Proc. Univ. Bristol Spelaeol. Soc., 2011, 25 (2), 187-232

IN FURTHER PURSUIT OF RABBITS
ACCOUNTS OF AVELINE'S HOLE, 1799 to 1921

by

A. BOYCOTT and L.J. WILSON

ABSTRACT

The main focus of this paper is an examination of the accounts of the discovery of Aveline's Hole and its contents. The unpublished manuscripts of Reverend John Skinner and his influence on various published accounts are also considered. Skinner's accounts of the cave are presented in greater detail and his observations on and drawings of the objects found in the cave by Reverend David Williams are presented for the first time.

INTRODUCTION

The discovery of numerous skeletons in a cave near Burrington, on the edge of the Mendip Hills in Somerset, in 1797 has captured the attention and imagination of writers for over 200 years but no systematic examination of the source material that informs our knowledge of the cave and its contents has been carried out. Amongst the mass of material available to the researcher, there are very few contemporary accounts of the discovery and no named or known eyewitnesses. The nearest we can come to the first discoverers of the cave is through the accounts of Reverend John Skinner, an antiquarian and diarist who visited the site 3 times, in 1819, 23 years after its discovery, again in 1820 and finally in 1824, apparently in the company of one of those men. However, Skinner's journals were not published during his lifetime, and the parts that are relevant to Aveline's Hole did not appear in print until the re-evaluation of the site published in 2005 (Schulting, 2005). In spite of this, Skinner's accounts of the discovery found their way into the published record through other authors, namely Buckland and Phelps, who are, in turn, relied on by later writers. In view of this, Skinner's accounts will also be examined in this paper.

In the previous volume of these *Proceedings*, five previously unknown accounts of the discovery of Aveline's Hole were presented (Boycott and Wilson, 2010), made up of three letters written by the poet Robert Southey immediately before and after his visit to the cave on 27th January 1797 and two more contemporary newspaper reports, to add to the one already known at the time Schulting wrote his paper. In his letters, Southey refuted the accuracy of some details given in newspaper accounts available to him but these remain untraced. In an attempt to discover whether these 'missing' sources informed any later accounts of the cave, a review of the available literature has been conducted and an attempt made to ascertain the source material for each account.

In addition, this paper seeks to disentangle the mass of information about Aveline's Hole and attempts to decide how far, if at all, any account might provide accurate information about the state of the cave and its contents at the time of the original discovery. As part of this work, the authors will pick up the story where they left off, starting with Gibbes, as the previous paper went no further than accounts published in 1797, the year of the cave's discovery.

The accounts of the cave given in this paper have been presented in full and not redacted, to enable future researchers to form their own opinion on the importance or otherwise

of the details contained in each entry. As is often said, the devil lies in the detail, and even small omissions from the original texts can alter meaning and lead to erroneous conclusions. By way of an example, in our previous paper (Boycott and Wilson, 2010), when discussing the actions of the Burrington rector who caused the bones to be covered by several cartloads of earth, reliance was placed on the extract from Skinner's 1824 diary given by Schulting, and it was presumed that the rector had covered up the skeletons out of respect for the dead, however when the original diary was consulted and a full transcription obtained, it appears that the motivation for the burial under a cartload of earth was actually the more prosaic reason that in the rector's opinion, frequent visits to the cave to remove bones were making 'the people idle, and was otherwise productive of mischief'. From this it is easy to see that even the omission of seemingly inconsequential detail can put quite a different slant on events.

ANALYSIS OF THE ACCOUNTS

a) Account of a Cavern discovered on the North-west Side of the Mendip Hills, in Somersetshire by George Smith Gibbes, M.B. F.L.S. (Gibbes, 1799).

Gibbes visited the cave in or before 1799 and wrote what is probably the first scientific account of the cave and its contents, read to the Linnean Society on 2nd April 1799 and published in its Transactions. Gibbes was a physician in Bath, admitted to the Linnean Society in 1793, and was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1796 (Anon, 1852).

> PERHAPS the following account of a cavern which I visited some time since may be acceptable, as we there see the process going on, which Nature employs to enclose foreign substances in the hardest rocks.
>
> At the bottom of a deep ravine on the north-west side of the Mendip Hills, in Somersetshire, near the little village of Berrington, there has been discovered a cavern of considerable extent, in which was found a great collection of human bones.
>
> As I have observed in this cavern many circumstances which appear curious to me, I beg leave to mention them, as I do not believe there is another place in the kingdom where the different stages (if I may be allowed the expression) of bones incorporating with lime stone rocks can be so well seen. From the top and sides there is a continual dripping of water, which being loaded with a large quantity of calcareous earth, deposits a white kind of paste on most parts of the cavern. Many of the bones are incrusted with this cement, and a large proportion of them are actually fixed in the solid rock. I suppose therefore that this substance, which at first is in a state resembling mortar, by losing its water hardens into a firm and solid stone. I had an opportunity of examining the process in every part. Had the cavern not been discovered, and these deposited substances not been removed, I do not doubt that the whole excavation would, in no great length of time, have been completely filled up. The water was still bringing fresh quantities of calcareous earth, and the bones were in some places completely incorporated with the solid rock. Every degree of intermediate solidity was plainly discernible. There were several nodules of stone, each of which contained a perfect human skull. The substance which is deposited from the water effervesces with acids, and has, in short, every character of limestone. At the farther end of this very curious cavern, where- the height is about fifteen feet, there depends a most beautiful

> stalactite, perfectly conical, which, when the cavern was first discovered, reached within an inch of a cone of the same kind which rises from the floor. By some accident a small part of the stalactite was broken off; but Nature is now busy in repairing an injury which had been done to one of the prettiest productions of her mineral kingdom. Had these two cones met, a most beautiful column would have been formed, of nearly fifteen feet in height. On striking this stalactite, a sound is produced similar to that of a bell, which may be heard at a considerable distance beyond the mouth of the cavern.
> I examined the bones with considerable attention, and I found that there was adhering to the surface of many of them, a substance which resembled the spermaceti I have before described, in the Philosophical Transactions for the years 1794 and 1795.[1]
> I have to add, that this cavern was discovered about two years ago by accident, and that no satisfactory reason has been given for this singular accumulation of human bones.

It is clear that Gibbes visited the cave in person within two years of its discovery. He makes no mention of any previous report apart from his remark that 'no satisfactory account has been given for this singular accumulation of bones', nor does he give any indication of how the discovery came to his attention.

Gibbes concentrates almost wholly on the physical processes by which the bones were being incorporated into the rock, leading to the gradual infill of the cave itself. It is perhaps surprising in view of the fact that Gibbes was a physician that he gives little detail of the skeletons themselves. He makes no mention of the number of skeletons in the cave and refers simply to a 'great collection'. Nor does Gibbes draw any conclusion from his observations as to the likely antiquity or otherwise of the bones.

Gibbes' account pays more attention to the geology of the site rather than its archaeology and he provides a more detailed description of the stalactite feature mentioned in the Bath Chronicle (Anon, 1797c) that was said to emit a musical noise when struck. He likens this sound to that of a bell. There is no reason to believe that Gibbes was the author of that newspaper report and therefore his account does provide independent corroboration of the existence of this formation.

Gibbes' work was much reprinted (Gibbes, 1800a, b & c; 1801a & b; 1817) and used as a basis for erroneous conclusions about the age of the skeletons, as will be seen from the next account.

b) A DESCRIPTION OF THE EMPIRES, KINGDOMS, STATES, AND COLONIES; WITH THE OCEANS, SEAS, AND ISLES; OF ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD: INCLUDING THE MOST RECENT DISCOVERIES, AND POLITICAL ATERATIONS. DIGESTED ON A NEW PLAN VOL. I. by John Pinkerton. (Pinkerton, 1802, etc).

> Cheddar cliffs, in Somersetshire, may also be mentioned among the natural curiosities; and the Mendip-hills, are not without their caverns, particularly Wookey-hole, near Wells, a stalactitic cavern of about six hundred feet in length,

[1] Spermaceti is a white, pure fat, found in the head of sperm whales and formerly used in medicaments and candle making. It was very rare and valuable, and Gibbes described a method for converting dead animal carcasses into a substitute (Gibbes 1794 & 1795). The moonmilk in the cave evidently had a similar texture. Gibbes was much ridiculed for these articles as "having discovered a way of emptying graveyards by turning corpses into candle wax".

> divided by low passages, into various apartments; one of which, called the hall, somewhat resembles a Gothic chapel, and is said to be eighty feet in height; while the farthest, styled the parlour, is of moderate height, but extensive diameter. On the N. W. side of the Mendip-hills, is a yet more remarkable curiosity, a considerable cavern, at the bottom of a deep ravine, near the little village of Berrington, or Burrington. Here are a number of human bones, gradually incorporating with the lime-stone rock; there being a continual dripping from the roof and sides, which deposites a stalactitic sediment on the bones. Several nodules contain perfect human skulls. At the further end, where the height is about fifteen feet, there is a large conic stalactite, which nearly meets a pillar rising from the floor. This cave was only discovered about two years ago; and as the matter increases so fast, it is conjectured that it would soon have been closed up. Hence it is probable that these bones are of no remote antiquity, and may, perhaps, be the remains of some wretches who had here taken shelter from the cruelty of Jefferies, after the insurrection of Monmouth.

Pinkerton specifically references Gibbes' account (Gibbes, 1800a & b), however he draws from it a conclusion that Gibbes does not make explicit, namely that the bones cannot have been of any great age as otherwise the rate of deposition of the layer above them would have filled up the cave entirely. His conjecture as to their origin is wholly unsupported by any facts, but as will be seen later, speculation is rife amongst the various accounts.

John Pinkerton (1758 – 1826) was a Scottish antiquarian, historian and cartographer, author of a notorious forgery regarding Scottish history. His father made money in the hair trade in Somerset, but Pinkerton was born in Edinburgh and there is no evidence that he had any direct local knowledge. He is the author of the first account of the cave by someone who probably did not actually visit the site and is also the first to reach a wholly conjectural conclusion as to the origin of the bones. His account was reprinted in later editions, in Britain and the USA, and also republished in French and Italian translations. A similar French translation from Gibbes was also published independently in 1803 (Desmarest, 1803), but without the conjecture regarding Jefferies and the Monmouth rebellion.

Pinkerton's original account was later reprinted verbatim in Morse (1812), published in the United States of America.

c) Untitled letter to the editor of The Gentleman's Magazine by H.W. (identified as H. Wansey by Schulting (2005) (W(ansey), 1805).[2]

> THE instrument (fig. 7.) was found in a natural cavern, 28 feet below the surface, on a ledge in the rock at Burrington Coomb, in Somersetshire, about five miles from Stanton Drew.
>
> Within 50 yards of it, in 1795, was found in another natural cavern, 30 feet deep, an ancient catacomb or internment of the dead, consisting of near 50 perfect skeletons lying parallel to each other, some of whose bones were petrified.

[2] HW has been identified by Schulting (2005) as Henry Wansey, 1751 – 1827, a woollen manufacturer and later traveller in America and France. He was elected to the Society of Antiquaries in 1789 for his interest in medieval and Roman remains, and was an associate of Sir Richard Colt Hoare of Stourhead, who was later friendly with Rev. Skinner. However, ApSimon (2004) raises the possibility of HW being Henry Penruddock Wyndham, 1736 – 1819, MP for Wiltshire and writer of topographic surveys and books concerning Wiltshire history, also an associate of Sir Richard Colt Hoare.

> It is of fine Corinthian brass, and weighs full 8½ times its bulk in water, and I apprehend was an instrument of war. In your volume for 1789* there is an account of another catacomb discovered within half a mile of this, which contained near a hundred of these skeletons, not indeed petrified. Yours, &c. H.W.

In the first paragraph of the letter the correspondent is referring to a brass (bronze?) axehead found not in Aveline's Hole, but in another, unnamed, cave in Burrington Coombe.

The date given by HW for the discovery of the cave is incorrect as he places it in 1795 and not 1797. This error is then picked up and used by various other writers. HW also makes the first mention apart from that in Southey's unknown sources of the number of skeletons found in the cave. Those sources appear to mention 30, whereas HW refers to 'near 50'. It is, however, still possible that these sources have informed HW's account as he refers to the skeletons as being 'perfect' and this was a description that Southey specifically refuted in his accounts, although the word perfect does not appear in any of the currently known newspaper reports (Boycott and Wilson, 2010). HW also adds additional detail regarding the placement of the skeletons in the cave as he states they were 'lying parallel to each other'. This letter is of significance in that it provides some possible corroboration for the existence of other contemporary but still untraced accounts of the discovery.

It will be seen later that this letter became one of the most commonly used published source for the discovery of the cave and its contents.

d) The General Gazetteer (Brookes, 1812).

> At the bottom of a deep ravine, near the village of Berrington, a cavern was discovered in 1798, in which was a great number of human bones, many of them incrusted with a calcareous cement, and a large portion incorporated with the solid rock.

Descriptions such as this soon became incorporated in many gazetteers under the entry for Mendip Hills. The descriptions appear to have been précised from Gibbes, although the date of 1798 is wrong. This exact entry was frequently repeated (Brookes, 1815, 1816, 1818, 1821 and 1838, Ramsay, 1819, Marshall, 1843), although no mention of the cave appears in the 1801 or 1806 editions of Brookes.

With an entry as short as this, it is difficult to find sufficient points of similarity to be sure of attributing a source, although Pinkerton appears the most likely candidate. The description of 'deep ravine' is identical to the words used by Pinkerton, who also refers to the cave being 'near the little village of Berrington'.

e) Memoirs Historical and Topographical of Bristol and it's Neighbourhood, from the earliest period to the present time by The Rev^{d} Samuel Seyer, M.A. (Seyer, 1821)

> §110f In the cavern at Burrington, in Somersetshire, at the foot of Mendip, twelve miles from Bristol, an ancient catacomb was* discovered in 1795, consisting of near fifty perfect skeletons lying parallel to each other, some of whose bones were petrified. Within half a mile of this was discovered^{+} another catacomb, which contained near 100 of these skeletons, not petrified.

Seyer references H.W.'s letter in the Gentleman's Magazine as his source, and he repeats both the incorrect date of 1795 and gives other specific details from that publication. The other catacomb is believed to be the now-destroyed tumulus of Fairy Toot nearby (Boon and Donovan, 1954). It can be seen from this how errors are now being repeated as fact.

f) i) Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society by Rev. William Buckland. (Buckland, 1822a)

> 1. The discovery of human bones incrusted with stalactite, in a cave of mountain lime-stone at Burringdon, in the Mendip-hills, is explained, by this cave having either been used as a place of sepulture in early times, or been resorted to for refuge by wretches that perished in it, when the country was suffering under one of the numerous military operations which, in different periods of our early history, have been conducted in that quarter. The mouth of this cave was nearly closed by stalactite, and many of the bones were incrusted with it. In the instance of a skull, it had covered the inside as well as the outside of the bone; and I have a fragment from the inside, which bears in relief casts of the channel of the veins along the interior of the skull. The state of these bones affords indications of very high antiquity; but there is no reason for not considering them post-diluvian. Mr. SKINNER, on examination of this cave, found the bones disposed chiefly in a recess on one side, as in a sepulchral catacomb; and in the same neighbourhood..... Buckland then goes on to talk about catacombs at Wellow and New Grange.

