

IX.

NOTES ON ORMOND OR AVOCH CASTLE, IN THE BLACK ISLE, ROSS-SHIRE, WITH A PLAN AND SECTION; AND NOTICE (WITH DRAWINGS) OF BRONZE CELTS FOUND IN ITS VICINITY. BY ANGUS J. BEATON, C.E., F.S.A. SCOT., BANGOR, NORTH WALES.

Ormond or Lady Hill lies on the east side of the northern shore of the Inverness Firth, and midway between Inverness and Fortrose, forming one of the headlands which guard the entrance to the Bay of Munlochy. The highest point of the hill is 390 feet, but the knoll on its eastern shoulder, on which the castle stood, is only 200 feet above sea-level.

The castle is supposed to have been one of the royal erections built in the twelfth century, to keep in check the disloyal inhabitants of the district. We find it chronicled that in 1179 King William the Lion erected two castles in the lordship of Ardmanach [the Black Isle]; one of these was Redcastle, and Ormond Castle is supposed to be the other.

The ancient name of Redcastle was Eddyrdor. In 1278 it was in possession of Sir Andrew de Boscho and his wife Elizabeth, and they paid two merks yearly to the monks of Beaully at their Castle of Eddirdivar. In 1230 it belonged to Sir John Bisset, who built the Beaully Priory. In 1455 the Barony of Edderdail and the Red Castle, with the lordships of Ross belonging thereto, were annexed to the Crown by James II.; and in 1481 (5th April) James III. granted to his second son, the Marquis of Ormond, the lands of the lordship of Ardmannache, called Avauch, and Netherdale, with the moot hill of Ormond and the castle and fortalice of Redcastle. The building of Redcastle is considerably modernised, and so much changed that its original form can now be only conjectured. Mr Alexander Ross, architect, referring to it at a meeting of the Inverness Field Club, says:—"It appears to me that the oldest portion is the south front overlooking the firth, and that it constituted the keep or main tower; the east and south fronts seem to form two sides of a pentagon, which may have been the form of the great enclosure, a plan not uncommon in our Highland castles."

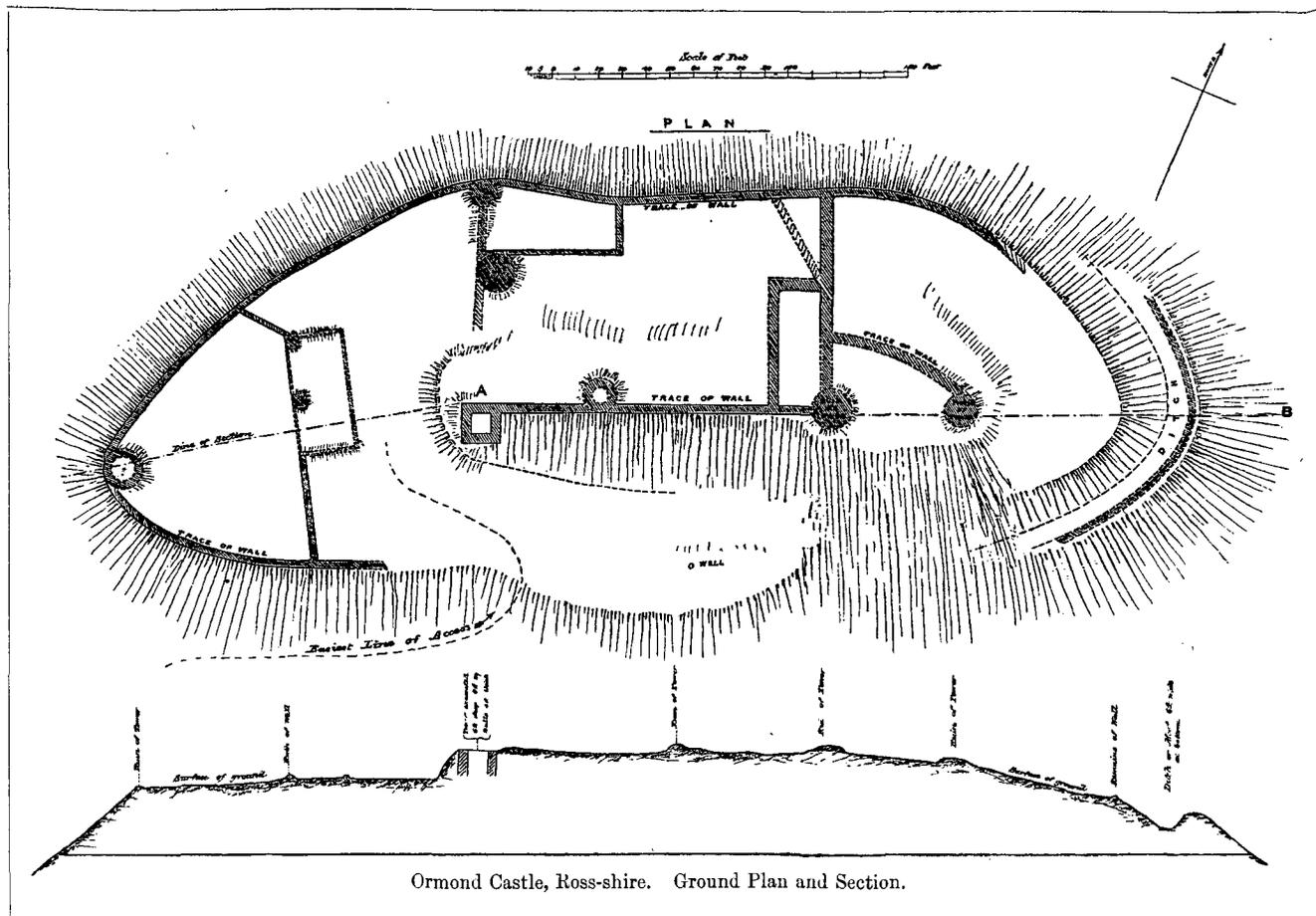
In the *Origines Parochiales Scotiæ* we have the following:—"From the Castle of Avoch, known as the Castle of Ormond, Ormondry or Ormond Hill and Douglas Castle, Hugh of Douglas, between 1440 and 1448, drew the style of Earl of Ormond; and James Stewart, the second son of King James III., between 1460 and 1481, drew the style of Marquis of Ormond. In 1481, as we have seen, King James III. granted the lands of Avauch, with the moot-hill of Ormond, to the Marquis of Ormond, who about 1503 resigned the lands, but retained the moot-hill in order to preserve his title."

