

IV.

NOTICE OF THE ANCIENT CIRCULAR DWELLINGS, HILL FORTS, AND
BURIAL CAIRNS OF STRATHNAIRN. (WITH SKETCH PLANS.) BY DAVID
CAMERON, DAVIOT.

1. *Ancient Circular Dwellings.*—The ancient circular dwellings of North Wales, as described by Mr. Stanley, reveal a remarkable similarity to those of Central Scotland—(1) in having stone circles or cromlechs, and cisted tumuli with urns, and stone weapons in their vicinity; (2) in their apparent connection with lines of signal or beacon hills; (3) in the larger structures distributed among them evidently for defensive purposes; (4) in their situations and relative positions; (5) in their constructive features; (6) in the compass direction of their doors; (7) and in the probable age of their contents. It also appears that there is a marked resemblance between the ancient dwellings which occur near Brest, as described by M. le Men, and those of North Wales.

The Welsh structures have yielded a great variety of implements for crushing or pounding food. (See *Antiquities of Holyhead Island and Anglesey*, by the Hon. William Owen Stanley, F.S.A.) But as yet the Scottish structures have been explored in only a few instances.

The National Museum of Antiquities at Edinburgh contains a stone implement, evidently a pestle, or possibly a small club, 11 inches long

and $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches diameter. It was found with stone celts in a cairn here at Daviot (*Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, vol. vi. p. 179, referred to by Mr. Stanley). The Museum also contains one specimen of the long-handled comb, or ancient weaving implement, found in a hut circle (or ancient dwelling) of Central Scotland. This implement has been found in the Northern brochs, the Borness cave, Kirkcudbrightshire, and the underground houses of the Hebrides, and in certain cases associated with stone and bone implements, which belong to the post-Roman period. (See *Notes on the Structure of the Brochs*, by Dr. Anderson.) Some "huts" are said to have yielded flints.

I may now make a few observations regarding—(1) the situation of these interesting structures; (2) their relative positions; (3) numbers and diameters; (4) entrances; (5) walls or banks; (6) fireplaces, &c.; (7) and other circular remains.

(1) As a rule, the remains of these structures are situated on the hill slopes of this district. A few of them occur, however, low down in the valley below Mid Lairgs, but by far the greatest number occur on the wide and elevated moor of Drumossie and the western plateau of Maumsale. The elevated positions of the different groups place them in sight of each other, and command an extensive prospect of the surrounding districts. It would thus be difficult to take their occupants by surprise, and the neighbouring fastnesses and hill-forts could be utilised in case of retreat. Neither tradition nor record of their occupancy remains.

(2) In a few cases these remains are found linked together in twos and threes, sometimes a few yards apart, and detached groups occur at short intervals over the moors. In many instances they occur in detached pairs, and in all instances they are situated on comparatively high and dry positions.

(3) Their diameters are easily determined. I found them as follows:—

boulder clay. In another structure, 11 yards diameter, I found in the centre, first 2 feet of black soil, then a good coating of charcoal resting upon a sandstone flag 3 ft. × 3 ft. A few spadefuls of charcoal also occurred below this flag, which was propped up by twelve small stones about 3 inches thick, arranged round its edges. These again rested upon a hard surface of boulder clay. The flag had the appearance of having been subjected to intense heat, and broke up in handling it. A somewhat similar case occurred in another structure. On the plateau of Maumsale we may see the tiers of masonry which formed the foundations of the structures, and the larger stones which in a few cases formed the doorways. A causeway occurs in one case.

(7) Ten or twelve other circular structures of an unknown character, and comparatively small diameter, occur near the head of Glenernie. On the ridge of Drumossie and at Little Mills we have a few circular pits about a yard deep and four yards diameter, with an earthen ring formed of the ground, thrown up from the interior. In digging up several of them I found charcoal, in one instance, $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet under the surface in the centre. A few smaller, but deeper pits occur here, and also in the vicinity of Loch Moy, traditionally regarded as wolf traps.

2. *Hill Forts.*—(1) Doune Daviot (900 feet) is crowned with an entrenchment about 40 × 20 yards, N.E. and S.W. (magnetic). Charcoal occurs in the centre, a little below the surface. Possibly this place was also used as a beacon hill, for which its situation was admirably adapted, being within hail of Ben Beurlaich to the south, from which the Cairngorm mountains are visible, and in full view of the vitrified forts of Craig Phadrick and Doune Evan to the N.W. and N.E. These in their turn communicated with other vitrified forts, such as Knock Farri, Ross; Creich, in Sutherland; Castle Findlay, near Calder; Dun Jardel, near Foyers; Dun Jardel, in Glen Nevis; and Tor Dun, near Fort Augustus. (See *Travels in the Highlands and Western Isles*, by Dr. John Macculloch, vol. i. p. 288.)

The earthen rampart on Doune Daviot is of the same character as the

remains of the ancient circular structures or dwellings, but far more substantial, particularly on the sides more open for attack, viz., the N.E., the N.W., and the S.W.¹

(2) Nearly a mile E.N.E. from Doune Daviot, the Nairn takes a sharp turn to the right, round a high and precipitous promontory on the left bank. This spot was evidently covered by an irregular fort about 40×23 yards in extent, to which the only approach could have been from the N.E., which was guarded by a rough wall running W.N.W. and E.S.E. across the neck of the promontory. The wall was bisected by a narrow doorway. The ground seems to have been hollowed out from the interior, and thrown up in trenches round the other sides.

