

CHAMBERED TUMULUS AT PLAS NEWYDD, ANGLESEY.

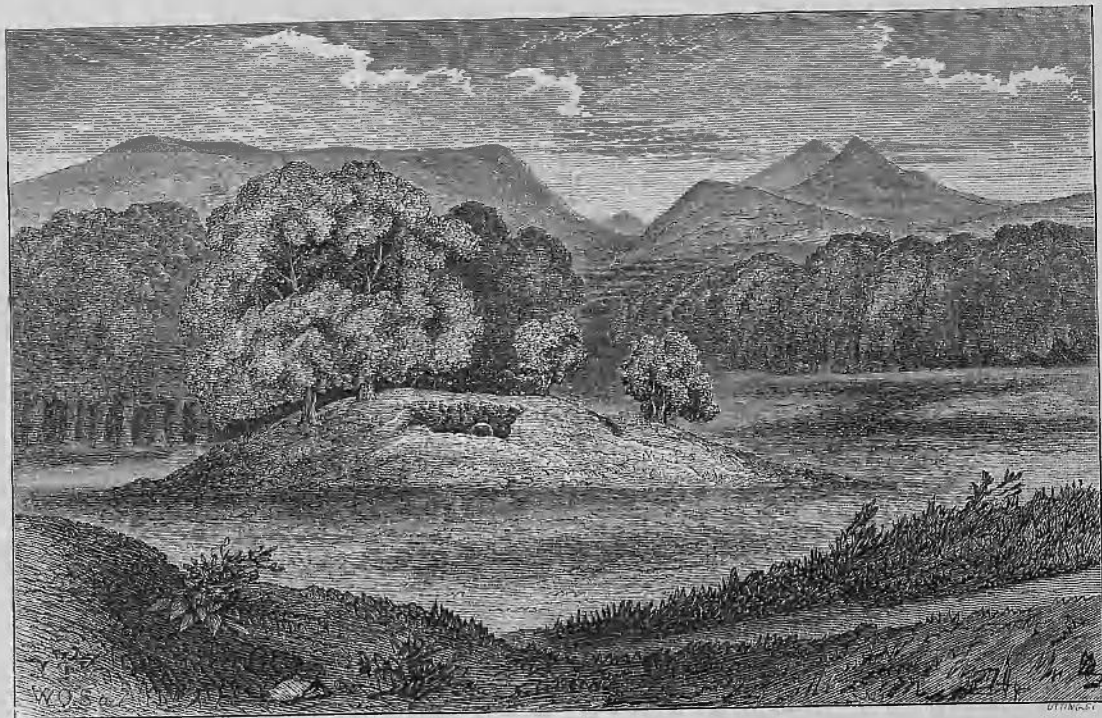


Fig. 1.—The Chambered Tumulus in the Park, Plas Newydd, Anglesey. View from the north-west.
From a drawing by the Hon. William Owen Stanley, M P., F.S.A.

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THE CHAMBERED TUMULUS IN PLAS NEWYDD PARK, ANGLESEY.

By the Hon. WILLIAM OWEN STANLEY, M.P., F.S.A.

WITH the exception of Cornwall there is, perhaps, no county in England and Wales so rich in Celtic remains as Anglesey, or possessing so varied a form of megalithic structures, cromlechs and cistvaens, meini-hirion and chambered tumuli. Many of these have been described of late, and figured in the pages of the *Archæological Journal* and *Archæologia Cambrensis*; but hitherto one of the most interesting has not been so fully noticed as it deserves, from its size and peculiar features.

In the park of Plas Newydd, the seat of the Marquis of Anglesey, towards the southern end, and on the left hand of a path leading to the kitchen gardens, there is to be seen a large green mound or tumulus with two oak trees of considerable size growing upon it. No one can pass without being struck with its appearance, situated as it is in a valley of surpassing beauty, surrounded by magnificent trees of all sorts. The vista to the south-east is terminated by the grand range of Carnarvonshire mountains, Snowdon with its triple head above all the others (see woodcuts, fig. 1).

