

reports on the range of natural damage observable on quartzite pebbles from a gravel pit. Tyldesley deals with the quartzite component of the well known industry from the Wolvercote Channel. But why, one asks, is the illustration of the best quartzite example of a plano-convex piriform handaxe, the type for which the site is famous, also the only one which does not allow the reader to judge that asymmetry (Fig. 1)? MacRae appends a comment on some less securely attributed material from Wolvercote.

The three remaining papers on the Upper Thames all take a more geological direction, beginning with Briggs, who reviews the terrace sequence and its interpretation regarding human environments. Bridgland then discusses the derivation, in the plateaux deposits, of the quartzites used by Palaeolithic man in this area, and finally Preston examines the Triassic Bunter pebble beds. Personally, I found this small group of contributions particularly valuable. The last of the strictly regional sections, on Southern England, contains just one paper on the raw materials in the south-west, by Alison Roberts.

A section entitled 'Caves' then follows. It consists of an article by Green on raw material selection and natural damage at Pontnewydd, and a note by the editors (faute de mieux) dealing with Creswell Crags. The case for abandoning the geographical structure at this point did not seem to me to be overwhelmingly strong, I must confess. The last chapter came almost as a shock, in the table of contents: the title is 'Africa: Everything but Flint'. But its inclusion makes good sense. Inskeep shows that Africa has a lot to tell us about what can be done with the rock types discussed in the previous couple of hundred pages! (Question: is it perverse to have left this until the end?).

Spending some time carrying the book around while travelling, and dipping into it occasionally (I re-read it more systematically later), I soon realised that there were small but significant improvements which would have been very helpful to the reader even under less trying conditions. The contents of some more or less adjacent chapters are sufficiently alike for it to be quite easy to lose one's place and hardly realise it. Modern word-processing software should by now have resulted, as a matter of course, in the provision of running heads identifying the papers. Also, at the expense of a little more editorial work a unified numbering system for illustrations and tables would have been helpful. Perhaps the editors could have been more demanding of their contributors, too. I was born in Warwickshire and (though not an inhabitant) have more knowledge of the county than do many other readers. Nevertheless, I found myself becoming irritated as I tried to work out how Professor Shotton's quite large-scale maps related to the Midlands generally ... so why no location map?

These are small and perhaps ungenerous quibbles, though. No less important is that the chapters are well laid out, the illustrations have reproduced clearly, and the proof-reading is excellent. I was briefly entertained on p. 252 by the idea of a four-dimensional handaxe from Iffley (9.5 x 6.5 x 3 x 5 cm), so do not regard this slip as serious grounds for complaint.

A point worth making is that this is not a conference volume. Rather, it is the result of the editors' having

approached, encouraged and probably badgered (human nature being what it is when it comes to deadlines) sixteen other people to contribute to the realisation of a concept, without the familiar inducements of spending someone else's money by way of conference or travel grants, or the social junketing that usually goes with this ... all the more credit to the editors, therefore, for making the book work. For that matter, I hope the publishers will not take it too much amiss if I say that the series to which this belongs has speedy and economical publishing as its particular attraction, rather than the prestige of a glossy, highly-packaged and expensive list backed by a centuries-old reputation. It is the kind of project for which B.A.R. works particularly well: one with modest objectives and technical demands, which fills a clear need in the literature but which would not be viable further up-market.

Asking whether the editors have been entirely successful, I conclude that they have met the objectives that they set themselves: they have brought together a useful fund of knowledge and in the process have provided something for everyone. The latter perhaps inevitably creates a certain unevenness, and will probably also leave many readers slightly dissatisfied. As an essentially academic archaeologist with a particularly European orientation, I found myself hoping for more of an outward-looking approach, perhaps also with more ambitious discussion of raw material procurement strategies and related topics, until I realised that I was not being altogether fair. I am not the only type of reader for whom it is intended. The verdict, then? It is a book that I welcome to my shelves, and one which no one seriously committed to the British Palaeolithic should be without.

Paul Callow, February 1989

Neolithic Settlement of the Thames Basin by Robin Holgate.
B.A.R. 194, 1988, 391 pp., 143 figs, price £24.00.

This volume aims to reconstruct 'the patterns of settlement and economy immediately preceding and during the Neolithic period' (p.1) within the Thames Basin. There is a considerable variety of landscape and environmental zones within this area and the quality and distribution of known monuments and sites of the later prehistoric period is such that, when combined with the author's research data, there should be great potential for detailed and stimulating discussion.

