

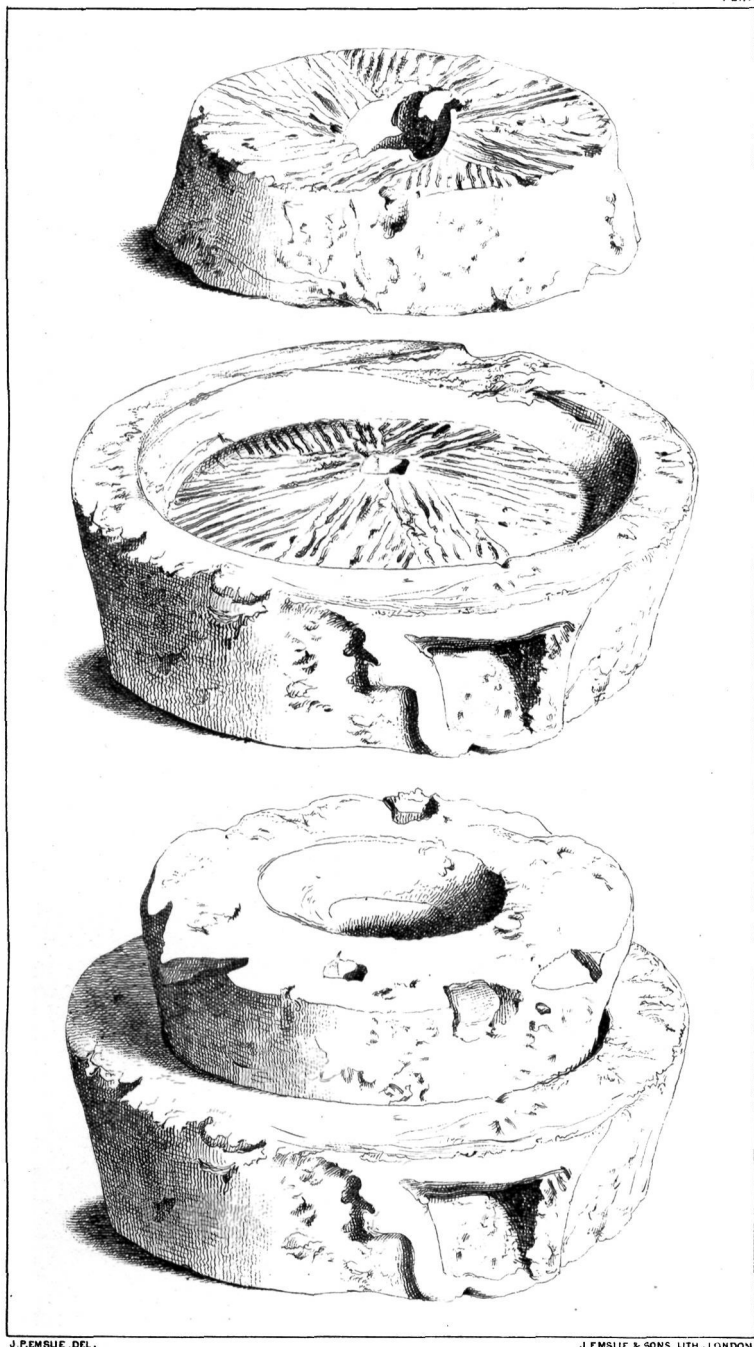
NOTES ON A ROMAN QUERN DISCOVERED IN  
ST. MARTIN'S-LE-GRAND.

By JOHN EDWARD PRICE, Hon. Sec.

A Collection of Roman and Medieval Antiquities discovered in the excavations for the new Post Office in St. Martin's-le-Grand, was exhibited at a meeting of the Society by the kind permission of the First Commissioner of Works. It comprised a large quantity of Samian and Early-English Pottery, together with coins, glass, and other objects, recovered from depths varying from 10 to 20 feet from the surface level. A section of the excavations is shewn by the annexed woodcut. It has been copied from a diagram prepared by Mr. John Gould, clerk of the works, and exhibited before the Society of Antiquaries of London, to whom I am indebted for the loan of the illustration.\* The line marked by black earth and ashes indicates what may be considered as the ground level at the time of the Great Fire.

