DURRINGTON WALLS THEN AND NOW: THE DESCRIPTION, INTERPRETATION AND MEANING OF A MONSTROUS ASSEMBLAGE

Benjamin Tun-Yee Chan

ABSTRACT
There have been two principal excavations at Durrington Walls; those conducted by Wainwright from 1966–1968 and those conducted by the Stonehenge Riverside Project from 2004–2007. Comparison between the lithic assemblages from the two excavations reveals similarities and provides the ideal opportunity to consider how lithic studies have changed over the last forty years. The 1971 publication of the worked flint assemblage from Wainwright’s excavation is typical of its day being primarily descriptive and concentrating on the presentation of typology. The current analysis places a much greater emphasis on the potential of detailed statistical, contextual and spatial analyses. Most fundamentally the approach is interpretative in treating the mass of worked flint, not as a passive record of the past, but as the product of material practices that helped constitute Neolithic society. A general description of the assemblage and detailed examples of a house floor assemblage and a midden context are used to demonstrate the potentials that the assemblage holds for revealing the significance of flintworking at Durrington Walls.


Keywords: Durrington Walls, Neolithic occupation surfaces, daily practice, spatial analysis, context of practice, Late Neolithic flintworking.

INTRODUCTION
Over the years there have been a number of excavations at Durrington Walls but by far the most significant have been those directed by Geoffrey Wainwright from 1966–1968 (Wainwright & Longworth 1971) and those conducted by the Stonehenge Riverside Project (SRP) between 2004–2007 (Parker Pearson et al. 2006a, 2006b & 2007). These two projects have produced two of the most significant later Neolithic flint assemblages from southern Britain and accordingly a comparison of the two is warranted. As the analyses are separated by a period of 40 years, and in keeping with the retrospective sentiment of the Lithic Studies Societies 30th anniversary conference, this also provides an opportunity to assess the changes in lithic studies that have occurred over that time. It should be stressed from the outset that it is relatively easy and perhaps unfair to critique a lithics report with the benefit of 40 years of hindsight. My intention is not to set up a one-sided debate and hence I shall keep discussion of Wainwright’s methodology to a minimum, focusing instead on the approach that is being adopted by the SRP and the potentials it offers for understanding later Neolithic society.

THE EXCAVATIONS
Wainwright’s excavations at Durrington Walls followed the route of the proposed realignment of the A345, which cut a 20 m – 40 m wide linear transect across the henge (Wainwright & Longworth 1971, 10). The excavation was ground breaking for its time in terms of its scale, the widespread use of mechanical excavators and the speed with which it was completed (Pitts 2000, 48–61). It was also successful in uncovering extensive remains including parts of the Northern Circle, the Southern Circle, the henge ditch, the henge bank and the occupation debris sealed beneath it. The SRP arrived at the site under very different circumstances and without the exigency of road construction. Seeking initially to explore the relationship between the henge and the River Avon, the SRP first investigated the area between the East Entrance of Durrington Walls and the river and subsequently went on to excavate parts of the Southern Circle, the Western Enclosures, the South Entrance and the West Entrance. Like the former project, the findings have been ground breaking and have included the remains of a number of well-preserved house floors, associated middens and an avenue.

1Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield, Northgate House, West Street, Sheffield S1 4ET. Email: b.chan@sheffield.ac.uk.
connecting the East Entrance of Durrington Walls to the River Avon (Parker Pearson et al. 2006a). The important point for our current purposes is that, whilst the excavations were conducted under very different circumstances, the range of contexts excavated by Wainwright and the SRP were essentially the same. This facilitates a comparison of the worked flint from the two projects.

