

## A Palaeolith from the Hanborough Terrace

By W. J. ARKELL

THE implement here figured is probably the most important single palaeolithic artifact yet found in the Oxford district. It was obtained by the Rev. E. D. Sedding, S.S.J.E., of Cowley, from the late Mr. James Lardner, for many years gravel-worker in the Duke's pit, on the north side of the Witney road, opposite Witney Row and Slatter's Garage, Long Hanborough.<sup>1</sup> Father Sedding, formerly vicar of Freeland, was in the habit of occasionally visiting the gravel-pits and had obtained fragments of bone and teeth of *Elephas* from Mr. Lardner. He made such visits, however, purely as an interested amateur and had offered no reward should flint implements be found. He writes (*in lit.*): 'It was perhaps in April, 1938 (or 1939), that I was talking to Mr. Lardner in his shed and examining some small fossils which he had found. In the half-light I suddenly caught sight of the hand-axe lying on the floor of the shed. He said that it had been there when I came to the quarry late in the previous autumn, but he had not shown it to me, as he believed it to be of no value.' Annual visits by Father Sedding since then have disclosed no further implement.

The Duke's pit<sup>2</sup> is worked to a fairly uniform depth of 14 ft., of which on the average the highest 2 ft. is occupied by soil and brown pebbly loam. The remaining 12 ft. consists of cream-coloured, stratified, waterworn limestone gravel, predominantly of Oolite fragments, but containing a number of quartzose and other pebbles of the Northern Drift. The lowest 4 ft. is coarser than the rest and contains many large pebbles, both of Oolite and Northern Drift, especially brown quartzites and white Carboniferous chert, and is not used as gravel, but worked only to be screened for sand. A foot or two below the floor of the pit the base of the gravel, with many large pebbles, rests on clay (Kellaways?); and solid rock (Cornbrash?) was struck at 18 ft. below the surface in a neighbouring well. The junction of the Pleistocene gravel with the Jurassic rocks below may be seen in another pit, on the east side of the road to Combe, at the top of the hill leading down to the River Evenlode.

<sup>1</sup> On realizing its importance, Father Sedding has generously presented the implement to the Ashmolean Museum, where it has been registered as no. 1946.7.

<sup>2</sup> The pit is figured in *The Geology of the Country around Oxford*, 2nd edition, 1926 (Memoirs of the Geological Survey), pl. 2B, facing p. 24; also in Arkell, *The Geology of Oxford*, 1947 (Clarendon Press), pl. 6.

