

Notes on the Discovery of a Human Skeleton at Avonmouth Dock, Bristol

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On August 11th, 1931, during excavation for the construction of a new Oil Berth at Avonmouth Dock, a human skeleton was uncovered.

The skeleton was discovered 16 feet below the surface level; 14 feet of this represented a new fill, being the spoil from the excavation of the Royal Edward Dock in 1906, the junction of the river silt and the new fill above being clearly marked by blackened vegetation forming a distinct cleavage plane. The excavation was carried 4 feet into the river silt, which is known to extend to a depth of about 50 feet, when the underlying sand is reached.

The site of the discovery is approximately the old mouth or junction of the River Avon with the River Severn before the course of the former was changed by heavy silting near this point.

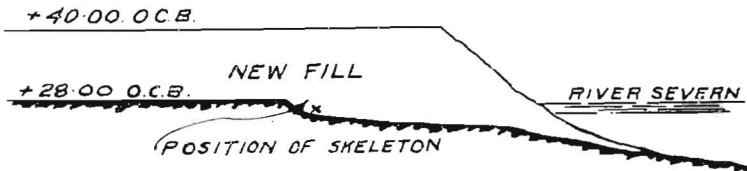


FIG. 21—O.C.B. = Old Cumberland Basin Datum.

The skeleton lay on its back with the left knee bent, the leg hanging downwards into the silt and the head to the west. No trace of ligaments were noticed, although the bones lay in apparently true anatomical position. There were no associated finds.

The position of the skeleton near the surface of the river silt, together with the attitude of the leg, suggests that the individual was not buried but drowned or bogged on the side of the river, and covered with silt.

In 1906 the site of the find would have been about a mile from the nearest building, on an unfrequented river bank, which may have accounted for the body not being discovered.

Since 12 feet of river silt may accumulate in a single year, such remains are undateable in the absence of associated finds.