

## XVI.—THE PRE-HISTORIC CAMPS OF NORTHUMBERLAND.

BY R. C. HEDLEY.

[Read on the 28th March, 1888.]

AN apology may appear to be needed for treating this subject at some length. Such a mode of treatment seems however to be warranted from the fact that, with the exception of the Rev. G. Rome Hall's exhaustive and able papers on the Camps of Upper Tynedale<sup>1</sup>, nothing has been done towards a *systematic* examination and description of this class of pre-historic antiquities for the purposes of Comparative Archaeology. The Ancient Briton as deposited in the grave has received much attention:—his mode of burial, by inhumation, or after cremation;—his cinerary urns and other sepulchral vessels;—his implements, domestic and warlike;—his personal appearance and mental capacity as shown by his skull and other bones; all these have been studied, described, and illustrated ably and exhaustively: but of the people who occupied Northumberland previous to the Roman invasion, in relation to their domestic and political life, we have very little information. It is obvious that an investigation of the nature of their habitations and places of defence must throw strong light on their manner of life. A recital of dry facts and details, in many cases isolated, may not possess the interest attached to more tangible results,—such as the discovery of an altar, a weapon, or an urn,—but it is to be hoped that the series of papers which it is proposed to lay before the Society, with a view to assist in this investigation, may not be entirely resultless. I have undertaken to plan and describe these fortified sites in Northumberland which I may from time to time have an opportunity of surveying and examining. I shall endeavour in this effort to avoid speculation, and to bring forward the facts in each case with as strict a regard to accurate observation and correct relation as I am able.

### THE CAMPS OF UPPER COQUETDALE.

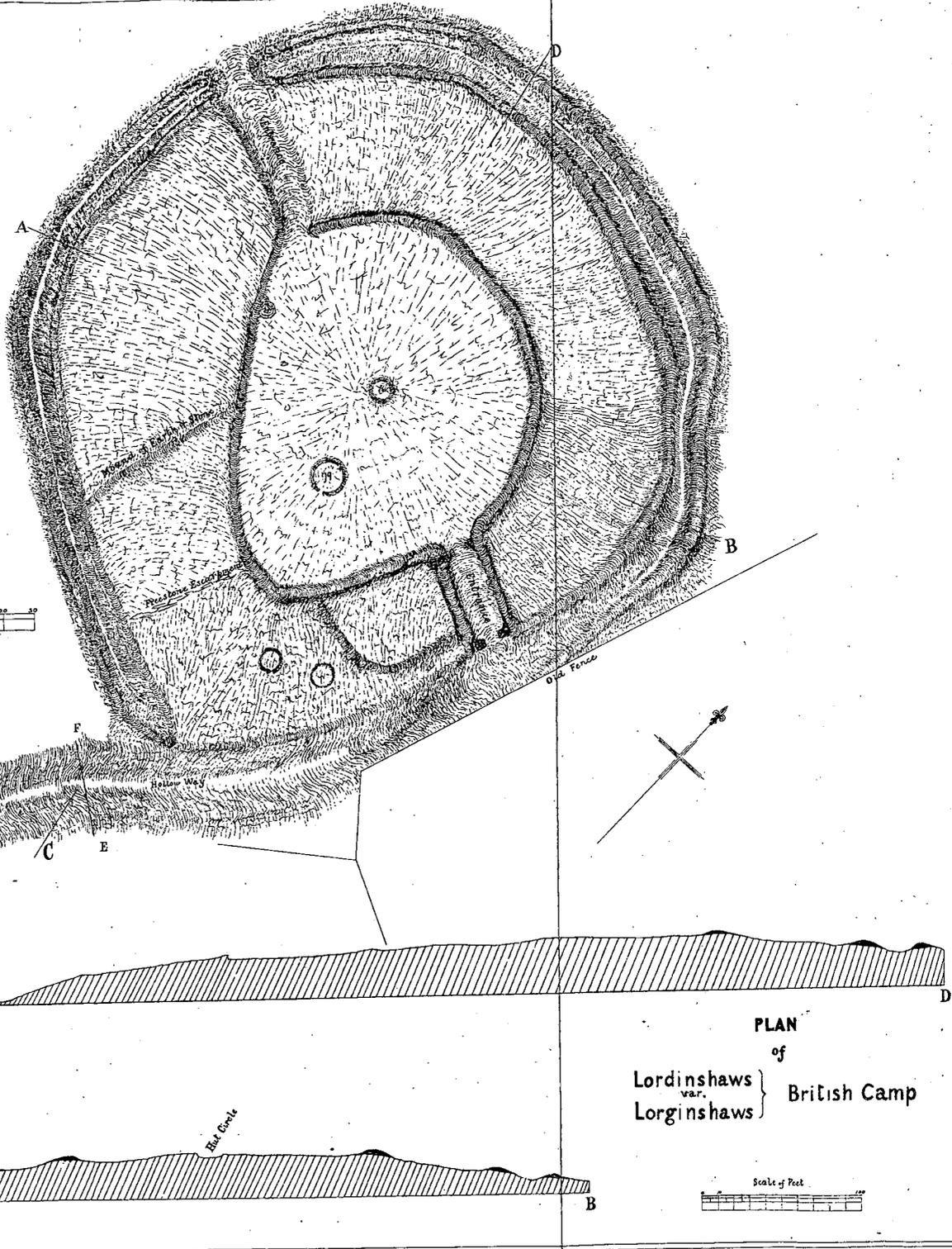
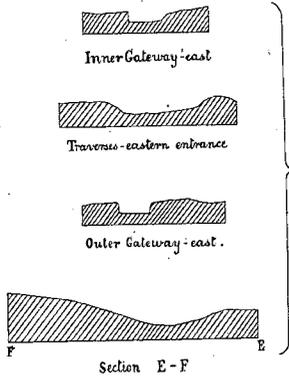
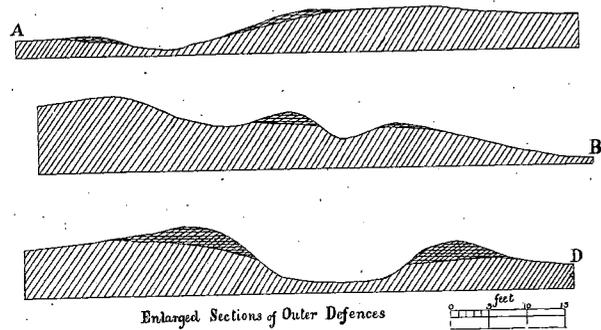
In the examination of this series, I have been associated with Mr. D. D. Dixon, of Rothbury, to whose local knowledge and interest in

