



ROUGH PLAN OF HOBHURST CASTLE.

A = Mouth of fissure

## A Human Skeleton in Monsal Dale.

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THE day excursionist from Manchester alighting at Monsal Dale Station can hardly be expected to be aware that he is standing in the midst of a country full of associations with a past which existed before the dawn of history. As the train hurried him through the last few miles of his journey, he may have been struck with admiration and awe by the glimpses he gained of the silent, pale-grey limestone crags. And now, as he turns his steps in the direction of the course of the river, he makes a closer acquaintance with the unique grandeur of a Derbyshire dale.

At the railway bridge, river and dale make an abrupt turn to the right, and for about a mile run in a westerly direction. Not far below the railway bridge there is a weir, and just below it a wooden foot-bridge. On the north side of the river, and immediately above the foot-bridge, is situated Hobhurst Castle, or Hob's House, as it is named on the Ordnance Map. It is easy to find. It stands out quite distinctly from the opposite side of the river, and its position is almost exactly below the southern termination of the western rampart of the Fin Cop fort.<sup>1</sup>

Hobhurst Castle is a mass of shattered rock standing at a short distance from the crag, which at that point forms the north side of the dale. It is divided up into turrets and walls, and is surrounded by a rugged mass of rough stone. Above the neighbouring crag are scree, always on the move; every scuttling rabbit sends down a small avalanche of stone.

<sup>1</sup> See vol. xxxiv., p. 133, of this *Journal*.

The climb to Hobhurst Castle from the river is steep at first, up a winding path in the lower scree, and then across a more gentle slope of rough stone, in which the hardiest plants can hardly maintain themselves. Anyone who visits the place, and who wanders in and out and around the mass of isolated rocks, will notice in the crag opposite to it a deep and narrow fissure. If he enters this fissure he will find a rough and rather steep descent, at the bottom of which the fissure becomes too narrow for further progress.

In March, 1911, some boys climbed down to the bottom of this fissure, and to pass the time began to remove the stones forming its floor. They had a vague hope that they might find something, and they were rewarded for their trouble, for one of them came upon a skull and other bones. As soon as he emerged from the fissure he showed his treasures to me. The skull was human, and evidently had belonged to a very young person. Within the next few days I went and examined the place carefully, in the hope of finding the rest of the skeleton. In this I was not wholly successful. After a thorough search I procured the greater part of it, but some of the limb-bones were missing. The bones which I met with were indiscriminately mixed up with the loose stones which formed the floor. In close proximity to the area in which they lay, but nearer to the entrance of the fissure, were the skeletons of a goat and of a sheep.

Such were the conditions of the discovery, and two problems must now be considered: first, to what period do the bones belong, and, secondly, why were they at the bottom of the fissure?

When I had finished my search, and had tabulated the bones found, I submitted the skull to Dr. A. Keith, the Conservator of the Royal College of Surgeons' Museum, who has gained so widespread a reputation in connection with recent discoveries of prehistoric man. I laid all the available facts before him, and I pointed out that the fissure is very near to the camp on Fin Cop,  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles (only 500 yards as

the crow flies) from the site of the British village<sup>1</sup> of Horsborough, and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the Old Woman's House in Taddington Dale.<sup>2</sup> He very kindly sent me an exhaustive report on the skeleton, with tracings of the skull, which, as it is too technical to be printed at length, is here somewhat abridged:—

“The skeleton is that of a child of fourteen years of age, probably a boy, judging from the pelvis and size of teeth and palate. . . . The supposition that the child had been a member of an adjoining British camp is borne out by the physical characters of the skull. . . . The head is rounded or ball-like in every direction—remarkably round. . . . As regards the head, one notes especially its rounded form, its face relatively wide and short, its wide palate, and especially wide lower jaw . . . and very moderate cranial capacity, indicating a brain which is rather below the average of a modern child of from fourteen to fifteen years.

“The stature would have been about 5 ft. . . . The right ulna is distinctly larger than the left . . . showing, as is usual in primitive tribes, a greater use of the right hand. . . .

“The upper third of the femur shows a considerable degree of flattening from front to back (27.5 by 23.5 mm.); the shaft also shows a similar flattening (25 by 20 mm.); the tibia is flattened from side to side in its upper third (20 by 30 mm.).”

From the above it is clear that Dr. Keith considers the boy to have been contemporary with the Horsborough village and the Old Woman's House, or, in other words, to have been a Briton of about the first century of our era.

Now, how was it that the poor lad's body was deposited at the bottom of this fissure? It is quite evident that it was not carried there by the river. Two thousand years ago the river must have flowed in very much the same position as to-day. At present the mouth of the fissure is about 200 yards from the river, and about 150 ft. above it. No conceivable

<sup>1</sup> See vol. xxxiii., p. 124-5, of this *Journal*.

<sup>2</sup> See vol. xxxiii., p. 117, of this *Journal*.

flood could cause the river to rise 150 ft. Secondly, he had not been buried there; the haphazard position of his bones makes that certain. It is possible that he went there to hide from some foe, and did not dare to come out again. In that case he must have died of starvation, and that would account for the position of his bones. When Roman legions were penetrating into this wild district, which up till then had seemed a safe retreat for many a British fugitive; when the Horsborough village was desolated, and a few of the terrified inhabitants managed to escape, and for a time find hiding in the depths of the pit-like cave called the Old Woman's House; in such troubled times as those a boy might escape at the time of the attack on the village, or he might be surprised while wandering in the dale, and flee for refuge to the bottom of the fissure. That is likely enough. But it must be remembered that close to him were the skeletons of a sheep and a goat, and these had the appearance of having been there as long as his own. Had he by some means drawn one or both of them near him for warmth? Possibly, but it is not a satisfactory explanation for anyone who has seen the place itself.

To my mind the facts suggest murder. It is fruitless to make wild guesses at the motive for such a deed. But if the poor boy was murdered by a fellow-Briton, his assailant would have every reason to wish to conceal his crime. He would be well aware that the boy's relatives would make a search. If he were merely dragged to the end of the fissure his whereabouts would soon be discovered. But if a dead sheep and goat were roughly thrown down close to him in that dark recess, it would be most improbable that any search would be carried on beyond them.

The human bones have been given to the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons. They are as follows: skull, right scapula, both clavicles, right humerus, both ulnæ, right radius, pelvis, left femur, left tibia, several ribs, and twenty-two vertebrae.