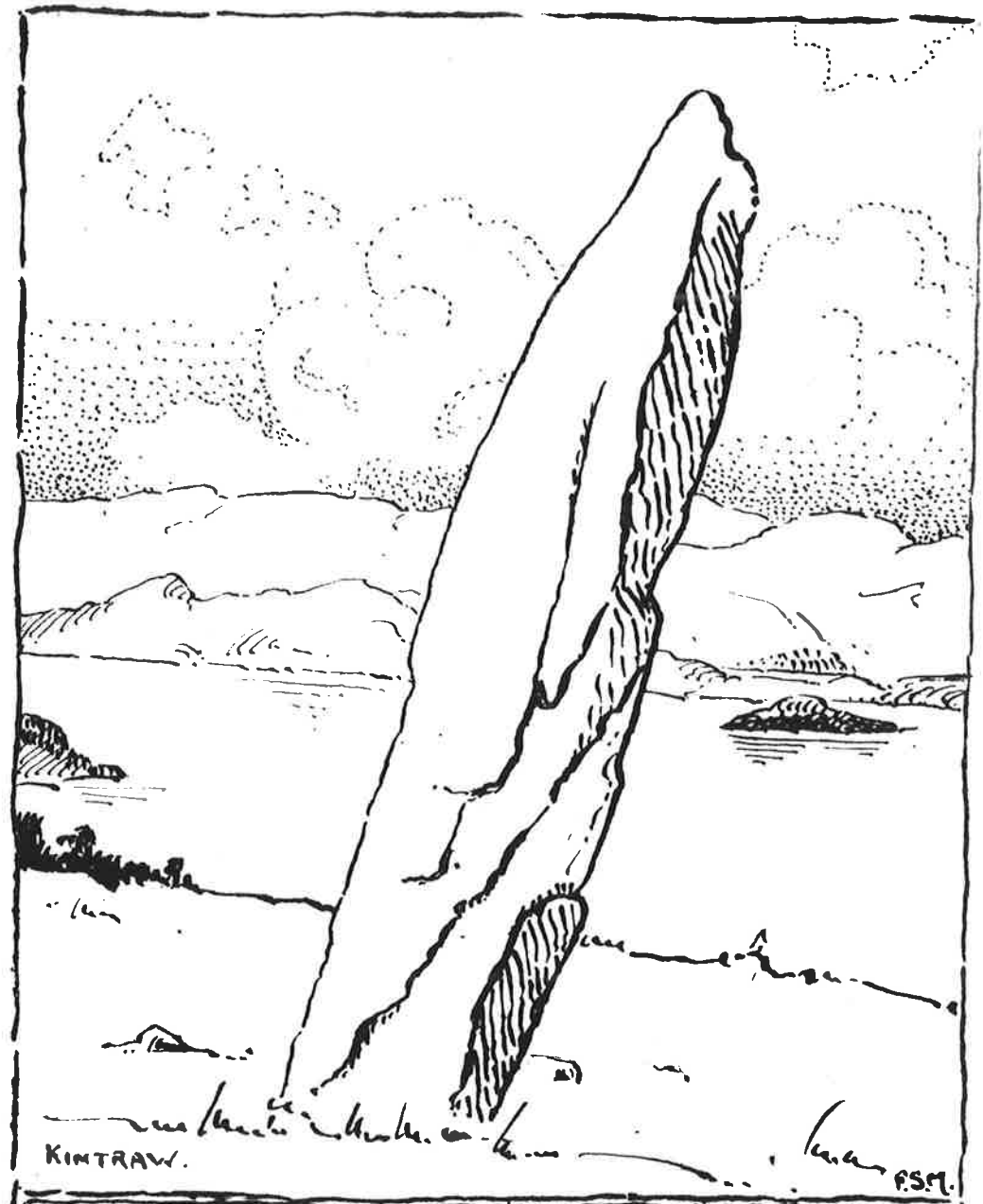

The KIST. 4

T H E .K I S T

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The Magazine of
The Natural History & Antiquarian Society
of Mid-Argyll

.....

NUMBER FOUR
Martinmas I972.

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Editor: F. S. Mackenna, M.A., F.S.A.

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Secretary
Gordon Davis
Harbour Ho. Crinan

Price I5p
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EDITORIAL

.....

It will not escape the notice of readers that the Editorial mantle has descended upon the present incumbent's unworthy shoulders, and the fact of its having so obviously and well become its previous owner serves only to emphasise how ill-fitting it is to its present wearer. Only a full appreciation of the circumstances which had now made it intolerably irksome for our respected and most esteemed President to continue at the present time in the Editorial chair compelled one to display an unwonted temerity in assuming the duties; one can only hope that readers will temper their strictures with kindly indulgence.

Apart from our usual run of outings and lectures, we have embarked, together with the Kintyre Antiquarian Society, on the task of recording all discoverable - and decipherable - pre-1855 gravestones in mid-Argyll and Kintyre; I say 'embarked' but in truth we seem to have done little more than cast off our mooring ropes and make an announcement of where we hope to voyage. I could wish that we had more enthusiasm, as a Society, in the pursuit of this fascinating undertaking, for it is indeed a most interesting and absorbing occupation; but so far only a very few dedicated members have made appreciable inroads in the list of burying-grounds, and this applies equally to the Kintyre Society, to the Council of which I have the honour to belong. Please get moving, and let us have your results, carefully recorded, in a steady flow so that we may fulfil our undertaking to the Scottish Genealogy Society. Elsewhere will be found a short note setting out some of the methods which have proved to yield satisfactory results in the recording of these old stones. Autumn, winter and spring are the seasons which afford greatest comfort, when bracken and midges are not in full career.

