

# TOTTY POT, CHEDDAR SOMERSET: A HISTORY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AND FINDS FROM 1960 TO 1998

by

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This paper is dedicated to the memory of Christopher Hawkes and William Stanton.

## ABSTRACT

The cave now called Totty Pot was discovered in 1960 by archaeologist and caver, Christopher Hawkes. Subsequent excavation by Hawkes, Willie Stanton and members of the Wessex Caving Club in 1961-65, revealed a 4 m deep shaft leading to several small chambers which contained a large quantity of animal bone, flint, pottery and human remains. Microliths and a radiocarbon date of 7450-7050 cal.BC (BM-2973) on human bone indicated the presence of a Mesolithic individual buried in the cave. The 1960s excavations did not anticipate the recovery of such important Mesolithic finds and the excavation has never been published. A research excavation in 1998 by the author confirmed Totty Pot as a burial place with little or no evidence of occupation around the mouth of the cave. This paper has drawn together all the known documentation for the 1960s excavations and this, together with the data from the 1998 field-work, has confirmed Totty Pot as one of the significant Mesolithic and Neolithic burial places in Britain.

## INTRODUCTION

When Totty Pot was discovered in 1960 by Christopher Hawkes and subsequently excavated by himself, geologist Willie Stanton and members of the Wessex Caving Club, they were not anticipating the discovery of archaeological remains, or that the cave would become one of a significant group of caves, together with Gough's Cave and Aveline's Hole, for Mesolithic burial in the country. Obtaining a Mesolithic radiocarbon date highlighted the cave's importance in archaeological terms but the destruction of the initial group of human remains by the Leicestershire Police caused a significant loss of data for a period that has such little burial or cemetery evidence in Britain. The 1960s excavations have not been published as an excavation report, but there are early notes by Barrington and Stanton (1970) and Smith (1975) denoting its importance as a Mesolithic burial site. The 1998 excavation has contributed to the site's landscape interpretation (Gardiner, 2001; 2008) and the radiocarbon dates as part of an AMS Dating Programme in 2010 on the human remains, have allowed new interpretations to be put forward for the cave's cultural history (Schulting *et al.*, 2010). The Somerset Historic Environment Record No. 10349 notes the site's current references; HER No. 29685 covers the 1998 excavations, but needs updating. Totty Pot's Mesolithic importance, both in relation to the data from the other burial sites at Aveline's Hole and Gough's Cave cannot be underestimated, but five unexpected Middle to Late Neolithic dates have shown that the cave played an important part in burial rites in later periods, as well.

Totty Pot is situated in the parish of Cheddar, Somerset (ST482535). It is a small depression that sinks vertically into the limestone, from the level plateau of a rock outcrop at a height of 245 m AOD. It is approximately 2 km east of Cheddar village. The considerable height of the cave entrance above sea level gives an all-round view of the Somerset Levels to the south west and the Mendip Forest in the north, but this open, somewhat dramatic, aspect

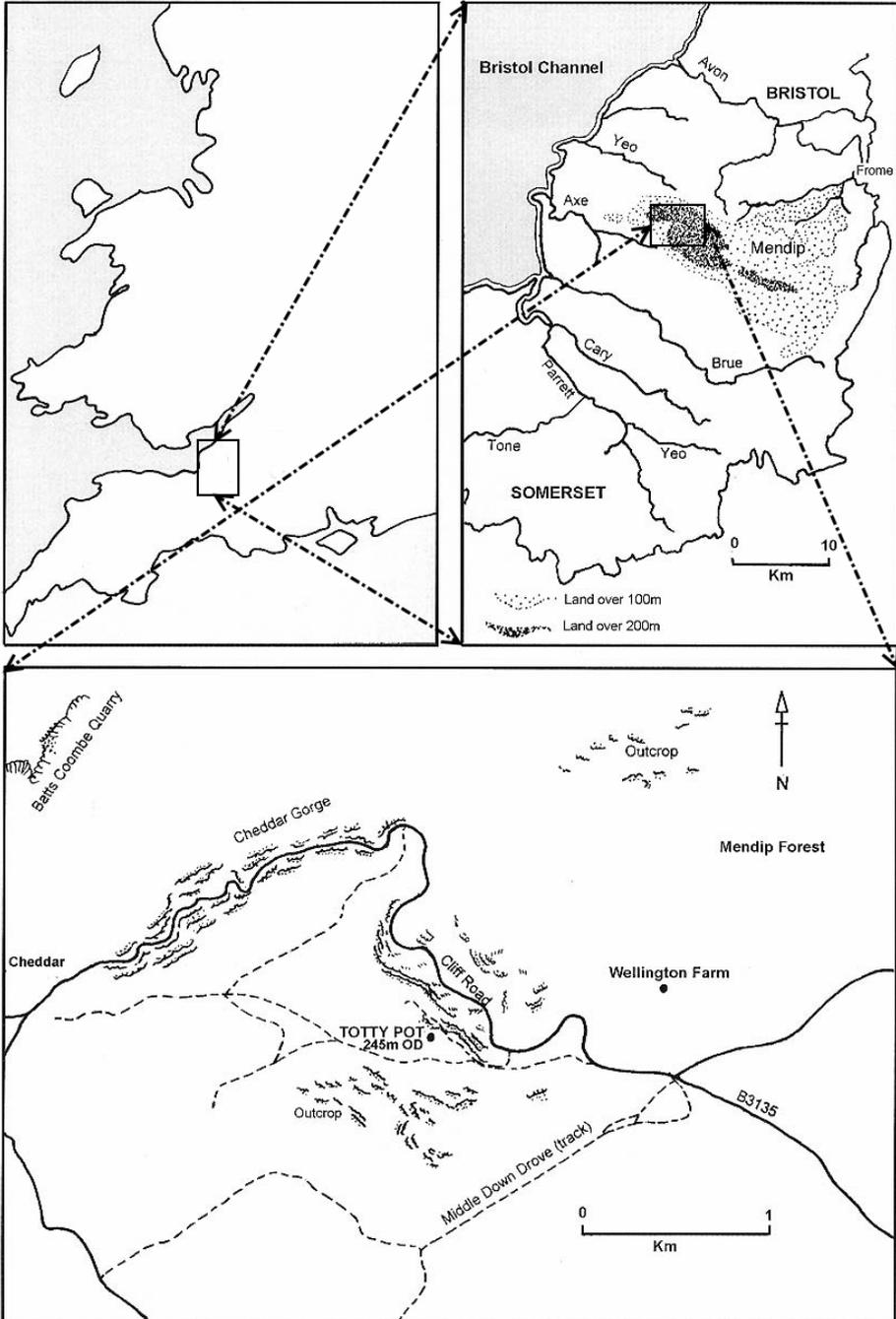


Figure 1. Location map of Totty Pot, Mendip Hills, Somerset.

also exposes it to the weather. In the Mesolithic, aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) were found on Mendip and aurochs horn and bone have been recovered from Totty Pot. Aurochs bone has also been found in Charterhouse Warren Farm swallet, 4 km north east of Totty Pot, these animals were still roaming Mendip until the Bronze Age (Burleigh and Clutton-Brock, 1977). The site is bordered by an open landscape that is used for pasture with a steep hillside that drops down to Cliff Road in the north. The open ground with sparse vegetation and stunted trees that surround the cave today, may not be too dissimilar to the landscape in the Mesolithic. The site is on private land owned by the Marquess of Bath.

The cave was formed within the Hotwells Limestone that makes up the Cheddar Cliffs and the level ground of the plateau immediately around the site. This overlies the Chinastone of Cliff Road. Cheddar Gorge, which is to the north-west of Totty Pot. This, in turn, is comprised of the Clifton Down Limestone, with Goblin Coombe Oolite bordering the area at Wellington Farm, in the north, and forming a thin semicircular band to the south of



**Figure 2.** *The entrance to Totty Pot.*

Photo: © P. Gardiner

Middle Down Drove. Natural dew-ponds and springs are found within the limestone formation in this area (Green 1992; Green *et al.* 1965; Smith and Drew 1975, 388) and there are Lulsgate Series soils immediately around the cave with deep windblown Nordrach series soils close by. These soils are formed on Carboniferous Limestone and are typical on upland plateaux such as the Mendip Hills over 300 m OD and cover deep pockets intermittently in the area (Findlay, 1965; Findlay *et al.* 1984).

Today, the limestone grassland supports heather and gorse, together with deciduous scrub of lime, ash and hazel. Although human activities have altered the landscape to a certain extent, the slopes and plateau surrounding Totty Pot have never been ploughed. Although the cave entrance has been clearly visible since the 1960s excavations, it does not lie on the current track way that leads across the plateau and is unwittingly missed by walkers and visitors. To some extent this may have preserved what is effectively an open, if difficult to access, cave and what remains of its sparse contents.

The present entrance to the cave is a narrow, vertical shaft approximately 4 m deep and 0.75 m wide leading into a short tunnel giving access to several small chambers, which open up to approximately 2 m in height at the far end. Willie Stanton cemented the low wall that currently surrounds the top of the shaft entrance and fitted a metal plate over allowing it to

be secured. This is the only entrance into the cave found to date. Currently, the metal plate is unlocked and can be opened to expose the shaft.

The cave is 10 m long approximately. Totty Pot, unlike Gough's Cave and Aveline's Hole, is accessed by a vertical drop. This makes for a difficult entry and the layout of the cave chambers requires crawling and squeezing to get into them. It is unlikely that the archaeological finds and human remains could have been accidentally washed in.

The cave's position on the Mendip plateau commands an almost uninterrupted 360° view of the surrounding landscape. Its location on the edge of the Cheddar escarpment and overlooking the Somerset Levels may well be the reason for choosing this site as a burial cave in prehistory. As a location, it is isolated and solitary, but Mesolithic hunter-gatherers using this landscape knew of other places nearby, such as Wright's Piece, Gorsey Bigbury or Rain's Batch and this would have brought Totty Pot into the Mesolithic orbit. Further afield, it is probable that hunter-gatherers near the North Somerset coast, such as at Birdcombe in Wraxall on the Failand Ridge could have travelled to the escarpment not only for hunting, but for burying their dead in this remote and unusual place (Gardiner, 2001; 2007). The testament to its longevity as a burial place is evidenced by the radiocarbon dates indicating its use into the Neolithic (Schulting *et al.* 2010).

