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978-1-107-53664-7 - On Some Antiquities in the Neighbourhood of Dunecht House Aberdeenshire

G. F. Browne

Frontmatter

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IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF
DUNECHT HOUSE ABERDEENSHIRE

BY

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TO
THE BRIGHTNESS OF FRIENDSHIP
AT
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PREFACE

IN the autumn of 1919 some of the guests of Lady Cowdray at Dunecht House, on her Scottish estate of Dunecht, found marked on a large-scale Ordnance Map a Stone Circle, about 3 miles off in a direct line, quite near a main road, and about a mile further on another Stone Circle, also quite near a road. A car was called for, and Lord Cowdray and two friends, one of them an engineer, the other a person devoted to archaeology, went to look for the circles. They found the first circle in a small wood of fir trees. The archaeologist declared the principal feature of the circle to be unique in his experience, while mentioning the fact that he had never studied rude stone monuments which had neither patterns nor inscriptions to give them human interest. They went on to the next circle, and found the same apparently unique feature. Later on, they went to yet another Stone Circle marked on the map, and again found the apparently unique feature. Only the first circle was complete. The second circle had lost several of its stones. The third had lost more, but two or three of them were lying down *in situ*. In the autumn of 1920 Lady Cowdray and the writer visited and measured a large number of circles, unfortunately in terrible weather for the most part.

It was known to the archaeologist that there were ogam inscriptions in the district, two of them being among the most important in Caledonia; and that within an easy motor drive there was a minuscule inscription of six lines of which no satisfactory explanation had been given. This inscription they had visited in a previous year.

Further, the quick eye of the hostess of Dunecht had caught sight of some curious sculptures on a stone by the road-side on the way to the minuscule inscription; and other like stones in the neighbourhood had been shewn in Stuart's two volumes of *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*.

The suggestion was then made that for the sake of visitors at Dunecht a sort of guide book should be prepared, giving some simple description of the several objects and their meaning and uses.

Of course the thing grew, grew beyond all original ideas of what it should be. As will be seen by any one who is good enough to glance at it, a good deal of investigation and enquiry has been involved, and the enquiry has now and then led towards scientific matters. But the book does not profess to be scientific, and has no sort of claim to be conclusive or positive or exhaustive or didactic. It is meant to quicken interest in some of the many interesting

objects which are still to be found between Dee and Don ; to quicken interest is to effect an insurance against neglect or destruction. It is not meant for the experts on any of the many points touched ; but the writer has done his best to avoid misleading his reader, even when he has ventured upon fields where experts will not tread. It is the work of one who knows just enough about it to know how little he knows. Unfortunately on one point of great importance in dealing with old stones, namely petrology, he knows nothing at all. How great a loss this is, both to the interest in the stone circles and to the reputation of their prehistoric builders for skill and knowledge, is pointed out in the course of the book.

The largest Plates are almost all of them from photographs specially taken by the local photographer Mr R. Benzie of Dunecht. The half-size Plates are almost all of them from photographs presented by Mr James Ritchie of Hawthorn Cottage, Port Elphinstone, Inverurie, who has given learned help in all directions for which the writer is deeply grateful. His best thanks are due also, and are here tendered, to the authorities of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, for allowing him to make use of their articles on several of the stone circles of Aberdeenshire, and for putting at his disposal plans of circles from their *Proceedings*, and their block of the Maiden Stone, Plate LVI. The writer has been advised on Gaelic points by Dr Sinton of Dores Manse, Inverness, and has received valuable help of many kinds from many others ; to some of whom his thanks are expressed in the text. It will be obvious to the reader that Sir Norman Lockyer's investigations and theories have added greatly to the interest of the Aberdeenshire circles. The writer has quoted largely and gratefully from his important volume on Stonehenge and other stone monuments, in the second edition of which the Aberdeenshire stone circles are dealt with. But earnest gratitude does not include the acceptance of a range of dates from 2000 B.C. to 1300 B.C. for fourteen of the circles dealt with, as shewn on page 33, depending as it does upon the supposition that fourteen great recumbent stones lie exactly in the line in which they did lie, when first placed where they now are, at the dates named. Not that the dates are in themselves even improbable. It will be seen in the concluding chapter that elaborate investigations are leading to a claim that the astronomer-priests in this country had registration-marks on their stones which enabled them to predict eclipses from 2250 B.C. to 1000 B.C.

G. F. BROWNE.

2 CAMPDEN HOUSE ROAD,
LONDON, W. 8.
22 June 1921.

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