

ART. III.—*An Ancient Village near Threlkeld.* By C. W. DYMOND, F.S.A., Hon. F.S.A. (Scot.), and T. H. HODGSON, F.S.A.

Communicated at Durham, June 20th, 1901.

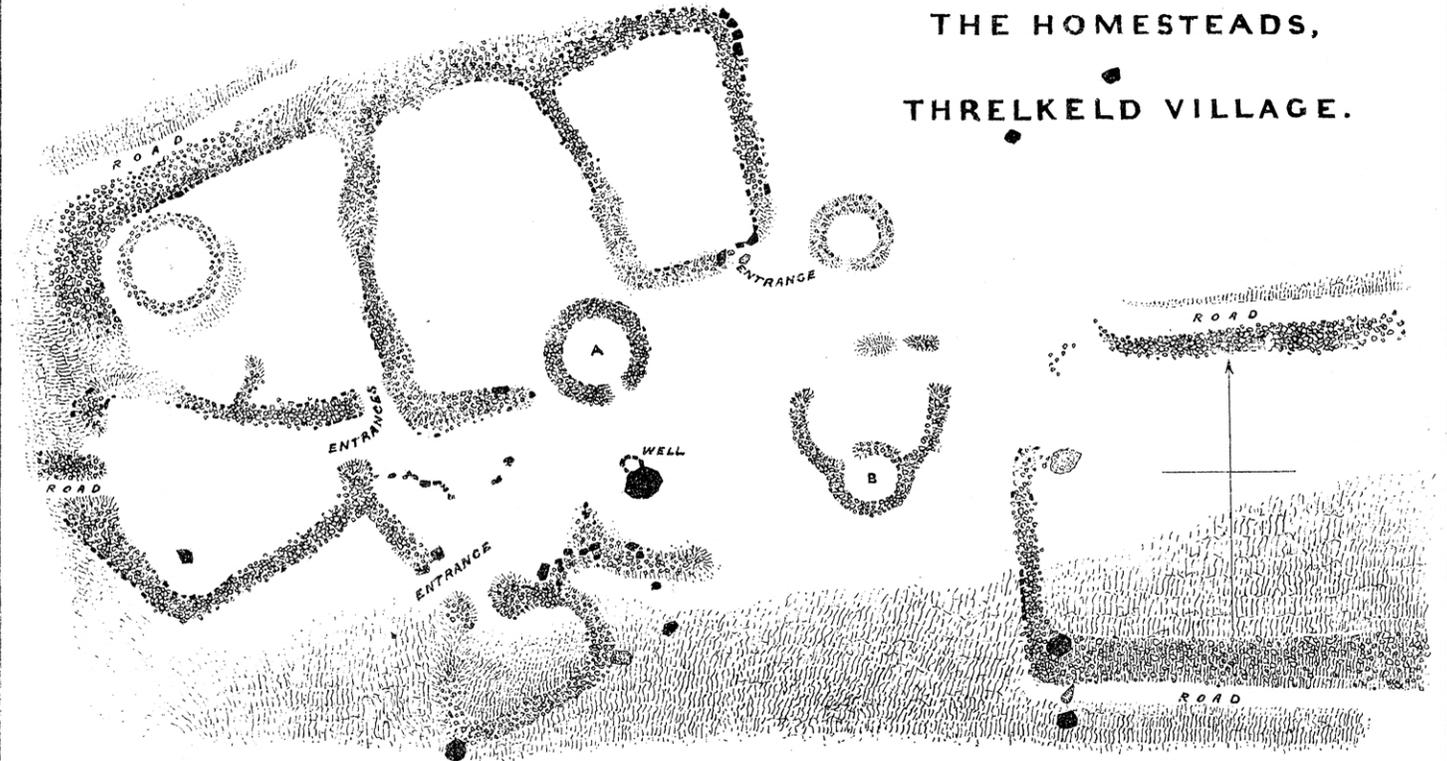
PART I.—DESCRIPTIVE. BY C. W. DYMOND.

SITE.

