

III.

FOUR NEW HENGE MONUMENTS IN SCOTLAND
AND NORTHUMBERLAND.

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The four monuments described below are recent additions to the class of prehistoric sacred sites known by the name of "henge monuments," of which forty examples are now known in England and Scotland. Though these monuments vary considerably in the details of their plans, certain features are common to nearly all of them. The chief of these is the presence of an enclosing earthwork, in which the bank normally lies *outside* the ditch; access to the enclosed area, which is circular or nearly so, is given either by a single entrance-gap, or by two such gaps facing each other from opposite sides of the site. The central area may contain a circular setting of standing-stones or, exceptionally, a ring of timber posts or of ritual pits, or one or more burials. In many sites no visible feature now remains within the earthwork.¹

The henge monuments may conveniently be divided into two classes, on the basis of the number of entrances; Class I comprises those with a single entrance, and Class II those with two. The finds from excavated sites of both classes suggest that this division is a real one. Pottery and other artefacts from monuments of Class I belong, with few exceptions, to the non-Western Neolithic cultures of Britain; while the finds from sites of Class II point to an association with the Beaker peoples, and particularly to that group of them represented by beakers of Type A.

The henge monuments hitherto recognised in Scotland all belong to Class II. The circles of Stennis² and Brodgar³ in Orkney have not been examined, but excavations have been carried out at the three remaining sites, Broomend of Crichtie⁴ (Aberdeenshire), Ballymeanoch⁵ (Argyllshire), and Cairnpapple⁶ (West Lothian). It is significant that the only two beakers of Type A so far recorded in Scotland come from Ballymeanoch and Cairnpapple respectively.

¹ For a general discussion of henge monuments, see Atkinson, Piggott and Sandars, *Excavations at Dorchester, Oxon.*, vol. i. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1951), pp. 81-107.

² *R.C.A.M. Orkney*, vol. ii. (1946), p. 302, no. 876, with refs.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 299, no. 875, with refs.

⁴ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vols. xviii. (1884), p. 319; liv. (1920), p. 160.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vols. vi. (1878), p. 348; lxv. (1931), p. 278.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. lxxxii. (1948), p. 68.

Of the four new discoveries described below, two are of Class II and two of Class I. The latter are the first monuments of this type to be found in Scotland, and extend the distribution of the class far to the north of its previous limit at Mayburgh,¹ near Penrith, Cumberland.

CLASS I.

Balfarg, Markinch, Fifeshire (NO(37)/281032).

This site was discovered from air-photographs by Dr K. A. Steer, and was surveyed by the writer in November 1950. It is associated with two standing-stones, already recorded by the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments (Scotland),² which appear to be the remains of a stone setting originally forming part of the monument.

The site lies on level ground at a height of 320 feet above sea-level, about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles north-west of Markinch, and some 800 feet west-south-west of the farm of Balfarg. The air-photograph showed about two-thirds of the circumference of a circular ditch, with an entrance-gap on the north-west side. The position of this ditch and of its ends at the entrance were confirmed by probing. In the south-west sector the ditch is not visible on the photograph, and has evidently been eaten away by a gully which here cuts back into the plateau upon which the site stands (fig. 1).

It is clear that a bank originally stood outside the ditch, though it has now been almost entirely flattened by cultivation. The contoured plan (fig. 1) shows traces of it surviving at a height of 6 to 8 inches on the north and east of the circle; its original diameter, crest to crest, would have been about 280 feet.

The two standing-stones are of undressed sandstone, and lie some 45 feet apart. That on the north-west is 6 feet 7 inches high, the other 5 feet 3 inches; both are roughly trapezoid in section. It seems likely from their relation to the ditch that the former stone is one of a pair set in the entrance-gap, and the latter the survivor of a ring of stones set some 20 feet within the ditch and concentric with it. If this stone and its hypothetical neighbour to the north were set symmetrically with respect to the entrance, the original circle would have had 10 or 11 stones, and a diameter of about 120 feet.

The presence of flanking stones on the entrance-causeway is unusual, but is recorded at two henge monuments of Class I, Mayburgh (Cumberland) and Maumbury Rings³ (Dorset), and from one of Class II, King Arthur's Round Table⁴ (Cumberland).

