

II.

NOTICES OF TEAMPULL MICHAEL, KEALLUN, NORTH UIST, AND OF
SCULPTURED STONES IN BEARNAREY, HARRIS, AND IN BENBECULA;
AN "ABRACH" QUERN, AND QUARRY FOR QUERNS, HEISGEIR,
NORTH UIST, &c. BY ALEX. A. CARMICHAEL, Esq., LOCHMADDY, IN
A LETTER TO W. F. SKENE, Esq., LL.D., F.S.A. Scot.

St Michael's Temple (*Teampull Mhicheil*), at Keallun, in the island of Grimisey, N. Uist, is said to have been built during the last half of the fourteenth century, by Amie, sometimes named Annie, and sometimes Algive Macruari, daughter and heiress of Ruari MacAllan, styled *De Insulis*, and High Chief of Lorn. This Amie Macruari married her relation, John of Isla, the first Lord of the Isles, *Dominus Insularum*, and called by the priests of the period, from his benefactions to their Church, "the good John of Isla." Their consanguinity being within the forbidden degree, a dispensation for their marriage was obtained from the Pope. This dispensation is dated 1337. But, in the course of some years, "the good John of Isla," forming more ambitious schemes, obtained another dispensation from the Pope for the dissolution of this marriage; and, without a stain upon her character, he divorced the Lady Amie, and married the Lady Margaret, daughter of Robert II., and of

Marjory, the only remaining child of King Robert the Bruce. The Lady Amie had three sons by her marriage. These were—John, whose descendants early became extinct; Godfrey, ancestor of Siol Gorrie, in N. Uist; and Ranald, who married a daughter of the Earl of Atholl, and niece of Robert II., and ancestor of the MacDonells of Glengarry and the Clanranalds.

By his second marriage, the first Lord of the Isles had other three sons. Donald, the eldest of these, and the second Lord of the Isles, became the first Earl of Ross, and fought the famous battle of Harlaw, in 1411, against the Duke of Albany; John, *Iain Mòr*, ancestor of Clan Iain Mhoir of Isla, and the Earls of Antrim; and Alexander, *Mastair Carrach*, Lord of Lochaber, and the progenitor of the Macdonalds of Kepoch.

After her divorce, the Lady Amie dwelt on her own numerous and extensive properties, where she erected a number of secular and ecclesiastical buildings. Among others, she is said to have built the well-known Castletirin (*Caisteal-Tioram*) in Moideart, Borve Castle (*Caisteal Bhuiridh*), and St Columba's Church (*Eaglais Chalumchìlee*) in the island of Benbecula, S. Uist; and the Temple of the Holy Trinity (*Teampull na Trianaid*), at Cairinnish; Christ's Temple (*Teampull Chrìosd*), in the island of Baileshear; and St Michael's Temple (*Teampull Mhicheil*), in the island of Grimisey, North Uist.

St Michael's Chapel is built upon a beautiful knoll, jutting into, and about 150 feet above the level of the sea, at Keallun Bay, in the island of Grimisey. There is a very fine and extensive view from it. The founder is said to have built it as an oratory wherein she might worship while detained from crossing the Minch by stormy weather, when going to visit her relations in Lorn.

About 150 yards north-east of St Michael's, there was another chapel and burying ground upon another point of land jutting into, but only a few feet above the level of, the sea. There are now hardly any traces of this chapel, and I have hitherto failed even to ascertain the name.

This end of the island of Grimisey is called Keallun (*Na Ceallun*), the name evidently originating from these chapels or oratories. Probably the name is derived from the Latin *cella*, which in its turn is likely to be derived from the Gaelic *cuil* or *ceall*, a cell. From this again origi-

nated the surname Mac Keallar (*Mac Ceallair*), the son of the *Ceallair*, the man of the cells, or the superior of the cells or chapels, that is, the superior of the monastery. Keallun Bay is called *Bàgh-nan-Ceall*, and these old chapels are known as *Teampull nan Ceall*. There is a place in Mull also called Keallun, and the arm of the sea upon which it is situated is called *Loch-nan-Ceall*. I have heard of other places similarly named.

