

NOTE ON THE PRECEDING COMMUNICATION. BY JOHN STUART, Esq.,
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Shortly after hearing from Mr Milne Home, I was able to inspect the underground chamber discovered at Broomhouse, and found it to correspond, in plan and construction, with the Picts' houses of Aberdeenshire and the northern counties, with which I was familiar under the name of "Eirde Houses."

The whole of these have been formed after one idea, viz., to secure an unobserved entrance, and to preserve a curved shape. From the entrance the first part of these structures is generally a low and narrow passage, growing in width and height from the point where the direction is changed, and terminating in a rounded extremity.

The part of them last referred to is generally from 5 to 9 feet in width, with a height barely sufficient to permit a man to stand erect. In some cases, however, they have been found to be of much more contracted dimensions throughout. The Eirde house at Migvie, in Cromar, only

admits a single person to pass along ; while that at Torrich, in Strathdonan, Sutherlandshire, is barely 3 feet in width.

Dr Mitchell has described another at Erribol, in that county, which is more like a large drain than anything else.

One of the Eirde houses at Buchaam, in Aberdeenshire, has two upright slabs at the curve, just as in the one at Broomhouse, and in both cases they seem to have formed the jambs of a door, which was probably formed of a large flag. In the passage to the central tomb at Maeshowe, a similar arrangement for closing up the entrance occurred. There, at a point towards the outer end, were two slabs slightly projecting into the passage, with a recess in the wall for receiving the slab which formed the door when the passage was open. The curved stone in the foundations at Broomhouse seems to have been one of the rubbing stones which probably preceded the querns ; and at Migvie a similar stone was found in the wall broken in two pieces. That at Broomhouse resembles the example which was found in excavating a group of hut circles in Strathardle some years ago, and is now in the Museum. It may be remarked, that a stone sculptured with cups and circles was found in the foundation of an underground house on the estate of Letham, near Arbroath.

These underground houses have occasionally smaller chambers, as offshoots from the main one, which are entered by openings of small size.

They occur at times singly, and at others in groups. On a muir near Kildrummy, in Aberdeenshire, a group of nearly fifty were discovered ; and five were found in one neighbourhood, in the parish of Airlie, in Forfarshire.

The Eirde houses at Kildrummy were traced by the occurrence near the entrance of low foundations, which seem to have supported the frail summer or daylight houses of the early population.

In Strathdonan, in Sutherlandshire, I examined two Eirde houses which were entered from the wall of circular huts on the surface. One of these at Kilphader, had a sort of trap at the end opposite to the entrance, formed of slabs, and permitting egress. That at Torrish, on the neighbouring haugh, had also a small opening at the extreme end to the surface of the same character ; while a curious double house at Kintradwell has an entrance at one end, narrow and difficult of access, and at the opposite end an opening by a flight of steps formed of flags.

It has been doubted if these houses were ever really used as places of abode, a purpose for which they seem in no degree to be suited.

But as to this there can be no real doubt. The substances found in many of them have been the accumulated debris of food used by man, and indicate his presence as surely as the kindred kitchen middens which have recently attracted so much attention, while their occurrence in groups marks the gregarious habits of the early people. The bones of the ox, deer, and other like creatures have been found, as well as the shells of fish, mixed with fatty earth and charred wood. Ornaments of bronze have been found in a few of them, and beads of streaked glass. In some cases the articles found would indicate that the occupation of these houses had come down to comparatively recent times, as is the case of the Irish crannogs, where objects of the rudest times are found alongside of those of the seventeenth century. The traces of hut foundations on the surface in connection with some of these underground chambers, are also conclusive of their use as places of, at least, occasional retreat of man.

One or two of them have apertures which seem to have been used as chimneys ; but, in general, there is no opening in the roofs or in the walls.

One at Buchaam has a well-formed drain leading away from it, and a drain has also been noticed in connection with the curious congeries of apartments at Skail, in Orkney.

Some of them are paved in the bottom, and in several the floor is rock. Pieces of pottery have been frequently found in the debris of these houses ; and in two cases (at Pitcur, near Coupar-Angus, and at Fithie, near Brechin) fragments of Samian ware have been discovered.

The Eirde or Pict's house occurs very frequently in Aberdeenshire ; and good examples have been noticed in Forfarshire and Sutherlandshire. On the south of the Forth they are comparatively rare, and in Galloway they seem to be unknown.

The example now described by Mr Milne Home is, so far as I know, the only one which has been found in Berwickshire, and in that light it has a peculiar interest. In the same neighbourhood is the curious structure known as Edins Hall, which is of the same family and idea as the Pictish castles or Brochs of the north ; and yet I know of no instance of a similar structure in the intervening country.

In Roxburghshire, also, an Eirde house has been found near the Roman station at Newstead, and has been described and figured in our Proceedings by my colleague Dr Smith. It has a very peculiar interest from the fact of its having been built of dressed stones, and stones found in it with mouldings of Roman character.

It is a gratifying circumstance, that Colonel Logan Home is resolved to preserve the Pict's house at Broomhouse from farther destruction. Its occurrence in this district is a fact of importance in any conclusion on the disposition of the early races through the country, which is not diminished by the consideration that hitherto no other has been found in it ; and that in any event these structures are of far greater rarity here than in the country on the north of the firths, which, in the days of Bede, was known as the Land of the Picts.

I ought to add that the particles of bones discovered in the Pict's house at Broomhouse have been submitted to Professor Turner, who writes to me that "the fragments you sent me for identification are so small, that, with one exception, it is impossible to state with certainty not merely to what animal they belonged, but even what bone they formed a part of. Fortunately, however, I can identify one bone. It is the right astrapalus (*i.e.*, one of the bones of the foot) of a roe-deer. The other fragments consist of bits of bone, teeth, and horn ; and, as I presume, they were found with the astrapalus, they may be assumed to be parts of the same animal."

It also appears by a letter from Colonel Logan Home to Mr Milne Home, written after that gentleman had prepared his description, that the Pict's house was first discovered about twenty-five years ago by a ploughman, when a number of the covering stones were removed. At this time some human bones were discovered in it ; and these were replaced, and the earth thrown back, in the belief that it had been a place of sepulture. It has not been disturbed since that time. Colonel Home adds, that the bones submitted to Professor Turner were found both in the oval chamber and the passage leading to it. They were supposed at the time to be human bones ; but as this turns out to be a mistake, it is probable that the bones found at the time of the first discovery were not human bones either.