

ROMANO-BRITISH USAGE OF THE CAVES OF CHEDDAR GORGE

by

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ABSTRACT

A catalogue of all extant and reasonably recorded lost Romano-British material derived from the caves of Cheddar Gorge is presented. The vast majority of finds are from the third and fourth century. The smaller and relatively inaccessible caves (Sun Hole, Soldiers Hole) were used as hideaways, but the larger caves (Goughs Old Cave, Long Hole) saw domestic occupation, and possibly metalworking activity.

INTRODUCTION

Cheddar Gorge on the southern edge of the Mendip Hills contains a number of caves, both large and small, and parts of the largest cave (Gough's New Cave) are now a major tourist attraction. Although the significance of several of these caves for prehistoric studies is well established, the evidence for Romano-British activity in some caves is less well known. The present article, which is part of a wider study being undertaken by the authors into Romano-British cave usage, aims to outline what is known of the usage in the caves in this period and to catalogue the extant material. Only a limited discussion of the significance of the activity is presented as a wider discussion is intended to appear in due course.

THE CAVES AND THE HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

Six caves are considered in this paper: Sun Hole, Soldier's Hole, Pride Evans' Hole, Gough's Old Cave, Gough's New Cave and Long Hole. They fall into two broad groups, the smaller caves higher up the gorge (the first three sites) and the three large caves grouped tightly together near the bottom of the gorge. Both Sun and Soldier's Holes open on to the side of the gorge some 45 m above its floor and are difficult of access; they are more or less opposite each other a little up the gorge from the larger caves. Both are 8-10 m long, ending in choked passages, several metres wide and high enough to admit a man without difficulty. Sun Hole was excavated by Tratman and Henderson (1928), though it had probably seen treasure hunting activity at some previous time. Subsequent work in 1951-4 by A. G. Davies, C. D. Ollier and J. W. Jackson examined only the lower, Pleistocene layers as did later work by Campbell and Colcut. Soldier's Hole was examined by R. F. Parry and H. E. Balch in 1928-30 (Balch, 1928; Balch, 1935; Parry, 1930).

Pride Evans' Hole, a short roomy cave occupied by Pride Evans c. 1810 (and

enlarged by him), lies on the north side of the gorge more or less below Sun Hole some 15 m above the gorge floor, at the top of a scree slope. Only a single casual find of archaeological material is known from the site and, as we shall see, its provenance may be dubious.

The larger caves — Gough's Old and New, and Long Hole (to which must be added 'The Slitter', a dump of material derived from them) — form a group, the highest of which is Long Hole. This is a large chamber up to 18.2 m high, 7.6 m wide and 86 m long, with various choked passages leading off, reached by a steep climb 30 m above the gorge floor. Most of the material forming 'The Slitter' was probably derived from it. Directly below Long Hole but nearer the gorge floor, and originally reached by a gentle slope from it, is Gough's Old Cave. This, the former show cave run by R. C. Gough, was extensively modified in the nineteenth century and is basically a tunnel-like cave, widening from the entrance and splitting into two passages at the back. Its original dimensions are not certain, but it was some 10 m long, 2.4–7.3 m wide and high enough for easy access. Below Gough's Old Cave is Gough's New Cave, the present show cave which has been extensively cleared and extended. Again the form is tunnel-like with two branches at the back and a side passage to the left. It seems likely that its floor was removed in the Iron Age but it is likely that deep floor deposits had accumulated again by the Romano-British period, allowing only the use of the front part of the cave (pers. comm. R. Jacobi). The actual dimensions of the area available for use at the time must be speculative.

These larger caves clearly once held large accumulations of material, yet the work in them is poorly recorded. Gough's Old Cave was largely stripped of material by Gough in the nineteenth century and a talus outside it removed without record during the construction of the Restaurant (1936) (R. Jacobi, pers. comm.). More scientific work in this cave by E. K. Tratman (1960) revealed that very few deposits of Romano-British date remained *in situ*. Long Hole, probably the most significant of the caves in the Romano-British period, was ransacked in the nineteenth century. Much material derived from it clearly fell down the slope to form 'The Slitter' (and some probably contaminated Gough's Old Cave). 'The Slitter' itself was also removed without record in the early twentieth century (R. Jacobi, pers. comm.). The material from the New Cave was removed in the early twentieth century with little record except for some excavations by Parry (1928, 1930) and the remainder of its talus removed without record in the 1950s (R. Jacobi, pers. comm.).

