

MORE ON THE ECTON HAMMER-STONES

Graeme Guilbert

The discovery of hammer-stones on a waste-heap at the Ecton copper-mines was described in the last issue of the *Bulletin* Guilbert 1994). In June 1994 these stones were deposited in Sheffield City Museum, and the opportunity was taken to view those which Thomas Bateman had obtained from Ecton in the mid-19th century (see Trevor Ford's note appended to Guilbert 1994) and which are now in that museum (seen by courtesy of Julien Parsons, Keeper of Archaeology and Ethnography). These, too, are all 'unmodified' hammer-stones. Seven appear superficially to comprise some form of quartzite, while two are sandstone and another, more dubious, as an implement, is limestone (petrological identifications by Gaynor Boon, Assistant Keeper of Earth Sciences and Meteorology). A label, in Bateman's hand, accompanies these stones, declaring them to have been "found in an ancient copper mine at Ecton in June 1855" with "sharpened pieces of stag's horns", and interpreting them as "the working tools of the aboriginal miners". Bateman's terminology implies that these implements were found underground and, together with Nellie Kirkham's letter (quoted by Trevor Ford in the note mentioned above), this suggests that ancient workings may survive intact; though the 1855 finds could, of course, have been made by miners in re-opening old workings.

Having been made aware of the recent find from Ecton, John Barnatt (Survey Archaeologist, Peak District National Park) informs the writer that he made a visit to the site in the company of James Rieuwerts, with a view to entering Quarry Mine in search of evidence similar to that seen by Kirkham in

1945 (ie. foreign stones down the mine as described in her 1958 letter). They found that this mine had run-in since Kirkham's time, and this would seem to rule out any immediate prospect of locating early undisturbed workings.

The whereabouts of 'the fragmentary 'stag's horns', of which there were apparently nine, are no longer known. This is a pity, not least because they might have been suitable for radiocarbon-dating and could thereby have offered an opportunity to confirm the theory that copper was mined at Ecton in prehistory.

Apart from the Llandudno hammer-stones (also noted by Trevor Ford), the only other utilized boulder seen by the writer amongst the Bateman Collection in Sheffield was "found at Long Low, near Wetton, 1853", a complex prehistoric monument located at SK121539, only 5 km south-east of Ecton. This is also a quartzitic rock, but, unlike those from Ecton, it displays patches of fine abrasion, as if from rubbing or grinding, rather than being pitted from pounding. The Long Low boulder therefore seems unlikely to have been "used for pounding ore" (pace Howarth 1899, p.158).

REFERENCES

- Guilbert, G., 1994 Hammer-stones from the copper-mining site at Ecton, Staffordshire. *Bul. PDMHS*. Vol. 12, No. 3, pp.26-7.
- Howarth, E., 1899 *Catalogue of the Bateman Collection of Antiquities in the Sheffield Public Museum*.

Graeme Guilbert.