

## BANWELL BONE AND STALACTITE CAVES 1757 - 1826

by

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### ABSTRACT

The popular belief that William Beard played a large part in the opening of Banwell Bone and Stalactite Caves is examined in the light of contemporary material, largely previously unpublished, and on the basis the discovery of a letter written in 1829. As a result it is concluded that Beard was not involved with the opening of these caves. The date of exploration of the caves is clarified as September 1824 and an account is given of some early visits to the caves.

### INTRODUCTION

The two caves on Banwell Hill are amongst the earliest to have been explored in the Mendips. The largest of the pair, the Stalactite Cave, is thought to have been that discovered in 1757 and noted by the geologist, Reverend Alexander Catcott [1725-1779]. At some time during the period 1757-1824 its entrance passage became blocked and access to a large chamber was no longer possible. In 1824 the cave was re-opened and re-explored in order to make it accessible to the general public for a fee; intended to raise money for charitable purposes in Banwell. To avoid the difficult descent to the large chamber it was decided to improve access by tunnelling a second, horizontal entrance through the side of the hill at a lower level. In doing so the miners accidentally discovered another cave which became known as the Bone Cave. At the time of its discovery, the new cave comprised solely of a large chamber, the floor of which comprised a vast mixture of cave infill and animal bone.

The Banwell caves were located on land owned by the Lord of the Manor of Banwell, the Bishop of Bath and Wells; at this time the incumbent was George Henry Law [1761-1845]. The Bishop decided to open the Bone Cave to the public to illustrate the truth of the biblical account of the great Deluge. To impress on the visitor the importance of the Bone Cave and its religious significance short poems were painted on boards placed near the cave entrances. Erected at the entrance to the Bone Cave was a board bearing the following:

Here let the scoffer of God's holy word  
Behold the traces of a deluged world,  
Here let him learn in Banwell Cave t'adore  
The Lord of Heaven, then go and scoff no more.

By the entrance to the Stalactite Cave the following was displayed:

O thou, who, trembling, viewst this cavern's gloom,  
Pause & reflect on thy eternal doom,

Think what the punishment of sin will be  
In the abyss of endless misery.

Several fictional publications appeared relating to the religious significance of the Bone Cave including Anon, 1830 and Porch, 1833; both these authors, writing in prose, reflect upon the significance of the bone deposit.

A retired local farmer, William Beard [1772-1868] was closely associated with these caves for four decades and is often given credit for having initiated the search for and re-opening of the Stalactite Cave. The accidental discovery of the Bone Cave is also credited to his assistance and encouragement. John Rutter's account of the exploration of the caves is one of the two main sources to credit Beard as being the discoverer of the Banwell caves (Rutter, 1829a, p.148).

... when the discoveries of Professor Buckland opened a new era for research, a respectable farmer named Beard, who lives at Wint Hill, a village below the south side of the high ridge, remembered hearing of this [Stalactite] cavern when a child, and happening to meet with John Webb the miner ... was directed to the supposed entrance, which Webb and another miner, named Colman, commenced clearing out.

The second account is more explicit. William Phelps (1836, p.21) wrote of the 'lost' cave of Banwell Hill

... Little further notice was taken of it [Stalactite Cave], and the shaft was partly filled up. In this state it remained till Mr. Beard determined on re-opening it ...

Later authorities including Knight and Balch embellished the story. Knight's account follows that of Rutter and Balch's account is strongly influenced by that of Phelps. This paper will show that Beard was not involved with the activity that resulted in the opening of the caves on Banwell Hill.

During the next 150 years many influential authors wrote about these caves and numerous papers were published in various archaeological and natural history society proceedings and county and town guide-books for the several local holiday resorts. As a result the date of the exploration of the caves became obscured and in addition these writings maintained the belief that Beard himself had been responsible for their opening and subsequent exploration.

However, the discovery of a letter from the geologist, the Reverend David Williams [1792-1850], Rector of Bleadon and Kingston Seymour written to Rutter in January 1829, cast doubt upon the claims that Beard was directly connected with the discovery of the caves. The existence of this letter caused the authors to undertake a thorough re-examination of the opening of the caves and the part played by the various individuals concerned. This involved the search for manuscripts and published material based upon first-hand information from the years 1824-1826. A considerable quantity of primary material was located much of which had not been previously published in speleological or archaeological accounts of these caves.



