

I.

NOTICE OF A GROUP OF FOUR CIRCLES OF STANDING STONES IN THE SOUTH CORNER OF THE PARISH OF BANCHORY-DEVENICK, COUNTY OF KINCARDINE. BY ALEXANDER THOMSON, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

A somewhat remarkable group of circles of Standing Stones occurs in the southern part of the parish of Banchory-Devenick, county of Kincardine. Four of them are found within the space of little more than a mile, and nearly on a straight line from north-east to south-west.

The most easterly of the group is on the estate of Badentoy, the property of Mr Dyce Nicol of Ballogie, and the three others on Mrs Irvine Boswell's estate of Kingcausie. They lie to the north of the turnpike road from Aberdeen to Stonehaven, about a half mile distant from it, and about a mile and a half from the sea.

It was resolved to explore and examine them carefully; and on 30th September 1858, a party, consisting of Mr Dyce Nicol of Ballogie, Mr C. E. Dalrymple of Westhall, Mr Nicolson of Glenberrie, Captain Burnett, yr. of Monboddo, the Rev. Mr Stewart of Oathlaw, and myself, with two or three active labourers and the necessary tools, spent a day in making a minute examination of them all, taking measurements and notes on the spot.

No. 1.—*Stone Circle at Badentoy.*

We commenced with the eastmost, viz., that on Badentoy. This circle has been very much damaged by agricultural operations, but the platform on which the stones are placed can still be traced, though not with perfect accuracy.

It stands on the highest portion of a hill, with a nearly flat top of considerable extent, sloping rapidly at the south and west sides, more gently to the north and east, and so situated that the stones are very conspicuous from a considerable distance on all sides.

The platform seems to have been about 60 yards in circumference, nearly circular, but having the margin now greatly encroached upon by the plough.

The circle appears to have consisted originally of seven stones, of which three now remain, and the other four have been broken up, for building purposes, probably, the usual fate of these monuments, if not specially protected. Many of them are noted in the old Statistical Account of Scotland, of which not a trace is now to be found. The three remaining stones are all of coarse gneiss or mica slate, the prevailing rocks of the neighbourhood.

On the platform three stones are still standing. No. 1 is four feet high above ground, 3 feet broad, and 1 foot 3 inches thick; No. 2 is 9 feet 7 inches high, 3 feet 3 inches broad, and 2 feet thick; No. 3 is 6 feet high, 3 feet broad, and 1 foot 6 inches thick. The rest of the stones forming the circle have been removed.

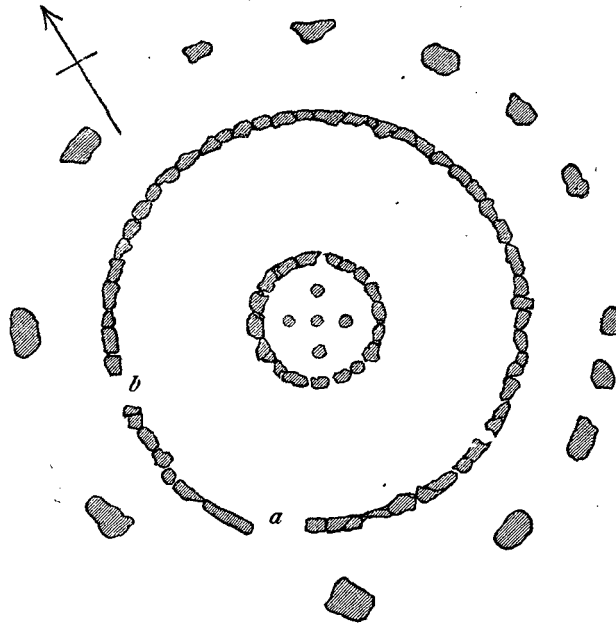
We dug up the ground in the centre of the circle, down to the solid earth about 2 feet. We found that it had been excavated at least once before; but, notwithstanding, we discovered unmistakable traces of sepulture—half-calcined bones and morsels of wood charcoal.

No. 2.—*Stone Circle at Kingcausie.*

This circle is the eastmost of the three on the estate of Kingcausie. It lies about half a mile west of the former (No. 1.), in a hollow, where the ground is very damp. It is a small circle, but peculiar in various respects. The general disposition of it is as follows:—There is no distinct platform, and there are three concentric rings of stones. The outer circle consists now of thirteen stones, but several must have been removed, supposing that originally they were placed at nearly equal distances from each other, and none of them are more than from 2 to 3 feet high. The second circle is about 12 feet distant from the outer, and consists of a tolerably close wall of small stones, nearly touching each other, set on edge. This circle is about 56 feet in diameter. The stones scarcely rise above the level of the ground, and look like the foundation course of a dry-stone wall. None of them are more than a foot and a half to two feet long, and scarcely a foot thick. This circle is nearly perfect, and the stones must have been very carefully placed at first to remain so long unmoved. Within this is a third circle, about 21 feet from the second, and having a diameter of 12 feet. This circle is not quite entire, but nearly so. The stones are set on edge, rather

larger than those of the intermediate circle, and as close together. The free central space is about 9 feet in diameter, and we dug up the whole of it. We found it full of black mould, *i.e.*, churchyard earth, with fragments of bones and wood charcoal, and, what was specially interesting, we found at five spots, arranged in a quincunx, fragments of coarse earthenware urns; thus proving unquestionably that it had been used as a place of burial.

