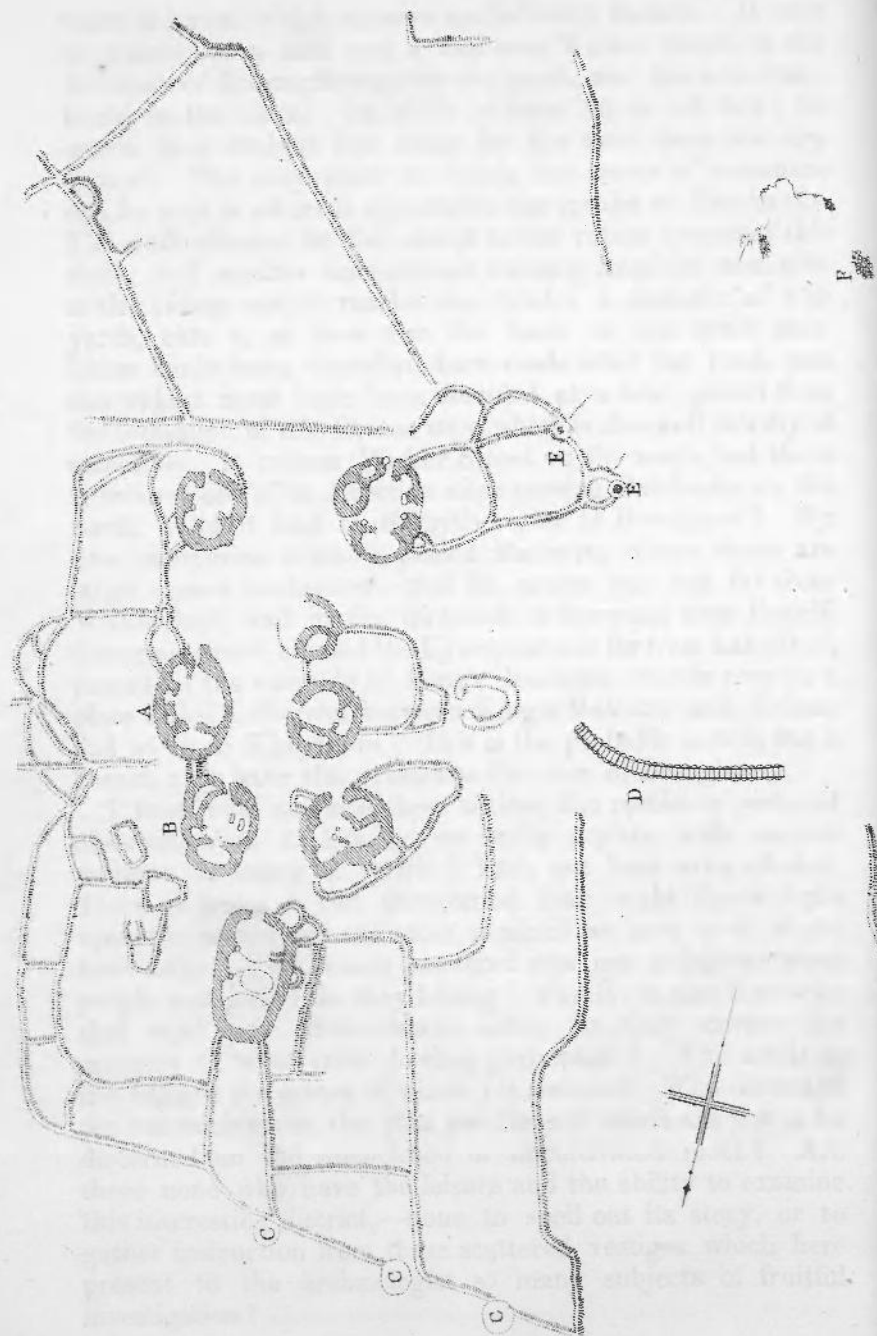


BRITISH VILLAGE AT CHYSAUSTER IN THE PARISH OF GULVAL, CORNWALL.



