

BOOK REVIEWS

***Excavations at Ferriter's Cove, 1983-95: Last Foragers, First Farmers in the Dingle Peninsula.* Woodman, P.C., Anderson, E. & Finlay, N. 1999. Wordwell Ltd., Bray. ISBN 1-869857-33-X. £25.00.**

The discovery of a single chance find - a tang of a Neolithic plano-convex knife - sparked a small-scale rescue excavation to investigate a possible Neolithic settlement site at Ferriter's Cove on the western end of the Dingle Peninsula in Ireland. The brief field season, directed by Peter Woodman of the University of Cork in 1983, led to more extensive work following the realisation that the site was predominantly later Mesolithic rather than Neolithic as had been expected. This book presents the results of the fieldwork project and explains the importance of Ferriter's Cove to our understanding of the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition in Ireland.

This monograph follows the traditional format we have come to expect of an excavation report. It commences with an introduction to the project and a description of the local geology and topography. The excavations revealed a large number of features, so all significant stake holes, fire spots and concentrations of lithic artefacts or faunal remains are described in detail.

Three chapters are devoted to the lithic assemblage. Refitting has been used to demonstrate the different reduction strategies for the removal of flakes and blades from a range of raw materials as diverse as beach pebble flint and local volcanic tuffs. A section on use wear provides ample evidence for a range of tasks being undertaken at this site using unmodified flakes and blades. The detailed descriptions and illustrations of the few retouched tools and stone artefacts provide a useful reminder of the differences that exist between the later Mesolithic knapped assemblages of Ireland and those of

England and Wales. However, similarities also emerge in the discussion about the polished stone axes, which places these and a grindstone very firmly in the Mesolithic. This interpretation challenges the traditional view that polishing did not take place in the Mesolithic and mirrors a debate taking place in Wales where discoveries of ground axes at The Nab Head and at Ogmores-by-Sea have also come from later Mesolithic contexts.

The organic remains from the site are also interesting and reports on the range of fish, bird and molluscan species provide evidence for seasonal use of the site. But it is undoubtedly the mammal remains that are the most important discovery at Ferriter's Cove for, not only has the excavation uncovered later Mesolithic human remains, but also early Neolithic cattle bones and a single, undated sheep tooth.

The report pulls the threads together from the specialist reports in two chapters to provide a detailed interpretation of the site and to place it in its broader context. Ferriter's Cove thus reveals discrete activity zones where use is demonstrated to be short-stay and seasonal. The stakeholes are interpreted as drying racks, whilst the fire spots are shown to be outdoor hearths. The marine component of the human diet is linked to the quantity of fish bone and shellfish middens on the site. But it is the early dating of the cattle at the site that makes this report significant as the interpretation of the dating evidence reopens a debate about the origins of the Irish Neolithic.

This report was a pleasure to read, it is clearly presented with splendid line drawings of all the significant finds and contains some useful colour plates. The only minor criticism is that site plans would benefit from keys, for that accompanying the first drawing does not contain all the symbols represented on later plans and sections. The solid evidence that this report provides for the existence of Stone Age archaeology in south-western Ireland and also for the early dating of the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition in Ireland makes this essential reading for those with an interest in this period. This book should certainly stimulate further discussion on this subject.

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***Flint Architecture of East Anglia.* Hart, S. 2000. Giles de la Mare Publishers Ltd., London. 150pp; 128 colour pls; 48 b&w pls. ISBN 1-900357-18-6. Paperback: £19.99.**

All aficionados of what this Society's most well-kent face habitually describes as "the master substance" will relish this initiation into the architectural use of

flint. It comes as a surprise to realize there is so little previous general literature on this subject and the author - an architect himself - has performed a major service (obviously a labour of love) in compiling this account. Flint has of course been used as a basic building material since at least Roman times, and its particular strengths and weaknesses have conditioned many of the characteristics of architecture in flint country, not least the famous round towers of East Anglian churches. Its other main architectural usage has been decorative rather than structural, with flint-knapping skills employed to the full, for example in creating the infilling of limestone emblems and tracery on late Medieval churches.

After brief introductions to the origins and nature of flint, to the constructional features of flint walling, and a rather hurried look at the chronology of building in flint, the author gets to the heart of his book - an extensive account of the varieties of flintwork to be encountered in the buildings of East Anglia, where flint architecture arguably reaches its British apogee. To structure his account the author has devised a nomenclature and classification of flintwork, using major categories from 'as-found flintwork' to 'flushwork', each with numerous sub-types. This not only provides a framework for the rest of the book, but it surely will become the basis for a standard terminology to be applied to architectural flintwork in Britain.

Since flint is virtually indestructible, it is the associated materials - mortar and weaker stones - used in constructing flint walling which create the problems for conservation. It is to be hoped that this book will foster increased recognition of the value of flint architecture as an outstanding example of local building tradition, both ecclesiastical and vernacular, and thus help ensure due attention from planning authorities and owners alike. Nor should flint architecture be thought of only in conservation terms, since there is scope for innovation in the use of flint from a new generation of architects in tune with the use of local materials.

The author has produced a readable yet authoritative work, which will educate anyone with an eye for architectural variation, and I would guess the reader would not even have to be a flint enthusiast to enjoy this book. Anyone who is, however, will be captivated immediately by the superb illustrations in the central colour section; there is something quite mesmerizing about the close-up details of different styles of flint walling, whether it be flint on its own or in conjunction with brick or other stones.

The book has a glossary, a general index, and an index of place-names, but a slight drawback is the absence of any maps or diagrams. The author shows little interest in the industrial or sociological aspects

of his subject, and there is hardly any investigation into the supply of flint raw material to the building trade, but these are minor complaints. Overall this is a fascinating book which flint enthusiasts should not be without.

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Hengeworld. Pitts, M. 2000. Century. London. 404 pages, 18 plates, 57 line-drawings. ISBN 0 7126 79545. HB £17.99.

Hengeworld is an enjoyable read. Mike Pitts succeeds in making the archaeological record at least as absorbing and exciting as para-archaeological fantasy, rendering the fantasy redundant. He tells the parallel stories of Wessex in the third and second millennia BC and of its investigation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries AD with pace, warmth and enthusiasm. In the process he manages to infuse life and personality into the protagonists of both, although this must have been a challenge in the case of some of the twentieth-century players.

An extensive, fragmented and sometimes forbidding literature has been digested into accessibility. Accurate and vivid vignettes cover easily communicated topics, such as the early history of aerial reconnaissance, and succeed impressively with more challenging and contentious ones, such as archaeoastronomy, the possibility that Neolithic carvings reflect the use of mind-altering drugs, or the source of the Stonehenge bluestones. The conclusions of the Stonehenge monograph are made available to many more readers than will ever tackle the family bible-sized source. The end product is as much the result of discussions, often relayed in the text, with numerous individuals, outside and inside archaeology, as it is of extensive reading. The significance of lithic technology comes to the fore - not surprisingly given that Mike Pitts was the founder of the Lithic Studies Society - in a consideration of how monumental stone and timber were worked: 'Technologically and conceptually, Stonehenge is an arrangement of absurdly massive stone tools', a reflection on the knapability of sarsen and bluestone.

Original research is woven into the fabric, notably in the form of excavations at the Sanctuary and the tracking-down and subsequent investigation of missing excavated skeletons. Original interpretation figures prominently too, often based on reconstructed experience of the monuments and on the metaphorical value of their components and the artefacts and food remains buried within them.