

A MIDDLE PALAEOLITHIC *BOUT COUPÉ* HANDAXE FROM SHIRLEY, SURREY

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights a newly identified bout coupé handaxe from Shirley, Surrey. During 2016 this artefact, owned by the Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society Museum, was returned after a period of almost 20 years on long-term loan. Only on its return was it realised that it is a finely worked and hitherto unidentified bout coupé handaxe. This is a relatively rare type, there being fewer than 100 from Britain. The opportunity is also taken to identify another bout coupé from Gosden Farm, Bramley, Surrey.

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INTRODUCTION

The *bout coupé* flint handaxe was found in 1970 in a garden in Shirley, Surrey, and donated to the Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society Museum. It was included within a short note on flint axes in the Society's *Proceedings* in 1971 (Thornhill 1971: 185). From 1998 until 2016 it was on loan and was not identified as a *bout coupé* until its return to the museum. The handaxe's metrics, flaking characteristics and patination, as well as the geology, topography and brief history of the find spot, are detailed below.

DESCRIPTION

The handaxe measures 102 mm in length, 75 mm in maximum breadth, is 24 mm thick and weighs 209.6 g. It is very finely worked with a symmetrical planform as shown in Figure 1. One face (Figure 1a) has approximately 29 flake scars, while the other displays 24. A number of these stretch from the edge to the centre. Reduction was probably achieved by the use of a soft hammer, with very thin flakes removed in the final shaping process. Final dressing is present along parts of the edge and no cortex remains. The handaxe is very 'fresh', with no sign of rolling or abrasion, and presents a sharp edge all round. Table 1 and

Figure 2 provide the metrics, discussed below, based on techniques employed by Roe (1968: 23–25) and Tyldesley (1987: 164–165).

A slight protrusion that remains on the left side accentuates the apparent overall thickness and curvature of that face relative to the other, but the two faces otherwise have the same degree of curvature and thickness.

The lack of well-defined angular corners means that this is not a classic Type N (Wymer 1968) *bout coupé* as described by Roe (1968: 18). However, as the Lynford site demonstrates (Boismier *et al.* 2012), there is a continuum with other cordate forms, and Roe (1968: figure 2) illustrates outlines of six *bout coupés* to show the variability in planform, with that from Erith, as illustrated by Tyldesley (1987: 57), being a close comparison to the example from Shirley.

A distinct and interesting feature is a step in the flaking halfway along the butt, which can be seen most clearly in Figure 1c. The knapper did not extend the flaking along the whole butt towards the left edge. If this had been done, the 'corner' may have been more distinctly angular. This trimming may represent some form of edge sharpening.

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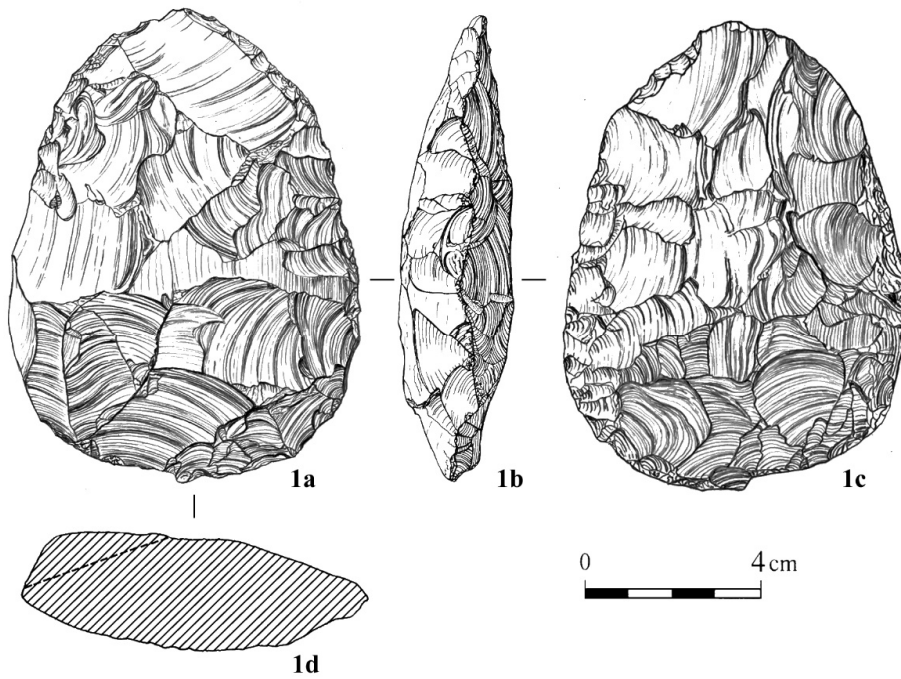


