

ART. XLI.—*History of Cavern Exploration in Devonshire, England;* by W. PENGELLY, F.R.S., F.G.S., President of the Geological Section of the British Association at Plymouth.

\* \* \* \* \* AMONG the local geological papers read [before the British Association] in 1841 [at the time of its only previous visit to Plymouth,] none appear to have attracted so much attention as those on Lithodomous Perforations, Raised Beaches, Submerged Forests, and Caverns (see *Athenæum* for 7th to 28th of August, 1841); and, as an effort to connect the present with the past, I have decided on taking up one of these threads, and devoting the remarks I have now to offer to the History of Cavern-Exploration in Devonshire. I am not unmindful that there were giants in those days; and no one can deplore more than I do our loss of Buckland and De la Beche, among many others; nor can I forget the enormous strides opinion has made since 1841, when, in this Section, Dr. Buckland "contended that human remains had never been found under such circumstances as to prove their contemporaneous existence with the hyænas and bears of the caverns," and added that "in Kent's Hole the Celtic knives \* \* \* \* were found in holes *dug by art*, and which had disturbed the floor of the cave and the bones below it" (*Athenæum*, 14th Aug., 1841, p. 626). This scepticism, however, did the good service of inducing cavern explorers to conduct their researches with an accuracy which should place their results, whatever they might prove to be, amongst the undoubted additions to human knowledge.

The principal caverns in South Devon occur in the limestone districts of Plymouth, Yealmpton, Brixham, Torquay, Buckfastleigh, and Chudleigh; but as those in the last two localities have yielded nothing of importance to the anthropologist or the paleontologist, they will not be further noticed on this occasion. In dealing with the others it seems most simple to follow mainly the order of chronology; that is to say, to commence with the cavern which first caught scientific attention, and, having finished all that the time at my disposal will allow me to say about it, but not before, to proceed to the next, in the order thus defined; and so on through the series.

*Oreston Caverns.*—When Mr. Whidbey engaged to superintend the construction of the Plymouth Breakwater, Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, requested him to examine narrowly any caverns he might meet with in the limestone-rock to be quarried at Oreston, near the mouth of the river Plym, not more than two miles from the room in which we are assembled, and have the bones or any other fossil remains that were met with carefully preserved (see *Phil. Trans.*, 1817, pp.

176–182). This request was cheerfully complied with, and Mr. Whidbey had the pleasure of discovering bone-caves in November, 1816, November, 1820, August and November, 1822, and of sending the remains found in them to the Royal Society.

It is, perhaps, worthy of remark that, though cavern-researches received a great impulse from the discoveries in Kirkdale, Yorkshire, and especially from Dr. Buckland's well-known and graphic descriptions of them, such researches had originated many years before. The request by Sir Joseph Banks was made at least as early as 1812 (see *Trans. Devon. Assoc.*, v, pp. 252, 253), and a paper on the Oreston discoveries was read to the Royal Society in February, 1817, whereas the Kirkdale Cavern was not discovered until 1821. British cave-hunting appears to have been a science of Devonshire birth.

The Oreston Caverns soon attracted a considerable number of able observers; they were visited in 1822 by Dr. Buckland and Mr. Warburton; and in a comparatively short time became the theme of a somewhat voluminous literature. Nothing of importance, however, seems to have been met with from 1822 until 1858, when another cavern, containing a large number of bones, was broken into. Unfortunately, there was no one at hand to superintend the exhumation of the specimens; the work was left entirely to the common workmen, and was badly done; many of the remains were dispersed beyond recovery; the matrix in which they were buried was never adequately examined; and we are utterly ignorant, and must for ever remain so, as to whether they did or did not contain indications of human existence. I visited the spot from time to time, and bought up everything to be met with; but other scientific work in another part of the county occupied me too closely to allow more than an occasional visit. The greater part of the specimens I secured were lodged in the British Museum, where they seem to have been forgotten, while a few remain in my private collection.