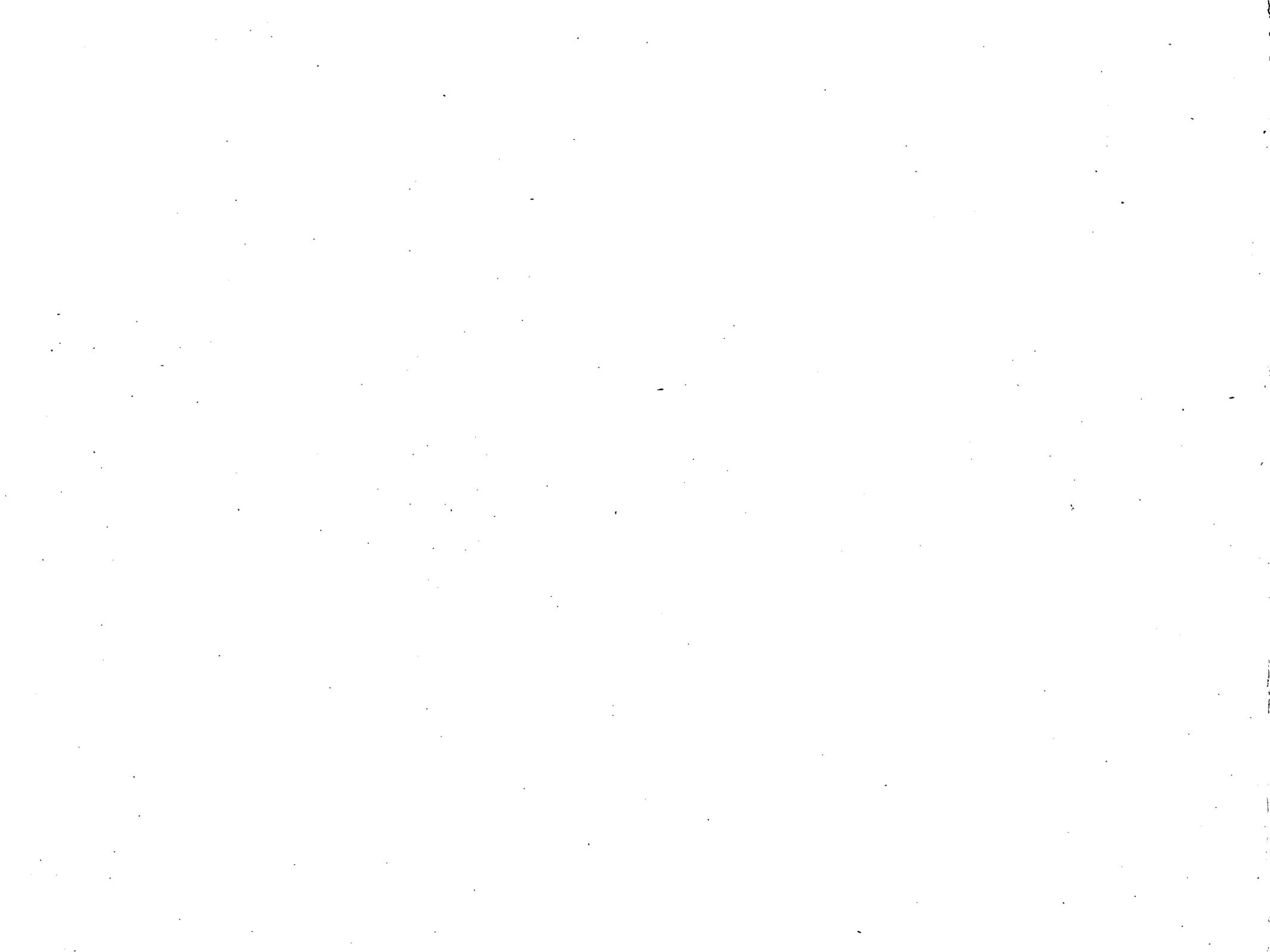
<sup>1</sup> *Archaeologia Aeliana*, Vol. VII., pp. 3-17.