Figure 1: Bout coupé from 11 Palace View, Shirley, Surrey. (Drawn by C.J.W. Taylor)

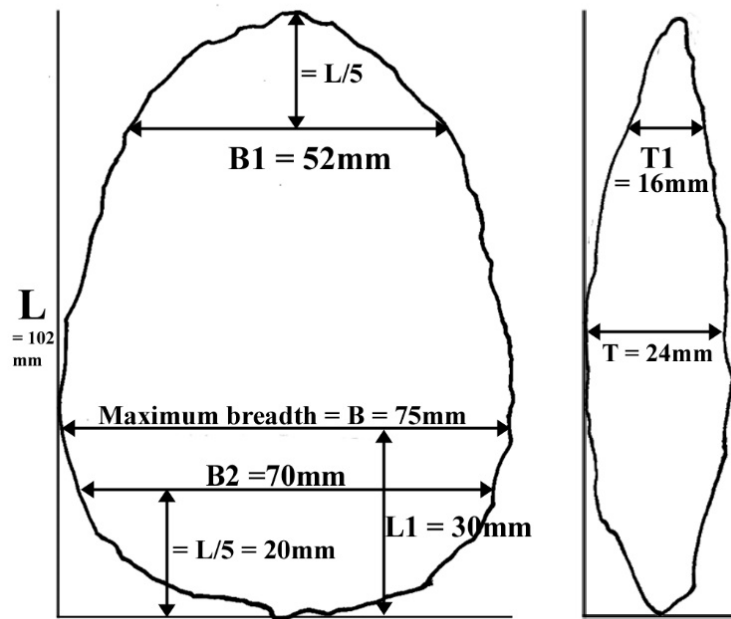


Figure 2: Measurements recorded sensu Roe (1968).

The side of the handaxe in Figure 1a displays white patination with some grey mottling, which has not extended beyond this face. A possible cause of the white patina in a location away from chalk bedrock are periods of temporary alkalinity derived from periglacial loess; the differential between faces may be due to the way the biface was lying on or embedded in the ground affecting its exposure to this temporary local alkalinity and moisture

(Harp, personal communication, 2016). The other face is black with a 'basket-weave' patination (e.g. Shepherd 1972: 119 & plate XVI). Basket-weave patination can be brought about within just a few years by the prints of grass roots (Shepherd 1972: 119). The distinctive differential patination of this axe, white on one side and basket-weave on the other, is almost identical to two other *bout coupés*, one from the Chelmer valley, Essex

Table 1: Measurements of the Shirley handaxe sensu Roe (1968), in comparison to the mean values for bout coupés from Tyldesley (1987).

<i>Metric</i>	<i>The Shirley handaxe</i>	<i>Tyldesley mean values (n = 60) (1987: 165)</i>
B/L	0.735	0.707
B1/B2	0.743	0.667
L1/L	0.294	0.197
T/B	0.320	0.414
T1/B	0.213	0.198

(Doman 2010), the other from Wincheap, Kent (Roe 1981: 259).

PROVENANCE, LOCAL TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The axe is number 198 in the Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society Museum accession register. It was donated by Mr Edwards who found it whilst gardening in 1970 at 11 Palace View, Shirley, Surrey (NGR TQ 3668 6506). Historical map Surrey XIV (1:10 560 scale) shows the find site was part of

Spring Park until sometime after 1945 when it was developed into a residential estate. The topography (Figure 3) indicates that any movement caused by solifluction or post-glacial soil creep would have been in a northeasterly direction, from near Addington Golf Course. As a result, the handaxe was in all likelihood not found *in situ*.

