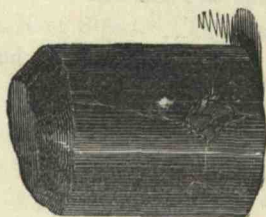


KNIGHT.



PAWN.

CHESS-MEN FOUND AT THE MOTE HILL, WARRINGTON.

## II.—AN ACCOUNT OF EXCAVATIONS MADE AT THE MOTE HILL,

WARRINGTON, LANCASHIRE.

By James Kendrick, M.D.

A few years more, and the existence of the *Moot*, or *Mote-Hill*, at Warrington, will become a mere record of history. The course of modern requirement has called for its entire demolition and removal, with the exception of a small and mutilated portion, which still holds a precarious and undistinguishable tenure. Its site now forms part of that of the "*Clergy Orphan Institution*," and to secure a proper foundation for this extensive building, it has been found requisite from time to time to remove portions of the ancient *Mote-Hill*, until little now remains.

Whilst the recollection of these changes remains fresh in the memory of many, I have thought that a short record of them would be a fit subject for the consideration of our Historic Society; the more so, as, independent of their local interest, a few of the early remains found during the excavation of the *Mote-Hill*, possess likewise a singular value to the general archæologist.

An examination of the neighbouring locality, leads to a belief that the *Mote-Hill*, at a very remote period, formed part of an elevated ridge of land, running in a north-east direction from the site of the present church-yard. A large portion of this ridge still remains in the fields between the *Mote-Hill* and the high-road to Manchester; and it is not improbable that the high land of Church Street is another portion, running in an opposite direction.\* But be this as it may, the form of the hill, which, until a few years back, was a very perfect oval, is clearly artificial; and, with its flattened summit, was a characteristic example of the tumulus, designated by antiquarians "the broad barrow." Its height above the land surrounding it was three yards, though apparently greater, from a trench or water-course, which ran at its base on the south and west sides, and on the outside of which were distinct remains of a *vallum*, or earthen parapet. Prior to the year 1832, when a large portion was removed from the south-west border of the hill, its level summit measured from east to west fifty-four

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\* A reference to the *Plan of Warrington*, given at page 22 of the preceding volume of the *Historic Society's Transactions*, will greatly assist my description of the locality.



yards, and from north to south forty-three yards. The south and west sides were steep and abrupt, terminating below in the ditch and *vallum*, whilst on the north and east, although the form of the mound was very clearly defined, its sides sloped more gradually to the low ground near it.

