

LETTERS AND NOTES

A LOWER PALAEOLITHIC BIFACE FOUND AT SOUTH GARE, REDCAR

Introduction

The artefact was found by Richard Owen of Inshore Fisheries, whilst collecting winkles along the rock armour, at Paddy's Hole on the west side of the South Gare Breakwater, which forms a sea defence on the south side of the River Tees (NZ 554 272). The find was reported to Tees Archaeology, the Local Authority archaeological service for the area.

Description

The item is incomplete and comprises the slightly asymmetric tip and part of the body of a pointed flint biface measuring 105mm x 51mm x 25mm and weighing 109g. There is no remaining cortex on the surface of the item as this has been removed in the reduction process. One face of the artefact has regular and invasive retouch. The reverse face has less evidence for this but has some battering along one edge suggesting ancient damage (Figure 1).

The flint has a dense yellow/brown surface patina and is heavily abraded by wave action. Variations in the patina suggest that the artefact has broken on two occasions in antiquity. The earlier of these is a thermal fracture that has removed a large chunk from the body of the piece. This is in turn truncated by a later break revealing a light grey/cream interior to the flint. In addition there are several smaller recent chips from the edges and a number of iron-rich concretions on the surface of the object.

Discussion

Specialist examination of the artefact (by Dr Mark White, Dept. of Archaeology, University of Durham) has led to its interpretation as part of a Lower Palaeolithic handaxe. This is the first Palaeolithic artefact to be recovered from Teesside. Previous finds of the period are limited to several items of megafauna from the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic periods (Huntley & Stallibras 1995). An additional unpublished item of an undated mammoth's tooth was found at Redcar in 1954 (Tees Archaeology Historic Environment Record Number 0351).

It is evident that the distribution of Lower Palaeolithic artefacts on the British mainland is heavily concentrated in the south-east of England and that there is a dramatic reduction of such finds north of a line between the Humber and the Bristol Channel (Roe 1996: 3–4). In an earlier edition of *Lithics*, Saville (1995) discussed the issues of similar bifaces from Scotland set against the general pattern of such stray finds in northern England. More recently, Waddington (2007) notes the recycling of beach-rolled Palaeolithic material by 8th millennium BC coastal hunter-gatherers at Howick, Northumberland. This find adds to this body of evidence but has similar problems of provenance. In this case the item was found beneath the rock armour of a 19th century breakwater constructed between 1866 and 1888 (Harrison 1978: 19). It may have been sealed in position by this feature or washed in on a more recent tide.

There are several possibilities as to the original provenance. The artefact may have eroded from a submerged offshore deposit from anywhere in the North Sea Basin or could have been disturbed during offshore dredging specifically targeted to retrieve fossil and artefactual

remains for sale on internet auction sites (Mark White pers. comm.).

