

LECTURE V.

(31st October 1881.)

THE BROCHS AND THEIR CONTENTS.

IN 1852 the late Mr. A. H. Rhind of Sibster, the founder of the Rhind Lectureship, made a systematic investigation of an ancient structure at Kettleburn, near Wick, in Caithness. It was a work of great magnitude, employing a number of men for upwards of three months.¹ It is easy for us, with more extended knowledge of this class of buildings, to recognise the features of the structure as those of a Broch, although it was not so considered by Mr. Rhind.

The external appearance of the ruin was that of a mound somewhat more than 120 feet in diameter, and 10 feet high. It stood in a cultivated field; the plough had regularly passed over it for a quarter of a century, and a cottage had been built out of one of its sides. Though thus diminished and dilapidated, there remained enough of its structure underneath the surface to show clearly what were its general features.

When fully cleared from the ruin of its upper portion, the lower part of the building showed a circular construction (*b b* in the accompanying plan, Fig. 185), consisting of a wall

¹ An account of the excavation, with plans and drawings, was given by Mr. Rhind in the *Archæological Journal*, vol. x. p. 212; and also in the first volume of the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 265.

1½ feet thick, surrounding a central area of 30 feet diameter. The doorway (*e*) passing straight through the wall, was flanked by a guard-chamber (*f*) on either side. Remains of two oblong chambers (*γ, δ*) constructed in the thickness of the wall were also found some distance apart. The roofs of all the chambers were gone, but the lintels remained on the passages leading into them. There was a well with steps leading down to it in the central area. It was 9 feet deep,

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and being covered for the support of a partition wall (*p p*) which passed over it, was full of good spring water when discovered. The area enclosed within the circular wall of the Broch was subdivided into irregularly-shaped spaces (*m, s, o*) by walls built across it in various directions, and abutting on the main wall. I shall have more to say of such irregular constructions within and around these towers when we come to deal with them in other cases, which show that they are secondary constructions, built out of and upon the fallen materials of the primary edifice. The area outside the tower for a distance of 25 feet from its external wall was covered by the ruins of similar irregular constructions (*c d*), and the whole was surrounded at that distance from the central tower by a wall (*a*) 3 feet thick, of whose height little more than the foundations remained.

The objects found during the excavation of the buildings are preserved in the Museum. They were not very numerous, but they formed the first collection made by the systematic excavation of a Broch, and thus were possessed of inestimable value and interest. In point of fact, the gift of this collection to the National Museum gave a new character to the collection of Scottish antiquities, and a new direction to the science of Scottish Archaeology. The Museum had previously been enriched by multitudes of donations of objects illustrating the unwritten history of the country, but they were mostly objects whose associations and relations were matters of inference and speculation. This group of objects, on the other hand, was one of which it could be said—(1) that they were related to each other by their common association with a single inhabited site; (2) that they all had relations with a certain typical form of structure; (3) that very various characteristics of form, material, art, and industry were shown to be thus inter-associated; (4) that the condition and culture of the occupants of the structure

are truly disclosed by the study of this group of relics, in so far as the objects of which it is composed are capable of affording such indications ; and (5) that the special knowledge thus acquired from the study of a group of relics derived from one structure is also an important contribution to our general knowledge of the class to which it belongs.

The group of objects recovered from the ruins of the Broch consisted—(1) of manufactured articles used in connection with the daily life of the inmates ; and (2) of objects not manufactured, which were plainly the refuse of their food.

The manufactured articles included objects fabricated in stone and bone, bronze and iron. The stone objects were principally querns or stones of the old hand-mills for grinding grain ; stone pounders or oblong naturally rounded pebbles of various sizes, having their ends worn down by use ; flat circular discs of thin slaty stone, varying from 3 or 4 to 10 or 12 inches diameter, which might have served such purposes as are still occasionally served by similar articles in country dairies and kitchens ; oval-shaped boulders of sandstone, having roughly-formed oval or cup shaped cavities in

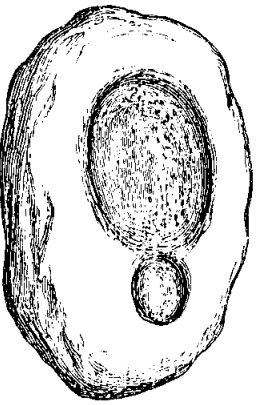


Fig. 186.—Lamp of Sandstone from Broch of Kettleburn.

their upper surfaces, which may have held a dab of tallow, with a wick of tow or moss, and thus served as lamps (Fig. 186) ; other hollowed cup-shaped or bowl-shaped stones, more regularly formed externally and internally, some of which

were furnished with handles, and were therefore obviously domestic dishes ; seven stone whorls for the spindle ; several

whestones and various other articles of indeterminate purpose.