The general arrangement of the whole is shown by the annexed diagram.



Plan of Stone Circle at Kingcausie.

From its position, and the small size of the stones, this circle is by no means conspicuous. One might pass within a few yards of it without noticing it. We observed no trace of any larger stones having ever been

connected with it; and as the ground around it is uncultivated, it probably now appears very much as when it was originally completed. It will be observed that one stone of the middle circle is longer than the others, and a gap marked *a* appears at the east end of it. Could this have been an entrance? The gap *b* is evidently caused by the removal of a stone.

No. 3.—*Stone Circle at Anquorthies,*

Stands on the farm of Anquorthies of Kingcausie, on the side of a hill, but well seen from east, south, and west. It is larger than the two already described.

It consists also of three concentric circles, and in one direction the platform extends considerably beyond the outermost.

There are three rows of stones; of the outermost only 13 remain; 6 or 7 have been removed. The largest is 9 feet; the others from 6 feet down to 2 feet; but most of them 3 or 4 feet high.

The second circle is composed of smaller stones, arranged closely together; but at one place, on the south side of the circle, a large stone lies on its side, about 7 feet long and 4 feet high, and nearly as thick at one end, but thin towards the other; and at the west end of it is a stone 5 feet high and $3\frac{1}{2}$ thick, placed close to the lying stone; and at the east end of it is a cavity, from which evidently a similar stone has been removed.

The inner circle is composed of small stones placed close together, as in No. 2, and it is not quite entire. Between this inner circle and the second one is a short, low wall of five stones, only found by excavating; and behind this again is a low bank of small stones and earth, perhaps only the result of a previous excavation.

We turned up the whole of the area of the innermost circle, and we here also found charcoal, half-calcined bones, black unctuous earth, and small fragments of a vase.

We also excavated in front of the larger lying stone, but found nothing.

The outermost circle is about 120 yards in circumference; the second about 50; and the innermost about 14.

A portion of the platform projects beyond the stone circles to the south, and is very well marked, though encroached upon by the farmer. We

had a great discussion as to whether large stones had ever been erected round it, but could not decide the question. The outermost circle is evidently complete in itself; and if the stones ever extended round the whole platform to the south, the outline would become oval instead of round. But what the use of the platform, if not to carry stones? The surface is irregular, and we learned that fifteen or twenty years ago excavations had been made, but that nothing was found. It was not remembered by whom this was done.

No. 4.—*Stone Circle at Bourtree Bush.*

This was probably, when entire, the finest of all the four circles, but unhappily it has been greatly damaged. The platform is about 100 yards round, but very irregular. There are now seven stones placed at irregular intervals round the circumference of the circle.

Of these one is $11\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, 4 feet wide, and 2 feet thick; the next in order is 8 feet high, $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, and 2 feet thick; the next is 10 feet high by 4 wide and 2 thick; the next 12 feet high, 6 wide, and 2 thick; another has been lately thrown down, and is about 6 feet long; and one lies on its side, and is 10 feet \times 4 \times 2, and appears to have been so placed originally. These remains still have a very imposing appearance.

In the centre of the circle is a flat stone of about 4 feet wide, and of irregular form and thickness. We turned it out, but soon found it had been moved before, probably more than once, and we discovered nothing below it.

In order to give some idea of the two last circles, I have had them photographed. (Copies of the photographs were exhibited, and presented to the Society.) I also send for exhibition an eye-sketch of the situation of the stones in regard to the railroad and other roads, so that if any members of the Society choose to visit them, they may the more easily find them. Mrs Irvine Boswell is always glad to give permission to strangers to see and examine them.

The results of our examination are not very important, except that they show very clearly that, whatever other purposes these circles may have served, certainly one use of them was as a place of burial; but whether the persons buried had been sacrificed on the spot, as victims of

a cruel superstition, or were great heroes in whose honour the stones were set up, we cannot tell. We found no trace of sculpture or inscription, nor of flint knives or weapons. Arrow heads are often found in the vicinity, and also cists with bones and urns. Whatever they may have been, the occurrence of so many circles so near each other is unusual.