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COX'S CAVE, CHEDDAR A HISTORY

by

D. J. IRWIN

N.G.R. ST 46465390

ABSTRACT

Cox's Cave was discovered by a workman employed by George Cox in 1837 and opened to the public in the following year. Since then only small extensions have been discovered, though the opening of the Lady Chapel in 1913 encouraged the making of a second entrance. The cave was lit by gas from about 1870 and electric lighting, partially installed in 1913, fully replaced gas in 1929. The Cox family attempted to sell the cave in 1884, but a High Court decision that it was not in fact theirs to sell prevented this, although they were granted a lease of the cave. The cave returned to the control of Longleat Estates in 1939. Roland Pavey's underground activities nearby presented a potential danger to Cox's Cave between 1890 and 1904. This account has been based on contemporary accounts as far as possible, including official documents, newspapers, and travel guides.

Cox's Cave was the first cave at Rock-End, Cheddar, to be developed for tourists, and this was done immediately after its discovery in 1837. Other sites, namely Long Hole and Gough's Old Cave, were visited by travellers occasionally, usually accompanied by a woman or child acting as guide (Irwin, 1986a,b). In the early part of the 19th century Cheddar village and the Gorge formed part of the Longleat Estate, as does the south side of the Gorge today.

THE COX FAMILY AND THEIR PROPERTY

George Cox (1800-1868) inherited a grist mill from his father, James. It was leasehold property, originally known as Harris's Mill, later to be renamed Cox's Mill and today better known as the Cliff Hotel. There were several paper mills and grist mills operating at Cheddar about this time, the name of a mill being that of its current owner. Harris's Mill had been purchased by James Cox at an auction at the Marquis of Bath Arms Inn (now the Bath Arms), Cheddar, on 29 December 1823. Previously it had been owned by one Edward Nicholls who had bought it in the same year from the Harris family (Longleat, 1823, 1842). The sale comprised six lots, the last being the mill, described as:

LOT 6.-All That NEWLY ERECTED and WELL-ACCUSTOMED WATERGRIST MILL, GARDEN and Premises adjoining; having a most excellent supply of Water, and desirably situated at the foot of the beautiful and Romantic Cliffs of Cheddar.

In the 1830 edition of Pigot's *Commercial Directory*, James Cox was included as a miller, but the 1842 edition lists George, his son, as miller and James (presumably retired) among the gentry and clergy of Cheddar. Though the original documents have not survived, the lease to James Cox was dated 27 April 1828, with a revision dated 7 September 1834, possibly about the time of James's retirement. By 1852 George was operating the mill, the Cliff Inn and the tea gardens (Slater, 1852). Kelly (1866) associates George Cox with the Cliff Hotel and lists George Cox junior (1828-1902) as a miller and seedsman.

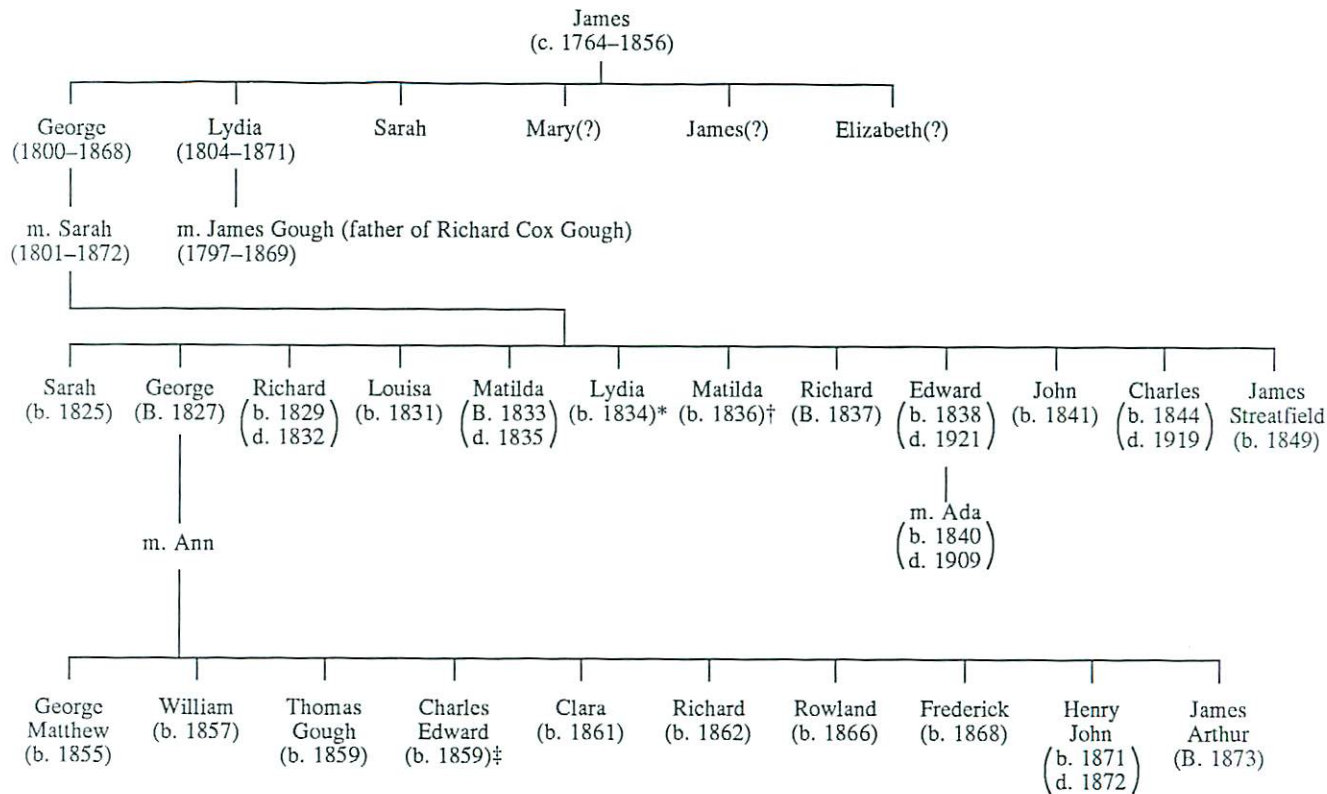


FIG. 1—THE COX FAMILY TREE

Notes. b.:year of birth B.:year of baptism d.:year of death

*The 1861 census gives Lydia as 26 years old; the 1871 census gives her age as 33

†The 1861 census gives Matilda as 25 years old; the 1871 census gives her age as 31

‡The 1871 census gives Charles Edward as 10 years old

Dates are from the Cheddar parish registers and from censuses in the Somerset County Archives at Taunton.

Following the death of the elder George in 1868, the property passed to his children (FIG. 1). A revised lease, dated 27 October 1871 (Longleat, 1871) lists the following, who were associated with the Cheddar operations, as being the beneficiaries of George Cox's will: George Cox (licensed victualler), Edward Cox (Bristol, draper), James Streatfield Cox (Cheddar, gentleman), Charles Cox (Clifton, gentleman), and Lydia Cox and Matilda Cox (Weston-super-Mare, though the 1871 census shows them living at Cheddar). This lease describes the property as comprising the Cliff Hotel, refreshment rooms, and gardens. The cave was not included in the 1834 revision (it had not yet been discovered), nor was it included in the 1871 revision. When the Cox family tried to sell the cave in 1884 they were under the mistaken impression that the cave was their freehold property, as they claimed to have been in undisputed possession of it since its discovery. This belief was also apparent as early as 1842 when George Cox was involved in a dispute concerning what legal rights, if any, he had over the cave (Longleat, 1842).

