

I.

NOTES ON A COLLECTION OF POLISHERS AND OTHER OBJECTS
FOUND ON THE SITE OF THE ROMAN FORT AT NEWSTEAD,
MELROSE. EXHIBITED TO THE SOCIETY BY JOHN M. CORRIE,
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The extensive excavations undertaken by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland at Newstead Roman Fort, in 1905-10, revealed traces of the Roman occupation of Scotland surpassing in interest any that had previously been recorded. Notwithstanding this gratifying result, Mr James Curle has pointed out that, owing to the cost involved in removing the earth from the large area dealt with at Newstead, it was found impracticable at certain points to make a thorough exploration;¹ and from the fact that during the whole course of the excavations only two burials were discovered, he infers that somewhere on the outskirts of the fort the cemetery has still to be located.²

¹ *A Roman Frontier Post*, p. 42.

² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

In view of these statements it seemed reasonable to suppose that a number of small objects might still be picked up, and a systematic search at the site of the fort and its annexes, undertaken at intervals during the years 1911-14, has amply justified this conclusion. The collection exhibited consists of twenty-three burnishers or polishers, fourteen pieces for a game, ten fragments of beads, a fragment of "Samian" ware with maker's mark, a small portion of a glass armlet, a weight, a fibula and small mounting of bronze, two whetstones, a stone sinker (supposed), a chipped stone of unknown use, three scrapers of flint, a knife-like object of pitchstone, and a number of flints of no definite character, but nearly all showing traces of secondary working.

In a few instances the objects supply new records or furnish additional examples of early workmanship or decorative art, although, as will be seen, they cannot in all cases be identified with the occupation of the Newstead area by the Romans.

The burnishers or polishers (fig. 1) are in the form of quartz-like pebbles commonly worked or polished on the one side. They are obviously of two classes, each of which must have been used for a distinct purpose, although, in the present state of our knowledge, it is impossible to fix with certainty the particular use to which each class was applied. The contrast between the two types is deserving of careful consideration. In one class, represented by eighteen specimens, the pebbles are roughly conical, with a convexly ground surface showing distinct traces of striation, indicating a movement always in the same direction. They can be easily gripped between the finger and thumb, and the fact that the worked face is regularly convex, and in no instance shows a facet or sharp edge, seems to imply that they were not opposed to a hard, unyielding surface. They may possibly have been used in conjunction with sand in the dressing of hides. The rough, sandy particles would cause the striation which we find across the face of the pebbles, while the yielding surface of the

skins would explain the convex form, more particularly if the skins were stretched on pegs preparatory to drying. It is important also to note that a use of this kind would account for the movement always in the one direction. A backward and forward motion would undoubtedly have had the effect of roughening rather than of dressing the inner surface of the skins. It will be observed that two of the speci-

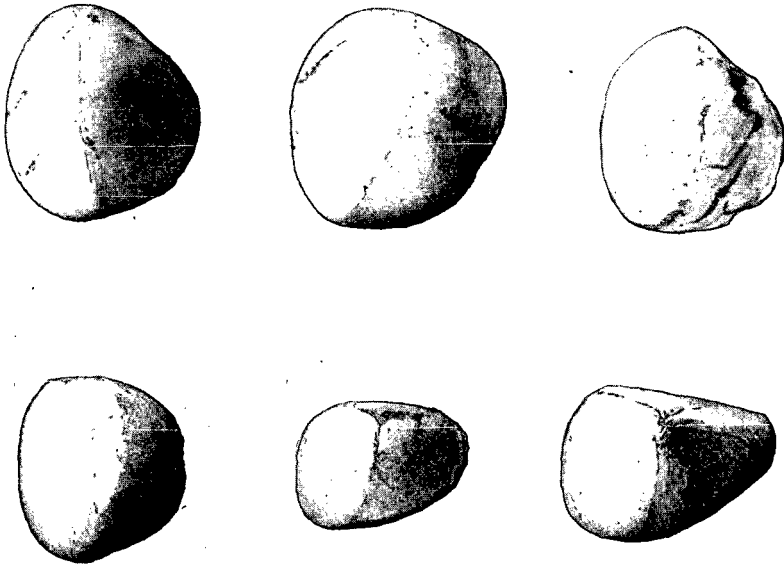


Fig. 1. Six Burnishers or Polishers of Quartz.

mens have been subjected to use on two sides. This is probably an unusual feature. Mr A. O. Curle informs me that specimens have been found in Wigtownshire and in Aberdeenshire, and it may be of interest to record that I have also found them in the neighbourhood of Dryburgh, in the parish of Mertoun, Berwickshire. Mr Curle is disposed to think that they may not be uncommon, although they have hitherto escaped observation. At the present time the only specimen in the National Museum is one presented by the writer.

