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The Great Eolith Debate and the Anthropological Institute

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From the 1880s onwards, the Anthropological Institute played a key role in arguments surrounding eoliths, both as a venue for significant events and through the pages of its journals. Eoliths, stone objects claimed to be man-made and regarded by 'eolithophiles' as the precursors of handaxes, had become an issue almost as soon as the first chipped flints had been accepted as artifacts in the mid-nineteenth century. The ensuing debate, that drew in many luminaries of the age – such as Edward Tylor, John Evans, Alfred Russel Wallace and Joseph Prestwich – in many ways exemplified the changing relationship between amateurs and professionals in the affairs of the Institute, and between the different branches of evolutionist anthropology, addressing questions of scientific method, the use of ethnographic analogies, and contributing to the splits between the branches, and the eventual supremacy of the professionals by the eve of the Second World War.

Introduction

From the 1880s onwards, the [Royal] Anthropological Institute (hereafter, the Institute or RAI) played a key role in arguments surrounding eoliths, both as a venue for significant events and through the pages of its journals. Eoliths, regarded by 'eolithophiles' as the precursors of handaxes, had become an issue almost as soon as the first chipped flints had been accepted as artifacts in the mid-nineteenth century. The ensuing debate, which drew in many luminaries of the age–such as Edward Tylor, Alfred Russel Wallace and Joseph Prestwich–exemplified the changing relationship between amateurs and professionals in the affairs of the Institute, and between different branches of evolutionist anthropology, addressing questions of scientific method and ethnographic analogy, and contributing to the splits between the branches, and the eventual supremacy of the professionals by the eve of the Second World War. The objective of this paper is to shed light on this relationship, based on a critical review of the large bibliography on the subject and on the Harrison archive deposited in the Maidstone Museum. We have also examined publications relating to the controversy in RAI publications and in its manuscripts and archive collection. This has allowed us to marry the accounts found in the two archives, which reflect different perspectives: that of the serious amateur and eolithophile Benjamin Harrison, and the official–more neutral and cautious–records of the Institute.[1]

Eoliths Make an Appearance at the Institute, 1892–1900

The Anthropological Institute had been formed by merging the Ethnological Society of London and the Anthropological Society of London in 1871 (Stocking 1971). By the time of the eolithic controversy, a pro-Darwin (though not necessarily Darwinist) evolutionary discourse on human origins and history had emerged as a dominant intellectual current at the Institute; an overarching interest in 'man's place in nature' with the objective of developing anthropology as a natural science. A kind of synthesis was apparent, partly a resolution of the preponderant concerns of the Ethnological Society on the one hand, and of the Anthropological Society on the other. The first had a founding focus on the relationship between all humans and their origins (using physical, linguistic, archaeological and cultural evidence), while the second had a much narrower antithetical focus on pre-Darwinian racial classifications on the basis of physical traits (Stocking 1971: 384). An event which reflected this agenda was convened by John Evans (1878) during his first period as president (1876–7), a small conference on the 'Antiquity of Man' on 22 May 1877 in support of the post-glacial (Pleistocene) date for humans and the drift terraces of the Thames Valley, in other words the argument against the existence of pre-glacial Tertiary Man in Britain.

Although the question of crude pre-palaeoliths was active from the discovery and acceptance of Palaeolithic tools from France in 1859 (Ellen 2013: 451), in England the controversy did not go national until two of its protagonists, Joseph Prestwich and John Evans, began engaging with claims for the anthropogenic character of objects found and advocated as implements by Benjamin Harrison (1837–1921), a grocer and amateur prehistorian from Ightham, Kent. By the mid-1880s Harrison was convinced that he had discovered stone objects recognizable as tools at sites in high-level Pliocene deposits in Kent west of the Medway. With the support of Prestwich, and John Lubbock–later Lord Avebury–his work disseminated more widely. At this time Harrison was acquainted with the Anthropological Institute and was reading its journal.[2] In a letter to Harrison dated 18 September 1890, fellow Kentish antiquarian Flaxman Spurrell, who was already

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working on 'rude' implements from the North Downs and was to publish on the subject in 1891, promises to read a paper at the Institute on the subject if Harrison himself will write one along the lines he proposes.[3] By November 1890, Prestwich too was writing to Harrison to say that 'something should be done to bring them [the eoliths] before the Anthropological Society…'. Harrison was a modest and diffident man, and Prestwich urged him to stop prevaricating. Two papers were given at Geological Society meetings early in 1891, one of which Harrison attended, which were evidently persuasive. Prestwich wrote to Harrison afterwards: 'Now that the geological question is settled, it may be well to see what specimens … can be laid before the Anthropological Society',[4] and then in a letter to Evans:[5] 'having done with the geological question….I am taking up the anthropological side, and getting up a paper for the Institute'.

Harrison experienced difficulty in organising his notes to accompany Prestwich's paper for the Institute (Harrison 1928: 162; Ellen 2013: 455). He wrote a draft, copied it, and posted it to Prestwich. Before the latter replied, Harrison concluded that he could improve on his first effort. He sent Prestwich a revised version, embodying his second thoughts, and this happened several times. Prestwich became exasperated, seeking one 'approved version' and no other. As the Maidstone Notebooks show, there was considerable discussion concerning the right 'figuring' required to make the presentation.[6]

Prestwich eventually read his paper–'On the primitive characters of the flint implements of the chalk plateau of Kent'–on 23 June 1891, in the second floor rooms of the Zoological Society at 3 Hanover Square, which the Institute rented at the time (Ellen 2013: 455–6). The paper was printed in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* (hereafter the *Journal*) the following year (Prestwich 1892), along with Harrison's notes, which were available at the meeting since these referred to the specimens 'laid out separately for inspection' (Harrison 1892: 264). We do not know whether Harrison actually spoke, as he was rather deaf and remarks in his notebooks that he could not hear the speakers at lectures.