The visitor, descending to examine the mound, will find on the east side that excavations have been made in former times, disclosing the entrance to an interior chamber or cist which once contained the bones or ashes of the great warrior, in whose memory this stupendous mound was erected. We may speculate whether he was one of the heroes who died on this spot fighting against the victorious

legion of the Romans led by Paulinus Suetonius ; more probably he may have been one of an earlier race.

The mound itself, as is usually the case, is formed of earth and the small fragments of limestone which abound in the surrounding soil. The cist is composed of large flat slabs of limestone, the dimensions of which are accurately given in the accompanying plan, from drawings and measurements taken by the Rev. W. Wynn Williams, jun. of Menaifron (fig. 2). The peculiar feature of this sepulchral chamber is the front stone closing the entrance to the cist.

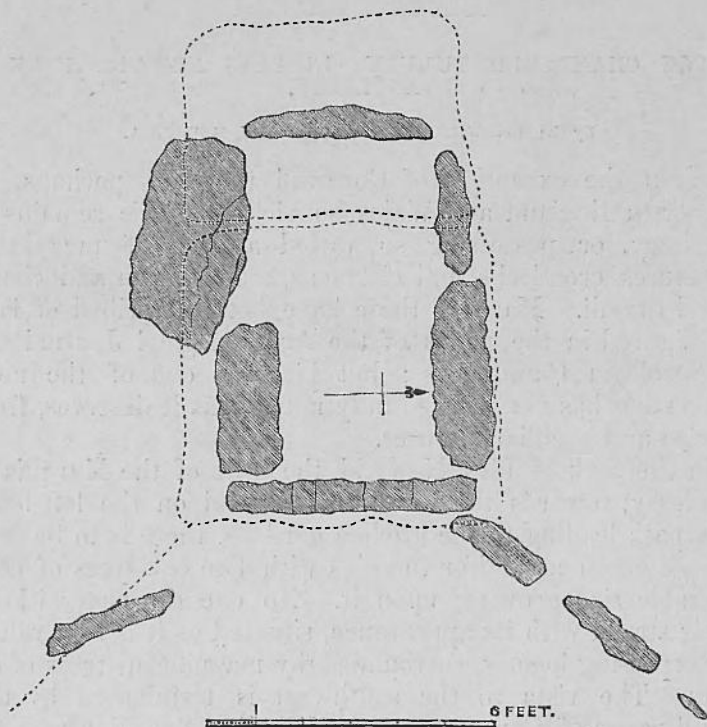


Fig 2.—Plan of the chamber in the Tumulus, Plas Newydd Park. From measurements taken by the Rev. W. Wynn Williams, jun.

It faces the east, and was perforated in a remarkable manner (fig. 3). This stone is now broken in half, but the lower portion remains in its original position ; it has two circular holes, about ten inches in diameter, artificially made in it ; the upper portion of the stone having been broken, and probably removed, when the mound was first excavated, we

