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ARCHAEOLOGIA:
OR
MISCELLANEOUS TRACTS
RELATING TO
ANTIQUITY.
PUBLISHED BY
THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQVARIARIES OF LONDON.
VOLUME XV.



LONDON:
Printed by T. Baskerville, Bell Court, Fleet Street.
Sold at the Society's Apartments in Bouverie Place; and by Messrs
Wells, Garton, Rogers, Lane and Murray, Stationers,
Cannon and Dulwich, Easton and Tatham,
MILTON.

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H. E. Balch

Archaeologia / Volume 64 / January 1913, pp 337 - 346

DOI: 10.1017/S0261340900010766, Published online: 15 November 2011

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0261340900010766

How to cite this article:

H. E. Balch (1913). VIII.—*Further Excavations at the Late-Celtic and Romano-British Cave-dwelling at Wookey Hole, Somerset*.
Archaeologia, 64, pp 337-346 doi:10.1017/S0261340900010766

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VIII.—*Further Excavations at the Late-Celtic and Romano-British Cave-dwelling at Wookey Hole, Somerset.* By H. E. BALCH, Esq., F.S.A.

Read 26th June, 1913.

SINCE last I had the honour to report upon the work of excavation, which for several years past has been carried on in the cavern at Wookey Hole, considerable progress has been made, the excavation being completed as far as the door of the cave. In doing this, a great quantity of floor débris has been minutely examined, and some very interesting finds have been made.

An outstanding feature of the deposit has been the rapid thickening towards the entrance. Whereas over the general floor of the dwelling the Roman débris averaged 6 in. and was very uniform, at a few feet from the present doorway it was a foot in thickness; and whereas the Celtic débris beneath was liable to considerable variation and was rarely 2 ft. 6 in. in thickness, at the point referred to it reached no less than 4 ft. over a considerable area.

Further, while in the earlier portion of the work no evidence was found of the fall of boulders from the roof, recently we have found one large rock which fell during the Late-Celtic occupation and two during the Roman period. The 'black band', as we called it, the half-inch of greasy soot which ran over everything further within the cave, disappeared as we got near the entrance, so that we may fairly assume that it arose from the smoke of the earlier fires whilst the occupants were living close to the present doorway. The larger accumulation of fire-ash and the absence of the soot, taken together with the finds made by us in these deeper beds, must be held to prove that for some considerable time the occupation was practically confined to the daylight portion of the dwelling. Moreover, the occurrence of pottery in these deeper levels, of a character distinct from that found in the other parts of the cave floor, confirms this in a remarkable way.

A peculiar feature of this pottery is, that most ornate designs elaborated from the C-curve were found at the very base of the deposit, being indeed covered by the ashes of the first fires to be lit in the cave, so far as we can tell. The fragments, in fact, were discoloured in every instance by the underlying gravel, which has

yielded nothing but two coprolites of *Hyaena spelaea*. The discovery of these fragments in such a situation makes it extremely probable that they were portions of vessels brought by the cave people when first they came to the cave. In at least one case the ware is different from anything made by the cave people themselves afterwards, both in form and decoration, and indeed it differs from any single specimen found in the lake-villages of the moorland near Glastonbury. Speaking generally, however, the striking resemblance which has been so marked hitherto has persisted, and there can be no doubt that there was a very close connexion between the two places. This is most marked in the weaving-combs, which persistently repeat patterns found at the Glastonbury lake-village; and we were fortunate in finding several of these combs quite perfect. It is of interest that though these earlier deposits must carry us back considerably in time, there is no dearth of iron quite at the bottom of the excavation; indeed, some of our best finds of this metal occur in those levels. The find of the denarius of Marcia (120 B.C.) in the upper levels, as reported last year, now assumes considerable importance, for the depth of pre-Roman débris reaches to 4 ft., and this coin, unaccompanied by Imperial coins, occurred at less than 3 in. from the top. It is incredible that the larger accumulation beneath it can have been made in less than a hundred years. I therefore suggest that from a hundred to a hundred and fifty years is a minimum for the deposit below the level of the coin of Marcia, and that therefore the occupation must have begun somewhere about 200 to 250 B.C. It may well be before that time, if the rate of accumulation of the débris was uniform.