this subject much is due. The district of Upper Coquetdale lying between Brinkburn priory on the east and Alwinton on the west, a distance of 15 miles, is peculiarly rich in evidences of early occupation. These consist of fortified sites, hut circles, burial mounds, and standing and incised stones. I propose to lay before the Society a plan and description of each important camp, and notice the other remains of pre-Roman occupation in connection therewith, in order of position, commencing with the eastern part of the district.

#### LORDENSHAWS OR LURGANSHAWS.

This camp is situated at the north-western extremity of Lee Ward township, and in that part of Rothbury parish, known as 'Rothbury Forest.' It is about  $1\frac{3}{4}$  miles due south from Rothbury, and occupies, as is usual the summit of a lofty ridge (an eastern spur of Simon-side), 879 feet above sea level. The view from the ramparts is extensive, and includes much of the Chéviot range, Druridge Bay, Coquet Island, and the valley of the Coquet from Warkworth to Harbottle. This position implies an obvious and ready means of communication with a large tract of country which may be assumed to have been extensively occupied in pre-historic times judging by the evidences still left to us, remembering also that many remains have been swept away by lapse of time and cultivation. This communication with places at a distance may have been rendered more easy and far-reaching by the use of Spy Law as a signal station. This hill forms a prominent feature in many Northumbrian landscapes, being 1,181 feet above sea level. On its summit is a huge pile of rough stones, displaying neither methodical arrangements nor any distinct indication of its ancient use. On a platform west from the pile is a circle composed of heaped up stones, which has an internal diameter of 36 feet, and an external one of 54 feet. As Spy Law is also known as 'The Beacon,' it probably was used as a site for one of the fires which gave the alarm on the occasions of Scotch forays, and it may have been used in still earlier times for a similar purpose. It would be vain at present to hazard an opinion as to the uses to which this pile and circle were originally put; they have been regarded as watch-towers, but no evidence has been advanced in favour of this supposition.





It may be remarked that, as in the case of most camps, so also at Lurganshaws, the site is overlooked by a higher hill at no great distance. This might seem to be a great disadvantage, but an apparently inferior site was perhaps necessitated by its being essential to have such a supply of water as was not obtainable at the higher elevation.