From the time of the second revision, in 1871, Charles Cox (1844-1919) and James Streatfield Cox appear as proprietors of the site (Morris, 1872) whilst George Cox junior operated the "'Cliff' family and commercial hotel' as well as being a miller. No precise date has been found for the closure of Edward's drapery business in Bristol, but by 1888 he is listed (Kelly, 1889) as the proprietor of Cox's Cave. The actual date of his becoming proprietor may be inferred from a letter dated 21 August 1888 written by Richard Cox Gough (*Weston-super-Mare Gazette*, 25 Aug. 1888):

In April of 1887 . . . one of the caves came under new management, and since then (and not before) there has been rivalry, and not the best of feeling manifested.

Thus it appears that he became proprietor of Cox's Cave during 1887 but had been involved with its operation as early as 1884 when he was listed as one of the defendants during the dispute over the sale of the cave. He presumably returned to live at Cheddar about 1888 and is first listed as an inhabitant there by Kelly (1889).

THE CAVE DISCOVERY

The discovery of the cave in 1837 has been popularly ascribed to George Cox himself. However *The Wells Journal* (22 March, 1900), reporting the death of a 94-year-old Betsy Cooper, stated that her late husband had been 'the accidental discoverer of Cox's celebrated stalactite cavern'. George Cox was in the process of building an outhouse or coach-house when this happened. Many years later his son, Edward Cox, recalled the incident (*Weston-super-Mare Gazette*, 10 July 1909):

Seventy-two years ago a resident of Cheddar with a scheme on hand for building a new coach-house, was using a crowbar on the surface of the cliff twenty or thirty feet above the level of the road. He was surprised as he handled the implement to find it slipped from his grasp and disappeared through a hole, which he discovered communicated with a passage leading he knew not where. This simple incident led to the opening up of a set of caverns . . . The present owner, Mr. Edward Cox, points to the hole away up in the roof of the cavern where his father forced an entrance and worked his way into the cave, which at this time had no entrance from the . . . road.

Although the *Gazette* account refers to George Cox as the discoverer, it seems more likely that the entrance was opened by Cooper, Betsy's husband, while it was George Cox who explored the cave.

During the re-structuring of the cave entrance in 1986-1987, the original entrance to the cave, 'twenty or thirty feet above the level of the road', was located. It proved to be the top of Daylight Hole which contains a short

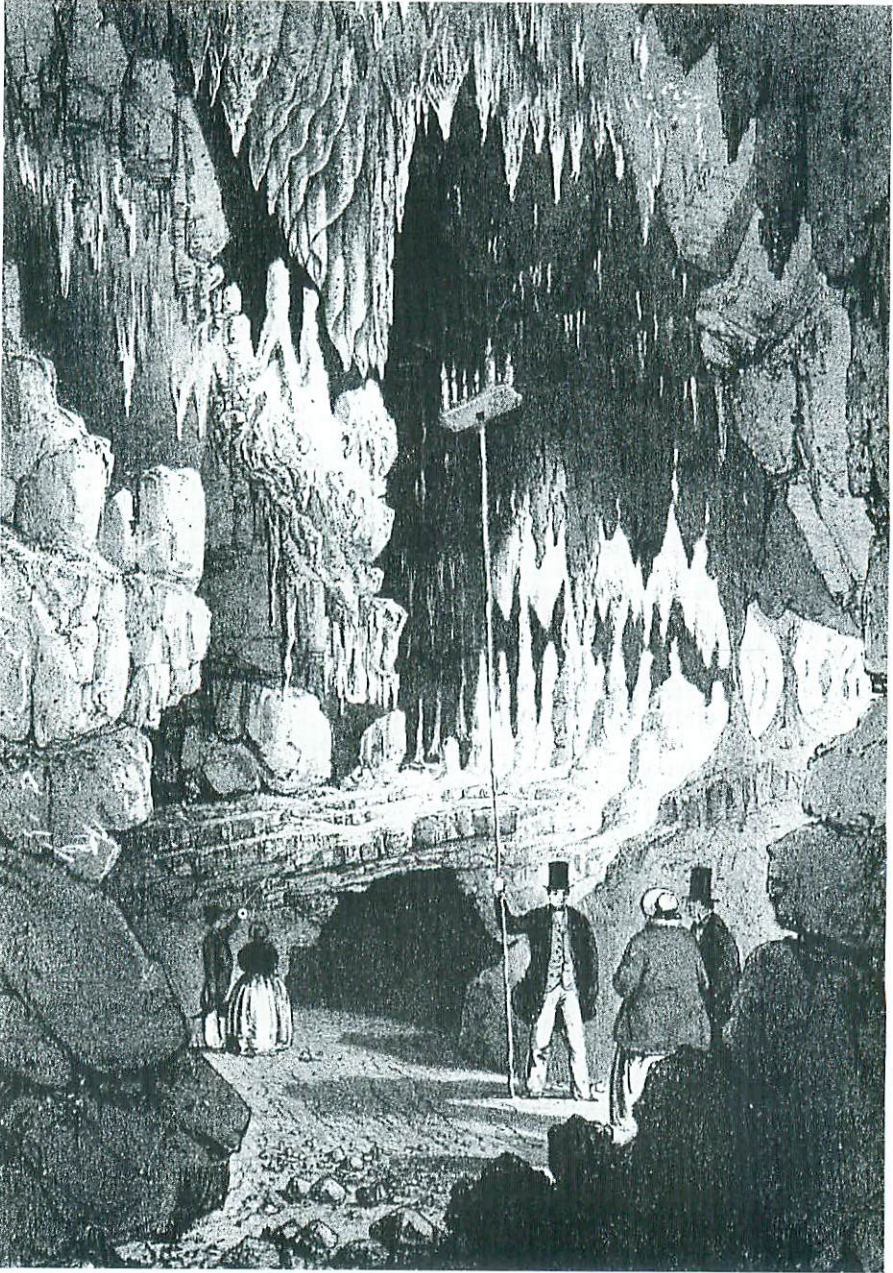


FIG. 2.—THE TRANSFORMATION SCENE AS SHOWN TO TOURISTS ABOUT 1850, USING CANDLES
From a private collection, accessible via U.B.S.S.

flight of steps and can be seen just inside the modern cave entrance. The next few months were spent by George Cox, who had recognized the commercial viability of the site, exploring and developing the cave for public showing, and it was eventually opened to the public in 1838 and the road level entrance some time between 1838 and 1842. In the course of this preparation he must have blasted through the cliff wall between the outside and the First Chamber, for the several reports published in the 1840s mention that the cave was of easy access and the pathways inside were fit for ladies to walk without soiling their clothes.

Initially called The Stalactite Cavern, the cave gradually became known as Cox's Stalactite Cavern.

Richard Beadon (1842), vicar of Cheddar from 1836 to 1883, wrote, anonymously, the first known account of the cave and its early history:

... But the Stalactite Cave, discovered in 1837 by Mr. George Cox, proprietor of the contiguous corn mill and tea gardens, has been found to have been an object of very great and pleasing interest.

Mr. Cox's description of this admired cavern is subjoined:-

'The roof resembles ancient sculpture, the formations are grotesque and fanciful, in one part you perceive the furniture of a Hindoo temple, the Black Prince, in another a mummy, elegant drapery and pillars from four to fifteen feet in height, fonts, transparent stalactite, likewise the substantial comforts of a farm-house, viz:- turkeys, tongues, fat goose, bacon, bread, &c., are naturally portrayed: and the cavern is so perfectly clean and easy of access that the most timid and delicate may explore it without inconvenience.'

