

II.

NOTES ON SOME STONE CIRCLES IN THE SOUTH OF ABERDEENSHIRE
AND NORTH OF KINCARDINESHIRE. BY JAMES RITCHIE,
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The following paper is a continuation of the Notes on Stone Circles, the earlier portion of which, relating to the circles in Central Aberdeenshire, appeared in vol. li. of the *Proceedings*, and is intended to supplement and bring up to date the information contained in the reports of Mr Fred R. Coles on the circles in the Aberdeen district, which appear in vols. xxxiv. to xxxix. of the *Proceedings*.

The circles referred to are (I.) in Aberdeenshire: (1) Wester Echt, (2) Balblair, (3) Gask or Springhill, (4) Standing Stones of Cullerlie, (5) Balnacraig, and (6) Inchbaire, and Corsedardar Stone; (II.) in Kincardineshire: (1) Inchmarlo Lodge, (2) Banchory-Ternan, (3) Standing Stones of Durris, (4) Tilquhillie, and (5) Rees of Clune, along with Rees of Clune and Sundayswells Ring Cairns.

I. SOUTH ABERDEENSHIRE CIRCLES.

(1) WESTER ECHT.

The remains of this circle stand a few hundred yards to the west of the road leading from Waterton to Echt, about one mile south of Waterton and two miles north of Echt. The circle consisted originally of nine stones, but only three now remain (fig. 1), and these are plainly visible from the road near the lodge at the western entrance to Dunecht House. The most easterly of the stones is 9 feet high, and about 4 feet broad and 3 feet thick at the base. The middle stone is nearly as bulky as its neighbour, but is only 6 feet high. It has partly fallen over, and now leans towards the outside of the circle. The third stone is 8 feet high and 5 feet broad, but its thickness is only about 1 foot 6 inches. It has, on the side facing the interior of the circle, two smaller stones set firmly in the ground at right angles to the face of the upright stone. These two stones are about 3 feet apart, and rise only a short distance above the level of the ground. They seem to be the remains of a stone cist, and indicate that this circle, like so many others, had been used for burial purposes.

(2) BALBLAIR.

About a hundred yards from the circle at Midmar Kirk, in a strip of plantation running north between the road and a field on its eastern side, there stands a single stone which is reputed to be the sole remnant of a

circle. It is of reddish granite and measures 8 feet 6 inches in height. Its average width is about 1 foot 6 inches, but near the top it expands to 1 foot 10 inches. Its greatest thickness is 1 foot 7 inches near the base, but at the broad part near the top it is only 10 inches thick. When viewed from the north side this stone has much the appearance of a

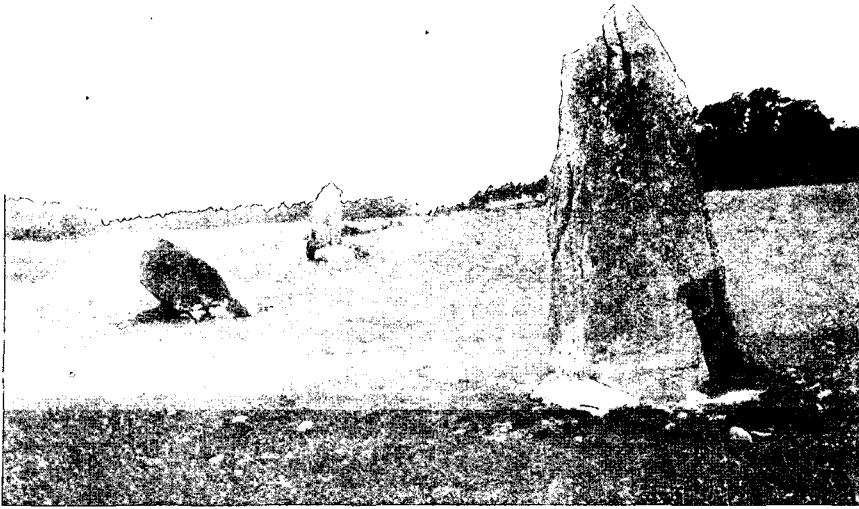


Fig. 1. Remains of Wester Echt Stone Circle.

damaged cross from which the arms have been broken off; but this appearance is deceptive, for a closer inspection fails to confirm the first impression, and shows that the stone is not a broken cross.

