

I.

NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY OF A VIKING INTERMENT, IN THE ISLAND OF COLONSAY. By MALCOLM M'NEILL, F.S.A. Scot.

Early in August 1891, Sir John M'Neill became aware of the probability of the existence of a Viking burial-mound on one of his farms, and accordingly examined it by means of a trench opened on the long diameter from south to north. The mound was a rough oval, of about 30' by 20', with an apex 7' above the level of the surrounding turf, and proved to be composed throughout of shell sand, with occasional slabs of schist, which, from their position both here and elsewhere, are conjectured to have been used to prevent blowing of the sand during the earlier years succeeding the interment.

At the southern extremity, where the trench was begun, some previous explorer had probably broken the skin of green turf, with the result that the wind had scooped a considerable slice away, leaving a nearly circular depression, in which, within a few minutes, were discovered an iron pot with handle entire, a fairly perfect iron axe-head, and portions of a sword of the usual Viking type. Continuing the trench northwards, the

sand was found to be freely sprinkled with boat-rivets of the characteristic shape, and in the bottom lay a mass of material like mortar or cement, softened by the percolation of rain-water from the surface. This material was familiar to the explorers from former experience, and undoubtedly formed the boat's cooking hearth—portions being found adhering to many of the rivets.

Within the boat lay the skeleton of a horse ; but the only recognisable part of the horse-furniture recovered was the bridle-bit—a plain snaffle without cheeks—which had been doubled together by the centre hinge, and had rusted in that position. Portions of shield bosses, the broken socket of a lance-head still containing some of the wooden shaft, one amber bead, a penannular brooch of bronze, and a bronze pin were also found in sifting the sand ; but the whole mound had been disturbed either by treasure-seekers in former times, or, perhaps more probably, by the burrowing of many generations of rabbits.

There was remarkable evidence of the care with which the arms had been destroyed before being placed in the grave ; for example, the grasp of the sword—a solid iron bar nearly an inch in diameter—was broken in two in the middle ; the sword itself was found in numerous fragments, all about the same size, and fitting accurately together ; the lance-blade was missing, but the slender neck had been deliberately broken across, the socket had been dashed to pieces, and the shaft apparently *cut* with some sharp instrument. On the other hand, the pot was nearly perfect, as also the axe-head (perhaps because it was too solid a mass of metal to be easily reduced to fragments), though the edge showed signs of intentional damage.