

EXCAVATIONS AT REYNARD'S CAVE, DOVEDALE, 1959.

By J. H. KELLY.

A SELECTIVE excavation of Reynard's Cave was undertaken in 1959 by members of the City of Stoke-on-Trent Museum Archaeological Society. No records of any previous excavation have been traced. The aim was to establish whether there was any evidence of human occupation and, if so, during which periods. The evidence obtained indicated visitation rather than occupation of the cave in the Neolithic, Romano-British and medieval periods.

Thanks are due to the owner, Sir William Fitzherbert, for permission to carry out the excavation. For reports on the pottery, we are grateful to Professor Stuart Piggott, Dr. Isobel Smith, Curator of the Avebury Museum, Mr. Norman Cook, Director of the Guildhall Museum, and Mr. David Clarke, Keeper of Antiquities in the Leicester Museum.

THE SITE.

The cave is situated on the Derbyshire side of the river Dove between Bostern Grange and Sharplow Dale (Nat. Grid Ref. 145525). With the adjacent Reynard's Kitchen, it is approximately 120 ft. above the present river level in the face of the limestone cliff. It has a small platform, the edge of which ends in the cliff face. The cave may be reached by leaving the riverside path and scrambling up the scree through a fine natural arch, which pierces a massive spur of rock. The southern corner of the cave platform lies about 20 yds. beyond this arch. The platform widens rapidly, reaching its maximum breadth in front of the cave entrance; it then tapers sharply, terminating in the cliff face.

The entrance is 16 ft. wide and 10 ft. high. The cave runs horizontally into the rock with its floor and roof parallel. The walls rise almost vertically for between 3

