

JOHN WYMER BURSARY 2014

EXCAVATIONS IN OXFORDSHIRE

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Items that were purchased

With the Wymer bursary I was able to purchase a collection of tools and equipment to assist me with my dissertation. My dissertation included the cataloguing and collection of material 'in-the-field' but focuses on analysis of lithic tools and cores. The tools and equipment purchased with the Wymer bursary included steel pins, measuring tapes, a trowel, weighing scales, callipers, a handheld microscope, finds bags, tags, a planning frame and planning equipment. Most of the items were purchased through the 'past Horizons' tool shop but some, such as tapes, finds stickers and shovels were purchased for the lowest cost through other means.

How it was used

For the first stage of my dissertation I had to collect lithics from the surface of a field in Oxfordshire. To try and give the finds context I gridded out and excavated two shovel pits and a test pit using strings, tapes, a trowel and grid pins to make the work of a professional standard. The longer tapes were also used to grid out areas of the field in an aim to create some spatial data for the assemblage. The first shovel pit, by chance, was located directly over what little remains of an archaeological context. The finds were all bagged and samples were taken with illustrations also produced for spatial information. The finds included a blade core and some bladelets, some burnt flint and some small charred seeds that may be archaeological. The test pit, located over a surface concentration of finds, was excavated and recorded down to the natural subsoil revealing no archaeological contexts.

The second stage of analysis for the dissertation consisted of weighing, measuring and identifying a series of characteristics on the flints. Each lithic (both cores and tools) had its length, width and thickness measured, it

was then weighed and analysed at both macroscopic and microscopic levels to create a catalogue/ database. Flint blade cores also had their platform angles analysed as well as noted for any signs of rejuvenation. Bladelets had their angle (much like blade cores) and their retouch also noted, as these are characteristics deemed significant in lithic analysis.

Current progress and learnings from work

The current stage of the dissertation is focused around the analysis of the lithics and the creation of a dataset. The lithics are being weighed and measured with some particular tool types receiving other types of analysis based on their characteristics. The dissertation conclusions are interpretations that can be made based on analysis of the dataset. Although typological analysis is very inexact, it is the only dating method useable on the surface assemblage; accurate dating could be acquired if sealed stratigraphic contexts are identified with material that can be carbon dated. Other interpretations circle around the activities that may have been carried out at the site during the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. I do acknowledge in my dissertation that there are many other archaeological features and finds which have been recorded and discovered in the immediate area which could themselves be separately catalogued, analysed and interpreted.

The possible site functions may have been; a manufacture site, a settlement site, a seasonal/ temporary site which the suggested activities including hide scraping, tool production, animal hunting and animal butchery. Flint scrapers discovered at the site appear in several typological forms; button scrapers, bifacial scrapers and end scrapers which may have been used to work hides or similar organic materials. Composite tool fragments (Microliths) were also recovered from the site that is the closest form of typological dating for the site. Two hand-axes I discovered may

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be indicative of early land clearance or simply the chopping down of trees. Several barbed and tanged arrowheads along with the composite tools, although assumed to be separated distinctly in date, may be evidence for the hunting of wild animals in the area; especially with the barbed and tanged arrowheads that, at a glance, appear to have been damaged or destroyed during antiquity through use.

Future uses

After the completion of the dissertation fieldwork and studies the equipment will continue to be useful. Further work on the site could lead onto Masters or doctoral studies so it will be continued to be carried out and studied under relevant guidance at all stages.

The standard to which everything is recorded would be regarded as 'professional'. The long-term intentions for the site are based on preserving the knowledge that the site holds as much of the evidence is being destroyed by modern agriculture. The finds themselves can be collated more and used to create spatial data for the assemblage within the field. The spatial data would have even more significance if geophysical surveys could be carried out on the site to perhaps identify any archaeological features that the surface collections may relate to. There are other sites which have been and can be discovered through desktop surveys and field walking and much more work that I can take part in within the field of archaeology, all of which is made possible by the equipment I purchased using the Wymer Bursary.