PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SOMERSETSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

DURING THE YEAR

1909.

AFTER an interval of twenty-one years, the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society revisited Wells, the Sixty-First Annual Meeting of the Society opening in the Cathedral City on Monday, July 12th, and continuing until the following Friday. It was extremely appropriate and fitting that the visit of the Society to Wells should have been repeated at the time when the Diocese of Bath and Wells was celebrating the foundation of the See. There was a very large gathering of members.

Wookey Hole and the Hyaena Den.

The proceedings began on Monday afternoon when the members visited Wookey. The party were fortunate in having with them that afternoon the original explorer of the Hyæna Den, Professor W. BOYD DAWKINS, D.SC., F.R.S., who gave an excellent description of the Den and its contents.

He said: It was some fifty years ago since he first commenced the exploration of that cave. Since that time he had had the opportunity of twice speaking to the members of the Society from that spot, and he considered he was very fortunate in being able to meet them there for the third time. He proposed that afternoon to give them some sort of idea as to the

place which the exploration of that cave had taken in contributing to the ancient history of man in these islands.

The cave was discovered in cutting the water passage in the year 1852. In 1859 he happened to be pretending to read for 'Greats' at Oxford at a neighbouring place called Theale, along with his friend John Richard Green, the future historian, and as they had nothing to do in the way of learning, time pressed rather heavily on their hands. They heard that some bones had been found in that place. They came over, and Mr. Hodgkinson, the owner—the father of the place, he might say—was good enough to give them every facility for digging. This was the beginning of the exploration. When they began, the original mouth of the cave had been cut away, but not much of it. The whole chamber in which he stood was full of cave earth, containing remains of animals and human implements. They dug their way in and found the passage passing from the back of the chamber to the north. Ultimately in 1860 and 1862 they thoroughly explored the cave. The result of their explorations was that they found a vast quantity of bones, and teeth of various beasts; most of the bones were marked by teeth, and no doubt the bones were those of animals that had been used for food by hyænas who had lived there. The hyænas dragged the animals in, and ate them at their leisure. They were in the habit of eating not only the flesh but the bones. Most of these were gnawed and broken by their powerful teeth and jaws in order to get at the marrow. That place was then a den of hyænas, and there was no doubt that the great cave and other caves in the neighbourhood were also inhabited by hyænas. Among the remains of the animals there were large numbers of reindeer antlers, and teeth and bones, and the hyænas often used to amuse themselves when they could not get bones to eat by playing with the antlers and gnawing them, although there was no good food to be got out of them. They gnawed them to keep their teeth sharp or to keep the muscles of their mouths in good order; sometimes

they gnawed stones for the same reason. The reindeer then abounded in this neighbourhood, but besides these there were bisons, horses, and the great Irish elk, an extinct kind of stag. There were also other Arctic beasts, Arctic foxes, lemmings, and Alpine hares. But he must not forget that besides these comparatively small and familiar animals there were also large animals, some of which were now extinct. There was the woolly rhinoceros in great numbers and the woolly elephant or the mammoth. The latter were for the most part represented by young remains. Now, of course, large bulky beasts such as the rhinoceros and the elephant would be rather tough customers for a single hyæna, and the chances were that if it came to a square fight between one hyæna and one mammoth the hyæna would not get the best of it. The large numbers of these beasts found in the cave were the result of the hyænas hunting in packs, as they do at present. What they did was to drive the large beasts that they could not master in equal combat over the rocks forming the sides and head of the Wookey ravine. Then they came round to the bottom and had a right good feed. That was the manner in which the hunting was carried on by packs of hyænas. He heard that within the last few years some of the domestic dogs in that neighbourhood had driven cattle over the same precipices, thus following out the instinct they had derived from their hunting ancestor the wolf.

Besides these animals there were large numbers of cave bears, bigger bears than any of to-day, brown bears and grizzlies, wolves, and lions, so that they had in the cave a collection of animals representative of the wild beasts living then in the immediate neighbourhood.

