

ART. VII.—*A re-consideration of the Lakeside site at Ehenside Tarn, West Cumberland.* By MARY C. FAIR.

THE discovery of the neolithic occupation site at Ehenside (or Gibb) Tarn in West Cumberland is such ancient history that it has been somewhat overlooked, though one of the most important prehistoric discoveries as yet made in Cumberland. I have recently been reviewing the schedule of finds then brought to light, and have noted therein two items the significance of which has not been previously noticed, and I therefore review the history of the discovery of the site briefly, and describe the two items to which I refer.

Ehenside Tarn is (or rather was, for it has been filled in, and is now under cultivation) situated between Beckermeth and the sea, in a locality where many sporadic finds of stone axes, quern-stones, etc. have been recorded from time to time. It was an oblong sheet of water covering about 6 acres, with a crescent-shaped island, the points of which were directed to north and south, towards the east end. In 1869 Mr. Quayle, the tenant of the farm, Middle Ehenside, whereon the tarn was situated, commenced the work of draining the tarn by means of a 15 ft. deep outfall drain cut from the east end of the tarn and leading to the river. As the water drained away and the bed of the tarn was exposed, the drain-excavators cut trenches across this area, throwing out a quantity of boggy upcast.

The Rev. S. Pinhorne, vicar of Beckermeth, noticed prehistoric implements of stone and wood lying about on this upcast material, but died suddenly before he had made any systematic research or report.

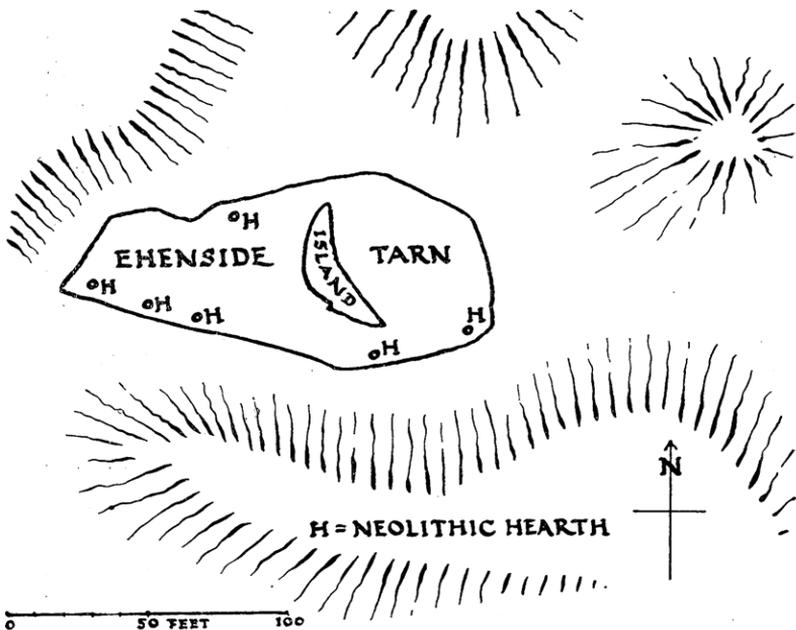
In the summer of 1871, however, the Society of Antiquaries sent Mr. R. D. Darbishire, B.A., F.G.S., to examine and report on the site. His report is printed in *Archaeologia*, vol. 44.

Ehenside Tarn had been a forest-pit into which trees of several varieties, oak birch, beech, alder, hazel, had fallen at a period "when after the destruction of the woods which once surrounded the lake, the water still stood at a level considerably lower, or the forest bed somewhat higher than its present surface." The lake-bed and this layer of tree trunks and branches rested upon sharp silver sand and the hard marl of the district. Mr. Darbishire had a series of trenches cut on the drained shore of the tarn at its south-east end during August and September 1871, "and a fair amount of tarn bottom turned over."

Six hearths were discovered; one on the north shore, where a neolithic round-bottomed pot was found, "in the lake-bed, near the large fireplace." Three hearths were found on the south-west shore, and two more on the south-east shore. Mr. Quayle said that "at the south east corner of the tarn . . . there were abundant pieces of pottery." All the hearths were a little below modern water-level, but must originally have been a little above it, on the shore.

One of the most important of the finds was a beautiful stone axe (now in the British Museum), of hard, dark olive-grey greenstone, 9 inches long, 3 inches wide at the cutting edge, tapering to 1.5 inches in width at the butt. It weighed 1 lb. 14 ozs. With this was found its haft, a piece of hard beech-wood, carefully shaped and finished. "The whole is a beautiful specimen of the skill and finish of the ancient workman." Other axes, some finished, some partly ground, were found, and a fine example of a corn-muller was discovered and is now in the British Museum: "a large slab of local freestone rubbed on the upper side into an even shallow basin, 1.5 inches

deep." The whole weighs 52 lbs. 8 ozs. The hand-stone of this muller was found with it, "a heavy spheroidal boulder of greenstone weathered grey, 7.5 ins. diameter, 4 inches thick, and weighs 15 lbs." This is the form of corn-grinding implement used by Neolithic and Bronze Age people (E. C. Curwen in *Antiquity*, Sept., 1927, "*Prehistoric Agriculture in Britain*," p. 267-8).



