

THE MOUTH OF HARBOROUGH CAVE.

## Harborough Cave, near Brassington.

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### I.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE EXCAVATIONS.

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THE group of rugged dolomitized limestone rocks called Harborough Rocks are well known outside their own immediate vicinity, and attract a considerable number of visitors to this part of Derbyshire. Their flattened summit is broken by upright blocks of stone. Three of these have been carved, one to represent a pulpit, another a font, and a third a throne. Just below the summit on the western side is a natural terrace, on which there are indications of a prehistoric encampment. A few years ago some digging was attempted on this site, and a few sepulchral urns and some bones were unearthed; but the work was stopped by order of the landlord.

The cave is in the face of the crag immediately below this terrace. It lies about 1,200 feet above sea-level. It is eight and a quarter miles south of Bakewell, three miles west-north-west of Wirksworth, and three-quarters of a mile north-east of Brassington. The chamber is formed by the fall of beds of rock between two main joints, which run due north and south. In its south-eastern half the roof is flat, but in the remaining portion it is hollowed out into a dome, which

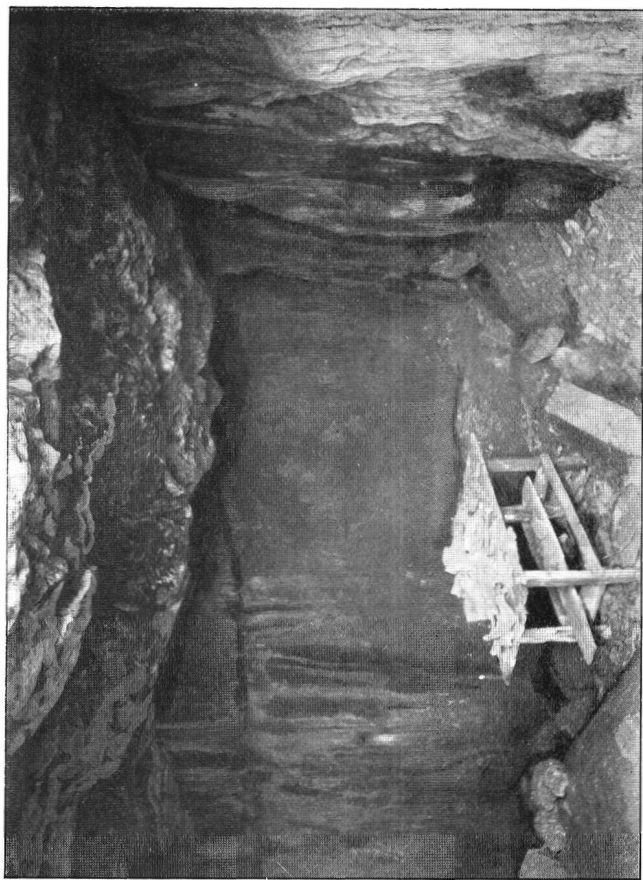
communicates with the outer air by means of a natural chimney. The stone displaced in the formation of this dome lies strewn in large blocks on the floor beneath. The cave is almost rectangular, the entrance cutting obliquely across the south-west corner.

The work of excavation began on the 2nd of September, 1907, and was carried on for seven weeks. During that time the contents of the cave were cleared out, not to a uniform depth, but, as far as was practicable, to a definite bed. Roughly speaking, it may be said that, if a diagonal was drawn from the south-western to the north-eastern corner, the one half presented few difficulties and yielded a harvest of finds, while the other was obstructed by blocks of stone.

On some former occasion a trial-hole had been made by some unknown investigator; but he had set to work in the more obstructed and barren area to the left-hand side on entering the cave. Apparently he met with no success, and so relinquished an unpromising undertaking.

Last year's workers also started near the mouth of the cave, but on the opposite side of it. Here no great difficulties beset them, and it so happened that they had alighted on a most suitable place for beginning to trace its history. First of all, they dug down till they reached the surface of a bed of yellowish-brown soil, similar to that which often constitutes the older deposits in caves. They proceeded to follow the surface of this bed until it disappeared at the line EB marked on the plan. Beyond that it became more difficult to trace the history of the cave; but the general facts are as follows.

