

ART. VIII.—*Bloomery sites in Eskdale and Wasdale*  
(Part I). By DR. CHARLES A. PARKER and MISS  
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THE late Dr. Parker commenced the work of tracing out the bloomery sites of Eskdale and Wasdale, a work he was unfortunately unable to complete. I have not his wide knowledge and skill in such matters, but have done the best I could to put together a list and description of all the bloomery sites of which I can obtain information, or of which I can find traces. I propose dividing this paper into two parts:—

- (i) The bloomery sites of Mitredale and the Esk valley.
- (ii)—The bloomery sites of the Upper Esk valley and Bow Fell, and the bloomery sites of Wasdale.

I.—THE BLOOMERY SITES OF MITREDALE AND  
ESKDALE.

MITREDALE. PORTERTHWAITE WOOD. Bloomery sites, noted as existing here by the late Rev. W. S. Calverley, but no clue as to whereabouts. The wood is now very thickly overgrown, and it is difficult to trace out workings of the kind. I have found three sites.

No. 1. There are traces of somewhat extensive workings to the right of the Eskdale to Strands road, just over the bridge across the Mite. At the foot of a conical mound, between it and the river, is a small, artificial watercourse (now usually dry), passing under the road into the Mite. In the western face of this mound is a large heap of clinker and heavy slag of the usual type where the smelting process has been somewhat primitive, and between the mound and the road is the foundation of

a circular building approximately 44 feet in diameter. Across the road at the foot of the first hill are further remains of bloomery workings in a hollow adjoining a little stream which comes down the wood, flowing into the Mite. There are slag heaps, traces of a very rude hearth of small size (5 feet in external diameter), traces of red oxide puddle and charcoal. The natural draught is good, and the water-power fair. There are several charcoal pitsteads adjoining these workings, two being on the top of the mound previously alluded to.

2. On the ancient road leading from the Whitehaven road to Low Place through Porterthwaite wood, there is the site of a small bloomery on the east bank of a little stream to the north of the road. This site is about 100 yards south of the ruins of an ancient homestead (in one corner of which Mr. Calverley records the finding of a celt), in the wood. There are traces of a very small and rude hearth, several small heaps of heavy slag and clinker and charcoal, and two charcoal pitsteads adjoining. Fair natural draught, and poor water-force.

3. A quarter of a mile east of No. 2 along the old road, beyond the gate, about 40 yards south of the road at the edge of a hollow at the bottom of which runs a little stream, is a bloomery site. The hearth is on the lip of the hollow; it is 18 feet in external diameter, with a well defined gutter leading down the slope which is strewn with slag over a good portion of its surface. Higher up the stream are traces of oxide puddle on its banks. There are no heaps of slag or clinker. Good natural draught and poor water-power.

There are numerous pitsteads for charcoal burning in the wood opposite Low Place, though careful search has revealed no bloomery site here. Porterthwaite wood is full of pitsteads, and there are also the remains of kilns used for burning bracken roots for soap making (note by late Rev. W. S. Calverley).

In a little wood on the north bank of the Mite, just below Mrs. Rea's Home Farm, at the opposite side of the river, are little heaps of slag. No traces of any hearth.

**BURN BOOTH.** On the north bank of the Mite, opposite the ruins known as Walk Milne (formerly a fulling mill), are traces of foundations of some building (the place is called "Burn Booth"), and patches of red oxide puddle. No slag heap located though it is said the site was a bloomery.

**ESKDALE. ESKDALE GREEN** (formerly known as Yeat House Green). A field known as Smithy Dale adjoins Irton Road station of the Narrow Gauge Railway to the south of the line. The field has been constantly ploughed, but I have found here a few pieces of slag.

About 400 yards from the last site, in a large field opposite the villa known as "The Birches," just over the wall of the high road there is a bloomery site at the foot of a rocky slope. Foundations of masonry (apparently two small hearths) can be traced and slag is abundant as well as oxide puddle. At some remote time the field has been ploughed destroying many traces of the extent of smelting operations. The slag extends scattered about into the bottom of the garden of the house on the hill known as "Gowrie," and there are extensive remains of charcoal scattered about all over the adjoining field, below "Gowrie" and the next house, "Moor Head." Good natural draught, but no water-power except a very small runner.

