

III.

ACCOUNT OF THE RECENT DISCOVERY OF A ROMAN CAMP AT
KINTORE, ABERDEENSHIRE. BY CAPTAIN E. H. COURTNEY, R.E.,
CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT. (PLATE XLVIII.)

The traces of the Roman occupation of Scotland have of late years been so much defaced by the rapid progress of cultivation, that had it not been for the laborious and able researches, in the last century, of such men as General Roy, Mr Chalmers, and others, it would probably

have been next to impossible in our days to have identified with sufficient exactness and certainty the outlines and dimensions of their temporary camps, for the purpose of comparing them one with another. Indeed, it is chiefly owing to the accurate plans made by General Roy and Colonel Shand that I am now able to announce the discovery of another Roman camp at Kintore, in the county of Aberdeen, situate about midway between their camps on the rivers Dee and Ythan.

My professional duties have employed me during the last five years on the Ordnance Survey of Kincardineshire and that portion of Aberdeenshire (at the eastern side of the county) lying north of the river Don. From the excellent survey made by Captain Henderson, 29th Regiment, and given at page 125 of Chalmers' "Caledonia," vol. i., I was enabled with ease to identify on the ground the Roman camp at Peterculter, on the river Dee, the spot which is now generally admitted to be the "Devana" of Ptolemy and of Richard of Cirencester. From this to "Rædykes" Camp at Glenmailen, on the river Ythan, is a distance of some 26 miles [Richard, in his "Itinerary," makes it 24 miles from "Devana" to "Ituna"], and as the daily march of the Romans generally averaged about 12 miles, it occurred to me that a camp of somewhat similar size must have been thrown up by the Romans for this army at some equidistant spot from these two stations, in the neighbourhood, probably, of either Inverurie or Kintore. My first care, however, was to determine the size of their post at Pitcaple, on the river Ury; but, after diligent inquiry, and a very careful survey of the ground, I came to the conclusion that this post¹ was only a small affair, and simply intended for a small detachment, probably for the purpose of keeping open their communications between Kintore and Glenmailen. The two British hill forts of Ben-na-chie and Barra are about 4 miles distant from it on either hand. This point settled, I resumed my search for the supposed missing camp,² and seeing that Mr Chalmers, in his "Caledonia," p. 126, as well

¹ This Pitcaple post corresponds very nearly in dimensions with the Roman post at Fortingal, in Glen-Lyon, depicted on plate xix. of Roy's work.

² I find that Professor John Stuart, in his "Antiquarian Essays," p. 87, also affirms "that there certainly must have been one" (*i.e.*, a Roman camp) "somewhere near to the burgh of Inverurie." He, however, wrongly imagines that the fort on Ben-na-chie might have been of Roman construction.

as all the principal maps of Aberdeenshire, had supposed the Romans to have passed through Kintore and Inverurie, I concluded that the vestiges of their camp, if any existed, would be found at one or other of those places.

My own work (in connection with the survey) lying to the north of the river Don, I first examined most minutely all the ground in the vicinity of that river, in the parishes of Inverurie and Keith-Hall, but without success. I then communicated, about eighteen months ago, with the officer of Engineers who had surveyed south of the Don, on the subject, but he replied that he had found no Roman camp in Kintore parish, although he was aware of the tradition that the 'Deer's Den' was one, and he had discovered the supposed track of the Roman road from a point near the village of Kintore northwards towards Inverurie, but he had failed in tracing this road southwards to the river Dee. This was a disappointment; but I resolved to examine the ground for myself in my spare moments.

Soon afterwards, or about thirteen months ago, I accidentally came across a small work written by Mr Alexander Watt¹ ("a Kintore loon," as he styles himself), entitled "The Early History of Kintore." Mr Watt was possessed of more than the ordinary intelligence of his class, and by his means four or five of the sculptured stones, found at Kintore, were brought to notice and saved from destruction [see Mr Stuart's preface to the "Sculptured Stones of Scotland," Spalding Club edition, 1856, vol. i.] In giving a description of his ramblings about sixty years ago with the old herdsmen of Kintore, Watt mentions, at page 20, an object "then called by the name of the 'Deer's Den,' which at that period was still to be seen, with dyke and ditch, enclosing a great portion of the town." This Deer's Den, curiously enough, is stated by Watt to have been pointed out to him, by "some of the traditional herdsmen," as a Roman camp, having, by their account, at that time "lost its original name." Its description then follows:—"The remains showed that it could not have been less than 18 feet wide at the base, leaving it still some 6 or 8 feet high in some places, with a ditch 8 to 10 feet wide, and contrived so as the greater part, if not the whole, could have been filled

¹ Mr Watt died about three years ago, and left his pamphlet in an imperfect state.

with water. This wonderful Deer's Den was of an oblong square form,¹ taking in a great part of the upper or west part of the town, and would have contained some 80 acres" (*Scottish*, apparently) of land by measurement. Only a very small portion of that wonderful place of defence is now to be seen; the inroads of plough and spade have done their work of demolition. A number of bronze and stone relics of defence have been found from time to time near this ancient fortification."