Where records of any sort — except for the excavations of Tratman and Parry — exist, they are almost exclusively in the works of H. E. Balch, who was, at least up until c. 1910, writing from personal experience. However, even these accounts (Balch, 1928; 1935) and the more derivative one of Haverfield (1906) are of little use other than in confirming the provenance of extant items or adding one or two lost ones to catalogues. Great quantities of material are likely to have been lost from all three, and particularly the two higher, caves without record. In particular, considerable amounts of pottery seem to have been found in 'The Slitter' but little is extant or recorded. The extant material from the three caves is mainly in the museum of Cheddar Caves Ltd. Some of the extant, and perhaps

a few otherwise unrecorded finds are mentioned in the 'Additions to the Museum' section of the Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society for 1926 (volume 72, pages 85 to 86). However, the provenances are very generalised and the brief descriptions make correlation of the list with known finds very problematic. The provenance of the Cheddar Caves Museum material relies upon a catalogue compiled by E. K. Tratman using the existing labels in the museum (R. Jacobi, pers. comm.). It is clear that cross-contamination of material from different caves and from 'the caves' and 'The Slitter' has taken place (eg. Tratman, 1960). Thus the hook catalogued below as from Goughs Old Cave may in reality have come from Long Hole (Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, 1926). A small amount of bonework including three gaming pieces, a whistle, a carved handle and a 'socketed implement, pointed', together with an iron knife and whetstone, are recorded from Long Hole in the 'Additions to the Museum' but are otherwise undocumented. The total of 485 coins from Long Hole and the Slitter mentioned in these notes is at variance with the 375 published by Boon (1957), who provides the only modern account of any of the Romano-British material. The larger total evidently included some non-Roman items, but some coins may also have been lost without record.

THE CATALOGUES

The catalogues include all extant and reasonably recorded lost material, but it should be noted that the pottery 'reconstructions' by Balch (1935, pl. 13) are inaccurate and not all Roman, and have therefore been ignored. The following abbreviations have been used:

(L)	Lost
(C)	At Cheddar Caves Museum
(UBSS)	At the University of Bristol Spelaeological Museum
(WSM)	At Weston-Super-Mare Museum

PRIDE EVANS' HOLE

The only archaeological find from this cave is a hoard of coins, now lost, said to have consisted of 47 items ranging in reign from Gallienus to Tetricus II. However, as Balch (1935) points out, Pride Evans used and extended the cave, and Balch himself had searched it with no result. That a coin hoard eluded both is hard to credit, and since its subsequent discovery is very poorly documented its authenticity must be in doubt.

SUN HOLE

Pottery

A minimum of 8 vessels are represented by extant and recorded sherds. Three Black Burnished sherds (UBSS) are of buff fabric, there are single sherds of buff fabric (L) and of a brownish, thick, sandy fabric fired to dark grey (UBSS) and three grey-ware sherds (UBSS). Little can be said of the forms or dates represented.

Coins

1. (UBSS) Ae4 obv. bust of Constans to left, diademed, orb in hand. Rev. FEL TEMP REPARATIO. Soldier leading child to right with tree. ?Aquila mint c. 348. Very little wear with lug remaining at edge.
2. (UBSS) Barbarous radiate. Obv. bust of ?Victorinus ()S AVG. Rev. Sol; star in field. Figure to left with whip. ?INVIC Imitation. c. 268-70. Worn.
3. (UBSS) Barbarous radiate. ?Imitation of Tetricus I. Rev. ?Hilaritas. Worn.
4. (L) Crescentic fragment. ?Result of two coins being punched out of one.

Stonework

1. (L) Shale bracelet fragment.

GOUGH'S OLD CAVE

Note: the coins attributed to this cave by Boon (1957) in fact derive from Long Hole (cf. Tratman, 1960).