## 18TH CENTURY RECORDS

The earliest known notes of mining on Banwell Hill are to be found in the manuscripts of John Strachey of Ston Easton (Strachey, c.1730). From this time the Banwell miners had driven tunnels and sunk shafts into Banwell Hill in their search for exploitable minerals and a wide variety was found in varying quantities including iron, lead and calamine. Some workings entered natural passage, the best known site, and the largest, is thought to be that known today as Banwell Stalactite Cave.<sup>1</sup>

During the eighteenth century caves were accidentally opened by mining activity in the parishes of Hutton, Bleadon, Banwell, Winscombe (Sandford) and Loxton. Many of the sites found during the period 1749-1761 were noted and described by Catcott during his researches relating to the Deluge. A number of caves were discovered by miners working the pits for yellow ochre and on occasion they broke into fairly sizeable cavities, subsequently lost by natural blockage or possibly by deliberate backfilling.<sup>2</sup> One cave in particular was discovered at the western end of Banwell Hill, then known as the Houghings or Heughings (Bennett, c.1833). Catcott received information about this site when passing through Banwell on his way to Bristol on June 10th 1757 following the exploration of Hutton Cavern. He noted that a recently discovered stalactite cave had been explored at the western end of Banwell Hill and that it was like that at Loxton but not so beautiful<sup>3</sup> (Catcott, [1748-1774]).

Although Catcott makes a passing mention of this site in his *Treatise on the Deluge* (Catcott, 1761) he never visited it, nor, it appears, was it visited by any other acknowledged authority of the day.

By the early 19th century the cave had become part of local legend and villagers told of a large chamber having been reached by the miners which was 'so large as the interior of Banwell Church' (Bennett, c.1833). The village choir is said to have descended and practised their skills in the chamber (Phelps, 1836).

George Bennett [1771 - 1834], a local solicitor and antiquarian alludes in his history of Banwell to the fact that several caverns had been discovered on the hill. (Bennett, c.1833).<sup>4</sup>

... In our early youth we were often told there were several large Caverns or as they were called by the Miners leers under some part of Heughings & that one of them was so large as the interior of Banwell Church & that Many persons had from time to time descended & examined them but nothing was done for effectively exploring these subterraneous Mansions till the Month of September 1824 ...

<sup>1</sup> A number of these workings have been explored and recorded by members of the Mendip Geological Club, Axbridge Caving Group and Archaeological Society and Axbridge Caving Group. Reports of their investigative work are contained in their various publications details of which may be found in the bibliographies by T.R. Shaw and R.W. Mansfield (ed).

<sup>2</sup> Bleadon and Hutton Caverns were located and reopened in 1970 and 1973 respectively by the Axbridge Caving Group and Archaeological Society and Axbridge Caving Group.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to the lost Loxton Cavern; the open cave now accessible is Loxton Cave, opened up by quarrying activity in May 1862.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase 'several caverns' could well refer to a number of chambers in what today would be regarded as a single cave.

The actual date of its discovery is unknown but is probably between the 19th May and 10th June 1757. Catcott had visited Loxton Cavern on the former date (Catcott, [1748-1774]) and if the Banwell cave had been discovered at that time, or had been known to the miners, it is likely that he would have been made aware of its existence as caves were objects of great curiosity, none more so than those which contained animal remains.<sup>5</sup>

### THE OPENING OF THE BANWELL CAVES

In the 1820's Banwell was a small country community whose wealth was derived from farming and mining. In the same way as other parishes it was required by law to support sections of the poor by implementing the Poor Law Rate which was largely raised from local business and landowners. Ways to ease this financial commitment were frequently sought and at Banwell the vicar, Reverend Francis Randolph [1752-1831], identified a potentially lucrative source of income from the holiday makers at Weston-super-Mare who frequently visited Banwell for its woods and picturesque scenery. Randolph reasoned that if the legendary cave could be re-opened visitors would be willing to pay a small fee to see it. The income generated would help to finance the charity school then being built and help clothe the poor. (Bennett, c.1833) Randolph was fully supported by Dr. Beadon, Bishop of Bath and Wells, who was also the Lord of the Manor of Banwell. Unfortunately the Bishop died on 21st April 1824. The new incumbent, George Henry Law, was enthroned a month later.