3. *Burial Cairns*.—The following instances occur in this district:—

(1) The chambered cairns of Clava, with their concentric stone circles, used for burial by cremation.—As these have been fully described by more competent archaeologists, I pass on to the other burial structures, equally interesting, but comparatively unknown.

(2) Cisted cairns enclosed by stone circles, and situated on round knolls, evidently of moraine formation.—Four examples, 8 yards diameter, occur on Faillie Moor, but the cists have been wrecked, with one exception, measuring $46 \times 22 \times 22$ inches, lying E. and W. (magnetic). Another specimen occurs at Mid Lairgs, about $39 \times 20 \times 20$ inches, lying to E.N.E. (magnetic).

(3) Interments in rude cairns and barrows.—Very few of these numerous mounds have been explored. The interments have only been found in several instances, and where the ground happens to be composed of peat moss. The mounds are usually formed of layers of stones and earth. The stones might have been necessary to protect the remains from the wolves, which were only finally exterminated in Moy within the last century.

¹ *Bhuail Chomraig* (the fold of the battle) and *Doune Reach* (the grey fort) occur S. of Loch Ashie. *Bhuail Chomraig* is nearly circular, and is defined by a dry stone wall 330 ft. circumference, 8 ft. thick, and 8 ft. high. It has also the remains of a central structure about 30 ft. diam. *Doune Reach* has a wall round the more exposed parts.

(See *Morayshire Floods*, by Sir Thomas Dick Lauder.) Sir Thomas, who visited the district in 1829, relates a very interesting story, telling how the last wolf was killed by Macqueen of Pollochaig. These mounds are invariably associated with the remains of the circular dwellings. It would not, however, be an easy matter to give their precise number, as the ridges, slopes, and hollows are in some parts thickly strewed with them; but I counted about 550 instances associated with the remains of 118 circular structures or dwellings, and generally with four or five mounds to each structure. This would seem to be their natural order, but sometimes the proportion of mounds is less, and in a few cases, such as Faillie Moor, it is surprisingly great, as if the usual order had been disturbed by war. But their character can only be definitely ascertained by examining them. I have seen a few other graves on this moor said to contain the remains of some of the men who fell on the retreat from Culloden, which was mainly in the direction of Daviot.

(4) Concentric stone circles at Mains of Daviot used for burial by interment, but *minus* a central cairn. The centre is said to have been explored about the year 1820, by order of the then proprietor, and a cist was found containing a skull and other remains, which were carefully replaced. Five very fine stone circles occur in this vicinity—at Leys, Gask, Tordarroch, Crofteroy, and Mid Lairgs. I have seen a cist found a few yards beyond the outer circle of Leys. It contained no remains. Another cist was found recently in this circle.

(5) Cisted cairns, low or flat, enclosed by stone circles, and situated on comparatively level ground.—Three very fine examples occur here, 15, 11, and 8 yards diameter, with cists $48 \times 23 \times 24\frac{1}{2}$ inches, $56 \times 36 \times 24$ inches, and $35 \times 28 \times 22$ inches respectively, all to N.E. by N. (magnetic). The largest of these is locally known as the "Giant's grave," from the large size of the skeleton it contained, which occurred in the usual recumbent posture. I have reason to believe that these and some other cists were opened about the time that the Clava cairns were explored. Unopened cairns like the above occur frequently here.

(6) Cisted stone circle without a cairn.—As yet I have found only one

example here, 8 yards diameter. The cist has been removed, and the lid alone remains. The enclosed area resembles a beautiful little lawn with a hole in the centre where the cist occurred.

(7) Cists found in arable fields where stone circles, cairns, or mounds might have formerly occurred.—Seven or eight cists have been found at different times on certain parts of the farms of Mains of Daviot, Nairnside, and Castletown. It is understood that they lay in the usual compass direction, and that one of them (at Nairnside) contained an urn.

(8) Full length cists and other remains situated on the summit of a round knoll crowned with an earthen ring or trench, 11 yards diameter. A narrow trench in it opened by me showed that it was filled with small chips of sandstone and the bottom covered with charcoal. The full length cist, $6 \times 2\frac{1}{2} \times 2$ feet, opened by me. It was also strewed with charcoal, very neatly filled up with small chips of sandstone, and covered with large flags, which lay 8 or 9 inches under the surface of the ground. The adjacent structures are still unopened. The sides are formed of flags set on edge, the largest being at the west end. It is 5 feet broad, and stands 5 feet 3 inches above the surface. The cists lie E. and W. (magnetic). Somewhat similar cases are referred to in *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, Jan. 10, 1876, pp. 369 and 372. There is also a "hut circle" containing a burial cairn.

(9) Full length cists on comparatively level ground *minus* the earthen ring, &c.—Two specimens occur here, but their sides have been partially displaced. They lie to N.E. by N. (magnetic).

(10) Churchyards apparently founded upon the sites of earlier burying places.—At St. Dorothy's (Clava), Daviot, and Dunlichity we have three cases in point.