This description of the object called the "Deer's Den," apart from the tradition of the herdsmen,—which was of little moment, seeing that everything ancient used to be termed Roman,—instantly showed me that here might be the object of my search. I accordingly visited Kintore, and after one fruitless attempt, I was fortunate enough to hit on parts of three sides of the camp, and by inquiry on the spot, assisted by Mr Watt's descriptions, have been also able to show on the attached plan the probable tracks of the whole enceinte. (See Plate XLVIII.)

The prevalent belief in Kintore is that the "Deer's Den" was formed and preserved by the inhabitants of the village for the purpose of keeping off the wild animals that came from the forest and destroyed their crops. It may possibly have been used in this way, and thus have given rise to this belief, but the most casual observation shows that it is far too regular to have been originally made for this purpose. Situated on a table-land similar to other sites chosen by the Romans, with rampart and ditch exactly the same in size as those of their camps discovered elsewhere, and corresponding to the dimensions² mentioned by General Roy at page 42 of his work, this camp stands very nearly to the cardinal points of the compass, and from two-thirds of its interior space the British hill fort on Ben-na-chie³ is plainly visible, while a good view is also secured to the south-east and south-west. About 500 yards of its west face, from the south-west angle, can even now be distinctly traced, and

¹ Watt says, further, at page 150, that the Deer's Den "consisted, until very lately, almost entirely of moor land." He excepts, however, the *east* face, which he says "had disappeared" (if it ever existed) "long before the recollection of any one I ever communicated with on the subject." "The early cultivation of these lands will account for its total disappearance."

² Ditch, 8 feet wide, 6 feet deep; parapet, about 6 feet high.

³ I did not observe whether the fort on Hill of Barra can also be seen from it.

for nearly 200 yards of this length the profile of the vallum and ditch is still in existence, although not of course to such dimensions as when described by Watt.¹ The plough is at this moment taking away even this vestige of the camp. From *a* to *c* (the north-west angle), the track can be followed, but hardly without assistance, as a bend occurs here in the line of parapet, perhaps for the purpose of including within the defences the high ground at this angle.² The length of this bend is about 264 yards.

James Rennie, aged about 60, pointed out this bend to me, and said that he himself assisted in demolishing this part of the defences. He lives alongside the bend in question. Thomas Peter, aged 62, at once pointed out this bend, on a different occasion, and without my mentioning it to him at all, thus confirming Rennie's testimony. He has lived all his days in the small house through which the north face of the camp formerly went, and he remembered this bend distinctly. He further showed me the track of the north face,³ which from *c* to *d* can be easily traced; but from *d* to *e*, where the north-east angle should stand, cannot now be followed at all on the ground. I propose, however, visiting this place again next summer, when perhaps this portion of the camp may even still be distinguished by the difference in the crops raised on it. Thomas Peter told me that the direction of this part was to the angle of the "Bridge-alehouse Burn," and so I have shown it for the present.

The south-west angle is very plain even now, and from it the south face of the camp can be distinctly followed for 300 yards by the swell in the ploughed ground, and then more faintly for apparently its whole length. Watt describes this face, in his time, as being 500 yards long, and there is some appearance of the south-east angle having existed

¹ Watt describes the total length of the west face to have been "800 yards long." My survey makes it 809 yards altogether.

² The existence of this bend would also appear to be alluded to by Watt, at page 150 of his work, where he states "that the north-west point receded to nearly the highest part of the moor." This would not be the case had the west face been in one continuous straight line.

³ Watt's measurements make the north face "about 200 yards long." This would be from *c* to *d* on my plan. He adds, however, that he "is inclined to think that it really had been of the same length as the south side, since undoubted traces of it could be discovered among the cultivated lands."

somewhere about 510 yards from the south-west angle. I have accordingly acted on this supposition, and have drawn the east face of the camp from this point, parallel to the general run of the west one, until it joins the north face near the Bridge-alehouse Burn. Thomas Peter (before alluded to) told me that he remembers his father saying that this face of the "Deer's Den" went from the Bridge-alehouse Burn to near the Torry Burn, and this accords very fairly with my plan. None of the east face of the camp is to be seen, and was not even when Watt first noticed this object; but this is easily to be accounted for, from the very early cultivation of this part,¹ situate as it is in the village of Kintore itself. Indeed, it would have been a marvel if any of it could have been now traced, Kintore having admittedly been a very early settlement. The Aberdeen Canal also passed through the east face of this camp in more recent times.

