

I.

NOTICE OF ADDITIONAL GROUPS OF CARVINGS OF CUPS AND CIRCLES ON ROCK SURFACES AT HIGH BANKS, KIRKCUDBRIGHT-SHIRE. BY GEORGE HAMILTON, F.S.A., SCOT., KIRKCUDBRIGHT.

At page 157 of Volume IX. of the *Proceedings* for 1886-87, I mentioned that it was intended to strip the turf from off a knoll on the farm of High Banks, in the parish of Kirkeudbright, as it was thought more of the archaic carvings such as I described in that paper might be found there.

Last autumn we carried out our intentions, and laid bare a large portion of glaciated rock. Towards the centre of the northern side of this knoll, from which was removed about a foot and a half of soil and turf, we exposed a great many more of these sculpturings, some as sharply incised as if done quite recently, and others very much weathered and worn by exposure to atmospheric influences.

The top of the knoll commands a most extensive view on all sides, excepting south-east, where a series of hillocks, rising up towards Bemtudor and Bengairn, prevents one seeing to any distance, and on some of which, amongst rocks covered with whins, are to be found several carvings

of cups and rings, a large one of which consists of a cup with seven concentric rings around it. The view to the north embraces most of the land of the Stewartry towards the Kells range of hills. To the west, the richly wooded banks of the Dee, and the windings of that river, lie at one's feet, while over that are to be seen the flat level lands of Wigtownshire. To the south, across the Solway, are the Isle of Man and the Cumberland hills.

The most interesting specimens of these sculptures are shown in the accompanying engravings.<sup>1</sup> The glaciated rock, with portions of its surface broken away and traversed with cracks and fissures, slopes at an angle of 30° from south-west to north-east. This portion of rock measures 31 feet in length, and tapering towards rounded ends, measures 5 feet at its broadest. For 5 feet at each end there are no carvings, but the intermediate space is filled with distinct and separate sculptures. It is almost impossible to give such a written description as will convey a correct notice of how they are clustered together, but by aid of the accompanying engravings and the following remarks, I may be able to give a faint idea of this strange and mysterious congeries of carvings.

Beginning on the right or western side (fig. 1), there is a cup with four concentric rings and a cluster of nine cups on the upper left, beneath a cup and single ring around it. Further to the left are two other cup and ring formations; and passing from the centre cup of the one next to the left, through the cup of the central figure, till it touches the lower ring of the first above mentioned figure, there extends, in a straight line, a narrow groove of about an inch in width; beneath these are a few cups, and a ring without a central cup, while to the right there is a crescent-shaped groove with the concave portion facing west. A large dislocation of the rock then intervenes, and then comes a strange cluster of cups surrounding a figure of a cup in the centre of two concentric rings. This cup is twice as large as the others surrounding the whole

<sup>1</sup> These engravings are made from photographs taken from casts of the portions of sculptured rock-surfaces, obtained with much trouble by Messrs M'Kie, Hornell, and Thomson, members of the Local Natural History and Antiquarian Society. These casts are to be seen in the Local Museum at Kirkcudbright, and in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh.

figure, the great majority of the cups being about 3 inches in diameter, and the few smaller ones about the half of that size. To the left of this is a mass of clustering cups, and without apparently any regular order, though there are to be traced several grooved rings—and in one instance four cups fill up the centre of the ring. Further, to the left again, and occupying the lower or northern portion (I am describing these as being seen from the bottom of the hillock), is an oblong piece of the rock (fig. 2), measuring 3 feet 2 inches by 2 feet, arched in the direction of its length, with a rise of about 6 inches from the level, and having a figure with a centre not quite in the top

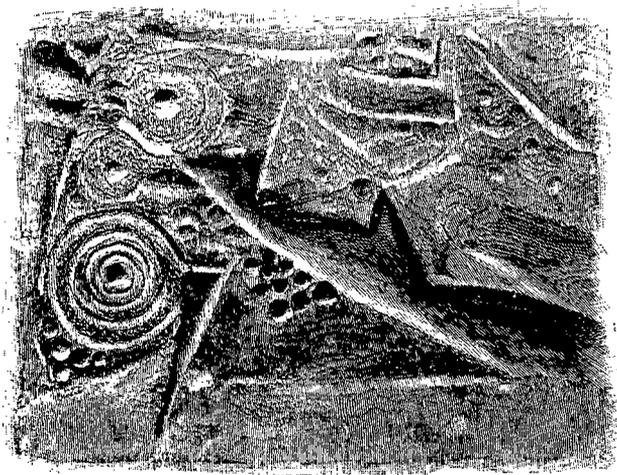


Fig. 1. Cup-marked Rock Surface, at High Banks.

of the arch, but slightly nearer the south portion, consisting of a large cup nearly 4 inches in diameter, with a well-raised ring of 6 inches across surrounding it, and then a flat space of 3 inches, all pitted over with small indentations, and again enclosed by two grooved circles, and the whole surrounded by upwards of two hundred cups, clustering chiefly at the two ends. I counted 208, but it is not easy to do so with exactness, as the cups are not always regularly defined, but run into each other.

