

DREWSTEIGNTON CROMLECH.

(Spinster's Rock.)

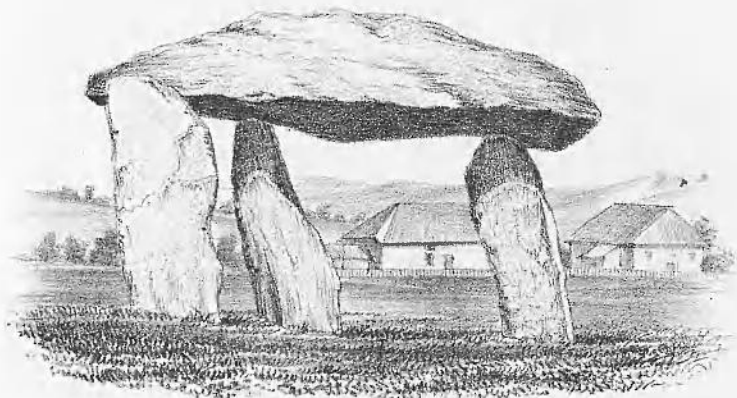
G. W. O. Sketch by Camera Lucida July, 1855.
Copy 9th September, 1858.

N° 1.



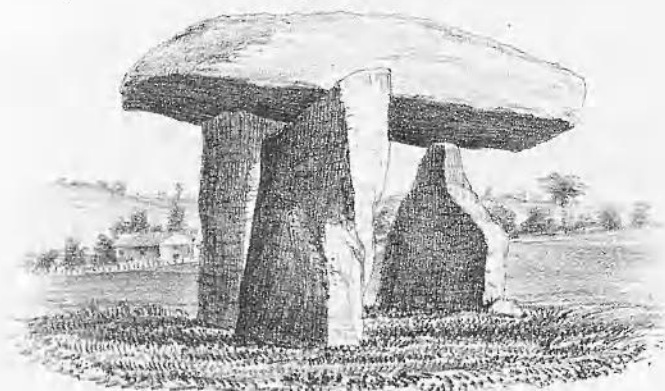
From South.

N° 2.



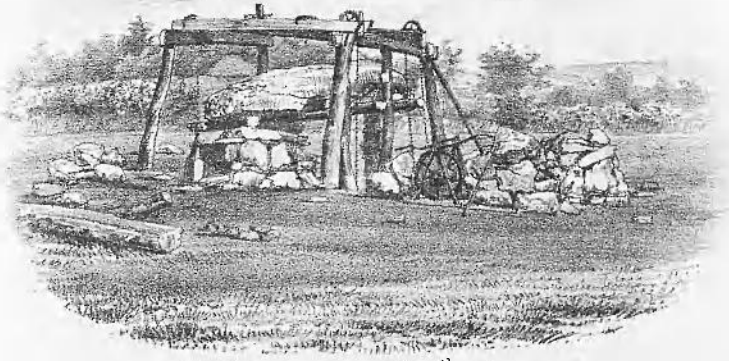
From North-West.

N° 3.



From North.

N° 4.



Raising the Quoit 16th Oct^r 1862.

N° 5.



Drewsteignton Cromlech 21st Feb^r 1862.
From Photograph.

N° 6.



Cromlech completed 17th Nov^r 1862.

NOTICE OF THE FALL AND RESTORATION OF "THE SPINSTER'S
ROCK," OR CROMLECH, IN THE PARISH OF DREWSTEIGNTON,
IN THE COUNTY OF DEVON, AND OF STONE CIRCLES AND
AVENUES FORMERLY EXISTING IN ITS VICINITY.

By G. WAREING ORMEROD, M.A., F.G.S.

"THE Spinster's Rock," or Drewsteignton Cromlech, is situate in a field adjoining Shilston Farm in the parish of Drewsteignton, about two miles to the west of the parish church. This Cromlech has been mentioned in most of the historical and descriptive works relating to Devon, but the fullest notices are in Polwhele's Historical Views of Devonshire, 1793, and History of Devon, 1797; in a memoir, signed N. E., "On some of the more remarkable Monuments of Devon," contained in Essays by a Society of Gentlemen at Exeter, 1796; and in Rowe's "Perambulations of Dartmoor," 1848, republished in 1856, which work was an extension of Antiquarian Investigations in the Forest of Dartmoor, by that author, contained in the "Transactions" of the Plymouth Institution, published in 1830. About the middle of the last century Mr. William Chapple of Exeter wrote a treatise, entitled "Description and Exegesis of the Drewsteignton Cromlech;" this is noticed in Rowe's "Dartmoor" (pages 42 and 118, edition of 1856), but of this treatise I have not been able to procure further information. In the following pages the consideration of the purpose for which the Cromlech was raised has not been entered upon.