### THE DISCOVERY OF THE CAVE

On 9 September 1960, whilst walking across the lip of the gorge opposite Wellington Farm, Willie Stanton spotted two potential caves that looked "diggable" (Stanton Diary 10, p10) close to the 800 foot contour. On 11 September 1960, Stanton, Hawkes and their families went up to the plateau for a picnic. While they were up there they started to move rocks from



**Figure 3.** Sarah Hawkes, as a child, helping to clear out the shaft with her potty.

Photo: © Chris Hawkes

one of the potential cave entrances and discovered a hole. After four hours removing soil and scree, the top of the cave entrance was revealed.

When the discovery was made, Hawkes was living in Leicester, but he visited Mendip at weekends to go caving. Tony Oldham, a fellow caver, also offered to help dig. When the first human bones were discovered, they were taken to Picken's Hole where Prof. Tratman was digging at the time. He believed them to be modern (*pers. comm.* Stanton to Hawkes, 2007).

The cave was named after Chris Hawkes' toddler Sarah, whose potty, which she called 'Totty', was used to carry soil from the shaft during the initial dig. The name Potties Pot or Totty's Pot was used and Totty Pot has persisted in the literature and appears on the current O.S. Map. Clearance of the entrance shaft, the western passage (now blocked), the eastern

passage and subsequent cave chambers was carried out intermittently at weekends in the early 1960s by Chris Hawkes and the Wessex Caving Club and in 1964 and 1965 by Stanton in Chris Hawkes' absence (Stanton Logbooks; Barrington and Stanton 1970, 112).

Excavation was carried out, not in the expectation of finding archaeology, but of discovering new cave passage. That important archaeological finds revealed themselves many months later, was somewhat alarming and surprising to the cavers. Stanton noted the discovery of human bones during a visit he made to the site on 19 May 1963, but did not draw special attention to the discovery. This may suggest that recovering human remains from the cave in 1963 may not have been particularly noteworthy, but something to be expected during excavation. There is no recorded note of the date of the first finds of human remains.

Unfortunately, no photographs exist of the 1960s excavations and a simple grid system was only put in place by Stanton in an effort to record the finds several years after excavation had started. There has been no current attempt to test this grid system inside the cave and no survey was carried out either inside or outside the cave in the 1960s. It would, therefore, be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct the 1960 excavations in detail.



**Figure 4.** *The entrance shaft in 1998.*

Photo: © P. Gardiner

## THE 1960'S EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

The cave was dug by hand, using spades, with the spoil being collected behind the caver that was digging out the deposits and then being brought to the surface, up the shaft in buckets and emptied on to a spoil heap. Some of the finds were recognised *in situ* (animal bone, human bone, pottery and flint) and were brought to the surface separately, whilst others, including some of the microliths, were revealed on the spoil heap after heavy rain (*pers. comm* C. Hawkes).

Stanton noted in his Logbooks that the spoil was brought to the surface in buckets and was sorted outside at the top of the shaft, probably indicating that the majority of the finds were not recovered *in situ*. Some buckets were left between weekends before sorting and some were

later taken home for sorting. Spoil was also tipped out on the plateau for “weathering”. Charcoal was also recovered and noted by Stanton, but not given any specific treatment, bagged or preserved. Between August 1964 and July 1965 there are several references in Stanton’s Logbooks to explosives being used inside the cave by Luke Devenish. He would have been using gelignite, with charges tamped with mud, rather than drilling shot holes into the rock (Graham Mullan, *pers. comm.*).

During the initial excavations in the early 1960s, there was no grid, baseline or bench mark set up and no measured survey, either inside or outside the cave. No archaeological recording method was used and there is no surviving published record or photographs of the excavations. The author has utilised personal communications from Christopher Hawkes, the letters and logbook entries by Stanton and the brief diary entries of Tony Oldham who visited the site infrequently between April 1963 and April 1965. Oldham’s diary entries include references to human bones including skull, upper jaw and two vertebrae, as well as some flints. Oldham made two very rough sketches of inside Totty Pot and a section of the deposits. He also noted that two evenings were spent washing bones in April 1963.

Notes recognising the archaeological significance of the cave were published by Barrington and Stanton (1970, 112); Smith (1975); Norman (1982, 21) and more recently by Gardiner (2001; 2006) and Schulting (2005, 242).

The human remains have their own story. The remains that were recovered in the 1960s were fragmented and came from at least two separate areas inside the cave: Area (A) K19 and Area (B) (Fig. 14). They were subsequently sent to C.B. Denston of the University of Cambridge, who estimated there was a minimum number of three adults and one child (Gardiner, 2001). Some of the bones were reported and delivered to the Leicestershire Police, where Hawkes was living at the time, but unfortunately after a cursory examination, they destroyed much of the material as being of no interest to them (Schulting *et al.* 2010). There is, however, an original radiocarbon date from a longbone from Area (B) (Fig.6) of 7450-7050 cal BC (BM-2973), (Ambers and Bowman 2003). The surviving human material was the subject of an AMS dating programme in 2010 and the results confirmed the presence of one previously identified Mesolithic individual (7445-7080 cal BC), but surprisingly had the other five individuals spanning the Middle to Late Neolithic, from ca. 3500 to ca. 2600 cal BC (Schulting *et al.* 2010).

All the other finds from the 1960s excavations were bagged in paper or put into cardboard boxes or other containers and stored in Hawkes’ garage. The author had access to some of these finds in 1998, prior to her own excavation the same year (see below). The flint was identified and drawn by Christopher Norman and the author was given information personally by Christopher Hawkes from 1998 (Gardiner 2001). Sadly, both Hawkes and Willie Stanton are now deceased.

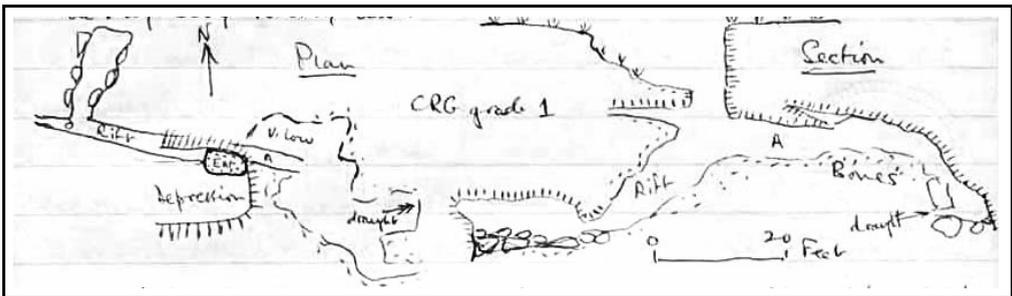
Since the 1960s, Totty Pot has become recognised as one of the important and rare Mesolithic burial sites in Britain, although we now know that burial continued in the cave well beyond this period (Schulting *et al.* 2010). Its place in the Mesolithic database cannot be underestimated and it is a shame that the original excavators left no contextual record that could be reproduced. However, we have finds that include both human and animal bone, flint and pottery and this, together with the personal explanations of both Christopher Hawkes and Willie Stanton, can go some way to piecing together the lost history of the excavation. Although this can never replace good methodological recording, careful collating can at least provide a backdrop for any future research on the site

## WORK PRIOR TO THE PLACING OF THE MASTER GRID, 2 JUNE 1965

Willie Stanton's logbooks can be accessed online via the Mendip Cave Registry and Archive website ([www.mcra.org.uk](http://www.mcra.org.uk)). The originals are held in Wells and Mendip Museum. Copies of the entries from Tony Oldham's diary were kindly provided by him. Much of the following section is derived from Stanton's logbooks. Measurements have been kept in Imperial units, as in the originals.

Between the discovery of the cave on 11 September 1960 and 19 May 1963, there is a gap in Stanton's references to Totty Pot and there are no notes surviving from Hawkes relating to this period. Stanton's diaries refer to areas that had been dug by cavers in his absence and, in some cases, how deposits were covered up to deter other cavers from interfering. It is not clear to whom he was referring. When Stanton visited on 19 May 1963, he noted that a barbed wire fence had been put around the cave entrance and that Hawkes had broken into a "large-ish solutional cavity, filled almost to the roof with angular stones and mud". The finds included "human and other bones", together with bones of *Bos*, sheep, fox or badger.

Fifteen months later Stanton visited the excavation again (2 August 1964). He noted that around six volunteers were helping with the dig and that the old cave had been much enlarged by removing mud, stones and bones. He notes that a "deep rift had been opened below the entrance, which is about 25 ft down, with an extension of about 20 ft that led towards the Gorge (Figure 5). It was on this day that Luke Devenish arrived with "chemical persuader" (explosives), to widen the rift at Point A. Devenish laid multiple charges of gelignite, but this did little to remove the rock. Further explosives were used the following day also with little success.



**Figure 5.** Stanton's sketch plan and elevation, 2 August 1964.

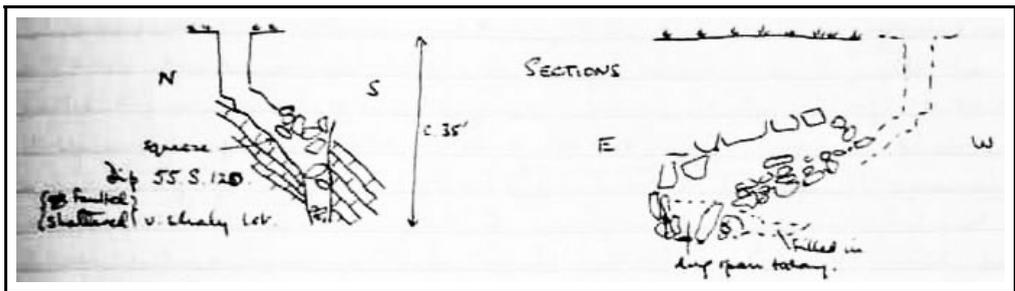
Stanton Log vol. 10 p. 124.

On the 11 and 13 August 1964 Stanton began building a wall at the entrance of the cave. This wall remains today. The use of explosives continued in September 1964. The cave was further contaminated when the farmer threw a stillborn foal down the shaft in April 1965, which gave the excavators trouble removing it by using paraffin to burn it. This unsuccessful attempt meant that it was finally covered with rocks and Stanton notes "that passage is now blocked". New holes were dug into the rock for iron fence posts in August 1962 and the remains of these can still be found around the entrance. Two flints "possibly Cheddarian and much bone fragments" were removed from "the old tip"; Stanton notes that there was "no apparent stratification" inside the cave.

In May 1965 further flints were recovered including "2 vaguely Cheddarian and a possible microlith" and "one Cheddarian style flint" with "bones and teeth, including 2

articulated toe bones”. It was not noted whether the bones were human, or what Stanton regards as Cheddarian, i.e. are they Cheddar points from the Creswellian, or Mesolithic blades?