## ACCOUNT OF AN ANCIENT BRITISH VILLAGE IN CORNWALL.

THE remains of ancient dwellings in Cornwall have hitherto been little noticed by antiquarian writers. Dr. Borlase has described a large portion of the antiquities of the county, more especially those connected with religion and warfare, but he seems to have overlooked certain curious and rude structures which were evidently formed, at a remote period, for the abodes of men.

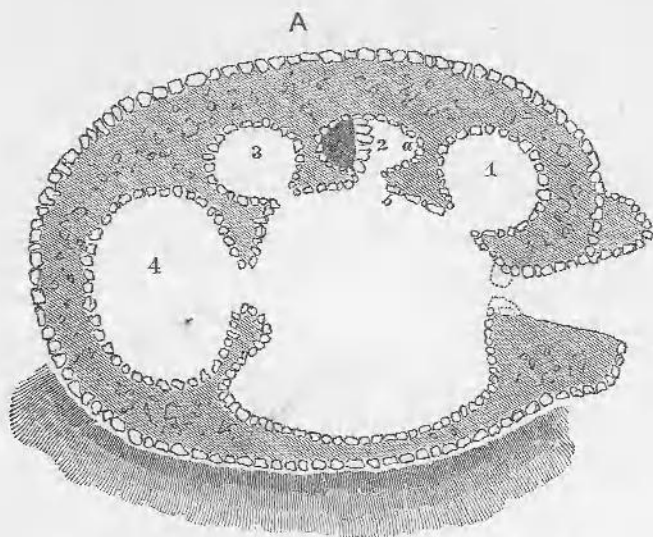
The ancient British village which I propose now to describe is on the estate of Chysauster (southern dwelling), in the parish of Gulval, and about three miles from Penzance. The huts are situated on the declivity of a hill, and, with the enclosures by which they are surrounded, they occupied several acres of land. The spot commands a view of a portion of Mount's Bay; Castle-an-dinas, a remarkable fortification consisting of three circular embankments, stands on the loftiest point of the same hill,<sup>1</sup> the highest elevation in the western parts of Cornwall, being 735 feet above the sea. That entrenchment is about a mile from the remains of the ancient village, and is of easy access.

The first sketch of the accompanying plan of the group of habitations in the parish of Gulval was made in 1849, by Mr. H. A. Crozier, a gentleman possessing considerable acquaintance with Cornish antiquities. Having conducted me to these ruins in 1854 or 1855, Mr. Crozier presented to me his plan, and requested that I would carry out some further investigation of these curious remains.

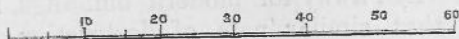
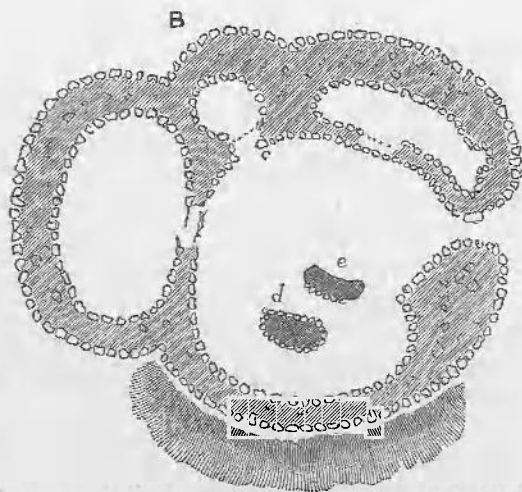
Though the huts are still pretty entire, they are not so perfect as they were in 1849, many of the larger stones having been carried away for modern buildings, and it is to be regretted that similar acts of destruction have been recklessly practised, to the serious injury of other antiquities in the county. Enough, however, remains to show the

<sup>1</sup> See Borlase's description of Castle-an-dinas, *Antiquities of Cornwall*, p. 346.

REMAINS OF AN ANCIENT VILLAGE, CHYSAUSTER, CORNWALL.



Ground Plan of the Dwelling marked A. in the Map.



