

NOTES ON AN UNIQUE IMPLEMENT OF FLINT, FOUND, AS
STATED, IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT.

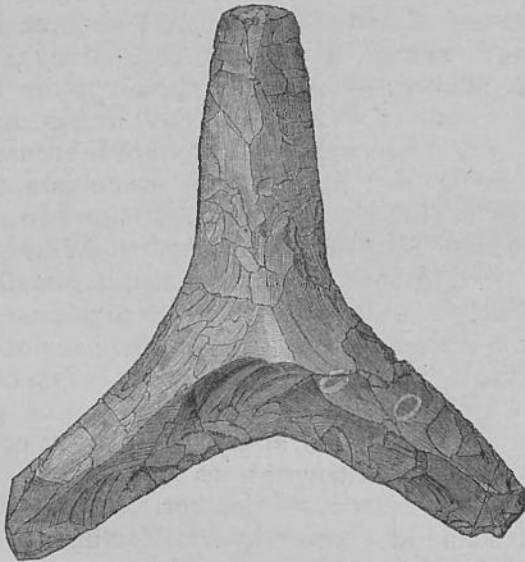
DURING a recent residence of several months in the Isle of Wight, my curiosity was much excited by an object of flint now preserved in the Museum at Ryde. It had been recently exhibited by Colonel Lane Fox, at a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries,¹ and also submitted to the Ethnological Society. I believe that the impression has been that it is an object of questionable authenticity. I know, moreover, that Mr. Evans, and some other archæologists, on whose judgment I have entire reliance, were unable to regard the relic as ancient, or to admit it within the range of the Palæolithic period, namely the time of Unpolished Stone, to which probably it might otherwise have been with little hesitation assigned.

Having obtained a cast of this unique implement through the kindness of the late Miss Bloxam, of Ryde, for presentation to the Blackmore Museum, at Salisbury, I took occasion, in exhibiting that accurate reproduction, to invite the attention of the Institute to the remarkable character of the relic. I have also to acknowledge the obliging assistance of Mr. Hodder Westropp, of Ventnor, through whose recommendation the cast was made by that lady, and who has rendered me valuable assistance in the investigation of the alleged discovery.

The implement, as will be seen by the woodcut, for which, I am indebted to the courtesy of the Society of Antiquaries, is of a form that may be designated *tribrachial*, having three branches radiating from the centre, where the flint is somewhat thicker (about $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches) than in other parts. The diameter is about 8 in., measured from one extremity to the other, in one direction, and about $9\frac{1}{2}$ in., measuring from

¹ On March 23, 1871. A short notice series, vol. v. p. 113, where the implement is figured, has appeared in their Proceedings, second

the end of one of the limbs, which is somewhat longer and thinner than the other two, and may possibly have served as a handle, or as the part adapted for hafting the implement, if, as some suppose, it may have been affixed in a cleft stick, or the like. It has, however, been imagined that this rather elongated portion of the object may have been the apex, and that it was held or hafted between the two divergent limbs, that would thus present in some degree the appearance of barbs.



Flint Implement found at Ventnor, Isle of Wight; now in the Ryde Museum.
(Scale $\frac{1}{4}$ linear.)

No probable suggestion having hitherto been offered, in regard to the use for which such an implement (if its authentic and ancient character should be admitted) could have been intended, it may suffice here to point out these general features, and leave them for the consideration of those who may take interest in the alleged discovery. I will only take occasion therefore to observe, that it would be not less unreasonable in our imperfect knowledge of various vestiges of prehistoric antiquity, to reject any object hastily, because it is of unique fashion and of a type wholly unfamiliar, as it were to conclude that it must necessarily be spurious, because no probable purpose can be ascribed to it.

It should also be remembered that, even at the present time, as regards the stone implements of the drift, those vestiges of a remote race, that a few years since were types unknown to us, although now comparatively familiar to the student of Palæolithic Antiquity, our most sagacious antiquaries are almost as undecided, in the question of their precise use and adaptation, as we are in the present instance in the attempt to suggest what may have been the intention, whether perchance warlike or for every-day uses, of the strange tribrachial article under consideration.