### ASSEMBLAGE SIZE AND COMPOSITION

It is first necessary to examine the assemblages at their broadest scale, which is in terms of their size and composition (Table 1). Before proceeding it should be noted that, whilst the recording of the SRP assemblage is substantially complete, the data analysis and writing up is still in progress and hence the data utilised here should be regarded as preliminary. It should also be mentioned that the area of the excavation calculated for Wainwright’s excavation within Table 1 includes only the area within Durrington Walls and excludes the long transect which stretched south of the henge. The area for the SRP excavations includes only those trenches which lie within the monument and the trench at the East Entrance, which lies partly outside of the bank of the henge.

As can be seen some differences between the two assemblages are immediately apparent. In proportion to the relative size of the excavated areas, the SRP recovered about 36 times the quantity of flint than Wainwright’s excavations. Of course the comparison is not entirely on even ground as it has not been possible to calculate the total volume of excavated soil. Despite this, the massive contrast in the quantity of worked flint retrieved by the two projects does indicate significant differences in retrieval rates. This clearly affects the statistical comparability of the two datasets and this is compounded by the fact that during Wainwright’s excavation, whilst debitage and tools were normally collected, only tools were retained from certain contexts such as the secondary and tertiary fills of the henge ditch (Wainwright and Longworth 1971, 161).

This perhaps highlights the first major difference between the approaches of the two projects. One was essentially carried out as rescue archaeology, whereas the other was conducted as a research project geared towards close contextual analysis. Indeed developments within the last few decades have made it clear that contextual and spatial analyses, and consequently our understandings of prehistoric inhabitation, are only as good as the excavation they are based on. With this in mind the SRP wet sieved a high proportion of excavated contexts with the remainder being dry sieved and all occupation surfaces were excavated on grids to allow the spatial recovery of artefact patterns. The commitment, dedication and resources it takes to conduct such detailed artefact retrieval within a site of such complexity and richness of material culture should not be underestimated.

Despite the large differences between the retrieval rates of the two excavations the basic assemblage composition is remarkably similar (Figure 1). The main difference between the two is that within Wainwright’s assemblage cores account for 0.5% of the assemblage whereas within the SRP material (excluding chips and irregular waste) the figure is 1.4%. The low frequency of cores within Wainwright’s assemblage was noted in the excavation report (Wainwright & Longworth 1971, 162) although no explanation was offered. Given the results of the more recent excavation it is likely that the figure of 0.5%, which is low compared to most Neolithic sites, is at least partially a result of retrieval biases. The differential classification of cores may also have been an issue as many cores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excavation</th>
<th>Total Worked Flint</th>
<th>Approximate Area of Excavation (ha.)</th>
<th>Worked Flint/ha.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wainwright</td>
<td>12596</td>
<td>1.150</td>
<td>10953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRP (all DW excavations)</td>
<td>89446</td>
<td>0.226</td>
<td>395779</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The total assemblage size and amount of worked flint/ha.
recorded within the SRP consist of nodules with minimal removals, often with no prepared platform, and in other circumstances such artefacts may have been discarded as little more than bashed lumps.

Whilst the broad similarities between the two assemblages provides hope for a detailed statistical comparison, when one looks in more detail differences start to emerge. In particular there is a clear difference in the ratio of arrowheads to scrapers recovered by the two projects (Figure 2). Within the assemblages as a whole scrapers and arrowheads are both the most ubiquitous of tool types and also probably the most recognisable. Hence, it is hard to understand whether the difference in the two assemblages is archaeologically meaningful or merely a result of differential retrieval rates. Further analysis of the SRP material will examine the ratios of arrowheads to scrapers across a range of contexts across the site and this may provide further insight into this issue.

Despite the statistical differences between the two assemblages, my overriding impression when reading the earlier report is one of familiarity, particularly in the forms of the various cores and tools. In this sense I am confident that the two sets of material represent the same assemblage, produced from the same types of contexts and containing the same range of artefact types. Despite this, the brief analysis conducted here indicates that direct comparison in statistical terms would be problematic and for the most part unnecessary given the large well-excavated assemblage from the recent excavations. The main exception to this is the Southern Circle where not only did Wainwright excavate a much greater proportion of the monument than the SRP, but the distribution of artefacts across the circle provided the basis for Richards and Thomas’s (1984) seminal article on structured deposition. Hence combining the results of the analysis of the SRP assemblage with the earlier material is highly desirable and will be
considered in more detail within the future analysis for the project.