Once these upheavals were over, Randolph was free to progress his idea of locating the 'lost' cave. The events that led to the opening of the Stalactite and Bone Caves can be reconstructed from three contemporary sources: Bennett, Beard and Williams. Each of the three men left quite different sets of records. Bennett's manuscript is a general history of Banwell compiled from various sources during the period 1804-1833; Beard left several volumes of notes and a detailed set of accounts relating to the caves and Williams' contribution is the content of a letter he wrote to John Rutter, in January 1829, requesting the publication of a balanced account of the discovery of the Banwell caves in the recipient's forthcoming books (Rutter, 1829a, 1829b, 1829c). All these individuals and in addition Buckland, Skinner and Phelps had first hand experience of the events which took place on Banwell Hill during the early years of exploration, 1824-1826 and so their various notes can be considered primary information.

In an attempt to re-open the Stalactite Cave, Randolph employed two local miners, Isaac Coleman (or Colman) and John Webb,<sup>6</sup> to excavate the blockage. The men worked for about a week for which they were together paid £1 (Beard, 1824-1865).<sup>7</sup> They failed to achieve their objective. Bennett states that this work commenced in September, 1824 (Bennett, c.1833).

A short time later the two men returned to the site, this time to search for exploitable minerals. (Anon, 1824a; Rutter, 1829a, p.148; Williams, 1829).<sup>8</sup> Following a short spell of

<sup>5</sup> This site has been assumed by many to be Banwell Stalactite Cave. There is no evidence to support this claim as the fact that both caves have a large chamber may be coincidence.

<sup>6</sup> It has proved difficult to identify these men from official documentation for both families were large and each had a considerable duplication of Christian names.

<sup>7</sup> This represents about one week's work for the two men at about 7 1/2p per man per day, based upon the evidence contained in the accounts kept by William Beard.

<sup>8</sup> Mining at this time was an extremely unpredictable livelihood and the general living conditions of these men and their families would have been dire; Rutter commented "... The hill in which the caves exist, contains ochre,



digging the men broke through the choke somewhere below a 6m deep entrance shaft; the legendary cave had been re-opened.<sup>9</sup> Evidence of earlier visits was found by the miners in the form of two pieces of candle, which had been

... evidently left there by the original discoverers, encrusted with a slight coating of carbonate of lime, giving them the appearance of stalactites. ... The cave thus re-discovered is the one distinguished as the Stalactite Cave ... (Rutter, 1829a, p.148)

Plans to convert the site into a show-cave progressed but it was felt that the steep descents close to the entrance involving the use of two wooden ladders (Skinner, 1826) was too awkward and possibly dangerous particularly for ladies. It was suggested that a tunnel be driven from an old quarry lower down the hillside to provide easy access by walking to the bottom of the shaft. Bennett (c.1833) noted that

... if the entrance of the great Cavern was made somewhat more accessible to a level audit [sic] instead of the present incommodious Ladders, which are very unpleasant & even dangerous to Ladies it would soon be acknowledged to rank as one of the greatest National curiosity's of this kind in Great Britain ...

The miners drove a tunnel towards the Stalactite Cave and at a point about 6 m from its entrance an unexpected opening was found leading into passages totally un-connected with it. The miners worked their way into partially choked passage leading to a large chamber floored with a vast mixture of sand and animal bone. This became known as the Bone Cave and Beard made the following entry into his notebook on the 21st September 1824 (Beard, [1824-1865]).

Lately was opened a large and wonderfull [sic] Cavern in Banwell Hill the property of Mr. Blackburrow Esq of Banwell Court.

To the miners, the Bone Cave became known simply as the Bone House; to the clerics it held proof of Noah's Flood and to the geologist it presented an important source of bones for study. Bishop Law decided that the cave should be systematically excavated and the bones distributed to the finest geologists and institutions in the country. The work, financed by him,

calamine, and lead, as before mentioned, which were obtained from the mines in considerable quantities ... but these proving less productive than other parts of the Mendip range, have not been worked during the present generation of miners." Several reports indicate that mining activity at Banwell was " ... proving less productive than other parts of the hills ... About Shipham and Winscombe the calamine pits were still giving employment to a large proportion of the population in the early years of the nineteenth century." Several reports indicate that the miners were searching for calamine. The published accounts of the discovery of the caves tell that the Stalactite Cave was discovered by miners searching for calamine but fail to indicate whether the report was referring to the 1757 or 1824 discovery. For example, the *Gentleman's Magazine* stated " ... Some miners engaged in sinking a shaft in search of calamine, intersected a steep and narrow fissure ..."

