

IV.

NOTICES OF ROCK-SCULPTURINGS OF CUPS AND CIRCLES IN KIRK-
CUDBRIGHTSHIRE. BY GEORGE HAMILTON, F.S.A. SCOT., ARDEN-
DEE, KIRKCUDBRIGHT.

About six miles from the royal burgh of Kirkcudbright, the county town of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, and in the south-eastern portion of the parish of Kirkcudbright, where it is bounded by the Solway Firth, there is on the farms of Dromore and Howwell a sheltered valley known as "The Milton Parks." In the centre of this valley lies a lonely burying-ground called "Dunrod Kirkyard," having, within the bare stone dyke enclosing the acre of which it consists, the ruins of an old ecclesiastical building, mentioned in the grant by Fergus, Lord of Galloway, to Holyrood in 1160 as the church of St Mary and St Bruok of Dunroden. There are now no dwelling-houses near it; but I can remember half a century ago two or three thatched cottages, in one of which lived an old man who told me that his father remembered "a hundred smoking 'lums' in the strath"; the turf-covered outlines of their enclosures and a few old ash trees are all that show where the village existed.

Close by the walls of the churchyard are still to be seen the well-defined outlines of a Roman encampment, while on the height to the south are the remains of a double-fossed ancient fortification, known as Dromore Castle, and on the slope of this hill are four large boulders, the remains of what is called a "Druidical circle," of which, until a few years ago, several other similar stones existed, but which were broken up to build neighbouring dykes.

At the entrance to the burying-ground there lies a large travelled granite boulder, forming part of the rude bridge or roadway over a bit of a stream which skirts the burying-ground. This stone measures 2

feet 9 inches in length and 1 foot 10 inches in width, weighing, I should think, above four hundredweight. A portion of it has been, in recent times, broken off from one side. The top of it has been flattened, and on this flat surface are carved two hollows, one much larger than the other. The larger is an oval 20 inches long by 13 inches wide. The sides are smoothed or rounded and slope gradually to the centre, where the depth is 5 inches. The smaller hollow is circular, 4 inches in diameter and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth, and is 3 inches from one of the ends of the oval hollow and connected therewith by a very slightly marked groove.

The road surfaceman, who acts as sexton, tells me it has always lain where it is, and that his father, who lived to an old age, and had been sexton before him, told him never to allow it to be moved, as it would bring bad luck to do so.

A few months ago the cattle in the neighbouring field, going and coming along a dyke-side to their feeding-shed, laid bare a piece of rock, and hearing that there were some strange markings to be seen upon it, I went and examined them, and found that they were cup and ring markings. On farther search, assisted by other friends interested in the subject, we found several others in the immediate neighbourhood and in other places in the parish, of which I shall now give brief notices, illustrated by sketches made for me by an artist friend, Mr E. Hornell, of Kirkcudbright.

These incised carvings are all found on glaciated surfaces of the common sedimentary rock of the district, that of the Lower Silurian formation. Amongst the many discovered, none have as yet been found on the surfaces of rocks of an igneous formation, although these are to be found in apparently equally suitable character and position as the former.

No. 1. The rock surface here slopes from the south towards the north-west, at an angle of 30° , and is traversed by cracks or splits in the rock at right angles to each other. On this surface are to be seen traces of seventeen different carvings (fig. 1), of which the most distinct is one with three circles surrounding the central cup, which is $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in diameter and $\frac{1}{3}$ of an inch in depth. These are the usual sizes of the figures we found. The outer circle is 9 inches in diameter. From the

outer circle towards the east are cut two grooves of a similar depth as the cup and rings. Above this figure on the same surface is cut an oblong hole, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and $1\frac{1}{2}$ wide. All the other markings are circular.

