

II.

STONE CIRCLES AT RAEDYKES, NEAR STONEHAVEN, KINCARDINESHIRE. BY JAMES RITCHIE, F.E.I.S., CORRESPONDING MEMBER.

Raedykes is well known for its Roman Camp, a full description of which, with accompanying plans, is given by Dr George Macdonald in vol. 1. of the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*. The first map illustrating that paper is a rough sketch of the country round Raedykes as it appeared about 1784, and on it the site of a stone circle is marked, a short distance beyond the north-west corner of the camp. The second map is an improved edition of the first one, and on it also the circle marked and is named "Druid Temple" (fig. 1). It shows a single circle apparently formed of two concentric rings of standing stones, with no other circles in the neighbourhood. But this is not correct, for there are really four circles or ring-cairns on the site. The original map-maker, who was chiefly concerned with the Roman Camp, apparently did not consider the circles of sufficient interest to trouble about marking them in detail, and was content simply to indicate the site.

The circles are situated near each other, on the flat ground forming the top of the Saddle Hill, within a quarter of a mile of the farm-house of West Raedykes (fig. 2), and about 4 miles from Stonehaven. To reach them the visitor should proceed along the way to Banchory known as the Slug Road, leading north-west from the town past the policies of Ury House, till he reaches the third milestone. Fifty yards beyond the milestone a branch road strikes up the brae to the north. Fully 100 yards up the brae the road divides into two branches, the one on the right hand leading direct to the farm of Broomhill on the east side of the Roman Camp. If the visitor wishes to inspect the circles before visiting the camp, he should proceed along the Broomhill road for nearly a quarter of a mile, till he reaches the first branch turning off to the left. This is a rough farm road which passes a little to the south of the farm buildings on the hillside, and then along the west side of the camp till it ends at the farm of West Raedykes. Then a short walk through the heather, up the slope behind the farm-steading, brings the circles into view.

The four circles are situated within a short distance of each other, so that a line joining their centres would form a slight curve little more than a hundred yards in length. They are nearly equal in size, and each consists of a ring-shaped cairn with a hollow centre, the interior depression and the exterior circumference being bounded by a setting of

