

6. ON STANDING STONES OR MONOLITHS.

Large unhewn standing-stones, stone columns, obelisks, monoliths, or menhirs, abound in different parts of Scotland, sometimes standing alone, more rarely placed in groups or lines. They were, as already stated, raised with various objects. One of these objects was, as we know from the urns and bones near their base, as a memorial of the dead.

"Of single memorial stones," says Professor Wilson, "examples might be cited in nearly every Scottish parish; nor are they wanting even in the Lothians, and in the immediate vicinity of Edinburgh, where the presence of a busy population, and the unsparing operations of the agriculturist, have done so much to obliterate the traces of older generations. But nearly all are of the same character, differing in nothing but relative size, and the varying outlines of their unhewn masses. They have outlived the traditions of their rearers, and no inscription preserves to us the long-forgotten name."¹ In every district of North Britain, according to George Chalmers,² these stone pillars are to be found "in their natural shape, *without the mark of any tool.*"

This last observation certainly holds good with regard to most of the Scottish standing-stones. But latterly, since studying the subject of lapidary cup and ring cuttings, I have found these archaic tool-marks on no small number of our ancient monoliths; and the surfaces of some of the stones have become far too broken and disintegrated to show them now, if ever they did exist on them. In his "Prehistoric Annals," Dr Wilson gives figures of two monoliths standing in the Lothians,—namely, the Caiy stone within a few miles of Edinburgh, and a tall monolith near Dunbar. Markings were only lately detected on them when they were specially examined for that purpose.

Caiy Stone near Edinburgh.—The Caiy stone, in the parish of Colinton, about three miles south-west of Edinburgh, is a massive, unhewn, flattened sandstone obelisk, standing about ten feet high. Its surface is much weathered, but near its base there are still distinctly marked the remains of seven cup excavations of the usual form, and arranged in a row like those on the cromlech at Bonnington, some six or seven miles

¹ Wilson's *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, 2d edition, vol i. p. 130.

² Chalmers's *Caledonia*, vol. i. p. 87.

distant. The sketch of these cups on the Caiy stone, given in Plate XVII. fig. 1, is from the able pencil of Colonel Forbes-Leslie. There are other more dubious and lesser excavations placed higher up. "On digging," observes Professor Daniel Wilson, "in the neighbourhood of this primitive monument, a quantity of human bones were found."¹

Monolith at Dunbar.—When speaking of the great memorial stones which still survive in dumb forgetfulness in many a populous centre of the low country, Dr Wilson gives a masterly sketch by Mr Drummond² of, to use his own words, "one such fine monolith which stands in massive rudeness in the vicinity of Dunbar. In a neighbouring field," he adds, "a number of rude cists, containing sepulchral urns, were dug up in the early part of the present century."³ When Mr Drummond originally sketched this stone, he did not observe any cup excavations upon it. But lately he has furnished me with a new drawing of the monolith, copied into Plate IV. fig. 3, taken by a friend, and showing five cup markings upon one face of the stone.⁴

I have notes of similar cup markings upon other Scottish monoliths, as in Fifeshire, at Pitcorthy and Torrie; in Stirlingshire, at Ruehill, near Doune; in Perthshire, at Belmont Castle; in Wigtonshire, on a standing stone at Whirlpool, in the parish of Stoneykirk; in Cantyre, on a monolith near Campbelltown, &c.; and no doubt many others exist; and many others which formerly existed, cut both with cups and rings, are now lost and destroyed.⁵ By far the most interesting specimens

¹ Prehistoric Annals of Scotland, vol. i. p. 137.

² See the stone represented in Mr Drummond's interesting paper on Stone Crosses, in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, vol. iv. p. 87.

³ See his Prehistoric Annals, vol. i. p. 125.

⁴ Four large obelisks stand within a few miles of Dunbar, viz., one at Kirklandhill, a second at Markle, and two on Standingstone farm, near Duncupper. None of them have any markings upon their present surfaces; but they are all much weathered.

⁵ As an illustration of this remark, let me adduce a notice of a monolith in Galloway which Andrew Simson alludes to in his history of that district, written towards the end of the seventeenth century. In Camerot Muir, in the old parish of Kirkdale, there is, says he, a stone four or five feet in diameter, called the Penny Stone, which "hath upon it the resemblance of that draught which is commonly called the walls of Troy," viz., a volute or spiral. (See Mr Nicolson's History of Galloway, vol. ii. p. 47.) It is stated in the last Statistical Account that this stone has disappeared.

which I have myself happened to see are in the vicinity of Kilmartin, in Argyleshire, at a short distance from the western end of the Crinan Canal.

