

## V.

NOTICE OF DUN STRON DUIN, BERNERA, BARRA HEAD. WITH PLANS.  
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OF THE MUSEUM.

I first heard of this Dun from the late Ian Campbell of Islay, from whom, about twenty years ago, I received a verbal description of the fortified promontory, along with a pencil sketch or diagram (from memory) of the dry-built wall of the fort, showing its doorway still entire and lintelled over. I was greatly interested in the description, the more so that, as I told Mr Campbell, it was the only example of a dry-stone fort known to me in Scotland, having still the doorway in a state of entirety. Of course there are many doorways of brochs, known and figured, which are still entire, but, so far as is yet known, this is the only Scottish example of a fort of this kind, with a wall still standing, of sufficient height to show the doorway as it was originally. Moreover, it is the only Scottish example (so far as is known) which shows a galleried wall thrown across the neck of a promontory, so as to convert that part of the promontory which it cuts off from the land into a place of strength. Circular or oval forts or cashels, with chambers in the thickness of the wall, and even in some cases with a gallery or long narrow chamber extending round the greater part of the wall upon the ground-level, and roofed in by horizontal lintel-stones, are not uncommon in Ireland, but it is only of late years that the existence of this type of structure has been made known in Scotland; and at the time when Mr Campbell's description was communicated to me, the type was quite unknown in this country. Assuring him of this fact, that the type as well as the state of preservation of the structure was unique in Scotland, I begged him, if ever he found himself there again, to bring away with him a measured ground-plan and sections, as well as sketches of the internal and external elevations, which he faithfully promised to do, though he never found opportunity. I have since, on various occasions, made the same request to several persons who were likely to have opportunities of landing on the island, but without success, until recently, when, through the good offices of

Norman Macpherson, LL.D., late Sheriff of Dumfries, and one of the Commissioners of Northern Lights, I obtained the careful plans and sketches which I have now the pleasure of submitting to the Society.

The Dun is situated on the extreme point of a promontory on the south-west side of the island of Bernera, which forms the southern extremity of the Long Island. The Long Island group, beginning in the north with the large island of Lewis, diminishes gradually to the southwards, till it finally tails off in the cluster of islets which, with the island of Barra, form the parish of that name. The small islets of the Barra group, lying to the south of Barra Island, are Vatersay, Sanderay, Pabbay, Mingula, and Bernera, the last forming the most southerly point of land of the whole Long Island group. The islet of Bernera, which lies 16 miles south-west of Barra, is but 1 mile in length and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile in breadth, and, like all the others of the group, is not easy of access. It contains only three or four houses, and the lighthouse which was built in 1833, on the highest part of the promontory, close beside the Dun. Muir, who visited Bernera in 1866, has thus described it:—"From the low rocky landing-place on its north side, a continuously ascending path leads to the lighthouse, perched on the edge of a precipice over 600 feet in height, at the head of a *gio* [ravine] facing the west. The lighthouse people, and three native families living precariously upon their fishings and small crops, are the only inhabitants. A few paces off the lighthouse, and overhanging a deep *gio*, is a dilapidated dun, still retaining its massive doorway entire; and down a little bit, in another direction, are some remains of what appears to have been in very old times a heathen place of sepulture.<sup>1</sup> These are seemingly the only antiquities in the island. A burial-ground down at the crofts is probably ancient, but no objects in it are of any age."

Captain F. W. L. Thomas, in his paper on "The Duns of the Outer Hebrides" (*Arch. Scot.*, v. p. 404), devotes a paragraph to Dun Stron Duin, as follows:—"This Dun is a curved wall of dry-stone masonry, enclosing a point of a promontory 680 feet high. The wall is about 95 feet long, 15 feet thick, and is still 13 feet high. Through the north end there is a doorway 5½ feet high by 3½ feet wide. At 4 feet in

<sup>1</sup> In another place he describes this as "the remains of a cairn or dolmen."

there is a rebate on the north side, perhaps for a wooden door-post. At 8 feet in on the south side a ground gallery begins, which is  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide, and runs throughout the length of the wall. The masonry of the lower part of the wall is of very large stones."

