

# "Bedfordshire Primeval Man"

Man The Primeval Savage

His Haunts and Relics from the Hill-Tops of Bedfordshire to Blackwall  
1894

Worthington G. Smith,  
Fellow of the Anthropological Institute, F.L.S, F.R.S.A., Ireland



"...tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

Our knowledge of the primeval or Palaeolithic savage and his mode of life is at present little better than a shadow. His imperishable weapons and tools of stone are, however, common and well known. The savage himself has vanished, and but few remains of his bony fabric have been found for examination and study. Explorers of the future may discover other bones, and these may possibly give more perfect views of the presence, relationships, origin, and evolution of the primeval savage than are possessed at present.

It is impossible to estimate the antiquity of the human race in years; there are no historical records or dated stone implements for such a purpose. Primeval man's far removed Neolithic descendants – the comparatively recent chippers of the newer stone tools – lived in Egypt and many other places ten thousand or more years ago, in times long prior to the oldest monuments known by date.

In computing the time when the primeval savage first appeared in Europe, one has to deal with what is termed geological time, or time indicated by different natural

# "Bedfordshire Primeval Man"

phenomena, not time deduced from dated monuments and documents. The dates are determined by geological, astronomical, and mathematical computations. As I estimate the evidence, man did not live in what is now Britain before what is known as the last great glacial period.

It is, however, highly probable that he lived in Asia and Africa before that period, because the primeval savage is first detected in North-Western Europe as a skilful designer and maker of stone tools. The tools are of different designs, and they were obviously made for different purposes. They indicate provision for a variety of wants and experiences.

It is clear that man must have existed for thousands of years as a being incapable of designing and making stone weapons and tools of geometrically correct form.

The facts as to the last great glacial period and its date may be stated briefly as follows. There are proofs of a far—off time when North-Western Europe possessed a different configuration from now, a time when the country now represented by Great Britain was elevated much more above the level of the sea than it is at present.

Sometimes a distinct stratum of sand, gravel, and clay is intercalated in the boulder-clay, together with remains of trees, and bones of the great hairy elephant or mammoth, reindeer, and other animals. The presence of these intercalated vegetable and animal remains may possibly indicate an amelioration of climate possibly extending over a very long period of time; in other words, these relics may indicate an inter-glacial period, or a period with a milder climate, which allowed forest trees to grow, and a variety of animals to live upon the surface of the country. No human relics, as I estimate the evidence, have ever been found in these intercalated strata.

At the time of the deposit of these river gravels, sands, and earths, as the evidence is interpreted by the majority of competent men of science, Man the primeval savage first appeared in Britain. He wandered into what is now Great Britain from the mainland of Europe. With him the mammoth, or great hairy elephant returned, accompanied by the rhinoceros, the lion, the hyaena, and the remarkable series of animals, some of which are now extinct, enumerated further on.

Man therefore first appeared in Britain some time after the re—elevation of the land, after the deep submergence which followed the glacial period of a hundred thousand years ago.

# "Bedfordshire Primeval Man"

It is obvious that the primeval savage could not have lived here, when the land was deeply covered with ice and snow, or when it was under the sea. He came when the newly elevated land surface had become suitable for his mode of life. He might, of course, have lived here before the last glacial period, or in a milder intercalated period.

It unfortunately happens that, at present, no material is at hand which satisfactorily bridges over the physical and mental gulf which separates man from the ape. That remains of lower human form will some day come to hand there can be little doubt. Certain links in the chain which connect man and extinct apes have not yet been lighted on. Similar links in other chains, both zoological and botanical, have not yet been found, but discoveries of new species which connect distinct forms with each other, and old forms with new, are not uncommon. Certain intermediate forms amongst animals and plants show a tendency to become extinct. Palaeolithic man is himself as extinct as his immediate precursors. Man's nearest ally, if ally it may be called, is probably not the coarse and hairy gorilla, but rather one of the more delicate and refined apes, in the style of the chimpanzee.

