

Second Report on Rowberrow Cavern.¹

BY HERBERT TAYLOR.

During the past year it became necessary to dig a deeper barrow-run, 62 feet in length and 9 feet in maximum depth, through the platform at the mouth of the cave. Over 50 tons of earth and rock were removed. Blasting had to be employed twice in dealing with the very large stalagmite-cemented boulders which underlie the upper two or three feet of earth, and these probably represent a collapsed part of the cave. The material excavated proved absolutely barren, until evidence of occupation was met with ten feet from the cave-mouth. Here, at a depth of eight feet, were found bones of pig and other animals, some charred, along with small quantities of iron-slag and charcoal; these lay upon a fairly level floor of large stalagmite-cemented boulders. The depth corresponds to the fourth foot inside the cave, and probably to the Black Band.

In addition, about 14 tons were removed from the cave itself.

FINDS.

HUMAN BONES.

A fragment of a Right Parietal bone was found in the second foot, and near it, but a foot below, part of a human molar tooth, the crown of which was much worn.

A fragment of a Left Parietal was found in the exploratory pit, in Easter 1921, close to the present finds; but its depth was uncertain, for it was discovered in the floor of the pit, then six feet deep, beneath recently fallen earth. In preservation and general appearance it corresponds with the Right Parietal, and may belong to the same individual.

OTHER BONES.

No additional species have been identified:

POTTERY.

At least eight varieties of pottery have been found: three are typical La Tène in character, the remainder Romano-British. All these varieties occur at all depths down to, and including, the Black Band, owing no doubt to disturbance by animals: but

in very different proportions at different depths. The fragments are for the most part small, and no vessel has been reconstructed.

1. The La Tène types.

70 per cent. to 80 per cent. of the fragments are found in the Black Band. The pottery is not made on the wheel; it is grey or black, with coarser or finer white granules, and resembles that from Read's Cavern, but is undecorated. One vessel may be a crucible.

2. The Romano-British.

Relatively very few fragments are found in the Black Band; they are most abundant one or two feet above it. There are at least five varieties, all wheel-made. A part of a very large vessel, with a boss or leg on the base, has been pieced together. Some of the fine pottery is engraved with a lattice pattern; of this some is black and polished, some grey, and covered externally by a light grey film.

BONE ARTIFACTS.

A flat bone article with symmetrically-grooved edge is probably a second potter's implement.

METAL ARTIFACTS.

1. Coins.

Two more coins have been found.² Like that of TETRICUS II described previously, they are British reproductions of Roman models, current at the end of the Third, and in the early part of the Fourth Centuries. They are of TETRICUS I and VALERIANUS respectively; the word HILARITAS has been attempted on the reverse of the latter.

In addition, fragments of at least four other coins have been found. All these, and the three complete specimens, come from the surface layer of "clay and stones."³

2. Weapons.

An iron arrow or lance-head, with solid tang, was found at the depth of three feet, and eighteen feet from the entrance. It is reported to be probably of Mediaeval date.²

¹ For First Report see Proceedings No. 2, p. 83.

² Kindly identified by Mr. Reginald A. Smith, British Museum.

³ Proceedings, Vol. I, No. 2, p. 84.

3. Metal and Slag.

Partly smelted iron, and slag, are fairly plentiful; the greater part, including all the heavy pieces, occurs in the Black Band.

FLINT ARTIFACTS.

Worked flints have been found at all depths above the "cemented floor," and in its surface. They include :—

An arrow-head, barbed and tanged, apparently of Bronze Age design.

A fragment of a lozenge-shaped arrowhead (?).

Scrapers; straight, concave and convex-edged.

Knives; many of these are without any retouch.

Piercing and boring tools, etc.

All these appear to be of late Neolithic or Bronze Age designs. Several fragments of chert may be roughly-worked implements; one at least appears to have been used.

STRATIFICATION AND CONCLUSIONS.

