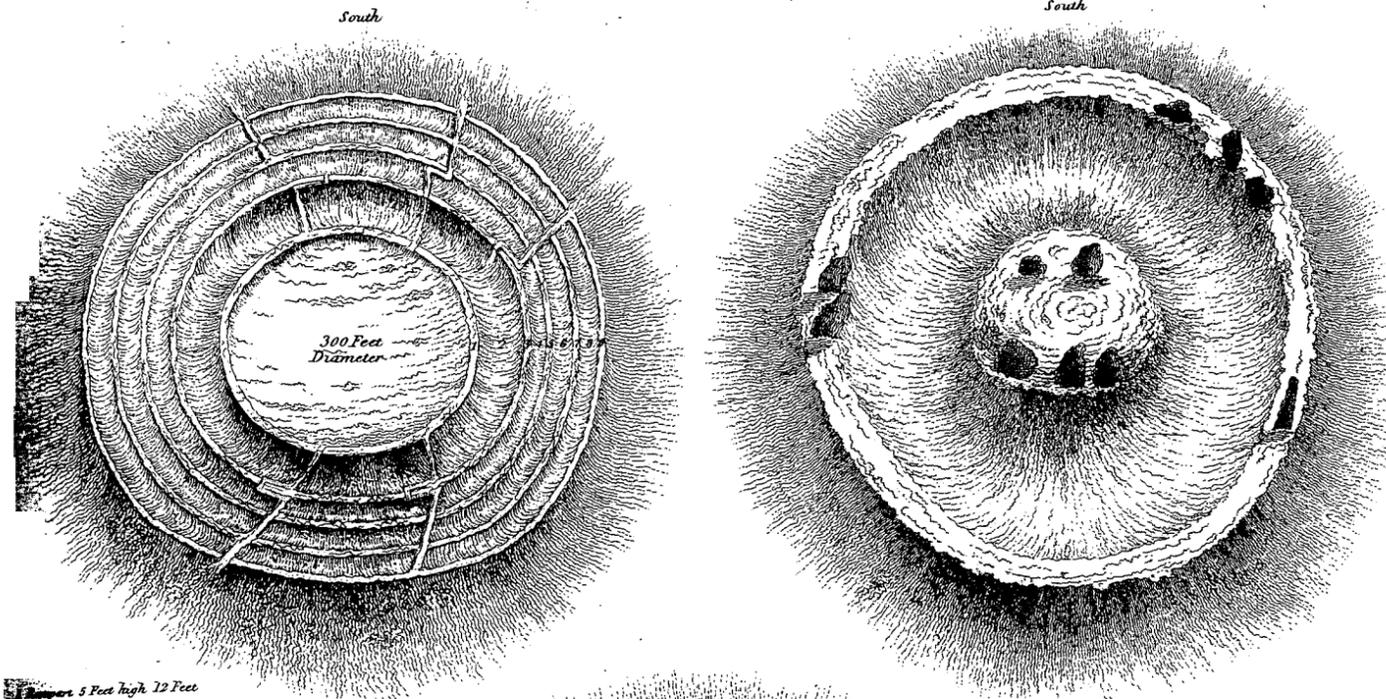


Summit of the Barmekyn Hill Aberdean Shire.

Entrenchment on the South side of the Barmekyn Hill.