The Siol Gorrie, previously referred to, were at one time numerous in N. Uist; but a savage feud between themselves and the Siol Murdoch, another sept of the Macdonalds, brought them to the verge of extinction. The former were the legitimate possessors of N. Uist, but the latter disputed this, whereupon the two contending factions began a struggle which, in its destructiveness, might be compared to the Wars of the Roses, or the apocryphal story of the Kilkenny cats.

It would seem that the Siol Murdoch (*Siolach Mhurachaidh*), the descendants of Murdoch, were the stronger, and consequently that the Siol Gorrie (*Siolach Ghoirriidh*), the descendants of Gorrie, were as much indebted to their stratagems as to their strength in maintaining the unequal contest. The greater part of the Siol Murdoch lived in the Valley of Hosta. About three quarters of a mile from, and in the hill above this, there was a lake. The Siol Gorrie upon one occasion came under cover of night and cut away the embankment of this lake, whereupon the water rushed down the glen and drowned the inhabitants of the valley beneath.

The scene of this tragedy has remained the site of the lake ever since. During calm, clear weather, I believe, the remains of houses can still be discovered in the bottom of the lake. To revenge this outrage, the rest of the Siol Murdoch marched in a body against the Siol Gorrie, who lived at Udal, on the north-east side of the island. It is said that Udal was the largest township in the Long Island at that time.

The Siol Murdoch found the Siol Gorrie at their tillage in the fields, when they came upon them unawares, and put them all to the sword, except one man, who escaped by swimming and wading across to the island of Oirisey, whence he escaped to Boisdall, in S. Uist, where it is said some of his descendants are still. After putting all their foes to the sword, the Siol Murdoch pursued their course to the hamlet of Udal, the

whole of which they gave to the flames, sparing neither young nor old, male nor female, in their savagery.

It is said that there were eighteen "ploughs" (*seisrichean*) at work in the fields on this occasion, and considering that the rude mode of tillage in vogue in those days required five or six men attending each "plough," the carnage on this field of slaughter must have been great.

The Gaelic *seisreach*, a set of plough horses, literally means six horses—*seis-ir-each*, the necessary team for ploughing of old in the Western Isles. There were four horses attached to the principal plough—*crom-nan-gad*—and two to the *rustal*, a kind of marking or scarifying plough, which preceded the *crom-nan-gad*. As evidence of the tenacity of antiquated customs, however effete they may become, I may mention that these ancient ploughs, the *crom-nan-gad* and the *rustal*, are still commonly used in Lewis.

I have examined the ruins, many of which are still visible, of the houses wherein lived the ill-fated Siol Gorrie; and in corroboration of the tradition regarding their fate, I have found charred bones, grain, and stones, and pins and needles of bone, brass, and bronze. I have seen a very fine gold pin found there. It is from three to four inches long, and very plain.

The deceitfulness of the Siol Murdoch is still proverbial in Uist, and there are those who pride themselves upon being descended not from the deceitful and illegitimate Siol Murdoch, but from the legitimate and honourable Siol Gorrie.

A funeral took place at Killmuir, on the west side of N. Uist, some years ago. It was before the bagpipe was discontinued here at funerals. The piper played a *piobaireac* that had often caused many a bloody fray between the rival septs. At once the whole scene changed from solemn propriety to a lively fight, and resulted in many severe injuries having been given and received on either side. Not long since, a piper played this party air in a house in which there was an old woman of ninety of the Siol Murdoch, upon whom the poet reflects. The piper was walking to and fro, evidently unconscious of the brewing storm. The old woman, who was spinning with her distaff, was observed to be "nursing her wrath to keep it warm," but her wrath would not be nursed, and she got up and struck the piper, breaking his chanter, and severely injuring his fingers!

I have been able to recover only the following lines of the obnoxious song :—

Gu traigh ! gu traigh ! Siolach a Mhurachaidh,
 Gu traigh ! gu traigh ! Siolach a Mhurachaidh,
 Gu traigh ! gu traigh ! Siolach a Mhurachaidh,
 Siol dugh nan car !
 Siol dugh nan car !
 Siol dugh nan car !
 Siol nan cuilichian or cuiligionn.

