

Notes

STONE WEIGHTS FROM THE THAMES

This note deals with the function, dating and distribution of a class of stone weights, 29 examples of which have recently been found in the Thames near Abingdon.¹ Similar objects have been found in the river as far downstream as Moulsoford;² these are thought to have been used for sinking fishing nets, and have been tentatively assigned to the mediaeval period.³ An example is known from the Cherwell,⁴ and an object of comparable form, made from a quartzite pebble, has recently been found at a mediaeval fishpond near Abingdon (No. 4 below).

THE WEIGHTS

Twenty-nine complete weights and fragments, all of oolitic limestone, have been recovered from material dredged from the Thames near Abingdon. Some are encrusted with a white calcareous deposit, presumably the result of long immersion in river water. Essentially the weights consist of an elongated piece of stone, generally roughly rectangular or ovoid in cross-section and perforated towards one end by a smoothly bored cylindrical hole. Within this basic form there is a great deal of variation: some of the weights are quite markedly rectangular, while others are of ovoid shape; others are roughly triangular, expanding outwards from the perforated end, while some are of quite irregular shape. The degree of finish also varies widely: some weights are only roughly trimmed to shape, while others are smoothly rounded off or faced; one example (No. 5) has been worked to a neatly rectangular form.

There is considerable variation, too, in the size and weight of these objects, and also in the diameter of the perforation. Complete examples vary in weight from 227g. to 2580g., with 80% of them weighing less than 1250g. The diameters of the perforations vary from 9mm. to 23mm., the majority of them clustering in the region of 9mm.-10mm. or 18mm.-20mm. There does not appear to be any direct correlation between weight in grams and the diameter of the perforation.

¹ The weights were retrieved from dredgings dumped on the river bank, by the author, and by messrs. W. Skellington, D. Steptoe and R. Wiggins, to whom thanks are due. The weights are now on loan to Abingdon Museum; I am grateful to Nancy Stebbing, the Curator, for facilitating their publication. No. 8 was found by Miss J. Smithson, to whom I am grateful for allowing me to examine the weight. I would like to thank Dr. A. Macgregor and Mr. N. Palmer for their help with this note. Lastly, I am most grateful to Imogen Rizk who did the drawings and to Lindsay Donaghy for help with typing.

² *Berks. Archaeol. Journ.*, lviii (1960), 62; lix (1961), 60; lx (1962), 119; lxi (1963-4), 108; lxii (1965-6), 76.

³ *Ibid.*, lxi (1963-4), 108.

⁴ J.M. Steane, *Peopling Past Landscapes* (1978), 49, Fig. 16.

FUNCTION

A number of possible uses have been suggested for these objects, such as thatch-weights, loomweights and net-sinkers. The great weight of some examples, as well as the wide variation in weight, makes it unlikely that they are loomweights. It would in any case seem unnecessary to manufacture loomweights in stone, and certainly the known loomweight series (such as Iron Age triangular and Anglo-Saxon annular loomweights) are made in baked clay. That these objects are thatch-weights is possible, but the suggestion that they are net-sinkers seems most plausible. It explains well their riverine distribution (the examples not *from* rivers are from sites near rivers — note the Abingdon, Oxford and Seacourt weights, below) and also, perhaps, the material used for their manufacture, since stone could survive prolonged immersion, which baked clay probably could not. The example from a mediaeval fishpond (No. 4 below) further supports the interpretation that these objects were connected with fishing. It should however be said that weights of exactly similar form could have had entirely different 'terrestrial' functions, such as thatch-weights.

DATING

Close dating of these objects is difficult since their function decrees that few will occur in datable contexts, while form might well have remained unchanged for many centuries.

Of the weights from archaeological excavations, none has been found in a closely dated context. One from Abingdon came from a site occupied in the Roman, mediaeval and post-mediaeval periods,⁵ and an example from the Hamel, Oxford, occurred in a modern feature on a site occupied since the 12th century AD.⁶ The unstratified weight from Seacourt is rather more helpful, as the site was abandoned by c. 1400.⁷ The Abingdon fishpond which produced a weight may have been in use in the 14th century.⁸ Further afield, a weight from York, decorated with an interlace pattern, probably dates from the 10th/11th century.⁹ Thus a dating at least partly within the mediaeval period, but possibly extending into post-mediaeval times, is suggested, on admittedly rather slender evidence.

DISTRIBUTION

All the weights are made of oolitic limestone. Thus, assuming that these weights are not the result of a secondary use of stone moved down river for some purpose such as building, it seems likely that they would have been produced somewhere north or west of Oxford. There may have been a small-scale industry producing weights somewhere close to the Thames in the Cotswold area, whence they could have been distributed downstream, certainly at least as far as Moulsoford,¹⁰ by trade or by the movements of fishermen. It is interesting to note that two weights found further downstream, at Mapledurham and Wargrave, were made of chalk, not limestone.¹¹

⁵ M. Parrington, 'Fairlawn Wharf, Abingdon', *Oxoniensia*, xl (1975), 104.