An examination of the skeletons of infant chimpanzees in the public gallery of the British Museum, shows well that young examples are very human in appearance.



Skull of chimpanzee, front.  
One-third scale.

The fossil bones found associated with the stone implements of primeval man show that the following animals, amongst many others, were man's companions: The hippopotamus, mammoth, elephant, rhinoceros, lion, wild cat, bear, hyaena,

## "Bedfordshire Primeval Man"

ox, bison, and wild horse; the latter perhaps then faintly striped like a zebra. The hippopotamus reached what is now the Thames by rivers and the seashore from Africa; not being a flesh-eating animal, it would not be much dreaded by its human companions; and the straight-tusked elephant molest the men further than by an occasional charge from a furious old bull. The rhinoceros was doubtlessly a dangerous animal, and no man would dare to face it. Men, horses, oxen, deer, would all give a wide berth to the different species of rhinoceros; doubtlessly men, women, and children, as well as other animals, were often mauled, ripped, and killed by them. The stealthy and terrible lion, silent and swift of foot, together with the spiteful and ferocious wild cat, would always strike terror into the heart of the primeval savage.

Stone-implement making would be a great industry. The old males and females, aided by children, would be despatched to look after suitable blocks of flint, to push such flints out of the chalk, stiff clay, or earth with sticks, and bring them to the human haunt. There, by the fireside, the more skilled and light-handed human creatures would, with anvil, hammer, and punch stones, fabricate pointed stone weapons and keen-edged oval choppers and knives.

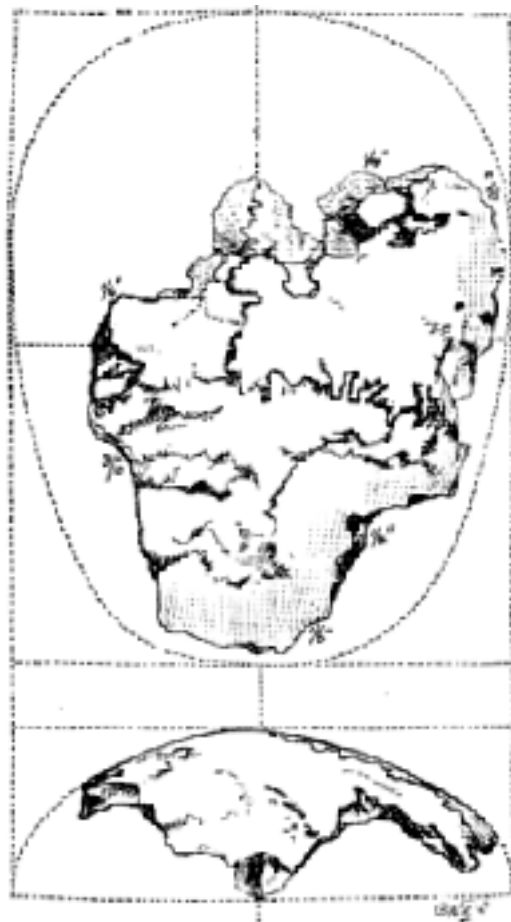
For four years all the Caddington clay-diggers have been specially requested by me to look out for bones and small shells, but with no result. Repeated interviews held by me with diggers, old and young, during this period, have ended in the positive statement, that no bones whatever have ever been seen or heard of in any of the Caddington pits. There was a possible faint trace of the animals of old in a discovery made in the early part of 1892. Whilst some men were digging in pit C, at the place where the Palaeolithic floor is thirteen feet beneath the surface, the men met with some teeth which they declared were horse's teeth. The teeth were brought to the surface and placed on the grass by the side of the pit, where, according to the statements of the men, they fell into pieces and were blown away.

