<center>III.</center>

THE "STONE CIRCLE" AT HOLYWOOD, DUMFRIESSHIRE. By FRED. R. COLES, Cor. Mem. Soc. Antiq. Scot.

This large and rudely circular group of stones, which, under the two designations of "Druidical Circle" and "The Twelve Apostles," is a well-known object to local antiquaries, has never been fully described in our *Proceedings*. As, apart from its size, it possesses several features of interest, it seemed to me desirable that an accurate account, with drawings and plans, should be submitted to the Society.

In the following notice I shall, first, recapitulate briefly any previous notices to which I have had access : secondly, I shall place on record a trustworthy plan and description of the stones : and thirdly, I shall discuss one or two of the subsidiary points to which, apparently, this circle may more than others lay claim.

I. *Previous Notices.*—The earliest notice is, I believe, that contained in Grose's *Antiquities of Scotland*, under date 1797. It is a very brief, verbal account, eked out by what claims to be—and, no doubt, was— "a Plan accurately taken in 1789." Grose speaks of the stones as "this oval of stones, supposed Druidical."

Two characteristics at once arrest the eye in this plan of Grose's : the extreme irregularity of the distances between the stones, and the markedly uncurved line in which three on the N.E. (H, I, J) [1] and three on the N.W. (G, F, E) are placed. The observer has been careful also to note that at K there are two, possibly three, stones very closely grouped together. This plan, be it observed, shows twelve stones, the greatest diameter being that between A and G, which, from centre to centre, measures 303 feet. This diameter closely approximated to the true N. and S. Its contrary axis—D to K—measures 256 feet. The circumference is 819 feet.

The next notice is furnished by the *Old Statistical Account* of the parish. At page 18 of the first volume, Rev. Dr Bryce Johnstone says :—

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[1] See Plan, p. 87.

· " Holywood is evidently derived from the holywood or grove of oak-trees which surrounded a large Druidical temple, still standing, within half a mile of the Parish Church. It is formed of twelve very large whin or moor stones, which inclose a circular piece of ground of about eighty yards in diameter. . . . . Killness," says Dr Johnstone further on, " seems to be composed of two languages : *cella*, Latin for a chapel or cell, and *ness* or *naes*, Danish for a promontory. The place so-called is the field where the Druidical temple stands, and it is prominent in to the river Cluden."

In the General Appendix to the *O. S. A.* (vol. xxi. p. 3), the same writer, in reply to queries made by Sir John Sinclair, says of a certain group of houses :—

" The village is built at a small distance from the site of the Druidical Temple, on the side of the great turnpike road which leads from Dumfries to Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Ayr. It is called Druid-ville : and he intends this winter (1791) to plant a grove of oaks around it in memory of the holy grove of the Druids, from which the Parish has its name."

From which we may gather how fixed was the impression that groves of oaks and stone circles were mutually symbolic of Druidism !

Even when we come up to the date of the *New Statistical Account* (1844) no new light is brought to bear on the subject, the then minister of Holywood contenting himself with the remark that " a quarter of a mile S.W. from the Parish Kirk there are Druidical remains, ... eleven large stones placed in an oval form."

The writer also describes the nature of the stones, but without any very useful result.

It is, however, in our own *Proceedings* that the most flagrant error becomes conspicuous. I have already stated that we have no account of Holywood Circle as such. But, in that exhaustive monograph by the late Sir James Y. Simpson on " Ancient Sculpturings of Cups and Rings," which forms the Appendix to vol. vi., occur these words :—

" *Cromlech and Circle at Holywood, Dumfriesshire.*—A few miles from Dumfries is a megalithic circle nearly 80 feet in diameter, and eleven of its massive compact stones are still left."

This statement is remarkable on two points—the assumption of a " cromlech," and the mistake, or misprint, of " feet " for " yards." As

just shown, the longer diameter is over 97 yards. The discovery of this curiously erroneous description led me to inquire into the possible existence of any trustworthy account of these stones. Hence this notice.

I now proceed to describe, and, with help of a very carefully made plan by Mr Rutherford and myself, to point out certain features in this " Circle " which may prove interesting and at the same time in-structive.

