

II.

ANCIENT REMAINS AT BIRNAM, PERTHSHIRE.

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The various sites about to be described occupy prominent positions on the south-eastern slopes of Birnam Hill, and command magnificent views of the surrounding country. They are situated in the area once covered by the "Great Birnam Wood," immortalised by Shakespeare, which formed part of the ancient royal domain of Scotland.

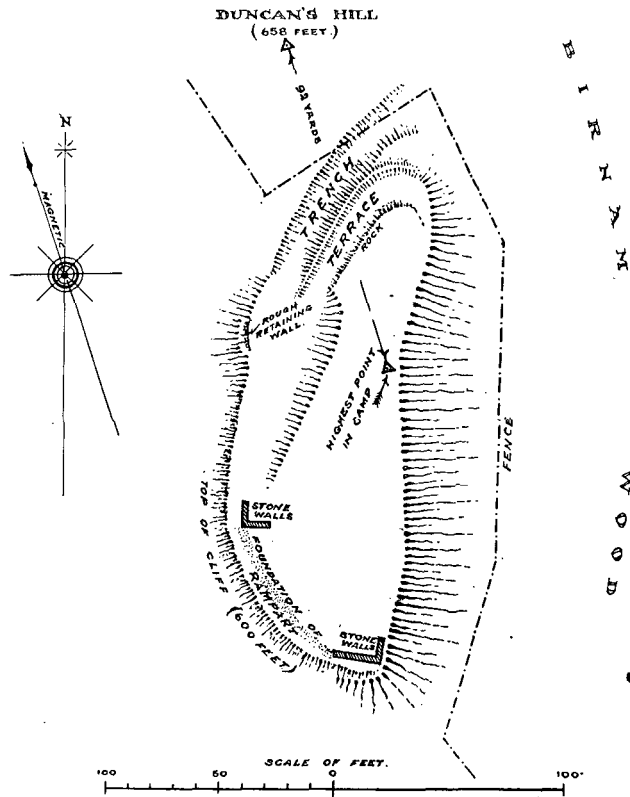
The lands belong to Colonel W. Steuart Fotheringham of Murthly, and form that part of his estate known as Rohallion. Through the kindness of the proprietor, I was allowed to visit the ground on the 19th April 1919 and make a survey of the following places of archaeological interest.

DUNCAN'S CAMP.

Near the top of an eminence called Duncan's Hill, 658 feet above sea-level, are the remains of a fort called "Duncan's Camp." Southwards it overlooks the series of small sheets of water on Birnam Burn that extend from Rohallion Lodge to Staredam. This place is twice referred to in Sir Walter Scott's *Fair Maid of Perth*, and is described in a note to chap. xxxiii., written by David Morison, author and publisher in Perth about 1828, "as a collection of waters in a very desolate hollow between the hill of Birnam and the road from Perth to Dunkeld. . . . The eeriness of the place is indescribable." The marsh, however, has been drained, and the once desolate hollow has now become one of the loveliest spots in Perthshire.

Duncan's Hill commands a striking view of the plain of Strathmore and looks over against that prominent height in the Sidlaw range, Dunsinane, which is also surmounted by the ruins of a large fort. The camp is roughly oval on plan (fig. 1). Its main access, running north and south, is 80 yards in length. Along the south-western side the

boundary of the camp follows the edge of a precipitous cliff, the top of which is at the 600-foot level. The other sides are steeply sloped, except at the north end, where there are artificial defences. Here is a terrace 8 to 10 feet wide with a parapet along the outer edge about



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Fig. 1. Duncan's Camp, Birnam.

6 feet wide and nearly 2 feet high. On the outside of the parapet is a trench 15 feet wide and about 6 feet in depth below the top of the parapet. The ground gradually rises from the north side of the trench towards the top of Duncan's Hill. The south end of the camp is the only part that is comparatively flat, and it has a fall of about 1 in 6 towards the edge of the cliff that bounds the south-west side of the fort. Along the top of the cliff can be traced the foundation of a stone

rampart about 3 feet wide, at each end of which stone walls have been erected to a height of about 12 feet. These stone walls were built by the late Sir William Drummond Stewart of Murthly about 1867, so that the position of the camp might form a more striking object in the landscape.

The highest part of the camp is on a ridge parallel to the north and south axis, and this is overlooked by the top of Duncan's Hill about 100 yards to the north. No artificial entrenchments, similar to those already described at the north end, could be traced along the eastern slope, so that the extent of the camp in this direction cannot be definitely given unless the top of the slope is taken as the boundary.

On the Ordnance Survey Map, 360 yards ESE. of the camp, at an elevation of 500 feet, is marked the "Court Hill," but on visiting this ground it was found so thickly planted with larch and fir as to make an examination of the site impossible.

