Notes

A PALAEOLITHIC BIFACE FROM FINSTOCK, OXFORDSHIRE

The implement described in this note was found by Thomas Thompson while he was walking with a friend in 1982. It is sad to report that as the result of an accident Thomas has since died, and it is thanks to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson of Crawley, Witney, that this note is published.

The artefact was discovered on a grassy footpath on Mount Skippitt, an area of high ground to the South West of Finstock, Oxfordshire (SP 355158) at a height of about 500ft. O.D., approximately 200ft. above the River Evenlode. The footpath, which is about 200m. long, runs along the side of a field (unploughed when visited) to meet the Rural and District Boundary. There are no signs of any gravel having been dumped on or near to the footpath, nor any signs of recent digging near the path, and it seems likely that the artefact was recovered from one of the ruts in the path. Mount Skippitt is close to the River Evenlode, but it is unlikely to be connected with the river terrace system.

Fig. 1. The biface from Finstock, Oxfordshire.

The implement is a small cordiform biface (Wymer type J/G) 71 mm. × 57 mm. × 18.5 mm. when measured as drawn, and weighing 70g. It has been manufactured from a brownish banded flint, and on both sides has an intermittent mottled white patina with slight signs of iron staining. When held up to the light the implement appears translucent around the edges, and when viewed in profile it is slightly plano-convex. The butt of the biface is essentially unworked though of symmetrical shape. It consists of a large patch of

1 J.J. Wymer, Lower Palaeolithic Archaeology in Britain as represented by the Thames Valley (1968).
cortex and a single large flake scar with an area of damage between the two. The cortex is battered and slightly stained, and its distribution indicates that the biface was made from a flint pebble and not from a natural or deliberately struck flake. In contrast to the unworn nature of the butt the upper part of the biface is well made and refined, showing clear signs of the use of ‘soft hammer’ technique and with occasional step flakes near the edge. There are no signs of a trancheau finish on either face, and no signs of a twist to the tip. The edges of the implement are slightly abraded. Unfortunately the artefact is not in a suitable condition for examination by microwear analysis, a technique which might have been able to give valuable information about its possible uses.

There is a shortage of good flint for knapping in the area around Oxford. As the flint pebble used in the manufacture of the biface has been severely battered, it is possible that it came from either the Plateau (or Northern) Drift of the Anglian Glaciation, or from the Wolvercote Terrace. The latter is dated to the Wolstonian, and contains Midland rocks, including some flint brought into the Upper Thames drainage system when the pro-glacial Lake Harrison overflowed.

As the implement was recovered as a stray surface find without any associated material, it is necessary to rely upon typology and technology to suggest a date for the piece. Cordate and subcordate bifaces showing the use of ‘soft hammer’ technique are found in Lower Palaeolithic (Acheulian) contexts in England (e.g. Upper Loam, Barnfield Pit, Swanscombe, and Roebuck Pit, Tilehurst). However, small refined cordate bifaces similar to the piece described above are more typical of the known British and French Middle Palaeolithic (Mousterian of Acheulian Tradition) assemblages, and this implement would fit very well with the finds from such British Mousterian sites as Wookey Hole, Somerset, or Oldbury, Kent. Similar cordiform bifaces may be seen in M.A.T. assemblages from Northern France as well as in the caves further South. There are no major Mousterian find spots in the area around Oxford, although a probably Mousterian disc core has been recovered from Chaundy’s Pit, Radley, and a typical bout coupé biface has come from Abingdon (SU 482935). The importance of the bout coupé class of implements and their probable Mousterian date have been discussed elsewhere, principally by Roe. Bout coupés are often found, as was the biface under discussion, as stray finds; this biface, however, is not a bout coupé type. Only one Palaeolithic implement, ‘a larger ovate implement of chert’ from Charlbury, and a few flakes appear to have been found in the immediate vicinity of Finstock. The whereabouts of these pieces is not known. On balance it may be concluded that although the Finstock biface is possibly of Lower Palaeolithic date, it seems that the available evidence is more suggestive of a Middle Palaeolithic date.

The biface is to be kept at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for a short time, and then will be returned to Mr. and Mrs. Thompson.

Thanks are due to Mr. and Mrs. Thompson for their permission to publish the biface, and to Dr. Sherratt and Dr. Roe for their help with the writing of this note.