As our President told us at the A.G.M. it is hoped that work will recommence next spring

at St Columba's Cave, Ellery, and responsible help with this important project is asked for. Announcements will be made nearer the time at some of our meetings. We ought to welcome any opportunity for making a practical contribution to the objects for which the Society exists; outings and lectures are all very well, but however informative and pleasant they may be they are almost entirely passive, and active participation in excavations and the like should make a direct appeal to our members.

The papers in this number of Kist are again of varied character and it is hoped that a nice balance between the strictly academic and the somewhat lighter contribution has again been held. Papers for future issues are, as always, most earnestly solicited. A slightly different set-up of the pages enables us to use rather longer contributions as well as the shorter, and by suggesting an upward limit of something like 1000 to 1500 words members should feel a greater freedom of room for expounding their subject. This announcement is not intended to scare off any member who has something to communicate which requires only a few words; both short and long papers are most welcome.

The present cover depicts the standing stone at Kintraw, on a plateau overlooking Loch Craignish; it is 13 ft. high and is called locally the Danish King's Grave.

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ENTOMOLOGICAL NOTE

...

Mr Jex Long informs us that he has discovered a fully-fed caterpillar of the Elephant Hawk Moth (Choerocampa elpenor) at Minard, and that it has now successfully pupated. This moth is reasonably common in England and has been noted in Scotland as far north as Dumbarton in the west and Aberdeen in the east, but this Minard sighting places its range-limit somewhat farther.

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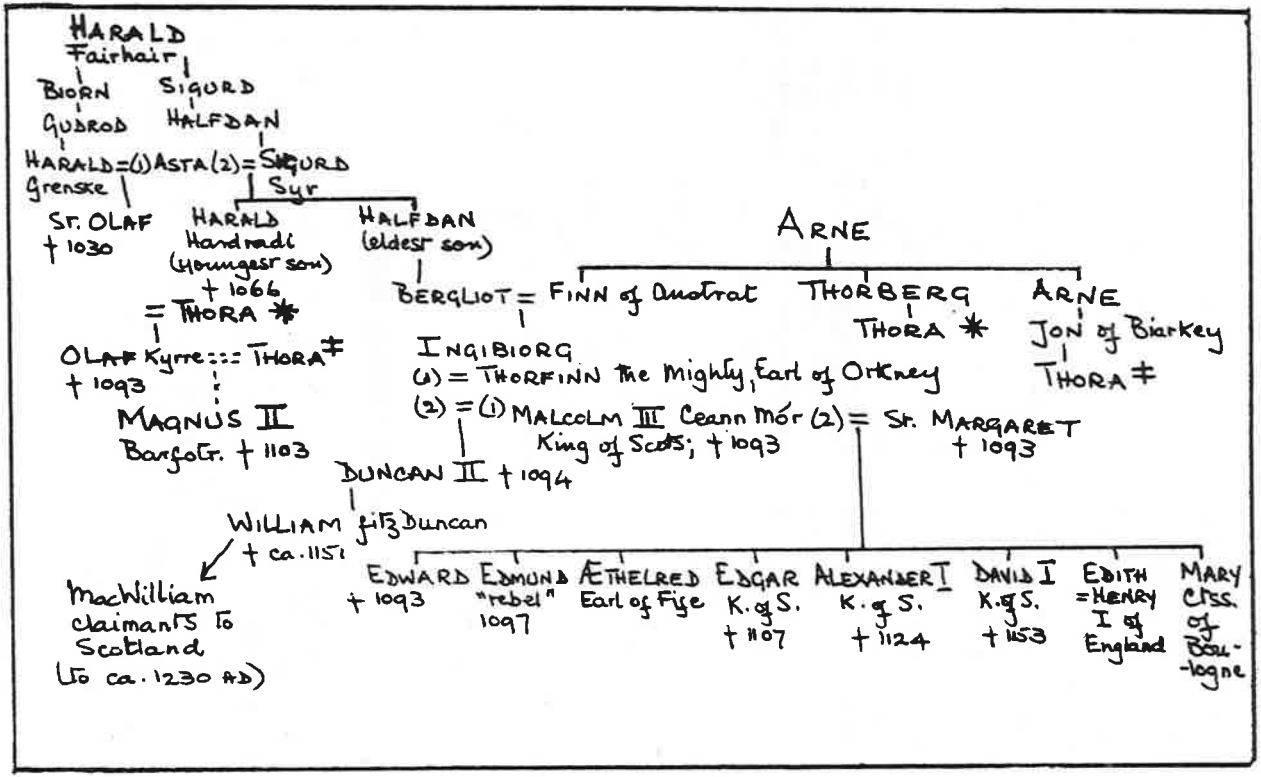
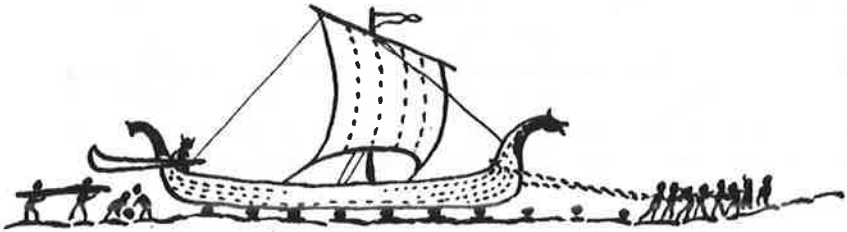