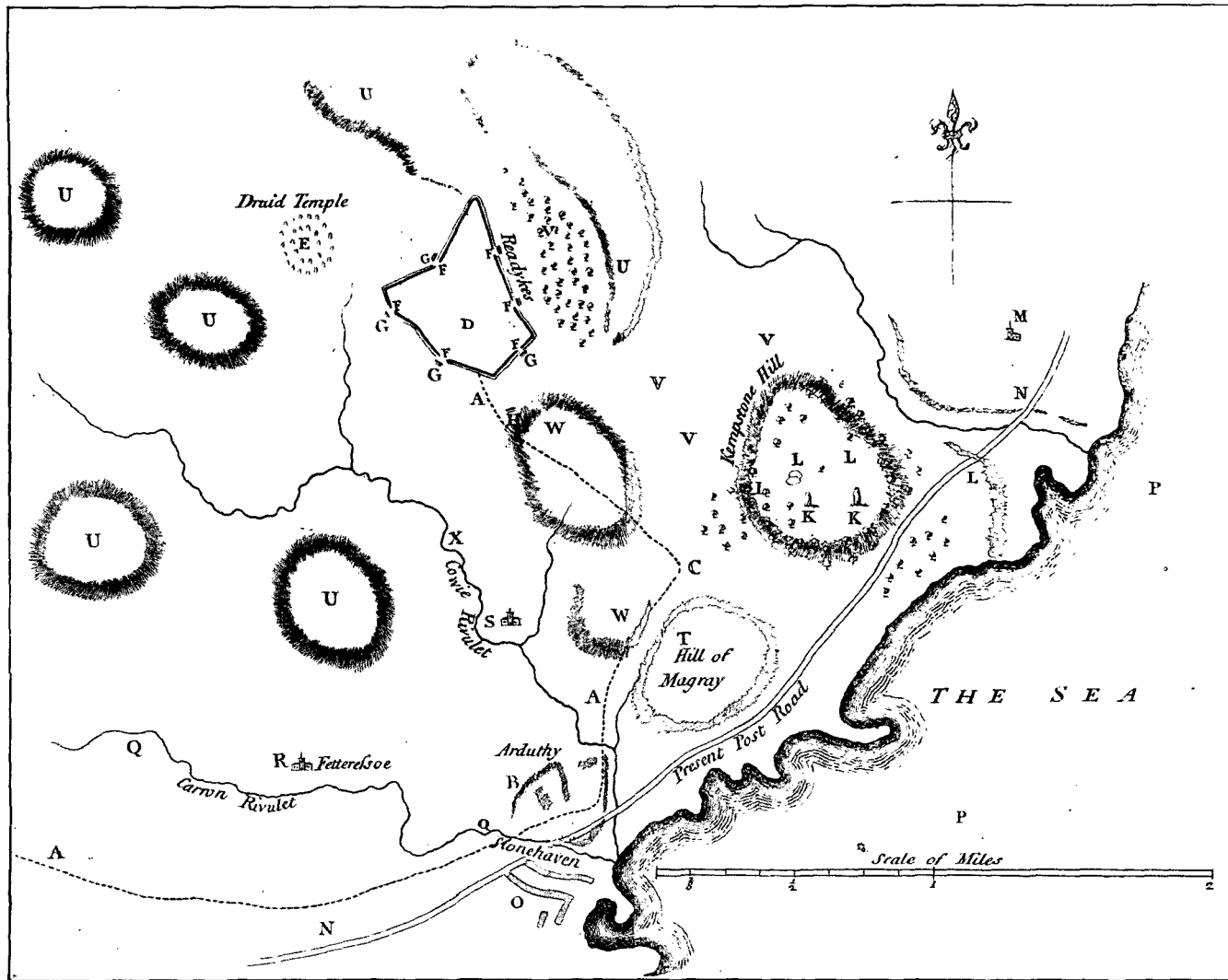


Fig. 1, Map of the Raedykes District, from the *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*, No. xxxvi.

earthfast stones, set upright to support the smaller loose stones of which the cairns are composed. Only two of these ring-cairns, the most