THE remains described in the following pages are, for the most part, situated on the slope below the northern extremity of the Helvellyn range, known as "The Knotts", or "St. John's Stinted Common", here lying east and west, to its division from Threlkeld Common by a wire fence. The full name of the Common, as given by Mr. R. D. Marshall, lord of the manor, is "High Fells Stinted Pasture of the manors of Castle-rigg and Derwent-water, in the Township of Wanthwaite."

The site is high, commanding a fine view of mountain and valley, from Cross-fell on the one hand to the Newlands summits on the other;—the scarred precipices of Blencathra rising immediately in front, above the top of Threlkeld-knott, which occupies the foreground; while Skiddaw, from base to summit, is full in view, a little to the left. Behind, or on the near side of, the granite quarries which were opened more than twenty years ago in the northern face of Threlkeld-knott, the ground falls away southward to a flat neck which separates the Knott from the rising ground of the Common, the rock of which also is granite. This southern slope was divided into three pastures, named respectively on the plan, "Far-

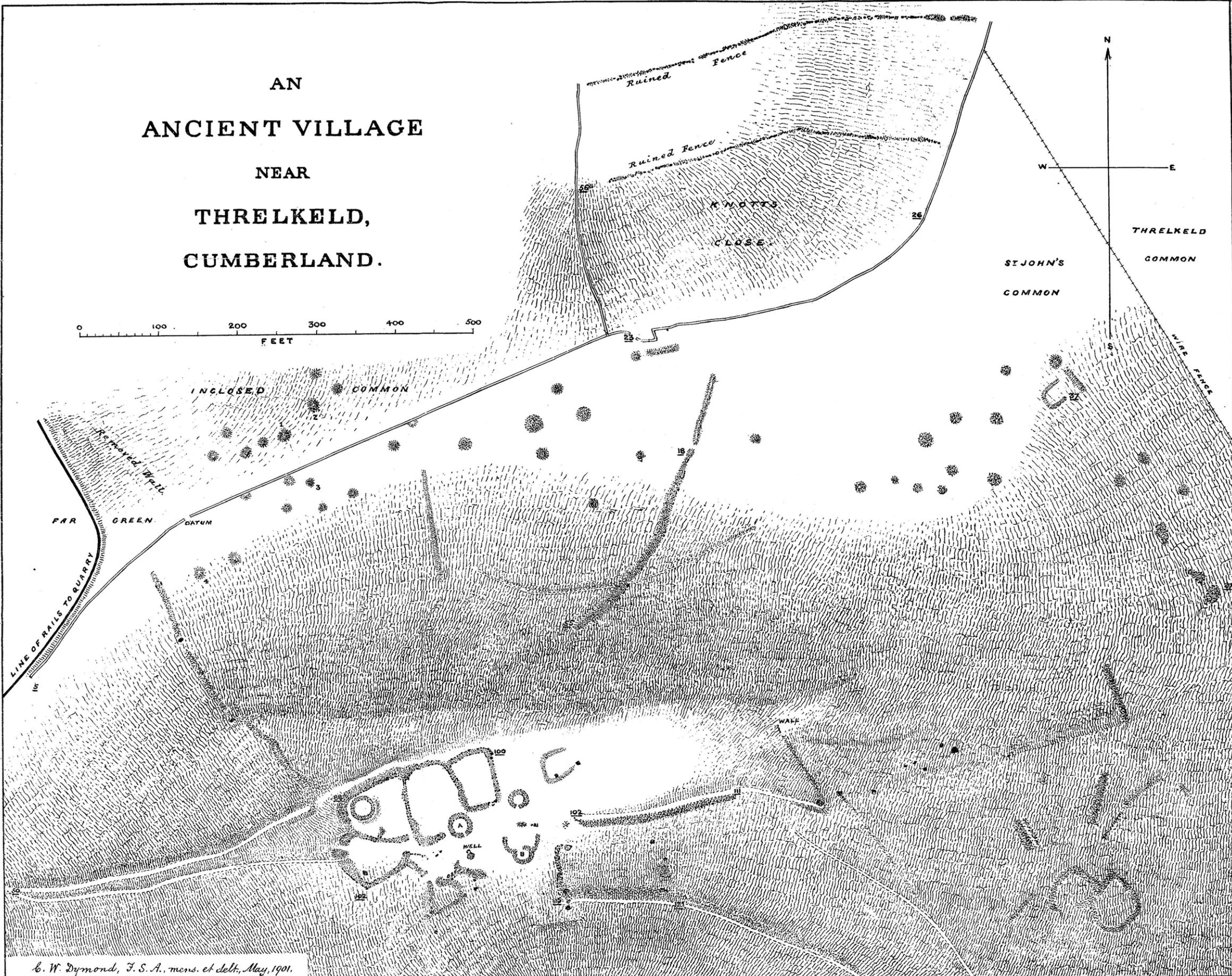
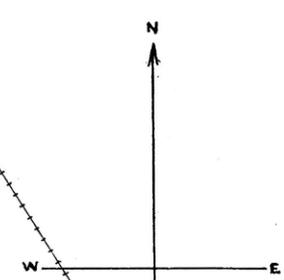
THE HOMESTEADS, THRELKELD VILLAGE.