THE QUESTION CONCERNING TECHNOLOGY

Having discussed the assemblages in broad terms it is important to move away from a discussion of basic numbers to compare the difference in the approaches taken towards the analysis of the material. Wainwright’s approach towards the worked flint is quite typical of its day and like many others owes a great debt to the standards set by Isobel Smith (1965) and Grahame Clark (Clark 1934; Clark et al. 1960). In this respect the report consists of a fairly standard list of tool and core types alongside some basic metrical analyses of length-breadth ratios, with some comparisons with other sites. As is perhaps to be expected for its time, the report is descriptive rather than interpretative with the result that whilst it is known that the flakes from the site are broad and squat and that scrapers and arrowheads dominate the tool assemblage, there is no discussion of what any of this might actually mean.

The analysis of the worked flint from Durrington Walls is only brought into a wider archaeological discussion within Wainwright and Longworth’s (1971, 235–306) reconsideration of Piggot’s Rinyo-Clacton Culture. In his Neolithic Cultures of the British Isles, Piggot (1954) had rejected his earlier idea of a Grooved Ware tradition in favour of a unified Rinyo-Clacton Culture spreading from northern to southern Britain (Wainwright & Longworth 1971, 235). In light of the large Grooved Ware assemblage from Durrington Walls, Wainwright and Longworth reconsider the material associations of Grooved Ware across a wide range of sites. Within this, the worked flint from these sites features as part of a list of Grooved Ware’s “non-ceramic associations”. The conclusion is that the ceramic sub-styles of Grooved Ware overlap geographically to the extent that they cannot be thought to define a uniform culture. Instead they suggest that it should be seen as a sub-culture defined by a material tradition (the use of Grooved Ware) which existed alongside other sub-cultures of Peterborough Ware and Beaker users (ibid., 268).

It is unnecessary at this point to argue over the correctness of this suggestion. What is important is that, whilst rejecting Piggot’s hypothesis of the Rinyo-Clacton Culture, the idea of a Grooved Ware tradition is only one very small step removed from it. Both are clearly working within the same paradigm; that of culture-history. The basic premise of the culture-historical approach was that artefacts served as markers of ethnic identities and that therefore common groups of artefacts could define cultures geographically and be used to trace their movement and development (Trigger 1989, chapter 5). By the early 1970s the critique of culture-history had begun (Clark 1966), however, this was often based upon a lack of continental parallels from which aspects of British prehistoric material culture could have been derived. What was not yet being questioned was that material culture was anything more than a passive reflection of a society, rather than an active constituent in its formation and reproduction (Thomas 1999, 92). Within the culture-historical approach the description of artefact typologies and thus the identification of cultures, was a primary goal and it is within this tradition that Wainwright’s analysis fits. What is lost in such an approach is any understanding of the crucial relationship between daily practice, social reproduction and social change. In its widest sense, what is missing is an understanding of the significance and meaning of this assemblage.

Much of course has changed since the time of Wainwright’s Durrington Walls report starting with the rise to prominence during the 1970s and 1980s of ecological and economic approaches to technology (Torrence 1986 & 1989; Myers 1987 & 1989). Whilst these approaches moved away from the study of artefact typologies to provide a much needed focus on aspects of production, consumption and exchange, it was not until the 1990s that the relationship between technological practice and social reproduction began to be highlighted (Edmonds 1995; Dobres & Hoffman 1999; Dobres 2000). Within the study of British later prehistory, at the forefront of this movement has been the work of Mark Edmonds (1990, 1995, 1997, 1998 & 1999). In comparison to previous analyses of worked stone, this new generation of work drew upon a more nuanced and embodied
understanding of technological practice inspired by the concept of the *chaîne opératoire* (Edmonds 1990; Pigeot 1990; Schlanger 1994; Dobres 1999). Rather than concentrating on the consumption of the final forms of tools it was argued that the character and context of their creation was of equal importance (Edmonds 1990, 57). In small scale societies there is often a lack of anonymity and an open knowledge of the abilities of others to both make and use tools (Dobres 1999, 137). Therefore stoneworking within such societies can provide the conditions under which tacit distinctions of age, gender and kinship are reproduced.