Within the enceinte of the camp the following relics have, it appears, been found, viz.:—Within and near the north-east angle, heads of spears, in A.D. 1856, and a battle-axe in 1852; while about one mile south-east of it, on the "Hill of Boghead," the ground, being mostly uncultivated, is still covered with rings, which may perhaps be the remains of some early British town. Similar remains existed near the Roman camp at Peterculter, which led to the supposition, and probably a correct one, that they were the remains of the ancient town "Devana." A bronze battle-axe was also found in 1844, on the "Hill of Boghead," as well as stone celts and flint arrow-heads, in great numbers, at various times.

Assuming, then, that the Kintore camp is correctly laid down on my plan (and it cannot be far out), it would enclose an area of 91 imperial acres. I am inclined to believe that it really was rather larger, and from Watt's statement it should contain about 103 imperial acres; but, even as it is, a very good agreement is now established with the other Roman camps to the south, and is in itself a proof of its having been also made by the same Roman army which occupied the "Raedykes" (near Stonehaven), and "Peterculter" camps. The "Raedykes"

¹ Watt says, at page 150, with reference to the east face, that "if it ever existed, it must have been at right angles to the south and north walls, and have passed through some part of the burgh roads." He gives no reason for this assertion, but it is adduced by me to show that he even considered this a *four-sided* object.

camp¹ at Glenmailen is a little larger, according to Colonel Shand's survey, but I have not yet tested the correctness of this for myself. The acreage of the other camps mentioned is as follows, viz. :—Raedykes (near Stonehaven) = 96 imperial acres; and Peterculter (or Normandykes) = $107\frac{1}{2}$ imperial acres. The agreement, therefore, in the space enclosed is very good, and would be perhaps still better, if the undefined portions of this camp could now be traced with certainty. The proportions, too, of the camp are perfect, the breadth being very nearly two-thirds of the length, which Vegetius says corresponds with the best form that can be adopted.

In conclusion, the existence of a Roman camp here is confirmed by the following points :—

1st, The rectangular nature of the object, and its general profile, as regards vallum and ditch.

2d, Its dimensions, proportion, and acreage.

3rd, The table-land on which it is situate—being one of those positions in which the Romans, according to Hyginus, most delighted.

4th, The previous discovery of the Roman road by an independent person, leading out of the north face of the very rampart itself.

5th, The necessity of a Roman camp having existed somewhere in that district.

I propose, as before stated, to examine this interesting object again next summer, and shall then see if the track of the traverse in front of the gateway, which probably existed in the north face, can now be discovered. There would have been a gate most likely at the point where the Roman road debouches from the camp.

I must, before closing, acknowledge the great assistance I have derived from the late Mr Watt's measurements of this camp, as it existed in his days.

The attached plan (Plate XLVIII.), showing the survey of the camp, is taken from the published ordnance map.

Note.—According to my intention expressed in the foregoing, I visited this camp during the summer of 1868, and was fortunate enough to

¹ It appears from Roy to have contained about 115 imperial acres.

establish quite distinctly its north-east angle, and even to trace from it quite readily about 330 yards of its east face. (This I had never expected to do after Watt's statement.) The whole of the north face was also quite distinct on the ground (except just at the north-west angle itself). I was not, however, able to find the track of any traverse, as I had hoped to do, nor could the position of the south-east angle be identified at all. However, the result of this further investigation is most satisfactory, proving, as it does, that this object is undoubtedly the Roman camp which should have existed in this district. The whole of its north and west faces have now been plainly traced out, and about 300 yards of both its south and east faces; the north-east and south-west angles are *distinctly* established, the north-west angle has been ascertained on evidence, and cannot be far out, even if the west face of the camp had been in one continuous straight line: only the south-east angle cannot be traced at all; but from the data now at hand, the form of this camp can be drawn almost with certainty (as shown on Plate XLVIII.), enclosing an area of 110 imperial acres, an acreage which accords so wonderfully with that of either camp to the south or north of it, viz., Peterculter and Glenmailen, that all doubt as to the Kintore camp being the handiwork of the same Roman army must now be entirely removed.

ROMAN CAMP

(AT) **KINTORE**

(SURVEYED BY)
CAPT. E. H. COURTNEY, ROYAL ENGINEERS,
ON 9TH NOVEMBER 1867.

Space enclosed - 91 Imp^l Acres.