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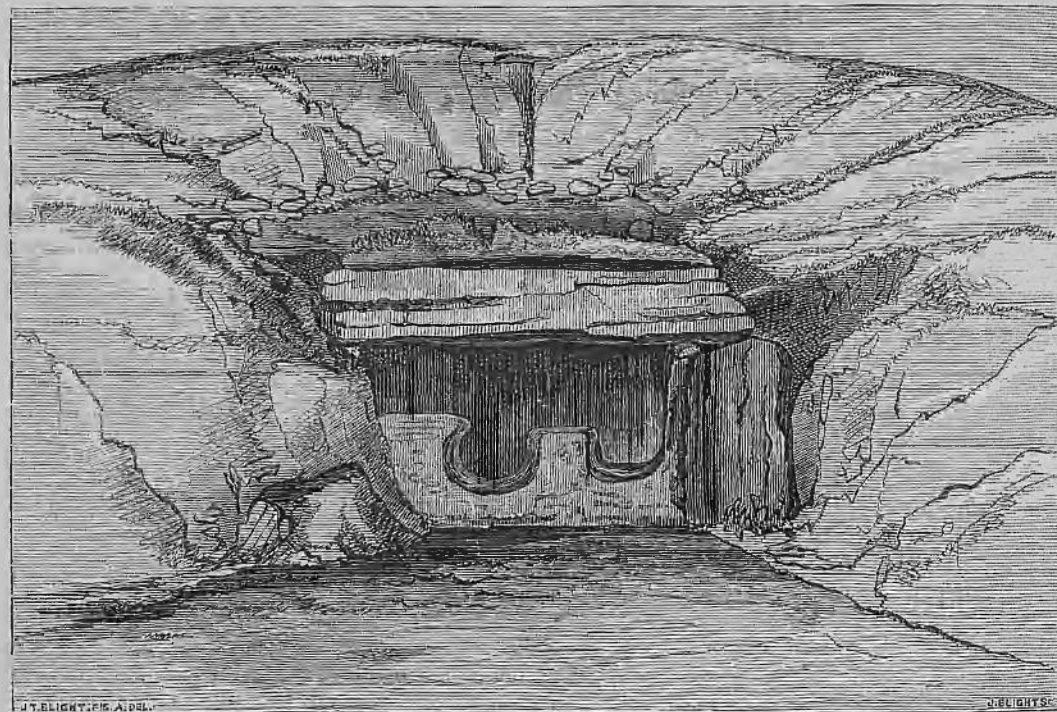


Fig. 3.—Entrance to the Chamber, with holed stone facing south-east, Plas Newydd Tumulus, Anglesey.

From a drawing by the Hon. William Owen Stanley, M.P., F.S.A.

cannot with any certainty say that the stone had been of one piece, or that the holes had been perfect circles. About three-quarters appear to remain ; and from the circumstance that this stone, on the north side, reaches within seven inches of the covering stone at the top, we may, I think, conclude that it was originally one perfect stone, which closed the entrance to the chamber. The holes are chamfered off on the outside. The entrance is about 2 ft. 3 ins. high, and 5 ft. wide.

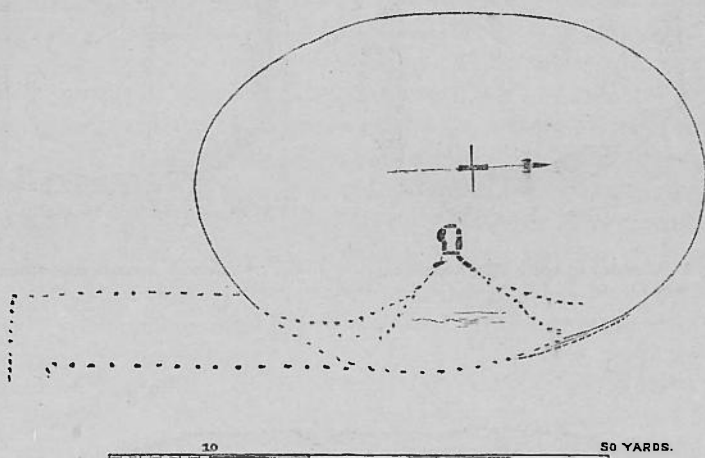


Fig. 4.—Ground plan of the chambered Tumulus, Plas Newydd.

The dimensions of the tumulus are about 150 ft. in length, 105 ft. in width, and 14 to 15 ft. in height (see ground-plan, fig. 4).

Of late attention has been called to such perforations occurring in the front or side-stones of sepulchral chambers in India and other parts. I have endeavoured to ascertain how many similar structures are to be found in this country. I am indebted to my relation, Mr. Albert Way, for a reference to the account of one presenting the same peculiarities of form and structure. It has been published in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*,¹ in the description given by the Rev. S. Lysons of a chambered tumulus at Rodmarton, Gloucestershire. This mound is of a kind known as "long barrows." Its dimensions are as follow: length, 176 ft.; width, 71 ft.; height, 10 ft. (See ground-plan,

¹ *Proc. Soc. Antiq.*, second series, vol. ii. p. 275.

