

IV.—AN ACCOUNT OF THE DISCOVERY OF A BRITISH
PERFORATED AXE - HAMMER AND A ROMAN
SILVER COIN, NEAR BARRASFORD, NORTH
TYNEDALE; WITH NOTICES OF OTHER STONE
IMPLEMENTS FROM THIS LOCALITY.

BY THE REV. G. ROME HALL, F.S.A., VICAR OF BIRTLEY.

[Read on the 31st March, 1886.]

IN the *Newcastle Daily Journal*, of January 30th last (1886), the following paragraph appeared in the column of "Local News:—" "An interesting discovery of ancient British and Roman remains has been made at the new whinstone quarry, recently opened by Messrs. Steel and Turner, near to Barrasford, consisting of spear-heads, coins, &c." In the issue of the same journal of the ensuing Saturday, February 6th, "the spear-heads, coins, &c., ancient British and Roman remains" were said to have been forwarded to me.

In connection with an archaeological "find," it has not often occurred that so much has been made of so little, that so great a smoke has arisen from so small a fire. When I undertook a walk over snow-covered hills for some miles, to search into a matter apparently of so considerable an interest to antiquaries, "imagination bodied forth" a large and important hoard of pre-historic implements and weapons, stone and bronze, together with Roman coins of silver and so-called "brass"—perhaps one or more British coins, like that solitary specimen recently found at the Lawe Camp, South Shields,* or that of the Welsh prince Bôduoc, discovered in Dumfriesshire, their highest geographical limit hitherto.

On my arrival, however, and after careful inquiry of the foreman of the new whinstone quarry, Mr. Humphreys, formerly my most efficient helper in exploring the Brito-Roman camp on the slope of the Gunnar Peak, I was informed that only *two objects* of archaeological interest had come to light a few days previous to my visit. These were an Ancient British perforated stone axe-hammer, and a Roman silver coin—a *denarius* of Hadrian.

SITE OF THE DISCOVERY.

In addition to the older and well-known whinstone quarry, close to the North British Railway, a new one, about one and a quarter mile to the east, also on a large scale, has recently been added to the limited industries of the district, through the enterprise of the proprietors of the adjoining freestone quarry at Gunnarton Camp Hill, or "Pity Me." As the earlier has broken into the western outburst of this part of the great basaltic fault or whin dyke, the newer quarry is nearly at its eastern extremity on the Reiver Crag Farm. Both are on the Barrasford estate of the Duke of Northumberland. The picturesque grey cliffs of columnar basalt, 60 to 80 feet in perpendicular height, look toward the north, and stand out very boldly near where these relics of antiquity were found. The whole abrupt face of the crags was left bare, long before Briton or Roman appeared in the valley of the North Tyne, by the erosive action of glaciers moving in a south-east direction, as we know from the traces left by them in striations and smoothing on rock surfaces, and erratic boulders. But since the glacial epoch a vast mass of *débris* (the *talus* of the geologist), angular fragments of varying size splintered off the whinstone cliffs by sub-aerial forces of frost, weathering, etc., has accumulated against the crag face to nearly half its height at this spot. A rich brown soil, differing in depth here and there, and covered in part with green sward, has spread itself over the *talus* slope, during the lapse of so many centuries, or rather thousands of years. Here the quarrymen had removed a considerable portion of the loose whinstone, and in the process had undermined the overhanging soil and sward, which then suddenly rushed down into the hollow below, and amongst the stones. Two young men, separately, found, in clearing out this mass of soil and whinstones, both the axe-hammer and the silver coin. They were within about three yards from each other, though the exact depth below the surface of the sward cannot, unfortunately, now be ascertained under these circumstances.

In a brief and fairly accurate notice of this "find," contributed to the *Hexham Herald* of the 6th inst., it is stated that "a few days previous to the discovery of this, a smaller but similar axe-head was picked up by one of the workmen, but he, not knowing its value, carelessly threw it aside." No details, however, have come to my