Buckland gives two alternative explanations for the bodies in the cave, saying it was either used as a 'place of sepulture in early times' or as a 'refuge for wretches'. The mention of 'wretches' seems to echo the words used by Pinkerton (1802) which presumably would have been readily accessible. Buckland also expands on the theory of the 'wretches' by going on to mention numerous phases of military occupation in our early history so it will be seen that the tale is already starting to grow and be embellished. Buckland believed the bones to be old, probably post-diluvian.

It is not apparent from his account whether Buckland visited the cave, although it is certainly possible as he had a fragment of the incrustation in his possession. Later writers presumed that Buckland had skulls and other bones from the site. Boyd Dawkins (1865) referred to skeletons and skulls having 'vanished from the Bucklandian collection' and E.K. Tratman declared that a skull in the Department of Human Anatomy in Oxford 'was undoubtedly one of the specimens excavated by Buckland in Aveline's Hole, and lost sight of for many years.' However, apart from the fact that a piece of paper had been inserted into a hole in the skull containing the statement that 'the specimen had been discovered in a cave in "Burrington Combe," and a reference to Buckland's *Reliquiæ Diluvianæ* was added.', there is no certain evidence to support Tratman's assertion (Buxton, 1924). It is known that Buckland visited and excavated caves such as Banwell, Paviland and Kirkdale, but Buckland's own writings do not make it clear whether he excavated in Aveline's Hole.

'Mr Skinner', mentioned by Buckland, was the Reverend John Skinner of Camerton in Somerset, 1772 – 1839, an antiquarian who travelled extensively both in England and abroad, and wrote and illustrated detailed accounts of his travels in journal form. Skinner bequeathed his journals to the British Museum on his death in 1839 on the condition that they were to remain unopened for a period of 50 years. As Buckland refers to Skinner's examination of the

cave, it seems reasonable to assume that the two men knew each other. They were both clergymen with similar antiquarian interests.

Buckland's article was reprinted later the same year in The Annals of Philosophy (Buckland, 1822b).

ii) Reliquiæ Diluvianæ (Buckland, 1823 & 1824)

The wording in the book is identical to Buckland 1822a, except for the addition of a statement that the cave is mentioned in Collinson's History of Somerset (Collinson, 1791). However, Buckland is incorrect in this respect as there is no mention of the cave in Collinson's book. The History of Somerset was actually published in 1791, before the discovery of the cave, and the Supplement, compiled in the 1930s from manuscript written by Richard Locke between 1795 and 1806, was only published in 1939 (Locke, 1939) and also makes no mention of the cave. Locke's information about Burrington appears to date from no later than 1795 when "The rev. Sydenham Teaste Wylde M.A. succeeded the rev. George Inman as the incumbent".

This error was repeated in a paper by Buckland and Conybeare in the Transactions of the Geological Society in 1824, and was not corrected until the paper on the "Lost Cave of Burrington" (Boon and Donovan, 1954).

Buckland is often quoted and commented on, for example by Lyell (1832), Robertson (1854) and MacEnery (1859) although they add nothing new to the description of the cave.

g) A Comparative Estimate of the Mineral and Mosaical Geologies (Penn, 1825).

As an aside in a much longer article on the relative merits of Biblical and scientific geology, Penn criticises the 'either … or' nature of Buckland's two alternative theories, namely the sepulture or refuge theories saying 'that nothing "*is explained"* by proposing *two* different and contradictory conjectures, neither of which is in the slightest degree supported by any *accompanying and determining evidence*;' (Penn's own emphasis in italics). Whilst Penn's sarcasm was in this respect was justified, he also goes on to attack Buckland's conclusion that the bones were 'of very high antiquity' and post-diluvian, as it does not agree with his own belief that the bones found in certain caves were in fact ante-diluvian.

Penn concentrates wholly on criticism of Buckland's conclusion and adds nothing new by way of facts or other theories so for this reason, the text of his essay is not reproduced here.

h) Some Account of the Fissures and Caverns hitherto discovered in the Western District of the Mendip Range of Hills, Comprised in a letter from the Rev. D. Williams to the Rev. W Patterson (Williams, 1829).

This is a 16 page pamphlet printed by John Rutter at Shaftesbury and dated Bleadon, February 16th 1829, the same John Rutter who collated the account of the cave in i) below. The pamphlet was apparently first printed for private circulation before Rutter's own book was published (1829) and Rutter uses and references Williams for many of his accounts of caves, but the pamphlet was not actually published for general circulation until after Rutter's book Rutter, 1829, page 102).

> In Burrington Combe are two caves, in the lowest of which, human skeletons have been found imbedded in stalagmite; when I visited it about a year ago, I

> soon dug out a portion of a palate and upper jaw, a tooth, a rib, and one of the dorsal vertebra; it has generally been supposed to have been a place of sepulture only, but on examining the talus that lay at its mouth, before the cave was discovered, I found an abundance of bones of the ox, deer, sheep, hare and rabbit, which argues that it was formerly inhabited by beings, that once animated the skeletons we find within. They probably were outlaws or banditti; or they may have retired here from religious persecution, like the prophets of old, who "wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens, and caves of the earth." It certainly may have been a place of sepulture formerly, and tenanted subsequently, by those, who ejected the bones above mentioned.

It is clear from this account that Williams did visit the cave (apparently in 1828 as he states his visit was 'about a year ago'. He gives details only of his own observations and makes no reference in this pamphlet to any other account of the cave.

i) Delineations of the North Western Division of the County of Somerset, and of its Antediluvian Bone Caverns, with a Geological Sketch of the district, by John Rutter. (Rutter, 1829a).

> The Combe is also remarkable for two curious natural caverns, one of which was probably
>
> AN ANCIENT CATACOMB
>
> This was accidentally discovered in the year 1795, and contained nearly fifty skeletons, surrounded by black mould, placed regularly with their heads close under the north side of the rock, and their feet extending towards the centre. The mouth of the cavern was evidently secreted by a mound of loose stones and earth, mixed with bones of sheep and deer. Within the entrance, the cavern expands into a broad natural arch, below which, an inclined plane descends about one hundred yards; the floor afterwards extends horizontally for some distance, and in one place, some immense flat stones had been over a crack or fissure, which traversed the floor.
>
> Professor Buckland describes this cave in the first volume of his "Reliquiæ Diluvianæ," and he considers it to have been either a place of sepulture in early times, or a retreat into which, the individuals of whom the skeletons remained, had retired for protection during some military excursion; but the artificial bridge over the fissure, together with the bones of sheep and deer, which were found amongst the rubble at the entrance, indicate that at some distant period it was the habitation of man. At all events the state of the bones affords a presumption of high antiquity; some of which, were incrusted with a coating of stalagmite, particularly a skull, the inside of which had been so covered with this substance, as to form casts of the channels of the veins.*
>
> *Mr Williams suggests, that the inhabitants of this cave may have retired into it from religious persecution, like the prophets of old, who "wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens, and caves of the earth." The persecution under Diocletian and Maximian, raged long and fiercely in Britain, in the beginning of the fourth century. Constantius Chlorus, who was their subordinate in the empire, and the minister of their cruel edicts in this country, died at York. St Alban, who bequeathed his name to the town of St. Albans, was the first Martyr.-Mr. W. has

> since discovered a considerable quantity of flint knives, and some tesserae, possibly used in a game; these were buried near the spot where the human skeletons were found.

It is clear that some of the details here are drawn from the Gentleman's Magazine as again the date of discovery is given as 1795 and the number of skeletons is stated to be 'nearly fifty'.

Rutter's main source appears to be Buckland, which he quotes, but he is also working on some details from Mr Williams as he mentions Williams' theory that the inhabitants of the cave might have retired there from religious persecution. It appears that Rutter did visit the places he describes as his introduction states that the treatise originated in notes taken in the summer of 1828, during two excursions, enlarged by reference to numerous authorities, and by a 'more recent personal examination of the places described.' No acknowledgments for authorship of any of the cave illustrations has been found, although acknowledgments exist for other engravings, so it is probable they were all Rutter's own work; indeed some were used and acknowledged by Phelps (1836). Rutter also includes Williams in his list of acknowledgments at the beginning of his book: 'The Author, in addition to his own labours, has gratefully to acknowledge the receipt of valuable communications from several literary characters, ….David Williams, M.A., F.G.S. rector of Bleadon;' and in other contexts he also specifically references Williams' letter in h) above.

j) On the Caves and Fissures in the Western District of the Mendip Hills by Rev. David Williams, A.M. F.G.S. published in Proceedings of the Royal Society. The paper appears to have been read on his behalf by Davies Gilbert (Williams 1831a).

> An account is also given of two caves at Burrington Coomb, lying about six miles to the east of Banwell, in one of which, though similar in appearance to the caves already described, no ante-diluvian remains of animals have been found. Several human skeletons, and flint knives and celts,[3] were discovered there by Mr. Williams; from which it has been inferred that it had formerly been used as a burying-ground. In the upper caverns, remains of the bear, elk and polecat, were discovered; the two former evidently of the extinct species.

The author of this paper is the same Revd. D. Williams whose pamphlet is referred to in h) above. The 'upper caverns' referred to here is Goatchurch Cavern, and the cave that Williams describes is Aveline's Hole. A description and sketch of one the 'celts' and one of the flint blades found by Williams was discovered by the authors during their examination of Skinner's journals (Figure 2).

There is insufficient detail given in the summary of Williams' paper to ascertain what sources he was drawing on for his account of the cave and its contents, but references to his own discoveries will make an appearance in later accounts.

The Philosophical Magazine reprinted this paper verbatim (Williams, 1831b).

k) The Family Topographer by Samuel Tymms (Tymms, 1832).

---

[3] Celt is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a sculptor's chisel or stone chisel, and also an implement with a chisel shaped edge of bronze, stone or iron, as found among the remains of prehistoric man. The "brass" celt mentioned in W[ansey] 1805 was presumably bronze, although its current whereabouts are unknown.

Under the section "County History – Somersetshire: caves '*Burrington Combe, an antient catacomb, accidentally discovered in 1795, with nearly fifty skeletons*;'

The source appears to be Rutter as all these details tally with his account, including the reference to the accidental nature of the discovery. The word 'accidentally' does not appear in either the Gentleman's Magazine or Seyer.

l) The Sketcher, Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine (Eagles, 1835).

These are a series of articles discussing suitable subjects for sketching. They were anonymous at the time of their original publication, but were later collated and published in book form by their original author, Rev. John Eagles, in 1856 (Eagles, 1856).[4]

> **Eagles, 1835 page 481; Eagles, 1856 page 331**: On our way to Cheddar, we entered a small comb (Berrington, or Burrington) to see a cavern in which, upon its accidental discovery, some years ago, were found, not far from its mouth, skeletons laid apparently in order, and further in, an immense quantity of fossil bones of antediluvian animals. These had all disappeared, but we were told, that some of them were of very large size. We learned that they were removed by a Mr Beard of Banwell, where a similar cave has been opened....
>
> **Eagles, 1835, page 482; Eagles, 1856 page 332-333**: To return to the Burrington cavern. How the animal fossil bones came there, let Professor Buckland determine, if he can. But how came the human skeletons there? That will appear more strange, when the tale of the first discovery of the cavern is told. A party of rustics hunted a rabbit into a small hole. They commenced digging it out; and, to their surprise, the small hole became a considerable aperture, and at length the whole mouth of the cavern was exposed; not far in they found the skeletons. There was not, apparently, any entrance to the cavern. The mouth must have been closed by the falling of pieces from above, which by accumulation of ages, formed one mass, covered with earth and verdure, effectually stopping up the entrance to the cavern. At the time that these bodies were deposited in the cavern, it was of course open, and used as a burial place, probably on the occasion of some battle, for there is the site of an ancient encampment not far off. This must have been ages ago; and the interior part wherein were the fossil bones, was probably never examined until the modern discovery. To the sketcher this cave is not particularly interesting, there being so much finer within his reach.

It is clear from Eagles' account that he did visit the cave. He also appears to have spoken to someone with knowledge of the original discovery as he states that he and his companions were 'told' that the 'fossil bones of antediluvian animals' 'were of very large size' and they 'learned that they were removed by a Mr Beard of Banwell,'. This is the first mention of Beard digging in the cave and this assertion is not corroborated by any other source, nor is it known where Eagles' obtained this information from.

This account is interesting in that it makes the first mention of the discovery coming about from the pursuit of a rabbit since the contemporary newspaper accounts (Anon, 1797a, b,

[4] John Eagles (1783 – 1855), art critic and poet, was born in Bristol & educated by Rev Samuel Seyer at the Royal Fort School before going to Winchester and Wadham College, Oxford. At the time of writing "The Sketcher" he was Curate of Winford, before retiring in 1841 (Dictionary of National Biography).

c, & d) and it seems unlikely that Eagles would have had cause to examine newspaper accounts from 37 years previously. A more likely conclusion appears to be that an oral account of the discovery of the cave was still current locally at the time of Eagles' visit. This theory is supported by the fact that Eagles does not give an exact date for this discovery of the cave and simply says 'some years ago', whereas if he had been working from a written source such as a newspaper account, the appearance of an exact date would seem to be more likely. The reference to the 'skeletons laid apparently in order' is also interesting as the contemporary newspaper reports actually say something quite different (Boycott and Wilson, 2010). In their previous paper, the authors concluded that not all contemporary accounts of the discovery of the cave have been traced as Southey (1797) went to the trouble of specifically refuting two statements that have not yet been traced to a source, namely that the skeletons were 'perfect, and lying north and south,'. Southey states that 'neither was there any perfect skeleton, or any apparent regularity in the mode of laying them.' Eagles' article appears to follow the missing sources to the extent that he refers to the skeletons being 'laid apparently in order'.

Another possibility that needs to be considered is whether Eagles had sight of Phelps' account of the cave. Whilst volume one of Phelps' book was not published until 1836, some parts were issued from 1835 and may have been available to Eagles. However, apart from the story of the pursuit of the rabbit, there is no other striking similarity between Eagles' account and that of Phelps.

Other than the theory that Eagles drew on stories still current locally at the time of his visit, and a possible, although doubtful, connection with Phelps, it is difficult to form any definite opinion of what other sources he has used.

m) Outlines of Mineralogy, Geology, and Mineral Analysis by Thomas Thomson, M.D. (Thomson, 1823).

Vol 2, Eocene Formations, page 89

Human bones have been occasionally met with in caverns, but these remains, in all cases hitherto observed, are comparatively recent.

(1.) They have been found encrusted with stalactite in a mountain limestone cavern at Barrington, in the Mendip hills. This cave was either used as a place of sepulchre in early times, or resorted to as a place of refuge by wretches who perished in it during some of the numerous cases of devastating warfare that occurred in ancient times. The bones are chiefly deposited on one side of the cavern, as in a sepulchre catacomb.

Although no reference is given, this appears to be a précis of Buckland (1823 and 1824), with some added embellishment in that 'numerous military operations' becomes 'numerous cases of devastating warfare'. In other respects, the account has been shortened as the mention of a 'recess' has been dropped. The spelling of Barrington is used instead of Buckland's spelling of Burringdon.

n) The History and Antiquities of Somersetshire by Rev. W. Phelps (Phelps 1836).

