

## Arbor Low and the Holed Stone.

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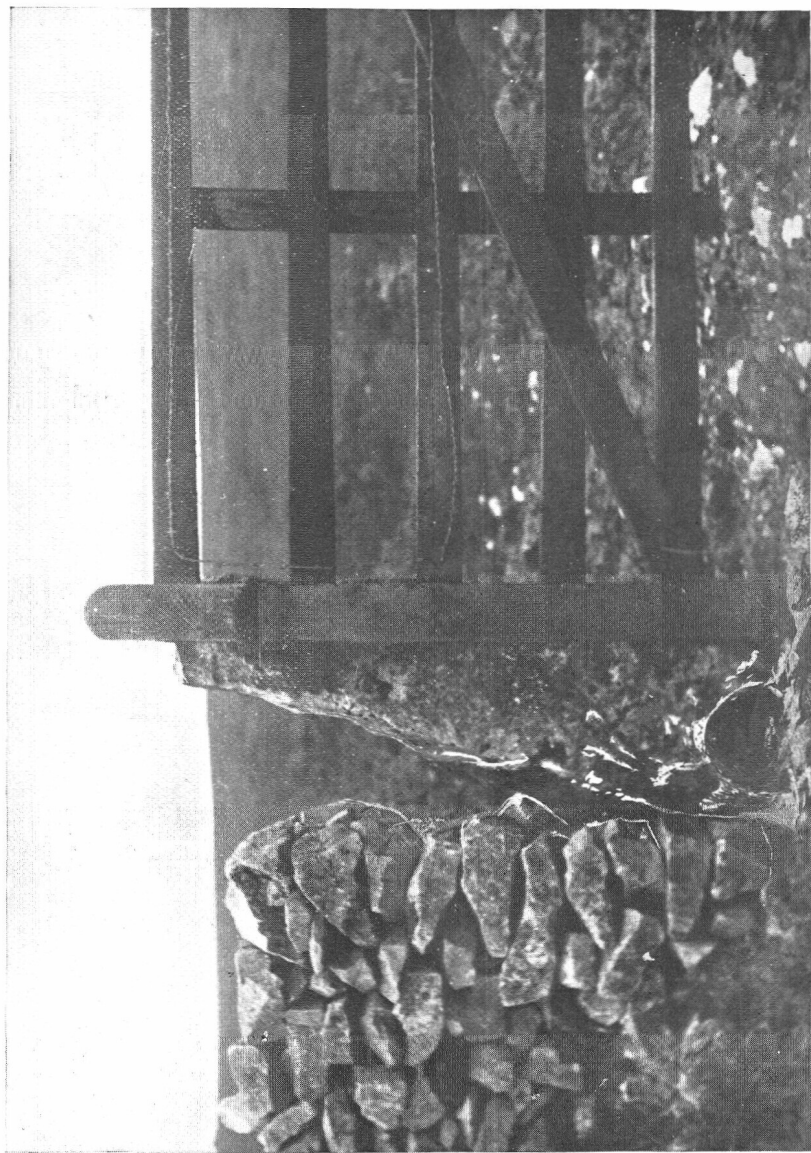
**I**T was in 1923 that I first noticed, in the dry stone walls in the vicinity of Arbor Low, pieces of stone which shewed modern fractures on several faces but which, on one face bore traces of excessive weathering. At first I put this down to the stone having been worked from a weathered outcrop, and it is probable that much of the local stone with that characteristic is merely stone which owes its weathering to exposure through a rock slip or to exposure on a natural rock face. The finding, not far from Parsley Hay station of a large piece of stone which, though broken with a modern fracture on base, top and two sides yet shewed two excessively weathered faces on opposite sides caused me to revise that opinion. It was evident that no possible position on an outcrop face could account for such weathering in the ordinary way, and that I must either picture a jutting pinnacle of rock some sixteen or eighteen inches thick and projecting some distance out, or else consider that the stone in question had been at one time a 'standing stone.' It may be suggested that a stone gate post of great age would shew weathering on all faces, but anyone familiar with the weathering of the stones at Rollricht or Arbor Low knows that the weathering is much more pronounced than would be found on any stone cut and erected within comparatively modern times.

Working on the idea that many of the weathered stones in the dry walls were originally standing stones, broken to convenient size and removed for wall building, I made a

fairly systematic search of the walls in the vicinity of Arbor Low and found, particularly along the walls between the Circle and the Youlgrave road many traces of stones which seemed certainly to have been removed either from the Circle itself or its vicinity and broken up. In the walls bounding the fields which lie between the line of the almost effaced Roman road, the Parsley Hay and Youlgrave road and the field road from the Circle to the main road are a large number of these weathered stones, some of them still being of considerable size. In the field between Mr. Dunne's farm, known as Upper Oldham's Farm, are to be seen, by the way, a few faint traces of banking and ditching forming a semi-circle—this is to the north-west of the farm—and there are also, hardly discernible, traces of pit dwellings which, to the practised eye, are quite different from the much more plainly marked traces of old lead and surface workings. Two or three tumuli are plainly visible, and slight and almost unnoticeable rises shew where others have been ploughed down and there seems little room for doubt that there was at one time a fairly extensive Neolithic settlement to the north and north-west of the Circle.