Pottery

A minimum of ?8 vessels are represented by 24 sherds (all UBSS):

1. Body sherd of a samian, form 38, central Gaulish bowl.
2. Rim sherd of third/fourth century Oxfordshire ware.
3. Seven sherds representing a single olla in BBI.
- 4-5. Nine sherds representing one olla and one closed mouthed jar in blackware.
6. Rim sherd of ?Congresbury ware jar.
7. Three grey-ware body sherds.
8. Three body sherds in a pale brown/buff fabric.

Coins

1. (UBSS) Unidentifiable Ae3.

Objects of Bronze

1. (C) Zoomorphic headed pin (length 8.8 cm) (Figure 1, 1) with broken and bent rectangular sectioned shaft. The head is corroded but was formed into the head of a horse with eyes and mouth indicated. The neck is decorated with raised mouldings and incised lines. Late or sub-Roman.
2. (C) Hook (length 7.8 cm) (Figure 1, 2) cast to imitate thick braided wire. The end of the straight stem has a long central notch with a small circular hole above it. A heavy but decorative item. Presumed Roman.
3. (C) Stud (length 2.8 cm). Circular-sectioned shank with groove near base. Conical head with radial incised lines.
4. (C) Bracelet fragment (original diameter c. 4.6 cm). Strip form with ribbed decoration. Probably later Roman.

Bonework

1. (C) Counter (diameter 2.3 cm). Lathe turned. Three incised concentric grooves.
- 2-3. (C) ?Ditto (diameters 1.3 cm). Without decoration.