Some difference of opinion has existed respecting the character of the successive caverns, and much mystery has been imported into the question of the introduction of their contents. Mr. Whidbey, it is said, "saw no possibility of the cavern of 1816 having had any external communication through the rock in which it was inclosed" (*Phil. Trans.*, 1817, pp. 176–182); but Dr. Buckland was of opinion that they were all at first fissures open at the top, and "that the openings had been long filled up with rubbish, mud, stalactite, or fragments of rock cemented, as sometimes happens, into a breccia as solid as the original rock, and overgrown with grass" (*Phil. Trans.*, 1822, pp. 171–240).

The conclusion I arrived at, after studying so much of the roof of the cavern of 1858 as remained intact, was that Dr. Buckland's opinion was fully borne out by the facts; that, in short, the Oreston Caverns were *Fissure Caverns*, not *Tunnel Caverns*.

The cavern of 1858 was an almost vertical fissure, extending a length of about ninety feet from N.N.E. to S.S.W. It commenced at about eight feet below the surface of the plateau, continued thence to the base of the cliff, but how much farther was not known, and its ascertained height was about fifty-two feet. It was two feet wide at top, whence it gradually widened to ten feet at bottom. The roof, judging from that part which had not been destroyed, was a mass of limestone-breccia, made up of large angular fragments cemented with carbonate of lime, and requiring to be blasted as much as ordinary limestone. The cavern was completely filled with deposits of various kinds.

The uppermost eight feet consisted of loose angular pieces of limestone, none of which exceeded ten pounds in weight, mixed with a comparatively small amount of such sand as is common in dolomitic limestone districts, but without a trace of stalagmite or fossil of any kind. The thirty-two feet next below were occupied with similar materials, with the addition of a considerable quantity of tough, dark, unctuous clay. Between this mass and the outer wall of the cavern was a nearly vertical plate of stalagmite, usually about two feet thick, and containing, at by no means wide intervals, firmly cemented masses of breccia identical in composition with the adjacent bed just mentioned. The bones the cavern yielded were all found within these thirty-two feet; and were met with equally in the loose and the coherent breccia, as well as in the stalagmite. A somewhat considerable number of ellipsoidal balls of clay, from 1·5 to 2·5 inches in greatest diameter, occurred in the clay of this bone-bed, but not elsewhere. Still lower was a mass of dark, tough, unctuous clay, containing a very few, small, angular stones, but otherwise perfectly homogeneous, and known to be twelve feet deep, but how much more was undetermined.

The osseous remains found at Oreston prior to 1858 have been described by Sir E. Home, Mr. Clift, Dr. Buckland, Professor Owen, Mr. Busk, and others. The animals represented were *Ursus priscus*, *U. speleus*, weasel (?), wolf, fox, cave hyæna, cave lion, *Rhinoceros leptorhinus*, *Equus fossilis*, *E. plicidens*, *Asinus fossilis*, *Bison minor*, *Bos longifrons*, and, according to the late Mr. Bellamy, mammoth and hippopotamus (see Nat. Hist. of S. Devon, 1839, p. 82). With regard to hippopotamus, I can only say that I have never met with satisfactory evidence of its occurrence in Devonshire; but the

mammoth was certainly found at Oreston in 1858; and, unless I am greatly in error, remains of *Rhinoceros tichorhinus* were also met with there, and lodged by me in the British Museum. It may be added that the skull and other relics of a hog were exhumed on that occasion, and now belong to my collection. There was nothing to suggest that the cavern had been the home of the hyæna; and whilst I fully accept Dr. Buckland's opinion that animals had fallen into the open fissures and there perished, and that the remains had subsequently been washed thence into the lower vaultings ("Reliq. Dil.", 2d. ed., 1834, p. 78), I venture to add that some of the animals may have retired thither to die; a few may have been dragged or pursued there by beasts of prey; whilst rains, such as are not quite unknown in Devonshire in the present day, probably washed in some of the bones of such as died near at hand on the adjacent plateau. Nothing appears to have been met with suggestive of human visits.