¹ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, vol. ii. (1936), p. 44, with refs.

² *R.C.A.M. Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan* (1933), p. 209, no. 420.

³ *Antiquity*, vol. xiii. (1939), p. 155.

⁴ *Trans. Cumb. and West. Ant. and Arch. Soc.*, n.s., vol. xl. (1940), p. 169.

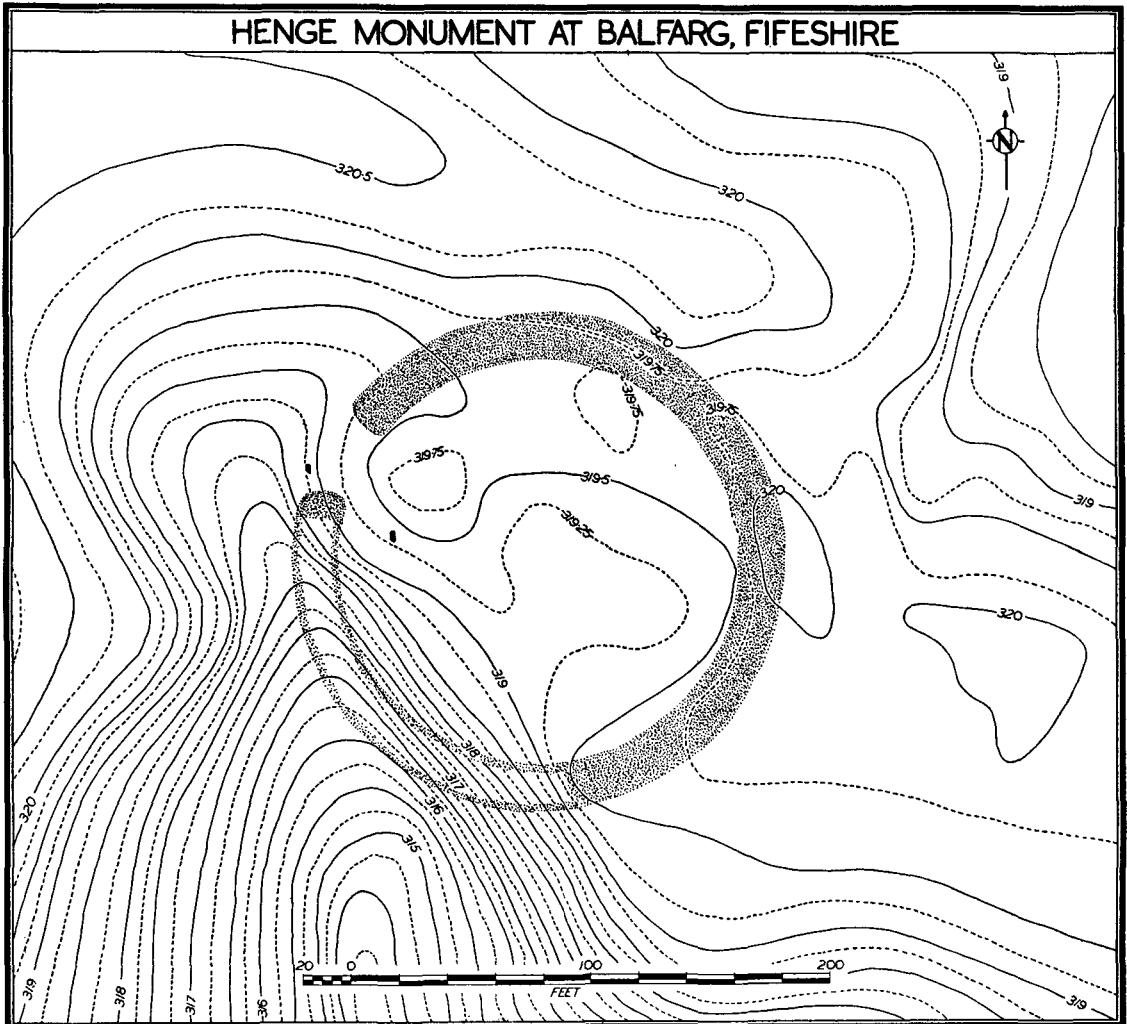


Fig. 1. Plan of henge monument at Balfarg, Markinch, Fifeshire. Contours at vertical intervals of 3 inches. Crop mark plotted from air-photographs and stippled. The standing stones are shown in solid black.