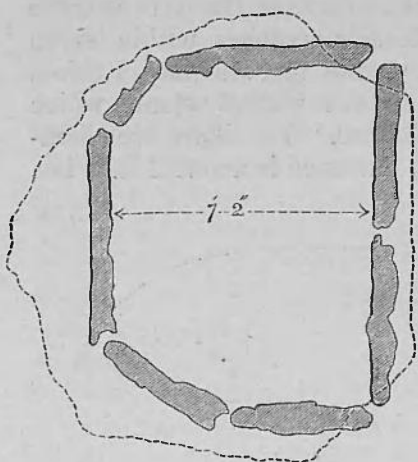


Fig. 6.—Chamber on north side, Rodmarton.

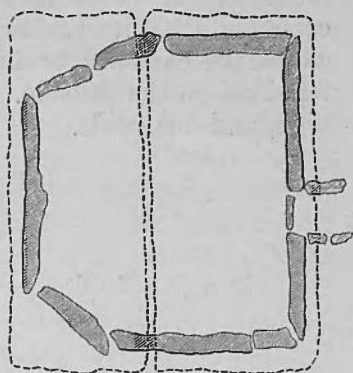


Fig. 7.—Chamber on south side, Rodmarton.

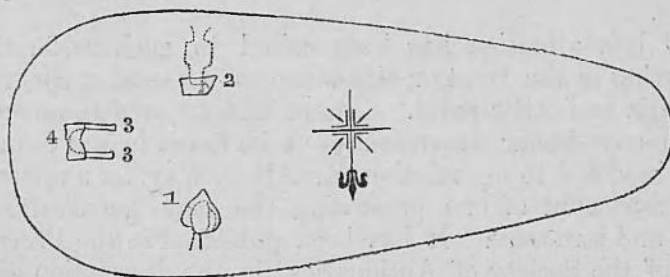


Fig. 5.—Windmill Tump, a chambered barrow at Rodmarton, Gloucestershire. Elevation and ground plan. Scale, 50 ft. to 1 in. 1, Stone covering the north chamber. 2, South chamber. 3, 3, Upright stones. 4, Leaning stone.

fig. 5, also plans of the chambers, figs. 6, 7.) The entrance to the north chamber was closed, nearly to the roof, by a barrier of two stones placed side by side, upright, in the ground, and hollowed out on their two inner and adjoining edges, so as to leave a sort of porthole of an oval shape (woodcut, fig. 8). In some instances, as at Uley, Gloucestershire (fig. 9), there is a doorway with jambs and a horizontal slab.

Another very similar example may be cited that was brought to light, in 1808, in the "long barrow" at Avening, Gloucestershire, as described by the antiquary of that county, Fosbrooke.² The entrance of the chamber was closed, as at Rodmarton, by two upright slabs, or jambs, hollowed out so as, when placed side by side, to leave a sort of central porthole, through which the tomb might be entered by a person in a creeping posture³ (see fig. 10). These openings are termed "tolmens" by Lysons, and it was imagined that the structure was thus adapted to the purpose of successive interments. In another instance, the Fairy's Toote, a long barrow at Nempnet, Somerset, there was a further variety of the "tolmen" entrance—a perforated stone shutting up the avenue between the walls of approach.⁴ The Rev. W. C. Lukis describes a similar arrangement in a chambered barrow at Kerlescant in Brittany. Much valuable information on chambered long barrows, and the structures enclosed within them, will be found in Dr. Thurnam's *Memoir on Ancient British Barrows*, published by the Society of Antiquaries.⁵

Mr. Blight mentions a cromlech at Trevethy,⁶ in Cornwall, with a circular hole in the covering stone. Other instances, in Brittany and elsewhere, are noticed in the *Archæologia Cambrensis*.⁷

Col. Meadows Taylor, in his interesting account of the cromlechs in the Dekhan in India, published by the Royal Irish Academy,⁸ describes a large group of cromlechs in

² *Encycl. Antiq.*, pp. 544, 547.

³ *Journal Brit. Arch. Assoc.* 1868, 40, plates 2, 3.

⁴ It was opened in 1789. See Collinson's and other local histories, and *Gent. Mag.* for 1789, 1792, &c.