*Kent's Hole*.—About a mile due east from Torquay harbor and half a mile north from Torbay there is a small wooded limestone hill, the eastern side of which is, for the uppermost thirty feet, a vertical cliff, having at its base, and fifty-four feet apart, two apertures leading into one and the same vast cavity in the interior of the hill, known as Kent's Hole or Cavern. These openings are about 200 feet above mean sea-level, and from them the hill slopes rapidly to the valley at its foot, at a level of from sixty to seventy feet below.

There seems to be neither record nor tradition of the discovery of the cavern. Richardson, in the 8th edition of "A Tour through the Island of Great Britain," published in 1778, speaks of it as "perhaps the greatest natural curiosity" in the county. Its name occurs on a map dated 1769; it is mentioned in a lease 1659; visitors cut their names and dates on the stalagmite from 1571 down to the present century; judging from numerous objects found on the floor, it was visited by man through mediæval back to pre-Roman times; and, unless the facts exhumed by explorers have been misinterpreted, it was a human home during the era of the mammoth and his contemporaries.

In 1824 Mr. Northmore, of Cleve, near Exeter, was led to make a few diggings in the cavern, and was the first to find fossil bones there. He was soon followed by Mr. (now Sir) W. C. Trevelyan, who not only found bones, but had a plate of them engraved. In 1825, the Rev. J. MacEnergy, an Irish Roman Catholic priest residing in the family of Mr. Cary, of Tor Abby, Torquay, first visited the cavern, when he, too, found teeth and bones, of which he published a plate. Soon after, he made another visit, accompanied by Dr. Buckland,

when he had the good fortune to discover a flint implement; the first instance, he tells us, of such a relic being noticed in any cavern (see *Trans. Devon. Assoc.*, iii, p. 441). Before the close of 1825, he commenced a series of more or less systematic diggings, and continued them until, and perhaps after, the summer of 1829 (*ibid.*, p. 295). Preparations appear to have been made to publish the results of his labors; a prospectus was issued, numerous plates were lithographed, it was generally believed that the MS. was almost ready, and the only thing needed was a list of subscribers sufficient to justify publication, when, alas! on February 18, 1841, before the printer had received any "copy," before even the world of science had accepted his anthropological discoveries, before the value of his labors was known to more than a very few, Mr. MacEnery died at Torquay.

After his decease his MS. could not be discovered, and its loss was duly deplored. Nevertheless, it was found after several years, and, having undergone varieties of fortune, became the property of Mr. Vivian, of Torquay, who, having published portions of it in 1859, presented it in 1867 to the Torquay Natural History Society, whose property it still remains. In 1869 I had the pleasure of printing the whole, in the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*.

Whilst Mr. MacEnery was conducting his researches, a few independent diggings, on a less extensive scale, were taken by other gentlemen. The principal of these was Mr. Godwin-Austen, the well-known geologist, whose papers fully bore out all that MacEnery had stated. (See *Trans. Geol. Soc. Lond.*, 2d series, vi, 446). In 1846, a sub-committee of the Torquay Natural History Society undertook the careful exploration of very small parts of the cavern, and their report was entirely confirmatory of the statements of their predecessor—that undoubted flint implements did occur, mixed with the remains of extinct mammals, in the cave-earth, beneath a thick floor of stalagmite. The sceptical position of the authorities in geological science remained unaffected, however, until 1858, when the discovery and systematic exploration of a comparatively small virgin cavern on Windmill Hill, at Brixham, led to a sudden and complete revolution; for it was seen that whatever were the facts elsewhere, there had undoubtedly been found at Brixham flint implements commingled with remains of the mammoth and his companions, and in such a way as to render it impossible to doubt that man occupied Devonshire before the extinction of the cave mammals.