I think the following is a sufficiently close translation :—

To the strand ! to the strand ! ye seedlings of Murdoch,
 To the strand ! to the strand ! ye seedlings of Murdoch,
 To the strand ! to the strand ! ye seedlings of Murdoch,
 The black-hearted seedlings !
 The black-hearted seedlings !
 The black-hearted seedlings !
 The seedlings of Murdoch.

The request, “ Gu traigh, gu traigh,” “ to the strand, to the strand,” is evidently in allusion to the Siol Murdoch being considered as intruders by the Siol Gorrie.

Such was the state of society in Uist some centuries ago, and the feelings engendered then are not even yet entirely extinct.

THE BEARNAREY OBELISK.—The stone of which I send a tracing has been taken from the island of Bearnarey, in the Sound of Harris. It formed the upper end of an obelisk which stood in a large semicircle facing the east, near the centre of the island, at a place called Kil-laisem (*Cilleaiseam*), St Asaph. Speaking of Bearnarey, Martin, in his “ Western Islands,” says,—“ There are two chappels in this isle, to wit, St Asaph and St. Columbus’s Chappel. There is a stone erected near the former, which is 8 foot high, and 2 foot thick.”

About fifty years ago this obelisk was broken. Boys were in the habit of mounting to the top and swaying it to and fro, till ultimately they broke it at the surface of the ground. When it fell it broke in two pieces near the centre. These were taken away by two crofters, and placed as lintels over the entrance to a cattle-fold (*cuthaidh*) close at hand. After having been there for some years, they were transferred by the same men to serve a similar purpose in their dwelling-houses. I traced

this piece to the house of one of these crofters, a MacKillop (*MacPhilip*), where it was used as a lintel over his kitchen window. MacKillop was very reluctant to allow the slab to be removed for examination, although I twice offered to replace it at my own expense. Ultimately, however, he consented. But before removing it, I thought proper to inform the proprietor, the Earl of Dunmore, of its existence, and to ask his sanction to its removal from the island. His Lordship immediately wrote his factor to secure the slab, and bring it to Rodail. Upon his Lordship's arrival in Harris he wrote me, expressing his interest in the stone, and giving his permission to make what use of it I pleased. I got the slab removed from Rodail to Lochmaddy, where it now lies. It is a dark bluish-gray gneiss, and measures 3 feet 8 inches long, 19 inches broad, and 3 inches thick. The upper portion of the carving forming the square is sufficiently distinct to be easily traced, but the lower portion is more defaced, and in some places the surface of the stone is entirely broken. How far the carving extended on the other part of the obelisk there is at present no means of ascertaining. The crofter who had it, feeling some remorse, restored it to the place where he found it. He alleged that a carlin of ugly form and features visited him one night, and entreated and commanded him to return the obelisk of *Cilleaiseam*, St Asaph, otherwise that he would suffer here and hereafter. The man went early the following morning, apparently much troubled, and entreated MacKillop to restore his part of the stone. MacKillop replied that his part of the slab was of much use to him; that he had no vision; and that he would defer returning it till the ugly carlin honoured him with a visit. The other man returned his part, and shortly thereafter went to America, where he died. Some other person less scrupulous took away this part of the stone, which I have hitherto failed to trace.

The old people of Bearnarey have told me that within their memory the base of the obelisk was surrounded with a heap of small, beautifully white, and variegated pebbles, old coins, bone pins, and bronze needles, the offerings of pilgrims at the shrine of St Asaph.

MacKillop, on whose croft the obelisk stood, told me that in delving the place preparatory to sowing corn, he was in the habit of turning up a number of bones. There is no trace now of the "chappel" mentioned by Martin, nor indeed of any building whatever. The place is in the

corner of a field, and has been under cultivation for some years. Close by the side of the obelisk there stood one of those old circular duns so common in the Hebrides. I would have inferred that this was the remains of the "chappel," were it not that MacKillop told me that it contained wall passages and galleries common to these duns. All the stones were carried away for building materials.