Amongst the objects found was an example of the ancient Quern or hand-mill, in unusually good preservation. It calls for especial notice, being one of the most perfect specimens yet met with in London excavations, only isolated stones or fragments being generally found. Both stones are perfect, and are formed from lava plentiful in the neighbourhood of the Rhine, where the material is quarried for the fabrication of mill-stones to the present time. In the annexed plate, carefully prepared by Mr. J. P. Emslie, it will be observed that the lower stone, which is about 16 inches in diameter, has a slightly convex surface, and has been hollowed to receive the upper one. The surface shows the usual arrangement of channels found in mill-stones. These also appear on the concave portion of the upper stone. In this there is a central aperture or hopper for the reception of the corn or other farinaceous substance, and in the lower is an outlet in the rim. The thickness of the lower stone, inclusive of the rim, is about 4 inches. In the centre is a square hole, which, from the quantity of rust contained within, marks the remains of an iron pivot which was fitted into a bridge let in the under surface of the upper stone. The

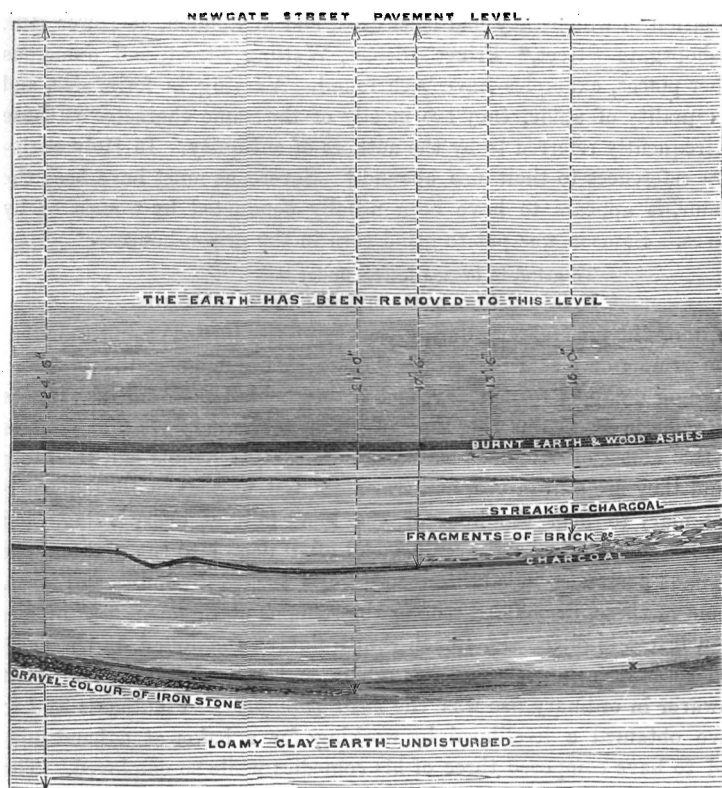
\* See Proc. Soc. Antiquaries of London, Series iv. No. 8, p. 467.



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ROMAN QUERN  
DISCOVERED IN ST MARTIN'S-LE-GRAND.



mode of working was evidently by the hand, two apertures which held the handles existing in the upper stone; in one of these remained a quantity of the lead by which the handles had been fastened in position. It was usual for two persons to work such mills. They faced each other; both grasped the handles, while the one with the disengaged right hand threw the corn into the hole in the upper stone. From the position in which this quern was discovered, and its association with quantities of the red pottery, glass, coins, &c. it must be viewed as a relic of the Roman household. In discoveries made on Roman sites and stations in this country such hand mills are among the most frequent of the objects found. At the Northern stations Dr. Bruce describes them as most plentiful. At Isurium (Aldborough in Yorkshire), in one of the houses excavated, they were found in the

situation in which they had been used, and in London, at Tower Hill, Bishopsgate Street,\* Prince's Street, Watling Street, and numerous other places, examples have been found. Varying in form, size, and the quality of stone, they are mostly of the same character as those so frequently referred to by the authors of antiquity. In Holy Scripture references to their use abound.† Severe as must have been the labour, it appears to have been usually conducted by women or by slaves. Samson was put to grind corn in the prison-house—

To grind in brazen fetters under task  
Eyeless at Gaza at the mill with slaves.—MILTON.