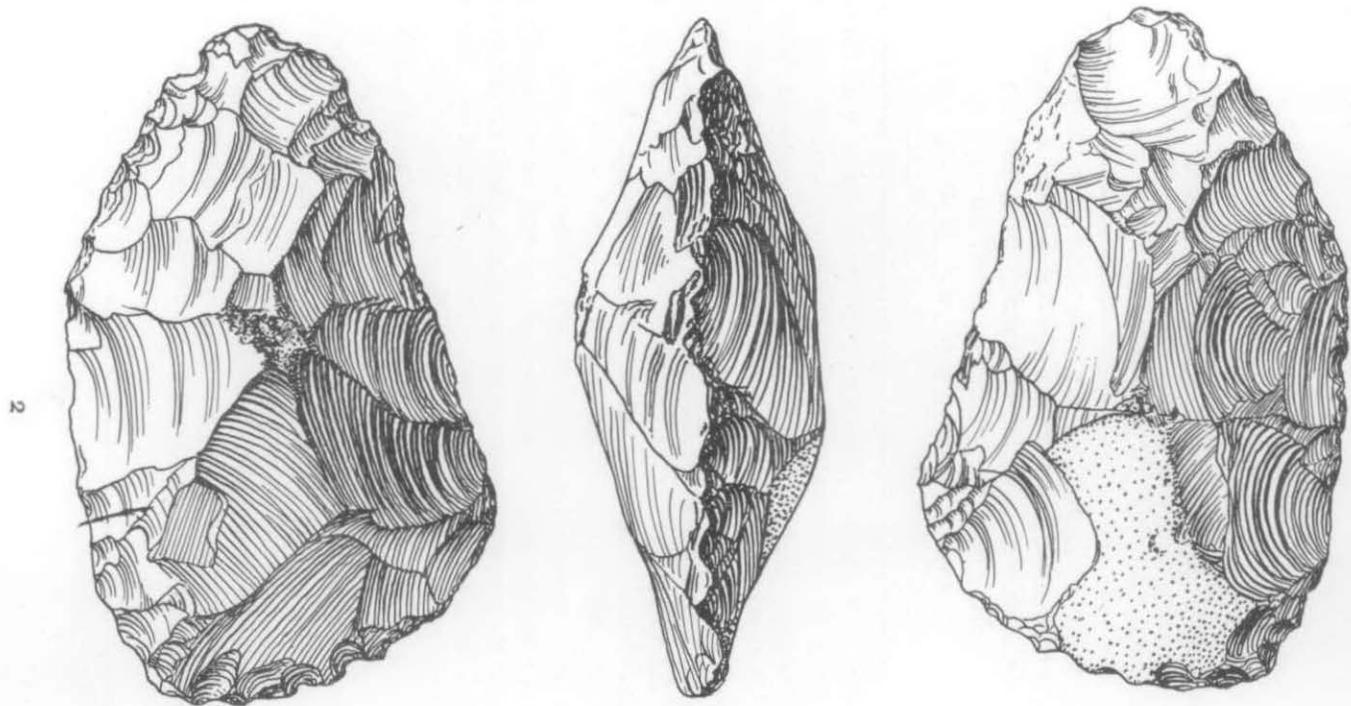


FIG. 1

A PALAEO LITH FROM LONG HANBOROUGH, OXON. (p. 1)

Scale  $\frac{3}{4}$ . (W.J.A. del.)

## A PALAEOOLITH FROM THE HANBOROUGH TERRACE

It will be recalled that the surface of these gravels stands at 90-100 ft. above the river near the mouth of the Evenlode, and that they are the oldest Oolite river gravels in the Oxford district.

Mr. Lardner informed Father Sedding that he found the palaeolith in the basal coarse gravel, about 2 ft. above the floor of the pit and 12 ft. below the surface, and that it came out of the bedded gravel and not from one of the 'pipes' of later date, very few of which penetrate more than 6 ft. below the surface. This is corroborated by the white colour of the implement; if it had lain in a 'pipe' it would almost certainly have been stained brown. The point where it lay was to the south-east of the middle of the main face, about 100 yards from the corner nearest the road.

The implement is a thick, boldly flaked, asymmetric, ovate hand-axe. Both faces retain a high proportion of the primary flake scars, some resolved. Secondary work is almost confined to the edges, but the side edges appear battered rather than flaked, most of the small secondary flakes there being resolved. Some cortex remains at the centre of the lower edge on one face only. The implement is completely unrolled. The patina is creamy white all over the face that bears the cortex and near the edges of the opposite face. The central part of the face devoid of cortex is stained ochreous. From the shape and centre of gravity of the implement it is probable that the ochreous face lay downwards in the gravel.

Compared with figured palaeoliths, the implement agrees perhaps best with the Lower Acheulian (Acheul I) 'limande épaisse' from the high terrace at St. Acheul (Breuil and Koslowski, 1931-2, p. 467, fig. 7), and the similar industry from Terrace A at Farnham (Oakley, 1939, pp. 22-33). Dr. K. P. Oakley and Mr. A. D. Lacaille both agreed with this diagnosis. Professor H. Breuil, to whom I subsequently had the opportunity to show the implement, was more inclined to place it in the latest Abbevillian, or on the border-line between Abbevillian and earliest Acheulian.

In France both the Abbevillian and the Early Acheulian I are dated to the Günz-Mindel interglacial (Breuil, 1939, p. 38). Since the Hanborough specimen is quite unrolled, it provides the first 'human' evidence for the date of the Hanborough terrace and of its important interglacial mammalian fauna made known by Dr. K. S. Sandford (1924, 1926). Furthermore, it follows from this dating that the Be and Ca glaciations of the Oxford district are the Günz and Mindel respectively, as recently inferred on other grounds (Arkell, 1946, pp. 27, 29).

At least one other hand-axe is recorded in the literature as 'from a gravel-pit at Handborough, Oxon.' It was purchased in 1907 for four shillings from T. Hutt for the Pitt Rivers Museum (Balfour, 1908; and cited in Manning

W. J. ARKELL

and Leeds, 1921, p. 244). Through the kindness of Mr. T. K. Penniman, Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, I have been able to examine the specimen. If it came from any of the Hanborough pits it can only have been from the loam or solution pipes. It is one of the small late-Middle or early-Upper Acheulian sharp-pointed hand-axes, with one flat face, typical of the basal gravel of the Wolvercote Channel. In culture, technique, patination, and deep iron staining, it corresponds so exactly with specimens from the prolific Wolvercote site that there must always be at least a strong suspicion that it is in reality a Wolvercote specimen. In either case, as dating evidence for the Hanborough terrace, it is worthless. Hence the unusual importance of the specimen here described.

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