Overhowden, Oxtou, Berwickshire (NT(36)/487524).

This monument has long been recorded, by the Royal Commission¹ and on the Ordnance Survey maps, as a fort. The suggestion that it might be a henge monument is due to Professor and Mrs Piggott. The site was visited in November 1949, and a survey and trial excavations were carried out by the writer in May 1950.

¹ *R.C.A.M. Berwickshire* (1915), p. 15, no. 30.

The monument stands at a height of about 970 feet above sea-level on the west side of the Lauder valley, immediately to the west of the farm of

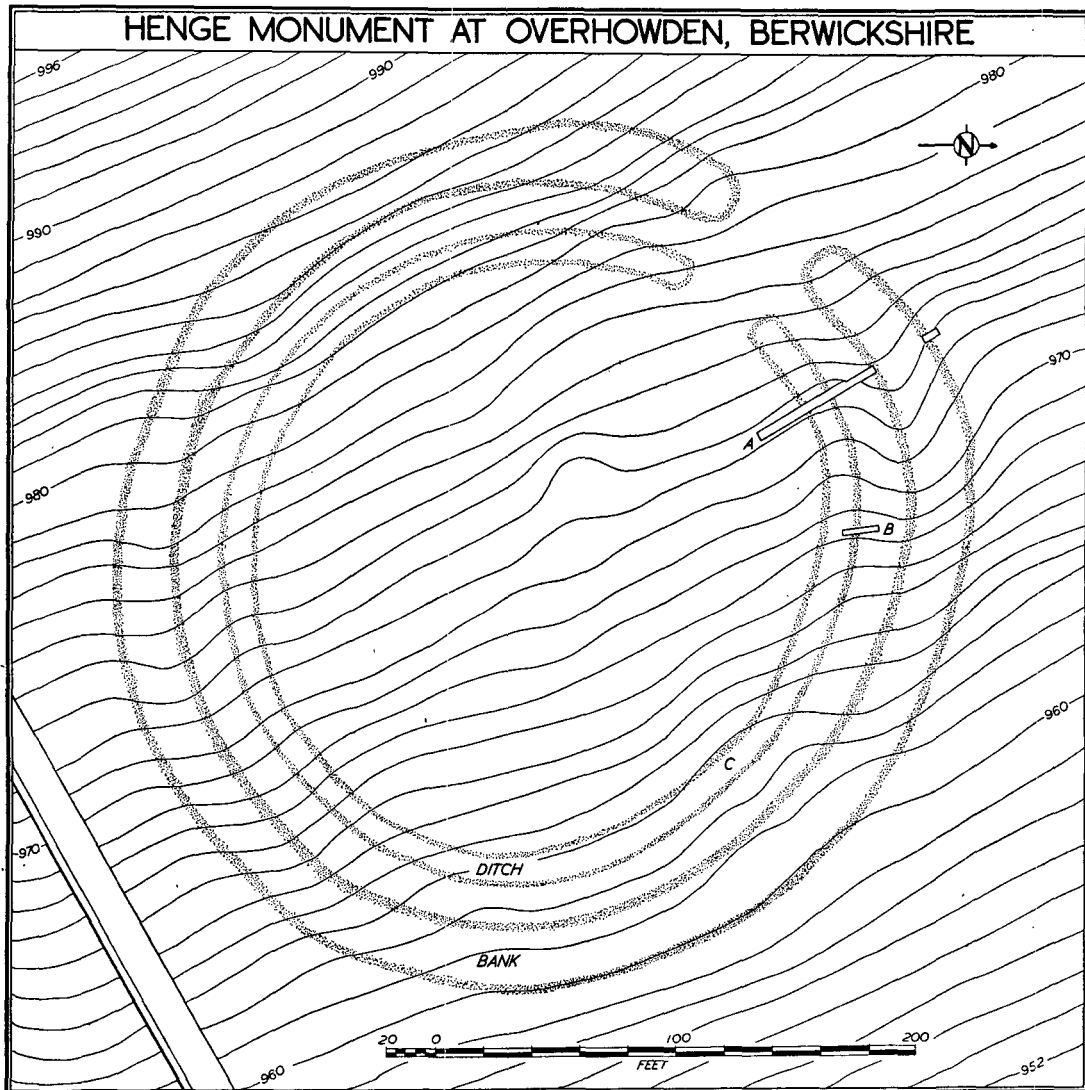


Fig. 2. Plan of henge monument at Overhowden, Oxton, Berwickshire. Contours at vertical intervals of 1 foot.

