

VII.

NOTES ON THE STONE CIRCLE NEAR KENMORE AND OF SOME HILL
FORTS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF ABERFELDY, PERTHSHIRE.
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A residence of some weeks during the summer of last year in Aberfeldy gave me the opportunity to examine the antiquities of the district, and amongst these I found several hitherto undescribed, or but slightly referred to, and it occurred to me that a particular notice of the more important of these would be of interest to the members of the Society.

The first of these objects of antiquity to which I desire to direct attention is the very fine and complete series of stone circles at Croft Morag (figs. 1 and 2), 4 miles west from Aberfeldy, and about 50 yards south of the public road leading from the latter place to Kenmore. The circles are concentric, three in number, and occupy a little plateau which may be artificial, as the outer circle just covers it, on the gentle slope which here rises towards the south from the public road.

I have prepared and exhibit a plan of the circles, and for reference have distinguished the stones by numbering them in the plan. The inner circle consists of eight stones all standing, with one exception, No. 3, which presumably has fallen inwards. The next or second circle consists of thirteen much larger stones, nine of which stand erect; Nos. 3 and 5 have presumably fallen in, while Nos. 7 and 9 have fallen outwards. The outer circle is formed by a number of smaller stones placed so as to form a sort of rampart. These are recumbent, and lie generally with their larger axes in the direction of the rampart. The circle measures, over the stones, as follows:—

Inner circle,	West to East,	25 ft. 6 ins.,	North to South,	22 ft. 6 ins.
Second	„	„	40 „	„
Outer	„	„	58 „	„

The stones are all rounded or water-worn boulders of dolerite, granite, schist, &c. The stones marked A and B are large blocks, 6 feet 6 inches

high, 4 feet broad, and 2 feet 6 inches thick, standing upright. C seems to be a large skelb which has fallen from B, and lies flat on the ground.

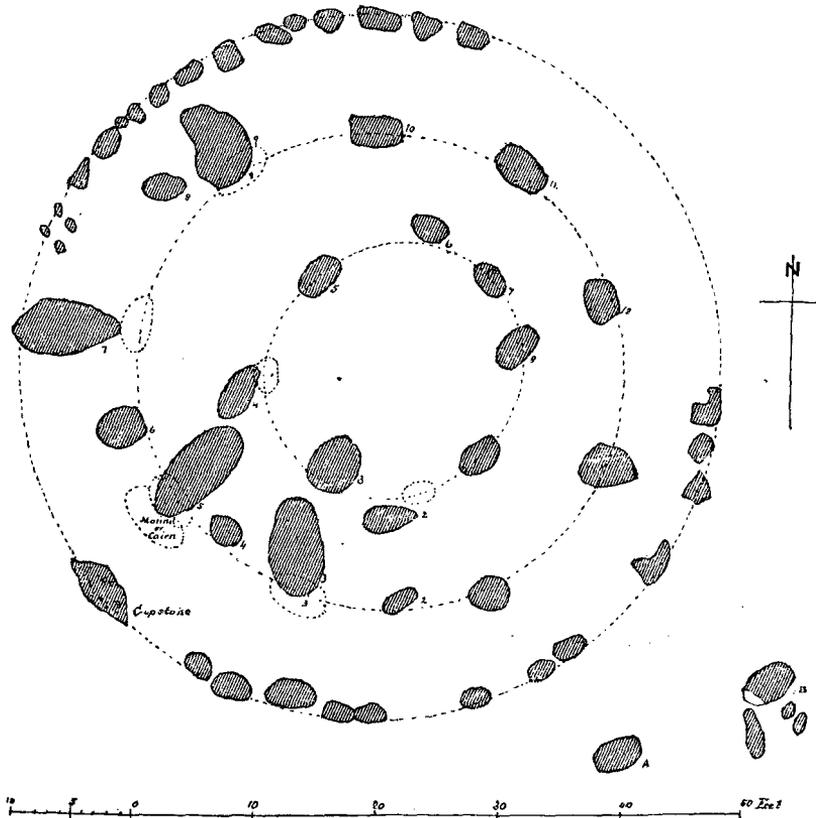


Fig. 1. Ground Plan of Circle at Croft Morag.

