

THE SKELETON OF HALLING MAN

By K. P. OAKLEY, H. BARKER and G. DE G. SIEVEKING

THE skeleton in contracted burial was excavated in August, 1912, at Halling (TQ 705644; 51° 21' N., 0° 27' E.) at depth of c. 2 m. (6 ft.) from base of alluvial loam (Cook, 1914) which was capped by 'floor' of artifacts variously regarded as Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic or Neolithic. The skull was identified by Keith (1914) as belonging to T. Huxley's 'river-bed' type. Application of relative dating techniques showed that the skeleton was Post-Pleistocene (Oakley, 1963), and radiocarbon dating (H. Barker *et. al.*, in press) indicates that it is of Neolithic age.

Femur 4180±190 BP BM-249.

Re-examination of the artifacts showed that they could fit into either Late Mesolithic or Neolithic context (G. de G. Sieveking *in lit.*, 1967).

W. H. Cook (1914). On the Discovery of a Human Skeleton in a Brick-earth deposit in the Valley of the River Medway at Halling, Kent, *J. R. Anthropol. Inst.*, xliv, 212-27.

A. Keith (1914). Report on the Human and Animal Remains found at Halling, Kent, *J. R. Anthropol. Inst.*, xliv, 228-40.

K. P. Oakley (1963). Note on the antiquity of Halling Man, in M. P. Kerney, Late-Glacial Deposits on the Chalk of South-East England, *Phil. Trans. Roy. Soc. B*, ccxlvi, 203-54.

The skeleton is preserved in the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), London, S.W.7.

NOTE by John Evans

1. This note will serve to remind or acquaint readers with the circumstances of the discovery of a fossil human skeleton known as 'Halling Man' and the opinions then expressed as to its age and significance.

In August, 1912, an excavation for a sewerage tank was being dug at the foot of the 'low terrace' of the Medway at Halling, Kent, when there occurred a fall of material from the face of the terrace or low cliff into the excavation. When this material was cleared away it was seen that it contained part of a human skeleton, the remainder of which was seen to be still *in situ* imbedded in the face of the terrace. The Medway 'terrace' here forms a low cliff some 7 ft. higher than the marshes of the river and its extension along the landward edge of the

THE SKELETON OF HALLING MAN

marshes everywhere contained and limited the flood plain of the river before the river walls were built. The surface of the marsh at Halling stands at 8·25 ft. O.D. and the top of the terrace at 15 ft. O.D. The section of the terrace at Halling was said to be made up of bands of brick-earths, loams and sands. The skeleton came from a level 6 ft from the top.

The late W. H. Cook of Snodland, an active member of the Medway Scientific Research Society, undertook the investigation of the discovery immediately after it was made, and the human and some animal bones were sent to Dr. (afterwards Sir Arthur) Keith, Conservator of the Museum and Hunterian Professor at the Royal College of Surgeons, for expert examination. Their reports appeared together in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* for July, 1914, xlv, 212-40.

In his paper Cook showed a drawing of the face of the terrace at the site divided up into nine horizontal bands or strata, and it was from No. 5 stratum, counting downwards, that the skeleton came. He insisted that all the strata were undisturbed and thus the body had not been buried from a higher land surface. He mentioned that a few mammalian bones were found in the depression which occurred in stratum No. 3, but no bones, other than human, were found in No. 5. Later, however, he listed certain specimens of an early fauna as coming from strata Nos. 2, 3, 4 and 5.¹ Of these Mr. Charles Andrews of² the British Museum declared that there was not a single representative of any animal which was certainly of Pleistocene date; the fauna pointed to a late Palaeolithic or Neolithic date.

No true flint implements were found but a number of flint flakes were recovered from the skeleton stratum. Of these Cook wrote, 'many of the samples in the opinion of some of the highest authorities attune to the culture of the (so-called) cave period known as Aurignacian'.³ Dr. D. A. E. Garrod later examined the Halling flints in detail with negative results; she found it impossible to accept the Aurignacian date for the skeleton.⁴

Dr. Keith's examination of the skeleton led him to declare that it was in every respect of modern type.

Cook wisely refrained from attempting to draw conclusions from the geological environment since at that time little was known of the age and origin of the 'low terrace' feature of the Medway valley, but it was thought that it was an ancient river deposit. Recently Dr. Kerney

¹ *Proc. Prehist. Soc. E. Anglia*, iv (1922-23), 152, and D. A. E. Garrod (1926), *The Upper Palaeolithic Age in Britain*, 163, 164.

² *J. R. Anthropol. Inst.*, xlv (1914), 239.

³ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁴ Garrod, *op. cit.*, 165.

THE SKELETON OF HALLING MAN

has examined⁵ the Halling and other low-terrace features of the middle Medway valley and he has stated that the low terrace or bluff is illusory, and due, not to river deposits, but to a combination of natural hill washes and age-long 'ploughing down'. Cook's strata Nos. 1 to 5 were hill washes of post-Glacial age, a view supported by the contained non-marine mollusca. He believed that the skeleton was not much older than the Early Boreal Period.

When the discussion about Halling died down it would be fair to say that the consensus of opinion was that Halling Man lived in Mesolithic times between the close of the Palaeolithic Age and the opening of the Neolithic Age; the Aurignacian ascription was disregarded.

When it became known in 1941 that the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons had been bombed it was thought that this closed the Halling episode. But such was not to be the case for the human and animal bones were saved and sent to the British Museum (Natural History). Here they have been studied by Dr. Oakley and Mr. Barker, and the associated flints by Mr. G. de G. Sieveking, with the results as shown in their report, which we are very glad to publish.

2. The 'relative dating techniques' mentioned in the report refers to the determination of the fluorine, uranium and nitrogen content of the human and animal bones. See chapter 6, 'Fluorine, Uranium and Nitrogen dating of Bone (Oakley)' in *The Scientist and Archaeology*, Pyddoke, 1963.

3. The radiocarbon dating given in the report means that Halling Man lived between 4370 and 3990 BP (i.e. Before the Present). This was well within the Neolithic Age.

For radiocarbon dating see chapter 7 of the work quoted above.

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© Kent Archaeological Society

⁵ *Phil. Trans. Roy. Soc. B*, ccxlvi (1963), no. 730, 203-54.