

R. H. Worth.

WORKING PARTY, HUT 3, METHEREL. 29 AUGUST, 1934.

DARTMOOR EXPLORATION COMMITTEE, TWELFTH REPORT.

TWELFTH REPORT of the Committee, consisting of Mr. G. T. Harris, Mr. C. A. R. Radford, and Mr. R. H. Worth, for the purpose of exploring Dartmoor and the Camps of Devon.

BY R. HANSFORD WORTH.

(Read at Sidmouth, 26th June, 1935.)

TWENTY-NINE years have passed since the Committee last presented a Report (D.A. Trans., Vol. XXXVIII., p. 101). Death or removal from Devon have taken all but one of the then active members; and there has always been the competition of the Barrow Report, which, as being the senior, has been used as the means of presenting all Dartmoor records which fell within its scope.

Beyond doubt there has been a feeling that, while the bulk of the available evidence could be increased, its scope was not likely to be materially enlarged, a view which can not be accepted without some qualification, as events have proved.

RIDERS RINGS OR THE RINGS, AVON VALLEY.

The valley of the Avon is notable for the number of pounds with hut-circles which are to be found within its confines, Counting contiguous pounds as single examples, there are twenty shown on the Ordnance Survey, and that tale is not complete. Of these the largest and most important is known as *Riders Rings*, and is situate on the eastern slope of *Zeal Plains*, at an elevation of 1,100 feet. It lies within a mile of *Shipley Bridge*, and hence is easily accessible, although rarely visited. Perhaps it is best regarded as being two contiguous pounds, of which it would appear that the south-western member was the first to be constructed, while the north-eastern member was added as a later extension. The two pounds have altogether an area of over six acres, and enclose some three dozen hut-circles, as compared with *Grimspound*, where the area is approximately four acres, and the number of huts is twenty-four.

I had long desired to have some closer knowledge of this structure, and in August, 1930, I took advantage of a fine week to attack the problem, by the kind consent of Mrs. Meynell, the owner of the land, and with a digging party of five men. Neither at that date, nor since, have I been

able to give the time to make a complete survey, but reproduce as an approximation, and with the kind consent of the Director General of the Ordnance Survey, the plan as it appears on the Ordnance. Fig. 1.



Fig. 1. PLAN OF RIDERS RINGS, scale 12 inches to 1 mile.
(adapted from the Ordnance Survey Map, with the sanction of the
Controller of H.M. Stationery Office).

As to that part of the pound which was investigated, I prepared and here insert a detail survey (Fig. 2). The length represented in this survey is that which lies between the points marked "A" and "B" on Fig. 1. It lies on the northern margin of the pound, and includes what would appear to have been the original entrance.

The nature and quality of the available building material has of necessity a great influence on the structures erected therewith. At *Grimspound*, granite blocks and slabs of considerable dimensions were freely available. At *Riders*

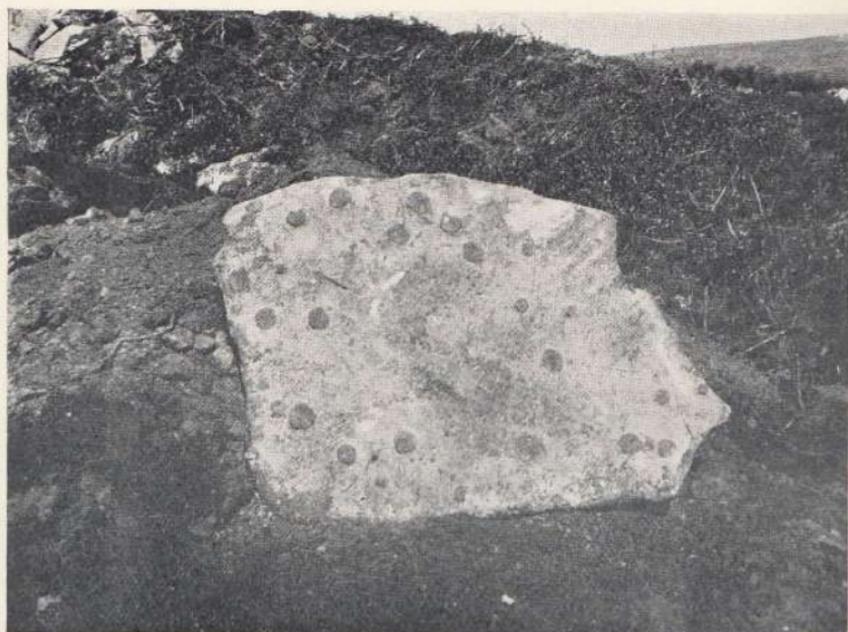


Fig. 3. FINE-GRAINED FELSITE WITH QUARTZ-SCHORL NODULES.
RIDERS RINGS. *R. H. Worth.*

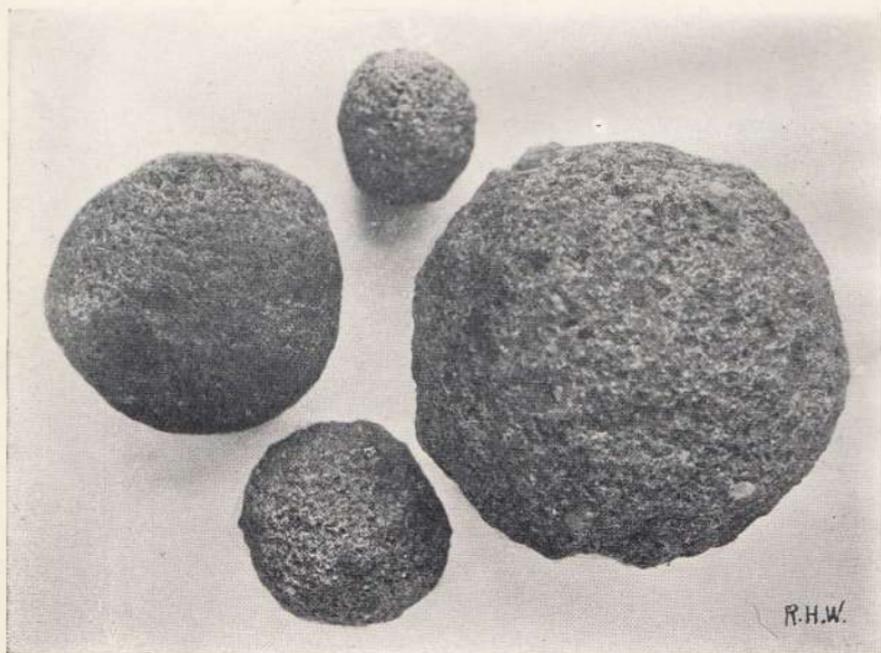


Fig. 4. LOOSE QUARTZ-SCHORL NODULES, RIDERS RINGS. NATURAL SIZE.

RYDERS RINGS.