0 FEET 50 100 150 200

C. W. Dymond, F.S.A., mens. et delt., 1901

AN
 ANCIENT VILLAGE
 NEAR
 THRELKELD,
 CUMBERLAND.



C. W. Dymond, F.S.A., mens. et delt., May, 1901.

Rocks, boulders and building-stones insitu ▲ Heights above Datum at gate to Quarry-field, 50

green", "Inclosed common", and "Knotts-close". The two former have recently been thrown into one by the removal of the wall which separated them.

DESCRIPTION OF THE REMAINS.

Classification.—These, as included in the plan, consist of (1) a group of inclosures, which may be called "the homesteads", containing, or in close association with, four hut-circles; (2) some rectangular "pounds", "folds", or "bields", open on one side, and a pair of outlying inclosed folds; (3) banks of stone and earth, or ruined stone walls, traversing the common in various directions; (4) roads, or tracks, some or all of which may be of later date than the rest of the remains; (5) forty-four cairns, eight of which are in the "inclosed common", and about a dozen stone-heaps, looking like cairns, not within the limits of the plan, which are scattered over a small area at the western end of Threlkeld-common, beyond the wire-fence; (6) the ruins of two old fences in Knotts-close. These remains may be more particularly described as follows:—

The Homesteads.—Well placed upon a shelf, or platform, from which the ground falls away northward and westward, the inclosures forming the homesteads were fenced by stone walls, of which the lower courses of the facing still remain in many places; but some of these, having been less solidly built, have become degraded into almost indistinguishable low banks of stone and earth overgrown with grass. Some portions were laid out with a rude attempt of rectangularity; others are irregular in form. The north-eastern rounded corner is curiously strengthened by three large blocks, placed close together, a little in advance of the line of facing. The principal entrances—so far as they can be ascertained with more or less of probability—are marked on the plan. The place has been so much turned over that it is difficult to judge as to what was the original height of the walls, which vary in

thickness from $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 8 feet, the general thickness being from 6 to 7 feet; but, if none of the material has been taken away, there may, perhaps, be enough on the spot to raise the best portions to the height of four or five feet. There could have been no idea of securing the place from any other enemies than the predatory beasts of the time. It was merely a pastoral settlement, generally free from apprehensions of attack by human marauders, and quite indefensible. In the midst, under a great rock, is a well, $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 3 feet wide and 3 feet deep; its sides rudely formed by heavy cobbles, and the bottom apparently with small stones rammed, or with a hard sub-soil. It was found filled with rushes, indicating moisture.

