

II.

NOTE ON "TROTTER ROOFING." BY PROFESSOR DUNS, D.D., VICE-PRESIDENT.

Before slates came into common use for roofing, thin flags were much employed as a substitute for thatch in districts where fissile rocks of any sort were easily obtained. The readiness with which they could be split into convenient pieces, and their tidy appearance on the roof, led to their frequent use for the better class of houses. The rafters were in many cases made of oak, and the flags were hung on them by means either of wooden pegs or of "trotter-bones"—sheep-shanks, as they were called—the metacarpal bones of the sheep. The bones were driven into the flag till flush with the upper surface, and suspended on the rafter by the part projecting below. Some of these bones, together with a fragment of a roofing flag, pierced by a circular hole large enough to receive the pin of bone, are now presented to the Museum. They were obtained by me in 1861, in the course of a visit to the late James Cunningham, Esq., then residing at Gretna Hall, Dumfriesshire. In the autumn of that year, a house in the High Street, Annan, had the flagstones removed from its roof, and replaced by common slates. The

flags were, for the most part, larger than the slates now in use, the hole for the pin being in a position answering to that for the nail in slates. Some of the largest flags had two holes. The number of bones in a comparatively fresh condition was far greater than could have been expected, considering the age of the building.

A notice of the unroofing of Mrs Williamson's house appeared at the time in *The Annan Observer*, from which the following extract is taken. It is worth preserving, because of its reference to the history of this old house:—

“Naworth Castle, before the great fire a few years ago, was roofed with the grey flags so common in Northumberland, and they were fastened down with sheep-shanks in the same way as in the roof of the old house in the High Street to which we have alluded. This house was built in 1666, and it is supposed that the flags now removed have never before been disturbed since the house was erected. The house is built of bricks, burned so hard as to be almost vitrified; and it is supposed that they were made at the brickworks that are understood to have been in operation long ago, at the Pricked Acre. As was the case with many of the old houses in Annan that have now disappeared, the house we refer to stands with its gable to the street. At one time it was a house of great importance, and was occupied as the head inn in the town; and it was the host of this inn who is supposed to have been the hero of the anecdote narrated in the lecture on ‘Annan,’ delivered by the late Mr James Little to the members of our Mechanics’ Institute, according to which anecdote the landlord of the principal inn in the town was found by a traveller from England to be both ostler and waiter at the inn, and at the same time was Provost of the burgh, and its representative in the Scottish Parliament. In this old house—no doubt an inn at the time—Burns lodged, when on duty as an excise-man in Annan; and in it he is said to have composed the song of ‘The de’il cam’ fiddlin’ through the toun.’ The bed in which the poet sought repose when on duty here still retains the same position in a snug little closet which it occupied when he used it.”