

T.P.I. 17 1926

THE MOORLAND PLYM: 36 YEARS AFTER.

ABSTRACT OF LECTURE BY MR. R. HANSFORD WORTH.

(Read December 10th, 1925.)

My first paper on the Moorland Plym was read to this Institution on the 19th December, 1889. It summarized the results obtained during several years' knowledge of the locality, and some two and a half years' intensive work. While preparations for the paper were in hand the late Mr. Robert Burnard read, on the 22nd March, 1888, a lecture entitled "On the Track of the Old Men on Dartmoor."

Unconsciously we were the forerunners of a period which may be described as the Golden Age of Dartmoor Archæology. There had been interest in the antiquities of the Moor before our time, and members of the Plymouth Institution had taken a leading part in descriptive work. One has but to name Woollcombe, Hamilton Smith, Prideaux, and Rowe. In the summers of 1827 and 1828 these four men seriously attempted the exploration of the Moor, and in the first volume of our *Transactions*, published in 1830, their results are set forth by the Rev. Samuel Rowe, whose paper was read on the 9th October, 1828. Rowe's work was later expanded to become *A Perambulation of the antient and royal Forest of Dartmoor, and the Venville Precincts*, published in 1848.

It was characteristic of the methods of the time that the explorers had definite ideas of what might be expected, and their discoveries were fitted to those ideas. But their observations were precise, even if their interpretation was unsound.

In the 'seventies of the last century Ormerod and Spence Bate contributed papers on the antiquities of Dartmoor; and Spence Bate gave the results of some excavation. Other workers, from time to time, examined some of the moorland graves by spade work.

But, prior to 1893, no systematic effort had been made to test the truth of the many theories as to the prehistoric remains. In

that year Robert Burnard conducted excavations in the hut-circles at Broadun, near Post Bridge, with results so interesting that a Committee of the Devonshire Association was formed, under the style of "The Dartmoor Exploration Committee," and at once proceeded to the examination of Grimspound. Of the seven members of that Committee, four were also members of the Plymouth Institution.

For some years constant additions to our knowledge of the pre-historic antiquities were being made; and when the activities of the Committee were checked, in part by the loss of many of the members by death, in part by the conditions imposed by the Great War, it was possible to say that, of the knowledge which is recoverable, by far the greater part was known. I need not enter fully into the results, they will be found summarised in my Presidential Address at the opening of the Session 1905-1906. It will suffice that I endeavour to bring up to date my former description of the valley of the Moorland Plym.

At Shaugh Bridge the ruin of a cottage still stands. My early recollection is of something unusual, some feature not frequent in cottages of the size. But early recollections, grown old by more than half a century, are hardly fitting items for archæological evidence. Within the past few years I have been fortunate in seeing a sketch of this cottage, made by F. Foot, the artist, of Ashburton, in 1841. This shows that the unusual feature was a dressed stone window of ecclesiastical type, and in the Perpendicular style. By the kindness of Mrs. Lomax, the artist's niece, I am able to reproduce this drawing on a small scale. (Plate I, Fig. 1.)

There was also an old farm-house at Grenofen, abandoned before my earliest recollection, and now wholly lost. Of this also Mr. Foot made a drawing, which I have had reproduced. (Plate I, Fig. 2.) The prehistoric remains I propose to classify as follows:—

STONE ROWS.

Two are to be added to my previous list. The first I found on Ringmoor Down. It is nearly a quarter of a mile in length, its direction a few degrees east of north, and there is a circle at the south end.

The second row was discovered by the Rev. H. H. Breton, on Shaugh Moor. Like the last, its direction lies somewhat (N. 20°-40' E.) east of north, and at the south end it terminates in a circle.

Its length is 578'-9", to the centre of the circle. It can easily be found by producing the line of the southern hedge of Shaden Plantation, when, at 591 feet from the east side of the Cadover road, a hut circle will be found, which almost touches the remains of the circle at the south end of the row.

STONE CIRCLES.

The stone circle on Ringmoor, near Brisworthy, has been restored by the Rev. H. H. Breton. The restoration was confined to erecting the fallen stones. A description of the circle, with a plan as it was before restoration, will be found in the forty-eighth volume of the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, page 99.

KISTVAENS.

In my former paper I mention that I knew of eight kistvaens in the Plym valley, but I describe seven only. The list must now be extended. The following additional kistvaens were subsequently found by me : Guttor, Lee Moor, Drizzlecombe southern, Langcombe near Plym Steps, and two kistvaens in Langcombe near Deadmans Bottom ; these will be found figured and described in the Nineteenth Report of the Barrow Committee, in Vol. XXXII of the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*.

