

would never be used. Chilmark in turn has now closed, and I suppose that a chapter in the history of British defence has come to an end.

Desmond Donovan

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Westbury Cave: The Natural History Museum Excavations 1976–1984. edited by Peter Andrews, Jill Cook, Andrew Currant and Christopher Stringer. 1999. Western Academic & Specialist Press Ltd. Bristol. HB 309pp Price £55 ISBN 0 9535418 0 0.

Westbury Cave first really captured the attention of the archaeological world in 1975, when Michael Bishop published details of stone artefacts in association with a Cromerian-type fauna. At that time Westbury represented the best, although certainly not the first, claim for pre-Anglian occupation of the British Isles. It was, as such, fairly revolutionary; only a year earlier Wymer (1974) had reviewed the British evidence and concluded that Britain had not been colonised until the late Anglian at the earliest. On the strength of Bishop's work, the Natural History Museum began a nine-year research project at the site, starting in 1976. It is the results of this project that are presented in the current report.

Twenty-five years later pre-Anglian occupation in Britain is far less of a conceptual hurdle. Britain now has, in Boxgrove (Roberts and Parfitt, 1999), the best excavated and most well preserved Cromerian archaeological site in Europe; as well as a number of other less perfectly preserved locales such as High Lodge and Warren Hill. Nevertheless, Westbury is still regarded as a highly important member of the corpus of Cromerian archaeological sites. The current report, though, makes one seriously wonder whether this is really the case.

Typically for a site report this is a reference volume rather than a riveting read, but the quantity and quality of detailed information it contains clearly makes it a major contribution to the British Quaternary. The book is divided into eleven chapters, with two appendices. These can be grouped into three related blocks: 1) history and geology; 2) palaeontology and ecology and; 3) archaeology.

The first block opens with an introduction by Stringer, Andrews and Current that provides the fundamental details and also outlines the early research history of the site. The important message to take away from this chapter is that the Westbury site represents the truncated remnants of two partly linked chambers of an ancient cave system, exposed in modern times at the edge of a major and often dangerous quarry 28 km from Bristol, each filled with a complex sequence of various sediments over an extensive period of time. The second chapter, by Stanton, picks up some of these themes, describing the initial research on the site by Bishop and Stanton and detailing the early development of the cave sequence; while chapter three by Andrews and Cook describes in detail the highly complex stratigraphy of the site. This can be summarised as a lower siliceous member and an upper, heavily sub-divided, calcareous member; the latter forming the focus of the palaeontological and archaeological research at the site. The fourth chapter, by McPhail and Goldberg, describes the micromorphology of the main Westbury sediments, suggesting that while the soils testify to climatic variation and diverse faunal activity, there is no evidence for hearths or burning in the cave that might highlight human presence. McPhail and Goldberg suggest that post-depositional alterations make preservation of such evidence unlikely at Westbury, leading one to wonder just how far this, rather

than human behaviour, accounts for the general paucity of hearths or other formal structures in sites of this age.

The second block provides details of the taphonomy of the bone assemblages; Andrews and Ghaleb giving the clear impression that during the majority of the cave's history it was home to bears and various raptors, who were largely responsible for the bone accumulations recovered. This is followed by details of the small mammals by Currant; the ruminants, Gentry; and the carnivores, Turner; with Andrews and Stringer drawing the faunal and stratigraphic evidence together as a proxy for environmental conditions. The latter confirm observations made in earlier reports and elsewhere in this volume that at least two warm periods with deciduous mosaic woodland; at times as warm or warmer than present day Southern England; separated by an intervening cold period with tundra or boreal forest vegetation are represented at Westbury. The final chapter, by Schreve, Currant and Stringer, summarises the faunal evidence and attempts to place Westbury more firmly within the British Quaternary sequence. They interpret the climatic variation at Westbury as evidence for fluctuations at an OI sub-stage scale rather than different interglacials within of the long Cromerian complex, concluding that all the material from the calcareous member most likely correlates with the Cromerian IV interglacial (OIS 13). However, recent work on a range of British Cromerian faunal assemblages by Preece and Parfitt (1999) argues that the vole *Microtus gragalooides*, the ancestral form of *M. gragalis*, indicates that the Westbury fauna is early Middle Pleistocene in age, possibly equating with Cromerian interglacial III. It is therefore older than Boxgrove, meaning that the artefacts from Westbury may yet retain their position as the earliest in Britain.

However, this depends on ones reading of the lithics, here given by Cook, and the humanly modified bones from the Calcareous Member, Andrews and Ghaleb; which go together to make this volume most interesting and highly contentious. Since 1975, it has been almost universally accepted that genuine stone artefacts were present at Westbury (Wymer 1988, 1999; Roberts *et al.*, 1995). In this volume, however, Cook returns us to first principles. In a chapter that rehearses not only the recent controversy regarding the earliest occupation of Europe (Roebroeks and Kolfshoten, 1995) but also the classic Eolith debate, Cook makes a reasoned case that these are, in fact, merely geofacts. This clearly contrasts with the majority view and raises some interesting questions.

If these are geofacts as Cook affirms, then is Westbury an archaeological site at all? According to Andrews and Ghaleb, the answer is categorically yes. At least one (and possibly four) of the 5384 bones examined from the site show evidence of human modification, in the form of cutmarks. As far as these are concerned I am assured by those intimately associated with the site that there is little doubt as to their validity, regardless of the statement that the surface of most convincing piece, a red deer metacarpal, was "fairly corroded and further obscured by both manganese staining and (orange) lichen growth" (p121). Despite the faith of the original workers, I am afraid that if the stones are not really artefacts, then it will take more than one cut-marked bone from a sample of 5384 to fully convince me that humans were present at this site, especially when that bone came from a mudflow containing flint-splinters and a pre-Boxgrove age is at stake. On the other hand, if, at least, some are genuine artefacts, then we may begin to look more favourably on the bone evidence and agree with Andrews that it is only post-depositional surface modification that prevents the identification of larger numbers of humanly modified bone. For me, it is an exercise in probability and sampling. One reason to lean towards some of these pieces being humanly modified lies in the fact that flint does not today occur locally at Westbury, suggesting that humans *must* have been responsible for its introduction. Cook, though makes the suggestion that now-eroded Cretaceous beds could have introduced this flint without the need for humans ever having touched it. One way or the

other, Cook argues that Westbury was probably not a classic cave with habitable horizontal galleries, but a vertiginous shaft favoured by bears and owls but not humans. Anything within the cave that is anthropogenic arrived there from outside, along with much of the non-ursine large mammals. If this is the case, then the real archaeological importance of Westbury remains its extreme antiquity and the information concerning Cromerian biostratigraphy and environments provided by its mammalian faunas.

This is undoubtedly an important volume, reasonably priced and with excellent production standards (although where's the dust jacket). The only real problem lies in the barely disguised editorial discord, reflected in the contradictory interpretations we are offered. In essence this volume is a series of eleven essays about various aspects of Westbury rather than the definitive, cogent statement we might have been expecting. Given the complexity of the site, though, such expectations might have been naïve. The report raises a huge number of additional questions, especially regarding the archaeology. In some respects this might be the beginning of a new chapter in the archaeological interpretation of Westbury, rather than the last word.

Mark White

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