

## III.

## NOTES ON A STONE CIRCLE IN WIGTOWNSHIRE. BY FRED. R. COLES, CORR. MEM. SOC. ANTIQ. SCOT. (WITH PLANS AND VIEW.)

The Standing Stones of Torhouse, of which there is no description in the *Proceedings*, are situated on either side of the road between Wigtown and Kirkcowan, about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles N.W. of the county town. The name on Pont's map is Torhouse Macky, and to this day it is locally pronounced Torrus-kie. These remains have been noticed and partially described by old Andrew Symson, minister of Kirkinner; and Muir, who penned the greater part of his *Lighthouse* at the Mull of Galloway in 1864, also gives a plan of the principal group of stones, which, however, tends to mislead, by being too diagrammatic and regular.

Like many other stone circles in the adjoining Stewartry, this at Torhouse Moor seems at first sight to be the environment of a cairn, but with the added feature of three great stones in line near its centre. The fact, however, is, that the accumulation of stones within the area is the result of the clearance of the field. Many cartloads, I am informed by Rev. George Wilson, who knew the site years ago, of stones were emptied round the three great central blocks, till, on his applying to the factor, the abuse was stopped. Three examples of stone circles having a central monolith are recorded in my paper in the *Proceedings*, vol. xxix. p. 316; but this Wigtownshire circle is the only one known to me having more than a monolith of such bulk within the area, with the exception, of course, of such chambered cairns as possess tall, upright, pillar-like stones, distinctively forming the sides or ends of the enclosing burial structure.

There are at Torhousekie, besides the circle, several smaller groups of great stones, the positions and arrangement of which will be made clear by a reference to the accompanying general plan (fig. 1). Approaching these fields from the south or Wigtown side, one is first arrested by the group of three stones on a slight, very gently ascending height on the east. The Ordnance map (6 inch scale) shows four stones here, that on the south forming a rectangle with the tallest of the three

now extant. But Muir mentions only three. Nearly opposite, and built into the dike, is a large stone (granite?), bearing on its upright surface a deeply cut oval-shaped basin 15 inches by  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches (see D, fig. 1). This also was observed by Muir. Leaving on the right the ruined sites of three cairns, we reach the principal group of the Standing Stones. The enlarged plan (fig. 2) shows the arrangement of these two-and-

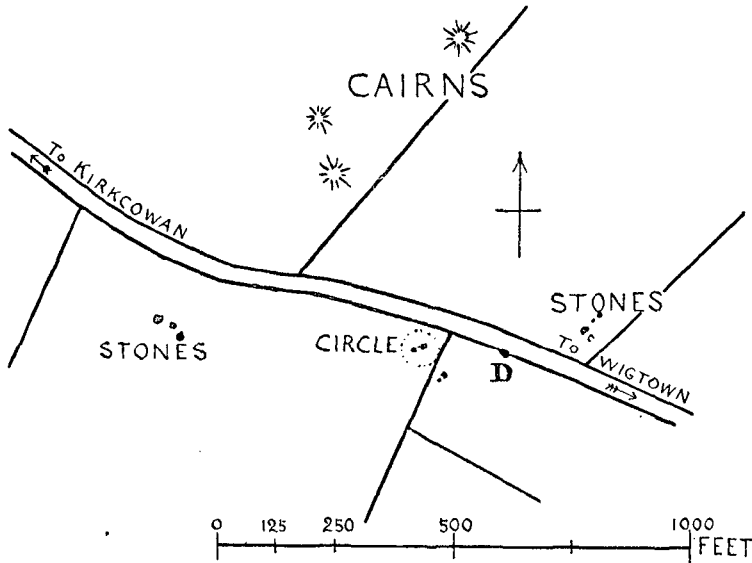


Fig. 1. General Plan.

twenty stones, as faithfully as single-handed measurement by triangulation can render it. The stones are all rude, somewhat rounded, quite unhewn blocks of granite; not one is whinstone (as is erroneously stated in *The Lighthouse*); neither is the circumference a true circle, nor are the interspaces regular. Several of the stones stand close upon 5 feet above ground; A and S are especially conspicuous; B, not now nearly so perpendicular as its fellows, measures over that along its sloping upper side. The three central stones present some difficulties. As may be seen from the ground plan (fig. 2), they have not been placed

