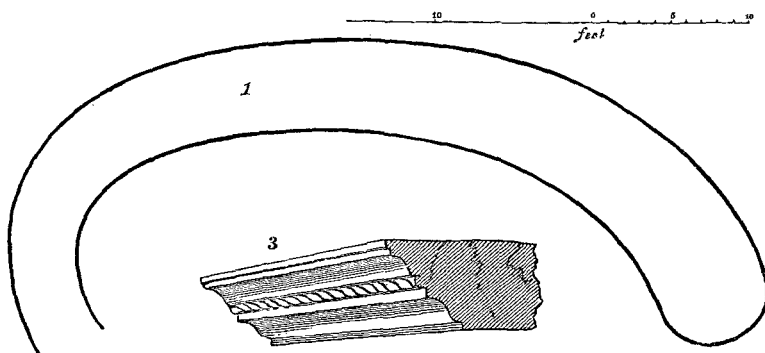


VI.

NOTICE OF THE REMAINS OF AN ANCIENT STONE BUILDING, DISCOVERED NEAR THE VILLAGE OF NEWSTEAD, ROXBURGHSHIRE. By JOHN ALEXANDER SMITH, M.D., SEC. S.A. SCOT.

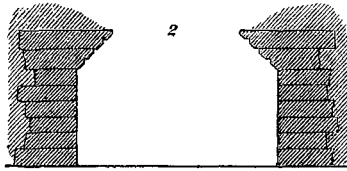
In a previous communication (in 1850) on the Roman remains near Newstead, I gave a short description of this building ; but having since been able to get more correct details of its structure, I have thought it worthy of another notice. The building was discovered by a man when cutting a drain in the spring of 1845, in a field near the village of Newstead, a short distance to the south of the Roman road and other remains afterwards exposed by the railway cutting ; which I have already brought before the notice of the Society. On visiting, at a later period, the field which was then under turnip crop, I found the only trace of the building still remaining, was the hollow from which the stones had been all dug out, and in which the stronger growth and darker green colour of the

turnips distinctly pointed out both its peculiar size and shape. It had been visited when first discovered by many individuals, but no one could give any explanation of its supposed age or use; it had, however, been carefully examined by my friend John Smith, Esq., Darnick, on the 22d of May 1845, and to his kindness I am indebted for a plan and details of the ruins, from which I am able to give an outline of its peculiar form, as in the accompanying illustration, Fig. 1.



The building was rather more than two feet under the surface of the ground, and consisted of two low, apparently sunk or face walls about three feet deep, built of hewn stone (reddish sandstone) laid in courses, and inclosing an elongated space, increasing gradually in breadth from the opening to the other extremity, which was shut in by a semicircular wall; the whole forming, from being bent considerably, a figure somewhat resembling a chemist's retort. The walls were formed of only one stone in the thickness, and each stone is described as varying from about six to ten or twelve inches in depth; they seem to have been built *dry*, as no appearance of lime or mortar was observed. The entrance or doorway was turned towards the north-west, and was four feet two inches in width; seventeen feet from this the building was five feet four inches wide; eighteen feet further up the interior, it was six feet nine inches; and eighteen feet still further, it was seven feet in width; the whole length of the interior, measured along the centre, being fifty-four feet; and a line drawn from the outside of the entrance across to the beginning of the curved extremity was thirty-six feet in length. Nothing was found within the space inclosed by the walls of the building, except dressed stones of various sizes and shapes; some of them simply flat pavement-like slabs, which were most numerous near

the entrance ; others, flat stones bevelled on one side, along which a notch was cut longitudinally. These last were about seven and a half inches thick, the bevelled projection being seven inches in length ; they were indiscriminately mixed with the pavement-like stones, which were about the same thickness ; but the bevelled ones were found in greatest number in the wider portions of the interior, or from about the middle to the closed extremity. Two larger stones were also found, having a rich moulding cut on one side ; as shewn in the woodcut, Fig. 3 ; they measured about four feet in length, two feet three inches in width, and eight inches in thickness. One of these moulded stones was given, I believe, to Lord Polwarth, and the other was cut and altered for some economical use ; I was fortunate enough to get a small portion of the latter (which was presented to the Society's Museum) : it distinctly shews the central member of the moulding, the well known rope or cable pattern,—one that frequently occurs on various Roman ornamental stones or tablets, and also forming part of a moulding in almost the same or at least a corresponding position to this, in some of the Roman altars that have been discovered in Scotland. The moulding was considered by some of my friends, architects, to be undoubtedly Roman in its character. The stones found in the interior of the building may have been merely a coping to the walls, or, what is more probable, the remains of the roof which had covered the vault ; this latter opinion is strengthened by the fact of several of the stones being found apparently *in situ* on the top of the wall, so as to favour the idea of its being covered by a somewhat arch-like or flattened roof,—one row of stones being placed with the bevelled part projecting inwards, as represented in the section, Fig. 2, and others in a similar way above it ; thus corbelling in, or encroaching on the central space, and shortening the bearing of the roof, so that a flat stone or two on the top would complete the enclosure, and thus do away with the necessity of long stones, which are by no means plentiful in this neighbourhood ;—and reminding one of the ancient so-called Cyclopean edifices, which were arched in a somewhat similar way. In favour of this view, I may refer to the position which the stones occupied in the interior of the building ; the bevelled ones being found in most abundance towards the widest parts ; and the flat stones being possibly the covers of the whole, were many of them rather in short lengths, having apparently been broken by the falling in of the roof. The two moulded stones were found near the inner or closed extremity of the building, and as they can scarcely be supposed from their totally different character