HARALD Fairhair
BIORN
GUDROD
SIGURD
HALFDAN
HARALD = (1) ASTA (2) = SIGURD
Grenske
Syr
ST. OLAF † 1030
HARALD Hardradi (Hungaer son) † 1066
HALFDAN (eldest son)
= THORA *
OLAF Kyrre ::: THORA ≠
† 1093
MAGNUS II Barfotr. † 1103
ARNE
BERGLIOT = FINN of Quotrat
THORBERG
ARNE
THORA *
JON of Biarkey
THORA ≠
INGIBIORG
(1) = THORFINN the Mighty, Earl of Orkney
(2) = (1) MALCOLM III Ceann Mór (2) = ST. MARGARET
King of Scots; † 1093
† 1093
DUNCAN II † 1094
WILLIAM fitz Duncan
† ca. 1151
MacWilliam claimants to Scotland (to ca. 1230 AD)
EDWARD † 1093
EDMUND "rebel" 1097
ÆTHELRED Earl of Fife
EDGAR K. of S. † 1107
ALEXANDER I K. of S. † 1124
DAVID I K. of S. † 1153
EDITH = HENRY I of England
MARY Ctss. of Boulogne



MAGNUS BAREFOOT AND THE TREATY OF TARBERT

Marion Campbell

.....

Most Argyll people know the tale of a Viking who claimed Kintyre by crossing the Tarbert isthmus in his galley with rudder shipped and sail set, but few history books explain the political background to his deed. The "Viking" was in fact a King of Norway, Magnus II "Barefoot" or "Bareleg" (Barfotr) so nicknamed, according to Norwegian tradition, because he adopted Highland dress. His descent on the Western Isles is usually explained as a resolve to levy tribute from subjects who had fled Norway to evade his rule; but there was another reason.

One must recall the dynastic situation in Scotland. Scots kings were (nominally at least) elected from among the royal house within four generations of a former king; Malcolm III "Canmore" (Ceann Mór) after killing MacBeth, succeeded MacBeth's stepson Lulach and was himself succeeded by his eldest son Duncan II. Duncan, dying within the year, was followed by his uncle Donald III Bàn who fought off attacks by his younger nephews and died in 1097. In 1098, when Magnus appeared with his fleet, Edgar Malcomson was newly enthroned as King of Scots with the help of troops sent by William Rufus of England, but his grip on the kingdom was not yet secure.

Donald Bàn left only a daughter, but Duncan II had a son, and as the sketch-pedigree shows,

Magnus II was his close kinsman. Edgar could not rely on endless support from the Norman rulers of England; a Norwegian invasion of Scotland might well incite risings in northern England, where Harald Hardradi had found support only thirty years before and where the Conqueror had savagely suppressed a rebellion.

Older historians chose to see Malcolm III as a northern boor, overawed by his saintly English bride - but in truth Malcolm was himself half English, his mother a grand-daughter of Ethelred the Unready (as Margaret's father was a grandson). His sons could not command total support from traditionalist Scots, least of all in the west where Donald Bàn had found most of his adherents. (Donald is said to have taken refuge in the Isles "where he had kinsmen" after his father's death; it is just possible that he and Malcolm may have been half-brothers.)

On his way southward Magnus seized the young joint-Earls of Orkney, his cousins (sons of Thorfinn and Ingibiorg) and sent them prisoners to Norway; he overthrew local rulers in the Isles, the grandfather of Somerled among them; and he was on his way to deal with Man and with Ireland. It was no wonder if King Edgar tried to buy peace.

The Scots had lost all control of the Isles; to yield them to Magnus was only to recognise a <u>fait accompli</u>. Kintyre, and possibly the islands within the Clyde, and the mainland coasts long settled by Norsemen, were the only bargaining counters left. If the "Treaty of Tarbert" of 1098 was a real treaty (and no text survives, if one ever existed) then it was a diplomatic triumph for the Scots negotiators, playing a weak hand with considerable skill. If they had failed, the history of both Scotland and England might have been very different; we might have formed part of the Norwegian instead of the British Empire, although the dynastic strife in Norway after Magnus's death might have broken the tie very shortly. But they succeeded, and it is a pity that their names have not been recorded for

posterity.

As to the extent of the concessions, there is great doubt. David I was to assert rights over Arran, Bute and Kintyre, and may even have begun building a castle at Tarbert; almost certainly, by alliance with Somerled after he regained his possessions, David acquired a friend with the seapower Scotland lacked. But as to Magnus's demonstration of the grant of 1098 there is small doubt. The crossing of the isthmus was a typically symbolic act, like the giving of seisin by handing over a cut turf; an act to be remembered by all who saw it.

To take ships overland was a commonplace to Norsemen, who traversed Russia from river to river (and 165 years later put a fifty-ship fleet on Loch Lomond during the Largs campaign). Their steering oars were designed to be tripped before grounding, and movement on shore, by rollers and ropes and sail, was nothing unusual. All that was needed was a fair wind astern and plenty of hands to man the cables. We can picture the long, lean ship slithering over her tree-trunk road, with the young king alone at the stern while the Scottish envoys tried to look as if they had got the worst of the bargain.

But indeed they had got much the best of it; only ignorance of the state of the country could have induced Magnus to settle for so little; ignorance or perhaps reluctance to undertake a land campaign. But we may see it as an early example of Scots diplomacy and the attainment of a peaceful settlement when the alternative must have been a destructive and prolonged war. They could not know, after all, that within five years Magnus would be killed in an Irish ambush and that his sons would plunge their own country into civil war; they could only do what was possible to avert invasion and bloodshed - and in this they succeeded.

...oOo...

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER AND HIS LADY

Gladys Mackechnie

.....

