

ART. XXVII. — *The Name of Cartmel.* By HENRY FLETCHER RIGGE.

Read at Appleby, September 22nd, 1885.

IN “*Annales Caermolenses,*” by the late James Stockdale, published in 1872, at page 586, he says:—

The word Cartmel is derived from the Cymric word *caer*, an enclosed or fortified place (fortified against enemies or wild beasts by a trench, wattling, felled trees, a wall, or a ditch), and *moel*, Cymric, a bare-topt hill; *Caermoel*, therefore, is an enclosed or defended place amongst the bare-topt hills, and a most appropriate description of the place it is.

Now as shown *passim* in the “*Annales,*” Cartmel is a district, like Furness, where there is no town named Furness, and extends from the point of Humphrey Head, in Morecambe Bay, to near Storrs, on the east side of Windermere, a length of some thirteen miles, and a breadth of six or seven; its chief town was, till this century, in all the old registers and parish documents called “*Churchtown in Cartmel,*” and it did not till of late get the name of Cartmel appropriated to it by custom. It is by no means a town on a bare-topt hill, being placed in the centre of the valley, on the lowest ground, close by the small river Ea, or Ay, which runs through it. This may have been the site, or near the site of a Roman encampment, which tradition, and the name of the adjacent lowground “*Castlemeadows,*” may indicate. This name from *castrum* and *moed*, Anglo-Saxon meadow, is of a later origin than the British or Cymric name *Caermoel*; and the Augustin canons, when they in 1188 built the happily still existing fine Priory Church, may have kept to the same Roman site. But I suggest that we may find a much more suitable place for the British name *Caermoel* in the traces of a group of some fifty or more prehistoric hut-circles on the summit
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of the bare-topt hill, Hampsfell, just above the present town to the east, and on a steep ascent of nearly a mile ; this would be an admirable site for the camp of savage inhabitants, for it commands a full view over the chief approaches to each side of the promontory of Cartmel, those on the east by the Kent estuary, and those on the west by the estuary of the Leven. In times when the land was roadless and covered with dense woods and morasses, these sands would be the most practicable route, and the hours and nature of the tides would be well understood by the native tribes, though a puzzle to the Roman legions when they came here under Agricola from the tideless shores of the Mediterranean. We may suppose a tribe of Cymric Britons who had possession of the vale and its bordering hills, bounded on each side by branches of Morecambe Bay, and on the north by Windermere and its fells ; they would have their cultivated patches in the low ground of the valley, but it would be too hazardous for them to build their huts there, so they would place them up above on the top of the chief hill, at a height of 625 feet by the ordnance map, where they could overlook the whole district, and on seeing enemies approaching either be ready for defence, or have plenty of time to make their escape along the top of Hampsfell and the neighbouring line of fells towards the wilds on Windermere. There is an apparent difficulty in that, as Hampsfell is of the mountain limestone formation, there are no springs of water, but there is a good spring at the foot of the hill, just below the encampment ; it would be the work of their woman and slaves to fetch the water, and as they probably did not wash, only a moderate supply would be required for cooking and drinking. To this day savages in Africa and Australia never build their huts near water, where they could be found by their enemies, but at least a mile or more off in the scrub, and send their women for water. If this was the original British settlement, and there

there are no traces of any other known in the parish, the name Caermoel would be very appropriate to it, and its name would naturally be given to the adjacent district over which it dominated.

This group of circles is irregularly distributed over a part of the top of Hampsfell, in the allotment attached to Pit Farm, belonging to the Duke of Devonshire, facing to the sunny south, looking over the bay, and to some degree sheltered from the keen north wind by a rise of fifty feet behind the camp, the highest point of the fell a little further to the north being 725 feet. They appear on the surface of the turf as circular grass-grown slight elevations, about half a foot above the rest of the ground, and are mostly about ten feet in diameter, but there is one near the centre of the group twenty feet in diameter, which must have been the most important one; in one place two, and a little further three, circles appear on the hill top to the south; these outliers may have been either for outposts of observation, or the huts of lepers not allowed to live among the main body. These circles were not known to Mr. Stockdale; they have the appearance of old stack bottoms, though there never could have been anything to stack on so bare a summit, and they have attracted no attention in the parish till their nature was suggested to me a few years ago, and in 1882 I took my friends R. S. Ferguson, F.S.A., and William Jackson, F.S.A., to inspect them; we took with us a labourer and some tools, and we opened four of them, but found nothing conclusive; however both were of opinion that they are the so named hut-circles, and, if so, the remains of the earliest settlement of which there are any traces known in the parish of Cartmel.

There are no other prehistoric remains that I know of in the district of Cartmel, and during a long life there I have always had my attention turned to such matters. Some years ago a farmer at Flookburgh had two or three bronze palstaves which had been ploughed up near there,
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but on enquiry I found that he had sold them at Liverpool. Mr. Beardsley, F.L.S., F.G.S., of Grange-over-Sands, has a good specimen of a perforated polished stone axe-hammer of felstone, of which there are many veins among the upper Silurian slates of the district; this was found a few years ago in a small wood near Ayside, otherwise Ayshead, where the river Ay rises in the valley; and there is another at Aynsome, (also from Ay,) the seat of the Rev. T. M. Remington; it has been there to my knowledge for more than 60 years, but I never heard where it was found, probably somewhere in the parish.