Huts.—One of the hut-circles, but faintly marked, having an internal diameter of perhaps 20 feet, is within the north-western rounded corner of the homesteads, which has lately been destroyed by a trial-trench cut through it in search of quarry-stone; another (the best preserved), in the south-eastern corner of the second inclosure, reckoning from the east end, has an internal diameter each way of 20 feet, and walls varying in thickness from $5\frac{1}{4}$ to 6 feet. The poor face-work is traceable around much of the circumference, within and without. Its apparent entrance (for no jambs remain to mark it distinctly) faces about 20° east of south. A third hut, with internal diameters of $13\frac{1}{2}$ feet and 15 feet, and walls about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet in thickness, is 100 feet to the east of the second one. Its entrance opened N.N.W. into a court, or area, embraced on two sides by wing-walls, one of which had a short return. The fourth is just outside the south-eastern corner of the homesteads. It is indistinctly defined, and seems to have had diameters of 12 to 16 feet, walls from 4 to 6 feet thick, and an entrance facing 10° west of south.

Folds.—An oblong space, walled on the north, south and west sides, occupies rising ground, near the foot of the slope, south-east of the homesteads. A small rectangular plot has been cleared outside its south-

western corner, which is reinforced, as are two of the corners of the southernmost of the homestead-inclosures, by great boulders *in situ*. North of its north-western corner, on an open plain, are the indistinct remains of another but much smaller area, of similar shape, the southern bank of which likewise connects two boulders. A still smaller specimen, of the same general form, but partly closed by a transverse bank running south-eastward from a cairn, is at the foot of the hill-slopes, near the eastern margin of the plan; while, at its south-eastern corner, are the remains of a couple of inclosed folds connected together, the upper one partly excavated out of the slope.

Fences.—The banks and ruins of stone walls shown on the plan are those which are sufficiently distinct to be unhesitatingly included in it. They vary much in appearance—some being low and grassy, others tolerably bold and very stony. Possibly some of the shorter ones may be the ruins of “bields”. There are also several traces of very short and very indefinite banks scattered here and there over the hill-side, within the covered area; but, as none of them could be brought into an intelligible scheme, and as the labour of laying out and measuring lines to survey them would have been out of all proportion to their value when plotted, they were omitted. So also were two or three streams of stones which look like the work of nature rather than of man.

Roads.—All the roads, or tracks, within the limits of the plan (except a short unimportant loop at its western end) are delineated thereon. Perhaps these (though old) may be of later date than the village itself. The principal road comes from the west up to the north-western corner of the homesteads, from whence it is continued along the brow of the terrace to the plateau at its east end; after crossing which, it runs along the outer side of the north wall of the rectangular outwork; then, passing a little to the west of a great rock (to which also a branch of it runs),

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it climbs the hill-side south-eastward. From a point 430 feet down the main approach-road, just described, another (with the short loop referred to above) branches off, enters the southernmost of the two western inclosures of the homesteads, bends around in front of the rock at the spring, and is continued along the southern side of the rectangular outwork; from whence it proceeds, in a south-easterly direction, up-hill, till it unites with the other track, and eventually runs into the fell-road leading to Matterdale. A short length of indistinctly marked road runs, nearly east and west, a little above the foot of the slope, near the flat ground of the neck. The course of the approach-road westward of the part shown in the plan is clearly traceable to a gate about 300 yards from the inclosures, where it crosses the quarry railway near a small plantation at the head of a lane leading down to Far Birkett-bank. It was at first thought that the track must have coincided with the upper part of this lane; and that, diverging from it about half-way down, it crossed some pastures to where traces of old roads are seen leading down to the head of the steep straight ascent which forms the approach from the valley to Far Birkett-bank. But careful examination of the ground, and inquiry on the spot, have made it clear that this conjecture must be abandoned. Though there are distinct remains of two old roads in the lower part of the said pastures, which are an ancient inclosure from the common, there are none to be seen anywhere on the steep ground intervening between them and the outlet on to the fell. The only remains visible on these slopes are those of some ruined walls, or banks, which, with the roads below them, cannot be distinguished in appearance from the remains connected with the old settlement. But it was ascertained from the farmer (an old and very intelligent man) that these antique-looking relics of bye-gone times are comparatively recent—the ground having once been divided into allotments, to which the roads had been made to give access.