So, too, did the Hebrews during their captivity in Egypt and Babylon. The grinders are said to have performed their labour in the morning, grinding a supply for the day, and sitting behind their mills. It was the same in Greece in the time of Homer, who employs fifty females in the house of Alcinous in this service.‡ In Arabia and the Holy Land they are still in use, and travellers tell us that in Philistia it is customary to hear the hum of the hand-mill at every village and Arab camp morning and evening, and often deep into the night. The Romans possessed in addition corn mills turned by mules and asses. Some of these, discovered among the remains at Pompeii, are not less than 6 feet high.§ Mr. Roach Smith figures one found at Orleans,|| and such may be seen on bas-reliefs and other monuments. That however in ordinary use was the *mola manuaria*. Plautus is said to have obtained a livelihood by working for a baker at a hand-mill, and to have composed three of his comedies while so employed. The custom of parching the grain before grinding, which has extended into later times, is mentioned by Virgil in the Georgics, book i. 267.

Nunc torrete igni fruges, nunc frangite saxo.

Querns are often met with in this country formed from conglomerate

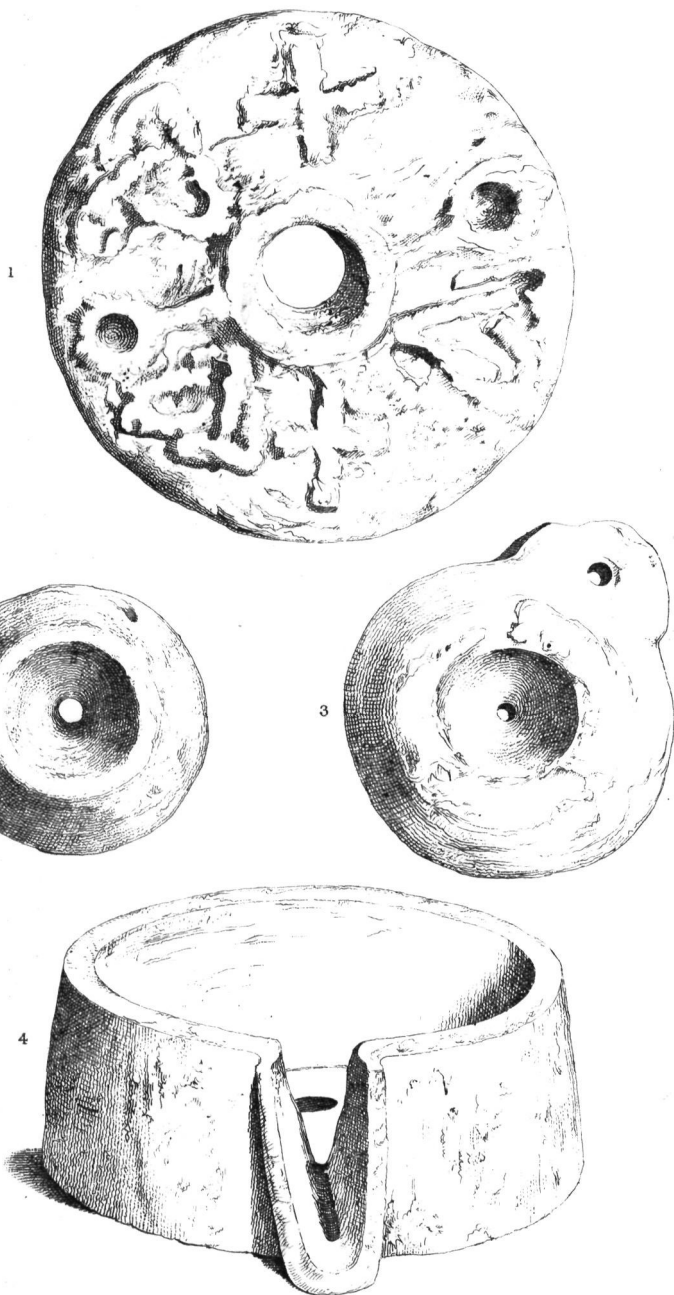
\* There are specimens from this locality preserved in the Museum of Antiquities at Guildhall. They are of volcanic stone, flat, very thin in substance, and resemble two stones in the British Museum, which were found together near the river Breamish, and adjacent to an ancient hill-fort at Prendwick among the Cheviot hills; of this type there is a small one about 8 inches in diameter which was found at Colchester, and the top stone of a quern discovered at Dumno, near St. Andrews, Scotland. This is flat, of schistose stone, and a good deal worn away at the edge.

† Matthew, xxiv. 41; Judges, xvi. 21; Lamentations, v. 13; Exodus, xi. 5; Isaiah, xlvii. 2; Revelations, xviii. 22.