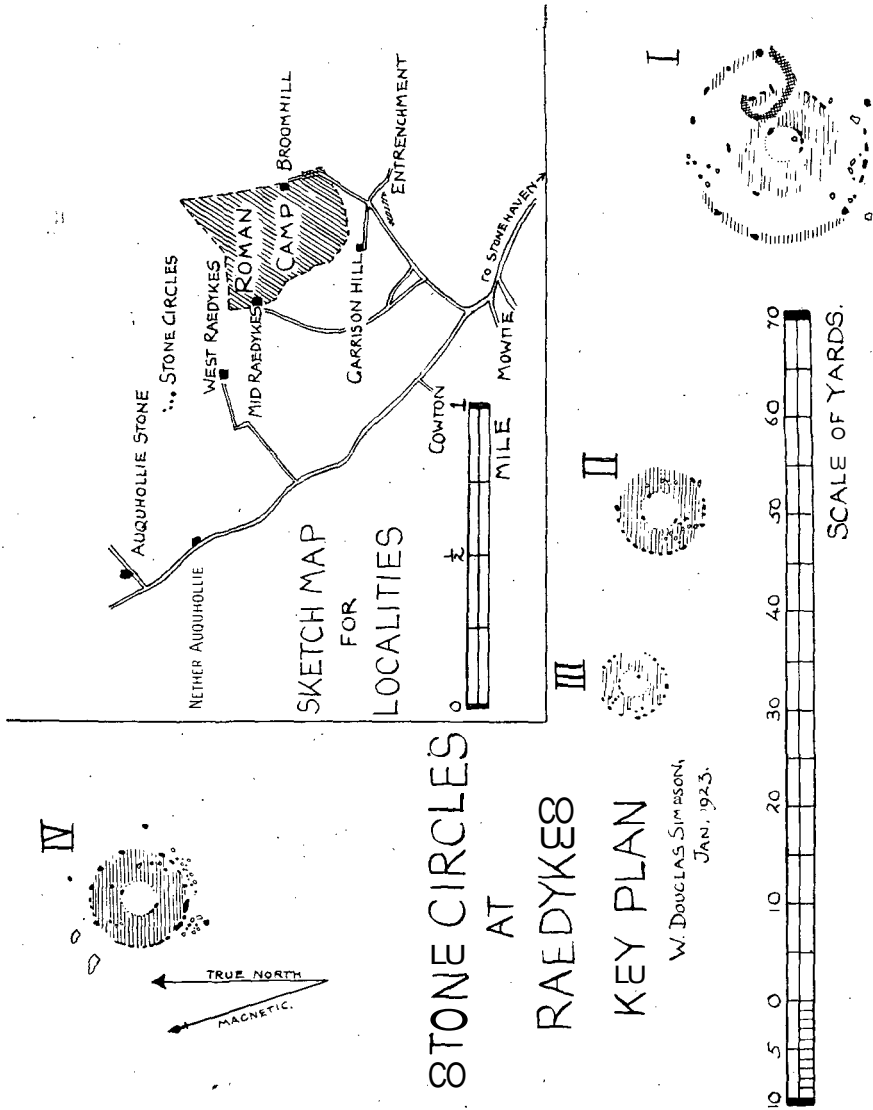


Fig. 2. General Plan of Stone Circles at Raedykes.

northerly and the most southerly, are surrounded by standing stones, and each is furnished with a circle of upright stones placed at a distance of a few feet beyond the outer circumference of the cairn. The recumbent stone, so important a feature in the Aberdeenshire type of circle, is

entirely absent, and there are no outlying pillar stones similar to those found in Cornwall and Devon and also at a few of the Aberdeenshire circles, such as those at Balquhain and Druidstown.

For the sake of distinguishing the circles from each other, they are numbered in the order in which they would be approached by a visitor proceeding from the farm-steading of West Raedykes, that is from the south-east.

No. 1.—This is the southern circle nearest to the farm of West Raedykes (figs. 2 and 3). It consists of a central ring-cairn surrounded by a circle of standing stones. The hollow in the centre of the cairn has a diameter of between 9 and 10 feet, and is bounded by upright earthfast stones averaging 2 feet in height. The ring of the cairn measures about 12 feet across from the central hollow to the outer circumference, which is formed of a ring of upright stones similar to those at its inner circumference. The cairn is very imperfect, many of its stones having been taken away to build a circular sheepfold near by, which is now somewhat dilapidated and apparently disused. About 18 feet of the outer stone setting on the south side of the cairn is in fairly good condition, being about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, and having three stones in the centre rather larger than the others. The cairn was originally surrounded by a circle of standing stones placed at a distance of about 12 feet from it, making the diameter of the circle approximately 60 feet, but many of these stones have now disappeared. Only eight are at present standing, four of these on the east side being neighbouring stones in their original positions. As they are placed about 10 feet from each other, measured from centre to centre of each stone, this would indicate that the circle when complete consisted of some eighteen or nineteen upright pillars. These standing stones, however, are of small size, being only from 3 to 4 feet in height, and they seem at one time to have been connected by a dyke of small stones, portions of which still remain. Traces of a similar dyke, connecting the upright standing stones, were found during the excavations at the Garrol Wood Circle described in the *Proceedings of the Society*, vol. xxxix. p. 199, but it is very doubtful if in either case the connecting dyke formed part of the original structure. Just outside the circle of standing stones there are one or two blocks of stone lying prostrate among the heather. These may be the remains of a second circle of standing stones which has now disappeared, but which seems to be indicated on Barclay's map (fig. 1), or, as seems more probable, they may be simply stones which have been displaced from the existing circle or cairn.