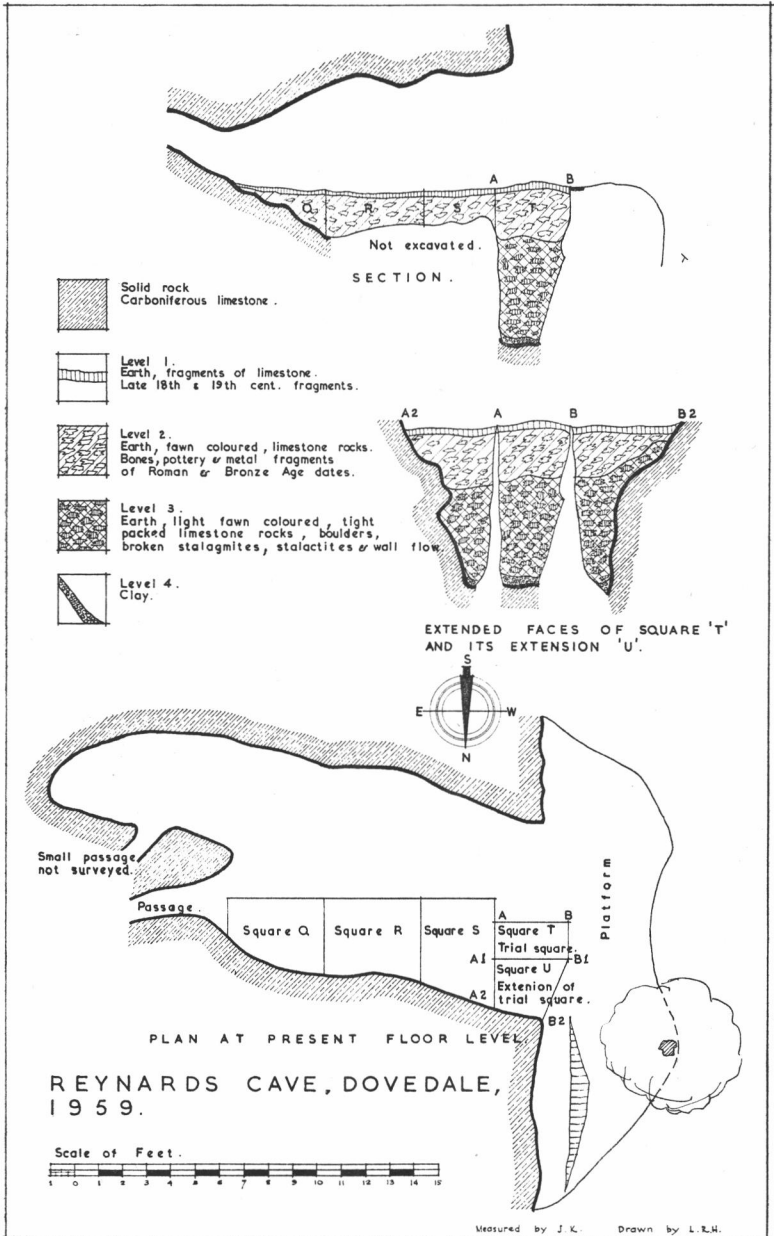


FIG. 17. Reynard's Cave — sections and plan.

and 4 ft. and then arch over to form the roof. The rear of the cave is divided, one portion ending in a vertical face, the other rapidly degenerating into a narrow and rising rock passage.

METHOD OF EXCAVATION.

A trial square, T on plan (Fig. 17), was excavated first. This area in the cave entrance away from the more easily accessible edge of the platform was chosen as the most likely to yield traces of occupation. Owing to the depth of accumulated deposits it was found necessary to include square U. Bed rock was reached at 13 ft. 9 in. below the present floor level; the north wall sloped in towards the line AB until at bed rock the cave floor was reduced to little more than a fissure. After excavation, these squares were refilled to give sufficient space for the spoil from the other squares to be excavated.

Layers 3 and 4 in squares T and U proved to be archaeologically sterile, apart from 12 bird bones and a rodent's incisor, so the remaining squares Q, R, S were not excavated below layer 2.

Description of Layers.

1. A darkish grey, loamy soil containing small fragments of limestone rock, charcoal, tins, and pottery dating from about 1800 to the present day.
2. Lightly packed, mid-grey loamy soil with pieces of limestone rock of varying sizes up to approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt., fragments of charcoal, together with all the finds detailed in the list (p. 120).
3. Tightly packed, fawn coloured soil with pieces of limestone rock of varying sizes up to approximately 2 cwt., broken stalactites, calcite wall flow, 12 bird bones, and the claw of a small rodent.
4. Dark brown clay.

CONCLUSION.

During the excavation in squares T and U, the depth reached was almost 6 ft. lower than the visible rock on the edge of the cave platform. This rock face is continuous along the whole perimeter of the platform, and its

top limit coincides with the junctions of layers 2 and 3. This implies that, prior to the formation of layer 2, the floor of the cave would have been a watershed, as water percolating into the cave would have been trapped behind this wall making the cave uninhabitable. The clay of layer 4 appears to substantiate this, as its presence suggests that it is a deposit carried down from layer 3.

The lack of visible stratigraphy within the periods covered by layer 2 was most disappointing, but certain features may account for this. Considering its limited thickness for the long period covered by the finds, its build-up was very slow; roof falls occurred, and roots from the tree standing on the edge of the platform have penetrated through this layer. From the slight evidence obtained for any one period and the absence of any hearth where it might be expected in squares T or U, it seems that the cave was never used as more than a temporary shelter.

THE FINDS (Plate XIII).

NEOLITHIC.

Pottery.

1. Rim fragment, incised on edge, hard, grey brown broken surface (no. 1).
2. Body fragment, slightly darker than above (no. 2).

Flints.

1. Scraper, 1.1 in. x 0.8 in. (no. 3).
2. Scraper, 1.1 in. x 0.9 in. (no. 4).

Professor Stuart Piggott writes:

I find it very difficult to make any useful comments on these, but I am not convinced that they are Neolithic, though in our ignorance of material from Derbyshire, they may in fact be a local version of what one might call Ebbsfleet ware in the south of England. The rim with the decoration on it might suggest this.