(3) GASK OR SPRINGHILL.

On the top of the ridge between the Skene and Echt roads, about ten miles west of Aberdeen, two upright stone pillars may be seen standing a little apart from each other. These are the remains of a circle which formerly stood on the farm of Gask, though, owing to an alteration of boundaries, they are now attached to the farm of Springhill. Both stones are of grey granite. The southern one is a thick flat-topped stone, 6 feet 8 inches in height and 2 feet 9 inches in breadth at the base. Near the ground level it is 2 feet 3 inches thick, and narrows to 1 foot 4 inches about half-way up. The northern stone has a pointed top and measures 6 feet 3 inches in height. Its greatest breadth is near the middle, where it measures 3 feet. The thickness at the base is 2 feet 3 inches, and

it gradually decreases to about 1 foot at the top. These two stones are 47 feet apart, and as their broad sides face each other and are nearly parallel, it is probable that they stood on opposite sides of the circle, whose diameter would therefore be somewhere in the neighbourhood of



Fig. 2. Northern Standing Stone at Gask or Springhill, showing cup-marks.

50 feet. The northern stone (fig. 2) is notable for the cup-marks upon it, there being eight plain cups on its southern side facing the centre of the circle, and one rather doubtful cup and ring on the northern side near the top.

(4) STANDING STONES OF CULLERLIE.

About three miles south-east of the village of Echt, and two miles south of the loch of Skene, lies the farm of "Standing Stones," on the estate

of Cullerlie, in the parish of Echt. The farm derives its name from the stone circle which stands in the field to the north of the farmhouse. The circle has eight standing-stones, all in position, but there is no recumbent stone. Mr Coles, in describing the circle, draws attention to the unusual circumstance that the largest stones are found on its northern arc instead of, as is commonly the case, on the southern one. But the circle has, or rather had, another peculiarity which is found in only a few of the Aberdeenshire circles, namely, an outlying stone standing a short distance outside the circumference. This stone was removed without the proprietor's permission many years ago, but is still remembered in the district. It was an upright block about 5 feet in height, and it stood about 3 or 4 yards from the circle on the western side. Though these outlying stones occur frequently in connection with circles in the south-west of England, they are somewhat rare in Aberdeenshire. One stands to the south-east of the Shelden circle in the parish of Bourtie, near Inverurie, and another to the north-west of the Druidstown circle in the parish of Premnay, while a huge block of white quartz stands to the south-east of the Balquhain circle about three miles north of Inverurie. It is quite likely that similar outlying standing-stones were connected with other circles, but have been removed to facilitate the cultivation of the ground, as has been the case at Cullerlie.

Many of the circles in the Skene and Echt districts have suffered great dilapidation. At Wester Echt there are only three stones left standing; at South Fornet, Nether Corskie, and Gask only two; and at Balblair only a single stone remains. Three stone circles formerly stood near the base of the Barmekin of Echt, two of them on the south side and one on the north, and these three circles have entirely disappeared. The stones taken from these damaged circles seem in many cases to have been utilised as rubbing-posts for cattle, for these rubbing-posts are specially numerous in the fields of the district.

(5) BALNACRAIG.

About half-way between Torphins and Lumphanan stations on the Deeside railway, and about two miles from either station, is situated the farm of Balnacraig, on which the remains of a stone circle are to be found. Mr Coles during his survey was unable to ascertain the position of this circle, and so was led to infer that it had been destroyed, but this is not so. The circle has been much damaged, and is very far from being complete, but it has been in its present condition for many years. The stones lie in a small plantation on the north side of the railway, only about a hundred yards west of the farm-steading. The farm road runs

along the north side of the plantation, and from it the stones are easily seen, though the clump of trees in which they are placed hides them from the railway.

