

STONE AGE RELICS.

FINDS IN PORT WARATAH.

(By D. F. COOKSEY, Drawing Office, Steel Works)

The writer for many years has had keen interest in the tools of the stone age and the men who made them. It began when, as a small boy in London, a quantity of red river drift gravel was dug up 20 feet below the road surface and was used for a garden path. Amongst the stones there came to view a fine black flint celt, or tomahawk, which dated back to the time of the mastodon and the sabre-toothed tiger. This early interest was quickened when, on removing to the Upper Thames Valley at Reading, he found himself in a neighbourhood where it was possible to find, in a short afternoon stroll, several specimens of the same early work. These were usually obtained in gravel pits or on newly ploughed fields along the tops of the hills.

On coming to Australia the thought naturally arose: Here is a country only just coming out of the stone age; there would be much that could be easily learnt of the actual method of use and manufacture of more obscure varieties of these tools. It proved, however, not so easy as it seemed. The blackfellow had vanished and interest in the prehistoric past of this continent seemed to be small.

The first attempt was made in Victoria, when a large number of ancient heaps of ashes were located in the neighbourhood of Echuca. A day of careful digging and sifting disclosed nothing of any interest, and the searchers returned no wiser and as black as aborigines.

This rather quenched the one-time ardour, and on coming to Newcastle some ten years ago it was found that this part had been looked upon as a poor place for such finds. Good luck started when Mr. Loch, of the Survey Department, who is an enthusiastic antiquarian, came to the rescue. He had noticed in Crebert street, near the Administration Offices of the Steel Works, a deposit of much disintegrated shells with black earth, and suggested that it would be a good site to explore.

The writer took a general look over the ground, but at first could see nothing worthy of study. After many visits, however, he began to notice pieces of chert that showed signs of man's handiwork.

From then on for many weeks—at dinner times—the obvious interest of the surrounding cottagers, he could be seen filling his pockets with stones, or crawling in ungainly attitudes over the sand looking for stone knives not much bigger than pins.

In time, the collection having grown to hundreds of specimens, these began to sort themselves into 14 or 15 classes. Becoming more assured as to their interest and value, he took advantage of a short holiday in Sydney to call at the Australian Museum and show samples to Dr. Anderson, the chief, and to Mr. Thorpe, keeper of the Ethnological Section. They were agreeably surprised, and arranged for Mr. Thorpe to pay a visit to the site.

He did so one Saturday, and after seeing all the specimens expressed a strong wish that they should be presented to the Museum.

The writer hopes that these few notes will be of interest to those employed in the great factory at Port Waratah, known to the world as the B.H.P. Iron and Steel Works. For they show that, ~~only~~ so many years ago, there existed close to its site ~~a~~ a very small factory, whose operatives, knowing nothing of iron and steel, perforce wrought in stone to manufacture such implements as daily exigencies demanded. Operatives, lean and lank, dusky in hue, ill-clad and ill-fed, according to our standards, who had none of our highly specialised machinery or huge buildings. And this tiny factory employed, most likely, but one or two men, instead of the thousands which over-run its site to-day.

The contrast compels thought. I trust my few notes may induce others to start upon a study in which they would find much of novelty and fascination.