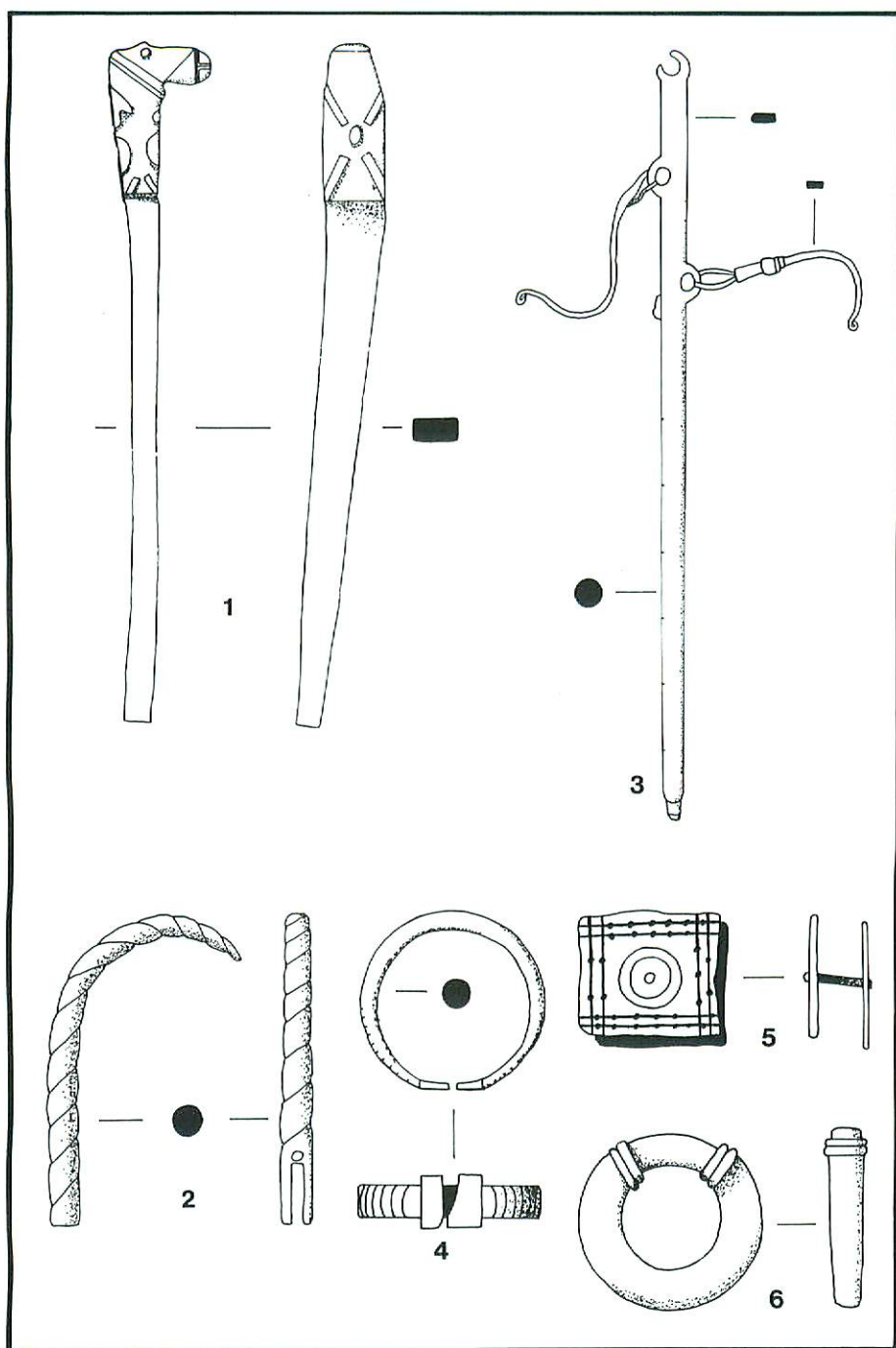


Figure 1. Ae objects (1, 4, 5 and 6, 1:1; 2 and 3, 1:2); 1 and 2, Gough's Old Cave; 3, Long Hole; 4, 5 and 6, The Slitter.

GOUGH'S NEW CAVE

Note: much bone and stone work has been omitted as probably pre-Roman.

Pottery

The only extant pottery item is a spindle wheel made from a body sherd (C). Four sherds in Tratman's catalogue of the Cheddar Caves Museum are now lost. They included two rims but were not described further. Some forty sherds, all lost, were listed but little described by Parry (1928; 1930). The material apparently included Black Burnished and grey wares and ollae and a handle.

Glass

1. (L) 'Bead with three bosses of incised circles (Tratman catalogue).

Coins

1. (WSM) Ae3 Constantine II. Gloria Romanorum type.
2. (WSM) Ae3 Valentinian.
3. (WSM) Ae3 Valens. Securitas Republicae type.
4. (WSM) Ae3 Valens. Gloria Romanorum type.

SOLDIER'S HOLE

Pottery:

The extant pottery (C) represents only sherds of one blackish-grey olla and two spindle wheel blanks (one illustrated by Balch (1928, Figure 23)).

Coins

A single coin is listed by Boon (1957); it is a radiate copy of uncertain type previously identified as of Claudius II.

Bronze Objects

The only bronze object is at Cheddar and is a pin (length 2 cm) with rectangular sectioned shaft and large round head.

Bonework

Two lathe turned counters (C) with central concave rebates (diameter 2.2 cm) are probably Romano-British (illustrated by Balch (1928, Figure 25)), as is a blank for a ?counter similarly illustrated but now lost. More uncertainty must attach to a flat needle apparently with a second eye pierced when the first broke, now lost but illustrated by Balch (1928, Figure 24). Other bonework is certainly pre-Roman.

LONG HOLE/THE SLITTER

Note: Tratman catalogued the finds from Long Hole and The Slitter separately and this precedent is followed here though the assemblage most probably ultimately derived entirely from the former. However, the coin finds are undifferentiated (though Boon (1957) erroneously attributed them partly to Gough's Old Cave, cf. Tratman (1960)).