**FOREST HOWE.** The extensive bloomery site situated on the slope of Muncaster Fell and the field at the other side of the road between Irton road and Muncaster Head has been previously noted in these *Transactions* (N.S. xix, p. 168). It must have been of considerable extent. On the south-west side of the hill on which this bloomery is situated I have found iron ore (turned up in digging out rabbits whilst ferretting), but no signs of

adjacent mine workings. It was here that I found a fragment of a Roman amphora and pieces of Roman tile. Fair natural draught ; only water-power a small runner. From this bloomery an ancient road leads direct to

MUNCASTER HEAD BLOOMERY SITE. This is quite the most interesting of the sites I have so far met with. It is in a field at the opposite side of the Private Drive to Muncaster Head Farm, to the east. There is a great quantity of charcoal ; the tenant of the farm tells me that the charcoal extends for four feet at least underground as well as some six feet above. There are also great heaps of clinker and heavy slag, and where the land has been ploughed it is red with iron oxide. There are foundations of buildings (? hearth sites), in one of which I found two fragments of heavy Roman floor-tile. This does not prove the Roman origin of the workings, as the Roman tile manufactory was only something under a mile away westward along the Drive, and some medieval iron-founder may quite well have brought bricks and tiles from here for his bloom-smithy. In the mud of a small runlet adjacent I found pieces of burnt brick and what look like Roman tiles. That the site was an important one, less primitive than many in the neighbourhood, is shown by the existence of an artificial water-conduit which passes from the front of the farm, alongside the bloomery site, finishing abruptly at the bank of the river Esk some fifty yards below the Lord's Bridge. This canal is about 10 to 18 feet in width ; its depth I do not know, as it is now silted up with black mud. Near its river end is a small heap of slag, also remains of masonry built with mortar. From the mud I got some pieces of firestained brick and large lumps of friable, red, baked brick clay. There is a curious deep, boggy hollow behind the farm which may possibly have been the reservoir for supplying the canal with water. I am informed by the son of a patient of Dr. Parker's that he

had examined this trench (which I at first took for a road), and also arrived at the definite conclusion that it was a water conduit. Quite near to the spot at the river end where there are signs of masonry, Dr. Parker in his book "The Gosforth District" tells us that during the making of the Drive a trough made of the hollowed trunk of a tree was discovered, complete with spigots *in situ* and drains for water leading to and from. It is possible that this had some connection with the canal.

**FORGE FARM.** About half a mile from the Muncaster Head bloomery to the east, across the river Esk, there is a bloomery site in a small paddock adjoining the farm now called the Forge Farm. The old name of this farm is Howe Howe or Howe Powe. It has only been known as the Forge Farm comparatively recently. The ground has been ploughed though now pasture, but the tenant (Mr. William Southward) informs me that a quantity of slag and cinders is scattered about over the field under the grass. I saw plenty of heavy slag and clinker in the dyke bank dividing the field from the wood, and also on the banks of a runner at the foot of the wood. No traces of hearth. There are numerous charcoal pitsteads in this wood, and Mr. Southward tells me that he remembers charcoal being burned there. Good natural draught, but no water-power to speak of.

**LINBECK MILL.** About a mile from the Forge Farm along the old road beside the Esk on its south side, is the ruin of a mill called Linbeck Mill. This is built on a slag-heap which extends to the beck, and other heaps are on the bank of the Esk. The old mill race (now dry) is cut through one of these slag-heaps. Adjacent are mounds of charcoal. There is a hollow much overgrown with bracken which may be a hearth site. Good natural draught and ample water-power. Mr. Southward informs me that the mill was working up to about eighteen years ago. An older mill, now completely vanished, formerly

existed higher up Linbeck Ghyll. In the registers and chapel wardens' account book of Eskdale "Ghyll" and "Mill" are noted as separate tenements.

DALEGARTH WOOD. There are two (if not more) bloomery sites here. One, No. 2, has been known for many years, being first mentioned by the late Rev. W. S. Calverley. No. 1, I discovered recently. This site is situated about 100 yards through the wood east of the gate by Turn Dub. There is a small heap of slag on the old road, another to the right in the wood, and over a wall to the left, more heaps of heavy slag on the bank of a small runner. No trace of hearth. There are heaps of charcoal in the vicinity, and pitsteads in the wood.