At the south-west side and in the line of the outer circle lies the cup-marked stone. It is a recumbent stone, and like the others in that circle lies with its larger axis in the direction of the encircling line. It measures 6 feet 6 inches long by 2 feet broad, and bears on its surface

23 cups. Two of these are connected by straight channels. The largest cup is 2 inches in diameter and $\frac{7}{8}$ inch deep. Two of the cups are encircled, each with a concentric ring. None of the other stones exhibit any cups or other artificial markings. If, as has been suggested, the two large blocks A and B formed the entrance to the circles, then the entrance faced towards the south-east. The blocks vary in height from 3 feet to 7 feet above ground, while of those which I have supposed to have fallen, their dimensions are, naturally from the ground-hold having to be added, much greater, amounting in one of them to 9 feet 6 inches long. There is a longish low mound of small stones, like an elongated cairn, which might yield something if it were to be searched. It lies just



Fig. 2. View of Circle at Croft Morag (from a photograph by Rev. J. B. Mackenzie).

abreast of the cup-marked stone. I have referred to the recumbent stones in the two inner circles as having probably stood at one time erect. This I have presumed for several reasons, the principal being that one end of each of these stones corresponds in position with the circle formed by the standing stones; and while this is the case the recumbent stones do not preserve a uniformity of direction, but lie indifferently outwards and inwards from the lines of circularity, and at differing angles from these lines, features of mal-arrangement, which had they been purposely originally placed recumbent, we would not have expected to find, since the genius which arranged the standing stones with such comparative methodicity of treatment could scarcely have failed to note the irregularity, if we are to assume that the recumbent stones have been always so.

It is to be hoped that this fine series of circles, perhaps the finest and most complete now in Scotland, will be protected from the vandalism and neglect which have resulted in the destruction of so many of our native ancient monuments.

I do not consider it necessary to do more than mention Miss Mac-lagan's theory, that this circle, in common with many similar stone circles, is the remains of the basement of a broch, a theory against which much might be advanced, and for which, in the case of the Croft Morag circles, it is difficult to see any evidence.

The other class of antiquities to which I am to refer is comprehended under the general term Hill Forts, of which there are several remarkable examples in this neighbourhood. The first to be noticed is the fine one on the summit of one of the eastern spurs of Drummond Hill, Kenmore (fig. 4). This summit is 900 feet in height, Ordnance datum, and may be reached by a footpath leading due south up a rather steep ascent from Comrie Farm, or it may be approached by an easier although more circuitous ascent from the south, by a path leading up through the wood a little to the west of the first cottage south from Comrie Castle on the road leading to Kenmore. The particular point of Drummond Hill occupied by this fort may be recognised by the passenger travelling along the public road leading from Weem to Fortingall, when he has reached Keltney Burn, and looking towards Drummond Hill, which is here densely wooded, he will observe on its eastern extremity the line of the tree tops as it dips from the summit, rise suddenly into a knoll-like form, then resume its downward slope towards the low ground at the confluence of the rivers Lyon and Tay. The knoll-like projection of the trees marks the bold rocky eminence which is crowned by the fort in question. I have been thus particular in describing the position of the fort, because it was only on my second visit to the hill I was able to discover the site of the fort, nor need the visitor rely upon information being got in the district, as inquiries made at the cottages around the base of the hill were fruitless.