Here at Bridge of Douglas, near Inveraray, we've seen the woodpecker flying overhead or heard the impatient 'kip kip' call from high in the tree tops for years. In the early months of the year we hear the 'drumming' and know that spring has come.

It was on March 17th. 1972 that we had our first close-up of G.S.Wood Pecker. He alighted in the holly tree at our back gate. He explored the tree from top to bottom and gave ample time for us to see the symmetrical black and white markings and brilliant pillar-box red head bar and under-tail patch. St Patrick and his early Christian teachings were forgotten, for that had made our day!

A week later he was in the garden gobbling up porridge which the cats had rejected. Then he tried the Tits fat basket which hangs on the Dickie Stick at the greenhouse, but it swayed as he pecked at it. We tied a similar basket close to the trunk of the poplar. That very day he explored the poplar, keeking round at the fat from all angles. At last he jabbed at it, tasted it carefully, jabbed at it again and obviously liked it, for he made a meal of it. He brought his Lady. She tried it and liked it.

They hollowed out their nest hole in the rotten alder at the riverside, taking turns at the job and feeding at the fat basket preceded the change-over, times noted being around 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. in early May. Later in the month a high-pitched and querulous calling came from the vicinity of the nest hole but I did'nt establish definitely that there were young ones. By June 5th the cock bird returned -- his head-bar more subdued. Since then they both come regularly each day (around 10 a.m., 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. at the time of writing - mid-September).

Should any member of the N.H.A.S.M.A. care to come in we shall be glad to show off G.S.Wood Pecker or his Lady...that is provided their liking for best quality beef suet continues!

Pinguicula vulgaris ~
(MC, after Bentham & Hooker).

BUTTERWORT
(small plant great power)

Marion Campbell

.....

In the course of some research into Gaelic botanical names I have found a curious cluster of traditions surrounding the Common Butterwort, Pinguicula vulgaris. My source is Dwelly's Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary (1967 reprint); Dwelly gives seven names for the plant (translating them all as "bog-violet" but fortunately giving a drawing and the specific name under Mòthan). These names are :-

Badan- or Bodan-measgan (tuft or phallus. measgan also "buttercock");
Bròg-na-cubhaig (Cuckoo's shoe; a name shared with Heartsease, Wild Hyacinth, Harebell, Corn Cockle and Cowslip);
Lus-a'bhainne (Milk-plant);
Measgan (see above);
Uachdar (cream); and
Mòthan, which Dwelly apparently regarded as the correct name, since he gives the illustration and specific name there. (I am no Gaelic scholar and cannot be sure if one should link this name with mòdhar (soft, mild, tender) or with mòthail (the lowing of cattle). Under mòthan Dwelly adds (1) that the plant can be used instead of rennet (for butter or cheese making); (2) that it is a love-philtre and (3) that it was carried by "wayfarers to safeguard them on their journeys". It was also used as a charm in childbirth. For the second use a woman knelt on her left knee and plucked nine roots, knotting them into a ring, which if placed on a girl's mouth made her irresistible. The same

ring was used as a charm in the other cases. From a final note it appears that to drink the milk of a cow that had eaten mòthan ensured miraculous escapes from danger.

I suspect from all this that the plant was sacred to Brigitta, the Celtic goddess whose attributes were transferred to St Bride. It is perhaps curious no name suggesting this association is recorded. The dandelion is Beàrnan-Bride, and there are of course other plant- and bird-names connected with St Bride.

It would be interesting if any of our readers have heard of these or other traditions about Pinguicula.

...oOo...

LITTLE THINGS

Dr A. J. Campbell

.....

Holidays are often memorable for little things. For example one brief return, three years ago, to my native Argyll, was highlighted by the discovery of an Oystercatcher's nest on a shingle beach south of Ronachan.

July 1972 yielded three such precious memories. An 'exiled' member, I had as my first outing with the Society the expedition to Tur a'Bhodaich. By the roadside at Barnlaunich I shared others' joy in the discovery of the Greater Butterfly Orchis, and was grateful for a demonstration on the major points of differentiation from its Lesser relative. And, on the descent from the fort an unfamiliar flower, starshaped and resembling a Stonecrop, proved to be Yellow Mountain Saxifrage. Thirdly, by Loch Leathan in Kilmichael Glen on another day, I glimpsed the unmistakable 'white collar, black hood and bib' of a reed-bunting; no great ornithological discovery perhaps, but a personal 'first'.

Of such memories are holidays made. The prophet Zachariah had the right idea when he posed the query "Who hath despised the day of small things?"

...oOo...

HARVEST and HALLOW E'EN CUSTOMS

Although most of these customs are still well-remembered amongst country folk there is no doubt that many will fall out of recollection unless committed to print. With this in mind we have asked a number of our members for information, and some of the results are given here.

Harvest was a time of particular significance in the matter of propitiation and many of the rites which were once commonly observed can be traced back to pagan times.

When the last sheaf was cut it was with some ceremony, and the name a'Mhaideag or a'Mhaighdeannan (the Maiden) was bestowed on it, the deireadh buan or last sheaf. It was set up over the fireplace or the door, and ensured plenty for the livestock all through the winter.....Revd. Alex. Fraser.

It was essential that the task of carrying the last sheaf to the homestead be given to the youngest child present; and in building the stacks it was the custom to get children, holding hands in a ring, to tread down the sheaves, moving, of course, with the sun and not against it. It was absolutely counter to custom and propriety to refuse to partake when food was brought out to the workfolk in the fields; an obligation which over-ruled all parental edicts regarding eating between meals or taking food from strangers! Once the harvest field was cleared the gate was left open, not only as an indication to all poor folk that gleaning could proceed but also that unimpeded passage be afforded to any of the chancy beings who might want to wander about..... from Miss Campbell of Kilberry.