BURRINGTON CAVERN

About forty years since (1795), a man who was persuing a rabbit, suddenly lost it among a heap of loose stones, piled up against the perpendicular face of a rock near the road, which passes up through a deep ravine on the side of Mendip,

> called Burrington Comb, situated in a parish of that name. On pulling away some of the stones, he discovered an opening in the rock, through which the rabbit had passed. After removing the stones to obtain a sufficient aperture to creep in, he perceived the mouth of the inner opening closed up by a large stone. Having made this discovery, he procured assistance, and removed the stone, when a cavern was discovered in the rock. Lights were procured, and upon entering into it, a number of most beautiful stalactites were seen depending from the roof of the cave, and masses of stalagmite rising up from the floor, which nearly united with the pendant columns above. The cavern measured in the interior about twelve feet in width, and upwards of a hundred feet in length. On the floor were deposited human skeletons, not lying side by side, but at length, one after the other, with their feet towards the entrance of the cave. From forty to fifty of these skeletons were perfect, and had become incrusted with the stalagmite which fell from the roof, a proof of the great length of time which had elapsed since these bodies were deposited in the cavern. Bones of horses, swine, sheep, and the jawbone of a fox was found on the floor, proving it to have been a retreat for foxes. Some charcoal was also found in the cave, and a flint arrow-head, which seemed to prove it to have been a burial place of the early inhabitants of Britain.
>
> A celt of fine brass found in another cavern, fifty yards distant, at twenty-eight feet below the surface, is engraved in the Gentleman's Magazine for May 1805.*
>
> *Gent.Mag vol LXXV. p 409.

Phelps clearly had access to the Gentleman's Magazine (Wansey, 1805) as he uses this as a reference for the discovery of the brass celt. The mention of the incorrect date of discovery, 1795, also indicates reliance on this as a source.

However, a comparison of the words and phrases used in Phelps' account with Skinner's diary entry for 1824, demonstrates that he must have had access to the information collected by Skinner. The similarity between the two accounts is too great to allow any other interpretation as at least 50% of Phelps' description coincides exactly with the words used by Skinner, in some cases with whole sentences being repeated almost *verbatim*. His physical description of the cave is also almost identical, differing by no more than two words. The language used by Phelps to describe the placement of the bodies within the cave also follows Skinner's own words as recorded in his journals. Another striking similarity between Phelps' details and those in Skinner's journals lies in the list of the animal bones found in the cave. Phelps mentions 'horses, swine, sheep and the jawbone of a fox' and Skinner (1824) lists 'swine, sheep and larger animals, either oxen or horses; and one the jaw of a Fox.'

Phelps omits some of the details recorded by Skinner in his second diary account; in particular the story of the local rector attempting to bury the skeletons but in spite of this, his source remains quite clear when the two accounts are compared. Phelps clearly preferred Skinner's account of the positioning of the skeleton's over that in the Gentleman's Magazine as he has ignored the suggestion in that account that the bodies were 'lying parallel to each other' in favour of Skinner's description that they were 'not lying side by side.'

Evidence exists in Beard's diaries (Beard, 1838 – 1845, Irwin, 1996) to suggest that Phelps was acquainted with Skinner. Beard, the custodian of Banwell Caves, recorded an entry in his cashbook that the sum of five shillings was received from Mr J.H. Skinner, Mr O.F. Skinner and Revd Wm Phelps Meare. Although the exact date of their visit is uncertain, this places them together in 1826, two years after Skinner's third visit to Aveline's Hole. Mr O.F. Skinner is presumably his son, Fitz Owen, as his brother of the same name had died in 1810.

Skinner also held the curacy of South Brent for a year in 1799, adjacent to Phelps' parish at Meare.

o) The Penny Magazine (Anon 1840).

> Nearly fifty years ago a cave was discovered on the opposite side of the Mendip hills to that on which the Cheddar cliffs are situated. This cave is near the bottom of a deep dell that runs for a mile or two up into the mountain, and near to the village of Burrington, thirteen miles south-west of Bristol. In this cave many skeletons were found, some of which were of the human race, and in a tolerable state of preservation; whilst others were the skeletons of animals that were not known ever to have existed in this island. Several were perfectly imbedded in stone, some of which are now exhibited in the British Museum.

The Penny Magazine was published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and printed weekly on Saturdays from 31st March 1832 to 31st October 1845, intended as a cheap method of educating the British working class, until it folded for lack of circulation. An identical article was published in The Family Magazine published in Cincinnati (Anon, 1841).

The mention of 'skeletons of animals that were not known to have existed in this island' possibly indicates a reliance on Eagles as a source, as his account mentions 'an immense quantity of fossil bones of antediluvian animals.'

p) The Parliamentary Gazetteer of England and Wales (Anon, 1851, p144).

> Two curious caverns exist amid the romantic scenery of Burrington Combe: the one was accidentally discovered in 1795, and found to contain nearly 50 human skeletons, surrounded by black mould, and appears to have been a catacomb of high antiquity

This entry on caves in Somersetshire is clearly sourced directly from Rutter (1829) as the black mould is mentioned nowhere else and the other details accord with Rutter's account.

q) Handbook for Travellers in Wiltshire, Dorsetshire and Somersetshire (Anon, 1856 and 1859)

> The little road in this valley [Burrington Combe] is margined by fine turf, and ¼ m. above the village reveals the mouth of a cavern, with sanded floor slanting steeply downward, as if it were a highway to the Lower Regions. This is *Burrington Cavern*, which when first discovered exhibited a scene which filled the beholder with astonishment. The vaulted chamber glittered with fantastic pendants, and on the floor were arranged in a long grim line about 50 human skeletons, resting amongst the weapons which they had used when living. Subsequent searchers also found in the hardened mud the bones of horses and of sheep, and the jaw of a fox, showing that this cavern had been the resort of wild animals after its abandonment by the Britons as a place of burial. If you stand in the arched entrance, and speak even in a whisper, your voice will be distinctly repeated. On either side of the hollow are great ribs of mountain limestone, well displaying the inclination of the strata; and above, on the hill, an earthwork called *Burrington Ham*, which is supposed to have been a scene of druidical worship.

The only two actual details in this somewhat fanciful entry are the number of skeletons ('about 50') and the type of animal bones found ('bones of horses and of sheep, and the jaw of a fox'). The only account that uses both of the details together is Phelps who mentions the number of skeletons in the context of how many of them were 'perfect' ('From forty to fifty…were perfect') and then goes on to list the types of bone as 'horses, swine, sheep, and the jawbone of a fox'.

r) On the Caverns of Burrington Combe, explored in 1864, by Messers. W. Ashford Sandford, and W. Boyd Dawkins. Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society (Boyd Dawkins 1865).

> III.- Avelines Hole. The first of these, Avelines Hole, is situated in the lower portion of the combe, and on a level with its bottom. It consists of two chambers (see Fig.1) A and B connected by a short narrow passage. At the time of its discovery, in or about the year 1820, its present entrance was blocked up by a large mass of stalactite, and the only access was through a small hole between it and the combe side. Several skeletons were found deposited in a recess, as in a sepulchral catacomb, and some of the bones and skulls having been exposed to the calcareous droppings from the roof, were encrusted with stalagmites.* All these were found on the left hand side of the chamber A. There can be no reasonable doubt but that the cave was used as a place of interment by some early people; but in the absence of the skeletons and skulls, which have vanished from the Bucklandian collection, it is impossible to form an opinion of their date or race. The chamber A is 78 feet long, and runs due west with a dip of 35º. The whole of the lower part is occupied with a talus of large stones, which have rolled down during the last few years, and since the zealous collector of bones, Mr. Beard, had been at work. It is commonly reported that he obtained a large quantity of remains from the lower part of this chamber. Either he, or a poor man of the neighbourhood, impelled by a dream to search for gold, had broken through the crust of stalagmite in places three inches thick, which formerly extended horizontally across the lower portion. Unwilling to re-examine the portion that had been disturbed, we began work at the further end of the chamber B, which was filled with a fine, horizontally stratified silt, containing layers of fine sand. And after sinking a shaft 38 feet deep (C) without finding any organic remains except a portion of the head with the horn cores of Ovis Aries at a depth of 26 feet, and one of the teeth of Sus Scrofa at a depth of 36 feet, we gave it up as a profitless undertaking. On a former visit in 1860, I obtained one of the sternal bones of a wolf, from a hole in the side of chamber B, and one of the teeth of Arvicola Amphibia, associated with the shells of Helix and charcoal. The horizontality of the silt proves that the contents were introduced by water, and the presence of sheep indicate that it was deposited at a comparatively recent date after the extinction of the wild beasts of Wookey Hole Cavern. The presence of charcoal renders it probable that the cave was a place of habitation at some early period or other. The direction of the cave is due east and west, running nearly parallel to the strike of the rock, the dip of the limestone being 62º to the north-east.
>
> *See Buckland, Reliquiæ Diluvianæ, 4to, 1824, p.p. 164, 165.

This article is notable for containing the first use of the name Aveline's Hole. The date of discovery is incorrectly given as 'in or about the year 1820' and it is difficult to see how this mistake came about, although an examination of the details contained in this extract shows that the most likely source is Buckland (1824). The reference to the entrance being blocked by 'a large mass of stalactite' only appears in Buckland, and the mention of several skeletons being found in a 'recess' also follows Buckland's account, where he refers to Skinner as a source of information.

The reference to Beard having worked in the cave may have been taken from Eagles, who mentions bones being removed by Mr Beard of Banwell, although apparently Beard's own manuscripts make no reference to any work by him in Aveline's Hole (Irwin, 1996). They do mention work in "Burrington Cavern on 18th April 1829 called Gochurch."

Aveline's Hole is also mentioned in a subsequent article, Cave-Hunting (Boyd Dawkins, 1870), which does not include any new information, but, surprisingly, no mention of the cave is made in the subsequent book of the same name (Boyd Dawkins 1874), despite the fact that this book devotes four pages to the nearby cave of Goatchurch, or in his later book, Early Man in Britain (Boyd Dawkins, 1880).

s) The Quarternary Deposits of the Bristol Neighbourhood (Stoddart 1870).

> At Burrington Comb are several caverns. One 100 feet in length was accidentally discovered in 1795, by a man who persuing a Rabbit suddenly lost it in a heap of stones. On pulling these away, an opening was discovered. Creeping in, he perceived the mouth of an inner opening, closed by a large stone. On entering 40 or 50 human skeletons were found laid end to end—not side by side. The bones were encrusted with Stalagmite. On the floor were the knawed bones of the Horse, Pig, Sheep, and the jawbone of a Fox. Some pieces of charcoal and a flint arrow-head were also collected. It evidently was a burial place, and afterwards a retreat for wolves and foxes.

The main source for this is Phelps (1836) with a few embellishments; the "knawed bones" (an obsolete form of gnawed) are not mentioned elsewhere, and the wolf has been added from Boyd Dawkins (1865) who mentions finding wolf bones. This is an example of how the information from Skinner's journals has found its way into print through reliance on Phelps as a source.

t) Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset (Norris and Mayo, 1890).

> 44. CONTEMPORARY NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY OF BURRINGTON BONE CAVES. – "January 9, 1797. as two young men were persuing a rabbit in Burrington Coomb, they observed it take shelter in a small crevice of the rock. Desirous of obtaining the little animal, they with a pick axe enlarged the aperture, and in a few minutes were surprised with the appearance of a subterraneous passage, leading to a large and lofty cavern, the roof and sides of which are most curiously fretted and embossed with whimsical concreted forms. On the left side of the cavern are a number of human skeletons, laying promiscuously, almost converted into stone.- Burrington is 12 miles from Bristol, and the cavern about three parts of a mile from Langford, Somersetshire." Sporting Magazine, Feb., 1797. Vol. 9, p. 283.

This is largely a reprint of the Sporting Magazine of 1797 (Anon, 1797d). The only difference between the two accounts is that the original does not give the date of 1797 in the text of the article and this has been added into the entry in Notes and Queries.

u) Tourists Guide to Somersetshire, Rail and Road (Worth, 1881, etc).

> The northern slopes of the Mendips is more romantic if less bold than the southern, intersected by many a leafy combe and rugged and picturesque ravine. One of these, *Burrington Combe*, leads from the village up to the crest of *Black Down*, thee highest point of the Mendips, 1067 feet above the sea. The rocky sides of the Combe are pierced by several caverns. Some of these have yielded remains of the customary cavern fauna, while one, Burrington Cavern, five minutes walk from the village had been used as a place of ancient sepulture, and when discovered contained nearly 50 skeletons in orderly array.

The brevity of this entry makes the identification of its likely source difficult but HW in the Gentleman's Magazine with its reference to 'near 50 perfect skeletons lying parallel to each other' seems a strong possibility.

v) A Mendip Valley by Theodore Compton (Compton, 1893).

> Relics of ancient inhabitants-we dare not say aborigines-have been discovered in the caves of this neighbourhood. In one of these in Burrington combe, explored in 1795, and again by Dr Buckland in 1820, were found in a recess near the entrance, fifty human skeletons lying in regular order, the heads against the side of the cave and the feet towards the centre. The bodies do not seem to have been buried; but some of the skulls and bones were encrusted with stalagmite, and the same substance had nearly closed the cave's mouth. The later search discovered traces of charcoal, mutton bones, flint knives, and what is more curious, a set of counters, dice, or *tesseræ*, used by the Romans and other ancients in games. The skulls collected by Dr. Buckland have been lost, and no account has been given of them to show to what race of men they belonged. The flint knives would indicate an early date, while the *tesseræ* show a connection with men more advanced in civilization. The discoverer of the cave seems to have considered it a catacomb, used, like those of Paris and Rome, for both living and dead. It is difficult to understand how fifty unembalmed and uncoffined bodies could have been entombed in such a way, unless at the same time. The account seems rather to suggest the idea that the men had their dwelling in the cave, and after playing at counters by their charcoal fire, with the door shut to keep out the cold and hyænas, had fallen asleep and been stifled.

The major source for this account appears to be Rutter (1829). Rutter uses the incorrect date of discovery (1795), he describes the bodies as lying with their heads 'close under the north side of the rock, and their feet extending towards the centre' although Compton omits the detail of the black mould, which originates in Rutter's account. Compton has also read Buckland's account as Reliquiæ Diluvianæ is specifically mentioned and the mention of the skeletons being found in a recess near the entrance appears to derive from Buckland (1824) quoting Skinner. However, Compton's account does introduce some confusion as his reference

to 'The later search' appears to relate to Buckland's work in 1820, whereas Buckland makes no mention of the items Compton lists i.e. the 'charcoal, mutton bones, flint knives, and …. tesseræ,'. These items, with the exception of charcoal, are all included in Rutter's account, not in Buckland, which is in accordance with the suggestion that Compton was using Rutter as a source. However, it is difficult to account for the presence of charcoal in Compton's account, as the only prior mentions in literature of charcoal are by Phelps (using Skinner as a source) and Boyd Dawkins (based on his own observations), and no other trace of either of these accounts can be detected in Compton's work.

w) Mendip's Sunless Caves by W. Tyte in Memorials of Old Somerset*,* ed. F. J. Snell (Tyte 1906).