The succession of layers was described in the previous report. Unfortunately, disturbance by badgers and other animals has so mixed the contents of the upper three to five feet in many places that it is difficult to refer articles to each with certainty, and hence to decide at what period the layer was formed.

Three occupations seem to have occurred in the depth excavated, exclusive of casual occupation in mediæval and modern times.

3. ROMANO-BRITISH.

This probably corresponds to the lowest foot of the surface layer of clay and stones. There are only slight signs of stratification in this layer, it is naturally the most disturbed. It contains about 80 per cent. of the wheel-made pottery; pottery, coins and fragments, and burnt bone are more abundant in its lowest foot.

2. THE SMELTING-HEARTH, OR FORGE.

It was first suggested by Mr. Balch that the Black Band was a smelting-hearth, and to judge by the large quantity of slag,

partly smelted iron, and charcoal found in it, some adherent to coarse pottery (crucibles?) or to stones, this suggestion is possibly correct. Burnt bones of domestic and other animals are also abundant.

With regard to the date of the occupation, the following points may be considered:—

(a) The Black Band, where undisturbed, is a well-defined layer, distinct from that of clay and stones.

(b) Comparatively little slag, or partly-smelted iron occurs in the superficial layers; much, including all the heavy masses, in the Black Band.

(c) All the Romano-British coins and fragments were found in the material above this layer.

(d) From 70 per cent. to 80 per cent. of the La Tène type of pottery is found in the Black Band, including all the larger fragments, in spite of the relative thinness of the layer. No pottery has been found below it. On the other hand the Romano-British pottery is abundant in the lower part of the layer of clay and stones, very scanty in the Black Band.

(e) The proximity of Read's Cavern, an Early Iron Age station. With regard to the pottery, it is of course not improbable that the two types were in use together in an outlying station; the distribution of the fragments may show merely a gradual transition from one to the other. But disturbance by animals is at least as probable an explanation of the occurrence of the two side by side; the sharp boundary of the layer where undisturbed, and the sudden cessation of the iron industry, seem to indicate a complete change of occupation rather than a transition period.

The provisional conclusion is that the Black Band is of early Iron Age, or possibly early Romano-British date.

1. LATE NEOLITHIC, OR BRONZE AGE.

The flint implements appear to indicate an occupation at some earlier period, probably during the Bronze Age.

They have been found at all depths down to the "Cemented Floor" (the layer which underlies the Black Band), and in its surface, but not below it. They are not abundant in that floor, and but little more abundant in the foot or so immediately above

it than nearer the surface. In the small area where the Black Band is separated from the cemented floor, several were found embedded in red earth between the two layers. The flints have not come into the cave with earth from the hill-side, for the earth moved in digging the barrow-run, was found quite barren of flint except close to the mouth of the cave.

The formation of such a stalagmite-cemented floor (which, although absent over large areas, is continuous with a shelf more than two feet thick running along one side of the cave), proves that for a considerable interval very little earth was accumulating; stalagmite is not being deposited to-day; no part of the Black Band or superficial layers has been found cemented. From this we may conclude:—

(a) That the formation of the "cemented floor" was probably very slow, and that the layers beneath it are much older than those above;

(b) That articles which bear a film of stalagmite probably acquired it when lying in or on that floor; *i.e.*, they are older than the Black Band. Such articles are:—

Flint implements: 31 per cent. of the whole number, but 47 per cent. of those found near areas where the stalagmite is present, *i.e.*, where there was a drip. The percentage would be still higher if small specimens and flakes were excluded. It has been said that these appear to be of the late Neolithic or Bronze Age.

A perforated oyster shell.

Bones, some charred, of horse, deer, badger, fox and rabbit.

Charcoal.

No pottery, metal or slag has been found bearing such a film.

The present hypothesis is therefore that the flints and the stalagmite-coated articles belong to a late Neolithic, or Bronze Age, layer, which lay originally on the cemented floor, but was largely remixed by subsequent occupation and by animals.

The "Second Bone Layer," which lies from two to three feet deeper, has not been excavated any further. It is hoped to reach it again during the present year.