No. 2 is in the wood beside the road immediately behind Dalegarth Hall. This appears to have been a more extensive working than the other, judging from the slag-heaps. There are also the remains of a hearth which is about 20 feet in external diameter at the top. There is a well defined channel or conduit leading from the bottom to a trough made of rough masonry. Adjoining are small heaps of charcoal and patches of oxide puddle. Fair natural draught, and no water-power, except small gutters.

STANLEY GHYLL GUEST HOUSE. Two slag-heaps in the garden here, near to the river Esk. Owing to disturbance of ground due to making the garden, the scope of the work cannot be traced. Before the building of this place, the ground was open common.

VICARAGE GLEBE. Many years ago I noted a small heap of heavy slag under the bushes on a steep bank beside the river Esk, about 50 yards below the Dalegarth Bridge. It is now quite overgrown, and not to be located. No hearth found. A little lower down the river it is probable that there was a ford giving communication between Dalegarth Hall and Beckfoot (now the vicarage).

UNDERBANK WOOD. This is across the river from the old church, a little to the east. I am told that there is a slag-heap here, but the wood is so overgrown that I have not been able to locate it. During the time in the 19th century when iron ore was mined at Boot, operations were also carried on here. A bridge was built across the Esk carrying a waggon-way to an adit in the fell side now fallen in. There are other numerous shafts sunk in the fell side. The waggon-way joined the railway (crossing the high road and the Whellan Beck), between Boot and Beckfoot.

LOW BIRKER. This site was first noted by the Rev. W. S. Calverley, and later by the Rev. W. S. Sykes and Dr. Parker. I have recently examined it. It is situated on the ancient road on the south side of the Esk leading from Dalegarth Hall to Low Birker and Penny Hill, being about 270 yards west of the former. On the bank of a little stream north of the road is a slag-heap, and there are several others and heaps of charcoal over the wall in the wood. No trace of hearth or oxide puddle in wood. At the other side of the little beck between it and the gate is a hollow suggesting the site of a hearth about 12 feet in external diameter, with a rude gutter sloping to the stream. In the field at the other side of the wall there are heaps of oxide mixed with metallic ore on the banks of the stream, and red oxide and slag are scattered here and there in the earth of the field lately turned up by the plough. On the bank of the stream just above its junction with the Esk is a depression which looks as if it might be a hearth site 13 feet in external diameter. Poor natural blast, but ample water-power from Esk. There are numerous charcoal pitsteads in Birker Wood.

HARDKNOTT GHYLL. Noted by the Rev. W. S. Calverley, but no clue as to exact locality. To the right of the road ascending the pass about 50 yards over the bridge are remains of a hearth or kiln, the bottom of which

is covered with burnt matter. From the bottom, a gutter slopes down in direction of the stream. The ruin is some 18 feet in external diameter at the top. I have not been able to find a slag-heap, but through the gate above, at the right beside the ancient track leading from a ford, is a heap of iron ore. There are charcoal pitsteads in the wood at the opposite side of the road from the hearth. Good natural draught.

The bloomeries in Eskdale appear to have been of somewhat varying types, those at Forest Howe and Muncaster Head being the most extensive. The making of the elaborate conduit at the latter suggests an important smelting furnace, as does also the ground covered at Forest Howe near to which are foundations of a large block of buildings.

The next in importance is that in Dalegarth wood, No. 2, which, though of different type, appears to have been on a larger scale than the others which must have been of primitive plan. I have been told by a dalesman that his grandfather could remember the smelting of iron in the woods in the old rude way, so that many of these small sites may be comparatively modern. Iron ore abounds in the fells all round Eskdale, and no doubt has been worked from early times. Every wood contains numbers of charcoal pitsteads, and the number of the bloomery sites suggests that the iron required for the dwellers in the dale was smelted locally. Possibly the two at Muncaster Head and Forest Howe may have been Roman, a fact that can only be definitely settled by excavation. The others are more likely to be medieval and of 17th, 18th, or even early 19th century origin. Many of the workings are so small as to suggest that the owner of the tenement did his own iron smelting as he wanted iron.