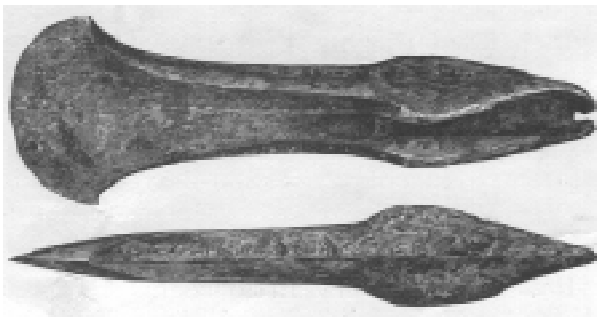


Fig. 2. Flanged Bronze Axe from West Glenbuck

amongst the loose soil fallen from the cutting and within a few feet from the urn burial, a fragment of pottery showing part of the undecorated rim of a different vessel. A thorough search of the whole site was decided upon, and carried out under the personal supervision of Major and Mrs Broun Lindsay. With the concurrence of the tenant farmer, a trial trench of 27 feet long and 7 feet wide was opened in the field, parallel with the road cutting and passing within 3 feet of the spot where the first discovery was made. Throughout there was an average depth of 3½ feet of fine loam overlying sand, and the whole was carefully examined to a depth of 5½ feet to clean undisturbed strata, without any further trace of urns being found.

Near the end of the trench on the west side a setting of stones, 8½ feet wide, was encountered and laid bare. Leaving the inner and outer margin of this setting intact, the centre portion was removed and the ground examined underneath, without resulting in any further discovery of relics. The stones continued into the field at a depth of 2 feet below the surface, and they were followed far enough to ascertain their direction and to expose the arrangement of the margin. It was apparent that the setting took the form of a wide circle. There was no evidence of stones on the freshly ploughed surface of the field, nor any unevenness of the ground, to suggest a construction underneath, but by probing deeply the stones could be felt sufficiently well to enable a circle to be traced.

The application of the measuring-tape across the diameter of the mapped-out circle, from east to west, and parallel with the roadway, proved at once that the urn burial ("A," fig. 1) occupied the exact centre of a circle 47 feet in diameter, the southern half of which had been demolished by the construction of the original roadway.

The excavation now proceeded with a view to exposing, perhaps, an enclosing wall, or the base of a protecting cairn. The chief difficulty lay in the disposal of the soil, and this was overcome by wheeling it off the area altogether, and by following up the outer margin first as a guide.

The accompanying plan, prepared by Major Broun Lindsay, D.S.O., accurately illustrates the construction found underneath the ploughing, and what is probably the remains of the base of a round cairn of the Bronze Age.

Midway between the surface and the inner margin of the south-west side of the cairn-base, several fragments of a cinerary urn corresponding to the fragment already referred to were found, and associated with them, a good sprinkling of burn bones. At the same time, a similar fragment was found projecting from the upper soil of the road-cutting, 12 feet distant. All had the appearance of having been broken long ago, and were much overgrown with fibrous roots.

It was evident that the early roadmakers in cutting through the cairn, had broken and scattered with its contents, a thickly made cinerary urn with a plain rim, and had removed the central portion of the cairn covering the urn with the decorated rim; the modern road improvers also missed this vessel by a narrow margin in cutting out the gradient.

The interior of the area was examined carefully, as well as the upper part of the stony marginal base of the cairn, which in the higher parts the plough had somewhat damaged, and which still measured from 8½ feet to 14 feet wide, but with disappointing results. The cairn-base within the margin of stones was next

ACCOUNT OF THE DISCOVERY OF A CINERARY URN WITH OTHER RELICS NEAR MARCHHOUSE MUIRKIRK

By ARCHIBALD FAIRBAIRN, F.S.A.Scot

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On the 29th of January, 1924, a decorated cinerary urn, containing burnt bones and other relics, was recovered from the right bank of the public road leading from Muirkirk to Cumnock, at a point $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Muirkirk and 120 yards east of Marchhouse, a cottage situated on the roadside. The site of the find is the crest of a natural sandhill, over which the road takes its course (fig. 1), and where, quite recently, the steep gradient was cut out and the road lowered widened to meet the requirements of modern traffic. The workmen at the time of the road improvement saw no signs of an internment, and it was on the date mentioned that Mr James Neilson, the road contractor, carrying out some repairs on the spot, noticed that the sand which had fallen from the bank by action of frost and thaw had exposed the urn in question. Information of the discovery was speedily brought to me, which I conveyed to Major and Mrs Broun Lindsay of Wellwood, and when we arrived on the scene we found that the urn had already been removed from the bank, emptied of its contents, and deposited on the roadside.