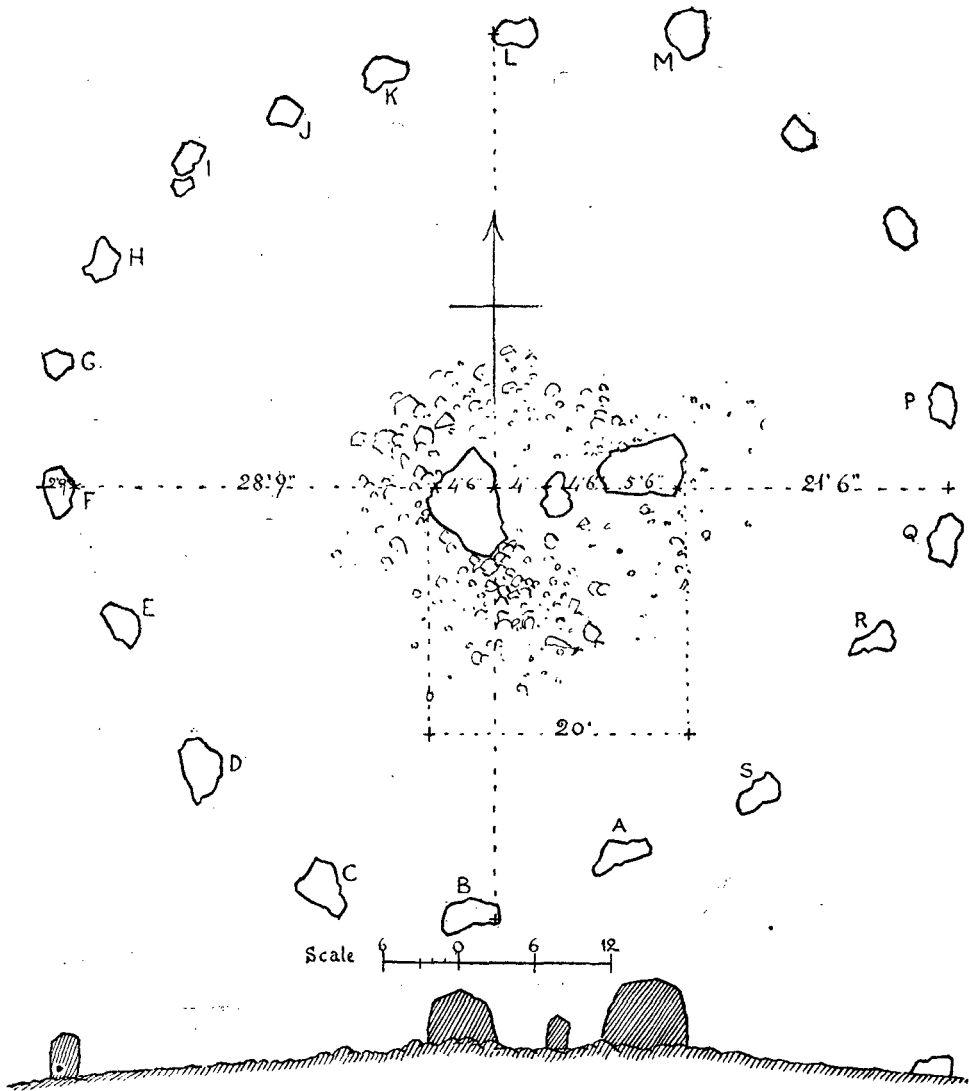


Fig. 2. Plan and Section of Circle at Torhousekie.

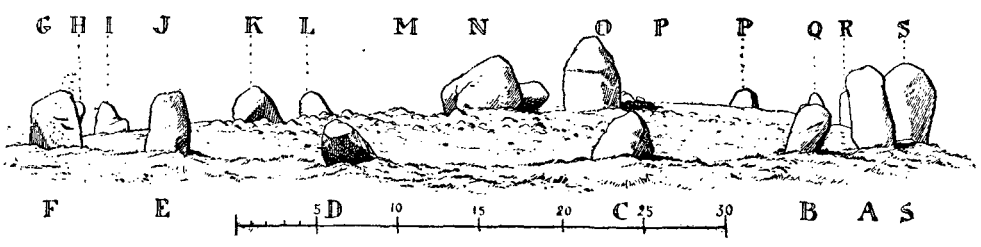


Fig. 3. View of Circle at Torhousekie.

so that their longest sides could have formed the sides of a grave ; and the presence of the smaller middle stone further tends to dispel the notion that these stones directly surrounded an interment. This middle stone, however, has been moved ; for at present it slopes northwards into the earth to such a distance as to preclude the possibility of measuring it. But, even on the supposition that its length once nearly filled up the space between the two greater stones—nearly 8 feet wide—and its inner edge lay in line with that of the easterly stone, the interment could not be said to be enclosed by these three stones alone. If there has been an overground interment here, built on the same principle as are several in the Stewartry, several large stones must have been removed from the south side and the east end. The extreme unlikelihood of an overground interment is attested by, at any rate, the following pieces of negative evidence: tradition tells of none ; history records no attempt at discovering the popular “pot of gold” ; and, on the ground itself, there is not the least vestige of any thin whinstone slabs, such as are commonly used in Galloway kist-vaens.<sup>1</sup> I am inclined, on these grounds, therefore, to rank this circle of Torhousekie with those at Glenquicken, Park of Tongland, and Hills, in the Stewartry, in the belief that the interment will be found in the area of the circle, nearer the circumference than the centre. About 170 feet to the S.E. of the central stone, over the dike (see fig. 1), two other stones remain, 21 feet apart: one is a huge boulder 4 feet 6 inches high, the other prostrate ; and 500 feet due W. of the central stone is the first of three great stones, all prostrate, lying very much as if they formed the sole relics of a small circle, some 30 feet in diameter.

Popular tradition associates this circle of the Standing Stones of Torhouskie with the grave of the reputed King Galdus ; and it is usually supposed that Symson is the authority for the belief. As a matter of fact, however, Symson merely quotes the then current tradition in his *Large Description of Galloway*, which was written in 1684, and revised 1692. In the Appendix No. V., printed from the *Sibbald MSS.*, when describing Wigtown, the authors use these words: “Near

<sup>1</sup> See my “Record of Kist-vaens found in The Stewartry,” in *The Reliquary* for January 1897.

to it is the Monument of the King Galdus (from whom some think the Shyre was named). There is ther ane large circle of ground, set round with long obelisk stones, and some shorter ones in the middle."

In the last edition of Harper's *Rambles in Galloway*, p. 327, occurs an unaccountable blunder. Quoting in full Symson's description of the Standing Stones, in its very midst, the author adds a passage from the *Statistical Account*, to the effect that "on the third stone is the following, *Me mento mori*," &c. This passage really applies to the third of three gravestones in the kirkyard of the parish church of Wigtown.