

BOOK REVIEW

High Lodge: Excavations by G. de G. Sieveking, 1962-8 and J. Cook, 1988. Edited by N.M. Ashton, J. Cook, S.G. Lewis and J. Rose. London: British Museum Press. 1992. ISBN 0-7141-13697. 192 pp, 73 pl, 94 fig, 45 tab. Price £65.00.

Paul Callow

Some sites generate a stream of interim reports during and after excavation, so that at most only a modest final publication is demanded. In contrast, anyone relying for information on more or less accessible literature could be forgiven for fancifully supposing that a cloak of invisibility had descended on the High Lodge project for many years. Very nearly a quarter of a century elapsed between the close of the excavations conducted at High Lodge by Gale Sieveking for the British Museum and the appearance of this book. The explanation is to be found in a very brief mention in the Preface by I. Longworth. Quite simply, what the geologists had to say about the age of the site was totally at odds with the archaeological wisdom of the day. The inconsistency was thought too great for publication, and paralysis set in. How strange that seems now, but of course we are more accustomed to the problems which multi-disciplinary work brings. Of the 1960s team (G. de G. Sieveking, E.A. Frances, R.W. Hey, R.M.S. Perrin, C. Turner and R.G. West) only Frances and Perrin appear in this volume; the reader may safely be left to imagine the frustrations of which their contributions are now the representatives. By the time J. Cook was appointed as Sieveking's successor, a fresh excavation was clearly called for, and with a fresh team.

First impressions, then. This is a splendid, even sumptuous publication, very well printed and bound; a substantial volume, too, both physically and in terms of the effort which has gone into it. Nevertheless, it is a shorter read than its bulk suggests, because it is packed with drawings of the very highest quality. Also, it may reasonably be described as two books in one. Part I is the site report as such, describing the work and the results, whereas Part II is a complete illustrated catalogue of the stone artefacts found prior to the 1960s excavations (many of them during the 19th century).

Glancing at the table of contents, one is struck by the way that space has been allocated among the different disciplines. Although High Lodge has long been particularly famed for its archaeology, the biological and earth sciences predominate in this report. Of the 155 pages of Part I which precede the summary, only 68 are written by archaeologists (include those on the history of the site). Reading on, it becomes clear why this should be so.

The first chapter, High Lodge: regional context and geological background' (J. Rose), comes as something of a surprise, and I suspect that the editors must have agonised somewhat over its position (and indeed the editing process itself was not tight enough for it to be totally successful, when as yet unexplained terms are used). As the title indicates, the details of the High Lodge site itself are largely ignored by Rose, who especially concentrates on two deposits. The first, the High Lodge sands and clayey silts, is linked by him to the Shouldham sands and gravels to the north, and so to a pre-glacial river system which can be traced from the Midlands through Lincolnshire and East Anglia to the coast at Lowestoft. The second is the Lowestoft Till, laid down during the Anglian glacial stage. Rose argues that the initial Anglian ice flow was of mainly northern Pennine ice moving south-eastwards through the Midlands and curving round eastwards through East Anglia. Later in the same glacial event a piedmont lobe of Scottish ice fanned out through the Wash Basin. It was the earlier ice flow which played a key role at High Lodge.

The chapter which in a more conventionally edited book might have appeared first, 'Historical background and description of excavations 1962-8 and 1988' (N.M. Ashton), describes very clearly how High Lodge has puzzled the scientific community for many years. It also makes very effective use of line drawings in describing the complex process of excavation in the 1960s and 1988.

Flint artefacts were first discovered at High Lodge in the 1860s. It was Sir John Evans in 1872 who described the stratigraphic sequence as consisting of boulder clay, red clay (containing finely made flint sidescrapers and points), and then sands and gravels (containing handaxes). He found a parallel for the scraper industry in that from Le Moustier in the Dordogne. Since then, this supposed link to the variously named Cave Period / Mousterian / Middle Palaeolithic of the High Lodge scraper industry has been one important element in any archaeological discussion of High Lodge, because of the difficulty of accommodating Drift Period / Acheulian / Lower Palaeolithic handaxes of apparently later date. Another long standing issue has been whether or not a second, overlying boulder clay exists at High Lodge, as claimed by some observers. Archaeological thinking, again, has tended to play its part here. At the outset, the very existence of pre-glacial humans was being questioned; later, Dr Allen Sturge postulated that a second ice-sheet was responsible for an inverted stratigraphy. And whether there were one or two boulder clays, it would be necessary to integrate them into the East Anglian sequence.

The objectives of the 1962-8 excavations were thus: "to obtain a properly excavated series of artefacts from the site, and to place both these and the existing British Museum collection into a firmer geological context".

The next four chapters concern the geological issues: 'High Lodge -

stratigraphy and depositional environments' (S.G. Lewis); 'Structural studies in and around High Lodge' (the late E.A. Francis); 'Heavy mineral composition of the sands at High Lodge' (J. Rose, H. Davies and S.G. Lewis); and 'Recycled palynomorphs from the High Lodge clayey-silts' (C.O. Hunt and J. Rose).

