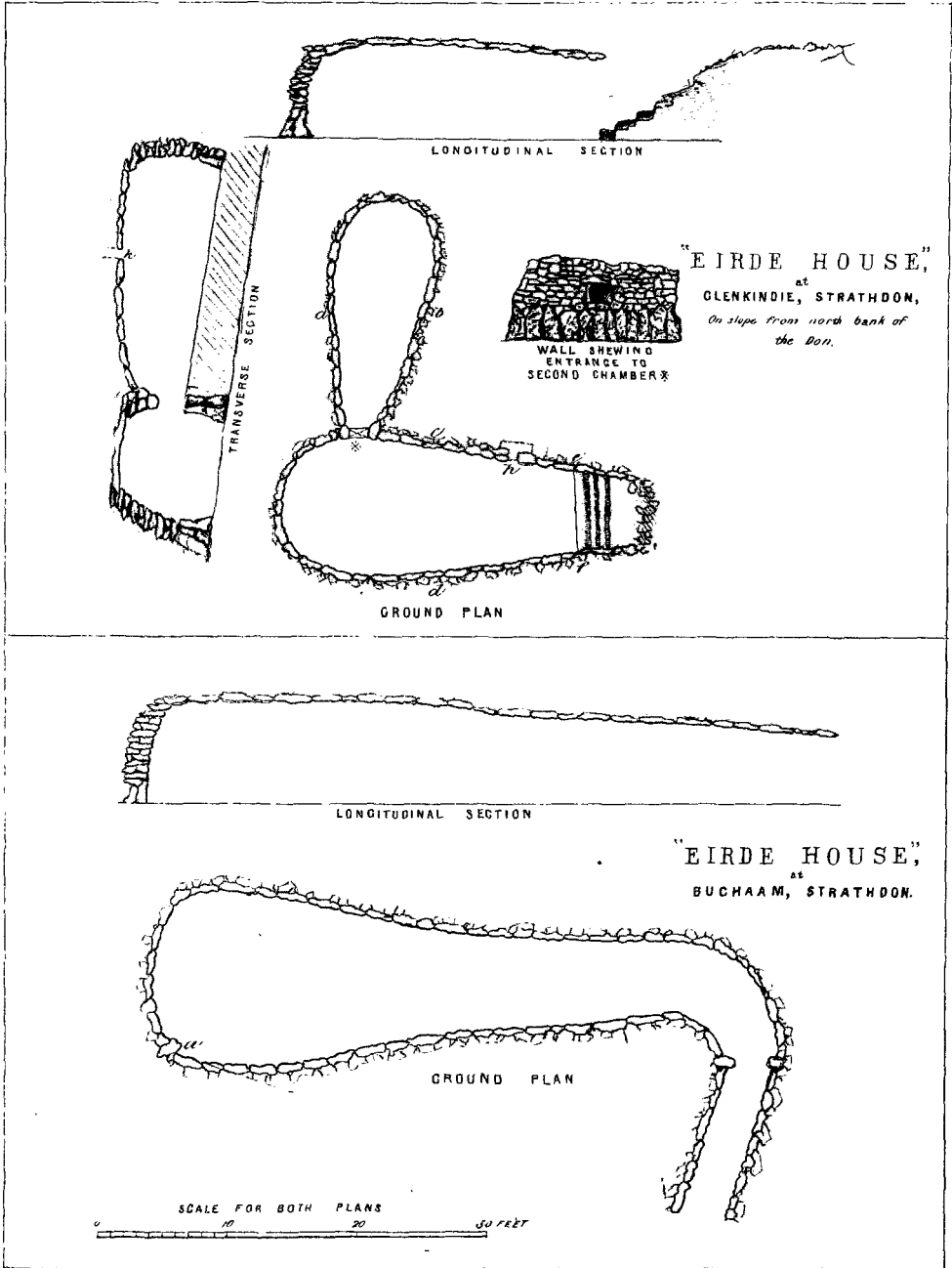


#### IV.

NOTICE OF THE RECENT EXCAVATION OF AN UNDERGROUND BUILDING AT BUCHAAM, STRATHDON, ON THE PROPERTY OF SIR CHARLES FORBES, BARONET, OF NEWE AND EDINGLASSIE. COMMUNICATED TO THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES BY ARTHUR MITCHELL, A.M. AND M.D., CORR. MEM S.A. SCOT. (Plate XIV.)