The local name for the stones is " The Twelve Apostles." When the rustic believer in Druidism is asked, why so, when there are only eleven stones ? the reply usually bears upon the treachery of Judas Iscariot. Further inquiry is, of course, rendered useless. That there were a century ago really twelve stones I have already shown : that there are now only eleven is equally true. The oldest observer whose testimony has been accessible to me firmly alleges the removal of one stone, and within the memory of living persons eleven has always been the number. It was with the greatest surprise, therefore, that, on consult-ing the O.M. 25″ scale, I found twelve stones marked—the extra stone being shown some 40 feet or so N.W. of stone F—its position is quite immaterial.

At a loss to account for this resurrection of a stone in 1850, which in 1837 was non-existent, I bethought me of writing to my friend Captain C. F. Mould of H.M. Survey, now stationed at Chester. His reply is somewhat startling in its suggestiveness :—

" There should only be eleven stones. The drawn plan shows only this number ; but there turns out to have been an accidental blue spot on this plan which has been reproduced by the zincography on the published plans."

On such trivial mechanical accidents may the most mystical theories in archæology repose !

II. *Plan and Description of the Stones as at the Present Day.*—The annexed plan (fig. 1) is reduced to a scale of 75 feet to 1 inch from the rough drawings made in conjunction with Mr Rutherford. The stones, however, are drawn to double that scale.

(*a*) *Dimensions of Area.*—Comparing the annexed plan with that

made in 1789, we find little difference in the position of some of the stones, *e.g.*, those on the W. arc (A to G) are all almost exactly in the same sites, while great differences are observable on the E. arc, especially
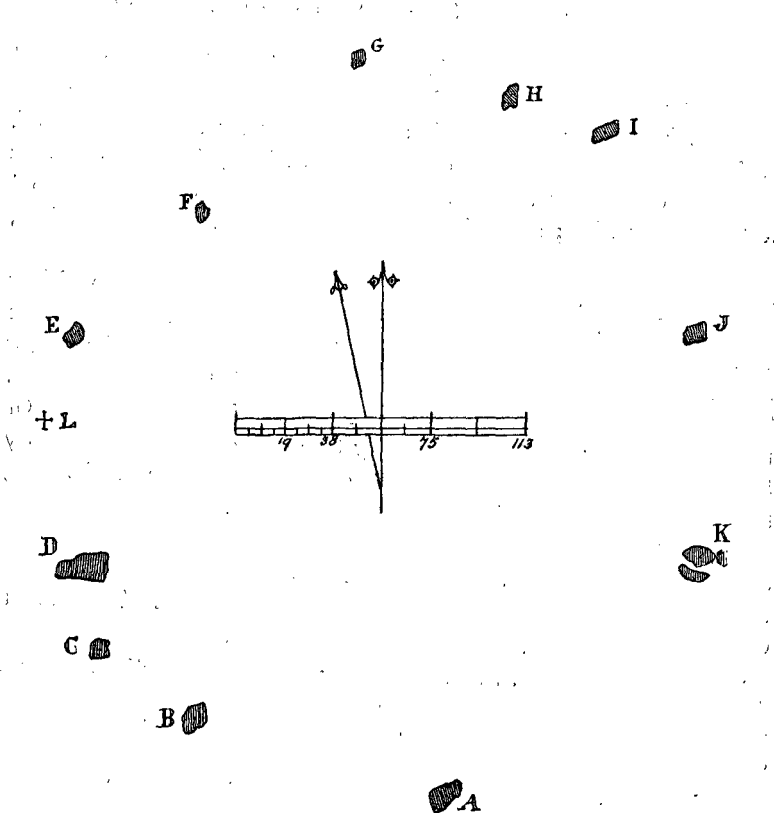

Fig. 1. Ground Plan of Holywood Circle
(Scale, 75 feet to an inch).

in the relative positions of H, I, and J.   At the same time, the two main diameters are almost identical in position; and yet there is a difference of quite 10 feet in their actual measurements, our present survey giving

the N. and S. diameter, centre to centre of stones A and G, as 292 feet, and the two parallel cross-diameters E, J and D, K each 246 feet. I am at a loss how to account for this, as the measurements made for this notice were made with the greatest care, and subjected to repeated tests.