Well, let him pass for a moment to point out the conditions of life at the time the hyænas had possession of those caves. There were no marshes in the neighbourhood, for the reason that the great Somerset marshes in those days were more than six hundred feet above the sea level—they had since

become depressed. In the place of the marshes there was a great wide valley, sweeping away from the Mendip Hills clad with forests right down to the Quantock Hills, and away farther to the south the forest stretched without a break across the Parrett and the Tone to the Blackdown Hills. He mentioned the Blackdown Hills for a definite purpose, as they would see in a minute. Suppose they looked to the north of the Mendip Hills, there was then no Bristol Channel. That too was a great open valley, offering any amount of feed for the great herds of bison, reindeer, and horses, mammoths and rhinoceroses, that lived there. These herds formed the food of the bear and the hyæna, and the lion, and other carnivora. They thus saw that the physical geography was altogether different from that of to-day.

The climate also was different. At the present time the inhabitants of Britain enjoyed a comparatively mild winter, and not a very hot summer, simply because of the gulf stream. They had an insular climate nowadays, but there was no gulf stream touching the present area of the British Isles then ; for the western shores of Europe extended 100 miles west of Ireland, and a wide range of forest-clad land, broken by occasional stretches of grass traversed by various rivers, occupied the Irish Sea and the western margin of the Atlantic. The River Severn flowed out into the open sea far away off the west coast of Ireland. The River Mersey and other rivers found their way readily by a great deep submarine ravine which extended between Scotland and Ireland, and opened out to the northward. That was the physical geography of that time. And now as to climate. He had mentioned the presence of reindeer, which could now enjoy life only in a cold climate, and he mentioned cave hyænas there, which were now found in comparatively warm climates. There were also some other beasts which were peculiar to warm climates, which had been found in association with that group of beasts in other places. They found, for instance, leopards in some of the Mendip

caves as well as lions and hyænas. Thus they had on one hand Arctic beasts such as the reindeer, the lemming, and the Alpine hare, and on the other hand they had southern beasts. How did they account for that? Simply in this way. The reindeer ranged southward, in the severity of the Continental winter, into Somerset, while the Continental summer was sufficiently warm for the horses and bisons to occupy in summer the same feeding grounds as the reindeer did in winter.

Professor Boyd Dawkins then dealt with the remains of man, consisting of implements of flint and chert, and rudely fashioned bone. These prove beyond all doubt that man inhabited the cave before and during the accumulation of earth. The people who lived in this cavé were people closely allied to the Esquimaux in type, in art, and in manner of life—rude hunters, ignorant of pottery, living a rude, wild hunter's life in this beautiful ravine. The woods then covering the district were the same as now—there were no elms. The oak, the ash, and the yew, and nearly all the common British forest trees were then there.

Whence came these men? He had mentioned to them that the animals migrated according to the seasons. The hunters followed after them and brought with them the stones out of which the implements in the cave were made, and among them chert from the Blackdowns or Dorset. These men therefore came from the south and followed the animals northward into the Mendips. How is it that the cave was inhabited by men and hyænas? The hyænas lived here mostly all the year round. Hunters only came here occasionally, and when they were here the hyænas found it convenient to be away. Hyænas are afraid of fire, to say nothing of man, and the very fact of a fire being kindled would drive them away from their dens. The hunter came here, kindled his fire, and ate his food, and carried out his avocations, which were of a low savage order, and then went away, and the hyænas came back. Thus the remains of animals brought in by man and eaten by him lay

side by side with the animals brought in and eaten by hyænas. It was a sort of Box and Cox arrangement: man in and hyæna out, and *vice versa*.

Caves of this kind had been used in all ages and all periods of the world, as places of shelter for animals and for men. And they might ask him why it was in the Mendip Hills that they did not find traces of any caverns older than this. He could explain that very simply. It was due to the fact that the rocks containing older caves had been destroyed by the atmosphere, the rain and the frost. The destruction had been so universal that there was only one exception on record—the Pliocene cave of Doveholes, near Buxton.

