

Antiquity

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Editorial Notes

TWO important events have taken place since our last number appeared: Stonehenge has been saved; and, under the Royal Tombs of Ur, Mr Leonard Woolley has found The Flood.



The Royal Tombs were constructed at the bottom of deep shafts, dug through a thick deposit of stratified earth containing immense quantities of pottery. This deposit is obviously older than the tombs; and it appears to have been a refuse-dump containing the rubbish of the Ur of those times. It was formed in the same way as any modern municipal dump, but of course more slowly. The strata immediately outside the town dip at a steep angle (45°); those further away from it flatten out to the horizontal. The formation of these outer strata is partly natural, through the agencies of wind (depositing dust) and rain; but they contain a fair amount of pottery and 'in each stratum the fragments lay, not at all angles, as they do higher up, but flat at the bottom of a deposit of smooth, water-laid mud The earlier settlements [whose buildings Mr Woolley found] had been formed on an island in the marshy delta of the Euphrates; the rubbish heaps flung out from the walls had gradually increased the size of the island by filling up the edges of the marsh, and had been later utilized as a burying-ground'. (*The Times*, 16 March).

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Having dug down through this deposit to the level of the outer plain, 'the workmen announced virgin soil, a clean water-laid clay, without the slightest admixture of pottery or ash or other human débris That there might be no possible mistake, we carried our pits deeper, through eight solid feet of clean clay, and then suddenly came upon a flat stratum rich in flint chips and cores, pottery like that found above and *painted fragments of that Al 'Ubaid ware* which I had last summer labelled as antediluvian!' [The italics are ours]. At the bottom was found a burnt brick of a wholly new type, proving that 'at the time when the painted pottery and the flints were in use, Ur was not merely a village of mud huts, but already a town, civilized and properly built. Then, at a few feet above sea-level, real virgin soil, the clean river silt of the island on which the first huts were built'. From this it is inferred that the Painted Pottery People, the earliest settlers of all, were overwhelmed by a flood—the Flood—which deposited the eight feet of clean clay.



That the Flood of Genesis was also the Flood of the far older Sumerian records admits of no doubt.* That it was an historical event localized in Mesopotamia has long been held by all reasonable people. Tangible, archaeological evidence of it, however, has not hitherto been forthcoming. Interest centres in that eight-foot bank of clay. Does it represent a single event or a series? And how long did it take to form? These hard questions will doubtless be answered in time; they will yield to a concentrated fire from several directions, the principal weapon used being the spirit-level and staff in the hands of a surveyor. On the other hand, it is easy to imagine how such a bank might have been formed on the down-stream shore of an island or shoal. Here more than elsewhere, in the slack water, fine silt would rapidly accumulate, derived not only from the flood-water generally, but also from the submerged slopes of the mound or shoal itself. If not wholly submerged the friction along the wind-and-water-line of the island would greatly increase the supply of fine silt from this latter source.

* The legend of the Flood is known to have been current in Sumeria at least as early as B.C. 2000. The best account will be found in the British Museum Handbook: *The Babylonian Story of the Deluge and the Epic of Gilgamesh, with an account of the Royal Libraries of Nineveh.* 1920. Price 1s 6d.

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Mr Woolley has a very strong case, and will doubtless strengthen it yet more in the future. His annual address before the Society of Antiquaries of London will be delivered on 13 June.



Immediately after the announcement was made in *The Times*, Dr Langdon claimed, on behalf of the Kish excavators, that traces of the Flood had been found there also (*Daily Telegraph*, 18 March). Kish is only 140 miles from Ur; and a flood of any magnitude must have affected a very large area. The correlation of the Flood-stratum on both sites would have the most far-reaching consequences; it would purge Sumerian chronology of many errors, and provide a fixed datum-point of incalculable value. But we fancy the problem is more complicated than appears at first sight. There may, for instance, have been several Floods. Apart from accurate levelling which, as a foundation for the drawing of sections is, of course, of prime importance, good results might be achieved by close examination of the soil by a conchologist. This might determine the character of the water by which it was deposited and could be done in England from samples.



The saving of Stonehenge from the threat that overshadowed it is an achievement of which we may all feel proud. That it was possible to raise more than £30,000 in the short space of 2 years for a purely idealistic project, is a fact that speaks for itself. There is still some tidying up to be done and this was purposely left until the main object should have been attained. Personally, we should like to see *all* the buildings near it removed, including those on Lark Hill; but the practical difficulties are great, and they must be faced by reasonable people. Stonehenge has to be protected from those who would leave paper bags, old bottles and camp fires behind them, to say nothing of those more ambitious spirits who attempted last year to lever off one of the great lintel-stones. The custodians must be protected from the weather and must live somewhere near. They work for long hours during the summer and carry out their none too easy task with cheerfulness and efficiency; they cannot be expected to work all night as well, and it seems desirable that they should be reinforced by a night-watchman with a couple of dogs—say Alsations who have had their licences endorsed—at any rate during the period of the annual training camps.

