



Palæolithic Man in East Berks.

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2.—RUSCOMBE AND TWYFORD.

ANOTHER locality in East Berks where traces of Palæolithic Man, or rather of his handiwork, have been discovered is the low hill on the east side of the village of Twyford, part of which is in that parish and part in the parish of Ruscombe. The summit of the hill, which rises to an elevation of about 60 feet above the bottom of the Loddon valley close by, forms a nearly level plateau bounded by a line joining the following points :—Twyford Vicarage, Grove Hall, Ruscombe Brickfield, Northbury Farm, Ruscombe Church and the top of Stanlake Hill. Beyond these limits the surface levels descend on all sides so that the hill is entirely cut off from any higher ground by intervening valleys.

All over the highest part there is spread a deposit of gravel, generally very thin, but in some places filling hollows of considerable depth in the underlying clays and sands of the Reading Beds, of which the mass of the hill is composed. It is in this gravel that, during the last eight or nine years, Palæolithic implements have been found. From its composition it appears to belong partly to the Loddon valley gravel, and partly to that of the Thames, and it was probably at or near this place that the two streams met when they flowed at this higher level. At that time the contours of the land in this neighbourhood must have been very different from what they are at present, in fact there are few places which so well show the effect of the enormous amount of denudation the surface of the country has undergone since the days of Palæolithic Man. While this gravel was being deposited by the river, high ground, a southward continuation of Bowsey Hill, extended right across what is now Ruscombe Lake as far as Haines Hill, forming a barrier which prevented the Thames taking a straight course past Waltham to Bray and Windsor, and turned it northward round the hills of Henley and Marlow. During the ages which have passed since then, and while the Thames and Loddon have been working their way to lower levels, the whole of this part of the old wall of the valley has been gradually washed

away, and the gravel at Ruscombe, instead of forming a terrace along a hill-side as at Cookham, now occurs as a capping to an isolated hill. The Ruscombe gravel being in the same relative position to, and at about the same height above, the present river as the Palæolithic terrace gravel at Cookham and Maidenhead, it is only reasonable to suppose that the two deposits were nearly or quite contemporaneous, and that the makers of the stone implements found in each lived at the same time.

In the year 1890, Mr. O. A. Shrubsole, F.G.S., read a paper before the Geological Society of London on "The Valley Gravels about Reading." * In it he mentioned having found a flint implement on a road in Twyford where some gravel had been newly laid down, and that he had also obtained a few specimens from the Ruscombe pits.

My attention was first drawn to the subject by finding a small implement of Palæolithic type on the surface of a field near the Ruscombe brickyard, on February 6th, 1888. This specimen is now in the Reading Museum. On my showing it to Dr. Stevens he advised me to carefully watch all the places where gravel was being dug in the neighbourhood, and I have been rewarded for so doing by finding, or obtaining through the workmen, at Ruscombe and Twyford, a collection of over 80 perfect implements besides a considerable number of broken and unfinished specimens and a few flakes. Unfortunately nearly all the best gravel had been worked out long before the presence of Palæolithic implements was suspected and consequently large numbers must have been broken on the roads and lost beyond recovery. Most of those preserved were found in the Ruscombe brickfield while the top soil and gravel was being removed to get at the clay; and I have to thank Mr. R. L. Cotterell, the proprietor, for kindly allowing me to examine the sections whenever I wished to do so. I have also obtained a few from a now disused gravel pit on Northbury Farm, and one or two from the Great Western Railway cutting while the line was being widened in 1891-2. These places are all on the highest part of Ruscombe hill. Gravel also occurs in a succession of terraces along the north-western slope of the hill down to the banks of the Loddon. On one of these terraces, at a level of about 30 feet above the river, the greater part of the village of Twyford is built. In this gravel, which is often more than 10 feet thick, several pits have

* *Quart. Journ. Geol. Soc.*, vol. 46, p. 582.

been dug, and from them I have obtained at least a dozen implements. They are ochreous in colour, and are all somewhat abraded, and were doubtless derived, with the gravel in which they were found, from the higher level at Ruscombe.

Most of the Ruscombe implements occur as single specimens at the base of the gravel resting on the underlying clay, some having actually sunk a little way into the clay itself. In two instances there were four or five implements lying near together with waste flakes, and the edges of both being quite sharp and unworn, they had probably been made at or near the spots where they were found. I have also noticed, in the same position at the bottom of the gravel, some very large unrolled flints of a size greater than any ordinary stream could move along a clay floor, and as the nearest outcrop of chalk from which they could have been derived is at least two miles away some force different from mere running water must have brought them here. The presence of large stones in such a position is sometimes accounted for by supposing that the river often contained masses of floating ice which carried fragments of rock from one part of the valley to another. This may have been the case here, as the Ruscombe gravel having been formed in an angle of the stream and close to the edge of the valley this was a favourable place for floating ice to accumulate, and when in the summer time it melted and the stream became shallow the fresh flints would appear ready to the hands of the implement makers.