Overhowden; the ground here slopes east-north-east with a gradient of about 1 in 12. The position is little suited for the siting of a fort, having no natural defence, but is not unparalleled among henge monuments in England.

The visible remains consist of a nearly circular bank, much flattened by cultivation, with a mean diameter, crest to crest, of 320 feet; its present maximum height is less than 1 foot. Within the bank is a broad shallow depression marking the position of the silted ditch. On the north-west side the bank and ditch are broken by a well-marked entrance-gap some 35 feet wide (bearing from the centre 306°). On the north-east side, at the lowest point of the circumference (fig. 2, C), there is a second break in the bank; probing showed that there is no corresponding causeway across the ditch, and the gap is probably to be explained as a means of draining away surface water which would otherwise accumulate above the earthwork at this point.

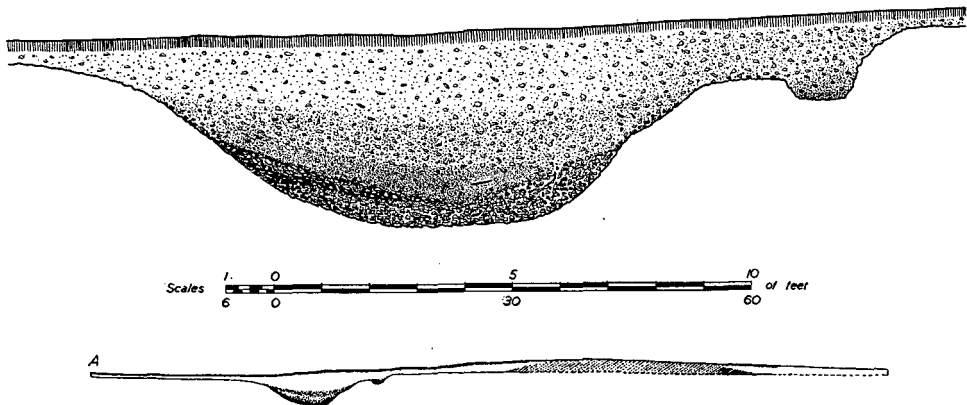


Fig. 3. Section of ditch of henge monument at Overhowden and, below, profile of ditch and bank.

On the south-east side, where the earthwork is approached by the farm track, the bank had been almost completely worn away. The ditch, however, appears as a continuous mark on the air-photograph, and has been traced by probing.

The purpose of the trial cutting (fig. 2, A) was to locate and determine the section of the ditch, and its relation to the bank. The section exposed is shown in fig. 3. The ditch is cut in shale rock, which, on undisturbed ground, is here only 6 to 8 inches beneath the surface. Its width and depth were 12 feet and 4 feet respectively; the bottom was wide and almost flat. The silting was normal, consisting of rock rubble at the bottom, with a layer of fine-grained rain-wash above, containing at one point a small spread of charcoal. This was covered by a deep layer of stony soil, becoming finer towards the surface.

The only unusual feature of the ditch was the presence on its outer edge of a narrow, steep-sided, flat-bottomed gully, 18 inches wide and deep. It

was found in identical positions in cuttings A and B (fig. 2), and most probably follows the main ditch throughout its circuit. It was filled with loose dark soil and fragments of rock rubble, and contained no packing-stones or other evidence to suggest that it had ever served as a palisade-slot. The section did not show whether it had been cut before or after the main ditch; and, indeed, its apparently constant relation to the main ditch suggests that the two are contemporary. Its purpose, however, remains obscure.

The main cutting (fig. 2, A) was continued beyond the outer lip of the ditch to determine the width and position of the bank. It is clear that originally the bank was some 30 feet wide, and was separated from the ditch by a flat berm 12 to 15 feet across; in view of the size of the ditch from which its material was derived, it can hardly have been more than a foot or two in height.