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Archaeologists will always be grateful to the Royal Air Force for the sympathetic way in which they receive their demands for assistance. Air-photography is now, as Dr Wheeler says below on page 182, a necessity rather than a luxury in the equipment of a field-archaeologist, but a special aeroplane is usually beyond his means. Air-photography being also a military necessity, for which training is required, it is not difficult to see how the interests of both parties may be served at the cost of no more than a little organization. This has now been achieved and, whilst we must not expect elaborate surveys of large areas, we may well look forward to a regular stream of interesting results. Selected negatives of British sites will be handed over to the Ordnance Survey, which already has a large collection; those of sites overseas will be stored at the British Museum. As a nucleus the Editor has already handed over to the Director of the British Museum those R.A.F. negatives which he was allowed to select during his recent tour in the Middle East. Some of them are reproduced in this number.



In Northern Ireland, a similar co-operation has been effected, and we are promised the first fruits for a forthcoming number of ANTIQUITY.



Last month we suggested that it was possible to have too much excavation as well as too little; and that, at any rate, it was time that some discrimination was made between urgent (threatened) and non-urgent sites. By a curious coincidence, a very similar policy was advocated quite independently by Dr Wheeler in the March number of DISCOVERY; and in his description of Caistor (below, pp. 182-7) he illustrates his argument by a case in point. There is, of course, ample scope abroad for adventurous spirits who wish to make a name for themselves. For example the region between Scinde and the head of the Persian Gulf still hides many secrets; and it may well solve the riddles of the early civilizations of India and Mesopotamia. Afghanistan is closed for repairs, but Baluchistan is not. Transcaspia to the north is almost an untrodden field, though the excavations of Pumpelly at Anau showed how fruitful it is. Another very promising region is the south-western corner of Asia Minor, the ancient provinces of Lycia, Caria and Pamphylia. No prehistoric sites have been excavated there, but Cretan evidence suggests that they exist and that they would reveal a new phase of ancient civilization.

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Yet another neglected sphere is the later historic period in Iraq, that of the Hellenistic, Parthian, Sassanid and Mohammedan empires. Hitherto this has been the special preserve of French and German savants. We would be the last to disparage work on the earliest periods, to which so much space has been given in *ANTIQUITY*, but surely there is room for a British, or British and American expedition to excavate these later sites? Dastagerd for instance, where stood the summer palace of the Sassanid kings; or Raqqa on the Euphrates, the source of the famous pottery. For the history of art and architecture the complete uncovering of such ruins as these would be of immense value, and the finds would be such that no museum would have cause to repent of supporting such an expedition.



The exhibition of recent archaeological discoveries in the British Isles arranged by the British Archaeology Committee (University College, London), of which Dr R. E. Mortimer Wheeler, F.S.A., was the secretary and organizer, attracted a large number of visitors from 19 February to 16 March. Much of its success lay in its select character, for the exhibits could be seen, and understood, without undue exertion, and the general public—with no great knowledge of the archaeological work which is being done in the British Isles—could not fail to be interested. Each exhibit was arranged so as to show its significance and history, and the catalogue prepared by Dr Wheeler gave very clear explanations. The exhibition will in future days perhaps be regarded as a land-mark. It is evidence, also, that British Archaeology (that is, the archaeology of Britain) is full of virility.



Practically all the finds were those of 1928 from 30 sites, among which are Creswell Crags, Windmill Hill, The Trundle (Sussex), Woodhenge (Durrington, Wilts) illustrated by a scale-model, Meare Lake village, 'Old England' (Brentford), Lydney, Caerleon, Richborough, and the village settlement at Skara Brae. Ireland was represented by a model of the foundations of a house which probably formed part of the palace of the kings of Connacht, 2nd–3rd centuries A.D., and a Viking sword found in Ballinderry Bog, co. Westmeath, of about 840 A.D.

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In order to show the development of the use of air-photography in surveying archaeological remains and sites a collection of air-photographs was also arranged. These included part of the Stonehenge Avenue, revealed for the first time by an air-photograph; Amesbury Down, showing a 'triple barrow' and 'Celtic' prehistoric fields; Maiden Castle; and a remarkable photograph of a Romano-British farmstead in Dorset, showing the field-system surrounding it. The catalogue points out that in the last no clearer record exists of the agricultural system characteristic of the country districts of Southern England, both in prehistoric and Roman times.



We offer a humble apology to the Society of Antiquaries of London for failing to make the usual acknowledgements for the use of the plans illustrating Mr Peers' paper on 'Early Christian Churches in England' in the last number. These were all printed from electros of blocks illustrating papers by him in *Archaeologia* (vol. 77). The omission was entirely accidental and we much regret that it should have occurred.