No. 2 is about 200 yards north-east of No. 1. We stripped the turf from off this rock-face, which sloped at an angle of 30° in the opposite direction from No. 1. There are traces of sixteen incised markings of various kinds upon it (fig. 2). The most distinct has four

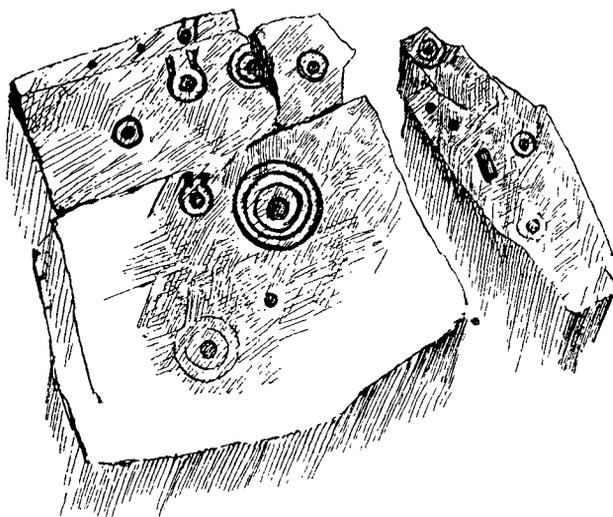


Fig. 1. Sculptured Rock Surface at Dromore, Kirkcubrightshire.

concentric rings round the central cup, the outer one being a foot in diameter, and on the eastern side is a very distinctly carved groove intersecting the two outer circles, widening towards the east and at the part farthest from the central cup. This figure has over it, on the upper or western side, a number of smaller cups or holes, one of which is oblong, of similar size and character to those described in No. 1.

The other circles on this face are apparently joined by slight grooves

cut in the rock, and branching off as shown in the sketch, and, besides, there are two long tapering grooves, not cracks, in the stone, but distinctly carved as if pitted or dabbed upon the rock by a sharp pointed tool of some kind. These grooves are 2 inches wide at the outer extremity, and taper to a point towards the centre of the rock-face.



Fig. 2. Sculptured Rock Surface at Dromore, Kirkcudbrightshire.

No. 3 is about the same distance from No. 2 as the latter is from No. 1, and in a north-eastern direction. The figures here, which are two in number, are carved on a horizontal face, and the peculiarity is that in the case of the larger one, which consists of a central cup with

four rings, a cup of similar size and character to the central cup is carved on the outer ring, which is 8 inches in diameter. The other figure is a small cup with one ring.

No. 4 is about the same distance from all the others and more to the west. There are two surfaces of rock-face alongside of each other, both with cup and ring carvings. In one the cup is deeper than usual, being quite half an inch deep, and has only one ring 3 inches in

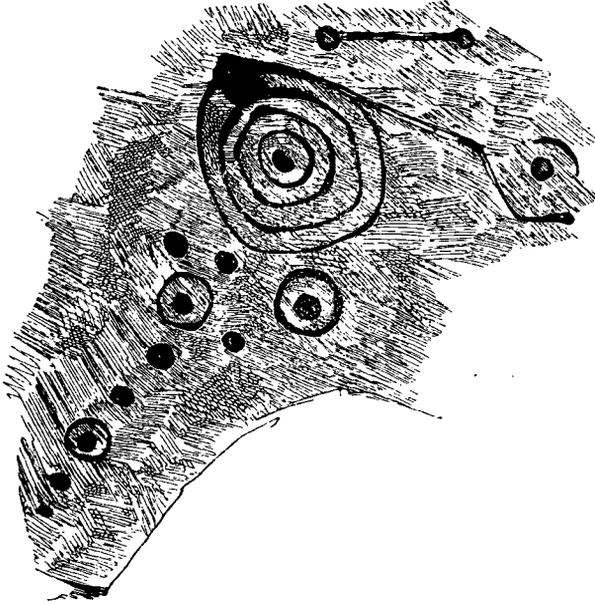


Fig. 3. Rock-Sculpture at Dromore, Kirkcudbrightshire.

diameter round it, sharply and deeply cut. Other markings were found in this neighbourhood, but very faint; doubtless many more exist if the turf was stripped off the rocks, and many have been destroyed in quarrying for dykes.