The village of Kilmartin is situated upon a rising ground, and commands a striking view of the valley of the Add and of the mountains beyond. Its interesting and antique churchyard is—like some others in Argyleshire—full of sepulchral slabs and tombs, covered with rich olden floriated and figure carvings. But, stretching out for a course of three or four miles below it, is a scattered archaic necropolis of immensely older date,—and having spread over it, at various distances, single and grouped monoliths and megalithic circles, cairns and barrows, chambered tumuli, stone cists, &c. Some of the monoliths show no decided evidence of tooling upon them. But amongst the extant groups of ancient obelisks at Nether Largie, Ballymenach, &c., several of the stones are strongly carved, and hence require more notice from us here.

Largie, Argyleshire.—Along the low ground, from Kilmartin to the farm of Largie, runs a string or succession of large cairns or barrows, terminated by a group of six or seven tall monoliths, planted very irregularly—six of them in pairs. One of these obelisks, about nine feet high, and three and a-half broad, presents on its flat eastern side a series of above twenty cup-markings. This stone is represented in Plate XVII. fig. 2. Two of the cups are each surrounded by a deep and smooth ring. The largest of these circles is from six to seven inches in diameter, and its central cup three inches broad. One of these ringed cups has a groove or gutter traversing its circle, and running downwards into a second cup placed a few inches below. The base of this monolith is surrounded by a circlet of stones placed on edge. The ring-markings upon it were first discovered by the Rev. Mr Mapleton, to whose extreme courtesy I—and other antiquarian visitors to the district—feel most deeply indebted. One of the other Largie stones has an appearance of three cup excavations upon it. With this exception no other tool-markings

In the *Archæologia*, vol. v. p. 315, &c., there was published in the last century an account of several megalithic circles at Achencorthie in Kincardineshire, and two stones are alluded to having each a cup and channel leading out from it. These circles have latterly become much destroyed, and some friends have searched in vain for me for those described as cupped and channelled.

seem to exist on the Largie obelisks; nor on the thirteen upright stones which form the remains of a megalithic circle, fourteen or fifteen paces in diameter, standing on the opposite side of the road, and surrounding a stone cist, five feet long and two feet nine in breadth. In the adjoining field are the remains of a large cairn containing several sepulchral chambers; but no apparent markings exist upon any of the huge stones composing the walls of these chambers.

Ballymenach, Argyleshire.—Proceeding along the valley from the Largie group of monoliths, we pass on the left a cairn in a wood, with one or two large chambers or cists already opened within it; and about a mile beyond the Largie stones, we come upon another still more stately and imposing cluster of seven pillar-stones standing on the farm of Ballymenach, in the parish of Kilmichael-Glassary. The field containing them is skirted at two sides by woods, which have been found the seat of isolated stone cists. In the field itself are placed the levelled remains of two barrows or cairns, and a small closed circle of stones, the circle measuring only six paces across, and the stones being about three feet in height. Thirty or forty paces behind this circle stand arranged in a straight row the four tallest monoliths, looking nearly directly east; about forty paces further back are a pair of the stones placed side by side, and parallel with the first row; and some twenty paces still further back, but obliquely, and somewhat to the left, the remaining seventh pillar-stone is situated. In Plate XVII. fig. 1 is represented this group of seven stones, with the small stone circle placed in front of them.

Four of the seven Ballymenach monoliths show no appearances of artificial cutting upon their surfaces; the most southerly in the first row presenting no markings, though it is the most stately in the whole group, overtopping them all by two or three feet. Three of them are more or less carved—two on the eastern, and one on the western side of the stone or slab.

The two stones principally carved are the two innermost of the first row of four. The most southerly of these two is a huge slab above twelve feet in height and six in breadth. To trace all its markings, Dr Hunter and I were obliged to clear portions of its surface of accumulated moss. Its eastern face shows about forty cup excavations. Five

of the cups are surrounded each with a deep circle or ring, and near the top is a sixth appearance of a ring without any central cup. The circles are from seven to nine inches in diameter. The central cup of the largest is nine inches broad and about two and a half in depth. Four of these cup and ring cuttings show the common radial groove passing through the circle. The western face of this stone does not present any markings. In Plate XVII. fig. 2, is a representation from a careful sketch, kindly drawn for me by Mr H. D. Graham, of the eastern surface of the stone, showing the appearances I allude to. The opposite or western surface of the next stone in the row has about forty cup markings upon it. Three of the cups are surrounded by rings with a traversing radial gutter. Six of the cups are tied together by a continuous grooved line. The carvings on this stone are represented in Plate XVII. fig. 3. The isolated monolith is the only other one exhibiting any markings. It is above nine feet in height, and its eastern face shows eighteen cup excavations. (See the sketch of it in Plate XVIII. fig. 3.) In addition, it is a specimen of a so-called "holed stone;" for between two and three feet above its base it is completely perforated.¹ The opening which is represented in the sketch is much splayed on either side. At its centre it is about three inches wide; and externally