In the event, the proceedings were a sensation (Quick n.d. 335). Edward Tylor was in the chair, and the brief official Institute record[7] survives (**Figure 1**). However, 'The Meeting Book' for 1891 is missing, and so we do not have a complete list of those in attendance. Harrison's reminiscences are lively and indicate the overall balance of argument: Evans forcefully stating his objections and advising 'extreme caution', Pitt-Rivers and Allen Brown being basically positive and supportive, and Boyd Dawkins not accepting Prestwich's claim at all. What is interesting is that in addition to Harrison's display of Kentish eoliths, at the same meeting, prior to Prestwich's lecture, there was a display of Tasmanian artifacts acquired for the Pitt-Rivers Museum by Henry Balfour. These were later to feature more prominently in the debate.[8]

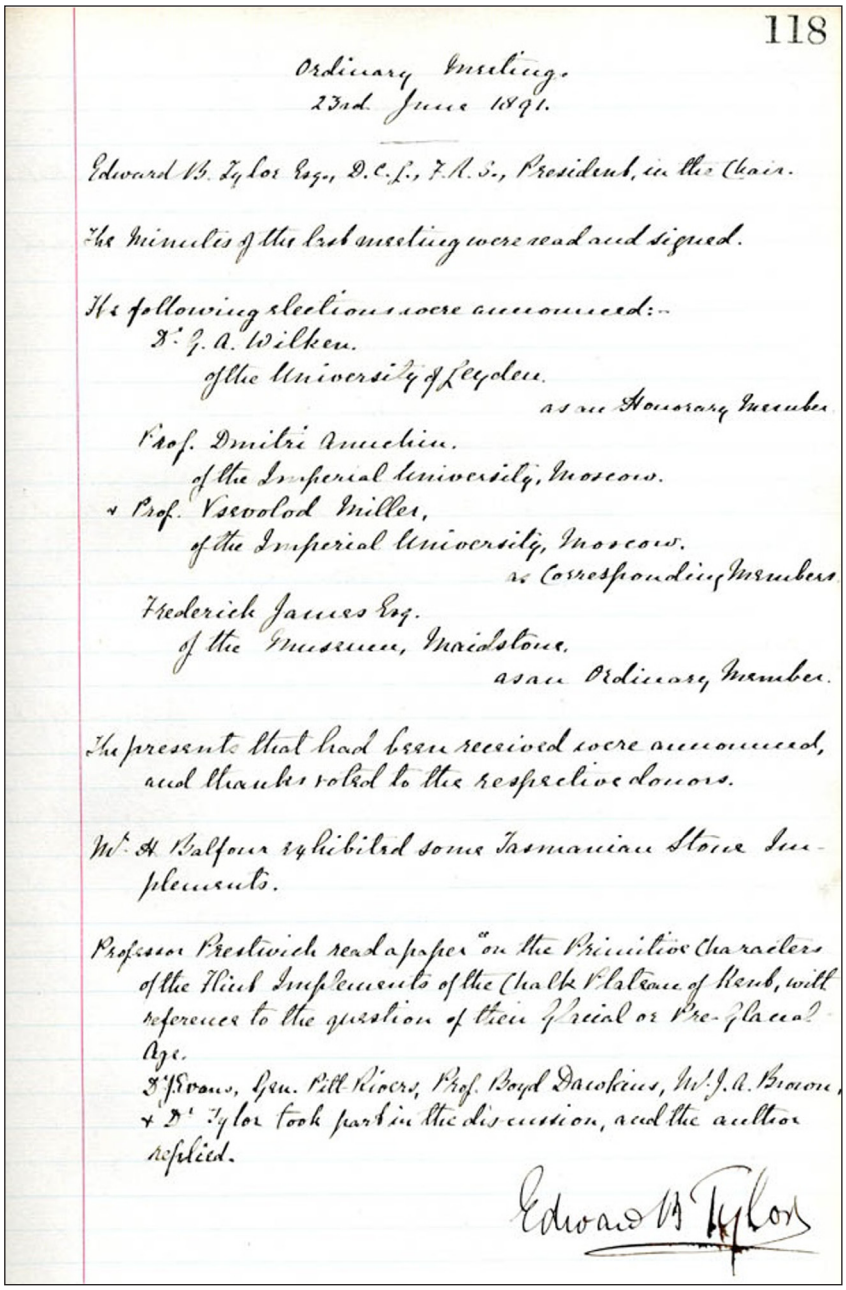
The 1891 meeting initiated a lot of activity among those associated with the Institute, or who saw it as a focus for settling the issue. Both Harrison's paper–what he called his 'Anthropological paper'–and that by Prestwich were eventually published in 1892, Prestwich later revising and extending his in *Controverted Questions* (1895). The meeting, from any perspective, was a highly significant moment in the life of the Institute, in the debate on the evidence for human origins, and personally in the lives of the various protagonists. Harrison referred back to Prestwich's approach in a lecture he gave at the Guildhall Museum on 21 September 1896, where he also exhibited.[9] He was still referring to it in the notes he prepared much later for his autobiography, as 'ever memorable.'[10] With the death of Prestwich in 1897 the eolithic cause lost a powerful advocate in Britain, but as we shall see the debate was to revive, while Harrison himself remained ever committed to their authenticity.

Another eolith enthusiast and member of the Harrison circle, though we do not know that he attended the 1891 meeting, was A. Montgomerie Bell. Bell was a classics teacher from Limpsfield in Surrey who was later to work on the lower Palaeolithic of Oxfordshire. Bell wrote to Harrison in April 1892 following up an earlier suggestion by Tylor, speaking of a paper he hoped to submit to the *Journal*. However, this paper, did not appear for another two years (Bell 1894),[11] and then not before Bell had written again to Harrison after delivering the spoken version at the Institute on 14 November 1894.[12] Harrison refers to the Bell paper several times in his notebooks,[13] suggesting his close following of relevant publications in the *Journal*, either directly or through their coverage in newspaper reports of meetings.[14] In his paper, Bell responds to a paper by Boyd Dawkins given at the Institute early in 1894, but it was originally a response to Boyd Dawkins's earlier criticism of Prestwich at the 1891 meeting.