A careful scrutiny revealed no further trace of urns that day, but 12 feet west of, and on the same level as, the urn burial—which was 5 feet from the present surface—I found embedded in the dark coloured sand of the cutting two unburnt bones, much decayed and very fragile.

It was noticeable from the discoloration of the filling-in that the urn had been buried in the sand, but how far below the prehistoric ground-level depended on the amount of turf, now converted into fine loam, accumulated there from the original road cutting. From the depth of soil ascertained later in the exploration of the site, the cinerary urn had probably been buried about 2 feet deep, and there was no evidence that it had ever been contained within a cist. The urn, on discovery, was in an inverted position, covering a large deposit of burnt bones, and containing as well a small urn of the incense-cup type, an unburnt bone pin polished and pointed at one end, a bronze awl pointed at one end and flattened at the other, and an unworked flake of radiolarian chert.

We took charge of the urn in its soft condition, and also of its contents, and after careful drying and hardening the whole was deposited in the care of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

On making a minute examination of the site the following day, I picked up from

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 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 mediaeval 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-

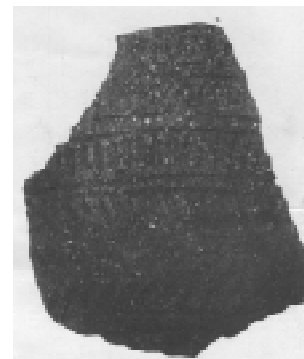


Fig. 4. Fragment of Beaker from Hut Circle
No.1

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



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

described in the *Proceedings*, vol. xlviii. 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. 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 mediaeval homestead has been discovered and excavated only a short distance to the south-east, 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 for drying grain in the straw. It is probable also that the cobbled hut-circle floor found in 1913, on which the green, glazed, mediaeval 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.

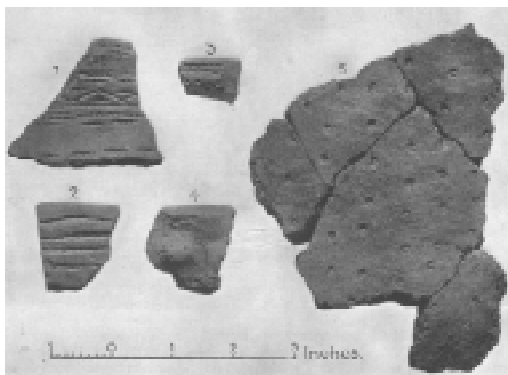


Fig. 6. Fragments of Pottery from Hut-circle No. 2.

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 was described in the *Proceedings*, vol. li. p. 24.

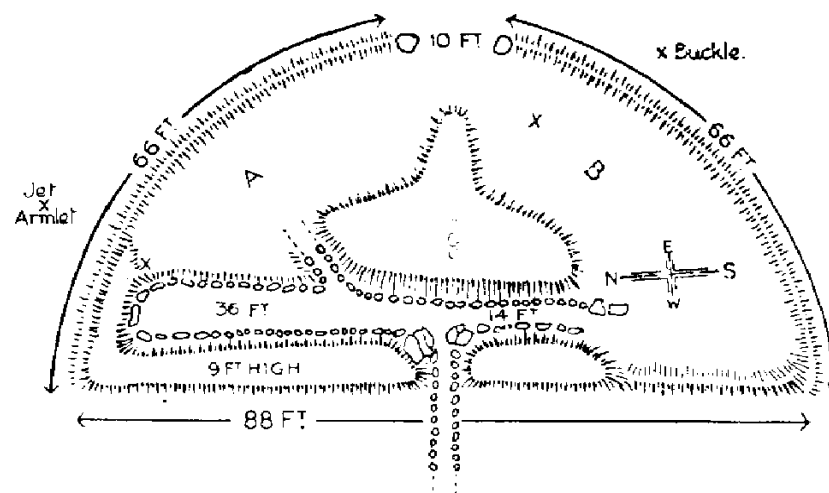
This round cairn of the Bronze Age (No. 4) lies on the summit of a green knoll and is surrounded on all sides by peat moss. It was formed over an outcrop of dolerite rock, on which the body had previously been burned. The excavation of the cairn yielded a food vessel (fig. 8) and a cinerary urn (fig. 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 *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,