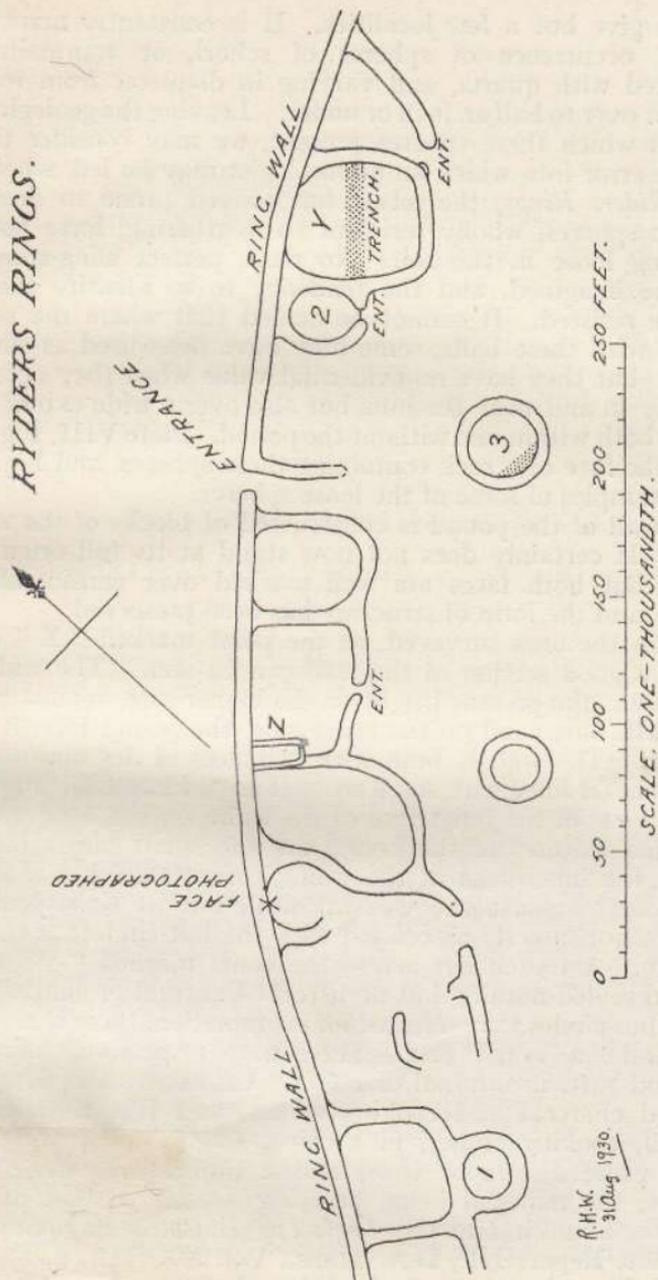


Fig. 2. DETAIL SURVEY OF PORTION OF RIDERS RINGS. B to A on fig. 1.

Rings there is practically no porphyritic granite, but much fine grained pink felsite, which occurs in small angular blocks. This felsite occurs at many places on the Moor, as far apart as Zeal Gorge, Riders Rings, Sheepstor and near Cumsdon

Tor, to give but a few localities. It is constantly marked by the occurrence of spheres of schorl, or tourmaline, associated with quartz, and varying in diameter from four inches or over to half an inch or under. Leaving the geological problem which these spheres present, we may consider the possible error into which an archæologist may be led, where, as at *Riders Rings*, the felsite has proved prone to decay and the spheres, wholly resistant to weathering, have been left lying loose in the soil. No more perfect sling-stones could be imagined, and the tendency to so identify them must be resisted. It cannot be denied that where the soil is filled with these balls, some may have been used as sling stones; but they have no evidential value when they occur, not only in and near the huts but also over a wide extent of ground both within and without the pound. Plate VIII, Fig. 3 shows the face of a rock containing these spheres, and Fig. 4 gives examples of some of the loose spheres.

The wall of the pound is constructed of blocks of the red felsite. It certainly does not now stand at its full original height, but both faces are well marked over considerable lengths, and the form of structure has been preserved.

Within the area surveyed, at the point marked "X" on Fig. 2, a good section of the wall can be seen. The width is 6ft. 8ins., the present height on the higher side, against the hill, is 2ft. 6ins., and on the lower side, the pound face, it is 3ft. 6ins. The wall is built with two faces of dry masonry, and the heart filled with small stone (Fig. 5, Plate IX). Fig. 6 gives a view of the inner face of the wall.

Marked features of the pound are the small courts built against the inner face of the wall. *Grimspound* has a few such courts against the western wall, but at *Grimspound* they are not directly associated with the hut-circles, as they are here. A trench cut across the court marked "Y" on Fig. 2 revealed nothing but undisturbed natural ground.

Two hut circles were selected for examination, those marked "1" and "2" on Fig. 2. These were respectively about 20ft. and 24ft. in internal diameter. On excavation, Hut 1 returned charcoal and cooking stones, and Hut 2 yielded charcoal, cooking stones, flint chips, fragments of pottery of the usual Dartmoor type, and a broken whetstone in red grit, the material being precisely similar to that of a whetstone found in Hut viij, *Legis Tor* (*Dartmoor Exploration Committee, Report III.*, D.A. Trans., Vol. XXVIII., p. 179). Plate X, Fig. 7 is a photograph of this whetstone.

In Hut 1 no defined hearth or fire was discovered, but in Hut 2 there was an unusual arrangement. The entrance lay to the south-east, and was defined by the usual stone step, leading down to the floor on the granite subsoil. Four

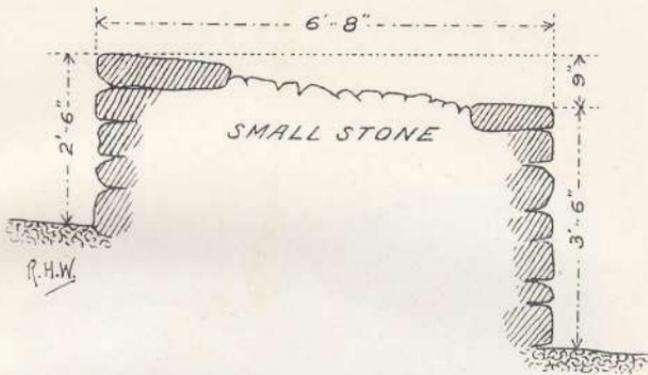


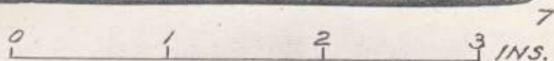
Fig. 5. RIDERS RINGS, SECTION OF POUND WALL.



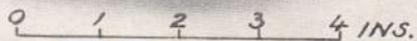
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Fig. 6. RIDERS RINGS, INNER FACE OF POUND WALL.

HUT 2 RIDERS RINGS.



HUT 2 METHERELL.



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Figs. 7 and 17.

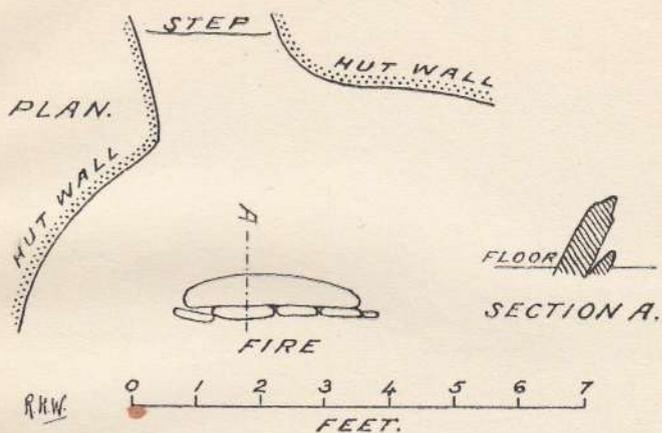


Fig. 8. PLAN OF FIREPLACE, HUT 2, RIDERS RINGS.