It was not simply Prestwich, Harrison, Allen Brown and Bell who fuelled the eolithic cause through the life of the Institute. It was taken up at the highest levels. Harrison himself reports Tylor (then president) as giving a lecture at 'the London Institute,'[15] most likely a reference to Tylor's (1892) presidential address read on 26 January 1892, in which he mentions interest raised by the eolithic controversy. At around the same time, Allen Brown (1893) and Boyd Dawkins (1894) both delivered papers at the Institute on the same subject, subsequently published in the *Journal*, and we have a set of comments on the reception of these papers from G. Worthington Smith in the Harrison notebooks.[16] Following Tylor's example, Edward Brabrook, president between 1895 and 1897, refers to the debate in his annual addresses for 1896, 1897 and 1898 (Brabrook 1896, 1897 and 1898).[17] Moreover, Frederic Rudler (President in 1898) wrote to Harrison warmly in support of his contentions, visited him in Ightham to view the eoliths,[18] and also talks about the debate in his address of 1899. Such remarks need to be understood in the context of previous presidential interest in pre-palaeoliths, as reported by Lubbock in his 1873 address and by Busk in 1875, of which they were in a sense a continuation. Thus, the first antiquity of Man debate merged with the second.

Routinization, Re-configuration and Decline

By 1900 the eolithic debate was well-established, one might almost say 'routinized.' The protagonists–both 'eolithophiles' and 'eolithophobes'–physically met at meet-



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Ordinary Meeting.
23rd June 1891.

Edward B. Tylor Esq., D.C.L., F.R.S., President, in the Chair.

The Minutes of the last meeting were read and signed.

The following elections were announced:—
Dr. J. A. Wilken.
of the University of Leyden.
as an Honorary Member.
Prof. Dmitri Anuchin.
of the Imperial University, Moscow.
& Prof. Vsevolod Miller,
of the Imperial University, Moscow.
as Corresponding Members.
Frederick James Esq.
of the Museum, Maidstone.
as an Ordinary Member.

The presents that had been received were announced, and thanks voted to the respective donors.

Mr. A. Balfour exhibited some Tasmanian Stone Implements.

Professor Prestwich read a paper "on the Primitive Characters of the Flint Implements of the Chalk Plateau of Kent, with reference to the question of their Glacial or Pre-Glacial Age.
Sir J. Evans, Gen. Pitt Rivers, Prof. Boyd Dawkins, Mr. J. A. Brown, & Dr. Tylor took part in the discussion, and the author replied.

Edward B. Tylor

Figure 1: Official Institute record of the meeting of 23 June 1891 (RAI 'Ordinary Meetings' A12: 12, p. 118). Reproduced with permission.

ings, not only at the Anthropological Institute, but also at the Royal Society, the Geological Society, and at a host of lesser regional associations, but perhaps most significantly and most frequently at the British Association (for the Advancement of Science), for which we have detailed reports. Anthropological Institute fellows and members visited Harrison at Ightham and were involved in excavations and field trips in and around Ash in west Kent between 1880 and 1920.[19]

A new phase more-or-less coincided with the appearance of the Institute's new periodical *Man* in 1901. This was announced as 'a monthly record of progress in the various branches of the study of Man' (Anon 1900: 1). In contrast to the *Journal*, *Man* was designed to supply an immediate record ('a prompt survey of work') for research and scholarly activity, and allowed for more, more varied, and shorter pieces. Its format made it easier for a larger number of authors (the majority still amateur) to participate. From the beginning its policy included providing a forum for the eolithic debate, and there are letters from Hugh J. Kingsford (Assistant Secretary of the Institute, 1904–1907) which put this nicely. Firstly, Kingsford replies on 11 June 1903 to a letter from J. Russell Larkby (likely on behalf of Harrison) requesting that a letter be published on eoliths:

> I am sorry to say that we are unable to publish your letter as we are rather full up with matter, and the subject of eoliths is so controversial that we should probably be inundated with letters on the subject and at present we are in no position to open the pages of *Man* for such a discussion.

> We will however keep your letter by us, and in the event of our deciding to start a discussion in Man on eoliths we will publish and thus begin the matter'.[20]

And then in a second letter, after a change of heart:

> Some time ago you may remember, you were good enough to write a paper on eoliths, which we were unable to use at the time owing to the amount of matter that we had in hand. Now however we propose to open *Man*'s pages to a discussion on this subject. In August *Man* there was a short note by Mr O. M. Dalton on Obermaier's work in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* on machine-made eoliths. A reply to this note will appear in the October number and if you would care to join the discussion we should be glad to welcome any contribution you may care to make. I may add that we want to keep the discussion as much as possible on the lines in these two papers.[21]

In the event, the paper was not published, though for what reason we do not know. However, the debate rolled-on and around the same time there are new developments, as indicated in another letter from Larkby to CAR (most likely Clement Reid), written late September 1905:

> I don't know if you have been advised but Mr Harrison is busy sinking another section on the crest of the escarpment near the 770 OD stone ... a little to the east of Terry's Lodge section. I was down there on Sunday last and visited the pit, and succeeded in finding two of three very interesting eoliths in situ ...
>
> According to the latest thing for an origin of these forms [is] that of a centrifugal separation at Mantes – rolled and unrolled flints should not occur together. So far as I have been able to examine the implements from the section they show very few incipient cones of percussion caused by impact during deposition, and seems to point to gentle conditions of the depositing agent ... I sincerely hope no Frenchman's theory will not pass unchallenged, although I regret the absence of any note on the matter in the current number of *Man*. [22]
>
> Would it be possible to exhibit a series of those newly acquired specimens at some meeting of the Anthropological Institute in order to show the variety in their condition. This at all events would serve as an answer to the French theory. It would not be necessary to read notes on the implements as they are sufficiently definite to speak for themselves. As the implements have been pilloried in public, we are naturally anxious to remove the odium as soon as possible.[23]

However, by December there were plans for another meeting at the Institute devoted to eoliths, as Hazzledine Warren notes in a letter to Harrison in which he seeks to arrange a visit to examine the specimens in Ightham:

> ... You may have heard, or at least will surely hear, that there is going to be an eolith meeting at the Anthropology Institute on December 19th. I have sent an article to *Man* giving my views on the subject and they have asked me to, as it were, open the case for the prosecution, at the meeting on December 19th. I have agreed to do this, but before it takes place I should like to see your collections, and hear what you have to say at first hand. I am always open to criticism if I can see that my present position is wrong. I would gladly accept the theory if I could see my way to, as it is just what we want to fill up the early history of man. Would Monday December 4th be convenient to you? ...[24]

The 19th December meeting took place at the Institute, though Harrison did not attend. He duly noted the arrangements, was aware that Warren was the main advocate for the prosecution, and that those for the defence included Larkby, Bennett, Kendall, Hinton, Kennard, Grist, Bullen, Higgs, and Reginald Smith.[25]

On 20 December Harrison received a letter from (we assume) Charles Druery[26] about the Institute meeting of the previous day, expressing the opinion that:

> ...the paper [i.e. Warren's] was to my mind rotten from end to end and it will satisfy you to know that out of the some 10 subsequent speakers, only one had a word to say in support of it and it was clear that the great majority, if not all the rest were of my opinion. Ted [Edward Harrison] will inform of this. The speakers were listed beforehand and as the paper was far too long the discussion was all too inadequate ...
>
> With best wishes for the season, Yours truly, Charlie.

Papers continued to be presented on eoliths at what had now become the 'Royal' Anthropological Institute, and the first three surviving referee reports in the Institute archive for papers to be presented at meetings all concern the eolithic controversy. The first two are by Reginald Smith and Henry Balfour on a paper by Lewis Abbott on the 'Classification of the British stone age.' Smith in his report of 1 December 1909 is decidedly lukewarm, recommending a summary be delivered as a spoken paper, but adamant that the piece is not worth publishing mainly because 'the suggested nomenclature is undesirable.' Balfour in his report, not submitted until 28 February 1910, agrees that it might be presented but that there should be experts present, as 'the facts are to a considerable extent new and debateable.' Balfour too does not recommend printing 'unless the discussion by experts proves favourable.' Despite these poor reviews, Abbott's paper was published in the *Journal* for 1911, and at considerable length. The much later paper by Abbott on Tasmanian implements submitted in 1921, also received a poor report from Balfour who felt unable to recommend either presentation or publication: 'few facts that are new' ... 'many descriptions unconvincing' ... 'most of the deductions are debateable' ... 'eccentric terminol-

ogy.' He concludes it unlikely that 'the reputation of the Institute would be advanced materially by publication.' The paper was neither presented nor published.[27]

In addition to submitting papers to the Institute, participants in the eolithic debate also engaged in a voluminous correspondence. During the first flush of the debate, during the 1880s and 1890s, Harrison corresponded with Prestwich, Evans, Tylor, Bell, Abbott, Allen, Wallace and others. For a list of the main protagonists in the debate mentioned in this paper, and who were associated with the Anthropological Institute, see Supplementary File 1: Appendix. There was a more time-lapsed and disjointed exchange through the published scientific and popular scientific literature. Indeed, the number and type of periodical in which the protagonists published was astonishing, ranging from the Institute's *Journal* and the *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society*, to the more popular *Nineteenth Century*. From all this emerged what we might describe as 'a community of eolithic practice' (following Lave 1993), and 'web of interconnection' (McNabb 2012: 225), linking both professionals and enthusiastic amateurs.

And although the Geological Society and the British Association played important roles, it was the Anthropological Institute which by this time had become a kind of hub and repository of authority in relation to the pursuit and resolution of 'anthropological' questions: not the questions about the age and physical context of the objects, but rather whether they were humanly-made, and if so what their purpose was. By bringing unresolved issues to the Institute there was an acceptance that what the 'Institute' then resolved somehow represented an authoritative and settled view; but that by the same token the Institute had a responsibility to host events and presentations of a kind that would not bring its good name into disrepute, on eolithic matters no less than anything else. As late as 1926, when the eolithic issue was already past its peak, Barnes and Reid Moir (1926: 78–9) could indignantly rail against hosting 'under the auspices of the Royal Anthropological Institute'–at its lecture room at 52 Upper Bedford Place–an exhibit by Warren (Anon 1926: 40) on experiments for testing the ways in which eoliths might be produced under natural conditions. Warren was at the forefront of those who sought to introduce rigorous methods for testing evidence for human activity in producing eoliths, but was under assault from those defending the authenticity of, particularly by this stage, the East Anglian eoliths, and also from those who were critical of the RAI for accepting a 'misleading exhibit' in support of 'his erroneous views' and thus bringing its reputation into question.

The eolith debate had long been comparativist and international, again partly through the auspices of the Institute. We have referred to the early comparisons with tools produced by nineteenth century native Tasmanians, and on 27 November 1900 Henry Balfour presented to the Institute extracts from a letter from Paxton Moir subsequently published in the *Journal* (Moir 1900). In the accompanying discussion, Balfour describes the Tasmanian tools quite explicitly as 'survivals' (Moir 1900: 259). Indeed, it was almost as if evolutionary anthropology required a Tasmanian-like stage of development (Stocking 1987: 274–83). The temporal remoteness of eoliths and their 'perplexing dissimilarity to everything' else (McNabb 2012: 279) provided a convenient and persuasive beginning point for the British sequence, and in terms of the evolution of complexity, an equally suitable starting point for the physical displays of artifacts. But in addition to the ethnographic Tasmanian material, 'eoliths' were being found elsewhere in geological contexts. Leith had published on eolith-like tools from the Transvaal in the *Journal* during 1899, and the matter of South African eoliths was taken up again by Kennard in correspondence with, amongst others, Harrison.[28] Johnson's published account of South African eoliths was favourably reviewed by Balfour for the Institute in 1907. In Europe, claims for complex Tertiary eolithic sequences had long been claimed for Belgium, France and Portugal, and more recently for Germany and elsewhere, all reported in *Man*.[29] *Man* even carried summaries of papers delivered to other scientific and learned societies on eolithic issues, and in this way tended to inflate the amount of interest in the subject.

