

The Newsletter of the Lithic Studies Society

ContentsArticles

- 1 - 7 The late F.W. Shotton with J.J. Wymer
HAND-AXES OF ANDESITIC TUFF FROM BENEATH THE STANDARD
WOLSTONIAN SUCCESSION IN WARWICKSHIRE
- 8 J.J. Wymer
PROFESSOR F.W. SHOTTON
- 9 - 15 A.J. Schofield
RECENT FINDS FROM RAINBOW BAR AND SOME THOUGHTS ON SITE
FORMATION
- 16 - 27 Ann Clarke
THE SKAILL KNIFE AS A BUTCHERING TOOL
- 28 - 32 John Bateman
FIELDWALKING WITH A COMPASS
- 33 - 42 Andy Brown and Frances Healy
THE FENLAND PROJECT
- 44 - 51 Bob Middleton, Andy Brown, Mark Edmonds and Peter
Bellamy
LITHICS AND EARLY NEOLITHIC ENCLOSURES
- 52 - 53 Frances Healy
EXIT, PURSUED BY COLLEAGUES

Reviews

- 54 - 59 Bill Finlayson
REVIEW of Torrence, R., (ed.), TIME, ENERGY AND STONE
TOOLS
- 59 - 63 Julian Richards
REVIEW of Phillips, P. (ed.), ARCHAEOLOGY AND LANDSCAPE
STUDIES IN NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE

Recent Publications Relevant to Lithic Studies

- 64 - 65 GENERAL
- 66 BRITAIN AND IRELAND
- 66 - 71 BRITAIN AND IRELAND: REGIONAL STUDIES

RESPONSIBILITY FOR VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS PUBLICATION RESTS
ENTIRELY WITH INDIVIDUAL AUTHORS

ARTICLES

HAND-AXES OF ANDESITIC TUFF FROM BENEATH THE STANDARD WOLSTONIAN SUCCESSION IN WARWICKSHIRE

by the late F.W. Shotton with J.J. Wymer. Illustrations also by
the late F.W. Shotton

Three large hand-axes, a modified quartzite pebble and a quartzite flake are figured (Figs 1 - 4: A-E). They were found at Smith's Concrete Ltd at Waverley Wood Farm Pit, Bubbenhall, Warwickshire (NGR SP 3262 7135).

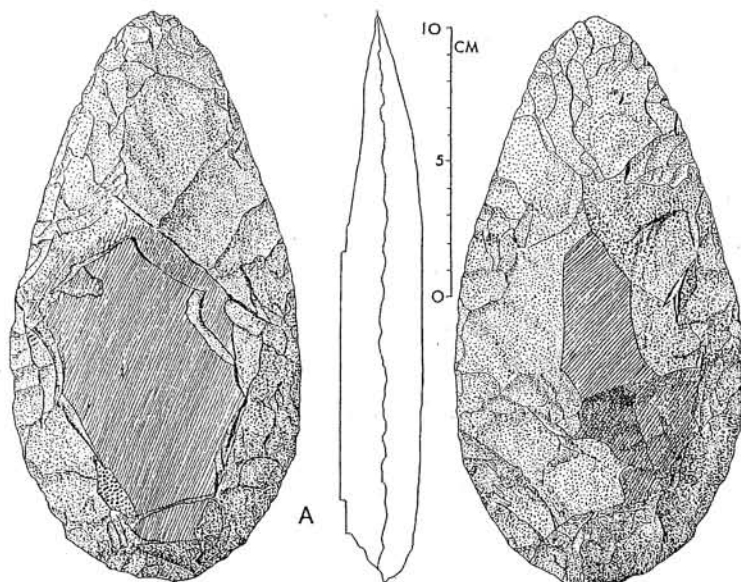
There is a gradually increasing list of palaeoliths being found in Warwickshire and elsewhere in the Midlands (MacRae and Moloney 1988), but these new discoveries are unique in that not only can they be attributed with certainty to their position within a complex Quaternary stratigraphy, but their virtually mint condition precludes any possibility of their having been derived from earlier surfaces or sediments. Also, the three hand-axes are made of andesitic tuffs, a very rare material for the manufacture of such tools, and no other site in Britain has produced more than an isolated specimen. The source of this type of rock could be the Lake District or North Wales, but it is more likely that the Palaeolithic craftsman had used glacial erratics rather than that this be regarded as evidence for their travelling. Andesitic tuff is found among the erratics in the local tills.

The site of Waverley Wood Farm Pit is at the grid reference quoted above and not to be confused with Waverley Wood which is three-quarters of a mile distant, belongs to the forestry Commission, and is unquarried. It is on the other side of Weston Lane to Waverley Wood Farm Pit. Attention was first drawn to this site by Shotton (1986) who identified a channel of organic-bearing sediments cut into the Triassic bedrock of Mercian Mudstone, sealed beneath the classic Wolstonian succession of the Midlands, i.e.:

<u>Deposit</u>	<u>Thickness</u>
Thrussington Till	2 - 3m
Baginton Sand	1 - 2m
Baginton/Lillington Gravel	4 - 5m
Organic beds in channel	?