ABRACH QUERN AND QUARRY FOR QUERNS AT HEISGEIR.—The stones I have sent for the Museum, besides the font previously described, are the flat stone found under the sea in Benbecula, and the upper half of an old quern. This quern, I think, possesses some interest. It was found a number of years ago in Benbecula, after the winter storms blew away a large sand bank under which it lay buried. It was discovered at a place known as *Machair an Dunghaineacha*, a little north-east of Bailevanaich, where the monks had their monastery.

A large sand bank, which might be called a small hill, ran parallel with the sea south-west and north-east for about a mile or a mile and a half. Here and there some solitary remnants of this sand hill are still standing. In the large gaps dug by the winds to the level of the surrounding *machair* (sandy plain) ruins were discovered of various shapes and sizes. Among some of these ruins this quern was discovered. It is small, and of a kind known here as "*Abrachs*," evidently meaning Lochaber. These "*Abrachs*" are a peculiar kind of quern. They are smaller than the ordinary quern, and different in their geological composition. The ordinary quern is picked like a mill-stone, but these "*Abrachs*" are never picked. The people here have a tradition among them that the mode the old people had to roughen the "*Abrach*" was to place it under a waterfall at night, and in the morning that it was ready for use. At first sight this may seem absurd, but I believe it to be substantially correct. If the stone is minutely examined, the composition will be found to contain hard and soft matter in equal proportions. If the stone were placed under a waterfall, the water would wash away the soft matter, and leave the hard gritty matter unaffected. The only difficulty would be to find a waterfall in the Long Island. But these "*Abrachs*" work for a long series of years ere they require "*roughening*." I have seen one a few days ago, and I was assured that it had not been roughened within the last seventy or eighty years, although always working during that time.

The name of these querns would imply that they came from Lochaber. "Abrach," or more correctly "Aberach," means a person or thing of or belonging to Lochaber. Yet the stone of which the "Abrach" quern is made is found in the island of Heisgeir, North Uist. When there, a few weeks ago, I discovered a sea-beaten rock in a small creek, where scores of these querns were quarried. The original surface of the rock is cut away, and the size of each quern, and the marks of the tools used in cutting out, are quite visible. On examining the composition of this rock, I found it to correspond exactly with the peculiar kind of stone of which the "Abrachs" are made.

This was to me an interesting discovery. The quern cutting was in all stages of progress. Some were just begun, and the marking could only be faintly traced; others were half cut and abandoned; while not a few broke as they were being separated from the rock. Yet this quern quarry, if I may so term it, cannot have been worked for many long years. The "Abrachs" are only found among old ruins, and the oldest people in the place have no tradition where they came from, except that they infer from the name that they must have come from Lochaber. Neither did they seem to know anything of this quarry before I discovered it.

When the *brath-uacair* or *clar-uacair* (the upper quern stone sent you) was found sixty or seventy years ago, a *beirt* was placed in the eye, and it was set to work. The family who had it in Benbecula removed some years ago to North Uist. Here I traced it to an old woman at Taighearry, a daughter of the finder. It probably lay buried under the sand hill for some hundred years. You will observe that there is a cross upon it in relief. I may mention, that the people here have a tradition that the sand banks change every alternate century. They allege that the banks take a century in forming, and another in decaying. Martin mentions that the same opinion was current in his day, nearly two centuries ago.

Near the ruins where the quern was found two other interesting objects were discovered,—a paved cross and a draw-well. The cross was paved with small brown stones like a ship's biscuits, and overlapping one another like slates upon a house. The pavement was in four sections, divided by a cross of pure white sand, with a raised stone at each corner. I believe that it was about ten feet square. I got a minute description of this interesting work of antiquity from an old man who saw it in his boyhood,

but after much search and inquiry, I regret to say that I have failed to find it myself. I fear it is long ago again covered with sand. If I remember right, I think I sent a rude sketch of this cross to Captain Thomas some time ago. I intended to send him a better sketch, but I delayed in hopes to find the original.