Under the feeling that the statements made by MacEnery and his followers respecting Kent's Hole were perhaps, after all, to be accepted as verities, the British Association, in 1864, ap-

pointed a committee to make a complete, systematic, and accurate exploration of the cavern, in which it was known that very extensive portions remained entirely intact. This committee commenced its labors on March 28, 1865; it has been re-appointed, year after year, with sufficient grants of money, up to the present time; the work has gone on continuously throughout the entire thirteen years; and the result has been, not only a complete confirmation of Mr. MacEnergy's statements, but the discovery of far older deposits than he suspected—deposits implying great changes of, at least, local geographical conditions; changes in the fauna of the district; and yielding evidence of men more ancient and far ruder than even those who made the oldest flint tools found in Kent's Hole prior to the appointment of the committee.

The cavern consists of a series of chambers and passages, which resolve themselves into two main *divisions*, extending from nearly north to south in parallel lines, but passing into each other near their extremities, and throwing off branches, occasionally of considerable size.

The successive deposits, in descending order, were:—

1st, or uppermost. Fragments and blocks of limestone from an ounce to upwards of 100 tons weight each, which had fallen from the roof from time to time, and were, in some instances, cemented with carbonate of lime.

2d. Beneath and between these blocks lay a dark-colored mud or mould, consisting largely of decayed leaves and other vegetable matter. It was from three to twelve inches thick, and known as the *black mould*. This occupied the entire eastern division, with the exception of a small chamber in its south-western end only, but was not found in the other, the remoter, parts of the cavern.

3d. Under this was a stalagmitic floor, commonly of granular texture, and frequently laminated, from less than an inch to fully five feet in thickness, and termed the *granular stalagmite*.

4th. An almost black layer, about four inches thick, composed mainly of small fragments of charred wood, and distinguished as the *black band*, occupied an area of about 100 square feet, immediately under the granular stalagmite, and, at the nearest point, not more than twenty-two feet from one of the entrances to the cavern. Nothing of the kind has occurred elsewhere.

5th. Immediately under the granular stalagmite and the black band lay a light red clay, containing usually about fifty per cent of small angular fragments of limestone, and somewhat numerous blocks of the same rock as large as those lying on the black mould. In this deposit, known as the *cave-earth*, many of the stones and bones were, at all depths, invested with

thin stalagmitic films. The cave-earth was of unknown depth near the entrances, where its base had never been reached; but in the remoter parts of the cavern it did not usually exceed a foot, and in a few localities it "thinned out" entirely.

6th. Beneath the cave-earth there was usually found a floor of stalagmite having a crystalline texture, and termed on that account the *crystalline stalagmite*. It was commonly thicker than the granular floor, and in one instance but little short of twelve feet.

7th. Below the whole occurred, so far as is at present known, the oldest of the cavern deposits. It was composed of sub-angular and rounded pieces of dark-red grit, embedded in a sandy paste of the same color. Small angular fragments of limestone, and investing films of stalagmite, both prevalent in the cave-earth, were extremely rare. Large blocks of limestone were occasionally met with; and the deposit, to which the name of *breccia* was given, was of a depth exceeding that to which the exploration has yet been carried.

Except in a very few small branches, the bottom of the cavern has nowhere been reached. In the cases in which there was no cave-earth, the granular stalagmite rested immediately on the crystalline; and where the crystalline stalagmite was not present the cave-earth and breccia were in direct contact. Large isolated masses of the crystalline stalagmite, as well as concreted lumps of the breccia, were occasionally met with in the cave-earth, thus showing that the older deposits had, in portions of the cavern, been partially broken up, dislodged, and re-deposited. No instance was met with of the incorporation in a lower bed of fragments derived from an upper one. In short, wherever all the deposits were found in one and the same vertical section, the order of superposition was clear and invariable; and elsewhere the succession, though defective, was never transgressed.

Excepting the overlying blocks of limestone, of course, all the deposits contained remains of animals, which, however, were not abundant in the stalagmites.