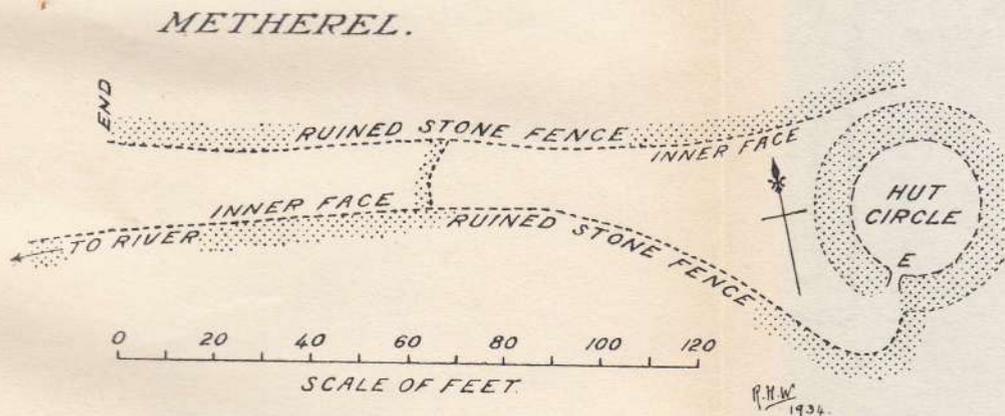
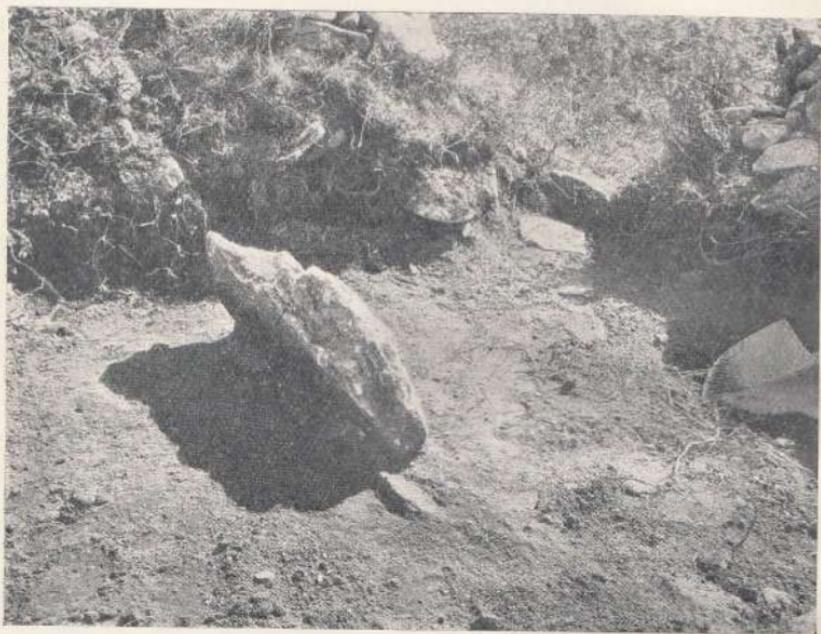


Fig. 9a. PLAN OF HUT 1, METHEREL, AND ASSOCIATED HEDGES.



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Fig. 9. VIEW OF FIRE-PLACE, HUT 2, RIDERS RINGS.



Fig. 14. PIGMY FLINT FROM HUT 1, METHEREL.

feet within this step there stood a granite slab, erect on edge, a little under 3ft. in length, standing 13ins. above the floor of the Hut, and leaning slightly inward. This had been carefully trigged on the side toward the centre of the Hut with small flat stones. Against the slab, and extending some little way toward the centre of the Hut, there had evidently been one of the fireplaces, represented by a shallow pit, filled with charcoal and ash. No such fire facing an entrance and similarly screened from draught has been found in any other Dartmoor circle. Fig. 8, Plate XI provides a plan and section of this fireplace, and Fig. 9, Plate XII is a photograph of the upstanding slab.

A small area of another Hut—No. 3—was excavated, sufficient only to uncover a patch of the floor. It was hoped that the fireplace might be found, but, failing this, the excavation was abandoned since piecemeal excavations are not to be encouraged.

The general conclusions are that the pound at *Riders Rings* and its associated huts are clearly of the same period as the many other huts which have now been excavated; and that the "courts" were enclosed spaces, probably for cattle, possibly used as gardens for crops, but not habitations.

Riders Rings and *Grimspound* have this in common—each has a possible source of water supply in a neighbouring small stream. It must be remarked, however, that in very dry years both streams are apt to fail for a short period.

At *Riders Rings* a small square building of dry masonry has been erected, doubtless as a shelter at some not very remote date. It is indicated by the letter "Z" on Fig. 2, and its dimensions are 18ft. 6ins. by 6ft. 6ins.

HUT CIRCLES AT METHERELL, SOUTH TEIGN.

The proposed new reservoir of the Corporation of Torquay at *Fernworthy* will submerge several hut-circles. By agreement with the Duchy of Cornwall and other interested persons the Corporation undertook that these circles, or some of them, should be excavated and examined prior to the construction of the reservoir; especially was it desired that a large hut associated with a double hedge (sometimes claimed as a stone row) should be examined. The Corporation undertook to supply the necessary labour for the excavation. In consultation with the *Devonshire Association* and the *Devon Archaeological Exploration Society* it was determined that I should supervise the work, and that the results should be offered to our Society for publication, the finds being deposited in the Torquay Museum by the kind permission of the Duchy of Cornwall.

I spent the latter part of August, 1934 (16th to 31st

inclusive) on this work, five excavators being employed. The weather, unlike that enjoyed at *Riders Rings*, left somewhat to be desired, and a little time was lost in consequence of storms of rain, while sieving was for some hours impossible during a violent gale. But the ground did not get sodden, and on the whole the conditions were not unfavourable.

At *Metherell* the building material consists of porphyritic granite which yields large slabs. It follows that some of

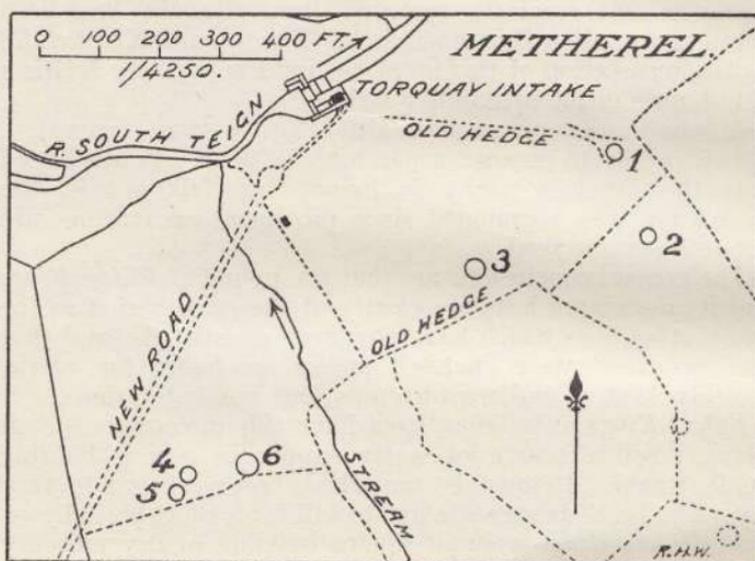


Fig. 10. GENERAL PLAN, METHERELL.

the lining stones of the huts are as large as any to be found on the Moor, and are only equalled by those of the one hut at *Shapley* the stones of which were large enough to defy even the road contractors who wrecked and destroyed all else of the group described in the second report of this Committee (D.A. Trans., Vol. XXVII., pp. 88-91. *Cullacombe Head*).