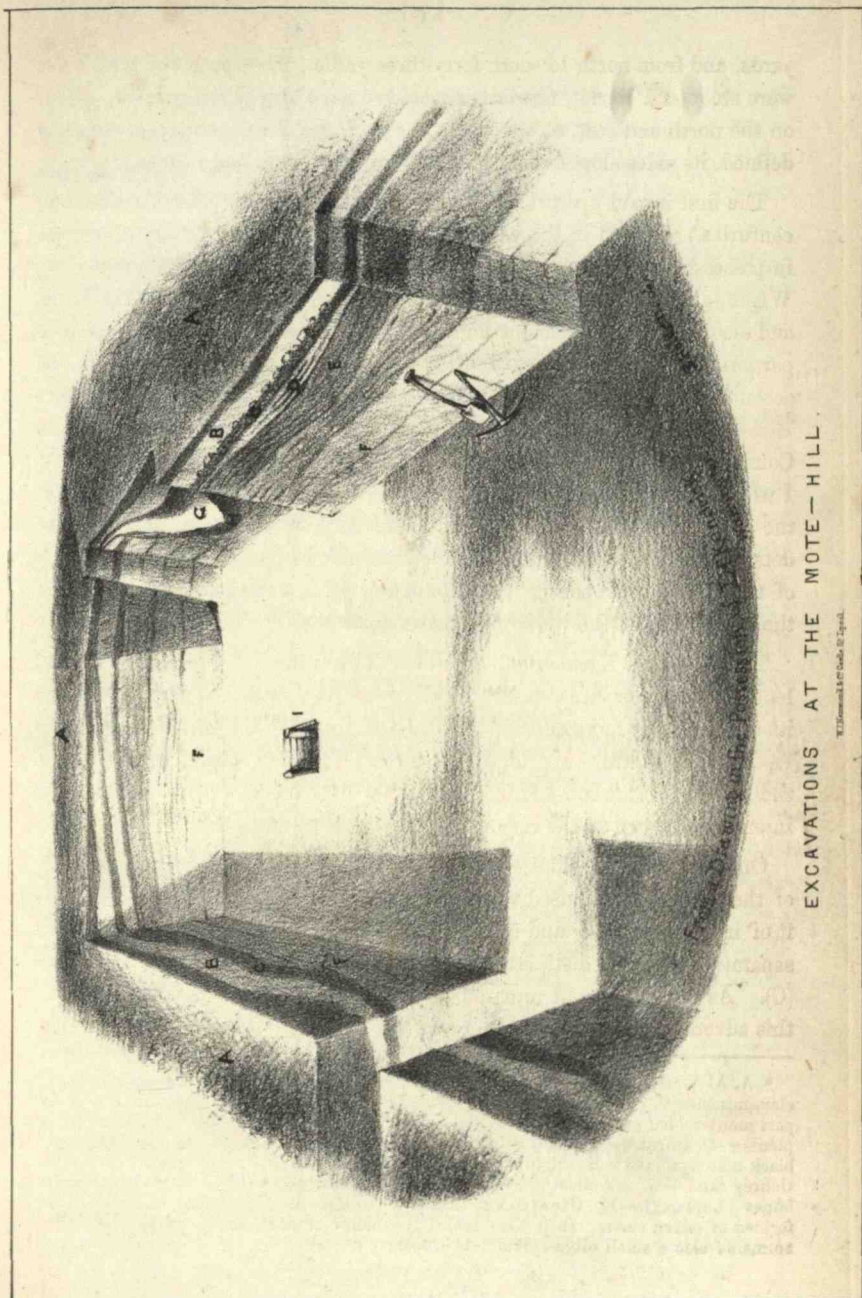
The first inroad upon the *Mote-Hill*, in its perfect state, (at least for two centuries,) occurred in the year 1832, as just stated, and we are fortunate in possessing from the pen of the late Rev. Edmund Sibson, of Ashton, near Wigan, a graphic account of the form and size of the mound at that time, and also of the early remains found during the removal of a considerable portion. This valuable contribution to our local history, forms part of an account of the *Roman Roads in Lancashire*, written by Mr. Sibson for Mr. Edward Baines, and inserted in the third volume of his *History of the County of Lancaster*, a work of so easy access and frequent reference, that I will not occupy the time of the Society with reading the description of the Mote-Hill at Warrington, more especially since the appearances there detailed are inferior in interest to those observed in 1841, when the centre of the mound was opened to a large extent, and a considerable depth, as the foundation of the "*Clergy Orphan Institution*."

The necessary *Excavation*, of which a drawing is appended,\* was in length thirty-four yards, and in width twenty-two yards; comprising within its extent rather more than one-half of the area of the *Mote-Hill*, and this too, from its centre. Its depth was three yards, and several driftways for the removal of the soil, afforded additional opportunities of displaying the internal structure of the mound.

On examining the sides of the excavation, it was evident that the summit of the hill had been raised to the extent of three feet, by the heaping upon it of much clay, sand, and earth. (B. B. in the drawing.) The line of separation was very distinctly marked by a stratum of pure vegetable soil (C). As my subsequent remarks will entirely refer to a period *anterior* to this adventitious superstratum, I may dismiss it at this point by stating

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\* A. A. A. Green sward, covering the top of the Mote-Hill.—B. B. A stratum of clay, mixed with earth, copper dross, fragments of earthenware and glass; in the lower part many tooled *ashlars*.—C. C. A stratum of vegetable soil, with boulder pavement in places.—D. Burnt Clay, mixed with carbonized wood, reeds, &c.; on the top a layer of black matter, mixed with unburnt bones and broken pottery.—E. Sandy loam.—F. F. F. Ochrey sand.—G. A conical pit, containing white wood ashes, with burnt pottery and bones (human?).—H. Sand, burnt to a red colour.—I. An ancient *well*, the sides formed of oaken staves. In it were found the bones of deer, sheep, geese, and other animals; also a small bronze *fibula*, or brooch.