Some patterns of interaction described for the first flush of the eolithic debate (1880–1900) persisted into the new century, and individuals prominent at the 1891 meeting continued to play a significant role. For example, Tylor (though ailing) was still urging Harrison to give a paper at (the now Royal) Anthropological Institute, as late as 1908, 'to show how systematically eoliths were made.'[30] But the early twentieth century also saw the appearance of new figures in the debate (William Sollas, Ray Lankester, Hazzledine Warren, Allen Sturge), bringing rigorous analytic approaches, but also huge egos. The intemperate exchanges between Sollas and Lankester in particular were to become legendary, and were clearly followed with interest by Harrison.[31] It is also undoubtedly true that the controversy had always got some of the more passionate protagonists over-heated, which discouraged others. Thus, Worthington Smith remarked to Harrison in 1904 that 'Eoliths seem to me quite political; with two schools; Ultra Radical and Ultra Tories, or church and chapel with damnation to outsiders–I don't intend to join in…'.[32] However, by this time Smith himself was already a regular part of the underpinning correspondence circle.

With this new group also came a gradual shift in interest from the Kentish Eoliths to the somewhat less controversial East Anglian pre-palaeoliths, and in particular, the 'rostrocarinates.' Sollas effectively rejected the Kentish eoliths, and fluctuated on the East Anglian pre-palaeoliths, while still according the Tasmanian tools a crucial analogical role (Ellen 2011). Harrison engaged with the new generation of scholars through the Institute, as we know from his correspondence and delivery of specimens to Sollas (Ellen 2011: 293–4), the letters and visits of Larkby,[33] H.P. Blackmore,[34] Warren, and others.[35] He had a detailed familiarity with relevant articles on the subject published in the *Journal*, and knowledge of continuing meetings at the Institute on the subject of eoliths,[36]

including a lecture by Allen Sturge,[37] and a discussion concerning the possibility of exhibiting eoliths.[38] All this confirms the perception of the Institute as a kind of validating body for matters relating to eoliths, and Harrison reports in his notebooks of 'eos' having been 'accepted' by the Institute, though quite what is meant by this is uncertain–perhaps simply for display.[39]

Doubts concerning the authenticity of eoliths had been robustly articulated right from the beginning by the likes of John Evans, and latterly the meticulous techniques of people such as Warren contributed to a groundswell of objections. But throughout the early twentieth century the cause had enough support in high places, for example from Ray Lankester, Arthur Keith and others, to keep the show on the road. The discovery of human remains near Piltdown in 1907 in particular bolstered the cause, as 'eoliths' said to have been discovered in the same deposits were part of the argument in favour of early dates attributed to the specimens. However, the growing challenges to the authenticity of the Piltdown remains also ultimately undermined the case for eoliths. Although Moir (1935a, 1935b) could still get an audience at the Institute on 19 February 1935 for a presentation on East Anglian pre-Crag implements, several decades of bad publicity and a shift in the search for the earliest human origins from southern England to sub-Saharan Africa had left it in terminal decline. The Second World War effectively ended the controversy in professional circles, with the final blow coming with Kenneth Oakley's (e.g. 1955) destruction of the Piltdown claims. Eolithic collections in museums throughout the country became an embarrassment and were neglected.

Assessing the Role of the Anthropological institute in the Eolithic Controversy

Even with hindsight it is difficult to appreciate the significance of the eolithic debate for the history of the RAI. The subsequent fall of eoliths into disrepute meant that it was effectively airbrushed out of official histories of anthropology and the Institute, which were anyway more likely to be written by socio-cultural anthropologists. The evolutionist anthropology of Tylor and Lubbock has in more recent times tended to be taught and discussed in relation to the development of social institutions rather than technology (Stocking 1995), and most contemporary archaeologists have been embarrassed by the excessive claims made by eolithophiles. Subsequent histories of the controversy have tended to be from the perspectives of geology and archaeology (O'Connor 2007), rather than as part of the history of anthropology writ large, though McNabb (2012) does an excellent job in demonstrating that at the time things were viewed very differently. With the exception of George Busk, all the first presidents (1871–1904) of the Institute played a part in the eolith debate: John Lubbock, Pitt-Rivers (formerly as Lane-Fox), John Evans, Edward Tylor, Edward Brabrook, Frederick Rudler, Alfred Haddon and Henry Balfour. All, in Stocking's (1971: 386) terms, were Darwinian 'ethnologicals.' As Stocking (1987: 262) also notes, the first few decades in the life of the Institute tended to be dominated by what we would in retrospect describe as physical anthropologists and archaeologists, or even 'evolutionary anthropologists.'

Between 1892 and 1935, 18 articles were published in the *Journal* on eoliths, and thereafter, from its founding in 1901 to 1923, *Man* published 16 articles. In 1914 there was also an influential Occasional Paper by Ray Lankester. The pattern of publications over time is instructive (**Table 1**). We find an initial flurry in the *Journal* in the early 1890s following interest in Harrison's specimens, their active promotion by Prestwich, and criticism offered by Evans. There is also a spike with the appearance of *Man* after 1901, and this also reflects the arrival of the new group of scholars using experimental methods. There is steady interest thereafter, but by 1914–as we have seen–the focus had moved from Kent to East Anglia, and the terminology from 'eoliths' to 'pre-palaeoliths.'

It is important also to note publication patterns across the range of periodicals, rather than just those emanating from the Institute. McNabb (2012: 171–2, table 7.2) has reviewed the most important of those carrying articles on human origins, palaeolithic archaeology and Pleistocene stratigraphy for the years 1880–1900, and calculated frequency of appearance for these subjects. He shows that while such articles were not prominent in any one journal as a percentage of total carried, the order of importance in terms of numbers of articles on these subjects was significant. However, when looked at by percentage of relevant articles in terms of the maximum for any one five-year interval, consistently highest was the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, followed by the *Proceedings of the Geologists Association* and the *Reports of the British Association*.

