

THE WAITE PRIVATE COLLECTION (2005–2008) OF PALAEOLITHIC ARTEFACTS FROM AROUND NUNEATON, WARWICKSHIRE (UK): FURTHER OBSERVATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Palaeolithic surface artefacts from around Nuneaton, Warwickshire (UK), in Mr Ron Waite's private collection from 2005 to 2008 have now been recorded, and include numerous quartzite handaxes and unusual items such as picks and bifacial knives. The collection is compared with earlier finds from Waverley Wood and Wood Farm Pits, Warwickshire.

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THE NUNEATON STUDY

Mr Ron Waite has donated many of his surface finds to local museums (Graf 2002; 2004). The present project recorded others from around Nuneaton, Warwickshire, in his own private collection between 2005 and 2008 (Table 1) and the illustrated archive with fuller discussion will be deposited for public consultation with the Warwickshire Historic Environment Record and with the Archaeology Data Service, York:

(http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/waite_na_2011/.)

The Palaeolithic artefacts are predominantly of quartzite, in widely-varying condition, with a high proportion of tools, mainly handaxes, and chopper-cores (Table 1; Figures 1 & 2), partly the result of selective retrieval and repeated searches focussed on 'visually impressive' material (R. Waite, pers. comm.). The distribution suggests wide-ranging landscape exploitation, of interfluvial as well as valleys (Graf 2004, Figure 1), probably during repeated visits perhaps widely separated in time. The drift deposits forming the local landscape, from whose surface the artefacts came, are thought to be from the Anglian glaciation, suggesting a post-Anglian date for the finds.

<i>Artefact Type</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Quartzite</i>	<i>Flint</i>	<i>Andesitic Tuff/Lava</i>	<i>Mudstone or Limestone?</i>
Handaxe (4 unifaces)	60	38%	38	21	1?	-
Chopper-Core	35	22%	34	1	-	-
Other Core	18	12%	18	-	-	-
Flake	11	7%	5	3	2	1
Point	10	6.4%	10	-	-	-
Roughout	9	5.7%	8	-	1	-
Pick	8	5%	8	-	-	-
(Core)-Scraper	4	2%	4	-	-	-
Bifacial Knife	2	1.3%	2	-	-	-
Bifacial Core-Axe	1	0.6%	1	-	-	-
Totals	158	100%	128	25	4	1
			(81%)	(15.5%)	(3%)	(0.5%)

Table 1. Surface artefacts of probable Palaeolithic origin from around Nuneaton, Warwickshire, in the Waite Private Collection 2005–2008 (doubtful identifications omitted)

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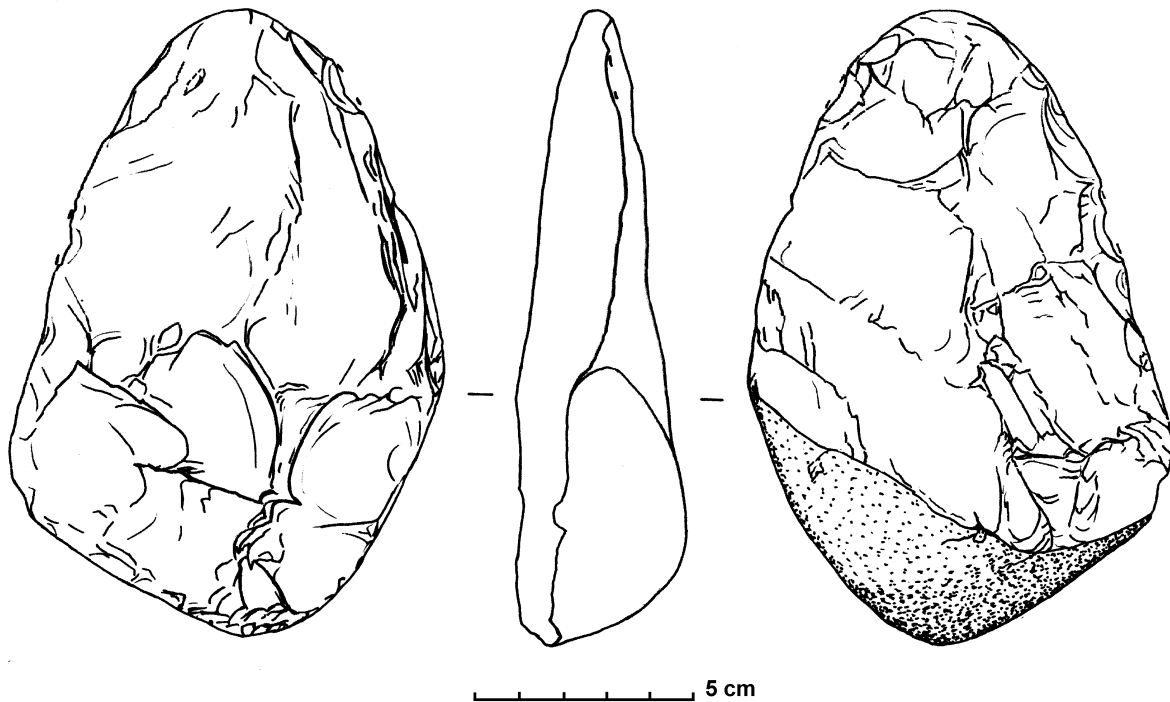


Figure 1. Quartzite handaxe from Nuneaton: SP3355 9065. Catalogue Ref.W41 (illustration by the author).