EXCAVATIONS AT THE MOTE—HILL.

From a Drawing in the Possession of Dr. G. G. Smith.



clay. The well had been filled up with earth, and the rapid rising of the water from the spring below prevented the whole of this being removed. Amongst the mud taken out, in the vain attempt to empty it, were found the bones of deer, sheep, geese, and other animals; a number of shells of land snails; pieces of oaken timber, much blackened, but in good preservation; a large nail, of rude and curious shape, as also another of smaller size, apparently lost from a horse-shoe, and a small slender *fibula*, or buckle of bronze, which Mr. Akerman considers Anglo-Saxon.

Many other, and indeed more valuable relics, were found mixed indiscriminately with the soil and rubbish after their removal from the Excavation. Though this lack of certainty is much to be regretted, its occurrence was unavoidable, since each observer, however zealous in the work, had his own more important private duties. Fortunately none of the soil was carted away from the neighbourhood of the mound, but was employed in filling up the moat or water-course surrounding it, and in levelling other inequalities of the ground. It is still possible that early relics of interest may from time to time be recovered; and this, in truth, is no unfounded expectation, as the further course of my narrative will shew.

Amongst the refuse soil, during and after its removal, there were found many fragments of early *pottery*, chiefly mediæval, with some few of Roman date. Mr. Baines, in his quarto edition of the History of Lancashire, states, (vol. iii., p. 651,) that no Roman remains whatever had (in 1836) been discovered in the Mote-Hill at Warrington. I have in my possession, however, fragments of the necks of two *Amphora*, and the handle of a third, which are unquestionably of Roman manufacture, found at the Mote-Hill in 1841. A fourth, also, of very curious form, has been pronounced to be "*first Roman*," by Mr. Akerman. It has possibly formed the handle of a *patera*, or sacrificial vessel.\*

But the most interesting relics which were brought to light upon this and a subsequent excavation at the Mote-Hill, are two ancient *Chess-pieces*, formed of jet; and my account of the Mote-Hill would be most incomplete without some notice of these early remains, although they have already been exhibited, and the circumstances of their discovery detailed at the Day-Meeting of the Historic Society, in the month of April last.

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\* See the *three* upper figures in the illustration.



that it is traditionally said to have been placed upon the ancient *Mote-Hill* by the forces of the Parliament, in the year 1643, with the view of battering the church, which was garrisoned by Royalists, from thence. To this precise spot, indeed, and to this occasion, I refer the marvellous incident recorded in the Puritan tract, "*Lancashire's Valley of Achor is Englandes Doore of Hope; by a well wisher to the Peace of the Land, and Piety of the Church,*" printed in 1643, when the noise of the besiegers working was providentially concealed by a high wind.\* In the removal of this mingled stratum of earth and rubbish no relics were found, with the exception of a few of no earlier date than the Siege in 1643. A military spur, a few brass ornaments for harness, with some fragments of glass, which may be referred to the same period, comprise all. One or two English coins of a later date were found, and a gold moidore of Portugal, **IOANNES. V. D.G. PORT. ET. ALG. REX. 1724."**

Having thus disposed of the less interesting portion of my subject, I turn to the consideration of the *Mote-Hill*, in more ancient times. Commencing with the line of vegetable soil, (marked C. in the drawing,) which unquestionably marks the original summit of the mound, I shall first describe the appearances presented by the sides of the *Excavation*, and the early remains found in it, and afterwards enumerate such objects of interest to the antiquary as were found at *uncertain* depths, in consequence of the impossibility of constant supervision by those whom other engagements unavoidably called away.