SCALE OF FEET

Ground Plan of the Dwelling marked B. in the Map.

peculiar character of the work, and to render Chysauster an object of no slight interest to the archæologist amongst the numerous curious vestiges in the west of England.

The village appears to have consisted of several huts mostly of elliptical form ; some, however, are more circular than others. The foundations of eight dwellings may yet be traced, and these in some instances are connected by banks of earth and stone. They are all constructed on nearly the same principle, that marked A in the map and ground-plan being in the best state of preservation. This structure is formed by a thick wall, faced externally and internally with stones put together without cement, the intermediate space being filled with earth. On the north-east side, which is the highest part of the ground, the wall is about 2 feet high and 9 feet thick ; on the opposite side it is constructed on a rampart, which slopes away from its base ; the height here, exclusive of the rampart, is about 9 or 10 feet, the breadth 4 feet. The entrance, which faces a little east of south, forms the approach to a passage somewhat more than 20 feet in length, and gradually contracted in width towards the interior of the dwelling. The area of the hut within is now a large open space, 32 feet by 34, from which there are openings leading into smaller chambers, 1, 2, 3, 4. No. 1 is nearly circular ; it is difficult to decide whether that marked 2 formed originally one apartment or two, one half, which is shaded in the woodcut, is deeper than the other : the south end (a) of this cell exhibits the mode of construction better than any other portion now remaining. (See woodcut, opposite the next page, fig. a.) The wall here inclines towards the top, so that the dwelling must have had somewhat of a bee-hive shape. The specimen of construction (woodcut, fig. b), shows the facing of the wall at b, between the cells 1 and 2. This wall is about 5 feet high.

The hut B is not so large as A, and some slight differences will be observed in its construction ; the outer wall, for instance, does not run in a continuous curve, but follows the shape of the cells within. At the entrance there is a granite pillar or jamb, about 5 feet high, and at c there is another 4 feet high ; the position of the latter seems to supply conclusive evidence that there were regular openings from the central space to these smaller apartments ; in some cases this might seem doubtful on account of the mutilation

of the walls. At the points marked d, e, are pits, each about 6 feet long and 3 feet wide ; their sides were regularly walled ; d is still about 3 feet deep, but the other pit is nearly filled up. I did not observe similar pits in any of the other huts.

It will be observed in the map that these structures are surrounded by enclosures of eccentric shapes, formed by banks of earth and stone, now about two or three feet high ; broken-down fences of this kind are locally called *Gurgows*. They continue much farther to the south-east than is shown in the plan. At d there was a subterraneous gallery or *Vau*, about 180 feet long. This cave resembled that called Pendeen Vau in St. Just, and another existing at Bollirt in St. Burian. Its sides were walled like that at Pendeen,<sup>2</sup> every successive course of stone overlapping or, as technically termed, stepped over, that beneath it, by which means the walls converged towards the top, so as better to support the flat slabs which formed the roof.

Mr. Crozier informed me that he formerly saw about 20 feet of this cave at Gulval entire ; he stated that it was 5 feet wide, and that the floor was flagged with granite. This gallery is now totally demolished, a long drain filled with stones alone marking its position. It has been in its present ruined condition for the last nine or ten years. There are various opinions as to the use of these caves ; some suppose them to have been sepulchral ; by other antiquaries they are considered to have been hiding-places in times of danger ; it has also been stated that the Britons were accustomed to lay up their corn for preservation in subterraneous depositories. E E mark the sites of two shallow shafts : these were walled around. Farther down the hill-side at F are barrows, which have never been opened ; they are probably sepulchral ; other mounds of similar character may be seen on the south-eastern side of the huts. c c c are modern mine-barrows ; between these and the cave d, fences ran longitudinally on the face of the hill, the enclosed spaces following one above the other like a succession of terraces ; these were very evenly levelled, and had more the appearance of having been used for some purpose connected with games than for pastures or as means of defence ; this ground

<sup>2</sup> See Borlase's *Antiquities of Cornwall*, p. 293, pl. xxv. This cave is described

as measuring about 6 feet in height, the entrance, 4 feet 6 inches.

