

II.

AN ACCOUNT OF A CIRCULAR BUILDING AND OTHER ANCIENT REMAINS DISCOVERED IN SOUTH UIST. BY SIR HENRY DRY- DEN, BART.

The following account of a discovery of ancient remains in South Uist is a very imperfect one, but, under the circumstances, it is not probable that a better one will be obtained. The island is nearly at the south end of the group of the Hebrides, and is the property of Colonel Gordon of Cluny, and in 1855 his son Mr C. Gordon (since deceased) was residing there. I took down the account of the discovery from a description by Mr C. Gordon when he was in Edinburgh in 1856. Some of the remains were brought over by him at that time, and given to the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Near the west shore, and nearly level with the sea, was a mound of sand, &c. (see woodcut, fig. 1.) In 1855 Mr C. Gordon opened it, and found the remains of a circular building (see plan in the woodcut fig. 2) about 12 feet diameter in the interior, composed of rough walls about 5 feet thick. There were two entrances, one about 4 feet square, and the other about 2 feet 6 inches square, up to one of which was a

paved path. The circular wall, about 8 feet in height, remained; and parts of the roof remained, projecting inwards a little. The roof was

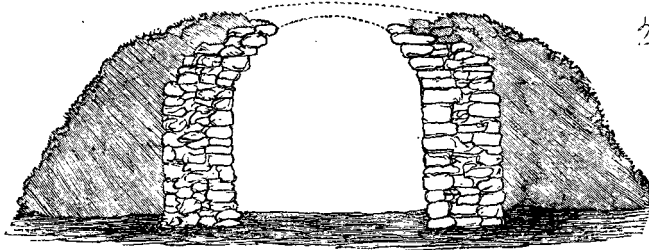


Fig. 1. Section of Building.

formed of stones laid horizontally, each projecting inwards a little more than the one below it, as shown in section.

In the thickness of the walls were recesses (4?), each about 4 feet square, all covered in with roofs formed as described above. On the floor of the main chamber was found a copper needle (formed of wire, with an eye or opening through it near one extremity)—a quantity of deer's horns—a human thigh-bone—thirty or forty vertebrae of whales, flattened and marked with cuts—a bone article, flat at each end and round in the middle, 8 or 9 inches long (lost)—a sort of knife or lancet made of thin bone, probably the brow antler pared thin and carved—another bone article, apparently a lid of a small box—a comb—six black stone dishes, all about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, and varying from 1 foot 8 inches to 10 inches long. The small brooch, which is now, with the other remains, in the Museum of the Society, was found in the island, but not in this building.

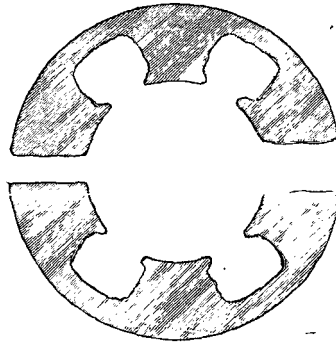


Fig. 2. Ground Plan.

I have before stated that I wrote down this account from a verbal description by Mr C. Gordon, and therefore I cannot with confidence com-

pare it with other remains; but, if correctly described, it is an interesting link between the forts or "burgs" and the so-called "Picts' houses" found in Orkney and Shetland. The burgs (generally pronounced brochs) or forts in these islands are buildings consisting of a wall from 8 feet to 25 feet in thickness, enclosing an unroofed circular area varying from 14 to 38 feet in diameter, with *one* entrance, rectangular in the head. The enclosing wall of Mousa Tower, which is the most perfect, is 41 feet high. (See Wilson's "Prehistoric Annals," p. 420.) But probably many were not so high. In the thickness of the walls are chambers generally isolated, and roofed by gradually bringing inward stones laid horizontally, till a large stone would reach across. The chambers at Mousa and at one or two other forts are continuous, and covered by large stones without the measuring process. The interior area of the brochs was not roofed, and could not have been, as they had no timber to roof with, or to make a framework to construct a stone roof on, and the area was too large to cover, as the chambers are covered.

The "Picts' houses" are more or less sunk in the ground, and consist of several roofed chambers like those first mentioned in the brochs, in one block without the central area, and are irregular in shape and relative disposition, with one entrance. (See Wilson, p. 84.) This South Uist building is of small area, and the walls thin compared with the forts above mentioned. It resembles them in being circular, and in having chambers *in* the walls. On the other hand, it differs from them in having two entrances, and in the very material point of having had a roof to the central area. This would lead us to suppose that it had never been above 15 feet high.

It differs from the Picts' houses in being circular, in being above ground, in having small chambers placed round a central one, and in having two entrances.

Search in printed documents and inquiry from antiquaries should be made, whether any similar buildings have been discovered.

Of the remains found and presented to the Museum of the Society, the comb and pin resemble many others found in Picts' houses and brochs. The knife is peculiar. The vertebræ mentioned were probably for some game; and somewhat similar articles have been found elsewhere. Deer's horns are almost always found in those ancient buildings.

Stone dishes like these have been found near Sand Lodge in Shetland, and were probably used at a much later date than the date of this building.