Below the band of vegetable soil, the hill was composed of sand, disposed in wavy strata, and of remarkably sharp texture. Underneath the sand, again, was a thick bed of clay. On a level with the line of vegetable soil, traces of the action of fire were manifest over a large extent. The materials employed for combustion appear to have consisted of brushwood, reeds, and straw, the remains of which, though carbonized and blackened by the fire, might still be distinctly made out and separated. The thickness in which this stratum (marked D. in the drawing,) was found, varied from an inch to a foot or more. At the point on which it was thickest, the sandy soil underneath had been burnt to a bright red colour; and the pebbles with which it was mixed were calcined by the application of so strong heat. Intermixed with the burnt vegetable matter were found many

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\* Proceedings and Papers IV., 28.



fragments of pottery, of early mediæval date.\* Such they have been designated by Mr. Akerman, the Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries, to whose opinion the more interesting relics found at the *Mote-Hill* have been submitted. Along with them were picked up the half of an ancient iron horse-shoe, curiously vandyked on the outer edge; an oval piece of iron, which may have formed the head of an arrow or javelin; another piece of iron, apparently the curb of a horse's bridle; a curved knife-blade, considered by Mr. Akerman to be Anglo-Saxon, and part of a small millstone or quern.

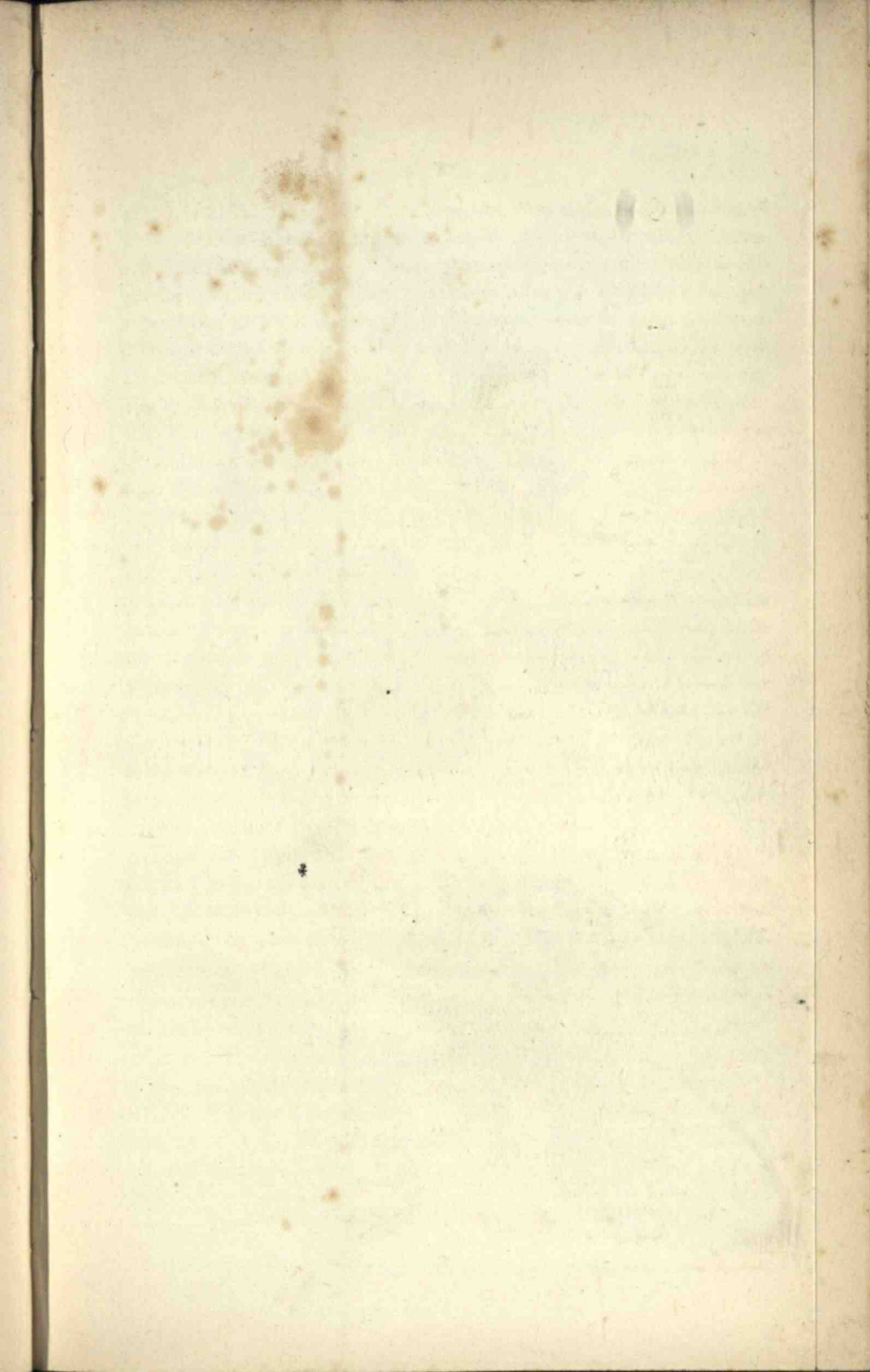
In many places, immediately above the burnt vegetables, was found a thin layer of a peculiar brown matter, which had an unctuous feel when kneaded between the fingers, staining them to a deep chocolate colour. When applied to the flame, however, it did not ignite, nor exhale any unpleasant odour, nor when gently heated did it melt, but on the contrary, left a dry insoluble powder. It could scarcely, therefore, be an animal *residuum*. There were, however, at the same level found large quantities of broken bones and teeth of the ox, and wild boar, and probably of the red deer also, as portions of stags' horns were here and there discovered. As was remarked by Mr. Sibson, who observed the same organic remains in the excavation of 1832, every bone had been broken, but none actually burnt; leading to the inference that the animals had been rudely cut up into pieces for the convenience of cooking, and completely refuting any supposition that the carcasses had been buried entire.