The discovery was purely accidental. Mr. Cox, in removing a part of the cave in front of his mill, for the purposes of erecting a waggon house, broke into a hole which led into the present cave; he explored it, and after very considerable labour, the work of several months, in blasting and removing large masses of rock, he has brought it to its present perfection.

A year later the geologist W. D. Conybeare, Dean of Llandaff, visited the cave and wrote about it to William Buckland:

Stalactite Cavern, Cheddar, 1st July, 1843

Dear Buckland, Happening to be visiting a friend, with my youngest boy, I chose to go round from Banwell hither, to show him Cheddar Cliffs, and visited this cavern, more to show it to him than expecting to see anything myself, but I think it ought to be better known. You must come and see it yourself, it is the only graceful cave fit for ladies we have; the only thing I ever saw that at all realises my idea of Antiparos[*]. It has one main porch and three or four lateral branches, narrow fissures, about ten or twelve feet broad, and some thirty or forty feet high, vested and draped with the most fantastic and beautiful marble stalactite one can conceive. The floor, when discovered, was a mass of stalagmite, covering rounded gravel of the mountain limestone, filling up about ten feet of the bottom. The owner has cut galleries through this stalagmite, and he is one of the best showmen of a cave I ever saw, lighting the whole with a group of candles on a tin plate, which he raises to the roof, or thrusts through the narrow fissures, so as to exhibit to whole to perfection. Make this known as the prettiest thing in the island, and come and see it. (Jamieson, 1858).

This illumination by 'candles on a tin plate' is shown in FIG. 2.

A guide book of 1847 reprints Beadon's description and adds:

... The cave is shown by Mr. Cox, who ably points out the various objects of notice. ... with the exception of an occasional stooping of the body, the cavern may be seen with the most perfect ease; the paths well gravelled, and free from wet; and ladies are enabled without soiling their apparel, to inspect every portion of this interesting interior.

For the accommodation of visitors, Mr. Cox has established pleasure gardens, where parties may be entertained in lovely bowers, opposite a sheet of water, so remarkable for its crystalline cleanness, which we pass on our approach to the cliffs. We recommend it as a delightful place for a pic-nic, and in case the visitors do not think fit to lay in their own store of provisions, they may obtain on the spot an abundant supply of all requests, every attention is afforded which is usual on such occasions. (Chilcott, 1847, pp. 33-34).

*The stalactite cave on the Greek island of Antiparos, famous from the 17th to the 19th century.

A similar description was published the same year in another guide book (Whereat, 1847, pp. 39-40). In Hunt's *Directory* of 1850 the entry for Cheddar states that there were several caves there, the 'principal of which is easy of access, extending in a zig-zag direction about 200 feet into the solid rock, and is covered by beautiful incrustations . . . transparent Stalactites, thousands of quill-like tubes . . .'. This is the only mention of stalactite straws in the cave; few have survived the 150 years of public viewing.



FIG. 3—THE TRANSFORMATION SCENE AFTER GAS LIGHTING HAD BEEN INSTALLED. FROM AN ENGRAVING OF 1874
(Bryne, c. 1874, plate [8])

EXTENT OF CAVE

The extent of the cave open for public viewing at any particular time is unclear. What can be deduced from existing records is shown in TABLE I. Up to the mid 1880s the first four chambers were shown, the highlight being the Transformation Scene. This famous stalagmite group appears in FIG. 2 and two different engravings of it appear in successive editions of Bryne's booklets of Cheddar views (Bryne, c. 1860, c. 1874, c. 1879); in the 1874 edition it is seen lit with gas jets (see FIG. 3).

TABLE 1—*Discovery and development of Cox's Cave*

	<i>Discovered</i>	<i>Shown to the public</i>
Chambers 1 to 4	1837	1838
Chambers 5 to 6	before 1884	c. 1886
Chamber 7	before 1884	1887
Lady Chapel	1905 & 1913	1905 & 1913
second entrance	1913	1913

The cave plan made by Thomas Cruse in July 1884 (Cruse, 1884) (FIG. 4) shows that much more was then known but not shown to the public. The cave actually extended as far as the 7th Chamber, called at that time the Upper Grotto. This 7th Chamber was not shown to the public at that time, even though a flight of 16 steps had been built to it.

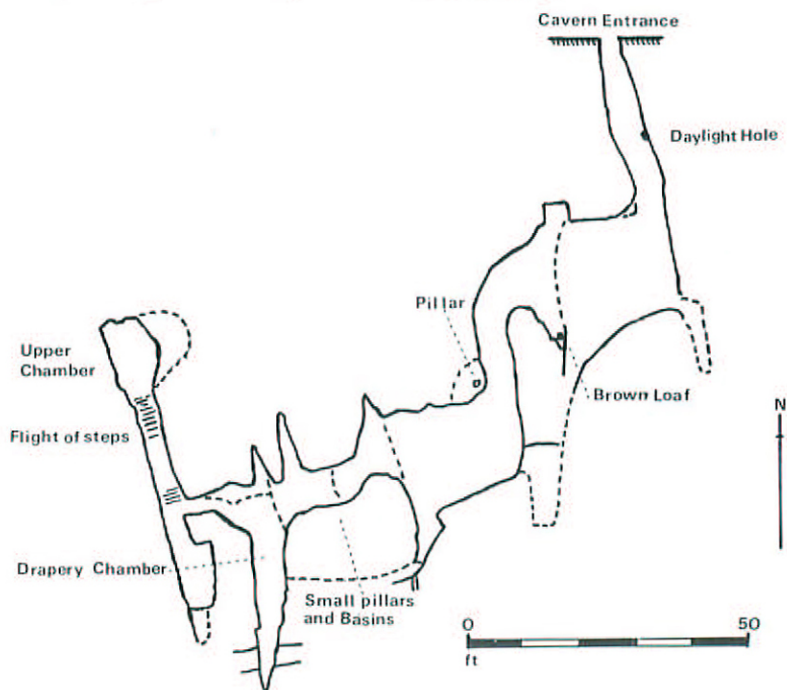


FIG. 4—A PLAN OF COX'S CAVE BY THOMAS CRUSE, DATED 8 JULY 1884. REDRAWN WITH A SCALE AND NORTH POINT ADDED
REPRODUCED BY COURTESY OF THE MARQUESS OF BATH

A passage had been cut beneath the flowstone floor at the Transformation Scene, giving access to the 5th, 6th and 7th Chambers. The passage underneath was no more than about three or four feet high, as a photograph of about 1925 clearly shows. It is possible that the 5th and 6th Chambers (which contain the Peal of Bells and the sawn through section of stalagmite) were already included in the tours by 1884. They were certainly being advertised and shown by about 1886 (Cox, c. 1886). In 1887, no doubt timed to coincide with Queen Victoria's golden jubilee, the 7th Chamber was 'discovered' and christened The Fairies' Grotto.

During Martel's visit in 1904, *The Times* (Anon., 1904) reported: 'They were greatly pleased with the kaleidoscopic beauties of Cox's Cavern, which will soon be enlarged by the addition of a newly discovered chamber.' A handbill (Cox, c. 1906) quotes *The Times* and adds 'The New and Charming Chamber is now on View'. The remaining grottos, collectively known today as The Lady Chapel, were discovered in 1905 and extended in 1913, the latter date being that of the opening of the second entrance. An advertisement in *The Wells Journal* (4 July, 1913) called the discovery 'Treasures of darkness . . . lost to sight for ages'. It is possible that Edward Cox had 'stored' these grottos to enable them to be 'discovered' in response to any discoveries made at Gough's Cave or any other event.