There is no doubt whatever that the pottery, with designs formed of the C-curve interlocked, is of earlier date than the more abundant ware in which herring-bone and cross-hatching prevail, some designs which closely approach Bronze Age originals occurring 2 ft. higher in the débris. As to the origin of this pottery, M. Déchelette claims that it belongs to the same family as that of Armorica, the incised ware of which he looks upon as closely allied to the painted Gaulish vases of the rest of France. These date from 400 B.C. onwards, and it would therefore appear that, if the facts in connexion with the Wookey Hole excavation count for anything at all, the earlier incised ware with designs originating in C-curves cannot be much later. It is a peculiar fact that we have not found abundant specimens with decoration based on the S-curve, only one vessel occurring of that kind, and that not at so low a level as the pottery decorated with C-curves. This one vessel is, I believe, identical with one found at the Glastonbury lake-village in every detail but one. Whether this must be taken to mean that that particular vessel was brought from Glastonbury is an open question. The decoration of the base as in the Armorican vases, which was held

to be a strong link between the two places, had not occurred at Wookey Hole until this year, when one portion of a base was found with this characteristic. The absence of the taller pedestalled and cordoned forms of the south-eastern counties continues to the end to be most marked, and without question they can be said to be absent from the district, though when the cemeteries of the lake-villages and cave-dwelling are found they may possibly appear. The only cordoned vessels that we have are the dwarf-pedestalled, open-mouthed bowls, of which one instance, nearly perfect, occurred where it had been concealed in a fissure, covered by a slab of lias, which fell on it and crushed it at the moment of discovery. It contained the lower portion of the bill of a duck, fragments of which are still inside. In this vessel, and in a number of closely similar fragmentary specimens, the pedestal, illustrated as no. 4 of fig. 11 of last year's report, was first made inverted, and was reversed for completion, the line of joint in the side determining the fracture when the vessel was broken. One of these bowls had a perforation near the rim, apparently for suspension. One vessel, fully decorated, occurred with two perforations; the incisions are executed with a dentated bone, or cogged wheel, far more deeply than in any case before found by us. Probably among the mass of fragments collected the portions necessary to complete this will be found. In the case of one simple pot the decoration is novel, being very superficial, and consisting of large triangles filled with cross-hatching. Further, in this case there is a line of finger-prints beneath the lower limit of the decoration. Amongst the large number of decorated fragments here illustrated (fig. 1), no large portions of which have yet appeared, there are many that we should much like to see more complete; the missing pieces probably still lie in the outer porch of the cave, which is as yet untouched. They belong principally to that earlier period represented in the deep levels just within the cave door. From these it will be evident that there are numerous variations of the earliest designs; in no case were these found in the earlier excavations, further in the cave.

Amongst the twelve restorations here given (fig. 2) are the specimens (nos. 5 and 8) which it is suggested were brought to the cave by the first comers. There were two vessels almost precisely similar to no. 5, but in neither instance have we nearly all the fragments necessary for its reconstruction. The finger impressions are very clear, and carefully formed. The ware is black, free from grit, and polished. In no. 8 we see the open bowl which is represented by three portions formed of a ware quite distinct from anything else in the cave. It is a good ware, very hard, grey in colour, and well finished. The upper part, on every face of the rather square rim, is deeply lined, in a way foreign to all the other pottery. The alternating double C-curves are well defined, and filled in with