He also said that the ancient way (as a bend in it at the railway gate seemed to indicate) led, as it still does, along the upper side of the fell wall, where it can easily be followed, above Near Birkett-bank, and down into the valley at Hill-top. If, therefore, there was a way of approach, coëval with the settlement, this must have been its course.

Cairns.—Two or three of the stone-heaps shown in the plan as cairns may possibly be no more than excoriations of the surface; for the cairns have been so much pulled about and spread, that it is sometimes difficult to decide which heaps are natural and which artificial. Similarly, it is possible that a few collections of small stones a little way up the slopes, which have been omitted from the survey, as doubtful, may really be the ruins of cairns. But, all told, the total number of cairns at this place could hardly have been more than 60. They are just like hundreds of others which are found in groups on the fells of the district. Very few appeared to remain intact at the date of our examination; nearly all of them having been thoroughly ransacked.

Fences in Knotts-close.—The two old fences in Knotts-close doubtless belong to a much later period than the remains on the fell, and had no real connexion with them. The field is a portion of the property of Cros-thwaite High-school, and it seems probable that the land between these fences was an old allotment connected with that foundation. Mr. Marshall says:—"I can find no *authentic* account of the ancient enclosure within the present walls of the school field. The field was bought by the trustees of the ancient school in Keswick in 1730. There is no estate-map of the school properties."

WATER-SUPPLY.

It is likely that, in olden times, when rains were heavier than they now are, the spring under the rock in the homesteads may have yielded a tolerable supply for

domestic use: but now its capacity for collecting and retaining water in useful quantity seems to have disappeared; for none has been seen in it when visited on several occasions in various states of the weather. But, even in dry seasons, the settlement was well supplied with this necessary of life: for, near the iron fence separating the two commons, there is a very good perennial runnel (Birkett-beck); which would have afforded an ample supply for man and beast.

ANALOGUES.

The settlements in and near the Lake district are not all of the same class. Some of them—as Urswick, Hugill, Millrigg, Barnscar, &c.—are more or less completely contained within a rudely circular stone rampart, as though their builders saw need for providing some defence against risks of occasional attack. Others—as Heathwaite and this Threlkeld village—were irregularly laid out with walls, sometimes nearly straight, unprovided with a closely enveloping rampart, and quite open and defenceless. A third kind, taking most erratic forms and embanked with earth, are scattered over some parts of the Westmorland fells; while in other parts may be found a fourth variety, of which the partitions seem to have been constituted by lines of rude stones laid upon the ground. From lack of excavation, we know too little about these places to be yet able to assert that difference of type necessarily marks difference of date: still less are we able to say with certainty what is the date of any of them.

EARLIER NOTICES.

So far as appears, the only other accounts of this place which have hitherto been published are those written by the late Mr. J. Clifton Ward, F.G.S., of Her Majesty's Ordnance Survey, and printed in these *Transactions*. The descriptive portions of these are here reprinted, with a reference to the sheet of the 6-inch ordnance map, in the north-west corner of which is the site of the remains:—

“Near to the Wanthwaite Crag, on the edge of a stony common, are the remains of a very considerable village. It consists of small walled inclosures, and a great number of what now look more like circles, or mounds of stones, at regular distances, and about 20ft. to 30ft. in diameter. It seems impossible to resist the conclusion that the stone mounds are the remains of cairns, which have been built from the innumerable loose stones lying about, and that they have fallen in, for it is very curious to observe how that those which occur on flat ground present the appearance of a symmetrical heap of stones, while those on a slope, almost without exception, show a trace of walled structure on the higher side, below which is a comparatively small clear space, and then a stream of stones directed down hill. It would seem that the falling in of a cairn on a slope would just produce this. . . . The largest inclosures are upon a prominent platform, overlooking the numerous cairns, and it may be conjectured that they were in connection with the house of the chief of the village. . . . The position of this old village is very striking immediately opposite the deeply ravined Blencathra, commanding the full sweep of the vale from Penrith to Keswick, and near the lower end of the narrow valley of St John. Moreover from its site is visible another venerable object of antiquity, the so-called Druidical circle.”—V. i, p. 217, 1871.