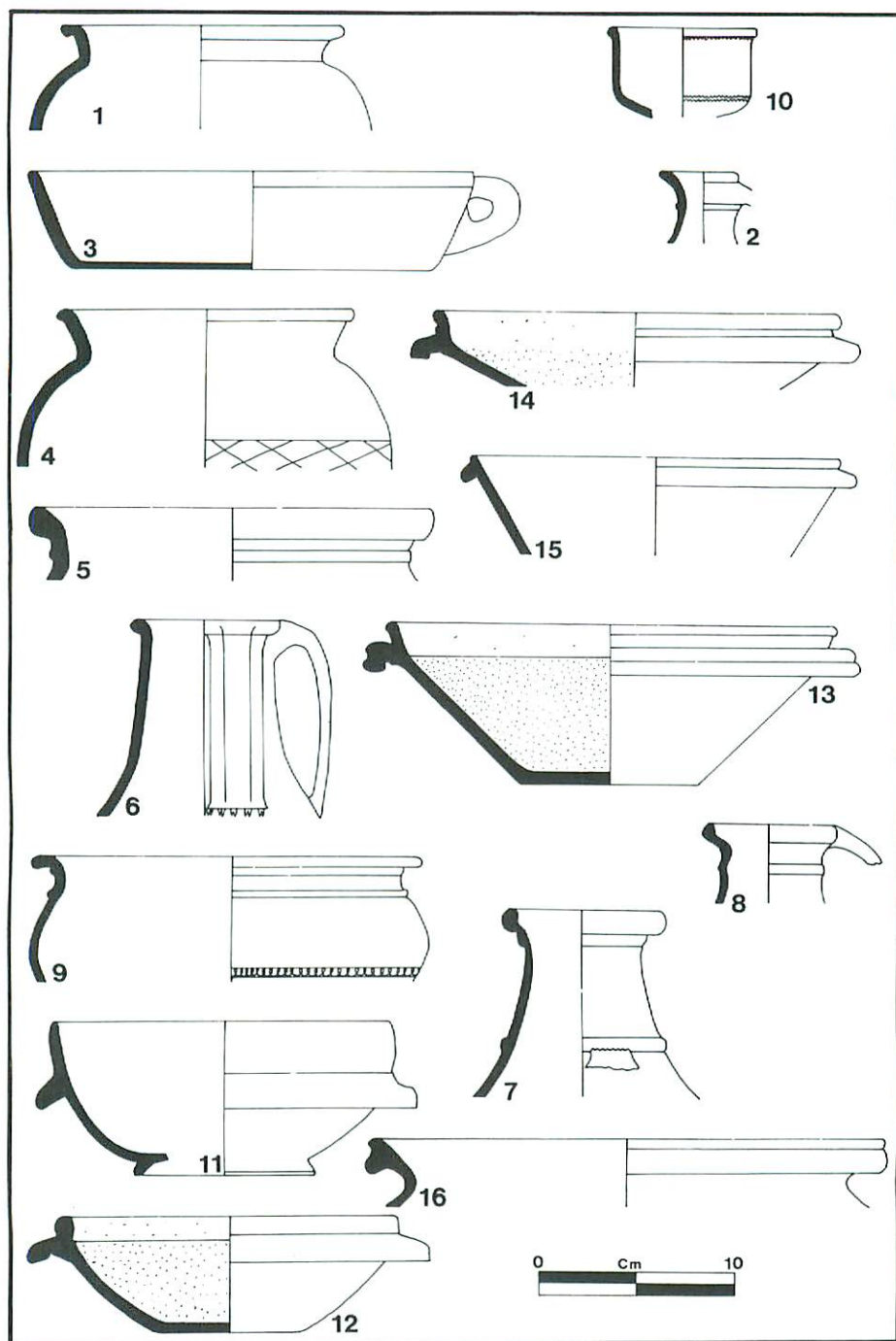


Figure 2. Pottery (1:4); 1, Soldiers Hole; 2-5, Long Hole; 6-16, The Slitter.

Pottery: Long Hole

Some twenty-seven sherds are extant at Cheddar Caves Museum, probably representing a minimum of eighteen vessels:

- 1-3. Seven sherds representing three Colour-Coated fabrics (?three vessels), viz a soft, pale buff ware with dull, blackish, slightly flaky coat (Figure 2, 2); a hard, pale grey fabric with a dull black non-flaky wash; a hard grey fabric with a glossy black coat.
- 4-8. Eight sherds of Black Burnished pie dishes representing at least five vessels, including a deep form in Gatcombe Type Fabric 36, half of an oval dish with a handle (Figure 2, 3), and three other vessels of varying depths.
- 9-10. Sherds representing two Black Burnished ware ollae (Figure 2, 4).
11. Three sherds of one or more grey ware jars.
12. A sherd of a grey ware colander.
13. A heavily restored small, dullish grey ware jar or olla.
- 14-16. Sherds of three pie dishes in local black ware, grey/brown ware and grey ware.
17. The base of a plain ?miniature greyish black olla (base diameter 4 cm).
18. Sherds of a shell gritted jar (Figure 2, 5).