On 2 June 1965 Stanton noted that inside the cave was “coarse scree with friable earth with air spaces with bones, often large and clean”. This was below a surface deposit of dark clay. Fifteen buckets were removed and left out “to weather”. It is not noted whether the bones were animal or human, nor their condition after ‘weathering’, but this does appear to have been common practice at the site. By 11 June 1965 they were down to a solid floor that sloped southwards and a Bronze Age scraper was found with some large bones, including a fragment of human skull.



**Figure 6.** Stanton's sketch of the entrance shaft: plan and sections showing the depth of the excavation, 11 June 1965 at c. 35ft.

Stanton Log vol. 11 p. 57.

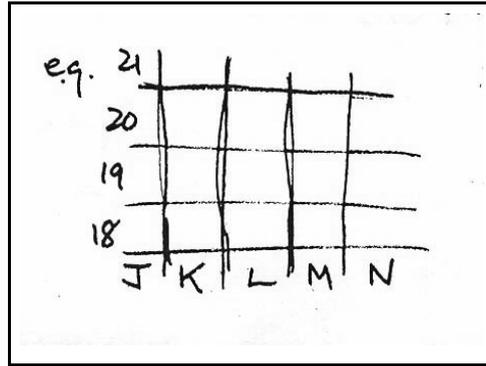
### THE MASTER GRID

On the 12 June 1965, the first attempt was made to introduce a master grid for recording the finds. Hawkes and Stanton marked out a grid of yard squares on the roof of the cave in a north-south and east-west orientation, with “candle smoke”. The grid started in the middle of the alphabet to allow for unexpected extensions, with numbering from the south west corner. Stanton subsequently included a diagram of the grid (Figure 7) in a letter to Hawkes (28/10/65) as well as mentioning the finding of three microliths from “the very bottom”.

In the same letter he includes a sketch plan of the section, but warns that it could only be diagrammatic until the depths had been levelled (Figure 8). Stanton is aware of the inadequacies of the recording, even at this point. We do not know whether the section was levelled in as there is no written record of this. In this letter he mentions that he kept careful notes of his “diggings”, which he would forward to Hawkes.

Following the setting up of the master grid, the deposits were dug in one foot spits and noted alphabetically and numerically beginning from the top down. K19 is the area from which one of the human bone deposits (A) (Figure 14) were recovered (Hawkes *pers. comm.*) and is a muddy scree layer composed of seven parts mud to 20 parts water-rolled stones.

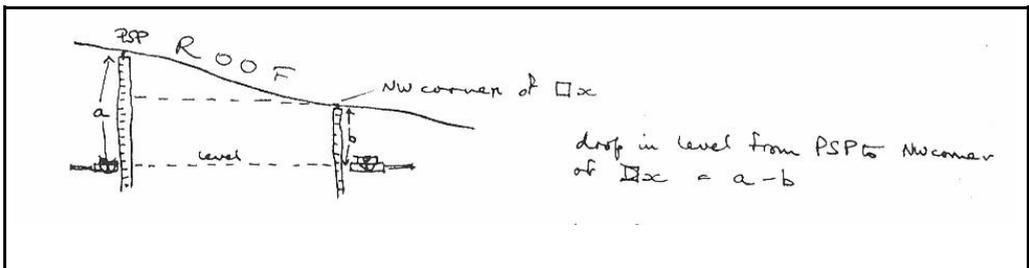
In a typed document from his diary entries from 2 June to 17 July 1965, Stanton wrote to Hawkes summarising his work at the site and included grid references for some of the stratigraphic layers. This is the only written reference that links the master grid squares with the deposits and the finds inside the cave.



**Figure 7.** Stanton's sketch plan of the 'Master Grid.'  
Stanton letter to Hawkes 28 October 1965.

Describing K19, Stanton stated that pits were dug out, which consisted of coarse scree with friable earth and air spaces in between that contained large, clean bones, beneath a surface deposit of dark clay. The pits were deepened and the solid floor continued sloping downwards. "Some large bones, including human skull and a scraper came from this deposit". He stated that "4.5' below the roof" some large bones came from a pit at the bottom. He describes a blackish layer below a deposit of tufa. Further human bone appears to have been recovered from the tufa floor. The spoil heap left by an earlier caver, Tony Oldham, contained charcoal, a microlith and several human bones. Calcite flow deposit had dripped through to weld stones and bones together. It was in this area that part of a quern was recovered and described by Stanton as "a large block, roughly 9" cube, of sandstone, roughly shaped" (Stanton's letter to Hawkes dated 22 June 1965).

There are two other references to sandstone blocks in Stanton's Diaries: 21 June 1965, a large block of sandstone had two smoothed faces, which Stanton believed had been used for polishing flints. He recognised that the sandstone block had been brought into the cave from outside; 1 July 1965, a "6" sandstone block smoothed by polishing" was recovered from a bucket that had been taken home for sorting. Stanton regarded this as *in situ* as it came from the "top foot" during excavation.



**Figure 8.** Stanton's sketch of the section, prior to levelling.  
Stanton letter to Hawkes 28 October 1965.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Grid</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i> Finds</i>
2.6.65	K19	A pit of coarse scree with friable earth and air spaces. This layer was below the surface deposit of dark clay on the left.	Bones, large and clean, here and there.
19.6.65	L19	Dark, muddy soil dumped from a lower level. 12 more buckets removed from the upper muddy scree layer, completing square to depth of about 1.5' where the square was filled with a gigantic boulder. Drip had percolated down through the scree and stalled stones and some boned together.	Microlith, several bones
26.6.65	L19	Square 2 was marked out and part of the original surface was preserved at the E edge; elsewhere c. 1.5' of the top of the deposit had been removed; originally there had been about 6" air space between roof and deposit. Top foot was compacted brown, stony mud; downward stones were common and the soil between, looser. At 2.5' down was the upper surface of a big rock 6" higher than the top of last week's; where the two touched there was open space down which small stones rolled 2-3'. These big rocks have split off the N wall, which is only a few inches beyond the E edge at the square. Along this edge is a tufaceous scree with air gaps and not much earth. Max depth reached 3' on W side, wet rock. Elsewhere 2.4; lower dark layer not reached.	A few large bones; a pocket of big limb bones from NW corner 2.5' down.
3.7.65	L20	8 buckets were removed from yard square 2, all from the 3 <sup>rd</sup> foot and were stopped by a tufaceous floor covering almost the whole floor, including the big rock rising to the roof in a big boss south of the square. All the overlying deposit is in sharp contact with the tufa, showing that it was a sharply-defined, stal-forming phase – Mesolithic? The tufa-covered boulders seem to form the top of a ruckle, as stones trickle down a good 10'. Marked out square 3 and dig from the surface in the SE corner; the top foot was stony compact and less stones than lower down. The 2 <sup>nd</sup> foot was muddy scree with lots of rodent bones; the 3 <sup>rd</sup> muddy scree contained large bones (incl. human femur).	Quite a few large bones including a human femur. Virtually all the bones came from just above the tufa floor, some were almost in contact with it.
6.7.65	L19	Collected the tip from square 2, 3 <sup>rd</sup> foot. Mud : stone 3 : 5. The spoil contains numerous lumps of impure yellow or greyish sticky plastic clay, apparently derived from shaly bands in the limestone.	
11.7.65	L20	Continued opening square 3. starting layer 4 after 5 buckets. Removed several large-ish rocks. Nearing the bottom of the 4 <sup>th</sup> foot, with a few spaces between the rocks.	Large bone or two in pieces from under the north wall.
17.7.65	L20	Removed 8 buckets from square 3, 4 <sup>th</sup> foot, taking the level to the start of the 5 <sup>th</sup> foot. Time was spent trying to destroy a big boulder in parts of squares 1, 2 and 3. The mud contained several lumps of crystalline stal and an abundance of broken crystalline formations.	A lot of charcoal.

**(Left) Table 1.** *Stanton's stratigraphic references linking the deposits and finds to his grid system.*

Whilst at Totty Pot on 21 June, Stanton noted that within the muddy scree layer they were excavating, the stones were rounded with strong solutional etching and not typical angular scree, being mostly 3" to 6". He also noted that mud had trickled down among the stones coating the tufa and the ratio of mud to stone was 5 : 7 and that some contaminated material in the darker mud was formed by whitish grains of calcined stone or bone. Within this dark mud was "a lot of charcoal".

### THE TUFA FLOOR

The earliest mention of tufa as a stratigraphic deposit appeared on 12 June 1965, when Hawkes and Stanton put in the master grid. It was noted as a localised deposit in the SW corner of a pit (Diary 11, p56).

In a letter to Hawkes dated 16 July 1965, Stanton summarised his diary entries on a visit he had made earlier (3 July) with Tony Fardon. He cleared three squares (temporarily numbered 1, 2, 3) down to what he recognised as "a Mesolithic tufa floor, like in other Cheddar caves". He described this floor as extending up to the roof in bosses and that it was a sharply defined stal-forming phase, as there was sharp contact with the overlying mud (Stanton letter to Hawkes 16.7.65). His diary entry for 3 July 1965, also notes that the rock ledge was not "diggable"; the top foot was stony compacted mud; the 2nd foot was muddy scree with lots of rodent bones; the 3rd muddy scree had large bones, including a possible human femur. Nearly all the bones came from the 3rd foot, just above the stal floor. This was noted as L19 in Table A.

The last entry mentioning the tufa floor was on 17 July 1965 when they were digging down to the start of the 5<sup>th</sup> foot and had not recognised the tufa floor. By the 20 July more explosives were laid in an unsuccessful attempt to remove a large boulder.

The 16 July letter notes that ten more microliths were recovered from an earlier spoil heap left by Tony Oldham and were described as a crescent or triangle, with one possible rod. These were sketched by Stanton in the letter (noted by the author). Stanton suggests an 8,000 BC date for the flint. He advised that digging should be stopped at the tufa floor as it was serving as both a datum line and protection for future finds (Stanton letter to Hawkes 16.7.65).