The existence of this eccentric object has been known to me for several years. A drawing long in my portfolio is endorsed as follows:—"Object of flint found on the beach near Ventnor, Isle of Wight, and now in the museum at Ryde." I have unfortunately no record of the source whence I obtained the sketch; it must have come into my hands subsequently to 1850. In that year the Isle of Wight Philosophical and Scientific Society was established at Ryde; the actual arrangement of the museum, in Melville Street, may have been somewhat later. It was a purpose in which the lamented Prince Consort took lively interest. In Mr. Charles S. Lockhart's "General Guide to the Isle of Wight," published in 1870, the following mention of the implement is found.—"In the museum at Ryde is a Flint cut into the shape of a warlike instrument, as used by the ancients; presented by Dr. Martin, of Ventnor. This well-chipped weapon was found at Ventnor by Dr. Martin, and looks like a barbed spear-head. It is large and heavy, and of rare (if not unique) shape—an unpolished specimen."²

The relic is now described, in the Ryde Museum, as having been obtained, not at Ventnor, but on Ashey Down, near Brading, where there were found various remains,—urns, bronze objects, &c., in British grave-hills excavated about 1854, by Mr. Benjamin Barrow, President of the Philosophical Society at Ryde.³ I believe that the change in the description, namely the statement that the find occurred at

² Guide to the Isle of Wight, by Mr. Lockhart; published by Virtue, 1870, p. 36. It should be here observed that when a cast of this supposed weapon was exhibited to the Institute in May, 1872, it was observed by Mr. Hewitt that there is little reason to consider it as a war-

like weapon. In this opinion, and also in Mr. Hewitt's suggestion, that probably its very singular form may be partly natural and partly artificial, I entirely agree. Arch. Journ., vol. xxix. p. 278.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Ashey Down and not at Ventnor, was made on the authority of that gentleman, who takes the part of Curator of the collection. It is, however, remarkable that in the relation of his researches on the Down, which was communicated to the British Archaeological Association in 1854, no allusion is found to the unique tribrachial implement, as having been there brought to light.⁴

On the other hand, the discovery on the beach at Ventnor, as above stated, is not mentioned by the late Dr. Martin, long resident at that place. This is doubtless a remarkable omission, but it must be observed that in his "Guide to the Undercliff" his purpose was almost exclusively to set forth the advantages of that salubrious region, and especially of Ventnor, as a shelter for invalids. He was a well-informed naturalist, but does not appear to have paid much attention to antiquarian subjects; it is probable, moreover, that the curiously-shaped flint may not have been regarded as an object of any special interest, in days when the vestiges of the "Stone Period" had not as yet excited attention. I am informed by his brother, Mr. J. B. Martin, that he distinctly remembers the implement as existing in Dr. Martin's house at Ventnor, not less than thirty years ago.

In the absence of any record, in Dr. Martin's valuable work on the Undercliff, of the actual circumstances of the discovery of so singular a relic, and the source whence it had come into his possession, I wish to make special mention of the courtesy of his brother and also of Mr. Hodder Westropp, who have spared no pains in the endeavour to elucidate a difficulty of so much interest in connection with the antiquities of the Island. In a recent examination of the registers of the Ryde Philosophical Society, Mr. Martin has found, as I have been informed through Mr. Westropp's kindness, the entry, that the flint *tribrach* was presented to the collection by the late Dr. Martin in 1853, with other objects from Ventnor, and as having been obtained on the shore at that place. The locality where the find occurred appears thus to be undeniably established.

It is scarcely needful here to point out that the crafty deceptions subsequently perpetrated by "Flint Jack," and

⁴ Journ. Brit. Arch. Ass., July, 1854, p. 162, where a map of the barrows on Ashey Down, representations of urns and

other relics are given. See also Dr. Williams' Early History of the Island, Newport, 1859, p. 52.

others of the same treacherous fraternity, were unknown in the early days of Popular Archæology, about 1840; and, had any "flint-knacker" at that time existed, capable of fabricating so elaborate, skilfully-wrought a production as the remarkable object under consideration, it may be confidently affirmed that he never would have come to the remote villages of the Undercliff to dispose of his forgeries, nor would any encouragement have there been shown to him.