‡ Dyer's Pompeii, p. 357.

§ Dyer's Pompeii, p. 356.

|| Collectanea Antiqua, vol. iv. p. 26.



ANCIENT QUERNS  
IN THE MUSEUM OF JOHN WALKER BAILY, ESQ.

and other native stones. Mr. A. W. Franks, F.S.A., has kindly directed my attention to examples which may be seen in the British Museum; among them are some of the conical or sugar-loaf type, formed from the conglomerate known as the Hertfordshire "pudding-stone." There is a specimen found while ploughing in a field in the neighbourhood of Ipswich, and others from Cambridgeshire, in which county they may be sometimes seen built into old walls. Mr. Roach Smith, F.S.A., records the discovery of similar millstones at Springhead, Kent, and formed from the same conglomerate. Sometimes the upper and lower stone were of different material, but in the specimen we have illustrated they are similar. The lower stone was often of a harder and more compact material than the upper one, which was porous, lighter, and consequently easy to turn. This was observed by Dr. Thomson in his travels in the Holy Land,\* and he cites the fact as illustrative of the passage in Job—"Hard as the nether millstone." In his *Mediterranean Sketches*, 1834, the Earl of Ellesmere quotes the passage in Judges ix. 53, which records the death of Abimelech by a portion of a millstone thrown upon his head. And he remarks that some commentators render this as the upper stone of a handmill, observing that no better missile could be devised than the entire stone. Such a stone also would not only serve as a sufficient weight to drown the swimmer, but might be easily attached to his neck for that purpose. In a Dutch illustrated Bible, continues his Lordship, the woman is represented as heaving a millstone of some ten feet diameter at the head of Abimelech.†

A curious quern was discovered some years since on a conical hill called the Biggin near the Watling Street, some three miles from Rugby. An engraving and description is given in the fifth volume of the *Journal of the Archæological Institute*. The aperture for working the handle was at the side, and, though the surface of the lower stone was slightly convex and raised at the margin, it differed from our London specimen in the aperture for the spindle in the lower stone being but an inch in diameter, in this was a wooden plug, with which the stones were kept in place. And, writes Mr. Moultrie, "the spindle only partially filling the cavity in the upper stone, the grain fell gradually through the

\* The Land and the Book, p. 528.

† See Willis's Current Notes, x. 3, January 1852, p. 60.

passage from the small bason above, and was thrown out in flour at the sides." A quern of this form is also preserved in Mr. Bateman's museum, and illustrated in his *Vestiges of the Antiquities of Derbyshire*, p. 127.

Among the Saxon laws of Ethelbert there is one relating to the grinding of corn by female domestics; and in later times various expedients for turning the mills appear to have been in use. In the fourteenth century one of a novel character was adopted. To the ceiling of the room immediately over the quern was affixed a piece of iron having a hole in it. Near the edge of the upper mill-stone was another hole. In these holes was placed a staff, by which a female seated beside the apparatus revolved the mill, the iron ring in the ceiling retaining the staff in a vertical position.\* Wycliffe renders the old version reference in St. Matthew's Gospel as "Two wymmen schulen be grinding in one querne;" and Harison the historian speaks of his wife grinding her malt upon a quern.† Until quite recently they were in use among the peasantry in the outlying districts of Scotland and Northumberland. In his Tour to the Hebrides, Boswell records—"We stopped at a little hut where we saw an old woman grinding corn with the quern, an ancient Highland instrument which it is said was used by the Romans, but which being very slow in its operation is almost entirely gone into disuse." He also mentions water-mills in Skye and Raasay, but says, "when they are too far distant the housewives grind their oats with a quern or handmill, which consists of two stones, about a foot and a-half in diameter, the lower is a little convex, to which the concavity of the upper must be fitted." In France they are said to be still in use. Mr. Smith figures one in his *Collectanea Antiqua*, which he observed at Abbeville. It was fixed in a stand, and turned by means of an iron handle, as previously described. Among the Irish peasantry they are still employed. In the Catalogue

\* See Die Burg Tannenburg und Ihre Ausgrabungen, Bearbites von Dr. J. Von Hefner and Dr. J. W. Wolf. Frankfort an Main, 1850. Arch. Institute Journal, vol. vii. p. 404.