In the old *Statistical Account* reference is made to the Court Hill in the following terms:—

"A round mound at the bottom of Birnam hill on the south-east side is worthy of remark. It is faced with steep oaks, except for a few yards where it is fortified by art. This eminence has been known for time immemorial, by the names of Court-hill, and *Duncan's hill*, and is believed to have been on some occasions occupied by the unfortunate Scottish king of that name. It looks full in the face, at a distance of about 12 miles, the celebrated Dunsinan-Hill, the seat and fortress of Macbeth. Within the range of an arrow from this mound are to be seen a number of tumuli or small heaps of stones, about the length of a human body. It is not unlikely that upon digging, human skeletons would be found under these tumuli."

The Rev. John Robertson, who wrote this account, seems to have confused the title of the Court Hill with Duncan's Hill.

In the note to chap. xxxiii. of Scott's *Fair Maid of Perth*, describing the hollow at Staredam, David Morison mentions that "Ruthven, the Sheriff, is said to have held his court on a rising ground to the north still called the Court Hill."

W. A. Rae, Esq., Douglasfield, Murthly, kindly showed me an old plan of the estate prepared by James Chalmers in 1825. On this plan farm buildings are shown occupying the summit of the Court Hill, and the surrounding ground was apparently under cultivation.

CUP-MARKED ROCKS.

The eastern shoulder of Birnam Hill south of the Slate Quarries is named on the Ordnance Survey Map, Craig Ruenshin, and by the contour lines on the map it is slightly over 800 feet in height. A line of rocky

outcrops generally facing the south-east swings round the hill about this elevation. On the upper surface of a large bench of undisturbed rock which slopes slightly towards the west is a group of twenty cup-marks, most of which are well formed and deeply cut (fig. 2). The space occupied by these sculpturings measures 4 feet 8 inches by 4 feet 6 inches. The two largest cup-marks are $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, and one of them is $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch in depth; the others range in size down to $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter. There are slight evidences of rings round three of the cups, the largest being

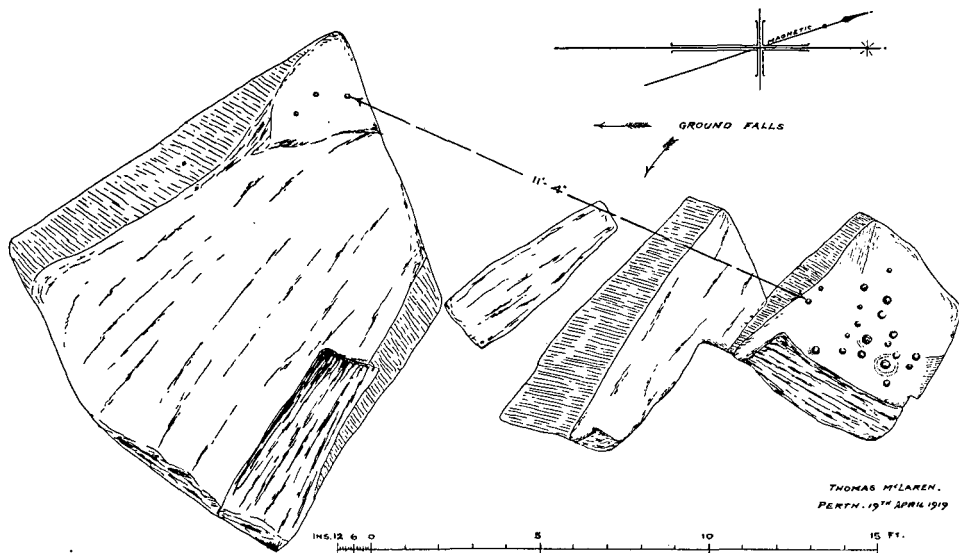


Fig. 2. Cup-marked Rocks on Birnam Hill.

about $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. Immediately to the south of this outcrop is a large block which seems originally to have formed part of the solid rock, but which has got dislodged evidently at an early period as the weathering on the fractured parts looks as old as that on the hollows of the cup-marks. On the top of this detached mass are three cup-marks, the distance between the nearest of the two groups of carvings measuring 11 feet 4 inches. Two of the cup-marks are $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. On the south face also there is a slight hollow resembling another cup-mark.

ROHALLION CASTLE.

About 30 feet below the top of Craig Ruenshin and a short distance to the south of it are the ruins of an old fortalice, marked on the Ordnance Survey sheet as Rohallion Castle (fig. 3).

The site lies 93 yards ENE. of the group of cup-marks already described. Not only is the position of this structure peculiar—it lies in a hollow on the hillside completely dominated by a rocky eminence less than 100 yards away—but its dimensions are very much smaller than it is customary to find in ancient Scottish defensive buildings. It consists of a central block, oblong on plan with round towers at two diagonally opposite corners, and a series of outer defences. The main building is of square rubble masonry measuring 27 feet 3 inches in length and 20 feet 6 inches