<sup>9</sup> The date of the re-discovery of Banwell Stalactite Cave and the subsequent accidental discovery of the Bone Cave has been discussed for many years. A number of papers published in the Axbridge Caving Group's Newsletters and Journals between 1951 and 1980 attempted to solve the problem. In all cases the established date came from 19th century references extant at that time, with Rutter and Phelps regarded as primary sources. When George Bennett's manuscript (q.v.) of c.1833, was uncovered it showed that work to re-open the Stalactite Cave commenced in September 1824 but the date of the discovery of the Bone Cave was still much in doubt.

commenced shortly after the cave had been opened and the bones were dragged through the mined tunnel in baskets. During 1824-1826, under Beard's direction, workmen were employed to clear unwanted debris, sort the bones and effect a second, easier, entrance in preparation for the cave being opened to the public (Anon, 1824d). The eventual success and popularity of the site created employment for several people including women and children, although some of this work was seasonal. The use of the villagers and miners to work in the Bone Cave and on general maintenance work on the gardens created a surprising labour shortage elsewhere. Williams, wishing to excavate Uphill Cavern found that his work was being seriously hampered

... from the difficulty I find at this moment in getting the men away from the Banwell Cave.  
(Williams, 1829)

The floor of the bone chamber was levelled and the pit in the west corner was substantially lowered by the workmen. Rutter's account relates that spoil to the depth of 'eight or ten feet' had been removed from the chamber (Rutter, 1829a, p.150).<sup>10</sup> During the last few months of 1824 Beard had been 'engaged' at the site, appointed by Law to act in an unpaid managerial capacity, directing the casual labour, particularly Webb and Coleman, in the clearance of more debris thus improving the safety of the structure by the construction of the second entrance at the west end of the main chamber of the Bone Cave. From the doorway, a flight of stone steps had been constructed that led down to the floor of the chamber and this was completed before the cave was opened to the public on 28th April 1825<sup>11</sup> (Beard, 1824-1865; Rutter, 1829a, p.150).

### *Bristol Newspapers*

The earliest contemporary reports appeared in the Bristol weekly newspapers; the first was published in the Bristol Mercury, on the 8th November 1824. (Anon, 1824b) As one would expect the body of the account dealt with the content of the Bone Cave.<sup>12</sup>

Geological Discovery. - A cavern, which promises to be of much geological interest, has been lately discovered on the Mendip Hills, near Banwell, Somerset. Like those of Yorkshire, the soil which covers the floor is replete with bones of quadrupads. [sic] The remains which have as yet been found consist principally of the ox and the deer; but some imperfect canine teeth, apparently of the hyaena, have been discovered, and it is probable that further researches will lead to important results. The circumstances connected with the discovery are as follows: - A few years ago, some miners having sunk a perpendicular shaft in search of calamine, suddenly came upon a deep fissure, which, after descending about 120 feet in an oblique direction, opened into a spacious cavern, 150 feet long by 30 feet wide and 20 feet high. It was lately judged desirable to obtain, if possible, an easier access to this vault; and, with this in view, another opening on the face of the hill, about a furlong distant (which forms its direction it was hoped might communicate with the principal cavern), was explored. On removing the fragments of rock with which it was partly choaked, [sic] it was found to lead to a low passage, which, after extending a

<sup>10</sup> Similar figures may be obtained from various notes in the Beard notebooks. From observation in the cave it would appear that the floor was very uneven and that the quoted depths were maximum values.

<sup>11</sup> The entrance fee varied between one and two shillings [5 - 10p] per person.

<sup>12</sup> A copy of this account also appeared in the Bristol Mirror, 13th November 1824, p.4, c.4. The text is the same as in the Mercury report except for slight typographical differences.



few feet, again expanded into a vault of large dimensions (though much inferior to those of the principal cavern). The floor of the chamber was covered to a considerable depth with calcareous sand, interspersed with angular fragments of the lime-stone rock, and the bones were found dispersed through this mass. The vault terminated in another low-descending passage, entirely choked [sic] by the sand and bones. Beyond this point the fissure has not yet been cleared; but from the close analogy of the spot with the other caverns which have been found most productive of quadrupad [sic] remains, and from the circumstances that all the teeth of an elephant were formerly discovered in a similar fissure, about 3 miles distant, upon Hutton Hill, there is every reason to believe that further examination would be well repaid. The bones procured from Hutton Hill were collected by the late Rev. Mr. Catcott, and are now in the Bristol Library. It is understood that the Curator of the Bristol Institution is at present engaged in an examination of this interesting spot.