From then on no further discoveries were made and the cave came under the direct control of Longleat Estates in 1939.

Until 1913 the cave had just a single entrance (FIG. 5). This was inconvenient quite early on:

. . . If at all practicable, means of exit should be provided distinct from the entrance, so that on special occasions visitors might pass through, and much confusion be thereby avoided. (Stevens, 1869, p. 31).

The second entrance, via an enlarged rift from the 7th Chamber to the cliff face, was made in 1913. Cox's guide book to the cave (Cox, 1914, p. 3) reported 'There is also a new and most convenient exit.' This entrance was closed in 1987 and a connection to Pavey's Cave (which is now known as Fantasy Grotto) has been made so that visitors may exit through the Pavey's Cave entrance.



No. 53. Entrance to Cox's Cave, Cheddar.

Visited by the late King Edward VII see Caves visited by M. Martel, Paris. Cox's admitted the most.

FIG. 5—THE ENTRANCE TO COX'S CAVE ABOUT 1910

THE CAVE LIGHTING

Before 1870 the cave was lit by candles, as illustrated in FIG. 2 and described by Conybeare in 1843 (see p. 24). Improvements were on the way in the late 1860s. Green (1869, p. 31) stated that 'Gas will shortly be used to light the cavern' and Stevens (1869, p. 31) commented:

It is to be desired also that an endeavour be made to light this exquisite cavern with gas, or at any rate by some more brilliant arrangement than has been hitherto adopted. With a powerful light, increased or diminished so as to produce the best effects, the result would be truly magnificent.

- * COX'S * -

STALACTITE CAVERN,
LIGHTED WITH
WELSBACH INCANDESCENT,
A BRILLIANT WHITE LIGHT,
Superior to Electricity.

Opposite the "Cliff Hotel" and Pleasure Gardens,
Commanding Magnificent Views of the Cheddar Cliffs.

VISITED BY

H.R.H. The Prince of Wales,
T.R.H. the Duke & Duchess D'Aumale,
H.R.H. the Prince of Siam,
The Duke of Argyll,
The Ladies Campbell,
The Right Hon. Sir M. Grant-Duff,
Lord Avebury (Sir John Lubbock),
&c.

THE TWO SONS OF
His Majesty the King of Siam,
AND
The Lord Chief Justice of England,
VISITED COX'S CAVERN, 1898.

FIG. 6—THE FRONT OF A HANDBILL (C. 1899) DESCRIBING THE GAS LIGHTING AS 'WELSBACH INCANDESCENT'
From a private collection, accessible via U.B.S.S.

Stevens's wish was answered within a few months, for acetylene gas lighting was installed during 1869 and 1870 (FIG. 3). During the 1870 season Cox's advertisements described the cave as 'Now lit by Gas' (Beedle, 1870, p. 101). A later handbill (Cox, c. 1894) stated that the 'Reflectors throw light on the rich colours, red, white, pink, olive, amber, orange, chocolate, bronze, & terra-cotta.'

COX'S STALACTITE CAVERN, CHEDDAR,
Lighted with Acetylene,
The Most Brilliant Light yet discovered,
VISITED BY
HIS MAJESTY KING EDWARD VII.

THE COLOURS
In COX'S Cavern are more brilliant and beautiful than
in any other Cavern in the world.
◇ □ ◇ □ ◇ □ ◇

The Marble Curtain
(Post Card No. 17) is described as
"The Finest Stalactite in the World."

The greatest living authority on Caves,
MONSIEUR MARTEL, PARIS,
says:
"Much more original appeared to me **Cox's Cave**, known since 1837. I admired there a profusion of slender columns and draperies of calcite such as I have seen nowhere else; their incredible delicacy and rich colourings make the interior of Cox's Cave
A Veritable Jewel.
Every tone of red from tender pink to a deep brown, and even certain violet shades, decorate its sparkling crystallisations. **No other Cave presents to my knowledge such a variety of tints.**"

[P.T.O.]

FIG. 7—THE FRONT OF A HANDBILL OF ABOUT 1907, REFERRING TO ACETYLENE LIGHTING AND QUOTING MARTEL'S OPINION AFTER HIS 1904 VISIT

The method of lighting the caves was to become a part of the continual rivalry between Cox and Gough during the 1890s and the early years of the 20th century. Gough had put gas lighting in Gough's Old Cave in 1883 (Irwin, 1986b) but in 1899 after his discovery of the Diamond Chamber and St. Paul's Chamber in Gough's New Cave, he installed electric lighting in them. A typical claim by Gough reads 'Illuminated by Electrical Light. Grandest sight in the world'. From the same date Cox's handbills (Cox, c. 1899) (see FIG. 6) advertise that his cave was 'lighted with Welsbach Incandescent, a brilliant white light, superior to electricity.' Welsbach Incandescent was in fact a trade name for gas mantles used with acetylene lighting. Later Cox (c. 1906) rephrased his advertisements to read 'lighted with Acetylene, the most brilliant light yet discovered'. A slightly later version of this handbill (Cox, c. 1907) is illustrated in FIG. 7.

Electric lighting of Cox's Cave was first mentioned as a possibility in 1884 when the cave was being offered for auction. The prospectus and press advertisements suggest that 'the introduction of the electric light, easily practicable, would add immensely to the present attractions and income.' However, another thirty years were to pass before electric lighting was installed, in 1913. An advertisement in *The Wells Journal* (4 July 1913) refers to The Lady Chapel as being 'now revealed by the ELECTRIC LIGHT, 1913.' Edward Cox appears to have altered his view; electricity did have some merit, and his later advertisements read: 'the Cave . . . is brilliantly illuminated with electric light' (Cox, 1914, p. 3). The cave was only partially lit by electricity in 1913, presumably in the Lady Chapel area, but it was wired for electric lighting throughout in 1929. An advertisement (Guy-Bray, c. 1932, opp. p. 9) states that Cox's Cave, discovered in 1837, was 'rediscovered in 1929 by the installation throughout of electric light'.

VISITORS AND VANDALISM

From about the mid 1840s Cox's Cave was widely advertised in travel books and local guide books and by several handbills, many of which are quoted in this paper. Probably the earliest recorded handbill is a large one in the Somerset Local History Library at Taunton Castle, engraved in copperplate handwriting and surmounted by a view of the Cheddar Cliff village and cliffs (G. Cox, c. 1850). The earliest datable advertisements recorded are in *The Wells Journal* (26 June 1852) and in *Brown's New Guide to Weston-super-Mare* (Brown, 1853) (FIG. 8).

The Pleasure Gardens were an integral part of Cox's operations at Cheddar. Green (1869) indicated that there were only two places in Cheddar where visitors were able to leave their horses and obtain refreshment - the Bath Arms and 'Mr. G. Cox's tea gardens'. Cox himself (c. 1857) advertised the

PLEASURE GARDENS

opposite a sheet of water, with boats, &c., where parties bringing provisions for dinner may be accommodated with table-cloths, knives, &c., at Sixpence each person; but dinner with wine, spirits, &c., can be had on the premises.

GOOD STABLING AND COACH HOUSES

For years equal emphasis was given (e.g. in Kelly, 1861, and Stevens, 1869) to the Cliff Hotel and Pleasure Gardens as well as the cave itself. By 1890 the advertisements concentrated on the cave alone.

