A REPLY TO NICK ASHTON'S REVIEW OF SCOTT-JACKSON J.E., 2000, LOWER AND MIDDLE PALAEOLITHIC ARTEFACTS FROM DEPOSITS MAPPED AS CLAY-WITH-FLINTS: A NEW SYNTHESIS WITH SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EARLIEST OCCUPATION OF BRITAIN.

Julie Scott-Jackson

In his review of this book in Lithics 22, Ashton makes some useful and interesting points, not least in reinforcing the importance of high-level sites on deposits mapped as Clay-with-flints to the archaeological record. His distaste for zeal is essentially a matter of personal taste and should not detract from the rest of the review or indeed the value of the book to the audience for which it was intended. This audience is clearly identified as 'the general reader, albeit with a grounding in archaeology and/or earth sciences' (Scott-Jackson 2000:preface) therefore no apology is needed for basic guidelines such as the need for topographic survey of the area and a cautionary approach to auguring on Palaeolithic sites. The purpose of the book was to report early work in a neglected field of study, to encourage further research and, in particular, to generate contention and debate on the reported method and interpretations so as to aid our understanding of the deposits mapped as Clay-with-flints which cap the downlands of southern England and the associated Palaeolithic artefacts.

As Ashton acknowledges, the analysis of high-level sites is both important and difficult. The 1993 excavation and 1994 investigations at the Wood Hill Lower Palaeolithic site were an early attempt to explore and define methods for increasing our understanding by identifying any subtle stratigraphy. More recently, the PADMAC Unit, composed of geologists, sedimentologists and lithic specialists, has refined many of these methods and will continue to do so. The reviewer also acknowledges that 'this book is a starting point' as was clearly its intention. For example, Ashton's criticism that there are several options for the reconstruction of the processes operating over geological time at Wood Hill is simply repeating the book's caution that the interpretation was provisional ("not intended to be definitive but rather to be a springboard for much needed further investigations" Scott-Jackson 2000:154). Also, in the case of interpretation of burnt flint analysis, he seems not to have noticed the statement on page 151, that "considerable caution must be exercised in its application ... ".

In regard to fabric analysis, given the pioneering nature of this work, there was every reason for including full details of the method and analyses. Fabric analysis is indeed problematic in these deposits, partly due to highly variable numbers of clasts, and therefore remains an area of continuing research.

Understanding the relationships between deposits mapped as Clay-with-flints and associated Palaeolithic artefacts on these high-level downland sites, requires the use of techniques more normally employed in sedimentological, geomorphological and geological analysis. The analysis of particle size data by square and spit does not assume horizontal stratigraphy but facilitates the identification of underlying subtle stratigraphy and is an addition to the more obvious visual units which were also sampled and which are the focus of Ashton's attention.

Although considerable progress in the investigation and understanding of Palaeolithic high level sites on deposits mapped as Clay-with-flints has now been made, I would be the first to acknowledge that we have much to learn. Ashton will have done a severe disservice to archaeology if this review, by a senior figure, were to suppress or repress work in this important area.