⁶ N.J. Palmer, 'A Beaker Burial and Mediaeval Tenements in the Hamel, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xlv (1980) 195, No. 14.

⁷ M. Biddle, 'The Deserted Mediaeval Village of Seacourt, Berkshire', *Oxoniensia*, xxvi/xxvii (1961/2), 187, Fig. 33, No. 1.

⁸ J. Townsend, *History of Abingdon* (1910), 39.

⁹ D.M. Waterman, 'Late Saxon, Viking, and Early Mediaeval Finds from York', *Archaeologia*, xcvi (1959), 99, Fig. 23, No. 14. I am grateful to Arthur Macgregor for drawing this reference to my attention.

¹⁰ *Berks. Archaeol. Journ.*, lxii (1965-6), 76.

¹¹ *Ibid.* lviii (1960), 62.

To judge from the number of finds made at Abingdon, these weights were extremely common. As, when encrusted with river mud, they are barely recognisable as artefacts, many have probably escaped notice during dredging operations. If, as argued above, they are net-sinkers, their commonness is further evidence for the importance of freshwater fishing in mediaeval times, already attested by other archaeological evidence¹² and by documentary evidence.¹³

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Descriptions

A selection of examples is shown here. All the weights are now in the Abingdon Museum.

Abbreviations: L, length; MB, maximum breadth; Wt, weight; PD, diameter of perforation. All dimensions in millimetres, weights in grams.

1. (Fig. 1) Complete. Roughly rectangular, with rounded end. One face has been worked smooth. Roughly rectangular cross-section. L, 245mm. MB, 115mm. PD, 11mm. Wt, 2580g. Accn.No. 355.
2. (Fig. 1) Complete, rectangular with rounded top. Fairly regular sharp edges and flat faces. Rectangular cross-section. L, 210mm. MB, 110mm. PD, 20mm. Wt, 2040g. Unaccessioned. (Loan, Mr. R. Wiggins)

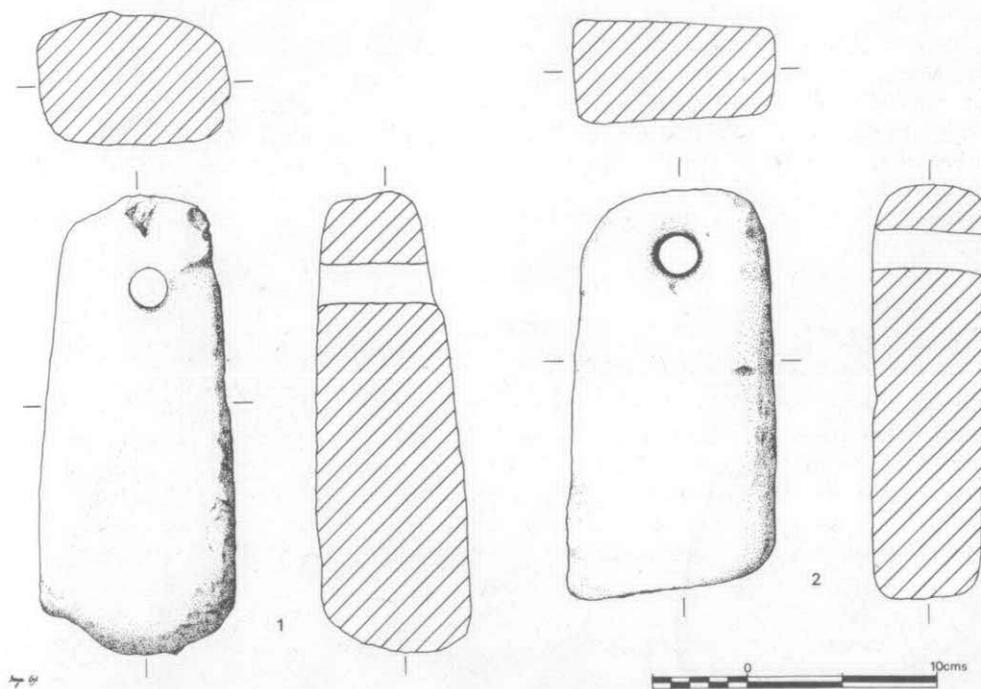


Fig. 1 Stone Weights Scale $\frac{1}{4}$

¹² A. Wheeler in M. Parrington, 'Excavations at Stert St., Abingdon, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia* xlv (1979), 21-3.

¹³ J. Bond, 'Landscape of the Estates of Abingdon Abbey', *Landscape History*, i (1979), 65.

