

III.

NOTICE OF A CANOE RECENTLY FOUND IN THE ISLAND OF STRONSAY, ORKNEY. BY JAMES W. CURSITER, F.S.A. SOOT.

On the evening of 11th April 1887 I received a letter from Mr Stevenson, tenant of the farm of Holland, in the island of Stronsay, informing me that, two or three days previously, an ancient boat had been dug up from the sand in the Loch of Leashun by a labourer. The day following I hired a large boat, and proceeded to the spot, with a view of inquiring into the particulars of the discovery.

The Loch of Leashun covers a space of about 80 acres, and is situated about 500 yards south of the farm-house of Holland, on the south of the island of Stronsay. It is separated from the sea by a sandbank of about 40 feet wide. There can be little doubt that the space now occupied by the loch at one time formed the head of a bay, and that what is now a sandbank dividing it from the mother ocean was once an "ere."¹ We know that the Norsemen utilised these natural "eres" where they existed, and erected others, for the purpose of sheltering their craft from the run of the high sea. This habit of laying up boats and vessels in "oyces" at the back of "eres" obtained till quite recent

¹ This word is of very frequent occurrence in Orkney; is pronounced air, and generally spelt ayre. See *Burnt Njal*, intro. cxviii.

times ; and the "oyee" of Kirkwall, called the Peerie Sea, was used for that purpose well into the present century.

About six years ago a cutting was made through the ere of the Loch of Leashun, and pipes laid to draw the water from the loch, since which the larger portion of its area has become a level plain of wet sand, the water remaining in it being only about a foot deep and standing about the level of high tides. The canoe was found about 130 yards from the "ere," in a westerly direction, in the wet sand. The finder informed me that he has long observed what he took to be a small piece of wood projecting from the sand, but on Saturday last, examining it closely, he found that it was larger than he supposed, and returning with assistance, got it dug up.

The canoe was lying about north and south, on its edge, one edge being partially exposed. This side I imagine to be the starboard one, and for purposes of description will consider it so. It is in a very broken condition, and has lost the gunwale throughout its entire length. The other gunwale is almost complete. The extreme length of the canoe is 13 feet 9 inches, width 2 feet 5 inches, and present depth about 7 inches. I think that if the starboard side had been complete the canoe would have been about a foot in depth. At the bow there has evidently been a metal binder on the inner edge, as there is a piece of the wood, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and 1 inch broad, recessed evidently for that purpose. The sides are straight fore and aft from where they are narrowed to bow and stern, both of which are shaped like the bowl end of a spoon. Sixteen inches from the bow on the port side, and 2 inches below the gunwale, there is a round hole 1 inch in diameter ; and on the same side, 16 inches from the stern, there is a similar hole with another one 4 inches below it. The first-mentioned hole was simply plugged with oak, which seemed to have been broken off externally and internally ; the second is broken externally, but dressed flush on the inside ; the third is broken externally, but seemed to have been fixed internally with a treenail wedge, as observed by Mr Buchanan in his article in the case of the canoe found at Bankton, on the Clyde, described in the *Proceedings*, first series, vol. i. p. 212. In addition to these holes there are two smaller ones, also plugged—one on the port side,

21 inches from the bow, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches below the gunwale, the other on the starboard side, about 5 feet from the stern. These smaller holes were not observable till the boat began to dry, but now the plugs have dropped out of them. They are nearly half an inch in diameter. The drying also revealed seven holes, each about half an inch in diameter, ranged in line along the bottom of the canoe, evidently for holding on the keel, and plugs driven from the inside, showing half the beam of the boat to be $16\frac{1}{2}$ inches, or 33 inches over all.

There were two patches on the boat—one on the port gunwale 5 feet from the bow, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $9\frac{3}{4}$; the other lower down, and nearer the bow, 7 inches by 10; both occur over very large knots in the wood, and are similarly put on. The knotty wood and a square-shaped space around it is reduced in thickness, and a rectangular piece of oak inserted, the edges being nailed with iron nails, the rust from the heads of which (with the sand) has formed large protuberances. The nails themselves have disappeared, although their square section could be observed.

The canoe is exceedingly well cut out, and is about an inch and a half in thickness, except in one unpatched knotty portion, which is 3 inches thick; and in the bow and stern, where the wood is of course cross cut, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 inches thick. A careful search in the sand in the vicinity of the canoe failed to yield any trace of other relics, or of how the canoe came to lie in that position; but I have little doubt that the canoe must have lain there either since the loch was the head of a bay, or was an oyce into which boats were sheltered.

I send copies of two photographs, which show the boat as she at present lies at the back of my house in Kirkwall, where I had her removed, and treated with salt, in the hope that such an interesting relic might be preserved.