I have evidence of animal relics in brick-earth on the hill at Round Green, three miles to the north-east of Caddington, at a height of 533 feet, the lowest height at Caddington being 531 feet. Here, in a stratum of brick-earth about ten or twelve feet beneath the surface, were found numerous bones and antlers, possibly associated with keen-edged flakes in the style of the Caddington flakes. All my efforts to recover the bones failed; they were taken away by a workman who could not be traced. On my first visit to the pit, I secured part of an antler, a small piece of fossil bone, and a few flakes, the later from the bottom of the pit. Immediately after my visit digging was abandoned, the pit partially filled in, and no new pits

# "Bedfordshire Primeval Man"

dug. The antler and flint flakes I sent on to Dr. (now Sir John) Evans, who reported the piece of antler to belong to red deer, *Cervus elephus*, Linn.

The only undoubted human relics of bone of presumed Palaeolithic age seen by me is a fragment of a human skull found, in November 1882, near the northern border of Essex, in 7-1/2 feet of brick-earth, by the side of the highroad from Bury St. Edmunds to Saxham, in the parish of Westley, in Suffolk. The discovery was made by my late friend, Mr. Henry Prigg, M.A.I., and is recorded in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. xiv, p. 51. Mr. Prigg says he thinks there can be no question as to the great antiquity of the fragment, and that the deposit of red loam in which it was found must have been formed long anterior to the complete excavation of the valley of the Linnet to the south.



Fragment of human skull, of supposed Palaeolithic age.  
Westley, near Bury St. Edmunds. Half scale.

In adjoining pockets two grinders of the mammoth were found, and four Palaeolithic implements. An illustration of the skull fragment, engraved to one-half

## "Bedfordshire Primeval Man"

the natural size, is given. It consists of a portion of a frontal bone, about five inches of the coronal suture, and a little over two inches of the sagittal, with the anterior third of the left parietal and a small portion of the right. The thickest portion of the bone is three-tenths of an inch. Mr. Prigg considered the fragment to have belonged to an undersized poorly developed individual of middle age, probably of the female sex.



Large implement, Westley, near Bury St. Edmunds.  
Half scale.

### Forgeries of Implements.

Soon after the publication of my first discoveries of Palaeolithic implements in North-East London, forgeries became common, not only of the implements themselves, but of the hammer-stones of quartzite.

No workman ever received a single word of information from me as to tools, or their marks of authenticity; others, however, were not so cautious, but told the men everything they knew, and explained the various characteristic points of form, mineral condition, and abrasion of implements.

The consequence was that carpenters and plasterers, men who knew how to use different forms of hammer and punch, speedily produced forgeries. The forgeries were never made by the labourers, as they were without the necessary skill of

## "Bedfordshire Primeval Man"

hand. The carpenters and plasterers sold the forgeries to the labourers for small sums, and the labourers resold the stones, often for very large sums, to collectors of curios. A sovereign has many times been received for a good forgery, and I know of an instance where five pounds was foolishly paid for an example of surpassing size, weight, and finish.

Excavations were being made at this time in Gray's Inn Lane, and as collectors had learned that the first British Palaeolithic implement was lighted on in Gray's Inn Lane, the collectors plagued the diggers there for implements. Several genuine implements were indeed found, but many forgeries were taken by a Stoke Newington plasterer to the labourers of Gray's Inn Lane for re-sale. Genuine implements from Stoke Newington were sold as City implements.

Even at the present time it is in the highest degree dangerous to buy stone implements of labourers and their boys. The art of forgery has been made so complete, that nearly every mark of authenticity has been successfully imitated.

As soon as the men were advised about quartzite pebbles with abraded ends, they speedily produced a large quantity for sale, for nothing could be easier than the abrasion of a quartzite pebble.

The fault, of course, rested wholly with the visitors who gave information to the men. As the forged implements have been sold and resold in all directions, and are doubtlessly in the market today, I here describe some of them.

In the first place, the best forgeries are beautifully and perfectly made, in close imitation of the best type forms. Every delicate gradation of form, shape, and thinness of point has been most successfully imitated. Collectors at one time lent the men their best genuine tools as aids to discovery, and one special forger was most successful in exactly imitating the best type forms in the minutest details.