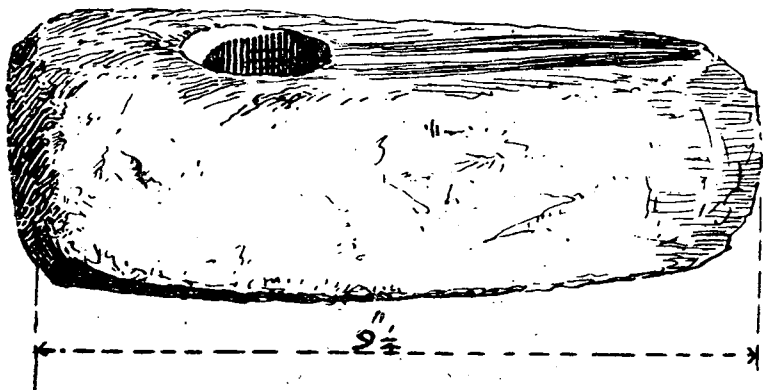
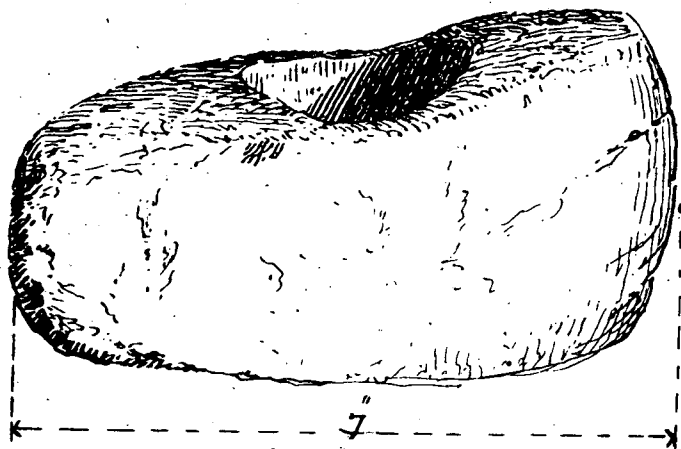
knowledge respecting this second stone implement, nor of any other relic than the two which will now be described.

I.—THE PERFORATED STONE AXE-HAMMER

Is made of gray basalt of a bastard kind, different from that of the adjoining whin crags, and is very hard but not very heavy. It seems to have been formed out of a small detached boulder, such as may still be met with in marshy ground north of the line of crags. This implement or weapon belongs to the fourth class of perforated axe-hammers, sharp at one end and more or less hammer-like at the other, the shaft hole being usually in the centre.

Mr. Evans, in his *Ancient Stone Implements*, chap. viii., p. 163, whose classification is here followed (*Ibid.*, p. 164), speaks of these stone axes or axe-hammers, with a hole for the insertion of a shaft, as "a very important class of antiquities." They are, no doubt, later in date than the solid unperforated stone hatchets, one of which, a large and finely polished specimen, was found a few years since in draining a little to the east of the present site, and which passed from the possession of the late Rev. John Bigge, vicar of Stamfordham, to that of the Rev. Wm. Greenwell, F.S.A., Durham, in whose collection it now is. This specimen, now under notice, is of the large form somewhat common in Cumberland, Northumberland, and the North of England generally. It is $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad at the well-preserved cutting edge, $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches in the middle, which is the length of the shaft-hole (where the sides are slightly curved inwards longitudinally), and $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches at the hammer end. The thickness across at the centre, the widest part, is $2\frac{7}{8}$ inches, in which is bored the hole for the insertion of a handle, made, probably, of a tough sapling of the ash tree, or some other suitable wood. The perforation, not parallel, but expanding from the centre, is very nearly circular, being $1\frac{5}{8}$ inch across, and $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch lengthwise of the implement, and is bored through in the direction of the cutting edge, like our ordinary axes in present use. Thus it differs from the smaller stone axes or hammers which, like hoes or adzes, are perforated through the thinner and broader face, like a small one, made from a pebble of silurian grit,* which was discovered in clearing away the

* *Ancient Stone Implements*, chap. ix., p. 204, Fig. 155, is very similar to this.



ANCIENT STONE IMPLEMENTS FROM COLWELL AND GUNNARTON
CRAGS, NORTH TYNEDALE.



débris (or *talus*) close to, and east of the Gunnar "Nick," or ravine, that runs between two ancient British or Romano-British camps or forts crowning the summit of these basaltic cliffs, about three-quarters of a mile distant. (This perforated hammer is in my possession, but lent at present to Mr. Hugh Miller, F.G.S.)

The large axe-hammer, recently found, has one peculiarity not at all common, like a similar but larger specimen in Mr. Evans's collection from Plumpton, near Penrith.* It is partially rounded and flat at the butt-end, where it has suffered from long-continued abrasion. But it is unsymmetrical, owing to a natural plane of cleavage interfering with the usual convex shape, and, as it were, taking off a slice from the stone. This flattened side has been smoothed, and also bears marks of abrasion from use. The shape resembles that of Fig. 35 in Evans's book (p. 185), but, though fairly polished, is less elaborately finished.