Many rubbers and grinders of stone, used in the making of axes, were also found.

In addition to two axe-hafts, there were many wooden implements, including a basin, clubs, a paddle, and two curious objects like paddles with projecting prongs.\* It

\* This object, a kind of three-pronged fork with the prongs springing from a flat member like the blade of a paddle, is explained by Dr. E. Cecil Curwen, F.S.A., in answer to a query from us, as a fish-spear, "the prototype of Neptune's trident." He tells us that three-pronged wooden spears barbed with shark's teeth are used for fishing by Pacific Islanders.—Ed.

was reported that a dug-out canoe had been found, but this may have been part of the debris of a mill burnt down in 1830, and is rightly omitted from Dr. Cyril Fox's list of canoes in *Antiquaries Journal*, vol. vi.

The pottery included two types of neolithic ware; coarse undecorated, and a decorated sherd which Mr. Stuart Piggott, who is about to notice it in a paper on "The Neolithic Pottery of the British Isles" in the *Archaeological Journal*, tells me is decorated with the "figure-of-eight" pattern (*cf.* Miss Liddell in *Antiquity*, Sept., 1929, pp. 283-291), characteristic of the later neolithic culture. Mr. Piggott adds (letter to the writer) "in the north, and especially in Scotland, the two neolithic cultures fused to some extent, and the Ehenside sherds look like the results of some such fusion."

So far, the site presents the appearance of a simple neolithic settlement; but this appearance is complicated by the presence of two relics belonging to a much later age.

(1) A beehive rotary quern. This first appears in Britain *c.* 250 B.C., and becomes steadily commoner until, about the beginning of our era, it predominates over the saddle-quern (Curwen, *op. cit.*). Beehive querns are common at Roman sites (e.g. Hardknot, Parkhouse kilns near Muncaster, and Ravenglass) and are still used in remote districts of Algeria (*Antiquity*, 1927, pp. 399-400).

(2) A sherd of pottery which Mr. Darbishire rightly identified as Roman. Its place in the Roman period can now be definitely fixed. When studying Mr. Corder's report of the Roman Pottery at Crambeck, Castle Howard, I was struck by the marked resemblance between certain styles of Crambeck ware, and this sherd from Ehenside Tarn very minutely described in Mr. Darbishire's report. I wrote to Mr. Kendrick of the British Museum, who confirmed my conjecture, saying that the Ehenside fragment "is part of a flanged bowl almost exactly like those represented on Plate 1 of the Crambeck Report, nos.

1 and 2." Mr. Darbishire's description is as follows: "A vessel about 10 inches in diameter of a fine clay well baked, buff coloured internally, and with a brownish-black smooth well-finished surface inside and outside; below the edge of a thin vertical edge is a rounded overhanging curved ornamented lip. The inner surface still bears traces of an even and a wavy line of ornament, now dully glazed, formerly probably with some colour. This fragment is apparently of Roman origin; its exact place or level of deposit is not now determinable" (*Archaeologia*, vol. 44, pp. 291-92. Item 34 of schedule). "These bowls vary considerably in size, but comparatively little in section. The majority are grey or black, frequently burnished . . . About half the examples have a wavy line or zig-zag burnished internally, often a zone left unburnished when the rest of the vessel has been polished. A few examples with two or even three internal wavy lines have been found. Bowls of this form are of common occurrence particularly on late Roman sites. . . The internal wavy line . . . may be confidently assigned to the last quarter of the 4th century" (P. Corder, *op. cit.* pp. 25-6).

As far as I know this is the first fragment of Crambeck ware to be recorded in West Cumberland; I found (October, 1931) a fragment of a bowl of similar shape, but without the internal wavy line, in the occupation-level of the western face of the Roman fort at Ravenglass.

These two relics seem to show that the Ehenside Tarn site was occupied down to (or rather perhaps, re-occupied in) the late Roman period. To their evidence should perhaps be added that of the axe-hammer (schedule, no. 86) found in an old wall near the tarn; this type of implement is now recognized as belonging to the Bronze Age. The wooden objects cannot all be dated with precision, but the natural presumption is that they mostly belong, as the axe-hafts certainly do, to the

neolithic period. The conclusion seems to be that there was a considerable Late Neolithic occupation on the shores of Ehenside Tarn, belonging to what Mr. T. D. Kendrick calls "the Axe Age," which immediately preceded the introduction of bronze (c. 2000 B.C.) and may have overlapped well into the Bronze Age in these remote districts; and that the site was either continuously occupied, though on a very small scale, into the late Roman period, or else that it was revisited from time to time, no doubt by people bent on fishing and settling there temporarily, in the latter period.

I have to thank Mr. Stuart Piggott, Mr. R. G. Collingwood and Mr. T. D. Kendrick for much information and help, and the Society of Antiquaries for permission to reproduce a sketch-plan of the site from the engraving in *Archaeologia*, vol. 44.