

II.

NOTICE OF AN UNDERGROUND CHAMBER RECENTLY DISCOVERED
AT CRICHTON MAINS. By the RIGHT HON. LORD ROSEHILL, F.S.A.
Scot.

Early in February last I heard that a subterranean passage had been discovered at the farm of Crichton Mains, on the property of Mrs Callander of Prestonhall.

A few days afterwards I visited the spot, and found that excavations had already been commenced, under the direction of Mr Maddison, the factor of the estate, and with the warm interest of Mr Pringle, the tenant of the farm; and that one of the entrances and part of the passage beyond, had been cleared out.

From time to time afterwards I visited the place, taking notes, measure-

¹ O'Connor, vol. i. cxxvi.; vol. ii. p. 44.

² Ulster Journal, v. p. 233.

ments, and a few rough sketches; and from these, at the suggestion of Sir James Simpson and Mr Stuart, I have drawn up a short "Notice" of this Eirde-House.

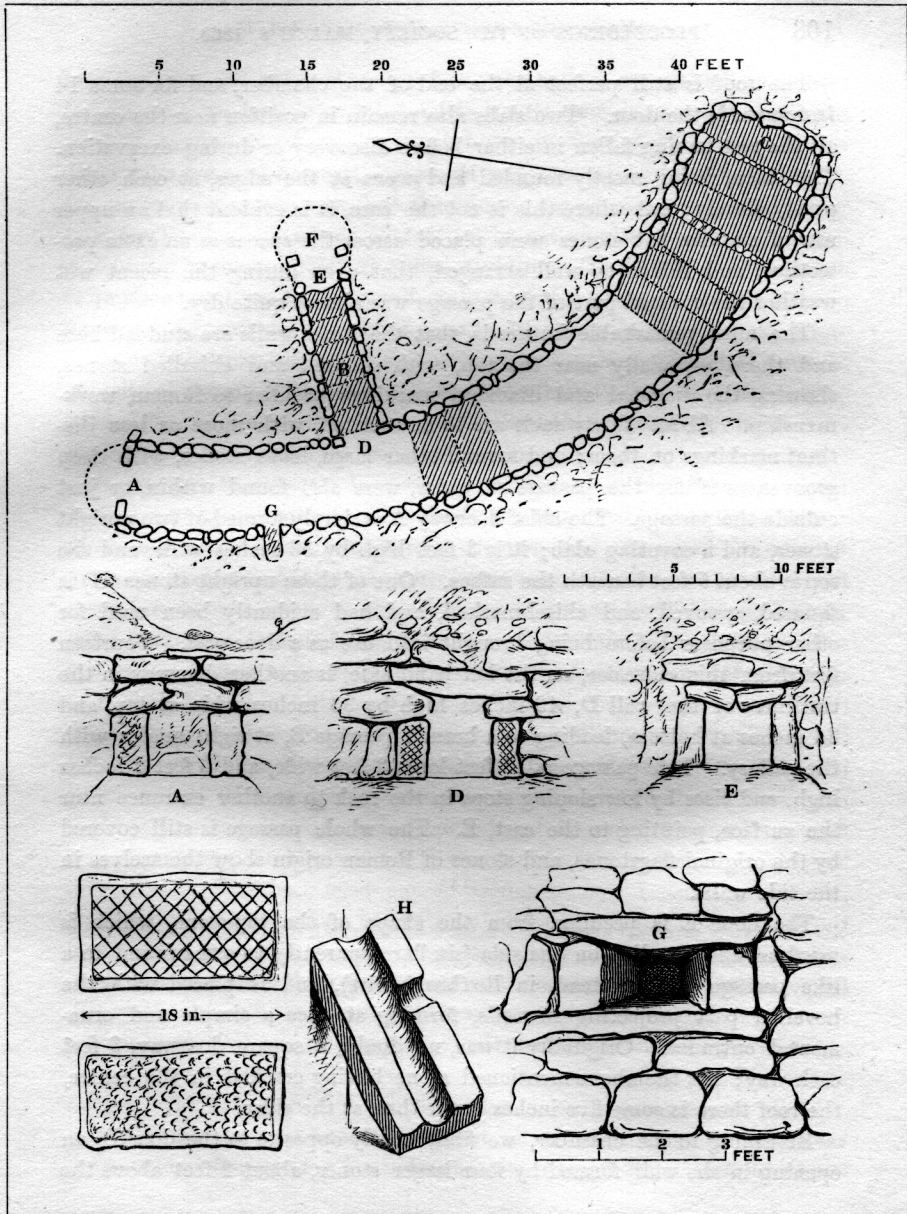
The field in which the "Picts' House" is situated is now under cultivation, though report places a clump of trees on the spot at no very remote date. It lies on a rising ground, overlooking the valley of the Tyne, and a considerable stretch of country around. In the immediate neighbourhood to the south-east is a British fort, known as the "Roman Camp;" and a similar remain, with a like name, is in sight on the rising ground towards Dalkeith.