In the second and, generally speaking, smaller variety, represented by five specimens, one side of the pebbles has been worn flat and smooth in some polishing process. A single specimen was discovered during the excavations undertaken by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, but it would seem to have escaped the notice of Mr James Curle, as no reference is made to it in his painstaking volume.¹ They have not been found beyond the limits of the fort and its annexes; and while this seems to suggest that they are of Roman origin, it must be remembered that we have no recorded instances of their discovery at any other Roman station in Scotland.

MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTS.

1. *Pieces for a Game*.—These are made of white and black vitreous paste, of a fragment of “Samian” ware, and of bone. The piece of “Samian” ware has its sides carefully chipped and ground so as to give it a circular appearance. Similar pieces in blue and yellow vitreous paste were found during the excavations (*cf.* Curle, *op. cit.*, xciii). Those exhibited were all found on the site of the fort or east annexe. A regular chequer-board, incised on stone, such as might have been used with these pieces, was found recently at Corstopitum (Corbridge).

2. *Beads*.—No complete beads have been found, but fragments are exhibited of the common ribbed melon-shaped variety of blue porcelain paste and glass, and of a blue glass bead decorated with wavy lines of opaque white (*cf.* Curle, *op. cit.*, xci).

3. “*Samian*” *Ware with Potter’s Mark*.—The fragment of “Samian” ware supplies a new record for the Newstead area. It seems to have formed part of the bottom of an undecorated platter-shaped vessel, and it bears on the inside the impress of a potter’s mark—BVTTVRRI. From the texture of the ware and the highly raised plane of the bottom, it can be accurately assigned as a second-

¹ *A Roman Frontier Post and its People.*

century type, probably from the Lezoux potteries (*cf.* Curle, *op. cit.*, xl, 22). It was found on the site of the fort. Specimens by the same potter have been found at Camelon,¹ and at several places near London, but the name has not previously been noted at Newstead.

4. *Portion of a Glass Armlet.*—This specimen also furnishes an additional example from the Newstead area, as it differs in its decoration from other fragments found on the site. It is of a blue-grey colour, ornamented with a slightly raised rope-like pattern in three lines, the two outer being of blue and white, and the central line of tawny brown and white. Found on the site of the fort.

5. *Weight.*—This specimen came from the east annexe. It is circular, with flattened upper and under sides, and weighs 604 grains. The two small holes drilled half-way through the weight on the one side may have been intended for pins used for the attachment of an ornamental top. An interesting example of this kind, found recently at Talnotrie, Kirkcudbrightshire, has been described and figured in the *Proceedings* of the Society.²

6. *Fibula.*—This object is of the so-called "knee-fibula" type, evidently second century. It retains the socket for the spring, but the pin and pin catch are missing (*cf.* Curle, *op. cit.*, lxxxvii; and *Cappuck Report*, fig. 11, 1). Found on the east annexe.

7. *Mounting of Bronze.*—The small bronze mounting is provided with tangs, apparently for attachment to leather. It was found on the south annexe.

8. *Whetstones.*—Whetstones occurred at Newstead in large numbers. They were usually made from river stones, but among them were a few which were clearly manufactured articles. The two exhibited have been carefully fashioned, both having a perforation at the one end. The larger measures $3\frac{1}{8}$ inches and the smaller $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length. Both specimens were found on the south annexe.

¹ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. xxxv. p. 392.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xlvii. p. 13.

9. *Stone Sinker* (supposed).—Net-fishing is suggested by the sinker of stone having a notch in each side to prevent the cords or thongs, by which it was fastened, from slipping. It was found on the site of the fort. Similar stones have been found at Dryburgh, Bemersyde, and Whitrigbog in the parish of Mertoun, Berwickshire, and at St Boswells Haugh and Fairnington in the county of Roxburgh. They are occasionally found with two or more notches in each side.

10. *Chipped Stone of unknown use*.—This stone came from the site of the Great Camp, and in some respects it closely resembles the rudely dressed circular discs from the Culbin Sands to which attention was directed a few years ago by the late Sir Arthur Mitchell. To quote from his paper: "At present I desire to direct attention to one object found on the sands. I do so because as yet Scotland is the only country, and Morayshire the only part of Scotland, in which it has been found. . . ." "There are now seventy-two specimens in the Museum, and they constitute archæological material as fully and truly as polished axes or delicately flaked flint arrowheads. No one can say what word or sentence in the unwritten story of Scotland they may some day supply. They can only be described as rudely dressed circular discs of stone, of sizes varying from about $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 inches in diameter, and from about $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch to about $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in thickness."¹ The Newstead specimen is oval-shaped, slightly concave, and measures 5 inches by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch.

11. *Scrapers of Flint*.—The scrapers of flint are all small. One specimen from the east annexe has been very carefully fashioned.

12. *Knife-like Object of Pitchstone*.—The curious opaque, black, knife-like object of pitchstone was found on the site of the fort. It calls for mention because specimens made of pitchstone are uncommon.

¹ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 1901-2, p. 36. The type is figured in the *Museum Catalogue*, 1892, p. 94.