⁵ *Archæologia*, vol. xlii. pp. 199—243.

⁶ Described by Norden, A.D. 1584. There is a model in the British Museum. Note p. 291, Col. Forbes Leslie.

⁷ *Arch. Camb.*, 3rd Series, vol. xv. p. 193. Mr. C. Thorne, in a note on the construction of Cromlechs, points out

that M. Carro, in his "*Voyage chez les Celtes*," mentions the *dolmen* of Trie as having the slab on the south side perforated by a round hole; also another near Beauvais, at Villers St. Sepulcre, and elsewhere in Brittany.

⁸ This memoir was first given by Col. Taylor in the *Transactions of the Bombay Asiatic Society*, Jan. 1853. The kistvaen with a circular aperture has been figured in Col. Forbes Leslie's *Early Races of Scotland*, ii. p. 290; and Lubbock, *Pre-historic Times*, p. 121, second edit.

Shirapoor, on the Bheema and Krishna rivers. They are called by the natives "Mori Munni," or Mories' houses, and regarded as vestiges of a supposed dwarf race of great strength. These Druidical Celtic, Scythian, or Aryan remains are most instructive. Many of the closed kistvaens had round holes in the centre slab, on the south side: diameter, from 9 to 4 inches (figs. 11, 12). Colonel Meadows Taylor states that this peculiarity is found to exist in similar remains in Brittany and in England, Kits Coty House, in Kent, being a well-known example; and such objects exist also in Circassia, according to Mr. Bell.⁹ Mr. R. A. Cole mentions, in his account of the cromlechs of Southern India, a double one with a hole in each end¹ (see woodcut, fig. 13).

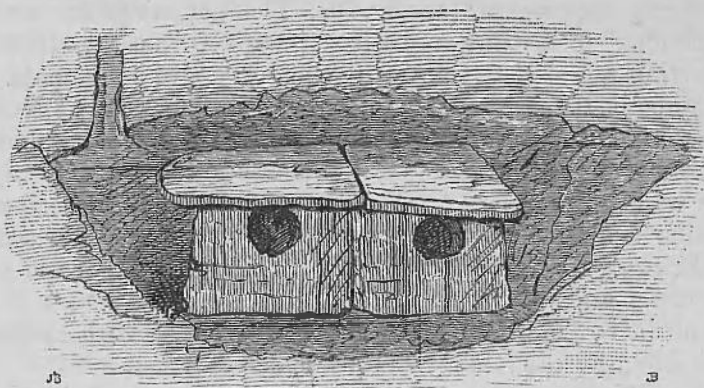


Fig. 13.—Cromlechs of Southern India. Each cavity 7 ft. 3 in. by 3 ft. 6 in. Formed of unhewn stone. Upper lines about 11 in. by 4. (From a drawing by R. A. Cole.)

I may here, however, remark that Kits Coty House (fig. 14), has no perforation in the front, or in any of the other stones of which it is composed;² but it is remarkable as being composed of three upright stones instead of four, making it an open cromlech; or, as Col. Meadows Taylor goes on to say, "I here make a distinction between kistvaen and cromlech. They are similarly constructed, except that the former, whether with or without a top, has always four sides, and

⁹ Travels in Circassia, i. p. 154.

¹ Trans. Ethnological Society, vol. vii. N. S. p. 299.

² A good representation of Kits Coty House was given in Col. Forbes Leslie's Early Races of Scotland, ii. p. 275; by

his courteous permission it has been reproduced in this memoir. Compare Camden's description of it in 1590; Archaeologia, vol. ii. p. 116, pl. vii.: Gent. Mag. May 1753, p. 248; Borlase, Antiqu. Cornw. p. 224.

the latter only three. In none of the open cromlechs could anything be found, and the original earth of the floors remained undisturbed. In the closed or four-sided cromlechs were found human ashes, portions of bone, and charcoal mixed with pieces of broken pottery, red and black, with the invariable *pandre matti*, or black earth mould, brought from a distance." Of 2129 dolmens in one district in the Dekhan more than 1100 had the lateral opening.

