

AN UNUSUAL FLINT POINT FROM KINBEACHIE FARM, THE BLACK ISLE, SCOTLAND.

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INTRODUCTION

The archaeological site at Kinbeachie Farm, the Black Isle (Figure 1), comprises the traces of what appears to be an early Neolithic structure (Figure 2). In addition to the post-holes and pits that made up the structural remains, there were small assemblages of pottery, worked stone and the carbonised remains of crop plants. Radiocarbon dating suggests that the site was occupied between 3500 and 2900 cal BC. Full information on the whole site has been submitted for publication to the Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society (Barclay *et al.*, forthcoming). Artefactual material has been collected from Kinbeachie Farm by many people through much of the twentieth century (*ibid*). Most recently, in 1997, Headland Archaeology Ltd. compiled soil survey, geophysical survey and trial trenching, and the final report has been compiled under their aegis.

As a part of the post-excavation analysis, the author was invited to examine the Kinbeachie lithics. The lithic assemblage comprises 51 pieces and in common with the other artefactual remains it derives both from field collection and from detailed archaeological excavation. Early Neolithic sites are not common in Scotland and so the assemblage from Kinbeachie Farm included much that was of interest, and this is discussed in the full report (*ibid*). There is, however, one piece that is not included and it is the purpose of this publication to set out the information relating to this piece and bring it to the attention of others.

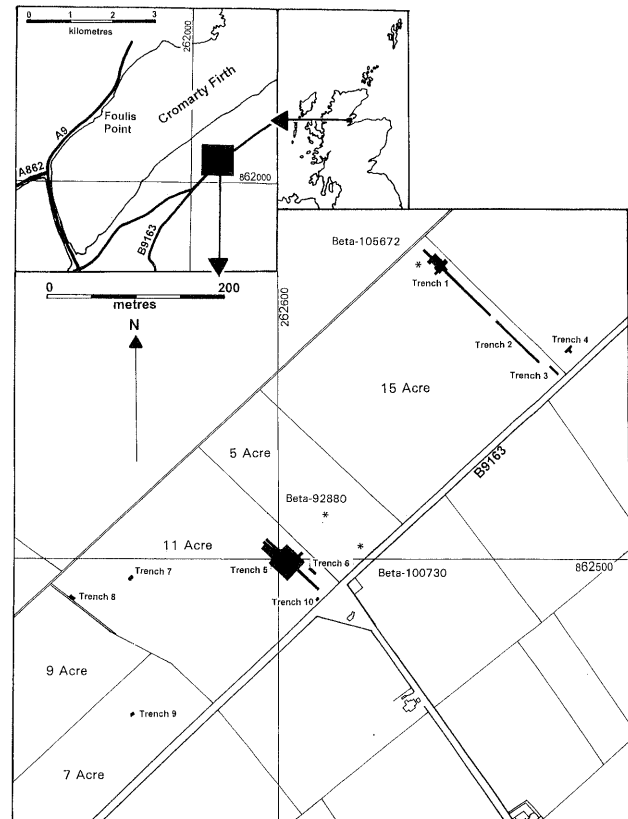


Figure 1: Location Map

THE BIFACIAL POINT

The piece in question is a large, bifacial, flint point (Figure 3), reputedly found as part of a “hoard” in the 1940s, by the then farmer, together with nine others (now lost). No precise location for this hoard was recorded, apart from the field name: Nine Acre Field.