There are also kists at Hentor and Great Gnats Head, figured and described in the Twentieth Report of the Barrow Committee, Vol. XXXIII of the same *Transactions*. I found yet another kist in Drizzlecombe, figured and described in the Twenty-sixth Barrow Report, Vol. XXXIX, *D.A.* ; and the Rev. H. H. Breton found a kist near the stone circle on Ringmoor, near also to Legis Lake ; this formed the subject of the Twenty-ninth Barrow Report, Vol. XLII, *D.A.* I would add that the barrow which lies four hundred yards above Shavercombe waterfall, on the north bank of the stream, contains a kistvaen as yet undescribed. I dare not assert that the list is, even now, complete. To the seven previously described eleven more examples must thus be added, but four of these were referred to in my paper on the Erme, Yealm, and Torry.

HUT-CIRCLES AND POUNDS.

No attempt was made in the former paper to list the whole of the groups of hut-circles in the valley, nor all the pounds, and no such attempt is now made.

Reference seems desirable to the excavations which I made in the group of huts on the slopes of Legis Tor, full details of which will be found in the Third Report of the Dartmoor Exploration Committee, published in Vol. XXVIII, *D.A.*

This settlement was especially interesting as yielding a spindle-whorl in baked clay, a flint flake with one edge ground, a whetstone for bronze implements, a muller and the stone on which it worked, and a cooking-pot still set in the floor (the cooking-pot had been cracked and repaired with china-clay). No other Dartmoor huts have as yet yielded any strictly similar objects; although except for the use of china-clay there was nothing of an unexpected nature, and cooking-pots or their fragments are usual finds.

In my former paper (Vol. X, *Plym. Inst.*, p. 296) I referred to an enclosure above the lower reservoir of the Shaugh Lake clay works. I did not mention an enclosure on the slopes of Saddleborough two thousand feet west-south-west of this. In the south wall of this latter enclosure one of the stones has been worked into a trough in relatively recent years, and affords an example of the habit of the old stonemasons of working on the Moor, and only bringing in the finished article. In the wall of an enclosure in the Erme Valley above Addicombe is a stone similarly worked.

CAIRNS AND BARROWS.

A confused mass of stones on the summit of Wigford Down, and an elliptical enclosure to the west of it (Vol. X, *Plym. Inst.*, p. 295) are now known to be the remains of two cairns, robbed for road metal, the evidence having been obtained from a workman who assisted in their removal. The elliptical enclosure may yield the solution of the problem of certain other "ring cairns" which have afforded puzzles.

The cairn on the summit of Ringmoor has a "retaining circle" of stones, a ring of stones set either around the margin of the cairn, or, more usually, originally within that margin.

At Drizzlecombe a circle shown on the plan published in the tenth volume of our *Transactions*, and there marked "Stone Circle, fallen," has been excavated. I found that it consisted of stones set as a close kerb around a burial place, another form of retaining circle. The burial pit was discovered, and yielded a fine flint scraper.

FLINT.

During the past forty years I have picked up numerous fragments of flint, all bearing traces of handwork. Well-formed implements have been rare, and with small exception have been taken from the graves.

In addition to the scraper referred to above as having been found in the grave at Drizzlecombe, I took three barbed and tanged arrow-heads from a kist at Deadmans Bottom, Langcombe, and a tanged arrow-head from the Calveslake kistvaen. I have seen another similar arrow-head from the neighbourhood of the Calveslake kist, and I think it may well have come from that kist when opened by treasure-seekers in old time. It must, however, be noted that there are evidences of implement factories having existed at certain spots, and that the ground immediately around Calveslake Tor is one such spot, large numbers of chips having been there found.

The flake with a ground edge, found in a hut-circle at Legis Tor, has already been referred to.

MINING REMAINS.

In my paper on the Erme, Yealm, and Torry I described a Blowing House as existing at Mill Corner opposite Drizzlecombe. The mortar stones which I then described have since disappeared, being more probably buried than removed.

There have been at least three other blowing houses in the valley, in addition to the smelting place of Eyelesborough mine.

One blowing house was at Brisworthy Burrows ; its wall formed part of the farm enclosure and the adjacent field was known as " Mill Park." Here there were mortar stones, the float or bottom of the furnace, and considerable remains of the walls. A cottage has been constructed hard by, and the walls of the blowing house have practically disappeared ; the float was long since removed, and now only one mortar stone remains.

Another blowing house was close to Brisworthy farm ; a mortar stone will be found serving as a gate post ; the leat which served the wheel now continues to Wigford Down clay works.

A third example is to be found beside the Plym, on the south bank, about 170 yards above Langcombe foot. Here one mortar stone is still to be seen. I think it probable that more of these buildings remain to be discovered in the valley.

These are the principal additions to our knowledge of the antiquities in the valley of the Moorland Plym, a valley singularly rich in prehistoric remains, and presenting outstanding examples of every form of monument known on Dartmoor, with the one exception of the cromlech, and even that may be represented by the unusual formation on the summit of Hawks Tor.