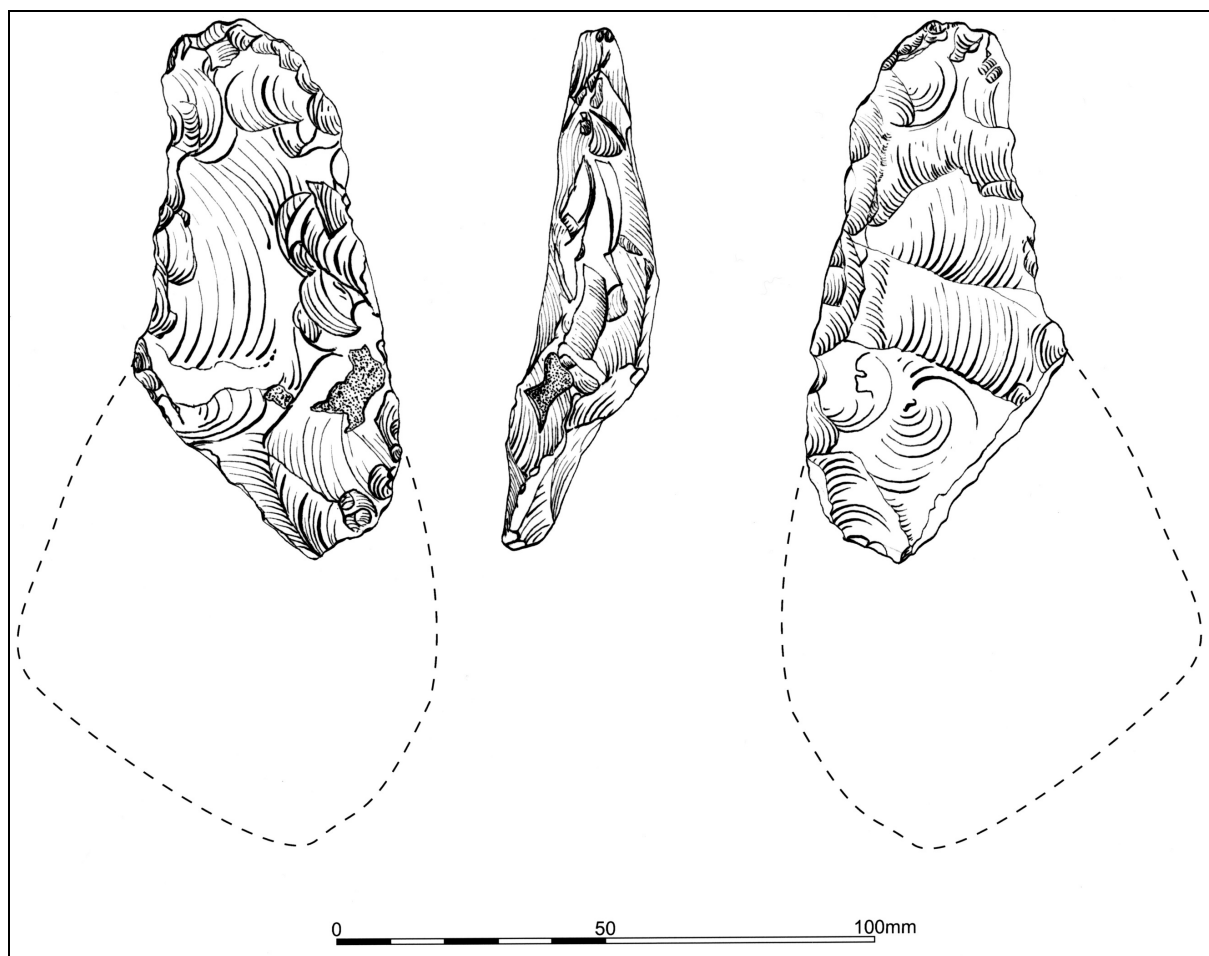


Figure 1: Flint biface from South Gare, Redcar

A more intriguing possibility is that it derives from a broad palaeo-channel that lies approximately 250 metres to the east of the South Gare, identified in a recent offshore geophysical survey (Entec UK Ltd 2004) or has eroded from beneath glacial boulder clay deposits and associated sand and gravel beds of the local coastline (Agar 1954: 239). Finally, a less romantic option is that the flint formed part of a dumped ballast cargo from a 19th century collier sailing back from the south-east coast.

Although the provenance is open to debate, the find nevertheless adds to the growing body of evidence of Lower Palaeolithic material reported from outside of the traditional heartland of research, and is intrinsically interesting as an object of that period.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for their assistance in identifying the object, Dr. Paul Pettitt, Mr. Simon Buteux, Dr. Jenni Chambers and Dr. Mark White. I am particularly grateful to Barbara and Richard Owen for reporting the find, which has been deposited with the Dorman Museum, Middlesbrough. The illustration is by Margaret Finch.

References

- Agar, R. 1954. Glacial and Post-Glacial Geology of Middlesbrough and the Tees Estuary. *Proceedings of the Yorkshire Geological Society* 29: 237–253.
- Entec UK Limited. 2004. *EDF Energy (Northern Offshore Wind) Ltd. Teesside Offshore Wind Farm. Environmental Statement. March 2004.* Entec UK Limited, Newcastle.
- Harrison, J.K. 1978. A Tour along the South Bank of the River Tees. In J.K. Harrison & J.K. Almond (eds.) *Industrial Archaeology in Cleveland — A Guide*: 1–23. The Cleveland Industrial Archaeology Society. Cleveland County Libraries, Middlesbrough.
- Huntley, J.P. & Stallibras, S. 1995. Plant and Vertebrate Remains from Archaeological Sites in Northern England: Data Review and Future Directions. *Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland. Research Report 4.* Durham.
- Roe, D. 1996. Artefact Distributions and the British Earlier Palaeolithic. In C. Gamble & A. Lawson (eds.) *The English Palaeolithic Reviewed: Papers from a Day Conference held at the Society of Antiquaries of London, 28 October 1994*: 1–7. Trust for Wessex Archaeology Ltd, Salisbury.
- Saville, A. 1995. Bifaces of Lower Palaeolithic type from Scotland. *Lithics: The Newsletter of the Lithic Studies Society* 14: 1–7.
- Waddington, C. (ed.) 2007. *Mesolithic Settlement in the North Sea Basin: A Case Study from Howick, North-East England.* Oxbow Books, Oxford.

Peter Rowe
Tees Archaeology

THE LITHIC STUDIES SOCIETY VISIT TO CRESWELL CRAGS, 14TH JULY 2007

Despite the recent problems caused by the torrential rain that had brought parts of the country to a standstill, a small group of Lithic Studies Society members met up at midday on the 14th July at the Creswell Museum and Education Centre. Here we were greeted in glorious sunshine by Ian Wall of the Creswell Heritage Trust, who gave us an introduction and brief history of the archaeological discoveries at the Crag.

Creswell Crag (Figure 1) is located just to the south of Worksop on the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire border in the English Midlands. It has long been recognised for the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic discoveries that have been made in the caves that line the Crag: a gorge created by the River Meadow as it cuts through a belt of Magnesian limestone. The importance of Creswell's archaeology is reflected in its status as the type-site for the "Creswellian", a local equivalent of the Continental Magdalenian culture. More recently, Creswell shot to prominence when a number of animal engravings and other figures were discovered in the caves, and subsequently dated in excess of 12,800 years old. Creswell therefore provides Britain's only confirmed examples of Upper Palaeolithic cave art, comparable in style and chronology to that found in the world-renowned Franco-Cantabrian caves such as Altamira and Lascaux.

Our visit also coincided with National Archaeology Week and before exploring the caves we were treated to re-enactments of various prehistoric activities, including bronze casting and stone axe polishing, and enjoyed an impressive display of flint knapping skills by John Lord and his son Will.

Dr Paul Pettitt, of Sheffield University and one of the original discoverers of the Creswell Palaeolithic cave art, took us down into the gorge, starting at Church Hole Cave to view the recent discoveries (Figure 2). This cave contains the majority of the images that have been identified, most of which are located on the ceiling, some 12m in from the entrance and