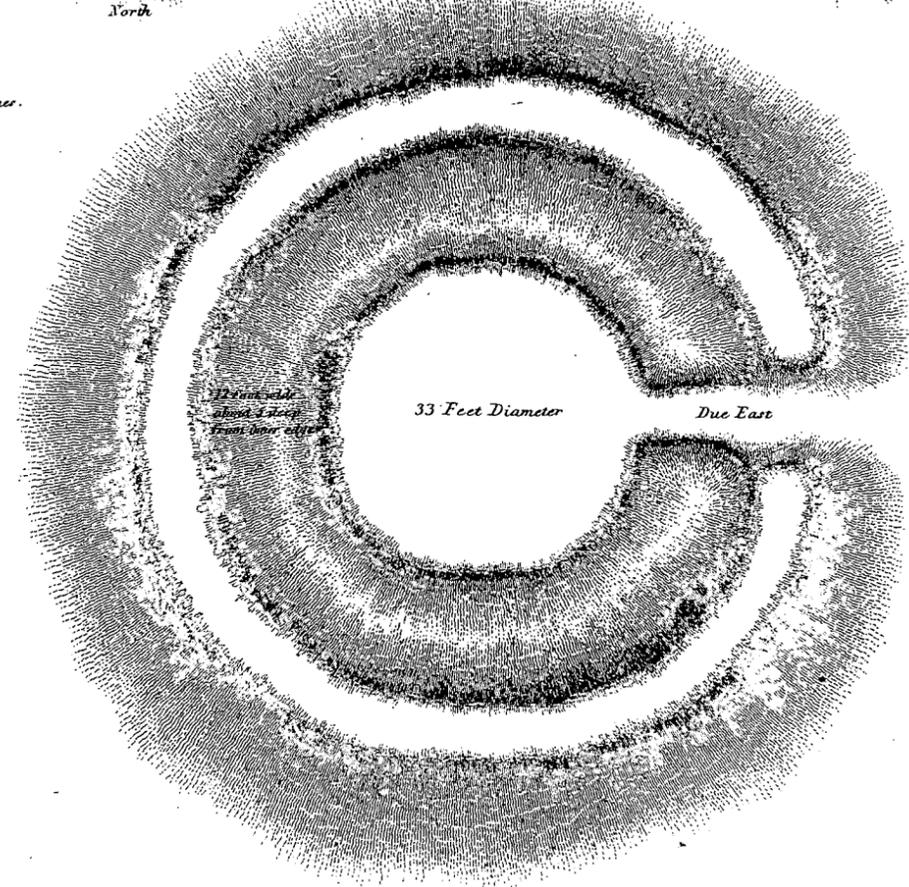


AN ACCOUNT
OF THE
HILL FORT OF THE BARMEKYNE IN
ABERDEENSHIRE.

By James Skene of Rubislaw, Esquire.

I WAS induced to offer to the notice of the Society some drawings I happen to possess of the remarkable Hill Fort of the Barmekyne in Aberdeenshire, from the circumstance of its being alluded to by Professor Stewart, in his paper on the advance of the Romans towards the north of Scotland, as a very interesting remnant of antiquity, of which no plan or notice has been hitherto laid before the public. The Barmekyne is an insulated conical hill of considerable height, deriving its name from the ancient fortress that occupies its summit. It rises near the centre of the district of Echt, of which it forms a very beautiful and striking feature; and, from the steepness of its acclivity, has hitherto remained protected from the invasion of the plough, so fatal to the pursuits of the antiquary, though it has lately become the subject of improvement in another way, which often proves equally destructive to these objects of research. Planting in a

1 Rampart 5 Feet high 12 Feet thick at the base.
2 Wall 30 Feet wide.
3 Rampart 5 Feet high 4 Feet thick.
4 Wall 9 Feet wide.
5 Rampart 5 Feet.
6 Wall 5 Feet.
7 Rampart 5 Feet lined with stones.
8 Wall 9 Feet.
9 Wall 5 Feet.



Plan of a circular Entrenchment near Conin in Ross Shire situate in the east end of Loch Achilty