This fort occupies the summit of a projecting rock, and is well chosen for defence. On the south and east sides the rock is steep and precipitous, but slopes less steeply on the other sides. The walls of the

fort have followed the contour of the hill, twisting out and in to suit the exigencies of the site, thus resembling the remarkable fort near Drumgask, in the parish of Laggan, described in the *Archæologia Scotica*, vol. iv. p. 305. The area within the walls is thus of very irregular outline, measuring in greatest longitude from north-west to south-east about 100 yards, and at right angles to this about 70 yards. At the south-east angle, where the hill is most precipitous, there is a natural platform in the rock, to include which with the main enclosing wall would have caused an awkward twist, and therefore the main wall has been broken here, and a separate wall, A, B, erected along the outer edge of this platform, thus effectively securing against attack from that side, and evincing considerable skill in defence. At the north-east angle, where there is a spur of the hill rising up towards the summit, it has also been found necessary to project a separate defence, and a recurving wall has been thrown out here, enclosing a space about 55 yards in length. The walls are much broken down, and it is difficult to follow their outline in some places other than as a continuous heap of stones; but there are, notwithstanding, many parts where the outside and inside faces of the walls can still be traced. In particular, at C, D, on the plan, from

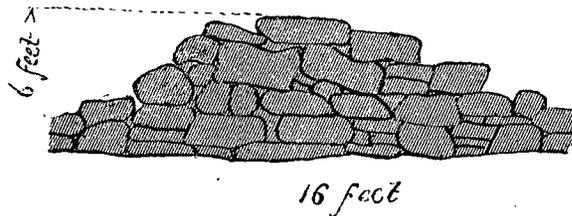


Fig. 3. Portion of Wall of Caisteal Mac Tuathal, from C to D.

16 to 20 feet in length by about 6 feet in height of the original wall (fig. 3) may still be seen. This fragment shows that the walls had been erected of rough and massive unhewn blocks without any mortar or cementing material. A regular face line had, however, been adhered to, although the jointing of the stones does not indicate any special or noticeable care in making band, so conspicuous a feature in more modern masonry. The

wall here is some 9 feet in thickness at the base, is almost perpendicular externally, but in the inside is considerably sloped. There are at some parts evidences that the ground inside had been raised or filled in at the back of the walls, probably to give those inside the fort an advantage in

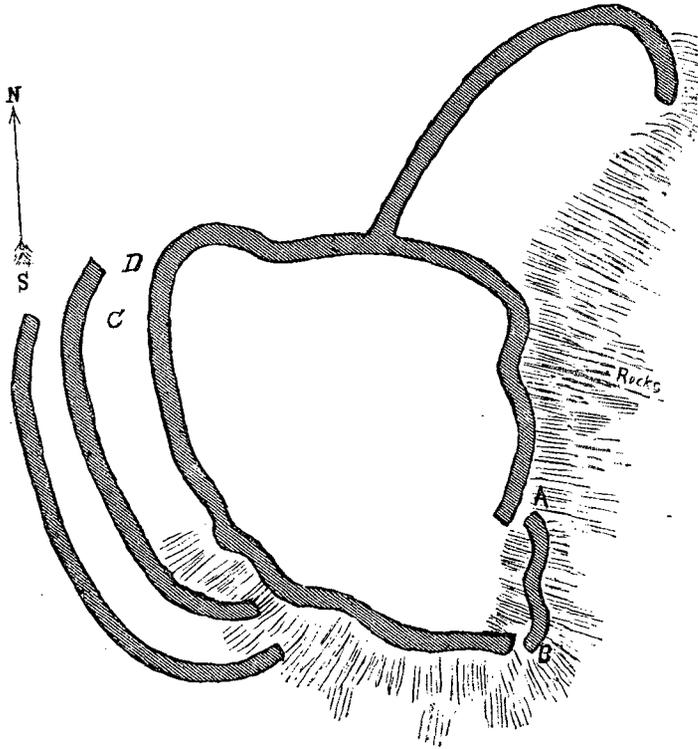


Fig. 4. Caisteal Mac Tuathal on Drummond Hill, Kenmore, Perthshire.

