reports on the range of natural damage observable on quartzite pebbles from a gravel pit. Tyldesley deals with the quartzite cobbles of the well known industry at Wolvecote Channel: But why, one asks, is the illustration of the best quartzite example of a plano-convex piritform handaxe, the type for which the site is famous, also the only one which does not allow the reader to judge that asymmetry (Fig. 1)? Mackee adds a comment on some less securely attributed material from Wolvecote.

The three remaining papers on the Upper Thames all take a more geological direction, beginning with Briggs, who reviews the terrace sequence and its interpretation regarding human environments. Bridgland then discusses the derivation, in the place where quartzite, the quartzites used by Paleolithic man in this area, and finally Preston examines the Triassic Bunter pebble beds. Personally, I found this small group of contributions particularly valuable. The last of the strictly regional sections, on Southern England, contains just one paper on the raw materials in the south-west, by Alison Roberts.

A section entitled 'Caves' then follows. It consists of an article by Green on raw material selection and natural damage at Pontnewydd, and a note by the editors (faute de mieux) dealing with Creswell Crags. The case for abandoning the geographical approach is made, and it did not seem to me that the arguments were strongly put across, but I must confess. The last chapter came almost as a shock, in the table of contents: the title is 'Africa: Everything but Flint'. But this is not altogether surprising. Africa has a lot to tell us about what can be done with the rock types discussed in the previous couple of hundred pages! (Question: is it perverse to have left this until the end?)

Spending some time carrying the book around while travelling, and dipping into it occasionally (I re-read it more systematically later), I soon realised that there were small but significant improvements which would have been very helpful to the reader even under less trying conditions. The contents of some more or less adjacent chapters are sufficiently alike for it to be quite easy to lose one's place and hardly realise it. Modern word-processing software should by now have resulted in a matter of course, in the provision of running heads identifying the papers. Also, at the expense of a little more editorial work, a more logical system of filing and numbering the tables would have been helpful. Perhaps the editors could have been more demanding of their contributors, too. I was born in Warwickshire and (though not an inhabitant) have more knowledge of the county than do many other readers. Nevertheless, I found myself becoming irritated as I tried to work out how Professor Shuttle's quite large-scale maps related to the Midlands generally ... so why no location map?

These are small and perhaps ungenerous quibbles, though. So less important is that the chapters are well laid out, the illustrations have reproduced clearly, and the proof-reading is excellent. I was briefly entertained on p. 141, finding of a four-dimensional handaxe from Ifley (9.5 x 6.5 x 3 x 5 cm), so do not regard this slip as serious grounds for complaint.

A point worth making is that this is not a conference volume. Rather, it is the result of the editors' having approached, encouraged and probably badgered (human nature being what it is when it comes to deadlines) sixteen other people to contribute to the realisation of a concept, without the familiar inducements of spending someone else's money by way of conference or travel grants, or the social junketing that usually goes with this kind of credit. I must confess, therefore, for making the book work. For that matter, I hope the publishers will not take it too much amiss if I say that the editors have made this belongs this has happened, and economical publishing as its particular attraction, rather than the prestige of a glossy, highly-packaged and expensive list backed by a centuries-old reputation. It is the kind of project for which the A.R.B. works particularly well: while it enjoys some modest objectives and technical demands, which fills a niche within the literature but which would not be viable further up-market.

Asking whether the editors have been entirely successful, I conclude that they have not met the objectives that they set themselves: they have brought together a useful fund of knowledge and in the process have provided something for everyone. The latter perhaps inevitably creates a certain uneasiness, and will probably also leave many readers slightly dissatisfied. As an essentially academic archaeologist with a particularly European orientation, I found myself hoping for more of an outward-looking approach, perhaps also with more ambitious discussion of raw material procurement strategies and raw material, until I realized that I was not being altogether fair. I forget the vision makes all too a Perhaps the editors could have been more demanding of their contributors, too. I was born in Warwickshire and (though not an inhabitant) have more knowledge of the county than do many other readers. Nevertheless, I found myself becoming irritated as I tried to work out how Professor Shuttle's quite large-scale maps related to the Midlands generally ... so why no location map?

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there is also important information on the location of both monumental and non-monumental sites throughout the area. A potted history of antiquarian and archaeological research is provided for each geographical/topographical region, and note is taken of the close association between flint axes and water places.

Where the report falls down is in the author's apparently uncritical acceptance of the evidence for monument distribution and existence of his sites. Despite his statement on interpreting the evidence on the basis of a very few specific ethnographic and continental Neolithic parallels. Certainly there are comparisons to be made in these areas but, not only is there considerably more relevant (published) archaeological data from much closer to home, there are also some extremely important contrasts with that archaeological data which Holgate either ignores or misses entirely.

What we are presented with is, essentially, a series of distribution maps, with accompanying brief descriptions, showing Later Neolithic to Late Neolithic finds and a model of farming economy for the latter part of that sequence. Sequence is the key word here, for the distributions are described as though they represent static situations and there is little attempt at understanding either the processes by which those distributions came about, or the underlying social context in which development occurred. True, there is a brief discourse on the possibility of social groupings, based on familiar arguments about 'fingers' of new settlement and the recognition of other scholars, of the existence of fabric and stylistic variations amongst some pottery types, but there is virtually no attempt at examining the artefactual evidence against any of the more forceful recent discussions on social organisation in this period. This is a great shame because there is already clear evidence of both sequence and non-random patterning amongst the monuments and existing artefactual evidence from the region even before the author's own material is introduced.