Pottery: The Slitter

Rather more sherds are extant at Cheddar, representing a minimum of seventeen or eighteen vessels:

- 1-4. Flagons in Colour Coated fabrics (Figure 2, 6-8). At least three, and probably four, vessels are represented, the most interesting being two matching body sherds in an Oxford fabric with a moulded design of a female head. Also present are sherds of two or three other flagons, one with a rather narrow neck.
5. A single body sherd of a mortarium in Oxfordshire Colour Coated ware.
- 6-8. Sherds of three bowls in Oxfordshire Colour Coated ware, two globular and open mouthed (Figure 2, 9), one small and carinated (Figure 2, 10).
9. Sherds of a flanged bowl imitating samian form 38 in the same fabric (Figure 2, 11).
10. Base of a small cup in a Colour Coated fabric.
11. A single body sherd in a Colour Coated, rouletted ware.
12. Body sherds of at least one or two Colour Coated vessels with white painted and rouletted decoration.
- 13-16. Sherds representing four mortaria in hard, creamy, off-white fabric with pink red and brown trituration grits (Figure 2, 12-14).
17. Sherds of a single Black Burnished flanged bowl (Figure 2, 15).
18. Rim sherd of a flattened-rim jar in Congresbury ware (Figure 2, 16).

Glass: The Slitter

Single body sherd. Bubbly, clear, thin vessel glass. Lathe mark.

Bronze Objects: Long Hole

1. (C) Steelyard (length 19.8 cm) (Figure 1, 3). Circular sectioned arm, becoming rectangular sectioned at suspension end. Graduated end broken at very tip. One scale detectable of six slight nicks at c. 1.5 cm intervals, probably applying to end fulcrum. Two cast suspension loops on opposite ends of arm with irregular projection opposite the inner one (?casting lug). Broken pan suspension loop.
2. (C) Finger ring (diameter 2.1 cm) semi-oval section. Overlapping terminals. Alternate raised and toothed zones. ?Made from bracelet fragment.
3. (C) Finger ring (diameter 2 cm). Annular. Cast. Circular section.

4. (C) Child's bracelet (diameter c. 2.8 cm). Twisted rectangular sectioned rod. Hook and (broken) eye fixing. ?Later Roman.
5. (C) Bracelet (diameter 6.6 cm). Circular sectioned rod. Overlapped terminals.
6. (C) Ring or bracelet. Overlapping terminals stylised as serpent heads. Cast.

Bronze Objects: The Slitter

1. (C) Steelyard (length 11.7 cm). Probably incomplete. Square sectioned bar. Two scales marked by deep nicks with ball of iron corrosion (iron weight loop). Suspension end with three holes with iron corrosion for two suspension loops and pan suspension.
2. (C) Finger ring (diameter 1.9 cm) (Figure 1, 4). Circular sectioned ribbed ring with integral flat rectangular bezel plate.
3. (C) Ear ring (diameter 1 cm). Allason-Jones (1989) type 1. Oval sectioned wire. Tapered terminals.
4. (C) Strip bracelet (diameter 2.5 cm). Plain terminals. Raised, ribbed central band.
5. (C) ?Bracelet frag. (diameter 3.5 cm). Half of lozenge sectioned ring. Cast.
6. (C) Strip bracelet frag. (length 6.6 cm) eye terminal. Alternate groups of incised lines and raised rectangles with truncated corners. Third/fourth century.
- 7-10. (C) Braided wire bracelet frags. Two, three and four strands. Later Roman.
11. (C) Fastener. Rectangular head and feet formed of single sheet. Cf. Nettleton (Wedlake, 1982, Figure 86 No. 22; fourth century).
12. (C) Fastener (Figure 1, 5). Dot and line decorated rectangular head linked to smaller back plate by rivet. Not certainly Roman.
- 13-14. (C) Complete and fragment of decorative chain link. ?From necklace.
15. (C) Late Roman necklet fastener (length 2.6 cm). Long, thin plate hook. Cf. Lankhills (Clarke, 1979, Crave 336); Nettleton (Wedlake, 1982, Figure 85, No. 1 and 2).
16. (C) Small terret (diameter 2.4 cm) (Figure 1, 6). Double cross mouldings on annular ring. Cf. Manchester (Jones and Grealey, 1974, Figure 44, No. 16).
17. (C) ?Tubular ring.
18. (C) Decorated pin shaft/binding (length 3.2 cm).
19. (C) Dot and circle decorated ?belt plate.
- 20-22. (C) Broken/distorted tweezers. One reused as chain link.
- 23-52. (C) Sheet and bar fragments. Perhaps including binding fragments, hinge fragment, ?dot punch test piece, 12 matching fragments. of sheathing/fitments from ?box/leather item.
53. (C) Bar (length 10 cm). Thick, tapering, rectangular sectioned, one face with a series of marks. ?from repeated strikes of punch or damaged hammer.
- 54-55. (C) Small hooks.
56. (C) Penannular brooch pin.

