



## Grave Mounds at Penmaenmawr

BY R. NEWSTEAD, F.E.S.

(Plate I, figs. I—II.)



THE discovery of a tumulus, or burial place of prehistoric man, is always attended with much interest, especially in a district like our own, where, so far as our present knowledge is concerned, they are comparatively rare. It is only in the higher grounds of Cheshire that a few prehistoric tumuli (lows) have been found; but North Wales is undoubtedly richer in this respect, and it is highly probable that, by careful investigation in suitable localities, the district may prove much more productive than has been generally supposed.

In 1891, it will be remembered, Mr. C. H. Darbishire excavated a tumulus on his estate at Penmaenmawr, which proved exceptionally rich in urns and other relics.<sup>1</sup> And we have again to thank him for his generosity in excavating, at considerable expense and labour, another large tumulus on his grounds, during the months of August and September, 1897.

On three occasions representatives of the Archæological Society visited the tumulus, and the notes and observations then made are compiled in this Paper.

The geographical position and features of the wild mountains and beautiful sea-side resort of Penmaenmawr are too well-known to need description. It is only necessary to add, that the situation chosen for the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Camb.*, January, 1891, p. 33, two plates.

burial of the dead by the prehistoric people of that district is a truly magnificent one ; where

“ Hills upon hills,  
Mountains on mountains rise ;”

bordered on the north by a magnificent expanse of ocean. The grave-mound, too, was no mean monument, and could be seen from long distances by the tribe who raised it, whilst engaged in fishing, hunting, and other pursuits.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE TUMULUS.

Externally the tumulus presented a long ovate outline at the base, almost ellipsoidal, its longest diameter being approximately one hundred feet, and its greatest width forty-six feet ; of a low convex form, sloping gently from the centre towards the margin all round, its greatest height being five feet, and the whole covered with turf. This mound, on excavation, proved to consist of two distinct tumuli. It will be necessary, therefore, to describe them separately.

The primary tumulus occupied the greater half of the eastern portion of the mound, and its outline was distinctly marked by large boulders and fragments of rock, which slightly protruded through the turf at long and irregular intervals. The outer layer of the mound consisted chiefly of loose earth, which varied in depth from six to twenty-four inches ; the remainder being made up of loose stones of varying sizes, which at the extreme margin formed an irregular but distinct wall, sloping from the margin inwards. At the western extremity the converging walls terminated in two large upright stone pillars, each with an inner buttress of large selected stones. The pillars were about three feet six inches above the *original* ground level, and distant at their bases on the inner surface about five feet

six inches. These stones evidently formed the entrance to the tumulus, which is an interesting feature; and it is pleasing to know they have been left *in situ*—monuments to time and to the prehistoric people who, ages gone by, set them up in honour of their dead.

The original ground surface would naturally form a sloping contour with the surrounding land; but it was found that it had been materially altered by cutting away the soil from the upper portion, and the floor of the tumulus made comparatively smooth and almost level. All the burials were by cremation, and no urns were used to store the ashes of the dead; or, at least, no satisfactory trace of them could be found. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume they were not employed, and the following evidence will support this.

What was evidently the principal burial occurred near the centre, a little towards the eastern extremity, and was of a distinctive character to the rest. It had been formed by digging a hole in the earth, and lining the sides with suitable flat stones, forming a countersunk cist, two feet six inches in diameter at the top, and seventeen inches at the base, its greatest depth being eighteen inches. It contained a quantity of black earth, and small fragments of charcoal; but there were no traces of bones, and they had probably turned to their dust; which may also be said of all the other burials which were uncovered, there being no trace of human bones in any of them. In addition to the large burial there were at least five others, apparently of less importance, occupying widely separated positions in the tumulus. They were merely small shallow depressions in the soil, filled with black earth—all that was left of the cremated remains that had been placed in them. Four small flat

stones were placed at the edge of one depression; and Mr. Darbishire is of opinion that all the burials were marked by the presence of one or more flat stones.

Traces of the funeral pyre were very evident at the south-eastern portion of the tumulus, where the ground and boulders for some considerable distance and depth had been subject to the action of a large fire; and where, also, many fragments of charcoal were found.

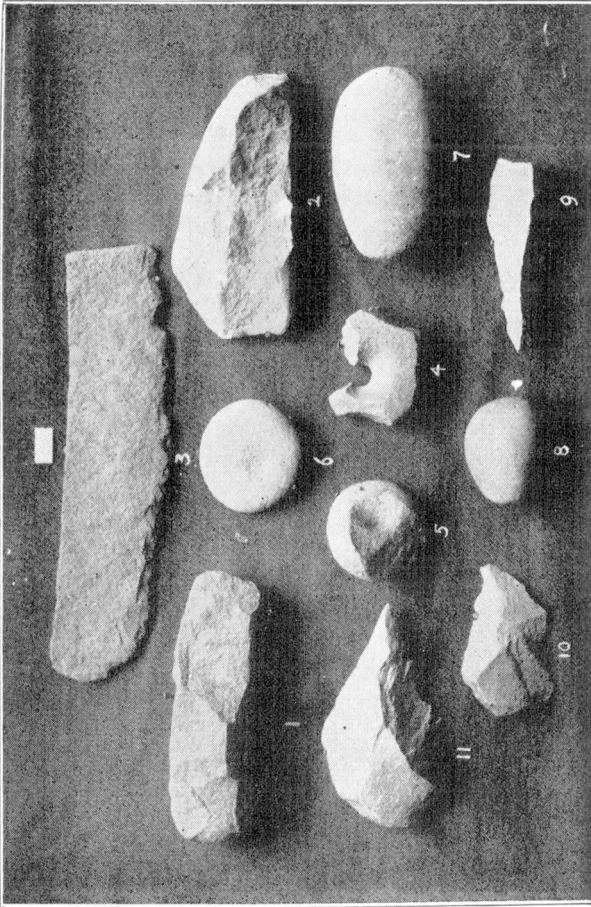
The second or supplementary tumulus abutted on to the first, but was made with less care, there being no exterior wall or regular covering of stones, as in the previous case. The burials were by cremation, and the remains were placed as in the other tumulus. In this tumulus, too, were marked traces of the funeral pyre—the earth and boulders being burnt, and quantities of small fragments of charcoal remaining.

