

THE STONE ROWS OF DARTMOOR.

PART IV.

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I HAVE to record the discovery of seven stone rows on Dartmoor since the meeting of the Devonshire Association last year at South Molton—at Sherrell Down, by the Messrs. Fabyan and John Amery; Merrivale, by the Rev. S. Baring-Gould; Lake Head Hill, by the Rev. S. Baring-Gould and Mr. R. Burnard; Ringmoor, by Mr. R. Hansford Worth; and at Yartor. Five are single, one double, and one triple. This makes the full total forty-four (forty-seven, if the Batworthy and Fernworthy examples are independent)—twenty-two single, fifteen double, three triple, one quadruple, one septuple, one partially double, one double continued as single. Excluding doubtful examples, we now know of the existence of more than twice the number recorded when this investigation commenced.¹

The Lyd Valley.

Yet further search has failed to find the stone rows in the valley of the Lyd, the only important watershed on the Moor from which they have not been reported. There does seem, however, somewhat more reason to believe that if they cannot be identified there at present, they did once exist. For example, on the western slope of Arms Tor, near

¹ In the course of the discussion on this paper, Mr. T. Cann Hughes, of Manchester, mentioned that a stone row had recently been found in Derbyshire. We thus have them in the Midlands as well as in the North and West, though Dartmoor still preserves its singular and striking pre-eminence in the possession and illustration of these remarkable monuments, the recognition of the sepulchral character of which has by no means solved their entire mystery.

Bridestowe Station, there are the remains of several hut circles, some retaining the door jambs; and of other circles of detached stones which have more of a ritual aspect. In two of these the stones are exceptionally irregular in size, and one fallen is over six feet in length. In another there is still standing as part of the circle, a menhir five feet high, which, it is quite clear, never formed part of any entrance; and, more or less distinctly in a line with this, down the hill to the N.W. are scattered upright stones, which may have formed part of a row, while there are other earth-set stones on the slope which cannot be connected with any existing remains of habitation. Without drawing any definite conclusions, it seems best to put the facts on record.

The latest search was not, however, by any means barren, for my daughter—Miss Worth—found a very fine example of a rock shelter on the left bank of the Lyd, opposite Great Nodden, at a point where an extensive accumulation of detritus in an angle of the valley has been turned over by streamers. A very large flat granite slab, partly buried, partly forming the crest of one of the little stony hillocks, has been built up from underneath at the eastern and southern corners by rude walling, leaving an opening at the southern end of the eastern face, by which access is gained to a capacious hollow beneath, about three feet six inches high at the entrance, but gradually lessening with the slope of the slab to the north and west. The shape of the slab can only be made out by digging, but the cavity has roughly the form of a right-angled triangle, the longest side, on the east, being about fourteen feet, and the shortest, on the south, about eleven. The slab probably averages between a foot and eighteen inches in thickness, but I had no means of exact measurement handy. The position suggests that this was a tinnerns' shelter, but the suggestion is not without difficulties. I cannot see how such a slab would get to such a position by accident or natural operation, and I very much doubt any tinnerns going to the trouble to carry it. Had it been the capstone of an earth-fast cromlech, the cavity beneath which, when found, was utilised for habitation, the conditions would be satisfied. Of that, however, there is as yet no sufficient evidence, and indeed the position militates against the hypothesis. Still, the latest purpose is clear, and, lying as it does in the Gubbins country, it may even have been a lair of that uncouth "Scythian" folk.

Lake Head Hill.

A remarkably interesting group of stone rows has been investigated on Lake Head Hill, which lies immediately to the S.E. of the road from Princetown to Moretonhampstead, between Belliver and Postbridge, the interest being all the greater because the connection of the rows with interments is absolutely established in each case—every row leading off from a cairn or kistvaen. I give the notes thereon as kindly furnished me by the Rev. S. Baring-Gould, circumstances unfortunately preventing my taking part in the examination. It will be seen that the rows are all single. I believe that three may be regarded as certain (Nos. 1, 2, and 4), and four probable (No. 3). I do not think that No. 5 is absolutely to be rejected.

1. Great kistvaen, Lake Head, has a circle round it, and a stone row running W.N.W.—E.S.E. The row consists now of eleven stones, and two socket-holes have been uncovered. How much further it extended is uncertain, as it has been robbed. Length at present 44 ft.; each stone about 2 ft. to 2 ft. 6 in. high. It has a peculiar feature in the closeness of the stones to each other, and the fact that the line forms a slight curve.

2. Fine cairn within double circle, and ruined kistvaen; large stones near centre. From this leads a line of stones N.W. Owing to a very ancient hedge having been erected parallel with this line, the stones were left, where not taken, in the ditch of the hedge. This became in time a bog, and the stones sank so that only their nozzles appear above the bog, and in some places can only be detected by sounding with stick or crowbar. Stones small.

3. On top of the hill is a line of stones running W.N.W. and E.S.E. for 100 ft.; stones small, at even intervals. How much further not examined. End stone at right angles. This row is very doubtful. We suspect it formed an old boundary, as there are faint indications of another line at right angles to it, and because the stones have not the customary pits and "triggers." Anyhow, it is a doubtful line.

4. Small kistvaen and circle, very complete, only one side-stone of kistvaen missing. From this apparently a line of stones led in a S.E. direction for about 150 or 200 ft.; but stones small, many removed, and many sunk. Not examined, so that it cannot be reckoned on as certain.

5. Near the former is a circle of upright stones enclosing a cairn, from which *perhaps* a stone row led some 250 ft., but only three stones are in position ; so this is also uncertain.