These large slabs are not, however, without their disadvantages for the excavators. Where they have fallen upon the floor of a hut there is nothing to be done but lift them if access to the floor is desired. Lifting such rocks is strenuous work and requires skilled hands. At *Metherell* a set of patent blocks was wrecked over this work, but the stones were none the less persuaded to yield to levers and sheer man-power. Three Huts were excavated, and the alleged stone-row was examined and determined to be two hedges (Fig. 9a, Plate XI). Fig. 10 gives a plan of the group of remains which was dealt with. One general remark may be made—all the huts had been subjected to interference and

robbery by stone workers and from the nature of the tool marks left, the interference has taken place within the past 120 years.

HUT 1, at the head of the two hedges, is 28ft. in diameter within its walls. Large slabs, one as long as 10ft., line the inner face of the wall, but their height is not great, ranging from 3ft. to 4ft. The entrance lies to the south-west, and was readily identified. Its clear width is greater than usual, being 2ft. 9ins.; its height is 3ft. 9ins. It is formed by two slabs which extend through the thickness of the wall. The entrance has been paved, and there are two steps down to the floor of the hut. Fig. 11 gives a general plan of Hut 1, and Fig. 12 a plan and section of the entrance.

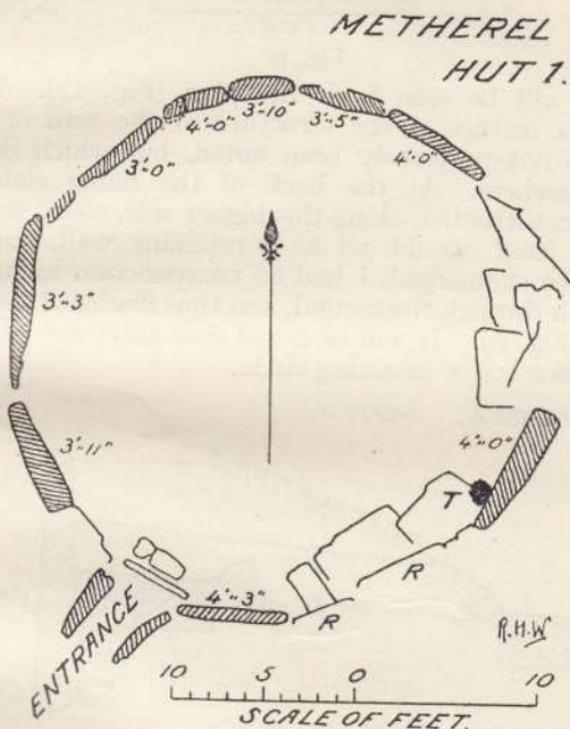


Fig. 11.

The floor is on the "calm" or decomposed granite, and lies on the average 20ins. below the surrounding ground; the deposit which had formed within the area of the hut since its abandonment was on the average 18ins. in depth; a similar depth was found in the other huts. The hut is on ground which slopes to the north-east, and the floor slopes similarly. The natural creep of the soil would impose a strain on the slabs lining the higher part of the circumference of the circle. Indeed, many of these slabs have been thrown

METHERELL, ENTRANCE HUT 1.

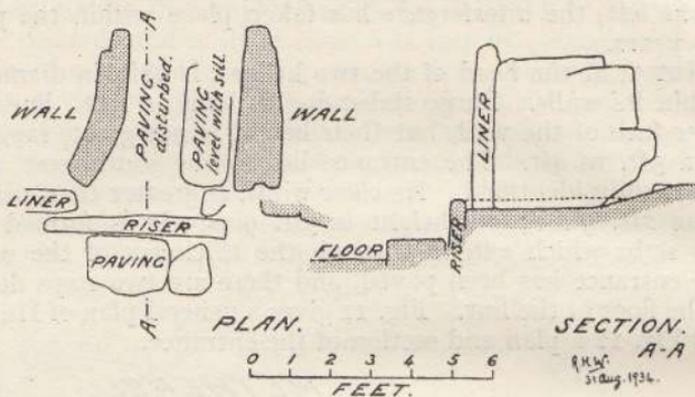


Fig. 12.

down, as will be seen from the plan (Fig. 11). The fall disclosed a feature of the structure of the wall or mound which has not previously been noted, but which doubtless occurs elsewhere. At the back of the lining slabs there had been constructed, along this higher side, a dry stone wall which, in itself, would act as a retaining wall. Since the hut is to be submerged, I had no compunction in running a trial trench through the mound, and thus disclosed the section shown in Fig. 13. It will be noted that there are also stones disposed as a toe or retaining circle.

METHEREL, HUT 1.

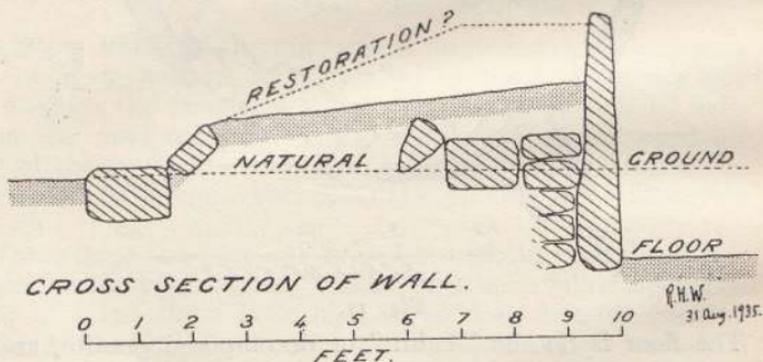


Fig. 13. STRUCTURE OF HUT WALL.

In the centre of the hut a pit had been sunk, probably in connection with the removal of stone by the stone-workers, this had involved a considerable disturbance of the floor. On excavation, three pieces of flint were found, two of which are mere flakes; the third may be regarded as a typical "pigmy" (Plate XII, Fig. 14). Charcoal was found, and