During a visit to Upper Oldham's Farm in 1925 and again in 1926, my first conclusions as to the weathered stones were confirmed and I made a fairly exhaustive search along the walls near the Circle and found that the great majority of the weathered stones were to the north and west of the Low. There were comparatively few to be found in the dry walls near Gib Hill and to the south.

A year later, in the early spring, I abandoned entirely a somewhat obvious conclusion at which I had half-arrived; that the weathered stones were from an "avenue" which ran along the line of the earthwork (bank and ditch) between the Circle and Gib Hill. The entire absence of any traces of depressions in which such stones could have stood coupled with the comparative scarcity of weathered



ARBOR LOW HOLED STONE.

fragments in the neighbouring walls put that theory out of court.

The stones in the Circle itself are fairly full in number and the alignment is fairly regular and taking the general lay-out into consideration, there can be very few missing from the original arrangement. There are no stones in the vicinity that go to indicate the line of any avenue and there is nothing, except the faint semi-circular banking referred to above, that might give any strength to a theory that there was a second circle, now effaced. Whence, then, came the weathered stones?

An examination of the great Stone Circle of Arbor Low shews that it consists of four parts, all of differing dates. These parts are (a) the earth circle and ditch, (b) a circle of small standing stones, (c) a circle and a centre setting of much bigger stones and (d) a Bronze age of Beaker People's barrow on the ancient banking. For the purposes of this article (c) may be ignored, as it is of much later date.

Whether the building of the bank and ditch were contemporaneous is a matter for conjecture; we do not know and it does not seem possible that we shall ever know anything as to that, but judging so far as one can do so, from Stonehenge, Avebury and the Rollright Stones, it seems probable that the bank and ditch were cut some time before the erection of the stone circles was commenced.

As to the two circles of stones, the standing stones, which are small and almost buried, are by far the older. Several of them are missing but an examination of all that are still *in situ* shew that they were arranged with the cleavage lines of the stones parallel with the banking; they are deeply set, almost uniform in size and in characteristics, from size to arrangement are similar to the stone circle on Stanton Moor, known as the Nine Ladies and dissimilar in arrangement to the stones in the big circle on Eyam Moor. The general lay-out is similar to

but much smaller than that of the Nine Maidens at Belstone and also to the unnamed circle at Pizwell. Emphasis must be placed on the fact that these smaller stones originally stood upright and still stand upright and that in them we have a perfect circle of small standing stones inside a bank and ditch of considerable size and importance.

The circle of large, flat stones, of irregular size, is a much later work and it has every appearance of being unfinished.

There is no evidence that any of these stones ever stood upright. On the contrary there seems every indication that they lie to-day just as they were originally placed; ready for embedding but never embedded. It is inconceivable that, if these stones had ever been properly socketted—some of them may have been tentatively lightly bedded for testing and aligning purposes and even moved once or twice—they would all have fallen, perfectly flatly, on their inner faces without shewing any traces of the socket in which they had been placed. From an engineering point of view the thing is impossible; no bedded stones could fall flat without dragging up a big mass of soil on one side and making a big hole underneath to which, in process of time the stone would again sink and so lie at a tilting angle to the horizon. That is sufficiently evident at Stonehenge and other big megalithic circles and needs no stressing. The conclusion arrived at is that the big circle at Arbor Low, for some reason as to which we need not speculate, was never finished.

We now get a little nearer to the origin of the weathered stones in the dry walls and the probability is that they were not taken from the Circle itself but from a sort of store of stones suitable for standing stone purposes that had been brought to the Low for final selection. Some, and those the most suitable, were arranged in the circle area; the others were left for avenue building and other purposes. And then something happened, as at the Dove

Holes further north, and about which I hope to be allowed to say something later in this *Journal*, and all further work at the Low was abandoned.

It was in 1928 that I first saw the "Holed Stone" and at that time, owing to the position in which it lay, I took it to be merely one of the fallen stones to which I referred above. It lay prone as a sill or threshold to a field gate to the south-east of the farm buildings. At a later visit, in the spring of 1929, Mr. Dunne, of Upper Oldham's Farm, told me that he wished to encourage visitors to the Low and after going into the question rather fully it was suggested that the field gate in question should be closed up and another gate opened in the dry wall nearer the Low and that, in addition, certain other conveniences should be arranged for visitors. About six weeks later, in the early part of August of 1929, I was able to get over to Arbor Low again and found that the work suggested had been done, and the large stone had been taken up. On account of its great size it had been deemed suitable for use as a gatepost for the new gate and it was with great interest that I found that it was, as I had surmised it to be a "holed stone," the hole being about eight or nine inches in diameter and beautifully cut.

The total overall length of the stone is about 8 ft. 6 ins., the hole being about central. Owing to fears as to whether the hole would weaken the stone for gatepost use, it was deeply buried in its new setting and only a portion of the hole can be seen. As to the weight of the stone, it is impossible to say more than that it took the full efforts of one of Mr. Dunne's horses to move it to its present position.

When the wall was broken down to make the opening for the new gate a flat, fairly thin and heavily weathered stone was found which had been used as a wall foundation. This was taken up and is now used as the other gatepost at this opening and there are some grounds for thinking

that this, also, is one of the stones brought for the building of the circle.

Unfortunately it is not possible to say where the Holed Stone originally stood. I have been asked by H. M. Office of Works to assist them in deciding the exact original position of the stone but to them, as in this paper, I am only able to say that it has served, possibly for generations, as a threshold to the field gate just south of Upper Oldham's Farm, Youlgrave.