The author is eager to expand his economic model, which proposes an agricultural basis for Early Neolithic subsistence settlement later Neolithic pits and notional plough agriculture and animal husbandry, and to advance continental parallels for this development. Unfortunately he is unable to show us much about the extent to which the evidence of the environmental evidence, the distribution and use of stone resources, the definition of site types and the period distributions themselves at such a pace that it all seems so strung out that it is obvious that one wonders why we have been struggling to understand this period for so long.

The author's 'race-value' approach to his topic is further revealed by his apparent belief that most Neolithic beliefs necessarily involves the construction of monuments. Causewayed enclosures are observed to occur at the periphery of domestic areas (good point), where they seem to coincide with ill-defined pits and other possible evidence for activities such as the exchange of axes. Where settlement extends, particularly during the later Neolithic, into new areas, he concludes that the nature of settlement must have been rather similar because monuments were not built. This may be true and, as the author points out, those newly colonised areas were very different in terms of topography, soils, drainage and other characteristics from the main area of earlier settlement - so perhaps it was necessary to adopt a different type of farming and to introduce the plough (as expressed in the model). Unfortunately what he does not go on to question, except by the most perfunctory of comments, are the possible reasons for this expansion of the inhabited areas, the implication of the location and probable chronological and social position of the monuments themselves, or the relationship between them and those of his data and the recognition of 'votive' and/or structured deposits which occur at this period. There is no integration of the evidence from these different sources and no serious questions are asked of them.

'Neolithic' monuments were constructed for good reasons, at different stages in the settlement sequence, and held meaning for communities which created (or inherited) them. It is not sufficiently simple to plot their final distribution alongside domestic material since it is already quite clear, again from published archaeological sources, that their construction, use and location exerted profound influences on many aspects of human behaviour - including the location of domestic sites and the distribution and structure of votive deposits, of which there are many in the Thames Valley. The author also appears to treat later monuments as if they were the direct descendants of earlier ones - perhaps this was not the intention but the text is so brief in places that one is not sure. Similarly, the introduction of the plough, if it does come as late in the sequence as the author suggests, there is little evidence that changes in agricultural practice but it would surely not cause them, as the text seems to imply.

Lithic material forms the bulk of the evidence discussed. Holgate clearly has no difficulty in identifying his artefacts correctly, though the implication that thin-butted axes are generally Late Neolithic is stretching the evidence - some certainly are but the Sussex flint bowls, which ceased production by the middle of the 3rd millennium, produced both thin- and thick-butted axes. In terms of site definition, there seems little need for the author to demonstrate, at length and on the basis of an ethnographic parallel, that a distinguishable from domestic sites and there is a worrying implication that surface scatters of overlying pits must be distant fishing villages, or that certain sites (which comes before any of the data have been presented) as being 'a discrete locality where a domestic flint assemblage has been recovered and whose location is at least 0.5 km away from the nearest nearest settlement' (p.68) is extraordinary again it seems to be based on ethnographic evidence. Archaeological data from other areas of lowland England (e.g. the Downs, Hampshire Basin, East Anglian Breckland, Yorkshire Wolds) has shown that 'Late Neolithic' and earlier Neolithic sites are frequently discrete and fairly restricted in extent, the bulk of the surface flint evidence well late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age in date and is likely to extend over vast areas and the almost continuous spread of artefacts. Presumably Holgate would not be able to identify any Late Neolithic sites in the areas and one wonders whether such spreads occur in the Thames Valley.

The author states (Chapter 9) that his results compare favourably with other areas of the country yet it is the
contrasts which seem so important. If there really are no vast spreads of material in this area, then here we have a most interesting distinction from other regions which have been studied in depth. It is difficult to say more from the text but the reliance suggests that this distinction may be genuine. Although Late Neolithic domestic sites in the region include more tool-types than earlier assemblages, as has been demonstrated elsewhere, the range is nowhere as wide as it is in any of the areas mentioned above and tool variability amongst individual collections is unusually low. This is a point which urgently needs further consideration.

I regret to say that I think Dr Holgate, despite the great deal of work he has obviously put into his research, has been unable to see the wood for the trees. This report does not do justice to the amount and importance of the data he has collected and whilst it may go some way towards reconstructing settlement patterns in the Thames Basin, it does little to aid our understanding of them. The economic model is interesting, but a closer look at evidence from within the British Isles would have provided a much more relevant and focused background to the region than many of the continental cultures referred to.

Once upon a time BARs were cheap and one could afford to buy volumes such as this for the catalogue and the better bits. At £24 my advice would be to borrow this one from a library.

Julie Gardiner, January 1989


and


Almost half of Stone Axe Studies 2 is made up of a list of the available petrological identifications of prehistoric or apparently prehistoric implements from Britain, accompanied by nationwide distribution maps of implements of each petrological group. This pulling-together of information either previously unpublished or dispersed among many sources is one of the volume’s most useful features now, and will ensure that it remains a valuable work of reference for many years to come. A major achievement of the volume is that it presents information from Scotland, Cumbria and Northumberland for the first time. Congratulations are due to the editors, the C.B.A. and the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, whose computerised record of identifications, will, one hopes, be systematically maintained.

These data are preceded by an admirable introduction by Clough, and by the following papers:

1. Fenton, M.B., and Travis, R.J.A., 'A method for taking petrological samples from stone implements'