

#### IV.

##### NOTES OF A CRANNOG AT FRIARS' CARSE, DUMFRIESSHIRE.

By ROBERT MUNRO, M.A., M.D., F.S.A. Scot.

Early in the summer of 1879 I was informed that, during the autumn of the preceding year, a lake-dwelling had been exposed in a small loch at Friars' Carse, Dumfriesshire, and, being then engaged in drawing up a report of the excavations made at Lochlee, I was anxious to have an opportunity of comparing the results obtained from the former with those of the latter. This opportunity was afforded me by the Rev. Mr. Landsborough, who, being also interested in such discoveries, made arrangements with his friend, Dr. Grierson of Thornhill, to conduct us to Friars' Carse. After inspecting a canoe, some fragments of pottery, and a few other things from this crannog, then deposited in Dr. Grierson's museum, we drove off to inspect the structure itself. Its site was a small pear-shaped basin situated behind a wooded knoll, close to the Parliamentary road to Dumfries, and in the midst of a well-cultivated but singularly undulating district. By deepening the outlet of this lake

to the extent of 2 feet, a partial drainage was effected, which reduced its area from 10 to 3 acres. It was then that it became generally known that a small bushy island near the middle of the loch had been artificially constructed of oak logs and trunks of trees. As the weather was dry for some weeks previous to our visit, and the water particularly low, we readily stepped on to the island, over what appeared to have been the old bed of the lake, then presenting a hard, crisp, and dried-up surface of aquatic plants. The island was nearly circular in shape, strongly built, and surrounded by piles, some of which, however, were only visible through the water. The log pavement, which by this time had been completely bared, was composed of parallel beams of oak, apparently arranged in groups, lying in various directions, and firmly united together by the overlapping and sometimes mortising of their ends. Its level was from 1 to 2 feet above that of the water, but at the margin of the island there was a large quantity of stones, especially on its north side, *i.e.*, the side towards the deepest portion of the lake, and most distant from the outlet. Through these stones, which shelved under the water, a few heads of the surrounding piles projected, some of which were also visible above the water. Some mortised holes were here and there to be seen in the horizontal beams, but there was no trace of a raised breast-work surrounding the wooden pavement—thus differing in this respect from the crannog at Lochlee, and agreeing with that at Lochspouts. In the centre were a few ends of uprights, in rectangular rows, seemingly the remains of partitions, one of which I traced for 40 feet in a straight line.

Upon inquiring where the rubbish removed from the island was located, we were informed that it had been wheeled to the west side of the crannog, and heaped up just close to where we had stepped across to the island. Here it lay for some days; but one morning, to the great astonishment of the workmen, it was found to have entirely disappeared. Upon examination, it turned out that the apparently dry land was a matted crust of mud and roots of aquatic plants, which virtually floated over the water and suddenly gave way under the accumulated weight,

and so buried the whole mass in the water beneath. With this singular and unfortunate catastrophe terminated all further prospects of finding relics.

My examination of the crannog was then of a very limited character, and hence, when I came to require more definite information, I found it necessary to revisit the locality. This visit took place so recently as the 31st January 1882, and, although a day by no means suitable for such investigations, I am glad to say that, through the courtesy and kindness of the proprietor, Thomas Nelson, Esq., who was personally conversant with the drainage operations, and took much interest in the lake-dwelling, the following additional details were procured :—

The island is slightly oval in shape, and, including the partially submerged zone in which the piles were noticed, measures 80 by 70 feet. Near its centre the *débris* was from 2 to 3 feet thick, and formed a sort of mound containing ashes, charcoal, and some bones. Here the fragments of pottery afterwards described were found.

A circular portion of the log pavement, near the centre, was covered with small stones as if to protect it from fire; also some remains of clay flooring were observed in other parts of the island.

Regarding the deeper structures little can be said. Mr. Nelson attempted to cut a hole through the timber, and, as far as the water allowed the men to penetrate, he saw nothing but layer upon layer of oak beams lying transversely upon each other. Judging, however, from the solidity and firmness of the island, the great size of some of the logs, and the depth of the loch (still about 12 feet a little to the west of the island), the total thickness of this immense mass of timber cannot, I should say, be less than 12 or 16 feet.

Mr. Nelson has directed my attention to the following notice of this island in the *Antiquities of Scotland*, by Grose, vol. i. p. 146.

#### FRIARS' CARSE, IN NITHSDALE.

“Here was a cell dependent on the rich Abbey of Melrose, which, at

the Reformation, was granted by the Commendator to the Laird of Elliesland, a cadet of the Kirkpatricks of Closeburne; from whom it passed to the Maxwells of Tinwald, and from them to the Barneleugh family, also cadets of the Lords of Maxwell; from whom it went to the Riddells, of Glenriddell, the present possessors. The old refectory, or dining-room, had walls 8 feet thick, and the chimney was 12 feet wide. This old building having become ruinous, was pulled down in 1773, to make way for the present house.