Report by Dr. Isobel Smith:

Pottery: I have no first-hand knowledge of the Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery of Derbyshire, and the following comments are therefore made with some reserve.

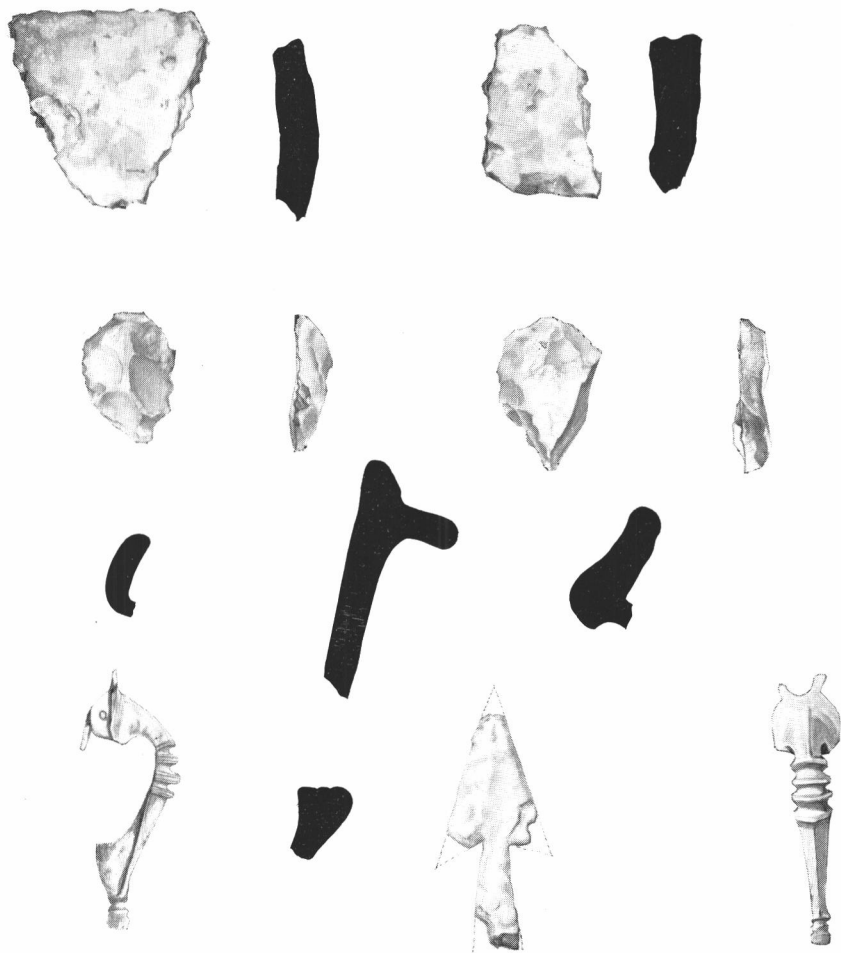


PLATE XIII. Pottery (1-2, 5-7, 9), flints (3-4) and metal objects (8, 10) from Reynard's Cave. Scale rather over $\frac{1}{2}$.

Form: Both fragments appear to have come from round-bottomed bowls; the rim sherd from an open bowl with greatest diameter at the rim; the other piece from near a thick, round bottom. The latter shows a typical ring-joint at the top.

Decoration: The oblique impressions on the rim, possibly made with a fingernail, are diagnostic for Ebbsfleet ware in the south, where, however, they normally appear on bowls with neck and shoulder.

Fabric: The heavy ware, with large angular rock fragments protruding from the surface, would in the south be diagnostic for the later Mortlake style of Peterborough ware.

I would therefore agree with Professor Piggott's tentative attribution to the Ebbsfleet variety of Peterborough ware, which in Yorkshire and Derbyshire appears to develop some variant forms. Comparison may be made with sherds from Weaverthorpe¹ and perhaps also with a pot from Rains Cave, Longcliffe, Derbyshire.² The sherds from High Wheeldon Cave, Buxton, with fingernail and punched decoration may afford the best analogies.³ The sherd illustrated in Plate B, 6 seems to belong to a similar shallow bowl; and the description of the sherd illustrated in Plate A, 2 as resembling "nut chocolate" in fracture could apply equally well to the pieces from Reynard's Cave.