A finer specimen, of a perfectly symmetrical form, made of feldstone, is in my possession, which came from the village of Colwell, about two miles distant to the south-east from the new whinstone quarry. It was used as a wedge for keeping open a cottage door, and on one side are two shallow grooves, not parallel but converging,† as if for ornamentation, not for sharpening weapons. It is similar in appearance to Fig. 131 (in Evans, p. 180), from Wigton, Cumberland.

The same great authority mentions three perforated axe-hammers in our Newcastle Museum, one of mottled green stone found in the river Wear, at Sunderland, and the other two from Kirkoswald, in Cumberland, and Haydon Bridge; and examples exist elsewhere from Thirstone, Shilbottle, and Hipsburn in our county.

These perforated implements seem to have been first brought into shape and polished over the whole surface, and the position for the shafthole was then chosen. The process of boring was probably carried out with a flint, or even a piece of elder or other soft wood, working probably in drill fashion with sand and water. The proverbial patience of the semi-savage nature would be required, as the process

* *Ibid.*, chap. viii., p. 178. It is $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, and only $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches wide.

† Compare Evans, *Ibid.*, chap. viii., p. 181, Fig. 132, from Wollaton Park, Notts, where the sides of a large perforated axe-hammer have each four parallel grooves worked into them. This Colwell specimen was given to me by the Rev. C. Bird, Vicar of Chollerton.

would be an elaborate and tedious one. This is exemplified in the lower half of an axe in Mr. Greenwell's collection, found at Sprouston, near Kelso. It had been broken half way across the hole. "The conical cup-shaped depressions produced by the boring instrument extend to some depth in the stone, but are still $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from meeting" (Evans, chap. viii., p. 184).

Though the smoothened and perforated axe-hammers may be called Neolithic, as belonging to the New or Polished Stone Age of Pre-historic Archaeology, there is reason to believe, that at least in the North of England they belong to the bronze period. A finely-finished specimen was discovered by Mr. Greenwell in a barrow at Cowlam, near Weaverthorpe, Yorkshire. It lay in front of a contracted skeleton, the edge towards the face, and the remains of the wooden handle still grasped by the right hand. The cutting edge had been carefully removed, so that it was probably a battle-axe. Connected with this burial was that of a woman with two bronze ear-rings at her head. (Evans, p. 185; *British Barrows*, LVIII., p. 222-225; *Pro. Soc. Ant. Lond.*, 2nd S., Vol. IV., p. 61.) Thus the date may be approximately fixed as that of the early Bronze Age, the same as that of the ancient British barrows recently opened near Birtley, although no bronze implement or ornament was found in the cists, or with the cinerary urns. From about 500 or 600 years B.C. (when the use of bronze may be supposed to have been in general use in this country), these polished stone tools and weapons fell into comparative desuetude, though long lingering in use, as they were in some form at the Battle of Hastings, and in remote parts of the island almost to the present time. As an adaptation of ancient implements to modern uses, Sir W. Wilde mentions a large axe-hammer in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, which is said to have been recently in use. Mr. Greenwell has another which was used for felling pigs in Yorkshire.

In my possession is a curious perforated implement of hard-grained gray basalt, weathered, formed of a flat whin boulder. The surface of one side is carefully smoothened, as is also the rounded, narrower edge, which is semi-circular, and half of the other side, the rest being left in the rough state. It is exactly the same length as the Barrasford perforated axe-hammer, $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches; greatest width, 5 inches:

narrower upper edge, $1\frac{3}{4}$ to 2 inches; and wider at bottom, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The stone takes a shape almost like that of a gibbous moon, and the perforation has been intentionally formed askew, the nearly circular hole in the centre expanding outwards, as if to fit the grasp of the fingers, into an oval, $2\frac{1}{4}$ and $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter. The lower surface appears to be smoothed by long continued use, perhaps as a beetle for domestic needs, and it has also served the purpose of a hammer from the decided marks of abrasion at the more massive end. The implement is of unknown antiquity, and may be, though this is not very probable, comparatively modern. But its only ascertained purpose within the present century connects it with the superstitious observances of far distant times, as it was hung up in the cow-house of a cottager of Birtley till his ninetieth year as "a charm to keep off witches."

The position and formation of the hole in the Barrasford axe-hammer is such, that there is a very exact equipoise when grasped in the right hand, and used as a hammer-pounder or smoothing instrument, either with the flattened face or partially rounded end. We might, therefore, infer from this fact, what has otherwise seemed a reasonable supposition that, while the smaller perforated stone axes might, and would probably be used as battle-axes, these larger specimens were too heavy for this purpose, or for missiles. Bishop Lyttelton, in the last century, held to their use as warlike weapons, but Pegge then asserted the contrary opinion. Professor Nilsson more recently has arrived at Pegge's conclusion, and considers them most suitable for being held in the left hand by a short handle, and driven into wood by blows from a club held in the right hand. He has suggested for them the name of "handled wedges." Mr. Evans remarks (chap. viii., p. 181, 182) that in some parts of France he has seen extremely heavy iron axes, much resembling these stone implements in form, used for splitting wood. "It seems possible," he adds, and this is not only possible but probable, I think, in connection with the limited cereal cultivation of the Ancient Britons on the numerous terraced slopes of our North Tyne valley, "that in old times these heavy stone implements may also have been employed in agriculture."