Much of Edmonds’ work is concerned with “tacking back and forth” between micro- and macro-scales of human activity and hence it is perhaps unsurprising that alongside the idea of the *chaîne opératoire* Ingold’s (1993) concept of the taskscape has also been of central importance. Within his work, the taskscape moves the concept of the *chaîne opératoire* away from the analysis of micro-scale contexts and individual knapping episodes to generate an inhabited perspective of Neolithic landscapes as a whole. In this sense a repeated concern is “the pattern, tempo and roll-call of routine experience” (Edmonds 1997, 100). This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in his discussion of the manner in which continuity and change in the routines of daily practice played an integral part in the cultural change that occurred across the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition (*ibid.*). Within this broader argument he suggests that Mesolithic flintworking reveals a consistent concern with the controlled production of blades represented by considered raw material selection, careful platform preparation and maintenance, and the careful placement of blows on the core. In essence the process requires a high degree of craftsmanship and technical know-how (cf. Pelegrin 1990). Such structured forms of core-working reflect long-term traditions of knowledge and technique, which in themselves suggests that they were a “medium through which ideas about identity and community were addressed” (Edmonds 1997, 102). This idea contrasts quite neatly with the culture-historical approach discussed above within which the typological forms of artefacts are taken as markers of ethnic identity. One seeks to explain how identity was formed within prehistoric communities through technological practice; the other sought merely to use the products of technology to identify them as ethnic entities.

During the earlier Neolithic there are many elements of continuity with the preceding period, both in terms of the continued use of certain stone sources and in the production of blades and elongate flakes, however, there were differences too. Blade reduction sequences were not as tightly structured as before and the resultant flake morphology had become less regular. Long held traditions of core working had begun to break down and this is interpreted as possibly “reflecting a gradual shift away from core working [...] as [a] media through which basic concepts of social identity were carried forward” (Edmonds 1997, 104). This is suggested to have occurred through shifts in routine practice that happened in step with a number of novel developments including the introduction of monumentality, cattle herding, small-scale agriculture, pottery, mining and quarrying. These material practices affected a change in the temporality of daily life and accordingly the affordances which it offered for the negotiation of social identity. The importance of this argument is that it reveals the relationship between daily practice and long term social change. More specifically, to the lithic analyst, it indicates how the analysis of mundane debitage can inform broad-scale archaeological narratives. Looking back to Wainwright’s presentation of length/breadth ratios; it is not enough to know that flakes were broad and squat, it is also necessary to question what the gradual shift from elongate to broad flakes during the Neolithic tells us about the changing role of flintworking within Neolithic society.

As contingent and historically situated as Edmonds’ approach towards technology may be, many of his arguments are developed at a necessarily general level. There is at times a tension between a desire to focus on the composition and performance of individual events and the quality of the archaeological data at hand. Given what survives to us today, our understanding of many Neolithic landscapes represents a blurred canvas of generalised activity punctuated by points of insight represented by a pit here or a
monument there. Within southern Britain there are sites and accordingly there is little understanding of the character of domestic architecture, the layout of settlement sites and the articulation of daily practices across them. In their absence Edmonds has often had to refer to more broad scale evidence, such as the changing character of lithics scatters over time, or to the implications of practices we know took place (e.g. cattle herding, flint mining, aggregation at enclosures) even if we do not know the details of them. This has certainly provided insight into the general contexts and implications of routine practice, but details have often been left necessarily fuzzy. We might know cattle herding took place, but over what distances and between which landscapes were cattle moved? We might know that communities aggregated at causewayed enclosures and later at henges, but where did they come from and which parts of the community gathered at these times? Such detailed questions may seem forever out of our reach, but recent advances allow us to provide ever finer chronologies for our sites through Bayesian modelling (Bayliss et al. 1997) and to tackle questions of population movement through isotope analysis (Evans et al. 2006).