> Burrington cavern measures about a hundred feet in length and twelve in breadth. It is remarkable for the large number of human skeletons found on the floor when first entered in 1795. They were not lying side by side, but at length one after the other. From forty to fifty of the skeletons were perfect, and covered with stalagmite. On the floor were bones of horses, swine, and sheep, and also some charcoal, and a flint arrow-head. The cave had probably been used as a burial-place in late Celtic times.

It seems clear that the source for this was Phelps (1836). Every detail here appears in that account, and no detail has been drawn from elsewhere. This is an example of an author obtaining all of his details from a specific source whilst making no attempt to acknowledge from where the information has been drawn. Tyte also makes no mention of anyone who had worked in the cave, although in the rest of this chapter, he does record this type of detail. This omission can be explained by the fact that Phelps does not cite the names of those who worked in the cave either and so Tyte did not have this sort of detail available when he wrote this part of the chapter.

x) The Netherworld of Mendip (Baker and Balch, 1907).

This book contains a chapter on the Burrington Caverns, which starts with a description of Burrington Combe and its caves, and places Goatchurch Cavern as first in importance. The account continues:

> The next in importance is Aveline's Hole, discovered in 1796, but not explored until 1820, when about fifty human skeletons were found lying side by side with their weapons, a stalagmitic crust sealing bones and implements to the floor. This cavern has since had its mouth silted up by drainage from the road, so that troublesome excavation will have to be undertaken before it can be entered again. It would well repay a thorough exploration, for it is reported that a natural pit, covered by a slab, has never yet been descended, and leads probably into important cavities.

Baker and Balch use the name Aveline's Hole, but beyond helping to establish this usage, all they do is introduce further confusion in several respects to an already tangled tale. Firstly, they give an incorrect date of discovery, 1796, and imply that the skeletons were not discovered until 1820, being the date given in Compton (1893) for Buckland's examination of

the cave. Secondly, they state that the skeletons were found together with their weapons, and here appear to be drawing on the Handbooks for Travellers (1856), which makes the only mention of weapons in this context. Two further sources appear to have been used in arriving at this short, but almost wholly erroneous entry. The words 'stalagmitic crust' are reminiscent of Boyd Dawkins' mention of a 'crust of stalagmite' and the reference to a 'natural pit, covered by a slab' seems to draw on Rutter's account, which introduces this detail. So here we have three, possibly four (if Boyd Dawkins is accepted as a source) different accounts being brought together and conflated into one almost completely incorrect entry.

y) The Heart of Mendip by Francis Knight (Knight, 1915).

Like Baker and Balch, Knight sets his description of the cave amidst a chapter describing the Burrington area in general.

> The most conspicuous of the Burrington caves, indeed the only one which the ordinary wayfarer sees at all, is Aveline's Hole, whose dark archway, deeply set under a rocky brow, at the foot of a bold and striking headland that towers above the road, on the left hand ascending the combe, is very picturesque. It was not always conspicuous. A paragraph in the *Sporting Magazine* for February, 1797, describes how, on the 9th of the preceding month, "as two young men were pursuing a rabbit in Burrington Comb, they observed it take shelter in a small crevice of the rock. Desirous of obtaining the little animal, they with a pickaxe enlarged the aperture, and in a few minutes were surprised with the appearance of a subterraneous passage, leading to a large and lofty cavern the roof and sides of which were almost fretted and embossed with whimsical concreted forms. On the left side of the cavern are a number of human skeletons, laying promiscuously, almost converted into stone. Burrington is twelve miles from Bristol, and the cavern about thee-parts of a mile from Langford.
>
> Dr Whalley, who visited the cave soon after its discovery, and who, in a manuscript note-book preserved by Colonel Llewellyn, evidently writes as an eye-witness, speaks of the great numbers of people who visited the spot, and says that at the far end of it a most beautiful stalactite, perfectly conical, was then hanging from the roof, "and reached within an inch of a cone of the same kind rising from the floor . . . Had these two cones met, a beautiful column would have been formed, nearly 15 feet in height."
>
> Rutter, writing in 1829, gives a few more details. After saying that nearly fifty skeletons were found lying side by side in a sort of recess on the left, near the entrance, he adds that some of the bones were coated with stalagmite, "particularly a skull, the inside of which had been so covered with this substance as to form casts of the channels of the veins." Fint knives and roughly-fashioned bone dice were afterwards found in the cave. Some of the remains were taken to Oxford by Buckland, who visited the spot himself, but all trace of them has long been lost. Beard, the famous Banwell cave-hunter, is said to have found a large quantity of bones in the lower part of the outer chamber; but in the inner chamber, Professor Boyd Dawkins, who explored the place twice, in 1860 and 1864, and sank a shaft thirty-eight feet deep at the far end of it, discovered nothing but a wolf-bone and some charcoal, the latter furnishing additional evidence that the cave had been used as a human habitation. In recent times,

> Aveline's Hole, which consists of two chambers connected by a short and narrow passage, has been much silted up by the earth and stones which have been swept into it by the water rushing down the road after heavy rain and it now contains no features of interest.

Knight follows what now appears to be accepted practice of using the name Aveline's Hole, although he makes no attempt to give a derivation for the name. His account of the cave is useful in that he clearly attributes his sources and he is the first author to return to and directly quote from contemporary sources in his use of the Sporting Magazine (1797d). He either did not have access to or ignored the Gentleman's magazine as the incorrect, but often repeated, date of discovery of 1795 does not make an appearance.

Knight also appears to have had access to Whalley's notebooks as he quotes from them. Knight's other quoted source is Rutter and he mentions the flint knives that appear in Rutter's account, although he refers to 'bone dice' instead of using the word 'tesserae'. Knight also draws on Boyd Dawkins' work although he does not include all the details present in Boyd Dawkins' account as he omits mention of the discovery of the bones of sheep, pig and vole and makes no mention of the shells, choosing instead to only mention the wolf-bone and the charcoal.

Knight's account comprises information from four sources (the Sporting Magazine, Whalley's unpublished notebooks, Rutter and Boyd Dawkins), three of which are directly attributed and the fourth, Boyd Dawkins, is obvious from the inclusion of the details from that account.

z) Aveline's Hole, Burrington Combe. An Upper Palaeolithic Station by J. A. Davies. Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society (Davies, 1921).

Davies' paper is the first of the 20th century accounts to adopt a scientific approach to the study of the cave and its contents. He gives details of work in the cave by members of the Bristol Speleological Research Society who worked in the cave in 1914 and was later reformed after the First World War as the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society. Davies records the excavation in detail, with lists of finds and concludes that 'the people whose remains were found in the cave were contemporaries with the late Magdalanians of S. France…' It is Davies' work that provides the foundation of all modern reassessments of the cave, including the work of Schulting *et al.* (2005).

His account of the discovery is repeated here so that it can be seen what sources Davies was using.

> Aveline's Hole is a rift cavern opening into the cliffs of mountain limestone which forms the east wall of Burrington Combe near its lower end. (Frontispiece). It is 130 feet long, 12 feet wide and its average height is 10 feet. The cave has been written of as Burrington Cavern and The Cave, but all through the locality it is spoken of as Aveline's Hole, which name Sir Wm, Boyd Dawkins used in 1864.
>
> The following is an extract from the notebook of Dr. Whalley who lived at Mendip Lodge when the cave was discovered:-
>
> 1. "As two young men were chasing a rabbit in Burrington Combe, the little animal took refuge in the crevice of a rock, the lads, not willing to give up the

object of their pursuit, procured a pickaxe with which they attempted to enlarge the entrance of the retreat, when a considerable portion of the stone gave way and discovered to their astonishment a cavern of considerable extent. As a very great collection of human bones were found in different parts of the Cave, it became an object of curiosity and was visited for many months by persons of every description."

The date of the discovery was January 9th, 1797,[2] and according to original accounts, the mouth of the cave was nearly enclosed by stalagmite intermingled with the bones of sheep and deer. Rutter,[3] writing in 1829, said that nearly 50 skeletons were found lying with heads under the north side of the rock and feet extending towards the centre of the cave and surrounded by black mould. The *Sporting Magazine* however, describes the skeletons as lying promiscuously, while another writer[4] says that they lay at length down the cave, one after the other. All accounts agree that the bones were incrusted with stalagmite. Rutter further says that immense stones had been placed over a crack or fissure, and infers from this that the cave was used as a habitation. Stones and fissure are not now apparent."

Footnotes:-

[1] This account was received through the courtesy of Mrs. Vernon Hill of Woodspring Priory in whose possession the book now is.

[2] "Sporting Magazine," February, 1797.

[3] Rutter, "Delineations of N.W.Somerset," 1829, pp. 117, 118.

[4] W. Tyte, "Memorials of Old Somerset," 1906, p.22.

Davies' next section is on Early Archaeological Work. He describes and references Buckland (1823/4), then goes on to give details of Williams' work in the cave and although he does not directly quote a source for this he does reference Rutter, who in turn includes details of William's work. Davies also references Boyd Dawkins (1865).

DISCUSSION

The development of the 'story' through later accounts including theories of how the bones came to be in the cave.

From an examination of the literature, it seems that the majority of authors who report more than the bald 'facts' about the discovery of the cave and its contents all have their own theory of how the skeletons came to be in the cave and the majority of these theories are highly speculative. Pinkerton was clearly unconvinced of the antiquity of the bones and thought that they might have been the remains of 'some wretches' who were fleeing persecution after the Monmouth Rebellion, although he does not say how he thought they had all contrived to die at the same time.

Buckland had two wholly unconnected ideas, believing that either the cave was a 'place of sepulture' or that it had been a 'refuge for wretches', indicating that he might have been picking up Pinkerton's ideas. We have seen that the either/or nature of Buckland's theory was criticised, with good reason, by Penn.

So far as matters of detail are concerned, Buckland records Skinner's belief that the bones were 'disposed chiefly in a recess on one side, as in a sepulchral catacomb'. However, in

Skinner's journals no mentions are made in the text of any bones being found in any sort of recess. He simply refers to them 'lying on the left hand side of the Cave about twenty feet from the entrance' (Skinner, 1819), and in his later diary entry in 1824, Skinner states that 'other skeletons had been laid near to the left hand side of the Cavern' (Skinner, 1824). The mystery of the 'recess' can be solved by consulting one of Skinner's sketches, in the same volume of his diary, dated 'November 2 1819' and captioned 'Interior of Burrington Cavern'. This shows an alcove or recess on the left side of the cave, with a notation on the sketch that says, 'Several skeletons found here' (Figure 1). This detail makes its way into print solely because it was used by Buckland and then copied from him by Boyd Dawkins and Compton.

Figure 1. *Interior of Burrington Cavern November 2 1819 by Rev. John Skinner. The following words are written on the sketch inside the recess: " Several skeletons found here". .*

The next direct observations of the cave come from Williams' in his 1829 pamphlet and he returns to the subject a year later in the paper read on his behalf to the Royal Society (Williams, 1831a). In his pamphlet, Williams adds some new information from his own observations, namely that he found an abundance of animal bones in the talus at the entrance and from this he believed that the cave was in fact inhabited by the people whose bones were later found there. Williams' ideas about how the bodies came to be in the cave are hopelessly confused and difficult to deconstruct but his supposition seems to be that they were outlaws or bandits or fleeing from religious persecution, and he refers in a footnote to the persecution of the early Christians under Diocletian and Maximian. Williams contributes to the increasingly fanciful theories of how the bodies came to be in the cave and it must be borne in mind that there is no evidence to support his supposition that the animal bones were of any antiquity.

Rutter's account, which comes after the publication of Williams' pamphlet, but before the subsequent reading of a paper on Williams' behalf to the Royal Society, is the first mention

of the discovery by 'Mr W' (Mr Williams) of 'a considerable quantity of flint knives, and some tesserae, possibly used in a game; these were buried near the spot where the human skeletons were found.' This discovery is not mentioned by Williams in his own pamphlet but is referred to in the report of his paper (Williams 1831a & b), which also contains the first mention of the discovery of 'celts'. Flint knives are not making a new appearance as they have been mentioned before in Rutter's report of Williams' discoveries in the cave. There is no mention of any animal bones having been found outside the cave; however, the lack of these details is not particularly surprising as the mention of Aveline's Hole appears to be something of an after-thought in the paper. The main excavations described are Uphill, Bleadon and Hutton, all sites close to Williams' parishes.

The 'celts' found by Williams were seen and drawn by Skinner and these details are contained in two memoranda, the first of which appears in Volume 24 of his journals, and the second in Volume 45. Both of these descriptions are contained in the Appendix to this paper. It would be reasonable to assume that the celts were discovered by Williams shortly after the publication of his pamphlet in 1829 as his paper given to the Royal Society, which is the first mention of them, appears in the volume of their proceedings for 1830-1831, however Skinner's first mention of the 'stone Celt or hatchet' immediately follows the short retelling of the story of the discovery that appears to be based more closely on the account he was given in 1819 rather than on his later visit in 1824, so it is impossible to be certain when these objects were found.

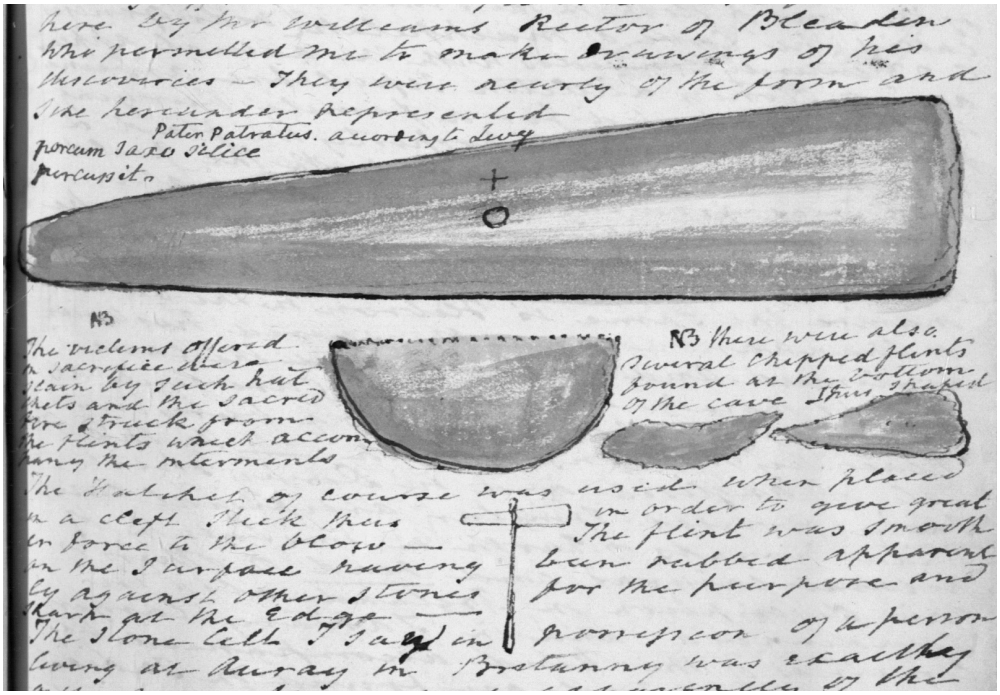

Figure 2. *Drawing by Rev. John Skinner of the 'celt' and flint knives found by Mr. Williams.*

Rutter, also writing in 1829, repeats both of Buckland's theories but also includes Williams' idea of religious persecution, however, of more potential significance lies in the fact that Rutter's description brings in mention of the skeletons being 'surrounded by black mould'. It is tempting to attribute this mould to a combination of the earth deposited over the bones on the orders of Mr Wylde, the local rector, and the droppings of the sheep that are said to have been frequent visitors to the cave. In Rutter's account the heads are specifically stated to be 'close under the north side of the rock' whereas earlier accounts have referred to this as the left side of the cave. When viewed from outside and facing the entrance, the left side of the cave does lie to the north, so this description is consistent with the earlier accounts. Rutter also states that the feet extended towards the centre.