comparison, and almost free from black residue, and, while they contained charcoal, there was no visible evidence of burnt bone. The smooth (comparatively speaking) clay-covered floor, however, is analogous with two such floors in local hut-circles, on both of which fragments of decorated and undecorated Bronze Age pottery have recently been discovered. On noticeable feature of this site is the absence of stony debris. The original construction may have been for the greater part formed of turf, otherwise the stones forming a hut-circle, with its accompanying embankment, must have been very completely removed.

Fig. 1.

PLAN OF AN EARTHWORK IN THE PARISH OF MUIRKIRK



excavated in the rock, and both containing flint chips. A small water-worn stone, showing a ring of abrasions round its edge, possibly from use in fabricating flints, was discovered near the deposits, as well as a rubbing stone, associated no doubt with the saddle quern.

From the numerous fragments of hard water-worn stone found throughout the mound, as well as from larger pieces with portions flaked off them, it was obvious that the early inhabitants of the site had made liberal use of this material so easily obtained in the neighbourhood. That the site had been occupied in early times by a race who had chipped out their weapons and implements of stone on the spot, was clearly evident, but the later mediaeval reconstruction had, unfortunately, removed all trace above ground of the early form of dwelling.

Nothing further was done until some time ago, when the writer made an effort to examine the remaining portions of both enclosures, particularly that marked "A" on plan, where the extra depth of soil, it was hoped, might have preserved any relics underneath. Here, under the deep accumulation of soil from the ruins of the inner wall, and on a layer of clay spread on the rock, and still presenting a particularly smooth surface, were found several large fragments of hand-made undecorated pottery of the Bronze Age. In close association with the potshreds were several small water-worn pebbles, which had evidently been subjected to intense heat and had become split in consequence. The pottery fragments were, no doubt, part of a Bronze Age cooking-pot, which accounts for the presence of the heat-cracked pot-boilers on the floor. The clay-covered floor was liberally strewn and stained with wood charcoal on a space about 5 feet square, which was carefully yet quite easily followed. Unfortunately, all trace of this floor was lost inwards, on the ground disturbed by the last users of the site. Underneath a portion of the inner wall of the ewe bught, and among the lower soil, was discovered a large segment of what had been a magnificent jet armlet, probably dating to the first few centuries of this era. Although only a length of $2\frac{7}{8}$ inches survive, it had measured about 5 inches in external and $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches in internal diameter when complete. The ring, which is of triangular section with slightly convex sides, measures $15/16$ inch in breadth and $13/16$ inch in thickness.

In this section also, but nearer the surface, were found a small silver button, ornamented with concentric circles, and a small portion of a whetstone.

In the enclosure marked "B" on the plan, where the soil is very shallow, a brass shoe-buckle, probably of eighteenth-century origin, was recovered.

It will be gathered that the relics, though few in number, are sufficiently characteristic to indicate various periods for the occupation of this site. The fragments of Bronze Age pottery, pot-stones, hammer-stone, and flints are referable to the earliest occupation; while in succession we have the jet armlet and saddle quern probably indicating an Early Iron Age occupation, glazed potshreds pointing to a mediaeval occupation, and, finally, the brass shoe-buckle and silver button suggesting an eighteenth-century occupation.

The unsolved enigma, and herein lies one of the charms of archaeology, are the deposits within the excavated circular cavities underneath the mound. They do not quite compare with the cooking-holes recently discovered within Bronze Age hut-circles in the district, although it must be admitted that the hard strata in which they were formed may account for their want of depth. They were clean in

containing a cremation burial, along with a great quantity of charcoal of wood in unusually large fragments. Two worked knives, one of flint 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.

