

## II.

EXCAVATIONS NEAR FORGLEN HOUSE ON THE BORDERS OF  
ABERDEENSHIRE AND BANFFSHIRE. BY H. ST GEORGE GRAY.

From 24th July to 1st August 1906 I had the opportunity of conducting excavations on the Forglen estate for the Hon. John Abercromby, of Edinburgh, who defrayed all the expenses connected with the investigations. Mr Abercromby was present during the greater part of the time that the excavations were in progress. Thanks are due to Captain Douglas Abercromby (uncle and guardian of Sir George Abercromby, Bart., the owner of Forglen) for giving leave to conduct the excavations; by his kind co-operation the preliminary arrangements were greatly facilitated. Mr Andrew Bell, forester of the estate, also rendered useful assistance.

## I. "BARBARA'S HILLOCK," N.W. ABERDEENSHIRE.

A preliminary inspection of this large mound was made by Mr Abercromby in February 1906, when he asked me to undertake the excavation of it, although he had great doubts as to its artificial origin, in spite of the fact that the 6-inch Ordnance sheet<sup>1</sup> states that a stone coffin containing human remains was found here, or very near here, in 1850.

"Barbara's Hillock" (fig. 1) is situated about  $1\frac{3}{4}$  miles to the N.W. of the centre of the town of Turriff, and half a mile to the E.N.E. of Forglen House, from which it is separated by the river Deveron. The centre of the mound is only 200 feet E. of the farm known as "Haughs of Ashogle," 1000 feet W. of Tillyfar Farm, and 630 feet W. of the nearest point of the Great North of Scotland Railway between Turriff and Macduff. From "Barbara's Hillock" the slight mound known as "Rounie Law" is just a mile distant in a S.S.W. direction, and the

<sup>1</sup> Aberdeenshire, Sheet XI. S. W. ; Banffshire, Sheet XVII. S. W.

tumulus in which three Bronze Age beakers were found recently<sup>1</sup> is  $7\frac{1}{2}$  furlongs to the S.W.

The summit of the hillock is about 150 feet above sea-level, and is bounded on the N. and S. by hills rising abruptly to a height of about 190 feet. The top of the mound rises to a height of about 18 feet above the natural slope of the surrounding ground, which falls from E.N.E. to W.S.W.

The first day was devoted to making a contoured plan of the mound,



Fig. 1. View of "Barbara's Hillock" from E.N.E.

with contours of 1 foot vertical height. The area enclosed by the marginal lines of the plan embraced nearly two-fifths of an acre, and included a portion of the road connecting Haughs of Ashogle and Tillyfar farms.<sup>2</sup> There is a fall of  $30\frac{1}{2}$  feet from the top of the mound to the W. corner of the plan. The contours show that the mound is not circular by any means, but of an irregular oval outline. The slight recess on the N.N.W. side is the result of digging carried on by a late

<sup>1</sup> Recorded by Mr J. Graham Callander, F.S.A. Scot., in the *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, vol. xl.

<sup>2</sup> On the S. side of the road there is a small quarry for obtaining stone for repairing farm buildings.

tenant of the farm about fifty years ago ; some of the débris thrown out on that occasion is seen at the foot of the mound and some to the S.W. of his digging, as shown by the ridge indicated by the contours.

The excavations were begun on the second day, the intention being to dig a cutting 15 feet wide through the mound from N.E. to S.W. During the first morning nothing but shards of modern pottery were found at the foot of the mound and near the surface, and at the close of the day a rotten shaley rock was reached, apparently *in situ*. Digging was stopped here, and an excavation was made on the line of the cutting but nearer the summit of the mound. Natural rock was soon reached here also. Finally, a large hole was made on the summit, and the material excavated (surface mould, sand, and quartz and quartzite pebbles) was seen to be closely packed and had the appearance of not having been artificially placed there. The natural rock having been reached at a depth of 5 feet, the work was abandoned, sufficient evidence having been obtained that "Barbara's Hillock" is of natural formation.

