

## VIII.

NOTICE OF AN "EIRDE HOUSE" OR UNDERGROUND BUILDING  
RECENTLY DISCOVERED AT PIRNIE, NOW ASHGROVE, IN THE  
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In cutting the branch railway between Cameron Bridge Station and Buckhaven, the workmen, in the month of April last, came upon an "*Eirde House*" about a quarter of a mile from that station. Unfortunately the largest portion of it was demolished and carted away before the interesting nature of the structure was perceived, and before any measurement was taken, or any scientific examination of its contents made. On its ancient character being made known to Mr Granger, the contractor of the work, he at once gave instructions that what remained should be left untouched, until it could be opened in the presence of those acquainted with such structures. The attention of the Society having been drawn to it, our Secretary, Dr John Alexander Smith, accompanied by Captain F. W. L. Thomas, R.N., Dr Trail, and several other members of the Society, visited it on the 2d May. On their arrival, Mr Granger most kindly placed workmen at their disposal, who at once proceeded to throw out the earth with which it was filled. Towards the bottom a very considerable mixture of charcoal was observable, and several fragments of bones (apparently of oxen), one of them of a vertebra and the head of a thigh bone, were found.

The portion that was excavated in presence of those assembled, measured only nine feet in length, and formed the entrance to the "house." On the west side of the entrance there were three pillar stones, forming, as it were, door posts, each 3 feet 9 inches high, and 12 inches thick. Beyond these there was 6 feet of rubble work, built of the flat sandstone

of the district. On the east side of the entrance there was only one pillar stone, which, however, corresponded in its position with the inmost one on the west side. The rubble work, which consisted of ten courses, was entirely without mortar. Though very rude, it displayed some skill in the art of building, as the stones were not all laid parallel, but were alternately laid with what masons technically call *headers*, to bind the wall together.

The portion excavated, and which was all that remained, was without any roof or covering when opened. It gradually widened as it went inward. At the entrance the width was 2 feet 8 inches. Nine feet farther in, it was 3 feet 5 inches at the floor, and 2 feet 10 inches at the top, the walls gradually converging. When the covering was on, the entrance could not have been more than 3 feet 9 inches, or at the very most 4 feet in height. These measurements were all taken immediately after it was excavated.

On examining the workman who demolished the structure, and he, besides displaying great intelligence, had the very good reason for remembering its length accurately, that he was paid by the measurement of the soil or gravel he removed; he stated that it extended at least 40 feet beyond what remained, so that its extreme length must have been not less than 50 feet. He drew a rough sketch of it on the ground, showing a pear-shaped area, elongated at the small end, and bending round towards the entrance, which looked southward. The sketch he drew was similar in every respect to that given along with Dr Mitchell's interesting account of the "Eirde House," at Buchan, Strathdon, in the 4th vol. of the "Proceedings" of the Society (p. 436), excepting that the curve at the entrance was more gradual. It gradually widened as it went inward, and at the inner end it was at least seven feet wide.

Immediately beyond what remained, he said there were six steps stretching across the passage, formed of large flat stones, nearly a foot in depth, leading down into the interior, and that the building at the inmost end was upwards of eight feet in height; the floor being sunk there through the gravel, about half a foot into the clay. The walls were all rubble, exactly the same as what remained, but round the inner end there was a series of large stones, upwards of four feet in height, standing close to the wall, but not built into it, and placed at regular distances from

each other. At the curve there was a similar row on each side of the building. It is difficult to conceive the use of these, as the roof did not rest upon them, unless they were meant for buttresses; which, however, could scarcely have been the case, as the rubble building was a foot deeper in the earth than they were. At the entrance the walls gradually converged, but our informant distinctly stated that they were perpendicular at the inmost end.

Only two portions of the roof remained; one part covering the rounded end, and the other a portion near the curved part of the building. The roof was formed of large flat sandstones stretching from side to side. One stone apparently longer than was required simply to stretch across, being at least 9 feet in length, and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet broad, was laid along the roof in a diagonal direction,—the builders skilfully availing themselves of its great length to economise their labour. It was supported by a high upright stone at each side of the building, and smaller roof stones probably reached from the walls on each side and rested on it.

When the building was discovered the whole area was filled with earth, and a few loose stone slabs. The bottom was of soft unctuous earth, and a considerable quantity of bones and teeth of animals and charcoal was found. Several of the former were large; one a jaw-bone apparently of an ox or horse, and a thigh bone. Unfortunately the bones were all dispersed without any scientific examination of them having been made. There were no markings, or remains of art of any kind observed. The building was about one foot beneath the surface, and was imbedded in a firm dry gravel bank overlooking the river Leven.

Though the members of the Society had little left to inspect, yet it was easy to see the class to which the building belonged, and their visit is likely to have a beneficial effect, as it showed that interest is taken in every relic of the past, however rude, and that apparently insignificant things help to throw light on the condition and early history of the country.