to have formed part of the roof, they had probably been portions of some enclosure which may have existed at that part of the interior.

Another ruin, said to have been of a somewhat similar kind, was found in the adjoining field in the spring of 1849, about a hundred yards to the east of the building mentioned. It was described as having resembled the other considerably, except that it was built of whinstone as well as sandstone, and the stones were not so neatly dressed, being altogether of a ruder character. The materials of which it was composed were dug out for economical purposes; and after following it for some ten or twelve feet, further progress was arrested by its passing apparently under an adjoining road, which formed the boundary of the man's field, and consequently put a final conclusion to his operations.

Various shallow flat-roofed buildings, formed of hewn stone, have been found at different Roman stations in Scotland, as at Duntocher (vide *Caledonia Romana*), which consisted of circular vaults, and were believed to have been granaries; the Newstead building had, however, a much closer resemblance to those described by Pennant as existing at Borthwick in this county, and others found near Coupar-Angus. These, though of much the same general shape, and having their entrance apparently also turned towards the north-west, were much ruder in their character, being built of stones in their natural state, and not cut or dressed. They enclosed within their walls a black mould containing the remains of animals (bones and teeth), considered to belong to cattle and sheep, and none of them to be human; with charcoal and burnt earth interspersed throughout; and also, it is said, "some stones which must have fallen from the surrounding walls," but which may possibly have formed part of a flattened roof; and were supposed by Pennant "to be the Repositories of the ashes of the sacrifices which our Ancestors were wont to offer in honour of their deities." It is an interesting fact that these buildings appear to have been in the neighbourhood of Roman remains; and although others of a somewhat similar character have also been found in distant parts of the country, I am of opinion, that the one just described might be of Roman workmanship; and, when we remember that it was at no great distance from the pits and beds of burnt materials formerly described, I imagine it might have been connected with the religious rites of the people. Because, even if we suppose buildings of this peculiar shape, which are much ruder in their details, to have been the work of the natives of our country; still, from their mysterious character, their length, and apparently, at least in some instances, their total absence of the light of day, it seems to me not impossible they were either used as places for the safe keeping of their most valued property, or had more probably been connected with the secret rites of a native priesthood. The same style of building might have been

adopted by the Roman invaders, who, with the facility so remarkable in that people, may have continued in its gloomy recesses the superstitious ceremonies of its first architects, or engrafted on them their own dark Mithraic worship; and, for want at least of a better explanation, I can only say, it reminds me of the dark underground Sacella or smaller temples which the Romans dedicated to the god Mithras or the Sun. There is one described by Hodgson, in his "History of Northumberland," as having been found at Housesteads or "Borovicus," the general character of which somewhat resembled this building: he says, "the cave itself seems to have been a contemptible hovel dug out of the hill-side, lined with dry walls and covered with turf or straw; for the ruins of the walls and roof had not been sufficient to hide the altars from the action of the weather." It is also worthy of notice, that in it the altars, with the exception of a small one, were ranged along the western wall; corresponding, as it seemed, to the position in which the moulded stones were found in the Newstead building. In conclusion, I may allude to the fact of several coins of Constantine the Great, formerly exhibited to the Society, which were stated to have been found in the immediate neighbourhood; having on the reverse, a male figure of the Sun, standing, with radiated crown, his right hand raised, and left holding a globe; with the inscription, "*Soli invicto comiti*," the sun the invincible companion; "*Imperii comes*," I suppose, of the emperor. These coins might serve to shew that the worship of the sun was by no means unknown here. And Hodgson has referred to the same fact, when he says that "Mithraism had become common among the Romans during the reign of Commodus, and in the time of Severus had extended over all the western part of the empire."