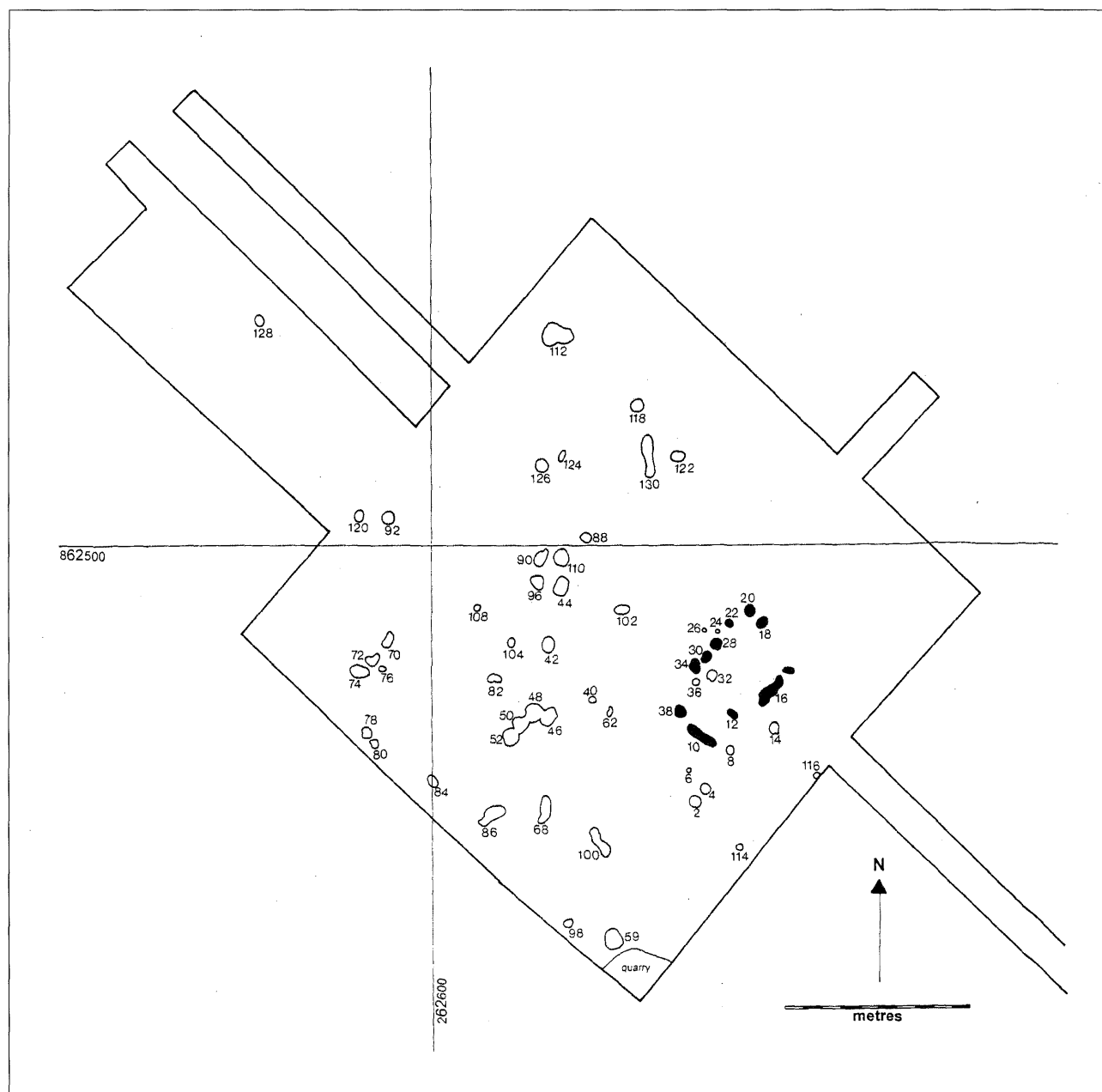


Figure 2: An Early Neolithic Structure from Area 5, Kinbeachie Farm

Though broken well below the point, this artefact measures nearly 60mm in length, and it is much bigger than any other piece in the assemblage. It is flaked all over with wide surface flaking, and has been shaped at the base with corner notches to form vestigial barbs and a wide tang which has been indented to form a “fish tail”. The secondary alteration differs from that on the rest of the formal

tools from Kinbeachie in that it comprises wide shallow removals, apparently due to light percussion with a soft hammer, rather than to pressure-flaking as used for the other retouched pieces. In addition, only one other piece, a leaf point, has surface flaking.

This piece is of a type that is unknown from both Scotland and further afield in Britain (Green 1980). The material is a honey-coloured flint that could be

Scottish, but this is a common type of raw material in many countries. In comparison to the other pieces from Kinbeachie, it must have come from a much larger blank, and therefore nodule. Indeed, the blank would have been large by the standards of any Scottish prehistoric site. It is, of course, possible that Kinbeachie has produced the first example of a hitherto unknown type of point, and it must be said that both blank size and knapping technique would obviously have had to be adapted in order to produce a piece like this. It could be argued, therefore, that the piece might sit quite happily, as a Neolithic oddity, in its parent assemblage. This is not a one off trial piece, however. It is an accomplished artefact, and as such it would seem more likely that the piece is an exotic, accidentally introduced into the assemblage at some time in the past.

