

## RED DEER ANTLERS FOUND IN ABERDEEN.

BY JOHN MILNE, LL.D.

IN April, 1901, in excavating for the foundation of a chimney for electric works to be erected at Dee Village, Aberdeen, the antlers and some bones of a red deer were found at a great depth below the surface in a bed of gravel and clay. Those taking an interest in the find naturally wish to know how the body of the stag had come to be where its remains were found, when it was deposited, and how it had been covered up. Something may be learned from the following section of the strata seen in the side of the excavation.

LEVEL OF DEE VILLAGE ROAD.		
Feet.	Inches.	
4	6	Made-up ground.
1	5	Broken brick and tile rubbish.
3	0	Rough sand and gravel.
2	6	Fine sand and blue clay in alternate layers.
1	7	Rough gravel and pebbles.
1	2	Close blue sand and clay (like harbour dredgings).
1	6	Gravel (hard, uniform, solid gravel and clay, upon which the chimney is founded).

The antlers were found in the bed of gravel on which the chimney rests, at a depth of about eighteen feet below the surface. The first six feet of the excavation passed through material laid down recently by man; the lower twelve were in estuarine beds of gravel, sand, mud, and clay. On comparing the level of Dee Village Road with Ordnance Survey marks, it was found that the bed in which the antlers lay was about the level of ordinary high water mark.

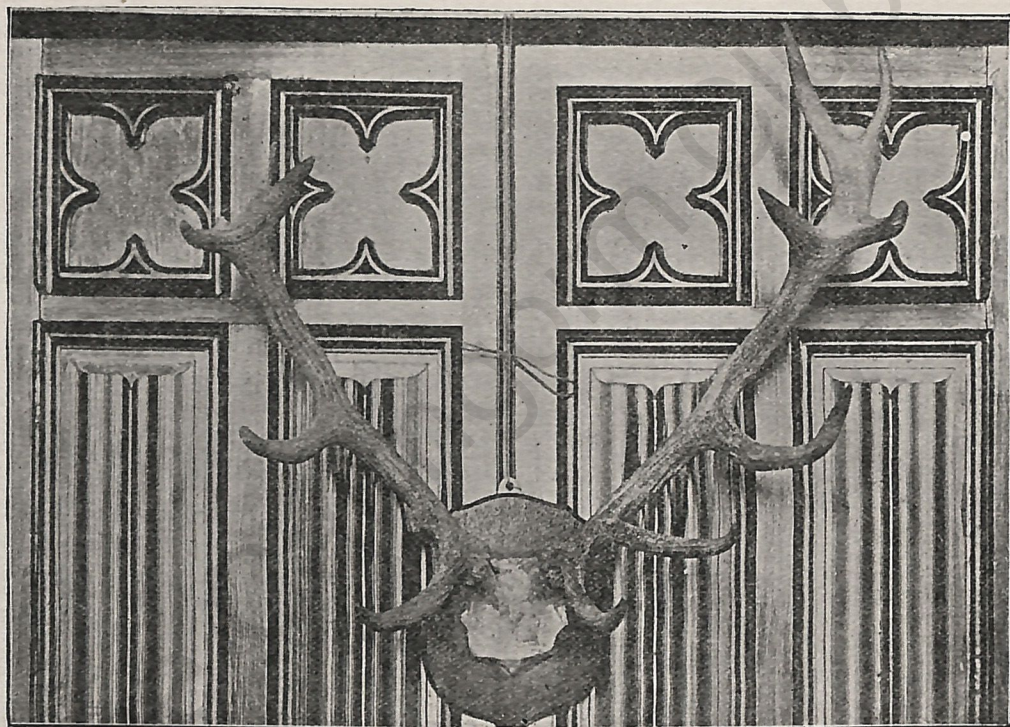
Red deer abound on the hills and in the glens of the upper half of the Dee basin. They keep to the high ground by day, but come boldly down to the glens and valleys at night. In passing from their day to their night haunts they frequently have to cross streams, which they do by



