



The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle

Old Description of Tiree, 1808

NRAS6/PFV65/87

Docketed: "Description of 'Tirey' from a book pub'd in 1808"

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About one half of the surface is arable, interspersed with small rocks and rising grounds, none of which are above 250 feet above the sea level ; but the surface is generally so even that its ancient name was Riog-Hachd-bar-Fathuim, ie "the Kingdom whose summits are lower than the waves": and this name still used in the popular dialect of the Hebrides, describes the low situation of the island, as the waves are often seen from the one shore rising apparently

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several feet above the level of the other. In the interior of the island are not fewer than 24 small lakes, covering in all about 600 acres, many of which might easily be drained.

[margin] 'The Island House'

In one of these is a small island on which was a square turreted castle, with an entrance by a drawbridge. Upon the ruins of this a real house is erected... and the island was made a peninsula.

The crops are generally bear and black oats with potatoes and small quantities of lint. Large roots and trunks of trees are found in all the mosses. The number of sheep in the island is 600, of black cattle

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1800 and of horses 1400.

The Ceanm-harra, the west point of Tirey is very remarkable for a great number of large natural caves, frequented in time of hatching by innumerable flocks of sea-fowls. The height of some of the caves, (160 feet) the sea bellowing in below and thousands of fowls with discordant notes, crowding in upon the cliffs, form a hideous (sic) scene.

(The writer goes on to describe a method of catching the birds by lighting straw in the cave.)

There is a place called the Reef near the centre of Tirey. It is almost a pentagon of

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1200 Scottish acres, with a sandy bottom mostly covered with black earth 10 inches deep – a beautiful carpet variegated with flowers.... It has three curved green banks each about 2 feet high; upon which it appears the sea had formerly beat. Between these banks the ground is surprisingly level. The greatest height above high water mark is about 6ft. except a small green hill near the centre 9ft. higher.



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On Tirey the remains of the ancient buildings called Duns are to be seen. On the rocks around the coast of Tirey and Coll no less

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than 39 of these buildings are placed. They are in sight of each other and are all of a similar structure to those formerly described ie they have two walls without any appearance of lime or other cement. The inner wall is always circular, but the outer sometimes assumes the form of the rock on which it stands. At Ceanm-harra on a very rugged declivity is St.Patrick's Temple. The vestige of a wall incloses it in $\frac{1}{3}$ of an acre of land. It is 26 X 11 within walls; the side walls $5\frac{1}{2}$ ft high

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one gable 6 inches thicker than the other ; without a roof and ill built with stone and lime.

A square altar in the E. and is still 18" high ; the cross without the pedestal 4ft. within 60 yards of it, on the shore, on the top of a rock is made a hollow 2ft. diam'r and 4ft. deep called by the country people St.Patrick's Vat. There are 9 or 10 large stones in different parts.... British Danish and other small silver coins have been found buried in small earthen vessels. In a stock-yard at Cornaig beg in Tirey

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in digging pits in sandy ground there were found at different times human skeletons and nigh them the skeletons of horses. They seemed to have been completely armed according to the times. 200 swords were found diminished with rust: silver work preserved the handles. There were also shields and helmets with a brass spear.

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