Looking at anthropology as a whole, as reflected in the life of the Anthropological Institute rather than at its contribution to illuminating the evidence for human origins,

Table 1: Articles about eoliths appearing in RAI publications between 1892 and 1935.

Year	J(R)AI	Man	Year	J(R)AI	Man
1892	3		1910	2	
1893	2		1911	1	
1894	3		1913		2
1895	1		1914	2	
1899	1		1916	1	
1900	2		1922		1
1901		1	1923		6
1903		1	1924		3
1904		1	1925	1	
1905	1	6	1926		3
1906		5	1932		1
1908		1	1935	1	1
1909		3			
			Total	21	35

the eolithic debate clearly exemplified the changing relationship between the different branches of evolutionist anthropology, addressing questions of scientific method, the use of ethnographic analogies, and contributing to the splits between the branches. In the early phase of the debate we find generalists such as Tylor (1871: 16) freely moving between supposedly ancient European eoliths and eolithic 'survivals' in the form of the Tasmanian data. The Tasmanian specimens had been exhibited at the famous 1891 meeting, and Tylor himself had read a paper at the Institute on 21 March 1893 'On the Tasmanians as representatives of Palaeolithic man,' which subsequently appeared in the *Journal* (Tylor 1894). He followed this up through a continuing interest in eoliths, and a correspondence with Harrison, visiting him in June 1899. On that occasion Harrison notes that Tylor refers back to the events of his presidency during 1879–80 and 1891–2 and draws parallels between Harrison's 'pointed eos [i.e. eoliths] and the Tasmanian Duck-billed types.'[40] By 1900 there was a particular interest in cross-cultural and ethnographic comparisons, in eoliths looked at from an international perspective, even prompting 'a minor revival in the flagging fortunes of evolutionary anthropology and the use of ethnological parallels' (McNabb (2012: 14).

Even those we would now regard as social anthropologists, such as Robert Marett (1912) and Alfred Haddon (1930), were engaged in the debate well into the new century, and both were in touch with Harrison.[41] But the decline in interest in evolutionism in the face of accusations of uncontrolled conjecture, encouraged splits between the evolutionary physical anthropologists together with the prehistorians, and the growing number of confident theoretically-informed anthropologists involved in ethnographic fieldwork. Nevertheless, appeals for unity persisted, for example from W.H.R. Rivers, himself a critic of unilinear evolutionism. In his presidential address to the Institute of 1922, Rivers (1922: 12) asks 'why we should consider the relation in which the different branches of our science stand one to another.' Given his own background, he understandably pays attention to links between psychology and social anthropology. He also stresses the importance of the connections between 'ethnology and archaeology,' though without explicit reference to eoliths.

Although the Anthropological Institute was only one of several learned societies that played a role in the emerging eolith debate and its subsequent collapse, it was especially significant. The Institute and its precursor societies, the Anthropological Society of London and the Ethnological Society of London, had dominated human origins debates in Britain since 1859. This is demonstrated in McNabb's (2012) quantitative data for papers delivered and published. Moreover, the debate on human origins in the mid-nineteenth century (the first antiquity of Man debate) was a continuation in a different form of older debates around slavery and race (see e.g., Harris 1969: 53–107). Another unintended consequence of this embedding within the older polemics of the two societies was that although in 1859 the issues were ostensibly about geological and archaeological questions, they thereafter got caught up in a wider anthropological discourse, as interest moved from description of stone tools found in river gravels of a putative ice age date, to a 'more interpretative approach which attempted to anthropomorphise the Palaeolithic period' (McNabb 2012: 17). The use of ethnographic parallels to reflect different archaeological periods 'lent prehistory a recognizable and human face' (McNabb 2012: 11). Thus, for Tylor, Huxley and others, stone tools were a kind of evidence of moral, mental and social conditions. Whereas Darwin had focussed on physical variation and selection in populations over time, the anthropologists were advocating 'incrementally progressive cultural stages,' and an explicit linkage between time and progress (and indeed improvement) (Stocking 1968: 37–8, 238–73; Kuklick 1991: 75–118)–what Trautman (1992) calls 'ethnological time,' and McNabb (2012: 101) 'the perspective of progressive time.' Such ideas translated comfortably into a broader holistic anthropology, as Palaeolithic archaeology during the second half of the nineteenth century had no particular theoretical position of its own and no particular place to go, instead drawing its ideas from general anthropological paradigms. No wonder it was sometimes referred to as 'prehistoric anthropology.'[42]

The discovery of eoliths was part of 'the second antiquity of Man debate', which arose once the question of the authenticity of Palaeolithic handaxes had been settled and focussed on possible Tertiary origins for humans. In this context, eoliths extended the typological sequence by a long additional period of geological time, stretching from the Pliocene to the Neolithic, and such an empty temporal space with such variation in physical evidence suggested strongly a sequence of more general cultural stages. 'Eoliths fitted into any developmental sequence perfectly' … anchoring 'the earliest ends of progressive sequences by playing to the expectations of what the earliest tools should look like' (McNabb 2012: 249). For example, Henry Stopes–who spoke at the Institute (1899) and is frequently referred to in the Harrison papers[43]–argued from the developmental stages of material culture. In focussing on evidence for different uses rather than geology, he paralleled the functional classifications that Harrison and Prestwich had devised for the Kentish eoliths, and was much against Evans's methodology (McNabb 2012: 267). This level of detailed inference was anathema to the likes of Evans, who considered it difficult enough for the Palaeolithic let alone for the temporal remoteness of the Eolithic.

