



Palæolithic Man in East Berks.

By Llewellyn Treacher, F.G.S.

1.—COOKHAM AND MAIDENHEAD.

FROM Cookham to Maidenhead the Thames flows in a north and south direction through a valley about two miles wide between the hills of Cliveden and Taplow Court on the east and of Cookham Dean and Pinkney's Green on the west. On the east side the wall of the valley rises direct from the river in a cliff-like slope to a height of about 140 feet above the present stream, while on the west the land ascends in a succession of terraces for about 80 feet and then abruptly to over 200 feet above the river. Owing to the southerly dip of the underlying strata—Chalk and Tertiary Beds—the western boundary of the valley which is over 200 feet above the river at Cookham Dean, descends near Maidenhead to not more than 80 or 90 feet. As shown many years ago by Mr. W. Whitaker, F.R.S.,* three distinct terraces may be traced at intervals from Cookham to Maidenhead at heights of about 80, 30 and 10 feet above the bottom of the valley. These figures are only approximate as the surface levels vary considerably within short distances. Each of these terraces is covered with a thick deposit of gravel, which was probably formed and then left behind by the river as it worked its way downwards and eastwards in the process of excavating its valley. It is the highest or oldest that is of most interest to archæologists, as it contains the relics of Palæolithic Man in the shape of his stone tools or weapons. The gravel of this terrace is from 10 to 15 feet in thickness, and it extends, with a few breaks caused by side valleys, from north of Cookham Rise to some distance south of Maidenhead railway station. In breadth it varies from a quarter of a mile to nearly a mile, and the surface levels are from 70 to 90 feet above the Thames at the nearest point.

Previous to the year 1889, several much abraded Palæolithic implements had been found in the low level gravel near Taplow

* Memoir on Sheet 7 of the Geological Survey Maps, 1864, and in *Geology of London*, Vol. I., 1889.

station, by Mr. J. Rutland and others. On January 21st in that year, I paid my first visit to Maidenhead and Cookham, with the object of finding out if implements occurred in the high terrace, that being about the same level above the river as the gravel in which I had found them at Ruscombe and other places. I examined all the sections then open, and during the day discovered lying on the gravel heaps in the pits, or among gravel spread on new roads, 4 or 5 good specimens and several broken ones. This, together with the fact that the workmen appeared to know nothing about the implements, seems to show that they had not been found here before. From then to the present time, I have found, or have heard of the finding of, at least 200 more. They are by no means common, the large number being accounted for by the many pits which have been opened during that time, often only for temporary purposes. The precise localities in which the implements have been discovered are in a pit just west of Cookham railway station, a little north of the Furze Platt, in several pits about Maidenhead Cemetery, the Workhouse and Boyn Hill, and in King's pit or Shoppenhangers, just south of Maidenhead station. In most cases they occur as isolated specimens at all depths in the gravel, often close to the surface, and flakes are rare. In one instance only, near the Furze Platt, has anything approaching a Palæolithic workshop been found. In this case a considerable number of implements were discovered close together at the bottom of the gravel, resting on the chalk in a layer of large unrolled flints mixed with fine sand at a depth of about 12 feet from the surface, the gravel above them being well stratified. Many flakes were found among the implements, but they were both almost entirely confined to one end of the pit within a space of a few yards. While that end of the pit was being worked, the men often found 4 or 5 specimens in a week, while at the other end they might search carefully for a month without finding one. This finding of implements with flakes in small patches is by no means an unusual occurrence. I have noticed the same at Caversham, Ruscombe, and other places. I am inclined to think that Palæolithic Man sought out spots where suitable flints were easily obtainable, probably on the banks of a stream, and there he sat down and chipped out his tools, and for some unknown reason left them about in quantities with the waste flakes. Then the stream shifted its course, or a flood of waters came and spread a deposit of gravel over the place, covering up past recovery, the result of his labours. At the same time, the flood would take up some of the

implements and roll them about among the gravel or wash them down stream. In this way we may account for the isolated specimens found which are almost all much abraded. Of course Palæolithic Man may have dropped some of them in the water and so have lost them in the same way as his Neolithic successors did their stone axes, which are often dredged from the bottom of the present rivers. I have one Palæolithic implement found while digging a hole on Pinkney's Green at a height far above the gravel terrace. Could this have been one which its owner lost while hunting the Mammoth on Maidenhead Thicket?

The Palæolithic implements from the Maidenhead-Cookham district are, on the whole, of types different to those found in other parts of the Thames valley. The sharp-rimmed oval is almost unknown. The pear-shaped form with a wrought butt is very rare; only 3 or 4 specimens can be considered as belonging to this elsewhere common type. An axe-like implement with a straight cutting edge is of frequent occurrence, as is also a small pointed tool about 4 inches long, made from a nodule of flint, the butt end being left in its natural state unwrought. Many specimens have a lengthened oval outline, flat on one side and rising on the other from a broad thin point to a remarkably thick butt. In general, the implements are not well wrought, being often nothing but nodules of flint with a few chips taken from them to bring them to a point. Few show anything like the fine workmanship of the specimens from Caversham, discovered by Dr. Stevens and deposited by him in the Reading Museum. In length they vary from 8 to 3 inches, the usual size being $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. They are all of flint with the exception of one from the Furze Platt, which is made of part of a pebble of quartzite.

In the Palæolithic Terrace gravel I have found no traces of bones, and in the lower terraces no implements, except at Taplow (see above). In the great pits at Taplow, large quantities of teeth and bones of Mammoth, Horse and other mammalia have been found in level gravel, as mentioned by Dr. Stevens in his paper "on the Earliest known Traces of Man in the Thames Valley Drift at Reading," published in the Transactions of the Berks Archæological Society for 1881-1882.