The next cairn (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 margins of Ayr 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 Rineknowe, 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 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

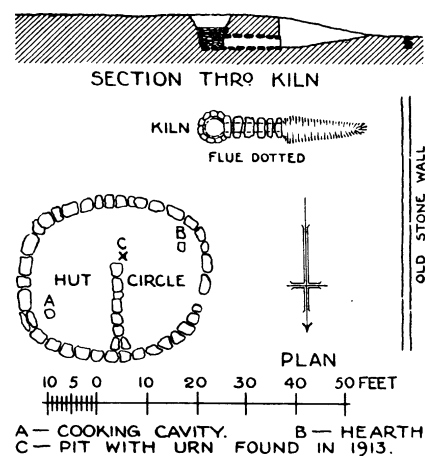


Fig 7. Plan of Hut-circle No. 2 and Kiln

only a short distance north-west from the last and slightly to the east of Marchhouse. This was described in the Proceedings, vol. lviii, p. 333. A cinerary urn of large size (fig 10), ornamented, and with broad overhanging rim, was discovered 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), 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 3/8 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 burial, a shallow pit in the sand contained a large deposit of charcoal 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 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.

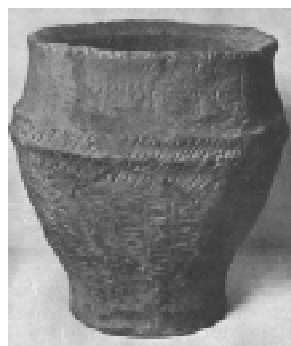


Fig. 8. Food-vessel from Cairn on Wetherhill

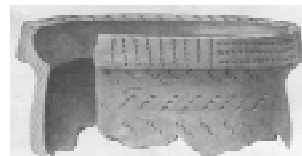


Fig. 9. Cinerary Urn from Cairn on Wetherhill

There were indications of a double setting of stones leading from this bught into the circular enclosure on the north side of the mound—the foundations, no doubt, of a connecting passage. There is ample evidence that the soil had been cleared from the bught, and that, when in use, the floor was the native clay-band rock. The enclosing fail dykes, continuing from the ends of the 88-foot embankment, are each 66 feet in length; both swing round towards the east, ending against large boulder stones, and leaving an opening 10 feet wide, convenient for use as an entrance into either enclosure.

Should the arrangement of the structure be referable to ewe-milking practices, a glance at the accompanying plan will show that the ewes could be driven through a shedding gate in the 10-foot opening to one enclosure, pass through the milking bught, and out into the other enclosure. Doubtless this was the use the structure was put to as we see the ruins of it to-day; all with the exception of the mound of earth which, though it conveniently forms a division between the two enclosures, seems to be out of place within the precincts of a sheepfold.

The fact that 60 yards north-west from the structure a never-failing spring runs clearly from under the visible roots of a prehistoric oak is a now treeless district, suggested a more human element, and that the whole site was worthy of exploration. A strip of ground was trenched over within the enclosure facing north (marked A on plan) and the excavation carried into the central mound. Part of the upper soil had fallen from the decayed turf wall, but underneath this many chips of flint, chert, and water-worn stone were found mixed with the lower soil. The upper soil of the central mound contained numerous fragments of clay-band rock, suggesting that the repeated cleaning and scrapings of the bught and passages had been thrown over it. Under the turf, near the top of the mound, a small glazed vessel of light red ware and curved rim was discovered, while lower down several fragments of thick, glazed, mediaeval pottery were recovered from the soil. At about 3 feet above ground level the greater part of a saddle quern was discovered set on end, and face inwards, within the mound. It measures 16 inches in length and 27 inches in breadth, the hollow part being 18 inches in diameter and 3½ inches deep. Here the soil was fine, rich, and dark coloured, and under the closest scrutiny almost every spadeful was found to contain minute chips of flint and chert. Slightly under this level a row of ten stones was brought to light, all set on edge and in line over the lower base of the mound. These were carefully removed and laid aside in the formation in which they were found. The soil underneath continued dark in colour, and it was quite strewn with chips of flint; one or two worked but imperfect flints were recovered.