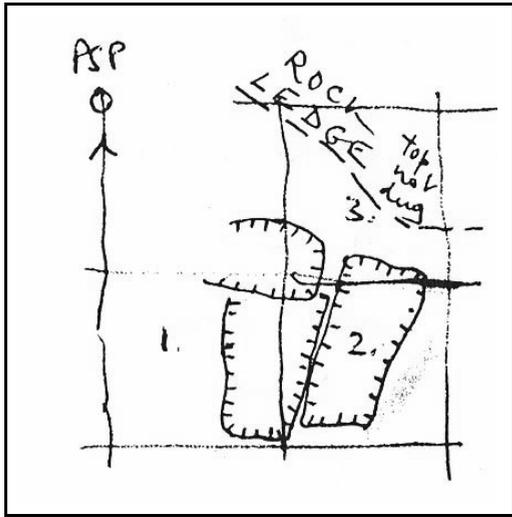
Stanton's notes relating to this plan record that large rocks had split off the north wall, which was only a few inches beyond the eastern edge of the square. Along the eastern edge was a tufaceous scree with air gaps and not much earth. The maximum depth reached at the west



**Figure 9.** *Piece of quern with polished surface from K19, as described by Stanton.*

**Photo: P. Gardiner**

**By courtesy of Wells and Mendip Museum.**



**Figure 10.** Stanton's plan of L19, showing three squares excavated down to the tufa floor.  
Stanton letter to Hawkes 16 July 1965.

of all his visits to Totty Pot, in particular during a period when Hawkes was laid up with a knee injury. He included sketches throughout these logbooks, which go some way to explaining where in the cave they were working, the soil type and at what depth. Stanton's geological training came to the fore in this respect. He also summarised these diary entries in letters to Hawkes especially when he was asking for instructions regarding the dig and the identification of the finds.

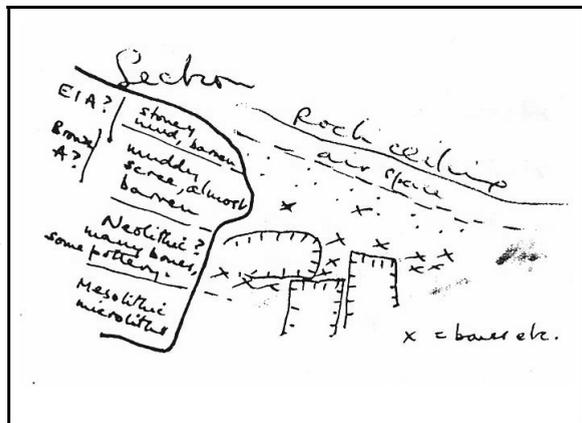
There was a certain amount of contamination at the site, with the farmer disposing of dead animals into the depression and today we are dismayed at the use of explosives on an archaeological site. Current methodology would not allow for buckets of spoil to be removed from the site, for sorting elsewhere, in effect losing any contextual evidence. Whilst we can criticise the methodology used at Totty Pot in the 1960s, we can at least today bring more modern scientific techniques regarding dating and identification of flint and bone to the excavation archive.

side was 3' and elsewhere it was 2.5'. The lower dark layer had not been reached by this date. He later noted that the upper scree layer contained more rodent bones than the lower dark layer. This is L19 in Table A (Diary 11, p59).

Stanton's Diary entries for the excavations end on 24 July 1965.

#### Discussion

Although Chris Hawkes curated the finds from Totty Pot and kept them safely boxed in his garage (they are now held in Wells Museum), he does not appear to have kept any written record of the excavation, such as a diary of his own. Hawkes did, however, annotate some of the finds with their alphabetical reference and number of foot. When Willie Stanton introduced the Master Grid in June 1965, this was a significant attempt to put the excavation into some sort of recording order, albeit, five years after digging had commenced. Stanton logged detailed entries



**Figure 11.** Stanton's section drawing describing the stratigraphic deposits, including the position of microliths.

Stanton letter to Hawkes 16 July 1965.

## HUMAN REMAINS

From the 1963 excavation and throughout 1964 and 1965 Stanton records in his logbooks the recovery of bones. In letters to Hawkes, Stanton mentions the large quantities of bones that were waiting for collection by Hawkes. However, many of these entries do not differentiate between human bone and animal bone, although this may be because they could not be classified when first they came out of the cave covered in soil. The first mention of



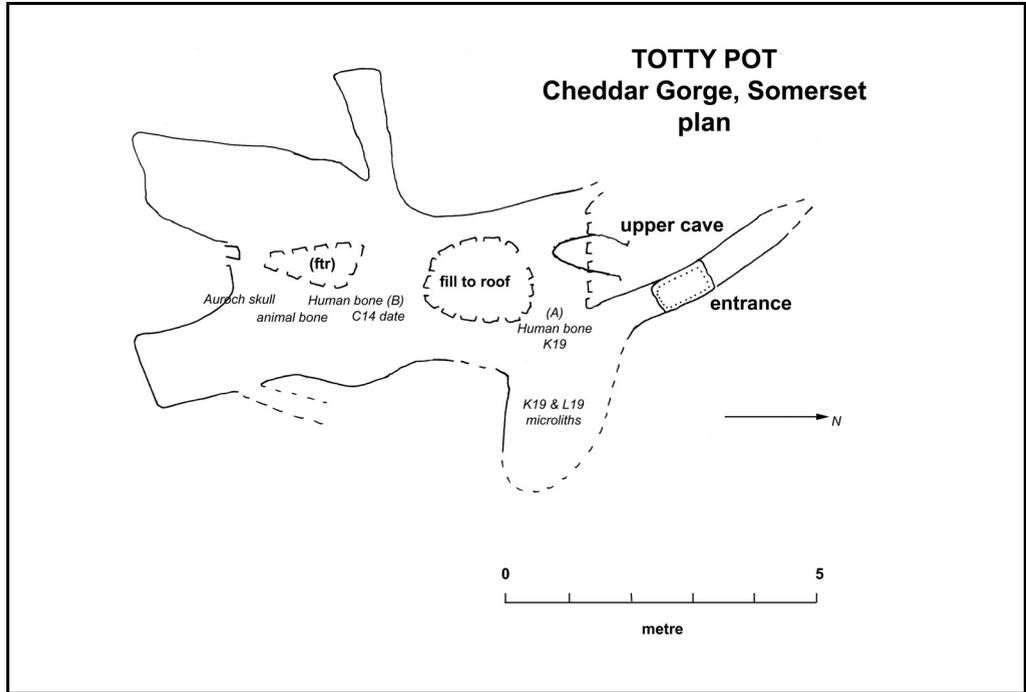
**Figure 12.** *Chris Hawkes examining the location of human bones, in 1998.*

**Photo:** © P. Gardiner

Human bones is on 19 May 1963 when a number were recovered together with *bos*, sheep, fox and badger from a large ‘solutional’ cavity that was filled with angular stones and mud (Diary 10, p13).

Between April and June 1965 there are several references to bones being recovered with flint. On 19 April 1965 bone fragments came up with two “Cheddarian” flints and on 11 May 1965, two articulated toe bones came up with a possible microlith. By 2 June, bones “often large and clean” were being removed below a surface deposit of dark clay (K19). On 11 June 1965 large bones, including a skull fragment appeared with flint. At the bottom of a pit in blackish soil, the following day, “large bones” were discovered. On 19 June 1965 a microlith and several bones came up in a bucket dumped by Tony Oldham (L19). Stanton noted that a lot of charcoal and bones were common in the Oldham tip where the soil was dark. On 26 June a “pocket of big limb bones” were removed in the north west corner, 2.5' down, close to the edge of the tufaceous scree, which is within yard square L19 (Diary 11). On 3 July 1965 the 3rd foot

of muddy scree produced a possible human femur, just above the stal floor and some bones were almost in contact with it. Tony Oldham noted during his visits on 15 April 1963, that the human bones recovered included a human skull, upper jaw and two vertebrae, together with domesticated and wild animal bones.



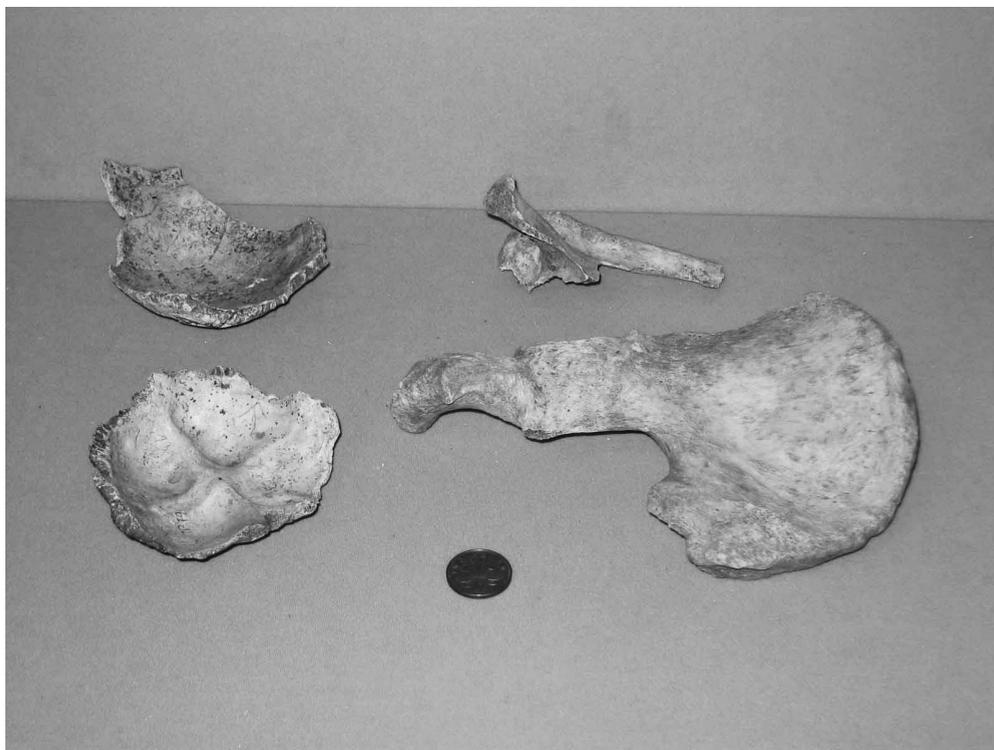
**Figure 13.** *Plan survey of Totty Pot.*  
Survey: Mullan & Boycott, 2006.

On a visit with Chris Hawkes to the cave during the 1998 excavation, the author was shown the location of the human remains. These are the two areas marked (A) and (B) on the interior plan of Totty Pot within the K19 yard square (Figure 13). Hawkes recognised that a certain quantity of the human remains had been mixed with some of the animal bone during excavation, but was confident that the bulk of the human bone came from Areas (A) and (B) inside the cave (Hawkes *pers. comm.*).