A writer of the seventeenth century mentions "Ormond Hill southward from the church [of Avoch], with the remains of a castle," and elsewhere describes it as "Castletown, with the ruynes of a castle called the Castle of Ormond, which hath given style to sundrie earls, and last to the princes of Scotland." The foundations of the Castle remain on the top of a hill near Castletown Point, on the Bay of Munloch, about 200 feet above the level of the sea. They occupy a space 350 feet by 160 feet, and the castle seems to have been built of coarse red sandstone and lime, with a ditch on one side. The Hill of Castletown is now known as Ormond Hill or Ladyhill,—the latter name having arisen evidently from the dedication of its chapel.

The following is an extract quoted in Anderson's *Guide to the Highlands*:—

"On a rocky mound called 'Ormond' or 'Ladyhill,' stood the ancient Castle of Avoch, to which, as related by Wyntoun, the Regent, Sir Andrew de Moravia, retired from the fatigues of war, and ended his days about the year 1338, and was buried in the 'Cathedral Kirk of Rosemarkin.'¹ Passing afterwards into the possession of the Earls of Ross, this castle was, on their forfeiture in 1476, annexed to the Crown, when James the Third created his second son Duke of Ross, Marquis of

¹ See Fraser-Tytler's *History of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 65. It appears strange that no trace of Regent Moray's grave has been discovered about the cathedral tombs of Fortrose. There are three tombs built under the arches of the remaining aisle, one of which is regarded as being the tomb of a Countess of Ross, supposed to have been the foundress of the church; the other as of its first bishop, and probably the remains of the third may have held the Regent.



Ormond Castle, Ross-shire. Ground Plan and Section.

Ormond, and Earl of Edirdal, otherwise called Ardmanache ; and hence this district, which still bears these names, thus became one of the regular appanages of the royal family of Scotland.”¹

This annexation in the time of James II. was repeated and confirmed by the whole Parliament on 1st July 1476, in favour of James III., who afterwards, on 29th January 1487, created his second son Duke of Ross, *Marquis of Ormond*, and Earl of Edirdale otherwise called Ardmanache or the Black Isle ;² from which period the lordship of Ardmanache was generally considered as part of the patrimony of the king's second son (*Acts of Scot. Parliament*, Thomson's folio edition, pp. 42, 113, and 181).

In October 1883 I made a survey of the top of Ormond Hill and the ruins of the castle, but, notwithstanding the assistance of several men, kindly sent by Mr Fletcher of Rosehaugh for excavating, the amount of débris requiring removal was so great, that we only succeeded in clearing one tower, marked A on plan I therefore experienced great difficulty in tracing the original outline as shown on the annexed plan (see fig.); the walls being so much overgrown with turf, the whole area must needs be excavated to obtain a thoroughly reliable ground plan. So far as measured, we found pretty well-defined traces of walls ; but the towers, which now appear as circular, may prove to be square when cleared out, as did the one at A on the plan, which presented a circular appearance before being cleared out, but when dug to a depth of 6 feet revealed an inside opening 9 feet square, with substantially built walls in sandstone and mortar, 4 feet thick. In this tower we found a very fine sandstone door rybat, with the “droving” or chisel marks distinctly clear. This stone is now in the possession of Mr Douglas Fletcher at Rosehaugh House.

