

JOHN WYMER BURSARY 2015

THE WESSENDEN HEAD RESERVOIR PROJECT

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Through the generous support of the Lithic Studies Society the author assisted three amateur archaeologists from Marsden, West Yorkshire, in analysing a lithic assemblage from a site at Wessenden Head Reservoir, Peak District National Park, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire (SE 0715 0765). A similar project, the Central Pennines Lithic Scatters Project has already been undertaken (Preston 2014). Therefore, the Wessenden Head Reservoir Project has sought to complement rather than duplicate previous efforts through a collaborative research project co-managed by the author and Preston.

The Wessenden Head Reservoir Project has four main aims. First, to deliver practical teaching on lithic analysis. Secondly, to provide guidance on the curation and conservation of the site archive. Thirdly, to create an engaging display at an appropriate institution. Finally, to publish a report.

The site occupies a small peat-covered prominence known as Gilberts Island which is occasionally exposed by low water levels close to the eastern shore of the Wessenden Head Reservoir (Preston 2013). It first came to the attention of archaeologists when Stonehouse (1982) recovered a total of 180 lithics from an area of 100 square metres on the island. The lithic assemblage consisted of broad blade microliths, piercers, scrapers and a tranchet axe sharpening flake. Stonehouse suggested that the broad blade microliths and the sharpening flake were characteristic of occupation during the Early Mesolithic and that the thumbnail scrapers were denotative of an Early Bronze Age occupation.

However, these claims need to be verified because Stonehouse undertook only a basic typological analysis of the assemblage and

made potentially erroneous observations based on a flawed classification scheme (Preston 2011). Therefore, the Wessenden Head Reservoir Project is both timely and necessary.

In summer 2014 amateur archaeologists Adrian Burnham and Dean Handforth visited the Wessenden Head Reservoir. On various trips they recovered approximately 500 lithics from the island and the adjacent shore. They also conducted a survey of a linear bank of stones which runs along the crest of the island. The lithic assemblage includes cores, manufacturing debitage (such as core rejuvenation pieces) and a large number of retouched pieces (such as microliths and scrapers). This assemblage is especially important because it is substantially more diverse than the previous one and offers much greater possibilities for a detailed technological analysis.

Even though Burnham and Handforth made comprehensive plans and took detailed photographs of the stone linear bank, the spatial distribution of lithics at the Wessenden Head Reservoir was not recorded. Notwithstanding this limitation, it has been possible to analyse the assemblage as a surface collection and to obtain additional information on the strategies of exploitation and reduction employed at the site.

In the beginning it was necessary to teach the group technological analysis because many amateur archaeologists tend to classify lithics according to their shape alone. Therefore, the project commenced with an introduction to the analytical and theoretical approaches used in lithic analysis. The group were also provided with equipment (e.g. calipers, loupes, scales) and manuals (e.g. Martingell & Saville 1988; Inizan *et al.* 1999; Preston 2011) with which they were able to undertake an exploratory analysis of the assemblage.

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The group was also provided with a manual of analytical protocols (including type and attribute definitions, decision trees and flow charts and full instructions for measuring and recording pieces) and a pro forma for recording each piece based on the Analytical Lithics Module (Preston 2011). The use of an explicit protocol facilitated the teaching of lithic analysis and yielded more accurate data. The data recorded on the forms were then entered into a relational database in Microsoft Access. At the time of writing the assemblage has been fully analysed and the data are being processed.

Preliminary analysis of the data has yielded some interesting results. For instance, the typological composition of the assemblage is broadly similar to, but slightly more diverse than, the one recovered by Stonehouse. However, some additional time periods are represented by the lithics. In addition to the Early Mesolithic date suggested by Stonehouse, the presence of straight backed and rod microliths implies a very Late or Terminal Mesolithic occupation. Furthermore, the site has yielded evidence of Neolithic occupation in the form of a linear bank of stones which has been identified as a long barrow (Yvonne Luke, pers. comm.) and a possible fragment of a green polished stone axe. However, preliminary analysis of the greenstone was inconclusive and it has been sent to the Implement Petrology Group for further analysis.

In addition to the lithics analysis, the group has been given practical guidance on the curation and conservation of the collection. This involved assigning each piece a number and placing it in a plastic bag in an acid-free box and teaching them to label bags with the appropriate provenance information. However, a decision was made to apply numbers to the bags rather than the lithics because the application of Indian ink and clear nail varnish often obscures important features.

To conclude, the analysis will be submitted to a journal, the data will be made available to the public and the assemblage will be displayed in a museum or other appropriate venue. It is hoped that the results of the project, when published, will include not only this assemblage but the one recovered by Stonehouse. This should provide a better understanding of the lithic reduction strategies that occurred at the

site. Possible future directions for the Wessenden Head Reservoir Project include an excavation of the site. This would provide the opportunity for survey and excavation training. An introduction to the concepts of stratigraphy and context would be particularly relevant because such information has not been recorded at the Wessenden Head Reservoir before.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my appreciation to Paul R. Preston for sharing his knowledge of the Mesolithic of northern England and for the use of his Analytical Lithics Module prior to publication. I would like to sincerely thank Yorkshire Water for allowing access to their land. I am indebted to Yvonne Luke for kindly identifying the long barrow. I am especially grateful to the West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service (particularly Ian Sanderson and Jason Dodds) for providing funding for radiocarbon dating. I would like to thank Jo Heron and John Bowen of the Huddersfield and District Archaeological Society for their support throughout the project. Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Lithic Studies Society for the award of a John Wymer Bursary for the Wessenden Head Reservoir Project.

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