REMAINS OF AN ANCIENT VILLAGE, CHYSAUSTER, CORNWALL.

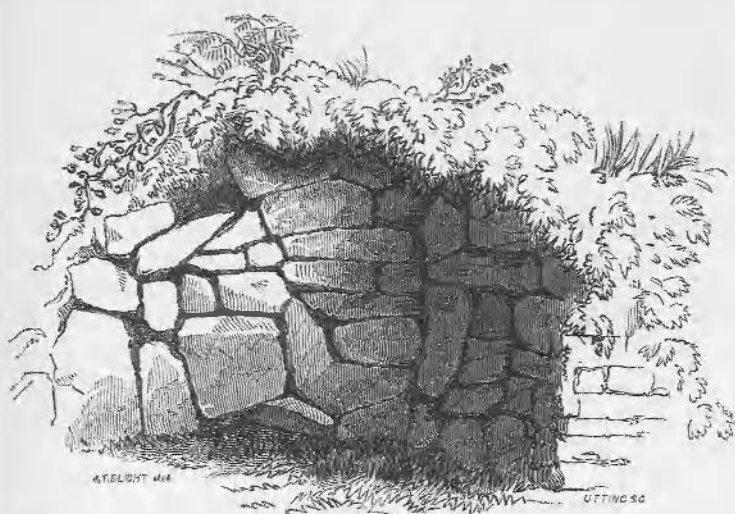


Fig. a. Showing the construction of the South end of the cell 2, in the Dwelling A.



Fig. b. Showing the construction of part of the Wall in the Dwelling A.

having been lately cultivated, much of their original form is destroyed.

The Mulfra Cromlech,<sup>3</sup> on the summit of a high round hill, is a very conspicuous object from this village; it is rather more than a mile distant. Occupying a high position, on the opposite side of the valley, on the farm of Boscreage, is a curious circular enclosure, called the "Round."

In other parts of the county remains exist similar to those at Chysauster, and it is remarkable that most of them are situate in the vicinity of Cromlechs and other monuments which have been attributed by antiquarian writers to the Celts and the Druids. Near Chun Castle the ruins of huts are nearly as remarkable as those of Chysauster, and there is a regular approach to the castle from the village, the way being protected on either side by a walled fence. The word Chun or Choone has been interpreted as signifying a dwelling on a common; the castle and huts were possibly the work of the same people, one being constructed for the defence of the other.

The huts at Chysauster, with the exception of those marked A, B, are now almost entirely overgrown with fern, thorns, and brambles; consequently it is difficult to trace their forms and arrangement with accuracy. If the site and other similar remains existing in the county were thoroughly investigated, no doubt some interesting details might be discovered which would throw light on the domestic architecture, and also on the manners and conditions of the ancient races by whom the West of England was peopled at a very remote period.

J. T. BLIGHT.

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### NOTE.

The remains of circular dwellings, sometimes designated hut-circles, formed of stones laid without mortar, have been noticed in various parts of the British Islands, and it may probably be concluded that the rudely fashioned abodes of the earlier inhabitants were generally thus constructed, in all localities where stone suitable for the purpose could be readily obtained. We are much indebted to Mr. Blight, whose investigation of the ancient crosses and antiquities in the west of Cornwall may be known to

<sup>3</sup> Borlase, p. 230, pl. xxiv. It is figured in the West of Cornwall, p. 63. Penzance, 1856, 4to.