For the excavation, the results of which I am about to detail, we are indebted to the liberality of Sir Charles Forbes, Bart., of Newe and Edinglassie, on whose property Buchaam is situated. - The work was ably superintended by Mr Walker, gardener at Castle Newe. I happened to be in the locality when the clearing out was in progress; and on stating to Mr Walker that I thought the results ought to be laid before this Society, he promised to forward to me everything he found, and undertook to give me all the information he possessed, if I would prepare a short communication on the subject. This he has done, and the note which I now read is a compilation from the numerous letters which I have received from him, though of course I have been assisted by having had an opportunity of examining the ruin, and of taking sketches and measurements on the spot. These have been submitted to Mr Walker for verification.

In the district in which this "*Eirde House*" occurs, similar structures



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are numerous, but only two of them have been carefully examined, viz., the one at Buchaam, which I am now to describe, and another at Glenkindie, which is in a state of wonderful preservation. Of both of these I append accurate plans. (See Plate XIV.)

The road to the farm-steading of Buchaam passed over that which Mr Walker has just cleared out, and the foundation of the farm-house itself was in such close proximity to it, that we feel sure its existence could not have been known to those who built the house. On the mound over the roof, there grew a large ash tree, which Mr Walker thinks must have been planted in 1727, and he concludes that those who planted it must have known nothing of the cavity below them. The roots of this tree had disturbed the roof stones, many of which were found out of place. Some of these are of great size, being 7 to 8 feet long, 3 feet wide, and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  thick, and more than a ton in weight. Neither they nor any other stone about the structure gave any evidence of having been dressed or shaped by tools of any sort.

The chamber was nearly filled with earth and rubbish, and at the bottom there were 20 inches of fine blue clay, which had evidently been carried through the walls by the action of water from the clay bank outside. Its finer quality left no doubt on this point. Either in or below this bed of clay, all the objects now exhibited were picked up. Above the clay there was a deep layer of black earth and stones.

In forming the road to which allusion has been made, it is known that the mound above the chamber was levelled; and when Mr Walker began his excavations, some of the roof stones were almost bare. From what remained *in situ* however, he thinks that, after the stones were laid, the builders must have spread a rough puddling of clay over them, more effectually to make the chamber water-tight.

The general outline of the chamber is pear-shaped, with an elongated and curved neck, and the length of the mesial line, following the curve, is 58 feet; the greatest breadth is 9 feet 3 inches, and the smallest at the entrance is 3 feet 6 inches; the height varies from 5 feet to 7 feet, and for the greatest part of its length is above 6 feet. The walls rise perpendicularly for the first two or three feet, and the first course consists of large cubical stones resting on their broadest aspects. After rising two or three feet, the walls begin to incline inwards, not in a

straight line, but with a curve, as represented in the drawings—this portion of the cross section corresponding to the cross section of a cylinder sliced off above and below. In other Eirde houses which I have seen, the stones of the first course are included in this curve, and fall outwards from the line of the base, so that the breadth of the chamber, three or four feet above the floor, is somewhat greater than at the floor, there being first a slight expansion and then a contraction. In the chamber at Buchaam, however, this is not noticeable, if it exists at all. Where the breadth at the base is 9 feet 3 inches, at four feet above the floor it falls to 7 feet 9 inches, and at the roof stone to 5 feet. This will give some idea of the rate and extent of the contraction. The drawings, however, which are to scale, still better illustrate this feature in the construction of Eirde houses. They also show that in this instance the outer aspect of the walls was nearly perpendicular.

Twelve feet from the entrance, there are two projecting jambs. I saw these, and the conclusion was resistless, that they were in some way intended as the supports of an internal door; but there was no mark of tools about them, nor could I see any way in which bolts or fastenings had been used, as, for instance, holes in the adjoining side walls.

At the north-eastern corner of the chamber, a large quantity of charcoal was found, and near it, bones of the sheep and domestic fowl. Above this, there was a well-built smoke-hole. A similar smoke-hole is to be seen in the Eirde house at Glenkindie.

At the opposite, or south-eastern corner, was found the mouth of a drain, leading away under the corner of Buchaam House, and six feet below the present ground surface. Its outlet has not yet been found, but it was followed for five or six feet, and was found to be about ten inches square, well built, with good roof, sides, and bottom, and having a peculiar box-like opening in the inside of the chamber. I am not aware that such a drain has ever before been observed in connection with the so-called Pict's house, and I regret that I had not an opportunity of personally examining this peculiarity. The floor of the chamber was regularly paved, and the pavement in many parts was found in good preservation.