Harvest knots, tied out of corn stalks plaited together were hung above the fireplace. After the winter one or two bunches of corn were arranged in a cross-shape and given to the horses. These old customs were looked at askance by the Free Churches and were apt, in consequence, to fall into abeyance in strict households. In the matter of the potato crop, its safe gathering was marked by the boiling

of a large potful, which were eaten mashed and with milk, to the accompaniment of much good humour.

In the case of a township of crofts or where there were neighbouring farms, the end of harvest's labours was celebrated by a gathering in one of the barns at which tea, uisge beatha, roast venison and variety of scones and oatcakes appeared in greatest abundance. Music from melodeons and fiddles timed the reels, and the entire company devoted itself to merrymaking.....Mr Fraser.

Hallow e'en provided another opportunity for observing archaic customs. We have some personal recollections from Mrs Forman:- "My memories of Hallow e'en go back to the early 1900's. What fun it was, and at the same time a bit 'eerie-skeerie' when we marched out in the dark with our turnip lanterns. These involved much scooping-out with knife and old kitchen spoon, the more sharply worn the better. (In some districts it was obligatory for the carver to eat all the excavated material, much to his later discomfiture! ...Editor). As we grew more expert in our carving we would cut witches, cats, stars, moons etc. in the very thin outer skin, always, of course, with the main item being a large grinning face. My father's old magic lantern with coloured slides was the start of the entertainment, then came 'dookin' for apples, at first from the back of a chair with a fork held between the teeth, then with head in the tub of water...a more difficult and exciting method! Later the older ones would wander into the garden to pull up a kail stalk after dark. Much depended on the result; the lucky ones who got a stalk with much earth sticking to it would marry a rich man; a bare stalk foretold a poor husband; a twisted one denoted a crooked man; while a straight one meant a good and proper partner. Burning nuts in the fire was also an old custom. Two people placed their nuts in the glowing coals; if they burned quietly the couple were destined to remain good friends, but if on the other hand they crackled and spat at each other it was sure their friendship would be broken. On the island of Luing, where I lived for some years, young and old

disguised themselves and visited all the neighbours. Some very original costumes were devised, including one year a happily-leaping Sputnik....Mrs Forman.

At Kilberry it was the custom for the country children to form a group headed by a 'bridegroom and bride' with the remainder of the company dressed so that the boys appeared as girls and vice versa, a most extraordinary example of transvestism. Apples nuts and, oddly, ginfer nuts, were freely handed out but never under any circumstances money. Two men would appear in female dress, disguised of course, and much merriment would accompany attempts made to trick them into betraying the deception, such as a search for non-existent trouser pockets when matches were sought. Great hilarity was caused by some of the purposely wild guesses at identity. Apparently there has been a marked resurgence of these old customs in recent years. .....Miss Campbell.

Hallow e'en is the name given to October 31st, the vigil of All Saints Day, although it was a significant occasion long before the introduction of Christianity. It had been believed by the earlier Druids that certain wicked souls were summoned that night by Saman, lord of death (cf. Gaelic samhuinn). The Romans observed this day as a festival to Pomona, in which nuts and apples, symbols of the winter store of fruits, played an important part; the two elements which most conspicuously survive to the present day. Bonfires likewise featured, but we find in this case that the practice has largely been transferred to Guy Fawkes night. In more modern times bands of guysers habited as warlocks and bogles, with their faces painted or with 'fause faces' roamed the neighbourhood, soliciting their Hallow e'en. A song was expected, formerly Gaelic, perhaps from the pen of Duncan Ban MacIntyre, but now more usually English, after which nuts and apples were distributed and the party went off to its next port of call. The residents of the house and their friends proceeded with various ploys such as 'dooking for apples', trying to eat a well-treacled scone suspended from the ceiling, burning of nuts etc. Apples would be peeled carefully by the

young girls, and the peel thrown over the left shoulder was thought to form the initial of her sweetheart on the floor. In 1900 the servant girls at Brenachoille came down to Auchendrain and invited young men and women from the township to join them in dancing reels by the light of their lanterns on the ground at the cross-roads formed by the highroad to Inveraray and the hill-track to Loch Awe. Several mischievous tricks were played, signifying the idea that Hallow e'en was an occasion on which all wicked spirits were let loose. Farm carts were taken out of their sheds and left in the yard; chimneys of the croft houses were stopped up with divots of turf, an inconvenience where the peat fire customarily burned all night. In the northern part of Scotland, unlike Argyll, the pranks were more malicious. In a Caithness village a goat was purloined annually from its lodging and placed in some byre or stable at several miles distance. In Inverness-shire gates were lifted off and carried to some distant rubbish-heap. Wheels were taken off from carts and rolled away to be lost in undergrowth. Bands headed by a piper would march up and down before some house, to warlike and challenging tunes. Such aggressive ploys sometimes gave rise to ill-feeling, but it was wiser to keep one's temper and stay quiet. To show anger and resentment was to invite greater excesses the following year.

.....Mr Fraser.

Although not directly connected with Harvest or Hallow e'en matters, a memory from Miss Campbell may well take its place here. In former days at Kilberry it was an unfailing routine for the person driving the cows back to pasture after milking to pull a hazel switch on the outward journey; once safely in their field the attendant turned his back and tossed the switch over his shoulder in the direction of the cows but without pausing to observe its fall.

..oOo..