At the same time, the excavations by the SRP at Durrington Walls have also provided us with a rare set of contexts, including in situ occupation debris and domestic architecture, with which we may start to look in detail at the articulation of daily practice. There are therefore some grounds for optimism about the potentials of the current analysis.

**ANALYSING THE DURRINGTON WALLS ASSEMBLAGE**

The current approach starts from the analysis of the contexts of flintworking in its broadest sense. That is, not only to examine its archaeological context, but also the contexts of practice itself. Within the analysis choices in the production, consumption and discard of stone tools are treated as meaningful (even if not always discursively so). Hence it is hoped that mapping activities across the site will provide insight into the structure of the inhabitation of Durrington Walls and therefore into later Neolithic society as a whole. It is also understood that stone tool production, consumption and discard was never conducted in isolation. People most often worked flint in

is a general paucity of excavated occupation social contexts and worked them in relation to other materials. Understanding the network of relationships between flint use, pottery use and the consumption of animals is an important aspect of the work and will hopefully be achieved through the close collaboration of the various specialists involved in the project combined with a contextual analysis of the material and spatial analyses utilising a GIS. In accordance with the approach just outlined, before moving onto to discuss the lithics assemblage, it is first important to consider the contexts of practice that existed on the site.

**The contexts of practice**

At the East Entrance the later Neolithic occupation surfaces were preserved substantially intact and the remains include seven house floors, pits, large areas of middening and the Durrington Avenue leading down to the River Avon (Parker Pearson et al. 2006a; Chan 2009). Bayesian modelling of C14 dates indicates an extremely short-lived occupation spanning less than 50 years in the mid-3rd millennium BC (Peter Marshall pers. comm.).

So what more do we know about the inhabitants of Durrington Walls? First of all we know that the occupants were involved in monument building. A recent redating of the Stonehenge sequence indicates that in dating terms the inhabitation of Durrington Walls and the construction of the sarsen phase of Stonehenge are statistically indistinguishable (Parker Pearson et al. 2007). Therefore, it seems likely that the inhabitants of Durrington Walls were involved at different times in not only the construction of the timber circles and massive henge at Durrington Walls, but also the construction of Stonehenge itself. Previous analysis of pig teeth from Durrington Walls (Albarella & Payne 2005) has also led to the suggestion that a concentration of pig killing occurred in winter, when the site must therefore have been occupied. Work on the bones from the largest midden (context 593) from the SRP excavations has confirmed the presence of this winter peak, but has also identified a smaller summer cull (Umberto Albarella & Elizabeth Wright pers. comm.). Hence it seems likely that the occupation of Durrington Walls was seasonal or at the least fluctuated seasonally.
The possibility that Durrington Walls was a seasonal aggregation site has also been strengthened by preliminary isotope analysis of 13 cattle molars from Durrington Walls, which has indicated that 11 of the 13 cows were reared off the chalk (Viner et al. 2010). These cattle were reared on a range of different geologies which vary in distance from 30 km to at least 90 km away and potentially include areas such as Wales, Devon and Cornwall. The evidence of the cattle and pig bones also indicate that at Durrington Walls people were involved in wasteful feasting on a large scale (Albarella & Serjeantson 2002). In this sense, the huge quantity of animal bones on the site represents large-scale conspicuous consumption and the similarly large quantities of pottery and worked flint must be seen in the same light. Consumption was important at Durrington Walls and being seen to consume equally so.