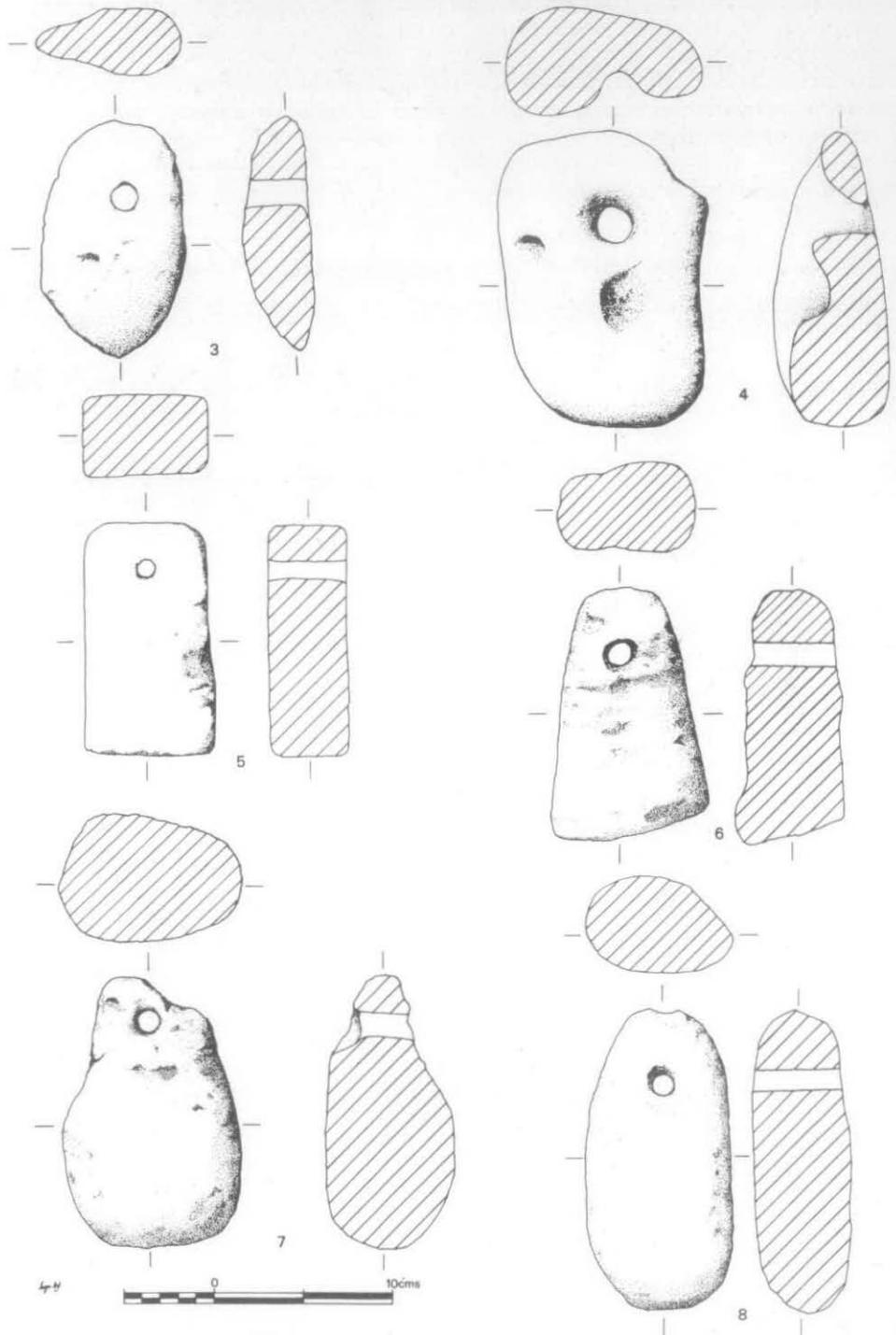


Fig. 2 Stone Weights Scale ¼

3. (Fig. 2) Complete, ovoid, with a roughly oval cross-section. L,132mm. MB,80mm. PD,14mm. Wt,340g. Accn. No. 367.
4. (Fig. 2) Complete. Made from a quartzite pebble. Roughly rectangular shape, irregular cross-section. Somewhat conical perforation. Found at Daisy Banks fishpond near Abingdon. L,165mm. MB,115m. PD, 18mm. Wt,1550g.
Unaccessioned. (Loan, Miss J. Smithson)
5. (Fig. 2) Complete. Sharply rectangular, with squared and straight edges, flat faces. Rectangular cross-section. L,129mm. MB,72mm. PD,10mm. Wt,750g.
Accn. No. 369
6. (Fig. 2) Possibly the upper part of an originally larger weight. Triangular with rounded top. Irregular rectangular cross-section. L,142mm. MB,87mm. PD,13mm. Wt,680g.
Accn. No. 358.
7. (Fig. 2) Small piece broken from top. Irregular in shape with a bulbous lower part and irregular cross-section. L,152mm. MB,100mm. PD,12mm. Wt,1165g.
Accn. No. 375.
8. (Fig. 2) Complete, roughly ovoid with oval cross-section. L,169mm. MB,80mm. PD,11mm. Wt,795g.
Accn. No. 368.

