

IV.

ON SOME STOKE CIRCLES ON THE SIDE OF A HILL AT THE EAST END OF QUENDALE BAY, SHETLAND. BY THE REV. C. L. ACLAND, M.A., HEAD MASTER OF THE ROYAL GRAMMAR SCHOOL, COLCHESTER.

In the extreme south of the Mainland of Shetland, and itself facing south, lies Quendale Bay. At the east end of the bay rises a long slope, very sandy at first, but afterwards covered with short close turf and small stones in about equal proportions. The slope culminates at an elevation of about 300 feet, in a well-marked "wart" or hill-summit, called on the Ordnance map the Erne's Wart, though locally much better known as the Wart, or Wart Hill of Quendale. On the south-west side of this hill, considerably below the top, is a perfectly level plain of two or three acres in extent. As nearly as may be in the centre of this plain is a group of concentric stone circles (fig. 1), which, so far as I am aware, has not yet been described. It consists of two large exterior circles, surrounding an interior circle of much smaller diameter. Of the two exterior circles, one is about a yard inside the other, the external diameter of the outer circle being 56 feet. The outer one has some forty stones still in place, the inner one thirty to thirty-five. The stones range from 2 to 6 feet in length at the surface of the ground, and some of them are 2 feet thick. Few of them stand more than 18 inches out of the ground, but, as I had no means of excavation, I cannot tell to what depth they may be covered. They are of the common sandstone of the district, but look water-worn, and as if they had been brought up from the shore, rather than quarried in the neighbourhood. There is an entire absence of the small stones so noteworthy in the remains of the other structures on the same hillside. An entrance to the circles faces to the east, a passage from it leading towards the centre. The stones on the north side of this passage are *in situ*. The outer stone is very nearly square, about 18 inches in the side, and stands 2 feet 6 inches out of the ground. Probably the south corner of the entrance was marked by a similar stone, but if so it is gone. Diametrically opposite this entrance, and therefore on

the west side of the circle, many more stones are lying on the ground than are needed for the circle itself, and look as if they were the

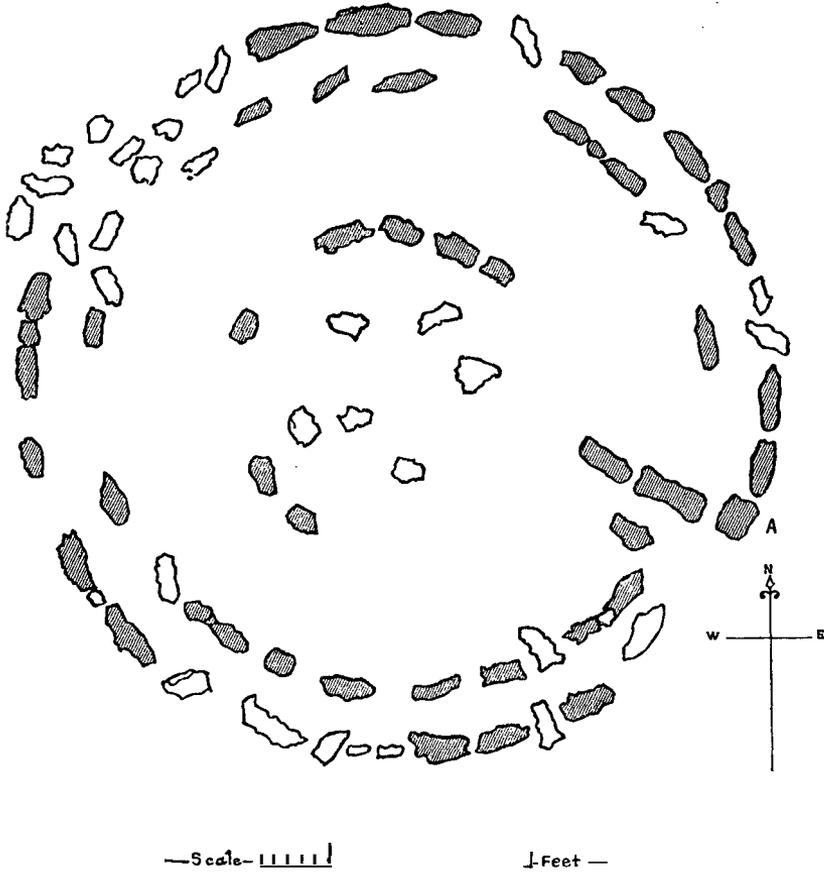


Fig. 1. Stone Circle at Quendale Bay, Shetland.

remains of some more elaborate structure. Concentric with the two exterior circles, but much smaller, is a third. On one side of it four

stones are still in place, and elsewhere one or two mark its position quite distinctly. Several stones lying near the centre of the whole may have belonged to this inner circle, or may indicate other arrangements the plan of which is no longer discoverable.

Such is a very imperfect, but so far as it goes accurate, description of what I take to be an interesting monument of a very remote past. There are to my knowledge several others, but I fear they are disappearing.

At various spots on this south-west side of the Wart, but not on this level plain, are other remains of circular stone structures, but they all differ from that which I have just described. They look like the remains of circular burial cairns, and seem to have been purposely destroyed. A more or less complete circle of large stones, 30 to 50 feet in diameter, many of the stones 5 or 6 feet long and 2 feet or more in thickness, can be plainly traced on the hill-side. Within and around these circles are scattered in complete confusion a great quantity of much smaller stones, which have to all appearance formed the bulk of the cairns of which the circles form the groundwork. I noticed half a dozen or more of these remains. There is also a kind of serpentine line of great stones which winds across and up a considerable portion of the side of the hill, and ends in one large standing stone, which is surrounded by the remains of a small circle of smaller stones.