JOYCE TYLDESLEY

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6 Sotheby Sale Catalogue, 9 November 1921, Lot 14, p. 4.
Fig. 2. Stone axe from the Berkshire Downs
Plate 1. Stone axe from the Berkshire Downs
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A STONE AXE FROM THE BERKSHIRE DOWNS

This Axe was found on the Berkshire Downs in 1958 near the Lockinge monument (SU 424844 now in Oxfordshire), and was donated by the finder to Newbury museum (museum no. 1958; 7). It has been submitted to Dr. B. Sellwood of Department of Geology, Reading University who has thin sectioned it and provided the following identification. The rock is Hornfels containing spots of plagioclase in a glassy sheared groundmass with occasional platy minerals (biotite?) altered to haematite. It comes from an ungrouped rock source and is a rare if not unique raw material for an axe. An origin in south west England, possibly near Dartmoor is suggested.

The specimen is unusually large: 26 cm. long, 7cm. wide, 7cm. thick and 1780gm. in weight; its blunt working edge and its damaged butt prompt a comparison with the recently studied stone ploughshares in Orkney and Shetland. An agricultural function has also been suggested for Cornish axes in Yorkshire where they are associated with the heavy boulder clay soils and do not occur in 'prestige' contexts such as burials or ritual monuments.

However, large functional examples of south-western axes are known usually from nearer to the source, and blunting has also been observed on less massive fine grained axes. Typologically no distinction can be made between stone axes and stone ploughshares, and until well-preserved examples can be obtained and examined for wear patterns the possibility that some stone axes were used as ploughshares cannot be further developed.

The thin section has been deposited with the south east midlands region petrologist of the CBA Implement petrology committee.

I would like to thank R. Bradley, T. Higgott, S. Rees, Dr. B. Sellwood and Dr. I.F. Smith for their comments and assistance.

STEVE FORD

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE METALWORK FROM HARDWICK, OXFORDSHIRE

The butt-end of a bronze rapier, reworked to make a small knife, and a bronze side-looped spearhead were found with a metal detector by Mr. R.J. Milloini at Hardwick, Oxfordshire, in 1982. They came from a ploughed field to the south of the road to Stanton Harcourt, on the edge of the first gravel terrace overlooking the western arm of the river Windrush. The finds were made on separate occasions and were some distance apart, although both came from near the ditch on the western edge of the field (Nat. Grid Ref. SP 382058). They have been deposited on loan in the Ashmolean Museum (Loan No. 341).

The butt-end and part of the blade of a rapier (Fig. 3, 1), 11.6 cm. long and 4.5 cm. wide at the butt. The broken end of the blade has been reworked to make a short knife with a rounded tip. The rapier has a round-ended butt, two side-notches for rivets, a hilt-plate flat in cross-section and a blade with ‘flattened mid-rib’ cross-section. The piece has, presumably fairly recently, been broken in two across the blade. The end of the butt and edge of the blade have been slightly damaged, again perhaps recently.

3 Information from Dr. I.F. Smith, 2 Church Walk, Avebury, Marlborough, Wilts.
The blade cross-section indicates that this rapier belongs to Burgess’ Group IV, and
the shape of the butt and side-notches place it in Burgess and Gerloff’s ‘Type Stuntney’
sub-division of Group IV. Such weapons were current in the ‘Penard’ metalworking phase
of the late Middle Bronze Age.¹

Side-looped spearhead (Fig. 3, 2), 13.8 cm. long and 2.0 cm. wide across the blade.
The piece has a leaf-shaped blade with slightly bevelled blade edges, and a lozenge-section
mid-rib. The loops have what appear to be flat ‘protective plates’. The loops are rather
poorly cast, and there are holes, presumably casting flaws, beside both of them. There is a
further such flaw in the blade. The socket is circular and its mouth is bevelled. The socket
mouth is slightly damaged, but the blade is in fairly good condition.

This spearhead is a member of Rowlands’ Group 1 of side-looped spearheads,
although the lozenge-sectioned mid-rib is more typical of his group 2.² Side-looped
spearheads, especially those of Group 1, are not closely dated. A few associations of Group
2 spearheads with late Middle Bronze Age material are known. Group 1 spearheads may
have originated earlier in the Middle Bronze Age, but the interchangeability of features
between the two groups suggests that they are in part contemporary.³

Ten other rapiers, 7 of them of Group IV, have been found in the Upper Thames

² M.J. Rowlands, The Production and Distribution of Metalwork in the Middle Bronze Age in Southern Britain (1976), i. 52.
³ Ibid. 55.
region. There is a cluster of six side-looped spearheads on either side of the Thames above Oxford, an area which includes Hardwick.