Artefact Type	Length range: Flint	Length range: Quartzite	Length range: Andesitic Tuff or Lava
Flake	26-30mm	65-136mm	75-87mm
Handaxe	46-140mm	64-152mm	107mm (min.)

Table 2. Comparative length ranges of artefacts of flint, quartzite and andesitic materials in the Waite Private Collection from around Nuneaton, Warwickshire 2005 – 2008.

DISCUSSION

Extent of Quartzite use in the Palaeolithic of the Midlands

Past failure to search for and recognise quartzite artefacts (Hardaker 2001; White *et al.* 2008) means that the question of the extent of Palaeolithic occupation north-west of the Chilterns is still open. There have now been numerous additional non-flint finds since Posnansky's (1963) and MacRae and Moloney's (1988) summaries (Graf 2002 & 2004 and bibliographies therein; Hardaker 2004; Jacobi 2004; Lang 2004; Lang & Keen 2005; Keen *et al.* 2006; White & White 2007; White *et al.* 2008; Jarvis *et al.* 2010).

The pre-Anglian Bytham River deposits at Waverley Wood and Wood Farm pits, Warwickshire, (hereafter Waverley Wood), have latterly produced, as a result of consciously-directed searches, over 70 quartzite artefacts (Keen *et al.* 2006). Brooksby quarry, Leicestershire, working

similar pre-Anglian deposits, is currently producing even more (Stephens *et al.* 2008; Jarvis *et al.* 2010).

Post-glacial populations continued to use quartzite (Table 1; Figures 1 & 2) in addition to the limited flint transported to the area for the first time by the Anglian ice. This was often in small clasts or flawed and fractured, and the small size of the Nuneaton flint artefacts perhaps reflects this (Table 2).

The Waite quartzite finds have thus been important in emphasising the extensive continuing use of this material to supplement the often limited flint in this area.

Contrast with Waverley Wood and Wood Farm Pits, Warwickshire (Keen *et al.* 2006)

The two collections of finds, from Nuneaton and from Waverley Wood, are in similar materials, though probably of very different dates. Both groups vary widely in craftsmanship and condition, both were