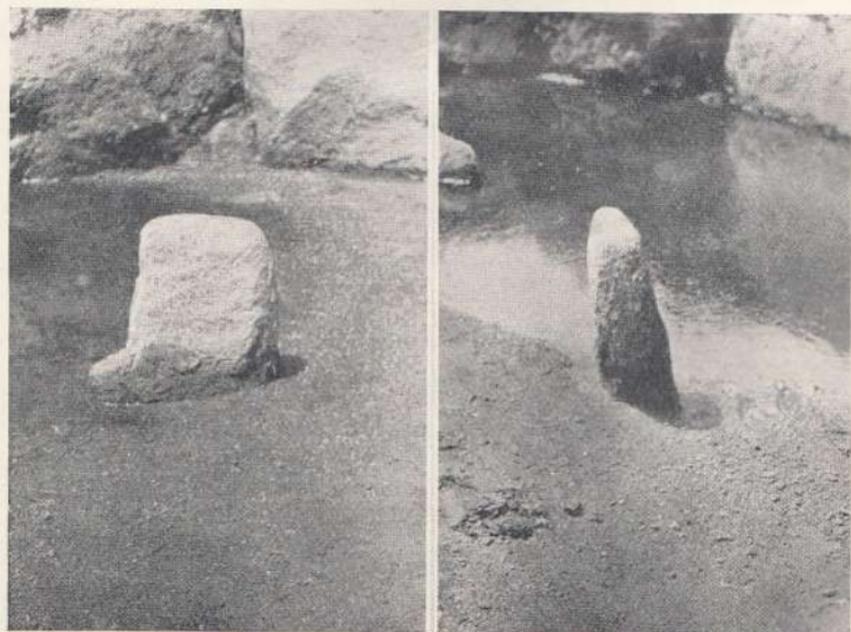
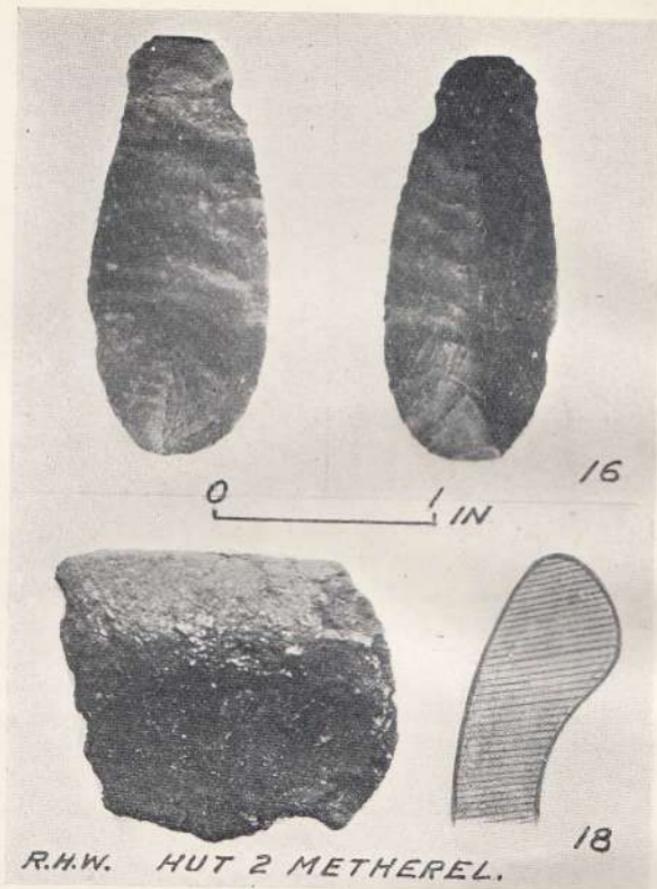


Fig. 21. VIEWS OF ANVIL STONE, Hut 3. METHEREL.
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fire-cracked pot-boilers, but no pottery, neither any defined hearth or fire.

A piece of quartz vein-stone with micaceous iron ore and tin was of natural occurrence, and casts some doubt on the significance of the rather numerous pieces of ruddle which were found in all three huts. Ruddle has been found in other Dartmoor huts where it was foreign to the soil, and would appear to have been used as a pigment, but here it is possibly native to the soil.

HUT 2 is of 25ft. internal diameter. The lining slabs are unusually large. One, the elevation of which is approximately a triangle standing on its base, is 12ft. long in the face of the wall, and 6ft. 10ins. in height.

Great disturbance had been caused to this hut by the quarrymen; many stones had obviously been broken up, and the floor was deep in a layer of spalls. So great had been the disturbance that the site of the entrance could not be ascertained. It was here that the stone with the jumper-holes was found, which dates the interference as relatively recent. Fig. 15 is a plan of Hut 2.

The floor was on the calm, the usual rule of removing all meat earth within the hut having been followed. A well-worked flint javelin head was found (Plate XIII, Fig. 16). The

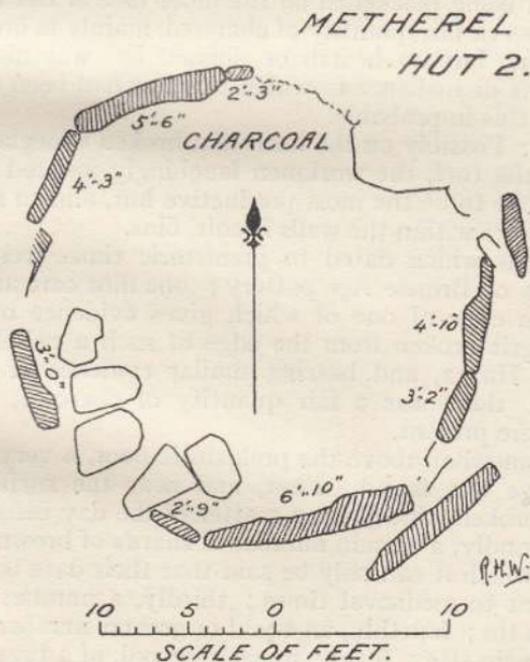


Fig. 15.

point is slightly broken ; the present length of the weapon is 54 mm., the breadth 23 mm., and the greatest thickness 8.5 mm. One face is unworked, the other is worked on both edges, and over one half the surface has been ripple-marked. I have called this a javelin head, but I have no quarrel with any who would prefer the simpler term "trimmed flake," especially as one edge appears to have been bruised by use as a cutting tool. Three other pieces of flint were recovered but these are unformed chips.

A flat pebble of fine-grained grit was found (Plate X, Fig. 17). Its dimensions are 13 cm. \times 9.5 cm. \times 3.2 cm. at the place of greatest thickness. One side is formed by an irregular break, the minor irregularities of which have been rounded off by grinding. The natural edges of the pebble have been battered, and there are slight striae on one face adjacent to the battered edges, and two close set grooves on the other. Both faces have been smoothed by friction, but one face more markedly. The object is either a whetstone or a smoothing stone, and has been used as a hammer.

Fragments of pottery of the usual Early Bronze Age type occurred, the average thickness being about 1 cm. The largest piece is part of the rim of a pot, of characteristic contour (Plate XIII, Fig. 18). The pottery has the usual feature of being blackened on the inner face of the vessel.

There was a fair quantity of charcoal, mainly in one quarter of the hut, but no hearth or defined fire was discovered ; indeed, the disturbance to which this hut had been subjected rendered this improbable.

HUT 3 : Possibly on the faith of a broken wineglass turned up with the turf, the workmen laughingly insisted that this would prove to be the most productive hut, and so it proved. The diameter within the walls is 29ft. 6ins.

The finds which dated to prehistoric times were several fragments of Bronze Age pottery ; one flint core and eleven chips, the edge of one of which gives evidence of use ; a piece of grit broken from the edge of such a pebble as was found in Hut 2, and bearing similar evidence of use as a hammer ; there was a fair quantity of charcoal, and pot-boilers were present.