The context of the Hardwick bronzes merits some comment, as it is possible that they were originally deposited at a settlement site. The rapier is unusual in being fragmentary and found on dry land. Virtually all the rapiers from the Upper Thames region are complete and come from the river itself, where they may have been deliberately thrown. Side-looped spearheads are quite commonly found on dry land, unlike the larger basal-looped spears which are frequently river finds. A number of side-looped spearheads (although of Group 2) have been found on Middle Bronze Age settlement sites.

The two Hardwick bronzes were not found together, and thus do not constitute a hoard or association. They were however found close together, and it is possible that they could be derived from a settlement site. Bronzes found on settlements of the Middle Bronze Age are generally small (and often fragmentary) items — knives, small tools, ornaments, and side-looped spearheads. No traces of pottery or other habitation debris were found at Hardwick, despite a search of the ploughed area; however, settlements of this period may leave only very slight surface indications. The character of these two bronzes would at any rate be consistent with their being derived from a settlement context.

ROGER THOMAS AND ANDREW SHERRATT

TWO BOUT COUPÉ HANDAXES FROM OXFORDSHIRE

The first bout coupé handaxe from Oxfordshire was found in 1972. Recently a second bout coupé was recovered, and as such handaxes are relatively uncommon in Britain it seemed desirable to publish a brief note on the two implements.

Bout coupé handaxe from Abingdon (Fig. 4)

The implement is a well made slightly plano-convex classic bout coupé biface of black flint, 106mm. long, 79mm. broad and 29mm. thick as drawn; weight 220g. It is unpatinated, with only slight signs of abrasion, and no cortex on either face. The edge runs all the way around the handaxe. There is a slight twist to the profile (Fig. 4b) and a ‘tranchet finish’ to the tip of the more convex face (Fig. 4a). Both shallow and deeper flake scars appear on each face of the piece, possibly indicating the use of both hard and soft hammer technique by the maker. Unfortunately the biface was broken after its recovery, although it has since been repaired.

The handaxe was found protruding from the bank of a small stream by Mr. Nigel Scaysbrook at SU 482935. The deposit in which it lay probably either belongs to the Devensian Flood Plain Terrace, or incorporates material derived from it. The handaxe is now in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (teaching collection).

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5 M.R. Ehrenberg, Bronze Age Spearheads from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire (1977), Fig. 27.
6 Burgess and Gerloff, op.cit., passim.
7 Ehrenberg, op.cit., 17.
8 Rowlands, op.cit., ii. 276-8.

D.A. Roe, The Lower and Middle Palaeolithic periods in Britain (1981), 264 and plate 35.
**Fig. 4.** *boult coupé* handaxe from Abingdon.

**Fig. 5.** *boult coupé* handaxe from Radley.
Bout coupé handaxe from Radley (Fig. 5)
The handaxe is of classic *bout coupé* shape, very similar to the implement described above, 117mm. long, 86mm. broad and 28mm. thick as drawn; weight 275g. It is plano-convex, and made from dark grey flint which has acquired an uneven light patina, stained a grey-green colour in places. The more convex face (Fig. 5a) also has patches of orange iron stain. A large cherty inclusion passes through the biface without affecting the edge; it would have been too large for the maker to remove without drastically altering the size and shape of the piece. The tip of the flatter face (Fig. 5c) has what is probably a deliberate narrow ‘tranchet’ scar, and on the other face of the tip there is a ridge caused by a hinge fracture which again could not have been easily removed. The butt of the handaxe is carefully worked with flat flake removals, and the edge runs all the way round the piece. Despite signs of slight abrasion and modern damage the handaxe is in very good condition.
The handaxe was recovered from Tuckwell’s Pit, Radley (SU 525977) during gravel extraction. It was found lying on the surface of the grey tertiary clay under a band of cobbles at the base of the gravel (Fig. 6). When the pit was visited no further information was obtained, although a rather dubious crude implement made on a Bunter cobble was

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**Fig. 6. Tuckwell’s Pit, Radley.**
Section drawn on 24/4/83 at south east end of pit, by S.R. Snape.
1 Kimmeridge clay.
2 Cobbles, mixed in top third with gravel.
3 Coarser gravels with thicker bands of pebbles.
   Black manganese bands occur in the lower half; below the bands there are no pebbles.
4 Evenly bedded gravels with thin lenses of sand and bands of small pebbles c 2–4 cm. thick.
picked up from a pile of stones on the surface. Tuckwell's Pit cuts into the Thames Flood Plain Terrace. The handaxe has been retained by the finder, Mr. John Steptoe.