Ever keen to encourage the public to visit the cave and pleasure gardens, George Cox organized regular transport from Weston-super-Mare. An advertisement appeared in *The Weston-super-Mare Mercury* on 9 August 1862:

CHEDDAR—Our Weston friends and visitors to that favourite watering place have now increased means of journeying to our far-famed Caverns and well known cliffs every Monday, Thursday and Friday during the season. Well horsed and convenient public conveyances run between Weston and Cheddar at moderate rates affording accomodation to parties who are not disposed to hire expressly for the journey.

Many companies took their employees to Cheddar for their annual outing, and in 1868, for example, E. S. and A. Robinson of Bristol travelled there in a convoy of horse-drawn brakes, one of them carrying a brass band. Having left Bristol at 7 a.m., they reached Cheddar about midday. After a meal at the Cliff Hotel they

separated to enjoy themselves according as their tastes led them. The caves were, of course, the principal attraction and were visited by most of the excursionists. (*Weston-super-Mare Mercury*, 1 Aug. 1868).

Not all visitors were enthusiastic. Thomas Woodhouse (1870) noted in his copy of Stevens (1869) on August 10 1870: 'This cavern is extremely disappointing and strikes such a chill that it is a place to be avoided.'

BROWN'S GUIDE BOOK ADVERTISER.

125

Brown's Guide Book Advertiser.

CHEDDAR CLIFFS, SOMERSETSHIRE.

The most Wonderful Production of Nature ever discovered in this Island is

COX'S STALACTITE CAVERN.

This Cavern, so justly admired by Scientific Gentlemen from all parts of the Kingdom, and which is surrounded by scenery the most striking and picturesque, is rendered increasingly attractive by Mr. Cox's PLEASURE GARDENS, opposite a sheet of Water with boats, &c., where parties bringing their provisions for Dinner may be accommodated with table-cloths, knives, &c., at sixpence each person. But Dinner, with Wine, Spirits, &c., can be had on the premises.

Such Visitors as are desirous of spending a few days in this interesting locality can now be accommodated by the Proprietor of the Cavern and Gardens with every convenience usually found in a respectable and retired Hotel.

There is good Stabling and Coach House.

Admission to the Cavern for one or two persons, 3s.; for more than that number, 1s. each.

N.B.—No admission to either the Gardens or Cavern on the Sabbath.

FIG. 8—AN EARLY ADVERTISEMENT FOR COX'S CAVE, FROM 'BROWN'S NEW GUIDE TO WESTON-SUPER-MARE' OF 1853

The railway reached Cheddar in 1869 and by 1887 the Great Western Railway was offering cheap day excursions to Cheddar during the summer months.

Motor coach companies were becoming established at the turn of the century and by 1911 they offered daily tours to Cheddar Caves (*Weston-super-Mare Gazette*, 19 Aug. 1911).

Admission charges from about 1850 were three shillings for one or two persons and one shilling each for more than that number (Cox, c. 1857). They continued at this rate until 1874 and possibly later. By 1887 (Cox, c. 1886) the price had been reduced:

One Shilling each for a party of not less than three. One Single Visitor, 2s. Two visitors 1s. 6d. each. More than that number, as stated above, viz:- 1s. each. Children under 12 half-price.

In the early years of the 20th century admission charges were fixed at one shilling per person at both Gough's and Cox's Caves.

Early visitors were accompanied by George Cox or a member of his family, and after their visit were requested to sign the visitors' book. This practice continued well into the 20th century, certainly up to 1914, though the book may have been produced only for selected visitors. It is not known whether these books have survived.

The first reported visit of an international figure was described in *The Wells Journal* (28 Aug., 1852):

Large parties have lately visited the cliffs, gardens, and cavern, notwithstanding the heavy rains and boisterous winds. Among other distinguished guests who have honoured this neighbourhood with their company, we find the following entry in the visitors' book under date of the 12th inst., 'President Fillimore and party, U.S.'

Millard Fillmore, incorrectly spelled in the newspaper, was President of the United States from 1850 to 1853.

Cox, like Gough, encouraged the public to visit his cave by widely advertising the names of famous people who had signed the visitors' book. By the turn of the century he was able to produce an impressive list of visitors (Cox, c. 1899). They included The Prince of Wales, the Duke and Duchess d'Aumale, the Prince of Siam, the Duke of Argyll, the Ladies Campbell, the Right Hon. Sir M. Grant-Duff, Lord Avebury, etc. In addition to these, he stated 'The two sons of His Majesty the King of Siam and the Lord Justice of England visited Cox's Cavern, 1898.'

In the late 1850s the cave was visited by the young Prince of Wales (later to be King Edward VII), with his tutor. This event was to provide fuel fifty years later in the continuing rivalry between Cox and Gough. From about 1868 the Cox family regularly advertised the fact that the cave had been visited by the Prince of Wales but the only published dates for the visit appear in later booklets and handbills. Cox (c. 1911, 1914) states that 'His late Majesty, King Edward VII., was brought to see Cox's Cavern in 1857.'

Though these booklets give 1857 as the year of the visit, the date must remain in doubt. On the King's recollection (below) the date could be 1856 or 1857. According to Jamieson (1858), however, it was in April 1858 that 'Mr. Cox has laudably determined that the contents of the cave shall not be broken up or disturbed, anticipating the probability of its being honoured with a royal visit.'

By 1905 Cox's handbills and picture postcards included the statement that Edward VII had visited the cave. Photographs of the time also show a clearly painted advertisement on the gable end of one of the buildings, making the same statement. In the rivalry between the two proprietors, Gough had published the following statement on 1 August 1904:

EYE-OPENER FOR STRANGERS—His Majesty King Edward never visited Cheddar or Caves. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales never visited Cheddar or Caves. To make a long story short, visitors should not be misled . . .

However, Edward Cox wrote to Buckingham Palace and received the following reply, dated 5 August 1904, from the King's secretary:

I have had the honour of submitting your letter of the 3rd instant to the King, and I am commanded to inform you in reply that His Majesty remembers when quite young having visited the Stalactite Caverns at Cheddar, Somerset. The King thinks he must have been about fifteen or sixteen years of age at the time. (Cox, c. 1905).

Martel (1905) and his wife came to Mendip in 1904. They visited Cox's and Gough's Caves on 15 June with a host party comprising Balch, Baker, Bamforth, Botterill, Puttrel and Troup. Of his visit to Cox's Cave, Martel wrote in the visitors' book (Cox, c. 1905):

Never saw anywhere such graceful and charmingly coloured stalactites in about 600 visited caves. Quite unique.

Other comments attributed to Martel are printed in a handbill of about 1907 (Fig. 7).

As the popularity of the cave grew it is not surprising that vandalism occurred. The first reported case was in October 1861, with a second late in 1862 when a visitor was arrested for breaking and stealing a large stalagmite (*Weston-super-Mare Mercury*, 29 Nov. 1862):

ACT OF VANDALISM—Some short time since a gentleman whose name was subsequently discovered to be Eggar . . . was given in custody of the police by Mr. George Cox proprietor of the far famed Stalactite Cavern in this village, charged with having stolen a valuable stalagmite, the property of Mr. Cox. It would appear that Mr. Eggar, accompanied by two ladies, arrived at Cheddar from Weston-super-Mare, where he had been lodging, and finding the cavern then open entered contrary to the notice conspicuously painted thereupon . . . Soon afterwards Mr. Cox, who had been absent, returned home and upon entering the cavern to his dismay missed a valuable and prominent Stalagmite upwards of four feet long and hitherto considered one of the chief attractions of the cavern. Upon inspection Mr. Cox discovered that it had been ruthlessly broken from its base. When Mr. Cox learnt that a gentleman and two ladies had been seen to emerge from the cave and proceed in the direction of the cliffs. Feeling one of the party in question must have been the despoilers, the proprietor obtained the assistance of the police and upon the return of Mr. Eggar, Mr. Cox discovered in a basket belonging to the former, the greater portion of the missing Stalagmite, and at once gave Mr. Eggar into custody . . . The following day the case was heard . . . At the conclusion of the evidence the magistrates decided upon committing Mr. Eggar for trial at the next Quarter Sessions for the County to be holden at Taunton early in January. Consenting however to the bail for his appearance, himself £80 and two surities in £40 each. We understand Mr. Cox valued the Stalagmite at over one hundred pounds sterling.