SHEET 65.

“N.W.—South-east of Threlkeld railway station, and between Knott and the old mountain road to Matterdale, is what I cannot fail to regard as a prehistoric village. There are cairns (old hut circles) innumerable, placed often at regular distances from one another, and many curiously walled enclosures. These latter are mostly placed upon the flat summit of a small outstanding hill or platform, and have a remarkable freshness when looked down upon from the hill side above. The foundations of some of these walls may even now be clearly seen, large blocks of stone placed side by side, and the walls, in some cases at any rate, at least 4 feet in thickness. Within the enclosures are several cases of circular foundations or large cairns, and an old road clearly leads to the enclosures, and may be traced some way eastwards beyond them. The stone-heaps, cairns, or hut circles are distributed mainly below the enclosures, and eastwards of them. One very important fact should be noted with reference to these. Wherever they occur on a slope, the form of the mounds is just that which would be assumed by the falling in of a circular or domed structure based upon a sloping surface, that is to say, the majority of the stones occur at the lower part of the heap, a comparatively blockless area dividing this lower part from the upper accumulation.”—V. iii, pp. 247-8, 1878.

The only comments on the above which is necessary to make are :—(1) that Mr. Ward much over-estimated the number of cairns on the spot ; which also are not spaced at such regular distances as he thought they were ; (2) that he has rather confounded these with the totally distinct hut-circles, of which there are remains of no more than four—those associated with the homesteads, near which were no cairns. Probably Mr. Ward was not aware of the extent of the dilapidations which the cairns have suffered from lapse of time, and at the hands of treasure-seekers ; and the condition of these heaps, as described in the above extracts, may be fully accounted for by reference to such causes. The northern slope and wet character of the ground on which most of the cairns are found is such as was very seldom selected by the builders of hut-circles, and the total absence of remains of ring-walls confirms the conviction that all the round mounds and stone-heaps, when not natural, are sepulchral.

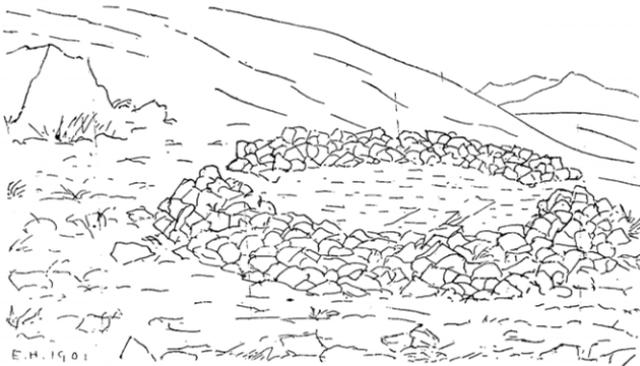
PART II.—HISTORICAL. By T. H. HODGSON.

Though this settlement has previously attracted attention—see the papers by Mr. Clifton Ward in vols. i. and iii. of these *Transactions*—no proper exploration, or at least none of which any record was kept, seems to have been made. The place had, as our workmen expressed it, been “turned over.” They had a tradition that it had been dug over about sixty years ago, probably in search of relics or curiosities rather than to examine its structure ; and we thought that it had been previously ransacked, perhaps more than once, possibly by seekers after treasure in accordance with the apparently universal tendency to connect traditions of buried treasure with the dwellings or burial-places of an earlier race.

We began our operations by clearing out the interior of



QUERN, THRELKELD.



Hut Circle, a boulder with supposed Well, from the North East.

HUT CIRCLE NEAR THRELKELD.