¹ The stone at Torrie, Fifeshire, alluded to at p. 31, is a flattened sandstone flag, deeply guttered in longitudinal lines, and presenting cup-markings on its eastern side. It has been attempted to be made "a holed stone," like this block at Ballymenach, but the artificially splayed perforations from the opposite sides do not meet in the middle. About fifty paces from it are the remains of a small circle of stones. Let me here add, what I ought to have noted before (p. 25), that two of the stones at Stonehenge are "holed;" no doubt merely by weathering and disintegration. One of the holed stones is the first upright stone in the avenue at Stonehenge; the perforation is very irregular in shape, and traverses obliquely its south-east angle. The second holed stone is one composing the first upright trilithon on the right side of the circle. It has a deep longitudinal perforation in its back; and below this perforation there is, to use the old description of Dr Stukely, "a cavity in which two or three persons may sit, worn by the weather." (See his "Stonehenge," 1740, p. 29.) In his "Abury" (1743) he describes a perforated stone standing outside the southern interior circle, which has, he states, "a hole in it, and probably was designed to fasten the victim in order for slaying it. This I call the Ring Stone," p. 25. I did not observe this holed stone in visiting Abury; but the Rev. Mr Ross, late rector of Abury, tells me, that it still remains.

it is seven inches in diameter on the east side and four on the west. There are no cups nor rings on the eastern side of this stone.

Passing along the road from Kilmartin to Lochgilphead, we come, about a mile or less beyond Ballymenach, to a field lying between the road and the farm of Dunadd, where stands a very broad and tall monolith. At the distance of half a mile or so beyond this point is the new village of Kilmichael-Glassary. On the western side of the village, and on the banks of the river Add, are placed, on the farm of Dunamuk, first, three stately stones, of about nine or ten feet each in height, arranged originally in a straight row as a trilith, but the middle stone is now prostrate; then a quarter of a mile higher up the stream there stands together a pair of still taller monoliths; and lastly, in the field above this erect pair, and on the higher ground, are two great prostrate pillars, with the remains of three large cairns—one of them within a few feet of the fallen monoliths. There are stones also showing the remains of three circles and cairns in the adjoining and lower field, but their true appearances have lately been destroyed by blasting them with gunpowder. On examining the surfaces of these various monoliths, I could only trace on one of them—namely, the easternmost of the tall standing pair—one circular cup depression of the usual form, and near it an elongated smoothed oval cavity, measuring about six inches in length and one and a-half in breadth and depth.

My friend Mr J. MacGow Crom has lately examined for me other standing stones near Kilmartin, as two on the road to Ford, and one at Lechguary to the northward of Kilmartin, twelve feet high,—all of them unmarked. But about a mile or more above the village of Kilmichael-Glassary he found a carved stone above ten feet high, at a place bearing the name of “Tor-a-Vlaarin” or “The Mound of the Battles.” The stone was “half buried in the earth, and almost all its marks were placed low down below ground.” These marks consist of several cup excavations on the north and south sides of the stone; and one of them on the north side is surrounded by a circle, like the ringed cups on the Largie and Ballymenach stones, and has also, like them, a radial duct or groove traversing it.

I have examined two monoliths placed on the low ground below Auchnabreach, and hence a mile or more further down the valley of the

Crinan Canal than Dunamuk; but I could discover no markings or cuttings on them. One of them, which is now prostrate, was found, it is said, to have evidence of sepulture near its base.

There has been already described and figured the panel (see Plate XIII. fig. 4), with angulated concentric carvings, taken from the barrow at Carnban, about a mile or so nearer Kilmartin.

We shall see subsequently that several rocks *in situ* on the sides of the Crinan Valley, and in the vicinity of this archaic cemetery—running from Kilmartin to Auchnabreach—are cut with numerous groups of concentric circles and cups.

Hence in this limited district we have specimens of rings and cups cut upon the surfaces of solid rocks, upon monoliths, and upon cist-stones; and the specimens already discovered amount, I believe, to upwards of two hundred in number, in a locality about five or six miles in length and a mile or two in breadth.