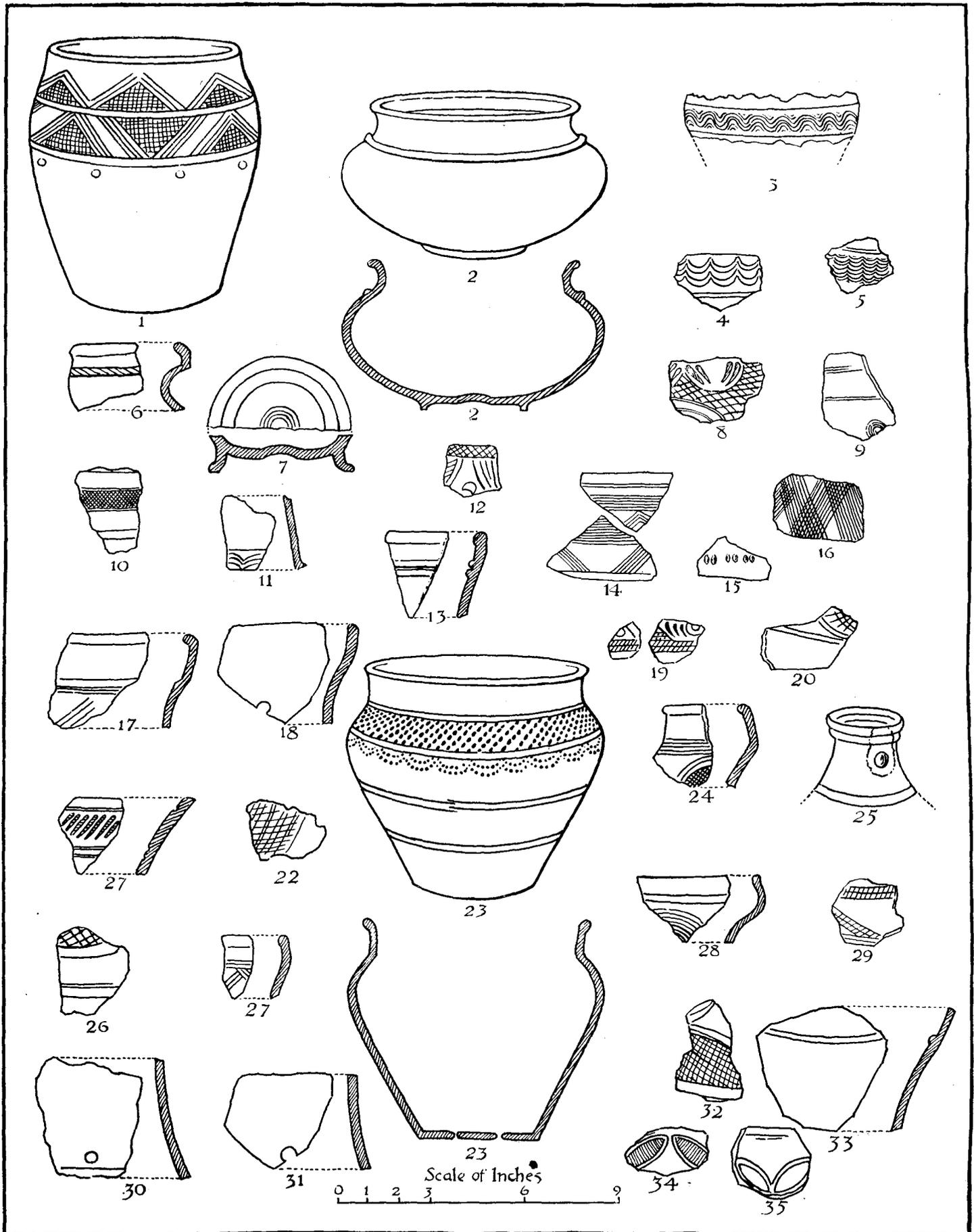


Fig. 1. Fragments of decorated pottery from Wookey Hole.