At one point of the Excavation, (marked G in the drawing,) a deep pit, of a conical form, had been dug in the sand, and a wood fire burnt in it, as was evident from the quantity of white ashes which it contained, amongst which were found a few pieces of early pottery, strongly burnt, and three or four fragments of calcined bones, which an acquaintance with anatomy leads me to believe were those of a human being.

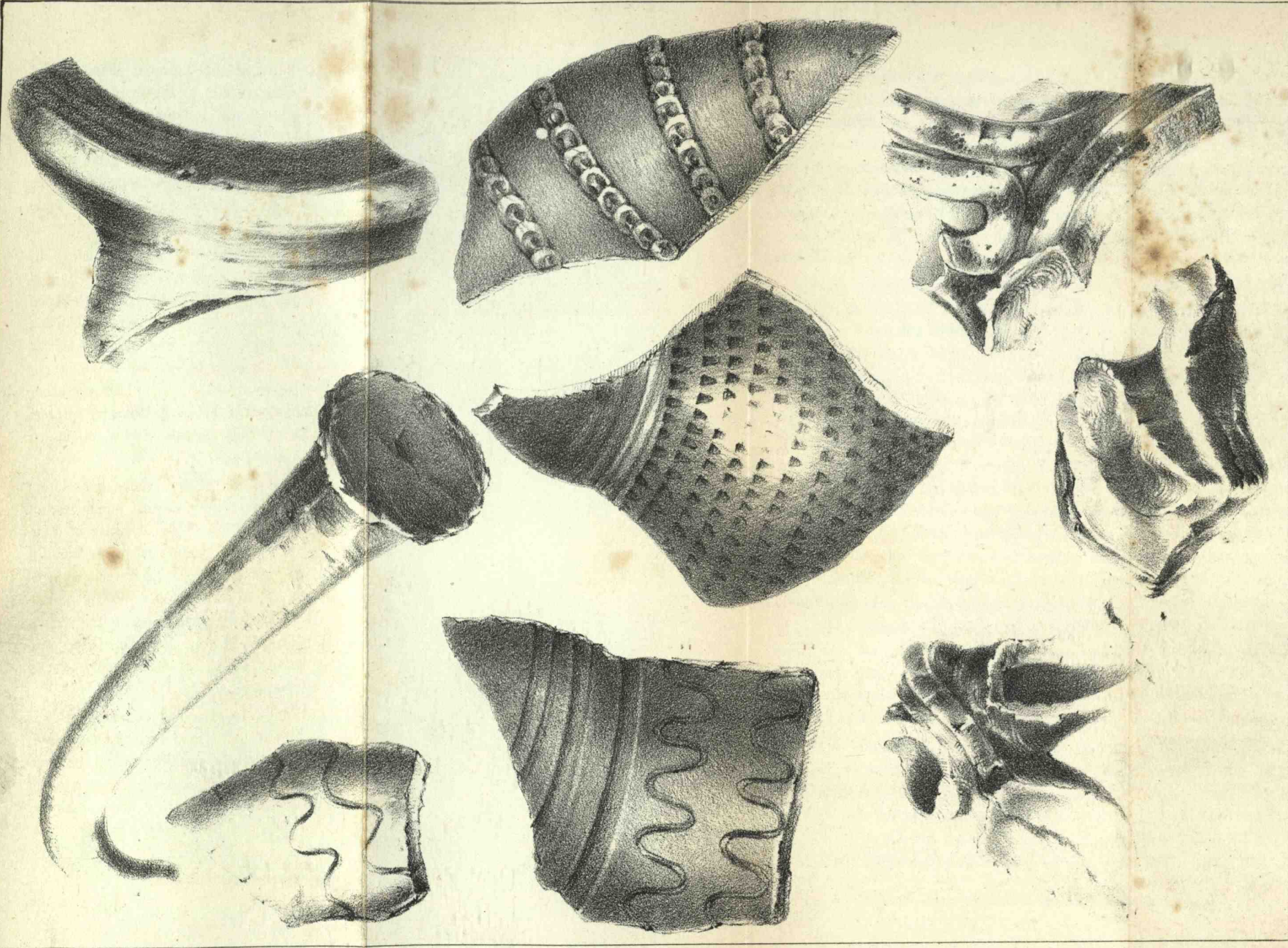
There is one point further shewn in the drawing, which requires description; an ancient *draw-well*, marked I. Although here represented as on a level with the floor of the Excavation, it originally extended upwards to the line of vegetable soil, and was reduced correspondingly with the removal of the sand. The sides of the well were composed of oaken staves, laid horizontally, and supported at each end by strong posts, driven deep into the

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\* See the six lower figures in the accompanying drawing.







POTTERY FROM THE MOTE HILL

W. G. L. & Co. Ltd. & J. P. & Co.



I picked up the smaller of these pieces on the occasion which forms the subject of the present paper, from earth which had been wheeled from the Excavation, and can therefore afford no clue to the precise spot where it had lain concealed for ages. So little evidence of antiquity did it possess, that I preserved it unnoticed for ten long years, amongst the other results of the search, until, in the early part of the last year, (1851) my opinion was asked on the nature of the larger piece, which had just before been found by a labourer, in a further enlargement of the Clergy Orphan School, rendering necessary extensive cutting, at a right angle with the former excavation. Unfortunately, no one qualified to examine and record the appearances exhibited on this second occasion, was aware of the undertaking until too late; but from the account given by the finder, I feel every confidence that the larger piece was seen by him *in situ*, and that this was in, or immediately below, the line of vegetable soil which marked the original summit of the Mote-Hill. A momentary glance at this second relic was sufficient to connect it with the former one, and no time was lost in submitting both to the opinions of our most distinguished archæologists. Without hesitation, and with one accord, they were pronounced to be *Chess-pieces*, and of a date anterior to any previously known.\*

As it is scarcely possible to imagine a figure more simple and primitive than the smaller piece, we may safely term it a *Pawn*, the piece of least value. The larger one I look upon as a *Knight*: but if we except the two small circles on the upper and fore part, which may have been intended for eyes, and some distant resemblance in the whole figure to the arching neck of a horse, we are left to form our judgment rather from the negative character which it exhibits, when compared with the other pieces of the game, than from any distinguishing points.