The stones which form the Cromlech are of granite, probably procured in the immediate vicinity. Before the fall the upper stone, or quoit, rested on the tops of the southerly and easterly uprights, and against the bevilled inner side of the top of the northerly stone; the greatest length of the quoit is 15 ft., taken parallel to the sides about 14 ft., the medium 13 ft. and a half; the greatest breadth 10 ft., medium breadth 9 ft. 10 in.; thickness about 2 ft.; according to Chapple, as quoted in Rowe's Dartmoor (page 42,

edition 1856), it contains nearly 216 cubic ft., and weighs sixteen tons and sixteen pounds. At page 110 of the Essays above mentioned there is an engraving of the Cromlech from the north-west, taken from a drawing by J. Swete, and "N. E." describes the quoit as 14 ft. and a half long from north to south, and from east to west 10 ft. wide, and the height from the ground as above 6 ft. Mr. Samuel Lysons made a drawing of the Cromlech in 1807, and in his "Devonshire" (page cccvii) the measures are given as about 12 ft. in length and 9 ft. in width, and the height of the supporting stones as from 6 ft. to 6 ft. 6 in. to the under side of the covering stone. This last measure was about the height at the time when the fall took place; very little change, if any, had therefore taken place in the height to the under side of the quoit during the sixty-six years preceding the fall. The dimensions of the quoit as first stated may, I think, be relied upon; those given by "N. E." as from north to south and east to west are not correct, and those given by Mr. Lysons are only approximate.

I much regret that I did not take exact measures and a plan before the fall; as the restoration is not quite a counterpart of the original Cromlech, the present dimensions will not supply the deficiency. On Monday, 27th January 1862, I endeavoured to take a photograph of the Cromlech, but in consequence of the deficiency of light was not able to succeed. I was there about three-quarters of an hour, and there was no sign of the adjoining land being disturbed, and on the following Friday, 31st January, the Cromlech fell. On Wednesday, 5th February, I took a photograph of the Cromlech in its fallen condition, and there was no sign of the land being disturbed save where it had been broken up by the accident. The following is the minute entered in my journal: "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 accident probably arose from the following causes: the upright stones had only a hold of from 18 to 24 in. in the ground; as above stated, the quoit rested on the tops of two stones, and against the bevelled top of the third; the southerly and easterly stones, as shown in diagrams in The Essays, page 110, and in Lyson's "Devonshire," page cccviii., leaned

slightly to the east, and the position of the quoit resting against the bevilled side of the top of the third caused it to act as a wedge; the soil under the Cromlech is of light granite gravel, and this had been saturated by the winter rains, and the field was in the course of being broken up for a wheat crop, so that the adjoining ground furnished very little lateral support; the wedge-like action of the quoit therefore pressed back the northerly stone, and the quoit, assisted by the sloping position of the two other stones, threw them out of position; the southern was partly broken, and the eastern lifted out of the ground; by natural causes, therefore, and not by wilful mischief; I think the fall was caused.

The restoration was made by the direction of the late Mrs. Bragg of Furlong, the owner of the estate, at the cost of twenty pounds, under the superintendence of the Rev. William Ponsford, the rector of the parish; the persons employed were John Ball, a carpenter, and William Stone, a builder, both living at Chagford. Previous to the fall I had taken with the *camera lucida* sketches of the Cromlech and these were used at the restoration, but were not followed exactly, as the eastern stone has been put up nearly at right angles with the position it formerly occupied, and the quoit, instead of laying against the northern stone, rests in a notch cut in the bevilled top. On account of the position in which the quoit had fallen the restoration was difficult; a strong framework was erected over the stone to carry the pulleys, the quoit was laid on two horizontal beams, one end of each of these rested on a pile of stones which was increased in height after each lift had taken place; to the other end a chain connected with a powerful crab was attached, and a screw jack was placed below; by this means the stone was gradually raised, and, to prevent accident, after each lift it was secured by the insertion of blocks. When raised to a proper height the stone uprights were put in position, and the quoit was lowered upon them. In the course of restoration the ground on which the Cromlech had stood was excavated, and a pavement of large blocks of granite was made round the uprights, fixing them firmly in their places, and to make them more secure a hole was cut through each of the uprights, in which a thick bar of iron was placed resting horizontally on the granite pavement.

The restoration was finished on Friday, 7th November, 1862.

I watched the excavation of the ground on which the Cromlech had stood for a portion of the time; and had any remains been found during my absence, I feel no doubt that they would have been given to me or Mr. Ponsford; but nothing was discovered, and the ground did not differ from that of the adjoining part of the field.