The assemblage of worked flint

In many senses the assemblage of worked flint from Durrington Walls is quite typical for a Late Neolithic assemblage from Wessex. Within the limits of identification all of the flint worked on the site is of local origin. The quality of the utilised raw material varies from thermally flawed surface nodules to some better quality and less weathered flint probably retrieved during the various digging activities that must have taken place in and around the site. Technologically the worked flint is extremely uniform in character and in keeping with other later Neolithic assemblages revolves around the ad hoc or expedient production of broad flakes with little apparent care taken over platform maintenance or core control (Chan 2009). There is very little evidence for specialised reduction sequences for blank production for specific tool types and the range of tools on the site is quite typical of the period. The most common tool types are scrapers, arrowheads, denticulates, fabricators, knives, piercers/awls with serrated flakes and plano-convex knives also being present but in small numbers. One tool type which is notably absent is the stone or flint axe. At present only a single flake from a ground flint axe has been identified within the current assemblage and both its context and condition suggest that it is a residual find. Wainwright’s assemblage contains one polished flint axe and two fragments from flaked flint axes (Wainwright & Longworth 1971, 156 & 176). Two of the three artefacts come from the old land surface beneath the enclosure bank with only the tip of a flaked axe being found within a demonstrably Late Neolithic context (the fill of the enclosure ditch).

Where the assemblage stands out most is in its assemblage of arrowheads. Since Wainwright’s excavation (Wainwright & Longworth 1971) there has been a known association between Durrington Walls and oblique arrowheads and this has become even clearer within the SRP assemblage. Not only is the sheer quantity of arrowheads unusual (384 from all SRP Durrington Walls excavations at present count), but their proportion within the assemblage (as measured by their ratio to scrapers) is also extremely high compared to other Neolithic enclosures (Chan 2009). Previous work by Umberto Albarella and Dale Serjeantson (2002) identified four pieces of flint embedded in animal bones, mainly pig, one of which was positively identified as a projectile point. Further examples from the current excavations await analysis and identification. Therefore it seems likely that the association between the site and oblique arrowhead is linked to the shooting of pigs prior to their slaughtering for feasting. This is just one of many aspects of highly visible acts of conspicuous consumption that took place on the site.

Contexts of production and deposition

Having looked at the assemblage in general terms it is necessary to examine examples of the contexts of production and deposition from the site. Firstly, is a context of production in the form of the floor of House 851 (Figure 3). During excavation this house floor was cleaner than other house floors from the site, some of which have complex post-abandonment treatment. The distribution of worked flint across the floor of House 851 is uneven. The majority of the central chalk platform was relatively clean, especially the area towards the door. In contrast, the areas around the edges of the house, where beam slots suggest furniture once stood, have significant quantities of debitage. These patterns are interpreted as sweeping out patterns with the central floor being swept clean and other materials having been trapped amongst the furniture around the
edge of the house. This is significant as it suggests that this assemblage represents that of a house in active use. In comparison to the majority of other contexts examined from the site, cores and tools were heavily under-represented in House 851 (Table 2; cf. Chan 2009). The presence of large quantities of waste flakes suggests that flintknapping and tool use did take place within the house and also that it was being actively cleaned. Therefore, whatever tools were in use were ultimately used and/or deposited elsewhere. In either case it is clear that flintworking was taking place in inherently social contexts, in this case within the house. This is an important reminder that “industrial” and “domestic” practices that within modern Western societies have become mutually exclusive spheres of life (Brück 1999, 60–64), were not conceptually or spatially separated in the Neolithic.