many of our readers,<sup>4</sup> for the notice of so interesting an example as the village in the parish of Gulval, of which a memorial has been placed on record in the foregoing memoir. It were much to be desired that a careful investigation should be made of all the remains of this description in various localities, aided by excavations sufficing to clear the sites from accumulated debris; and the comparison of details of construction or arrangement which would thus be brought to light, might tend in no slight degree to make us better acquainted with the social condition, not less than with the arts or manners, of ancient races in our country. The mode of construction would doubtless be found modified in various districts, according to the nature of the materials most readily to be obtained; in localities, for example, where the strata supplied in abundance stone easily adapted for dry masonry in courses more or less regular, the interstices of which may have been filled up with loam or turf, it is probable that from a very early period domed or bee-hive shaped dwellings were constructed, for the most part similar to the *cloghauns* still existing in some parts of Ireland in remarkable preservation, as described and figured in Mr. Du Noyer's valuable memoir in this Journal, vol. xv. p. 1. In other localities, however, where stone was deficient and wood abundant, a different and less permanent mode of construction would unquestionably prevail; and we may conclude that when the stone, from the irregularity of its fracture, was unsuitable for the simple but ingenious expedient of "stepping over," so as to form the bee-hive shaped roofing, the hut would be rudely covered in by aid of rafters supporting brushwood or sods of turf, as may still be seen commonly in the remoter parts of North Britain. It is obviously only in mountainous or uncultivated districts, on the heights of the western counties or of Wales, amongst the hill fortresses of Northumberland, or in distant parts of Scotland and Ireland, in localities still unapproached by modern improvements, that we may hope to discover traces of the dwellings of races whose history and origin is still merged in impenetrable obscurity. It were needless to remind the reader of the observations regarding the primitive circular huts in question, to be found in the works of Rowland or Whitaker, in King's Munimenta, or the incidental mention of such dwellings by earlier writers, Boetius for instance, who speaks of examples existing in his time in Ross-shire, "*rotunda figura, in formam campane facta.*" Investigations more systematically carried out in recent times have thrown some light upon the nature of the hut-circles, serving to mark the sites of those curious dwellings of which Mr. Blight has brought before us so interesting and comparatively well-preserved an example. We may refer those readers who may desire further information on the subject to Sir Gardner Wilkinson's valuable Memoir on Carn Brea, in the Transactions of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, 1860; to the notices of hut-circles within the great entrenched work of Worlebury on the Coast of Somerset, investigated by the Rev. F. Warre, and published in the Proceedings of the

<sup>4</sup> Ancient Crosses, &c., in the West of Cornwall, drawn and engraved by J. T. Blight. London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co.; Penzance: Vibert, 1856. Sixty-eight pages of illustrations, representing crosses, cromlechs, circles of stones, inscribed stones, &c. A second series of these interesting collections was pub-

lished in 1859, containing 100 illustrations of early antiquities of the same description. Further notices of antiquities in Cornwall are given by the same author, in his *Week at the Land's End*, recently published. London: Longman & Co. 8vo.



Somersetshire Archæological Society ; to notices also in the *Archæologia Cambrensis*, vol. i. third series, p. 255 ; and to the Memoir by Mr. Du Noyer (before cited) in this Journal, vol. xv. p. 1. The curious details regarding ancient pit-dwellings in Yorkshire, described by Dr. Young in his *History of Whitby*, vol. ii. pp. 677, 681, may contribute to throw light upon the character of primitive habitations ; and the observations of Dr. Wilson, in his *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, p. 74, cannot fail to be read with interest. A remarkable description of beehive houses in Harris and Lewis, by Commander F. W. L. Thomas, R.N., recently published in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. iii. p. 127, accompanied by numerous illustrations, has brought before us fresh and most instructive evidence. The examples of primitive construction there existing are remarkable for their preservation, and the variety of combinations in their arrangement.

Whilst the foregoing account of Chysauster by Mr. Blight was in the hands of the printer, a memoir has appeared in the *Journal of the Archæological Association* (for March, 1861), on Ancient British Walls, from the pen of that acute investigator of early remains, Sir Gardner Wilkinson, to whose notices of Carn Brea reference has already been made. It is illustrated by a series of diagrams showing the peculiarities of ancient construction,—the bee-hive huts of Brown Willy in Cornwall, the walls of the large town on Worle Hill, or Worlebury, Somerset, the Carl's work, near Hathersage, Derbyshire, the hut circles on Dartmoor, &c. Sir Gardner's observations cannot fail to be received with great interest ; they throw fresh light on the very curious subject of research to which he has long devoted attention with indefatigable perseverance in various parts of the country.

A. W.