Discussion
The classic bout coupé is a broad flat biface with two symmetrical convex sides and a well worked straight or slightly convex butt forming two distinct corners at the base. There is often elegant flat flaking on both faces, and cortex patches are rare. ‘Tranchet’ finishes and slightly twisted edges may or may not be present. The handaxes frequently show signs of weathering and often have a white patina, although a few very well preserved examples have been found. For some time the handaxes have been regarded by several writers as a distinct morphological group although the name bout coupé, which is of doubtful origin has not always been used (eg Wymer; flat butted cordate type N, Collins; Paxton type). Unfortunately, few bout coupés may be dated with any degree of certainty as the majority have been recovered as stray finds. Those which can be dated belong either to the Devensian or possibly in a few cases to the late Ipswichian. They do not occur in an Acheulian context in Britain but are occasionally found associated with what appears to be typical Mousterian material (eg Kents Cavern, Devon), and as Roe has pointed out, within or near each bout coupé concentration ‘is to be found at least one substantial known or arguable Mousterian site’. Typologically the handaxes are unlike British Acheulian handaxes but resemble some early French ‘Mousterian of Acheulian Tradition’ handaxes (eg those from Le Tillet, café au lait series). This evidence suggests that the bout coupé may be regarded as a ‘typical’ Mousterian artefact. If this is accepted, the two bifaces described here can be regarded as establishing the presence of Mousterian man in the Oxfordshire region at some time during the Late Pleistocene, very probably one of the milder intervals of the Devensian glacial.

The illustrations of the handaxes were drawn by Mr. Jeffrey Wallis, to whom many thanks are due for all his help. Thanks are also due to Mr. John Steptoe for the loan of the Radley handaxe, and to Dr. Derek Roe.

JOYCE TYLDESLEY

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11 J.J. Wymer, Lower Palaeolithic archaeology in Britain (1968).
13 D.A. Roe, The Lower and Middle Palaeolithic periods in Britain, 252.
14 Ibid. 250.
16 For other Mousterian finds in Oxfordshire see above pp. 143–4.
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THE OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMMITTEE IN 1982

A full description of the work of the Oxford Archaeological Unit in 1982 can be found in the Unit’s Annual Report published in CBA Group IX Newsletter, 13 (1983). The Unit produces a Newsletter which appears quarterly. It can be obtained from the Oxford Archaeological Unit, 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP. During the year work by the Unit and others took place at a number of sites including the following:

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

*Fairford/Lechlade; Claydon Pike*: continuing excavation of a late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement.
*Lechlade, Leaze Farm*: identification of a Romano-British settlement.
*Lechlade, Rough Ground Farm*: continued preparation of the report on the excavation of the late Bronze Age settlement and Romano-British villa.

OXFORDSHIRE

*Abingdon, 20 Bath Street*: identification of an undated human skull.
*Abingdon, 6 Lombard Street*: structural survey of a timber framed building and the excavation of an Iron Age, Romano-British and Medieval occupation site.
*Abingdon, Ex-MG Factory*: excavation of an Iron Age and Romano-British settlement.
*Asthall, Fordwells*: finds of Romano-British pottery.
*Asthall, Worsham*: identification of Romano-British boundary ditches.
*Banbury, the Castle*: observation of the outer bailey of the castle and possible Civil War burials.
*Benson, Fifield Manor*: observation of the foundations of a post-medieval building.
*Berinsfield, Mount Farm*: continued preparation of the report on the excavation of multi-period (Neolithic - Saxon) settlement.
*Bicester, the Priory*: observation of the foundations of the church.
*Cassington*: identification of Medieval fishponds.
*Chalgrove, Harding’s Field*: continued preparation of the report on the excavation of the Medieval moated manor house.
*Charlbury, Coat*: field-walking of the deserted Medieval village site.
*Charlbury, Grim’s Ditch*: identification of a continuation of the earthwork.
*Charlbury, high pressure gas main*: observation of construction works.
*Charlbury, Hill Farm*: identification of early field systems.
*Charlbury, Walcot House*: observation of the destruction of garden earthworks.
*Charney Bassett, Cherbury Camp*: identification of an Iron Age settlement site adjacent to the valley fort.
*Checkendon, the Devil’s Churchyard*: completion of the report on the excavation of the Iron Age earthworks.
*Cholsey*: identification of a human skull.
*Cumnor, Dean Court Farm*: excavation of Medieval settlement.
*Cumnor, Hurst Hill*: identification of an Iron Age settlement.
*Didcot, the Rectory*: excavation of an Iron Age settlement and probable post-medieval rectory.
*Dorchester, Green Acre, Bridge End*: identification of Romano-British burials.
*Dorchester, by-pass*: continued preparation of the report on the excavation of the Neolithic
cursus and henges, possible Bronze Age boundary ditches and Romano-British cemetery.


