

ART. XXI.—*A Contrivance for producing Fire, formerly used in the English Lake District.* By JOSEPH GREENOP.

BEFORE the introduction of the modern friction match, our forefathers, when they needed to procure fire, commonly used the flint and steel, with its accompanying tinder box and sulphur match. According to one authority, it took an expert from three to five minutes under the most favourable circumstances to produce fire by these old-fashioned means, and in the open air it was almost impossible to get the tinder to light, especially if the atmosphere were damp or the wind high.

Some years ago my old friend, the late Mr. John Birkett of Keswick, gave me a contrivance for producing fire, an illustration of which is shown from my drawings. The history he then gave of it was that, when he was a boy serving his apprenticeship in Keswick, a shepherd brought one to his master's shop for repairs—probably to get a new washer on the plunger. Mr. Birkett, who was from his youth interested in Cumberland antiquities, having heard of these contrivances and knowing that they were rare, asked (and was granted) permission to make a copy of it, and it was this copy that Mr. Birkett gave to me.

From the illustration it will be seen that it is composed of two principal parts—a tube or barrel and a plunger. Fig. 1 shows the apparatus closed; figs. 2 and 3 show the barrel and plunger separately. The plunger (fig. 3) is made of steel and brass. A steel rod (c) is at one end screwed into a brass box (D), the latter serving the double purpose of holding a supply of touch-paper and acting as a handle when driving the plunger into the barrel. Towards the other end a leather washer (B) serves to compress the air when the plunger is being driven into the barrel.

At the extremity is a brass hollow end piece (A), into which a piece of touch-paper is inserted. The barrel (fig. 2) is a hollow smooth brass tube (E), bound outside with steel wire, with a brass end piece (F) screwed into the barrel.

The method of using it is as follows:—A small piece of touch-paper is fixed into A (fig. 3); the plunger is then inserted into the barrel, and driven in with a sharp jerk and quickly withdrawn, when the touch-paper bursts into flame.

This contrivance had many advantages over the flint and steel method. Much time was saved; it could be used out of doors; there was no need for the old sulphur match which had to be used in connection with the tinder box; and its compass was small, so that it could be carried in the pocket.

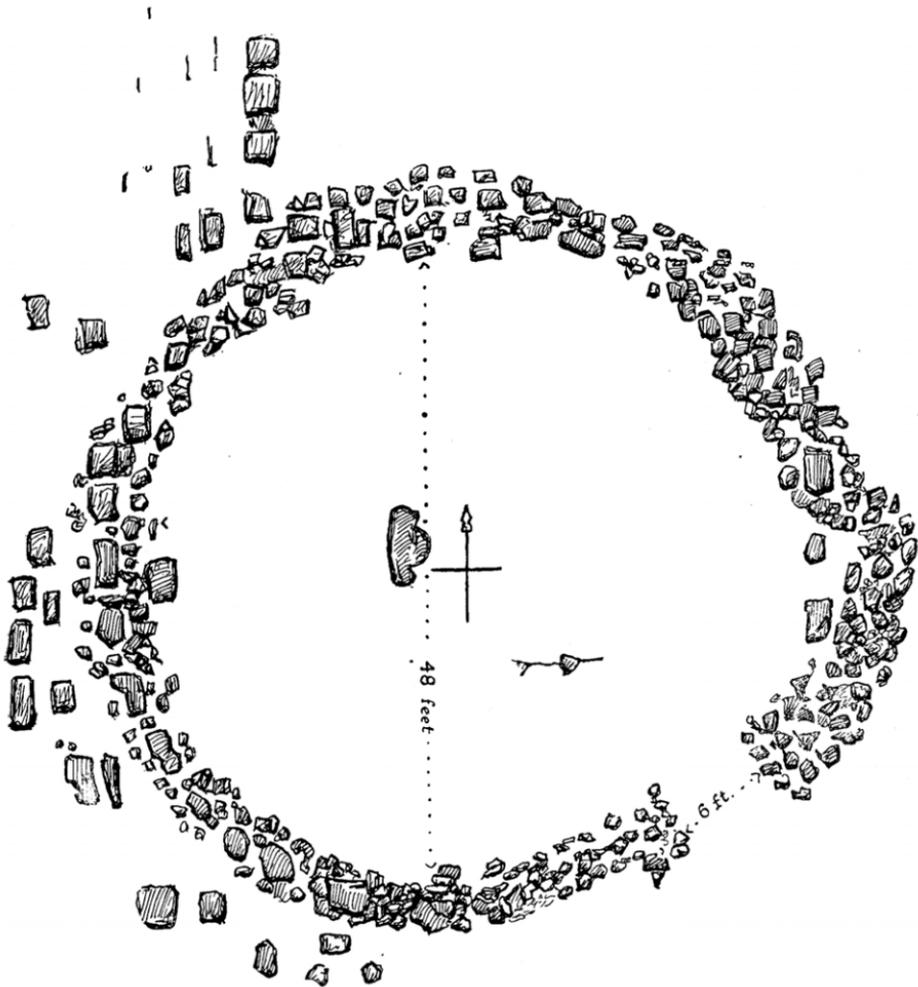
Mr. Birkett said he believed that at one time it was in general use in the Lake District, especially among the shepherds. It was known also in the Yorkshire Dales.

Captain Dean, of the United States Medical Service, recently gave a most interesting account of a similar contrivance used by the Philippine Islanders. He says:—

The native has a tube about two inches long, and one-third of an inch internal diameter. It is either not quite bored through or plugged at one end. A small piece of lint scraped from the bark of trees and dried is placed in the tube. Then a piston, highly polished, is driven home with the palm of the hand. The sudden compression has the effect of igniting the tinder, which on the withdrawal of the piston is found to be alight. How many centuries this ingenious little contrivance has been in use, or who invented it, are facts which are lost in the dim ages of the past.

It is most interesting to hear of another example of this quaint contrivance from a country so far away as the Philippines.

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STONE CIRCLE ON KNIPE SCAR.