The trial was reported in both the Weston-super-Mare newspapers:

MALICIOUS DAMAGE AT THE CAVE AT CHEDDAR—William Joseph Eggar, a respectably dressed man, was indited for maliciously damaging a Stalactite in a cave at Cheddar, the property of George Cox, exceeding the value of five pounds, on the 3rd. November last. Mr. Bailey for the prosecution said the prosecutor was a highly respectable and very honourable man who was not acquainted and did not know Mr. Eggar who went into the cavern at Cheddar on the day in question and destroyed the choicest stalactite there. Subsequent enquiries proved that there was no intention on the part of Mr. Eggar to maliciously injure and destroy the stalactite and some arrangement had been come to by which some small compensation had been paid to Mr. Cox and he did not wish to proceed with the case . . . Mr. Eggar . . . pleaded not guilty . . . A verdict of acquittal was taken and Mr. Eggar left the court declaring that he had paid dearly for the Stalactite. We understand that the terms were £25 and costs. (*Weston-super-Mare Gazette*, 10 Jan. 1863).

The stalagmite in question could well be the Speaker's Mace, which shows signs of a multiple repair.

It is interesting to see that an awareness of the need for conservation existed even as early as 1842. Towards the end of the letter printed in the Appendix (p. 42) the solicitor for the Longleat Estate pointed out the importance of 'the preservation undefaced of the fragile stalactites etc.'

SOUVENIR SHOP AND PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO

Associated with the cave were a souvenir shop, photographic studio, refreshment room, and stores. The location of these buildings has been identified from maps of 1884 (FIG. 9). At that time photographs of the Gorge (but not of the cave) would have been on sale, and so too, probably, would Bryne's souvenir book of Cheddar engravings.

Contemporary advertisements indicate that Cox was selling photographs taken inside his cave before the year 1890, when some of the interior of Gough's Old Cave appear to have been available (Irwin, 1986b). Those of Cox's Cave were possibly as early as 1886, for a handbill (Cox, c. 1886), issued before the 'discovery' of the 7th Chamber in 1887, advertises 'Photographs of the Cliffs and the Stalactite Cavern, by the Best Artists, in great Variety'. A later handbill (Cox, c. 1890) lists 18 photographs by Frith as being available. These photographic prints were sold at various prices according to size but did not then include postcards. By about 1894 the number had increased to 20 (Cox, c. 1894), and soon (Cox, c. 1899) 25 cave views were on sale. Between 1902 and 1903 all 25 were progressively published as picture postcards. The selection of postcards was increased to 28 in 1905; to 39 in 1908; to 52 in 1910; to 60 in 1913; and to 72 by 1932. The prices for unmounted views at that time were sixpence, one shilling or two shillings each, post free, according to size. The postcards cost a penny each, or two shillings for a set of 25 cards. Six 'Giant Photo Post Cards' were also sold (Cox, c. 1905). Several stereo photographs were published by Underwood & Underwood (London) Ltd. (Shaw, pers. comm.)

Photographic prints and postcards were certainly on sale together until 1914, and some very large bromide prints were sold as late as the 1920s.

The photographic studio at the cave is puzzling. Why should Cox have one when there were several in Cheddar village itself? What is most likely is that Cox operated a souvenir studio offering to take photographs of tourists as a memento of their visit to Cheddar. One photograph of mid 1880s style exists, with 'Cox Cheddar' printed on the mount, showing a family group in the Pleasure Gardens behind the Cliff Hotel.

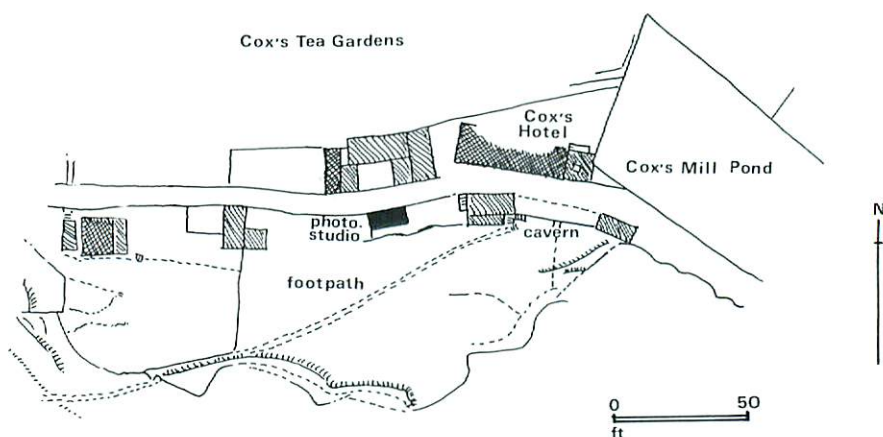


FIG. 9—MAP SHOWING COX'S CAVE BUILDINGS AND THE CLIFF HOTEL IN 1884. TRACED FROM ORIGINALS IN THE LONGLEAT HOUSE LIBRARY, WITH NORTH POINT AND SCALE ADDED
Reproduced by courtesy of the Marquess of Bath

ATTEMPTED SALE OF COX'S CAVE

In 1884 the Cox family offered the cave for sale. The increased competition caused by their cousin Richard Cox Gough at Gough's Old Cave, then known as The New Great Stalactite Cavern, probably encouraged them to review their prospects. Gough would now be a threat to their livelihood in a business where they had held a monopoly for over 40 years. With improved means of access and the introduction of gas lighting in 1883 Gough's income was on the increase, for in the first ten years of his proprietorship he claimed that 20,000 people had passed through his cave (*Weston-super-Mare Mercury*, 20 Aug. 1887). The sale of the Cliff Hotel was also considered by the Cox family, as indicated in a letter from their solicitors, Webster & Smith, to the Longleat Estate manager, H. J. Jones (Longleat, 1884a):

Dear Sir,

15th, April 1884

Cheddar Cave

We are offering this Cavern for sale by auction at the Grand Hotel in Bristol on 8th. May next & we have been asked by several people since Saturday to sell 'the Hotel' at the same time and place.

The Hotel and Gardens as you know we only hold for the life of Mr. George Cox the reversion being to Lord Bath—Is it practicable for the Marquess of Bath to concur with us in a sale of the Hotel and Gardens at the same time & place when a good sum might be realised?

If this suggestion appears favourable to you kindly give us an appointment to confer with you at Your earliest possible convenience.

We are, dear Sir,
Yours faithfully,
Webster & Smith.'