Col. Forbes Leslie, in his remarks upon this memoir by Col. Meadows Taylor, observes that these kistvaens are altogether above ground. They never appear to have been under a mound, like the dolmens. They were probably used as sacrificial altars. Speaking of the closed kistvaens of the Dekhan, with the round hole in one of the stones which forms the end or side of the monument, it may have been intended for the spirit to pass through in progress to the new body which it was to occupy in its destined transmigration; and, as Col. Leslie presumed, through this opening the spirit was expected to convey the arms, ornaments, and valuables deposited for its use, but still found in such tombs.³ The Hindus believe that the soul of a person deceased exists, but in ethereal or unsubstantial form, until certain necessary funeral ceremonies are performed. It then passes into a more substantial form, described as about the size and length of a man's thumb. The ceremonies are continued daily for ten days; then once a month until the final ceremony takes place at the end of the year. The soul is supplied with food daily, cakes of rice and milk, rich libations of water.⁴

It is not disputed, I apprehend, that the Druids believed in the Pythagorean doctrines, the pre-existence of souls, and their transmigration from one vehicle to another.

Pennant, in his account of the cromlech and tumulus at Plas Newydd, writes as follows:—"Not far from the cromlech is a large *carnedd*. Part has been removed, and within was discovered a cell about 7 ft. long and 3 ft. wide, covered at top with two flat stones, and lined on the sides with others. To get in I crept over a flag placed across the entrance. On the top of the stone were two semicircular holes of size sufficient to take in the human neck. It is conjectured that above might have been another; so that both

³ Forbes Leslie, vol. ii. p. 290.

⁴ Carey's Ramayan, iii. p. 72.

together might perform the office of a stocks. It is indeed conjecture, yet not an improbable one, that in this place had been kept the wretches destined for sacrifice ; as it is well known that they performed those execrable rites, and often upon captives who had suffered long imprisonment, perhaps in cells similar to this.”⁵

Had Pennant lived and written in these days, he would, with his acute mind, most probably have compared the holed stone in the sepulchral chamber at Plas Newydd with the kistvaens of the East. In their perforated entrance-stone he would have traced the link between East and West, and in his mind's eye have followed the great migration of peoples from the plains and hills of India, gradually spreading their religious rites, manners, and customs, as far as the bleak islands of the far West ; leaving their stupendous stone structures, as they passed, an indelible witness of their passage, and of the cradle from which they sprang. He might also have found reason to doubt whether the religion of the Druids was in fact, as had been alleged, tainted with the horrid rites of human sacrifice.

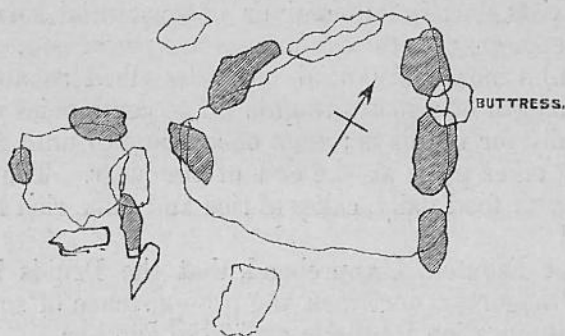


Fig. 15.—Ground plan of the double cromlech, near the stables, Plas Newydd.

On comparing Pennant's engraving of the Plas Newydd cromlech (published 1781) with the present appearance ; also finding in Pughe's *Cambria Depicta* (1816) this account, "Some time before I saw it, it was supposed that some part of its supporters had given way on one side, which greatly alarmed the family : it was in consequence propped up with pieces of thick timber ;" I am inclined to think that the

⁵ *Tour in Wales*, vol. ii. p. 238.

projecting stone at the north-east end, supporting the cap-stone, has been placed there as a support, of late years, by the Anglesey family. The stone is placed at an angle most unusual in all cromlechs, and it is not figured in Pennant's view (see figs. 16, 17, and plan, fig. 15).⁶