DEATH OF AN OLD PIONEER

(Reprinted in Toronto Genealogical Society's Proceedings, I972, from The Weekly Glove, Feb.23rd,I877. Sent by Miss Eleanor Campbell, Toronto)

There died at Walnut Grove, Raleigh, County Kent, on Friday the 9th February I877, Flora, relict of the late Mr Peter McKellar, and mother of Sheriff McKellar, of Hamilton, a native of Argyleshire, Scotland, aged 95 years.

Mrs McKellar was one of the pioneers of Ontario, having sailed from Greenock for Quebec, with her husband and a few relatives, in the summer of I8I7, just sixty years ago, and after a boisterous passage of nine weeks' duration landed at Quebec. From there they worked their way westward by batteaux and such other slow modes of transport as were then available until they reached Queenston, the then western limit of civilisation. Having heard of the Talbot Settlement, where free grants of land were given to actual settlers, Mr McKellar and his fellow emigrants, John McDougall (father of Mr Peter McDougall of Oakville) Malcolm McGregor, and Duncan McNab (better known as 'The Chief') resolved to leave the women at Queenston while they visited the Talbot Settlement, with a view of ascertaining its fitness for their future home. They travelled on foot following the Indian Trail (the only roads then to be seen) until they reached the township of Aldboro' a distance of over one hundred and twenty miles. Here they found five Highland families--those of John C. Gillies, Archd. Gillies, Neil Haggart, Donald McEwen and Alex. Forbes, who had come by way of the States and settled in Aldboro' the preceding year. Mr McKellar and his friends resolved at once to cast in their lot with their fellow-countrymen. They selected their lots, returned to Queenston for their families, and with the aid of two pair of oxen and waggons, were enabled to transport their wives, 'weans' and worldly goods to Aldboro' in time to erect their shanties before winter set in.

Large accessions were made to the settlement during the next few years, and often great privations and sufferings prevailed among them, they being at times reduced to such extremities as to be under the necessity of subsisting on roots and bark. The subject of this notice bore up heroically under these trials, always encouraging neighbours and being ever ready to share her frugal meal with the hungry and distressed. An instance of her indomitable energy and perseverence is given as follows:

A few years after settlement at Aldboro' she resolved to visit her only sister (Mrs McLaren) who settled in Caledon, a distance of one hundred and seventy miles. In the absence of railways, stages, or any mode of public conveyance, she undertook the journey on foot, and reached her sister's house on the evening of the fourth day travelling forty-three miles each day. When her visit was ended she returned in the same time, and attended to her household duties on the following day as usual.

Forty years ago she and her family removed from Aldboro' to the farm on which she died. About that time settlers began to locate in the neighbouring townships, who were subjected to some of the same privations as settlers in all new countries are and many of these bear in grateful remembrance the many acts of kindness extended to them by Mrs McKellar during their early trials in the 'bush'. Six years ago she was stricken with the loss of sight, from which affliction she never recovered. Mrs McKellar was the last survivor of the heads of the families that preceded her in the Aldboro' district, as well as of the party with which she herself settled.

...oOo...

REVIEW: Scotland in the Age of Improvement edited by Phillipson & Mitchison. Edinburgh Univ. Press £2.50. Includes two papers of especial local interest; E. Cregeen on Changing Role of the House of Argyll in the Scot. Highlands, & Prof.Smout on Landowner & Planned Village in Scot. 1730-1830. Eight other essays are no less interesting.

RECOVERY OF AN EARTH HOUSE

F. S. Mackenna

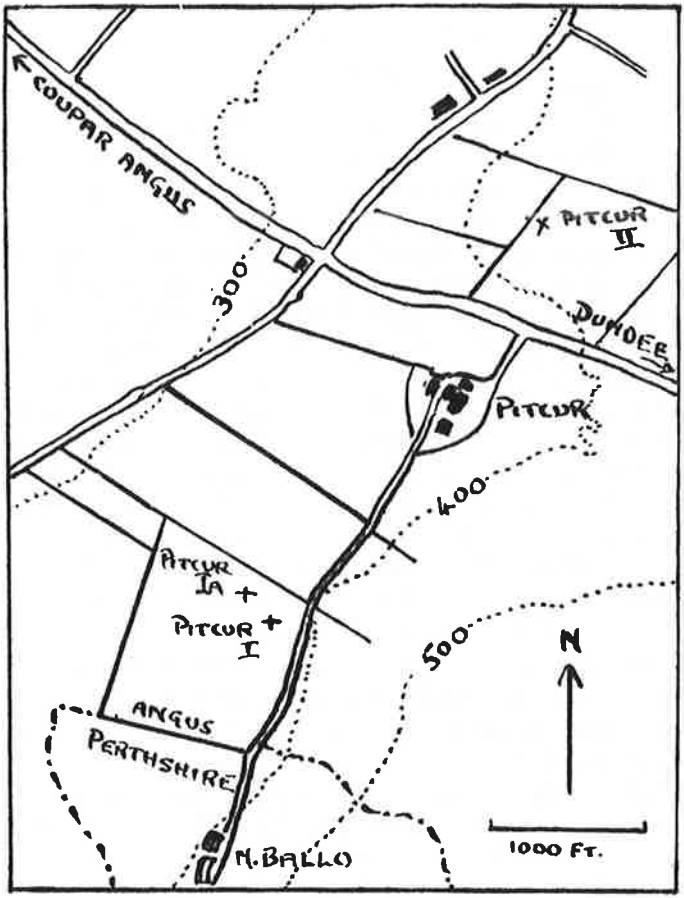
.....