But, somewhat above the prehistoric floor, a very different assemblage was found. First, and near the surface, there was the broken wine-glass, a matter of the day before yesterday ; secondly, a certain number of shards of brown earthenware, of which it can only be said that their date is anything subsequent to mediæval times ; thirdly, a number of pieces of stream tin ; fourthly, an equal or greater number of pieces of broken tin slag ; fifthly, much charcoal, of a type differing from that found in the other huts, or on the floor of this hut,

PLATE XIV

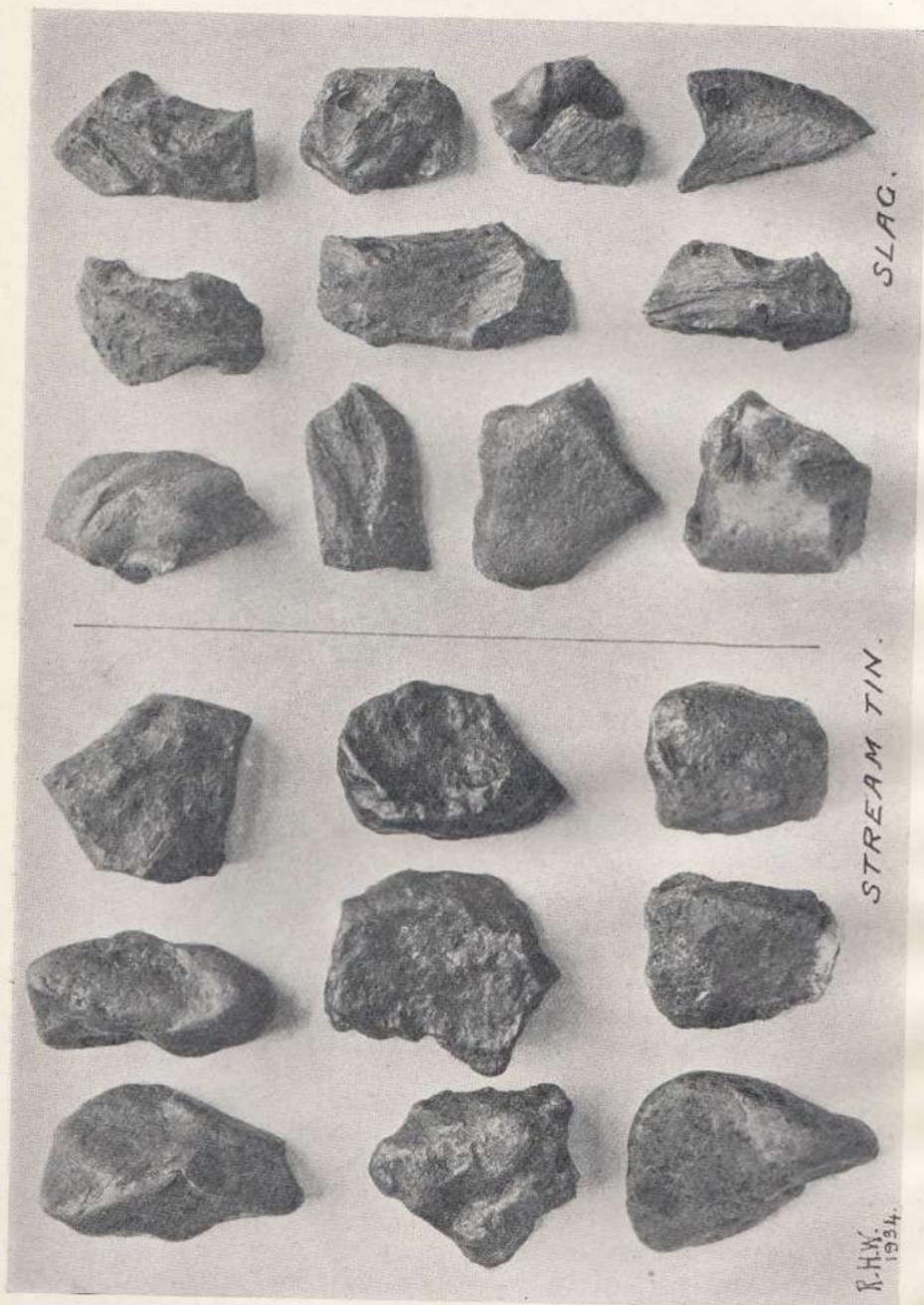


Fig. 22. STREAM TIN, AND Fig. 23. SLAG. (Natural size).

and most obviously in that it occurred in larger pieces; sixthly, a silver coin, broken and much worn.

The whole collection made it evident that there had been a secondary occupation of this hut by the tanners. It had been used as a store for stream tin, tin slag and charcoal; it had also most probably been used in part as a workshop for breaking up and examining tin slag.

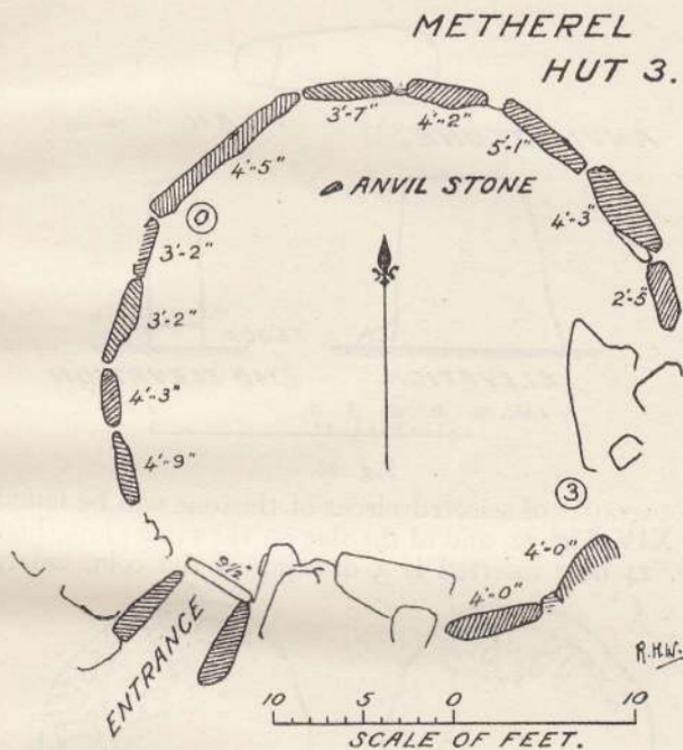


Fig. 19.

The question arose whether the silver coin would give any approximation to the date of this occupation. On careful examination it was found that, worn and broken as it was, it retained precisely those details of its original imprint which enabled it to be identified as a York penny of Henry VII., a coin which could not have been minted later than 1500 A.D. This probably gives the earliest definitely assignable date for the second occupation, and, since the coin is much worn, we would probably be safe in assuming that the date can not have been much earlier than 1540.

I have said that there is some reason to think that the hut may have been used as a workshop as well as a store; there is, set in the floor of the hut, a granite stone, 1ft. in

height, 15ins. in length, and $5\frac{1}{2}$ ins. in greatest thickness, the rounded top of which bears marks of abrasion, as if it had been used as an anvil. It was near this stone that the broken slag lay thickest; and it may be that the slag was broken on the stone. The position of this stone is shewn in Fig. 19, and marked Anvil. Fig. 20 gives details of the "anvil," and Plate XIII, Fig. 21 gives views.

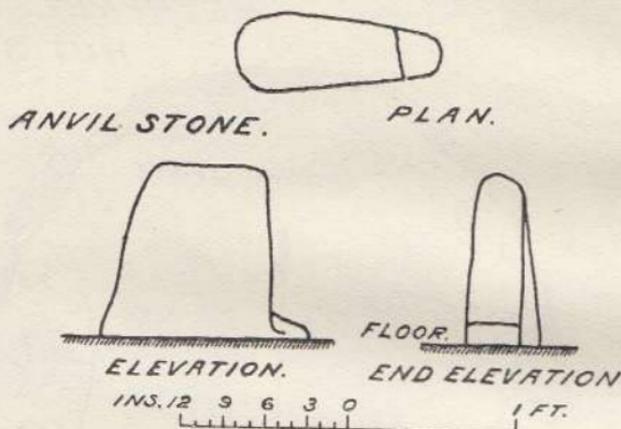


Fig. 20.