Flints: There is no necessary relationship between these and the pottery. The intact scraper is similar in shape, size and to some extent in retouch, to those characteristically found with beakers on occupation sites. But it is not certainly of beaker type, and these small forms also occur sporadically in other Neolithic contexts. The most interesting feature is the treatment of the bulbar end, which has been retouched to make a thick, blunt point. The tip shows heavy wear and silica lustre can be seen on the bulbar surface, suggesting that it may have been used for enlarging small holes in wood. The burnt and

¹ Newbiggin, *P.P.S.*, 1937, 189 ff., Pl. XVI, 8, 10.

² Ward, *D.A.J.*, XI (1889), 31 ff., Pl. II, 3.

³ Jackson, *D.A.J.*, LXXI (1951), 72 ff.

broken fragment seems to come from a much larger scraper which had been retouched along one side as well as at the end.

ROMANO-BRITISH.

Report by Norman Cook and David Clarke:

Pottery.

1. Body fragment, buff, trailed slip decoration. Castor ware, 160-180.
2. Body fragment, dark coated outside only on buff clay. Castor ware, 160-180.
3. Body fragment, dark coated on light grey body, with traces of white slip decoration. Castor ware, 4th century.
4. Body fragment, dark coated in and out, white body. Castor ware, 4th century.
5. Body fragment, red on buff. Castor ware, 4th century.
6. Rim fragment, dark grey polished, diameter 5 in. Castor ware, 2nd century (no. 5).
7. Rim fragments (6) and body fragments (3), flanged cooking pot, diameter, c. $7\frac{3}{4}$ in., mid-grey. 4th century (no. 6).
8. Cooking pot rim fragment, diameter c. 7 in. Hard, mid-grey, rough surface. Derbyshire ware, mid-3rd century.
9. Cooking pot rim fragment, diameter c. $7\frac{3}{4}$ in. Hard, dirty-grey, rough surface. Derbyshire ware, mid-3rd century (no. 7).

Metal.

1. Bronze fibula, Collingwood Type R. Mid-2nd century (no. 8).
2. Ox goad, bronze ferrule, 9 in. long, diameter 0.5 in. Traces of wood inside around a quadrangular iron spike 1.1 in. in length. Romano-British origin.

MEDIEVAL.

Pottery.

Rim fragment flattened, diameter c. 9 in. Hard, mid-grey coarse surface decorated on rim graffito (no. 9).

Metal.

1. Iron arrow head, maximum breadth 8 in., 2 in. long, hollow centre (no. 10).
2. Iron bolt arrow, 2.6 in. long to a maximum width at hollow base, 0.4 in. diameter, octagonal in form.
3. Debased long-cross penny, Henry III, 1248-50.

Stone.

Fragment of millstone, 45 degrees of full circle weighing 10 lbs. with 8 grooves on one surface. The estimated weight of the complete stone would have been about 80 lbs.

UNCLASSIFIED.

Worked bones.

1. Bone pin 4.2 in. long by 0.4 in. maximum thickness, bone split longitudinally, highly polished with use.
2. Bone 3.4 in. long, cut off square at both ends.
3. Bone 1.8 in. long, 0.2 in. thick, cut off square at both ends.
4. Pointed bone sliver 2 in. long, maximum thickness 0.4 in.

Metal.

1. Flat piece of iron 3.6 in. long, 0.6 in. wide, 0.2 in. thick.
2. Slightly serrated piece of lead, about 3.5 x 0.4 x 0.2 in.
3. Cast piece of bronze, irregular shape, 1 oz. in weight.
4. Six corroded iron nails.

Pottery.

120 unglazed coarse pottery fragments.

The finds, which also included animal and bird bones (cow, sheep, pig, horse, bear, dog, swan or goose), have been deposited in Buxton Museum.