From the ramparts of Lurganshaws may be seen the camp of Burgh near Great Tosson, on its green basaltic hill, in striking contrast to the surrounding dark heath: this is to the south of the Coquet. To the north are 'Old Rothbury' and West Hills camps,—to the east Garleigh Pike, with its group of hut circles, southward is Ewesley camp, and further up the Coquet valley may be seen the camps at Newtown, Harehaugh Hill, Hetchester, and Caistron (Ceasterton). In a more comprehensive view may be seen Robert's Law, Cartington Pike, Debdon Moors, Cragside, and the hills of Rimside Moor, all of which bear evidences of early occupation.

The camp at Lurganshaws is one of the most perfect in the county. Its defences are in good preservation except in a part of the eastern ramparts where the two outer lines are much destroyed; probably due to the cultivation of the adjoining land, and is distinguished in the parish tithe maps as 'Old Improvement.' The defences consist of three ramparts of earth and stone, with a ditch between the two outer ones, which at present is in many places 12 feet deep. The outer rampart has a circumference of 474 yards and encloses an area of 3·483 acres. The innermost one with a circumference of 225 yards encloses an area of 1·282 acres, thus leaving a space of 2·201 acres: this large area between the two lines of defence appears to point to a provision for enclosing and defending the flocks and herds of the occupiers of the camp. The intermediate space, as will appear by the plan, is subdivided, the portion to the south of the west gateway being terraced in a fashion that does not occur anywhere around, and is undoubtedly artificial as shown by its regularity. This terracing is shown in section A-B. In form Lurganshaws camp is an irregular oval. It has two entrances; an eastern and a western. That on the eastern side is an elaborate defensive work strengthened by traverses to the right and left, which extend between the outer and the innermost rampart, and form a passage 66 feet long and 18 wide, narrowed at the gateways to 8 feet.

4 inches. This protected passage way with its outer and inner gates may be considered as a rude proto-type of the mediæval barbican. The western gateway possesses at present only one traverse, on the right side, and it is not improbable that this may be accordance with the original plan, as there are other instances of gateways which have only a single traverse also to the right hand, for instance, as at Quarry House<sup>2</sup> and Old Rothbury. A suggestion may be offered as to this seemingly incomplete defence. The sword arm of any assailant penetrating the outer gateway, and not his shield protected left, would be exposed to the attacks of the defenders stationed behind the traverse on the right.

The outer gates at Lurganshaws have large blocks of sandstone on each side; those at the western gateway have been mutilated probably by the 13th century builders of Robert Fitz Roger's deer park wall, which runs past the west side of the camp. The presence of this wall may also account for the mutilation of the incised stone, noticed hereafter, and also for the incomplete state of the southern ramparts, which seem to have been robbed of many of their stones. The gateway stones of the eastern entrance still remain almost in their original state.

Traces of a roadway may still be seen between the eastern and western entrances.

The principal traffic has been through the eastern gate. A hollow way leads up towards this gate as shown on the plan. It is from 4 to 9 feet deep, but does not lead quite up to the gate: it may have done so originally, but I am not inclined to suppose that this hollow way is to any great extent, if at all, designedly artificial.<sup>3</sup> Previous to the construction of the camp, the gully probably existed in a modified form, and carried off the drainage from the plateau above: during the use of the camp, the constant traffic of men and animals, and the flow of a considerable amount of drainage water, would easily hollow out the way to its present dimensions. Many of these so-called hollow ways exist in the district of Lurganshaws, and are regarded by some as roadways of pre-historic times; the evidence of their artificial nature is very slender; the main fact insisted upon is their apparent connection with camps: this may be explained by the reasons given above in connection with Lurganshaws.

<sup>2</sup> *Archæologia Aeliana*, Vol. XII., p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> Canon Greenwell believes "that they are trackways of people bringing peat from the bogs."

A line of stones, described in the Parish Tithe Maps as 'Large stones set in a line,' and which seem to be either designedly or accidentally, a continuation of the hollow way extends across the morass, between the hill on which the camp is situated and Garleigh Pike. Similar alignments are also to be seen on the northern and south-eastern slopes of the hill: these have been noticed by Canon Greenwell in *British Barrows*, p. 430.

In the space between the outer and second ramparts at Lurganshaws, on the southern and south-eastern sides of the camp, are a series of earth and stone rampiers, dividing the intermediate space between the defences, into several enclosures, which may have been used as night-folds for the protection of the occupiers' stock. Within one of the subdivisions are the remains of two hut-circles each 15 feet in diameter.