The well I have seen, but it is now full of sand. When discovered, I believe it was somewhere between 15 and 25 feet deep, and built in the form of a cone. Over the mouth of the well there was a fine large flag, which, as well as part of the stones of the well, a man carried away to build a house. Of course the consequence was, that in such a sandy place the well immediately filled up with sand drift (*siaban*).

The people allege that the water in this well was quite different from that of any other well in the Long Island. They maintain that it was medicinal. There are many such in the Long Island. The people also maintain that the spirit of the ancient well was angry at the ruthless manner in which the well was treated, and that, as a consequence, no person has lived long or happily in the house built with the stones taken out of the well.

SCULPTURED STONE, BENBECULA.—About a mile or a mile and a half due east of the ruined well is Strome Shunnamal, or the Stronce or Sound of Sunnamal, where I found the flat slab of granite sent. Sunnamal is a small isle in the island of Benbecula, the sound of which is dry at low water. The stone rested upon a thin stratum of sand. Underneath the sand was a considerable depth of moss, as pure, fresh, and containing as much undecayed vegetable matter as any in the contiguous moor where the people cut their peats. Upon making a more accurate survey of the spot upon which the stone lay, I find that it is nearly dry at half-ebb spring tides. Close to the stone lay scattered a number of other stones, evidently the remains of some ancient building or heap of stones. The place is on the north-east side of Benbecula, upon the sound betwixt Benbecula and North Uist.

[The slab from Strome Shunnamal is of grey granite, 3 feet long by $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet broad and 8 to 9 inches thick. It bears on the one face an incised circle twelve inches in diameter, within which are three smaller circles and a triquetral ornament between them. Beside the large circle there is an oblong incised rectangular figure 13 inches long by 3 inches in

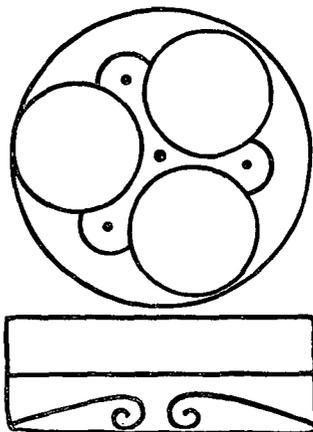
breadth, divided into two panels, one of which contains two triangular figures. The other side of the stone is not sculptured.]

STONE, WITH SCULPTURINGS OF CUPS AND CIRCLES, BENBECULA.—I sent also a tracing upon cotton cloth, for Sir James Simpson's acceptance, of a large stone discovered by me more than two years ago at N. Håcleit, Benbecula. This very fine stone is 10 feet, by $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet, by 10 inches. The under side is perfectly level, with a granular surface. The upper side is nearly, but not quite level, and smooth and weather-beaten on the surface.

This granite slab rests upon the edge of a low bank. A passage runs under the slab, and the first time I saw it the slab formed the roof of a piggery. The slab slopes towards one side and one end. On the upper edge it rests upon the ground about the centre, both ends being free; and on the lower edge it rests upon the ground from the centre to the end. This is the edge and end towards which the slab inclines, and upon which it mainly rests. The slab is on the top of a knoll, or hillock, at the end of a shepherd's house.

On one side of the slab, the knoll is seemingly composed of stones and earth, and I fancy there are some passages; while on the other side, at the end of the slab, the mound is cut away to the level of the surrounding ground for the site of a house, the walls of which are still standing.

The ring and cup-cuttings are upon the upper side of the slab. When I first saw this interesting stone I had not seen Sir James Simpson's book on Rings and Cup-cuttings, nor had I ever seen or heard anything of the stones of which the book treats. I was attracted to the stone from its size and beauty, and upon looking at it minutely I saw a ring and hollows upon it. My impression then was that these had something to do with astronomy. But since reading Professor Simpson's book, I



Sculpture on a Stone of Granite from
Strome Shunnamal, Benbecula
(3 feet in length).

find that he does not much venture upon any theory regarding the use of these circles and cup-cuttings, and when he refrains it would ill become me to suggest any.