cross-hatching. There is a slight foot to the bowl. Altogether it is a very interesting specimen, especially as its like has not occurred in the lake-villages. Until this year the same could be said of no. 2, with its beautiful triple herring-bone finished with two rows of deeply impressed dots within double-incised lines. This year, however, one fragment almost precisely the same as this, but having only double herring-bone, has been found at Meare. Its appearance is so much like this that it might even have been the work of the same potter. No. 1 is closely allied to this vessel, the loops taking the place of the lines of dots. No. 3, which is from approximately the same level, is the most crude attempt at decoration among our finds. The incisions are deep, but there is no design, and many of the markings are most erratic. No. 4 bears a simple band of hatching, clear and effective, from the Late-Celtic deposit. No. 6 is peculiar, and from its position I am inclined to think that it is the C-curve much deteriorated. No. 7, a vessel of very brittle ware, having much calcite in its composition and washed over with finer clay, bears a pattern unique in the cave. The neck ornament is evidently the fern-leaf, and the rest strikes one as simple Bronze Age decoration, with the addition of the little line of triangles at the bottom. I fail to find this latter anywhere else. No. 9 is of hard but good ware, unpolished, with nothing but radiating lines by way of decoration. No. 10 is a small vessel of which the incised pattern consists of the fern-leaf and a series of pretty little triangles. No. 11 is, I believe, of early date and is closely allied to the earliest forms 5 and 8, its decoration being very superficial. No. 12 is a pygmy form of drinking-cup with pretty decoration recalling Bronze Age originals. The large central urn figured last year has now been found to have a notched edge and pattern varying in depth. There are also many specimens of the later (Romano-British) pottery from the upper levels, all restored from fragments.

Iron objects have been added to materially this year (pl. XXVI, fig. 1). Not only have we a pig of iron weighing some seven pounds, but a curious clamp (*b*), a good bill-hook resembling specimens from other Early Iron Age sites, with the wooden handle still contained in the socket; an adze in excellent condition and with traces of the wooden handle (*a*); a drawknife, (*c*) small but otherwise resembling the woodman's knife of to-day; a saw-handle which fits the iron saw previously found (pl. XXVI, fig. 4, *b*); a large socket of a weapon or tool, a broken dagger or knife, and various very crude attempts at making iron knives. These were all from the Celtic level, low down, with the exception of the pig of iron, which was at the top of the pre-Roman deposit. In the Roman deposit no good article of iron was found, but many large nails.

The group of weaving-combs (pl. XXVI, fig. 3) has now become one of the best in the country. They are all of early date except two. No. 2 is remarkable,

not only because of its perfect condition but because it is so curved in section. I submitted it to a lady at Clevedon who knows much about working on vertical looms, and she suggests that this may have been purposely shaped for the working of patterns. No. 1 is also remarkable, not only for its size but for the termination of the handle. No. 4, not so well preserved, is much more fully decorated. It has square panels with diagonal lines near the teeth, and has also the pointed termination, which is rare, with perforation for suspension. No. 3 is, so far as I can tell, unique. The great series from the lake-villages contain no such specimen. It is irregular in shape, decorated with lozenges, twice pierced (a very rare occurrence), and deeply incised with lines at the handle end. Moreover, its teeth, though perfect, are exceedingly short, being barely $\frac{1}{4}$ inch long. This and another beautiful specimen, no. 5, were at, or near, the base of the deposit, and in close proximity to the iron adze (pl. XXVI, fig. 1, *a*). This comb is by far the best found throughout the excavation, being a more perfect specimen of a type found at the Glastonbury lake-village. The deeply incised circles and lines, and the perfect teeth, mark it as distinct from any other in the group. Two undecorated and broken combs came from the Roman level.

A large number of remarkable hone-stones, etc., have been found, and the number increased as daylight was approached. They are usually of local stone from the Millstone Grit series of Ebbor, and commonly show the marks of wear. One interesting find consists of a flint-and-steel: a nodule of flint much worn in use and a similarly worn piece of iron pyrites. They are from the top of the pre-Roman level.