The black mould, the uppermost bed, yielded teeth and bones of man, dog, fox, badger, brown bear, *Bos longifrons*, roe-deer, sheep, goat, pig, hare, rabbit and seal—species still existing, and almost all of them in Devonshire. This has been called the *Ovine* bed, the remains of sheep being restricted to it. In it were also found numerous flint flakes and "strike-lights," stone spindle-whorls, fragments of curvilinear pieces of slate, amber beads, bone tools, including awls, chisels and combs; bronze articles, such as rings, a fibula, a spoon, a spear-head, a socketed celt, and a pin; pieces of smelted copper, and a great

number and variety of potsherds, including fragments of Samian ware.

The granular stalagmite, black band, and cave-earth, taken together as belonging to one and the same biological period, may be termed the *Hyænine* beds, the cave hyæna being their most prevalent species, and found in them alone. So far as they have been identified, the remains belong to the cave hyæna, *Equus caballus*, *Rhinoceros tichorhinus*, gigantic Irish deer, *Bos primigenius*, *Bison priscus*, red deer, mammoth, badger, cave bear, grizzly bear, brown bear, cave lion, wolf, fox, reindeer, beaver, glutton, *Machairodus latidens*, and man—the last being a part of a jaw with teeth, in the granular stalagmite. In the same beds were found unpolished *ovate* and *lanceolate* implements made from *flakes*, not *nodules*, of flint and chert; flint flakes, chips, and “cores;” “whetstones,” a “hammer-stone,” “dead” shells of *Pecten*, bits of charcoal, and bone tools, including a needle or bodkin having a well-formed eye, a pin, an awl, three harpoons, and a perforated tooth of badger. The artificial objects, of both bone and stone, were found at all depths in each of the hyænine beds, but were much more numerous below the stalagmite than in it.

The relics found in the crystalline stalagmite and the breccia, in some places extremely abundant, were almost exclusively those of bear, the only exceptions being a very few remains of cave line and fox. Hence these have been termed the *Ursine* beds. It will be remembered that teeth and bones of bear were also met with in both the hyænine and the ovine beds; and it should be understood that this biological classification is intended to apply to Kent's Cavern only. The ursine deposits, or rather the breccia, the lowest of them, also yielded evidences of human existence; but they were exclusively tools made from *nodules*, not *flakes*, of flint and chert.

*Ansty's Cove Cavern.*—About three furlongs from Kent's Hole toward N.N.E., near the top of the lofty cliff forming the northern boundary of the beautiful Ansty's Cove, Torquay, there is a cavern where, simultaneously with those in Kent's Cavern, Mr. MacEnery conducted some researches, of which he has left a brief account (see *Trans. Devon. Assoc.*, vi, pp. 61–69). I have visited it several times, but it seems to be frequently kept under lock and key, as a tool and powder-house, by the workmen in a neighboring quarry. It is a simple gallery, and, according to Mr. MacEnery, sixty-three feet long, from three to nine feet high, and from three to six feet broad. Beneath some angular stones he found a stalagmitic floor fourteen inches thick, and in the deposit below remains of deer, horse, bear, fox, hyæna (?), coprolites, a few marine and land shells, one white flint tool with fragments of others, a Roman coin, and potsherds.

In a letter to Sir W. C. Trevelyan, dated December 16th, 1825, Dr. Buckland states that Mr. MacEnery had found in this cave "bones of all sorts of beasts, and also flint knives and Roman coins; in short, an open-mouthed cave, which has been inhabited by animals of all kinds, quadruped and biped, in all successive generations, and who have all deposited their exuviae one upon another" (*ibid.*, p. 69).

