

VI.

NOTICE OF A BRONZE SWORD (EXHIBITED BY JOHN L. STEWART, Esq. OF COLL), AND OTHER ANTIQUITIES, FOUND IN THAT ISLAND. BY WILLIAM M'GILLIVRAY, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

In a letter to Mr MacGillivray, Mr J. L. Stewart of Coll has given the following notice of the circumstances in which the bronze sword now exhibited was found :—

“ I send you the hilt-end of a sword which a drainer found lying upon a bed of sand, having cut through peat earth to the depth of say $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet.

“ At the time the peat began to grow, the outlet of the lake in which it was found must have been several feet deep. Previous to the peat formation, the inhabitants had formed an island of boulders, say 40 feet broad at the top, and from a rising ground made a narrow causeway with stones into their island.

“ The broken sword was found 25 to 30 feet away from the island, as if thrown from it into the lake. *Now*, the outlet I have deepened, and it is perhaps 20 feet, yet not more than enough to make the land about the island quite dry.”

Mr MacGillivray, in a note to Mr Anderson, adds :—

“ When I visited Coll two years ago, I found that there were two existing lakes which had old forts in them similar to the one in the drained lake to which Mr Stewart refers. These forts were rudely built of stone, without cement, and have a rough causeway leading to them from the land. I visited and inspected one of them, and found that it had consisted of two separate chambers about 10 or 12 feet, by about 6 or 8 each. It occurred to me that if the adjoining parts of the lakes could be searched, interesting remains of the ancient occupants might be found.

“ I also found that there were various other matters of antiquarian interest in Coll, and in particular an old burying-ground, and a series of

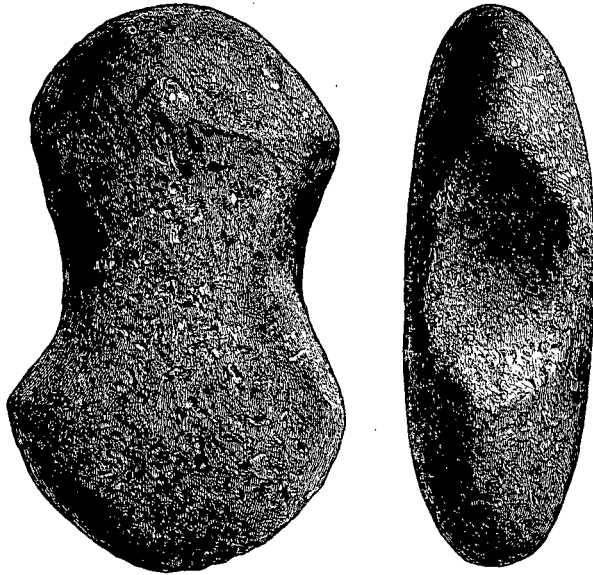
shell mounds along the shore ; but to enable you the better to understand the position of these, I should explain that a great part of the western shore of the island is covered by a wilderness of sand hills to the extent of hundreds of acres. The old burying-ground is situated amongst these. It is on a low sand hill or mound in a small secluded valley surrounded by higher ones. The wind has been gradually encroaching on it, and various rude stone coffins with their contents of human bones have been exposed and scattered through the little valley. I saw nothing but the stones which had composed the coffins and the bones, but possibly an examination of some of the graves not yet exposed might result in interesting discoveries. My antiquarian knowledge was insufficient to enable me to form any conjecture as to the time when this burying-ground had been in use, but one circumstance which to some extent indicated its great antiquity, was the fact that at the distance of little more than a mile from it there is another burying-ground still used, with the ruins of an old church on it, which appeared to be of the earliest style of pointed architecture in Scotland.

“The shell mounds which I saw are partly among the sand hills and partly on the level sand between the hills and the sea. There were vast quantities of shells—consisting of limpets, cockles, clams, whelks, &c., mixed with sand, peat, ashes, fragments of rude pottery, flint, and other hard stones. Without much searching I found some arrow-heads, mostly rude and unfinished, but one or two were beautifully formed. I also found a stone hammer, still unperforated, of a hard black volcanic rock, and other pieces of stone which appeared to have been artificially—although rudely—formed for implements of some kind. The fragments of pottery indicated that it must have been of a very primitive character—although some of these fragments show traces of beautiful ornamentation.

“I send you the best specimens of the articles to which I have referred, that you may present them to the Society.

“There are enormous boulders in some parts of Coll, occasionally to be seen beautifully balanced on pedestals of smaller stones ; and although they greatly puzzled Dr Johnson a hundred years ago, when he was a castaway on the island for a week, and led him to propose theories to account for them not less superstitious than the stories of the natives

about the giants whose playthings they were, still I do not doubt that



Stone Hammer found in Coll ($4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length).

their character and position—at least in the case of all that I saw—could easily be accounted for by the geologist.”

This being the last meeting of the Session, the usual votes of thanks were given to the Office-bearers at the conclusion of the meeting ; and the Society then adjourned to St Andrew's Day, 30th November 1878.