Unfortunately, the author runs into serious difficulties at this point. Having suggested that the traditional typology might not be wholly applicable, and that some sites are mixed, according to that typology, he becomes unclear as to how the assemblages discussed are dated. The range of tool-forms recovered is very small and the amount of waste and core material also is, relatively, not very extensive. The typology described by Dr Young seems to conform to the traditional typology, rather well and, despite a certain circularity of argument, the impression is that mixed sites stand out simply because they do represent material of different periods. The area covered is 0.45 sq. miles and though 196 'sites' are listed, most of them consist of very small amounts of flintwork and 40% are classified as being of indeterminate date. The whole region produced only 78 scrapers, 120 cores (mostly from 'mixed' sites), 63 microliths, 35 arrowheads and barely 100 other classifiable tools. The present writer, having worked carefully on material exclusively from lowland England, would hesitate in dating many of these assemblages closely on the basis of what are, for the most part, not very diagnostic types, and particularly if working from Dr Young's view on the continued use of Mesolithic forms. Since, in addition and as the report points out, there is as yet no northern equivalent of the Pitts and Jacobi standard work on typological analysis, I am not entirely convinced by the internal chronology presented on the basis of this material.

In Chapter 5 the prehistoric sequence, or more properly, the Late Mesolithic occupation, is introduced under the heading 'Prehistoric land and resource utilisation'. The natural resources of the region and the effects of Mesolithic man on the environment are discussed and a model of utilisation based on ethnographic parallels made familiar by the works of Binford, Mellars, Clark, Price and others, is described. It is concluded that, that a nomadic, seasonal round would be followed, and that sites may be expected to be dominated by microliths, would have more a varied composition of lithic assemblages and the specific environmental conditions and available resources in those areas are located. Following the works of Mellars and Price and others, it is suggested that base camps, extraction camps and other classes of site may be identified amongst lithic assemblages within the study region.

The author re-examines his data in the light of this adopted model and produces some very interesting tables, such as Table V.I 'hypothetical schedule of resource availability'. He explores the problem of the completeness of the tool-record on audit sites, and how this may affect our interpretation of such sites on a functional and typological basis. He suggests that Mesolithic hunter-gatherer groups may be reflected in the varying composition of lithic assemblages and the specific environmental conditions and available resources in those areas where sites are located. Following the works of Mellars and Price and others, it is suggested that base camps, extraction camps and other classes of site may be identified amongst lithic assemblages within the study region.

Again, however, the author is let down by his data and the small size of many of the assemblages. A number of sites listed as extraction sites have as many tool types, and in some cases are of considerably greater size, than some of the base camps; whilst some base camps have a very limited range of forms and may have microliths but no scrapers. It is difficult to accept, for
instance, that Howel John East Field (F30) is a base camp (27 flakes, 2 cores, 1 microburin, 1 retouched), and Quarry Hill (F49) is classified as an extraction camp (34 flakes, 2 cores, 1 scraper, 1 denticulate, 1 retouched flake, 1 microburin, 15 miscellaneous retouched).

Having classified many of the assemblages on a functional basis, the report concludes with a consideration of some of the main areas in which lithic scatters are concentrated. It is argued that there is evidence for the seasonal occupation of some areas and the probable exploitation patterns of particular locations. There is little evidence for cereal pollen at the site, and it is suggested that agriculture may have spread slowly into the upland area alongside some pastoral activity and continued hunting and gathering.

There is no adequate discussion of the Neolithic or Bronze Age, despite the title of the volume, though the present writer noted in passing the high incidence of leaf and barbed-and-tanged arrowheads compared to transverse forms; the concordance of the distributions of the first two types and very different distribution of the latter.

This report inspires mixed feelings. The author’s enthusiasm and thoughtful approach to the subject are obvious and there are some useful and thought-provoking discussions. The report emphasizes the need for careful background research when dealing with surface lithic collections and takes a well-rounded approach to the environmental context. The adoption of the Neolith and Eshelton model for the Late Mesolithic seems to have been a considered decision, the site catchment analysis is carefully handled and the author’s data collection methods and analyses suggest that he could have produced some startling results. Sadly, in the end, it is the quality of the data which is at fault and leaves the report begging many questions – a problem which faces all postgraduate researchers and one for which the author cannot be blamed.

One final point – rather larger ‘period’ maps than those included, showing the location of sites with their catalogue numbers, would have been useful for those of us who do not ‘know the exact location of the River Wear... and... its archaeology, particularly its prehistory’.

Julie Gardiner, March 1988


Since it is notoriously difficult to review this type of multi-author volume without being selective in generalising, it seems only fair to begin with a list of the contents:

F. Healy, ‘Prediction or prejudice? The relationship between field survey and excavation’, pp. 9 - 17


J. Gardiner, ‘Tales of the unexpected: approaches to the assessment and interpretation of museums flint collections’, pp. 59 - 65

S. Ford, ‘Chronological and functional aspects of flint assemblages’, pp. 67 - 85


S. Ford, ‘Flint scatters and prehistoric settlement patterns in south Oxfordshire and east Berkshire’, pp. 101 - 135

A. Myers, ‘All shot to pieces? Inter-assemblage variability, lithic analysis, and mesolithic assemblage ‘types’: some preliminary observations’, pp. 137 - 153


R. Bradley, ‘Flint technology and the character of Neolithic settlement’, pp. 181 - 185


Listing the contents also gives the potential reader a clear idea of what kind of a volume this is, once it is appreciated that by ‘later prehistoric’ in the title the editors mean Mesolithic to Bronze Age. The ‘approaches’ under consideration are largely those of fieldwalking in a British winter, the going is mostly heavy. The only paper I can honestly say I read with positive enjoyment was Julie Gardiner’s, the first part of which should be required reading for those who, like the Late Mesolithic or Neolithic, come face-to-face with flints in museum basements. Lithic collections in museums have been ignored for too long by professional archaeologists. It may be that some lack of interest is partly due to the lack of concern shown towards this material by museum professionals. One problem Gardiner does not mention is that of the ‘School Loans factor’: in many museums lithic material which is not from the immediate vicinity or is judged for other reasons to be ‘unimportant’ has been dumped into the School Loan Collections, where it is difficult to come adrift from its provenance and to become damaged or even lost. It is difficult to quantify such losses, but there are grounds for suspecting that this ‘School Loans factor’, particularly in the case of lithic items, is of alarming proportions.

I am sure it is not entirely coincidental to my enjoyment of Gardiner’s paper that it is the only one in the volume to contain an artefact illustration! Next in terms of user-friendliness come the papers by Bradley and Healy, which are admirably brief and well-written. Further test-cases need to be examined, but it may be that Healy will be seen to have hit upon a phenomenon of absolutely fundamental importance – for the understanding of the surface collections. Her thesis is that lithic depositional contexts changed during the Neolithic period with a trend away from ‘subsoil’ features – Early Neolithic features are found incorporated in the fill of subsoil features, Late Neolithic debris more often being discarded on the contemporary land surface – hence the relative rarity of Early Neolithic compared with Late Neolithic flint and lithic material in the ploughsoil. The suggestion in one of Bradley’s papers, that sedentism is more of a Later Neolithic trait than an Earlier one, thus explaining the