In late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain, archaeology as a distinct discipline was still to be established, and indeed its separate credentials were in contention. This meant that in questions regarding the artifactual and human character of eoliths, it was the Anthropological Institute that was considered the best placed to address the issues involved. A kind of dialectic was established between the geologists and the anthropologists, both between the relevant sections of the British Association, and between the Geological Society and the Anthropological Institute. By 1900, however, the interests of anthropology, as reflected in events hosted and papers published by the Institute began to shift

from matters of early human antiquity to understanding social institutions, reflected in part through the changing interests of figures such as Tylor, and Lubbock's increasing preoccupation with social reform and natural history. The vacuum left by the withdrawal of these two was filled by Evans and his concern for a more descriptive, more archaeological style, rather than the broad cultural interpretations of the anthropologists (McNabb 2012: 12–13). The developments described here provided space for a distinctive archaeological discourse, but the subject was still not independent in its institutional underpinnings, at least not in Britain.

Existing archaeological periodicals, such as *Archaeologia* and the *Archaeological Journal* and their sponsoring organisations (the Society of Antiquaries and the British Archaeological Association) were not really equipped to foster the special needs of prehistory. In the late nineteenth century, both journals focussed mainly on Roman and medieval archaeology, while society members regarded Palaeolithic archaeology as a branch of geology. The geological and archaeological aspects of human origins were considered part of a single and separate interest in human origins and not archaeology in the then understood sense (McNabb 2012: 131). For a long time prehistoric archaeology was caught between geology, history, and anthropology, but in Britain during the last two decades of the century anthropology itself was in disarray and decline, underfunded, ignored by the government, and with a falling membership (Stocking 1987).

By comparison, in France and Germany there was strong institutional and government support for anthropology in the sense of a comprehensive science of human origins, encouraged by the increasing number of spectacular skeletal finds, and an emphasis on the search for long racial lineages, linking race to contemporary politics. In France the term 'Anthopologie' applied to periodicals, congresses and institutes, and focussed quite centrally on human origins. Although Britain had provided the lead in the theorisation of human origins, through the role of Darwin, Huxley, Evans, Lubbock and Tylor, it was short on skeletal evidence for early humans. The search for 'the first Englishman' was therefore as much a question of national pride as much as a purely scientific endeavour, a search that was to end in the imbroglio of Piltdown. In the absence of credible skeletal evidence of the right age, eoliths plugged the gap so to speak, and could stand as a proxy. As McNabb (2012: 13–14) puts it, 'the success of the eolithic controversy as a debate, was that it fulfilled the role of a British origins debate.' Even if Britain could not match the age and quantity of skeletal evidence from France and Germany, it could at least compete when it came to the earliest human artifacts. And part of the role of the Anthropological Institute was–as it were–to bat for Britain.

Despite the weightiness of the issues involved, prehistoric archaeology as a subject was left in a kind of organisational limbo up until the eve of the Second World War. True, Miles Burkitt had first lectured in the subject at Cambridge in 1916 (Clarke 1989: ix, 2, 30), but in the context of the new tripos offered by the 'Board for Anthropological Studies'. This placed the Anthropological Institute in a crucial–though increasingly anomalous–position. The Prehistoric Society was not established until 1935, having metamorphosed from the Prehistoric Society of East Anglia (founded 1908, and first publishing its Proceedings in 1911), *Antiquity* was founded by O.G.S. Crawford in 1937, with the first university departments focussing on prehistoric archaeology appearing around the same time (the London Institute of Archaeology, for example, in 1937). Once these new institutions were up-and-running, the role of the RAI in fostering prehistoric archaeology had less purpose.

In the 1880s and 1890s people were not concerned about the unity of anthropology because they could not imagine its disunity. Material culture, mental culture, social culture were all of a piece. Only when things began to fall apart did this become a concern: professionals began to despair of amateurs, students of contemporary human social behaviour despised the speculations of the prehistorians, for example the 'body stone' episode (Ellen and Muthana 2010: 360). The cries for unity and 'the integrative functions of the institute' (Forde 1944) came in the 1940s at the time of the Centenary Meeting in 1943 (see *Man* 1955, 8). For Forde (1948: 3): 'the belief that human life as a whole was the expression of a complex series of interconnected lines of development' could no longer be taken for granted, even though it 'brought the study of extinct cultures into relation with that of living peoples.' The 'grand visions of Huxley, Spencer and Tylor [now seemed remote, and] … strangely far from fulfilment.'

Conclusion

While the Anthropological Institute did not stand alone in fostering the debate around eoliths, it was an important lynch pin in a network of learned societies and publications, with overlapping membership and authorship. Moreover, it offered a distinctive perspective. In particular, it was a key locus for the initial emergence of the debate, and later for its continuing discussion and eventual despatch. It became the focus for the anthropological defence of eoliths (that they were anthropic) as opposed to the geological defence (that they were found in strata of an agreed age). This was possible because, after 1871, the Institute promoted itself, and was early recognized as, the main forum in Britain for the scientific validation of matters relating to human origins. This was supported by a more-or-less coherent evolutionist ideology, in part Darwinian, but inclusive of work in physical anthropology, prehistoric archaeology and the ethnography of material culture, all of which made arguments incorporating evidence from different fields easier. The eolithic debate also demonstrates the interconnectedness of Victorian science in spanning the divide between professional and amateur, with Benjamin Harrison–a village grocer–becoming a pivot in a large network of enthusiasts of varying degrees of professionalism and specialist expertise. The controversy exemplified the changing relationship between amateurs and professionals in the affairs of the Institute, and the eventual supremacy of the latter by the eve of the Second World War.[44] In short, the Eolithic controversy pro-

vides us with a vignette of a changing set of relationships between academic fields and practitioners. It was possibly the last episode of scientific discussion at the Institute that involved social anthropologists, biologists and prehistoric archaeologists participating equally in the detail of the debate, and the last in which amateurs could be taken seriously.

Notes

[1] We refer to 19 of the 23 Notebooks in the Harrison archive held by the Maidstone Museum (hereafter MM): volumes 4–6, 8–10, 12–14, 17, 21, 21a, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, and 30. We also refer to notes Harrison produced with a view to writing his autobiography (Auto 1 and 2). All Notebooks have been transcribed by Angela Muthana: see https://www.kent.ac.uk/sac/research/projects/rfe_cognitive.html.

[2] MM Notebook 12, p 1: reference to Knowles 1880.