scaling the walls for defence. This feature I have observed elsewhere in similar structures. Judging from the quantity of stones lying outside of the portion of the wall standing at C, D, the wall must have been originally of at least double the height of the fragment remaining, or say

from 12 to 15 feet high. Many of the stones are of large dimensions, and while some of them may have been quarried from the rock of the hill, no tool-mark of any kind could be discovered upon any of them. On the west a considerable hollow separates that side of the fort from the ascending slope of the hill, and along the inner side of this hollow two walls or embankments of stone have been thrown up, as a protection on that the most vulnerable side. These latter walls are chiefly remarkable for the huge dimensions of the stones or boulders incorporated therewith. At the bottom of this hollow, which is some 25 feet deep, rises a spring of water, which doubtless supplied the needs of the garrison. The entrance to the fort was probably from the south end of this hollow.

The structure is known locally as Caisteal Mac Tual, or Dun Mac Tual, and the tradition is that a Highland chief of that name erected the fort, and inhabited it some centuries ago. He is described as the son of Tual or Tuaghail, a bishop of Dunkeld, who was slain at Fortrenn, Strathearn. The late Rev. Samuel Fergusson, minister of Fortingall, in his valuable notes to *The Queen's Visit and other Poems*, Edin., 1869, says:—"On the north-east shoulder of Drummond Hill, facing the Vale of Appin, are the remains of a strong hill fort. Its erection and occupancy are ascribed to Mac Tual, whose name figures in ancient Celtic poetry, and legend. *The Annals of Ulster*, under the year A.D. 865, relate that Tuathal, son of Artguso, abbot of Dunkeld, died. The person referred to in the text was son of this abbot, and consequently of considerable note and influence, although this rude ruined fort is all that remains of his history." Miss Maclagan refers to this fort, but apparently had not visited it, as she quotes from the Statistical Account regarding it. The latter is inaccurate, inasmuch as it describes the plan of the fort as a parallelogram. It mentions the existence of a defending wall at the base of the rock on the south and east sides, which cannot now be traced.

The next fort to be noticed is known as "The Dun," and is so marked on the Ordnance maps. It occupies the summit of a commanding wooded height overlooking from the south the town of Aberfeldy. Unlike the last, this structure has been erected as an almost complete circle, 110 feet in diameter inside the walls, which are from 14 to 15 feet in

thickness. Very little more than the outlines sufficient to permit of their being traced now remain. The outside and inside faces of the walls, however, can be clearly seen to have been formed of blocks from 2 to 4 feet long closely set, and selected as facing stones, from their possessing a comparatively flat side to form the face of the walls. The stones bear no evidence of dressing. At about the middle of the western side there are appearances of a narrow entrance having existed there, in large stones lying transversely across the wall. And a little beyond, in a hollow, is a pool of water, which may have supplied the needs of the occupants of the fort. The surface of the hill enclosed within the fort slopes from north-east, which is highest, and forms a natural defence on that side to the south-west, where there are three distinct trenches or earthworks running longitudinally from east to west, and 48 yards long and from 4 to 5 yards wide, for protection on that the most vulnerable side.

Considerably lower down on the same hill, within 50 yards of the public road from Aberfeldy to Crieff, there is a very distinct and well-marked earthen fort. It is in the form of a rectangle (fig. 5), and measures internally 51 yards by 41 yards, has two trenches varying from 24 feet to 36 feet wide, and rising some 40 to 45 feet above the surrounding ground. Whether the mound is wholly artificial, or if the earthworks, as is most probable, have been thrown up around a natural mound, it is impossible to determine without excavating. The whole of the mound is covered with trees. There is a low retaining wall along the lower edge of the east embankment, which is probably modern. But on the ascending slope of the hill on the south of the fort are several well-marked trenches, which may have been thrown up as outworks, to protect the fort on that the most vulnerable side (fig. 6).

