

VI.

NOTE OF AN UNDERGROUND STRUCTURE AT GRESS, NEAR STORNO-
WAY, AND OTHER ANCIENT REMAINS IN THE ISLAND OF LEWIS.
By PETER LIDDEL, Esq., Gress. IN A LETTER TO THE SECRETARY.

1. *Underground House, Gress.*—The underground house at Gress is of circular form, 9 feet diameter internally, approached by a slightly curved passage 2 feet wide, and having a recess of 2 feet 6 inches on both sides just before it enters the chamber. The whole is built with unmortared and unhewn stones, and a pillar of masonry stands in the centre of the floor of the circular chamber, evidently designed to give support to the roof, which is formed of large flag stones. Part of the roof next to the sea-shore has fallen in, and thus disclosed the existence of the chamber. It is filled with blown sand, and contains large quantities of split bones and shells of the edible molluscs, among which there are a number of the large whelk (*Fusus antiquus*) which seem to have been used as lamps.

Crannog at Tolsta.—In a lake recently drained at Tolsta I have examined a crannog which seems to me to possess some interest. A drain has been cut through part of the crannog which affords a section of its construction. At the outside there is a row of piles 5 or 6 inches diameter, then large stones, then another row of piles, then heather and moss, the whole covered with earth and gravel. The remains of three houses built of unhewn stones are still visible upon it. All round the crannog, but inside the outer row of piles, there is an immense quantity of shells, plentifully intermixed with bones, ashes, and twigs of trees. The shells are those of the ordinary edible shell-fish, the mussel being the most common. The bones are chiefly those of deer, and the small Highland sheep still found on the island. The only implement I found was part of a stag's horn, with the brow-antler thinned. Three hollowed stone vessels or knocking-stones were found on the surface, but they were destroyed or lost sight of. A causeway of large stones under water led to the crannog.

Castle-Rock at North Tolsta.—This ancient strength (of which I send you a rough ground-plan), is built on a nearly perpendicular stack of rock 100 feet high, and isolated at high water. The building, which the

inhabitants of the district call "The Castle," consists of an oblong chamber of irregularly rectangular shape, nearly 40 feet long and 13 feet wide, with a smaller chamber about 10 feet by 8, opening off it by a door 2 feet wide in the centre of the end wall. Close to this end of the building there is a circular space nearly 6 feet diameter and 3 feet deep, which has been quarried out of the rock, and may have been a well. Fragments of the coarse pottery called "craggans" were found in it. I dug all over the floor of the chamber. The walls are of unhewn stones, backed with earth. There had been a fireplace at each side of the door, close beside the wall. Broken "craggans" and stones which had been used as hammers or pounders were found all over the floor. There were but few bones, which may be accounted for by the facilities they had for disposing of them by throwing them at once over the rock.

Perforated Stones, Cure-stones, &c.—I have a few perforated stones, a description of which may be interesting.

No. 1 is a whorl made of a black softish sandstone, and is of the usual flat and round form.

No. 2 is of the same kind of stone with a smaller hole, flat on the one side and convex on the other. Both these were dug up at the village of Back. They are called "serpent stones" by the people.

No. 3 is a whorl of a greyish blue soapstone, with a smaller hole. It was found near a shieling on Back Moor about fifteen years ago, and is said to have cured a girl in Back of a supposed snake-bite about two years ago.

No. 4 is a perforated stone found on the Hill of Monad about forty years ago. I do not see for what purpose it may have been intended originally, but the inhabitants now call it a "serpent-stone," as they call every perforated stone, believing that the serpents make the holes through them, and that they are able to do so instantaneously. This stone has frequently been used for curing cattle that are supposed to be "serpent-bitten."

No. 5 is a perforated round stone, having the appearance of amber, semi-transparent, weathered on the surface, and waterworn. It belonged to an old man named Donald M'Leod, who got it sixty years ago from a very old woman, who had it a long time in her possession, so that it has probably been in the keeping of these two parties for upwards

of a century. Extraordinary virtue is ascribed to its curative properties, both with regard to man and beast, when they happen to be serpent-bitten. I had great difficulty in getting possession of it even for a short time, and I have reason to believe that its loss would be regarded as a great calamity by the whole district. It has been sent to all the villages for many miles round about, and was in special request when the ordinary serpent-stones failed in effecting a cure.

No. 6 is a whorl of clay slate, ornamented on the upper and lower sides, the edges plain. The people here have not seen any other like it.

No. 7 is a small square-shaped stone, slightly fuller at the middle than at the ends, and perforated by a small hole at one end. It is of a fine-grained reddish sandstone. This stone was found by a woman (now residing at Back) about forty years ago, at Stoer Head, Assynt. It is said that at the place where it was found the cattle used sometimes to drop down dead without any apparent cause. The stone was warm when it was found, owing, it is believed, to its having been newly thrown or shot at some of the cows by the invisible members of the elfin world. These stones are credited with the power of being able to vanish the instant you take your eye off them, that is, if they are not secured the moment they are first seen. The belief is common on the west coast that if you keep one in a house it will be a protection against fire, but this belief is unknown among the people of the Lewis.

No. 8 is a stone axe of gneiss, highly polished and quite perfect. It was found 4 feet under the surface, in a gravelly knoll here.

Snuff Querns.—I have a few snuff querns found in the ground here from time to time. To account for this, I may state that one of my predecessors in this place was an extensive fish-curer. He had a number of vessels employed transporting his cured fish to the Continent, and they brought back quantities of tobacco-leaf which did not all pass through the Custom House. But there has been none imported now for nearly seventy years, so that the querns have not only fallen out of use but out of mind. Three of them are 6 inches, $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches respectively. One of them has a mould on the reverse side for forming the common lamp for burning fish oil.

Other kinds of hollowed stones, mostly of an oval form, are common in the islands. The people call them holy-water stones. Every one of

them has one edge broken. One dug up at Gress measures 14 inches by 11 inches inside, and 4 inches deep, but most of them are larger. Probably they were rubbing stones.

Spoons, Horn, &c., found under Peat.—About four years ago there was found at Vatskin Moss, under about 7 feet of peat, a fireplace made of three stones, between which the ashes still remained. Near it there were found six spoons, four small single-piece wooden dishes, and an ox horn, all enclosed in a large box of wood, also made of a single piece. All were destroyed except one spoon, which is in my possession. It is of Scotch fir apparently, and the bowl appears to have been hollowed out by burning.

This being the last meeting of the Session, thanks were given to the Office-Bearers, and the Society adjourned to St Andrew's day, 30th November 1875.

ERRATUM

P. 481, after the title to the woodcut, "Section of Borness Cave,"
delete the words "Scale $\frac{1}{8}$ inch to a foot."