The plan indicates that the castle was of an oval form, following the

¹ The earldom of Ross and lordship of Ardmanoch are appointed to be the patrimony of the king's second son, James VI., par. 11, cap. 30.

² The original appellation of the Black Isle was Edderdail, or the land between the two arms of the sea ; some think that this name in course of time might become corrupted to “Ellandhu,” which is the Gaelic for Black Isle. “Ardmeanach” signifies a height in the middle, and “Ardmanach” the land or territory of the monks.—See *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, June 1883, p. 477.

contour of the hill, similar in outline to many ancient places of defence. The summit of the hill is moderately flat, so far as occupied by the castle, and showing a uniform, and rather artificial slope of about one to one, starting abruptly from the edge of a wall 4 feet thick which runs all round; while on the east side a fosse or dry ditch traverses the nose of the hill, running for 30 or 40 yards around the north and south sides; this ditch is now 6 feet wide at the bottom, with a mound on east side rising 5 feet above the level of the bottom, 9 feet wide on the top, and sloping $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 on either side. The total length from east to west is about 470 feet and 150 feet broad at the widest part. As may be seen on the plan, there seems to have been a detached portion at the west end. I regret that a more complete plan cannot be presented on this occasion, but I hope after completing further excavations to present a complete plan of the original outline. I have only drawn on this plan what can now be traced, and I have dotted in such portions as remain doubtful.

The "well" shown is merely an excavation scooped out of the conglomerate rock, and being filled with stones, I could not ascertain its actual depth. I managed to push down a rod about 3 feet, which I believe is nearly its maximum depth. Tradition has it that in the bottom of this well the treasures of the castle were thrown, and the buildings set on fire by the occupants, on seeing the approach of Cromwell's army against it. That the materials of the building were removed from the site, there is abundance of evidence, for from the summit to the shore, the track where the stones were rolled down can be easily traced, and a large block of the building, still lying on the shore, and weighing fully 4 tons, testifies to the truth of this supposition.

Hoard of Flat Bronze Celts found at Ladyhill.—Through the kindness of Mr Hutchison, W.S., Elgin, I am enabled to send drawings of two of a hoard of five bronze Celts found many years ago in the vicinity of Ladyhill, and presented by James Fletcher, Esq. of Rosehaugh, to the Elgin Museum.

Drawing No. 1 represents—full size—the most perfect specimen. It is of the ordinary type of flat bronze Celt, 5 inches long, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide at the broadest point across the cutting face.

No. 2 is less perfect in outline, and measures $5\frac{1}{10}$ inches in length and $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches at widest part across the cutting face. The other three are all more or less of uniform shape, and similar in every respect to the two which have been described. They were discovered while trenching a field in the vicinity of the ruins of the castle.

Small cannon balls are also sometimes discovered in the field adjoining, and one weighing about 4 lbs. was found while digging a sand-pit about 600 yards north of the castle.

Standing Stone.—In the vicinity of the castle and a little further up Munloch Bay, there stands on the terrace, on a circular mound about 10 feet high and 44 yards in circumference, an obelisk of red sandstone 12 inches by 9 inches, slightly tapered, and 8 feet 8 inches high above the ground. According to tradition, it was placed there by a giant who lived in the cave of Craigiechow, immediately opposite; it is, however, most probable that it is a monument erected by the Mathesons, once owners of these lands of Bennetsfield, as it bears on the west face the initials G.M.K. and date 1752, and on the opposite face I.M. E.M.K., 1755, with the Caberfeidh (stag's head) or the Mackenzie crest, and the name of John Matheson and Elizabeth—the surname being hid by a clasp of iron which binds the stone.¹ Northwards from Ormond Castle, and within sight of it, and about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile north of Avoch Church, are the ruins of Arkendeith Tower, called "Airc-Eoin-dubh," or Black John's Ark or place of safety. Black John was a Highland reiver: making raids on his surrounding neighbours, and carrying his booty in safety to his strong fortified dwelling. Nothing now remains of it but the lower story, consisting of a strong walled square room, with the arched or vaulted roof of the dungeon still intact; it seems an erection contemporaneous with Fairburn Tower in the west of the Black Isle, and perhaps not of so much antiquity as is generally ascribed to it. In the *Retours* (1611–18) there is mention of the Bruces of Kinloss holding the lands of Muireal-house and Arkindeuch.

¹ Immediately below this monument is Craigoek Well, to which hundreds resort for its healing virtues on the first Sabbath of summer. A dripping well in Craigiechow Cave is supposed to cure deafness.