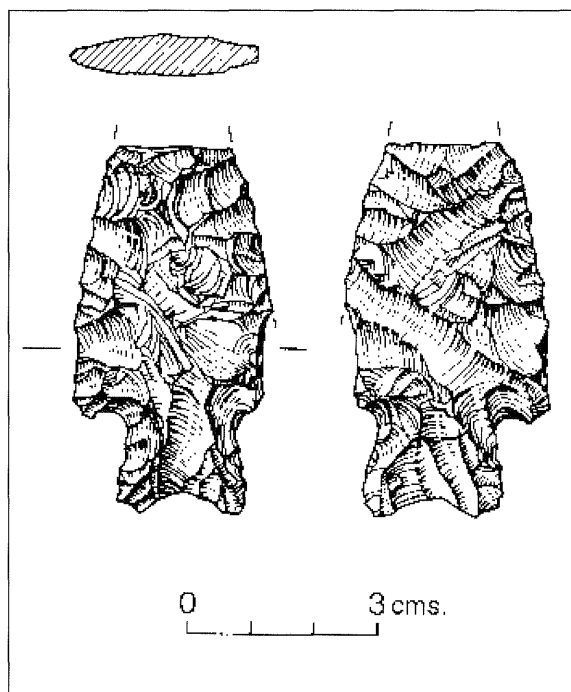


Figure 3: The Bifacial Point

DISCUSSION

In this respect it is interesting to note that the piece has all the hallmarks of a relatively common North American archaeological type: the Rice Lobed Point, described as having a concave base, wide corner notching and barbs (Justice 1987, 85-89). Rice

Lobed projectile points date to the Early Archaic period, between 7500 - 6500 BC and they occur over a large area of the eastern United States particularly in Missouri, Arkansas, and the Ozark highlands of Oklahoma (*ibid*). Other point-types with vestigial barbs and corner notching are listed on Lithics Net (<http://members.aol.com/artgumbus/byshape.html>), a listing of projectile point data, indexed by morphology, many of which have concave bases, (for example, the Early Archaic Martindale point or the Mid Archaic to Woodland Marshall point, both from the Midwest).

North American-type points of various shapes do turn up from time to time in supposedly Scottish contexts, but none have so far (to the author's knowledge), been securely stratified within a prehistoric Scottish site. Most were presumably brought over by enthusiasts and subsequently mislabeled or separated from their original context notes. The Kinbeachie point was apparently found some time ago, in the 1940s, when the archaeological interest of the farm was just beginning. It is recorded as having been found as part of a hoard of ten similar points, nine of which are now lost. The long-standing interest in archaeology and things lithic on the part of the farmer at this time is well known and it is not inconceivable that these ten pieces were brought over as souvenirs from the United States and that one was accidentally incorporated into the local assemblage.

Lithic points have always been relatively easy to come by in the States, and they have often formed a popular souvenir. The most likely scenario is that this piece was brought back earlier in the century, by someone who knew that it would be of interest at Kinbeachie. The recorded find date, in the 1940s, may well provide the date for the transfer, perhaps by a GI. The fate of the nine other pieces remains a mystery, but as they got lost, so did their origin, and finally the piece in question became incorporated into the local material, ready to be handed over to Inverness Museum together with other pieces from the farm.

Occurrences of unusual lithic artefacts such as this are relatively rare, but they do happen as Kinbeachie reminds us. I believe that it is important not to sweep them under the carpet, but rather to

keep a record of them, in an appropriate place. This article is an attempt to do just that, while soliciting opinion from other interested archaeologists.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The farmer, Mr Andrew Fraser, has always been very interested in and supportive of the archaeological work taking place on his land. The evidence from Kinbeachie Farm was put together by Headland Archaeology Ltd, using finance supplied by Historic Scotland. As a part of this work the author was invited to look at the lithic assemblage and Headland subsequently facilitated separate publication of the bifacial point. The point itself was among material deposited in Inverness Museum, and the Assistant Curator, Patricia Weekes, is to be thanked for clarifying the information held here regarding its origin and context. The illustrations were prepared by Sylvia Stevenson. Tam Ward, then of the National Museums of Scotland was very helpful in the fruitless quest for Scottish parallels for this point. John Whittaker of Grinnell University helped with

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