As far as can be judged from its dilapidated condition, the Balnacraig circle seems to have had an original diameter of about 45 feet. The recumbent stone which faces the south-west is a rounded massive block of reddish granite, 10 feet long, 4 feet 6 inches high, and about 3 feet thick at the broadest part. It has on its outer face six plain cup-marks—two near the centre being quite distinct, but the remaining four



Fig. 3. Northern portion of Balnacraig Stone Circle, near Torphins.

towards the western side very shallow and indistinct. Both the east and west pillars are missing. Beginning near the edge of the recumbent stone, and proceeding along the west side of the circle, there are six earth-fast stones set close to each other. These are all that remain of the stone setting, which doubtless once formed a complete circle within the ring of standing-stones. Three only of these standing-stones remain erect, two lie prostrate on the ground, and there are several fragments, which are probably portions of a broken one. With the exception of the recumbent stone, none of the standing-stones remains fully upright; they are either leaning over as if about to fall, or have already fallen.

The most striking of the standing-stones, as regards both its size and colour, is that on the north-west of the circle (fig. 3). It is a pillar of

reddish igneous rock, 5 feet 9 inches high, 3 feet 3 inches broad at its widest part, and 1 foot 5 inches thick. Its red colour contrasts finely with the green of the surrounding vegetation, and at once attracts the attention of the observer. It leans towards the outside of the circle, and looks as if at no distant day it would fall over. Its neighbour on the north leans in the opposite direction, towards the south-east. It is almost square in shape, being 3 feet 10 inches high and 3 feet 6 inches broad, but it is only 8 inches thick. A large block, 6 feet long by 2 feet 3 inches broad, lies on the south-east of the circle. The remaining stones are smaller, being all under 3 feet in length, and have more the appearance of broken pieces than of complete standing-stones. Nothing seems to be known locally of any remains having been found at any time within the area of the circle.

(6) INCHBAIRE CIRCLE, BIRSE, AND CORSEDARDAR STONE.

The Inchbaire circle stood about a mile below the bridge over the Dee at Potarch, and about a hundred yards west from the right bank of the river. It was a small circle, and was known as "The Worship Stones," but no details of its appearance are now available, as the stones of which it was constructed were removed about seventy years ago. It is chiefly remarkable as being the only circle known to have existed in the parish of Birse, though further down the valley of the Dee stone circles and their remains are numerous. There is, however, a standing-stone still in existence about two miles south of the Inchbaire site. It is situated near the roadside a short distance east of Finzean House, and is known as the Corседardar Stone. It is a reddish granite block, 4 feet 6 inches high, and about 2 feet both in breadth and thickness. Tradition says it marks the spot where Dardanas, a Pictish king, was killed. He is said to have been buried under a large cairn in the neighbouring wood.

II. NORTH KINCARDINESHIRE CIRCLES.

(1) INCHMARLO LODGE, BANCHORY.

On the western outskirts of Banchory-Ternan, among the trees around Inchmarlo Cottage and close to the turnpike, there stands a solitary stone, all that remains of a large circle which once occupied the site. Mr Coles describes it in his report in vol. xxxiv. of the *Proceedings*, and suggests that the curious oblong cavity near the top may have been formed to hold a modern letter-box. This, however, is not the case. The cavity was made in 1835 to contain a small marble tablet on which a couple of doggerel verses referring to the Druids were engraved. These verses were written by an eccentric inhabitant of Banchory, and were

probably suggested by the name Druid Stone, by which the block is known in the neighbourhood. The tablet was inserted during the absence of the proprietor, and without his consent, therefore on his return he had it removed, and it is now preserved at Inchmarlo.

(2) BANCHORY-TERNAN.

A short distance to the north-east of Banchory railway station, just where the North Deeside road enters the town, there are two large stones built into the wall on the north side of the road, directly opposite the manse. Tradition says they are the remains of a circle which once stood in the neighbourhood. They, however, have more the appearance of being portions of a cist than of standing-stones removed from a circle. On the other side of the road, directly opposite these stones, there may be seen the small cross described in the *Proceedings*, vol. xlix. p. 46. It is built into the boundary wall of the manse garden, about a foot above the surface of the ground.

(3) STANDING STONES OF DURRIS.

