

HOSIE'S WELL

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THE year 1411 is well-known locally for it was then that the Battle of Harlaw took place on the sloping land to the north of Inverurie. Here the Earl of Mar and his men fought the Highlanders in a bloody battle. Hosie, a local lad, was on his way to the altar when the fiery cross beckoned him from the side of his bride to be. He fought in the battle but was captured and incarcerated in a Hebridean dungeon for several years. Eventually he escaped and made his way as quickly as possible to continue the bridal march, but true love being what it is, he discovered his "dear" one was now married to another.

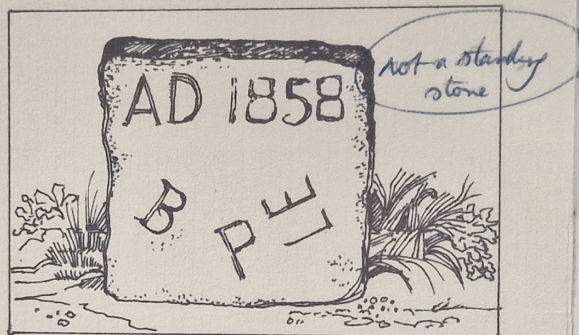
Heartbroken and with nothing to live for, he died and was buried on the Hill overlooking the Mither Tap. The nearby well now bears his name and the belief is that the water in the well is "nothing but Hosie's tears".

Pause here for a while and get your breath back before the final assault on the Mither Tap and spare a thought for the lad who, putting duty before self, lost his all, over five hundred years ago.



THE THIEVES' MARK

EVENTS of the mid nineteenth century have been covered under "The Colony" and from reading this you will know the story of the shameful division of the "Common" — and the subsequent disastrous effects on the lives of the inhabitants of the 60 homesteads clustering round the foothills of the Mither Tap, near the Clachie Burn. Now it is an easy enough thing to draw a line on a map, but to translate this to the ground is another matter. To mark a boundary on the ground various methods are used —



posts, cairns or single stones, fences, walls or ditches. The method used here was single stones, often with letters inscribed, as illustrated. This particular one can be found on the Mither Tap itself but others similar or unmarked are to be seen all over the Hill. Here the letters inscribed stand for the three estates involved at this meeting point — the estates of Balquhain, Pittodrie and Logie Elphinstone. The date too is of interest for it preceeds the court's decision by one year. The action succeeded in 1859 but the stone is dated 1858. Was this a measure of the confidence of the estates on the outcome of the action? Although backed by the process of law, many folk feel that the division of the commonty was a shameful act and their feelings find expression in the local name for The Stone — "The Thieves' Mark".

BENNACHIE FORESTRY COMMISSION



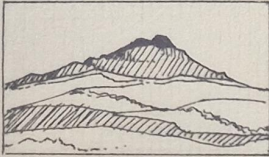
THE LINTELS

AT several places on the Hill can be found old granite lintels. Lintels are pieces of stone used in house building to hold up the wall above doors and windows. Obviously they must be strong and nowadays are made of concrete or steel. In the 19th century they were hewn out of solid stone cut from local quarries. There were several such quarries on the Hill — some quite large and some very small. A large one can be seen on Little Oxen Craig and there are several finished lintels still lying around where they were carved. Drill holes can be seen in the quarry face where wedges were driven in to break off large blocks of granite. Some lintels are just off the path from Esson's Park to Mither Tap among the old Scots pine near the summit. The lintels were carried down the Hill on horse-drawn carts — probably two to a cart, with a third trailing to act as a brake. See the drawing of this in the Donview Centre. Next time you climb the Hill think of the men who did this every day, before work, and ponder about their determination to earn their daily bread.



THE HILL FORT

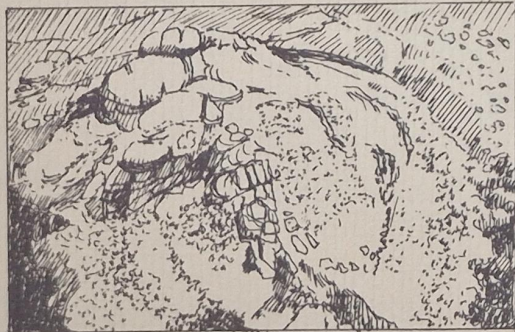
MANY climb the Mither Tap and never realise they have been inside this ancient fortress. Others think it is a **vitri-fied** fort which it is not. (A vitrified fort has walls of stone, fused together by heat by some unknown process). No one is sure when the fort was built but it is thought to be between 500 BC and 500 AD, and that is the Iron Age. Why was it built? Some say to keep the Romans out and some say to keep maidens in! The former is less quaint but more likely. See the huge walls, carefully built with stones, see what looks like tumble down scree where the walls have succumbed to the ravages of time, weather and vandals. Make sure you don't disturb a single stone of what remains for these stones (thousands of tons of them) were painstakingly brought up the Hill probably by way of the Maiden Causeway. Within the walls were at least ten buildings and a well, now dry. Who built it — how, why and when? Think on these things when next perched like an eagle, on top of the Mither Tap. There is so little known about the fort that your guesses might well be the right ones.



THE COLONY

ABOUT the start of the 19th century — almost 200 years ago — one or two pioneers went up into the lower lying hill land of Bennachie and began to wrest a living from the land. The Hill (mostly treeless and covered with low scrub and heather) was also Common land. These pioneers "squatted" on the land — building walls and little homesteads with stones from the fields and clay, and rough-thatched with heather turves. Quiet, hard-working folk they asked only to be left in peace to earn their livelihood from the soil and from labouring for neighbouring farms, building dykes and working at the harvest, draining and doing all kinds of farm work. All went well for about 50 years during which land was improved, buildings were altered and life was secure if hard, for the squatters. In 1859 however, the court action raised in 1844 to divide the Common among the eight neighbouring estates succeeded. This meant that the land, clawed back from the Hill by so many years of sweat and toil, became the property of the neighbouring landowners — and the squatters became tenants. When times got really bad in the 1880s rents became impossible to pay and family by family, the squatters were squeezed off the land they had won so hard. One Colonist — George Esson, refused to admit defeat and died there in 1938. The croft still bears his name.

9



THE GOUK STONE



FROM Esson's Car Park take the path up the Clachie Burn and you will see a sign "To the Gouk Stone". Follow up the path and you will come to a sad little clearing — a quiet space where tumbledown walls are all that is left of a happy homestead and silent trees replace children's laughter. You are seeing the remnants of yet another of the Colonist homes. In the midst of all this stands a simple stone — no markings or carvings adorn it. Yet it too has a place in the Bennachie Story for it was one of the marker stones showing the boundary of the Common Land which was divided by Court Action in 1859. There must be **many** more such stones on the Hill, but few are now in evidence, and this, the "Gouk Stone", is the best known. A "gouk" is a cuckoo and it has been suggested that the stone was so called because it may have been the favoured perch for the bird every April. It seems too near habitation for this to be likely as it is a shy bird, but it could have been true once the house was in ruins. Remember there would have been no trees then — just a bare hillside. No cuckoo now, no Colonists either — just the Gouk Stone remains.

1939?