In England the most striking and magnificent group of monoliths that I have seen are the so-called "Devil's Arrows" at Borough Bridge, in Yorkshire. Three only of these tall and enormous monoliths are now left, and stand in a line about a stone's throw from each other. They are all pillars of a squarish shape, and said to be formed of millstone grit. Each at its upper part is deeply and vertically guttered, apparently by long weathering and exposure; and their lower portions show round, smooth, cup-like excavations upon some of their surfaces. The most northerly of these imposing monoliths is especially marked in this last way. Many, if not all, of these excavations, have probably been effected by the elements and weather; while some of them, which look more artificial, are of the same shape and form as those on the Kilmartin stones, &c. But unfortunately we have not here the presence of rings or circles around the cups to determine conclusively their artificial character.

PLATE IV.

STONES AT 1, THORAX. 2, MONCRIEFF. 3, DUNBAR,



PLATE XVII.

OBELISKS AT COLINTON, LARGIE, BALLYMENACH AND SHAP.

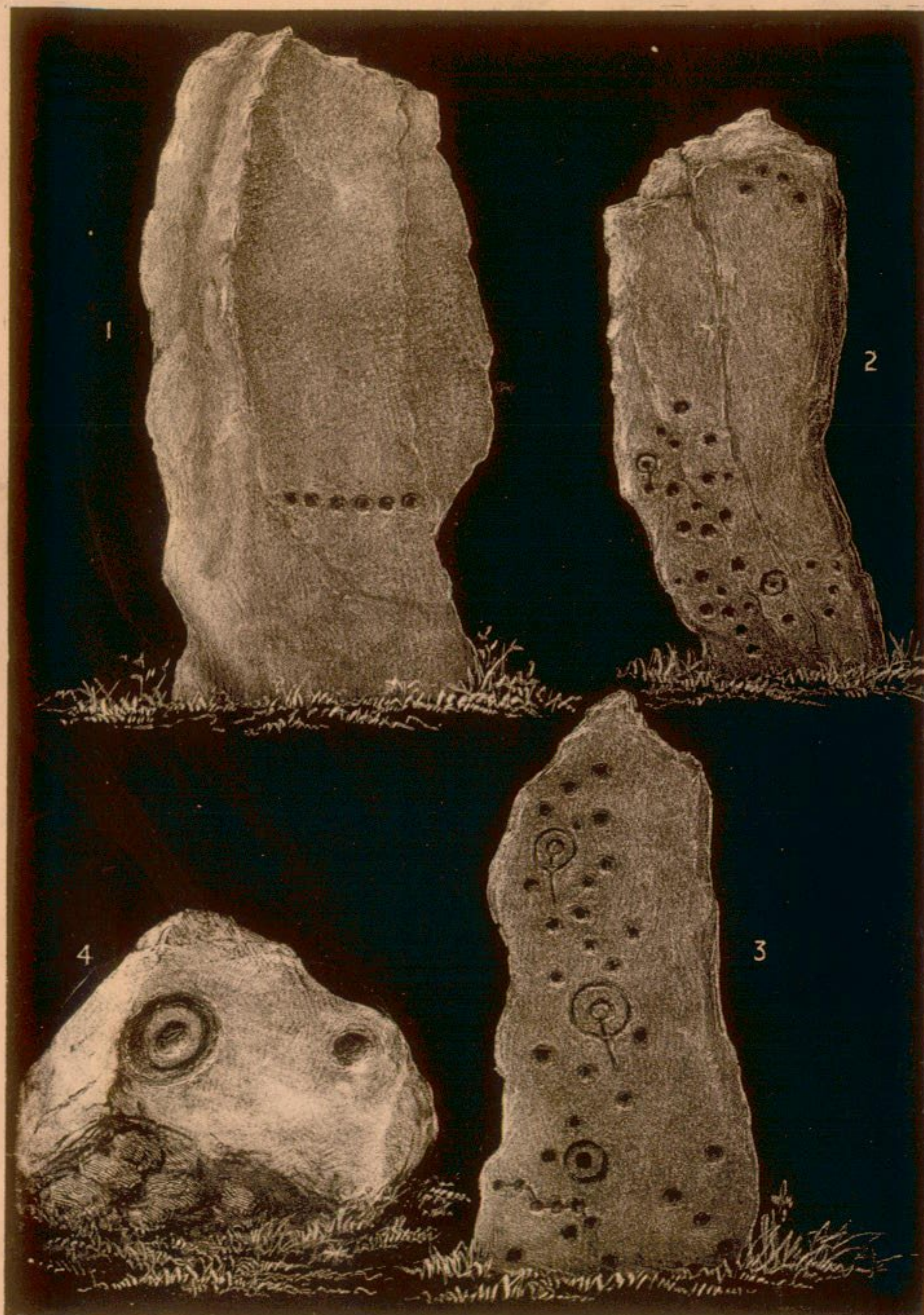


PLATE XVIII.

STANDING STONES AT BALLYMENACH.