Professor Boyd Dawkins then turned to the later history of this ravine. The hyæna-den was inhabited by man and the wild animals, and was filled to the roof with débris in the oldest of the four periods of human progress, the Palæolithic age. The great cave was also open at this time, and was doubtless also inhabited, but all traces of such habitation have been swept out of it by the floods of the Axe. It was also open during the Neolithic, Bronze, and Prehistoric Iron Ages, through the Roman Period, and down to to-day. The only important remains however, discovered by Messrs. Balch and Troup, belonged to the Prehistoric Iron Age, and to the time of the Roman occupation of Britain. They proved that the same people who inhabited Glastonbury, and the other Lake Villages then bordering the marshes south of the Mendip Hills, lived in the large caverns, and were succeeded by inhabitants using Roman coins and Roman pottery. For details Professor Boyd Dawkins would refer to the lecture of Mr. Balch, who was so ably carrying on the researches which he (the Professor) began in the Mendip Hills some forty years ago.

Wookey Hole Cavern.

A move was next made to the mouth of Wookey Hole Cavern where Mr. H. E. Balch gave an account of recent

excavations. He, taking up the story where Professor Boyd Dawkins left off, said they started work with the idea that possibly they might connect up the story actually—that they might follow on from just where the story of the hyæna den finished—that they might possibly get down here to Palæolithic remains. But they had been disappointed in that possibility, and they had not succeeded yet in discovering Neolithic remains. With permission most freely given by Mr. Hodgkinson, Mr. R. D. R. Troup and himself had turned over the floor of the cavern for a distance of about 120 feet from the entrance. At a point about 30 feet from the entrance they had to deal with a series of levels where nothing had been disturbed. The floor had been raised by the accumulation of all sorts of rubbish till the passage had become simply a contracted rift in the rocks and only about a foot remained between the floor and the pendant mass of rock which they knew was a prominent feature within the mouth of the cavern. For a depth of a foot to 15 inches they came across common objects, such as pipe-stems, fragments of recent pottery, and one or two coins dating back to Charles I. But having penetrated the surface material they came to a sharply defined line of mud, varying in thickness from a few inches to 18 inches; this was followed by a deposit of black ashy material averaging 6 inches thick, containing a large quantity of Roman remains, and coins of the Roman emperors dating back to Marcia representing Consular Rome about 119 B.C.[1] They found a large quantity of Romano-British pottery that mingled with other remains of Roman occupation, including glass and bronze. But directly they passed this black layer, they lost all trace of Roman remains. At a level of from 4 to 5 feet from the surface they found a considerable accumulation of ash, due to the presence of fires, which contained pre-Roman

1. A large number of Roman coins, apparently of the Constantine period, were found at Wookey Hole in 1857. (*Som. Co. Herald*, Nov. 27, 1909).

pottery, iron implements, human remains, worked bones, etc. They had at the bottom of this deposit of Romano-British and pre-Roman rubbish a sooty black accumulation which must have been the result of human occupation, and it was hoped that flint implements would yet be found in this cave, perhaps near the entrance. In Kent's Cavern the only trace of a Neolithic deposit occurred close to the entrance, where 365 Neolithic implements were found scattered round the remains of fires.

For a fuller account of this exploration *see* the Report of the Wells Natural History and Archæological Society for 1908.

Under the guidance of Messrs. Balch and Troup, the members inspected the full length of the cave and afterwards wended their way to the charming grounds of Glencot where Mr. and Mrs. W. S. Hodgkinson very kindly provided Tea. Before leaving the Rev. F. W. Weaver fittingly expressed the thanks and appreciation of the members to their host and hostess for their kind hospitality.

Wookey Church.