Within the inner rampart are remains of several hut circles, two have been excavated, the larger one, 19 feet in diameter, has an encircling wall about 2 feet high, formed carefully of freestone slabs. Another small chamber has been formed in the thickness of the southern rampart; and the walls at least on the west side seem to have been straight lines. This, probably a guard chamber, is situated on the side of the camp immediately facing Spy Law.

Two large rocks in the neighbourhood of Lurganshaws camp have cut upon them the mysterious markings, which were first brought to public notice by Canon Greenwell in a paper read before the Archaeological Institute at Newcastle, in July, 1852. Several series of these markings have been figured and described by the late Mr. Geo. Tate, in *Proceedings of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Field Club*, Vol. V., 1864, p. 137. The Lurganshaws series is as yet inedited: the first of them was only discovered so late as 1870. I forbear, at present, to make any conjectures as to their meaning, merely remarking their frequent association with camps and occurrence in intimate connection with burials.

In relation to the camp, the rocks at Lurganshaws are as follows. The first is a large earth-fast rock 238 yards west from the western gateway. Part of the northern face has been quarried away, cutting through the centres of two series of circles, as shown by the rubbing; 15 markings are still left in fairly perfect condition. The next is

154 yards north-north-west from the first : it is comparatively a small stone, but contains an interesting example of the horse-shoe marking, with a series of pits within it.

Two other large rocks, 187 yards east from the north-east angle of the camp, contain many pits and hollows, which are probably artificial, being possibly the remains of the central cups and markings which have yielded to the action of the weather. This fate will soon overtake the other incised stones, now that their covering of peat and heath has been removed.

#### OLD ROTHBURY CAMP.

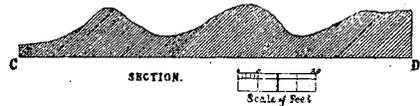
[Read on the 26th September, 1888.]

HALF a mile N.W. from Rothbury, and immediately behind The Penny Stane Quarry, is situated the camp of Old Rothbury. It occupies the western extremity of the freestone range which encircles Lord Armstrong's grounds at Crag-side and the village of Rothbury. The situation is naturally a very strong one on its northern and western sides. To the east it is sheltered by a higher plateau of the same formation, but this shelter is gained at the expense of security, as the site is overlooked and commanded from this plateau within bowshot of the ramparts.