Within the memory of the present generation, I am informed that the ordinary paints or colours for common sale in chemists' shops used to be regularly ground or pulverised there by a rude implement, or

pestle, of hard stone, before the grindstones of the manufactory came to be applied to this purpose. In his *Past in the Present*, Rhind Lectures on Archaeology, Dr. Arthur Mitchell gives many illustrations of the modern survival of the rude arts and appliances of the far distant Stone Age period.

From the greater labour bestowed upon them, such perforated axe-hammers as this from the Barrasford Crags, would serve as marks of distinction for their possessors. In many countries they have "shared with the more simply formed celts the attribution of a heavenly origin as thunderbolts, together with the superstitious reverence due to their supernatural origin." This seems to be exemplified in the singular use to which the holed hammer-and-beetle-stone from Birtley was put, even in the present day. Professor Daniel Wilson, in his *Pre-historic Annals of Scotland*,* remarks that the name by which such implements were popularly known in the sister-country, almost till the close of the last century, was that of the "Purgatory Hammer," buried with its owner, that he might have the wherewithal "to thunder at the gates of purgatory till the heavenly janitor appeared."

II.—DENARIUS OF HADRIAN.

The only other object of antiquity discovered with the British perforated axe-hammer, and in proximity to it, was a small silver coin of the early Roman empire. It will not need any detailed description. The denarius is in fine condition—the bust of the Emperor with face to the right on the obverse, and the name HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS. On the reverse, a figure facing the left, the nearest description to which in Cohen's *Description Historique des Monnaies* is, as Mr. Blair informs me, "Nemesis standing to left, holding her dress with the right hand (in this coin there is a spear also), and a purse (?) in her left, a wheel at her feet." The inscription is COS. III., the two latter letters being indistinct, but the requirements of space on the coin show clearly they must have been there originally. Hadrian began his third consulship in A.U.C. 872 (A.D. 119). The large brass coin, struck by decree of the Roman senate in A.D. 121 (it is figured by Dr. Bruce in the *Roman Wall*, from Akerman), to

* Vol. I., p. 191; *Arch. Scot.*, Vol. I., p. 391.

commemorate the great Emperor's arrival in Britain, bears on the obverse this inscription: COS. III., and on the reverse, ADVENTVS AVG. BRITANNIAE. When Hadrian's prowess and far sighted statesmanship had secured the Roman conquests in our island, as far as was deemed needful or prudent, by the building of the great Wall or Barrier of the Lower Isthmus of Britain, it will be remembered that "This circumstance was announced to the world in another coin, bearing, on the reverse, a name destined to sound through regions Hadrian never knew—BRITANNIA—and representing a female figure seated on a rock, having a spear in her left hand, and a shield by her side." This second brass of Hadrian has also upon the obverse, COS. III.

Thus the denarius found in the new whinstone quarry, at Barrasford, was passing from hand to hand, as part of the currency of the Roman empire in the North Tyne Valley at or, probably from its fine condition, not long after the building of Hadrian's murus and vallum.

We cannot, of course, imply any necessary connection, from the mere association of these two objects, the British implement and Roman coin, found in the same fall of soil, in this particular quarry. We would require much more accurate knowledge than is possible in a case of casual finding like this to enable us to form any just estimate of approximate time as to when each relic was dropped and by whom. It is certainly, however, a fact of interest, that on the green slope of the whin crag above the quarry, may still be traced the foundations of the ramparts, intersecting lines of division, and oblong and circular dwellings of an ancient "camp" or settlement.* It is of considerable size, larger than the other camps on the Gunnar Crag, and has probably been occupied by primitive pastoral tribes in the British, and Romano-British, or even later times. Also the spot where the stone hammer-axe and denarius were found is at the descent of the crags, most easily available to any Roman or Romanised Briton, who might desire to pass in the most direct line from this hill fort on the basaltic ridge to the adjoining camp of Pity Me or Camp-hill, an oval-shaped fort defended by a ditch and ramparts, and situate on a very commanding position, about half-a-mile distant.

* *Arch. Aeliana*, New Series, Vol. VII., p. 7.