Among the articles fashioned in bone were pins and bodkins, made out of the long bones of various animals ; rounded knobs like buttons, cut out of the outer table of the jaw-bone of the whale, and retaining part of the loop of iron inserted into them ; and two long-handled combs (Fig. 187) of the same

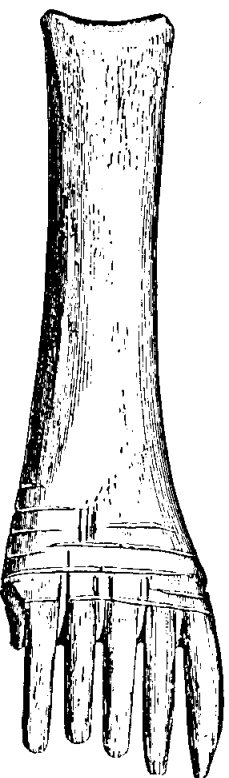
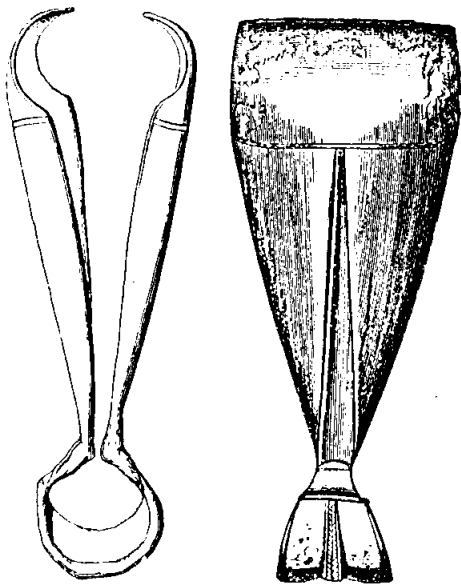


Fig. 187.—Long-handled Comb of Bone, from Broch of Kettleburn.

material, furnished with stout teeth, about an inch in length, at the end of the handle. These peculiar implements are so frequently found in Brochs that no considerable group of Broch relics is without them. They are of great interest ; but their purpose has to be inferred from considerations of their form, associations, and marks of use. It is sufficiently obvious from their form, that as *long-handled* combs they are quite distinct in character from the ordinary double-edged combs for the hair, which are also common in Brochs.

The objects in bronze found in the Broch of Kettleburn were a small bronze pin and a pair of bronze tweezers of large size (Figs. 188, 189), $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length by $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch in breadth, elegantly formed and ornamented in a style that is suggestive of the peculiarly bold and effective ornamentation of the metal-work of the early Celtic period, described in a former Lecture. They are $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length and $1\frac{1}{4}$

inches in width. Their special purpose is unknown,¹ but they are still strong and serviceable for any purpose for which such implements may have been employed. They possess



Figs. 188, 189. — Front and side views of Bronze Tweezers from Broch of Kettleburn (4½ inches in length).

a peculiar interest as being the only pair of tweezers known to have been found in Scotland.

The objects of iron were mostly in such a fragmentary condition and so greatly oxidised that little more could be said of them than that they were portions of implements of iron.

¹ Bronze tweezers are not uncommon accompaniments of female interments of the Bronze Age in Denmark, and it has been suggested that they were used as sewing implements when the material to be sewed was skin and the thread a thong. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that small awls of bronze are occasionally found with them, and it is obvious that the end of a thong hardened in the fire, and pushed partially through the holes bored by an awl, could be readily seized by such a pair of tweezers and so dragged tight. But the tweezers found in the Kettleburn Broch do not belong to the Bronze Age. Their ornamentation is that of the Iron Age, and they were found in association with objects of iron.

The fragments of pottery were abundant. They were coarse in texture and unglazed. They mostly represented globular vessels with everted rims and bulging sides.

The unmanufactured objects consisted chiefly of bones and shells, which were so abundant that they were evidently the remains of a long accumulation of the refuse of the food of a considerable number of individuals who had neither fared scantily nor without variety. Their diet had included beef and venison, pork and veal, mutton and lamb, fish and shell-fish, with an occasional fowl. The animal remains were determined by Mr. Quekett, who notes that the bones and teeth of a small horse, larger, however, than the Shetland pony, occurred in great numbers; there were also remains of a horse of much greater size. The other animals were red-deer and roe-buck, the ox, sheep of small size, goats, and swine. Many remains of dogs were found, some indicating a variety larger than a pointer, others being smaller. There were also bones of the whale and seal, and some remains of a bird of the size of the heron or swan. The fish-bones were not determined. The shell-fish were principally the periwinkle, the whelk, and the limpet. A few human bones were found intermixed with the relics, but there is no record of their precise associations, and other examples will show that the mounds covering these ruined Brochs were frequently selected as burying-places in subsequent ages. The occurrence of the bones of the dog and the horse, the seal and the whale among the food refuse of a community, does not necessarily imply that the animals were eaten. But there is reason to believe that tastes differed in this respect at different times. The horse was eaten among the northern nations of Europe till within the historic period. The whale appears down to the sixteenth century among the provision made for rich and royal tables in Scottish and English records. The seal was salted with the ashes of burnt sea-

ware, and eaten in the Hebrides in the beginning of the last century. While, therefore, it may be a fair inference from the occurrence of many bones of these animals in the food refuse of this Broch that its occupants used the flesh of such beasts as a common article of diet, it is obviously an equally fair admission that they are no more to be regarded as savages on that account than the people of historic times who were partial to the same kind of food. In point of fact, so far as the evidence goes, there is no reason for attributing to them an exceptionally low condition of culture or civilization. We have seen that the type of defensive dwelling with which we find them associated is one which possesses remarkable features of constructive merit and originality of design. Their diet was not less varied in kind and quality of nutriment than that of modern times. They possessed iron and bronze, and their manufactured implements show that they were neither destitute of technical skill nor deficient in artistic taste.