From the annexed illustrations, the relative positions of the lighthouse with its enclosing walls, and the wall of the Dun, will be made out without difficulty. In fig. 1 the wall of the Dun, which crosses the promontory to the right, or on the seaward side of the lighthouse, rises high above the modern enclosing walls of the lighthouse grounds, and shows a gap in the middle where part of its height was taken down, so as not to obstruct the view of the light from the sea. Fig. 2 shows the general view of the south side of the island from the sea, and the position of the lighthouse and fort, which are also shown on the sketch map of the island in fig. 3. A ground-plan of the promontory (fig. 4) shows the triangular space to seaward cut off from the land by the wall of the Dun. The wall itself is shown in external elevation in fig. 5, from which it is seen that the stones of which it is composed are much more massive in the central portion of the structure than towards the sides. Fig. 6 gives the ground-plan of the wall on a scale of 20 feet to an inch, and shows the ground gallery, so far as the inner wall remains.

Captain Thomas further states that Dun Stron Duin is the only example known to him of this kind of fortification, viz., a galleried wall built across the neck of a promontory, although the variety of fortification, which consists of a ditch and rampart of earth cutting off from the land the seaward end of a promontory, is not uncommon. There is one case, however, in which the remains of a wall of masonry remain in a similar position, viz., at Dun a Bheirg [The Dun of the Berg], Strabost, Lewis, but there are no traces of a gallery within the wall, which is merely a mass of ruin.

Miss Stokes only mentions two forts of this character in her notices of the Pagan Forts of Ireland.<sup>1</sup> One of these, Dubh Cathair [Black Fort], situated on the island of Aranmor, on the west coast of Galway,

<sup>1</sup> Dunraven's *Notes on Irish Architecture*, edited by Miss Stokes, vol. i. p. 9. Du Noyer on "Remains of Ancient Stone-built Fortresses in Kerry," in *Archaeological Journal*, vol. xv. p. 4.

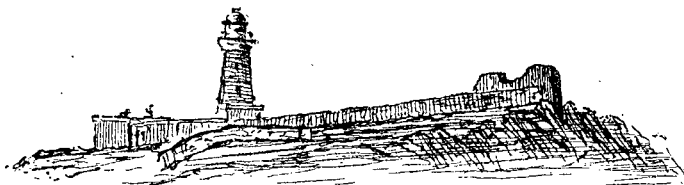


Fig. 1. View of Lighthouse, Barra Head, Bernera, showing also the Wall of Dun Stron Duin on the extreme right.

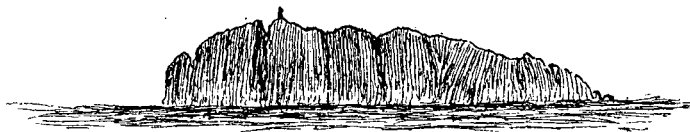


Fig. 2. View of Bernera Isle (or Barra Head), showing the Promontory of Dun Stron Duin (with Lighthouse) from the Sea.

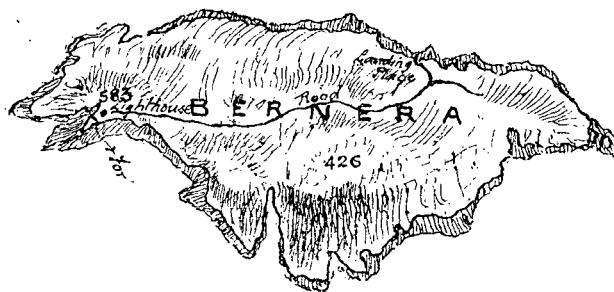


Fig. 3. Sketch Map of Bernera Isle, showing position of the Fort of Dun Stron Duin and Lighthouse.

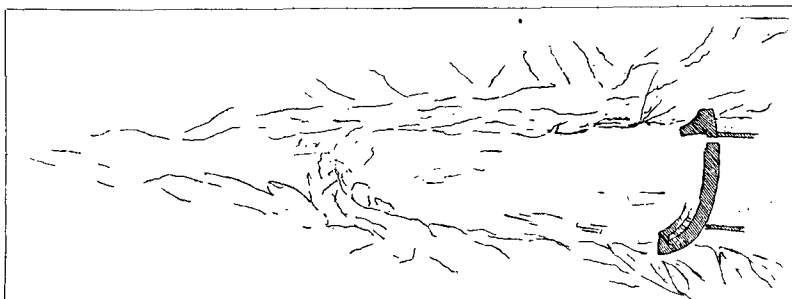


Fig. 4. Ground-plan of Promontory of Dun Stron Duin, Bernera, showing position of Fort Wall and Enclosing Walls of Lighthouse grounds.