Since the excavations I have been informed by the Director-General of the Ordnance Surveys that, with regard to the Stone Coffin found in 1850, there is no record of its being discovered *in* "Barbara's Hillock," or even close to the side of it, but it "was found by Mr Jamieson of Haughs of Ashogle whilst cultivating his land. It contained calcined bones, but no urn. The authorities for the name 'Barbara's Hillock' were Will Jamieson of Haughs of Ashogle, Captain Morrison of Knockiemill Cottage, and James Clark of Tillyfar."

## II. "ROUNIE LAW," PARISH OF FORGLEN, BANFFSHIRE.

"Rounie Law" is situated in an arable field, forming part of Kirk-town Farm, 1 mile to the S.S.W. of "Barbara's Hillock," 300 yards S.E. of the tumulus in the wood in which three Bronze Age beakers were found early in 1906 (before mentioned), and nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile N.E. of Forglen church. Judging from the contours on the 6-inch Ordnance sheet, the site is about 340 feet above sea-level, the highest ground for

some considerable distance on all sides. A commanding view is obtained in W., S., and E. directions, and before Meadowheads Wood was planted an extensive view was also obtainable in a northerly direction. We therefore felt sanguine of obtaining more interesting archæological results than when we commenced operations at "Barbara's Hillock."

The slight mound is barely recognisable, the centre being only 8 inches higher than the surrounding field. Even less noticeable was the encircling ditch, now, aided by the plough, almost completely filled up, the middle of the silting being, according to levels taken, only 3 inches lower than the surrounding level of the ground, and 11 inches below the middle of the mound.

Ditches of barrows have frequently been missed in archæological excavations, having become completely filled up owing to denudation and agricultural operations; many others, traceable on the surface, have been left unexcavated. Indeed it is only since the notable excavations conducted by the late General Pitt-Rivers in Wilts and Dorset were put on record, that archæologists have been able to appreciate the fact that valuable evidence of date is often obtainable by ditch-digging, whether in connection with camps, barrows, or other ancient sites. Frequently in his excavations of barrows and camps it was not at first known whether surrounding ditches existed, but cuttings made in the position in which they might be expected often revealed, not only clean-cut fossæ, but also relics, and sometimes human interments of vast archæological importance.

It was in the hope of finding an encircling ditch of prehistoric origin that excavations were begun at "Rounie Law" on 28th July 1906 (continuing them until 1st August). Owing to the slight height of the mound, reduced by the constant disturbance of the ground by ploughing, we had no great hopes of finding human remains in the mound, or at least not in good condition, unless a depression had been cut in the natural sand for the reception of an interment.

Firstly, a square was formed round the parts to be excavated, enclosing an area of a little less than an eighth of an acre (fig. 2). The sides of

