

RECORDS, CATALOGUES AND LAYERS AT GOUGH'S CAVE

by

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Archaeological work at the caves up to 1953 was revised and interpreted, to the best of my ability, in 1955. I am very glad that more information has been extracted from the material by the present contributors. I return to the subject only to comment on one or two matters which were not discussed in 1955, and which have concerned the present authors.

Parry's Records

The first report of Parry's excavations (1927-1931) to appear in a learned journal was in *Nature* for 10th November, 1928 (Parry, 1928) where it is explained that 'Owing to the increasing number of visitors . . . it became advisable . . . to enlarge the entrance'. This 'necessary work' was carried out systematically in the hope of throwing light on earlier finds which had been made without any useful records being kept. After explaining the method of digging in layers (see below), Parry writes 'A careful record was kept of all finds, so that it is possible to refer any specimen to both its horizontal and vertical position in the deposits.'

This statement seems explicit, but strangely the next report (Parry, 1929) does not corroborate it. The primary purpose of the work has now become archaeological ('With the object of throwing some light on the earlier finds . . . an excavation . . . was commenced'). Parry repeats that 'a daily record of all finds was kept' but reference to the records of the horizontal positions of finds is omitted.

What are we to make of this? Records of horizontal position are neither referred to again, nor used in the reports. The only indications that account was taken of the position of finds in a horizontal sense are:

(a) the attribution in J. . Davies's account of the flints (pp. 106-111 in Parry, 1929) of finds to the right or left (i.e. south or north) sides of the path, the area of the latter being then unexcavated. Finds from the two sides are labelled accordingly.

(b) The 'datum line at the cave mouth' referred to by N. C. Cooper (p. 118) in Parry, 1929). It is possible that distances of important finds were measured from such a datum, and that they were the sources of remarks (same page) that the fragments of the adult skull were found seven feet apart. If such measurements were made they were not used in writing the account.

(c) One find, the second 'bâton', was marked on the plan (Parry, 1929, p. 103).

In the 1931 report the only reference to horizontal position is the remark on p. 49 that the splinter of the 1903 'bâton' must have been at least eight feet from the original find.

With the above exceptions none of the specialists' reports in either 1929 or 1931 refer to the horizontal position of finds, or to the relationships of the finds to stratification in the sense of cultural horizons, hearths, etc. They all refer to layer numbers, which as we know were marked on finds, and this is all the information given.

The Museum Catalogue

I have already remarked that, in general, only layer numbers were written on finds. This being so, it is difficult to see how a catalogue of finds could have been kept at the time of excavation, or compiled later, since there would have been no way of referring to individual finds unless they were sketched, a method used by H. E. Balch at Badger Hole, Wookey Hole (1938-1952), and by other workers.

Tratman (1975, p. 16) records that in the early 1960s he and the late Gerald Robertson, then Manager at Cheddar, 'compiled a catalogue of the finds in the museum. Special attention was given to the Upper Palaeolithic flint implements.' This catalogue, of course, could not have contained any original excavation data. Tratman further recorded that in 1974 he examined (and counted) the 'uncatalogued flint fragments in the store' – uncatalogued, that is, by Tratman and Robertson in the early 1960s.

Oakley (1980, p. 29, footnote 6) referred to 'a register of the Gough's Cave finds shown to the author [K. P. Oakley] in 1954 by the late Curator Mr Gerald Robertson.' On the same page Oakley quotes Register numbers of human and animal bones, which include finds by both R. C. Gough (Cheddar Man) and R. F. Parry. This register was said to have recorded the position of a reindeer jaw analysed on behalf of Oakley as being above the Cheddar Man skeleton. In a letter dated 27 May 1975, in which he sent me a draft of the Cheddar information published in his 1980 paper, Oakley wrote:

Tratman will not believe that I obtained a sample for analysis of a reindeer bone found above Gough's Cave 1 [Cheddar Man], because he does not know of it. On the contrary I sampled a reindeer bone which was in a catalogue of finds shown to me by the late Mr. Robertson. I have the impression that Tratman is unaware of what happened to this Old Register. I have copied from the Old Register in the mid 1950's full details of all the bones from Gough's Cave which were analysed for me in the Dept. of the Government Chemist. Certainly I am not prepared to suppress the analytical information which I have about the reindeer bone which occurred above the skeleton of Cheddar Man.

It was, no doubt, as a result of Oakley's representations to Tratman that the latter (1976, p. 123) referred to 'his [Parry's] catalogue, which was still in existence about 1950.'

I first visited Gough's Cave (other than as a tourist) last in 1950 with Oakley whose visit was for the purpose of sampling Cheddar Man for fluorine analysis in the presence of Lord Bath, the young Viscount Weymouth, and Gerald Robertson. We did not then go into the question of catalogues or records. It was on this visit that we found, to our dismay, that excavations had been taking place without any records being kept, and

without the knowledge of archaeologists. Oakley asked me to do what I could to record the excavations, resulting in my paper of 1955. I paid a number of visits to the cave in 1951, 1952 and early 1953, and was in the Museum and the manager's office various times. Robertson was friendly and helpful and I find it slightly odd that he did not show me the register referred to by Oakley (1980), though of course I was working on the excavations and not on the finds. Tratman was visiting the caves at the same period to study finds, and he did not see the register either. Oakley paid one or more visits to Cheddar but I was not present on these occasions.

The nature, origin and fate of this register is thus a mystery. I am sorry that I cannot throw any light on it, and I fear that it will remain a mystery unless the register itself turns up.

Parry's Layers

Parry, or rather, I suppose, the head guide Victor Painter and his assistants, dug in the 6-inch 'layers' referred to in numerous places by the present authors. Parry wrote (1929, p. 104) 'The layers were not dead level but followed the dip of the cave', by which he presumably meant the downward slope from the entrance. He later wrote, after the excavations had been extended further towards the mouth of the cave, that 'the layers approximate very nearly, and vary only by a few inches from those described in the previous report' (1931, p. [46]). This leaves it unclear as to whether the 6-inch layers were measured exactly, or were deviated from to follow the stratigraphy.

Victor Painter was still head guide when I first visited Gough's Cave in 1950, and was responsible for the excavations which had been done before the visit by Oakley and myself late in 1950. I am sorry to report that I never questioned him about the layers in the Parry excavations. My reason was that I felt that Parry's layering was artificial, and I feared that I might embarrass Painter if I questioned him closely about it, and might have betrayed my scepticism. Looking back, I wish I had done so.

When I wrote my 1955 paper I found it very difficult to believe that the natural stratification had corresponded at all closely to artificial 6-inch layers; I still find this very hard to believe. The point can be appreciated by comparing the left hand part of my Figure 16, based on published data, with the right hand part (from A to E) based on my own observations. The conglomerate, introduced, as now seems probable, from the Gorge outside (Collcutt, this volume) is most unlikely to have been constant in thickness both along the length of the cave and across its width, as implied by Parry.

The layer system of course has an inherent uncertainty, in that finds recorded from the same layer could have been associated or as much as 6 inches apart vertically, and finds recorded as from adjacent layers could have been a fraction of an inch, or as much as twelve inches, apart. This may or may not matter much, depending on one's view as to the amount of disturbance the deposits had suffered by human or natural processes. The authors in this volume are right to treat the relationships implied by layer numbers with great caution.

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- TRATMAN, E. K. 1976. A Late Upper Palaeolithic calculator (?), Gough's Cave, Cheddar, Somerset. *Proc. Univ. Bristol Spelaeol. Soc.*, 14 (2), 123-129. (Note that in this paper figure 33.2, which is a reprint of figure 4.2 in the previous paper, is wrongly captioned.)

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