A dry valley, an extension of the river Ravensbourne, runs southwest–northeast, *ca* 1 km from the find spot, which is on the

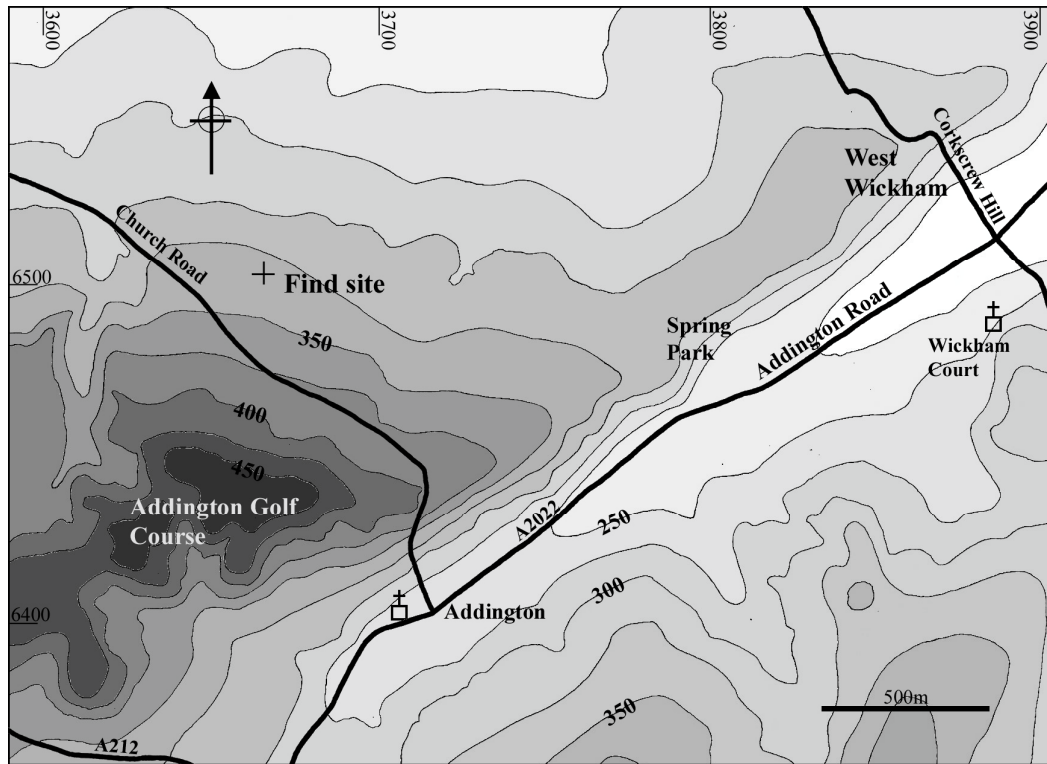


Figure 3: Topography of Shirley bout coupé find spot. Contours are in feet. (Map by C.J.W. Taylor; based on Ordnance Survey Sheet TQ36, reprinted with corrections in 1952)

