

NOTT CAVING by Duncan Price

It is amazing the lengths that people will go in order to get underground during the Foot & Mouth crisis. Some CSS members have resorted to getting the British Government to pay for them to go caving abroad (see N/L 43/5). The same characters have also taken to going caving beneath the streets of Nottingham...

Not a lot of people know that Nottingham is riddled with caves - 27 under the city centre alone - developed in the sandstone cliffs upon which Robin Hood's city is built, north of the river Trent. They are all, however, man-made - the result of enterprising excavation to provide residents with cellars, stables etc. Some are still in use beneath the historic public houses of the city and are used to keep the foaming ale cool. Others have fallen into disuse, filled with rubbish and often forgotten until they become a hazard to redevelopment of the area.

A visit to some of the more accessible caves was arranged by Andy Farrant on May 9th, 2001. Our guide for the evening was none other than Dr. Tony Waltham, famous cave explorer, lecturer at Nottingham Trent University and author of the book "Sandstone Caves of Nottingham" published by the East Midlands Geological Society 1996 (ISBN 0-9519717-1-9, price £3.95). A group of us

(British Geological Survey employees, climbers, cavers and assorted hangers-on) assembled outside the Broadmarsh Shopping Centre to await Tony's arrival, briefcase in hand, fresh from work. Issuing us with a survey, we set off through the empty shopping centre to the entrance to the caves beneath.

The Drury Hill Caves were originally in the cliff face above the flood plain of the River Trent and would have been totally destroyed during the construction of the shopping centre in the 1960's. Instead, their historic value was recognised and the design of the centre was changed to conserve them, whereupon they were subsequently developed as a tourist attraction which opened to the general public in 1994. The show caves have been tastefully filled with props which illustrate their uses from a tannery, Victorian slum and beer cellar. Many of the caves in the city were pressed into use as a wartime air raid shelter. Some of the caves retain their original roofs - the sandstone is quite strong when dry but is prone to failure when exposed to moisture (usually from leaking drains). In other places the concrete base of the shopping mall above was visible overhead and a substantial reinforced beam was placed above the caves so as not to overload their thin and weak roofs.

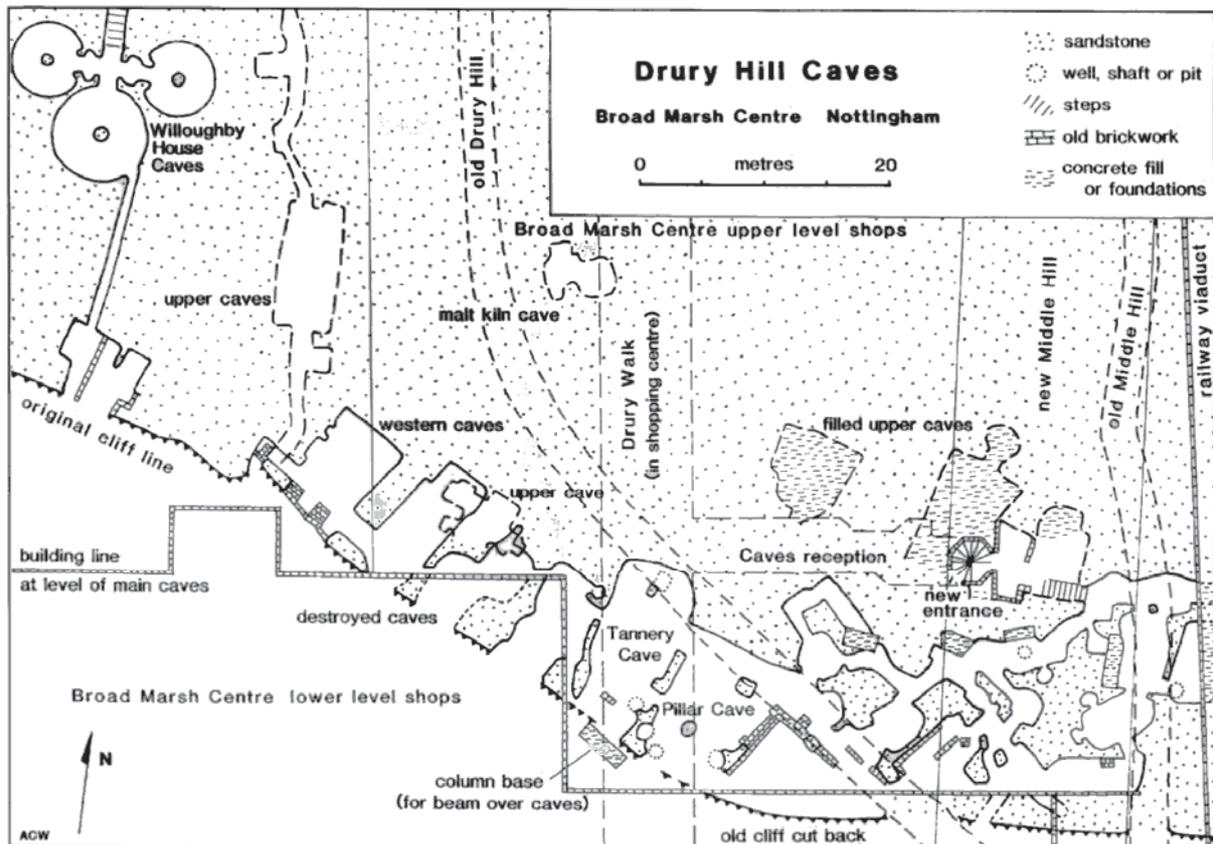


Figure 1: Plan of the main group of caves cut into the sandstone cliff where the old Drury hill climbed from the flood plain into the old town. Most of the caves are now preserved beneath the Broad Marsh Shopping Centre, and these include the tourist caves known as The Caves of Nottingham.

