

to be made, with John Keeping rightly in sole charge of the work.

Abingdon (Oxfordshire)

For many years, Jeffrey Wallis (that master of lithic illustration) has haunted the gravel pits around Abingdon, a few miles south of Oxford, though he has received scant acknowledgement of his efforts. He has lately increased his finds to 19 quartzite bifaces and chopping tools and 8 flint bifaces, thereby adding substantially to the tally of Upper Thames Palaeolithic material (fig 3). The quartzites alone have reinforced my own insistence (tediously reiterated!) that this material was regularly used in a flint-scarce environment. Recoveries in the Oxford region are slow just now, because of pit closures, by Jeffrey (a palaeomaniac if ever there was one) keeps his eyes on the ground.

From a different source comes news of three 'bout coupé' (flat-butted cordate) handaxes picked up some years ago by Brian Beveridge of Gloucester, at one of the Abingdon pits. This makes seven MTA bifaces from the river gravels here - perhaps relics of a single fleeting visit by a band of Mousterians, who knows? Middle Palaeolithic evidence is rare indeed in the region. Jeff Wallis and I have seen and recorded these three, of which one is illustrated here (fig 4).

Wolvey (Warwickshire)

It was a cause for wonder a decade ago that numbers of flint and quartzite handaxes were being picked up on the surface of ploughed fields in what seemed a most unlikely place: the border of northeastern Warwickshire with Leicestershire. The late Professor F.W. Shotton (1988) dealt fully with the geomorphology of the region and argued that these Acheulian artefacts, which include scored flakes as well as the handaxes, had been transported by a glacier, subsequently incorporated in outwash deposits and later brought by erosion to the surface, where the discoveries have been made by Mr R. Waite. The original source area is thus somewhere north of Warwickshire, and the Pleistocene deposit, on whose surface the artefacts now occur around the village of Wolvey, is the Wigston Gravel.

Alan Saville (1988) has fully described and illustrated Mr Waite's Lower Palaeolithic finds, along with a number of modified quartzite pebbles and other pieces, not necessarily of Palaeolithic age. Since then, Mr Waite has added to his collection, so that the assemblage now totals about 20 quartzite bifaces, 30 small crude flint bifaces and 30 or so of the chopper-like quartzite tools, plus numerous flakes. Mr Waite carefully records and sketches his finds, and he keeps in close touch with Warwick Museum and with myself.

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References

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16, The Tennis, Cassington, Oxon.

STOP PRESS: A handaxe from the Stanton Harcourt Interglacial Channel.

R.J. MacRae

No sooner had I completed the preceding article for this number of *Lithics*, than an important new find was made. Dr Kate Scott, Research Associate at the Donald Baden-Powell Quaternary Research Centre at Oxford, who is directing the excavations in the new interglacial channel at Stanton Harcourt (Oxfordshire), brought me, with unconcealed excitement, a fine flint handaxe, 170 x 90 mm, found there the day before. The implement was discovered, *in situ* in the channel deposits, by her assistant Sharanjij ("Paddy") Paddam. The new handaxe closely resembles, in style, colouring and condition, the larger of the 50 bifaces I have collected over the years

from the gravel pit known as Gravelly Guy (MacRae 1990), some one and a half kilometres west (and upstream) of the current exposures of the Stanton Harcourt Channel. The surface of the implement shows scattered traces of a phenomenon frequently seen on the Gravelly Guy artefacts: patchy exfoliation and chemical alteration of the surface, which we take to represent heavy weathering.

In the three years of excavation in the Stanton Harcourt Channel, located at the Linch Hill Gravel Pit (MacRae, *op. cit.*, quoting other references), there have been numerous and important finds of mammalian bones and other faunal material in excellent condition, and even plant remains and wood, but hitherto only two small derived bifaces, heavily abraded. The latter would appear to be simply stones of doubtful origin in the channel bed, which just happen to be artefacts. The new find is of all together different quality, and is in sharp condition. If it can indeed be related to the handaxes from the nearby Gravelly Guy Pit, is of considerable importance. It could lead to a revision of our present ideas about the direction of the channel's course, and its stream velocity, and might offer at least circumstantial evidence for the age of the Gravelly Guy handaxes, which seem to come mainly from the base of the gravel at that pit and may well have lain on an old land-surface below the gravel mass. In any case, the exciting fact is that the handaxe was carefully extracted from the same horizon, within the Stanton Harcourt Channel, as abundant remains of mammoth and numerous molluscs (*Corbicula fulminalis*, *Unio* sp., etc). The channel's faunal assemblage is thought likely to be attributable to Oxygen Isotope Stage 7.

We have long hoped that a handaxe would be found in a well-stratified context at Stanton Harcourt, and also the artefacts would turn up in proper association with the interglacial channel and its other contents; now, patience has been rewarded. Clearly, much work lies ahead to turn the potential value of this discovery into reality, but meanwhile the champagne has been opened. A fuller report on the new handaxe, with greater technical detail concerning all aspects of the find, will be prepared in due course.

Reference

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16, The Tennis, Cassington, Oxon

The Southern Rivers Palaeolithic Project

John Wymer

Members who attended the Lithic Studies meeting at Franks House on the 22nd January will have heard a short summary of this project, and a detailed report has now appeared in *PAST*, the newsletter of the Prehistoric Society. For those who have neither seen this nor heard of the project, it is broadly a survey of all the known Lower Palaeolithic sites in England, south of the River Thames. It was prompted by a realisation that a valuable and limited archaeological source was endangered by a lack of sufficient information to enable County Archaeological Officers (CAOs), County Planners and developers to identify and evaluate the potential of sites, especially when threatened. It is restricted to the area south of the Thames, from Cornwall to Kent as the majority of Palaeolithic sites are in this part of Britain, and more is already known and published of those in East Anglia, the Thames itself and the Midlands. It is significant that the two counties of England with the greatest number of known sites, and some of the richest, Kent and Hampshire, have previously only had very general surveys of them published, apart from reports and monographs on outstanding sites such as Swanscombe, Northfleet, Sturry and Warsash.

The project is funded by English Heritage for three years, administered by Wessex Archaeology in collaboration with Dr Clive Gamble and in consultation with several Quaternary specialists (mainly members of the Lithic Studies Society), County Archaeologists and officers of English Heritage. John Wymer is the Project Leader; Phil Harding assists in the field and consults with CAO's and museums; Karen Walker contacts county councils, and examines maps and literature in order to assess the current and future threats from gravel extraction, and plots the locations of major quarries in the past. Art work, publishing and general back-up is received from Wessex Archaeology through the management of Andrew Lawson and Sue Davies.

The plan of the survey is to produce reports on six regions, based on watersheds, which will contain distribution plans of all the known Lower Palaeolithic sites with lists describing each site in tabulated form: i.e. provenance; date and circumstances of discovery; county SMR numbers; geological sediments in which found; categories of finds made, quantities and where preserved; major published references or source of information; present state of site. Obviously, with such a multitude of sites this information is very abbreviated, and several items unknown. The maps show the Quaternary sediments of each area mainly at a scale of 1:50,000, but 1:25,000 or even town plans for prolific areas. These are taken from