

IV.

NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY OF AN OLD CANOE IN A PEAT-BOG AT OBAN. BY REV. R. J. MAPLETON, CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT.

Just outside of Oban, at the north end of the town, is a peat bog, extending to 12 acres or more, part of which is feued by Mr G. Drummond. In some places the peat is about 12 feet in depth. A burn now flows at one edge of the bog, and is on a level with the top of it. There are symptoms that this is not the original course of the burn. The whole bog has decided appearances of having once been a loch. Logs of wood and twisted roots abound throughout it. On May 24th, as Mr Drummond was trenching the ground, he came upon what appeared to him to be an old canoe, hollowed out of a solid block of oak. Mr Drummond reported the matter to Mr Duncan Clerk of Oban ; and on the 28th of May, Mr Clerk, Mr Carmichael, and myself proceeded to the spot to examine the thing. The structure (including the canoe, with the slabs and stakes) was in the peat itself, the bottom being 2 feet below the surface of the peat ; there is a depth of 9 feet of peat below the canoe, and above it a deposit of "made" ground to the height of 4 feet. This "made" ground extends to about 40 feet round the structure, and is formed of small pieces of roughly broken stone, mixed with peaty soil. Mr Drummond told us that there had been evident signs of a kind of mound, or rising of the land, on the spot. The outside length of the structure is 7 feet 6 inches. The inside measure is 6 feet. The depth is 2 feet 3 inches, not including the cover, or what served for a cover ; the width is 2 feet.

The structure was formed as follows :—Evidently a canoe had been

utilised for some purpose; it is part of a trunk of a tree, roughly and irregularly hollowed out; it is lying due north and south. The south end has been broken off, or perhaps merely worn or decayed away; probably this was the stern, as, instead of rising up to a point, there is a wide groove cut on each side, into which a board or slab of wood is made to fit. The north end is likewise defective, and is filled up with a board or slab, with some marks of a groove, but not so decided as to show whether this was the original form of the canoe, or merely an alteration made by the builders of the structure—especially as there is a projection or continuation of the keel, or bottom part of the canoe, extending to 6 inches beyond the structure. In the inside, the bottom of the canoe slopes upwards towards each end, showing that the original size was not much greater than it is at present. The general impression was that the south end is still as it was, except the decay or fracture of a portion of the wood, but that the north end or stem had been altered, to suit the convenience of the builders. The sides do not converge at either end. The slabs at each end are kept in their place by stakes, driven into the soil; and on some there are manifest signs of rough workmanship, made by a rough tool. The size of the canoe is—length, 5 feet 9½ inches; depth, 1 foot 7 inches; width, 2 feet. Along the gunwale, on each side, logs were placed lengthways, and kept in their place by stakes; the intervals between were stuffed with moss—apparently to keep the inside of the structure free from moisture or dirt. This raised the height of the structure, giving a total of 2 feet 3 inches.

Logs were placed on the top, and around the structure; some of these last were parallel to the sides, lying loose or fixed in the ground; others lying in an oblique direction near the corners, evidently intended to protect the structure from the pressure of the surrounding peat or soil. We did not see what passed for a cover; but Mr Drummond and his assistant told us, that it was formed of branches of birch, and probably hazel, well stuffed with moss. Both inside and outside the canoe were plenty of hazel nuts, chiefly shells split in two. There were no signs of bone, burnt or unburnt, in the canoe, and no implements of any sort. The soil in the canoe was very unctuous, and mixed with charcoal; charcoal also was in the soil surround-

ing the structure ; and when first opened, a very strong and unpleasant odour was perceived. In the canoe were several pieces of birch bark ; and among them is one piece of about 6 inches square, which has most unmistakable holes along one edge, made by a fine instrument, but much larger than a needle ; when found, this was adhering to the side of the canoe, but not sewn to it, and was evidently not intended to be sewn to the solid oak side. There was nothing to show whether this had formed part of the cover, or whether, on the supposition that the structure might have been a "burial," it might have been part of something deposited with the body. The canoe itself cannot have required a lining of birch bark.

There was a small slab of wood lying on the west side of the canoe, protected by small logs, but there was nothing to show what had been the intention of this.

There is some difference of opinion as to what was the intention of the whole structure, whether it was a burial, or made for some industrial purpose ; but as Mr Clerk is to institute further inquiries, perhaps something may be discovered that will assist in forming an opinion.