

research by Cooper and Hughes (Cooper, 2021), indicates that more investigation is needed before we can understand the use of caves for burial or ritual, also the importance that these caves played as shelters during different periods. Gower in particular is a key area for understanding early prehistoric life styles as well the challenging social dynamics people faced in post-glacial Britain. The finds from Paviland Cave, Deborah's Hole and Long Hole suggest that caves were not just shelters for Palaeolithic societies from the more extreme climatic conditions of those times.

In line with caves in southern England and Europe, Paviland, as a burial cave, provides evidence for a complex society with intimate knowledge of the natural environment, and strong bonds with their landscape and with their main campsites outside of the cave but close by. This is an interesting interpretation that allows us to support the narrative that people did not just hide in caves in fear of the harsh climatic conditions of those times. To them caves were something more than shelters, they were places where social memory and group rituals began to be expressed.

The relatively dry caves of Gower have been used by people in later prehistoric eras as well. During the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Ages, the use of Gower caves as places of ritual expression and burial continued. Finally, the importance for Gower caves is not restricted to the use of caves during prehistory. Caves also provide archaeological information for the medieval and modern eras, information that can help interpret legends based on written sources and local folk lore.

There is Culver Hole (Port Eynon) with its impressive masonry wall, and Stout Hall Cave, with its pole and pick marks that show its main chamber was hewn out of the rock, and its stories of smugglers and hidden passages leading to Stout Hall; and in 2019, the remains of some 50-60 domestic dogs were excavated from a medieval context inside Harry Thomas Cave, near Overton (Cooper, 2021). In more recent times Lewes Castle Cave has been used as a climbers' shelter. They all add unique information to the much-understudied field of the modern and contemporary phenomenon of cave use in Britain.



*Figure 5.8. Excavating a midden deposit, Harry Thomas Cave*