

The Ten Boundary Stones of Markinch Hill

In Spring, before the foliage gets green and dense, it's a good time to spot boundary stones of all kinds, both marked and unmarked. The best known set of stones are the ones marked with a B on the north side and an L on the south side. They straggle in a line across Markinch Hill from a clear join in the wall close to the Stob Cross Road entrance gate, all the way to the reset stone in the woods at the bottom of the hill at the other end. There are ten in total including one that was found just this month towards the Northhall end, and the one that lies face down at the Stob Cross Road end.

As most people in Markinch know, the stones once marked a boundary between the Leven estate (L) and the Balbirnie estate (B). In the early part of the 19th century when General Robert Balfour became heir to Balbirnie, the estate was extended and much investment carried out. In November 1819 the General bought a large part of Markinch Hill from Lord Leven and the stones were probably set out around this time. The feu was transferred for a fee of £148/13/4.ⁱ



Both estates now had an interest in the hill but for totally different reasons. The Balfours wanted to lay out a pleasure park with sweeping lawns and carriage drives. The Leslie-Melvilles of Leven who had by that time moved away from Balgonie Castle, wanted to develop a property portfolio with new housing in Markinch. They needed the

sand on the slope facing towards Markinch, and the remains of the big sandpit can still be seen at the Stob Cross end. The stones effectively separated the leisure park from the sandpit.

Neither of these aims was wholly realised. With the coming of the railway the idea of a sweeping carriage drive from Balbirnie to Northhall was abandoned, and the cut-off eastern end of the hill became the cemetery. The Leslie-Melvilles moved away from Fife around 1824 selling out to the Balfours of Whittingehame. The hill was eventually gifted to the Burgh of Markinch by the Balfour family in the 1920s. If you get a chance take a walk along the hill and count them for yourself but make sure that you do it quickly before the brambles shoot up and the bracken begins to hide the stones from view,

ⁱ Source :- State of the Title Deeds of the various properties now belonging to John Balfour of Balbirny (sic). Courtesy Jean Balfour