As already stated, all the objects now exhibited were found in or below the clay. We have, first, an iron ring, the purpose of which I

cannot divine, and another object in iron, which appears to have been the iron shoeing of a wooden spade. These were the only pieces of metal discovered.

Several staves of a small wooden cog were found. The duplicate of this might be bought in our own day in any country market. Other fragments of wood were also found, whose shape had been given to them by cutting tools. One of these Mr Walker regards as a bit of the handle of a spade. The wooden comb, so generally found in such excavations, was also found here, and is now shown. Bones of the sheep and domestic fowl, deer's horns, bits of charcoal, fragments of pottery of a fine clay but coarse workmanship, an acorn, and a piece of a quern, were the other objects discovered.

It appears to me that the general character of these objects is not such as to lead us to regard them as very ancient, or as by any means coeval with the structure in which they were found. The temporary occupation of such a chamber as a human habitation might occur in very late times.

Mr Walker has peculiar views as to the manner in which these Eirde houses must have been constructed. He thinks that a deep trench was first dug round the outline of the house, and that in this the walls were built with the required slope inwards, the undisturbed earth supporting them till the huge covering stones were rolled over the contained earth into position. Though these are in no sense the key-stones of an arch, still, he thinks, that by their weight, they would prevent the walls from falling in, and bind them together. When all this was done, he thinks the *excavation* was commenced, and a mound raised over the roof.

Mr Walker has restored the house at Buchaam, as far as he could, to its original state. A solid coat of clay has been puddled over the traverses of the roof to make it water-tight, and over this there is now an oblong curved mound of earth, round which 80 to 100 spruce and silver firs are planted. Restorations are perhaps doubtful, but Mr Walker has done what *he* thought best for the preservation of this interesting relic of antiquity.

Mr JOHN STUART pointed out the great value of Dr Mitchell's careful observations and plans, which enabled us to compare these structures with each other. He added, that all along the course of the Don, down to Kildrummy, there appeared groups of similar houses, indicating the

presence of an abundant population at an early period, and with evidences, in some cases like the present, that they had been the abode of men, which had sometimes been doubted. Their more recent occupation was analogous to what was found in the Irish crannoges, where articles of bone and stone were found mixed with others which were not 200 years old.

Professor SIMPSON drew attention to a similar house which he had discovered in a mound near Bathgate, now destroyed, and to the fewness of such structures south of the Forth.

Various members gave instances of the continued use of the quern for grinding meal at the present time.

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TUESDAY, 14th April 1862.

DAVID LAING, Esq., one of the Vice-Presidents, in the chair.

On a ballot the following gentlemen were elected as follows:—

Sir WALTER CALVERLEY TREVELYAN, Bart., Wallington, near Morpeth.  
 ROBERT MERCER of Scotsbank, Esq., Portobello.  
 ROBERT CARFRAE, Esq., George Street.  
 GEORGE SETON VEITCH, Esq., Bank of Scotland.

The following Donations were laid on the table, and thanks voted to the donors:—

Portion of a large Yellowish-coloured Clay Urn, showing black fracture, and a quantity of burnt human bones which it contained. It was found near Burntisland. The urn is of the usual type of the large cinerary urn, ornamented with a belt of crossing lines on the upper part, the lower portion being plain. By JOSEPH YOUNG of Dunearn, Esq., F.S.A. Scot., Burntisland.

Four Stone Balls of Limestone, measuring from two to five inches in diameter. Found in digging the foundations of a house in York. By THOMAS LAYCOCK, M.D., Professor of the Practice of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh.

Circular Rough-grained Stone, measuring three inches in diameter,

with deep cup-like indentations on each side. Found on Goldenoch Moor, Wigtownshire. By the Rev. THOMAS B. BELL, Leswalt, Wigtown.

Bronze Three-legged Pot, with angular loop on each side of the mouth or neck. It measures 9 inches high, and 8 inches across the mouth; the inner lip of the mouth is ornamented with a scroll pattern, apparently bit with acid. The pot was found in digging near Haddington;

Seventeen small Iron Spear-Heads of various sizes and shapes, one ornamented with bronze; several of the spears are divided into three prongs: Also a rude Knife with waved blade and wooden handle; three blades, and a terminal ornament in bronze. Found among the ruins of an old temple in Ceylon;

By HORATIO M'COLLOCH, Esq., R.S.A.