(b) *Dimensions of Individual Stones and their Positions.*—In the old plan stone L—between D and E—the stone now lost, is drawn considerably larger than D, which is at present by far the largest of all. It is a huge prostrate block of whinstone, slightly tapering outwards from the circle from a base 7 feet 6 inches wide to an irregular top 4 feet 10 inches wide ; and it is 10 feet 6 inches long. If ever upright, it would naturally have rested on its broad end, and would then have overtopped by fully 4 feet its diametrically-opposite stone (J), which is now the highest. It has been estimated that stone D weighs between 11 and 12 tons. The next largest stone is the broader one of the two (or three ?) so closely grouped together at K (Simpson's " fallen cromlech"). This also is recumbent. It measures 10 feet 3 inches by 6 feet. Of the rest, A, B, and I average 8 feet by 6 ; C, F, and G are each nearly 5 feet 6 inches by 5 feet, while H is only 3 feet square at the base, tapering upwards, and weighs probably only 3 tons.

(c) *Mineralogical Character of the Stones.*—I find, from consulting descriptions in the *Trans. Dfs. and Gall. Nat. Hist. and Antiq. Soc.,* that there are marked differences among these eleven stones. The late Dr Gilchrist—a sound geologist—thus describes them :—

" They are all Silurian . . . . . except one ; that one is a so-called Porphyry. Again, of the whole number, including the porphyry, four are boulders. These might have been obtained at or near the spot where they stand ; but the seven others have been detached from the living rock by some ancient quarrying process. The nearest place where such rock could be obtained is the hills in the vicinity of Irongray Church,"

i.e., seven or eight miles distant.

My friend, Mr James Barbour, Architect, agrees with the above opinion, stating that the basement of one of the stones (D in plan) shows that it has been torn from the rock.[1]

. [1] It is perhaps only fair to quote the opinion of Dr Dickson, *quondam* Secretary to

This leads me by a natural sequence to discuss what is, after all, the most interesting feature of these stones ; I refer to

III. *The supposed Artificial Cup-Marks on certain of the Stones.*— Following the paragraph already quoted from Simpson are these words : —" The largest (stone), about 10 feet long and 7 broad, is prostrated forward, and has upon its face, its top, and one of its sides, about thirty smooth and rounded cup excavations."

This can apply only to stone D. Dr Dickson finds cup-markings upon four of the whinstones ; and in referring to stone D he says :— " It is upon what must have been the base (had it ever stood upright, which is doubtful) that these hollows exist."

I had previously come to the same conclusion myself. Apart, how-ever, entirely from any possibilities of this sort, I most unhesitatingly decline to consider these cup-hollows as the handiwork of man ; and as I have revisited and re-examined many times every reputed rock-surface in Galloway, and some other districts, bearing genuine sculpturings of the type under discussion, I think I may say that these cup-hollows are assuredly due only to natural causes. They are neither round enough, shallow enough, nor sufficiently grouped to be the handiwork of man.

Once more to quote Simpson :—

" At one side of the circle, and somewhat within the circuit of it, are three or four stones, which appear to me to be the prostrated remains of a cromlech and its supports. The cap-stone has, running across its back, four oblique rows of cup-like excavations, some of them round and others irregularly elongated in form. One of the fallen props is similarly marked. It would be important to note accurately if the various strings of cups correspond in any degree with natural lines in these stones, and if, therefore, they may possibly have a natural origin ; or if they are arranged quite independently of the mineralogical peculiarities of the blocks, and are, hence, as they seem to be, the results of artificial tooling."

This description with fair accuracy may apply to the groups of stones at K. Waiving, for the meantime, the question of their being " a fallen cromlech," I may state that it has been the opinion of all experienced

the Dfs. and Gall. Soc. In a notice entitled ''On certain Markings on the Druid Circle at Holywood," he says :—" The stones differ much in size and appearance, but are all equally rugged and irregular, as nature has fashioned them."

observers that the cup-hollows on both the "cap-stone" and its "support" are due to natural causes only. In my own judgment they do decidedly run along the lines of cleavage in the rock ; more especially is this quite evident in the stone called the support.