Some very interesting specimens of potters' tools have been found in the lower level, and are here illustrated (pl. XXVI, fig. 2, *a, b*). Portions of ribs occurred, in the side of which perfectly shaped curves have been cut. These were of varying depths to suit the different vessels under construction, some being very shallow, and others much deeper. A perfect polished moulding tool for the opposite side of the curves is also illustrated. These tools are probably rare, as they have not been identified at the lake-villages. I incline to the belief that boar tusks and animal ribs, in one case dentated at the top, also contributed to the shaping of the walls of certain pottery. All the objects in the group, including ordinary pottery pens, were found in close proximity to each other.

Many bone implements have also been found, some pierced and used, I think, for spinning; others twice perforated, at end and side, and roughly tapered at the other end; burnishing bones, polished to the highest possible degree, perhaps for cloth dressing; tapered bones, which are pierced and show pegs of both iron and bone (pl. XXVI, fig. 2, *d, e*); and a decorated spindle-whorl

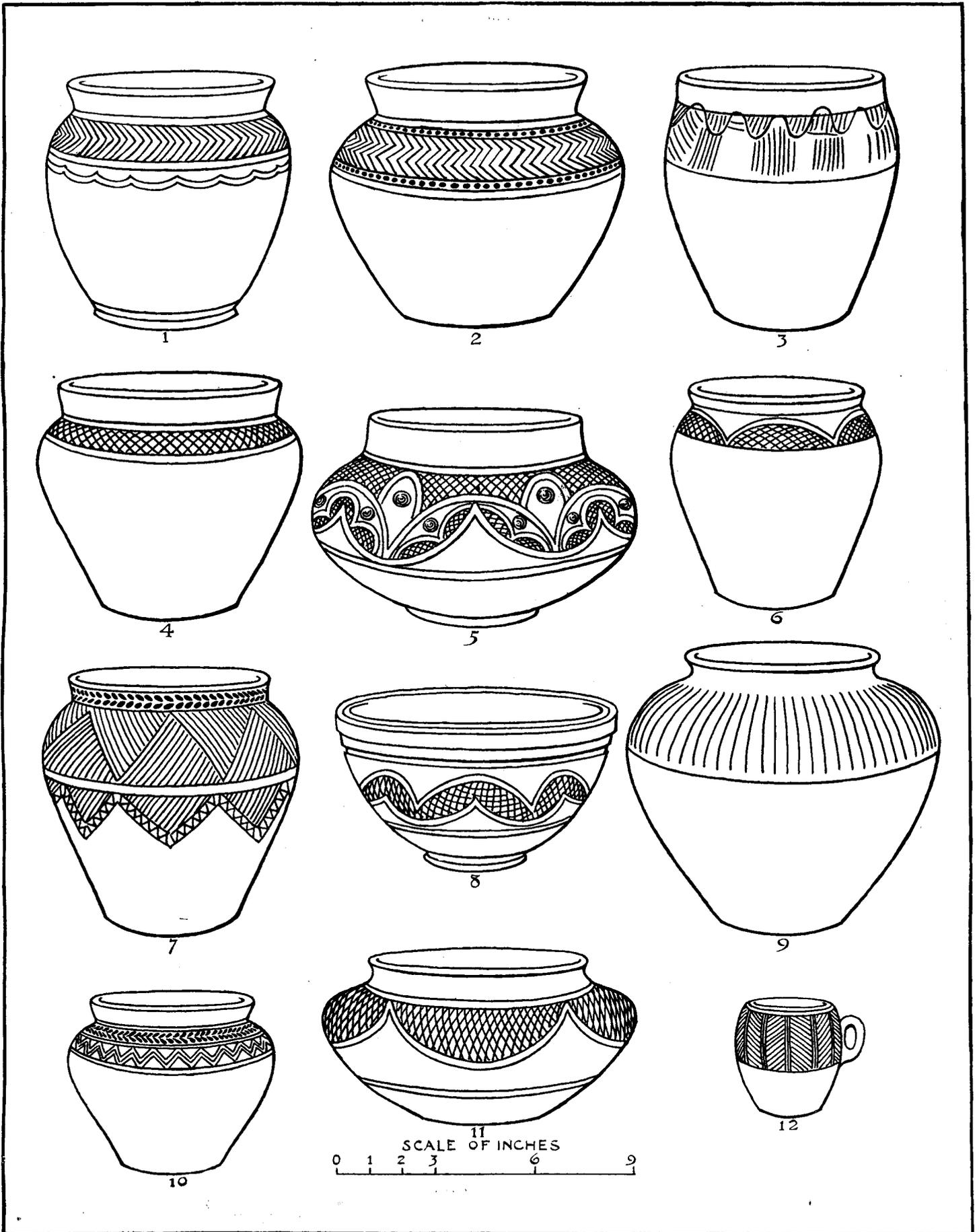


Fig. 2. Decorated pottery (restored) from Wookey Hole.

U U 2

(pl. XXVI, fig. 2, *c*), having a large number of incised dots and circles. All these and others have been found in the deeper beds in the cave. A curious little sphere of stone, from the Roman level, has radiations from a centre to the point of greatest diameter, but there is nothing to suggest its use.

The full series of pins and needles discovered in the cave contains a large number of new finds, some having decorated heads quite distinct from those previously discovered. These tend to concentrate in the upper Celtic and lower Roman levels, and it is not easy to discover marked differences in them. One or two specially fine specimens are included in this year's finds, but these will be better understood by examination than by description.