There is considerable variety both in the colour and condition of the Ruscombe implements. Those found in the brick-yard at the base of the gravel or sunk into the clay are quite sharp and fresh-looking, while above them in the gravel are some which have a very different appearance, being much bruised and worn. In colour they are either black, dark brown, grey, ochreous or, when at or near the surface of the ground, a dirty white. There is no reason to suppose that these differences in colour and condition are any test of the relative age of the implements. The evidence seems to show that the river flowed at or about this level for a very lengthened period during the whole of which Palæolithic Man may have lived along its banks. His implements found together in the same deposit may thus belong to any part of that time, and older ones may have been covered up and preserved from the first, while others made much later may have been rolled about in the bed of the stream and become much damaged and broken.

The greater number of the implements from Ruscombe and Twyford are more or less pointed, approaching in form the pear-shape or spear-head type. Some specimens are well trimmed all over, while others have their butt ends left in the natural rough state unwrought. Three fine ones, six or seven inches in length, have long narrow points with incurved sides. Sharp-rimmed oval implements are very rare, and the axe-like forms so common at Maidenhead are unknown. The smallest implement yet found is a narrow one with a sharp point and only three inches long, while the largest two (one of which is now in the Reading Museum) are of a lengthened oval shape nine inches long. Among what may be called the unfinished implements are some very interesting specimens which help to give one an idea of the way in which Palæolithic Man worked. One of these is a large flint having one end trimmed round to form the well-wrought butt of an implement. When the maker had finished this end and begun to work at the sides he seems to have struck off a too-large flake, which spoilt the appearance of his work, and then to have thrown the flint away as a failure. Another is fairly well trimmed all over with the exception of part of one side where there is a small protuberance, which proved so obstinate that there are marks of six distinct blows having been given in the attempt to remove it. Among the broken pieces sometimes found are two or three points of implements of such beauty of workmanship as to make a collector grieve to think that the other parts belonging to them are lost. Possibly the owners, having broken off the points while using the implements, simply trimmed the ends again to form fresh points. Many Neolithic celts show clear evidence that this was often done in later times.

On looking over a large collection of Palæolithic implements it is often difficult to imagine in what way and for what purpose many of them were used. The variety of shapes and sizes is so great, and it being possible to trace a regular gradation of form from the acutely pointed to the oval or even circular implement, we cannot easily put them into distinct classes or call them by any definite names. Some look as though they were made to be held in the hand, while others seem more suitable for mounting as clubs or axes. As we have no reason for supposing that Palæolithic Man was very highly civilized, he probably used his stone implements either for fighting with his fellows or for hunting wild beasts and preparing their flesh for food and their skins for clothing. A well-

known Berkshire archæologist once told me that he thought the finest specimens might possibly have been objects of worship! But then he was a collector.

Seeing that Palæolithic implements are so abundant at Maidenhead and Cookham, and again at Ruscombe, it is rather remarkable that so few have been found in the Thames valley between those places. All I know of is one which was taken to Mr. G. W. Smith, of Reading, a few years ago, by a workman, who said that he had found it in a gravel pit near Remenham Church. There is no reason to doubt the correctness of his statement, as the gravel there belongs to a terrace at about the same height above the river as the Palæolithic gravel at Maidenhead and Ruscombe. I may add that I have repeatedly searched the gravel at Remenham for implements, but hitherto without the least result. On the opposite or Oxon and Bucks side of the Thames, I have not heard of any having been found between Henley and Taplow, from both of which places I have specimens.

Since the first part of this paper was written, the largest Palæolithic implement yet discovered in the district has been found in the gravel at Maidenhead Cemetery. It is fully ten inches long, of a brown colour and in shape something like a laurel leaf. It is now in the possession of Mr. Biddell, of Boyn Hill, Maidenhead.

The Northern Genealogist, edited by A. Gibbons, F.S.A. The current number of this excellent periodical is full of interest. We notice that the Editor is about to print the Parish Register of Clay Coton, Northants. The Ayscough Monuments, Marriage Bonds of Durham, York, Carlisle and Lincoln, an Ancient Richmond Will, some Physicians' Wills, Gosberton Court Rolls, &c., constitute the contents of this number.