![Figure 3. The distribution of worked flint across the floor of House 851 (plan digitised by M. Dover, background photo copyright Aerial-Cam).](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artefact Type</th>
<th>Context 852</th>
<th>All contexts excl. 852</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flakes and Blades</td>
<td>1274</td>
<td>92.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. Waste</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chips</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cores</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retouched flakes and utilised flakes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Tools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1372</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. The assemblage composition of house floor context 852 (from House 851) compared to all other East Entrance contexts.*
In studying the significance of flintworking within Neolithic societies it is important to study not only contexts of production, but also contexts of deposition. Indeed the majority of worked flint from the site lies removed from its immediate context of production and within features such pits and middens. There are several areas of middening at the East Entrance, the most extensive occurred alongside five houses to the north of the Durrington Avenue, covering an area of roughly 20 m x 30 m (Figure 4). A GIS based analysis of the midden material revealed it to be a series of three middens, each roughly 6 m across (Chan 2009). Each of these middens was closely associated with a house platform and in the case of House 851 its midden seems to have been contained within its perimeter fence. It would therefore appear that at least some middening at Durrington Walls occurred at a household level. Moreover, the extreme proximity between house and midden emphasised the sense of ownership between the two. It should be reiterated at this point that the contents of the middens can be characterised as being wasteful in nature; articulated animal bones are relatively frequent, flintworking was profligate and pottery appears in unusual quantities. In many ways the site is a celebration of wastefulness. Like so many other aspects of life at Durrington Walls middening seems to have been employed as an act of conspicuous consumption, which in this case represented the wealth of an individual household. This is not a wealth as recognised in the usual archaeological terms of prestige or exotic goods, but in a massive concentration of otherwise quotidian refuse.

**CONCLUSION**

Hopefully the preceding discussion has provided some insight into the approach that is being taken towards the analysis and interpretation of the Durrington Walls assemblage. Gatherings at Durrington Walls during the mid 3rd millennium BC represents a coming together of disparate communities, the huge pooling of resources, the active consumption of those resources and the often

![Figure 4. The distribution of worked flint across midden context 593 (plan digitised by M. Dover).](image-url)
visible deposition of the remains of that consumption. As a lithics specialist I have struggled in the past to seek the social significance of the wasteful and expedient use of flint exhibited in Wessex in the later Neolithic. As discussed, the lack of core control exhibited during later Neolithic reduction sequences may tell us a lot about the declining role of flint knapping as an effective medium for expressing social identity. However, as has been shown here, the consumption of flint still had the potential to carry a powerful message, even if through quantity rather than quality.

In this respect, it is important to understand that probably many of these people were not from the chalkland. Indeed, many may have come from areas where flint raw materials were of a very different character or did not occur at all. Hence, when they came to Durrington Walls flint suddenly became abundant. I think it is important to realise how these occasions offered different affordances to those that were available at other times. The working of such quantities of flint surely gave the young and inexperienced contexts within which they could learn knapping skills without wasting what at other times may have been a scarce material. At the opposite end of the scale, the production of oblique arrowheads provided a context for skilled hands to show what they could do. With this in mind, future work on the assemblage will examine its potential to address crucial questions of skill acquisition in detail (cf. Pigeot 1990; Bamforth & Finlay 2008; Högberg 2008).

Gatherings of such widespread communities may have represented opportunities for different kin groups to either emphasise their similarities and/or differences to the supra-community group. The technological homogeneity evident throughout the assemblage suggests that perhaps, at least in terms of lithics practice, there was a tacit desire to emphasise similarities. In this sense, like monument building, flintworking at such gatherings may have served to engender a feeling of community amongst a widespread population and served to homogenise material practices and cultural traditions across large parts of the country.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research was conducted whilst working on the AHRC funded Stonehenge Riverside Project and Feeding Stonehenge Project. The analysis has only been made possible by the enormous number of directors, supervisors, students and volunteers that formed the SRP excavation and post-exavation teams. The work has benefitted enormously from conversations during the course of the project with Christina Tsoraki, Jim Rylatt, Hugo Lamdin-Whymark, Erick Robinson, Umberto Albarella and of course the individual site directors Mike Parker Pearson, Josh Pollard, Colin Richards and Julian Thomas.

REFERENCES


Dobres, M-A. 1999. Technology’s links and chaînes: The processual unfolding of