Lewis's chapter is arguably the most significant in the book, describing the sedimentary units one by one in great detail, and integrating his own observations with those by the other specialists. One slight complication for anyone chiefly interested in the archaeology is the abandonment of the numbering of sedimentary units adopted during the Sieveking excavations (fair enough, of course, under the circumstances). Instead, he uses terms describing their lithology, and where necessary colour. The term 'till' is rejected in favour of 'diamiction', as the latter is not loaded with an assumption about the mode of origin. His first illustration, Figure 3.1, sets out the outlines of the sequence, and his lithostratigraphic classification and his interpretation are reproduced here:

Breckland coversands (Devensian aeolian deposits)

Mildenhall upper diamiction (Debris flow derived from exposures of lower diamiction)

Mildenhall upper sands and gravels (Anglian glaciofluvial outwash deposits)

High Lodge clayey-silts and High Lodge sands (pre-Anglian fluvial and lacustrine sediments contorted, sheared and interbedded with lower diamiction as a result of glaciotectionic disturbance / transport)

Mildenhall lower sands (Glaciofluvial outwash deposits)

Mildenhall lower diamiction (Lodgement till deposited by ice during the Anglian glaciation).

He comments that the lower diamiction, sand and clayey-silts have been subjected to deformation by shear stress; the ice which deposited the lower diamiction also entrained the pre-existing High Lodge clayey-silts, and transported and deposited them in a down-ice position. In this, he is particularly indebted to Francis's study of the microstructure of the diamictions and clayey silts, and the orientation of shear planes.

The heavy mineral analyses link the clayey silts to the pre-glacial river referred to by Rose, and show that the diamictions are equivalent in every way to the Anglian glaciogenic deposits of East Anglia (the Mildenhall sands and gravels are a mixture of the two, reworked by meltwater). The importance of the recycled palynomorphs is that they provide palaeocatchment information which accords well with the clast and heavy mineral lithologies.

Chapters 6 to 10 describe the environmental information recovered from the site: 'Pollen and algal microfossils from the High Lodge clayey-silts' (C.O. Hunt); 'Charcoal from High Lodge' (C. Cartwright); 'The High Lodge insect fauna' (G.R. Coope); and 'The High Lodge mammalian fauna' (A.J. Stuart).

The pollen and algal microfossils from the clayey silts lead to a cautious environmental interpretation: they suggest a cool, slightly damp climate during an interstadial or a period late in an interglacial (parallels are drawn with north Saskatchewan or central Sweden today), and the *Pinus* and *Betula* charcoal fragments generally accord with this. The insects indicate cool temperate conditions, probably with no greater continentality than at present. The most significant item in the very sparse mammalian fauna is a premolar fragment of *Dicerorhinus etruscus* from the clayey silts, corroborating a pre-Anglian date.

The archaeology puts in an appearance in chapters 11 and 12: 'The High Lodge flint industries' (N.M. Ashton); and 'The interpretation and context of the High Lodge industries' (N.M. Ashton and J. McNabb). Ashton's task is complicated by having three groups of finds to work with. The 'Old Collections' are highly selected in favour of spectacular pieces which are poorly provenanced and have little contextual information; they are chiefly of interest as a large sample of flake tools and bifaces. The 1960s excavations supplied about 2000 artefacts in all, including 100 flake tools, 14 bifaces and 80 cores from all levels, and therefore provide the bulk of the information about lithic reduction processes. The 1988 excavations yielded 104 artefacts, of which 5 are flake tools and 5 cores; they include numerous small chips, showing how many of these were overlooked earlier. Much of the analysis has perforce to employ the stratigraphic labelling of the 1960s, which is slightly confusing because it has been so little used elsewhere that it is not very familiar. Given the paucity of material from the later biface industry, most of the discussion concerns the industry from the ice-rafted deposits.

Ashton rejects elaborate technological and technological schemes in favour of simplicity. The knapping method is seen as a progression of techniques from simple removal of one or more flakes from a single platform to the use of alternate or alternating platforms; with the possibility of using more than one method in the development of a single core. Two main approaches to the modification of flakes resulting from core reduction are suggested: the production of 'flaked flakes' (including Clactonian notches), and the retouching of slightly larger blanks as (chiefly) scrapers. An observation which I found interesting was that there were differences in the angle and position of retouch suggesting a functional distinction between right and left sides. All in all, this is a difficult area, well handled.

Expanding the discussion, Ashton and McNabb clearly set out to provoke controversy. For them, the presence at High Lodge of an ovate/limande biface industry with tranche removals confirms the untenability of the evolutionary model of biface development (though the discovery of a similar industry at Boxgrove had already stolen some of their thunder). As for the 'classic' High Lodge flake-tool industry, again its early date set against the many parallels

with demonstrably later sites destroys the traditional framework. As a final thunderbolt, the authors argue that it is premature to recognise groupings such as Acheulian and Clactonian within the British Lower Palaeolithic. Although there some who will rise to the bait, I cannot help feeling that for others the argument had already moved on some time before (for me, at least, the beginnings at least of such a conversion came a good many years ago, when I saw the high-quality flake tools being produced in East Africa nearly a million years before High Lodge).