(TO FACE P. 47).

the largest and best preserved hut circle (A on plan) to the floor, which we found to be the native rock, the hollows of which had been filled up with a yellowish sandy clay, trodden or rammed to a fairly level surface. The walls were rudely built, of great thickness, but are so much destroyed and the stones scattered about that little or nothing of their construction can be made out, except that they had foundation courses of large stones laid with some regularity, which enabled us to trace the general form of the dwelling. The entrance faced a little east of south, almost exactly pointing to the large boulder under which was the basin from which we suppose that the inhabitants procured their water. Nearly opposite is another opening in the wall. After clearing it out, however, we thought that this opening was not original, but had been made by some earlier excavators for the convenience of removing material from the interior. At three feet north of the centre, and opposite the entrance, we found a ridge, chiefly of the natural rock, which had much the appearance of the kerb of a hearth, but no traces of fire were seen; and, though some of the spaces seemed to have been built up, it may be merely natural. It is 6ft. 9in. long and about a foot in width, with appearances of a return towards the north at each end. A very little charcoal was found on the floor about three feet east of the centre, or to the right of the entrance, but no trace of a hearth or fireplace.

We then cleared out the interior of another hut circle (B on plan) lying to the south-east of the set of inclosures. The entrance to this circle faces north-west, and there appears to have been a small and irregular inclosure in front of it, formed by projecting walls, perhaps to shelter the entrance from the wind. This circle is even more ruined than the first, and the walls have fallen out so much that it is almost impossible to judge of their original thickness, though the interior of the foundation is fairly traceable. In the centre was a hole about a foot in

diameter and two feet deep, rudely lined with stones at side and bottom. At the bottom some small fragments of charcoal and bone were found; it may, therefore, have been a cooking place, but showed no other traces of fire. The soil in it was loose, and had evidently been recently disturbed, as a piece of newspaper was found at the surface, probably left by the children who, as our workmen said, come up on the fell "leykin'." No relics of any kind were found, except the charcoal and fragments of bone mentioned; but it is much to be feared that any which may have existed have been carried off by previous explorers, or, perhaps more probably, overlooked and buried among the material removed, the place of deposit of which cannot now be traced. The other circles are even more ruined, so much so that, having regard to the small results obtained, we thought that we should not be justified in proceeding with our excavations.

We then turned our attention, in the first place, to the cairns in the field marked "Inclosed Common," selecting two which appeared to be intact. In the first (No. 1 on plan), which is of oval shape—the longer axis being 20ft. E. and W., the shorter 17ft. N. and S.—we drove a trench through from north to south, and another at right angles to it. Then a space of four feet square or more was cleared in the centre, going down to the rock. At the centre the summit was about two feet above the natural surface. The stones at the centre were large, those above and around were smaller; all filled up and packed with earth. The workmen noticed the earth, and said that the quantity of it quite disposed of the opinion which has been sometimes expressed that these were mere gathering heaps of stones cleared off the land. They remarked that there was not much good soil to spare thereabouts, and no one would have wasted it on stone heaps. Some fragments of charcoal, all very small, lay beneath the stones, just above the subsoil. A small thin layer of whitish earth was noticed at one point, but if there ever

had been any sign of structural peculiarity it had wholly disappeared. Many of the charcoal fragments retained traces of wood fibre; some were pieces of small stick, apparently scrub oak.

The second cairn (No. 2 on plan), also oval in shape—the longer axis 23ft. N. and S., the shorter 17ft E. and W.—was opened in the same way, and showed exactly the same features. The stones were rather larger; one of



SECTION THROUGH CAIRN NO. 2 EAST AND WEST.
SCALE: 6 FEET=1 INCH.

them measured irregularly $25 \times 17 \times 16$ inches. They were closely packed together, and there could have been no kist anywhere that we dug. In this cairn most of the charcoal was eighteen inches below the surface, lying eastward of the centre. The original surface was a little lower at the centre of the mound than at the circumference, perhaps by two or three inches; but this might be the effect of the pressure of the large stones. (See Fig. 2.)

Another cairn (No. 3 on plan), lying south of the stone wall dividing the intake from the fell, had still larger stones in the centre. We dug down to the rock, but found nothing. The men say that this part is so wet in winter that any organic remains must have perished. This cairn may be recognised by the men having set up two of the largest stones on the top of it when filling up.

A short trench was driven into another heap of stones (No. 4 on plan), but was quickly given up, as it seemed that this was simply a natural heap of stones. The workmen said—"We've gitten t' wrang pleeace this time."