Although no objects were found in these small excavations, a strong hint of the associations of this monument is given by the numerous flint implements found on the farm of Overhowden;¹ these include *petit tranchet*, derivative arrow-heads, scrapers polished on the edge, and a perforated mace-head, all of which are characteristic of the non-Western Neolithic cultures to which henge monuments of Class I may be ascribed. The concentration of these surface finds on a small eminence some 500 feet from the monument, towards which its entrance faces, suggests the presence there of a settlement. Further trial excavations made in this area in October 1950 unfortunately revealed nothing, and it is probable that the process of cultivation which exposed the numerous flints has also destroyed any structures with which they may have been associated.

CLASS II.

Broadlee, Middlebie, Dumfriesshire (NY(35)/216747).

This site was discovered and photographed from the air by Dr J. K. St Joseph. It lies $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles due east of Ecclefechan, on the edge of a flat plateau overlooking the valley of the Mein Water, at a height of 220 feet above sea-level. At a similar height on the other side of the valley, half a mile to the north, stands the Roman fort of Birrens.

In its present state the monument consists of an approximately circular bank, 260 feet in diameter from crest to crest, with entrance-gaps on the north-west and south-east (bearings from the centre 119° and 303°). Within it, and following its line, is a broad depression representing the silted ditch, with opposing causeways corresponding to the gaps in the bank. The earthwork has been much flattened by cultivation, but there is still a maximum difference of height, on the north side, of nearly 4 feet (fig. 4). In the figure

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xlvi. (1912), p. 370.

the crop-mark has been plotted from the air-photograph, and is shown by stippling. As is usual in such cases, the bank has spread inwards, especially on the north side, with the result that the apparent position of the ditch has been displaced from its true position.