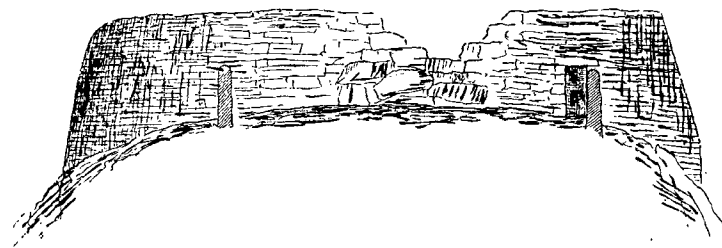


Fig. 5. External Elevation of Wall of Dun Stron Duin, showing Doorway and position of Enclosing Walls of Lighthouse grounds.

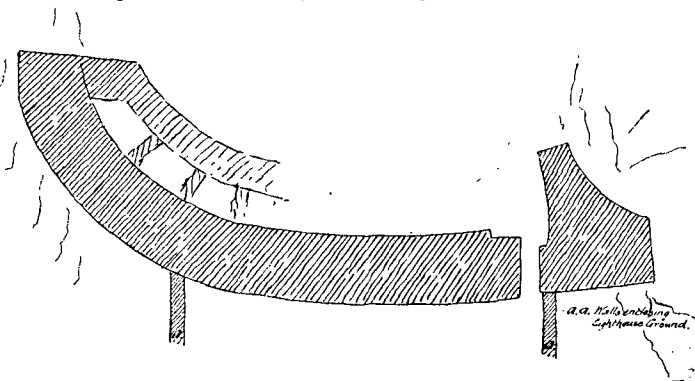


Fig. 6. Ground-plan of Wall of Dun Stron Duin, Bernera, showing Entrance, and Gallery in thickness of wall. (Scale 20 feet to 1 inch.)

consists of a great wall 220 feet in length, cutting off from the land the outlying portion of a promontory of triangular shape, the cliffs on either side rising about 300 feet above the sea. The wall is from 16 to 18 feet in thickness and 20 feet in height at the highest part as it now stands, though the top is nowhere perfect. It has a doorway towards the eastern side of the promontory, now completely ruined. The part of the promontory within the wall is a triangular area of 354 feet in length by 220 feet in width at the landward side, narrowing to a point at the seaward end. On this enclosed area Dr O'Donovan observed "several small stone houses or cells of an oblong form with rounded roofs somewhat in the shape of an upturned boat: one row extended along the wall, against which they were built, while another row ran from north to south for a distance of about 170 feet. The largest of these houses was 18 feet in length and 13 feet wide, and had a small chamber in the thickness of the wall, 3 feet 8 inches by 3 feet 4 inches, and 3 feet 8 inches high.

The other fort of this description noticed by Miss Stokes is *Dunbeg* [The Little Dun], situated on a headland in Dingle Bay, County Kerry. It differs from the others in having three earthen ramparts with intervening fosses outside of its stone wall, all of which reach from cliff to cliff across the promontory, the entrance-way being left nearly in the middle of the width of the space between the cliffs. The wall is 200 feet in length and about 22 feet thick, built of very large stones. The doorway, like that of *Dun Stron Duin* on *Berneray*, is entire. It is 3 feet 8 inches high, with inclined sides, the width of the entrance at the ground being 3 feet, and at the top 2 feet 2 inches. The lintel over the entrance is 4 feet 7 inches long, 3 feet deep, and 1 foot high. Inside the entrance the passage becomes wider and higher, and there are guard-chambers on either side. In the thickness of the wall, a long gallery, flagged overhead, extends for a considerable distance on either side of the entrance-passage, but does not apparently communicate with it, and there is now no indication of an entrance to these galleries from the interior of the fort. The interior face of the main wall seems to have receded by a succession of steps, probably to lead up to a parapet.