The existence of the chamber was made known by a horse's leg having slipped into the cavity whilst ploughing; and it was then found that the covering stones of the subterranean passage were only some few inches below the surface of the ground.

The north entrance A, and the chamber or termination of the gallery C, were the first parts explored; the centre, and the branch passage B, having been discovered some time after. (See the annexed woodcut, Plate IV.)

In general shape the weem is that of an elongated pear, somewhat curved in the middle, thus resembling many others of the same description. It averages 6 feet in height; and from the middle of door A to the extremity of the gallery at C, it is $51\frac{1}{2}$ feet long. Its greatest width is within two feet of the end, where it measures about 9 feet; and the narrowest part is just inside the entrance A, or 5 feet 10 inches. The floor is throughout formed by the natural rock, and has a slight fall towards the interior. The walls are in the Cyclopean style of masonry, showing no signs of lime or mortar having been used, and consisting for the most part of large undressed stones placed above each other, the back and spaces being filled in with earth and stones. Contrary to the usual form, the walls in most places converge towards each other from the floor, upwards, to half their height; after which they rise perpendicularly till, at the average height of six feet, they are crossed by the slabs or flagstones of the roof.

These covering-stones are entirely rude and undressed, and most of them are of the common whinstone of the district; and they average 7 feet in length by 3 or 4 feet internal width, and are of very varied thickness.



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The roof is still perfect at the end of the chamber, and for some 14 feet towards the door. Two slabs also remain in position near the centre, all the rest having fallen in either before discovery or during excavation. The slabs, being mostly rounded and worn at the edges, fit each other pretty closely; but where this is not the case, it is evident that an upper row of smaller flat stones were placed across the spaces as an extra protection; and this is so well arranged, that even during the recent wet weather the covered part of the passage was almost quite dry.

The most remarkable feature is, that the inner walls are studded here and there, especially near the top, with squared and chiselled stones, showing the diagonal and diamond markings peculiar to Roman workmanship. About thirty such are to be counted, with more or less distinct markings on them; and several other large, loose stones, with deep grooves, as if for the passage of water, were also found within, or just outside the passage. The chief doorway A is simply formed of two upright stones, and a covering slab; it is 3 feet high by 33 inches wide, and the top is about 5 feet beneath the surface. One of these upright stones (H) is squared, grooved, and chisel-marked, and had evidently been used for other purposes before being brought into use as a door-post. Fourteen feet from this entrance, on the left hand side, is another doorway in the thickness of the wall D, 43 inches high by 33 inches wide at top, and 36 inches at bottom, leading to a branch passage B, at right angles with the gallery. This passage is 13 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 3 feet 6 inches high, and rises by low sloping steps in the rock to another entrance near the surface, pointing to the east, E. The whole passage is still covered by the original flagstones, and stones of Roman origin show themselves in the side walls.

The door E is peculiar, from the shape of the top-stone, which is moulded and bevelled on one side (similar apparently to some found in a like passage at Newstead, in Roxburghshire), and is placed with the bevelled part projecting inwards, forming at once a simple and ornamental entrance. Originally it was, no doubt, a square doorway, 3 feet each way; but the above-mentioned stone having cracked in the centre, the roof there is some five inches lower than at the sides.

Returning to the chamber, we find, nearly opposite to the door D, an opening in the wall formed by four larger stones, about 2 feet above the

floor G. It is 18 inches wide, by about 15 inches high, and extends some feet through the wall into the soil itself: the correct measurements are marked on fig. G. I was in great hopes of finding that it communicated with some inner room, but as yet our search has been in vain. A few pieces of charcoal were found inside it.

Before closing this notice, it may not be out of place to offer some suggestions as to the possible age of this building. The Roman stones found in it place it at once as not earlier than A.D. 80, when Agricola first advanced as far north as the plains of Lothian.

From that time till A.D. 422, this part of Scotland remained more or less under Roman rule, although, at least twice during that time, viz., before 140, and again from 364 to 367, our Celtic ancestors swept irresistibly over both walls into England itself.

It remains therefore to be decided, whether this chamber was built during one of those periods when the Caledonians had for the time become repossessed of their land, or after the Romans had evacuated the country north of Hadrian's Wall? In the latter case, it seems strange that the aborigines should return to their dark, rude, and underground dwellings, when, as in this instance, they were almost in sight of the comparative luxury of a Roman settlement such as Inveresk, boasting its baths, theatre, and villas.

A Roman road is believed to have passed within a short distance of Crichton; and the stones may have formed part of some station on this line.