A LATE NEOLITHIC FLINT HOARD AT TWO MILE BOTTOM, NEAR THETFORD, NORFOLK

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The area known as Two Mile Bottom, Norfolk, lies downstream of Thetford on the north and east banks of the River Little Ouse. It consists of a strip of land 2-300 metres wide and about a kilometre long, lying between the river and the Brandon-Thetford railway line. At roughly the centre of this strip a factory has been established since the early years of the twentieth century, originally Fison's Vitriol and Manure Works, with the area later being extended and occupied by a manufacturer of lightweight building blocks. More recently, with further expansion to the north, the Fibrewatt Power Station has been established.

Two Mile Bottom is well known in the archaeological literature as a Mesolithic site (Haward 1914; Clark 1932; Jacobi 1984; Robins 1998) as well as the site of a Romano-British kiln (Frere and Clarke 1942; Bates forthcoming). Activity in these two periods seems to have been restricted to the river bank but to the north and east of the railway line the Breckland surface has proved to be a rich source of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age flintwork, which has been described by Healy (1984, 1998). Grimes Graves Neolithic flint mines lie only a few kilometres away to the north and good quality flint has always been readily available in the area.

Recent excavations carried out by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit prior to the construction of the Fibrewatt Power Station (Bates forthcoming) showed that the original ground surface has been buried by some two metres of industrial waste, mainly generated by the building block factory. This ground surface yielded very little flintwork that could be assigned to the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, but both Mesolithic and Romano-British activity was apparent. It was therefore surprising to learn that, during the construction operations on the site of a fuel store for the power station, a substantial hoard of flint artefacts was encountered "at a depth of 2-3 metres of sand and gravel". The full extent of the hoard is uncertain as it became dispersed among a number of site workers who cannot now be traced, but it is believed to comprise about twenty or thirty pieces. Fortunately, one of the site workers, Mr Ormrod of Brandon, reported his collection to the Suffolk County SMR and subsequently allowed it to be forwarded to the Castle Museum at Norwich for study and record.

Mr Ormrod's collection, which may not be representative of the hoard as a whole, consists of the following:

3 bifaces
3 discoidal knives
2 flake knives
1 retouched flake
2 unmodified flakes
1 flint hammerstone
All the flakes artefacts are made on a glossy dark grey to black flint of Grimes Graves type and show negligible patination, with the single exception of the retouched flake which has some incipient creamy buff patina.

The three bifaces (Fig. 1) which closely resemble Palaeolithic handaxes in form, have been made on flakes and two still carry significant areas of the original ventral surface. The comprise a pointed ovate and two subcordate forms; both the subcordates have suffered some recent damage, probably during the construction activity, but both have had their bulbs removed by shallow ventral flaking.

![Figure 1: 1) Pointed ovate biface with some residual cortex; 2) Subcordate biface on a flake; 3) Subcordate biface on a large side-struck flake. (Hatched areas indicate recent damage)](image)

Of the three discoidal knives the largest (Fig 2.1) has a chordate outline and is clearly formed from a second removal from a Levalloisoid core; the platform and bulb have been subsequently removed by shallow ventral flaking. A second smaller example is flaked over all the dorsal surface and similarly has the bulb removed from the ventral. The third (Fig. 2.2) has a D-shaped outline; it has been prepared from a large side-struck flake fragment and has only minimal ventral retouch.

The two flake knives (Fig. 2.3 & 2.4) have irregular oval outlines - each is prepared on a complete side struck flake and is flaked over the whole of the dorsal face. The ventral faces are intact.
Figure 2: 1) Large cordate flake from a Levalloisoid core with bulbar thinning - probably a discoidal knife; 2) Discoidal knife of D-shaped form; 3 & 4) Flake knives on broad oval flakes, the ventral faces are devoid of retouch.

No item in the collection shows any signs of polish, but the location of the hoard, within tens of metres of the present day river bank, where plentiful supplies of sand and water are available, suggests the possibility that it was awaiting further processing or alternatively was destined for transport elsewhere by water.

The on-site production of both bifaces and discoidal knives at Grimes Graves is well attested (Mercer 1981, and references therein) and scattered finds of discoidal knives across Norfolk, probably of Grimes Graves flint, have been noted by Healy (1980, 1998). Healy (1984, 1996) also comments on the geographical distribution of flaked axes in the Breckland, in which Grimes Graves occur, and the extensive use of lathe Levalloisoid flakes as blanks for both discoidal knives and axes. However, to the best of my knowledge no previous hoard of the magnitude of that described here has been recorded away from the immediate vicinity of the mining area and its existence perhaps points to an organised trading or distribution system.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