No. 5. On the height beyond that on which the old fortification exists, and known as Knockshinnie, we found a face of rock with very

distinct carvings upon it. The rock sloped at an angle of 45° and partially concave, and from the way the sun shone upon it was distinctly visible to us at some distance off. The peculiarity of the principal sculpture here (fig. 3) is that all the rings round the central cup, which is 2 inches in diameter, are not circles, but the outer ones are lengthened out to a sort of angular outline, so as to embrace another and larger cup, which is $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter, on the second outermost circle. The outer carving is 17 inches across from the angular corner across the centre, and 14 inches across the other diameter. The second ring stretches out towards the angle, while the third ring embraces the larger cup, one side forming part of the cup, while the outer ring runs quite clear of it, and is connected by a groove with a less distinct circle above.

About a mile west of this last figure, and much nearer the seashore, and close to the old mansion-house at Balmae, now the gardener's house, are several glaciated rocks with carvings upon them of a much coarser type, and on a larger scale than those above described. It is not easy to describe them very specifically.

No. 6 has no centre cup, but five concentric rings, the outer one 2 feet in diameter.

No. 7 has three rings without a centre cup, the outer ring 20 inches in diameter.

No. 8 has no centre cup, but the two surrounding rings are quite irregular in shape, the measurement of the inner ring being 10 inches by 12, and the outer one 17 by 18 inches.

No. 9 has a very small centre cup, only 1 inch in diameter, surrounded by three rings, the outer one a foot in diameter.

No. 10 has two large central cups, $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter and 9 inches apart, with short grooves, 5 inches in length, running from each, and are surrounded (as shown in fig. 4) by two irregular circles, the outer one measuring in one direction 2 feet across, and in another 1 foot 10 inches.

On searching a little further inland, and about 3 miles from Dunrod, we discovered some more incised rocks in the neighbourhood of another old burying-ground of the parish, called Galtway churchyard,

but mentioned in the same deed by Fergus as the church of Galtweid.

No. 11. To the south, and near the cot house at the foot of Gilroonie Brae, we found cup and ring markings of the ordinary type close to a quarry which is being worked at present.

No. 12. To the north of the burying-ground, where tradition says there stood an old village, the foundations of which can still be traced, we found some very fine specimens of incised rocks, in which the sculpturings had this peculiarity that the rings are not completed, but only partially, with two grooves from the cup outwards.

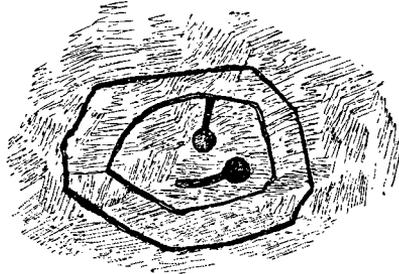


Fig. 4. Rock Sculpture at Balmae, Kirkcudbrightshire.

No. 13. In the next field, and on the farm of High Banks, were found the most interesting group of such incised rocks that we have as yet seen. Mr Rigg, who has been tenant of this farm for many years, states that a great many of such markings were destroyed about fifty years ago, when the surrounding stone dykes were built from the quarry here; and his remembrance is that when the field was ploughed long ago several other rock surfaces were to be seen similarly marked. The Lady Isabellà Hope, of St Mary's Isle, who is proprietor of this farm, has kindly consented to allow this part of the field to be stripped of turf, and should many such carved surfaces be found, or markings of a different character to these above described be discovered, I will take notes of them for a future paper.

Meanwhile I may describe two specimens of those already found. The first consists of only a cup and one circle around it, but this has

been so skilfully carved as to give a casual observer the impression that the whole figure stands up in relief above the surface of the rock.