The account, although garbled, is interesting as it relates to the earlier discovery of the cave and confirms the sequence of events.

### *National Magazines*

By the end of 1824 accounts of the discovery of the Bone Cave were published in the *Philosophical Magazine* (Anon, 1824c) and in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (Anon, 1824a). Both of these are substantially the same in content as the reports that appeared in the Bristol newspapers. Beard's activities are not mentioned. The *Gentleman's Magazine* condensed the news relating to the re-opening of the Stalactite Cave.

Some miners engaged in sinking a shaft in search of calamine, intersected a steep and narrow fissure, which after descending 80 feet, opened into a spacious cavern, 100 feet long and about 30 feet wide, and from 20 to 30 feet high. From the difficulty of descending by this fissure, it was lately judged desirable to make an opening in the side of the hill a little below, in a line which might lead directly to the interior of the cave. This gallery had been conducted but a few feet, when the workmen suddenly penetrated another cavern of inferior dimensions to that which they were in search of, and found its floor to be covered, to a depth of which has not yet been ascertained, with a bed of sand, mud, and fragments of limestone, through which were dispersed an enormous quantity of bones, horns, and teeth. The thickness of this mass has been ascertained by a shaft sunk into it, to be in one place nearly 40 feet. ...

The account in the *Philosophical Magazine* is similar but added that the

... cave at Banwell has within these few days been examined by Professor Buckland ...

By early December Buckland appeared to be fully conversant with the discoveries being made in the Bone Cave as an extract from one of his letters appeared in the *Bristol Mirror* published on the 4th December (Anon, 1824d).

Professor Buckland has published a letter relative to the cave lately discovered at Banwell, Somersetshire. The Professor states the thickness of the mass of sand, mud, and lime-stones, through which the bones, horns, and teeth are dispersed, to be in one place nearly 40 feet. He adds - "Many large baskets full of bones have already been extracted, belonging to the ox and their

tribes; of the latter there are several varieties, including the elk. There are also a few portions of the skeleton of a wolf, and of a gigantic bear. The bones are mostly in a state of preservation equal to that of common grave bones; but it is clear, from the fact of some of them belonging to the great extinct species of bear, that they are of an antediluvian origin."

### WILLIAM BEARD

The name of William Beard has become inseparable with the Banwell caves and rightly so for he was involved with the general management of the caves and grounds under which they were situated, known as 'The Caves', for some forty years. It was Beard and Webb who regularly acted as guides to the Bishop and his associates and the members of the public who called to see the wonders of the Bone Cave. He finally retired at the age of 93 in 1865.

In 1824, following the discovery of the caves Beard decided, at the age of 52, to retire and concentrate his efforts on the excavation and management of the caves. During the period 1825 to 1838 Beard was also involved with several other excavations at Hutton, Bleadon, Uphill and Burrington.<sup>13</sup> He even renamed his farmhouse 'Bone Cottage'.<sup>14</sup>

How Beard became involved with the caves and became effectively the general manager and chief guide is unknown. However, his ability to organise and control people was quickly recognised by the Bishop and because Beard lived locally, was literate and seemingly intelligent, he was an ideal choice for carrying out the Bishop's wishes. This appointment had taken place by the time Bennett visited the site on the 2nd February, 1825.<sup>15</sup>

On 21st June 1826, John Skinner, Rector of Camerton paid his first visit to the caves. He noted that the Bishop had given Beard the honorary title of 'Professor'.<sup>16</sup> A few months earlier, in November 1825, the Bishop, impressed by Beard's enthusiasm and hard work, expressed his gratitude by presenting Beard with an embossed silver tankard bearing the following inscription:

Given to Mr. Beard, of Banwell, by George Henry Law, Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells, as a small token of acknowledgement of his care and skill in exploring the Antediluvian remains, discovered at Banwell. A.D. 1825.

