

The VIII International Flint Symposium, Bochum, Germany

David Field

English Heritage, Kemble Drive, Swindon, SN2 2GZ

The VIIIth International Flint Symposium took place in Bochum, Germany between 13th and 17th September 1999, the Deutsches Bergbau-Museum playing host to almost 150 delegates from 24 countries. Dwarfed by its winding gear, the German National Mining Museum provided an imposing and appropriate setting, with its exhibition galleries on flint material (including exhibits on Cissbury, Grimes Graves and Harrow Hill) and early metal mining and an extensive library relating to the early exploitation of materials. In addition the museum was responsible for the first comprehensive catalogue of flint mines across Europe, a publication long out of print but appropriately reprinted for the Symposium (Deutsches Bergbau-Museum 1980).

Traditionally the Symposium deals with all aspects of flint research, giving equal weight to geology/chemistry and archaeology, but on this occasion contributions on archaeology definitely outweighed all others. Papers were presented by participants from countries from as far afield as Sweden, Ukraine, Russia, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Israel, Spain, Peru and the USA and as usual it was necessary to run parallel sessions, always annoying, but the dash between lecture theatres at the end of each paper is very much part of the event. Almost 70 papers were delivered dealing with subjects as diverse as the 'petrological composition and provenance of Neolithic black stone artefacts' from Switzerland, and the 'quality of debitage as a result of mineral structure in flint nodules', to the 'Lower-Middle Palaeolithic flint workshops of Ca Palui' in Italy, and 'Gunflint workshop traces in the Lessini Mountains', all of which kept delegates alternately enthralled, and bemused as they struggled to comprehend meanings obscured by translation. Favoured subjects again included the Palaeolithic exploitation of material, Neolithic and later flint mines, and the distribution of material from certain sources, but on this occasion inexplicably there were fewer papers on typology, experimental knapping and micro-wear. It would take too long to describe all contributions, and in any case the Proceedings should be published in 2000 for those who are particularly keen, but amongst the more thought provoking were:

Lars Larsson (Sweden) *Flint and fire-destruction of wealth*. Excavations in Sweden had revealed a series of pits that contained over 70 axes, chisels, arrowheads and other tools that had been deliberately burnt. Some had been deliberately broken before being subjected to this treatment. Such burnt implements are also often found outside megalithic

tombs and Larsson considered this to represent the ritual burning or sacrifice of rare objects, destruction of the artefact being a dramatic but similar process to that of cremation of a human body involving changes in colour and form.

Martin Oliva (Czech Republic) *The Krumlov Forest exploitation area: mining techniques, chronology, symbolic meanings*. Nine flint extraction areas within woodland in South Moravia covering an area of 100ha had been investigated, and the surface was described as comprising a mass of depressions up to 15m diameter which when excavated were up to 4.5m deep. Oliva suggested that such extensive mines were dug communally and that gatherings of large numbers of people to dig mines was a social convention to channel energy to ease tension and provide social cohesion, that is, some kind of 'conformity ceremony'.

Outside the lecture halls, books on flint in many languages sold briskly, and there was a good trade in other items such as Letraset mining symbols, Symposium T-shirts, and oh yes bottles of 'feuerstein bier' with the Symposium logo on the label.

The fieldtrip, an integral part of the Symposium, allowed discussion of the detail of the papers with other delegates, while a visit to a quarry in Limburg provided opportunities to inspect the stratigraphy and test the material (its always a pleasure to watch Bruce Bradley knapping). Several phases of earthworks on a hilltop overlooking Aachen (Germany) testified to the longevity of flint and chalk extraction adjacent to the medieval town, and what better way to visit Rijcholt (Netherlands) than with the excavators P Felder and colleagues to provide anecdotal interest. Finally the mines at Spiennes (Belgium) where the extensive traces of earthworks on the surface are generally ignored, visitors usually making straight for the underground. The shaft open to the public is currently too dangerous to descend but another has been recently excavated at nearby Petit-Spiennes as part of a programme of modern excavation at the site. As the first Neolithic flint mine excavated in the world the visit provided the ideal conclusion to the Symposium.

The next Symposium is in Israel in 2003, and it would be no bad thing to see a greater representation from Great Britain. Certainly we have much to offer.

Bibliography

Deutsches Bergbau-Museum, 1980. *5000 Jahre Feuersteinbergbau: die Suche nach dem Stahl der Steinzeit* Reprint 1999 Bochum: Germany