To the west of the Cromlech several stone circles and avenues formerly existed. Polwhele, in his *Historical Views of Devonshire*, p. 61, and *History of Devon*, vol. i. p. 150, when describing the Cromlech, writes thus:—"Towards the west of the Cromlech are several conical pillars, about 4 ft. high. On the south side there are three, standing in a direct line from east to west. The distance from the most western to the middle is 212 paces, from the middle to that on the east 106, just one-half of the former, by which it would seem that an intermediate pillar at least had been removed. In a parallel line to the north are two others remaining erect, the one from the other distant about 52 paces, nearly one-fourth of the greatest space on the opposite line. The area between is 93 paces, in the midway of which, at the eastern extremity, stands the Cromlech." He further adds (*Historical View*, p. 94; *History of Devon*, vol. i. p. 154):—"At Drewsteignton the Cromlech is placed on an elevated spot overlooking a sacred way and two rows of pillars, and several columnar circles." The Cromlech was visited by "N. E." prior to 1796, by Lysons in 1807, and by Rowe prior to 1830, and these remains are not noticed by either of them, probably on account of the intervention of the lane. Whilst residing at Chagford, near the Cromlech, from 1855 to 1869, I carefully examined the fields where I thought these remains were situate, and made many inquiries, but I could not either find the remains, or gain any information respecting them. In the spring of 1872 Mr. King, of Crediton, who had also searched for these remains without success, informed me that the Rev. William Grey had made a plan of them, and the following description is copied from Mr. Grey's journal, containing the notes taken on the spot:—"Wednesday, 4th July, 1838. Visited first from Moreton the Druidical circles above the Cromlech. The Cromlech lies in a field about 110 yards to the east.

Here are two concentric circles of stones, the inner circle having entrances facing the cardinal points, that to the north being 65 paces in length and 5 broad. The outer circle, besides these, has avenues diverging towards N.E., S.E., S.W., and N.W.; a smaller circle seems to intersect the larger, of which the avenue eastwards is very evident." Mr. Grey informed me that he visited and measured these remains, in company with his brother, at 9.30 A.M., on Wednesday, July 4, 1838, and that the plan was made on the spot, and finished up at the hotel at Okehampton that same evening. The remains, mapped by Mr. Grey, are unquestionably the "Sacred way," the "Two rows of Pillars," and "columnar circles" noticed by Polwhele. As Mr. Grey's plan does not include the pillars on the north and south, it is probable that at the time of his visit the work of destruction had commenced. The fields on which these remains existed were examined by myself this year, 22nd March, 1872, and again on 12th September. On the first occasion they had been recently ploughed, so that there was every opportunity for making a careful inspection. In the easterly field I could not find a trace of the remains; in the westerly some stones were visible near the gate opening upon the common; but, after studying the spot, with the map in hand, they could not be identified as forming part of these remains. There is an upright stone, larger than those mentioned by Polwhele, in the field to the south of that in which the Cromlech stands, but the distance is far beyond that given by Polwhele to the row of southerly stones. On the common, 56 ft. to the west of the point where the division hedge joins the outside boundary, there is an upright stone, 4 ft. 6 in. high, 4 ft. 8 in. in girth at the bottom, and wedge-shaped at the top, which, from its character, may have been one of the old stones, and by its position might have either formed a part of the north-western avenue, or a prolongation of the row of stones mentioned by Polwhele as being to the north of the Cromlech. On the common, in an angle formed by prolonging the northern and north-eastern avenues, three stones run from east to west, crossed by two from north to south; these are large rounded stones, and in their character do not resemble those found in avenues or circles, and I think that they are only boulders that have been left where the excavations for