#### IMPLEMENTS.

As will be seen from the illustrations on plate 1, the implements are of a very rude character, and are either fashioned from the native felstone rocks, or selected water-worn stones from the beach. Not a trace of flint was found during any part of the excavation. A couple of spindle-whorls were found—one formed from a soft clay-stone, the other of terra-cotta, which, unfortunately, was in a very fragmentary condition. It is by no means an easy matter to fix the date of these spinning implements, but I am inclined to think they are of a comparatively recent period, and that they occurred at or near the surface; but I failed to gain any satisfactory evidence as to their exact position in the tumulus.

STONE CELT (fig. 1). This well-proportioned implement has been hewn from a local boulder, which, on two surfaces, bears distinct trace of glacial striæ.

PLATE I.



Stone Implements from the Grave Mounds at Pennacunnawt.  
(The white label at the top indicates an inch.)

*From a photograph by the writer.*



Although of rude workmanship, it is superior in this respect to the other examples. Length,  $7\frac{3}{4}$  inches; width,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches; thickness,  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches; weight, 2 lbs.

STONE CELT (fig. 2). Like the preceding, this implement has also been formed from a local boulder; but the glacial striæ are less distinct, and the material a soft white limestone. Length,  $7\frac{1}{4}$  inches; width,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

Fig. 3 is a very singular implement, and probably unique. Its cutting edge has been undoubtedly worked by human agency, as it presents a number of small concoidal fractures on both sides, clearly indicating that it has been artificially formed by striking off small flakes. The back edge is slightly recurved, and almost of a uniform width throughout. Length, 12 inches; width,  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches; thickness at back, 1 inch; weight, 1 lb. 8 oz.

CIRCULAR STONE-HAMMERS. Of these there are three imperfect examples, which are interesting as showing different stages in their manufacture. Fig. 4 is a portion only of the completed article; very little of it remains but the central hole, which has undoubtedly been formed by drilling. It is just possible this implement may have been used for the double purpose of hammer and net-sinker. The two remaining examples are selected water-worn stones from the beach. In fig. 5 we clearly see an attempt has been made to cut a hole through the centre, and for a distance of half-an-inch, on both sides, this has been accomplished; but the attempt proved a failure, for on both sides a large portion has accidentally broken away, thus rendering the stone useless for the purpose for which it was intended. The work does not show the slightest trace of having been drilled, but presents an irregular pitted surface, as

if it had been formed by striking with some sharp instrument. The third example (fig. 6) is thin and flat; and the formation of the hole has only just been commenced, there being nothing more than a shallow depression, formed by a similar sharp-pointed instrument as in the previous example, which has left its impressions or pittings on both flat surfaces of the stone. It is a small example, and only weighs  $7\frac{1}{2}$  ozs.

**STONE CORN CRUSHER** (fig. 7). Here again a water-worn stone has been selected. In form it is ellipsoidal, and rather flat; at the ends are two or more plane surfaces, formed by continuous grinding; and it is interesting to note that, with the exception of one of the surfaces, all have been finely pitted by a sharp implement, which has given them an excellent grinding surface. Length, 5 inches; width,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches; thickness,  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches; weight, 1 lb.  $8\frac{1}{2}$  ozs.

**HAMMER-STONES.** Four of these were found—all water-worn stones from the beach. Two of them have been extensively used, as indicated by the innumerable pittings at the ends, or at the prominent parts of the margin (fig. 8). The largest implement is somewhat hemispherical, and weighs 2 lb. 12 oz.; and, although a clumsy stone to handle, has been the most used. The others weigh respectively 1 lb. 6 oz., and  $9\frac{1}{2}$  oz.

It is supposed hammer-stones were used chiefly for making celts and other stone implements, but were not fastened to any kind of haft; they were simply held in the hand.

**MILL STONE.** This is of the saddle-shaped type, and may be considered the most interesting find of all, as it is a sure indication that wheat, or some other cereal, was cultivated by the prehistoric people—the ancient Britons of that district. The stone is of the local felstone; is



roughly triangular in form, and its longest dimensions are 1 foot 6 inches  $\times$  1 foot 3 inches.

**SPEAR HEAD** (fig. 11). Originally this was probably a large flake chipped from a rock fragment, as it is almost flat on the side opposite to that shewn in the photograph; but the illustration shows very clearly the characteristic bulb of concussion peculiar to worked implements of this type. Length, 6 inches; width,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

A large number of "flakes," and objects of a doubtful character, were also found; but it has not been thought desirable to give a description of them. Two of these are shewn in the plate, figs. 9 and 10.

**CHARCOAL.** This occurred freely, and on being washed clearly shows that the funeral pyre was composed of oak branches. Why was this so? Was the oak sacred to these prehistoric people, and it only was chosen to cremate the bodies of their dead? It is possible the oak was then the only available timber; and that no preference was given to it. But the matter is worth investigating, and I hope other workers in this interesting field of study will investigate the subject, and throw some light on—what is to me—a most interesting fact.

It now remains to offer our sincere thanks to Mr. Darbishire for his courtesy towards the Society in allowing its members to inspect the excavation, and for the hospitality he at all times extended to us on the occasion of our visits. And last, but not least, for his valued gift of the implements, &c., which were discovered in the tumulus.