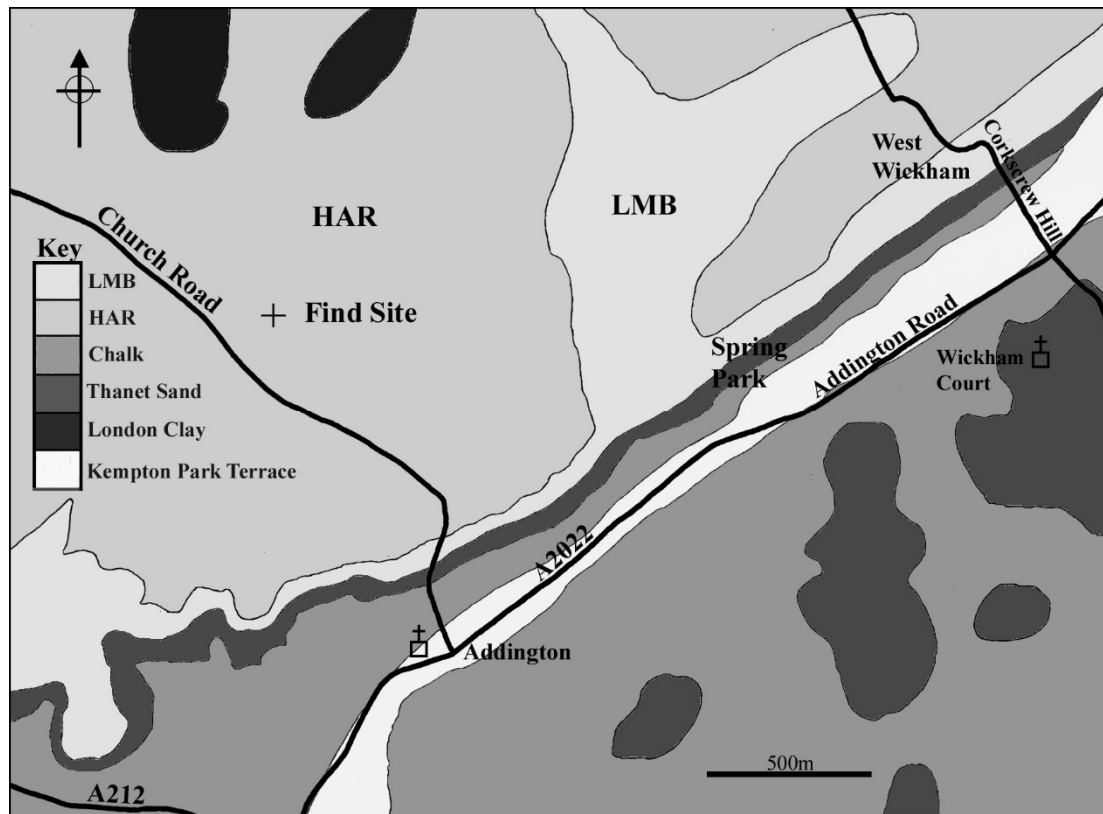


Figure 4. Geology of the find spot and surrounding area. LMB = Lambeth Group; HAR = the Harwich Formation. (Map by C.J.W. Taylor; based on British Geological Survey, South London Sheet 270, Solid and Drift Geology [1951])

Table 2. Bout coupés from south London, Surrey and Kent.

<i>Location</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Balham, south London	1		Roe 1981: 265; Tyldesley 1987: 160
Richmond, south London	1		Roe 1981: 266; Tyldesley 1987: 160
Farnham, Surrey	2+	From the only terrace (D) of the river Wey where mammoth remains have been located.	Bury 1913: 199; Roe 1981: 265
Gosden Farm, Bramley, Surrey	1	ca 27 km from Farnham but also from terrace D of the Wey. Found with mammoth tooth.	North 1931: 144–145 & plate 31
Limpsfield, Surrey	2		Roe 1981: 266
Kent	17	Of the 17, the nearest are three from Erith	Tyldesley 1987: 160

Harwich Formation, part of the Woolwich and Reading Beds (Figure 4). The probable origin of the piece, as described above, is also on this deposit, which extends further up the slope. The Upper Chalk is close by, within *ca* 1 km.

The only Pleistocene deposits in the vicinity are in the dry valley and are mapped as the Kempton Park Gravel, which is dated to MIS 6–4 (Sumbler 1996: 111; Juby 2011: 328, 334 & 337). However, the cold stage deposits in

the upper part of this deposit are dated to MIS 4–2 (Sumbler 1996: 122).

***BOUT COUPÉS* – INCIDENCE, DISTRIBUTION AND NUMBERS**

The number of *bout coupé* handaxes from Britain is tiny. Tyldesley listed just 75 (1987: 159–161), although this number has since been increased by finds from the Chelmer valley (Doman 2010), Lynford (Boismier *et al.* 2012) and elsewhere. The find spot for the Shirley biface is only 500 m from the Kent-Surrey border. The other *bout coupés* from south London, Surrey and Kent that have been found in the vicinity of this area are listed in Table 2.

Bout coupés are well documented as being associated with the remains of mammoth. At Farnham, three of the principal fauna of the Pin Hole Mammalian Assemblage Zone (MAZ) have been found in the same terrace (D) as *bout coupés*, indicating a Middle Devensian (MIS 3) date (Juby 2011: 318). This was the period when the woolly mammoth was in its prime (Lister 2014: 99). Roe (1981: 258, 263 & 267) and Tyldesley (1987: 169) give further examples of finds associated with the remains of cold-loving Devensian fauna, including mammoth. The *bout coupé* found at Gosden Farm, Bramley (Table 2) has not previously been identified as such and is another example associated with mammoth remains, in this case a tooth (North 1931: 144–145 & plate 31). Significantly the gravel pit in which it was found is in the same low river terrace (D) of the Wey as those from Farnham.

SUMMARY

The Shirley *bout coupé*, and that from Gosden Farm, are useful additions to the sparse numbers of such artefacts previously recorded from Britain. The basket-weave patination of the Shirley axe adds to the number of *bout coupés* found with this feature and reflects the fact that they are often surface finds or from low river terraces.

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