Lead Objects: The Slitter

- 1-3. (C) Spindle whorls. Two flat, one truncated cone form.

Iron Objects: The Slitter

- 1-4. (L) Spear heads illustrated by Balch (1935, Plate 14).
5. (C) Wall hook.
- 6-7. (C) Rings (diameters 3 and 3.7 cm).
8. (C) Buckle. Very corroded. Perhaps not Roman.
- 9-10. (C) ?Binding strips.
11. (C) Crescentic plate.
- 12-17. (C) Nails with very large square heads (length up to 9 cm). Perhaps not Roman.

Stonework: The Slitter

1. (?C) Upper stone of rotary quern.

Note: some Long Hole/Slitter items at Cheddar are excluded as modern, notably a clock hand, buckle, sheet frags. A Neuheim derivative brooch fragment is excluded as Iron Age.

Coins: from Long Hole/The Slitter

Boon (1957) published 375 coins, 74 of which appeared in Tratman's catalogue of the Cheddar Caves Museum, though only 22 can now be certainly traced there. The coins listed by Balch (1935) are likely to be amongst those listed by Boon, with the exception of one or more that Balch identified as of Honorius. For details of the coins, the reader is referred to Boon's catalogue but his main conclusions may be re-stated. The chronological range was from the mid-first century to the end of the fourth with a single coin of c. 500, but the emphasis was strongly on post-244 issues and particularly the period 306-95. The finds seem to have included a fourth century hoard. One further coin not known to Boon is also extant: (WSM) Antoninianus of Gallienus. Rev. L AVG.

Coins from 'the stream bed' at Cheddar (Numismatic Chronicle 1839/40,2,206) cannot safely be assigned to the caves.

FINDS NOT SPECIFICALLY ATTRIBUTED

The following material was attributed in Tratman's catalogue simply to the caves at Cheddar, where all but one or two stone items appear to be extant.

Pottery

1. Rim sherd of Central Gaulish form ?18/31 samian bowl.
2. Body sherd of Central Gaulish samian.
- 3-7. Spindle whorls in light pinky grey fabric. Flat and bun forms.

Bronze Objects

1. Penannular brooch. Flat hoop. Fowler (1960) type C terminals.
2. Bracelet (diameter 4 cm). Oval. Rectangular sectioned. Slightly ribbed terminals.
3. Nail or rivet with square head. Not certainly Roman.

Bonework

- 1-3. Pins. Circular and flattened bun heads.

Stonework

1. Very rough, large, heavy shale ring (diameter 10.8-11.5 cm) with crude central counter-sunk hole.
- 2-3. Shale armlet fragments. Plano-convex section. One with grooves on outer edge.
4. Shale ring (diameter 4 cm).
- 5-8. Shale spindle whorls. Biconvex form.
9. Cosmetic palette in white crystalline limestone (6.2 x 4.8 cm).
N.B. This item does not appear in Tratman's catalogue and the provenance is an assumption.
- 10-15. Spindle whorls in grey and white limestone and gritstone. Flat form.
- 16-21. Spindle whorl blanks/incompletely pierced, in sandstone, gritstone and limestone. Flat form.

DISCUSSION

Chronologically, the vast majority of Romano-British finds from the Cheddar Caves appear to be of third and fourth century date. There are a few earlier sherds of pottery such as the Central Gaulish Form 38 bowl from Gough's Old Cave, but the samian at least may be heirloom items. The colour-coated and black burnished fabric are generally characteristic of a third/fourth century date. Similarly, though there are a small number of earlier issues in the Long Hole/Slitter coin list, attention is strongly focused on the later third and particularly fourth centuries. The uses to which the six caves were put is more difficult to establish with certainty. Romano-British usage of Pride Evans' Hole must remain dubious given the doubts about the hoard supposedly found there. If it was genuine, the cave would seem on the evidence available to have been used only as a hideaway.

