



General view of the right-hand wall of structure in the Castle Beck, showing circular protrusion, with the slots in the wall at the farther end (Courtesy D. G. Tucker)

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Curious Stone Structure

Professor D. G. Tucker, Department of Electronic & Electrical Engineering, University of Birmingham, writes:

I recently came across an interesting stone structure on a small stream, the Castle Beck, in Yorkshire, about 8 miles north-west of Scarborough Station, grid reference SE 953974. Its purpose, apart from damming the flow of the stream, has so far eluded me in spite of the numerous enquiries I have made, not only with the only local resident I could find but with industrial archaeologists, fisheries officers, geographers, freshwater biologists, etc. I am

tempted to conclude that the structure is very unusual, if not unique.

The structure, illustrated in the photographs, is rather like a small flash lock, about 30ft long and 5-7ft wide. The walls are not parallel. There are slots in the walls at the downstream end, and a stone sill, obviously designed to take a door or a number of planks with the purpose of blocking the flow of the stream. There is no sign of any mechanism for raising the door, and it must presumably have been necessary to lift it right out by hand when the level of the stream was to be reduced again. The walls are the height (about 3ft) of the banks and so, in a sense, are like retaining walls. The most remarkable feature is the circular stone protrusion in one wall, about 10ft from the slotted end, containing a hollow space with its lip about 6in below the top of the wall. At the time of my visit it was practically full of water. Its purpose is even more puzzling than that of the rest of the structure.

The stream is a very small one, about 5-6ft wide, and is a tributary of the Jugger Howe Beck. It has its source about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile above the structure, and joins the Jugger

Howe Beck nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ mile below. With a mean and fairly uniform gradient of about 1 in 40, and with a 3ft high door, the rise of water level would be noticed for about 40yd upstream, and the bridle path fording the stream almost immediately above the structure would become impassable.

The structure appears to be marked merely by a single line across the stream on the 6in OS map. On the 6in Geological OS map, surveyed in 1848-9 and published in 1854, Castlebeck Farm is shown within 70yd or so of the structure in the stream; there is now no building there. More interestingly, however, this map has the wording 'Cinder Hill Iron Slag' inscribed just where the structure stands in the stream. There was evidently, therefore, at some time local industrial activity, but it is unlikely that the structure was part of it as it seems in much too good condition to be more than a century old.

It may also be relevant that less than a mile away, on the Helwath Beck, the old OS maps show a small rectangular mark beside the stream with the inscription 'Helwath Wash Fold'. Suggestions as to the purpose of the structure which I have received from some of the people I have consulted include: fish trap; eel trap; sheep dip (the shepherd stands in the hole in the circular protrusion); baptismal device for some esoteric sect; horizontal turbine (ie with vertical shaft); and gauging station in connection with proposed waterworks schemes in the mid-nineteenth century. No one has claimed any positive knowledge of such a structure. Unfortunately there appears to be no local Industrial Archaeological Society in that area. I wonder if any of your readers knows the history and purpose of this structure, and whether it is unique.