Beard's wife was also given a token present of a silver snuff box (Bennett, c.1833). In 1860 Beard gave the tankard to the parish church at Banwell (Beard, [1824-1865], inside rear cover) with an additional inscription. It read:

Presented to the Parish Church of Banwell, by the above named William Beard, as a remembrance of himself and the Right Reverend Donor. (Knight, 1902, p.447)

To many, Beard is best known as the man who was responsible for the opening of the Banwell caves but there is no evidence to support this claim although many writers, who were

<sup>13</sup> A detailed biography of William Beard is currently being prepared by the authors.

<sup>14</sup> This was demolished in 1955. There are no known photographs of the cottage except for those of Beard sat at his front door. A house named 'Hunters' Lodge' now stands on the site.

<sup>15</sup> There is no evidence that Beard received any salary or financial remuneration for his work at the site.

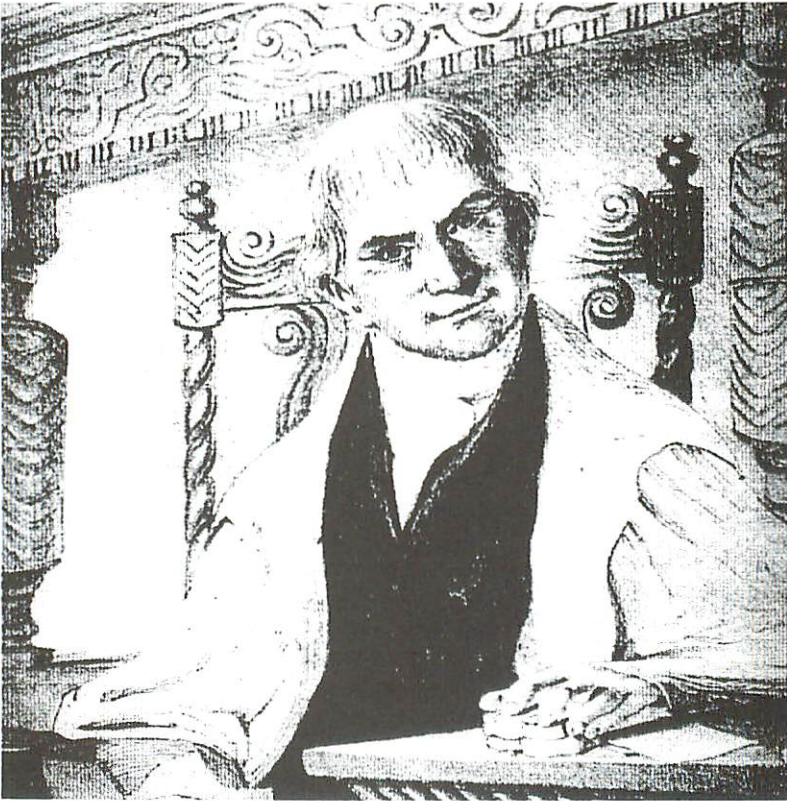
<sup>16</sup> This is the first recorded mention of Beard's honorary title.



not directly associated in any way with the opening of the caves, perpetuated this myth including Rutter, Bennett and Knight, whose account is a brief reworking of that published in Rutter.

The most important and illuminating comment of that time is contained in a letter written by Williams to Rutter in January 1829.

... I hope that you will give the 'quantum merit' of the discovery of Banwell Caves, where it is due ... I regret to say, tho' he appears the part, Professor Beard had nothing to do with it. Dr. Randolph wishing to ascertain the truth of a rumour that such a Cave existed offered two men a Pound to clear out the shaft that led to it. ...



**Figure 1.** *Portrait of William Beard, detail from an 1841 lithograph by Samuel G. Tovey of the Repository of Art, Bristol*

By kind permission of John and Margaret Chapman, Cheddar

Williams' note confirms what Beard himself had written in his own note, dated 21st September, 1824, quoted above. In it Beard states that he was not present at the time of the opening of the cave and, further, he did not know the exact date when it had been entered. At first sight it might be thought that Beard was involved with the opening of the caves but it

becomes clear that the 'wonderful' cavern (see above, p. 205) in fact relates to the Bone Cave that had already been discovered. It has already been noted above that the Stalactite Cave was considered of little importance and thus would never have been associated with the adjective 'wonderful'. Beard appears from various accounts to have been an egoist, and pedant, (Clark, 1836; Murchison, Roderick I., 1825) and it is unlikely, therefore, that he would have ignored his own involvement, had there been any, in his own notebooks. On two separate occasions he prepared lists of caves with which he had been associated. In the first list precise dates are given for the commencement of work at each site with the exception of the Bone Cave where the month only is given, the Stalactite Cave is not even mentioned. The second manuscript lists the caves with which he was involved but omits the date of discovery for each site. However, Beard's note relating to the Bone Cave avoids any claim relating to the discovery of the cave (Beard, c.1833-1862).<sup>17</sup>