Two miles drive brought the members to Wookey Church, which was described by the Vicar, the Rev. E. B. Cook, who said : Wookey gets its name from the cave which you visited to-day, Wookey Hole being an explanatory reduplication of the old word *Wocob* or *Wocov*, which means a cave. The parish was included in the 50 hides of land which were given by the Confessor (1065) to Giso, the sixteenth and last Bishop of Wells, so-called. In older times (577-658) it was included in the tongue of Saxon land which was bounded on the south by the little river Axe, and thus was Saxon while Wells was still British. Of this 50 hides, the Bishop made use of eight for himself, giving the rest for the support of the church in Wells and its officers. Wookey was included in this Bishop's land, and the origin of the village and its peculiar interest is

in the need here for a manorial house for the Bishop, and the direct concern which the bishops had to show for their tenants.

Of the building of the Church there is no record, but there is a font of the middle XII Century, and a piscina, now in the wall of the south chapel, of the same date; and the first mention of the institution of a vicar in Drokensford's register (1313) seems to indicate that the Church and Vicarage already existed. It is likely then that the Church was built in the time of Bishop Robert (1136-1166), for the record is "Robertus episcopus ecclesiasm de Woky decano dedit." The Deans of Wells were then its first Rectors, and in Joscelin's time (1213), by an exchange with Wedmore, the Sub-Deans became Rectors, until the Ecclesiastical Commissioners came in by a new arrangement. The institution of the vicarage is not recorded, but seems to belong to the end of the XIII Century. The Church as it is at present is a very simple structure without any remarkable features. Of the older building there are no remains except, perhaps, the lower parts of the chancel, east and north walls. The present building was probably built in the end of the XIII Century, and the east window seems to belong to that date. At first it was a rectangular building without aisles, without the present chancel steps, and having a rood-screen which was approached by a stone staircase now within the north-east buttress behind the pulpit and by a door the outline of which is marked in the plaster above the pulpit. The staircase was lighted by two windows, one at the back of the hole opened in the restoration of 1871 to show it, and one lower, which may be seen in the present north aisle. The north aisle was next built, and a long squint provided with a piscina worked on the front of it for the altar, which stood at the end of the aisle. Some fifty years later the south aisle was built, and the capitals and columns of the north pillars were re-cut to match the more graceful later ones; the end piers were untouched. At the east of this aisle was another altar, with its piscina on the south wall, and a

double squint made amid the mouldings of the pier. The tower belongs to the early XV Century, and was probably built by Bishop Bubwith, who was peculiarly fond of Wookey and spent much of his time in his manor house here. The south-east chapel is said to have been built around the tomb of Thos. Clarke, 1555 (leaseholder for life of the manor of his brother, Bishop John Clarke, 1527-1541), a tomb which was later moved to its present position south of the sanctuary. In 1423 Bubwith repaired the chancel, and to this date seems to belong the rectangular window in the chapel, and the south small door. From the poor work of the two arches and pillar which were put in when the chapel was built, it looks as if the south wall of the old chancel was used for the south wall of the new chapel, and the arches, perhaps, brought here from somewhere else and badly erected, or else badly worked by inexperienced or unskilled hands locally. A confirmation of this cheap method of erecting the chapel is that the capital of the pillar is left unfinished. Probably the big opening in the south pier of the chancel arch belongs to a later date; to a time in the XVIII Century, after the chapel had been re-arranged and was filled with great pews, or possibly was a hagioscope for the altar of the chapel. There are no remains of the rood-screen. The panels of the pulpit probably came from the XVI Century screen, which stood between the south aisle and the chapel. The little sacristy was built in 1772 by the trustees of the Church. The rail between the south aisle and the chapel was put here, as the altar rail, in the time of Bishop Pierce, and bears the date 1635, which is the date of Laud's order for the fencing of the communion tables at the east end of the Church. The altar belongs to that date, but was lengthened in 1871.

Of possessions, the church plate is the most interesting. There is a long silver Elizabethan chalice and cover, bearing the date 1573, and the initials "I.P.," the mark of the maker of the Cathedral vessels and many more in the district. There

are, besides, a silver flagon, a silver paten with a foot, and a silver font for private baptism, bearing the mark of the year 1823 (Exeter), and therefore belonging to the time of George IV.