Dr Holgate has obviously amassed a great deal of information and studied a large body of data. I would like to be able to review the results of his labours in a positive and enthusiastic tone but, sorry to say, the report does not fulfil its promise. To be fair, this is a much distilled version of an original doctoral thesis, but it is to be hoped that it represents more edited highlights than overall synthesis since discussion throughout is extremely brief and peppered with a host of sweeping statements.

The report has its good points certainly - there is useful discussion of the post-depositional factors affecting surface flint assemblages, for instance, and the catalogue of sites and finds is clearly formatted and accompanied by neat distribution maps. The phasing of certain groups of sites is considered and

there is also important information on the location of both monumental and non-monumental sites throughout the area. A potted history of antiquarian and archaeological research is provided for each geological/topographical region, and note is taken of the close association between flint axes and 'watery places'.

Where the report falls down is in the author's apparently uncritical acceptance of his data and his insistence on interpreting the evidence on the basis of a very few specific ethnographic and continental Neolithic parallels. Certainly there are comparisons to be made in these areas but, not only is there considerably more relevant (published) archaeological data from much closer to home, there are also some extremely important contrasts with that archaeological data which Holgate either ignores or misses entirely.

What we are presented with is, essentially, a series of distribution maps, with accompanying brief descriptions, showing Later Mesolithic to Late Neolithic findspots and a model of farming economy for the latter part of that sequence. Sequence is the key word here, for the distributions are described as though they represent static situations and there is little attempt at understanding either the processes by which those distributions came about, or the underlying social context in which development occurred. True, there is a brief discourse on the possibility of social groupings, based on familiar arguments about the role of causewayed enclosures and the recognition, by other scholars, of the existence of fabric and stylistic variations amongst some pottery types, but there is virtually no attempt at examining the artefactual evidence against any of the more forceful recent discussions on social organisation in this period. This is a great shame because there is already clear evidence of both sequence and non-random patterning amongst the monuments and existing artefactual evidence from the region even before the author's own material is introduced.

The author is eager to expound his economic model, which proposes an horticultural basis for Early Neolithic subsistence settlement later replaced by an 'infield-outfield' system of plough agriculture and animal husbandry, and to adduce continental parallels for this development. Unfortunately he is so eager that we are hurried through extremely brief outlines of the environmental evidence, the distribution and use of stone resources, the definition of site types and the period distributions themselves at such a pace that it all seems so straightforward and obvious that one wonders why we have been struggling to understand this period for so long.

The author's 'face-value' approach to his topic is further revealed by his apparent belief that normal Neolithic settlement necessarily involves the construction of monuments. Causewayed enclosures are observed to occur at the periphery of domestic areas (good point), where they seem also to coincide with ill-defined social boundaries and provide a focus for a range of activities such as the exchange of axes. Where settlement extends, particularly during the later Neolithic, into new areas, he concludes that the nature of settlement must have been rather different because monuments were not constructed. Now this may be true and, as the author points out, those newly colonised areas were very different in terms of topography,

soils, drainage and other characteristics from the main area of earlier settlement - so perhaps it was necessary to adopt a different type of farming and to introduce the plough (as expressed in the model). Unfortunately what he does not go on to question, except by the most perfunctory of comments, are the possible reasons for this expansion of the settled area, the implication of the location and probable chronological and social position of the monuments themselves, or the relationship between monumental sites, domestic sites and the large number of 'votive' and/or structured deposits which occur at this period. There is no integration of the evidence from these different sources and no serious questions are asked of them.

'Neolithic' monuments were constructed for good reasons, at different stages in the settlement sequence, and held meaning for the communities which created (or inherited) them. It is not sufficient simply to plot their final distribution alongside domestic material since it is already quite clear, again from published archaeological sources, that their construction, use and location exerted profound influences on many aspects of human behaviour - including the location of domestic sites and the distribution and structure of votive deposits, of which there are many in the Thames Valley. The author also appears to treat later monuments as if they were the direct descendants of earlier ones - perhaps this was not the intention but the text is so brief in places that that is how it reads. Similarly, the introduction of the plough, if it does come as late in the sequence as the author suggests, might allow for important changes in agricultural practice but it would surely not cause them, as the text seems to imply.