In connection with the peculiar construction of the Plas Newydd tumulus, and the double perforation of the front stone, Tylor, in his book upon *Primitive Culture*, under the article called "*Animism*," throws much light upon the holed tombs in India, in the Dekhan and elsewhere. He treats of the early belief entertained by most nations of the material and substantial nature of the soul. Thus it is an usual proceeding to make openings through solid materials to allow souls to pass. The Iroquois in old times used to leave an opening in the grave for lingering souls to visit the body, and some of them still bore holes in the coffin for the same purpose. We may give this as a plausible reason for leaving the circular hole or holes in the portal stone of sepulchral structures, such as Plas Newydd, and other similar places of burial in this and other countries of the world. The Chinese make a hole in the roof to let out the soul at death; and lastly, the custom of opening a window or door for the departing soul when it quits the body is, to this day, a very familiar superstition in France, Germany, England and Scotland. The reader will doubtless recal the tragic scene of the dying smuggler in Meg Merrilies' hut, and the assertion of the hag, when blamed for leaving the entrance of the lair open. "Wha ever heard of a door being barred when a man was in the death-thraw? How d'ye think the spirit to get awa through bolts and bars like thae?" (Guy Mannering, c. xxvii.).

It may not be out of place to notice here that recent research leads to the belief, or rather to the confirmation of the fact, that all megalithic structures, whether sepulchral or for religious rites and ceremonies, were first known in the East.

Most of the cromlechs in Anglesey appear to have been originally chambered cists covered over with a mound of earth, like this tumulus at Plas Newydd. The great cromlech near the stables at Plas Newydd bears all the appear-

⁶ Allusion is made by the Rev. E. L. Barnwell to this additional supporter of the enormous cap-stone in his memoir on

Cromlechs in North Wales, Arch. Cambr., third series, vol. xv. p. 142.

ance of having been covered over, and a circle of large stones arranged round the mound. Some of these stones are still to be seen. The very curious and interesting chambered tomb at Bryncelli, about a mile distant, was covered with a mound in the memory of man.⁷ When first opened it contained, as has been stated, the bones of those who had therein been buried, arranged on stone seats round the central cell, which was supported by a stone pillar. The bodies, probably, were introduced through the long narrow passage which communicated with the outside of the mound, like the entrance at New Grange in Ireland.

I cannot find any authentic mention of urns having been found in or under cromlechs. The Rev. Hugh Prichard, however, states that a cinerary urn was found near the cromlech at Henblas, Anglesey.⁸ According to tradition urns were found under the cromlech at Trefigneth, described on the next page.

The urn-burials, which are frequent in Anglesey, seem to have been placed in a rudely-formed cell composed of flat stones, to prevent the pressure of the earth and destruction of the urn. A small mound was frequently raised over the urn, as at Bronwen's tomb on the banks of the Alaw, and at Porth Dafarch.⁹

Anglesey has many large upright stones or *meinihirion* scattered in all parts. These seem to have marked battles fought in the vicinity, or to have been raised over the tomb of a slain warrior. Wherever they are seen, tradition points out some memorable conflict that had there occurred in ancient times.

Mr. Barnwell, in a recent memoir in the *Archæologia Cambrensis*, has stated that the great question whether all cromlechs are the perfect or imperfect remains of sepulchral chambers, or the works of Druidic hands, must in the year 1869 be considered finally and satisfactorily settled; the theory of Druidic altars being, it is hoped, finally disposed of.¹ If Mr. Barnwell means to affirm that all megalithic structures were originally sepulchral, I must, I fear, differ from him. At one time, all stone structures were called Druids' altars; now, it is contended that none were ever

⁷ See also "*Barclodjad y Gawres*," by the Rev. H. Prichard, *Arch. Camb.*, third series, vol. xv. p. 403.

⁸ *Ibid.* vol. xii. p. 469.

⁹ *Arch. Camb.*, 3rd Series, vol. xiv. pp. 222, 223.