The Stalactite Cavern was offered as freehold property and was to be auctioned by George Nicholls, Son, and Alder of Bristol at the Grand Hotel, Broad Street on Thursday, May 8th. 1884 'at two for three o'clock in the afternoon precisely, the highly remunerative freehold property universally known as Cox's Stalactite Cavern, . . .'. A fold-out prospectus (Longleat, 1884b) (FIG. 10) described the site as follows:

The neighbourhood, famous for the beauty of its scenery, abounds in natural attractions, of which this Cavern is undoubtedly the chief. Situated immediately opposite the Cliff Hotel and Pleasure Gardens, at the entrance to the wonderfully romantic ravine known as the Cheddar Cliffs, the Cavern is about 300 feet in extent, and comprises several chambers branching from the main passage, each displaying stalactites unmatched in their grotesque and peculiar beauty.

Numerous excursion trains regularly run from Bristol and other places during the season, and upwards of 8,000 persons visit the cavern each year, the average revenue derived therefrom exceeding £300 per annum, while the expenditure for gas and taxes amounts yearly to about £15 only.

The Cavern is now illuminated by gas, but the introduction of the electric light, easily practicable, would add immensely to the present attractions and income.

Very rarely does such a splendid chance occur to acquire a Property workable on the one hand at a comparatively small outlay, and possessing on the other an established and substantial income capable of a large increase by enterprising management . . . *The Cavern can be inspected at any time upon application to Mr. J. S. Cox, Cheddar, upon payment of the usual admission fee; and further particulars can be obtained of the Auctioneers, 55, Broad Street, Bristol; or of Messrs. SALMON, COCHRANE, & STURGE, Solicitors 17, Small Street, Bristol; or of Messrs. WEBSTER & SMITH, Solicitors, Axbridge and Cheddar.*

A similar advertisement was placed in local newspapers including *The Weston-super-Mare Gazette* (3 May 1884).

The prospectus included sufficient detail to show that the Cox family were under the impression that they owned the freehold of the cave. Clause 3 of the Conditions of Sale stated:

PARTICULARS
 AND
 CONDITIONS OF SALE
 OF
 COX'S WORLD-CELEBRATED
 STALACTITE CAVERN
 CHEDDAR, SOMERSET.

MESSRS.
 GEORGE NICHOLS, SON, AND ALDER

WILL
 Sell by Auction,
 AT THE
 GRAND HOTEL, BROAD STREET,
 BRISTOL,
 On THURSDAY Next, May 8th, 1884,

THE HIGHLY REMUNERATIVE
 FREEHOLD PROPERTY
 UNIVERSALLY KNOWN AS
 COX'S STALACTITE CAVERN.

SALMON, COCHRANE, & STURGE,
 SOLICITORS,
 BRISTOL.

WEBSTER AND SMITH,
 SOLICITORS,
 AXBRIDGE AND CHEDDAR.

Printed at the Office of the Bristol Mercury and Daily Post.

FIG. 10—THE FRONT OF THE 1884 PROSPECTUS FOR THE SALE
 OF COX'S CAVE
 Reproduced by courtesy of the Marquess of Bath

The title to the property shall commence with a general devise contained in the Will of George Cox, late of Cheddar aforesaid, who died in the year 1868, and the purchaser shall assume that the Testator was, at the time of his death, seised in fee simple of the said property, the Vendors will produce the Statutory Declaration of Joseph Thatcher, of Cheddar, in the County of Somerset, made on the 29th day of April, 1874, to the effect that he was then seventy-one years of age, that he well knew the Coppice, under which is Cox's Stalactite Cavern, that it was taken possession of by James Cox, the Grandfather of the Vendors, about fifty years then back, and was afterwards possessed by George Cox, the father of the Vendors, that the cavern was discovered in or about the year 1837 or 1838, and that since that time it had been the undisputed possession of the said George Cox and his family up to the date of his making that Declaration, and the statutory Declaration of George Cox (son of the said George Cox, and Grandson of James Cox), made on the 20th day of April, 1874, to the effect that no rent or acknowledgement had ever been paid by his father therefor up to 1868, or since that time, but that the said premises had been in the undisputed possession of his father and the declarants' family from the date when the cavern was discovered, to the time of his making that declaration.

It was also made clear by the auctioneers that only the cavern was offered for sale, not the land above. Alerted to the fact that the cave, and possibly the Cliff Hotel and Gardens also, were to be offered at auction, the Longleat Estate solicitors (Wakeman & Bleech of Warminster) took action. In a dispute, in 1842, a Frome solicitor, J. W. D. Wickham (Longleat 1842) had already come to the conclusion that the cave was leasehold property and so Wakeham & Bleech were able to take the necessary action to protect the interests of the Estate. The basis of Wickham's conclusion is contained in a lengthy extract from his 1842 letter, printed here as an appendix (pp. 41-42). An injunction was obtained by the Estate managers preventing the auction being held on 10 May 1884. A report in *The Weston-super-Mare Gazette* on that day, describing the events at the auction rooms, states:

Mr. George Nicholls addressed those present and said that he had appeared before them that day in a very unpleasant position, as there was nothing he disliked more than to attempt to deceive the public. He would, at once, read to them the following telegram that he had received late the previous night, from Messrs. Wakeman & Bleech, Solicitors at Warminster. 'Have today obtained an injunction on behalf of Lord Bath against the sale of Cheddar Cave. We will see you tomorrow.' Mr. Nicholls then proceeded to read the terms of the injunction obtained in the Court of Queen's Bench from Mr. Justice Matthew, a copy of which he had received that morning. The plaintiff was stated to be the Marquis of Bath, and the defendants, Messrs James Streatfield Cox, Edward Cox and Charles Cox. The Auctioneer added that he did not, for one moment, admit that the Cavern belonged to the Marquis of Bath. The question of ownership would have to be fought out and at some future time they might meet with the same purpose as they had that day.

On 18 July 1884 the Lord Chief Justice, sitting at Wells, ordered (Longleat, 1884c) that:

Judgment for an injunction should be entered for the Plaintiff without costs on certain terms that is to say:

1. That the Defendants be restrained from proceeding with or holding any Sale by Auction or otherwise of the freehold of the Cavern known as 'Stalactite Cavern' . . .
2. That the Defendants do acknowledge the Plaintiffs title to the said Cavern.
3. That the Plaintiff do grant to the Defendants or to their Nominees approved by the Plaintiff a reversionary Lease for 99 years determinable on the longest of two lives to be selected by the Defendants of the said Cavern and of the premises in which the Defendants are interested upon the same side of the road as the Cavern upon the same terms as those of the existing Lease dated September 7th 1834 at a rental of Ten shillings per annum and that no Fine be payable upon the granting of the said lease.
4. That in the said Lease there be inserted a Covenant by the Lessees for the protection of the Stalactites and Stalagmites in the said Cavern and also a Covenant by the Plaintiff not to withhold unreasonably his license to assign or underlet the said Cavern.

The Judgement was dated 13 August 1884 and the reversionary lease 24 March 1885 (Longleat, 1885a). Area maps associated with the cave (e.g. Longleat, 1885b) and surveys of the cave itself (Longleat, 1885c) were

produced by the Estate and involved considerable correspondence (Longleat, 1885d).

COX V. PAVEY

The discoveries made by Cox's cousin, Richard Cox Gough, generated great rivalry between the two proprietors (Irwin, 1986b). To add to Edward Cox's worries a neighbour, Roland Pavey, started excavating close to Cox's Cave. A bundle of correspondence at Longleat House (Pavey, 1890-1904) tells a fascinating story of their conflict. This will be incorporated in a later paper on Pavey's cave activities, and only a summary of its impact on Cox's Cave is given here.

