

I.

NOTICE OF A 'BURGH,' RECENTLY OPENED IN THE ISLAND OF
BURRAY, ORKNEY. BY JAMES FARRER, Esq., M.P.

The Pict's Castle, partially excavated by me in the Island of Burray, is close to the sea-shore, and its foundations are only a few feet above high-water mark. It stands at the north-east end of the island. When I first visited it in 1852 it presented the appearance of a large circular mound covered with herbage. The remains of an earthen rampart and fosse may be traced round that part of the building not protected by the sea. The stone used in its construction has evidently been quarried from the adjoining beach; it is common to all the islands in the Orkney group, and is considered as belonging to the Old Red Sandstone formation. The diameter of the whole building is about 65 feet, including the outer, or main wall, which is 15 feet thick. The stones are of various sizes, laid horizontally, and without mortar or cement of any kind. A portion of the wall on the side next the sea has been cleared of rubbish to the depth of 11 feet. It resembles a modern Martello tower more than anything else. Large quantities of bones of horses, sheep, and cattle, with deers' horns, tusks of boars, and bones of many small animals, were found amongst the debris, together with masses of common sea-shells, in which the limpet predominated; the deers' horns were all at a considerable depth, and principally amongst the rubbish on the outside of the main wall, and mingled with ashes and portions of burnt stone, having apparently been thrown outside the wall from some of the upper chambers. (The

discovery in 1852 of a chamber in the upper part of the building, 5 feet 6 inches wide, and which was excavated to a depth of 8 feet 6 inches, chiefly filled with burnt bones and a dark greasy earth, apparently decayed animal remains, together with ashes and shells, seems to favour this supposition.) In 1853 a subterranean passage was discovered, leading from one of the chambers (afterwards mentioned) in the main wall to a sort of well or dungeon, 7 feet high and 4 feet wide outside the building, and below its foundations.

This passage is only 2 feet 8 inches wide, and the descent is by 9 stone steps, the upper one being 19 inches wide and 9 in depth, and the remaining 8 averaging in width and depth about $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The surface is covered by a large flat stone, with clay thickly plastered over it.

In a small recess in the wall was found a portion of the jaw-bone of a whale. A broken stone querne, portions of deer horns, and a bone pin, were found in the rubbish covering this passage and chamber. Two other small rooms (before alluded to) were also discovered in the main wall; the first being 6 feet 2 inches wide by 6 feet 10 inches long, and the second 4 feet 10 inches wide by 5 feet 6 inches long. In the former were two recesses in the wall, nearly opposite each other, in the latter only one. Nothing was found in these chambers except rubbish and a few fragments of bone. In both of them the stones are laid lapping one over the other, till the top is reached, when a large stone is placed over the aperture. A narrow passage connects these two rooms; and from it there is another running at right angles into the interior of the building. It is formed of large stones placed upright, with similar stones laid over them. This passage when cleared of rubbish is about $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet in height, and about 4 in width. It appears also to lead to the exterior, but this portion of it has not yet been excavated. The interior of the Burgh was filled with stone, ashes, and quantities of shell and bone in various stages of decay. There were, however, many instances of bone and shell being but little affected during the long period that must have elapsed since the destruction of the building. Part of a bone wheel, bone pins, a small piece of comb, deer horns apparently cut with some sharp instrument, bones with holes drilled through them, a stone lamp, and broken quernes were also found within this inner chamber, which appears to be circular, but is at present only partially excavated: the bottom is paved with large flat stones. With the exception of a small bone resembling a button, and a fragment of a comb, in both of which there appears to be iron, no metal of any kind has been found. There are no indications of wood having been used in the construction of the building.

The Island of Burray is the property of the Earl of Zetland, who has kindly permitted me to make such excavations as I thought most expedient.