The genuine Stoke Newington implements are often keen-edged, and as often highly lustrous. At first the forgeries were all dull and lustreless. On this fact being made known to the forgers, they vigorously brushed their forgeries all over with a very hard brush; the result was an excellent and natural-looking lustre or polish.

Next, the collectors wanted slightly abraded edges, some genuine tools being slightly abraded. To meet this demand the men put the tools into a twisted sack, and shook the sack with its contained implements together with natural stones and sand, till the tools exhibited a proper amount of abrasion.

## "Bedfordshire Primeval Man"

Some wise person next showed the men that many genuine tools were stained with ochre, caused by the presence of iron in the soil. To provide this colour the men kept large iron saucepans constantly boiling on their fires—saucepans filled with forged implements, old rusty nails, and other iron fragments; this gave the required tint, but some of the purchasers suspected the tools, and put them again into boiling water, with the result that the ochreous colour soon came off and left the tools grey. Potash removed the colour. This was because the men at first boiled the tools after they had brushed them up to produce a lustre.

The forgers now boiled their unpolished grey tools in their saucepans and polished them up afterwards. When this was done, re-boiling would not remove the ochreous colour derived from the iron, and the longer the tools were boiled the more permanently ochreous they became.

One visitor to the site of my discovery was a believer in pre-glacial man; he believed all

Palaeolithic implements to be pre-glacial, and he set the men to look after ice-scratched tools. He brought pieces of indurated glacially-scratched chalk from Finchley, so that the men might better understand what true glacial scratches were. In a few days implements were on sale scratched deeply all over the worked surface.

Of all the devices practiced by these forgers, one possessed a great pre-eminence over the others. The men were enlightened as to the presence of the little, highly lustrous, quicksilver-like specks seen on many genuine implements. The forgers soon reproduced these specks perfectly, by forcibly rubbing a small stone burnisher on suitable places.

The only characters they were unable to forge, as far as I know, were the black moss-like dendritic deposits caused by the crystallisation of peroxide of manganese and calcareous and compact ferruginous incrustations. Whitening the forgeries was not attempted.

The forgers did not confine themselves to Palaeolithic implements; they also made Neolithic tools, including polished celts. In form all were perfect, and calculated to deceive the sharpest and most experienced eyes. The polished celts were surfaced on a revolving grindstone; on an examination with a lens it could be seen that the



## "Bedfordshire Primeval Man"

almost invisible striae were too perfect, and too much in one continued direction, to be the work of irregular hand-polishing.

Soon after Mr. Spurrell's wonderful discovery at Crayford of Palaeolithic flints capable of replacement, one or more persons informed the Stoke Newington men of this fact; the men straightway began to strike off grey flakes, and put them together again. The Stoke Newington workmen were even told of the pits at Crayford; they visited the pits and showed the Crayford diggers how to replace newly struck off flakes. Some of the forged pieces were sent on to me. Many of the Stoke Newington forgeries have been sent to me for an opinion.

The moral to be drawn from the facts narrated is: be very careful in dealing with workmen, especially London workmen. It is a different state of things in the country, where fewer persons are on the look-out for antiquities. But even in the country it is in the highest degree inadvisable to inform workmen of the nature and points of authenticity of stone tools; the whole mischief is brought about by collectors of curios airing their superficial knowledge before groups of workmen. Although I have been keenly looking out for Palaeolithic implements between London and Bedfordshire for more than fifteen years, and although I have been in close contact with the workmen during the whole of this period, I have never mentioned implements to one of the men, and I do not believe that a single man or boy in any of the pits frequented by me has the least knowledge of implements as such. When I have wanted to examine special gravel, sand, or clay, I have simply paid the men to dig it or spread it out for me with shovels. I have then looked over the material another day, or perhaps weeks after, and taken out anything worth removal.

It is a curious fact in regard to the Stoke Newington forgeries, that some of the collectors who informed the workmen of the points of authenticity in stone tools were themselves severely bitten by the forgers. This feat should delight the hearts of all antiquaries.