The cave having for many years been used as a fowl-house, the surface consisted of a layer of dung. Below this was a bed of rubble, varying in thickness from a few inches to a foot, but co-extensive with the whole area of the cave. It has been ascertained that this rubble has been laid down within the memory of man. The object in view had been to provide an even and dry floor, sloping slightly from the back of the cave



SOUTH-EAST PORTION OF INTERIOR OF HARBOROUGH CAVE, FROM THE ENTRANCE.

The table is placed towards the east end of the working in which most of the finds occurred. To the left of it runs the deeper trench, which ultimately leads into the second chamber.

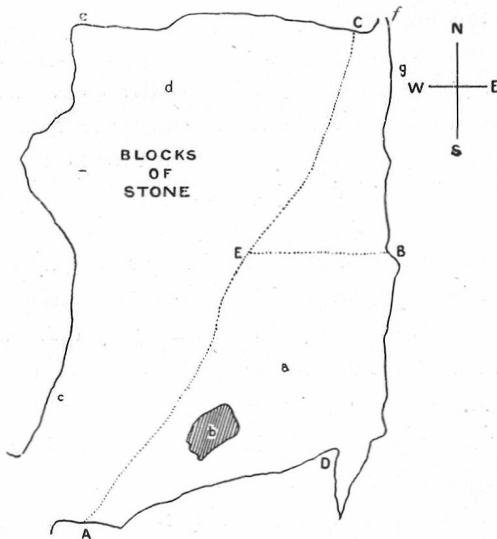
towards the entrance. Before this was done, the slope had been in the opposite direction; consequently the rubble was deeper at the back of the cave than near its mouth. The stones were obtained from a mound heaped up in the entrance, blocking and dwarfing it. Their removal provided not only a good floor, but also a convenient and spacious doorway. The rubble was free from earth, but a percentage of bones and pottery was mixed with it.

Beneath this first and quite recent bed the conditions ceased to be uniform. As already stated, large blocks of rock were strewn over the north-western half of the cave. These had, however, fallen clear of the northern and western walls, leaving an unobstructed passage varying from two to three feet in width. The area from the line EB to the north-eastern corner will be described later. The most definite and productive part was that which was first excavated, and is roughly bounded—by a line running from the right of the entrance towards the north-eastern corner; by the line EB; by that part of the eastern wall which lies to the south of EB; and by the southern wall.

Within the area thus delineated there existed beneath the superficial rubble a well-defined second bed. This extended downwards to a depth of from nearly two feet to two feet six inches. It consisted of a succession of floors, the whole being composed of charcoal and charred earth, its surface being hardened into a crust. In and just below this crust the majority of the implements and ornaments were found.

The second bed rested upon a third one, of unknown depth, made of fine, yellow cave-earth. Only one attempt was made to probe and examine this. On that occasion a few hours were spent in boring down some two feet six inches below its surface. In this trial-hole many splints of bone were found, but very few were perfect enough to be determinable, and those belonged to deer and bat.

At the line EB the second bed (charcoal) quite suddenly ended, and was replaced beyond that line by clay. When this was removed, instead of the third bed of yellow earth being revealed, a mass of rubble was found beneath it. As this was absolutely barren of finds, the work here was temporarily abandoned, and the attention of the men was directed to the chinks between the blocks of rock, and to the spaces between those blocks and the cave walls. This work proceeded from



Plan of Harborough Cave, 1907. Scale  $\frac{1}{144}$

a. Area of finds (5 brooches, iron and bone implements). b. Trial-hole into third bed (yellow-earth). c. Gold ring and bone needles. d. Second gold ring. e. North-western passage (skulls of *bos longifrons*). f. North-eastern passage. g. Rude-pottery, heavy bone awls. The diagonal dotted line (AEC) shows the boundary between the obstructed and the unobstructed halves of the floor.

the left-hand side of the entrance to the north-west corner, and from there onwards to the north-east corner. Not far from the entrance the yellow cave-earth was again met with, and may fairly be considered to have been a continuation of the third bed previously mentioned. Here, however, it did not extend far, and, instead of being horizontal, it sloped sharply downwards from east to west. So much was this the case that, whereas near the cave wall it lay at a depth of four feet

below the surface, at a distance of six feet further east it abutted upon the blocks of stone, with only six inches of material covering it. Near the side of the cave, and lying one foot above this yellow earth, a gold ring was found in association with four or five bone needles.