The parish of Durriss, or Dores as it is locally pronounced, lies on the south side of the Dee, the most convenient station for visiting its antiquities being Crathes on the Deeside railway, about fourteen miles west of Aberdeen. The district is famous for the large number of Stone Circles which it possesses. In vol. xxxiv. of the *Proceedings* five of these are described, namely, those at Clune Hill, Cairnfauld, Garrol Wood, and Eslie, at which latter place there are two, the smaller one, however, being better known as the West Mulloch Circle, since it stands close to the farmhouse of that name. But this list does not contain all the circles in the neighbourhood. On the farm of "Standing Stones" near Crossroads, in a field just below the wood which covers the top of the ridge, there are the remains of another. Though still known as the "Standing Stones," not a single stone now remains standing, all have been gathered together and thrown into a heap, which has now more the appearance of a cairn than of a circle. This cairn-like appearance has been further increased by the addition to the heap of quantities of stones gathered from the surrounding field during agricultural operations. The circle was destroyed upwards of half a century ago, when great agricultural improvements were being carried out in the district. These same improvements are doubtless responsible for the disappearance of another circle, which stood a few hundred yards west of the farmhouse of East Mulloch, and so was called the East Mulloch Circle. No trace of it now remains, unless a slight difference in the level of the ground marks its site.

(4) TILQUHILLIE CIRCLE.

Rather more than a mile to the north-west of "Standing Stones," the remains of Tilquhillie circle are to be seen. They are situated in a field, to the south of a side road leading to Tilquhillie Castle, and are only a short distance from that building. The remains consist of the recumbent stone and west pillar only. A large stone lies on the east of the recumbent stone almost in the position which the east pillar ought to occupy, but as it had more the appearance of a boulder than of a fallen pillar, inquiry was made from the farmer. He explained that the stone had really no connection with the circle, but had been brought in quite recently from the neighbouring field, and thrown down in the vacant space so as to be out of the way.

The recumbent stone faces almost due west, being very slightly inclined towards the south. It is 3 feet 6 inches long, 2 feet 3 inches high, and 2 feet 10 inches thick. The west pillar is 5 feet 2 inches high, 3 feet 6 inches wide at base, 3 feet at the middle, and 2 feet at the top, and its average thickness is about 1 foot 8 inches. As only two stones remain in position, it is impossible to ascertain the original diameter of the circle. In the neighbouring field there is a large stone built into the dyke, and known as the Druid Stone, but if it is in its original position it could not have formed part of the circle. It may, however, have been an outlying stone similar to those found at Shelden, Balquhain, and Druidstown, but its shape renders this somewhat unlikely. The Tilquhillie circle is not marked on any map that I have seen, and I am indebted for my knowledge of it and also of the East Mulloch site to Mr A. Macdonald, M.A., of Crossroads, Durris, whose knowledge of the antiquities of the district is extensive and accurate and most willingly given for the benefit of inquirers.

(5) REES OF CLUNE OR CLUNE HILL CIRCLE, DURRIS.

This circle stands on the high ground in the wood to the south-west of the residence of the factor of the Durris estate, and nearly three miles south of Park railway station. When Mr Coles visited it in 1899, the circle was so closely shut in by the surrounding plantation that it was extremely difficult to get a satisfactory survey made of it, but since that time a number of the trees have been removed and the circle is now plainly visible.

The circle consists of a recumbent stone and pillars (fig. 4) with six other stones—three of them erect and three fallen, one of the fallen stones being broken into several pieces. The recumbent stone faces the south,

its length being 9 feet 10 inches, its height varying from 2 feet to 3 feet 9 inches, and its width averaging about 2 feet 9 inches. On its outer surface there are four cup-like marks rather larger and more roughly formed than cup-marks usually are, so that it seems more likely they have been made by weathering than by human hands. The west pillar is 5 feet 6 inches high, fully 3 feet broad, and 2 feet 6 inches thick at the



Fig. 4. Rees of Clune Circle. Recumbent Stone and Pillars, as seen from outside the circle.

base, gradually decreasing to about 1 foot at the top. The east pillar is 4 feet 6 inches high, 2 feet 6 inches broad, and nearly as thick. The standing-stone next to the east pillar is 5 feet high, 3 feet broad, and 2 feet 4 inches thick. The standing-stone at the north is 5 feet 3 inches high, 2 feet 6 inches wide at its broadest part, and 2 feet thick. The remaining standing-stone at the north-west is 5 feet 6 inches high, 2 feet 6 inches broad, and varies in thickness from 1 foot 9 inches at the base to about 2 inches at the top. The greatest diameter of the circle from north-west to south-east is 58 feet, and the shortest, from the interior face of the recumbent stone to the standing-stone at the north, is 45 feet, so that the average diameter is about 50 feet.