No. 2.—This ring-cairn is situated 25 yards north-west of No. 1, the circle just described (figs. 2 and 3). Its central hollow and outer circumference

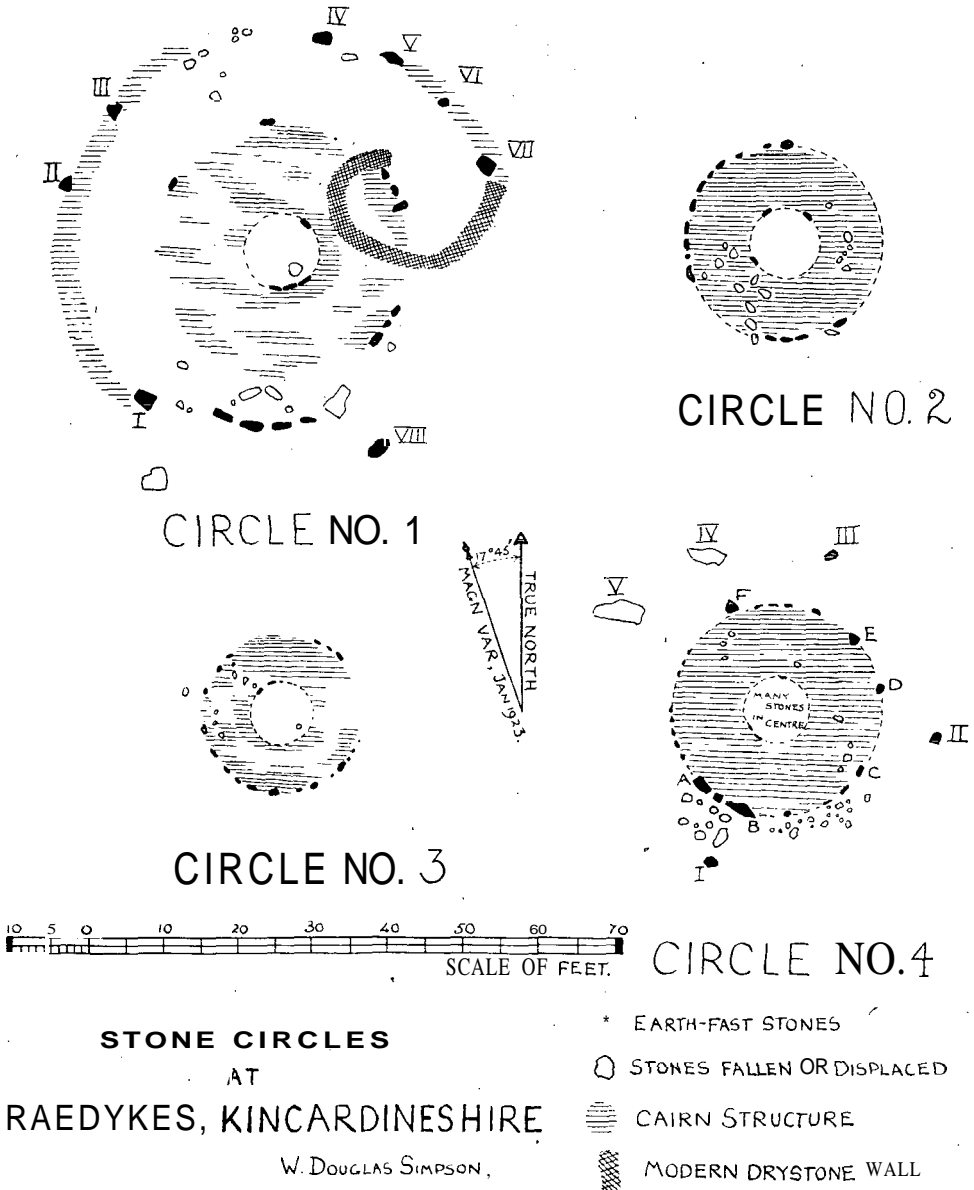


Fig. 3. Plans of individual Stone Circles at Raedykes.