Following the signing of the reversionary lease both the Cox family and the Longleat Estate were conscious of their responsibilities for the protection of the cave. Any action causing damage to the cave could be a breach of the covenant imposed by the court and so might involve both sides in a further legal dispute. Cox continued working in the cave and in 1887 the 'Fairies Grotto' was opened to the public. Meanwhile Pavey, who had leased the adjoining land, had caught the cave exploration fever and in the late 1880s commenced excavating in the hillside behind their premises. He enlarged small rifts and fissures and soon began tunnelling in earnest. By 1890 Pavey had opened up a passage running parallel to the hillside and accidentally broke into Cox's Cave close by the Fairies Grotto (*Weston-super-Mare Gazette*, 6 Dec. 1890). Cox complained and the Warminster Office manager, H. J. Jones wrote to Pavey requesting him to stop all blasting work immediately. Later Pavey again broke through into Cox's Cave, this time into the roof of the 6th Chamber; the exact date of this is not known though it was certainly before November 1894.

By 1893 Pavey had sufficient passage cleared to enable him to open his cave to the public. It was a fantastic affair—exhibiting clay stalagmites, various items of china and a miscellany of flints and bones found at various cave sites in the neighbourhood. The venture failed and Pavey's Cave was closed in 1896.

About the time Pavey was preparing to open his cave to the public Edward Cox was creating problems for himself. During March 1893 workmen were employed blasting inside Cox's Cave between the First and Second chambers, in an attempt to stabilize the roof. This collapsed early the next year bringing down some 200 tons of boulders and mud. The Cheddar Office of the Longleat Estate, aware of Cox's action, wrote to the Estate Office at Warminster:

. . . It was a great downfall indeed. Cox thinks himself it must have been 200 tons . . . It was a fortunate thing that it did not come down in the Summer when the visitors were passing in and out—If any life had been lost, few people would have ventured to have gone into it again . . .

Edward Cox wrote to the Warminster Office on March 1, 1894:

Sir,

I write to express my deep regret that I have interfered with the Marquess of Bath's property.

Last March I noticed a crack in the Rock—it was getting wider—I thought it unsafe & had it down. There was a fissure reaching almost to the surface.

I put a light and could see stones and earth hanging the Man said 'that it will never be safe unless opened from the top', & without thinking I ordered him to open it.

My only anxiety was to make it all safe—I did not know I was doing wrong and can only once more express my sorrow—

I am Sir
Your obedient Servant
Edward Cox

Warminster replied, accepting Cox's apology but requesting that he consulted the Estate before commencing any further improvements. Pavey, still in trouble himself, took advantage of Cox's apparent discomfort and on 22 November wrote a long statement to the Estate Office at Warminster outlining, why in his view, the collapse in Cox's Cave had occurred:

The winter before last Mr. Cox had a chasm cut from floor to the roof, to let in air and daylight . . . Mr. Cox had men to work as did not understand underground work. They came to me several times to assist them, which I did by blasting down large bolders of stone . . . One hole they charged so heavily near the top it blew stones in the pond and one down by our Mill door . . . At this time we were having hard frost and rain, which really was the cause of bringing their unstabled beds so soon—as the frost would be exceedingly hard through the gate up the chasm . . . At this time Mr. Cox, blasting in his cave with gelatine, close to that beautiful formation and nothing to keep the concussion from it.

Mr. Cox paid me nearly £1 for gelatine I spared him which was used in his cave . . .

Pavey also informed the Estate Office that, far from restraining his activities, Cox was still blasting at two points in the cave in the hope that Pavey's unknown cave would be reached from Cox's Cave first. According to a sketch map drawn by Pavey, Edward Cox's men were attempting to extend the cave at the end of the First Chamber and at another place close to the 6th Chamber. From recent inspection of the collapse site it appears that this section of the cave is an old choked shaft still partially blocked with mud and boulder infill. From Pavey's evidence the collapse had broken through to the surface and major repairs had to be made to re-roof the cave. The existing false wall in the Second Chamber of Cox's Cave is probably there to protect visitors from any further movement of the remaining infill. An 8 to 10ft deep shaft above the present cave entrance is no doubt where the collapse occurred. Part of the false wall can be seen at the bottom of the shaft.

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D. J. IRWIN, Townsend Cottage, Priddy, Wells, Somerset BA5 3BP, U.K.

APPENDIX

Extract from a letter from the Frome Solicitor, J. W. D. Wickham, dated 19 November 1842, concerning whether or not Cox's Cave is Leasehold Property

I believe the description of parcels demised by the existing Lease of Harris' mill is to the same purport as that contained in the preceding Lease now returned—In this Lease the site of the Cave entrance is not specifically described, but the words "all that Water Grist Mill or Corn Mill with the appurtenances thereof," with the general words, are of course quite sufficient to pass the Cave entrance, and account for its being occupied by the Lessee.

On the strength of the foregoing evidence and information my decided opinion is that the site of the Cave entrance must be regarded as forming part of the Leasehold property held under the Lease of the 27th September 1834.

Assuming this point to be established, we have to consider how far the Lessor can at present interfere with the possession of the cave by the Lessee under the *exception* contained in the Lease; which I believe to be in the following words. "And, also all mines Quarries and all Timber trees, and other Trees whatsoever, now standing growing or being or which shall at any time hereafter stand, grow, or be in or upon the said demised premises, with full liberty for him and them, and his and their servants and workmen at seasonable times, with horses and carriages or otherwise to enter in and upon the said demised premises and dig, search after and work the said mines and Quarries, and cut down convert and carry away the said Trees doing as little damage and trespass as may be".

This exception seems *primâ facie* applicable to mines and quarries worked as such, rather than to a cave of stalactites and stalagmites, which though containing stone and, I believe, iron and other ore, is only valuable to exhibit as curious, and scarcely capable of being worked profitably—D^r. Johnsons definition of the word "mine" is "a place or cavern in the earth which contains metals or minerals". The old and modern Law Dictionaries and Abridgments define mines thus "mines" (mineroe) quarries or places wherout any thing is dug" and mineral "anything that grows in mines, and contains metals" Cowell Blount— Wishaws Law Dictionary & c. The cases, statutes, and authorities all allude to mines worked for obtaining ore & c., and as to such matters appear to support the rights of Lessors as against Lessees, it having been held that where land containing open and unopened mines, is let *with the mines* therein, the Lessee can only work the opened mines, Jacob Viner.—On considering the whole matter, although I can see nothing exactly applicable to the present case, I think that on principle the Cheddar cave comes within the words "mines and quarries", and would at law be regarded as excepted by the Lease—

Not being accurately informed as to your wishes in this matter, I feel rather uncertain what proceedings to recommend. Should it be your wish to press the Lessors rights to the utmost, or obtain a share of the profits, I recommend in the first place the opinion of Counsel being taken as to the cave being included in the exception or otherwise, for which purpose a proper description of it should be given. If however you merely wish to regulate the terms of admission,

and obtain an acknowledgement of the Lessor's right, I think it would be best to propose the desired terms to the Lessee, stating the Lessors intention to assert his strict right in case of the Lessee declining to accede to the terms specified. With regard to the price of admission I beg to add that I think its material or perhaps any reduction would tend to decrease the value of the cave. Its sole interest consists in the preservation undefaced of the fragile stalactites & c. there shown, and many of which would I believe be soon injured if the Public were admitted at low prices: and in any proceedings we may adopt towards obtaining possession of the cave we must bear in mind the great facility the Lessee has of ruining the interest attached to it, if left under his controul pending any litigation. As to the income derived from exhibiting the cave, I may as well state that Mr. Cox informed me his gross receipts for the present year up to the time of my late visit amounted to £57, but a feeling prevails in the neighbourhood that they are larger.