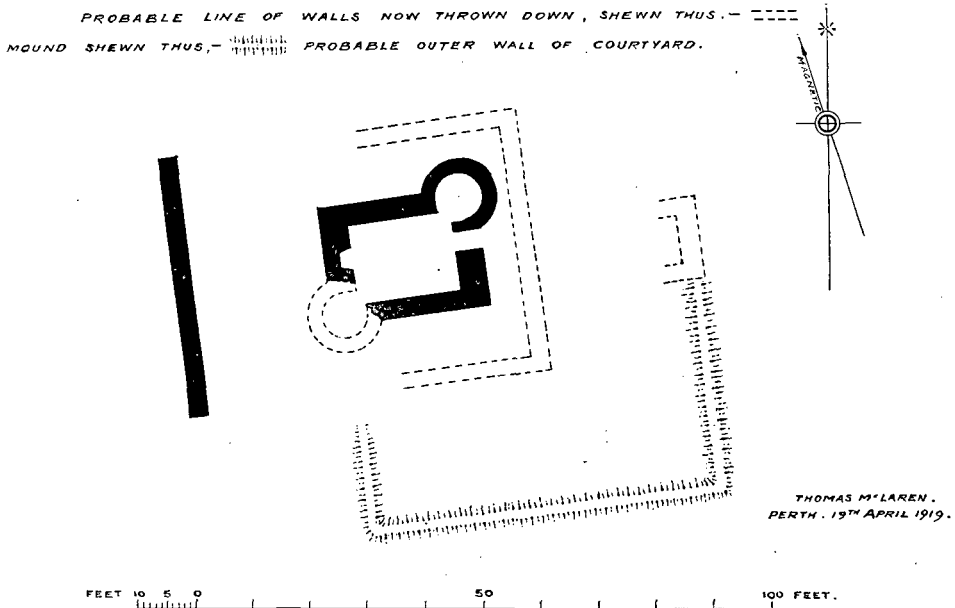


Fig. 3. Plan of Rohallion Castle, Birnam Hill.

in breadth over the walls but not including the projections of the towers, the main axis running WSW. and ENE. The walls, which are not more than 4 feet in height above the ground, measure from 3 feet to 4 feet 6 inches in thickness.

An opening 3 feet wide on the east side next the tower, with square jambs, was probably the entrance. The only other feature within the central block is a recess, in the west wall, 3 feet 9 inches wide and extending 2 feet 3 inches into the thickness of the wall and formed with splayed ingoings.

Of the two towers that to the north-east is the better preserved. It has an external diameter of only 12 feet, and the stonework is thinner

than in the walls of the square part of the building. There is an opening into either tower from the interior of the main block. No vaulting is visible, and there is nothing to indicate the position of a staircase. The walls have been reduced to such a level that no conception can be obtained of the superstructure. Around this central building and parallel to the walls of it are the remains of other walls, mostly in a very ruinous state, except the western one, shown on the plan, which seems to have been partly restored at one time. To the south and east distinct turf-covered mounds can be traced parallel to and arranged in line with certain of the walls of the fortalice.

Since my survey was made, the trees which surrounded the site have been cut down and allowed to fall over the building, displacing a great deal of the stonework and altering the formation of the outer parts to such an extent that the original lines are now more difficult to trace.

My attention has been drawn to the resemblance between the plan of this building and that of Terspersie Castle, Aberdeenshire. The central block of Terspersie Castle is 28 feet by 18 feet over the walls, and thus corresponds very closely in size to Rohallion. The two towers are also placed at diagonally opposite angles, but are larger in diameter, being 18 feet over the walls, thus affording much more space internally.

Messrs Macgibbon and Ross in their *Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, class this form of keep in the Z plan type, and ascribe such buildings as belonging to the latter half of the sixteenth century. This form of building was evidently evolved for defensive reasons, as the whole surface of the main walls could be effectively covered and defended from shot holes provided in the two diagonally opposite towers. Rohallion and Terspersie seem to be the smallest examples of their class. Claypotts Castle, Broughty Ferry, is much larger, 34 feet by 25 feet over the walls, and the towers are about 20 feet in diameter.

Dr Wm. Marshall, in *Historic Scenes in Perthshire*, states that Rohallion is called in Gaelic "Forhaillon." According to the same authority the last time this building was occupied was during the period following the Reformation of Religion in Scotland, and it was also a hiding place of William, fourth Lord Ruthven after the daring adventure of the Raid of Ruthven in 1582.

Previous to 1615 when the Murthly estates came into the possession of the Stuarts, Barons of Grantully, the Abercrombies were in possession, and they were staunch supporters of the Church of Rome.

The similarity in construction to buildings, the age of which is known, and the information gleaned from these historical notices, leave it almost beyond doubt that Rohallion is sixteenth-century work.

Between the cup-marked rocks and Rohallion Castle, slightly to the north, is a rectangular formation, with rounded corners, 46 feet long and 19 feet wide, measuring from centre to centre of the mound forming the enclosure.

The mound averages about 5 feet wide and 2 feet high, and is composed of earth and stones. The level inside the enclosure corresponds with the level of the ground to the north. No evidence of similar formations could be traced in the vicinity.

Inquiries have been made from several people who were connected with the Murthly Estate for many years, but none of them could remember this structure being formed for any purpose.

It is interesting to find so many remains grouped within a limited area and differing so much in character, each site indicating the occupation of the district by man during widely detached periods of time.