

The Chambered Tumulus at Heston Brake, Monmouthshire

By the REV WILLIAM BAGNALL-OAKELEY, M.A.

(Read August 22nd 1888.)^a

In Ormerod's *Strigulensia* this spot is described as the Rough Grounds, in which is a mound called Heston Brake, raised artificially on the edge of a dingle, and having a seeming elevation very much increased by natural slopes toward the North-east. This mound has a flat summit and commands a view of the Severn towards Aust; it is covered with a venerable shade of oaks and yew trees. In the centre of the summit is a space about 27ft- long by 9ft, wide, surrounded originally by thirteen rude and upright stones, now time-worn, mossed over, and matted with ivy. One is at the East-end, two at the West, and three remain at each side with spaces for the four which have been removed. It has been suggested that this is a sepulchral memorial in connection with the massacre of Harold's servants by Caradoc, in 1065, but I think we may dismiss this idea and consider its erection at a much earlier date.

The mound now presents a very different appearance to what it did when Mr. Ormerod's description was written, but as we are about to open the Chamber you will I hope have an opportunity of forming your own opinion on the subject.

The Chamber is erected on a natural mound, increased by the mound of earth which originally covered the stones; elevated sites were generally chosen for these memorials of the dead in order that they might be seen from afar. These large Cromlechs and Chambered Tumuli were no doubt the burial-places of chieftains and

^a A paper on this and other "rude stone monuments" in South Wales, from which the above is extracted, was read at a meeting of the Monmouthshire and Cacrleon Antiquarian Association, at which the President, Secretary, and some of the members of the Clifton Antiquarian Club were present by invitation. A. E. H

leaders of the people, as it must have required the help of the tribe to erect the immense stones and mounds of which they were composed. In this Portskewett tumulus there are now exposed to view fifteen of the twenty stones which originally formed the sepulchral chamber and a gallery leading to it. The height of the largest stone was 5 feet 2 inches before the ground was disturbed, and from thence about two feet to the floor of the chamber, the solid natural rock.

The Chamber lies nearly East and West. There are two holes in the upright stones on either side of the chamber, which are very remarkable. The positions of these curious openings are shown on the plan, Plate VII, at the points marked a.a. There are a few examples in this country of one similar hole, but no other instance that I know of, where two holes exist in the same chamber. There is much doubt about the object of these holes; some consider that they were made for the egress of the spirit of the departed; others affirm that they were for conveying food to the Manes.

These sepulchral mounds appear to have been regarded with reverence long after the people who erected them had passed away, for we often find one or two interments made years after their erection, and in fact by different races of people. These are spoken of as "secondary interments," and occur in all parts of the mound, outside the regular chamber of the earlier burial.

There are two large rough stones near the railway between Heston and the Black rock, which may possibly have had some connection with the tumulus, and there is also a *menhir*, or large upright stone, not far off.

Within the area of the ancient Chace or Forest of Wentwood there are several ancient rude stone monuments which present features of great interest, and which are but little known.

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Postscript. -This interesting tumulus was opened and very carefully examined under the direction and in the presence of Mr. Mitchell, the Rev. W. B. Oakeley, and other members of the Monmouthshire and Caerleon Antiquarian Association, and of the Clifton Antiquarian Club, on August 22nd, 1888, when it was found to have been

previously disturbed, and very few remains were discovered. The few relics that were found, consisting of three pieces of human, jaw, one with three teeth, several separate teeth, and some small bones, were much broken. These are now in the Caerleon Museum. Some fragments of an urn of coarse pottery and a few bones were found just outside the chamber on the North of the tumulus, near the spot shown on the Plan on Plate VII, which has been reproduced from a measured drawing made at the time the remains were uncovered, by Mrs. Bagnall-Oakeley. The dimensions of most of the stones which remain are given on this Plan, and the pits and depressions from which other stones have been removed are shown in outline. A.E.H.