There are two old chests, one in the sacristy, with the initials "E.B." and "R.L.," the initials of the churchwardens Edward Barlow and Richard Lyde, 1634; and a small one in the chapel, dated 1689, with the initials of Thomas Corpe and Hugh Merifield. There is a third one in the vicarage, which was purchased in 1764. The old copy of the Authorised Version was replaced by a new one in 1749. It is the original church copy, and was well restored in the time of my predecessor. It now lies within the squint of the south chancel pier.

The bells are five in number; the third is the oldest and bears the inscription abbreviated, "Jesus Nazarenus rex Judaeorum." The other bells are dated 1615, 1639, 1719, 1735. The organ was enlarged and put in the west tower in 1902. The first organ was given by an inhabitant farmer, T. Wear, in 1836.

A very complete restoration of the Church took place in 1871, at a cost of £1,300. To that date belong the roof, the fittings, the present condition of the floor, the reredos, two windows in the north chancel wall, the east window, two windows in the nave, and the gathering of the monuments in the tower. The only bits of old glass are the fragments at the head of the small windows in the chancel, and these were probably not parts of the church windows. They were dug up, and perhaps came from the Bishop's Court.

Of more modern things, the chapel was decorated and arranged for use as a "Children's Church" in 1903; the churchyard cross was restored in 1906 by Mr. Harry Hems. This cross is designed from an early XV Century fragment belonging to Stoke-sub-Hamdon, and which was found embedded in an old garden wall there some fifty years ago, the main difference being that the crowned Madonna in one of the panels is replaced by a homelier figure of the Blessed Mother

and Holy Child, and the lantern is not pierced from east to west, as is the Stoke example. It is an attempt to reproduce the Somerset type of churchyard cross of the early XV Century, all of which seem to have had the somewhat short pinnacles which are a feature of the design of this one. The other panels contain representations of the Crucifixion; the patron saint, St. Matthew; and Bishop Bubwith, who loved Wookey so well.

The other thing of modern interest is the record of the striking of the church by lightning during service on May 13, 1906. The oak cross upon the tablet and the two churchwardens' staves are made from the roof timbers which then fell.

The entries in the registers date from 1558.[1] The books were commenced in 1598, when the entries on loose pieces of parchment and paper for the previous 40 years were copied in a parchment book, which afterwards was thrice enlarged, until it covers the period from 1558-1758, Marriages, and 1812 Baptisms and Burials.

The Rev. F. W. WEAVER tendered the hearty thanks of the Society to the Rev. E. B. Cook, adding that it was interesting to notice that this was the only old church in Somerset dedicated to St. Matthew. With regard to a knowledge of the early vicars of Wookey they were not in such a good position as they were at Exeter, Lincoln and in one or two other dioceses, for there the Bishop's registers began in the XIII Century; in Wells, the first Bishop's register began in 1309.

Old Buildings at Wookey.

After viewing the Church, the Rev. E. B. COOK conducted some of the members to buildings of interest in the village.

They visited the front of the old Rectory House, which has built into it old corbels, spandrils, and a beautiful oriel window, all perhaps from Wells or the Bishop's House at Wookey.

1. The registers are kept in a fire-proof safe at the Vicarage.

This work was done, and the house built about 200 years ago, and then an old house, which is described in 1634 as in the churchyard, was incorporated to form the offices of the new house.

The members then walked along the village street and came round across the "Court" to see the remains of the moat and fishponds, and hall of the Court House built by Joscelin. The chapel and camera, the columbarium and tithe barns are all gone, and all that remains is included in the present farmhouse, which still has the Early English western doorway of Joscelin's chapel.

The old Vicarage House, which stood in the walled garden made on the two-acre strip set aside for the vicars in the XIII Century, was in a ruinous state during the greater part of the XVIII Century. Its stones were probably used in the building of the middle part of the present one at the beginning of the XIX Century.

In 1886 Chancellor Holmes, the present Vicar's predecessor, collected and published all that was then known of the history of the parish and manor of Wookey.