I lately visited his Lordship at his Elegant Cottage at Banwell where the remains of Animals was discovered by Beard they consist of a different species of Deer, Buffalo Wolf & Bear ...

News of Beard's work at the Bone Cave spread rapidly and he was elected honorary member of several Philosophical Societies and in 1836 he was elected member of the British Association (Beard, 1824-1865).

### EARLY VISITORS

Shortly after the caves were opened important visitors were allowed to visit the site, among the earliest being one of the most influential geologists of his day, William Buckland. The exact date of his visit is unknown but it was certainly by the end of November 1824. Buckland also returned in 1827 and on this occasion Beard noted that he had lent him a box of bones but whether they were ever returned is unknown (Beard, [1824-1865]). Buckland returned again on two further occasions, 29th January 1829 and 26th April 1833.

Several other well-known personalities paid visits to the Bone Cave during the first years of the caves' being open, including Roderick Murchison, John Skinner, Phelps and Warner; all supporters of the Mosaic account, that is the account of the Deluge as told in the Book of Genesis and attributed to Moses.

Beard, and occasionally Webb, led the parties into the caves. Murchison's account is typical of several that have survived from this time (Murchison, 1825).

... Bones innumerable & masses of rubbish were found immediately, but this was one of the extreme hole of the Cave by which he had by accident driven in the direct line of the fissure & also in the great Cave no bones were ever found but only heaps and masses of rubble and limestone as if worked up by the miners - The bones always in extreme dens in masses by themselves rubble being composed of other materials & powdered bones - so this was clearly the simple falling in of animals - but these bones are clearly post diluvian & not fossilised ... No stalagmite occurs as a flooring to this cave altho the adjoining great Cavern is full of it & was shown to us as a curiosity<sup>18</sup> - The bones were simply found in heaps with earth - Mr. B is

<sup>17</sup> The list was compiled sometime between 1838 and 1845 for it includes details of Sandford Hill Cavern which was discovered in January 1838. Bishop Law died in 1845.



arranging them as a great Charnel House - There are bones of animals of every sort ... Mr. B tenacious of his bone ... both workmen and visitors pocket - The Bishop of Wells is his Magnus Apollo, though the regrets are innumerable about the loss of some bones carried out by the Bishop's party - He gave a humerous account of the Bishop in his night cap accompanied by Buckland squeezing through some of the fissures. Unfortunately we were obliged to have the torment of going thro his other great Cavern which you descend by ladders from the top of the hill - stalactites as usual.

Initially payment was voluntary but eventually the situation was formalised and Beard entered the following short note in his visitors' book (Beard, [1824-1865], p.21 from front cover).

Gentlemen and Ladies

I have to inform you that I recd. a letter bearing date 22nd of June 1826 - from the Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells wherein he request that all the money that I have and may receive of Visitors who see these Caves are to be expended in exploring and improving the same.

Other important visitors included Adam Sedgewick (1847), Richard Owen (1850) and William Pengelly (1858). The caves remained open to the public until November 1865 some twenty years after the death of George Henry Law. His eldest son, Mr. 'Chancellor' James T. Law, enabled Beard to continue his work after the death of his father until Beard himself, when 93 years old, seemed to end his association with the caves, for the last entry in his note books is in November 1865 (Beard, 1824-1865) After Beard's death in 1868 the caves remained closed and were only opened on occasion for visiting natural history societies.

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<sup>18</sup>

When exploring the extensions found in the Stalactite Cave in 1971 by Marie Clarke and Chris Richards, a high level side passage was entered in which animal bone was seen trapped between the boulder choke strongly suggesting a direct connection with the Bone Cave.

- ANON. 1824c. Discovery of Fossil Bones at Banwell. *Philosophical Magazine* 64 (July-December), pp. 389-390.
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