Plaster Casts of Four Ivory Chess Pieces—the king, queen, bishop, and knight—found in the Island of Lewis, and now in the British Museum. By J. O. WESTWOOD, Esq., Oxford.

Circular Embossed Brass Alms-plate, 16 inches in diameter, with a rude representation in relief of Eve offering Adam the apple, surrounded by a wreath and other ornaments. Stated to have belonged to one of the Edinburgh City Churches;

Oval-shaped Belt Badge in Brass, displaying a castle with flag flying, surrounded by trees; and above, on a ribbon, the words LOYAL STIRLING VOLUNTEERS; below, the thistle, rose, and shamrock;

Small Mummy Figure in Wood painted, with hieroglyphic inscription on the front, 21 inches high;

By JAMES FERGUSON, Esq., Lauriston Place.

Etui Case, of Egyptian jasper and pinchbeck, containing knife, spoon, scissors, tooth and ear picks, and pencil-case. By Mr JOHN E. VERNON, Jeweller, 54 Leith Street.

English Coins,—Edward I., Penny of Bristol, and one of York; Edward II., Penny of London;

Scottish Coins,—Alexander III., two Pennies of usual type, late coinage;

Foreign Sterling,—Gaucher II. de Chatillon, Comte de Porcien or Neufchateau, who died in 1329; *R. MONET NOVA XVE*. The coin was struck at Ives;

By Major THOMAS BELL, E.A.V.

Curiously carved Smoking-Pipe in Blue Slate; the bowl rises in the middle of the pipe in the shape of an ornamented box or house; on one side two male figures are seated, and on the other a female and a large bird. From Queen Charlotte's Island, North Pacific. By R. D. DAVIDSON, Esq., Smith's Place.

Twelve Autograph Letters by General Wolfe, from 1749 to 1758, addressed to Captain, afterwards Lieutenant-Colonel Rickson. By Mrs JANE PIERRIE ROBERTSON of Rosebank, near Glasgow, through John Buchanan, Esq., Corr. Mem. S.A. Scot. (See Communication, page 455.)

The Standard Yard-Measure of the City of Edinburgh, with the initials of Patrick Lindsay, Dean of Guild, 1726;

Proposals for keeping the Streets, Lanes, and Passages of Edinburgh Neat and Clean, by a Voluntary Subscription of the Proprietors and Possessors of the Sundry Houses therein. Edinb. 1734, small 4to MS. (pp. 22);

The City Cleaned and Country Improven. Edinb., small 8vo (pp. 16). 1760. (See Proceedings of the Society, vol. iii. page 171);

History of Edinburgh from its Foundation to the Present Time, by William Maitland, F.R.S. Edinb. 1753, folio;

By DAVID LAING, Esq., V.P.S.A. Scot.

Autograph Signature of Lord Balmerino, 23d July 1739;

Autograph Letter from Lady Margaret Balmerino to Mrs Borthwick, her sister, dated London August 19, 1746. (See page 453);

Petition of Elizabeth, Lady Dowager of Balmerino, to the Commissioners of Edinburgh, 7th Nov. 1746. MS. (See page 454);

Information for His Majesty's Advocate for His Highness' Interest against John Porteous, late Captain-Lieutenant of the City Guard of Edinburgh. Edinb. 1736, small 4to (pp. 16);

By D. H. ROBERTSON, M.D., F.S.A. Scot.

The Cambrian Journal, published under the auspices of the Cambrian Institute. Seven vols. and parts 1 and 2 of vol. viii. 8vo. Tenby, 1855-61. By the CAMBRIAN INSTITUTE.

The Old Countess of Desmond: an Inquiry, Did she ever seek redress at the Court of Queen Elizabeth, as recorded in the Journal of Robert Sydney, Earl of Leycester? &c. 8vo. Dublin, 1861. By RICHARD SAINT-HILL, Esq., Cork.



Guide to the Isle of Man, comprising an Account of the Island.  
12mo. Douglas, 1861. By W. KNEALE, Esq. (the Author).

The Old Celtic Town at Treaves Ash, near Linhope, Northumberland.  
8vo (pp. 36); Alnwick, 1862. By GEORGE TATE, Esq., Corr. Mem. S.A.  
Scot. (the Author).