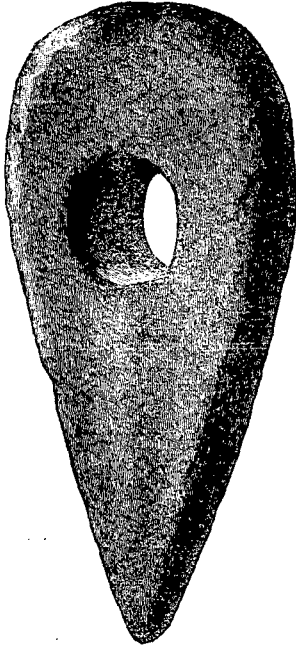


Fig. 1. Axe-Hammer-Head found in the Loch of Friars' Carse (10 inches in length).

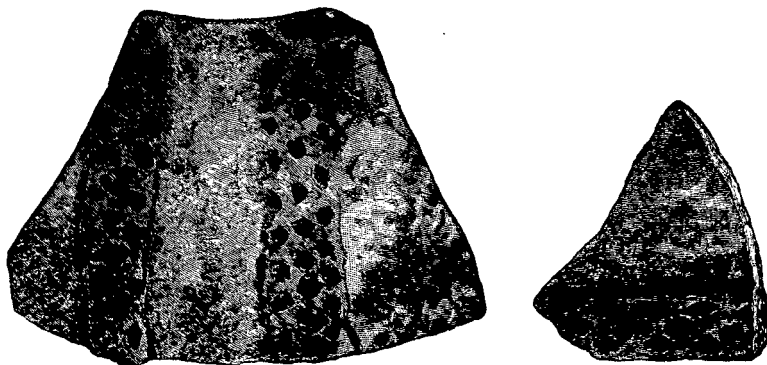
“Near the house was the Lough, which was the fish-pond of the friary, in the middle of which is a very curious artificial island, founded upon large piles and planks of oak, where the monks lodged their valuable effects when the English made an inroad into Strathnith.”

From the above quotation it would appear that this structure has not ceased to be an island by becoming submerged, like most of the other lake-dwellings hitherto noticed. The surface of the log pavement is at present about 18 inches above the water-level, so that before the recent drainage it would be 6 inches below it, but, originally, it must have been 3 or 4 feet above the ordinary level of the loch. Hence, on the supposition that no great alteration was made on the lake area by former cuttings, the maximum amount of subsidence would not be more than 5 feet.

*Canoe.*—About 60 yards from the island, while making the cut for drainage, a canoe was found, “deeply imbedded” in the mud (about 4

feet). It now lies in Dr. Grierson's museum at Thornhill, but it has become so shrivelled and distorted that it would be difficult to recognise it as a dug-out canoe. From Dr. Grierson's description of it, shortly after discovery, it appears to have been 22 feet long and 2 feet 10 inches broad. The prow was the root end of the tree, and tapered to a point; but the stern, which was squarely cut, was closed by a flat stern-piece fitting into a groove.

A neatly formed paddle was found on the west side of the loch. Its length is 3 feet 10 inches, of which the blade takes up 1 foot 6 inches by 5 inches broad.



Figs. 2 and 3. Pottery found in the Loch of Friars' Carse.

The ponderous axe-hammer-head here figured (fig. 1) was found on the west side of the loch along with the paddle. "It was about 2 feet below the present surface, and about 30 yards from the island, at a place where the ground was firmer, and might have been a landing-place from the island." It is made of hard whinstone, and measures 10 inches in length, 5 inches in breadth, and a shade less than 3 inches in depth. It is perforated by a round shaft-hole, 2 inches in diameter, but tapers slightly from both surfaces to the middle.

*Pottery.*—Two handles of jars with a yellowish glaze inclining in some parts to a green and in others to a reddish-brown colour.

Two fragments of a large dish were ornamented by a series of little pits regularly grouped together in the form of bands as represented in figs. 2 and 3. These bands were formed of three parallel rows of pits, which in the larger fragment radiated from the base upwards at a distance of about an inch, but became a little wider at the bulge of the dish. The other fragment (fig. 3) is too small to indicate the direction of the pitted rows, but the band is decidedly raised above the general surface of the vessel—a feature which is only partially noticeable in the former, just at the upper termination of the rows. The little indentations are irregularly shaped, but, from a repetition of the same peculiarities in their form in each row, it is clear that they were made by a small trident-like implement.

All these fragments of pottery were made of a fine reddish clay, mixed with coarse sand or small quartz pebbles.

The only other relics were a circular stone polisher,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, and an oval-shaped mass of vitreous paste.