[3] MM Notebook 14, p 47: Spurrell to Harrison, 18 September 1890. Spurrell had already published on early stone tools in the Institute's *Journal* (1884).

[4] MM Prestwich to Harrison, February 5, 1891; Harrison 1928: 160.

[5] MM Evans to Harrison, April 22, 1891.

[6] MM Notebook 8, pp. 12–13 Joseph Prestwich on 'figuring' for the RAI, 13 February 1891.

[7] RAI Archives 'Ordinary Meetings' A12:12, f. 118: 23 June 1891.

[8] MM Notebook 8, p. 19: Record of Institute meeting in Hanover Square, 23 June 1891. On Harrison's visits to Hanover Square see also: MM Notebook 10, p. 45a, and for Spurrell's notes on the same meeting.

[9] MM Notebook 14, p. 31–32.

[10] MM Harrison Auto 2, p. 164.

[11] MM Bell to Harrison, 3 April 1892, Notebook 8, p. 52; also Notebook 13, p. 76 (4 July 1894) on Bell's paper.

[12] Date reported in the *Journal* at the time the published version appeared. The copied letter (MM Bell to Harrison, 10 August 1894, Notebook 13) has 10 August 1894, probably an error arising from successive transcriptions, first by Harrison and posthumously by his son Edward.

[13] MM Notebook 14, p. 40: reference to Bell and the Institute; Notebook 17, p. 3: on Bell and the *Journal*, August 1894.

[14] MM Notebook 20, p. 69: November 1900.

[15] MM Notebook 8, p. 47: 17 November 1892. There is no reference to this in RAI Archive 'Ordinary Meetings' A12:12, but the record is incomplete.

[16] MM Notebook 13, p. 57, 8 February 1894: Worthington Smith and the 'Anthropological Journal'; also p. 87.

[17] MM Notebook 21, p. 147.

[18] MM Notebook 21, p. 169: Rudler to Harrison, undated (end of April 1904); also MM Notebook 30, p. 27: more on Tylor in relation to Wallace and Lubbock, and Rudler's presidential address of 1899.

[19] MM Notebook 21, p. 185: report on Institute outing to Kits Coty for 8 July 1904.

[20] MM Notebook 21, p. 73: Kingsford to Larkby, 11 June 1903.

[21] MM Notebook 23, p 67: Kingsford to Larkby, 28 September 1905.

[22] The Frenchman concerned was Marcelin Boule (see Boule 1905).

[23] MM Notebook 23, p 65–66: Larkby to Clement Reid, September 1905.

[24] MM Notebook 23, p 81: Warren to Harrison, 4 December 1905.

[25] MM Notebook 23, p 83–4.

[26] MM Notebook 23, p 84: Druery to Harrison, 20 December 1905.

[27] RAI Archive, W.J. Lewis. Classification of the British Stone Age. Reginald A. Smith, 9 November 1909), A25/1/2 (Ibid. Henry Balfour, 8 December 1909), A25/1/3 (Ibid. Tasmanian implements. Ibid, 18 February 1921).

[28] MM Notebook 21, pp 141–3: Kennard to Harrison from Johannesburg, 1904.

[29] MM Notebook 27, p. 39: mentions of the work of Max Verworn, Aimé Rutot and Hermann Klaatsch.

[30] MM Notebook 21a, p. 171: Tylor to Harrison, 4 May 1908: asking BH for a paper for the Institute. By this time Tylor's influence in such matters had declined along with his mental health, and with it the authority of the general cultural evolutionist position in palaeolithic archaeology (Stocking 1995: 125).

[31] MM Notebook 29, p. 54: on the *Times* review of Sollas' *Ancient Hunters*, 28 December 1911, and on the *Westminster Gazette* article of 21 December 1911 in which Sollas remarks on Lankester's eolithic theories; p. 55: letter from Moir to the *Westminster Gazette* commenting on the review of *Ancient Hunters*; p. 90: and Sollas to Harrison, about what specimens impressed him most.

[32] MM Notebook 21 p 59: Worthington Smith to Harrison, 15 April 1904.

[33] MM Notebook 21, p. 10; Harrison makes the acquaintance of Larkby through the Institute in early 1903: MM Notebook 22, p. 67: Harrison to Larkby, 28 September 1905; also Notebook 23, p. 67.

[34] MM Notebook 21a, p. 68: Blackmore to Abbott, 24 August 1907.

[35] There is also Harrison's acquaintance with W. M. Newton 'of the RAI', mentioned in connection with the 'figure stone' debate of the same period: MM Notebook 29, p. 111 (October 1912); also Ellen 2013: 456–7.

[36] MM Notebook 22, p. 81 Warren to Harrison, 19 December 1905; p. 83; MM Notebook 30 p. 100.

[37] MM Notebook 26, p. 34: lecture by Allen Sturge at the RAI.

[38] MM Notebook 23, p. 65: undated letter from JRL (most likely J. Russell Larkby) to Charles Hercules Read of the British Museum about exhibiting eoliths at the RAI, around September 1905.

[39] MM Notebook 27, pp. 1: list of eolithic types 'accepted by' the Institute, no date.

[40] MM Notebook 30, p. 24, 20 June 1899.

[41] Ellen 2011: 392–3, on Marett; MM Notebook 21, p. 193: a reference to Harrison reading Haddon's paper

on 'rude implements'; p. 196: on a conversation with Clodd about Haddon, along with Lankester, Grant Allen, Huxley and Evans.

[42] e.g. MM Notebook 21A, p 26.

[43] See e.g. MM Notebooks 12–15, 17, 20–21.

[44] As recently as 1953 J. P. Mills (1953) could still deliver a spirited defence of the amateur in his presidential address to the RAI; also Kuklick 1991: 27–74.

Additional File

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

- **Appendix.** Main players in the eolithic controversy in relation to the Anthropological Institute. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/bha-623.s1

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Author Contribution

Muthana edited and annotated the Harrison archive notebooks. The paper was drafted by Ellen, with contributions from Muthana. The final editing was a joint effort by the authors.

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