

Two Hearth-blowers from Henley-on-Thames and Basingstoke.

By R. PATTERSON, B.Sc.

INTEREST has recently been shown in the "Jack-of-Hilton" type of hearth-blower¹ of which only two examples are known to exist in this country. One is from Basingstoke and now in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries, while the other is from Henley-on-Thames, and is in the possession of the Reading Museum.

HEARTH-BLOWER FROM HENLEY-ON-THAMES.

The Henley blower came into the possession of Mr. C. H. W. à Court Repington of Amington Hall, Tamworth, Warwickshire, about 1830, and was given to his son, Mr. S. à Court, of Paradise Farm, Henley-on-Thames, in 1896. Shortly after this date it was discarded into a pond in his garden, and was subsequently rediscovered in December, 1937, during the process of emptying and cleaning the pond.

This blower is a hollow bronze figure of a man standing 10 inches high, weighing five pounds fifteen ounces and with a capacity of 45½ cubic inches. The figure is resting on the right knee with the left hand on the left knee and the right hand on the forehead. A girdle fastening with a buckle at the front, and some form of necklet with a pendant at the throat are the only adornments. The hair is short-cut, parted in the middle, and a roll round the back of the head is a separate addition of lead. A small circular hole one sixteenth of an inch in diameter represents the mouth, and there is a larger hole three-eighths of an inch diameter in the middle of the back and on a level with the shoulders. Half of the left foot and the lower part of the penis are missing, this being an attempt at defacement by a previous owner. The back of the head was damaged by a pick when rediscovered, and the lower part of the right leg shows a brazed repair.

The figure is grotesquely ill-proportioned, with narrow fore-arms, large belly and pronounced buttocks, and bears crude representations of features. Much flaking has taken place but patches of the original surface, well patinated, indicate a rough casting coarsely finished with a file and decorated with incisions.

The presence of four bronze pins in the body, and two in the head indicate that the body was cast around a clay core as in *cire perdue*, and a rectangular opening in the base, 1½ inches by 1 inch, sealed with a brazed plate of copper, was probably made for the extraction of this core.

¹ *Museums J.* XLVII. 160 and 176 and the forthcoming paper by Dr. W. L. Hildburgh to the Soc. of Antiquaries.

A HEARTH-BLOWER FROM BASINGSTOKE.

A very similar hearth-blower was discovered in 1799 when digging the basin of the canal at Basingstoke,¹ and presented by Mr. Edmund Fry to the Society of Antiquaries, in whose museum at Burlington House it may now be seen.

This Basingstoke bronze stands $10\frac{3}{4}$ inches high and weighs six pounds eleven ounces. There is a circular hole five sixteenth inches diameter in the back just below the neck, and a smaller hole one sixteenth inches diameter in the mouth. The attitude is almost identical with that of the Henley figure, but the face is more childish in appearance and the cheeks blown out. The hair is again short-cut but in an unparted style, and is surmounted by a chaplet. A buckled belt and necklet are present, and the penis is greatly exaggerated.

There are indications of copper pins piercing the figure, and a rectangular hole in the base, $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches by $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches, is sealed by a plate of copper brazed as in the Henley figure. This specimen is in a fine state of preservation, with a dark green patina.

It will at once be seen how striking is the similarity between these two figures from Henley and Basingstoke.

USE OF THE HEARTH-BLOWER.

There appears to be only one really full account of the manner of use of hearth-blowers, and this is given by Dr. Robert Plot in 1686.² I cannot do better than quote his own words:—

“Yet there are many old *Customs* in use within memory, of whose originals I could find no tolerable account, that possibly might commence as high as these times; such as the service due from the Lord of *Essington* in this *County* to the Lord of *Hilton*, about a mile distant, *viz.* that the Lord of the Manor of *Essington* (now one St. *Johns* Esq., late *St. Gilbert Waking*) shall bring a goose every *New-years* day, and drive it round the fire in the *Hall* at *Hilton*, at least 3 times (which he is bound to doe as mean Lord) whil'st *Jack* of *Hilton* is blowing the fire. Now *Jack* of *Hilton* is a little hollow Image of brass of about 12 inches high, kneeling upon his left knee, and holding his right hand upon his head, and his left upon *Pego* or his *veretrum* erected, as in *Tab. 33, Fig. 12*, above mention'd; having a little hole in the place of the *mouth*, about the bigness of a great pins head, and another in the back about $\frac{2}{3}$ of an inch diameter, at which last hole it is fill'd with water. it holding about 4 pints and $\frac{1}{4}$, which, when set to a strong fire, evaporates after the same manner as in an *Aeolipile*, and vents itself at the smaller hole at the mouth in a constant blast, blowing the fire so strongly that it is very audible,

¹ *Archaeologia*, XIII, 212 and 410.