¹ Cromlechs in North Wales, *Arch. Camb.*, third series, vol. xv. p. 118.

used for religious rites and ceremonies. We may thus run into another extreme. If we take a wider view of this question, and examine into the nature of the stone altars, circles, and avenues, existing in other countries as well as our own, we must pause before we come to such a conclusion. The earliest notice of stone structures is contained in the Bible history. There they are all connected with worship, either of Baal or of the Supreme Deity. They were of unhewn stone (altars of sacrifice), set up on high places or near groves. We read in the Book of Deuteronomy, "Ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars" (upright stones), "and burn their groves with fire."² Joshua set up a stone as a witness; many other allusions to megalithic monuments occur also in Scripture, too numerous to quote.

Kits Coty House, in its present condition, an open three-stone cell, with a covering stone, bears no appearance of being sepulchral; and I am informed that cromlechs existing in Cornwall and Brittany are apparently of the same character.

In connection with the subject of this memoir, the following notices of some megalithic remains that exist in another quarter of the Island of Anglesey cannot fail to prove of interest to the members of the Institute. They are here reproduced, with some additional particulars, from the communication formerly made by me to the Cambrian Archaeological Association.³

Upon a rocky knoll close to the farm-house of Trefigneth, about a mile and a half from Holyhead, there is a cromlech, or rather kistvaen, of which a representation is here given⁴ (fig. 18). From this spot there is a commanding view over the bay of Holyhead, with the Skerries Island and light-house and the opposite coast of Anglesey in the distance.

This is first mentioned by Aubrey, in his *Monumenta Britannica*, cited by Bishop Gibson, "There is in Anglesey, about a mile from Holy-head, on a hill near the way that leads to Beaumaris, a Monument of huge stones. They are about twenty in number, and between four and five feet high; at the

² Deut. c. xii. v. 3. See also Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, under "Stones."

³ Arch. Cambr., 3rd series, vol. xiii. p. 234.

⁴ Lewis Morris, in his account of Holyhead Church addressed to Browne Willis about 1710, remarks that "at a

place called Treviorweth, in this parish there is a cromlech composed after a very artificial manner, and seems to be three monuments erectèd over the graves of some great men," Cambr. Register, vol. iii. p. 216.

Northern end of it there are two stones about six feet high. They stand upon an hillock in a Farm call'd Trevigneth, and have no other name than Lhecheu [*id est*, Flat-stones] whence the field where they are rais'd is call'd Kaer Lhecheu." Aubrey may probably have visited the place in 1660, when on his return from a journey to Ireland he was "like to be shipwrecked at Holyhead, but no hurt done," as he states in his Autobiographical Memoranda.⁵

About seventy or eighty years ago many of the stones, which formed the covered chambers, were wantonly taken away for gateposts and lintels. The late Lady Stanley, of Penrhos, preserved it from further destruction at that time, and it remains now as it then was. The remains present the appearance of having formed a covered chamber, of about 20 ft. in length, 4 ft. in height inside, and 4 ft. in width, composed of a row of upright stones on each side, covered with large flat slabs. There is a tradition that, when first exposed on the removal of the superincumbent mound of earth and stones, urns and human bones were found inside. Of this, however, no reliable record appears to have been preserved.

About a quarter of a mile from this cromlech, near Trearddur Farm, close to the road on the right, there are the traces of a similar cromlech or kistvaen, now nearly obliterated, called Coetan Arthur. Near this spot, in 1837, was found a vessel containing a great many Roman brass coins of the later emperors. I took them to the British Museum, but none of the coins were peculiar, and I regret that they were purloined in transmission by post to the owner.⁶

Nearer Holyhead, on the same road, there is a fine meinhir (long stone), on the right, in a field near Ty Mawr Farm.

The Central Committee desire to renew the grateful expression of the obligations of the Institute to the kind liberality of the author of the foregoing Memoir, by whom the whole of the illustrations have been contributed.

⁵ Camden's *Britannia*, translated by Bp. Gibson, vol. ii. p. 812.

⁶ A considerable number of Roman coins have been brought to light at various times near Holyhead. Lewis Morris, in his account of Holyhead Church, states that a great quantity had been

found in the parish in 1710, some of them as clear as if recently struck; he mentions coins of Constantine, Constantius, Helena, Crispus, Licinius, Licinianus, Fausta, and several others. *Cambr Register*, vol. iii. p. 216.