The pieces are formed of remarkably fine *jet*, similar in quality to that obtained from the aluminous shale in Yorkshire, where it is employed, even to the present day, in the manufacture of ornamental articles. Fosbroke, in his *Encyclopedia of Antiquities*, states that even prior to the Christian era, the Britons were in the habit of carving rings and beads from this material, ornamenting them on the outside with imperfect circles, scratched upon them by some hard instrument.

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\* With the exception, perhaps, of those of the Emperor Charlemagne, given in Willemin's "*Monumens Inédits*."

The close affinity which this description bears to one of the present relics, would at first view carry us back to this period of our history for their origin, but authorities are unanimous in considering that the game of Chess was introduced into this country by the Danes, in the reign of Canute. A date further back than this, therefore, we cannot assign to them.

Mr. Albert Way, who favoured me by exhibiting the *Chess-men* at the recent Meeting of the Archæological Institute at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, likewise informs me, that from a recent conversation with Worsaae, the Danish antiquary, he learns that no objects formed of jet have been discovered in the Scandinavian countries. Nor is this to be wondered at, since the material does not occur there as a natural production. We cannot, then, consider the Chess-knight and Pawn, found at Warrington, to be of Danish manufacture and introduction; but must of necessity descend to the later Saxon times. And this I consider their probable era. The insatiable attachment of the Saxons to the "Royal Game," is perhaps another argument for the correctness of this date, and the two interesting relics now brought again to the light, may, in an age long past, have been the warlike toys of one of the Saxon thanes, named in the Domesday Survey as holding land under King Edward, within the hundred of Warrington.

In relics of the description before us, the style of ornamentation is often a useful index to the most valuable points of their history. Unless my failure in detecting this may be in part attributable to the limited means of reference which a small provincial town affords, I fear we have little to hope from this source. The only instance of an approximation to the figures seen on the larger Chess-piece found at Warrington, is on the shield of one of the ancient Chess-knights found in the Isle of Lewis, depicted and described by Sir Frederick Madden, in the 24th volume of the *Archæologia*. The device on the shield alluded to is a simple linear cross, the centre formed by a dotted circle, and each limb similarly terminated. By a reference to the wood-engraving given here, it will not require much imaginative licence to detect a similar device, the form of the Chess-piece rendering it necessary that the cross should be somewhat distorted. It is singular, and perhaps not without a hidden meaning, that the straight lines and other supernumerary ornaments are all in an erect, instead of a pendent position. The instrument employed in the carving, (if it be in the least worthy of such a name,) appears to have been a sharp knife, from the



notches still remaining in the small angles round the apparent face of the horse. The circles and lines are very irregular and rude, but the surface and bevelled edges of the pieces bear a high polish, little affected by the coarse depository in which they have reposed for centuries.

I am fortunate in possessing the opinions of several distinguished archaeologists on the subject of the Warrington Chess-men. After stating his conviction that the relics are unquestionably chess-pieces, Sir Frederick Madden, (in himself a host,) thus continues:—"The period to which they belong is a more difficult question, but from the rude style of ornament, I should certainly judge them anterior to the twelfth century, and perhaps as early as the tenth. \* \* \* \* The workmanship of the pieces found at Warrington is so rude that they may have been executed by a Scandinavian, an Anglo-Saxon, or a German hand; and, no doubt, the history and supply of the *material* of which they are made, (as in the case of the Lewis Chessmen, made of the teeth of the *Walrus*,) would have considerable weight in determining the people by whom they were cut and engraved." Mr. Roach Smith says—"The Chess-men may be as old as the ninth or tenth century. At the same time they may be as late as the twelfth. I should not think they are of a date much more recent than the latter, and it is more likely they are older." Mr. Way concurs with Mr. Roach Smith in the date which he assigns to the relics, and further considers them undeniably the fabrication of this country, and not of its foreign invaders. Mr. Hawkins, of the British Museum, by whose favour the chess pieces were exhibited to a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries, on the 17th of June last, stated upon that occasion, that in his opinion, they cannot be of later date than the tenth century, and that they are unquestionably genuine.