† In the appraisement of the goods and chattels of Stephen le Northerne, among the articles mentioned are two "quernestones," 18*d.* and one pair of "musterd quernes," 6*d.* 30 Edw. III. A.D. 1356. Riley's Memorials of London Life in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, p. 283. Mr. A. W. Franks, F.S.A., informs me that in Denmark querns are used for grinding mustard to the present day.

of Antiquities belonging to the Royal Irish Academy, by Mr. Wilde, several curious specimens are figured, and the author remarks that the museum possesses no less than 35 specimens (more or less perfect) of these primitive objects. He observes also that their antiquity is very great, and that amongst the causes of their discontinuance are certain prohibitions against them in some localities in Ireland as well as Scotland, in which latter country laws have been long in force which make the peasantry grind the corn at the proprietor's water-mill. During the famine in Ireland many of the hand-mills were employed, particularly in hilly districts, or where the water-mills were inaccessible. Mr. Wilde mentions that in the summer of 1853 he purchased a quern at work in the neighbourhood of Clifden, Connemara. In a paper on the subject of Irish querns, the Rev. J. Graves, Secretary to the Kilkenny Archæological Society, remarks that the diameter of those in use varies from 3 feet 6 inches to 2 feet, and some few are even smaller, and that the principle of working is the same as that adopted in ancient times. One handle only seems to be employed, and that worked by two women, who, seated on the ground, seize the handle and dexterously push round the runner stone from one to the other; the stone thus acquires considerable velocity, receiving a fresh momentum as the handle passes each grinder, and as the work proceeds the mill is continually fed by handfuls of corn, the meal passing out by a notch cut in the rim of the nether stone.\* "One quern (says Mr. Graves,) serves for several families; and, although the owner may chance to be in the poorest circumstances, yet no charge is ever made for the use of the machine, such a procedure being counted unlucky." It is difficult to determine the age of many querns now in actual use, inasmuch as they have been handed down for many generations from mother to daughter. Ill fortune is believed to ensue when the quern is sold; the *Beau-tighe*, or "woman of the house, is extremely reluctant to part with this heir-loom, even though offered for it much more than the intrinsic value." May not these customs be relics of the old Jewish law, which says "No man shall take the nether or upper millstone to pledge"? †

For the purpose of comparison we have illustrated on the second plate four interesting specimens of ancient querns, also exhibited; they

\* See Arch. Institute Journal, vol. viii. p. 394. Also the modern Irish Quern presented by the Archæological Institute to the British Museum.

† Deut. xxiv. v. 6.



are preserved in the valuable collection of John Walker Baily, esq. and are typical of the other forms usually found. Fig. 1 is from the Island of Rathlin off the Irish coast; it is of a hard conglomerate, the upper side appearing to be somewhat softer than the under, which resembles what is termed "plum-pudding" stone. It measures 18 inches in diameter, is 4 inches thick in the centre, slanting off to a width of 3 inches at the side, and has an aperture or grain-hole in the centre of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches. There are two handle-holes, and on either side of these are rude decorated carvings of the cross and interlacing knots. It bears some resemblance to an example in the museum of the Royal Irish Academy, which is of the same diameter, but less in thickness, and is ornamented with the old Irish cross contained within a circle, the hole for the handle being placed in one of the arms of the cross. It is composed of sandstone; the ornamentation is in high relief; and it is considered to have been a church quern. "It was found in a crannoge in Roughan Lake near Dungannon, county of Tyrone."

Fig. 2 is of the conical or sugar-loaf form, also from the north of Ireland, formed from a hard sharp-cutting stone. It is  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches high, 6 inches in diameter at the top, and 12 inches across at the base, and much resembles in form and size an example, 33 pounds in weight, which was found in position on the nether stone some years since upon a bed of gravel at Garthorpe in Leicestershire.\* It is also similar to a perfect specimen in the British Museum which was found at Iwerne Courtenay, Dorset, and presented to the Collection by the Rev. Frederick Bliss.

Fig. 4 is likewise from Ireland. It is the top stone of a quern measuring 12 inches in diameter, with a projection from its circumference of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches where the handle-hole is placed. It is 6 inches high. The grain-hole is deeply excavated.

Fig. 5 is of late date, but an interesting specimen of a "nether stone." It was found in the course of excavations in Whitecross Street, London; it is of Purbeck stone. Its form is best described by the illustration, which well indicates the side-lip or outlet and the central orifice for the spindle. It measures  $16\frac{1}{2}$  inches diameter, and has a thickness of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch.

\* See Gentleman's Magazine, 1815, p. 209.