Immediately underneath the row of stones, and below the original ground level, in the centre of the mound, three small heaps of a whitish clay-like substance were laid bare. The heaps lay close together in a line running east and west, and the middle one, the largest, was marked with a square-shaped stone on the top. This deposit was carefully examined, and the light-coloured substance composing it, which had an adhesive feeling, was found to be plentifully mixed with wood charcoal. The deposit was contained within a circular cavity, 18 inches in diameter and 6 inches deep, which had been picked out of the soft clay-band rock. On the bottom of the cavity lay a finely worked flint scraper and several flakes of dark-coloured flint. The lesser heaps contained a similar substance intermixed with charcoal, both deposits being also within circular cavities

THE EXCAVATION OF A PREHISTORIC AND MEDIAEVAL SITE NEAR BLACKSIDE, MUIRKIRK

By ARCHIBALD FAIRBAIRN, F.S.A.Scot

From the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
1925—1926

The site under review, situated within the Parish of Muirkirk, at Whitefield, a short distance northeast of Blackside and north of the road leading to Priesthill had in times past been called by local people "The Roman Camp." It is not uncommon in pastoral districts to ascribe to Roman times mysterious mediaeval remains, probably formed in greater part by the dexterous use of the flauchterspade in the early days of ewe bughts, ewe milking, and the building of feal dykes. The structure, prominently situated on rising ground, is easily noticeable on the skyline, and this, along with the finding of part of a flint implement or weapon in the vicinity many years ago, may have given rise to the local tradition.

The excavation of the site was commenced in the autumn of 1913 by the late Col. J. G. A. Baird, F.S.A. Scot., proprietor of the Muirkirk estate, and the writer. The structure seemed curiously planned (Fig. 1), and it presented at first an enigma as to its probable age and use. Two quadrant-shaped areas adjacent to each other are enclosed by fail dykes or turf walling, and are separated in the centre by a large mound of earth. Across one side of both enclosures, facing west, there is a massive grass-grown earth embankment in a line running north and south, divided in the centre by an opening through it, opposite to the mound. This embankment is 44 feet in length each way, right and left of the opening, giving a total length 88 feet, and it rises to an average height of 9 feet, with a corresponding thickness. The opening through the embankment runs outwards (west) in a straight channel for 32 feet. It has sloping banks 8 feet wide at middle distance, narrowing to 2 feet at ground level and to 1 foot 6 inches below ground level, as it passes between a setting of stones into the interior at the base of the mound. This opening at its upper end is cut into the clay-band rock underlying the surface soil, for the purpose of evidently draining the whole interior. Leading from the upper end of the opening there is a continuous setting of stones, going right and left along the inner base of the embankment. On the right, the stones run parallel to a similar setting along the base of the mound, indicating the foundations of a narrow turf-walled passage, 2 feet wide and 14 feet in length, leading to, and ending within, the circular enclosure on the south side of the mound. On the left, the stone setting is continuous along the interior base of the embankment, returning in a circular curve at the far end, and continuing in a parallel line along the base of the inner bank of earth, thus forming a bught or pen 36 feet in length and 6 feet in width.

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 15/16-inch and 1 3/16-inch diameter, was discovered. No other relic was discovered throughout the excavation, and the cairn was restored.

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 from, 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 from 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 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 a landslide in to 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. lx. p. 262.



Fig. 10. Cinerary Urn from Cairn at Marchhouse

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 mediaeval times. Fragments of a course, undecorated



Fig. 11. Incense Cup from Cairn at Marchhouse

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 armlet and saddle-quern indicated an early Iron Age occupation; glazed potsherds pointed to very mediaeval 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 parts, on a foundation of rough, unhewn boulders without tool marks.

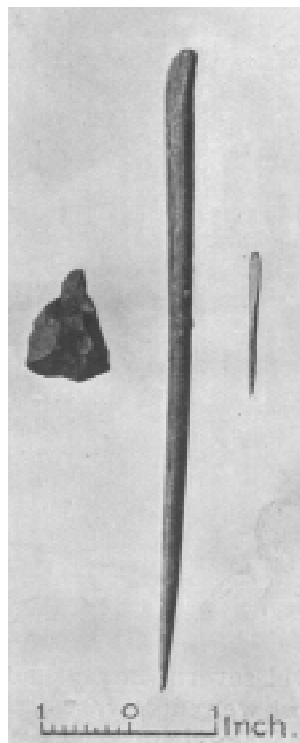


Fig. 12. Bronze Pin, Bronze Awl, and fragment of Chert from Cairn at Marchhouse

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

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 tract, and also a ford, for the carting 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 by 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.