With the sanction of such high authorities, I think I may claim for the town of Warrington the good fortune to have furnished archaeologists with the earliest form of chess-men hitherto discovered. They are likewise the only specimens which can, with any degree of confidence, be considered of British manufacture. When entire, the set must in all probability have comprised the usual number of thirty-two pieces; sixteen being of jet, and the same number of some adverse colour and material. For the latter, amber, ivory, or the tooth of the *Walrus*, are the most probable; all of extreme durability, and leading us to entertain a hope that ere long it may



be the lot of some lucky excavator to strike his pickaxe into a perfect California of ancient chess-men.

I have dwelt so long upon these interesting relics that little time is left for any further remarks upon the *Mote-Hill* itself. Various surmises have been ventured upon, relative to the period at which the Mote-Hill was first formed, and the purposes to which it was then applied. Pennant pronounced it of Roman origin; Dr. Ormerod says that it is Norman, and Mr. Whitaker, the historian of Manchester, considers it Saxon. To this last opinion I think all the appearances detailed this evening afford strong support. Mr. Sibson, likewise, who was present at the examination of the hill in 1832, and again in 1841, coincides in this view, and suggests that it originally constituted a *tumulus*, or burial-place, raised after the battle fought at Winwick, near Warrington, on the 5th of August, A.D. 642, between the rival Saxons, Oswald, king of Northumbria, and Penda, king of Mercia, in which the former was slain, and to whose honour the Church of Winwick is still dedicated. The details of Oswald's death and burial are, however, circumstantially narrated by *Beda*, as taking place at Winwick, and with him it is probable that his followers, who fell on the same occasion, were interred. May I, then, express an opinion that the Mote-Hill, at Warrington, is the *tumulus* of Elfvin, a Northumbrian prince, nephew of king Oswald, and like him a Christian, who fell in battle with Ethelred, king of Mercia, A.D. 679, since the parish church at Warrington, at the period of Domesday Survey, was dedicated to *St. Elfyn*. The distance from Warrington to the field of battle, on the banks of the Trent, in which Elfvin fell, is probably not more than twenty-four or thirty miles, and being a near relative of both kings, it is more than likely that his remains would be brought for Christian interment to his native province. Here, then, within a quarter of a mile of the ancient *Ford* over the Mersey, *which they must have sought to gain the kingdom of Northumbria*, I suppose that the royal Elfvin was interred, and the Church which then, or soon afterwards, arose near the spot, dedicated to his memory.

When England fell under the Norman sway, we find that the conqueror placed his baron, Paganus de Vilars, at Warrington, and that he selected the *Mote-Hill* as the site of his residence. Of this a few probable remains were found at the time of the excavation, consisting of massive beams of timber, and a few tooled and squared stones, which may have formed

the foundation for the pillars of a gateway. Immediately above the stratum of vegetable soil, which I have spoken of as indicating the original summit of the hill, a number of boulder stones, disposed in the form of a regular pavement, were found over a large extent of surface, and may formerly have marked out the court-yard. At this level was also found a silver penny of Henry III., the moneyer's name **AIMER. ON. LVND.** We have no record of the demolition of this edifice, but in a Survey of the Barony taken in the year 1587, in possession of the Right Hon. Lord Lilford, the *Mote-Hill* is spoken of as "the Scyt of the Mannor or Barronage nowe decayed, and no Buildinge thereuppon."

In conclusion I may state, that from measurements and calculations which I have caused to be made, there still remains a small portion of the *Mote-Hill* undisturbed. Such inducements to further research as I have detailed this evening, combined with the watchful interest awakened amongst the workmen and gardeners employed at the Institution, inspire me with a hope that at some future time, unless undertaken by an abler hand, I may again have the pleasure of laying before the Historic Society an account of further discoveries made at the ancient *Mote-Hill* at Warington.