A survey of the interior of the cave was carried by G.J. Mullan and A. Boycott in 2006. The findspots annotated on the 2006 survey were recorded from memory by Hawkes and from Stanton's diary notes.

The destruction of part of the human bone assemblage from Totty Pot in the early 1960s by the Leicestershire Police, has distorted future dating and analysis. A quantity of the collection of the human bones from the excavation were initially examined in the 1960s by C.B. Denston of the Duckworth Laboratory of Physical Anthropology at Cambridge University. The full report can be found in the Appendix of Gardiner (2001, Appendix, viii). The report estimated that there were a minimum number of four individuals: a male (5'7" tall); a male or female adult; a female aged 25-30 years with 4 teeth *in situ*; a child aged 2-3 years.

There was one initial radiocarbon date on the human bone from a left humerus (BM-2973)  $8180 \pm 70$  BP (7450-7050 cal.BC) (Ambers and Bowman 2003, 532; Schulting 2005, 231).



**Figure 14.** Human remains (skull and pelvis) from the 1960s excavations.

Photo: P Gardiner. By courtesy of Wells and Mendip Museum

#### THE 2010 AMS DATING PROGRAMME

The author, together with Rick Schulting and Chris Hawkes (Schulting *et al.* 2010) carried out an AMS Dating Programme on bone samples from the surviving collection based on the presence of a minimum number of six individuals. The bones were in a reasonable condition and comprised mainly longbones, cranial fragments, vertebrae and pelvis. There were no cutmarks, burning or other modifications. Schulting identified a minimum of six, but more likely seven individuals as present in the cave, including three or four adults, an older child of perhaps ten and two young children under six years. He points out that each individual is only partially represented; see the full report in Schulting *et al.* (2010).

The radiocarbon dates confirmed the presence of one Mesolithic individual (7455–7085 cal. BC) so close in age to the original radiocarbon date, that it suggests it is from the same person. Unexpectedly, the other five individuals were found to be Neolithic, within a span of 2830-2460 cal. BC to 3630-3370 cal. BC. Interestingly, there are no archaeological

finds from Totty Pot that may relate to the Neolithic, apart from the quernstones, but these may not necessarily be Neolithic and could be much later in date (Schulting *et al.* 2010, 80).



**Figure 15.** *Human remains (long bones) from the 1960s excavations.*

**Photo: P. Gardiner. By courtesy of Wells and Mendip Museum**

### *Discussion*

It is not known whether the human remains represent complete bodies, or whether they were brought into the cave disarticulated. Survival of small bones from the hands and feet suggested to Schulting that they came in as complete bodies (Schulting *et al.* 2010, 87). If this is the case, there may be another entrance to the cave. Mullan (*pers. comm.*) suggests that the main part of the cave may have been accessed from the area marked in Figure 13 as “upper cave” which has subsequently collapsed. Although there is a 3000 year gap between the latest Mesolithic date and the earliest Neolithic date, the 2010 dating programme has shown that the cave remained a focus for burial into a period when chambered tombs were becoming commonplace. Whilst Totty Pot’s history began primarily as a place for burial in the Mesolithic, it remained an important focus in the Mendip landscape, alongside other sites such as Hay Wood Cave, where microliths have been found together with Neolithic human remains (Everton and Everton, 1972; Gardiner, 2001; Schulting, *et al* 2013).

## ANIMAL BONE

The faunal material had previously been housed at Wells Museum in Somerset and Cambridge University, but was brought together for examination at the Grahame Clark Laboratory for Zooarchaeology at the University of Cambridge over one week in May 2006 by Emily Murray of Queen's University, Belfast. The following is summarised from her report which can be found in Murray (2010).

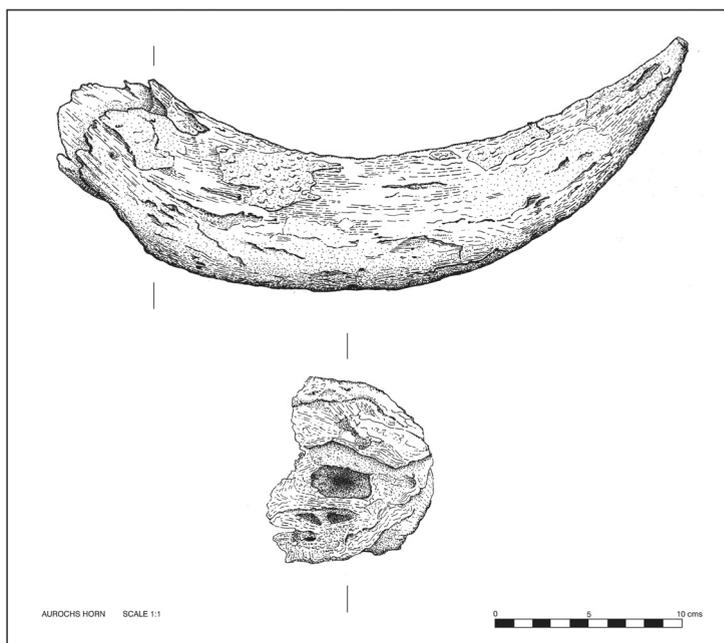
Less than half of the animal bones in the collection were individually numbered (45%). The remainder were unlabelled or loosely ascribed to Stanton's categories above as deriving from L19, K19; or from earlier unidentified deposits such as 'Totty 63; 'TP63'. There is no stratigraphic record for the animal bones that were excavated from Totty Pot in the 1960s excavation.

There are both domestic and wild species in the collection which includes red deer, roe deer, horse, sheep and pig. There are small mammals such as ox and badger as well as field voles and red squirrel. Of the 794 identifiable specimens, pigs (wild and domesticated) are the most common (26%), with cattle (wild and domesticated) 20%, sheep/goat (15%), fox (9%) and rabbit (6%). Some of the bone has butchery marks and there is evidence of gnawing by other animals.

Aurochs accounts for one fifth of the cattle bone and includes two mature females, parts of a skull and horncores. There was an initial radiocarbon date for an aurochs (5620-5370 cal. BC) (Schulting *et al.* 2010) and there is a surviving aurochs horn in the collection that is been illustrated here (Figure 16).

Evidence of aurochs has been found at Charterhouse Warren Farm (4 km from Totty Pot) dating to the Bronze Age (Burleigh and Clutton-Brock 1977), but the dated aurochs from Totty Pot confirms a late Mesolithic presence in the area and suggests a landscape of fairly open, scrubby, vegetation in the Mesolithic, rather similar to that of today.

Pig is the most common species at Totty Pot with both adult and juvenile (wild and domestic) being represented. Animal activity beyond the Mesolithic and Bronze Age is demonstrated by the presence of small mammals such as fox, badger, cat, dog and weasel. There are



**Figure 16.** *Aurochs horn from the 1960s excavation.*

**Drawing: A. George 2006**

no Pleistocene animal bones in Totty Pot. Frog/toad and field and bank voles are the most common small mammals.

### Discussion

Although some of the animal bones were recovered with the human remains, they were not recorded separately, so any direct association has since been lost. A number of human bones were identified among the bags of animal bones at Cambridge which would suggest that the majority of the excavated bones were found in a mixed, disarticulated state. The known *terminus post quem* dates for the domestic cattle, sheep and pig date them to the Neolithic or later, including horse (Bronze Age or later), while the presence of rabbit suggests twelfth century or later. The small size of the deer bones suggest they are not early post-glacial in age. The presence of these animals indicates more recent activity, in addition to the Mesolithic horizons represented in the cave.

### THE 1960s ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

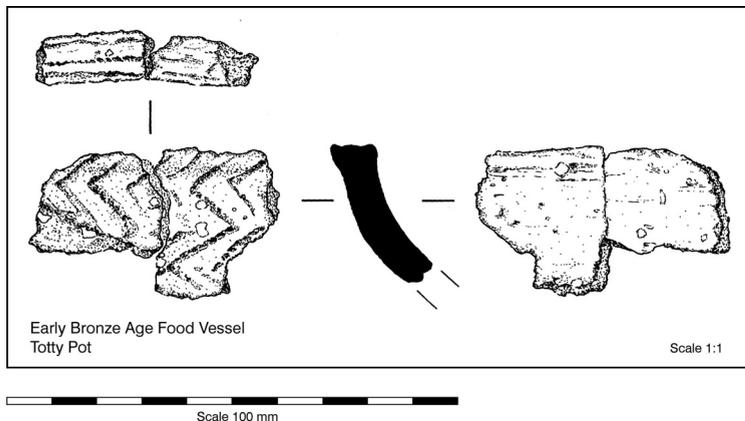
Few of the finds from Totty Pot were recorded *in situ* with the exception of some of the microliths, an aurochs skull and the two positions of the human bone. Most of the flint came up in buckets and was tipped on to a spoil heap, but some were revealed much later after rain had washed mud from the spoil (Chris Hawkes *pers. Comm.*).

### Flint

There are twenty microliths from the 1960s excavation that were classified and illustrated by Christopher Norman, see Table 2 and Figure 22.

Included in the 1960s flint assemblage are nine blades that do not have retouch and 17 waste fragments. There is an absence of debitage in any quantity from inside the cave. This may be due to the fact that the excavators may not have kept any flint waste or, more likely,

that it was only finished tools that were deposited in the cave during the Mesolithic. This small collection of microliths does confirm the radiocarbon dates for a distinct late Mesolithic presence inside the cave.



**Figure 17.** *Early Bronze Age food vessel from the 1960s excavation.*

Drawing: A. George 2006

### Pottery

Thirteen sherds of sherds of Bronze Age pottery were recovered from the buckets and spoil heaps during the 1960s excavations. There are diagnostic pieces from the Beaker period, including an Early Bronze Age Food Vessel (Figure 17), Rusticated Beaker Pot, Groggy Food Vessel and Deverel Rimbury pottery.

Illustration No.	Description	Early/Late Mesolithic	Material
1	Short convex backed	Late	Flint
2	Short convex backed	Late	Flint
3	Short convex backed	Late	Flint
4	Short convex backed	Late	Flint
5	Short convex backed	Late	Flint
6	Short convex backed	Late	Flint
7	Lanceolate	Late	Flint
8	Convex backed	Late	Flint
9	Lanceolate	Late	Flint
10	Rod	Late	Flint
11	Rod	Late	Flint
12	Rod	Late	Flint
13	Scalene triangle	Late	Flint
14	Scalene triangle	Late	Flint
15	Scalene triangle	Late	Flint
16	Scalene triangle	Late	Flint
17	Scalene triangle	Late	Flint
18	Scalene triangle	Late	Flint
19	Scalene triangle	Late	Flint
20	Broken tip of microlith	Unclassified	Flint

**Table 2.** *Microliths from the 1960s excavation (Gardiner 2001, 111)*

### Discussion

The 1960s excavations did not establish whether the finds had been deliberately deposited inside the cave or washed in from the outside. No interpretation was put forward relating to any activity outside the entrance of the cave or of its wider contextual significance in relation to the other caves used for Mesolithic burial, for example, at Aveline's Hole and

Gough's Cave. In spite of these limitations, a distinct late Mesolithic presence inside Totty Pot is assured by the flint tool typology and the initial radiocarbon date (Gardiner 2001; 2006).