Drayton Cursus: see Sutton Courtenay.


Fawler, Oaklands Farm: field survey of Romano-British farmstead site.

Finstock, Mount Pleasant: research into documentation of possible moated site.

Frilford/Marcham, Noah's Ark Inn: excavation of Early Iron Age settlement.

Great Coxwell, Badbury: finds of Early Iron Age pottery.

Great Coxwell, St. Giles’ Church: completion of the excavation of the Norman floor within the church.

Great Faringdon, Wicklesham Lodge Farm: survey of late Medieval fishponds.

Hardwick with Yelford, Mingies Ditch: completion of excavation and report on the Iron Age concentric enclosure.

Hardwick with Yelford, Smith’s Field: continued preparation of the report of the excavation of the late Iron Age and Roman site.

Harpsden, Harpsden Wood: find of 17 gold coins c. 55BC.

Hook Norton, All Saints Church: uncovering of blocked Norman doorway, aumbry, reliquary, piscina and sedilia.

Holwell: field survey of probable Neolithic henge.

Kidlington, Moat Cottage: observation of construction works at the Medieval moated site.

Little Coxwell, Ringdale Manor: survey of the earthworks of possible Iron Age hillfort.

Little Milton, Ditch End Farm: identification of probable Romano-British burial.

Little Wittenham, Castle Hill: finds of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age pottery.

Marcham, All Saints’ Church: observation of the re-flooring of the Church.

Merton: identification of Medieval pottery.

Newington, Great Holcombe Farm: observation of Medieval floor levels beneath the existing building.

North Stoke: excavation of Bronze Age ring ditch.

Oxford, Between Towns Road: continued observation of Romano-British kiln site.


Oxford, 39 George Street: observation of the Medieval and post-medieval City Ditch and the completion of the excavation report.


Oxford, 21 Longwall Street: see above Hertford College.

Oxford, New Inn Court: see below 11–18 Queen street.

Oxford, Osney Abbey, Mill Street: excavations of Medieval conventual buildings.


Oxford, 11–18 Queen Street and New Inn Court: completion of the report of the excavation of Late Saxon and Medieval tenements.


Oxford, St. Cross Road: observation of building works on the presumed line of the civil War defences.

Oxford, South Parks Road: excavation of Bronze Age double concentric ring ditch.


Radley, Tuckwell’s Pit: recording of Early Iron Age occupation and undated timber lined well.

Rollright, Rollright Stones: excavation of possible Neolithic cairn, Bronze Age round barrow, Iron Age ditch, trackway and settlement.

Spelsbury: identification of possible trackway and field system.

Stanton Harcourt, Blackditch by-pass: salvage excavation of Iron Age ditch.

Stanton Harcourt, Dix pit: observation of probable Medieval ridge and furrow.

Stanton Harcourt, Gravelly Guy: salvage excavation of probable Bronze Age ring ditch and Iron Age storage pits.

Sutton Courtenay, Drayton Cursus: continued excavation of Neolithic Cursus.

Swyncombe, Soundness Field: location of Medieval pottery kiln.

Thames Floodplain Survey: continued survey.

Wallingford, Goldsmith’s Lane: excavation of Medieval tenements and St. Rumbold’s church.

Wallingford, 56 High Street: observation of Medieval features and graves for Holy Trinity Priory.

Wallingford, 9–11 St. Martin’s Street: preparation of the report on the excavation of a Late Saxon sunken-floored building.

Wallingford, 12–13 St. Mary’s Street: observation of contractor’s excavation.

Wallingford, the Mill, St. Mary’s Street: excavation on presumed line of the Late Saxon defences.

Witney, 27 Market Square: excavation of Medieval tenements.