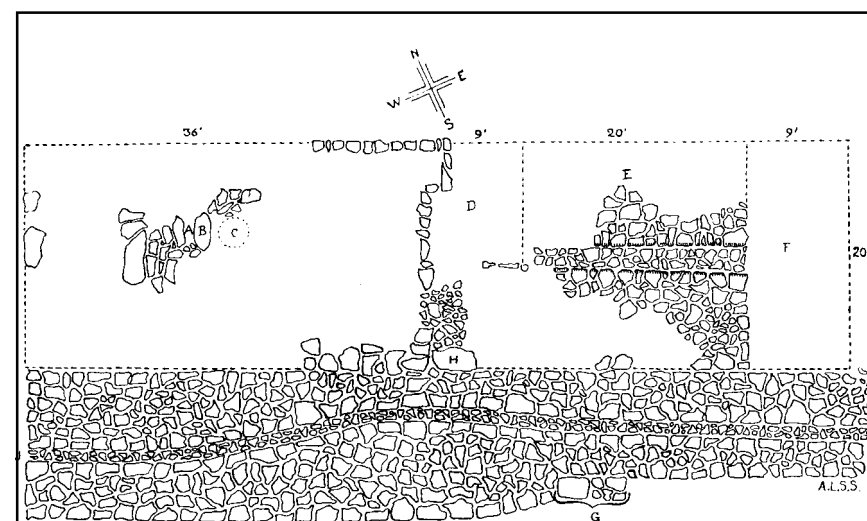


Fig. 15.

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| A. Well Fire | D. Barn | G. Loupin'-on Stane |
| B. Hearth-stone | E. Stable and Byre | H. Doorstep |
| C. Hearth | F. Out-house | J. Gutter |

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

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 John Brown's house were gradually revealed. On completion of removal of turf and super-incumbent 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.

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 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 2½ feet by 1½ 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.

tion, 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 the 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 discernable. 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 sheiling (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 was then found that while the heather may grow, as it usually does, over the walls of ancient sites, it rarely grows over the refuse heaps of spent ash in front of doorways.

In trenching this section carefully over, a goodly number of pot-shreds 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

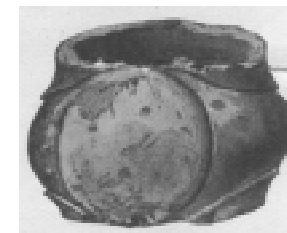


Fig. 13. Bronze Finger-ring from Wardlaw Cairn

Burn - the burn of oaks, which have now vanished - the foundation walls of a mediaeval 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 at 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 cue 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 developments exhibit 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 semi-circular 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

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.

FINDINGS AT PRIESTHILL

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 1st May, 1685, by John Graham of Claverhouse, later Viscount Dundee.

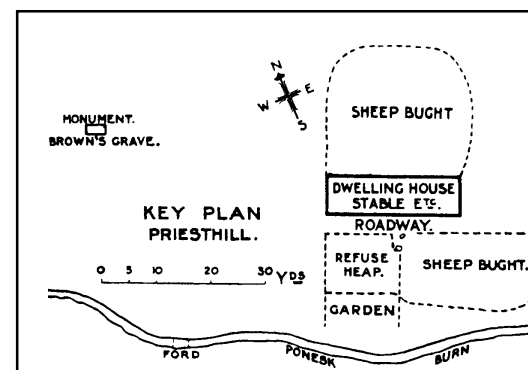


Fig. 14. Key Plan of Priesthill

The Priesthill in question is some distance north-east from the presently occupied homestead of that name, and the peat moss that 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 the 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 enclosure 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 whole heaps that the mound was composed chiefly of burnt ash - the midden really - and therefore, according to

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 fue (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 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 fue 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 internally with stone. High up on Grasshill Ridge, south-east of Priesthill, there is a construction of somewhat similar nature (No. 27), 145 yards west of the standing 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 3½ 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 various 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 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 discovered was entirely of the sixteenth or seventeenth

the Garpel. Its interior measurement, 20½ feet in length and 7½ 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 might 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 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 mediaeval 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 feet 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 by 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