Rutter is the first to mention 'some immense flat stones' placed over a crack or fissure which traversed the floor. He uses the existence of the 'artificial bridge over the fissure', together with the presence of bones of sheep or deer, as evidence for his theory that the cave was once 'a habitation of man.' These immense flat stones are not mentioned in the sources Rutter draws on, so it is possible that this detail comes from his own observations, although this should be treated with some caution in the absence of any corroborative evidence.

In 1835, in his retelling of the story of the discovery, Eagles conjectures that the entrance was stopped up 'by the falling of pieces from above' which accumulated over time and became covered up with earth and 'verdure'. He also believed that it was used as a burial ground but his theory is that they were the dead from a battle, and in support of this, he refers to the 'ancient encampment not far off', Burrington Ham, situated above the entrance to the cave. This provides yet another unsupported theory for the origin of the bodies.

Phelps, in his book, The History and Antiquities of Somersetshire, is far less fanciful and simply believes that the cave was 'a burial place of the early inhabitants of Britain.' As has been demonstrated, the source for Phelps' account is Skinner's 1824 diary and an important element that Phelps brings into the published accounts is the mention of the cave's 'inner opening' being 'closed up by a large stone', which is taken directly from Skinner's 1824 diary entry. Phelps also provides the first mention in print of charcoal being found in the cave and this detail has also been drawn from Skinner.

One detail in Phelps' account that does not accord with Skinner's diary entry is the statement that 40 – 50 of the skeletons were 'perfect'. In his diary entry for 1819 Skinner only mentions 'several' being perfect and in his later entry in 1824 he records that 'one man said he counted twelve of the skeletons perfect: the other said there were twenty:'. Forty to 50 as numbers do not appear in Skinner's accounts. The nearest comparison is with the Gentleman's Magazine so far as the number is concerned as that account refers to 'near 50'. It is possible that Phelps has favoured the Gentleman's Magazine in this respect simply because it reports a higher number of skeletons and thus might have appeared more interesting to his readers than Skinner's lower numbers.

The short article in the Penny Magazine published in 1840 is notable for being the only mention of bones from the cave having been exhibited in the British Museum. The Natural History Museum, (which was part of the British Museum until the building was opened in 1881, but only formally separated from the British Museum in 1963) does hold some human remains from Aveline's Hole, but these were not acquired until 1873 (Schulting, 2005 p. 178).

The Handbook for Travellers, published in 1856, whilst using Phelps as a source and repeating his burial place theory, is unable to resist embellishing the account and it appears that Phelps' mention of a flint arrow-head has now turned into the statement that the bodies were 'resting amongst the weapons they had used when living'. It also adds a description of the acoustic properties of the cave and adds a wholly unsubstantiated mention of the nearby

earthwork on Burrington Ham having been a place of Druidical worship. The language used throughout this entry contains much adjectival detail, both in its description of the cave itself with words such as 'vaulted chamber', 'fantastic pendants', and the even more extreme 'long grim line'. The author was clearly determined to milk his few details for all they were worth. These weapons reappear later in Baker and Balch's 1907 account of the cave.

Boyd Dawkins' paper (1865) is an account of the caves of Burrington Combe, explored by him the previous year and a discussion of the formation 'of Combes and Caverns, in Limestone Districts.' He states that this examination was part of 'a plan for the systematic exploration of the Mendip Hills,' which he had undertaken for five years in conjunction with Mr W. Ayshford Sanford. This is a scientific article that discusses the processes by which both caves and limestone gorges are formed and contains the first known survey of the cave, displayed as a vertical section. As has been seen from his account, Boyd Dawkins gives specific details of length, depth and the dip of the rock and on the section the word 'skeletons' appears just inside the entrance. He states that all the skeletons were found in the left hand side of what he designates as chamber A.

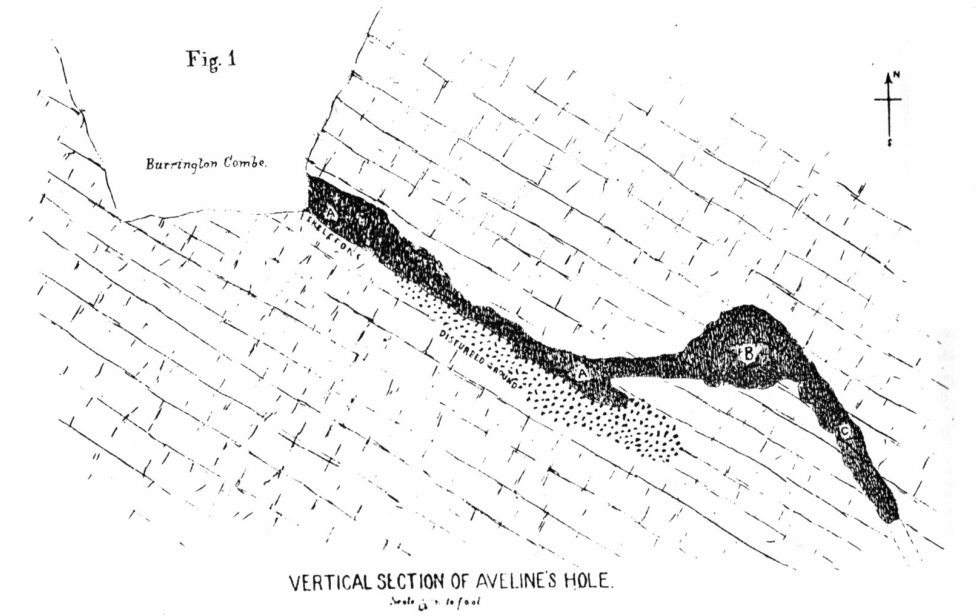

Figure 3. *Vertical section through Aveline's Hole*
After W. Boyd Dawkins, 1865.

This account is particularly interesting as it gives details of the state of the cave at the time Boyd Dawkins worked there, and he comments that the talus of large stones in the whole of the lower part of the entrance passage had accumulated 'during the last few years' and since Beard's work in the cave. Boyd Dawkins also mentions the existence of a 'crust of stalagmite in places three inches thick' which had extended across the lower part of the passage. He suggests that this layer was either breached by Beard or by local treasure hunters, and as he did not want to re-examine the portion that had been disturbed, he worked instead at the further end

of what he calls chamber B, which on his diagram comprises the second half of the cave, after the short horizontal section in the middle (Figure 3).

Boyd Dawkins did a considerable amount of work in the cave as will be seen from his statement that he sunk a shaft '38 feet deep', but as it yielded nothing more than a portion of a sheep's skull and a pig's tooth he gave up the excavation. He also mentions an earlier visit in 1860 on which he obtained a wolf bone, the tooth of a water vole, some snail shells and charcoal. Boyd Dawkins theorises that the horizontal nature of the silt indicates that the contents were introduced by the action of the water and the presence of sheep indicate deposition at a comparatively recent date. From the presence of charcoal he believes it is 'probable' that the cave was inhabited 'at some early period or other.'

Boyd Dawkins believed it was beyond reasonable doubt that the cave was 'used as a place of interment by some early people;' but as he did not have access to the skeletal material he believed to have been removed by Buckland, he refrained from forming an opinion 'of their date or race'. However, he also felt that the presence of charcoal in the cave rendered it probable that the cave had also been a 'place of habitation at some early period or other.'

In 1890, one of the contemporary accounts of the discovery of Aveline's Hole finds its way back into print when Notes and Queries reprints the short article that originally appeared in the Sporting Magazine (Anon,1797d). The Sporting Magazine is later used by both Knight (1915) and Davies (1921), and is specifically mentioned by both authors, so it is presumed that they had access to the original source. A textual analysis of the two derivative accounts does not help in determining whether the original account or the more recently published Notes and Queries (Norris and Mayo, 1890) was used.

The prize for the most fanciful theory of all, however, must be awarded to Compton who, whilst seeking an explanation for the presence of 'fifty unembalmed and uncoffined bodies' resorts a flight of fancy in which he envisages a large group of men playing a game of counters beside a fire, who shut the door to keep out both the cold and hyaenas then fell asleep and stifled en masse. The current authors are strongly tempted to follow in the tradition of previous writers and use this to explain why there are no hyaena bones in the cave as the door had obviously been closed to keep them out. In other respects, Compton follows his sources, Buckland and Rutter, reasonably closely

Baker and Balch, writing in The Netherworld of Mendip, have clearly visited the caves they are describing, but this in itself poses a problem with their statement that the mouth of the cave had become silted up by drainage from the road. Their book was published in 1907, and yet a postcard exists, postmarked '10. AM JU 24 1906' that clearly shows the mouth of the cave being open, much as it is today (Figure 4). It seems highly unlikely that any drainage from the road could have closed up the entrance in the space of one year, and no account is given in any later publication of work having been done to reopen the cave, so this aspect of Baker and Balch's book remains a mystery. By way of comparison, a later account of the cave by Balch (1937 & 1948) refers to several visits to the cave made by him before 1892 and he makes no mention of any silting up of the entrance.

In The Heart of Mendip, published in 1915, Knight repeats the assertion that the cave had been used as a human habitation, and this is the only theory he includes in his description of the cave and its contents. He does not speculate on how the skeletons came to be there. The account is interesting in that it also makes mention of the cave having been silted up by earth and stones carried into it after heavy rain, although he does not claim, as Balch does that the mouth of the cave had become impassable and indeed Knight's book contains the first published photograph of the cave entrance, which looks very much as it does today and certainly shows no evidence for the assertion that the entrance itself had silted up.

Figure 4. *Postcard, dated June 1906, showing the entrance to the cave.*
By courtesy of R.P. Shaw.

The next person to deal with the cave is UBSS member J.A. Davies. Davies lists his sources for the first section of his paper as being Whalley's unpublished notebooks, the Sporting Magazine, Rutter and Tyte, and in his next section it is clear that he is drawing on the work of Buckland, Williams and Boyd Dawkins. Whilst Davies is reasonably faithful to his sources, he does somewhat misrepresent Boyd Dawkins' account when he takes the rather throwaway comment made in the context of Beard's supposed activities in the cave (for which no actual evidence has been found) that "*Either he, or a poor man of the neighbourhood, impelled by a dream to search for gold, had broken through the crust of stalagmite in places three inches thick…*", and turns this into the rather more definite statement that, "*He* (Boyd Dawkins) *also mentioned that the state of the floor had been complicated by a villager of Burrington who had dug in it after a supposed treasure.*" This demonstrates how easy it is even for a researcher of Davies' calibre to contribute to the mass of misinformation surrounding the cave and its contents by taking what appears, in its original context, to have been a hypothetical scenario and later repeating it as fact.

Skinner's Influence

Skinner first visited the cave in 1819, 23 years after it was discovered, again briefly in 1820 and then four years later in 1824. Skinner recorded his visits in great detail, as he did with his many other excursions, and accompanied his notes with sketches. However, as his journals were unpublished during his lifetime, and indeed still remain largely unpublished to this day, the information he obtained on his visits only reached published accounts through personal contact with other authors who then included information obtained from him in their own accounts, attributed, in the case of Buckland, and unattributed, in Phelps' case. Boyd Dawkins also used details from Skinner's account, such as the mention of the 'recess' in which some of the skeletons were found.

Buckland's account in 1822 was drawing on the information obtained by Skinner on the occasion of his first visit in 1819, but it is Skinner's third visit, in 1824, which provides the basis for Phelps' account of the cave published in 1836. A comparison of the accounts demonstrates that Phelps was relying entirely on Skinner's diary entry as a source as approximately 50% of the words and phrases used are drawn almost exactly from Skinner's 1824 account. In this later diary entry 'some boys' have been replaced by 'a man', the pile of stones concealing the entrance has been augmented by 'a large flat stone which was placed upright to close the mouth of the Cave,' and more specific detail is given about the number of skeletons that were considered to have been 'perfect'. Phelps faithfully follows the later account.

The differences between Skinner's two accounts of the discovery can be explained by the fact that on the occasion of his third visit he states that one of their guides 'was we found, one of the first who had originally entered it, and I collected from him, and another person I afterwards conversed with, the following account:'. From this it appears that the second diary entry comprises information from two different people, both still living locally, who claimed to have knowledge of the original discovery, whereas Skinner's first guide, in 1819, seems to have made no such claim. Whilst Skinner's guide lays no claim to having been the man in pursuit of the rabbit, it is possible that he was one of those who assisted in the removal of the large stone as this would accord with the man's description of himself as one of the first people to enter the cave.

Skinner's accounts contain two separate elements, firstly, the hearsay evidence obtained from local sources, coupled later with what purports to be direct recollections from one of the first people to have entered the cave and secondly, Skinner's own observations, both written and pictorial. From Skinner himself in his 1819 account, comes confirmation that the bones were 'imbedded in the stalactite' and he reports noticing, amongst other things that he does not describe, part of a vertebra and hip, a jaw bone, part of a finger bone, part of a skull with two intact teeth, and a fragment of a larger bone, possibly part of a thigh bone, some of which he kept. He also makes observations about the interior of the cave itself and records this in a series of sketches.

On his second visit he obtained some specimens for his companion, Mr Cranch, but complained that "as the place has been much visited of late, and every visitor taken away with him a piece of the incrustation it will be soon demolished." The irony of this statement appears to have been lost on Skinner. On his third visit, he wanted to procure more specimens of the incrustation and with the assistance of his guide, he obtained a large piece of cranium 'entirely imbedded in the stalactite:'.

Skinner's third journal entry contains the story of, Mr Wylde, the Rector of Burrington, who wanted to discourage the interest of the local people in the cave and its contents and so arranged for 'several cartloads of earth' to be thrown over the bones to bury them, but his efforts appear to have been frustrated by sheep continually entering the cave and apparently uncovering the bones.

Possibly the most important element of Skinner's accounts is the description of a large stone sealing the inner mouth of the cave. This has particular significance for the theory that the burials in the cave were actively curated to the extent that the cave was kept sealed between burials, which prevented disturbance of the bodies by anything other than small rodents, as there is no evidence on the surviving bones of gnawing by any larger carnivores (Schulting, 2005).

In spite of the fact that Skinner's accounts of the cave remained unpublished until Schulting (2005) first used extracts from them, his influence can be traced through various accounts. Buckland includes his observation that the bones were 'disposed chiefly in a recess

on one side' and this same observation is repeated by Boyd Dawkins and also by Compton. Phelps draws the majority of his account from Skinner and the Handbook for Travellers in turn relies on Phelps as does Tyte.