Over this, to the extreme west portion, is an oblong panel, having the rock cut from around it, the upper portion of which contains six or seven smaller cups, while the lower part is quite plain. A serpentine groove commences over the arched piece of rock mentioned above, and winds away to the left and again upwards to the south, in and around other carvings, passing under a triangle formed by five cups and a cup surrounded by four rings, round an ear-shaped cavity, past an oblong of seven cups (fig. 3), and ending in indistinct circles—all of which, as well as the serpent-like groove, show along its whole length pittings or a dotted

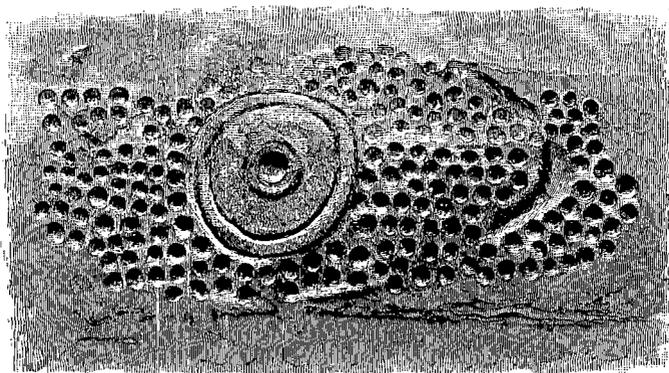


Fig. 2. Cup-marked Rock Surface, at High Banks.

surface, evidently done by some sharp-pointed tool, and not by rubbing, as most of the cups and rings seem to have been formed. This pitted surface may be unfinished work, or it may be purposely so left. Close to this groove is a figure of 3 inches in diameter, consisting of a raised circular centre with the top surface level—immediately around which are four incised portions of a circle one at each of the four sides—each respectively touching the centre figure and the circumference of the two circles adjoining, the whole forming a rose-like figure, such as Sir James Simpson mentions as peculiar to Irish archaic carvings, not having been at the time he wrote noticed in Scotland.

Further still to the left are more circles and cups, one large figure being very markedly pitted, and to the left again a groove enclosing a rhomboid-shaped figure embraces eleven small cups; and at the right extremity is a large cup surrounded by five smaller ones. Altogether, I counted seven hundred separate and distinct carved figures—sixteen systems of cups and rings, with plain cups scattered about in all sorts of positions.

On a small separate piece of rock, about three yards north-west of the larger rock already described, was a cup surrounded by five rings and a

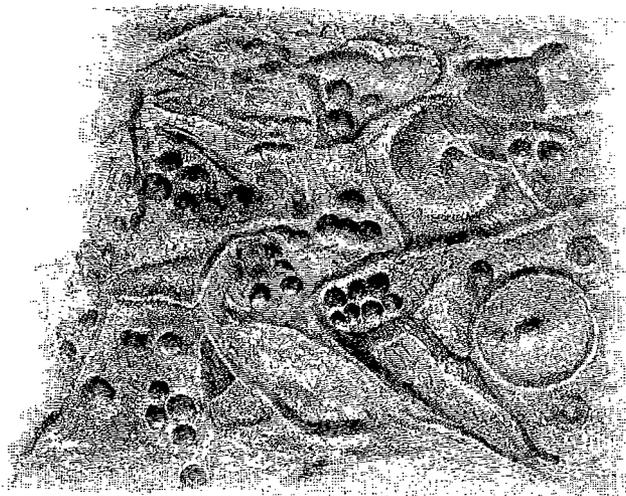


Fig. 3. Cup-marked Rock Surface, at High Banks.

half ring—the diameter of the fifth ring being 17 inches; joining with the half ring was a serpentine groove stretching from the above carving upwards, and separating into a forked figure, above the two ends of which were two cups joined by an arched groove. Some other cups were carved on this piece of rock. These last mentioned carvings, from long exposure, are not very distinctly defined.

Besides those I have described, we found fourteen other specimens of

the cup and ring carvings on this knoll, and there must have been many more, for to the east of it a quarry has been worked about fifty years ago, to procure stones wherewith to build the neighbouring dikes, and the tenant, then a boy, but now a hale old man, distinctly remembers carvings like those now described being visible on the surface of the rock quarried. I have, however, been unable to find any markings on the stones, although I have carefully searched the dikes, but I found a very perfect specimen on the copestone of a small bridge crossed by the road not very far from this place.