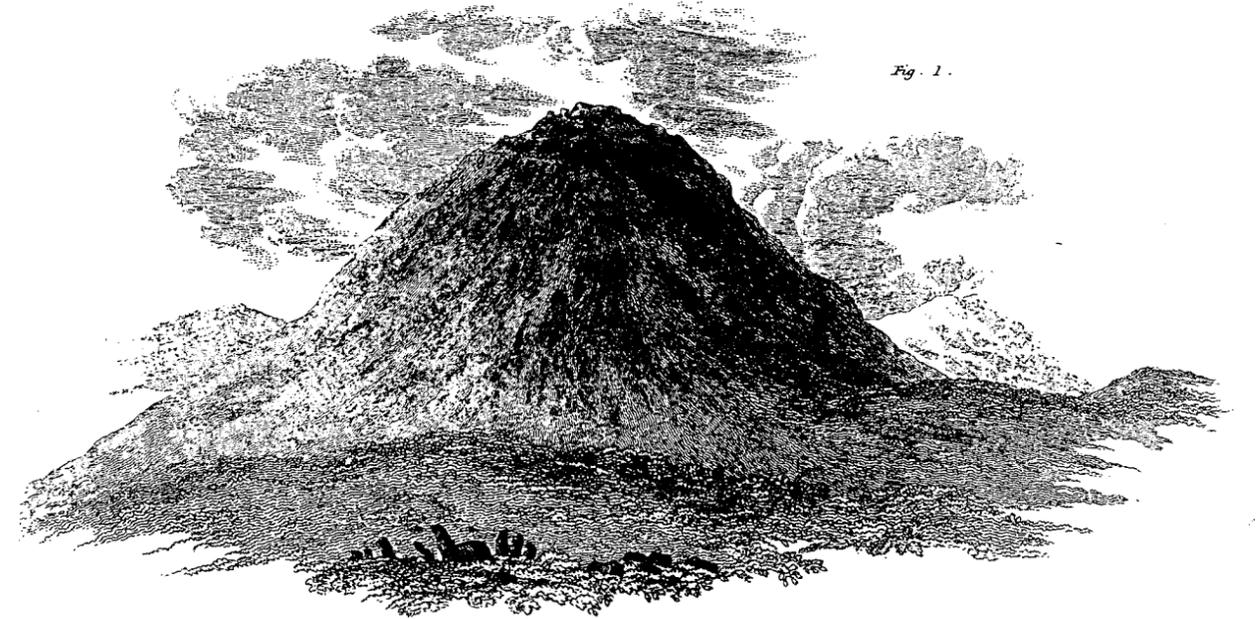


Fig. 1.

Summit of the Barmekyn hill, Aberdeenshire.

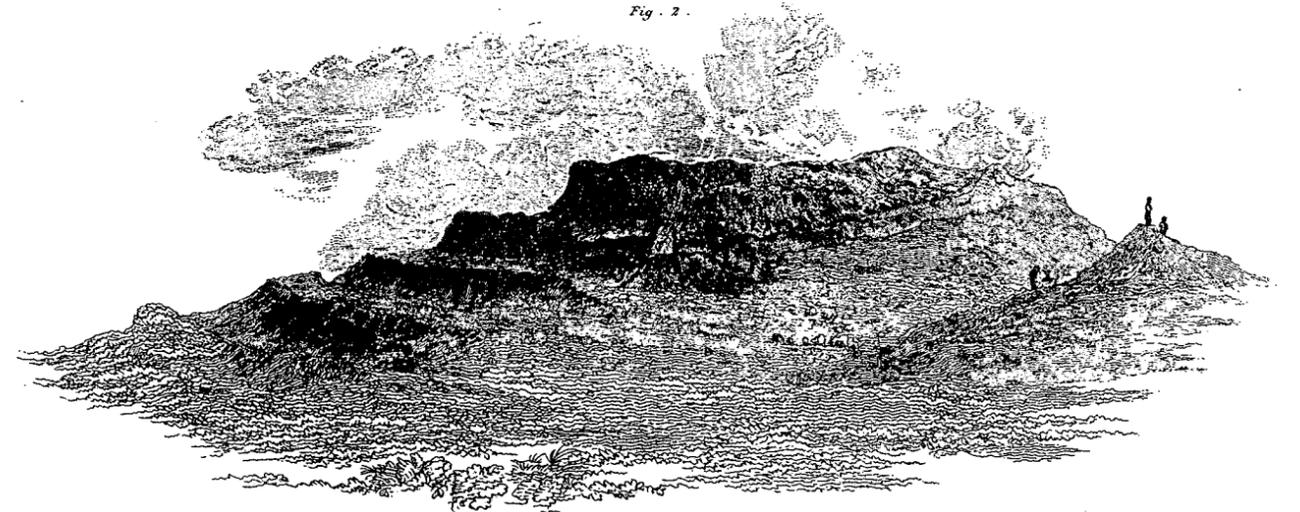


Fig. 2.

Druidical circle near the Barmekyn, Aberdeenshire, 96 feet in diameter
the Altar Stone 10 feet by 6, above ground.

