

I.

NOTICE OF THE "EIRDE HOUSE," OR UNDERGROUND CHAMBER, AT MIGVIE, ABERDEENSHIRE, WITH PLANS. BY A. JERVISE, Esq.,
COR. MEM. S.A. SCOT. (PLATE XIX.)

The "Eirde House" at Migvie was discovered in the month of July 1862. The total length of the passage, following the curve, is about 41 feet. The original entrance, now closed by a stone flag, was on the north-east, at the point marked H upon the plan; and it appears to have been about 2 feet 5 inches in height, by 1 foot 10 inches in breadth. Nine separate stones cover the passage from C to D; and as it is little more than 2 feet broad, and 11 feet 9 inches long, the flags, unlike those in similar buildings, are in no way remarkable for greatness of size. After the late clearing out of the passage, the portion from A to B was covered with planks of durable native fir; and the side walls, which are about 6 feet high, appear to have converged slightly towards the roof. With the view of having the timber laid level, the walls were *made up* to an equal height; and although now, as before stated, the average height is about 6 feet, probably it had not been more than 5 feet when the original stone covers were upon it, and it had possibly become lower as it approached towards the first remaining cover, where the height is about 4 feet 4 inches. With the exception of a small portion of the wall at F (where is now the entrance, with a door and lock upon it), the side walls were pretty entire when the weem was discovered; but, excepting the single slab at G, and those upon the portion from C to D, the rest of the covers were gone. They had been removed and used for lintels to barn-doors, and for other utilitarian purposes, many years ago.

As shown upon the plan, there is a pretty rapid descent from H to F—a short level portion follows, then a slight rise in the ground towards the inner or west end of the chamber—resembling in this particular the kindred and neighbouring structure at Culsh. About 1 foot 9 inches from the inner end (K), the chamber partakes somewhat of a circular form, and widens considerably and rather irregularly on the north side, while the south side extends much more gently. But these peculiarities, as well as the height and breadth of the chamber at different points, will be best understood by referring to the plan.

At EE two stones are built into the base course of the wall. They are scooped out to the depth of two or three inches, and resemble a mortar both in smoothness and appearance. They are set up perpendicularly—one opposite the other—and, although two different stones, they look more like two halves of one stone, the circle being broken on the lower side, or partly sunk into the ground.

Like the walls of similar buildings, those of the Migvie weem are composed of pretty regular courses of rude boulders, the larger sized forming the base course, with an absence of all sort of mortar. The stones range from one to two cwt. each, though many of them are less, and a few of them larger. The floor is composed of the original soil. The covers on the north-east portion were about $1\frac{1}{2}$ foot below the surface of the field, while the slab G was only from 8 to 10 inches.

I visited this place soon after its discovery, in the hope of being then able to make a plan of it; but the passages were so filled with stones and rubbish, that I gave up the idea for a time—the more readily, as I had the pleasure of hearing that Mr Farquharson of Finzean, on whose property the weem is situated, had taken in hand to have it cleared out, and put into a creditable state. This has now been done in a very satisfactory manner, under the superintendence of Mr Reid, farmer, Smiddyhill, and Mr Thomson, farmer, Mill of Migvie, notwithstanding that some points may not have been managed quite in accordance with the tastes of an antiquary. Nothing was found in the course of making the excavations, or rather in clearing out the weem, except a bronze ring, two or three roughly-formed stone cups, one of which (now at Finzean) was superior in make to the rest, some bits of corroded iron or metal, a bone like a horse's tooth, and large quantities of cinders and charred wood. A lime kiln stood upon the spot where the weem now is; and it was while removing this kiln (which had become useless) that the "eirde house" was discovered. Old inhabitants have heard the erector of the kiln say that he chose the site because he got lintels for the "killogie" ready to his hand.

It was on the occasion of my last visit (14th May 1863) that, accompanied by the Rev. Mr Michie, schoolmaster of Logie-Coldstone (who was the first to acquaint me of the discovery, and from whom I have obtained much valuable assistance and information), I took the necessary measurements for constructing the plan now presented to the Society.

The "eirde house" occupies the summit of a gravel hillock, from which there is an extensive prospect, including the locality of the weem at Culsh, of which I lately sent an account and drawing to the Society, through my friend Mr Stuart, who has so well described Culsh and the district, in his excellent paper on some of the antiquities of Cromar.¹ The church of Migvie, which is now attached to that of Tarland, is about half a mile to the westward of the "eirde house." The church was dedicated to St Finnian, bishop, who flourished about A.D. 660, in honour of whom, about half a mile north-west of the church, a fountain, much esteemed for its never-failing supply of refreshing water, is called *Finnian's Well*.² Only about a year before the discovery of the weem, a fine example of the old sculptured stones of Scotland was raised out of the foundations of the old church, and is now set up in the burial ground.³

It ought to be added, that attention was first drawn both to the "eirde house" and to the sculptured stone, by the late Mr Smith, the humble teacher of a neighbouring side-school. He was quite an enthusiast in such matters; and it is probable that, had he been longer spared, we should have had to thank him for other services of a like kind.

The foundations of the Castle of Migvie, which still indicate the building to have been a place of considerable size and strength, occupy an eminence south-west of the burial ground. It was a residence of the old Earls of Mar.

Mr STUART drew attention to a curious specimen of the ancient sculptured stones of Scotland recently dug out of the foundations of the old church of Migvie, and to the fact now stated by Mr Jervise, that since the time of its discovery, about three years ago, some of the sculptures of equestrian figures have been re-chiselled and defaced. It is to be feared that these monuments, the earliest records of the skill of our forefathers, are not generally treated with the regard which they deserve; but he trusted that such conduct as the present had only to be noticed to secure its reprobation and discontinuance.

¹ Proceedings, vol. i. p. 258-263; and *supra*, page 283, Plate XIX.

² Collections for Aberdeen and Banff, vol. i. p. 632.

³ On my last visit to Migvie, I was shocked to find that some goth had *re-chiselled* and *bevelled* away the originally simple, yet bold and characteristic, outlines of the equestrian figures upon this obelisk!