6. This apparent row promised well, stones large, but on examination proved to consist of "shiners"; *i.e.* large flat stones set up on end to form a wall. It must have been a very ancient wall, and it is not in connection with any kistvaen or cairn, and as a genuine stone row must be abandoned.

Merrivale.

Merrivale has now recorded four rows, instead of the two which attracted so strongly the attention of the earlier investigators of Dartmoor antiquities—the well-known double ones, the fragment of a single row next the great menhir, and the row now described, found this year by the Rev. S. Baring-Gould to start nearly at right angles to the southern double row from a small cairn immediately adjacent to that row. As this cairn is marked in the map attached to the Rev. S. Rowe's first Dartmoor paper in the first volume of the *Transactions of the Plymouth Institution* (1830), it is not very easy to understand how the row escaped observation. However, it did escape; or, at any rate, it is not recorded. There are sixteen stones in place, small, and the cairn at which it begins was enclosed by a circle. Omissions of this kind greatly shake one's confidence in the older explorers where no means of testing their accuracy remains.

Ringmoor.

There is a single stone row upon Ringmoor Down, on the side nearest Legis Tor, which extends nearly a quarter of a mile in length. It was first observed by Mr. R. Hansford Worth. The existence of a fine example of the mis-called "sacred" circles² lower down the slope, immediately outside

² It is actually set down on the Ordnance Survey map as a "hut circle," with which it is really most difficult to understand how any one could have confounded it. Some special name is sadly wanted for this class of monument. "Sacred" is simply an appropriation without a shadow of proof; "great" circle will not do, for such circles occur of almost all sizes in this country, to go no further, from six feet in diameter to three or four hundred, while Avebury reaches twelve hundred. We want some inclusive descriptive epithet to embrace the whole class, and which shall not confound definition with interpretation. Were it not somewhat too grandiose, the "columnar circle" of the elder antiquaries might very well serve; and perhaps if we translate that phrase into simpler English, and speak of "pillar circles," we shall get as near to what we want as we are likely to. Brisworthy is therefore neither a "hut circle" nor a "sacred," but a "pillar circle."

the enclosures of the ancient tenement of Brisworthy, has long been known; and there are three large tumuli on the crest of the hill, which were rifled long since, if they contained aught worthy the taking of the old treasure-seekers. The locality therefore is one in which the presence of a row was rather to be expected than otherwise. The surface blocks of granite here are exceptionally rude and irregular in shape, as may well be seen in the circle. This is some eighty feet in diameter, and consists at present of twenty-three or twenty-four stones, of which all but five have fallen, and one of these is half down; while some are hidden by the turf, and suggested simply by little mounds. Quite a score indeed are plainly evident, but, judging by the spacing in the most perfect part of the circle, there must have been originally at least double that number. The northern and western segments of the circle are most perfect; the southern has been so pillaged by the wall-builders that its remnants viewed independently would hardly suggest the existence of such a monument at all. The fact is that the reasons which induced the builders of rows and circles to select special stones on the score of size or regularity of form, have equally weighed with their destroyers. The largest stone left is barely five feet long.

Sherrell Down.

On the high-lying plateau of Sherrell Down (called in the Ordnance map Sherberton Common), nearly at the central point of a semi-circle, embracing Bel, Mel, and Sharp Tors, and immediately adjoining the road from Ashburton to Princetown, Messrs. Fabyan and John Amery noticed last winter the remains of a double row of stones, which I have had the pleasure of visiting, at their invitation and in their company. It differs from all the other examples on the Moor in two points—the great width between the two rows—between eight and nine feet, and the closeness with which at points the stones in the rows are set together. In fact, in part the line is practically continuous, from the setting of smaller stones in the spaces. I have satisfied myself, however, that this was not the case generally, and have little doubt that these interstitial stones are of later date, though their purpose is by no means clear—possibly, however, the intention to make a boundary. The stones are also very irregular in size and shape, some being long slabs, and others fairly-shaped pillar stones, ranging up to nearly five feet in length. Surface slab stones are exceptionally plentiful here,

and there are the remains of a fine 25-foot circle, formed by two sets of such stones set on edge about two feet apart, one of them being eight feet long. The row runs N.N.W. and S.S.E., and is identifiable for about 75 yards. The first 15 yards, starting from the southern end, are very imperfect; then for 40 yards most of the stones are in place, more or less, several standing; for the remainder of the distance the stones have nearly all disappeared, but the hollows which several of them occupied are still visible. The surface stones have been removed so freely from this part of the Down, for road-making and other purposes, that it is a marvel so much is left. At the northern end of the row there is a group of stones, in which there is little difficulty in tracing the remains of a kistvaen, with an enclosing circle. There are nearly 40 stones more or less in place, the eastern line being the most perfect.

The width between the rows, and the close spacing of the stones, seem to me merely varietal differences, possibly dictated to some extent by the character of the material; but it is worthy of notice that the stones forming a circle round a kistvaen on Yartor, a little more than half a mile distant, are close set, which may point to a local custom. However, we do find close-set kistvaen circles elsewhere.

The visit paid to this kistvaen was rewarded in a double sense, for in returning to the carriage in the road leading to Babney, we hit upon, in the most casual fashion, the remains of a triple row, running close up to the road, and the continuation of which was probably destroyed when the road was made. It runs S.E. and N.W., and is at present 19 yards in length. The stones are small, but regularly set, and there are a dozen certainly in place, while others probably would be found just beneath the turf. There are only two stones now visible in the central row, and these are placed fairly midway, the space between the outer rows being about $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet. Such finds as these encourage one to believe that after all our searches, discovery is far from being exhausted.