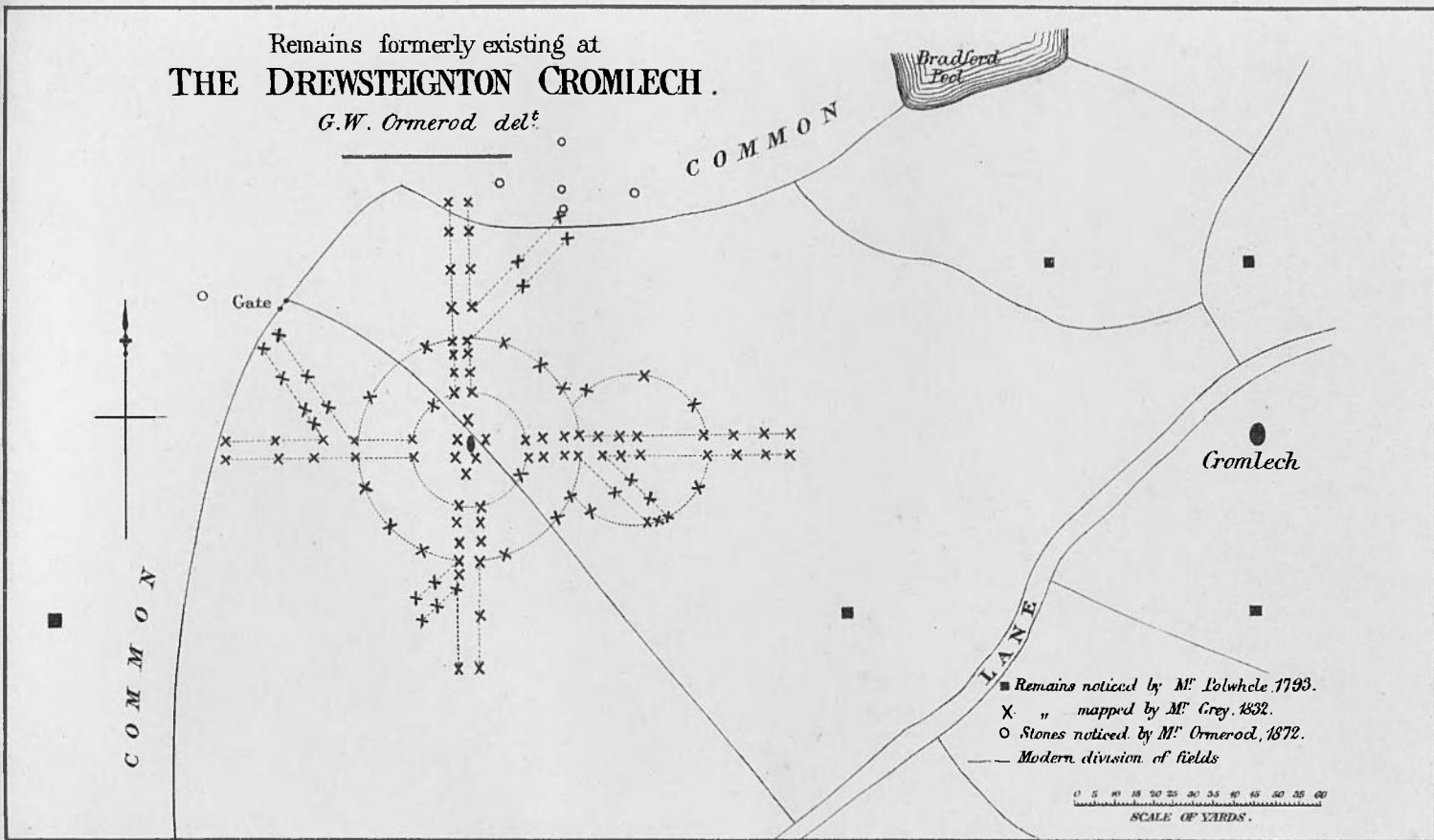
clay and tin streaming were made. With two exceptions only, I have not been able to find any persons acquainted with these remains. My friend, Mr. Samuel Hunt, of Chagford, M.R.C.S., informs me that he remembers the "Via Sacra," or stone avenue, leading to the Cromlech, and that about the year 1832 complaints were made, because stones had been removed for building purposes. Mrs. Ponsford, the widow of the late rector, also tells me that she remembers being shown the "Via Sacra" certainly as late as 1848, but does not remember the circles. The "Via Sacra" is the avenue in the plan leading to the Cromlech. A few years since, by permission of the tenant, a quantity of stones were taken from the eastern field to build a farm-house in the neighbourhood. This probably was the last step in converting the site of these curious remains into a level-surfaced field.

As the measures in Mr. Grey's survey are given in paces, and the points of the compass only approximately, the plan cannot be regarded as strictly correct; but I showed it to him when nearly completed, on the 24th May, 1872, and he said that it was right; since that time my valued friend has died.

The lithographs of the Cromlech, Nos. 1, 2, and 3, are from sketches taken with the *camera lucida* by the author, July 7, 1855; that of the fallen Cromlech, No. 5, from a photograph taken by him February 5, 1862.

Remains formerly existing at
THE DREWSTEIGTON CROMLECH.

G.W. Ormerod del^t



- Remains noticed by M^r Lolwhele 1793.
- X " mapped by M^r Grey 1832.
- Stones noticed by M^r Ormerod, 1872.
- Modern division of fields

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60
SCALE OF YARDS.