The area within the circle is occupied by a cairn of stones with a hollow space in the centre, similar in appearance to that within the Whitehill Wood circle at Monymusk, though the hollow space is rather

larger than that at the Whitehill Wood. This cairn has a diameter of 44 feet, while that of the central hollow is 18 feet, but in both cases these measurements are only approximate, as there is no well-defined boundary either at the inner or outer portions of the cairn. Both at the Clune Hill and Whitehill Wood circles the central hollow seems to have been interfered with by excavation at some previous period, so that it has been enlarged somewhat, and the regularity of its circumference destroyed.

CLUNE HILL RING CAIRN.

In close connection with the circle, and almost touching its north-eastern boundary, there is another hollow-centred cairn very similar in appearance to that within the circle. Its diameter is 23 feet, just a little more than half of that within the circle, but its central hollow is much better defined. The diameter of the hollow space is 9 feet, and it is lined



Fig. 5. Central hollow space of Clune Hill Ring Cairn.

with flat stones standing upright and serving to bind in and support the loose stones of the cairn. These upright stones have an average height of about 2 feet, and the width of the ring of small stones between the central hollow and the outside of the cairn is 7 feet (fig. 5). The height of the cairn at present is about 5 feet, but originally it was probably a little higher. If, as seems likely, its outer circumference was formerly bound in by a ring of upright stones similar to those in the centre, these are

not now visible, having either been removed or covered up by the loose stones falling from the upper portion of the heap. There seems to be no record of any remains having been found either within the stone circle or its neighbouring cairn. In the case of the cairn outside the circle, any remains which it ever contained are likely to have been damaged by the roots of a tree, which at one time grew in the central hollow, but which has now been removed.

SUNDAYSWELLS RING CAIRN.

The Clune Hill Cairn is not the only one of the kind in the district. Another, very similar in size and appearance, is situated a little to the



Fig. 6. Sundayswells Ring Cairn, near Torphins.

north of Torphins, on the hillside near the farm of Sundayswells, Aberdeenshire. There are no standing-stones round it, neither is there any record of a circle ever having been connected with it, the nearest one having stood at Gownieburn, on the lower ground nearly half a mile from the cairn, where only a single stone now remains.

The central hollow of the Sundayswells Cairn (fig. 6) is so like that at Clune Hill Cairn that a view of one might easily be mistaken for that of the other. The flat slabs which bound the central hollow, however, are rather more massive than those at Clune Hill Cairn, and their average height is about 3 feet. They slope slightly outwards, so that the diameter

of the hollow space at the ground level is 9 feet, while at the top it is nearly 10 feet. This central hollow was excavated about thirty years ago by the late Colonel Innes, proprietor of the estate of Learney, on which the cairn stands. A broken urn and some fragments of bones, which are still preserved at Learney House, were found within it. The excavation was carried out with great care, and no alteration was made on the appearance either of the cairn or of its central hollow. In the neighbourhood of the Sundayswells Cairn there are numerous smaller cairns, probably tumuli, scattered for a considerable distance along the hillside, and in the valley to the west of the hill is the farm of Bogin-chapel, where, according to tradition, there was at one time an ancient place of worship.

It is greatly to be regretted that so much damage has been done to the stone circles in this district. Not a single one of those described in this paper is intact; many of them consist of only a few stones, and some have entirely disappeared. In several instances the harm has been done thoughtlessly by the tenant, without the permission, or even the knowledge, of the landlord, and when the mischief was discovered it was too late to be remedied. The danger of damage would be very much lessened, if not altogether prevented, by the insertion of a clause in each lease prohibiting the tenant from interfering in any way with antiquarian remains on his farm. We are really trustees in this matter for future generations. These remains have been preserved and handed down to us by past generations, and it is only our duty in like manner to pass them on to our descendants, for, if once destroyed, they can never be replaced.