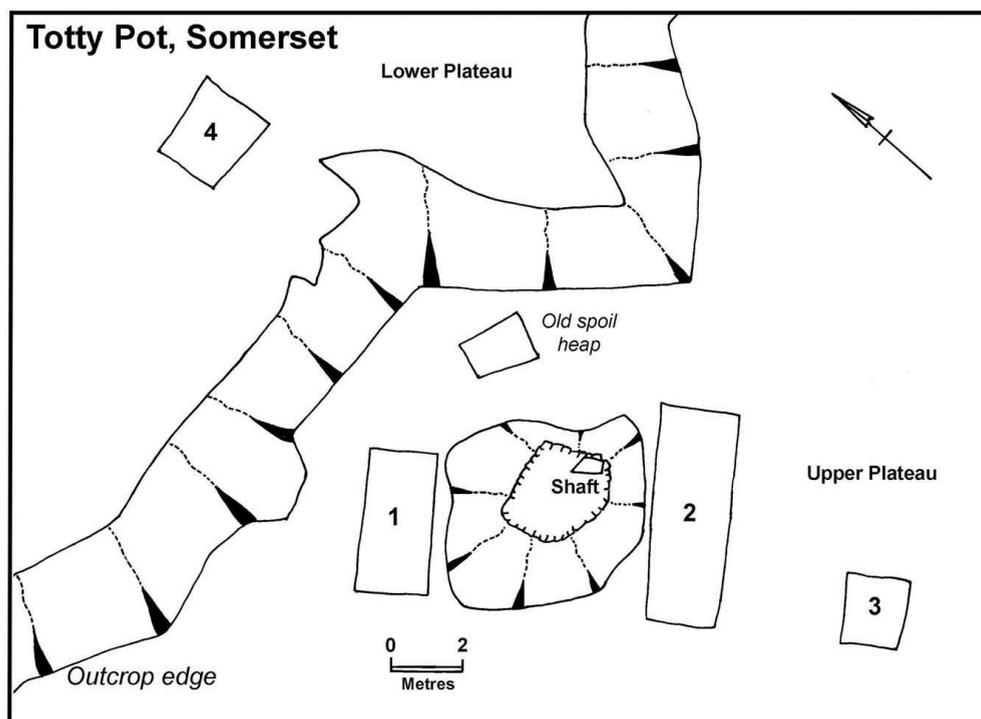
The archaeological finds from the 1960s excavations include both wild and domesticated animal bone: wolf, red deer, badger, vole, mole, sheep and pig, together with aurochs bone and horn. Worked flint tools from the Mesolithic and the Bronze Age periods were recovered, together with early Bronze Age pottery, including Beaker pottery and two stone quern fragments, one of which survives. There is abundant Bronze Age burial evidence on the Mendip plateau in round barrows, but settlement evidence is more unusual (Aston and Burrow, 1982). The discrete Bronze Age presence at Totty Pot, therefore, should not necessarily be regarded as unusual.

To summarise the 1960s excavations, it is not always possible from the notes and letters, to ascertain whether the bones recovered by Stanton were human or animal. There does, however, appear to be a tentative association between bone and the microliths, with "a pocket of big limb bones" being excavated from L19 on June 26th 1965 and the earlier excavation of a microlith and several bones from L19 earlier on June 19th 1965. However, secure association between the microliths and the human bone remains elusive. The 1960s excavations were carried out by cavers in the anticipation of discovering a new and unexplored cavern and was not viewed from any archaeological perspective until the finds revealed themselves, almost by chance. The loss of the human remains to the Leicestershire Police is catastrophic for the period, particularly as we lack such important information from our current databases. The dates derived from the remaining bone, however, have reaffirmed Totty Pot as a significant burial place in the Mesolithic and produced unexpected Neolithic dates for the continuing use of the cave for burial in a later period.

### THE 1998 EXCAVATIONS

The previous excavations had not established any stratigraphic sequence within the cave, apart from Stanton's diary entries that linked some of the human bones and microliths to the master grid squares (see Table 1). The 1960s excavations did not establish whether the archaeological finds had been deliberately placed inside the cave, or whether they had been washed in from outside. It did not establish any secure association between the microliths and the skeletal material. In 1998, there was only one radiocarbon date from a minimum number of four individuals. Clearly the site interpretation would benefit from further, more structured, archaeological investigation.

The 1998 excavation was undertaken as part of the author's PhD research and aimed to establish whether there had been any occupation around the mouth of the cave in an attempt to understand whether the finds from inside the cave had been deliberately deposited or had been washed in. Totty Pot could be put into a wider context in relation to the other Mesolithic cave burials from Aveline's Hole and Gough's Cave, as well as within the wider North Somerset landscape. The Marquess of Bath did not give permission for excavation inside the cave, although the author was taken inside by Chris Hawkes during the excavation period. Fieldwork was, therefore, concentrated around the mouth of the cave on the upper plateau and the lower plateau to the north east of the entrance shaft.



**Figure 18.** Plan of Upper and Lower Plateaux showing the trench positions (after Gardiner 2007, 32.)

## METHODOLOGY

Grids of 10 m square were laid out on both the Upper and Lower Plateaux and all fieldwork and excavation was carried out within the grid. The grid was tied into a temporary bench mark carved on to a large, protruding rock near to the cave entrance. Total sieving from all trenches was carried out with the exception of Trenches 4 and 5 which were full of roots and stones and otherwise sterile.

Resistivity and magnetic susceptibility surveys were carried out on the Upper and Lower Plateaux, but only natural geology was apparent from the results. Shovel pit testing was carried out on both the Upper and Lower Plateaux, but no flint or other finds were recovered from the surveys.

Two trenches were laid either side of the cave entrance: Trench 1 (west of the cave) measured 2 m x 4 m and Trench 2 (east of the cave entrance) measured 2 m x 6 m. Trench 3 was 5 m east of Trench 2 and laid across a small hollow in the grass, suggesting a possible second entrance once it was taken down. Trench 3 measured 1.5 m x 2 m.

Two further trenches were laid on the Lower Plateau (Trenches 4 and 5) in the anticipation of further Mesolithic activity below the outcrop that forms the cave on the Upper Plateau and the possibility of another cave entrance.

Excavation was carried out using trowels in Trenches 1 and 2; with small hand mattocks in Trenches 3, 4 and 5 and all deposits were taken down vertically in 10 cm spits, but allowing for the horizontal contexts.

The spoil heap from the 1960s excavation was sieved. Five pieces of flint were recovered from the spoil heap, which included a rod, a convex backed microlith and a retouched blade (Figure 22, 25-27).

Also recovered were a few fragments of animal bone identified as domestic cow, fox and rabbit, together with three pieces of juvenile and adult pig teeth.



**Figure 19.** *Trenches 1 and 2 around the cave entrance depression.*

**Photo:** © P. Gardiner

#### *Trenches 1, 2 and 3 (Upper Plateau)*

Bedrock was close to the surface in Trenches 1 and 2 and there was little or no stratigraphy in the sections. Trench 1 was taken down to a depth of 60 cm to bedrock; Trench 2 to a depth of 30 cm to bedrock. A small concentration of charcoal was found in the middle of Trench 2, but it was so close to the surface as to not be secure enough for dating. There was no evidence of hearths in any of the trenches.

Trench 3 contained soils of the Lulsgate Series which are largely windblown and can be many metres thick (Findlay, 1965). Trench 3 was taken down to 50 cm at the north west corner and sectioned to 90 cm in the south west corner. It was augered to a depth of 76 cm in the middle of the trench and to 96 cm in the south west corner. A sondage (50 cm x 50 cm) was dug through pure clay in the south west corner of Trench 3. It came down on to a yellow, stony layer with manganese staining, but bedrock was not reached.

### *Searching for a Second Entrance*

Immediately below the rocky outcrop of the Upper Plateau is an overhang of bedrock, with evidence of rabbit droppings. It was decided that an exploration of this area might secure entry into the cave from the north side and mattocking was carried out below the overhang. It only revealed solid rock, so two trenches were opened up on the level ground below the overhang on the Lower Plateau.

### *Trenches 4 and 5 (Lower Plateau)*

Trench 4 measured 2 m x 2.5 m. Trench 5 was a 1m wide connecting trench between Trench 4 and the rock overhang. Trench 4 was sectioned in half, but abandoned at a depth of 30 cm. Trench 5 was taken down to the bedrock at a depth of 66 cm. Both trenches proved to be sterile except for a small piece of quartzite and a few tiny pieces of charcoal and a second entrance was not found.

A second entrance might not exist and the human remains inside Totty Pot might have been taken down the shaft in a disarticulated state for burial inside. Another possibility of entry may have been through what looks like a blockage of large stones almost adjacent to the shaft entrance. (vide supra) However, Chris Hawkes communicated that there might be some burning from the 1960s in this area. If this blockage could be removed and an easier entrance revealed, it may be too contaminated for dating. A further possibility would be further along the northern outcrop edge eastwards between the Upper and Lower Plateaux.

### *Inside the cave*

Hawkes had vague memories of where the flint had come from inside the cave. He believed that from the bottom of the shaft moving east along a short passage that led to the first chamber is where both animal bone and human bone was recovered along with a quern stone (now lost) (C.J. Hawkes *pers. comm.*). There are many small tunnels and chambers inside Totty Pot and some run into small spaces from which one can just squeeze through into a larger space, but not always at standing height. It is from these larger spaces that the human bones were excavated. The furthest extent of the cave appeared to be below Trench 3, where the soil in the roof of the cave resembled that in Trench 3. There is still a large amount of soil on the cave floor, some with animal bone and charcoal embedded within it. The bones of hare and fox have been identified, but it is not known whether the bones are modern or not. Two lumps of charcoal (0.5 cm and 1.5 cm) were recovered from the 1960s spoil heap, that is. originally from



**Figure 20.** *Bedrock in Trench 2.*

Photo: © P. Gardiner.

inside the cave, but it does seem highly unlikely that fires could have been lit in the small spaces inside the cave. A washing-in of charcoal seems to be the only explanation.