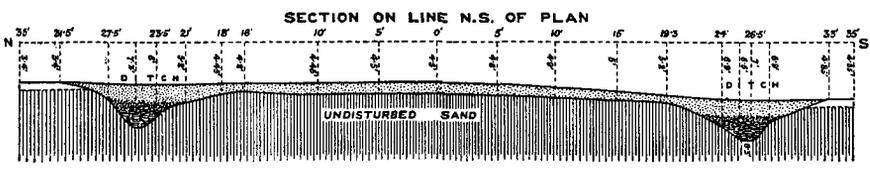
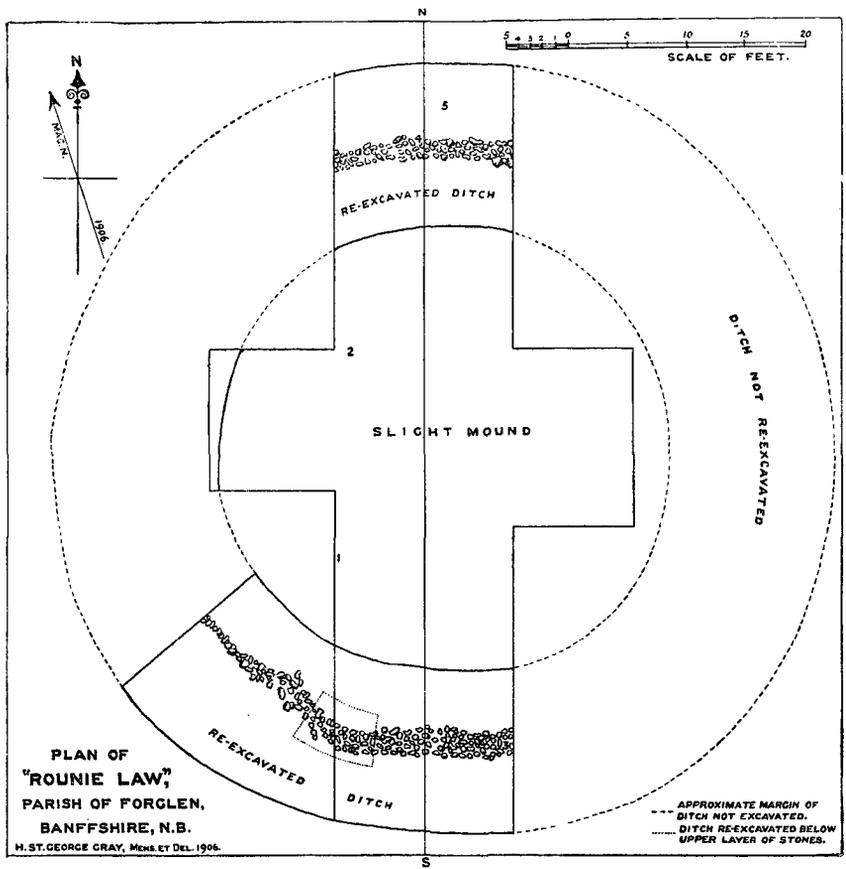


Fig. 2. Plan and Section of Excavations at Rounie Law.

the square were oriented to the four points of the compass by means of a prismatic compass, the magnetic variation at Turiff on 1st January 1906 being  $18^{\circ} 40'$  west of true north.<sup>1</sup>

The excavations were begun by making a cutting from S. to N., 15 feet wide, the mound proper being dug first, after which the cutting was extended in both directions in the endeavour to find an encircling ditch. On the E. side of the main cutting an extension was made in the middle, measuring 15 by 10 feet, and on the W. the cutting was extended by an area measuring 12 by  $10\frac{1}{2}$  feet. Nothing was found in the mound beyond several modern shards near the surface, and a worked

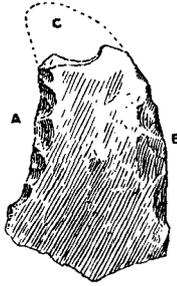


Fig. 3. Worked Flint found at "1" on Plan.

flint implement on the surface at "1" on plan, and a flint flake without secondary chipping at "2," depth 0.2 feet.<sup>2</sup> No. 1 is of very light drab colour; the under-face is unworked. The illustration (fig. 3) represents the worked face full size. The secondary chipping along edge A is certainly artificial; that on edge B is probably artificial; C represents the part which is deficient. The undisturbed sand was reached as an even floor at a maximum depth of 1 foot from the summit of the mound and a minimum depth of 0.65 feet at the margins. The surface of the sand was closely examined in the hope of finding a cut

<sup>1</sup> The magnetic variation was obtained from the Director-General of the Ordnance Surveys, Southampton.

<sup>2</sup> Mr Henry Balfour, of Oxford, has kindly looked at some of the flints from "Rounie Law."

hole in which an interment might have been deposited.<sup>1</sup> In some parts the peaty mould was very dark—indeed, almost black, and was full of root-fibres; in other places hard ferruginous “pan” was observed deposited on the sand.<sup>2</sup>