It has been thanks to the vigilance of Mr Brian Ward, who keeps a watchful eye on the material dug from the base of the Baginton/Lillington Gravel before it is conveyed to the crushing plant, that these finds have been made. He has also been responsible for saving most of the remains of some large mammals, including straight-tusked elephant and Bos/Bison, currently being

studied by Andrew Carrant and Adrian Lister. Insect remains from the organic deposits are being examined by Russell Coope.

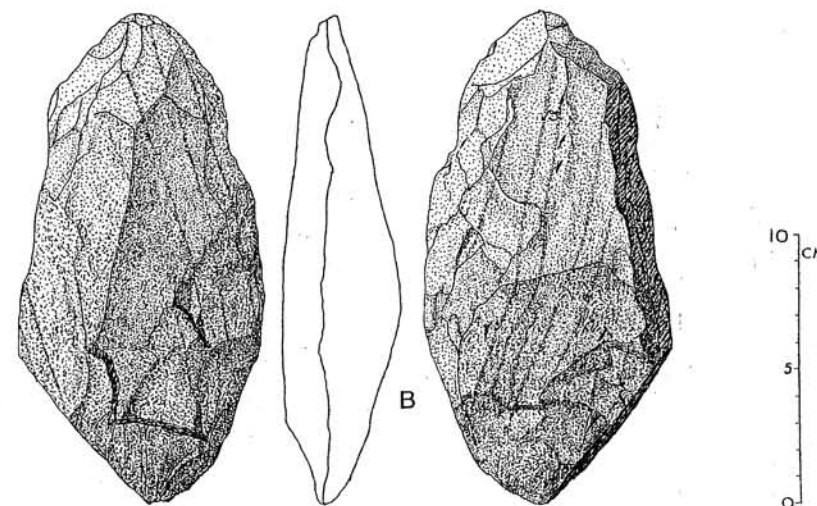


1. A. Hand-axe of andesitic tuff from Waverley Wood Farm Pit, Bubbenhall, Warwickshire

The first specimen found (Fig. 1:A) is made from a slab of andesitic tuff which was originally weathered with a light green patina 1 - 1.5mm thick. Most of this had been flaked away and the tool-forming flake scars are fresh and unweathered. The hand-axe is remarkably thin (213 x 112 x 31mm) because its thickness was controlled by two iron-stained bedding planes which must have limited the original slab from which it was chipped. The workmanship is magnificent and it is surprising that such a beautiful implement could be fashioned from such unusual rock.

The second specimen (Fig. 2:B) is also made from an andesitic tuff, which shows no tendency to be slab-like, for traces of bedding planes can be seen traversing the specimen at a

high angle along which there is no tendency to split. Its dimensions are 185 x 92 x 44mm. Only one side is fashioned into a cutting edge, for the other side is determined by a joint face and what appears to be a poorer joint cut by cleavage, and neither is conducive to accurate flaking. The artefact has not developed visible weathering.

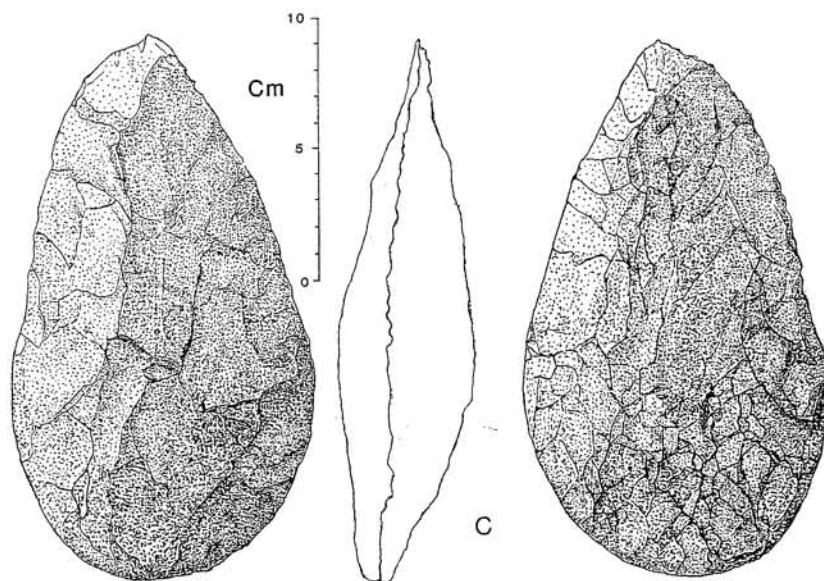


2. B. Hand-axe of andesitic tuff from Waverley Wood Farm Pit, Bubbenhall, Warwickshire

A third hand-axe (Fig. 3:C) of the same rock was found early in 1990, very similar in size and workmanship to the first discovery (A). It is made from a boulder with a thick, weathered crust which has been left on one side. This suggests that a large glacial erratic may have been used as a veritable quarry for this and possibly the other hand-axes.

Another hand-axe which is relevant to these discoveries (Fig. 5:F) was found several years ago at Brandon, 5.5km to the north-north-east of Waverley Wood Farm, and not to be confused with the artefacts coming from Waverley. It is a well-made hand-axe (139 x 77 x 39mm) fabricated from an andesitic tuff which in this case was thin-sectioned. Unlike the other specimens it was evenly patinated with a light, greenish coating which appears to

cover wind-fretting on the flake facets.