wading. Deer can swim across lakes and arms of the sea: a stag that was kept in confinement in Duff House grounds for a long time has been found several miles from land off Banff; but they cannot cross rivers in flood. A gentleman who lives near the river Dee saw about 1889, at Cambus O'May, a dead stag floating down the river in a spate; and in 1896 or 1897, after a thunderstorm and heavy rain at night, he saw several deer huddled together on a knoll on the north side of the Dee between Braemar and Invercauld, surrounded with water. They had come down from the hills to feed after the storm abated, but the river had risen in flood and cut off their retreat before daylight came in. Though the east wind is often dry or only showery near the coast, yet in the interior of Aberdeenshire, in river valleys bordered with hills, it often brings persistent rain. A few hundred feet of elevation bring the moisture-laden air down to a temperature at which it can no longer carry the water it has absorbed from the sea, and frequently steady, heavy rain falls.

The stag whose remains were found at Dee Village probably lost his life in trying to ford the Dee in an autumn spate brought on by a strong east wind. After drowning he might have lain at the bottom of the river in some deep pool for a few hours, but soon the grass in his stomach would have begun to decompose and give off gas. Then he floated, and was carried down the river with one antler rubbing on the bottom. The right antler is quite complete, and carries three tines and a crown with four points; the left, which had trailed, has only four tines and points. The right antler measures 36 inches from the tip to the base, along the outside; and it is 8 inches in circumference above, but clear of, the burr. The spread, or extreme width, of the antlers had been about 40 inches. The stag had been about 8 years old, and as he had lost his life in autumn after his antlers were fully developed, but while they had still a firm hold of the skull, he may have been a solitary rover expelled by younger and more active rivals from the society of the hinds in the rutting season—September and October. Such exiles from the herd be-





THE DEE VILLAGE ANTLERS.

[Photo by James Porter.]



come fierce and aggressive; they lose their timidity, and do not trouble themselves to go to the hills by day, but lurk about among bushes in glens and near rivers; hence they are more liable than others to be surrounded by water in spates, and drowned.

Arriving at Aberdeen when the tide was low, the drowned stag would have been carried towards the mouth of the river, but with the rise of the tide his course would have been arrested, and the east wind had blown him up the mouth of the Ferryhill Burn and stranded him where his remains were found. Within the memory of a lady still living in Aberdeen, Ferryhill was covered with broom. Dee Village, though it had an old, worn-out look, was not an ancient place. Probably a hundred years ago the daily perambulations of those who lived about the Green did not extend beyond Mary's Well, between Marywell Street and Affleck Street, or the Mill Road to the Meal Mill on Ferryhill Burn; and so the body of the stag might have been allowed to lie undisturbed till it was covered up by mud carried down by the burn in spates, and by sand and gravel driven in from the Dee in storms.

Those who were boys in Aberdeen about 1844 will remember the interest with which they watched "floaters" bringing to land at Poynerook rafts of trees which they had floated down the Dee from Glentanner. The landing-place was a gently sloping beach of sand and gravel, which varied much from day to day according to the direction from which the wind blew and the height to which the tide rose. With an east wind at spring tides there would soon have been deposition in the estuary of the Ferryhill Burn of sand and gravel sufficient to bury the body of the stag to a depth of 12 feet. In 1768, on September 16, the Dee rose 12 feet, and again, in 1774, on November 30, it rose 13 feet. The work of spates, with east winds and high tides, is indicated by the layers of rough gravel; the alternate layers of fine sand and blue clay point to quiet water in times of spring tides.

How long the body of the stag lay where the antlers were found can only be judged by the state of the bones.



The antlers are still attached to the front of the skull, which looks well preserved; but the greater part of the skeleton had disappeared. If the bones had been constantly soaking with water there would have been very slow decay and removal of their substance. I found a man digging a drain in a street in York, and saw some bones among the earth he was casting out. They proved to be leg bones of a *bos primigenius* which had stuck in a bog till it died, probably 1000 years ago. On the other hand, bones wet every winter and dry every summer might decay entirely in 100 years. The layer of gravel and clay in which the bones of the stag were found had been usually wet, but occasionally dry, and, looking to all the circumstances, it is pretty certain that it is more than 100 years since the stag was stranded at Dee Village, and not likely more than 200 years.

The antlers have been cleaned and mounted upon a board, and are now in Aberdeen Art Gallery. The stag that carried them had been of about the same age and size as the one Landseer selected for his painting, "The Stag at Bay".