The summary by N.M. Ashton, S.G. Lewis and J. Rose brings together all the different threads in a very readable manner and is much more than a simple precis of what has gone before. Perhaps the most striking illustration in the book (Fig. 13.1) is to be found here; it consists of a series of six reconstructions of events at the site, showing the impact of the ice-sheet particularly well. All credit, too, for including French and German translations of the text of this chapter.

There is a single appendix, 'Lithology of the High Lodge sediments' (R.M.S. Perrin) which describes work done during the 1962-8 excavations, giving detailed tables, though without further comment.

Part II, the 'Catalogue of the High Lodge Old Collections', is the fruits of a task which occupied some of the British Museum's best illustrators for a considerable period. Each piece is illustrated and given a simple description, with typological classification and measurements following F. Bordes's scheme, and occasional supplementary information about provenance (it is a pity, though, that the butts of the flake tools are not illustrated). While it is welcome to have all this, it is a curious luxury by modern standards of publication (and presumably adds to the cover price!); also, given the history of the project, I am left with the impression that its production was of the nature of a displacement activity while grittier tasks were being avoided!

In a book which merits considerable praise, there is one glaring deficiency which I find hard to understand. There is not a single photograph to be found anywhere, whether of the site in general, the excavations in progress, the stratigraphic features, or indeed any of the finds back in the laboratory. It is almost as if the site were an abstraction, rather than something physical.

High Lodge is not the only excavation to have waited twenty or more years for publication, and will not be the last either, although one hopes that tighter control over funding will eventually put an end to such cases. Even if some parts of this book are stronger than others, it is nevertheless a very much better conclusion to a rather sorry episode than I for one had ever expected, and its editors and contributors are to be heartily congratulated, as too is the British Museum.

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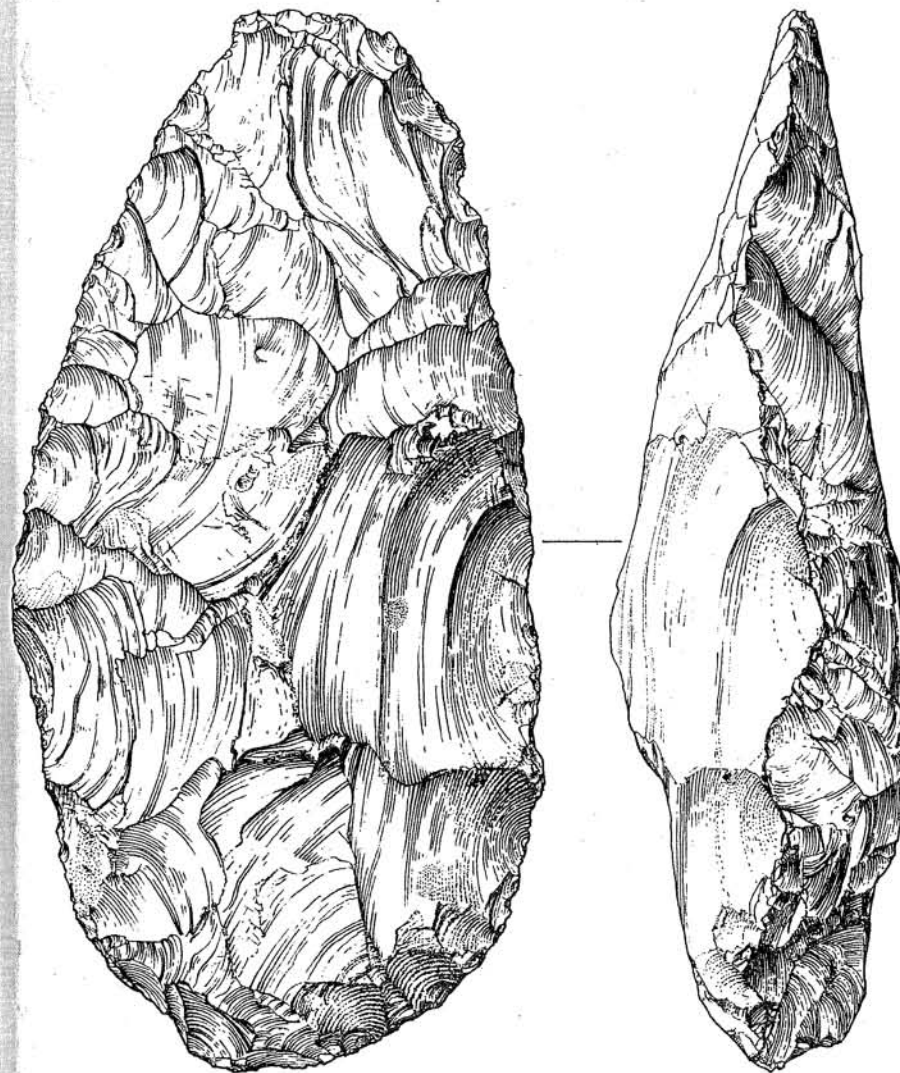
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