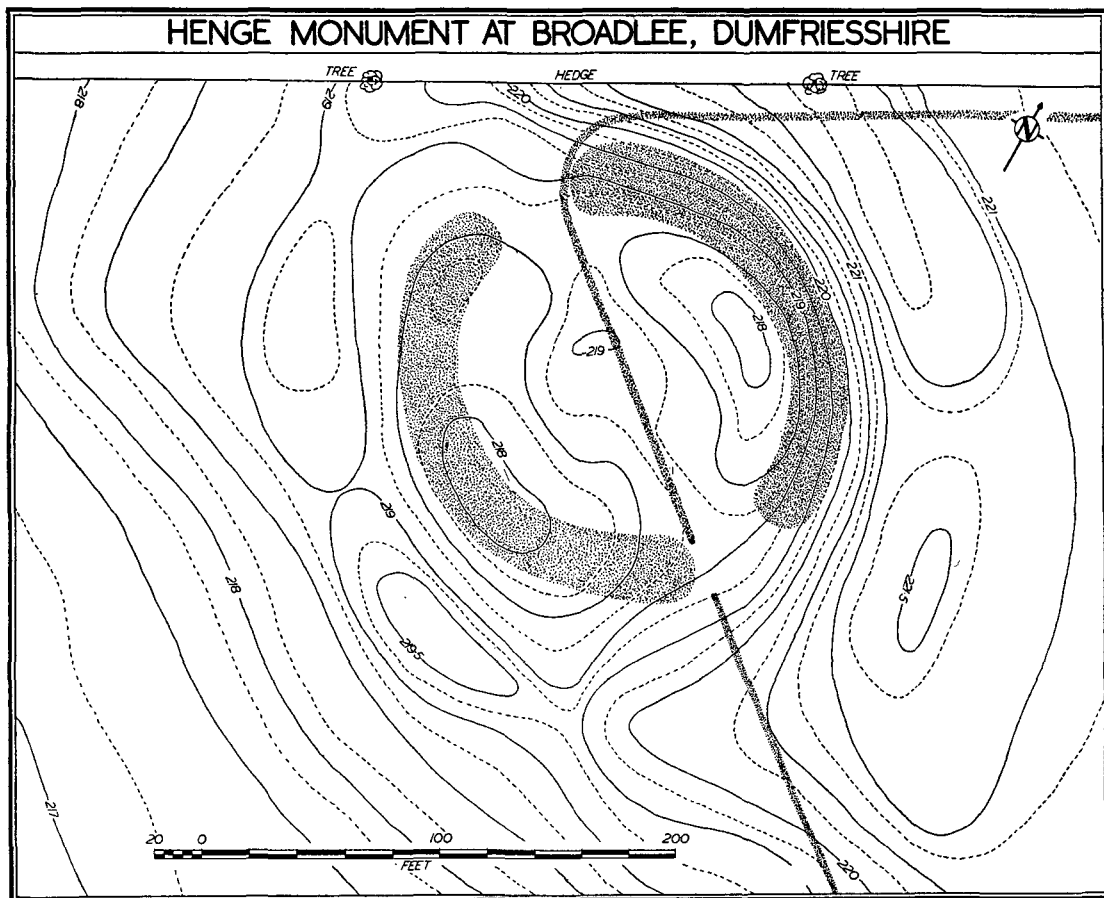


Fig. 4. Plan of henge monument at Broadlee, Middlebie, Dumfriesshire. Contours at vertical intervals of 3 inches. Crop marks plotted from air-photograph and stippled.

The air-photograph shows, in addition to the henge monument, three sides of a rectilinear ditch with rounded corners, presumably a Roman marching-camp hitherto unrecorded. The relation of this ditch to those of the henge monument show that it must have been laid out when the latter was already in existence. The defences of the marching-camp are not now visible on the surface, except for a short stretch running parallel to the hedge in the vicinity of the northern of the two trees shown in fig. 4.

Coupland, Northumberland (NT(36)/940330).

This site, like the last, was discovered and photographed from the air by Dr J. K. St Joseph. The writer is indebted to Sir Walter de L. Aitchison for permission to survey the site in December 1950.