Photographs of selected pieces of tinstone will be found on Plate XIV, Fig. 22, and of the slag on the same plate, Fig. 23. Fig. 24 here inserted is a drawing of the coin, enlarged.

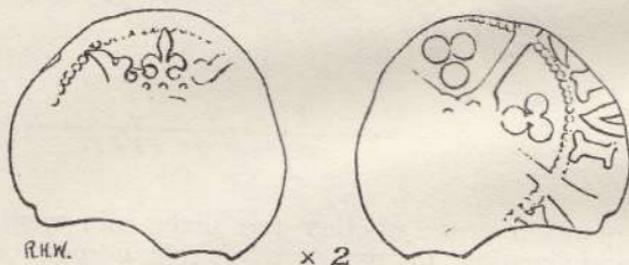


Fig. 24. YORK PENNY OF HENRY VII.

The slag is mainly pale ochreous in colour, but many pieces break with a black, vitreous fracture. The smaller pieces are ochreous throughout. They have been obviously much weathered in the soil.

There is a blowing-house farther down the valley, below Metherell, and Mr. S. C. Chapman obtained slag when the present pipe line was constructed in a trench near the blowing-house. He also found the fine sand or slimes from tin dressing. I incline to think the blowing-house is of a slightly later date than the occupation of the hut by the tanners.



Fig. 25. PORCH, OLD YARDWORTHY.

I found no trace of any smelting having been done in the hut. Tin slag, but not stream tin, has once before been found in a Dartmoor hut, at *Yes Tor* near *Princetown*. (*Dartmoor Exploration Committee*, Report V., D.A. Trans., Vol. XXX., p. 100).

The thanks of the Committee are due to those who permitted excavation on the sites above described, and who provided facilities; I would add my personal thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard, of Brent Moor House, for assistance and hospitality kindly afforded, and I desire to mention the excavators: At *Riders Rings*, Messrs. Pedrick, F. W. Hancock, W. Alcock, L. Barnes and L. Tucker; and at *Metherell*, Messrs. G. Rooke, J. Endicott, G. Bowden, J. Sanders and A. Mears, not omitting mention of the amiable and accomplished little terrier who with commendable courtesy exhibited no impatience at the time wasted in excavating huts, when he could have indicated far more sporting propositions.

ANCIENT FARMHOUSE, YARDWORTHY.

At *Yardworthy*, in the parish of Chagford, there were formerly three farms. There is now but one, but that has three yards. In one of these yards stand the remains of an ancient building, roofless but otherwise well preserved. It now forms part of the outbuildings.

The dominant feature of the building is a granite porch of a very early type. Its construction is of the simplest, slab superimposed on slab in either wall, and a single slab for the roof. This strikes the note of primitiveness, and closer examination shows that the door which closed this porch had no frame, but hung from granite wall to granite wall; turning, not upon hinges, but upon a projection at the head of the hanging style engaging in a hole in the roof slab, and doubtless another such projection at the foot, engaging in a hole in the sill (the sill has been lost). The sides of the porch converge to the entrance, and are dressed to receive the door. The door did not stand parallel to the front of the house, or at equal angles with the sides of the porch. A view of this porch is given in Plate XV, Fig. 25, and full details are shown in Fig. 26, here inserted. (See also Plate XVIII, Fig. 32).

The window which can be seen in the far wall, through the doorway in Fig. 25, is consistent with the porch. It has never been glazed, but was closed by a wooden shutter, hung as described for the porch door. In this instance the granite sill is still left and the hole in which the shutter turned may be seen. A view of this window opening, taken from the outside, is given in Plate XVI, Fig. 27, and Fig. 28, Plate XVII supplies an elevation and plan.

This method of hanging gates and doors has remained in use to the present day in the matter of gates. There is still a gate on *North Harton Farm*, at the north of *Lustleigh Cleave*, which is so hung, and until the last year or so there was a similar gate at *Wormhill* by the side of a public road. (See Plate XVI, Fig. 29 for a view of the *Wormhill Gate*).

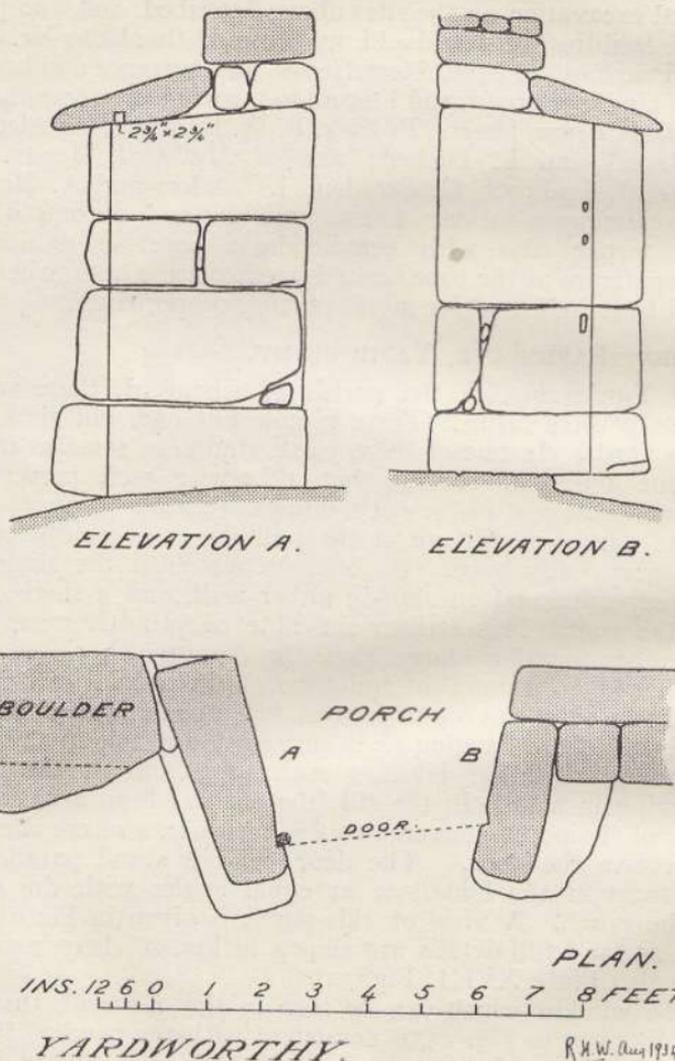
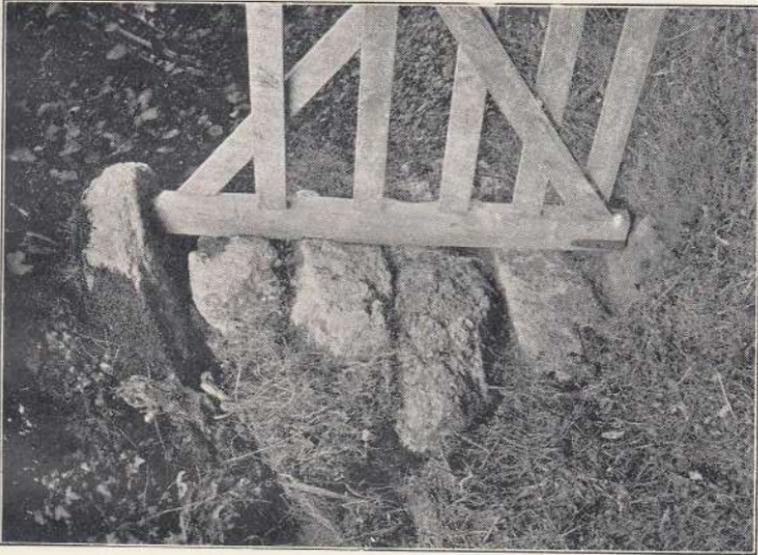


Fig. 26.