These considerations have led me to believe that those who have recently had the opportunity of inspecting the implement in London, and whose eyes are also familiar with the strange fallacies circulated by "Flint Jack" in later years,—flint saws and fish-hooks, weapons and articles of very eccentric types,—may have too hastily come to the conclusion that the implement before them was merely a masterpiece of the same knavish artifices.

A few observations must be offered, in conclusion, on the material and the condition of the object. The only articles known to us, that present a certain general resemblance in character and bold chipping, although in form quite different, are the remarkable stone relics obtained in the Bay of Honduras, in South America, in 1794, as related in our Journal, and also by Dr. Daniel Wilson, of Toronto.⁵ Of these one is in the British Museum, but the most striking specimens are now in the Blackmore Museum at Salisbury, and their peculiar character is well set forth by Mr. E. T. Stevens, in his "Flint Chips," an admirable guide to prehistoric archæology, where the objects in question are figured.⁶ It has naturally been suggested that the Ventnor tribrach, if possessing any claims to authenticity, must be of the same class of exotic antiquities, from the New World, and that it might have been casually thrown upon the southern margin of the Channel. In regard to this conjecture, I am enabled to assert, not merely from personal examination, but on the distinct assurance of two experts residing at Ventnor, and thoroughly cognisant of the question, that the material of the object at Ryde is unquestionably an Isle of Wight flint, from the lower portion of the upper chalk, such as might be

⁵ Arch. Journ., vol. viii. p. 422; ix. p. 97, Wilson, Pre-historic Man, vol. i. p. 214.

⁶ Flint Chips, p. 289. Three objects

of similar character purchased at Roug-ham, Suffolk, are described in the Journal of the Suffolk Institute of Archæology, Jan., 1869, p. 8.

obtained from the Bembridge Down, near Sandown, and elsewhere. My information is derived from a well-known lapidary at Ventnor, Mr. Billings, who won the commendation of our friend, Canon Venables, in his Handbook for the Isle of Wight; the other being Mr. Norman, a well-known local geologist and collector of fossils, whose intimate knowledge of the strata of the Island is undeniable. There are moreover to be seen in the implement some small fossils, and especially a choanite, of common occurrence in the flints of the district. The material of the objects from Honduras, repeatedly brought before the Institute by Mr. Brackstone, is perfectly different; it is a compact-grained, opaque cherty substance, and does not present any resemblance to the somewhat translucent flaky appearance of the flints of the Island.

If, as I am disposed to consider most probable, the triple-branched implement was actually found on the shore at Ventnor, and not in the Northern parts of *Vectis*, I would observe that the objection suggested by some persons, that it must have suffered, in that case, much greater injury and accidental fractures, especially of the sharp edges, than can now be noticed on the relic, it may be stated that the masses of flint now frequently dislodged from the cliff, along the Ventnor shore, rarely present any great amount of fracture from rolling amongst the pebbles of the beach. There are, moreover, many vestiges of early occupation of that sea-margin, several kitchen-middens, and the like, and from some of the sides of the littoral shelters of an ancient race, the tribrach may unquestionably have become dislodged, and, having fallen on the shore beneath, have been by good fortune observed and rescued, before its fragile edges had become much damaged through friction and water-wear.

Such an incident actually occurred. In 1851 an implement of dark flint, as described, was found near Plumbley's Hotel, Freshwater, and it was supposed to have come from the Down by "foundering of the Cliff." It is now in the Newport Museum, and is described in Mr. Lockhart's Guide to the Island as a "remarkably fine Celtic spear-head."⁷

Mr. Evans, our most erudite and sagacious authority in all questions that arise in the investigation of implements of

⁷ Mr. C. Lockhart's Guide to the Isle of Wight, published by Virtue, p. 35.

stone, has informed me that he regards this implement as of exotic origin. His conclusion, founded on the supposed origin of the material employed, may doubtless in that instance dispose us to regard the relic from the Freshwater Cliff as one of those remarkable waifs from foreign lands, occasionally occurring upon our shores, and which the archæologist is wholly unable to associate with the relics or vestiges of early British antiquity.

