neolithic exchange systems has barely advanced since the time when the first axe was sliced in 1928. Like nineteenth century Cornishmen, archaeologists have boiled the axes in water: but why remains still the riddle?

There has been a general tendency to concentrate exclusively on the raw material characteristics of artefacts, when these are definable. Since Peacock's demonstration that certain pottery styles in prehistoric Britain could be petrologically related to single sources, and the consequent collapse of the culture model based on an assumption of home-produced ceramics, most pottery studies in Britain have been concerned with clays and sources. The 'cultural approach to stone axes had died long before, perhaps partly as a result of the onslaught by Keiller and others on a 'collector mentality' in the 1930s, and certainly by the time Stone and Wallis rejoiced in the 'certain degree of detachment' which they felt petrological data gave them (Stone and Wallis 1951, 131). By focusing too narrowly on physical characterisation, however, archaeologists are inevitably limiting the potential of their enquiries. Despite the vast amount of work expended on the petrological identification of stone axes from Britain, there has never been a full consideration of the axes as axes: objects with defined roles, functions and values subject to changing demands, production organisations and so on. Neither have corpora been prepared detailing the available data (much of the best unpublished, most of the worst unknown) nor the factors that disturb the sampling ideal and enormously complicate our attempts to understand prehistoric societies been considered.

The writer's thesis, in preparation, deals with and attempts to overcome such problems, using two major data-sets: a detailed record of some 2000 stone axes (of which c.1100 are flint) and a comprehensive study of contextual and affiliated information.

Reference


THE STATUS OF THE CLACTONIAN INDUSTRY

by John Wymer

A paper published by Milla Y. Obel in Current Anthropology in 1979 has emphasised the problem of assessing what the Clactonian Industry means.
in terms of technology, human activity and tradition. He states the two most likely possibilities:

(i) The Clactonian Industry is an independent technological entity of an episodical nature

(ii) It is a preparatory stage within the Acheulian manufacturing process

The published opinion of several specialists in the same article is divided. Ochêl favours the latter possibility. His arguments question the whole archaeological concept of what defines a stone industry. It is usually regarded as an assemblage of stone artifacts thought to have been made by one group of people with particular traditional methods of working. Ochêl is suggesting that the Clactonian Industry was the work of the same group of people responsible for hand-axes and that the obvious technological differences are created by the former being restricted to the initial processes of hand-axe manufacture. The elementary hammerstone or anvill technique of the Clactonian Industry is unquestionably an element of most stone industries, as all sophisticated crafts must include some basic processes. This possibility of the Clactonian Industry being the result of hand-axe preparatory areas questions the whole concept of traditional methods of producing identifiable assemblages for archaeologists. It is critical to consider whether this is so for its acceptance will negate much of the archaeological thought of the last century. Modern parallels alone, which indicate that inherited tradition and its modification is the driving force of cultural processes, for progress or otherwise, suggest to me that it is unlikely. However, it is well worthy of examination.

The four sites in Britain where a Clactonian Industry is found in profusion are: Clacton-on-Sea, Swanscombe (Barnfield and Rickson’s Pit), Barnham, and Little Thurrock.

Elsewhere, such as in the Ancient Channel of the Thames between Caversham and Henley, cores and flakes indistinguishable from cores and flakes found at the above sites occur in gravel with hand-axes. Their differing conditions strongly support the notion that two industrial traditions are represented, but it is safer to use only the evidence from the four sites listed above. At all four sites there are no hand-axe whatsoever, although the quantity of artifacts collected over the years from the Lower Gravels at Swanscombe, at both Barnfield and Rickson’s Pits, is prodigious.

Reasons which support the interpretation of the industry at these sites reflecting living activities as opposed to mass-production of hand-axe rough-outs or blanks are:

(i) There are numerous flakes with secondary working which are identified as tools. Their domestic use is corroborated by micro-wear traces.

(ii) At Clacton and Barnfield Pit (Lower Gravel and Lower Loom) fragmentary mammalian bones almost certainly denote butchering activities.

(iii) At Clacton and Barnham the only flint readily available is either not very prolific or mainly unsuitable for refined flintwork. Some of the Clactonian flint was seemingly grubbed out of Chalk and brought to the site.

(iv) The elementary alternate flaking usually used on Clactonian cores renders them most unsuitable as blanks for hand-axes. (Of the very different flaking techniques used in blocking out hand-axes as demonstrated by conjoinable flakes at Caddington, and the difference in the flaking debris at a manufacturing and domestic site such as Swanscombe).

Reasons which support the interpretation of the Clactonian Industry as Acheulian hand-axe preparatory areas are:

(i) The contemporaneity of Acheulian and Clactonian Industries. This cannot be demonstrated in Britain but well-formed hand-axes are known from Africa at about 1.3 million years and, whatever the age of the British Clactonian industries, they cannot be as old as this, and they are overlain by other Acheulian industries.

(ii) Some flakes and cores in Acheulian industries are indistinguishable from those in the Clactonian Industry.

The evidence is, in my opinion, stronger for the former interpretation, i.e. that the Clactonian Industry is an independent technological entity of an episodical nature.
Ohel has also used the evidence from the coastal site at St. Adresse near Le Havre to support his hand-axe preparatory areas theory. The so-called Claestonian from this site is, from my own observations and visit to the site, of dubious age and bears little resemblance to the Claestonian industry. It is not to be confused with artifacts from the Acheulian site of the Station Romain nearby, although Ohel considers the two are contemporary. A geological assessment of the St. Adresse site is required before such contemporaneity can be claimed.

Select References

ARTICLES
IRON AGE FLINTWORKING - FACT OR FICTION?
by Alan Saville

The opinion current among British lithicists, and the view to which the present writer is inclined to subscribe, is that the regular production and use of flint artefacts for everyday domestic activities declined and ceased altogether within the later Bronze Age. In southern England this means during the first half, and probably during the first quarter, of the first millennium bc. This major technological and industrial change would appear to correlate with the increased availability and durability of bronze, and its use to manufacture a wide range of domestic tools. With the introduction of iron technology flintworking was rendered obsolete, except in certain specialised situations, such as bone object manufacture, and in instances of ad hoc usage. One of the latest radiocarbon determinations for a fully-fledged flint assemblage is that associated with the Middle Bronze Age settlement at Grimes Graves, Norfolk (H3=1097, 1134+44bc; Mercer 1981, 36), an assemblage which is probably already anachronistic in scale and scope, but stimulated by the unusually prolific availability of raw material.

This picture has now been challenged by A.J. Smith (1981) in her publication of the flints recovered during recent and past excavations at the Iron Age site of Meare West in Somerset. Smith claims (1981, 65) that her analysis "... establishes the definite manufacture and use of flint tools at the site, during the main period of occupation" (i.e. third century bc), and that "... it seems clear that a south-western flint knapping tradition of Iron Age date can be distinguished" (1981, Pl.66). A critical reading of Smith’s study would suggest that these claims are perhaps premature, since the evidence is by no means clear-cut.

Objections to Smith's claims may be summarised under the following headings.

Quantification and stratification. The 1979 excavations at Meare West produced a total of 124 flints. Smith (1981, 65) regards this as a "considerable number", which hardly seems appropriate when it is realised that the same excavations produced 50kg of Iron Age pottery (over 5,000 potsherds). The Iron Age pottery is concentrated stratigraphically in