



DAWLISH LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter

September 2015

Dear members,

As you will have read from the previous Newsletter our chairman Mike Ralls has become seriously ill and is unable to carry on with his work for our club. His wife Sheila is understandably supporting him. This is a serious loss as both Mike and Sheila were an integral part of the History Group and its continuation after Bob Thompson passed away. The remaining members of the committee are continuing to run the Group in their absence, and would like to appeal to the members to support them in their effort.

As the relatively new editor of the Newsletter, much of my task to date has been writing articles, as input from other authors has been very scarce. As this could become very one sided, I would very much appreciate any contribution anyone would like to make so that in future we can provide a certain degree of variety and cater for diverse interests.

Ian Thomson

The Origin of Kents Cavern

The history of our area does not only deal with local persons, buildings or properties, but is intrinsically connected with the geography and geology that surrounds us. Even the traditional Devon cob buildings are the product of soils and natural materials available in our area. Very often, the architecture of an area is very much governed by these and the indigenous population's ingenuity.

**Our Next DLHG Talk: Tuesday 6 October:
"Garton and King - Exeter" by Richard
Holladay**

Geologically, however, looking back some 400 million years, certain parts of south Devon lay at the bottom of a sea full of organisms with shell and bone structures. When these organisms died the structures were broken up and, over time, (millions of years) they formed limestone (a form of calcium carbonate). Another local area was a desert consisting of red sands and gravels that now form the characteristic red sandstone cliffs around Dawlish. It originated in desert conditions between about 250 and 300 million years ago during the Permian

period, when the land it sits on was about 15 degrees north of the Equator (about 2,400 miles from where it is now) in a supercontinent that geologists call Pangea, which broke apart about 200 million years ago due to movements in the Earth's tectonic plates.'

In the instance of the caves forming Kents Cavern (situated in the Wellswood area of Torquay), these were formed over long periods in the Pleistocene when the vegetation growing above the limestone strata there died and decayed. Together with rainwater this formed a weak acid that seeped through the layers, slowly dissolving the limestone.

This initially formed small cavities. Over millions of years these cavities slowly enlarged and became the caverns we know today. The seeping of acidic rainwater also led to the formation of the slow growing straws, stalactites, helictites and stalagmites we can now observe in the cavern.

The stratigraphy is very complex. The surrounding landscape, however, has been untouched by glaciation. It was formed by the action of tropical seas, scorching deserts, and drowned forests. It has seen hippopotami and mammoth, straight-tusked elephant and tigers along with earliest man. These inhabited Kents cavern in past ages, their remains having been investigated at various times since Father John MacEnery first excavated the cavern in 1825. MacEnery was chaplain to the Cary family who owned the area at the time.

Local Diary Dates

RAMM Exeter: To December 2018

First world War Centenary 2014-18

RAMM Exeter: To 28 February 2016

The Ways of the Ancestors: the Art of Tonga

**Chudleigh HG: 2 October "Chudleigh in the
Latter Half of the 19th Century" by Alan
Brunton**

**Starcross History: 9 September: Rear
Admiral Francis Bond (sailed to Tahiti with
Captain Bligh of the Bounty) by Sally Ayres**

A number of people including William Pengelly, who led a 1865 British Association exploration of the cave system, deduced that human-created artifacts found under a stalagmite could be half a million years old. Importantly Pengelly plotted the position of every bone, flint and other artefact he discovered during the excavations.

The Carys were associated with the caverns until they

eventually passed into the hands of the Powe family. They still own the caves as a family business in the fifth generation, and they have developed it into a tourist attraction.

However, the cave should not only be considered as an attraction because it is the subject of considerable scientific interest and importance.

It is one of the most important archaeological and paleontological sites in Britain. Acheulian biface flint artefacts recovered from the cave are amongst the earliest evidence of humans in Britain.

There is evidence of both Neanderthal and Homo Sapiens living there. The Homo Sapien fossil from 42,000 BC makes it the earliest anatomically modern human find yet discovered in northwestern Europe. The cave bear remains are the most abundant and important from any British site. Kents Cavern has also played a central role in the 19th Century history of archaeological and paleontological thinking with initial writings predating Darwin's theory of evolution. These publications were suppressed by religious bodies at the time, because the theories they proposed were contrary to contemporary bible teaching.

The name Kents is likely to derive from the Cornish (Celtic) word Kent or Kant meaning a border or headland, so the name came from the hole on the headland. Many places in Scotland have similar Celtic derivations such as kintyre meaning headland, kenmare meaning head of the sea and kinloch meaning head of the loch.

Sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kents_Cavern

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/8966689/Kents-Cavern-inside-the-cave-of-stone-age-secrets.html>

<http://www.kents-cavern.co.uk>

<http://www.europeangeoparks.org>

<http://faculty.jsd.claremont.edu/dmcfarlane/KentsCavern/index.htm>

Old Dawlish in photos

It was house full at our last meeting when Mike Wedlake showed some of the photographs in the Bernard Chapman collection. Bernard is the fourth generation to carry on the business of the Chapman family who owned a photographic studio and printing works which opened in 1863 in Regent Street, later moving to Hatcher Street until they closed in 1963. Dawlish is very lucky that Bernard saved a thousand or more photos of the town which includes street scenes, local industries, and well known characters, which brought back happy memories to many in the audience. The photographs in the collection are gradually being digitised, along with many others, and can be seen in the museum.

David Allanach

From the Dawlish Museum

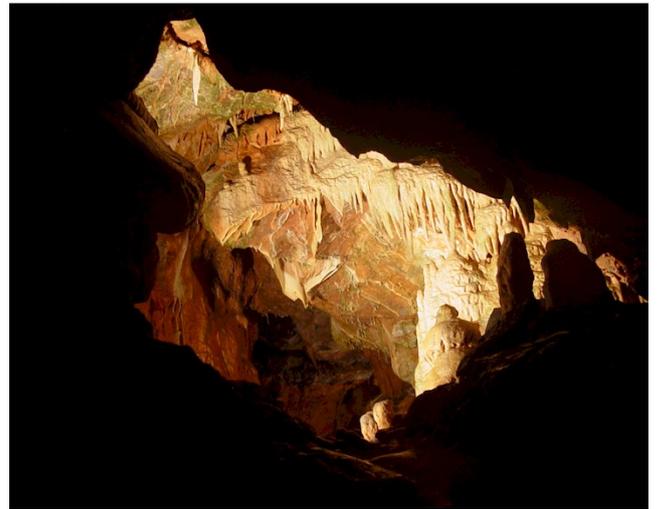
The new stewards recruited from various local organisations have made things a lot easier - they all appear to enjoy it and are very enthusiastic. It has been good for the more experienced staff as for most sessions there are now three stewards on duty which means that more time can be spent chatting to visitors. These have been very complimentary. Children are enjoying doing the quiz and also finding the hidden black swans throughout the building. They are rewarded with a badge for their efforts. The garden has also proved popular and once again been complimented on. DLHG books will once again be on sale on the museum stalls at the Rotary Fair and the Air Show.

M. Stuckey

Kents Cavern is a one of Devon's Scheduled Ancient Monuments and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The region around Kents Cavern forms the English Riviera Geopark. This is part of the Geopark Network that extends worldwide.

A Geopark aims to protect geo-diversity and to promote geological heritage to the general public as well as to support sustainable economic development of the area, primarily through the development of geological tourism. The European Geopark Network was founded in 2000.



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Ian Thomson