Miss Maclagan has made reference to the "Dun of Dull," a designation which I have not been able to identify with either of the two last named forts. The name the "Dun of Dull" occurs in the index attached to the Statistical Account 1845, but it is not given in the text; and while Miss Maclagan has evidently borrowed from the Statistical Account her description of the former fort, she gives to it the dimensions of the latter, and it would almost seem as if the writer of the description in the Statistical Account had also confused the two forts. He says:—

“It measures upwards of 50 yards in diameter within walls, and appears

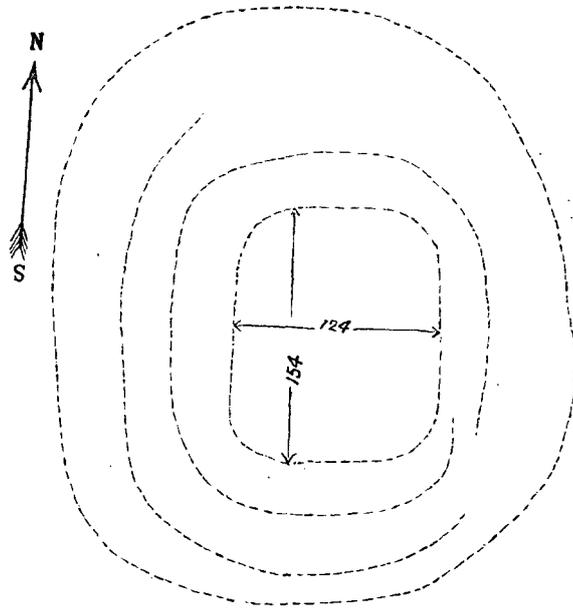


Fig. 5. Fort on Crieff Road, near Aberfeldy.

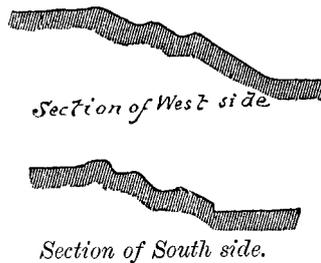


Fig. 6. Sections, Fort on Crieff Road, near Aberfeldy.

to have been defended on all sides, save the north-east, where the hill is very rugged and steep, with two concentric ramparts.” This cannot

apply to the fort called "The Dun," which measures only some 36 yards inside the walls, and possesses no concentric ramparts, unless the trenches already referred to as extending along the south side are meant, but there are no evidences of any rampart on the other sides. Miss Mac-lagan repeats the story about the concentric ramparts, which would be correct if applied to the other fort, but then it has no pool of water beside it, which she mentions as an adjunct of the fort described by her.

I also visited the circular stone fort on the summit of the rocky hill above the farm of Balnacraig, Fortingall. It is called in the neighbourhood Fort Dun Geal, or the White Fort. It is well described by Miss Mac-lagan. It differs from Caisteal Mac Tual in that it does not follow or indeed cover the top of the hill, but stands on the summit with a considerable extent of easy-sloping ground around it. The fort is circular, and measures 58 feet in diameter within the walls, which average 10 feet in thickness. They are much broken down, but at several places exhibit the outside and inside faces of the wall intact. The masonry of this fort has been of a very massive character, and erected almost wholly of stones separated either naturally or by art from the rock of the hill, which falling in large masses from the adjoining craigs, splits naturally into large cubical fragments, eminently suited for building, as they are square and ready for use, in the walls. Be this as it may, Fort Dun Geal exhibits in its ruins a massiveness and regularity of masonry not perceptible in any of the other forts named. Within the encircling wall of the fort are evidences of the foundations of several rectangular enclosures, but whether connected with the use of the original structure, or erected in subsequent times as folds for sheep or for other purposes, there is no evidence to show. At same time, it is almost certain that the occupants of these hill forts must have had some sort of shelter from the severity of the weather, and it is not improbable that that shelter would take the form of huts formed of sods and turf cut from the hill side, which in the course of time would be blown entirely away with the wind, or exist only in low grass-covered mounds like those in Fort Dun Geal.