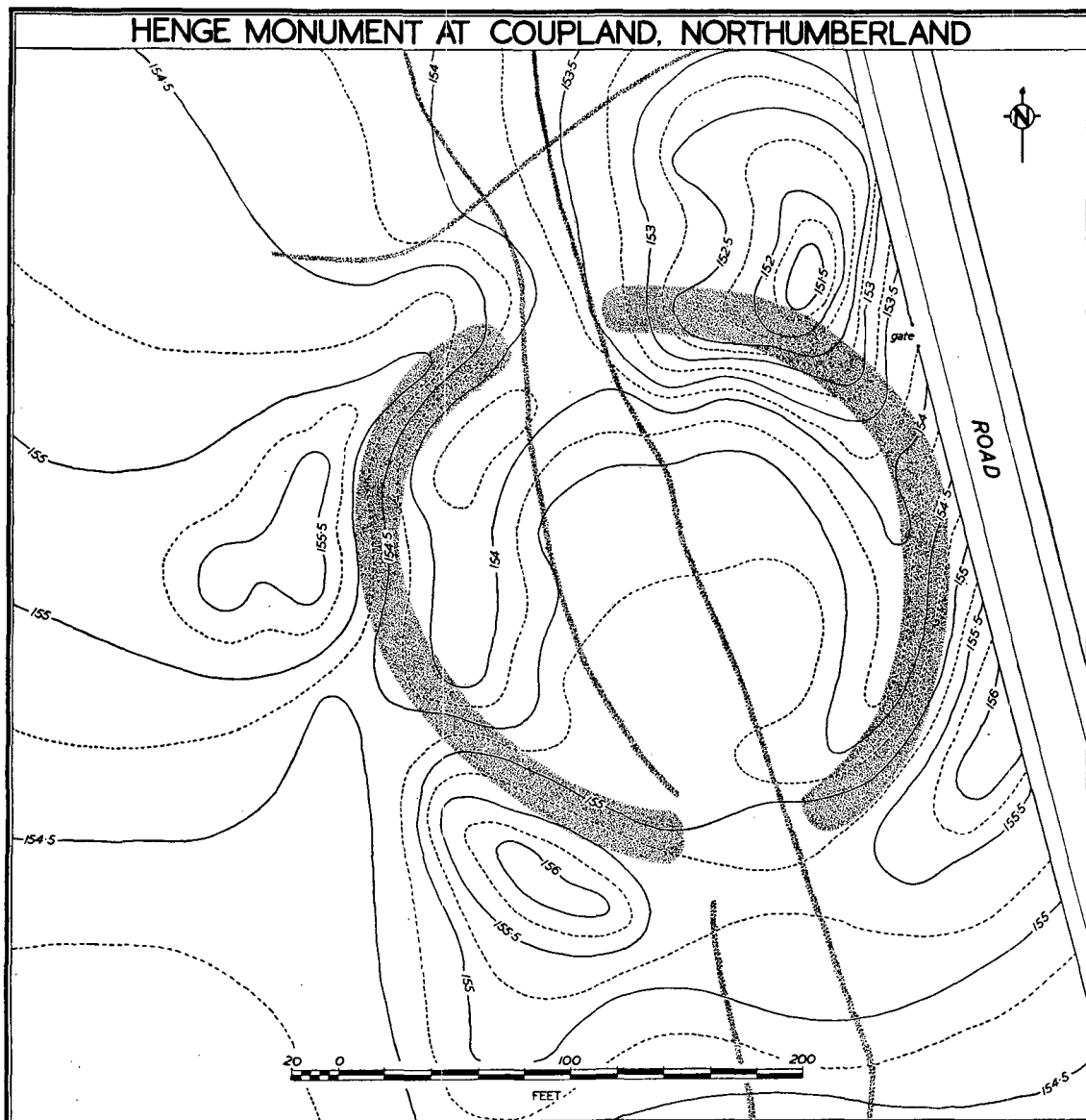


Fig. 5. Plan of henge monument at Coupland, Northumberland. Contours at vertical intervals of 3 inches. Crop marks plotted from air-photograph and stippled.

The monument lies on flat ground at a height of 155 feet above sea-level, $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles north-north-east of Coupland, immediately to the west of the main Wooler-Coldstream road. It has been greatly denuded by cultivation, but is still visible on the surface, the greatest difference of height being about 2 feet (fig. 5). The bank appears to have had an original diameter, crest to crest, of about 310 feet; it is best preserved on the west. On the east it has been destroyed by the road, and on the north-east by a quarry, now disused and silted up. The ditch appears as a broad shallow depression within the bank. As at Broadlee and elsewhere, its true position as plotted from the air-photograph lies outside its apparent position as indicated by the contours, owing to the inward spreading of the bank. The two entrances are visible on the ground; their bearings from the centre are 162° and 337° . It is noticeable that a line joining the centres of the entrance-gaps divides the monument asymmetrically; the same feature appears in the plans of other henge monuments of Class II, notably Cairnpapple and Arbor Low.¹

The air-photograph shows two narrow ditches running roughly parallel, about 50 feet apart, which pass across the site through its entrances. These presumably represent some form of drove-way, which must be of later date than the henge monument, since the western of the two ditches swerves in two places to avoid the earthwork. A short stretch of a third ditch crosses the other two obliquely to the north of the henge monument. None of these three ditches is now visible on the surface.

DOUBTFUL SITE.

Rachan Slack, Broughton, Peeblesshire (NT(36/335115)).

It is convenient to record here a site discovered from air-photographs by Mr R. W. Feachem, which may be a henge monument, but is too badly damaged by cultivation for certainty on this point. It lies $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles south of Broughton, 750 feet west of the main Broughton-Moffat road, in a shallow depression which falls northwards to the Holms Water, a small tributary of the Tweed. The ground at this point is about 700 feet above sea-level.

The visible remains of the monument consist of a circular ditch, about 25 feet wide and now only 6 to 9 inches deep, with an internal diameter of some 280 feet. There is a single well-marked entrance-causeway, about 40 feet wide, across the ditch on the east side (bearing from the centre 96°). Probing suggested the presence of a second causeway on the west, diametrically opposite the first, but the surface at this point is obscured by an elongated heap of small boulders, on which small trees and bushes grew until recently. There is now no trace of a bank, except for a short distance to the north of the east entrance, where the level rises outside the ditch; this rise may well be accounted for, however, by the proximity of the

¹ *Archæologia*, vol. lviii. (1903), p. 461.

field wall at this point. On the north side of the site the ground is marshy, and the ditch is difficult to trace on the surface, though it can be seen faintly on the air-photographs.

The position of the monument and the width of the surviving entrance make it unlikely that it is the remains of a fort or defensive enclosure. On the other hand, its position, size, and regular circular plan are all characteristic of henge monuments. The question of its date and purpose can be settled only by excavation.