Figure 5. *Interior of the cave November 2 1819 by Rev. John Skinner.*
© British Library Board Add. Mss. 33654.

What do these accounts tell us about the cave and its contents?

Skinner's accounts have already been discussed in detail and are presented in full in the Appendix, along with his sketches, and his influence on later writers has also been examined.

Buckland provides little by way of useful information and it is not even certain that he visited the cave, although the belief that he dug there is still persistent (Lewis, 2011). Buckland and Williams were certainly acquainted.[5] Williams records the bones and object he discovered in the cave and Rutter references Williams' discovery of 'tesserae'. Rutter, who does appear to have visited the cave, remarks on the existence of black mould, although it is not clear whether this is a reported detail or something that he personally observed. In the context of the description, it seems more likely that he is recording someone else's observation rather than his own, so although Rutter is possibly one of the better known sources of information, he actually adds very little to our knowledge.

[5] Buckland and Williams were acquainted, as they visited Banwell together (Beard 1838 – 1845, Irwin, 1996). Beard's diary entry reads:

Also on Friday the 26th of April 1833. The Revd. Dr Buckland and the Revd. D. Williams and the Revd. Mr. Lunn and Mr. Hyde Whalley paid me a visit to see my collection and last discovery which extended from the Ochre Pitts on a part of Hutton Hill under the boundary wall into Mrs. Fears allotment in the parish of Bleadon the distance of about 250 feet they was much pleased to see it.

Eagles, who did the visit the cave, adds nothing at all from his own observations, although it is possible that he did speak to someone locally with knowledge of the original discovery.

We have to wait until 1865, 68 years after the cave was discovered, to obtain a detailed description of the cave from Boyd Dawkins who also described his own work in the cave and presented the first survey of the cave. A later account by Baker and Balch in 1907 does nothing more than introduce more confusion with their belief that the entrance had silted up and it is not until the work of first the Bristol Speleological Research Society (BSRS) and then the UBSS from 1919 that a detailed examination of the cave and its remaining contents is made and recorded.

Who dug in the cave?

There is a persistent belief that Buckland dug in the cave, although as has been mentioned above, this is not supported by his own writings.

A similar, apparently unsupported presumption is made of William Beard (1772 – 1868), a gentleman farmer, tourist guide and collector of bones, involved in the exploration and curation of Banwell Bone and Stalactite Caves, and Uphill Caves with Rev Williams. His relationship with Banwell Caves has been extensively researched and described (Irwin and Richards, 1996). However, Beard's association with Aveline's Hole is harder to define. It is implied by many of the sources (Eagles, Phelps, Boyd Dawkins, Knight, Davies, Balch) that he dug in Aveline's Hole, but the only mentions of Burrington in his diaries (Beard 1838-1845, Irwin 1996) suggest that his work in the area was at Goatchurch. The extracts read:

> 4th Burrington Cavern. 18th April 1829 called Gochurch. Mr. Williams with me.
>
> 10th March 1832
> Paid Robt Brown 2 Days at Burrington 3 0
> Paid Robt Brown one Days work at Burrington 1 6
>
> List of Animal Bones found in six different caverns:
>
> In Burrington Combe
> The Bear & Fox &c &c

Bear has certainly been found in Goatchurch, but not claimed by any other source from Avelines before the 20th century excavations. (Davies, 1922 a & b). So far as Beard's diaries are concerned, the authors are relying here on the unpublished work of D.J. Irwin as they have not, as yet, personally examined Beard's notebooks.

It is not until Boyd Dawkins' work in 1864 that any systematic excavations in the cave were carried out and it was left to the Bristol Speleological Research Society to continue this work, with considerably more success, in 1914 (Shaw, 1993). Their work was followed by that of Davies and the University of Bristol Speleological Society from 1919 (Davies, 1921 & 1922a & b).

What's in a name?

In the text of the Boyd Dawkins article, the name is written as Avelines with no apostrophe. Apostrophes are used elsewhere in the book and the cave names are apostrophised on the title page. Apostrophes do appear on all the diagrams but these are handwritten. The name Aveline's Hole was conferred on the cave by William Boyd Dawkins in honour of his mentor and friend, William Talbot Aveline, a well-known Somerset geologist, and first used in print in 1865 (Boyd Dawkins, 1865; Anon, 1922; Schulting, 2005).

The name Aveline's Hole next appears in Baker and Balch (1907) when it was in widespread use locally, and after that enters common usage. The Bristol Speleological Research Society used the name Aveline's Hole before the First World War (Shaw, 1993), but during their early excavations the UBSS referred to the site as "The Cave", probably because of an unexplained confusion on the Ordnance Survey maps (Davies, 1920 & 1921). The site is marked as "Cave" on the 1885 1:25000 map, but the name Aveline's Hole is shown in the wrong place on the 1903 1:25000 map, which places it in the approximate position of Toad's Hole, further up the Combe. The true position of Aveline's Hole is marked as Witcomb Hole, although Plumley's Den (*ie* Plumley's Hole) is marked and named on both editions. This error was corrected on the 1931 edition. The six inch maps have not been examined.

The origin of the name was confirmed in 1922 when, as a Vice President of the UBSS and newly elected President of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, Sir William Boyd Dawkins was present at a SANHS field trip to the UBSS excavations at Aveline's Hole (Anon, 1922, Davies 1922a & b).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper originated in a search for the untraced newspaper reports mentioned by Southey in his letters. After a detailed examination of the various accounts, the only possible traces of the accounts so specifically contradicted by Southey that the authors have found are in the Gentleman's Magazine and the account given by Eagles in Blackwood's Magazine.

The Gentleman's Magazine states that the skeletons were 'perfect', a description that Southey specifically refutes, even though it does not appear in any of the known newspaper accounts. It is perhaps not particularly surprising that there is a possible appearance of Southey's unknown sources in 1805, as this is only eight years after the discovery, a time when it is reasonable to believe that the author of the account, H.W. was writing from his own knowledge of the contemporary accounts of the discovery, which may have included a greater range of newspaper reports than is now available. The reappearance of details from these accounts in Eagles' description of the cave and its contents is possibly even more tenuous in that he makes reference to the skeletons being laid 'apparently in order' whereas Southey states that there was no 'apparent regularity in the mode of laying them. After that, all trace of contemporary accounts of any sort vanishes from the literature until the reprint in Notes and Queries (Norris and Mayo, 1890) of the article in the Sporting Magazine (Anon, 1797d).

There are no eyewitness accounts of the discovery that can be attributed to any named individual. The nearest we possibly come to one of the original discoverers is through Skinner's 1824 account. How much weight is given to that claim to direct knowledge by one of Skinner's guides is therefore a matter for individual researchers to decide. The detail of the large stone covering the inner entrance is not corroborated by any other accounts, however, it is possible that archaeology can lend some weight to the possible existence of such a means of closure, as

has been mentioned above. A comparison of Skinner's accounts with those in the newspaper accounts (Anon, 1797 a, b, c & d) shows that they have the story of the pursuit of the rabbit in common and the description of the stalactite that, when struck, sounded like a bell. The existence of the stalactite is also confirmed by Gibbes, who also makes observations about the calcite growth on the human remains.

The basic story of the pursuit of the rabbit also appears in the notebooks of Dr Thomas Sedgwick Whalley, who lived locally at Mendip Lodge, near Burrington Combe (Boycott and Wilson, 2010). Knight first mentions the existence of this notebook and after retelling the story of the discovery, taken from The Sporting Magazine (Anon, 1797d)., he references Whalley's observations of both the number of people who visited the cave after its discovery and the beautiful stalactite in the cave. The details taken from Whalley's notebook and quoted by Davies, are broadly the same as the newspaper accounts, but Whalley's authorship of any of those accounts cannot be presumed. However, whilst Whalley can be taken to corroborate the amount of interest the cave and its contents generated, he tells us nothing about how the bones were lying in the cave, other than recording that there was 'a very great collection of human bones.'

The most important question to be answered in this examination of the accounts of the discovery of the cave is what weight can be placed on each description. It is generally accepted that the closer a source is to the event that it purport to describe, the more it is likely to be trusted to give an accurate description of events and if a number of independent sources contain the same details, their credibility is thereby enhanced. However, in the case of Aveline's Hole, the case for the reliability of any eyewitness accounts becomes greatly complicated. Southey, who visited the cave within three weeks of its discovery, refutes details in reports to which we do not have access. Southey's opinion was that the skeletons were not perfect, nor were they lying with any 'apparent regularity', however, it must be remembered that the cave had almost certainly been much visited before Southey, so even he was probably not seeing it in anything approaching its original state.

The firsthand accounts we do have of visits to the cave actually tell us very little and by far the most detail comes from Skinner's journals, in particular his third visit in 1824, apparently accompanied by one of the first people to enter the cave. It is clear that not every local 'guide' made such a claim, as no such statement was made by the person who accompanied Skinner on his first visit to the cave, so the fact that Skinner may have received a genuine firsthand account of the actually discovery certainly cannot be discounted.

It is important to bear in mind that it is not possible to take individual elements from a variety of different sources and put them together to tell one story. Each piece of information has first to be traced to its likely source and then assessed for possible accuracy in the light of all known circumstances surrounding that source. The fact that one particular account is subsequently repeated more than any other cannot be taken to lend it any greater weight. This can be seen by the often repeated 'fact' that the cave was discovered in 1795. Repetition is clearly no guarantee of accuracy. The same is true of the belief that certain individuals dug in the cave, which has found its way into print, at least so far as Buckland is concerned, in Lewis (2011).

The most commonly quoted sources of information are the Gentleman's Magazine, Buckland, Rutter, Phelps and Boyd Dawkins, with Skinner's accounts making their appearance in the literature by means firstly of Buckland and thence to Boyd Dawkins and Compton, and secondly, Phelps and those who derive their information from him such as the Handbook for Travellers and Tyte. From this it will be seen that Skinner's unpublished journals do exert considerable influence on the literature from an early stage.

It is clear from the various accounts that exaggeration, such as the appearance of weapons surrounding the bodies, was common as were flights of total fantasy such as Compton's theory of mass suffocation. The more prosaic, and almost certainly more accurate, belief that the cave was a place of burial for early inhabitants of Britain makes relatively few appearances, finding favour with only the author of the entry in the Handbook for Travellers and Boyd Dawkins. Even Buckland felt the need to add an alternative theory.

The cave has held a large amount of popular appeal since its discovery, which is why the current authors felt it would be useful, to draw together and examine the various accounts, as well as presenting Skinner's descriptions in more detail. In this way it is hoped that fewer errors and false assumptions will be made in the course of future research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Arthur ApSimon and the anonymous referees for helpful comments, and the British Library for access to the Skinner Manuscripts and permission to publish the sketches. In addition our research would not have been practicable without the existence of Google Book Search.

APPENDIX
SKINNER'S JOURNALS

Large parts of Skinner's journals were transcribed by his brother Russell, which must have been a huge task, as Skinner's handwriting is often extremely difficult to read and his use of punctuation and capitals was at times erratic, as was his habit of splitting words at the end of a line and continuing it on the line below. He would even do this for words of no more than four letters. He also regularly included words in Latin and sometimes paragraphs in Greek. The main accounts of Skinner's visits to the cave were transcribed by his brother, but some of Skinner's original writing has been preserved in places, mainly where he has written on the backs of sketches and sometimes when he was adding memoranda to his accounts. So far as these relate to his accounts of Aveline's Hole, these original writings and memoranda are undated and it is impossible to be sure when they were written or added. They may not be contemporaneous with the journal entries they appear to accompany.

It is difficult to be sure of the accuracy of any of the page numbers as some pages bear multiple numbers, some of which are the numbers that were assigned when the journals were foliated. The pages are numbered only on one side, and the reverse is now designated 'v' meaning verso, which differs from the convention used in Shaw (1972). The sketches Skinner made on his various visits are in general consistently numbered, although unnumbered sketches do exist. The sketches of the entrance and interior (Figures 1, 5, 6 and 7) have been compared to the present state of the cave, and once allowance has been made for the fact that the floor level is now lower than it was when Skinner visited the cave, such comparison demonstrates that he was an extremely accurate observer.

The extracts

The following extract is in the handwriting of Russell Skinner and is taken from a section headed, on page 104: Journal of an Excursion from Camerton to Uphill Tuesday November 2nd 1819.

Volume 22 (1819) Additional Manuscript 33654

(pages 106 – 107v)
Turing off to the left as we had been directed, beyond Burrington, we procured a guide to conduct us to the Cavern, and whilst he was gone to procure candles, we ascended a lofty eminence above the excavation on which is a small but strongly secured Camp, apparently Roman; [Skinner then describes the camp]

Having made a sketch of the commanding height of the Severn and Welsh Coast; we descended the steep, literally as shelving as the side of a house, to join our guide, who was prepared to escort us to the Cave. As we entered it, he informed us that the opening in the rock was discovered about twenty years since, by some boys pursuing a Rabbit that took refuge under some large heaps of stones, piled up to conceal the aperture, which is nearly an arch, three feet and a half high, and about six wide. On its discovery, a number of skeletons were seen lying on the left hand side of the Cave about twenty feet from the entrance, several of them being quite perfect, with their heads placed against the rock. Bones of deer and horses were also found near the human remains but no weapon or vessel, as I could learn. On asking whether any of the bones were still to be seen, he showed us several pieces imbedded in the stalactite, formed by the dripping of the water from the roof of the Cave; amongst them I noticed part of the vertebra and hip entirely surrounded with the petrefaction; also a jaw bone, part of a finger bone &c, &c. I have no doubt if some large portion of the stalactite were broken off it, they would present a similar appearance to the skeleton in the British Museum, which was brought from Gaudaloupe, and is imbedded in a mass of stalactite like that we are speaking of. As we proceeded farther into the Cave, the roof gradually rising, in one part is estimated at thirty feet in height. I endeavoured to make two sketches at this point but found it impossible to represent to any effect the stratification of the rock so as to describe the perpendicular dip it here takes. Before we returned to day light, our conductor procured us some fragments of the bones of a skeleton imbedded in the stalactite, which he knocked off with a large stone; one piece retained two teeth with the enamel quite perfect; another a fragment of a large bone, probably the thigh bone. I was anxious to retain these specimens as complete proof of the subsequent formation of the West Indian specimen about which so much has been said; for though the stalactite has formed an incrustation round the bone; the bone itself remains unpetrified, nor has it undergone any change whatsoever. It is very probably that this Cavern was occupied as a burying place by some of the earliest British settlers; and I should suppose by removing some of the masses of the stalactite, it might be ascertained to what depth the incrustation extends. On reaching the open air I made two or three sketches of the Coombe, and the Limestone strata in the immediate vicinity which are to [sic] less interesting to the painter than to the Geologist.