Among new finds of bronze are a fine pin with decorated head, some finger-rings and an ear-ring, a curious brooch-like ornament, possibly for the wrist, a little twisted spoon or ear-scoop from the older level, and a decorated bronze bar, possibly a brooch, from the Roman level. The curious ring of bronze (pl. XXVI, fig. 1, *d*) has eight ornamental rings wrapped on at intervals, and the spaces between are deeply milled on the outer edge only, recalling the decoration of certain early Italian brooches. It is very small and, if intended for the wrist, must have been made for a child. It is slightly flattened at one end and pointed at the other. A little ingot of tin with lead has been found, but has not yet been examined. Spindle-whorls in great variety have persistently occurred, together with a number of specimens which have not been pierced. These show all the stages of manufacture, from the rough stone to the finely finished specimen. The oldest seem to be those of antler and stone, and the later more finely turned.

Numerous antlers of roe and red deer (fragmentary) have been found, and in the articles made from these are many of great interest. First is a complete pick, much worn. It is much like various finds of greater age which have been made from time to time, and comes from the middle of the Celtic level in the cave. Then occurs the hanger (pl. XXVI, fig. 4, *a*) pierced for suspension and sawn off flat to hang evenly against the wall, perhaps for the suspension of game. It is from the deeper level, from which comes also an implement, the purpose of which is most uncertain. It was formed from the antler of a roe deer, shaped by the removal of a tine, polished, bevelled at the base from two sides and then sawn into a deep notch at right angles with the bevels. Awl-handles and portions having iron rivets embedded have also occurred. A considerable number of worked-up tines, some doubtless bridle-pieces, but others of doubtful use, have occurred and are not confined to either level. Certain specimens are highly finished, polished, decorated with lines, and doubly pierced. Perhaps one of the most interesting is a complete specimen,