KIRTLINGTON MANOR COURT 1500-1659

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THE OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMMITTEE IN 1980

A full description of the Committee's Unit's work in 1980 can be found in CBA Group IX *Newsletter*, 11 (1981), 97-162. The Committee produces a Newsletter which appears approximately bi-monthly, subscription £2 per annum, obtainable from the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit, 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP. During the year the following work took place:-

1. *Surveys*

- G. Lambrick, *Thames Flood Plain Survey*, CBA Group IX *Newsletter*, 11 (1981), 102-104.
- R. Hingley, *The Upper Thames Valley Survey*, *Ibid.*, 104-107.
- R. Hingley, *Frilford/Garford: The Noah's Ark Survey*, *Ibid.*, 107-109.
- S. Brown and R. White, *Sandford-on-Thames*, *Ibid.*, 109-111.
- D. Miles, *Uffington: The White Horse*, *Ibid.*, 111-112.

2. *Excavations*

- (a) Sites excavated or recorded: brief notes appear in CBA Group IX *Newsletter*, 11 (1981), 112-146.

- Abingdon:* Iron Age, Roman and medieval material from the Base Court of Abingdon Abbey at Checker Walk.
- Abingdon:* Roman finds at Nuffield Way Allotments.
- Abingdon:* Roman disc brooch at Peachcroft Farm Housing Estate.
- Asthall:* Roman burials.
- Aston Tirrold:* Worked Flints.
- Barford St. Michael:* Medieval pottery.
- Bicester:* Medieval and later occupation at the Causeway.
- Blewbury:* The Grim's Ditch at Churn.
- Blewbury:* The Grim's Ditch at Woodway Farm.
- Checkendon:* Iron Age earthworks at the Devil's Churchyard.
- Cholsey:* Medieval pottery and earthworks at Manor Farm.
- Deddington:* Earthworks of Ilbury medieval village.
- Didcot:* Roman settlement at the Rectory.
- Drayton:* Palaeoliths.
- Fencott and Murcott:* Timbers of preserved Roman Bridge at Ivy Farm.
- Great Coxwell:* Medieval floor levels at St. Giles Church.
- Hardwick with Yelford:* Iron Age and Roman settlement at Smith's Field.
- Horley:* Undated human burial.
- Kidlington:* Medieval manor house at Moat Cottage.
- Launton:* Roman and later pottery scatters.
- Leafield:* Iron Age and Roman settlement at Roustage Barrow.
- Marcham:* Undated human burial.
- Oxford:* Medieval stone causeway at Abingdon Road and Folly Bridge.
- Oxford:* Little Cloister of Blackfriars.
- Oxford:* Medieval pits at Bulwarks Lane.
- Oxford:* Street surfaces at Catte Street, New Inn Hall Street and St. Aldates.
- Oxford:* The medieval outer City Wall at 51-55 Holywell Street and St. Helen's Passage.
- Oxford:* The medieval town ditch at 21 Longwall Street.
- Oxford:* Medieval building of New Inn Hall and pottery from 1-7 New Inn Hall Street.
- Oxford:* Medieval pottery from Frewin Hall.
- Oxford:* Late Saxon pottery from 11-12 Queen Street.
- Oxford:* Possible Civil War defences at 31-34 St. Clements.
- Radley:* Roman ditch at Ford's Field.
- Radley:* Palaeoliths, Neolithic pit and finds, Iron Age enclosure and finds at Thrupp Farm.
- Radley:* Beaker burial at Tuckwell's Pit.
- Ramsden:* Roman settlement at Brize Lodge.
- Stanton Harcourt:* Bronze Age ring ditch, Iron Age and Roman settlement at Linch Hill Corner.
- Wallingford:* Post-medieval pits at Goldsmiths Lane.
- Wallingford:* Late Saxon buildings at 9-11 St. Martin's Street.
- Wroxton St. Mary:* Roman burials at Barn Lodge.
- Fairford/Lechlade, Gloucestershire:* Iron Age and Roman settlement at Claydon Pike.
- (b) Reports in progress: brief notes appear in CBA Group IX *Newsletter*, 11 (1981), 146-157
- Abingdon/Radley:* Neolithic, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon settlement at Barton Court Farm.