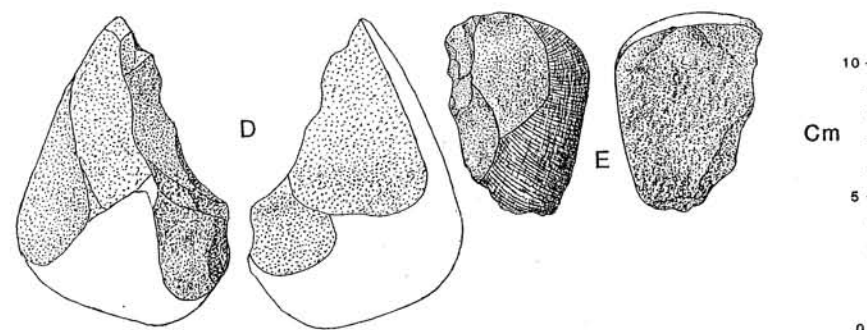


3. C. Hand-axe of andesitic tuff from Waverley Wood Farm Pit, Bubbenhall, Warwickshire

It was picked up by J. Fennell on the Mercia Mudstone floor of a large pit from which about 3m of Baginton/Lillington Gravel had been removed. As these gravels were themselves overlain by Avon No. 4 Terrace, the describers of this find (Fennell and Shotton 1977) were reluctant to ascribe it to the unconformity from which it was picked up, and preferred the Terrace gravels which were well known in the county as an occasional source of Acheulian implements. Now, in the light of the discoveries at Waverley, it seems more likely that the hand-axe was lying on the plane of unconformity where was found and had remained in position long enough to develop a weathered crust before being

covered by Wolstonian sediments.

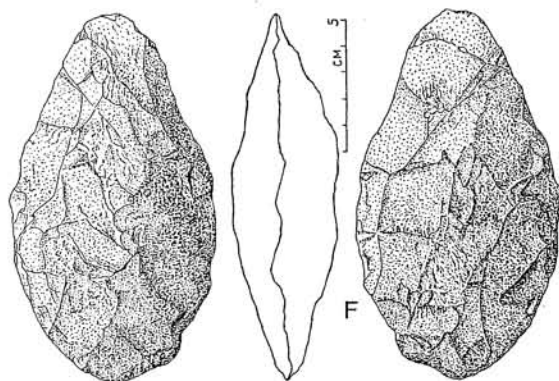
Other evidence of human handiwork preserved at Waverley at or near the base of the Baginton/Lillington Gravels comes in the form of modified 'Bunter pebbles' of quartzite. Figure 4:D has at least ten large flakes removed and could be regarded as a simple hand-axe. The edges between adjacent flakes are all very waterworn, and this artefact must have undergone severe battering in transport to its ultimate destination in the basal gravels above the organic sediments.



4. D-E. Modified Bunter pebbles from Waverley Wood Farm Pit, Bubbenhall, Warwickshire

Figure 4:E was collected by Mr R.J. MacRae from a tip heap in the south quarry. One side shows the large flake by which the separation from the quartzite pebble was achieved, with a well-developed positive bulb of percussion; the other side exhibits a large flake removal with a negative bulb of percussion, plus several trimming flakes. It can be described as a scraper. The artefact has a fretted appearance, and it has taken on a high polish, suggestive of wind action. Again, there is the possibility of some lapse of time between when the implement was made and its natural conveyance to the site of the south quarry.

Finally, when Dr David Keen of Coventry Polytechnic was examining the trench which cut through the organic beds in the channel beneath the Baginton/Lillington Gravels, he picked out from gravel on the south face a flake, humanly struck from a Bunter pebble. This raises the possibility of artefacts occurring in the channel deposits, but, as these are not likely to be exploited, there will be little chance to search them.



5.F. Hand-axe of andesitic tuff from Brandon, Warwickshire

On the question of the age of the implements, their typology is of little help, other than to place them in some Acheulian industry any time within the Lower Palaeolithic period in Britain. The conventional, geological correlation would place the organic, interglacial channel into the stage preceding the Wolstonian stage, i.e. the Hoxnian, in which, of course, such hand-axes would be in accord. Recent suggestions (Rose 1987) that the glacial episode represented by the Wolstonian succession is the same as that of the pre-Hoxnian Anglian Stage would, if proven, place these hand-axes in a pre-Anglian context. This would be unusual, but in view of the evidence from Boxgrove at least, not contradictory from the archaeological aspect. Apart from Welton-le-Wold (Wymer and Straw 1977), this is the only site in Britain with hand-axes found unequivocally beneath in situ boulder clay. Whatever conclusions may be reached concerning their position in the British Quaternary sequence, it is obvious that they are of great importance.

In respect of the other hand-axe mentioned from Brandon, it may be significant that at the base of the adjacent Pool Farm Pit there are organics which contain an insect fauna similar to that from Waverley Wood Farm (G.R. Coope pers. comm.).

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