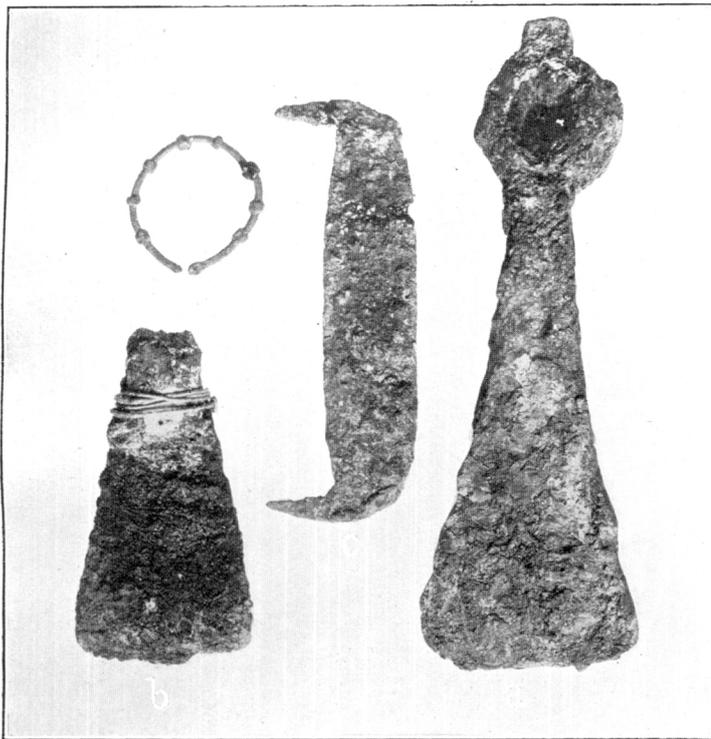


Fig. 1. Adze (a), clamp (b), and draw-knife (c) of iron, and bronze wrist-ornament (d). $\frac{1}{2}$

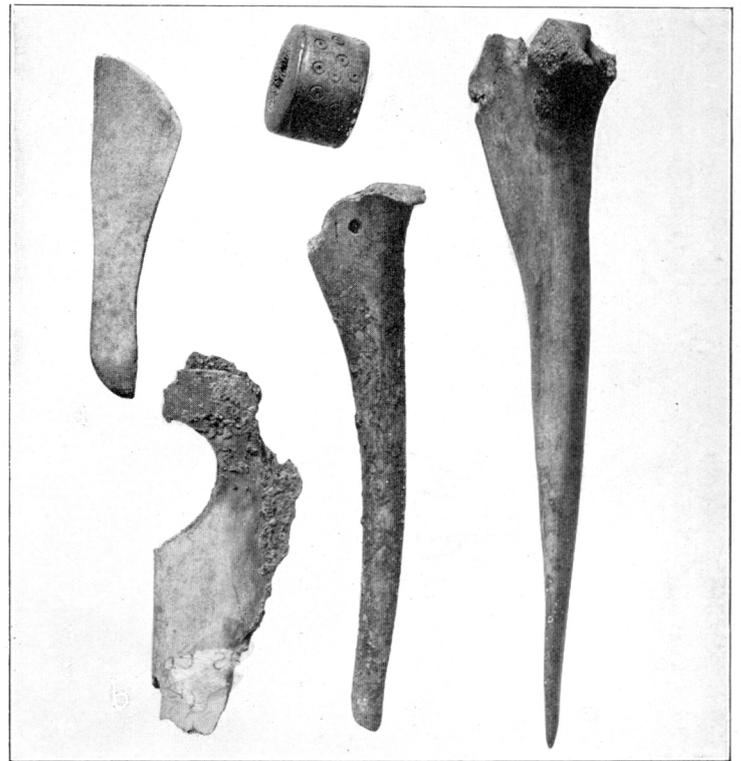


Fig. 2. Pottery-moulding tools (a, b), decorated whorl (c), and weaving implements (d, e) from the Late-Celtic level. $\frac{1}{2}$