Lithic material forms the bulk of the evidence discussed. Holgate clearly has no difficulty in identifying his artefacts correctly, though the implication that thin-butted axes are generally Late Neolithic is stretching the evidence - some certainly are but the Sussex flint mines, which ceased production by the middle of the 3rd millennium, produced both thin- and thick-butted axes. In terms of site definition, there seems little need for the author to demonstrate, at length and on the basis of an ethnographic parallel, that quarry sites are distinguishable from domestic sites and there is a worrying implication that surface scatters overlying pits must be directly related to them. The definition of a domestic site (which comes before any of the data have been presented) as being 'a discrete locality where a domestic flint assemblage... has been recovered and whose location is at least 0.5 km away from its 'nearest neighbour'' (p.68) is extraordinary. Once again it seems to be based on ethnographic evidence. Archaeological data from other areas of lowland England (e.g. the South Downs, Hampshire Basin, East Anglian Breckland, Yorkshire Wolds) has shown that, whilst later Mesolithic and earlier Neolithic sites are frequently discrete and fairly restricted in extent, the bulk of the surface flint evidence will be Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age in date and is likely to extend over vast areas as an almost continuous spread of material. Presumably Holgate would not be able to identify any Late Neolithic sites in these areas and one wonders whether such spreads occur in the Thames Valley.

The author states (Chapter 9) that his results compare favourably with other areas of the country yet it is the

contrasts which seem so important. If there really are no vast spreads of material in this area, then here we have a most interesting distinction from other regions which have been studied in depth. It is difficult to say more from the text but the catalogue suggests that this distinction may be genuine. Although Late Neolithic domestic sites in the region include more tool-types than earlier assemblages, as has been demonstrated elsewhere, the range is nowhere near as wide as it is in any of the areas mentioned above and tool variability amongst individual collections is unusually low. This is a point which urgently needs further consideration.

I regret to say that I think Dr Holgate, despite the great deal of work he has obviously put into his research, has been unable to see the wood for the trees. This report does not do justice to the amount and importance of the data he has collected and whilst it may go some way towards reconstructing settlement patterns in the Thames Basin, it does little to aid our understanding of them. The economic model is interesting, but a closer look at evidence from within the British Isles would have provided a much more relevant and focused background to the region than many of the continental cultures referred to.

Once upon a time BARS were cheap and one could afford to buy volumes such as this for the catalogue and the better bits. At £24 my advice would be to borrow this one from a library.

Julie Gardiner, January 1989

Stone Axe Studies Volume 2, the Petrology of Prehistoric Stone Implements from the British Isles, edited by T.H. McK. Clough and W.A. Cummins. C.B.A. Research Report 27, 1988, 297 pp., 42 figs, 23 maps, 40 tables, price £35.

and

Stone Axe Morphology and Distribution in Neolithic Britain, by Sylvia Chappell. B.A.R. 177, 1987, 2 vols, 684 + xvii pp., 126 figs, 49 tables, price £35.

Almost half of Stone Axe Studies 2 is made up of a list of the available petrological identifications of prehistoric or apparently prehistoric implements from Britain, accompanied by nationwide distribution maps of implements of each petrological group. This pulling-together of information either previously unpublished or dispersed among many sources is one of the volume's most useful features now, and will ensure that it remains a valued work of reference for many years to come. A major achievement of the volume is that it presents information from Scotland, Cumbria and Northumberland for the first time. Congratulations are due to the editors, the C.B.A. and the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, whose computerised record of identifications, will, one hopes, be systematically maintained.

These data are preceded by an admirable introduction by Clough, and by the following papers:

1. Fenton, M.B., and Travis, R.J.A., 'A method for taking petrological samples from stone implements'

2. Davis, R.V., Howard, H., and Smith, I.F., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from south-west England: sixth report'
3. Woodcock, A.G., Kelly, D.B., and Woolley, A.R., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from south-east England'
4. Clough, T.H. McK., and Cummins, W.A., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from London and Middlesex'
5. Green, B., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from East Anglia: second report'
6. Cummins, W.A., and Moore, W.R.G., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from the south-east Midlands'
7. Clough, T.H. McK., and Cummins, W.A., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from the east Midlands: third report'
8. Shotton, F.W., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from the west Midlands: third report'
9. Phillips, P., Cummins, W.A., and Keen, L., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from Yorkshire: second report'
10. Coope, G.R., Robinson, D.J., and Roe, F.E.S., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from Lancashire and Cheshire'
11. Coope, G.R., and Garrard, L.S., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from the Isle of Man'
12. Fell, C.I., and Davis, R.V., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from Cumbria'
13. Cummins, W.A., and Harding, A.F., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from north-east England'
14. Ritchie, P.R., and Scott, J.G., 'The petrological identification of stone axes from Scotland'
15. Fenton, M.B., 'The petrological identification of stone battle-axes and axe-hammers from Scotland'
16. Houlder, C.H., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from Wales'
17. Francis, E.L., Francis, P.J., and Preston, J., 'The petrological identification of stone implements from Ireland'

All the authors have suffered equally from the volume's long period of gestation. The papers are inevitably of uneven quality. The nadir is hit by Houlder's almost exclusive concern with typological definitions which are not only inherently barren but reflect unfamiliarity with the literature of the last twenty years.