have been bound in by low walls of earthfast stones standing on edge, but many of these have become displaced or have been removed, so that it is almost impossible to give exact measurements, and those given here are only approximate. The central hollow of the cairn has a diameter of 8 or 9 feet, and, as the ring itself is about 10 feet in breadth, the diameter of the whole structure is from 25 to 30 feet. The heap of loose stones of which the mass of the cairn is composed, rises to a height of about 3 feet above the level of the surrounding soil. *No* circle of standing stones now surrounds the cairn, and there is no trace of any such circle ever having existed.

No. 3.—Ten yards north-west of No. 2 is another ring-cairn (figs. 2 and 3). It is similar in appearance to that already described, but not quite so large. The central hollow has a diameter of 8 feet, while the ring itself is only about 6 or 7 feet in breadth, making the total diameter of the cairn just a little over 20 feet. It also rises to a height of 3 feet above the surrounding surface. The material of which the cairn is composed is completely hidden by a thick growth of coarse grass and whins, as are also the boundary stones, so that this cairn appears less clearly defined than any of the others. The cairn is not now surrounded by any circle of standing stones, and there are no signs of any such circle ever having been attached to it.

No. 4.—This, the most northerly circle, stands about 50 yards to the north of that last described (figs. 2 and 3). It is a ring-cairn surrounded by a circle of upright standing stones, and thus it resembles the circle first described more closely than it does the others. The stones, however, are larger, and the circle, when in its original condition, must have been the most striking one of the group, though it did not differ from the others in size to any great extent. The central hollow of the cairn is 8 feet in diameter, and is enclosed by a ring of upright stones about 2 feet high set close together so as to form both a boundary and a support for the loose stones of the cairn. The ring of the cairn is 12 feet in breadth, and rises to a height of fully 3 feet above the level surface of the surrounding moor. The outer boundary of the cairn consists of a stone setting about 2 feet high, but it also contains several pillar stones of a much greater size, considerably larger than those found in the stone setting of any of the other cairns. Six of these stones remain in an upright position, but the largest two are on the south-west side (fig. 4). The tallest one measures 5 feet 6 inches in height, 3 feet 2 inches in breadth, and 1 foot in thickness. Its neighbour on the south side is 3 feet 10 inches high, 4 feet broad, and 1 foot 2 inches thick at the middle of the stone, tapering off to a narrow edge at each side. The distance between the centres of these two neighbouring stones is 7 feet. When

the structure was complete the ring-cairn was surrounded by a circle of standing stones, placed at a distance of 7 feet 6 inches beyond its outer ring, and forming a circle having a diameter of 16 yards, and a circumference of about 50 yards. Only three of these standing stones now remain in position; two others, having fallen over, lie flat beside their original sites, and fragments of several others lie scattered near. The tallest of the stones still standing is on the south-west side, near the two large stones of the outer stone setting already described. It is 4 feet 6 inches in height, 1 foot 6 inches in breadth, and 1 foot in thickness. The two fallen pillar stones lie on the northern arc of