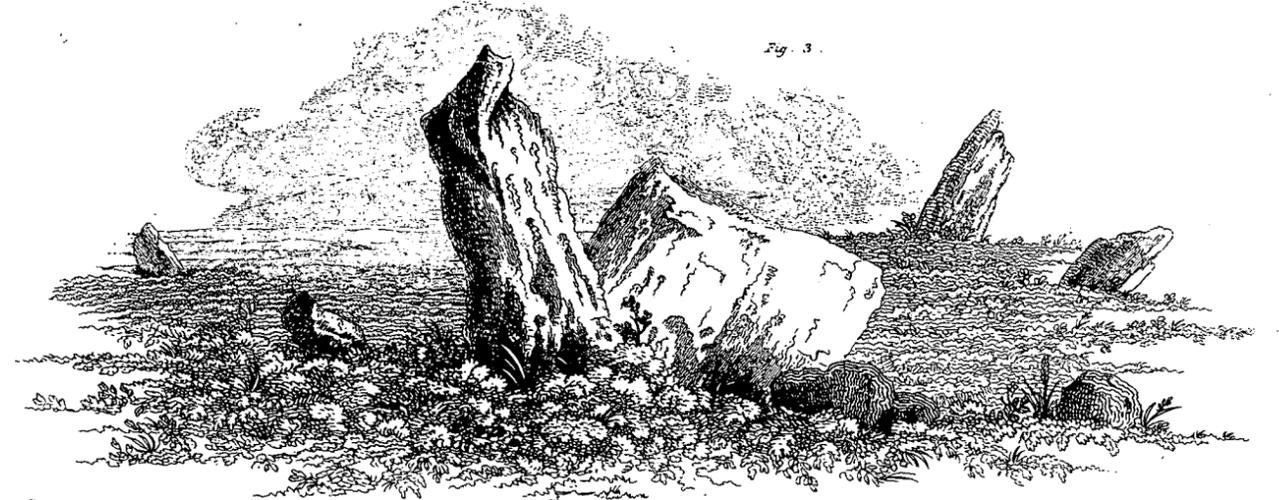


Fig. 3.

Drawn by J. Skene Esq.

Eng^d by W. B. Lewis



bare country like Scotland is doubtless deserving of every praise, were it not for a certain propensity which leads many of our landed proprietors to select in preference, and often exclusively, any classical spot, Druidical monument, or ancient entrenchment which may happen to be on their property, as the fittest subject for a plantation. I was anxious to obtain an accurate measurement and drawings of the Barmekyne, before the young forest, of which it is now the site, should have consigned this interesting structure, for ages perhaps, to oblivion.

The concentric intrenchments, which inclose the summit of Plate vii. the hill, are five in number, in a very perfect state of preservation, so far as regards the lines of fortification, though more or less crumbled into ruins, and partly removed for the supply of materials to the neighbouring fences. There is no appearance of cement having been used in constructing these ramparts, which in several parts are still so entire as to exhibit a regular structure of masonry, squared and fitted with skill, particularly at the gateways, of which there appear to have been three on the south side, and two to the north, where, as might be expected, greater pains seem to have been bestowed in the strength and solidity of the work, as well as in the arrangement of defences. This object is obtained, as will appear by the plan, in covering the approach by traverses, by means of which the general breadth of the access, which is about nine feet, is narrowed by the inclosing walls of the traverses to three feet only, and commanded by the rampart above. The walls measure about five feet in thickness, and appear to have been of considerable height, though not now sufficiently entire in any part to enable the amount to be ascertained. The progressive rise of the ground, and filling up of the ditches, has brought the inner side of the walls nearly on a level with the



surface. I had not the means of discovering the depth of the ditches. The three outer ones are nine feet in breadth, but the inner ditch measures full thirty feet in breadth, with indications of considerable depth, though probably dry. The inner rampart likewise exhibits greater care and strength in its structure, being at least twelve feet thick at the base, of which several feet in height still remain entire.

The interior inclosure, which has been reduced to an uniform level, and nearly circular, is three hundred feet in diameter, amounting to about one acre of ground.

I did not learn that there is any distinct tradition in the country regarding the Barmekyne, nor am I aware that any data exist from which we might trace its history. The name itself, which distinctively implies 'The Fortress,' seems to indicate its pre-eminence over the neighbouring strongholds; and, indeed, the prominent and commanding position of this insulated hill leaves little doubt of its having been at a very early period resorted to for refuge, perhaps coeval with the necessity of defence. It forms the first link of a remarkable chain of hill forts, stretching towards the north at uniform distances, from those extensive ruins of an ancient city, described by Professor Stewart as existing near the Roman station of Norman Dykes, which the Professor, with much probability, conjectures to be those of the ancient Devana, capital of the Taixali.

This district of Aberdeenshire abounds in monuments of the early wars and ancient worship of its inhabitants. The drawings I possess of the greater part of them I should feel much pleasure in adding to the collections of the Society, were they other than meagre sketches, generally unaccompanied either by measure-

ments or description, beyond the imperfect remarks of a very cursory examination.

On the skirts of the Barmekyne hill itself there are three Druidical circles still existing, two on the south side, and one on the north, which last has the misfortune to encumber a cultivated field, a situation it has little chance of enjoying long; while that on the south side of the hill, being the largest and most entire, is so successfully buried under a clump of trees, as to have rendered any examination of it perfectly unsatisfactory. Though in some respects analogous to the Druidical circle, there are some features in this latter ruin which incline me to consider it as having been connected more probably with the fortress above, as an intrenchment or outpost, and afterwards selected as the sepulchre of those chiefs who may have fallen in battle. The circular intrenchment formed by the earth dug out of the ditch is sixty feet in diameter, surmounted by six great stones placed at irregular distances, the remnants, most likely, of an entire circle. In the centre is a cairn of loose stones, supporting five large ones, which have all the appearance of sepulchral monuments—a fact which I had not then the means of ascertaining by opening the cairn.