The somewhat cryptic title of this paper will explain itself in due course, but it will be necessary to commence with a few words about Earth Houses particularly as no specimen seems so far to have been located in the area which our Society normally covers.

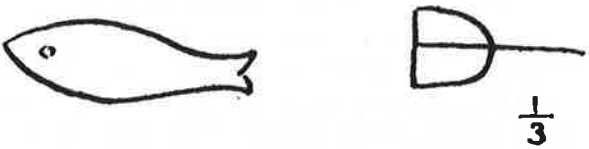
Earth Houses, variously called eird-hoose and weem (possibly a corruption of the Gaelic uamh) are underground structures which occur in some profusion in Scotland (mainly in the eastern and northern parts and in the Hebrides, but with sporadic examples in other areas), in Ireland and in many northern European countries. Their purpose has been much debated but the concensus of opinion considers them to have been dwelling places, possibly for only occasional or seasonal occupation. The arguments which support this are too extended to be examined here, but two of the main are the occurrence of numerous signs of occupation in the shape of artefacts and middens, and the presence, in some of what are perhaps amongst the earlier examples, of built-in obstructions which would have made unauthorised entry highly hazardous.

Essentially the normal earth house consists of an elongated tunnel-like structure, often curving in plan, with much but not necessarily all of its length completely roofed over with stones; some of them no doubt had to have timber roofing over the wider parts. Many are fairly complicated in plan; perhaps the best known of these is one of the three about to be noted.

On the farm of Pitcur, two miles to the east of Coupar Angus (see plan) an earth house (Pitcur I) was discovered in 1863 "in a sandy knoll in a field called Ballo-field, on the S.W. of the farm, and just below the road leading between Pitcur and Ballo farms" (D. MacRitchie, 1900). In 1917 it was thought to be 'quite demolished', though some 50 years after its discovery it had again been located in the course of farming operations, when a hole appeared which was at once filled up and the episode suppressed. Wainwright



PITCUR, ANGUS.



ROCK CARVING IN PITCUR II.

in I963 surmised that "presumably it still exists". In the meantime, in I878, Pitcur II was discovered and proved to be a complex, spectacular specimen which still attracts much attention.

So matters rested until 25th November I970 when I arrived at Pitcur on one of my frequent visits, to be told that on that very day a tractor working in Ballo-field had fallen into a hole! At first-light next morning an inspection was carried out resulting in an entrance being obtained into the supposed lost earth-house. Unfortunately it was in the nature of a race against time, with the tractor standing impatiently waiting to continue its work. All that it was possible to do was to measure and photograph the interior thoroughly before the hole was again blocked up. The last act underground was to place a bottle-sealed document in a small 'keeping place' in one of the sides, with an account of its having been entered on that date.

The portion available without excavation was relatively short, being bounded at one end by an old infill of soil, presumably from a fracture in the roof, and at the other by the debris deposited when the tractor broke in. This available length was 24 feet long; the average width was 7 feet 6 inches; and the greatest height 4 feet. This last-named figure reflects the fact that the original floor is buried in fallen soil, as evidenced by the almost floor-level springing of the roof arch, postulating at least two feet depth of infill. The stonework was of fine quality, much superior to that seen in Pitcur II; the only feature was a small square-shape 'keeping place' in the southern wall at (present) floor level.

The position of the entrance hole having been carefully plotted I had no difficulty in locating it when I returned the following October after the crop had been cleared. A comprehensive probing of the site was carried out, together with a full survey so that future investigators might be enabled to locate it accurately. It was unfortunate that re-opening and excavation were not possible. By means of this

probing, which showed an average of only some 9 ins of earth above most of the roofing stones, we got a total length of 75 feet.

Happily, in the course of further exploratory probing, we discovered a second earth-house, on much the same axis as the first one and some I30 feet to the N.W. of it. Quite definitely a separate structure and equally certainly an earth-house. This likewise was carefully plotted for future investigators. The length ascertained by probing was 48 feet, and the stones were at a similar depth from the surface. The new discovery has been marked Pitcur Ia on the plan. Both these houses well merit thorough excavation and it is hoped that one day this may be possible.

The structure marked Pitcur II need not have any description here, as it is well documented in the literature, especially in various volumes of the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, but it will interest our members, who know of so many cup-marked stones in this area, to learn that there are three such boulders connected with Pitcur II. One lies now on the ground near the entrance, and is considerably weathered; neither it nor its two companions have rings. The other two stones are built into the walls, one at the (present) entrance to the main gallery, the other in a small covered passage close by but at right-angles. Both are well preserved and give one the impression of having been placed where they are by reason of their decorative character. The remaining object of note seems not to have been previously recorded; it is a horizontal stone, again near the present entrance, on the left-hand wall, which has an incised design of a fish and 'bow and arrow' form (see drawing). Although not, it would seem, known to earlier investigators, I was told by Mr David Pattullo, the present tenant, that he was aware of it.

My data relating to Pitcur I and Ia are lodged with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

Pitcur has an additional claim on antiquarian

attention, apart from the earth-houses and its impressing ruined castle, for close to this building is an enormous holly tree, reputed to be the oldest in Scotland. On its trunk can be deciphered dates going back towards the early 1700's, and many others, obviously still older, are now too eroded to be read with certainty. It has always been a local tradition that Claverhouse, when he stayed at Pitcur Castle before the battle of Killiecrankie, tethered his horse to the then well-grown tree. Although it is gradually receding in spread it still produces a crop of berries each year which germinate with considerable vigour. If any member would care to have a seedling I shall be pleased to oblige, as I have a number in my rhododendron nursery.