Sun Hole and Soldier's Hole, both inaccessible and with small assemblages of material, also suggest themselves as hideaways of some sort, with Sun Hole at least perhaps used around the middle of the fourth century and conceivably for counterfeiting activity. The larger caves perhaps fulfilled different functions. Their pottery assemblages contain a range of cooking and storage vessels (ollae and pie dishes, and large jars respectively), some mortaria and fineware probably suggesting that Gough's Old Cave and Long Hole at least saw some more or less permanent domestic occupation. However, a dearth of finds from Gough's New Cave may suggest, unless it is due to the unscientific removal of the deposits there, that it was relatively little utilised. The other finds from Gough's Old Cave and Long Hole may suggest that they were not the scenes of purely domestic occupation. The presence of two steelyards, of numbers of bronze jewellery items and of a collection of what may be bronze scraps including possible test pieces perhaps suggests that some metalworking activity was in progress. Certainly spindle whorls seem to have been in the process of manufacture, even if they were only for personal use. Again the number of coin finds indicate involvement in the money economy, and on a purely numerical basis they suggest a significant involvement. It is a surprise to find that Long Hole/The Slitter have produced more coins than the Roman town of Ilchester, significantly more than the Ilchester Mead villa, and eight times as many as the Bradley Hill farmstead. Nevertheless, given the general picture of greater coin loss after the mid third century, it would be unwise to place too great an emphasis on their numbers.

One other factor to be taken into consideration is the position of the caves. Whilst Gough's Old Cave (and the New Cave if it was large enough to be used much) was easily accessible from the gorge floor, access to Long Hole was relatively difficult — which may add to the possible uses of Long Hole that of some kind of clandestine activity. In summary, the smaller Cheddar caves appear most likely to have been used as hideaways, probably in the later Roman period. The large caves were used for domestic purposes in the third and fourth centuries and may also have been used for metalworking.

The usage of the caves in Cheddar Gorge is part of a wider pattern of Romano-British cave usage in the Mendips, and that in turn part of a phenomenon repeated in both north and south Wales, the Peak District and Settle area of Yorkshire.

Altogether, about a hundred caves in England and Wales reveal some evidence of Romano-British usage, and of that total twenty-three are in Somerset/Avon, mostly in or close to Mendip. A full discussion of, and bibliography for these, will appear in a forthcoming monograph (Branigan and Dearne, 1991). The varying usage of the six Cheddar caves discussed here can be paralleled elsewhere in the area. The hideaway function suggested for Sun Hole, Soldier's Hole and Pride Evans' Hole also best explains the usage of Little Cave, Ebor, and one of the Uphill Quarry caves. More specialised hideaway functions are confirmed for White Woman's Hole where a secreted hoard of counterfeiting debris was recovered, and the same usage may have been made of Rowberrow Cavern. The domestic occupation of Long Hole and Gough's Old Cave, with a suggestion of some craft production activities, is matched by the evidence from Wookey Hole. But Wookey also saw usage as a burial place, and other Romano British burials have been recovered from Backwell Cave, Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet, and possibly Hey Wood Cave and Taylors Wood Cave. The majority of caves, however, were probably never used for more than occasional shelter by local farmers, and in particular by Mendip shepherds.

It is interesting to speculate on the relationship between the cave users and those who occupied the open sites in the area. The latter included a diversity of sites ranging from farmsteads given over largely to sheep and cattle raising, like Butcombe (Fowler, 1968; 1970), lead-working sites like Green Ore (Ashworth, 1970), townships like Charterhouse (Elkington, 1976), and of course a substantial number of villas (Branigan, 1977). The quantity of coins and both the quantity and range of bronzework from Long Hole and from Wookey are best matched in some of the villas and in towns like Ilchester and Camerton, suggesting that the occupants of these caves were in no sense deprived or uncivilised peasants. But Long Hole and Wookey are not the norm; the majority of caves, whether used for burials or as occasional shelters, are most easily related to the rural population of shepherds and lead-workers who frequented Mendip.

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