Exploration inside the cave to the east of the shaft during the 1998 excavation did not to reveal any further chambers or a hidden entrance.

	Illustr. No.	Description	Trench	Grid	Context	Material	Meso	Length/Width mm	Weight gm
1	21	Lanceolate	2	N10/E2	3-1	Flint	Late	13.5 x 5.8	0.12
2	22	Lanceolate	2	N10/E2	3-11	Flint	Late	16.9 x 7.4	0.21
3	23	Lanceolate	3	N10/E7	3-111	Flint	Late	16.4 x 5.2	0.28
4	24	Narrow microlith	2	E1/N10	5	Flint	Late	15.6 x 6.4	0.22
5		Microlith tip	2	E1/N10	5	Flint	Late	8.1 x 5.0	0.09
6		Fragment narrow microlith	2	N10/E2	5	Flint	Late	9.3 x 3.9	0.05
7		Distal frag. blade/flake	3	E30/N75	3-111	Flint		8.9 x 3.9	0.06
8		Prox. frag. retouched blade	1	N10/W6 S	3-1	Flint		20.1 x 13.6	1.03
9		Prox. frag. retouched blade	3	E68/N71.5	3-11	Flint		27.0 x 12.2	1.61
10		Piece esquilee	2	E2/N10SE	3-1	Flint		22.8 x 20.5	2.63
11		Tanged & barbed arrowhead	1	W7/N10	3-1	Flint	Beaker	17.3 x 18.8	1.01
12		Microlith fragment	2	N10/E2	3-1	Flint	Late	10.6 x 6.2	0.06
13		Microlith fragment	2	N10/E2	3-1	Flint	Late	12.5 x 0.4	0.01
14		Flake worn	1	N13/W6	2-1	Flint		19.5 x 10.1	1.82
15		Microlith broken tip	1	N10/W6	3-11	Flint		12.2 x 4.1	0.43
16		Blade end fire crackled	2	N30/E70	5-1	Flint		11.6 x 10.4	1.28
17		Concave base blade	2	N10/E2	6-1	Flint		24.0 x 11.7	2.12

**Table 3a.** *Retouched tools from the 1998 excavation.*

## THE 1998 FINDS

*Flint*

A total of 38 pieces of flint were recovered from the 1998 excavation, of which 22 are retouched microliths, and includes five retouched pieces from the 1960s spoil heap. A small quartzite flake was recovered from Trench 4 on the Lower Plateau. The retouched tools are listed in Tables 3a and 3b and the debitage in Table 4. The flint was classified by Roger Jacobi in 1998.

		C. Hawkes' Spoil Heap	Material	Meso	Length/ Width mm	Weight gm
18	25	Straight backed bladelet (rod)	Flint	Late	18.0 x 4.0	0.12
19	26	Convex backed microlith	Flint	Late	12.6 x 4.3	0.15
20	27	Retouched blade	Flint		14.1 x 6.7	0.27
21		Retouched blade	Flint		9.8 x 6.2	0.2
22		Blade (recent break)	Flint		32.2 x 14.4	4.11

**Table 3b.** *Retouched tools discovered during the 1998 excavation on the 1960s spoil heap.*

*Flaking and Manufacture*

The majority of the retouched tools are heavily patinated with the exception of one piece of Greensand Chert (No. 24), two pieces of medium brown flint (Nos. 3, 7) and three pieces ranging from light grey, medium grey and dark grey (Nos. 18, 19, 21). Patination on the 17 pieces of debitage is more varied with only six pieces having patination. One piece of debitage shows slight evidence of fire crackle (No. 26). All the retouched tools and debitage in the assemblage have been reduced to the tertiary stage of the reduction process, but No. 25 has a small amount of cortex remaining.

*Raw material*

It is difficult to source the raw material as there is very little debitage and most of retouched tools are patinated. The raw material fabric does not suggest that it derives from beach pebble and the nearest source of good quality flint would be from the Marlborough Downs in Wiltshire. There is no flowing surface water on the Mendip Hills from which river gravels might deposit flint from other sources, so it appears likely that the raw material was brought in from some distance away. The one piece of Greensand Chert most likely derives from a source on the Blackdown Hills, approximately 60 km away.

*Chronology*

The flint recovered from the 1960s excavations and illustrated by Chris Norman (Gardiner, 2001, 111) is late Mesolithic, apart from No. 20, which is an unclassifiable broken tip of a microlith, but certainly Mesolithic. The retouched tools from the 1998 excavation

	Description	Trench	Grid	Context	Material	Depth cm	Length/Width mm	Weight gm
23	Waste fragment	3	N10/E7	302	Flint		9.1 x 8.4	0.16
24	Prox. blade end	3	N10/E7	303-III	Greensand Chert		26.9 x 20.8	2.98
25	Flake with cortex	3	N10/E7	303-III	Flint		19.7 x 12.7	0.98
26	Fire crackled	1	N10/W6	103-II	Flint		23.3 x 13.3	1.33
27	Waste	1	N10/W6	104	Flint	15-20	19.2 x 8.9	0.68
28	Blade frag	2	N13/E2	202	Flint	15	12.8 x 10.1	0.29
29	Retouched spall	2	N15/E1	202	Flint		9.8 x 7.8	0.19
30	Waste	2	N15/E1 West	202	Flint		12.5 x 8.4	0.3
31	Fire crackled chip	2	N10/E2	203-I		23	4.7 x 3.5	0.01
32	Waste chip	2	N10/E2	203-I	Flint	23	6.2 x 4.0	0.08
33	Flake	2	N10/E1	205	Flint	28	18.9 x 10.8	0.73
34	Flake	2	N10/E1	205	Flint		14.0 x 8.3	0.2
35	Waste chip	2	N10/E2	206	Flint		6.7 x 5.6	0.07
36	Flake	2	N10/E2	206-I	Flint	11	18.7 x 12.1	0.91
37	BA spall	2	N10/E2	207	Flint		10.8 x 7.9	0.11
38	Flake	2	N10/E2	207	Flint	23	14.8 x 11.5	0.43
39	Quartzite flake	4	Lower plateau		Quartzite	31.5	14.0 x 13.8	82.71

**Table 4.** *Debitage from the 1998 excavation.*

includes ten pieces that are diagnostic of the late Mesolithic. There are two pieces from the Bronze Age, a Beaker tanged and barbed arrowhead (No. 11) and a waste Bronze Age spall (No. 37). The Beaker arrowhead was recovered from the sieve of Context 3-I grid square W7/N10 in Trench 1 at a depth of 30 cm, with the waste spall from Trench 2 at a depth of 16 cms. The arrowhead is patinated and retains sharp edges; the spall is light grey with slight patination forming and has sharp edges. Both pieces can be regarded as later deposits and may have been hunting losses. The flint collection from the 1998 excavation is therefore predominantly late Mesolithic, although a later Bronze Age presence cannot be ignored, when placed together with the 1960s' finds.



### *Discussion*

All three trenches on the Upper Plateau produced diagnostic tools of the later Mesolithic and include lanceolates and microliths. All the retouched tools (with one exception) and debitage came from the southern areas of the trenches and are all within a few metres of the cave entrance, with the greatest number coming from Trench 2. Overall, it is a small flint assemblage, with an almost equal percentage of debitage to retouched tools. There is not enough quantity of raw material (total weight of retouched tools 17.97 g and debitage 92.66 g) to suggest that the area outside the cave entrance was used as a knapping site. The heavy patination and smooth edges on much of the assemblage, suggests it had been rolled in the ground in antiquity, but whether this was prior to deposition or during time inside the cave, is impossible to be certain. Within the flint collection there is one piece of Greensand Chert which has a separate source from the rest of the flint. There are some fire-crackled fragments, but not enough to suggest that burning occurred around the mouth of the cave. The absence of concentrations of charcoal confirm this. There was no evidence of postholes or pits, but this is not surprising, considering how close the bedrock is to the ground surface.

### *Non-flint finds*

Two sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from Trench 1. There is a nodule of quartzite, two pieces of calcite and a small quantity of charcoal from the Lower Plateau. A small hooked piece of metal (1.5 cm x 0.2 cm) was recovered near the surface of Trench 2. The animal bone from the 1960s spoil heap consists of adult and juvenile pig teeth, together with fragments of domestic cow, fox and rabbit. Trench 2 produced a small quantity of charcoal, as did the 1960s spoil heap, but neither were dense enough or secure enough to suggest a hearth or provide a dating sample (Gardiner, 2001, Appendix ix).