The second group is on the west face of a rock 3 feet by $2\frac{1}{2}$, and has on this space 186 distinctly separate carvings. The chief figure is a cup surrounded by two concentric rings, and outside them two rings

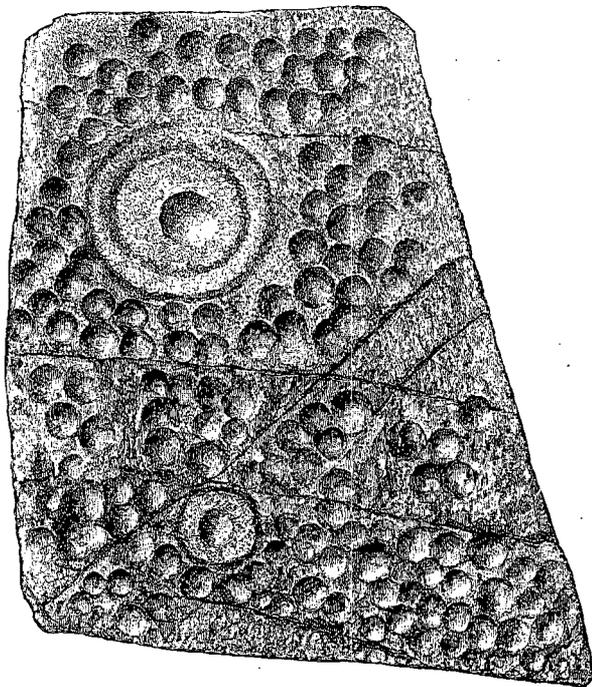


Fig. 5. Cup-marked Rock Surface, High Banks, Kirkcudbrightshire.

formed by separate cups. The strange peculiarity seems to be that all are in multiples of seven. The cup is $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, the first ring 7 inches in diameter, the second ring $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter; the first ring of cups, consisting of twenty-one cups, is 14 inches in diameter, and the second, consisting of thirty-five cups, is 21 inches in diameter. The cups forming these outer circles are generally each 2 inches in

diameter. To the left or north of this figure, and on the same slab of rock, are about 100 small cups carved without any apparent system, but amongst them can be distinguished circles of cups and rings as on the accompanying woodcut (fig. 5) from a photograph of a cast taken of this very elaborate system of carvings.

None of the carvings on this rock are horizontal, but all slope at various angles.

No. 14. About a mile to the east of this, on a farm called the Tongue of Bombie, are to be seen another group of such markings, where the figures are of a smaller type than any I have already described.

All the foregoing examples are found in the parish of Kirkcudbright. The neighbouring parishes have not as yet been carefully searched, but that such incised rocks exist in them also is shown by our finding at Castlecreavie, in Rerwick parish, close to a quarry that is at present being worked, a cup with four concentric rings around it, the outer one a foot in diameter, with a second cup, larger than the centre one, between the second and fourth rings, and two simple cups outside.

In the adjoining parish of Borgue we also found some traces of cup and ring markings near the mansion of Senwick, not far from the cave described in Vol. X. of the *Proceedings*. The best defined of these, was in a field called Cleagh, on a glaciated rock measuring 5 feet by 2, lying east and west, and sloping at a slight angle towards the south. On it were three very distinctly carved circles. The first figure to the left was a cup 3 inches deep, surrounded by four circles, the outer one 9 inches in diameter; the second a cup $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, surrounded by five rings, the outer one of which is $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter; and the third a cup $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in depth, surrounded by six rings, the outer one of which is $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, with two grooves cut from the centre intersecting the five inner rings. Besides these circles, there is an oblong figure sunk 3 inches in the rock, and 3 inches in width by $4\frac{1}{8}$ inches in length, surrounded by an oblong incision $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in width by 7 inches long. Besides these carvings there is an indistinct cup, and another apparently oblong or oval-shaped indefinite figure $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by 2 inches wide.

Such is an account of several of the incised rocks found recently in

the immediate neighbourhood of Kirkeudbright. The only conclusion I can safely come to regarding these mysterious symbols is that they are all carved upon the comparatively softer sedimentary rocks and never on the harder igneous rocks of which many glaciated surfaces are to be found in close proximity to the former, and apparently equally well fitted for the purpose, unless it is that they may be more liable to crumble under atmospheric influences. It appears to me also that the cup and ring carvings are not to be found very far from the seashore, while the simple cups are found inland,