Most of the cairns have been dug into at some former time, and it did not seem worth while to proceed further

with so little encouragement. We, therefore, stopped the work. No remains of urns, implements, or organic matter, except the charcoal were found, but the covering is so shallow that any organic matter would probably have been destroyed by the action of air and water. The presence of charcoal, however, seems to point to burial after cremation.

Mr. Clifton Ward, in the second of the articles quoted by Mr. Dymond, seems to have taken these cairns to indicate the sites of dome-roofed dwellings which have collapsed. I thought the same on first seeing them, but excavation convinced me that they are really cairns.

It has been said that no relics were found in the hut circles, but at the north west corner of the inclosures the quarry workmen in making a trial hole found on the surface a quern stone. It is of the local granite, apparently a lower stone of rude construction; or it may, perhaps, be an unfinished upper stone. We found near the same place a fragment of another stone of red granite, which appears to be part of the stone corresponding, as its circumference has the same curvature, and its concave grinding surface exactly fits the convex grinding surface of the other stone. Both are shown in the illustration. It is also said that the quarry workmen found another fragment, which is lost. Possibly it may be the same which we found. These quern stones imply the possession of iron implements, and Mr. Dymond notices a partial excavation of the two outlying folds, which also would indicate the use of iron.

Mr. Clifton Ward mentions that stone implements of neolithic age have been found in the neighbourhood, and he is inclined to connect them with these dwellings; but, at the same time, he points out that these rude stone structures may be of much later date. In fact, such dwellings were in use in the Hebrides less than fifty years since, and possibly some might still be found to be occupied.

Mr. Dymond suggests that as these buildings were of some solidity they were probably intended for continuous habitation, which implies that the cattle possessed by the inhabitants were of a stock hardy enough to remain on the fell throughout the year. If, therefore, we could ascertain at what date such a breed gave place in these parts to an improved and more delicate stock requiring shelter in winter, we should have some guide as to the date when the dwellings ceased to be occupied—except, perhaps, as a summer station. The roads, too, which are solidly constructed and to some extent excavated, do not, if they were made by the original builders of the dwellings, seem to imply a very early date.

On the whole, I am not disposed to think this a pre-historic settlement. The practice of burning their dead, as indicated by the charcoal found in the cairns, seems to point to a period of occupation not later than the extinction of paganism in these parts; perhaps, about the eighth century of our era. If the roads were made by the original builders of the dwellings, I should be disposed to think that they had copied from the Roman models, and so assign the dwellings to a period subsequent to the Roman occupation. Perhaps from the third to the eighth century is as near as we can venture to go in assigning an approximate date.

The people seem to have been poor and rude, but a peaceful race. They were not apprehensive of attack by man, as there is no trace of a containing wall of defence. The inclosures were probably merely for the protection of the cattle against wild beasts. They cannot have been intended for cultivation, as the rock is too near the surface to allow of even the poorest attempt at it.

It is to be regretted that we have no means of forming a more definite conclusion, but the place has now been carefully surveyed and planned, and what is at present known placed on record. If, therefore, any one should think it worth while to attempt further exploration, he will find

his way made smooth by Mr. Dymond's excellent survey, but it does not seem hopeful. The cairns, however, are numerous, and possibly a thorough search of them might lead to some results ; but nearly all have apparently been previously opened and destroyed. At any rate, it is well that what is now known should be placed on record, as the place may perhaps in the future be destroyed by the quarrying operations.

As usual, no name of the settlement has come down to us from the past. The name "Setterah," which of late years has been occasionally ascribed to it, is merely a fancy name given a few years since in consequence of a supposed resemblance to the "sætters" of the Norwegian mountains. (*Transactions*, vol. xv., p. 310.)

In conclusion, we must express our obligations to Mr. Marshall for leave to excavate, and for the interest he has taken in our proceedings ; and especially our thanks are due to Mr. Harkewitz, the managing director of the Quarry Company, for his kindness in providing skilled labourers, who were not only efficient and intelligent, but also most civil and obliging. It was a real pleasure to work with them.