Having obtained unsatisfactory results from the excavation of the mound, we next turned our attention to the ditch, the inner margin of which was found at the N., S., and W. in excavating the interior space. In digging out the upper “spits” of the ditch at the N. and S. it was found that rich mould extended to an average depth of 1·6 feet, as seen in the sectional diagram on the line N S. of plan. Below this the silting was composed of very dark mould, almost black. At an average depth of 1·8 feet from the middle of the silting an irregular and uneven mass of nodular stones and pebbles was reached; the stones consisted of sandstone, quartz, and quartzite, ranging from 2 to 10 inches in length. These extended from an average depth of 1·8 to 2·5 feet, and at this depth the excavation of the N. and S. 15-feet of ditch was temporarily discontinued. This wall, or paving, of which several photographs were taken, was found as a confused mass of stones, the interspaces being filled with black earth, a sample of which I sent to Mr Clement Reid, F.R.S., who reported as follows:—“Black earth with finely divided carbonaceous matter—one small fragment of charcoal. This suggests trodden charcoal rather than peat, as no trace of fibre is visible; the sample contains no seeds.” The width of the walling was found to vary from 1·3 to 2·4 feet, and to be rather nearer the inner than the outer margin of the ditch; the average width of the ditch at the top proved to be 14 feet.

Adhering to the sides of the ditch in places, from a foot below the surface to the level of the upper layer of stones, thin layers

<sup>1</sup> In certain places the sand was of a bright “light-red” colour, mixed with tiny angular stones. A sample of this has been examined by Mr Clement Reid, who reports that “the colour is due to iron-oxide, the result either of burning or weathering a loam derived from the glacial deposits; the stones are not such as to show marks of fire.”

<sup>2</sup> This does not, as a rule, form rapidly, but need not take many years.

of a rather dark grey material were noticed. Mr Reid has kindly examined a sample, and reports that it is composed of "sandy loam and small angular stones. It looks like rain-wash derived from the boulder clay, not like soil derived from the weathering of the underlying rock."

From the southern 15-foot cutting the re-excavation of the ditch down to the layer of stones was continued in a westerly direction, so that 45 feet (measured along the stones) of ditch were excavated in all. As before stated, the inner margin of the ditch on the W. side was traced, and dotted lines have been indicated on the plan to show the approximate size and extent of the ditch. It is circular, or nearly so, with a circumference (measured along the bottom of the ditch) of 162 feet, and an exterior diameter of  $65\frac{1}{2}$  feet, leaving about  $37\frac{1}{2}$  feet as the diameter of the mound bounded by the inner margin of the ditch.

Although the stones in the ditch were fairly regularly placed in the N. and S. 15-foot cuttings, their position in the extension cutting made on the S.W. indicates that if they were not originally deposited in systematic order, they were left in the position shown on the plan at the time when the ditch was allowed to silt up. Towards the west the confused mass of stones was found to taper to a single row (fig. 4). In the N. cutting, and on the S. within the margin of the fine dotted line (see plan), these upper nodular stones were removed, and the sides of the ditch cut into the natural sand were traced down to a maximum depth of 3.7 feet from the surface, the profiles of the two sections of the ditch being shown in the sectional diagram. Below the nodular stones (maximum depth 0.7 feet) an entirely different "filling" was found, consisting of thin slabs of shaley stone, some a foot long, loosely arranged horizontally with sand between, but no black mould. Dr J. Horne, F.R.S., chief of the Geological Survey of Scotland, has kindly examined a specimen of this stone, which he describes as the bluish-grey type of Banffshire slate, which is well developed in the parish of Forglan.

A few pieces of glazed pottery, probably 18th or early 19th century, were found in the ditch (certainly not below the nodular stones); some were picked up at a greater depth than one would expect to find them if the ditch is of ancient origin. As a large proportion of the silting was dug out vertically, and the workmen being untrained, it was difficult to be certain as to the exact depth of these shards, but the