At *Peck Farm*, *Lustleigh*, and at *Foxworthy* in the same parish, may be seen the upper hangings for barn doors still built into the walls, and at *Forder*, in *Gidleigh* parish, the upper hanging for a court gate. But all these were for heavy



R. H. Worth.
Fig. 29. GATE-HANGING, WORMHILL.



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Fig. 27. WINDOW, OLD YARDWORTHY.

YARDWORTHY.
WINDOW.

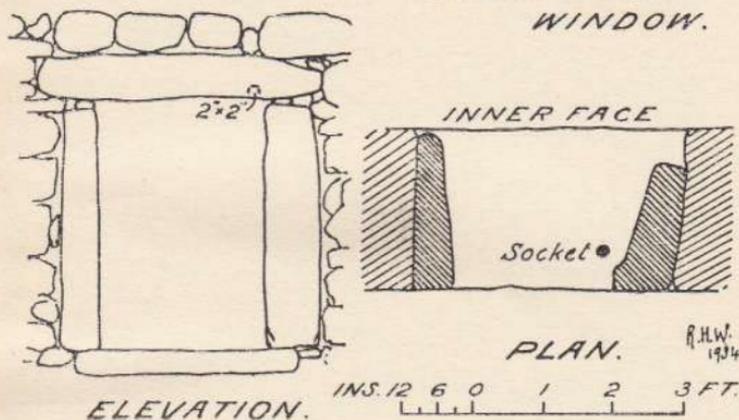


Fig. 28.

YARDWORTHY.

WINDOW, sill 4 inches above ground.

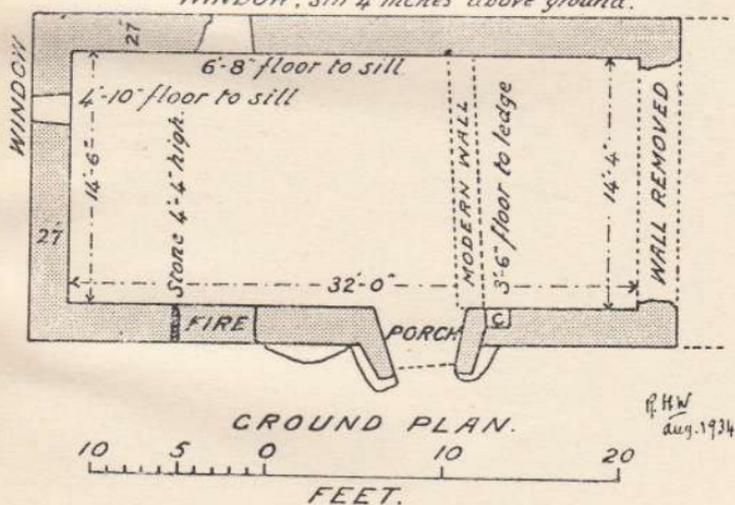


Fig. 30.



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Fig. 32. PORCH, OLD YARDWORTHY.



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Fig. 31. SOUTH GABLE, OLD YARDWORTHY.

gates or doors, and the holes are from 4 to 5ins. in diameter, and from 5 to 6ins. in depth. Here the hole for the head of the door is $2\frac{3}{4}$ ins. in diameter by $2\frac{3}{4}$ ins. deep, and that for the window shutter is 2ins. in diameter and 2ins. in depth. Similar examples may yet be found, but none are at present known.

The internal dimensions of this old house are 32ft. by between 14ft. 6ins. and 14ft. 3ins. The length is significant, as being double the linear perch of the twelfth century, a measure which doubtless lingered on into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries for building purposes (Plate XVII, Fig. 30).

One end wall has been taken down, but the quoins are left and there can be no uncertainty as to the length of the building. A recent wall has been built across the house, close by the porch. This is in no way bonded to the old work. To the right of the entrance there is a small recess or cupboard formed in the thickness of the wall, its internal dimensions being 18ins. by 14ins., by 14ins. in depth.

To the left of the entrance there appears to have been a hearth fire, since built up, but one side of which, consisting of a single stone, yet remains. This fire may have had an external chimney or flue, of which no trace can now be seen.

There is a small window in the south end wall, the sill being 4ft. 10ins. above the floor level; and there is an opening in the gable which may indicate that there was an upper floor or tallet, although no provision for floor joists can be traced in the walls. Indeed there is no evidence of internal partitions of any sort, but the absence of such evidence is not conclusive that there were none; partitions may well have been formed of framed and panelled oak, many such survive in farms and houses of a later date.

The masonry of uncoursed rubble is set in good mortar, and the walls are but 27 inches in thickness, they are still sound, lacking but a roof for their security for many years. The main quoins are built in a variation of the "long and short" work, sometimes, but probably erroneously, described as of Saxon date. In place of slabs placed on flat alternating with blocks set on end, the quoins here consist of slabs set on edge, their broad faces alternating on either side of the angle. Such slabs are necessarily "shiners," faces of perhaps 5ft. by 4ft., standing on beds no more than 5ft. by 9ins., the stone not even extending through half the thickness of the wall. The photographic elevation of the south gable wall (Plate XVIII, Fig. 31) shows this form of construction clearly. It may be assumed to be faulty, but the proof of its soundness lies in its endurance. Other examples may be found on Dartmoor,

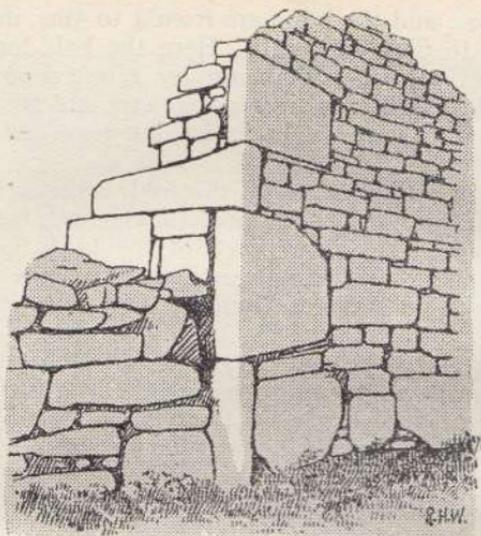


Fig. 33. BROAD AND NARROW WORK QUOIN, CHALLACOMBE.

for instance in an old building at *Challacombe* near *Headland Warren*, and in another at *Rushlade, Ashburton*. A sketch of the quoin at *Challacombe* is here inserted, Fig. 33.

There are no precise criteria for the dating of such a building as has been above described, it is certainly early, possibly, even probably, belonging to the fourteenth century. It is unique on Dartmoor as far as our knowledge extends, there may be scraps of similar date but nothing as complete. Its preservation is a matter most earnestly to be desired. It has been in danger of use as a quarry, but the sound judgment of Mr. Harvey, the present tenant of the farm, saved it. A well designed roof, with good tie beams, and a covering, even of galvanised iron, would save the structure for generations to come, and would provide a useful farm-building. It is to be hoped that the Duchy of Cornwall, whose property it now is, may be pleased to take the necessary measures for its security.

I have to thank Mr. Harvey for kindly giving me every facility for the examination and measurement of this antique.

R. H. WORTH.