

THE FALL AND RESTORATION OF THE CROMLECH,
AT DREWSTEIGNTON,
IN THE COUNTY OF DEVON, 1862.

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(Read at Bideford, August, 1871.)

THE Cromlech, well known as the "Spinster's Rock," or "Drewsteington Cromlech," is situated at Shilstone Farm, in the parish of Drewsteignton, and was until its fall, on Friday, 31st January, 1862, the only perfect Cromlech in the County of Devon. In consequence of a question in *Notes and Queries* (sec. 3, vol. 2, page 27, 1862), as to the cause of the fall, I communicated to that Journal such particulars relating thereto as I was acquainted with (sec. 3, vol. 2, page 70, 1862); but as it is advisable that these particulars and others should be recorded in a publication connected with the county, I have thought that the Journal of this Society was the proper place for such purpose. The etchings of the Cromlech before the fall, now exhibited, were taken with the camera lucida, the others are from photographs, and the etchings and photographs were made by myself. The stones which form the Cromlech are of granite. The upper stone, or quoit, rested on the tops of two of the stones and against the bevelled side or top of the third. The heights of the supporting stones from the ground to the under side of the quoit, when Lysons wrote, about 1818, were from six feet to six feet six inches, and little if any change had taken place in these dimensions at the time of the fall. The quoit measures about twelve feet in length, and nine feet in width at the widest part, and about two feet in thickness, and according to Mr. Chapple, as quoted in Rowe's *Dartmoor* (edit. 1856, page 42), contains nearly 216 cubic feet, and weighs sixteen tons and sixteen pounds. When the fall took place, evil report said that the stone had been maliciously thrown down, but this charge I believe is perfectly unfounded. On Monday, 27th January, 1862, I visited the Cromlech, and was there for, probably, about three quarters of an hour,

endeavouring to take a photograph, in which, on account of the deficiency of light, I did not succeed; at that time there was no sign of the land under the Cromlech being disturbed. Four days afterwards, on Friday, January 31st, the Cromlech fell; and on the next Wednesday, February 5th, I again visited the Cromlech, and took a photograph of it in its fallen condition; there was no sign of the land being disturbed save where it had been evidently broken up by the accident. The following is a copy of the short remarks relating to the fall, which are entered in my journal of that date:—"The southerly and easterly stones had given way, and the quoit had fallen leaning against the northerly stone, and the two others were under it. Judging by the small depth of stone in the ground, it is a wonder that it did not fall before." The fall probably occurred from the following causes: the upright stones were only sunk from eighteen to about twenty-four inches in the ground, which was of light granite gravel which had been soaked by the heavy and continued winter rains, the field also was in the course of being broken up for a wheat crop, so that the adjoining ground furnished very little lateral support. The quoit rested on the tops of two stones and against the bevelled side of the top of the third, as has been already stated. The southerly and easterly stones, as shown in the diagrams, and also in Lysons' *Devonshire* (p. xxxviii., taken in 1807), leaned to the east. The position of the quoit caused it to act against the north stone like a wedge; therefore if the ground about the base of this upright became softened, the mechanical action of the quoit against that stone would be to thrust it backwards. Such evidently had been the case, the stone was thrust backwards, and had the southerly and easterly stones been strong and well bedded, the quoit would probably, if it had moved, have slipped down the side of the northern stone and rested against the two others. The southerly upright however was of weak coarse granite, and the easterly had little hold in the ground, so that when the northerly stone was thrust back, the quoit, assisted by their sloping position, drew the other two stones out of position, and the southerly was broken and the easterly lifted out of the ground. To natural causes, and not to wilful mischief, I therefore think the fall is to be attributed.

After the fall the question was considered whether the stones should remain as they were, or the Cromlech be restored. The late Rev. William Ponsford, the Rector of Drewsteignton, however, closed the question by having the

stones replaced. Previously to the fall I had taken carefully, with the camera lucida, outline sketches of the Cromlech, and copies of these were given to the persons employed in the restoration. The easterly stone has not however been placed in the exact position which it occupied, and the quoit instead of resting against the northerly stone lies in a notch cut in the bevel, but the differences between the old and the restored Cromlech are so slight that they would not be noticed unless by careful comparison with drawings of the old Cromlech. In the course of the re-erection, the ground on which the Cromlech stood was excavated, and a pavement made of large blocks of granite which fixed the uprights firmly in their places, and to make them more secure a hole was cut horizontally through each of the uprights, in which a thick bar of iron was placed resting on the granite pavement, and the whole foundation was then covered with earth.

On account of the position in which the quoit had fallen, the restoration was difficult. A strong framework was erected over the fallen stones to carry the pulleys, and the quoit was laid horizontally on two beams, one end of these rested on piles of stones which were increased in height after each lift had taken place, and to the other end chains connected with powerful crabs were attached, and screw jacks were placed below; by this means the quoit was gradually raised, and to prevent accident it was well secured at each step by the insertion of blocks. When raised to the proper height, the stone uprights were put in position, the quoit was lowered upon them, and the pavement completed.

The work was finished on Friday, 7th November, 1862, by Thomas Ball, a carpenter, and William Stone, a builder, at Chagford. I watched the excavation of the ground on which the Cromlech stood; it did not differ from that of the adjoining part of the field, and no remains of any description were found.

The above particulars have been stated fully, as I am not aware of any other Cromlech being restored, with the exception of Lanyon Quoit, near Penzance, and also that a record may remain which will prevent any future antiquary describing the present Cromlech, with the sub-pavement and iron bars, as the work of the pre-historic inhabitants of Drewsteignton parish.

The paper was illustrated by views of the Cromlech before the fall, of it after the fall, the manner of restoration, and after the restoration.