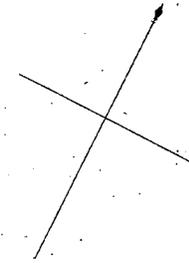
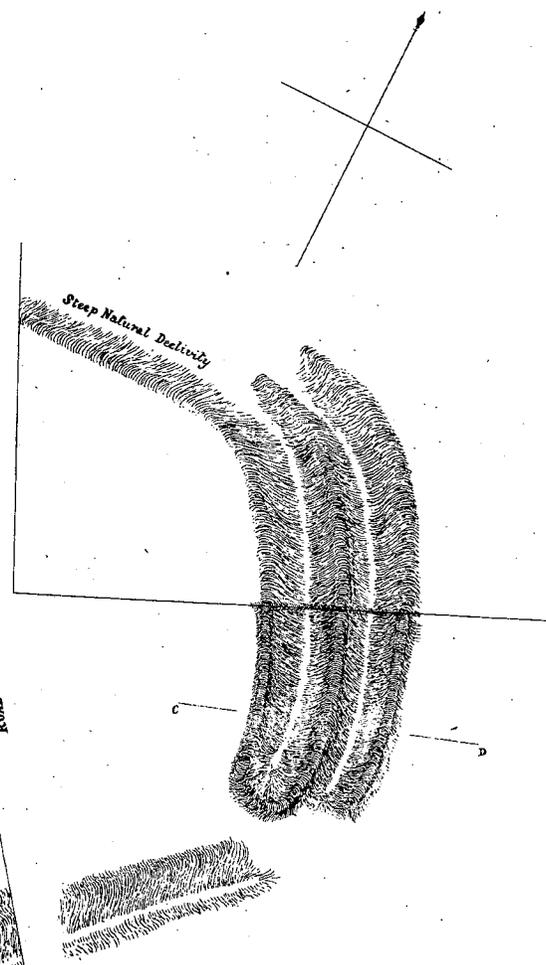
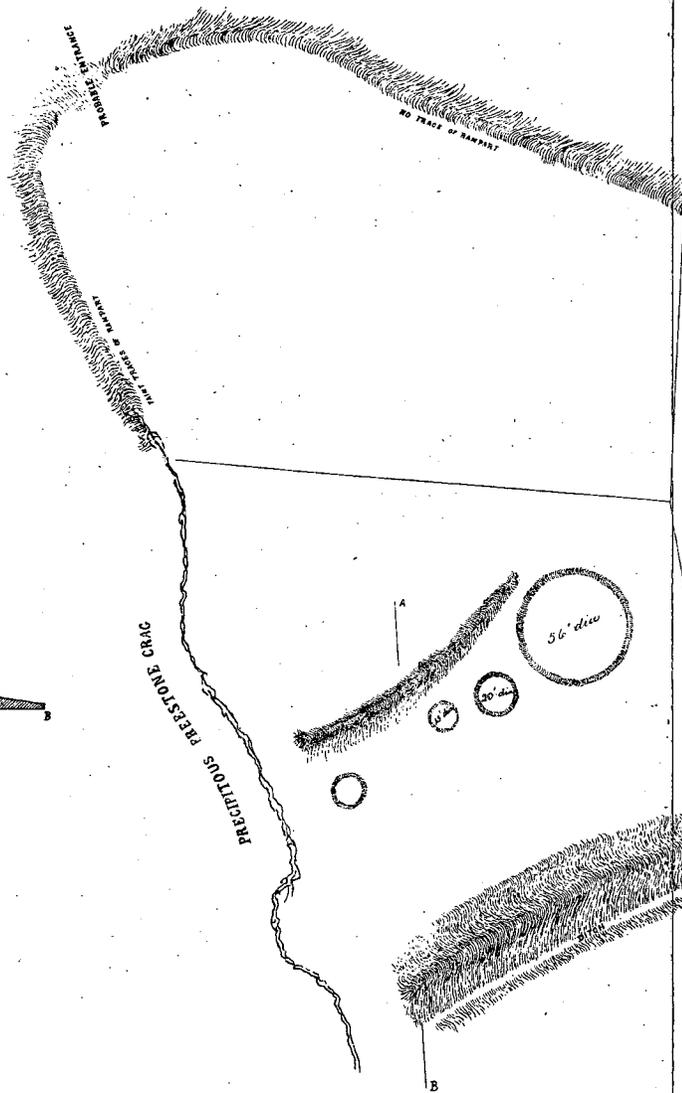
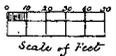
The camp area is intersected N. and S. by a road, and E. and W. by a farm fence. Such portions as lie to the north of this fence have been under-cultivation, and consequently the defences have been very much destroyed.

The eastern lines immediately N. of the gateway mentioned below are in particularly fine preservation. They consist of two ramparts and two ditches : the dimensions of which are as follows. Depth of first ditch, 5 feet 8 inches ; height of first rampart from outer ditch, 7 feet 4 inches ; depth of inner ditch, 8 feet 6 inches ; height of inner rampart, 7 feet.

The defence of the south side has consisted of two ramparts and two ditches. Of these, little that is instructive now remains. The situation here is marshy, and possibly the stones composing the ramparts have been extracted to use for other purposes. The ramparts end



"OLD ROTHBURY" CAMP.



R. C. Hedley mens. et del. 1887



abruptly at their western extremity, and leave a passage 35 feet wide, which may have been, and probably was, one of the camp gateways.

The west side of the site, at least southward of the stone wall mentioned as intersecting the camp, is naturally very well defended, for here the freestone range ends in a rugged and inaccessible crag. Northward of the stone wall where the natural position is weaker, a rampart of stone has been constructed, of this little remains but heaps of rubble and refuse, as the stones suitable for walling have been taken away.

Several circular dwellings may be traced in the angle between this rampart and the modern stone wall; these possess no special features of interest, and have only escaped by their situation near the crag face, where an insufficiency of soil prevented cultivation.

Much detritus covers the crag face at the north-east corner, and this seems to have been taken advantage of for use as a roadway, probably to the well situate near the base of the hill, within the outer ramparts, and not far from Kimmernod house.