The remainder of this entry has no relevance to the visit to the cave. In the above account, the discoverers of the cave were 'some boys pursuing a rabbit'. The contemporary accounts of the discovery in the newspapers and in the Sporting Magazine describe a crevice being enlarged with a pick-axe to enable access to be gained, but in Skinner's account, a heap of stones concealing the entrance had to be removed. The contemporary accounts refer to the discoverers as having been 'two young men'. The detail of the skeletons 'lying on the left hand side of the Cave' is also consistent with them and by the time of Rutter's description, this detail appears to have been rendered as 'the north side of the rock', which is consistent with the left side when viewing the entrance from outside.

Sketch
[page 134] No 6 The coombe or defile under Burrington Camp with the entrance to the cavern. Nov 2 1819.

Sketch
[page 135] No 7 The Coombe or Defile under Burrington Camp Nov 2 1819.

Sketch
[page 136] No 8 Entrance to Burrington Cavern Novr 2 1819.

Sketch
[page 137] No 9 Entrance to Burrington Cavern Novr 2. (Figure 6.)

Figure 6. *Exterior view of Burrington Cavern November 2 1819 by Rev. John Skinner.*

Sketch
[page 138] No 10 Interior of Burrington Cavern November 2 1819 [This shows the recess referred to by both Buckland and Phelps] The following words are written on the sketch inside the recess: " Several skeletons found here". . (Figure 1.)

Sketch
[page 139] No 11 Interior of the Cavern Burrington Novr 2 1819. (Figure 5.)

Sketch
[page 140] No 12 Interior of Burrington Cavern Nov 2 1819. (Figure 3 in Schulting, 2005.)

Note: The handwriting on all the sketches is John Skinner's.

Volume 24 (1820) Additional Manuscript 33656

The following entry is in the handwriting of Russell Skinner and is taken from a section headed Excursion from Camerton, to Cheddar, and Charterhouse Mendip August 1 to August 4, 1820.

> (pages 33-33v)
> The road on descending the hill, passed very near the deep defile of Burrington Combe, where is the Cave used as a place of sepulture which I visited last year. Being anxious that Mr Cranch should see the singular petrefactions, or rather stalactites, ~~it~~ the dripping of the water [the words 'the dripping of the water' are in John Skinner's handwriting and were inserted above the word 'it', which is crossed out] had formed round the bones theirin interred, we sent the Car round to wait for us near the Church, and with a little contrivance descended the precipice to the Cave; where having procured a light, Mr Cranch obtained some specimens to take home with him; as the place has been much visited of late, and every visitor taken away with him a piece of the incrustation it will soon be demolished. From the Cave we walked to the Church…..

Skinner then proceeds to describe the church in detail.

The following extract is in the handwriting of John Skinner and is on the back of a sketch of some details inside the church. This starts with a highly speculative discussion on the possible derivation of the name Go Church and then continues as follows:

> (page 47v)
> A little way from hence at the entrance of Burrington Combe is the remarkable cavern in which so many skeletons were found not many years ago and since that period Mr Williams of Bleadon on examining the place more minutely discovered a flint Hatchet apparently used in sacrificing and a small saw made of a thin flint knotched [sic] thus I have described this as well as the stone hatchet at large elsewhere. [sketch of hatchet]

A fresh page starts in John Skinner's handwriting.

> Burington indicates the place of residence near the Bur or passage there being a Belgic British road that passed to the S East of Mendip to the passage over the Severn under Worle Hill at Weston This line of passage went through the Harptrees east & west Combe Martin the parish of Ubley Blagdon Burington Churchill Worle and Kings Weston from most of their outposts there was lines of passage to Mendip by which the produce of the mines was carried to other places at Burington a singular sepulchre was discovered in a cavern as here opposite represented by some boys pursuing a Rabbit which fled for refuge into a heap of stones on removing which they found the opening of the cavern here represented and several skeletons lying at length in the interior with their feet facing the opening of the cave some of the bones by the dripping of the water from the roof were become quite incrusted with the stalagmite or deposit of the water a stone Celt or hatchet and a small knotched flint by way of saw were found indicative of it being an ancient place of internment probably of the Britons but I should say decidedly after the time of the Druids that is their first introduction of their tenets of Britains namely the worship of…..[becomes difficult to transcribe and no longer appears to be relevant.]

This account is consistent with the account of Skinner's 1819 visit to the cave so far as the discovery of the cave is concerned, but the detail of the placement of the bodies has changed in that there is now no mention of the skeleton lying on the left hand side and here they are stated to be lying at length with their feet facing the entrance. Both this account and the shorter one above mention the finding of the 'stone Celt' by Mr Williams.

Sketch

[page 54] No 19 Burrington Cave a place of British interment under a high place sacred to the worship of the sun and the Heavenly Host. [The sketch also contains a noted stating 'Square enclosure on the summit of the hill called Burrington Ham'.]

Volume 45 (1824) Additional Manuscript 33677

[page 135]

Writing above the sketch states "Burington implies the residence on the line of the water passage". Underneath that, but still above the sketch, are the words "No 68 Burrington Cave". Below the sketch are the words "No 71 Burrington Cave an original British sepulchre".

The sketch shows the open cave entrance with two people standing in front of it. The cave entrance is shown as slightly higher then the people.

The following extract is in the handwriting of John Skinner.

> Memoranda – respecting interments in natural and artificial caverns connected with the account given in the subsequent journals since I made these remarks on Burrington Cave I have received confirmation that it was an original British place of interment and not of a later period occupied by the Danes for a stone hatchet and a flint chipped and knotched so as to form a saw capable of cutting off the branch of a tree were found here by Mr Williams Rector of Bleadon who permitted me to make drawings of his discoveries – They were nearly of the form and are hereunder represented.

Pater Patratus according to Livy porcum saxo silice percussit.
[Diagram] (Figure 2.)
[On the left hand side] NB
The victims offered in sacrifice were slain by such hatchets and the sacred fire struck from the flints which accompany the interments.

[On the right hand side] NB
there were also several chipped flints found at the bottom of the cave thus shaped

The hatchet of course was used when placed in a cleft stick thus [small drawing of hatchet in text] in order to give greater force to the blow – The flint was smooth on the surface having been rubbed apparently against other stones for the purpose and sharp at the edge – The Stone Celt I saw in possession of a person living at Auray in Brittanny was exactly of the same form and apparently of the same material only it was perforated in the centre marked + apparently for the purpose of fixing it better to the handle with a sinew or string - as charcoal and bones of sheep and swine were found in Burrington Cave it is evident offerings were made for the dead and probably some religeous [sic] ceremonies were performed at the time of the interment of every fresh deposit as it is apparent such sepulchres belonged to a family or sept [?] and not employed for the burying place of those slain in battle at Stoney Littleton tumulus there were cists each capable of receiving four bodies that now nearly demolished called Fairy Toot in Butcombe Parish was probably still larger. The family as they died off were thus in succession gathered to their fathers – the description given of the sepulchre Abraham bought of the sons of Heth in the Plains of Mamre called the Cave of Machpelah (*vide* Genesis C 23) entirely coincides with the actual appearance of Stoney Little sepulchre as being a place appointed for a family burying place. It was private property we find and purchased by Abraham with the field and tress growing thereon – and after Abraham had purchased this field he buried his wife Sarah there in the cave of of the field of Machpelah before Mamre the same is Hebron in the land of Chanaan _ and the sacred historian continues and the field and the cave that is therein were made over unto Abraham for a possession of a burying place by the sons of Heth ___ In the Isle of Anglesea and in Derbyshire I have noticed similar artificial cave formed under mounds of earth in imitation of natural caverns and read of others of this description in Ireland also in Scandinavia and in Tartary larger cematries [sic] of this kind accompanied by Temples and Idols are found in India and Egypt & Persia which appears to have been sacred to the sun when below the horizon an apt Emblem of Death _ *vide* remarks at the end of this volume by way of illustration on the caverns of Elora and Elephanta in India. The burying places of the kings of Thebes the necropolis of Racotes [?] near Alexandria and Lycopolis and the Caves of the Magi in which Mithras was adored [?] _ The ancient sepulchres near Jerusalem were also hewn in the Rock and offerings made to the names [?] of the deceased even to a late period.

[Sketch intervenes]

[page 125] No 72 interior of Burrington Cave

[The sketch shows a person bending down, possibly kneeling or standing in a hole, and shows the strata of the rock and some phreatic features. (Figure 7.)]

Figure 7. *Interior view of Burrington Cave by Rev. John Skinner.*
© British Library Board Add. Mss. 33654.

[Probably continuation of narrative from before the sketch still in John Skinner's handwriting]

> Natural caverns of course may be considered as the most ancient places of interment when it was the object of the primitive settlers of the earth to get rid of their dead and before the discovery of the metals enabled them to dig graves of course they would look about for natural crevices in the rock in which they might place them and secure them from the wild beasts by placing a stone at the entrance as we find was done at Burrington from the circumstance of finding a stone instrument for sacrifice in this cavern I should suppose it might have been employed as a burying place at a very early period still we are not quite certain that it might not have been a tradition [MS illegible] by the Druids who derived their information from Egypt that the flint saw instruments ought to be used in preference to the metals since they employed such sharp instruments made of flint which whilst embalming their bodies in preference to the sharp metallic tools they then were in possession of this we know that the primitive alters erected both by the Heathens and Jews were not to have a tool employed in their construction since being symbols of the [MS illegible] or the immortals they were not to be formed by mortal hands or by any tool of melted or fabricated by human skill - some funeral

rites were certainly performed in Burrington Cave and probably sacrifices offered since the bones of sheep and pieces of charcoal are found in the bed of the cavern if each separate had funereal rites performed it would well account for such appearances although there is evident proof the bodies were buried there and not burnt. [His theories about burial continue but no longer appear to be referring to the cave in Burrington]

Sketch
[page 126] This is the drawing reproduced as Figure 5 in Schulting (2006), showing the skull encased in stalagmite together with a jaw, two teeth, two fragments of charcoal and a small sketch at the bottom with the words "manner of the skeletons lying in the midst of the stalagmitic incrustation"

[page 127]
The handwriting is now that of Russell Skinner.

August 28

We had breakfast at 8, and afterwards drove to Burrington Cavern in order to examine it more particularly than I had hitherto done. Having procured a person to attend us with lights, and a pick axe, we entered the mouth of the Cavern, measuring about six or seven feet in width, by as much in height. The man who attended us, was we found, one of the first who had originally entered it, and I collected from him, and another person I afterwards conversed with on the subject, the following account: upwards of 20 years ago, a Burrington man, who was pursuing a Rabbit suddenly lost his prey amongst a heap of loose stones piled up against a nearby perpendicular lime stone rock near the road to the left-hand side, as you go up the Combe. On pulling away some of the stones he discovered an opening through which he supposed the Rabbit had escaped; and accordingly crept through this hole, elevated or four or five feet from the ground of the Cavern which he thereby entered. Having made the discovery, he procured assistance, and by cleaning away the rubbish in front of a large flat stone which was placed upright to close the mouth of the Cave; the party examined it with lights: The first object which struck them, was a mass of Stalactite which they denominated a while marble pillar, about six feet in length, suspended from the roof; and coming to a point, another mass of the same material was formed on the ground by the dripping from the first, and nearly met it, there being but little space between them. When struck this stalactite sounded like a bell, as was the man's expression. On the ground of the Cavern, which measured in the interior about twelve feet in width to upwards of a hundred in length, were deposited several skeletons, lying not side by side, but one after the other, their feet pointing towards the opening of the Cavern: one man said he counted twelve of the skeletons perfect: the other said there were twenty: there were also bones of horses, but no kind of iron weapon, or earthen vessel of any description. On a closer examination they discovered that other skeletons had been laid near to the left hand side of the Cavern, and were incrusted and almost become a part of the rock, by the dripping of the water upon them. For several days after the discovery was made, persons came from all parts to visit the place, and took away some of

the bones with them, till Mr Wylde; the Rector of Burrington, finding it made the people idle, and was otherwise productive of mischief, had several cartloads of earth thrown over the bones in order to bury them; but as the sheep are continually entering the Cavern, these bones are from time to time uncovered; indeed we saw several which had been collected at the entrance; some evidently human; others of Swine, Sheep, and larger animals, either Oxen or horses, and one the jaw of a Fox. As I wished much to procure a specimen of the incrustation, I desired the man to dig with his pick axe where he thought he could meet with one; and in the course of a quarter of an hour, he brought me the greater part of a cranium entirely imbedded in the stalactite: in getting it out he broke it off from the skull, and I have no doubt but the skeleton might be procured from the same place. While we were thus engaged, the boys made a curious collection of the minute bones of bats, mice, and rats; also of rabbits; the jaw teeth indicating the nature of the animal: they were all in excellent preservation and they packed them up in the down of thistles, to take home with them. While observing the heap of rubbish at the entrance, I picked up a bit of flint, cut with the intention of making an arrowhead; and noticed some small pieces of charcoal from all which circumstances, I am convinced that the Cavern was employed as a burial place [the manuscript contains a later insertion of the world 'probably' at this point] by the same people who created the long barrows of Fairy Toote, and Cowleys, also that at Stoney Littleton and Chambrey Hill, in Kilmersdon Parish; but the question is, where [sic] they the original British settlers who buried in this manner prior to the introduction of cremation, or were they the Danes, who we know from Wormius, retained the custom of erecting these shiplike Tumuli, as late as the time of Harold, a little more than seven Centuries ago.

[page 134]

This is in the handwriting of Russell Skinner.

…. as the camp at Burrington is situate just above the Cave, it might have been used as a place of interment in succession by its several occupiers whether Britons or Danes, we will not say Romans, since they for the most part used cremation at any rate till the time of Constantine and his successors. When we find them employing stone coffins near the public roads.

Having occupied nearly two hours in the cave and its immediate vicinity which gave us an opportunity of making drawings of the most prominent features, we drove slowly up the Combe or narrow pass, which nearly encompasses the Hill on which Burrington Camp is situate hence it obtains the denomination of Burrington Ham; or the inclosure of the settlement on the place of passage; and very strong position it must have been. Bur as I have frequently observed indicates a passage; ington the site of the residence; and most completely was the passage defended at this spot, where the line of the Mendip range appears to have been broken through by some great convulsion of nature. The opposite side of the gorge was also defended by fortified post; called Sinch Hill, and about a mile beyond, on the same range was the magnificent fortress of Dolebury. The pass up Burrington Combe is very interesting and might have been defended by fifty resolute men against a whole army. About halfway up, we perceived men

working a quarry of large Slab Stones, one of which kind was probably used as the entrance of the Sepulchre, as my informant described it as very large, fitting the aperture with great exactness: indeed Stoney Littleton Barrow was secured just in the same manner as the entrance by a large flat stone placed upright, and this was further guarded by a heap of loose stones, so as to conceal it from observation."

Volume 35 (Not dated) Additional Manuscripts 33667

This volume is undated and is entitled Extracts on Antiquities Vol XXXV. It contains the unnumbered sketch of the cave showing the 'large flat stone which was placed upright to close the mouth of the cave, which was reproduced in Schulting (2005, Figure 4).

This drawing bears a remarkable resemblance to the large flat stone in his sketch of the 'north end of Fairy Toot barrow' (Skinner, 1820 page 62). In arriving at this reconstruction he appears to have combined the description given to him by his guide with his own observations made at other sites.