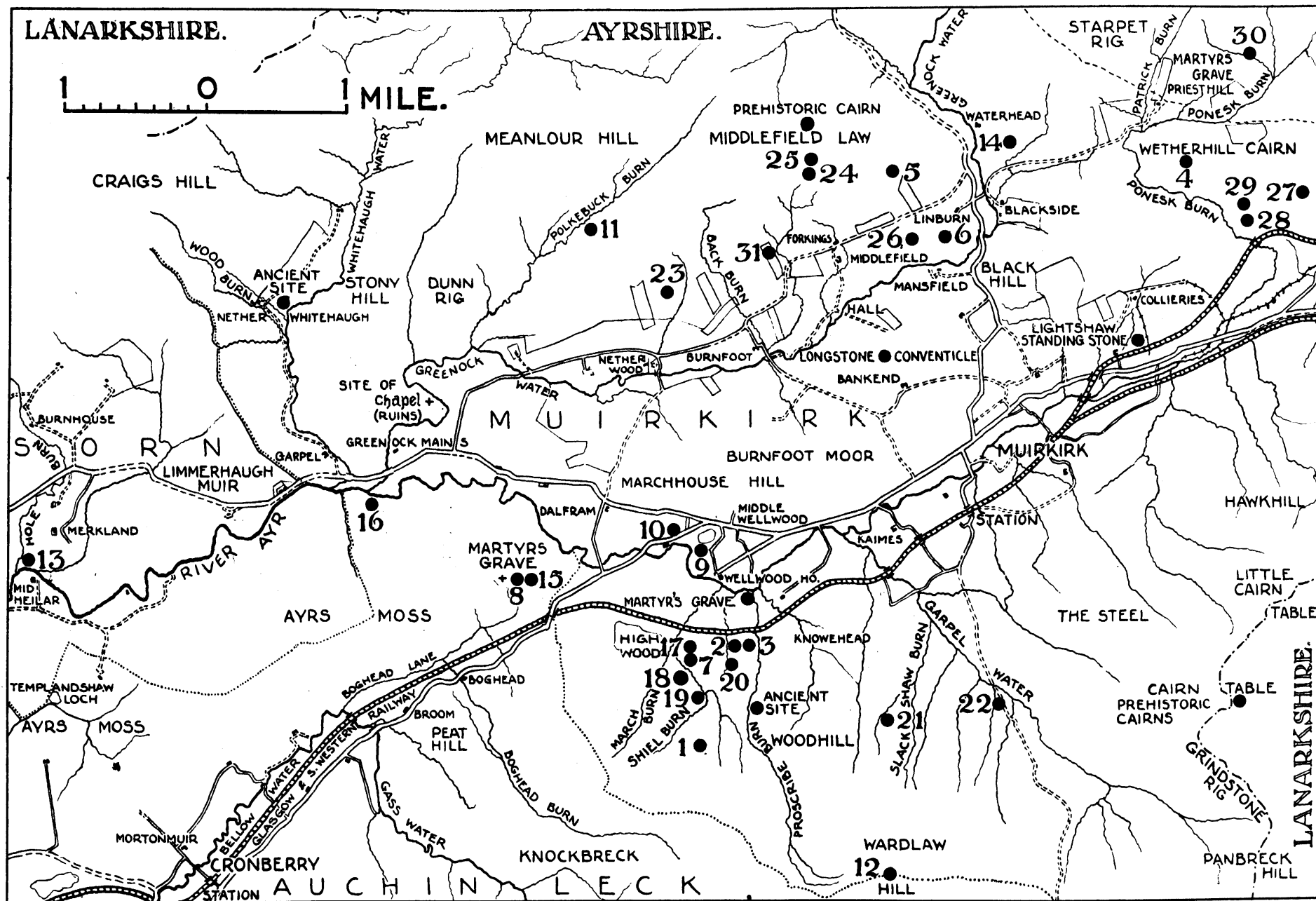


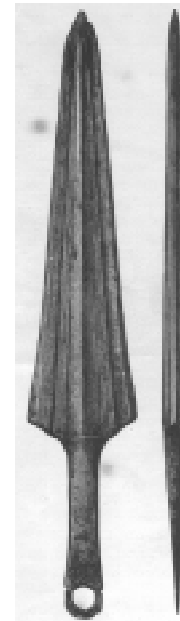
Fig. 3. Map of Muirkirk District showing Archaeological Sites

MUIRKIRK IRONWORKS



1787 - 1918

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUIRKIRK



Compiled from James Taylor's Book,
"CAIRNTABLE ECHOES"

1998