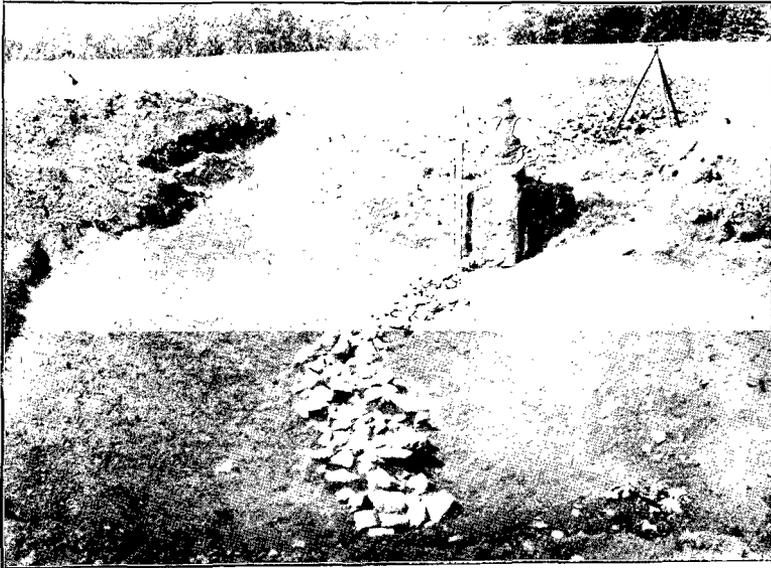


Fig. 4. View of Stones in re-excavated Ditch at Rounie Law.

position of the three flints found in the silting I was able to determine with accuracy. At "3" on plan (fig. 2) a flint flake was found at a depth of 1.9 feet, amongst the upper layer of stones (this flake is doubtfully artificial); at "4" a small flint slightly resembling a core, depth 1.5 feet in mould (this is also doubtfully artificial); and at "5" a flint chip, depth 1.3 feet, which is very probably natural. Nothing, therefore, positively of prehistoric date was found in any part of the excavations;

and it is quite possible that the few flints found may have been in the soil before "Rounie Law" was constructed.

For what purpose were these flat slabs of stone and the nodular ones above them placed in the ditch? It is a question we have been unable to determine with any degree of certainty. Although I have excavated ditches of barrows and camps datable to the Stone, Bronze, Romano-British, and Norman periods, I have never seen anything similar, and it is hoped that the publication of this paper may result in the elucidation of the problem, by comparison with similar excavations, if any have been made.

The upper stones cannot be regarded as a "paved way," for they are too rough even for prehistoric feet. Ditches lined with wood are not unknown. Mr S. Jackson found a flooring of poles at the bottom of a Bronze Age ditch at Fairsnape Farm, Bleasdale, near Garstang.<sup>1</sup> The stones at "Rounie Law" may perhaps have been placed in the ditch as stepping-stones when the sand bottom of the ditch was under water in wet seasons; on the other hand, they may represent the remains of a rough wall. Mr Reid suggests that the slabs of slate may have formed a continuous hearth round the ditch, the nodular stones above being "heaters." He makes this suggestion probably on account of the presence of charcoal, but although I examined several of the stones I did not observe any traces of fire.

Time did not permit us to carry on the excavation of the ditch further; we have, therefore, not determined whether an entrance-causeway of sand, or other material, exists.

During the excavations the tenant of the farm, Mr John Cameron, stated that there was a tradition that "Rounie Law" was used as a stance for holding fairs and markets about a hundred years ago; and since the excavations were made, the Hon. John Abercromby has found the following in the *Old Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. xiv. p. 544, published in 1795:—"There is a know called

<sup>1</sup> See Professor Boyd Dawkins's paper on the subject, *Trans. Lanc. and Ches. Antiq. Soc.*, xviii. 114-124.

the 'Rounie Law' where formerly markets were held on side of the wood of Forglen a little north of the church. None are held now." It does not follow that "Rounie Law" was originally constructed for the purpose of markets, and its origin has probably far greater antiquity.

Since writing this paper the Director-General of the Ordnance Surveys has sent me the following extract from his records:—"Rounie Law.—A small hillock surrounded by a ditch or fosse much defaced by ploughing over it. There is some difference of opinion as to what class of antiquities this object belongs. In the *New Statistical Account* it is described as a barrow or tumulus, while in the *Old Statistical Account* it is said to have been a place where markets were held. On inquiry I cannot find any person who ever knew or recollects of markets being held here, while the general opinion is that it belongs to that class described as barrows. Another opinion is that it is one of the Moothills of the Ancient Britons, but I cannot find sufficient authority to support this opinion."