II.

AN ACCOUNT OF A CIRCULAR BUILDING AND OTHER ANCIENT REMAINS DISCOVERED IN SOUTH UIST. BY SIR HENRY DRYDEN, BART.

The following account of a discovery of ancient remains in South Uist is a very imperfect one, but, under the circumstances, it is not probable that a better one will be obtained. The island is nearly at the south end of the group of the Hebrides, and is the property of Colonel Gordon of Cluny, and in 1855 his son Mr C. Gordon (since deceased) was residing there. I took down the account of the discovery from a description by Mr C. Gordon when he was in Edinburgh in 1856. Some of the remains were brought over by him at that time, and given to the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Near the west shore, and nearly level with the sea, was a mound of sand, &c. (see woodcut, fig. 1.) In 1855 Mr C. Gordon opened it, and found the remains of a circular building (see plan in the woodcut fig. 2) about 12 feet diameter in the interior, composed of rough walls about 5 feet thick. There were two entrances, one about 4 feet square, and the other about 2 feet 6 inches square, up to one of which was a
paved path. The circular wall, about 8 feet in height, remained; and
parts of the roof remained, projecting inwards a little. The roof was
formed of stones laid horizontally, each projecting inwards a little more
than the one below it, as shown in section.

In the thickness of the walls were recesses (4?), each about 4 feet
square, all covered in with roofs formed as described above. On the floor of the
main chamber was found a copper needle (formed of wire, with an eye or opening
through it near one extremity)—a quantity of deer's horns—a human
thigh-bone—thirty or forty vertebrae of whales, flattened and marked with
cuts—a bone article, flat at each end and round in the middle, 8 or 9 inches
long (lost)—a sort of knife or lancet made of thin bone, probably the brow
antler pared thin and carved—another bone article, apparently a lid of a small
box—a comb—six black stone dishes, all about 2½ inches thick, and
varying from 1 foot 8 inches to 10 inches long. The small brooch,
which is now, with the other remains, in the Museum of the Society, was
found in the island, but not in this building.

I have before stated that I wrote down this account from a verbal de-
scription by Mr C. Gordon, and therefore I cannot with confidence com-
pare it with other remains; but, if correctly described, it is an interesting
link between the forts or "burgs" and the so-called "Picts' houses"
found in Orkney and Shetland. The burgs (generally pronounced brochs)
or forts in these islands are buildings consisting of a wall from 8 feet to 25
feet in thickness, enclosing an unroofed circular area varying from 14 to
38 feet in diameter, with one entrance, rectangular in the head. The
enclosing wall of Mousa Tower, which is the most perfect, is 41 feet high.
(See Wilson’s "Prehistoric Annals," p. 420.) But probably many were
not so high. In the thickness of the walls are chambers generally
isolated, and roofed by gradually bringing inward stones laid horizontally,
till a large stone would reach across. The chambers at Mousa and at
one or two other forts are continuous, and covered by large stones without
the measuring process. The interior area of the brochs was not roofed,
and could not have been, as they had no timber to roof with, or to make
a framework to construct a stone roof on, and the area was too large to
cover, as the chambers are covered.

The "Picts' houses" are more or less sunk in the ground, and consist
of several roofed chambers like those first mentioned in the brochs, in one
block without the central area, and are irregular in shape and relative
disposition, with one entrance. (See Wilson, p. 84.) This South Uist build-
ing is of small area, and the walls thin compared with the forts above
mentioned. It resembles them in being circular, and in having chambers
in the walls. On the other hand, it differs from them in having two
entrances, and in the very material point of having had a roof to the
central area. This would lead us to suppose that it had never been above
15 feet high.

It differs from the Picts' houses in being circular, in being above ground,
in having small chambers placed round a central one, and in having two
entrances.

Search in printed documents and inquiry from antiquaries should be
made, whether any similar buildings have been discovered.

Of the remains found and presented to the Museum of the Society, the
comb and pin resemble many others found in Picts' houses and brochs.
The knife is peculiar. The vertebrae mentioned were probably for some
game; and somewhat similar articles have been found elsewhere. Deer's
horns are almost always found in those ancient buildings.
Stone dishes like these have been found near Sand Lodge in Shetland, and were probably used at a much later date than the date of this building.