*Yealm-Bridge Cavern.*—About the year 1832 the workmen broke into a bone-cavern in Yealm-Bridge Quarry, about one mile from the village of Yealmpton, and eight miles E.S.E. from Plymouth; and through their operations it was so nearly destroyed that but a small arm of it remained in 1835, when it was visited by Mr. J. C. Bellamy, who at once wrote an account of it, from which it appears that, so far as he could learn, the cavern was about thirty feet below the original limestone surface, and was filled to from one foot to six feet of the roof (see "*Nat. Hist. S. Devon.*," 1839, pp. 86–105). In the same year, but subsequently, it was examined by Capt. (afterwards Col.) Mudge, who states that there were originally three openings into the cave, each about twelve feet above the river Yealm; that the deposits were, in descending order:—

1. Loam with bones and stones .....	3·5 feet.
2. Stiff whitish clay .....	2·5 "
3. Sand .....	6·0 "
4. Red clay .....	3·5 "
5. Argillaceous sand .....	6 to 18·0 "

and that, where they did not reach the roof, the deposits were covered with stalagmite.

On the authority of Mr. Clift and Prof. Owen, Capt. Mudge mentions relics of elephant, rhinoceros, horse, ox, sheep, hyæna, dog, wolf, fox, bear, hare and water-vole. The bones, and especially the teeth, of the hyæna exceeded in number those of all the other animals, though remains of horse and ox were very abundant. Mr. Bellamy, whilst also mentioning all the foregoing forms, with the exception of dog only, adds deer, pig, glutton, weasel and mouse. He also speaks of the abundance of bones and teeth of hyæna, but seems to regard the fox as being almost as fully represented; and next in order he places horse, deer, sheep, and rabbit or hare; whilst the relics of elephant, wolf, bear, pig and glutton are spoken of as very rare. The bones, he says, were found in the uppermost bed only. They were frequently mere fragments and splinters, some being undoubtedly gnawed, and all had become very adherent through loss of their animal matter. Those of cylindrical form were without their extremities; there was no approach to anatomical juxtaposition; and the remains belonged to individuals of all

ages. Reliquiae of carnivorous animals greatly exceeded those of the herbivora, and teeth were very abundant. Coprolites occurred at some depth below the stalagnite, in the upper bed, which also contained granitic and trappean pebbles, and lumps of breccia made up of fragments of rock, bones, pebbles, and stalagnite. The bones found prior to 1835 had been removed as rubbish, and some good specimens were recovered from materials employed in making a pathway. Nothing indicating the presence of man appears to have been found.

*The Ash-Hole.*—On the southern shore of Torbay, midway between the town of Brixham and Berry Head, and about half a mile from each, there is a cavern known as the *Ash-Hole*. It was partially explored, probably about, or soon after, the time Mr. MacEnery was engaged in Kent's Hole, by the late Rev. H. F. Lyte, who, unfortunately, does not appear to have left any account of the results. The earliest mention of this cavern I have been able to find is a very brief one in Bellamy's "Natural History of South Devon," published in 1839 (p. 14). During the Plymouth Meeting in 1841, Mr. George Bartlett, a native of Brixham, who assisted Mr. Lyte, described to this Section the objects of interest the *Ash-Hole* had yielded (see Report Brit. Assoc. 1851, Trans. Sections, p. 61). So far as was then known the cave was thirty yards long and six yards broad. Below a recent accumulation, four feet deep, of loam and earth, with land and marine shells, bones of the domestic fowl and of man, pottery, and various implements, lay a true cave-earth, abounding in the remains of elephant. Prof. Owen, who identified, from this lower bed, relics of badger, polecat, stoat, water-vole, rabbit and reindeer, remarks, that for the first good evidence of the reindeer in this island he had been indebted to Mr. Bartlett, who stated that the remains were found in this cavern (see "Brit. Foss. Mam." 1846, pp. 109–110, 113–114, 116, 204, 212, 479–480). I have made numerous visits to the spot, which, when Mr. Lyte began his diggings, must have been a shaft-like fissure, accessible from the top only. A lateral opening, however, has been quarried into it; there is a narrow tunnel extending westward, in which the deposit is covered with a thick sheet of stalagnite, and where one is tempted to believe that a few weeks' labor might be well invested.

(To be continued.)