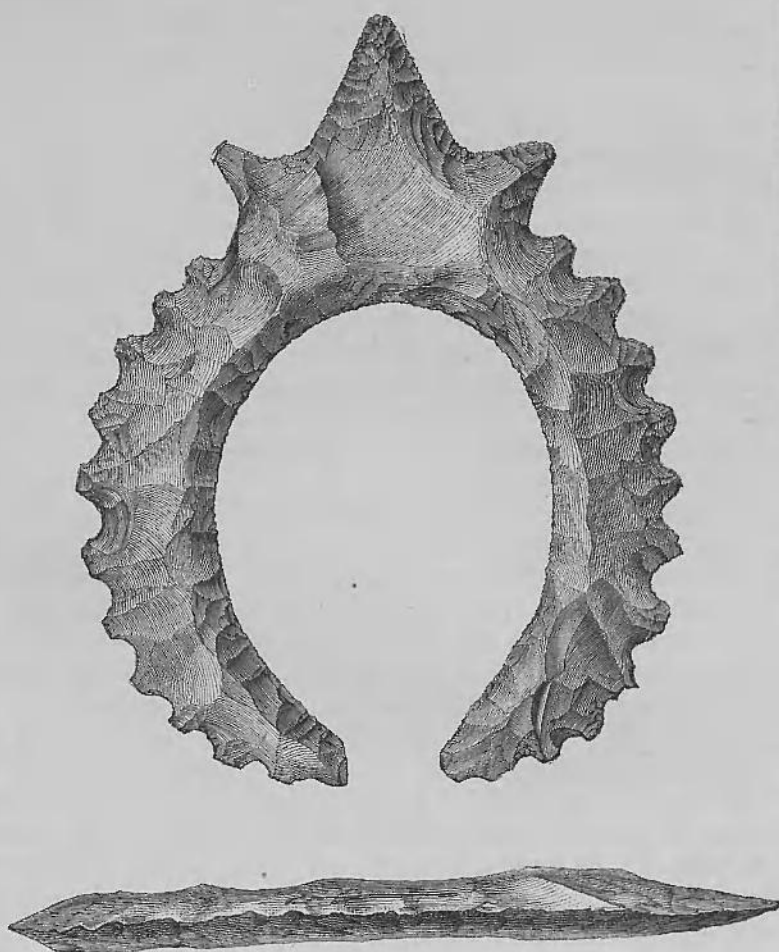
In regard to the supposed occurrence of certain ancient objects found in the British Islands that must be regarded, on account of their material or other circumstances, to be of exotic origin, I would here advert to the observation of one of our most sagacious archæologists, Mr. Franks, that this may occasionally have been owing to their transport as ballast from one country to another by shipping. In this manner he is of opinion that foreign types of stone implements may sometimes have been removed from one country to another, even far remote, and that it is scarcely to be wondered at that a few antiquities should have thus been displaced, and perplex antiquarians by the unexpected positions in which they crop up.⁸

In concluding this brief notice of a very remarkable relic, it is with gratification that I am permitted, through the courtesy of the Society of Antiquaries, to place before the Members of our Society a fresh example of the singular boldly-chipped implements of flint from Honduras, of which certain specimens, as above noticed, were formerly figured in this Journal. It is a horse-shoe-shaped object (see the accompanying woodcut), that was brought from the West Indies some years ago by a naval officer; except in its smaller size, and finer workmanship, it resembles one of those curious relics from Honduras now in the Blackmore Museum at Salisbury, and formerly in possession of Mr. Brackstone.⁹ With the exception of these implements from the far West, no object has, so far as I am aware, been pointed out that presents any analogy in its general fashion, as compared with the unique "tribrach" from Ventnor.

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⁸ Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, second series, vol. v. pp. 233, 361.

⁹ Frontispiece to Flint Chips, by Mr. E. T. Stevens, Hon. Curator of the Blackmore Museum.



Flint Implement, and Section. Found in Honduras.
(Scale $\frac{2}{3}$ linear.)