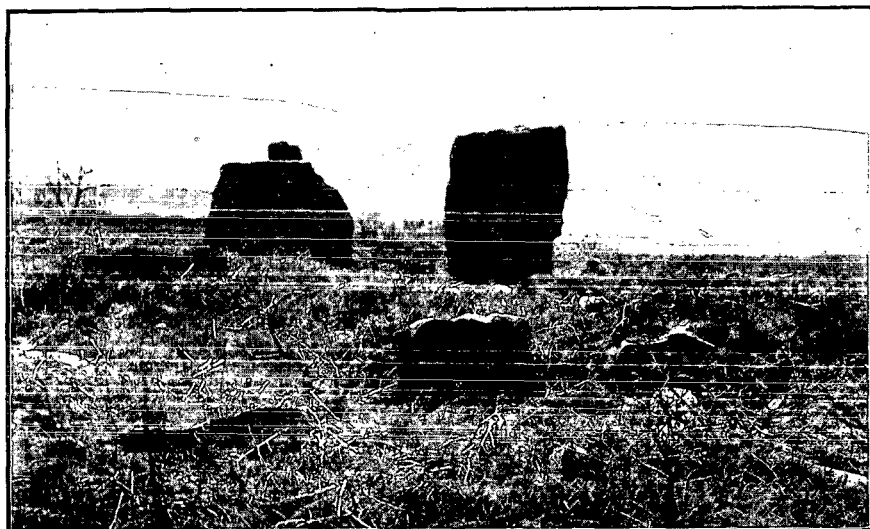


Fig. 4. Raedykes northern Stone Circle showing inner Stone Setting and Standing Stones
•from north-east.

the circle. The larger of the two, the west one, is 6 feet long, and its neighbour is 5 feet. Allowing for the portion of the base which was originally embedded in the soil, these stones when erect would closely resemble, both in height and general appearance, that still standing erect on the south-west. Since these are neighbouring stones, and they are 9 feet apart, the circle when complete may have consisted of sixteen or seventeen stones and have been in appearance almost a duplicate of the southern circle No. 1.

From their nearness to each other as well as from their similarity in size and construction, these circles form a remarkable group of ancient monuments. The ring-cairn is common to them all, but in two cases it is surrounded by a circle of standing stones. Ring-cairns surrounded

by circles of standing stones occur at Rees o' Clune, Durris, and Whitehill, Monymusk, but each of these has also a recumbent stone, a feature which is absent at Raedykes. A large proportion of the stones which formed the ring-cairn at the southern circle near Raedykes have been removed to make a sheepfold. Had this process been continued till all the loose stones of the cairn had disappeared, the remaining



Fig. 5. Ogam-inscribed Stone at Auquhollie.

earthfast blocks, which at present form the inner and outer boundaries of the ring-cairn, would have presented exactly the appearance of those stone settings which exist in many of the Aberdeenshire circles. This suggests the idea that in many cases these stone settings may be the sole remains of ring-cairns, which once occupied the interior of the circles, the loose stones having long since been removed for utilitarian purposes, such as road making and dyke building.

The moorland to the north of the circles is dotted over with numerous small mounds which have all the appearance of tumuli, but no

systematic examination of any of them appears to have been made. The circles also seem to have escaped examination, and though several urns have been found in the neighbourhood of the Roman Camp, none so far are recorded as having been discovered at the circles while stones were being removed from the interior cairns. The numerous standing stones which have disappeared have in all likelihood been used for building purposes at the neighbouring farm-steading.

On the low ground at the foot of the hill on the west side, and about a mile from the circles, another object of antiquarian interest is to be seen. It is a tall, upright pillar standing at the side of the road near the farm of Auquhollie, and hence known as the Auquhollie Stone (fig. 5). It is 8 feet 6 inches high, 2 feet wide, and 1 foot 6 inches thick at the base, tapering slightly to 1 foot 2 inches at the top. Its chief interest centres in the Ogam inscription which is incised on its southern side, the edge of the stone being used instead of a stem line, in a manner similar to that shown on the well-known Newton Stone, near Insch. The Ogam strokes, especially those at the beginning and end of the inscription, are somewhat indistinct, so that it is difficult to get a satisfactory reading of the lettering. The Auquhollie Stone is described in *Early Christian Monuments*, pp. 203-4.

To Mr W. Douglas Simpson, M.A., F.S.A.Scot., I wish to record my great indebtedness for the valuable plans of the circles, specially prepared by him to accompany this paper.