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ENTOMOLOGICAL NOTE

Miss Campbell of Kilberry

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One result of Kist has been to make me take more care in identifying butterflies and moths (I had not realised that the Peacock Butterfly was uncommon elsewhere until I read Mr Jex Long's note in Kist3; and incidentally I must apologise for getting the scientific name wrong on the accompanying illustration there). I am still unsure of what is worth recording, but new to me was a Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk Moth, Hemaris tityus, seen in May 1972 on the shore at Keppoch, Kilberry. (The habitat is brackish marshland with rough grass, patches of whin and heather, and later in the year a good deal of Devil's-Bit Scabious, the food plant of the moth's caterpillar).

It may perhaps be worth noting also a relative abundance of the Old Lady Moth, Mormo maura, entering rooms in this house during July evenings from 24th onwards.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR RECORDING PRE-1855 STONES

Firstly decide on a rational plan of action. Start from some prominent feature, such as an entrance gate, and state clearly where it is and that the stones have been recorded in (say) rows from east to west. The idea is to make subsequent identification as easy and certain as possible. Work along each row, calling it Row I, Row 2 etc, and note every stone whether modern or not. Even in the case of an apparently modern stone it is necessary to read carefully as some of the persons named on it may have pre-deceased the first few who appear and may thus fall within our period.

As to the actual deciphering of the lettering much patience is sometimes needed.... upwards of two hours has been spent by the writer on a single plain-seeming stone, resulting in a complete recovery of the inscription. The infestation of lichen usually yields to careful brushing with a stiff scrubbing brush but often the services of a wire brush are needed, care being taken when dealing with flaking sandstone. There is a variety of close-growing grey lichen like thick paint which resists brushing but which has been found to scale off in large flat flakes when a small trowel or palette knife is used on it. If the inscription still defies elucidation much may be done with a moderately damp sponge passed carefully over the surface; this darkens the stone and leaves the lettering dry, causing it to show up much more clearly. A tuft of grass rubbed vigorously over the surface serves much the same purpose, but is less desirable as the process is not reversible, the stone being stained. Where water is used it soon dries out and things are back as they were and other methods can be tried in the event of difficulty. Viewing at different times of the day sometimes helps, for the light falls from another angle.

Always examine the backs of stones, for many have been made to serve twice over, or there may be an armorial or pictorial design which should be

noted. Look also at the top edge, where one may sometimes find the mason's name carved. Examine the corner stones of private burying vaults, for they have sometimes been used as headstones. With practice one soon comes to realise that there are certain recognised formulae of words, and this is a hepl if part of an inscription is difficult to make out; if one has established a few words, missing portions can sometimes be supplied from one's know-:ledge, but such surmises must be noted in the rec-:ord by means of brackets. Use question marks in brackets when letters or dates cannot be made out. Divide each line just as it occurs, using a diagonal stroke, as shown in the appended examples. Make sure that the lowest part of the inscription is in fact the end of it, and that more is not buried in grass and earth; excavation with a trowel will often reveal a surprising amount of additional information. Ingenuity and commonsense are conspicuous requisites in this pursuit, but once it has been commenced it becomes extremely fascinating, particularly when some wildly phonetic spelling is encountered.

Finally it is wise, if duplication of work is to be avoided, to find out from Dr MacNab or the Editor which burial grounds have already been done or have been allocated.

EXAMPLES

Row 5. No.2I Here lies the / corps of Rogar/ Mcarmaig who lived / in Clachan and died / Ocr I724 aged 50 3 Don by Felix his son.

No.22 Modern.

No.23 Plain marker.

No.24 Here lyies Alexr & Dun McMillans/ sons of Dugald Mc/ Millan & mary fairly/ In Belloch the one/ Aged 30 the other 23/ years they were both/ (?????) with a (???).

No.25 Erected by/ Archd Galbreath/ miller in Barr in/ Memory of his spo/ use Mary Bell who/ died the 7 Sep I795 ag/ ed 25 years Also his son John aged 5 days.

SECRETARY'S NOTES

The past year has been satisfactory for the Soc-:iety. At the A.G.M. the Treasurer reported an incr) :ease in the paid-up membership and a sound financial position.

Although the weather was inclement for the early part of our Summer Session the programme was completed, with a good attendance at all our meetings. We are grateful to the leaders of the expeditions and it is an indication of the faithful support of the members when 30 or more turn out in the foulest weather, although I am sure everyone who braved the elements found their reward. It seemed to me that the worse the weather the more rewarding the meeting!

The Scoiety has been associated with the excavat-:ions at St Columba's Cave; the survey of Crannogs in Loch Awe by Dr MacArdle and a team of R.N. divers; Mr Leslie Rymer's research into early cultivations in Knapdale; as well as minor discoveries in Knapdale Forest. We hope eventually to publish details of all in 'The Kist'.

The survey of pre-1855 tombstones has been ment-:ioned in the Editorial. A sub-committee of Dr MacNab and Mr Mackenna has been formed with power to co-opt, in order to get the matter completed as soon as may be.

It was with great regret that we received the resignation of the first Editor of 'The Kist', but we look forward with excitement to Miss Campbell's new publications. All members will appreciate the good fortune of the Society in obtaining the experienced services of Mr Mackenna, but no one will envy his responsibility in following Miss Campbell.

In addition to the excavation and tombstone plans which the Editor has already mentioned, there are some other areas in which help is sought. Location of old postcards, photographs and paintings of the district which can be photographed as slides. (Contact Mr Colin Fergusson or me). Papers for Kist 5. Leaders for expeditions. Suggestions for the Summer Programme and for the improvement of the Society in general.

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