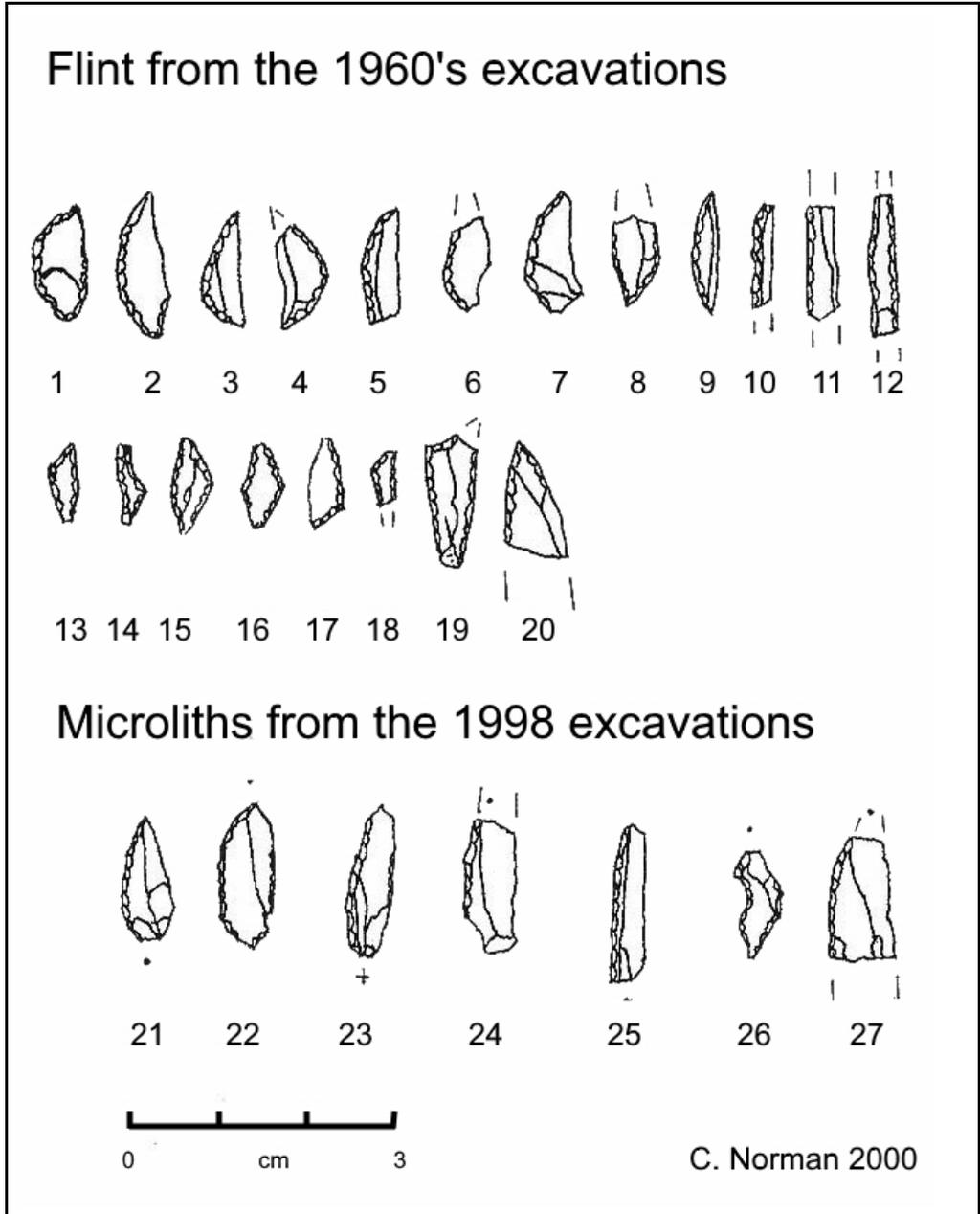
## INTERPRETATION

The condition and position of the human remains inside the cave suggest that they had been deliberately placed inside, rather than being washed in. Totty Pot is not a walk-in cave and the only known access is via the shaft. There is, however, the possibility that another entrance might exist, but it was not found in 1998.

The 1998 excavations around the mouth of the cave produced no evidence of postholes or hearths that might suggest occupation or temporary shelter. There was a very small amount of charcoal with some fire-crackled flint, but the charcoal was not of a size that could be identified or might suggest a concentrated area of burning at the cave entrance. It must be concluded, therefore, that the cave was primarily used for burial. The difficult access, via the shaft and its narrowness suggests that it is unlikely that the finds were washed in (Gardiner, 2001, 117; Gardiner 2007, 29). The position of the human bone, approximately 10 m from the shaft bottom suggests that corpses were probably disarticulated before deposition, although Schulting (2010, 87) believes that the presence of small hand and foot bones suggested that complete bodies were taken into the cave. A complete body could be taken down the shaft and dragged inside with considerable effort, difficult, but not impossible.

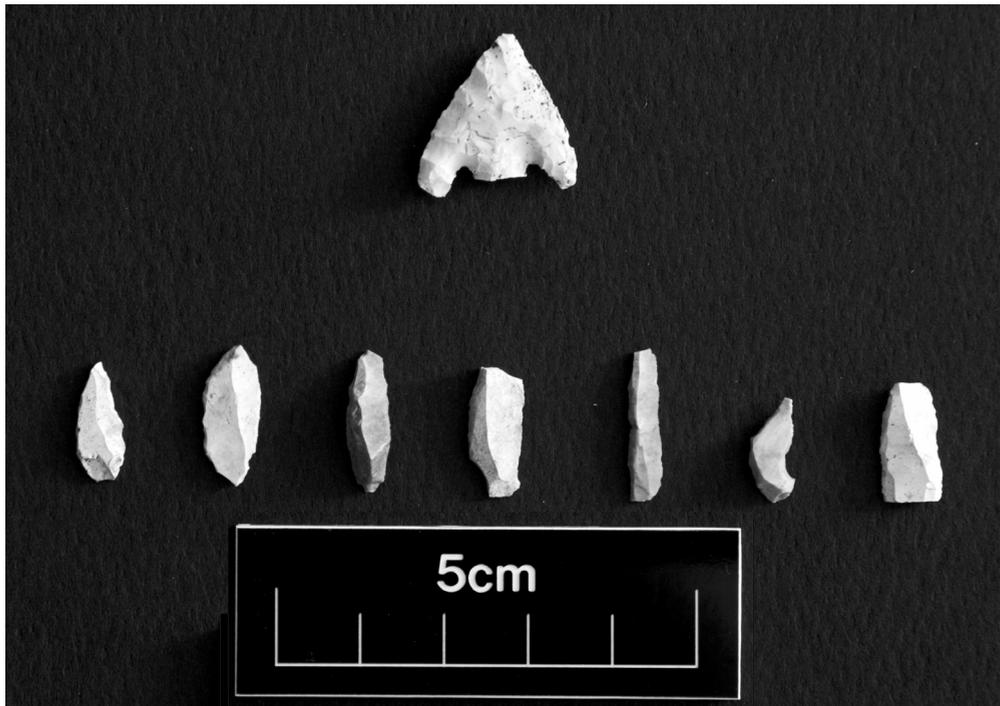
The flint assemblage does not suggest that flint knapping took place outside the cave in any quantity. The finished tools could be regarded as hunting losses, with the small amount of debitage resulting from manufacture and re-sharpening. The diagnostic late Mesolithic tools recovered from inside the cave in the 1960s, hint at careful deposition at the time of burial, but

the smooth edges on many of the tools suggest some movement within the soil and this should not be discounted.



**Figure 22.** Retouched tools from the 1960s and 1998 excavations (Gardiner, 2001, 111).

Whether the microliths from inside the cave can be regarded as grave goods is debatable, but the microliths and other retouched tools that belong to the late Mesolithic, suggests that Totty Pot was a chosen place of activity by late hunter-gatherers who were in the area not only to hunt, but to bury their dead. The fact that Totty Pot was used as a burial place in the Mesolithic, suggests its significance and importance within the landscape. The cave may have attracted people whose presence we can see on the Mendip plateau at Priddy, Rowberrow, Gorsey Bigbury or Axbridge Hill and even from the Failand Ridge, in particular from Birdcombe, Wraxall on the North Somerset Moors (Gardiner, 2001, 120; Gardiner 1007, 24).



**Figure 23.** Tanged and barbed arrowhead from Trench 1 and microliths 21-27 (Figure 22) from 1998 excavations.

Photo: © P. Gardiner.

Other cave sites on Mendip that have yielded Mesolithic burials are Aveline's Hole, Burrington Combe (Schulting *et al.* 2005) and 'Cheddar Man' from Gough's Cave (Tratman, 1975). There are microliths from Hay Wood Cave, but the human bone assemblage is Neolithic (Everton and Everton, 1972; Richards and Hedges, 2000, Schulting *et al.* 2013.). Aveline's Hole and Gough's Cave have a much easier walk-in access, but Totty Pot's dating within the range 7355-7080 (Schulting *et al.* 2010) confirms it as continuing the tradition of burial in caves into the late Mesolithic, regardless of ease of access.

It is interesting, given the radiocarbon dates for a strong Neolithic presence inside the cave (Schulting *et al.* 2010), that there is nothing in the flint assemblage or the pottery that dates to this period. The piece of quern that was found in the 1960s could be either Neolithic or

Bronze Age. Bronze Age people certainly appear to have had a presence, both inside and outside the cave, but did not bury their dead there. There are now, however, a number of cave sites that have yielded human remains of Neolithic age without accompanying Neolithic archaeology (Schulting, *et al.* 2013).

The animal bone suggests that hunting of aurochs on the Mendip plateau continued from the Mesolithic into the Bronze Age (Burleigh and Clutton-Brock 1977; Gardiner, 2001). The present landscape of stunted trees and open vegetation on the plateau, may not have been so very different in the Mesolithic and it is this kind of landscape that is favoured by aurochs.

Totty Pot as a place of mystical significance may have formed part of the annual seasonal round, with its association not only with hunting, but as a special place for human burial. Its extreme location, high on the Mendip plateau, with its 360° view of hunting territory may have bestowed it with a unique significance in the hunter-gatherer world. This was a place where one could drop down below the ground surface, out of the wind, and enter a quiet world that was completely different from the grind of daily existence. Whether Totty Pot was regarded as the entrance to a supernatural underworld, we can never know, but the focus of the cave as a burial place continued long after hunter-gatherers had departed.

## CONCLUSIONS

The 1960s excavations produced an unexpected array of archaeological material from a cave that was dug intermittently over many years. One radiocarbon date on human remains tantalisingly placed Totty Pot with other important Mesolithic burial places on Mendip, at Aveline's Hole and Gough's Cave. The subsequent excavation in 1998 confirmed the cave as a significant burial place in the Mesolithic and the 2010 AMS dating programme unexpectedly produced radiocarbon results for Neolithic burial. This does not detract from Totty Pot's important position within the Mendip landscape for burial in the Mesolithic, but gives us a wider insight into how farming communities were treating their dead.

Regrettably the 1960s excavations suffered from the lack of a methodical recording system that could be reproduced at a later stage and the stratigraphic position of the finds are lost. It is impossible to securely associate the flint assemblage with the human remains, but many of the finds still exist and are currently curated at Wells Museum. The biggest regret is the loss of the human remains by the Leicestershire Police, but the 2010 dating programme has gone some way to counteracting this. This paper has endeavoured to compensate for the poor contextual recording during excavation in the 1960s, with personal memories from Christopher Hawkes, the diaries of Willie Stanton and the finds themselves.

Further excavation inside the cave may allow a secure recording system to be put in place for any remaining material, but will not place the existing finds in context. A search for another more accessible entrance could be carried out further along the Upper Plateau, or to the side of the current shaft entrance amongst the blocked stones. Further excavation in Trench 3 may break into the cave roof, but an accurate surface survey will identify its position in relation to the passages and small chambers inside the cave to assess whether this is a possibility. Geophysical survey has technically improved since 1998 and there may be some benefit in carrying out further surveys on both the Upper and Lower Plateaux, although the closeness of the bedrock to the surface may obscure results.

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The 1998 excavation archive and finds are housed in Wells and Mendip Museum with the permission of Cheddar Gorge and Caves.

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*The author with Christopher Hawkes at Totty Pot, 2010.*