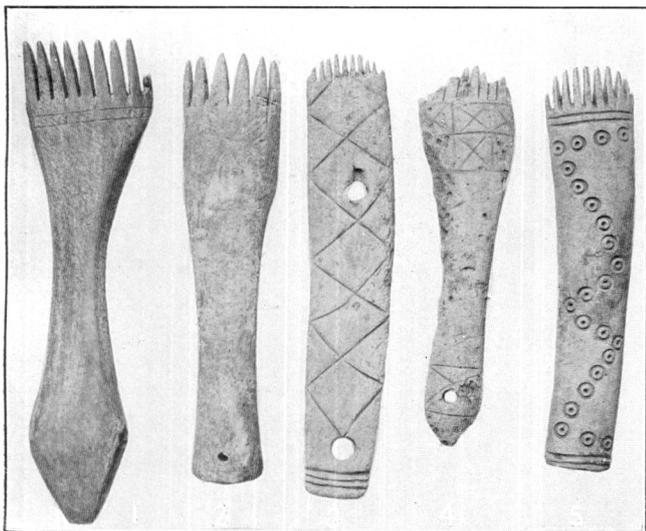


Fig. 3. Late-Celtic weaving combs. $\frac{1}{3}$



Fig. 4. Hook for suspension (a), and antler-handled saw (b). $\frac{1}{3}$

IRON, BRONZE, AND BONE OBJECTS FROM WOOKEY HOLE

much worn, pierced twice, and with both ends decorated with crossed lines and ring-and-dot pattern. It appears to be identical with a broken specimen found by Warre in Worlebury camp in 1852, and thought to be part of the mouth-piece of a musical instrument. Our specimen could have been nothing of the kind.

In Kimmeridge shale several new finds have been made. There are portions of three wristlets and an armlet, two spindle-whorls, and a larger portion of what must have been a marvel of turning, a large, deep bowl, cut into a rebate at the upper edge to receive a similarly made cover, and with the finest cordons raised at intervals, singly or in pairs.

Some further specimens of Roman glass have been found, including a rolled edge of some beautiful vessel, several fragments of possible drinking glasses, etc. The only articles of wood that escaped destruction had been embedded in goat's dung, which in some way preserved them. Some portions of footwear are of unknown age, having been found in a deep hollow amongst boulders.

The bones of the animals used for food have of course persisted throughout the excavation. I have throughout been faced with the same difficulty in accounting for the presence of human bones under precisely the same conditions as the animal bones with which they are mingled. To this there must now be a reservation. The deeper level from which came the beautiful decorated pottery showed the food bones, as did all the rest of the cave-floor, but it did not contain a human bone. Half-way up the Celtic deposit they began, and continued well into the Romano-British accumulation. The distribution is so strange that I have thought it worth while to exhibit a few specimens of these well-preserved (though shattered) human bones. Smashed tibiae, femora, jaws in pieces, portions of skulls, detached though perfect jaws, were embedded in the undisturbed wood-ashes of the fires from wall to wall of the cave, lying side by side with the bones of deer, goat, pig, and cow, all of which have been broken in a similar way. I thought that the lake-villages of the moorland near by were without these human remains in the dwellings, but Mr. Gray informs me this is not the case, such fragmentary human remains having been found inside the dwellings at the Glastonbury lake-village.

It should be added that the whole of the work, manual and otherwise, has been done at Wookey Hole by volunteers, and that the funds of no Society have been called on to bear a single penny of the costs of this excavation. It may be of interest to state that when the great coal strike caused the shutting down of the neighbouring paper mills, a number of the paper-makers volunteered to give their services without reward, and the work was brought to a close

much more quickly in consequence. There now remains the open archway without the cave door, and when this is undertaken, I have no doubt that some further light will be thrown upon these prehistoric cave-dwellers of the Early Iron Age.

It is a remarkable fact that the cavern has so far failed to produce relics definitely of Neolithic or Bronze age. A small exhibit represents the large number of relics of this age which we are finding little more than a stone's-throw from the cave. This includes a group of arrow-heads and a flat bronze celt of presumably early form, found but yesterday at Ebbor, a short distance from Wookey Hole.