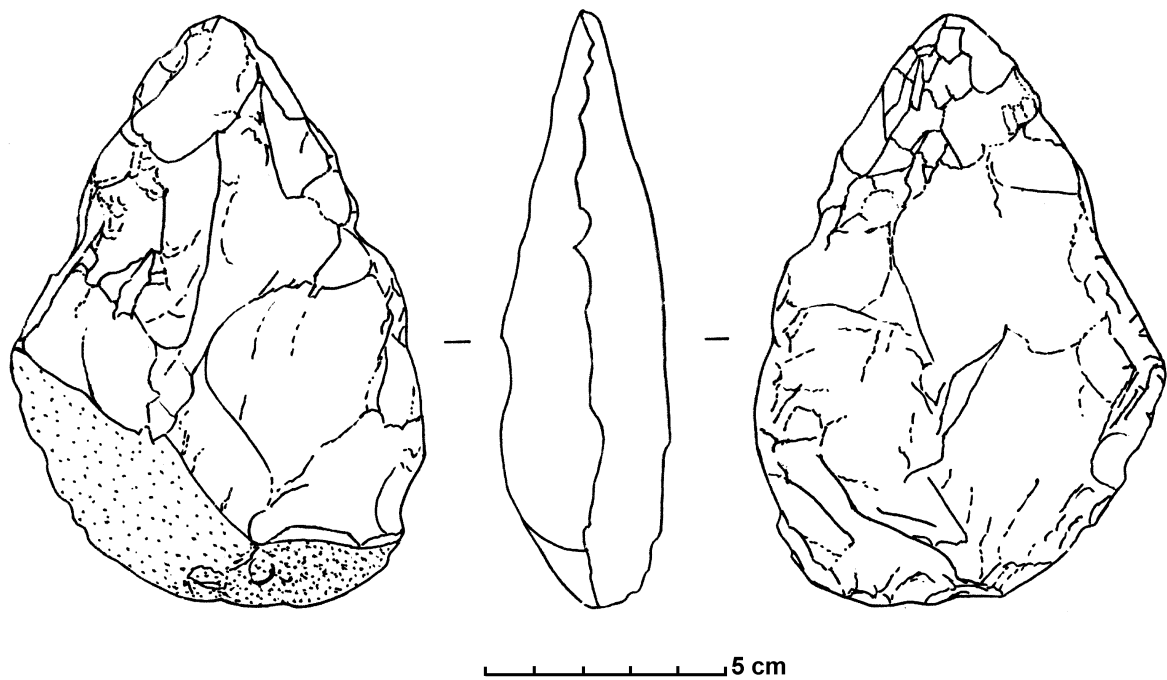


Figure 2. Quartzite handaxe from Burton Hastings: SP430 901. Catalogue Ref. W60 (illustration by the author).

Quartzite Artefact Type	Waverley Wood	Nuneaton
Handaxes	2 (3%)	38 (30%)
Other Tools	6 (10%)	33 (25%)
Debitage (incl. Chopper-Cores)	53 (87%)	57 (45%)
Totals	61 (100%)	128 (100%)

Table 3. Contrasting proportions of types of quartzite artefacts from Waverley Wood and Wood Farm Pits, Warwickshire (Keen et al.2006) and the Waite Private Collection 2005-2008 from around Nuneaton, Warwickshire

probably created by multiple communities (Keen et al. 2006) and a comparison may be of interest.

At Waverley Wood quartzite constitutes 91% of all 'definite' artefacts (Keen et al. 2006); at Nuneaton 81% (Table 1). There is only one flint item from Waverley Wood, possibly due to absence of any local source in the pre-Anglian period. Quartzite sizes are biased in this Waverley Wood material (mostly from the quarry reject heaps) by prior extraction of smaller material for sale. Despite this, most Nuneaton quartzite artefacts are up to 50mm larger than corresponding types from Waverley Wood (Table 2, and cf. Keen et al. 2006), and the selective retrieval mentioned above may be involved.

The high proportion of tools in the quartzite material from Nuneaton is striking, compared

with the few from Waverley Wood (Table 3). The greatest contrast between the two collections lies in the character and quantity of the handaxes. The eight from Waverley Wood to date include five large, magnificent-quality andesitic handaxes, a single fine, though fragmentary, flint example, and merely an unremarkable pair in quartzite (Table 3). The Nuneaton area by contrast has produced 60 handaxes, 38 in quartzite (Table 1), many of which, though smaller than the andesitic pieces from Waverley Wood, are of fine quality workmanship (Figs.1 & 2; Graf 2004, Figs. 3 & 4). However, the single andesitic handaxe from Nuneaton is very worn, possibly not a convincing example, while many of the flint handaxes fall below the single piece from Waverley Wood in quality. Selective retrieval will have influenced these results, which nevertheless are noteworthy.

Post-Anglian tool developments, including fine quartzite handaxes

The many fine quartzite handaxes from Nuneaton (Table 1; Figs. 1 & 2) contrast with their virtual lack in the Waverley Wood material, where the difficulty is noted of attempting handaxe manufacture in quartzite (Keen et al. 2006, 464). If the surface material from around Nuneaton is, as seems likely, of post-Anglian origin, then it might be speculated that the wish, need or ability to execute fine quality bifacial work in quartzite was not developed until re-occupation of the Midlands after the Anglian glaciation. The material from pre-Anglian Brooksby will be significant in this respect in due course: to date only one small quartzite handaxe has been recovered (L. Cooper, pers. comm.) to add to the andesitic examples from the site (Jarvis et al. 2010).

The diversity of the Nuneaton quartzite tools compared with those from pre-Anglian Waverley Wood may perhaps be associated with the changing post-Anglian environment. Corresponding alterations in hunting and other elements of life-style may have led to a developing repertoire of tasks and hence tools, as part of the lengthy process of 'Neanderthalisation' (Pope 2010), by an evolving human population.

CONCLUSIONS

Fieldwork with unbiased collection is needed to test the pattern recorded from Mr Waite's work. Additionally, in areas of geological potential for availability of similar raw material, worked quartzite and andesitic materials, as well as the more familiar flint, should be consciously targeted in fieldwork. It seems that archaeologists may not be identifying quartzite artefacts except when deliberately seeking them

Mr Waite is continuing his fieldwork in the Tamworth and Lichfield areas of Staffordshire. Study of the results, and of his finds previously donated to Warwickshire, Leicestershire and other local museums and to private individuals, is suggested as future work for others; the scope of the present project, which is now concluded, has not permitted their inclusion. The resulting fuller picture of quartzite and other raw material use should throw much

further light on Palaeolithic exploitation of the Midlands landscape.

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