² Plot Robert. “*The Natural History of Staffordshire.*” Oxford, 1686. 433.

and makes a sensible impression in that part of the fire where the blast lights, as I found by experience *May* the 26, 1680. After the Lord of *Essington*, or his *Deputy* or *Bayliff*, has driven the goose round the fire (at lest 3 times) whilst this *Image* blows it, he carries it into the *Kitchin* of *Hilton-Hall*, and delivers it to the *Cook*, who having dressed it, the Lord of *Essington* or his *Bayliff*, by way of further service, brings it to the Table of the Lord paramount of *Hilton* and *Essington*, and receives a dish of meat, from the said Lord of *Hiltons* table, for his own Mess."

From the above description it is obvious that the Henley and Basingstoke figures are of the same type as Jack of Hilton, differing only in the height, the reversal of the resting knee and the position of the lower hand, while the condition of the surface is in both cases consistent with a metal which has been subjected to the heat of a fire.

Although the manner of use of Jack of Hilton is described, and presumably the Henley and Basingstoke specimens were similarly used, there is no indication of the significance of their use. It is possible that the menial pose and function of the figures indicate some form of feudal service due from one person to another, the ritual being perpetuated until all trace of its origin is lost.

This is to some extent confirmed by Mr. S. à Court's statement that the Henley specimen was produced annually at the Amington Rent Audit until after 1830 for the amusement of the tenants, being filled with water and placed in the hob to emit steam. Alternatively it might, as suggested by Thomas Astle,¹ be a form of pagan worship of Priapus, a deity who was worshipped in Naples as late as 1780 and who, no doubt, was classed by our pagan ancestors amongst their idols.

ORIGIN OF HEARTH-BLOWERS.

The origin of these hearth-blowers is equally vague, but apparently they were known in Roman times, for Vitruvius mentions an Aeolipile, "*aeolipylae aecrae dicuntur vasa ad cognoscendam ventorum rationem facta*," and in the accounts book of King Rene 11 of Anjou for the year 1448 is recorded the purchase from Rome of a "bronze head which breathes out fire." Ant. A. Filarete in 1465,² describes in detail a steam-blower in the form of a "Naked figure with the blown-out cheeks of a Putto."

A bronze figure very similar to the Henley one but 23 inches high was dug up in the 16th century at Kyffhauser.³

Of the final date of the use of hearth-blowers one can be a little more certain, for Jack of Hilton was used annually until about 1630, as shewn by Dr. Plot.⁴ "Which service was performed about 50

¹ *Archaeologia*, XIII. 212.

² Filarete. Ant. A. "*The Art of Building*," 1465.

³ Falke and Meyer, "*Bronzegerate des Mittelalters I.*" Berlin, 1935. 106.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*

years since, by *James Wilkinson* then Bayliff of *St. Gilbert Wakering*, the *Lady Townsend* being Lady of the Manor of *Hilton, Tho. a Stokes* and *John a Stokes* brothers, both living *An. 1680*, then being present."

Their use was widespread in England and possibly continued to a later date in some parts, for in Lancashire as late as the 1890's it was not uncommon to subdue an erring child by threatening "to fill him with water and sit him on the fire until it boiled out of his mouth"—no doubt a reference to the hearth-blower.

I am greatly indebted to Dr. O. von Falke of the Schloss Museum, Berlin, for much of the information here presented, and to W. A. Smallcombe, B.Sc., Director of the Reading Museum, for valuable help and advice. I should also like to thank Miss M. M. Swadling of the Reading Public Library and H. S. Kingsford, Assistant Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries, for their kind assistance.

Archæological Notes.

A NEOLITHIC BOWL FROM PANGBOURNE.

In 1928 fragments of pottery associated with human and other bones were unearthed at "Farmhill," Courtlands Hill, Pangbourne, Berks. (Stuart Piggott: "Neolithic Pottery and other remains from Pangbourne and Caversham." *Prehist. Soc., East Anglia*. Vol. VI. Pt. 1, P. 30, 1928.)

The sherds were known to be from a large round bottomed bowl with at least 4 lugs. Some important pieces were missing when dug, whilst war damage (1942) accounted for the loss of several more. In 1947 I was able to reconstruct and assemble the bowl, which is on view in the permanent collection at Reading Museum (75.28).

W. A. SMALLCOMBE.

A FLINT FLAKE FROM ASTON TIRROLD.

The unusually fine flake implement illustrated in the accompanying figure was found in December 1947 by a Mr. Farey, of Crowmarsh, on low-lying alluvial land half a mile to the east of Aston Tirrold Church, Berks. He has presented it to Reading Museum, where it bears the accession number 2.48.

The implement which is $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches long is made from dark greenish grey translucent flint. It is neatly trimmed along both edges. It was submitted to Dr. Grahame Clark, who is of the opinion that the secondary trimming suggests an Early Bronze Age date.

I wish to thank Reading Museum for permission to publish this find.

A. E. P. COLLINS.