The north face of the camp site, though covered with soil and stone rubbish, is still very steep, and has been regarded as sufficiently strong to need no further protection than that afforded by a rampart and ditch scarcely traceable now, and probably at no time very large. These are not shown on the plan. This defence runs round the base of the hill, and includes the well of the camp within its circuit.

A fine entrance to this camp may be seen at the S.E. corner, where a ledge of rock forms an excellent passage to the hill face overhanging Rothbury. This gateway may have had some connection with a rampart and ditch, which, first seen near the County Hotel, run up the hill face towards the camp, and join in a portion of their course, a deep gully known as Antons Letch, which once used to harbour a ghost. To the north of this south-east entrance, the outer rampart is recurved to meet the inner; thus forming as may be seen in other examples,<sup>4</sup> a traverse to the right hand on entering.

The total area enclosed by the inner part of Old Rothbury is 3.429 acres, within a circuit of 530 yards.

A curious feature in this camp is a mound of earth and stone shown on the plan. It may have been a portion of a camp which

<sup>4</sup> See Vol. XII., p. 159.

existed here when the present double ramparted area was enclosed, or it may be the remains of a division or defence for enclosing the flocks and herds of the tribe or community who occupied the camp. What militates against either suggestion is that the termination of the embankment near the centre of the camp, is quite distinct, and its further course across the area is not to be traced even with the aid of the imagination. A third suggestion is that it may have been constructed specially as a shelter from the north to a group of 10 or 12 hut-circles clustered under its southern side. The most easterly of these circles is of very great diameter, viz., 56 feet, the one next to it on the west is also greater than any of the others now remaining, being 20 feet across, whereas the ordinary diameter is 16 feet. Without any great stretch of the imagination, we may regard this very large circle, which was probably never roofed in, as a place of general assembly, and the large circle next it as the abode of some person of greater consequence than those housed in the lesser huts.

Round about Old Rothbury the hills are studded with burial mounds: two of these have been examined by Canon Greenwell.<sup>5</sup> One of these burial mounds is known as 'The Futtbaa' Cairn': it is situated on the hill immediately to the north of the camp.

Mr. D. D. Dixon says, 'it was here where, a few years ago, according to ancient custom, the ball to be contested for by the inhabitants of Thropton and Rothbury, was thrown up with all due ceremony by the village bailiffs, who carried with them their halberts,—insignia of office.' This custom of a football contest at Shrovetide is of great antiquity.<sup>6</sup>

Round about the camp are scattered hut-circles and earthworks, the particular uses of which are not now very apparent. It is probable that these earthworks are co-aeval with the camp, and were used at such times as the camp was not occupied. The camps known as 'British' seem from their situation and construction to have been made, not for permanent residence or to withstand a long siege, but only to retire to in times of danger, and to form a defence against surprise. From what we know of uncivilised races, we may infer that the ancient Britons during times known vaguely as pre-historic, would,

<sup>5</sup> *British Barrons*, p. 428 to 433.

<sup>6</sup> Brand's *Popular Antiquities*, 4to, 1813, Vol. I., pp. 62, 76.

when not united into their respective septs in time of tribal danger, be addicted as their successors up to the 17th and even 18th century were to cattle-lifting and petty forays. Such a state of insecurity may have caused the construction of the camp which is under consideration.

A large oblong rock jutting out from the southern face of the hill on which the camp stands, is known as 'Kate's Kist.' It has a horizontal cleft near its top. Whether this curious name is a freak of modern local nomenclature, or whether it enjoyed a more extended use, going back to pre-Roman times, it is not for us to suggest.

Below the camp also is Cartington Cove, a recess or cave which local tradition says is connected by a subterranean passage with Cartington Castle, three miles distant! However, much we may be inclined to smile at the credulity which accepted without question such a tradition as this, at the same time it is quite possible, that, though perverted by centuries of oral transmission, we have in these traditions, the mark of some event sufficiently important at the time of its occurrence to have a place in the unwritten volume of local records.

The rock at Cartington Cove has a series of rock markings upon it. These consist of simple pits or hollows, if any concentric circles and grooves ever existed, they have now disappeared. These markings are known locally as Cups and Saucers; they are referred to in *Ancient British Sculptured Rocks of Northumberland*, by Mr. Geo. Tate, p. 10.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Berwickshire Naturalists' Field Club Transactions*, Vol. V., pp: 137-138.