

STONES FOUND AT SWINCOMBE (DARTMOOR),
PROBABLY CONNECTED WITH ANCIENT
MINING THERE.

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(Read at Devonport, July, 1870.)

IN 1866 I was informed by a miner who worked on Dartmoor that some curious stones had been found in a large heap of rubbish at the Gobbuts Mine in Swincombe valley.

Shortly afterwards I visited the spot, which I found to be about a mile above Hexworthy bridge, on the West Dart, and two miles below Two Bridges.

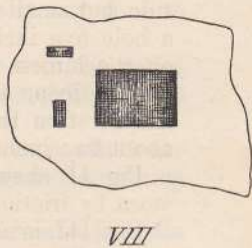
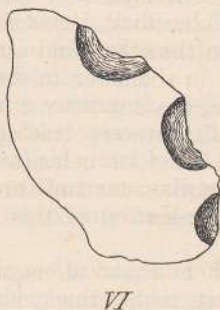
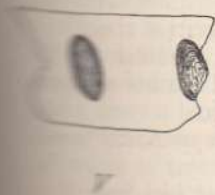
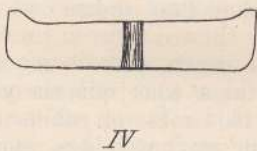
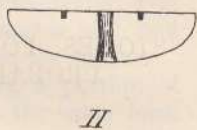
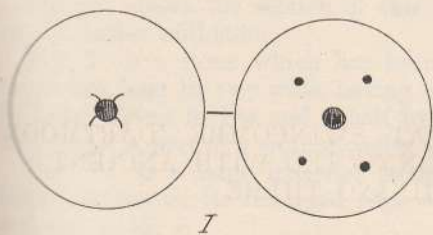
The valley shewed signs of previous mining, and there is a modern mine on the same site. It seems that in obtaining stone to build a wheel-pit many large and curious stones were found in a mass of rubbish. I am afraid some were used for building, but others remain, consisting of a pair of what seem to be mill-stones, being circular, and of a few others having cavities in them.

Last autumn I again visited the spot, and found the stones much as I had seen them three years previously. I carefully examined and measured them. From these measurements the drawings are made.

Fig. I. is a circular disk, three feet in diameter on one side, but smaller on the other, and eight inches thick, having a hole five inches in diameter in its centre, around which, on the largest side, are curiously curved cavities about two inches deep, as if to receive metal work; whilst on the smaller face there are four holes, at equal distances apart, about two inches in diameter and three deep.

Fig. II. shews the section of this stone apparently much worn by friction.

Fig. III. is another circular stone, three feet and ten inches in diameter, and ten inches thick, having an unequal cavity on one side, which fits in shape and size the rounded bottom of the first stone, fig. ii. It also has a circular hole, six



inches and half in diameter, in its centre, and a lip cut in one side.

Fig. IV. shews the section of this stone, which I take to be the nether mill-stone.

Fig. V. is a stone which has been broken. It is about three feet long by two wide, having one perfect cavity, oval in form, eleven inches and a half by seven and a half, and five deep. A part of a similar cavity is seen on the fracture.

Fig. VI. is a large irregular stone, having a portion of three cavities on its fractured edge of much the same form and size as fig. v.

Fig. VII. is a block, two feet long by eighteen inches wide, having a portion scooped out as it were on each side, about twelve inches by eight. The sides do not seem to have been broken, and the shape is therefore curious, and not unlike the headsman's block in the Tower.

Fig. VIII. is an irregular flat stone, about four feet by three, but apparently broken, having an oblong basin, fifteen inches long by eleven wide at one end and ten at the other, and five inches deep. There are also two smaller cavities of the same shape, but only two inches long by three quarters wide, and two deep.

Whatever has been the use of these stones I expect must be left to conjecture. The circular ones were evidently for grinding, and being found on the site of an old mine, and in rubbish containing charcoal and slag from smelting, may have been used for grinding the ore in water, the stones with the cavities being used to receive the ore and water which the former might deposit. It has, however, been suggested that these cavities were used as moulds to receive the metal in a fluid state.

To me it seems a pity that any relic of ancient industry should be allowed to remain unnoticed by those capable of giving an opinion on the subject, and liable at any time to be destroyed by this utilitarian age.

This is my reason for troubling the Society with the notice of these stones, hoping that persons in the neighbourhood may be led to examine them; and, what is of more importance, keep a look-out on Dartmoor wherever excavations are being made, to rescue for county or local museums anything of value or interest.

I may add that I hear the mine at Swincombe is again about to be worked, when more curiosities may be found or lost.