REFERENCES

ANON. 1797a. *Bristol Mercury and Universal Advertiser* **7.** 360. for Monday January 16th 1797. 3 col 4.

ANON. 1797b. *Bath Herald and Register* **6.** 257. for Saturday January 21st 1797. 3 col 4.

ANON. 1797c. *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* **39.** 1840. for Thursday January 26th 1797. 3 col 4.

ANON. 1797d. Untitled letter to the editor. *The Sporting Magazine or Monthly Calendar of the Transactions of The Turf, The Chace, And every other Diversion interesting to the Man of Pleasure, Enterprize & Spirit.* **9**. 53. (February) 283 col 2.

ANON. 1840. *The Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* (January 4th). Charles Knight & Co, London 7.

ANON. 1841. *The Family Magazine or Monthly Abstract of General Knowledge.* Cincinnati. J.A. James & Co. 519-521.

ANON. 1851. *The Parliamentary gazetteer of England and Wales, adapted to the most recent statistical arrangements. And lines of Railroad and Canal communication, with a complete county-atlas of England, four large maps of Wales. And an appendix containing the results, in detail, of the census of 1841*. **Vol IV**, R – Z. Edinburgh and London. A. Fullarton & Co.

ANON. 1852. Obituary of Sir George Smith Gibbes, M.D., F.R.S. *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London.* II. 188-189.

ANON. 1856. *A Handbook for Travellers in Wiltshire, Dorsetshire and Somersetshire*. London. John Murray. 196. Also 2nd edition 1859. 230.

ANON. 1922. Aveline's Hole, Burrington Combe. *Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society for the year 1922*. **68**. lxv-lxvi.

ApSIMON, A.M. 2004. H.P. Wyndham and the "Lost Cave of Burrington". *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society.* **23.** 2. 141-142.

BAKER, E.A. and BALCH, H.E. 1907. *The Netherworld of Mendip*. Clifton and London.

BALCH, H.E. 1937. *Mendip: Its Swallet Caves and Rock Shelters*. Wells. The Cathedral Press. 1st Edition.

BALCH, H.E. 1948. *Mendip: Its Swallet Caves and Rock Shelters.* Bristol and London, 2nd Edition.

BEARD, W. c.1838-1845. Bundle of miscellaneous papers and manuscripts. Somerset Record Office, Taunton, ref. no. : DD/SAS/54/C1193.

BOON, G.C. and DONOVAN, D.T. 1954. Fairy Toot: the "Lost Cave of Burrington" *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society.* **7.**1. 35-38.

BOYCOTT, A. and WILSON, L.J. 2010. Contemporary Accounts of the Discovery of Aveline's Hole, Burrington Combe, North Somerset. *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society.* **25**. 1. 11-25.

BOYD DAWKINS, W. 1865. On the Caverns of Burrington Combe, explored in 1864, by Messers. W. Ashford Sandford, and W. Boyd Dawkins. *Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society for 1863-4.* **XII**. II. 161-176.

BOYD DAWKINS, W. 1870. Cave-Hunting 1- The Somerset Caves *Macmillans Magazine.* **XXII.** 452-460.

BOYD DAWKINS, W. 1874. *Cave Hunting, researches on the Evidence of Caves respecting the Early Inhabitants of Europe.* London. Macmillan & Co.

BOYD DAWKINS, W. 1880. *Early Man in Britain and his place in the Tertiary Period*. London. Macmillan & Co.

BROOKES, R. 1812. *The General Gazetteer; or, compendious Geographical Dictionary. Containing a Description of All the Empires in the Known World: Together with the Government and Religion of the Inhabitants, Including an Account of the Counties* 15th edition. London. Also later editions/reprints 1815, 1816, 1818, 1821. Reprinted BiblioLife 2010.

BUCKLAND, W. 1822a. Account of an assemblage of Fossil Teeth and Bones of Elephant, Rhinoceros, Hippopotamus, Bear, Tiger, and Hyaena, and sixteen other animals; discovered in a cave in Kirkdale, Yorkshire, in the year 1821: with a comparative view of five similar caverns in various parts of England, and others on the continent. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* **225.** 1. 171-236.

BUCKLAND, W. 1822b. Account of an assemblage of Fossil Teeth and Bones of Elephant, Rhinoceros, Hippopotamus, Bear, Tiger, and Hyaena, and sixteen other animals; discovered in a cave in Kirkdale, Yorkshire, in the year 1821: with a comparative view of five similar caverns in various parts of England, and others on the continent. *The Annals of Philosophy.* **IV**. 133-145 & 173-194.

BUCKLAND, W. 1823. *Reliquiæ Diluvianæ, or Observations on the Organic Remains contained in Caves, Fissures, and Diluvial Gravel, and on Other Geological Phenomena attesting the action of an Universal Deluge* London. John Murray. 1st edition.

BUCKLAND, W. 1824. *Reliquiæ Diluvianæ, or Observations on the Organic Remains contained in Caves, Fissures, and Diluvial Gravel, and on Other Geological Phenomena attesting the action of an Universal Deluge* London, John Murray. 2nd edition.

BUCKLAND, W. and CONYBEARE, W.D. 1824. Observations on the South-western Coal District of England *Transactions of the Geological Society.* **2**. 1. 210.

BUXTON, L.H.D. 1924. Notes on a Skull, in the University Museum, Oxford, from Aveline's Hole. *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society.* **2**. 2. 115-119.

COLLINSON, J. 1791. *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* (Three volumes) R Cruttwell, Bath. [Burrington Vol 1. 203-205.]

COMPTON, T. 1893. *A Mendip Valley, its inhabitants and surroundings, being an enlarged and illustrated version of Winscombe Sketches.* London and Swindon.

DAVIES, J.A. 1920. Field Work, April, 1919 – February, 1920. *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society.* **1**. 1. 21-24.

DAVIES, J.A. 1921. Aveline's Hole, Burrington Combe. An Upper Palaeolithic Station. *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society.* **1**. 2. 61-73.

DAVIES, J.A. 1922a. Second report on Aveline's Hole. *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society.* **1**. 3. 113-125.

DAVIES, J.A. 1922b. Aveline's Hole, Burrington Combe. An Upper Palaeolithic Station. *Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society for the year 1922*. **68**. 21-26.

DESMAREST, [Citoyen]. 1803. Angleterre. *Encyclopédie Méthodique. Geographie-Physique*. (Revolutionary calendar year X1) Paris. H. Agasse. **2.** 607.

[EAGLES, J.] 1835. The Sketcher no XIV *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* **38.** (July – December) 480-488.

EAGLES, J. 1856. *The Sketcher.* Edinburgh and London. Blackwood & Sons, 328-343.

GIBBES, G.S. 1794. On the Conversion of Animal Muscle into a Substance Much Resembling Spermaceti. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society.* **84.** 169-173.

GIBBES, G.S. 1795. On the Conversion of Animal Substances into a Fatty Matter Much Resembling Spermaceti. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* **85,** 239-245.

GIBBES, G.S. 1799. Account of a cavern discovered on the north-west side of the Mendip Hills in Somersetshire. *Nicholson's Journal: A Journal of Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, and the Arts.* **3**. 319 or 359. [Original not seen, sources differ on the page number.]

GIBBES, G.S. 1800a. Account of a cavern discovered on the north-west side of the Mendip Hills in Somersetshire. *Transactions of the Linnaean Society*. **5**. 1.143-144.

GIBBES, G.S. 1800b. Account of a cavern discovered on the north-west side of the Mendip Hills in Somersetshire. *Tilloch's Philosophical Magazine.* **7.** 26.146-148.

GIBBES, G.S. 1800c. Account of a cavern discovered on the north-west side of the Mendip Hills in Somersetshire. *The Scots Magazine or General Repository of Literature, History and Politics.* **62.** (October) 662 - 663.

GIBBES, G.S. 1801a. Account of a cavern discovered on the north-west side of the Mendip Hills in Somersetshire. *The Anti-Jacobin review and magazine, or Monthly Political and Literary Censor.* **8.** (January) 2-3.

GIBBES, G.S. 1801b. Account of a cavern discovered on the north-west side of the Mendip Hills in Somersetshire. *The Critical Review; or Annals of Literature; extended & modified by a Society of Gentlemen.* **XXXII**. 69-70.

GIBBES, G.S. 1817. Account of a cavern discovered on the north-west side of the Mendip Hills in Somersetshire. *Encyclopædia Londinensis; or Universal Directory of Arts, Sciences, and Literature.* **XV**. 99.

IRWIN, D.J. c1996. *Unpublished notes on the Beard Diaries*.

IRWIN, D.J. and RICHARDS, C. 1996. Banwell Bone and Stalactite Caves 1757 – 1826. *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society.* **20**. 3. 201-213.

KNIGHT, F.A. 1915. *The Heart of Mendip*. London. J.M. Dent & Sons. Reprinted Chatford House Press, 1971. 242-245.

LEWIS, J. (Ed.) 2011. *The Archaeology of Mendip: 500,000 Years of Continuity and Change.* Oxford Heritage, Oxbow Books.

LOCKE, R. 1939. *Supplement to Collinson's History of Somerset.* The Wessex Press, Taunton. [Burrington p 55.]

LYELL, C. 1832. *Principles of geology, being an attempt to explain the former changes of the Earth's surface, by reference to causes now in operation.* London John Murray. **2.** 223-224.

MacENERY, J. 1859. *Cavern Researches, or, Discoveries of Organic Remains and of British and Roman Reliques, in the Caves of Kents Hole, Anstis Cove, Chudleigh, and Berry Head.* London & Torquay. 68.

MARSHALL, J. 1843. *Brookes's Universal Gazetteer, re-modelled and brought down to the present time*. Philadelphia. E H Butler. 499.

MORSE, J. 1812. *The American Universal Geography; or a view of the present state of all the Kingdoms, States, and Colonies in the known world*. Boston. Thomas & Andrews. 88.

NORRIS, H. and MAYO, C. H. 1890. Contemporary Notice of the Discovery of Burrington Bone Caves, *Notes & Queries for Somerset and Dorset.* **1.** 44. 26-27.

PENN, G. 1825. *A Comparative Estimate of the Mineral and Mosaical Geologies. Revised and enlarged with relation to the latest publications on Geology.* Second Edition. London. **2.** 409-410.

PHELPS, W. 1836. *The History and Antiquities of Somersetshire*. London. J. B. Nichols. 25-26.

PINKERTON, J. 1802. *A DESCRIPTION OF THE EMPIRES, KINGDOMS, STATES, AND COLONIES; WITH THE OCEANS, SEAS, AND ISLES; OF ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD: INCLUDING*

THE MOST RECENT DISCOVERIES, AND POLITICAL ATERATIONS. DIGESTED ON A NEW PLAN. London. Cadell & Davies, and Longman & Rees. **1.** 62. also 2nd edition 1806, also published in USA 1804, p104. French translation 1804 Paris, Dentu (Revolutionary calendar year X11) p 230 – 231; Italian translation, Roma, Salvioni, 1805, p 411. Reprinted, General Books, 2010.

RAMSAY, D. 1819. *Universal History Americanised, or An Historical View of the World.* Philadelphia. M. Carey & Son. **VI**. 11.

ROBERTSON, J. G. 1854. The Cave of Dunmore *The Natural History Review: A Quarterly Journal including the Transactions of the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society, Cork Cuvierian Society, Dublin Natural History Society, Dublin University Zoological Association, and the Literary and Scientific Institution of Kilkenny.* **I.** 169-176.

RUTTER, J. 1829. *Delineations of the North Western Division of the County of Somerset, and of its Antediluvian Bone Caverns, with a Geological Sketch of the district*. Shaftesbury & London, Longman, Rees & Co. Reprinted Amberley Publishing. 2009.

SCHULTING, R. *et. al*. 2005. '...Pursuing a Rabbit in Burrington Combe': New Research on the Early Mesolithic Burial Cave of Aveline's Hole. *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society*. **23**. 3. 171-265.

SEYER, S. 1821. *Memoirs Historical and Topographical of Bristol and it's Neighbourhood.* **1.** 108.

SHAW, T.R. 1972. Mendip Cave Bibliography Part II. *The Transactions of the Cave Research Group of Great Britain*. **14**.3. item 860.

SHAW, T.R. 1993. The Bristol Speleological Research Society 1912 – 1914. *Cave Science (Transactions of the British Cave Research Association)*. **20**. 1. 17-21.

SKINNER, J. 1819. Journal of a Tour in Somerset Vol. 22. *British Library, Additional manuscripts 33,654*. London.

SKINNER, J. 1820. Journal of Tours in Somerset and Wilts Vol. 24. *British Library, Additional manuscripts 33,656*. London.

SKINNER, J. 1824. Tours in Somerset Vol. 45. *British Library, Additional manuscripts 33,677*. London.

SKINNER, J. nd. Extracts on Antiquities Vol. XXXV. *British Library, Additional manuscripts 33,667*. London.

SOUTHEY, R. 1797. Sepulchral Caverns. *The Monthly Magazine and British Register* **3**. 14. 114-115 for February *and available at* http://romantic.arhu.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters/Part_One/HTML/letterEEd.26.196.html accessed on 9th March 2011.

STODDART, W.W. 1870. The Quaternary Deposits of the Bristol Neighbourhood. Read before the Geological Section, Feb. 8th 1870. *Proceedings of the Bristol Naturalists' Society* New series. **IV**. 37-43.

THOMSON, T. 1836. *Outlines of Mineralogy, Geology, and Mineral Analysis.* 2 Vols. London. Baldwin & Cradock.

TYMMS, S. 1832. *The Family Topographer being a compendious account of the Antient and Present State of the Counties of England. Vol 2 – Western Circuit.* London. J. B. Nichols and Son.

TYTE, W. 1906. Mendip's Sunless Caves. in Snell, F.J. (Ed) *Memorials of Old Somerset*. London. Bemrose & Sons. 17-26.

W[ANSEY], H. 1805. [Instrument found in a cavern at Burrington Coombe, in Somersetshire]. *Gentleman's Magazine.* **79.** 409.

WILLIAMS, D. 1829. *Some Account of the Fissures and Caverns hitherto discovered in the Western District of the Mendip Range of Hills, Comprised in a letter from the Rev. D. Williams to the Rev. W. Patterson.* Shaftesbury. John Rutter.

WILLIAMS, D. 1831a. On the Caves and Fissures in the Western District of the Mendip Hills by the Rev. David Williams, A.M. F.G.S. *Proceedings of the Royal Society* 1830-1831 No 5 suppl. Letter accessioned by the Royal Society on 14th February 1831.

WILLIAMS, D. 1831b. On the Caves and Fissures in the Western District of the Mendip Hills by the Rev. David Williams, A.M. F.G.S. *Philosophical Magazine, or Annals of Chemistry, Mathematics, Astronomy, Natural History, and General Science.* Ser 3, **X.** 57. 223-225.

WORTH, R.N. 1881. *Tourist's Guide to Somersetshire, Rail and Road.* Also revised editions 1885, 1890. Reprinted 2009.

A. Boycott
14, Walton Rise
Westbury on Trym
Bristol BS9 3EW
tony.boycott@btopenworld.com

L.J. Wilson
38, Delvin Road
Westbury on Trym
Bristol BS10 5EJ
lindawilson@coly.org.uk