The last fort to be mentioned is, in point of size, the most remarkable. It is known as Castle Dubh, or the Black Castle (fig. 7), and is situated

about 2 miles from Grantully Railway Station, by the road which leads past the farm of Balbeggan, or it may be reached from the village of Balnagard. This extensive fort occupies the summit of an isolated and commanding height overlooking the valley of the Tay from Aberfeldy to Dalguise. Like the Dun of Aberfeldy, it stands at an altitude of over 1000 feet,

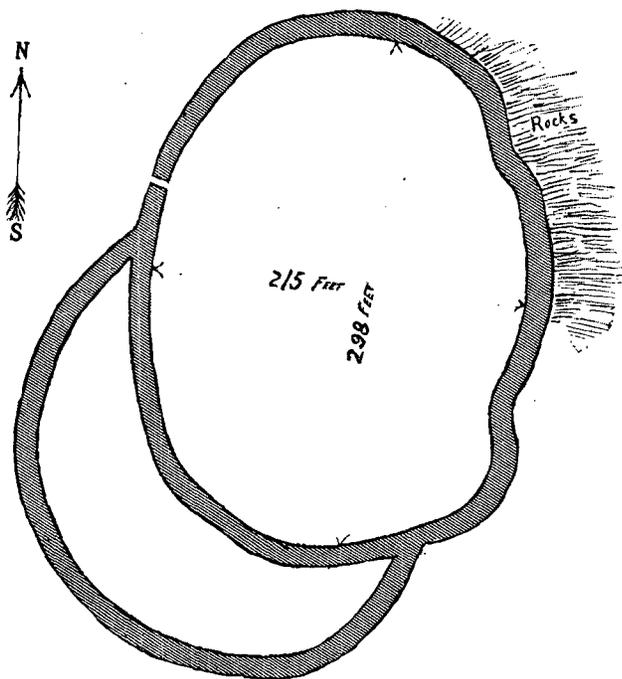


Fig. 7. Caisteal Dubh, near Grantully.

and is of an oval form, measuring from north to south 100 yards within the walls and from east to west 71 yards. In character of masonry, it approaches more nearly to Mac Tual's fort. On the north-east and east the hill is rocky and steep, and here the wall is not so well marked, but still it can be traced with tolerable distinctness all round the fort. At the south-west side there is a length of about 17 yards of

the wall still tolerably well preserved, from which the masonry can be seen to have a strong resemblance to that of Castle Mac Tual. The walls, however, are much thicker, ranging from 14 feet to 16 feet in thickness, faced outside and inside with large stones without mortar. On this side, where the hill is most vulnerable, the fort has been strengthened by means of a sort of half-moon battery, projecting 28 yards and extending in length 80 yards. In the south-east angle of this enclosure are the remains of a circular structure of about 15 feet diameter. Along the southern side, the wall has been further strengthened by a ditch. Like the Dun, this fort shows evidence of an entrance having existed about the middle of the west side. The micaceous schist of the hill within the fort is quite bare and smooth, and almost devoid of vegetation. Towards the south-east, but considerably within the enclosing wall, there is a piece of this schist, measuring about 4 feet long by 1 foot thick and 1 foot high, set in edgewise east and west. Possibly it may mark the site of an interment. Many of the stones of the fort have been used in erecting sheep-folds and other similar erections in the near neighbourhood, and many of the stones lie amongst the heather on the slopes of the hill. This fort also exhibits evidences of the banking up of earth, at the back of the wall, noticed in the case of Mac Tual's fort, and in other instances.

In presenting these notes to the Society I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to the Rev. John M'Lean, minister of Grantully, whose knowledge of the antiquities of the district is as extensive as his urbanity in pointing them out to strangers is well known and widely acknowledged.

[The Society is also indebted to Rev. J. B. Mackenzie, F.S.A. Scot., Kenmore, for the Photograph of the Circle of Croft Morag, and for a ground-plan of the same, prepared by Mr Brigham, of the Clerk of Works' Office, Taymouth.]