In the attempt to again meet with a definite, recognisable bed, the excavation was carried down some seven feet along the north wall. In the north-west corner a passage was found. After clearing out the rubble which choked it, it was seen to widen out into a second chamber; but owing to the close proximity of the passage walls, this could not be reached without blasting, and, consequently, the attempt to enter it here was abandoned. The north-eastern corner was then tried, and another passage (running due northwards like the first one) was soon entered. Like the other, this one was filled up with rubble. It was much wider than the other, and though lack of time and funds prevented us from making our way into the chamber beyond the cave proper, we were able to crawl along far enough to gain a good view of it.

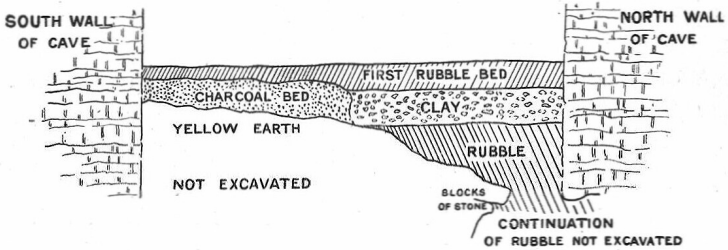
It will be remembered that between the line EB and this corner there was, beneath the superficial layer of recent rubble, a bed of clay two feet six inches thick, and lying upon another bed of rubble. Though the excavation in this corner was carried down to a depth of seven feet, the bottom of this second rubble was not reached. But at this depth the eastern cave wall terminated, and among the stones near it and under it some rude pottery, a few bone awls, and a metapodial of boar and other bones were found.

The abrupt ending of the cave wall so far below the surface called to mind the like condition at Ravencliffe Cave, where also implements were discovered actually under the solid rock.

The reappearance of implements and pottery here gave some colour to the inference that this was a continuation of the charcoal bed, in point of time, though not with regard to material. So the few days which remained before the work was to be discontinued were devoted to uniting the level here

with that which lay to the south of the line EB. In doing this it was found that a natural rock floor sloped down irregularly from EB towards the north, and apparently the deep hole in the corner had at some time been filled first with loose stones, and then above that with clay; and for an unknown reason the same hands had shut off all ingress to the chamber which lies to the north of the cave by choking the two passages with stones.

The expense of the work was shared by Messrs. H. C. Heathcote, J. H. Dawson, Col. H. Brooke Taylor, and myself. The excavation was carried out by Mr. Alfred Bramwell, of



Harborough Cave, 1907. Scale  $\frac{1}{144}$   
Section (partly imaginary) of floor through DC of the plan.

Bakewell, to whom great praise is due for the careful and intelligent manner in which it was performed. It can only be regarded as a preliminary step in the exploration of an interesting and important site. The continuation and completion of the task is delayed only by lack of funds, and can again be taken in hand if those who are interested in the early history of Derbyshire will come forward with subscriptions. There is every reason to believe that bones of extinct animals and implements used by early man are still hidden away in the cave itself, while no one can foretell what objects of interest may be awaiting the explorer in the spacious inner chamber which



has not yet been reached. Surely this is a work which might with advantage be pursued by the Derbyshire Archæological Society. Now that the pioneer work of opening up the cave has been successfully undertaken, and the results have been made known, it is greatly to be feared that stray collectors will from time to time carry off what they can find unless this Society takes the matter up and sees that it is accomplished on scientific lines.

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NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

It must be evident to all who take the trouble to consider the matter, that the income of this Society—dependent as it is almost entirely upon the small annual subscriptions of its members, and one which does not even cover the cost of such a *Journal* as was issued last year—is not sufficient of itself to provide a fund upon which the Council can depend for any outside work such as that described in the above article.

Now, a County Archæological Society does not usually exist only for the production of an annual publication. It ought not to do so, nor should members be satisfied if nothing more be done by it.

A certain amount of excavation work should be attempted every year. This, however, as will have been seen, costs money. Where and how is it to be found?

As it happens, the Council has now a small sum—about £35 or £40—available for such a purpose. It was the surplus of the Brough Excavation Fund, which, when further work on that site was abandoned owing to legal difficulties, was put aside as a nucleus for similar work, and is called the Excavation Fund. Such a sum, however, unless it be added to from time to time, is not of much practical use for any serious work.

I can see only two methods by which money for this purpose could be obtained. Either that members who are interested

in this kind of archæological work should subscribe annually to this special fund, or else that the present annual subscription paid by all members should be raised. Earnestly do I make this appeal that the question should be seriously considered. The Secretary or Editor will be glad to receive subscriptions or communications on this subject.